Family Ties
by LOTSlover

Summary

Sequel to Family Matters, Diana tries to deal with the struggles of setting up the Themysciran Embassy in Gotham, but some don’t want to see it succeed. Also, the unexpected appearance of Talia with Bruce’s son Damian only adds to the Wayne’s already stressful family dynamic. BMWW
Chapter 1

 Themyscira; June 6th, 01:10 GMT+2

She slipped through the darkness as inconspicuously as the shadows that shifted around her, pausing to look back over her shoulder to make sure that she wasn’t being followed. She brushed a fiery red curl away from her face, tucking it back inside the hood of her black cloak.

She continued her journey, carefully picking her way through the heavily wooded area with only slivers of moonlight to guide her. It didn’t matter anyhow. She knew these woods like the back of her hand. Little of its topography had actually changed over the last few thousand years.

It was the benefit of living on a magically protected island—there was little change.

Her lips thinned into a grim line. That was all changing now…had been changing ever since their own princess had forsaken them to marry a mortal man and have his children. It was not only unacceptable but forbidden and so were the plans that their queen had put into motion.

Things were rapidly changing for the Amazons, spiraling so far out of control. The wayward princess had put notions into her mother’s head, influencing her decisions. It was time to put a stop to it now before things progressed any further.

They needed to restore the island to the purity it had once possessed before Diana had turned her back on her sisters and her heritage by marrying a man, tainting her home by bringing her mate and sons to Themyscira’s shores. The decision to make the princess an ambassador to the world for the Amazon nation was the final breaking point.
Opening up Themyscira to Man’s World went against everything they knew, everything they believe in and they were going to put a stop to it no matter what it took.

“What took you so long?”

Amara lowered the hood of her cloak as she approached the circle of sisters waiting for her. “Sorry, Kyriaki, but I couldn’t get away from the palace until now,” she informed them as she took her seat among her sisters.

Kyriaki stood to her feet before taking a step closer to the fire, allowing the flickering flames to cast an eerie glow about her face. “As you know, Princess Diana will be opening the Themyscrian Embassy in Gotham in two months,” she began, her gaze shifting from one sister to the next to make certain the true deeps of such an atrocity was fully felt among her gathered sisters. “We need to make certain that she is stopped before Themyscira can be compromised any further.”

“We’ve been talking about this for months,” Melita bitterly complained. “It’s time we finally acted.”

Cyanea stood to her feet, her expression hard with rage. “I agree,” she stated, turning her glower to Kyriaki. “We’ve been meeting and discussing without any decisions being made. We are Amazons, not old men sitting around a fire gossiping about old times. It’d time we fight for what we want. We fight to make Themyscira great again.”

Kyriaki’s mahogany brown eyes hardened with resentment, her nostrils flaring in abject censure. “Are you proposing you lead this battle, Cyanea?”

Cyanea lowered her gaze slightly, knowing that she had overstepped her bounds. Kyriaki outranked her in the Queen’s Guard. If she wished to be leader, she would have to participate in the ritual battle to the death. That was something that she wanted to avoid, especially against Kyriaki.

Even though she was an Amazon warrior, she was no fool. Kyriaki was one of the very best, second only to Phillipus in direct hand-to-hand combat. Trying to defy her or battle her for leadership was to hand her own death over to the God Hades by her own sword. She might as well throw herself into the Pits of Tartarus.

“No,” Cyanea replied, her voice losing a measure of the confidence that it had just held. “I merely meant to point out that we have been wasting precious time discussing and quibbling over the way things used to be before Diana left Themyscira and fell in love with that mortal demon. I believe it’s high time we act before our princess starts inviting all of Man’s World to visit our home.”

“I agree with Cyanea,” Leda said as she stood to her feet, coming to her friend’s defense. “All of this discussion has gotten us nowhere. Diana will be opening the embassy in two months. We need to plan out what our move it going to be.”

“I don’t think we should attack Diana,” Maia volunteered. “I think we should start by sending some sort of message letting her know that not all of us approve what Queen Hippolyta is doing.”

“We’ve already voiced our grievances to Hippolyta on numerous occasions and it only falls on deaf ears,” Kyriaki heatedly stated as she began to pace. “We’ve tried approaching this the peaceful way. I believe it’s time for action.”

“Besides, Diana no longer deserves the title of princess or an Amazon,” Leda spat out. “She turned her back on us years ago when she left for Man’s World. She herself drove the final nail into her own coffin when she chose to marry the mortal demon and have his children, bringing them to the...
island to visit. For that, she was must reap the consequences of her actions.”

“I agree,” Melita concurred. “It is time that she pays. Once Queen Hippolyta sees what has become of her daughter, she’ll withdraw from the world again, restoring Themyscira to what it once was.”

“How do you suggest we go about doing it?” Leda asked with a frown. While she was in favor of stopping this nonsense before it got out of hand, she wasn’t certain that attacking Diana was the answer to their problem.

“I have quite a few ideas in mind,” Kyriaki replied with a darkening gleam in her eye. “It’s going to require stealth, but I think we should be able to pull it off without alerting Queen Hippolyta.”

“And just what are you proposing, Kyriaki?” Astraea inquired, voicing the question that was on the twenty gathered Amazons’ minds.

“It will require much work as well as some of us leaving the island for Man’s World in order to make sure my plan does not fail,” Kyriaki revealed. “Now, I’m just going to need some volunteers.”

“I’ll be more than happy to go take care of Princess Diana.”

Everyone turned at the unexpected sound of the voice of the Amazon sister who emerged from the shadows that surrounded them to join the group gathered around the small fire. Kyriaki’s lips slowly curled into a pleased smile as she stared at her sister.

“I guess it’s settled than,” she announced.

Wayne Manor; August 2nd, 09:04 EST

Diana paced the length of the library, her arms folded across her chest and her bright blue eyes ablaze with anger. She could hardly believe that this was actually happening let alone today of all days. It felt as though she had just stepped out of a dream and into a living nightmare fresh from the Pits of Tartarus.

Talia al Ghul sat perched on the couch looking like the queen of the world. Her attention was focused solely on Bruce, a smug expression gracing her face. She was clearly enjoying every agonizing minute of this, reveling in some perceived victory.

Bruce sat in an armchair directly across from her, his forearms resting on his thighs as he studied the woman before him. The dark glower on his face seemed to be carved out of marble, the tight set of his jaw like steel. There was no guessing what he was thinking. Diana could easily see the tension that consumed his body, the doubt and anger that had settled over him.

Diana knew that Bruce would not accept Talia’s word for it. He’d want to do his own testing to make sure Damian was truly his son. She could clearly see that Damian was unmistakably Bruce’s child with Talia, though. Damian possessed her nose and mouth, but there was no denying those piercing blue eyes or his stubborn chin. He also shared similarities with Nicholas and Kaia, making her stomach lurch. Damian al Ghul was their half-brother.

Bruce cast a fleeting glance at Diana who was still pacing on the other side of the library, her arms wrapped around herself. He wanted to hold her, to tell her how sorry he was, but he knew that now was not the time. She was rightfully upset, her fury tangible. This was supposed to be a memorable day for her, one that signified Themyscira’s stepping out of the past and into the present…into Man’s World.
Unfortunately, Talia had shown up at their front door with a son that Bruce had had no idea even existed; forcing Diana to call her secretary at the newly opened embassy to let her know that she would be arriving late. He felt horrible for bringing her pain and ruining what was supposed to be a historic day for her, her mother, and her sisters.

“Talia, tell me the truth,” Bruce icily stated. “Why are you really here?”

“As I told you before, beloved,” Talia spoke again, “I felt it was time for you to finally meet your son.”

“Why now?” Bruce demanded to know. “How do I even know that he’s my son?”

“Beloved, how can you even say that?” Talia questioned him, her expression growing wounded with his suspicion.

Bruce noticed how Diana grew angrier every time Talia called him “beloved” and, to be perfectly honest, it was pissing him off as well. He’d never particularly liked being called that even when he’d thought that he was falling in love with her.

“First of all, stop calling me that, Talia,” he warned her, his gaze narrowing. “I am not your beloved. I’m married to Diana. Second, I don’t trust you. It would be just like you and your father to orchestrate something like this in order to get me to leave Gotham and join you.”

“I’m truly hurt that you would think so little of me,” Talia replied, glaring darkly at her former lover.

“Past experience with you has taught me some very valuable and painful lesions that I don’t plan on ever repeating,” he bit out. “I want proof that he is my son.”

A Cheshire grin stole across Talia’s face as she intently studied him. “Have you so easily forgotten the passionate nights spent in my bed, beloved?” she asked with a sultry lilt to her voice. “The way that I could make you cry out my name…repeatedly begging for more of me? I know what drives you wild, what brings you the greatest pleasure. Can your wife do for you what I could?”

Standing by the window with her arms crossed against her chest, Diana’s fingernails dug into her upper arms, her teeth clenched with fury. She couldn’t stand here listening to this any longer, hearing the intimate details of his love affair with Talia al’Gul. It felt as if someone was ripping her heart open.

“I need to leave for the embassy,” she ground out, storming out of the library without looking back.

“Stay here,” Bruce ordered Talia with a deadly glare as he jumped to his feet to follow Diana out. He found her in the foyer gathering her things. “Diana, wait. Please, don’t go.”

Diana stopped, her back to her husband and her head lowered. “I’m not going to stand there and listen to every sordid detail of your sexual relationship with that woman, Bruce,” she stated with a deadly calm that actually made Bruce’s stomach drop into his shoes. It hinted at the barely controlled fury that filled her, how she was teetering on the edge.

He quickly reached out to her, forcing her to turn around and face him. The look of anguish that he found shining in her blue eyes as well as the tears brimming there was more than he could take. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her to him, holding her tightly against his larger frame.

“Diana, I’m so very sorry,” he murmured against her ear, doing his best to keep a firm hold on his own pain knowing that he had hurt her so deeply. “I promise you that I’ll find out what Talia is
really up to and what she wants, but I can’t turn him away if Damian is truly my son.”

“I know,” she whispered, pulling out of his arms after several long moments. “I’ll see you tonight.”

The fact that she didn’t return his embrace did not go unnoticed by him nor did the hurt created by it. “I love you, Diana,” he told her.

She bit at her bottom lip, silently nodding her head as a tear slowly slid down her cheek. She quickly brushed it away as she abruptly turned on her heel and left without a word, without return his proclamation of love. It was like a stab to his heart, her tears like salt being poured in an open wound.

He reminded himself that she just needed some time right now, to work through this latest nightmare to descend upon their family. It did little to soothe the painful ache that had bloomed in his chest as she had walked away from him without saying a word.

“Did I say something wrong?” Talia coyly asked from behind him, a smirk on her lips. 

Bruce’s hands balled into fists, his lips thinning into a sneer as he whirled around to face her. “I don’t know what you’re up to, Talia, but I will get to the bottom of this and, when I do, you are out of here forever,” he heatedly replied. “Do you understand me?”

Talia tried not to shrink back from him, making sure she firmly stood her ground. She straightened her shoulders and held her head high, not breaking eye contact with him despite the fact that she didn’t think that she had ever seen him so livid before.

“Maybe it’s something as simple as me wanting our son to finally get to know his father,” Talia countered, fire returning to her eyes. “Did you ever think of that?”

“Why now, Talia?” he demanded as he closed the distance between them, finding it more than difficult to keep a tight leash on his anger right now. “Why wait ten years before suddenly showing up at my front door and announcing we have a son together?”

“I had hoped that now that you were married and have children of your own you would be a little more receptive of Damian,” she shot back. “Face it, Bruce. You wouldn’t have handled finding out that you were going to be a father very well ten years ago would you?”

“I wasn’t given a chance so I guess we’ll never know,” Bruce quietly seethed, pushing past her to head towards the kitchen where Alfred was watching the children.

He was still reeling from Talia’s arrival and revelation that they have a son together. His mind was struggling to process it all, to sort through all the ramifications and possibilities as to what Talia was really up to by showing up now. It was more than difficult to think straight knowing how upset Diana was. He just hoped that they could work through this unexpected development.

Things had settled down for the most part since Sienna Falcone’s death a year ago, allowing him to reconnect with his wife and reestablish the fact that their marriage was on solid ground with the media. Cleaning up Gotham from Sienna’s attempt to resurrect the Falcone Mafia had taken some time, but things were progressing well.

They’d found a new normal for them with Diana taking on the title of Ambassador of Themyscira, making their new routines work for their family despite the fact that they were being pulled in every direction. Now, Talia was here with a son that he’d never known even existed and throwing their lives into another tailspin that he hoped that they’d be able to recover from.
Finding his children sitting at the kitchen table, Bruce knew that they had to recover from this, find a way to make this additional tie to his family work. No other outcome was acceptable in his mind. If Damian was truly his son, then they would find a way to make this work no matter what it took.

He watched as Nicholas stared warily at Damian, studying him as he sat and colored his picture. It was quite clear that Nicholas wasn’t so sure about this new guest that had invaded their home. Bruce could practically see the wheels turning in his head, trying to make sense of it all and how this boy fit in here. It made Bruce proud to witness. He already knew that Nicholas was going to make a great detective someday.

Kaia, on the other hand, was just like her mother in every way, freely accepting the new visitor as a friend already. She offered Damian a crayon, the boy dismissing her with a scowl of pure annoyance and boredom. It didn’t seem to sway his little girl in the least as she tried to offer him a different color instead in an effort to make a friend.

She looked up at that moment, noticing her father standing in the doorway. “Daddy,” Kaia exclaimed from her seat at the table. “Color wif me.”

Bruce walked over to the table, stopping beside his daughter to look at the picture she was coloring. “I can’t right now, baby girl, but I promise I will later,” he told her as he bent over and kissed the top of her head.

He turned his attention to Alfred as he straightened up. “Alfred, I’m going to need you to cancel—”

“Already took the liberty of calling the office and cancelling your day, sir,” he replied as he handed him a cup of coffee.

“Thank you,” Bruce murmured, downing some of the much needed caffeine.

Damian just glared sullenly at Bruce, clearly bored and irritated with this whole meeting. “I suppose you’re going to want to run tests to prove that I’m really your son,” he stated, arms folded tightly against his small frame.

If Bruce was surprised by Damian’s assumption, he didn’t show it. Instead, he set his cup of coffee on the table, his other hand falling on Kaia’s head to gently stroke her raven curls. “That’s right,” Bruce evenly replied.

The boy was obviously highly intelligent. There was no reason to hide the facts from him or try to sugar coat it. He could already tell Damian was a lot like his grandfather. This was going to prove to be a very difficult situation to circumnavigate.

“Hey, who’s the kid?” Tim asked as he entered the kitchen, all eyes turning towards him.

“I’m his son,” Damian responded, pointing at Bruce with his thumb. “Who exactly are you? Another one of my brothers?”

“Whoa,” Tim gasped in shock, his gaze flickering between Damian and Bruce. “Um, do I want to know what’s going on around here?”

“Just what are you planning to do to prove that Damian is your son, beloved?” Talia asked as she entered the kitchen, a scowl on her face.

“Beloved?” Tim exclaimed with a look of pure disgust as he turned to level a glare at Bruce. “What is she doing here and does mom know about this?”
“She knows,” Talia interjected as a pleased smile spread across her face. “Now, what about our son?”

“He’ll probably want to swab my mouth, draw blood, get a full set of fingerprints, and a hair sample, mother,” Damian matter-of-factly rattled off.

Bruce internally grimaced with Damian’s response to his mother. This was most definitely his son whether he had irrefutable proof or not. He knew it deep in his bones without doing any tests. Now, he just had to find a way to accept him into his heart and life. It was a little difficult knowing who his mother and grandfather were and what they were capable of.

He had once foolishly thought that Talia was the one, that he had found a reason to be happy for once in his life, but he had been so very wrong. Talia just blindly followed her maniacal father no matter the cost…even when the price had been him. Her betrayal had only caused him to reinforce the walls that he had built up around his heart, making him wary of trying to reach out to another woman ever again.

She had chosen her father over him in the end, choosing rather to follow the delusional machinations of a madman instead of him. It had hurt him deeply at the time, but he had recovered, finding love and contentment with Diana.

“I don’t know why you can’t just believe me when I say that he’s your son, Bruce,” Talia snapped.

“I wouldn’t believe you without proof either if I were him,” Damian calmly stated.

Tim bit at his bottom lip to keep from laughing with the young boy’s rejoinder to his maniacal mother. He was more than stunned by the unexpected revelation that Bruce had a son with Talia no less. From the look on Bruce’s face, Tim could tell that he was having a very difficult time accepting it as well. Of course, who wouldn’t after discovering you have a son and his grandfather is none other than Ra’s al Ghul, the foremost eccoterrorist in the world.

“Perhaps it might be better if this conversation were to resume downstairs,” Alfred interjected, frowning at Bruce.

Bruce glanced at Nicholas and Kaia who were absorbing the entire scene with rapt fascination. “I agree,” he concurred. “Be good for Alfred you two…especially you, little princess.”

Kaia looked up at him with those big blue eyes, appearing as innocent as an angel just sent from heaven. “I good, daddy,” she said with a sudden scowl that could rival her mother’s.

“You have your moments,” he muttered as he walked away, turning his attention to Talia and Damian. “Let’s go get this settled once and for all. Alfred, Damian will need a guest room prepared for him. He can stay here with us if he wishes or with his mother.”

“I’ll make sure a room is ready for him,” Alfred replied.

He found it more than difficult to appear courteous to their newest guests, especially knowing Talia’s past with Master Bruce. He had a very bad feeling that this was not going to end well. Anytime an al Ghul was involved that was usually the case.

He watched as Talia and Damian followed Bruce out of the kitchen, releasing a sigh as he glanced at Nicholas and Kaia who had resumed their coloring. He worried about how this was going to affect not only the children, but Miss Diana as well.

“This is so not good,” Tim muttered as he sat down at the kitchen table.
“No, I’m afraid not, Master Timothy,” Alfred agreed as he became lost in his own thoughts on the matter. “I’m afraid not in the least.”

**Themyscirian Embassy; August 2nd, 11:43 EST**

Diana did her best to focus on the important work of getting the Themyscirian Embassy up and running, but it was more than difficult with the unexpected and unwanted arrival of Talia al Ghul and her son Damian…Damian Wayne. She felt her stomach lurch again with the thought.

It was bad enough knowing that Bruce had been with that sadistic woman, but knowing that they shared a child together just seemed to magnify everything a hundredfold. She had known that Bruce had had past relationships that had failed and she was fine with that. He had married her, chosen to have a life and a family with her.

For some reason, this seemed to open up a wound she hadn’t realized even existed; the proof of a son with Bruce’s blood flowing through his veins along with Talia’s just seemed to rip it open. She couldn’t quite give a name to what that wound was or she was too afraid to actually call it jealousy.

She was an Amazon, confident and proud. She didn’t get jealous, but this…this just seemed to stir up a jealous fury in her that she couldn’t quite contain. At the same time, it also awakened an insecurity in her that she was too ashamed to admit to.

Did Bruce truly love her?

She felt so foolish even considering it let alone allowing it to have any sort of foothold in her mind. She knew with every fiber of her being that Bruce loved her, but he had also thought at one time that he had been in love with Talia…with Andrea and Selina.

She felt the burn of tears attempting to return, but she tamped down on them, refusing to allow them to form. She would not let this newest development interfere with her marriage and family or the pride that she felt with opening the Themyscirian Embassy.

They had gone through enough marital discord when Sienna Falcone attempted to break up their marriage over a year ago. She refused to go through that again. She was not about to allow Talia to invade her home and break up her family.

She had no doubt that Talia was up to something and that Ra’s was more than likely involved. They were just going to have to be vigilant at all times, watching for the smallest clues that something was about to happen. At this point, she wouldn’t put anything past Talia or Ra’s.

Maybe Damian wasn’t even Bruce’s son.

The fleeting thought brought a small measure of comfort, but she already knew that he was Bruce’s flesh and blood. She could see the resemblance in those intense blue eyes and his chin. Now, they were just going to have to find a way to welcome him into their family despite the fact that he was an al Ghul.

She couldn’t help wondering just how deep those family roots ran in Damian. Did he possess the same radical beliefs and arrogance as his grandfather, the same manipulative and deceptive abilities that his mother possessed? If Damian was anything like his mother or grandfather, they were going to be in a great deal of trouble.

“Princess Diana?”

The sound of Phaedra’s voice broke her out of her troubled thoughts. “Yes, Phaedra?”
“The Italian Embassy is calling,” Phaedra informed her. “The ambassador was hoping to set up a meeting with you some time in the next two weeks.”

“That’s fine,” Diana replied, “and you can call me Diana, Phaedra.”

“Sorry, princess, but it’s very difficult,” she told her with a frown. “You’ve always been Princess Diana.”

Diana gave her a small smile. “It’s okay,” she reassured her. “Set up a meeting with the Italian ambassador for the next two weeks. I’m going to be busy next week with the peace summit.”

“There’s also another delivery for you,” Phaedra revealed.

“Send them in,” she said, getting to her feet.

Diana watched as Phaedra disappeared from the doorway of her office, wondering what was coming now. She looked around her office at the various bouquets of flowers that already adorned the room from various countries congratulating her and Themyscira on the opening of their new embassy.

Walking around her desk, Diana smiled as a female delivery person entered her office with a beautifully decorated box in hand. “Please, sign here,” the woman instructed her, offering her the clipboard she carried.

Diana signed her name before taking the box, wondering who the gift was from. “Thank you,” Diana replied as the delivery woman left her alone in her office once more.

Finding no card or note, Diana set the box down on her desk as her phone began to ring. “This is Diana,” she answered.

“Hey, Di, how’s your first day going?” Donna asked.

Diana sank into one of the chairs that sat in front of her desk, her shoulders slumping with the new weight that she carried. “I don’t think you want to know,” she told her, anger lacing her voice.

“What is it?” Donna questioned her. “Did something happen?”

“You could say that,” Diana bit out, her eyebrows knitting with fury. “Talia al Ghul showed up at our front door this morning.”

“You’re kidding!” Donna exclaimed. “What did she want?”

“For Bruce to finally meet their son that he evidently fathered ten years ago.”

There were several seconds of silence before Donna finally spoke again. “Oh, sweet Hera,” Donna gasped. “Diana, I’m so sorry. What can I do?”

Diana released a sigh, hooking a raven curl behind her ear as her gaze fell on the box resting on the corner of her desk. “There’s nothing anyone can do about it, Donna,” she softly replied, feeling her throat begin to tighten again with the myriad of emotions coursing through her. “Bruce is running tests to confirm Damian is really his son, but I already know that he is. He has Bruce’s features.”

“Diana, I’m sure you and Bruce will figure out a way through this,” Donna attempted to reassure her sister.

“Yes…I guess,” Diana dejectedly responded as she played with the curly ribbon on top of the gift.
sitting on the corner of her desk that she had yet to open.

“Diana Wayne,” Donna curtly said. “Bruce loves you and you know it. That man is head over heels in love with you. Even after all this time, he can’t take his eyes off you. Just the other day at dinner, I caught him staring at you at least a couple of times.”

Diana’s eyes fell closed as she leaned her head back against the chair. “I know,” she murmured, afraid to test her voice. “I’m just…this whole thing has me rattled for some reason.”

“That’s not like you, Di,” Donna pointed out. “You don’t get rattled.”

“I know that, but I can’t shake this bad feeling that I have,” she told her. “I just feel…I don’t know…like something horrible is about to happen. I don’t know if it’s just because Talia has shown up with Damian or because of all the stress of opening the embassy, but I feel like I’m going to lose Bruce somehow.”

“You are not going to lose Bruce,” Donna firmly stated. “You know what? Grab your purse. We’re going to lunch.”

Diana sat up in her chair with Donna’s suggestion. “Where are you?”

“Blüdhaven, but I can be there in five minutes,” Donna said. “I’ll meet you at Saffron’s in fifteen minutes.”

“Donna, you really don’t have to do this,” Diana attempted to tell her.

“I know I don’t have to, but I want to,” she replied. “I haven’t had lunch and you’re having a bad day. You need some sister time and I’m the best sister you’ve got.”

The corners of Diana’s lips curled. “You are, Troia,” she agreed. “I’ll see you in a few minutes…and thanks.”

“Hey, that’s what little sisters are for, right? Besides, maybe I can talk you into a little shopping afterwards.”

“I really should actually try to get some work done here since this is my new job.”

“And it’s my job to cheer you up,” Donna pointed out. “What better way to do it then with a shopping spree?”

Diana chuckled with her sister’s response. “Okay, fine…I’ll let Phaedra know I’m leaving for a couple of hours.”

“Hey, how is Phaedra adjusting to life off the island?”

“She’s doing great,” Diana said as she stood to her feet to grab her purse. “She’s only been here a couple of months, but she loves Gotham and she’s really excited about her job as my secretary.”

“Good,” Donna responded. “We’ll have to drag her along with us for lunch some time.”

“I’ll see you in a few minutes,” Diana told her.

“See you, Di.”

Diana reached for her cell phone lying on her desk, her smile fading as she noticed a text message from Bruce. “I love you, Diana. Never forget that no matter what happens.”
She ran her thumb over the cell phone screen, wishing that she could see him, but she couldn’t right now. She needed a little time to think and to process everything that happened so far this morning. She needed to find a way to deal with this newest development that had thrown their family into another tailspin.

She knew that Bruce was not to blame for this. It all lay at Talia’s feet for not telling him from the moment she knew that she was pregnant that she was having his child. She felt horrible for what Bruce was no doubt going through. He didn’t handle change very well and this was turning out to be the bombshell no one had seen coming.

He had just gotten Jason back last year, finally fully welcoming him back into the family. Now, it seemed they had another family member that they were going to have to adjust to being around. Only this time, Bruce’s son was his own blood and he was an al Ghul.

Slipping her phone into her purse, Diana walked past her desk and the gift box lying on the corner of it. She’d deal with it when she returned in a couple of hours. Right now, she needed to see her sister and to try to figure out how she could help Bruce through this nightmare.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Told you! Even though Talia is here, this is not going to be a repeat of Family Matters with Sienna Conti. This will be much different.

UP NEXT: Bruce tries to confirm Damian's parentage and Diana has been keeping something from Bruce. Also, another surprise appearance rocks the Wayne Household, but it's not necessarily bad...or is it? :)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 2

Batcave; August 2nd, 16:36 EST

Jason, Dick, and Tim stood side-by-side on the platform with arms crossed and sour expressions adorning their faces. All three of them had their eyes locked on Talia and Damian who were currently sitting in the medical bay talking quietly. It was obvious by the boy’s expression that he was quite unhappy about being here if the fierce scowl on Damian’s face was any indication.

What was more disturbing to the trio was the fact that they had seen that very same scowl on their father’s face more times than they could begin to count.

“If I hadn’t seen it for myself, I wouldn’t have believed it,” Jason muttered.

“I see it and I still don’t believe it,” Dick groused.

“I believe it, but I definitely don’t like it,” Tim added, his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“I don’t know why Bruce is bothering with all of these tests,” Jason said. “The kid looks just like him. They even scowl the same.”

“Because his mother is an al Ghul and so his grandfather,” Dick pointed out. “There’s no telling what they’re cooking up now.”

“Don’t remind me,” Jason snorted with derision. “This can’t be anything but trouble.”

“What I can’t believe is that Bruce hasn’t sent them away yet,” Tim said. “Mom is going to flip out when she comes home and they’re still here.”

Dick glanced at Tim, knowing how close he’d grown to Diana since she and Bruce had gotten together. They all loved her and were protective of her, but Tim even more so. “You know Bruce. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer. I think Diana would have to agree with him on that.”

“What would Diana agree with me on?” Bruce asked as he stepped up onto the platform.

“Keeping Talia and Damian close while we figure out what they’re up to,” Jason replied.

“I don’t particularly like the idea of her being here in Gotham, but, until I can determine what she’s up to, I have no choice,” Bruce informed them as he took his seat at his computer. “Diana will understand and agree with me on that.”

Dick didn’t think Bruce sounded quite as confident about Diana as he attempted to sound. He could see the telltale signs of worry in the fine lines at the corners of his eyes though he tried to hide it. “So is he your son?” Dick asked the question that was burning in everyone’s mind, hoping that it wasn’t true, but knowing in their hearts that it was.

Bruce sat back in his chair, slowly releasing a breath before finally responding as if trying to wrap his own mind around what he was about to tell them. “Yes, Damian is my biological son,” Bruce
confessed, pinching the bridge of his nose as the words seemed to rattle around in his brain, but refused to actually sink in.

He was still more than a little shell-shocked by the unexpected revelation, but more than that he was furious with Talia for hiding it from him for all of these years. She had no right to withhold that kind of information or keep his son away from him.

He couldn’t help think of all the years that he had lost, the time that he could have spent with Damian getting to know him. The thought that he had been solely raised by Talia and Ra’s made him ill to his core, making him too afraid to think about the ramifications of it all.

“It’s not really a shocker,” Jason said. “The kid looks just like you.”

“Not helping, Jason,” Dick muttered under his breath, elbowing him sharply in the ribs.

“Hey!” Jason exclaimed, rubbing his ribs as he leveled his brother with an irritated glare.

“No, it’s okay,” Bruce stated as he sat forward in his chair, his jaw clenched in that betraying sign that told everyone it wasn’t all right and might never be. “It’s a fact that we’re going to have to accept.”

“So what does Talia want?” Dick asked.

“She hasn’t said yet, but I know she’s up to something,” Bruce replied. “I’m just not sure what that is.”

“There has to be a reason that she decided to show up now with Damian after ten years,” Tim thoughtfully commented, watching as Talia ran her fingers through Damian’s jet black hair.

“I agree and it can’t be anything good,” Bruce murmured.

“Beloved,” Talia called up to him. “I need to talk to you in private.”

Bruce rubbed his forehead in an effort to ward off the headache building behind his eyes. “I’ll be right there,” he told her, standing to his feet. “Keep an eye on Damian. I don’t want him wandering around down here or in the manor.”

“I’m not going to babysit,” Jason grumbled with a frown. “I’m going upstairs to see what Alfred has to eat.”

“Great…leave him with us,” Tim mumbled.

“This won’t take long,” Bruce told him, squeezing Tim’s shoulder as he walked past him.

Dick and Tim watched as Bruce descended the platform, making his way to Talia. “I have a very bad feeling about this,” Dick said.

“I know,” Tim agreed as he watched Damian roaming around the main floor of the Batcave, pausing to look at the giant penny. “Problem is I think Damian is going to get stuck in the middle of whatever Talia and her father are up to now.”

“I doubt he’s as innocent as Talia wants us to believe,” Dick commented. “He’s probably part of whatever they’re planning.”

Tim began to make his way towards the stairs of the platform. “I guess we’ll have to wait and see.”
“We’ll have to keep a close eye on both of them,” Dick told him as he followed his brother. “You know Talia is going to try to get Bruce back. We can’t let her break up this family no matter what.”

Glancing over his shoulder, Bruce noticed Dick and Tim heading over to Damian, providing him a small measure of relief knowing they would be keeping an eye on him. Now, he just had to find out what Talia wanted and the reason for her coming here.

“So are you convinced now that I’m telling you the truth?” Talia haughtily asked as she intently studied him.

“What do you want, Talia?” he demanded to know.

“I told you I wanted you to meet your son.”

Bruce’s anger flared hotly with her refusal to tell him the truth. He was not going to put up with her manipulative ways, not when his family was at stake. “I am not going to allow you to keep playing games like this or allow you to toy with my family. I’m willing to do whatever is necessary for our son, but nothing more beyond that.”

Talia grew furious with his words, closing the distance between them in three quick strides. “You always assume the worst from me, beloved,” she spat out. “Don’t you think you could grant me the least bit of trust?”

“You’ve hidden my own son from me for ten years,” he angrily growled. “Where is the trust in that, Talia?”

“I was only doing what I thought was best for Damian,” she claimed.

“You were only thinking of yourself and no one else, waiting for the opportunity to show up here and use him as a tool to get what you want,” he shot back.

“I was trying to raise our son, knowing his father did not want me any longer,” she hissed like a venomous snake. “My father was more than thrilled to be a part of his grandson’s life in your absence. He has been wonderful with Damian.”

Bruce refused to sink to her baiting, knowing that that was not how things had ended between them. “What did Ra’s do to Damian?” Bruce heatedly questioned her, his mind racing with all of the dreadful things that Ra’s could have done in order to mold Damian into his image.

Talia glared defiantly at Bruce, getting in his face. “My father never laid a single finger on him,” she seethed. “He worked hard to train him to fight and to be able to defend himself.”

“Ra’s trained him to be an assassin, didn’t he?” Bruce bit out with a sneer, his heart hammering wildly with the dreadful thought.

Talia backed away from him, doing her best to rein in her anger and resentment. “Yes…my father personally trained him, taught him everything that he knows.”

“Has he killed anyone, Talia?”

The rage that Bruce was struggling to contain seemed to sear through every single syllable he uttered. She knew how he felt about killing…how precious life was to him, but she’d brought Damian here despite knowing this.

“Talia!” he yelled, demanding answers.
She involuntarily reacted, jumping as he yelled her name. She silently cursed herself for it. “No,” she snapped, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye. “Damian has never taken a life. I would not allow it.”

Bruce’s hands curled into fists, his chest tight with the heat of the ire rolling through him like thunder. “How could you allow Ra’s to turn our son into an assassin?” he growled, chest heaving. “You should have brought him here where he’d be safe instead of subjecting him to Ra’s and his delusional brainwashing and sadistic ways.”

“‘My father is not a monster, Bruce,” she maintained with a huff of indignation. “My father has very strong beliefs about making the world a better place—nothing more.”

Bruce could hardly believe what he was hearing from his former lover. “Talia, he wants to destroy the world so he can recreate it in his own image and rule over it.”

“You’ve never truly understood my father like I do,” she countered, wrapping her arms around her torso as if trying to hold herself together. “After I chose to stay with my father instead of leaving with you, I found out I was pregnant with your child. I was so overjoyed to be carrying your baby, but I knew that you’d never give up Gotham for me or our child. That’s when I decided that I would never tell you about Damian.”

“I still don’t understand why you chose to tell me now,” he pressed for answers, refusing to back down. He could tell that some of what she was telling him was the truth, but she was still holding so much more back. “What happened that caused you to change your mind now after all these years?”

Talia averted her eyes, her gaze falling on her son who was sulking with his arms crossed and a glower on his face as he leaned against a cave wall waiting for them. “I needed a safe place for Damian to stay for a while,” she confessed. “Things have become rather…tense…with my father. I felt it was best for Damian to leave until things settled down.”

Bruce’s chin fell to his chest as he released a shuddering breath. “Talia…how could you have let it get this far?” he asked. “He’s just a child.”

“I know,” she stated as she began to pace back and forth before him. “My father is trying to train Damian to become just like him in order to follow in his footsteps. I couldn’t stand by and watch it happen any longer. That is why I brought him here to you.”

“You want me to raise him? To try to undo everything that Ra’s has trained him to be for the last several years?”

“Yes,” she softly confirmed. “I know that he’ll be safe here with you away from my father’s influence.”

“Does Ra’s know that you left or that you brought him here?”

Tears instantly filled Talia’s eyes before spilling down her cheeks as she stared up into Bruce’s blue orbs filled with such anger and resentment. “No…my father did not know what I was planning on doing,” she tried to tell him, but Bruce wasn’t buying it at this point. “I left in the middle of the night without him knowing, but I’m sure he’ll discover where I am.”

Bruce’s frown deepened even further with her answer, knowing she was lying to him and yet he couldn’t help worrying for his family. He was going to have to buy her story for now until he could discover the real reason for why she was here.
“Don’t cry, Talia,” he told her. “We’ll figure something out.”

Sniffling, Talia looked up at him through eyelashes wet with tears, her bottom lip quivering. “I can’t thank you enough, beloved,” she softly said. “I’m so happy that you finally have the chance to get to know our son. I’m proud of the child we made together and I know that you will be too.”

Bruce could feel a small measure of his anger dissipating as he stared into her tear-filled eyes, his thoughts unexpectedly taking him down a path forgotten long ago. He couldn’t help wondering how different things could have been for them if she had chosen him over her father all those years ago. He would’ve been able to raise Damian himself with Talia by his side instead of subjecting him to the maniacal influences of his grandfather who no doubt poisoned the boy’s mind.

Could he have actually been happy married to Talia, raising Damian together here in Gotham and having Ra’s as his father-in-law?

He couldn’t suppress the icy shudder that shot through him or the thick knot of emotion that unexpectedly clogged his throat, making it difficult to draw a breath. If he had married Talia, she would have undoubtedly forced him to give up Batman and his mission to protect Gotham. He might never have met Diana or fallen in love with her. He wouldn’t have Nicholas or Kaia or the idyllic life that he had now with them.

Without Diana, he and Dick might never have been able to repair their relationship or mend his relationship with Jason. It seemed like Diana was the warm light that brought everyone together in this family, the unbreakable glue that held them together as the strong family that they were now…the family that he had always dreamed of having, but never believed was a possibility until Diana.

He knew in his heart that Talia had not been what he had needed in his life despite the fact that their brief union had produced a son. Talia was toxic…poisonous. While he had seen glimpses of something more to her, something that he thought he could love, she had been too ensnared by her father and his psychotic dreams for a better world that was ruled by him. She had been too entrenched in his wild beliefs.

“We made such a beautiful son together, beloved,” Talia softly murmured, her hand coming to rest against his cheek. “He is the physical representation of our love for one another…the perfect combination of both of us.”

“Talia, I don’t love you,” he stiffly said, pulling her hand away from his face. “I’m not sure that I ever truly loved you or was even capable of it back then.”

She laced their fingers together, refusing to let go of his hand. “Have you so easily forgotten what we once shared?” she asked him with a sultry lilt to her voice, her cheeks stained with tears. “We shared some special times together filled with such happiness and passion. We could have that once again, beloved.”

Bruce stared at her in disbelief, somewhat taken aback by her attempt to seduce him. He knew that he really shouldn’t be. This was Talia after all. She was manipulative, a master deceiver and filled with resolve to get what she wanted most and what she had always wanted most in her life was him. He was her obsession.

Despite how painful it had been when she had chosen to stay with her father instead of coming with him, Bruce found himself more than thankful that he had allowed her to walk away from him that day. The love that she felt for him was possessive and fanatical, unhealthy at best. She could never hold a candle to Diana.
The sound of footsteps caused Bruce to look up to find Diana standing there watching him and Talia holding hands, standing very close together. The look of anger and hurt that permeated her eyes was unnerving to say the least. He quickly pulled his hand free from Talia’s, turning towards his wife.

“Diana,” he said, trying to figure out how to explain what she had just seen between him and Talia.

“I’ll be upstairs when you’re finished,” Diana coolly stated before abruptly turning on her heel and marching away from them.

“Diana…wait,” Bruce called after her.

“Let her go, beloved,” Talia insisted, seizing hold of his hand again. “We have so much that we still need to discuss about Damian…so many things that I want to share with you.”

Bruce leveled her with a deadly glare that caused her to unconsciously release her hold on his hand. “I think we’ve talked enough for one day,” he ground out. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’d like to see my wife.”

“Fine,” Talia snapped. “I will return to my hotel suite. I’ll come back tomorrow.”

Bruce glanced at Tim and Dick who were already beginning to lead Damian back upstairs into the manor, thankful for their presence and assistance. He had a feeling he’d be relying on his three eldest sons to help him protect their family.

He made his way towards the stairs with Talia in tow, more than anxious to see Diana. He hadn’t heard from her all day, never received a response to his text message this morning. He been trying not to think about it since she had left for the embassy this morning, knowing she was going to need some time to adjust to these changes as well, but he’d be lying to himself if he tried to say that hadn’t been overly worried about her.

He had wanted to surprise her at her office at the newly opened Themyscirian Embassy today and take her out for lunch, but those plans had been abolished with Talia’s unexpected appearance this morning. Now, he just hoped to be able to spend some much needed time alone with her, reconnecting with her and repairing some of the damage that had been done today.

Entering the manor, Bruce quickly made his way to the entertainment room, hoping that she would be in there with the kids. Poking his head inside, he found Jason sitting between Nicholas and Kaia watching television, all three sitting together on the couch and completely engrossed in some show.

“Have you seen Diana?” Bruce asked.

“She stopped in for a minute and then I think she went to the kitchen,” Jason said, his gaze locked on the television.

“You’re not watching anything violent are you?” Bruce asked with a frown.

“Not if you consider Justice League Action to be violent,” Jason quipped.

“There’s daddy!” Nicholas excitedly exclaimed, pointing at the television screen.

Bruce rolled his eyes as he turned to leave, nearly running into Talia who was underfoot. “Stay up here in the manor,” he ordered her. “I don’t want you or Damian down in the cave without me there.”
“Yes, sir,” she said with a sneer, turning her attention to Damian. “Damian, I’m going to return to the hotel suite. I’ll come by tomorrow.”

“Fine,” Damian said with a scowl adorning his face as he glared at Bruce. “I will be happy when we can finally leave this wretched place and go home.”

Bruce’s eyes momentarily fell closed as he struggled to hold his tongue, a sharp reprimand left dancing on his tongue. He headed towards the kitchen, hoping that he could see his wife for just a little while before having to deal with Talia anymore.

Entering the kitchen, he found Diana sitting at the kitchen table holding a letter in her hands. She gasped softly, her brow knitting in that betraying way that told him that what she had read wasn’t anything good. “What is it?” he asked as he approached her.

Diana looked up sharply to find Bruce coming to stand at the table beside her, concern burning in his eyes. She quickly placed the letter back into the envelope, fixing a small smile on her face that was completely incongruent with the anger still simmering in her blue eyes.

“It’s nothing,” she stated with a definitive shake of her head. “It’s just a letter that was sent to me today at the embassy. I’ve been receiving flowers and letters all day congratulating us.”

Bruce stared at her for a long moment, glancing at Alfred out of the corner of his eye. The British butler appeared to be completely engrossed in cooking dinner, but Bruce knew better. The man knew every single thing that happened in this house no matter what it was or where it happened. It was uncanny and a little unnerving to say the least.

“It doesn’t look like nothing, Princess,” Bruce pressed, his lips thinning into a grim line. “Who is it from?”

“I’m not even quite sure,” she cryptically replied, her movements stiff as she pushed the envelope aside. “How did it go with Talia today?”

Bruce’s frown returned with a fierce vengeance, not buying it. “Fine,” he stated, not about to let this go. “Then how do you know the letter was for you?”

“The letter was addressed to Ambassador Wayne,” she clarified as she stood to her feet, envelope firmly in hand. “I’m going to go upstairs to change before dinner.”

She attempted to walk past him only for his hand to firmly grip her arm, his fingers pressing into her skin like steel bands. “Not until we talk, Princess,” he insisted.

“I believe I shall finish preparing the formal dining room for this evening’s meal,” Alfred announced, making a hasty exit in order to give the couple some privacy.

“There’s nothing really to talk about, Bruce,” she told him, casting a fleeting glance at him.

“I believe we have a lot we need to talk about,” he evenly stated, his voice broking no room for argument.

“Fine,” she relented, annoyed. “What did you find out about Damian?”

“Damian is my son, Diana,” he revealed, carefully studying her expression for her reaction to the news. “I personally confirmed it.”

“So what do we do now?” she managed to ask as her heart sank. She turned to face him, the letter
still in hand.

“I have no idea,” he confessed, shaking his head. “I know Talia is up to something, but I’m not sure what it is.”

“She wants you,” Diana stated, her blue eyes flashing with a possessive anger.

“Diana, you know that’s never going to happen,” he confirmed. “Talia was my past, but you are my present…my future. I love this life that we’ve built together. I’m not about to let her destroy that.”

She wanted to point out how it didn’t quite look like that down in the cave just a few moments ago, but she didn’t really feel like arguing right now. She wasn’t going to be petty or stoop to the jealous wife status, stirring up chaos. It was beneath her.

“What do you think she’s up to?” she asked instead.

“I have no idea, but I’m not going to stop until I find out what it is,” he told her, crossing his arms tightly against his chest as he stared her down. “Now, what was in the letter that upset you?”

She drew a deep breath in an effort to steady her anger before ultimately handing him the envelope. Taking it, Bruce opened up the letter, reading it.

“You were warned to shut down the Themyscirian Embassy. Now, you’ll suffer the consequences.”

His head shot up, a look of dread etched in his handsome face. “Diana,” he growled. “This is not ‘nothing’. What is going on?”

“Don’t overreact, Bruce,” Diana warned him. “Someone is just upset about me opening the embassy.”

“Have you been receiving threats?” he demanded to know, his blue eyes seeming to pierce her as he stared directly into her soul.

“Just a couple of letters telling me not to open the embassy or I will pay for it.”

Bruce turned away from her, setting the letter on the countertop. “Why didn’t you tell me about this?” he questioned her, his voice low and strained, his anger palpable even with his back turned to her.

“It’s nothing that I can’t handle, Bruce,” she claimed. “Someone is just trying to scare me into quitting, but it’s not going to work. I will not walk away from this.”

He placed the palms of his hands on the kitchen counter, leaning heavily on it for support as his mind took him places that he never wanted to go. “Where are the other letters?”

Retrieving her purse, Diana pulled out two envelopes, handing them to Bruce. “You’re not going to let this go, are you?”

Turning, he snatched the envelopes out of her hand before grabbing the other letter and walking out of the kitchen without another word. Diana sank into a chair at the counter, holding her head in her hands. After several moments, she felt a hand on her shoulder, forcing her to lift her head.

“Just give him a little time, Miss Diana,” Alfred consoled her. “It’s been a very bad day all around for everyone. I’m afraid finding out you’re being threatened is the icing on the cake for Master
Bruce. He loves you deeply and the thought of something happening to you terrifies him.”

“I can take care of myself, Alfred,” she told him, her own anger prickling like hot needles beneath her skin.

“He knows that on some level, but you know as well as I do that his paranoia won’t always let him rest in that confidence and faith that he truly has in you.”

“I don’t know if I’m going to be able to handle having Talia hanging around here,” she confessed with a sigh.

Alfred patted her shoulder, squeezing it lovingly. “We’ll find a way through this too, Miss. We always do,” he reassured her. “This family is very strong. We always stick together through thick and thin.”

“I know…you’re right,” she murmured as she stood to her feet.

“Mama,” Nicholas cried as he ran into the kitchen with tears streaming down his face.

“What happened?” she asked, reaching down and picking him up to hold him in her arms.

“Kai-Kai bit me,” he choked out, holding up his arm to show her.

Diana looked at his forearm to find small teeth marks imprinted in his skin. Diana lifted his arm, gently pressing her lips to the red bite mark. “Why did she bite you?”

Jason walked in at that moment with a crying Kaia in his arms, her head resting on his shoulder and her tears wetting his t-shirt. “Nicholas wanted to change the channel and Kai didn’t like it so she bit him.”

“Kaia, you know better than that,” Diana scolded her with a disapproving frown.

“Kid’s got sharp little teeth,” Jason replied with a chuckle, holding up his hand. “She got me too when I tried to break them up.”

Diana sighed heavily as she set Nicholas down. “Kaia Alexandrea, what am I going to do with you?” she asked as she took her daughter into her arms.

“Maybe that’s her new super power,” Jason teased as he picked Nicholas up.

“Oh, Hera, Jason,” Diana groaned. “Let’s not even go down that path about Meta abilities. We have too much going on right now around here as it is without having to worry about that.”

“You mean besides Talia and Damian showing up?” Jason questioned her.

“Miss Diana is receiving threatening messages at the embassy,” Alfred volunteered as he passed by them with a platter of roast pork.

“Alfred,” Diana chided him with a groan.

“Whoa…what?” Jason asked with a frown. “When did that start?”

“A couple of weeks ago,” she replied, wanting to change the subject.

“What started a couple of weeks ago?” Dick asked as he and Tim entered the kitchen.
“Nothing,” Diana adamantly stated.

“Diana’s getting threats at the embassy,” Jason revealed.

“What?” Tim exclaimed.

“It’s nothing to worry about…I swear,” Diana attempted to reassure her three sons standing before her looking like they were ready for a fight to erupt right there in the kitchen. “You three are worrying about nothing.”

“Mom, you can’t go back there,” Tim readily decided.

Jason snorted in response. “Do you honestly think you can stop her or that she’ll listen to you?”

“Please, don’t worry about me,” Diana told them. “Bruce has already cornered the market on worrying around here without you three adding to it. Now, let’s go wash up for dinner.”

The boys left with Nicholas, leaving Diana to take care of Kaia. “Now, little sun and stars,” she addressed her daughter who was contenting herself by playing with Diana’s necklace. “You cannot bite people when you don’t get your way. You need to tell Nicholas that you’re sorry and you’re going straight to bed after dinner. No play time tonight with daddy.”

Kaia scowled darkly in response, her expression one that Batman would be proud of. “No, mama,” she grumbled, her bottom lip protruding in an angry pout. “Me pay with daddy.”

“No, you were mean to your brothers,” Diana reminded her as she carried her to the dining room, thankful that Talia had left. “You’ll go to bed right after dinner.”

She didn’t think that she could handle having to sit across the dinner table from Talia. She knew what the daughter of Ra’s was up to and she wasn’t going to allow her to waltz into their lives and try to destroy their family. Sienna had already tried that and failed.

Whatever else Talia was planning was going to fail as well. The problem was that Talia actually shared a child with Bruce, forever tying her to their family. It was something that she was going to have to come to terms with whether she liked it or not and she definitely didn’t like it. She had almost thrown Talia out of the house with the way that she had been all over Bruce in the cave when she’d first arrived down there.

There had been a look in Bruce’s eyes as he had stared at Talia when Diana had first seen them. It had caused her to stop dead in her tracks. Her heart had leapt into her throat at seeing him standing so close to Talia, holding her hand. It had created sick dread to swim in the pit of her stomach.

Diana forced the troubled thoughts from her mind, refusing to give them any credence. Talia was purposefully trying to stir up suspicions and doubts. Entering the dining room, she wasn’t the least bit surprised to find that Bruce wasn’t there. He had no doubt locked himself down in that dreary cave of his, burying himself in work so he wouldn’t have to think about Talia or Damian.

“Where’s Bruce?” Jason asked.

“Master Bruce has sequestered himself downstairs,” Alfred revealed with a sniff of disapproval. “He said that he wasn’t hungry and that you were to eat without him.”

Diana sighed wearily as she put Kaia in her highchair, knowing she was going to have to go down there and talk to her husband, but not now. Right now, she needed to focus on her children. “Dick, you should’ve called Donna to come over for dinner,” she commented, glancing at Damian who
was seated beside Tim.

“I tried, but she said she wasn’t feeling well,” he replied.

“You know I thought she looked a little pale at lunch today,” Diana thoughtfully replied.

“Yah, I’m not sure what’s going on, but she didn’t feel well yesterday either,” he revealed.

“Maybe it’s your cooking,” Jason quipped as he hungrily piled food onto his plate.

“I’ll have you know that I’m a great cook,” Dick maintained.

“I thought Amazons didn’t get sick,” Tim interjected.

“Typically not, but it’s not unheard of when an Amazon is gone from the protection of the island for an extended period of time that she becomes a little more susceptible to illness.”

“Mama, DD sick?” Kaia asked with a curious tilt of her head.

“She’s just not feeling well, honey,” she told her. “She’ll come to see you soon.”

Hearing the doorbell ring, Diana immediately felt dread begin to creep through her veins and settle in her stomach. She couldn’t help wondering who was coming now to add to their troubles. Her usual optimistic spirit had been smothered this morning with the unanticipated arrival of Talia al Ghul.

“I wonder who that could be,” Dick muttered.

“I’m not sure I want to know,” Diana replied as she put some potatoes on Nicholas’s plate.

Alfred appeared in the doorway of the dining room a few minutes later, a rather disturbed expression on his face. “Miss Diana, I’m sorry to interrupt your dinner, but it seems you have a—”

Before Alfred could finish, a red-headed woman pushed past him into the dining room, causing Diana to drop her fork at the sight of her visitor. “Artemis?” Diana gasped in shock.

“Princess Diana,” Artemis greeted her with a nod. “We need to talk.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: *GASP!* Artemis is here?? What in Hades is going on?? Don't worry about Bruce and Diana. They are definitely going to be more than all right. Just you wait and see! :)  
UP NEXT: Diana is not happy about Artemis's unexpected appearance...Bruce and Diana get busy in a good way...and what's going on with Donna??
Talia finished typing her message on her laptop, reading through it one more time before sending it off. Her lips quirked into a smirk as she reached for her cell phone to check her messages. Glancing over her shoulder, she made sure that she was all alone. She wouldn’t put it past Bruce to follow her here or to suddenly appear out of thin air.

“Yes…it’s me,” she said. “No, we’re all set. I think that he suspects something, but he has no idea what’s coming.”

She nodded her head in agreement as she received further instructions though no one could see it. Her smile broadened as she considered the mission that they were about to embark on. Bruce would have no clue about what was about to happen until it was far too late to do anything about it.

While she would love nothing more than to permanently eliminate the Amazon in order to get Bruce back, she knew that that particular pleasure would have to wait until a later time. They had bigger things they needed to focus on right now.

“Damian is fine,” she replied. “Well, he’s not happy about meeting his father, but he fully understands the need for being here. Yes, I saw her…no, she was quite furious about our appearance. I believe it’s caused quite a stir in their marriage. It’ll be interesting to see how Damian’s arrival affects their happy little family.”

She’d had to explain very little to her son. Damian tended to pick up on things quickly with little explanation necessary, understanding the fact that they were here for more than just meeting Bruce. Damian was highly intelligent like his father and his grandfather, making it a difficult to raise him at times. She could barely keep a step ahead of him.

“I’ve been studying the plans,” she replied. “I know how to handle my assignment. No, you don’t need to send anyone to help me.”

Talia could feel her impatience thinning as her anger grew. She took a drink of her wine as she listened; holding her tongue when all she wanted to do was unleash a scathing retort. She typed angrily on her computer, waiting for the chance to get a single word in.

“I understand,” she snapped. “Everything is going according to plan. Just let me handle Bruce. I know him better than anyone, even the Amazon. Yes…I will call you again tomorrow. Goodnight.”

Talia sighed heavily as she laid her cell phone aside, rubbing her forehead as she pulled up another email. She didn’t have time for this nonsense. She was fully capable of handling a simple assignment like this. She had bigger things that she had to worry about if their mission was going to be a success.

She pulled up the schematics for the building just in case she was going to have to infiltrate it in order to get what she came here for. Pulling a dark brown lock behind her ear, she began reviewing
every single entrance and exit, all stairways and back doors. She didn’t want this plan to fail.

In the end, Bruce would come to see that it would’ve been a far more prudent choice to stay with her, to marry her and become the heir to her father. When she’d heard that Bruce had married the Amazon, had children with her, she had been devastated.

She’d always believed in her heart that she and Bruce were destined to be together and that belief still held true now. Unfortunately, Bruce was not the primary reason for her being in Gotham. She was going to have to focus on the mission, Bruce and the Amazon becoming casualties if they got in her way.

Wayne Manor; August 2nd, 19:11 EST

“Artemis, what are you doing here?” Diana asked as she stood to her feet. “Did something happen to mother? Is everything all right back home?”

“The queen is safe, but I must speak with you at once about an urgent matter,” Artemis evenly replied, her hands on her hips.

“What is going on?” Diana asked, her forehead creased with worry.

Artemis’s gaze roamed over those present in the dining room, everyone staring at her in stunned disbelief. She recognized the princess’s two small children as well as Timothy and Dick, but the man with black hair sitting by Nicholas was unfamiliar to her as was the boy sitting next to Timothy. She didn’t know where the princess’s mate was, but it was of little concern to her at that moment.

“It is of a private matter, princess,” Artemis evenly informed her, her hand coming to settle on the hilt of her sword that rested at her hip. “It is most urgent that I speak with you about it.”

“Alfred, would you mind having Bruce come to the study right away?” she asked, turning towards her Amazon sister.

“Yes, Miss Diana,” Alfred said with a nod before leaving to deliver the message.

Dick, Jason, and Tim all watched as Diana led Artemis out of the dining room, Jason releasing a long low whistle as his gaze travelled over the Amazon’s feminine curves. “Wow,” he murmured in appreciation. “She is hot.”

“Don’t even think about it,” Dick muttered.

“What?” Jason asked with a frown. “Everyone in this family gets an Amazon for a wife except for me?”

“I don’t have one,” Tim announced as he moved his plate to sit by Kaia.

“Yah, well you’re still a kid,” Jason told him. “Give it time.”

“I’m a sophomore in college,” Tim corrected him with a roll of his eyes.

“Well, I hope she’s planning to stick around for a while,” Jason decided with a wicked grin. “I wouldn’t mind getting to know her.”

“She looks as though she could kick your ass without even breaking a sweat,” Dick said.

“Hey, she can do whatever she wants to me…any time…anywhere,” Jason replied.
Tim shook his head in disbelief as he stuck his fork into his meat. “Dude, you need help.”

Dick snickered. “You’re just now figuring that out?”

“Funny,” Jason muttered. “I’m telling you both right now that Amazon is going to be mine someday.”

Damian snickered derisively. “Like she’d ever give you the time of day,” he interjected.

Jason looked at him in stunned disbelief, taken aback by his brazen comment. “And what do you know about it?” he shot back. “You don’t even know me. In fact, you don’t know any of us so I don’t think you have a right to be offering your opinion yet.”

“Jason!” Dick exclaimed. “Be nice. He’s just a kid.”

“I am not a child,” Damian countered with a sneer as he leveled each of them with an antagonizing glare.

“You’re ten years old,” Jason pointed out. “You’re a kid.”

“I could take you out in less than three minutes,” Damian cockily stated, meeting Jason’s glare without flinching.

Jason chuckled in response. “You certainly have your dad’s arrogance,” he told him. “I doubt you could, but I’ll give you props for believing you could.”

Damian leapt to his feet, nearly knocking his chair over. “I’ll take you on right here…right now.”

“Damian, sit down,” Dick firmly stated. “No one is fighting anyone right now. Just finish your dinner.”

Damian glared at Jason a moment longer before turning his glare on Dick. “I’m finished,” he bit out before stalking out of the dining room.

“Well, that went well,” Tim muttered as he wiped Kaia’s mouth with a napkin.

“Why is he mad?” Nicholas asked Dick. “What’s wrong with him?”

“I’m afraid more than we can begin to imagine, Nick,” Dick cryptically said.

**Batcave; August 2nd, 19:20 EST**

Bruce could hardly believe that this was happening as he continued to study the three threatening letters Diana had received. Opening the Themysciran Embassy was not supposed to have lead to something like this. If he had thought for one second that Diana was going to be in danger by taking the title of Ambassador of the Amazons, he never would’ve agreed to her doing it.

At this point, he wasn’t sure what he was angrier about—his wife being threatened or the fact that she never told him about it. He glared darkly at the letters in his hands, practically willing them to give up their secrets, to give him some sort of information that would help him figure out who was behind it.

The letters had been typed on a computer and printed using standard white paper. There was nothing unusual about any of it—no telling sign that would give the slightest hint about who was behind it, no fingerprints apart from Diana’s, and no hints in the wording.
All three letters basically said the same thing, warning Diana to not open the embassy or there would be dire consequences for her actions. The threat seemed to be mostly pointing directly at Diana, not their family or the staff at the embassy. Whoever was behind these threats was holding Diana personally responsible for its opening in Gotham. The revelation did little settle his mounting worry.

He let his mind wander, trying to think of who could possibly be behind this. It could be someone other country, but the chances of that seemed pretty slim. No one really even knew the Amazons existed until Diana’s arrival in Man’s World. Themyscira was magically hidden and protected, making it impossible to find.

Their interaction with the world had been thousands of years ago, limiting who could actually still hold some sort of grudge against the all-female nation after all these years. He wondered about Ares being a possibility, his hatred for Diana and the Amazons legendary, but he wouldn’t resort to sending threatening letters. He’d be more far more direct than that and so would Circe for that matter. No, this wasn’t either of them.

He felt his heart nearly stutter with the sudden realization that the threats could be coming from the Bana-Mighdall, a faction of Amazons who resided in Egypt. It would make sense that they would be against having attention drawn to Amazons no matter where they lived. It could potentially open them up to attacks or create new enemies.

He sat back in his chair as he thought about the implications of the Bana-Mighdall potentially being behind this or even being in Gotham right now. It only created even more trouble for them then what they already had with Talia and Damian’s arrival.

His glare darkened as he stared at the letters, his thoughts taking him down another path…one that didn’t want to consider, but knew that he had to. He couldn’t help but notice the coincidence of these threats coming at the same time as Talia’s arrival in Gotham with Damian. Could Ra’s or Talia be behind these threats to Diana, trying to throw him off their trail by making it look like the Bana-Mighdall were or someone else was involved?

The possibility of Ra’s being after Diana made no sense to him. There was far more going on here than what they knew so far and he hated it. He felt dread begin to swim in the pit of his stomach as he thought about what could still be coming.

Whoever was behind it, he didn’t like it one bit. He knew there was no way he was going to be able to stop Diana from going back to the embassy. Bringing it up would only cause a nasty argument that would get them absolutely nowhere but angry at each other.

He was going to have to solve this case before something horrible happened. On top of that, he was going to have to figure out what exactly had brought Talia to Gotham. He had no doubt in his mind that she was here for far more than him meeting his son.

“Master Bruce, you’re needed upstairs immediately,” Alfred said, the urgency in his voice causing Bruce to look up sharply.

“What is it?” he asked, instantly standing to his feet.

“There is an Amazon here to see the princess,” Alfred informed him. “Miss Diana asked that you come to the study at once.”

Bruce glanced at his security system screen, angry at himself for missing the fact that someone had arrived without him noticing. He’d been so consumed with running tests on the letters that he
hadn’t been paying much attention to anything else.

“Do you know who it is?” Bruce asked as he quickly followed Alfred up the stairs and out of the cave.

“I believe it is Miss Artemis,” Alfred informed him.

“Artemis?” he murmured with a frown, wondering what the hell was going on.

Bruce quickened his pace as he made his way to the study, his pulse racing with the worry that he could feel rising. Entering the study, he found Artemis standing tall and proud like a statue, her red hair pulled back into a long ponytail and a forbidding expression gracing her face as she watched Diana pace.

“Diana,” Bruce called her name as he closed the distance between them. “What’s going on?”

Diana turned to look at him, the haunting look in her blue eyes doing little to settle his already frayed nerves. She forced a smile to her lips, one that did nothing to reassure him. “It seems there’s some unrest on Themyscira,” she told him as she glanced at Artemis.

The Amazon took that as her cue to explain what was happening, taking a step forward and handing Bruce a scroll. “Queen Hippolyta has recently become aware of several Amazons who are rather unhappy with the opening of the Themysciran Embassy,” she began. “There is a small band of sisters who have voiced concerns about opening Themyscira up to the world. The Queen believe that these same Amazons are plotting trouble for Diana and the newly opened embassy.”

Bruce’s eyes momentarily fell closed as he considered this unexpected revelation. His suspect list was growing instead of being narrowed down. He now had several possible suspects, all of them potentially capable of making good on the threats that had been sent to Diana so far. What made it worse was his belief that this was only the tip of the iceberg.

“What sort of trouble are they planning?” he questioned her.

“It is not known as of yet, but the queen doesn’t want to take any chances,” Artemis divulged. “These are Amazons after all. They’ll go to any length necessary in order to accomplish their goal.”

“What does Hippolyta suggest we do?” Bruce asked, his mind already shifting from worried husband into Bat-mode. He needed to keep a clear head if he was going to solve this before something happened.

“She firmly believes that it’s time to move forward instead of being stuck in the past,” Artemis revealed. “She will not cower from this challenge because there are those who believe in keeping Themyscira locked in the past.”

“I agree,” Diana firmly said, her blue eyes flashing with unwavering determination. “I’m not about to back down from my duties just because some of my sisters don’t agree with my mother’s decision.”

Bruce released a heavy sigh as he rubbed the back of his neck, knowing that trying to stop her was beyond impossible. “What are we to do about Diana’s safety?” he questioned her.

“I don’t need protecting,” Diana angrily bit out, glaring at him.

“That is why I am here,” Artemis stated as if the answer was glaringly obvious.
Bruce shook his head in confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“Queen Hippolyta summoned me and asked me to come here to help Princess Diana with the embassy and make sure that none of these threats come to fruition.”

“I don’t need a bodyguard,” Diana hissed, her fury spiking. “I can take care of myself. Artemis, you can go back home and tell my mother that everything is under control. I’m perfectly fine.”

Diana stormed out of the library without a second look, leaving Bruce and Artemis alone under a thick blanket of tension. “Let me talk to her,” he told Artemis. “It’s been a very bad day. She’s too angry to think straight now about any of this.”

Artemis stared at the princess’s mate, a single red eyebrow arching. “Queen Hippolyta already warned me that she would refuse,” she calmly replied. “I’m afraid the queen’s orders outrank that of the princess’s. Queen Hippolyta told me I was to stay here in Gotham with your family regardless of what Princess Diana wishes. She told me you would agree with her and that you would see to it that I was able to perform my duties.”

“So you’re not just here for Diana’s safety, but our family’s?”

“I’m here to protect you and your family as well as the princess,” Artemis revealed. “Queen Hippolyta also fears for your safety as well as that of your children. I’m to take whatever measures I deem necessary to protect the Wayne family including your manservant.”

Bruce nodded his agreement, tension settling into every line of his body. “I’ll have Alfred prepare a guest bedroom for you to use until things settle down. We’ll also need to get you some clothes that will be suitable for you to be out in Gotham,” he suggested as he studied the Amazon dressed in battle attire and looking for all the world as if she had just stepped out of a book on Ancient Greece.

“As long as I can keep a weapon on me at all times, I will dress according to the customs of Man’s World,” Artemis told him. The weapon was something that she would not negotiate on if she was going to protect the princess and her family.

“We’ll work on getting you some clothing tomorrow,” Bruce replied. “Alfred, would you please get Artemis something to eat and then show her to her room?”

“Yes, Master Bruce,” Alfred replied, appearing as if on cue in the doorway of the study.

Artemis tilted her head in acknowledgement before turning and leaving the study with Alfred. Bruce scrubbed his face with his hands, wondering just how much more they could possibly take before they finally cracked.

Drawing a deep breath, he left the study, knowing that he needed to find his wife. Taking the steps two and three at a time, Bruce found her standing on the balcony of their bedroom, her arms folded against her chest as she stared out into the darkening landscape. He silently closed the distance between them, coming to stand beside her.

He wanted to pull her into his arms and hold her, to feel how her feminine curves always fit so perfectly against his muscular frame. He always loved the feel of her pressed against him, the feel of her hair beneath his fingers and the way her heady scent always seemed to permeate every fiber of his being.

He knew that he couldn’t right now. She was far too upset, too furious about everything that was going on. It had been a very bad day, one filled with far too many revelations and none of them...
necessarily good. Artemis’s arrival had only seemed to add to the tumultuous situation.

“Diana, your mother just wants to make sure that you’re safe and that you will be successful with the embassy,” Bruce attempted to assuage her, hoping to calm her fiery temper.

“I don’t need protection, Bruce,” she ground out, keeping her eyes locked on the sweeping landscape of Wayne Manor.

“It’s not just for you, Princess,” he informed her. “Your mother wanted to make sure the family was safe as well. She’s worried about the children.”

Diana felt a small measure of her anger diminishing with the mention of her family…her children. If she was determined to move forward with this, then she was going to need to ensure that her family was protected. This wasn’t just about her anymore. She had several loved ones that needed to be kept safe.

Turning to look into Bruce’s eyes, she knew that she didn’t have a choice. She was going to have to accept Artemis’s presence in their home in order to preserve Bruce’s sanity. He had enough that he was trying to deal with now with Talia and Damian’s arrival without having to worry about her or their children.

Without another thought, she threw herself into him, burying herself against his larger frame. He instantly responded, wrapping his arms tightly around her as she pressed her face into the crook of his neck. He leaned down, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

“This day has been a nightmare,” she softly murmured. “It was supposed to be such a memorable day for Themyscira and for me. Now, I just want to forget about all of it.”

“I’m sorry, Princess,” he replied, his heart hurting for her as he gently rubbed her back. He wished there was something he could do to make it all better for her, but there was absolutely nothing he could do right now, leaving him feeling utterly helpless. He hated feeling like this.

“Where’s Artemis now?” she asked, squeezing her eyes closed and savoring the feeling of being encircled in his arms.

“In the dining room with everyone I imagine,” he informed her.

He felt her chuckle more than heard her. “I hope she doesn’t hurt them,” she told him.

“Your mother definitely sent one of the best,” Bruce agreed, nuzzling his nose in her silky hair. “Artemis is like a red-headed version of you.”

“I like to think I have a little more self-control than she possesses.”

He wanted to just stand here and hold her like this forever, but he was going to have to prepare for patrol soon. He needed to swing by the Grand Island Hotel to check up on Talia while he was out in Gotham. She was here for more than a father-son introduction. He also wanted to make a sweep of the Themysciran Embassy to make sure it was safe. Right now, though, he needed to talk to her about Talia.

“Diana, nothing is ever going to happen between me and Talia,” he promised her. “She’s going to try to worm her way into our lives, but I won’t allow it. We share a son together—nothing else.”

“I know,” she confessed as she pulled back to look into his eyes. “It just upset me to see her pressed up against you, holding your hand as if you were all hers.”
Bruce gently traced the curve of her cheek, drinking in her beauty overall again. Even after all this time, she still managed to take his breath away. “I am so in love with you, Princess,” he declared, “and nothing in this world could ever change that…not Talia, not Damian.”

“I love you too,” she murmured, pressing her lips to his in a sweet kiss that only took moments to grow passionate as the frustrations and stress of the day rapidly rose to the surface in hopes of escape.

Pulling her closer, Bruce’s hand settled low on her back as he pressed his pelvis against hers. She moaned softly with the feel of his growing arousal as she tilted her head, their tongues engaging in a sensual duel that left them both panting for more. Drawing apart, he pressed another kiss to her lips, reluctant to let her go just yet. He needed her now more than ever.

“We should probably go downstairs…and help referee,” Diana breathlessly recommended as her lips and teeth slid sensually along his jaw to his ear as her hand found the evidence of his arousal. “We can’t leave it all on Alfred to do.”

“I don’t hear any yelling yet,” he managed to utter; his voice growing husky with the sultry assault his wife was subjecting him to as she massaged him through his pants. “I think we have some time before they really miss us.”

“Kaia needs to go straight to bed after dinner,” Diana informed him as her fingers pulled his shirt free from his pants, sliding her hands up under the material to lightly scrape her fingernails over his chest.

Bruce’s head fell back, a sharp gasp escaping his parted lips as she raked her teeth over his pulse point. “What…did she do…now?” he asked though at this point he really couldn’t care less. All he cared about now was finding the fastest way to get her clothes off and himself inside of her.

“Biting,” she murmured.

“Again?” he muttered with a frown.

“Unfortunately,” she confirmed as she finally just ripped his shirt open.

A low growl issued from his throat with her frenzied assault, loving this side of her. It was like they couldn’t get enough of each other, both of them overwhelmed with a need so desperate and so intense that they couldn’t wait another second to be skin against skin with one another…to feel the friction of their bodies rubbing against each other.

“That was one of my favorite shirts, Princess,” he growled.

“I’ll buy you another one,” she whispered in his ear, pausing to outline the shell with her tongue.

His hands wrapped around her thighs, lifting her up and wrapping her long limbs around his waist. He roughly shoved her skirt up around her waist as he carried her into their bedroom, his fingers looping into her panties and tearing them off in one swift motion.

He pressed her up against the wall, his mouth plundering hers with a sweet desperation that was all raw passion and heat without any tenderness behind it. Right now, this was what they needed after all that had happened today, needing something more primal and physical and reassuring to unleash their aggressions than sweet and slow.

He dug his fingers into her hips as she worked him free from the confines of his pants, not wanting to waste any time. She needed him, needed to feel the raw power that was so tightly leashed in his
perfectly muscular body, the forceful drive of his hips…his hard length pulsating so hotly as he spilled his seed inside of her in complete abandon and surrender to her.

He touched her entrance with his tip, teasing her with what she wanted only to receive a throaty growl of warning in response. With a smirk on his lips, he pressed himself inside of her wet heat, fully sheathing him. His next thrust forced the air from her lungs as she pressed her fingers into his shoulders.

“Bruce…” she gasped his name as she tilted her head back, squeezing her legs tighter around his waist in an effort to hold on as he let loose his frustration and hunger on her.

She raked her fingernails over his back causing him to hiss in response as he moved in and out of her. He knew he wasn’t going to last much longer at this rate, not with how she kept squeezing her internal muscles around him. It was making him lightheaded, and rapidly driving him insane with pleasure.

He hooked his arm under her left knee that was wrapped around his waist, lifting her leg higher and allowing him to sink even further into her. Her responding cry of pleasure told him he had found that spot deep inside that always drove her wild.

He buried his face in the crook of her neck as sweat began to trickle down his back, his panting breaths hot against her skin as his hips continually slammed into hers, pushing her higher and higher up the wall. He kissed and nipped at her throat as he thrust into her with everything he had and all that he felt for her.

She came undone around him with a scream that only added to his own pleasure, propelling him over that sweet precipice along with her. She milked him of every last drop, panting heavily with the euphoric bliss that now permeated every fiber of her being.

His lips found hers in a tender kiss that further communicated his love for her, nuzzling his nose with hers. “I think I better take you into the shower and show you again how much I love you,” he murmured in her ear, pausing to suck long and hard on the lobe as he lowered her left leg back to his waist.

Her lips curled into a grin as she wrapped her arms around his neck. “I think that’s the best idea you’ve had all day,” she told him as he kicked his pants off before carrying her to their bathroom, his member still buried inside of her. “You also get to put Kaia to bed when we’re done here.”

Bruce groaned, hating that particular part of parenting. Whenever Kaia looked up at him with those big blue eyes, he melted into a defenseless puddle. He decided it was much more preferable to deal with his daughter, though, than with Artemis as he set Diana down, anxiously making quick work of her clothing.

Pulling her into the shower with him, all thoughts of the turmoil storming around them were swiftly forgotten as his mouth claimed hers once more. Reaching behind her to turn the water on, his only thought at that moment was her.

Blüdhaven; August 2nd, 20:47 EST

Entering his apartment, Dick tossed his car keys on the counter, more than anxious to find his beautiful wife. He was rather concerned about her, knowing that she wasn’t feeling well. It wasn’t like her to get sick which only caused his worry to grow.

“Donna?” he called with a frown as he made his way through the apartment, not finding her
anywhere.

He made his way down the hallway to their bedroom, his concern growing. “Donna, are you here?”

“In here!” she called from the bathroom.

Dick pushed the cracked bathroom door open to find her kneeling before the toilet, her raven mane pulled over one shoulder and held firmly with her hand. He kneeled down beside her, brushing a stray lock of hair off her forehead. “Still not feeling well?”

“What was your first clue?” she asked with a frown as she laid her head on his shoulder.

“I think we need to call the doctor or take you up to the infirmary on the Watchtower,” Dick readily decided, helping her up to her feet.

“No, I’m sure it’s just the flu,” she attempted to reassure him. “I’m beginning to feel better already.”

“That’s because you just deposited your supper,” he replied as he watched her go to the sink.

“How are Bruce and Diana holding up?” she asked as she brushed her teeth, wanting to change the subject.

“They’re having a rough time of it,” he revealed, leaning against the doorframe with arms crossed against his chest. “They’re still trying to wrap their minds around the idea of Bruce sharing a son with Talia al Ghul.”

Donna visibly shuddered as she rinsed her mouth out. “Diana is really upset,” she confessed as she turned to face her husband. “It seems like they just got everything back on track after Sienna Falcone only for this to happen.”

“There’s more,” he revealed, taking her hand and leading her out to the living room.

Donna groaned as she settled down beside Dick, his arm slipping around her to pull her to him. She readily melted into his side, fatigue beginning to wash over her. “What else happened?”

“Apparently Diana has been receiving threats at the embassy,” Dick revealed.

Donna sat up to look at Dick who immediately pulled her back into him again. “She never said anything to me about it at lunch today.”

“She hasn’t said anything to anyone about it…not even Bruce,” he told her, lightly running his fingers through her raven hair. “Artemis showed up at the manor tonight during dinner. Evidently your mother sent her to Gotham to keep an eye on the family.”

“Artemis is here?” she questioned him, lacing her fingers with his and holding their joined hands against her abdomen.

“Yep and Jason has his sights set on her.”

Donna chuckled softly as she thought about Jason trying to hit on Artemis. “She’ll break him in two before he can even ask her out on a date.”

“He doesn’t stand a chance,” Dick agreed. “She’s way out of his league, but he seems to think that she’s the woman for him.”
“I guess every Wayne needs an Amazon for a wife,” she quipped, sighing contentedly with the soothing feeling of Dick running his fingers through her hair.

“Jason believes it now that he’s met Artemis.”

“I wish Diana would’ve told me about the threats,” she thoughtfully murmured. “I could help her figure out who’s behind it all.”

“Bruce is already throwing himself into finding out whose involved in this,” he reassured her.

Donna frowned as she thought about it. “He already has his hands full with Talia and Damian showing up,” she replied. “This is the last thing they need right now.”

“I know,” he agreed, his thoughts racing with the consequences of Talia being in Gotham. It made him shudder.

“Did I miss anything else?”

Dick chuckled as he carefully extricated himself from his wife. “Kaia bit Jason and Nicholas,” he told her.

“Again?”

Dick leaned down and kissed her softly on the lips. “Yep, she got sent to bed after dinner. She was mad as a little hornet when Bruce put her to bed without play time,” he confirmed. “I’m going to make you some tea. Do you want some crackers?”

Donna shifted her position on the couch to lay her head on the pillows, taking his hand in hers. “Dick, you don’t have to do that. I just want to sit here with you for a while before you go out on patrol.”

“I want to,” he said, kissing her temple. “I’ll be right back.”

Dick went to the kitchen, putting a mug of water into the microwave before hunting for the box of crackers. They were in dire need of getting groceries at some point this week or they would be forced to eat out until they did or start eating at the manor.

Putting a tea bag in the cup of hot water, he grabbed the crackers before heading back into the sitting room. Setting it down on the coffee table, he found that she was already fast asleep on the couch. He gently stroked her hair, pressing his lips to her forehead.

“I love you, Troia,” he whispered as he stroked her hair.

He stayed there for a few moments longer before grabbing a blanket and gently draping it over her. He bent over and kissed her head before turning the light off to get ready for patrol. He hoped that she felt better by tomorrow. If not, he was going to make sure she went to the infirmary to get checked out. He just prayed that she would be all right.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Yes, Donna is pregnant, but Dick is a little oblivious at this point. Bruce and Diana are doing better now! What kind of dynamic will Artemis bring to the group? Is
she really here to protect the family or is she behind the threats against Diana?

UP NEXT: Diana receives another threat...and it's far more than just a letter. Donna is still sick and Nicholas and Kaia want something, but will Bruce give in? :)
Chapter 4

Gotham; August 3rd, 02:21 EST

Batman shot his grappling line, allowing it to pull him off the ledge of the roof and into the night. He’d stopped a couple of muggings and an attempted rape so far tonight. Other than that, it had been a rather quiet night for Gotham which never set well with him.

It gave him time to think…almost too much time. He didn’t really want to think right now, though. He just wanted to lose himself in the feel of patrol, going through the motions and expending a measure of the frustration and anger that still teemed inside of him despite having made love with Diana twice this evening before leaving.

It revived his soul being able to reconnect with his wife again after all that had transpired today, demonstrating with his body what lived and breathed in his heart for her. She was his rock, his personal beacon of hope and faith. Without her, he knew that he would forever be lost to the darkness that dwelt in his soul.

He just had to find a way to keep her safe in the midst of this latest turmoil to insinuate itself into their lives. Unfortunately, he was going to need more to go on if he was going to get to the bottom of who was behind the threats. What worried him most was that he knew that these letters were just the tip of the iceberg. Things were going to get much worse.

He dreaded to think of just how much more these threats were going to escalate in order to get their point across. He reminded himself that Diana could handle this and take care of herself, but it did little to settle the unrest that consumed him now. She immortal, not invincible.

Right now, though, he needed to focus on Talia and the real reason for her appearance in Gotham.

He still wasn’t certain how he felt about the fact that he had another child. In some ways, he was thrilled to know that he had a son, pride filling his heart. At the same time, he was having a difficult time accepting that he shared his son with Talia al Ghul.

It wasn’t that he hadn’t cared for Talia at one time or hadn’t thought about sharing a life and a future with her. It was more regret that he didn’t share Damian with Diana…that Talia’s blood also flowed through his son’s veins instead of his princess’s.

Bruce knew that what was done was done and it couldn’t be changed no matter how much he wished that things were different. Now, it was time to just accept it and move forward, to find a way to adjust to the changes that were coming to their family.

He still had no idea what it was that Talia actually wanted from him, but he was more than prepared to fight to keep Damian here in Gotham with him if he had to. There was no way that he was going to allow his son to be subjected to Ra’s and his unhinged influence any longer.

Landing on the top of a department store building, he raced across the roof, his cape whipping wildly in the wind. He didn’t slow down as he neared the ledge, instead picking up speed and leaping off the edge. Using his cape, he slowed his descent, gliding on the wind as he landed on the
roof of the Grand Island Hotel. It was time to see what he could learn.

He walked to the edge, lowering his grappling line to rappel down the side of hotel. He landed silently on the balcony of the penthouse suite, thankful for the thick cloud cover that blocked the moon and helped to shield his presence. Keeping to the shadows, he peered inside the balcony doors, past the gap in the curtains.

He spotted Talia lying in bed, the covers concealing her lower half. She wore a cream colored negligee, thin spaghetti straps on her bare shoulders. Her chestnut brown hair was splayed on her pillow, her expression so serene as she slept...almost appearing innocent. He also knew that appearances could be deceiving especially if it was Talia al Ghul.

Bruce found himself abruptly being dragged back in time to the nights that he had shared with her over ten years ago. While it had brought him a small measure of happiness and contentment, there had always been a small part of him that had known that it would never truly last.

He leaned down and kissed her slowly, his tongue prodding her lips and finding solace in the warm cavern of her mouth. She moaned softly as her hand slipped up to settle on the back of his neck. The feel of her fingers pulling him closer, the softness of her nude frame against his was exciting him all over again.

“Talia,” he murmured her name, his arm slipping around her and pulling her flush against his fully aroused body.

She was the closest to happiness that he had found since losing his parents. She exuded so much sex appeal, tempting him with her exotic beauty and sultry sway of her hips...her alluring accent and inner strength. He felt such a powerful attraction to her, one that he couldn’t ignore.

Being bed with her, tangled in the sheets and in each other’s arms, Bruce didn’t think life could be any better. He kissed her deeply, pinning her to the mattress as he began to take her all over again. She gasped with the power of his thrusts, her fingers digging into his shoulders as she held on to him.

“Bruce!” she cried out, coming undone together.

He pulled her against him, stroking her hair as they came down from their mutual release. “Beloved,” she breathlessly purred. “That was incredible.”

He groaned as she slowly stroked his chest, her mouth latching onto his nipple. “I wish we could stay here like this forever,” he told her, his eyes falling closed as she assaulted his chest.

“We can, beloved,” she replied between sensual kisses against his chest.

Bruce chuckled softly. “And how do you propose we do that?” he asked, amused by her suggestion.

“Join us,” she proposed. “Join me and my father. We can be invincible together.”

Bruce sat up to look at her, stunned by her suggestion. “What?”

“Stay with me and my father,” she repeated, sitting up and holding the sheet against her chest. “My father wants you to be part of his plans for a better future...to be his future heir.”

“What are you talking about?” he questioned her with a frown. “What plans?”
“My father has a vision for a better world, one where humans live in perfect harmony with nature instead of plundering and destroying it,” she explained.

“That’s a very noble cause, but I can’t leave Gotham,” he tried to tell her. “Gotham needs me.”

“But what about us…me?” she asked, her expression full of sorrow. “I need you here with me, beloved.”

“Talia…I just...” he began, his voice trailing off as he slowly shook his head. How could he possibly make a choice between Gotham and the promise he had made to his parents and this beautiful woman that he cared so much for?

She placed her forefinger against his lips, leaning in close to him. “Please, Bruce, promise me that you’ll seriously consider it,” she pleaded with him, her eyes filled with adoration. “I love you, beloved. I want you here with me...always.”

She replaced her finger with her lips, her hands continuing their earlier exploration that was rapidly heating his blood. All thoughts other than her filled his mind, Gotham a distant consideration as she forced him back against the pillows. His hands slipped around her waist, pulling her firmly against him.

Bruce released a low breath, his gauntleted hand coming to rest against the balcony doorframe. His life could have been so much different if he had chosen to stay with her. It was only a few days later that he had learned the truth about Ra’s al Ghul and what his vision for a better world actually entailed.

It was soon after that that he had asked Talia to come away with him, to return to Gotham. She had ended up betraying him in the end, choosing her father over him and breaking his heart. He had vowed never to allow another woman get close to him again, reinforcing the barriers around his heart to protect it and to keep from getting hurt ever again.

Selina had come close to working her way into his heart after that, but no one had ever been able to thoroughly breach his barriers like Diana had been able to. She had captivated him from the very beginning, turning his head and capturing his attention like no one else had ever been able to do.

Diana was the brilliant sunrise that lit his entire world, Talia a flickering flame in the wind. He had never been more thankful for Talia breaking his heart than he was now as he realized what his future could have held. The thought of never having Diana in his life, never knowing her or falling in love with her nearly made his knees buckle.

He didn’t know what Talia was up to by coming to Gotham with Damian now, but he would not rest until he had discovered the truth. Giving Talia one last look, he turned and fired his grappling gun, flying off to move on to his next destination tonight.

He needed to go the Themyscirian Embassy to do a sweep of the building. He wouldn’t be able to let his mind rest until he’d made certain that she was safe by being there. While it had been equipped with Wayne Tech’s best security system when it had been built, he wouldn’t be happy until he’d personally searched every inch of the embassy himself.

Getting into his Batmobile, Bruce tore through the streets towards the embassy, his mind still thrumming with endless thoughts and possibilities of what Talia wanted as well as who was threatening Diana. “Batman to Robin,” he called on his commlink. “Report.”

“Robin here,” Tim reported in. “Everything quiet on the west side.”
“Good,” he responded. “Keep me posted if you need anything. I’m heading to the embassy to make a sweep of the building.”

“Any ideas about who could be behind the threats?”

“I have a few, but no not enough evidence for concrete proof.”

“Hope we can come up with something before the peace summit planned for next week,” he replied.

“I know,” he agreed with a sigh. “It’s the first one for Themyscira. Everything must go absolutely perfect for her. I don’t want anything to go wrong.”

“I agree,” Robin said. “It wouldn’t hurt to get Red Hood and Nightwing to help make sure nothing goes wrong.”

“Way ahead of you,” Batman revealed.


His mind was already working way ahead of the events for next week’s peace summit that Diana was overseeing between three disputing countries in hope of finding common ground. Diana was so excited about her first peace talks. She’d been working for weeks on getting it scheduled, offering housing for all three ambassadors at the Themyscirian Embassy where they could work on establishing peace between their countries.

He was going to do everything in his power to make sure that everything went smoothly. He owed it to her to ensure that this peace summit was successful. Because of him, her first official day at the opening of the embassy had been ruined by Talia’s unexpected arrival with their son.

Pulling to a stop in the alley beside the embassy, Batman exited the car, taking a moment to secure the car and scan the area. The street was empty at this time of night, the lights off inside of the embassy. Firing his grappling gun, he scaled the side of the building, landing on the roof.

He did a quick sweep of the roof, making certain that there was no sign of trouble up there before bypassing the security system and entering through a maintenance door. He worked his way through the top floor of the embassy, finding nothing of significance before methodically working his way through every floor.

Approaching Diana’s office, he opened the door, entering it to find it filled with various bouquets of flowers. It caused the corner of his lips to curl slightly, seeing the physical representation of how well-loved his princess was to the world. It wasn’t really a surprise.

Pulling out the mobile device from his utility belt, he slowly worked his way around the large office, sweeping it for any hidden devices. He paused by a wrapped box that sat on the credenza, his brow furrowing as he picked it up to inspect it. It was addressed to Ambassador Wayne, but there was no identification of who it was from.

Setting it down, he systematically worked his way around the office towards her desk, pausing to glance at it. He tightened his grip on his handheld device as dread rolled through him. He found a bloody dagger sticking up out of the middle of her desk, bright red blood pooling on the wood. He drew a shuddering breath, his body frozen with fear for her.

His legs felt like lead, but he forced himself to move. Pulling a camera from his belt, he took several pictures before he began dusting for prints. He tried to think of this as just another case to
investigate, but it was next to impossible. This was his wife who was being threatened, the woman he loved that was in danger.

He knew it was the nature of the lives they led, but this was very different. This was a focused attack on her personally, one that was directed solely at her. The intention behind the threats was abundantly clear. They wanted the embassy closed or Diana would end up paying with her life and that was not something that he could begin to accept.

_Blüdhaven; August 3rd; 07:32 EST_

Donna awoke to the feel of warm lips tracing along the length of her neck, a hand coming to rest against her abdomen and a fully aroused husband pressing against her backside. She moaned sleepily, her lips curling with the feel of him.

“Morning,” she murmured, her eyes falling closed as she gave herself over to the amazing sensations he was creating within her as his hands and mouth began a very thorough exploration of her body.

“Morning,” he whispered against her skin. “How are you feeling this morning?”

“Much better,” she replied.

“Thank heavens,” he said, his hand on her chin turning her to look at him so he could give her a proper morning kiss. “You had me worried.”

“I’m sorry,” she told him, rolling on to her back.

Dick took the opportunity to shift his position so he could move on top of her, using his elbows to prop himself up. “Don’t be,” he said with a shake of his head, his eyebrows knitting as he stared into her deep blue eyes. “I love you, Troia. I hate to see you sick.”

“Well, I’m all better now,” she reassured him, reaching up to run her fingers through his jet black hair. “How was patrol last night?”

“It started out busy, but things seemed to calm down after three,” he revealed, leaning down to press his lips to hers.

She pulled him fully on top of her as she spread her legs to accommodate his muscular body, loving the press of his weight on her. She readily returned his kiss, anxious for some alone time with him before they had to start their respective days. She ran her hands over the expanse of his back as she nibbled on his lower lip, humming her approval as his hand reached between them to touch the apex between her thighs.

Kisses grew more heated, touches becoming far more urgent as they drove each other to that pinnacle. Tangled limbs and panting breaths soon gave way to mutual cries of passion, both of them fully satiated. They held one another close, relishing the feel of being in each other’s arms as they came down from their climaxes.

Dick brushed a damp raven lock from her face, placing gentle kisses across her cheek before finding her lips once more. “How about you go get a shower while I make us some breakfast?” he suggested.

“I don’t want to leave this bed yet,” she replied, glancing at the clock on the nightstand. “But I guess we have no choice, do we?”
“Not really,” he confirmed, forcing himself to let go of his wife.

Donna smiled as she watched her naked husband disentangle himself from the sheets before standing by the bed in all his masculine divine glory. He truly was a picture of finely sculpted manliness and he was all hers to enjoy as she pleased. She could hardly wait to enjoy him all over again.

Dick saw the lustful look in her eyes, the way her heated gaze languidly travelled over the full length of him. She raked her teeth over her bottom lip as lustful thoughts invaded her mind. “Okay, you can’t look at me like that and expect me not to ravage you again,” he told her, pointing dramatically at their bathroom. “Shower…now.”

“Fine,” she uttered with a pout as she threw the covers off her. It was Dick’s turn to cast a wandering, lustful gaze over his naked wife as she walked towards the shower. “Eyes on the kitchen and not my posterior, Bird Boy.”

Dick chuckled as he searched for his boxer shorts, slipping them on before heading to the kitchen to see what he could throw together for breakfast. They didn’t have much in the way of food yet, but he thought he had enough to throw together a rather satisfying omelet.

Hearing the shower turn on, he forced himself to not think about his naked wife who was currently in the shower all alone... who was all wet in that shower all alone, her raven hair clinging to her bronzed skin, hot water running in tiny rivulets down her body.

He growled to himself as he began cracking eggs. She was making it damn near impossible to think straight this morning. While making love with her had been amazing, he found himself wanting her all over again. Unfortunately, that little repeat performance would have to wait until tonight.

He started the coffee maker as he began to make breakfast, hitting the on button on the radio to help get his mind off Donna in the shower. He was beyond relieved that she was feeling better. If she hadn’t, he was going to be hauling her up to the infirmary on the Watchtower this morning to have her checked out whether she liked it or not and he was certain that she wouldn’t like it one bit.

He whistled softly as he worked in the kitchen, popping some bread in the toaster. He wanted to get back to the manor today to help Bruce try to figure out the reason for Talia and Damian’s arrival in Gotham, but he had to work today. Returning to the manor would have to wait until after his shift was over.

He could only imagine the mood Bruce was in right now, but he was pretty sure he wouldn’t refuse the extra help especially with what was going on with Diana now. Bruce was no doubt beside himself with worry, feeling torn between his former lover’s unexpected arrival and his wife being threatened like this, but he wasn’t alone. Not this time. They had the entire family there to help them through it this time.

“Whatever you’re making smells divine,” Donna said as she entered the kitchen, dressed for the day. “I’m positively starving.”

“That’s because everything you’ve eaten the last couple of days has come back up,” Dick replied with a frown as he handed her a plate.

“I’m sure this will stay put,” she reassured him, giving him a sultry once-over. “I feel great this morning... thanks to you.”

“Well, I want you to eat every single bite, young lady,” Dick ordered her.
“Yes, sir,” she responded, saluting him with her fork before digging into her omelet. “I’ll run by the grocery store this afternoon after my photo shoot.”

Handing her a cup of coffee, Dick sat down at the bar beside her. “That would be fabulous,” he agreed. “I think we’re down to a box of crackers and a jar of olives now.”

“Is that all?”

“Pretty much,” he said with a nod as he took a bite of his breakfast. “I’m probably going to head over to the manor after work to see if I can help Bruce. Do you want to come along?”

“Yes, I’m sure Diana could use some support right now,” she replied.

Before Dick could say another word, Donna dropped her fork and ran for the bathroom, her husband following close behind her. “Troia,” he called her name as he entered the bathroom to find her kneeling before the toilet.

He knelt down beside her, holding her hair back for her as she lost what little bit of breakfast she had eaten. He rubbed her back, his worry returning with a vengeance. “That’s it,” he muttered. “You’re going to see someone today.”

“It’s nothing, Dick,” she tried to reassure him. “It’s just some flu bug.”

“You don’t get sick, Donna,” he replied. “Something is definitely not right.”

“We have to go work today,” she reminded him.

“I’ll calling off and you’re calling to reschedule your appointment.”

“Dick…” she began, ready to argue.

“Please, Donna,” he pleaded with her, his hand coming to rest against her cheek. “You’re starting to scare me. I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

Releasing a breath, she finally relented, standing to her feet. “Fine,” she agreed. “I’ll go for you.”

He gave her a crooked grin as he stood to his feet as well. “I knew you’d see it my way.”

Wayne Manor; August 3rd; 08:14 EST

Damian made his way downstairs, uncertain about what today would actually hold for him, but he knew what his mother and grandfather had in mind and he had a definite role to play in it. It didn’t mean that he particularly liked it, though.

Grandfather had taught him everything that he knew, training him to be the very best and future leader of the League of Assassins. He may only be ten years old, but he was not someone to be trifled with. He was not just some ordinary child.

Entering the kitchen, Damian found the two Amazons sitting at the table with the two children that his father had sired with the Amazon princess. He’d never been around other children or spent any sort of time with friends his own age. He’d only ever been with his mother, grandfather, Ubu, and Ra’s defense force.

He found himself more than anxious to return to his real home, not the least bit interested in getting to know his father or his siblings. He’d done very well without them for the last ten years. There was no need to change things now, but the mission had called for it.
Damian came to a stop at the entrance to the kitchen, watching his new family though he was loathe to call them that just yet. His family was with his mother and grandfather, not here. He hoped that they wouldn’t be staying here in Gotham for long and would be gone once the mission was over, but he had a feeling it wasn’t going to be that simple.

“Mama, I want a puppy,” Nicholas spoke up.

“Yah me want one,” Kaia agreed.

Diana chuckled softly as she shook her head in amusement. “You’ll have to convince your father on that one,” she warned them. “What kind of dog do you want, Nicholas?”

“A black one,” Nicholas readily decided.

“Me too!” Kaia added with a scowl. “Me want a puppy.”

“Hera, two puppies in the house,” Diana lamented with a groan. “Your dad is not going to like that.”

“I believe these two have Master Bruce wrapped around their fingers…especially this one here,” Alfred commented as he put a bowl of oatmeal before Kaia. “I have no doubt they could persuade him into perhaps one puppy.”

“I wouldn’t hold my breath,” Diana replied. “Bruce isn’t exactly an animal lover. He’s pretty particular about things like that. I can’t see him agreeing to a dog living in the manor.”

Diana looked up at that moment to find Damian standing in the doorway, a sullen expression on his face. “Good morning,” she politely greeted him.

“Morning,” Damian grumbled as he made his way to the table.

Kaia waved at him while Nicholas seemed to be watching his every move. Artemis appeared to pay him little heed, but that would be an untrue notion. Artemis noticed everything that went on around her, especially when ordered to protect the princess and her family at any cost.

“Master Damian,” Alfred said. “What would you like for breakfast this morning?”

“Eggs,” he stated. “Where is my father?”

Diana’s eyebrow arched with his forthrightness, but she held her tongue. It was obvious that Damian was struggling with all that was happening. She tried to remember that this had to be very difficult for him as well, being thrust into a family that he didn’t know and meeting a father he probably never knew existed.

“Your father is downstairs working,” Alfred patiently informed him.

“Still?” Diana questioned him. “He didn’t come to bed last night. I can only imagine what has managed to capture his attention now.”

Diana couldn’t help wondering if it had something do with Talia and Damian’s unexpected arrival in Gotham, but kept her suspicions to herself. She’d been worried when she woke to find that he hadn’t come to bed last night.

She’d learned long ago not to worry herself sick when he didn’t come to bed after patrol. After the first thirty or forty times when she’d woken to find herself all alone, she’d flown down into the
cave in a panic to find him safely working away on a case and completely oblivious to the time. She trusted Tim to wake her if Bruce needed her or was in need of being patched up the nights that she didn’t accompany him as Batwoman.

“Has my mother called yet?” Damian asked.

“No, not yet,” Diana told him. “I’m sure that she’ll be coming by soon.”

“You don’t like my mother,” Damian stated, no hint of a question in his words.

“No, I do not,” Diana coolly replied. “It doesn’t mean that you’re not welcome here as Bruce’s son.”

“I’m not sure how long I’ll be staying here,” he informed her.

“You will always be welcome here no matter what the future holds.”

“I will never call you mother,” he bit out as Alfred set his plate of eggs down in front of him.

Diana stiffened with his abrasive attitude. “I’d never expect you to,” she calmly responded. “I’d still like us to be friends.”

Damian snorted as he poked at his eggs with the tines of his fork. “Not likely.”

“Why you insolent little—” Artemis ground out as she stood to her feet, the legs of her chair scraping across the floor.


Artemis glared darkly at the boy for a moment longer before finally sitting down, her lips twisted into a sneer of disapproval. Damian appeared unaffected by her anger, eating his breakfast and ignoring the Amazon or the potential threat that she could be to him.

Diana stood to her feet, needing to see what Bruce was up to downstairs. “Finish your breakfast, Nicholas and Kaia,” she instructed them. “I’m going to go downstairs to check on your father. You listen to Alfred.”

Leaving the kitchen, she hoped that Damian didn’t try to provoke Artemis into a fight. It was quite obvious that Damian was a lot of like Talia and Ra’s which did not bode well for their family, also carrying an arrogant streak similar to his father’s. He was definitely going to be a problem that they were going to have a difficult time dealing with.

Passing through the cave entrance behind the grandfather clock, Diana floated down the steps. She was somewhat surprised not to find her husband hunched over his computer as was usual for him. Making her way deeper into the gloomy sanctuary, she finally spotted him in his lab studying something under his microscope.

“Bruce?” she called to him as she approached.

Not receiving a response, she silently closed the distance between them, her concern mounting with the rigidity with which he held himself and the death-grip that he held on some dagger in his left hand. Something had obviously happened last night that had deeply troubled him.

She had scaled back her patrols with him as Batwoman, hoping that once things with the embassy had settled down she could return to patrolling Gotham with him again. Now, she regretted that
decision, wishing that she had gone out with him last night.

“Bruce…what is it?” she asked. “What’s wrong?”

Bruce’s chin fell to his chest as he released a ragged breath, squeezing his eyes closed. “I found this dagger covered with blood sticking out of the top of your desk at the embassy last night.”

“What?” she gasped in shock, reaching for the dagger in Bruce’s hand.

He handed her the dagger, finally turning towards her. Instead of hot fury burning in his piercing blue eyes, she found ice cold wrath that hinted at the steel-like determination brewing within him. She almost felt bad for whoever was behind these threats. They had no idea the dangerous depths that lived within Bruce that they had awakened.

When it came to his family, Bruce could be absolutely ruthless.

“Was there any note left behind this time?” she asked as she closely examined the weapon.

“I think a bloody dagger sticking out of your desk was message enough, don’t you?” he angrily snapped, yanking the weapon out of her hand.

Diana calmly drew a deep breath in an effort to not lose her patience with him. He could be next to impossible to deal with when he got like this, but she knew it was based in fear and his love for her.

“Do you know whose blood it was?”

“It wasn’t human blood,” he replied. “It was some sort of an animal.”

“That’s a relief,” she murmured with a sigh.

“A relief?” he nearly yelled. “Diana, someone obviously wants you dead. There’s absolutely no relief in that.”

“I’m sorry,” she apologized, her hand coming to rest on his forearm. “I just meant that I was relieved that someone hadn’t been killed or hurt.”

He stared at the weapon in his hands, his mind racing with possibilities and none of them good. It caused cold fear to pump through his veins. “Have you ever seen this dagger before?”

Taking it back, she examined it again, her heart nearly leaping into her throat. “This is my dagger.”

Bruce’s head snapped up to look at her, his eyebrows knitted with worry. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” she confirmed, her throat constricting as memories of this dagger came flooding back to her.

“I dusted it for fingerprints,” he told her. “The results should be complete any minute now. Did you leave it in your bedroom at the palace on Themyscira?”

Bruce’s worry only intensified as he watched as all the color drained from Diana’s face. She slowly shook her head as she bit at her bottom lip. “Not exactly.”

“What does that mean?” he demanded to know, grasping hold of her upper arms as he glared at her. “Diana, you’re scaring me. Who could’ve gotten a hold of your dagger?”

“Aresia,” she softly revealed.
“Aresia is dead,” he bit out. “You said yourself that she perished when the airplane exploded with her inside of it.”

“I know she died, Bruce,” Diana confirmed, “but I gave her this dagger as a gift over fifty years ago.”

Bruce stared at his wife in stunned disbelief, his gaze falling to the dagger in her hands as he released his hold on her. His mind was spinning in an effort to make sense of all of this, but was coming up with nothing. What in the world was going on here?

Someone was after Diana and wasn’t going to stop until she was dead.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: WHAT?! Aresia? What's going on here? A lot more than you can begin to imagine, peeps!

UP NEXT: Dick and Donna get some unexpected news. Kaia and Nicholas still want a puppy and Bruce tests Damian to see how well trained he actually is.

Hope you guys are getting sick of me. Got lots going on right now with all the fics. Thank you all for your support! :)
Chapter 5

Dick paced the length of the exam room, his arms folded firmly against his chest. A frown was fixed on his typical jovial face; his blue eyes that usually sparkled with mischief were now drowning in worry. It was obvious his mind was swimming with thoughts that did nothing to settle his concern.

Donna watched him pace from her perch on the end of the examination table as he reached the far wall only to turn and start the same route he’d been walking for the last twenty minutes all over again. “Dick, I’m fine,” she attempted to reassure him for the hundredth time. Unfortunately, it fell on deaf ears. “You’re making me nervous with your pacing.”

Dick turned to look at her, releasing a sigh as he made his way to her. “I’m sorry,” he murmured, wrapping his arms around her and holding her close. “I just can’t stand the thought of something being wrong with you. You’re an Amazon, Troia. You don’t get sick.”

Donna returned his embrace, laying her head on his shoulder. “I know, but I’m not that easy to get rid of.”

A quick knock at the door forced them apart just as Leslie entered the room with a smile on her face and a chart in her hands. Dick immediately grabbed Donna’s hand. “Leslie, please tell me,” he pleaded. “Is she all right?”

“Well, yes and no,” Leslie hesitantly began. “She’s in perfect health.”

“Well, yes and no,” Leslie hesitantly began. “She’s in perfect health.”

“Then what’s wrong with her?” he pressed.

“Nothing is actually wrong, Dick,” she calmly responded. “You’re pregnant, Donna. You two are going to be parents.”

Dick’s jaw fell open in shock, the possibility of Donna being pregnant not even crossing his mind since all of this first started. He’d been too worried about all the other possibilities to even consider the most obvious explanation for her condition.

He turned to look at his wife to find tears brimming in her bright blue eyes. He quickly reached out to her, cradling her face in his hands. “We’re going to have a baby,” he murmured, overcome with emotions varying from elation to terror and everything in between at that moment.

Leslie silently left the pair alone, allowing them some privacy. Bruce was going to be a grandfather. “Wonders never cease,” she happily thought to herself.

“Are you happy about it?” Donna tentatively asked, almost afraid of his answer.

“Are you kidding me, Troia?” he replied. “I’m over the moon about it. How could you possibly think for one moment that I wouldn’t want to have a baby with you or that I wouldn’t be happy about it?”
“Well, I know that we had wanted to wait for a couple of years before thinking about having a baby,” she explained as tears began to slip down her cheeks.

“I’m beyond thrilled, Donna,” Dick reassured her as he wiped away her tears. “There’s nothing in this world that I want more than to have this baby with you.”

Her smile was nearly blinding as she threw her arms around his neck. “I just can’t believe it,” she murmured in his ear. “We’re going to have a baby.”

“I love you so much,” he told her, pressing his lips to hers.

Her arms tightened around his neck, drawing him closer as she parted her lips. His hands settled on her hips, pulling her firmly against him as he kissed his wife breathless. Dick had never dreamed that he could be any happier after marrying Donna, but he had been proven very wrong.

“Okay, you two,” Leslie interrupted as she returned to the exam room with the ultrasound machine. “You already have a baby on the way. No need to try to work on another one right away.”

Donna blushed as she pulled back, biting at her bottom lip in embarrassment. “So how far along am I, Leslie?”

“I’m guessing around seven weeks, but we’re about to find out for sure,” she revealed.

“Ugh,” Dick groaned as Donna lay back on the examination table and lifted her shirt. “I’m not going to be able to wait seven more months to see our baby.”

“You’re going to be thankful for the time you’ll have to prepare for your new arrival,” Leslie replied as she applied gel to Donna abdomen. “It’s going to be a big adjustment for the two of you.”

Dick moved to the other side of the exam table, taking Donna’s hand in his as Leslie began to move the wand over her abdomen. “I can’t believe this is really happening,” Dick said. “It’s like a wonderful dream.”

“Oh, it’s really happening,” Leslie reassured them. “In fact…there’s your baby.”

Dick and Donna stared at the screen, both stunned by what they saw. “It’s so small,” Donna marveled.

“Your baby is about the size of a blueberry right now,” Leslie informed them. “I’d say you’re right at seven weeks.”

Donna felt tears begin to trickle down her cheeks. “Look at what we did, Dick,” she softly murmured in awe.

“It’s so amazing,” he agreed, leaning over and kissing her temple. “How soon before we’ll know if it’s a boy or a girl?”

“You’ll have to wait another eleven to twelve weeks before we’ll know that,” she replied. “We’ll have to set you up for regular visits.”

“And no more missions, Troia,” Dick sternly stated. “You’re on leave starting immediately.”

“If I can’t be on active duty, this is the best reason not to,” she agreed.

“I’ll print you a picture so you can show your family,” Leslie said.
“We have to tell Bruce and Diana,” Dick suddenly realized.

“Tonight,” Donna readily decided. “We’ll go over for dinner tonight and tell everyone the news.”

“It’s good news that they could actually use about now,” Dick added.

*Gotham; August 3rd, 10:43 EST*

Diana sat at her desk at the Themysciran Embassy, her brow furrowed as she worked on preparations for the peace talks coming up next week. There was still much work to be done before the ambassadors from their respective countries arrived.

The ambassadors would be staying here in the embassy where they would hopefully be safe, but now Diana wasn’t so certain about that. She glanced at the deep scratch in the top of her desk where the dagger had been imbedded into the wood.

She lightly ran the tip of her forefinger over the groove, her thoughts jumbled with reasons why and theories about who was behind it. The fact that they had been able to get inside of the embassy and do something like this without being caught had her more than a little concerned, especially with the ambassadors arriving next week.

She needed to be able to ensure their safety, provide a safe haven for them to come together in the name of peace to find common ground. If she didn’t succeed in this newest mission, she feared that no country would be willing to work with Themyscira. She would be a disgrace to her sisters and bring shame upon the Amazons as well as her mother if this turned into a disaster.

She was thankful that Bruce had cleaned the mess from her desk last night. If she had discovered it this morning, she more than likely would’ve thrown her desk right out the window in a fit of fury. Luckily, Bruce had found it first and was able to collect valuable evidence.

Aresia.

She couldn’t still be alive…could she? Diana had watched that plane explode with Aresia on board. No body had ever been recovered, but there was no way that she could have gotten out of there alive. She began to wonder if maybe there was some divine intervention, one of her gods rescuing her from her fate. She didn’t really see that as a possibility, but she couldn’t rule it out either.

She sat back in her chair as she considered the suspects, trying to look at it the way that Bruce always viewed a case. The only fingerprints found on the dagger were her own and Aresia’s. Someone was either trying to make them believe that Aresia was actually alive or Aresia didn’t die that day the plan exploded.

She rubbed her forehead, deciding that the best part of her morning had been the fact that she had left for the embassy before Talia had shown up at the manor. Damian was already proving to be a handful, but she was more than up to the task. If he wanted a battle of wills, he had more then met his match in her.

Picking up her cell phone, Diana checked her messages frowning when she found that Donna had yet to return her text message this morning. She hoped that her sister was all right, but reminded herself that she was in good hands with Dick. He absolutely adored her.

While she had been hesitant at first, Diana didn’t think that Donna could have fallen in love with a better man than Dick. They were perfect for each other in every way conceivable. Still, she couldn’t help the lingering worry that continued to creep into the back of her mind.
Diana decided if she didn’t hear from her soon, she’d give Donna a call to make sure she was okay. She sent a quick text message to Bruce to see how things were going with Damian this morning before turning her focus back to her work.

Three ambassadors were scheduled to come to Gotham next week, all arriving at various times throughout the day on Wednesday. She had made arrangements for them to all be housed in separate areas of the embassy, ensuring privacy and hopefully decreasing the chance of a war breaking out right there in the newly built embassy.

The food had been ordered per their dietary requests, the kitchen staff prepped and ready to go. Commissioner Gordon was going to provide increase patrols around the embassy while the diplomats were here. Now, she just had to worry about whoever was sending these threats. With the increase in violence came escalating worry about her family, but she knew there was no safer place on the planet then Wayne Manor.

It did help to know that Artemis was here to help watch over her family so she could focus on her work as an ambassador as well as keeping up with her duties within the Justice League. It had taken a lot of work and a great deal of time, but a routine had at last been established.

Hearing laughter, Diana looked up to find Artemis and Phaedra entering her office. She’d sent Phaedra on a mission to find appropriate attire for Artemis since the Amazon would be staying here in Gotham for the time being. She thought that it would give Phaedra a chance to catch up with her friend as well. She knew that Phaedra was a little homesick at times and spending time with Artemis was just the fix she needed even if Artemis wasn’t actually from Themyscira.

“You should have come with us, Princess Diana,” Phaedra said as she and Artemis entered Diana’s office with several shopping bags. “It was so much fun. I hope we didn’t destroy your mate’s credit card.”

“Bruce will be fine, Phaedra,” Diana reassured her as she made her way around to the other side of her to desk to see what they had purchased. “Please just tell me you didn’t attack anyone, Artemis.”

“My sword was never drawn during our outing,” Artemis reported with a grimace. “However, there was one woman who nearly lost her arm after spraying me in the face with some foul smelling substance.”

Diana couldn’t help but chuckle, remembering all too well her first encounter with the perfume lady at the department store. It had taken every single ounce of self-restraint she possessed not to strike the woman for assaulting her with perfume.

She fondly recalled her lengthy conversation soon after with Bruce and Kal on the Watchtower explaining her confusion with the whole need for women to paint themselves and parade around with such false pretense. It had taken Bruce and Kal the better part of an hour to explain it to her, but she’d ultimately had to turn to Shayera and the stack of Cosmo magazines she’d given her to find the answers she’d been looking for.

Of course, falling in love with Bruce had also opened her eyes to the desire to delight and entice the one who stole her heart. It wasn’t about debasing herself or changing who she was. It was about wanting to be her best for the man she loved.

“I can totally relate, Artemis,” Diana agreed. “It looks like you found plenty of things, though.”

“Enough clothes to keep her looking beautiful and in style for years to come,” Phaedra replied.
“I do not care if I look beautiful or in style,” Artemis said, wrinkling her nose. “I’m here to protect the princess and her family—nothing more.”

“Just wait,” Diana predicted. “I’m sure someone will come along that will change your mind.”

Artemis crossed her arms, glaring darkly at Diana. “I’m here to protect you and ensure the safety of your family, not fall in love and especially not with some man.”

“I don’t know, Artemis,” Diana teased her. “I do have another son who isn’t attached to anyone right now. You might like Jason. I think the two of you would get along well together.”

Artemis snorted derisively as she looked away in unmistakable disgust. “I highly doubt he could be any sort of match to me,” she spat out, impressed.

