Everybody Plays the Fool

by Alternate_Alien

Summary

It was a dangerous job, working the psych wards at Arkham State Hospital. But the pay was decent and you needed insurance so for now, it was the best job you could get. Until the recent budget cuts sent you working the maximum-security ward and you're face to face with the infamous criminal you'd heard so much about.

Notes

I have no idea what I'm doing.
Yet another day in this dump, another training class, another three hours of boredom. It was a seminar this time on the proper ways to handle a crisis situation. Same shit, different day. You swore that there must have been teams of people who made their entire careers by taking the old mental health procedures, changing the words around, and reselling them to psych wards all over the country.

And it was people like you, the nurses and orderlies and people working in the wards that were severely underpaid for dealing with this kind of thing, that were forced to listen to the same tired, old bullshit. How did they actually expect you to handle a crisis?

The people imprisoned here were dangerous, to themselves and others. Hell, a large chunk of them had murdered people before and would kill again if they had the chance. And now, administration decided with a few training classes, some demonstration of how to properly hold and subdue a patient, you were supposed to keep these people from hurting someone?

It was, as you often thought, above your pay grade. Your responsibility was medications. Someone with more medical training than you would sort the meds, would lay them on the trays labeled with the names of each patient, and you wheeled the cart to each door.

That was all your job was; wheeling pills and cups of water down the endless labyrinth halls of the psych ward. Usually, you were paired with an orderly who would be the one to make sure each patient took their dosages and checked to see if they hid them beneath their tongue. You stayed near the door just in case a nutjob tried to fight. And if that were to happen, you were the one responsible for going to get help. That's all.

Yet, you were still required by the state to sit in these extra training sessions at the beginning of each quarter. Just to freshen up your memory, make sure you didn’t forget how to keep a situation from escalating. Though you would never admit it, your own, personal policy was to run for your life. There were too many horror stories passed around these wards of patients going psychotic and stabbing the orderly with any shiv they could fashion.

That was not going to be your fate.
This job didn't pay near enough for you to even think about risking your life. But, for the sake of keeping a job, you sat at the folding table in the back of the conference room along with a group of coworkers, watching the video play over the static-filled television. At the opposite end of the table, two of your coworkers had folded some paper into a football and were thumping it back and forth.

One of them, a large, mountain of a man named Todd who worked part-time as a bouncer held his hands up and gave a silent cry of victory as he thumped the paper over the goal. The other man who you hadn't been introduced properly to yet (a day shifter who had missed the earlier training session) rolled his eyes and caught you staring as he situated the football again. His eyebrows went up and before you could look away, he pointed down to the game.

"You want in, Cricket," he asked. Cricket had become your unofficial nickname among the other orderlies and night shift workers, due to the fact that on your first night, you had an unfortunate run-in with a cricket while taking a smoke break. The name had stuck. Not that you minded really. It was a lot better than most of the nicknames you’d heard around this place. Quickly, you glanced at where your shift supervisor sat at the side of the room. Her eyes were blinking slower and slower with each minute that passed. She'd be out in less than five minutes.

Carefully, you slid down to their end of the table and Todd leaned back in his chair, giving you a quick nod of his chin. The paper football was slid to you and you held it up on its side, aiming for the goal the other orderly made with his fingers. With a thump, it shot quickly across the table, missing the goal by a mile and slid over the tile floor.

Todd dropped his head to the table to hide his laugh and you did the same. A quick peek to the side of the room confirmed that the supervisor hadn't noticed and you let yourself laugh. As the other guy crept out of his chair to snag the football, Todd leaned closer to you.

"I think we're teamed up tonight for med rounds."

You smiled. Todd may have looked menacing and mean, but he was a total teddy bear and definitely your favorite person to work with. You never had to worry about a patient trying anything funny with him. You gave him a smile.

Two hours later, you were released from the confines of the first-floor conference room and were sent on your way to complete your nightly tasks. It was already dark outside the windows of the hospital and you could see brief flashes of lightning that the city lights couldn't wash out. You pulled your sweater tighter across your body and moved to the elevator.
Usually, you worked only worked five days a week but with the cuts to the hospital's budget, you took any shift you could get these days, even the weekends. There had already been so many layoffs. One wrong move and they'd be on your ass faster than you could blink. So when the supervisor had come to ask you on Thursday if you could take a Saturday shift, you didn’t hesitate to accept.

You needed this job. It was the last good one left in this city that actually had benefits. Sure the insurance sucked and didn’t include dental or vision but at least it was something. Still, you didn’t like to be here longer than you had to be. Near the employee lounge, which was nothing more than a spare room that had a couch and table pushed into it, Todd found you.

“Yo, Cricket!” He called, jogging up behind you. Turning to face him, you smiled. The look of exasperation on his face made you frown. “You heard?”

“ Heard what?”

“Mikey just up and quit today. We gotta cover our shit and his.”

Your stomach dropped as you followed him into the lounge where he found the stapled papers hanging by a thumbtack on a bulletin board. It was the list of duties each person had to finish by the end of their shifts and sure enough, Mikey’s list of things was written above your name and Todd’s.

A queasy feeling settled into your gut. For the past nine months that you’d worked here, you hadn’t been above the third floor. Elderly psych patients and short-term stays were all you were equipped to deal with. Mikey had been the orderly on the fourth floor. The maximum-security ward, reserved for those who were a danger to themselves or others.

And you knew exactly what was up there.

There were enough rumors to fuel your anxiety for years about that place, not to mention the psychiatrist who had been murdered last year by one of the patients. That had been one of the reasons your aunt had begged you not to take this job while also the main reason the hospital was desperate and willing to give you insurance and weekday shifts.

You chewed your lower lip and stared at the words on the page for several seconds before Todd
dropped them and let out a heavy sigh. “That fucking prick just up and leaves us with his shit. Like we don’t have enough to do already?”

“Let’s just get this over with.”

By nine o’clock, the two of you had made your usual rounds in record time, even giving up on your first break to finish before ten. While all medications were supposed to be given out around nine, there was just no way two people could do it all. As long as it was done, that’s what mattered most.

Stepping onto the elevator with your medicine cart, all the sorted pills in their trays and cups of water sitting next to them, you leaned against the wall and stifled a yawn behind your elbow. Todd was popping his own meds into his mouth, four ibuprofen and washed down with coffee. “Fuck, I hate this place,” he muttered as the doors slid open.

The fourth floor. Maximum Security.

A guard greeted you in the hallway from his perch on a stool that you were almost certain was against the rules. There was a gun on his hip and a baton hanging beside it. He gave the two of you a nod and shifted in his seat.

You paused at the station at the end of the long hallway, parking your cart so you could step into the room to gather a fresh pair of gloves. Todd did the same and glanced out into the hallway. “Dude gets to just sit on his ass all night?”

“Looks like it.” You rolled your eyes and donned a mask, looping the elastic around your ears. It wasn’t unheard of for these people to spit in faces or throw their shit. And you really didn’t want to top your night off with a mouthful of excrement.

The first two doors were easy. The woman behind the first was confined to a straight jacket and secured to the wall for trying to peel her own face off with a plastic knife. She mumbled continuously and you tried not to stare as Todd took the tray of meds and cup of water into her room. He dumped the pills into her mouth and followed it with the water.

She didn’t struggle much, but it was difficult for her to mumble her repeated ramblings with a mouthful of water and she dribbled most of it down her chin. Todd sighed as he moved out of her room and locked the door behind him.
You shifted the cart onto the next one and glanced down the hallway. “Hey,” you whispered to your partner. “Which one is...you know?”

He glanced over his shoulder to meet your worried gaze before looking down at the other doors. “Not sure. I’ve only worked up here twice now.”

With a nod, you keep up the pace. Thankfully, most of the patients in this ward seem to be so high off their meds that they’re just zombies. Sure, they had done things to get here, but now...They were barely even human.

Some sat on their beds, facing away from the door, barely reacting as Todd made sure they took their doses. Others were catatonic. It was far creepier than you were expecting. Like you’d stumbled into some horror movie.

At the end of the hallway, with only two doors left, Todd stopped in front of a patient’s door and unlocked it. “Please stand away from the door, ma’am.” From inside the room, a pair of feet shuffled across the tile and you looked down at the name on the door to confirm the correct meds. As you busied yourself with balancing the cup of water on the tray, Todd opened the door.

And was met with a wet, sickening slop of a sound. You blinked up at him in surprise and your mouth dropped. His mask was covered in lumpy, brown...well, shit. Some of it had splattered across his eye and into his hair.

“God, fucking DAMNIT!” He exploded. The patient in the room shrieked and flung something else. It hit the door just as he slammed it shut, though a bit had managed to spray out the crack and covered his hands. He spat into his mask and scraped most of the glob off of his forehead. At the other end of the hall, the guard had stood to his feet and put a hand to his gun.

“You all right down there?” He called, making Todd snarl in disgust.

“Just fucking dandy!”

You were thankful for the mask hiding your smile. It wasn’t like you were happy he had gotten hit, but damn, you were glad it wasn’t you.
“You just gonna stand there? Hand me a towel!”

“They’re all soiled. I didn’t think to pick any up from the supply room.” It was hard to hide your giggling now and he turned to glare at you, though it was a bit hard to look menacing with shit smeared across his face.

“Fucking hell, Cricket! Alright, don’t move. I’ll be back,” he barked, turning on his heel to storm down the length of the hallway. You watched until he found the supply room once more and disappeared around the corner. Even from a distance, you could hear him grumbling and cursing as he searched for clean towels.

You shook your head and leaned against the wall, far enough away from the poop splatters as you could get. As you stared down at the scuff marks on your tennis shoes, you heard what sounded like the metallic click of a lighter from the door to your right.

“Your name is Cricket?” The voice was soft and polite and not at all what you had been expecting to hear through the narrow slit in the middle of the door. You blinked and turned to your right to see into the square window built into the door.

A pale face, with dark eyes and hair, looked back at you and smoke coiled up between the patient and the glass of the window. How the hell had he gotten a cigarette? Before you could even try to figure that out, recognition hit you like a punch to the gut and your eyes betrayed you, going wide in surprise and fear.

He noticed, and a smile pushed the tops of his cheeks up, wrinkling the corners of his eyes. It wasn’t exactly forbidden to speak to the patients, but there were policies in place that severely frowned upon giving them specific names, etc. And so far, you had only held polite conversations with your patients. None had ever asked your name.

You knew it was best to change the subject because not answering his question didn’t even register in your head. Pursing your lips, you looked pointedly at his cigarette. “You’re not supposed to be smoking.”

His smile softened and he took a deep drag as if to prove that he didn’t give a shit what he wasn’t supposed to do. Holding the smoke in, he held up a finger and tilted his head back before exhaling. The smoke left his lips in a ring that glowed from the fluorescent lights of the hallway.
You followed it up with your eyes until it floated above the window, out of your sight. Meeting his gaze, you frowned. “If you have a lighter in there, we’ll have to confiscate it.”

His sudden laugh startled you. He touched his forehead to the glass and you backed away from his door a bit as the sound of his laughter echoed around you in the hallway. He shook his head and took another drag of the cigarette, his outburst fading. With his head still touching the window, he looked up at you and pushed his hand out of the opening in the door.

You looked down to see a simple, black lighter between his first two fingers. He offered it to you as if he were just a stranger on the street and you needed a light. At your sides, your fingers twitched, nearly reaching for it before your brain caught up. Were you crazy? This was a dangerous criminal who had killed several people.

What he was doing was obviously a trap. As soon as you reached for that lighter, he would have grabbed you and tried to rip your arm off. Pursing your lips, you met his gaze again and glared. “You think I’m an idiot?”

Another round of laughter that made your entire body jump a few inches off the ground. He pulled his hand back into his room and stepped away from the door, disappearing for a second before reappearing. His shoulders shook with the giggling he suppressed behind tightly pinched lips. Once it had faded once more, along with the smile stretching his lips, he looked back into your face.

He studied it, scrutinized every feature, every inch and you burned beneath his gaze.

“I don’t think you’re an idiot,” he said quietly. “I’ve just never met you before. We don’t get a lot of women up here.”

“Oh,” you mumbled, glancing back down to where the security guard sat on his stool. It made no sense to you why one of the most dangerous patients in this hospital was on the opposite end of the only man with a gun. Then again, it was probably his job to make frequent trips up and down the halls instead of parking his ass in one spot all night. Against your better judgment, you looked back at the patient’s door and checked the information sheet. Arther Fleck. A name you’d seen multiple times in the newspapers and headlines. They made him out to be...well, quite the monster, which wasn’t exactly matching the person in front of you.

And you knew you were being monumentally stupid with that reasoning. He was psychotic. Luring people in with his docile, innocent-seeming personality was probably how he operated. Trick people into trusting him before he slit their throats and danced in the blood. You should ignore him, report him to the orderlies who could handle him, switch shifts so you never had to see him
But instead of doing all of that, you crossed your arms over your chest and sighed. “Cricket is my nickname.”

He nodded and let out another breath of smoke that clouded the window. It cleared and you found him staring at you with that same intensity as before, the kind that made your stomach clench tight and your teeth clamp over your bottom lip behind your mask. As he pinched the cigarette between his lips, he slipped his left hand out of the slit in the door and held it out to you...as if to shake. Okay, now he was just fucking with you.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” a voice from down the hall made you jump and Arthur pulled his hand back away from his door. He stepped away from the window and disappeared on the left side of it. Todd’s face was damp and his hair looked as if it had been thoroughly scrubbed clean and you stared up at him as he made his way back to the cart. “I’m ready for this night to be done.”

He snatched the tray of meds intended for patient A. Fleck, set it on the opening of the door and banged his fist near the window. You watched around Todd’s massive bicep as that same left hand, the one you had been seconds away from shaking, took the pills and the cup. Neither of you stuck around to see if the meds were actually taken.

Todd was clearly over the entire night and you...well...it was probably for the best that you didn’t stick around. Especially after the strange conversation you’d had with the Joker of Gotham City, and the fact that you looked back down the hallway, at the very last door on the ward before stepping into the elevator. Even as you listened to Todd’s complaining in silence, your mind was a hundred miles away, picturing the look in those eyes as he held his hand out to you.

A frightening, unexplainable part of you wished you had taken it.
For the fifteenth time in the past half hour, you yawned into your palm and settled back into the cushions of your couch. The sun was just starting to peek over the buildings of the city and shine through the thin, black curtains of your shared living room. It was in these hours that you enjoyed yourself the most.

Both you and your roommate worked alternating shifts and hardly saw one another. Which was perfect for the both of you since she was just as antisocial as you were. It had taken a lot of convincing for you to even answer the ad, but it was too good of a deal to pass up and there was no way you could afford a place on your own. This way, you wasted less money for rent, got a bigger apartment, paid fewer utilities. It wasn't ideal, but it was alright for now.

Especially since she worked until 7 in the morning and you got your nights to yourself. You'd always been a night owl, spending the darker hours wide awake. It was when your creativity sparked the easiest. Shadows and moonlight inspired you more than the natural light of the sun.

But for the past six months, the corner of your bedroom had been filled with four or five blank canvases of differing sizes. Your aunt was still asking about the painting she had paid you fifty bucks for, the painting you had sketched out but never picked up a brush to complete. Just thinking about the 5 by 7 canvas, propped against the windowsill with the pencil sketch slowly smudging every time you moved it, made you sigh and pinch the bridge of your nose.

At first, you'd blamed a lack of funds for your block. No money to buy the good paint or the proper brushes. But after picking up several shifts, you splurged and bought the supplies you'd
been needing. And now, two months later, it all still sat in the shopping bag at the base of the mountain of canvases.

You wondered if you could submit it to the Museum of Modern Art as one enormous installation piece and call it "Artists Block". If you had a name for yourself, you'd probably make millions off the gullible art fiends who were easily swayed by critics. But, seeing as you were a nobody, just a twenty-something with a bit of talent, you wouldn't see millions anytime soon.

Another yawn and you peeled yourself from the couch, crossing to the television to turn it off. The room was bathed in the dim light of dawn and you shuffled down the hall to your bedroom. You didn't want to be home when Janey got there. Mostly because you were in no mood to have a conversation, but partly because you hadn't washed the dishes you promised you would. And you definitely weren't in the mood to hear nagging at the moment.

You shut the door to your bedroom and avoided making eye contact with the corner of the room. Even with your back to the canvases, you could feel them staring at you expectedly, willing you to break through your block and just paint. Instead, you peeled your pajama pants off and collapsed into bed.

Burying your face deep into your pillow, you took a breath and let it out slowly. Sleep found you easily, though the last thought that crossed your mind was about the strange interaction you'd had with a certain maximum-security psych patient. It was odd to you that even through the oncoming haze of sleep, you couldn't get those eyes out of your head.

Several hours later, the shrill ringing of the telephone pulled you from your sleep. It was on its third ring and you groggily lifted your head from your pillow. Aside from the phone ringing, the apartment was quiet.

"Janey?" You shouted, voice half-muffled by the corner of the pillow beneath you. Another ring echoed through the apartment and you sighed in frustration. Two more and the machine would get it, but you didn't trust that ancient thing to actually pick it up.

Somehow, you managed to rush from your bedroom and shake yourself from the daze of sleep in time to snatch the phone from the base. The twisted cord hit your stomach and you leaned against the wall with a mumbled "hello?"

"Oh, good. I caught you." The voice was instantly familiar and you had to swallow back the urge to groan. It was Margaret, your supervisor from work, and if she was calling you at home, on an off day, you knew she had nothing good to tell you.
"Why hadn't you just let the damn thing ring?"

"Hey, Margaret." You tried to hide the disappointment in your voice but didn't do a very good job.

She sighed and you could hear her shuffle some papers around on her messy, paper-strewn desk. "I know, I know. It's your day off and if I could avoid asking you, I would. You've already worked 6 days in a row."

"Yeah, I have. And I thought overtime couldn't be approved for this quarter."

Another sigh. "It can't. But we're willing to compensate for your time in the future when funding starts to pick back up."

Your head fell back against the wall with a soft thump and you blinked up at the ceiling tiles above you. You wanted nothing more than to laugh and tell her you were going back to bed, but that little voice in the back of your head stopped you and reminded you that this job was the one thing keeping you from selling either your artwork on the streets or your body on the corner. At least as a prostitute, you'd make more.

"Fine. I'll come in. Usual time?"

"Actually, no. We can't find a damn person who wants to cover Mikey's third shift. So, for the time being, we're going to put you on the rounds."

A knot twisted around your insides and you picked your head up off the wall to stare into the living room. You could tell your roommate had come home. There was a note taped to the middle of the television screen with the word dishes underlined twice. And while your eyes landed on the yellow paper, your thoughts were miles away. Third shift rounds seemed fairly innocent. Walk the halls and make sure the patients were exactly where they were supposed to be, how they were supposed to be.

But that would take you back to the fourth floor, back to that door, back to--

"Hello? Are you still there?"
"Oh, sorry. Yeah, I'm here. That's fine. I'll be there tonight at eleven."

You hung the phone back up and took your bottom lip between your teeth. There was tension building at the base of your skull, a dull ache that pinched the muscles just enough for you to notice. You pressed a hand against the stretch of skin between your shoulder and neck and moved back into your bedroom, ignoring the note that had been left on the television.

You'd get to the dishes eventually. For now, you needed sleep. Midnight would come quickly and if you were already nervous now, there was no telling how bad it would be in twelve hours.

And just as you suspected, the ball of knots and nerves in your stomach after the phone call earlier in the day had tripled inside you. Fingers played nervously at the strings of your jacket and your eyes darted up to the windows of the building as you crossed the street, unable to keep yourself from wondering who could possibly be watching you. Perhaps it was no one...it didn't feel like no one, though.

The psych ward had its own wing of the Arkham hospital, pushed to the back behind the emergency department where it could be hidden and ignored for the most part. After nine, the doors to the ward were locked and the third shift staff had to come in through the ER.

You'd always hated hospitals ever since watching your grandfather wither away and die after six months in a room. It was like watching someone slowly turn into a ghoul. His skin stretched tighter and tighter across the bones of his face and the day you'd been pulled from class to say goodbye, his eyes were sunken and mouth hung open in a perpetual, silent cry.

That hadn't been in this hospital, or even Gotham, but it didn't matter. They all felt and smelled the same. Thankfully, the psych ward reeked so heavily of air freshener and Lysol that it covered the smell of death that always lingered in hospital hallways. Walking through the ER brought all the memories back and you grimaced as you hurried through.

A baby was crying behind one of the closed curtains, a pitiful sound that both grated your nerves and squeezed at your heart. A man and woman argued in a room with the door open, both appeared to be on a number of drugs for several years judging by the sores on their arms.

You picked up the pace and took a right where the ER turned toward the rest of the hospital. It was strange but you wanted to be back among the white walls and relative quiet of the psychiatry halls. That was not what you were met with as you pushed the doors open and stepped into the main
For one, Margaret was still there, rushing from her office on the ground floor to the employee lounge with a binder beneath one arm and a straight jacket in the other. Great. Something was clearly going down and you were walking right into the thick of it.

You followed behind her and watched from the door of the lounge as she dropped the binder on the table in front of some male orderlies you'd never met before. They barely paid you any attention but Margaret spotted you and ushered you over.

"What's going on?"

The look on her face was pinched, brows coming together, lips pursing tight. She flipped open a procedure handbook and handed the jacket off to one of the men. "We caught some of the patients...engaging in things."

Your own face shifted into a frown and you closed the hooded jacket tighter around your waist. "What kind of things?"

A man sitting at the table hid a bout of laughter behind his hand and lifted his gaze to you. "They had a damn orgy going on."

"A what?" You'd heard him but you couldn't quite believe it. Before you could ask what floor this orgy took place on, because your brain just couldn't handle the thought of a maximum security level orgy, Margaret spoke up.

"We caught a few elderly patients engaging in sexual activities with one another. Five of them to be exact and it seems they had some...fetishes."

Again, your eyes went wide and you could only stare at each face of the workers around you and back up to your supervisor. She flipped through the procedural handbook and ordered one of the guys to secure Mrs. Hall in her room. You'd met her several times while delivering medications and though you could never guess an orgy would have happened, it wasn't surprising that Mrs. Hall was involved.

She was wily, to say the least.
After instructing two other orderlies to clean up the mess left behind, Margaret finally turned to you, closing the binder with a thump. She sighed and brushed her graying, curly hair from her face. "This job is going to be the death of me."

"At least there's never have a dull moment."

"Trust me, all I want are dull moments." She scooped the book back into her arms and put a hand to your shoulder. "Thank you for coming in. I appreciate your time and willingness to step up when no one else will."

You wanted to tell her to remember that the next time there were layoffs, but you kept your mouth shut and resorted to a nod. "I'll do my best tonight, but I'm not sure what to do."

"It's actually very simple. At the top of every hour, you make your round to the severe wings. Floors four and five. Then, every three hours, check the other three floors. Just look for anything out of the ordinary, like orgies."

She patted your shoulder with a smirk and left the lounge and you behind. You listened to the soft click of her heels on the tile and sighed. What exactly was out of the ordinary in this place? Sure orgies were easy to spot, but all you'd ever done was hand out trays of medicine and cups of water, or push a cart down the hallways. You weren't trained to look for suicidal patients or anything out of the ordinary.

You stripped your jacket off and moved to the columns of square lockers stacked at the back of the room. Yours was near the bottom and you stopped to pop it open, exchanging your jacket for the gray sweater that was dress code approved by the administration. With it buttoned along your midsection, you checked the time and let out another sigh. It was nearly eleven.

Time for your first round.

The fourth floor, the one you'd been unable to stop thinking about all day, was first. A different security guard met you outside the elevator, though he appeared just as bored as the first. He had a book splayed out on his leg, his thumb stuck in the middle of the pages. He gave you a simple, but curious nod having never seen you before and turned the book back up to his face.

You could hear the never-ending mumbling from the first door already, exactly how it had
sounded the evening before. She sat on her bed, rocking back and forth while making the sign of the cross at points on her body over and over. Several of the words she muttered sounded Latin and you stepped away from the door with a frown.

How horrible it would be to be trapped in a state of mind like hers. You didn't even want to think about it. The next room you peeked into, you found a man lying on his bed with eyes wide and flicking back and forth from one corner of the ceiling to the other.

Was this normal? You tried to remember him from the night before but you'd been mostly trying to focus on meds and what room the infamous Joker was housed in. Even now, the thought of him had your eyes darting to the end of the hallway, exactly where you had been standing outside his door, speaking to him.

You shook the thoughts from your head and turned to look at the guard still reading. "Excuse me," you asked quietly.

The guard glanced up at you from the top of the book, only to acknowledge that he'd heard you, before moving his gaze back down to the page he was on. You blinked in confusion before addressing him once more.

"Is this normal behavior for him?" You pointed a thumb to the door at your right.

"What's he doing?" The guard asked, turning the page without looking up.

"He's just staring up at the ceiling, but his eyes are moving back and forth."

"Yep," was all he offered you and you paused to narrow your eyes on the apathetic guard. Wouldn’t it be more efficient for him to make the rounds with you? Yeah, there would be no doors opening, but he was the only one here armed with a weapon.

Knowing there was no way he was going to take himself away from that book, you turned back around and continued on with your duties. One by one, you peeked through the square windows, making sure each patient inside wasn’t hanging from the rafters or doing something equally out of the ordinary.

Each step you took down the hall, the more nervous you grew. It settled low in your belly, cold
and hot at the same time, twisting itself around your insides until you were barely paying attention to your duties. A quick glance in the room on the left, two more to go, you didn’t know what to expect to see once you got there.

Would he be waiting for you?

No, that was ridiculous. He had no idea you were even working tonight.

Another window to peek through, the patient inside lying on the floor instead of the bed, tracing invisible patterns in the air with their fingers. Jesus, did none of them sleep?

You crossed your arms over your chest, pulling the sleeves of your sweater down to gather the fabric in your fists. The last door on the right, the one with the white, rectangular card of information reading ‘A. Fleck’ was right in front of you. Yet, your feet were planted firmly on the tile floor beneath you.

From your current position, you could see a small sliver of the room beyond the door. The bed was still made with a paper-thin pillow propped against the wall and if you hadn’t known any better, you’d have guessed the room was empty. With a sigh, you stepped forward and more of the room came into view.

The bed was empty and a small prickle of panic touched your chest. You stepped in front of the door and caught your breath in your throat, gulping it back down at the sight of his figure near the window. The street lights from outside washed the room in a strange, orange glow and left him in shadows. You could see the outline of his hair, unruly and touching the tops of his shoulders, and the thin frame of his body. He was shirtless, that much you could tell, with a pair of gray pajama bottoms sitting low on his hips.

There was no cigarette smoke this time.

Just him shrouded in darkness, staring out the barred window with his arms hugged around his chest.

Though you were certain you hadn’t made a single sound during your approach to his room or in the seconds you stood there staring, he seemed to notice your presence anyway. Slowly, he turned his head to the side and you caught the silhouette of his profile against the light. It was different than you remembered like it didn’t match the face you’d spoken to the day before.
His shoulders turned and now, he was looking back at you. The lights from the streets lit his face and you could only stare as the corner of his lips lifted in a soft, slow smile, dimpling his cheek and wrinkling the corner of his eye.

“Hello again,” he spoke softly, but it echoed in your head as if he had shouted it.

Somehow, you were able to respond. “Hi. You should be asleep.” Unfortunately, your response sounded as stupid out loud as it had in your head.

He let out a soft laugh; a throaty sound that caught on the back of his tongue halfway out and made you purse your lips. Not because his laugh irritated you, but because you instantly liked the sound and that was just stupid. You were being reckless and stupid and were you really being charmed by a psychopathic murdering clown?

Before he could say anything else, you decided it was time to nip this in the bud. Turning your body away from his door, you let your gaze linger on him for a moment longer while telling him, “get some sleep, Mr. Fleck. I’ll be back to check on you in an hour.”

“Is that a promise?” He called after you had walked away. If you were being honest with yourself, you’d be able to admit that his question had made your steps stumble just slightly, but you didn’t like to think things like that.

Thankfully, the guard barely acknowledged you as you made your way back to the elevator and stepped onto it. As the doors shut between him and you, he flipped to the next page and you smacked your palm against the fifth floor button. One round down, 7 more to go.

By five A.M., you were exhausted. Sure, the job was easy as hell and you’d thankfully had no issues pop up during the shift, but there was endless walking. Up and down each floor, peeking into rooms, watching monitors, pausing at the end of the maximum-security ward to share quick conversations with Arthur Fleck. That was exhausting enough as it was.

Not because he was annoying, but because he wasn’t.

Sure, he was a tad awkward and stared at you like you were some sort of alien specimen. That wasn’t exactly a reason to avoid him. The murders he’d committed definitely were, though. But it wasn’t as though you were waltzing into his room to play games with him. It was polite
conversation, something none of the other patients offered you on that floor. And if he just so
happened to seem genuinely glad to see you, then well…

Another elevator ride up to the fourth floor, the last trip down this hall before the day shift arrived
and you’d be signing off on the work list and going home. One last peek into the rooms of the
criminality dangerous and insane and you could go home and collapse in your bed, and possibly
conquer those dishes.

But when the elevator door opened, the stool where the guards sat was empty. Had something
happened? Had he actually put his book down and decided to do something in his job description?
You poked your head out of the elevator and heard the sound of his keys jingling near the supply
closet on the right side of the hall.

The guard stood at the sink, filling a cup with water. Ah, so nothing serious had happened. You let
out a little breath of relief and started your rounds.

The rambling lady was finally lying down on her side, facing away from the door but you could
see her hands were still repeating the shape of the cross over her body. Four patients were sleeping,
or what you guessed was sleeping, and the others seemed to be doing exactly what they always
did.

Halfway down, the guard emerged from the supply closet and sniffed. “Hey, you gonna be alright
if I go to the bathroom?”

Turning to face him, you found the book pinched beneath his arm and he now had a newspaper to
accompany it. He was already turning to the bathroom doors before you could answer him and
once it shut behind him, you let out a sigh.

Six more doors and you were back exactly where you had been both dreading and for some reason,
looking forward to being. Arthur was still standing by the window, as he had been the last several
times you’d come to check on him, but he turned to face you almost as soon as you reached the
window.

“Do you like jokes?” He asked, his eyes lighting up just a fraction. You didn’t know whether this
excitement he had was more unnerving than the dark intensity he usually stared at you with.

Crossing your arms over your chest, you leaned a shoulder against the door and gave him a small
smile. “It depends.”


“On whether or not they’re funny.”

He was laughing before you could finish the sentence and you found yourself doing the same. He shook his head and held his hands up. By now, the two of you were standing closer than you’d ever been before, though there was a two-inch piece of steel between you. Somehow, you didn’t feel exactly safe and found yourself moving back a step.

Arthur mimicked your stance, arms crossed over his chest, leaning his opposite shoulder against the door so he could see you out the window. His face was still stretched into a smile that you mirrored as well.

“How do you shake hands with a leper?”

“I don’t know, how?”

“First, you have to pick the hand up off the floor.”

You laughed and ducked your head with a quick roll of your eyes. Jokes weren’t really your thing, but corny ones could always make you smile. And he seemed to genuinely find comfort in the fact that you had been smiling at his joke. He took a deep breath and you lifted your face to look at him again.

He moved and you felt yourself jump out of instinct, though you recovered quickly and noticed his hand reaching to the slit in the door where his meds passed through. His palm was out once more, long fingers stretched straight, waiting for you to shake his hand.

“We still haven’t been properly introduced.”

If it had been a stupid idea the day before with two other people on the floor to come to your aid, giving your hand to the Joker when the guard was currently busy in the bathroom was beyond
idiotic. Then again, he seemed so thin and a tad on the frail side. Did he even have the strength to hurt you through a four-inch slit in the door?

Pursing your lips, because you knew what you were about to do was against every protocol and policy that had been drilled in your head since taking the job, you unfolded your arms from your chest and found his hand. It was softer than you expected but cold and his grip was firm around your palm. Not enough to make you panic, but enough to make you...well, you didn’t quite know what reaction it was giving you.

It was the wrong reaction, that was for sure.

Your eyes met his through the sheet of glass in the window and he smiled. “I’m Arthur,” he said softly.

Shaking his hand was one thing; telling him your actual name? Not gonna happen. “Nice to meet you, Arthur. You can call me Cricket.”

“Do you know what I’ve missed the most while I’ve been trapped in here?” His question caught you off guard and you blinked down to where your hands were still touching. He turned your wrist gently so his palm was facing up and yours sat on top of his. Somehow, and for some strange reason, you’d never quite understand, you stepped closer.

Closer to a murderer, closer to a psychotic mental patient who told corny jokes and made you smile. You put your free hand against the door and lifted your gaze to meet his through the window. He stared down at your hand as he slowly inched it closer to him, through the opening in the door. It was frightening how easily he’d been able to overpower you without any strength or force at all.

And when his eyes met yours, obscured only by smudges and crisscrossing wires inside the plate of glass, your entire body tensed. His middle finger stroked the inside of your wrist and a frenzy of alarm bells rang in the back of your mind. The smile in his eyes was gone now, replaced by that darkness that had haunted you while you slept. When he spoke, the whisper of his voice didn’t match the look he was giving you. “It’s strange,” he murmured, warm breath fogging the bottom of the glass. “I never cared for human contact before. Never needed it, never really had it. And yet, I miss it.”

He turned your hand so your palm was up and his fingers traced the line of your own, lingering long enough to make you shiver and through the glass, you could see him staring down at your hand, could almost feel his gaze burning over you. And when he pressed something hard and
plastic into your hands, you let out a gasp. He closed your hands over it and stepped back, letting you free.

At the end of the hallway, the toilet flushed from inside the bathroom and you jerked your hand back against your chest, clutching whatever it was he had given you tightly in your fist. Arthur kept his gaze on you as you retreated away from his door, the look in his eyes sending a wave of terror and fire coursing through your body.

You turned on your heel and all but ran back to the elevator. The guard emerged from the bathroom just as the doors opened, though he didn’t really seem to notice the rush in you. Your finger pressed the ground floor button repeatedly, though you had more rounds to make. It could wait.

You needed to find somewhere you could be alone, collect the frenzy of thoughts in your head and- you looked down at your fist and uncurled your fingers. A black, plastic lighter sat in your palm and as the elevator took you slowly down three floors, you could only stare at it. The bell above you dinged and the doors opened into the main floor lobby.

A small bubble of laughter filled your throat and you tightened your fist around the lighter once more, holding it against your chest as if it were a secret. Maybe it was. A secret you shared only with Arthur. It was bizarre to even think about. Why were you acting this way? Was it his reputation, the stories, the rumors you’d heard playing tricks on you? Or was it something else?

The one question that plagued your mind as you found your way into the women’s restroom, hiding behind one of the stalls, was...why did you like him?

Chapter End Notes

Again, thanks for all the reads, kudos, and comments!!
Disturbed

Chapter Summary

You've made peace with your new late-night schedule, but that peace is soon disturbed by one Arthur Fleck.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is long, but I think the ending will be a bit of a payoff :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Inspiration was a fickle thing. For six long months, it had played a one-sided game of hide and seek, concealing itself down in the depths of your mind where no light could reach. Six months of nothing. Not even the urge to doodle had sprung up inside the creative center of your brain.

Two days after meeting Arthur Fleck, however, after a handful of conversation and him touching you, inspiration crawled out from whatever depths it had been slumbering and found you in your bedroom right before sunset. Your eyes moved to the corner of canvases leaning against the wall, ignoring the sketch you were planning to paint for your aunt. That one was too big anyway and you weren’t in the mood to paint horses or landscapes.

This was something you didn't want catching anyone's attention but your own. From the living room, you could hear the television blaring and knew Janey had turned it up that loud for a reason. She thought you were asleep and wanted to disturb you for not washing the dishes. You stayed quiet as you moved to the floor, not wanting her to hear you and think it was an invitation to come into your room and nag, and sat in front of the frames to sort through. The smallest one, a 12 inch by 12 inch would have to do.

You took the supplies out of the bag they had been sitting in the past two months and found the right colors. One of the tubes still had the sticker price on it and you scowled down at it, still angry that you'd spent so much without ever even touching it. Well, at least that would be changing soon.
Bubbles of black, titanium white, ochre, and a few drops of green dotted your palette and with a deep breath, you dipped the flat brush into the black. It felt good just putting the brush to the paint and the paint to the canvas. Even if it was just streaks of black with no details yet. You were surprised by how much you’d missed this.

Out passed your bedroom door, you could hear the television shifting to the six o’clock news and the water in the kitchen turned off with a squeak of the faucet. Janey’s footsteps thumped down the hall and your brush stilled on the canvas. You turned to stare at the door from over your shoulder.

Beneath the crack, you could see the shadows of her feet and the slight creak of the loose floorboard. She was listening for any signs that you were awake, but you weren’t going to give her any reason to knock. After a minute and a huff of annoyance, she turned away and moved into the living room to watch the news.

You turned back to your painting and swatched a drop of white into the black to create the dark gray shades. As you worked, you kept one ear on any hint that she might come back and try to listen for you again while the other ear focused on the news.

“...the current CEO of Wayne Enterprises, stepping into the role after the tragic murder of the Thomas Wayne. Mr. Fox, who we could not reach for comment, has been out of the country working on negotiations with foreign investors to restore balance to the company. In other news, the trial of the century is set to begin later this month. Arthur Fleck, otherwise known as Joker--”

You were on your feet before you had time to even register what the anchorwoman was saying. Brush still in hand, you threw open your bedroom door and rushed into the living room just in time to see the same scene playing on the news that had dominated every news station in the past year. Arthur, in full makeup and red suit, sat in that chair on the Murray Franklin show, and though you’d seen it dozens of times, it felt different now.

Now that you’d met him, spoke to him, touched him.

“Ah, she lives,” Janey muttered around the rim of her coffee mug. “Was starting to think you’d disappeared.”

You ignored her, sitting on your knees in front of the television screen, watching Arthur scream at the late-night talk show host. His eyes were wild, mouth twisted into a snarl as he shouted, “You get what you fucking deserve”. Of course, the expletive was bleeped out as well as the shot that followed, but you’d seen pictures of Arthur’s face in the aftermath, splattered with drops of blood. A year ago, you had looked at it as if he were a wild animal that had escaped its enclosure and
wreaked havoc. But now...

The frame froze on his face and the anchorwoman came back onto the screen with the squared image moving to the corner over her shoulder. She shook her head, though you could only focus on the still frame of Arthur’s face looking right into the camera after he had shot Murray.

“Even a year later, it’s still shocking to see. Prosecutors have officially released the official trial date of October 30th in the murder of three Wall street junior executives, Murray Franklin and a co-worker of Fleck’s. The state is seeking the death penalty in an unprecedented turn of events.”

Your throat clenched and you had to swallow the tight, pinching sensation down just to breathe. October 30th was so soon. Did he even know? More importantly, why did you feel bad for him? He had murdered five people in cold blood, one on national television and deserved to be locked away.

Of course, he was already locked away.

“What a sicko,” Janey said behind your back, making your hands clench around the paintbrush still in your hands. “I hope they give him the chair.”

“He’s mentally ill.”

“So what? He’s still a criminal. I don’t see how you can even be in the same building as him.” The girl sniffed and looked down into her coffee, but her attitude didn’t surprise you. Janey was from a different world. She thought she was poor now, living in a two-bedroom apartment, splitting rent and working a job at a bank.

She didn’t know poor.

You’d met her parents last Christmas when they popped by for a visit. You’d stood in the living room, waiting to politely greet them with a smile as if they were your own family. But the moment her mother looked around the apartment and wrinkled her nose in disgust, you lost all desire to know these people. And from that moment on Janey had hated the apartment.

She complained to the maintenance men on a weekly basis and hassled the landlord about proper security. It was her mission, you suspected, to turn the whole building into the kind of places that
only existed in the wealthier parts of Gotham.

Could you blame her though? She was raised by wealthy parents away from the city, had never seen poverty or streets piled with trash. She didn’t know that the apartment the two of you shared was nice...compared to what you’d been used to, of course.

“He’s--” your throat clenched around the words. You couldn’t tell her about your conversations with him, about meeting the infamous Joker. So, you restated what you’d already said. “He’s mentally unwell. He was off his medications when he…” Your words trailed off as you nodded to the television set, though the news had already switched to sports news.

“Still,” she said with a shrug. “He needs to pay for what he did.”

You were already making your way to your bedroom before she had finished her words. And though you didn’t know why they were making you so upset, you couldn’t deny that they were. He may have been a murderer, may have been psychotic and an animal, but you felt bad for him.

A year ago, while watching that video clip play over and over on every news channel for months, you’d saw nothing but a madman, nothing but evil in those eyes. A year ago, you hadn’t met Arthur Fleck. You hadn’t spoken to him, hadn’t even tried to think about things from his point of view. And now that you had, watching that two-minute clip was different. You didn’t see evil or a deranged animal. You saw a person drowning in a sea of misery and loneliness.

Your paintbrush glided through the blob of gray you’d made and you put it back to the canvas to continue your painting. In the back of your mind, you tried to forget the look on his painted face, tried to forget the drops of blood speckled along his white cheeks, and instead, thought of the way you’d seen him the night before in his room; silhouetted against the light filtering in through the barred window.

It was that image that had inspired you after all.

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A week had passed since you’d started the third shift and though Margaret assured you every day that she was still searching for a replacement so you could return to your normal shifts, you didn’t mind. There was a strange peace to be found in the middle of the night. The sounds of the city continued on; sirens blaring at all hours of the night, horns honking, and whatnot. But inside the four walls of the psych ward, they were easier to ignore.
On the sixth night of your new third shift, however, the peace you’d already grown used to was disturbed. And it all started with a note left on your locker. You peeled the folded page from the metal door and looked down at Margaret’s messy handwriting.

‘I’m so sorry to ask you, but we need you to stay until noon at least. The stomach bug is going around and half the staff has called out sick. Thanks, - Margaret’

You couldn’t help but notice that even though she’d apologized for asking, she hadn’t exactly asked anything. She had told you, the way supervisors do, that you were needed to work a twelve-hour shift. Which meant, if you refused, it would reflect badly on you and you really couldn’t risk a point against you right now.

Sighing, you kicked your jacket into your locker, thrust your arms into your sleeves and slammed the door shut behind you. Twelve-hour shifts weren’t a stranger to you. Several times over the past year, you’d handled them without complaint, which was why Margaret knew you’d do it. But for some stupid reason, you had thought it was a good idea to forgo sleep and finish your painting.

