The Raven And The Nightingale Book II: The Gold Coast

by BradyGirl_12

Summary

A series of daring robberies on Gotham City’s Gold Coast catches the attention of the Raven and the Nightingale.

Notes

Original LJ Dates Of Completion: August 31, 2014-April 14, 2015
Original LJ Dates Of Posting: June 9, 2015-
Disclaimer: I don’t own ‘em, DC does, more’s the pity.
Original LJ Word Count: 39,517
Feedback welcome and appreciated.
Author’s Notes: Submitted for my 2015 DCU Fic/Art Dick Grayson Diamond Anniversary Challenge. The entire series can be found here.
Return Of The Prince

Chapter Summary

Bruce Wayne makes his triumphant return to Gotham City.

PART ONE

AMETHYST

September 6, 1907

Lo, the Prince returneth!

Excerpt from the play,
The Prince Of Broadway,
By Playwright
George J. Kohan
1899 C.E.

Vicki Vale clutched her ostrich-feathered hat as a gust of wind blew in off Gotham Harbor. The dock was crowded with people waiting for the arrival of the Queen Mary, fresh out of Southampton, England. The cream of Gotham High Society had turned out, befeathered and bejeweled and chattering as they exchanged gossip about Newport, Bar Harbor, and Fifth Avenue, as well as their own city’s Gold Coast. Dockworkers went about their tasks, bemused by the band tuning up three feet away from the edge of the pier and the brass-buttoned policemen with their handlebar mustaches keeping an eye on both the crowd and the gaggle of politicians led by Mayor Augustus Sandstone that stood in a place of prominence.

Alas, Vicki was not one of the young socialite women so eagerly pushed by their socially-ambitious mothers to come down to these docks on a crisp September day. Instead, she was just one of the ink-stained wretches from The Gotham Gazette and other newspapers sent by news-hungry editors to chronicle the triumphant return of the Prince of Gotham, Bruce Wayne, after over a year in Europe on the Grand Tour.

“Hey, watch your elbow!” complained Vicki as she was jostled.

“Sorry, Vickster,” apologized Joe Cavendish, a reporter from The Gotham Trumpet. Like any self-respecting American city at the turn of the new century, Gotham boasted several more dailies and smaller papers as the news business thrived. “Imagine all this folderall for one spoiled rich fop.”

“You know better than that, Joe.” Vicki looked at the handsome, brown-haired man dressed in his stiff collar and cheap, light-brown suit. “Without that ‘fop’, as you call him, we wouldn’t have half the copy we usually get.”

“I suppose,” Joe grumbled. “He’s front-page news and not just the purview of the society pages.”
“That’s right.”

“Doesn’t hurt that you were on the society beat not so long ago, eh?”

Vicki proudly lifted her head, her red hair glinting in the sunlight. “I’m with the hard news boys now.”

“Good, because I hear that Lois Lane is trying to out-Bly Nellie Bly.”

Vicki sniffed at the mention of her *Daily Planet* rival, currently traveling around the world in a hot-air balloon and filing dispatches from exotic places such as New Delhi, Tokyo, and Manila. “It’s been done already.”

Joe grinned. He peered out at the harbor. The water sparkled like diamonds as a brilliant blue sky stretched out to the horizon.

“I hear that the Prince had a thing for one of the prima ballerinas over there, a Russian who’s cousin to the Czar.”

“I heard that, too. He followed the troupe all over the Continent.”

“I saw her picture in the paper. Nice-looking dish.”

“I was more partial to her co-star.” Vicki dug a small pair of opera glasses from her purse and scanned the horizon.

“Some guy with an English name?”

“Could be American. Looked very good in tights.”

Joe snorted. “Dancing ballet’s okay for women, but what kind of life is that for a grown man?”

“Just another way of being on the stage like Barrymore.”

“I doubt Barrymore goes leaping around the stage in a pink tutu. Ow!”

Joe rubbed his ribs where Vicki had jabbed him with a sharp elbow. She pointed to the horizon.

“The *Queen Mary’s* on her way!”

Once the great ship was close to the harbor, it steamed into port and grew larger and larger, a miracle of modern engineering. The tall smokestacks belched out smoke like a Pittsburgh factory on the shores of the Allegheny, the sleek lines of the steamship truly epitomizing the progress of the new century.

The band struck up a John Philip Sousa march as people waved and shouted. Many were there to greet friends and loved ones but counted themselves among the curious to see the Prince of Gotham.

“Wonder if he’ll stumble down the gangplank?” shouted Joe over the din of the music.

“Why, just because he tipples now and again?” Vicki shouted back. She took out her Brownie camera.

“Tipples? He’s been known to soak up bourbon like a sponge. *The Iceberg Lounge* is kept afloat by Wayne imbibing.”
“They must’ve sunk this past year, then.” Vicki scanned the passengers waving from the railing of the ship.

Joe signaled his cameraman, who set up by the edge of the crowd. He had a bulky camera with powder tray and hoped to get a usable photograph. Photography had advanced to the point of subjects no longer needing to stand stiffly for long minutes, but they still had to pose at least for a few minutes. He hoped that his subjects would cooperate.

The docking took several minutes, but finally the gangplank was lowered and the passengers disembarked. Happy reunions took place all along the pier, and toward the end of the flow of passengers was Bruce Wayne.

Vicki recognized Alfred, Bruce’s butler and manservant, and she also recognized the stunning young man next to him, dressed in a dark-green suit, bright yellow vest, and red ascot. A diamond glittered from the ascot. He wore a green cloak with gold lining.

“Oh, my,” Vicki said. This was news.

“He brought the ballet dancer!” Joe exclaimed.

“Oh, Bruce, you madcap heir.” Vicki snapped some photos with the Brownie.

Bruce obligingly posed for pictures, and Major Sandstone stepped forward to greet Bruce. Reporters started shouting questions.

“Hey, Bruce, how’s it feel to be back in America after over a year away?”

“Did you say hi to the Queen?”

“Are you going out on the town?”

“Did you break Natasha Romanoff’s heart?”

“Who’s the young gentleman with you and Mr. Pennyworth?”

Bruce laughingly held up a hand. The band and reporters quieted. “Gentlemen, let me catch my breath!” The questions subsided and Bruce smiled charmingly. “I’m very glad to be back home in the good ol’ U.S. of A. I plan to have a Porterhouse steak with a mess of hash browns and apple pie for dessert first thing.” The reporters laughed. “We stopped off in England on the way home and Alfred visited his family while Mr. Grayson and I watched the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace and saw the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.”

“Mr. Grayson, aren’t you a ballet dancer like Miss Romanoff?”

Dick’s smile was dazzling. “Yes, I am. I have always wanted to visit the United States. There is much to see in your wonderful country.”

Vicki noticed that he spoke flawless English without the trace of an accent. Richard Grayson was a very intriguing young man.

“Can you tell us about your trip?” asked another reporter.

“The Grand Tour was…grand.” Laughter. “I might write a book, publish some photos. Now, gentlemen, it’s been a long voyage and I’m eager to see my home again.”

Bruce waved cavalierly at the disgruntled mayor, who had not had a chance to deliver his speech.
He, Dick, and Alfred walked to a waiting carriage, the driver cracking his whip after they had boarded. Alfred had already arranged for their considerable luggage to be delivered to the Manor.

“Well, you’re right, Wayne always gives good copy,” Joe said.

Vicki smirked and put away her camera. She had a story to write and some digging to do in the newspaper morgue.
Dick’s eyes grew wide as the carriage went up the circular driveway. Stately elms and maple trees bordered the drive and flanked the grand Manor, a house of gabled magnificence and Ionic columns. It was old, at least as Americans measured age. Europe contained houses that had been in use in the Middle Ages. Wayne Manor’s provenance could be traced back to the 1600s, but the structure had been added to in subsequent years.

Dick was immediately drawn to it. Its brooding architecture seemed to fit somehow. Surrounded on three rides by rolling green lawns and thick woods, the fourth side looked out over the ocean.

“Heathcliff on the moors,” muttered Dick.

“Did you say something?” Bruce asked.

“Just that it’s beautiful.”

Bruce was pleased. “Wait ‘til you see inside.”

The driver stopped the carriage and his passengers alighted. Alfred went up the steps, unlocking the oak door that held a gleaming brass knocker.

“Alfred had a cleaning service come in. They dusted off a year’s worth of mustiness.”
They stepped into the foyer. The parquet floor was composed of black-and-white tiles and a chandelier glittered high above, directly over a polished mahogany table with a porcelain bowl of gold and red chrysanthemums. Polished suits of armor were set in the alcoves and a grand staircase stretched high up to the second floor. A stained-glass window sparkled brilliantly on the landing.


“How about a tour?” Bruce asked.

“Sure.”

“I shall get luncheon started,” Alfred said.

Bruce led Dick across the foyer to the front parlor. Dark walnut furniture was placed throughout the long room: overstuffed chairs and a horsehair sofa with stiff pillows. The color scheme was dark green, and the drapes at the windows were a lighter watersilk green fringed with black tassels. The mantelpiece was imported Carrera marble and a painting of an English foxhunt hung above it. The wallpaper was patterned green-and-gold and the carpet was an expensive Aubusson.

Dick hid his dismay that everything was so dark. At least there were several windows overlooking the grounds.

*Should get some light in.*

Bruce escorted Dick down the hall and showed the dining room with a long walnut table and chairs and massive sideboard. A sparkling chandelier hung over the table. The wallpaper was yellow-sprigged against a cream background.

The next room was Bruce’s study with a large walnut desk, a small fireplace, a couch and two chairs, and tall French doors and windows with comfortable windowseats that overlooked magnificent gardens. The walls were paneled in dark wood and paintings of landscapes hung on the walls.

The room next to it was the library with three walls lined with full bookshelves, more French doors and windows with a view of the gardens, and a tall grandfather clock against one wall. Two large chairs were set before the fireplace.

What attracted Dick’s attention was a large, gilt-framed portrait of a handsome man, beautiful woman, and charming young boy. The man wore a dark-blue suit and vest with a gold chain and pocketwatch, and stood next to a chair where the woman sat in a pale blue silk gown wearing a string of lustrous pearls. The boy wore a dark-blue suit with starched white shirt as he stood on the other side of the chair. Their clothing and hairstyles were from nearly two decades ago.

Dick stood in front of the portrait. “Your parents.”

“That’s right.” Bruce stood next to Dick. “Thomas and Martha Wayne.”

“You were a handsome little boy.”

“I suppose.”

Dick curled his fingers around Bruce’s hand and squeezed.

After several minutes Bruce said, “Let me show you the upstairs.” He smiled slightly. “Oh, I almost forgot. One more little room.”
They went to the back of the house and Bruce opened a set of doors, amused as Dick’s jaw dropped. He walked into the cavernous ballroom, craning his neck to see the three giant chandeliers hanging from the vaulted frescoed ceiling. Tall French windows looked out over the ocean. The polished hardwood floors gleamed under the chandeliers and Dick danced out to the center of the vast ballroom. He performed a pirouette and bowed elaborately as if to a cheering audience.

“Magnifique!” Dick said.

“So you approve?”

“Of this ‘little room’? Yes, I do.”

“You’re welcome to practice here at any time.”

“Thank you.” Dick danced down the length of the floor, then turned and danced all the way back to where an amused Bruce stood.

“Shall we go upstairs?” He offered his arm and Dick took it with a smile.

They ascended the grant staircase and walked down a hall lined with small pier tables containing vases of fresh flowers. Gilt-edged mirrors were interspersed with Impressionist paintings.

Bruce hesitated in front of a door. “This is the master bedroom. Perhaps you would like your own room?”

“What if I store my costumes in a separate room and keep daywear in your room, where I’d sleep?”

Very satisfied by this compromise, Bruce opened the door to his room. Dick entered and was impressed by the huge four-poster bed and the rich furniture: a dresser, bureau, and nightstands were set on each side of the bed. The wallpaper was dark-green with golden patterns, the drapes heavy black velvet with golden cords, and the lush carpet was a rich, dark gold.

Dark again. Oh, well, I can add my own touches.

“There is a private bath here.” Bruce opened the door. “You’ll find the plumbing quite modern. Tradition is one thing, but a working water closet is another.”

Dick laughed. “I agree.”

A knock on the door interrupted their badinage. Bruce said, “Come in.”

Alfred opened the door. “The luggage is here, sir.”

“Excellent. Please have them bring it up to this room.”

“At once, Master Bruce.”

The Queen Mary’s porters carried the trunks and bags upstairs. Bruce and Dick’s luggage soon filled the room as Dick directed what trunks went in the room next door, and Alfred requested his luggage brought to his room.