“You don’t know Jason,” Diana replied, turning to pick up her phone to find Bruce had replied to her message.

“Not going well. We definitely have our hands full. Talia is up to something.”

“We already knew that. So what are you going to do now?”

“Test his combat ability. You get to test his sword skills.”

Diana groaned as she sent him a quick reply, one that may or may not have included a Greek curse. She hoped and prayed that they would be able to find their way through this latest challenge that came in the form of a ten year old boy who was like Bruce but trained to be an assassin like his grandfather Ra’s al Ghul.

She definitely didn’t like the idea of Damian being around Nicholas and Kaia, but she knew that Alfred and Bruce would never let anything happen to her children. Alfred may not look like it, but the man was more deadly than Bruce.

“What is it, princess?” Artemis inquired.

“Damian,” she told her.

“That boy needs to be taught a lesson that he won’t soon forget, starting with manners and respect,” Artemis bit out.

“I have a strong feeling that you’ll have to get in a very long line in order to do just that,” Diana said with a frown.

“We’re going to get something to eat,” Phaedra announced. “Do you want anything?”

“No, go ahead,” Diana replied, watching them leave. She got to her feet, making her way to the countless bouquets that lines her credenza. Gifts and flowers had continued to come in, overwhelming her with the well wishes and congratulations.

She frowned as she noticed the gift that had arrived on the day the embassy had opened. She had forgotten all about it, setting it aside to deal with later. Picking it up, she couldn’t help hoping that it was another box of chocolates. She had received a box of expensive chocolates from Kasnia, one that she had ashamedly finished this morning.

Pulling the ribbon free, she carefully removed the wrapper and opened the box to find her doll that she’d had as a child on Themyscira. She had left it in her room at the palace on her island home.
Now, it was here in Gotham…with its head missing.

_Batcave; August 3rd, 11:31 EST_

“I want to see what your level of training is,” Bruce told his son as he led him into the training room.

Damian appeared indignant as if the question alone was completely beneath even answering. He scowled darkly at his father, staring him down. Little did the boy know that his father was the superior when it came to glares.

“I can definitely take you down,” Damian arrogantly stated.

“We’ll see about that,” Bruce replied, hiding his surprise at his son’s overconfidence. He knew that he really shouldn’t be. It was his blood running through Damian’s blood along with al Ghul.

“It’s your funeral,” Damian said with an indifferent shrug.

Bruce knew that he needed to do this, not only to assess his level of skill but to also evaluate his intelligence and ability to think quickly on his feet. If there was going to be anyway to undo the damage that Ra’s al Ghul had done, he needed to know how far Damian was willing to go in a fight.

They carefully sized each other up, neither making the first move yet. Bruce crouched low on the mat, wondering just how much Talia had told their son about him. It was obvious that he knew Bruce was Batman, but did Damian know the extent of what that meant or what he did every night in Gotham?

Talia had no idea that he was immortal and had stopped aging. He would forever be thirty-six years old. While he was grateful for the gift, it did carry several complications with it, ones that they were going to have to eventually navigate through. Today, however, was not that day.

Losing his patience, Damian decided to make the first move, throwing himself at Bruce with a flurry of kicks and punches that Bruce swiftly deflected with superior skill much to his son’s surprise. Breathing heavily, Damian retreated several steps back to regroup, his blue eyes narrowed in frustration.

They started circling each other, Bruce patiently waiting to see what his son would do next. Damian turned away from him, appearing as if he was going to walk away from the challenge, but Bruce wasn’t buying it. His son was too arrogant to walk away from a chance to prove himself to his father.

Damian abruptly whirled on his heel, lunging at him with a murderous look in his eyes. Bruce effectively blocked his attack, following up with a kick to the back of his son’s knee. Damian began to go down, but swiftly compensated as he tucked into a roll.

He flipped out of the way of a fist coming straight at his face, coming up with a foot to Bruce’s chest. Bruce caught him by the heel of his shoe, throwing him off balance and causing him to land hard on the mat. Damian was up and on his feet in less than a heartbeat, a sneer on his lips.

He refused to back down or give up, knowing that he was better than his father. He angrily charged at him, feinting to his left only to come up with a right hook. Bruce raised his arm, blocking his hit. Damian swiftly countered with a firm kick to Bruce’s ribs.

Bruce grunted softly with the contact, somewhat impressed with his son’s skills, but he knew that
there was room for improvement. Damian was definitely very good and trained by some of the best, but he hadn’t been trained by him.

He allowed his son to get three quick punches in to see what he would follow it up with next. He was rewarded with a kick to the jaw that was more powerful that he had anticipated it would be. He could feel a thin trickle of blood escape from the corner of his mouth as he stumbled back a couple of steps.

The boy was lean, making him easy to underestimate, but there was a lot of strength contained in his small frame and he knew exactly how to channel it. It could be very detrimental to dismiss him or ignore the very real threat that he could present to an opponent especially if he was armed with weapons.

In the short time that he had spent sparing with him, Bruce had already learned quite a bit about his son. His maneuvers were performed with great precision, but some of it was predictable. With a little more work, he could shape Damian into a very formidable fighter.

Bruce wiped the trickle of blood from his mouth with the back of his hand as he studied him. Damian seemed quite pleased with himself for drawing blood, feeling as though he had just proven himself when in reality Bruce had allowed him to get those shots in.

“Not bad,” Bruce commented.

Damian straightened up, his expression incredulous. “Not bad?” he repeated with disdain in his voice. “I believe I was quite superior. I beat you.”

“Not really,” Bruce stated as he stared down his son. “I let you get those shots in, Damian.”

“Whatever,” Damian snorted in disbelief, crossing his arms defiantly. “I made the infamous Batman bleed and you’re too embarrassed to admit it.”

Bruce closed the distance between them in three long strides, allowing his towering height to make an indelible impression upon his son. “I could have easily blocked each and every hit and kick,” he told him with a deadly calm air that only added to his imposing frame. “I knew exactly how you were going to follow up each hit and which direction you were going to take. It was performed perfectly, but highly predictable. I needed to know exactly what areas we needed to work the most on. Now, I know.”

Bruce stared at him a moment longer, letting his glare relay the truth of his words before turning and walking away. Enraged, Damian charged at him, determined to prove to his father that he knew that he was highly trained and not in need of further teaching.

As Damian lunged at him, Bruce whirled on his heel, catching his son’s wrist in a tight grip that caught the boy completely by surprise. Bruce ground his teeth as he stared at him, wanting his lesson to be absorbed. “Like I said…predictable,” he told him, releasing his grip on him.

“You have to admit that he is almost as good as my father or you.”

Bruce and Damian looked up to find Talia standing there in the doorway of the training room, Alfred’s retreating form seen in the background. “He’s good, Talia, but I wouldn’t go that far,” Bruce readily decided as he walked over to the table to grab a bottle of water.

“My father personally oversaw his training, teaching him everything he knows,” Talia shot back, putting a protective hand on her son’s shoulder. “He worked for hours at a time since he could walk.”
“I’m sure he did,” Bruce said, turning to look at her. “He has a good base of knowledge and skill, but there is definite room for improvement. He needs to learn to control his anger.”

“I’m sure he is more than skilled enough to join you on patrol as Robin,” Talia told him.

“I have a Robin already,” Bruce ground out, not liking at all where this was going. Talia was up to something, making sure that she planted Damian firmly in both aspects of their lives—their family as well as the Batclan.

“I’m sure you could always use more help in your mission to save your beloved city,” Talia shot back, pressing the issue. “Why not your very own son instead of those boys you adopted?”

Bruce could feel his anger burning through his veins as he scowled darkly at her. “Tim, Dick, and Jason are just as much my sons as Nicholas and Damian and don’t you ever insinuate otherwise.”

“They do not have your blood flowing through their veins,” she snapped. “Damian is older than Nicholas therefore he should be the one to inherit the mantle of the Batman when you step down.”

“I’m not stepping down, Talia,” he growled as he came to stand before her. “And I don’t care whose blood flows through my adopted sons’ veins. They are no less my children. Now, if you want Damian to be a part of this family, you’ll respect that. If not, there’s the door.”

“Fine with me,” Damian grumbled, crossing his arms against his chest.

“What does he have to do to prove to you that he’s ready to fight by your side?” she bit out.

Bruce’s gaze narrowed suspiciously, his mind racing to figure out what it was she was up to. “Why?” he demanded to know. “Why are you so anxious to make Damian into Robin?”

“I just want to make sure Damian fits in here and is given the same chances as his other brothers and sister,” Talia attempted to tell him.

“You know I would never treat him any differently than the rest of my children, Talia,” Bruce bit out. “Besides, it’s not like Nicholas and Kaia are ready to fill any shoes yet.”

“Fine,” she relented. “What more does he need to do to prove himself to you?”

“I’m going to have Diana test his sword skills later,” he revealed as he began to exit the training room.

“That wench will not test my son,” Talia spat out. “I don’t want her near him.”

Bruce whirled on his heel, his expression deadly. “Don’t you ever talk about Diana that way,” he furiously hissed. “She is my wife, the woman that I love, and the mother of two of my children. You and Damian will show her respect or we’re done right here and now.”

Talia swallowed hard despite herself, knowing that she had pushed him too far. It inflamed her anger and jealousy with how protective he was of the Amazon. Damian, on the other hand, couldn’t care less. “I will not call her ‘mother’,” he spat out.

“I would never ask you to,” Bruce told him, placing his hand on his son’s shoulder. “You already have a mother. At the same time, you must be respectful of her as well as everyone else in this household. I will not tolerate insolent behavior.”

Damian looked up at him with a sullen expression on his face. He didn’t argue any further, but it
was clear that he wasn’t happy about the stipulations of staying here in this house. The sooner that they got this mission over with and left, the happier he would be.

“Damian,” Bruce began, his tone gentler. “I think you’re a very gifted fighter and possess immense skill that can be used for good. We all have room for improvement. There are several things that I can teach you that will only help you.”

“Fine,” he relented, his arms falling to his sides.

“Come, Damian,” Talia said, staring intently at Bruce. “I have your school work upstairs waiting for you.”

Bruce watched as Talia led his son towards the stairs that would lead them into the manor, his thoughts troubled. There had to be a reason that Talia was so intent on making sure Damian was the next Robin. He was going to have to warn Tim to watch his back just in case Talia was determined to make room for Damian in the Batclan.

**Wayne Manor; August 3rd, 18:36 EST**

Bruce looked around the table at all who were gathered here together, the sight filling him with a sense of warmth and happiness that he hadn’t known before Diana had entered his life. At the same time, he couldn’t deny the unease that continued to gnaw at his insides, warning him that trouble was brewing beyond the threats to Diana.

His muscles instinctively tensed with the thought of Diana being threatened, his wandering gaze falling on Artemis. He felt a slight measure of comfort with the fiery Amazon’s presence here, but only slight. He wouldn’t truly feel relaxed until the threat had been fully dealt with.

He smirked to himself as he noticed the way Jason was practically drooling over the newly arrived Amazon from across the table from her. He was having a very hard time taking his eyes off her. Artemis was ignoring the overt attention he was paying her, talking instead to Donna.

Bruce knew there was definitely something going on with how Dick and Donna held hands as they ate, sharing little looks and whispering to each other. He had a feeling he already knew what was up, but was willing to bide his time until they were ready to spill the beans.

He let his gaze move on to Damian who was sitting beside Tim, Damian’s attention solely on his plate of food. Tim had tried to strike up a conversation with him a few times, but wasn’t having much luck pulling him out of his shell. Damian’s icy attitude was apparent to all as was the large chip he carried on his shoulder. It was definitely going to take a lot of work to break through that icy exterior of his. Fortunately, he had a wife who specialized in doing just that.

The feel of Diana’s hand caressing his thigh and her warm breath on his ear rapidly brought him back to the moment. “Have you heard the latest news?” she asked, amusement lacing her voice.

“Now what?” he questioned her, looking at her with a frown.

“Nicholas, do you want to tell daddy what you want to get?”

Nicholas’s face lit up with the reminder as he dropped his fork. “I want a puppy, daddy,” he animatedly announced.

Dick, Jason, and Tim all attempted to stifle the laughter that threatened to spill from their lips, but failed miserably. They all knew how Bruce felt about pets, especially pets living in the manor. They couldn’t wait to see how Bruce was going to react to the request coming from his four-year-
old son.

Bruce looked over at the three boys with a frown, knowing what they were all thinking. It was hard to say no to his young children especially when Nicholas looked so expectantly at him with those blue eyes that were just like his mother’s. He was so sunk.

“Me too, daddy,” Kaia joined in. “Me want a oggy too.”

That was the final nail in the proverbial coffin.

“I don’t know,” Bruce hesitantly replied as he sat back in his chair, all eyes locked expectantly on him. “What kind of dog do you want?”

“A big one,” Kaia decided, her eyes widening as she tried to show him how big of a dog she wanted with her little hands.

“A black one,” Nicholas said.

Bruce drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly as he searched for a way to say no that wouldn’t end up crushing his children and creating tears. “I guess…we could...maybe...someday...look into getting...a puppy,” he found himself uttering.

Bruce groaned as he realized what he’d just said, his son and daughter cheering excitedly. Diana bit at her bottom lip, rubbing his back in support as well as sympathy. Bruce leveled his three eldest sons with a deadly batglare in an effort to stifle their amusement, but it only made them laugh even harder.

“What would you name your puppy?” Diana asked, trying to take the heat off Bruce.

“Daddy,” Kaia said.

“You’d name your new puppy ‘daddy’?” Diana said with a confused frown.

Kaia nodded adamantly as she held her sippy cup. “For my daddy,” she tried to explain, a huge smile on her face.

Bruce couldn’t help but return his daughter’s adoring smile. “No,” Nicholas interjected. “We name him Batman.”

Diana chuckled with the suggestion. “That would be hilarious,” she replied, trying to stifle her amusement. “We could put a cape and mask on him.”

Bruce glared at his wife, the muscles in his jaw tightening. “Not helping, Princess.”

“So, Bruce,” Dick piped up with a mischievous grin on his face. “When do we get to go look for a new puppy?”

Bruce growled threateningly at him, but it had no effect whatsoever. “Maybe next week…I guess,” he reluctantly ground out. “I’ll have to check my schedule.”

Another round of cheers from the two youngest Wayne children filled the dining room as Alfred entered with dessert. “I guess there’s something exciting to celebrate,” he noted with a knowing grin. “How about some chocolate cake to celebrate the newest addition to the family?”

“Actually, Donna and I have some news that we’d like to share,” Dick announced, glancing at his wife. “Do you want to tell them, Troia?”
Donna beamed as she nodded her head, squeezing her husband’s hand. “We’re going to have a baby.”

Diana gasped in shock, happiness filling her face. “How far along are you?”

“I’m only seven weeks along, but it’s why I’ve been feeling sick for the last few days,” she revealed with a grimace as she handed Diana the picture from the ultrasound. “We just saw Leslie this morning. We won’t know if it’s a boy or a girl for a few more weeks.”

Bruce leaned over to look at the picture in Diana’s hand, memories of her being pregnant with their children parading through his mind. It filled him with great pride knowing that Dick was going to be a father in a few months. “Congratulations you two,” he told them.

Dick grinned at him, his excitement contagious. “Thanks,” he replied. “That means you’re going to be a grandfather, Bruce.”

“Can we call you ‘pops’?” Jason joked.

“No,” Bruce decided with a frown. “I think I’m too young to be a grandfather,”

“I’ll be a grandmother and an aunt,” Diana reminded him.

“And you’ll still be as beautiful as ever,” Bruce murmured.

“Oh, brother,” Jason mumbled. “They’re getting all mushy again.”

“Someday you’ll find someone that captures your attention and you’ll be just as bad,” Donna warned him, patting his leg.

Jason glanced at Artemis, their eyes meeting. Artemis quickly looked away, refusing to even consider the notion of following in the footsteps of Diana and Donna. She was not about to allow herself to fall for some foolish man and especially not this silly Jason Todd.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Nicholas and Kaia are getting a puppy, Dick and Donna are having a baby, Diana is getting threats, Talia is up to something, and Jason is getting the cold shoulder from Artemis. Poor Bruce! How much more can he handle?

UP NEXT: Diana receives a deadly threat. Artemis and Jason spend some time together. :)
Chapter 6

Wayne Enterprises; August 5th, 11:56 EST

Bruce leaned back in his chair, his right leg crossed over his left, his ankle resting on his knee as he listened to the head of Wayne Security as he outlined the plans for the visiting dignitaries. The diplomats would be arriving in three days and he wanted to make sure that the Themyscirian Embassy was well protected and prepared for every eventuality.

He glanced at Diana who was sitting to his left. She was listening intently as she jotted down notes, determination permeating her cobalt blue eyes. He shared in her resolve to make this first peace summit a complete success no matter what it took. He'd already enlisted Nightwing and Red Hood to assist during the three days they would be staying in Gotham with Black Canary and Etrigen on standby if backup was needed.

He had been rather upset with her for not telling him about the headless doll right away when she'd received it at the embassy two days ago. She had chosen to wait until after putting the children to bed, ensuring his presence at dinner instead of hiding out in his cave doing research. She knew him far too well.

It made him worry that much more that whoever was behind these threats was just ramping up for something far worse to happen in time for the peace talks. He wanted to cancel the summit and whisk Diana away to some secluded island where no one could find her, but he knew that he couldn’t do that to her. She’d never forgive him if he even attempted something like that. Still, the thought managed to linger in the back of his mind, becoming more appealing by the second.

Diana looked up at that moment, noticing the look on his face and the deviousness in his eyes as he studied her. She’d seen that look far too often in the past. He was silently plotting something and she had a feeling that whatever it was she wasn’t going to like it one bit.

She gave him a questioning look to which he only smiled wickedly. She rolled her eyes, wondering what in Hera he was up to this time. The problem was there was no predicting when it came to that incredibly shrewd mind of his. She was going to have to seriously interrogate him later, maybe threaten him with the lasso of truth. Of course, he’d love that idea.

She was relieved that he had been able to return to work. He had taken a few days off to spend time with Damian and to try to get to the bottom of what Talia was up to, but now it was time for life to return to normal…or as normal as things ever got for them.

Damian was proving to be a challenge to say the least and Talia was a definite wild card that they were forced to keep a close eye on. There wasn’t much more they could do until she finally made her move. Thankfully, Bruce had insisted that Damian stay with Talia during the day while they were at work instead of at the manor with Alfred and the children.

Neither of them was very comfortable with him being around Nicholas and Kaia and Alfred had enough to do without having to keep track of Damian as well. Damian was highly intelligent just like his father and trained as an assassin by Ra’s, making him a very dangerous boy. They wanted...
to limit his time around Nicholas and Kaia until he had earned their trust which at this rate could take years.

Diana had to admit that she felt bad for Damian in a way. The poor boy hardly stood a chance having Talia as a mother and Ra’s as his grandfather. She had no doubts that Ra’s had been instilling his deluded beliefs and maniacal schemes into Damian. It was going to make breaking through all that brainwashing more than difficult. It was going to be a nightmare requiring a great deal of patience as well as perseverance.

“I think this will provide the best protection for the embassy itself as well as the ambassadors,” Alex Winslow concluded as he turned back to face the Wayne’s, turning off the power point presentation he’d put together. “Do either of you have any questions or suggestions?”

“It sounds like a great plan, Alex,” Bruce replied. “I just want to make sure everyone understands the importance of this. There have been some threats from someone who has already managed to get inside of the embassy. I want to make sure Diana and her staff as well as the visiting dignitaries are safe.”

“You have my word that I will personally oversee this peace summit to make certain that everything goes smoothly,” Alex told him. “I’m meeting with the security team tomorrow to review the plan.”

“Thank you,” Bruce said as he stood to his feet. “I know you’ll do a great job.”

Alex shook his hand before beginning to gather his things. “Thank you, Mister Wayne,” he responded. “I’m going to head over to the embassy right now and do a preliminary walk through.”

“I appreciate that,” Bruce replied. “I’ll touch base with you tomorrow then.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” Alex agreed, turning to Diana. “Please call me if you have any concerns at all, Missus Wayne. I’m available any time, day or night.”

“I will…thank you, Alex,” she responded with a smile as he left the conference room.

Bruce sat back down, turning his attention to his wife. “What do you think?” he asked her. “Are you happy with everything Alex outlined?”

“I think he has a very good plan in mind,” she told him. “I just want to know what you were thinking about during the meeting.”

Bruce kept his expression stoic, not revealing anything. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Princess.”

“I’m sure you don’t,” she muttered with a frown. “You got this far off look in your eyes when you were looking at me, Bruce. I could practically see the wheels turning in that head of yours. You want to cancel my peace talks and send me somewhere safe until things settle down, don’t you?”

Bruce had the decency to appear somewhat sheepish, knowing he’d been caught. “It was just a passing thought,” he claimed with a shrug. “It wasn’t like I was actually going to go through with kidnapping you and hiding you away somewhere.”

“Bruce,” Diana uttered in exasperation as she leaned back in her chair. “That is not the answer and you know it. Besides, I would never run and hide from a fight.”

“I know…I know,” he relented. “Just once I wish you wouldn’t be so damn brave and noble.”
Diana smiled as she leaned in close, kissing him on the cheek. “But you love that about me.”

“You’re going to give me a heart attack one of these days, Princess,” he swore, taking her hand in his.

“Come on,” she said as she stood to her feet, pulling him up from his chair. “Let’s go get some lunch. I’m starving and I have to get back to the embassy. I have a lot of work to do before the dignitaries arrive.”

“I guess I could work you into my schedule for lunch,” he decided as he followed her out of the conference room.

“How sweet of you,” she said with a roll of her eyes. “Never say my husband isn’t a romantic at heart.”

“Hey, I can be very romantic,” he maintained as they entered the elevator, sending a quick message to his secretary to let her know he was going to be out for an hour or so.

Diana shot him a look that said she believed otherwise. “Let’s just say you’re a little rough around the edges in the romance department,” she decided. “We have a lot we need to talk about over lunch, so you better tell Carol you might be gone for a couple of hours.”

“What do we need to discuss?”

“Damian…Artemis…Dick and Donna’s announcement…a new puppy for the kids,” she began to list off. “Talia and what she’s really doing here in Gotham.”

“Whoa,” he abruptly stated. “I am still not sold on this whole puppy in the manor business yet. You know how I feel about pets.”

Stepping out into the warm sunlight, the Amazon turned to look at her husband, tilting her head as she studied him. “You’re going to tell me that you can look our children in the eye and tell them they can’t have a puppy just because you don’t like pets.”

Bruce maintained a firm stance for a long moment before his shoulders slowly sunk in defeat, knowing he wasn’t going to win this one. “No,” he grumbled sullenly, frowning with the thought that he had just been defeated by his wife and their two toddlers. He could take on Bane without breaking a sweat, but when it came to his family it was a completely different story.

Diana smiled sweetly as she squeezed his hand in reassurance, leaning in to kiss the pout from his lips. “Don’t worry, Bruce,” she told him. “I’ll make sure that the puppy behaves.”

Bruce’s eyes narrowed suspiciously as he stared at his wife. “And just how do you plan on accomplishing that feat?”

“I can communicate with animals,” she revealed as they began to walk down the crowded street towards their favorite diner, fingers laced together.

“You can?” he questioned her, incredulous.

“Yes,” she confirmed with a nod. “I thought you already knew that.”

“No, I didn’t,” he claimed, stunned by the unexpected revelation as he glanced at the throng of people around them, a person dressed in black coming into his periphery. “What other gifts do you possess that I don’t know about yet?”
Diana chuckled as she cast a glance at her handsome husband just as someone slammed hard into her on the crowded sidewalk. The force of the unexpected encounter caused Diana to stumble backwards in surprise, Bruce instantly grabbing hold of her arm to keep her from falling.

He scowled as he looked back over his shoulder at the person in black who had just run into his wife, angered by the inconsiderate behavior. He cursed under his breath as he turned his attention back to Diana, his hand still gripping her arm.

“Bruce,” she softly murmured as she looked up at him with concern swimming in her eyes.

“Diana, what is it?” he asked, grabbing hold of her upper arms to steady her.

Not receiving a response, he looked down as she pulled her hand away from her abdomen to find it covered in bright red blood. “Diana,” he gasped, quickly looking around for whoever had done this to her.

No one seemed to be paying any attention to them, nobody watching to see what would happen next to Diana. Everyone was too absorbed in their own lives, talking to their companions or on their cell phones to notice that someone had just been attacked.

Without a second thought, Bruce swiftly wrapped an arm around her shoulders before guiding her into an alley. He instantly reached for his commlink hidden in his ear, fury simmering in his eyes as he applied pressure to her wound.

“Batman to Watchtower,” he hailed them.

“This is Watchtower,” J’onn responded.

“I need immediate transport to the infirmary for Diana and me,” he demanded. “She’s just been stabbed.”

“Transporting now, Batman,” J’onn confirmed, the pair disappearing in a bright flash of white light. “I’ll alert Doctor Collins.”

Appearing in the infirmary a few seconds later, Bruce quickly led Diana to one of the medical beds. “We need help here!” he yelled, applying firm pressure to her wound. “Hang on, Princess.”

“I’m fine,” she attempted to reassure him. “This isn’t necessary, Bruce. I’m sure it’ll heal on its own.”

“You’re losing a lot of blood,” he told her as he looked down at his hands covering her abdomen, the bright red blood that soaked her clothes and covered his skin.

Bruce looked up to find Doctor Collins rushing towards them with a couple of nurses following close behind him. “Mister Wayne,” he uttered as he approached them. “What happened?”

“We were walking down the street in Gotham when someone ran into Diana and stabbed her,” he explained, unable to tear his gaze away from his wife. Her face was growing paler by the moment. “I had her transported here right away.”

“We’ll take over from here,” Doctor Collins reassured him, escorting Bruce several feet away to allow them room to work. “Just stay right here.”

Bruce could hardly breathe past the thick lump that clogged his throat as they began to take care of his wife, his panic rising with every tense moment that ticked by. One nurse was putting an oxygen
mask on her face as the other was cutting her bloody shirt away so they could assess her wound.

He glanced down at his hands and suit covered in blood…her blood. He could hardly believe this was actually happening. They should be eating lunch together right now, talking about the kids and arguing about how he didn’t want a dog not here in the infirmary of the Watchtower watching the medical team working to save Diana’s life.

Superman flew into the infirmary at that moment, his expression grave. “Bruce,” he called to him as he approached. “J’onn just told me that Diana was stabbed. What exactly happened?”

Bruce tried to keep the furious growl of the Batman from reaching his voice, but it was more than difficult. He needed to be Bruce Wayne up here right now, not Batman. “I don’t know,” he replied. “We were walking down the sidewalk to get lunch when someone almost knocked her over. That’s when I noticed Diana holding her abdomen and the blood on her hand.”

“Did you see who it was?” Superman asked.

“Maybe,” he said, shaking his head. “The sidewalk was crowded, but there was someone dressed in black. It could’ve been that person.”

Clark put an arm around Bruce’s shoulders, leading him away from Diana. “Come on, Bruce,” he said to him. “You don’t need to see this. Let’s allow them to work while you wash up and we’ll try to figure out who could have done this.”

Bruce numbly walked to a sink, washing the blood from his hands. Diana had to be all right. His eyes fell closed as his chin fell to his chest, his mind racing with thoughts that only made him nauseated. He had feared that someone was going to do whatever it took to eliminate her.

This had to be related to the threats she’d been receiving at that embassy. It was no coincidence that he had found a bloody dagger sticking out of her desk only for her to be stabbed a few days later. He drew a deep breath in an effort to calm a measure of the fury burning through his veins, but it was useless. He would hunt down whoever was behind this and personally take them out.

“Do you have any suspects?” Superman asked, keeping his voice low so as not to be overheard.

“I have a few,” he bit out. “Talia is in town…along with our son.”

“What?” Clark nearly yelled, quickly lowering his voice. “Is he really your son?”

“Yes, I confirmed it myself,” Bruce told him as he turned to face him. “Damian is my son with Talia from when I was with her nearly eleven years ago.”

“Wow,” Clark gasped as he shook his head in stunned disbelief. “How is Diana taking it?”

“She’s handling it better than I would have if I had been in her shoes,” he confessed as he pinched the bridge of his nose. “She knows it was long before we’d ever met. It’s been over with Talia since she chose her father over me.”

“So Talia has been keeping your son from you for ten years?” he questioned him. “That sounds like something that Talia would do.”

“That’s only the tip of the iceberg,” he replied. “Ra’s has been training him to be an assassin.”

“That is definitely a nightmare waiting to happen,” Clark agreed, crossing his arms against his chest. He could tell that there was more that Bruce wasn’t telling him. “Anything else I should
“Not really,” Bruce bit out, not one to divulge his entire life even to his best friend.

“What do you think Talia wants?” Clark pressed.

“I have no idea,” Bruce confessed as he leaned against the sink, crossing his arms in a mirror image of his friend. “I’m going to have to see if I can get her to talk. She has yet to divulge why she’s really here in Gotham now after all these years with a son that I never even knew existed.”

“Well, don’t worry about anything League related,” Superman told him. “You two have enough going on right now in Gotham. We’ll only call you if it’s an absolute emergency.”

“Thanks,” Bruce replied with a weary sigh.

Superman laid a hand on Bruce’s shoulder, squeezing it. “Keep me posted on Diana and let me know if there’s anything I can do to help,” he said. “You know I’m just a phone call away.”

Bruce silently nodded in response, moving to a chair to wait for the doctor as Superman left. It gave him time to think, too much time. He closed his eyes, trying to remember every face they had passed on the sidewalk before Diana was attacked.

He recalled seeing someone dressed in black with the hood pulled up to conceal their face, but he hadn’t been able to make out any details. From the person’s size, it could have been a woman or a small man, but it was difficult to determine.

Could it have been Talia? Was she trying to get Diana out of the picture to make room for her? He leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees as he held his head in his hands. Wherever Talia went, death and disaster always seemed to follow. It was something that he hadn’t been able to escape, her dangerous reach finding him even after all these years and miles.

She was like a plague that had followed him into his life and marriage. He couldn’t believe now that he had actually cared so much for her at one time, had even briefly considered building a life with her. He’d never dreamed that she could be so manipulative and ruthless. Would she sink so low as to try to take his wife away from him? The thought made him ill.

“Mister Wayne?”

Bruce looked up sharply at the sound of Doctor Collin’s voice, abruptly standing to his feet. “Is Diana all right?”

“She’ll be fine,” he reassured him. “The wound was deep, but not deep enough to reach her aorta. I was able to repair the damage, but she’s already beginning to mend thanks to her enhanced healing ability.”

His eyes fell closed as he released a slow breath of relief. “Can I see her now?”

“She’s actually asking for you,” Doctor Collins revealed, a knowing smile on his lips. “She also wants to go home.”

Bruce shook his head in annoyance. “Of course she does,” he muttered with a frown.

“I’d prefer keeping her here overnight for observation, but I’m not against her going home since she’s already beginning to heal,” he confessed. “With her meta abilities, she should be fine. You
could always bring her back up to the infirmary if she has any problems.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” he said.

Bruce did his best to keep the worry from reaching his face, not wanting to upset Diana, but it was next to impossible as he spotted her laying in that medical bed. She looked pale, her eyes closed. He couldn’t bear the thought of her not being a part of every aspect of his life.

He silently slid into the chair by the bed, reaching for her hand. He laced his fingers with hers, Diana’s eyes opening. “Bruce,” she said. “Are you ready to go home?”

He shook his head in amazement. “Not yet, Princess,” he stated. “Let’s just give it a couple of hours to make sure that you’re really all right before even talking about going home.”

She frowned in response, unhappy with his request, but knew better than to push him on this. She wasn’t one for backing down on anything, but she had quickly learned in marriage that she needed to pick her battles. Now was not the time to argue, especially with how rattled he still looked.

She rolled on to her side to face him, tightening her hold on his hand. “Fine,” she relented. “Two hours and then we go home. I refuse to stay here overnight, though.”

“Stubborn to the core,” he muttered with a glare. “Do you remember seeing anything before you were stabbed?”

She pursed her lips as she thought back on it. “No, I was looking at you and then suddenly someone slammed into me,” she thoughtfully replied. “I felt something pierce my abdomen and then I felt something wet. That’s when I realized I was bleeding.”

He leaned forward, his free hand brushing a raven curl behind her ear. “I’m so sorry, Princess,” he murmured.

“It’s not your fault, Bruce,” she reassured him, her thumb caressing his hand. “You had no way of knowing that something like this was going to happen.”

“Well, I guess that’s it for the peace talks,” he told her. “We’ll have to cancel it until we can figure out who’s after you. It’s getting to be far too dangerous to continue this now.”

“No way, Bruce,” she adamantly stated. “I am not cancelling. That’s exactly what they want, but I’m not going to back down because of this. We’re moving forward with the talks.”

“Diana,” he nearly growled her name. “We should at least postpone it until we can find out who’s behind this.”

Diana sat up in bed, her expression hard as steel. “I will not stop just because someone isn’t happy about us opening the Themyscirian Embassy. If they think they can scare me into stepping down, they’re going to find out different. I don’t scare.”

“And what about our children?” he pressed.

She grew angry with his question. “I will never let anyone hurt our children,” she bit out. “You know I would never intentionally put their lives in danger.”

“I didn’t mean that you would, Diana,” he told her.

“There is no place safer than the Manor,” she told him. “Artemis can stay with Alfred and the
children to make certain no one can get near them.”

“We can’t expect the children to stay in the manor forever,” he argued. “They’re going to have to leave at some point.”

“I’m not saying they have to, Bruce,” she replied. “Whoever is behind this is after me, not my family. If I hide or run away, they could turn their attention to you and the children. I refuse to let that happen.”

“And you think I can handle you being out there in Gotham with a target on your back...knowing that someone wants you dead?” he growled more fiercely than he had anticipated, leaping to his feet and beginning to pace back and forth by her bed. “The thought of losing you absolutely terrifies me, Diana.”

“I’m far more durable than that,” she maintained, moving to sit on the edge of the bed. “Besides, we’ll catch whoever is behind this before anything more can happen to me.”

Bruce raked his fingers back through his hair, pausing to rub his face. He didn’t like this one bit. At the same time, he knew that arguing with her was going to prove futile. She wasn’t going to change her mind no matter what he said or how logical his argument might be. She was raised a warrior, surrender never in her vocabulary. It was one of the numerous things that first attracted him to her, but now it could end up being the reason that he loses her.

The feel of her hand against his cheek forced him to meet her intense gaze. “Let’s go home, Bruce,” she said, her voice losing a measure of the heat that it had just held as she stood before him. “The sooner you and I get to the bottom of this the sooner we can put all of this behind us.”

His frown deepened as his expression darkened even further. His hand came to rest on top of hers on his cheek, pulling it away to clutch tightly. “You had better damn well stay alive, Princess,” he ground out. “I don’t ever want to be a single parent raising our children by myself. Living my life without you isn’t an option…ever.”

The corners of her lips quirked affectionately as she leaned closer to him, her lips pressing tenderly against his. “I promise,” she reassured him.

Wayne Manor; August 5th, 17:34 EST

Artemis wandered around the manor, trying to familiarize herself with the entire layout. She wanted to know every single entrance, every window, every feasible way of entrance or escape just in case someone decided to attack.

She thoughtfully ran her fingers over the handle of her dagger as she slowly meandered around the library, taking in the very extensive collection of books. She paused before an end table, picking up the picture frame that she found resting on top of it.

She studied the picture of Diana and Bruce Wayne on their wedding day, the Amazon Princess glowing as she gazed into her husband’s eyes. They both had their hands on Diana’s round abdomen where their son Nicholas was growing.

They both appeared so happy and in love with each other. Artemis didn’t think that she had ever seen the princess so happy in all the years that she had known her. It caused a faint smile to appear on her lips as she set the frame back down, picking up the smaller one next to it.

It was a picture of Bruce holding Kaia at her first birthday party. The pride that permeated Bruce’s eyes as he looked lovingly at his daughter was unmistakable, sparking Artemis’s curiosity about
this whole notion of finding love with a man and having children…making a family.

Picking up the picture next to it, she found one of Diana holding Nicholas, both of them laughing about something. Whoever had taken the picture had obviously captured a special moment, cementing the memory in print to look back on and enjoy.

With a frown, she set the frames down, continuing on her journey. She was still trying to understand Man’s World and the draw that the princess had felt to stay here. Seeing all of these pictures had somewhat helped her to grasp a small measure of understanding, but there were still several questions that lingered in her mind.

As she exited the library, Artemis made her way to Bruce’s study, her mind drifting back to Donna and Dick’s news about having a baby. The news hadn’t necessarily taken her by surprise, but she was still a little taken aback nonetheless.

Donna had always been taken with Man’s World as well, her marriage cementing her place here as well. While Diana and Donna appeared to be very content here with the lives that they were building with their mates, Artemis wasn’t certain that such a life was for her.

While she was more than willing to be here to help protect Princess Diana and her family, she highly doubted that she would look for a mate here or have children. She was quite happy being an Amazon warrior, protecting the princess to make sure she was successful in her mission as ambassador.

She had to admit that she was rather excited about the adventure that awaited her here, the things that she was going to get to learn and see and do. She couldn’t help wondering if Diana would let her help Batman and Wonder Woman in the battle for justice…maybe even joining the Justice League someday.

Leaning over, Artemis looked at the display of pictures that Bruce had on his desk, pictures of him and Diana, each of his children including the older ones. While she had been quite skeptical of the mortal demon who had won the princess’s heart, she had quickly come to learn how deeply he loved Diana, willing to risk his life at any cost in order to protect her and his family. He had earned her respect in that regard.

“Armis, you want to come pay wif us?”

Artemis straightened up, turning and looking down to find Kaia standing behind her, looking up at her with big blue expectant eyes. “Maybe later,” she replied.

“Ni-Ni and me are paying Ego’s,” she told her, walking over and taking her by the hand. “Come see what we made.”

“All right,” she murmured with a frown, allowing the two-and-a-half-year-old to lead her out of the study and to the entertainment room.

She was not accustomed to being around children like this. The only child she’d really known was Diana and Donna, but they hadn’t been children in more years than she could begin to even count. This was definitely going to take some getting used to.

Artemis knew she was supposed to help protect the princess’s family, but she had assumed she’d be going with Diana to the embassy every day, not staying here at the manor with the butler and the children. Either way, she was going to have to adapt to it since she’ll be living here for the unforeseeable future.
Entering the entertainment room, she was somewhat surprised to find Jason sitting on the floor playing with Nicholas. Jason looked up as she entered with Kaia, a smile on his lips. “Me found her,” Kaia proudly announced, much to Jason’s chagrin.

“Kaia,” Jason playfully scolded her as Kaia led her to where they were playing on the floor. “I didn’t send you to get her.”

“Yes, you did,” Nicholas joined in, confusion on his face. “You said—”

Jason quickly handed Nicholas a cookie from the plate on the floor, hoping to silence the four-year-old. “Would you like to join us?”

Artemis looked at Jason with a smirk on her face. She knew what he was up to, but she wasn’t going to fall for it or him for that fact. At the same time, she did need to get to know everyone hear to determine any potential threats and the capabilities of her allies.

She sat on the floor with her legs crossed across from Nicholas and Jason, an enormous Lego building separating them. Kaia immediately settled on Artemis’s lap before reaching out to add some more Legos to their creation, the Amazon taken aback by the little girl’s actions.

Noticing the surprise on Artemis’s face, Jason chuckled softly. “Kaia knows no strangers,” he explained. “Everyone is her friend.”

Artemis frowned. “That is not a very good quality to possess,” she replied. “It’ll get her into trouble if she’s not careful.”

“She gets it from Diana,” he revealed.

Artemis’s frown turned into a slight smile. “That can I see,” she agreed. “The princess has always been far too trusting for her own good.”

“So how are you adjusting to being away from home?” he asked.

“It has been rather eye-opening,” she confessed as she glanced down at Kaia in her lap. “I never understood Diana’s desire to stay here or to build a life with a mortal man, but I’m beginning to.”

“I’d be happy to show you around sometime if you’d like,” Jason offered as he handed Nicholas another Lego.

“Perhaps,” she hesitantly responded. “So you come by here often to play with the children?”

“I come by when I can,” he cryptically replied. “ Depends on how busy my schedule is.”

“Jason, I didn’t know you were going to be here today,” Bruce said as he entered with Diana. “I think we’ve seen you more this week then we have in the last three weeks.”

Artemis glanced at Jason with an arcing eyebrow, a slight smirk playing on her lips. Jason shrugged a shoulder as he averted his gaze. “I’ve busy,” he amended. “Things have slowed down lately.”

“Mommy, see what we made,” Nicholas excitedly said.

“It looks great, my little warrior,” Diana told him as she carefully sat down on a nearby couch, doing her best to keep her expression emotionless.

“What happened?” Artemis astutely asked.
“Nothing…I’m fine,” Diana said.

“You’re moving differently,” Artemis pressed. “Are you injured?”

“Not now, Artemis,” Diana warned her, glancing at the children.

Artemis seemed to take the hint, letting it drop for the moment, but not without leveling the princess with a disapproving glare. “As you wish,” she bit out.

Bruce sat on the couch beside Diana, Kaia immediately toddling over to them. Bruce scooped her up and placed her on his lap. “What trouble have you gotten into today, baby girl?”

“Me good, daddy,” she insisted, her little raven pigtails bouncing as she turned to scowl at her father.

“She had to sit in the time-out chair two times,” Nicholas volunteered with a grin.

“And how many times did you have to sit in time out, Nick?” Bruce asked as he rubbed his daughter’s back.

“Not at all,” he proudly relayed.

“All right, time to wash up for dinner,” Alfred announced. “Come, children. Let’s go.”

Bruce set Kaia down, allowing her and Nicholas to follow Alfred. Artemis immediately leapt at the chance to get to the bottom of what was going on. “Spill it, Diana,” she stated with a glare. “What happened?”

“It was nothing—”

“Someone stabbed her today while we were walking to lunch,” Bruce revealed with a dark glower as he sat forward on the couch. “I’ve already had Oracle download any security footage from the area that could give us an idea about who did it.”

“I’m coming with you to the embassy tomorrow,” Artemis readily decided, standing to her feet.

“No, I want you here with Alfred and the children,” Diana stated.

“Diana—” Artemis argued.

“That’s my final word,” Diana ground out as she stood to her feet and exited the room.

Artemis looked to Bruce, arms folded against her chest. “Don’t look at me,” he replied. “I already tried to get her to cancel the peace summit and she refused. She’s not backing down on this.”

“Would it help if I kept an eye on the embassy?” Jason offered.

Artemis glanced at him with a frown. “What can you do?”

A smirk formed on his face. “You obviously haven’t heard of Red Hood.”

“I’d appreciate that, Jason,” Bruce replied, his stomach still knotted with worry. “We’re all going to have to be on guard.”

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Okay, so I must beg for forgiveness if I'm not writing Artemis, Jason, or Damian in character. I'm pretty clueless on these three characters, especially Artemis and Damian so please don't kill me if I get a little out of character at times. There's a lot going on in this fic and I want to give each plot thread it's due time in the spotlight so characters will be revolving in and out, but the top priority is of course Bruce and Diana.

UP NEXT: Bruce confronts Talia about Diana's attack and her real reasons for being in Gotham.
Chapter 7

Gotham; August 6th, 22:41 EST

Talia checked on her son once more, finding him fast asleep in his bed. She watched him for several moments, so proud of the boy that she and Bruce had created together. He was the actual personification of the love that she and Bruce shared with one another. She just wished that her beloved would see it that way too.

Instead, he was completely beguiled by his Amazon princess and the family they had made together. It made her nauseated as she remembered the way that he had looked at her, how he had put his wife before her despite the fact that she had just introduced him to their son. While they had been apart for the last ten years, her love for him had never diminished in the least, only growing stronger over that time. She hoped to remind him of that by the time they left Gotham.

Silently pulling his bedroom door closed, Talia turned, gasping sharply to find Batman standing there in her penthouse suite. His black cape was drawn dramatically around him, creating a very dark foreboding aura that caused her to momentarily take pause.

“What are you doing here?” she softly demanded to know once she had recovered enough to make her voice work. She straightened her shoulders and held her chin high in defiance, refusing to show the littlest bit of weakness before him. “You could have used the door, beloved. There was no need to break in. You know that you’re always welcome here.”

The white slits of his cowl narrowed as she slowly drew closer to him, her lips curving into an appreciative smile. She exuded such sexiness, but there was a deadly edge to it. “Where were you this afternoon?”

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“Why do you ask?”

“Just answer the damn question, Talia.”

She sniffed indignantly, her hands coming to rest on her hips. “If you must know, I took Damian shopping.”

“All afternoon?” he questioned her.

“Yes, we left around eleven, ate lunch and spent the afternoon shopping and sightseeing in Gotham,” she informed him, her gaze narrowing suspiciously. “What is this all about? Why are you here interrogating me like this?”

“It’s none of your business,” he growled darkly.

She tilted her head slightly as she studied him. She knew Bruce well. If he was this upset, then something had to have happened today that brought him here to interrogate her. “Did something happen to your Amazon wife?” she bit out with a slight smirk curling her lips.

“You told me all that I need to know,” he said, turning on his heel to leave. “There’s nothing
Talia quickly reached out, her hand capturing his wrist and stopping him from leaving. “Please…
don’t leave so soon,” she told him. “We still have so much that we need to talk about…decisions
that need to be made about our son.”

“We’ll talk once you are willing to tell me the truth about why you’re really here in Gotham,” he
curtly stated.

“I already told you, beloved,” she maintained, her hand falling from his arm. “I wanted Damian to
meet his father, to get him away from his grandfather’s influence before he corrupted him.”

Batman’s posture remained rigged, unwilling to fall for her tricks. “I don’t believe you.”

“Why not?” she snapped in frustration. “Is it because that Amazon of yours has blinded you to the
truth of what you once felt for me? Has she brainwashed you so much that you can no longer think
for yourself or believe the truth when you hear it?”

“I am not the one who is deluded, Talia,” he evenly told her. “It’s you. You chose your father over
me, staying with a man who is the personification of evil.”

“My father is not evil,” she bit out through clenched teeth. “You’re just angry because you feel I
scorned you, but you gave me an impossible decision to make.”

“It shouldn’t have been an impossible decision,” he reminded her. “Besides, this is no longer about
whether you wanted to be with me or stay with your father. It’s been over between us for years.”

“Look, beloved,” she replied with a sigh. “We’re getting nowhere with this. We need to put aside
our difference for our son.”

“I agree,” he said. “It should also start with you telling me the truth. What do you want, Talia? Do
you plan on staying in Gotham forever or will you suddenly disappear on an errand for your
father?”

She averted her eyes as she bit at her bottom lip. “…haven’t quite decided just yet,” she confessed.
“I’m not certain where I’ll go, but I don’t think I can bear to stay here and watch you sharing your
life with the Amazon. My heart can’t handle that, Bruce. You should’ve stayed with me and my
father. We could have been so happy.”

“That’s in the past,” he stated. “I’m not going to revisit it or question it. Diana is the one that I love
and nothing you say or do is ever going to change that.”

“Then, I guess there’s no reason for me to stay here.”

“So, you’re just going to leave Damian here for us to raise?”

“I don’t know,” she murmured. “I don’t think I can leave my son, but I can’t stay here. I can’t be
near you knowing that you are married to another.”

“You certainly didn’t think this through very well before you ran away from Ra’s, did you?”

“There wasn’t a lot of time,” she admitted as she made her way to the liquor bar. She poured
herself a glass of wine before turning to face him once more. “I can’t go back to my father but…I
have no place to go. I’m on my own now.”
“Let me know what you decide,” he icily stated as he turned on his heel, heading towards the open balcony doors.

“How can you be so cruel after what we once meant to each other?” she angrily questioned him, trying to keep her voice down so as not to wake their son.

“You created this years ago when you decided to stay with your father instead of coming with me,” he told her as he paused at the balcony doors, his hand coming to rest on the frame. “It’s what you wanted, Talia. I’m just following your rules.”

Talia watched as he disappeared from the balcony, leaving her all alone once more. Her lips curled slightly as she took a sip of her wine, knowing that something had obviously happened to the Amazon or he wouldn’t have come here tonight questioning her whereabouts this afternoon. She was anxious to find out just what that something was. With a little luck, someone would do all the work of eliminating her from Bruce’s life without her having to lift a finger.

Sitting down at the desk, she opened her laptop, pulling up the files that she had been working on earlier. The mission was going take place in two days and she needed to make sure that everything went smoothly. They couldn’t afford any mistakes or mishaps especially since they were here in Batman’s territory.

She knew that Bruce would increase security in the city with the diplomats’ arrival, but he had no idea what was about to happen or the drastic turn that his life was about to take. By the time he figured it out, it would be far too late for him to do anything about it.

**Gotham; August 7th, 00:52 EST**

She walked down the deserted street, occasionally glancing back over her shoulder to make sure that she wasn’t being followed. She tightened her grip on her cloak, doing her best to blend in with the shadows as she made her way through Gotham. The last thing she needed was to draw any unwanted attention to herself.

She tucked a golden blond lock of hair further into the hood of her cloak, wanting to return to her apartment as quickly as possible. She pursed her lips in frustration and anger, not at all happy with how her day had turned out.

Her mind was reeling as the events played through her mind like some distant dream that put a smile on her face. She was rather proud of how things were progressing, little steps that would eventually lead her closer and closer to their goal.

She quickened her steps, the growling in her stomach reminding her she hadn’t eaten anything since lunch. She’d been far too busy with her assignment, making sure that everything was ready and in place for when the time came for her to act again.

Turning the corner, she found herself face to face with four large men who blocking her path. “Excuse me,” she murmured, ducking her head slightly as she attempted to step around them.

Unfortunately, they had other ideas in mind.

One of them reached out and grabbed hold of her arm, dragging her to a stop. “Where do you think you’re going, sweetheart?” he gruffly asked.

“Yah, you look like you’re in quite a hurry,” another commented with a gleam in his dark eyes. “Why don’t you stay and keep us company for a while?”
“Let go of me,” she hissed with a sneer as she glanced down at his vice-like grip on her arm.

“Hey, I think we got ourselves a feisty one here,” the one holding her arm announced to his friends. “We were just talking about how bored we were and then you came around the corner.”

“Perfect timing if you ask me,” the third guy added with a grin, revealing several missing teeth.

“Great timing,” the first man agreed, pulling her in close to him and wrapping his arms around her. “I think we could have a really good time together tonight.”

“I don’t think so,” she spat out, her fingers brushing against the handle of her dagger sheathed at her waist beneath her cloak. “I’m going home.”

“You’re not going anywhere, babe,” he told her as he turned and roughly pushed her up against the wall of a building, his three friends coming to stand on either side of him.

“I believe the lady said no.”

All five turned to see the dark shadowy form of someone standing there with them, the glow of a street light behind him creating an eerie halo around him. They were unable to see his face, but there was no question about who was coming to the woman’s rescue.

“It’s the Bat!” the third guy yelled, taking off running only to be stopped by a bola wrapping around his legs and taking him to the ground.

The second guy pulled out a switchblade, a grin stealing across his face. “I ain’t afraid of no freak in a mask.”

The first guy joined his friend, pulling out a knife as well. “We’re going to carve you up,” he threatened him.

Batman took a step forward, a shaft of light splashing across his face revealing a dangerous smirk that caused all three men to momentarily pause. “Bring it,” he rasped something dark and otherworldly.

The woman stood with her back pressed against the building, watching with great interest as the three thugs lunged at the man dressed in the black cape and cowl. He fought with rather impressive skill, blocking strikes and delivering punishing blows. It didn’t seem to deter the three men from still trying to take down the bat.

Batman shoved his elbow into the back of the third guy, dropping him with a grunt. He paused to cast a fleeting glance at the mysterious woman in the black cloak to make sure she was all right, her hood shadowing her face. A golden blond curl fell from her hood, one that was quickly tucked back inside. It had allowed him a partial glimpse of her face, one that pricked his memory bank.

She gave him a little wave of gratitude, before turning to leave. The wind caught her cloak at that precise moment, revealing the impressive handle of a dagger sheathed at her waist. Before he could pursue her, the other two thugs came to, jumping him while he was distracted and throwing punches in an attempt to take him down.

He threw the one man over his shoulder, slamming him into the ground. He grabbed the other by the arm, tossing him like a rag doll into the brick wall to his right. He swiftly incapacitated them with a rapid succession of kicks and punches. After tying the three men up, Batman looked around the area for any sign of her and finding none.
He turned to fire his grappling gun, pausing to look back over his shoulder once more before allowing it to carry him up and away to the top of an apartment building across the street. He swore he had seen that woman this afternoon on the crowded street in Gotham just before Diana had been stabbed.

Was she the one who had attacked Diana

And was that woman Aresia?

**Wayne Manor; August 7th, 04:55 EST**

Climbing the stairs to his bed and his wife that awaited his arrival, Bruce found his mind preoccupied with thoughts of the woman that he had believed he was rescuing tonight. The more he thought about it the more certain he was that she had been on the street outside of Wayne Enterprises this afternoon. It caused a worrisome sense of foreboding to settle over him, one that he wasn’t going to be able to shake until he’d found her.

He had looked up and down that street for the rest of the night as well as every side street in the area. There had been no sign of her anywhere. He didn’t know what she was doing in that particular side of Gotham, but he was going to damn-well find out.

Stopping by Nicholas’s room, he quietly opened the door to find his son sleeping soundly, his beloved stuffed rabbit that Dick had given when he was born clutched protectively to his chest. He could hardly believe how big his son was getting. He was already four years old now and would soon be starting preschool.

It wouldn’t be long before he would be begging to be the next Robin. His bedroom had already become a shrine to Batman, his favorite hero of the Justice League. He just recently started telling everyone that he was Robin. It made his stomach lurch just thinking about Nicholas being out there patrolling the streets of Gotham, coming face-to-face with the worst that his city had to offer.

Closing the door with a weary sigh, he made his way to Kaia’s room to find her sleeping peacefully, her raven curls a wispy mess that brought an affectionate smile to his lips. She was tangled up in her favorite pink blanket, but didn’t seem to mind it in the least.

There was such a peaceful expression gracing her face, one that warmed him clear to his toes. As much as Nicholas was like him, Kaia was definitely just like her mother…all fiery spirit and mischievousness wrapped up in a little body. She was like a firecracker that could go off at any moment. He had a feeling he was witnessing Diana when she was a little girl.

He knew they had their hands full with her, but he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Retreating from her room, he finally entered his own bedroom. Seeing Diana asleep in his bed provided him with a sense of peace and comfort. She was the only one who had ever been able to do that for him, none of the other women in his past coming close to it.

He silently slipped in under the covers, sinking against the pillows and the soft warmth of the mattress. It didn’t take but a few moments before Diana sensed his presence, snuggling against his muscular frame. He wrapped his arm around her, pulling her closer to him. He tilted down to kiss the top of her head.

“How was your night?” she softly inquired, turning and pressing her lips against his chest.

“I’m not sure you want to know,” he replied as he slowly began to stroke her hair, his fingers gently running through the silky strands as he thoughtfully stared at the ceiling.
“What is it, Bruce?” she asked, concern etched in her face as she propped herself up on her elbow to look at him.

“I think I might have seen the person who stabbed you this afternoon,” he gruffly revealed. “There was a woman being harassed by a gang. While I was taking on the gang, she smiled and waved at me before disappearing. I looked for her all night, but I couldn’t find her.”

“How do you know she was the one who stabbed me?” Diana questioned him with a frown.

“I remember seeing someone wearing a black cloak, but hadn’t thought anything of it at the time,” he countered. “Running into her tonight made me think it had to be her.”

“I can’t believe this,” she murmured, stunned with the unexpected news.

She laid back against the pillows, her mind racing with questions that she had no answers to. Bruce rolled onto his side to look down at her, his hand moving to caress her cheek. “It’s okay, princess,” he attempted to reassure her. “We’ll find whoever this woman is and we’ll stop her.”

“I just can’t believe this is happening,” she replied as she gazed up at him. “I’m relieved that she didn’t try to attack you.”

“I’m fine,” he reassured her. “Right now, I’m more worried about your safety than anything else.”

Diana’s hand came to rest against the side of his face. “I’m alright, Bruce,” she insisted as she sat up, gently pushing him onto his back. “I’m just glad that you’re home safe. I missed you tonight.”

The corner of his lips curled slightly. “Oh, really?” he responded with a husky rasp. “Are you going to show me just how much you missed me?”

“Yes,” she replied, her hand caressing his abdomen. “You’re too tense…too worried about everything. I need to help you relax.”

“How is your wound?” he asked, trying to not focus on how her touch was beginning to turn him on.

“Why don’t you check for yourself?” she questioned him with a sultry lilt to her voice and a smirk on her lips.

Diana shifted her body to straddle his lap, gazing down at him with playful mischief dancing in her blue eyes. Shafts of moonlight cut across her face and body as she reached down to grasp the hem of her tank top before pulling it up and over her head before tossing it aside, her panties quickly following.

Bruce’s ravenous gaze roamed appreciatively over her feminine form that still drove him absolutely wild, his hands moving to firmly grip her waist. There was a red mark on her abdomen from where the knife’s blade had pierce her skin, making him internally shudder with the ramifications of such a horrifying act. There had just been so much blood.

His right hand moved closer, her thumb lightly tracing over the mark that was already healing. He silently thanked her gods for her meta healing abilities, knowing that it had saved her life once again, keeping her here with him where she always belonged.

She gave him a tender, loving smile, noticing the fear that flashed through his eyes as he stared at the scar that would likely be gone by tomorrow. She bit at her bottom lip as his hand ventured higher to the underside of her breast, lightly dragging the tip of his finger along her sensitive skin
and enjoying the reaction that he elicited with the barest of touches.

She shivered above him, her eyes momentarily falling closed as he repeated the action several times. He noticed how her nipple began to tighten in anticipation of what was to come, causing him to harden even further with growing lust and anxious anticipation of where he soon would be.

Impatient with his teasing, Diana took hold of his hand, moving it to cover her breast in an unspoken demand for more of his focused attention. Bruce smirked at her annoyance, knowing how she much she detested drawing out the foreplay when she was this ready for him.

She gasped sharply as he kneaded and stroked her breast, his eyes feasting on every flickering expression, every movement—the subtle shift of her hips as she ground against him, the way her head would tilt back with pleasure, the ebony waterfall of her hair cascading into his lap. It only made it that much harder for him not to just take her right here…right now.

Regaining a measure of control, she reached for his shorts, shifting off of him enough to free him of its confines. She slowly stroked his hardened length a couple of times, anxious for him to fill her and ease the pulsating ache that lived between her thighs.

Lifting her hips, she guided him to her entrance, rubbing his tip over her wet heat a few times and earning a throaty growl of impatience from her husband. She smiled wickedly as she gazed down at him, fulling in control now and enjoying every single second of it.

“You are so wicked,” he rasped, doing his best to control his breathing, but she was making it next to impossible with the way she tormented and teased him.

Finally, she allowed him to slip inside of her, stretching her all over again and filling her so very full in one powerful downward thrust of her hips. They cried out their mutual pleasure with the union, both savoring the intense sensations that were skyrocketing through them. They took several moments to regain some semblance of control once more, attempting to catch their breaths.

She could feel his fingers digging deeply into her hips as if holding on to her for dear life. Any other woman would have been badly bruised from his death-grip, but she was definitely no ordinary woman. Gazing down at him, she slowly ran her hands over her abdomen before finding her breasts, further teasing herself as well as him.

Bruce moaned deeply as he watched her, her hips beginning to rock and grind against his in a slow, steady movement that soon had his head spinning. Any and all worries that he’d had about her wound were quickly thrown out the window as she began to raise and lower her hips.

He hungrily joined in, meeting her every downward thrust, their hips crashing together with a frantic need. One hand moved from her hip to settle on her backside, squeezing and kneading her flesh. His breaths were coming in hot, short pants as she continued to ride him, her own breathing ragged as her chest heaved for more air.

A thin sheen of perspiration glistened on her skin as she continued to work them both into a heated frenzy, neither knowing or caring where one started and the other ended. They were just one continuous motion of heated need and passion being shared in the still darkness before dawn, connecting with one another body and soul as they expressed the love that they only felt for each other.

“Diana…”

Her name was a long, drawn out moan of building ecstasy that was pounding through his entire
system as she rode him fast and hard. Any lesser man wouldn’t have been able to handle such a
vixen, a powerful Amazon blessed by Aphrodite herself, but he was not some lesser man. He was
fully willing and able to go toe-to-toe with the beautiful princess, satisfying her in ways that she
never dreamed possible.

He proudly wore the bruises and scratch marks she left on his body, badges of respect and the love
that she gave him and only him. She belonged to him, this amazing creature that truly deserved to
live among the gods and goddesses of her pantheon.

His orgasm hit him fast and hard, the feel of her inner walls like a vice gripping him and milking
him only prolonging his ecstasy to an almost painful end as his body arched and spasmed. He
gulped in deep breaths in an effort to calm his hammering heart, his entire body thrumming with
pleasure.

Diana sprawled on top of him, placing languid kisses along his chest. He brushed her damp raven
hair from her face, pulling her up for a bruising kiss that only seemed to ignite their fire for each
other all over again. His tongue danced with hers for several long moments before retreating.

“I love you,” he murmured as he caressed her cheek.

“I love you too,” she softly replied with a lazy grin. “Now, do you believe I’m fine?”

“You’re more than fine, princess,” he teased her with a smirk, his hands stroking along the
contours of her back to caress her backside.

“I’m glad you think so,” she lightly teased, pausing to nip at his bottom lip. “Did you check out the
embassy again tonight?”

Bruce was having a challenging time connecting his thoughts as she kissed and nipped a path along
his jaw and down his neck towards his chest, his hands cradling the back of her head as she
tortured his nipple with her mouth. “Yes…it was…it was fine,” he finally managed to utter. “I
couldn’t find any problems.”

“Good,” she practically purred against his chest. “And Talia?”

“She…she was with Damian all day in Gotham…I double checked her story.”,” he muttered,
pressing the back of his head deeper into his pillow as he bucked his hips.

Diana’s lips curled against his chest as her fingers stroked his sides. “I had no doubt that you
would.”

Her hand came to rest on his breastbone, her chin settling on top of the back of her hand. She gazed
up at him with affection, her expression growing serious. “I’m sorry all of this is happening,
Bruce,” she softly said. “I know how much seeing Talia and finding out about Damian has upset
you. She hurt you deeply years ago and she’s doing it all over again, reopening old wounds.”

He stared into her sapphire eyes, amazed once again that he was lucky enough to be on the
receiving end of all the love and beauty that she possessed. With all that was happening to her, she
was still more worried about him and how he was dealing with the unexpected arrival of Talia and
their son.

He ran his fingers through her damp hair, his emotions shimmering right there in his eyes for her to
witness. “I thought she meant something to me at one time,” he found himself opening up to her.
“Since meeting you, I realize it was just a fleeting infatuation. You’ve taught me so much about
what love is and what it is not, princess. What we have together goes so far beyond just the
boundaries of love. You’re somehow a part of me.”

Diana surged forward, capturing his lips in a sultry kiss that rapidly began to heat his blood all over again. Unfortunately, she broke the kiss far too soon for his liking. “I feel the same way about you,” she confessed. “Have you been able to figure out why she’s here after all this time?”

“No yet,” he replied with a sigh, “but she’s made it abundantly clear she wants Damian to take over the role of Robin.”

“What?” Diana exclaimed in stunned disbelief. “You’re not considering it, are you?”

“No at all,” he reassured her. “The role of Robin belongs to Tim for as long as he wants it.”

“Did you talk to Tim about it?”

“I talked to him and warned him to watch his back around Damian,” he revealed. “Tim didn’t seem too bothered by it. I know he can take care of himself, but I still want to keep a close eye on Damian.”

“I know you’re worried about me and these threats, but I’ll be fine, Bruce,” she tried to reassure him. “If it’s really Aresia, I can handle her.”

“Just please promise me that you’ll be careful,” he pleaded with her. “The thought of being immortal and being forced to live without you is not something that I can deal with.”

“It’ll take more than some disgruntled Amazons to get rid of me,” she lightly teased, brushing her lips against his. “I’m afraid you’re stuck with me, Bruce Wayne.”

“Assuming this really is Aresia, do you think she’s working alone or with other Amazons?” he questioned her with a frown.

It was more than difficult for him to think clearly with her nude form lying on top of him, her very feminine parts touching him in all the right places. It definitely didn’t help when she wiggled her bottom against his groin every time they kissed.

“It’s hard to say,” she said with a frown. “I can’t imagine anyone else but my sisters going to these lengths to try to get the embassy shut down. Not all of them are happy about my mother opening up Themyscira like this. There are some that are staunch believers in the old ways including Aresia.”

“But they’re not responding the way that I would’ve guessed Amazons would,” he countered, his hands stroking the curves of her backside. “I would’ve thought they’d be more direct and open about it.”

“It depends actually,” she thoughtfully said, her fingers caressing his hair as she considered it. “Most of the time we are very upfront and direct, but we can also be very sly and stealthy if we have to be…like a predator or hunter. I’m sure those who are against the embassy opening have already shared their concerns with my mother, but she’s the queen and what she decides is law. To go against her would be like signing your own death sentence.”

“They would be executed?” he questioned her, surprised.

“Depending on the extent of the offense,” she explained. “It could be something as simple as losing your rank among the Amazons to permanent banishment from the island. If it was viewed as a severe enough offense, death would be the punishment. To us, though, banishment is akin to death,
being separated from our sisters and the only home we’ve known for thousands of years. It can be devastating to an Amazon.”

Bruce’s expression grew tender as he felt her shudder on top of him, but his eyes were hard with resentment. “I knew you were hurt deeply after your mother exiled you. I just didn’t know how to help you or how to make it better for you. I almost went back to Themyscira to force your mother to change her mind.”

“There wasn’t anything anyone could’ve done,” she admitted. “Mother would’ve had you killed the second you landed on Themyscira. It was just something that I had to learn to come to terms with on my own.”

He lost himself in the ocean blueness of her eyes as well as the wealth of feelings that she always managed to awaken within him only to find them reflected back at him in her gaze. “My strong, beautiful princess,” he murmured, burying his fingers in her hair as he pulled her in for another kiss.

Wrapping his arms around her, Bruce rolled her onto her back, pinning her to the mattress with his body. He loomed so large above her as he propped himself up on his elbows, hunger permeating his penetrating blue eyes. He pressed his lips to hers, kissing her deeply as he pressed his hardening arousal into her.

She moaned as she threw her head back, wrapping her long legs securely around his waist. Hera, she loved this man. It never ceased to amaze her how their love for one another had only grown and deepened over time. As his hands and mouth began to explore her body all over again, she knew in her heart that he felt the same way too.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Whoo-hoo! Sexy times for Mr. & Mrs. Wayne. What is Talia up to and who is thy mysterious blond woman in the black cloak?

UP NEXT: The ambassadors arrive for the peace summit at the Themysciran Embassy and Bruce comes home early from work to spend time with Damian, but how will it go?

Thank you all for the reviews and follows. Your support for this fic honestly means the world to me. This has been the biggest fic I've ever undertaken as far as so many characters and plot threads. I really hope I can do a good job and create a high-quality fic worthy of your time! :)
Chapter 8

Themysciran Embassy; August 8th, 13:11 EST

Diana did her best to focus on the large stack of work that was piled on her desk, but it was more than difficult with Artemis relentlessly pacing the length of her office. She’d insisted on coming with her to the embassy especially since the ambassadors were scheduled to arrive this afternoon.

She had argued vehemently that Artemis stay at the manor with Alfred and the children, but Bruce had sided against her and with Artemis. It had turned into everyone ganging up against her. She had lost and their demand had become a reality. Hence, Artemis pacing back and forth in her office like a caged animal more than prepared for a fight.

Diana gripped her pen so tightly it nearly snapped, forcing her to take a deep breath before speaking. “Artemis,” she finally called her name. “Please, stop pacing. You’re driving me crazy.”

“Sorry, but I am ready for some sort of action,” she replied with a frown, her hands coming to rest on her hips.

“Why don’t you explore the embassy to make sure it’s secure,” she suggested.

“I already did that this morning…twice,” she responded.

“I’m sure it wouldn’t hurt to check again,” she told her.

“Your mate has also done his own security check as well as that male that runs the security company,” Artemis informed her, crossing her arms against her chest.

Diana’s lips twitched with amusement. “You know my husband has a name, Artemis,” she pointed out. “His name is Bruce. You can use it.”

The red-headed Amazon rolled her eyes in response. “As you wish, princess.”

“So how are you settling in at the manor?”

Artemis made her way to a chair before the princess’s desk, taking a seat. “I am comfortable there if that is what you’re asking.”

“Is there anything that you still need?” she pressed. “More clothes? Any personal necessities?”

“No,” she replied with a shake of her head. “I do not require anything more. Your man servant supplied my bathroom with everything that I could ever need.”

“Nicholas and Kaia are already growing quite fond of you,” Diana told her. “Kaia asked me how long you were going to be staying. She hopes you’ll live here forever. Nicholas wants you to take them to the zoo next week.”

Artemis stared at her in stunned disbelief. “I’m not particularly accustomed to being around children,” she confessed. “They are quite…active…especially your daughter.”
Diana chuckled softly. “Yes, they are,” she agreed with an affectionate smile gracing her lips as she thought about her children. “Just wait until we get a new puppy. It’ll only add to the chaos. Then, of course, there’s Dick and Donna’s new baby that’ll be arriving in a few months.”

“I still don’t see the need for a mate, but if it is what you want then who am I to say anything against it.”

“Well, I have a feeling it won’t be long before Phaedra finds herself in the same boat,” Diana warned her.

“What makes you say that?” Artemis asked with a curious tilt of her head. “Has she already found a man?”

“I’m not sure,” Diana admitted. “She’s been acting a little secretive lately. I’m wondering if she hasn’t met someone, but she doesn’t want us to know about it just yet. When I asked her about it, she blushed and changed the subject.”

“I’ll just ask her,” Artemis announced as she began to stand to her feet, determination glinting in her green eyes.

“No, sit down, Artemis,” Diana insisted with a threatening glare. “I’m not going to go prying into her life like that. She’s allowed to have a private life outside of work.”

“Fine,” she relented, sitting back down again. “Maybe you can help me with this then instead.”

“What is it?”

“Your mate…I mean Bruce…gave me this device yesterday, but I have no idea how to use it,” she confessed as she handed her the object from her pocket.

“It’s a cell phone,” Diana informed her.

“What exactly am I to do with it?”

“You can do just about anything with it,” Diana told her, taking the phone from her. “You can make phone calls, send text messages, take pictures, watch videos, check the weather, find—”

“And why would I want to do all of those things?” Artemis asked, cocking a red eyebrow.

“You know what? I’ll have Tim show you everything you can do with it and why you need it,” she replied. “He’s a genius with computers and electronics.”

“As long as it’s not Jason,” Artemis grumbled with a frown, propping her right elbow up on the armrest and twirling her red ponytail around her finger.

“What’s wrong with Jason?”

Artemis wrinkled up her face at the mention of him. “He annoys me,” she decided. “He constantly tries to make conversation with me. I don’t like it.”

Diana bit back a grin, recognizing the fact that Jason had a crush on Artemis already. “He’s a nice young man if you would let yourself get to know him,” she encouraged her. “He can be cocky at times and a little rough around the edges, but deep down I believe he has a good heart. He’s really come a long way since Bruce and I first discovered that he was alive.”

“Cocky is putting it mildly,” she stated. “He wants to spar with me. He told me there were things
that he could teach me…teach me. Does he not know who I am or where I come from? What an arrogant little insect—"

"Artemis!" Diana cried, bringing the Amazon’s tirade to an abrupt halt. “He’s my son and you’ll be nice to him even if there are times that I’d love nothing more than to wipe the smirk from his face.”

The corner of Artemis’s lips curled. “See?” she said with a triumphant air. “You find him conceited too.”

“Every male in that family is a conceited…except for maybe Tim,” Diana admitted. “They learned it from their father I believe.”

“But you said the three older boys weren’t his blood relation.”

“They’re not, but Bruce took them in…raised them and taught them everything he knows,” she explained. “I think some of Bruce’s ego might have rubbed off on the boys.”

“And not your little ones?”

“Hera, it’ll only be a matter of time before we find that out for certain,” Diana said with a sigh at the thought.

“Nicholas is like a little Bruce and Kaia is you,” Artemis pointed out. “It stands to reason that the little boy will be arrogant like his father while Kaia will be a—”

“Fine warrior like her mother,” Diana adamantly finished for her, not wanting to know what road Artemis was going to take with that comparison.

Artemis smirked as she stared at the princess. “I was merely going to say a strong, independent woman such as yourself.”

“Oh…well thanks,” Diana decided, relieved.

Her mother had told Bruce so many stories about her childhood that it was far too embarrassing to even think about. He made it a point to remind her that Kaia tended to act just like her mother did when she was a child every time their daughter did something mischievous or was willfully disobedient. It only added to her shame that she was being paid back for all the headaches that she put her own mother through growing up.

“I’m going to try to get some work done before the diplomats begin to arrive.”

“Fine,” Artemis answered with a scowl as she looked down at the device in her hands.

She decided to see if she could figure out how the phone worked by herself. It couldn’t be that difficult to learn. Besides, what was the worst that could possibly happen? Holding up the phone, she began pushing buttons to see what they did.

Pursing her lips, she frowned as nothing happened. The phone was completely dark, no sign of life in it at all. She began to wonder if Bruce had given her a broken device until a perfectly manicured fingernail slipped into her line of sight.

“You have to push this…to turn it on,” Diana told her before straightening up and heading towards the coffee maker.
Artemis muttered a curse that made Diana smile. Returning to her desk with a full cup of coffee, she was relieved that Artemis finally had something to keep her occupied while she got some work done. She turned her attention to the documents that required her signature, losing herself in the mundane task that lay ahead of her.

“Artemis?” Bruce loudly barked, Artemis’s phone on speaker. “What’s wrong? Is Diana all right?”

Diana looked up sharply at the unexpected sound of her husband’s voice. Artemis had a sheepish expression on her face as she smiled awkwardly in response. “Ah, yes, we are fine…thank you for asking,” Artemis yelled at the device.

“What’s going on?” he demanded to know. “Is Diana hurt? Did something happen?”

“Just trying to figure out how this phone works that you gave me,” Artemis told him, awkwardly holding the phone up in front of her face.

“Artemis, put Diana on the phone,” he growled, anger in his voice. “I want to talk—”

Bruce’s voice abruptly cut off, the call ended. “I believe I found the termination button,” Artemis triumphantly informed Diana with a smirk.

“Artemis,” Diana uttered with a sigh as her own cell phone began to blow up. It was Bruce. “Hi, Bruce…yes, I know…I’m sorry. Yes, I’m perfectly fine. Artemis is just trying to learn how to use her phone. No…they’re due to arrive here soon. Yes, I’ll try to keep her from calling you again unless it’s an actual emergency. I’m sorry she scared you…yes, I’ll see you tonight. I love you…bye.”

“Problem?” Artemis asked with a single arched eyebrow.

“You nearly gave Bruce a panic attack for starters,” she informed her with an annoyed sigh. “He thought that something had happened to me.”

“Well, it’s his own fault,” Artemis decided with an indifferent shrug of a shoulder. “He never showed me how to use this stupid thing. He just handed it to me and told me to only call him if there was an absolute emergency.”

Diana bit at her bottom lip to keep her amusement from fully forming on her face. It really was Bruce’s own fault for not showing her how to use it. Didn’t he remember the migraine she had given him soon after arriving in Man’s World when he had tried to teach her how to use the Watchtower computer or when he had given her a cell phone for the first time?

It had led to many heated arguments as two stubborn, strong willed superheroes collided. Bruce had been more than a little annoyed and frustrated as the electronically naïve Amazon struggled to learn something she had no clue about. Of course, Bruce hadn’t exactly been the most patient of teachers.

“Artemis,” Diana said. “Don’t call anymore—”

A bright flash of light in Diana’s face told her that her picture had just been taken. “I think this phone doesn’t know what it’s doing,” Artemis decided with a frown as she shook it.

“I think it’s the person trying to operate it,” Diana muttered as she began to review some more documents.

A knock at her door caused both Amazons to look up. “Sorry to interrupt, Princess Diana,” Phaedra
apologized. “The ambassador from Lycernia is here.”

“Thank you, Phaedra,” she replied as she stood to her feet. “And you can just call me Diana.”

“Oh…right,” Phaedra muttered, embarrassed. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Diana reassured her as she walked around her desk.

“Finally!” Artemis uttered with a huff of irritation. “Some action around here.”

“This is a diplomatic peace summit,” Diana pointed out as she exited her office. “Just promise me you’ll be on your best behavior.”

Artemis’s eyebrows rose with the princess’s words. “I am always on my best behavior.”

Diana chuckled softly, her previous experiences with the red-headed Amazon telling her otherwise. “Not always,” she murmured under her breath as she extended her hand to greet the newly arrived diplomat. “Ambassador Nosh, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

A very large man flanked by two even larger men turned to face the Themyscirian Ambassador, his face brightening and his gaze appreciative of what he discovered. “Ambassador Wayne,” he greeted her with a wide grin, extending his hand to her. “It is definitely a pleasure to meet such a beautiful woman as yourself.”

Diana could practically feel Artemis bristle from her position behind her as Nosh brought her hand up to his lips, kissing the back of it. “The pleasure is all mine,” she replied kindly. “I hope you will be comfortable here during your stay. If there is ever anything that you need, please do not hesitate to notify my staff.”

“And who is this beauty?” Nosh asked with his thick accent as he set his sights on Artemis, reaching out to shake her hand.

Diana internally cringed, holding her breath and hoping that Artemis didn’t crush his hand or rip his arm off and beat him with it. “This is Artemis,” she introduced her. “She’s my…”

“Head of security,” Artemis finished for her, shaking the ambassador’s hand with a pleasant smile. “I hope that you enjoy your stay.”

“Oh, I’m very certain that I will especially knowing that you will be watching over me,” Nosh flirted.

“Let me show you to your rooms so you can rest and freshen up from your long trip,” Diana offered.

“That would be lovely,” Nosh agreed. “I’m anxious to explore your city later this evening. Have the others arrived yet?”

“Not yet,” Diana replied as she led the dignitary and his entourage to their suite. “Ambassador Pallock should be here within the hour and Ambassador Welich soon after that.”

“Welich,” Nosh groused, unmistakable disdain filling his voice as a disgusted expression filled his chubby face. “He’s a hopeless cause.”

“Hopefully, we can all work through your various grievances with each other and come to some sort of peaceful resolution that will be beneficial for all involved,” Diana calmly stated.
Nosh snorted in response as they came to a stop outside of a set of double doors that led into a very large suite. “We shall see, princess.”

“Ambassador Wayne,” Phaedra politely interrupted. “Sorry for the intrusion but Ambassador Pallock has just arrived.”

“Thank you, Phaedra,” Diana replied. “I hope you will find your accommodations to your liking. If you’ll excuse me, I need to greet Ambassador Pallock.”

Nosh frowned. “He is only slightly better than Welich and that’s not saying very much.”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she folded her arms against her chest. She was more than relieved she wasn’t the one who was going to have to deal with negotiations among these men. She would start with knocking their heads together, tying them to their chairs and going on from there.

She watched as Diana made a gracious exit from the dignitary’s company, displaying far more patience then she possessed. She did not appreciate the way Nosh leered at her or Diana. She was going to make certain that she kept a very close eye on the man.

Bruce had pulled her aside this morning for a private conversation that did not include the princess. He had given her strict instructions to not leave Diana’s side if at all possible. He wasn’t ruling out the countries of the visiting dignitaries as a possible source of the threats against the princess.

Artemis could tell there was far more that he wasn’t telling her. She was fairly certain that he had an idea of who was behind it all, but was choosing not to reveal that information to her as of yet. She found she rather admired his wisdom in not revealing everything, but more than that she appreciated his fierce love for the princess and his overt determination to keep her safe from harm.

Even though she didn’t quite understand this draw to build a life and a family with a man, she could still appreciate the love that had grown between them as well as why the princess chose this particular man. While mortal and without enhanced gifts, Bruce has proven that he is quite capable of handling any situation thrown at them.

Approaching the man presumed to be the ambassador from Arisinia, Artemis found the man to actually be rather pleasing to look at. He was younger than Nosh, tall in stature with dark hair and even darker eyes. He smiled as they approached, his white teeth almost glistening against his tanned skin. She couldn’t help but notice how well built he was despite the tailored suit that he wore.

“Ambassador Pallock,” Diana greeted him warmly, shaking his hand. “It’s so nice to finally meet you in person.”

“Please, call me Ivan,” he said. “It is an honor and privilege to meet you. Congratulations on the opening of your beautiful embassy.”

“Thank you,” Diana replied, already impressed by him. “I’m pleased that you were able to come. This is my head of security…Artemis.”

Artemis smiled as she shook his hand, feeling a little bit of a warm flush inside that took her by surprise. Where was this coming from? “Ambassador,” she greeted him, shaking his hand.

“Please, it’s Ivan,” he reminded her, taking her hand in his. He bowed as he kissed the back of it. “Ambassador sounds far too formal and obnoxious. That is not who I am or want to be.”

Diana glanced at Artemis, noticing the faint pink glow that suffused her cheeks. The charming
A dignitary had definitely captured her friend’s attention. She felt bad for Jason who was obviously smitten with the red-head, but there were definitely more Amazons that would be arriving in Gotham periodically now that her mother had opened the island to the world.

“Please, allow me to show you to your suite,” Artemis offered without even acknowledging Diana was still there.

“I’d like that, Artemis,” Ivan replied, pausing to motion to his entourage before following the Amazon down the hallway.

“I’ll see you later,” Diana said to no one in particular, somewhat taken aback by the unexpected turn of events.

She watched as Ivan fell into step beside Artemis, asking her about her home and her training as an Amazon. “Two down…one to go,” Diana murmured to herself.

Returning to her office, Diana sat down at her desk. She couldn’t help wondering when the enemy would strike next. The threats were escalating and it was only a matter of time before they would try again to close down the embassy for good.

She looked at the large framed photo of her family that sat on the corner of her desk. It had been taken just a couple of months ago by Donna. She had managed to get all of them in the photo including Jason and Alfred. While Donna wasn’t in the picture, it had turned out perfectly, becoming one of her favorite pictures.

Bruce was looking at her, a small smile on his face that he only ever gave her. It always filled her with a warm rush of emotion when he looked at her, gracing her with that smile. She had never dreamed when she’d left Themyscira that she would fall in love with a man or have a beautiful family like this.

Now that she did, though, she swore to herself that she’d never let them go.

**Wayne Manor; August 8th, 15:05 EST**

Bruce entered through the front door of the manor, immediately removing his suit jacket before dropping it in a chair in the foyer. Even after all these years, it was a habit that Alfred had been unable to break him from. Loosening his tie, he turned to find Alfred coming down the stairs with Nicholas in his arms.

“Daddy,” Nicholas called to him.

“Hey, little man,” Bruce responded with a smile. “Is Kaia still sleeping?”

“Yes,” Alfred answered. “Miss Kaia seems to be coming down with a cold.”

“Do I need to go get some medicine?” Bruce asked.

“We have plenty from the last time Master Nicholas was ill,” he reassured him. “We’re just heading to the kitchen now for a snack.”

“Where’s Damian?” he asked.

“Around,” Alfred cryptically responded with a knowing smile.

“I can only imagine where,” Bruce grumbled.
He’d cut his afternoon at work short, wanting to spend some time with Damian. He wanted to get to know his son, but he also hoped to glean some valuable information from him that might shed some light on why Talia decided to show up now of all times.

He’d also purposefully had Talia bring him to the manor after lunch so he could see what Damian would do when left to his own devices with no one particularly keeping track of him. He’d increased the security around the manor, making certain that Damian was unable to get into certain areas that he didn’t want him in while seeing if he obeyed the rules that had already been outlined to him—namely staying out of the cave without him being present.

“Daddy, when can we get my puppy?” Nicholas asked as Bruce followed Alfred and his son to the kitchen.

Bruce sighed, knowing this question was going to continue to haunt him until he finally caved. Looking into his son’s blue eyes filled with such expectation and hope, there was very little he could do to defend himself or stop the words that came tumbling out of his mouth.

“How about next Friday?” he replied, wondering when he’d lost his ability to law down the law around here.

Nicholas’s excited cheer warmed his heart, though he kept a stoic expression fixed firmly on his face. Dick, Jason, and Tim had all hounded him about getting a dog at one point or another after bringing them into his home, but he’d always stood his ground, holding firm to his position of no animals in the manor. He didn’t particularly like pets and he certainly didn’t like entertaining the notion of having one underfoot in the manor let alone allowing it to happen for real.

Now, though, he found his heart had softened some over the last few years, no longer bent on having things his way all the time. He put the blame fully on Diana. She had changed him since they had started dating, eventually having children and getting married. It was much easier to swallow and wasn’t as bruising to his pride to put the totality of the liability for his softer edge on his wife.

Besides, Batman couldn’t be seen as growing softer over the years by his choice, could he? It had to be the Amazon’s fault with her warmth and compassion and that smile that could melt glaciers. She had corrupted him somehow…right?

“What kind of puppy do you want?” Bruce asked as he flipped through the pile of mail lying on the kitchen counter.

“A black one,” Nicholas decided. “Can we call him Robin?”

“That’s probably not a good idea, buddy,” Bruce told him. “Maybe we can come up with something not related to Batman.”

“But I love you, daddy, and I love Batman,” Nicholas told him as Alfred placed a small plate of cookies and a glass of milk in front of him.

Alfred bit at his bottom lip in an effort to suppress the grin threatening to form, knowing that his surrogate son was in a no-win situation. He glanced at Bruce who was rubbing the back of his neck, searching for an acceptable response that wouldn’t crush his young son’s spirit.

“I love you too, Nicholas,” he replied, affection filling his voice. “We’ll have to see what Kaia thinks. It’ll be her dog too. You’ll have to share the puppy.”

Nicholas frowned at first as he thought about it, but his expression eventually brightened as he
picked up a cookie. “Ok,” he accepted the proposition. “Kai can clean up the messes it makes on the floor.”

Bruce couldn’t help but laugh out loud with Nicholas’s logic. “It won’t just be Kai’s responsibility,” he pointed out. “It’ll be your responsibility to take care of the puppy too.”

“Okay,” he relented with a frown that was so much like his father’s.

As if on cue, the sound of Kaia waking up came over the baby monitor. “I’ll go get her, Alfred,” Bruce told him.

After getting his daughter up, he needed to see what trouble Damian was getting himself into. He hadn’t been spotted as of yet making Bruce anxious to see how resourceful the boy was when locked out of certain areas of the manor. Would he be able to break through the security defenses he’d set up? More importantly, would he obey the rules that had been laid out for him?

He knew he should probably feel guilty for testing his own son like this, but he was an al Ghul. There was no telling just how much Ra’s had brainwashed him or how deep the bond between grandfather and grandson ran. Bruce needed to know if he was going to allow Damian to stay in the manor.

Making his way up the stairs, he couldn’t help wondering where exactly Damian was now. Entering Kaia’s room, he found his daughter sitting up in her toddler bed sniffling with tears running down her face. “Hey, baby girl,” he gently said. “What’s wrong?”

“Daddy,” she tearfully said, raising her arms up to him to pick her up.

Leaning over the railing, he picked her up, taking her into his arms. Kaia immediately snuggled into his protective embrace, laying her head against his chest. He rubbed her back, pausing to gather up her favorite pink blanket.

“Did you have a bad dream?”

Kaia nodded her head against his dress shirt, her hiccoughing breaths causing her little body to shudder. “Where’s Ni-Ni?”

“Nicholas is in the kitchen having a snack with Alfred,” he told her. “Do you want a cookie?”

“Yah,” she sniffled, drawing a shuddering breath.

Bruce wasn’t sure how much of her congestion was from her cold and how much was from her tears, but she did feel warm to him. He hoped she felt well enough to look for a puppy. While he wasn’t exactly anxious about the concept, he knew that his fate was pretty much sealed.

“Do you want to get a puppy on Friday?”

“Yah,” she agreed, clutching her pink blanket to her chest.

“What color do you want?” he asked as they made their way towards the kitchen.

“Pink.”

Bruce chuckled in response to her request. “I’m afraid there are no pink puppies, Kai,” he broke the news to her. “Nicholas wants a black one.”

Kaia lifted her head from her father’s chest to look at him, a very serious expression on her face.
“Me want pink,” she stated with determination, her little pigtails mussed from her nap.

“If you find a pink puppy at the animal shelter, I’ll get it for you,” he reassured her.

Content with his promise, she laid her head back down against his chest with a congested sigh as they entered the kitchen. “Miss Kaia,” Alfred greeted her with an affection smile. “Would you like some cookies too?”

Kaia nodded as Bruce set her down in her booster seat. “When was the last time she had cold medicine?” Bruce asked, frowning. “She feels warm.”

“Before lunch,” Alfred informed him. “I’ll check her temperature and get her another dose.”

“I’m going to see what trouble Damian is getting himself into,” Bruce replied.

“You might want to check your study,” Alfred told him. “I believe I heard some stomping around coming from that direction a little while ago.”

“Great,” he muttered under his breath, shoving his hands into his pants pockets. “I’ll be right back.”

Heading towards his study, he couldn’t help wondering what trouble Damian had gotten into. What he found there, however, was something that he hadn’t expected. He spotted Damian standing in his study staring up at the portrait of his parents.

“Damian?”

Damian didn’t bother turning around, didn’t even flinch with his father’s unexpected appearance. “Are they your parents?”

Bruce stared at the frame picture for a long moment, his hands slipping in his pants pockets. Seeing the portrait always caused an instantaneous stab to his heart even after all these years, even though he was happier now than he had ever been since losing them.

“Yes,” he softly confirmed as he slowly crossed the room to him.

His stomach felt as if it was twisting into knots of dread as he came to stand beside his son who was staring up at the portrait. He really didn’t want to have this conversation with him, but he knew that it was inevitable. There were bound to be a lot of questions about him as well as intimate details of his life.

“Mother said they were murdered right in front of you when you were eight years old,” he stated in a matter-of-fact way that was very clinical in nature.

“They were,” he confirmed with a sigh as his gaze met that of his parents.

The sharp pang in his chest deepened, knowing that he would be having this very same conversation with Nicholas and Kaia some day when they were older and could understand. It was one that he wasn’t relishing and yet he wanted them to know their grandparents, for his parents to never be forgotten despite how painful it still was for him to remember.

“Why didn’t your father fight back?” Damian asked, turning face him. “He should’ve tried to defend himself.”

Bruce felt his throat tighten as if invisible fingers had unexpectedly slipped around his neck in an
attempt to steal his breath. “He didn’t have a chance,” he replied, his body as well as his voice rigid. “The gunman appeared out of the shadows and pointed a gun at us.”

“Mother said that’s why you are the way you are... why you’re Batman,” he pressed.

There was an unemotional air about his questions as he tried to figure out what exactly had happened. It was as if he was trying to dissect the case himself, trying to solve the murder of his parents. “What else did you mother tell you about me?” Bruce questioned him, trying to mask his growing irritation.

“She said that you are incapable of fully committing to anything except for your mission to protect Gotham,” Damian revealed. “Love is not something that is easy for you to accept or to give. You don’t like to deal with your emotions especially when it comes to love. You avoid it all cost.”

Bruce snorted derisively. “Really?” he said. “Well, I fell in love with Diana, married her and have a family with her. What does that tell you?”

Damian thought about it for a long moment before ultimately responding. “Just because you married the Amazon and had children with her doesn’t mean that you actually love her or that you’ll stay with her forever,” he told him with a note of bitterness. “You were with my mother and had me. You were unable to commit to her.”

“Is that what she told you happened between us?”

“Yes,” he stated, his blue eyes darkening as if challenging him to tell him his mother was lying to him.

Bruce frowned as he weighed his words. “That may be what your mother believes, but the truth is that I did care for your mother at one time,” he explained, choosing his words carefully. “I asked her to come back to Gotham with me, but she chose to stay with your grandfather instead. I didn’t even know that she was pregnant with you when I left. I never knew you existed until six days ago.”

“I thought so,” Damian simply stated.

His response took Bruce by surprise, but he kept his expression emotionless. Damian was a highly intelligent and perceptive boy. He had a feeling that he wasn’t easily fooled by anything, including the delusions of his mother. He wondered if that same insight carried over to his grandfather as well.

“So did you find anything interesting in the cave?” Bruce asked him.

Damian looked up sharply at his father, his brow knitting. “I haven’t been down there since we last sparred,” he maintained.

“I know you’ve been down there without me, Damian.”

Damian’s shoulders sank slightly, but he quickly recovered, raising his chin in defiance. “I should’ve guessed you were tracking my every movement in the manor. You don’t trust me.”

“Actually, I wasn’t,” Bruce truthfully confessed. “You just confirmed it for me without having to check the security feed.”

Damian scowled darkly at him, averting his gaze at his mistake. “I just wanted to see what cool stuff you’re hiding down there that you don’t want me to know about.”
“There isn’t anything down there that concerns you,” Bruce informed him, angered by Damian’s lack of obedience. He definitely wasn’t earning his trust.

“It will when I become your next Robin,” Damian countered, stuffing his hands into the front pocket of his sweatshirt.

Bruce studied him intently, wondering what he and his mother were up to with their overwhelming desire for Damian to become Robin. “You’re not going to be my Robin,” he said, his voice breaking no room for argument. “Tim is Robin and will hold that title for as long as he wants to.”

Damian snorted derisively, averting his eyes. “I’d be better at it than him.”

“Don’t sell Tim short,” Bruce warned him. “You’re making a very dangerous mistake if you try to cross him. Now, do you want to go down to the cave with me or not?”

“You’re still letting me go down there?” he asked, stunned.

“You definitely aren’t any closer to gaining my trust by disobeying my orders, but I will still allow you to be down there as long as I’m with you,” Bruce replied.

“Okay,” Damian agreed, following his father out of the study.

Damian felt his father’s trust and faith in Tim Drake and his abilities were severely misplaced and he was going to do everything he could to prove that to him. He deserved to be the next Robin and no one was going to stop him from accomplishing that goal…not even the current Robin.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I'm really loving the addition of Artemis to this fic. She's so much fun to write! I also love writing Bruce with his children. It's a side of him that we never get to see anywhere else but in fanfics. Hope you are enjoying it too!

UP NEXT: Artemis follows an ambassador as he explores Gotham and runs into someone unexpected. Diana talks to her mother about Artemis. :)
Chapter 9

Gotham; August 8th, 23:36 EST

She surreptitiously moved through the streets of Gotham, her attention focused solely on her prey. She’d been on the hunt since the moment they had left the Themysciran Embassy, staying several paces behind them to keep from being noticed. They had thankfully chosen to walk to their destination instead of taking a car, making it that much easier for her.

She paused in a deserted alley, peering around the corner to keep a close eye on them. They seemed to be content to chat outside of the bar instead of actually going inside. She had a very bad feeling, one that had settled in her gut from the very beginning and she was going to find out why.

She rested her back against the rough brick of the building, her patience wearing thinner by the moment. So far this little expedition had revealed nothing of significance except for the fact that the man was a complete lush on top of being a creep among several other things.

She huffed a fiery red lock of hair out of her line of sight, wondering how much longer he was going to tour the city. So far, Ambassador Nosh had visited a restaurant for a late dinner before moving from one bar to the next. She wasn’t certain what he was looking for exactly and she wasn’t certain that she wanted to know, but she knew that it was important to find out.

Artemis tipped her head back, looking up at the night sky. She couldn’t help wondering if the princess’s mate was near. She had privately shared her concerns with him tonight after dinner, making mention of the fact that the vile human being had been unable to keep his eyes off the princess or herself.

Bruce had been less than happy with the information, but agreed that they should keep a close eye on him just in case. He’d told her that he’d already done extensive investigations into all three ambassadors as well as their entourage and body guards. He didn’t want to be caught unawares and he definitely wasn’t ruling any of them out as possibly being behind the threats to Diana.

Artemis had promised him that she would do whatever it took to keep the princess and his family safe. While she felt that he had appreciated her reassurance, it had done little to dissipate the haunting look of dread that continued to fill his eyes.

She knew that he would be following up on things at the embassy tonight, checking to make sure that everything was still secure. Ambassador Welich had arrived not long after Ivan Pallock. He had appeared to be rather innocuous, not sending up any alarms.

Welich was an older man with graying hair and a rather bland personality. He was quiet and mild-mannered, leading her to feel that he was the least likely to be involved in the threats. She hoped that he’d be able to stand up to someone as obnoxious and boisterous as Nosh when it came to the peace talks tomorrow.

Her thoughts quickly wandered to the third ambassador—Ivan Pallock. She felt a small smile threatening to form as she considered him. He was a very attractive male specimen, one that she hadn’t anticipated affecting her like this. She wasn’t quite certain what to think about it.
She watched as Nosh and his body guards went into the bar, leaving her to her thoughts as she was forced to patiently wait for them. After showing Ivan to his suite, they had talked for what felt like forever. It almost felt as though she had known him for years, discovering a kindred spirit in a man no less.

She knew, though, she couldn’t let her guard down around him. The most charming could also be the deadliest, the most devious and the most unsuspecting. Still, she couldn’t help being anxious to see him again tomorrow when she returned to the embassy.

While the ambassadors were here in Gotham, Bruce wanted her at the embassy with Diana as backup. Once the ambassadors were gone, he wanted her home with the small children, keeping watch over them in case the threats against Diana carried over to their home.

While that possibility seemed fairly unlikely at this point, neither she nor Bruce were ruling out the possibility. When she had been sent here to help protect the princess and her family, she’d never imagined that she would be working so closely with Diana’s mate.

In doing so, she had found a very intelligent and thoroughly prepared man who fiercely loved his wife as well as his family. She was becoming more impressed with him with every passing day, helping her to further understand why Diana had fallen so hard for the mortal man who dresses like a demon of the night.

“Anything going on yet?”

Artemis nearly jumped out of her skin with the unexpected grating rasp that unexpectedly filled her ear. She whirled around into a fighting stance, prepared to take out the intruder. With a curse, she lowered her fists. “What are you doing here?” she hissed.

“Following up to see if you had discovered anything yet,” Batman evenly informed the fiery red head prepared to take him down.

“How can a mortal appear out thin air like that?” she spat out with annoyance. “You’re just like a demon.”

“Practice,” he told her, his expression stoic. “What have you learned?”

“The man is a drunk,” she groused. “He’s only visited about three bars and one dance club since leaving the restaurant.”

“That’s what my intel on him revealed,” he replied. “He’s a drinker and a womanizer. Time will tell us more.”

Artemis snorted derisively. “The sooner he leaves the better,” she muttered. “The man is revolting.”

“I agree, but we have to play nice with him for now if we want the peace summit to be a success for Themyscira,” he reminded her. “Did you get a feeling for Welich or Pallock?”

“Welich is unremarkable,” she revealed with a shrug. “He seems to keep to himself and speaks very little. I have a feeling Nosh will eat him alive at the peace talks.”

“And Pallock?”

“Ivan is—”
“Ivan?” Batman cut her off, the barest of smirks playing on his face.

Artemis immediately realized her mistake, silently cursing herself for the slip. “Yes, he asked that Diana and I call him Ivan,” she coolly stated, lifting her chin defiantly. “He does not appear to be a threat at this point.”

“How?”

“How what?”

“How doesn’t he appear to be a threat?” he pressed, sensing there was more she was withholding.

Artemis scowled at him, not liking the way that he was questioning her. She was an Amazon and a Champion of the Bana-Mighdall. “He was friendly and polite,” she bit out. “He was very focused on the reasons for his being here in Gotham.”

“So he was charming?”

“Yes…wait,” Artemis said, scowling. “What?”

“He was good looking and charming is what you’re telling me,” Batman told her. “You know those can be the most dangerous.”

“I realize that, Batman,” she snapped, emphasizing his name with an angry air. “I am merely pointing out that as of right now he doesn’t appear to be a threat. However, I will continue to keep a close watch on him.”

“I’m sure you will,” he murmured, amused by the fact that the Amazon was smitten with the ambassador. He had definitely not seen that coming.

“Is there anything else?” she demanded to know, crossing her arms against her chest as she glared at him.

“Yes,” he calmly replied, pulling something out of his utility belt and handing a device to her. “Put this in your ear and wear it all times. If you run into anything, press it and you can let me know. Just make sure it’s a real emergency this time.”

Artemis smirked as she took the tiny device from his gauntleted hand. “It was purely an accident,” she claimed.

“Right,” he growled, clearly not buying it. Her call had caused him to panic for no reason at all. He’d been a step away from bolting from Wayne Enterprises in order to get to the embassy and Diana.

“It’s your fault for not showing me how to use the cellular device,” she reminded him.

“Well, this is very simple,” he assured her. “It’s programmed to go directly to me and Robin. Just press it and both of us can respond.”

“Does this mean I’m officially part of the team?”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” he muttered.

Artemis glanced back over her shoulder to check on the bar Nosh had disappeared into some time ago, wanting to make sure that he was still inside. “I’m definitely not taking a code name if—” she began, only to turn around and find herself all alone in the dark alley.
She muttered several curses as she studied the small hearing device before sticking it in her ear. She had never seen anything like it before. The man was mortal and yet he moved and acted like a wraith. It was unnerving to say the least.

From above, Batman studied the Amazon as she turned back around to watch the bar. While her arrival in Gotham had been very unexpected, he couldn’t say that her presence was totally unwanted. She provided him a small measure of comfort that one more person was watching Diana’s back for him.

At first, he hadn’t been certain that Artemis could be fully trusted and he still wasn’t completely at that point yet, but so far she had proven herself to be loyal and true to her word. That didn’t mean that he still wasn’t suspicious of her true motives for being here.

“Do you think we can trust her?”

“For now…yes,” Batman replied as Robin came to a stop beside him on the roof. “We should still be on guard, though.”

“I agree,” Robin said with a nod as he watched Artemis loitering in the shadows of the alley below. “So far, her intentions seem to be honest. I think that she really wants to protect the family.”

“I get that feeling too,” Batman stated as he studied the streets below.

“Were you able to learn anything worthwhile this afternoon?” Tim cryptically inquired, casting a sidelong glance at his father-figure.

Bruce instinctively stiffened with the reminder of the conversation that he’d had with Damian this afternoon. While it hadn’t been pleasant at the time, it was one that they had needed to have. He was relieved it was over, but he knew that there would be many more conversations like this in the future between them.

“Not much,” Batman revealed. “He’s a very difficult boy to get to know. He’s very closed off.”

“Wonder where he got that characteristic from?”

Ignoring the comment, Batman continued. “He definitely has a chip on his shoulder.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Robin agreed with a grimace. “I’m sure he feels he has something to prove especially with how his grandfather is. Not to mention, his family is a group of environmental terrorists.”

Batman snorted. “Don’t remind me.”

“You sure knew how to pick them before you finally found the right one,” Robin told him.

“I’m just fortune she loved me back,” he said.

“Well, the poor boy doesn’t really stand a chance,” Robin told him. “He has your stubborn arrogance on top of your genius mind.”

Batman turned a menacing glare on his partner. “Are you finished?”

Robin grinned at him. “For now I guess,” he decided. “I may have more later.”

“He knows why they’re really here in Gotham, but I doubt he’ll betray his mother or Ra’s by giving that information up,” Batman said. “He wants to prove that he can complete the mission…
that he’s worthy to become the heir of the League of Assassins.”

“And worthy to become the next Robin?”

“That title belongs to you for as long as you want it,” Batman firmly stated. “No one is going to take that from you as long as there is breath in my body.”

“Thanks,” he replied, relieved by Bruce’s reassurance.

He knew that Damian had a long way to go before proving himself trustworthy and able to take on the mantle of Robin, but he couldn’t help wondering if it would come sooner rather than later since he’d been personally trained by Ra’s al Ghul himself. He definitely wasn’t ready to give up his nighttime activities any time soon. He loved it too much, loved his family too much to stop being a part of all of it. Fighting crime and saving lives was what his family did and he was proud to be a part of it.

“Of course, you pull something stupid like dropping out of college and I’ll take the title away from you myself,” Batman sternly informed him.

Despite the harshness of his words, Tim could hear the underlying affection in his voice. It wasn’t something that he would have allowed to escape before Diana. “Well, I had considered dropping out and starting my own rock band and—”

“Don’t even think about it,” Batman rasped with a threatening edge.

A very loud, very drunk Ambassador Nosh emerged…or rather stumbled out of the bar at that precise moment. He was being held up by his two burly body guards who appeared less than thrilled with their jobs as they attempted to hail a taxi cab only to be completely ignored.

Nosh was adamantly arguing that he was completely fine, but his insistence fell on deaf ears. Instead, he turned his attention on a couple of women who were walking past him. “Hello, ladies,” he greeted them with his thick accent and a leer as he began to follow them. “Would you two do me the extreme pleasure by accompanying me back to the Themyscireten Em…Em…Emassy for a night filled with unbridled ecstasy?”

He totally butchered the word Themyscirian, the drunken haze that consumed him causing him to stumble and nearly fall. The two women gave him a disgusted look, one of them clearly considering decking him as she raised her fist. She quickly lowered it as the two body guards quickly grabbed hold of him, pulling him back towards them before he could cause any more trouble.

“Wow,” Robin muttered. “That’s the ambassador from Lycernia?”

“I’m afraid so,” Batman confirmed with a scowl.

He already didn’t like the man. At least he knew that Artemis had been truthful in her assessment of the man. He was a womanizer, chasing after anything in a skirt. While it had been a reputation that he himself had worked hard at cultivating in order to deflect suspicions from his nighttime activities, it was one that he had loathed.

No woman should ever be treated with such little respect or subjected to such contemptible actions by a man who is after just one thing. Now that he had a daughter of his own, that same sentiment had only grown that much stronger.

“What a letch,” Robin grumbled. “I hope mom doesn’t have to spend too much time with him.”
“I just hope she doesn’t break his neck before the week is out,” Bruce replied.

Robin chuckled with the image that popped into his head of Diana grabbing Nosh by the throat and throwing him out the nearest window. “I guess you’re right,” he decided. “It’s Nosh we should feel sorry for. She’s going to put him in his place and it won’t be pretty. Let’s just hope that he can walk out of the embassy under his own power and with his teeth still in place.”

A tug at the corner of Bruce’s lips revealed his amusement as Nosh was shoved into a taxi cab by his body guards. “Let’s go,” Batman said. “We still have to finish patrol before swinging by the embassy to ensure everything is still secure.”

“I’ll start on the East End,” Robin volunteered. “Meet you at the embassy by three?”

Batman nodded his head in agreement as he fired his grappling gun. “Be careful and keep your eyes open for Joker,” he warned him. “He’s been too quiet lately. He’s ramping up for something big.”

“Got it,” Robin replied, a smile on his lips as he watched the Dark Knight disappear over the next rooftop. Turning, he noticed Artemis getting into a taxi of her own, more than likely heading home for the night.

He sincerely hoped that she would prove trustworthy because he found that he liked her. She was pretty tough and definitely not much of a talker, but he thought that she fit in nicely with the family. He just hoped that she didn’t end up breaking Jason in two before all was said and done.

Blüdhaven; August 9th, 03:43 EST

Dick stripped off his Nightwing uniform, stifling a groan that rose in his throat. He paused to rub his shoulder, wincing with the pain that caused the muscles to seize as he attempted to rotate it. A fight with a gang hadn’t gone as well as he’d hoped, but he had been the victor in the end.

Stepping into the shower, he allowed the hot water to sluice over his body, allowing it to melt away the stress of the night. Thoughts about patrol and the open cases that he was working on gradually dissolved as he happier thoughts began to take their place.

He was going to be a father in seven months.

The thought put a grin on his face as he rinsed the soap from his body, dipping his head under the water again. He could hardly believe they were actually having a baby. They had talked about starting a family someday, choosing to wait until they’d had a chance to settle into married life for a while.

Now, after being married for over a year, they were finally going to be starting a family of their own. Indescribable happiness unlike anything he’d ever felt before had taken root in his heart when Leslie had showed them their child growing in Donna’s womb.

They had made this baby, this little life that would soon turn their worlds upside down and life inside out. He didn’t know how he was going to be able to wait for seven whole months to finally see his child, to hold him or her in his arms.

He couldn’t help wondering if it was going to be a girl or a boy, what he or she would look like. Would he have his nose? Would she have Donna’s eyes and her beautiful smile that seemed to light up his whole world? Would he have a feisty spirit like Donna or would she be high-spirited like him?
Turning the water off, Dick exited the shower, grabbing a towel to dry off. He decided that waiting for their baby to come was a lot like waiting for Christmas to open a present. He was anxious to find out if the sex of their baby, but Donna was leaning towards wanting to be surprised.

He didn’t know how he was going to survive the next seven months if she decided that they should wait to find out. He was far too excited to not know. Of course, knowing the sex of their baby wasn’t going to make the wait any easier. He’d already decided that it was going to be a girl.

Slipping on a pair of boxers, Dick silently made his way to their bedroom, finding his wife sound asleep. She was so beautiful, her ebony hair splayed on her pillow as she slept. She was lying on her right side, her hand resting on his pillow as if silently willing him to come home.

He carefully lifted the covers, sliding in beside her. She immediately reached for him, murmuring his name in her sleep. Taking her hand in his, he gently pulled her towards him, wrapping his arms around her as she shifted to lay against him.

“Are you all right?” she murmured sleepily.

“Just a few bruises,” he reassured her. “Nothing I can’t handle.”

She sighed heavily as she snuggled even closer to him, her hand nestled into the crook of his neck. “What am I going to do with you, bird boy?”

“I can think of several things off the top of my head that you can do with me, but we really should get some sleep,” he flirted.

Her arm slipped over his torso, squeezing him tightly. He grunted in response to her firm hold and the bruises that she had found. “Maybe in the morning…if you’re lucky,” she murmured.

“Oh, I’m very lucky,” he told her.

“We’ll see about that,” she muttered, her lips grazing his throat.

“How are you feeling?”

“Better now that you’re home safe,” she replied.

“And how’s our baby girl?” he asked with a grin.

Donna chuckled softly despite her sleepy state. “Baby girl? How do you know we’re having a girl?”

“Call it a father’s intuition,” he teased.

“You’re not a father yet,” she pointed out.

“You have our baby growing inside of you…a baby that we made,” he told her. “As far as I’m concerned, I am father whether she’s been born yet or not.”

His words warmed her clear through to her toes. “You’re going to be an amazing father, Dick.”

“And you’re going to be an awesome mother,” he told her, leaning down to press a kiss to her forehead.

“Would you think I was crazy if I told you I was scared?”
Dick tightened his hold on her, rubbing her back as he held her. “Not at all,” he reassured her. “To be honest, I’m scared too. I have no idea how to take care of a baby or how to raise a child.”

“That makes two of us.”

“We’ll figure it out together, Troia,” he promised her.

“And we’ll have Bruce and Diana on speed dial,” she said with a chuckle. “They’re no longer rookies like we will be.”

“Already programmed that into my phone,” he told her. “You know we’re going to have to think of names for your little BG One.”

“BG One?”

“Yah, Baby Grayson One,” he explained. “That’s what I’m calling our little peanut until we know if it’s a boy or a girl and we come up with a name.”

Donna giggled as she leaned up to press a kiss to his lips. “If this peanut is number one, just how many peanuts are planning on having?”

“I don’t know,” he thoughtfully replied. “Maybe one or two more.”

“Let’s see how we handle this one before we decide on more,” she suggested.

Dick rolled over to face his wife, his hand coming to rest on her abdomen. He could scarcely believe that their baby was growing right there beneath his hand. “I think we’ll be great parents, Troia,” he reassured her. “This baby was made out of the immense love that we have for each other. I think that’s a pretty good place to start.”

Donna stared into his icy blue eyes, her heart swelling with his words. “I love you, Dick,” she murmured, leaning in and kissing him deeply.

“I love you too,” he told her.

She rolled onto her left side, Dick moving to press his entire body along the length of her back. He wrapped his arms around her, his large hand coming to rest against her abdomen. He kissed her shoulder. “Sweet dreams, Troia,” he murmured into her hair.

Themyscirian Embassy; August 9th, 07:26 EST

Diana sat at her desk in her office, turning her computer on. She was scheduled to speak with her mother this morning who wanted an update on how things were progressing with the newly opened embassy. She was anxious to speak with her mother as well.

She didn’t particularly like the fact that her mother had sent Artemis to Gotham. It made her feel as though her mother didn’t trust her to be able to handle this situation. At the same time, she was thankful for the extra protection it provided her family.

Diana knew that Artemis and Bruce were talking in private behind her back, making plans for her protection as well as their family. While it irritated her, she didn’t bother stepping in to put a stop to it. She knew that Bruce needed to do this in order to feel a small measure of control over the situation that was beyond his reach. It helped him feel a little less helpless and she was willing to do whatever it took to keep him from worrying so much about her.
Her mother’s face appeared on her computer screen, her expression regal and proud. “Good morning, mother,” she formally greeted her.

“Good afternoon, my sun and stars,” the Queen of the Amazons replied, instantly picking up on her daughter’s prickly demeanor. “How are you? Are you well?”

“I’m fine,” she answered. “How are things on Themyscira?”

Hippolyta kept her expression even despite the flash of apprehension in her blue eyes. “Things are…a little difficult,” she reluctantly informed her.

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

The queen drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly through her nose. “No, Diana,” she firmly stated. “There are some Amazons who are unhappy with the recent turn of events with the opening of the embassy, but they will adjust.”

“And if they don’t?”

“It won’t come to that.”

“Do you think sending Artemis here was the best choice?” Diana ventured, not wanting to beat around the bush any longer.

“You do not agree with my decision,” she surmised. It was more of a statement than a question.

“Did you really think that I would?”

“I thought that you would appreciate someone to help look after your family,” Hippolyta maintained, raising her chin with every bit of the regal authority that she held. “This isn’t just about you, my sun and stars. While I worry for your safety, I know that you can take care of yourself. I fear greatly for my grandchildren as well as the other members of your family.”