Sure, it was exactly how you’d planned it to look and you were proud of it, but you were going to need multiple cups of coffee to make it through tonight. First hour of rounds passed exactly as they had the last six days. Arthur was waiting for you like usual, shoulder propped against the wall, mouth curling into a smile as soon as you stepped up to the window.

It was strange how surprised you were every time you saw him as if in the time away from him you forgot that he could be charming. Still, you couldn’t help replaying that clip from the Murray Franklin show in the back of your mind while he spoke to you.

Currently, they were like two different people to you. There was Arthur, the psych patient who told you corny jokes to make you laugh in the middle of the night, and Joker, who pulled out a gun and shot a bullet through a celebrity’s head.

On the second round, at exactly one in the morning, you stopped by his door and found him sitting on the bed, head ducked low with his elbows on his knees. He didn’t look up at you this time and you frowned, stepping closer to the door.

“Everything alright?” You asked.
He didn’t answer and you rose on your tiptoes to look down at the rest of his body. His foot bounced with nervous energy and he stared between his legs. This was unusual behavior for sure and you glanced nervously back at the guard on the opposite end of the hallway. The book was back in front of his face and you pursed your lips.

“Arthur, are you alright?”

Slowly, he nodded and you wondered what had happened in the last hour. He had been so, for lack of a better term, normal at midnight, had even cracked a joke that actually made you laugh. Maybe he was sick. Margaret had said the stomach bug was going around.

Before you could ask him if he was feeling sick, Arthur lifted his head and met your gaze through the glass. There was pain in his face, twisting his smile into something unsettling and frightening, though it never faded. He took a deep breath and stood to his feet. You watched his fingers rake through his hair and let your gaze fall down the length of his shirtless chest. He was so thin.

It was heartbreaking to even look at.

“Why are you nice to me?” He whispered the question and you’d almost not even heard it. It caught you off guard and you blinked up at him. In your silence, he continued. “Because no one else is. They force their smiles and order me to take my medication, pull me this way and that and when I don’t want to go with them, they hurt me.”

“Arther, did something happen?” You looked back at the guard with worry. Had he done something in the hour you last made your rounds? “Did someone hurt you?”

When you looked back, he was directly in front of you, looking down at you through the window and you clamped your mouth shut. He leaned forward and let out a long sigh that fogged the glass in front of him. After a moment, he nodded and you felt fear and anger strike so suddenly in your chest your hands curled into fists at your side.

“That is not okay. Who hurt you?”

He opened his eyes and searched yours thoroughly and it left you breathless. Your pulse pounded in your throat, stomach clenching with dread and worry.

“Everyone. They all do eventually.” The creases at the corners of his eyes smoothed out as his face fell slack. He’d never looked at you this way. It scared you more than you cared to admit. It was as
if in less than an hour, he’d convinced himself you weren’t his friend anymore. “And you will too.”

“Arthur, don’t say that.”

“It’s the truth, isn’t it?”

“No, it isn’t. I’m not going to hurt you. I--” The words stuck to the back of your tongue and you quickly looked away from him, not sure how to even say what you wanted to. Hell, you weren’t sure if you even should say it. In the back of your mind, you saw your painting, the dark figure in shadows in front of the barred window, you saw the still frame of Arthur’s face on the news and you couldn’t figure out why he was so many different people to you at once. Clenching your jaw, you turned back to face him and sniffed. “I like you. You’re nice and you make me laugh.”

He moved closer to the door, putting his hands on the steel beside the window before ducking his head. Even in the darkness of his room, you could see the tension coiling along the muscles of his arms and shoulders and the slight tremor in his body.

“Don’t you know what I am? What I’ve done?”

“Yes,” you said quietly. He raised his head just enough to look at you and you offered a smile, though it wasn’t much. It was just enough to comfort him, though you weren’t sure if it worked. Arthur never got the chance to tell you either way.

“Is everything alright down there?” The guard asked, making you jump away from the door with a gasp. You slapped a hand to your chest and blinked in surprise. You’d forgotten he even existed. Clearing your throat, you nodded, glanced quickly to find Arthur still staring at you, and hurried back down to the elevators.

When you got there, the guard was suddenly no longer interested in his book and watched you closely. You pressed a finger to the panel of buttons and cleared your throat.

“I think he’s sick.”

The guard scoffed. “They’re all sick.”
“I mean, with the stomach bug. It’s going around, you know?”

“Whatever,” the man, whose name tag read Geoff, mumbled and shifted on top of the stool to find a more comfortable perch. “If he pukes, you’re cleaning it up.”

For the rest of the night, Arthur stayed seated on his bed the same way you’d found him at one in the morning; head ducked low, elbows on his knees, and foot-tapping with a nervous energy that seemed to sink deeper into you the more you saw it. It had made the night seem twice as long and you actually missed the jokes he told.

You had even tried to tell him one, the only one you could remember. “How much did the pirate pay for his peg leg and hook? An arm and a leg.”

He hadn’t laughed, hadn’t even looked up or stopped bouncing that leg. Which wasn’t surprising. You didn’t know many jokes and what you did know had been passed down from your aunt who was often corny and lame, though she tried to seem cool. When it was clear he wasn’t going to be speaking to you at all tonight, you turned and left.

By six, the sun was rising and the psych ward was back into its usual swing and you had officially signed off on another third shift round. Unfortunately, your workday still had six more hours and you were surprised to find Todd waiting in the employee lounge.

“Whoa, you look rough,” he said as you walked in the door. His words made you pause and stare, tiny threads of insecurity weaving through you. There weren’t many mirrors around the hospital and though you’d checked to make sure you looked halfway decent before leaving the house at 10 the night before, you hadn’t even seen your face since then.

With a frown, you turned to the coffee pot and poured its contents into a styrofoam cup. “Nice to see you, too.”

Todd laughed and leaned back in the chair, making the joints creak in protest. “Oh, don’t be like that, Cricket. Even on your rough days, you still look a hell of a lot better than the loonies we see around here.”

You shoved the coffee pot back onto the burner and turned to glare at him. “These loonies are people, Todd.”
“Jesus,” he mumbled, looking down at the newspaper stretched before him with a slight roll of his eyes. “I guess we know it’s that time of the month for you.”

“Are you serious? I’ve been on my feet for the past six hours and I have six more to go. You really don’t want to get on my bad side today.”

“You’re telling me.” He stood from the table, the sudden motion sending his chair scraping along the floor. “We have med rounds. Let’s get it over with.”

He stormed out the door, leaving you behind to gape after him. You’d never had him act this way toward you. Or maybe, it was different when he was directing it to someone else. As you downed your coffee and tossed it in the trash to follow him to the med supply, you tried to recall all the times you’d laughed along with him when he poked fun at someone. It had seemed innocent enough then.

Why was it bothering you so much now?

Things were tense during the med rounds, though neither of you decided to discuss it further. You were beyond thankful for that. It was bad enough just being in the company of someone who acted like a scolded child. The last thing you wanted was to make him want to lash out. If he wanted to think you were menstrual, you’d let him. Maybe he’d keep his mouth shut.

By the time the fourth-floor rounds were looming, you were beyond nervous. Each tray was set up on the cart like they were every day, with patient names labeled clearly on them. Arthur’s were at the back of the cart, right beside your left hand. Every time you reached for one tray, your eyes would catch the sight of his name and your stomach would clench with nervous worry all over again.

The guard had changed and a new one stood by the large window at the end of the hall. He seemed newer, more serious about his job, and he had given you a nod of approval as you wheeled the cart out. You could feel his stare at your back as you and Todd made your way down the hall as well, though the guard never said anything. When you looked back, you found him stepping into the supply closet beside the elevator shaft.

By the end of the fourth floor med round, you were sweating. It beaded up along the small of your back and you couldn’t keep your eyes off the last door on the right. The room was bright from the morning sun and you had to crane your neck to see in from where you stopped the cart. Todd
stepped between you and reached for the tray, ignoring the scowl you gave him.

You watched him turn to the door and pause. He looked into the window and down to the floor at the far left of the room. “Shit,” he hissed, dropping the tray back onto the cart.

Panic flooded your body overwhelmingly fast. “What? What’s wrong?”

Already, Todd was fumbling with the ring of keys at his hip. “He’s face down on the floor. Fucker probably offed himself.”

“What?!” You pushed the cart out of your way and pressed yourself against the door. Sure enough, Arthur was laying on the floor of his room, face down with a curtain of dark, unruly hair covering his face. “Arthur!” You pounded your palm against the door but couldn’t look for any sign of life from him.

Todd shoved you aside with his shoulder and wrenched the key in the lock, throwing it open. You followed behind him, eyes glancing to the window where you’d seen him standing several nights ago, where he had inspired you to paint once more. Except, now...something was different.

You did a double-take back to the window and blinked in confusion at the bars that were bolted into the wall. One was... gone.

Time slammed to a stop and you heard your gasp before you even realized you were sucking in a breath of surprise. You turned to where Todd was kneeling down to the floor, right beside the unmoving body of Arthur Fleck. He wasn’t dead, though. He was waiting.

You watched your coworker turn Arthur onto his back and your eyes moved down to the steel bar held tightly against his chest. Todd noticed it too and fell back on his ass to get away. Before he could open his mouth to shout for help from the guard down the hall, the metal bar slammed right against his forehead with a sickening thump. Blood was instantly dripping from the cut above his eyebrow and he slumped to the floor, out cold.

Slowly, Arthur sat up and took in several deep, ragged breaths. His legs were bent and he propped his arms on his knees as if he had come close to exhausting himself. The metal bar was still gripped in his fist and you looked from the small smudge of blood on its surface up to meet Arthur’s gaze.
He stared at you the same way he had the first night you had met him when his joke had made you laugh nervously and his gaze haunted you. You pressed you back against the open door and could do nothing but stare down at him. Despite the trembling in your entire body, despite the immense amount of fear nearly suffocating you, you couldn’t move.

He held your gaze, those green eyes piercing through you, as he tossed the bar onto the bed at his left and stood to his feet. You were vaguely aware of his lack of a shirt but were too focused on him stepping closer to you. He took in the length of your body in a quick glance that made you shake harder and when his eyes met yours once more, he arched an eyebrow.

Your breath came out fast and shallow and beneath your scrubs, your heart was slamming like a drum against your chest. Arthur reached up to cup your face with his hands that were cold and drew another gasp from your throat. He brushed the hair from your face and tilted your chin up to let you look up at him.

He lowered his mouth onto yours and you whimpered, powerless to stop him, powerless to stop yourself. The kiss was soft and tender and you had a hard time believing this was even real, that his lips were actually against yours and you were enjoying the feel of them. Somehow, you managed to move your hands and found his slim waist, dragging your fingers up the bumps of his ribcage just beneath his skin.

Arthur leaned his head to the side and suddenly, your lips fit easier against his, like two pieces of a puzzle clicking together. Despite the terror still gripping your spine, despite the wailing thoughts swirling and screaming inside your head, you kissed him back, let yourself open your mouth to explore his.

God, it felt good.

It was so wrong, so strange, but good.

He slipped one hand to the back of your head and tangled his fingers through your hair, pulling at the band around your ponytail until you felt it fall around your shoulders. He was gentle yet demanding all at once, pulling you closer to him and cradling your jaw at the same time. You could taste how badly he craved you on his tongue and hoped he knew that you wanted him the same.

Before you were ready, much too soon, he pulled away and you could feel his ragged breath warm against your slick lips, could feel how his ribs expanded beneath your hands. He pressed his forehead against yours and stroked the side of your hair. Somehow, you managed to open your eyes and the sight of his smile, the one that made your stomach jump and flutter, curled your own
lips.

“I like you too,” Arthur whispered, pressing one more kiss to your lips before stepping over Todd’s body. His hands slid away from your face and you were frozen to the spot against his open door. Still looking at you, his hips hit the cart of meds and sent it rolling to the other side of the hallway.

He gave you another flash of his smile and then he was gone. He wouldn’t get far. The guard at the end of the hallway was already radioing for help and Arthur was no match for his size. You were afraid he’d get hurt in the fight or, god forbid, shot, but there was no deafening gunfire.

Just shouts and grunts of a fight, followed by the ding of the elevator and more voices rushing onto the fourth floor. You felt your knees go weak and slowly, you slid down the door until your ass met the tile beneath you. Todd was coming to, groaning and no doubt suffering from a killer headache, but he was alive.

And so were you.

For the first time in a long time.

You reached up to touch your lips, still warm, still damp from Arthur’s kiss and you found yourself still smiling as well.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the feedback! I'm so happy you're all enjoying this fic and I hope I can continue writing chapters for you to enjoy!
Questions Without Answers

Chapter Summary

You seem to have a lot of questions and Arthur's being rather charming.

Chapter Notes

Oh gosh, I really can't believe I've gotten such good feedback for this fic but I'm so inspired by your comments and kudos! It's unreal! I'm also planning to see Joker for a third time this Sunday so I'm super pumped about the inspiration it'll give me. I can't believe I'm posting another chapter so soon but I literally can't stop writing this fic. I just love him so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two days later, you sat at one side of a long table with Margaret, the hospital's lawyer and two other official-looking individuals you'd never met before and would likely never see again. The lawyer, a man of about fifty with a balding head that he hid behind a toupee that wasn't fooling anyone, took a drag from his cigarette and tapped the ashes into a silver tray. You followed the smoke up until it disappeared and bit the inside of your lip to keep from smiling.

Not that this was a particularly humorous meeting. Quite the opposite in fact. But the smoke and smell of it reminded you of the night you met Arthur for the first time and he had blown a ring of smoke to impress you. Of course, thinking of that night only reminded you of what had happened two mornings ago on the 3rd.

And thinking of the way he had kissed you never failed to make you smile. Even in moments like this, where you were having to repeat and relive every little detail of Arthur's escape attempt. It had failed, to no one's surprise and landed him in more confinement than he was already in.

After the whole thing, the hospital administration had been so scared you'd run to the press with your story that they'd given you two days off with pay. Which had definitely been nice, and honestly, you wouldn't have leaked the story anyway, but coming back for this kind of meeting was making you regret ever taking the vacation days.
This could have all been done two days ago and you could have returned to your normal life by now. Well, the life of normality that you’d gotten used to the past week or so. The normal where you shared late-night talks and jokes with Arthur, the normal that these four people did not know existed. The room was stuffy with smoke and serious tones and every so often, one of the men who worked in administration would scowl at you as if he didn't believe what you were telling them.

But you were telling the truth. The only truth they’d ever know, anyway.

"What happened after Fleck knocked Mr. Daniels unconscious?"

This question again. You'd already answered it when Margaret asked, and again when you had to give a written account of the events. With a sigh, you folded your hands in your lap and looked the lawyer in the eye.

"I backed into the doorway and said, please don't hurt me. Mr. Fleck tossed the metal bar onto his bed and ran out. He hit the cart of meds and then I heard him fighting the guard."

"And Mr. Fleck in no way attempted to grab you or harm you to your understanding?"

Oh, he had grabbed you alright. Those cold hands had cupped your face so gently that even now, 48 hours later, you could still feel the traces of them on your jaw. And the way they had gripped a handful of hair at the back of your head...you'd laid in bed the night before, wide awake, replaying it all in your mind, trying to figure out how you felt about the whole thing.

On one hand, you had been frightened and genuinely thought he would attack you. He had acted so bizarrely, so out of the ordinary all night. It wasn’t like he wasn’t capable, though you hoped he wouldn’t do that to you. On the other hand, you had kissed him back, had wanted him to pull you closer and taste whatever strange desire you had been feeling for him. If he hadn’t pulled away when he did, you didn’t know how far you would have let him go. That thought usually kept you awake at all hours as well.

If he hadn’t stopped the kiss when he did, what would you have been willing to let him do to you? The answer was something you couldn’t admit to yourself just yet. It was too much to think about and you knew the answer would make these strange feelings inside you amplify.

The lawyer cleared his throat and you met his eyes with a polite, if not a bit shy, smile. You nodded, shifted in your chair and answered the question you’d taken far too long to answer.
"Correct. He barely even looked at me."

Oh, but he had. In the moments before he had kissed you, he had looked at you, gaze burning through you, studying you in that long stretch of seconds. He really had no idea his effect on you, and you were surprised by it as well. But now that you knew what it was like to be touched by him, kissed by Arthur, you could think of little else. And it disturbed you to come to that realization.

"Alright, if you'll sign this form and initial in the highlighted areas," the lawyer said, sliding a pack of papers toward you. At the top of the page he wanted you to sign, you saw the words 'confidentiality agreement'. "All this states is that your account that we have here is the truth according to you and you, in no way, can sue the hospital for future damages."

You wouldn't sue. It wasn't all their fault, though you knew something had provoked Arthur to lash out. That, you intended to find out.

Once your initials and signature had been written on each page, the team of men stood up from their chairs, shook your hand, and exited the room. On the wall to your left, the clock ticked by and filled the silence that was left between you and Margaret. She reached across the table and took your hand, patting it in a motherly way. "How are you holding up, dear?"

"I'm alright," you admitted. "How's Todd?"

"He has a concussion and will be out for the next week, but he'll live. I think his pride is more wounded than anything. Big guy like that being beaten by someone so frail." She curled a hand beneath her chin and looked you over. "It's a miracle that mongrel didn't try to hurt you as well."

You bristled at that word; mongrel. He wasn't a mongrel or an animal. He was a human being who's been caged like a wild beast for the past year. Caged and forgotten and forced to live like a shell of a former human like the others on the fourth floor. Pursing your lips, you looked down at your lap and hoped Margaret took your sudden annoyance as fear of what could have happened.

"Where did they take him?"

"Who, Todd?"
"No, Arthur." God, what did you care about where Todd went? "I know he has his trial coming up soon and I just figured after his escape attempt, he'd be held at the jail or something."

Margaret leaned back in her chair and pulled a cigarette from her purse. She lit up and took a drag before answering letting it out with a sigh. "He's our problem until they determine if he's actually insane or just faking it to get out of the death penalty. They've got a state psychiatrist coming in next week to evaluate him."

"They can't seriously think he's faking it."

Margaret scowled at you and held her cigarette between her fingers. You stared as she narrowed her eyes and pursed her wrinkled lips. "Honey, insane or not, he killed five people. Almost killed Todd and could have killed you if he'd wanted to. When an animal is rabid, you put it down."

You couldn't quite believe what you were hearing. This woman had worked in the mental health field for fifteen years. She was around mentally unwell people day in and day out and this was the compassion she had? Put a sick man out of his misery?

It was disgusting and her words left you feeling queasy. You rubbed at your stomach and decided to put the conversation to bed. You never wanted to hear anyone talk about him, or any other human being, as if they were nothing but pests. Shaking your head, you crossed your arms over your chest.

"What time should I be here tonight?"

"You want to come back to work so soon? You have another day on your vacation."

You shrugged. "I'm going stir crazy at home. I like my job and I want to work." In other words, you wanted to see Arthur and check how badly he was wounded.

Margaret stubbed her cigarette into the ashtray and shrugged her shoulders. "If you say so. You can be on laundry tonight. I don't want you on rounds--"

"Why not?"
"It's too soon for you. I know you're telling me you're fine, but I’ve worked in this place too long to believe that. If you don’t want laundry, there’s a whole storeroom of old files that need to be boxed away up on 7th.” Seventh floor: Records. Just the thought made you curl your lip. Paperwork was bad enough as it was, but sorting old files alphabetically, boxing them up and moving them to the basement?

There had to be thirty years worth of files--

You blinked down at the table and stopped yourself before you told Margaret you’d take the laundry duty. Surely, Arthur’s file was locked up. There’s no way they’d leave something like that lying around for anyone to peek into. But this was Arkham you were talking about. This place was one bad week away from crumbling in on itself.

“Alright, I can sort through old records. What time do you need me here?”

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The clerk who worked behind the gate and desk at the Records department was a nice guy, if not a bit wry. He seemed to be only a little annoyed that he had to stay until six to show you into the store room and where to retrieve the boxes to pack up. As he opened the locked room with a key at his hip, he turned back to look at you.

“You’re the one who got attacked, right? By the Joker?”

“He didn’t attack me.” You didn’t feel like giving the whole story over again. The door opened and he shoved it back, knocking into a stack of boxes as he did so. A tower of files slid along the floor and Carl cursed under his breath.

“No one ever picks up after themselves around here. Always leaving their shit for someone else to take care of,” he complained, stooping low to grab the file folders that had fallen. When you moved in behind him, he sighed and glanced back at you. “He came in here before all that Murray Franklin shit went down. Stole a file on his mom.”

You frowned and met Carl’s stare. “His mom? She was institutionalized?”

“You can’t really talk about the shit we see in the files, but I will say, I get it.”
You frowned and closed the door behind you. “You get what?”

“You went crazy. I don’t condone the fucked up shit he did, but from what I read in that file. I get it. The dude was fucked from the get-go.”

What you were hearing made your breath still in your lungs while your pulse tripled. Dizziness swam in your head and you quickly shook it away. When you spoke, your words were nothing but a whisper. “What do you mean?”

Carl sighed and scrubbed the lower half of his face with his hand. You could see that he was truly torn between the confidentiality policies he had agreed to for the job and wanting to tell someone about this. You wondered if he’d kept this bottled up the whole year, or if his hesitation was for show. Either way, he leaned closer to you.

“His mom was fucked up. She let some dude she was dating beat him when he was a kid, gave him head trauma. So, I get it.” He nodded and turned away to face the rack of endless files, some stuffed with paper until the seam was bursting, others so thin they were barely even there. And all the while he explained the process of keeping the files in alphabetical order and properly labeling the boxes to be stored, you couldn’t focus on a damn word he said.

A burning ache grew in the center of your chest and you rubbed at it absentmindedly as you tried to follow along to the instructions Carl was giving you. It was hard to think about anything apart from the mental pain and physical torture Arthur had went through in his life. And now, there was an entire state, possibly the nation, that wanted him to die for the things he had been through.

“No one expects you to get through the whole room in one night. It’s impossible. But whatever you do, make sure you lock up before you leave.” Carl turned and laid the ring of keys on one of the shelves, between two folders that were bursting with files. “And don’t lose those keys. It’s got the hospital’s master key on it and I don’t wanna lose my fucking job because of you, alright?”

He said it with a smile and a laugh and you flashed him one back and promised you wouldn’t. As soon as the door shut behind him, you snatched the ring from the shelf and stared at the collection of multi-shaped keys. They were labeled with little tags, obviously done by someone with far more patience and more organizational skills than you had. But you were thankful.

You flipped through until you found the tag with the letters M.C. and a thick, brass key that had a strange arrangement of curves and dips caught the light above you. Did the master key unlock any door? It seemed ridiculous that they would have one key that could open every door. What chaos it would cause to fall into the wrong hands.
And for some reason, you felt as if your hands were exactly the wrong kind.

You snatched a spare piece of paper from a desk shoved into the back of the storeroom and a pen before laying the key down flat. You traced the jagged edge with the tip of the pin and studied the two to make sure they both matched. Once you were sure they did, you folded the paper and slipped it into the pocket of your scrubs.

Several seconds passed with you standing in the center of the room, your mind reeling with everything that had happened in the past ten minutes. Trying to make sense of what Carl had told you about Arthur’s past, the sinister ideas that lurked in the back of your mind now that you somewhat possessed the hospital master key... it made you stop and think.

What were you even trying to accomplish here?

It’s not like you could break him out and set him free as if he were a dog. You’d end up locked away, right beside him, and besides, you didn’t exactly think he should be freed. Any time you let your mind wander to the what ifs, you were quick to remind yourself that no matter how much you liked him, he was still a murderer, still the Joker.

He was both the man who made you laugh and the man who terrified you and while you wanted nothing more than to help the former, you couldn’t risk freeing the latter.

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By three-thirty in the morning, you’d had enough of files and boxes and trips down to the basement storage. The dust was giving you sneezing fits every ten minutes and your eyes were watering from allergies. Besides, you were tired of trying to make sense of the mess of thoughts in your head.

You wanted to see him again.

And you knew the schedule of the third shift orderlies. The rounds were done on the hour and they were possibly taking a smoke break or in the employee lounge for a late-night snack by now. The only person who would stand in your way was the guard, Geoff, who would be on high alert more than likely after the latest escape attempt.

It was a tricky situation, one that you were more than willing to chance.
Before you had a chance to back out of this monumentally stupid idea, the elevator bell chimed above your head and the doors slid open to the fourth floor. Just like every night last week, Geoff sat on the stool with his nose in a book. Apparently, the excitement of Arthur’s attempt to escape didn’t leak over to the night shift guard.

At least he seemed to have purchased a new book. You smiled at him as he glanced over the top of the pages to you. When he put his thumb to the center of the book, you had to bite back a groan.

“Thought you’d be too spooked to come back up here.”

You forced a sweeter smile and stepped off the elevator. “It takes more than a clown to scare me. But, speaking of our resident escape artist, is he allowed to have visitors?”

Geoff gaped at you and you tried not to wince at his reaction. Was it too suspicious to want to talk to him? Would he think you were crazy and report your out of ordinary behavior to Margaret? With a deep breath that he blew out of his mouth, he nodded to the opposite end of the hallway. “Can’t imagine why you want to see that fucker, but be my guest. Don’t open the door and don’t get too close. I’m in no mood to chase anyone down tonight.”

You wanted to ask if he was ever in the mood to do anything, but didn’t chance it. Turning on your heel, you tried to keep your pace slow and leisurely. It was difficult. You had been rehearsing a thousand questions to ask him in your mind, each one zipping through your head like a speeding train. It was impossible to concentrate on just one.

‘ Why did you try to escape? ’

‘ Why did you try to kiss me? ’

‘ Are you scared about the trial? ’

You clamped your teeth around your bottom lip and kept your eyes glued to the last door on the right. It was dark inside the window, but that was nothing new. It was rather late, after all. Would he be asleep? He hadn’t seemed to ever sleep the entire week you had worked third shift, but he would be heavily medicated now.
As you neared his door, you thought back to the look in his eyes in the seconds before he kissed you. Those green irises blazing with an indescribable energy that still lingered in your head, still burned through you, his hands reaching for you, the soft press of his lips before he had kissed you properly.

Each step you took was another memory of that brief encounter and the closer you got to his door, the more you were thirsty for another moment alone with him. Your entire body was practically buzzing with anticipation and you had to take a deep breath to steady your pulse as you stopped outside his door.

He stood in front of the window, shirtless like always, silhouetted against the yellowing light from the street and for a moment, you thought you were staring at the painting you had created. But then he turned and his eyes fell on you through the glass of the window and his face stretched into a smile.

“Arthur,” you said softly, unable to stop your own smile from pulling at your mouth. He moved toward the door and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Cricket.”

Hearing your nickname, spoken so endearingly, made you duck your head to hide the blush warming your cheeks. What was happening? Where were all the questions you had wanted the answers to? They had all disappeared the moment you saw him again and a part of you, the sane, rational part of you, wanted to scream in frustration.

You weren’t supposed to like him.

Not like this.

“You kissed me,” was all you could think to say.

He looked up to the ceiling and laughed, the sound drawing a similar chuckle from your throat, though you didn’t dare let the guard hear it. Arthur pushed a hand through his hair, slicking it back away from his face and you studied the features that were more defined without the curtain of hair framing them.
“Was I not supposed to?”

You pursed your lips into a playful scowl and leaned a shoulder against the door so your back was to the long stretch of hallway. “I wasn’t complaining.”

Arthur reached up and laid his arm along the top of the window, leaning down to let his forehead rest against his wrist. From there, he gazed down at you and you felt things, things you hadn’t felt in a very long time, sinking deep into your chest and sliding down to your lower belly. You looked over his face, trying to memorize every dimple, every wrinkle, every flaw that made you more attracted to him.

Neither of you said anything else about it. There was no need to, no point.

At the opening in the door, you caught him slipping his hand through and stared at his fingers. His nails were bitten down to the quick and there were several cuts along his knuckles. Apparently, he had gotten in a few punches as well.

“Did they hurt you badly?”

He slowly shook his head and without thinking too long or hard about it, you reached out to slip your fingers in the spaces between his. “I’ve been punched before.”

“Why am I not surprised by that?”

He laughed suddenly and loudly and you put a finger to your lips, hoping the guard you were trying to avoid didn’t feel the need to come see what the actual hell was going on. As his laughter died down, Arthur met your eyes once more and his smile slipped.

“I hear they’re going to throw the book at me.”

You sighed and felt your own face fall at the mention of the trial. Well, there was one question you no longer needed the answer to, though he didn’t sound too scared. He sounded as blase about it as if he were asking about the weather. Before you could answer, he gave your fingers a squeeze and pulled his hand back into the room.
“Could you do something for me?”

You turned and blinked up at him. “If I can, of course.”

“Could you get me a newspaper?”

It wasn’t what you were expecting, but you understood. With a nod, you crossed your arms over your chest and forced a small smile. “I’ll try. I need to go before people start suspecting things.” Before you turned to leave, you gave him another playful scowl. “But no more escape attempts, alright?”

“How else am I going to kiss you?”

His question knocked the breath out of you and you scoffed with a shake of your head. “Wow, you’re something else, you know that?” Something dangerous and terrifying and charming and sweet and you were in way over your head with this.

Arthur backed away from the door but watched you leave with a smirk on his lips, one that you were definitely going to see every time you close your eyes. You kept your head ducked as you walked the hall and had to force the smile to fade from your face by the time you reached the elevators.

“What was that about?” Geoff asked, nodding toward the end of the fourth floor.

“Oh,” you said, turning to look in the same direction. “I just wanted to see if he even knew what he had done the other day.”

“Well, did he?”

The doors opened and you stepped inside, leaning over to press the ground floor button. As you waited for the doors to close, you looked back to the guard and nodded. “Oh yeah, he knew exactly what he was doing.”
There were things you would never understand about the world, or about yourself. For instance, why was there such a stigma around people with mental illnesses these days? Why did everyone seem to fear them and want to lock them away? That was something you would never know the answer to and truthfully, you didn’t want to know the answer.

It was probably as fucked up as the people who forced you to ask the question. But about yourself, you had no idea why you were still smiling, three hours later while riding the bus through the streets of Gotham. You had no right to feel this giddy about a situation that was as fucked up as the questions you asked yourself on a daily basis.

It wasn’t as if you could ever be with him.

He was locked behind two inches of steel and blocks of concrete. You couldn’t even properly hold his hand. How would you ever be able to do... more?

The thought made you blush and you sighed, staring down at your hands in your lap. And not just the physical aspects of things. You weren’t even sure which Arthur you were speaking to. He was simultaneously three people all at once and you still didn’t know which one to be afraid of most. Though you had to admit, the smooth, charming Arthur you had the pleasure of speaking to tonight was rather enjoyable.

Maybe he was the one to fear most of all.

You weren’t sure exactly, but what you did know, was that you liked him. That was just unavoidable at this point. You liked him, there was nothing you could do about it, so it was time to figure things out.

It was ridiculous and dangerous and if anyone found out, you’d be a laughing stock. Not that you even cared about that.

What you did care about was Arthur and keeping him from feeling so alone, so hopeless. No one deserved to go through what he did and have to die because of it.

You leaned forward with a sigh and laid your head against the seat in front of you that smelled vaguely of piss and sweat. Maybe that was what this was. Maybe you were convinced that if you could just help him, he’d be fixed, would be able to return to society and live a happy life.
But that wasn’t possible and it hurt too badly to even fantasize about it. Taking a deep breath, you sat back in the seat and looked out the window. Your apartment building was close by and the bus was already starting to slow. Along the street, people were standing around and you leaned closer to the window to see what the hell was going on.

Sure, it was early morning and people were making their way to work, but this seemed different. Around the side of the bus, you could see blue lights flashing on top of several police cars. Panic seized your chest and you stood to your feet as the brakes of the bus shrieked. A few other commuters were standing to see what was going on and you pushed through them, ignoring their shouts of protest.

The bus driver barely managed to open the door before you hurried out and ran up the street. Five police cars and a coroner’s van was stopped directly outside your apartment building. What the hell had happened?

You pushed through the crowd and managed to wedge yourself between a man and the barricade that had been set up by the police. From across the sidewalk, a familiar voice called your name and you whipped your head to the gate of the apartment building. Janey stood next to two police officers, waving her hand above her head.

“She’s my roommate,” she said through a quick sob.

You ducked beneath the barricade and walked through the edge of the scene, catching sight of a body bag being hoisted into the back of the van. Someone had been killed...brutally, by the looks of all the blood on the sidewalks.

By the time you reached Janey, she was wiping the tears from her eyes with a handkerchief. “Oh, it’s just awful,” she sobbed into your shoulder.

“What happened?”

One of the officers glanced at Janey and then to you before he sighed. “Your friend was attacked. Said a guy grabbed her and tried to pull her out of the gate.”

“Jesus,” you mumbled, looking to the bloodstains. “Did someone shoot him?”
“No, it seems the maintenance man of your building tried to help fight the attacker off and was shot. Several times.”

Janey wailed again and clutched you tighter, making you scowl up at the officer. You put an arm around her shoulders and found yourself at a loss for words or what to do. Comforting and tense situations weren’t one of your strong points and at the moment, you were still struggling through your own inner turmoil.

As the police officers turned away, stepping over to another small group discussing the incident, you caught the tail end of their conversation, despite their hushed voices. And what you heard made your chest ache. “...another fucker in a clown mask. Second one this week.”

“That fucking trial is going to stir shit up all over again. The last thing this city needs is another riot.”

Chapter End Notes

Things are about to heat up big time!
October always brought rain to Gotham city. It fell in sheets at night with thunder rumbling over the sounds of sirens and endless traffic. In the day, it drizzled so fine that you could barely see it until you stepped out of your front door. It collected along the strands of your hair and eyelashes and you pulled the hood of your jacket up around your face.

The trash strike had ended months ago but there were still piles of garbage bags lying everywhere, collecting flies and gnats that buzzed at your ear as you passed. No one seemed to care anymore. It had been like this for so long now that it was just they were all used to. You side-stepped around an overflowing trash can and turned the corner.

The whole morning had been rough after coming home to a murder practically outside your front door. Janey had been a complete and total wreck, crying for two hours straight before talking to her mother for another two. You’d barely been able to nap. For some reason though, you weren’t tired.

You felt jittery as if you’d had far too much coffee and were still riding the coattails of your caffeine high. Which was what brought you into the city, in the misting rain with nothing but your thoughts and a list of items that Janey requested you pick up.

The groceries weren’t what was bothering you. It was the last thing on the list, the thing she’d begged you to go get because she was too distraught to even think about it. You could feel the
folded paper list in your coat pocket and somehow, could feel the word she’d written at the very bottom beneath peanut butter and paper towels.

A gun.

“Where am I even going to get a gun, Janey?” You’d asked her, keys in one hand and the list in the other as you stared at her puffy, red face.

“I don’t know,” she wailed with fresh tears bubbling at the corner of her eyes. “But I think I would feel safer here if we had one. There’s got to be a pawn shop or something around here you can get one.”

“Yeah, with the money I don’t have right now. Even a cheap one would be about two hundred dollars, maybe more.”

“Here,” Janey snatched her purse off the counter and rifled through it for her wallet. She pulled out all the cash she had on her and her checkbook. “Just write a check for whatever is left. We need to protect ourselves. You’ve seen how crazy it is out there.”

You stared down at the crumpled twenties she shoved into your hand and the checkbook before looking up at her. She hadn’t been in the mood to discuss it further which was why an hour later, you were standing outside one of the numerous pawnshops around the city. The bright, neon signs in the front window seemed to bounce and dance in the misty rain.

With a sigh, you pushed the door open and dropped the hood from your face. There were aisles of miscellaneous tools and other junk that had been sold off for spare cash. To the left of the door was the front counter and a man who stood an entire foot taller than you and maybe two feet wider watched you move further into the shop.

You forced a weak smile and moved toward him, noticing the glass case that stretched along the front counter. There was an assortment of weapons locked away, from knives to tasers to guns. You gaped at the price tags on a few. Sure, Janey had given you her checkbook but you didn’t think she was okay with you spending five hundred dollars on a pistol.

“Can I help you with something?”
“Um, yes.” You tightened your fist around the list in your pocket and looked up at the man. “Someone was shot outside my apartment building today—”

“Look, you can’t prove they bought the gun here.”

“No, no. I’m looking to buy a gun myself. For protection. But I’m not wanting to spend too much money.”

The guy sighed and moved further down the cases until you could see a small selection of pistols with shorter barrels. He pointed a thick finger down at the top of the glass and you leaned closer to see where he was pointing. “These are gonna be our cheapest guns. If you’re wanting something to carry out on the streets, I suggest the snub-nose .38. Easy to put in your purse and grab when you need it. Three fifty for the gun and we throw in some ammo free of charge.”

Jesus. You thought spent sixty bucks on paint supplies was bad. Three hundred and fifty dollars for a gun you might never use was ridiculous. But this was Janey’s money and she’d been pretty insistent upon having one. With a sigh, you glanced back to where the tasers were on the opposite end of the case.

“How much for the taser?”

“Forty bucks.”

Chewing your bottom lip, you weighed your options and recounted the twenties Janey had given you. She’d never really know how much you’d spent. What was forty more bucks on top of three fifty? You looked back up at the man and nodded. “Do you take checks?”

He nodded and moved to snatch some keys from beneath the register. You watched him slide open the case and take the .38 out and remove the price tag. Next came the taser and as he punched the prices into the register, you glanced around the shop. One of the neon signs in the windows caught your attention and you narrowed your eyes on the letters.

‘We Copy Keys’

By now, another piece of paper that you had almost forgotten entirely about was burning a hole in the pocket of your jeans. You reached in and pulled out the folded paper you’d traced the
hospital’s master key onto. Before you could talk yourself out of doing anything stupid, you turned the paper around and slid it across the counter.

“Could you make a key just from this?”

The man glanced down at the tracing and then back up to you with an eyebrow arched. “I could. But it’ll cost you.”

“How much?”

“It’s five for the key, fifty for the trouble.”

You hadn’t been expecting that. Janey was already spending nearly four hundred dollars on weapons that more than likely would never be used. You couldn’t really use her money on something as incredibly stupid as this. Frowning, you reached to grab the paper but before you slid it back to you and packed it away in your pocket, you looked up at the guy.

“I’ll pay for it separately.”

“Whatever you say.”

Twenty minutes later, you left the pawnshop with a paper bag containing two weapons, and a key that you’d shoved down into the pocket of your pants where the tracing had once been. It felt hot against your skin, even through the fabric, and you wondered if that was because of how dangerous having the key in your possession was.

But it’s not like you were planning to use it.

Not how you were already thinking about anyway.

Yeah, it was a master key, but surely it wouldn’t unlock all doors. Surely it was just to have in case one of the doctors or nurses locked their keys in an office. There was no way it could be used to unlock a particular door that existed at the end of the hallway on the fourth floor.
You stopped at a small bodega around the corner from your building to pick up the grocery items. All the while, you couldn’t ignore the press of the metal in your pocket or the weight of both the taser and gun against your side. The cashier bagged up the items, handed you the change, and you hurried back home.

The police tape was still fluttering in the wind, though the rain had helped wash away the stains of blood from the sidewalk. There were no kids playing out in the courtyard and even the resident homeless woman who camped out near the building had picked up her various belongings and high tailed it somewhere else.

In the elevator, you shifted the bags into your left arm and reached into your pocket to fish out the key. It was such a simple thing, barely weighing anything in your palm, but could cause so much damage in the wrong hands. You curled your fingers back around it and pushed it into your pocket as the bell chimed and you stepped out.

Janey was on the phone with her mother again and you set the bags down on the kitchen counter, turning your back to her so she couldn’t see the roll of your eyes. You weren’t sure if she was blowing this out of proportion, or if you were so desensitized to violence and murder that you couldn’t see how traumatizing it was for her.

“I don’t know, Mom. He was just some guy in a clown mask.”

Your hand froze as you reached into the bag to retrieve the peanut butter and a loaf of bread. She sniffled and glancing over your shoulder, you saw her wipe a tear away. “I told the police everything. I don’t even want to think about it anymore...Love you too. Bye.”

You faced the bag once again and set down the one you’d been keeping at your side on the counter near the fridge. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah, she’s just worried. She hates me living here. In Gotham, I mean.” You knew what she meant. Her mother didn't like her living in this city, in a dump of an apartment, with a weirdo who worked in a mental hospital. Janey moved into the kitchen and leaned against the counter, eyeing the crumpled bag you had hidden inside your jacket. "Were you able to get it?"

“Yep,” you said, reaching in to pull out the gun. It felt strange in your hand, too heavy for such a small thing. You set it on the counter and didn't offer to show her the taser or ammo you'd gotten.
Making your way out of the kitchen, you crossed into your bedroom and shut the door behind you. You took the bag and key from your pocket and set them on the bed. For some reason, you reached over to the nightstand and grabbed the black, plastic lighter that Arthur had given you the first time he touched you and laid it beside the key.

It was a strange assortment of things. None of them connected to one another in any way but they all reminded you of him somehow. Bullets for the horrible things he’d done last year, the lighter he had pressed so gently into your palm, the key that could possibly get you closer to him and the taser that was the only way to describe how you had felt when he kissed you. Like you were kissing the sparkling volts of electricity. You brought your hand up to your lips and traced them, fully aware that you were thinking crazy, dangerous things.

A knock at your bedroom door startled you and you hurried to shove all the items back into the bag. You shoved it under your pillow and sat on the bed, opening your mouth to tell Janey to come in. That is until you saw the painting you had been working on of Arthur. "Uh, just a minute!"

You hurried to the canvases in the corner of your room and hid the 12 by 12 behind a larger one. There was no way to tell what or who it was just by looking at it, but you didn’t want to take any chances.

"Come in," you said, smoothing the hair from your face. Jandy poked her head in and looked around the room.

"What were you doing?"

You frowned, having to bite your tongue before you snapped at her. What business was it of hers what you were doing behind closed doors? Forcing a smile, you shrugged.

"Nothing."

"Okay…Well, I put the gun in the cabinet above the fridge. Oh, and your coworker called while you were out. Todd something.” She handed over the notepad she kept by the phone and you stepped forward to look down at the number she had taken down. Why was Todd calling you at home?

You wrinkled your nose. "Probably wants me to take over his shift." You tossed the notepad back
to her and remembered what you had promised Arthur. "Oh! Do you happen to have today's newspaper?"