Dick immediately grasped a small cedarwood box on Bruce’s bed and opened it. On a red velvet base nestled the glittering bejeweled nightingale in its golden cage that Bruce had given him for Christmas.

“Ah, my beautiful Nightingale,” said Bruce as he watched Dick set the music box in a place of honor.
on the dresser. He laughed as Dick wound the key and the nightingale sang its sweet, clear song.

Dick liked the kitchen immediately. Alfred explained that part of the kitchen was from Revolutionary times. He pointed to the beams overhead.

“This place is incredible.”

Alfred smiled. “It is my favorite room in the house.”

“I can see why.” Dick looked at the oakwood cabinets and the large table with the embroidered cloth. The big, black, cast-iron stove dominated the room. A wooden cutting board held preparations for the midday meal. “It’s a warm, charming place.”

“Thank you.”

Bruce entered the kitchen. “We’re all unpacked, Alfred.”

“Master Bruce.”

Bruce held up a hand. “No protests, Alfred. I am perfectly capable of putting away my shirts and hanging up my own jackets.”

“Well, almost,” Dick said with a wink.

Bruce harrumphed. “I’ll show you the garden after lunch.”

“I’d like that.”

Luncheon was the last of the garden tomatoes, crisp iceberg lettuce, and imported mustard on wheat bread with tall glasses of iced tea with a spring of mint adorning each one. The delicious smell of gingerbread permeated the kitchen, and Alfred served warm squares with a dollop of whipped cream and a maraschino cherry on top.

After the meal, Bruce escorted Dick to the formal gardens. Dick liked them immediately. The profusion of colors and variety of blooms were a delight to the eye. He loved the giant sunflowers and the pink hollyhocks and the sturdy red, orange, and gold chrysanthemums. There was a fountain with a cherubic marble water bearer and Bruce explained that it would be checked out and soon splashing water again after its long idleness.

“Alfred has his kitchen garden over there.” Bruce pointed to the east. “He plants tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, scallions, and a host of other good things.”

“Sounds delicious.”

“You will discover that Alfred’s cooking rivals that of the finest chefs in Europe.”

“I have no doubt.” He could still taste that exquisite gingerbread. He took a deep breath of sea air. “You’re so lucky to live here.”

Bruce nodded slowly. “I’m beginning to appreciate that fact more lately.”

“You didn’t before?”

Bruce shrugged. “I did when I was a child, but after my parents…died…I took it for granted. I was
angry at the world. Still am, sometimes.” He cupped a sunflower. “I drank; I gambled; I wanted to rail against the world. I asked why, but of course there was no answer.”

“I know,” Dick said softly.

Their eyes met and they understood each other perfectly. Bruce took hold of Dick’s hand and they walked to the seawall.
Dick gets his first look at downtown Gotham while he arranges for an audition with the Gotham Ballet Company.

In the light of day  
Lurks the shadows  
As the blue willow  
Bends  
With graceful fingers.

Elaine Besbriss  
"Blue-And-White"  
1906 C.E.

Dick observed the carriages jamming the streets. There were broughams, landaus, four-in-hands, and coaches. There was even the occasional automobile, a jarring juxtaposition to the horse-drawn drays and wagons. Here in the downtown area peddlers were scarce on the crowded sidewalks, but an occasional enterprising sort trundled down the street, calling out his wares.

Dick looked up at the tall iron and brick buildings. “You are correct about the Gothic architecture. Flying buttresses and grinning gargoyles seem to be the décor.”

“You should see us at Halloween.”

Dick grinned. “I look forward to my first American Halloween, complete with treating-and-tricking and pumpkin pie.”

Bruce chuckled. “Trick-or-treating.”

The carriage stopped at the Savoy Theater, an ornate building with colorful playbills advertising ballets and plays. Dick alighted with a toss of his yellow scarf as he strutted into the theater. Bruce followed at a more sedate pace.

He was dressed to the nines in black broadcloth with a gold vest, homburg, and shiny boots. He carried an ivory-handled cane in his white-gloved hand.

Dick, of course, was unconventional. He wore his wine-red suit and yellow vest with a green watersilk cravat and sapphire stickpin. As an auditioner for a theatrical position, the more flamboyant, the better.

The foyer was richly-appointed with full-length mirrors, red velvet drapes, crystal chandeliers and marble columns. Bruce and Dick turned at the sound of approaching footsteps, punctuated by a cane.
A distinguished gentleman with gray hair and mustache looked Dick over from head-to-toe, barely glancing at Bruce. His brown pants were baggy and he wore a squash-colored pullover with an old green-and-blue woolen scarf wound around his neck. His feet were shod in worn blue slippers.

“Monsieur Belliveau?” asked Dick.

“That is correct.” Pale blue eyes flicked down to Dick’s outstretched hand. He shook it and said, “Come this way.”

Jean-Paul Belliveau walked with a limp, but he still managed to convey impatience. He led his visitors to the theater proper, a good-sized room with vaulted ceiling and a large stage. There were the requisite rows of seats and private boxes, and Dick wondered if the acoustics were right.

*Luckily I’m a dancer not a singer.*

Belliveau swept an arm toward the stage. “That will be where you audition. I will see you tomorrow at 1:00.” He started to turn away.

“Thank you, Monsieur Belliveau,” Dick said.

Belliveau sniffed. “Just be here. I do not tolerate tardiness.” He clomped away.

“Rather abrupt, isn’t he?” Bruce asked.

Dick smiled. “Just artistic temperament.” He walked toward the stage and Bruce followed. “That bad leg of his cut his career short, I’d guess. Not being able to dance eats away at him.”

He leaped onto the stage and danced its length, looking out at the imaginary audience. “I really want this job. I don’t want to leave Gotham…and you…for Boston or New York, but I must dance!”

“Of course.” Bruce smiled.

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Bruce treated his young lover to luncheon at *The Blue Willow Plate,* a clean, cheerful restaurant with the emblematic chinaware on shelves around the room. Blue-and-white-checked tablecloths and fresh flowers in milky-white vases completed the décor.

“Ah, Mr. Wayne. Glad to see you back, sir,” said a plump, middle-aged woman with silvery-gray hair and a pleasant smile. “Your usual table?”

“Of course, Mrs. Hendrikson.”

“Come this way, please.”

Bruce and Dick followed Anna Hendrikson as she bustled to a table by the window.

“Thank you, Mrs. Hendrikson,” said Bruce.

She laid out the handwritten menus and went over to another table.

Dick picked up his menu. “Thank you for arranging the audition for me.”

“Glad to do it.”

Dick smiled. “You really are too good to me.”
“Nonsense! You deserve only the best.”

Dick kept his eyes on the menu but a smile remained on his lips. When Anna came over, he ordered chicken on a wheat roll with lettuce, tomato, red onions and mustard, adding tomato barley soup.

“I can recommend the hand-cut potato fries,” Bruce said.

“I’ll take that recommendation.”

Bruce ordered vegetable soup and a turkey on wheat with the same ingredients that Dick had ordered. They both decided on iced tea.

Anna left with their orders and Dick looked down at the busy street through the plate-glass window. The restaurant was located on the second floor and offered an interesting view of downtown Gotham.

“Is this city like New York and Chicago?”

“Somewhat.” Bruce shook out his linen napkin and placed it on his lap. “Some of the architecture is the same, though we really go in for gargoyles.”

Dick snickered. “Gothic has its uses.” He lowered his voice. “Little wonder Poe’s Raven appeals to you.”

Other diners began trickling in. Bruce and Dick had been early for luncheon.

“I suppose you’re right.”

“Will we continue?”

Bruce smiled. “Perhaps.”

Dick seemed satisfied with his answer. Bruce was happy about that, since he was uncertain. He liked the idea of the clandestine operation. It was thrilling to steal away into the night behind cape and mask and seek justice.

“Bruce?”

“Hmm?”

“I said I’d like to check out the park after lunch.”

“Of course, whatever you like.”

Anna arrived with their soup. Dick thanked her with a dazzling smile. He opened the package of oyster crackers and sprinkled them into the tomato barley soup.

“I have a routine worked out.”

“You do?” Bruce put his crackers in his soup, too.

“Yes, I’m going to do a piece from Swan Lake.” He stirred the ice in his tea with a long-handled spoon. “It’s easy enough. I’ve danced it a thousand times.”

“And it’s always as fresh as the first time.”
“Flatterer.” Dick was careful with the soup. It was piping-hot. “How long do you think Dinah and Ollie will stay on the Continent?”

“Oh, I expect for awhile. Dinah really needs to rest her vocal cords.”

“I’m not surprised. They say her Canary Cry can shatter glass.” Dick leaned forward conspiratorially. “I heard that theaters have to remove the chandeliers to prevent falling shards of crystal.”

Bruce laughed. “People do love to tell stories.”

Dick leaned back. “The theater is full of stories, my friend.”

After luncheon they walked briskly to Wayne Park, Bruce pointing out special views, statues and fountains.

“It’s all so beautiful. I like open space in the middle of a city.” Dick’s eyes sparkled as he breathed in the fresh air.

“Autumn weather is the best.”

“I noticed some of the trees are starting to turn.”

“A handful will, but you’ll really see a show by the end of the month.”

“I look forward to it.”

Bruce had some plans in mind for later in the season, but for now simply enjoyed Dick’s sparkling presence by his side.

“I sure hope I get the job, Bruce.” Dick squeezed his lover’s hand. They were temporarily alone on the footpath. “I want to see America, but not by myself. I don’t want to leave Gotham in search of work.”

Bruce wanted to say that Dick did not have to work. He would take care of everything, but he knew that Dick would never accept such an arrangement. He had to dance. It was in his blood.

“You’ll do just fine,” Bruce assured him, and squeezed his hand back.

Back at the Manor, Dick practiced his routine in the ballroom while Bruce wandered into the kitchen. Alfred was making preparations for dinner.

“Did you have a good time in town, sir?”

“Very satisfactory, Alfred.”

“Excellent.” The butler efficiently chopped scallions on the cutting board. “Will you be accompanying Master Dick to his audition?”

“No, it’s not necessary.”

Alfred paused, the knife poised over the board. “Not necessary, sir?”
“Yes.” Bruce picked up a walnut from the bowl on the table and applied the nutcracker. He picked the meat out of the shell and ate it.

Alfred resumed chopping very slowly. “Sir, did you…arrange…for master Dick to already get this job?”

Bruce cracked another walnut. “He needn’t ever know.”

“Let us hope so, sir.”

The sounds of chopping and cracking sounded loud in the silent kitchen.
Chapter Summary

After his audition, Dick discovers a Gotham treasure.

The quiet
Rests
In marble halls
As footsteps
Echo
While ferns
Bend
In graceful
Nods.

Estelle Dickerson
"Veined Marble"
1896 C.E.

Dick began his routine in the cavernous theater, keeping time in his head as he had no musical accompaniment. Jean-Paul Belliveau was his only audience, sitting stiffly in a chair in the sixth row. He tapped one knee impatiently with his cane.

Dick’s nervousness had melted away to a pure calmness. He knew that he was good. He had danced before the crowned heads of Europe. Surely he could make the cast of this American company!

He concentrated on his routine. No matter what the outcome, this is what he lived for. He knew Belliveau’s type: embittered, cutting, and envious.

Let him. I know how good I am.

He finally finished with a flourish, bowing as he met Belliveau’s eyes. He straightened and waited. Silence was his only answer.

Belliveau still said nothing. Dick knew the game. He crossed his arms and waited.

Finally Belliveau must have realized how ridiculous this was and grunted, “You are adequate. Report tomorrow at one o’clock.”

He levered himself up from the seat and clomped away. Dick was more amused than annoyed. He wiped himself down with a towel he had brought and changed into his street clothes, leaving the Savoy with a bouncy step and a small duffel bag.

Once outside he walked down the sidewalk with a smile, his yellow scarf a dashing accent around his neck. Admiring glances were thrown his way by women and covertly by a few men.
He wandered through the downtown area, curious about the city. He bought a newspaper and read it while he drank coffee in a small café. On the move again, he noted where there were clothing stores, restaurants, and business, coming to an impressive building that turned out to be a bank.

Another splendid building on a tree-shaded side street attracted his attention. Marble steps led up to a facade of Ionic columns and brass-paneled double doors. Letters etched over the entrance read **GOTHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY**. Dick went inside.

The quiet was soothing as Dick entered the foyer. The floor was polished to a high sheen and there were marble wall panels interspersed with regular wood. The ceiling held oblong globes for light and a marble desk with a gold-embossed sign read Information.

A prim, red-haired woman was busy checking a stack of books back in. Her hair was set in a pompadour and her dress was pale green with fashionable puffed sleeves. Pearl buttons reached from her collar to her waist.