Diana released a sigh, knowing that her mother was right. It wasn’t that she was against Artemis being here to help protect her family. It was the fact that she felt that her mother didn’t trust her to handle the situation or that she needed the help.

“Why did you choose Artemis?” she asked, a small measure of her annoyance dissolving into simple curiosity.

“She is the Champion of the Bana-Mighdall. Furthermore, there is unrest here on Themyscira, Diana,” she explained. “I wanted you to have the best with you in case things escalated, but I didn’t feel I could afford to send you Phillipus or Antiope. I need to ensure that Themyscira is safely guarded while still making sure that you and your family are well-protected.”

“I appreciate that, mother,” Diana replied. “Artemis’s arrival was just…unexpected. I felt that you were questioning my ability to handle the situation.”

“Hera, no, my sun and stars,” Hippolyta quickly reassured her. “I merely wanted you to have backup. While some of my grandchildren are old enough to protect themselves, Nicholas and Kaia are not.”

“Well, there is actually more news,” she grudgingly informed her.

Hippolyta’s brow furrowed with concern, noticing her daughter’s expression. “What is it?”
“We just recently discovered that Bruce has a son that he never knew about,” she revealed. “A former lover from almost eleven years ago arrived with their son…Damian al Ghul.”

“Oh, dear,” she murmured. “How is Bruce handling this?”

“While he’s happy to learn he has a son, he is not thrilled with the fact that Talia kept him a secret from him for the last ten years,” she disclosed. “He feels bad about it…wishes that Damian was ours instead of his and Talia’s, but what it is done is done. It’s not something that can be changed.”

“And how are you holding up?”

“It’s…difficult,” she confessed with a sigh. “Damian looks very much like Bruce. There’s definitely no denying who his father is. He’s been rather difficult to get to know. He has many issues that we’re going to have to work through.”

“Not unlike Bruce I assume,” Hippolyta noted, her lips twitching with amusement. “You managed to work through some of his issues and look at the beautiful family and love that you have to show for it. I know that you’ll be able to find some common ground with young Damian and form a relationship that works well for the two of you.”

“It’s going to be more than difficult, though,” Diana replied with a frown. “He’s already told me that it’s unlikely that we’ll ever be friends.”

Hippolyta chuckled softly. “And when has an obstacle like that ever stopped you from anything, Diana?” she questioned her. “I’m sure that this hasn’t been very easy for him either. Give Damian some space and time to adjust. You are an easy person to love, my daughter. I’m sure that he’ll warm up to you soon enough.”

“Thank you, mother,” Diana softly said with a small smile. “I hope you’ll be able to come visit some time soon. I’d love for you to see what Bruce and I have done with the embassy. He was adamant about purchasing several Greek relics and antiquities to show Themyscira’s rich history. I think you’d be quite impressed by the various displays throughout the embassy.”

“I hope to soon,” she agreed. “I just have to make sure that things have settled down here before I can leave the island.”

“Would it help if I came home…maybe spoke to my sisters in person about the changes?” she offered. “It might help if they knew that we aren’t trying to fully erase everything about Themyscira or change the ways of the Amazons that makes us who we are.”

“I don’t know,” she honestly answered. “For now, you continue to handle things there and I will take care of the island. Have the ambassadors all arrived safely?”

“Yes,” she informed her. “They all arrived yesterday. The summit is scheduled to begin this morning at ten.”

“I wish you all the wisdom of Athena that you will be able to persuade them into a peaceful end to their disagreements,” Hippolyta told her. “I know you’ll do a wonderful job, Diana. I’m so very proud of you and all that you’ve accomplished for Themyscira thus far.”

Diana felt tears prick her eyes with her mother’s words. She touched the screen with her fingertips, wishing her mother was here with her now. “I love you, mother.”

“And I you, my sun and stars,” Hippolyta said with a tender smile. “Now, give the little ones hugs and kisses for me and send the others my love. I hope to see you all very soon.”
“I know Bruce is more than anxious for you to come for a visit,” Diana informed her with a frown. “I think he wants more stories from my childhood to use against me.”

Hippolyta chuckled. “I never thought I’d see the day that I would become so fond of your husband, but he and I have formed a bond because we love you so.”

“I’m relieved even though it’s at the expense of my pride,” she said with a roll of her eyes.

“How are my dear little grandchildren?” she asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

“Nicholas is a young Bruce and Kaia is ornery as ever,” she revealed. “Nicholas wants to be daddy’s partner and Kaia is biting. The biggest controversy right now is that they want a puppy which Bruce is not exactly a fan of getting.”

It warmed the queen’s heart to hear about her grandchildren. “You were a biter too as a child so Kaia comes by it honestly.”

“Hera, don’t tell Bruce or I’ll never hear the end of it,” Diana decided. “I need to go. I’ll let you know how the summit goes.”

“I have an incoming message from Donna,” Hippolyta informed her. “I’ll talk to you soon.”

Diana smiled as she ended the transmission, knowing her mother was going to be over the moon when she learned that Donna was pregnant. While her daughters marrying men and staying in Man’s World hadn’t been her first choice, she had definitely settled quite happily into the role of grandmother.

Reaching for her cup of coffee, Diana decided that she was feeling better about things then she had in a while. She had been able to settle matters with her mother, Damian was beginning to settle into Wayne Manor without Talia’s inference, and no more threats had come in since she’d been stabbed.

Hopefully, things were finally beginning to settle down around here for a change.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I just want to say that if you guys knew what was going to happen in this fic you might have a heart attack. I’m loving having Artemis in this. She’s a great co-conspirator for Bruce and it’s so much fun to write her with Jason. Really hope you guys are enjoying this!

UP NEXT: Jason finds out about the attraction between Ivan and Artemis. Also, Damian is surprised as he learns more about his step-mother.

Thank you guys for your support and reviews! Let’s keep the Wonderbat dream alive! :)


Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 10

\textit{Themysciran Embassy; August 9th, 09:45 EST}

Artemis wandered the halls of the embassy, making sure that everything was ready for today. It was going to be a big day for Diana, no doubt testing her patience as well as her self-control. She was relieved that the responsibility did not fall on her shoulders to deal with these men. She’d start breaking bones in order ensure they agreed to a peaceful agreement between the countries.

She smiled to herself as she thought about it, wishing now she could be a part of the peace talks. She was anxious for some action. She was itching to stretch her legs and use her fists. Bruce had showed her how to get down into the cave that lived beneath the manor in order to use the training room and equipment. She had yet to get down there to try it out, but she was looking forward to it.

Right now, though, she needed to focus on making her rounds. The fact that there hadn’t been any more threats did little to settle her unease or allowed her to relax her attention to every little detail. She definitely didn’t like Nosh and Ambassador Welich had done little to endear himself to her or anyone else for that fact.

Pulling out her cell phone, she decided to send a text message to Bruce to let him know that things were still quiet. She knew if she didn’t text him he’d be contacting her in minute now. She frowned as she focused on her phone, trying to remember exactly how Tim had taught her how to send a message.

Walking around the corner, she found herself running straight into someone, nearly causing her to drop her phone. “Excuse me,” she murmured, looking up to find herself staring into the handsome face of Ivan Pallock, his arms wrapped around her.

“Good morning,” Ivan greeted her with a grin.

Artemis felt a little flustered to be in a man’s arms, but especially this particular man’s arms. “Morning,” she replied, hooking a red lock behind her ear as she pulled out of his embrace. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going. I’m still trying to learn how to use this phone.”

“No worries,” he reassured her. “If I were to bump into anyone, I’m happy it’s you.”

Artemis felt her cheeks grow warm with his flirtatious comment. “Are you settling into your suite?”

“Yes,” he replied. “It was quite extravagant…far more than I’m accustomed to.”

She frowned with his response. “Do you not have sufficient living quarters at home?”

“Let’s just say that it’s modest compared to this,” Ivan informed her. “Ambassadors don’t make quite as much as people think.”

“Then why do you do it?”
“I enjoy it,” he revealed, his hands slipping into his pants pockets. “I like negotiating agreements for the betterment of my country or to protect it from harm.”

“That’s very noble of you,” Artemis commented.

“Walk with me?” he requested. “I’m not exactly sure where I’m supposed to go, and I don’t want to be late for the first meeting.”

“It’s right this way,” she replied, turning and walking with him down the hallway that she had just come from.

“So, how long have you been here, Artemis?”

“I just arrived a few days ago to help ensure the safety of the embassy,” she informed him as she fell in step beside him.

“I’m sure it’s been somewhat of a culture shock for you trying to adjust to everything,” he said with his thick accent, casting a sidelong glance at the beautiful Amazon walking beside him.

“A little bit, but Diana and her family have been very helpful,” she revealed as she came to a stop before the conference room. “This is where you’ll be meeting.”

“Thank you,” he told her. “I appreciate the assistance and the company. Perhaps we can meet for dinner tomorrow night and you can show me some of Gotham. I would tonight, but I have plans to night to visit a couple of shops that I’m interested in.”

“I will have to see if I am free.”

“I hope to see you later then,” he said, giving her a warm smile before entering the room.

Artemis didn’t realize that she had been holding her breath until now. She didn’t understand the affect this man was having on her or where these warm feelings of attraction were coming from. She had sworn to herself that she was only here to provide protection, not find a man like Diana and Donna.

Now, she was beginning to have second thoughts.

“Artemis!”

She looked up to find Jason Todd walking towards her, taking her by surprise. She frowned as he approached, wondering what he was up to by showing up at the embassy. “What are you doing here?”

“Good morning to you. I just wanted to check in with Diana to make sure that everything was going well so far,” he replied as he came to a stop before her, his lips curving into a frown. “Who was that guy you were talking to?”

“Ivan Pallock,” she informed him, wishing that he would leave.

“Artemis, here’s my cell phone number,” Ivan said as he reappeared in the doorway, handing her a piece of paper. “Let me know about tomorrow night.”

“I will, Ivan,” she replied with a faint smile. “Thank you.”

Ivan nodded towards Jason before disappearing back inside the conference room. “One of the ambassadors is giving you his cell phone number?” Jason challenged her, jaw automatically
“Yes,” she confirmed, folding the paper and stuffing it into her pants pocket. “He asked me to join him for dinner tomorrow night.”

Jason crossed his arms against his chest, glaring at her with obvious disapproval. “Well, I guess you haven’t wasted any time getting to know the men in town have you?”

Artemis instantly bristled with his insinuation, furious with his comment. “I only just met him yesterday. We’re just friends,” she snapped. “Of course, not that any of this is your business.”

“Jason, what are you doing here?” Diana asked as she approached.

“I just wanted to stop by to make sure everything was okay. I told Bruce I’d be on standby if there was any trouble,” he told her, glancing at Artemis with a heated glare. “But it seems that Artemis already has everything in hand. She’s even dating Ambassador Pallock.”

“I am not dating anyone,” Artemis ground out, her hands curling into fists at her sides. “He just asked me if I wanted to have dinner with him tomorrow night and to check out Gotham.”

Jason snorted in response as he averted his eyes. “Yah, I’ll bet that’s all he wants to check out.”

Diana bit at her bottom lip to keep the amusement from reaching her face. She swore these two were made for each other. “I appreciate you stopping by, Jason, but there haven’t been any more threats. I’m just about to start the peace negotiations now. I’ll make sure Artemis calls you if we run into any trouble.”

“Sure,” he grumbled with a curt nod. “Good luck.”

“Thanks,” Diana said with a warm smile before entering the conference room, shutting the doors behind her.

“I guess I’ll go now,” Jason evenly replied. “Call me if you have trouble handling Ivan…or anything else.”

“No man is a match for me,” she spat out. “I have to return to my rounds now. I’m sure you can find your way out.”

“Nice to see you again too,” he shot back with a scowl, turning on his heel and storming away.

Artemis watched as he stalked off, wondering how in the name of Ra a man could get so far under her skin like Jason Todd could. Whatever hopes he may have about something happening between them was nothing more than a deluded fantasy on his part.

He could find himself another Amazon if that was what he wanted for all she cared because it certainly wasn’t going to be her.

*Wayne Enterprises; August 9th, 16:15 EST*

Bruce exited the conference room with his files under his arm and a cup of coffee in his hand. It had been a lengthy meeting, but it had proven to be valuable. Hopefully, it would lead to a significant deal that could bring the company nearly a billion dollars in the next year.

Heading to his office, he was anxious to check in with Diana to see how the peace talks were going. Thankfully, Tim had spent some time teaching Artemis how to send and receive text messages
yesterday, allowing him to check in with her a couple of times today to make sure that things were going well. Still, he wanted to talk to his wife.

The fact that Diana hadn’t received anymore threats since the stabbing did little to settle his anxiety over the situation. He couldn’t help feeling as though the perpetrator was just ramping up for something far deadlier to get their point across. It made him ill to his core and he was no closer to figuring out who was behind it.

Setting his files down on his desk, he pulled his cell phone out as he settled into his chair. He frowned, noticing there were no messages yet from Diana. He could only imagine the stress and headache she was enduring by having to deal with all three ambassadors, but especially Ambassador Nosh.

The man was a swine, consumed with women and booze. He had no idea how the man was able to function properly in the role of ambassador for his country. He had to have one doozy of a hangover today that would no doubt put him in a very unpleasant mood.

Hoping that Diana was on a break, he called her, needing to hear her voice and to know that she was okay. “Hey, Bruce,” she answered, her voice revealing her fatigue.

“How are you doing?” he asked. “You sound exhausted.”

“It’s been a very long day,” she informed him with a sigh.

“Are you done for the day?”

“I just called their bickering to an end and sent all of them to their rooms,” she told him.

Bruce chuckled softly with her response. “I wish I could have seen that,” he replied. “Did you go all Wonder Woman on them…threaten them with the lasso?”

“Almost,” she confessed. “There were a couple of times that I nearly split the table in two with my fist.”

“I made sure the conference table was built with reinforced titanium underneath it just for you.”

“You always think of everything, don’t you?”

Bruce could practically hear the smile in her voice. It put a smile on his own face. “Always…especially when it comes to my hot-tempered wife,” he teased.

“I am not hot-tempered,” she claimed. “Are you going to be getting home early?”

“I’m trying to get out of here, but I have a couple more things to finish up first.”

“I’m leaving here shortly,” she replied. “I think I deserve a nice hot bath for what I’ve had to deal with today.”

“Hmmm…” Bruce hummed appreciatively. “I just might have to come home and join you. I can give you a neck massage.”

“I thought you said you had some things to finish up first,” she reminded him.

“I think it can wait until tomorrow,” he said with a chuckle. “Picturing you naked, wet, and alone in our bathtub just made up my mind for me.”
“Did you have a long day too?”

“One meeting after another,” he confirmed. “I’m more than ready for a break.”

“Race you home,” she seductively purred. “First one there starts the water.”

“Deal,” he agreed. “See you soon.”

Ending the call, Bruce set his phone down before gathering up the files on his desk into some semblance of organization. The longer he thought about spending time alone with Diana in the bathtub the harder it was becoming to focus on anything else.

A knock at his office door unfortunately invaded those lustful thoughts. “Come in,” he called with a frown.

He put a couple of files into his briefcase to look at later if he got around to it, but he knew that was highly unlikely. Once he was at home, he preferred to spend that time with his family…as long as Gotham cooperated and allowed him to do it.

“Sorry to interrupt, Mister Wayne, but you…uh, have a visitor here,” Carol informed him.

Bruce looked up at her, her apprehensive expression putting him alert. “Who is it?”

“Hello, father,” Damian said as he pushed past Carol to enter Bruce’s office.

“Damian,” Bruce stated as he stood to his feet in disbelief. “What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to see where you worked,” he replied as if it was the most obvious answer.

“Thank you, Carol,” Bruce told her. “I’ll take him home.”

“Yes, sir,” she said with a nod, closing the door behind her.

“Damian, how did you get here?” Bruce demanded to know as he walked around his desk.

“Taxi,” he muttered with a shrug as he began to wander around the richly decorated office.

“Does your mother know where you are?”

“I doubt it,” he replied.

“Where is she?” Bruce pressed, growing more irritated by the moment.

“She had to take care of some personal business,” he informed her. “I finished early with my school work and was bored so I decided to come see you.”

“So you took a taxi from your hotel to Wayne Enterprises just to see where I worked?” Damian turned to face him, his hands still buried in his sweatshirt pockets. “Yes,” he confirmed with a nod. “It wasn’t hard.”

“You’re ten years old in a city that you don’t know anything about,” Bruce ground out, his voice rising despite his best efforts to keep his temper in check. “Do you have any idea how dangerous that was?”

“I can take care of myself, father,” he spat out with a dark scowl. “I’m not a child.”
Bruce closed the distance between them, his chest tight with anger. “You are a child, Damian,” he heatedly informed him. “You may have been trained by your grandfather to be an assassin, but you are still a child. Gotham is far too dangerous for you to be wandering around alone like this.”

“I can take care of myself,” Damian stubbornly spat out. “I don’t need to have someone hold my hand like your other children require.”

Bruce pinched the bridge of his nose, drawing a deep calming breath to try to keep himself from saying something he might regret. “Call your mother right now and tell her where you are,” he told him. “I’m taking you back to the hotel.”

Damian didn’t get a chance to call his mother as Bruce’s cell phone rang. He went to his desk, picking it up to find Talia calling him. “Beloved, where is Damian?” she asked, her voice revealing her worry. “He’s not here at the hotel.”

“He’s here in my office, Talia,” he revealed.

“What is he doing there?”

“He got bored so he took a taxi to my office,” he informed her. “Why did you leave him alone?”

“I had some things that I needed to take care of,” she defended herself.

“And you couldn’t take him with you?”

“For your information I could not,” she snapped.

“I’m bringing him to the hotel right now,” Bruce stated as he grabbed his suit jacket and briefcase.

“Actually, I was going to see if he could stay with you tonight at the manor,” she replied, her tone guarded.

“Why?” Bruce asked. “What are you up to?”

“Stop being so suspicious of me, beloved!” she yelled. “You always assume the worst of me. There was a time when you actually trusted me.”

“Talia…”

“I just want him to spend some time with you and get to know his siblings,” she tried again. “You’re at work all day and he doesn’t get to see you very much.”

“Fine,” he agreed, glancing at Damian who was staring at the large picture of their family. There was almost a sense of sadness permeating his expression that tugged at Bruce’s heart. “You know he can stay at the manor with us any time he wants to, Talia. That’s never been in question.”

“I thought you would agree,” Talia said with a pleased tone. “I promise you, Bruce. I’m not here to cause you any trouble. I only want you and Damian to get to know each other.”

“I want that too,” he confessed. “Good-bye, Talia.”

He ended the call before she could say anything more. He didn’t buy her story for one minute, but now was not the time to question her about it with their son standing right here in his office with him. This was hard enough for Damian without having his parents fighting all the time about him, putting him right in the middle of a tug-o-war over him.
“All right,” he said, slipping his phone into his pocket. “Are you ready to go?”

“Mother is sending me home with you I take it,” he perceptively stated.

“She wants us to be able to spend more time together,” he informed him.

“You don’t trust her,” he said as he studied his father. It was more of a statement than an actual question, indicating that he already knew the answer, but was interested in how his father would handle it.

“No, I don’t, but that’s between me and her,” he told him. “It’s not something that you need to worry about.”

“She loves you,” Damian revealed. “She thinks that you belong with her instead of the Amazon.”

“Her name is Diana and she is my wife, Damian,” Bruce firmly reminded him. “Nothing is ever going to change that fact.”

“I know,” he confessed. “You loved my mother at one time or I wouldn’t be here.”

“Yes, I did care for her at one time, but that was a very long time ago,” Bruce told him. “Let’s go home.”

Damian nodded his head as he made his way to the door, knowing that his mother’s mission was going down tonight. He smiled to himself. With a little luck, they would be leaving Gotham soon and returning home to his grandfather.

He had to admit that he felt a small twinge of disappointment with the thought. There was a tiny part of him that liked being at the manor with everyone though he would never admit it to anyone. It had been somewhat lonely growing up with only his mother, grandfather, and Ubu. It felt comforting in a way to have a real family for a change.

There was always something going on at the manor, family coming and going at any given time, dinner eaten together. There was a real sense of love and attention there. It didn’t feel quite so lonely. It somehow felt the way a real family should be instead of the only one that he had ever known.

Maybe he could come back to visit someday if they would still let him when this was all over.

Wayne Manor; August 9th, 17:46 EST

Diana descended the stairs with a contented smile on her lips. After sharing a relaxing bath with Bruce, she was feeling better than she had when she’d first arrived home. Meeting most of the day with all three ambassadors had definitely tested her patience to the very limits.

Of course, sharing a bath with Bruce always led to much more than just a relaxing soak with her handsome husband. Things had gotten quite heated especially since Bruce couldn’t seem to keep his hands from roaming. Her cheeks grew warm just thinking about how passionate things had become. He had definitely helped to get her mind off the stress of her day.

Forcing him from her thoughts, Diana made her way to the entertainment room to check on the kids. She was worried about Kaia, knowing that she was fighting a cold. Entering the room, she found her daughter sitting on the floor with Nicholas playing with Legos, Damian sitting on the couch playing a video game and completely ignoring the two little ones.
“Mama,” Kaia got up and ran to her, raising her arms up into the air.

Diana picked up her daughter, taking her into her arms. “Hey, baby girl,” she said. “You still have a runny nose.”

Grabbing a Kleenex, she wiped her daughter’s nose, kissing her on the cheek to find that she was warm. “She coughed on my Legos,” Nicholas volunteered, clearly unhappy with the ramifications of such an action.

“We’ll clean them up,” Diana reassured him as she set Kaia back down. “What are you two building?”

“A Batcave,” Nicholas proudly announced. “This is where daddy sits…and this is where Tim parks his cycle…this is where I’m going to keep my uniform.”

“Your uniform?” Diana asked as she sat down on the floor next to her son. “Who are you going to be?”

“I’m going to be Robin like Tim,” he decided.

“I’m going to be the next Robin,” Damian stated, his gaze locked on the television screen.

Nicholas gave him a curious look, his brow furrowed in thought. “Tim is Robin,” he reminded him, his expression so reminiscent of his father. “I’m going to help him.”

“Tim is not going to be Robin for long,” Damian told him in no uncertain terms.

“Mama, what’s going to happen to Tim?” Nicholas asked, clearly upset by Damian’s words.

“Nothing is going to happen to Tim,” she reassured him, tenderly running her fingers through his hair. “Tim is Robin and will be for as long as he wants to help daddy.”

“We’ll see about that,” Damian grumbled.

“Damian,” Diana firmly interjected, growing angry with how he was upsetting Nicholas with his grandiose talk. “That’s enough.”

“What?” Damian innocently said. “I’m just telling him how it’s going to be. I’m Bruce’s son by blood. Tim is adopted. Therefore, I should be Robin.”

“Tim is just as much our son as Nicholas is,” Diana stated, her tone stern. “Besides, you are not in charge. Your father will determine if and when he will allow you to participate in patrol of Gotham and not until then. Do not speak of it again in front of the children.”

“I’m highly trained by my grandfather,” Damian shot back with a heated glare, refusing to back down. “I’m more than ready to take on the worst that Gotham has to offer.”

“We’ll see about that,” Diana replied. “You still have to run through sword training exercises with me and according to Bruce you still have several skills that need work.”

“What do you know about using a sword?” he spat out with unmistakable disdain.

The corner of Diana’s lips twitched with amusement. He really didn’t know who was dealing with or talking to. “I am an Amazon,” she reminded him, her voice holding every bit of the authority she held as Princess of the Amazons. “I’ve been using a sword since I was old enough to hold one.”
“So have I,” he smugly countered.

“I’m over a thousand years old,” she revealed.

Damian nearly dropped his game controller as he paused to stare at Diana, blinking several times as if trying to register what he had just heard. “You are?”

“Yes, Damian,” she confirmed, looking him dead in the eye. “I’ve been training with a sword for over a thousand years. I am the best warrior of all the Amazons.”

“So…you’re immortal?”

“Yes,” she replied. “I have been this age since I reached adulthood.”

“Have you always lived here?”

“No,” she told him. “I lived on Themyscira for most of my life until I came to Man’s World about eight years ago to help protect the world from an alien invasion.”

He seemed to consider what she had told him before finally speaking again. “What is Themyscira like?”

“It’s absolute paradise,” she told him, her eyes brightening as she spoke of her homeland. “It’s populated by only women—the Amazons. It’s magically protected by my goddesses and is unlike anything you’ve ever seen before. I can take you there some time if you’d like.”

Damian set aside his game controller, moving to sit on the edge of the couch as he studied her. “Are you serious?” he challenged her, his expression one of pure shock.

“Yes, if my mother should pass away, I would become the Queen of the Amazons.”

Diana was nothing like what his mother had painted her to be. She was interesting to talk to and seemed very kind, not the monster that his mother had said that she was. “Wow…a real queen,” he murmured. “What would you do if that
happened? Would you leave my father and your family to be queen?”

Diana thought for a moment, the notion of her mother passing away causing an unexpected lump to stick in her throat. “No, I couldn’t leave my family here,” she replied, her voice filled with emotion. “I love Bruce and our family too much to ever leave them. I guess I would allow the crown to pass to someone else…someone I trusted that could fill the role of queen for me.”

“You would do that?” Damian questioned her. “Give up the crown to stay with my father?”

Diana bit at her bottom lip, nodding her head. “As much as I love my Amazon sisters, Bruce and Gotham are my home and always will be.”

“You could always take your family with you,” Damian suggested.

“I could, but I would never ask that of them,” she softly said. “I would never ask Bruce to leave Gotham behind. This city means absolutely everything to him. I couldn’t take him away from what means the most to him.”

“Not the most, princess.”

With the familiar sound of that baritone voice she adored, Diana looked up to find Bruce standing in the entrance to the entertainment room, leaning against the doorway with his arms folded against his chest. His expression was tender, his piercing blue eyes filled with love as he stared at her.

“Have you been listening in?” she questioned him with an amused twitch of her lips.

“Guilty,” he confirmed with a crooked smile, his expression growing serious. “Family always comes first…no matter what.”

Damian stared at his father in stunned disbelief. His mother had always told him that there was absolutely nothing more important to him than Gotham. It had been that way ever since his parents had been murdered when he was eight years old. It was the reason that he would not stay with her and his grandfather years ago. Gotham meant everything to him at the exclusion of all else.

Now, Damian was beginning to realize that maybe not everything that his mother had told him was the truth…or there was another perspective that she had refused to see.

He watched as Kaia ran over to her father, Bruce bending over and picking her up to hold her in his arms. He could easily see how much his family meant to his father. He knew deep down that he could be a part of this too if he truly wanted it…if he made an effort.

Bruce grabbed a Kleenex from the box on the end table, intent on blowing Kaia’s nose. However, Kaia wasn’t interested. She turned her head back and forth, not wanting to cooperate. Bruce finally captured her nose, wiping it for her despite how unhappy she was about it.

“No, daddy,” she scolded him, sniffling as she glared at her father.

“Stubborn just like your mother,” Bruce said with a chuckle as he moved to sit on the couch with Damian, Kaia sitting on his lap.

“I not stubborn,” Kaia insisted with a scowl, her head tilting to look at him.

“I think she gets it from you, Bruce,” Diana told him as she helped Nicholas with his Batcave.
“So, was Diana really molded from clay and blessed by Greek gods or is she totally lying to me?” Damian asked Bruce.

“Diana doesn’t lie. She was really molded from clay by Queen Hippolyta,” Bruce confirmed, turning his attention to his wife. “You did forget to tell him the part about the god Hades being your father, princess.”

“What?” Damian nearly yelled. “First, you tell me that you don’t have a father and you were molded from clay and now you tell me Hades is your father?”

“I was molded from clay by my mother Queen Hippolyta, but Hades helped her so he technically would be my father,” she explained to him.

“Whoa,” Damian muttered, turning his stunned gaze to Bruce. “So that makes Hades your father-in-law and their grandfather.”

“I’m afraid so,” Bruce admitted with a frown, not really liking that particular part very much. He just hoped that he never escaped the Underworld for a family reunion.

“He’s never tried to visit has he?” Damian asked.

“No,” Diana informed him. “He’s safely locked away in the Underworld.”

“Okay, is there anything else that I need to know about this family?” Damian questioned him, looking from Diana to Bruce and back again.

“Nothing else that I can think of,” Diana confessed.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Tim asked as he entered.

“Tim, come help me,” Nicholas requested. “I’m making a cave like daddy’s.”

“Cool, Nick,” Tim said as he sat down on the floor with Diana and Nicholas. “Anything new happen today I should know about?”

“Just the usual,” Diana replied. “Arguing ambassadors, one of whom refuses to cooperate leading to more arguments and a very angry Amazon.”

Tim chuckled with her response. “Just take Artemis in with you tomorrow,” he suggested. “I have a feeling she’d scare all three of them into agreeing to whatever you wanted them to.”

“Are you intimidated by her?” Damian challenged him.

“No, but she could certainly put the fear into a lot of people,” Tim told him. “Have you gotten anymore threats?”

“No, I think we’ve seen the last of them,” Diana attempted to reassure not only her son but her husband as well. Glancing at Bruce who was holding Kaia, she could tell he wasn’t buying it. “The peace talks have started without any trouble occurring. I think that’s a very good sign.”

“Wishful thinking, Diana,” Bruce groused, clearly unconvinced.

“You still think things are going to escalate?” Tim asked.

“Unfortunately, yes,” Bruce admitted. “I hope I’m wrong, but—”
“You’re rarely if ever wrong,” Tim finished for him.

Bruce grimly nodded his head as he lightly ran his fingers through Kaia’s raven curls. “We just have to be prepared for anything.”

Tim drew a deep breath, hating the fact that Bruce was always right. “So, you have no idea what could possibly happen next?”

“None, but it’s coming and it’s coming very soon,” Bruce confessed, his worried gaze falling on Diana. “I can feel it in my bones.”

“Nothing is going to happen to me,” Diana insisted.

“Says the woman who was stabbed,” Bruce muttered.

“How about we talk about something else?” Diana suggested, glancing at Nicholas who was listening closely.

“Mama, are you hurt?” Nicholas asked, worry evident on his little face as he climbed into her lap.

“No, little warrior,” she reassured him, stroking his hair as she held him in her lap. “I’m fine and I can take care of myself. I’m an Amazon, remember?”

Bruce felt guilty for worrying his son, momentarily forgetting how much his young son picked up on. He was very intelligent and quite perceptive like he was at that age, making it difficult to get anything past him now. He was amazed at how much like himself Nicholas truly was. He was like a mini Bruce.

“And daddy won’t let anything happen to her either,” Bruce added.

“We all look out for each other, Nick,” Tim reassured him. “That’s what family is for.”

“I want to be Robin with you, Tim,” Nicholas told him.

Tim chuckled, reaching over and ruffling Nicholas’s hair. “You can be my partner any day, Nick.”

“Me too,” Kaia said with a sniffle, not wanting to be left out.

“You can too, Kai,” Tim said.

“Me wear pink,” Kaia decided.

“I want a blue cape,” Nicholas announced.

“Do I get a say in any of this?” Bruce asked.

“I don’t think so, Bruce,” Diana replied. “I think you’ll definitely have plenty of help patrolling Gotham in the coming years.”

“How many Robins can you have?” Damian inquired, frowning at his father.

“I guess that’s a question I’m going to have to answer someday,” Bruce decided with a very unhappy frown.

“Sooner than you think,” Damian cryptically informed him.
Bruce glanced at Damian, not liking the insinuation in the least. Something was going on and he was going to get to the bottom of it one way or another.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: First, much love to all of you for all the support for my fics. You guys make my day with your reviews and kudos. Sending out Wonderbat hugs to all of you!

Now, down to business. What is up with Ivan and Artemis? (Don't worry about it b/c it won't last for long) Love Diana putting Damian in his place. It was definitely needed.

UP NEXT: I can't say much b/c I don't want to give anything away, but be prepared for a major bomb drop...and I mean MAJOR...BOMB...DROP!! You don't want to miss it. BWAHAHAHA!!! :)
Chapter 11

Themysciran Embassy; August 9th, 23:46 EST

Artemis warily watched as Ambassador Nosh and his entourage once again took off on foot towards downtown Gotham, no doubt to find every bar and available woman within a twenty-block radius. The man disgusted her beyond measure. She would give anything to be able to put him in his place. If that were to happen, he’d never be able to walk under his own power ever again.

The man made her skin crawl and turned her stomach. Diana had told her what an ass he had been during negotiations all day, testing her patience to the point of nearly breaking. Welich and Pallock had proven to be far more competent in their discussions, both clearly eager to make as much headway during these talks as was possible despite Nosh and arrogance.

Turning to follow Nosh, Artemis’s brow furrowed as she spotted Ivan Pallock coming out of the embassy as well. He was dressed smartly in a nice suit, a brown leather satchel slung over his shoulder. He appeared to be heading in the same direction as Nosh making her wonder what was going on. She didn’t like the sudden apprehension that had settled over her.

She had a bad feeling that something was going to happen tonight. She wasn’t certain if it was connected to the threats that had been made against Diana or not, but she wasn’t going to wait to find out. She quickly began to follow, staying to the shadows to keep from being detected.

She wasn’t certain what she was going to do if Nosh and Pallock ended up going in different directions, but she decided she’d cross that bridge when she got to it. She highly doubted that they were going to the same place or would be spending any time together outside of the embassy. Diana had told her it was plainly obvious that Pallock and Welich detested Nosh and everything that represented.

Following Ivan, she found that she was not liking the unsettling feeling that was swimming in the pit of her stomach, growing stronger with every step she took. She really liked Ivan. The thought of him being devious or up to more than just his ambassadorial duties bothered her far more than it should.

She frowned as she followed him from across the street, the fine hairs on the back of her neck prickling in warning. She ducked into a dark alley, watching as Ivan went into a bookstore. So far, he had done absolutely nothing wrong and yet she couldn’t ignore the suspicion she felt.

“I would’ve thought stalking a boyfriend was beneath an Amazon…even a Bana-Mighdall Amazon.”

Artemis didn’t even bother turning around, her entire body bristling with annoyance. “I’m not stalking him,” she ground out as she kept her gaze locked on the store across the street.

“So he is your boyfriend,” Jason pressed as he came to a stop behind her.

“He is not my boyfriend,” she snapped, leaning her right shoulder against the side of the building as
she folded her arms against her chest.

“Someone seems a little touchy about it.”

“What are you doing here?” she demanded to know as she turned a haughty glare on him, finding him standing there with a red mask covering his face. “Why are you dressed like that?”

“I’m Red Hood…remember?”

“Does everyone in the family have an alter ego?”

“Not Alfred…or the little ones,” he informed her. “Should we give you a code name too, Arty?”

“I’m good,” she stated, turning back around to check the bookstore. “And if you ever call me that again, I’ll rip your throat out.”

“Noted,” he responded with a smirk.

Several moments slipped by, the silence between them growing more tense by the moment. She could feel him behind her, his eyes boring into her back. She’d never met another man like him before. He enjoyed getting under her skin and irritating her.

“Why are you here?” she finally asked with an annoyed huff. “Are you stalking me?”

“Actually, I was following your boyfriend and Nosh when I spotted you,” he informed her.

“Ivan is not my boyfriend,” she bit out.

“Look, you obviously like the guy,” he pointed out. “I’d just make sure that he isn’t into something illegal before agreeing to go out with him.”

“I don’t know how any of this is your business,” she curtly replied, glancing to her left to find him standing beside her in the shadows. “Besides, I can take care of myself.”

“I’m sure you can, but I still don’t want to see you get hurt,” he told her, his gaze focused straight ahead and his arms crossed firmly against his chest.

Artemis was a little taken aback by his admission, unsure what to think. “Why do you care?” she asked, her voice losing a measure of the biting sting that it had just held. Now, it was filled with genuine curiosity.

Jason felt a little tongue-tied as he searched for the reason that he couldn’t give voice to, one that didn’t put him in a coma for the next month. “You’re helping to protect my family,” he explained. “That’s enough for me to trust you and to make sure that nothing happens to you.”

“I can assure you that I’m a big girl,” she said. “I can handle any man.”

“I know you can, but you don’t know how some men can be,” he countered, not back down. “Some are wicked and deceitful, looking for a woman that they can take advantage of and use her. I just want you to be aware of that fact. Not everyone is as innocent as they appear.”

Artemis turned her head to look at him, her lips twitching with mild amusement. “Does that warning include you?” she asked. “Because I have a feeling that you’re hardly innocent, Red Hood.”

Jason couldn’t help but smirk beneath his mask, his attraction to her growing. She had awakened
something in him that he’d never felt before. “Oh, I can assure you I am far from innocent,” he flirted.

“I had that feeling from the moment I met you,” she confessed. “Nothing but trouble. I could see it in your eyes.”

“Trouble can be dangerous, but it can also be very fun,” he teased.

Artemis shook her head in amazement at this man, a response dancing on the tip of her tongue, but it would have to wait. “He’s on the move,” she said as Ivan Pallock exited the bookstore. “I guess I’ll see you later.”

“I’ll tag along with you,” he offered.

“I can handle this on my own,” she retorted, her voice leaving no room for argument.

Unfortunately, she had no idea who she was dealing with or how equally stubborn he could be. “I know,” he told her. “I’m coming along anyway.”

“Whatever,” she grumbled. “Just…stay out of my way.”

Artemis quickly exited the alley, her sights locked on the handsome Ivan Pallock. It didn’t appear that he bought anything in the bookstore, but she knew that he could have slipped it into his satchel before exiting the store. It piqued her curiosity as he pulled a piece of paper from his suit pocket, pausing to study it for several moments before putting it away.

He had a definite destination in mind, but she had yet to figure out what that was. She still didn’t know Gotham very well so he could be heading just about anywhere at this point. That wasn’t going to deter her in the least from following him and finding out what he was up to.

She glanced behind her to find no sign of Jason anywhere, making her wonder where he went. She had a feeling that he wasn’t one to give up very easily. When his mind was made up, he didn’t stop until he’d succeeded in his mission. While it was an admirable trait that she could appreciate, it was also completely infuriating. He was like an annoying gnat that she wanted to swat away.

Following Ivan for several blocks, Artemis began to notice how Gotham slowly morphed into a darker, more ominous city that caused a chill to settle in her bones. The buildings became more rundown, the aura seedier. Instead of deterring her, she found that it fascinated her, made her blood sing with the danger she could literally feel crackling in the air around her. She was starting to see why Bruce and his family of superheroes fought every night.

Even though she couldn’t see him, she knew that Jason was close by. She could feel his eyes on her, watching her every move. It excited her in a way that she had not anticipated. She wasn’t certain what she thought of it, but she didn’t have time right now to dwell on it.

She had far more important matters that required her attention…like why Ivan was purposefully visiting such a dilapidated and sinister part of Gotham.

She paused behind a newsstand, her brow furrowing as she watched Ivan stop outside of an old steel mill. As if sensing her presence, he looked around to make sure that he wasn’t being followed by anyone. He turned his attention back to the building before him, testing the handle of the door.

Ivan pushed the door to find it open, slipping inside. He paused for a moment, allowing his eyes to adjust to the dense darkness that swallowed him up. He drew a shaky breath, hoping this was the right place. He didn’t want to be late for this appointment with his buyer. It was going to be the
most important appointment of his life if all went well.

Spotting a faint glow ahead, he cautiously began to make his way deeper inside the steel mill, his eyes darting about in hopes of noticing any trouble before it reached him. He tightened his hold on his satchel, his hand brushing against the weapon hidden beneath his suit jacket.

Approaching the light, Ivan found a table and a couple of chairs, but no one was there. He appeared to be all alone. His breathing grew shallow as he glanced about the empty room, perspiration breaking out on his brow as he wondered what was going on. Frowning, he checked his watch. Where was his buyer?

“You’re right on time.”

The cool, calculating voice that permeated the eerie silence of the building nearly caused him to jump out of his skin, but he was able to keep a certain measure of calmness as he slowly turned around to find his buyer standing behind him. Instead of relaxing, he found his tension rising.

“I thought you had forgotten I was coming.”

“Are you kidding me? I’ve been counting the hours till our meeting.”

Ivan set his satchel down on the table, opening it up and pulling out the package. “Do you have my money?”

“Yes,” the buyer replied. “Did you run into any trouble retrieving it?”

“Not much,” Ivan confessed as he carefully pulled the velvet cloth away from the precious artifact. “Obtaining it was no trouble. Getting it out of my country and into this one proved slightly more difficult, but nothing that I could not handle.”

“You made certain no one followed you here?”

“Of course,” Ivan replied with a frown as he glanced up at his buyer. “As far as anyone knows, I merely went for a walk to explore Gotham.”

“Good,” the buyer stated, nearing the table to inspect the merchandise.

Ivan focused on carefully removing the ornately decorated golden box from the velvet material, not liking the unspoken words that were left hanging in the air. There was a definite “or else” that had been left unsaid. Thankfully, he hadn’t been followed by anyone.

Setting the small box on the table, Ivan straightened up to his full height, eyeing his buyer for a reaction. “This is what you requested…is it not?” he questioned in his thick accent.

The buyer leaned over slightly to inspect the box, using the tip of a finger to nudge the lid open. The golden lid slipped to the side, revealing the prize inside. Reaching inside, the buyer picked up the item to carefully inspect it, making certain it was the real artifact and not a fake.

“This appears to be the piece I’ve been looking for.”

“I guess that completes our deal then,” Ivan responded as he reached for his satchel. “I will take my money now and leave. I need to return to the Themyscirian Embassy before anyone begins to worry about my prolonged absence.”

“Wait…I need to make sure that this is legitimate and not a fake.”
“I assure you it’s not a fake,” he curtly stated, greatly irritated by the insinuation.

The buyer could practically feel the power contained within the artifact, reassured that this was the genuine article. They were that much closer to gaining everything that they were going to need to make their plan work.

“Good,” the buyer muttered.

“I told you,” Ivan smugly said. “I know better than to try to deceive you.”

“Smart man,” the buyer commented with a nod, pulling a gun. “But not smart enough.”

“No!”

The sound of Ivan screaming followed by gunshots caused Artemis to momentarily freeze in the steel mill. Summoning the Bow of Ra, she raced towards the sound of Ivan’s voice, fearful of what she was going to find, but more than prepared for a fight.

Running towards a dim light in the distance, she sent up a silent prayer to her gods that Ivan was all right. As she drew near, though, she found a very different scene. Ivan was lying on the ground, three bullet holes right between his eyes and one right through his heart.

“Ivan,” she murmured as she fell to her knees at his side, her eyes darting about looking for who could have done this to him and why.

Catching a glimpse of movement in the shadows, Artemis leapt to her feet, her bow pointed menacingly at the source of the movement. Jason emerged from the shadows, hands held up to keep her from shooting him with her deadly looking arrow.

“Did you see who shot him?” Jason asked as he closed the distance between them.

“No,” she said, pursing her lips as she glanced down at the body and the pool of blood spreading beneath his body. “I heard him yell and then the shots. By the time I reached him, they were gone.”

“And you have no idea what he might have been involved in this?”

“No,” she snapped. “I’ve only spoken to him a couple of times. The subject of illegal activities never really came up after exchanging names and being asked out for dinner.”

Jason’s eyebrows rose beneath his red mask, his lips twitching into a smirk that she couldn’t see. She definitely had a sharp tongue to go with that fiery red hair and the temper that he could tell brewed just beneath the surface.

“Guess your date is cancelled for tomorrow night.”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she shook her head. “It was not a date.”

“Whatever,” he muttered as he knelt beside the body.

“What are you doing?” she demanded to know, not appreciating the fact that he was desecrating Ivan’s body.

“Checking his pockets for money,” he deadpanned without even looking up into her emerald eyes brimming with fiery ire.
“You’re robbing him?” she growled in fury. “How dare you—”

“Relax, Red,” he interrupted her. “I’m looking for any clues as to what he was doing here in this part of Gotham at this time of night. It’s obvious he was here to either buy or sell something.”

Artemis relaxed minutely as she watched him go through his pockets, pulling out his wallet to look through it. She had to admit that Jason seemed to know what he was doing, but how would he do in an actual fight. She found she was rather anxious to find out.

“You rang?”

Artemis spun on her heel to find Robin approaching. She scowled in annoyance. “I hate when you men do that,” she spat out.

Robin just grinned in response before turning his attention to his brother. “Please don’t tell me that you offed an ambassador,” he said half-joking. The groan that followed hinted at the fact that he wouldn’t put it past Jason especially knowing how he attracted he was to Artemis.

“No, I didn’t,” Jason stated with a scowl as he stood to his feet. “I don’t have any reason to. Besides, I wouldn’t jeopardize the peace talks like this. Artemis and I followed him here from the embassy.”

Robin looked from Jason to Artemis and back again. “You two are working together now?”

“No,” they both responded at the same time, turning their heads to glare at each other though Jason’s face was covered with his mask.

“She wishes,” Jason grumbled.

“You can take that red mask of yours and shove it—”

“Okay, good to see that you two are getting along so well,” Robin decided, trying to create some semblance of peace between the two hot-heads. “I better let Batman know what happened. He’s definitely going to be pissed.”

“Artemis and I are going back to the embassy to search his room,” Jason informed him.

Artemis glared at Jason, her green eyes twin infernos. “I am not your partner nor am I someone you can just order around. I do as I please not as some man dictates.”

“Fine,” Jason bit out, throwing his hands up in the air. “Didn’t mean to insult the warrior princess. Would you be so kind to accompany me back to the embassy so we can search for clues or would you prefer to stay here with your dead boyfriend and Robin?”

Artemis unexpectedly got in his face, her hands balled tightly into fists at her sides. “For the last time, Ivan is not my boyfriend.”

“You looked pretty head-over-heels over him at the embassy when I saw you,” he shot back.

“I think it’s time I taught you a lesson,” Artemis hissed.

The pair was interrupted by the sound of snickering, both looking at Robin who was trying desperately to contain his amusement with his hand over his mouth. “You two argue just like another certain couple we all know and love,” he told them.

“We are not a couple,” Jason stated.
“Never,” Artemis defiantly stated, folding her arms against her chest.

“Whatever you say,” Robin muttered as he turned his back to them to notify Batman of the situation.

**Wayne Manor; August 10th, 02:58 EST**

Still dressed in his uniform pants and gray t-shirt, Bruce quickly made his way up the steps of the manor. To say that he was rattled would’ve been the understatement of the year. Finding Ivan shot to death in that steel mill had done little to settle his own worries about who was after Diana.

He feared that this was just going to continue to escalate, Diana the next one to be gunned down. He tried to remind himself that she was strong and could handle herself, but his mind continued to storm with situations and outcomes that were anything but reassuring to him at this point.

He was dreading this, the fact that he was going to have to tell her that Ambassador Pallock had been killed. She had put so much work and effort into this peace summit, her pride in the steps that Themyscira was taking evident in every single aspect of the embassy itself as well as the peace talks.

It hurt him knowing that he was going to bring her pain with the news, but she needed to know what had happened. He’d much rather have her hear it from him than anyone else. The last thing that he wanted was for her to hear it on the news or find out about it when she arrived at the embassy later this morning.

Bypassing Nick and Kaia’s rooms, Bruce headed straight towards his own bedroom. Opening the door, he found her sleeping so peacefully, her face angelic. She was laying on her side facing the place where he always slept. She murmured his name in her sleep as if sensing his presence, her hand caressing his pillow.

It made his lips curl slightly with the way that she searched for him even in the midst of sleep. It filled him with a warm sense of endearment that made waking her to tell her the horrible news that much more difficult for him to do, but he knew it could not wait.

He silently made his way towards their bed, pausing to pull off his boots, uniform pants, and t-shirt before sitting down on the edge of the bed beside her. “Princess,” he softly called to her, his fingers brushing a couple raven curls away from her face.

She sighed in her sleep, refusing to wake. He knew that the last several months of working, planning, and juggling all the responsibilities of life had finally caught up to her. Between wife, mother, superhero, and ambassador, she was spread pretty thin. He leaned over and kissed her softly on the cheek, his lips lingering as he nuzzled her nose with his.

“Diana,” he said her name, earning a groan.

“Bruce,” she murmured, her eyebrows furrowing against the need to wake up. “What is it? Are you all right?”

“I’m fine, but we need to talk,” he told her.

The tone of his voice told her this was not going to be anything good. Forcing her eyes open, she rolled over to gaze up at him through heavily lidded eyes. “Bruce, what is it?” she asked, trying to clear the sleepy fog from her brain. “Is Tim okay?”

He drew a deep breath before finally responding. “Tim is fine, but there was a murder last night.
I’m afraid that Ambassador Ivan Pallock was shot and killed a few hours ago.”

“What?” she gasped in shock, tears instantly brimming in her eyes as the ramifications of such a horrific act slowly began to crash over her. “What happened? Who would do this?”

“I don’t know yet, but I promise you I’ll get to the bottom of it,” he swore to her.

Diana sat up, leaning forward and raking her fingers back through her raven hair. “Where did you find him?”

“Artemis and Jason followed him from the embassy before midnight to the steel mill.”

“What in Hera’s name would he be doing in that part of Gotham?” she asked, still reeling from the horrible news. “That’s not a good part of the city to be in at night.”

“I’m not certain, but it looks as though he went there specifically to meet someone,” he told her.

Diana stared at him, her heart heavy with grief. “Bruce, what am I going to do?” she asked.

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to him. She sounded so small in that moment, making him that much more desperate to take her away from here until the murderer was caught. “I’m so sorry, Princess,” he whispered into her hair. “We’ll figure out what’s going on and we’ll find whoever killed Pallock.”

None of this was sitting very well with him. Something about all of this was definitely off and his list of suspects was growing by leaps and bounds. While the shooting and the precision of the bullet holes reeked of Talia al Ghul and the League of Assassins, he couldn’t exclude the other two ambassadors as possible suspects or their respective countries.

While he believed that whoever was behind the threats against Diana was an Amazon, possibly Aresia, he couldn’t leave her off the suspect list. Shooting someone with a gun was not in keeping with the way of the Amazons, but then again, Aresia was deluded and would take whatever steps she felt necessary to see her goals accomplished.

Pulling back, Diana gazed up at him with blue eyes swimming with hurt and anger. “I’m sorry,” she sniffed, swallowing back the tears that still threatened to fall.

“You never have to apologize to me, Diana,” he gently said, kissing her tenderly.

Bruce pulled her close once more. Her hand rested against his muscular chest right above his heart, the steady rhythm soothing to her. They stayed like that for several long minutes before Diana pulled out of his embrace, moving to stand to her feet. She walked over to the window, her arms wrapping around her torso.

“I just feel so terrible…like I failed,” she confessed, her words punctuated with the extent of her fury. “I worked so hard on this only for an ambassador to be killed. The eyes of the whole world were on this peace summit and how Themyscira would handle it. Now, no one is going to want to have any dealings with the Amazons. There’s going to be a dark cloud hanging over us forever now…a blemish on our reputation that I can’t begin to erase.”

“You don’t know that, Princess,” he replied as he stood to his feet, coming to stand behind her. “There was no way you could have prevented it. You can’t hold the ambassadors hostage inside the embassy. They have every right to come and go as they please.”

“I know…I just…I don’t know what to do now,” she admitted.
He wrapped his arms around her, his forehead coming to rest on the back of her head. “We’ll figure it out together. We’ll need to hold a press conference. Keep the information to a minimum. Only give the bare facts. I’ll be there with you if you want.”

Diana turned around to look at him. “You would?”

“Yes,” he said, his forehead creasing. “I love you. There isn’t anything I wouldn’t do for you.”

“I know,” she said, her hand coming to rest against his cheek. “It’s just I know that you have so much going on right now. The last thing you need is to have to be there for me.”

“Diana, nothing else matters right now except for you and what you’re going through,” he firmly replied, taking her hand from his face and holding it tightly. “Everything else can wait until we get this straightened out.”

She smiled softly as she gazed at him, the full extent of her love for him shining in her eyes. “I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

His lips formed into a crooked grin as he leaned in to kiss her on the forehead. “It’s a good thing that you won’t have to find out.”

She crushed her lips against his, kissing him hard and pouring her love for him into it. As badly as she wanted him to stay here with her, she knew that he needed to leave for his cave. “I know you need to go,” she breathlessly whispered against his lips. “Is there anything I can do to help you with the investigation?”

“No, it’s something I need to do myself,” he told her. “Get some sleep, Princess,” he urged her. “There’s nothing more that you can do now until morning.”

“Do you think it was Talia?” she softly asked, lacing her fingers with his.

“I don’t know,” he honestly replied. “She’s definitely at the top of the list, but it could just as easily have been one of the other ambassadors or a hit ordered by one of the other countries.”

“I agree,” she murmured with a weary sigh.

He rubbed her back as he held her, wishing there was more that he could do to take all this chaos and hurt away for her. While it was something that he loved to do, holding her seemed so insignificant, leaving him feeling helpless. He was a man of action…reason and logic and investigation, but if this was what she needed right now from him then he’d give it to her.

“Go,” she softly said, releasing her hold on him before taking a step back. Fury burned brightly in her azure eyes, the face of a true warrior gazing back at him. “Find out who did this. When you do, I’m personally going to break every bone in their body.”

Bruce felt a shiver race through him, knowing his powerful wife meant every single word. He had no doubt in his mind that when she got her hands on whoever was behind all this, they were going to regret the day they were born.

**Themyscira; August 10th, 12:00 GMT+2**

Queen Hippolyta knelt before the alter, her head bowed in supplication and humility. She prayed fervently for protection for her daughter and her family, petitioned for guidance and wisdom in her rule as the Queen of the Amazons. She had felt her confidence in her decisions begin to waver over
the last several days, hoping that spending time with her goddesses would provide the insight that she greatly needed right now.

She greatly feared for her daughter and her family, knowing that trials were coming upon them because of the decisions that she had made. While the majority of the Amazons readily accepted the changes that were coming, there were still a select few that held to the old ways, clung to traditions steeped in thousands of years of history.

While a part of her still felt strongly about keeping hold of their traditions, she had begun to see the necessity of opening Themyscira up to the outside world instead of staying closed off. Diana and Donna had both opened her eyes, helped her to see that not all men were evil.

She felt this was the greatest opportunity to further spread the ideas of the Amazons, to show the world that peace and love was better than war and hate. She truly believed in her heart that she was making the right decisions. She just hoped that Diana didn’t pay the ultimate price for her choices. She’d never be able to live with that outcome.

Finishing her prayers, Hippolyta lifted her head, releasing a sigh. While a part of her felt better, her heart was still quite heavy with worry. She slowly stood to her feet, smoothing out her robes. She took one last look at the statue of Hera, her lips pursing with the thoughts still swirling inside of her head.

Turning, she found Phillipus waiting for her at the entrance of the temple. Her expression was stern, but the look in her eyes determined. Approaching her trusted general, the queen laid her hand on Phillipus’s shoulder, squeezing it gently and offering her a gentle smile.

The general nodded at the queen as she tightened her hold on the hilt of her sword sheathed at her side, silently letting her know that she had her full support in this no matter what. She would not allow anyone to get close to the queen should some rebel Amazons decide to form some sort of insurrection against her. Her army was ready and willing to do whatever it took to protect their queen.

Since the first murmurings of resentment began, General Phillipus reaffirmed her loyalty to the queen. She’d been keeping a close on eye on a few members of her army, more than prepared to take down any sister who sided against the queen.

“Come, Phillipus,” Hippolyta said. “Let’s see what Parthenope has made for lunch today.”

They walked together back towards the palace, enjoying the warmth of the sun and the gentle breeze that came off the ocean. They passed several Amazons going about their daily duties, each bowing their heads in silent recognition of the queen’s royal status.

Smiling at each Amazon that they passed, Hippolyta couldn’t help wondering which ones were really with her, truly supported her in these changes that were coming to their hidden island and which ones were behind the threat to her daughter. For now, it appeared that the threats were solely directed at Diana and not herself. It was easier to target the daughter of the queen then the queen herself.

Little did they know that the full wrath of the queen would be felt if anything happened to Diana or her family. No one threatened her daughter and got away with it. When they finally fleshed out who was behind the secret uprising, they would lament the day that they chose to defy their queen.

Entering the palace, Hippolyta made her way towards her private chambers, motioning for Phillipus to come with her. The general obediently followed her, wondering what she wanted to
discuss with her. Closing the door behind her, she didn’t have to wait long.

Hippolyta turned on her heel to appraise her general. “Phillipus, I need your honest and open opinion,” she began. “Do you believe I am doing the right thing by opening this embassy… knowingly putting my daughter and her family in danger?”

“You are doing what you feel you have to do for the best of Themyscira,” Phillipus readily replied. “I greatly respect that. I believe in that and in you. Princess Diana believes that too or she never would’ve agreed to become the Ambassador of Themyscira.”

Hippolyta’s lips curled with her trusted general’s response, feeling a sense of relief wash over her. It was what she had needed to hear right now. She just hoped and prayed that Diana would be all right. At least Artemis was there to help her if things spiraled out of control.

Hopefully, once this peace summit was over, things would finally begin to settle down.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, that was unexpected, right? Love writing Artemis and Jason together. They are so fun! I would definitely hate to be the one behind this knowing that Diana is going to make them pay for it. Never upset an Amazon!

UP NEXT: Diana holds a press conference, Bruce and Clark have lunch, Dick does something sweet for Donna, and Talia...well, she's Talia. You'll have to wait and see. :
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 12

Themysciran Embassy; August 10th, 11:59 EST

Diana moved to stand before a dozen or more cameras and at least twice as many reporters, her bearing regal and in complete command of the situation. On the inside, her stomach was twisted into a sick knot of dread. It was an ever-expanding knot that had settled there ever since Bruce had woken her to tell her the news.

She could feel his presence behind her and to her left, standing in silent support. She found her love for him deepening with his insistence on being there for the press conference. She knew that he wanted to be there to support her, but also because he wanted to make certain that no one attempted an attack while she was out in the open like this.

As her gaze roamed over the gathered crowd, she was certain Dick, Tim, and Jason were standing watch in various spots in order to keep an eye out for any brewing trouble. She was also certain Bruce had J’onn on standby in case an emergency medical transport was needed.

“It is with great sorrow that I am here to announce that Ambassador Ivan Pallock was killed last night,” Diana began, swallowing down the lump that threatened to form in her throat. “Ambassador Pallock left the embassy last night to enjoy the sights of our beautiful city. Unfortunately, he was shot and killed during his outing.

“The GCPD is working diligently to get to the bottom of this horrific tragedy. Our sincerest condolences go out to Ambassador Pallock’s family and the people of Arisinia. We are completely cooperating with the investigation and are hoping that the murderer is swiftly brought to justice. If any of you have questions, I will take those now.”

Bruce felt as if a vice was squeezing his chest as he watched his wife begin to take questions from the reporters, answering them with the immense grace and pose that she possessed. Though she appeared to be in control, he knew how deeply this was affecting her. The more it upset her the more hurt that he felt for her, the more determined he became to find out who was behind these threats and the murder of Ivan Pallock.

He surreptitiously looked out over the gathered crowd, his expression stoic and not revealing one iota of what was going on in his head. He had Oracle running facial recognition scans on everyone gathered there in hopes that the killer came to revel in the misery that they had caused.

He worried about Diana’s safety being out in the open like this, but he had Tim, Jason, and Dick all strategically placed and on the lookout for potential trouble. He almost hoped the killer tried something so they could put a stop to this nightmare once and for all.

His intense gaze settled on the reporter from the Daily Planet who was asking Diana about the wellbeing of the other ambassadors and how they were handling the unexpected death. Clark’s gaze subtly drifted to Bruce, both communicating their readiness to act if things turned ugly here.

While Bruce didn’t particularly like asking for League assistance in Gotham, he was willing to swallow his pride if it ensured Diana’s safety as well as the other ambassadors. Besides, Clark was
going to be here regardless. He might as well put him to good use while he was here.

When another reporter began harassing Diana about the ability of Themyscira to protect visiting delegates, Bruce decided that it was a good time to end this. Stepping forward, he gently grasped his wife’s elbow, Diana taking the hint. “I believe I have answered all the questions that I can at this time,” she evenly stated. “Please direct any further questions to the GCPD. Thank you all for coming today.”

Bruce’s arm slipped around her shoulders before guiding her back inside the embassy, more than thankful that was over and he could get her back inside. He knew that Clark would want to know more about what was going on around here, but that would have to wait. Right now, he needed to make sure that his wife was okay.

Diana was the strongest woman that he’d ever known and in every single sense of the word. At the same time, she felt things so deeply. Her heart was enormous, her compassion knowing no bounds. It was one of her best qualities as well as her greatest weakness.

Leading her into her office, Bruce released his hold on her. Diana quickly turned towards him, wrapping her arms around him. He held her close to him, knowing that she didn’t need protecting, but that never seemed to settle his deep-seated need to protect her at all cost. He tilted down to kiss the top of her head as she tightened her hold on him.

“You did great out there, princess,” he reassured her.

Diana drew in a deep breath, releasing it slowly. “Thanks,” she murmured as she leaned back enough to look into his eyes. “I couldn’t have gotten through it without you, Bruce.”

He smiled softly at her, mischief beginning to dance in his blue eyes. “Yes, you could have,” he told her. “I was just eye candy for the press.”

“Oh, Hera help me,” Diana uttered with a soft chuckle, her expression turning serious after a moment. “I’m coming out with you tonight. We have to stop this before any more people get hurt.”

“You would probably just ignore me if I told you no,” he replied with a frown, his arms resting around her waist.

“You’re learning,” she told him.

“I still don’t have to like it,” he grumbled with a scowl.

“I never expected you to, Bruce,” she reassured him, patting his chest.

“At least we’re on the same page I guess.”

She pressed her lips to his, kissing him deeply and taking great comfort in the tender, quiet moment between husband and wife. He always managed to soothe her haggard spirit, reminding her why she kept going…why she kept fighting when things became so difficult, when her fury grew too hot to control.

Bruce swiftly became lost in the kiss and the feel of his wife in his arms and pressed against his body. He had been so proud of her this morning and, despite her insistence to investigate tonight with him, he was proud of the fact that she never gave up, never seemed to lose that determined edge to fight for justice.

“You keep kissing me like that and I’m not going to be able to leave your office until I’ve had my
way with you, Ambassador Wayne,” he huskily informed her, his lips beginning a delightful trek along her neck to her ear.

Diana moaned softly, her eyes fluttering closed. “You keep doing that and I won’t let you leave until you’ve had your way with me, Mister Wayne,” she breathily replied, her hands gripping his upper arms.

Even through his suit jacket and dress shirt, she could feel the steel like bands of muscle that wrapped so perfectly around his arms and chest. It made her all the more anxious to remove his clothes and run her fingers over his entire body. It was something, though, she knew that would have to wait until later.

A sharp knock at the door interrupted their passionate moment, forcing them to step away from each other. Diana ran her fingers through her hair before smoothing out her blouse. “Who is it?”

“It’s Clark Kent from the Daily Planet, Ambassador Wayne,” the familiar voice announced. “Your head of security said I could find you in here.”

Bruce rolled his eyes and shook his head as he turned to open the door for their friend. “Get in here already,” he growled.

Clark gave him an affable grin as he entered, adjusting his glasses on his nose before closing the door behind him. “Hope I’m not interrupting anything important going on in here,” he cheekily apologized. “I wouldn’t want to disrupt a private moment between the ambassador and her husband.”

“Oh, cut the crap, Clark,” Bruce muttered with a huff of annoyance as he stuffed his hands into his pants pockets. “What do you want?”

“I was hoping to get a personal interview with the ambassador for the Daily Planet,” he requested with pen and pad of paper in hand. “I’ve heard rumors of some threats being made against you.”

“That is off the record, Kent, and you know it,” Bruce ground out. “The only reason I told you about it is because I wanted you to be on your toes in case something happened this morning during the press conference.”

“Can’t I get a little break here?” Clark asked in exasperation, looking to Diana for a little support.

“Sorry, Kal,” she apologized. “I’d love to help you, but we’re keeping the threats on the down low for now. Once we know more, I promise I’ll give you an exclusive about who is actually behind it all.”

“Okay, that’s fair,” Clark decided. “Now, what can I do to help?”

“Leave,” Bruce told him, still a little annoyed with being interrupted.

“Bruce,” Diana scolded him with a frown. “There’s nothing right now, but I promise we’ll let you know if we need any help.”

“All right then…what about lunch?” Clark asked. “I’m starving and I’m sure you two haven’t eaten yet either.”

“I’m not that hungry,” Diana replied, shaking her head as she folded her arms against her chest. “If you two want to go, that’s fine. I’m going to stay here and see if I can’t get a handle on things. Besides, I need to contact my mother and let her know what’s happened.”
Clark laid his hand on Diana’s shoulder, squeezing it affectionately. “Don’t this get to you, Di,” he told her. “None of this was your fault. You couldn’t have known that this was going to happen and there wasn’t anything you could have done to prevent it.”

“That still won’t stop her from feeling she’s totally to blame,” Bruce reminded him.

“I know, but it was worth a shot,” Clark answered him.

“Thank you both, but really I have a lot I need to do,” she maintained. “You two go enjoy lunch. I’ll join you next time.”

“Promise?” Clark questioned her.

“Promise,” she agreed with a forced smile that didn’t quite reach her blue eyes.

Bruce captured her hand in his, pulling her in for a sweet kiss. “I’ll see you later at home,” he softly told her. “Call me if you need anything at all.”

“I will,” she reassured him. “Thank you for being here.”

He gave her a small smile, squeezing her hand before releasing it. She watched as the two men left her office, closing the door behind them. She stared at the large oak door for several moments before finally turning and heading to her desk, dreading the conversation she was going to have to have with her mother.

Clark and Bruce wandered out of the embassy in silence, Bruce mostly lost in his own thoughts. Clark knew without asking that the one consuming his thoughts was Diana. He would be the same way if Lois was the one being threatened…had been the same way when she’d been in danger countless times in the past.

Walking outside into the afternoon sun, Clark finally broke the brooding silence. “Where to for lunch?” he asked. “And don’t even bother telling me that you don’t have time. Diana already told me that you cleared your entire schedule for the day in order to be here for the press conference.”

Bruce scowled at his friend, clearly unhappy that little tidbit of information had been leaked. He wanted to get back to the cave to continue his investigation into Ivan Pallock and his death. There was obviously something that he had missed when he’d originally vetted all the ambassadors for this peace summit.

He had missed something somewhere and it pissed him off. Because of his failure, Diana was paying the price. He swore to himself that he’d figure out who was behind all this madness and stop it before anything more could happen to her or to anyone else for that matter.

“Let’s go to McCray’s up the street,” Bruce finally relented. “I need to get home then. Something is not right about all of this.”

Clark’s brow furrowed as he glanced at his friend on his left. “What do you mean?” he asked. “The whole thing is not right.”

“I know, but there’s just something about this that doesn’t make any sense,” he replied, his frown deepening even further. “If the Amazons are truly behind the threats to Diana, they wouldn’t shoot Pallock. Either it’s not the Amazons who are after Diana or it’s someone unrelated to all of this who murdered Pallock.”

“Maybe it’s Talia behind Pallock’s death,” Clark ventured as they stopped in front of the diner.
“She was my first suspect in Pallock’s murder, but she has a confirmed alibi at the time of Diana’s attack,” Bruce replied. “It doesn’t mean she couldn’t have had someone else attack Diana for her.”

Entering the diner, they found a booth in the back that would afford them some privacy. After placing their orders with the waitress, Clark decided it was time to press for some answers. “All right, Bruce,” he ventured. “What are you not telling me about all of this?”

Bruce gave him his best innocent look, pretending not to know what the reporter was talking about, but it turned into a scowl fairly quickly after realizing that Clark wasn’t buying it. “Damn investigative reporter,” he grumbled under his breath, pausing to take a sip of his iced tea. “There’s a chance this could be Aresia.”

Clark had the presence of mind to school his features despite the shock that the unexpected news caused. “She’s dead,” he pointed out.

“No body was ever recovered from the plan wreckage,” he reminded him.

Clark adjusted his glasses in that telltale manner that said that he needed a minute to process the latest bombshell information. “Let’s just say for one minute that you’re right and it is Aresia that’s behind this, why would she be gunning for Diana now after all this time and why because of the embassy’s opening?” he questioned him. “She’s no doubt been banned from Themyscira so what does she care if they open themselves up to the outside world? It’s men that Aresia hates. If anything, she should be coming after you.”

Bruce grunted with his response, his expression souring. “I wish they were coming after me instead of my wife,” he spat out. “I swear I will make them wish they’d never been born if they hurt her again.”

Clark internally shuddered with the dark, raw fury he saw flashing through Bruce’s eyes. He feared for whoever was threatening Diana, knowing that Bruce would stay true to his word. “You know you have the League behind you,” he softly murmured, hoping to put his friend’s mind at ease, but knowing deep down that nothing short of capturing the person himself would ever help settle his friend’s fears.

“I know, but I’m not dragging the League into this,” he quietly replied. “It’s my wife…my city. I will take care of this.”

Clark released a sigh, understanding all too well where he was coming from. He always felt the same way when it was Lois in trouble. “I understand,” he relented. “As badly as I want to help you two, I understand you want to do this yourself.”

“Thanks,” Bruce murmured, appreciating the support, but feeling as though it was wholly unnecessary. He and his family would handle this themselves.

Clark sensed that it was time to change the subject. “How are the kids doing?” he asked as their food arrived. “Are they adjusting to Damian being there?”

“Nicholas is pretty wary of him,” Bruce revealed. “He doesn’t say much about it, but he’s always watching him. You can see the wheels turning in his head, trying to process all of it…trying to figure out how Damian fits into everything. He hasn’t asked any questions yet, but I know they’re coming.”

Clark laughed as he picked up a couple of French fries. “I wonder where he got that from.”

Ignoring his remark, Bruce continued. “Of course, Kaia feels everyone is her best friend, but she’s
too young to fully understand what’s going on. I’m sure in a few months, she’ll begin to ask questions too, wondering how Damian fits into the family.”

“How is Damian doing adjusting to everything?”

His expression darkened somewhat as he considered his son’s attitude and behavior. “It’s been difficult,” he admitted. “He definitely has the al Ghul blood in his veins. It’s going to take time to break through all the brainwashing that his grandfather and mother have done to him.”

“You really have to feel for Damian, though,” Clark thoughtfully said. “Poor kid has been raised by al Ghul’s and now finds out he has a whole other family that he probably didn’t even know about. I’m sure it hasn’t been easy for him to adjust.”

“I know it hasn’t been easy for him, but he could definitely help things by trying to be a little easier to get along with,” he told him with a definite air of frustration. “He is starting to warm up to Diana though.”

Clark smiled as he reached for his Coke. “Of course, he is,” he knowingly replied. “Everybody loves Diana.”

“Not whoever is out to get her,” Bruce darkly responded. “I’m afraid of what could happen if I don’t find them soon.”

Blüdhaven; August 10th, 18:02 EST

Donna worked on preparing dinner, finding that her stomach was starting to revolt against her with the smell of the food. She swallowed back the bile rising in her throat, refusing to give in to the wave of nausea assaulting her. She knew she had to eat and keep it down or Leslie had threatened her with medicine. She hated taking pills especially now that she was pregnant.

She remembered how Diana had struggled with morning sickness both times that she had been pregnant. She had hoped and prayed that she would escape it when she got pregnant, but she had obviously not been that fortunate.

Her thoughts turned to her sister as she turned down the heat on the boiling pot of pasta. Her heart was heavy with worry for Diana and anger over what had happened to the ambassador. She had planned on going to the embassy today to support her sister, but Diana and Bruce had adamantly refused. They didn’t want her anywhere near the embassy with all the danger that surrounded it right now.

It had made her angry that everyone was trying to protect her, especially when Dick had sided with them instead of her. It had taken a while to calm her down and several “remember the baby” before she had finally concluded that they were probably right. It just frustrated her to no end that just because she was pregnant she couldn’t go where she wanted or do what she wanted to do.

It really wasn’t fair. Men had it so easy. They could spread their seed all over and go on with life. Women had to sit on the sideline like a walking incubator waiting for the baby to come before being allowed to live life again. The more she thought about it the more upset she became.

It certainly wasn’t helping her hormonal state any being able to feel Diana’s heartache and anger over what was happening in Gotham. She could feel the angry tears rising as she stirred the sauce, her grip on the wooden spoon tightening to the point of breaking it. With a growl, she threw the broken spoon into the trashcan before reaching for another.

She wanted to fly over to Gotham and find whoever was threatening her sister and beat them
senseless. Bruce had already reassured her that he was handling it and she knew that he would. When it came to Bruce, no one messed with Diana or his family and got away with it.

The unexpected feel of arms slipping around her waist from behind nearly had her whirling around with her fists, more than prepared for a fight, but she immediately relaxed as his lips encountered the sensitive spot behind her ear. Dick knew that attacking that particular spot always made her melt. Her eyes fell closed with a contented sigh as some of the anger seemed to seep out of her body.

“Hey, beautiful,” Dick murmured into her ear as he pressed himself flush against her back. “How are my two favorite girls today?”

Donna chuckled softly, tilting her head to the side to give him more access. “First, we don’t know if it’s a boy or a girl,” she began. “Second, don’t let Kaia hear you say that or she’ll throw a royal temper tantrum.”

Dick laughed against her neck with the reminder as he tightened his hold on his wife. “Kai knows that she’s my favorite little peanut.”

Donna turned around in his arms, kissing him deeply as her arms slipped around his neck. “You know you have a lot of girls in your life,” she pointed out in mock jealousy.

Dick smirked as his lips met hers again, his hands wandering over her feminine curves. He was more than anxious for the day when she would begin to show, the appearance of the telltale baby bump that showed that she carried his child.

“You’re still my most favorite of all,” he reassured her as his hands settled on her waist, this thumbs sneaking beneath her t-shirt to caress her still flat abdomen. Retreating, he frowned, noticing the tears that clung to her eyelashes. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

Donna quickly wiped her eyes, embarrassed that he had noticed. “I was thinking about Diana,” she confessed. “She’s really hurt by all of this. She put so much work and so much of herself into getting the embassy up and running.”

“I know,” he agreed, his hand coming to rest against her jaw. “We’re going to find out who’s behind it one way or another.”

“I know, but it just hurts me to feel how deeply this is affecting her,” she continued. “She’s really crushed by this. She feels as though she failed our mother and sisters.”

“I don’t want you worrying about this,” he firmly stated. “Let us worry about it. I know it’s hard because it’s your sister and you share a bond with her. You can feel her emotions, but it won’t help you or the baby if you get yourself all worked up about it.”

Donna rolled her eyes, huffing in exasperation. “That’s easier said than done.”

Dick smirked at his wife as he brushed her raven hair behind her ear. “That’s what husbands are for,” he huskily informed her. “I’m here to help you relax while you protect our baby girl.”

“Dick, I hope you’re not getting your hopes up that it’s a girl,” she warned him as she turned around to shut the burners off before putting the contents onto two plates. “I don’t want you to be disappointed if it’s a boy.”

Taking a plate, Dick walked over to the kitchen counter to sit down on one of the bar stools. “I’m so thrilled about this baby, Donna,” he told her. “I don’t care if it’s a boy or a girl or born green
with purple polka dots. She’s going to be perfect because she’s ours and we made her.”

“Green with purple polka dots?” Donna repeated with a chuckle. “Hera help me if our poor baby is born looking like that.”

“I’m just saying that I’ll love our baby no matter what sex it is or what it looks like,” he said as he dug into his dinner. “I just know in my heart that we’re having a girl. I even bought our baby a present today.”

“You did?” Donna was stunned by the revelation. “What did you get?”

Dick reached over to a bag lying on the counter. “I got her this,” he replied, pulling out a pink teddy bear.

Donna felt the tears returning with a fierce vengeance as she took the pink bear from him. It was so soft and squishy and absolutely perfect for their child. It made her that much more anxious for their baby to come. She set the bear down, turning and pulling her husband into a very heated kiss that rapidly stole his breath.

Leaving his mouth, she began to kiss and nip along his jaw to his ear. “I love it…and I love you,” she murmured, nibbling on his earlobe.

Dinner was quickly forgotten as they lost themselves in each other and the passion that flared between them. Donna pricked him up and carried him to their bed, Dick suddenly finding himself on his back on their bed with a very aroused Amazon wife straddling him as she began to remove her clothes as well as his.

He couldn’t wait to show her the pink pacifier that he’d bought as well but decided to wait until later. Right now, he was thoroughly going to enjoy every single second of this as he peeled off her bra and tossed it over the side of the bed.

Gotham; August 10th, 23:24 EST

Talia carefully pulled the velvet material away to reveal the ornate box hidden beneath the dark fabric. Opening the box, she pulled out the large golden ring contained within it, watching with a small measure of fascination as it gleamed in the light of the room. It truly was an exquisite piece. She could practically feel the immense power trapped inside of it just waiting to be released.

She carefully slipped it onto her thumb, finding the ring far too big for her, but she wasn’t going to be the one wearing it when the time finally came. She would be by his side, though, when that time arrived just like she’d always been and always would be. With any luck, Bruce would be by her side as well, forsaking his wife and children to be with her.

She felt a deep sea of bitterness and resentment rising inside of her as she stared at the ring. She could’ve had the life that the Amazon was living right now—married to Bruce, raising his children, owning his heart and sharing his bed each night.

No, she had chosen to stay with her father, her loyalty to him too strong and too deep for even Bruce to break. He would always be her true love no matter who he thought he loved or was married to. Nothing could fully break their bond or their love, not even the Amazon.

She shared a son with Bruce, one who would carry on the Wayne name. He would become Robin and eventually take over the mantle of Gotham’s Dark Knight. It was his legacy to carry on for his father with her and her own father to help guide him.
Gazing at the ring, Talia knew they were that much closer to finally realizing her father’s dream after all this time. They only needed a few more pieces to complete the collection. After that, no one could stop her father from receiving the ultimate power.

“I want answers, Talia, and I want them right now,” Batman growled the demand. “I’m not leaving here until I have them.”

Talia froze with the unexpected sound of Batman's voice. She silently cursed herself for being so careless. She should’ve known that he’d show up here asking questions and demanding answers about what had happened to the ambassador.

She carefully slipped the priceless ring into her sweater pocket before standing and turning to face him. “I have given you all the answers that you have wanted,” she snapped, folding her arms against her chest in a show of defiance and anger. “It is not my fault that you refuse to believe me or to trust me like you once did.”

Batman appraised her for a long moment. He could tell that she was hiding something by the way she was standing. He wasn’t going to leave here until he’d found out what she was doing here. He slowly began to pace, his attention solely on her though his cowl made it more than difficult for her to tell.

“You know that Ambassador Pallock was murdered last night,” he stated. “It stinks of the League of Assassins, Talia. I want to know why you were gunning after Pallock.”

Talia’s fury nearly exploded with his accusations, but mostly because he’d already been able to connect the League of Assassins to Pallock’s murder. She should’ve known that he’d start pointing fingers at her the second the body was discovered.

“How dare you accuse me of murdering him,” she ground out. “I don’t even know Ambassador Pallock.”

“Don’t play ignorant with me, Talia,” he bit out with a sneer, catching a fleeting glimpse of something lying on the desk behind her. Whatever it was it was made of gold. “It doesn’t suit you.”

She averted her gaze, refusing to respond to his baiting. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Bruce,” she spat out. “Now, if you would please leave. I’m very tired and would like to go to bed.”

He closed the distance between them, forcing her to take a couple of steps backwards. She felt the edge of the desk hit the back of her upper thighs. She held her breath, refusing to show any signs of being intimidated by him. She reached behind her, her hand finding the small box and clutching it to keep him from finding it.

“I know that you’re involved in Pallock’s murder and I will prove it,” he said with a deadly calm air. “You and your father are up to something. Make no mistake, I will find out what it is and I will stop you.”

Talia slapped him hard across the face, refusing to break with his intimidation. “Get out,” she ordered him with a venomous glare.

The corners of Batman’s mouth curled ever so slightly, enough to cause a shiver to race up her spine. “Now, I know for certain you came here for something,” he said before turning on his heel and leaving through the balcony doors he’d entered through.

Talia swore under her breath as she watched him leave, releasing a ragged breath. She waited several long moments before finally removing the small box from her hand. She quickly retrieved
the ring from her sweater pocket, carefully placing it back inside.

She was going to have to hide the ring someplace safe. She had no doubt that Bruce would try to come back later to search her penthouse suite in order to find the real reason for her and Damian being in Gotham. She just hoped that she’d be able to finish her mission before he discovered what she was after.

_Gotham; August 10th, 23:55 EST_

Batman landed on the ground, his cape falling around him as he quickly made his way to the waiting Batmobile. He had gotten more than he had bargained for, feeling a thin tendril of hope beginning to take root inside of him. There just might be a dim light at the end of this nightmarish tunnel.

Opening the door, he slid into the driver’s seat, immediately hitting some buttons on his gauntlet. “What did you find out?”

He turned to look at his partner, a sense of gratitude drifting through him that she had decided to come out with him tonight. He wouldn’t verbally admit it to anyone, but he found that he liked it when she came out on patrol with him.

“I’m not sure yet,” he murmured as he downloaded the information from his cowl cam into the computer in the Batmobile.

“You obviously found something,” Diana pressed, growing more than anxious with every passing moment.

She’d been forced to wait in the Batmobile while he went to interrogate Talia. He knew that waiting patiently wasn’t her forte and yet she’d had to for the good of the mission. Bruce felt the less that Talia knew about them and specifically Batwoman the better. He didn’t want her to have more information than he wanted her to have. Bruce was all about control especially when it came to information and the enemy.

“When I entered, I found her sitting at the desk with her back to me,” he explained as he started pulling up pictures that he’d been able to take without her knowledge. “She got her hands on something, but I’m not sure what it is yet.”

Diana removed her mask as she stared at the screen, her eyebrows knitting together at the pictures. There was some sort of black material lying on the desk and the corner of what appeared to be an elaborately decorated box. It seemed to be small and unable to hold very much inside of it.

“Were you able to get anything else?” she asked, almost lost in her thoughts as she wracked her brain for what Talia had gotten her greedy little hands on.

“No,” he replied with a frustrated sigh. “I could tell she was hiding something in her pocket, but I couldn’t tell what it was. I waited outside on the balcony, watching to see what she was going to do, but she turned her back to me and then disappeared into her bedroom.”

“Whatever it is, she’s going to make sure you never find out what it is,” Diana replied, clearly as frustrated and angry as her husband.

“Agreed,” he thoughtfully stated, rubbing his bottom lip with his forefinger as his mind tried to work through this case. “Let’s say Talia is behind Pallock’s murder—”

“I thought we’d already decided that,” Diana interrupted him.
“We have, but we can’t rule out other possibilities until we have definite proof it was Talia,” he told her. “For now, she’s our prime suspect.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Talia is the buyer and the one killed Ivan! Yah, no real surprise there I suppose, but what is she after and why? This is only scratching the surface of what it's going on here so stayed tuned!

UP NEXT: Bruce and Diana take Nicholas and Kaia to buy a puppy. How will that turn out? Also, Artemis and Jason return to the scene of the murder to look for more clues as to who is behind this. What will they find?

Also, I started the next fic Deadly Intentions! First chapter is almost done already. I have to say I'm getting really excited about how this new one is going! :)

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13

Themyscira; August 12th, 01:16 GMT+2

Kyriaki stood before the small fire, her hands clasped behind her back as she stared into the flickering orange flames. Her anger was smoldering far hotter than the fire crackling before her. The fact that they had yet been unsuccessful in stopping the princess was rapidly eating away at her.

She knew they were going to have to take far more drastic measures.

“We are not getting anywhere,” Aikaterina spat out as she sharpened the blade of her sword. “Princess Diana is still running the embassy. We need to move forward before men begin showing up at our shores and defiling our island.”

“I agree,” Stamatia voiced her opinion, brushing a golden blond curl of hair behind her shoulder. “She needs to be dealt with now. We’re spending far too much time with these senseless games and threats.”

Leda frowned with all the fierce animosity being directed at Diana. While she didn’t agree with what Diana and the queen were doing, she didn’t feel that hurting the princess was the answer to this nonsense. “I thought we had agreed not to seriously injure or kill Diana.”

Kyriaki turned an angry eye on her fellow Amazon, her glare nearly causing Leda to shrink back. “Don’t tell me you’ve lost your nerve, sister,” she hissed.

“No,” Leda quickly responded with a shake of her head, her eyes wide. “I’m not backing out on this. I just don’t believe that murdering the princess is the answer.”

“How else will we get the queen’s attention?” Kyriaki demanded to know, hands clenched into fists at her sides. “Send her a letter? Maybe we should invite her for tea?”

Her condescending tone infuriated Leda, but she was powerless to do anything about it. Kyriaki was highly dangerous and deadly in her own right. She didn’t have to muster a response to her snarky remarks. Thankfully, Cyanea’s arrival saved her.

Kyriaki turned her attention to the newly arrived sister. “What do you have?”

“I just received word from Man’s World,” Cyanea replied as she came to a stop beside Kyriaki. “Because of the ambassador’s death, Arisinia has declared war. The other ambassadors have returned to their countries. They want nothing to do with Themyscira.”

Kyriaki’s lips spread into a wicked grin. “This unexpected development has played into our favor.”

Leda brightened slightly with the news. “Then, that’s it,” she said. “The embassy has failed. We won’t have to do anything more.”

“I am not satisfied,” Kyriaki icily stated. “Diana must still pay for what she has done by marrying a
mortal demon and bearing his children...for bringing them here to our island and allowing them to
tread on sacred ground. Besides, this doesn't mean that Diana and the queen won't try something
else."

“And how do you plan on doing that, sister?” Aikaterina asked.

Kyriaki glanced around the circle as her gathered sisters, united in their efforts to preserve
Themyscira and the future of the Amazons. “I have an idea,” she announced. “We need to get word
to Man’s World immediately.”

**Gotham; August 12th, 10:30 EST**

Bruce couldn’t believe he was actually doing this and yet he found that he wanted to because it
would bring so much happiness to his children. He had found over time that he was less stringent
about certain things that he’d been adamant about in the past.

He glanced at his wife who was currently taking Kaia out of her car seat. He was fairly certain that
Diana was to blame for the change in him or it was the children they were currently carrying in
their arms. Releasing a resigned sign, he knew that he wouldn’t want it any other way. He loved
them too fiercely to deny them something that he knew would bring them happiness.

Making his family happy brought him immeasurable joy. He was certain, however, the first time
the new puppy made a mess on the floor or chewed up his newspaper, he’d lose his temper and
forbid the dog from being inside the manor ever again.

“Don’t look so resigned, Bruce,” Diana chided him as they entered the animal shelter. “The kids
are excited about this and you look as though you’re walking to your hanging.”

“I’m happy about this...really,” he replied, forcing a smile to his face. “Don’t I look happy?”

Diana gave him a look that told him he was very wrong. She leaned over and kissed his cheek in an
effort to ease his tension some. It’ll be just fine,” she reassured him. “You might even grow to love
the puppy.”

“I highly doubt that,” he grumbled with a huff.

He was just happy to see Diana actually looking and acting more like herself again. She’d been so
upset over Pallock’s death that he had been concerned about her. The light had vanished from her
typically vibrant blue eyes, her spirit crushed. It was disheartening to watch, feeling powerless to
make it right again.

Today, though, she seemed a little more like herself. He hoped it was real and not just for the
benefit of the children. He hated it when she was hurting, hated feeling so helpless to make it better
even more. Hopefully, he could solve this murder and end these threats to his wife all in one fell
swoop.

“Hi, my name is Carly. How may I help you today?” a young woman greeted them, immediately
recognizing the famous couple standing before her.

“I want a puppy,” Nicholas proudly announced from his father’s arms.

Kaia scowled at her brother from her mother’s hold. “Me want one too,” she adamantly declared.

“We have to share,” Nicholas informed the woman, clearly unhappy with the notion that had been
firmly impressed upon him by his father.
“That’s right,” Bruce confirmed, adjusting his hold on his son. “We are not getting two dogs.”

Diana bit at her bottom lip to keep her amusement at bay. She had a feeling that Bruce was going to lose any battle of wills that might be waged here today, her equally stubborn children coming out victorious in the end despite their father’s determination.

“Well, we just received a whole litter of Great Danes last week,” Carly replied.

“Aren’t they kind of big dogs?” Bruce asked.

“Perfect,” Diana said with a smile, ignoring Bruce’s question. “Can we see them?”

“Me want a pink puppy,” Kaia told her.

Carly laughed as she began to lead the way towards the puppies. “I’m afraid we don’t have any pink puppies, sweetheart.”

Looking over her mother’s shoulder, Kaia scowled directly at her father as Bruce and Nicholas fell in step behind them. Bruce drew a deep breath in an attempt to fortify his typical iron will. He was not returning to the manor with two puppies no matter what color they were or how much Kaia glared at him.

“Let’s see what puppies they have, Kaia,” Bruce tried to console his daughter. “You and Nick might find one that the two of you both like.”

Kaia appeared completely unconvinced as she sniffled, turning to lay her head on her mother’s shoulder. Bruce knew that his daughter was still not feeling well, but he hoped that a new puppy would help her feel a little better.

Diana rubbed Kaia’s back, wishing she could get over this cold. She hated it when her kids were sick. She had hoped they would both gain her ability to heal quickly, but so far only Nicholas had showed any signs of enhanced healing. Kaia had yet to display any meta abilities yet, but she knew it would be coming soon. It was only a matter of when and what those abilities would be.

Here we are,” Carly announced.

“Kitty!” Kaia cried in excitement as they passed a large cage with kittens.

“Oh, we just got them in the other day. Do you want to hold one?” Carly asked.

“No,” Bruce said as the same time Diana said “yes”. Bruce received a glare from his wife as she set Kaia down, kneeling beside her as Carly handed Kaia a kitten. Kaia giggled as she held the kitten, gently petting the fluffy fur as she looked up at her father with those big blue eyes that were his Kryptonite.

“Oh, hell,” Bruce grumbled under his breath as Nicholas went over to see the puppies, feeling his infamous iron will begin to buckle and shudder.

Diana chuckled softly as she gazed up at Bruce. “Isn’t she adorable?”

Bruce had to admit the kitten was kind of cute, but his daughter holding the kitten was even more so. “Daddy!” Nicholas cried. “I want this one!”

Bruce walked over to where Nicholas was holding a small black and white puppy that was quite obviously the runt of the liter. “Don’t you want one of his brothers or sisters?” Bruce asked,
looking at some of the other puppies that were a bit bigger.

“No,” Nicholas adamantly stated as he hugged the squirming puppy to his chest. “This is the one I want.”

Bruce glanced over at Diana and Kaia who was still holding the kitten, adoration shining in her eyes as she talked to it. Looking down at Nicholas, he could tell his son wasn’t going to ever let this puppy out of his sight or his arms.

It was at that moment that Bruce realized just how screwed he really was.

Wayne Manor; August 12th, 17:52 EST

Kaia laid on her stomach on the floor, talking to her new kitten and stroking its soft fur. “Good, kitty,” she praised her new pet.

She giggled as her kitten lifted her paw to touch Kaia’s runny nose as Alfred appeared in the entertainment room. “Time for more cold medicine, Miss Kaia,” he announced.

Kaia scowled as she looked up at Alfred. “No…me no want to,” Kaia pouted.

“Come now, Miss Kaia,” Alfred said. “Take your medicine and then you can play with your new kitten.”

“Kaia, listen to Pappoús,” Nicholas told her as he played with his new puppy.

Kaia huffed in annoyance which only caused her nose to run even more. She picked up her kitten, holding her in her arms as she walked over to where Alfred was waiting with the cold medicine. “Kitty needs medicine too,” Kaia decided, holding her up to Alfred. “She’s sick.”

Alfred chuckled softly as he took the offered kitten. “Hmmm…she doesn’t appear to be sick,” he replied. “Her nose isn’t running. Maybe you should take your cold medicine so your kitten doesn’t get sick.”

“Otay,” Kaia reluctantly agreed, taking the small measure cup and drinking the pink liquid.

“Good girl,” Alfred praised her, wiping her nose before handing her kitten back to her.

Kaia carefully took her new pet into her arms as Damian walked into the room. “What’s with the cat?”

“I got a new puppy and Kaia got a kitten,” Nicholas announced as he tried to escape his puppies wet tongue trying to lick his face.

“Kind of small, isn’t he?” Damian commented as he stood beside Nicholas.

Nicholas looked up at him with a confused expression on his little face. “He’s a puppy,” he told him as if the answer was completely obvious. “Puppies are supposed to be small.”

“What’s his name?” Damian asked.

“Ace,” Nick informed him.

“Where did that name come from?”

“Daddy thought it was a good name,” he informed him. “Do you have a pet?”
“No,” Damian stated, moving on to his sister. “I thought you wanted a puppy too.”

“They had no pink puppies,” Kaia told him.

Damian’s forehead creased as he stared down at his little sister. “There are no such things as pink puppies, Kaia.”

“She won’t believe you,” Nick tried to tell him. “She’s pretty stubborn.”

“You want to play with my kitty?” Kaia asked him.

Damian looked at the kitten she was holding up to him. “No…I’m good.”

He wasn’t much of a cat person, preferring dogs, but he’d never had a pet growing up so he was uncertain what the excitement was all about. It was just some animal that would have to be cared for. It served no real purpose that he could see.

He plopped down on one of the couches to watch television but found himself watching the little ones as they played with her new pets. The kitten was kind of cute though he was loathe to admit it and the puppy looked like he was a lot of fun though he was on the small side.

“Hey, kiddos,” Dick greeted them as he entered the entertainment room holding Donna’s hand.

“DD!” Kaia cried. “See my kitty!”

“I see that,” Donna said, chuckling at her niece’s excitement.

“I can’t believe that Bruce caved,” Dick said with a stunned shake of his head. “Not only did he cave and get a puppy, but he also brought a kitten home too. Hell must have frozen over.”

“Dick,” Donna scolded him, pursing her lips. “You know there’s nothing Bruce wouldn’t do for his children.”

“Do you know how many years I begged for a dog and never got one?” Dick asked.

“And yet you still survived,” Donna teased him, running her fingers through his hair. “If you’re good, maybe I’ll let you get a dog someday.”

“Wow, I get a baby and a dog?” Dick questioned her, a smirk playing on his lips as he turned his attention to Nicholas. “I love your new puppy, Nick. What’s his name?”

“Ace,” Nicholas proudly announced. “Daddy and I named him.”

“That’s a great name,” Dick agreed, stroking the puppy’s head.

Kaia carried her kitten over to Dick, leaning back as if carrying a heavy load. “See my new kitty?”

“Hey, peanut,” he said to Kaia, lifting his sister and the kitten into his strong arms. He blew a slobbering kiss on her cheek causing her to giggle and squirm.

“She’s sick,” Damian informed him. “I wouldn’t get anywhere near her.”

“Aw, it’s okay,” Dick told him. “She’s my favorite peanut. What did you name your kitten, Kai?”

“Peanut,” she revealed.
Dick chuckled with her answer, surprised by her choice. “But that’s what I call you.”

“Me know,” she replied, holding her kitten out to him. “She’s peanut like me.”

“Where are your mom and dad?” Donna asked.

“Father and Diana are in the cave,” Damian informed them.

“I’m going to run down there and let them know we’re here,” Dick said, setting Kaia and her kitten down. “Maybe I can convince them to come up.”

Kaia walked over to Donna and Nicholas, sitting down on the floor with them so her kitten could play with his puppy. “Don’t stay down there too long,” Donna told him. “The smell of Alfred’s cooking is making me hungry and I’m eating for two now.”

“I promise I’ll drag them out of there in no time,” he reassured her.

Dick took off for the study, turning the hands on the grandfather clock and opening the secret entrance to the cave. He bounded down the steps that he knew so well, spotting Bruce and Tim sitting in front of the computer system working on something. Diana was on her cell phone, pacing several yards away from the platform. He could tell that whoever she was talking to it wasn’t a good thing.

“I can’t believe you went to buy a dog and came home with a cat too,” Dick told him, more than anxious to poke fun at his father-figure.

“Pretty wild isn’t it?” Tim agreed with a grin as he looked up to see his older brother approaching. “Never thought I’d see the day.”

“I told Donna I think hell must have frozen over,” Dick replied as he came to stand beside them, turning to rest his backside against the edge of the desk.

“All right you two,” Bruce grumbled with a frown. “It wasn’t my fault. You try to look Kaia in the eye and tell her no when she’s holding a kitten in her arms and begging you to let her take it home. I held out for at least five minutes. You both would’ve crumbled a lot faster than I did.”

“He has a point,” Tim said with a nod. “She gives me that look with those big blue eyes and I’m a puddle. There’s absolutely no defense for that. I’m beginning to think it’s her super power.”

“Nicholas is just as bad,” Dick pointed out. “It’s your fault, Bruce. If you hadn’t had such adorable kids, we’d all be able to say no to them.”

“Blame Diana,” he muttered. “I do.”

Tim snickered as he turned his attention back to the file that he was working on. “What are you two up to?” Dick asked.

“Joker is up to something,” Bruce replied. “We’ve possibly uncovered some additional information that we’re looking into.”

“Well, I had to promise to bring you guys upstairs right away,” Dick informed them, folding his arms against his chest.

“Why?” Bruce asked, his brow furrowed as he continued typing on his computer.

“I have a pregnant wife who is starving, and Alfred has dinner almost ready.”
“I think you two only come over here so you can eat,” Bruce decided without missing a single keystroke.

“Not true,” Dick adamantly denied. “We came over to see the new puppy only to discover there’s a kitten as well.”

“And your visit just so happens to coincide with dinner every time,” Bruce pointed out.

“It’s not my fault,” Dick maintained. “Donna didn’t get done with her assignment until about an hour ago.”

“Convenient,” Bruce murmured.

Dick glanced over at Diana who was still on her cell phone, pacing back and forth by the equipment table. She was too far away to hear what she was saying, but it was obvious by her expression that she was very upset.

“How’s Diana doing?” Dick asked, concern lacing his voice.

Bruce released a frustrated sigh as he paused in his work to glance at his wife. “I thought she was doing better today, but it’s obviously not going to last.”

“Who is she talking to?”

“We don’t know, but it’s not good whatever it is,” Tim interjected from his spot beside Bruce. “I’ve picked up a few Greek curses here and there, but that’s about it.”

“I hope things get better soon,” Dick said, his expression grim as he watched the Amazon. “Donna can feel everything that Diana is going through. It’s been upsetting her quite a bit lately knowing how deeply all of this has hurt her sister.”

“I intend to make it better one way or another,” Bruce gruffly stated.

“Have you found out anything?” Dick inquired, turning his attention to Bruce.

“Not much,” Bruce grimly replied. “I still think Talia or the League of Assassins are behind Ivan Pallock’s death, but I don’t have actual proof.”

“Has Artemis been able to find out anything at the embassy?”

“Nothing yet,” Bruce told him. “She and Jason weren’t able to find anything in Ivan’s possessions to reveal why he was at the steel mill that night or what he was really up to.”

Dick stared at Bruce in stunned disbelief. “Artemis and Jason are working together? Never thought I’d see the day that would happen.”

“They actually make a pretty good team,” Tim informed him. “They remind me of mom and Bruce.”

Bruce gave Tim a withering glare which Tim summarily ignored as he pulled up another file. He looked back over his shoulder to find Diana standing there with her back to them. Her phone call had ended, leaving her upset. He was anxious to find out what was going on, hoping that he could help her fix whatever was wrong.

“Why don’t you two go get ready for dinner?” Bruce suggested.
Tim and Dick took the hint, Dick straightening up. “Come on, Timmy,” Dick said. “Race you to the dining room.”

Tim glared at Dick, a sneer on his lips. He hated it when Dick called him that. “I’m going to kick your ass, Dickie.”

Bruce just shook his head as they ran towards the platform steps, elbowing each other in the ribs along the way. It didn’t matter how old they were. They would still compete and challenge each other, picking on one another and doing their best to get under their sibling’s skin. He’d never had any siblings so it wasn’t something that he had been accustomed to before having boys living in his house.

“Get the little ones around,” Bruce yelled.

“Aye, aye, captain dad,” Dick yelled back.

Bruce growled low in his throat as he saved his work on the computer before getting out of his chair and making his way to where his wife was still standing. She had her arms wrapped around her torso, her head lowered. Whatever it was he could tell it was very bad. It further stirred his anger to see her hurting so deeply.

“What happened, Diana?” he asked, coming to stand beside her.

Diana didn’t move, didn’t lift her head to look at him. “Because of Ambassador Pallock’s death, Arisinia has completely pulled out of everything. They want nothing to do with Themyscira or the other two countries. They believe that Lycernia and Ambassador Nosh are behind Pallock’s murder and have now declared war on Lycernia.”

“I’m so sorry, princess,” Bruce softly said, moving to stand in front of her before wrapping his arms around her and drawing her close to him.

She buried her face in his muscular chest, her fingers gripping his shirt. “All I wanted to do was to bring peace to the world…to make my mother and sisters proud,” she told him. “Instead, I’ve helped to start a war and completely ruined Themyscira’s name and reputation.”

Bruce tightened his hold on her, his chin resting on top of her head. “None of this is your fault, princess,” he firmly stated. “We’ll find out who murdered Pallock and why. Then, we’ll rebuild Themyscira’s reputation and show the world how amazing you are.”

“It might be too late for that, Bruce,” she replied, drawing away from him. “Whoever is threatening me and trying to get the embassy shut down has won. No one is going to want to have any dealings with the Amazons after this. When Pallock died, the embassy likely died with it.”

“I don’t believe that for one minute,” Bruce adamantly maintained, his jaw set tightly. “We just need to prove that Pallock’s murder had nothing to do with the peace talks. Once we prove that, we can distance the embassy from this mess and show that Themyscira can provide a safe haven for dignitaries to meet and pave the way for peace.”

A sardonic laugh escaped Diana’s lips as she finally met Bruce’s penetrating gaze. “Maybe I should appoint you to be the Ambassador of Themyscira,” she ruefully responded. “You would be far better at it than I have been.”

“Can’t…far too busy,” he summarily said. “Besides, the position is already filled by the most capable woman that I’ve ever had the pleasure of knowing and marrying.”
“Not feeling very capable right now,” she commented with a frown.

Bruce chuckled softly as he leaned in and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. “Diana, you’re the strongest, most stubborn woman in the world,” he told her. “If anyone can find a way to put things back together again, it’s most definitely you.”

The corners of her lips curled slightly against her will as she stared into his azure eyes. “I don’t know what I’d do without you, Bruce,” she confessed, her gaze growing tender. “You somehow manage to hold me together when I feel as though everything around me is falling apart.”

“Funny,” he said with a crooked smile. “I feel the exact same way about you.”

Diana slipped her arms around his waist, hugging him. “Thank you,” she murmured.

Bruce returned her embrace, kissing the top of her head. “Any time, princess,” he told her. “Let’s go upstairs and see what trouble our family is getting into.”

“Or better yet what the new kitten and puppy are getting into,” Diana corrected him.

Bruce groaned with the reminder as they began to make their way upstairs. “You couldn’t have let me forget about that for a little while longer?”

Diana smirked at him as she began to ascend the stairs ahead of him. “No way,” she claimed. “The fact that you not only bought Nicholas a puppy but Kaia a kitten as well just proves our children have you wrapped around their little fingers.”

“Don’t remind me,” he grumbled, his gaze becoming transfixed by the Amazon’s backside and the sexy sway of her hips. He reached out and squeezed her as she paused to open the secret door, his body pressing against her.

“Bruce,” she scolded him.

“I couldn’t resist,” he maintained. “You have the sexiest ass I’ve ever seen and it was right there in front of me. How could I not want to touch it?”

“I swear you have no self-control sometimes,” she decided as they entered the study.

“I have more self-control than you can even begin to imagine,” he stated. “If I didn’t, you’d be naked on the medical table in the cave right now with me on top of you.”

Diana felt her cheeks grow warm with the scenario he proposed, but quickly banished those thoughts as they headed towards the dining room. Entering, they found everyone taking their seats, Nick and Kaia already in their booster seats.

Making his way to his chair, Bruce readily decided that family dinner when everyone was present was one of his favorite times. After losing his parents, he had never dreamed that he would grow to love dinner time around the large table in the dining room ever again. Now, it was an event that he looked forward to.

Noticing that Jason and Artemis were missing from the table, he decided that he would need to check in with them later tonight to see what was going on. The two rarely saw eye to eye and often spent more time arguing then actually agreeing, but he had to concur with Tim. They did seem to make a pretty formidable team.

“I still can’t believe that you bought a puppy and a kitten, Bruce,” Dick said as Alfred began to
serve the dinner.

“Do I even want to know where they are now?” he asked, looking at Nicholas.

“I put Ace in his cage,” Nicholas told him.

“Good job, little man,” Bruce praised him. “And about the kitten?”

“Peanut is with Pappoús,” Kaia said.

“Peanut?” Bruce repeated, taken aback by the name she had chosen for her kitten.

“Yah, Peanut,” Kaia insisted with a furrowed brow. “It’s my kitty.”

“I think it’s a great name, Kai,” Tim told her as he placed a spoonful of peas on her plate.

Kaia smiled at Tim, pleased until she saw the peas on her plate. “Me no like peas,” she uttered with a frown.

“Kaia, you know you need to eat what is put on your plate,” Diana reminded her.

Kaia glared at her peas as if silently wishing they’d disappeared. “Me feed em to Peanut.”

“Here we go,” Bruce muttered. “No people food is to be given to Ace or Peanut.”

“Not even lima beans?” Nicholas asked, clearly distressed by this unexpected turn of events.

“No, they are for you to eat, not the dog,” Bruce adamantly stated.

Alfred appeared at that moment, a disapproving expression gracing his face. “I’m very sorry to interrupt, but I’m afraid you have a call, Miss Diana,” he announced.

“Excuse me,” she said with a sigh, placing her napkin on the table as she stood to her feet.

Bruce watched as Diana left the dining room, wondering how much worse things were going to get around here. He hoped whatever phone call this was about would be good news for a change, but he doubted that was possible with their track record.

Placing some potatoes on Nicholas’s plate, he found his worry spiking.

**Themysciran Embassy; August 12th; 19:06 EST**

“This is a waste of time,” Artemis stated, her hands on her hips and a glower gracing her face as she watched Jason pick the lock.

“No…it’s not,” he maintained as the door swung open to the steel mill. “If there’s one thing that I’ve learned from Batman it's that going back over a crime scene is never a waste of time.”

“It sounds ludicrous,” Artemis decided. “The police have already combed over the building. Besides, I’m still convinced that Nosh had something to do with this. We should be interrogating him.”

“He was already questioned,” he pointed out. “He wasn’t anywhere near here at the time of the murder. His alibi is solid. Furthermore, Nosh has been allowed to leave the country. He’s heading for the airport now.”
“Vile pig,” she commented, remembering all too well how he looked at her and Diana as if they were nothing more than a source of entertainment and pleasure. “I didn’t get to interrogate him.”

“Which is probably a good thing,” Jason told her with a smirk as they made their way through the dark mill. “You probably would’ve ended up castrating him.”

“He deserves it,” she claimed.

“Everyone is innocent until proven guilty.”

“That doesn’t mean he isn’t guilty,” she said. “He could’ve very easily hired someone to take Ivan out.”

Jason frowned with the personal use of the ambassador’s name. “As far as the police are concerned, they had nothing that linked him to the murder…hence, he’s leaving the country.”

“And getting away,” she scoffed as they approached the spot Ivan had lost his life. “I still can’t believe I let you talk me into this. We should be doing something far more productive.”

“Like what?”

“Comb through the embassy again…review the security footage…interrogate Nosh before he escapes,” she counted off.

“We already combed through the embassy and found nothing,” he pointed out. “Oracle and Batman have both poured over the security footage and neither of them have found anything that gives us any idea as to who could be behind this.”

Artemis felt a wave of sadness drift over her that she hadn’t expected or quite understood as she stared at the ground. She didn’t even know Ivan very well and yet she felt a sense of loss with his death. She felt as though they could have been good friends.

Jason glanced at the Bana-Mighdall Amazon standing to his left, noticing the sense of grief that seemed to consume her. He felt a tug of jealousy infiltrating his mood. He had to admit that he hadn’t liked the way that Ivan and Artemis had seemed drawn to each other. He wanted her to feel that draw to him, not some other man.

He felt his anger creeping up inside of him. “Just look around and see if you notice anything out of place,” he told her.

Artemis looked up at him, somewhat taken aback by his abrupt change in mood from somewhat jovial to angry. “Yes, because I’ve spent so much time in a steel mill,” she countered with a huff of annoyance. “How am I going to be able to tell if something is out of place?”

“Just look for anything that may have been left behind,” he shot back as he stalked off, leaving her with the red blood stain that still colored the concrete.

She drew a deep breath as she began to look around, still uncertain what exactly she was looking for. She was sure that they wouldn’t find anything of any importance here. This was wasted effort and time that could be better spent hunting down the scum behind this senseless murder.

She unconsciously placed her hands on her hips as she slowly wandered around the area, her thoughts on Ivan and how he afraid he must have been. There had to have been some reason he had come here to meet with someone. She just wished they could figure out why.
She swore to herself that she was going to find out who took his life and make sure that they paid for it. He didn’t deserve what had happened to him, didn’t deserve to be gunned down as if he meant nothing to anyone else in the world.

Kneeling beside the large blood stain, Artemis lightly ran her fingers over the discolored concrete. If she had just been a little quicker, she might have been able to save his life or stop whoever had been so determined to take his life.

She glanced up at the table sitting a few feet away, wondering what transaction had taken place here. She knew that Tim had done a thorough job of searching the area and collecting evidence. She had been down in the cave yesterday when they had been sorting through the collected evidence, none of it revealing anything of importance.

“What in the name of Ra happened here?” she muttered to herself.

“Artemis!” Jason called.

She stood to her feet, looking in the direction that his voice came from. Catching site of him walking towards her. “What is it? Have you found anything?”

“Nothing,” he admitted with a frown, stopping beside the table.

“I told you this was pointless,” she stated.

“It was worth a shot,” he insisted.

“We still have no leads as to who did this to Ivan,” she heatedly spat out.

Jason studied her, noticing her frustration. While it fueled his annoyance, he felt the need to comfort and reassure her. He closed the distance between them, tentatively placing his hand on her shoulder. “We’ll find out who killed Ivan,” he assured her, his tone gentler than he had intended. “I promise we’ll figure this out.”

Artemis turned to look at him, somewhat taken aback by his touch and the kindness that filled his voice. “Thank you,” she replied, feeling a little awkward. “We should probably return to the embassy. It wouldn’t hurt to search his suite again.”

Jason smiled though she couldn’t see it beneath the mask, his hand falling from her shoulder to rest at his side. “I thought you said it was a waste of time to go back over something that we’ve already searched.”

She frowned at him, doing her best not to notice how she missed his touch. “I guess it couldn’t hurt,” she decided, turning on her heel to leave. “I’m not saying you’re right, though. I still think it’s a waste of time, but we have little else to go on right now.”

Jason smirked as he began to follow her through the building and outside onto the side street. She had to be just about the most frustrating…most irritatingly stubborn woman that he’d ever met and yet he couldn’t deny the fact that he was falling hard for her.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Bruce's biggest weakness is his family! Who knew?? Things are beginning to
escalate. You guys are not going to believe where we're headed with this, but I think you'll like it!

UP NEXT: Artemis and Jason do some investigating and uncover a major clue that cracks this mystery wide open only to discover a heinous plot is in the works! Can't wait for the big reveal! :)

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 14

_Themysciran Embassy; August 12th, 20:55 EST_

Jason looked around the suite, trying to spot anything that seemed out of place. They’d already combed over the rooms once, but he wanted to make sure that they hadn’t missed anything. It was difficult to keep his focus, however, when there was a beautiful red-headed Amazon walking around the room. It really didn’t help matters when she would get a certain perplexed expression on her face causing her to chew on her lower lip.

And she was doing it right now.

He forced himself to look away from her, pushing away the pull that he felt towards her. He wanted to kiss her, but he knew that she’d probably break his neck if he even attempted anything like that. Besides, she didn’t want to have anything to do with him. Still, she was here with him now so that was a good sign.

Glancing at her out of the corner of his eye, he noticed how she moved so gracefully. It was like her feet barely touched the ground when she walked, gliding about the room as she inspected various aspects and corners of it in search of anything they might have missed the other day.

“I’m going to check the bedroom,” she announced as she walked towards the other room.

Jason looked around the sitting room, not finding anything out of place. They’d gone over Ambassador Pallock’s suite the night of his murder and found nothing. His personal possessions had already been removed and prepared for shipping back to his country.

Unfortunately, going through his suitcase and briefcase had revealed nothing about why he’d gone down to the steel mill or who had been there to meet with him. It only seemed to add to everyone’s frustration. Oracle had hacked into his cell phone for information, finding that he’d received several calls over the last month from a number that turned out to be a burner cell.

Still, Jason wasn’t about to give up hope of finding something here that they had missed before.

He meticulously began combing over everything—checking desk and cabinet drawers, removing couch and chair cushions, moving lamps and framed pictures on the wall. While his frustration was telling him to move and look someplace else, his gut was telling him there was something here they had missed.

Finding nothing, Jason decided to see if Artemis was having any better luck in the bedroom. He started to walk through the doorway to the bedroom while she was attempting to exit, causing them to collide into one another. Jason’s arms instinctively circled around her waist to keep her from falling, her lips a breath away from his.

Stunned, they stayed like that for several seconds as they stared at one another, both trying to register what had just happened and how to get out of the sudden awkward situation. Artemis felt herself growing warm with the way that he was holding her, feeling every bit of his masculine form that was pressed against hers.
She scowled to herself, wondering where in the world this unexpected feeling had just come from and banishing it to the furthest reaches of her mind. “Excuse me,” she stated, self-consciously pulling herself out of his hold on her.

“Sorry,” he muttered, taking a step back, uncertain what to do with his hands all of the sudden. He ultimately decided to place them on his hips. “Did you find anything?”

“Actually, yes,” she informed him, her frown slipping into a pleased smile as she held up a piece of paper.

Jason frowned as he stared at the piece of paper. “Where did you find that?” he demanded to know, annoyed with himself for having missed it the first time around.