"No. I watch the news instead." Janey looked at you funny as if you had suddenly started speaking a different language and you sighed. She pulled the door shut behind her and you figured you could always steal the neighbor's paper tomorrow morning.

In the quiet stillness of your bedroom, you glanced at the pillow where all your secret Arthur reminders still sat hidden and turned to the canvases. You snatched one and sat on the floor with a smile. It may have been weird to be so inspired to paint by someone like Arthur Fleck but you weren't going to ignore your muse when it so clearly wanted you to create. This time, however, you would paint Joker.

Todd found you sitting in the employee lounge, enjoying a cup of coffee before your shift that night. He leaned a shoulder against the doorframe and breathed a quick hello your way. He still had a bandage across his eyebrow and you resisted the urge to roll your eyes.

"I tried calling you earlier."

"Oh, yeah, I was out and didn't get home until pretty late." It was easy to lie to him and he bought it without suspicion. He moved into the lounge and took a seat across from the table from you.

"How're you holding up?" He asked you, making you frown. It took a moment before you realized he was referring to the night Arthur attacked him. The thought pulled at the corner of your lips and you ducked your head so he couldn't see your smile.

"I'm alright. Just ready to get back to normal."

"Does normal even exist around here?" He laughed and you did the same to play along. His normal was quite different from your own. "Listen, I wanted to apologize for the other night. I was being an ass and I should have been able to see that attack coming a mile away."

"It's fine."
"I know you said he didn't hurt you, but if he touched you, just let me know and I'll put him through the wall."

You stared at your coworker, from his stupid military-style haircut to the fading scar on his chin. You had never wanted to hurt someone quite like you wanted to hurt him in that moment. What a big man he was, threatening to hurt someone like Arthur. Your jaw clenched and thankfully, the fists you were making with your hands were hidden beneath the table.

"He didn't touch me. In fact, he seemed apologetic to put me in that situation to begin with." The look of surprise on Todd's face was satisfying and he opened his mouth to respond but you stood up from the table and cut him off. "I need to clock in. I have a ton of records to sort through tonight."

Without waiting for him to form a single syllable, you grabbed your sweater from the back of the chair and left the room. The echo of his threats repeated through your head and you dug your fingernails into your palms to distract you from the fury.

Why did everyone seem to want to hurt him in some way? Why couldn't they just talk to him and see him the way you saw him? Why did you see one person while the rest of the world saw another? You asked yourself those questions all night while sorting through the mess of files on the 7th floor.

You hadn't come across Arthur's or anyone named Fleck and figured his file must be kept under lock and key. Which was convenient for you, since you had just the key to use to get to it. Wherever it was, of course.

Unfortunately, you weren't able to pay Arthur a visit. He had been moved up a floor to get ready for his meeting with the state psychiatrist. And you'd only found that out by eavesdropping on a conversation the guard had with a fellow coworker.

The meeting was scheduled for 8 in the morning, an hour after you were scheduled to clock out. But, just because your shift was over didn't mean you had to leave the building and you found yourself in the stairwell between the fifth and sixth floor at half-past 8. You had stayed dressed in your scrubs and hoped no one would be suspicious of you pacing the halls outside the office.

You weren't trying to hear anything in particular. You just wanted to know if the psychiatrist did see him as insane or not. It wasn't a fair assessment, and would more than likely lead to him being in prison for the rest of his life, but at least he'd be alive.
Through the window in the stairwell door, you watched an orderly steer a patient down the hall to their room and you crept into the fifth floor. It was just as bleak and equally shaped as the floor beneath it, but there was an office situated in the center. The room to the left was where Arthur's examination was taking place and the one to the right of it was for a team of psychiatrists could observe.

You lingered by the water fountain, taking your time sipping at the stream while you tried to listen for any sign of a struggle from inside the exam room. There was nothing to worry about, but there was laughter. And not the one-sided, forced laughter Arthur was afflicted with. It was two people laughing, one soft and humoring and the other belonged to him.

You frowned and turned to face the door, blinking in surprise at the figure you could see through the rectangular window. The psychiatrist was a young woman, maybe a few years your senior, with blonde hair pulled into a ponytail and tortoise-shell glasses sitting across her nose. And she was smiling, smiling at Arthur as if he was someone she was on a date with.

Jealousy ran rampant inside you and you glanced to the back of Arthur's head as he sat at the table inside the room. He was cuffed across the wrists and you watched him reach back and rake his fingers through his hair. Was he charming her? Was he saying things to make her blush the way he did for you?

Here you were, thinking you were special, only to be crushed at the thought that your muse was inspiring someone else to smile. You turned away and shoved the stairwell door open, hurrying down the steps as you berated yourself for being so stupid. You were jealous of a woman who was stealing a mental patient away from you.

What was wrong with you?

Were you going crazy? When did you become this person? Memories of the night you met Arthur flashed through your mind and you stopped on the second floor, breath coming out in quick puffs. You knew you were being irrational, that even if he was being charming to that woman, that didn't mean he didn't like you as well.

But you knew you couldn't compete with someone like her. She was like...Dr. Barbie or something. And honestly, even if he did like her more and was attracted to her more, that didn't change the fact that you cared about him. You wanted to help him and to do that, you had to push the jealousy aside. There were more important things to think about right now.
On the ground floor, you changed out of your scrubs and back into your jeans, shirt, and jacket. The key still burned your thigh as you pressed a hand to where it sat in your pocket. The night before, you'd tried it in a few doors. It unlocked the employee lounge and the supply closets. You hadn't been brave enough to try anything more than those two.

Tomorrow night would be different.

As you zipped your jacket up to your chest, the elevator in the lobby chimed and you poked your head out of the lounge to find a tall, blonde figure wearing a dark pantsuit and white coat. It was the psychiatrist evaluating Arthur. Was the meeting finished already?

At her side, Margaret walked with her and steered her toward the office across the lobby. The two of them slipped in and you glanced around to make sure no one noticed you. No one ever did.

You made your way across the lobby and stood beside Margaret's office door. They were discussing the examination and you leaned closer to hear better.

"I think it's safe to say Mr. Fleck will be found clinically insane. He seems to have developed Narcissistic Personality Disorder, which his previous doctors never made note of." There was a shuffle of papers from inside the office and you frowned. Did Margaret have Arthur's file? Or was this new doctor taking it with her? Surely there was a duplicate.

"And what do you suggest we do until then? He's already attempted escape twice in a year, he attacked the woman you replaced and--"

"For now, just keep the same routine as you've been doing. He seems to be in high hopes and a somewhat good mood. I've prescribed a different kind of depressants for him and it should make him less likely to lash out or attempt anything that could put your employees in harm's way."

You crossed your arms over your chest. How many more medications were they going to shove down his throat? At this point, did they even work anymore? Inside the office, the two women wrapped the conversation up and you spun around, ducking toward a rack of magazines and hoping you didn't look too suspicious.

With a final goodbye, the woman left Margaret's office and the door shut quietly behind her. In a rather stupid move, you followed the doctor out of the hospital and watched her open a black umbrella over her head. She moved toward the line of cars parked on the curb and you could see
one with the state seal printed on the side.

Rain pelted the hood of your jacket and face and you quickened your pace to reach her before she could slip into her car and drive away. "Excuse me," you called.

The woman turned on her heel and blinked at you in surprise. She was even prettier than you had originally thought. That jealousy flared back inside you and you pushed it aside quickly. "Can I help you?"

"Yeah, I'm...well, I'm a friend of Arthur's. I'm sorry to bombard you like this, but I'm just worried about him."

She frowned, a line forming between her perfectly manicured brows. "You said you're a friend of his?"

"Yeah. I work here at nights and I just wanted to see if you can give me any insight on how to--"

"Are you Cricket?"

Your eyes widened and you stammered over your words. Had he told her about you? Warmth touched your cheeks despite the cold rain still dropping across your face. "Yes. That's what he knows me as."

"I thought he was imagining you." She stared at you strangely and you were beginning to think this was a bad idea. Maybe you should have just let her leave. Nodding, you glanced back to the hospital, trying to think up any excuse to run away from her that wouldn't make her think you were crazy. "Listen," she said before you could think of anything. "Arthur is a sick man. That doesn't mean he isn't nice or charming. But above all else, he is mentally unstable and dangerous. I know you might think he can be fixed with a bit of love, but the only thing that will help him is continued therapy and a medication regimen."

"I don't want to fix him. I just don't want him to be put to death! I'm worried about his trial." It was the truth, even if it stung to hear her assume you wanted to fix him. There was nothing to fix. He may have been mentally unwell, but that didn't mean he didn't need a friend or love.

She smiled and reached out to touch your shoulder reassuringly. You resisted the need to jerk away
from her touch and blinked through the rain up at her. "Arthur will be found clinically insane. The state can't condemn him to death for that. Nine times out of ten, they seek the harshest punishment to ensure he will get life in prison."

"But what about the other one?"

She frowned. "What other one?"

"You said nine times out of ten. What about the one time out of ten?" She seemed surprised by your words and you shook your head fighting the sense of hopelessness suddenly working its way through you. "I just don't want him to die. He may deserve some things, but no one deserves that. Not when he's as sick as you say he is."

"I agree, but please be careful around him. From the way he talked about you..." she trailed off. The sound of the rain pecking at her umbrella was almost deafening until you realized it was the beat of your heart that was in your ears. "I can see he cares about you, but the way someone like him cares for someone is different than the way you or I would. Here," she paused, reaching into the front of her satchel. She pulled out a card and you blinked down at her name. Dr. H. Quinzel. "If you ever need to talk, about Arthur or otherwise, give me a call."

The rain smudged the text on the card and you quickly shoved it into the pocket of your jacket with a nod. You stepped onto the sidewalk as she got in the car and turned the ignition. She didn't look back at you before pulling away from the curb and as you stood in the rain, staring up at the windows of Arkham State Hospital, you felt yourself growing angrier in your frustration.

It didn't help that you had to walk six blocks to the bus stop in the rain with that woman's words echoing in your head. I know you might think he can be fixed with a bit of love. Even an hour later, it still left a bad taste in your mouth to hear them and you clenched your hands into fists in your lap. Who was she to assume anything about you? Just because Arthur was who he was and just because you cared about him, suddenly she was an expert on how you felt?

Fuck her.

Fuck anyone who tried to tell you not to care about someone just because the way they loved was different.

The rain was coming down harder by the time you made it to your apartment and you were
drenched to the bone. A hot bath and maybe some soup was in your immediate future to help relieve this bad mood you'd found yourself in. And while a part of you knew it was because you didn't have a chance to see Arthur, you were still feeling jealous overhearing that doctor laugh with him.

You stepped into the elevator and leaned against the wall, waiting for the doors to shut. You replayed the words she had said to you once she found out who you were. Knowing Arthur had mentioned you put a smile to your face and you felt the jealousy starting to fade.

He had told her about Cricket...God, you wanted to know what he had said. From the look in the doctor's face, you suspected it was something surprising. She had thought he had made you up. Did he say something shocking? Did he tell her what he wanted to do to you?

The thought made your eyes slide closed and you took your bottom lip between your teeth, biting down hard enough to make you gasp. Tension coiled deep within you and despite the shiver that trembled through you, your body felt rather warm all of a sudden. Pressure was building, not just in your mind, but in your body as well. You needed a release, needed to clear it out so you could think clearly again.

The elevator doors opened and you walked out, heading for your door with a smile still pulling at the corners of your lips. If Janey was home, you didn't notice. You dumped your jacket onto the hook and peeled your wet shirt over your head to be thrown into the hamper. That bath was calling your name and you wanted to lay back in the hot water, maybe smoke a cigarette, and touch yourself while imagining it was Arthur.

But upon entering your bedroom, your plans were slashed at the sight of your roommate kneeling in the corner of the room. The corner where your art was propped against the wall, to be exact. Your eyes darted from her to the two paintings she had laid out in the floor in front of her knees. Arthur standing in the shadows of his room and his painted face, exactly how the news had been showing him lately, from the Murray Franklin show.

You met her eyes and felt your breath become quick and shallow. "What are you doing?"

"This is him, isn't it?" She pointed to the one of him in the shadows. "This is that Joker guy. You're one of his supporters, aren't you?"

"How dare you go through my things!" You stomped across the floor and snatched up the two canvases, holding them both to your chest. "Get out!"
"No! Not until you answer me!"

You snarled in fury and dropped the paintings onto the bed before turning on her. You gripped her by the arm and wrenched her toward the door. She managed to pull herself from your grasp and you stumbled back.

"I knew there was something weird about you! I just never thought it was this. He's a murderer! And you're painting him like he's a hero!"

"Get. Out."

"Are you only working at the hospital to be close to him? Oh God, you're one of those women who--who fetishize him! You want to fuck him!"

Red bled into the corners of your vision and your fingers curled at your sides. Her words, her screeching voice, it swirled in your head with what the doctor had said earlier, with what Todd and Margaret said about him and you took a step closer to Janey. You lashed out before you could stop yourself, raking your fingernails across her cheek and drawing a few drops of blood. She gasped and held her hand to her face.

"My parents were right about you," she whispered. "They warned me that you were weird but I didn't listen to them." With that, she turned on her heel and you listened to her scurry around the apartment. She grabbed her purse, keys, and jacket from the peg near the door and slammed it shut behind her.

In the quiet she left behind, you stood in your bedroom, in your bra and jeans, panting for breath. You glanced at the paintings of Arthur and snatched them. You held them out in front of you, staring at his painted face, at his shadowed figure and you wanted nothing more than to rip them both to shreds. Not because you were ashamed of them, or your affection for him… but because they were tainted now. They were yours to see. No one else's. And now that was ruined.

You tossed them onto the bed and wrenched open your bedside table drawer, searching through the clutter for a pack of cigarettes you had hidden from yourself. The pack was crumbled but there were 5 left and you pulled one out with shaking fingers. You brought it to your lips, lit the end with Arthur's lighter and dragged in a deep breath. It burned your throat but you welcomed the discomfort.
You stood from your bed and peeled your damp jeans from your legs, along with your panties and bra. You strolled to the bath and twisted the knob for the hot water. And as steam wafted up from the tub, you took another drag from the cigarette and leaned back to blow the smoke above your head.

It brought a smile to your face and you stepped into the tub, toes curling from the heat of the water, before sinking into it.

The adrenaline from your altercation with Janey was subsiding and leaving you shaking in your legs and arms but you didn't let your smile fade. You were tired of hiding your attraction to Arthur, tired of pretending he was just another patient, another checkmark on a list of duties. You weren't going to hide it anymore.

You sat back against the tub, sinking further into the water. You didn't touch yourself though like you had planned to. No, not this time. You had a new plan to get exactly what you wanted from exactly who you wanted.

Chapter End Notes

So, about the Dr. H. Quinzel. I feel like she might exist in this universe, but I don't see her turning into Harley. Plus, I don't want her to in this story. Arthur is yours! Anyway, I hope you liked this chapter, and I'm sorry Arthur was missing, but I'll make up for it in the next one. Things get a bit...steamy. Also, I'm going to see the movie again tomorrow! I'm going to try to write, but it might be Monday before I can update! :}


Marked

Chapter Summary

Arthur has some requests and you come baring gifts.

Chapter Notes

This is just a gratuitous smutty chapter, though it will get more explicit later on. I saw the movie for the third time today and GOD I can't get over how fucking HOT Joker is and how precious Arthur is. I just love them both!

Also, this chapter's theme is brought to you by Taylor Swift's song 'I did something bad' just for the lyrics:

They say I did something bad
But why's it feel so good?
Most fun I ever had
And I'd do it over and over and over again if I could
It just felt so good, good

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You stared down at the headlines printed on the front page of yesterday’s newspaper. It was almost identical to the one for today’s and you wondered if it was a slow news week...or if this trial was really as big as they were making it out to be. ‘The Trial of the Century: Joker To Plead Insanity’ read yesterday’s and today’s was ‘Public Defender Seeks Insanity Plea in Joker Murders’. Both had Arthur’s mugshot printed beneath the headline, face battered and bleeding, still painted up like a clown, still smiling.

You reached out and traced his bloody lip with your middle finger, not caring who walked into the employee lounge and found you staring longingly at the Joker. The clock on the wall on the lounge ticked the seconds by and you let out a deep breath. It was ten minutes until your shift started and you leaned back in the chair, tilting your face toward the ceiling.

There was so much to do tonight.
Your actual duties, finishing the records storeroom of all the old, outdated files, was almost finished but it would have to wait. There were more important things on your agenda. First being visiting Arthur and giving him the newspaper he had requested. Of course, you added to the little care package, including a pack of cigarettes, the black lighter he had given you, and a note with a doodle of his face on it.

Just knowing you were in possession of something so intimate made your toes bunch up in your sneakers. You reached up to touch your lips, finding yourself smiling at the idea of giving him a peek into your mind. The thought of sharing your art with him, even just a simple doodle of him in clown paint, was both exciting and terrifying.

You'd never been the type of artist to show off your work. They existed only for yourself, avenues that let you express yourself, see your thoughts and mind on display. Which was why it had been so distressing to see Janey snooping through them.

She hadn't come back home after storming out earlier that day. A part of you was worried she would move back home and leave you to pay all of the bills yourself. There was no way you would be able to afford it on your own. If she ran back home, afraid of this city and who lurked in the shadows, then she was a coward. You'd lived in places worse than this and look at you now.

The thought made you smirk and you rolled the cigarette box, lighter and note up into the two issues of the Gotham Reporter. In the pocket of your scrubs, the key was already burning a hole in your pocket. You couldn't wait to try it out and see if it would work on the one door you wanted to open most.

But you didn't want to get ahead of yourself. You had a plan after all.

Abandoning your duties in the records room on the 7th floor, you moved instead toward the laundry area. It was a dark section of the basement with industrial washing machines and dryers constantly spinning. The air was thick with heat and just being down there to grab a laundry cart was enough to make you feel as if you were suffocating.

With the empty cart, you piled a few dirty towels into it that were waiting to be washed when the first shift arrived at 7. You added just enough to look as if you'd been working and slipped the bundle of newspapers beneath a few layers before pushing the cart toward the elevator. As the doors shut, you reached over and pressed the button for the fourth floor.

The mechanics whirred to life above you and took you up through the floors and all the while, your stomach was a tangle of knots and worry. You had gone over every possibility, every chance that
this would go awry. But it was a risk you were willing to take if it meant you would be able to see Arthur again.

The doors slid open and just like every night for the past two weeks, Geoff the guard sat with his nose in a book. It was a western this time, according to the front cover that showed a cowboy and a woman with a tight dress at his side. He eyed your laundry cart and you smiled wearily.

"I just have to pick up the soiled linens."

He nodded and returned to his book, letting you push your way to the fourth floor supply closet. As you pushed the door open, you stifled a yawn behind your elbow and made a big show to convince him how tired you were.

"I could go for some strong coffee right about now. How about you?" God, did you actually sound this corny? You hoped he couldn't see through your charade.

Geoff snorted and looked at you from over the pages of the book. "Coffee and something a bit stronger, that's for sure."

Your pulse picked up speed and you tried to keep your laugh as breezy as possible. "If I didn't think we'd get fired for it, I'd pour us a cup. I happen to know a guy on second shift who keeps a flask in his locker."

Geoff arched an eyebrow and you watched him lower the book to his lap. For a split second, you just knew he was onto you. It was enough to make the knots in your stomach heave against what little dinner you'd eaten earlier that night.

"I mean, I won't tell if you won't tell."

Your eyes went a bit wide and you quickly masked it with a giggle—a fucking giggle. What were you, thirteen years old? Resisting the urge to roll your eyes at yourself (mostly because giggling like a preteen was working on Geoff), you crossed your arms over your chest and scowled playfully.

"I think I'll take you up on that offer. I hope you like cheap whiskey."
Geoff laughed as you crossed the hall back to the elevator. "It's my favorite."

The doors slid shut behind you and you let out a sigh, rolling your eyes. Sometimes, men were so predictable. A little flirtatious giggling and they fell right into the trap.

You moved out of the elevator once you reached the ground floor and made a beeline for the lounge where you had stashed a bottle of whiskey you'd stolen from Janey's bedroom. Sitting beside it was another bottle full of laxatives. You just hoped the alcohol would mask any taste and that Geoff wasn't familiar with this particular brand of laxative. Although, you suspected he'd be familiar after tonight.

You filled two cups with coffee and marked yours with a small dot on the lid to tell them apart. While you gave Geoff a hearty dose of whiskey and an even heartier portion of laxative, you poured yourself only the coffee. Equipped with both cups, you cleaned up the evidence and turned back to head toward the elevator.

With a chime, the doors opened and Geoff lowered his book with a mischievous grin, his eyes darting to the cups in your hand. You handed off the one without the dot on the lid and sipped with a grimace for show. He did the same and smacked his lips.

"That'll definitely help get me through tonight."

"Mm, I bet." Tipping your cup toward his, you turned toward the supply room and took your time sorting out the towels, linen and hospital issues clothing provided to the patients. On the bottle of medicine, it had warned against using more than the proper dosage, but you didn't want to wait an hour for it to kick in. So you had doubled it.

And sure enough, half an hour later, Geoff appeared at the door to the supply room. He had a pinched frown on his face and was already pointing to the restroom behind him.

"That coffee is going right through me. I'll be back in a minute or two." Judging by the worried look on his face, you felt as if you had a bit more time than a few minutes. He was going to be busy on that toilet for a while.

As soon as it shut behind him, you snatched the bundle of newspapers from the laundry and fished the key out of your pocket. You were down the hall before poor Geoff could even get his pants
down to his ankles.

Arthur's room was dark but you knew he was awake. He was always awake.

Seeing him on the bed, legs out in front of him and crossed at the ankles with his arms folded behind his head, made your heart flutter and mouth stretch into a smile. He noticed you at the same time and sat up, eyes bright. You didn't wait for him to stand.

The key slid into the lock and you took a deep breath before twisting it. There was a bit of resistance, enough to make a momentary bubble of panic fill your chest, but after another good tug, it turned the mechanisms inside and the sounds of the lock clicking back into the door made you sigh.

Arthur lifted an eyebrow and stood to his feet, surprised to see the door opening to let you inside his room. He crossed his arms over his chest and grinned devilishly. It sent shivers all over your body.

"This isn't a rescue mission, so don't even try escape attempt number three."

He laughed softly and rubbed his stubbled chin with his palm. "I won't. I promise."

"Good." You left the door open just a fraction. It would be damn hard to explain how you got locked in a patient's room and you had other things to address at the moment. You held the newspapers out for him and he took them from you with a sweet smile. "There's also some things inside."

He opened the bundle of papers and opened his mouth in surprise at the sight of the gifts you'd brought him. "You did this for me?"

"Yes," you said in a whisper, hating how shy you were in front of him. Where was that blistering desire you'd felt last night? Where was the need to press your lips against his and feel his hands on you? "Do you like it?"

Arthur looked up at you through his lashes and the corners of his smile faded into something that sent heat licking at your insides. He set the bundle of paper onto the bed beside him and stood up straight to look at you. And all you could do was stand close to the wall, hands clasped behind
your back and a tremble in your knees like a child.

You watched him push his hair away from his face, slicking it back with one hand while he lifted the other and crooked a finger at you. God, you could have melted into a puddle right then, but somehow, you were able to take a step toward him and then another and another until you were right in front of him.

He studied your face in silence, his face stoic and serious, though there was a spark of something in his gaze. You held your breath as he reached up and brushed the back of his knuckles across your jaw. The feather-light touch drew a sigh from your lips and he pushed your hair over your shoulder. He let out a breath and you inhaled the warmth of it into your lungs.

"Every time you leave, I wonder if you're even real at all," Arthur whispered, reaching up with his other hand to slip against your cheek. He curled his thumb beneath your chin and tilted your head back until you were looking up at him with a gaze half-lidded with lust.

"I'm real. I promise."

His eyes moved from yours down to your lips and back up. The split second it took was enough to shift something behind his gaze, something dark and twisted that pierced through you the same way it had the first time he had kissed you. Behind his eyes, so dark yet so green and beautiful in the darkness of his room, was the same thing you knew mirrored in your own. It was the unexplainable want and desire and craving for him.

Arthur leaned down and kissed you. It was soft, just a caress of his lips against yours and you reached out to twist your fingers around the loose, cotton shirt he wore. He sank his hands into your hair and held you steady, turning his head to deepen the kiss. His lips opened and you did the same, letting his tongue into your mouth to taste him, to drink him in.

You hadn't realized he was moving you until your back hit the cold, concrete wall just beside his open door. He pulled a hand from your hair and pressed it against the wall beside your head, trapping you. Though he had no reason to. There was nothing short of an atomic blast that could pull you away from him at that moment.

You spread your hands over and up the length of his chest and looped them around his neck. The feel of your fingers slipping up the back of his head, beneath his hair, must have excited him. Arthur surprised you by snaking an arm around your waist, along the small of your back and down the curve of your ass. Your entire body was alive, electric beneath his touch and it was dizzying trying to concentrate on his hands and mouth at the same time.
Especially when your body was craving something else entirely.

He pulled away from your lips, ducking his head to kiss along your jaw and throat. He nipped gently at your flesh and then harder, drawing a deep moan from inside you. You could feel him smirk against your throat and he lifted his head to your ear.

"Mark me," he purred at your earlobe. Before your confusion could set in, he pulled back long enough to pull his shirt over his head. He gave you no time to take in the sight of him, reaching up to grip your chin and force your eyes to meet his. "Bite me. Mark me so I know you're real."

You nodded and stepped up on your tiptoes, angling your head into the crook of his neck. Right along his pulse point, where you could see the muscles tightening with every breath he took, you did exactly as he asked. He gave a hiss from the initial pain and then a deep laugh rumbled through his chest, turning you on more than he would ever know. He cradled your head with one hand while the other explored the rest of your body.

He found his way beneath your top and pressed his palm flat against your breast. Even through your bra, it felt so good you thought you were going to melt in his arms.

Pulling away from his throat, you admired the spots you had given him, tracing the slick skin with your finger. Arthur dipped his head to yours and captured you in another kiss that curled your toes. He pushed you back against the wall and ground his hips into yours.

You could easily feel how hard he was and you whimpered into his mouth. As desperate as you were to take this as far as he was willing to go, you knew your time would be running out soon. Unfortunately, Arthur was already reaching between the two of you.

"Arthur--the guard, he'll be back soon and--" the words died on your lips as you sucked in a breath. He dipped a hand between your legs, pressing into your center through your pants. It was enough to make a faint tremor of pleasure erupt inside you, but it wasn't enough. Not near enough.

"I suppose I should do my best to make you come quickly then." Hearing him purr those deliciously wicked words into your ear was almost enough to come undone right then and there. You could only whimper as his fingers pulled quickly at the drawstring of your scrubs, back pressed against the wall, a silent cry on your lips. He slipped his mouth back over yours, capturing your sudden moan and swallowing it down.
His hand was pushing your scrubs down your hips before you could stop him and by the time they, as well as your panties, were low enough to give him access, you didn't protest. It wasn't like you really could, or even wanted to anymore.

Arthur broke your kiss as he sank his fingers into your folds, finding you slick and needy for him. He brushed his lips over yours, barely even touching them, but you could feel his smile.

"Ah, you're so wet," he purred over your lips. "Have you been wanting this for a long time, Kitten?"

Oh, that had nearly made your knees buckle right then and there. You tightened your grip around his shoulders and whimpered up at him. He slid his middle finger along your center, finding your clit easily, but instead of circling it like you were begging for, he pulled away and clucked his tongue.

"If you want to come, you need to answer me."

"Y-yes," you hissed, nodding your head desperately. "I've wanted this since the first time I met you."

He kissed your forehead, right between your eyebrows and grinned. "Good girl."

His finger returned to your clit and swirled around it, dipping into your folds and back again in repeated motions that were driving you mad. You wanted to kiss him but he was deliberately keeping his distance, watching your reactions with a smile.

As he continued to tease you and draw you closer to the edge in the most delicious way, you let your head fall back against the wall. Arthur ducked his head to your throat and nipped and sucked along your flesh, marking you the way you had done to him. Just knowing you would have something on your body that he left behind, another secret only for you, amplified the feeling of pleasure he was bringing you.

Your lips parted in a panting breath and you clenched his shirt sleeve in your fist. By now, you were rocking your hips against his hand, grinding into him as he drew circles around your clit. You were close, desperately focused on the motions of his finger and his mouth pressing warm kisses along your neck.
"Ah--Arthur," you panted, your voice nothing but a ghost. "I'm coming, I'm--"

He cut your words off with a kiss that seared into your soul, branding you with an electric fire. There was no turning back now. You were his.

Your thighs trembled and knees shook and he didn't stop what he was doing as you came, drawing more whimpers and gasps from your throat that he captured on your lips. Every nerve in your body, every fiber of your being was heightened and practically buzzing from the high of your orgasm. Each time your body shuddered, you were sure it would be the last but another wave would wash through you.

Arthur pulled his hand free and you opened your eyes to stare up at him. He brought his finger to his lips and dipped it into his mouth, sucking at the dampness you had left on him. It was a beautiful sight to see, one that turned you on all over again and you bit hard on your lower lip.

His lips stretched into a smile around his finger and lingered even after he pulled it out with a slick pop. Your eyes met and he leaned back over you, pressing his hands to the wall on either side of your head.

"Are we out of time?"

The question made you whine and you looked back through the crack in the door with worry. Beyond it, the hallway was empty and you were sure Geoff was still preoccupied with the toilet. As much as you were absolutely aching to go further, you turned back to Arthur and nodded.

"I don't think we should press our luck."

"That's a shame," he murmured, leaning down to kiss you sweetly on the mouth as you wriggled your pants back up around your waist. When he backed away, you were both smiling. "Tell me we'll pick up where we left off next time."

You looped an arm around his neck and smirked up at him. "If you light me one of your cigarettes, I'll tell you whatever you want to hear."
He laughed and turned to the bed, grabbing the red box you had smuggled in for him. He put a cigarette to his lips and held the lighter beneath it, never taking his eyes off of you. With a deep inhale, he plucked the cigarette from his lips and held it out to you to take.

You held it between your fingers and reached for his shirt, pulling him closer. "I'll be back tomorrow night. If I can figure out how to knock the guard out, we'll have a few hours all to ourselves."

"I'm sure there are plenty of sedatives and syringes around this place." He followed you to the door and with a quick glance toward the other end of the hallway, you slipped out. Just before shutting the door behind you, you turned and smiled up at Arthur. "Or if you want, I can take care of him right now. He'll never disturb us again."

You gave him a playful scowl. "Don't tempt me."

After another kiss that wasn't anywhere near long enough, you slid the door shut and twisted the key to lock it behind you. Arthur watched you from the window in the door until you disappeared from his line of sight and turned to face the hallway. Bringing the cigarette to your lips, you took a deep drag and blew it out as you passed the bathrooms. Inside, you could hear a miserable grunt and couldn't help the giggle that bubbled into your throat.

You stopped by the supply room long enough to retrieve your cart and with your afterglow still written across your face, you rode the elevator down to the basement. Though you knew what you had let him do would only cause you heartache down the road, it would only make things so much harder, so much worse, you refused to think about those things.

All you wanted to think about was the way he looked at you, the way he had whispered such dirty, delicious things, and the marks he had given you that you were going to keep secret from everyone. Just like your paintings, these were his works of art, and they were only for you.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who left comments and kudos! I really appreciate each and every one of them! I hope you liked this chapter as well because I really enjoyed writing it. I had wanted to keep Arthur's tenderness while also playing into Joker's dirtiness because I can really see him being into some real good shit. (Also, I think I would die if he called me kitten) Anyway, let me know what you thought! There will
be MUCH more to come!
Animosity

Chapter Summary

Things are getting a little tense around Arkham State Hospital.

Chapter Notes

Hello! I'm back for another chapter and things are certainly about to start rolling!
Hope you enjoy this chapter!

It took a few days for the rain to clear up and it left Gotham ten degrees colder. You had to pull your winter coat from the back of your closet and find a long sleeve t-shirt before heading out for the day. The apartment was quiet, far too quiet, even with the television on and volume up. If Janey had been back, she was doing a damn good job avoiding you and you were glad.

As you pulled your hair out from under the hood of your coat, you caught a glimpse of yourself in the mirror that hung in the hall. Along your throat, right above your collarbone were two splotches peeking up over your shirt. You pulled the fabric down to admire them closer in the mirror, the same as you’d been doing the past few days. They were faded now, dark purple and turning slightly green around the edges, but you loved the sight of them, loved knowing where you had gotten them from.

The corner of your lip popped up in a half-smile and you reached over to flip the light switch off before heading out the door. Maybe it was the uncharacteristic sunshine beaming outside, or maybe it was the little secret you carried in your mind and on your body that was making you feel giddy. You didn't know for sure, but you liked it.

You hadn't felt giddy or excited about something in so long. For years, your life had been the same routine of waking up, going to work, coming home, and falling asleep. You'd eat between those four things and tried to find time to paint. Other than that, you were just an automaton, programmed to do the same things over and over and over until death.

That's not how you wanted to live anymore.
Despite the sunshine, the air was cold and crisp and you dug your hands into the pocket of your jacket as you hurried to the bus stop. An hour later, you found yourself in a quaint little burg of Gotham full of bargain shops and thrift stores. Several times, you'd come to these stores in search for some scrubs at a decent price. Today, you weren't going to think about work. Well, not the actual job anyway.

You let your mind wander as you strolled down the street, stopping at a storefront to look at their merchandise. A display of televisions was set up on a platform and had price tags set up beside each one. It wasn't the deals that caught your attention though. It was the report playing on the news. You couldn't hear the anchor's words through the window, but there was an advisory on the screen.

'Citywide ban of clown masks on Halloween. Businesses are urging patrons not to wear anything clown-related.'

The advisory faded from the screen and the anchorwoman reappeared, the topic switching to the latest arrests made at a peaceful protest at city hall. You hadn't heard about it, but you didn't exactly follow the news lately. It wasn't surprising though, seeing things like protests and activists coming from all over. There had been a lot of it in the past year since the riots died down after Arthur's arrest.

With his trial coming up, you suspected that there would be more to come.

Turning from the window display, you walked up the street and found that the quaint little thrift shop with decent prices had been shut down. In its place was a costume store that advertised the upcoming Halloween holiday on every available space in the front windows. And right on the front door was the sign "NO MASKS".

Your shoulders fell. You'd been looking forward to finding some new clothes. Everything you wore was outdated by at least five years and probably handed down two or three times. Before you turned away, you wondered if there could be something in the costume shop that Arthur would enjoy.

He was a clown after all.

Maybe some trick gum or a flower that squirted water. You pushed inside the door and had to jump back to avoid two children racing by, fighting one another with plastic pirate swords. The man
behind the counter shouted to them in a heavy accent and you raised a curious eyebrow. The walls were covered in costumes and accessories. They had everything from an astronaut to ninja to zoo animals and as you looked around, you were almost disappointed that there wasn't a single clown in sight.

It seemed so stupid. Why ban clowns and masks when there were obviously more pressing matters that still existed in the city? It was like slapping a few bandaids on a severed arm to get it to stay on. Sure it might hold it together, but not for long, and not very well.

"May I help you find something, Miss?" The owner of the shop said with a bright smile from the counter. You shook your head.

"I'm just looking, thanks."

"Of course, but might I suggest a mysterious vampire priestess costume? Or perhaps something more bright, like a cheerleader?" He waved his hand toward the rack of women's costumes and you followed with your eyes. You loved Halloween but hadn't had a reason to dress up since you were a kid. As much fun as it would be, there was nowhere to wear it to and you doubted the hospital would allow costumes.

Still, it was fun to imagine the look on Arthur's face if you showed up in his room wearing a cheerleader costume. He would laugh but in a loving way. Never mocking. He would make you do a twirl, possibly even cheer as peppy as you possibly could. He might even try to feel you up while you wore it.

That thought brought a bright smile to your face and you bit your lip as you shook your head once more. "I have nowhere to wear it to."

"Surely you have someone to wear it for!" The man shouted with a cheeky smirk and you laughed.

"Yeah, but we have a kind of long-distance relationship. Besides, I don't think he..." you trailed off as your eyes caught a box of makeup sitting on one of the shelves. It had an array of colors and a set of brushes and sponges as well and on the front cover, where the name of the product was, there was a bright painted clown face. You pointed to the makeup and turned to look at the shop owner. "I thought clown stuff was banned."
"Clown masks. Clown costumes. Not clown makeup." He urged you to take a closer look and you did, chewing the inside of your cheek in thought. It would definitely make Arthur happy to have this and just imagining him in full makeup, painted as Joker, made your insides tremble with desire. "'Ey! You filthy brats!"

You spun on your heel to see the man storm out from behind the counter, first raised in the air as he scolded the two children from earlier. They had managed to crawl into the display window and were making an absolute mess of the spider web and streamers. As he busied himself with fighting off two rowdy kids who were trying to fight him off with their swords, you turned back to the makeup; particularly the price tag. It was high-quality makeup and expensive. More money than you had on you.

Squaring your jaw, you snatched it from the shelf and rearranged the packages to make it look as if it had never been touched. You quickly shoved the box into the front of your coat and hurried out the door, heart pounding the entire way. You didn't dare look back until you were at least two blocks away and by the time you slowed down, you were out of breath.

You pulled the box of makeup from your coat and stared at it. It was the first time you'd ever stolen...well, the first time in your adult life anyway. Teenage you always had a five-finger discount, but you thought you had left that shit behind you. It bothered you how quickly you fell right back into the bullshit of your past.

It bothered you, but surprisingly, not as much as you thought it would. In fact, the adrenaline pumping through you, your heart racing and lungs aching for breath, was all exhilarating. You glanced down at the sidewalk around your feet and found a white, plastic bag that didn't seem too dirty lying on the ground. There was a can of beer inside it and you dumped it into the nearest trash can before slipping the box of makeup into the bag.

You turned on your heel and promptly slammed into someone's broad chest. They caught you around your arms and you gasped, looking up into Todd's familiar face.

"Cricket! I thought that was you!" He released you and you held your bag tighter. Had he seen you pick it up off the ground? "I never see you on this side of town."

"Oh, I was just doing some shopping. You working tonight?" You meant at the club where he was a part-time bouncer, and he nodded.

"Yeah, I finally got a night away from that loony bin. What about you?"
You nodded and tucked your hair behind your ear. It caught his attention and he followed the line of your neck right down to the purple marks above your shirt. Immediately, you pulled your hair out from behind your ear and cleared your throat. "I work every night, remember?"

"Yeah," he said, obviously distracted by the bruises on your throat. "I heard they're cutting some more departments soon."

"Like what? We're already stretched thin."

Todd sighed and scratched the back of his head. "I think they're going to lay off some of the lower totem pole folks like laundry and janitorial. It'll be on us to do that shit now."

You rolled your eyes. How much more could they cut from mental health funding? It was already barely held together as it was. Without workers to take care of cleaning and laundry, it would fall on those that were already overworked and barely finishing their regular duties. It was infuriating and not just because more work on your plate would take you away from Arthur.

"That's just great. Have you talked to Margaret about it?"

"Yeah right. She keeps herself holed up in her office, saying she's trying to get ready for the trial but what the fuck does she have to do with it? She's just avoiding us."

You sighed and looked down at the bag hanging to your right side. As your mouth opened, intent on telling him an excuse to leave and get back to your apartment, Todd interrupted. He stepped closer and your entire body tensed. You peered up at him, eyes darting to the healing scar above his eyebrow where Arthur had hit him.

"Listen, if you don't have anywhere to be, why don't you stop by the club tonight."

"I work at eleven."

Todd shrugged. "If anyone needs a night off, it's you. I'll get you a discount at the bar and we can hang out. I can promise you'll have more fun with me than with Joker and the rest of the crazies."
Your fists tightened and jaw clenched and you struggled to keep yourself from giving him another gash on his other eye. Faking a sugary, sweet smile, you shrugged a shoulder and looked away from him. "I don't know, Todd. He's pretty funny. I think I'll take my chances with him."

His face fell and eyes narrowed in confusion and slight anger. You could tell he wasn't used to being turned down, and while in the beginning, you had actually liked him, knowing he was a womanizer and a jerk quickly turned you off. Besides, you'd been telling the truth. You'd much rather take your chances with Joker than him.

At least Joker could please you like you never would have imagined. With a pat to his shoulder, you left Todd standing on the street and crossed to the nearest bus stop. You didn't look back and didn't need to to know he was staring after you. It may have been a mistake to say something like that, but you didn't really care. It gave you a little bit of an adrenaline rush and right now, you were definitely enjoying the high.

Of course, every high came with a crash.

Several days passed and you still hadn’t figured out how to get back to Arthur’s room alone. When you weren’t working the third shift, sorting laundry and old records to be put in storage, Margaret had you making rounds with Todd and he had been in a foul mood ever since you’d turned him down. He never took it out on you, but you could tell he wasn’t happy about being passed over for the Joker.

While a small part of your worried he might look too far into it, you were sure he thought you were just kidding, turning him down with a joke. Even if it had been the truth. Today, you were instructed to come in at 6 to handle med rounds and whatever other duties needed to be done. A month ago, this had been your favorite shift.

Now, it left no time to actually talk to Arthur. You always had Todd or some other orderly at your side, handing out meds and cups of water. However, you noticed that the tray with Arthur’s name on it had two new pills to the usual assortment he was prescribed. You frowned down at them and looked at the woman working in the pharmacy.

She was only following the orders handed down from the psychiatrist, but you couldn’t help speaking up anyway. You pointed to the tray she had passed to you and frowned. “He’s already taking six different things. Isn’t this overkill?”
The woman was much older than you and hardly ever smiled. She was one of those kinds of workers who came in, did exactly as they were told, and never questioned it. Her frown deepened as you spoke to her and you immediately regretted ever bringing it up. “Look, I’m not a doctor, alright? If you think the freak needs a med change, why don’t you talk to his psychiatrist?”

With that, she shut the gate and locked it behind her, giving you a clear end to the discussion. From beside the cart of meds, Todd chuckled to himself and you turned to glare up at him. He shook his head. “What’s with you and this guy?”

Icy tendrils of fear slid down your spine and you scoffed. “Nothing is with me and him. I just don’t think shoving a whole bunch of pills down his throat is a good idea.”

“He murdered five people. What should be shoved down his throat is the barrel of a shotgun.”