“May I help you, sir?” asked the librarian.

“This is my first time here.”

“Ah, well, you’ll find the A-Z stacks down here in two rooms on the first floor, a reading room, and washroom facilities down that way.” She pointed to a small corridor next to the main staircase.

“Upstairs is our collection of periodicals and newspapers.”

“Thank you, Miss…?”

“Gordon.”

Dick smiled at her and went into the room to the left, pleased at the multitude of windows that let in autumn light. Potted palms and ferns were placed around the room. Furniture included long tables, chairs, and overstuffed chairs with small tables by the windows. There were patrons scattered about, reading and smoking. A desk marked Reference was in one corner but no one was behind it. Shiny brass spittoons were set by the overstuffed chairs. The second room was much the same, and the reading room was cozier with the more comfortable chairs and small tables.

Upstairs the stacks were set by the long tables and straight-backed chairs. Dick put his soft bag on a table and perused the stacks. He found several newspapers on the date of his arrival with Bruce and Alfred in Gotham Harbor. He set the stack on the table, took a seat, and began to read.

He was amused by headlines that said **Royal Return, Gotham’s Favorite Son Comes Home**, and **Bruce Wayne Back In Town**. He chose the second headline written in *The Gotham Gazette*. The writer was Vicki Vale. He began to read.

& & & & & &

*Looking as regal as any royal, Bruce Wayne alighted on the dock from the Queen Mary in the company of his manservant, Mr. Alfred Pennyworth, and European ballet dancer Richard Grayson. Jovial and accommodating, Mr. Wayne answered reporters’ questions and expressed his joy in being back in America.*

“I’m very glad to be back in the good ol’ U. S. of A. I plan to have a Porterhouse steak with a mess of hash browns and apple pie for dessert.” He was forthcoming with the following: “We stopped off in England on the way home and Alfred visited his family while Dick and I watched the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace and saw the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.”
When questioned about his presence, Mr. Grayson said, “I have always wanted to visit the United States. There is much to see in your wonderful country.”

Dick was impressed with Miss Vale. She got all the quotes right! She painted a good picture of the hoopla at the docks. She wrote about Bruce’s Grand Tour itinerary and was not overly sensationalistic, though her writing kept the story interesting.

The picture accompanying the article was credited to Miss Vale. She’s a good photographer, too.

Dick read through the other papers, amused at all the fuss over his handsome lover. He refolded the papers and thought, The town’s socialite mothers must be dancing with glee now that Bruce is back.

He felt a twinge of jealousy. Would Bruce have to end up marrying one of their daughters? Where would that leave him?

He put the newspapers back in the stacks. He was being silly. Bruce was not tired of him yet! He picked up his bag and went downstairs with a light bounce in his step.

At the Information Desk he saw Miss Gordon. “Thank you for your help.”

“You’re welcome, sir.”

Dick smiled. He took note of the library’s hours from a bulletin board on the wall and knew he would return soon.
Chapter Summary

Dick meets his fellow dancers in the troupe.

"Confections so light,
Days so bright,
Champagne-filled nights,
Men in tights."

Old French Song
“Ballet Souffle”
18th Century C.E.

Bruce celebrated Dick’s acceptance into the Gotham Ballet Company. They dined on beef stroganoff and fine wine from the Manor’s cellar. After dinner with a wink and nod to each other, they retired upstairs and kissed passionately, falling onto the bed.

“So you’re the star now,” Bruce whispered as he nibbled on Dick’s ear.

“Ha, I’ll be lucky to be a spear-carrier.”

“Oh, you’ll be the star.”

“You sound so confident,” said Dick as he unbuttoned Bruce’s shirt. He exposed his lover’s chest and kissed the warm skin, brushing his lips over a nipple and sucking the other bud.

Bruce shivered and grasped Dick’s hips, pulling him closer. As moonlight spilled into the room and across the bed, he could swear that the young man sparkled! Laughing, he stroked the soft hair that was thick and beautiful.

Dick sucked the other nipple and trailed kisses down his chest and stomach, his breath tickling Bruce’s cock as Dick pulled down his underdrawers.

“Hurry,” Bruce urged.

Dick’s tongue flicked out and licked the stiffening column of flesh that showed Bruce’s eagerness. He teased his lover and finally gave in to Bruce’s pleading, swallowing his cock and sucking hard and fast. Bruce’s fingers curled up in the silky hair and tugged. He bucked his hips and lost himself in warm wetness. Looking down at Dick’s bobbing head, he felt a wild rush of lust and came, Dick grabbing his thighs in a bruising grip.

“Mmm,” he purred like a cat after swallowing cream, “You are a delicious morsel all by yourself, Mr. Wayne.”

“A morsel! I’m more than that.”
Dick laughed. “You’re still delicious.”

“And you’re more than a morsel.”

Dick smiled impishly. “Eat me up.”

Bruce pulled him into a deep kiss while busy pushing Dick’s pants down and grasped his cock. Dick’s smile was pure bliss as Bruce manipulated the rigid cock.

“Dance for me,” Bruce crooned. He stroked with skilled fingers.

Dick arched his back and gave himself fully to Bruce’s ministrations. He writhed as his body glistened with exertion but he wanted more. Bruce’s thumb rubbed heated flesh and Dick groaned. Bruce teased but gradually took pity on him and stroked a gasping lover to climax.

“Tomorrow, you dance again,” Bruce whispered as he kissed Dick’s temple.

Dick shook hands with his fellow dancers, pouring on the charm. He had auditioned for lead male dancer and he was aware that there might be some resentment at a newcomer stepping into the role instead of someone being promoted from within. His handclasp lingered just a bit with the well-muscled redhead who introduced himself as Roy Harper.

“You’re quite the toast of the Continent, aren’t you?” Roy asked with a smile.

“I hope so. I worked hard to be the toast to Natasha Romanoff’s omelette.”

“She tough to work with?”

“Not really, but then, I bring out the best in people.”

Roy laughed. “You’re confident; I’ll give you that.”

“Thanks.” Dick already liked this friendly man.

Donna Troy pushed a strand of dark hair back from her brow. “Glad to see someone’s filling the role. We lost our prima ballerina, too.”

Dick decided not to ask if that star role would be filled from within, not wanting to remind people of his outsider status.

A sharp handclap caught their attention and they turned to see Jean-Paul Belliveau standing impatiently in the center aisle. He was dressed in the brown pants and a green pullover this time. His feet were clad in the old slippers that Dick had seen yesterday.

“All right, people, we must get to work. You have met Mr. Grayson, our new lead dancer, and we will be holding auditions for a prima ballerina. You will be present, Mr. Grayson, for those auditions as I must see how you work with our prospective star. For now, Miss Troy, you will fill that role.”

Dick was pleased. He liked Donna, too.

“We shall be staging Cinderella. Let us begin!”

Dick and Donna were able to find a working rhythm fairly quickly. Rehearsal went well despite Jean-Paul’s criticisms, but Dick was unfazed. He had never met a ballet impresario who was not
unreasonable and demanding. A pleasant, cheerful director would have thrown him off.

Dick remembered last night with Bruce and nearly blushed, but the memory gave him extra energy. He danced with passion and won over the company with his dazzling talent.

“All right, passable, people.” Jean-Paul gestured. “Now, *attende*, go over the last scene again.”

Rehearsal went on for another hour, and when it was over Jean-Paul shook his head and snapped, “Tomorrow at one o’clock,” and limped away.

Dick wiped his face with a towel. “I feel right at home with grumpy Jean-Paul.”

Donna and Roy laughed. “Say, want to go for coffee?” Roy asked Dick.

“Sure. I’ll meet you out front in twenty minutes.” Dick went to his dressing room and quickly changed. He wore a dark-green suit with yellow vest and scarf and red buttons. He slipped out of his dressing room and cranked the phone in the hallway.

“Hi, Alfred. Would you tell Bruce I’m going out for coffee with some of the troupe? Thanks. Don’t wait dinner for me. See you later.”

He hung up just as Roy emerged from the men’s dressing room, attired resplendently in a smartly-tailored dark-red suit with a matching vest, crisp white shirt, and scarlet cravat. His high-buttoned black shoes were showing a little wear but were polished. He looked up and did a double-take.

“That’s, um, quite an outfit.”

“Isn’t it?” Dick gave a little twirl. “It’s the cat’s pajamas, isn’t it?”

Roy laughed. “I could see you in silk Oriental pajamas.”

“Oh, yes. I should get a pair. Red, I think.”

Donna emerged from the women’s dressing room in a lavender suit with a white pleated bodice. A purple brooch sparkled at her high-collared throat. A lavender hat with white feather and sweeping brim shaded her face as she carried a matching parasol with a ruffle of white lace in a white-gloved hand. Black shoes peeked out from under her skirt, the black buttons shining. She wore her hair in a net, having no time to put it in a proper pompadour.

“Oh, such loveliness,” Dick said with a bow.

Donna laughed. “Aren’t you Beau Brummel! You have a unique style, Mr. Grayson.”

“I hope so.” Dick grinned widely. “I’m new in town. Can you recommend a good place for coffee?”

“The *Café Parisian*.”

“Sounds fancy.”

“Just the way I like it.” Donna twirled her parasol.

The three of them walked out of the theater and Roy said, “We can walk. It’s not far.”

“Great.” Dick was pleased to skip a hansom cab. Stretching his legs would be good for him after that rehearsal. He liked a brisk walk as a sort of cool-down.
He was proud of his attractive companions, too. Admiring glances were thrown the trio’s way. The air was crisp and Dick actually felt jaunty.

They reached Café Parisian and sat at one of the outdoor tables in the French style. A waiter came out immediately and they all ordered coffee, each one choosing a different blend.

“So you’ve been dancing for awhile,” Roy said to Dick.

“Yes, I had experience.”

“What was it like, to dance before the crowned heads of Europe?” Donna smoothed her skirt.

“It’s exhilarating, but any audience is worthy.”

“You sound like a diplomat,” Roy laughed.

“It’s a useful skill.” Dick pulled off his gloves.

“I would say so,” Donna said in amusement. “It’ll be easy to dance with you.”

“Likewise, my lady.” Dick made a little bow.

“What did you like best about Europe?” The waiter brought their coffee and a complimentary plate of French pastries. Donna smiled her thanks.

“The different cultures and languages are fascinating.” Dick stirred his coffee. “The architecture is magnifique.”

“The gargoyles are not your taste?” Donna sipped her coffee.

“Charming,” Dick said dryly.

“Why give up Europe for America?” Roy studied the pastries and chose a cream-filled spiral confection.

“I’ve always wanted to see America.” Dick chose a lemon puff with strawberries. He bit into the flaky pastry and looked at it approvingly.

“We’re still a pretty young country compared to Europe. Raw around the edges.”

“But new and exciting.”

“You came across the Atlantic with Bruce Wayne, I read.” Donna put some sugar in her coffee and stirred.

Roy laughed. Dick looked at him curiously. “I said something funny?”

“Yeah.” Roy finished his pastry. “I know Bruce Wayne.”

Dick wondered if he should be jealous. “You do?”

“Yep.” Roy’s green eyes sparkled. “I grew up in Star City on the estate of Robert and Moira Queen. My mother was the cook. When she died of influenza, they kept me on. I attended public school and worked around the estate, helping with the landscaping and horses. Oliver Queen is an old friend of Bruce Wayne’s.”
“Did you take dancing lessons?”

Roy grinned. “I did. Miss Dinah said I had talent.”

“She was right.” Dick finished his lemon puff. “So the theater called to you over mucking out the stables?”

Roy smirked. “Sometimes I think mucking out stables is easier than ballet.”

“I agree with that.” Dick flexed his leg. “Sore muscles are a dancer’s lot.”

“Tell me about it,” Donna groaned.

The three of them talked ballet while they drank their coffee, and Dick asked, “Is Jean-Paul extremely difficult?”

“Not more than usual with directors,” Donna said.

“So I thought. How did he injure his leg?”

“The story is that he fell off a stage one night into the orchestra pit.”

“The story?” Dick quirked an eyebrow.

“Yeah, there were rumors that ol’ Jean-Paul was set up by a rival,” Roy said as he took another pastry.

“How could a rival do that?”

“Rumor had it that he tampered with Belliveau’s slippers before the performance. Made ‘em slippery and wham! ol’ Jean-Paul slips like he’s at the zoo and stepped on a banana peel by the monkey cage.”

Dick stared at Roy. “You’re going to hell in a handbasket, aren’t you?”

Roy’s grin was cream-filled. “Probably.” He licked the cream off his lip like a cat. “Look, I know it’s a serious thing a man getting injured badly enough to ruin his career, but I’m sick of guys like him taking out his anger on the rest of the world, namely us dancers.”