“Don’t feel bad,” she told him with a smirk. “It was easy to miss. Ivan had it stuck behind the mirror in the bathroom.”

Jason growled as he snatched it out of her hand to read it. It was a letter of authentication for a gold ring believed to have belonged to the Greek god Hades. “What was Ivan doing with this?” he muttered more to himself than to her, holding up the piece of paper.

Artemis frowned at him. “How in the name of Ra would I know?”

“You were his girlfriend,” Jason shot back as he studied the letter.

Artemis glowered at him, closing the distance between them in two strides. “I was not his girlfriend,” she ground out. “We were merely acquaintances—nothing more.”

“Friendly acquaintances,” he grumbled under his breath as he turned away from her.

“Why you—” she angrily began.

“Let’s make sure he didn’t have anything else stashed away in here,” he interrupted her.

“You are the most infuriating human being I have ever met,” Artemis ground out.

“Feelings mutual, sweetheart,” he countered as he continued to look over the letter. There was something about this that was not setting well with him. “It looks like your friend got his hands on this ring to sell it to a buyer.”

“I can’t see Ivan doing something illegal like this,” Artemis stated, her mind still reeling with the notion. She had believed Ivan to be an honest, forthright man. She had been so very wrong about him and she hated it.

“Well, I’m afraid it’s definitely not looking good for him,” he told her. “He obviously had to have stolen it from someone to get it out of his country and into this one.”

“I should’ve known better than to trust a man,” she bit out as she made her way to the balcony doors, crossing her arms against her chest as she stared out at the Gotham night life.

“Hey, not all men are slime you know,” he snapped with a glare. “There are some very good men in the world.”

“Like you?” she asked, arching an eyebrow as she looked at him over her shoulder.

“Yah, and the other men in my family,” he evenly stated.
Artemis didn’t have a response to that. She knew they were good men… Jason was a good man despite the fact that he drove her crazy and infuriated her more times than not. “I don’t think we’re going to find anything more here,” she said with an irritated huff. “I’m starving. I’m going to get something to eat.”

“I know this little diner that’s pretty good,” he offered, glancing at her out of the corner of his eye. “Wanna grab something to eat?”

Artemis drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly. “Fine,” she ultimately decided. “We need to figure out what this letter is all about and what Ivan was really up to. Might as well figure it out over dinner.”

Jason smiled with her response, relieved that she had agreed to eat with him. He had been silently willing her to say yes but hadn’t held out much hope. He knew how hard headed she was and the fact that she still held no trust or love for men in general didn’t bode well for him.

Still, he wasn’t going to give up.

They exited the suite and made their way out of the embassy, both lost in their own thoughts. Jason knew he should probably get this letter to Bruce right away or let him know about it in the very least, but, as he led Artemis towards the diner, he decided his surrogate father could wait for an hour or so.

They entered the diner, slipping into a booth near the back where they could talk in private. “You’re certain that Ivan never said anything to you about why he was going out that night?” he asked her. “It could have even been in code or maybe—”

“Yes, I’m certain,” she told him, gritting her teeth in annoyance. “And if you ask me that question one more time, you’re going to be eating your meals through a straw.”

Jason smirked in response. “Just wanted to make sure you didn’t happen to suddenly remember something that you might have forgotten.”

“If I do, I swear on my life that you’ll be the first to know,” she icily stated.

The waitress came at that moment, taking their orders before leaving them alone once more. “So, tell me about Ivan,” Jason said. “What was he like?”

“What do you mean?” she asked with a suspicious narrowed glare.

“Did he act like he was trying to hide his ulterior motive for being in Gotham? Did he seem nervous or anxious?” he pressed with his questions. “Did he appear to be distracted by something?”

“No, none of those things,” Artemis thoughtfully replied. “In fact, he seemed quite… down to earth I think is the right term. He was friendly and charming. There was no sense of duplicity in him. I thought he was honest in his intentions for being here. He seemed genuine in his desire to help his country.”

Jason could sense that she was angry with herself for having been taken in by this man. He found himself wanting to make her feel better. “Some men are honest in their intentions and are trustworthy, Artemis,” he told her. “Some are very cunning, though. They use their looks and charm to deceive people. It’s not your fault that he made you believe that he was a good man.”

Artemis stiffened with his words. “Ivan may still be a good man,” she shot back with fire blazing in her emerald green eyes. “We still do not know for certain what he was doing the night that he was...
killed or why he was there. He may be completely innocent for all we know.”

Jason handed her the letter that she’d found. “This does not scream innocent,” he insisted. “This screams thief, swindler, con man, fraud, and a bunch of other names that I won’t go into right now.”

She huffed a sigh of irritation. “All right,” she sullenly conceded. “I’ll admit that you’re right that this doesn’t necessarily look good for him, but until we have further evidence we can’t just assume the worse about him.”

“The man was shot in a very seedy part of Gotham,” he pointed out. “He wasn’t there to buy Girl Scout cookies, Artemis. He was obviously selling this ring or trying to buy it for some reason we don’t know about yet.”

She scowled darkly as she averted her eyes, wishing that Jason was wrong about Ivan, but deep down she knew that he wasn’t. There was a reason that men met in secret, in dark places where prying eyes could not find them. It was to conduct illegal business.

The waitress arrived with their food, Artemis immediately reaching for her chocolate milkshake. It was one thing that she had quickly decided was a necessary part of her day. She took a long drink, savoring the chocolate as the cold liquid slid down her throat.

“I’m sorry, Artemis,” Jason softly said.

She looked up at him, noticing the emotion that permeated his eyes. It was not something that he usually allowed to surface. “For what?” she asked.

“I know you liked Ivan,” he replied as he picked up his hamburger. “I’m just sorry that he wasn’t who you thought he was…that he was some creep.”

“He wasn’t a creep…or at least I don’t think he was,” she quickly amended. “We don’t know yet why he was doing it. He might have been doing something very important for his country.”

“Or he might have been doing something very illegal,” he pointed out. “Either way, I promise we’ll find out. We’ll find whoever killed him and make sure they pay for their crimes.”

“What was your childhood like?” Artemis asked, suddenly curious about the man sitting across the table from her.

Jason was surprised by her question but hid it. “Well, I was constantly in trouble…either causing it or trying to get out myself of it.”

“Then how did you come to live with Bruce?”

Jason chuckled softly as he thought back on that fateful night. “I was trying to steal the tires off the Batmobile,” he revealed with a grin.

Artemis’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, stunned by what she’d just learned. “And Bruce took you in after that?”

“Well yah…you could kind of say that,” Jason replied as he picked at his French fries. “I was a pretty messed up kid, but Bruce saw something in me…something that he felt could be used for good I guess. He trained me to be Robin.

“All I know is that if it weren’t for him, I’d have been dead long ago. Well, actually I was dead and
brought back to life, but that’s a completely different story.”

She stared at him in unmistakable disbelief, trying to discern if he was telling her the truth or not. “You died and were brought back to life?” she asked.

“Yah, Joker beat me bloody with a crowbar, but it was the bomb he planted there that ended up killing me,” he revealed, his eyes growing distant with the horrible memory that still haunted his sleep at times. “Anyway, I was resurrected by Ra’s al Ghul.”

Artemis shook her head, feeling a sense of horror for what Jason had endured. She could hardly comprehend what he’d been through in his life. She had a feeling that there was a lot more that he hadn’t told her, several details and events that had been left out. Maybe someday he’d feel as though he could tell her everything.

“I’m sorry, Jason,” she softly replied. “I had no idea that you’ve had such a difficult life.”

Jason shrugged an indifferent shoulder, suddenly feeling a little awkward and embarrassed. He didn’t want pity or sympathy. He’d survived some terrible things in his life, but that was all behind him. Now, he was focusing on this second chance that he had with his family and his life.

“Okay,” Jason said, straightening his shoulders and clearing his throat. “We need to meet up with Batman and let him know what we found. He’s going to want to get working on this clue right away.”

“He’s definitely not going to be very happy about this,” Artemis uttered with a sigh.

“No, but it will hopefully blow this case wide open.”

**Gotham; August 12th, 23:43 EST**

Using his elbow, Robin slammed it into the gut of a thug, causing him to double over with a groan. He grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, lifting him up and driving his knee into his abdomen before tossing him aside like a bag of garbage. Turning, he narrowly missed a pipe to his head, ducking at the last second and coming up with a fist that connected with the guy’s jaw.

The upper cut stunned the guy senseless, the lead pipe dropping from his grip. He stumbled back, trying to wipe away the blood that was trickling from the corner of his mouth. Robin followed up with a series of kicks and strikes that ended with the guy handcuffed on the ground unconscious.

Robin spun around, lifting his leg and slamming his boot into the chest of another one. He threw an electrified bola, watching it as it wrapped around his opponent and taking him down. He pulled out a batarang, letting it fly with exact precision. It nailed a guy with a shiv right between the eyes as he tried to take out Batman.

Batman whirled on his heel, delivering a punishing kick square into a gang member’s chest. Another one jumped on Batman’s back in a futile attempt to take the Dark Knight down. Batman grabbed him and threw him off his back and straight into a brick wall.

Looking around at all the bodies lying on the ground, Batman found the fight was finally over. He hated gang fights the most, this one between Two-Face’s gang and the Joker’s men. At the same time, they’d just reduced the number of two of the worst gangs in Gotham by at least ten each.

Batman turned at the sound of clapping, preparing for another fight as Robin appeared at his side to assist. They both relaxed as Red Hood and Artemis appeared from the shadows. “Great performance guys,” Jason said. “You could’ve saved a few for us, you know.”
“What are you doing here?” Batman demanded to know, using the edge of his gauntlet to wipe a thin trail of blood from his chin.

“We found…” Jason began only to receive a sharp elbow to the ribs, a groan escaping and forcing him to rethink his words. “Artemis found a clue in Pallock’s suite at the embassy.”

Batman frowned as he closed the distance between them. “What is it?”

“It’s a letter of authentication for a gold ring,” Artemis informed them.

“What kind of ring?” Batman questioned them, taking the offered paper from the Amazon.

“It’s supposed to be a gold ring that was believed to belong to Hades himself,” Jason replied.

Bruce’s head shot up from the letter in his hands, his heart beginning to pound a little harder with the unexpected news. If what was going on was in anyway related to Diana’s father, then they were in a great deal of trouble. There was no telling what Hades was up to or what he wanted with Diana and their family.

“Hades?” Robin exclaimed in shock. “Then this could have something to do with Wonder Woman.”

“Exactly,” Jason agreed, glancing down at a thug that was being to come around. He kicked him square in the jaw, taking him out.

Artemis just glanced at him in amusement, knowing she would’ve done the exact same thing. “If Hades is somehow at the heart of this, we need to contact Queen Hippolyta immediately. They’ll need to reinforce security at the Gates of the Underworld,” she commented.

Bruce felt a shiver of dread race up his spine with the thought of Hades possibly escaping. The thought of the Greek god of the Underworld coming anywhere near his family nearly made his legs buckle with terror. It was always a faint lingering fear that lived in the back of his mind regardless of the fact that Hades was securely locked away.

It was something that he knew could always be a possibility, one that he had actually considered and created a contingency plan for. That plan, however, was not fully developed nor had it been tested in simulations. It looked like he was going to have push that project to the forefront now.

“Good work, Artemis,” Batman muttered as he stared at the letter, dread coursing through his system. Things had just gotten dramatically worse than he had first believed.

“Do you think Ivan’s death is tied to the threats to Diana?” Artemis asked.

“I’m not sure,” Batman stated with a shake of his head. “Aresia or whoever wants us to believe it’s Aresia has been quiet ever since the stabbing. All of her attacks have been focused solely on Diana. To suddenly change tactics and go after an ambassador doesn’t fit. It leads me to believe they are two separate cases going on.”

“Yah but killing an ambassador would be a sure-fire way of getting the embassy shut down and forcing Diana out as ambassador,” Robin commented.

“I’m beginning to think now that it’s just a strange coincidence that Ivan was killed at the same time as these threats,” Batman said, his lips thinning into a grim line. “It looks like Ivan got himself into some sort of illegal trouble.”
“What’s going on?”

Batman fought the urge to hide the authentication letter as Diana approached the group. He had learned long ago in their marriage that trying to hide things from her only caused more trouble and heartache. Besides, if this involved her father, she deserved to know. She could also provide valuable information about how to stop him if he was trying to escape.

Batwoman came to a stop on the either side of Robin, her brow furrowing at the assembled group. It was obvious by the suffocating tension in the air that whatever had happened was not good. On top of that, Bruce’s back was ramrod straight, his entire countenance foreboding. Something had definitely upset him.

“Hey, BW,” Robin greeted her with a grin, trying to ease the tension that surrounded them. “How was the East End?”

“Quiet for a change,” Batwoman informed them. “Catwoman has been keeping a tight leash on things over there. What’s going on, Batman?”

Batman knew they needed to move this meeting to some place more secure. “I don’t want to discuss this here. Meet back in the cave to discuss things.”

Diana stared at Batman for a long moment, not liking the horrible feeling of dread that began washing over her. Robin, Jason, and Artemis all took off, leaving Batman and Batwoman standing there alone. He closed the distance between them, tucking the letter into his utility belt.

“Let’s go,” he softly told her.

“It’s still early,” she pointed out. “It’s just after midnight. What about Gotham?”

“This is more important,” he revealed. “I’ll have Oracle watching the police bands. She’ll notify us if anything happens that we need to intervene. Right now, we have a bigger problem to deal with.”

Diana glanced down at the nearly two dozen gang members lying unconscious on the ground. If Bruce was this adamant about returning home, then whatever was happening was going to be their worst nightmare. She shuddered to think what it could be.

“Come on,” he encouraged her, placing his hand on her forearm before leading her back to the Batmobile. “I promise I’ll tell you everything.”

“Fine,” Diana relented.

She had considered swinging by the embassy later to check on it, but there really wasn’t any reason to. Ambassadors Nosh and Welich had both returned home after being cleared by the police. There wasn’t anything to check on except the staff that stayed there.

**Batcave; August 13th, 01:26 EST**

Bruce sat before his computer array as he typed at a furious pace, his mind racing in a thousand different directions that all led to nothing but more worry. He could feel Diana pacing behind him, wishing that she would talk to him, but she had pretty much shut down since the moment she found out about Hades’ ring.

He could practically feel her fear and rage rolling off her. He shared it with her. He knew she was afraid for their family’s safety as well as that of the world’s. The amount of sheer devastation and chaos that Hades could unleash would be unimaginable, the thought of him getting his hands on
their children threatening his sanity.

Tim, Jason, and Artemis sat a few feet away in some chairs eating sandwiches that Alfred had prepared when he found the entire clan had returned. Alfred was always the best at shifting into emergency mode when the family was in trouble, making sure that everyone was properly fed and taken care of so they could do whatever they needed to do to solve the crisis at hand.

Releasing a frustrated sigh, Bruce sat back in his chair, turning back to face the trio to his right. He hoped that Diana would end up joining in, providing valuable information that they so desperately needed right now in regard to Hades.

“I checked it out and it appears the Ring of Hades was in a museum in Arisinia,” Bruce revealed, raking his fingers back through his hair.

“Was there?” Artemis questioned, picking up on the past tense.

“It was reported missing the day before Ambassador Pallock left Arisinia for Gotham,” Bruce continued.

“So, Ivan stole the Ring of Hades,” Jason surmised, “but the question is why and who did he sell it too? There’s gotta be a reason that someone wants it so badly that they would kill him over it.”

“I think it has to be Talia al Ghul,” Tim volunteered. “She’s the most likely suspect. The shooting fits perfectly with the al Ghul’s and the League of Assassins.”

“I agree,” Jason stated, nodding his head. “It fits with them.”

“Yes, but is Talia responsible for the threats against Diana?” Artemis questioned them.

“I don’t see Talia being behind the threats,” Tim said with a frown. “I think it’s two separate suspects. Talia is behind the murder, but someone else…possibly Aresia is behind the threats.”

“I don’t know,” Jason responded with a shake of his head as he grabbed another sandwich. “I can see Talia threatening Diana in an effort to get her out of Bruce’s life. She’s always wanted Bruce all to herself and Diana stands in the way of that.”

“But she’s being threatened at the embassy,” Artemis pointed out. “Someone wants Diana gone and the embassy shut down. Why in the name of Ra would Talia al Ghul want the embassy closed? That makes absolutely no sense.”

“Maybe it’s just a diversion tactic of Talia’s to keep the suspicion off her,” Jason suggested.

“That would kind of make sense I guess,” Tim thoughtfully replied, pausing to take a drink of his pop. “Talia knows that Bruce would automatically suspect her if Diana was being threatened. Threatening her as well as the embassy would throw suspicions off her.”

“So how does this Ring of Hades play into it?” Artemis asked. “None of this makes any sense.”

Bruce glanced at Diana who continued to pace back and forth across the platform, her forearm across her abdomen and her elbow resting on top of it with her fist beneath her chin. She seemed to be lost in her own thoughts, but Bruce knew better. She was listening to all the theories being discussed, processing it and trying to work through it all for herself. She was definitely more than just a pretty face. She was highly intelligent, a fact that many discounted or forgot.

“Diana,” Bruce called to her. “What do you think?”
Diana stopped in her tracks, crossing her arms against her chest. “I don’t know what to think anymore,” she honestly admitted. “I agree that the murder fits with Talia, but these threats don’t. How would she have gotten her hands on the dagger I gave Aresia or my doll from my childhood that I had left on Themyscira?”

“She has a good point,” Tim noted.

“Could an Amazon be working with Talia to take out Diana and get their hands on this ring?” Jason proposed.

“It’s not beyond reach,” Artemis confessed with a deepening frown.

“How could Talia have gotten to the island?” Diana demanded to know. “It’s hidden and magically protected. I don’t know how she could have found a way on it.”

“Do you think Circe could somehow be involved?” Artemis asked.

“I don’t know,” Diana replied, shaking her head as she pursed his lips. “I don’t know what to think about it. I feel as though there are multiple players involved in this but knowing who is responsible for what is going to be difficult to sort out until we know more.”

“I agree with Diana,” Bruce stated. “It’s going to be difficult to sort out who is involved in what until we know more. What do you know about this Ring of Hades, princess?”

Diana turned to Bruce, her blue eyes twin infernos of fury over the possibility of her father escaping his prison. She’d always felt as though another confrontation between father and daughter was an inevitable occurrence. Now, it appeared it was coming sooner than she’d expected.

Before Diana could respond, the transporter fired up, altering them to someone’s arrival. All of them turned to find Nightwing stepping off the transport pad, quickly making his way towards them. “Sorry I’m late,” he said as he took the steps up to the platform two at a time. “What have I missed and are there any sandwiches left?”

Jason immediately picked up the half-eaten platter of sandwiches, placing it possessively on his lap. “Nope, none for you, Dicky boy,” he told his older brother.

“Funny…hand over the sandwiches and no one will get hurt, Jas,” Dick responded with a frown as he grabbed a seat next to Tim, Artemis handing him a sandwich. “What’s going on?”

“Hades is involved. Boom…you’re up to speed,” Tim told him. “Okay, mom. Tell us about the Ring of Hades.”

“The Ring of Hades allows the wearer to fully control the army of the dead,” she revealed.

“But doesn’t Hades already rule the dead with or without the ring?” Tim asked.

“Yes, because he is in the Underworld,” Diana explained. “Away from the Underworld, the ring gives him even more power, allowing him to manipulate the dead and giving him an endless supply of warriors that he can raise from their graves.”

“I definitely don’t like the sound of that,” Jason decided as took another sandwich.

“So right now, whoever has the ring can control the dead?” Artemis questioned her, feeling trepidation rise.
“No, not yet…not without the rest of the pieces,” Diana clarified.

Bruce sat up with his wife’s revelation, his heart nearly stuttering out of rhythm. “The rest of the pieces of what?” he demanded to know with his famous Batman growl.

“The rest of Hades’ weapons and armor,” she told him, studying him carefully to see how he was going to handle what she was about to tell him. “They were scattered all over the Earth after Hades was locked away in the Underworld to make certain that no one could reassemble the various pieces.”

“And what would happen if all the pieces were reassembled,” Bruce asked, afraid to breathe for fear that the nightmare he was imagining was going to prove to be a possible reality.

Diana looked at Bruce, her expression that of a warrior bent on victory. “The bearer of these artifacts becomes filled with the essence of Hades himself and wields his power.”

“Ra, help us all,” Artemis softly gasped.

Bruce sat back in his chair, tilting his head back to stare at the dark void of the cave ceiling as he released a low breath. This was the worst possible outcome and now he had no doubt that was going to be the end result once all was said and done. His greatest fear was Ra’s al Ghul getting his hands on these pieces.

“Bruce…” Diana began, her frantic gaze finding Bruce’s as their eyes abruptly met with sudden realization.

“The Bident,” Bruce and Diana both said in unison.

“Whoa…what Bident?” Dick asked, looking from Diana to Bruce and back again.

“Hades’ Bident is on display at the Gotham Museum,” Diana revealed. “Bruce and I were able to acquire it for the Gotham Museum a couple of years ago.”

“We need to go…now,” Bruce urgently stated as he grabbed his cowl and gauntlets before leaping out of his chair.

“What do you want us to do?” Tim yelled as Diana and Bruce raced towards the Batmobile.

“Start researching all of Hades’ armor and weapons,” Bruce yelled back. “Track them down and locate them before Ra’s does.”

“So, we’re sure Ra’s is behind this?” Jason asked.

“It reeks of Ra’s al Ghul,” Tim groaned as he flopped back in his chair.

“And any time Ra’s is involved it is not a good thing,” Dick reminded him.

*Gotham Museum; August 13th, 03:01 EST*

“Dammit,” Bruce growled as he and Batwoman raced from the Batmobile to find the security alarms already blaring at the Gotham Museum.

Bruce silently cursed to himself, furious that he hadn’t anticipated something like this happening sooner. He should’ve stayed on Talia day and night, watching her every move to find out what she was really up to by showing up in Gotham after all of these years.

He’d been too consumed with threats to his wife as well as trying to come to terms with Damian’s
existence that he hadn’t given Talia the attention that she had deserved. As a daughter of Ra’s al Ghul, he should’ve known she was here for something more than a simple father-son reunion.

Racing up the steps, Diana kicked the door open to find red lights flashing and security alarms blaring. She ran towards the Greek artifacts display that she and Bruce had gradually been building with donations over the last few years since getting married.

She swore to Hera that she would not stop until Talia and Ra’s paid for their crimes if they were truly behind all of this. She would hunt them down to the ends of the Earth and the Underworld below if she had to in order to keep them from resurrecting her father’s spirit and unleashing him on the world.

She could feel her husband following closely behind her, always by her side in every aspect of her life. This was no different. They would fight this evil together and they would win. There was no other outcome that was acceptable to her.

Her father would never get anywhere near any of her children as long as there was breath in her body. He was going to have to get through her first.

Approaching the Greek artifacts display, Diana came to a dead stop, her breath catching in her throat as she stared in shock at it. Batman came to stand beside her, his throat clenching tightly as he too stared at the glass case where Hades’ Bident was on display.

It was gone.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: BAM! This fic isn't called Family Ties just because of Bruce & Damian! Hades is now involved. Can things get any worse for Bruce and Diana?

So, I'm taking some liberties here. There really are some pieces of armor that Hades has, but I'm adding some items of my own. I've created this theory that all combined, Hades' spirit can be unleashed from the Underworld. Hope you all enjoy this unexpected turn of events! :)

UP NEXT: Have you been missing the Justice League in this fic? Are you itching to see some more League involvement? Well, your wish is my command! Next up, the League gets involved. Also, Donna visits Artemis and the kids at the manor.

Thank you all for the love and support! You guys totally make me smile with your reviews. :)
Wally yawned as he stretched his arms over his head, not bothering to hide the fact that he was more than a little tired. It had been a long night between chasing Captain Cold all over Central City and having to pull a four-hour monitor duty shift until seven. He had hoped to grab a couple hours of sleep before heading into work this morning, but that hope had been dashed when Batman had called an emergency Founders’ meeting this morning.

Of course, if Bats was calling an emergency meeting then he knew it wasn’t going to be anything good and he wasn’t going to be getting any sleep any time soon.

Yawning once more, he reached for his forth cup of coffee, hoping another jolt of caffeine would help, but it was proving futile. “Okay, why are we all here so early in the morning?” Wally asked his gathered friends and teammates. “And where is Bats? He’s the one that called this meeting. I think we should leave before he—”

“I’m right here,” the Dark Knight rasped something otherworldly, nearly scaring the scarlet speedster out of his chair.

“Just wanted to make sure nothing had happened to you, ol’ buddy,” Flash said with a grin as Batman and Wonder Woman took their respective seats at the table.

“I called an emergency meeting because we have a potentially dangerous situation on our hands,” Batman announced, getting down to business. “Since this originated in Gotham, I wouldn’t normally bring this to the League’s attention, but my wife…” He paused to level Diana with a menacingly dark Batglare. “…insisted that we bring it to the Founders’ attention.”

“We know who wears the pants in that marriage,” Flash muttered to John.

Batman glowered at the scarlet speedster, his jaw clenched tightly. John smacked Wally on the back of his head for Bruce, Flash rubbing his head. “Hey!”

Bruce glanced at Diana out of the corner of his eye, his cowl hiding the fact. While he still didn’t agree with the decision to involve the League, he knew deep down it was the right thing to do. If Ra’s did happen to get his hands on all the pieces and release Hades from the Underworld, they were going to need every single member of the Justice League as well as the Amazons to lock him away again.

“What’s going on?” Superman asked, picking up on the tension in his best friends as he leaned forward in his seat, hands clasped before him on the conference table.

“We believe that Ra’s al Ghul is in the process of obtaining all the pieces of Hades’ armor as well as his weapons,” Batman revealed.

“That definitely can’t be good,” John said with a shake of his head.
“No, it’s not,” Batman confirmed with a frown, the muscles in his jaw tensing.

“Once he possesses all the necessary pieces and puts them on, he will be able to summon Hades’ spirit from the Underworld,” Diana informed them, her expression grim. “Hades will be able to live through Ra’s.”

“Definitely not good,” Wally concurred with a visible shudder.

“I take it Ra’s al Ghul has already obtained some of the necessary items,” J’onn surmised.

“Talia recently stole the Ring of Hades and his Bident,” Diana revealed. “We are in the process of tracking down the other artifacts to confirm their locations and if they are still there.”

Her fury was barely contained and nearly palpable, seeping through the room and causing the tension to spike. They all knew and fully understood the ramifications of Hades escaping the Underworld. They also knew they would do everything in their power to keep Bruce, Diana, and their family safe.

“We do know an amulet is hidden in a cave in Greece,” Batman informed them. “The Helm of Darkness is rumored to be somewhere on Mykonos but has yet to be completely confirmed.”

“What else does that leave?” Shayera asked, urgency lacing her voice. She was already itching to get her hands on Talia and Ra’s al Ghul and make them suffer for causing her friends pain.

“A pair of gauntlets, a belt, and a shield,” Diana replied. “There may or may not be a breastplate, but I need to confer with my mother on the veracity of that particular item and any others that might be missing.”

“All right,” Superman said, ready to end this before it could fully begin. “What do we need to do?”

“Diana is going to return to Themyscira to talk to her mother in person and see what she can find out from her gods,” Bruce stated. “She’s also going to Mykonos to find the Helmet of Darkness.”

“What are you going to do?” John asked.

“I’m going to Greece to get the amulet before Talia can get her hands on it,” Bruce responded.

“Where is Talia now?” Clark questioned him. “Isn’t she still in Gotham with Damian?”

“No,” Bruce said with a shake of his head. “After discovering Hades’ Bident stolen from the Gotham Museum, Diana and I went straight to her hotel suite. She was gone along with all of her things.”

Clark didn’t like the sound of this. “Where’s Damian?”

“He’s staying at the manor with us for now,” Bruce replied. “He doesn’t know that she’s gone yet.”

“Wait…wait,” Wally suddenly interjected, holding up his hands to halt this conversation from progressing any further. “I am so confused. Who is Damian and what does he have to do with any of this?”

“Damian is Bruce’s ten-year-old son that he shares with Talia,” Diana evenly stated, but Bruce easily picked up on the underlying tension in her voice. He knew it was difficult for her and yet she had been so accepting of his son into their family. He didn’t think he could love her anymore for it.
“What?” Wally cried in shock.

“Oh, hell,” John muttered under his breath, his hand moving to cover his mouth as he tried to process this unexpected revelation.

Shayera immediately looked at Diana, trying her best to read her friend’s demeanor, but it was difficult to ascertain whether her fury with Ra’s was in any way connected to Talia and the son that she shared with Bruce. She knew if Vixen suddenly walked in with a son that she shared with John she would definitely not handle it well.

Diana briefly met Shayera’s intent gaze, not wanting to discuss it right now, but she knew the Thanagarian would not let it go any time soon. There would no doubt be a private discussion between the two friends after the Founders’ meeting.

“I’m going with Diana to Themyscira,” Shayera abruptly announced, taking everyone by surprise.

“What?” John asked, stunned as he turned to stare at his wife.

“She can’t go alone,” Shayera decided, turning his attention to her friend. “It’s not safe if Hades is on the verge of escaping. Besides, you could run into trouble on Mykonos trying to get the Helm of Darkness. You’ll need someone watching your back.”

“I’m perfectly fine going alone,” Diana spat out the words like venom. “Besides, it’ll be Talia needing someone to protect her from me once I get my hands on her.”

“Still, you could use the company and I need some time away from the kids,” Shayera stated, refusing to back down.

Bruce had to admit he was somewhat relieved that someone would be going with Diana to Themyscira and Mykonos. If the Amazons truly were behind the threats to her, then returning to her home island could prove to be a deadly move. It would give the rebels a prime opportunity to try to take Diana out once and for all. If Circe or Aresia was involved in this in some way, she was going to need backup.

“Fine,” John said. “I’ll go with Batman to Greece then.”

“I don’t need—” Batman began only to be interrupted by the Man of Steel.

“Good, it’s all settled then,” Superman said, not wanting to give Bruce a chance to argue about it. “I think we need to meet again once those two pieces have been recovered so we can settle on our next move.”

“Diana, what will happen if Ra’s only has a few of the items?” J’onn inquired. “Can he still summon some of Hades’ power or influence?”

“He can garner some of his power, but not the full extent,” she replied. “The more items he possesses the greater his power will become. The greatest asset to him will be the Helm of Darkness. It holds the greatest power.”

“Can this become a permanent situation?” Superman questioned her.

“If Ra’s wears it for too long, Hades’ foothold in the world of the living will become too strong to break,” she informed them. “Ra’s will become Hades’ permanent host and Ra’s will be lost forever.”
“That’s a no-win situation,” Wally grumbled. “We finally get rid of Ra’s only to have Hades in his place? We need to find a way to send both of them to the Underworld.”

Diana stood to her feet, her expression fierce and her blue eyes blazing brightly. “That’s exactly what I intend to do,” she announced, her steel-like expression falling on the Thanagarian. “We leave in fifteen minutes.”

“Okay, meeting adjourned,” Superman decided as he too stood to his feet. “Keep us informed on your progress. The rest of us will stay on standby. Call if you need back up.”

Batman stood as well, his hand moving to gently grip his wife’s elbow. “A moment before you leave, princess,” he softly said to her.

“That’s our cue to leave,” Flash readily decided, racing from the room and directly to his quarters for some sleep.

“Let’s go check on the kids in daycare before we take off too,” John suggested, taking Shayera’s hand.

“I’ll have Dinah and Ollie on standby for the kids while we’re gone,” she told him.

“Better idea than Uncle Wally,” John agreed as they headed for the conference room door. “Last time he babysat, we practically had to peel Rex off the ceiling with all the sugar he loaded him up with.”

“Be safe, my friends, and call if you need assistance,” J’onn said before phasing through the floor.Clark approached them and placed a hand on both of his friends’ shoulders. “I’m sorry this is happening to you guys, but I promise we’ll do everything in our power to stop it.”

“Thanks, Kal,” Diana replied with a forced smile.

“Do you need me to check in on Alfred and the kids?” Clark asked.

“No, Artemis is staying with them,” Bruce informed him, smirking to himself as he thought back on how well that conversation had gone.

Artemis had not been the least bit happy about being told she was staying at home with Alfred and the children instead of going to Themyscira with Diana. It taken quite a bit of coaxing from both him and Diana before the Bana-Mighdall Amazon had agreed to the decision. The children had to come first especially if there was any chance their grandfather was going to try to make an appearance.

“Well, let me know if you need anything,” Clark said.

“We will,” Bruce replied as the Kryptonian exited the conference room, leaving them all alone.

Removing his cowl, Bruce drew a deep breath, Diana’s hand coming to rest against his cheek. “It’ll be all right…I promise,” she gently said, gazing into the piercing blue depths filled with overt worry staring back at her.

His eyes momentarily fell closed, praying that she was right. He had always feared Hades escaping from the Underworld and now that fear was on the verge of being realized. He swore on his life his father-in-law would not get his hands on his children or his wife.
“I know,” he lied. “Just promise me you’ll be careful especially on Themyscira. There are Amazons there that don’t believe in what you and your mother are trying to do. They may try to attack you while you’re there in order to keep you from returning to Gotham and the embassy.”

“They wouldn’t dare,” she ground out with unwavering determination, her hand falling away from his face as her shoulders slumped slightly. “But…I will still be careful.”

“Call me as soon as you leave Themyscira and let me know what Hippolyta said,” he told her.

“I will,” she promised, her forefinger repeatedly poking him firmly in the chest. “You be careful too and call me as soon as you get the amulet. I don’t trust Talia. No matter what her schemes entail you are always there at the very heart of it in her mind. You will always be her end goal no matter what plan her father devises.”

He took her forefinger in his hand, bringing it to his lips to gently kiss the tip of it. “I promise,” he murmured, wrapping his arms around her waist and drawing her to him. He buried his face in her hair, drawing comfort from her. “Why does it feel like I’m saying goodbye forever?”

“You’re not, Bruce,” she reassured him as she pulled back, her lips grazing his. “I’ll meet you back in the cave before dinner tonight.”

“You better come home to me, princess,” he warned her, his tone haunting and laced with worry.

“I know you don’t agree with this plan, but it’s the only course of action we have right now,” she reminded him, “and I will see you tonight.”

Bruce tightened his hold on his wife, his lips connecting with hers in a searing kiss which she readily matched with equal passion. Her fingers slid up along the back of his neck and into his hair as they communicated with their mouths and tongues what they felt for each other, reassuring one another.

She nipped and suckled on his bottom lip before finally pulling away. “I love you, Bruce,” she whispered, kissing him once more. “I’ll meet you back in the cave and then we can continue this.”

“I look forward to it…and I love you too,” he said, pressing a kiss to her forehead before finally releasing his hold on her.

He replaced his cowl before walking out of the conference room together, both of their hearts heavy with worry about what the future held for them and their family. Diana didn’t like being away from home especially knowing that Kaia still had a cold and Nicholas was going to be starting preschool soon, but she fully understood the urgency and necessity of the situation.

Her father would not be seeing his grandchildren…of that Diana was absolutely certain.

Wayne Manor; August 13th, 12:10 EST

Entering Wayne Manor, Donna found the historic home to be eerily quiet which was highly unusual these days with the young Wayne children running about and the older ones coming and going at all times of the day and night. “Hello?” she called. “Is anyone home?”

Receiving no answer, she made her way to the kitchen, knowing that someone would no doubt be in there between Alfred’s love for cooking and baking and Tim’s insatiable appetite. Entering the kitchen, she was surprised to find it empty as well.

She placed her hands on her hips, looking about as she tried to figure out where everyone was at
this time of day. Hearing laughter, Donna’s lips curled into a smile. Her niece and nephew’s laugh was always contagious, cheering up the darkest of moods no matter the situation.

Making her way to the sliding glass door, she walked outside to find Alfred and Artemis watching Nicholas and Kaia in the swimming pool. “Miss Donna,” Alfred greeted her with a warm smile. “What a pleasant surprise. Please, do come join us.”

“You had me worried for a moment,” she replied as she settled into a lounge chair beside Artemis. “When I didn’t hear anyone in the house and found no one in the kitchen, I was beginning to think something had happened.”

“Oh, not all,” Alfred reassured her. “The children were anxious to get into the pool earlier than usual today.”

“DD!” Kaia excitedly yelled, waving at her aunt. “Come swim wif us.”

“I’m sorry, kiddo, but I didn’t bring my swimsuit,” she told her.

“I’m sure Miss Diana has one you can borrow,” Alfred suggested.

“I think I’ll just watch for now but thank you.”

“Watch me, DD!” Nicholas called, scrambling out of the swimming pool and running towards the diving board.

“Master Nicholas, no running,” Alfred reminded him.

Nicholas instantly slowed down, being carefully as he climbed up onto the diving board. He looked up at his aunt, making sure that she was watching before closing his eyes and jumping into the pool. He popped up out of the water, swimming over to the edge.

“Good job, Nicholas,” Donna praised him. “When did you learn to do that?”

“He just learned to do that last week,” Alfred informed her.

“Yah, Mama taught me,” Nicholas said, his little hands gripping the edge of the pool as he peered up at her. Water dripped from his hair and his eyelashes as he looked at them with eyes that were so much like his mother’s. “I don’t need floaties anymore.”

Donna chuckled softly with his enthusiasm. “I see that,” she replied. “You’re just like a fish.”

“Like Uncle Arthur,” Nicholas clarified.

“I do believe it’s time to come out of the pool for lunch,” Alfred announced.

“No, Pappós,” Kaia uttered with a scowl reminiscent of her father. “I not done.”

“We should check on your kitten, Miss Kaia,” he coaxed. “I’m sure she’s hungry too.”

“Otay,” Kaia ultimately decided as she paddled her way over to the edge of the pool.

Alfred leaned over the edge of the pool, picking her up out of the water and handing her off to Donna who stood ready with her towel. She pulled off Kaia’s swim vest before wrapping her up in her towel, picking her up in her arms.

“Come, Master Nicholas,” Alfred said. “I have your lunch all ready for you.”
“Can we swim later?” he asked as he climbed out of the pool.

“Maybe while Miss Kaia is taking her nap,” he suggested.

“No, me no take no naps,” Kaia stated as Donna dried her hair, raven curls sticking out everywhere.

“You have a cold, Kaia,” Donna reminded her. “You need your sleep.”

“Armis, take naps too?” Kaia asked, looking at the Amazon.

Donna laughed as she glanced at Artemis who was clearly unsure how best to answer that. “Artemis takes naps too sometimes.”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she shook her head. “Why do you lie to the children?” she muttered under her breath.

“I’m sure you have taken a nap at least once in your adult life so it’s not an actual lie,” Donna told her as she set Kaia down. “Besides, sometimes it’s the best way to get cooperation when the children have Bruce and Diana’s personalities.”

“You have to see my puppy Ace,” Nicholas told Donna, running over and taking her hand to lead her inside. “He’s getting big.”

“You get started on lunch with Alfred and Kaia,” Donna said. “I’ll be right in. I want to talk to Artemis for a minute.”


Kaia followed Nicholas and Alfred inside, leaving the two Amazons alone together. “What is it?” Artemis asked.

“Just wondered how you were doing,” Donna replied, sitting down next to her.

“Annoyed that Bruce and Diana insisted I stay here instead of going with Diana,” Artemis said with a huff of irritation. “Diana could be walking into an assassination attempt by returning to Themyscira right now. It’s far too dangerous for her to return home until we know who is behind these threats to her.”

“Well, she hasn’t received anymore threats since Pallock’s murder so that’s a good thing,” Donna decided. “Maybe this will be the end of it.”

Artemis frowned, an eyebrow arching in disbelief. “I highly doubt that. They don’t believe the same person who murdered Pallock is the same one behind the threats to Diana.”

“I heard,” Donna confessed with a disheartened sigh. “Still, I know staying here at the manor with the kids probably isn’t what you had planned on doing today, but it’s a huge relief to Bruce and Diana knowing you’re here with Nick and Kaia.”

“I guess,” Artemis grumbled. “I’m just not used to sitting and waiting for a possible attack to come. Besides, I have a sneaking suspicion that Alfred is quite capable of defending himself or the children. I have a feeling that he’s quite dangerous.”

Donna smiled at her friend as she leaned back in her chair. “You don’t know the half of it. He used to serve in the British Secret Service. He’s a highly trained former spy.”
Artemis snorted with the revelation. “I suspected as much,” she replied. “How is Diana? Is she well?”

“I haven’t talked to her since early this morning.”

“Yes, but you two can feel each other’s emotions,” Artemis reminded her. “Is she safe?”

Donna sighed as she thought about it, pulling a stray ebony lock back up into her ponytail. “She’s beyond furious,” she began, her lips pursing with worry. “She’s very worried…terrified that Hades is going to escape the Underworld and come after her family.”

“Which is why I should be with her right now,” Artemis bit out with a fierce scowl.

“By protecting her children, you’re protecting Diana,” Donna tried to explain to her. “Her family is her life. To lose them would be akin to death to her.”

Artemis sat up a little straighter in her chair, squaring her shoulders as her gaze wandered over the beautiful grounds of Wayne Manor. “You’re right,” she reluctantly agreed. “I would not want Diana to go through that pain. I have seen how dearly she loves Bruce and her family and they love her just as much.”

“Speaking of Bruce and the children, where’s Damian?” Donna asked.

“He’s in the entertainment room playing video games I believe,” Artemis revealed. “He didn’t want to swim with the little ones. I think he prefers to be alone.”

“So, he still doesn’t know his mother left him?”

“No, Bruce has not told him yet.”

“He’s going to figure it out sooner or later,” Donna pressed. “Don’t you think that someone should tell him?”

“Bruce is going to talk to him tonight when he returns from Greece.”

“Poor kid,” Donna said with a shake of her head, her eyes filled with sorrow. “I can’t begin to imagine how this is going to affect him.”

Artemis stood to her feet. “He’ll have to learn to adapt,” she told her. “He has a good family now. He needs to accept that.”

Donna stood up as well, following Artemis inside. “That’s going to be easier said than done.”

Entering the kitchen, they found Alfred placing sandwiches on the table. Nicholas entered with Damian following behind him. “Damian,” Donna greeted him. “It’s good to see you again. How have you been?”

“Fine,” he evenly stated as he took a seat at the table. “When is my father returning?”

“He said he’d be back later this afternoon,” Artemis told him.

Damian stared at her for a moment before finally accepting the answer that he’d been given instead of questioning her on it. He took a couple of sandwiches from the platter as Kaia entered the kitchen with her kitten in her arms.

“Peanut is hungry, Pappós,” Kaia said, lifting her kitten up to him.
Donna giggled as she crouched down by her niece. “Kaia, how do you know Peanut is hungry?”

“She told me,” she replied, her eyebrows furrowed as if the answer was completely obvious.

“She told you?” Alfred repeated in disbelief.

“Kaia thinks her kitten can talk to her,” Nicholas announced before taking a bite of his sandwich.

“Peanut told me,” Kaia insisted with an expression so reminiscent of her father. “She’s hungry.”

“I believe you, Kai,” Donna said, running her fingers through her raven curls. “Did you know your mommy can talk to animals too?”

“What?” Alfred questioned her.

“That can’t happen,” Damian stated, unconvinced.

“Diana has been gifted with the ability to communicate with animals,” Donna told them. “It wouldn’t be beyond reason that Kaia can too.”

“Well, then, Miss Kaia, what do you think your kitten wants to eat?” Alfred asked, kneeling down and taking the kitten from her.

“Milk,” Kaia decided.

“I will get her some milk while you start your lunch,” Alfred promised her.

“Otay,” Kaia agreed.

“Didn’t see that coming,” Artemis mumbled as she joined the others at the table as Donna put Kaia in her booster seat.

“Nicholas was around Kaia’s age when he began displaying special abilities,” Donna told her.

“What can he do?” Damian asked, taken aback by the news.

“He can teleport himself from one place to another,” Donna revealed. “He also has advanced healing abilities. Cuts and breaks heal faster than normal and he doesn’t get as sick as often or for as long as others do.”

Damian stared at Nicholas, trying to process this new information. Nicholas seemed oblivious to the fact they were talking to him as he talked to Kaia about her kitten. “Can he do it now?”

“No, Bruce and J’onn created a special inhibitor that was implanted under his skin,” Donna explained. “It inhibits his abilities. They’ll remove the inhibitor when he’s old enough to control his gifts.”

“Okay, is there anything else going on around here that I need to know about?” Damian demanded to know, stunned by the things that he kept learning about this family.

Donna and Artemis shared a knowing look with Alfred, none of them about to divulge the fact that his mother had pretty much abandoned him after murdering an ambassador. Bruce was going to have to be the one to handle that painful discussion tonight.

Themyscira; August 13th, 18:13 GMT+2
Landing the invisible jet on the beach of Themyscira, Diana hadn’t realized how much she had missed home until this moment. She knew that Gotham was her real home, but Themyscira would always hold a special place in her heart no matter what transpired with the embassy and the Amazons who were secretly fighting the tides of change that were coming.

“Okay, from here on out, you are to update me every single day on what is going on in your life—no exceptions,” Shayera stated in no uncertain terms as she shot an irritated glare at her best friend, arms folded tightly against her chest. “I had no idea all of this chaos has been going on in your family. How am I supposed to help you if you don’t tell me what’s going on in your life?”

“I’m sorry, Shay,” Diana apologized as she unbuckled her seatbelt. “It’s just been so crazy lately with the threats, Talia and Damian’s sudden appearance, Artemis’s arrival, the embassy and the kids.”

“You know I’m more than happy to help you,” Shayera reminded her.

“I know,” Diana confessed with a weary sigh. She leaned forward, holding her head in her hands, her elbows resting on her thighs. “Nicholas is supposed to start preschool soon and I’m not even there to take him shopping for clothes or school supplies. Kaia is sick with a cold and I’m not there to take care of her. I’m a horrible mother, Shay.”

Shayera reached over, rubbing Diana’s back. “No, you’re not a horrible mother, Diana,” she reassured her. “You’re a great mother. You’re just also a superhero and an ambassador with responsibilities that try to interfere with life. You also have a husband who shares a son with a psychotic ecoterrorist’s daughter. It doesn’t help that Ra’s is trying to release your father from the Underworld.”

Diana groaned as she sat back in her seat, raking her fingers through her hair. “I seriously don’t think my life can possibly get any more complicated than it already is.”

“We’ll stop Ra’s,” Shayera promised her. “Stopping Ra’s will stop Hades. Then, we can focus on these threats being made against you.”

“I know I should be more worried about the threats, but I’m seriously not,” Diana admitted. “I can take care of myself even though Bruce isn’t entirely convinced. I know that he and Artemis have been conspiring behind my back about how best to keep me safe.”

Shayera laughed with the unexpected revelation. “Diana, you knew Bruce was a freaky paranoid when you married him,” she pointed out. “Did you honestly expect that to change over time?”

“No, I guess I just hoped that it would lessen at least a little,” she replied.

“It’s only because he’s so in love with you, Diana,” she reminded her. “It’s not that he doesn’t believe that you can’t take care of yourself. It’s just that can’t handle the thought of losing any of his loved ones so he tries his best to control every single circumstance, every outcome in order to avoid it. With Bruce, it’s always that outlier…that unforeseen situation or moment that wasn’t accounted for. That’s what keeps him up at night. That one moment when someone might take you away from him.”

“There’s always going to be that chance, Shay, but the same could be said for him too,” Diana answered her. “I can’t let myself think about it or I’ll go crazy with worry about him.”

“Well, you know Bruce is already a little wacked in the head,” Shayera teased her, trying to lighten her mood somewhat.
“No, he’s not,” Diana insisted with an affectionate smile gracing her lips as she stood to her feet. “He’s just…too smart for his own good. He thinks far too much.”

“Well, let’s get this over with,” Shayera stated as she followed her out of the plane.

“I thought you liked it here.”

“I do, but that was before I found out that your crazy sisters are probably the ones behind the threats being made against you.”

Diana shook her head, brushing her long hair behind her shoulder. “I can’t believe that my own sisters would actually attack me on Themyscira.”

“Diana, people will go to any lengths in order to protect something that they believe in…no matter who it hurts in the process.”

Diana swallowed hard past the unexpected lump that lodged in her throat with the thought of her very own sisters turning against her or her mother. It was unthinkable…unconceivable…but she knew it wasn’t impossible.

She watched as Phillipus made her way towards her with at least a dozen Amazon warriors behind her with spears and swords firmly in hand. It caused the fine hairs on the back of Diana’s neck to prickle with apprehension. Who could she trust here? Which sisters were on her side and who were against her?

“Princess Diana,” Phillipus greeted her with a grimness that only put Diana even more on edge. “It is good to see you again.”

“I need to speak with my mother right away,” Diana told her. She met the intense gazes of each one of her sisters that were staring at her in an attempt to read the thoughts and intents of each one’s heart. Those who were against them would die by her blade if necessary.

“Please, come with me, princess,” Phillipus told her, her gaze speaking far more than any words could at that moment.

Diana glanced at Shayera, silently telling her to stay close and alert. Shayera nodded almost imperceptibly in response, her hand falling to her mace hanging at her hip. They wordlessly followed Phillipus and the entourage of Amazons that escorted them towards the palace. This was definitely not the welcome that Diana had anticipated receiving.

Nearing the palace, Diana paused, pulling Phillipus to the side. “What is going on here?” she softly asked. She’d never required a personal escort to the palace before. “Is there something going on that I need to know about?”

Phillipus stared at the princess for a long moment as if weighing her words. “I believe you best speak with your mother, princess. She will be able to explain things.”

Diana’s lips pursed into a thin line, her forehead creased with growing fear as they continued inside the palace. Reaching the throne room, Diana found her mother standing by a large window, peering outside with her hands clasped behind her back.

“Mother?” Diana tentatively called to her.

Queen Hippolyta turned around to face her, forcing a smile to her face that never reached her sky-blue eyes. “Diana…Shayera,” she greeted them. “It is so good to see you both.”
“Mother, what’s going on here?” Diana demanded to know as she closed the distance between them, glancing back over her shoulder to find Phillipus standing guard with Vasiliki and Theophania.

“Nothing that you need to be worrying yourself about, my sun and stars,” the queen attempted to reassure her daughter. “Now, what brings you both here? Did you bring my grandchildren for a visit?”

“No, not this time,” Diana replied with a frown. “I’m afraid we have a dire situation on our hands.”

Hippolyta looked from Diana to Shayera and back again, their grim expressions not easing her worry in the least. “What has happened, Diana?” she demanded to know. “Is your family safe?”

“For now, they are, but Ra’s al Ghul is in the process of obtaining all the pieces of Hades’ armor as well as his weapons,” Diana informed her.

“Dear Hera…no,” Hippolyta uttered with a gasp, reaching out and grabbing hold of Diana’s hand and clutching it tightly. “He must not get his hands on those artifacts or the world will be doomed.”

“I know, mother,” Diana reassured her. “That’s why we’re here. We need any information you have about his armor, their whereabouts, and how to keep this from happening.”

“What has Ra’s al Ghul obtained thus far?”

“He has the Ring of Hades and the Bident,” Shayera revealed. “Batman and Green Lantern are on their way to Greece now to get Hades’ amulet before Talia or her father can get their hands on it.”

“You need to get to Mykonos right away and get the Helm of Darkness,” Hippolyta stated, urgency lacing her every word. “Once Ra’s gets his hands on it, all will be lost. Hades will consume him, pushing aside Ra’s conscious mind.”

“Is there anything else that you can tell us that would be helpful?” Shayera asked her.

“It has been rumored that there is a golden spear that belongs to Hades,” Hippolyta told them. “If someone is struck by the spear, they will be doomed to eternal death and pain in the deepest parts of Tartarus.”

“Lovely,” Shayera muttered under her breath.

“Also, with the Ring of Hades, Ra’s will be able to not only control the dead, but he’ll also be able to bend the living to his will,” the queen continued.

“This just keeps getting better and better,” Shayera murmured.

“Mother, what is going on here?” Diana asked her, keeping her voice low, but urgency permeated her eyes. “Why is there extra security around the palace? Why send an entourage to escort me to you?”

Hippolyta drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly as she rubbed her forehead. “It’s just a precaution, my sun and stars,” she replied. “I know how things have been escalating in Man’s World surrounding the opening of the embassy and that poor ambassador’s death. I didn’t want to take any chances with your visit.”

Diana’s frown deepened as she studied her mother. “Do you honestly think there will be a war among my sisters?”
Hippolyta forced a smile to her lips, doing her best to reassure her daughter, but it was a futile endeavor. “No, nothing like that,” she said with a shake of her head. “It’s just a few sisters who are still clinging to the old ways. I don’t believe they will attempt a coup or anything that drastic.”

“Still, mother, I can tell that you’re worried,” Diana pressed. “Maybe you should come stay at the manor with us until things settle down.”

“No,” Hippolyta quickly responded, her chin raised in regal authority. “I will not run and hide like some coward. I am queen of this island and therefore I will lead as I see fit. If there are those who do not agree, they are more than welcome to leave.”

Diana didn’t feel the least bit relieved or reassured with her mother’s words. Glancing at Phillipus, she could tell that the general was in full agreement with the queen, but there was a hint of something more in her eyes. Diana had a horrible feeling that things were going to get much worse before they got better here.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Things are going to continue to build. How are Bruce and Diana going to be able to handle it all and stop Ra’s?

UP NEXT: Batman and Green Lantern head to Greece while Diana and Shayera head to Mykonos. Will they be in time? Also, Bruce has a talk with Damian about his mother. How will Damian handle it?

Thanks for your reviews and support, guys!! Love this fandom so much! You all make it so much fun and a joy to write for. :)
Chapter 16

Greece; August 13th, 13:13 EST

Batman and Green Lantern exited the Javelin, both landing on the sandy shore with a soft thud of their boots. Batman’s inky cape draped around him like a wraith come to spread death and darkness upon the country despite the sun that was still shining in the sky above.

“Okay, where do we start?” John asked as he glanced around at their surroundings.

Batman had been less than his talkative self on the flight to Greece, but John had filled the silence with conversation ranging from everything from sports to the League to their mutual children. He had received a few one-word answers here and there, but he hadn’t really expected much more than that.

He knew that Bruce’s mind was consumed with thoughts and worries about his wife and family. He was certain if he was in Bruce’s shoes he wouldn’t be much better off. It was a wonder that Bruce even allowed him to tag along on this mission. It proved just how desperate he was to end this nightmare before it ever really began.

“Over there…in those rocks,” he informed him, pointing off at the rocks several yards away. “There are some caves hidden there.”

“All right then,” John replied with a nod. “Let’s go find us an amulet.”

Using his power ring, John encompassed Batman and himself in a green bubble, lifting them up into the air. Looking up from his handheld device, Batman frowned at him. “We could’ve walked you know.”

John shook his head in response. “No time,” he told him. “If the League of Assassins are involved in this search, we need to get there before they do.”

Batman knew that he was right, but he didn’t particularly like being carried when he was more than capable of moving under his own power. Still, it beat being carried like a child in the arms of Superman. Nothing was more humiliating than that.

“Let’s try that first cave over there,” Bruce said, pointing towards a cave entrance on the right side.

John’s dark-eyed gaze wandered over the landscape. There were at least three cave entrances that he could see and probably far more that he couldn’t. “So, we’ve got nothing to narrow down this search at all?”

“Nothing short of spotting Ra’s walking out of a cave with an amulet around his neck,” Batman stated, moving his handheld device over the area as John landed at the entrance of the first cave.

“Yah, let’s hope it doesn’t come to that,” John grimly decided.

Batman’s flashlight cast a wide beam of light across the cave floor and walls, hoping that
something would stand out and point them in the right direction. Unfortunately, Bruce had no idea what exactly they were looking for except for Hades’ Amulet. Diana hadn’t been able to provide much more information than that.

“I have a question about all of this,” John said as they began to search the cave. “How did all of these pieces of armor and weapons get scattered all over the world in the first place?”

“Evidently, when Hades was banished to the Underworld, his possessions were scattered and concealed all over the world to keep them from ever being reunited again,” Batman informed him.

Using his power ring, Green Lantern began to shine a light along the other side of the cave, hoping they could get this amulet before Ra’s al Ghul got his grimy little hands on it. “It doesn’t look like whoever hid them do a very good job if Ra’s and Talia al Ghul are able to locate them and get their hands on them.”

“Well, they’ve stayed hidden for the most part for this long,” Batman replied. “It was bound to happen at some point.”

“Leave it to Ra’s al Ghul to be the one to try to put them together again,” John muttered, working his way to the back of the cave. “I don’t think it’s here.”

“It’s not going to be sitting out in plain sight, but I’m not picking up any signals for heavy metals,” Bruce agreed. “Let’s move on to the next cave.”

“You got it,” Lantern murmured as he followed him outside.

As they exited the cave, Batman spotted someone coming out of one of the other caves. “Damn,” he cursed, pointing at the other cave. “Ubu.”

“Who?” Lantern asked, powering up his ring.

“Ra’s personal servant,” Batman angrily growled as he exchanged his handheld device for a couple of batarangs.

“And it looks like he brought lots of company,” John noticed as several guards followed the large man out of the cave.

“Don’t let him leave here with that amulet,” Batman stated as he fired his grappling gun.

The metal claw found purchase in the rock, pulling him up as Lantern took to the sky to intercept the guards. They were severely outnumbered, but then again Batman was used to being outnumbered. It didn’t hurt that he had a Green Lantern for backup while he took care of Ubu.

Spotting Batman and the Green Lantern approaching, Ubu quickly motioned for the guards to spread out and prepare for a fight. He slipped the golden amulet into a pouch before attaching it to his belt for safe keeping. He was going to enjoy this rematch with the infamous Batman of Gotham.

Batman threw a pair of batarangs, knocking the weapons from a couple of the guards’ hands. He flew straight at them on his grappling line, kicking them both in the chest and taking them out. He landed on the rocky cliff, Ubu grinning wickedly at him.

“The Dark Knight of Gotham,” Ubu stated. “It will be a pleasure being the one to end the infamous Batman once and for all.”
“Many have tried,” Batman countered, unleashing a Batbomb that Ubu caught in his hand.

Ubu grinned, crushing it before it could discharge. “Is that all you’ve got?” he taunted him.

“No,” Batman replied with a smirk as three more Batbombs rolled to a stop at Ubu’s feet.

A thick cloud of smoke encompassed the giant manservant of Ra’s al Ghul, buying Batman time to launch an attack while Green Lantern took care of the dozen guards accompanying him. He slammed his fist into Ubu’s jaw, the electrified brass knuckles he was wearing adding extra weight to the powerful punch.

Ubu stumbled backwards in surprise, Batman following up with a powerful kick to his face. Ubu swung blindly through the smoke, trying to make some sort of contact with his skilled opponent, but missed only to receive a shocking jolt that nearly took the large man to his knees.

Batman attempted to reach for the bag containing Hades’ Amulet only to receive an upper cut for his efforts. He tasted the metallic tang of blood in his mouth but ignored it as he struggled to stay upright. He could feel bits of rock and stone giving way beneath the heel of his boot letting him know that he was dangerously close to the edge.

He felt a shift in the wind, allowing him to duck low at the last second to avoid Ubu’s fist coming straight towards his head. He definitely couldn’t afford a head injury right now with the threat of Hades being released from the Underworld.

Pulling an electrified bola from his utility belt, Batman didn’t get a chance to throw it as Ubu abruptly tackled the Dark Knight, barreling straight into him. Batman grunted with the fierce impact, the wind being knocked from his lungs by Ubu’s shoulder slamming hard into his chest as the pair plummeted over the precipice of the rock.

Batman wrestled against the larger man’s hold, fighting to get a grip on his grappling gun before they landed on the rocks below. Ubu didn’t seem the least bit concerned with the fact they were falling to their deaths as he wrapped his fingers around Batman’s neck in an attempt to choke the life out of him.

He struggled to turn his head, gasping for air as he fought to get a grasp on his grappling gun. He glanced at the rocks below that were rapidly looming larger by the second. He knew he couldn’t give up, couldn’t let this be the end. He needed to stay alive for Diana and his family. They needed him right now more than ever.

With a growl of pure rage, Batman slammed his forehead against Ubu’s, causing Ubu to loosen his grip on Bruce’s throat. Sucking in much needed air, he managed to get his hand free at the last moment, firing his grappling gun at the precipice above them.

The metal claw grasped hold, allowing Batman to swing through the air with Ubu and barely missing the deadly rocks that had been waiting for him. Ubu’s fist connected with Batman’s side before releasing his hold on the Dark Knight and leaping down to the ground below.

“No!” Batman roared as he watched Ubu take off towards a waiting plane, grimacing against the pain in his side. “Lantern! Stop that plane!”

John finished off three guards before flying straight towards the plane that was beginning to take off, determined to keep it from leaving. He threw up a green shield as the plane opened fire on him. Unable to escape the Green Lantern, the plane fired a heat-seeking missile in order to take him out.

“Oh…crap…” John muttered under his breath as the missile headed straight towards him.
John took off towards the ocean with the missile following very close behind him. Knowing he needed to do something fast, he led it deep underwater, creating a green protective bubble around himself as he flew through a narrow opening in a large coral formation. The missile exploded in a burst of flames as it collided with the coral, throwing John several yards away.

“That was a little too close,” John muttered to himself as he flew up out of the water to find Batman standing on the beach.

Flying towards his teammate, John could practically feel the rage rolling off him in hot waves as he drew closer, the sneer on Bruce’s face nothing compared to what he knew was simmering on the inside of the Dark Knight. “Are you okay?” Batman asked him as John landed on the beach beside him.

“Yah, I’m good,” he told him, rubbing his neck. “Just mad that they got away with the amulet.”

“It’s not over yet,” Batman stated. “Ra’s doesn’t have all the pieces he needs to fully resurrect Hades’ spirit.”

“Hopefully, Diana and Shay are having better luck then we are.”

“I hope so,” Batman muttered, his thoughts drifting to his wife.

Mykonos; August 13th, 14:01 EST

Diana raised her bracers, blocking the barrage of bullets that were aimed straight at her. “Shayera!” she yelled. “Don’t let them get the helmet!”

“On it!” Shay hollered back, soaring through the air with her mace gripped tightly in her fist.

Shayera flew straight towards six guards who were attempting to escape with the helmet. A warrior’s cry pierced the air as she used her mace to take down two of the guards, the other four turning their weapons on the angry Thanagarian.

Blocking their shots, she gritted her teeth as she tackled another one to the ground, leaving three more to go. She risked a glance over her shoulder to check on Diana, finding her closing in on Talia al Ghul and the group of mercenaries protecting her. She smirked to herself knowing that Talia deserved every single bit of what she was about to receive from the enraged Amazon. She just wished there would be something left of Talia for her to get a few shots in once Diana was done with her.

Diana was not about to let Talia escape with the Helm of Darkness. It was a very powerful relic in its own right, one that could give the wearer the power of invisibility. That was definitely something that Ra’s did not need to get his hands on. Coupled with the other pieces of armor and weapons, Ra’s would be nearly unstoppable.

Diana felt the heat of her fury intensifying as she pushed her way towards Talia and her men. This woman had caused them more than enough heartache and grief. She was not about to let her cause them or anyone else any more pain.

“Give up, Talia,” Diana demanded, deflecting bullets as she inched her way closer to her husband’s ex-lover.

Talia laughed derisively as she paused to quickly reload her gun, her guards closing ranks around her to protect her. “You are crazy if you think I’m surrendering to you, Amazon,” she spat out. “My father will summon the spirit of Hades and he will rule this world the way that it should be.”
“If he tries to do that, Hades will take over Ra’s mind,” Diana tried to warn her. “It’ll become permanent if he wears Hades’ armor for too long. Your father will be lost forever.”

“You’re spouting lies to keep us from destroying you,” Talia countered, refusing to believe her.

“I don’t lie, Talia,” Diana ground out. “You can’t let your father go through with this. It will destroy his mind.”

“Why do you suddenly care about my father?” Talia yelled.

Diana knew she had to keep her talking. She was getting closer to her. She just needed a few more moments and then maybe she could talk some sense into her. “I don’t, but you can’t let Hades escape the Underworld. He’ll only try to further his own agenda and destroy your father in the process.”

“I’m not listening to you, Amazon,” Talia spat out, firing at her again. “It’s bad enough you took my beloved away from me. I will crush you and Bruce will be mine again. He’ll rule by father’s side as it should have been all along. Damian, Bruce, and I will finally be a family like it should have been all along.”

Diana would never let that happen as long as there was breath in her body. “I will never allow you to take Bruce away from his family,” she growled with a renewed sense of ire. “You don’t deserve Bruce or Damian.”

“How dare you speak about my son like this!” Talia furiously hissed, her chest heaving with the weight of her indignation and rage. “Damian is our son. He belongs to me and Bruce…not you. You will never be a mother to him.”

“You left him, Talia,” Diana stated, ducking behind a rock in hopes of sneaking closer to her. “You abandoned him for your father just like you chose your father over Bruce. When will you finally come to your senses and realize that your father is deluded? You mean nothing to him. He’s only using you to further his own goals.”

Talia’s fury got the best of her as she fully revealed herself to Wonder Woman. “Bruce left me…he walked away from me and our son,” she screamed. “I will get him and Damian back and, when I do, you will be left all alone. You took everything that was mine and I will make you pay for it.”

Diana could scarcely believe how deceived Talia truly was. There was no talking any sense into her. She refused to see the truth no matter what anyone told her. “If you want me, come and get me, Talia,” Diana told her, stepping out from behind the large rock to fully face her. “Let’s end this here and now. Prove to me that you deserve to have Bruce in your life.”

Talia smirked at her as she pointed her weapon directly at Diana. “You think I’m foolish enough to attack the mighty Wonder Woman?” she countered, her gaze narrowing. “You’re just trying to provoke me, but I’m not stupid, Amazon. Once my father resurrects Hades from the Underworld, he will destroy you for me. I’ll make sure your children are well cared for.”

Diana gritted her teeth, her nostrils flaring with the fierce ire pounding through her veins. “I will never allow you anywhere near my children,” she ground out with a ferocious edge that nearly gave Talia pause. “Besides, Hades is my father, Talia. Do you really want to mess with me?”

Talia stared at her in stunned disbelief, uncertain of whether she was telling the truth or not. “You lie,” she stated, cocking her gun.

“Am I?” Diana asked. “Look into my eyes and tell me I’m not telling you the truth.”
Staring into the Amazon’s blue eyes, Talia knew deep in her bones that she was speaking the truth. This information could prove very valuable in her father’s plans. “Well, I guess you’ll soon have a family reunion for you and your children to look forward to.”

Talia pulled a device out of her pocket and pushed a button, a loud explosion nearly rocking the entire island. Diana turned to see people running in every direction, flames shooting towards the sky and dark plumes of smoke creating a canopy over the small town that lived along the water. Car alarms blared and people screamed for help as panic tore through the quiet little village.

“Help…please, help me!”

The sound of a child’s cry tore at Diana’s heart as she turned back to see Talia fleeing with her guards and the Helm of Darkness. Torn between stopping Talia and helping this village, Diana knew in her heart that she had no choice right now.

“Shayera!” Diana yelled before racing towards the child’s cry for help.

Shayera slammed her knee into the groin of one of the guards, dropping him to the ground with a punch. Watching as another explosion rocked the small town, she immediately took off towards the village, Talia and her men quickly forgotten as she flew to the rescue.

**Batcave; August 13th, 17:47 EST**

Batman pulled his utility belt free from his waist, dropping it onto his work table. He knew he needed to take inventory and restock his belt before heading out on patrol later tonight. Right now, though, he just wanted to see his wife and take a hot shower, forgetting all about the events of the day if but for only a little while.

Pulling his cowl and gauntlets off, he tossed them aside on his work table beside his utility belt wishing that Diana would return soon. They’d only spoken briefly to let the other one know that they were returning home. Other than that, he had no idea how things had gone on Themyscira with Hippolyta or any new information that Diana might have learned.

The only other thing they did know was that neither of them had been successful in getting their hands on the objects they had gone to find. Ra’s now had the Ring of Hades, the Bident, Hades’ Amulet, and the Helm of Darkness. It was only a matter of time now before he would have everything that he needed to release Hades’ spirit from the Underworld.

He placed his hands on the table, leaning over it as his eyes fell closed in utter frustration. This was his worst nightmare beginning to come to life right before his very eyes and he felt helpless to stop it. His family was in danger and he needed to find a way to protect them no matter what it cost him.

“Rough day?”

Bruce raised his head to find Damian standing before him, hands stuffed into his hoodie sweatshirt pockets. “How did you get…never mind,” he began only to realize what he had been about to ask his highly intelligent son. “You could say that.”

Damian appraised him for a long moment, knowing that something very bad had happened. He knew that his mother and grandfather were more than likely at the very heart of it. What he didn’t understand was where his mother was at that moment.

“My mother left…didn’t she?” he astutely asked. There wasn’t much of a question to his words. He knew the answer in his heart but hoped against hope that he was wrong.
“She’s gone, Damian,” Bruce truthfully informed him, drawing a deep breath before continuing. “She stole a priceless Greek artifact from the Gotham Museum and then left town. I don’t know where she is right now, but we’re trying to find her.”

Damian stared at his father, knowing that he was telling him the truth. He was a little taken aback by the fact that his father was being so honest with him, not sugar-coating the facts or overlooking the detail that his mother had stolen something. He was talking to him like he was an intelligent adult instead of just some kid who knew nothing. It was a fact that he found that he actually appreciated.

“I guess I’m not surprised,” Damian confessed as he looked away from his father, trying to decide exactly how he felt at that moment.

It was difficult to put a name to the emotions teeming inside of him—abandonment, anger, resentment, bitterness, maybe apathy. He should have known that his mother was capable of just up and leaving him without a word. Everything came down to the will of his grandfather no matter who you were or if you had al Ghul blood flowing through your veins or not. It was always about the mission.

Bruce walked around his work table towards his son, trying to find the words to make this easier, but finding none. “I’m sorry, Damian,” he finally settled on. “I know this must be difficult for you, but I want you to know that you always have a home and a family here with us no matter what your mother has done.”

A scowl formed on Damian’s face, his eyes growing hard and cold like steel. “I don’t need anyone,” he angrily bit out. “I’m fine on my own. I can take care of myself.”

Bruce felt his chest constrict with the anger that he could see burning in his son’s eyes. He had been there himself after losing his parents—full of such rage and a deep chasm of sorrow that never seemed to lessen over time. Because of it, he had walled himself off from people and attempted to lock away his heart to keep from getting hurt like that ever again.

Thankfully, Diana had refused to allow him to continue down that dark, lonely road.

Bruce crouched down in front of his son, knowing there were no words that could possibly make this better. He wasn’t certain which was worse—losing a parent forever or being abandoned by one. He guessed it really didn’t matter. Either way, it was painful no matter how anyone looked at it. He still felt all alone regardless.

“Damian, I’m truly sorry this happened,” he tentatively began as he gazed into his son’s eyes that tried so hard to hide the hurt inside. “I know we’re still getting to know one another but trust me when I say I understand what you’re feeling right now. I was filled with so much anger after I lost my parents. I shut myself off from everyone except for Alfred, but it only caused more problems for myself...countless issues that I’m still struggling with even after all this time and probably will for the rest of my life. I don’t want that for you, Damian. You have a family here who cares about you if you’ll let us.”

Damian seemed to consider what his father had said, finally speaking after several moments of tense silence. “How was Diana able to get through to you when no one else could...not even my mother?”

Bruce was a little taken aback by the question, but quickly recovered. The corner of Bruce’s lips curled up slightly, the sadness he felt for his son briefly relieved by thoughts of his wife. “There’s no one in this world quite like Diana,” he softly replied, his tone not disguising his love for his
princess. “There are just so many things about her that drew me to her and caused me to fall in love with her, but what I love the most is the fact that she never gave up on me despite all my attempts to keep her out. She managed to break through all my defenses and I’m so thankful that she did because she saved me.”

Damian nodded his head in acknowledgement, his gaze still cold and angry. “I guess I’ll stick around here for now. Maybe she’ll come back for me someday.”

“Maybe she will,” Bruce told him, squeezing his shoulder, both knowing the chances of that were slim. “Head on upstairs. I’ll be up in a little bit for dinner.”

Damian turned and walked away, Bruce standing there watching him for a few moments lost in his turbulent thoughts. “That was very sweet, Bruce.”

The dulcet sound of her voice that always somehow managed to soothe his haggard soul drifted through the cave and tickled his ears. He turned to see her walking towards him, relieved she had safely returned. “Are you all right?” he asked, automatically reaching for her and pulling her into his arms.

She smiled reassuringly at him, kissing him softly as she came to rest against his muscular body. “I’m fine,” she reassured him. “Just irate with your ex-girlfriend.”

“That would make two of us,” he agreed with her. “How did she get away?”

Diana’s features darkened with fury. “She detonated some bombs in a small village and escape with the helmet. We had no choice but to help the people in danger while Talia escaped. There was a child and…I had to…I couldn’t just let that child die.”

“No, it’s okay, princess,” he told her with a frown. “I would’ve made the same decision.”

She frowned as she stared at his chest, her fingertips tracing the bat emblem on his uniform. “Ra’s is getting stronger with every piece he gets his hands on,” she said, shaking her head as she considered the ramifications of it all.

“I know, but it’s not over yet,” he reminded her. “He still needs to get the gauntlets, shield, and breastplate. Were you able to find out anymore from your mother?”

“Yes…and I’m afraid it’s not good news.”

His fingers beneath her chin forced her to meet his penetrating gaze. “What is it?”

“Evidently, there’s also a sword out there somewhere that belongs to Hades,” she revealed as she pulled out of his embrace. “Also, Hades’ Ring doesn’t just control the dead, but it can control the living as well. If Ra’s figures out how to tap into its power, he can control the mind of anyone he wants and bend them to his will.”

“Great,” Bruce grumbled with growing frustration that was teeming inside of him. “Anything happen on Themyscira that I should know about?”

“Besides the fact that I had to have an entourage escort Shayera and myself to my mother in the palace?” she informed him, pacing back and forth before him as her fury returned with a vengeance.

Bruce frowned as he watched his wife who was pacing like a prowling animal. He could feel her tension radiating off her. He definitely didn’t like the implications that were beginning to form in
his mind with what she had just told him. “What?” he growled. “Why would the Princess of the Amazons require a formal escort on her own island?”

“Exactly,” Diana agreed, hands fisted at her sides. “It seems things aren’t quite as calm on Themyscira as my mother made it seem.”

“Were there any disturbances while you were there?”

“No,” she admitted, “but there was definitely a thick tension blanketing the island. It’s almost like a powder keg ready to explode if the right match is struck.”

“I don’t like this,” he stated, folding his arms against his chest. “Is Hippolyta prepared to do whatever is necessary if a war breaks out?”

“Of course she is, Bruce,” Diana snapped. “Mother assured me that she has everything under control.”

“Diana, you yourself admitted that your mother had downplayed how tense things were becoming,” Bruce countered.

Diana shook her head, rubbing her face with her hands. “I can’t think about it right now,” she told him. “I have to trust that my mother can handle things on Themyscira. I have to focus on stopping Ra’s and Talia before they can release my father from the Underworld. I can’t let him get anywhere near our family.”

Bruce walked over to her, his hand coming to rest on her shoulder. “We’ll figure out a way to stop Ra’s and help your mother any way we can,” he reassured her.

He kissed her softly, wanting to comfort her more than anything. He swallowed Diana’s moan as she slipped her arms around him, wanting far more from him at that moment. A kiss of comfort and reassurance rapidly escalated into far more as their desire for one another flamed hotter inside of them.

She wanted him more than anything. She needed a release, to just forget about all the heartache and fear for just a little while as she lost herself in her husband. She ached for the comfort that his touch always brought her, the reassurance of his presence. He always made her feel as though everything was going to be all right even when it was so far from it.

Breaking the kiss, Diana nuzzled her nose against his. “I want you,” she breathlessly murmured, her lips brushing against his lower lip as she pressed her fingers into his shoulders and gripped him firmly.

Bruce groaned with her request as his lips met hers again, his body already beginning to respond to her need for him. He leaned down and grabbed hold of her thighs, pulling her legs up to wrap around his waist before carrying her towards the changing area.

Entering the bathroom, he kicked the door closed. Setting her down on the floor, they hurriedly began to undress one another, both anxious to feel their lover’s skin against their own. It had been a very long day filled with too much anger and setbacks, pent-up emotions that needed some sort of release.

Bruce buried his face in the crook of her neck, kissing and sucking hard as she ripped his uniform pants off. She tilted her head to give him more access to her, her fingers sliding into his hair and tugging on it. She gasped sharply as he bit down on the tendon at the juncture of her neck and shoulder, her eyes fluttering closed as pleasure shot through straight to her core.
“Bruce…” she gasped his name. “I need you inside of me…now.”

He needed no further invitation or plea at that point. Picking her up, he set her nude form down on the edge of the counter as he kissed her senseless, his tongue tangling with hers as he began to release a measure of his own tension and stress.

She threw her head back with a gasp, rocking her hips against his as he took her. “Yes…yes…more,” she hissed with the pleasure rapidly building inside of her.

Her arm was looped around his neck, her fingers gripping his hair tightly as he pressed his forehead against her shoulder. Bruce braced his left hand against the wall behind her, his other hand settling low on her back to hold her right where he wanted her. He pounded into her with wild abandon, Diana’s continual whimpering pleas and breathless demands for more driving him harder and faster.

His mouth collided with hers, kissing her hard as he continued to take her, doing his best to give his wife everything that she needed from him at that moment. He understood her need for some sort of release all too well. He was desperate to give that to her as well as finding release for himself.

The last few days had been harrowing to say the least and he knew that things were only going to continue to escalate from here on out. These stolen moments shared between lovers was something that they were going to have to contend themselves with until they could actually have some proper time together like a normal married couple.

Diana’s fingernails raked over his back causing him to hiss with pleasure. He knew that he wasn’t going to be able to hold on for much longer, his need to come growing too demanding to ignore. She felt absolutely amazing to him, so tight and hot. He was struggling to hold to himself together as she nibbled on his earlobe, her hand settling on his backside and squeezing hard. She squirmed against him as he hit that spot deep inside of her that drove her positively wild, knowing she couldn’t hold out much longer.

She screamed as her climax hit her hard, the feel of Bruce coming deep inside of her prolonging her orgasm. Bruce sank bonelessly against her, keeping himself still buried inside of her. He searched for her lips, kissing her roughly as they both struggled to catch their breaths.

Without breaking the intimate contact with her, he carried Diana to the shower, turning on the hot water before beginning to love her all over again.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Things are really going downhill fast for poor Bruce and Diana! How much worse can things get for them? Answer: A lot.

UP NEXT: The threats to Diana escalate and Tim learns some valuable information from Damian.
Talia walked down the winding corridor that led to her father’s private chambers, the Helm of Darkness in her hands and a proud smile gracing her face. Her father was going to be most pleased with her find. She, on the other hand, was more pleased with the fact that she had beaten Diana. The Amazon may be the most powerful woman in the world, but she was no match for her. Just a few more relics and her father would be able to harness the power of Hades himself. There was no way they could possibly be defeated then. Her father’s dream would finally be realized after all these years.

She knocked once before entering her father’s private chambers. Opening the door, she found him standing before a large window, his hands clasped behind his back. He was obviously lost in his thoughts and plans for the future. He didn’t even turn around as she entered, closing the door behind her.

“Father,” she called to him as she closed the distance between them. “I have brought you the coveted Helm of Darkness that you require.”

“Yes, father,” she obediently replied, making her way to the table where Hades’ ring, Bident, and amulet lay.

Adding it to the others, Talia stepped back to gaze at the growing collection. They were getting so close she could practically taste it. She just wished her beloved was here to share in this monumental moment, but alas he had chosen a different path…a different woman to share his life with.

Foolish man believing an Amazon could make him happier than she could.

“Did you run into any difficulties?” he asked, turning to finally face his daughter.

The sound of his deep voice echoed off the walls and high ceiling of his chambers, making it seem far more ominous and foreboding than usual. She turned to face him a self-satisfied smirk on her lips as she brushed a chestnut brown lock of hair out of her face.

“Wonder Woman and her winged friend arrived as we were about to leave, but she was no match for me,” she boasted.

“Good,” Ra’s responded with a satisfied nod of his head. “It seems that the detective as figured out my plan. Ubu encountered the detective and the Green Lantern but was able to escape with the amulet with little trouble.”

Talia felt a flutter in the pit of her stomach with the mention of her beloved but kept her expression passive under her father’s scrutinizing stare. “I’m glad,” she simply said.
Ra’s gave her a knowing smile as he made his way to his daughter, his hands settling on her shoulders as he gently kissed her forehead. “I know how difficult it must be for you to see him again after all this time.”

Talia averted her eyes, her heart jumping out of rhythm with the reminder of being near him again—his handsome visage, the sound of his voice, the power trapped in his perfectly sculpted body as well as his masculine scent. It seemed to have turned memories graying with time to burst alive with vibrant colors all over again, rekindling her love for him.

She had never truly stopped loving him and probably never would but seeing him again had reawakened feelings that she had tried so hard to bury and lock away. She knew it was foolish of her to try to do so but it had been the only way to deal with the pain of her beloved leaving her.

“I can’t help but still hope that Bruce will realize his mistake and come back to me,” Talia softly confessed. “I want to see him fulfilling his true role as the eventual Demon’s Head along with our son. I still feel it’s his destiny.”

“It still might not be too late,” Ra’s told her.

She straightened her shoulders, refusing to show any weakness before her father. “I have learned some very interesting information that I believe you will find most valuable,” she said as she walked towards the bar to pour herself a glass of wine.

“And what is it that you’ve discovered?” he asked, a single eyebrow arching with curiosity.

“It would seem that Hades is Wonder Woman’s father,” she revealed with a gleam in her brown eyes.

Ra’s was stunned by the unexpected news, his gaze practically glowing with the dark thoughts that began to take shape in his devious mind. “Are you certain of this?”

“Yes,” Talia insisted, pausing to take a drink. “Wonder Woman told me herself in an effort to connect with me so that I wouldn’t steal the helmet.”

Ra’s stroked his chin as he began to pace, his lips curling slightly with the welcomed information. This could definitely be used in his plans to take over the world and cleanse it. If he could harness Hades’ power, maybe he could force Wonder Woman to join him. Having her by his side would ensure his success. If he could get Wonder Woman, then maybe the detective would come to his senses and join his cause as well.

He’d always believed the combined skills and supreme abilities of Wonder Woman and Batman would make a very formidable team. Now, that desire to see them in action doing his bidding became too tantalizing of a prospect to so easily dismiss or ignore. Having them as his left and right to serve him would ensure his success.

Talia watched as a devilish expression began to take over her father’s features. It caused a chill to slither down her spine. She knew something was taking shape in his mind, something that involved the Amazon and her beloved.

She didn’t care what her father had in store for the Amazon, but she swore on her life that she’d protect her beloved no matter the cost.

Themyscirian Embassy; August 14th, 11:42 EST

Diana finished signing off the last of the documents that had required her immediate attention. She
had been away from the embassy for the last couple of days to clear her head and decide on her next plan of action for getting the embassy back on track and clear the reputation of the Amazons.

After speaking with her mother at length, Diana felt some better about things, but only a little. There was a lot of work that lay ahead of her. The problem was that she couldn’t give it the full attention it deserved right now with Ra’s al Ghul’s plans to channel the power of Hades in order to cleanse the world.

She shuddered with the thought as she paused to take a sip of her coffee. The thought of her father escaping the confines of the Underworld struck fear to her very core. She wasn’t afraid of him, but what he was capable of. She feared the sheer misery and destruction that he could unleash on Earth, terrified that he might want to see his grandchildren or he could go after Bruce.

“Princess Diana,” Phaedra called to her from the doorway of Diana’s office.

Diana looked up with a small frown, releasing a weary sigh as she sat back in her chair. “Phaedra, I told you that you can call me Diana when it’s just us,” she reminded her secretary for what felt like the hundredth time.

Phaedra tucked a blond lock of hair behind her ear as she entered the office. “Sorry, I keep forgetting,” she apologized.

“It’s okay,” Diana replied with a small smile. “What do you need?”

“Ambassador Welich sent you a letter thanking you and Themyscira for your efforts in assembling the peace conference,” she informed her. “He is sorry that things did not turn out as hoped, but he is eager to work with you again in the future.”

A genuine smile formed on Diana’s lips, the heaviness that had been weighing down her heart suddenly feeling a little lighter. “Thank you, Phaedra,” she said. “I really appreciate that.”

“If you don’t mind, I think I’m going to head out for lunch,” Phaedra informed her. “I’m meeting someone.”

“What’s his name?” Diana intuitively asked.

“Jordan,” she revealed with a dreamy smile on her face that she just as quickly tucked away. “I mean…um…it’s really no one special. It’s…well, he’s just a guy that I met and we—”

Diana held a hand up to silence her. “Phaedra, I’m very happy for you,” she reassured her. “In fact, I’d love to meet him some time.”

“You would?”

“Yes, I would,” she insisted. “Have a great time. In fact, take an extra hour if you want to. There isn’t much going on around here right now anyway.”

Phaedra’s face instantly brightened with the offer. “Really? That’s so sweet of you,” she said. “Do you want me to bring you back anything for lunch?”

“No, I have a lunch date my handsome husband,” she told her as she glanced at the antique clock on her wall. “In fact, I need to leave myself. I’m supposed to meet him at the restaurant in ten minutes.”

“Have a good time,” Phaedra said.
“I’ll probably go home after lunch,” Diana informed her. “I have some things I need to take care of with Nicholas starting preschool soon. I’ll hopefully be back tomorrow for a couple of hours in the morning. Call me if you run into any problems.”

“I will…and thanks again,” Phaedra replied before turning and leaving her alone once more.

Diana straightened the papers on her desk before standing to her feet. Grabbing her purse and cell phone, she exited her office, placing the documents in Phaedra’s inbox. She hadn’t realized how late it had gotten, knowing that the lunch traffic was going to slow her down. She called Bruce as she exited the embassy to let him know she might be a few minutes late.

“Don’t tell me you’re breaking our date, princess,” Bruce uttered in that suave, baritone voice that sent tingles clear through to her toes. “I’m heading to the restaurant now. I’d hate to have to eat all by myself.”

“Not at all,” she reassured him with a chuckle. “I just wanted to let you know I might be a little late. I’m just now heading to my SUV and—”

Diana’s voice abruptly broke off as she picked up on a sound that she knew shouldn’t be there as she neared her car. It was one that immediately made her stomach drop and her heart race. “Diana? What is it?” Bruce demanded to know, tension instantly filling his voice.

“I’ve got to go, Bruce,” she stated with urgency.

“Diana, wait!” he shouted. “What—”

Shutting her phone off, Diana shoved it into her purse as she flew straight towards her SUV. Grabbing hold of it, she lifted it above her head before taking off with the speed of Hermes himself. She could hear the distinct sound of the ticking growing louder, her heart pounding in her ears as she flew towards Gotham Harbor. She needed to get her SUV as far away from the city as possible before it exploded and someone got hurt.

“Batman to Wonder Woman,” Bruce’s voice barked in her ear, not attempting to disguise his anger. “What the hell is going on?”

“I can’t talk right now!” she yelled. “I’m kind of in the middle of something here.”

“Princess, tell me now or so help me—” The deafening cacophony of an explosion filled his ear and instantly tore straight through his heart. “Diana!”

Several silent moments passed by, moments that felt like an eternity, until she finally responded. “I’m…I’m okay,” she replied, clearly rattled by what had happened.

“That’s it,” he growled darkly. “I’m done with this. You are not going back to that embassy until this is taken care of. Do you hear me?”

“Yes,” she softly said as she floated in the air above the bay, watching as flaming pieces of her SUV floated on top of the water. She glanced down as fragments of Nick and Kaia’s car seats landed in the water, causing bile to instantly burn the back of her throat. It stole her breath to see her children’s burning car seats.

“I…I’m sorry, princess,” Bruce finally spoke again, the brokenness in his voice filling her ear. “I just…I can’t let you continue this until I know that you’re safe.”

“We’ll talk about it later,” she murmured, tears burning in her eyes as the thought of her children
being in that SUV slammed into her as hard as Darkseid’s fist. It made her ill to her core.

“I’m almost to your position,” Bruce stated. “Meet me at the docks.”

“Okay,” she muttered, still in shock over what had just happened…over what could have happened if her children had been with her.

Diana floated there for a few moments before finally turning and flying back towards the docks. She spotted Bruce’s BMW tearing across the docks, screeching to a halt before he quickly exited his car. She landed on the ground before him, immediately finding herself enveloped in strong arms.

Bruce buried his face in her hair, his heart in his throat as he crushed her to him. He squeezed his eyes tightly closed against the horrifying image of burning pieces of Diana’s SUV dancing across the top of the water. It could have been her. She could have been inside of that SUV when it exploded…their children could have been with her.

He felt his legs grow weak with the unnerving thought. “I’m so sorry,” he murmured, pulling back to cradle her face in his hands to gaze at her. “Are you all right?”

Tears brimmed in her eyes as she stared back at him, her bottom lip trembling. “Nick…and Kaia…they could have been in there, Bruce,” she tearfully replied. “They…they could’ve…”

“Shhh…it’s all right,” he attempted to reassure her as he gently kissed her. “You found it before it was too late. Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m fine,” she replied, trying to calm the violent churning of emotions inside of her at that moment.

Fury burned through Bruce as hot as a blazing inferno, his chest heaving with the intensity of his rage. When he found out who was behind these threats to his wife, he was going to make them pay dearly. If they were lucky, they might even survive the encounter with him.

“You can’t go back to the embassy, princess,” he heatedly stated. “It’s far too dangerous.”

“Bruce, I know, but how are we going to find out who’s behind this if I don’t?” she demanded to know, her own fury glowing hotter than Hephaestus’s fire.

He knew that now was not the best time to discuss this with both of them so upset, but his emotions were overruling logic at this point. “I will find out who it is without you being put into danger all the time,” he snapped.

“We haven’t been able to figure anything out yet, Bruce,” she shot back. “The closest we’ve come is you spotting a woman who may or may not have been Aresia. That’s it…we have nothing.”

Bruce’s hands found his hips as a dark scowl crossed his features. He stared out over the flames that continued to float across the top of the water, reminding him how close he had come to his wife being blown up. He knew she was right. He had nothing…absolutely nothing. Some great detective he was. He couldn’t even protect his own wife, couldn’t discover who was behind these threats to her.

“And how long are you going to keep letting this go on, princess?” he heatedly bit out. “Until whoever is behind this has put you in the ICU or the grave?”

Diana could see the pain and fear smoldering darkly in his piercing blue eyes, how he was barely
holding his emotions together at that moment. “Do you really think that I’m that weak?” she hissed. “I’m not so easily defeated.”

“You’re not indestructible, Diana,” he nearly yelled. “Someone is going to be just a little faster, a little stronger and that will be it. There will be no second chances, no coming home to me or the kids.”

With the reminder of her children, she felt her heart clench painfully beneath her breastbone. It stole her breath as a tear suddenly slipped down her cheek. She angrily brushed it away, her frustration getting the better of her.

“I know that, Bruce,” she ground out, “but I won’t hide like some coward. Running away from this goes against everything that I’ve been known. It’s not who I am.”

“And what about our children, Diana…what about me?” he angrily growled. “Am I supposed to just stand by and watch someone try to kill my wife? I won’t survive if I lose you.”

Diana hands came to rest on either side of his face. “You won’t lose me,” she insisted as she gazed deeply in his eyes. “I’m an Amazon warrior, Bruce. I will fight this with my last breath.”

“That’s what terrifies me,” he softly said as he pulled out of her hold on him, turning his back to her.

His chin fell to his chest as he pinched the bridge of his nose. They weren’t going to find any common ground on this. The feel of a hand on his back that usually brought him so much comfort only brought him so much heartache at that moment. He was in danger of losing her and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

“Bruce,” Diana called his name, hoping to ease his panic. “Please, look at me.”

Drawing a deep, shuddering breath, Bruce slowly turned around to face her, his cobalt blue eyes shining a little too brightly, his jaw clenched tightly. Diana wrapped her arms around him, holding him close to her. “Leaving you or our family is unacceptable to me. It’s something that I will fight against with every fiber of my being,” she attempted to reassure him, knowing she needed to think about her family now.

“Diana——”

“Bruce, I’m not going to run away from this, but I won’t go into the embassy for the time being,” she conceded. “I can do the majority of the work from home right now. Maybe that way whoever is behind the threats will give up and leave if they think that I’m no longer actively pursuing rebuilding the embassy.”

Gazing into her sapphire eyes, he knew that she was doing her best to compromise without giving up who she was. It felt as though his heart expanded with even more love for her with her willingness to make concessions. It was one that gave him a little more peace about this mess, but not much.

“Thank you,” he murmured, pulling her into his embrace.

Diana’s arms slipped around him, releasing a ragged breath as she pressed her forehead against his temple. She hated to admit it but the bomb in her car had really rattled her. She was so thankful that the kids were safe at home. She couldn’t bear to think about the what-if’s.

“I’m sorry, Bruce,” she softly said.
Bruce released her, his hand coming to rest against her cheek. “For what?”

“I feel sometimes as if I bring you nothing but more anguish and pain,” she confessed, her forehead resting against his. “It’s the last thing that I ever wanted for you after everything you’ve already been through. Sometimes I wonder if you wouldn’t have been better off without me and—”

“No, Diana!” he fiercely growled, the muscles in his jaw flexing as he grabbed hold of her upper arms. “Don’t you ever say that again. You have brought me more happiness and contentment than I’ve ever believed was possible. You made a long-forgotten, buried dream a reality. Even with all the chaos that always seems to follow our family, I wouldn’t trade one day of my life with you for anything in this world.”

She pressed her lips to his, kissing him deeply as her hand settled on the back of his neck. “I love you so much, Bruce,” she murmured against his lips. “You…the family we’ve made…means absolutely everything to me. We will do everything in our power to protect it.”

The corners of his lips curled into a tender smile. “I love you too, princess,” he replied. “Let’s go home and see what we can do about getting to the bottom of this.”

“You still owe me a lunch date,” she told him as he took her by the hand and led her towards his waiting BMW. “Oh, and a new car.”

“I’ll take you to lunch tomorrow and we’ll go look for a new SUV for you,” he promised her.

“Or I can just drive one of the dozen or so cars you have in the garage,” she suggested as she climbed into the passenger seat.

“No way,” he told her, leaning in and kissing her soundly. “You’re too hard on your vehicles.”

Closing the passenger door, Bruce walked around to the driver’s side, casting a glance at the still burning remnants of Diana’s SUV. If it weren’t for her enhanced hearing, she could’ve been seriously injured or worse. Whoever was behind this had no idea who they were tangling with, but they were about to find out the hard way and they were going to regret it.

**Batcave; August 14th, 13:37 EST**

Tim’s fingers flew across the keyboard with impressive speed as he worked to locate the remaining pieces of Hades’ armor. He only hoped that he was able to track them down before Ra’s and Talia al Ghul could. Unfortunately, they had no idea how close the enemy actually was to getting their hands on them.

So far, he’d been able to locate a gauntlet that was in a museum in Washington, DC…another gauntlet in a museum in London, England…and a belt in France. The shield and breastplate were still missing. He’d been doing research all day in hopes of locating them, but they had remained elusive so far.

He felt a small amount of relief knowing that Ra’s had yet to get his hands on the gauntlets or the belt yet. He had verified with all three locations that the items were still present and accounted for. He had alerted them to the chance for theft and all three had immediately agreed to increase security…of course not that that would keep Talia or Ra’s from getting their hands on them.

It turned his stomach how much trouble and heartache Ra’s and Talia had caused their family. Every time they thought they had seen or heard the last of them, they showed up out of nowhere with a new devious plot to take over the world.
Sitting back in his chair, Tim sensed that someone else was in the cave with him…someone who was trying very hard to mask their presence from him. He continued working for several minutes, wondering what it was that his visitor wanted down here.

“What can I do for you, Damian?” Tim finally asked, keeping his attention locked on the computer screen.

He heard the almost imperceptible huff of annoyance before the soft shuffle of tennis shoes along the cave floor. “How did you know I was there?” Damian questioned him as he climbed the steps of the platform.

“Can’t give away all my secrets, now can I?” Tim replied as he continued typing.

“Well, you might have figured out I was here, but I’ve been here for—”

“Exactly seven minutes,” Tim finished for him, not even missing a keystroke.

Damian ground his teeth as he stared at the famous Robin to his father’s Batman, annoyed with himself that he hadn’t been able to sneak up on him. “What are you working on?” he asked, coming to stand behind him.

“I’m trying to find some relics,” he informed him, suddenly pausing to turn around and look at him. “Do you know anything about what your mother and grandfather are planning?”

Damian folded his arms against his chest as he stared down the brother he perceived as his biggest obstacle and competition to becoming the next Robin. He was unsure how to answer him. If he told him anything, he’d be betraying his mother and grandfather. If he didn’t tell him what he knew, he’d be betraying his father and new family.

Right now, his loyalties were still with his mother and grandfather even though his mother had virtually abandoned him without a single word. He still held out hope that she would return for him once the newest mission had been completed and his grandfather was fully in control of the world.

Damian lifted his chin in defiance as he stared at his older brother. “No, I have no idea what they are planning,” he flat out lied. “They never tell me anything.”

“Get off it, Damian,” Tim said with a scowl, turning back to face the computer. “You have Bruce’s analytical mind and intelligence which makes you a very smart kid. Don’t tell me you haven’t picked up on anything or haven’t figured out what your family is up to.”

Damian squared his shoulders and stiffened his stance. “Believe it or not…I don’t care,” he countered with a shrug of a shoulder. “I have no idea what my grandfather is doing or where my mother went.”

“Fine; have it your way,” Tim stated with growing exasperation. “I guess I gave you far too much credit. You’re not as smart as I thought you were.”

The younger Wayne gritted his teeth in anger, clenching his fists he’d buried in his sweatshirt pockets. “I’m much smarter than you think,” he shot back. “There’s nothing that anyone can hide from me that I won’t figure out.”

“If you don’t know, you don’t know,” Tim continued to press his buttons, knowing that he’d get the cocky kid to spill what he knew sooner or later. Damian was out to prove himself capable of being the next Robin and wouldn’t miss an opportunity like this to show he could do it. “There’s no use trying to make me believe otherwise. Why don’t you go upstairs and see what Nicholas and
Kaia are doing? I’m sure they would let you play with them since you’re no help down here.”

Damian felt his anger nearly boil over with Tim’s words. How dare he insinuate that he was incapable of being any help or that he was better off with the little children. It ate away at his ego and wounded his pride. “Fine; you know what?” Damian spouted off. “I do know some of what my grandfather is planning. He wants my mother to gather pieces of some ancient armor.”

“Tell me something I don’t already know or get out of the cave,” Tim firmly stated, his voice broking no room for argument.

Damian growled, cursing under his breath. “Fine,” he spat out. “My grandfather is going to put his plan into motion on September fifth, the night of the blood moon. He’s also been training me to be the new Robin.”

“And why is that?” Tim asked, relieved that they were finally getting somewhere. It helped to know that Ra’s wasn’t planning on making his move until September fifth, but he could always change his mind. “Ra’s doesn’t feel I’m qualified to be Robin?”

“No, he wants me to be his spy in Gotham,” Damian informed him. “He wanted me to keep tabs on my father for him.”

Tim turned to face him. “I take it you’ve changed your mind about it?”

Damian averted his gaze, realizing the mistake that his arrogance had just allowed him to make. His guilt was enormous, but he couldn’t deny the measure of relief he felt with divulging the information. Had he grown soft since moving in with his new family?

“I…I don’t know,” he sullenly confessed with a frown. “It looks like this might be the only family I have now.”

Tim actually felt sorry for his brother. He couldn’t begin to imagine how difficult all of this must be for him. He put a hand on Damian’s shoulder. “You’ll always be a welcomed part of this family, Damian,” he reassured him. “But it’s up to you if you truly want to be a part of it or not. You’re not exactly making it easy for any of us to accept you.”

Damian silently nodded his head before turning and leaving, heading back up into the manor. Tim returned to his research, more than satisfied that he’d been able to glean some information from his younger brother. He was fairly certain that Damian didn’t know much more than what he’d revealed. He was positive that Ra’s wouldn’t disclose his plans to his young grandson, keeping his schemes close to the vest.

“That was impressive,” Bruce commented as he and Diana revealed their presence, startling Tim.

Tim placed his hand on his chest in an effort to calm his pounding heart. “You guys didn’t have to scare me half to death.”

“Thought you’d be used to it by now,” Bruce replied as they climbed the platform steps. “I think maybe we need to review some of your training and skills of detection.”

“Hey, give me a break,” Tim said with a groan. “I’ve been working on tracking down all of these artifacts since you two left this morning.”

“Don’t listen to him, Tim,” Diana told him, coming to stand behind his chair. She affectionately ruffled her son’s hair, her hand coming to rest on his shoulder. “I appreciate all your hard work on this.”
“Mama’s boy,” Bruce mumbled under his breath with a slight smirk.  

“Leave our son alone,” Diana chided Bruce.  

“Yah, Bruce,” Tim said with a huge grin. “I can’t help it I’m mom’s favorite in this family.”  

Diana giggled as Bruce rolled his blue eyes. “I don’t have favorites,” she told them. “I love all of you equally.”  

“Yah, but she loves me more,” Bruce goaded Tim.  

“You’re so asking for it next time we spar,” Tim threatened him with mock agitation.  

Diana smacked her husband on the shoulder with the back of her hand. “Were you able to find out anything, Tim?”  

“I was able to find and confirm the presence of three artifacts,” he replied. “All three places are increasing their security, but we all know that’s not going to stop Ra’s and Talia. We’re going to have do something to get to them before they do.”  

“What about the other artifacts?” Bruce asked, leaning against the edge of the desk.  

“I’m still working on tracking the shield and breastplate down,” Tim said with a sigh. “I stumbled across some research that might help me find it, but it’s going to take quite a bit of time to go through all of it and it might not even prove helpful or true.”  

“Tim, we appreciate all your hard work so far,” Diana assured him. “You’re a very valuable part of this family and the team.”  

“Thanks, mom,” Tim replied with a bashful grin.  

“You did really well handling Damian,” Bruce added. “You were able to do what I was unable to. As his father, it’s unfair of me to force him to choose between his mother and Ra’s and us, but it’s something that you were able to do.”  

“I can’t believe that Ra’s would plant Damian here as a mole to keep tabs on you,” Tim said with a scowl. “That’s just wrong on so many levels. It’s no wonder the kid is the way he is. Ra’s and Talia have been messing with his head since the day he was born. Now, they want him to spy on his own father.”  

“Unfortunately, we can’t focus on Damian right now,” Bruce regretfully responded. “We need to focus on keeping the remaining relics from ending up in Ra’s hands.”  

“I agree, but…” Tim began, only to stop as realization hit him. “Hey, what are you two doing home so early? You weren’t supposed to be home until dinner tonight.”  

Bruce glanced at his wife out of the corner of his eye, something dark passing through his gaze. Diana stiffened minutely as she crossed her arms against her chest. Neither wanted to relive what had happened this afternoon, both of them still rattled by it and yet they needed to let Tim know.  

“Someone planted a bomb in Diana’s SUV,” Bruce informed him.  

“What?” Tim nearly yelled, his worried gaze falling on his mother. “Are you all right?”  

“I’m fine, Tim,” she reassured him. “I was able to get the bomb out over Gotham Harbor before it blew up.”
“It’s probably the same person who stabbed you,” Tim surmised, fire blazing in his eyes. No one messed with his family and got away with it…especially his mother. “We have got to find this person before they can strike again. You definitely can’t go back to the embassy now.”

“I know…I know. Your father has already made that abundantly clear,” she reluctantly agreed. “From now on, I’ll be doing my embassy work from home until this can solved. I don’t want to put my family in danger.”

Bruce stared at her, knowing how difficult this was for her. He knew working from home went against a thousand years of training that had been deeply ingrained into her very being, but she was willing to do it for him and their family.

“We’ll get to the bottom of this one way or another,” Bruce promised them. “Once we do, the Themyscirian Embassy will be a force to be reckoned with in the pursuit of world peace.”

Diana smiled tenderly at him, loving him for his efforts. It meant the world to her that he would stand by her in this. “Yes, we will,” she agreed with a renewed sense of resolve.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Whoa! Things are getting uglier by the update! How much worse can things possibly get??

UP NEXT: Kaia and Nicholas find themselves in some trouble. Batman and Wonder Woman go to France to retrieve Hades’ belt. Will they get it before Talia does?

Thank you all for the wonderful support of my fics! Hope you all enjoyed the awesome WonderBatWeek2018. Many amazing Wonderbat fics were posted by several writers. Go check them all out and keep fighting for Wonderbat. No matter what DC does with this stupid BatCat wedding coming up, we still won't give up hope on our awesome Wonderbat! :)

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 18

_Gotham; August 15th, 07:59 EST_

“Richard Grayson!” Donna ground out. “If you don’t sit down right now, I will physically tie you to that chair.”

Dick’s head snapped up as if he’d been struck. He obediently dropped into the nearby chair, his stunned expression turning into one of desire. “Is that a promise, Troia?” he flirted, mischievously wiggling his eyebrows at her.

Donna shook her head in exasperation but couldn’t quite smother the smile struggling to form on her lips. “You are such a flirt,” she replied. “Why do you have this incessant need to pace every time we’re in the doctor’s office?”

“I’m nervous,” he confessed, running his fingers back through his jet-black hair.

“We’re going to find out the sex of our baby,” Donna reminded him. “It’s supposed to be an exciting moment.”

“I know it is but what if something went wrong between now and the last ultrasound?”

“Wrong like what?”

“I don’t know,” he said with growing frustration. “What if she grows a third foot or she develops some sort of defect?”

“Dick, our baby will be perfect no matter what he or she is like,” Donna reassured him. “This is our baby and we’ll love him or her because it’s ours.”

Dick released a low breath, knowing in his heart that she was right. “You’re right,” he agreed as he stood to his feet, making his way to her position on the exam table. “She’s going to be as beautiful and perfect as her mother.”

“Or he’ll be as amazing as his father,” she amended.

Dick chuckled softly. “I told you, Troia. We’re having a girl. I just know it in my heart.”

“Just don’t be disappointed if it’s a boy.”

“I could never be disappointed,” he replied, kissing her softly. “I think when things settle down again for Bruce and Diana we should go away for a few days.”

“I think I like the sound of that,” she readily decided. “Where did you have in mind?”

“Some place warm…with lots of palm trees and drinks with umbrellas in them,” he said. “Oh, and you in a very teeny, tiny string bikini.”

“You are a bad boy, Dick Grayson,” Donna scolded him, her blue eyes sparkling with amusement.
“And you love me for it,” he murmured, kissing her again.

A quick knock at the door forced them apart as Leslie entered. “Are you two at it again?” she teased.

“Just calming Donna’s nerves,” Dick told her.

“I am not the one who’s nervous, Leslie,” Donna said. “It’s all him. He’s worried our baby will have three feet.”

Leslie chuckled as she started up the ultrasound machine. “Oh, dear me,” she replied with an amused shake of her head. “Not unless Amazons are prone to having mutant children. Diana didn’t throw me any curveballs with her children and she was molded from clay, so I think you’re safe, Donna.”

“You know it would be just like one of your gods or goddesses to decide to play some sort of joke on you and make our baby look weird,” Dick suggested with a frown.

“Hera, help me,” Donna muttered as she laid back on the table. “Leslie, can you sedate him for the next seven months?”

“Sorry, no can do,” Leslie replied as she applied jelly to Donna’s abdomen. “He’s all yours.”

Dick came to stand on the other side of the exam table, taking his wife’s hand in his. “Oh, come on, ladies,” he said. “I’m just being realistic here. You have to admit your gods have done some very outrageous things over the years.”

“You’re being paranoid like Bruce,” Donna pointed out as she focused her gaze on the ultrasound machine screen.

“I take offense to that,” Dick adamantly stated. “I am nothing like Bruce.”

Leslie and Donna both shared a look before turning to stare at Dick in stunned disbelief. “You want to try that again, Bruce Junior?” Donna asked him.

“Um…no,” Dick decided with a scowl, “and I’m not Bruce Junior.”

Dick watched Leslie’s face as she scanned for the baby, noticing how her brow furrowed as the corners of her mouth curved down into a frown. “What is it?” he demanded to know. “I knew there was something wrong. What’s wrong? Is it bad?”

“Dick, calm down,” Donna attempted to soothe him. “You’re going to hyperventilate.”

“Hmmm…well,” Leslie murmured more to herself than the other two. “That’s rather unexpected.”

“Leslie!” Dick nearly shrieked. “What is it? What’s wrong with our baby?”

“Oh, nothing is wrong with your daughter,” she quickly reassured them.

“I knew it was a girl!” Dick excitedly replied, leaning down and kissing his wife.

“You were right,” Donna said with an affectionate smile.

“Well, you’re half right,” Leslie told him. “You have a baby girl, but she has a brother that was hiding behind her until now.”
“What?” Donna gasped in shock as Dick hit the floor with a thud. “Dick!”

Donna lifted her head to look over the side of the exam table, but she could only make out his legs. The sound of a low groan told her that he was already beginning to come around as Leslie kneeled down beside him. “Easy, Dick,” she cautioned him as she helped into a sitting position. “Take your time.”

“I… I don’t know what happened,” Dick murmured. “You said a girl and then a brother and then everything just went black.”

“It is a little shocking to find out you’re having twins,” Leslie told him.

Dick got to his feet, embarrassed by the fact that he’d fainted. He knew he’d never be able to live this one down. “I can’t believe it. We’re having twins, Troia.”

“I can’t either,” she softly agreed, tears shining in her blue eyes. “We get one of each.”

Dick rubbed his forehead in an effort to erase the lingering lightheadedness. “We’ll need to get two of everything now… probably need to get a bigger place to live… a bigger car… two car seats… two cribs…”

“You’re going to have to make extra sure that you eat enough and keep it down,” Leslie reminded her. “You’re eating for three now, young lady.”

“I’ll make sure that she gets plenty to eat and that she gets her rest,” Dick reassured Leslie.

“Are you still vomiting?”

“Not quite as much as before,” Donna admitted. “I don’t want anything for it, though.”

“If it doesn’t improve soon, we’ll have to do something about it.”

“I’ll keep a close eye on her, Leslie,” Dick assured her.

Donna groaned, closing her eyes in resignation. Her husband was going to be worse than ever before, watching her every move and every single thing she put in her mouth. The next seven months were going to be brutal at this rate.

“Are you sure you couldn’t just sedate him until the babies come?” she asked.

“Hey, I’ll behave… I swear,” Dick promised her, kissing her temple. “I will be a model husband and daddy-to-be.”

“We’ll see,” Donna murmured with a disbelieving frown.

Wayne Manor; August 15th, 08:55 EST

Diana frowned as she entered the entertainment room to find it devoid of children. She placed her hands on her hips, her lips thinning into a grim line. It was far too quiet around here since breakfast, making her wonder what her mischievous children were up to.

“Where are Nick and Kaia?” Bruce asked, stopping behind her.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

“Oh, great,” he grumbled. “Nick! Kaia! Where are you?”
Diana winced as she turned to face her husband. “No need to yell, Bruce. I’m sure they’re just playing in Nicholas’s room.”

Bruce’s eyes narrowed as he stared at his wife. “You do remember who our children are, right?”

“Bruce, they’re good children,” she adamantly stated. “They’re just a little…energetic…at times.”

At that precise moment, they turned at the sound of a barking puppy and squealing children. Ace came running down the hallway dripping wet and covered in soap suds followed by a wet kitten and two equally wet children. Alfred appeared at the end of the hallway in time to grab the puppy as Nicholas caught the furious kitten.

“What in Hera’s name is going on?” Diana cried in shock.

Bruce caught Kaia as she attempted to run past him, picking her up in his arms. “What are you two doing?” he demanded to know.

“We giving Ace and Peanut a baf,” Kaia informed him with a huge grin on her face, her pigtails dripping with water and soap suds.

Diana couldn’t contain her laughter as Kaia dripped on Bruce who was less than amused by the unexpected turn of events. “And whose bright idea was this?” he growled.

Kaia pointed at Nicholas who was holding a hissing kitten as far away from his body as possible to keep from being scratched. “They needed a bath, daddy,” Nicholas said, bubbles and water dripping from his nose and chin.

“Nicholas,” Bruce said in exasperation. “You should have had one of us help you.”

Nicholas’s little face scrunches up in confusion as he stared up at his father. “But, daddy, you said that me and Kaia have to take care of Ace and Peanut. That’s what we did. We tried to give them a bath.”

“He has you there, Bruce,” Diana murmured, biting at her bottom lip.

Bruce felt all his anger melt away as he looked into those big blue eyes filled with confusion. This kind of was his fault. He had been adamant when they had left the pet shelter that Nicholas and Kaia had to be responsible for their pets and that’s exactly what they had been trying to do.

“You’re right, Nick,” Bruce said with a sigh. “Let’s go upstairs and get you two dried off. Your mom and I have to leave in a little bit.”

“Where you go?” Kaia asked, tilting her head in curiosity.

“Daddy and I have to go find something,” Diana told her, taking Kaia into her arms and kissing her on the cheek.

“What are you looking for?” Nicholas asked as Bruce picked him up. “Can we help?”

“Uh, no, not this time, little man,” Bruce said, ignoring a chuckling Alfred who turned to take the wet puppy into a bathroom to dry off.

“We never get to help you,” Nicholas pouted as they went upstairs.

“Maybe someday when you’re older, but this is very important,” Bruce told him. “I need you here to help take care of Kaia.”
“Me no need help,” Kaia said as Diana took her into her bedroom to dry off and change.

Taking Nicholas into his bedroom, Bruce got him dried off and changed into a dry pair of shorts and a clean t-shirt. “Okay, let’s go clean up the mess you made in the bathroom.”