“Killing him will solve everything, right? It’ll bring back all the people he killed and end all the tension in the city.” Todd glared at you and you clamped your lips shut before you said anything else stupid.

Thankfully, he didn’t respond but as he stalked off, you caught him mumbling something about ‘bleeding heart hippies’. You steered the cart behind him and the two of you made your way through the halls of the psych ward. It was a typical day without any surprises so far but as you rode the elevator from the third floor to the fourth, you couldn’t hide your smile.

Todd didn’t even look your way and hadn’t spoken a single word to you aside from what he had to. There was no light conversation or endearing nicknames today. Possibly not ever again with the two of you. It didn’t matter to you either way.

The second shift guard was back on the stool and as the elevator doors opened, you weren’t surprised to see him rubbing sleepily at his eyes. He gave the burly man at your side a nod hello but barely acknowledged you with a quick glance. “Just a heads up, there’s a new patient on fifth. Heard he’s a biter.”

“Great. More freaks,” Todd mumbled, stepping out of the elevator to head to the supply station. You let him grab gloves and a mask and leave the small space before you went in after him and did the same. The less time you had to spend with him in tight spaces, the better. Just because you knew it would piss him off, you took your time slipping the latex gloves on your hands. You were thankful that the mask hid your smile as you walked out and spotted him shaking his head in
annoyance.

He grabbed the handle of the cart and pulled it behind him and you let him. If he was going to do your job for you, just because he was being a brat about being turned down, you weren’t going to stop him. You followed the routine, handing off the meds for each patient and tried to glance down to Arthur’s room when Todd wasn’t looking.

You couldn’t wait to see him and wished you could give him the gift you had gotten for him. Well, stolen for him. Either way, you wanted to see the look of surprise on his face. Unfortunately, you had to wait for the right chance.

As you steered the cart to the last door on the right of the hallway, Todd slid the small compartment open with a snap of the metal. He banged his fist on the door and you stood on your tiptoes to peek into the room. The sight of Arthur lying on his bed, one ankle crossed over the other, with the newspaper open in front of him made you giggle and you had to press your lips together to keep from letting it out.

“What the--How did you get the paper?” Todd asked, receiving no response from the man inside. Arthur simply shook the pages and continued reading as if he were a man on the subway, looking over stock numbers. Again, Todd smacked his fist into the door. “Hey! I’m talking to you!”

This time, Arthur responded. “I had it conveniently delivered to my door. If you want to read it when I’m done, you can.”

Todd turned back and glared at you and you snapped your eyes to him, shrugging helplessly as if you didn’t know exactly how he got that newspaper. Fury bloomed behind his gaze and he reached for the key on his hip. With the way he’d been so hostile the past few days, you knew this was a bad idea. You didn’t want Arthur to be hurt and you definitely didn’t want another murder tacked onto his record.

You reached out and snatched Todd by the elbow and even though he wrenched it away, he turned to stare at you. With a laugh, you shook your head. “Can’t you see he’s taunting you? Just relax.”

“Relax? He has unauthorized materials in his room which is grounds for confiscation.”

“Since when is a newspaper unauthorized? What, you think he’s going to wad it up into a bat and try to hit you with it?” You regretted it as soon as you said it because Todd looked downright
furious that you brought it up. His run-in with Joker was obviously a sore spot for him. For someone trying to deescalate the situation, you weren’t doing a very good job.

Todd turned back to the window. “Come get your fucking meds.”

“You didn’t say the magic word.”

You caught Todd’s fist before he could punch the glass and you gaped at him. “Just chill out! Jesus, you’re acting like a child.” You wedged yourself between him and the door and was glad when he stepped away to let you handle it. Standing on your tiptoes, you looked into the window and tapped. Arthur turned down one side of the paper and grinned at you. “Arthur, can you please come take your medicine?”

He sat up, folded the paper beside him and crossed the room to join you at the door. His hair was damp and you wished you could tell him how good he looked. He leaned against the door and glanced at the man over your shoulder with a smirk. “Since you asked so nicely, I’d be happy to.”

You passed the tray into his hands through the compartment and he brushed his middle finger down the length of yours, out of sight from Todd. You hoped he wouldn’t notice how Arthur made you shiver. Through the glass, you met Arthur’s eyes and his smile widened.

Todd stepped around you and poked a finger against the window. “I want to see you take them.”

Slowly, Arthur shifted his gaze from you to Todd and raised an eyebrow. “Are you going to come in here and check my mouth to make sure I swallowed them?”

“I’m going to shove them down your throat, how about that?”

You rolled your eyes and pushed the cart against his hip, making him take a step away from the door. “What is your problem today?”

“I’m sick of these freaks.”

From inside the room, Arthur let out a laugh that pulled your attention back to him. He leaned
against the door, right at the window and grinned. “Hey, how’s your head?”

Todd slammed his fist into the glass and cracked it, making a spider web of fractures spread across the surface. Luckily the wire inside caught the pieces from shattering completely. Your hands went to your mouth, pressing against the paper mask and you could only stare with wide eyes at the damage he had caused. From the other side of the door, Arthur never even flinched. He let out another chuckle and whistled low.

You glanced from the door back to Todd and he turned on his heel and stalked away, hopefully, to calm down. Already, the guard was on his feet, hand on the gun on his hip and you scowled up at Arthur.

“You shouldn’t taunt him like that.”

“I missed you,” he said sweetly, catching you off guard. You glanced down at the hall and then back up to him with a smile creasing the corners of your eyes.

“I missed you too.”

“Hey,” He slid the empty tray back to you and you pretended to busy yourself with straightening the stack on your cart. “That drawing of me. Did you do that?”

“Oh,” you said, cheeks burning. “Yeah, I did.”

“I liked it.”

“Good.” You wanted to tell him about the others at home, the ones you were really proud of, but you were running out of time. Biting your lip, you took the empty cup of water back from him and watched him put the pills into his mouth. “I should go. I’ll try to come see you again before I leave tonight.”

He nodded with a sly smile and you pushed the cart back down the hall, back to where Todd and the security guard still stood, speaking to one another. It wasn’t until you reached them and were pushing the cart back onto the elevator that you realized...you’d never seen him swallow his meds. And not just today either. You’d never seen him actually swallow them down.
And Todd never stuck around to check because Arthur was always lucid and able to take them for himself, unlike the other patients who were trapped in their minds or too busy throwing their own shit to take their own pills. You stared down at the stack of empty trays and pulled at the paper mask around your face, taking a deep breath.

As Todd stepped back into the elevator, glaring down at his bruised and bleeding knuckles, you tried to remember any instance where you had seen Arthur actually take his pills and found nothing. But surely he was taking them. Where was he putting them if he wasn’t?

And more importantly, if he wasn’t taking his medication...he would be more prone to doing something dangerous. You bit your bottom lip and stared at your blurry reflection in the metal, elevator doors.

What could he be thinking?

What was he planning?
The Fool

Chapter Summary

Sometimes you have to get knocked down lower than you've ever been to finally stand taller than you ever have before.

Chapter Notes

I really liked this chapter and hope you do as well!

Janey was back, but from the looks of her open luggage and mess of belongings strewn around her room, you suspected she would be leaving soon again. You stood outside her bedroom door, arms crossed over your chest and shoulder leaned up against the frame. She was making a point to ignore your presence and you rolled your eyes with a heavy sigh.

"So, you're just leaving? Is that it?"

"That's it," she said simply, stuffing a few items of clothing down into her suitcase. "I can't stay in this city any longer. It's rotting from the inside and I'm not sticking around to see it crumble."

Jesus, she was being so dramatic. You watched her turn to her dresser and pull out the top drawer. She rifled through several pieces of underwear and bras before scooping them up and dumping them in a black trash bag. "You're not the first person to be mugged, you know? People have gone through worse shit than this and continue to live here."

Janey stopped and turned to you, her lips pinched shut and eyes wide with surprise and anger. "Yeah, well I haven't. I'm not staying in a place I'm scared of just because you need a roommate."

You scoffed. Not that what she said wasn't one hundred percent accurate, but because you never actually suspected her to leave. It put you in a shitty situation because there was no way in hell
you'd be able to afford this place on your own. You were barely paying the bills as it were. With her gone, you'd be kicked out on your ass in a month, forced to live with your aunt in Texas. And that was just out of the question.

"I can't afford this place on my own."

"That's your problem."

"Don't you have to give me at least thirty days to find another roommate or something? You're being completely unreasonable." You dropped your hands to your side and stepped further into her room. As you did, you noticed Janey tensed and stepped around her bed to put it between the two of you. Was she actually afraid of you?

She rolled her eyes and zipped up her suitcase. "You're not my landlord."

"I can't believe you're just dumping all of this on me because I painted a picture."

"It’s not just the picture!" She shouted, making you flinch and blink at her in surprise. "It’s the fact that you didn’t even bat an eyelash when you found out the guy who mugged me wore a clown mask! You fucking smiled! I thought you were just trying to make me feel better but after seeing those paintings and you scratching me…” She trailed off, shaking her head and you could only stand there, trying to make sense of what she was saying.

You had smiled? You couldn’t even remember reacting to it, much less smiling about it. As you stood there, speechless and caught completely off guard, Janey shook her head and pulled the suitcase off the bed. It hit the floor with a thump and you swallowed, looking away from her, ashamed of yourself for not hiding better.

With a sigh, she took hold of the overstuffed trash bag and you sniffed, backing out of her door so she could leave. “I’ve paid up the rent to November and the utilities should be good until then as well. I’m sorry it’s such short notice, but I’m not sorry for leaving.”

You nodded and kept your eyes down to the floor, not wanting to look up and see the expression of pity on her face. It would only piss you off and right now, you were struggling with so much that you were afraid you’d lash out at her again if you did. All you could do was stand in the hallway between your bedrooms, staring at the floorboards as she dragged her things to the front door.
She shut it behind her with a click that echoed through the sudden silence and you clenched your jaw tight. For several minutes, though it could have been a lot longer than that, you stood with your shoulder against the wall, not moving, barely letting yourself even think. It was as if all of your thoughts over the past few weeks, since first meeting Arthur, had been clogged and shoved down into the recesses of your mind and now that you were face to face with how this obsession has changed you, you didn’t want to think about it.

Because, if you were being honest with yourself, you had never felt better in these past few weeks. You didn’t know what it was about him, that just brought out so much... life all of a sudden. You knew he wasn’t a good person, or at least, he wasn’t a sane person, but that didn’t mean you couldn’t care about him. And you did care about him.

That was impossible to deny.

You cared so much about him that it scared you. Not just your feelings, but the fact that no matter how much you cared, you wouldn’t be able to protect him.

The shrill sound of the phone ringing cut through your thoughts and you lifted your eyes to the living room you could see from the hallway. On the wall, the phone hung, waiting for you to pick it up and answer the call. Instead, you turned to your room and sat down on the floor in front of your canvases.

After six rings, the machine picked up and you pulled your work in progress across your lap. You situated the paints and palette and looked through your cup of brushes while pulling a cigarette out of the pack next to your feet. Out in the hallway, a voice echoed from the answering machine.

“This is Margaret. I must have missed you but I was hoping you could come in an hour early for a mandatory meeting on patient employee relationships. Nothing serious, just a quick overview of our policies. Just be here by five tonight! See you then!”

You dragged in a deep breath of smoke and leaned your head back to blow it out above your head. The message didn’t surprise you, especially not after what had happened the day before with Todd. Did he go to Margaret to complain about you and Arthur? Or was he the problem being addressed in this meeting?

You assumed it was the former. No one cared when someone mistreated the patient, but loving them? That was clearly against the rules and should be nipped in the bud as quickly as possible.
No one understood. No one would ever understand. No one but Arthur would ever really understand you.

The dress code required that anyone with hair longer than shoulder length had to wear it up and away from their face. Patients were known to grab onto anything when they were having an episode and while you never really associated closely with any patients, you had always followed the rule. But tonight, you sat in the meeting with your hair loose, arms crossed over your chest, glaring at the back of Todd’s head.

For the first time since you worked there, he wasn’t sitting at the same table as you. In fact, he had avoided you at all costs and had taken a seat right at the first table, making a point to ignore you. Margaret had glanced at you, disapprovingly noticing your hair, and you made sure not to react in any way. Your face was as stoic and still as a statue.

It was clear from the moment you walked into the meeting that it definitely wasn’t about orderlies becoming violent and punching the windows. It was directed especially at you and that friendship with the patients was acceptable, but anything further was grounds for termination. Your eyes moved from Margaret at the front of the room, still rambling on about the proper ways to touch and interact with the patients, and landed on the back of Todd’s head.

If you were to spontaneously gain superpowers, you’d have made it explode with just a glance. How dare he go to your supervisor about your relationship with Arthur? How dare he assume that you had a relationship with him? There was no proof that you were anything except acquaintances at best.

You were undoubtedly certain that if there was proof, this meeting would be a lot shorter and with far fewer people. It would be Margaret and maybe someone from HR sitting you down to terminate your employment. And since that wasn’t happening, all they had was speculation.

For the next forty-five minutes, you sat in the seat, barely moving, barely reacting at all to anything she was saying at the front of the room. If you weren’t following her with your eyes, you were glaring daggers into the back of Todd’s skull. As soon as it concluded, you were out of your chair and at the door, throwing it open.

Out in the main lobby of the ward, you were able to finally take a deep breath and gather your thoughts aside from how badly you wished you could strangle a certain person with your bare hands. You knew Margaret would be looking for you, intent on tacking extra duties on you for your shift to keep you far away from the fourth floor, but you didn’t give her a chance.
You were in the elevator before anyone else even walked out of the conference room. And though, you wished you could go straight to the fourth floor to see him, you instead went to the seventh. A few patients ambled around the hallways, getting their exercise and visiting other patients, and you weaved through the crowd of them.

Behind the metal gate at the records window, you spotted Carl, the clerk who had helped you sort through the old records. He lifted his head and greeted you with a nod, one that you barely returned. He opened the door and you slipped in, heading right to the storage closet where you’d been working for the past two weeks.

You’d have been finished sorting the files earlier if you hadn’t been pulled this way and that to do everything else under the sun. Maybe that was why they hadn’t fired you yet. They didn’t want to lose their best lackey who bent over backward to take on any task out of fear of losing insurance and a steady paycheck.

As you sat in the chair inside the closet and grabbed the nearest box, there was a soft knock at the door behind you. You didn’t turn to face Carl and he cleared his throat. “Everything okay?”

You glared at the wall in front of you and wondered if he’d been let in on the little secret rumors circling around about you and Joker. Was this his attempt to pry and find out more for Margaret? He had already gossipped about Arthur’s mother. Why would you trust him?

Turning with a bright, wide smile, you looked at him over your shoulder. “Of course! Just ready to get this finished so I can jump onto the next task!”

He stared at you as if you’d grown a second head and after a moment, he nodded and backed out of the door. You watched him hesitate and turn back to face you. “I heard about that meeting.”

You faced the wall again, the smile immediately falling from your face. You reached into one of the boxes and took out a file, checking the date of the last entry. Anything ten years and older went straight to the basement. When you didn’t say anything else, Carl shuffled his feet and seemed to pick up on the hint that you weren’t going to discuss it.

After a moment, you glanced back to make sure he was gone and narrowed your eyes on the spot he had occupied a moment ago. Did everyone in the goddamn ward know about your presumed relationship with Joker?
Rumors spread like wildfire around here and you knew that from experience now. But they weren’t deterring you from actually getting closer to him. They were just making you more reckless. They were cornering you and like a wild animal, you were going to lash out, because not seeing him ever again was not an option.

You worked in the records department well into the night and thankfully, after Carl stopped by to tell you goodnight and give you the keys to lock up, you weren’t disturbed again. At midnight, you dumped the last box on the cart to be whisked down to the basement storage but you left it behind, snatching the keyring from the shelf.

You turned the lights off and locked up behind you, though you didn’t deposit the keys through the opening in the grate like you’d been instructed to. No, you weren’t going to give these keys up just yet. You’d left your copy of the master key at home; a stupid decision but you were being cautious, just in case they questioned you about your behavior. The last thing you needed was for them to find you in possession of a key that could open the doors of a certain patient.

Back down to the first floor, you crossed from the elevator and strolled right to Margaret’s door in the lobby. You knocked first, just to be sure, and when no answer came, you unlocked the door and slipped in. Turning the light on with your elbow, you stared at her messy desk and narrowed your eyes on her chair as if she were sitting in it, staring at you trespassing.

You pocketed the ring of keys and moved behind her desk, studying the arrangement of the clutter. Once you were sure you could return things back to the way she had it, you snooped through all of it, ignoring any mention of patients you didn’t care about. All you were looking for was the name ‘Arthur Fleck’.

But after half an hour of searching in every nook and cranny of her office, you came up short. Had that psychiatrist taken the file with her? It was possible. She would be a major character witness in the trial and Arthur’s fate was pretty much in her hands. If anyone should have the file, it was her.

It was still upsetting that you couldn’t see it for yourself, though you weren’t sure you even wanted to see what was in it. You were afraid it would make you like him less, and a bit scared it wouldn’t.

With a sigh of defeat, you placed the files back on Margaret's desk exactly how they had been before. Except a single slip of paper was sticking out from beneath a stack of thin file-folders. It wouldn't have caught your eye if you hadn't noticed one detail that seemed to jump off the page at you; your name.
You pulled slowly at the paper, an upside-down, typed incident report. Turning it right side up, you looked at the details with your heart thumping in your chest like a drum. The witness's signature at the bottom belonged to Margaret and the person filing the report was Todd, dated with yesterday's date.

"Employee has concerns that a coworker has become too close with a maximum security patient by the name of Arthur Fleck. In an incident occurring on October 15th, the complaint was presented to supervisor, Margaret Jackson who has begun an investigation into the incident. The course of action against employee suspected of entering a romantic relationship with a patient will be determined.'

Your fingers shook as you read the report over and over and each time, you hoped it would change, that this wasn't actually happening. There was no way they knew anything. This was a witch hunt and it was all because Todd was feeling threatened in his masculinity.

As much as you wanted to crumple the report into your fists, you returned it exactly how you found it; upside down and hidden beneath a stack of files. You fought the urge to vomit and buried your face in the bend of your elbow as you fled the room, locking it behind you.

You hurried to the lounge and put your hands down flat on the table. How could you have been so stupid to even tease Todd, or giggle when Arthur teased him? You had been so careless, a stupid fool, and now that the tears burned the back of your eyelids, you were facing the possibility of being taken away from him forever.

A sick feeling settled in your gut and you took several breaths in through your nose and let them out your mouth, trying to calm your anxiety. You opened your eyes and stared down at the table beneath you, not sure what the fuck to do. You wanted to go to the fourth floor and see him, to tell him what was going on and...you sighed and dropped your head between your arms.

What could he possibly do? He was more trapped than you were and would be for the rest of his life. Did he even deserve to be? You weren't sure anymore. All the things he had done, they were all starting to become justified in your eyes and you slowly lifted your head up to stare at the back wall of lockers.

Pushing away from the table, you marched past the elevators and pushed open the door leading to the stairwell instead. You marched up four flights and knew that it was late and your stomping would more than likely wake some of the patients, but you were at the end of your rope.
You were about to lose your job, your apartment, and your sanity. You weren't going to walk out of Arthur's life without doing everything in your power to see him as much as you could.

The door to the fourth floor was right ahead of you and you shoved your shoulder into it, throwing it open with a loud bang as it hit the wall behind you. With a quick darting glance down to the end hallway to see the guard jump up from the stool, you turned to the left and headed to Arthur's door.

From behind you, the guard called out. "Everything alright?"

Apparently, security guard Geoff didn't listen to rumors circulating through the wards. At least there was one thing going your way. Halfway to Arthur's door, you turned and faced the guard with a smile and a wave. "Yep! Making my rounds starting down here tonight."

He nodded and took a seat back on the stool, but didn't pick his book back up just yet. He watched you walk backward for a moment and even from the distance, you could see the look of confusion on his face. Whatever.

You turned on your heel and hurried to Arthur's door. He had heard your voice from down the hall and met you at the window. You frowned at the sight of the broken glass, though you really shouldn't be surprised it hadn't been fixed yet. You opened your mouth, eyes meeting his through the window, and you clamped your jaw shut once more. What could you possibly say that could begin to describe what you felt?

His usual smile he saved for you faded quickly and he put a hand to the door. "What's wrong?"

"Everything. If I keep seeing you like this, they're going to fire me. Todd, the one who--" you gestured to the fractured glass but Arthur's gaze stayed on you. "He reported me for having an inappropriate relationship with you. We had a meeting tonight about employee patient relationships and it was all just to tell me that it's against the rules and the punishment will be termination."

He listened to you spill the details, brows furrowed and mouth turned down in a scowl. You'd never seen him look at you like this and you could feel your heartbreaking.

"They're trying to keep us apart?"

You nodded and slid open the compartment in the door, reaching in. He found your hand instantly
and laced his fingers in the spaces between yours. "I was stupid and reckless coming to see you so often. But I couldn't help it. I feel crazy when I'm not close to you. I don't know what's happening to me."

He brushed his thumb across the back of your thumb and you leaned your forehead against the door. "You're not crazy. You're the only person who has treated me like a human since I've been in here and if they punish you for that, they'll be sorry."

Blinking up at him, you swallowed tightly, the question you'd been dreading to know the answer to suddenly springing into your head. "Are you...off your meds?"

His mouth lifted into a slow smile, both mischievous and coy and you frowned in return. If they found out he wasn't taking his medication, they would put a jacket on him and force them down his throat. The thought made you sick and you sighed. "How?"

Sighing wistfully, he leaned his head against the window and shrugged a bare shoulder. "You'd be surprised how much you can get away with when everyone is too afraid to come close."

"But... I saw you put them in your mouth. Surely someone has made sure you were swallowing them."

He poked a finger to his open mouth and made a gagging sound, winking down at you. As you stared at him through the window, his smile faded and he pulled his fingers out of yours to hold your hand in both of his. "I've never felt more like myself than I do right now. This is the real me. I shouldn't need pills to fit into their definition of what they want me to be."

Letting his words sink in, you nodded slowly. What he said made perfect sense to you and you felt the same way. If you could feel this way about him, about the real him, then why couldn't anyone else? Frowning, you looked up at him and took a deep breath. "I might not be able to come around for a while."

"Are you coming to the trial?"

“If you want me to be there, I will.” Your words made his signature grin reappear and you let out a small laugh at the sight of it. God, what you wouldn't give to be on the other side of his door in that moment. Seeing you laugh, Arthur took your hand in his and spun away from the door, throwing his other arm up as he shuffled his feet in a dance. You couldn’t hold back your laughter
anymore and didn’t really care who could hear it. Through the narrow opening in the door, he pulled gently at your hand and slowly shimmied his shoulders, urging you to dance as well.

“Falling in love is such an easy thing to do,” he sang softly to you, crossing his feet to spin in a circle before taking your hand once more. “And there's no guarantee that the one you love is gonna love you.”

You let your head fall back and danced as well as you could with a door between you and him, joined only by the hands. As he laughed, you finished the lyrics to the song the best you could. “Oh, loving eyes, they cannot see. A certain person...I forgot the rest!”

Arthur dipped his head down to kiss your knuckles and sang against them. “Everybody plays the fool, sometimes.” You giggled and turned your hand to cup the side of his face and he kneeled down to let you. The singing and dancing had definitely caught the guard’s attention and out of the corner of your eye, you could see him standing from his stool, staring down at the opposite end of the hall but you really didn’t care.

Despite feeling so far from one another, you had never felt so close to someone and maybe that was crazy to think, you didn’t know. Maybe you were crazy. Whatever it was, you didn’t care. You were happy, and just like Arthur said, anyone who took that away from you would be sorry.
Let's Talk

Chapter Summary

You need to have a talk with someone whose been trying to ruin your life and it doesn't go well.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was 15 pages long, so I broke it into two. This is the first part and I'm going to try hard to get the next part out today! I'm hoping to go see Joker again tonight though, so it all depends on that!

This chapter does come with some extra trigger warnings. The non-consent one in particular. Implications of rape, but nothing too graphic. Read at your own risk.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Tension across the city is mounting in the days before the Joker Murder Trial is set to begin.” You reached over and turned the volume up on the television. The sight of Arthur’s mugshot on the screen made you smile like a teenager and you turned back to the painting you had been working on the past few days since Janey had left for good. Your bedroom lighting had always been awful and so with her gone, you had moved all of your art supplies and canvases into the living room and opened the curtains to let in natural light. “Protestors have been lined up outside the Gotham City Courthouse for the past week speaking out against the state’s decision to seek the death penalty. Here’s what one protestor had to say.”

You put the paintbrush in your mouth and clamped down on it while reaching for the cigarette in the ashtray. On the screen, the image shifted to the grainy picture of a crowd of people outside the courthouse. You pulled your legs up to your chest and hugged your knees. It was so refreshing to see so many people supporting Arthur.

“They want to ignore the real problems and make an example out of Joker,” The protester was shouting, pointing his finger into the camera. “Just because he killed a celebrity, another rich fuck who doesn’t give a shit! They think killing him will get rid of us and all the problems and it won’t! They don’t want to see what’s right in front of their faces, they just want us gone!”
You blew the smoke away from you and nodded to the television, wondering if Janey and her parents were sitting in their big house, safe and comfy away from the real world. Were they watching this all unfold, shaking their heads and blaming the protestors for stirring up trouble? You could just see them turn the television off, say something useless like ‘this isn’t the way to solve problems’ and then go about their lives like nothing was wrong.

As the anchorwoman came back onto the screen, you picked your brush up and grabbed your latest painting. After coming home the other night, after your last visit with Arthur, you’d been so inspired to paint him dancing in his room that you hadn’t slept until you had started it. So far, you had created three different images of him and it was fitting since you were almost certain he was three different people altogether.

But that was fine. You wanted each one of them. The soft-spoken, sweet and tender Arthur who had kissed you for the first time after knocking out Todd; The Joker, who said deliciously dirty things in your ear as he made you come; and the man who just wanted to make people laugh. You wondered who he had been before when he was chocked full of meds and putting on a pretend face just to fit in with the world.

Would you have even liked him then? Would you have even noticed him?

The thought made you frown, and you hoped you would have. Anyone who had ever ignored him and passed over him missed out on something truly wonderful. Of course, he did murder several people.

You shook that thought from your head and dipped the brush through the light gray you had mixed together. As the news displayed more stories from around the city, you concentrated solely on getting Arthur’s grin just right, even though it paled in comparison to the real thing. Thinking back to how he had spun and danced behind the door of his room made you chuckle and you found yourself swaying to the sound of the song still playing in your head.

From the hallway behind you, the phone rang and you sighed with a roll of your eyes. You set the paintbrush, canvas, and palette back on the floor before stretching to your feet. Another ring and you groaned, reaching over to pluck it from the wall. “Hello?”

“Hey, is this Cricket?” The sound of Todd’s voice made your lip curl into a snarl and you crossed your arm over your chest. For a moment, you debated on just hanging up on him. What could he possibly want to say to you? He was already trying to get you fired. “Hello? Are you there?”

“Yes. What do you want, Todd?”
He sighed and you glanced back to the paintings sitting on the floor, calling you to just hang up the phone and come back. You scowled at them and turned away to face the door, waiting for him to answer.

“Look, I know things are weird with us right now. Can we just talk?”

“I’m kind of busy.” Talk? Talk about what? There was nothing you wanted to talk to him or anyone else about anymore. “Can’t it wait until we work together again?” Which would hopefully be never.

“I’d really like to meet up today and just clear the air between us. Can you meet me before your shift? At Rosie’s.” It was the bar he worked at on the side and you narrowed your eyes. That would be kind of out of your way before work, but he seemed persistent, and you’d love to see the look on your face when you confirmed your feelings for Joker.

After a brief hesitation, you sighed. “Fine. I can meet you at ten, but it’ll take me at least half an hour to get to the hospital so you better make it quick.”

“That’s fine. I’ll be outside.”

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The city on this side of town was in a much different state than you were used to. Rosie’s was in the heart of the downtown nightlife district, even though it was just a hole in the wall bar where bikers and tough guys usually spent their nights. A perfect place for a real tough guy like Todd to spend his off days. You wondered if he had told his coworkers and friends the truth about the gash above his eyebrow.

Stuffing your hands in the pocket of your coat, you weaved your way through the crowd of people strolling down the sidewalks. Some were talking about the trial, drunkenly claiming that they had been at the riots last year and were ready for more. You passed by the group of men and shook your head at their claims. Everyone and their mother said they were there last year, that they’d met Joker and tried to fight the police to keep him from being arrested.

It hadn’t worked.
Around the corner, you could see the red neon light of Rosie’s sign and a group of men and women, mostly all wearing leather, crowded around the front door. A cloud of smoke surrounded their heads and you ducked beneath it as you squeezed between two of the men to head inside. Right at the front door, arms crossed over his shoulders with a black T-shirt stretched across his muscles stood the one person who instantly turned your face into a scowl.

Todd spotted you and pushed off the wall he was leaning against. Behind him, you could hear the crack of the billiard balls and the sound of music playing from a live band. They sounded terrible. You stopped a few steps from Todd and lifted an eyebrow.

“Well, I’m here. Start talking."

He nodded and turned to face the bar. “Yo, Antonio! Going for a break!”

A rather fat man behind the bar raised an arm and you let Todd pass you in the doorway, leading back outside into the cold night air. The group of leather-clad men and women had moved on but the smell of them lingered and you wrinkled your nose. You followed Todd around the corner to an alleyway and was thankful he didn’t expect you to actually go into it. There’s no way you’d willingly be alone with him somewhere like that.

"Look, I know there’s been some issues between us lately and I think we should hash them out so they don’t get in the way of work."

You didn’t know why you expected him to apologize, not just for reporting you to Margaret but for the outburst and punching Arthur’s window. He had acted like a child, and just like a child, he tried to deflect and avoid the blame. Squaring your jaw, you gave a nod and looked out at the street of taxis.

"Alright. Let's start with you punching a door because a patient was teasing you. Is that one of the issues you want to discuss?" You watched him clench his jaw and take a deep breath through his nose that expanded the already massive size of his chest.

"It certainly has something to do with the main issue we need to talk about."

Your eyes narrowed and you dropped your arms to your side. If he thought for one second that you were going to stand here and listen to a lecture from him about the dangers of being friends with Arthur or Joker or whoever, he was sorely mistaken. He had no say in who you associated yourself
"Is this why you asked me here? To talk about Arthur?"

Todd pointed a finger to you and you flinched back, resisting the urge to swat his hand away. 
"That. That right there is what I'm talking about."

"What?"

"You call him by his name. You're the only one who does that, you know? Everyone else calls him what he really is. A psycho, a deranged lunatic. Why do you treat him like a child who needs coddling? He needs to die!"

"Oh, that's rich coming from you!" You didn't even try to keep your voice down. This conversation was absurd and you felt foolish just for standing here and letting it continue. "I treat him like a child? You're the one throwing tantrums when someone picks on you. And do you honestly hear yourself right now? He's sick, Todd. Mentally ill. Do you even know what that means?"

"Do you?" He snapped, moving closer to you and making you retreat against the brick wall of the building behind you. Todd reached up to rub his palm across his head and he stared at you with a strange look in his eyes. You were surprised to see pity behind his stare. "Jesus, Cricket. Can't you see he's manipulating you? He talks sweet when you're around because he knows you'll fall for it and do what he wants you to do."

You scoffed and crossed your arms over your chest. You didn't even want to think about the possibility of what he was saying was true. Arthur wouldn't manipulate you. He was mentally ill, not an asshole. Every contact you ever had with him, he'd shown you nothing but kindness and tenderness. That wasn't what a manipulator did.

But even as you assured yourself of that, you couldn't help feel the seeds of doubt being sewn deep within you. You swallowed it down and met Todd's gaze. "He isn't manipulating me. I'm the only one who treats him like a human, the only one that has never threatened to hurt him just because he made mistakes--"

"Mistakes?" Todd threw his head back and laughed, the sound echoing between the buildings. "He killed people! Those aren't mistakes, Cricket!"
"Stop calling me that. I hate that name. You only call me that because you're making fun of me."

"I call you that because I like you. I don't give nicknames to people I don't like." He sighed and rubbed at the back of his neck. Despite the darkness of the alley, you could see the flush of his face and it made you nervous. You felt as if he were about to confess his feelings for you, and you didn't want to hear it. "Which is why I'm worried about you lately. Ever since that fucker attacked us, you've been acting so strange."

You bit the inside of your cheek and averted your gaze away from him. The trashy sidewalk, the endless flash of headlights driving past on the street, it all blurred from the moisture prickling hot at your eyelids. You looked up at the sky and took a deep shaking breath. Sensing your confusion and sadness, Todd stepped even closer and with the building at your back, you had nowhere to go.

He reached up to your face and tilted your head back, but you refused to meet his eyes. "Cricket, can't you see how I feel for you?"

"Don't." Your voice was barely a whisper, barely heard over the sound of the streets around you.

"I requested our shifts to be together. I always try to tease you and flirt with you because I like you. I've liked you for a long time and unlike freaks trapped behind a door, I can actually be here for you."

You wanted to shove him away, to run from him and not stop until you made it to the hospital. You hated the smell of his aftershave, hated his height, how muscular he was. He was nothing like the one person you truly wanted. And most of all, you hated Todd for accusing Arthur of manipulating you when he was doing exactly the same thing.

He tucked your hair behind your ear and leaned toward you. Before he could even think about kissing you, your hand pressed into the center of his hard chest and you finally let your eyes meet his. He stared down at your face, the hardened look behind your eyes confusing him. Had he actually thought you were going to let him kiss you?

"You're right. Unlike Arthur, you at least can take me out and actually be here. And if you had come to me a month ago saying all this, I would have been happy. But, you're right about something else." You pushed against his chest until he retreated, though he still wasn't far enough away. As his eyes narrowed, you returned the look and stood up straighter, lifting your chin in defiance. "I have been acting strange ever since he attacked you. Because while you were out on
the floor like a helpless child, Arthur kissed me. And I liked it."

Fury swept fast across his face and his hand was on your arm before you had taken a breath. He shoved you hard into the wall and you gasped, blinking up at him in angry confusion. Opening your mouth to tell him to go fuck himself, Todd never gave you the chance to speak. His mouth came crashing down against your lips so hard, you felt your teeth knocking into his. Cringing in disgusted shock, you twisted your face away from his and he drove your hips back into the wall with one firm grip of his hands.

"Stop!" You took hold of his shirt and used it to try and pull him away. He didn't budge. The pressure he was applying on your hip was starting to bruise and you hissed in pain as he continued to smear sloppy kisses down your throat. "God, get off me!"

Todd backed away but held you in place. He glared down at you, his mouth twisted into a snarl that scared you. "You'd rather some fucking freak touch you than me?"

"Yes. At least he was actually enjoyable to kiss."

His hand clenched around your elbow and you cried out in pain. Todd wrenched you away from the wall and shoved you deeper into the alley, never letting his grip on your arm falter. You stumbled forward and struggled against him but to no avail. He was much bigger, far too strong for you to fight and as he dragged you to the large, overflowing dumpsters behind the bar, fear hit you like a brick to the face.

"Girls like you make me sick," he muttered, slamming your back into the metal of the dumpster. The back of your head smacked against it and for a second, you felt a wave of dizziness wash over you. It almost eclipsed the panic, but you managed to recover your senses. Todd pushed you into the corner and held you with one arm against your chest.

What was happening?

Why was he hurting you?

"You think you can just go around, flirting with whoever and not think about the consequences. And when a guy actually shows interest, you'd rather fuck a goddamn freak." To your horror, he reached to your waist and found the button of your jeans. It popped open with a quick twist of his hands and adrenaline spiked through you suddenly, snapping your thoughts into place. You kicked
out with a foot and hit his thigh with your heel, missing the groin you'd been aiming for. Todd caught you at the knee and pushed your legs apart with his own. "I'll fuck you so good you'll forget all about that mother fucker."

"You sick fuck!" You struggled harder, leaning your head down to close your mouth over the flesh of his arm right beneath your chin. He roared as you clamped down so hard you thought your teeth would shatter. His skin broke around your teeth and blood erupted into your mouth.

"Bitch!"

He ripped his arm away from your face and reared back to slap you. His hand missed you by a mere inch and you could feel the wind from the force of his hit blow the hair from your face. You looked down to where his heel had slipped on a patch of grease and grime, causing him to slip and you managed to free your leg from his. This time, you didn't miss your target.

You kicked out as hard as you could, connecting the toe of your boot with his balls. Letting out a pathetic shriek, Todd reached for his groin and stumbled back. His face was contorted with agony and fury and you shoved past him, breaking into a run and swiping at the horrible metallic taste clinging to your tongue. He managed to shout at you before you could get far enough away.

"If you talk, I'll make sure that fucker dies tonight!"

You skidded around the corner and slammed into a group of women who looked twice your age but dressed far too young. One of them stumbled over a trash bag on the sidewalk and shouted in protest, calling you a number of names as you ran. You ignored them and pumped your legs as hard as you could, hoping your adrenaline carried you far, far away. All you could hear was the wind at your ears and all you could think about was putting one foot in front of the other. Everything behind you ceased to exist and you focused on knowing that you would be back at the hospital soon, would be back with Arthur and could figure things out.

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for all the comments! And I hope we're all in agreement that Todd needs to pay for what he's done.
Though you would usually take a bus to work from this side of town, the thought of slowing down, even if you were far enough away, filled you with so much dread you thought you'd vomit. It wasn't until you were ten minutes late for your shift, exhausted and out of breath did you finally make it to Arkham State Hospital. You leaned over, hands on your knees and chest aching with each breath you sucked in, and squeezed your eyes shut. At the corner of your mouth, you could still taste blood and you reached up to touch it, finding a small cut. You hadn't even noticed the pain.

An ambulance raced by, the siren blaring loudly, though all you could hear was the sound of your own heartbeat. Despite the spots dancing in front of your eyes, you stood up and blinked at the scene waiting for you outside the hospital.

Painted faces, bright costumes, and picket signs dancing above a crowd of protesters stopped you in your tracks and you could only stand there and stare. There weren't as many here as there were at city hall, but it was definitely enough to cause a scene. The police had been called and were trying to calm the crowd, coaxing them to keep quiet and go home.

You stepped closer and gaped in shock, eyes darting to one of the signs. *An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind!* There were similar chants and you crossed behind the police presence, backing toward the emergency room doors. You wondered if Arthur could see them from his window, or if he could hear them. Would he be happy he had such a following of supporters? It definitely made you feel better and not so alone in your fight to save him from death.

Stumbling into the hospital, you spun and hurried through the emergency room, crossing quickly to the psych ward. You wrenched your jacket off your shoulders as you made your way into the lounge, dropping into the first chair. An older woman who worked third shift in the crisis unit stood near the only working coffee maker in the ward and she jumped when you slid the chair sharply across the tiles. Still fighting to catch your breath, you looked up at her and shook your head with a smile.
“Are you alright?” She asked, her eyes darting to your split lip.

You nodded and took a deep breath. “You ever feel like you’re just one bad day away from going insane?”

“All the time. Those protestors do that to you?” She tipped her cup to you, gesturing to your mouth and you shook your head. “They’re crazy, I tell you. Supporting a known murder and—”

“No. They didn’t do this to me.” Tired of hearing the same shit over and over from these people who should be more understanding of mental illnesses, you stood so abruptly the chair you’d been sitting in toppled backwards. The woman blinked and retreated a few steps. “And to be honest, I’d rather take my chances with the crazy people.”

You left her standing there, gaping after you, and you didn’t care if you fueled the rumors circling about you anymore. What was the point in hiding it, especially now that you’d admitted to it in front of Todd? But if he thought for one second that if he went to Margaret with it, that you wouldn’t go to the police with what he had done, he was an idiot.

You kicked open the door to the stairwell and took the steps two at a time. Around the bend on the third floor, you met the third shift worker making his rounds. He nodded to you, looking at your clothes with an eyebrow raised and you barely acknowledged his presence. As long as he was heading away from fourth, you didn’t care if he even existed. Before you could get too far away, he turned and called up to you.

“Are you even supposed to be here tonight?”

“I’m here every night.” You made it to the fourth floor landing and waited, listening for the familiar sound of the door below you opening and closing once more. In the silence that followed, you leaned against the wall and peered through the window down to where Geoff sat on his ass atop that stupid stool.

Working third shift so often, you’d picked up on a few of his habits and one of those was his shit schedule. Around midnight, whether you had dosed him with laxatives or not, he grabbed the newspaper and shuffled into the bathrooms. You’d only slipped him some to help him along in the process and to ensure he’d be busy for a while. Tonight, you didn’t need long.

All you needed was a few answers.
You stood against the wall, arms crossed over your chest as you watched Geoff through the narrow strip of glass in the door. He read slowly and for some reason, that annoyed you. It took him nearly five minutes just to read two pages and you had to reassure yourself to just be patient. He would get up soon and disappear into the bathroom and you would have a small window to talk to Arthur.

The minutes ticked by and you pressed your tongue against the cut on your lip, tasting your own blood and possibly Todd’s as well. You refused to think about what had happened. It was as if your brain couldn’t even process it, like it had been nothing but a nightmare you’d woken up from. The details were fuzzy and you couldn’t really remember how you had gotten from the sidewalk to the other side of the dumpster. Had he dragged you? Did you go with him?

The last thing you could remember coherently was his horrific attempt to kiss you. Even now, your teeth still hurt from his knocking into them. You reached up and felt the skin of your lip and moved to touch your front two teeth, just to make sure he hadn’t chipped them. They were still whole and you’d gotten away relatively unscathed.

Your throat clenched tightly and you felt your chin quivering before tears ever touched your eyes. A sob pulled the air from your lungs and you gasped for more, the sight of Goeff through the window blurring rapidly. You backed away from the door and put your hands over your face, feeling unbelievably stupid for crying.

Nothing had happened; you managed to get away. You were safe.

But it was as if all the adrenaline inside you had ran out abruptly and left you feeling void of everything. Tears made rivers down your cheeks and you slid down the wall until you sat on the dusty floor, trembling from head to toe.

You kept your crying as quiet as possible and did most of it into the bend of your elbow so your coat could muffle the sounds. Your chest ached from sucking in air, your shoulders and back were sore from the struggle against Todd and as you stared down the steps leading to the third floor, you felt nothing but the fires of fury licking through you.