“Aww, poor pitiful Roy,” Donna teased. “You just don’t understand the artistic temperament, my dear.”

“You’re right; I don’t.”

“Ah, but is our lot in that rarified world of ballet,” Dick said with a smile.

“You’re utterly charming,” Donna said with a smile of her own.

“Mais oui, Mademoiselle.”

Roy rolled his eyes. “Oh, brother.”

Dick and Donna laughed.

& & & & & &

Dick arrived at the Manor just in time for dinner. He was glad that he had eaten only one pastry at
Café Parisian. He was already extremely fond of Alfred’s cooking.

“Duck l’orange, sir,” said Alfred at Dick’s inquiry about dinner.

As Dick took his seat in the dining room, Bruce asked, “So did you enjoy coffee with your new acquaintances?”

“Very much so.” Dick shook out the cranberry-colored napkin and laid it across his lap. “I believe you may know one of them.”

“Oh?”

“Roy Harper. He said he grew up on the Queen estate in Star City.”

“Oh, yes, I know Roy. I didn’t know he was a dancer. He was good at archery but I never saw him dance.”

“Archery?” Dick smiled his thanks as Alfred set a laden plate in front of him.

“Yes, Ollie fancies himself Robin Hood and has an archery range.”

“Wow! Fascinating stuff.” Dick cut one of the baby Idaho potatoes. “You never know about people.”

Bruce cut a slice of duck. “No, you never do.”
Visit To A Graveside

Chapter Summary

Bruce and Dick begin an exercise regimen.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Use of the word 'Gypsies'

Autumn's bloom
Lifts the gloom
Of our days
By the grave.

Alice Villaker
Editor
"Victorian Poems
Of The Civil War"
1863 C.E.

“We should come up with an exercise regimen.”

Bruce’s pronouncement was nearly out of the blue as he sat in his favorite comfortable chair in front of the fireplace in the front parlor. Dick was comfortably sprawled on the couch, half-asleep after a rigorous rehearsal earlier that afternoon.

“I already exercise,” he grumbled.

“I mean Raven and Nightingale-type exercise.”

Dick perked up. “What do you see in that newspaper?”

Bruce rattled the paper. “Jewel robberies. We should do a little patrolling of the Gold Coast. We should also sharpen our fighting skills. Do you box?”

Dick shook his head. “I do know some moves I’ve needed for fight scenes in ballet. I just need some practice.”

“You teach me those moves and I’ll teach you boxing.”

Dick stretched luxuriously. “Sounds like a good trade-off.” He smiled lazily.
Bruce rattled his paper again.

Bruce had an exercise room set up on the second floor. Mats were spread on the floor, a medicine ball rolled around in the corner, and a set of pulleys was propped against the wall. Boxing gloves and towels were piled in one corner.

Bruce and Dick wore white sleeveless cotton jerseys and black shorts that ended just above the knees. White socks and tennis shoes completed their work-out clothes.

Bruce threw Dick a set of gloves. “Okay, let’s get started.”

They jabbed and feinted and Bruce taught Dick the art of uppercuts and rabbit punches. Dick was a quick learner.

“That’s it, right in the ol’ breadbasket,” Bruce pattered. “Now aim for the jaw. That’s it, okay, use that footwork.”

They sparred for an hour, then Dick taught Bruce the moves that could help distract an opponent. When they finished and wiped down with towels, Bruce said, “Good work-out. You’d better rest up before you go to rehearsal.”

“I’d better shower.” Dick slung his towel around his neck. “Care to join me?”

Bruce smirked. “Lead on.”

Dick did as bid, Bruce eagerly following his graceful lover. Once inside the master bedroom the dancer shed clothes as he walked to the bathroom.

He’s got style.

The sight of those tight buttocks caused Bruce to shed his clothes with alacrity. The shower was of the most modern design with gleaming chrome and copper piping. Dick twisted the handle labeled Hot and tested the water, getting it right “just like Baby Bear.” Bruce shook his head fondly, entering the shower and closing the glass door.

The warm spray relaxed the muscles, and Bruce took the bar of Ivory soap and rubbed it over Dick’s chest. His lover was not as broad-shouldered as he was, but his muscles were still powerful, especially his thighs.

Bruce soaped his stomach, thighs and back up to his chest again. Dick was frothy, rivulets of water running down his body. His hair hung in limp strands, glittering as if he was wearing strings of diamonds.

Dick arched his back and the water washed off the soap. Dick’s cock bobbed as he shivered with delight.

“Playful dolphin,” Bruce crooned.

“Do I have a dorsal fin?”

“Let me check.” Bruce ran his hand down Dick’s spine. “No, no fin.”

“Check lower.”
Bruce’s hand went down to the curve of the buttocks. “You could bounce a quarter off your ass.”

Dick’s grin was dazzling. “Let’s try that after we shower.”

“We should.” Bruce kissed him deeply as he squeezed both buttocks.

Dick slipped his arms around Bruce’s waist. Their cocks rubbed together, Dick purring after the kiss. He rubbed harder. The friction sent thrills of delight through both bodies. They speeded up that friction until pure pleasure ripped through the lovers, their passion washed away.

It was some time later when they emerged “squeaky-clean,” as Dick said cheerfully.

“Are you going out with your friends again?” Bruce asked.

“No, I don’t think so. Though who knows? I might change my mind.” Dick wiggled into a pair of underdrawers.

“Ahh, a free spirit.” Bruce picked out a light-brown pair of pants.

“Like a butterfly. Or a nightingale.”

“Okay, free spirit. Have a good rehearsal.”

“Always.” Dick threw on a pair of dark-purple pants with a lavender silk shirt. “I’ve got a vest around here someplace. And a cravat, too, that matches.”

“You’re wearing something that matches?”

“Ha ha.” Dick searched through one of the dresser drawers assigned to him. “Ah, ha, here it is!” He pulled out a lavender silk cravat. “My vest is in the closet.”

Bruce looked. “You’re right.” He took out the hanger with the vest. Dick took it from him and slipped the vest over his shirt, smoothing his hand over the velvet material. “Lavender suits you well.”

Dick smirked. He fastened his cuffs with amethyst cufflinks and put on his pants. Wiggling his toes, he walked over to the dresser and combed his wet hair. “When should we patrol?”

“Well, jewel thieves generally don’t carry guns, but they can fight if cornered. We should be up to par physically.”

“Sounds logical.” Dick put down the comb. “Well, I’m off! See you this evening.” He kissed Bruce and exited the bedroom.

Bruce decided to take a walk around the grounds. Dick took the carriage into town and Bruce informed Alfred of his plans.

“Very good, sir.”

Bruce put on a warm jacket and stuffed a pair of gloves into an inner pocket. He stepped out into the crisp air and walked briskly, twirling one of his many canes.

As he walked, his mind was racing with ideas. In addition to their exercises, they would have to review their costumes. They had quickly thrown them together while tracking criminals in Paris. It would probably be best to consult Alfred.
Leaves were beginning to turn. He observed their glorious colors: scarlet, gold, and burnt orange. They were only patches at this point but would be well on their way in a few weeks.

Except for the well-manicured lawns around the Manor and the flower and vegetable gardens in back, most of the acreage was uncultivated. There were stables and a carriage house and the indulgence of a tennis court, but the surrounding woods comprised the bulk of the estate. He owned a private beach, accessible by a sandy path down to the sea.

Dressed in country clothes, he had chosen sturdy walking boots, faun-colored trousers and a brown hunting jacket. A soft Irish hat completed the ensemble.

He inhaled deeply, smelling the salt tang of the ocean. Europe had been exciting but he truly needed to be home. The Manor was in his blood.

As he walked through the woods on a small path, he hoped that Dick would grow to love it here. Those who were Roma tended to wander, but if he formed an attachment here, it might help to keep him in Gotham.

After a lengthy walk, he circled back to the family graveyard, located over a rise and not seen from the Manor’s windows, but close enough for a visit to be only a short jaunt away.

Bruce pushed the iron gate open and strolled to the shiny black headstone bearing the names of Thomas and Martha Wayne. Stone angels knelt in impassive prayer as they flanked the stone.

“Hello, Mother and Father. I had a fine trip on the Continent.” He stood before the grave. His parents had been dead more than half his life. He had conducted more of these conversations than he remembered with his flesh-and-blood parents. “I met a young man.”

He nervously tapped the ground with his cane. He had no idea if they would have accepted his inversion. Such a subject would not have been considered suitable for a child’s ears.

“Dick Grayson is a wonderful person. He’s bright and cheerful and so very talented! He’s a star in the ballet world.” Bruce’s tone turned somber. “He lost his parents at a young age, too. They were Gypsies and their caravan was attacked one night. He’s seen the worst of people and yet can still find joy in life.” He restlessly turned the cane into the dirt. “He’s helped me, to learn to…to try and deal with what happened.”

Bruce walked around the grave, watching a robin swoop from the trees and fly around his head as its chirped. Bruce could not help laughing. The tiny bird perched on the gravestone.

Bruce went around to the front of the grave again. The robin hopped to the other end of the stone.

“You’d like him. He is really special.” He sighed. “I really love him.” The robin burst into song and Bruce laughed again. The bird flew away while still singing.

Feeling much better, Bruce returned to the Manor with a bounce in his step.
Chapter Summary

Bruce visits an old friend for information on the latest jewel robbery.

“The crème de la crème live on the Gold Coast in Gotham.”

Mrs. Eleanor Winchester
High Society Doyenne
1901 C.E.

Dick worked hard in rehearsals and in training with Bruce. Another jewel robbery had been committed on the Gold Coast, and Bruce was anxious to start working on this mystery. Dick was just as eager, so they pushed themselves in the training because Bruce refused to go out against even jewel thieves without proper training.

In the meantime they discussed strategies and Alfred approved of their costume choices. He suggested having more than one outfit in case of tears or rips that might occur. He volunteered to procure the same-colored suits, vests, and cravats, which was gratefully approved by Bruce and Dick. The white shirts they wore under their vests were plentiful in Bruce’s wardrobe. Dick needed more shirts of that color, so Alfred offered to purchase them for him.

While Dick was busy with rehearsal in the city, Bruce decided to do a little preliminary sleuthing. He dressed in a dark-blue suit, vest and lighter blue cravat and chose a homburg and warm coat. He pulled on gloves and selected a wolf’s-head cane that had belonged to his grandfather.

“I’m going to the Winchesters, Alfred. I don’t know if they’ll invite me for luncheon, but I’ll call you if I stay.”

“Very good, sir.”

Bruce went out into the crisp fall air. The Winchester house was not far, so he chose to walk. He had introduced Dick to Regan, the head groom, and Joey the stableboy. They would have cheerfully hitched up the carriage but it was not necessary. Walking would keep him fit. He was not a bricklayer or stonemason, browned by the sun, but he could keep in shape.

He nodded to passing ladies in landaus and smiled at little boys in knickers running down the street with hoops rolling in front of them or carrying baseball gloves. The day was ripe with energy, drawing his thoughts back to Dick.

Dick was energy personified. He had little time to brood now with this ray of sunshine in his life.

He smiled at the thought. Despite the tragedy in his own past, Dick enjoyed life and was teaching Bruce to do the same.

He was also spurring on Bruce’s enthusiasm for their proposed nocturnal activities. Being the Raven
was important to him. It gave him purpose, certainly more so than attending debutante balls and the latest exhibit at the Art Museum. As the Raven he could perform good deeds with something besides inherited money.

Whistling a jaunty tune, Bruce twirled his cane as he walked. The Gold Coast was the string of estates stretched out on Harborview Drive that overlooked the ocean, and was an address highly coveted by up-and-coming social climbers. Most of the estates were populated by Old Money families, but a few *nouveau riches* managed to slip in now and again.

Once he reached the gates of Elmwood, the Winchester estate, he toned down his joviality. He was coming to discuss a serious subject and it behooved him to exhibit a corresponding attitude. He walked through the gateway after giving the iron gates a push, listening to them clang shut behind him. He walked up the winding drive to the impressive mansion of brick and white Ionic columns. He jogged up the steps and used the brass doorknocker on the solid oak door.

The door was opened by the butler in mere minutes. “Good morning, Mr. Wayne.”

“Good morning, Anders.” Bruce handed the elderly butler his card and placed it on the silver tray that Anders held. He stepped inside and the butler took his hat, coat and cane. Once the items were stored in the hall closet, Bruce followed him to the parlor.

“Please be comfortable, sir. I shall see if Madame is receiving.”

Bruce nodded his acknowledgment. A fiction, of course. If there was a possibility that Eleanor Winchester would not receive him, Anders would have led him to the parlor without taking his coat and accessories.