Nicholas took off running ahead of Bruce into the bathroom, his bare feet splashing through the standing puddles of water on the marble floor. Bruce groaned as he entered the bathroom to find water and bubbles everywhere. He rubbed his face with his hands, reminding himself this was just a normal part of parenthood and dealing with toddlers…wasn’t it?

The sound of Kaia’s little feet joining in only caused the headache beginning to form behind his eyes to build a little more. Opening his eyes, he couldn’t contain the slight smirk that formed on his face as he watched Nicholas and Kaia laughing and stomping their feet in the water.

“What in the name of Ra is going on up—” Artemis began only to stop short beside Bruce when she saw the mess. “Oh Ra…”

“Yah,” Bruce curtly replied. “Suddenly fighting Ra’s al Ghul seems far easier than raising two toddlers.”

Tim’s laughter only seemed to add to Bruce’s headache. “This is awesome!”

“Glad you think so,” Bruce said. “You can help clean it up.”

“Oh, Hera,” Diana murmured as she joined the others in the bathroom. “This is worse than when Rex and Nicholas drew all over Kaia with their markers.”

“I don’t know if I’d say this is worse than that,” Bruce commented with a frown. “We don’t have time to deal with this right now. We have to leave for France.”

“When will you be back?” Artemis asked.

“Hopefully this afternoon if everything goes well,” Diana informed her.

“Call us right away if you discover the location of any other artifacts,” Bruce told Tim as he crouched down to focus his attention on Nicholas and Kaia. “And you two…help clean this mess up that you made. Okay?”

“Otay,” Kaia said, throwing herself into her father’s arms and giving him a huge hug.

Bruce hugged her before setting her back down. “And no more giving Ace and Peanut baths without asking an adult for help first. Got it?”

“Yes, daddy,” Nicholas agreed as he tried to kick water at Kaia who giggled and ran away from him.

“Too bad Kaia wasn’t given the gift of speed instead of talking to animals,” Artemis said.

Bruce, Diana, and Tim all looked at her in complete shock. “What are you talking about?” Bruce asked as he stood to his feet, finally recovering enough to respond.

“I thought you knew,” Artemis replied, looking at the three stunned faces staring back at her. “Donna stopped by a couple of days ago when you two left to go after the artifacts. She was the one who figured out that Kaia could communicate with her cat.”

“I can’t handle this right now,” he murmured under his breath as he pinched the bridge of his nose.
Looking down at Kaia who was currently throwing soap suds at Nicholas, he couldn’t help wondering what other abilities she was going to be “blessed” with. “Anything else I should know about my daughter?”

“I haven’t noticed any changes in her,” Diana commented as she reached down and picked her daughter up. “Can you really talk to Peanut, Kai?”

Kaia nodded her head. “She tells when she’s hungry,” she told her.

“And what about the puppy?” Bruce asked. “Can you talk with Ace?”

“Yah,” she said. “Me talk with Ace.”

Diana kissed her daughter’s cheek, pride filling her chest with the unexpected revelation before setting her back down. “I’m so proud of you, Kai. You’re getting to be such a big girl.”

“Let’s hope that’s all she’s gifted with,” Bruce grumbled. “Okay, we need to leave. Nick…Kaia…try to behave yourselves while we’re gone.”

Neither responded as they played in the water, having too much fun splashing each other and getting each other wet again. Tim clapped Bruce on the back, chuckling. “They’re toddlers, Bruce. I highly doubt that’s going to happen.”

Bruce shook his head as he turned to leave with Diana, leaving Tim and Artemis behind with the children. “Well, I guess it’s up to us to help clean this mess up,” Tim told her.

“I never imagined this being part of my duties when I agreed to come here to help protect Diana’s family,” Artemis said with a scowl as she took the towels that Tim handed her. “I should be using my sword to fight whoever is threatening Diana, not using towels to clean up a bathroom her children destroyed.”

“We help clean it up,” Nicholas told her as he slid across the bathroom floor on his stomach, sending water shooting up everywhere.

“I think you two have had more than enough fun in here,” Tim announced. “Time to clean this up, kiddo.”

Artemis glanced at Tim as she began mopping up the floor with the towels. “So, are you and Jason close?” she asked out of the blue, doing her best to sound nonchalant.

Tim was a little surprised by her question but hid it well. “Yah, I guess so,” he replied. “We’re definitely closer now than we used to be.”

“Then you used to be?” she questioned him. “You mean since he returned?”

“He told you about all that?” he cryptically inquired, not wanting Kaia and Nicholas to know that Jason died and had been brought back to life.

“Some of it,” she revealed. “He didn’t go into any detail, but yes he told me.”

Tim sat back on his heels as he considered it. “It was pretty tough at first. He tends to be difficult to deal with. His mouth and attitude can be trying at times, but he’s really been making an effort to be a part of the family so we just kind of put up with it.”

Artemis’s face scrunched up as she looked over at Tim. “Okay, what is that horrible smell?”
Tim looked directly at his sister who was trying to dry the floor with a washcloth. “Kaia, is that smell coming from you?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head and pointing at Nicholas. “It’s Ni-Ni.”

“It’s not me,” Nicholas adamantly declared, holding his nose. “It’s Kaia. She stinks.”

“Me don’t stink!” Kaia said with a fierce scowl.

“Artemis, you get to choose,” Tim told her. “Either change Kaia or help clean up the bathroom.”

“Bathroom…definitely the bathroom,” Artemis readily decided, her nose wrinkled in disgust at the stench that had invaded the room.

“What’s going on in here?”

“Jay!” Kaia exclaimed, running over to him.

He picked her up, swinging her up into the air and catching her only to wince with the obtrusive smell. “Whoa! Someone needs their diaper changed.”

“Not me,” Kaia adamantly declared. “It’s Ni-Ni.”

“He’s not in diapers, Kai,” Tim told her, taking her from Jason. “I’ll go change her. You can help Artemis and Nicholas clean up the bathroom.”

“What happened in here?” Jason asked as Tim left.

“We gave Ace and Peanut a bath,” Nicholas revealed with a proud grin.

“I take it that it didn’t go so well,” Jason surmised as he got down on his hands and knees to help. Nick frowned as he got down on the floor by Jason. “No, they got away.”

“Where are they now?”

“Pappoús has Ace and Peanut,” Nick told him.

Artemis watched the exchange between brothers out of the corner of her eye, smiling softly as Nicholas crawled onto Jason’s back as he tried to help dry the marble floor. It was obvious the children adored their older brothers and, even though Jason was a relative outsider compared to the other two, he was included in that. It didn’t hurt that Jason seemed to exude a natural charm that appealed to the children. It wasn’t something that she had noticed before but was seeing it now.

“What are you doing here?” Artemis found the words spilling past her lips before she could stop them. She scowled to herself, not liking the way that Jason had a way of making her feel unsettled inside.

Jason looked over at her with a smirk on his face but didn’t get a chance to answer. “Here you guys are,” Dick said as he entered the bathroom with a glass of milk in one hand and one of Alfred’s delectable homemade pastries in the other. “Wow…this doesn’t look good. Nick, did you and Kaia try to give the puppy a bath?”

“Yah, daddy wasn’t happy about it,” Nick said with a frown.

Dick moved to sit on the edge of the bathtub, reaching over to let the water out of it. “I can imagine
not,” he agreed with a chuckle. “I bet Bruce and Diana about had a heart attack.”

“He handled it better than you would think,” Tim said as he entered with a cleaned-up Kaia.

“Hey, peanut,” Dick said to her. “Did you and Nick cause this mess?”

“No, daddy did,” Kaia told him.

“Somehow, I find that very hard to believe,” Dick uttered with a laugh.

“We’re into blaming everyone else for everything that happens,” Tim warned him.

“Ah, toddlers,” Dick muttered. “Can’t wait until I get to experience all this with my own kids someday.”

“Did Donna come with you?” Artemis asked.

“No, she had a photo shoot this morning,” he replied as Kaia climbed up to sit on the edge of the tub beside him. “Bruce was able to get most of the pieces of Diana’s SUV from Gotham Harbor. I came over to help Jason go through all of it to see if we can find any evidence.”

“I will help too,” Artemis readily decided. “It has to be better than this.”

Atlantic Ocean; August 15th, 12:38 EST

Batman glanced at his wife out of the corner of his eye. She had been unusually quiet for most of the flight to France making him wonder what was bothering her the most. There were far too many things going on in their lives right now to be able to pinpoint just one thing.

“Okay, princess,” Batman began, checking the flight instruments on the Invisible jet. It wasn’t often she let him fly her plane, but when she did there was typically something wrong. “You have been far too quiet since we left Gotham. What are you worried about? The kids?”

“No…well, yah…I guess a little,” she confessed as she gazed absentmindedly out the window at the blue ocean waters below. “It just feels like everything is so out of control. I swear it’s as if Eris herself has decided to unleash all her chaos on us.”

Bruce frowned as he pondered what she had just said, a thought suddenly occurring to him. “Do you think that one of your gods could be involved in this?”

“I honestly don’t know what to think anymore, Bruce,” she replied, turning blue eyes swimming with anger and hurt on him. “It might not hurt to petition Athena to see if she knows of anything.”

“We’ll figure out a way through this, princess,” he reassured her. “We’ll stop Ra’s and Hades. We’ll find out who is threatening you and settle the turmoil on Themyscira. We’ll find a way to make Damian feel like a part of the family. We’ll survive the toddler years, the pets, Kaia’s gifted abilities, and Nicholas starting preschool.

“And hopefully, someday, we’ll manage to find time for the two of us to get away somewhere private where no one can reach us, and I can ravish you until we’re both too exhausted to move.”

Diana couldn’t contain the laughter that bubbled up inside of her. He always seemed to find a way to make her feel a little bit better about things when her anger and frustration tried to get the better of her. “I’d love to go away with you where we could just stay in bed all day, but I don’t see that happening any time soon.”
“Who said anything about staying in bed all day?” he questioned her with a small smirk. “I plan on taking you in the kitchen, the living room, the shower, on the beach.”

Diana groaned with the images of making love with Bruce that popped into her head. “You’re making it difficult to focus on this mission.”

“At least you’re not brooding anymore,” he replied. “I was beginning to worry I was rubbing off on you.”

“Hera help me if that starts to happen,” she teased him. “Do you think Damian knows where his grandfather is now?”

“I doubt it,” he responded with a shake of his head. “Ra’s no doubt moved bases right after Talia and Damian left for Gotham.”

“I know he can be difficult at times, but I feel so bad for him,” she thoughtfully said. “Maybe once things settle down again we should both spend some time with him together…just the three of us.”

Bruce looked over at Diana, stunned by her suggestion. “You would be willing to do that?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” she asked him. “I love you, Bruce. We’re a team. There isn’t anything I wouldn’t do for you.”

He felt his throat constrict with the unexpected flood of emotion that threatened to overwhelm him as he tightened his grip on the controls of the plane. “Love you too, princess,” he managed to murmur, his expression stoic.

Diana smiled to herself, knowing that he had been affected deeply by her offer and her willingness to accept his son. She knew that Bruce didn’t always know how to handle his emotions, but he was undeniably improving.

She had meant what she had told him. There was nothing that she wouldn’t do or give for him. She loved him with everything that she had. Instead of that love dimming over the years, it had only managed to shine brighter and hotter than ever before.

Glancing at him now, she still couldn’t shake the nagging feeling that something was going to happen to him. As he landed the jet in the French countryside, she did her best to push away the burning of tears that she felt building behind her eyes. She couldn’t handle the thought of being forced to live without him in her life.

Unbuckling her seatbelt, Diana stood to her feet only to be stopped by Bruce who took her by the hand, placing a gentle kiss on her lips. “Thank you, princess.”

She placed her hand against his exposed jaw, her thumb lightly tracing his lips. “You never need to thank me, Bruce,” she softly replied. “Just please promise me that you’ll do everything in your power to come back to me if something happens to you.”

Bruce took her hand from his face, holding it firmly in his. His lips curved into a frown with her request. “What are you talking about, Diana? Do you know something that you’re not telling me?”

“No…not at all,” she quickly responded, shaking her head. “I…I just can’t shake this horrible feeling that something is going to happen to you…that you’re going to be taken away from me. I’ve had it ever since Talia arrived with Damian.”

“Talia is not going to take me away from you, princess,” he firmly stated. “There is absolutely
nothing she could do to make me leave you.”

“I know,” she said. “Just forget I said anything.”

He released a low breath as he studied her. “If anything does happen, know that I will always fight to come back to you.”

She smiled softly with his reassurance. She knew that he would, but it still did little to settle the unsettling sense of fear that continued to swim in the pit of her stomach. “I know you will,” she told him. “Let’s go find this belt so we can go home. I’m sure your children have found some new source of trouble to get into.”

“Why are they my children when they do something wrong?” he asked as he followed her out of the jet.

“They got their mischievousness from you,” she replied, glancing back over her shoulder at her husband.

“I believe your mother told me otherwise…or do I need to remind you about the infamous baby big fiasco?” he countered.

Diana turned a haughty scowl on him, silently cursing her mother for regaling him with countless stories from her childhood. “No, I do not need to be reminded,” she ground out. “However, I have a rather detailed historical account of a very adventurous boy from Alfred that leads me to believe our children got it from you.”

Bruce growled under his breath, secretly plotting ways to get revenge on Alfred for telling her those stories. They should remain buried, never seeing the light of day. Wasn’t the relationship between butler and employee…surrogate father and son…sacred somehow? Now, his wife had ammunition to use against him which was never a good thing. She already had numerous ways to make him crumble without adding any more.

“And don’t be planning any sort of revenge against poor Alfred,” Diana warned him, cutting through his thoughts. “He’s my ally against you and my mother.”

Damn, she was good.

“Where did you say the belt was located?” Diana asked as she followed her husband.

“It should be coming up over the ridge here in a few minutes,” he revealed.

“How were you able to secure the belt in the first place?”

Bruce gave her a look that she was easily able to read despite the fact that he was wearing his cowl. “Princess, have you forgotten who you’re married to?”

“Sorry,” she sheepishly replied. “I just have a lot on my mind right now.”

“There it is,” he said, pointing at an ancient castle.

“Isn’t he expecting Bruce Wayne to show up for the belt?” she questioned him.

“No, Batman made the transaction,” he revealed.

“Always thinking ahead aren’t you?”
His lips twitched into an impish smirk, causing her to roll her eyes at him. “How long have we been married now?” he asked her.

Diana cursed at him in Ancient Greek which only caused his smirk to deepen as they approached the front door of the castle. Batman lifted his hand to grip the large iron ring on the door to let them know of their arrival, but the door opened before he could do anything.

A man about Alfred’s age stood in the doorway. “Please, won’t you come in,” he said with a thick French accent, stepping aside and allowing them entrance. “Monsieur Mercier is expecting you.”

Diana couldn’t help wondering how the butler even knew they were there. If he was anything like Alfred, he knew everything that went on. Of course, it wasn’t every day that two members of the Justice League were spotted walking across the French countryside.

Batman quickly assessed his surroundings as they followed the butler down a long hallway. He wanted to know every single doorway, every window, and possible point of entry and exit in case they needed to fight their way out of here. He wasn’t taking anything for granted, not even this seemingly innocent transaction.

He had contacted the owner of Hades’ Belt as soon as Tim had been able to track it down, negotiating a transaction that allowed him to purchase it. The owner had been quite hesitant at first but had readily changed his mind when Batman had pointed out the fact that the man had illegally attained off the black market.

They made their way towards a door at the end of the corridor, both of them filled with a certain measure of trepidation and ready awareness. There was no telling what they could be walking into or if Talia had beaten them here. They were more than prepared for a fight in order to keep Ra’s al Ghul from getting his hands on it.

He was growing stronger and stronger with every single piece that he amassed. He already had the Helm of Darkness which was the most dangerous and powerful piece that he could possess. The other articles only gave him that much more power.

It sent a shiver down Diana’s spine knowing that her father was that much closer to finding his way out of the Underworld. While they had reached a somewhat tenuous understanding the last time she had seen him, she had a feeling that it wouldn’t hold true once he was finally free from his prison.

Knocking once, the butler opened the door, stepping aside and allowing Batman and Wonder Woman to enter the study. An elderly man with wispy white hair atop his head sat behind a large desk, wire-rim glasses perched on the end of his nose. He looked up at the visitors, a weak smile forming on his face.

He stood up from behind his desk, removing his glasses. “The infamous Batman and the Amazon warrior Wonder Woman,” he greeted them. “I must say it is a pleasure being able to meet you in person.”

“We appreciate your willingness to allow us to purchase Hades’ Belt from you,” Diana diplomatically said.

“May I ask what it is that you need it for?” Mercier inquired.

“It’s confidential,” Batman flatly stated with his usual dangerous rasp and cold unfeeling tone.

Mercier nodded his head in understanding as he made his way towards a large painting on the
opposite wall. “I can understand your need for discretion,” he replied as he removed the painting to reveal a large wall safe. He carefully entered the code, the safe door opening. “I have to admit that I was rather surprised by your request for it. I was under the impression no one knew that I possessed it.”

“I do my homework,” Batman said, his hand resting on his utility belt beneath his cape. He didn’t have a very good feeling about this and, judging by how Diana was standing with her hand on her lasso, she didn’t either.

Mercier pulled out a rather large black metal case, struggling with the weight of it. “Please, let me help you,” Diana offered, quickly coming to his aid.

Mercier chuckled softly as Diana took the case from him and set it down on the enormous oak desk. “Not as strong as I used to be I’m afraid,” he told her.

Batman appeared at Diana’s side, his muscles tense with uneasiness as Mercier opened the case to reveal a golden belt. A soft gasp from Diana reached his ears, telling him that this must be the genuine article. He watched as she lightly ran her fingers over the artifact, appreciation and a healthy dose of respect filling her eyes.

It wasn’t respect of a daughter for her father but deference for what she knew that her father was capable of and the extreme power that he possessed. His fingers itched to reach over to her and put his arm around her, sensing how overwhelming this was for her. Now was not the time, though.

“Let’s go, princess,” he said, lightly grasping her elbow.

His baritone voice seemed to break her out of her trance, forcing her to move. She closed the case, turning towards Mercier. “Thank you, Monsieur Mercier.”

“I hope it will be of help to you,” he replied.

Taking the case, Batman and Wonder Woman quickly made their way towards the front door, feeling as though they had finally been able to accomplish something by gaining possession of one of Hades’ artifacts. Opening the front door, they found themselves facing Talia al Ghul and over a dozen of Ra’s men.

“Hello, my beloved,” Talia greeted him with a grin, her hands resting on her hips.

“Talia,” Batman growled, a batarang in his hand. “I had a feeling that something was off.”

“It’s not my fault,” Mercier said from behind Diana. “She threatened to burn my home to the ground if I told you they were here.”

“Get back and stay down,” Batman growled at Mercier who quickly slammed the door shut and locked it.

“Now, now, beloved,” Talia cooed at him. “It doesn’t have to be like this. Just give me the belt and I’ll let the Amazon live…for now.”

“Over my dead body,” Diana bit out, her hands clenched into fists.

“I’d be more than happy to oblige,” Talia hissed, cocking her gun and pointing it directly at Diana.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Okay, I have to admit I was laughing while I was writing Nicholas and Kaia's scene. Hope you enjoyed it! :)

UP NEXT: Bruce and Diana face off against Talia and her men. Meanwhile, the rest of the family tries to find clues in the wreckage of Diana's SUV. Will they find what they need?
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 19

*Underworld; August 15th, 12:33 EST*

Hades wandered across the length of his spacious throne room, his hands clasped behind his back as he mulled over the strange sensations that he had been experiencing as of late. Something was stirring in the land of the living and it most definitely involved him.

Someone was collecting his armor and weapons.

It caused his lips to curl into a devious smile as he considered the ramifications of such an event taking place. Did this collector truly understand what they were doing by amassing his possessions in such a way—-the true extent of the power that they could potentially tap into?

He closed as his eyes as he focused on the power that he could feel growing stronger within him…the pull he was beginning to feel to the outside world. Someone had his possessions in very close proximity to each other. He could feel it deep in his bones.

He couldn’t help wondering if this person understood the sacrifice they would be making in attempting to summon him and his power from the depths of the Underworld. Every time magic was involved there was always a price that would have to be paid and this person would be paying with their conscious mind and body.

Did they truly understand the extent of that price, or did they believe that they could just summon his power from the Underworld and harness it for themselves without any sacrifice on their part?

“Foolish mortal,” Hades muttered to himself with a darkening gleam in his eyes.

His mind began to wander with the possibilities that awaited him once he had finally gained his freedom from the Underworld. There was so very much to do, so many things to accomplish. His thoughts soon turned to that of his daughter.

Diana.

He mulled over the memories of their meeting and his revelation to her that he was her father. She had adamantly refused to believe him, but he knew the truth and, he was certain deep down, she knew it too on some level. There was no denying the fact that he was her father whether she wanted to accept it or not.

He knew that Diana had married a mortal man…the demon of the night known as Batman. Despite being mortal, this Batman was a force to be reckoned with, a highly intelligent mind not so easily dismissed. He had no doubt that Diana and her husband would do everything in their power to send him back to the Underworld.

This time, however, he would not be so easily defeated.

“My lord,” Thanatos greeted him as he entered the private chamber. “I have been keeping track of what has been going on with your daughter as you requested.”
“And?”

“It appears that her demon husband is helping her find your possessions to keep them from falling into the wrong hands,” Thanatos revealed. “So far they have failed to stop it.”

“I know my daughter,” Hades replied. “She won’t give up and neither will her husband. They are quite a formidable pair, but they won’t be able to stop me once I’ve escaped.”

“And what of their children?”

Hades’ lips curved with the thought of his grandchildren. “It will be a grand family reunion.”

**France; August 15th, 13:26 EST**

“Talia! Stop this right now!” Bruce yelled with a fierce growl as he instinctively moved to stand closer to his wife. “Diana has nothing to do with this. Your fight is with me, not her.”

Talia’s eyes narrowed with the raw anger flowing through her. She could feel her heart pounding wildly in her chest as she stared him down. “This has everything to do with her. You chose her over me and now my father and I will destroy your Amazon along with everyone else who stands in our way. You don’t have to perish along with her. You can still join us, beloved.”

“And what about Damian?” Bruce countered, hand clenched tightly around his batarang. “You had no trouble walking out on him and leaving him behind, did you?”

Talia’s expression briefly flashed with remorse, anguish choking her words as she spoke. “I only left him with you until I can come back for him. It’s far too dangerous for him to be with me right now. I couldn’t risk his life like that.”

“If you truly cared about our son, you never would have left him in the first place to follow your father,” Batman ground out. “You know as well as I do that he deserves far better than what you have given him, Talia.”

“Don’t you dare say that,” Talia hissed, pointing her gun directly at him. “I am a good mother. I have raised him to be a true warrior like his grandfather and his father.”

“Sorry I’m late,” Flash announced as he zipped in and around Talia and her guards. “Had a little low blood sugar problem so had to stop for a few dozen croissants.”

Batman growled low in his throat, annoyed that it took Flash so long to arrive. “Give up, Talia. It’s over.”

Flash stopped beside Talia, his elbow coming to rest on her shoulder as he leaned against her. “Wow, you’re a total babe,” he told her, giving her his best flirtatious grin. “You really know how to pick ‘em, Bats. Too bad she’s looney tunes like her daddy.”

“Flash!” Batman growled.

“Got it covered, Bats,” Flash casually replied, taking the gun out of a surprised Talia’s hands. “I’ll take this thank you very much…oh, and I better take these too. Wouldn’t want anyone getting an itchy trigger finger.”

Flash raced in and around all the guards, disarming each of them in less than a blink of an eye. He dumped the weapons in a pile at Batman and Wonder Woman’s feet before finally stopping on the other side of Diana and wrapping an arm around her shoulders.
“You know Talia’s hot, but no one is as absolutely gorgeous as you, Wondy,” he flirted with her, wiggling his eyebrows at her beneath his mask. “You are still the reigning Amazon of my heart.”

Talia screamed in rage, her hands clenched tightly at her sides. “This is far from over, beloved,” she seethed. “My father will win, and you will finally be forced to choose between me and your whore Amazon wife.”

Diana took a step forward, ready to beat this woman senseless. She’d had more than enough of her and was prepared to put a stop to her. Batman instantly reached out and grabbed Diana by the arm to stop her from going after her. Talia was dangerous and he didn’t trust her one bit. She was trying to bait them into a fight and he was not about to rise to that challenge.

Talia’s lips curled into a derisive sneer. “Till we meet again, beloved,” she taunted them, blowing Bruce a kiss. “And I guarantee that we will see each other again very soon.”

Talia signaled her guards who all threw smoke bombs at the same time as Talia drew a dagger from her boot, throwing it directly at Wonder Woman. Diana instinctively caught the dagger by the blade just inches from her throat, tossing it down with a furious growl.

“Flash!” Batman barked, his blood boiling with rage as they raced through the smoke to where Talia and her men had just been.

“On it!” Flash yelled, immediately running in a circle to remove the thick cloud of smoke that had enveloped the area revealing that Talia and her assassins were gone.

“You should’ve let me go after her when I had the chance instead of stopping me,” Diana angrily snapped. “Now, she’s escaped to only Hera knows where.”

“It was a trap, Diana,” Bruce insisted.

“I feel a marital spat coming on so I’m going to leave you two at it,” Flash decided as he slowly backed away with his hands held up in front of him. “Besides, I met a cute French chick at the bakery. See you guys later.”

Diana stormed away as Flash left, her anger flaming hot. She could have gotten to Talia if Bruce hadn’t grabbed her by the arm, pulling her to a stop. Now, Talia al Ghul was free to continue helping her father release Hades from the Underworld and try to take over the world.

Bruce followed from a short distance with the case in hand. He had learned long ago that it was best to give her a little space when she was this upset. Trying to talk to her only made things far worse and life right now was difficult enough for them as it was without having her even more furious with him.

Returning to the jet, Diana stopped, her head lowering as Bruce came to stand behind her. “Why did you stop me, Bruce?” she asked, anger lacing her voice. “Do you still have feelings for her?”

He knew this conversation was eventually going to be coming and she had every right to ask the question. She’d been put through hell ever since Talia and Damian had first shown up on their doorstep. It was natural for questions and insecurities to arise even in someone as strong and confident as Diana.

What he hadn’t anticipated was how deeply the hurt in her voice would cut straight through to his heart.

Bruce released a heavy sigh as he attempted to order his thoughts. He had a tendency to put his foot
in his mouth and he didn’t want this to be one of those times. He wanted to settle her insecurities once and for all.

“Diana—”

“Please, Bruce, just be honest with me even if it’s not something I want to hear,” she interjected. “I know you love me, but I just need to know if you still have feelings for Talia too.”

“Please look at me, princess,” he requested.

Diana turned to face her husband, a mix of anger and hurt veiling her face. She crossed her arms against her chest as if bracing herself for the worst. She knew in her heart that Bruce truly loved her. That wasn’t in question. What she feared was just how much he still felt for Talia.

“At one time, I did believe that I loved Talia, but not anymore,” he told her. “Since meeting you, I’ve learned what real love is and what it is not…and she could never come close to what I feel for you.”

“Why did you stop me then?” she demanded to know.

His gauntleted hand cupped her cheek as he gazed into her impossibly blue eyes that he loved to drown himself in. “Because I don’t trust Talia, princess. She was trying to bait you into attacking her.”

“I can handle her,” Diana maintained, a measure of her anger dissipating.

“I know you can, but you don’t know Talia like I do. She had something prepared for you in hopes that you would try to attack her, something far more than just throwing a dagger at your throat. For me, it wasn’t a risk worth taking. I need you with me if we’re going to stop Ra’s from releasing your father from the Underworld.”

Diana averted her eyes, taking in the beautiful French country landscape. It was so peaceful…so tranquil here…so unlike their life right now. “I understand, but I still think I could’ve taken her.”

The corner of Bruce’s lips quirked slightly with her stubborn resolution. It was so his princess in every way. “I know but we’ve got the belt now. That should help us some. It’ll give Ra’s less power.”

“Not by much,” she admitted. “The belt isn’t nearly as powerful as the Helm of Darkness or the ring. It’ll help even more if we can find the other pieces before they do.”

“Let’s go home,” Bruce suggested, both climbing into the invisible jet. “Maybe the boys have been able to uncover more information about the other pieces of missing armor.”

“I’m sorry, Bruce,” she replied as she settled into the passenger seat and buckled her seatbelt. “I shouldn’t have questioned you about Talia. This whole thing has just got me so rattled for some reason.”

“It’s okay, princess…I understand,” he reassured her as he started up the jet. “I would be the same way if I were in your place. I would be less than accepting of the situation if a man showed up with a child that you two shared.”

“I want you to know how much I appreciate you not attempting to shut me out of this or trying to keep me in the dark,” she told him. “In the past, you would’ve tried to do all of this on your own, leaving me out of it as much as possible in order to try to protect me. Thank you for allowing us to
be partners working together to stop Ra’s and Talia.”

His lips curled slightly with her words. “I guess we’ve come a long way since we first started dating, haven’t we?”

“Yes, we have, but especially you, Bruce,” she told him. “I know how difficult it has been for you not to revert to your old ways, but I really appreciate how hard you’re trying to let me work through this latest crisis with you.”

He chuckled softly, feeling somewhat uncomfortable talking about his feelings. “Well, you do make it a little difficult to revert back to old habits, princess,” he teased her. “Having a furious Amazon wife on your hands makes you think twice about what you’re doing…especially when you threaten to send me to the couch to sleep all alone for the night.”

Diana batted his shoulder with the back of her hand. “I’m not that bad,” she claimed. “I just can’t stand being left on the sideline while you constantly throw yourself into danger at every turn or always trying to take care of everything by yourself.”

“I’m not that bad,” he maintained with a grimace, casting a sidelong glance at his wife. Hearing it spoken out loud like that just made it seem so much worse than what his mind told him.

Diana gave him a look that told him otherwise. “Do I need to remind you of what happened with Sienna Conti because you decided to try to handle it yourself?” she icily reminded him. “Nearly tore our marriage apart.”

“Well it sounds bad when you put it like that,” he countered, knowing his argument was weak. It had probably been one of his worst ideas.

“I’m just saying that I appreciate you making an effort,” she told him. “It’s good to know that you’ve learned from your mistakes.”

Bruce growled low in his throat, frowning at her. “It was a solid plan at the time and you know it. If the press hadn’t gotten wind that something was up with Sienna, I would’ve been successful in stopping her without getting you involved in it.”

“Let’s not go down that road, Bruce…not unless you want to sleep on the couch tonight.”

Bruce scowled as he set the course for home, anxious to get back to the cave to find out what the boys had discovered about the bomb that blew up Diana’s car. With any luck, they were able to find some sort of evidence that had been left behind that would help them find her attacker.

**Batcave; August 15th, 18:05 EST**

“I’ve dusted every piece of the car that was recovered for prints and they all belong to Diana, Bruce, or one of us,” Dick informed them as he approached the group sitting on the floor of the Batcave around pieces of Diana’s SUV. He sat down on the floor next to his wife, placing his hands behind him as he leaned back. “I hate this. I feel like we’re just running in circles chasing our own tails. We should have more to go on than this by now.”

“Don’t worry,” Donna said, reaching over to pat his thigh. “We’ll get it figured out, Dick. You guys always do.”

“I feel like we’re running out of time, though,” Dick replied in frustration, his head falling back in frustration. He glared into the darkness of the cave above him as if it held all the answers that they so desperately needed but refused to divulge to them. “This person is escalating in their threats. I
don’t want to even think of what they’ll try to do next.”

“I know…me too,” Donna agreed, trying to suppress the shiver of dread that threatened to overtake her, but she couldn’t let it. She had two little ones growing inside of her to think about now.

Understanding what she was feeling and where her thoughts were going, Dick scooted closer to his wife, wrapping his arm around her shoulders. He didn’t want her getting upset about everything that was going on right now. She only needed to worry about their twins and staying safe.

“Well, Oracle ran through every single bit of the security footage of the parking lot outside of the embassy,” Tim said as he sat down in a huff of annoyance. “There is about ten minutes that is missing from the security feed.”

“Someone hacked into the security system and erased the evidence?” Dick angrily growled. “I can’t believe this is happening.”

“This is a nightmare that never seems to end,” Donna murmured, raking her fingers back through her raven hair.

Jason approached the group at that moment, a piece of the bomb in his hands as he sat down on the floor next to Artemis. “What is that?” she asked, leaning over to get a better look at what he was holding.

“It’s a piece of the bomb that was used on Diana’s car,” Jason muttered with a frown.

“What’s wrong?” Artemis asked, picking up on the unsettled feeling that gripped him.

“I think I’ve seen this sort of bomb design before,” he replied, turning it over in his hands as he continued to inspect it.

Tim sat up straighter with the unexpected revelation, his brow furrowing. “Like here in Gotham?”

“Yah,” Jason murmured. “It’s been a while, but I’m positive I caught a guy setting a bomb similar to this one.”

“Can you remember anything about him?” Dick asked.

Jason shook his head, his lips pursing into a thin line as he thought about it. “It’s probably been at least a year or more since I caught him.”

“You didn’t shoot him, did you?” Dick questioned him, fearing what his brother had done back then.

“No, Richard,” Jason spat out, overemphasizing his brother’s name as he shot a glare at him. “It’s just that a lot has happened since then.”

“Maybe you should hypnotize him into remembering,” Damian suggested from his position next to Dick.

“You know…that’s not a bad idea,” Dick thoughtfully added, reaching over to ruffle Damian’s hair. “Good idea, kid.”

“Excuse me?” Jason interjected, a frown on his face.

Damian smiled to himself, appreciating the praise Dick had given him. It made him feel as if he was a real part of the team…a part of the family. “I’ve heard you can get quite a bit of information
from someone under hypnosis. It has proven to be very useful.”

Jason, however, wholeheartedly disagreed with the notion. “I don’t think it’s a good idea at all,” he adamantly declared, his voice rising in proportion to the panic he could feel swelling inside of him.

“Why?” Tim demanded to know. “It could help us find whoever is after mom. Don’t you want to find this person before something more happens to her?”

“Of course I want to find whoever is out to get Diana as much as the rest of you, but I refuse to be hypnotized,” Jason heatedly maintained. “There has to be a better way.”

The corner of Artemis’s lips quirked with amusement as she leaned towards him with a sultry look in her eyes. “Afraid we might learn something that you don’t us to know about you?” she challenged him.

“That’s a big part of it,” Jason stated, looking around at the five pairs of eyes staring back at him. “You may all be family but I’d still like certain parts of my life to remain private.”

“What’s her name?” Tim challenged him with a laugh.

“There is no ‘her’,” Jason insisted, glancing at Artemis. “I just don’t like the idea of being hypnotized while you goons are hammering me with questions. I wouldn’t be able to control what you ask me or how I answer. It doesn’t sound like a very good idea to me.”

“What else do you suggest we do?” Tim asked, growing frustrated. “Mom’s agreed to work from home for now, but we all know that’s not going to last long. We’d have more luck trying to get Bruce to wear a pink cape on patrol then keeping her here.”

“That’s true,” Donna agreed. “Unfortunately, this is only a tentative truce to keep Bruce from having a nervous breakdown and to give us time to find out who is behind the attacks. She’s also too preoccupied with trying to keep Hades from being released from the Underworld to spend too much time on the embassy right now.”

“That is not a good thing to be preoccupied with,” Artemis groused. “We need to find this person quickly. Are we certain that it’s not Aresia?”

“No, but we aren’t certain it is her either,” Dick responded.

“Well, let’s look at what we have so far,” Jason said. “First, the doll that belonged to Diana that was left in her room on Themyscira. Who could have gotten their hands on it? Second, the bloody dagger sticking out of Diana’s desk at the embassy. It was the dagger that Diana gave to Aresia. Bruce spotted a woman with blond hair wearing a black cloak that matched the one worn by whoever stabbed Diana.”

“That’s a lot of circumstantial evidence,” Tim replied, rubbing the back of his neck as he stared at the pieces lying on the floor before him. It used to be his mom’s SUV. It made him sick inside to think what could have happened. “None of it points to the fact that Aresia is truly alive or behind these attacks.”

“Putting a bomb under Diana’s car does not fit with Aresia at all,” Artemis pointed out. “Amazons don’t sneak around building bombs. We confront and fight.”

Jason looked at Artemis, noticing the fire that blazed in her bright green eyes. He felt a draw to her that he couldn’t explain or fight nor did he want to. “What if she has an accomplish that is not an Amazon?” he suggested.
“I guess but I don’t see Aresia recruiting a male to help her destroy Diana,” Artemis replied with a shake of her head. “She hates men. She would never use one to help her no matter how desperate she might be.”

“I agree with Artemis,” Donna added. “I think someone is trying to make us think that it’s Aresia in order to throw suspicion off her.”

“Then who could it be?” Dick questioned them.

“I think we need to go back to the staff at the embassy,” Tim stated.

“Bruce already vetted all of them when they were hired,” Jason reminded them.

“Yah, and you all know how paranoid and anal Bruce can be about people he doesn’t know anything about,” Dick added. “He’s only that much worse when it comes to someone who’s going to be around Diana or one of us.”

“I just can’t believe that Ivan’s murder had nothing to do with this threat to Diana,” Artemis said, shaking her head in disbelief. “It ended up harming the embassy and Diana more than any of the threats that have been made to her.”

“Ra’s and Talia have impeccable timing,” Tim replied, glancing at Damian. He hoped that if Damian did know something more than what he’d already told him that he’d volunteer it now because they were quickly running out of time.

Damian kept his gaze fixed on the countless pieces of the SUV in front of him, feeling eyes on him. He felt as if he was being pulled in two opposite directions, caught in the middle of a tug-o-war that would never end. Side with his grandfather and mother or his father and his other family.

He felt his loyalties being stretched like a rubber band to its very limits. He couldn’t help wondering how long before those same loyalties finally snapped. At this point, even he didn’t know which side would end up winning—the Ra’s or the Wayne’s.

Whichever side won out in the end, he knew he could never return to the other. It would be the ultimate betrayal, one that could never be forgiven.

“I don’t know anything else if that’s what you’re wondering,” Damian cryptically replied, not meeting anyone’s gaze. “My grandfather never divulged his plans to me. What I learned I picked up here and there.”

Dick reached over and rubbed Damian’s back in a show of comfort and support. “It’s okay, Damian,” he reassured him, giving him a half smile. “We know that you would tell us if you knew more.”

Jason gave Dick a look that told him he thought otherwise. He believed that Damian still had more information that he was withholding and was determined to get it out of him one way or another. Now, however, wasn’t the time to press the issue. He’d do it later when he could get Damian alone and away from Dick’s protective eye.

“Okay, we’re getting off track here,” Artemis stated as she turned her attention to Jason. “If you are going to refuse hypnosis, then we need to come up with another plan on figuring out who planted this bomb.”

“I think I have an idea,” Jason announced, his eyes narrowing in thought.
“And what would that be?” Tim asked.

“Artemis and I are going to pay a friend of mine a visit tonight,” he informed them.

“Oh, Ra,” Artemis mumbled under breath. She could only imagine what trouble he was going to get the two of them into now.

“Are you having a party in the cave?”

All six of them turned to find Bruce and Diana returning from their mission, a black metal case in Batman’s hand. “You got it,” Tim said, relieved. “Did you run into any trouble?”

Diana glanced at Damian, her heart heavy for him and what he was no doubt going through.

“Nothing we couldn’t handle.”

“You saw my mother,” Damian stated, his voice emotionless.

“I think we should probably head upstairs for dinner,” Donna announced, giving everyone a look that said it was time to leave. She was also anxious to announce to everyone that she and Dick were expecting twins. “I’m sure Alfred will be coming after us soon.”

“Good idea,” Jason agreed. “I’m starving, and Artemis and I have a long night ahead of us.”

“Yay,” Artemis uttered with a roll of her eyes as she followed the others upstairs.

Bruce and Diana waited until everyone had left before making their way towards him. Damian stood to his feet, not really wanting to talk about it. “It’s all right,” the boy said. “I don’t want to know.”

“I’m sorry, Damian,” Diana softly said, placing her hand on his shoulder. “She told us that she is going to come back for you when she’s done.”

Damian snorted derisively in response, his jaw clenching as he steeled himself against the heartache that had seeped into his chest. “I’m sure she will.”

His voice held no conviction as he kicked at the stone floor with the toe of his tennis shoe. Diana knelt before him, wanting to ease his hurt. “Damian, you are a part of this family,” she reassured him. “I know your mother isn’t here, but—”

“You are not my mother and you never will be,” he angrily spat out. “I have a mother and she will come for me when she can.”

Bruce watched the exchange from behind Diana, ready to step in if Damian gave her too much trouble. He had warned his son long ago that he would not stand for any disrespect towards Diana or anyone else in the family for that matter.

Diana remained calm, understanding where his anger was rooted. “I don’t want to replace your mother, Damian,” she evenly replied, crouching before him. “You already have a mother in Talia, but I can still be your friend and I will always tell you the truth. Your mother feels bad about leaving you behind and does want to come back for you. How she feels about you is very clear. She loves you, Damian.”

Damian nodded his head but didn’t say another word. Instead, he turned and left, heading upstairs to join the others. Diana watched him as he made his way to the stairs, releasing a low breath before finally standing to her feet.
She felt Bruce press his lips against her temple, her shoulders slumping slightly. “You were great with him, princess,” he reassured her.

“I don’t know, Bruce,” she absentmindedly replied. “He has to feel some measure of animosity towards me. I’m the one who stands in the way of his mother being here. I’m in the position that he feels his mother should be.”

“I’m sure Damian feels that way…even wishes that it were true, but it’s not what I want,” he told her. “You are exactly where I want you to be—right here with me and our family.”

Diana smiled softly, kissing him. “Let’s go get cleaned up and see if the boys were able to find anything out while we were gone.”

Bruce glanced at the pieces of SUV that lay scattered on the ground. It still gave him chills to see her car like this, images of what could have been flashing through his mind. He was more certain than ever that Aresia was not behind these attacks. Someone was doing their best to try to make it seem that way.

Diana followed his gaze, her eyes falling to what was left of her car. “This wasn’t Aresia, Bruce,” she said.

Bruce’s head snapped up, stunned by her words. It was as if she had been reading his mind. “I know,” he agreed. “This isn’t Aresia’s handiwork.”

“This isn’t her style,” Diana thoughtfully replied. “She doesn’t blow things up.”

“For some reason, they want you to believe it’s Aresia who’s behind these attacks,” he said. “The question is why.”

“I don’t know but we’re going to find out,” Diana evenly stated. “I’m not about to run away from this and I’m not shutting down the embassy.”

“I would never expect you to,” he reassured her. “Asking you to shut down the embassy would be asking you to change who you are, and I refuse to do that to you. I won’t try to change the woman that I fell in love with.”

“That’s good because it would only cause a very violent argument,” she told him as she turned to head towards the changing area, “and I prefer having you in bed with me rather than on the couch.”

“I definitely prefer being in bed with you too,” he wholeheartedly agreed as he turned to follow her.

Making his way to the changing area, he couldn’t shake the nagging sense of dread that sat in the pit of his stomach that told him that things were only going to continue to get worse from here. He hoped that he was wrong, but, then again, he was rarely if ever wrong.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I love how this update turned out. I love writing the family all together especially when they’re trying to work a case together.

UP NEXT: Jason and Artemis are on the hunt for a bomber! Diana and her new
assistant work on rebuilding the embassy from home. :}
Chapter 20

Wayne Manor; August 15th, 21:43 EST

Jason couldn’t contain the laughter that continued to escape as he and Artemis entered the garage from the manor. Artemis shook her head in amazement as she followed him past one expensive car after another. She swore she’d never seen so many cars like this in one place.

“I do not see your amusement,” she told him. “They’re having twins. What is so humorous about that?”

“It’s the fact that Dick passed out at Leslie’s office,” he replied as he stopped in front of his Ducati. “I am never going to let him live that down.”

“Bruce and Diana were pretty shocked too,” Artemis commented, looking at the Ducati in front of her. “Where are we going exactly?”

“To see a man about a bomb,” Jason told her with a smirk as he handed her his helmet. “Hop on, Red.”

She watched as he swung his leg over his bike and started it up. “Are you sure this is safe?” she asked, clearly skeptical about getting on with him, looking over the bike as she held the helmet in her hands.

Jason gave her a big grin. “Trust me,” he told her, his voice taking on a cocky quality. “I’d never let anything happen to you.”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she handed him back his helmet. “I think you will need this far more than me.”

“No way,” he said, revving his bike. “Passengers always get the helmet. Bike rules.”

“Fine,” she grumbled, reluctantly putting the helmet on. “I’d feel better if I was the one driving though.”

“Do you even know how?”

“No, but I’m sure I could figure it out,” she decided as she climbed on behind him.

“I think it would be better if I just taught you myself…on Bruce’s bike.”

“You don’t trust me with yours?”

“Sweetheart, I don’t trust anyone with my bike, not even my own family,” he countered. “Just hold on tight.”

“To what?”

“Me,” he replied, shooting her a smug grin over his shoulder.
Jason’s breath hitched as her arms slowly circled his waist, her body pressing against him. The feel of her breasts against his back was causing his body to instantly respond to her and his mind taking him places that he shouldn’t go right now. It wasn’t helping things at all that she smelled so great.

He took off from the garage and down the road, his Ducati roaring loudly as they sped towards Gotham. He was having a very difficult time ignoring the intense attraction he felt towards her or the way that his heart raced as she shifted her body more fully against him.

The night was muggy but not particularly unbearable. It, however, felt as though he was caught up in an inferno at that moment with her breath pulsating against the back of his neck. This was going to be a very long night, one that he wasn’t certain he was going to survive…not with how badly he was aching to kiss her.

Artemis felt awkward on the back of a bike with her arms wrapped around Jason, but she couldn’t deny how exhilarating it felt. She wasn’t certain that it was due to the fact that they were racing through the night at a high rate of speed or because she was pressed up against Jason, holding him so intimately.

She knew that she’d be lying to herself if she didn’t acknowledge the growing feelings that Jason had somehow managed to stir up inside of her. The problem was what did she want to do about it. Did she even want to be in a relationship with a man?

She tightened her hold on Jason as he took a sharp corner, her hands moving over his abdomen to get a better grip. She was startled at the rock-hard muscles that she discovered beneath the soft cotton t-shirt he was wearing. It caused a startling sense of warmth to pulsate through her body, making her tingle all over.

Jason’s jaw clenched tightly with the unexpected feeling of Artemis’s hands roaming over his abdomen before settling low around his waist, her fingers brushing against the top of his blue jeans. He did his best to keep his breathing even, but it was next to impossible with her hands so close to his…

“How much further?” Artemis asked as they stopped at a stop light.

“About ten minutes,” he replied. “Why? Does my driving scare you?”

“Not at all,” she snapped. “I just want to find whoever is behind this and put a stop to it.”

“We will,” he reassured her, revving his bike again. “We won’t stop until we do.”

Artemis appreciated how resolute Jason was in helping to keep Diana and the family safe. It was obvious that Jason truly cared about his family though he didn’t verbalize it. It was more than evident in his actions and his refusal to let this go until the person was found.

She swallowed her yelp of surprise when Jason took off as the light turned green. Her fingers quickly found purchase on the edge of his jeans, not realizing what it was doing to Jason. At that point, she was just trying to hold on for dear life. She swore he was doing this to her on purpose.

She was going to make him pay dearly for this.

Jason knew they needed to get to their destination quickly. He didn’t think he was going to last much longer with the way that she had a death-grip on the edge of his jeans. When he had told her to hold on to him, this wasn’t exactly what he’d had in mind, but he certainly wasn’t complaining about it either.
He doubted that she even realized what she was doing. Besides that, he didn’t think that she had any feelings for him past grudging acceptance of his presence in her life. He hoped to work his charm a little more before actually making any moves towards something more between them.

He attempted to clear his mind of outside thoughts and distractions, forcing himself to focus on what they were doing in Gotham tonight and their imperative reasons for finding Eddie. It did little to help him, though, when her chin came to rest on his shoulder.

He swore he was not going to survive this night.

The lights of the bike shop came into view much to his relief as he drove towards the back of the shop. As soon as Jason parked the bike, Artemis immediately jumped off, removing the helmet and shoving it directly into Jason’s abdomen.

“I think you were trying to kill me,” she growled with a narrowed gaze.

Jason’s arms automatically wrapped around the helmet being shoved at him with a low grunt, setting it on his bike. “What are you talking about? I always drive like that.”

“Then you must have some sort of sick death wish,” she groused with an irritated huff. “Let’s get this over with so I can take a taxi home or I’ll walk. Either way, it’ll be far safer.”

“I’m crushed,” Jason replied, his hand covering his heart as if wounded by her words. “I got you here in one piece and I promise I’ll return you home safely. I’d never let anything happen to you.”

“Whatever,” she muttered, following him to the back door of the bike shop.

Jason lifted his fist, knocking twice before reaching for the handle to find it locked. “Come on, Eddie,” he called through the locked door. “I know that you’re in there. I need information.”

“Go away…Jason…” a man yelled back, his breathing sounding ragged and his voice strained. “Come back…later…uh…much later.”

Jason scowled as he lifted his fist again, pounding harder on the door. “Open the door or I’ll open it for you,” he hollered.

“Just give me…ah…a minute, okay?” the man responded, clearly angered by the intrusion.

Jason glanced at Artemis who was standing to his left with her arms crossed against her chest, her expression revealing her impatience. Just as Jason was about to kick the door down, it opened to reveal a blond-haired woman in a tight black dress that barely covered the essentials.

The woman grinned at Jason as she tugged the skirt of her dress down her thighs a little before straightening her long hair. “You’re cute,” she commented, reaching out to run a long red fingernail along Jason’s jawline. “Come by tomorrow night. Maybe we can have a threesome.”

A growl from Artemis snapped him out of his shock. “I think I’ll pass,” he evenly stated.

The woman glanced at Artemis, giving her a smile. “Bring your girlfriend,” she suggested. “We could make it a real party then.”

Jason’s hand automatically shot out to grab Artemis’s shoulder, keeping her from attacking the woman. “We have plans, but thanks for the offer,” he told her.

The hooker shrugged a shoulder before beginning to walk past them. “Your loss, handsome.”
Artemis glared darkly at the woman, disgusted by her behavior and more than a little angry with how she had tried to come on to Jason. She turned her glare on Jason, uncertain about what she was actually feeling at that moment but knowing she didn’t like it one bit.

“It’s not my fault,” Jason hissed, feeling the need to defend himself for some inexplicable reason.

She tilted her head, cocking an eyebrow at him. “Can we go now?”

“No, come on,” he told her, entering the back of the bike shop to find Eddie zipping up his jeans. “Does your girlfriend know about the hooker, Eddie?”

“No, and she’s not going to know about it either…you got it?” Eddie shot back, his gaze falling on Artemis. “Wow…who is she?”

“She’s with me,” Jason firmly stated with a direct warning gaze, wanting to make sure Eddie didn’t get any ideas about her. He moved to stand in front of Artemis, blocking her from Eddie’s view. “I need information.”

“What makes you think I know anything?” Eddie asked as he went over to his workbench where his cell phone sat next to an open can of beer. “You know I’ve gone clean.”

“Yah, and I’m really a girl scout selling cookies in my spare time,” Jason shot back. “I need to know who made this bomb.”

Jason handed him what was left of the bomb that he’d found still attached to what was left of Diana’s SUV. Eddie frowned as he set down his can of beer, taking the mangled piece to look it over. His eyes narrowed as he studied it before handing it back.

“It could be any of about six guys I know and that’s just off the top of my head,” Eddie replied, moving to sit on top of his workbench. “What do you need the infos for?”

“I have my reasons,” Jason cryptically said. “Just suffice it to say it’s urgent I find this guy.”

“Are you sure it’s a guy?”

“Do you know any bombers who are female?” Jason asked. “It’s not a female MO.”

“Point,” Eddie conceded.

“If you had to guess, who would be the first person you might suspect?”

Eddie ran his hand over his mouth as he thought about it, his eyebrows knitting together in thought. “Okay, I guess if you put a gun to my head, I’d have to say Frankie Alomar or Lefty Whitten.”

Jason thought about it for a moment, trying to remember if either of those names sounded like the guy that he had caught over a year ago. Both sounded familiar to him, but he wasn’t certain why. “Where can I find them?”

Eddie held his hands up in front of him, shaking his head. “No way, man,” he retorted. “I gave you names. I ain’t giving you more than that.”

Artemis stepped around Jason, growing impatient with the situation. “I’ll be more than happy to get the information out of you,” she stated with a dark scowl.

Jason quickly put a hand on Artemis’s arm, pulling her closer to him. “Tell me where I can find them or I’ll tell Denise what I saw going on here tonight,” Jason threatened him.
Eddie cursed under his breath as his hands came to rest on the edge of the workbench, his fingers curling around the edge of it. “Man, you’re trying to get me killed, aren’t you?”

“No, just trying to keep someone else alive.”

“Fine,” he spat out, “but you owe me big for this and I mean big, Jas.”

“Whatever,” Jason uttered in exasperation. “Where can I find these two guys?”

“Last I heard, Frankie was hiding out on the East End,” Eddie informed him. “All you gotta do is hang out at Nick’s Bar and you’ll find Frankie there. Lefty is going to be much harder to find. He tends to lay pretty low. I’ll have to do some asking around to see where he’s at these days.”

“Let me know as soon as you know anything,” Jason told him. “I need the info yesterday.”

“Yah, man,” Eddie relented with a sigh as he rubbed the back of his neck. “Must be pretty desperate if you dragged your sorry ass in here for information.”

“Yah, I guess I am,” Jason confessed. “Just let me know if you hear anything.”

“You got it,” Eddie promised him. “Just don’t tell Denise what you saw here.”

“Keep it zipped and I won’t have to,” Jason said, wagging his forefinger at him like a mother scolding a child.

Artemis gave Eddie a disapproving glare before turning on her heel to follow Jason out into the humid night air. She had to admit that she was rather impressed with what Jason had been able to find out tonight, but she was even more struck by how much Diana and his family must truly mean to him though he tried to hide it.

She picked up the helmet, putting it on before climbing back on the Ducati as Jason swung his leg over and started the bike up. “You really care about Diana, don’t you?”

Jason paused for a moment, mulling over her question as well as his response. He glanced back over his shoulder at her, his heart skipping a beat with the intensity of her gaze that seemed to pierce his very soul. “Yah, I do,” he admitted with a sigh. “She saved Bruce…she brought us all together and made us into a real family.”

“She’s good at drawing people in and making them feel welcomed and comforted…making you feel like you belong and are important,” Artemis agreed.

Jason nodded his head in acknowledgement but said no more as he took off. He didn’t know how she managed to make him talk about things that he’d rather not share. She made him feel things that ran deeper than he believed he was capable of experiencing after everything that he’d been through.

It was both exciting and terrifying at the same time.

He raced through the streets of Gotham, anxious to get to their destination. The feel of her against him was beginning to wreak havoc on his libido, his control starting to waver. The only thing that was saving him at that moment was the wind created by the high rate of speed he was going and the fact that his family was being threatened.

He parked his Ducati in an alley a block away, wanting to keep it out of sight especially in this part of Gotham. Getting off, he took the helmet from Artemis. “Stay close to me at all times and do not
Artemis looked completely affronted by his words as she glared at him. “I am more than capable of taking care of myself,” she snapped. “I do not require protection and definitely not from a man.”

Jason pinched the bridge of his nose as he drew in a deep breath in an effort to settle his rapidly rising frustration, but it was proving futile. “I’m not saying that,” he ground out. “You have no idea what we’re about to get into in that bar, but I do. I know how to handle this situation so please… just let me deal with this.”

“Why did you even bring me with you in the first place?” she questioned him.

“Well…because we’re…we’re kind of a team,” he replied, feeling a little awkward with the question.

Her hands found her hips as she studied, considering this newest information. “We are?”

Well…yah…I thought so,” he muttered, rubbing the back of his neck. “We’ve been working this case together since Ivan was murdered.”

“Fine,” she relented, the corner of her lips quirking slightly. “But I’m not responsible for the outcome if someone starts a fight with me.”

“Okay, deal,” Jason decided as he began to exit the alley. “Just promise me you’ll stay beside me at all times. We need people to think that we’re together…as a couple.”

Artemis came up behind him, capturing his hand with hers and lacing their fingers as she fell in step beside him. Jason nearly stumbled in his step with the unexpected move by the Bana-Mighdall Amazon. He glanced over at her, wondering if she felt the same thrilling sensation that he felt with the skin-to-skin contact. If she did, she was hiding it very well.

He instinctively tightened his hold on her hand as they walked into the bar, feeling very protective of her. Finding an empty table, he led her to a chair, not wanting to let go of her hand anytime soon. Unfortunately, he had to at that moment, releasing his hold on her to pull out a chair for her.

Artemis looked at him skeptically, glancing down at the chair and back up at Jason before finally taking the offered seat. Jason just shook his hand with a smirk as he moved to take the seat right next to her. He quickly took her hand in his again, relishing the contact with her.

He absentmindedly caressed the back of her hand as the waitress approached to take their orders. Jason ordered them a couple of beers before turning his attention to his partner. “Okay, keep your eyes and ears open,” he softly told her.

“For what exactly?”

“Anything that might tell us where Frankie Alomar is,” he murmured as the waitress returned with their drinks. “Hopefully we won’t have to be here very long.”

“Why? Don’t you like pretending to be my boyfriend?” she asked, tilting her head and giving him a sexy smile that nearly made him choke on his drink.

Jason coughed violently, finally regaining his ability to breathe. “What?” he nearly squeaked out, clearing his throat before speaking again. “No, it’s not that at all.”

“Then, what is it?” she coyly questioned him. “Do you not like being seen with me in public? Am I
not attractive?"

“No…I mean yes…I mean you’re very beautiful,” he tried to clarify without getting himself decapitated. “Anyone would be out of their mind not to want to be with you.”

He silently pleaded with her not to ask him anymore questions. He didn’t think that he was quite ready to let her know how he felt about her especially since he believed that she didn’t have any feelings for him. She constantly took him off guard and made him feel so flustered. It was disconcerting to say the least.

“So, any idea what Frankie looks like?” she asked, seemingly dropping the subject as she reached for her drink.

“Not sure,” he muttered. “If this is the same guy that I caught a year ago, I think he had a medium build, red hair and a scorpion tattoo on the side of his neck.”

“That narrows it down,” she murmured, gazing over the lip of her glass as her eyes swept over the crowded bar bustling with people, alcohol, and loud music.

Her sarcastic comment earned her a fleeting glare that she summarily dismissed as she focused instead on the feel of his hand holding hers. She found that she enjoyed it far more than she should, finding that she wouldn’t mind much more with him.

When she had hammered him with one flirtatious question after another, she had done it mostly to see how flustered she could make him, but then it was sincere curiosity that had fueled her motivation. She had let it drop before pushing him too far, most afraid of what his answer would be.

What if it was one that she didn’t want to hear…or maybe it was what she wanted to hear more than she should?

Taking another drink, she felt so conflicted about these emotions churning through her. The feel of his hand circling hers, his thumb caressing the back of it was causing her heart to beat a little harder…a little faster. She drew a slow, calming breath, knowing she needed to focus on their reason for being here and not the man holding her hand.

Scanning the crowd of people dancing, Artemis spotted someone with red hair, wondering if he was the one they were searching for. “Come on,” she said as she abruptly stood to her feet. “Let’s dance.”

“Wait…what?” he stammered in shock as Artemis dragged him out of his chair and towards the dance floor. “Do you even know how to dance?”

“It can’t be that difficult,” she replied, turning and pulling him flush against hers.

Stunned by the sudden intimate contact, Jason somehow managed to wrap his arms around, holding her close to him. He swallowed hard, finding himself gazing deeply into her bright emerald eyes and trying to remind himself to breathe. It was more than difficult with the feel of her perfect feminine frame pressing against his.

“Why are we doing this?” he whispered, glancing around in an effort to figure out what she had seen that had caused her to react like this…not that he minded of course. It was just tricky trying to make his mind focus on their reason for being here when her red lips were a breath away from his.

“I thought I saw a man with red hair on the dance floor,” she whispered back as they swayed back
and forth to the music.

Jason covertly looked about, trying to find the man that she had spotted. He turned his head slightly, trying his best to avoid the dangerous temptation of her lips lingering so close to his. He just prayed she couldn’t feel how his heart was thumping wildly against his breastbone.

Spotting red hair on the other side of the dance floor, he craned his neck to get a better look, finding it was not the guy they were looking for. “It’s not him,” he murmured, turning his head back to her.

His nose brushed against hers, her breath warm against his face. He watched as the tip of her tongue dragged along her bottom lip, forcing him to stifle a groan that became trapped in his throat. He slowly leaned in, the aching desire to kiss becoming too much to bear.

“How about you dance with a real man like me, babe?”

Jason watched as Artemis’s lips thinned into a grim line, her hold on him tightening as her anger surfaced. “Did you just call me ‘babe’?”

“Oh no,” Jason murmured under his breath, his eyes falling closed as he pinched the bridge of his nose. This was not going to end well if he didn’t intervene here. “Do yourself a favor and find someone else to hit on, friend.”

The man glared at Jason, his hand wrapping around Artemis’s arm. “I think we’ll let her decide who she’d rather dance with,” he shot back, pulling Artemis towards him and away from Jason.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Jason warned him, crossing his arms against his chest.

“Oh please…tell me that I can,” Artemis said as she looked at Jason with eyes filled with hostility.

“If you don’t, I will,” he told her, leveling the intruder with a dark glare.

He watched as Artemis’s lips curled into a smile of pure pleasure, her green eyes dancing with excitement. She calmly removed the man’s hand from her upper arm, holding it firmly in hers. “Maybe this will teach you to think first before acting like a dog in heat,” she said, squeezing his hand.

The man’s eyes began to bug out as the feeling in his hand quickly disappeared. Sharp pain shot up his arm as numbness invaded his fingers. He yelped in pain, doing his best to pull free but Artemis wasn’t about to let him escape that quickly.

She pulled him in close, their noses almost touching as she continued to apply an impressive degree of pressure on his hand that was on the verge of cracking under the strain. “I am not ‘babe’,” she ground out with a hiss. “And I would like it very much if you would leave me and my boyfriend alone. Got it?”

The man violently nodded his head in agreement, silently praying for mercy from anyone who could possibly deliver it. Releasing her hold on his hand, Artemis watched as he ran away, shaking his hand in an effort to regain some measure of feeling.
Turning back to Jason, Artemis wrapped her arms around his waist, ready to continue their dance. “That was totally hot,” he told her.

“I wanted to threaten castration and shoving it down his throat, but we’re undercover and I thought it best not to create a scene,” she replied with a grin.

He found it more than difficult to make his mind work, his thoughts still consumed with how she had called him her boyfriend. He knew they were just pretending to be a couple, but he really did enjoy the idea of them actually being together. He hoped one day that it would become a reality.

“Hey, Frankie! Where ya been for the last month?”

Artemis and Jason both looked up, turning towards the direction the voice had come from. They watched as a man walked in, waving at someone. He was tall and lanky with blond hair. Frankie waved back to his friend, going over to him and clapping him on the back.

“Been out in California for the last month and a half,” Frankie replied. “Just got back a couple of hours ago. What’s up?”

“Let’s get out of here,” Jason muttered in disappointment. “It’s not him.”

Taking Artemis’s hand, Jason led her out of the bar, discouraged by the fact that the tip had led to a dead-end. Neither said a word as they made their way towards the alley where he’d left his Ducati, both feeling the overt frustration.

Artemis took the helmet again, pausing to capture Jason’s hand. “Hey, we got further tonight then we were this morning,” she reminded him. “We’ll track this other guy down and make him talk. Hopefully, he’ll lead us to whoever is behind this.”

Jason nodded his head in response, appreciating her effort to cheer him up. He squeezed her hand in response, giving her small smile. “Yah, we will.”

“We’re a team that no one is going to want to mess with,” she teased him, putting the helmet on. “As long as you don’t kill me with this stupid bike of yours.”

He chuckled with her words, getting on his bike and starting it up. They had gotten further than they were this morning...in more ways than one.

**Wayne Manor; August 18th, 9:55 EST**

“Yes, ambassador,” Diana said, adjusting the phone on her shoulder as she reached for her pen. “I’m currently working on assembling another conference. I understand your hesitancy, but please rest assured that Ambassador Pallock’s death was a completely unrelated incident.”

Diana rolled her eyes in frustration as the ambassador voiced his concerns for the hundredth time in the course of this already too-long conversation. She understood everyone’s reluctance to participate in a peace conference in Gotham, but Pallock was involved in illegal dealings that had nothing to do with Themyscira or the peace summit. Of course, attempting to convince everyone else of that was beyond trying to her patience.

“I’m more than happy to email you what I’ve outlined so far for a conference between your country, Chezikstan, and Themyscira.”

She absentmindedly rubbed her daughter’s back, Kaia sitting on her lap and playing with her Leap Pad. Diana had told her she could work with her this morning as long as she promised to be quiet.
Kaia had readily promised and was actually doing a very good job so far much to her mother’s surprise. Diana thought for sure she would’ve had to send her out of the room minutes after her arrival.

“Thank you, ambassador…yes, I’ll get that email sent out to you today,” she agreed. “Thank you again for your time.”

Diana glanced down at her cell phone that was vibrating as she hung up the home phone. “Yes, Phaedra,” she answered. “What’s going on?”

“Daddy!” Kaia softly greeted her father who had just entered the office with Ace in his arms and a displeased expression on his face.

Bruce sat down in a chair on the opposite side of Diana’s desk, Ace settling into Bruce’s lap. The puppy looked resigned to the fact that he was in trouble. Giving him a very serious glare, Kaia put her finger to her lips, silently telling her father that he needed to be quiet while in her mother’s office. Bruce had to bite his bottom lip to keep from laughing at how very stern his daughter was at that moment.

He was somewhat surprised to find his daughter in here but more so by the fact that she was actually being so good. It was Kaia who had a tough time keeping quiet, a characteristic that she quite obviously received from her mother and not from him. His daughter couldn’t stay quiet for long, not without delving into a lengthy conversation about something or other that only half of which could be understood.

Kaia turned her attention back to her Leap Pad, frowning as she punched the button again. The expression on her face was her mother in every way imaginable—determined, focused, and in control. There was definitely no denying that Kaia was their daughter.

Bruce turned his attention to his wife, waiting patiently for her to finish her phone call. He was more than relieved by the fact that she was working from home now. At the same time, he couldn’t help worrying about the ramifications of it once whoever was after her figured it out. Would they turn their attention to the family and Wayne Manor in order to get to her?

He already made a mental note to increase security around here. Even though it was the safest place on the entire planet, he was prepared to make whatever upgrades would be necessary to help keep his family safe from whoever was after Diana.

“All right, Phaedra…yes, I promise I’ll look into later,” she replied, shaking her head in exasperation as she gave Bruce a look that spoke volumes. “No, that’s fine. Call me any time… okay, bye.”

Setting down her cell phone, Diana flopped back in her chair. “Why do I suddenly miss fighting against Cheetah and Darkseid?” she asked.

Bruce chuckled, understanding her better than anyone else. “I feel you, princess,” he told her. “There are days when I leave Wayne Enterprises thinking I’d much rather take on Bane or Doomsday than have to deal with the corporate sharks another day.”

“Aren’t you going in to work?” she asked, her forehead creasing with curiosity.

“No, I’m working from home today,” he responded. “There’s nothing important going on at the office that requires my attention. I can do what I need to do here. Besides, I have work downstairs that I need to focus on. I need to help Tim try to find the last few pieces before Ra’s does.”
“Can me help too, daddy?” Kaia asked.

“It looks like you’re helping mommy,” he said. “Are you her assistant today?”

“Yes, she’s being a very good girl while mommy has been on the phone,” Diana praised her, leaning forward and kissing her daughter on the cheek.

“Good,” Bruce said. “Maybe one of you two can tell Ace that my shoes are not meant to be chewed on.”

Diana chuckled as Kaia slid off her lap and made her way around the desk to her father. Bruce glanced at his wife before putting Ace down on the floor, a smirk playing on his lips as Kaia got down on her hands and knees to look the puppy directly in the eye.

“No, chewing on daddy’s shoes, Ace,” Kaia told the puppy. “You have to be good or daddy gets mad.”

“Well, I’m not mad really,” Bruce interjected with a frown, suddenly feeling guilty. “More like annoyed.”

“Don’t noy daddy,” Kaia said to Ace. “He’ll make you sit in the corner like me sometimes.”

Ace wagged his tail, licking Kaia’s face and causing her to squeal and giggle in response. Bruce gave Diana a look that revealed his amusement. Diana had to admit that she was more than relieved that he was taking Kaia’s newly revealed gift in stride. She just prayed that it stayed that way when her other gifts began to surface.

“Have you heard from Kal yet?” she asked.

“Yes, the belt and both gauntlets are currently en route to the Fortress for safe keeping as we speak,” he revealed.

Diana leaned back in her chair again, tilting her head back against the head rest. “It’s not enough, Bruce,” she said. “The belt and gauntlets will add to his power, but he already possesses the most potent pieces. He’s going to be very powerful…far more than me…more than Kal.”

Bruce could see the worry swimming in her blue eyes. He wanted to hold her and tell her that everything was going to be all right, but it was far from it. “I’m working on finding Ra’s before he can put the armor on.”

“We don’t have any idea where he’s at,” she pointed out as Kaia climbed back up into her lap again, “and September fifth is fast approaching.”

“Ra’s always stays near a Lazarus Pit,” he replied. “That helps narrow things down a little bit.”

“Not much,” she muttered with a huff.

“I want to talk to Damian to see if there’s anything he tell me about Ra’s last known location,” he told her. “I hate to pull him into this, but he already is and we’re running out of time.”

“Dick came by earlier and took Tim, Damian, and Nicholas with him for ‘brother bonding time’,” she informed him, using air quotes with her fingers.

“What is that all about?”

“Dick needed to look for a bigger vehicle now that they know that they’re having twins so he took
the boys with him to help him out because Donna had an assignment today,” she said. “At least that’s the gist of what I got from the conversation.”

“Twins,” he muttered with a shake of his head. “I can’t believe it. Not only am I going to be a grandfather but now they’re going to have twins.”

“If it’s any conciliation, you’re going to be a very handsome grandfather,” she told him with a grin.

“Thirty-eight seems far too young to be a grandfather,” he replied with a frown.

“But you’re forever thirty-eight now so it’s not really a valid point.”

“I guess,” he said with a sigh as Diana’s cell phone vibrated again.

“Sorry, it’s Phaedra again,” Diana revealed, picking up her phone. “Yes, Phaedra?”

Bruce stood to his feet, walking around the desk and kissing his wife’s temple before kissing his daughter’s cheek. Kaia put her finger to her lips to remind him to be quiet. Shaking his head, Bruce left with a chuckle, deciding that his wife and daughter made quite the formidable pair.

As he headed towards the Batcave, he knew that he wouldn’t change one thing about this family that he’d created with Diana. He just hoped and prayed he could keep it this way despite the darkening storm that was forming on the horizon.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Jason and Artemis are growing closer! I have to say I love writing them. Diana is trying to rebuild the embassy from home. Will it work or will it further endanger her and her family?

UP NEXT: Unrest on Themyscira is building, Dick and Donna look for a new home while Tim and Talia race to find the missing pieces of armor. Bruce and Diana...well...you can imagine what happens between them... :)


Chapter 21

Themyscira; August 19th, 05:00 EST

General Phillipus began making her daily rounds of the palace grounds, something that she deemed more important now than ever before. In the past, she had performed the duty more out of habit than anything else, not that she feared that anything would happen.

Now, though, things were changing on the island and not for the better.

The threat was not coming from any outside forces, some enemy living past their protected shores. No, this was coming from the last place anyone would expect. This was coming from within. Her own sisters were at the very source of the brewing trouble.

Tensions were rising drastically with every passing day. Sides were secretly being taken in dark shadows and whispered about among friends. It was only a matter of time before sister went against sister, a civil war of sorts breaking out on the island.

The thought caused fury to burn through every fiber of her being. It was not supposed to be this way. They were one people, bonded and united as sisters, as warriors, and as Amazons. They had followed Queen Hippolyta’s rule for thousands of years and it would stay that way for as long as there was breath in her body.

She trusted her inner circle of palace guards, knowing that they would defend their queen with their very lives if necessary. They were the ones who were keeping careful watch over the queen now while she did her rounds, unwilling to take any unnecessary risks with the queen’s life.

To her, there was no overreacting or being too caution.

“I don’t like this…things are moving too slowly. We need to make our move soon.”

Phillipus stopped dead in her tracks, her hand moving to the hilt of her sword as she listened. Her eyes narrowed with fury as recognition settled over her. It was Kyriaki. She had suspected that Kyriaki could possibly be behind the rumblings of dissatisfaction and rumors of a possible rebellion, but she never had proof…until now.

“You must not talk like that here,” Theophania hissed in warning. “Someone could hear you. Things are tense enough around here as it is without you stirring up more trouble.”

“You must think me a coward if you don’t believe I’m ready to move forward with our plans,” Kyriaki retorted with a derisive snort.

“This is not the time nor the place, Kyriaki,” Theophania icily stated. “We will discuss this later.”

“Why not now?” Kyriaki demanded to know. “Are you afraid, sister?”

“No, but I will not be the reason we fail,” she maintained.

“The princess and her demon mate are preoccupied with a male attempting to unleash Hades’
power. They will not be a factor in this,” Kyriaki spat out. “We will not fail in our plans, Theophania. Failure is not an option.”

“And what plans would that be, Kyriaki,” Phillipus demanded to know as she made her presence known, her face a mask of pure indignation.

Kyriaki simply arched an eyebrow as she stared the general down, unfazed by the fact that they had been overheard by her. “We were merely discussing plans for the upcoming festival,” she replied with a smile. “Haven’t you been making plans?”

Phillipus slowly closed the distance between them, her darkening gaze boring straight through her Amazon sister as if attempting to pierce her very soul with her eyes alone. “I know you are behind the attacks on the princess and that you’re planning some sort of plot against Queen Hippolyta.”

“I assure you, General Phillipus, I have no idea what you could be referring to,” Kyriaki responded with feigned innocence. “I only have the best intentions in mind for our beloved queen. Besides, I know the consequences involved in betraying the queen. Why would I risk death or banishment from my home?”

Phillipus reacted in less than a heartbeat, moving like a lioness catching her prey as she pinned Kyriaki up against the wall of the palace with her forearm across her throat. Her nose was millimeters from hers, her chest heaving with fury.

“I know that you’re involved in this somehow and I will prove it one way or another,” she hissed in a deadly, low voice. “And when you are found guilty by the queen, I will be more than pleased to be the one to remove your head from your shoulders for betraying your very own sisters.”

Kyriaki smiled at her, unaffected by the general’s threat. “You know I’ve never really understood how you were made general over me,” she shot back. “You’ve always been far more talk than action.”

Phillipus pressed her forearm even harder against Kyriaki’s throat, her teeth grinding with fury. “We’ll see who is all talk when I personally take you down.”

Phillipus held her there a heartbeat longer before finally releasing her hold on her. “Get back to your rounds or I’ll have you both scrubbing the temple floors on your hands and knees.”

“Yes, General Phillipus,” Theophania obediently replied, her hand surreptitiously grasping Kyriaki’s elbow in a silent plea for her to cooperate.

Kyriaki just glared at her as Phillipus continued on her way, leaving the two Amazons alone once more. “What are you trying to do?” Theophania demanded to know in a low whisper. “You’re going to give our plans away.”

“Just trying to rattle Phillipus,” Kyriaki replied with an indifferent shrug of a shoulder. “She’s not going to be able to stop us. Once we make our move, it will be far too late.”

“Your arrogance is going to be your downfall,” Theophania bit out.

“And your cowardice is going to be yours,” Kyriaki shot back, turning on her heel to continue her duties.

Blüdhaven; August 19th, 07:16 EST

Dick came out of the bedroom, toweling drying his hair as he made his way towards the kitchen.
and delicious aroma that assaulted him. His stomach was rumbling, demanding to be satisfied after
the vigorous workout he’d experienced with his wife this morning.

He had to admit that he was already looking forward to tonight when he could have her all to
himself all over again. While she gratified him in ways that he’d never dreamed, he still remained
insatiable when it came to his beautiful wife who was carrying his twin children.

He tossed his damp towel onto the back of the couch as he made his way towards the kitchen to
find Donna sitting on a barstool eating breakfast, her attention focused on a newspaper. She had a
red pen in her hand, tapping the end of it on the counter as she perused the paper.

“What are you up to?” Dick asked, pausing to kiss her temple before making his way to the stove
top where his breakfast awaited him.

“Just looking for a bigger apartment,” she absentmindedly replied, her forehead creased in thought.

“Having any luck?” he asked as he poured himself a cup of coffee.

“Not a whole lot I’m afraid,” she admitted, pausing to take a bite of her breakfast.

“You know we could look for a house,” he suggested as he sat down at the counter beside her.

“We don’t have to just look for an apartment.”

“I guess I just thought it would easier to find a loft or an apartment on the top floor so you can
continue being Nightwing without drawing a lot of attention from our neighbors,” Donna said.

“We could always find a house out in the country,” he proposed. “Besides, I’m not sure how long
I’m actually going to continue being Nightwing.”

Donna looked up sharply, completely taken aback by his confession. “Dick, what are you talking
about? You love being Nightwing.”

“Well, we’re going to be having twins in seven months, Troia,” he replied. “I don’t know if I want
to divide my time between our family and being a superhero anymore. It just doesn’t quite seem as
important to me as it used to be now that we’re starting the family that we’ve always wanted to
have.”

“Are you sure you really want to consider giving up Nightwing?”

“It’s not a decision I’m making on a whim or one that I haven’t been thinking about,” Dick replied,
taking a bite of his breakfast.

“Diana and Bruce have managed to make it work so I know that it can be done,” she pointed out. “I
just don’t want you to make a rash decision and then end up regretting it later or resenting me for
it.”

“I would never do that to you, Troia,” he reassured her, his hand coming to rest on top of hers.

“Besides, this isn’t a decision that I’m going to make right now. It’s just something that I’m
considering. We have plenty of time to talk about it.”

“I know…it’s just…I’m not sure I’m ready giving up being Troia,” she confessed. “I know I won’t
be able to participate in the Justice League as much once the twins are born, but I think I’d still like
to go out on a mission now and then.”

“I wouldn’t want to take that away from you, Donna,” Dick told her. “If either of us stops being
who we are or doing what we were born to do, then neither of us will be happy. I don’t want that to happen.”

“Well, if it’s any conciliation, we already have a volunteer to help us take care of the twins,” Donna informed him.

“Who is that?”

“Cassandra Sandsmark,” Donna revealed.

“We’d have Wonder Girl as our nanny?” he said with a chuckle. “I think I could handle that. Our kids would certainly be in good hands. We wouldn’t have to worry about anyone trying to take them. Cassie would pummel them into dust if anyone tried to lay a hand on them.”

Donna chuckled with the image that popped into her head. “I thought you’d approve,” she replied with a grin. “We also might be seeing more of Tim as well.”


“It’s looking more and more like things are heading that way,” she told him. “Haven’t you noticed anything the way they look at each other or the way they’re always with each other?”

Dick rubbed the back of his neck while he thought back on it. “I don’t know…I guess I hadn’t really thought about it.”

“And you’re supposed to be the son of the World’s Greatest Detective,” Donna said with a roll of her eyes.

“Hey, it isn’t an investigation or an open case that requires detective skills,” he countered with a huff. “I don’t keep track of who my brother is interested in. I thought he was still with Stephanie.”

“You are so behind the times,” Donna uttered with a shake of her head. “Steph and Tim broke up six months ago.”

“Really?” he exclaimed, stunned. “That long?”

“Yep,” she confirmed.

“Why did they break up?”

“They just got busy with life and college,” she informed him. “They grew apart. They’re still good friends. In fact, I think Stephanie is dating one of Tim’s friends from GU.”

“And he’s okay with it?”

“Yes,” she replied. “He’s been too busy chasing Cassie to notice or care.”

“Wow…where have I been?” Dick muttered to himself in stunned disbelief.

“Preoccupied with Blüdhaven…Damian…the pregnancy…the threats to Diana…Ra’s attempt to harness the power of Hades,” she began to rattle off. “You have to admit that you’ve had a lot going on.”

“Yah, I guess,” he reluctantly agreed. “Man, I would’ve thought Tim would’ve told me about it.”

“You know how Tim is when it comes to a girl that he likes,” Donna replied. “He clams up when it
“I’m going to have to interrogate him when I see him later today,” Dick decided.

“You will not,” Donna adamantly stated in no uncertain terms. “You leave him alone. He’s a sweet boy.”

“Come on, Don,” Dick responded with a hurt expression gracing his face. “I’ve always given him a hard time. It’s what brothers always do. Didn’t your sisters give you a hard time growing up on Themyscira?”

“Well, yah…I guess so,” Donna said as she thought back on it. “Diana was usually there making sure that no one was mean to me.”

“I’m never mean to Timmy or any of my brothers,” he maintained. “We just like to mess with each other.”

“And pick on each other…wrestle and beat up on one another…”

Dick stood up, kissing her on the cheek. “Point taken,” he said. “I gotta run or I’m going to be late for work. Let me know if you find anything worth looking at and we’ll schedule an appointment.”

“Sounds good,” she replied. “Be careful out there, handsome.”

Dick grinned at her as he grabbed his car keys and cell phone. “Always, Troia.”

Donna just shook her head as he left, wondering if it had been wise to reveal the fact that Tim and Cassie were practically dating each other. Dick was going to be relentless now in trying to get any and all information out of poor Tim.

Releasing a sigh, she guessed she was going to have to run interference for her brother-in-law. It was what a good sister-in-law was for, right?

**Wayne Manor; August 19th, 07:49 EST**

Diana was awakened by the unexpected feel of warm lips lightly traveling over her shoulder towards her spine, pausing to nip and suck lightly on her skin. It was a heavenly sensation to be awakened by, especially when she felt him shift his very muscular body a little more over hers like a warm blanket.

She pressed the side of her face deeper into the pillow that she currently had her arms wrapped around, biting at her bottom lip as his fingers lightly stroked the sides of her breast. She swallowed back a moan as his fingers continued down her side and over her hip, tracing along the outside of her thigh.

“Morning, princess,” he whispered in her ear, kissing the spot behind it that he knew drove her crazy.

Diana groaned in response as his fingers took a slight detour to tickle behind her right knee. He shifted his position again as he began to kiss down the length of her spine, his hands trailing down the outside of her legs as he thoroughly worshiped her body.

He took his time kissing his way back up to her neck, his mouth latching onto the tendon where neck and shoulder met. He bit down gently, sucking her skin as his fingers tickled her sides. She squirmed against his hold on her, enjoying being trapped between mattress and husband.
“I’m going to ravish you senseless,” he murmured low in her ear, nibbling on the lobe.

The lustful determination in his voice sent shivers through her body. All she could do was nod her head and gasp sharply as he playfully ran his fingers up the inside of her thigh towards the apex between her legs. She felt her hair being brushed aside, his warm breath pulsating against her now exposed neck as his other hand began a teasing quest of its own.

She moaned something throaty as she squirmed against his focused ministrations which was doing unbelievably amazing things to her at that particular moment. There was something so highly sensual about being pressed face down into the mattress with a very aroused husband on top of her.

“Bruce…” Diana gasped his name, his mouth creating a delicious assault along the length of her neck and across her shoulder. She just hoped that he didn’t leave a mark that she was going to have to explain to someone later, but right now she wasn’t sure that she really cared.

The combination of his hand and mouth on her was beginning to make her head spin. Her breathing grew more erratic as he quickened his pace, Diana’s fingers curling into the sheet beneath her as if holding on for dear life as pleasure coursed and spiked through her, pooling in her pelvis.

She could feel her impending climax rapidly approaching, her heart pounding in anticipation of the explosion of bliss that was about to rock her entire body. Unfortunately, Bruce could feel it too. He deliberately slowed his pace again, not about to let her come just yet. He had definite plans for his sexy wife this morning and he was only getting started.

“Bruce…” Diana growled low in her throat, her breathing ragged as perspiration broke out across her body.

He had her balancing precariously on a knife’s edge, teetering between complete ecstasy and overwhelming frustration in desperate need of a release. She breathlessly cursed at him in Ancient Greek, causing her husband leaning over her to chuckle against her shoulder in unmistakable satisfaction.

He knew how much he affected her, how he could reduce her to a boneless mess and he was lording it over her…the damn arrogant man. She swore if he didn’t give her what he had been teasing her with she was going to take matters into her own hands and make him give it to her.

The thought only heightened her arousal even more, enjoying the vision that popped into her head that had her tying him down and riding him until she collapsed in utter satisfaction and exhaustion. She had to admit as tempting as that was she knew that Bruce would make the teasing worth it in the end…if she survived that long.

Her right hand twisted the sheet tightly in her grip, his fingers picking up speed again. “Need something, princess?” he hoarsely asked, clearly deeply affected by what he was doing to her. She could feel his need for her pressing into her back.

It gave Diana a sense of satisfaction knowing that he was struggling to hold it together himself. “I’m so going to make you pay if you don’t let me come,” she growled her threat.

“I’m counting on it,” he murmured in her ear.

Bruce hooked his arm under her knee, pulling it up and giving him more access to her. He abruptly filled her with his hard arousal that was throbbing painfully with a need that demanded to be sated. Her pleasure-filled cry filled the room, her neck arching with the pleasure that shot straight through her to her very core.
“You like that?” he breathlessly asked, his left forearm coming to rest beside her head to keep a measure of his weight off her and giving him more room to move.

“Yes,” she hissed. “More…Bruce…”

He moaned with her gasping pleas. It always turned him on with how much she wanted him, loving the sound of her voice when they made love, the way she uttered his name. It was the sexiest thing that he’d ever heard in his entire life.

“Diana…” he huskily growled her name as he moved his left hand to cover hers resting on the mattress, lacing their fingers and keeping her locked in the sensual position that he wanted her in. “You feel…so amazing.”

He had woken up more than determined to make this morning one that his wife wouldn’t forget about anytime soon. He knew how grim their current situation was for them and how much worse it was going to become. He wanted her to have something to think about and relive in her mind when things became too hard or when he couldn’t be right there by her side.

He wanted her to know without a shadow of doubt how he felt about her…to feel and to revel in his undying love for her. He wanted that knowledge to be sewn into the very fabric of her heart and felt deep in her bones, giving her the strength to keep fighting when things seemed bleak.

She had done that for him more times than he could begin to count over the years they had been together. When life had tried to break them, she had reminded him that they were one in every way imaginable. They continually expressed and reassured one another of that ever-deepening love, but, after everything that had happened so far with Talia, he wanted to reassure her again.

Besides, she had just looked so damn sexy sleeping there next to him that he couldn’t help himself.

Diana came with a breathless cry, her release hitting her fast and hard and taking Bruce over that sweet precipice with her. He rocked into her a few more times before collapsing on top of her, too weak to move for several long moments. He finally recovered enough to move, sliding off and out of her as he settled on her left side to face her.

Diana struggled to catch her breath, her body still trembling from the heated release that had rocked her. She reached up to flip her hair out of her face before finally finding the energy to roll onto her side to face her husband, savoring the afterglow that gripped her.

“Good morning to you too,” she murmured with a sated smile, her eyelids heavy with the ecstasy still thrumming through her body.

Bruce reached over and moved a damp curl off her face before kissing her hard. He loved the all-encompassing glow that seemed to encompass her after they made love. It seemed to radiate from somewhere deep in her heart, rooted in the love that they shared with one another.

“That was…wow,” he managed to utter between exerted breaths. “I just don’t know…how it gets better every time.”

“So, it was horrible when we made love the other day?” she teased, her hand coming to rest against the curve of his face, her thumb lovingly caressing his cheekbone.

“Hell no,” he groaned as he thought back on it. “It’s always amazing being with you, princess. It’s just that it somehow just keeps getting even better.”

“Well, I’m sure we have Aphrodite’s blessing on us,” she pointed out.
“I guess, but I think it’s more than that,” he thoughtfully replied as he gazed deeply into her eyes. “It’s because of what we have together...because of our love for each other and the bond we share. When we make love, I feel it inside.”

“I like that better,” she agreed, her smile beginning to fade as thoughts of what lay ahead of them entered her mind. “I don’t want to leave this bed. I just want to stay here with you all day.”

Bruce turned his head, pressing his lips to the palm of her hand. “Me too, princess,” he confessed, his hand moving to her waist and pulling her flush against him. “Unfortunately, responsibilities await our attention...and I’m sure your children are getting into some sort of trouble already this morning.”

Before Bruce could blink, he found himself on his back and a very aggressive Amazon wife on top of him, pinning him to the mattress with not only her glare but her hands as well. It was highly erotic to say the least. He could already feel himself responding to her despite the very intense release he’d just experienced.

Diana leaned in close, her nose brushing against his as she glared at him. “They are our children, Bruce Wayne,” she stated in no uncertain terms. “You were just as much involved in making them as I was so there is no escaping the fact that they are exact duplicates of us.”

Bruce’s still hungry gaze wandered over her body, her heaving chest causing her breasts to repeatedly rub against him. “You make a validate point, Missus Wayne,” he responded, pausing to lick his lips in appreciation of the delicious view she presented him with. “Care to discuss this further?”

Diana gasped as he lifted his hips, pressing his growing erection into her. “I thought we had responsibilities and children that needed our attention?” she reminded him, suddenly finding it difficult to connect her thoughts.

“I think they can wait for a few more minutes,” he decided as she tightened her hold on his wrists and keeping them restrained against the mattress.

Diana had to admit that this was the position that she had pictured in her mind when he had been denying her release. Now that they found them in this position, she decided that it was most definitely time for some pay back for the teasing he’d done to her just a little while ago.

Bruce knew he was in trouble as a deviously sexy grin formed on her lips, her blue eyes gleaming with mischief. “I agree wholeheartedly,” she purred as she released her grip on his hands.

He groaned as she began to kiss along his chest towards his abdomen, taking her time to appreciate the chiseled muscles there that she swore had been carved by the gods themselves. She was most definitely going to enjoy returning the teasing torture he had done to her.

Bruce cursed to himself, knowing that he was in so much trouble as she went down on him. His eyelids slammed closed and his teeth clenched tightly as she began to make love to him. She was going to pay him back tenfold for what he had done to her...and it was going to be worth every single minute of it.

Nanda Parbat; August 20th, 10:17 EST

Talia clicked on another article that she hoped would ultimately lead her to the missing pieces of Hades’ armor. They were quickly running out of time. September fifth and the blood moon would be here before long. They needed to have everything in place and ready to go if this was going to
go according to plan.

The sooner they got this over with the sooner she could get her son back. She was happy that Damian had finally been able to meet his father, but she didn’t want him around the Amazon any longer than was absolutely necessary. She was his mother, not the Amazon wench.

Her lips curled as she thought about her father’s plans. If the Amazon knew what was about to happen, she would abandon her family and return to her silly little island and never return. There was no place for her in this world once her father cleansed it. She would make certain of that.

Talia glanced at her cell phone, her desire to talk to her son becoming too difficult to ignore. Picking it up, she sent him a text message, being careful to make sure that it could not be traced back to their current location. Her son was almost too smart and resourceful for his own good.

T: How are you, Damian?

Talia waited on tenterhooks for a reply, praying that he would respond to her. Hopefully someday soon she could explain it all to him and he would forgive her for leaving him behind without a single word like she had. She just hoped that her beloved and his family hadn’t already turned him against her and her father.

D: Fine

His one-word response caused her heart to sink but she knew that she could hardly blame him.

T: I’m so sorry that I had to leave you behind, but I knew that you’d be well taken care of and safe with your father.

D: It’s nice here.

His words were like a knife to her heart.

T: I am coming back for you, Damian.

D: Whatever

Talia could feel her anger rapidly bubbling to the surface. Bruce and his family were turning her son against her, brainwashing him against everything that her and her father had worked so hard to instill in him.

T: I am coming for you and I will bring you home with me.

D: Maybe I like it here. Maybe I don’t want to leave.

Talia nearly shook with the extent of the fury that gripped her. Bruce and Diana had already managed to turn her son against her. She was going to make sure they paid for this. They would not keep her from getting her son back.

T: You belong with your mother.

D: My mother left me.

T: You can’t understand now but you will someday. I love you, Damian.

Talia waited for a response to her text, but one never came. She felt tears gathering in her ears, threatening to fall. Another casualty in her life, lost because of her devotion to her father. She swore
to herself that she would get Damian back. She may have lost her beloved, but she would not lose her son.

She angrily brushed a tear away before continuing her research for the missing pieces of Hades’ armor. The sooner this was completed, and her father ruled the Earth the sooner she could get her son back with her where he always belonged.

“How is it going, daughter?”

Talia quickly schooled her features, not wanting her father to know how upset she was. “It’s a very tedious process, but I think I have narrowed down the search area.”

“Excellent,” he said with a satisfied nod. “Things are finally coming together.”

Talia could feel her loyalty to her father beginning to waver. She never dreamed that she was going to be forced to chose between her father and her own son someday. Losing her beloved because of her father had crushed her. She couldn’t bear to lose Damian too. It was all she had left of her and Bruce.

As if sensing her thoughts, her father’s hands came to rest on her shoulders. “I know how difficult it is being away from Damian like this, but it’s for the best, Talia. Just remember that this is only temporary.”

“I know, father;” she softly replied, biting at her bottom lip.

“Let me know if you find anything,” he told her, kissing the top of her head before leaving her alone once more.

Talia drew a deep, shuddering breath in an effort to gather her emotions and focus on the task at hand. She would do everything in her power to make this mission a success so she could get her son back. Scrolling through the article she had clicked on, she began to skim through the information. Her brow furrowed as she read it, something that she had read in another article clicking into place in her mind.

She had seen an article the other day that had speculated a piece of Hades’ armor was possibly located in very same place but had never been found. This article seemed to be pointing to the very same thing. They were two different articles from two different research teams.

Clicking through some other files that she’d accumulated, she found another interesting piece that mentioned a temple in that particular area where several artifacts had been discovered. The particular piece of armor they were looking for wasn’t one of the recovered items, but what if it was still there waiting to be found?

She quickly pulled up a map, comparing the two sites in question. Her lips slowly curved into a smile as her eyes narrowed. She had a sneaking suspicion that she had just located what they had been searching for weeks to locate.

“You aren’t going to get there before me this time, beloved,” she murmured to herself.

**Wayne Manor; August 19th, 11:32 EST**

Tim typed at a furious pace as he worked on tracking down the last pieces of Hades’ armor and weapons. He was on to something here. He knew it. He could feel it in his bones. He couldn’t contain the grin that kept trying to form on his lips.
He wasn’t successful yet, but he was close…very close. His extensive research was finally paying off in spades. He began to plot out the various suspected locations on a map from the research that he’d done, triangulating it and trying to narrow down exactly where that blasted piece was hidden.

“Come on…come on…” he muttered under his breath with growing impatience and frustration.

Adding in a few more parameters…taking into consideration changes in topography over the years…growing civilizations and expansion of industry…and…

“I got it!” Tim shouted with a whooping cry of elation as he pumped his fists into the air. “You’re going down Ra’s! I know where it is!”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, things are definitely heating up in more ways then one! Hope you're enjoying where things are headed with this.

UP NEXT: Nicholas start preschool. Bruce and Diana go after another piece of Hades’ armor but will they get there before Talia?

QUESTION: We're getting closer to the big climax of this story. I need to know if you want Damian to continue to be a part of this family or would you prefer he not be around for the sequel?
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 22

Wayne Manor; August 20th, 07:18 EST

Diana fought back the emotions that were churning inside of her as she gazed at the family members gathered around the breakfast table. She could hardly believe how things had changed so quickly since marrying Bruce, having children with him and building this unique family of theirs.

Her motherly gaze settled on Tim who was talking to Nicholas, the two conspirators laughing about something or other. Tim was the best big brother that either Nicholas or Kaia could ever ask for. He loved them both dearly as if they were blood relation, always ready to pitch in to help with them or simply spending time playing with them.

Not many young men his age would be so willing to spend time with a four and a two-and-a-half-year-old sibling but Tim wasn’t like most men. He genuinely loved this family that he had secretly always dreamed about having when he’d first come to live with Bruce. Now that he had it, he was more than happy to play his part as big brother.

She could hardly believe that he was going to be starting his second year at Gotham University. He had matured greatly since she’d first started dating Bruce, growing into the handsome young man that he was now. She had no doubt that he was going to continue to make them very proud of him.

Staring at her youngest son, she tried to swallow back the emotion that filled her throat. Nicholas was starting preschool today. He was so much like his father in a myriad of ways, but she could also see glimpses of herself in some of his expressions and his tender heart. He was definitely going to be a handsome heartbreaker someday just like his father.

Kaia’s giggles drew her attention next. She watched with amusement as Alfred affectionately tickled her ears. It was a trait that she and her daughter shared. Thankfully, Bruce hadn’t picked up on that fact or, if he had, he hadn’t acted on it yet. Of course, knowing him, he was just waiting for the right moment to launch his devious attack on her.

She smiled to herself as Alfred leaned down and kissed Kaia on the cheek before adding more blueberries to her oatmeal. Kaia turned, bestowing him with a slobbery kiss which he gladly received with a chuckle before surreptitiously wiping his cheek.

The bond between Alfred and the children was immense, stronger than any blood relation possibly could be. He loved them greatly, enjoying his role as their Pappoús. She couldn’t even remember how many times they had offered to hire someone to help with the children while she and Bruce were at work during the day, but Alfred had adamantly refused.

He had told them that it was the most welcome change to his typical daily routine as well as the perfect reward for all the years of worrying and fretting over Bruce and his nightly activities. He now left that to Diana and Tim, knowing that his master was in capable hands. He had proclaimed that changing diapers and wiping running noses was a pleasant reprieve from patching up all of Bruce’s injuries every night.

Even though he’d probably deny it, Diana knew that he adored being able to dote on his
grandchildren, being able to have a hand in helping to raise them. Personally, Diana couldn’t have thought of a better person to help them raise their children.

Diana watched as Kaia stuck her fingers in her oatmeal to retrieve the blueberries Alfred had just added to her breakfast. She was a blueberry fiend. She reminded her so much of herself as a little girl, mischievous and full of love for everything around her, fiercely stubborn and strong-willed.

She was very intelligent like Nicholas but wasn’t quite the deep thinker like he was. She was more like her mother, leaning more towards her emotions but she still had a good head on her shoulders. She couldn’t wait to see what other gifts her daughter was going to begin to display though she knew Bruce was already worrying about it.

Damian…the quiet one. He was the newest member of their unique family. She wasn’t quite certain how he was going to fit in, but, then again, she didn’t think that he knew either. She felt great sympathy for him and all that he’d been put through. No child should ever be subjected to all that he’d been led to believe, trained from an early age to be an assassin.

She couldn’t help wondering just how much of a childhood Damian had actually had. Even though she’d been trained as a warrior from the moment she could pick up a sword, her mother had made sure that she’d been allowed to have the freedom and fun of being a child.

A part of her could relate with Damian and the expectations of a role that was to be fulfilled, the pressure of becoming the very best. She had a feeling that she and Damian probably had more in common than either of them ever knew. She hoped, though, to get to know him and make him feel a part of their family despite who his mother and grandfather happened to be.

Glancing at Artemis, she attempted to suppress the pleasure she felt rising to her face. Artemis and Jason had been spending quite a bit of time together over the last few weeks as they tried to find out who was behind the threats to her. She had to admit that she was rather happy with the unexpected development. She just hoped that Artemis didn’t reject this opportunity to find love with a good man.

And Jason was a good man. Despite his troubled past and the events that had led to his reemergence in their lives, Diana had grown rather fond of Jason. While he was rougher around the edges compared to the other two boys Bruce adopted, he still had a good heart beneath all the layers that he’d built up over the years and the tension that he sometimes brought to any given situation.

Jason reminded her of Bruce in that way and she knew just the Bana-Mighdall Amazon who could handle him. If anyone could fight through all his defenses and reach his heart, it was definitely Artemis. She just hoped that her friend stuck around here to see it through to its beautiful end.

Diana’s thoughts finally drifted to Dick and Donna. She could scarcely believe they were having twins—a son and a daughter. She was going to be an aunt and a grandmother, Bruce a grandfather. She mused over the almost surreal makeup of their family, but she wouldn’t have it any other way.

She cast a sidelong glance at her handsome husband, her heart swelling with warm feelings as he talked to Artemis about her and Jason’s progress. She had never dreamed that she would love someone so deeply, so all-consuming.

What they shared went far beyond the bounds of love or even the term soul-mate. It had surprised her that Bruce had mentioned the bond that they shared. He didn’t like to talk about his feelings much, choosing rather to show it then discuss it, but he had opened up to her about it.
She had thought that she was the only one who could feel this inexplicable connection with him deep in her soul, a bond that seemed to ignite and burn brightly every time they made love. To know that he felt it too, acknowledging its existence had only made her love him all the more.

He was not only someone who didn’t like to talk about his feelings, but he was not a huge believer in sentimental idioms like love at first sight, being destined for one another, or soul-mates. She, however, believed with all her heart that Bruce was her twin soul, the other half of her that makes her complete.

He was her αδελφές ψυχές…adelfés psychés. To lose him would be akin to cutting out her heart and soul. The thought terrified her to her core.

And that was what had her feeling so sentimental and brooding this morning about her family. They were running out of time to stop Ra’s and keep her father locked away in the Underworld. Her family was in danger, the sick dread that continued to swim in the pit of her stomach for weeks now only intensifying.

She drew a deep breath, trying to calm herself and the fear that cut through her like a dagger. Their lives were growing and changing so fast as she watched them all talking and laughing together. She wished that she could just freeze time and keep them together like this forever, but she knew that wasn’t fair to them.

She just couldn’t bear the thought of anything happening to her family that she loved above all else. She swore that she would give everything that she had to keep them safe should Hades gain his freedom from the Underworld through Ra’s al Ghul.

The sudden feel of warm lips kissing her temple brought her out of her reverie. “Don’t go there, princess,” Bruce softly warned her, his hand finding hers in an effort to provide her an anchor to hold on to.

“Where?” she innocently asked, giving him a disconcerted look.

“Don’t play coy with me,” he chided her, his face lingering very close to hers. “I know you too well for that game.”

Diana released a sigh as she averted her eyes in sheepish reluctance at having been caught. She could hardly ever get anything past her brilliant detective husband. “It’s just…there’s a lot going on right now,” she quietly confessed, not wanting to draw attention to her troubled mood.

A finger beneath her chin forced her to meet her husband’s intense gaze that seemed to pierce her soul. “We’ll get through it, princess,” he reassured her. “We always do.”

She gave him a wan smile in an effort to ease his concern, but he saw right through that as well. He pressed his lips to hers, kissing her deeply to ease her worry. They were forced to stop, however, when the giggles and ewww sounds of their children reached their ears.

Bruce pulled away with a playful grin, glancing at his kids before kissing his wife once more. Kaia giggled while Tim and Nicholas yelled “ewww” again. Damian just watched with mild disinterest, neither for or against the public display of affection between husband and wife while Artemis merely raised an eyebrow at their affection.

“Just wait you two,” Bruce said, pointing at Tim and Nicholas. “Someday you’ll meet a girl who will steal your heart and turn your world upside down.”

Tim quickly found his breakfast plate very interesting, the tips of his ears turning pink. “I think our
Tim may have already found someone who does that for him,” Diana commented with a knowing grin.

“All right, Tim, give it up,” Bruce said, his investigational skills rising to the occasion. “What’s her name?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he evenly replied.

Diana chuckled as she reached for her orange juice. “Like father, like son,” she replied. “Using your dad’s go-to line isn’t going to help you this time, son. Is it someone we know?”

Tim averted his eyes as he tried to think of a way out of this. “Shouldn’t we be focusing on Nicholas and his first day of preschool instead of my love life?”

“So, there is a love life to discuss then,” Bruce pointed out his son’s mistake.

“I don’t want to go to school,” Nicholas readily decided, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “I want to stay with Pappóus and Kaia.”

“You’re going to love it, Nicholas,” Diana reassured him, her hand coming to rest on the back of his head. “You’re going to get to learn new things and make new friends.”

“Just remember what we talked about last night, son,” Bruce reminded him with a pointed look. “We don’t talk about what goes on in this house.”

“I know, daddy,” Nicholas replied with a look of exasperation, clearly revealing the extent of that talk last night. “No talk about Batman.”

“Good boy,” Bruce praised him. “It’s only to keep everyone safe.”

“Me go too?” Kaia asked, her spoon gripped tightly in her fist.

“Not yet, Kai,” Bruce told her. “You’re too young. You’re going to stay here with Alfred while Nicholas is in school.”

“But me want to go with Ni-Ni,” she insisted with a scowl for good measure.

“Your dad or I will take Nicholas to school in the morning and then you and Alfred get to go pick Nicholas up in time for lunch,” Diana explained to her daughter. “You’ll have all afternoon and evening to play with Nicholas.”

“We better leave soon,” Bruce announced as he glanced at his watch and stood to his feet. “You don’t want to be late for your first day, Nick.”

Kaia began to cry as Nicholas escaped his chair and ran to get his brand-new Justice League backpack. Diana picked Kaia up, holding her crying daughter in her arms. “Do you want to go with us to take Nicholas to school?” she asked her, kissing her forehead.

Kaia nodded her head as tears trickled down her cheeks. “How would you like to take your new backpack with you, Miss Kaia?” Alfred offered, holding up a pink Wonder Woman backpack as Diana set her down on the floor.

“Where did she get that?” Bruce asked as he grabbed his car keys.

“It’s my pack-pack,” Kaia told him, still sniffling from her tears as Alfred helped her slip her arms through the straps of her backpack.
Bruce bit back a chuckle at the sight of his little girl wearing a backpack that was nearly the same size as she was. It was a wonder that she could even walk without toppling over. “What do you have in there?”

“My sungasses, my blankie and my Emo,” she rattled off, satisfied that she could go along now too.

Bruce just shook his head in amusement. His children never ceased to amaze him. He turned his attention to the four still sitting at the table as Diana led Nicholas and Kaia out the front to the car. “We’ll be back in an hour or so,” he said. “Tim, I need you to see if you can narrow down where Ra’s could be hiding while Diana and I go after the piece of armor that you already found.”

“Got it, boss,” Tim replied with a salute.

“Damian, I want you to work on your training that I outlined for you to practice,” Bruce told him.

“When do I get to practice with the swords?” he asked, somewhat displeased.

“Once Diana gets time to test you with them,” he revealed. “We need to see what your skill level is before we outline more training for you.”

“And what is my assignment?” Artemis asked.

“You do whatever it is that you and Jason have been doing,” he decided, noticing how her cheeks turned a faint shade of pink as she averted her eyes. “See if you can find this bomber before he strikes again. I’d like to keep Diana in one piece for as long as possible.”

“Miss Kaia and I will pick Master Nicholas up from school at eleven thirty sharp,” Alfred confirmed.

“Thanks, Alfred,” Bruce appreciatively responded, his expression revealing his gratitude for his father-figure’s help with the family. “We really appreciate your help with Nicholas and Kaia.”

“It is my supreme pleasure, Master Bruce,” Alfred reassured him. “There is nothing I enjoy more than taking care of my grandchildren.”

“Hey, you know I’m more than happy to help pick up Nicholas from school sometimes too,” Tim piped up.

“I know, and I appreciate that, but I want you to be able to focus on college right now,” Bruce informed him. “You shouldn’t have to worry about the little ones.”

“But they’re my brother and sister,” Tim reminded him, his expression revealing his displeasure at being left out. “I love them and want to help out with them too.”

“We’ll see how it goes,” Bruce relented. “We may need your help at times now that Nick is starting school, but I don’t want it to interfere with your studies. Besides, aren’t you going to be busy with your new girlfriend that you swear you don’t have?”

Tim’s cheeks tinged pink as he looked away from his father’s penetrating stare. “Family always comes first,” he pointed out. “She understands that.”

“Right,” Bruce muttered with a grin as he turned to leave, gaining another clue as to who his son was dating now.
“Nicholas, if you need anything at all, you tell your teacher…okay? She can always call me or your father if you need us,” Diana told him as she kneeled in front of him. “Alfred and Kaia will be here at eleven thirty to pick you up and return home for lunch.”

“Okay, mama,” Nicholas agreed, throwing his arms around his mother’s neck.

Diana hugged him, fighting back the well of tears that were building behind her eyes. She could feel Bruce’s hand on her shoulder, reminding her that she was going to have to let go of their son. “Be a good boy and I’ll see you this afternoon,” she told him, reluctantly releasing her hold on him.

“You’ll do great, Nick,” Bruce encouraged him. “I want you to tell us all about your first day at school tonight at dinner.”

“Okay, daddy,” he agreed, giving Bruce a hug.

“Me go with him,” Kaia decided, determination written on her face as she let go of her father’s hand to go stand with her brother.

“Sorry, little princess,” Bruce said, picking her up and holding her in his arms. “You get to go home and spend some time with Alfred.”

Kaia laid her head on father’s shoulder, not liking this one bit, but pouting was all she could do about it. “Bye, Kaia,” Nicholas told her, waving at her.

The trio watched as Nicholas walked into his classroom, his teacher giving them a warm smile of understanding. “I promise we’ll take good care of him,” Miss Rebecca Bishop reassured them.

“I know,” Diana replied with a nod.

“Come on, princess,” Bruce said, taking her hand in his and leading her away.

Bruce and Diana walked out hand in hand, Kaia in her father’s arms. “Do you really think he’ll be all right?” Diana asked as they exited the school, making their way to Bruce’s SUV.

“He’ll be fine, Diana,” he assured her, somewhat taken aback by her worry. He thought for sure he would’ve been the wreck taking their son to his first day of school, not his wife.

Diana chewed on her bottom lip, glancing back at the school. She didn’t like the idea of leaving him on his first day of school to go track down a piece of Hades’ armor, but she knew that they had little choice at this point. Life and responsibilities were pulling them in all directions right now.

She stood by the SUV as Bruce put Kaia in her car seat, lost in her troubled thoughts and the gnawing sense of dread that clung to her like a second skin. It had started weeks ago just before Talia and Damian had shown up on their doorstep and had only grown stronger since then.

Closing the passenger car door, Bruce turned to his wife, wrapping his arms around her. “It’s going to be okay, Diana,” he told her, holding her tightly against him as he buried his face in her hair.

She returned his embrace, doing her best to bury her emotions. They needed to focus on this mission to stop Ra’s. Besides, worrying and brooding was best left for Bruce to do, not her. “I know,” she replied, attempting to sound confident but it fell flat.

Pulling out of his arms, she kissed him before turning to head to the passenger seat. Bruce followed
her, opening the door and holding it for her until she climbed inside. He leaned in, wanting to reassure her. “Diana, I did a sweep of the school last night after I sent you home from patrol. The only place safer than that school is the manor or the Watchtower. I’ve fully vetted the entire staff and they’re all good people. Tim and Dick both went to school here and they were perfectly fine.”

She smiled softly at him, her hand cupping his cheek. “I had a feeling you did,” she replied, her thumb caressing his cheekbone. “Thank you, Bruce.”

“Did I forget to mention I rigged a security camera in his classroom so we can check on him from home or work?” he sheepishly confessed.

“Bruce, you didn’t,” Diana said with an amused shake of her head.

“I’m not about to let our son go some place that I can’t check up on him if needed,” he adamantly maintained.

“Have I ever told you how much I appreciate your paranoia sometimes?”

“Not enough, princess…not nearly enough,” he told her, closing her car door before heading over to the driver’s seat.

Getting in, Bruce started the car, glancing at his wife who was absentmindedly staring out the passenger window. He could feel how her troubled spirit was driving her to distraction despite his attempts to reassure her. It had been there off and on over the last month or so, but it seemed to be getting worse over time.

Reaching over, he took hold of her hand. “As soon as we stop Ra’s, I’m taking you away for some time away…just the two of us. I think we both could use a break.”

Diana turned to look at him, doing her best to mask the worry that consumed her, but he could see it in her eyes. “I don’t know, Bruce,” she said. “Is it really a good time for us to be gone with Damian still struggling to find his way? I’d hate to just leave him like that especially after Talia abandoned him.”

“He’ll be fine,” he attempted to reassure her. “We’ll spend some time with him and make sure he’s settled before we leave. Besides, it’ll only be for a few days.”

“Maybe you’re right,” she decided, tightening her hold on his hand. She pulled it possessively into her lap and wrapping her other hand around it, not wanting to let go of him anytime soon. “It would be nice to just run away for a few days. I love the idea of having you all to myself to do with as I please.”

“I definitely love that thought,” he readily agreed. “I can’t wait for a repeat performance of yesterday morning. There’s nothing I love more than devouring you.”

“Me go too?”

The sound of Kaia’s voice coming from the back reminded them they were not alone in the car. “Ah, not you, little princess,” Bruce told her, flashing Diana a grin at having been caught by their youngest. “It would be just your mother and me.”

“We’ll take you with us when we go back to Themyscira to visit Yiayia again,” Diana revealed, glancing back at her daughter who had managed to find her sunglasses in her backpack and had put them on.
“Me want to see Yiayia,” Kaia decided.

Bruce gazed at his daughter in his review mirror, shaking his head in amusement. “I’m sure you’ll get to talk to her this afternoon. Hippolyta will want to talk to Nicholas about his first day of school.”

“I also want to see how things are on Themyscira,” Diana thoughtfully replied. “I’m afraid it might be some time before we can take the children back there with all the unrest.”

“We’ll support your mother in any way we can,” he reminded her. “If it would help for you and me to go there to meet with those who are opposing the embassy, then that’s what we’ll do. We’ll explain to them that this is not meant to completely expose the island or eradicate everything that they’ve ever known.”

“I really appreciate that, Bruce,” she told him, bringing his hand to her lips to kiss his knuckles.

“Hey, she’s my family too, Diana,” he said. “Whatever is happening with your mother affects all of us. I want our children to have their grandmother around for as long as possible. Hippolyta and Alfred are all that they have for grandparents…and we’re not even going to mention your father.”