Even if you turned him into the police, what could they do?

There was no proof except your busted lip. All they would have to do is come down to the psych ward and speak to your supervisor, investigate your relationship with Todd and of course, it would
come to light that you’d grown a bit too close to Arthur Fleck over the last several weeks. It would be the final straw and you’d be fired.

You would be fired and Todd would continue on with his life, thinking you’d gotten what you deserved.

From the hallway of the fourth floor, you heard the stool legs slide against the tile and you glanced up to the window. Slowly, you inched up until you could see Geoff disappear into the supply closet for the newspaper he kept on one of the shelves. He tucked it beneath his arm and crossed the hall, disappearing from your view. A second later, you could hear the door to the bathroom shut and you gripped the door handle.

At your feet, you stepped on a small, wooden wedge used to keep the doors propped open when transporting patients between floors. Without a second thought about it, you snatched it up and slipped into the hallway to creep down to the bathroom. You could hear the faint jiggle of keys and the shake of the newspaper and you stared down at the space beneath the door.

You slid the wedge into it sideways so he couldn’t see and pushed it with the toe of your shoe until it was good and stuck. It wouldn’t be hard for him to throw a shoulder into the door and break free, but it would buy you some time. Besides, he didn’t like to overexert himself. He would probably sit there and radio to the other guards to come let him out before using any physical labor.

Spinning on your heel, you shook the hair from your face and made your way to that last door at the end of the hallway. Through the splintered glass, you could see faint tendrils of smoke rising up from the bed and you lifted up onto your tiptoes to see Arthur lying back, staring up at the ceiling.

He noticed you at the door and smiled until his eyes fell on your lip and the lack of a smile in return. He stood up slowly and made his way to you, taking another drag of his cigarette before blowing it away from his face.

“What happened?”

You didn’t even know how to answer him. On one hand, what could he even do about it? This was your problem, your fight. He was stuck behind two inches of steel and concrete walls. The familiar burn of tears returned and you blinked it away, looking away from him.

“I’m not your pawn, Arthur.”
His eyebrows lifted but he made no reaction other than that. Another drag and another breath of smoke, this time clouding the window. “I never said you were.”

“If you think I’m going to fall in love with you and break you free so you can run to your little fans protesting on the street, you’re wrong.”

He nodded and glanced over his shoulder to the window. “Is that what all that noise is about?” When he turned back to face you, the look in his eyes made you swallow tightly and you bit down on the corner of your lips, focusing on the sharp sting of pain to remind you not to lose your head. He spoke again, the sound of his voice dark and making you shiver. “Who hurt you?”

“It doesn’t matter. You can’t do anything about it.”

“You sure about that?” He blew another lungful of smoke to the ceiling and leaned an arm against the door, ducking his head to look up at you. “People have underestimated me before and look where they are now.”

“Is that your solution to everything? Kill anyone who hurts you?”

“Yes,” he answered simply with a shrug to match his nonchalance. The corner of his lips twisted into a smile that drew all the air from your lungs and left you gasping for more. “And to kill anyone who hurts you as well.”

Hearing him say that shouldn’t have made you swoon. It shouldn’t have touched at your heart and made you weak in the knees. It should have frightened and disgusted you but it didn’t. Not in the slightest. Maybe you were more fucked up than you had previously thought.

“Are you manipulating me?”

“Is that what you think I’m doing?”

Ugh! What an annoying non-answer. You crossed your arms over your chest and narrowed your eyes on him. It was such a struggle keeping a straight face when he was still smiling at you, still making you want to melt into his arms. Oh yes, he was manipulating you.
“If by manipulating, you mean making you fall for me, then yes. That’s exactly what I’ve been trying to do. But not for the reasons you think.” At the center of the door, he presented his pack of cigarettes for you and a lighter. There was one left and he was offering it to you. Rolling your eyes, you plucked it from the pack and made a mental note to buy him some more. You lit it and took a drag, thankful for the burn. “I have no reason to think you’ll break me out of here. I just want to enjoy the time we have.”

The time you have…

It was running out. His trial was next week and while it would more than likely take weeks to complete, it was only the beginning of the end for you. Either he would be taken away from you to serve life in some other prison, or he would be executed.

You noticed Arthur holding his hand out through the opening and you slipped yours against his palm, the cold of his fingers making your eyes close. Though his voice was muffled from the door between you, his words sank into your soul. “I just want to make you laugh.”

The corner of your lips curled and despite the sharp sting to the cut on your lip, you held it in place and opened your eyes to see him grin. With another drag, you passed the cigarette to him, watching him lift it to his lips. “Tell me a joke then. And make it good.”

He nodded and laughed softly to himself before scratching his chin in thought. “What do you call a man with no arms, no legs and is boiling in a pot?”

“What?”

“Stu.”

It felt so good to laugh, as if it filled you from the inside and pushed out all the sadness and misery. You watched him take another drag and adored the look of pride on his face from making you laugh. That look was enough to make anyone feel crazy and you never wanted someone more than you wanted him. Before you could think about doing anything sensible like not pulling the key from your pocket, you were already pushing it into the lock of his door.

Arthur stepped back to let you and he pulled you inside with a hand circling around your wrist. His lips were against yours, blowing the smoke from his nose while he backed you into the wall just
inside his room. The force made you gasp from the tender spots on your body from earlier, but he quickly made you forget all about them.

He held his hand against the wall, careful not to let the cigarette touch you and used his other to push your jacket down your shoulders. It fell to the floor and you opened your mouth, inviting him to taste you. His tongue was slick and warm against yours and the aftertaste of cigarettes mingled with the sharp blood that lingered from your lip.

In the back of your mind, you knew you didn’t have much time, but you were going to get as much of him as you could. Between your bodies, your hands trembled as you pulled the button of your jeans apart. He occupied himself with dipping a hand beneath your shirt and finding your breast with a quick grope of his palm. It drew a deep groan from your throat and just as you managed to push your pants down to your thighs, Arthur broke the kiss.

“I take it we don’t have much time?”

“Just fuck me,” you whispered, glancing down to the smear of blood across his bottom lip. He turned you until you were facing the wall and pulled your hips against him so that your back was arched. The cool air met your ass as he shoved your panties down to where your jeans were. He brought the cigarette back to his mouth and you heard him drag in a deep breath before a cloud of smoke swirled around you.

He smoothed a hand down your hip, leaning back to admire you and you bit your lip with a whimper. His middle finger slid along your center and he dipped it into your opening, sighing contentedly at how wet you were. Your lips parted and eyes shuttered as you felt him pull himself free from his pajama pants. A moment later, he was pushing into you, drawing a gasp that quickly turned into a moan.

It felt so good, better than anything you ever felt before and your entire body quivered as he slowly pulled back and entered you again. He reached up and brushed the hair from your face, gathering it into his fist, though he wasn’t rough with you. He fell into a slow, steady rhythm, thrusting in and out of you. It felt so dirty, letting him fuck you like this. So dirty yet so good and you reached between your legs with one hand.

Before you could find your clit, he let go of your hair and snatched you by the wrist, twisting it behind your back. He was so careful not to truly hurt you that you couldn’t even complain. He let out a laugh, deep and low that seemed to vibrate through you.

“I’m not ready for you to come yet,” he purred, leaving you practically melting into the sound of
his voice. This wasn’t Arthur fucking you. This was Joker and you closed your eyes, thinking of the painted face you had seen in your head so often the past few weeks. He took another drag of his cigarette and tossed it to the floor in the corner of his room.

As he tilted his head back and blew the smoke out above him, he used his grip on your arm to pull you away from the wall until you felt his chest press into your back. He reached around your hip and found what you’d been reaching for earlier.

He swirled the tip of his middle finger around your clit and your entire body trembled. He matched the rhythm of his cock and made a full circle with his finger with each thrust into you, coiling the pressure deep within you. You clenched your thighs and pushed your ass against his hips each time he slammed into you. The sounds he was making, the grunts and sighs, it was enough to make you come on its own.

Releasing your arm, he reached around and took you by the throat, spreading his fingers up your jaw and around to your mouth, slipping his first two fingers between your lips. There was nothing you could do at that point. Even if he commanded you not to come, you couldn’t stop it.

He hissed at the feel of you pulsing around him and your cries were muffled by the fingers in your mouth. You panted around them and reached forward to grip the wall, grinding your hips against him to prolong the waves of your orgasm. He slammed into you harder and harder, jarring your body against the wall, and you found yourself laughing in the fading glow of your orgasm.

It wasn’t long before Joker was coming inside you, slowing his thrusts to savor the feel and he groaned deep with each one. You smiled and wished you could listen to the sound of it forever, wished this moment could stretch on for hours. When he pulled out of you, a whimper of protest left your throat and he remedied your sadness with a kiss to your shoulders.

He reached down at slipped your panties back in place around your hips and you giggled, dipping down to pull your pants up as well. You turned in his arms and stared at him, reaching up to brush the length of his hair from his face. He did the same to you as well and dragged his thumb over the corner of your lip, right over the cut.

You could feel the slick moisture of blood spread up to your cheek and you scowled playfully. “Are you drawing me a smile?”

He answered by dipping his head to kiss you and you sighed happily. There was no help for you now. With one quick fuck, you’d sealed your fate and smiled while doing it. How could you honestly expect to spend the rest of your life apart from him? There wasn’t anything in the world
that would stop you from being with him. Not steel doors, not annoying, horrible coworkers, and
certainly not an entire prison system.

When he broke your kiss, you looked up at him and searched his eyes. They were so beautiful; dark
and green and so alive.

“I will, though,” you said, making his brows pinch together. “I’ll break you out of here. No matter
what they say at your trial.”

Slowly, his lips curled into a smile and he lowered his head back down to kiss you once more. It
may have been a stupid decision, but you didn’t care anymore. There was nothing left to lose
except Arthur and that wasn’t an option. You’d break him free, or you would die trying.

From beyond his room, the toilet flushed and you dropped your head against the wall with a roll of
your eyes. He took the opportunity to nuzzle your neck and kiss along the faded marks he had left
on you last time. The feel of his teeth nipping at your skin made you bite your lip and you playfully
pushed him away.

“You’re making it hard for me not to take you away from here right now, you know?”

“I know,” he murmured against your throat. “But I don’t think I should miss making a guest
appearance before a judge and jury of my peers.”

“If you think that’s best, then I need to leave because you’re turning me on all over again,” you
said, pulling away from him to slide along the wall to his door, loving the way he stared after you,
as if he were trying to keep himself from ravaging you all over again. You closed his door shut as
quietly as you could manage. The key twisted back in the lock and you pulled it free, eyes sliding
up to meet his in the window. “I have a gift for you.”

“Another one? Are you trying to spoil me?”

“Yes.” It was the truth. “If you’re a good boy, I’ll bring it tomorrow.”

The water at the sink was running and you knew your time to get out of here undetected was
running out. With a glance back at the bathroom door, you sighed and faced Arthur once more.
You stood on your tiptoes and pressed a kiss to the broken glass, leaving a faint smear of blood and
as he gave you a smile, you turned and hurried back to the door to the stairwell.

Before it shut completely behind you, the sound of confused grunting and the rattling of a door handle from the bathroom made you tilt your head back with a laugh. Poor Geoff. You almost felt sorry for him. Almost.

The trip down the stairs was much different than the one you made going up. It was crazy how just one visit with Arthur had lifted your spirits and left you feeling as if you were walking on air. The dampness in your panties would be an all night reminder of what he had done to you and you landed on the ground floor with a bounce in your step.

While a part of you, the still rational, still sane part, was panicking at the ideas you had about breaking Arthur free from this place, you quickly pushed the voice down and ignored it. You didn’t want to be rational anymore. You wanted everyone who had tried to ruin your life to pay, wanted to burn this place to the ground, and most of all, you wanted to be with the one man who could make you laugh. And the only way to do that was to start planning as soon as possible.

You just hoped that from now and the trial, you could avoid Todd, Margaret and anyone else who would stop you.
Brand New Person

Chapter Summary

Your time with Arthur has made you feel like a whole new person...too bad people are hell bent on ruining it for you.

Chapter Notes

This is another chapter that I'm cutting up. The next one is going to be pretty intense. I'm so fucking excited to write it though. I'll try to have it up tomorrow to make up for this one being so short!

By nine-forty the following morning, you were taking your last smoke break behind the hospital. There was a short, concrete dock where supplies were dropped off every few days and when a delivery wasn't being made, you liked to spend a few quiet minutes with your feet dangling off the side of the wall. You were tired and ready to go home, take a shower, and relive all of the amazing things you’d experienced with Arthur.

You weren’t sure how you had managed to make it through the entire night after your visit with Arthur. It took amazing restraint to keep you from slipping into his room again for another quick fuck. Then again, you didn't want anymore quick fucks. You were craving something more.

Taking a drag from your cigarette, you blew it out with a smile. Every time you thought back to your night though, you couldn't quite believe it had happened. You could barely believe it had felt so good, better than all the times you'd imagined it.

It left you feeling strange, but in a good way. And though your thoughts were still cloudy with worry and indecision about the upcoming week, you felt like a brand new person. Was it normal to feel like this for someone? You thought you had been in love with your high school boyfriend and once more two years ago, but they had never felt this...intense.

Sure, time had passed and eroded the memory of how you felt for them, but you’d never felt this level of obsession. You knew it was unhealthy, that it would more than likely lead to unbearable heartache, but there was no stopping it now.
Every thought you had in your head, even the ones dripping with anxiety, centered around Arthur Fleck. It was like you were still caught in the throes of passion, where all sanity is fuzzy and nothing else matters but the person right in front of you. And god, you never wanted the fog to clear.

From behind you, where the hospital opened back up into the kitchen and store rooms, a person called your name and you twisted around to see a man you’d never seen before. He was wearing a suit and a long coat. In one hand, he carried a briefcase and the other was scratching at his forehead.

“Yes?” You asked, standing on the concrete dock before flicking your cigarette into the alley. Immediately, you were apprehensive about this guy. He looked too well dressed to work at the hospital, though he could have very well been someone in the higher up positions in Human Resources.

“I’m Harris Wright, Mr. Fleck’s public defender.” His words surprised you and you blinked a few times as it processed in your still clouded mind. He looked a bit weary, as if he didn’t quite know what to think of you, and you wondered what he had heard of you. You watched him pull a white, square cloth from his pocket and dab it across his brow. “Your supervisor told me I could probably find you out here and I was wondering if I could borrow a minute of your time?”

You nodded as he stepped out on the dock, glancing around the alley behind the enormous hospital building. There was a slight pale tinge to his face, as if he was either unbelievably nervous, or smelling something foul that made him nauseous. And judging by the dumpsters behind you filled with cafeteria waste and other disgusting things, you banked on it being the latter that was making him look queasy.

“Sure,” you said in a breath, crossing your arms over your chest. “What can I do for you?”

“As I’m sure you’re aware, Mr. Fleck’s trial is next week and I’m a bit desperate to find someone who can be a witness to his character. We had a meeting this morning and after several attempts to find anyone, he mentioned you.” That put a smile on your face and you ducked your head with a nod.

“I could do that. Would I need to take the stand or something?”

“No, nothing like that just yet. I just need to ask you some questions about him, about your
interactions with him and what you, as someone impartial to both sides, think of his current state of mind.” Impartial to both sides? You decided not to correct him that you were quite partial to one side in particular and you nodded once more.

“Of course. I’d be happy to help.”

Mr. Wright let out a sigh of relief and gestured around the area. “Is there a place we could go to discuss this? It would be easier for me to write your responses down.”

“Yes, we can go to the cafeteria. They’re in between meals so it’ll be relatively empty.” He nodded and you led him back through the storage area and into the kitchen. Once you were lowering yourself into one of the stiff, uncomfortable plastic chairs in the dining area, he breathed a sigh and sat down across from you.

It was spaghetti and meatball day, which never failed to make you wrinkle your nose at the smell, but it must have been far better than the trash outside. You crossed your legs beneath the table and waited patiently while Arthur’s lawyer clicked open his briefcase and pulled out a yellow notepad with notes scribbled along the top few pages.

You couldn’t help taking a peek inside at the contents of the case, seeing notes and details about the entire case. There were newspaper clippings and what looked like a transcript with the date of the Murray Franklin Show incident written in the top corner. Before you could take a better look, he shut the briefcase and you blinked your gaze back up to meet his.

“Alright, for starters, just give me a brief account of how you and Mr. Fleck know one another.” He clicked his pen and looked up at you, waiting for your response.

You froze, not sure how much you should tell him. He was his lawyer, so surely there were things that had to be known, but he was appointed by the state. The same state that wanted to put Arthur to death for the things he had done. Mr. Wright noticed your hesitation and smiled, though there was no warmth or reassurance behind it.

“Don’t be nervous. Anything that might be incriminating will be kept confidential. I’m only looking for things that can help Mr. Fleck’s case.”

You nodded and pushed your hands between your thighs and the chair beneath you. “Okay. I met him about four weeks ago on my med rounds, and basically, I hand his medicine to the orderly
who makes sure he takes it.” Mr. Wright nodded and began writing things down on the notepad. “Arthur’s always pleasant to be around. He’s polite, he tells jokes, and is very compliant.”

"Compliant, as in he takes his medication regularly?"

You swallowed but forced yourself to nod. "Yes."

"And has he ever showed any remorse for his actions?"

Was it against the law to lie to a lawyer? You technically weren't under oath, but if you took the stand and were asked this again...you'd be forced to tell the truth. Or, morally forced. They would never know if you were lying or not, though you weren't sure what Arthur would want you to say.

Truthfully, he wouldn't care either way what the court thought. It was you who wanted to convince them he wasn't fit for the death penalty. Thinking about Arthur letting whatever happen to him made you sick to your stomach. He may not care, but you certainly did.

"Yes," you answered as Mr. Wright looked up during your hesitation. "He has. It doesn't come up much. We try not to upset the patients so we avoid talking about things like that, but yes, I think he is remorseful." The lie left a bad taste in your mouth.

"And if you had to describe Mr. Fleck's mental state, from the time you became acquainted with him until now, would you say he is mostly lucid, or are there times when he seems...checked out?"

He had been checked out since the Murray Franklin incident. He was indifferent to everything, in his own world that he had invited you to join. But, did that make him lucid or not? Which would be the answer to help him?

"He has good days and bad. Which is to be expected, I think."

Mr. Wright didn't respond as he scribbled your responses onto his notepad. He made several more notes and you leaned forward, trying to read his chicken scratch upside down. It was nearly impossible and you gave up, falling back against your chair.
"Would it be possible for me to attend the trial? I'm not sure if it's open to the public or not. I was just curious."

With a nod, he clicked his pen and pulled his briefcase toward him. "It will be public, but they're restricting the amount of people who will be allowed in to view it. I could put you on a list and you'll have a reserved seat in the gallery."

"Oh. Thank you. I would appreciate that." You watched him pack the rest of his things back into the briefcase and just as he stood up, you couldn't help asking one more question. "What are his chances?"

Mr. Wright glanced at you and plucked his briefcase from the table. "Of getting free? Less than one percent. Of getting life in solitary confinement? Highly likely. Thank you for your time. I'll put your name down on the list."

You sat back and stared at him making his way through the tables of the dining area. He slipped out the door and you sighed. It hurt to hear the chance that Arthur would be free was slim to none. Not like you expected anything less.

But stranger things had happened and you would much rather him to he found too mentally ill to serve time at all than to break him free. It didn't seem like that was going to happen. Which meant it was up to you.

At the doors to the cafeteria, a familiar figure stepped into the room and cut through your thoughts like a knife. You stood from your chair and backed away at the sight of Todd. He wasn't wearing his usual white uniform and your eyes fell to the fabric of his t-shirt where you had pulled so hard, it hung from his shoulders a bit lopsided.

Not even halfway across the cafeteria, he held his hands up in a surrendering gesture and you glanced behind you to the kitchen. The workers were busy preparing the lunch menu and talking to one another but you felt safer with them at least there to hear you scream.

When he stepped up to the table where the lawyer had just been sitting, you narrowed your eyes into a glare. "What are you doing here, Todd?"

He scoffed and put his hands on the back of the chair. "I work here."
"Unfortunately."

He sighed and looked at you. Just having his eyes on you made you want to run and hide from him. He didn't deserve to look at you after what he'd done. "Don't be like that, Cricket. I just want to talk."

"Now you want to talk. Well, what about last night when all you wanted to do was pin me against a dumpster and try to rape me?"

He brought his hands to his face and scrubbed, bringing them down into a helpless shrug. "I fucked up, okay? I had been drinking and thought if I could just show you what I could give you, you'd change your mind."

Bullshit.

He hadn't been drinking. Some details may have been fuzzy, but the smell of his breath had stuck with you and even now, hours later, it disgusted you. Clenching your jaw, you stared at him and shook your head. "I'm not going to forgive you for what you did."

"I get that. But I need to know you aren't going to tell anyone."

"That depends on whether or not you're going to tell anyone what I said to you." You noticed the tension in his hands immediately, his knuckles turning white as he gripped the back of the chair tightly. Apparently, he was still a bit upset about knowing he could never compare to Arthur.

After a moment, Todd took a deep breath and let it out his nose, glancing away from you. "Fine. That doesn't mean I approve of anything you do. I think you're sick."

"Yet, you still wanted to fuck me against a dumpster, right?" You really needed to learn to shut your mouth. Todd slammed the chair into the table and you jumped back, wishing you could be as unflinching as Arthur. He spread his hand over his mouth and looked back at you.

"Why?"
"Why what?" You snapped, curling your lip into a snarl that you hoped properly reflected how you felt the longer you stared at him.

"Why him? Why someone like him? I don't get it. At all."

"You're asking me to explain my feelings after calling me sick?"

"Why not me?"

You rolled your eyes and headed toward the doors. This conversation was turning your stomach and the more you stood there, forced to have it, the more you wanted to throw up.

"Cricket," he called after you and you heard him jog up behind you. It made fear crawl down your spine and you spun on your heel, pointing a finger at him.

"Don't. You don't get to be anywhere near me anymore."

Todd's face twisted into an angry scowl and he took a slow step closer to you. "I'm sorry, I don't get to? You can't tell me where I can and can't go and honestly, how are you going to stop me? Gonna run to Margaret and tell on me? Do it and we'll see how fast they fire your ass."

"Fuck you." You whirled away from him again and crossed out of the dining room into the hallway that ran along the back portion of the first floor ward. It was mainly used by employees or staff to avoid the main hallways and you definitely wanted to avoid bumping into patients at the moment.

Unfortunately, Todd didn't get the hint. He closed the distance between you and put a hand on your shoulder, turning you to face him. You struck before you could stop yourself and as satisfying as the echo of the slap across his jaw was, you immediately regretted provoking him.

He took several breaths through his nose and looked down at you. "I came here apologize, yet you act like this? Don't push me, Cricket."

"Apologize?" You scoffed. "I haven't heard a single apology out of your mouth since you got here.
Leave me alone, Todd. Your threats don't scare me.” Once again, you spun on your heel and hurried through the double doors leading into the hallway. Two orderlies were standing at the other end talking to one another and you felt safer with them there.

They didn't speak to you as you passed, which you were thankful for, but they did stare at you. Obviously they'd heard the rumors. You circled the labyrinth halls until you found your way back into the employee lounge. During the day, it was inhabited with more people and you ducked your head to avoid their stares. You turned to the wall just inside the door and checked the schedule.

Your name was written beside the date and time slot of eleven PM. Right below it, was Todd's name. You'd both be working third shift and you couldn't help but wonder if he had requested that. The thought made your stomach pinch and you reached for your time card to clock out. Apparently avoiding him was going to be much harder than you thought. You were going to have to rethink your plans, figure this out.

Bringing Arthur's gift would be tricky with Todd here, breathing down your neck and looking for you to mess up. But he didn't know about the handy key you've been in possession of, or the fact that after testing it in the late hours of the previous night, you discovered that it opened the medicine store room.

And what had Arthur said to you a week or so ago? Surely there were plenty of syringes and sedatives in this place...enough to bring down a few men, that was for sure.

As you hurried out the front doors, not even bothering to change back into your regular clothes, for the first time in a long time, you didn't find yourself smiling. The conversation with Todd had put a sour taste in your mouth and had tainted the memories of your night with Arthur.

You were going to need a plan for tonight. One way or another, you were going to see Arthur. You were going to give him the gift you had stolen for him, you were going to spend the night with him, and if anyone tried to stop you, they were going to find out quickly just what you were capable of.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading!
Dark In My Imagination

Chapter Summary

Time to celebrate with some wine, poor decisions, and misery.

Chapter Notes

Okay, Jeez, I rewrote this chapter because it was a bit too choppy and it grew to ten pages before I even got to the intense parts. I should have tacked this part onto the last, but it'll be alright. Two teasing chapters in a row, so now I gotta make the next one REALLY good!

Also, want to make note of a couple of trigger warnings for this chapter. Mentions of suicide/suicidal thoughts. I don't think it's too intense, but I just thought I would give a warning in case. Please read at your own risk. This chapter is a bit darker than the others and kind of turning point for dear reader and her obsession.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On the way home from work, you got off the bus a stop early to run in the usual bodega you stopped to get groceries. In the middle of the morning, it was relatively empty and the only person in the shop was the woman standing behind the counter. She didn't offer you much in the way of customer service, but you didn't really feel like pretending to be friendly anyway.

You made a beeline for the freezer doors at the back of the space and grabbed two bottles of the cheapest wine they had to offer. With them sitting on the crook of your arm, pressed against your chest, you found the small aisle with medications and plucked a pack of ibuprofen from the shelf. The bruises along your back and stiffness in your muscles from being pinned against a dumpster and brick wall were beginning to bother you.

As you looked around the microwave meals, trying to find something to give you enough energy to make it through the next day, the women's husband stepped up to the register. He was much friendlier and today was no exception. "Good day, ma'am!" He called to you with a cheery wave.

You gave him a nod in return and grabbed a frozen box of meatloaf and mashed potatoes before balancing it between the wine and your chin. You dumped it all on the counter in front of the store
owner and made sure to be careful with the bottles. He looked at your items with a smile and winked. "Looks like you've got a fun night planned!"

"Yeah," you said, putting a hand on the neck of one of the bottles. "I'm getting fired tomorrow so I'm celebrating. Oh, can I get two packs of Reds, please?"

The woman plucked two packs of cigarettes from the wall behind her and punched the prices into the register. You could see that your statement had confused the guy and he blinked from you down to the items he slowly placed in a paper bag. With a look of mischievous amusement, you scooped the bag into your arms and stopped just outside the store to pop four pills into your mouth. You twisted the cap off of one of the bottles and washed the ibuprofen down with a gulp.

With a cigarette lit and between your lips, you headed down the three blocks to your apartment building. There was a good chance that along with being fired, you'd be arrested. And because of that chance, you knew you couldn't wait any longer. There was no way you were going to miss Arthur's trial because you were stuck in jail.

You'd never been arrested before. Came close a few times but had been able to flirt your way down into a ticket or warning. There was no way to flirt out of what you had up your sleeves for tonight.

The courtyard outside your apartment building had returned to normal despite the shooting that had happened right in front of the gate. Everyone either forgot about it, or was too busy living their lives to care anymore, and as soon as the blood had been properly washed away, life moved on. The resident homeless woman had moved back into the courtyard and you gave her a nod as you passed her.

You puffed on the cigarette the entire journey up to the fifth floor and while it was frowned upon to smoke in the hallways, you really couldn't give two shits. This place wouldn't be your home for much longer anyway.

That was a frightening thought. Where were you actually going to go once Arthur was free? There would be a manhunt unlike any this country had ever seen before. You had no connections aside from an aunt in Texas who was as poor as you were. She may have had her savings, but you couldn't exactly ask her to drain that to support you and your runaway boyfriend.

The thought of Arthur as your boyfriend set your cheeks aflame and you bit your lip hard enough to taste the dried blood at the corner. Was he your boyfriend? Did he even want to be? Sure he was into you now. But once he was out and free, would he feel the same?
You hoped he would.

The doors opened to your floor and you stepped off the elevator, heading to your front door. It was so nice walking into an apartment completely void of whiny roommates or television shows you didn't care to watch. Because Janey paid most of the bills, she always got dibs on the living room. And now that she was gone, your paintings had taken up the space.

You were up to four now and as you opened the door, you caught a glimpse of them sitting against the wall in front of the window. They brought a smile to your face and you wished you could show them to Arthur. You knew he would appreciate the Joker one the most and it had grown to become your favorite as well. But it would be impossible to bring them along...wherever you were going.

Possibly to jail.

You stubbed the cigarette out in the small bit of water lingering in the kitchen sink and tossed the frozen dinner into the nearly bare freezer. You didn't bother grabbing a glass for your wine. Drinking right from the bottle was fine with you.

The tension in your shoulders crawled up the back of your head and you reached back to massage at the muscles. Standing still was a bad idea. Not just because your body ached more, but because your mind settled on all the things that could go wrong with your horribly stupid plan.

What was the point?

So much trouble to go through just to spend one night with Arthur. There would plenty of time to spend with him once he was officially free, but you wanted to be selfish. And why shouldn't you? Everyone else took what they wanted, or at least tried to. They didn't care how it affected you, how much it would hurt you. So why should you care how much it might hurt them?

The only person you didn't want to hurt was your aunt and since she hardly ever watched the news, you doubted she would hear about your daring feat until much later. Hopefully, after you contacted her and assured her that you weren't, in fact, insane. Though you weren't doing a good job convincing yourself of that at the moment…

You snatched the bottle from the counter and turned it up, drinking several gulps. The alcohol instantly warmed your insides and you strolled into your living room, reaching down to switch on
the television as you did. Like every day for the past two weeks, the news midday news was on and you sat on your knees in front of your art, keeping one ear on the headlines.

Construction making traffic come to a standstill, election news, and weather. Nothing at all interesting. You sighed and took another swig of the bitter wine. Your brushes and paints sat neatly in the pile you had left them in yesterday, waiting for you to pick them back up and continue on, but you didn't see the point anymore.

They would soon be pieces of evidence and possibly displayed on the news when the country would soak up any information about the lunatic girl who broke Joker from his cell. Just the thought of that made you want to destroy them. You reached out to feel along the dried bumps and ridges of the paint on Joker's face, across the blue triangles beneath his eyes and down to the smears of red on his lips.

What a tragedy it would be to destroy something this beautiful.

"In other news, reports have come in informing us that a protestor outside Gotham City Hall who was shot last night by police has died this morning. The name of the victim has not yet been released but we do know that they were shot by mistake. The Gotham City Police Commissioner has confirmed that the officer responsible is now on suspension with pay." You lifted your eyebrows at the television and hummed to yourself.

This wasn't going to sit well with the protestors at all. It didn't seem quite fair that someone had died and the one responsible got a paid vacation. Then again, was it fair that five people died and you were planning to free Arthur?

You stood up from the floor and rubbed at the spot on your shoulder that had gone stiff. You had sat still for too long and let your muscles tense and mind wander. Equipped with the bottle of wine you'd already consumed half of, you made your way into the bathroom and stripped off your clothes. The hot water filled the tub and mist steamed around you. Before it could fog the mirror, you stood at the sink and stared at yourself.

Everything looked the same. Your hair hadn't changed much in the year since you had last cut it, your eyes were the same color and lined with shadows beneath them. Nothing was different, yet you felt like a completely different person than you had been a month ago. How had things changed so quickly?

Were you just a victim of the circumstances that had befallen to you? Or was it something else?
You dropped your head until your chin touched your chest and you sighed, wishing that the next few weeks were already over and whatever would happen had already passed. If you were going to end up in prison for the things you had planned, you’d much rather not have to wait it out.

You just wanted to be with Arthur. Even if it was for a single night, or two weeks, or the rest of your lives. However much time you had together, you planned to cherish it.

Snatching the neck of the bottle, you turned and stepped into the tub. You sank down as low as you could go and held the wine out of the tub as you dipped beneath the surface of the water. The roar of the faucet still spilling into the tub was deafening through the water filling your ears and you focused on it, needing it to drown out the thoughts in your head.

There you stayed, holding your breath tight in your lungs and the water rising up to the edge of the tub and you squeezed your eyes shut tight. Your chest ached for a breath and the sound of the faucet was drowned out by the pounding of your heart but still, you stayed beneath the water. Just when you thought you couldn’t take it anymore, you opened your eyes and stared up through the ripples and light reflecting off the surface.

At that moment, you didn’t have to do anything. You could have stayed where you were, suspended in time and avoided everything. There was no future, no pain, no life-altering decisions to be made. It was just you, and the water, and death.

You let go of the bottle of wine and held onto the edge of the tub, keeping yourself under. It was a struggle, but it was as if your body and mind were disconnected from one another. You knew you needed to breathe, but you couldn’t sit up, didn’t want to. Fighting the need, you shut your eyes again and let out the last bit of air from your lungs. The bubbles tickled your nose as they floated up above you.

In the dark behind your eyelids, memories flashed before you and while your childhood had been a struggle through foster homes and nightmares, you found yourself wishing to be a child once more. You wanted someone to make your decisions for you, wanted to let go of the control and pain and just not think.

Through the darkness, blinks of a painted face shown through and you ground your teeth together. Your entire body felt fuzzy and numb and you pressed your heels against the tile above the tub to keep yourself beneath the water. Blue painted eyes, red blood smeared across a mouth, a smile that almost hurt to look directly at. It all pulsed around your thoughts until it leveled out and you could see only one face. Joker.
You sat up suddenly. As soon as your face cut through the water, you were gasping for air and sucking in a bit of water as well. It burned your lungs and you flung yourself over the edge of the tub, coughing and sputtering. The water was starting to drip over the edge and puddle across the black and white tile floor but all you could do was stare down at the spilled bottle of wine doing the same.

For several minutes, you stayed in that position, cheek pressed to the edge of the tub and eyes closed as you gulped in breath after breath. You pulled a hand to your face and sobbed into your palm as the water continued to flow from the faucet and spill over the edge of the tub. And behind your eyes, all you could see was his face, smiling down at you, telling you he would make it all go away. He was all you needed.

Chapter End Notes

And the obsession deepens.
You weren’t in a rush to get to work tonight. Not like you usually were, anyway. You had taken your time getting ready, putting on makeup for the first time in months. Your eyes were lined with black and you found a stick of red lipstick that Janey had left behind in the bathroom cabinet. Red wasn’t much of your color, but you knew he’d like it.

Staring at your reflection, you finished applying the color and popped your lips a few times to even it out. You wondered what it would look like after a few of his kisses and smiled at yourself in the mirror. It was strange, how peaceful you felt after having such a rough morning. Maybe you’d come to terms with what you were facing.

You weren’t too sure what had happened, but you were feeling much better about things. All it took was a little oxygen deprivation, a little near-death experience, and you were back to normal. Tossing the lipstick onto your dresser, you crossed the room to your bed and stared down at the gifts you had laid out for Arthur.

The box of makeup sat on the bottom, with the cigarettes and the gun you’d bought Janey that she so carelessly left behind. It was armed. You’d managed to figure out how to load the bullets into the round chamber without accidentally setting it off and killing yourself. It felt strange holding a gun so capable of ending someone’s life. Strange, yet there was an amount of power that it brought to your hands.

You picked it up and slipped it into the paper bag you’d bought it in and dumped the other items in
as well. Such different things, none matching the other, yet all a perfect representation of Arthur.

You smiled and wondered when you were going to stop referring to him as that. It may not have been what he thought of himself anymore, but you liked the name. As if it were yours to call him and no one else’s.

They called him freak, psychotic, murder, Joker. But to you, he was Arthur. He was the man who had made you smile and genuinely laugh. He was the man who had stolen your kisses that morning after knocking out Todd. He was yours. Just like the paintings of him.

You gathered your things and shoved the gift into a bag with a strap you ducked beneath. It sat on your hip and you kept one hand against it as you pulled the front door shut behind you. Walking down these halls, knowing the next time you saw them, you were going to be a completely different person, made you want to laugh.

While at first, it bothered you how much your life had changed since that night you first met Arthur, you had since come to terms with it. Besides, so many things had to fall into place for any of this to happen. Your life led you to Gotham, led you to a job at the only place you could find that offered benefits, and you just happen to be on the shift after a coworker quit, leaving his duties to you. It was as if the universe had brought you to Arthur, had urged you to know him, to like him and fall for him. The universe wanted this to happen.

And how could a person ever deny the universe what it wanted?

Half an hour later, you stepped off the bus around the block from your side of the hospital and made your way toward the emergency room entrance. The small gathering of protestors was still there but had kept themselves across the street and were camping up for the night. Their signs were propped against the building and they gathered together to talk and discuss strategies.

You smiled at them as you passed and wondered what they would think about what you had planned up your sleeve. You doubted they would support you doing something so hilariously stupid. Whatever. They would understand if they had spent time around him as you had.

As usual, the smell of the hospital hit you as you strolled in and you were thankful for the quiet and calm of the psych ward. The main lobby was empty and you glanced at Margaret’s door, wondering if there were any other things to find sitting on her desk. Another complaint against you? More accusations from other coworkers?
Your steps had a slight bounce to them and you rounded the corner into the hallway, ducking into the lounge where your locker waited. Unfortunately, someone else was standing right next to it, blocking your way.

Todd faced the wall of lockers and busied himself with stuffing his jacket into his space. He slammed the door and turned, catching sight of you with an annoyed sigh. You half expected him to say something to you, but he kept his jaw clenched and stayed silent.

“Are you on rounds tonight?” You asked, surprising him. He lifted his head to you and nodded. *Good*. “I’ll be doing laundry tonight.”

“That your way of telling me to steer clear?”

You knelt down to open your locker but turned to smile up at him from over your shoulder. “I can’t tell you what to do, Todd. Isn’t that what you said? How am I going to stop you?”

He rolled his eyes and turned to leave the room. You stared after him and laughed softly to yourself. It was stupid to rile him up before he went on his rounds, but it was too fun to pass up. He just made it so easy. With him gone, you pulled the paper bag out of the other and stood to your feet, kicking the locker shut behind you. You pushed your hand into your pocket and pulled out the master key.

With it sitting in your palm, you left the lounge and made your way down the hall to where the medical supply room was; locked and empty for the night. The administration put far too much trust in its workers. Even with only a few master keys circling around the building, it had been too easy to pull this off. All you needed was time and some patience.

Glancing around to make sure no one was around to see what you were doing, you twisted the key into the lock and slipped inside the metal gate. It shut behind you with a soft rattle of the hinges and you turned toward the room. There were shelves on each wall with one long shelf running down the middle of the room and every available space was occupied with bottles of pills.

You leaned close to the shelves and read the labels despite the only light coming into the room was from the hallway. It didn’t offer much but you pressed your face close to the vials. You weren’t a pharmacist and didn’t know much about sedatives, but luckily, the bitch that worked here labeled everything for you. There were papers hanging from the shelves with dosage recommendations and weight limits per dose.
It took several minutes to find the syringes wrapped in plastic, sitting in a bin beneath the work cabinets. You grabbed two and laid them out before taking the Propofol off the shelf. With the three items lying next to one another, your fingers started to tremble and you bit your lip. You’d never willingly hurt someone before.

And while the sedative wouldn’t necessarily hurt them, you didn’t know if there were any negative side effects. What if they were allergic?

Todd, you didn’t care so much about, but Geoff. He didn’t deserve to be drugged. Well, drugged like this anyway. Sedatives were a long way from laxatives. You shook your head and loaded both syringes with the correct dosage. Just .5 mg was all it would take to bring two grown men down to their knees and give you enough time to do what you wanted.

It was such a small thing and just as the gun had felt in your hand, you couldn’t ignore the strange power it gave you. You snatched the needles from the counter, tossed the evidence in the trash, and slipped back out into the quiet, empty hallway. No one was any wiser to your deeds.

Rounding the corner, you checked the clock back in the lounge and guessed that Todd would be well above the fourth floor now. You had just enough time to drug Geoff and lock him in a room before you had to deal with Todd.

You ignored the elevator and took the stairs, pausing at the door to take a peek into the hallway. He was off his stool and with a glance down both sides of the door, you were pleasantly surprised that he was earlier for his evening bowel movement. You slipped easily into the door and held the syringe in your fist, the other clamped in your hand with the paper bag for Arthur.

Creeping to the bathroom door, you leaned an ear close to it and listened. All you could hear was the shift of the newspaper as he read and you sighed. You positioned yourself beside the door, syringe raised next to your head and ready to plunge deep into his neck. But the longer you stood there, listening to him sniff and grunt occasionally, the more you realized…

You couldn’t do this.

He didn’t deserve it and you were just going to have to find another way. Pursing your lips, you turned back to the door behind you where one of the patients lay on his bed. It was the man who you’d barely ever seen stand up from his bed, eyes darting back and forth in his skull. He looked older and probably couldn’t do much damage.
Taking your lip between your teeth, you fished the key once more from your pocket and opened the door. The man never even looked at you. He more than likely didn’t even know you were even there. You pushed it open and waved a hand in the air to see if you could get his attention.

He remained lying back, eyes roving the exact same way.

At least you felt better about leaving him alone with the door open. You turned and crept into the supply room across the hall to wait. You glanced around you at all the supplies and snatched a broken broom handle from the wall, holding it to you just in case Geoff decided tonight he was going to fight back.

Several minutes passed and your eyes moved from the open door of the patient’s room to the bathroom. Your entire body was shaking by now. As soon as Geoff closed the paper and started pulling his pants back up around his waist, you gripped the broom handle tighter.

The sink turned on and he whistled a tune as he washed his hands. God, you felt like a total bitch for doing this to him, but there was no other way. If you couldn’t knock him out, then locking him up was the next best option.

The door opened and you pressed yourself flat against the wall so he would see the open door first and not you. And sure enough, as soon as he took two steps out of the bathroom, he stopped dead in his tracks.

“What the fuck?”

You listened to the jingle of keys at his waist and the sound of the baton and radio at his belt shuffle as he circled the door and stepped into the patient’s room. He paused and looked around, giving you only a few seconds to move. You held the broomstick out in front of you and crossed the hall to press it right between his shoulder blades.

“Don’t move,” you said, cursing the tremor in your voice. “Take your radio and your gun and set them slowly on the floor.”

He sighed and you watched him reach for both things. He set the radio down first and you kicked it back into the hallway behind you. The gun was set down with a bit more hesitation but you managed to send it in the same direction as the radio. Geoff stood back up and put his hands in the air.
“Look, I’m just a guard. That gun isn’t even loaded. I don’t care what you want, just don’t shoot me.”