He wandered around the room, admiring the colorful Ming vase on a polished pier table, a Monet watercolor on one wall, and a Remington bronze of a cowboy on a rearing horse on another table. He turned when he heard the swish of silk on the tiled foyer floor.

In swept Eleanor Winchester, a handsome woman in her late forties with large brown eyes and an aquiline nose. Her chestnut hair was swept up in a fashionable pompadour. Her peach-colored gown was of the latest fashion, complete with puffed sleeves and a ruffled white bodice. An amber brooch glittered at the front of her high collar.

“Bruce, how delightful to see you.”

She held out her hands and Bruce took them. “Thank you, Eleanor.”

“Have a seat.” They settled into their respective chairs, Bruce in a damask-covered French Louis XIV chair and Eleanor on a yellow divan. “I read about your return. How was Europe?”

“Oh, you know, marbles in Italy, icons in Russia, the *Mona Lisa* in France, and the Parthenon in Greece. You know, the usual.”

Eleanor laughed. “So true. Our set has done the Grand Tour to death.” Her eyes glittered. “Though you did find a sparkling bauble to bring home, eh?”

Bruce felt a momentary irritation. “He sparkles, but he’s not a bauble.” He smiled to cover his umbrage.

“The ladies and I have been discussing a welcome home ball for you. Of course your houseguest is invited, too.”
“How generous,” Bruce replied, careful to keep the sarcasm out of his voice. “But I don’t know how you do it after that awful robbery!”

“That was dreadful,” Eleanor admitted. “The thief broke into our safe and stole my diamond necklace, bracelet and earrings, along with a ruby set.”

“Horrible.” Bruce shook his head. “Do the police have any leads?”

“None. Though I hardly expect the Gotham Police Department to be on top of things. Frankly, they’re rather corrupt.”

Bruce privately agreed. Most big-city police departments had less-than-stellar reputations.

“Well, perhaps the Women’s League For Clean Government can do something.”

“I certainly hope so!” Eleanor rang a little silver bell that she kept on a small table. “Will you stay for luncheon?”

“I’d be delighted. May I use your phone to call Alfred?”

“It’s right down the hall.”

“Thank you.”

Bruce made the call, replacing the receiver in its cradle. He noticed the sound of laughter as the green baize door to the kitchen opened. He could see a maid emerging at the end of the hall.

At least the staff sounds happy.

The young woman was thin but had a nice smile. She was no parlormaid, probably an upstairs maid. Only very comely women were chosen as parlormaids.

“Oh, good mornin’, sir.”

“Good morning…”

“Annie, sir.” She gave a little curtsy. “Would you be needin’ somethin’?”

“Oh, no, but thank you for asking.”

Her pale face tinged pink with a charming blush. She lowered her hazel eyes demurely. “Excuse me, sir.”

She walked to the end of the hall and into the foyer, ascending the main staircase. He liked the crisp little white cap and apron she wore with her light-blue uniform. It reminded him of a nurse’s uniform.

He returned to the parlor and resumed his conversation with his hostess. “How did the thief get in?”

“Through the French doors in the library.”

“May I see it?”

“See what?”

“The library.”

“What, are you playing Sherlock Holmes?”
Bruce chuckled. “I suppose I am. I’m quite a fan of Mr. Conan Doyle’s work.”

“Why not? It might be amusing.”

Eleanor rose and escorted Bruce to the library, a room of red Morrocco leather chairs and couch and dark wood paneling. She went over to a painting of a grim-faced ancestor and gently pulled it away from the wall. She spun the lock to the proper numbers and opened it.

“Have a look.” She swept her arm out to indicate the interior of the safe.

Bruce studied it. It was empty except for a stack of stocks and bonds. He noted the brand of safe and walked over to the French doors. “Were the panes broken?”

“Actually, it was a circle of glass cut out in one of the panes. Very neat and without any jagged shards.”

“Ah.”

“What do you make of that?”

“I’m not sure.” Bruce looked at the doors. “Which pane was it?”

Eleanor pointed. He noted that it was right above the handle.

“Anything found in here? A dropped glove, a scrap of fabric, anything?”

“I did hear Emerson say that one of the detectives found a scrap of black cloth.”

“Ah, well, I suppose they’re on the case.”

The ormolu clock on the mantel chimed twelve o’clock.

“Luncheon should be ready soon.” Eleanor smiled. “Heard from your Cousin Theodore yet?”

“Oh, I expect he’s pretty busy.”

“I’m sure. Well, to the breakfast nook. Unless you’d like the formal dining room.”

“Oh, no, the nook will do just fine.”

The nook was cheerful with yellow walls and plenty of windows. Ubiquitous ferns gently waved in the slight movement of air caused by the ceiling fan. The view from the windows showed the neatly-manicured lawn sloping down to the woods.

Another maid besides Annie served luncheon. Red hair was tucked up under her cap and freckles were sprinkled over her nose. Her brogue was thicker than Annie’s.

“Thank you, Bridget,” said Eleanor in a tone of dismissal.

The maid withdrew after settling the plates of fried cod and golden fried clam cakes on the table. Small bowls of salad completed the menu.

“I appreciate the fish, Eleanor.”

“I know you like it. Some people don’t.” She speared a clam cake with her fork. “The Winchesters in Boston live on a diet of fresh fish caught from the Atlantic.”
“Some people are fussy eaters.”

“Very true. However, fussiness means one misses out on so much.”

“Well, that’s true.” Bruce smiled. “You’re a very practical woman, Eleanor.”

“Oh, thank you, dear. That’s high praise. Practicality is such a *useful* skill.”

“Yes, useful is good.” Bruce cut a piece of fish. “The crunchy texture of the batter was just right. Combined with flair, nearly unstoppable.”

Eleanor’s smile was pure satisfaction.

& & & & & & &

When Dick came home from rehearsal, Bruce told him what he had learned at Elmwood.

“Sounds like a professional cat burglar, using the star glazier technique.” Dick massaged his calf. They were both sitting in the living room, Bruce in his favorite chair and Dick on the couch.

“That’s what I thought.”

“Reading all those *Police Gazettes* must have paid off.”

Bruce pretended to ignore Dick’s laughter. “I’ve got some research for you at the library.”

“Ready and willing.” Dick slipped off the couch and settled onto Bruce’s lap. “Always.”

He leaned in and kissed his lover deeply as Bruce’s arms went around him.
“Good morning, sir.”

“It’s Dick Grayson, ma’am.”

Barbara was sitting behind the Reference Desk today, wearing a light-green dress with an emerald brooch. Dick doubted that it was real. He could tell fake jewels after years in the theater, but it was pretty nonetheless.

“Do you have any information on the family jewels for the First Families of Gotham?”

Amusement crossed Barbara’s face. “And why would a famous dancer need such information?”

“Ah, so you know who I am?”

“Yes. You planning on any heists?”

“You mean beyond the robberies already committed?”

Barbara raised an eyebrow. “You know quite a bit about the latest news.”

“Call me curious.” Dick smiled charmingly, careful not to overdo it. This woman seemed too smart to be easily fooled. Maybe it was just the stereotype that librarians were brainy, but he doubted it. Intelligence gleamed in her green eyes, and Dick was loath to underestimate her.

“A curious dancer. Call me curious.” She suddenly smiled. “All right, I can show you some books. Have a seat.”

Dick sat at one of the long tables while Barbara went into the other room. She returned with several outsized tomes on a book cart.

“You’re in luck, Mr. Grayson. A book was published about Gotham’s treasures, in other words, about the wealthiest families’ Crown Jewels. There are several very nice photographs in the book.
These others have more in-depth information, and there are also newspaper clippings you might find of interest.”

“Thank you, Miss Gordon.”

“If you need any more help, just ask.” Barbara returned to her desk with a swish of silk skirts.

Dick opened the top book. The photographs showed various treasures: jewels, sculptures and paintings. There were even rare books as part of some collections.

*It’s like a guidebook for thieves.*

He read about the Winchester jewels, noting that there were more gems in the photograph than Eleanor had said were stolen. He would have to ask Bruce about it.

He studied the other treasures and made notes on a pad of paper that he had brought with him. He read the other books that went into more depth on the valuable objects.

There were a few other patrons in the room quietly reading. The only sounds were an occasional cough and the turning of pages.

Dick stretched his legs trying to work out a kink in his thigh. He would have to get some steam and a massage. He wiggled his toes, wishing he had his ballet slippers on.

*How do people wear those awful high-buttoned shoes?*

He shuddered at the thought. He brought the clippings close and began to read.

The robbery reporting was good. He noticed the byline was Vicki Vale. He made more notes, listening as Barbara spoke with a patron.

When he finished he put the books back on the cart. He went over to the Reference Desk while pushing the cart.

“Miss Gordon, I’d like to check out some of these books.”

“Certainly. Miss Brown will help you at the Circulation Desk.”

“That’s Information?”

“Yes.” She was wearing a set of wire-rimmed glasses attached to a gold chain and perched the glasses on her nose. “The newspaper clippings stay here.”

“Of course.”

As Dick began to turn away, Barbara asked, “Did you find what you wanted?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Dick flashed her a smile and trundled the cart out to the foyer.

& & & & &

Barbara watched as the ballet dancer walked away pushing the cart. It was a fine view, she thought with a slight blush.

*I know more than most girls about amore. Those French novels in my trunk at home tell you the way of the world.*
She still could not quite believe that a famous ballet dance was here in Gotham City. Once she had heard that Bruce Wayne was seen trailing a certain ballet company around Europe, she had done some research. Apparently Richard Grayson was a rising star in the ballet world. Intrigued, she had seen pictures of him in old issues of European newspapers.

"Didn’t do you justice, Grayson. You’re pretty dazzling in the flesh."

Barbara leaned back in her chair. Why would a man immersed in his art be so interested in the Gold Coast robberies? Could he be connected to them somehow?

"What a shame if he is. I’d hate to see him waste away in some filthy prison, though he’d probably wind up as King of his cellblock."

She tapped her teeth with the end of her glasses. Maybe he was just a crime aficionado.

"I hope he needs to do more research."

"What are you smiling about?"

Barbara looked up at her fellow librarian, who was standing by the desk.

"Smiling about?"

"Yes, you look like the Cheshire Cat.” Stephanie leaned closer. “Are you thinking about Mr. Gorgeous? Because I concur.”

Barbara laughed. “Do you?”

“Oh, yes.” Stephanie dropped her voice to a whisper. “He looks just as good from the front as the back.”

“Such thoughts from a demure librarian, Miss Brown!”

Stephanie smirked. “Do you want me to do some shelving? I put up the sign directing people here from the desk.”

“Yes, go ahead. Oh, put away those newspapers first, would you?”

“Sure.” Stephanie pushed the cart away.

Barbara checked the watch pinned to her bodice. Time to work on some statistics. She took a ledger out from the bottom drawer and began transferring numbers to it from a stack of papers.

& & & & & &

“Bruce!”

Bruce looked up from his work in the study. Papers were scattered across his desk and his hand hovered over the inkwell while clutching his pen.

“What have you got there?”

“Books that will help us.” Dick set the books on the coffee table and sat on the couch. “Come see.”

Bruce abandoned his desk and sat next to Dick. “That’s a good pile of books. Let’s take a look.”
Dick pointed out the pertinent pages and Bruce skimmed over them. “Okay, we might be able to
guess the next location he’ll hit with these as a guide.”

“Do you think we’ll be ready to do some night sleuthing?” Dick asked eagerly.

Bruce almost laughed. As it was he smiled fondly at the younger man. “Maybe by this weekend.”

“Excellent!”

Bruce brushed back the strand of hair that hung loosely over Dick’s forehead. “We’re getting there,
Nightingale.”

“Quoth the Raven?”

“Evermore.”

Dick smirked. With a wink he nuzzled Bruce’s ear.

“You’re insatiable, aren’t you?” Bruce asked.

“I certainly hope so.” Dick bent Bruce back to lie down on the couch, covering his body with his
own. “Mmm, insatiable is good.”

“Come on, show me.”

Dick leaned forward and caressed Bruce’s face. He was certainly flexible, a ballet dancer’s stock-in-
trade. He bent down almost in half to kiss deeply. Bruce returned it with enthusiasm, his hands
moving over Dick’s hips.

As Dick began to unbutton his shirt, Bruce hoped that Alfred would not come in, but all coherent
thoughts fled as Dick’s magic fingers began their work.

& & & & & &

The next day Alfred was dusting in the foyer when the doorknocker sounded. He put his feather
duster down on the table and opened the door.

“Ah, good morning, Mrs. Winchester.”

“Good morning, Alfred.” She presented her card, which Alfred placed on a silver tray.

“Follow me, please, Mrs. Winchester.”