Diana felt the burn of tears behind her eyes again, wondering how in the world she had ever managed to marry such an amazing man. She had known from the moment that she had first laid eyes on him that there was far more to the mysterious, imposing figure in black Kevlar than what he allowed everyone to see.

She had truly found herself a rare diamond in the rough. She was so thankful that she had followed her heart and decided to pursue him, refusing to give up on him. Despite how much she’d had to dig past the countless layers that he’d built up around himself, he had definitely been worth the effort.

And nothing was going to take him away from her as long as there was breath in her body.

*Atlantis; August 20th, 10:03 EST*

Batman and Wonder Woman appeared on the transport pad in the magnificent palace of Atlantis, an entourage of guards there to greet them. They parted like the sea to reveal Mera approaching from behind. “Welcome, my friends,” Mera greeted them with a warm smile. “Please come with me.”

Bruce and Diana stepped down from the platform, walking past the row of armed guards to follow Mera. The formal greeting was mildly surprising, but Bruce knew that they should expect no less when it came to Mera. The Queen of Atlantis always took greeting visitors to her home very seriously.

They followed Mera as she spoke casually about world events as they walked through the grand palace. Diana cast a fleeting glance at her husband, knowing that he was studying the layout of the area that surrounded them as they neared the throne room. Although Atlantis was viewed as an ally, he never took any situation for granted.

Entering the throne room, Mera ushered them towards a table laden with food and wine. “Please have a seat,” she insisted with a wave of her hand.

“Where’s Arthur?” Batman pointedly asked her as he stared her down, refusing to take a seat.

Mera took Batman’s abruptness in stride. She’d had little interaction with the infamous Gotham
vigilante, but she’d heard plenty of stories from her husband. Arthur and Bruce had a tenuous relationship at times, both strong-willed and argumentative when they believed they were right.

She felt that it was because their personalities were so strong, but it also had something to do with Arthur’s passing interest in Diana several years ago. It was something that Bruce most likely didn’t take very well to and still held a small grudge about.

“Arthur is looking into the item you had messaged him about,” she calmly revealed.

“Do you or Arthur have any idea about the armor’s location?” Diana pressed, anxious to get their hands on it.

“I’m afraid that I do not know, Diana, but Arthur may,” she replied. “I personally have never heard anything about the possibility of the breastplate being hidden somewhere in Atlantis or its boundaries, but Arthur and I have only been married a couple of years.”

“I’m sure if anyone knows about it, it’ll be Arthur,” Diana agreed with a smile.

Diana could feel Bruce bristle from his position beside her. Arthur had flirted with her a few times before she and Bruce had begun dating. Bruce hadn’t forgotten it despite how meaningless it had been or the fact that she had chosen him over the Atlantean. Of course, it didn’t help matters that Arthur continued to flirt with her at times just to get under Bruce’s skin.

“Please help yourself to some refreshments while we wait on Arthur,” Mera offered.

Diana took a seat at the table with Mera as Batman began to pace. “It’s been too long since we’ve seen you, Mera,” she said. “How have you been?”

“I’ve been well,” she replied. “Responsibilities here in Atlantis have kept me very busy. How are your children?”

“They’re growing up fast and causing all sorts of mischief,” Diana said with a fond smile, ignoring her husband’s almost imperceptible snort of agreement.

“You should bring them for a visit sometime,” Mera suggested. “I think they would love it here.”

“They might end up destroying it,” Bruce muttered under his breath so only Diana could hear him.

Diana shot him a glare before turning her attention back to Mera who handed her a glass of wine. “That would be lovely,” Diana agreed.

“How are your ambassadorial duties going?” Mera inquired. “It must be most difficult attempting to balance home life, the League, and the embassy.”

“It has been challenging at times but I’m managing,” she told her, suppressing the surge of heartache that erupted inside of her with the reminder of the embassy.

Mera offered Batman a glass of wine which he politely declined with a wave of his hand. “I heard about the murder of the visiting ambassador,” Mera continued, taking her seat once again. “Have you found the person who did it?”

“We know who, but we’re still working on apprehending the suspect,” Batman responded, his tone revealing his anger over the situation.

The throne room doors burst open at that moment, capturing everyone’s attention as Aquaman
entered. “I see our guests have arrived already,” he noted as he approached them.

Bruce was annoyed to see the King of Atlantis appearing empty-handed. Either he had no clue where the breastplate was, or he was going to let him and Diana fetch it. Either way, he was not leaving here without the piece of armor.

“Batman…Diana,” Arthur formally greeted them, pausing to take Diana’s hand and kiss the back of it much to Bruce’s irritation.

Bruce continued to stand behind Diana’s chair, his arms folded against his chest and a frown on his face. “No luck with the armor I take it?” he asked, allowing his displeasure to saturate his words.

“Well, there’s good news and there’s bad news,” Arthur began as he forked a large piece of meat and placed it on his plate.

Batman ground his teeth as the Atlantean continued to fill his plate. He hated the whole “good new, bad news” response. It was rarely if ever good news that accompanied the bad. It was just a polite way to soften the blow of the bad news, a sad attempt to sugar-coat something that was awful.

“Where is it, Arthur?” Bruce ground out through clenched teeth, his patience wearing very thin. He had too much going on back in Gotham to be wasting time here.

Arthur sat back in his chair, appraising the Dark Knight of Gotham with an amused expression. He still wasn’t certain what Diana had seen in Batman when she could have had someone so much better like himself. “I checked several of the ancient scrolls and it does appear that Poseidon hid a piece of Hades’ armor here, but I can’t find anything that indicates its possible location.”

Diana’s shoulders slumped minutely while her anger flared hotly. They didn’t have time for this. Ra’s al Ghul was growing stronger every day with all the pieces that he was amassing. The more they could keep from Ra’s’ possession the greater the chances of defeating him.

“Arthur, if you have any idea about where it could be, it would be greatly appreciated,” Diana said. “We’re running out of time to stop Ra’s al Ghul.”

“Well, there is a chance that it could be hidden in the Shadow Reef,” Arthur revealed. “If I was going to hide something that I didn’t want anyone to ever find, it would definitely be there.”

“Let’s go then,” Batman adamantly stated, his arms falling to his sides as his cape draped around him.

“It’s far too dangerous out there,” Arthur told them with a definitive shake of his head.

Diana stood to her feet, determination blazing in her blue eyes as her hands balled into fists at her sides. “I am not afraid,” she snapped. “I’m going whether you think we should or not.”

Arthur calmly held up a hand in an attempt to placate the angry Amazon and her husband. “Calm yourself, Diana. There’s no need for you to go rushing out there and getting yourself hurt,” he revealed. “I’ve already sent some of my best men out to search the reef for it. If it’s there, they’ll find it. In the meantime, please sit and have something to eat while we wait for them.”

“Yes, please,” Mera insisted as well, hoping to diffuse the tension that filled the room.

Diana released a sigh as she sank back into her seat, Batman moving to take the chair next to her. “I’m sorry, Arthur,” she apologized. “Things have been a little…stressful. This latest threat from
Ra’s has very damning consequences for everyone if he isn’t stopped.”

“Tell me what Ra’s al Ghul is planning now,” he said as he poured himself a large glass of wine.

“He’s in the process of collecting all the pieces of Hades’ armor that have been scattered all over the world,” Batman informed him.

“So, he’s attempting to resurrect Hades himself?” Arthur intuitively responded. “Bold move.”

“Something like that,” Diana confirmed, hooking a raven curl behind her ear before placing some food on her plate. “He believes that once he puts on all the pieces of armor that he’ll be able to harness the power of Hades and cleanse the Earth.”

“I sense a ‘but’ in there somewhere,” Arthur concluded.

“Hades will overtake the conscious mind of the one who wears the armor,” Bruce replied. “Ra’s will no longer exist. He’ll effectively become a host for Hades to use at his will. Ra’s will be nothing more than a puppet and Hades the puppeteer.”

Arthur thoughtfully stroked his beard as he considered the information. “I take it Ra’s has no idea of this caveat or he wouldn’t be so determined to collect the armor.”

“Not likely,” Bruce answered him. “If he does, Ra’s either doesn’t believe that it’ll happen to him or he feels he’s powerful enough in his own right to be able to stay in control of his conscious mind.”

“Arrogant bastard,” Arthur murmured. “Anything else that we should know about?”

“Once Hades escapes the Underworld, it’ll take everything we have to force him back,” Diana stated. “He’ll be able to control the dead…raise an army from their graves. He’ll also have the power to bring anyone under his control with the use of his ring, taking over their mind and forcing them to do his bidding.”

“That is not good,” Mera grimly muttered with a sad shake of her head, clearly unnerved by the possibilities of what lay ahead for all of them if Hades escaped. She knew that Atlantis would not be exempt from Hades’ reach.

“No, it’s not,” Batman firmly agreed. “That’s why we have to keep Ra’s from gaining any more pieces than he already has.”

“You will have the backing and full support of Atlantis in your fight against Ra’s al Ghul and Hades,” Arthur pledged.

“Thank you, Arthur,” Diana replied with a sense of relief. “I’m afraid that we may be calling for that support.”

A knock at the door interrupted their conversation, a guard entering. He bowed low before Arthur and Mera. “What is it?” Arthur asked.

“My lord, they have found something,” the guard revealed.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Bruce and Diana have their hands full, but if anyone can handle it, it's most definitely our favorite superhero couple!

Thank you to all of you who left reviews about Damian. He will be sticking around for the sequel and I think that you'll be pleasantly surprised by what I have in store for it and him. I know one reviewer felt that I had Jason and Damian come around too fast, but I assure you that all is not as it seems. Damian texted to his mother that he liked it at Wayne Manor mostly to get even for abandoning him. There's still plenty of tension and indecision there that will be showing up in upcoming chapters. There is a part of him that does like his new family, but he's still trying to reconcile it all with what he's been taught.

As for Jason, please keep in mind that there was a 1 yr time jump between Family Matters Chp 29 and Chp 30 where Jason and Bruce had some time to work some things out. I will tell you that Jason is playing by Bruce's rules for now and doing things his way because he wants to be part of the family, but it will not be staying that way. Consider this the lull before the storm. Jason and Bruce will most definitely be butting heads before it's all said and done.

UP NEXT: Diana stops by the embassy and meets someone unexpected. Artemis and Jason are getting closer to finding the bomber and closer to each other. :)
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 23

*Themysciran Embassy; August 21st, 10:57 EST*

Diana parked her new SUV across from the Themysciran Embassy. Turning the engine off, she turned her head to the left, staring at the building that she and Bruce had worked so hard to make a reality. She had been so proud of the accomplishment…so excited to finally introduce the world to the Amazons and their ideals.

She never would have dreamed all those months ago that things would spiral into this utter chaos…this dishonor and humiliation. Now, she was fighting to put the embassy back together again and rebuild relations with those who now doubted the capabilities of the Amazon Nation.

Unfortunately, she was forced to rebuild the embassy and Themyscira’s reputation from the safety of Wayne Manor. It still caused her pride to bristle with the very thought of hiding from a fight. It went against everything that she’d ever been taught or known, but deep down she knew she was doing this for the safety of her family.

She couldn’t further endanger her family any more than they already were. She was also doing this to keep Bruce from losing his sanity. She knew that he wouldn’t be able to do what he needed to if he was too busy worrying about her.

Releasing a sigh, Diana exited her car, making her way across the street towards the embassy. She had promised Bruce that she would only be there for a little while, signing some documents and picking up some things that required her attention.

She knew that it probably could have been done over the computer, but she wanted to make an appearance at the embassy in order to show her staff that she still supported the important work that they hoped to accomplish. She didn’t want anyone to think for one moment that she was surrendering. Conceding defeat was never an option.

Entering the embassy, Diana walked to her office, a sense of pride filling her as she drank in the embassy that she and Bruce had put together. She would forever be grateful to him for his unwavering support in this, his help in this initiative to bring Themyscira to the world.

Diana stopped at Phaedra’s desk to find her secretary absent. She looked around with a furrowed brow, wondering where she had gone. Picking up the stack of files on the corner of her desk, she began sorting through it, hoping that she returned soon. She needed to leave to pick Nicholas up from preschool in a few minutes.

She looked up at the sound of voices drawing closer, one of them Phaedra’s and the other unknown to her. It was a man. Shoving the files into her bag, she turned to find Phaedra approaching with a man that she didn’t recognize.

He was a tall man with reddish hair and a small tattoo on the left side of his neck. While he was a nice-looking man, he didn’t quite seem like someone that would capture Phaedra’s attention. Still, she was happy for her friend that she seemed to have adjusted to life in Man’s World.
They were talking quite intensely about something, but abruptly stopped their conversation when they spotted Diana.

“Oh…uh, Princess Diana,” Phaedra nervously greeted her, averting her eyes as she brushed a blond lock of hair behind her ear. “I wasn’t expecting you to come in today.”

“I wanted to personally check in with you to see how things were going,” she revealed. “I also needed to pick up these files that you put together for me.”

Phaedra looked to the man on her left, biting at her bottom lip as if she’d just been caught doing something she shouldn’t have. “I wish you would’ve told me you were coming,” she replied. “I would have been more prepared.”

“It’s okay, Phaedra,” she reassured her. “I have the things that I needed.”

“This is…he’s my…friend,” Phaedra introduced the man beside her to the Princess of the Amazons. “This is Jordan.”

“Hi, Jordan,” Diana greeted him, extending her hand to shake his. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“No, the pleasure is all mine,” Jordan said as he shook her hand, his expression a little starstruck.

“So, how did the two of you meet, Jordan?” she asked.

“We met at a bar,” Jordan revealed, glancing at Phaedra who nodded her head in agreement. “I’m a bartender at a family owned bar in Gotham. She walked in one night and I instantly fell in love. We’ve been together ever since.”

“Oh, Jordan,” Phaedra scoffed, lightly smacking his shoulder with the back of her hand. “It wasn’t quite like that.”

“What?” Jordan innocently asked. “It was love at first sight…at least for me it was. Are you telling me it wasn’t for you?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that, but it was pretty quick,” she admitted.

Diana smiled at the way the two looked at each other, obviously in love and not willing to hide the fact. “Well, I’m very happy for both of you. Phaedra hasn’t been able to stop smiling the last several weeks and I guess you’re the reason for it.”

“I’m afraid I’ve been in the same happy state,” Jordan divulged. “She’s the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Jordan leaned over and kissed her, his hand finding hers. Phaedra returned his kiss, but quickly retreated, embarrassed by the public display of affection. “I’m sorry, Princess Diana,” she apologized. “Jordan just stopped by to see if I was free for lunch. I was giving him a tour of the embassy.”

“That’s fine, Phaedra,” Diana reassured her. “And you can just call me Diana, remember?”

Phaedra appeared completely frazzled, rubbing her forehead with her hand. “I’m sorry,” she said. “You’ve just been Princess Diana for so long that I can’t seem to break the habit.”

“It’s all right,” she told her. “Go finish your tour and enjoy lunch with Jordan. I’ll tell the security guard the embassy will be closed until you return.”
“Thank you,” Phaedra gushed, obviously thrilled with the thought of spending time with her boyfriend. “Will you be coming back again soon?”

“Yes,” Diana responded with a nod. “Probably in a couple of days, but I’ll have to see how things go. I’ve been pretty busy with other matters at the moment, but I will be back. I guarantee you that this embassy will be up and running again very soon.”

“I’m so glad to hear that,” Phaedra agreed. “You’ve worked so hard to get the embassy going for Queen Hippolyta. You deserve to have it succeed.”

“It will, Phaedra,” she assured you. “I’ll never give up on my desire to see Themyscira become a proud beacon to the world.”

Diana’s cell phone rang at that moment, interrupting their conversation. “Excuse me,” she said to the couple. “Have a good time.”

Turning away from them, Diana answered her phone as she began to make her way towards the front entrance of the embassy. “What is it, Artemis?”

“Where are you?” she demanded to know.

“I’m at the embassy,” she revealed, pausing to speak to the security guard to let him know the embassy would be closed until Phaedra returned.

“What in the name of Ra are you doing there?” she yelled.

Diana held the phone away from her ear, grimacing with the Bana-Mighdall’s fury. “I just swung by here to pick up a few things and to check in with Phaedra before picking Nicholas up at preschool.”

“You aren’t supposed to be going there,” Artemis scolded her. “You’re supposed to be staying away from there until we can find out who is behind the attacks against you.”

“I’m leaving now, Artemis,” Diana told her, irritated with her friend’s anger with her. “Do I need to remind you that I’m fully capable of handling myself?”

“No, but do I need to remind you that your mother, the Queen of the Amazons, sent me here to help keep you and your family safe?” she shot back.

Diana growled a curse under her breath. “No,” she bit out as she walked across the street to her waiting SUV.

“Have you left yet?”

“I’m getting into my car to go pick Nicholas up from school,” she told her. “Happy?”

“No, but I’m getting there,” Artemis cockily replied. “I’ll see you at home.”

“Bye,” Diana ground out, tossing her cell phone into the cup holder of her car. “Damn Amazon is so annoying.”

Driving off, Diana decided that she was going to have to talk with Artemis about giving her a little breathing room. This smothering over-protectiveness was beginning to drive her absolutely crazy. If Artemis wasn’t careful, she was going to find herself on the wrong end of her fist in a sparring match she wouldn’t soon forget.
Jason tore through Gotham like a man possessed, Artemis clinging to him for dear life. Even though this was the fifth night in a row of doing this, she was still a little nervous about not being in full control of the bike or the situation she currently found herself in.

Coming to a stop at a red light, Artemis decided now was as good a time as any to ask her question. “When can I get a bike of my own?”

Jason smirked with her question but was a little disappointed by the request. He really liked having her ride on the back of his bike, the press of her body against his and the way she gripped the top of his jeans in order to keep from falling off. He didn’t want to give this up just yet…or ever.

“We’ll have to see,” he cryptically replied.

Artemis glared at him though she knew that he couldn’t see it. She had a feeling he liked being the one in control. While it annoyed her, she was having a tough time truly being furious with him about it. She couldn’t quite figure out why though.

She tightened her hold on him, earning a somewhat stifled grunt from her partner. He revved the engine a couple of times before taking off like a rocket and forcing her to tighten her grip on the edge of his jeans. Her fingernails pressed through his t-shirt and into his abdomen as her other hand slid further down his jeans to get a better grip.

All of this resulted in an aroused Jason and an irritated Amazon. It didn’t help matters any when her fingers began a slow, sensual caress of his rock-hard abdominal muscles. Her exploration was making his breathing ragged and his head spin with desire for far more with her.

She either had no clue what she was actually doing to him or she wasn’t as naïve as he had been led to believe.

Jason just prayed they got to their destination quick before he had an accident—with his bike or otherwise. He was growing rather uncomfortable, her wandering fingers creating sexy images in his head that he’d love to make a reality. Unfortunately, now was neither the time nor the place.

The last few nights of searching for Lefty Whitten had turned up nothing. Then, Eddie had called him earlier today with a possible lead. He was placing all his hope that this lead would pan out. If it didn’t, they were back to square one because he had no idea where else to look.

He had a very bad feeling that the attacker was going to strike again and this time it was going to be even worse than before. It caused a shiver of dread to race up his spine with the thought, fearing what it would do to his family to lose Diana. He knew he couldn’t let that happen no matter what it took to stop it.

Pulling to a stop behind some dumpsters on a side street, Jason turned to Artemis. Before he could say a word, she handed him his helmet, holding up her other hand to stop him from speaking. “I know…I know,” she told him. “I’m not allowed to speak or get into any fights while we’re here. You take the lead and I just pretend I’m your shy little girlfriend.”

Jason flashed her a cocky grin before climbing off his Ducati. “You act like you’ve done this before,” he teased her.

“Just every night for the last five nights,” she pointed out with an irritated huff. “Your method obviously isn’t working. Maybe we should try a different approach…one where we just go in and start slamming heads together and demanding answers.”
“While your way sounds a lot more fun, I still think we need to play it low key and see what we can dig up,” he replied, automatically reaching for her hand and lacing his fingers with hers.

There was no way he was going to change things now. He liked holding her hand and pretending they were together. While it was only a cover, it was one that he hoped would become a reality someday soon. He didn’t know how much longer he was going to be able to keep himself from kissing her.

“How sure is Eddie about this lead?” she asked as they approached the bar.

“Eddie swore to me that he heard Lefty was supposed to be here tonight,” Jason confirmed.

“And just how trustworthy is Eddie?” she questioned him. “I mean the man is cheating on his girlfriend with a hooker.”

“Eddie is a little rough around the edges, but deep down he’s a good guy.”

“It must be very deep down,” she muttered under her breath as they entered the bar.

It was nothing more than a dirty hole-in-the-wall bar, not much different from the first one they had gone to in order to find Frankie Alomar. The difference with this one was that they had three pool tables where a dance floor probably used to be.

Jason led her to a small table by one of the pool tables, ordering them a couple of drinks. “Okay, keep your eyes and ears open for anything,” he softly told her. “We want information. We don’t want to scare him off.”

“You know I’m not completely overbearing,” Artemis shot back with a frown. “I can be subtle when the occasion calls for it.”

Jason chuckled with her assessment of herself. “Tell that to the guy whose hand is now in a cast or the guy last night that will probably be walking with a limp for the rest of his life.”

Artemis scowled with the reminder. “He annoyed me,” she snapped. “He wouldn’t stop trying to touch my hair. Besides, he smelled like dung.”

“Yah, I have to agree,” he confessed. “I was about two seconds away from pounding him myself. You just beat me to it.”

“Well, if you’d take me to some place decent instead of these bars that are held together by nothing more than sweat and cobwebs, maybe I’d be able to show a little more restraint.”

“Point taken,” he replied with a nod. “You actually have done very well…far better than I had anticipated.”

Artemis frowned with his words. “I’m not sure whether to be pleased or offended with that compliment.”

“It was supposed to be a good thing,” he told her, tightening his hold on her hand.

“If you say so,” she said with a sigh, looking about with a frown on her face.

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t like all this waiting,” she admitted. “There has been nothing but surveillance all week. I’m anxious for some action.”
Jason looked about, deciding to do something to cheer her up. “Come on,” he said as he stood to his feet, pulling her up with him.

“What are we going to?”

“We’re going to play pool.”

“I don’t even know for sure what that is,” she told him as he handed her a pool cue. She glared at the stick in her hand, appraising it with great suspicion. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

“I’ll show you,” he reassured her. “Just watch me.”

Artemis drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly as she watched Jason put a triangle frame around a bunch of balls to line them up before removing the frame. He then took a little blue square that was resting on the edge of the pool table, rubbing it on the point of his stick.

She had really been hoping that they were going to get to hit something with their sticks, something far more enjoyable then these balls. Still, she had to admit that it was rather intriguing as Jason leaned over the table, placing a finger over the stick as he aimed it at the balls resting on the table.

He drew the long stick back and forth several times before quickly pushing his stick forward against a white ball. The white ball shot across the length of the table, slamming into the colored balls with a loud crack that caused them to scatter in every direction across the table.

A blue ball shot straight into a side pocket while the other balls came to rest in various locations on the table. He slowly circled the table with quiet deliberation, his razor-sharp gaze locked on the table as he studied the positions of the balls.

Noticing something that he seemed to like, he stopped, leaning over the table again and lining up his shot. Using the white ball, he knocked in another solid colored ball, this time into a corner pocket. He proceeded around the table, systematically eliminating every single solid colored ball before taking out each of the striped balls.

Jason straightened up after he took the last shot, giving Artemis a cocky grin. “That is how you play pool.”

A single eyebrow arched as she stared him down. “Do I get a turn at this?”

“Patience, Red,” he replied. “I just wanted to show you how it’s done before we play a real game.”

Jason went to work collecting all the balls from the various pockets, lining them up with the triangle frame before removing it. He placed the white ball on the table at the opposite end from the balls before stepping back to give Artemis the chance to go first.

Artemis glanced at Jason before looking at the table again, her eyebrows furrowing. “Okay, come on,” Jason said, placing his pool cue down before walking up behind her. “Lean over like this and line up your shot.”

Artemis’s breath hitched in her throat with the unexpected feel of Jason’s body against her back. He leaned her forward, his body molding itself against hers. He slowly ran his hands down the length of her arms, his fingers moving to caress her hands as he moved them into position.

He moved his head so that his cheek rested against hers, the feel of her against his body driving him absolutely crazy. He wondered if she could feel the way his heart was hammering wildly in his chest as he struggled to form a coherent thought.
“You just have to…line it up…like this,” he murmured, trying to keep his breathing even despite the effect she was having on him.

Artemis bit at her bottom lip, slowly dragging her teeth over it. She flushed with the feel of his muscular frame molding so perfectly against her body. She didn’t dare breathe for fear that he’d release his hold on her or pull away from her. She allowed him to help guide her hands, the stick seeming to move on its own as it suddenly struck the white ball.

She turned her head to the right to look at him, her lips nearly brushing against his. They stared into each other’s eyes, losing themselves in the unexpected intimacy of the moment as well as the feelings that had been steadily building beneath the surface between them.

“How was that?” she softly asked, trying to rein in her racing heart.

“Perfect,” he whispered, his breath warm against her skin.

His gaze fell to her red lips, the desire to kiss her becoming too much to battle any longer. “Do you two want another drink?”

Jason and Artemis jerked apart at the unexpected intrusion, both looking about them as they straightened up. “No, I think we’re good,” Jason nearly growled, angry with the intrusion.

He didn’t know how much longer he was going to be able to last before finally just pressing her up against the nearest wall and kissing her senseless. The sexual tension that filled the air every time they were together was becoming nearly suffocating.

“So what next?” Artemis asked, running her fingers through her hair to regain some measure of composure again.

Jason cleared his throat, stepping closer to her once more. “You need to try to get the striped balls into the pockets.”

“What about the solid balls?”

“Those are mine,” he informed her. “Whoever gets all their balls into the pockets first wins the game.”

“This is a very odd game,” she decided with a frown.

“It’s quite fun and competitive once you get into it.”

“If you say so,” Artemis said as she leaned forward, taking her stick and successfully knocking in a striped ball.

Jason stood there slack-jawed as he watched the Amazon knock in one ball after another before taking out every single one of his balls as well. “All right…where did you learn to play pool?”

She gave him a smirk, her emerald eyes sparkling with mischief. “We actually have something somewhat similar to this back home.”

“So, you totally played me,” he stated, leveling her with a deadly glare.

“Pretty much,” she revealed as she began lining up the balls again. “It’s not exactly like this. The sticks are shorter and there are more balls. There isn’t a table like this either.”

Jason stared at her with great appreciation, turned on by the fact that she had just completely fooled
him. Not many could do that to him and get away with it, but, then again, she wasn’t just anyone. She was undeniably a woman all her own, very unlike anyone else that he’d ever known before.

“Okay, now that I know that you know what you’re doing we’re going to play a real game,” he adamantly declared as he rubbed the tip of his pool stick with the blue chalk. “We’re also going to place a bet on it.”

“What kind of bet?” she asked, interested in the proposition.

“Care to make it interesting?” he questioned her, a roguish glint in his eyes.

“In what way?”

The suspicion in her voice only motivated him to continue down this dangerous path. “If I win, you have to do whatever I want and if you win, I have to do whatever you want.”

A fiery red eyebrow arched suspiciously as she tried to determine just what he was up to with this challenge. “I don’t know about this,” she muttered suspiciously.

Jason leaned in close to her, allowing his proximity to influence her. Unfortunately, it was also having quite an effect on him as well. “Are you scared, Amazon?”

She clenched her jaw, her grip tightening on her pool cue as she glared haughtily at him. “I am not scared of anything and definitely not you,” she shot back. “You’re on, Todd.”

His gaze fell to her lips before meeting her eyes once again. “I’ll even give you first shot.”

Her lips curled into a smirk. “Oh no, please…after you.”

“No, ladies first,” he insisted.

“Fine,” she accepted his offer, their mission temporarily forgotten as they waged war against each other. There was no way she was going to lose to him although she was curious as to what he would want her to do if he won.

Lining up her cue, she hit the white ball, breaking the other balls and sending a solid ball into a corner pocket. She slowly circled the table as if it were her prey to be conquered, deciding which ball would be her next target. Finding the one she wanted, she hit the ball, sending it into a side pocket.

Jason watched patiently as she set up for her third shot, growing slightly concerned about her winning. While he was excited about the prospect of being at her mercy, he feared she would tell him to leave her alone or something even worse.

He released an almost imperceptible sigh of relief when her shot missed. It was his turn and he was not going to lose. He quickly went to work, sinking one striped ball after another. As he lined up his cue to sink his fourth ball, he felt an unexpected hand brush against his backside.

The tip of Jason’s stick jabbed into the pool table, completely missing his intended shot. He shot straight up, turning a surprised stare at the Amazon standing so innocently behind him with a smirk on her lips. “What?” she coyly asked.

His eyes narrowed into a glare. “That is cheating.”

“I didn’t do anything,” she swore.
“Right,” he muttered in disbelief. “Behave yourself, Red, or I’ll be forced to get revenge.”

Jason leaned over to attempt his shot again, his gaze focused on his next move. Still, he couldn’t help wondering what Artemis might try next, feeling a warm flush with the knowledge that she was standing right behind him. She was already messing with his head and she hadn’t even tried anything again yet.

Just as he pulled his cue back, Artemis leaned in close to his right ear, her breath brushing against his skin. “Are you sure that’s the shot you want to take?”

Unable to halt his forward movement, his stick jumped the ball he’d intended to hit, taking out one of her balls instead and sending it careening into a side pocket. He straightened up, turning to face her with a scowl on his face. “Oh, it is on, Red,” he growled.

Artemis merely grinned at him as she quickly leaned over and took her shot before he could begin to think to retaliate. She walked around him, slapping him on the backside before deciding on her next shot. With a razor-sharp focus, she zoned in on the next ball to go down.

She leaned down and lined up her pool cue. As she began to make her shot, an unexpected yet not unwanted pair of hands suddenly gripped her hips. Jason leaned in close to her, allowing his breath to graze across the back of her neck.

Artemis yelped in surprise, nearly striking Jason with her pool cue. He ducked at the last second as she whirled around, her eyes aflame with emotion. “That was uncalled for!” she exclaimed.

“What?” he asked as he stared at her with the most innocent of expressions on his face.

“You know what,” she ground out, green eyes narrowing into dangerous slits. “You were purposefully trying to distract me.”

“Oh, and you weren’t when I was trying to shoot?” he countered, folding his arms against his chest.

“No, I just accidently brushed against you as I walked by,” she maintained.

“And when you were breathing in my ear?”

“I was trying to get a better look at what you were doing.”

“Right,” he murmured. “Just take your shot and behave yourself.”

Artemis sniffed in indignation as she turned her attention back to the pool table. She could feel the heat of Jason’s gaze raking across her body and up her spine. It made her tingle all over, a warm sensation washing through her and pooling low in her pelvis.

Just as Jason was reaching to touch her again, he happened to look up at that moment, spotting the very person they’d been looking for entering the bar. He surreptitiously placed his hand on Artemis’s low back, causing her to look up as well. He could feel her immediately tense up beneath his palm, the muscles in her back tightening into fight mode.

“That’s him,” Jason whispered in her ear as he brushed past her, putting his beer bottle to his lips and taking a long pull.

Artemis tightened her grip on her pool cue almost to the point of cracking it. She was more than anxious to get her hands on the man who had tried to hurt her friend. A calming touch of Jason’s
hand on hers refocused her fury. He led her back to their table, pretending to only be interested in each other as the red-headed man with a small scorpion tattoo talked to a large, rough looking man at the bar. He could tell by the intent looks on the two men’s faces that this was all about business.

Standing to his feet, Jason grabbed Artemis’s hand. “Come on,” he murmured.

Artemis readily went with him despite all the questions storming through her mind. She was unsure of what he was up to. “Shouldn’t we stay to see what he does?” she hissed low in his ear.

“Trust me,” he muttered.

Exiting the bar, Jason pulled her off to the side of the front door. He kept her close to him, his gaze locked on the entrance to the bar. He had Artemis positioned between him and the wall of the bar, keeping a close watch for their suspect to come out.

Artemis could feel her heart beat picking up in anticipation of the possible fight that was coming. She was anxious to capture their prey and eliminate the threat to Diana and her family. At the same time, she wasn’t ready to return home just yet.

She found that she really liked it here in Gotham and, as her eyes settled on the man in front of her, she knew that he was becoming a big part of that reason why.

Before she was able to voice her questions or her impatience, Jason abruptly wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her flush against his body. His lips met hers in an unexpected kiss that took her by surprise. The air practically crackled around them as mouths began to move against each other.

Her fingers threaded through his black hair as he pressed her back against the rough brick wall of the bar. His body instinctively followed, pinning her against the building and momentarily forgetting the real reason for them being here.

His tongue soon found hers in a duel for control, Artemis moaning with the taste of him as her tongue tangled with his. The reality of kissing him was even better than the dreams that had invaded her sleep as of late. She didn’t want it to end as passion flared, his hands roaming over her sides.

“Are you sure about this, Lefty?”

“Yah, I’m sure,” he replied. “There’s a huge payoff if we’re successful.”

“Yah, but this is huge,” the man countered, skepticism coloring his voice.

“But the payout will be even bigger.”

“Fine,” he finally relented. “Let’s go.”

Pulling apart, Jason held her close as he struggled to catch his breath, his blood rushing in his ears with all the emotions that she had awakened within him. Artemis didn’t seem to be fairing any better, her breathing as exerted as his at that moment as they stared in wonder at each other.

“We…we better follow them,” he softly said, finding it more than difficult to move. He didn’t want to let her go, didn’t want this moment to end for fear that he’d never have another with her.

“I guess so,” she agreed.
Jason reluctantly released his hold on her, turning towards his waiting Ducati. The unexpected feel of her hand slipping into his caused his heart to flutter in response. He automatically tightened his hold on her hand, interlacing their fingers as he led her away from the bar.

He quickly started it up as Artemis climbed on behind him, taking off to follow the best lead that they’d had since this whole nightmare had first begun. He couldn’t help wondering what she thought of that kiss they’d just shared as they followed the two men.

Did it mean anything to her? She had kissed him back, fully responding to him, but had it all been nothing more than an act on her part?

Questions and doubts clouded his mind as they followed the car, the feel of her wrapped around his body again only making it that much harder to think straight and focus on what they needed to do. Now was not the time to be thinking about his growing feelings for Artemis.

They had a bomber to catch.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, things are definitely beginning to heat up between Jason and Artemis. Who is this guy that Phaedra is dating?

UP NEXT: Artemis can't stop thinking about that kiss. Diana tests Damian's sword fighting skills. Batman and Batwoman stumble across something interesting during patrol.
Thanks for reading!! Hope you're enjoying this twisty tale. :)


Chapter 24

Gotham; August 23rd, 07:03 EST

Jason laid in his bed with his fingers laced behind his head, staring pensively at the white ceiling of his bedroom. His head was a virtual beehive of thoughts, a cyclone of varying emotions consuming him. His mind had not allowed him to get very much sleep since returning home a few hours ago, continually replaying the heated moment that he’d shared with Artemis at the bar.

His body was tense as he tried to sort through the events of the night, frustration thrumming through him. He swore he could still feel the press of her lips against his, tasted her on his tongue. It had been a passionate kiss that had been felt bone-deep, awakening a hunger in him that he was still struggling to temper even now.

He glanced to his left, staring at the red numbers of his alarm clock resting on his nightstand, wishing that Artemis was here with him in his bed right now. He’d never felt quite this way before for a woman. He found himself wanting to be a better person, to be the man that she would need him to be if she decided to give him a chance. He wanted to make her smile…to hear her laugh and be the source of that happiness.

With a growl of frustration, Jason flopped over onto his stomach. A muffled curse escaped as he fist the edges of his pillow. Neither of them had brought up the kiss after leaving the bar, an awkward tension settling between them as they had followed Lefty Whitten through Gotham only to lose the suspected bomber.

He had been more than furious when Whitten had run a red light. Jason had tried to follow him without being detected only to be nearly hit by a large box truck. He’d been forced to react quickly in order to keep the both of them alive. He had veered to the right and down a small alley, coming out the other end to find Whitten’s red Charger was nowhere to be found.

Artemis had tried to calm him down after losing Whitten, reassuring him that they would find him again. She was positive it was only a matter of time before they would track him down. He had dropped her off at the manor after that, neither of them speaking as she had handed him his helmet.

He knew that they were going to have to talk about the kiss they had shared. The sexual tension between them was growing stronger and they had too much work to do to find Whitten again. He couldn’t let these feelings for her get in the way of their mission to stop whoever was out to destroy Diana and the Themyscirian Embassy.

With a groan, he forced himself to climb out of bed, knowing that he wasn’t going to be getting any more sleep this morning. Deciding that an intense workout was definitely in order, he quickly changed before heading to his training equipment, starting with a fierce attack on his punching bag.

With a little luck, he could burn off some of this tension teeming inside of him, clearing his mind and allowing him to figure out his next move.

Batcave; August 23rd, 11:26 EST
Bruce jogged down the steps that took him into his gloomy sanctuary that was like his second home. Despite getting retrieving Hades’ breastplate, they still had plenty of work ahead of them. He had to find Ra’s ah Ghul before he could put on the armor and start an apocalyptic war.

Thankfully, the breastplate was safely hidden at Superman’s Fortress of Solitude along with the other items they’d been able to uncover. While they had managed to get some pieces of Hades’ armor, they had been unable to obtain the most important and most powerful pieces. They were still behind the so-called eight ball and it was not a good place to be in when going up against the likes of Ra’s al Ghul.

The Demon’s Head was powerful and very dangerous in his own right without putting on the armor of a Greek god. This had the potential to become the fiercest battle they’d ever had to face, taking the combined effort of the entire Justice League in order to take him down.

The thought completely unnerved him.

He climbed the steps of the platform where Tim was working feverishly to track down Ra’s latest hideout. “Any luck yet?” Bruce asked as he came to stand behind his son.

“I’ve been able to rule out three known al Ghul hideouts near Lazarus Pits,” Tim revealed as he pulled up a map for Bruce to look at. “I’ve been using satellite imagery to rule out any activity there. It appears that no one has been there for quite some time.”

“Damian isn’t going to be able to help us locate him,” Bruce surmised. “I’m sure Ra’s moved as soon as Talia and Damian left for Gotham to make sure that Damian didn’t know where the new base was located.”

“I agree,” Tim said with a thoughtful nod of his head as he sat back in his chair. “I’m currently checking out a couple more known Lazarus Pit locations. The problem is that we have no idea how many other Lazarus Pits there are out there.”

Bruce put a hand on Tim’s shoulder, squeezing it in reassurance. “You’re doing great, Tim,” he praised him. “I know if there’s anyone who can find Ra’s it’s definitely you.”

“I hope I can come through,” he replied with uncertainty lacing his voice. “If we don’t get to him before he puts on that armor…I don’t want to even think about it.”

“Well, we wouldn’t have been able to find the breastplate in Atlantis if it hadn’t been for you,” Bruce told him. “You’ve been a huge asset.”

“I’m sure you guys would’ve figured it out eventually.”

“Hey, I’m giving you a compliment,” Bruce said. “They don’t come often so I’d take it if I were you.”


“Let me know if you come across anything interesting,” he announced. “I’m going to watch Diana and Damian’s sword match.”

“A little worried about how that’s going to go?” Tim asked.

“More like just…mild concern,” he corrected him.
“Bruce, your level of concern is never mild,” Tim replied. “You know mom can handle Damian.”

“I know she can, but it’s just that Damian is in a very unstable place right now,” Bruce attempted to explain. “He doesn’t know for sure who he can trust. He’s stuck in the middle between two families, trying to figure out which side is the right side.”

“I wouldn’t want to be in his shoes,” Tim agreed.

“Exactly,” Bruce said as he walked away.

Bruce made his way towards the training room, silently praying that this didn’t turn out to be a complete disaster. Giving Damian a sword right now with so much animosity and anger brewing just beneath the surface didn’t seem like the best idea, but Diana had reassured him that they would be just fine.

He knew that if anyone could handle him it was most certainly his wife. Diana had an easy way about her that people just seemed to respond to. She had an understanding, compassionate heart that drew others in. No one was immune to her contagious spirit.

Heaven knows he tried everything in his power not to be affected by her for years until finally realizing one day that she had already gotten through all his defenses. Surrendering was the only option at that point. It was the best decision of his life.

Approaching the training room, Bruce spotted Artemis standing just inside the door. She was leaning against the wall with her arms crossed against her chest and a look of pure skepticism written on her face. Her legs were stretched out before her and crossed at the ankles.

“This is not a good idea,” she stated in no uncertain terms as he came to stand beside her.

“Diana can handle him,” Bruce said, unsure who he was trying harder to reassure—her or himself.

“We’ll see,” Artemis replied. “There is a great deal of anger inside of him.”

“Maybe it’ll help to get some of it out,” he suggested as he leaned against the wall next to the Bana-Mighdall Amazon, his focus solely on his wife. “Did you and Jason have any luck tracking down the bomber last night?”

Artemis instantly stiffened with the reminder of last night. Of course, it hadn’t been very far from her thoughts since Jason had kissed her, following her into her dreams, but it wasn’t something that she wanted to discuss with anyone right now.

“We found him, followed him, and lost him,” Artemis curtly answered, unwilling to divulge any more information than that.

“If you found him once, you’ll find him again,” he reassured her. “Jason is tenacious when it comes to tracking down suspects. It might not hurt to contact Oracle to see if she can help you find him.”

“I’m sure Jason has already done that,” Artemis murmured.

“Okay, Damian,” Diana said, handing the ten-year-old a practice sword. “We’re just going to test your skill level. Don’t worry about hurting me or trying to hold anything back. I want to see the full extent of your skills.”

“I’m already very adept with a sword,” he claimed.
“I’m sure you are, but we need to see just how adept you are.”

Damian scowled at her, unmistakable hostility on his face. “I don’t know why I have to prove anything to anyone.”

“Well, you want to join Bruce as the next Robin, don’t you?” she reminded him. “We need to know how ready you actually are to take on a significant role such as this one. Besides, I could use someone to practice with.”

Damian gave her a skeptical look, his shoulders dropping slightly as he considered her for a moment. “Why not practice with my father?”

“He’s not as skilled with a sword,” she told him, the corner of her lips curling slightly as she kept her focus on Damian. She knew Bruce wasn’t going to like that jab. “You told me that you’re very skilled with a sword and I need a good challenge.”

“Whatever,” Bruce grunted under his breath, shaking his head in disbelief.

Artemis glanced at him with amusement. “You said she could handle him,” she softly reminded him. “Seems to me that she’s doing a pretty good job of it.”

“Yah, at my expense,” he grumbled.

“Whatever works,” she murmured.

“Fine,” Damian relented, glancing down at his outfit before lifting his gaze to meet Diana’s. “I really don’t need all this protective gear on. I’m not a little kid you know.”

“It’s just for safety,” Diana reassured him, holding her sword up. “Now, are we going to keep talking or are we going to actually train?”

Damian’s lips thinned into a grim line as he lifted his sword to his opponent, his eyes hardening like steel. “Prepare to be defeated.”

Diana forced down the smile she could feel struggling to form on her lips. She knew that he was confident to a fault, but he didn’t have any idea what he was about to go up against even though she’d tried telling him. His arrogance was an asset if he could wield it like Bruce or it could turn out to be his greatest weakness if he didn’t learn to control it.

Diana held her sword up towards him, waiting for her opponent to make the first move. Damian didn’t disappoint as he swiftly swung his sword straight at her, wanting to show off his skills. She quickly responded as she tempered her strength and blocked his blade.

She allowed him to be on the offensive, blocking his strikes and letting him show her his extensive training. It was a little different facing off against someone so much smaller than her, but she made the necessary adjustments to her movements to ensure that he didn’t get hurt.

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She took a step back as he pressed his attack, wielding his sword with somewhat impressive proficiency. He swung his blade in a slashing motion towards her throat, Diana jerking back to avoid the blow. He countered with a reverse swing that was met with an opposing blade.

Damian grew more frustrated with every swing of his sword, angered by the fact that he hadn’t been able to prove himself to her or his father yet. He was more than ready to be the next Robin, but he needed to show them he was more than capable to handle the responsibility.
He growled as his blade arced towards Diana once more, her sword already there waiting for him to finish his strike. He angrily cursed as she turned the tables on him and put him on the defensive, forcing him to backpedal in order to keep up with her onslaught.

Diana began to press her advantage, knowing that she was wearing him down. Damian did show promising skill with a sword, but he lacked the ability to fully control his emotions. He needed to spend time with Bruce learning how to channel his emotions and use them to his advantage instead of allowing them to dictate him.

His breathing grew exerted as he attempted to block each of her swings, his muscles growing fatigued. He could feel her attempt to back him into a corner, but he knew that he couldn’t allow that to happen. It would be match over and he wasn’t about to let her win.

With a sneer on his lips, Damian tightened his grip on the handle of his sword, throwing every bit of energy and strength he had into his movements. With a growl, he charged at her, making slashing movements with his sword.

Diana easily countered his angry assault, his movements growing sloppy and highly predictable. Seeing that they were getting nowhere with this, she quickly disarmed him, his sword falling to the matted floor. “Okay...that’s enough,” she decided, glancing at Bruce and Artemis.

“You didn’t give me much of a chance,” Damian angrily ground out.

“You were allowing your emotions to dictate your moves, Damian,” she calmly told him. “You need to learn to control your anger.”

“You didn’t give me a real chance,” Damian spat out as he glared at her. “You stopped me when I was beginning to gain the advantage on you. You already had it in for me before we even started. You wanted to humiliate me in front of my father.”

Bruce instantly stiffened with his son’s angry outburst towards his wife, his arms falling to his sides as he pulled away from the wall. He was about ready to step in when Diana held up a hand towards him, her focus solely on the boy in front of her.

“I gave you every chance, Damian,” she evenly replied. “You have considerable skill. I think with some more training you could be highly proficient with a sword, but you need to learn to control your temper. Until then, your emotions will control you. It’ll be a detriment to you until you learn to use and channel your emotions.”

“You can’t tell me what to do,” he snapped. “You’re not my mother and you never will be.”

“I don’t want to be your mother,” Diana told him. “I only want to help you better yourself.”

Damian glowered at Diana, his anger seething inside of him as he fist his hands at his sides. “You just want me gone so Tim can stay Robin and your precious Nicholas can take over the role someday.”

“That’s enough, Damian,” Diana firmly stated as her blue flashed in warning. She wasn’t about to allow this to go on any further. “I have done nothing but accept you into this family as if you were my own from the very beginning. It has been your decision to remain on the outside of this family looking in. Now, if you wish, I would be more than happy to work with you on your sword training.”

“I’d rather not,” he sulked, turning away from her.
“I’ll take you on, princess,” Bruce offered.

“If you think you can handle it, Batman,” she taunted him with a smirk.

Bruce made his way towards her, pausing to pick up his son’s fallen sword as Damian stalked past him to lean against the far wall with his arms crossed and a fierce scowl firmly fixed on his face. He was not going to miss seeing his father doing battle with the Amazon.

Damian glanced at Artemis to see her glaring darkly at him, her angered gaze practically burning holes in him. He had the decency to give her a somewhat sheepish look, knowing that he had acted inappropriately towards Diana, but he was not about to apologize. No one could make him do that.

“Oh, I’m sure I can handle it, princess,” Bruce shot back with a leering stare. “The question is… can you?”

Diana chuckled softly as she shook her head in amazement. “I have handled far more than you, Bruce Wayne.”

Bruce instantly straightened with her response, jealousy blazing in his eyes. “And who would that be?”

The corner of her lips quirked. “Maybe I’ll tell you one day, but right now I think you’re just delaying getting your ass kicked. Are you afraid of me, Dark Knight?”

“Oh no you didn’t just say that,” Bruce shot back, raising his sword. “Bring it, Amazon.”

With a devious grin on her face, Diana launched herself into the attack on her husband. Blades clashed and clanged as they traded strikes, neither holding much back as they threw themselves into the competitive match between husband and wife.

Artemis smiled to herself as Diana threw in a leg kick towards Bruce’s chest, taking him off balance. She was itching to get in there and spar with the Amazon Champion herself. It had been far too long since she’d been able to really test her skills against a suitable opponent.

Jason had offered to spar with her a few times, but she had yet to take him up on the offer. She was still trying to figure out her feelings after that kiss last night. It had been thrilling and terrifying at the same time, leaving her wanting more and yet unsure if she should.

Neither of them had brought it up after parting last night, but she had felt the tension simmering between them right there beneath the surface. She couldn’t help wondering if Jason felt it too or if it was just something that only she felt?

She bit back a smile as Diana pushed her advantage, Bruce trapped in a corner and attempting to fight his way back out of it. Unfortunately, Diana had him right where she wanted him. It was only a matter of time now and…

Bruce cursed under his breath as Diana effectively disarmed him, the point of her sword pressing into his sternum. “Point,” Diana said with a Cheshire grin.

Damian didn’t feel quite as bad about losing to Diana after watching his father get bested by the Amazon. Still, he wasn’t very happy about being beaten by her. His grandfather would not be pleased if he knew. He needed another chance to prove himself.

Alfred stood in the doorway of the training room, witnessing Diana’s victory over her husband. “If you two are all done, lunch is ready.”
Damian didn’t need to be told twice as he made a hasty exit from the training room. He was famished after his sword fight with Diana. Artemis followed him, leaving Bruce and Diana alone in the room. Bruce bent down to retrieve his practice sword, walking over to place it in its holding place on the wall.

“I’m sorry that Damian was so difficult,” he told her. “You didn’t deserve to be on the receiving end of his angry outburst.”

“It’s okay, Bruce,” she reassured him, placing her practice sword next to his. “I knew it was coming. He needed to get some of that anger out instead of letting it fester inside of him.”

“You were really great with Damian,” he replied, leaning in and kissing her.

“I just hope we can get through to him,” Diana admitted with a sigh as they walked out together. “I truly believe that he has a good heart deep down. We just have to get past all of Ra’s and Talia’s training.”

“We’ll get there,” Bruce attempted to reassure her, taking her hand and squeezing it. “It’s just going to take time and a lot of patience.”

“Hera help us all,” she murmured with a sigh.

Gotham; August 24th, 02:37 EST

Batwoman slammed her elbow into the back of one of Joker’s henchman, forcing him to the ground with a grunting groan. He lay sprawled out on the street, struggling to catch his breath as she tied him up. She leaned in close to him, her lips a breath away from his ear.

“We will find your boss and we will stop him,” she hissed in his ear.

Straightening up, Diana watched as her husband slammed another of Joker’s men up against the side of a nearby building, his forearm pressing against the his throat. “What is Joker planning?” he demanded to know with a grating rasp, his nose millimeters away as he glowered at him.

The henchmen struggled to catch his breath, squirming unsuccessfully against the Dark Knight’s hold on him. “I…I don’t know nothin’,” he claimed, struggling and wheezing. “I swear!”

“I think you’re lying,” Batman ground out, pushing a little harder against the thug’s throat.

The guy gasped in response to the added pressure, his eyes widening with fear. “He didn’t tell us nothin’,” he swore again, his hands clawing at Batman’s arm in an effort to remove it.

With a threatening growl, Batman released his forearm from his throat. The henchmen sagged against the wall, sliding down it to the ground as he gasped and coughed. Batman leaned over and handcuffed him before turning to Batwoman.

“Let’s go,” he told her, firing his grappling gun.

Batwoman followed suit, firing her grappling gun as the sound of approaching sirens grew louder in the distance. Landing on a nearby rooftop beside her husband, Diana walked to the edge of the roof, coming to stand beside him, crossing her arms against her chest as worry tugged at her heart. She could tell by his stance that he was livid with the lack of information.

She could hardly blame him. It always sparked an overwhelming sense of dread whenever Joker was planning something, especially when it came to Gotham. The situation took on a renewed
sense of urgency and a sense of direness that could not be so easily dismissed.

“What are you thinking?” she softly inquired as she kept her distance and gave him some space, knowing that he was angry about the lack of information that he’d been able to uncover so far about what Joker was up to.

Several long moments passed in tense silence, both staring at the scene below as the GCPD arrested Joker’s men and took them away in their police cars. “I think Joker is planning our worst nightmare,” Bruce grimly confessed, his tone haunting and filled with dread. It caused a shiver to race up Diana’s spine.

She reach over to him, laying a reassuring hand on his forearm and squeezing it gently in hopes of pulling him away from that dark, brooding precipice. “We’ll figure out what it is before it’s too late,” she attempted to soothe him. “I just wish we knew why he had his men try to rob a pharmaceutical company and what exactly they were after.”

“I don’t know, but he clearly has a plan in mind,” Batman agreed, his mind racing to put the pieces together before someone got hurt. “This is the second one that he’s hit in the last month. There’s something that he definitely wants to get his hands on.”

“I wish we knew what it was that he was after so we could anticipate his next move,” she thoughtfully replied, thinking through it as well.

“I need to go back through the evidence again and see if I can figure out what I’m missing,” he ultimately decided.

“What drugs were taken during the last break-in?”

Batman shook his head as he thought back on the investigation that he had performed after the theft. “It was a wide range of drugs,” he revealed. “He didn’t steal just one particular kind of drug, but a wide range of them. It was everything from pills to treat seizures to chemotherapeutic meds to asthma medicine.”

“He’s trying to cover what he was really there to steal,” she surmised.

“Agreed,” he murmured in thought.

“So where to now?”

“I want to swing by the embassy before we turn in for the night,” he told her, gazing down at the streets below.

“Why do you want to go there?”

“I’m not ruling out the possibility that whoever is behind the attacks could be planning something more,” he replied.

“But I’m not even there right now,” Diana pointed out. “I’m working from home for the time being.”

“I know, but it’s easier to retaliate against you by targeting the embassy than trying to launch an attack on you at home,” he said.

“Do you know something that you haven’t told me?” she pointedly asked, an eyebrow quirking in suspicion.
“No,” he confessed. “It’s just a hunch that I have. Besides, it’s well known that Wayne Manor has the most sophisticated security system in the world. They’d be crazy to try to attempt anything there. The embassy is a far easier target.”

Diana drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly through parted lips. “All right,” she decided, wanting to make sure that her staff was well protected. “Never say that I don’t trust you and your paranoid hunches.”

“I think there’s a compliment in there somewhere,” he grumbled, his gaze narrowing into thin white slits as he glared at her.

“Are we driving or flying?”

“We’ll fly,” he replied. “The embassy is less than a dozen blocks from here and you could use the practice. Your grappling skills are still a little shaky.”

“What?” she exclaimed. “I am not shaky when it comes to any of my skills.”

“And I’m highly skilled with a sword,” he shot back with a devious smirk as he fired his grappling line, leaving her standing there with a scowl on her lips.

He heard a Greek curse as his line carried him away, his cape whipping behind him in the wind. He loved getting under her skin. Moreover, it was payback for telling Damian that he wasn’t much of a challenge for her in sword practice. He knew she was only trying to get him to comply with her wishes, but still. It was jab at his pride.

Batman could feel her gaining on him, forcing him to pick up his pace as something caught his eye below him. He landed on a roof a couple of blocks away from the embassy, his game of chase suddenly over and forgotten as he ran to the edge of the roof to confirm what he saw.

After chasing him for several blocks, Batwoman finally caught up to him on the roof of a building a block away from the embassy, a scowl still curling her lips into a frown. He enjoyed irritating her far too much and, what was worse, he was so good at it. “You should know better than to annoy me,” she pointedly stated as she approached him, her hands firmly planted on her shapely hips. “I can make you pay you know.”

“I’m counting on it, princess,” he absentmindedly murmured as his focused gaze followed a shadowy figure below.

“Go check the embassy,” Batman ordered her.

He immediately fired his grappling gun as he took off without another word, leaving Diana behind on the rooftop. Diana cursed under her breath, refusing to be ordered around like that. She was not someone to just take orders or to sit on the sideline and watch her husband throw himself into a possible dangerous situation.

Batman knew his wife was going to mad at him for ordering her like that, but he had a very bad feeling about this. He wished just once that she would listen to him. Landing silently behind the cloaked figure on the sidewalk, he carefully followed his prey who was moving surreptitiously in an effort to not be spotted.

He carefully began to close the distance between them, catching sight of a black cloak like the one he had seen when Diana had been stabbed and then again later when he had stopped that gang from attacking her. His every muscle tensed in anticipation, hoping to finally confirm whether this was Aresia or someone pretending to be her.
The wind caused some errant locks of hair to pull free from the hood of the black cloak, blond strands whipping in the wind. Batman immediately reached for a batarang, holding it tightly in his hand in preparation for a fight. He wasn’t about to let her get away this time.

Staying to the shadows, he followed the cloaked individual as she headed away from the embassy, studying her every move and imprinting every detail in his mind. “Stop!” Batman growled as he adjusted his grip on his batarang.

He watched as the cloaked individual froze in place but didn’t turn around to face him. Batman warily drew closer to her, not trusting her for second. If this was Aresia, then she was very dangerous to deal with. If it wasn’t Aresia, then he had an unknown opponent with unknown abilities who was after his wife. Either way, it was going to end tonight.

“Turn around,” he demanded with a terrifying rasp.

The woman in the cloak didn’t move—didn’t turn around, didn’t try to run, didn’t respond in any way. Batman gritted his teeth, his jaw clenching and unclenching in anticipation as he inched closer. If she wasn’t going to reveal herself, then he would.

“I believe you might want to check on the embassy,” the woman in the cloak simply stated.

Bruce felt his chest clench painfully as a deafening explosion rocked the very ground he stood on, causing him to crouch into a battle stance. His pulse raced wildly in his veins as he glanced back towards the sound of the explosion. Diana…he’d sent Diana to check the embassy. Turning around, he found the woman gone.

He cursed under his breath as he turned and fired his grappling line, taking off towards the embassy. “Batman to Batwoman…come in,” he demanded.

Not receiving a response, Batman raced towards the embassy, fear digging its claws deep into his heart and causing his throat to constrict with fear. An enormous ball of orange fire encompassed the entire embassy, flames shooting straight up into the air and black smoke billowing out of shattered windows.

His heart hammered against his chest wall as he looked all over for Diana. “Batman to Batwoman…come in, dammit!” he yelled as he tried to approach, but the blazing fire was far too hot.

At that moment, Batwoman flew straight out of the flames of the embassy, carrying two unconscious security guards with her. Bruce felt his knees nearly buckle in relief as she flew straight towards him. She carefully laid the security guards down in the grass as sirens began to blare in the distance.

Batman immediately wrapped an arm around her waist as he fired his grappling line, taking them both away to the roof of a nearby building across the street. Once they were safely on the roof, he quickly began looking her over, running his hands over her arms and torso in order to reassure himself that she was truly all right.

She hissed as he ran his fingers over a spot in her side. With a frown, he pulled a large shard of metal out from between her ribs, tossing it aside in raw fury. Without a second thought, he enveloped her in his arms, drawing her in close to him as he struggled to catch his breath.

“The…embassy,” Diana murmured, tears brimming in her eyes as she stared over Bruce’s shoulder at the building consumed by flames. “It’s all…it’s gone.”
“Shhh…it’s all right, princess,” he softly reassured her, stroking her hair. “We’ll rebuild it…I promise. We’ll make it bigger and better than before. You have my word.”

Bruce glanced down at the scene below as fire and rescue teams arrived on the scene, the embassy completely ablaze. His heart broke for his princess, for what she had worked so hard to build and to create only to watch as her dreams literally went up in flames.

Diana pulled out of his arms, fury blazing in her eyes. Without a word, she turned and flew off into the night, leaving her husband standing there all alone. As he watched her disappear into the night, he swore on his life he would find those responsible and make sure every single one of them involved paid dearly.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Whoa! Things are definitely getting worse. Will Damian ever come around? Who is behind the bombing?

UP NEXT: Artemis spars with Diana, Batman prepares the Justice League for a battle against Ra's, and Talia begins to have doubts.

***We're planning another #Wonderbat event for July 2nd - 6th called #WonderBatMilestones. Look for this hashtag on Twitter for entries. We would love for all of you to participate in the special week. Looking for fanfics, artwork, vids, gifs, or anything you want to post to promote #Wonderbat! Use the Milestones hashtag when you post on Twitter or Instagram.***
Wayne Manor; August 26th, 16:32 EST

Dick shut the car off before turning his attention to his wife, hoping that he didn’t stick his foot in his mouth with what he was about to say to her. “Please don’t get yourself all worked up, Troia,” he told her.

“I’ll try my best, but Diana is really upset, Dick,” she replied with a shake of her head as she stared at the historic Wayne Manor before her. “Bruce said she’s been keeping it all bottled up inside. She won’t talk about it. I can feel it beginning to really get to her. I can’t help it that we can feel each other’s emotions. When she hurts, I hurt with her.”

“I know…I get that,” he admitted, reaching over and taking hold of her hand. “I just hate seeing you upset and hurting. We also have the twins to think about now.”

“Dick, I’m fine…they’re fine,” she attempted to reassure him. “Leslie said everything is going according to schedule. You shouldn’t worry so much. You’re going to give yourself an ulcer before the babies even get here.”

“You’re right…I’m sorry,” he agreed with a sigh of reluctant acceptance. “It’s just that I love you so much and I already love our twins. I want everything to be perfect.”

“I love you too,” she said, leaning over and kissing him.

Dick hummed in appreciation as his fingers wound their way into her raven tresses. He deepened the kiss, his tongue finding hers and earning a low moan of pleasure. He continued to kiss his wife, passion beginning to grow hotter as the kiss intensified.

Things would’ve continued to escalate if they hadn’t been interrupted by an insistent knock on the driver’s side window. With a growl of annoyance, Dick turned to find Jason’s face in his window, a cocky grin on his lips.

“What’s up, guys?” he innocently asked.

“Go away, Jason,” Dick snapped in annoyance.

“Why don’t you come out and spar with me?” Jason asked him. “Or are you too scared, Dicky?”

“I’m talking with my wife,” Dick stated.

“Didn’t look like you were talking,” Jason pointed out with a smirk.

“We’ll be right in,” Dick bit out with a glare.

“Yah, right,” Jason said with a roll of his eyes. “See you in an hour or so.”

“Don’t you have a Bana-Mighdall Amazon to woo?”
Jason immediately straightened up, his mischievous smirk disappearing. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“There’s the patented Wayne answer every Wayne male in this family gives when they don’t want to talk about something,” Donna said with a frown as she opened her car door and got out.

Dick huffed in annoyance as he exited the car as well, leveling Jason with an irritated glare. “Thanks for the interruption, bro.”

“Any time,” Jason said with a grin. “Now, let’s spar before dinner’s ready.”

The trio entered the manor to find it unusually quiet for some unknown reason. Walking past the entertainment room, Dick abruptly stopped dead in his tracks causing the two behind him to plow into him, effectively sandwiching Donna between the two brothers.

“What the—?” Donna yelled.

“Hey!” Jason grumbled in annoyance as he backed up. “What’s the big deal?

“Now I know why it’s so quiet in here,” Dick announced with a chuckle as he pointed into the room.

Jason and Donna looked inside to find Kaia sitting on a chair with her nose in one corner and Nicholas in another corner. Kaia’s one pigtail was pulled out of place as if she’d been in a violent brawl. “What happened in here?” Donna asked.

“Two small Wayne children thought it would be fun to play Justice League,” Alfred informed them as he straightened up from behind one of the couches, remnants of a broken picture frame in his hands.

“Me was mama,” Kaia happily announced, turning around in her chair with a proud smile on her face, raven curls sticking out in complete disarray on one side of her head.

Nick turned around in his chair to reveal a purple bruise on his left cheekbone. “I was daddy and Uncle John,” he revealed with equal excitement.

“Nice shiner there, little bro,” Jason said with a laugh.

“Me did that,” Kaia proudly revealed, her face growing sad. “Sorry, Ni-Ni.”

“It’s okay,” Nicholas told her. “It doesn’t hurt.”

“Children,” Alfred sharply reprimanded them with a disapproving look.

Nicholas and Kaia both mumbled “sorry” as they turned around in their chairs to face their respective corners. Dick bit at his bottom lip to stifle his laughter as he spotted Bruce approaching from the kitchen with an ice pack in his hand, his father’s expression revealing the abundance of his displeasure.

“Not funny, Dick,” Bruce ground out with a glare. “Just wait until the twins are old enough to crawl. It all goes downhill from there.”

“Hera, don’t remind me,” Donna murmured. “Where’s Diana?”

“Artemis dragged her downstairs to spar in hopes of helping her feel better,” Bruce replied as he entered the room. “Come here, Nick.”
“But Pappous said I have to stay here,” he replied without turning around.

“It’s okay,” Bruce assured him. “You can get up now.”

“Yay!” Kaia cried, instantly jumping up out of her chair.

“Not you,” Bruce sternly stated with a frown, pointing at the chair she had just vacated.

Kaia scowled darkly at her father as she returned to her seat, clearly displeased as Nicholas went to Bruce. She grumbled an inappropriate response which immediately caught her father’s attention as he knelt before his son and applied the ice pack to his cheek.

“What was that, Kai?” Bruce demanded to know, wondering from which brother she had picked up that word and how she knew to use it in the proper context.

Kaia sat up straighter at having been caught, pressing her forehead against the wall as she burst into tears. Alfred went over to console her, her favorite blanket in hand for her to hold on to. Bruce released a sigh, shaking his head in frustration and guilt. He hadn’t meant to make his daughter cry. Tears were his kryptonite in this family.

Pulling the ice pack back, Bruce was pleased to find the swelling was already beginning to decrease a little bit. “Thank heavens for your mother’s advanced healing,” he murmured.

“I think we’re going to head downstairs and watch the Amazon sparring match,” Dick readily decided.

“I’ll be down in a minute,” Bruce replied as he tended to his son.

Dick, Donna, and Jason made a quick escape down into the cave. Dick was beginning to wonder about having children, but he knew it was a little too late now. Donna was worried and wanted to see her sister while Jason was anxious to see Artemis in action.

They could hear the exerted cries and grunts of battle echoing throughout the cave. “Sounds like they’re trying to kill each other,” Jason decided, concern filling his voice.

“Don’t worry,” Donna reassured him. “Amazons always put everything they have into a fight even if it’s just sparring with a friend.”

“I think those two are out for blood,” Tim said as they approached the workout area of the cave. Tim paused to use the towel around his neck to wipe the sweat from his forehead. “They’re really putting on a clinic in there.”

“Who’s winning?” Jason asked.

“Mom,” Tim replied. “She’s really kicking ass.”

“I gotta see this,” Dick said.

They made their way to the training room, the distinct sounds of battle growing louder. Entering, they found Diana and Artemis in a fierce fight, the repeated crack of the Bo staffs like thunder resounding through the room and nearly making it shake.

Both Amazons wore fierce scowls of pure focus and determination on their faces, neither holding much back. Artemis had a trickle of blood from the corner of her mouth where her lip had split open, but there were no other visible signs of injury.
Artemis was definitely a fierce competitor, keeping up with the Champion of the Gods. It was evident, however, that Diana was the better of the two, but not by much. Artemis was a highly skilled warrior in her own right, proving that fact by keeping up with and going toe-to-toe with the Amazon princess.

Jason couldn’t help but notice the way that Artemis moved with such skill and gracefulness, appreciating the way that her muscles flexed and tensed with each move she performed. A battle cry slipped past her lips as she lifted her staff, blocking a strike aimed for her red head. She gritted her teeth as she drew her staff across her body, raising it up and shoving it towards her opponent.

Bruce entered at that moment as Diana blocked the attack with her Bo staff, pressing her advantage and forcing Artemis to open herself up for a direct hit. Diana whirled on her heel, lifting her foot up and slamming it directly into Artemis’s stomach.

Artemis flew backwards, landing hard on her back and knocking the wind from her lungs. Diana was over her before she could draw her next breath, the tip of her Bo staff directly in her face. “Yield,” Diana growled, her lips twisted into a sneer and her chest heaving with anger.

Artemis glared back at her, furious with herself for allowing Diana to gain an opening on her like that. She didn’t want to surrender or yield. Everything inside of her wanted to throw herself back into the fight again, but she forced aside her instincts, reminding herself that it was just a friendly match.

Both of them were keyed up, adrenaline pumping furiously through their veins. Diana’s chest was heaving as she waited for Artemis to responded. The hurt and rage of the last several weeks had been wreaking havoc on her, the constant sense of dread that refused to leave her weighing so heavily on her.

“That was amazing!” Dick exclaimed, breaking the near palpable tension that permeated the training room.

“Very impressive,” Donna agreed. “You two make me want to spar with you.”

“Oh, hell no,” Dick immediately shot her down. “I refuse to allow my pregnant wife to spar with these two.”

“You refuse to allow?” Donna repeated, a raven eyebrow cocked in anger as she folded her arms against her chest.

“Wait…let me rephrase that,” Dick decided.

Ignoring them, Bruce made his way to Diana who had forced herself to back away from Artemis, her brow furrowed in anger. She was still struggling to temper her instincts as well as the rage that was running in hot waves beneath her skin. He followed her as she walked towards the far wall to put her Bo staff away.

“That was impressive,” Bruce told her as he came to stand behind her.

Diana put the staff back into its spot but did not turn back around to face her husband. “Thank you,” she softly said, her head lowered.

“Are you okay?” he asked, allowing his worry to permeate his voice.

“I’m fine,” she replied, realizing as soon as the words left her mouth that he wouldn’t believe her. It was a knee-jerk response, one that couldn’t have been further from the truth.
She wasn’t fine. She had poured so much work and heart into the Themyscirian Embassy, every bit of her pride going into every single aspect of it. Now, it was all gone. The embassy was nothing more than ashes and the dream a horrifying nightmare.

She felt a hand on her arm, a gentle tug urging her to turn around. She swallowed hard as she moved to face him, startled to find the room empty save for the two of them. She could tell by the look in his eye that he didn’t believe her. She didn’t think that he actually would.

“Yell…scream…cry…pound your fists against my chest if you have to, Diana, but you need to let it out,” he told her, studying her reaction.

“There’s no point in it, Bruce,” she curtly stated. “The embassy is gone. It’s over. There’s no use in crying or throwing a fit.”

“It’s not over, princess,” he adamantly insisted, his blue eyes hardening with resolve. “It’s far from over. We’re going to find out who did this and we’re going to rebuild.”

Diana averted her eyes as she drew a deep breath. “Maybe it’s for the best if we don’t.”

“What?” he demanded to know, stunned by her response. “What are you talking about?”

“Maybe this is for the best,” she repeated. “The embassy was taking me away from you…from our family…the League. Maybe it was too much for me to handle.”

Bruce closed the distance between them, grabbing hold of her upper arms to force her to look at him. “That is not true, and you know it,” he snapped. “I saw how happy you were organizing those peace talks and being able to bring nations together in the name of peace. You were so proud to represent your mother and sisters, Diana. You can’t tell me that you no longer want to pursue this.”

“I don’t know what I want right now,” she confessed.

“You need to take time to grieve over the loss and come to terms with it,” he told her. “Once things have settled down, we’ll see how you feel about rebuilding it. You know that I’m behind you no matter what you chose to do.”

“I know,” she softly said, pulling out of his hold on her. “I’m going to get a shower before dinner.”

Bruce watched as she walked away, his worry for her only escalating. He could sense the raw fury burning inside of her, but he could also see how much all of this had crushed her spirit. Whoever was behind all of this had killed something inside of her and he was going to do everything in his power to make it right for her again.

**Watchtower; August 28th, 15:36 EST**

Batman strode through the corridors of the Watchtower, his steely gaze locked straight ahead of him. His gauntleted fists were hidden beneath the black cape, but even still his dark brooding mood was more than evident in the determined pound of his boots against the steel floor.

Last night had been another night of dead ends. He was no closer to finding Aresia or whoever was pretending to be her, and he still had no leads as to what the Joker was up to. What was even worse was the fact that they still had no leads on Ra’s location and September fifth was rapidly approaching.

His fury and frustration were reaching new heights. The last thing he wanted to do was prepare for an apocalyptic sized battle, but he knew as sure as his love for his Diana that it was going to come
down to that very nightmare they were so desperate to avoid.

Diana didn’t like talking about it, but he knew that she had been battling an overwhelming sense of dread. He knew it was growing stronger. She was becoming far more pensive and brooding at times which was not like her at all. Watching her embassy go up in flames had only made things that much worse.

She had grown somewhat reclusive and withdrawn. She had lost her smile…her joy…and he was more determined to return that to her.

“Hey, Bats!”

Batman didn’t bother pausing, forcing the Emerald Archer to catch up to him. “Where’s the fire?” Ollie asked as he fell in step beside the Dark Knight of Gotham.

“Founders meeting,” he curtly stated, not bothering to make eye contact.

“Something big going down?”

“Why do you ask that?” Batman demanded to know, leveling Ollie with a patented Batglare.

“Because since Diana, you’ve been a little less grumpy, but today you look as though you ate broken glass for breakfast.”

Bruce scowled darkly in response. He didn’t like the idea that he had gotten soft since marrying Diana and starting a family with her. It had always been one of his biggest fears when he had embarked on a relationship with her.

Ollie quickly realized he’d said the wrong thing, holding his hands up in defense. “I mean don’t get me wrong,” Ollie quickly amended. “You’re still scary as hell. It’s just that sometimes your scowl isn’t quite as fierce. Of course, with a gorgeous Amazon in your bed, what man wouldn’t have an extra little bounce in his step and a smirk on his face.”

The white slits of Batman’s cowl narrowed dangerously, his lips curling back into a threatening sneer. “I’m sure your wife would be happy to hear that.”

“You know…forget I said anything,” Ollie decided. “In face, forget you even saw me today.”

“Gladly,” Bruce rasped as Ollie took off down the hall.

Making his way to the Founders’ conference room, he entered to a scene that he wished that he could erase from his mind. Instead of arriving a little early to spend a few moments of peace with his wife before the meeting started, he found Diana talking privately with Clark, tears in her eyes and her hands fisted in anger. Neither of them seemed to notice that Bruce had entered. They were too caught up in their conversation, Clark clearly trying to calm her down, his hand on her shoulder.

“What’s going on?” Bruce demanded to know, suppressing a faint wave of jealousy. Even after all this time, he still couldn’t shake the unexpected stab of jealousy he felt when he found Clark and his wife together.

Diana dipped her head in embarrassment, wiping her eyes to erase the stray tears that had escaped against as Clark’s head snapped up. “Hey, Bruce,” Clark replied. “We were just discussing what to do about Ra’s al Ghul.”
Diana turned her back to her husband, trying to gather herself once more. She didn’t want him to know about her fear that something was going to take him away from her. He knew about her sense of dread that had been clinging to her, but he didn’t know it was connected to him.

Bruce looked at Clark a moment longer before turning his attention to Diana. If something more was going on, he wanted to know about it. He closed the distance between them, his expression softening as he placed a hand on her shoulder.

“What’s wrong, princess?” he asked, his gentle tone so incongruous with his demonic persona.

He could feel her shoulder sink a little beneath his touch, causing his heart to sink too. He shot a glare at Clark who got the hint. “I’m going to give you two a few minutes alone,” Clark decided. “Meeting doesn’t start for another fifteen minutes or so anyway.”

Clark made a quick exit, leaving his two best friends alone. “Talk to me, Diana,” he pleaded with her. “You’re scaring me.”

Diana drew a deep, shuddering breath before abruptly turning around to face her husband. She responded to him by wrapping her arms around him and burying her face in the crook of his neck, holding onto him as if there was only him and her and nothing else in the world that mattered at that moment.

Bruce encircled her in his arms and cape, shielding her as best as he could as he tilted his head to kiss the top of hers. “I love you so much, Bruce,” she murmured, tightening her hold on him as if afraid that he would vanish from her embrace.

“I love you too, Diana,” he replied, fear beginning to fill his throat and making it difficult to draw a breath. “What’s going on that you’re not telling me?”

She reluctantly pulled back to look at him as he drew his cowl back. The worry swimming in his azure eyes did nothing to settle her own fear. “You know I’ve had this sense that something bad is going to happen,” she began, fighting back the tears that she could feel building behind her eyes again. “It’s about you and it’s getting stronger.”

“So about me?” he questioned her, surprised by her answer. “How so?”

“I can’t shake this terrifying feeling I’m going to lose you,” she confessed. Her bottom lip began to quiver as tears brimmed in her eyes. She lowered her head as she bit at her bottom lip, unable to gaze into the handsome visage she loved so much and held so dear.

“Hey, it’ll be okay…I’ll be okay,” he attempted to reassure her. He tilted her head up with his fingertips as a couple of tears broke free. He erased them with his lips before finding her mouth. He kissed her tenderly for several moments before finally pulling away.

“No matter what happens, princess, I’ll always come back to you,” he promised her. “Nothing can keep me from finding my way back to you.”

Her eyes fell closed as he kissed her forehead, wishing and praying that he was right. She knew that he’d fight to come back to his family. What terrified her was the question that kept lingering in her mind—what if he couldn’t?

“Um…guys,” Clark called to them as he poked his head into the conference room. “Are you two all good now?”

“Yah, come on in,” Batman replied, giving his wife one more kiss before releasing her.
Before Bruce could fully let go of his wife, Flash was at her side, his arm wrapped around Diana’s shoulders. “Hang in here, Wondy,” Wally said. “We’ll catch this creep before he can destroy the world or resurrect your dad from the Underworld.”

“Wally,” Bruce ground out between clenched teeth. “Not helping.”

“Sorry,” Flash said with a nervous grin. “All right, folks. Let’s get this meeting started.”

Bruce squeezed Diana’s hand before putting his cowl back on. She gave him a soft smile. “Thank you, Bruce,” she whispered.

“Hey, that’s what husbands are for,” he teased her as they headed to their seats.

Diana drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly to compose herself once more. She felt foolish for allowing her emotions to get the better of her, but after everything that had happened over the last few weeks she didn’t think she could handle very much more.

She shared a knowing look with Clark, one that did not go unnoticed by Bruce who made a mental note to have a private conversation with the Kryptonian as soon as the meeting was over with. Something more was going on that Diana had yet to tell him and he was going to get to the bottom of it one way or another.

“All right,” Clark called to get everyone’s attention. “I’m going to hand the meeting right over to Batman.”

Batman looked around at his fellow teammates and friends gathered at the table, knowing what they were going to be going up against. There was a very real chance that some of them would not return to their families or the League when the dust of battle had finally settled.

He didn’t want to think about it as his gaze settled on his wife, but he knew it was a very real possibility. He steeled himself against the onslaught of emotions that threatened to overwhelm him. He had a battle to lead and he would not fail.

“Ra’s al Ghul has gathered a good majority of the pieces of Hades’ armor,” Batman began. “We were able to recover a few, but he has the most powerful pieces that will enable him to summon Hades from the Underworld.”

Flash cursed as he began to tap his foot at a high rate of speed. “This is so not good,” he said.

“We sent him back to the Underworld once,” J’onn pointed out. “We will do it again.”

“Damn straight,” John chimed in. “Hades ain’t getting past us.”

Diana smiled sadly as her friends talked about how they would stop Hades and put him back in his place. She appreciated their optimism and bravery, but she greatly feared for their safety. She couldn’t bear the thought of any of them getting hurt because of her father.

She listened silently as Bruce outlined his battle plans for taking on Ra’s al Ghul and his daughter. She knew that he was the best person to lead their team against Ra’s, but she didn’t want him anywhere near this battle. She knew trying to keep him out of it would be next to impossible though.

The problem was that once Hades had gained control of Ra’s, he would be coming for her husband and her family. The thought made her ill, her anger flaring along with her resolve to protect them at all cost. No one was going to die because of her father, especially not her husband or her friends.
and teammates.

Batman noticed the way that Diana’s hands were clutching the arms of her chair but continued outlining his plans to stop Ra’s. He knew that this had the potential to be much worse than anything they’d ever faced before, but he was confident that they could stop Ra’s and therefor his father-in-law. Hades would not be meeting any of his grandchildren. Of that, he was absolutely certain.

“So, do we have any idea where he’s going to start his campaign to cleanse the world?” John grimly asked.

“No,” Batman bluntly stated. “I have a few ideas, but as of now we’re going into this completely blind. He could strike at any place or any time as soon as darkness falls on September fifth.”

“What’s up with Ra’s waiting until the blood moon?” Shayera inquired. “It seems he’d want to strike right away now that he finally has most of the armor.”

“According to Zatanna, it’s believed that dark forces are strongest during the blood moon,” Batman revealed.

“Great,” Flash groused. “This just keeps getting better and better. Sorry, Wondy, but your daddy is huge trouble. I mean we’re seriously screwed here.”

Batman leveled a deadly glare at the scarlet speedster to shut him up. He already knew how upset Diana was about all of this without Wally adding to it. Clark seemed to pick up on it as well. “If there are no more questions, then our meeting is adjourned,” he announced. “We’ll have another one in the next few days to review everything.”

Everyone began to get up and leave, Bruce’s attention locked on the Man of Steel. “I’m going to see Dinah before picking the kids up from daycare,” Diana told him.

“I want to talk to Atom first before returning home,” he replied.

She gave him a forced smile and a nod before walking out with Shayera and John. Clark gathered his things and headed for the door only to have his path unexpectedly blocked by the Caped Crusader. “What’s up?” he asked with a furrowed brow, further taken aback when Batman turned and locked the door before facing him once more.

“What was Diana talking to you about?” he demanded to know, the white slits of his cowl narrowing as he crossed his arms against his chest.

Clark instantly grew nervous, rubbing the back of his neck as he averted his eyes away from the imposing man before him. “Didn’t you two talk after I left?”

“Yes, but there’s more that she’s not telling me, and I want to know what it is,” Bruce pressed. “I need to know, Clark.”

“Bruce, you’re really putting me in a very tough spot,” Clark replied. “Diana made me promise not to tell you.”

Bruce’s jaw clenched even tighter as his anger spiked. “I have to know, Clark,” he ground out. “If it involves my wife, then I deserve to know.”

“It’s not so much her as it’s you,” Clark reluctantly confessed.
“Me?” Bruce exclaimed, stunned.

“Don’t make me do this, Bruce,” Clark pleaded.

“Who are you more afraid of—her or me?”

“Her,” Clark adamantly declared without even needing to think about it.

“But I have Kryptonite.”

Clark’s eyes narrowed in frustration. “You know, Bruce, that threat only works for so long before it becomes trite.”

“Does it really?” Bruce asked as he reached for the lead-lined compartment of his utility belt.

“All right! All right!” Clark yelled, holding a hand up to stop him. “Diana made me promise to get you away from the battle with Ra’s and Hades if it appears that they’re going after you. Evidently, she’s been having premonitions that something horrible is going to happen to you so she asked me to watch your back for her during the fight and to get you out of there if things get ugly.”

Bruce was stunned senseless by the revelation, his mind racing with the implications as well as fear for Diana facing her father alone. “Don’t you dare do it, Clark,” he ground out.

“But I…”

“No,” Bruce heatedly growled something low and utterly menacing. “Don’t you dare take me out of this fight for any reason.”

“Bruce, it’s only because Diana loves you so much,” he attempted to explain. “She’s terrified that something is going to happen to take you away from her.”

“I know, but I refuse to let her face her father alone.”

“I’ll come right back to help her,” Clark reassured him. “She won’t be alone.”

“I am her husband and I will be there with her every step of the way,” Bruce heatedly spat out. “We are in this together whether she likes it or not.”

Clark watched as Batman stormed from the conference room, worried about what he was going to do now. He didn’t want to break his promise to Diana, but he knew that Bruce would never forgive him if he removed him from the battle. He was in a no-win situation any way he looked at it.

He was just going to have to make sure both of his friends made it out of this battle alive.

_Nanda Parbat; August 29th, 13:13 EST_

Talia watched as her father studied each of the pieces of Hades’ armor that they had been able to collect so far—the Helm of Darkness, Ring of Hades, the Bident, the Amulet, and now the Spear which she recovered last night in South Africa. They were missing the gauntlets, the breastplate, and Hades’ belt which were in her beloved’s possession.

She smiled to herself. Bruce and the Amazon only had a few meager pieces of armor while they had the most powerful one in their possession. This battle would not last long. Bruce and his Justice League would be no match for her father once he put on Hades’ armor, harnessing the power of the god of the Underworld. He will finally be indestructible and all-powerful.
She was relieved to know that her father’s dreams were going to be realized after all this time. Then, things will finally be as they should have been all along. It was going to be a glorious day, one that she hoped that she’d be able to share with her son.

Damian was never far from her thoughts, a constant sense of worry clinging to her. She knew that he was safe with his father, but she feared they would brainwash him and turn him against her and his grandfather. They had worked too hard training him to be the future leader of the League of Assassins for everything to fall apart now.

Countless hours had been spent day after day instilling within him the skills and necessary abilities needed to be a lethal assassin and a capable leader. She feared that all that grueling work and training was being ruined at this very moment by Bruce and that Amazon.

Did she really believe that she could be a mother to Damian? A replacement for her? She would never allow that to happen. Damian had a mother and soon she would be coming for her son. Nothing was going to stop her from getting her son back where he belonged.

Talia watched as her father held the Helm of Darkness in his hands, his eyes gleaming with an otherworldly glow that was both eerie and mesmerizing at the same time. It was as if he could already feel the power from the helm, basking in its magical capabilities.

There was an almost inhuman glint in his eyes that growing darker. It was as if he was already grasping the very edges of Hades’ influence, his outstretched fingers brushing against the threads of magic that would soon inundate and consume him.

For a brief, all-too flickering moment, Diana’s words to her came flooding back in her mind…

“You can’t let your father go through with this. It will destroy his mind.”

“You can’t let Hades escape the Underworld. He’ll only try to further his own agenda and destroy your father in the process.”

Could the Amazon be right? Could Hades end up destroying her father in the process?

“Father,” Talia called to him as he stared at the helm in his hands. When he didn’t respond, she called again, much louder this time. “Father!”

After several long moments, Ra’s finally raised his head, the glow of his eyes not diminishing in the least as he stared at her. It caused a shiver of fear to lance through her. It was as if he was staring at her…seeing her and yet not…staring right through her. It caused her heart to pound against her breastbone.

It was like Hades himself had somehow managed to trickle into her father’s subconscious mind just by holding the Helm of Darkness. “Father…are you all right?” she asked, doing her best to keep the fear she could feel rising from inside of her from reaching her voice.

“I’m fine,” he evenly replied with his deep, commanding voice. “Why do you ask, daughter?”

“You don’t look quite like yourself,” she tentatively ventured, swallowing hard past the dryness of her throat.

“I feel perfectly fine, my dear,” he reassured her. “I can already feel the potential of the helm coursing through me. This piece alone holds unspeakable magic and power…the likes of which I’ve never felt before.”
“Maybe it would best if you didn’t use it,” Talia suggested, watching as anger flashed like lightning bolts through her father’s eyes.

“You can’t be serious, Talia,” he spat out. “After all these years, I am on the verge of recognizing my dreams. Why would I not take this opportunity after all the arduous work and planning that I have put into it?”

“It’s just that it seems dangerous, father,” she pressed. “You can already feel Hades’ control and power just by holding the Helm of Darkness. How are you going to be able to harness that power and not be crushed by it?”

Rage filled his face as he glowered darkly at his daughter. “How dare you try to dissuade me from seizing my destiny!” he roared. “I will put on the armor and I will harness all the power that Hades can offer me. I will be the one who will be fully in control, not the god of the Underworld. It will be me who dominates him, not the other way around.”

“Yes, father,” Talia softly said, her gaze falling under his penetrating glare. “I’m sorry.”

She felt a hand beneath her chin causing her to instantly stiffen with fear. She raised her head at his insistence, finding her father standing before her without the Helm of Darkness in his hands. His eyes were normal once more, his expression almost gentle in a strange way.

“I know your words were only spoken out of fear for me and my safety, daughter, but it is wholly unnecessary,” he told her. “I have been working to strengthen my mind so I won’t lose control. Hades cannot gain a foothold in my mind.”

“I hope you are right,” she replied, fighting back the tears she could building behind her eyes.

“Now, we still have much to do before the blood moon is here,” he reminded her. “We only have thirteen days left before the world will be mine and things will finally be the way the should’ve been all along.”

“Have you decided where you will make your stand and start your cleansing?” she asked.

“I haven’t quite decided yet,” he informed as he began to walk around his private room, his hands clasped behind his back. “There are several places that I have had in mind for quite some time now, but I’m actually leaning towards one specifically.”

“Which one is that, father?”

Ra’s paused in his step, turning slightly to look at her over his shoulder. “Gotham.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Things are definitely escalating! What is going to happen to Bruce? Will they find Ra’s before he puts on the armor? Who is really behind the attacks against Diana? So many threads to wrap up and so little time...

Thank you all for the reviews. You guys keep me writing and keep my spirits up especially with the way things are going for Bruce and Diana in the comics and movies. DON’T GIVE UP HOPE, GUYS! Keep up the fight for Wonderbat and keep the faith! :)

UP NEXT: Has Tim finally tracked down Ra's?
Chapter 26

Wayne Manor; August 30th, 15:38 EST

“Me gave Ni-Ni a boose on his cheek,” Kaia excitedly told her grandmother.

“Oh, dear me,” Hippolyta exaggeratedly exclaimed, trying to stifle the chuckle that rose up in her throat with her granddaughter’s expression. “I do hope Nicholas is all right.”

“He fine,” Kaia thoughtfully replied, thoughtfully tilting her head. “Daddy put ice on it and me kissed it to make it better.”

“Were you playing when Nicholas got hurt?”

“We were playing Jussus Weague,” Kaia told her. “Me was mommy.”

“Well, your mother is a wonderful hero for you to want to be, Kaia,” Hippolyta agreed. “Did Nicholas cry when he got hurt?”

“No, him no cry but me did cause I said a bad word,” Kaia revealed with a frown. “Daddy hold me then to make me feel betta.”

“Oh no,” Hippolyta said in feigned shock.

“I believe she picked it up from one of her brothers,” Diana interjected. “We now know that we don’t use that word.”

“Good girl, little moon,” the queen told her granddaughter.

Diana patted Kaia’s back in adoration, trying not to stifle her laughter at her own little sun and stars. “Kaia, tell Yiayia goodbye,” she instructed her. “I need to talk to her alone now.”

“Bye, Yiayia,” Kaia said, puckering up her lips and kissing the computer screen.

Hippolyta chuckled in response, touching the screen with her fingertips. “I love you, little moon,” she told her. “You be a good girl and take care of your brothers.”

“Me will,” Kaia replied before hopping off her mother’s lap.

“She is so precious, Diana,” Hippolyta told her with great affection in her voice.

“She certainly is,” Diana agreed. “She’s also like bottled fireworks.”

“Reminds me so much of you,” the queen informed her. “I just can’t believe that Nicholas has started school already. They’re both getting so big.”

Diana smiled wistfully as she thought of her young son. “I know it’s hard to believe sometimes. I wish I could just freeze time and keep them both like this.”
“It’s also a joy to watch them grow,” she told her. “You would miss out on so many precious moments that you will share with them as they get older.”

“How are things on Themyscira, mother?” Diana asked, abruptly changing the subject.

Hippolyta’s expression transformed from one of happiness to masked sorrow. “Things are a bit… tense here right now.”

“Define tense, mother,” Diana sternly demanded, her eyebrows knitted in anger over the situation that was brewing on her home island. She knew it was worse than what her mother was letting on.

“I’m afraid it’s not good, my sun and stars,” she confessed as she straightened her shoulders and held her head high. “But you mustn’t worry yourself about things here. You have more than enough going on at home with this Ra’s fellow and the possibility of your father escaping his prison not to mention the whole business with the embassy.”

Diana drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly. “Mother, I can’t help but worry,” she replied, wrapping her arms around her abdomen as if holding herself together. “Are you in danger?”

“I’m perfectly fine, Diana,” she maintained with an indignant sniff. “I am fully capable of handling things here myself. Besides, Phillipus barely lets me out of her sight for more than a few minutes at a time.”

“Have there been any direct threats made against you?”

Hippolyta paused for a long moment before responding, clearly uncertain about how much she should reveal. “No…not directly,” she carefully worded her response.

“Indirectly, though, you have been threatened,” Diana shrewdly surmised.

“Diana,” Hippolyta muttered with a weary sigh, waving a dismissive hand in the air. “It’s nothing I assure you.”

“It’s not nothing, mother,” Diana heatedly ground out. “It’s treasonous to threaten the Queen of the Amazons and punishable by death. Do you know who is leading this rebellion?”

“I have no proof, but I do have my suspicions.”

“Who do you believe is behind it all?”

“Kyriaki,” the queen reluctantly replied.

“I’m coming to Themyscira,” Diana readily decided, resolve burning in her eyes as she sat forward in her seat.

“No, you will not, Diana. I forbid it,” Hippolyta sternly stated, her voice that of the queen and not her mother at that moment. Her face bore every single ounce of the regal authority that she held. “You will stay with your family and take care of Ra’s Al Ghul. You cannot let him release Hades from the Underworld. You know how dire the consequences of such a thing could be.”

“And how am I supposed to do that when I know that my mother is being threatened and some of my sisters are behind it?” Diana bit out, her anger simmering just beneath the surface and ready to explode.

“You will do your duty as the Champion of the Gods and the Princess of the Amazons,” Hippolyta
told her. “Phillipus and I have everything under control. This uprising will not succeed in their plans.”

“As soon as Ra’s al Ghul is dealt with, I will be coming to Themyscira whether you like it or not,” she firmly stated, her voice broking no room for argument.

Hippolyta slowly nodded her head in agreement, accepting her daughter’s decision. “Only after this threat to the world is eliminated,” she ultimately agreed. “When do you plan on rebuilding the embassy?”

“Bruce is pushing to start right away, but I would like to wait for at least a couple more weeks,” she confessed, averting her gaze from her mother.

“Why is that?”

“I just need a little time to come to terms with all of this,” she informed her. “Bruce wants to get it rebuilt as soon as possible, but I just put so much of my heart into it. To see it go up in flames was far more difficult than I had imagined it would be. Besides, we need to track down the ones behind it and bring them to justice before we can even think about rebuilding it.”

“I know you will, my sun and stars,” she replied. “How is Donna doing?”

“She’s been struggling with morning sickness, but it’s been improving,” Diana confided, her lips curling slightly with the thought of her sister. “She’s beginning to show already.”

“I can’t believe my youngest is having babies of her own,” Hippolyta wistfully said. “How is Artemis adjusting?”

“She’s adapting very well,” Diana revealed. “In fact, I think she rather likes it here. I wouldn’t be surprised if she stays here in Gotham when things finally settle down.”

Hippolyta’s surprise was evident on her face as she considered the unexpected news. “Well, I guess that’s a good thing. Does it have something to do with a man?”

“You might say that,” Diana hinted.

“And how about Phaedra?”

“She’s pretty fond of Gotham as well,” she replied. “She even has a boyfriend now. She’s pretty upset about what happened to the embassy, though. She has taken it pretty hard.”

“She’s more than welcome to stay in Gotham while you rebuild,” the queen told her. “There is no need for her to return to Themyscira at this time.”

“I’m sure she’ll appreciate that.”

“I need to attend to some duties now, Diana,” Hippolyta said. “Give my love to everyone and don’t worry about me or things going on here. Just focus on your family and stopping your father from escaping.”

“I will,” she promised. “Please be careful, mother.”

“I will,” she told her. “You too, my sun and stars.”

Diana nodded as she ended the transmission, sitting back in her chair. Looking up, she found Bruce standing in the doorway of her office, his arms crossed against his chest as he leaned against the
Bruce allowed his arms to fall to his sides as he entered, closing the door behind him to allow them some privacy. Walking towards her, he reached out and took hold of her hands, pulling her up out her chair and leading her to the couch. “Yes,” he admitted, sitting down beside her.

“What should I do?” she asked, leaning forward with her elbows resting on her knees and holding her head in her hands.

“I know you want to go home to help your mother, but she’s right, princess,” he gently told her, reaching over to rub her back. “We need you here if we’re going to be able to stop Ra’s. If Hades does escape, you might be the only one who can convince him to go back to the Underworld.”

“I doubt he’ll listen to me, Bruce,” she replied as she raked her fingers back through her raven tresses, her hands coming rest on the back of her neck as she tightly gripped her hair. “We had a tenuous truce when Shayera and I went to the Underworld to restore order. I highly doubt he’s going to return to the Underworld just because I tell him to.”

“But you are his daughter, Diana,” he pointed out. “You may be able to get through to him in a way that no one else can. There is a part of him in you whether you want to accept it not.”

“Please, don’t remind me,” she spat out, her words dripping with disdain. “I’m trying my best to ignore that part.”

“I know you don’t like it, but Hades is still your father,” he continued, running his fingers through her black hair that he adored. It was one of the things that first attracted him to her. “You definitely didn’t get your beautiful hair from your mother, princess.”

Diana looked at him, shooting him a deadly glare. “Not funny, Bruce.”

“You know I love your hair,” he told her. “It’s one of the first things that attracted me to you.”

“How am I going to do this, Bruce?” she softly asked.

She drew a deep breath, turning her head to gaze out the window at the extensive landscape surrounding Wayne Manor. She knew in her heart that her mother and Bruce were right, but it pierced her heart not being able to be there to protect her mother and stop these rebellious sisters that refused to acknowledge the need for growth and advancement.

She felt fingertips beneath her chin, drawing her back towards her handsome husband and the look of love and understanding that permeated his blue eyes. “I know how hard this is for you being torn between both homes, but I promise you that we’ll be there to help your mother as soon as Ra’s is dealt with. I know how difficult all of this has been for you. I’m sorry that you’re having to deal with so much chaos. I want to make it all better for you, but I don’t even know how or where to begin.”

She smiled softly as she cupped his cheek, her blue eyes filled with warmth for the man who had captured her heart long ago. “Thank you, but it’s just something that I’ll have to deal with.”

“No, Diana, you aren’t dealing with it,” Bruce adamantly stated. “We are dealing with it. We gave ourselves to one another…married for better or for worse, princess. Together we’ll deal with it.”

She leaned forward, her nose brushing against his. “I don’t know how I would get through all of this without you.”
“You’re so strong,” he replied, his tone holding a sense of awe as he wrapped his arms around her. “Stronger than all of us combined.”

“You make me stronger, Bruce,” she murmured, her lips finding his.

He returned her kiss as his hands began an extensive exploration, fingers sneaking beneath the hem of her t-shirt to caress her soft skin. Her fingers threaded through his black hair, fist ing it tightly. Unfortunately, a banging knock on the door interrupted the passionate moment shared between husband and wife.

“Daddy!” Nicholas called through the closed door. “Come outside and play with me!”

Diana patted Bruce’s chest, giving him a small smile. “You better go,” she encouraged him. “We aren’t going to have very much time to spend with our children in the upcoming days.”

“I’ll be right there, Nick,” Bruce called back, capturing Diana’s hand that rested against his chest. He brought it to his lips, kissing her fingertips.

“Okay!” Nick yelled back.

“We will get through this, Diana,” Bruce reassured her. “We’ll find a way to stop Ra’s and your father, catch the ones responsible for the attack on the embassy, and we’ll help your mother save Themyscira.”

She nodded her head, praying that he was right. She didn’t want to go through this life without him. He had become so much a part of her that losing him meant losing herself as well. “I love you,” she said, kissing him again.

He fully returned her kiss, tilting his head and intensifying it. “I love you too,” he replied, his thumb caressing her cheek. “Will you be all right?”

“I’ll be fine,” she attempted to reassure him.

He chuckled softly as he leaned in to press his lips against her forehead. “You’re a terrible liar, princess,” he told her, “but I appreciate your attempt to make me feel better.”

She stood to her feet along with her husband, making their way towards the door. “I promised Kaia that she and I would finger paint together today.”

Bruce groaned as Diana pulled her t-shirt back into place. “Kaia and finger paints do not belong in the same room let alone the same sentence.”

“Bruce, she’ll be just fine,” Diana maintained as she moved to stand to her feet only for her husband to grab hold of her hand.

“Face it, princess,” Bruce said as they exited her office together. “Out daughter is a disaster waiting to happen.”

“She is not,” she insisted. “Mother said that she’s just like me and look how good I turned out.”

“That’s true,” he said with a smirk. “You turned out pretty amazing.”

“See?” she told him. “Nothing to worry about.”

Bruce groaned in response, shaking his head. “I wouldn’t go that far. Nick and Kaia are like Bonnie and Clyde.”
“Who?” she asked.

“Never mind,” he muttered. “You know I have to admit that I almost miss the days when Nicholas used to remove all his clothes and streak through the house. Things seemed almost simpler then.”

“Hey, think of it this way,” Diana said. “If we can handle Darkseid and Doomsday, we can most definitely handle raising two toddlers with our combined personalities.”

“I wish I could share your optimism, princess, but I think we’ve finally met our match.”

“Hey, guys,” Tim called to them as he raced around the corner towards them, excitement dancing in his eyes. “I think I found Ra’s al Ghul.”

“How is he, Tim?” Bruce asked.

“All signs point to Nanda Parbat,” he proudly announced, his grin spreading from ear to ear.

He’d finally tracked him down.

**Gotham; August 30th, 23:13 EST**

Jason accelerated as he tore through the streets of Gotham, hoping this lead on Lefty Whitten actually paid off. He was more determined than ever before to find this lunatic especially since the Themyscirian Embassy went up in flames. He had taken it personally when that had happened, putting his fist through a wall when he had gotten the news at his home.

He felt it was his fault that it had been destroyed. If he hadn’t lost Lefty the other night, then he might have been able to prevent it from happening. Still, there was no guarantee that Lefty was the one behind it all, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that he was the guy they had been searching for.

Taking a sudden sharp right, he felt Artemis tightened her hold around his waist. They had yet to talk about that heated kiss they’d shared over a week ago. There was still an underlying tension between them right there beneath the surface. He knew it was only a matter of time before it erupted.

He needed to bring it up, but it never seemed like the right time. The few times that he should have taken the given opportunity he hadn’t, worried about what her response was going to be. He didn’t want to hear that she didn’t have any feelings for him despite the electricity that he swore he felt every time he was near her. She had to feel it too.

Artemis was a very strong-headed woman, one who was fearless and steadfast in her beliefs. If she truly believed that men were nothing more than vile monsters, then there was no chance in hell that he’d ever be able to convince her otherwise.

Jason frowned as he turned down a side street, knowing that now was not the time to be debating this. He had a bomber to find and stop, his growing feelings for the Amazon on the back of his bike the least of his worries right now.

Stopping at the end of the alley, he shut his bike off. “There it is,” he told her, pointing to the bar across the street.

“Are you sure?”

“Yah, that’s what Eddie told me.”
Artemis snorted softly in response as she removed her helmet. “Eddie is not exactly trustworthy.”

“He’s what you would call…an acquired taste,” Jason explained to her. “He has a good heart if you look for it. It’s kind of buried real deep.”

“Very deep,” Artemis muttered as she got off the Ducati. “Let’s go.”

Jason smirked as he got off too. “Anxious to hold my hand?” he flirted with her.

“What?” Artemis exclaimed in shock. “No!”

“Hmmm…me thinks you protest too much,” he teased, taking her hand and lacing his fingers with hers as they crossed the street towards the bar.

“I am not,” she ground out. “It’s just that I want to find this guy and end this once and for all for Diana’s sake.”

“I know…me too,” he softly admitted. He hated watching what this was doing to Diana. Though she tried to hide it, he knew that she had been devastated by the destruction of the embassy. “Let’s get a table towards the back where we can keep an eye out for him without being too conspicuous…although with you that’s going to be difficult.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked, frowning at him.

“It just means…well…” Jason stumbled over his words in an effort to explain. “It’s just that you’re absolutely beautiful and so you attract a lot of attention everywhere you go.”

“You think I’m beautiful?” she asked, a red eyebrow cocked in question as well as surprise.

Jason looked at her in stunned disbelief, unaware of the words that were tumbling freely past his lips until he heard them being uttered. “Well yah…of course you are,” he confessed. “You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met.”

She smiled at him, her emerald eyes sparkling with appreciation. “Thank you,” she replied, looking away as she hooked a fiery-red lock behind her ear.

Entering the bar, Jason and Artemis found a quiet corner of the bar, sitting so their backs faced the wall. It allowed them a perfect view of the entire bar as well as the front door. Lefty Whitten was not getting past them this time.

Ordering a couple of drinks, Jason and Artemis settled into a somewhat uncomfortable silence as they surveyed the bar. Both were thinking about the other, but neither of them quite knew where to start, both struggling with uncertainties.

Jason looked over towards the bar as a man came out from a back room carrying a couple of boxes. The man set the boxes down behind the bar and began unpacking bottles, completely unaware of the two strangers sitting at a table in the far corner watching his every move.

“That’s him,” Jason said.

“And he works here at this bar?” Artemis asked, incredulous. “Why didn’t Eddie tell us this sooner?”

“He didn’t know until this afternoon,” Jason revealed.

“He was right here all this time,” she bit out, her grip on her glass tightening to near shattering.
The feel of his hand covering hers caused her to relax her grip. “We didn’t know that until today, but we know now so let’s put an end to it.”

She nodded her head as her lips curved slightly. “I get to hit him first,” she stated.

“Only after I’ve had a chance to question him,” Jason compromised. “We have to make sure that he’s really our guy before you start throwing punches.”

“Probably a good decision because once I get ahold of him, he won’t be able to speak for some time,” she ground out, her attention locked on Whitten. “It looks like he’s going to the back room again. Let’s go talk to him so I can hit him.”

Artemis stood to her feet only to abruptly sit back down again. “What is it?” Jason asked, confused.

“I just saw the guy Whitten was talking to the night you kissed me.”

Jason fought back a smile that threatened to form. She had been thinking of the kiss they’d shared. “Whitten doesn’t seem too pleased to see him either,” he noted as he watched the two men quietly argue at the far end of the bar.

“I say let’s go over there and introduce our fists to their faces,” she readily decided, her hands balling into fists.

“Slow down there, tiger,” Jason cautioned her. “Let’s see what happens first.”

They watched for several minutes as the two of them argued, attempting not to draw too much attention to themselves. Finally having enough, Artemis stood up from her chair. “I’m going to go over there and see what I can hear,” she told him as she made her way to the bar.

“Artemis!” Jason hissed in frustration as he instantly reached for her arm only to miss her by inches. He flopped back in his seat with a huff, folding his arms against his chest as he watched Artemis work her way through the crowded bar.

Artemis cautiously approached the bar, making sure to keep some distance from the quarreling men in hopes of picking up something that might help prove Whitten was behind the bombing. She was done with all of this pointless stealth and chasing shadows in the dead of night. She wanted to be able to sleep at night again, wanted the heads of those responsible for the attacks on pikes.

She stopped before the bar, placing her hands on top of it as she listened to the heated argument that only growing more intense by the moment. Whitten seemed to be having a very difficult time keeping his temper in check. His face was flushed red, the vein in the side of his neck bulging.

“And I told you that you’d get you your money once I was paid,” Whitten ground out with a sneer.

“And I told you I wanted it now,” the other man stubbornly demanded, refusing to back down. “The job is done…the building is gone. It’s time to pay up.”

“You’ll get it tomorrow,” Whitten insisted as he warily glanced around to make sure they weren’t being overheard.

“I better or there’ll be hell to pay,” the man stated, giving Whitten a firm shove to the chest.

Whitten’s eyes fell closed in an effort to suppress his anger with the shove, his nostrils flaring. “Don’t push me, Joe, or you’ll see a side of me that you wish you hadn’t.”
Whitten suddenly noticed Artemis out of the corner of his eye, his posture growing stiff. “Can I help you?” he asked, gazing suspiciously at her.

“We’d like another pitcher of beer at our table,” she told him, pointing over her shoulder with her thumb towards the table that Jason was sitting at.

“I’ll have Tiff bring a pitcher over to you,” he coolly responded.

“Thanks,” Artemis replied with a smile.

Artemis turned around to find a man standing right behind her, a leering smirk on his face. “Hey, babe,” the stranger greeted her. “Want to join me at my table?”

“I’m with someone,” she icily stated as she attempted to walk past him.

The man’s hand shot out, his fingers wrapping around her upper arm in a vice-like grip that instantly inflamed her fury. Jason buried his face in his hands, hoping and praying that she didn’t start another bar fight they’d have to flee from again to keep from being arrested. Why did she have to be so hot?

“I can show you a much better time than that guy,” he told her, pointing towards Jason with his chin.

“He is far more man than you could ever hope to be,” she said with a sneer, jerking her arm free. “And if you lay another finger on me, you’ll be forced to eat through a straw for the rest of your life.”

The man held his hands up in front of him in surrender. “Hey, I don’t have to beg a woman to come with me,” he snapped, turning his attention to Jason. “The whore is all yours.”

Jason was up and on his feet in less than a blink of an eye, stalking towards the man who had insulted Artemis. His fist was primed and ready for a direct hit when Whitten unexpectedly stepped in. “Hey, guys…take it outside if you’re going to fight,” he warned them.

“Let’s go,” Jason said, his dark glare focused solely on the man who had insulted Artemis.

“It’s okay, Jason,” Artemis softly said, her fingers gently wrapping around his forearm before slowly drifting down to his balled-up fist.

Jason relaxed with the feel of her hand on his, his fingers straightening before lacing with hers. The man backed up, clearly unwilling to take on Jason. Artemis lightly tugged on his arm, drawing him back to their table as Whitten returned to his spot behind the bar.

Settling back into their seats, the waitress arrived with the pitcher of beer, setting it down on the table before leaving them alone once more. “Were you able to pick up anything?” he asked.

“The guy talking to Whitten said that the job was done, and that the building was gone,” she revealed.

Jason released a disgruntled sigh as he slowly shook his head. “It’s not enough,” he told her. “We need more concrete proof then that. They didn’t talk specifically about Diana or the embassy?”

“No, he just mentioned the building and then they threatened each other,” she replied. “There wasn’t anything more. Why? Isn’t it enough?”
“They could be talking about any building and any job,” he explained to her as his gaze followed Whitten who was making a drink for a woman at the bar. “They could be talking about a legitimate demolition job for all we know.”

“Just give me a few minutes alone with Whitten and I will get you all the evidence you want,” she snapped.

“Patience, Red,” he cautioned her before taking a drink of his beer.

“Thank you for stepping in, but I can take care of myself,” she bit out, clearly annoyed by his chivalrous actions.

“I know you can, Artemis,” Jason told her, turning to meet her gaze. “But I can’t sit back and watch you being insulted like that. I won’t let you be treated like that by anyone. You deserve far better than that.”

“You still don’t have to defend me,” she stated with a frown. “I’m an Amazon. I can fight my own battles. You don’t need to.”

“I care about you, okay?” Jason uttered in frustration. “I think you’re absolutely beautiful and amazing and I can’t stop thinking about kissing you all the time. I can’t stop dreaming about you and—”

Artemis effectively shut him up, her lips crashing against his, kissing him hard and showing him what she felt for him. Her fingers moved to the back of his neck, keeping him where she wanted him as Jason thoroughly returned her kiss.

She took full advantage the moment his lips began to part, her tongue beginning to probe his mouth as they kissed each other breathless. Retreating to regain some measure of control once more, she kissed him once more before settling fully into her seat once more.

“Wow,” Jason murmured, raking his fingers back through his hair as he fought back the surge of desire coursing through his veins. “If it wasn’t so important to corner Whitten, I’d take you back to my place.”

“It’s okay,” she told him. “This is more important. We have plenty of time for us.”

“You aren’t going to leave Gotham when this is all over?”

“No,” she said with a shake of her head. “I like it here.”

I’m so relieved.” he confessed, drawing a deep breathe and releasing it slowly. “Let’s corner Whitten so we end this.”

“Just give me a few minutes with Whitten and it’ll be over,” she told him.

Artemis suddenly placed a firm hand on Jason’s forearm as someone entered that she had not anticipated. “What is…whoa,” Jason muttered.

Jason and Artemis both froze as Phaedra entered, making her way directly to the bar and the bartender behind it. Whitten’s face brightened at the sight of her, tossing his towel down on top of the bar. Phaedra leaned over the counter, her lips greeting his in a sultry kiss.

“Lefty Whitten is Phaedra’s boyfriend?” Jason hissed as he watched them kiss. “Do you think Phaedra is behind all of this?”
“It makes sense,” Artemis softly said, her fury building as everything began to fall into place.

“Still, we don’t have proof that Phaedra knows what Whitten has been doing and we don’t even know if Whitten is our bomber,” Jason pointed out.

“It’s too big of a coincidence, Jason,” Artemis replied. “They are both in on the attacks on Diana and the embassy. She had the most access to Diana’s office and the security system at the embassy.”

“So, you don’t think Aresia could still be a part of this?”

“I don’t know…maybe,” Artemis muttered. “There’s only one way to find out.”

Jason placed a hand on Artemis’s arm to keep her seated beside him. “Wait…let’s see what they do,” he said. “We don’t want them to know that we’re on to them just yet.”

“So, we’re just going to sit here and watch them get away with it?” she ground out.

“No, we’re not,” Jason insisted. “We’re going to go to Phaedra’s apartment and search it for any clues before revealing that we know what they’ve done.”

Artemis watched as Phaedra moved to sit on the barstool at the far end of the bar, completely enraptured by her boyfriend. Whitten was leaning towards her, his elbows resting on top of the bar as they talked. It was obvious they were in love, but she wasn’t certain how deep those feelings actually ran on Phaedra’s part.

This love for a man went against everything that the Amazons stood for and yet Artemis could hardly fault her for it. She found herself falling for Jason, something that she had not anticipated happening when she’d first come to Gotham. Now, she couldn’t imagine leaving Gotham or him behind.

Had Phaedra found herself in a similar situation?

“Come on,” Jason softly urged, grabbing her hand and leading her out a back door.

Following him outside, Artemis was stunned when Jason abruptly stopped, pulling her into his arms and kissing her passionately. She returned his passion with her own intense feelings for him, enjoying every single second of his touch. She wished they could further explore these new-found feelings for each other, but that would have to wait for now.

Releasing her, they quickly made their way towards Jason’s waiting Ducati, hoping they would find the proof they needed to stop Phaedra and Whitten. If they truly were behind all these attacks, Phaedra was going to curse the day she left Themyscira for Gotham.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Things are going to call come to a head and when they do...look out!!