You frowned and glanced back at the gun. It wasn’t loaded? What kind of fucked-up security firm did he work for? Shaking your head you sighed and pushed him further into the room with a poke of the broomstick that he assumed was a gun.

“I’m not going to shoot you.” You shoved your foot against his back and pushed him further into the room. While he stumbled forward, grabbing onto the bed in the center of the room to keep from falling, you jumped back and slammed the door shut, locking him in. You watched him whirl around and his eyes went wide as saucers at the sight of you. “I’m sorry. I didn’t want to hurt you so this was the only way.”

He ran to the door and threw his shoulder into it, though it didn’t and wouldn’t budge. He pounded a fist against it and for the first time since you had first stepped foot on the fourth floor, the man in the bed sat up and started wailing. It was muffled behind the door but haunting all the same and you turned away from Geoff’s fearful expression.

You kicked the gun and radio into the supply closet and slammed it shut as well. As you made your way back to the door leading to the stairwell, you could hear the low wails of the man and Geoff shouting at you to let him out. The slamming of the door behind you cut the sound off and you breathed a sigh of relief.

One down.

One to go.

As you landed back onto the ground floor, you checked the time on the clock hanging in the hallway. Ten til midnight. Todd would start back on the first floor again soon, not giving you much time to prepare. You hurried to the basement and stashed the bag on one of the shelves near the industrial-sized washing machine while you took care of Todd.

You quickly stripped from your street clothes and changed into a pair of scrubs and a top. It wasn’t yours, just some that had recently been washed and dried and folded neatly. The pants were a little baggy, but you didn’t exactly care about that at the moment. You raced back to the first floor, syringe in hand, where elderly dementia and mentally ill patients were all sleeping.
It was quiet here, much different than on fourth where there was incessant mumbling, random bouts of laughter and moans. You paced in front of the elevator and hoped he wouldn't take too long. You wanted this over, wanted to be back in Arthur's arms and in his bed. No more fucking up against the wall. Tonight, you wanted more.

From inside the elevator shaft, the mechanics whirred to life and you felt your heart drop to the bottom of your chest. You pressed a hand beneath your throat and stared up at the numbers above the doors that lit up with every passing floor.

When it landed on one, you let out a squeak and fought the need to turn tail and run away. Your feet turned and you closed your eyes, unsure you could do this. Locking a security guard in a room was one thing, but this? This was assault. It could possibly be attempted murder, and depending on whether or not he had a bad reaction to the sedative, straight-up murder. Even for Arthur, you didn't know if you could go that far.

Could Todd possibly be lured and locked behind a door as well? There were plenty of places in the basement you could shove him into. Possibly. He was a big guy and was already wary of you.

The elevator doors opened, not giving you much chance to decide either way and you quickly stuffed the syringe into the pocket of your pants before he looked up at you. He hadn't been expecting anyone and he jumped a bit, shaking his head.

"You scared the hell out of me."

"Oh, sorry. I was just looking for someone to help me with something in the basement." The lie spilled out of your mouth before you could swallow it back and Todd frowned at you.

"What is it?"

"I, uh, I got something stuck in the washer. I can't pull it out. Can you help?"

Todd scoffed and stepped out of the elevator as the doors started to close. He pushed past you and you had to step aside so he didn't knock his shoulder against your face. "I thought I wasn't allowed anywhere near you?"
You glared at the back of his head and put a hand to the bulge of plastic in your pocket. He should consider himself lucky that you were such a decent person. Shaking the hair from your face, you jogged up to catch him.

"You're the only one in the ward at the moment. The guards can't exactly leave their posts. I just need someone strong to pull this towel out." God, the lies just kept coming so easily. You had no idea when you'd gotten so good at lying but you were thankful for it.

With a sigh, Todd combed his fingers over his hair and glanced at the doors leading to the stairs. "Fine," he said, turning to face it. "Let's get this over with."

You let him lead the way, not wanting to keep him out of your sight. It was bad enough talking to him. Having to be near him, running the risk of him trying to touch you again, made your skin crawl. He jogged down the steps and you followed behind him. Inside the basement, you could hear the dryer still spinning and felt the heat instantly cling to your face.

It was suffocating, though that probably had more to do with how quickly your heart was beating at the moment. He rounded the machines and you glanced to the closet with the bag you had hidden on the shelves. "Actually," you started, making him turn to face you. "I could use some help in here as well."

He looked at the closet and lifted an eyebrow. "What? You got a towel stuck in there too?"

"No, I can't reach the softener on the top shelf. It fell back and I don't want to risk breaking my neck climbing up there."

He rolled his eyes but believed you and you watched him stroll in. He stood on his toes and felt along the top shelf for the nonexistent box of fabric softener as you stood at the door. Slowly, you reached and took hold of the bag, putting it behind your back. Just as he gave another reach, you slammed the door and reached for the doorknob. Your brows pinched together and you stared. There was no lock on the door.

Oh. Fuck.

It burst out at you and knocked into your chest, forcing you back with stumbling steps. The bag dropped on the floor and you had barely managed to brace yourself against the dryer at your back when Todd was in front of you again.
"What the fuck do you think you're doing? Are you trying to lock me in there?"

Yes. Why hadn't you checked the lock? You had been so stupid to think this was a better plan. Your eyes darted to the closet at his back and he reached up, taking hold of your chin to force your eyes to his. He stared down at you with anger smoldering behind his gaze.

"Tell me what the fuck you really brought me down here for."

"I--I needed help--"

"Bullshit. You wanted to close me up in there and get me out of the way." He let out a breath through his nose and you swallowed. "You were going to see him, weren't you? That fucking freak!"

Todd seethed as he came to his own conclusions and you stayed quiet. What else could you say anyway? He was going to believe what he wanted to believe no matter how much you tried to convince him otherwise.

"You're such a stupid bitch!" He gripped the front of your shirt and whirled you around by it, shoving you back into the closet you'd tried to lock him in. Your back hit the shelves and knocked over a bottle of cleaner. "What are you thinking, Cricket? Hmm? I just don't get you!"

"I'm not asking you to get me. I don't want you to get me."

Todd advanced quickly, closing the distance between you two in a few steps. Despite backing further into the room, he caught you by the wrist and jerked you against his chest. "You don't want me around, don't want me to get you, don't want anything to do with me. I'm a little sick of you trying to tell me what to do."

You snarled and kicked out at him and he dodged quickly, clucking his tongue.

"Not gonna work this time, baby."
"What is wrong with you?" You hissed through clenched teeth and tried to wrench your wrist from his grip. It was terrifying how strong he was. Even if you could get to the syringe, would the dosage be enough for him? "Let me go!"

He laughed and leaned his face toward yours, disgusting you with the breath he exhaled across your face. "Why? So you can run to your little Joker and set him free?"

"I don't want to set him free, asshole." You managed to twist and pull your hand out of his. Either that, or he let you. He reached up to your breast to grope it through your shirt and you gagged. "I just want you to get off of me!"

Todd backed away with a chuckle but still blocked your path. He shook his head and looked you up and down, his gaze full of disgust and judgment. "How about I lock you in here? Tie you up and push a dryer against the door and when you wake up, you'll be carried away in handcuffs for trying to break that fucker free."

He chuckled and brought his hands up to his chest, cracking his knuckles to scare you. You stared at him, eyes narrowed in an icy gaze that you hoped he could feel. He reached over to a shelf where there were strips of rags lying and your eyes darted to his hand. So much for trying to do this the easy way.

He pulled one out, long enough to bind your arms behind your back and you snatched the syringe from your pocket before lunging at him. He caught you around the waist, and together, you both stumbled into the shelves.

The tip of the needle caught in the side of his neck and you pushed the plunger down with your thumb. His roar was right against your ear and he tossed you aside like you weighed nothing. Your ass hit the ground and you shook your hair from your face to stare up at him pawing at the side of his neck.

Apparently, the needle had broken off in his skin, but judging by the swaying of his body, you could tell he had been drugged. He blinked the dizziness away and focused on you.

"Fucking bitch," he hissed, saliva flying from his lips. He took a step toward you and reached out to catch himself on the shelf. His slow, lumbering movements sent the entire shelf of toilet paper toppling to the ground and you scrambled back further as he hit his knees. "I'll fucking kill you."
Todd slumped over at your feet and you struggled to catch your breath, watching him as you pressed yourself into the cobwebs of the back of the closet. You didn't know how long you sat there, staring at him, but it was enough to tell you he was definitely out.

You managed to inch forward and reach out with trembling fingers to touch the side of his neck. Just beneath his skin, his pulse was a bit slow, but beating strong and you grabbed the strip of cloth he was going to use to tie you up with. It twisted around and around his wrist until you were sure he couldn't break free. Or break free very easily. You gave the same treatment to his ankles before rushing to the door. You pulled it shut and glanced around for anything to wedge beneath the door handle. You weren't sure how long the sedative would last, but you didn't want to be surprised.

You grabbed a broken hand truck that wheels had broken off and pushed it as far as it would go beneath the handle. It wedged into the concrete floor and once you were sure that he would have a damn hard time breaking free of his prison, you turned on your heel, snatched the bag from the floor and made your way back to the fourth floor.

Geoff was still shouting for help, though his voice was starting to strain. The man he was trapped with was also still wailing and the woman across the hall had started her usual religious mumbling. Slowly, you took a left and fished the key from your pocket.

Arthur lifted his face to you at the sound of the lock turning and he sat up on the bed. Seeing him there, arms draped over his knees, chest bare and hair slicked back, made everything you'd just went through worth it. You let out a sigh and leaned against the wall just inside his room, tilting your head back to let out a breath.

The springs of his mattress creaked and you looked over to find him standing. "You wouldn't believe the night I've had."

He chuckled and stepped closer, nodding to the window in the door. "Are you the cause of all the noise around here?"

You nodded and lifted the bag to your chest with a smile. "I told you I had a gift for you."

He closed the distance between you and slipped a finger beneath your chin. He dipped his head and pressed a soft kiss to your lips. It may not have been as passionate as the last few he had given you, but it was enough to make you feel as if you were walking on air. You sighed against his mouth and pushed the bag into his hands.
When he pulled away, he whispered to you, "What did I do to deserve you?"

"Just lucky I suppose."

He scoffed and reached down to take your hand, steering you to the bed. It was the furthest you'd ever been in his room and it sent your pulse into a frenzy as he pulled you down until you were sitting beside him. As he opened the bag, you watched him gesture to the door with a quick glance.

"How long do we have tonight?"

You shrugged. "I don't plan to leave until they drag me away."

Arthur studied you closely, and you stared back, searching the depths of his eyes and finding yourself lost in them. His smile crept across his face and he nodded. "Good."

He looked down to the bag on his lap and laughed at the sight of the goodies you'd brought him. He reached in and took the pack of cigarettes, laying them on the mattress beneath you. The next was the gun and he checked the cylinder to see it fully loaded. He held it in his hands and pointed it to the wall ahead of him.

"I think this falls under unauthorized materials," he teased, turning to wink at you.

"True, but after tonight, you're going to have a few more enemies around here. I'd rather be safe than sorry."

With another chuckle, he dipped his hand back into the bag and pulled out the makeup box. You watched him closely, biting your lip as he stared down at him. He brushed a thumb across the face on the package painted up like a clown and smiled.

He lifted his head and looked at you. "You got this for me?"

You nodded with a smile. "Well, I stole it. But I did it while thinking of you. Is it the right kind?"
"I think I can make this work. Thank you," he said quietly, turning to look at the two items sitting between you. Your hands were already on the cigarettes, pulling one out for the both of you to share. He took the lighter and you inhaled as he held the flame beneath the cigarette.

"Now, where are you going to hide this? They'll be searching your room come tomorrow, I'm sure."

Arthur stood from the bed and stepped onto it, reaching above him to the ceiling tiles. One slipped free and he pulled out a folded newspaper with his headline across the top. He held his free hand out for the gun and makeup box and you passed them up to him. "They haven't found me out yet. And I don't think they will any time soon."

When he lowered himself back onto the bed, you passed him the cigarette and watched him take a deep drag. He blew the breath of smoke out above your head and you smiled, ducking your head.

"What?" He asked with a laugh rasping the back of his throat.

"I don't know. I'm nervous for some reason."

"Around me?" He put a hand to his chest and you nodded. "Why? I think we're passed being nervous."

"I know. I just...I want to make you happy."

Arthur reached out and took your hand, pulling you toward him. He stretched his legs out and you laid at his side as he laid his head back on his pillow. With your head on his chest, you bit your lip and tentatively draped an arm over his stomach. It felt better than you had imagined and you looked up, watching him smoke. How could someone look so beautiful?

He smiled around the cigarette and plucked it from his mouth. "You're staring at me."

"Sorry," you whispered, burying your face into his chest. He smelled good. Like fresh soap and something that was uniquely him. "I just like looking at you."
"That makes two of us," he murmured, turning in the bed so he could face you. He flicked the cigarette against the wall and you laughed as he held you close. "I'm trying to think of a way to repay you for giving me a present."

His voice sent a shiver down your spine and you let your fingers trace up the bones and ridges of his back. Hospital food sucked, but you doubted if he ever ate. Surely he had to have been eating something but not very much of it by the feel of him.

"How about a kiss?" You suggested.

Arthur put a hand to your jaw and lifted your face up from his chest. He kissed you with such a sweetness that left you lightheaded and grasping for him. He trailed his fingers down your arm to your side and finally settled on your hip. You sighed at the feel of him dipping his touch beneath the hem of your shirt.

He rolled you onto your back and fit himself against your mouth better, urging your lips open with his. You invited his tongue into your mouth and arched your chest into his as he slid further up along your ribs. The second he found your nipple, you sighed like a contented kitten. He pulled the fabric of your bra down and palmed your breast, squeezing it tightly before rolling his fingers over the tightened bud.

You found yourself whimpering as he pulled away from your kiss and your eyes fluttered open. He stared down at you with a look in his eyes that you'd never be able to figure out. He smirked and glanced to your damp lips.

"I suppose that was for the cigarettes," he whispered, sending another tremble across your body.

He turned to look down your body and you closed your eyes as his fingers slipped down the stretch of your stomach to trace the line of your pants. He played with the drawstring, twisting it around his finger. You writhed in anticipation, practically mewling for him, and he chuckled.

"Now, how should I repay you for the gun?" The tips of his fingers walked from one hip to the other, teasing you so exquisitely you had to press your thighs together to relieve a bit of the ache. His hair tickled your cheek as he leaned over your face and brushed his lips across yours. "Should I use my fingers or my tongue?"
Your eyes snapped opened to find him staring down at you wickedly. He slid his palm between your thighs and applied just a tiny bit of pressure against your center. It was enough to make your breath shudder and he teased you with a flick of his tongue across your bottom lip.

"If you don't answer me, I'll assume you don't want either."

"Tongue," you whispered hastily and he nodded, pressing a quick kiss to the cut on your mouth.

"That's what I thought." He sat up, pulling his arm out from under your shoulders and you laid back against his pillows. Your breath was quick and each inhale, you pulled in more of the smell of him that surrounded you. It drove you crazy and you were dizzy with desire.

Arthur sat up at your waist and you watched him pull at the waistband of your pants before his eyes flickered back up to meet yours. He watched your face as he undressed you from the waist down, tossing your shoes and pants to the floor. You laid there in your panties, so intoxicated with the scent of him that you had to grip the bed beneath him to make sure you hadn't floated to the ceiling.

You lifted your hips and let him tug at your panties and once they joined the other garments on the floor, Arthur leaned forward and rest his head against your thigh. He explored first with his hands, tracing the slit between your folds before pushing them apart with his first two fingers.

A fire erupted through your body as he dipped his head forward and put his mouth against you. He took his time, much to your aggravation and each time you lifted your hips to push against his face, he kept his distance. You hoped he was having a good time teasing you because you were positively irritated in the best way.

He put a hand to your stomach and pushed you back to the bed before flicking his tongue out and tracing the same pattern his fingers had made a moment ago. As he did so, going slow up along your folds, you could feel him staring up at you, watching for your reaction. Each whimper you made, he paused and focused on the spot that had pulled a reaction from you.

And when he reached your clit, making you arch up off the pillows, he smiled against you. It took him a moment, but he learned quickly exactly what pleased you. Once he was confident that you were enjoying it, he switched things up, pressing his tongue flat against your clit.

He lapped at you, stroking you with his tongue and making you writhe beneath him. Your fingers
combed through your hair and gripped it at the side of your head. He tilted his head to the side and
dipped his tongue at a new angle and you cried out. "Oh, fuck," you whispered, bringing one hand
to his hair.

You brushed it away from his face and he circled a hand beneath your thigh, pulling it until your
legs were as open as they could go. From here, he pushed his tongue deeper and curled it back and
forth around your clit. It was absolutely unbearably and you were panting for breath, begging him
not to stop. And just when you thought you couldn’t take it anymore, he laughed.

It was deep and rasping and it vibrated his lips and tongue around you creating a whole new
sensation that sent you spiraling toward the edge. Your fingers closed around his hair and he
pushed his face harder against you, letting you grind your hips over his tongue. Lips parting in a
strangled cry that seemed to linger in your throat, you felt yourself coming hard. It erupted through
you like wildfire and he kept lapping at your clit with an eager tongue.

“Oh, god, fuck,” you hissed, wriggling away from him, unable to stand the intensity of his mouth
any longer. He let you go and you clamped your legs together, panting hard and blinking up at the
ceiling as your orgasm rolled on and on. “Shit, I’m still coming.”

He laughed again and you felt him crawl up the length of your body, parting your legs so he could
move between them. He inched your shirt up to your chest and tugged at the bra still covering your
breasts. Once freed, he dropped his mouth down to your nipple and licked and sucked. You could
feel how slick his chin was against them and you pressed a hand to your face to cover the sound of
your delirious giggle.

Arthur reached up and pulled your hand away, pushing it into the pillow beside your head. He
lifted his head from your breast and dipped it into the crook of your neck to nip and bite at your
skin. “You taste so good,” he murmured against your throat.

You loved the sound of his voice but needed so much more of him at that moment. You moved
your freehand between your bodies and pressed a palm against his erection, pulling a groan from
his throat. He helped you push his pants down his hips and you let out a sigh of relief to feel him
so close to your center.

You were so desperate to feel him inside you that you were nearly breathless, ducking your head to
meet his gaze as he laid over you. He met your gaze and leaned down to kiss you, letting you taste
yourself on his lips and tongue. It melded perfectly with the taste of smoke and you lifted your hips
off the bed, begging him to fuck you.
He took his cock in his hands and positioned it at your opening, slowly pushing it into you and swallowing the sounds of your moans as he did. Every inch of him slid inside you until you were completely filled by him and god, it felt so good. Nothing should feel this good. A part of you wondered if you had been knocked out earlier and this was all a dream.

But when Arthur pulled out and slid back into you, all doubts that this wasn’t reality faded and you broke his kiss to throw your head back into the pillow. He kissed down the length of your jaw and to your throat, and you adored the way his breath felt across your skin.

Nothing else existed at that moment. The entire hospital melted away and there was only you and him together. And for that brief slip of time, you already felt free.

Arthur lowered himself closer to you and thrust his hips just a bit faster. You didn’t care if he came fast. You’d already gotten what you wanted and just feeling him fill you so completely was enough for you. He kissed your collarbone and his breath hitched, quickly turning into a moan that you could feel vibrating through your chest.

You stroked his hair and stared at him, bringing your fingers down the muscles along his shoulders and back, tracing the lines of his bones. He lifted his head and stared down at you, brows pinched in concentration and lips parted with each breath and you had never seen something so beautiful.

His eyes searched yours and you could tell he was close. He pumped faster, his breath shuddered, and you smiled up at him. “I want to feel you come,” you whispered, reaching up to comb your fingers through his hair. “Joker.”

The look in his eyes shifted as something darker took over, and he fucked you so hard, your eyes rolled back into your head. He groaned deep and dropped his head to yours, capturing your mouth in a kiss that rivaled anything you’d ever had before. He kissed you as he came, spilling warmth inside you with each thrust and you had never felt more complete.

You pushed your hips toward his, wanting every bit he had to offer and when he stilled over you, you were delighted to find him still kissing you. He smoothed your hair back and lowered himself onto his elbows so his chest was flush against yours and you loved the feel of his skin on yours. You loved the feel of him inside you and the soft press of his mouth and the stubble that scraped your chin with each kiss.

As he pulled away, dropping his head to your shoulder, you stared up at the ceiling, biting your lip to keep from grinning. All too soon, he pulled out and collapsed beside you on the mattress. He reached down and pulled his pants up and you wished you had thought to look down and get a
peek at him. From what it felt like to have his cock inside you, you could tell he was working with something good.

Letting your head fall back onto the pillow again, you giggled and he turned to look at you. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. Everything? I’m not sure. I just want to laugh.”

He rolled onto his side and tucked an arm beneath his head, looking at you. “I like your laugh. I could listen to it all day.” He leaned his face down and bit gently down onto your shoulder, making you shriek and writhe away.

He snatched you before you could get too far and brought you back toward him. He took your hand and turned it over, looking down at it with a frown. “What’s this?”

You glanced down to where a streak of black and red still lingered on the inside of your wrist and you let out a breath. “Oh, I was painting earlier today. I forgot to wash it off.”

“You’re a painter.” You nodded and he moved his eyes to meet yours. “What do you paint?”

The simple question made your voice freeze against the back of your tongue and you hoped it was too dark in his room to see your blush. With a laugh, you looked away and brought a hand to your face. “It’s kind of embarrassing.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.”

You peeked at him through your fingers. “I’ve been painting you, actually.”

Arthur sat up and looked down at you, a smile of delight on his face. “Me?” When you nodded, he laid back down and reached for the pack of cigarettes on the floor beside the bed. He lit one, took a drag, and passed it to you. For a brief second, it felt as if this was your normal routine as if the two of you lived together and often shared a cigarette after making love. You wished it could be your future so badly. “Why are you painting me?”
“Because you’re my muse, I suppose.”

“I’m your muse,” he repeated with another smile and puff from his cigarette. “I like that.”

“Good. I like it too.”

“So, tell me, how the hell did you pull this off? I figured that guy would have come barreling in here to pull you off of me by now.”

Ah, you’d forgotten all about Todd and Geoff. You wondered if he was coming to yet, waking up to realize that you had drugged him and were now in bed with the freak he hated so much. With a smile stretching your lips, you snagged the cigarette from him and shrugged a shoulder.

“A master never reveals their secret.”

Arthur laughed, the sound echoing through the room and you joined him. You were only half aware that the lower half of your body was still naked, and that in a few hours, someone would be in the room to pull you off the bed. But for now, there was nothing but you and Arthur and the laughter you shared.
The Trial of the Century

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of your actions, you come to some realizations and Arthur puts on a show.

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I'm excited for this chapter only because the next one is gonna be extremely exciting! Hope you enjoy this one!
Thank you for all the love! I appreciate each and every kudo, comment, and hit! You guys are awesome!

The sun hadn’t yet started to peek up over the city’s horizon and you snuggled deeper against Arthur’s chest, wishing time would slow to a stop. He hadn’t slept much, maybe dozing off in the brief moment you had as well. As much as you wanted to keep your eyes open, it was difficult when he continuously stroked your hair like you were his prized kitten.

When you woke up for the final time, he was sighing and looking down at you with a sad smile. You sat up to look at him and frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“I think our time might be up.”

You blinked at his words and turned to face the door. Through the fog of your sleep, you hadn’t noticed the sound of voices from the hallway. They were sorting through the keys, possibly the first shift guard shocked to find his coworker trapped in a room with one of the patients. Maybe they wouldn’t think to check for you in Arthur’s room, though that was a long shot.

Draping your chin onto his chest, you smiled and reached up to brush his hair from his face. “This won’t be the last night we spend together.”
He reached down and cupped your face, bringing you up to meet his lips. It was a kiss that came with a promise and you squeezed your eyes shut to stop the burn behind your eyelids. The noise was growing closer in the hallway, feet stomping over the tile floor and voices rising in alarm.

You wondered if they would be shocked by what they found; Arthur’s door ajar, the both of you inside in one another’s arms. They wouldn’t know what to think and their surprise would give you at least a second longer to enjoy the last moments you could spend with him.

Arthur urged your mouth open with his lips and you sighed at the taste of his tongue. You could lay there until the end of time, experiencing nothing but his lips against yours, his hands sinking into your hair, and the warmth of his body and you would be completely content.

Unfortunately, time couldn't stop and the universe wasn't at your command. Despite the shouting and chaos that erupted at the entrance to his room, you never stopped kissing him. Fear and panic and terrible worry gripped your spine but the feel of his hands tightening around you brought a strange sense of calm and in that split second, there was peace.

All too soon, a second pair of hands took hold of your arms, and then another grabbed the white uniform you had dressed back into during the night and you were wrenched out of Arthur's arms. A strangled cry ripped from your throat and you reached out, so close to his fingers stretching toward you but much too far away. And then you were whirled away from him, the two guards on either side of you lifting you off the floor.

You arched your back in the air and turned your head to face Arthur. It took three orderlies to keep him down, his arms pinned behind him. He was laughing, despite it all and you found comfort instantly in the sound. So much that you let your head fall back against the guard's shoulder and laughed yourself.

Sure, you were aware of their insults, their inquiries. "Are you fucking mental?"

"What the fuck were you thinking?"

And while they might recommend you stay overnight in this very same ward, it was clear that they were calling the police on you. At the door, you quieted your laughing and let them haul you out into the hallway, catching sight of a larger crowd that had come to watch. Standing front and center was Margaret and Todd, one tall and wide, the other short and squat.
She looked at you like you were some deranged animal, *rabid* and sick. You smiled at her and lifted your face to Todd. If they thought you were crazy, you might as well sell it to them with all you had. "Sleep well?"

His hand struck your face before you could even blink and stars exploded across your vision. You'd never been hit like that and even with the two men still holding you up off the floor, you felt as if you might fall. The hallway spun on its side and you blinked the sudden wave of pain that spread across your jaw. The back of his knuckles had got you from your chin to your nose and you smelled blood with a deep sniff that burned your nostrils.

You could hear Margaret chastise him for lashing out but you couldn't be too upset. You had drugged him and bound him after all. And it had been worth it.

Despite blood dripping from your nose onto your top lip, you smiled up at him through your dizziness. "I suppose I deserved that."

Margaret said your name and you looked her way, lifting your eyebrows. She pursed her lips and glanced at the door to Arthur's room. He was still cackling and the orderlies had slipped out and locked him back up behind them. "We've called the police. I think it's safe to say your employment at Arkham is officially terminated."

You nodded and let the guards put your feet back down on the floor. "Makes sense. For what it's worth, I don't regret a single second of it."

Todd sneered at you as you were guided past them and you didn't even try to hide the bounce in your step. It didn't take long for the police to arrive. Any mention of trouble with Joker and they bumped it to their top priority. Though they did seem a bit disappointed to see it was only you sitting in the lobby, bloodied nose and hands cuffed behind you.

For a while, they stood around, getting the story straight from the witnesses and you offered corrections here and there to straighten things out. You made sure to tell them you only drugged Todd because he assaulted you outside the bar he worked for part-time.

It was amusing how many shades his face filtered through at hearing you tell them. White to red to damn near purple with rage. It had only made you laugh.

"She'll more than likely be charged with assault. Spend a night or two in jail depending on whether
they set bond before the weekend. The hospital pressing charges?" The cop asked Margaret, who was now joined by someone from human resources. You smiled up at them, wondering what that call had been like.

Were they asleep when the phone rang, listening to Margaret inform them about an employee that had not only attacked two people but had done it to sleep with a patient? Did they rush out of bed, frantically recalling any piece of protocol that could even begin to touch something like this? It was funny to think about. Every time you let out a laugh here or a chuckle there, the cops would turn to look at you in confusion while the others seemed too angry to really let themselves react.

If Mrs. Hall's orgy a few weeks ago had been the talk of Arkham's hallways for weeks, this would make you fucking *infamous* here. They'd be talking about you for years.

Nearly a day and six hours later, you found yourself in a cell behind bars. The only other women with you looked to be hookers or drugged out crackheads. One of them sat on the narrow bench in the middle of the cell, rocking back and forth, muttering to herself while she pulled her hair out one by one. She reminded you instantly of the woman on the fourth-floor psych ward and you stared at her, watching her come down from her high and go through the withdrawals. How strange was it to see two completely different people, in two totally different situations be so similar? What led them both onto the paths they'd found themselves?

So engrossed in your thoughts, you hadn't heard the female police officer call your last name until she was at the cell door, banging the baton against the metal bars. You jumped to your feet and crossed the room.

"Your bond hearing has been set for four PM. You can call someone if you need to."

She led you out of the cell and back through the twisting halls of the precinct. You tried not to stare at the people around you, but you had never been in a situation like this. It was actually kind of fascinating. An assortment of criminals sitting in the main area, waiting to be arraigned, some fussier than others. A lot of them were asleep in the uncomfortable, plastic chairs and you had no idea how they could find comfort enough to actually drift off.

The telephones were hanging on the walls just inside the hall leading to the jail cells and you picked up the receiver. The operator came on and you gave them the only name you could think of: your aunt in Texas.

She picked up on the third ring, and her southern drawl made you smile wistfully. "Hey, Aunt Betty. It's me...Listen, I got into some trouble and need your help."
It killed you to have to tell your Aunt what had happened and that you needed her to wire you money for your bail. It was enough to drain her savings and you swore to her, and yourself, that you’d pay her back in full. You didn’t know how, exactly. But even if you had to rob a bank or two, you’d pay her back.

By the time you made it back to your apartment, close to eight o’clock, two nights after you’d left it, you were exhausted, in need of a hot bath and some alcohol. Spending the night in a cell gave you a better appreciation for anyone who had to endure that for an extended period of time. Your shoulders were aching and you wanted to collapse into your bed and sleep the entire weekend away.

And you probably would. You would need plenty of rest. Arthur’s trial was on Monday and depending on how it went, you were going to have quite a busy week. Possibly a busy rest of your life as well, however long it would last.

The elevator doors opened and you looked up at the hallway, the same hallway you’d seen two nights ago, and you had been right. You did feel like a completely different person. You were jobless, soon to be homeless, had no friends and were now a criminal. Just like Joker. The corner of your lips lifted with a smile and you pushed away from the wall to make your way to your front door.

It was strange, how indifferent you felt toward it all. There was a peace to it all. No one to answer to, nothing to tie you down. Despite not being very free at all, you felt more free than you had felt in a long time. Even with the trial, your own court appearance, and your plans looming over your head, all you could do was smile and push your way back into your apartment.

You didn’t let yourself think too much about the last time you had taken a bath, or the thoughts you’d almost succumbed to. It was best to put it out of your head and move on. Arthur was counting on you. He was waiting for you.

And you weren’t going to disappoint him.

After a long soak in your tub, letting the heat sink into the aching muscles along various parts of your body, you sat on the edge of your bed wrapped in a towel. You stared at the window, facing the building next door, offering you no view of the city or sky. Just brick after brick. This time, you let your thoughts wander and they recalled the look on your coworker’s faces watching you being carried out of Joker’s room, with his laughter echoing from within.
You could see Todd’s face clearly, glaring daggers down at you. There was so much malice behind his gaze that you were sure that if you had been alone with him in that hallway, he would have strangled the life out of you. You wondered if he would be given another few vacation days after this incident. They were probably coddling him, bending over backward to give him what he wanted after being attacked twice.

Should you have felt remorse for that?

It was two to one against you. You and Arthur had attacked him both separately and he’d only attacked you once and there was no proof other than your word that it had actually happened. You frowned and wondered if it had even happened at all.

Maybe you had conjured it up to justify what you were planning to do, to make it easier to go through with it. Then again, Arthur had noticed your bloody, cut lip. He had kissed it and marked your face with the blood. What Todd did to you was real, it had happened. And he deserved what you did to him.

It was too late to second guess it and you weren’t sure why you were. You were holding onto that mindset that always made you doubt and anxious. It was time to stop living like that and start doing and getting what you wanted.

Without taking the towel off, or dressing in actual clothes, you fell back against the pillows and let out a long, weary breath. You were neck-deep in it now and your heart wouldn’t allow you to even attempt to turn back now. Not after what you and Arthur had shared the night before.

You closed your eyes as the memories swirled through your mind, hands resting across the terry cloth tucked around your chest. Your fingers trailed the same path he had taken, down your stomach, over your hips, and between your legs. They didn’t feel the same and would never compare to his, but you couldn’t help it.

The way he had kissed you and looked down at you and gone down on you...It was enough to make you crazy just thinking about it and you pushed your hand beneath the edge of the towel to find yourself wet. You wondered if he was touching himself to thoughts of you and you swallowed, hoping he was.

Though it paled in comparison, you made yourself come with Arthur’s name on your lips, sighing and moaning it freely without worry of anyone hearing. And when the last of the orgasm began to
fade, you blinked up at the ceiling, unable to fight your exhaustion any longer. It swept over you like a blanket, instantly smothering any lingering worry or thoughts and when you dreamt, it was about Arthur.

You didn’t do much other than sleep or drink the entire weekend. On Sunday, your aunt had called to check on you and you knew she was worried, and no amount of reassurance from you would help that. It hurt knowing that she was only going to find out more about you.

Thankfully, she didn’t ask many questions and her only concern was about your wellbeing. You’d told her you were fine, and it was the truth. For the first time in a long time in your life, you were feeling good, sure of yourself. There would be no more doubt or hiding behind a fake smile and quiet.

That wasn’t who you were, and you weren’t going to hide it just to make others feel comfortable.

By Monday, you were absolutely anxious. Getting ready bright and early, almost as soon as the sun had come up, you couldn’t stop shaking or bouncing your leg in anticipation for the trial. It was set to start at nine that morning and unfortunately, you’d have to take the bus down to the courthouse.

It wasn’t ideal. You didn’t want to smell like bus fumes in front of Arthur. Then again, there wasn’t much of a chance you’d even see him up close. You had in your head the image of him sitting in front of the judge, facing front, not making much of a reaction to anything. You hoped he would look back and see you in the gallery, that you were there to support him.

Knowing he would smile at you, possibly wave, instantly put a smile on your face and you hurried to get dressed. The only nice clothes you had were still a bit shabby. A button-up, black blouse that Janey had left behind, unaware that you had even taken it from her closet, and a pair of the only jeans you had without paint stains.

You combed your hair and cursed your lack of beauty products. All you had was red lipstick and mascara and a murder trial didn’t seem appropriate for such a bright color. Then again, what did it matter if it was appropriate or not? You leaned closer to the bathroom mirror and swiped it across your lips, popping them to even the color out.

When the bus stopped a block from your apartment, you were first in line to get on and picked the first available seat near the front. It took nearly an hour to lumber the vehicle toward Old Gotham where the courthouse was located. And even then, the bus had to stop two blocks away due to the number of people.
You pressed your face to the window as the brakes squealed and gaped with your jaw dropped at the sight of all the protestors. Some, you were sure, just wanted to be there to claim they had been, but the closer you got to the courthouse, the more you were sure these people were fed up with the system.

There was a sea of signs bobbing up and down over their heads and you stepped off the bus with a laugh. At the steps leading up to the courthouse, a policeman put an arm out and stopped you from getting through. You stepped back and tucked your hair behind your ear.

“No one’s getting through.”

“Oh, I’m actually on the list. I’m a character witness?” You hoped your uncertainty didn’t show through your words and the cop sighed. He glanced back to the top of the stairs and nodded to another guard before pinching the walkie talkie at his shoulder.

“What’s your name?” He asked you, an impatient glint in his eyes. You told him your name and he repeated it back to the guard. Time ticked by slowly and you flinched at the shouts of the protestors. It was almost deafening.

You caught sight of one of the signs with a painted clown face on the front and tried to keep your face from smiling. It was much easier to keep a straight face with your stomach twisting with nervous energy. You turned back to face the cop and after a moment, the walkie talkie beside his head buzzed with static.

“She’s on the list, according to the lawyer.”

The cop nodded and stepped back to let you through and a shout of protest came from the crowd. “What’s so special about her?” They cried. The cops ignored them and stepped back in formation to keep more from slipping through.

Every step you took up to the front doors, the more your stomach twisted and clenched until you weren’t sure if you could even walk inside the building without throwing up. One of the policemen opened the door for you and nodded up at it. “Second floor,” he told you and you attempted to nod.

Too much movement and you’d have to find the nearest toilet to puke. You hadn’t been expecting this intense nervousness and it ate at you from the inside out. If you were nervous just being here,
what would it be like to break him out?

You took a breath in through your nose and let it slowly out of your mouth. There was still a chance, less than one percent by Arthur’s public defender’s words, but a chance that he could be freed. As remote as it was, you held onto it and begged to every possible deity that you weren’t sure you even believed in. If they, one of them, could just allow that to happen, you would dedicate your life to them.

Making your way slowly up to the second floor, you were surprised yet again by the crowd mingling outside the courtrooms. More people added to the gallery list? You weren’t too sure. None of them seemed familiar, but then again, you didn’t know many people who would come to Arthur’s trial for him. You hoped they weren’t all there to oppose his case.

Breaking through the crowd, you blinked at the sight of a figure dressed in a black suit and dark grey tie. They made a beeline for you and you recognized the man as Arthur’s lawyer, Mr. Harris Wright. The closer he got, the more you could see that he wasn’t particularly excited to see you again.

"What the hell are you doing here?" He said, keeping his voice down as he steered you away from the crowd.

"You said you would add my name to the list to sit in on the trial.”

"Yeah, that was before you pulled that stunt and got yourself arrested."

"So, I'm off the list?"

Mr. Wright glanced back at the crowd starting to head into the courtroom and you worried the seats would be too full by the time this conversation wrapped up. "Arkham's lawyers are in a fucking frenzy trying to keep what you did under wraps. If anyone finds out you're here, you're going to do more harm for Arthur's case than good. I can't even use your testimony anymore."

"But they did, right? They kept it all under wraps. My name and face haven't been in any of the papers or on the news so technically, no one knows who I am."

He scrubbed the bottom half of his face and you could see he was struggling with whether or not to
"We can't afford any outbursts. You cannot jump up and declare your undying support for him."

You put a hand to your mouth to suppress your laughter but he didn't seem very amused. Clearing your throat, you made your smile fade and nodded. "I won't. I didn't do all of that because I'm crazy, you know? I just..." you trailed off, looking to the doors that people were still pushing through to get into the courtroom. "I think I love him."

"Yeah? Well, that sounds pretty fucking crazy to me. Just keep quiet or you'll be arrested for contempt." As he turned to make his way through to the proceedings, you thought you heard him mumbling about "fucking fanatics" and you glanced at the windows of the hall. Even two floors up, you could hear the shouts and chants of the protestors. It made you smile to know Arthur had supporters, that you weren't alone in this, or your feelings.

You found the closest seat to the bench that you could get and were disappointed that it was right near the center aisle. From your position, you were able to see the defendant’s table and tried to imagine what Arthur would look like sitting there. Would he be in handcuffs, prison attire or the usual uniform provided by the asylum? Would he see you?

It was enough to make that wave of sickness wash back of you and you crossed your leg to try to keep it from bouncing. It didn’t work.

The prosecutor was a young lawyer, a little older than you and he had that 'concerned for the public' look on his face down pat. It was so fake, the way he hung his head as he turned to make a big show about reaching out and touching the woman sitting behind the partition. She was wearing a fur shawl around her shoulders and dabbed at her cheeks with a white handkerchief. You'd seen her on the news giving interviews; Murray Franklin's second or third wife, you couldn't keep up. Behind her sat the families of the three men killed on the subway and you sighed through your nose.

Why hadn't you been expecting them to come? Their presence was a nuisance, paraded to show the jury the damage of Arthur's actions and you had a look around at the rest of the people around your side of the gallery. Regular people, maybe more fanatics who wanted a curious glimpse at Joker or Arthur. Whoever he decided to be today.

At the side of the courtroom, a door opened and you turned to see Mr. Wright walk through with his partner trailing behind him. A murmur spread through the crowd and you inched yourself to the front of your seat. Following behind the two men were police escorts and the sound of metal handcuffs clinking made your heart leap into your throat. You sat up and leaned toward the seats in front of you, hoping to catch his eye.
By now, the murmur had turned into hushed voices all saying similar things: *that's him*, *that's Joker*, and the growing sniffles from the other side of the gallery. One of the women had to be consoled and you resisted the urge to roll your eyes.

Arthur was wearing his hospital-issued white shirt and pants. His hair was a little damp and he pushed it back with his hands as he strolled into the courtroom. Almost instantly, his eyes found yours and he smiled. You did the same and hoped no one could see how much he was affecting you. With a wink that made your entire body feel dizzy, he turned away and was directed to sit in a chair between his lawyers. They ducked their heads toward him, speaking too low for you to hear.

All you could do was stare at the back of his head. He made no indication that he was even listening to his lawyers. There was a good chance he wasn't.

"All rise for the honorable Judge Frasier." The crowd stood up and you watched as Arthur's lawyers pulled him up by his elbows. From a side door behind the raised platform at the front of the room, the judge appeared and took his seat, allowing everyone to do the same.

He announced the trial, addressing the lawyers and reading off the many offenses Arthur committed and you had to press a hand to your stomach to soothe your nerves. You didn't know why it was doing this to you. Whatever decisions they made wouldn't change your mind about him, or what you planned to do. It just hurt to hear them say these things without truly knowing him.

When it came time for the prosecution to make their initial case to the jury, the young lawyer you had spied before stood up. He sighed heavily and you watched him button his jacket before crossing over to the jury. He waved a hand back to the crowd of people sitting behind his side of the room and you narrowed your eyes.

"These people, fifteen or twenty individual lives that have been severely traumatized by the actions of Arthur Fleck, shouldn't have to be here today. They should be in their homes, spending time with the loved ones they’d lost, and making memories. Instead, they're here. They're here to serve as a reminder of what horror Mr. Fleck caused them. With a gun, he shot down three men who were on the precipice of their lives. They could have gone on to do great things for the world--"

From the bench in front of you, Arthur caught your eye and you turned toward him. He leaned back in his chair, head tilting up to the ceiling and you could see a grin stretching his face. His lawyer looked pissed, trying to make sure he didn't blow this case.
The prosecutor continued, still facing the jury. "Mr. Fleck went on to hurt others a few weeks later and unfortunately, the entire country was in the front row. We watched him go on national broadcast television, watched him lift a gun and shoot Murray Franklin twice. Mr. Franklin's family--"

A bubble of laughter erupted from Arthur and he didn't even try to hide it. This time, the courtroom fell quiet and the prosecutor turned to stare at him with a glare. The judge pounded his gavel, making you jump. "Mr. Fleck, I would advise you to control yourself. This is a very serious matter and you're making a mockery of my courtroom."