Eleanor followed the butler into the parlor. Alfred did not take her hat and coat. He was not sure if
Bruce wanted to see her.

Alfred found Bruce in the library. “Mrs. Emerson Winchester calling, sir.”

“Ah, I take it she’s not calling on the phone.” Bruce saw the engraved card on the tray.

“No, sir.”

“I’ll see her.”

“Very good, sir.”

Alfred returned to the parlor and took Eleanor’s hat and coat, careful of the ostrich feathers on the
Bruce did not keep Eleanor waiting long. He entered the parlor and greeted his friend warmly. “Nice to see you, Eleanor. What brings you here?”

“Oh, just a little thing the ladies and I are putting together, remember?”

“What, some charity ball?”

“No, darling, your welcome home party, remember?”

“Oh, that.” Bruce waved her hand.

“Yes, that.” Eleanor looked miffed but Bruce knew that she was just pretending. “You’ll get your invitation but it’s next Saturday at the Stoddards. You and your houseguest are expected at eight.” She waved her hand languorously. “It will be the social event of the Season!”

“What if I have other plans?” Bruce asked in amusement.

“You’ll just have to cancel them, dear.”

Bruce laughed. “All right, my friend.” He stood by the mantel. The fire warmed his legs. “Would you like some tea?”

“No, thank you. I only stopped by to let you know when, where and why.”

“Why?”

“Because.”

“Because why?”

“Because you’re back.”

Bruce smirked at their word game. “Thanks to you and the ladies. Really, I appreciate it.”

“I’m so glad, dear. Now, I must be off! Caroline Stoddard and the rest of our group have much to do.”

Bruce summoned Alfred by tugging on a pull cord. He requested that Eleanor’s things be fetched.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay awhile longer?”

“While a very tempting notion, I do have many things to do. Pity we aren’t living in our grandparents’ time when leisure was part of our class’ birthright.”

“Do you feel hurried?”

“Modern life is very fast, Bruce. Why, I just attended a wedding in Bar Harbor this summer of a young couple who were only engaged for a year! Can you believe it? You can’t even get a decent wedding planned in that amount of time, never mind a courtship! I truly wonder what our society will become.” Eleanor shook her head.
Bruce thought of his own courtship of Dick. They had just met a year ago in Italy, and had fallen in love before leaving for Russia.

What would Eleanor say about our whirlwind courtship?

She departed and Bruce returned to the library and his study of the books that Dick had brought home.

This weekend, the Raven and the Nightingale would perform their first patrol in America.
The Raven and the Nightingale stake out a house.

The air of excitement reminded Dick of the atmosphere backstage before an Opening Night. Alfred helped him and Bruce with the finishing touches for their costumes: Bruce in black and Dick in dark-green with red vest, yellow cravat, and yellow cape. He pulled on green gloves.

“How are you going to skulk about with that canary-yellow cape of yours?” asked Bruce.

“Reversible,” Dick said with a smile, swishing his cape around.

Bruce sighed as Dick laughed and Alfred had hid his smile. “Are you ready, Nightingale?”

“Always, Raven.” Dick put his green domino mask on while Bruce put on his black one. He also put on a black top hat while Dick picked up his dark-green hat.

“Your canes, sirs,” said Alfred, holding out one with a raven’s head and the other with a nightingale’s head. Both were gold and heavy and formidable weapons. They also carried daggers in the inside of their cloaks. Practicing with the daggers had been a fun exercise, both of them proficient with the weapons. Bruce had vetoed guns, and Dick agreed. He knew that Bruce’s parents had been killed by a handgun.

Dick had no use for guns. He had never hunted, too young to learn before his own parents were killed. Daggers and other knives were his people’s preferred weapons.

“Can we walk to the Collins estate?” he asked.

“We can. Other nights we’ll have to take horses.”

Dick liked that idea. His favorite mount was a dappled mare named Daisy, a sweet-tempered soul who Dick had instantly bonded with upon their first meeting.

Walking was good, too. The night was crisp and cold with that autumn tang whether one was in America or Europe. He was eager to begin their work. Catching criminals was certainly a noble endeavor. Doing it with Bruce was just plain fun.
But being the lover of a rich adventurer was a very interesting choice to his life path. He glanced at Bruce beside him. They walked through the woods on a path Bruce knew. There was a nearly full moon, which suited their night’s work well.

Neither man spoke. The only sound was the whistle of the wind in the trees and the occasional hoot of an owl underscored by the crunch of fallen leaves under their shoes.

He suppressed a shiver. *Something* was going to happen tonight. His parents would have called it the Sight.

Sight or no sight, his instincts were finely-honed. He followed Bruce’s lead since he knew the way.

They reached the estate, a brass plaque at the front gate proclaiming it to be Collinswood. The brick walls enclosing the estate were topped by iron spikes. Bruce quietly signalled and they threw up lightweight ropes, snagging the spikes with iron hooks and climbing up the wall. Vaulting over the wall, they landed on their feet on the grass, pulling the ropes down.

Fortunately there were no guard dogs or other security around. They could be staking out the wrong house, but Bruce had deduced that the priceless Faberge egg owned by William and Valencia Collins would be targeted next. Dick had agree, and now they were stealing quietly through the trees to reach the edge of the woods and find a good spot so they could see activity around the house but remain unseen.

Dick was grateful that it was not raining or the bitter cold of winter. They would have to make modifications to their costumes for that snowy season.

For now, the crisp night air was just right. Dick wrapped his cloak tighter around himself, Bruce smiling as he put his cloak around his companion’s shoulders, leaving his arm around Dick. They settled in on the hard ground to watch.

Stars twinkled in the cloudless sky as the moon shone down brightly. Dick was dubious about any experienced thief choosing a near-full moon for his work, but it might be just the cover he would need, as he would think that no one would expect such a bold attempt.

*Rather romantic, except that it’s cold and we’re sitting on the hard ground.*

Lights were on in the first-floor rooms, probably the front parlor and study, perhaps the library. Dick thought back to the diagram Bruce had drawn and remembered that his guesses were right.

Shadows moved in the parlor. A thin, filmy undercurtain had been drawn. The silhouette was a woman with her hourglass figure. Dick sympathized with her. The corset she was wearing must be extremely tight. He had dressed as a woman for a play he had once performed in and the corset had been torturous.

*How do women wear those awful things?*

He was much happier with a waistcoat. He watched as the silhouette disappeared and the lamplight was extinguished, and the watchers’ attention was drawn to the study.

A soft glow from a Tiffany lamp illuminated a man sitting at a desk, working on a ledger. The woman from the parlor entered, looking handsome in a peach-colored dress. She put her hand on his shoulder and he looked up with a smile.
Dick was a little surprised at the affection. Most upper-class couples he had seen were extremely proper with each other. Most marriages were made for anything but love, but William and Valencia at least appeared to like each other.

The hooting of an owl carried over the clear night air. A rustle in the underbrush startled Dick.

Bruce gently tapped his shoulder. Dick relaxed. He could do this. Staying motionless and quiet was not exactly foreign to him. Observing people was a useful skill, especially when they were not aware of it.

The Collins couple talked for about ten minutes, then William ran a hand through his brown hair in a tired gesture. Slender and tall as he stood, he was only a few inches taller than Valencia, whose chestnut hair was beginning to fall out of her pompadour.

A shame people don’t get more comfortable in the evening.

He smiled as he remembered how scandalized Alfred had been when he had first come down to the parlor after dinner in yellow silk pajamas and a matching robe…

& & & & & &

“Master Dick!”

Bruce looked up from his chair by the fireplace at Alfred’s exclamation, eyes widening. “What have we here?”

Dick walked in as if he was onstage, graceful and majestic. He wore gold lame slippers, every inch of him sparkling.

“May I ask what this…outfit…is about?” Alfred asked, gripping a tray with cups of hot chocolate.

“My pajamas, Alfred. I have no performance tonight. I always dress comfortably if I’m not out on the town or entertaining people.”

Bruce was dressed in his dark-blue smoking jacket, white shirt and blue pants. He wore slippers, too.

“Gentlemen do not wear such things outside the bedroom,” Alfred said firmly.

“But I’m not a gentleman, Alfred,” Dick said with a wink as he took a cup.

Alfred shook his head. “You are, young sir.”


“Ah, very comfortable,” Bruce said. Gold highlights reflected in his eyes as he sipped his chocolate.

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Dick smiled at the memory. Alfred was properly appalled by Bruce adopting what he called Dick’s ‘Bohemian ways.’.

And it always pays off.

He squeezed Bruce’s knee and the other man smiled at him.
The Collinses left the study, extinguishing the lamp. Minutes later a light went on in an upstairs bedroom and the shade was drawn down. Fifteen minutes later the light went out around the edges of the shade.

They had already discussed how long they would stake out the place. They would stay two hours and then leave if nothing happened. Bruce had firmly stated that he had no intention of staying out all night without any indication that there would be a robbery.

Dick heartily agreed. They were mostly guessing as to the next robbery, but a jeweled Faberge egg was a tempting prize for any thief.

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An hour later Dick stretched his legs out. He was getting stiff. Not good for a dancer or crimebuster, for that matter.

Bruce began to move, too, then suddenly stiffened as he grabbed Dick’s arm. He pointed and Dick saw the movement of shadow from the northeast corner. They quickly got into a crouch and watched as the shadow moved toward the house with surprising agility. A black-clad figure disappeared around the back of the house out of sight, his cloak fluttering out behind him.

Bruce and Dick left the woods and went around the corner, noticing the neat hole in the glass of the kitchen door. The rapidity of the star glazier cut indicated a professional of the highest order.

Bruce opened the door and Dick followed him, the two of them silent as they went through the kitchen, careful not to bump into anything and make noise.

Moving stealthily down the hall, they reached the study. Bruce carefully opened the door.

The thief was standing at the French doors, holding a small sack. His face was obscured by a full hood, only green eyes visible in the moonlight. The cloak obscured his outfit.

Before either Bruce or Dick could say a word the thief pushed the doors open and dashed outside. Bruce and Dick ran after him but the burglar was incredibly quick.

“Where’d he go?” Dick whispered.

“I don’t know.” A horse’s whinny carried over from the stables. “Come on!”

The duo reached the stables just as the doors burst open and the thief galloped out astride a big chestnut horse. He guided the horse across the lawn and to the wall, vaulting over the spikes in a stunning display of power and agility.

Bruce and Dick followed but by the time they hit the ground outside the estate, the daring thief was long gone. Lights were going on in the house so Bruce and Dick ran into the forest as the moon shone its light placidly down.

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Next: Part II: Emerald
The headlines screamed the story of the daring theft of the Collins Faberge egg. The Gotham Police Commissioner, Alexander Teague, was besieged by angry millionaires fearful for their treasures.

Bruce read *The Gotham Gazette* over breakfast, reading aloud the pertinent parts to Dick, who busily tapped his hard-boiled egg with a spoon.

“Miss Vicki Vale is good at digging out stories. The servants gave her a good description of our burglar’s dashing ride.”

“Luckily we weren’t included.” Dick peeled his egg.

“It is not time for the Raven and the Nightingale to make their presence known.”

“Stay in the shadows, huh?”

“Ravens do not flit about in the daytime,” Bruce said with exaggerated diction.

Dick grinned. “Nightingales do.”

Bruce hid his smile behind the paper. “Don’t forget we have that little soiree to attend at the Stoddards’ tonight.”

“Ah, yes, the welcome home gala.” Dick ate a slice of toast. “And I’m invited?”

“That’s what the engraved invitation says.”

“All right with me.” Dick slathered another piece of toast with strawberry jam. “I’ve been to bashes like this before.”
“’Bash’, eh?”

“Just like they say in Hollywood.”

Bruce lowered his paper. “How do you know about Hollywood?” he asked in amusement.

“Europe has a movie industry, too. I read the magazines. Many had stories about Hollywood.”

“And did they say it was wicked and full of sin?”

“Pretty much.”

Bruce stroked his chin. “You know, maybe we should take a trip to the sunny climes of California in the future. I’ve always wanted to see lemon trees.”

“Sounds like fun.”

Bruce smiled. “Always up for fun, I see.”

“Always.” Dick’s expression was sly over his juice glass.

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Dick studied himself in the full-length mirror as Bruce decided on which pair of cufflinks to wear. His white tie and tails were impressive, perfectly tailored as he located the jewelry he wanted. He glanced up at his reflection as he checked to see if he had used enough pomade on his hair.

He was pleased with the overall effect. Looking good was a requirement for the Prince of Gotham, after all.

Dick was frowning as he tried to tie his cravat. He let out a sigh of frustration.

“Need help?”

“I can tie a cravat!”