UPDATE: For those of you wondering, I've been working away on my next fic Deadly Intentions. I've just started Chp 4. Once I'm finished with Family Ties, I'll start posting it. :)

UP NEXT: Jason and Artemis run into trouble at Phaedra's apartment while Bruce and Diana head to Nanda Parbat to stop Ra's al Ghul.
Chapter 27

Gotham; August 31st, 01:02 EST

“I don’t know why we can’t just corner her and beat the information out of her,” Artemis groused as they broke into Phaedra’s apartment. “I’m more than happy to be the one to do it.”

Jason gave her a lop-sided smirk as he pushed her door open. “Because we don’t know for sure how deeply involved in this she actually is,” he explained as he glanced down the hallway to make sure they weren’t seen. Thankfully, she lived in a new apartment building in downtown Gotham that had yet to rent any of the apartments surrounding hers yet. “We don’t want to tip our hand just yet. We need solid evidence linking her to all of it.”

“My fists are a great way to get all the proof we need,” she insisted.

“I’m sure they are, but I’m hoping we can find what we need without alerting her to the fact that we suspect her being involved.”

Artemis snorted in disagreement as they carefully wandered around Phaedra’s apartment, her arms crossed and pressed against her chest. “I’m tired of these games,” she uttered with an irritated frown. “All this sneaking around is very un-Amazon-like. I’m used to direct confrontation and fighting for what we want.”

“I hate to inform you, Red, but you’re not in Kansas anymore,” he muttered as he sat down at Phaedra’s desk and began rifling through the drawers.

“I’m not from Kansas,” she replied with an expression of confusion as she paused to look at a picture frame. It was one of Phaedra with Lefty Whitten.

“It’s an expression,” he absentmindedly responded. “It’s a line from the Wizard of Oz.”

“What is that?”

“A movie,” he told her, pausing to look up at her. “You’ve never seen the Wizard of Oz?”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she shook her head. “It’s not like we have movie theaters where I come from.”

“Okay, you’re coming over to my place to watch the Wizard of Oz,” he decided. “It’s a classic.”

“Is watching a movie all that you have in mind for us to do at your place?” she asked, cocking a single eyebrow as she watched him for a reaction.

Jason’s head shot up again, his head snapping to his right to look at her. “Well, not…not exactly,” he said. “I mean…what did you have in mind?”

“I guess you’ll have to wait and see, won’t you?” she flirted with him, turning on her heel and making her way to the bedroom.
Jason released a low whistle as she walked away, his body flushing warmly with the countless ideas that began parading through his mind one after another. None of those thoughts were rated PG and all of them included her and him and very little clothing.

Forcing himself back to the moment, he turned his focus back to the things that he found in the desk drawers. There didn’t appear to be anything incriminating so far. He found bills and banking statements, a day planner and a few personal items from Themyscira.

Opening the day planner, he found it to be mostly empty save for a few scheduled dates with Whitten. It appeared that Phaedra had started dating Whitten fairly soon after the Themysciran Embassy first opened its doors, casting further suspicion upon her.

Her association with Whitten fit the timeline of events. The bombs didn’t appear until well after she began seeing him and he was a known expert when it came to creating bombs. According to Oracle, his rap sheet was rather lengthy, beginning when he was fifteen. He’d been keeping his nose clean for the last two years or it appeared that way. There had been no arrests, nothing linking him to any crimes at present.

That meant little to Jason who knew that no arrests didn’t necessarily mean no criminal activity. Whitten was either becoming smarter about covering his tracks or he was better at flying under the radar. Either way, he looked too good for the two bombings associated with Diana.

Replacing everything where he’d found it, Jason got up and made his way towards the bedroom, hoping that Artemis had been more successful in their search. If they didn’t find anything here linking her to the bombings, they were probably going to have to do this Artemis’s way.

While it was typically his way as well, he was trying his best to do things Bruce’s way, deciding that he rather enjoyed being part of the family that Bruce and Diana had made. He didn’t always agree with the way Bruce handled things in Gotham, feeling that he was a little too lenient and didn’t deliver near enough judgement over criminals.

Joker was still running free instead dead and buried six feet under like he should have been after what that clown had done to him. Instead, Joker had gotten a slap on the wrist with a one-way trip to Arkham only to escape a few months later.

Arkham Asylum was nothing more than a vacation retreat for the criminally insane, one that had a revolving door that was constantly on the move. If Jason had his way, those that entered Arkham would never walk out again under their own power…that is if they even made it to Arkham.

“Find anything in here?” he asked.

“Maybe,” she murmured.

He found her sitting on the side of the bed, a book in her lap. “What is it?”

“It’s a journal,” she replied as she leafed through the pages.

Jason moved to sit on the edge of the bed beside her, leaning over to see what she had found. “Find anything incriminating?”

“Mostly she talks about Jordon and how she’s falling in love with him,” Artemis informed him. “She seems to be quite taken with him.”

“Maybe she doesn’t know that her boyfriend is Jordon “Lefty” Whitten, infamous mad bomber of Gotham and the one that destroyed the embassy,” Jason said.
“I can’t imagine that Phaedra doesn’t know,” Artemis muttered with a frown as she carefully placed the journal back where she found it. “She’ll be heartbroken if this is all just mere coincidence and she really doesn’t know about any of it.”

“So, do you think Aresia is really alive or it’s Phaedra that’s behind all this?”

Artemis slowly shook her head, her lips pursing into a thin line as she considered everything that had transpired since arriving here in Gotham. “I honestly don’t know,” she confessed. “My gut is telling me this goes far beyond Phaedra and yet I can’t deny that things look pretty damning for her.”

“We just need to gather the proof we need to stop whoever it is,” he told her.

Artemis gazed into his blue eyes, struggling not to lose herself in them. She forced herself to look away before standing to her feet. “Let’s keep looking,” she suggested. “As much as I’d love to beat the information we need out of her, I don’t want to be caught here when she returns.”

“If we don’t find anything here, I think our next step is going to be a little heart to heart meeting with Jordon,” he decided.

“Isn’t that going to be dangerous?” Artemis asked as she moved towards the dresser. “Jordon will run to Phaedra and tell her that we’re on to them.”

“Not necessarily,” he replied with a grin. “Depends on how we decide to threaten him.”

“I like how you think,” she said with a responding smile spreading across her face.

The sound of a key being entered into a lock caught both of their attention, causing them to freeze. They were about to get caught red-handed. They weren’t ready to reveal how much they knew yet which wasn’t near enough for Jason’s liking. All they had were suspicions and questionable associations.

Without a second thought, Jason went straight to Artemis, his arm slipping possessively around her waist as his hand went for the commlink in his ear. “Oracle, need an immediate transport out of here.”

“Gotta ya, J,” Oracle responded, the trespassing couple disappearing in a flash of light as Phaedra entered her apartment.

Phaedra giggled as Jordon began kissing along the back of her neck, his hands around her waist as he pressed himself against her. “Jordon, at least let me get my key out of the door,” she chided him. “I can’t help it, Phae,” he murmured, his lips grazing along her shoulder. “You look so good in that dress. I can’t wait to get you out of it.”

Phaedra stopped just inside of her apartment, pausing to deposit her keys on the table by the door. Her eyes quickly scanned her apartment, a strange feeling washing over her. Jordon seemed unaware of it as he began lowering the zipper on the back of her sundress.

“What is it?” he suddenly asked, noticing the way she had tensed up.

“I don’t know,” she murmured. “It just feels like someone is here in my apartment.”

“There’s no one here but me and you,” he attempted to reassure her, anxious to continue what he had just started.
Phaedra slowly pulled away from him, making her way to the kitchen before returning to the living room. “I guess you’re right,” she thoughtfully said as she glanced around her apartment. “It was just a strange feeling I had.”

“I get those sometimes,” he told her as he closed the distance between them, his hands settling on her hips. “Now…where were we?”

Phaedra smiled seductively as she tilted her head up towards his mouth. “I think we were…right…about…here,” she softly murmured before pressing her lips to his.

Jordon groaned as her hands snaked beneath his t-shirt to rake her fingernails against his chiseled abdominal muscles. Worrisome thoughts quickly fled her mind as she removed his t-shirt, her dress slipping down her body to pool on the floor.

With a squeal of surprise, Phaedra broke out with laughter as Jordon scooped her up into his arms and began to carry her to her bedroom. She looped her arms around his neck, amazed once more that she had fallen so hard for a man.

As he laid her down on her bed, she smiled up at him as he stripped off the rest of his clothes before joining her. He kissed her passionately as he settled over her, the weight of his body pressing her into the soft mattress beneath her.

From outside of her apartment building, Jason and Artemis stared up at Phaedra’s bedroom window. “That was close,” Artemis murmured.

“Nah,” Jason replied. “I had it all under control.”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she turned to face him, her head tilting to the side. “What was your back up plan?” she challenged him. “Throw ourselves out the bedroom window?”

Jason smirked. “If we had to,” he said with a shrug, his arm snaking around her waist and pulling her close.

Artemis returned his grin as she gazed into his eyes. “Inventive,” she muttered, leaning in to kiss him only to abruptly pull back.

“What is it?”

“There,” she pointed at a woman in a black cloak lingering in the shadows of the trees behind her.

The mysterious woman in the black cloak turned and fled, Jason and Artemis following in pursuit of her. They began to gain on her as they chased her down the street, Artemis getting nearly close enough to leap on her to stop her.

The woman turned at that moment, the hood of her cloak falling back and her blond hair bouncing free. “Aresia!” Artemis growled in fury.

She waved at Artemis, throwing something down on the ground. A burst of white smoke erupted, blocking Aresia from view and forcing Jason and Artemis to stop. They began to cough as they tried to press on through the thick cloud of smoke that seemed to grow denser by the second.

“Do you see her?” Jason yelled.

“I can’t see anything!” Artemis growled in response.
Jason cursed as he searched for Artemis, grabbing hold of her hand. “Come on,” he told her.

He carefully worked his way past the thick cloud of smoke, finding no sign of Aresia anywhere. Artemis released a scream of pure rage, her hands fisted tightly at her sides. “I will find you, Aresia, and you will pay with your blood!” she yelled.

Jason turned to her, grabbing hold of her upper arms. “Hey, we’ll find her,” he softly reassured her. “We now know she’s involved and she won’t win.”

Artemis nodded her head in agreement, doing her best to smother her fury. She could feel Aresia’s eyes on her, silently mocking her. It only fueled her anger that much more. She wasn’t going to stop until Aresia had been found and she paid for the pain and destruction that she had created.

**Nanda Parbat; August 31st, 15:47 EST**

“We need to be careful,” Batman said as they surveyed Ra’s al Ghul’s Himalayan home through the darkness that was settling over the mountain range.

“Are we sure he’s even here?” Flash asked, hands on his hips and foot tapping rapidly.

“Robin tracked definite movement here,” he replied. “It’s been in use for months. Whether Ra’s is actually here or not, we’re about to confirm that.”

“When are you going to let Robin join the League?” Superman asked from Batman’s left. “The boy is a genius. He’d be a great asset to the League and you know it.”

Batman leveled him with a deadly Batglare, conveying his answer in that single glower. “Do not engage Ra’s or Talia if you find them first. Contain them until I arrive.”

“I’m pretty sure we know how to handle the likes of the al Ghul’s,” John muttered.

“No, you don’t,” Batman flatly stated as he put his binoculars away in his utility belt. “I’ve dealt with Ra’s and Talia over the years. I know how they work Nothing is as it seems. Do not underestimate them. They always have a plan in mind. They have backup plans for their backup plans.”

“Kind of like you,” Flash pointed out.

“We won’t underestimate them,” Diana reassured him as she glared at Wally, placing a hand on her husband’s shoulder. “We’ll stop them.”

“How do you want us to go in?” Shayera asked.

Batman frowned as he thought about it. If he had his way, he’d be doing this alone, but that was before he’d let Diana into his life and his bed. Now, he found himself opening up to his teammates and friends, calling upon their help when he never would’ve in the past. This assembly here was mostly Diana’s idea, but he had agreed to it.

He knew that he needed to swallow his pride on this one and allow them to help him. The consequences were far too dire if they failed today, the chances of coming out of a fight with Ra’s with Hades’ armor too slim to ignore. As confident as he was that they would win, he knew deep down there would be a hefty cost. He just didn’t know what that cost would be or how steep the price.

“We’re going to all go in at once,” he replied, a feeling of dread swimming in the pit of his
stomach. “I want us to spread out around the perimeter of the fortress. We go in on my mark and not before. Be careful and be prepared for anything. We don’t know what we’re going into. Ra’s and Talia will not go without a fight.”

“We’re ready, Batman,” J’onn reassured him, placing a reassuring hand on the Dark Knight’s shoulder. “Trust your friends to handle this.”

“Right,” Batman said, inhaling deeply before standing to his feet. “Okay, spread out and wait for my mark.”

Diana couldn’t help the apprehension that rose in her throat, hoping that her premonitions about something happening to Bruce didn’t come true here. She swore to herself that she was not leaving this place without Bruce safe and with her where he always belonged.

She didn’t trust Talia one bit, wouldn’t put anything past her. She didn’t believe for one second that she wouldn’t try to sway Bruce to join their side. She knew that her husband would never willing join the al Ghul’s, but she didn’t trust Talia and Ra’s not to try something to force him into it.

As she turned away, Diana felt an unexpected gauntleted hand grasp hers. She turned to look at him, tucking away her fears. She didn’t want him worrying about her going into this. He needed to worry about himself and making sure he got out of there alive and in one piece.

“Be careful, princess,” he softly told her as the others took off to take up their positions.

“You too,” she murmured, giving him a reassuring smile though she didn’t feel it deep down.

He squeezed her hand before releasing it. He knew that she was afraid for him, but he wanted her to think of herself for once instead of him. He’d dealt with the al Ghul’s for longer than he cared to think about. He knew how they worked, how they thought. Diana and the others didn’t know them like he did, didn’t understand the way that they manipulated and deceived.

Batman moved into position, waiting for the others to report their readiness. Once all seven founders reported in, Batman knew they were ready to move. “Move on one,” he stated. “Three… two…one.”

Diana sent up a silent prayer of protection to any and all gods who were listening to her, praying that they came out of this battle successful and in one piece. She took off towards one of the top turrets of the Ra’s al Ghul’s fortress, more than ready for a fight.

From her position, she could see her teammates flying into position as well, converging on the fortress and more than prepared for a battle. A black form swung in on a grappling line, a blur of red streaked across the valley floor and a green glow flew up to the front of the fortress to join them.

It warmed her heart to see her friends and teammates fighting together like this again. It had been a while since all seven founders had gone into a mission together. It was just like old times and yet so much had happened and changed since they had first come together to form the Justice League.

Ripping a door off, Diana flew inside, weaving her way down corridors and through rooms in search of Ra’s and Hades’ armor. She was determined to get her hands on Talia as well, but she knew that had to be pushed aside in light of the more dire situation that lay ahead for them.

She gritted her teeth as she slammed her fist through a wall when she came to a dead end, refusing to be slowed down for any reason. She was not about to let her husband face off against Ra’s and Talia alone. He may think that he will be, but she knew differently.
She methodically worked her way down, checking rooms and searching for the armor. Coming up empty so far, her frustration and anger continued to build, but she channeled her anger into the mission to stop this maniac from releasing her father from the Underworld. Ra’s had no idea what horrors he could unleash by tapping into Hades’ power.

She couldn’t help wondering how her teammates were fairing. She knew that Dick, Jason, Artemis, and Tim had been most unhappy that they had been left out of the fight, but she and Bruce had agreed that they needed to sit on the sidelines for now. There would be plenty to do later if they were unsuccessful.

Diana punched a hole in the floor, flying through it. She needed to get to Ra’s before Bruce did. She feared for her husband’s safety, but she also feared how Bruce would react to Ra’s knowing what he was planning on doing. Bruce didn’t handle his family being threatened very well and neither did she.

She wanted to make sure that he kept his temper in check and didn’t beat Ra’s to within an inch of his life despite the fact that she would love nothing more. She wanted to ensure that neither of them ever crossed that line. It was one of Bruce’s greatest fears.

Flying down a corridor, Diana was met by three of Ra’s men, weapons drawn and awaiting her arrival. Her lips curled back in pleasure, her blood singing as she stood on the precipice of a fight. This was what she had been trained for and she would never back down.

They immediately began shooting at her, her bracelets easily deflecting the spray of bullets that attempted to stop her. She pressed on towards them, gritting her teeth as she wrenched a gun out of a hand of one and kicking him square in the chest.

She was a flurry of kicks and punches as she took out the other one. The last soldier slammed the butt of his gun into the back of her head only to receive a fist to the face that effectively knocked him out. She crumpled up the gun in her hands, rendering it useless before turning attention to the first man.

“You aren’t going to succeed,” he said with a smug grin as she held him up by the collar of his shirt.

“What are you talking about?” she demanded to know.

“None of you will escape here alive,” he told her, resigned to his fate as a follower of Ra’s al Ghul. “The Demon’s Head is gone. You’re too late.”

Diana’s eyes widened as realization slammed into her like Darkseid’s fist. She immediately reached for her commlink. “It’s a trap!” she yelled. “Get out here now! Go!”

The floor suddenly shook violently as a powerful explosion rocked the entire fortress, nearly taking Diana’s feet out from under her. She slammed her fist into the man’s face before scooping up all three men. She took off like a bullet, desperate to find Bruce.

“Diana!” Bruce yelled. “Where are you?”

“I don’t know,” she answered him. “Just get out of here now! This whole place is going to come down on top of us.”

Another bomb went off bringing a whole wing of the fortress down and causing structural damage to the rest of it. “Grab as many people as possible and get out of here,” Superman ordered. “We can only do so much now.”
“Copy that!” Flash responded.

“I’m clear,” Shayera answered. “John?”

“I’m right behind…augh!” John yelled.

“John!” Shayera called to him, fear lacing her voice.

Several tense moments passed before he finally responded. “I’m all right,” he replied. “Part of the ceiling nearly took me out, but I’m free. Heading out now.”

“I will be free here within seconds,” J’onn informed them.

Diana flew through the fortress as if Hermes himself had come down from Olympus to help her and guide her. She needed to get these men out of here and find Bruce. She knew that he wouldn’t give up until he was absolutely certain that Ra’s didn’t leave anything useful or important behind.

“Batman…come in,” Diana called to him.

Receiving no response, she growled under her breath, knowing that he was searching for any possible clues left behind as to what Ra’s was actually planning. “Damn it, Bruce,” she cursed. “If you don’t get your ass out of here, I swear to Hera I’ll—”

“Language, prin…ss,” Batman responded. “I…head..ut no…”

His transmission was broken up, her commlink crackling in her ear. “You had better be,” she darkly threatened him.

“I’m right behind him, Diana,” Superman informed her.

Diana pushed on through the thick gray smoke that began to seep through what was left of the fortress. Bombs began to go off again in rapid succession as she flew to what she hoped was the front. She needed to get out of here fast before it all came down on her.

While she was one of the most durable in the League, even she had her limits. Having a whole fortress come down on her wasn’t something that even she thought she might survive. A bomb suddenly went off to her left, sending her flying through three walls before landing in a heap on the rubble.

She quickly recovered, gathering up her load before starting off again. “Batman, where are you?”

“I’m on…m…ut now,” he told her. “Just give me…cou…mor…minut…”

“You were supposed to already be out of here,” she angrily growled, attempting to dodge support beams that broke free above her as one slammed into her shoulder.

“So are you,” he countered, his commlink delivering a full transmission again. “Get of there, princess…now!”

“You both need to get out of there now!” Shayera yelled at the arguing couple.

Finding a large window, Diana lowered her head flew straight through it, finally able to breathe in fresh air. She landed up in the mountains where they had initially planned their attack, setting the unconscious men down on the ground. She leaned forward, placing her hands on her knees as she coughed violently.
She felt Bruce’s hand on her back as the final bombs exploded, taking the entire fortress to the ground. She straightened up, turning her attention to her friends. “Is everyone okay?”

“Just a few minor cuts and bruises,” John told her. “Nothing to worry about.”

“I should’ve known that Ra’s would plan something like this,” Batman angrily ground out.

“There’s no way you could’ve known, Bruce,” Diana attempted to calm him down.

“Yes, I should’ve, Diana,” he turned and yelled at her, his anger set to explode. “This is just like Ra’s to take down his own fortress in order to end us…to keep us from stopping his plans to cleanse the Earth.”

“We’re all okay,” she reassured him. “We made it out of there. We just need to figure out where Ra’s went now.”

“Yah, Bats,” Flash told him. “We still have five more days to find him before the big, red moon shows up.”

“We’ll find him, Bruce,” Superman said, placing a hand on his shoulder. “This is far from over and we’ll be there with you every step of the way.”

Batman nodded his head but refused to relinquish his anger or the sense of failure that clung to him. He should have known that Ra’s would pull something like this. They were going to have start all over again in trying to find Ra’s al Ghul.

**Batcave; August 31st, 19:55 EST**

Tim paced back and forth, trying his best to control his emotions but it was more than difficult. Diana had let him know what had happened at Nanda Parbat and that they were heading home. He could hardly believe that things had gone so terribly wrong like that.

“You’re going to wear a path in the cave floor if you keep pacing like that,” Dick told him.

“It’s all my fault, Dick,” Tim ground out, his fingers curling into his palms. “I’m the one who tracked Ra’s to Nanda Parbat. I’m the one who practically sent them there. I’m the one who nearly got them all killed.”

“It’s not your fault, bro,” Dick adamantly stated with a frown.

“If it weren’t for me, they never would’ve been there in the first place,” Tim maintained.

“It was obvious that Ra’s had been there, Tim, otherwise he never would’ve blown it up like that.”

“I know, but I should’ve realized that it was a trap,” Tim nearly yelled, throwing his hands up in the air. “I must have missed something…missed a sign or something that this wasn’t as good as it appeared.”

“Hey, don’t you start playing the part of Bruce,” Dick said with a scowl. “You’re sounding more and more like him when you talk like that. You can’t carry the entire weight of the world on your shoulders. It’ll crush you. Look what it almost did to Bruce. If not for Diana, he’d have been a lost cause and none of us would be here like a real family right now.”

Tim stopped his pacing, hanging his head in defeat. “It’s just that…they almost got hurt because of me.”
“No, not because of you, Tim,” Dick stated. “Because of Ra’s. He lured them there in order to destroy them so there wouldn’t be anyone to stand in his way when he put on that armor.”

Hearing the transporter firing up, Tim and Dick looked up to see Bruce and Diana appearing on the transport pad. They both looked as though they’d seen better days, covered in dust and soot. Both appeared to be unharmed, though, much to Tim’s great relief.

“I’m so sorry,” Tim said as he approached them. “I didn’t know it was a trap.”

“It’s okay, Tim,” Diana reassured him, pulling him into her arms. “None of us could have known it was rigged to blow up.”

Bruce ignored the pointed look that she gave and the fact that her words were also directed at him as well as he pushed his cowl off his head to rest against his back. “You did a great job in tracking Ra’s, Tim,” he told him. “This is the closest we’ve been able to come to him in weeks.”

“Yah, but I almost got you all killed,” Tim said as he pulled out of Diana’s embrace.

“We deal with life and death issues with every mission we go out on,” Diana pointed out. “This was no different.”

Tim drew a deep breath as he frowned in response. “I still feel terrible.”

“All you can do is the best you can with the limited information you have at the time,” Bruce told him. “We all knew there was a risk in going in there and there was no guarantee that Ra’s was even there. We all accept the risks and do the best we can.”

Tim nodded his head in understanding, silently swearing to himself that he wasn’t going to give up finding Ra’s. “I’m going to see if Ra’s has circled back around to any of his previous known locations.”

“I have to return to Blüdhaven,” Dick announced. “Call me if you need me.”

“We will,” Diana replied. “Thanks, Dick.”

She turned her attention to her husband who was already making his way to his workstation. He removed his utility belt and began sorting compartments, restocking and preparing to go out on patrol in a couple of hours. She could tell by the tense way he held himself that he was still furious with himself for not being able to predict that Ra’s was going to blow up his fortress.

“Bruce—”

“Don’t start, Diana,” he angrily cut her off. “I know what you’re going to say, but I still should have suspected it.”

“So, you now have the gift of prophecy?” she asked. “You can predict the future and read the minds of men?”

He slammed his fist down on the worktable causing everything on top of it to rattle with the force of the blow. His head lowered with the fury still pounding through him, knowing that his wife didn’t deserve the brunt of his anger, but he couldn’t contain it any longer.

“You know what I mean,” he growled. “I know how Ra’s thinks. I should’ve known that he wouldn’t be that easy to find. I had a bad feeling before we even went in there, but I didn’t listen to myself. Because of that, you and the others could’ve been killed.”
“It hasn’t been easy to find him, Bruce,” Diana reminded him, refusing to back down in the wake of his furious outburst. She was determined to make him see logic. “You, Barbara, and Tim have been working for weeks to track him down. Countless hours have been poured into tracking his every movement, searching for any sign of him. Satellites have been tapped into in hopes of finding any trace of him. That has not been easy.”

Bruce placed his hands on top of the work desk, struggling to rein in his anger. His wife and teammates could’ve been killed had Diana not figured out it was a trap. That wasn’t something that he took lightly, not something that he could just let go of and not carry some measure of self-reproach over.

Diana closed the distance between them, placing her hand on top of his. After a couple of moments, he finally allowed himself to accept her comfort, eventually turning his hand over to lace his fingers with hers. “If you hadn’t figure it out…”

“Bruce, I didn’t figure it out,” she revealed. “One of Ra’s men told me. That’s the only way that I knew about it.”

“Still…”

“Hey, we still have five days to find him,” she reminded him. “We will find him, and we will stop this madness before it can become a reality.”

He tightened his hold on her hand as if holding on to her for dear life as he slowly nodded his head. She leaned in and pressed her lips against his cheek. “You and I are a team, Bruce, and we will get through this together,” she reassured him. “I love you more than anything in this world. Never forget that.”

“Love you too,” he softly murmured as she pulled her hand free before turning to head to the showers.

Time was beginning to run out for them. If they didn’t find Ra’s al Ghul in the next five days, they were going to have to face off against Hades and that was a horrifying nightmare that he was determined to avoid at all cost.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: LOVE how this chapter turned out. Hope you all did too! We're definitely getting closer to the climactic end of this one. Are Aresia and Phaedra working together? Will Tim and Bruce be able to find Ra's in time?

UP NEXT: Talia grows anxious as the day approaches. Diana finds out about Aresia's involvement. Will Jason and Artemis be able to stop her in time?

UPDATE: You don't want to miss out on WonderBatMilestones starting Monday July 2nd! I have a five day series based on the DCEU planned. I can't wait to share it all with you. Hope you'll join in on the fun! To find links to other Wonderbat entries, check out the hashtag #WonderBatMilestones on Twitter. :)
Chapter 28

Talia al Ghul stared at the satellite feed of what used to be her home at Nanda Parbat. It was all gone now, completely destroyed…nothing but a pile of rubble. It hurt her to see it reduced to that, not knowing if Bruce had made it out of there alive.

It had been quite difficult knowing what her father had been planning and not warning her beloved about it, but she knew that she couldn’t go against her father. She had cared little about what would happen to the others, but Bruce…that had been far more difficult to accept.

Nanda Parbat was where she had raised Damian until he was six years old. She had many fond memories there with her son, training and teaching him to become the best like her father. Now, that home was nothing more than bricks and rock and destroyed memories. She’d barely had enough time to gather a few of her things before having to escape.

Thinking of her son Damian caused a sharp tug at her heart. She missed him fiercely and longed to see him. It didn’t help that he clearly resented her for leaving him behind like she had, but it had been necessary in order to protect him. He couldn’t be with her right now because it was far too dangerous, but that would soon change.

Hopefully, Damian would come to realize and understand why she did what she had to. Once things had settled down and her father fully dominated the Earth, they would be reunited, and he would be with her once more.

She still greatly feared that her beloved and the Amazon were turning her son against her and his grandfather. There would be much work to do in order to reverse the damage done, but she would prove to her son how much she loved him and that his grandfather knew what was best for the world.

Closing the pictures of what once was Nanda Parbat, Talia turned her attention to what she had been working on before. She glanced back over her shoulder, ensuring the fact that she was alone before clicking on the files that she had accumulated thus far on Hades’ armor.

She could no longer ignore the nigglng in the back of her mind that told her that something in what Diana had said to her was the truth. Seeing the sheer darkness that had enveloped him as her father had held Hades’ helmet had unnerved her, leading her to suspect that the Amazon might have been truthful with her.

She didn’t wholly believe everything that Diana had said, but she feared that there might be a morsel of truth buried in her words of warning. She still planned to proceed with helping her father when the night of September fifth arrived, but she wanted to ensure the fact that he would be able to remain in full control of the power that would inundate him.

From the information that she had gathered so far, Talia had been unable to decipher any hint of trouble in her research yet, but she had only just begun her search. She had to admit to a small tremor of fear that the Amazon might be right.
What would she do if Hades took over her father’s mind? Her father swore that he was strong enough to remain in complete control if Hades attempted such a feat, but she worried that her father wouldn’t be able to withstand the power of the god of the Underworld.

She knew that Hades was not someone to trifle with. To attempt to wear his armor was a difficult undertaking to say the least, to attempt to harness his power even more so. She had known from the very beginning that her father’s plan was his most dangerous yet, but she couldn’t deny him. She had given up far too much to follow him, to aid him in his attempt to make his dream come true. She couldn’t back out now, but she wanted to make certain that she would be able to pull her father back from the brink of madness should that occur.

There had to be some information somewhere that would help her be able to save him should Hades gain control over his mind and body, maybe some relic that she could obtain that would banish him back to the Underworld. She knew that she’d never be able to talk her father out of going through with his plan now that he had all the necessary pieces of armor.

It was time to come up with a backup plan should her father’s conscious mind become suppressed.

Talia had a tough time focusing on the article that she had been reading, her mind continually going back to the pictures of a destroyed Nanda Parbat. She couldn’t help the fear that still clung to her, knowing that her beloved could’ve been killed.

She had to know if he was all right…that he had made it out of there alive.

Drawing a deep breath, she decided to contact Bruce, making sure that he wouldn’t be able to track her location. She couldn’t afford for him to find her before it was time to act. “Hello, beloved,” she answered him.

“Where are you, Talia?”

The gruff sound of his voice raked like fingernails up her spine. “It’s good to hear your voice,” she tentatively replied.

“Where are you?” he ground out each word, venom lacing his voice.

She could hear his fury, felt the heat of it against her skin despite being thousands of miles away from him. “Are you all right?”

“My condition is none of your business,” he bit out. “It didn’t matter when you left that trap for us so it shouldn’t matter now.”

“You have no idea how hard it was for me to not warn you about it, but you know very well that I can’t go against my father.”

“You have a free will, Talia,” he countered. “You chose to follow your father. You’ve always chosen him.”

“And you chose to leave me,” she hissed.

Bruce released a furious breath, clearly trying to control his anger. “I’m not having this argument with you again,” he stated. “It always comes back to the same thing every time we talk. I’m not doing it anymore.”

“How is Damian?”
“You lost the right to know about our son when you walked out of his life,” he told her.

“I did what I had to do in order to keep him safe,” she shot back. “I knew that he would be well taken care of with you. I would prefer the Amazon refrain from trying to take my place as his mother. That will never change, beloved. No matter what you think or what you want, I will always be his mother.”

“Leave Diana out of this,” he icily warned her. “Diana has done nothing but accept him from the very beginning.”

“I will not allow her to raise our son, Bruce.”

“You lost any say in that when you abandoned him,” he told her. “Now, tell me where you are, Talia. You have to help me stop this before your father puts on that armor. He has no idea the extent of the danger he’s in if he wears it.”

“You know that is impossible,” she said with a scowl. “He is determined to see this through to the end.”

“Ra’s will lose his mind and Hades will fully control him,” Bruce informed her. “The father you know now will be gone forever. There will be no getting him back, Talia. Hades will destroy everything if he gets free.”

“My father has been working on strengthening his mind,” she informed him. “He’ll be able to keep Hades at bay.”

“Do you honestly think that he’ll be able to stop a Greek god from gaining control over him?” he nearly yelled in stunned disbelief. “You are both delusional if you think that Ra’s is more powerful than Hades. You need to stop him before he goes through with this plan. Tell me where you are, and I’ll get you out of there.”

“You’re just saying these things because you want to stop my father from realizing his dream,” Talia shouted, her fingers curling in anger. “You’ve always been against him. You’ve never truly understood him or why he has worked so hard to try to make his dream a reality.”

“I do understand him, Talia,” Bruce replied, gaining a little more control over his anger. “I understand a little too well. That is why I’m trying to help you before you lose him forever.”

“I was afraid for your safety after what happened at Nanda Parbat,” she stiffly said. “I can see that contacting you was a mistake.”

“Please, Talia,” he begged her, his tone softening with his pleading. “If you ever felt anything for me, please don’t do this. Help me stop him before it’s too late.”

Talia paused with his words, her fingers lingering over the end button. “You know my heart has always belonged to you, my beloved. It always has, and it always will no matter what the future holds. You may think you love the Amazon, but you know a part of your heart will always belong to me.”

“Talia…” he shouted.

“Goodbye, beloved,” she softly said, pushing the end button.

She lowered her head as she fought back tears, relieved to hear his voice, but his words had cut her deeply. He had been very wrong. She had not lost her right to know about her son or to be his
mother. That was something that could never be taken away from her no matter what Bruce said.

_Batcave; August 31st, 11:36 EST_

Bruce sat back in his chair in his cave, raking his fingers back through his hair in overt frustration. He slammed his fist on the desk before standing to his feet, his hands clutching the back of it as he fought the overwhelming urge to hurl it across the cave.

He wanted nothing more than to throw it at something, but he needed to remain in control. Losing his temper now wouldn’t help anything, wouldn’t keep his father-in-law from being released from the Underworld or from coming after his family.

“What is it, Bruce?” Diana asked, coming to stand behind him.

She could tell by the tension and fury rolling off him that he was struggling to rein-in his rage and frustration. She wanted to go to him, gather him in her arms and hold him close, but she knew that was not what he needed at that moment. He needed time to deal with what was upsetting him.

Bruce lowered his head, taking a couple of moments to gather himself. “It was Talia,” he stated.

“What did she have to say?”

“Nothing important,” he spat out, keeping his back to her.

“She must have said something that upset you,” she gently pressed him.

He drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly. Diana wasn’t the source of his anger. She didn’t deserve having it unleashed on her. “She refused to tell me where they’re hiding now.”

“We’ll find them, Bruce,” she reassured him.

“I don’t think we will, Diana,” he snapped. “We’re going to have to face Ra’s and Hades. We need to prepare ourselves for war. There is no other outcome.”

Diana bristled with his words, wrapping her arms around herself. She’d learned long ago to trust her husband’s gut feelings. They had proven to be correct time and time again. She’d also learned to trust her own feelings. The one that clung to her like a second skin told her that she was going to lose him before all was said and done.

She felt ill to her core.

She turned away from him, fighting back the overwhelming onslaught of emotions that attempted to drown her. She didn’t know what she would do if she ever lost Bruce. She had always known there was a chance of losing him, understood all too well the risks involved in their line of work.

She had thought that she had accepted it, would be strong enough to deal with it when the time came, but now that she was faced with the overwhelming possibility…

She angrily brushed away a tear that had broken free against her will. She had to bottle up her emotions, bury them deep. They had a mission to complete, a madman to stop, and her father to contain. She couldn’t afford to be thinking like a wife right now. She had to think like an Amazon warrior.

The feel of a familiar hand on her back forced her to raise her head. “Look at me,” he simply requested, his voice gentler than it had just been.
She drew a shuddering breath, forcing herself to turn around to face the man that meant absolutely everything to her. She could feel the tears returning with a fierce vengeance, another tear escaping and trickling down her cheek. Embarrassed, she averted her eyes, wanting to runaway to some place where he couldn’t see how vulnerable and broken she was feeling right now.

“Hey, we’ll find a way to stop both Ra’s and your father,” he told her with a confidence that she didn’t feel at that moment, his hand moving to cup her jaw.

“I can’t talk you into sitting this one out…can I?” she asked, biting at her bottom lip.

He chuckled softly, his hand that cupped her cheek sliding back into her hair. “You can ask all you want to, princess, but I refuse to let you face Ra’s and your father alone. That is not going to happen.”

“I won’t be alone,” she insisted. “The League will be with me.”

“And so will I,” he stated, anger seeping through into his words once more. “I may be just a man without any Meta abilities, but I am still Batman and I will not allow my wife to go into a battle without me. I am your husband, Diana. We married for better or for worse and we will face this together.”

She shook her head as she turned away from him, knowing that he had misunderstood her. “No, Bruce, it’s not because you’re a man without Meta abilities,” she snapped, frustration boiling beneath the surface. “It has absolutely nothing to do with that and you know it. It’s because I know Ra’s will come straight for you and my father will too.”

“Let them,” he said. “I’ve dealt with Ra’s before and I’ll deal with him again.”

“And what about my father, Bruce?” she shouted, whirling on her heel to face him. “What are you going to do when the god of the Underworld…my father…comes after you just because you decided to fall in love me?”

Bruce closed the distance between them, his hands finding her upper arms. “Diana, you are my world,” he told her, his tone broking no room for argument. “I did not then, and I do not now regret falling in love with you or making a life with you. Loving you…marrying you…having children with you…it’s been the greatest joy of my entire life.

“I will face your father and make sure he understands that. I’m not giving you or our family up for any reason. I will fight him no matter what it takes because I love you, Diana. I will not lose you.”

“And do you think that I feel any less about you?” she demanded to know. “You mean absolutely everything to me, Bruce. I can’t let you go up against my father, knowing that he’ll try to kill you.”

“He can try, but it won’t work,” he confidently told her. “I have a few tricks up my sleeve, princess. I’m not going down that easily.”

“I don’t want you to go down at all,” she sadly replied.

“Hey, guys,” Jason called as he and Artemis approached. “We have some pretty big news that you’re going to want to hear.”

“And you’re not going to like it,” Artemis added as they walked up the platform steps.

“Of course not,” Bruce muttered under his breath as he turned to face them. “Might as well add to the trouble we already have to deal with.”
His gaze settled on the newly arrived couple, immediately sensing a change in them. It was evident that there had been an evolution in their relationship with the way that they looked at each other. His sons seemed to find the most inopportune times to progress a relationship.

“What is it?” Diana asked, her forehead creasing with worry.

“We think we found the guy who set the bombs in your car and the embassy,” Jason began. “He’s Phaedra’s boyfriend Jordon Whitten.”

Diana stared at them in stunned disbelief. “What?”

“We think Phaedra might be involved in all this,” Artemis informed her.

“Phaedra?” Bruce said with a growl to his voice and sneer on his lips. “I should’ve known it was her. It makes sense that it would be someone on the inside.”

“Well, not totally. There’s also someone on the outside,” Jason revealed. “We searched Phaedra’s apartment last night. We couldn’t find anything linking her to the attacks on Diana, but when we were leaving, we ran into an old friend of yours.”

“I saw Aresia,” Artemis revealed.

“So Aresia is alive,” Diana spat out with disdain.

“We chased her, but she threw some sort of smoke bomb,” Artemis told them. “When we got past it, she was gone.”

“Who could’ve saved her from that airplane?” Jason asked.

“Diana’s two biggest enemies who would have the ability to pull something like that off are Ares and Circe,” Bruce replied, turning to his wife. “Do you think this could be Ares’ handiwork?”

Diana shook her head as she thought about it. “It would have to be,” she decided. “Circe was still imprisoned in the Underworld when Aresia launched her attack against the men of this world.”

“There could be others that you’re just not thinking of,” Artemis suggested. “There could be another one of your gods who has it out for you that you just don’t know about yet.”

“I’ll need to speak with my mother to see if she has any ideas,” Diana determined.

“The question now is what do we do about Phaedra,” Jason interjected. “There is no way that she doesn’t know that her boyfriend is the one behind the bombings.”

“I’m going to talk to her and find out what in Hera is going on,” Diana stated, fury coursing through her veins. “She will answer to me if she is indeed culpable in any of this.”

“You’re not going there alone, princess,” Bruce told her. “We have no idea what their end game is. Besides, Aresia may have been given special abilities that we don’t know about yet. There’s no telling what you would be walking into. It could be some sort of trap.”

“We can handle both of them,” Artemis ground out, her hands fisted at her sides.

“But we don’t even know how we’re going to find Aresia,” Jason pointed out. “Phaedra will be easy to pin down, but Aresia is going to be far more difficult. I doubt that Phaedra will just give up Aresia’s location.”
“She will when I get a hold of her,” Artemis spat out.

“I think the first step is bringing Phaedra here to the manor,” Bruce suggested. “Have her come over this afternoon to discuss plans for rebuilding the embassy. While she’s here, Jason and Artemis can go back to Phaedra’s apartment and see if they can track down Aresia from there.”

“When you find her, Aresia is mine,” Diana stated with a steely grate to her voice.

“I’ll try to restrain myself, but I’m not making any promises,” Artemis stated.

Jason laid a hand on Artemis’s forearm. “Come on,” he told her. “We’ve got some time to kill. Let’s go workout for a while.”

Artemis’s lips twisted into a smirk. “If you think you can handle me,” she replied.

“I know I can, Red,” he shot back as they walked away.

Diana stared at the couple in stunned disbelief, turning to look at her husband. “What just happened?”

“They’re in love,” Bruce said with a frown.

“I think it’s cute,” she decided.

“I think it’s going to be a disaster,” Bruce grumbled, turning his attention to the other matter at hand. “Damian, you can come out now. I know you’re there.”

Damian came out of the shadows, a sulking expression on his face. “How did you know I was there?”

“I always know,” Bruce stated. “Did you finish with the new exercises I gave you to try?”

“Yah, they were easy,” Damian replied with an indifferent shrug of a shoulder.

“That was just the first level,” his father informed him. “We’ll move on to the next level tomorrow.”

“Aren’t you going to be busy trying to find my mother and my grandfather,” Damian pointedly asked, his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“Yes, we are, but I’m still going to make time for my children,” he firmly stated.

“Do you know where Ra’s or your mother could be?” Diana asked him, her tone gentle but not in a patronizing way. She hoped that by talking to him like an adult and being open and honest with him he just might meet them halfway one of these times.

Damian averted his eyes, stuffing his hands into his sweatshirt pockets. “They could be anywhere,” he grudgingly confessed, his gaze falling on Bruce. “My grandfather has more hideouts than you have cars.”

“Do you remember where any of them are located?” she prompted him again. “Anything you can give to help us would be greatly appreciated. Your grandfather is planning on wearing Hades’ armor in order to harness his power. It’s a very dangerous thing for him to do. Hades will take over your grandfather’s mind and body. There will be no getting him back if that happens. I know it’s unfair to you, but we need your help in stopping him, Damian.”
Damian released a sigh, knowing that he was running out of time. He needed to decide which side he was going to be on—with the Ra’s or the Wayne’s…his mother or his father. He felt like he was in a no-win situation no matter how he looked at it. He was going to lose something no matter which side he chose.

He looked up at Diana, finding compassion in her eyes. It wasn’t something that was used to seeing in a mother figure’s gaze. While his own mother was very loving and kind to him, there was always a certain coldness in her eyes that never seemed to leave her.

“I honestly don’t know where they are,” he admitted, his shoulders sinking with a sense of defeat. “There are at least ten different places I can think of off the top of my head and about a dozen more that I probably don’t know about.”

Diana placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder, squeezing it gently. “It’s all right, Damian,” she reassured him. “I know you’re in a very tough spot right now. We don’t want to make it anymore difficult than it already is, but if you happen to think of something please let us know.”

Damian nodded his head as Diana walked away, leaving him alone with his father. “I’m sorry you’re in such a hard position,” Bruce echoed his wife’s sentiment. “I know it can’t be easy having to choose between your mother and father. I know Ra’s and Talia think that what they’re doing is right, but it isn’t, Damian…not when it means that so many people will get hurt in the process.”

“But if it means a better world in the process, isn’t it worth it in the end?” he asked, trying to process it all.

“No, Damian,” Bruce adamantly stated. “Nothing is worth a better world if it means destroying the lives of those who are already living here. Life is far too precious to throw it away just because your grandfather doesn’t value it.”

Damian nodded his head in understanding, doing his best to reconcile everything that he’d ever been taught with what he was seeing displayed now. “I guess so,” he muttered.

“Why don’t you go upstairs and get cleaned up for lunch,” he suggested.

Bruce watched as Damian walked away, his heart hurting for his son. He couldn’t begin to imagine how hard all of this must be for him, trying to figure out which is right and which is wrong when all he’s ever known is Ra’s al Ghul’s way.

Whatever happened, he wasn’t going to give up on his son and helping him to find the right path.

Batcave; August 31st, 12:02 EST

“You’re not even trying.” Jason taunted her. “You won’t break me.”

Artemis snorted in disagreement as she smirked at him. “That’s what you think.”

“Well, you won’t break me very easily,” he amended, hoping that it was true.

He knew he was good and could take her, but he also knew that she was good and had incredible strength. He just hoped she remembered that fact when she got her hands on him, tempering her strength so as not to break him in two.

Artemis lunged at him, Jason side-stepping her maneuver. She whirled on her heel, her elbow finding his back. He grunted in response to the strike, turning and swinging his leg out in an attempt to take hers out from under her.
Artemis leapt into the air at the last second, narrowly missing his attempt to take her down. He was good…she’d give him that much, but she was better, and she was going to show him. She quickly grabbed him by the arm, preparing to throw him over her shoulder only for him to wrap his body around her and taking her by surprise with his move.

Jason wrapped her up in a bear hug from behind, his lips finding her neck and ear. “You smell amazing,” he huskily whispered in her ear.

“Jason,” she admonished him. “Are you even focusing?”

“On you?” he asked. “Most definitely.”

She stifled a chuckle as she tried to maneuver out of his hold on her. He was handsome, charming and very crafty. It was a dangerous combination of qualities especially when he had such an affect on her. She was going to have use his attraction to her to her advantage if she was going to win this match.

She pretended to kiss him, elbowing him instead in the abdomen and forcing Jason to loosen his hold on her. She followed it up with a series of quick kicks and punches that he just as rapidly blocked but just barely. She was fast, keeping him on his toes and forcing him to focus on the match instead of her.

Jason decided to throw in a little street fighting, effectively taking her off guard. He began to press his advantage, backing her up into a corner that he knew she’d have a tough time getting herself back out of. She surprised him when she did a backflip, vaulting herself over him before he could get blocked into said corner.

He spun on his heel, instantly raising his arms to block the assault that he knew would be coming. While she was tempering her strength, it still hurt when she struck. He knew he was going to be bruised from head to toe if he didn’t do something to get the advantage back.

Jason feinted with his left before striking with his right, his knee coming up towards her abdomen. She turned to the side to avoid the blow, Jason taking advantage of her move. He wrapped his arms around her again, holding her in a choke hold.

She attempted to spin out of his hold only for him to take her to the mat. She grinned to herself as she flipped him over, pinning him to the floor. The expression on his face was priceless when he found himself on his back looking up into the face of his opponent.

“How did you do that?” he demanded to know.

She grinned down at him, her lips just inches from his. “I’ll have to teach you some time.”

“Not that I’m complaining, though,” he replied with a leer, his gaze falling to her lips. “If you like to be on top, I’m perfectly happy with that.”

Artemis rolled her eyes as she chuckled at him. “Is that all you think about?”

“When it comes to you…mostly,” he ultimately decided, his hands finding her hips as she straddled his waist. “You have no idea what you do to me, do you?”

“You’re terrible,” she told him with a shake of her head.

“And yet you still find me completely irresistible,” he pointed out with a grin.
“Yah, I guess I kind of do,” she relented, gazing up at the ceiling as if having to really think about it.

While she was pretending to think, Jason abruptly flipped her onto her back, taking control of the situation. Artemis gasped softly with the feel of Jason’s body pressing firmly against hers, his hands finding her wrists and pinning them on either side of her head as he leaned in close to her.

“This could also be fun too,” Jason murmured as he brushed his lips against hers.

Artemis couldn’t contain her laughter as she gazed up into his handsome face. “You’re incorrigible,” she told him. “I can already tell I’m going to have my hands full with you.”

“You have no idea,” he answered her with a smirk.

“Maybe this isn’t a good idea then,” she wondered out loud. “Maybe I should walk away now before it’s too late.”

Jason’s eyes narrowed, a tremble of fear working its way through him. “Artemis…you can’t be serious,” he muttered, hurt flitting through his eyes.

She saw the fear that he was trying so hard to hide. It stabbed at her heart, her hands finding his face. “Hey, I’m only teasing,” she reassured him.

He visibly relaxed with her assurance, his confident smirk returning. “I was going to say…you can’t tell me that you don’t want to be with me,” he replied, grinding his hips against hers and earning another gasp.

“I never said I didn’t,” she softly said. “I just think we should take our time…that’s all.”

“I’ll wait for you for as long as it takes, Red,” he assured her, his expression tender.

She lifted her head, her lips crashing into his. He kissed her back, fully enjoying the feel of her body against his as well as the taste of her. His tongue tangled with hers, both fighting for dominance but neither really caring who won at that point.

His hands roamed over her deadly curves, caressing her and wishing they were skin against skin. He knew it was too soon. They had decided to take things slow, but this was driving him crazy. Kissing her like this…touching her like this and not being able to have her was excruciating but he would definitely die happy.

She moaned as his hands stroked her sides, his mouth devouring her. She was definitely rethinking the whole waiting notion they had agreed on earlier today. Right now, she was on the verge of pinning him to the mat and having her way with him regardless of their mutual decision.

“If you two are done groping each other, lunch is ready,” Bruce announced, standing in the doorway of the training room with a frown on his face.

Jason merely grinned at his father figure as Artemis shoved him off her, sitting up quickly and getting to her feet. “We’ll be right there,” she replied.

“Right,” Bruce dryly replied before turning and leaving.

Jason chuckled, earning a slug to his shoulder from Artemis. “It’s not funny,” she hissed.

“Yes, it is,” he insisted, grabbing her hand as she started to walk away. “Come here.”
Jason pulled her back into his arms and his waiting lips, kissing her hard. Her arms circled his neck, returning his passion as she lost herself in the kiss. “Now!” Bruce yelled from further away in the Batcave.

“Is he always so demanding?” Artemis asked with a scowl as she released her hold on him.

“Pretty much,” Jason replied, taking her hand. “Unless of course your name is Diana.”

“I can hear you, you know,” Bruce yelled.

Artemis rolled her eyes as Jason snickered, exiting the training room. She was more than anxious to eat lunch so they could get to Phaedra’s apartment. Maybe after that she could get him to herself for a little while.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Will Talia come to her senses in time to stop her father? How bad will things get for Bruce and Diana? You’ll just have to wait and see... :)

UP NEXT: Dick and Donna have a fight and Diana faces off against Phaedra to get some answers. What will Jason and Artemis find at Phaedra's apartment?

Thank you all for the reviews! So sorry I haven't been able to respond to all of them. Been a little busy with the #WonderbatMilestones event. Check out my friend SaultnPeppah's AO3 account. She's an amazing #Wonderbat fanfic writer. Give her a read! :)
Chapter 29

Blüdhaven; August 31st, 13:33 EST

Donna looked up from the sandwich she was making at the sound of the apartment door opening. She frowned to herself, wondering who could be here. She didn’t think it could be Dick. He still had another hour of his shift yet before he’d be home.

Wiping her hands on a dish towel, she left the kitchen to find that her husband was indeed home. “Dick!” she cried in shock, her heart nearly stopping at the sight before her. “Are you all right?”

Dick looked down at his uniform shirt before looking up at her. “I’m fine…I swear,” he told her, holding his hands up in defense. “It isn’t my blood, Troia.”

Donna put her hand over her heart, doing her best to calm the pounding that consumed her chest. “You nearly gave me a heart attack,” she said with a scowl, turning on her heel and stalking back to the kitchen. She hated that he worked such a dangerous job, but she guessed it was no different than him going out every night to protect Blüdhaven.

“Donna, I’m so sorry,” he apologized as he followed her, knowing he should’ve called and warned her. “Actually, I kind of forgot it was even there. The chief let me off early today so I could come home to get cleaned up.”

“What happened?” she softly asked, refusing to make eye contact with him.

“Homicide,” he replied, removing his uniform shirt and the undershirt underneath it. “Guy shot his wife because he thought she was having an affair. We tried to talk him down, but it didn’t work. Ended in a horrible shootout.”

Donna’s expression grew sorrowful as she finally turned to look at him, her hand coming to rest against his cheek. “I’m so sorry,” she said. “I know how these types of cases upset you.”

“It was tough,” he agreed with a weary sigh. “Now, two kids are orphans because their dad was paranoid and wouldn’t listen to reason.”

“It’s just so senseless,” she thoughtfully murmured, tears blurring her vision as she thought about the children left behind.

Dick’s hand moved to cup the slight bulge of her stomach as he leaned in and pressed his forehead against her temple. “I’m so sorry,” she said. “I know how these types of cases upset you.”

“I thank my gods every time you come home safe and sound,” she told him, tilting her head slightly to nuzzle her nose against his as her eyes fell closed.

“I know,” he said. “I will always do my very best to come home to you, Troia.”

“You better, Dick Grayson, or I’ll come down to the Underworld and make you wish you had fought harder.”
Dick chuckled softly as his fingers slipped into her hair, his lips seeking out and finding hers. They shared a tender kiss, Donna slanting her head to suck on his bottom lip until he was groaning with pleasure. He gripped her hips firmly, his hand slipping around to squeeze her backside.

Drawing back, Donna smiled softly, kissing him once more. “You realize in a few more months we won’t be able to kiss like this,” she pointed out. “I’ll be bigger than a truck. You won’t be able to get past my big belly to reach my lips.”

Dick chuckled as he pulled her closer to him. “Oh, don’t worry about that, Troia,” he reassured her. “I’ll always find a way to get to you no matter what I have to do. You aren’t getting away with not being kissed or without feeling how much I love you for the next seven months.”

“Hera, no,” Donna agreed. “I’d go crazy if I didn’t get to touch you or make love with you or kiss you like I want to.”

“Well, we can’t have that, now can we?” he uttered with a sexy smirk.

Donna pulled him in for another kiss before finally releasing him. “I’m making lunch,” she said. “Do you want a sandwich?”

“Sure,” he replied. “I’m going to get a quick shower and I’ll be right back.”

Donna swatted him on his backside as he walked past her. “Hurry it up, Officer Grayson,” she sternly stated. “I’m not going to wait all afternoon for you.”

Dick whirled around, grasping hold of her hand and pulling her off balance as he drew her to him. “You could always join me in the shower you know.”

She giggled as he tried to trickle her sides, kissing her in an attempt to persuade her. “I’d love nothing more, but we have work to do this afternoon.”

“We do?” he questioned her with a frown. “What work?”

“House-hunting remember?”

“Oh, yah…I forgot,” he mumbled.

“You tend to forget a lot of things.”

“Only when I’m in your beautiful presence,” he replied with a grin, wiggling his eyebrows at her.

“You are hopeless,” she said with a chuckle. “Now, scoot you. No more distractions. These babies are coming in seven months and we have to be prepared.”

“I know…I know,” he agreed with a reluctant sigh. “I just can’t help it. You’re just so damn sexy and even more so now that you’re carrying my babies.”

Donna grinned with his compliment, hoping that he would still think that way when she was eight months along. “You always know the right the to say, don’t you?”

“Not always,” Dick confessed. “I usually end up with my foot in my mouth.”

“That’s very true,” she replied. “Now, go!”

Dick stole another kiss before racing for the bathroom. Stripping, he took a quick shower, drying off and getting changed into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt before heading back to the kitchen. He
found Donna and a sandwich already waiting for him at the bar.

He sat down on one of the barstools to find his wife looking through a real-estate magazine. “So, what kind of house are you looking for?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted as she flipped through the book. “I guess I’ll just know it when I see it. What did you have in mind?”

“Well, I think we definitely need a two-story,” he decided. “With four of us, we’re going to need the room. Besides, you never know how many more kids we might decide to have.”

“Hey, now,” she said with pointed look at her husband. “Can we just get through this pregnancy first before we start thinking about having any more?”

“Anything you want,” he agreed. “You are the one carrying them so I guess you get the biggest vote.”

“Thank you for that,” she muttered with a roll of her eyes.

“Do you want to stay in Blüdhaven or would you prefer to be in Gotham so you can be closer to your sister and our family?”

Donna looked up at him, a little stunned by the question. “I think that’s a decision that maybe you should be making. I don’t want to be the one to make such an important decision for you. You’ve worked so hard to build a career and a life here in Blüdhaven, Dick. I don’t want to take that away from you.”

“You wouldn’t be,” he insisted. “It’s no longer about me anymore. It’s about us now.”

“That’s really sweet, but I still don’t want you to give up your life here just because of me.”

“It’s not my life here, Don,” he countered. “It stopped being just my life the day I put that ring on your finger. It’s our life now. Besides, I can go anywhere and still be a cop.”

“And Nightwing,” she reminded him. “You aren’t still considering giving it up are you?”

Dick took a bite of his sandwich as he considered it. “I’m not sure,” he thoughtfully replied as he chewed. “There’s a small part of me that wants to walk away from the superhero business and just live a normal life with my wife and our children, but there’s this bigger part of me that doesn’t think I can do that. I just think I would miss it too much. It’s kind of in my blood, you know?”

“I think you would miss too,” she agreed. “How about we see how things go and then decide? There’s no reason to rush into a decision.”

“Well, it wasn’t a decision that was going to be made any time soon anyway,” he told her. “I have a feeling Bruce and Diana are going to need as much help as they can get with Ra’s and Hades.”

“I’m going to be there to help too,” she informed him.

“Whoa…what?” Dick asked, nearly dropping his glass of tea.

“You’re not going to fight the god of the Underworld without me,” she heatedly stated. “Even though I’m pregnant, there has to be something I can do to help in the fight.”

“Yah, stay the hell out of it,” he adamantly declared, his eyes narrowing into a piercing glare.
He could hardly believe what he was hearing. They’d already talked about how she couldn’t get involved in any missions while she was pregnant and now here she was planning to go up against the god of the Underworld in a heated battle to protect the world.

“I’m serious, Dick,” she snapped. “You aren’t fighting Hades without me. Diana needs me and I’m going to be there for her.”

“I’m serious too, Troia,” he said, refusing to back down. “You’re not getting involved in this. End of discussion.”

“What do you mean ‘end of discussion’?” she spat out with a dark glare. “Just because I’m the one who’s pregnant I don’t get a say in any of this? You can’t tell me what to do just because I’m your wife and I’m carrying our children.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Dick ground out, realizing things were rapidly getting out of hand. “You know you can’t get involved in this battle. It’s too great of a risk and you know it. There’s a very good chance some of us won’t come back home. You need to keep yourself and our children out of harm’s way.”

“At the risk of losing my sister or you?” Donna ground out, fighting back the tears she could feel building in the back of her throat as her anger and fear swelled. “Do you honestly think that I can just sit back while all of you risk your lives like that…waiting around to see if my husband and sister are going to come back to me?”

“Why can’t you just let us handle it?” Dick asked, angry and exasperated. “Between me, Bruce, and the League, we can handle Ra’s and Hades. There’s no need for you to be there.”

“I need to be there for my sister, Dick.” Donna stated, refusing to back down. “I am an Amazon. How can I just sit back and not do something? How am I supposed to stay behind while my family goes to war?”

Dick reached over and took her hand in his, his expression growing tender. “I love you more than anything in this whole world, Troia. If anything ever happened to you, I…I couldn’t go on with my life. Right now, we need to think of what’s best for you and our children. Just this once I need you to be selfish and think of yourself and our babies.”

Donna drew a shuddering breath, swallowing back the thick lump that clogged her throat. Deep down, she knew that Dick was right, but knowing something was right and trying to accept it were two very different things.

“This really sucks,” she angrily murmured, wiping tears from her eyes. “Our family needs us, and I can’t even be there. You have no idea how hard that is. Diana has always been there for me when I’ve needed her and now when she needs me the most, I can’t do the same for her.”

“I know it’s hard, but everyone agrees that you can’t be a part of this,” he explained, squeezing her hand. “You have a far more imperative part in this than any of us do. You get to protect our children and keep them safe. That’s the most significant role you could ever play.”

“Great,” she muttered with a sigh. “I get to sit back watching and waiting while my husband, sister, and the rest of our family goes to war, wondering if you will be coming home at the end of the day.”

Dick leaned over and kissed her, trying to soothe her worries. “Actually, you won’t be alone.”

Donna gave him a confused look, her brow creasing. “What do you mean?”
“Bruce wants you at the manor with Nicholas and Kaia,” he revealed. “He wants a line of defense at home just in case Hades somehow managed to get past all of us. He’s going to have you and Tim, Damian, Jason and Artemis at the manor as a second line of defense.”

“Wow…does Jason and Artemis know about this yet?”

“I doubt it,” he told her. “If he had, you probably would’ve heard Artemis’s warrior cry of rage from Gotham.”

“She’s going to be so furious,” Donna agreed.

“Just promise me you’ll be careful if Hades does get past us,” Dick said. “Try to let the others handle him if at all possible.”

“I promise,” she reluctantly replied. “Protecting my niece and nephew as well as my own children is my first priority. I guess in a way I am helping Diana.”

Dick nodded in agreement. “It’ll make it far easier going into this without having to worry about you or constantly checking on you to make sure you’re all right.”

“You need to promise me that you’ll be careful too,” she stated. “You have to come back to me and our children, Dick Grayson. Please don’t make me a single parent before our babies are even born.”

Dick leaned in, kissing her gently as he caressed her cheek. “Promise.”

“Good,” she said with a soft smile. “Now, finish eating so we can get going. We have at least ten houses I want to check out this afternoon.”

Dick groaned as he picked up his sandwich again. “I was hoping to get some sexy time with my beautiful wife this afternoon.”

“You can when we get home,” she reassured him. “Consider it something for you to look forward to.”

“Or we could have a little now and a lot more later.”

Donna laughed as she took her empty plate to the sink. “You are insatiable, Dick Grayson.”

“Only when it comes to you, Troia.”

“Good answer,” she told him. “Any other answer would’ve gotten you a few night’s sleeping alone on the couch…probably more.”

“A fate worse than death avoided.”

Donna leaned over the counter, kissing him sweetly on the tip of his nose. “Enough talk,” she replied. “Let’s go so we can come home. If you’re good, you can have me all to yourself until you start patrol.”

Dick quickly finished what was left of sandwich, taking his plate to the sink. With any luck, they could check out these houses in two or three hours tops. Then, he could have his wife to ravage for the rest of the day before he had to leave to start patrol.

This day was definitely looking up.
Diana stared out the window, her thoughts numerous and chaotic but all containing varying degrees of anger. She sent up a silent prayer to every god she could think of for the patience she would need to get through this. She greatly feared losing her temper and beating Phaedra for all the pain and heartache that she had caused everyone.

The problem was that the more she thought about it the more furious she became. It was all she could do to keep from slamming her fists through a wall. She had to keep herself from choking the woman that she had trusted to help her with the embassy only for her to stab her in the back.

A pair of strong arms slipping around her from behind caused her to grow tense only for her to relax a little. His lips found her ear, kissing it softly. “It’ll be okay, princess,” he whispered.

“It doesn’t feel like it,” she murmured.

Bruce tightened his hold on her, pressing his chest more firmly against her back as he nuzzled her neck. “I know, but it will get better eventually.”

Diana chuckled softly despite her anger, causing them both to shake. “What’s so funny?” he asked her.

“Have we really been married that long that we’ve finally switched roles?” she pointed out.

“You’re usually the dark, brooding one and I’m the optimist.”

“I guess that means we’ll need to get a divorce now,” he told her. “An optimistic Batman just can’t happen. It’s not natural, princess. It would really damage the terrifying image I’ve worked so hard to perfect.”

Diana turned around, her blue eyes blazing darkly as she poked him firmly in the chest. “Don’t you ever bring that word up again, Bruce Wayne,” she warned him. “You are stuck with me forever whether you like it nor not. No divorce.”

Bruce grabbed hold of her forefinger, bringing it to his lips to kiss the tip as he gazed deeply into her eyes. “Well, it’s a good thing that I kind of like you then, right?”

“Kind of like me?” she questioned him, her sapphire eyes narrowing dangerously. “You better be madly in love with me, Bruce.”

“No, not just madly…also desperately…deeply…irrevocably…eternally,” he murmured, his lips drawing closer until finally capturing hers in a heated kiss.

“That’s an even better answer,” she breathlessly decided. “Now, why are you being so optimistic lately? It’s not like you at all.”

“I’m not being optimistic,” he countered. “I just know that we will win in the end.”

“So, it’s your confidence talking for you?” she surmised.

“Yes,” he replied. “Besides, I need you to be yourself again.”

Diana tilted her head as she thoughtfully studied him. “What do you mean?”

“I need your strength of spirit,” he revealed. “You give me faith when I have none. Your smile gives me hope and your compassionate heart reminds me of your love for me.”
“Bruce…” she murmured, taken aback by his heartfelt confession.

“You keep me going when things are the bleakest and there feels like there’s no way out,” he confessed. “I just have to look to you and I know we can do anything. I just need you to be you again.”

“I’m so sorry,” she told him, feeling guilty about not being stronger for him…for allowing her pain to blind her to her husband’s needs.

“You have nothing to apologize for,” he told her, his hand moving to cup her jaw. “I know how painful all of this has been for you, Diana. You’ve been put through hell these last few weeks and we have Ra’s and Hades yet to face. I just want to make sure you don’t give up hope because if you do then we’ve already lost the battle.”

“I’ve kind of lost my way, but never my hope,” she reassured him, her fingers caressing his cheek.

She met his lips in a kiss filled with love and assurance, knowing that they would face these next coming days together. As they began to lose themselves in the passion that was gradually building between them, they were interrupted by Alfred.

“Pardon the interruption, Miss Diana, but Miss Phaedra has arrived,” he announced.

“Thank you, Alfred,” she replied. “You can bring her here to my office.”

“As you wish, Miss,” he said with a nod before turning on his heel to leave.

Diana took a few steps away from Bruce, trying to organize her thoughts and how she wanted to approach this. It was going to be quite difficult to make Phaedra give up her secrets, but Diana refused to be denied what she needed.

Under Amazonian law, Phaedra was bound to answer her as the princess or be subject to punishment. It was her decision whether she chose to obey the demands of the princess or accept the punishment deemed necessary by Amazonian law.

Either way, Phaedra was not going to get out of this without paying the consequences for her actions.

“Miss Phaedra,” Alfred announced as he stepped aside to reveal the Amazon to Bruce and Diana.

Phaedra appeared to be a little taken off guard with Bruce’s presence in the room, but quickly tuck the discomfort away, hiding it behind a smile. “Princess Diana, it’s good to see you,” she said as she stepped further into the room, glancing back and forth between Bruce and Diana.

“Have a seat, Phaedra,” Diana coolly replied.

“Is there a problem, Princess Diana?” she innocently inquired as she took a seat on the couch.

“You could say that,” she began as she came to stand before her, Bruce moving to stand behind her and to the right.

Bruce was going to let Diana handle this alone, but she had insisted that he be there. She knew that between the two of them they would be better able to intimidate her into telling them what they wanted to know. Bruce, however, was certain that Diana could do that by herself. She could be terrifying in her own right when the need called for it.
He wanted to support her, though, in anyway she needed and if she needed him here to interrogate Phaedra then he would be here for her. Diana had told him that she had also wanted him here in case he picked up on something that she might miss. He had a knack for picking up on things that others usually overlooked, filling in pieces that could help solve all of this.

“I want to know what you know about these attacks on me and the embassy,” Diana stated, folding her arms against her chest as she stared her sister down.

Phaedra glanced at Bruce was staring at her with an equally piercing glare. Though, if truth be told, she found his slightly more intimidating than the princess’s. There was a darkness in him that the princess didn’t possess. “What do you mean?” she asked, her brow knitting together in confusion.

“We have reason to believe that you are involved in the attempts to shut down the embassy,” Diana explained with an icy chill to her voice that was incongruent with the fury blazing in her eyes like twin infernos.

Phaedra appeared completely shocked by the accusation, her eyes widening in disbelief. “Why would you even think such a thing about me?” she demanded to know as shock gave way to indignation and anger. “I left my home to come to Gotham to help you.”

“We know some of your sisters are behind the threats to Diana and the attempt to shut down the embassy, Phaedra,” Bruce told her.

“What makes you think that I’m one of them?” she asked. “Why would I come here to help you if I didn’t believe in what you and Queen Hippolyta are trying to do?”

“Because you make the perfect spy to infiltrate the embassy and get close to me,” Diana countered, undaunted by her proclamation of innocence. “You’re sweet and unassuming…eager to please and unsuspecting. It makes you the perfect person to send to sabotage my plans for the embassy.”

“I would never do such a thing,” she insisted, bolting upright off the couch and onto her feet. “I swear on my life, princess. I would never betray you.”

“Are you also going to claim that you don’t that know Aresia is still alive or that your boyfriend Jordon is an experienced bomb expert,” Bruce stated.

Phaedra visibly paled for a brief moment before her face turned into stony wrath. She crossed her arms against her chest in a defensive pose as she faced off against the couple. “What gave it away?” she questioned them, the tone becoming hard. “Has Jordon been running his mouth all over Gotham?”

Diana’s fingers curled into white-knuckled fists as she slowly closed the distance between them, her blood afame with rage for the part this woman…this sister of hers…had played in this chaotic nightmare. If they’d been on Themyscira, she’d have challenged her to a fight, but this wasn’t Themyscira. This was her home…the home she shared with her husband and the family that they had made together.

Bruce didn’t even flinch or move to stop his wife as she approached Phaedra. He knew he didn’t need to. He knew his wife…knew that she would not deliver punishment with as irate as she was at that moment, knowing that cooler heads needed to prevail for that. Besides, whatever Diana decided to do with Phaedra would be far less than what he would like to do with her.

“How dare you,” Diana seethed. “I trusted you…helped you set up a new life here in Gotham. You were my friend…my sister. You have betrayed me, your sisters, and your queen. Now, you are
nothing to me. You are no longer an Amazon."

“I did what I felt was best for Themyscira and the good of my sisters,” Phaedra spat out with great hatred. “You have the audacity to condemn me, but you stole your mother’s armor and fled your home in the dead of night to assist Man’s World. You desecrated yourself and your heritage by falling in love with this demon of a man…giving your body to him to do with as he pleases… lowering yourself to bear his children like some common whore.”

Bruce’s fury ignited like an inferno with the way Phaedra was speaking to Diana. He took a step closer, positioning himself closer to his wife. While he knew that Diana could handle herself, he was more than prepared to jump in and deal with Phaedra himself. No one spoke to his wife like that and got away with it.

Phaedra glowered defiantly at Bruce as if begging him to fight her, but Diana’s hand sharply striking her face and knocking her to the ground took care of that notion. Phaedra looked up at the Princess of the Amazons towering over her with rage in her eyes. She had never seen Diana look so furious before. It was terrifying to behold, but she refused to allow it to show.

“Don’t you ever speak of me or my husband in such a manner,” Diana hissed like a deadly viper about to strike its prey. “You will be immediately returned to Themyscira for trial.”

Phaedra slowly got to her feet. “You can do whatever you want to me, but we will prevail no matter what you do. You and your mother will not win in the end. There is a war coming, princess…one that you set in motion the moment you gave up your heritage to mate with this vile male.”

“You mean against Kyriaki and her followers?” Diana shot back, watching as Phaedra’s expression changed from haughty to shocked. “Yes, Phaedra, we know that Kyriaki is the one leading your little band of rebellion against my mother.”

Pulling a dagger, Phaedra lunged at Diana who just as swiftly grabbed her by the throat with one hand, her other breaking Phaedra’s wrist and forcing her to drop her weapon before pulling her in closer. “You won’t win,” Phaedra growled, cradling her broken wrist with her other hand. “You might as well give up because your mother is going to die, and you will soon follow her to Elysium.”

Diana tossed her back to the floor like she was nothing more than an insignificant piece of trash. “You and your mutinous sisters are no threat to me or my mother. We will defeat you.”

Phaedra’s lips curled into an amused sneer. “Your confidence will be your downfall,” she spat out. “If you knew what was about to happen, you wouldn’t be so self-assured, princess.”

“What are you planning, Phaedra?” Bruce demanded to know, coming to stand beside Diana. “Is Aresia going to do something?”

“Do you honestly think I would tell you anything?” she uttered with a scowl. “You are nothing but a pathetic piece of dung.”

Diana’s strike was swift and sure, her foot connecting with Phaedra’s jaw. The injured Amazon fell backwards, opening her eyes to find Diana’s foot firmly planted on her chest pinning her to the floor as she stood over her with a fury so white-hot it was paralyzing in its intensity.

“You will not speak of my husband this way,” she hissed with a deadly calm edge that sent a shiver up Phaedra’s spine. “He is the husband of the Princess of the Amazons. Therefore, he is considered
royalty, my equal in every way and you will show him the respect due him.”

Bruce’s head snapped to the side to stare in disbelief at his wife. He’d never really realized that he would actually be considered royalty on Themyscira. Men had been banned from the island from the moment the Amazons made it their home. It wasn’t until Nicholas had been born that Hippolyta had retracted that mandate, allowing him, Alfred, and the boys to come to the island to visit.

To be considered royalty now was startling to say the least. It gave him something to think about if Queen Hippolyta ever passed away. They would definitely have to think about what to do should Diana need to consider moving back to Themyscira to assume the throne. He would be co-ruler with his wife. It was dumbfounding to think about.

“Now, where is Aresia?” Diana demanded, her voice breaking through Bruce’s thoughts. “I know you two have been working together to take me and the embassy down. Tell me where she is.”

“I will tell you nothing,” Phaedra snapped. “You might as well kill me because I will not betray my sisters.”

“You mean like you betrayed me and my mother…your other sisters who don’t believe the way you and your cohorts do?”

Her words gave Phaedra pause to think, but only momentarily. “I am doing what is best for my sisters. You and your mother have brainwashed them into following you and your deluded ways. You have forgotten your heritage…turned your back on your sisters all for the love of a pathetic man and a world that does not deserve you.”

Diana’s expression turned somber…sorrowful. “You just don’t understand, do you, Phaedra?” she said, her voice losing the vehemence that it had just held. Now, it was just filled with anguish. “It’s not what anyone deserves in this world. It’s about doing what is right and what I’m doing with my life is absolutely right in every way.”

Diana turned incredibly sad eyes on her husband as she removed her foot from Phaedra’s chest. She turned away from her fallen sister, her heart heavy with how things were turning out with the sisters and home that she had always loved.

With her back turned, Phaedra grabbed the dagger that had fallen to the floor with her good hand, lunging at Diana once more in a futile attempt to end her life. Bruce was on her in less than a blink of an eye, slamming her back down on the floor with the kind of fierce rage only found in a husband protecting his wife.

“Don’t attempt anything like that ever again,” he growled with a ferocity that caused her to tremble despite herself.

Releasing her, Bruce straightened up, his eyes never leaving hers. “I’ll take her back to Themyscira and return as quickly as possible,” Diana told him, her hand coming to rest on his forearm in an effort to calm him.

“No need, princess,” Phaedra told her a moment before plunging the dagger deep into her chest.

“No!” Diana cried, diving for her sister an attempt to stop her.

Phaedra grinned up at the princess, blood pouring from the wound in her chest. “You will not… survive this…” she managed to choke out. “You will not…win.”
Diana used her hands to apply pressure on the wound, doing her best to try to stop the bleeding, but it was in vain. “Stay with me, Phaedra!” Diana yelled, trying to keep her sister alive. “Don’t do this!”

Diana watched as the light of life vanished from Phaedra’s eyes, her lifeless body lying on the floor of her office. She continued to apply pressure to the wound, doing her best to staunch the bleeding, but she was beyond saving.

“Diana,” Bruce gently called her name, his hand coming to rest on her shoulder. “Diana…it’s too late. She’s gone.”

“It can’t end this way,” she ground out as she began CPR, trying to save her sister as tears blurred her vision.

It couldn’t end like this…not like this. As furious as she was with her, she didn’t want her sister to die. Guilt and anguish welled up from somewhere deep inside of her, overwhelming her like a flood threatening to drown her. Tears spilled down her cheeks as she finally sat back on her heels, staring down at her fallen sister. She glanced down at the blood covering her hands, her chest beginning to heave.

Though she had betrayed her and her mother…destroyed the embassy they had worked so hard to build, Phaedra was still her sister. She had known her all her life, had believed that she was her friend only to discover that she never truly was.

“Diana,” Bruce softly murmured her name, his hands gently wrapping around her arms from behind her to pull her up onto her feet.

Diana went willingly, her mind numb and her heart broken. Had all of her choices over the years come down to this? Had she truly done this to her own sisters? Her home? Her mother? Had her selfish desire to marry Bruce and build a life with him brought about the war that was about to tear her home apart?

She swiftly turned into her husband’s arms, burying herself in his embrace as the dam finally broke. All the pent-up anger, hurt, and pain came pouring out of her in that moment, her body trembling uncontrollably as perceived failures of the past collided with fear of what the future held for her and her husband when Ra’s unleashed Hades from the Underworld.

She had given up so much to be with the man that she loved…to share this amazing life with him. Would she end up losing him in the end when Hades finally escaped his prison?

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Buckle up b/c things are really going to escalate from here on out!

UP NEXT: BWAHAAHAHA!!!!
Chapter 30

Underworld; September 2nd, 10:45 EST

Hades sat on his throne drinking his wine and biding his time. He could actually feel the subtle pull on his power growing stronger with every passing day. The blood moon was only three days away...three days until whoever held his armor donned it.

He would finally be free from his prison. He had great plans once he was released, plans that started with his daughter and her husband...his grandchildren. He slowly dragged his tongue along his lower lip as he considered everything and where he would go next after that.

He was also anxious to find his beautiful bride Persephone. He missed his wife greatly and longed to see her again. She had been gone for months and he wanted her back with him where she should always be. He knew she would be returning to him in another month or so, but it wasn’t soon enough for his liking.

An unexpected knock at the door drew him out of his brooding thoughts. “Enter!” he bellowed, taking another drink of wine from his chalice.

A servant peaked his head inside, fear alight in his eyes. “My lord Hades,” he solemnly said. “You have a visitor.”

“Who is it?” Hades demanded to know, stunned by the news. No one ever came to the Underworld to visit him unless they wanted something from him.

“Uncle,” the visitor greeted him with a grin as he boldly pushed past the servant, barging into Hades’ throne room.

Hades stood to his feet as his nephew approached him. “Ares,” he greeted him, surprised by the identity of his guest. “What brings you to my realm, nephew?”

“Can’t I visit my favorite uncle once in a while?” Ares inquired with a sly grin.

Hades’ dark gaze narrowed suspiciously at the god of war, his arms folding against his chest. “You never come to visit me unless you want something. What is it that brings you here this time?”

“I actually have some news to share with you that I think will greatly please you,” Ares replied with a wicked smirk on his face. “I just thought I would share it with you.”

“Really? What would that be?” he asked, his tone skeptical.

“As you are well aware, I have been plotting to bring your daughter down for some time and I am very close to accomplishing that goal,” he revealed.

Hades’ dark gaze shot daggers at his nephew as he studied him. “Careful, Ares,” he warned him. “Chose your next words carefully. While there is no love loss between me and my daughter, she is still my daughter.”
Ares held his hands up defensively, taking on an air of innocence. “No insult intended, uncle, but Diana has been a major thorn in my side for far too long. I’m just paying her back.”

“How so?” Hades cautiously inquired, wondering where Ares was going with all this.

“I saved a certain Amazon from death some time ago,” Ares explained. “She was bent on destroying the entire male population. I saved her from certain death and have enlisted her help in taking down your daughter. She was only too willing to help.”

“What have you done, nephew?” Hades growled.

Ares began a slow stroll around his uncle’s enormous throne room, his hands clasped behind his back as he considered his response. “Well, I will tell you that Diana won’t know what’s coming until it’s far too late.”

Hades lifted his chin as he gazed down his nose at Ares, wondering just what his nephew’s plans entailed. “What are you talking about?”

“I have coordinated a nightmare that will tear her apart at the seams,” Ares shared. “I’m going straight for her heart.”

“What are you the reason that someone has gathered all my armor and weapons?”

“No,” Ares replied with a shake of his head as he paused to look at his uncle. “That was just a lucky coincidence.”

“Then what sort of trouble have you concocted for my daughter?” Hades questioned him.

While at odds with each other, Diana was still his daughter and he didn’t necessarily appreciate any of the gods meddling with her. At the same time, if whatever Ares had planned for her benefited him any way, he was definitely open to hearing what his nephew had so cleverly devised.

“Let’s just say that you should have little trouble when Ra’s al Ghul puts your armor on,” Ares divulged. “Diana will have her hands full especially now that Themyscira is practically a powder keg set to explode any day now. Queen Hippolyta won’t survive the battle that is about to take place.”

Hades thoughtfully stroked his beard as he considered the unexpected bit of news. “So, she’ll be otherwise occupied fighting against her sisters,” he murmured, more to himself than to his guest.

“Among other things,” Ares cryptically answered him.

“I had hoped to greet my daughter and her husband first upon my release, but I guess our family reunion could be delayed a bit,” Hades supposed, the more he thought about it. The idea of Hippolyta being dethroned and reaping what she deserved brought him more joy than he could have imagined.

Ares’ dark eyes gleamed as he studied his uncle, seeing how intrigued he was with his plan. “I’m certain you have some gland plans of your own that you’re anxious to bring to fruition, Hades.”

“You have no idea, nephew,” Hades replied with a malicious grin that spread across his face. “No idea at all.”

_Batcave; September 2nd, 13:22 EST_
Bruce stood before his work table, his focused gaze glued to the task at hand. He could feel the minutes…the seconds slipping by at a fevered paced, far faster than he cared to dwell on. They were rapidly running out of time. A war loomed on the horizon, one that had a high probability of seeing casualties.

He shuddered just thinking about it. This had the potential to be the deadliest fight that they’d ever faced, and he was more than determined to make sure that everyone made it safely home when all the dust had finally settled on the battlefield.

Finishing another batarang, he carefully set it aside with the others and began the tedious process all over again, attaching tiny electrodes that would deliver a high voltage charge of electricity. He wasn’t so arrogant to think that it would stop Ra’s or Hades, but it would hopefully slow them down just a bit, buying them critical time.

He also had several other things up his sleeve that he had yet to discuss with anyone, not even his wife. He had no plans to tell her about it either at this point. He didn’t want to upset her anymore than she already was right now.

Despite the Amazon’s betrayal, Phaedra’s death had been difficult for Diana. She was struggling greatly, but she refused to talk about it with him. He was certain she felt responsible for all the unrest that had been steadily building on Themyscira. Phaedra’s accusations had cut her deeply, her words haunting her even now.

He knew that Diana didn’t regret falling in love with him, marrying or having children with him, but Phaedra’s words had Diana second guessing the decisions that she had made. He couldn’t help feeling somewhat guilty as well, wondering if there was something that he should have done differently…anything that would have made things easier for Diana and easing the tensions on Themyscira.

So many questions and doubts bombarded his mind the more he thought about it, but one thing he knew with absolute certainty—he loved her more than his own life and he wasn’t about to give her up for anything in this world. No matter what it took they would find a way to deal with all this, making things right with her sisters on Themyscira.

“Just finished the bolas,” Tim said as he approached, Damian following on his heels. “What’s next?”

“We need to check all the smoke and incendiary bombs,” Bruce replied. “We need to make sure that we have plenty of supplies. There’s no predicting how long this fight is going to take. I don’t want to run out.”

“I think we have enough to last us a whole year,” Tim decided, his hands coming to rest on his hips as his gaze swept over the work table covered with Bat gadgets.

“Hopefully, it’ll be enough to get me through the battle,” Bruce muttered more to himself than to his sons.

“You are not going without us, Bruce,” Tim adamantly stated with a frown. “We’re all going to be there to help take down Ra’s al Ghul.”

“I’m going too,” Damian added, not about to be left out. This was his grandfather they were going up against. He had to do something to try to keep him from losing control. “I have to try to save my grandfather. If what you told me about this armor is true, he’ll lose his mind and never come back.”
Bruce continued to work on the batarang in his hand. “No,” he adamantly stated. “I need you two here to protect the little ones and the manor while Diana and I are gone.”

“You have got to be kidding me!” Damian nearly yelled, a scowl etched firmly on his face, one that was so similar to his father’s. “You are not going to keep me here while you go fight. I am not staying behind to babysit a couple of toddlers while you go fight my grandfather.”

Bruce a deep breath before turning to face his two sons, his expression like chiseled stone. “You are not getting involved in this—neither of you are,” he evenly stated, his tone broking no room for argument as he glared at his sons. “First of all, I need to know that this home and those inside of it are safe while we go stop Ra’s. I’m leaving that responsibility to the best that I have…the people that I trust the most.

Secondly, I refuse to allow Hades to be anywhere near my children. He is already going to be hellbent on going after Diana and myself. I’m not about to let my children be there for him to focus on.”

A measure of Damian’s anger dissipated in the wake of his father’s confidence in him, but only somewhat. He still resented the fact that he was being forced to stay behind with the little kids. He was a skilled fighter…had been trained as an assassin by his grandfather. There had to be something he could do to help stop this from happening.

“I still don’t like this one bit,” Damian sullenly spat out, turning to lean his back against the edge of the work table as he crossed his arms against his chest. He kicked at the cave floor with the toe of his tennis shoe, trying to figure out a way to get around this.

“I can’t have either of you out there in the field worrying about your safety while we try to stop Ra’s,” Bruce told them. “I need to know that Alfred, Nicholas, and Kaia are being protected. I’m trusting you two, Artemis, Jason, and Donna to do that for us.”

“It’s not something that any of us like to accept, but we each need to do our part to make sure that everyone is safe,” Tim told Damian, reluctantly accepting Bruce’s decision as he turned his attention to his father figure. “Do you really think that Hades will attack here?”

“It’s just a gut feeling that I have, but I’m not ruling anything out,” he replied with a shake of his head. “That’s why I want all of you here just in case. I also want Donna to be safe here at the manor as well where you guys can look after her.”

Tim’s lips curl into an amused, knowing grin. “Oh yah…Donna’s gonna love this plan,” he said. “Do Jason and Artemis know about this plan of yours yet?”

“No, not exactly,” Bruce confessed, turning back to his batarangs.

“Can I be here when you tell them?” Tim asked, chuckling.

“You’ll probably be able to hear their response from anywhere within a thousand miles of Gotham,” Bruce responded.

“And yet you don’t seem the least bit concerned about it,” Tim replied.

“Nope,” Bruce flatly stated.

“Hey, where’s mom?” Tim asked. “She’s been awful quiet since Phaedra took her own life. Is she still having a hard time with it?”
“She’s currently destroying my training room,” Bruce muttered as he focused on the batarang in his hand, the sound Diana’s scream of pure fury followed by a loud thud echoing through the cave. “And there goes another punching bag.”

“How many does that make?” Tim questioned him.

“At least five,” Bruce said with a frown as he set aside another finished batarang.

Tim shook his head in amazement, wishing there was something he could do to make his mom feel better. Things had been so rough for her since Talia and Damian arrived and then everything that’s been going on with the now destroyed embassy. “She’s going to break your bank account at this rate.”

“Not likely,” Bruce replied.

Another enraged cry from a certain Amazon in the training alerted them to the fact that she wasn’t doing any better, a loud crash following. “Six,” Tim murmured.

Bruce released a slow breath as his chin fell to his chest. “Can you finish working on these for me?” he asked Tim. “I’m going to talk to her.”

“Good luck with that,” Tim told him. “Just remember to duck when you enter. You never know what might be coming at your head.”

Bruce sighed heavily as he turned to leave. He knew that he needed more than just luck. When Diana refused to talk, there was nothing in heaven or earth that could force her into it. He silently approached the training room, trying to decide how he best wanted to approach this with her.

She was in a very precarious state right now and, if he wasn’t careful, he would be too.

Coming to stand in the doorway of the training room, he kept his jaw clenched tight against the overwhelming desire to let it drop at the site that greeted him. Six training bags lay completely demolished in various spots on the floor, the stuffing strewn everywhere. There were a couple of mirrors on the wall that were cracked and one that was completely shattered, three of his barbells bent like pretzels.

Sitting on the mat in the midst of the destruction was his beautiful princess looking as lost and troubled as ever. Wearing a fitted tank top and workout shorts, her raven hair was pulled back into a ponytail, curly strands fallen free and framing her face. Her knuckles were raw and bleeding, but she didn’t appear to notice or care at that moment.

His heart ached at the sight of her, wishing that there was something he could do to make it all better for her, but there was little he could do especially now. They needed to be prepared for the fight of their lives. He knew they couldn’t do it with her like this. They needed her focused and at her best and right now she was far from it. He didn’t think that he’d ever seen her so beaten down in his life.

Bruce silently entered, closing and locking the door behind him. He didn’t want any intrusions. “Princess,” he gently called to her.

Diana just sat there with her knees bent and pulled up to her chest, her listless blue eyes staring blankly at the wall. She didn’t respond as he moved towards her, didn’t say anything to him as he sat down on the mat next to her. “I like what you’ve done with the place,” he lightly teased her, his elbows coming to rest on his drawn-up knees, his hands clasping as he looked around the room at the destruction his wife had created.
They sat there together like that for several long minutes, neither of them saying anything. Bruce knew that she needed some time right now to come to terms with all that had happened, but he wanted to be there for her, to help her through this if she’d just let him in.

Of course, it wasn’t like he was one to willingly accept support when things became grim. It was something that he was learning to deal with and how to handle it all, but it was still an uphill battle for him. With her, though, he knew it was becoming easier.

Bruce cast a sidelong glance at her as she drew a deep, shuddering breath, releasing it slowly through parted lips. It was the most response that he’d gotten out of her since she cried in his arms after Phaedra took her own life. He could tell Nicholas had detected that something was wrong with his mother, Kaia too little to notice.

Diana had tried to keep her emotions buried deep where the family wouldn’t be able to see them, but it had shown through at times. It was really beginning to worry him. He feared how she would handle facing Ra’s and Hades, what her frame of mind would be when the time came.

He knew it was going to be beyond difficult for her being forced to face her father and sending him back to the Underworld. There was no doubt in his mind that Hades would be coming after him and their children. He just hoped that they would be able to stop him before he got his hands on their family.

He needed his wife to be herself again. He needed his Diana…needed her to be sharp and focused and prepared for the battle of their lives. He knew that he could hardly blame her, though. Someone was clearly bent on breaking her and they were doing a pretty good job of trying to do it. He knew, though, his wife was stronger.

He just had to help her see that, but he feared what the consequences would be if she wasn’t able to regain control once more.

Diana turned to look at him, causing him to meet her gaze. What he found there startled him, causing his breath to hitch. He felt a shiver race through him with the pure predatory look that unexpectedly permeated her sapphire eyes…beautiful orbs that were darkening with a lustful storm that was focused solely on him.

Before he could open his mouth to utter a single word, she pounced him like a lioness, pinning his back to the mat and knocking the wind from his lungs. Her hands rested on his shoulders, her knees on either side of his hips as she gazed down at him.

He stared up at her in stunned disbelief as well as growing excitement, unsure what had just happened, but absolutely certain that he didn’t care at that moment. Her lips abruptly crashed into his, devouring him with a fierce hunger that he felt clear to his toes. It caused his own desire to shoot through his veins like an electrical current.

Kissing him senseless, Diana pulled back enough to grab the hem of her tank top and pulling it up over head. Reaching behind her, she removed her bra, tossing it aside before leaning in to kiss him again. Her lips moved over his like she was starving and only he could satisfy her.

Her fingers worked up beneath his t-shirt, ripping it in two and leaving him bare-chested. She raked her fingernails over his chest before pressing her body against his. Bruce growled low in his throat with the delicious sensation of her breasts smashed against his chest, her hands cradling his face.

His large hands roamed frantically over her back, a question about where all of this was coming
from lingering faintly in the back of his mind. It was quickly dismissed as her tongue thoroughly explored his mouth, pausing to suck on his bottom lip before trailing kisses along his jaw, chin, and down his neck.

He gasped as she raked her teeth over his pectoral muscle, her tongue circling his nipple before closing her lips over it and sucking hard. He arched his back as his hands moved to grip her hips, hanging on for dear life as she tortured him as she pleased.

Whatever he had been expecting when he had first entered the training room to talk to her, this was definitely not it. He wasn’t complaining, though. If this was what she needed from him right now, if she needed to be in control and ravage him senseless, then he was more than happy letting her do whatever she wanted to do to him.

It seemed that whatever she had been struggling with had obviously found some sort of resolution as she yanked his shorts and boxer briefs down past his hips. Not to be out done, he pulled her short and panties down as well, Diana somehow managing to kick them off and leaving herself bare to him.

She slowed her kisses as her breathing grew more exerted, her perfectly sculpted chest heaving as she sat up to gaze down at him. Her sultry gaze locked with his as she gripped his hardened length and shifted her hips, guiding him to her entrance.

Mesmerized, he watched with rapt attention as her eyes fluttered closed, ecstasy filling her as she slowly took every inch of him inside of her. Settling fully over his groin, she opened her eyes to look at him, her lips quirking into a hazy, pleasure-filled smile that caused his hips to buck involuntarily.

There was no denying she was truly a goddess, perfectly and divinely created and she was all his. He reached up to cup her breasts, gently kneading them and earning a breathless gasp of pleasure. She covered one of his hands with hers as he caressed her.

“I love you, Bruce…more than you can even begin to imagine,” she softly confessed to him, her fingers lovingly tracing the curve of his face. “I regret nothing that has happened since leaving Themyscira. This is my life and all I ever wanted was to share it with you.”

Bruce’s throat constricted with her heartfelt admission, his right hand leaving her breast to snake its way up her neck to cup the length of her jaw. “I love you, Diana,” he vowed, finding it difficult to make his voice work. “I only want to share my life with you too.”

She smiled softly at him, laying down on top of him and kissing him with a slow sensuality that made his head spin. He readily returned her passion, rolling her onto her back as he began to make love to her. If destroying the training room was what it took to help her get her thoughts and emotions sorted out, then she could burn the whole thing down for all he cared.

Training rooms could be replaced, but his Diana couldn’t.

_Gotham; Sept 3rd, 02:44 EST_

“Don’t lose him,” Diana adamantly stated, her gauntleted fingers wrapping around the door handle of the Batmobile, her jaw clenched with frustration.

“I don’t plan on it, princess,” Batman snapped as they tore through the streets of Gotham.

Sheets of rain poured from the heavens in a torrential downpour that made visibility more than a little difficulty. Lightning repeatedly created a jagged streak across the sky as thunder crashed and
rumbled in response. Batman made a sharp right turn, wheels squealing as a cascade of water drenched the sidewalk.

“Get closer to him,” Diana told him.

“I’m working on it,” he growled, equally frustrated.

“I know,” she told him. “If you can get closer, I can jump onto the box truck and stop it.”

“Hell no,” he ground out with a furious scowl.

Diana glared at him. “It’s our best shot right now.”

“First of all, you’re not Wonder Woman right now,” he pointed out. “Second, we’re in the middle of a thunderstorm with next to zero visibility. Third, you’ll have no defense against their guns with you climbing on the outside of a truck and fourth, if I can get a clear shot, I can take out their back tire.”

As if on cue, two of Joker’s goons leaned out of the box truck and opened fire on them with machine guns. The hail of bullets harmlessly bounced off the Batmobile as they continued to chase them. Another henchman pulled out a flame thrower that was absolutely no threat to the Batmobile especially in a downpour.

“Not very smart, are they?” Diana muttered in agitation, feeling utterly helpless sitting in the passenger seat. It was more than difficult at times allowing Bruce to be the one fully in control, but she had agreed to abide by his rules if she was going to patrol with him.

“Not typically,” he grumbled, keeping his focus on the truck before them.

Bruce slammed his foot on the gas pedal, pushing the Batmobile to its limits in an effort to catch the Joker and find out what he was up to now. He knew he was planning something big. He just had to find out what exactly that something was.

Diana’s hands automatically shot out to brace herself against the dashboard as Bruce drove up and onto the sidewalk to avoid hitting an oncoming truck. “Hera, Bruce!” Diana crossly exclaimed, swearing in Greek. “And you complain about my piloting skills.”

“That’s because you’re dangerous behind the controls of a plane, princess,” he groused, flipping a couple of switches and hitting a button.

Before Diana could utter any semblance of a response, a small rocket shot out from the front of the Batmobile, hitting the back tire and causing it to explode. The box truck immediately began to swerve back and forth, hitting a parked van before careening off another truck and flying into the air and off the dock directly into Gotham Harbor.

Batman cursed as he slammed on the brakes, the Batmobile skidding sideways on the wet pavement before finally coming to a stop. Batman and Batwoman jumped from the car, both running to the edge of the dock to find two of Joker’s men already scrambling out of the sinking box truck.

Without a second thought, Diana dove into the water followed by her husband. She swam towards the passenger side of the truck while Bruce headed for the driver’s side, anxious to find anyone still trapped inside. Spotting someone unconscious and slumped in his seat with his head down, Diana threw an elbow, breaking the window and reaching in to pull him out.
Grabbing hold of the front of his jacket, she forcefully pulled him out through the broken window, throwing him over her shoulder before swimming back to the surface. She quickly climbed the rickety ladder, carrying the unconscious man with her.

Breathing heavily, Batwoman glanced back over her shoulder to check on her husband to find that he had yet to surface from the water. Pushing aside her worry for him, she laid the man down on his back. She quickly removed her gauntlets before checking for a pulse as her other hand moved to remove his mask from his face only to have his hand abruptly clamp down on her wrist.

“Didn’t your mummy ever teach you it’s impolite to peek?” the man uttered.

“Joker,” Batwoman growled, stunned by the deception as she wrenched her wrist free from his hold on her. They hadn’t been certain Joker was with his men in the box truck or not, but they knew it had been a possibility.

“In the flesh, Bat babe!” Joker chuckled, his hand shooting out to grab hers once more to pull her in closer to him. “Pleasure to finally meet my ol’ buddy Bats’ new main squeeze,” he told her. “You are quite the dish.”

He suddenly pressed a button on his jacket, spraying her directly in the face. She immediately fell back on the ground as Joker jumped to his feet. “Sorry to spray and run, but I gotta go,” he said as he leaned over her, his face close to hers. “Boy, my buddy Bats really picked himself a looker this time,” he said, emitting a low whistle of appreciation. “I’d love to stay and chat and see what’s hidden behind the mask, but I gotta run. Things to do and terrifying plans to hatch and all you know.”

Diana’s eyes were fixed wide with horror as she began to lose feeling in her extremities, her body refusing to obey her commands. She attempted to gulp in much needed air as her fingers awkwardly clawed at the ground beneath her, but to no avail. It felt as if her entire body was on fire, her body her own and yet not. She struggled to regain some sort of control over her muscles, but it felt as though she was slowly being paralyzed.

What in Hades had he sprayed her with?

It wasn’t his usual Joker toxin that Bruce had warned her about. This was different…this was horrifying…this was deadlier…

“NO!”

The panicked sound of Batman’s rasping scream met her ears and sluggishly filtered its way into her brain. She forced herself to open her eyes to find him leaning over her, water dripping off his uniform as his hands swiftly roamed over her chest and body in search of injuries, but he wouldn’t find any.

“N…not…ve…ven…” she attempted to choke out the words, but it came out more like a wheeze.

Batman immediately picked up on what she was trying to tell him, knowing that she was in dire need of help before he lost her for good. He began searching his utility belt, finding the necessary antidote for what Joker had given her. By the way that she was reacting, he was fairly certain that he had sprayed her with a paralyzing agent, one that was affecting her lungs and brain function as well.

“Hang on,” he murmured as he jammed the needle into her. “It’ll be okay…I promise.”

He gently stroked her cheek as he did his best to calm the way his heart was hammering wildly in
his chest, the knot of dread that was sitting like a rock in the pit of his stomach. He had come up from investigating the back of the box truck to find her on the ground and not moving. It had scared him senseless.

He released a sigh of relief as her breathing began to even out, movement in her arms and legs starting to return. He fought against the overwhelming need to pull her into his arms and hold her close, knowing that he couldn’t show any public display of emotions towards her or risk their secret identities. They were partners out here, not husband and wife.

“I…I’m…I’m okay,” she finally managed to whisper, her muscles regaining their function again.

“Just rest here for a few moments,” he told her, his gauntleted hand resting against the curve of her face, his thumb caressing her cheekbone.

“No…I’m fine,” she insisted as she attempted to sit up, not wanting to appear weak.

“Damn stubborn woman,” Bruce muttered under his breath as he helped her sit up. “You need to give yourself some time to recover.”

Diana rubbed her face with her hands, wishing she could take her mask off, but refrained from removing it. “I don’t know where Joker went,” she said, looking around her.

“It’s all right,” he reassured her as he helped her to her feet, his hand settling on her back. “We’ll find him…I promise you that.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: WOW! Did you like this unexpected turn of events? Things just keep getting worse for our favorite couple, but you know they'll prevail...or will they?

UP NEXT: Everyone prepares for battle. That's all I'm going to say for now. :)
Chapter 31

Wayne Manor; September 3rd, 15:12 EST

Alfred placed a tray of cookies in the oven to bake, wiping his hands on his dish towel before returning to the task of preparing the evening meal. His crew was in dire need of some cheering up around here and he was bound and determined to lighten their hearts as best as he could even if it was something as simple as a hearty meal.

If truth be told, his heart was quite heavy as well, worry constantly nagging at the recesses of his mind, but he knew he couldn’t let it get the best of him. He had a family that he loved dearly and was resolved to take care of no matter what he had to do.

They were potentially facing their deadliest crisis yet, one that could claim more than a few lives. It saddened him deeply to think about it, knowing the future of this family weighed heavily in the balance. He abruptly shoved it aside, though, for the good of the children. Young Nicholas was already picking up on the tension and the fact that something was wrong. It was only a matter of time before he started asking questions. He was very much like his father in that respect.

He hated to think of how devastating it would be for them if either of their parents were to be lost in battle. He felt tears building behind his eyes as he considered the consequences of such a scenario, remembering all too well the effect of losing one’s parents had had on young Master Bruce.

He didn’t want to see the children headed down a similar, destructive path of self-loathing and anger-filled vengeance. It was only by the grace of God himself that Bruce had eventually allowed Diana into his life, forever altering that road of self-imposed isolation and bitterness.

The sound of shuffling tennis shoes caused Alfred to look up to find Damian entering the kitchen, his expression brooding. It was so reminiscent of Master Bruce when he was that age and even more so now. There was definitely no denying the boy’s parentage.

“Master Damian,” Alfred greeted him with his usual warm, welcoming smile. “May I interest you in some cookies?”

“I guess so,” Damian decided, taking a seat at the bar.

Alfred poured him a glass a milk before placing a plate of cookies in front of him. “May I ask what has you so downtrodden this afternoon?”
“It’s nothing,” Damian brushed him off, his focus on the plate of cookies. He didn’t really feel like talking to anyone about it.

Alfred studied him with a knowing gaze, turning away to pour himself a hot cup of tea. He took a seat at the bar across from him, stealing a cookie from Damian’s plate. “I see,” he replied with a nod, pausing to take a bite of his cookie and appreciating the tasty sweetness that filled his mouth. It was a new recipe that he had tried, and it was very good if he did say so himself. “I have to say that I think that it’s rather impressive.”

“What’s impressive?” Damian asked with a confused frown.

“Your self-restraint,” he replied. “I think if I were you, I’d be plotting a way to get to the battle in order to help regardless of what my father said.”

Damian’s head snapped up, taken aback by his words. How did he know that was what he’d been thinking about ever since learning from his father that he wasn’t going to be allowed to help stop his grandfather?

“Father doesn’t want my help,” he bit out with a huff as he picked up a cookie, breaking it in two. “I have to stay here and babysit the toddlers…make sure they’re safe.”

“Hmmm,” Alfred hummed thoughtfully as he took a sip of his tea. “That’s not what I heard.”

Damian’s brow knitted together in curiosity despite himself as he studied the elder man. “What did you hear?” he warily asked.

“I believe that your father wanted you and Master Timothy here because he feels you are the most capable of protecting the little ones,” Alfred informed him. “For me, I’d consider that pretty high praise especially coming from someone like Master Bruce. He is the most highly trained fighter in the world next to your grandfather I’m sure. He doesn’t trust just anyone with his home or his family.”

“I think he just said that in order to get me to stay home and do what he wants me to do,” Damian muttered, taking a drink of his milk. “He thinks that I can’t handle myself in a fight or that I’ll betray him and join my grandfather’s side.”

“Are you planning on joining your mother and grandfather?”

Damian frowned as he stared at the cookie in his hand. “No,” he muttered. “I like it here. I don’t want to go back with them. Besides, my mother abandoned me…left me behind. She obviously doesn’t want me around. Why would I want to go back with her?”

The corners of Alfred’s lips twitched, thankful for the small changes that he was seeing in the boy. It had been most difficult for him, trying to adjust and sort through the things that he’d been trained to believe and the reality of what a true family was really like.

“I have to say that I’m very happy to hear that,” Alfred told him. “We like having you here.”

Damian’s frown disappeared, his expression brightening some with the encouragement. “I still feel like I’m being left behind,” he confessed. “I mean it’s my grandfather who is in danger. I should be there to try to save him.”

“I know how difficult this must be for you, Master Damian, but I believe this might be for the best,” Alfred replied. “Things are going to get very nasty I’m afraid. I’d hate to have you there witnessing any of that. It could be very traumatizing not to mention there is no way to predict how
Damian’s face scrunched up into a look of disbelief. “My grandfather would never try to harm me,” he told him. “I’m his grandson. He trained me himself to be the best assassin in the world.”

“Yes, but he has trained you to eventually take his position someday as the Demon’s Head,” he pointed out. “We already know that Ra’s is in great danger of losing his mind during this whole sordid ordeal. He may see you as a direct threat to his power and his plans of cleanse the Earth. Your father wants to make sure that you are kept safe from your grandfather’s reach as well as to help protect the other children.”

Damian considered his explanation for a moment, realizing the validity of what he was being told. “I guess I can see your point,” he conceded.

“Your father does not take this sort of thing lightly, Master Damian,” Alfred told him. “There is also a very logical reason behind every decision that Master Bruce makes and, since meeting Miss Diana, a heartfelt aspect to that logic as well.”

The honking of a toy car horn caught their attention, the sound of wheels rolling over marble their only warning to what was coming. Alfred and Damian looked to see Nicholas driving his toy Batmobile, Kaia sitting in the passenger seat with her kitten in her arms.

“Master Nicholas,” Alfred greeted him with an amused grin, wondering what in the world had happened. “Would you and Miss Kaia like some cookies?”

“Peanut too,” Kaia said, holding up her kitten.

“I’m afraid Peanut won’t like cookies, but I’m sure we can find her something to eat if she’s hungry.”

“She hungry,” Kaia insisted.

Alfred got up, making his way around the bar to pick up Peanut. “May I ask how you were able to get your car inside?” he calmly asked, knowing that Master Bruce would no doubt have a stroke when he discovered what his children had done now.

“Kaia helped me,” Nicholas told him as if it was an ordinary occurrence.

“And how did she do that?” Alfred inquired as he lifted Kaia out of the toy car.

“I don’t know,” Nicholas said with a shrug as he climbed out.

“I think you better tell me exactly what happened,” Alfred decided, sensing that something magical was involved. If so, he was certain Master Bruce would finally have that coronary event that had been lingering on the horizon since he discovered his children inherited magical abilities from their mother’s heritage.

“We were playing, and I told Kaia that I wanted to play with my car, but it was outside,” Nicholas began to explain. “She looked out the window at it and then it was in the room with us. It’s so cool. I wish I could do that.”

“Oh, dear me,” Alfred murmured, placing some cookies on a plate. “Why don’t you have a seat at the table to eat your cookies while I go find your father?”
“Find me for what?” Bruce asked as he walked into the kitchen to find Alfred looking rather amused and Damian trying not to laugh. “I don’t want to know…do I?” he asked, looking from Alfred to Damian and back again.

“Probably not,” Damian told him, trying to keep from laughing but failing miserably.

“What’s Nicholas’s Batmobile doing in here?” Bruce asked as he folded his arms against his chest, his attention on his two youngest kids. “It’s supposed to stay outside, Nicholas.”

“Well, that is the way it should be and it was,” Alfred began to explain, “but it seems to me that Miss Kaia can make what she wants appear in the room with her.”

“Diana!” Bruce yelled for his wife as he looked at his daughter who was eating a cookie and appearing as innocent as ever. “What exactly happened?”

“I told Kaia I wanted my Batmobile, but it was outside,” Nicholas told him. “She looked through the window at it and then it was in the room with us. I want to do cool stuff like that, daddy.”

“Yah…cool. I feel a migraine coming on,” Bruce decided as he sank into a chair next to his daughter. “Kaia, how did you get the car in the house?”

Kaia climbed out of her booster seat and into her father’s lap with cookie in hand. “It’s otay, daddy,” she reassured him, handing him her cookie.

Bruce took the offered cookie, wrapping his arms around his daughter. He kissed the top of her head, wishing that he could keep his children just like this forever—no more Meta abilities or blessings, no worries about them following in their parent’s dangerous footsteps.

“Bruce, what’s the matter?” Diana asked as she flew into the kitchen, looking down at the toy Batmobile with a frown. “What is Nicholas’s car doing in the house? Nicholas, you know this is supposed to stay outside.”

“Your daughter suddenly has the ability to get whatever she wants,” Bruce ground out as he glared at his wife.

“What?” Diana exclaimed, shocked. “Kaia, how did you do this?”

“Me no know,” Kaia said, looking around at all the faces staring at her. Tears abruptly filled her eyes and began spilling down her cheeks as she started to cry, thinking that she was in trouble.

Diana knelt down in front of Bruce with Kaia on his lap, her hand cupping her cheek wet with tears. “You’re not in trouble, my little sun and stars,” she gently soothed her. “We just didn’t know you had such special gifts.”

Bruce scowled at Diana, uncertain if he would call them ‘special gifts’, but they would discuss that later when they were alone. He picked Kaia up and held her against his chest as he patted her back, her head resting on his shoulder as he tried to console her.

“It’s okay, Kai,” he told her. “It just…surprised us…that you could make Nicholas’s car appear in the house.”

“You have to admit it is pretty cool,” Damian added.

“Not helping,” Bruce stated, frowning at his son.
“It’s your fault you decided to marry an Amazon princess blessed by Greek gods,” Damian shot back, turning around to finish his snack.

“Definitely not helping,” Bruce growled as Diana glared at him, knowing that comment was going to lead to a heated argument. “Even knowing what I know now, I would still marry you all over again, Diana.”

“I need to consult with mother to figure out who is behind this latest development,” Diana replied with a frown.

“I’ll have J’onn work on creating another inhibitor,” Bruce muttered with a sigh as he handed his crying daughter over to her mother.

Alfred bit at his bottom lip to keep the smile from forming on his face. There was always something highly unexpected happening in this family that constantly kept him on his toes. He couldn’t help wondering what other special surprises awaited them in the future.

Hopefully, this family still had a future to look forward to when the battle was over.

*Gotham; September 3rd, 23:03 EST*

Jordon “Lefty” Whitten exited a bar, his eyes darting about suspiciously as he paused to light a cigarette. The street was empty save for a couple of parked cars, no one in sight as far as he could tell. The last few days had been nerve-wracking to say the least, constantly looking over his shoulder and watching his back for trouble.

Phaedra had gone to Wayne Manor three days ago to meet with Diana Wayne and she never came home. When she hadn’t returned to her apartment that night, he immediately knew that something was wrong. His only conclusion was that Wonder Woman had figured out that Phaedra was the one behind the attacks on her and the embassy. Still, he had hoped that she would try to contact him.

He had quickly gone dark, calling off work for a family emergency to avoid being cornered by Wonder Woman. The last thing he wanted was to come face to face with the famous Amazon, being forced to answer questions that he’d sooner not discuss with anyone.

Taking a long drag on his cigarette, he released it slowly, his eyes falling closed in frustration. He missed Phaedra greatly, wishing that he could see her, but he had no idea what Diana Wayne had done with her. If he had to guess, Wonder Woman immediately took her back to Themyscira for punishment.

He just hoped that Phaedra somehow managed to escape wherever she was and find a way to return to him. He was going to have to find a way to get her back if she didn’t return to him soon. He wanted to marry her and make a life with her.

Glancing both ways to make sure he wasn’t being followed, Jordon quickly made his way down the street, staying to the shadows to keep from being detected. As he passed by an alleyway, a hand suddenly reached out and grabbed hold of him, hauling him into the dimly lit side street.

He struggled against the hold on him only to be shoved up against the brick building behind him. “Let go of me!” he yelled.

“No gonna happen, Lefty,” Red Hood told him, getting in his face. “We’ve been looking for you.”

“Who are you?”
“It doesn’t matter who we are,” Artemis snapped. “We have questions and you have the answers we need.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jordon insisted, attempting to break free from Jason’s hold on him only to be slammed up against the wall again. “Whatever it is, I had nothing to do with it.”

“Oh, but we know that you’re involved,” Red Hood said, his blue eyes narrowing. “We know about you and Phaedra and all your little devious plans to destroy the embassy.”

Jordon appeared to visibly pale with the mention of Phaedra, his expression betraying him. If they knew where she was, then he needed to know. “Phaedra is my girlfriend, but I had nothing to do with the bombing of the embassy.”

“How…” Hood thoughtfully hummed. “And what made you think that’s what we were going to ask you about?”

“It’s been all over the news,” Jordon shot back. “Everyone knows the embassy was destroyed.”

“And you just so happen to be a bomb expert dating someone who works closely with the Ambassador of Themyscira at the embassy,” Artemis countered. “Don’t you think that’s a little shady?”