"Your honor," Mr. Wright scrambled to his feet and sorted through the papers strewn out in front of him. "My client suffers from a medical condition causing outbursts of laughter during tense situations."

Again, Arthur laughed and rocked back in his chair. The crowd was silent, reduced to nothing but stares. Even the sniffles from the families had quieted and all they could do was watch the man who had altered their lives laugh so hard he had tears coming from his eyes. After a moment, the laughter died down, but you could see the smile still stretching across his face.

There was a quiet moment of tension that seemed to inch its way through the crowd, one that left you squirming in your seat with nervousness. Clearing his throat and pulling your attention back to the prosecutor, he faced the jury once more. This time, his voice didn't carry the same confidence as before Arthur's outburst.

"Five men lost their lives in three separate attacks, their only mistake crossing paths with Arthur Fleck. To be gunned down in a subway, or shot dead on national television in front of the nation is no way to die. These men were someone's brother, someone's son and husband. They deserved better than--"

Arthur's laugh cut through his words so suddenly, you flinched, turning to stare at him. He leaned forward, caught in the grips of his laughter and banged his palm on the table in front of him. You'd heard his affliction before. You knew it strained the back of his throat as he tried to stop it. This was nothing like that.

He laughed as if he were hearing the funniest joke on earth, as if he wasn't a man being accused of murder and facing the penalty of death. He laughed as if he were already free. And you had to bite your lip to stop your smile from spreading.

A round of the gavel pounding had quieted Arthur but he was still sucking in a breath. The judge
looked beyond furious and a bit confused about what to do. Could he hold someone in contempt for something Arthur couldn't control?

"Mr. Fleck, I know you have a condition and I am trying to be patient, but if you want to remain in this courtroom, you will have to keep yourself contained. Do I make myself clear?"

Arthur slowly raised his gaze and your eyes darted from the back of his head up to the judge. With a nod, you watched Arthur reach up to pull his fingers across his lips as if he were zipping them up. You turned to see the reactions from the victim's families and found them either crying or glaring his way. It left you with a strange feeling of nausea and you sighed, wishing you could tell Arthur to just stop. You knew what he was doing. He was putting on a show for them, just like he told you he would do. A guest appearance.

And the media was going to eat it up.

"Now," the prosecuting lawyer spoke up again. "The defense will try to convince you that Mr. Fleck is a mentally ill man who had no control over his actions. He was deranged and lost in his mind. He did these horrendous things because he was off his medication and pushed to the brink by our mental health system. That might be convincing with one murder or a crime of passion, but what Mr. Fleck did was beyond that. It was premeditated, calculated, timed. None were in self-defense. He sought out each individual person and ended their lives and what does he have to say for himself?"

He had meant to say more, to finish with a grand show for the jury to hear, but he never got a chance. Arthur leaned back in his chair, the hinges beneath him squeaking loudly in the near silence of the room. As he lifted his face back up to the ceiling, his arms slowly formed a circle over his head and he brought them down at his side in an arc, as if here dancing. And then he spoke. "Five less pricks in Gotham city. I should be a hero."

Judge Frasier had had enough at this point. He slammed the gavel so hard on the desk you jumped and gripped the seat beneath your legs. Over the gasps and cries from the crowd, the judge pointed down at Arthur who barely even acknowledged his presence at all. "I hereby find you in contempt of court and another word out of you and I'll lock you in jail tonight."

You slid forward and shook your head, torn between telling Arthur to shut up and the warnings his lawyer had given you to not make a sound. He folded his hands behind his head and before he could even utter a syllable, several people around you stood up. They pulled masks from their jackets and slipped them over their faces, making your jaw drop to your chest. Clown masks, with bright green tufts of hair and painted faces, littered the crowd. Exactly the kind that had been banned citywide.
Arthur turned to face the protestors, his eyes going wide with joy at the sight. Several bailiffs were already advancing toward the partition and as you stared, you counted roughly seventeen masked faces. And then the chaos began.

One of them swung at an advancing bailiff and the rest lunged over the seats. Fists were swinging, grunting and shouting filled the room and as you stood, members of the families of the victims fled the room wailing. Arthur and his lawyers were guided away from the mayhem and you stumbled back into the aisle as the judge barked orders and called for the protestors to stand down.

You whirled to face Arthur and found him being led out of the room by the police escorts and behind him, Mr. Wright was glaring at you making you frown. It wasn't like you had planned this. You hadn't even spoken to a single soul other than him since you walked into the courtroom. As the fight continued, you followed the others out of the room and into the stretch of the hallway outside. The families were led to a quieter space away from the chaos by the prosecuting lawyers and the others who had come to just witness the trial were milling around you, dumbfounded by what had happened.

With no other options, you lowered yourself onto one of the wooden benches in the hallway and waited. As time ticked by, the others grew impatient and began to leave one by one. It was clear the lawyers and judge had no idea how to proceed with this. You didn't blame them. This was tricky and unprecedented. You just hoped that the protestors hadn't earned Arthur a night in jail.

After nearly an hour, Mr. Wright emerged from a door adjacent to the courtroom and you stood up from the bench. He took one look at you and sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose between two fingers before walking toward you.

"Is he going to have to stay the night in jail?"

Mr. Wright shook his head and took a deep breath. "No. But that whole shitshow pretty much ruined our case. Did you have anything to do with that?"

You held your hands up. "No, I swear. I had no idea. I'm not involved with the protests."

"Right." He gave you a look that told you he didn't quite believe you. With a sarcastic smile, he threw his hands in the air in defeat. "You're just in love with him."
With that, he turned on his heel and stalked away, muttering incoherently the entire way to the elevators. Before he could step on, you shouted after him. "Are they done for the day?"

"Yes, they're done. You think we can continue after something like that? Go home, and *stay* home." The elevator dinged and he stepped through the open doors and disappeared from your view. You stayed in the hallway, unsure of what to do now. Everyone else had left, not that you particularly cared if they were still here or not.

You turned on your heel and took the stairs down to the ground floor. Never before had you felt such a strange mix of nausea and pride mingling inside you. It left you feeling dizzy, strange and disoriented. Almost as if you had dreamed the whole entire thing in an instant and were just now waking up.

Shaking the confusion from your head, you managed to stumble forward and push your way out of the courthouse. The steps were covered in news cameras and anchormen who were desperate to get any shot of the infamous Joker. Behind the camera equipment, the crowd was absolutely riotous and you stared with wide eyes at the number of painted faces. Your eyes darted from one to the next, flickering to a protest sign bouncing above the crowd.

‘ *the rich thrive/we barely survive* ’

The urge to vomit was growing stronger and you hurried down the steps. Before you could break free of the chaos, a woman reached out and gripped your elbow, pulling you back toward her. It was a young woman, with a fresh face and polite smile. She held a microphone below her chin and you looked to see a camera swinging toward you.

“Hi, I’m Sascha Ryan from Channel ten news. Were you in the courtroom with the Joker?”

You flinched at that name but found yourself nodding.

“Perfect,” Sascha turned to the camera and made a circular motion with her finger. “We’re here live at Gotham City Courthouse where the trial of the century is taking place. I understand you were inside just now. Can you give us any details to what just happened?”

“Oh, s-some protestors got into the courtroom and when Ar--Joker said some things, they stood up and put masks on.”
“And what did he say?”

You blinked into the camera and swallowed tightly. “He said...he should be hailed as a hero.” Tears burned at your eyes and you pursed your lips to keep your chin from quivering.

Sascha Ryan noticed and nodded, putting the microphone back beneath her chin before speaking. “And where do you stand in the matter?”

The tone of her voice, the look in her eye, you could tell she was wanting you to side against Arthur and all the protestors. She wanted you to be the voice of reason, a voice for the scared people in their homes, to reassure them that everything wasn’t as crazy as they made it seem on TV.

And you looked out at the crowd of protestors, at the painted faces and messages written on cardboard and posters and turned back to the camera. You felt the tears burn your eyes and the hurt and anger twist your face into a scowl.

“I stand with Joker.”

Behind you, the doors to the courthouse burst open and the crowd erupted in cheers and applause. Police shouted at them to get back and you whirled around to see a flood of officers flanking Arthur on all sides. His hands were cuffed at his waist but it didn’t stop him from raising his hands to the adoring crowd, giving them a wave.

The cheering and shouts of praise were deafening and by now, the camera and anchorwoman had abandoned you on the steps. You stood there, watching from the sidelines as the police shoved the crowd back and moved Arthur toward the squad cars. From your position, you could see him smiling and laughing and soaking in the sounds of the protestors. He looked happier than you had ever seen him and while a part of you was jealous that you had never made him smile like that, you were mostly relieved to see the smile you’d grown to adore across his face.

You took a step down just as he was led to the police car parked right against the curb. Even through the flashing cameras and endless questions thrown at him, he turned and seemed to spot you immediately. His smile softened into the one he reserved just for you and you felt your lips twisting up into a grin. The rest of the world melted away and for several beats of your heart, you could see nothing but him. With another wink that cut through your sadness and dread like a hot knife, Arthur was ducked into the back seat of the squad car and the door shut behind him.
Not a single soul noticed the brief exchange between you, but that was fine. You preferred it that way. It was easier to get away with the things you were planning when no one noticed you.
“Police are urging parents to keep their children inside this Halloween, or stick to safe
neighborhoods.” The voice of the anchorman on the news went in one ear and out the other as you
strolled through the costume shop. Not the one you had stolen from, of course. You steered clear
from that street altogether, but it was a good thing that stores like this popped up all over Gotham
around this time of year.

You shifted through the racks of picked over costumes and wished you hadn’t waited until the
absolute last day to find something to wear. You’d been so distracted the day before by Arthur’s
trial that you could barely think straight. As you looked over a black, sheath style dress that was
made to be a vampire, you wrinkled your nose and caught the tail end of the conversation from the
front counter.

A woman was trying to return her kid’s costumes she had bought a few weeks prior and was
getting quite angry at the no return policy. “What am I supposed to do with these? Can’t take them
trick or treating because of the riots! I don’t want a cowboy and cat costume just lying around my
house.”

At the mention of the cat costume, you turned and looked at her. She was agitated, and so was the
man at the register who looked as if he’d rather be anywhere else than here. He sighed and rolled
his eyes, pointing to the sign above his head that stated ‘all sales final’.

Taking your hands away from the costumes on the rack, you turned to the counter and made your
way toward the angry mother. You cleared your throat with a sweet smile and glanced at the teenage boy behind the register.

“Excuse me?”

“What?” The woman snapped, shoving the costumes back into the bag.

“I’ll buy the cat costume from you.”

Her eyes lifted to meet yours and she arched an eyebrow. “You want to buy a kid’s costume?”

“Well,” you started, shrugging a shoulder. “ Mostly I just want the ears and tail. I have cash.” You dipped your hand into your pocket and fished out several bills. The hospital had sent your last paycheck by express mail, more than likely to persuade you not to show back up or call asking for it, and you had immediately gone to cash it all.

Truth be told, it was kind of burning a hole in your pocket. But you smiled as she looked from the wad of money back up to your face. She immediately pulled the black leotard out and set the cat ears and tail on the counter for you to see. The age group was for teenagers, but you could make the accessories work for sure.

As you handed over the money, which was more than enough to compensate, you plucked the tail from the counter and slipped the ears over your head. You turned to face the boy and beamed a smile. “How do I look?”

“Uh...cool?”

You threw down the can of purple hair dye spray and a tube of black face paint. He rang it up for you as the woman walked out with a roll of her eyes at him. “You going to a party tonight?”

“Oh yeah, didn’t you hear?” You counted out the money and held it out for him. He lifted an eyebrow. “There’s going to be a huge party downtown.”

The news playing on the radio behind the desk announced the areas to avoid for Halloween and the
boy pointed a thumb over his shoulder to it. “There’s going to be protests and riots downtown tonight.”

You scooped your items up into your arms and nodded with a bright smile. “Yeah, I know. It’s going to be a lot of fun.”

He stared at you as you turned and headed to the door, cat ears still perched on top of your head. With a final wave over your shoulder, you pushed your shoulder into the door and strolled out into the streets. A police car sped by, sirens blaring and lights flashing and you glared at it. The streets were relatively empty, despite it being a Tuesday afternoon, and you figured that had mostly to do with the riots.

No sane person would be out tonight. Halloween was already an iffy night to walk the streets of Gotham, but now with all the chaos surrounding Joker’s trial, it was magnified. Which made it a perfect night to carry out your master plan.

The master plan that really had no plan at all.

You had no idea how you were going to break Arthur out, but you knew you were going to do everything in your power to try. And with the master key, your pawnshop taser, and the need to see him again burning through you, you figured you could accomplish something.

But first, you needed to get dressed. If there was one thing Joker appreciated more than anything, it was a good show and if you couldn’t break him out, then you were going to give him that at least.

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You stared down at the simple, black plastic casing around the taser. You’d never used one before and the only time you’d ever even seen one up close was the day you purchased it. There was a small button on the side and you pressed it, nearly dropping it as an arc of electricity sprang from the two metal prongs on the top.

“Shit,” you whispered to yourself, releasing the button before tentatively pressing it once more. Now that you were expecting the loud clacking noise, it didn’t surprise you as much but you still held it away from your face just in case. It didn’t seem like it could render anyone incapacitated.

Hopefully, it would.
You set the taser down beside you on the bed and strolled to the mirror hanging on the back of your door to inspect your costume. It was unfortunate you couldn’t find a single clown costume anywhere in town, but you improvised well. And besides, you weren’t trying to be Joker.

Whereas his makeup was blue and red, you chose one simple color: black. You made two, thin streaks on each eye, one going up to your forehead and the other down to your cheeks, with dots at the very tips. The end of your nose was covered in a black heart and you painted your lips with the red lipstick you had stolen from Janey. With the cat ears slipped over your head, you gave a twirl and smoothed the black shirt down your torso.

The ears didn't quite match, but he had called you Kitten and it had been a turning point for you in this whole situation. So, if that was what he wanted you to be, then that was exactly what you were going to be.

Joker and his kitten.

It put a stupid grin on your face and you made sure your hair was covered in the purple spray and styled in a messy ponytail. You took a step back to admire yourself. From the tips of the cat ears to the toe of your boots, you were dressed all in black and felt incredibly sexy, despite all the tension and twisting nervousness that made you feel like you were going to puke any second.

Shaking the bottle of purple spray, you turned to grab your taser and key before heading back into the living room. Propped against the wall were your four paintings and you figured there was no point in destroying them now. With what you'd done last week and after tonight, your love for Joker would be known. And you were sure that your apartment would be raided within in the next few days. They would find no evidence of your obsession but the paintings and you could almost hear them already, standing where you stood now, muttering to each other about how crazy you were.

Even Arthur's public defender has said it to your face. "That sounds pretty fucking crazy to me."

Standing on the couch, you popped the cap off the spray and pointed it at the tacky, floral wallpaper that you had hated from the first moment you first walked in. You thought of the look on Janey's face when she saw your paintings, thought of Todd staring at you when you told him your feelings, and even Margaret staring at you like you'd gone crazy after being found in bed with Joker. You focused on it all as you wrote the only message you were going to give the police and when you were finished, you stepped back to admire your work.
You tossed the can across the room and spun toward the door, throwing it open as a giggle bubbled from your throat. You didn't bother locking the door. The things you left behind couldn't come with you. Not where you were going.

Despite the constant advice from the police and news stations, the streets were absolutely alive with people looking for chaos tonight. No one even looked twice at you, wearing their own homemade clown costumes and busy breaking car windows and spraying the buildings with graffitied messages of revolution. Some were repeated from the signs you'd seen at the protest.

*Eat the rich.*

*Burn Gotham.*

Etc.

You didn't care about any of the messages because Joker didn't care about them. He wasn't trying to be a symbol of hope for the little people or spread a message that would ultimately fall on dead ears. He was in it strictly for the chaos and you had never dreamed how beautiful it could be.

There was a kind of peace to it all, watching people with painted faces tipping cars over and burning mounds of trash that had been lingering on the streets. It was a mirror image of the chaos so many people felt inside all day, every day and it made you smile to see it manifested to reality.

Unfortunately, the riots meant the buses wouldn't be running and the taxis were few and far between. Which made you resort to the subway and walking. It wasn't so bad with the people on the streets or locked in their homes.

And besides, if anyone tried to attack you, you had a taser up your sleeve to make them think twice. It took nearly an hour to make your way across town, even with the subway, and you were nearly shaking as you neared the hospital.

Ambulances sped this way and that and you almost felt bad for the paramedics having to be on constant awareness all night. There were going to be a lot of injuries tonight and possible deaths. You just hoped you weren't one of them.
The closer you got to the blocks that the hospital sat on, the more you could hear chanting. And as you rounded the corner, your eyebrows lifted to see quite a large gathering of protestors outside. It warmed your heart but also annoyed you. They had gathered a police presence at the front doors to the emergency room and the psych block.

Which put an immediate damper into your plans.

“Fuck,” you hissed beneath your breath, standing across the street from Arkham with your hands on your hips. It wasn’t like you expected to be able to waltz in the front doors and right up to the fourth floor where Arthur was waiting with his arms open. You were in love, not stupid.

Sighing, you glanced through the archways along the sidewalk and stared into the darkness stretching down the alleyway. You recalled the morning you had sat on the dock, smoking a cigarette and deep in your thoughts before Arthur’s lawyer had interrupted you. In your mind, you could see the enormous, rolling doors and the one, regular-sized, beside it. It was locked but didn’t have a bolt or anything much more than what existed on the doorknob.

With a quick look back to the crowd of protestors and police trying to settle them down, you hurried into the shadows of the alleyway, pulling the key from where you’d stashed it in your bra. The pants you were wearing were tight and had no pockets and you had been forced to use the only other thing that could keep it safe. As for the taser, it was tucked into the waist of your pants, right at the small of your back.

You pulled yourself up onto the dock and dusted your hands off before glancing around the surroundings, just in case there was a guard making his rounds. You expected there would be much more security after your little shenanigans the week before. But it seemed that luck was on your side... for the moment at least.

The key opened the door and you slipped it back into your bra before ducking inside the dark storeroom of the hospital. You turned toward the cafeteria and made your way through the shadows, keeping an eye out for anyone.

On this side of the ground floor, there were administrative and accounting offices, but also the intake room where your first destination would be. Like the pharmacy, it was locked up for the night, and most of the time.

When patients were admitted, their clothes and the belongings they had on them at the time were
taken and stored behind a locked gate, much like in the records department. And while you weren’t too sure what you’d find in Arthur’s cubby, you could only assume it would be the clothes he came in with.

You opened the gate past the intake office and winced as the aging hinges shrieked in protest. Even moving it slowly did little to keep it quiet and with a huff of annoyance, you bit the bullet and pushed it open quickly. In the silence that followed, you listened for any commotion and heard nothing.

You hurried into the dark room and felt along the wall for a light switch. It blinked on overhead and you rushed through the endless shelves of plastic bins with white labels on the front. Thankfully, they were arranged alphabetically and you raced down the aisle with the F’s. His was near the bottom and had gathered a layer of dust on the top.

You pulled it out and knelt down to pop the lid off. The color of the fabric caught your attention first and your eyes widened at the red, folded jacket sitting on the top of the pile of things. You rifled through it, finding a green button-up, vest, pants, and shoes. It was all here and there was a tag clipped onto the lapel of the jacket reading ‘police evidence’. You ripped it off with a tug and gathered it all into your arms.

Why hadn’t you brought a bag or something to carry it in?

You stood and left the bin where you had set it down on the floor. There wasn’t much else in it besides papers from his intake. As you turned to the door, you looked down at the jacket in your arms and buried your face in it. Time was of the essence, but you just couldn’t resist.

There was a faint smell of being in storage for a long time, dust and plastic, and just beneath was something that sang to your senses. It was sweat and after shave, blood and Arthur. With another deep inhale, you let it sink into your soul and shivered.

If it smelled this good now, you couldn’t wait to smell it actually on him. Of course...you had to get it to him somehow first.

Rushing back out of the gate, you slid it closed behind you and searched around the intake offices for anything. Beneath a desk was a trash can with a clear, plastic bag sitting in it and you dumped the trash out. Thankfully it was only papers and an empty coffee cup. You shoved the suit and shoes down into the bag and hurried back out in the hallway.
Still, there was no one making rounds, no one to see you back in the hospital. A part of you wondered if this was a trap. Did they know you’d be back? Surely they’d be expecting something.

There was no time to wait around for someone to pop out of the shadows. With still so much to do, you made a beeline for the elevators in the lobby. You had to pass by the employee lounge and before you could get close to the open door leading to it, a voice caught your attention. Not just anyone's voice, either.

_Todd's voice._

He was laughing to whoever else was in the lounge with him and you glared at the light spilling from the room out into the hallway. _Shit_. How the hell were you supposed to get past him?

The elevators were out of the question. You'd have to take the stairs. It wasn't ideal, but you had to adjust to stay away from Todd. Doubling back, you pushed into the stairwell and hurried up through the floors. As much as you longed to go to the fourth, you had some things to do on the fifth.

It was maximum security as well and reserved for the more severe patients. The only reason Arthur had been placed on fourth was because there were no available rooms, and at the time of his intake, he hadn't exactly been a threat to anyone else. Which had made things convenient for you to meet him.

You wanted to smile, thinking back to that first night, but were far too nervous about your tasks at hand. Particularly this next one.

You crept up to the landing on the fifth floor and ducked beneath the window in the door before taking a peek. The guard was glancing into the rooms, actually doing his job and you bit your lip. You stashed the bag with Arthur's suit into the corner and took a deep breath to steady yourself.

_I can do this_ , you told yourself. _I have to do this for Arthur. For Joker._

You reached up to grab the door handle and slowly opened it a crack, just enough so that the guard can hear you. You stood and slid your back against the wall, taking the taser out to grip it tightly. He had his back turned to you but he was close enough that he would be able to hear.
Another shaking breath in.

You pursed your lips with a frown pinching your eyebrows and let the breath out. It did little to actually calm you but it was now or never.

You screamed loudly, wincing as the sound bounced off the walls and echoed around the stairwell. It was just a short shriek, enough to get his attention while not disturbing the guard on the floor below you. And sure enough, you watched through the window of the door as the uniformed guard spun on his heel and stared with wide, alert eyes.

The belt around his waist, containing the useless gun, radio and nightstick, bounced noisily as he ran. You braced yourself against the wall, trying to flatten yourself as much as you could and kept your thumb on the little button on the side of the taser.

Your vision blurred and you sucked in a breath, gripping the device as tightly as you could. When the door burst open, your eyes widened and time nearly slowed to a stop. Though your brain had checked out completely, your body was aware of what it had been planning.

The guard stepped into the stairwell, mouth open to question what the hell had happened. And when his eyes cut to the right, exactly where you were standing, your arm shot out and the tip of the taser met the strip of skin above his collared shirt. With a click of your thumb, electricity arced between the metal plates and flashed blue and white against his neck.

Instantly, the muscles in his body contracted and convulsed, sending him spasming to the floor. His face turned red and you followed him down, never letting the taser lift from his neck. It may have been overkill, but you didn't know how much it would take to incapacitate him and you weren't taking any chances.

Breathless, you pulled away and sucked in mouthfuls of air as the guard's body gave little tremors and jolts as he laid face down on the dusty floor. He was groaning, which left you feeling relieved that you hadn't killed him, but he moved again, sliding his arms beneath him to lift himself up.

You pressed the taser back into his neck and smashed your thumb on the button, sending more electricity through him. He convulsed and after several seconds, you fell against the wall with tears stinging your eyes.

The guard was motionless, but breathing and every so often, his body would jerk involuntarily as
the currents still wracked through him. You pushed off the wall and snatched his radio and gun, slipping it into the waist of your pants. The nightstick took a trip down through the railings of the stairs to the first floor.

Still struggling to regain your composure, you wedged your hand beneath the guard and unbuckled his belt, pulling it from the loops. You used it to secure his hands behind his back and then to the railing, hoping he would be knocked out the entire time you carried out the rest of your plan.

You whirled back into the hallway and wrenched the key from inside your bra. There was still a tremble through your fingers and you weren't sure it was from fear or the vibrations of the taser you had been gripping so tightly. More than likely, it was both.

You slid to a stop at the first door and glanced quickly into the darkened room. It was after lights out but none of these patients slept. They were on so many meds that sleep was an entirely different language to them. You unlocked the first door, gaining the attention of the woman inside.

Her eyes were wide and bloodshot and she had tufts of her hair missing. Several chunks littered the ground.

You didn't give her a second glance as you went to the next door, and then the next, and the next, unlocking all of the patients and leaving their cells wide open. You wasted no time sticking around to see if they actually crept out their doors, but you hoped they would. With the horror stories you'd heard about some of these people, you didn't doubt that they would see this as an opportunity to create some havoc on their own.

From the end of the hall, a man who had been described as a "biter" poked his head around the door and blinked at you in surprise. You walked backward, keeping your eye on him as you retrieved Arthur's belongings from the stairwell. More and more of them were creeping warily out of their rooms, checking to make sure they weren't being tricked.

You hurried to the elevator and stared at them all, pressing the down button repeatedly with your thumb. "The exit is five floors down and there are a lot of people waiting for you there," you called, backing into the elevator.

The door to the stairs was thrown open and you could hear one of the patients give a loud and excited whoop as he did so. In front of you, the door slid shut and you reached to your back for the gun you'd taken from the other guard, holding it in your right as you gripped the taser in your left.
As soon as the bell dinged to announce your arrival, you pointed the barrel out in front of you and clamped your arm down on the bag of clothes. The door opened and the guard was on his feet instantly, already looking to the stairwell where more patients were causing a scene. He glanced at you quickly before giving you a double-take, his eyes going wide in shock.

His hands shot up into the air above his head and you stepped out onto the fourth floor. "Into the supply room," you commanded.

He quickly made his way across the hall and you followed, the pointless gun that the security company didn't even provide bullets for pointed at his back. He didn't have to know it was useless though. For all he knew, it was real and it was deadly.

"Throw your radio into the hall. And the gun."

Just in case they'd upped their armory since your breach in the system. He did as you ordered and as the radio slid across the floor, you brought the heel of your boot down on it hard. As he turned back to face you, eyes wide and full of fear, you sighed.

"I'm not going to hurt you. Just stay in here and keep the door shut and locked. Tell them I knocked you out."

He opened his mouth to question you, but never got a chance to speak. You kicked the closet door shut with enough force that it rattled the frame and you hurried to the doors, giving them the same treatment as you did to the ones on fifth. Some of them, you were sure, wouldn't know that anything in their room had even changed. They barely noticed anything through their over-medicated haze.

But you needed a distraction and the more of them that roamed through the wards, hopefully venturing outside, the better. The more chaos, the easier it would be to sneak Joker free.

As you threw open the last door and slid to a stop in front of his, you couldn't resist giving a peek in at him, just like you had so many times before. He stood at the window, as he had in your painting, with his back to the door and the light from the street casting him in an artificial, orange glow. He wasn't still and stoic as he had been that first night. Tonight, he was using his reflection in the window to apply the makeup you had gotten for him.

From where you stood, you could only see the right side of his cheek and it was painted white.
Blue triangles ended in points on his cheek and forehead and you could see him putting the finishing touches on his blood-red smile. As you clicked the key into the lock and twisted it, he turned with a smile, his eyebrow slowly arching at the sight of you.

You pushed his door open all the way and stood shyly at the threshold of his room, letting him take in your costume and makeup. Arthur tilted his head and lifted his gaze to the ears on top of your head.

"Are you a cat or a clown?"

"I'm your kitten." Your voice was quiet, barely heard over the shouting protestors growing louder outside by the minute. Had the patients found their way to the streets yet?

Arthur let out a soft laugh and dropped the makeup brush onto the bed at his left. With one finger, he beckoned you further into the room and you obeyed, lowering your weapons to your sides. Step after step, you moved closer until he reached up and cupped your face. His palm was cool but you'd missed the feel of it so badly. He brushed his thumb against your bottom lip and dragged it up to your cheek, just as he had with the blood from your split lip.

"Kitten," he repeated, the look in his eyes dark and unfathomable. God, you were dying to know what he was thinking. It was so unfair how closed off he was. Did he approve? Did he still want you? Your eyes slid closed and he dipped his head down so his painted forehead touched yours. "I love it."

You bit your lip and pulled the bag out from beneath your elbow, presenting it to him like a gift. "This was in the storeroom. We can't have you traipsing about the city in your pajamas, can we?"

He looked down into the plastic trash bag the same way he had looked at the gifts you had brought him last week. Surprise and approval were clear on his face and you felt your lips stretch into a smile. He reached in and pulled the red jacket out, giving it a shake before holding it up. You pulled out the rest, handing him piece after piece for him to dress in. When he sat on the bed to slip his shoes on, you stood on the mattress and reached up for the ceiling tile.

He watched you with a grin as you felt around for the gun he had stashed. After a moment of fumbling, you found it and held it down for him to take. He took the gun with his left hand and your wrist in his right, pulling you back down to the floor.
As soon as your feet hit the tiles, he was cradling your face in his hands. The kiss surprised you but you closed your eyes with a sigh of relief. It felt so good to be back in his arms, to feel his kiss once more. Arthur parted his lips over yours and you followed his lead, opening your mouth to invite his tongue in to taste yours. He dropped one of his hands to your side and brought you even closer to him and you spread your fingers over the fabric of his suit jacket, toes curling in your shoes.

From outside the hospital, the shouting had grown and occasionally, glass shattered and shots were fired, breaking through your daze of pleasure. You giggled against his mouth and pulled back to blink up at him. The color around his lips had smeared and you tried to straighten it with the edge of your thumb.

"We don't have much time. We need to leave before they call in for backup."

You turned away but he held you in place with his arm around your waist. "You did all of this for me?"

"Of course." Your answer was immediate and the truth. "I love you."

A shadow of sorrow passed over his face and he looked down at the narrow space between your bodies. It made your heart clench tight and your breathing picked up speed. Did he not feel the same? It would break your heart if he didn't but wouldn't change how you felt. You were his, no matter how he felt about you in return.

You pulled his arm free from your waist and took his hand, offering him a smile when his eyes lifted to meet yours. "Let's get you out of here."

The corner of his lips lifted into a smile and he let you pull him toward the door. It only took a few seconds, but in that time, you couldn't help imagining all the places you and Arthur could go once he was free. You would be free to do anything. And as long as he was with you, you would be free as well.

But you were so lost in your thoughts and fantasies, you didn't see the fist until it was slamming into your face. Pain and bursts of light shot through your vision and you stumbled back into the room. Arthur's hand was pulled from yours seconds before you hit the ground on your ass.

Your taser and gun slid across the tiles in opposite directions and you sobbed at the pain throbbing across your face. It was blinding and even blinking the tears stinging at your eyes, you could barely...
make sense of the blur of the room in front of you.

There was a red figure by the door and a larger one, dressed in white, slamming it into the wall. Arthur… Todd.

You scrambled to your feet with a gasp and though you could just barely make out their edges through your tears, you attacked. You were on Todd before you could even think, arms wrapped around his neck as you clung to him from the back. He howled with rage and reached back to take you by the hair. The cat ears fell to the floor as he jerked your head to the side and you felt yourself slip from around his neck.

For the second time, your ass hit the tiles and your back knocked into the door of Arthur's room.

"I should have killed you when I had the chance," Todd snarled, pressing his elbow harder into his throat. The gun Arthur had been holding moments ago now laid at his feet, knocked free from his grip by the surprise of Todd's intrusion. He was gasping for air and you scrambled forward to snatch the gun.

Your finger squeezed the trigger and---nothing.

You blinked and stared at the gun. Had it jammed? You knew it had been loaded. Your eyes cut to the hammer on the back and you gasped. Frantically, you pulled the hammer back and aimed right at the one thing you could actually see right in front of you.

The shot was loud--much louder than you had been expecting and you sucked in a breath as Todd's knee exploded in a burst of blood and bone. Your ears were ringing too badly to hear much, but you could only assume he was screaming in pain.

His body hit the ground right in front of you, spilling him partway out of the door. He rolled onto his side, holding his knee and you scrambled back on your hands and heels. You couldn't look away from his face, contorted in so much rage and agony that the blood vessel on his forehead looked as if it might burst.

You blinked as the ringing started to fade. But the sounds of Arthur's cough and gasps for breath weren't much better. Every so often, Todd would hiss through his teeth or yell that you were a fucking bitch, but he was the last thing on your mind. You jumped to your feet just as Arthur straightened and sucked in a deep, shuddering breath.
He turned to face you, his eyes narrowed with dark hatred and you stumbled back to watch him. He bent down to pick up the gun you had dropped and calmly, he stepped over Todd who reached up to paw at Arthur's pants. He took hold of the material, stopping him from stepping over and the narrowed gaze lowered from your face down to Todd.

"I'll fuckin' kill you," he spat, trying to push through the pain to bring Arthur down to him. "You fucking freak. You deserve to die. Both of you!"

You swallowed and looked down to the gun in your hand, regretting that you hadn't aimed higher, somewhere that would really shut him up. Arthur stepped back and put his foot on the mangled knee that still spilled blood across the floor. You blinked up as Todd howled with agony, reaching down to grip Arthur's ankle that pushed hard into the wound.

He met your eyes and you took a step back to let him out of the room. Arthur sighed as if he were more annoyed by the whole thing and not terrified like you were. He put a hand to your stomach and gently guided you away from the door. You let him push you back but still stared at the man on the floor, writhing in fury and pain.

It was strange how small he looked now. The width of his shoulders had shrunk and his biceps didn't look like they could kill you anymore.

"Don't look." The voice sounded far away as if you were hearing it through a wall and you lifted your gaze. Pushing a hand through his hair, Arthur gripped the door with both hands and slammed it toward the door frame. It hit the side of Todd's head with a sickening crack and you put your hands to your ears but didn't look away like he had told you.

Several times, he slammed the door into his head and each time, Todd made less and less noise until he was completely quiet. With one last blow, his muscular body gave a twitch and Arthur stumbled away with deep breaths. He took a moment to look at what he had done and you could only stare with wide eyes at the gruesome scene.

Blood leaked out from the deep gashes on Todd's head and seeped across the tile where Arthur stood. He paid no attention to it. As calmly as he could, he reached up and slicked his hair back with both hands. Then he straightened his jacket and turned to face you with a sweet, bright smile.

You looked down to the arm he held out for you and you lifted the gun for him to take. He slid it into the waist of his pants before stepping close to you. Your body tensed, but mostly out of
instinct. You had just witnessed him kill a man.

Arthur looped an arm back around your waist and brought his hand to your face, brushing your bruised nose with a gentle touch of his thumb. It made you wince and he clucked his tongue, sticking his bottom lip out in a pout. "Poor kitten. Does it hurt bad?"

You shook your head and looked down, not able to meet his gaze. Again, it wasn't because you were afraid of him now. It was mostly because he was being so sweet, your face blushed hot.

He dipped his head and kissed you gently and sweetly, making you forget about the pain across your face. When he pulled away, he took your hand, lacing his fingers through yours, and turned to face the hallway of open doors. "C'mon. Let's make our appearance for the world to see."

Adrenaline surged through your body and you felt as if you could conquer the entire world at that moment. You let Arthur lead you to the elevator, smiling up at him as the two of you stepped onto it. As soon as the doors shut, his lips were against yours once more. You giggled and circled your arm around his neck, letting him smear his makeup across your mouth and down to your throat.

"No one can stand in our way," he murmured, lips brushing along the stretch of skin just beneath your jaw. "No one will hurt us."

It wasn't an 'I love you' but it was just as good. It was his own way of saying it; a whispered promise against your flesh and you felt your head swim.

All too soon, the doors opened and on the first floor, the chaos from the street had moved inside. The front doors had been kicked open and one of the patients from the fifth floor was wreaking havoc in the lobby, tossing chairs into the windows and screaming at the top of his lungs. You took Arthur by the hand and led him toward the cafeteria.

There was no way you were going to risk him being caught by the police. Hand in hand, you ran through the halls and dining area. He didn't protest, letting you lead him this time. The supply room was dark and deserted, just like you wanted it to be and you were breathless as you pushed through the door.

The air carried the smell of gasoline and burning trash and you looked up the alley to the street. A fire was burning in the frame of an old car and people ran to and fro. You didn't want to take Arthur through the street, but the back alley of the hospital led further into Gothman. You had to
get him out as fast as possible.

And unfortunately, the street was the fastest way.

The two of you hurried up the alley, fingers still laced together, and you were panting as you reached the street. A police car sped by and you jumped back with a gasp, though Arthur pulled you fearlessly toward the street.

Being so out in the open terrified you. Why had you come this way? Why had you let him dress in such a bright colored suit? His theatrics were rubbing off on you.

You squeezed his hand tighter and ran to keep up, looking at the shadows between the building up ahead for shelter. In the darkness, you would be safe. You would be able to take him out of this imploding city.

Unfortunately, he was noticed almost immediately and at the sound of his moniker being called, you spun back toward the hospital. Arthur came to a stop at your side and you stared at the line of figures moving toward you. They were wearing clown masks or their faces were painted and several carried makeshift weapons from various objects. You eyed the baseball bat in the hands of the one stepping closer to you.

You shrank back against Arthur, but he held his place, looking at the group with a small, curious smile. The man in front of you lifted his mask and you stared at the young face. He was covered in soot and there was a cut just beneath his eye.

When he spoke, he looked right at Joker. You didn't know if he even noticed you holding hands with Arthur. "We can hide you."

"No," you said with a shake of your head. "He needs to leave the city."

"He can't leave." Still, the guy hadn't even looked at you. "He's the only one that can bring Gotham to its knees." At this, the crowd that had gathered cheered, lifting their weapons in the air above their heads.

You swallowed and looked up at Arthur, pleading with your eyes. He turned to look down at you and pulled his hand free from yours to press his palm against your jaw. "We have to leave," you
said, swallowing against the lump pressing to your throat.

"I don't think I can." His eyes cut back to the protestor and you clenched your fingers around Arthur's jacket. "They're right. Gotham needs me."

"Arthur, please--"

A shot rang out behind the group circling around you and you flinched. The protestors let out their battle cries and a few of them broke apart from the circle to turn and face the wave of police pulling up to the scene. By now, you were frantically pulling at Arthur's jacket, urging him to flee to the shadows, anywhere they couldn't find him.

But he stayed rooted to the spot as if he didn't care what happened one way or another. He smiled like it was all some sort of cosmic joke and you felt powerless. Behind you, the guy with the mask spoke but you weren't too sure what he was saying. All you could hear was the chaos, no longer finding the beauty in it. You hated it, hated that it birthed these people who wanted to take him away from you.

A scream pierced the night and the guy rushed forward, taking Arthur by the arm. He assured him that they had a place to hide and you stumbled to keep up. You watched Arthur reach back for you, the tip of his fingers brushing yours and you nearly had a hold on them.

Pain erupted across your back, right at your shoulder blade and you screamed. Your knees hit the street beneath you and you sucked in a deep breath that did little to ease the agony surging through your body. You blinked down at the gravel beneath you and stared at the hand that fell limp in your lap. Blood slid down and around your elbow and you watched it drip to the street beneath you.

The sound of someone screaming for you lifted your head and you could see Arthur on the sidewalk, struggling against the arms around his waist. It wasn't the police dragging him away, which brought you such a strange sense of relief that you couldn't help but smile. It was the man in the mask, accompanied by two others pulling him to safety and as you sat on the street, tears burning your eyes, you watched Arthur disappear into the shadows you had been trying to urge him into.

There were more shots fired behind you, but if they hit you, you weren't aware. Your entire body was numb and the edges of your vision blurred to black. The ground around you was lit red and blue from the police lights and you slumped forward, knowing unconsciousness was coming fast.
A pair of hands were on you, assuring you that an ambulance was on the way, but you couldn't respond. All you could do was smile and hope that Arthur would be safe with his followers. You fell to the street with little resistance and the people above you, uniformed and shouting orders, rolled you onto your side so you could blink up at the sky.

The glow of the fires, the screams and sirens faded to black and before you slipped out of consciousness, you felt a tear roll down the side of your face.

But it was alright.

Arthur would be safe in the chaos.

Chapter End Notes

Ooo, what's gonna happen? Is reader going to find Arthur again? Is she going to prison for what she did or will she end up in Arkham? I guess you'll have to wait and see when I update next :P
The first thing you noticed upon waking from the thick, black fog of unconsciousness was how dry and heavy your tongue felt. It was as if it had been replaced with someone else's. It was far too thick and far too dry to feel right and though you hadn't yet opened your eyes, you smacked your lips.

They were dry as well and split.

You winced and tried to reach up to touch the tender edges of your mouth but you could barely lift
your arm. It felt as if there were weights sitting on top of it. Maybe there were.

You couldn't quite remember what had happened, what had brought you to wherever you were now. Struggling to pry your eyes open, you could see a blur of bright light through the slits of your eyelids and you winced in pain, squeezing them shut immediately. Again, you tried to lift your hand to shield your eyes and couldn't. What the hell was keeping your arms down at your side?

Well, one of them was at your side, lying limp across a strange, scratchy blanket. The other arm was across your chest, nestled in some sort of cocoon that kept it quite still.

And your mouth was still so dry. You smacked your lips again and let your head roll to the side, wondering if that damn bright light was over here as well. You tested it with a quick peek through your eyelashes and sighed as the light felt just a bit dimmer. With each slow blink of your eyelids, more and more of your surroundings came into focus. But that didn't clear things up for you.

If anything, it left you with more questions.

Head turned to the left, you were aware of the stiff pillow beneath you and a small, dimly lit room. The walls were a tacky, blue tile and just a few steps away, you could see a door with a narrow, rectangular window down the middle. It looked familiar, yet not at the same time. Almost as if you'd seen it a long time ago and the memory was fuzzy in your head.

Now that your eyes had adjusted to the light, you rolled your head to the right and frowned. The light was coming from a window on the wall in this direction and you slowly blinked a few times to focus on it. The glass was fogged but you didn't exactly care about what was going on outside the room. You were suddenly distracted by the sight of someone sitting in a chair across the room.