“Yes, but we all need help sometimes.” Bruce looked at his lover, who was wearing one of his favorite suits, the dark-green one which he liked to wear with a yellow vest and red cravat. A small emerald glittered in the middle of cherry-red silk as a paler shade of yellow shirt was actually a good match for the whole ensemble.

“Lovely outfit,” Bruce said.

“But I should be in white tie and tails?”

Bruce smiled affectionately. “Up to you.”

Dick sighed and began undressing.

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Bruce made his final adjustments and watched as Dick fixed his beautiful cravat in front of the dresser mirror. It was still the cherry-red silk. The yellow vest was part of the ensemble again. Bruce smiled. Dick could not be conventional. It simply was not in his make-up.

“What do you think?” Dick asked.
“Perfect.” Bruce put his hands on Dick’s hips and nuzzled his neck. “Just like you.”

“Ah, you flatter me.”

“That’s the idea.”

Dick laughed. “You’re incorrigible, you know that?”

“Insatiable, too.” Bruce began to nip at Dick’s neck.

“Stop that!” Dick wiggled out of Bruce’s grasp. “We’ll be late.”

“They can’t start without us.”

Dick rolled his eyes. “So this is the life of the spoiled rich?”

“Pretty much.”

Dick smirked. “You would make a fine diva, my friend.”

Bruce puffed up proudly. Dick laughed again and wound the key of his nightingale music box. As the jewel-encrusted bird trilled its song, Dick held out his hand and they danced as Dick took the lead.

Bruce was happy for this little dance. It was private, just the two of them, and certainly would never be the kind of dance they would have at the Stoddards’ estate. At the ball, every eye would be on them, and of course there could be no dancing. Men did not dance with men, except for certain clubs in Paris’ Left Bank and New York’s Greenwich Village.

Their waltz was graceful and intimate, each man smelling the other’s cologne and gazing into each other’s eyes with smiles on their faces.

As the song wound down Dick said, “There. Good practice for tonight.”

Bruce adjusted his tie. “Yes, good practice.”

& & & & & &

The Stoddard mansion was ablaze with light. Mr. Edison’s invention was doing well at Elmwood with every room on the first floor utilizing the electricity that had changed so many lives.

Head Groom Regan had driven Bruce and Dick in the carriage. He was dressed warmly as he would be staying outside for the evening, and the kitchen would provide hot chocolate and food later on for all the drivers. The driveway was rapidly filling up with carriages.

Caroline Stoddard had outdone herself. The decorations were autumn-themed with pumpkins on the veranda and shocks of cornstalks tied to the pillars, and arrangements of colorful leaves inside around the foyer. Music could be heard coming from down the hall.

Caroline swept into the foyer, her pale blond hair arranged in an intricate hairdo with ruby hair clips. Her gown was lace-trimmed and a deep russet gold. A ruby brooch sparkled at her throat.

“Bruce, darling, how delightful to see you.” She held out her hands.

Bruce took them and squeezed gently. “Thank you for this little shindig, Caroline.”
“My pleasure, my dear. Henry! Come welcome our guest!”

A tall man with muttonchop whiskers and a full mustache approached the group. His hair was reddish-brown and his eyes were hazel. His tuxedo was immaculate.

“Bruce, old man, how was the Continent?”

“Peachy, Henry, peachy.” Bruce shook hands vigorously with his host. “Let me introduce the newest star of the Gotham Ballet Company, the toast of the Continent.”

Dick gave a sweeping bow and the Stoddards looked at him with a critical eye. Caroline smiled and said, “Welcome, Mr. Grayson. Your reputation precedes you.”

“Thank you, Madame. So said Czar Nicholas when we first met last winter.”

Henry’s eyebrows rose high as he shook Dick’s hand. Everyone was wearing gloves as fashion and protocol demanded.

“Come, there are many more people to meet.” Caroline said.

She played the hostess with style and introduced Dick to many of Gotham High Society’s personages. Bruce noticed their polite greetings, and some held genuine interest in Dick as celebrity. Yet he could also see the faint contempt. Dick was a dancer, an entertainer, barely a step above an actor. It was perfectly all right to bask in the aura cast by one of the famous, but they would never invite him to tea or some very exclusive ball except as entertainment. He had only been invited to this ball as a courtesy to him, one of their own.

*If Dick was a woman and I was openly courting her, my friends and family would not approve of her profession.*

Bruce picked up a glass of champagne from a passing waiter’s tray. His heart ached as another thought came to him.

*With Dick as a man, I can’t even enjoy that much.*

Dick attracted his own crowd, playing to them as the showman he was born to be. Bruce watched in amusement.

“Bruce, dear, how nice to see you.”

He turned and smiled genuinely. “Val, love! You’re looking delicious.”

Valencia Collins smiled. Dressed in pale green with Brussels lace, she was a vision of loveliness. Emeralds sparkled at her ears and throat as she sipped champagne.

“Delicious is what you’ll find the food to be, I hope.”

“I thought Caroline was the hostess.”

She laughed. “I was consulted.”

“So generous of you to help after that frightful robbery.”

Valencia’s green eyes clouded momentarily. “Frightful, indeed. Our beautiful Faberge egg is gone, probably forever.”
"I read the newspapers. Were the accounts accurate?"

She shrugged. "Mostly. William and I had gone upstairs and were preparing for bed when we heard a noise downstairs. He was about to investigate when a loud series of noises brought us to the window. We saw a rider on a horse dash to the wall and vault over it. Not the horse, the rider."

Bruce chuckled. "That would have been some steeplechase."

"Yes." Valencia stared into her glass. "You know, there was something odd…"

"Bruce, darling!"

Bruce winced at the sound of the voice of Corella Woodbridge. He fixed a smile on his face and turned.

"Hello, Corella."

"Hello." The portly woman was nearly buried in a wild profusion of feathers and jewels as her ample bosom heaved in its lavender bodice. A string of jet pearls were draped to her waist. "Have you seen Carissa yet? She would so like to hear about your travels during the Grand Tour."

"She should come to my lecture. I have dozens of slides."

"Yes, well, she was hoping for something a little more private…"

"We should get together at that lecture. Good to see you, Corella."

Bruce quickly moved away, charming everyone in his path. He looked for Valencia but was unable to find her.

Dick was holding court as he entertained the crème de la crème of Society. Bruce wandered over to the buffet table, sampling slices of juicy roast beef from the carving station chef, potatoes au gratin, and asparagus spears that he smothered in hollandaise sauce. He stood by a large potted fern, the leaves obscuring his presence.

Dick’s court was close by as he spun tales of meeting the Czar and Czarina and dancing at the Parthenon. The ladies were aflutter as the men listened in amusement.

"And it was as if we were in Ancient Greece, the sun sparkling on azure water as boats floated by and we danced into the hearts of our audience. We could hear the lutes and pipes as the sun shone down on the Mediterranean as it had done two thousand years ago."

Bruce continued scamming the crowd for Valencia. What odd thing had she seen the night of the robbery?

He finished his meal. A maid appeared, dark hair tucked up under her frilly cap. She took his plate.

"Thank you." He glanced up. Green eyes shifted down demurely as he turned and walked away, Bruce looking at a fine view. "The maids are getting handsomer every day," he muttered.

He started to mingle, telling little pieces of his trip, keeping to the dictum of ‘less is more’. Maybe he really would present a slide lecture.

"Cheap," sniffed an elderly gentleman as Bruce passed him in conversation with another old man.

"People like cheap and tawdry," the second sniffed.
“I guess so.” The first man shrugged. “In my day, a good family would not even allow such trash into the house.”

“Entertainers,” said the second man contemptuously.

Bruce almost stopped to turn around and chew the duo out but kept going. He would change no one’s mind. Society was calcified in its opinions, but Society’s opinions mattered.

He was back in his beloved Gotham, and if he was going to change anything, it would have to be from within.
Silken Sultry

Chapter Summary

The Gotham Ballet Company acquires a new prima ballerina.

She moves like liquid
In enchanted air,
Her sultry smile
Like silk strewn
With diamonds.

William de Blythe
"The Glory Of Womanhood"
1859 C.E.

Bruce and Dick studied the library books that Dick had brought home, trying to figure out the Gold Coast Burglar’s next move. The papers had come up with the nickname, and Dick approved of it.

He and Bruce continued training as the leaves fell, the nights growing colder. The debut of Dick with the Gotham Ballet Company was nearly on the calendar, tickets selling briskly as the date approached.

Dick took catnaps during the day, his body needing rest from training, rehearsals and patrols. Bruce regretted a dip in their lovemaking but understood how even his energetic lover needed sleep.

Their patrols saw nothing amiss but Bruce was certain there would be another robbery. His mind was racing as he sparred with his companion.

“Ouch!”

“Gotcha!” Dick slammed Bruce down onto the mat. “You’re distracted, rich boy.”

“I might be,” Bruce admitted. “Or not.” He used his legs to grab Dick and flipped him over.

“Hey!” Dick fought back and they ended up laughing, tangled up together.

“Mmm,” Bruce nuzzled his neck. “You taste all salty.”

“What am I, a pretzel?”

“You look like one right now.”

Dick tried to disentangle but Bruce held fast. He smiled up at Dick, his blue eyes glittering.

Dick swallowed. Damn, he could never resist that look. He decided to go from defense to offense and leaned down. He brushed his lips over Bruce’s, then deepened the kiss.
“You taste like heaven,” he said as he broke the kiss.

“You surely know how to sweet talk a guy.”

Dick allowed his flexibility to lean down again and his thighs gripped Bruce’s ribs. Bruce’s hand stroked Dick’s back.

Their kiss deepened again, tongues touching as Bruce moaned. He was on his back and Dick kept him pressed down as he exerted his sexiest wiles.

Sunlight streamed in through the windows, illuminating the entwined bodies on the mat.

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“We open in a week!”

Jean-Paul’s outraged proclamation fell on his weary dancers’ heads. They stood around in postures of impatience and dejection. Rehearsal had not gone well. Donna was laboring with every move. Dick suspected a foot injury. Other dancers seemed listless. A thorough tongue-lashing was on the way.

Jean-Paul waved his cane around. “Idiotes! Where are your heads? Off in the clouds? We are dancing a fairytale, not living it! Come back to earth!” He slammed the tip of the cane down on the floor, barely missing his foot. “Bah! You women have the grace of cows, and you men are not much better. Argh!”

“Is this the company looking for a prima ballerina?”

All heads turned to see a woman in a shimmering green silk dress with an emerald brooch fastened at her lace collar. Her hat was adorned with a single pale-green paper rose, and she carried an ivory-colored umbrella trimmed in lace. The buttons on her high-buttoned shoes sparkled like diamonds, matching the buttons on her white gloves.

All very tasteful and expensive, and the face was exquisite. Jet-black hair framed a beautiful face as her eyes glittered.

“Who are you?” demanded Jean-Paul.

She regarded him coolly. “I am Miss Selina Kyle, lately of the Boston Ballet Company.”

“Are you ready to audition?”

She held up a green velvet bag. “Where shall I change?”

Jean-Paul pointed to backstage. She walked up the stage stairs and sashayed from view.

“Grayson!” Jean-Paul snapped. “You will put this woman through her paces.”

“Yes, sir.”

Dick stretched as he waited. Miss Kyle did not exhibit diva behavior as she appeared rather quickly. Dressed in a simple black leotard and pink ballet slippers, her hourglass figure was highly attractive. He was also surprised to see that her hair was short. Most women kept it long, though they kept it ‘up’.

Green eyes looked at him with cool amusement. Dick smiled at her. “What routine would you like to
“Cinderella’s dance with the Prince.”

Dick bowed. “Charmed.”

“Charming.”

He smirked as he straightened up. A small group of musicians struck up the music. The entire orchestra would be required for a full dress rehearsal tomorrow.

Selina and Dick took a few minutes to get into a rhythm, but they did so rapidly. Selina had powerful legs but was easy to lift, and Dick was thankful for all his training.

Selina was a sultry dancer. He could easily envision her in a Mexican cantina clicking castanets, and if she could sing, as a torch singer with a jazz band in some smoky nightclub.

He could feel her sexual pull. He had slept with women before, though he got more pleasure out of men. Selina was one he might find a great deal of pleasure with, in the right circumstances.

When the dance finished, the two of them bowed to each other. Roy applauded as the orchestra trilled a little victory song. Donna massaged her foot, mixed emotions on her face.

Jean-Paul scowled. “Adequate, Miss Kyle. Since Miss Troy is less-than-optimal right now, the job is yours.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Belliveau.”

Jean-Paul stalked to his office. The dancers crowded around Selina.

“Welcome to the troupe, Miss Kyle,” said Roy.

“Selina will do. And thank you…” Her eyes flickered over his impressive physique.