“Where is Phaedra?” Jordon demanded to know, refusing to answer anything about the bombings until he knew where she was at.

“Phaedra is dead, Jordon,” Jason informed him, studying his face for his reaction.

Jordon didn’t disappoint them, his tough guy veneer crumbling in the wake of the unexpected revelation. “What?” he whispered, shocked by the news. “You…you’re lying. Where is she? Where is Phaedra?”

“I’m sorry, Jordon,” Artemis replied with a gentleness that took Jason by surprise. “She confessed to everything and then took her own life the other day.”

“No…she…she wouldn’t…she didn’t,” Jordon murmured, his bottom lip quivering. “She wouldn’t leave me like that. We were going to build a future together.”

“I’m afraid she played you,” Jason said, releasing his hold on him. “She was only using you to help destroy Diana Wayne and the embassy. She was a spy sent from Themyscira to gain everyone’s trust so she could sabotage it.”

“She told me she loved me…we were talking about getting married,” Jordon responded. “She wouldn’t leave me like this.”

“I’m afraid she came to Gotham with one mission in mind and that was to stop Diana,” he told him.

“I’m sure there was a part of Phaedra that did love you,” Artemis offered, hoping that by showing sympathy they could get more answers out of him. Jason gave her a surprised, questioning look, but quickly covered it. “We need your help now, Jordon. Did Phaedra ever mention a woman by the name Aresia or did you ever meet her?”

“No, I don’t know that name,” he softly said, shaking his head. “A few times she said she had to meet with a friend from the island, but she never mentioned her name.”
“Do you know where they met?” Red Hood asked.

Jordon thought for a long moment, his mind still reeling with the unexpected revelation. “I think she said something once about this place on the East End…some apartment building or something.”

“What kind of apartment building, Jordon?” Artemis demanded to know. “We need more information. We have to find her before it’s too late.”

“I don’t know for sure,” Jordon insisted, growing hostile again. “Honestly… I don’t know anymore than what I told you. She never talked about this Aresia woman. What’s so special about her anyway?”

“She’s a very dangerous woman,” Artemis stated with a glare. “Just be glad you’ve never run into her or you wouldn’t be standing here talking to us.”

Jordon leaned his back against the wall, visibly sagging against it. “I can’t believe this,” he muttered.

Jason glanced at Artemis, wondering if she believed him or not. He didn’t think Jordon had anything more that he could give them regarding Artemis, but he didn’t know what the Bana-Mighdall Amazon had in mind. He was more than ready to turn him over to the GCPD and start searching the East End for Aresia.

“Fine,” Artemis finally uttered. “Call Oracle to have him picked up so we can go find Aresia.”

“But… wait! I helped you,” Jordon countered, stepping forward with arms outstretched in a plea. “Shouldn’t I get off for that?”

Artemis’s green eyes narrowed into twin infernos as she shoved him back up against the wall. “You blew up Ambassador Wayne’s SUV and completely demolished the Themyscirian Embassy, endangering many people. What do you think?”

Jordon paled again, his shoulders slouching with acceptance of his fate. “Look, if you confess to your crimes, I’m sure they’ll give you a lesser sentence,” Jason assured him. “Phaedra could’ve easily murdered you in your sleep and not thought twice about it. You’ve been given a second chance to clean up your act. I’d take advantage of it while you’re in jail.”

**Watchtower; September 4th, 09:37 EST**

“This will be the first wave of attack,” Batman explained from his position at the podium on the stage. “The second line teams will stay back until myself, Wonder Woman or Superman call you in. The third line teams will be responsible for civilian safety and keeping populated areas clear.”

“What about this fourth group?” Flash asked from his seat in the front row beside Fire.

“The fourth group is in charge of otherworldly attacks,” Batman replied. “Hades’ weapons are capable of raising the dead. We’re going to need you to stop these armies if he decides to raise them.”

“Bring them on!” Plastic Man yelled from somewhere in the back. “We’ll make them wish they’d stayed dead.”

There was a rolling murmur of confirmations and support from his teammates, agreeing with his assessment. “This isn’t going to be a walk in the park,” Batman barked, trying to get everyone to
quiet down. “I appreciate your enthusiasm and confidence, but do not underestimate Hades’ resurrected army. They will be dangerous and probably have magical abilities granted to them by Hades.”

“Do we know yet when this attack is going to begin?” Huntress asked.

Batman glanced at her sitting at the end of a row beside Question. He was still somewhat hesitant about her acceptance back into the League, but at this point they needed all the help that they could get even if she was a member on probation status. While he still didn’t fully trust her, he trusted Question and his ability to rein her in when she was on the verge of getting out of control.

“As of now, we have no idea where or when Ra’s will begin his attack so must be prepared to appear at a moment’s notice,” Batman responded. “Steel will be on the Watchtower organizing transporter deployment along with our civilian staff. They have already been prepped and informed of their duties.

“I will tell you that my best guess is that Ra’s will begin his attack as soon as it strikes midnight September fifth. He’s going to want to take advantage of the extra magical power that he believes exists during the blood moon.”

“Believe me…it does exist, and it will intensify Ra’s power and therefore Hades,” Zatanna evenly stated. “We all need to be ready for the worst, people. This is not going to be pretty.”

“Communication is going to be key,” Batman continued. “We all need to talk with each other. Leave all egos at home because we need to be prepared to work like a well-oiled machine. One team goes down, the other needs to be right there to back them up until they can recover.”

“I heard that Hades is Wonder Woman’s father,” Plastic Man yelled, his voice laced with amusement. “Can’t she do something about daddy dearest? I mean they’re family and all. There’s got to be something she can do about him.”

Batman growled low in his throat, the sound emanating around the room through the microphone like a roll of thunder. The sneer that curled his lips was terrifying to behold. The tension in the room was near suffocating as a deadly silence settled over the large auditorium, anxious to see what was going to happen next.

Plastic Man sunk lower in his chair, immediately regretting the fact that he’d opened his big mouth. If the fierce Batglare that Batman was giving him wasn’t bad enough, then the glare he was also receiving from the Man of Steel standing next to the Dark Knight was enough to scare him spitless.

“None of what is about to happen has anything to do with Wonder Woman,” Batman hissed, his fury palpable. “She along with Superman and myself will be spearheading the fight to stop Ra’s, hopefully getting the armor away from him before Hades is released from the Underworld. With any luck, it will be a quick fight.”

Batman glanced at Diana who was standing at the back of the auditorium, leaning against the wall. He could see the pain that reflected in her blue eyes from where he stood. He knew how much all of this had upset her, Plastic Man’s words definitely not helping the situation any.

She already felt responsible for all of this without Plastic Man’s big mouth making stupid comments. He would have to talk to her later, make sure that she was all right. He needed her to be at her absolute best and focused if they were going to be able to win this fight.

“Does anyone else have any other comments they would like to make before I continue?” he
growled, his piercing glare sweeping across the room.

Nothing could be heard as he waited, everyone too afraid to even draw a breath at that tense moment as each Leaguer waited to see if anyone would be dumb enough to even open their mouth. The seconds passed by agonizingly slow before Batman finally spoke again.

“Now, I have already met with Doctor Montgomery in the infirmary,” Batman continued. “The infirmary will be fully staffed with all doctors and nurses ready and waiting for the injured. I have also organized a back up staff who will be on call should they be needed.”

Wonder Woman felt her stomach churn as she leaned against the back wall of the large auditorium, her arms crossed and pressed against her chest as her gaze steadily roaming over those in attendance this morning. Nearly every single Leaguer was here, listening as Batman outlined his plans for taking on Ra’s al Ghul. J’onn was in the Monitor Womb with civilian staff covering monitor duty, one team out on a mission that Bruce would follow up with once they returned from Uganda.

Her husband had taken a week off work from Wayne Enterprises so that he could meticulously plan out every single angle of attack, assigning team leaders and team members that he knew would work best together. She honestly didn’t think there was anything that Bruce had not taken in consideration when it came to this battle, her husband the best strategist that she’d ever known and that was saying a lot.

Diana sighed heavily as she drank in the scene before her. These were men and women, some younger than others, some teammates far more seasoned and yet every single one of them was more than determined to do everything in their power to stop Ra’s and the destruction he was about to rain down on them.

She felt a thick lump form in her throat, clogging her airway as her thoughts took her places that she didn’t want to go, but knew it was a reality. These brave colleagues of hers…friends…were risking their lives to stop her father.

She gritted her teeth against the fierce anger that roiled through her. She couldn’t help the overwhelming guilt that besieged her, mortified that it was her father that was going to be causing such destruction and heartache. If she had her way, she would be meeting him on head-on and alone, everyone staying out of the fight including Bruce.

She knew that her husband was determined to be by her side every step of the fight. While she loved him dearly for it, she didn’t want him anywhere near this battle. She had no doubt in her mind whatsoever that Hades would be going after Bruce.

It caused the feeling of dread that sat like a rock in the pit of her stomach to grow stronger. Something horrifying was going to happen, something that would take Bruce away from her. She had no doubt in her mind whatsoever that Hades would be going after Bruce.

Kal met her gaze, giving her a small, reassuring smile. She had made him swear that he would remove Bruce from the fight if things got ugly. He had promised to stay close and do everything in his power to make sure that Bruce was taken out of the fight if it looked as though Hades was coming after him.

As if sensing her thoughts, Kal’s brow furrowed slightly, his eyes softening. It was obvious that he knew exactly what she was thinking about, doing his best to convey strength and reassurance in that singular look. She hated putting him in that position, but she needed to make sure that Bruce survived this fight especially for their children.
The feel of a hand on her shoulder caused her to look to her left, finding Shayera standing beside her. “Hey, don’t look so much like the world’s about to end,” she lightly teased her. “Let’s show some optimism and hope here.”

“Sorry,” Diana murmured, her lips pursing into a thin line.

“You know it doesn’t look good if the Founders appear as though we’re all marching to our death,” Shay reminded her.

“I know…I know,” Diana agreed with a sigh. “It’s just that I feel so guilty, Shay. Everyone here is so willing to put their lives on the line to stop my father from escaping the Underworld and some of them might not make it home. I can’t help feeling responsible.”

“Don’t think that way, Diana,” Shayera told her. “Every single one of these heroes willingly put their lives out there every time they go out whether it’s against Darkseid, Luthor, or Hades.”

“Hey, what’s going on back here?” Dinah asked as she approached. “You both look like you’ve just been sentenced to death.”

“Di feels responsible for this fight,” Shay revealed.

Dinah frowned as she gazed at the Amazon. “None of this is your fault, Diana,” she reassured her. “You didn’t gather the armor or weapons—that was all Ra’s al Ghul. If Hades does manage to take over Ra’s mind, that’s not your fault either—that is all Hades’ doing.”

“I know, but it certainly doesn’t make any of this any easier,” Diana replied, appreciating that her friends were trying to comfort her, but there was little that could make this better.

“Hey, you can’t pick your parents you know,” Shay added. “It’s not your fault that the god of the Underworld is your father. All you can do is try to stop him and send him packing.”

“You know what?” Dinah said, her hands planted firmly on her hips. “When this is all over, the three of us are going to have a spa day. I think we’re in dire need of some girl time—massages, manicures, pedicures, facials…the works.”

“I’m totally in,” Shay readily decided. “Let the men babysit while we go out for a girls’ afternoon.”

The corners of Diana’s lips curved into a reluctant smile. “That does sound pretty amazing,” she admitted.

“Good,” Dinah said with a nod. “I’ll get it scheduled for next week.”

Diana smiled brightly despite the fact that she still felt horrible on the inside. She silently prayed to her gods that everyone returned home safely when all was said and done. She didn’t think she could accept it if there were any deaths because of her father.

That was not something that she could live with.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: When it rains, it pours for poor Bruce & Diana! What will happen next for them?
UP NEXT: And so it begins...
Chapter 32

Themyscira; September 4th, 23:03 EST

Queen Hippolyta gazed out the window of the palace into the darkness, the moon growing brighter and fuller by the moment amidst the thick blanket of stars. There was an eerie blood red shade to the large globe in the sky that hinted at what was about to come.

Her heart was heavy…far heavier than her mind at that moment. War was about to break out on Themyscira, and it was a civil war no less. She swore she could actually smell the tension permeating the air around her, feel it deep in her bones. It was nearly suffocating.

Tonight, sister was going to fight sister. It was going to be a bloody battle, one that she would give everything and anything to avoid, but maybe it was a necessary evil needed to cleanse the island and the Amazon nation of the discord and hatred that had settled over it the last couple of years.

For months, she’d petitioned the goddesses for answers and for direction in these matters, praying fervently for some sort of insight, but they had remained silent thus far, leaving her to struggle with the questions and doubts that besieged her. She had a feeling she would no longer have to worry about it after tonight.

Despite the palace being full of guards, Queen Hippolyta felt very alone. She missed her daughters and the families they had made. She wished that she could see her grandchildren, witness Nicholas’s inquisitive little face full of questions or Kaia’s bright-eyed wonder bordering on mischief. She was anxious to meet Donna’s twins though she knew that their arrival was still months away.

Drawing a deep breath, Hippolyta steeled herself against her aching heart, knowing that now was not the time for self-pity and loneliness. She had a battle to win, one that she dreaded but accepted as inevitable nonetheless. She was the Queen of the Amazons and she fully accepted everything that came with her position. Besides, there was no going back now.

To be honest, she did not regret the decisions that she had made to open Themyscira up to Man’s World or to start the embassy in Gotham. She was doing what she felt was best for her people, not wanting to keep her sisters locked in the past or imprisoned by hatred of men.

She’d allowed her own biases and resentment for the last few thousand years to harden her heart and solidify notions in her head that were far from true. It had led her to banishing her own daughter from her home, driving her further away from her heritage and closer to the man that she would eventually marry.

Hippolyta couldn’t help wondering how different things might have been had she not followed the edicts of Themyscira. Would Diana still have ended up falling in love with and marrying Bruce Wayne? Would she have eventually grown tired of Man’s World instead, returning home like Hippolyta had hoped that she would happen?

Releasing a small sigh, she knew in her heart that it probably mattered little. Things were as they were supposed to be. There was no doubt in her mind that Bruce and Diana had been fated to fall in
love, two halves of the same soul destined to find one another long before she had ever formed her
daughter out of clay…long before Bruce’s ancestors had ever been born.

She had never dreamed that it would be through Diana that she would come to learn so very much.
She was the elder—the superior, the queen, the mother. And yet, Diana had opened her eyes and
taught her so very much about the world around them, the world that she had turned a blind eye to
thousands of years ago.

Men like Bruce, Alfred, Dick, and Tim had shown her that there are good men out there with hearts
filled with pure intentions. Heroes like Superman and Flash had proven that there are empowered
beings out there that want to use their gifts for good. It was time that Themyscira recognized the
fact that not all men are vile, self-serving vermin who are out to destroy and enslave women for
their own purposes.

“With all due respect, my queen, I believe you are more than determined to get yourself skewered
by an arrow before this night is out,” the Amazon stated. “I would definitely not like to be the one
to tell your daughters that I allowed you to be killed by an arrow. That is one conversation I’d like
to avoid at all cost.”

The sound of General Phillipus’s sarcastic chastisement caused the queen to turn away from the
window, putting some distance between her and the dangerous opening the enemy would need to
remove her from the throne. She was unafraid of what the enemy was planning to do to her. What
she feared most was for the safety of her Amazons that would no doubt be going to battle soon
against Kyriaki and her rebellious followers.

“You worry far too much, Phillipus,” Hippolyta replied with a frown. “You do remember that I am
a highly skilled warrior myself…or has all my years on the throne caused you to forget that fact?”

Phillipus pursed her lips, her gaze narrowing as she studied her queen with her hand resting on the
hilt of her sword. “My memory is not so short as to forget the humbling defeat that you served me
when we practiced sword training many years ago.”

“Humble defeat my foot,” Hippolyta retorted with a mischievous smirk. “You got your backside
handed to you and don’t you forget it.”

“How could I?” Phillipus coolly responded with an irritated huff. “It was nearly fifteen hundred
years ago and yet you still manage to remind me of it every chance you get.”

“Maybe when this is all over, I’ll finally give you that rematch that you’ve been begging for,” the
queen told her.

“I wouldn’t go so far as to call it begging,” the general said with a roll of her eyes. “It’s more like
an occasional petitioning. Begging makes me sound like some dog seeking scraps from the
mistress’s table.”

Hippolyta couldn’t contain the chuckle that escaped as she made her way to the table, pausing to
pour herself a glass of wine. “Phillipus, you are no dog,” she countered. “If I thought that of you,
then you wouldn’t be my most trusted ally and general of my army.”

Phillipus relaxed her stance slightly, holding her chin high. “And it is an honor to be considered as
such,” she formally stated. “It is for that reason that I try so valiantly to keep you alive despite your
attempts otherwise, my queen.”

“I do appreciate your attempts, but you have to admit it can become a little tedious,” Hippolyta
replied with a frown. “You’re worse than a smothering mother hen sometimes.”

“I only fear for your majesty’s wellbeing and safety,” she countered. “Is it not my job?”

Hippolyta waved a dismissive hand as she took a drink from her glass. “Oh, no need to be so formal, Phillipus,” she told her. “It’s just the two of us. You know you don’t need to be so rigid when we’re alone.”

Phillipus drew near the open window to peer out into the darkness for signs of trouble. She did not appreciate the sinister atmosphere that had settled over the island nor the overpowering feeling of dread that accompanied it. Her every muscle was tense and ready to react at a moment’s notice. She had no qualms about tonight being the night that Kyriaki and her followers would strike. What she wanted to know was who was pulling Kyriaki’s strings.

“Do you think Phaedra’s suicide will arouse further support for Kyriaki and her followers?” Phillipus asked, changing the subject.

Hippolyta contemplated her question for a long moment, giving it serious consideration before finally responding. “Phaedra’s martyrdom may be the spark that Kyriaki needs to gain further support, but only time will truly tell which side our sisters will take.”

Phillipus’s expression grew hard and vengeful as her hands curled into furious fists bent on retribution. “I wish you would allow me to take my army and capture Kyriaki before this battle even begins,” she told her.

Hippolyta drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly through her nose as she nonchalantly wandered her throne room. “I have certainly considered doing just that several times…arresting Kyriaki and keeping this fight from even beginning, but I’m afraid that cutting off the head won’t kill the beast, Phillipus,” she thoughtfully replied. “We have to allow them to attack in order to ferret out all those who are involved in this sedition. I don’t want a single Amazon to escape the punishment that is due them for their betrayal.

“When all is said and done, I do not want any Amazons left on this island that are filled with such betrayal. We will not be going through something this all over again in another hundred years because I allowed underground supporters of Kyriaki’s to live. No, all of them must fully reveal themselves this night if they want to oppose me.”

Phillipus gave her a nod of agreement, knowing that her queen’s decision was the wisest choice. It still did little to satisfy the thirst for revenge that coursed through her veins, eager to flush out all those who would dare to oppose the queen and her rule.

She knew they wouldn’t have to wait long as a horn unexpectedly sounded in the distance, a cluster of warrior cries filling the air. Phillipus instantly drew her sword as her determined gaze met Queen Hippolyta’s just as equally resolved stony glare.

“We will not fail you, my queen,” General Phillipus swore to her.

Reaching for her battle headgear, Hippolyta nodded her agreement. “No, we will not fail tonight, Phillipus,” she stated. “I promise you that.”

**Gotham; September 4th, 23:27 EST**

Diana stood on the rooftop of Wayne Enterprises next to her husband, silently watching as the moon grew fuller by the second. It was taking on a deeper hue of red that was reminiscent of the color of blood. Unfortunately, they were about to see a lot of it in the coming hours, possibly days
if they were unable to stem the tide of this fight and stop Ra’s.

She could feel the dark foreboding as the wind stirred the humid night air, whipping her raven tresses like a brood of deadly vipers. She grabbed hold of it, pulling her dark mane behind her shoulders only for it to lash freely all over again once she released it.

She shivered despite herself, not from cold of any kind but from the oppressive sense of dread that seemed to have consumed Gotham. Casting her gaze downward, it was somewhat disturbing to see the streets somewhat vacant at this time of night, a stray car passing by the mostly empty sidewalks.

She watched as a couple quickly walked down the street hand in hand as if in a hurry to return home, a homeless man wandering from one trashcan to the next in search of food. It seemed that even the city knew there was chaos waiting in the shadows to strike and lingering on the horizon.

Sensing movement behind her, Diana glanced back over her shoulder to find Nightwing approaching. She was somewhat surprised that Bruce had allowed Dick to join them tonight in this battle, knowing that he must have some special reason for his presence here instead of at the manor with Donna and the others.

Every other Wayne had practically been quarantined inside of the manor per Bruce’s direct orders. Diana’s lips curled slightly with amusement as she thought back on this afternoon. Artemis had unleashed a violent string of curses at poor Bruce when she had learned of her role in the battle...or better yet her lack thereof, but Bruce took it all in stride. Being married to a fiery Amazon had built up his tolerance for furious outbursts laced with curses.

To say that Artemis was displeased would’ve been the greatest understatement of all time. Reluctant acceptance was even a pretty far stretch. Jason had been a little more accepting, but only because he’d trained with Bruce and somewhat understood his thought process.

While they didn’t agree on everything, Jason understood Bruce’s paranoid tendencies and his desperate need to protect his family. At least Jason agreed with Bruce about wanting to make sure that Nicholas and Kaia were protected from their grandfather at all cost.

Jason had been able to calm down the irate Bana-Mighdall Amazon, talking to her privately and helping her to see the greater picture. Diana had also spoken to her, personally asking her to protect her family. Artemis had sworn on her life that no harm would come to either of her children. It had brought Diana immeasurable comfort knowing that Artemis was there along with Tim, Jason, and Alfred to watch over them.

Bruce had an extensive plan in place at the manor should Hades decide to attempt to visit his grandchildren. It was one time that Diana was more than thankful for her husband’s paranoia. If she had her way, their children would’ve been hidden away at Kal’s Fortress of Solitude, but Bruce had reassured her that they were well protected at home.

Besides, Nicholas and Kaia were already picking up on the fact that something really big was going on. He didn’t want to scare them by suddenly whisking them away to a strange place like that without either one of them there to reassure them.

As if sensing her worry about their children, Batman surreptitiously captured a couple of Diana’s fingers, squeezing them in reassurance before releasing them. It was a subtle show of love and comfort, but it spoke volumes to her as she gave him a tender smile.
They had spoken little to each other as they had prepared for tonight’s mission, choosing instead to treat it like every other night. They’d gotten Nicholas and Kaia ready for bed, Nicholas putting up a fight about going to sleep and Kaia insisting on wearing her rainboots to bed. They’d eventually gotten them tucked in for the night with books read before heading down to the cave.

They’re shared fleeting glances, but nothing more, choosing rather to focus on stopping Ra’s before the nightmare could begin instead of taking the time to say all the things that they wanted to say to each other. Bruce would pass by, placing a hand on the small of her back, her fingers brushing across his forearm as they both conveyed what they were thinking and feeling.

They already knew their love was strong enough to weather whatever lay ahead of them. They had chosen to save physically expressing that love until after they had won this fight, and Hades was safely back in the Underworld where he belonged.

“Do you really think Ra’s is going to show up here first?” Dick finally asked from his position on Batman’s left, breaking the silence that had pervaded the top of Wayne Enterprises as they waited.

“It’s the most logical starting point,” Bruce replied, his ever-vigilant gaze studying the area for any signs of trouble. “Ra’s views the world as filled with depravity and evil that needs to be washed away in order to restore the Earth to its natural state. To him, Gotham is the very epitome of a cesspool that only breeds evil. He’ll start here because of that…and because it’s my home.”

“Still ticked you spurned his daughter, huh?” Nightwing jested, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Because I refuse to join him in his insane crusade,” Batman correct his eldest. “He sees me as his biggest obstacle to what he wants, the one person that he couldn’t manipulate and corrupt into doing what he wanted. He’ll want to get me out of the way first.”

Bruce spoke so matter-of-factly it was almost as if he was discussing something as mundane as the weather and not a battle that they might not survive. Nightwing just shook his head in amazement.

“Even now, you never cease to amaze me,” he muttered.

“Hard to believe after all these years,” Batman responded. “Stay sharp. Talia might try something to distract us from Ra’s appearance.”

Batman glanced at his wife, noticing the telltale signs of her worry on her face. Her forehead was creased as she bit at her bottom lip, her eyes narrowed in thought. “Come here,” he softly said, his fingers gently tugging on hers before turning and walking towards the dark shadows of the roof.

Diana looked at Nightwing before turning and following her husband to a private spot on the roof several yards away from him. It was the same spot they had made love one night during patrol. It had been erotic to say the least as they had shared in that passionate exchange. Standing here now brought back that heated memory that couldn’t be revisited right now.

Bruce took her hand, pulling her into him and wrapping his arms around her. He held her close to him, tilting his head to press a kiss against her forehead. “We’ll be fine,” he murmured.

“I know,” she whispered, fully returning his embrace as she buried herself into his chest.

Bruce inhaled deeply, savoring her jasmine scent that never failed to stir something inside of him. He wanted to tell her that he knew about her talk with Clark to remove him from the battle if things got bad, but he also knew that telling her would only make things worse. It would cause her to worry that much more about him, possibly being injured because she wasn’t paying attention. He couldn’t risk that happening.
He just hoped that Clark listened to him instead of her when it came down to it. He had a shard of Kryptonite in his utility belt just in case Clark decided to do something stupid and intervene when he wasn’t wanted. He wasn’t going to leave this battle or his wife tonight for any reason.

Knowing that they were running out of time, Diana pulled back, her lips crashing into his. Her kiss was passionate...rough and bruising as she conveyed every ounce of love that she could into that moment. Bruce held nothing back as he returned her passion, showing her everything that he felt for her.

When they finally drew apart, both were breathing heavily, doing their best to regain some measure of control. “I love you, Bruce Wayne,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper as her fingers traced the rugged line of his jaw. “You better be coming home with me when this is all over or Tartarus will seem like a picnic compared to what I’ll do to you if you don’t.”

Bruce chuckled softly as he pressed his forehead against hers. “I love you too, princess,” he replied with a playful smirk, kissing her once more before releasing her. “Let’s finish this so we can go home to our kids.”

She nodded in agreement as they drew apart, Diana following her husband back to the ledge of the rooftop. Nightwing gave them a mischievous, knowing grin. “About time,” he told them. “If you were gone any longer, I thought I was going to have to find a hose to turn on you two.”

“Funny,” Batman snapped, allowing his cape to drape around him like a sinister shroud. “Do I need to remind you of the couch I had to replace in the living room because of you and Donna?”

Dick’s grin grew wider, taking on a dreamy quality as he thought back on that afternoon of post-fight make up sex. “That was...uh...yah,” he muttered, suddenly checking himself. He cleared his throat as he straightened his shoulders. “Anyway, no movement below yet. I know you think he’ll start in Gotham, but what makes you think he’ll start here?”

“I know how Ra’s thinks,” Batman replied. “It’s because it’s Wayne Enterprises and it’s in the heart of Gotham. He’ll strike first here.”

“There,” Diana suddenly said, pointing as a shadow emerged from an alley across the street. “Talia.”

Batman and Nightwing quickly drew weapons, prepared for a fight. “We’ve got incoming,” Batman informed all the teams standing at the ready to intervene as he and Diana descended from the top of the building, landing on the sidewalk below.

Nightwing stared down at the scene below, knowing that Bruce knew what he was doing, but still unable to contain the thread of fear that had woven its way through his heart. This was a definite gamble. If things played out the way they wanted it to, they’d all be going home tonight. He just prayed that was the outcome.

Talia waltzed down the sidewalk, a couple of cars passing by her as she came to a stop in front of Wayne Enterprises. Her gaze settled on Batman standing across the street, Wonder Woman at his side. “This is your last chance to join us, beloved,” she offered, glaring at the Amazon beside him.

Diana’s fingernails bit into the palms of her hands as her fists tightened, despising this woman and the pain that she had caused. She was more than anxious to get her hands on Talia, but she knew that would be a luxury saved for later. She needed to focus on stopping Ra’s and her father from escaping the Underworld first.
“We both know that will never happen,” Batman evenly stated, the white slits of his cowl narrowing as he glowered at his former lover. His grip tightened on his modified Batarang, prepared to do whatever was necessary to end this before it got started. “Where is Ra’s, Talia?”

“I’m right here, Detective,” Ra’s replied, emerging from the same alley as Talia had a few moments before. Batman watched as Ra’s approached, wearing the majority of Hades’ armor. He held the Helm of Darkness under his arm as he came to a stop beside his daughter. “I knew you would figure out that I would start my campaign here.”

“It wasn’t difficult,” Batman bit out.

“Then, you also understand why I must do this, Detective,” Ra’s calmly responded as he lifted the helmet.

“No!” Batman roared, causing Ra’s to pause. “You don’t have to do this, Ra’s. You summon Hades from the Underworld and he’ll destroy you. He’ll fully control your mind and body.”

Ra’s al Ghul chuckled softly as he shook his head. “Did your Amazon fill your head with that nonsense in order to persuade you to interfere with my plans?”

“It’s not nonsense, Ra’s,” Batman growled. “It’s a fact and you know it, Talia…don’t you?”

Talia stiffened as she stared at her beloved, swallowing hard. She had feared that what the Amazon had told her was the truth, forcing her to research everything she could find out about Hades and his armor. Unfortunately, she had been able to find the definitive proof she needed to show her father.

“I believe in my father’s mission, beloved,” she firmly stated, holding her chin high. “He will prevail despite your attempt to stop us.”

“You know the truth, Talia, and yet you still refuse to believe it,” Batman yelled. “Your father will be destroyed if he releases Hades.”

“That’s just a myth, Detective,” Ra’s maintained with a smirk as he raised the helmet to his head. “Now, I believe it’s time for me to begin my work.”

Wayne Manor; September 4th, 23:58 EST

Artemis paced the length of the entertainment room only to turn on her heel and start all over again, her arms folded tightly against her chest. She did not like this one bit but knew that she had to accept it nonetheless. She had promised Diana that she would be here to protect her family and she was not about to let her down.

Still, she had planned on fighting by Diana’s side to send Hades back to the Underworld where he belonged. It was not easy to accept being left behind to sit on the sidelines while a war was breaking out in downtown Gotham. She was always there in the heart of the battle, not sitting in a house waiting for a fight that may or may not come to her.

“Still stewing?” Jason asked.

Artemis looked up to see Jason and Tim enter the room with a large pizza box and some plates, both dressed in their uniforms and prepared for battle. “No, it’s just that I should be there helping them,” she insisted.

“Look at it this way, Artemis,” Tim told her. “Bruce only wants the very best at home protecting
Alfred and the little ones. It’s actually like an honor to be chosen to stay here.”

“I am not in need of protection, Master Timothy, but I do appreciate the sentiment just the same,” Alfred said as he entered with a couple of bags of chips, Damian following behind carrying bottles of pop.

“You know what I mean, Alfred.” Tim replied as he set the large pizza box down on the table. “It’s just that well…you’re older than us.”

“Are you saying that just because I am your elder that I am incapable of handling myself, my dear boy?” he inquired with a slight smirk, a single eyebrow arching in amusement as he regarded a suddenly flustered Tim.

Tim looked up from the pizza, realizing what he had just said. “No!” he corrected himself. “You’re deadly in your own right, Alfred. Bruce always told me to never underestimate you.”

Artemis watched as Jason filled his plate, shaking her head in amazement. “How can you guys eat at a time like this?” she asked.

Jason looked over at her as he brought a piece of pizza to his mouth. “What?” he asked, giving her an innocent expression. “It’s not like Hades will be coming this way any time soon anyway and that’s if he does manage to get past Diana, Bruce, Clark and whatever else Bruce has up his sleeve.”

“Does he have some secret plan in mind?” Damian asked, intrigued by the thought. He wanted nothing more than to be there, but, at the same time, he wasn’t certain he wanted to see his grandfather being defeated. He still felt torn despite choosing the Wayne’s over the al Ghul’s.

“Bruce always has a secret plan in mind that no one knows about,” Jason told him as he sat down on one of the couches, Artemis sitting down next to him.

“He has backup plans for his backup plans,” Tim reassured him as he sat down in a chair across from Jason.

“I know for a fact that Master Bruce has everything well in hand,” Alfred revealed.

“Ugh,” Donna groaned as she walked into the room. “Did you guys have to get pizza?”

“Sorry, Don,” Tim apologized. “We were hungry.”

Donna plopped down in a chair, her hand moving to cover the small swell of her belly. “It’s okay,” she replied. “The nausea will eventually pass.”

“Would you care for a cup of chamomile tea, Miss Donna?” Alfred offered. “It always seemed to help Miss Diana with her morning sickness.”

“No, thank you, Alfred,” she said. “Maybe later.”

“Maybe it would help to eat some pizza instead of just having to smell it,” Jason suggested.

Donna groaned again, pressing the back of her head into the headrest of the chair as she closed her eyes. “You want me to throw up right here, don’t you?”

“Don’t… please… just don’t,” Jason stated, holding up a hand. “I cannot handle vomit.”

Artemis chuckled softly as she turned to look at the man who had surprisingly managed to capture
her heart. “Wimp,” she teased him.

“I am not a wimp,” he maintained. “I just can’t stand people vomiting. It’s sounds so gross and don’t even get me started on the smell.”

“What are you going to do if Artemis gets pregnant?” Damian asked. All heads turned to look at the young Wayne, the silence that had settled over the room deafening. He looked up to see everyone staring at him. “What?”

“That is not going to happen,” Artemis bit out with a glare.

Jason’s head snapped to the side to stare at Artemis. “Well, it could…someday…couldn’t it?”

Artemis turned to look at him, her brow furrowing. “You want children?”

“You don’t?”

“You do?”

“Maybe,” he admitted.

“Maybe?”

“Don’t you?”

“I don’t know,” she thoughtfully confessed. “I guess I hadn’t really thought about it. I mean we haven’t even really…”

“I know…I know, but we…”

Alfred clearing his throat forced the couple to remember that there were other people in the room with them. “I think I need some pizza,” Artemis readily decided, getting up and making a beeline straight for the food, somewhat embarrassed by the unexpected turn of the conversation.

Jason watched her as she walked away, wondering what she was thinking about. He knew now was not the time or place for them to discuss anything like having children. They’d only just admitted they had feelings for each other, kissing as far as they’d gone.

They definitely weren’t ready for a discussion about children or marriage. They needed to take this slow and figure out what they wanted together. He definitely didn’t want to mess up the best thing that had ever happened to him.

A security alarm sounded, alerting them to the fact that they had company. A crack like thunder caused everyone to freeze where they stood, the windows rattling from the aftershock of it. “What was that?” Tim asked, his entire body tense with a need to act, ready to protect his family.

“Go,” Alfred sternly ordered as he raced from the room.

Alfred ran up the stairs, pulling his gun from its holster. No one would lay a single finger on either of these children as long as there was breath in his body. Coming to a stop in the hallway outside of their bedroom, he took up his post.

Bruce had gone into extensive detail, briefing Alfred on what he wanted to take place here should the threat in Gotham roll over into the manor. He had no doubt that Hades would try to see his grandchildren once he was free from his prison. He also didn’t trust anyone else who might take advantage of the distraction to strike Wayne Manor.
It seemed that his surrogate son had been right in his suspicions.

Jason, Tim, and Artemis raced out the front door while Donna and Damian took up position behind them in the foyer to stop anyone from entering the manor. “Aresia,” Artemis growled as her eyes fell on the woman who had evaded them since her arrival in Gotham.

“Aresia,” Artemis greeted her with a grin.

“You’re supposed to be dead,” Artemis spat out, gripping her sword. “Why aren’t you?”

“Ares decided to have pity on me,” she revealed. “He saved me from death, imbuing me with some special gifts to help him take Diana down.”

“Diana isn’t here so you might as well leave,” Jason told her.

“I already know that Diana has her hands full,” Aresia informed them. “She’s about to have a family reunion with her beloved father. I am here to take away everything that she holds dear.”

“You have to get through us first,” Tim ground out, gripping a Batarang.

“Oh, I plan on it, young man,” Aresia gloated. “Diana will come home to find it burned to the ground and her beloved children gone. When she contacts her dear mother, she’ll find Themyscira is no more as well.”

“What’s happening to Themyscira?” Artemis demanded to know.

“War, my dear sister,” Aresia told her. “A war unlike anything Hippolyta has ever encountered before. Diana will beg for death once we’ve taken everything she’s ever loved away from her.”

“Seems that Ares has finally managed to put together the perfect plan to destroy Diana,” Artemis replied. “Since Diana can’t be in three places at once, it’s a good thing that we’re here to stop you.”

“Didn’t I mention that Ares gave me some very special gifts to aid me in my mission of revenge against Diana?” she reminded her.

“If that’s supposed to scare me, you’re going to have try a lot harder than that,” Artemis ground out with a derisive sneer.

“Then, let me show you all instead!” Aresia yelled, extending her arms towards them.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Did you all see this coming?? The perfect trifecta of chaos. Who will win and who will lose?

UP NEXT: My lips are sealed. You'll have to wait and see! :)

Also, hoping to start posting my new fic Deadly Intentions in the next week or so!
Chapter 33

Wayne Manor; September 5th, 00:26 EST

Aresia extended her arms towards the trio before her, releasing an electrical surge of magic that caused all three of them to dive out of the way. A large shrub took the brunt of her furious attack, exploding and sending debris flying in every direction as it burst into flames.

Robin knew they were going to have to draw the fight away from the manor before she blew their home up along with everyone inside of it. “Over here, sweetheart,” Robin yelled, waving his arms at her. He knew that Artemis and Red Hood would take the hint.

“I am not your sweetheart, little boy,” Aresia ground out with a derisive sneer, releasing another magical current.

Tim ducked and rolled out of the way as another bush took the full impact of her assault, bursting into flames. Jason and Artemis quickly moved towards her, each moving into position behind the enraged Amazon. Sharing a fleeting glance, they charged at her with weapons drawn and ready as Robin threw a handful of Batbombs that rolled to a stop at her feet.

Aresia glanced down at the bombs with a sadistic laugh, shrill and condescending in tone as it pierced the air. “You and your foolish gadgets are no match for me, young man,” she hissed.

As if on cue, the Batbombs exploded, knocking Aresia several yards away. Artemis and Jason moved in as Robin shifted back to guard the front door. They needed to keep moving her further and further away from the manor or risk her getting inside.

Aresia swiftly leapt to her feet with a growl of fury, sending a powerful burst of magic directly at Red Hood, hitting him squarely in the chest. Jason flew backwards, his back hitting a low stone wall before landing face-first on the ground with a groan. Tim raced to his side, his hand coming to rest on his back as he tried to help him up.

Artemis released a fierce warrior’s cry as she raced towards Aresia, trying not to worry about Jason. She needed to focus on stopping this witch before anything more happened. She had promised Diana that no harm would come to her family and she was going to keep that promise no matter the cost to herself.

“Hiding behind magic?” Artemis taunted her as she closed the distance between them, both Amazons circling each other. “That is a coward’s way, not an Amazon’s way.”

“I was given this power by Ares himself,” she countered, holding her hands up in front of her.

“I thought you would know better than to trust Ares,” Artemis spat out as she adjusted her grip on her sword, her emerald eyes twin flames of vengeance. “Obviously, I gave you far too much credit.”

“He saved my life…gave me a second chance to get my revenge,” Aresia spat out.
“Only for you to become his slave,” Artemis shot back. “The Amazons are slave to no male—mortal or god.”

Aresia’s chest began to heave as fury burned through her veins. “I am no man’s slave,” she seethed. “Ares spared my life so that I could fulfill my need for retribution against the Amazon princess. She will pay dearly for what she did to me.”

“Trying to take away her family will only incur even more of her wrath,” Artemis pointed out. “She will not rest until she has avenged her family and has taken your life. Is that what you want?”

“She cannot beat me,” she snapped. “I am now a demi-goddess, possessing more power than she could ever dream of having.”

Artemis circled her foe like a predator would its next meal, more than anxious to deliver her own retribution for the pain this woman had caused. “How quickly you have forgotten how Diana beat Ares, a god far more powerful than you, Aresia.”

“She may have been able to beat Ares, but she’ll never be able to stop me from taking away what she loves most.”

“Diana doesn’t have to stop you,” Artemis ground out. “We won’t let you hurt anyone…I won’t let you.”

“That’s what you think.”

Aresia released another burst of magic, directing it straight at Artemis who rolled out of the way at the last moment. Coming up on the balls of her feet, she launched herself at the former Amazon, brandishing her sword at her.

“Fight me like a true Amazon,” Artemis demanded of her. “Or are you too afraid of me?”

Her taunting words only served to further enrage Aresia, a furious cry permeating the air as she drew her sword. “I don’t need Ares’ magic to take you down,” she responded with great disdain. “You’ve never been a true Amazon, Artemis. The Bana-Mighdall have always been like a red-headed step child to the Amazons.”

Artemis gritted her teeth as she swung her sword only to have Aresia block her strike. “I may be a red-head, but I am no one’s step child,” she spat out. “All Amazons are equal.”

“That’s what you think,” Aresia groused, grunting as her blade clashed with her opponent’s. “Do you really believe that Diana looks at you as her equal? She left you behind to watch her children while she went to face off against her father with her mortal husband.”

Artemis knew that she was only trying to get under her skin and she definitely wasn’t going to let Aresia do that. “So what rock have you been hiding under all this time?” she asked, lifting her foot and kicking her in the gut.

Aresia stumbled backwards, righting herself at the last moment. She growled as she lifted her sword, swinging it savagely as she launched a counter attack. “I have not been hiding.”

Artemis blocked her swing, shoving her back before throwing herself at her once more. With a flick of her wrist, she swiftly disarmed her, Aresia’s sword skittering across the asphalt out of her reach. “Don’t tell me you’ve been spending all your time with Ares?” she countered, breathing heavily. “Never thought I’d see the day an Amazon became Ares’ concubine.”
“I don’t need to answer to you or anyone else,” Aresia yelled, “and I definitely don’t a sword to eradicate you.”

Throwing her hands up, Aresia unleashed a powerful blast, forcing Artemis to throw up her sword in an effort to block it. Her arms began to tremble as she tried to hold off the magic that attempted to tear her apart, using her sword to prevent being killed.

“Artemis!”

Artemis chanced a glance over her shoulder as Jason ran towards her, a knife in his hand. With the flick of his wrist, he expertly threw the knife directly at Aresia who effectively batted it away as easily as if it had been a mere fly. She kept one hand focused on Artemis while using her right hand to take care of a charging Jason.

“How about this time, witch?” Jason muttered with a sneer, ignoring the pain in his ribs from the last hit that he took.

He dodged her attack, tucking himself into a roll and coming up onto his feet right beside her. He slammed his fist into her face, causing her head to snap back, but it had little affect on her otherwise.

She smirked at him derisively, her hand shooting out at him fast and deadly like a viper striking. Her fingers circled his throat as she lifted him a few inches off the ground.

“You pathetic excuse for a man,” she ground out, still holding Artemis at bay with her left hand. “Do you really think you are a match for me?”

Aresia tightened her grip on his throat, Jason clawing at her hand and arm in a futile attempt to break her grip on him. He kicked his legs at her, his boot connecting with her hip, but it only caused her to tighten her grip on him even more. His vision began to tunnel, his limbs starting to tingle and feel heavy from the lack of air.

Jason glanced at Artemis to find her struggling to overcome Aresia’s powerful magic. Her boots were digging into the asphalt, creating deep grooves as she struggled to find purchase. The blade of her sword glowed brightly, nearly blinding him and shielding her face from him.

A flurry of Batarangs flew past him directly hitting their intended target, forcing Aresia to release her hold on Red Hood. She stumbled backwards, releasing her hold on Artemis as well. Jason fell to the ground on his hands and knees, coughing violently as he gasped for air. Artemis dropped to her knees as the sword slipped from her fingers, her muscles burning with her attempt to hold Aresia’s magic at bay.

Aresia whirled around, turning her attention to the source of the Batarang attack to find a boy had joined the fight. She laughed sardonically as she sized up Damian who stood beside Robin, both of them gripping weapons in preparation for another onslaught.

“A boy?” Aresia mockingly sneered.

“I wouldn’t underestimate him if I were you,” Robin stated as he inched his way closer towards her.

Beyond Robin and Damian, Aresia spotted Donna standing on the front porch, her hands clenched into fists at her sides. “Dear, sweet Donna,” Aresia greeted her, her hands glowing again with the magic that Ares had gifted her. She couldn’t help noticing the baby bump that showed. “I see you’ve followed in your sister’s footsteps. You’ve fully imbedded yourself in the ways of Man’s
World, laying with a man and carrying his child like some consort. You are a disgrace to all Amazons just like your sister.”

Aresia felt the unexpected chill of cold steel pressed against her throat, causing her every muscle to tense. “Don’t even think about it,” Artemis slowly ground out in a deadly low voice in warning.

Aresia slowly turned her attention to Artemis, her eyes narrowed into slits. “I am always thinking, sister, and I think it’s time you were taught a lesson about interfering in matters that don’t concern you,” she responded, pressing her hand against Artemis’s abdomen.

Artemis was hurled several yards through the air, crashing through a stone statue of Athena that burst into fragments upon impact. She fell face first on the ground, blood quickly seeping from a wound on her side. Jason fought the urge to run to her, knowing they needed to keep Aresia from going after Donna or those inside the manor.

Getting his feet, Jason lunged at Aresia, tackling her and pinning her to the ground. He quickly drew his dagger, his breathing ragged as he pressed the blade against her throat. “Try something,” he hissed like a cobra. “I dare you.”

She gazed up at him, her lips curling slightly as she studied his red mask. “Why do I get the feeling that you are in love with Artemis?” she asked. “I wonder…does she share your feelings, or does she loathe you for the repulsive little worm that you are?”

She never gave him a chance to reply, her fist connecting with his face and knocking him off her. Before she could fully pick herself up off the ground, Damian was on her like a panther, his one arm wrapped around her neck and his other covering her eyes as Robin attacked her with his katanas.

Aresia howled with fury, trying to get Damian off her while attempting to avoid Robin’s attack, but she couldn’t see anything. “You brat!” she screamed. “I will tear you limb from limb!”

Robin struck fast and hard, but it proved to do little damage to the Amazon. She raised her hands, releasing her magic though she couldn’t see where in an attempt to take out whoever she could. Jason took a direct hit to the chest, crying out as he landed hard against the trunk of a tree.

Reaching up, Aresia grabbed Damian by the arm, flinging him off her and tossing him aside like a rag doll. She whirled on her heel, throwing out her leg and slamming her boot into Robin’s chest. Turning, around, she took a moment to appreciate the carnage that lay all around her. No one but Donna stood between her and Diana’s children sleeping inside.

Aresia slowly began to stalk towards Donna who stood ready and waiting on the front porch, more than ready to defend this home and all inside no matter what it took. Donna sent up a silent prayer to her gods and goddesses for protection over her own unborn children as well as the family that she was fighting to protect.

She understood all too well that the chance of losing these babies was very good if she fought Aresia. It was the last thing in this world that she ever wanted to happen, but at the same time, she knew that she couldn’t just step aside and let Aresia kill her niece and nephew or Alfred. She was the next to the last defensive for Kaia and Nicholas and she wasn’t about to let Alfred face this deranged excuse for an Amazon.

“You’re going to have to get past me if you want to get inside of this house,” Donna threatened her. Aresia threw back her head in laughter, her hands finding her hips. “You are nothing but an
insignificant flea,” she mocked her. “Just like your sister…you have grown soft being in Man’s World. There is no way you can keep me from getting what I want.”

“I’m prepared to do whatever it takes to stop you,” Donna sneered.

Aresia’s eyes fell to the small swell of the Amazon’s stomach. “Even at the expensive of your baby’s life?”

“Whatever…it…takes,” Donna bit out the words and spat them out as if they were broken shards of glass, her blue eyes blazing with furious indignation.

“What ever,” Aresia said with a shrug of a shoulder and roll of her eyes. “Makes no difference to me. The more of you that I kill the more pain it’ll bring Diana.”

Aresia began to raise her hands, her fingers crackling and glowing brightly with the magic within when an arrow abruptly pierced her chest just below her left clavicle. She cried out in shock and pain, her hand reaching up to touch the wound. Her fingers brushed against the tip of the arrow as she whirled around to find Artemis standing several yards behind her with her Bo of Ra primed and ready with another arrow.

“It’s over, Aresia,” Artemis adamantly stated, ignoring the blood that oozed from the wound in her side.

“It’s not over until I say it’s over!” Aresia screamed, watching as Jason, Robin, and Damian slowly began to pick themselves up off the ground.

Refusing to surrender, Aresia turned back around to face Donna, her hands stretching out to release her magic. Her hands flickered, and magic flared out from her fingers only to abruptly fizzle out at the last second as an arrow pierced her chest. Aresia looked down at the pointed end of the arrow protruding out of her chest before dropping to the ground.

She lay on the ground staring up at the night sky littered with a billion stars, the blood red moon glowing brightly above her. Blood began to trickle from the corner of her mouth, pain lancing through her body with every shuddering attempt to draw a breath.

Getting to his feet, Jason stumbled towards Artemis who stood stock still, another arrow notched and ready to be fired should Aresia attempt to move again. “Artemis,” Jason softly called to her as he forced his body to straighten up. “It’s over…she’s gone.”

The Bana-Mighdall Amazon gradually turned her furious gaze on him as she lowered her bow and arrow. She drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly as she drank him in. He didn’t appear to have any life-threatening injuries, but he still needed to be checked out for any internal damage.

“Are you all right?” she asked him.

“A little banged up, but I think I’ll live…especially if you’re the one taking care of me,” he joked as he removed his mask, groaning as her hand came to rest on his shoulder.

Jason glanced at Robin and Damian who were already being checked over by Donna. Both of them had some cuts and abrasions but appeared unharmed for the most part. He turned his attention back to Artemis, his worry spiking as he saw how much blood she was losing from the wound in her side.

“Come on,” he told her, his arm carefully wrapping around her waist. “We need to get you to Alfred.”
“I’ll be all right,” she tried to tell him, not wanting him to view her as weak or unable to handle a wound inflicted during battle. She was an Amazon after all.

“Don’t even try to pull that invincible crap on me,” Jason stated as he led her towards the front doors of the manor.

Alfred appeared in the doorway, gun still in hand. “Is it over?” he asked.

Donna looked back over her shoulder at the dead Amazon laying on the ground. “Aresia is dead,” she confirmed. “How are Nicholas and Kaia?”

Alfred’s lips quirked in response as he holstered his gun. “Sleeping like babies,” he replied. “Master Bruce had the good presence of mind to have Miss Zatanna sound proof their rooms just in case.”

“That man,” Donna said with an affectionate smile and a shake of her head. “He always thinks of everything.”

“Come now,” Alfred said, ushering them all inside. “All of you down to the cave for treatment before the next wave of attacks come.”

“It’s just a few scratches,” Damian tried to tell him. “I’ve had a lot worse.”

“No arguments, young man,” Alfred sternly stated. “If you are going to be a part of this family, then you will abide by my rules. No one goes into a mission without having injuries treated afterwards. There will be no infected wounds or disfiguring scars on my watch.”

“It’s best not to argue with him, Damian.” Tim told him, his arm bracing his cracked ribs as he limped behind his younger brother towards the grandfather clock.

“I’ll help you, Alfred,” Donna offered. “Hera knows I’ve had to treat more of Dick’s injuries since we’ve been married. I’ve actually become very good at stitches.”

Jason pulled Artemis to a stop before they could follow the others downstairs into the cave. “Are you still mad you didn’t get to go with Diana and Bruce?” he asked her.

“No anymore,” she replied, her hand coming to rest against his cheek. “I was afraid I’d lost you for a moment.”

He smiled softly at her, his lips finding hers in a sweet kiss. It started out slow and tender, reassuring and comforting in nature. She broke the kiss before it could become heated, gasping sharply as her hand moved to her bloody side. She leaned her forehead against his shoulder as she struggled to stay upright.

“Artemis,” he murmured her name with worry, his hand moving to her side.

Checking her side, he pulled out a long fragment of the marble statue that she had been thrown into. Ignoring his own injuries, he quickly leaned down, picking her up in his arms before racing down the stairs into the cave, knowing that it was far worse than what she was letting on.

“Jason…” she argued as her head came to rest against his shoulder, suddenly finding it hard to keep her eyes open as unconsciousness threatened to drag her into its depths. “I can…I can…walk.”

“No, you can’t,” he told her as he headed towards the medical bay, pressing his cheek against the top of her head. “Stay with me, Artemis. You can’t leave me now.”
Nightwing watched the showdown below from his perch on top of Wayne Enterprises, his body teeming with the worry that had a fierce grip on him. He wanted to be down there in the midst of the battle with them, but he knew that he needed to stay here until the time came.

Bruce had a definite plan in mind, one that involved him only if things became dire. He just prayed that it wouldn’t come down to that. If it did, then the circumstances surrounding his appearance in the fray was the worst possible outcome imaginable.

“I wouldn’t bother trying to stop me,” Ra’s taunted them as he lifted the helmet up with his left hand, brandishing it before them. He knew this final piece of armor would be their undoing. “You will not survive this battle if you choose to fight me. I can already feel the immense power of Hades flowing through me.”

Diana took to the air as she reached for her lasso. “I do not fear death,” she heatedly stated, her eyes ablaze with the ferocity of her resolve. “I only fear the devastation that a deluded tyrant like you will create if allowed to roam free.”

Throwing her lasso, she captured one of Ra’s hands, pulling hard on the lasso. Talia swiftly raised her gun to fire at Diana only to have a Batarang unexpectedly knock her weapon from her hand. Talia turned hard, cold eyes on her former lover, a sneer curling her lips as she appraised him.

“You have not only chosen the wrong woman, but you have chosen the wrong side, beloved,” she spat out, drawing another gun.

Batman raced towards Talia while Ra’s and Diana battled over her lasso. Diana gritted her teeth as she arched her back in an effort to gain some ground and keep Ra’s from putting the Helm of Darkness on, but he was proving very powerful no thanks to her father.

Ra’s simply smirked up at her before suddenly yanking hard on it, roughly jerking Diana towards him. She flew straight at him, his hand snatching hold of her throat before pulling her in very close to him, their noses almost touching.

“Your father is very anxious to see you again, Amazon,” Ra’s told her, his eyes falling closed as he savored the power that he could feel flowing through his veins and threatening to overwhelm him. “Ah…I can feel Hades presence within me. He’s trying to suppress my conscious mind in order to bring his own plans to fruition, but he will not win against me.”

“Stop, Ra’s,” Diana ground out, her hands gripping his forearm in an effort to keep him from putting the helmet on. “You cannot let him gain his freedom.”

Ra’s eyes glowed with a dark malevolence that sent an icy chill down her spine as the Helm of Darkness slipped over his head. “My dear Amazon,” he growled something sinister that rumbled and raged like a powerful clap of thunder. “I will not be denied my dream…not by Hades and definitely not by you.”

A treacherous smile slowly spread from ear to ear, curling at the corners as he tightened his hold on the Amazon’s throat. Staring at him, Diana swore she could see her father lingering there behind Ra’s al Ghul’s eyes, struggling to break through Ra’s defenses. It caused her heart to begin to hammer with what she knew was coming once Hades took over Ra’s body and mind. It was only a matter of time now.

Batman’s hands gripped his batarangs so tightly his fingers were beginning to lose feeling in them
as Ra’s held Diana by her throat. He had promised to let her try to get the helmet away from Ra’s first, but now all bets were off as Ra’s held his wife in a death-grip. It was time to act before Ra’s took her away from him forever.

“Now,” Batman growled low into his commlink as he raced towards Ra’s.

A sonic boom was his only warning as Superman shot past him like a rocket, flying straight towards Ra’s with fists primed and ready to take him out. Spotting Superman’s arrival, Ra’s threw Diana aside, sending her careening into the side of a nearby building.

Ra’s turned a malevolent grin on Superman, holding up his hands and releasing a powerful surge of magic. The collision between the Man of Steel and Hades’ magic resulted in a violent crash that caused windows to shatter from the shock and the ground to quake.

Superman dropped to the ground like a rock, landing on his hands and knees as he struggled to remain conscious. Ra’s sadistic laughter split the air that was thick with dread and trepidation as he slowly strolled towards the dazed hero.

“Ah, the mighty Kryptonian,” he stated with a smug grin at what he’d been able to accomplish. “I knew it would only be a matter of time before you showed yourself. Too bad you proved to be a complete disappointment just like the Amazon did.”

Ra’s was suddenly struck from behind, sending him careening into a parked truck. With a growl, he whirled around to find Wonder Woman standing beside the fallen Kryptonian, her hands clenched, and her blue eyes aflame with rage.

“I’m only getting started,” Diana bit out with a sneer.

Batman came to stand beside her, keeping a close eye on Talia who was staying back for the moment, Ubu finally making an appearance that was not unanticipated. It was only a matter of time before Ubu and Talia intervened in some way, creating a diversion or attempting to divide them in an effort to aid her father. He wasn’t about to let that happen. He wasn’t giving up hope that she would finally see how dangerous this was and help them stop Ra’s before it was too late.

Ra’s eyed the three members of the Justice League as Superman got to his feet, standing tall between his two teammates. His lips thinned into a surly line as he appraised them. He could feel Hades’ hold on him growing more powerful by the second, forcing him to steel his mind against his hold on him. He couldn’t let Hades gain a greater grip on him than he already had.

Raising his hands, Ra’s closed his eyes as he focused on the intensity of the magical power that coursed through his body like bottled lightning fighting for release. He unleashed a surge of magic more powerful than the last, directing it at the three Leaguers. Diana immediately stepped in front of the other two, holding up her bracers to block the blast.

She gritted her teeth as she held Hades’ magic at bay, her boots skidding across the asphalt as Ra’s attempted to push her back. Batman and Superman backed out of the way, each moving in on either side of Ra’s. Batman unleashed a couple of electrified Batarangs as Superman used his heat vision to stop him.

Ra’s merely laughed at their futile attempts, the Batarangs bouncing harmlessly off his body. The Kryptonian’s heat vision did little to slow him down as he increased the intensity of the magical current. Diana could feel the burn of the magic against her hands and upper arms where the bracers didn’t protect her skin.
She ignored the pain knowing that she couldn’t relax even for a moment, couldn’t lower her arms even an inch or he’d blast her clear across Gotham. She couldn’t afford that. She needed to stay in this fight until her very last breath.

Batman threw an explosive Batarang as he raced towards Ra’s, following up with several Batbombs that seemed to have little effect. He needed to stop him before he killed Diana. He spotted Superman inching his way closer from the other side in an attempt to get his hands on him.

As they closed the distance between them, Batman noticed as Ra’s flinched, his body beginning to jerk. Hades was gaining control over him, Ra’s unable to sustain the fight and suppress Hades at the same time. It wouldn’t be long now.

Batman’s hand went to his commlink. “All teams ready,” he barked.

Ra’s head fell back as an otherworldly sound escaped his throat, her entire body seizing as Hades gained full control over the man who had so arrogantly summoned him from his prison. Ra’s body tripled in size, morphing into a form more befitting the Greek god of the Underworld.

“Beta, Gamma, Delta,” Batman growled. “Move in!”

Diana’s heart hammered beneath her breastbone as her father stood before her, fully clad in his armor. A sadistic grin spread across his face, his dark eyes glowing as he stared her down, his gauntleted hands curling into fists. While Ra’s was still there physically, there was definitely no denying Hades’ presence before them now.

Flash appeared in a red blur, coming to stand beside Batman as Green Lantern, Hawkgirl, and Martian Manhunter descended from the sky to flank Diana and Superman on their right. Green Arrow, Black Canary, Fire and Ice as well as Zatanna and Dr. Fate appeared behind Hades.

A thunderous rumble of laughter split the air like a bolt of lightning, Hades hands fisted in the air as he savored the feeling of freedom. It had been far too long since he’d breathed in fresh air, absorbing the sights and sounds of the living world around him.

Batman watched as Hades lowered his head to glare at Diana, a smirk on his face as he slowly made his way towards her. Bruce started to follow only for Flash to place a hand on his shoulder, halting him. Batman growled low in his throat as he looked back over his shoulder at the scarlet speedster.

“Wait,” Flash murmured. “Give her a chance.”

Bruce didn’t need to give Diana a chance right now. He loved her deeply and knew that she could do anything that she put her mind to, but he also knew there was no way she was going to be able to talk Hades out of what he was planning to do now that he was free from the Underworld. Hades didn’t even have his Bident or shield yet and still he was more powerful than Superman and Diana combined.

“Daughter,” Hades arrogantly drawled as he came to a stop several yards away from her. “So good to see you again. We’ve been long overdue for a reunion.”

“Go back to the Underworld, Hades,” she ground out. “You cannot win against us.”

Another peel of laughter spilled from his lips as he appraised his daughter. “So much like your mother,” he told her. “And yet, you’re so very much like me.”

“I am nothing like you,” she furiously hissed. “Everything that I am is because of my mother, not
Hades shrugged an indifferent shoulder. “Believe what you will, but there is just as much of me in you, Diana, as your mother. You just refuse to realize it or accept it.”

Diana hated to think of Hades having any part of her creation and yet she knew that it was true. “Go back to the Underworld,” she repeated. “You don’t belong here, and you know it.”

“But I just got here,” he replied, sweeping his arm out at his surroundings. “I have so much I want to do and see…people to meet. I’m very anxious to meet your husband and my grandchildren.”

Batman shrugged off Flash’s hand, stalking straight towards Hades, not an ounce of ear in his bearing. “Here I am,” Batman growled. “Now, you can leave because you will never see our children.”

Hades appraised him for a long moment before finally responding. “You certainly are arrogant, aren’t you?” he responded with a note of admiration in his voice. “I’m not sure if that is a commendable trait or just plain foolhardy. Either way, you and my daughter are not going to keep me from seeing my grandchildren.”

“Over my dead body,” Batman rasped with a deadly grate.

“I’m more than happy to accommodate you, son-in-law,” Hades ground out, lifting his hand towards the Dark Knight.

“NO!” Diana screamed, racing towards her father and husband. There was no way she was going to allow her father to take Bruce away from her.

“Flash…now!” Batman yelled.

Flash immediately raced towards Hades as everyone prepared for retaliation from the god of the Underworld. Running straight for Hades, Flash reached for the Helm of Darkness in an effort to strip him of his armor and therefore his foothold in this world.

Unfortunately, Hades was just as fast, his arm shooting out and slamming hard into Flash, sending him hurling straight into the side of a building. Superman flew straight at him as Green Lantern, Hawkgirl, and Martian Manhunter took to the sky. Hades released several bolts of magic, knocking Hawkgirl and Lantern out of the air.

Manhunter flew in beneath them, catching both of them before they could hit the ground. Hades swatted Superman aside as if he was nothing more than pesky insect, ignoring the other Leaguers as he turned his full attention to his daughter and son-in-law. “I have great plans for the both of you,” he uttered as he raised his ringed hand towards Batman.

A bright light shot forth from his ring, Batman taking a direct hit that caused him to stumble backwards. Diana screamed in absolute rage, a warrior’s cry torn from her lips as she launched herself directly at her father with fists clenched in front of her.

She flew into him, shoving him back several yards, but creating no damage. Hades merely laughed at her failed attempt, his hand reaching out to grab hold of her arm. “Your temper is definitely not just from your mother,” he told her, turning her and pinning her back against his chest as he wrapped his arm around her to keep her there. “You’re not going to win, my daughter. I think it would be best if you joined me instead of fighting against me. It would be so much easier for everyone.”
“Never,” she spat out, struggling against his hold on her as her teammates all stood watching, trying to decide whether or not to attack and risk hurting Wonder Woman.

“If you aren’t going to join me, then I guess you’re going to have to fight your husband instead,” he told her.

Diana looked at Batman to see him holding his head in his hands, shaking it as if trying to regain his senses. He lifted his head to look at her, a vicious smile slowly spreading across his face as he stared at her. She’d never seen anything so evil on his face in all the years that she had known him.

His white lenses were glowing a bright red as he studied her, his hand reaching for a Batarang as he made his way towards her and Hades. He suddenly stopped several feet away from her before dropping to one knee before them. “My lord,” he rasped as he bowed his head in obedience. “Your wish is my command.”

“Hera…no,” Diana whispered as tears pricked her eyes, her gaze fixed on her kneeling husband.

Hades released his hold on her, allowing her to land on her feet before him. “Batman fight my daughter…to the death,” he ordered.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, this has gotten interesting don't you think??

UP NEXT: An all out war begins between Hades and the League and Batman vs Wonder Woman. Who will win and who will lose? :)
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 34

*Themyscira; September 5th, 04:16 EST*

Hippolyta released a battle cry of pure rage as she brandished her sword, loathing the fact that she was fighting her very own Amazons. These were her sisters, the very women that she had sworn to lead and protect. Now, she was taking their lives with her own hands and sending them to the Underworld.

Her sword pierced Cyanea’s abdomen, the traitorous Amazon pushing herself closer to Hippolyta and willingly plunging the blade of the queen’s sword deeper into her abdomen. She stopped when they were nearly nose to nose, Cyanea’s eyes dark with hatred.

“You do not deserve to be queen,” Cyanea spat out.

“That is not for you to decide,” Hippolyta hissed, pulling back and slamming her foot firmly in Cyanea’s chest to push her off her sword.

Breathing heavily, Hippolyta paused to look around her, gazing at the destruction…the blood and the bodies of fallen sisters. It made her physically ill to bear witness to such a horror and yet it had been inevitable and necessary for reasons that the goddesses only knew and fully understood.

Swallowing back the bile that burned in the back of her throat, she turned her attention to her next opposer only to find Circe floating in the sky above the rebellious Amazon army. She had a smirk on her face, her purple hair whipping in the wind as the blood moon shone fully behind her.

“Circe!” Hippolyta seethed. “I should have known that you would have a hand in this.”

“Actually, not at all,” Circe confessed. “This was actually your own Amazons’ doing. Ares just asked me to merely help things along a little and ensure their victory over you.”

“You know you are not to oppose me in any way,” Hippolyta reminded her. “Are you willing to risk banishment to the Underworld?”

“With Ares’s protection?” Circe asked, placing a forefinger to her lips as if contemplating her answer. “Of course!”

Hippolyta knew they were definitely in trouble if Circe was aiding the deceitful Amazon sisters who started this war. She tightened her grip on her sword, refusing to surrender or back down just because Circe was involved in this.

“Let’s have a little fun, shall we?” Circe asked, releasing blasts of magic that caused the island to quake, rocks breaking free. Structures that had stood the test of time for thousands of years cracked, fissures erupting in the stone and threatening to crumble to the ground.

“Stop!” Hippolyta yelled, fearing that the entire island would be destroyed.

“It’s too late for that, Hippolyta,” Circe stated, directing her magic at the queen.
General Phillipus shoved Queen Hippolyta out of the way, taking the full brunt of Circe’s magical attack. It threw her several yards into the air before slamming into the stone wall of the palace. She fell to the ground in a heap, her sword slipping free from her grip.

“Surrender!” Kyriaki demanded of the queen.

“Never!” Hippolyta roared in fury, praying to the goddesses that Phillipus was all right.

The queen charged forward, her supporters flanking her as they pressed on. Circe used her magic to give Kyriaki and her band of followers the upper hand, Amazons dropping left and right. Circe was enjoying every single moment of this. She had waited for so long to exercise her revenge against Hippolyta.

She knew that it could end up costing her in the end, but Ares had sworn his protection in exchange for her help in crushing the Amazons and the queen. She had to admit that Ares’ plan to destroy Diana and make her pay for her interference in his plans had been rather ingenious. There was no way that the Amazon princess was going to escape this without suffering some sort of loss.

The risk of her being forever banished to the Underworld was definitely worth it knowing Ares was going to destroy Diana and the Amazons. The thought made the grin on her face broaden even more, watching Hippolyta struggling to regain the upper hand even more so.

Kyriaki pressed in towards Hippolyta, resolved to bring the queen down herself. She was the one who had started this betrayal and opposition to the queen and she was going to be the one to end her reign. She gritted her teeth as she wiped the blood splatter from her face with the back of her hand, swiftly using her shield to upper cut her opponent in the jaw and sending her sprawling backwards onto the ground.

She leapt over her, racing towards Hippolyta who was fighting off two of her sisters. She adjusted her grip on the hilt of her sword, prepared to take the queen’s life. “Hippolyta!” Kyriaki yelled, causing the queen to whip around.

Hippolyta was surrounded by several of her opposers, all of them pointing their swords directly at the queen. They slowly inched closer to her, Hippolyta turning in a tight, small circle. She was not about to go down without a fight, making sure she took as many as possible along with her.

“It’s over,” Kyriaki sneered at her. “It’s time to pay for your crimes against the Amazon nation.”

A rumbling sound like a sonic boom caused everyone to freeze where they stood, looking about for the source of the noise in confusion. Every single Amazon fell on bended knee as Aphrodite, Artemis, and Athena appeared before them, Circe visibly paling at the sight of them.

“My goddesses,” Queen Hippolyta breathlessly greeted them on bended knee, her head lowered in humility before those she served and worshipped.

“There will be no more fighting among you,” Artemis angrily stated, her fiery gaze falling on Kyriaki. “This war is over. Do you hear me?”

Kyriaki lifted her head to meet the goddess’s furious glare, defiance dancing in the Amazon’s eyes. “Queen Hippolyta has gone the way of the world instead of following the traditions of the Amazons,” she obstinately retorted. “She must pay for her crimes.”

“Queen Hippolyta has done no wrong,” Athena responded. “She has consistently sought out counsel from us, sending much time in prayer over the future of the Amazons and how best to lead. What she had done has been with our blessing.”
“And what of Hera?” Kyriaki countered. “What does she have to say about this?”

“Hera is the one who sent us to stop this nonsense,” Aphrodite icily answered her, holding her chin high. “There will be no more fighting among you.”

Kyriaki rebelliously stood to her feet, blood dripping from the sword she still held tightly in her hand. “And what if we don’t agree?”

“You won’t have to worry about that, Amazon,” Artemis replied with a malevolent smile curling her lips. “You and your seditious followers are hereby banished from Themyscira for your offenses.”

“What we have done has only been for the best of Themyscira and the Amazons,” Kyriaki yelled. “You may have believed your intentions were pure, but you have done nothing but sow seeds of division and discord among your sisters,” Athena stated. “You have defied the orders of your queen and therefore us. For that, you and your followers will be sentenced to the Asphodel Meadows for your sedition.”

Asphodel Meadows was a dishonor to an Amazon. To be sent there in the Underworld instead of Elysian Fields was a severe punishment in and of itself. “You can’t do that!” Kyriaki seethed in fury.

“We can, and we will,” Aphrodite told her, waving her hand.

Hippolyta watched as Kyriaki and her traitorous sisters vanished before her eyes, leaving her faithful Amazons behind. “Praise be to Hera,” she murmured under her breath.

“And as for you, Circe,” Artemis pointedly said, her fierce glower falling on the witch. “For your participation in this chaos, you will be forever banished to the Pits of Tartarus.”

“No, wait…let me explain,” Circe yelled, holding up her hands to the three angry goddesses.

In another flash of light, Circe was gone, Hippolyta releasing a sigh of relief. “Thank you, my goddesses,” she told them, lowering her head once more.

“You will have much rebuilding to do, Hippolyta,” Aphrodite gently told her, placing a hand on her shoulder.

Hippolyta lifted her head. “It’s be a task that I will relish,” she reassured her.

“I know you will do a fine job of it too,” Athena agreed. “Remember, you have our blessing.”

The three goddesses vanished from sight as Hippolyta stood to her feet. She turned to see Phillipus attempting to get up. She rushed to her side, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and helping her to her feet. “Easy there, Phillipus,” she told her.

Phillipus looked around, stunned to find the Amazons they’d been fighting gone. “What did I miss?”

Hippolyta’s lips curved into a smile as her gaze roammed over the work that awaited them. “Just a miracle.”

**Gotham; September 5th, 01:45 EST**

Diana stared in unceonceled horror as Batman…her Bruce…slowly stood from his servile position
before Hades, straightening to his full foreboding height as his black cape wrapped around him like a death shroud. He glared daggers at her, his lips twisting into a sneering expression that she had never seen directed at her by him before. It was so cold and callous…menacing and wicked, causing a shiver of dread to lance straight through her.

This was no longer her husband standing before her now. It was her father’s servant, the Dark Knight of Gotham now Hades’ right hand of death. He stared at her as if seeing her, but not really registering that he even knew her or recognized her…that he’d ever felt anything for her except for absolute hatred.

“It will be my pleasure to serve you, my lord,” Batman rasped something positively sinister and otherworldly.

A peel of sadistic laughter erupted from her father standing behind her, his hand falling on her shoulder. “I hope you are prepared to face your love in a fight to the death,” he told her. “You will either have to kill him or be killed. Those your choices, my daughter.”

“Why are you doing this?” Diana demanded as she stepped further away from her father, her gaze never leaving Bruce as he stared her down.

“This all could have been avoided if you had only cooperated with me and allowed me to see my grandchildren,” he stated. “Instead, you chose to defy me, attempted to stop me and send me back to the Underworld. Now, you will have to pay the consequences for your obstinacy.”

Superman quickly closed the distance between him and Batman, ready to intervene and stop this madness before it even began. Diana’s pleas for him to remove Bruce from the fight if things turned deadly echoed through his mind, reminding him of the promise that he had made to his best friend. How on earth was he supposed to honor that promise now?

“Don’t even think about it Kryptonian,” Hades bellowed, pointing an accusatory finger at the Man of Steel. “None of you shall intervene on my daughter’s behalf. If any of you tries to help either one of them, I will strike them both dead where they stand and you as well.”

“You can’t do this!” Superman bellowed, enraged by the unexpected turn of events. This was not at all what any of them had anticipated. “Diana is your own daughter!”

“I can do it, and I will,” Hades retorted. “And just to make sure none of you get bored, I think it’s time to summon my army of the dead to keep you occupied.”

Closing his eyes, Hades lifted his arms as he chanted the words that would bring his army to life, his hands glowing with a brightness that was near blinding. The ground began to quake, thunderous bolts of lightning streaking across the night sky in a spiderweb pattern as he called upon those lost in eternal slumber in their graves to answer his call.

The ground beneath their boots shook as cracks and crevices split through the asphalt, narrow, deep maws erupting right in front of Wayne Enterprises. The crumbling ground forced League members to back further away from Hades, Batman, and Wonder Woman.

Batman began to circle Diana like a deadly hunter about to capture his prey, his arms hidden beneath his cape as well as whatever weapons he might already have in his gauntleted hands. Diana carefully circumnavigated around him as well, her hands held out in front of her to show him that she meant him no harm.

“I don’t want to fight you,” she adamantly told him.
A smirk twisted his lips into something completely ruthless. “Then, it’ll make killing you that much easier.”

“It doesn’t have to be like this, Batman,” Diana insisted, hoping she could somehow get through to her husband, needing to find his humanity deep within him if it still existed. “You need to fight Hades’ control over your mind.”

“The only one I need to fight is you,” Batman sneered at her. “I have fought you many times before and won. This time will be no different…except that you’ll find yourself in the Underworld when it’s all over.”

The haunting sound of wailing abruptly filled the area, quickly rising and descending in undulating waves that charged the air with apprehension and worry. Everyone froze where they stood except for Hades who merely grinned deviously.

“Ah, my army is on its way now,” the god of the Underworld uttered with pleasure.

The Justice League all looked at each other, somewhat unsure of what they were about to encounter and yet resolved to defeat Hades’ army nonetheless. Superman lifted into the air to gain everyone’s attention, immediately assuming command of the situation since Batman was now compromised.

“Make sure the area is cleared of all civilian,” Superman ordered. “We destroy Hades’ army at all cost.”

“But we don’t kill,” Flash countered.

“It doesn’t matter, you fool,” Green Lantern yelled at him, pointing towards the throng coming towards them. “They’re already dead.”

Everyone turned to see a large horde coming, flooding the street with their morbid presence. Some were nothing more than skeletons, but the vast majority of them were in various stages of decomposition. Their clothes hung on their bony frames, the material tattered and torn as they followed the command of their master.

“Ah, hell,” John muttered as he powered up his ring and took to the sky. “I’m going to get zombie guts all over my uniform.”

“Sweet!” Flash yelled, pumping his fist. “This is going to be just like an episode of The Walking Dead!”

“There is nothing exciting about this,” Shayera growled as she tightened her grip on her mace, smacking it against the palm of her other hand. “We need to stop them before someone gets hurt.”

“We need to focus on getting Hades’ armor off of Ra’s,” Superman heatedly stated. “It’s the only way to end this nightmare and keep Batman from trying to kill Diana.”

“Bats wouldn’t do that!” Flash exclaimed as he watched the army growing closer, the stench of death beginning to permeate his nostrils.

“He’s not Batman right now…or at least not the one that we know!” Shayera countered with a growl as she took to the air, flying straight at the corpses coming to stop them.

J’onn quickly morphed into a towering dragon, slithering along the street towards the walking cadavers bent on destruction. His tail whipped wildly, taking out three of them in one swipe, but it
did little to slow down the hundreds of others that continued to come in droves.

Green Arrow glanced at Black Canary, giving her a wink and a smirk before nocking an explosive arrow. “Let’s go get ‘em, pretty bird.”

“Right behind you, handsome,” she agreed, hands fisted at her sides as she opened her mouth and released a canary cry that caused several corpses to instantly disintegrate into dust.

Flash raced towards the cadavers, weaving in between them, pausing to snap necks and pull skeletons apart. Shayera flew directly into the midst of the throng, her mace effectively destroying the dead, but more continued to come despite their efforts.

Zatanna and Doctor Fate both conjured spells in an attempt to disperse the horde. Corpses dissolved to dust, but others quickly took their place. No matter what spells they tried, they couldn’t gain control over the army of the dead or remove Hades’ hold on Batman.

Nightwing’s heart was hammering wildly against his breastbone, the overwhelming need to help nearly pushing him over the edge. He kept his boots firmly planted on the roof of Wayne Enterprises despite that overpowering desire. Bruce had given him specific orders and he refused to let him down, knowing that he was counting on him.

“How much worse does it have to get before we move in?”

Nightwing didn’t even bother to turn around at the voice that joined him on the rooftop. “I wish I could say we were there, but I’m afraid it’s only going to get much worse,” Dick replied, keeping his gaze locked on the utter chaos erupting below. It was as if the pits of hell had erupted right on the streets of Gotham.

“I hope he knows what’s doing.”

“He does…he always does,” Dick assuredly spoke despite the fact that his confidence was beginning to waver, his chest tight as he his eye settled on the god of the Underworld.

With an otherworldly laugh that rolled like a wave of thunder, Hades extended his hands, his magic shooting out like rays from the sun that fell like a blanket over his army of the dead. Each of his walking cadavers were now fully armed with various weapons ranging from guns to swords, some ancient while others newer.

“This just keeps getting better and better,” Shayera groused, swinging her mace with a warrior cry on her lips.

Talia pressed her back against the side of the building, Ubu staying close at her side. Her eyes were wide in horror, fear for her father like tendrils wrapped around her throat threatening to choke her. She needed to get that armor off her father before Hades completely destroyed him, but she couldn’t get anywhere near him. She was going to have to wait and watch, hoping that the Justice League could stop Hades and save her father.

Batman took the opportunity of distraction to lunge at Diana, revealing the razor-sharp Batarang he had in his hand. Diana instinctively raised her bracers, crossing them in front of her and blocking the downward slice of his Batarang while simultaneously pulling her torso back to avoid the other deadly Batarang coming directly at her abdomen with his left.

Bruce had tried to conceal his counterattack with his left hand hidden beneath his cape, but she knew him better than anyone, knew how he thought and how he fought. They had sparred together countless times over the years. She knew his every move like she knew the back of her hand.
Batman growled his fury at the missed opportunity to gut his opponent, but his failure only seemed to fuel his next attempt as he attacked with a furious flurry of kicks and slicing swings of his Batarangs. He fought with a fearless vengeance that he had always attacked with but had always kept a tight leash of control over it. Now, it was reigning free in a determined attempt to take her life.

He bared his teeth, a snarl fixed on his face as he swung his weapons with deadly skill and precision. Diana was consistently kept on the defensive as they fought, blocking kicks and narrowly dodging swings of lethal Batarangs that glinted in the street lights that lined downtown Gotham.

Diana grunted as she blocked another attempt by Batman to remove her head from her shoulders, finding that Bruce was fighting with a strength fueled by his iron will to prevail and his sheer determination to please his master. He constantly kept her moving, trying to avoid having a Batarang buried deep in her chest.

She lifted her leg and kicked him square in the chest in burst of rage and frustration that was nearly blinding, sending Batman flying backwards into a parked taxi cab. She bent over, her hands coming to rest on her knees as she paused to catch her breath.

Hades laughed maliciously as he watched his daughter battle her husband to the death. “How about we make this even more entertaining,” he decided, magic shooting forth from his outstretched hand and hitting Batman who was getting to his feet. “That should make things far more interesting.”

Batman shook his head as if trying to escape the fog that had encompassed his mind, his hands momentarily holding the sides of his head. Lifting his head, his red-eyed glare narrowed dangerously as he charged towards Diana like an enraged, wild animal. His fists his hands as he stalked towards her, his entire body rigid.

Diana did her best to block out the deafening sounds of battle being waged all around her between the living and the dead, but it was difficult. She had to focus on finding a way to save Bruce without either of them getting killed. “Bruce, listen to me,” she tried again. “I don’t want to fight you. I love you.”

Batman drew his arm back without the slightest bit of hesitation, his fist connecting with Diana’s face. The cracking sound of her jaw bone fracturing was followed by the sickening thud of her body colliding into the front of Wayne Enterprises. Bricks and mortar rained down on her as she landed face down on the ground with a groan.

Dazed, Diana lifted her head to see Bruce coming straight towards her. She could feel blood collecting in her mouth as she forced herself to her feet, fury burning through her veins at what her father had done. Hades had given Bruce god-like strength, making this fight that much more difficult to escape and putting her in an even more dire situation.

Spitting out the blood that had pooled in her mouth, Diana charged at Bruce, plowing into him with all her strength and ignoring the throbbing pain in her jaw. They collided with a resounding crash, both struggling to gain the upper hand on one another as they skidded across the asphalt.

Hades’ dark eyes gleamed with pleasure as he watched his daughter and son-in-law fight one another. His gaze wandered over the destruction that was taking place all around him. The Kryptonian kept trying to get close to him only to be drawn back into the fight with his army of the dead surrounding him.

He watched as the blade of a sword pierced the abdomen of a green-haired woman, the speedster in
red racing to his fallen comrade’s side. A man dressed as a knight on a horse slashed his sword only to be shot in the chest, falling from his steed onto the ground below.

A cowboy met a similar fate as another gunshot rang out, finding its mark in the Leaguer’s abdomen. The blond-haired woman with the deafening cry was lying lifeless in the street, blood oozing from a wound in her side as the archer fell to his knees beside her and pulled her into his arms in an effort to protect her.

The two magicians were unleashing every spell they could think of, but everything they tried failed to prove profitable for any extended length of time. Small, brief successes kept them trying again, but in the end, they would fail just like all the others.

The Atlantean seemed to be holding his own, using the spear on the end of his arm to rip corpses to shreds. Behind him, a red android and a woman dressed in blue with white hair were fighting valiantly but were on the verge of being overwhelmed by the masses of cadavers pressing in around them.

Feeling a presence nearing, Hades turned a dark, accusing eye on the woman sneaking up behind him. “Your father is no more, child,” he told her. “Save yourself.”

“Release my father,” Talia bit out as she pointed her gun directly at him, refusing to back down despite the fact she was facing off against a Greek god.

Hades chuckled at her fearlessness…or her foolishness depending on one looked at it. With a dismissive wave of his hand, the gun in her hand disintegrated. “It is too late for him,” he informed her, sending a blast of magic directly at her, hurtling her into a brick wall.

Ubu ran to her side, kneeling down beside her. Talia was barely breathing, but she was still alive. Seeing that there was no way to save Ra’s, Ubu carefully gathered up Talia into his arms before taking off, knowing that he needed to get her back to a Lazarus pit in order to restore her and save her life.

He glanced back over his shoulder before disappearing around the corner, catching a glimpse of Batman trading violent blows with the Amazon. Diana gritted her teeth against the pain in her side and her jaw, the broken ribs that she could feel with every single breath she tried to draw.

A Batarang found purchase in her chest just below her clavicle, tearing through muscle and ligaments. She refused to give up, though, as she furiously yanked it out and threw it on the ground with a Greek curse. She had to try to save him, knowing that her premonitions about losing him were on the verge of becoming a gruesome reality.

“Bruce!” she yelled as she raised her arm to block a swing. “I know you’re in there. Remember who you are…remember the love that we share.”

Batman snarled at her, refusing to listen to her. Instead, he slammed his forehead against hers, nearly knocking her senseless before grabbing her arm and twisting it viciously. A loud crack of bones echoed in her ears as pain shot through her like a hot poker.

She knew she needed to fight harder but hurting him was the last thing in this world that she wanted to do. She loved him too much to bring him pain, choosing rather to take the beating he was dishing out and praying that she could get through to him before he killed her.

While she didn’t want to die, it was far more acceptable to her than killing the man that she loved with all her heart. If she died, then hopefully Hades would release Bruce from his control over him,
giving him a chance to defeat her father.

Batman lunged at her, pinning her to the ground and hitting her again. His repeated blows were making it difficult to stay conscious, her broken body in danger of shutting down as he pulled another Batarang. He brandished it before her face, a sadistic smirk gracing his face before he pressed it against her throat.

“This was far too easy,” he taunted her, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth and over the abrasion on his chin. He had his own fair share of injuries, but not nearly as severe as Diana’s were at that moment. “I’m going to thoroughly enjoy gutting you.”

Diana struggled to keep her eyes open, unconsciousness threatening to drag her away. Her arm and jaw were broken, her ribs shattered. Internal injuries were making it more than difficult to breathe, her head hammering harder than Hephaestus’s hammer on his anvil. All she wanted was to sleep, to feel Bruce’s arms wrapped securely around her, but that wasn’t going to happen this time.

“Bruce,” she softly murmured. “This isn’t your fault…please…remember that. Remember that I love you with all my heart. Take…take care of…Nicholas and Kaia.”

Batman stared into her face, her words invading his mind and piercing his heart as he held the deadly weapon high in the air. Her words had triggered something inside of him, something that he had forgotten or had just been locked so far away that he couldn’t find it or remember it.

“Don’t do it, Batman!”

Batman’s head snapped up to find Etrigan standing before him, his hands balled up at his sides and a sneer curling his lips. Batman’s own glower returned with a vengeance, the momentary feeling of warmth that had invaded his icy heart disappearing with the intrusion. Their interaction went unnoticed by Hades who was currently doing battle with Superman and Flash who were determined to strip him of his armor.

“It’s too late for her…and you,” Batman snarled, throwing his Batarang at Etrigan.

Etrigan batted the Batarang aside as if it was nothing more than a bug. “Come and get me if you think you can handle me, Bat!” he taunted him.

Batman got to his feet, stalking towards him. Etrigan unleashed a burst of fire at him, causing him to duck as he held up his cape to block the flames. Hearing something behind him, Batman turned to find Nightwing leaning over the fallen Amazon.

He rushed towards Nightwing, slamming him hard into the ground and knocking the wind out of him. “She is mine!” he roared.

“You don’t want to do this, Bruce,” Nightwing tried to tell him. “You planned for this moment… you had me and Etrigan waiting to stop you in case you were forced to fight Diana. You were afraid of hurting her and that’s exactly what you did.”

“I do not listen to you!” Batman seethed. “I only listen to my master!”

“Look at her, Bruce!” Nightwing yelled, pointing towards Diana lying on the ground, Etrigan inching closer to her to protect her. “Look at what you did to her…what you’re about to do to her. She’s your wife…the woman you love more than anything in this whole world.”

Batman looked over at Diana to find Etrigan attempting to gather her in his arms. “No!” Batman roared, lunging towards Etrigan and shoving him away from Diana.
He delivered a punishing blow, one that slammed Etrigan into the side of a building. Turning his attention to the fallen Amazon, Batman dropped to his knees, leaning over her. He pulled another Batarang, prepared to finish her off once and for all.

“Bruce…” she murmured, trying to keep her eyes open as she reached up to touch his bruised cheek. “I love you more than anything…more than my life. That…that is why…I’m giving it to you now. It’s yours to take.”

The feel of her fingers brushing tenderly against his cheek caused a shiver to race through him, awakening something deep inside of him once more. This woman was offering her very life to him, willingly giving herself to him. She loved him—with her heart, soul, body. Her love for him meant more to her than her own life.

He shook his head as he fought against the fierce hold that Hades had on his mind, something inside of him snapping back into razor-sharp focus once more. “Di…Diana?” he softly murmured, his lens red as blood becoming white once more.

“Bruce…” she whispered his name, her hand falling away from his face as she gazed up at him.

“No…no…no…” he chanted as panic rose up in his throat, threatening to steal his breath. “Don’t you dare, princess. Don’t leave me.”

“It’s okay…I’ll be all right,” she reassured him. “I know it wasn’t you.”

“I need to get you out of here;” he told her, gently gathering her up in his arms as tears escaped beneath his cowl and trickled down his cheeks. “Just please stay with him, Diana. Don’t make me go on without you.”

“I just need to rest,” she told him, her eyes falling closed.

“No, please…” Batman begged her, holding her close to him.

“Such a touching scene,” Hades mocked him, hands on his hips. “This is turning out better than I had hoped for.”

Batman carefully laid Diana down on the ground before whirling around to face his father-in-law with a white-hot fury that he’d never felt before. “I’m going to make you wish you had never left the Underworld,” he darkly seethed, his chest heaving with the raw, blinding fury that coursed through his veins.

Diana somehow managed to get herself up onto her knees, refusing to give into the pain or the desire to just sleep for days. Nightwing scrambled to her side, his arm slipping around her shoulders. “I need to get you to the infirmary,” he told her.

“No, I’m not leaving him,” Diana adamantly stated, slowly getting to her feet as she leaned heavily on Dick.

Batman came to a stop directly before Hades, his chest heaving with wrath. “It’s over Hades,” he spat out.

Hades’ laugh seemed to cause the ground itself to rumble as he faced off against his son-in-law. “I see now what my daughter sees in you,” he responded. “You certainly are brash.”

“You have no idea,” Batman ground out as Flash ripped Hades’ gauntlets off in less than a heartbeat.
Hades roared in rage, spinning on his heel to stop the speedster only to find no one there. “You think you can stop me?” he bellowed, raising his fists up into the air. “You think you can send me back to the Underworld?”

Batman unleashed a flurry of Batbombs as Flash removed another piece of armor. Hades began to shrink in size, his power growing weaker along with his foothold in the world of the living. Corpses began to slow down, some disappearing and others crumbling completely.

“No!” Hades cried in rage, turning his attention to Batman just in time to receive a Batarang directly to his chest. “If I’m going back, I’m taking you with me!”

Hades’ arm shot out, his fingers wrapping around Batman’s throat and pulling him in close. “NO!” Diana screamed, her shattered arm braced against her broken ribs as she leaned on Nightwing.

She attempted to get to Batman, but her legs gave out on her, causing her to sink to the ground. Flash removed Hades’ helmet as Superman flew towards Batman in an effort to free him. Batman turned to look at Diana, the sight of her so broken because of him nearly gutting him.

Sensing what was about to happen, Batman softly said, “I love you, princess.”

Hades, Ra’s, and Batman abruptly disappeared in flash of blinding light, the last piece of armor falling to the ground with a clank. Diana crumpled over as Bruce disappeared from sight, taken away to the Underworld with her father and Ra’s. Tears began to stream down her face, mingling with the blood that marred her skin as wracking sobs escaped her throat.

Nightwing wrapped his arms around, holding her close as he stared in utter shock and horror at the spot where his father had just been. He was gone…gone forever to the Underworld with Ra’s. It was something that he couldn’t begin to comprehend or accept.

Superman, Flash, Shayera, Lantern, and J’onn all stood in a circle around the distraught Amazon, none of them knowing what to say or do. An eerie, deafening silence pervaded the area save for the sounds of Diana’s uncontrollable sobs, the rest of the assembled League members all hanging their heads in sorrow for the loss.

Hades, Ra’s, his army of the dead…all of them were gone.

And so was Batman.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, what do you think of that turn of events? Diana’s premonition came true.

UP NEXT: The final chapter for this fic. :(
Chapter 35

Wayne Manor; September 7th, 19:07 EST

Diana released an anxious breath as she materialized on the transport pad of the Batcave. The emptiness that surrounded her caused a painful lump to instantly rise in her throat, but she forced it down. She needed to think of her children and the family that she had Bruce had made together. They were her first priority next to getting her husband back.

Stepping down off the transport pad, she spotted Alfred stepping out of the dark shadows of the cave, a weary smile on his face. His eyes were filled with affection and understanding, something that Diana did not feel she deserved at that moment.

“Miss Diana,” he solemnly greeted her. “I’m so happy that they finally allowed you to leave the infirmary. I do hope that you’re feeling better and are on the mend.”

“Allowed to leave is probably not quite the right word to use,” she tightly replied, forcing a smile. “I pretty much told them I was leaving despite their insistence otherwise. They wanted to keep me for another two or three days.”

Alfred came to stand before her, his hands clasped in front of him. “I can imagine,” he said, a small smile on his lips. “Obstinacy tends to run quite rampant in this household.”

“I couldn’t be away from my family another minute, Alfred,” she confessed with a sigh, pausing to look around the unoccupied cave. It caused an unexpected chill to settle over her, one that she couldn’t quite shake.

“We’re more than happy and relieved to have you home,” he assured her, his hand finding her forearm. “The little ones have been asking for you and Master Bruce.”

Diana silently nodded as she swallowed hard, pausing to bite at her bottom lip. “I’ve…missed them terribly,” she confessed. “I’m sure they’re upset and confused with our sudden absence…not knowing when we’d be home.”

“I told them that you and Master Bruce had to go on a very important mission,” he informed her. “I believe they seemed to understand that to some extent.”

“I swear to you that I’m going to bring him back, Alfred,” she insisted, her voice growing stronger as resolve hardened within her. “They will not live without their father and I refuse to go on without my husband.”

Alfred’s eyes glistened a little too brightly as he drew a shuddering breath. “I know you’ll do everything in your power to bring him back to us,” he responded with a confidence he felt bone deep.

“I’m so sorry that I couldn’t stop it,” she apologized, tears brimming in her eyes.

“It is not your fault, Miss Diana,” Alfred sternly stated. “Master Richard told us everything that
happened. You allowed Master Bruce to win the fight between you, permitted him to hurt you by refusing to fight back more than what was necessary to stay alive. You could have beaten Master Bruce bloody, but you voluntarily chose not to. You were willing to allow him to take your life in order to save him. That makes you the strongest, bravest woman I know.”

“I was trying to remind him of his ties to his family…to me,” she explained, brushing away a stray tear that had escaped against her will. “I knew that I could get through to him, but I had to let him break me in order to break through Hades’ hold on him.”

“It was a very sacrificial act, Miss Diana,” Alfred told her. “It more than proves the depths of your love for him. It’s what brought him back to himself. Your love for him and his for you saved him.”

“And now, it’s time that I save him from my father-in-law,” she stated, her voice hard like steel. “Hades is going to wish that he’d never left the Underworld in the first place.”

“That’s the Diana I know and love,” Alfred affectionately said.

Diana wrapped her arms around the elder man, pulling him into an embrace. “I love him, Alfred,” she confessed. “I won’t leave the Underworld without him with me.”

Alfred readily returned her embrace, knowing that truer words had never been spoken. Her decision to sacrifice herself for Bruce spoke volumes about her love for him as well as her strength of character. By voluntarily surrendering herself to Bruce, she had proven herself to be the strongest of them all.

“Come now,” Alfred said, patting her back before releasing her. “There are two little ones upstairs who are practically chattering non-stop with excitement to see their mother.”

“It feels like weeks since I last saw them,” she confessed as she followed Alfred towards the stairs.

If she’d had her way, she would’ve returned home right after the battle with Hades, but Kal and Dick had insisted otherwise, pointing out the fact that it would only scare Nicholas and Kaia senseless to see their mother bruised and injured. She had relented to go to the infirmary on the Watchtower for a couple of days until the bruises had faded some and the broken bones had started to knit back together.

Now, she just wanted to see her family and hold her children close. She wished more than anything that Bruce was here with her. She missed him desperately, ached to feel his arms around her and his body pressed against the length of hers, but that wasn’t going to happen right now. Soon, though, she reminded herself…soon he would be home where he belonged.

Entering the library through the grandfather clock, Diana easily picked up on the sounds of her children, deciphering each voice of the members of her family. She glanced down at her jeans and t-shirt, making sure that her bandages weren’t noticeable beneath the fabric.

Making her way to the entertainment room, she stopped in the doorway to see everyone there…everyone except for Bruce. It hurt her heart, but she steeled herself against that pain. “Hey, what’s going on in here?” she asked, displaying a bright smile that she didn’t wholly feel at that moment.

“Mama!” Kaia yelled, jumping off Dick’s lap and racing towards Diana. “Me miss you, mama.”

Diana bent over and picked her daughter up, holding her close to her. “I’ve missed you so much too, my little sun and stars,” she softly confessed, closing her eyes as she savored the feel of her daughter in her arms again.
“Me hurt my finger,” Kaia told her, holding up her forefinger to show her the small Wonder Woman band aid wrapped around it. “Me pinched it in the door.”

Diana kissed the tip of Kaia’s finger as Nicholas ran to greet her. She knelt down, scooping her son up with her other arm and receiving disapproving glares from each member of her family. “I’ve missed you, my little warrior,” she confirmed, kissing his temple. “I’m sorry we had to be gone, but it was very important.”

“I know,” Nicholas said, nodding in understanding. “Pappoús told us.”

“Should you be lifting anything right now?” Tim asked with a frown, walking over and snatching Kaia out of her arms. “I’m sure you have restrictions that you’re not following.”

“I’m fine, Tim,” she tried to reassure him.

“Right,” he muttered, clearly not believing her. “I think you better let us be the judge of that. We all promised Clark to keep an eye on you and make sure you didn’t over do it.”

“Mommy, are you hurt?” Nicholas asked, his little face scrunching up in concern.

“No, I’m fine,” she told him. “Your brother Tim is just being overly concerned.”


Diana knew the questions about Bruce would be coming. She’d tried to prepare herself for it, but it still proved to be far harder than she had thought it was going to be. “He’s still away for a little while longer, baby girl,” she replied, reaching over to caress her cheek. “I promise you that he’ll be back before you know it.”

“He told me he’s going to pick me up from school and take me out for lunch one day…just the two of us,” Nicholas announced, his brow furrowed in thought.

“He’ll do that just as soon as he can, Nicholas,” Diana assured him. “He has to be Batman right now, but I know he’s going to want to spend time with you and Kaia just as soon as he gets home.”

“Me have to show him what we made,” Kaia excitedly said, clapping her little hands together.

“What did you make?” Diana asked.

“Pappoús showed us how to make slime with glue,” Nicholas revealed. “It glows in the dark.”

Diana smiled affectionately at her son as she stroked his hair, his excitement contagious. It felt so good to be home once more. Seeing her family had definitely lifted her spirits somewhat, making her resolve to bring Bruce home that much stronger.

“You can show it to me tomorrow,” she told them. “Right now, you two need to start getting ready for bed. It’s getting late.”

“Oh no, mama,” Nicholas grumbled, laying his head on his mother’s shoulder. “I don’t want to go to bed. You just got home.”

“I know, but I’ll tuck you into bed and read you each a book,” she promised him. “Tomorrow, we’ll spend the whole day together. After that, though, I need to go help your father for a couple of days.”

“Okay,” Nicholas agreed, wrapping his arms around her neck. “Can you read me two books?”
“We’ll see,” Diana said with a chuckle. “Come on, Kai.”

“But me didn’t get my snack,” Kaia grumbled.

“Yes, you did,” Tim reminded her as he set Kaia down. “Alfred made us ice cream sundaes, remember?”

Kaia’s face lit up as Diana grabbed hold of her hand. “Me love ice cream.”

Tim watched as Kaia went with Diana and Nicholas out of the entertainment room. “Do you think she’ll be able to bring him back?” Tim asked as he returned to his seat on the couch.

“If anyone can rescue Bruce from the Underworld and bring him home, it’s Diana,” Artemis adamantly declared.

“It’s not Diana that I’m doubting,” Tim confessed. “It’s Hades that worries me. He’s not going to just let her waltz into the Underworld and bring Bruce back home. I mean he had Bruce and Diana fight each other to the death. How sick is that? That’s his own daughter and he still pulled something like that.”

“Well, Hades isn’t exactly known for being nice,” Donna pointed out. “It doesn’t matter who he’s related to or not. He’ll do whatever it takes to bring about his own sick enjoyment.”

“I’m going with her,” Artemis stated, her voice broking no room for argument.

“If you’re going then I’m going too,” Jason declared, his arm tightening around her shoulders. “You scared me enough fighting Aresia without you going to the Underworld with Diana to take on Hades.”

“You need to stay here to help Dick and Tim take care of Gotham for Bruce,” Artemis countered, rubbing his thigh. “Besides, I know how to take care of myself.”

“You’re still healing from Aresia’s attack,” Jason reminded her. “You’re going to need me to watch your back.”

“I can help cover Gotham too,” Damian announced, refusing to be left out of the debate.

“I don’t know if Bruce was ready to let you into Gotham yet,” Tim pointed out.

“I can fight, and you know it,” Damian stubbornly retorted.

“I guess there’s only one way to find out if you’re ready is to let you out in Gotham,” Dick told him.

“I’ll need my own uniform,” Damian replied.

“You can be Robin,” Tim informed him.

Everyone turned to look at Tim in stunned disbelief. “Are you serious, Tim?” Dick asked, frowning.

“I’ve been thinking it’s time that I changed things up,” he said. “You know…new costume…new name. I mean I’m not a kid anymore. I’m a sophomore in college. It’s time to be known by a new name.”

“What are you thinking?” Donna inquired.
“Red Robin,” Tim revealed, watching each of their faces for their reaction to his choice. “In fact, Alfred and I have already been working on a new costume design. He’ll have it ready in a couple more days.”

Dick nodded his head as he thought about it, glancing at Damian to see his reaction. “I like it, Timmy,” he told him with a smirk, knowing how much he hated being called that. “It looks like we’ll be refitting the Robin costume for Damian then.”

Damian could barely contain his excitement. The thought of being Robin...being his father’s partner out in Gotham was actually a dream coming true. Now, though, they just needed to get his father back. No one had any idea where his mother was or had actually happened to her during the fight with Hades.

As much it hurt him, he wasn’t sure that he cared. She had abandoned him, left him behind to follow his grandfather’s crazy scheme. In his mind, that was akin to betrayal and that wasn’t something that he could so easily forgive or forget. He had a new family now, one that he wanted to be part of.

“I guess that’s settled then,” Donna said. “I wish I could come with you and Diana, Artemis, but I’m sure Dick would have a heart attack if I went to the Underworld with you to bring Bruce back.”

“A heart attack would be putting it mildly,” Dick uttered with a roll of his eyes as he dramatically placed his hand over his heart. “I’m think more along the lines of a full-blown panic attack and a stint in one of Arkham’s padded rooms.”

“I’m sure Alfred would appreciate the help with Nick and Kaia,” Tim suggested.

“Already assigned myself that position,” Donna replied with a smile.

“That’s a relief,” Dick muttered, flopping back against the cushions of the couch.

“I still don’t like the idea of you going down there,” Jason softly groused in Artemis’s ear.

“I’m not letting Diana go down there alone,” Artemis told him. “She’ll need the backup.”

“I know...I know,” Jason agreed. “It’s just...promise me you’ll be careful.”

“Aren’t I always?” she said with a smirk he wanted to kiss right off her face.

_Gotham; September 7th, 23:55 EST_

Robin stood on top of the rooftop of Wayne Enterprises, gazing down at the destruction below as his cape whipped softly in the wind. Crews had already begun the work of repairing the damage done in the area, but it was still a painful sight to bear witness to, especially knowing it had partially been caused by his parents’ battle against each other.

He was having a difficult time accepting what had happened, that Hades had interfered in their lives and taken his father away. He knew that Nicholas and Kaia were too young to truly understand what had happened, but they were smart enough to know that something bad had taken place, leaving them confused and missing their father.

He felt an inexplicable need to fix it all, to try to put what had been broken by Hades back together again. He hated seeing his family hurting so much, especially his mother. Though she did her best to hide it, he could see how deeply her heartache ran.
His fingers balled into fists, determined to help hold his family together no matter what it took. He felt it was his role to take on, being the eldest still living at home. It was his job to watch out for them, to help hold things together when Bruce and Diana couldn’t be there to do it, and he wouldn’t let them down.

“Hey there, handsome.”

The corners of Tim’s lips curled slightly with the familiar voice that tickled his ears. “What are you doing here?” he asked, turning around to see his girlfriend approaching.

“I wanted to check on you and see how you were holding up,” she replied, coming to stand before him.

“I’m worried,” he softly confessed as he averted his eyes. “It’s pretty bad, Cass.”

Her hand came to rest against his cheek, forcing him to meet her gaze. “It’ll get better,” she reassured him. “Diana is the strongest Amazon I have ever known…strongest woman in the world for that matter. She’s not going to just sit back and let Batman stay in the Underworld.”

“She and Artemis are going after him,” he informed her. “They’re leaving for Themyscira tomorrow.”

“See?” she said with a warm smile. “She’ll get him back.”

“I know,” he relented with a sigh. “It’s just…nothing ever seems easy for them…or for my family for that matter. There’s always something happening…some catastrophe or nightmare awaiting us.”

“And your family always comes out winning…stronger for it in the end,” she reminded him.

“Yah, I guess we do, but I’m worried that one of these times we won’t,” he confessed, drawing a deep breath to calm his worried heart. He forced a smile to his face. “Thanks, Cass. I’m glad you stopped by. I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too,” she admitted, pressing her lips against his.

He returned the kiss, his arms wrapping around her waist and drawing her close to him. Breaking the kiss, he brushed his nose against hers. “You know this is probably the last time you will see me in this uniform.”

Cassandra’s expression revealed her shock with his words. “You’re not quitting, are you?”

“No, I’m just changing things up…new name and new costume,” he revealed. “I felt it was time for a change. I’m not the kid that I was when I first became Robin. I feel it’s time for me to grow up and take on a new identity.”

“And let Damian have the old one,” Cassandra finished his unspoken thought.

“Yah, he wants to be Robin so badly,” he replied with a shake of his head. “I can still help out and be a part of the team, but it’s time to let someone else have the mantle of Robin.”

Cassandra gave him an affectionate smile, her eyes softening with the love she felt for him. “You have the biggest, kindest heart of any man I’ve ever known, Timothy Drake,” she softly murmured.

His lips broadened into a grin, more than pleased with her compliment. “Just being a team player,
“No, it’s far more than that,” she said with a shake of her head. “You have a very noble heart, one that loves his family and friends fiercely. I’m just glad that I noticed it.”

“I am too,” he replied, his lips finding hers once more.

The sound of an alarm going off broke the tender moment, forcing Tim back into Robin mode. “Go be a hero,” she told him with a soft smile.

“And you had better get out of Gotham,” Robin warned her as he stepped up on the ledge of the roof, glancing back over his shoulder at her. “I’m sure Bruce will know you’re here even from the Underworld.”

Cassie shook her head in amusement, knowing he was right. She had no doubt about it. Taking to the air, she watched as he leapt off the side of the building, his grappling line finding purchase and taking him away into the night.

She sighed with a dreamy smile on her face as she began to make her way back home, finding that she already missed him. There was definitely no denying the fact that she was falling pretty hard for the handsome Boy Wonder. She hoped that Diana would be able to bring Batman home soon, not only for Tim and his family’s sake, but for the sake of the whole world.

Wayne Manor; September 8th, 01:22 EST

Diana laid awake in the large bed she shared with her husband, an unrelenting restlessness gripping her and keeping her from finding the sleep that she so desperately needed. Though she was loathe to admit it, she was still sore from her battle with Bruce, knowing that she needed the rest in order to recover.

Rest, however, would not come to her until she had Bruce back in their home and in their bed where he belonged.

She couldn’t help thinking about the others they had lost that night. Not only had Bruce and Ra’s been taken away by Hades, but several League members had been severely injured and were still recovering in the infirmary.

Both Black Canary and Fire had taken pretty severe hits but would thankfully make a full recovery in time. Unfortunately, Shining Knight and Elongated Man had not been so fortunate, both losing their lives in the end. Vigilante was currently on life support, the chances of his survival decreasing with every single day that passed by.

It made her sick to think that her father was the cause of their pain, the loss of life that had taken place. If it weren’t for her father, her friends wouldn’t have been injured, her teammates would still be alive and well. She couldn’t help the overwhelming guilt and sorrow that invaded her soul, wishing that Bruce was here to share in her grief with her.

Turning onto her right side, her gaze fell on the empty space where Bruce should be right now. She missed him so deeply it nearly crushed her heart, especially knowing where he was at that moment…what he could possibly be going through because of her father.

Sickening scenarios paraded through her mind one after another, taunting her with what Hades could be doing to Bruce…the unspeakable things that he could be enduring. It made her ill to her core the longer she thought about it, wishing it was her in the Underworld right now instead of him.
She should have known Hades was going to try to take Bruce away from her like that. She should have been faster, should have tried harder to get to him. Her mind continued to replay the events of that over and over again, trying to figure out what she could have done differently that would’ve prevented this from happening.

Tears blurred her vision as she lightly ran her fingers over his pillow, the longing inside of her growing stronger by the second. It was as if Hades knew of her pain and was using it to taunt her with his victory. He was going to learn that crossing her was the worst mistake he could ever have made.

She drew a shuddering breath, brushing away a tear as she pulled his pillow against her and wrapped her arms around it. She inhaled deeply, drinking in his masculine scent that she adored and that always stirred her soul. She knew it was the closest she was going to get to him for the moment.

She did her best to fall asleep, knowing that she had a very dangerous task ahead of her. She was going to spend the day with her family tomorrow, making sure Nicholas and Kaia were all right before leaving for Themyscira the day after that.

Themyscira.

Diana longed to see her island home…to see her mother again. She hadn’t had a chance to contact her mother yet but was more than anxious to return to Themyscira to see if things had quieted down at all. She knew that tensions had been growing more volatile by the day. Hopefully while she was there, she could help settle the discord before it exploded.

She knew that Artemis had already decided that she was coming with her to the Underworld to bring Bruce back. She didn’t think that she could’ve talked the Bana-Mighdall Amazon out of it even if she tried. She found herself comforted by the thought of having Artemis with her. It more than ensured her success in getting her husband back.

She softly ran her fingers over the satin pillowcase, her bottom lips beginning to tremble. “Please hold on, Bruce,” she softly murmured. “I’m coming after you and I’m bringing you home.”

Underworld; September 8th, 02:00 EST

Hades lazily lounged on his throne, a twisted grin adorning his face. Things had definitely not gone as he had hoped or how he had planned. His freedom had been too short-lived, his plans barely even getting off the ground only to be crushed by the Justice League.

Taking a drink of wine from his challis, he mulled over the events that had taken place, not entirely unhappy with the outcome. While he hadn’t been able to stay in the world of the living long, he’d been able to teach his daughter and son-in-law a lesson they wouldn’t forget any time soon.

His daughter had dared to keep him from seeing his grandchildren, standing in the way of what he wanted. Now, she was paying a steep price for her interference in his plans. He downed the last of his wine, setting his challis down on the table next to him.

Hades smirked as he glanced down at his personal guest chained to his throne. He may not have accomplished what he had wanted to, but he didn’t come back to the Underworld alone. He had brought two prisoners home with him.

“Fill my cup,” Hades ordered, handing the cup to his newest servant.

“Yes, my lord,” Batman solemnly replied as he stood to his feet and bowed his head in humble
obedience.

Taking the challis, he walked across the room, the chain around his ankles allowing him only to go that far. He filled his master’s challis with red wine, returning it to him with head lowered in a subservient manner. “Here, my lord Hades.”

“You do well and maybe someday I’ll remove the chain that binds you to my throne,” Hades told him, taking the offered challis.

“Yes, my lord,” Batman responded without lifting his head.

“You may sit,” Hades said, nodding his head to the spot beside his throne that he had given to his son-in-law, Cerberus occupying the spot on the other side of Hades’ throne. “Do you think that my daughter is crying tears into her pillow without you there occupying her bed?”

Batman sat on his heels, his palms resting flat on the tops of his thighs. His expression was emotionless, his tone flat and his body rigid as if awaiting his next orders. He appeared to be completely drained of all emotion, his mind emptied and filled with nothing by thoughts of serving his master.

“I do not know, my lord,” he stated.

“Do you even care about your wife?”

“No, my lord.”

Hades’ smirk broadened as he took a sip of his wine. “Good boy. Women are only good for one thing. After that, they’re nothing but trouble.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Hades harrumphed in annoyance, a sneer on his lips. “You certainly aren’t much of a conversationalist, are you?” he asked, not really expecting a response. “Makes me wonder what Diana ever saw in you, but you did prove yourself in some ways. You battled her like a true warrior.”

“I failed you, my lord,” Batman stoically said, his head lowered in shame.

“No worries, my boy,” Hades responded with a chuckle, patting the top of his head as if he was nothing more than a dog. “You’ll have plenty of time to repent and pay for your mistakes.”

Hades stood to his feet, his back turned to the Dark Knight of Gotham as he began to roam about his throne room. Batman lifted his head as he stared at his master, the lens of his cowl narrowing to dangerously thin slits.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, there you have it! I really hope that you enjoyed this. I was super happy
with how it turned out.

Please go to my profile page on Fanfiction. Net and vote for what fic you want to see next. In the meantime, please check out my newest fic Deadly Intentions. I’m writing it a little differently than my other fics, but Bruce and Diana are definitely in for a surprise they never could have predicted. Really hope you like it! :) 

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!