They were silhouetted against the light, cast in shadow and the corner of your dry, cracked lips lifted with a weak smile. Arthur?

You blinked again, and then again, trying once more to lift your left hand from the bed. All you wanted at that moment was to reach for him, to feel his fingers lace through yours once more. But you couldn't. Your hand stopped only a few inches from the blankets, stopped by something cold and metal looped around your wrist.

You frowned and dipped your head, finally seeing your legs stretched out in front of you on the bed. There was a footboard beyond your feet and following your body upwards, you took in the
sight. Arm held close to your chest in a blue sling, a hard, plaster cast stretching from your hand to your elbow.

A tube of oxygen was sitting on your upper lip and you scrunched your nose, finally noticing the tickle of it. But the sight of your left arm, laying weakly at your side, immediately pulled your attention to it. Primarily the silver band cuffed around it. A short chain draped from it to another circle of metal looped around the bed railing. You were... *handcuffed*?

No...

What had happened?

You slowly turned to face the figure once more, the one you'd been so certain had been Arthur. The fuzzy edges of the silhouette came into focus so fast, you felt your head swim. It wasn't Arthur at all. It was a man you'd never seen before.

Actually, you *had* seen him, but only on the television. He was young, maybe in his mid-thirties, with a short haircut close to his head and a thick, wiry mustache on his top lip. A cop of some sort. Lieutenant or something.

*Gordon*.

The name popped into your head just as he cleared his throat and leaned forward, looking at you. He'd been watching you come out of your daze, eyes narrowed and boring into you with such intensity, such strange disappointment that you felt the urge to recoil back into the pillows. Again, you struggled against the handcuffs and breathed hard out of your nose.

You tried to speak, but the back of your throat was as dry as sandpaper and the only sound that came out was a strangled cough. The cop put his elbows on his knees and stared at you, mustache twitching slightly as he sniffed.

When he spoke your name, he sounded far away. Apparently, your hearing was the last to come into focus. You blinked at him, the struggle in your arms fading. You barely had the strength to move, let alone try to pull yourself free from the handcuffs.

"Do you know where you are?" The cop asked, making your brows pinch into a frown. Was he
being stupid?

You opened your mouth, but couldn't find your voice. Luckily, he was able to read your lips as you breathed out the word *hospital* in a rasp. He nodded again and stood to his feet, stepping closer to his bed. Now that your hearing was back, the sound of his shoes sliding over the tiles made you jump. It was too loud, too close.

"That's right. You were shot two nights ago."

As if on cue, a strange pain radiated out from your right shoulder blade and traveled down your arm to settle across your nerves. It was as if you'd dipped your entire arm in ice water. Despite trying hard not to react one way or another, you couldn't help the soft, strangled cry. Along with the pain, the memories flooded back through your mind.

Memories of Arkham. Of Todd. Of Arthur and his kiss, his words whispered to your throat, his fingers reaching for yours in the streets and his face as he screamed for you. He had tried to go back for you. Tried and failed to wrench himself free of the arms circling him, carrying him into the shadows, away from the chaos and…

Your eyes cut to Gordon quickly, blinking the tears from your eyes. He seemed to sense exactly what you were thinking, though he made no mention of Joker. He put a hand to the railing on the bed and leaned closer, his eyes narrowing even further.

"Do you recall anything about that night?" You didn't respond, didn't exactly have to. He could see the answer written clearly across your face. He sighed and leaned back to let his hands fall away from the railing. "Do you think you're able to give us an account of what happened at Arkham State Hospital?"

You were only slightly worried about having a lawyer present, that this could be your confession and you blinked up at him, opting to stay quiet. For several seconds, he stared down at you, the look on his face unchanging and you had to look away.

"Ma'am?" His voice brought your attention back up to his face. "If you cooperate, it'll only make things easier on you in the long run. If not, as soon as you're discharged, you'll be taken to county lock up. Is that clear?"

You nodded slowly, unable to give him much more than slow jerks of your head up and down.
Anything more and you'd vomit. The urge was already creeping horribly up the inside of your esophagus. It brought with it a bad taste to your already dry tongue.

"C-can," you paused to wince at the struggle it was just to speak. "Water?" Short questions would have to do.

Thankfully, Gordon nodded and moved to the foot of the bed and you expected to see him continue on to the door to retrieve you a cup of water. But he didn’t. He stopped at the foot of the bed and put his hands on the end of it, leaning forward to look at you. Your eyes darted to the door and you wondered, with a sudden chill of fear spreading over you, who all knew you were here.

Obviously, the doctors and nurses who had been treating you. But there was no one else who cared about you. No one to stand outside and tell the detectives that this was all a mistake, that you hadn’t been in your right mind. No one to protect you from them if they decided not to patiently wait for you to come around and tell them what they wanted to know.

You didn’t know this man and him being a cop wasn’t reassuring. There were constant stories about crooked cops who fucked a person over just to save their ass. Was this guy one of those kinds of cops? Again, you pulled at the cuff around your wrist, making the metal skate over the bar and Gordon glanced down to it.

“You worked at Arkham for several months, correct?” You didn’t nod or respond in any way, just kept pulling on the restraints. Gordon didn’t exactly need you to answer. Surely by now, he knew enough about you to get a read on you. “And I’m assuming that during that time, you thought you were getting close to Arthur Fleck, and that, what? You would break him free and fly off on some honeymoon together?”

His words stung you deeply, like being shot all over again and you clenched your jaw. You kept your eyes glued to the wall near the door.

“It must be hard, waking up here in this room,” his voice dropped lower and you braced yourself for what he was going to say. You didn’t know how, but you just knew it was going to hurt. “Cuffed to the bed, facing the consequences of your actions, alone.”

At this, your eyes moved back to his and he pulled his hands away from the bed, standing straight and crossing his arms over his chest. You’d been right. It had hurt and though he didn’t show it on his face, you knew he could see the quiver of your chin, despite you struggling to stop it. Tears pricked at your eyes and the back of your throat, already so dry and rough, filled with a lump that made it nearly impossible to breathe.
“He left you alone and for the past two days, he hasn’t even attempted to look for you.”

Your pulse tripled in your chest and you leaned back against the pillows, looking up at the light above your bed. It was dim but seemed so much brighter than it was and with a few quick blinks, you felt the tears run warm down the curve of your face. Your lips parted and you ignored the pain from the cracks splitting and much to Gordon’s surprise you laughed. It was soft, barely even a sound but his eyes narrowed on you.

Your chin quivered and you wished you could reach up with either hand to brush the tears away since it was clear they weren’t going to stop coming. They bubbled up from your lower eyelids and dripped out and each one brought another rasp of a giggle from your throat. Gordon gave you a moment to come to your senses and when you sniffed and blinked down at him still at the foot of the bed, his frown deepened.

“So, he got away?” You whispered, wincing from the scratch at your throat. He didn’t answer you; just kept staring with that steely gaze that only cops know how to produce. “You haven’t caught him yet, have you?”

“We will. And I guarantee that when we do, he won’t give a rat’s ass about you.”

A knock at the door cut his words off and the both of you turned to see a man stroll in with green scrubs and a long, white lab coat. He had a name badge but it was obstructed by the collar and he smiled to see you were awake. “Good morning, I’m Dr. Ramirez,” he beamed as if you weren’t a criminal in police custody and just another one of his patients. The guy had some damn good bedside manner. “Or I suppose I should say good evening,” he pointed to the window where the sunlight was shifting to a deeper shade of orange with the sunset. “You’ve slept the days away, which is understandable after your ordeal. I’m just going to check your information real quick.”

The doctor looked down at the plastic bracelet on your wrist, gently pulling it out from beneath the cuffs as if they weren’t even there. He asked you to state your name, birthday, and the last four of your social security number and once you had confirmed that you were who they had you listed as he smiled and pulled out the file that he had clamped between his arm and side.

You watched him open it and at the foot of the bed, Gordon cleared his throat. “I’ll get you that water you wanted.”

He left the room and you had a feeling he wouldn’t bring you anything back when he returned.
With a sigh, you tried to scoot further back up in the bed and the doctor looked down at you from over the edge of the file. “You comfortable? Need an extra pillow?”

“No, I’m alright.”

“Alright, I’m just going to go over exactly what had happened and what we did during surgery.”

Surgery? No wonder you felt as if you’d been hit by a truck. At the mention of it, pain radiated from your shoulder and you winced, cradling your arm closer to your chest. Dr. Ramirez noticed but didn’t immediately bring it up.

“During surgery, we removed the bullet fragments and checked to see if there was damage to the bone and nerves surrounding it. Unfortunately, we won’t be able to know the extent until more time passes. But fortunately, your shoulder blade stopped it from hitting your lung, but it’s going to take a few months for you to be able to feel back to normal.” He snapped the file shut and held it with both hands in front of him. “Mind if I take a look?”

You shook your head and he set the chart down on the rolling table off to the side before crossing over to the right side of the bed. He unclipped the sling and gently pulled it away and you blinked down at your cast. “Did I break my arm?” You faintly recalled falling to the pavement but couldn’t remember any pain from breaking your arm. Then again, the pain from being shot had been enough to eclipse anything else.

“A small greenstick fracture. Shouldn’t take more than six weeks to heal.” Dr. Ramirez took your arm and extended it straight and just the small movement made you flinch and gasp with pain. He frowned and watched your face for reaction as he slowly inched it up away from your body. It was like fire from your neck down to the tips of your fingers on your right arm. "Hmm, we may need to go back in. Sometimes, with wounds like these, the bone fragments push on a nerve and can cause pain. I'll monitor you over the next few days and if we need to go back in and fix things, we will."

He stood from the bed and helped slip your arm back into the sling. It fit awkwardly but it was better than having to hold your arm against your chest by yourself. With a sigh, you settled back against your pillow and glanced at the door. Would he ever bring that water?

"I'm going to schedule you for an x-ray tomorrow morning to give us a better look inside. We'll be able to see any fragments that could be causing your discomfort."
"I don't have insurance," you whispered. You had insurance. Two weeks ago, before you risked everything to save Arthur, this would have been expensive, but it wouldn't have been something that would have bankrupted you. At least it would have been something to help these costs. How were you supposed to pay for a stay, surgery, and all these tests when you were facing prison time?

Dr. Ramirez scoffed and glanced to the doorway. "Once you're in custody, it's the city's dime. You may have to pay some fees, but it's the best insurance out there at the moment."

You could only stare at him. He was smirking as if that had been something for you to laugh at. But it was horrible. The only way to afford medical treatment was to get yourself arrested? As friendly as this doctor was, you now saw that he was just another clueless asshole. It was a joke to him, that your costs would be covered by the city, that otherwise, you would be up shit creek. He found it funny that the best insurance was to be in the custody of the police.

What about all the other poor souls on the streets of Gotham? Would they have to murder someone just to get the help they needed?

At the door, two figures appeared and you turned away from the doctor to see Gordon and someone else beside him. She was shorter but just as serious looking, and your eyes fell to the badge she wore on her hip. Another detective.

"Well, I'll leave you to it. Be sure to let the nurses know if you need any more pain meds." Dr. Ramirez gave you a thumbs up before turning on his heel to stroll from the room. He'd love it if you asked for more meds. More meds meant more money from the city lining his pocket. As soon as he disappeared around the corner, the two detectives moved into the room and you stiffened.

The tension made the muscles along your shoulders pull and you tried not to let the discomfort show on your face. The woman moved to the side of the bed where the chairs were, taking a seat to lean forward with her elbows on her knees and Gordon, surprisingly had your cup of water. He handed it to you but you had one arm secured and the other could barely move. He seemed to realize this two seconds after you blinked down at the cup then back up at him.

He directed the straw toward your lips and you sucked it in greedily. God, you'd never tasted tap water so delicious. It was like tasting it for the first time and you knew it was the same old crap you had at your apartment, but you were thankful for it. Sucking in a breath, you pulled away and he set the styrofoam cup down on the rolling cart. To your right, the female cop pulled a thin file from her jacket and opened it up.
There were pictures inside and as she shuffled through, you caught a quick glimpse of something familiar. Dripping, purple spray dye on the tacky wallpaper of your apartment. They'd been there, saw the message, saw your paintings. She plucked one of the photos from the small stack and turned it around to face you. It was the four canvases, all of various sizes, with Arthur and Joker, painted on them. They looked so muted in the photo, the colors drab and washed out. You missed them and found yourself smiling wistfully at the sight as the detective set it down on the bed in front of you.

"Look familiar?"

"Yes. They're my paintings."

The two cops shared a look before the woman turned back to the folder and pulled out another one. This time, it was of the message you'd left for Arthur's public defendant, Mr. Harris. *Am I crazy now, Mr. Harris?* You almost giggled and had to swallow down the urge to ask him if he'd seen it yet.

"I assume you did this as well?"

You nodded. There was no point in denying it, in fact, it seemed a little ridiculous that they were even questioning you about it. Who else would have done it? In the back of your mind, you wondered if they'd contacted Janey about you yet, questioned her and told her all what you’d done.

The folder snapped shut and the woman sighed, saying your name to pull you out of your thoughts. You blinked up at her. She was younger than Gordon, with blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail. If it weren’t for the lines on her face that deepened when she frowned, she’d be very pretty. As if she heard that thought of yours, her brows pinched together and that line of wrinkles formed down the center of them.

“We’re just trying to wrap our heads around things right now. You and Fleck entered a relationship while you worked for Arkham, correct?” Before you could nod, she continued. “Did he at any time ask you to do these things? To break him out of the hospital?”

“No.”

Your answer clearly surprised both of them. They were expecting you to reveal his master plan, to
give them insight into his mind and possibly clues about where he would go next. But you didn’t have any of that.

“You did this all on your own? Planned to break him out on your own?” She waited for you to nod and you did so after a moment. “So you’re aware that it led to the murder of your former coworker, Todd Daniels? You’re supervisor, Margaret Mitchell tells us that you and Mr. Daniels were close at one point.”

You dragged in a deep breath and let your head fall back against the pillows, staring up at the ceiling instead of looking at them. Would it do any good at this point to tell them what Todd had done to you? Saying anything now would just make them think you were trying to justify the murder. Hell, even telling them that Todd had tried to kill Arthur and that it was self-defense seemed pointless. With another sigh, you looked at them again and shrugged.

“I guess we weren’t as close as he wanted us to be. It caused some issues between us, but I didn’t have anything to do with his death.”

“It was a direct consequence of your actions,” Gordon argued.

“Todd didn’t have to attack us. He could have run with all the other orderlies out the door but he couldn’t get over the fact that I chose a man like Arthur over him. He died because of his own actions.”

The two detectives eyed each other again and Gordon frowned. You caught sight of him out of the corner of your eye but didn’t turn to face him. Obviously this little tidbit was news to them, though they didn’t seem to care too much or read into it. Clearing her throat, the detective looked at you once again.

“Arthur killed Mr. Daniels?”

They’d got you talking now, on a roll and they thought you were going to give them all the details of that night. You clamped your lips shut and turned your gaze to the corner of the room where the tacky, blue tiles came together. When it was clear that you weren’t going to answer, the detective spoke once more.

“You don’t need to protect him anymore. He clearly doesn’t care about you.” Your eyes narrowed into a glare as she spoke. With a sigh, she sat back in the chair and crossed her leg over the other.
“If he did, he would be here with you, wouldn’t he?”

“So you can arrest him? He’s not stupid.”

“No, but he is selfish and narcissistic, according to the reports of Dr. Quinzel. You may think he cares about you, but he isn’t capable of caring about you.” It was eerily similar to what the aforementioned doctor had said to you as well, in the pouring rain outside the hospital weeks ago. It didn’t matter to you then, and it doesn’t matter now. The detective shook her head and gave you a look full of pity, like you were some stray dog that had wandered in off the streets, mangy and hungry. “He didn’t even look back after you were shot.”

You pulled against the handcuffs and the sound of the metal clanking together split through the sudden silence. “Yes, he did. I saw him.”

She scoffed and looked up at Gordon. “So did we. I had a clear view of you two through the crowd. You hit the ground, reached out for him, and he turned his back on you. I knew he was heartless, but I didn’t think he would do that to the girl who orchestrated his entire freedom.”

“You’re lying. I know what I saw.”

“You know what you think you saw,” came Gordon’s quiet reply. Through the sudden haze of tears stinging at your eyelids, you watched him push off the wall and step closer to the foot of the bed. “He abandoned you the moment you were shot. There’s no point in helping him anymore. Like I said before, the more you cooperate with us, the better it will be in the long run.”

You pressed your lips together in a thin line and looked away from them, not wanting to hear anything else that they had to say. Their words slithered through your mind and you tried not to let them infect your memories or the way you felt. Arthur had tried to get to you. He had called your name and struggled against the two men holding him back. You saw it with your own eyes.

But the pain had been so blinding, so unrelenting... You hadn’t even felt your arm breaking beneath your weight. Could you really trust yourself to know the truth?

No! This was exactly what they wanted. They wanted you to doubt, and to blame, and to turn on him and you weren’t going to do it. You know what you saw. You knew Arthur. He wouldn’t have turned his back on you.
It took another surgery for the pain in your shoulder to subside, though it could have been the massive amount of painkillers they’d put you on. The sling was gone, thankfully. You still had to keep your arm close to your chest while the incision healed along your shoulder blade, but the bruises were easier to deal with than the nerve pain.

So far, no more electric stings shooting down to your fingertips at any slight movement. Dr. Ramirez was optimistic and had given you the next three days to fully heal. He told you all of this with a beaming, friendly smile as if when your stitches came out, you’d be free to go. But you wouldn’t. You’d be taken out of the hospital in handcuffs and thrown in a cell.

What did he care about that though? He had gotten his money by then. There would be no more need for friendly smiles and a good bedside manner once you were healed. That was only reserved for paying customers.

On the second day, after your second surgery, the rain started. It didn’t let up all day and pounded against the sheet of glass in the window of your room. If there was a lull, it was filled with howling wind and thunder before the downpour started up again.

By sundown, you were starving and the hospital food that had been wheeled into your room by a rather rude nurse who curled her nose up at the sight of you smelled disgusting. It was supposed to be lasagna but resembled a paper bag that had been stomped on over and over on the wet streets outside. Maybe that’s exactly what it was. Trash covered in tomato sauce.

You picked up one overcooked noodle with your fork and lifted an eyebrow at the meat and cheese beneath it. Well, you’d hoped it was meat and cheese. It looked more like what comes out the other end after eating something this disgusting. With a sigh, you dropped the fork and reached for the piece of buttered toast laying on the tray.

The cop who had been assigned to guard you during the night scoffed and turned his head up to look at the television hanging on the wall. “What? You too good for hospital food?” He said, picking something out of his teeth with his fingernail.

“No. It just doesn’t look appetizing.” You bit the corner of the hard toast. The crumbs scattered over your chest and you tried to brush them away as gently as you could, but it pulled at the stitches along your shoulder. You’d be happy to get them out soon. Even if that meant you’d be officially in police custody.
With another snort, the cop leaned back in the chair and folded an arm behind his head. “Better eat good food while you can. County ain’t known for its menu if you get what I mean.”

You stared at him while you chewed, eyes narrowing as he focused his attention on whatever sitcom was playing. The volume wasn’t loud, but the cop could clearly hear everything judging by how loud he laughed at every other word. Once you’d finished your toast, you checked the tray for something else you could eat but found nothing that appealed to you.

You pushed the rolling cart away and caught the cop’s attention. He pointed at the tray and looked at you. “Done?”

Before you could nod, he stood to his feet and crossed to it, plucking the fork from where you’d dropped it. He shoveled the trash with tomato sauce into his mouth in one bite and slurped it down, making your lip curl at the sight. His belly was already stretching the brown collared shirt he wore and you figured if he ate shit like this, he’d have to put another notch in his belt. It strained to hold his pants up as it was and he groaned as he sat back down in the chairs, the plate balanced in one palm.

“So,” he started in between bites, the sound of his sloppy saliva and chewing making your stomach turn. “You really fuck that guy?”

“What guy?”

“Joker.” He chomped another noodle into his mouth and a little dribble of sauce leaked down the side of his chin. He chuckled to himself as if the very thought of your relationship was a joke. “You won’t eat hospital food but you’d let that freak inside you?”

The metal of the handcuff scraped against the bar keeping you secured to it and you ground your teeth together so hard you could almost feel them crack. How dare this piece of shit judge you. The taste of bile rose in the back of your mouth and you eyed a small chunk of meat that fell from the fork and bounced off his belly.

“Maybe if you cared more about what you put inside you, women would want to fuck you too.”

He stopped eating, the fork halfway inside his mouth and slowly, he turned to meet your gaze. It didn’t take long for his face to burn as bright red as the tomato sauce he sucked down and it made you smile to know you got under his skin so easy. The cop jabbed one of his sausage fingers at
“Shut your god damn mouth. I don’t need a freak fucker judging me.” With that, he stood up and tossed the plate into the trash. “Can’t wait for ten o’clock when I can get out of this shit hole.”

“Well, until then,” you said, making him turn to look at you as you rattled the handcuffs. “I have to pee.”

It was the only time you felt relief from the shackles and as he pulled them off of you, waiting by the bed for you to shimmy off the side, you turned your wrist this way and that to relieve the ache. The cop snatched you by the elbow and all but hauled you across the room to the small closet of a bathroom.

He reached inside and smacked the light switch, making it blink on over the sink. “Make it quick,” he snapped, slamming the door shut behind you. You flinched but turned to face the mirror, not exactly needing to pee. It was the only way you could actually get out of that bed. This and the rounds the nurses made you walk through the halls. Of course, you were surrounded by two guards during those walks.

Couldn’t escape even if you wanted to.

And did you even want to? What was the point? If the cops couldn’t find Arthur in a city like this, what chance did you have? You had nothing without him.

It had been six days since you were brought to the hospital. Nearly a week since you’d freed Arthur from Arkham and though the detectives didn’t exactly give you info on their search, you could gather from the questions they asked that he was still out there. And the more time that passed with them finding no trace of him, the better you felt.

But they came at you harder. They drove accusations and lies and doubts into your head and heart at every turn and now, you didn’t quite know what to believe anymore. You’d been so sure that he had looked back at you, had tried to reach for you and couldn’t…but the memories were fuzzy now. Dipping in and out of consciousness so often in the past week, being shot, and undergoing surgeries, everything in your head was muddled and trying to see it the way it happened was like trying to see things through a fog.

You didn’t know what to believe anymore.
Taking a deep breath, you leaned against the sink and let your chin rest against your chest. You caught a quick glimpse of your reflection and could see the fading purple bruises across your nose where Todd had punched you. It was all that remained of him for you and once it was gone, you swore never to think about him again for as long as you lived.

Either way, you didn’t like looking at it.

Behind you, the cop pounded his fist against the door, making you jump. “I don’t hear pissing!”

You turned the faucet on and turned to face the door. “I can’t go if you’re listening!” From the crack beneath the door, you could see his feet shuffle a bit to the side and you scoffed. You gathered the hospital gown into your free hand and turned to the toilet, taking a seat. Just to piss the cop off further, you took your time.

By the time you flushed and washed your hands, you assumed five minutes had passed. Good. You hoped the cop was pissed off that he had to stand there, waiting for you to take your time. Once you dried your hands and opened the door, he was quick to snatch you around the wrist and steer you back to the bed.

“Wait,” you breathed, falling back on the mattress. “Can’t I just have five minutes without--”

He let out a sharp little laugh that made you snap your mouth shut. The cuffs clicked into place once more and your shoulders fell in disappointment. The fat cop turned his back to you and you lifted your middle finger with a sneer before scooting back along the uncomfortable bed. You settled back on the pillows and blew the hair from your face.

The cop reached up to change the channel on the television and landed on a flashy game show that could occupy his thoughts for the next half hour. To be honest, you were ready for ten o’clock as well. You didn’t know what kind of cop would take his place, but it would be better than him.

Well, hopefully.

The night shift usually plunked a chair down on either side of your door and barely even looked your way. The only time they even came into the room was to release you to take a piss.
Above you, the game show host with a blindingly white smile spoke into a tiny microphone while couples tried to guess their spouse's answer to certain questions. You’d seen it on before, back when Janey picked the shows you had to watch, and couldn’t give two shits about it then or now. Sighing, you laid back and turned to the window where fat drops of rain still pelted the glass.

For the next half hour, you laid there with the noise of the show, rain, and occasional laughter from the cop filling your ears. It blocked those toxic thoughts from weaseling back into your mind, so you weren’t too upset about it. But each time there was a null in the noise, the rain slacking off for the moment, or the audience on the show falling quiet, you couldn’t help thinking back to what the detectives had told you.

*He didn’t even look back.*

*He abandoned you…*

Even now, days later, you could hear the tone of their voice, so full of pity for you. They didn’t know how you had fallen for Arthur’s manipulations, couldn’t see why you refused to believe it. And it hurt *so bad* to know that they might be telling the truth.

Todd had said something similar as well. Everyone could see it.

*Why couldn’t you?*

You sucked in a trembling breath and closed your eyes against the burning pinpricks at the back of your eyelids. *He left you behind.* You squeezed your eyes shut tighter, wishing the thoughts would just--

*Bang!*

The cop was on his feet faster than you ever suspected a man of his size could jump and you gasped, jerking your head toward the door. For a split second after the sound, all was quiet. Even the television had grown quiet as if the people behind the screen were waiting for the answers to what the noise was.

*It sounded almost like a--*
Another pop echoed into the hallway and another, three in a row right after the other. You sat up as best as you could while being restrained and recovering from surgery. And that’s when the screaming started. It was everywhere all of a sudden. Nurses flew past the doorway, running from whatever--whoever was firing a gun.

Your heart was in your throat and you let out a strangled cry as you struggled against the handcuffs around your wrist. The cop hurried around your bed, his hand already reaching for the gun on his hip and the guard outside rushed into the room. “Don’t move, don’t speak, don’t even fucking breathe,” the fat one snarled to you.

“What’s happening?” You asked, louder than you had anticipated and he spun back around to point one of those sausage fingers to your face.

“What did I just fucking say?”

More gunshots from down the hall and your eyes snapped to the doorway. The other guard, a younger man who held his pistol pointed up at the ceiling while pressed against the wall, gave a nod to the fat one.

Your eyes darted between them and you pulled as hard as you could against your restraints. What the hell was going on? Was it a robbery? No, don’t be stupid. Who would rob a hospital? It had to be Arthur. But...why would he risk something like this? He was in hiding. The last thing he should do is shoot up a hospital to save you.

What else could it be?

You were torn right down the middle, with one side ecstatic about the thought, while the other was terrified of him being caught. Somewhere between the two was the hurt and anguish you’d been feeling from before. It bubbled right beneath the surface like a blister, right in the middle of your chest and left you trembling.

There was silence from the hallway but that didn’t mean it was over. The fat cop pointed his gun to the door and the younger one gave a quick nod before quickly poking his head out the door. Shots fired immediately and your heart skipped several beats.

The cop jumped back and a string of curse words hissed out from beneath his breath. He muttered
something to the fat one and they both looked up...at you. That was all the confirmation you needed.

Despite what the fat cop had told you, to keep your mouth shut, you opened it wide and screamed. “Arthur!”

In two strides, the fat one was at your bed. His hand flew out before you had a chance to even look up at him and he clamped one meaty palm over your mouth, silencing you. There was no point in struggling. He was much too strong for you to resist and he turned back to the other man at the door.

“Get to the phones! I’ll cover you.” He looked down at you, his pudgy face contorting with rage. “Shut your fucking mouth. If you make a peep, I’ll put a bullet in your head and blame the psycho.”

You gnashed your teeth together with a growl rumbling your throat and watched him rush back to the door to the hospital room. He pressed himself against the wall and gave a quick nod to the other cop. Together, they rushed out into the hall, guns blazing. A shot ripped through the fat guy’s meaty shoulder and he ducked back into the room.

You sat up as far as you could on the bed, trying to look into the hallway to see if the other one had made it to the circular desk where the phones sat. A hand reached up and snatched it off the desk and a moment later, it slammed down on the floor.

“They cut em!”

“Fuck!” The fat one hissed, reaching into the clip on his belt to pull out another round of ammo. He loaded it quickly and pressed his back against the wall. By now, you were on your knees on the bed, tethered by the three chain links of the handcuffs.

“Uncuff me!” You shouted, but the man ignored you. “I can talk to him!”

“Fuck you,” he spat. He made a circular motion with his fingers, signaling to the other guy and you caught the sight of his head weaving around the outside edge of the desk. They were going to try an ambush. Two against...however many were in the hallway. Judging by the number of rioters who seemed to support Arthur, there were bound to be a lot.
Surely he wouldn’t come alone.

“Uncuff me and let me go and no one has to die!”

“Shut your fucking mouth!”

“He’s going to kill you! Stop being an idiot! They clearly have you outnumbered--”

Another shot rang out, along with a deep howl of pain and you flinched. The other cop must have gone down. Now it was just one against them all. And he didn’t seem fit to run out of here. You stepped off the bed, pulling it with you by the handcuffs and it inched noisily across the tile floor. Even if you had to pull it all the way to the door, you would.

No one else had to die over this.

The cop finally noticed you struggling to drag your bed away from the wall and he pointed the barrel of the gun at you. Your feet skidded to a halt and you let out several ragged breaths. The cop cursed over and over beneath his breath and glanced into the hallway. He pulled the gun back to his chest and pointed it out the door at an angle. He fired a shot and three were returned. A bullet hit the doorframe and you flinched back, your legs hitting against the bed.

With breaths panted through his clenched teeth, the cop stepped out into the hallway and you struggled against your restraints. He fired shot after shot as he tried to rush across to the circular desk. He was definitely not a good runner. He was hit in the leg and went down hard on his knees, right up against the nurse’s station. You stared in horror, jaw slack and eyes wide.

The metal cuff was cutting into your hand from all the force you’d been pulling at it and you could feel blood oozing into the creases of your palm. You sucked in a sharp breath as a bullet hit the cop right in the middle of the stomach. His tight, brown shirt exploded outward with a splatter of blood and skin and he cried out in pain before toppling over.

And then there was nothing but silence.

You were breathless and your chest ached as you struggled to drag in lungfuls of air. No matter how much you gulped in, it did little to ease the burn through your chest. Had you been shot again? You looked down at yourself and found no wounds, no blood on the blue hospital gown.
Outside in the hall, three men raced by quickly. Their heads were covered in masks and you could see they each had a gun, but other than that, they were gone much too quickly. Several people screamed from the other rooms and you braced yourself for the next shots to come. Thankfully, they never did.

“It’s secure!” Someone shouted, making you jump back. The bottoms of your feet were sweaty and you slipped on the tile, barely managing to catch yourself on the bed. Laying on the floor, several feet from the door to your room, the cop groaned and you gasped. He was alive?

Before you could even shout at him not to move, you heard footsteps. They tapped against the floor in steady, confident strides and you took your bottom lip between your teeth. Each step made your heart hammer against your chest and you held your breath, waiting.

With a few quick steps, a figure slid across the floor right in front of your room, coming to a stop with his back turned to you. The bright lights from the nurse’s station cast him in a shadow, but that green hair and red suit stood out against them like a beacon. Smoke billowed up above his head, swirling around it like a halo. Your eyes widened before dropping down the length of him, taking in the entire sight. Oh my god... There was little room for any other thoughts than that in your head.

You could only watch as he snapped his fingers, shrugging his shoulders in time to a song only he could hear. He crossed one foot behind the other and spun around to face you, a cocky smirk lifting one corner of his mouth. With a flourish of his arms out at his side, Arthur slid across the tile floor once again and into your room. With him in the room suddenly, it felt twice as small with twice as less air. You tried to suck in a breath, but your throat was clenched tight and all that you managed was a tiny squeak. You were absolutely frozen to the spot, somewhere between terrified and mesmerized by him.

He arched one eyebrow and danced up to you, his hips swaying and rolling to a beat you were deaf to. When he was less than an arm’s length away, he lifted his hand to your face and traced your bottom lip with his thumb. He plucked the cigarette from his lips and grinned.

“Hiya Kitten.”
First of all, let me say thank you, thank you, thank you from the very bottom of my heart to the top for all of your comments, kudos, hits, and bookmarks for this fic. I never expected it to become this popular and I'm so thrilled that you've all enjoyed reading it.

But all good things come to an end, and this will be the final chapter of Arthur and Reader's love story. I am leaving it open for a sequel though :) Can't guarantee I'll write it, but the possibilities are there. I know this seems abrupt, but I set out in the beginning to write exactly this and now that I have, I think pushing it further will make it less special.

I really hope you all have enjoyed it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A huge, HUGE, shoutout to the lovely plaidoctor
For creating THIS lovely collage for the story
Check it out here
I adore it!!

Silence stretched through the entire room, maybe the entire hospital. It was hard to tell when your heart was beating so loudly in your ears and all you could see was the painted face in front of you. He lifted the cigarette back up to his lips and took a drag, the crackle of the paper burning pulling your eyes down to the glowing tip. When he blew the smoke out above your head, you frowned.

Despite the joy and relief upon seeing him, you were still annoyed for some reason. Glancing around his shoulder, you could see the cop still laying on the ground. He had rolled onto his side and was groaning in pain.

As much as you didn’t like the guy, and as much as he was an asshole to you, that didn’t mean he deserved to die. You pursed your lips and looked up into Arthur’s face once more. There was still a smirk on his face, but he was staring down at the handcuffs keeping you attached to the bed rails. He reached down and plucked his finger along the chains.

“Arthur,” you said quietly, but he didn’t lift his eyes to you. His hand trailed up from the cuff
around your wrist, along the inside of your arm and you shivered. Why did he have to do this when you wanted to talk? It wasn’t fair how easily he could make you forget about things. You lifted your chin in defiance and pulled your arm back, though it didn’t get far. It did make his eyes flicker up to yours, however.

“Are you hurt?” He asked, reaching up to cup your face. For a second, almost too quick for you to notice, you saw a flash of Arthur behind the paint and Joker facade. It was gone in a flash but you leaned into his touch to savor it.

“No. I’m on painkillers.”

“What happened?”

Your eyes snapped open and met his. Though he didn’t pull his hand away from your face, you moved away and looked down at the floor. “I was shot.” From the hallway, you could hear footsteps approaching. It didn’t make the words die on your tongue and you searched Arthur’s eyes. “And you left me.”

“Boss,” a voice said, pulling neither of your attention away from each other. “We don’t have much time here.”

“I didn’t want to leave you.” He ignored the man at the door and after a moment, the guy turned and gave you some space. Your eyes darted to the hallway where one of them had turned the cop onto his back and put the heel of his boot at his throat. When Arthur spoke again, you closed your eyes. “This was the only way.”

“I wouldn’t have left you.”

He sighed and shuffled backward on the tile, bringing the cigarette to his lips for one final drag before dropping it to the floor. He stepped on it with the toe of his shoe and pushed a hand through his hair. You could almost feel the agitation coming off of him in waves and it made you swallow tightly.

“I’m here now.”

“I know,” you whispered, ducking your head. “And I’m happy to see you but you shouldn’t have
come back for me. It’s too dangerous." You weren’t making much sense, but you couldn’t sort your thoughts out. There was too much chaos around and time was ticking down, pressuring you to say everything you had been thinking about the past few days.

Arthur dipped his head to meet your eyes and as he straightened, you followed him with your gaze. He was smiling and it made your heart swell. He reached out with both hands and brought them gently to your face, brushing your hair back with his thumb.

“You’re angry with me for leaving you and now you’re angry for me coming back for you.”

“I’m not angry. I’m just...scared.”

As soon as the word left your mouth, he was wrapping his arms around your shoulders and you sucked in a trembling breath against his chest. It felt so good to be back in his arms, to feel him, to smell him all around you. You wanted nothing more than to cling to him and feel safe, even if it was for just a few seconds.

With a deep breath, you turned your head and looked at the blue tile of the walls in the corner of the room. The words Gordon had said to you echoed through your mind. *He abandoned you …*

“They told me you left me because you didn’t need me anymore. That you used me to break free.”

Arthur turned toward the door, not letting you go or addressing the things you had said to him. “Get the keys to the handcuffs,” he snapped to whoever was standing out there listening.

There was a groan from the hallway and a hiss of curse words from the fat cop as he struggled to hold onto the handcuff keys. They were snatched from his hands and with quick, short steps, one of Joker’s men entered the room. He was at the side of the bed and you blinked in surprise by the clown mask still on his face.

With a quick click, the cuffs released and your arm fell to your side, finally free. The wounds around your wrist from pulling against the metal for so long and so hard stung and you brought it to your chest with a hiss of pain.

“We gotta go,” the guy said in a hushed tone and you noticed Joker nod out of the corner of your eye. The two of you were alone once more and he took your wrist in his hands, turning it over to
kiss the inside of it.

“We’re always running out of time,” he murmured before lacing his fingers between yours. “I promise to make it up to you when we get home.”

Home …

The sound of it made your entire body feel as if it were floating. He could have taken you anywhere at that moment and you would have gladly followed. Without looking up at you, he turned on his heel and pulled you by the hand out into the hallway.

You were surprised by how many men were waiting for him. There had to be at least ten, all wearing white clown masks with tufts of green hair sticking out. Some had been altered, painted with blacks and reds to make them more menacing and you stared with wide eyes at each of them. What in the world they must be thinking of you at that moment…

It brought a smile tilting the corner of your lips up and you lifted your head up to meet Arthur’s own smirk. The Joker and his girlfriend. You adored the way it sounded in your head, though neither of you had established any title for each other. Maybe you didn’t need to.

At your feet, a cold, wet hand reached out and snatched your ankle, ripping through your thoughts. You jumped back and stared down at the cop’s angry, round face staring up at you. He had blood seeping out of the wound on his stomach, staining the front of his shirt and now it was on your leg.

“You fucking bitch ;” he hissed, drawing Joker’s attention down as well. “I’ll make sure you both fry for thi--”

A shot rang out beside you and your hands flew to your ears much too late to shield them from the sound. You blinked at the barrel of the gun and followed it up to Joker’s face as he turned to smile at you. He offered his elbow for you to take as if he hadn’t just put a bullet through some man’s head.

With your uninjured arm, you looped your wrist around his elbow and shook your head. He turned and steered you to the exit where two other men were standing guard by the stairwell. Once the ringing in your ears had stopped, you scowled up at the man beside you. He looked straight ahead, never backward or down to his feet and you admired his confidence. You wish you could feel such
certainty in the face of chaos.

“Arthur,” you said, pushing your elbow into his side.

“Hmm?”

The door to the stairwell was shoved open and the two men standing guard rushed in ahead of your to make sure the coast was clear. It was bizarre how efficiently they all moved around Joker, as if his security and life were of the utmost importance.

As you followed them out into the stairs, you risked a glance back up to him. “You can’t just kill people like that. He wasn’t a threat to us.”

He didn’t respond and the look on his face made you almost nervous. He was telling you without even speaking that he *can* just kill people, whoever he wanted to. He kept his gaze straight and walked down the two flights of stairs where the doors were once more opened for him. Along the hallways, nurses and the hospital staff had all been corralled into one of the halls of the emergency room. They were sitting on the floor, some crying, others glaring up at the two of you while whispering to one another.

And right in the middle, no longer smiling his shit-eating grin, was Dr. Ramirez. He looked pale, as if he’d seen a ghost, and you kept your eyes on him as you passed. The frightened look on his face, the look that said his entire world view and cheerful demeanor was probably shattered, made you smile and you hugged Arthur tighter to you.

The emergency room doors had been shot open and tiny shards of glass littered the black rug that laid just inside it. You frowned and opened your mouth to tell Arthur that you hadn’t exactly had time to grab your shoes, but never got a chance. He bent down and scooped you right up into his arms and your breath left your lungs in a quick puff.

Several masked men ran ahead of you and two vans came screeching to a halt right at the curb. They each had ‘Arkham State Hospital’ written on the side, though most of it had been painted through with black paint. As much as you wanted to just take a minute to enjoy the feel of being carried in Arthur’s arms, you couldn’t help staring at your surroundings. An ambulance, parked in the circular bay of the emergency department, was on fire with the windows busted out and two night security guards were laying on the pavement in front of it, though they didn't appear to be dead.
All this destruction just for you.

When your feet touched back down, they were on the metal step of one of the vans and you ducked your head to take a seat inside. Arthur followed behind you and while you expected others to hop in as well, only a driver and passenger climbed into the front.

Your eyes darted out the open door of the van, the sound of distant police sirens making your pulse race, and you looked to the entrance of the hospital. The glow of the fire casting shadows on the brick and you held your breath. There was a split second of hesitation, of uncertainty that made you feel the urge to run.

You had anticipated all the things that could have gone wrong in the past few weeks. You were prepared to face the thought that Arthur had manipulated you into doing all of this, though it wouldn't have changed any of your decisions. You would have freed him, whether or not he loved you in return. If it had ended for you the night you broke him out of Arkham, if the bullet had ended your life, you wouldn't regret any of it.

But this.

This was something new, something you had never expected, something you couldn’t have ever prepared for and you were no longer in the safety of your own world. Even with all the uncertainty, all the obstacles you had faced to be with Arthur inside Arkham, everything had been on your terms, and because of your own decisions. Now, you would be in his world.

Your eyes slid to the right and met Arthur’s and the look in his gaze stole your breath away. There was so much behind his stare, so much that excited and frightened you and you felt your entire body relax into the seat at your back. Because in that moment, for the first time since you’d met him, he wasn’t Arthur, or Joker, or three different people all at once. He was just one man; the man you loved and though he would never be able to tell you the same, you knew he loved you as well. You could see it in his eyes, could feel it in the way he held you.

He was the man who risked his life just to kiss you, the man who killed the person who had hurt you, and the man who would kill anyone if they come between you and him. The corner of your lips lifted into a smile and he returned it, reaching up to press his palm against your cheek.

In that moment, there was nothing that frightened you more than being without him. At that moment, there was only you and him. The entire city, maybe the whole country, would think you were a fool for loving him, but that was fine. You didn’t care what anyone else thought.
The van pulled away from the curb, leaving the hospital behind it. Faintly, you could still hear the sirens cutting through the night but you’d be long gone before they arrived. You didn’t know where you were going, or what the future had in store for you, but you knew as long as you were with Arthur, with Joker, you’d be happy.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you once again for reading!! I love each and every one of you!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!