“Roy Harper, ma’am.”

Selina smiled warmly. She glanced over at Donna, who had remained sitting. “Miss Troy, I can help you get back up to speed.”

“Thank you.” Donna’s voice was carefully neutral. She had dealt with divas before.

“Dress rehearsal tomorrow at one o’clock,” Dick said to Selina.

“I’ll be here.”

Selina walked back to her dressing room. Every man and some of the women watched her seductive walk.

Oh, dear. Could be trouble, Dick thought. But could be fun.

& & & & &

“So there will be a surprise Opening Night?” Bruce asked in amusement.

“Somewhat.” Dick pretended to be indifferent.

Bruce buttoned his vest. “Somewhat, huh?”
“Have you been to Boston often?”

“Of course I have.” Bruce searched his jewelry box for cufflinks. “It was simple enough to cross over the river from Cambridge to Boston when I attended Harvard.”

“Ever go to the ballet?”

“Occasionally.” Bruce looked quizzically at his lover. “What’s all this about?”

“You’ll see.”

Bruce shook his head fondly. “All right, then. We’ll see.”

& & & & & &

Opening Night for the new incarnation of the Gotham Ballet Company finally arrived. Bruce had avoided the newspapers for the last few days, and Alfred strategically kept him from looking at any posters. Bruce was eager to see his surprise, so he went along with all the fuss. Whimsical fun had been missing from his life for years. It was time to indulge, courtesy of his sparkling lover.

Bruce and Alfred took their seats in the Wayne box. It was the box with the finest view in the house. Richly-appointed with red damask chairs and red silk curtains, a silver bucket of champagne chilled in ice on the small pier table. A box of Belgian chocolates was set next to a silver bowl of fruit, and there were two long-stemmed glasses next to the bucket.

“Ah, quite elegant,” Alfred said approvingly. He picked up one of the crystal glasses and poured the champagne. He handed it to Bruce.

“Thank you.” He sipped his drink and peered through his opera glasses. “The curtains are new. I’m glad we were able to get those old ones replaced.”

“Quite lovely, sir. Chandeliers new, too?”

“Yes.” Bruce waved around the box. “All the boxes were redecorated, too.”

“You’re quite ambitious, sir.”

“The company deserves the best.”

“Especially its stars.”

Bruce smiled. Alfred knew him well.

The orchestra tuned up while patrons filed their way into their seats and boxes. The lights began to dim, signaling the beginning of the overture. The curtain began to rise.

The music swelled and filled the theater with joyful noise. The stage was revealed and the beautiful fairytale world of Cinderella sparkled in ethereal beauty.

Dick’s part would come later. First, the bedraggled Cinderella would appear, and on cue, she danced out on-stage.

Bruce’s jaw dropped. He leaned forward, using his opera glasses.

“Selina,” he breathed.
Sparkling Silver Slippers With Green Rosettes

Chapter Summary

Bruce is shaken by Dick’s ‘surprise’.

XII

SPARKLING SILVER SLIPPERS WITH GREEN ROSETTES

Sparkling roses,
Sweet with the scent
Of success
In a glass house.

Isadora Duncanshire
"The Glass Slippers"
1906 C.E.

Selina and Dick were amazing, as the reviewers would write in the papers for the early edition. They had enjoyed scant rehearsal time, but it did not seem to matter. They moved as one, elegant and beautiful, and Bruce was stunned.

He watched Selina, barely noticing anyone else. Her lithe body moved as if she were as light as air, just as Dick easily lifted her up. She was the perfect Cinderella, first in rags and then in the beaded glory of a ball gown, complete with tiara.

Bruce finally tore his gaze away from her to watch Dick. The applause was thunderous as the curtain fell for the first intermission.

“Alfred…”

“Yes, I saw her.” Alfred drank his champagne. “I am sorry, sir. I was kept in the dark as well.”

Bruce let out a breath of air. “Dick surely doesn’t know.”

“I highly doubt it, sir.” Alfred stood. “I shall return before the curtain rises.”

He exited the box. Bruce was grateful for his tact. He tried to gather his emotions, sipping his champagne and fumbling for a chocolate.

Damn, Selina.

He calmed down enough to pour another glass of champagne, listening to the chatter of people returning to their seats. From the smiles on their faces, he judged that they approved of the new stars of the Gotham Ballet Company.
Alfred returned and handed him a lemon ice. Bruce gratefully took it, the icy coldness sliding down his suddenly-parched throat. He watched as the lights dimmed and the curtain rose.

The splendor of Cinderella was danced once more, sparkling and triumphant. Bruce fastened his attention on Dick. Dick was the one he loved.

& & & & &

Dick bowed during the curtain calls, gripping the hands of Selina and Roy as the crowd applauded. It was a grand Opening Night. Roses were thrown at their feet. He picked up a bouquet and bowed.

The curtain fell for the final time and Dick smiled at Selina. “Wonderful job, Selina.”

She curtsied. “I can say the same, darling.”

“Thanks.”

Dick found Donna and hugged her. She sniffed. “You were great.”

“Thanks, so were you.”

Donna indicated Selina with a nod of her head. “She’s good. We found our prima ballerina.”

Dick watched as Selina accepted congratulations from the cast and crew. She deserved every rose, every accolade.

He went to his dressing room, laying the bouquet down. The cellophane crinkled as he decided what to do next.

Better get changed. Bruce will be here any minute. He was hungry, damnit, and looking for something to eat. Oh, well, Bruce will take me out to supper to celebrate.

Whistling a cheerful tune, Dick started removing his make-up.

& & & & &

The voice bade him enter as he knocked. Bruce walked in, seeing the colorful costumes tossed around the dressing room. The star removed greasepaint and kohl expertly at the dressing table.

“Ah, so you’ve come.” Selina looked at his reflection in her dressing table mirror. She removed the blue mascara from her eyelids.

“Yes.”

Selina’s smile was amused, “Have a seat, dear.”

Bruce stayed standing. “Selina…”

Selina turned, her cleavage showing as her peignoir was untied. Her feet were bare, her ballet slippers discarded by the table.

“Darling, you look a trifle peaked.”

“I’m perfectly healthy. So are you.”

Selina stretched out her legs. The peignoir fell away to reveal their bareness. “Thank you. How nice
of you to attend Opening Night.”

“Yes, well, I…”

"Of course you were kind enough to attend because of your…resident dancer.” Selina turned back to the mirror and looked at Bruce’s reflection again. Silence hung heavy in the room.

“Welcome to Gotham, Selina.”

Bruce turned and walked out, leaving a smiling Selina alone.

Dick’s stomach rumbled. Where was Bruce? He was already dressed and still no sign of his rich, handsome lover.

A knock on the door garnered his attention. “Come in.” He smiled as he saw Bruce enter. “Hey, there, what happened to you? You usually like to see me in my unmentionables.” Dick winked.

“Huh? Oh, just listening to the general chatter. You’re a hit in Gotham.”

“Wonderful!” Dick picked up his bouquet. “I better get these in water before we go.”

“I’ll do it.” Bruce took the bouquet and kissed Dick. “You just make yourself as pretty as possible.”

Dick laughed. “All right.”

Bruce left and Dick put on his shoes, checking through his clothes rack for the coat he wanted to wear. He slipped the coat off the rack and buttoned it up, digging out his favorite yellow scarf from the pile on a small table and winding it around his neck with a flourish.

The door opened. “You decent?”

“Never!” Dick laughed. “Come on in.”

Selina was still in her lacy white peignoir. She was freshly-scrubbed and her short hair curled around her face. “Glad to get that wig off.”

“You look good as a blond.”

She smiled. Her silver shoes sparkled with green rosettes on top. Dick smiled as he pointed at her feet. “Those are really pretty.”

“Thank you. They were a gift.”


Selina flashed some leg. “Just a little token.”

The door opened again and Bruce walked in, obscured by the roses in a green vase. “Here you go.”

“Thanks, Bruce.”

He lowered the vase and nearly dropped it. “I didn’t know you had company.”

“Bruce, this is Miss Selina Kyle. Selina, Mr. Bruce Wayne.”
“Hello, Mr. Wayne.”

“Isn’t she a great surprise?”

“Very,” Bruce said, setting the vase down on a table.

“She’s the former star of the Boston Ballet Company.”

Selina tugged on her sleeve. “Just asking if Dick here knows of a good restaurant in town.”

“Oh, I’m sure the people waiting to take you out to supper will bring you to a fine place,” Bruce said.

“I bet you have a gaggle of stage door johnnies just waiting for you,” Dick laughed.

Selina smiled. “Oh, I do.” She cupped Dick’s chin. “So do you.” She did an impromptu softshoe. “Maybe we can combine…”

“Come now, darling, we don’t want to delay you,” Bruce said smoothly. “Ready to go, Dick?”

“Sure, Bruce.” Dick took Selina’s hand and kissed her cheek. “Enjoy your triumph, my dear.”

“Thank you, darling. See you tomorrow.”

Selina sashayed out of the dressing room to return to her own.

Dick cocked his head. “Everything all right, Bruce?”

“Huh?”

“You seem…uneasy.”

“Really?” Bruce pulled on his gloves. “Guess I’m just anxious to go out on the town.”

“Well, I’m your man.”

“Yes, you are.”

Bruce pulled Dick close and kissed him with possessive fervor.

& & & & & &

Bruce took Dick to The Pearl Oyster, the finest seafood restaurant in the city. Some of the audience had arrived earlier and applauded when they recognized Dick. The showman bowed elaborately in a swirl of glitter as he had chosen to wear a gold-threaded yellow vest. It actually went well with his green suit and yellow cravat. Ruby cufflinks and a stickpin sparkled under the lights. His yellow-lined green cloak actually matched his outfit, which impressed Bruce.

They had the best table, of course, and ordered the specialty of the house, champagne and oysters. Dick always ate ravenously after a performance. He always burned off what he ate, so he was free to indulge in his appetites.

Among other things, Bruce thought. He watched Dick eat fondly. He liked his lovers to have healthy appetites.

They ordered a light entrée of haddock, deviled eggs, and saffron rice with red pepper flakes.
Halfway through their supper, a buzz rippled around the room. Bruce had just finished a deviled egg when Selina walked in on the arm of one of Gotham’s richest men, Ellery Townsend.

Ellery was a man in his fifties, graying at the temples and in good shape for a man his age. His brown eyes were piercing as he scanned the crowd. Bruce had never particularly liked him. The man was arrogant and ruthless, the worst of their class’ characteristics.

“Quite an admirer for Selina,” Dick remarked as he took a bite of fish.

At one table, there men and a woman scribbled in small notebooks. Bruce recognized the men as theater critics and the woman as a society columnist. He expected full write-up in tomorrow’s newspapers.

Selina always knew how to work a room.

“She’s a perfect partner.”

“What?”

Dick nudged him. “Are you all right, Bruce? You’ve been woolgathering all night.”

“Oh, yes, perfectly fine.”

“Good.” Dick squeezed his hand under the table. “Though you’re cute when you’re drifting.”

“Hmph.”

“Better order some dessert. Chocolate always focuses the mind. Or sets one adrift, I suppose, but tastes so good!”

Bruce shook his head as Dick laughed. “Order what you like. I want some coffee.”

Selina’s laughter trilled from her table as she and Ellery enjoyed their meal.

Bruce and Dick finally decided on small slices of Boston cream pie with the coffee. Dick was delighted with his first taste of the American delicacy.

“You were magnificent tonight,” Bruce said with a smile.

“Thank you.” Dick’s sapphire eyes sparkled. “My biggest fan.”

“Always.” Bruce said it with intensity instead of playfulness.

Dick’s eyes indicated his understanding. A small smile played around his lips, his body canting toward Bruce subtly.

Bruce finished his coffee while Dick ate his last bite of pie. “Let’s go home,” Bruce said, ignoring the latest burst of laughter from the Townsend table.

Dick made no protest as they left the restaurant. The stars shone in the clear night sky as Bruce engaged a hansom cab, having sent Alfred home with the carriage after the ballet. They rode in companionable silence, hands clasped under the lap robe the cabbie had provided.

Arriving at the Manor, Bruce unlocked the front door. The house was dark except for the light shining from a lamp on the hall table. Bruce had installed electricity several years ago, the first house in Gotham to use the new energy source.
“Candles are more romantic,” Dick commented as Bruce shut off the lamp. Moonlight allowed them easy access up the stairs.

“Yes, but electricity is much more efficient. Convenient, too. No whale oil or other fuels to light lanterns or matches for candles. No messy melting wax. Just the flick of a switch.”

“Mr. Efficiency.”

Bruce smirked as they walked down the hall to their bedroom. Once inside Dick pulled Bruce by the lapels and kissed him deeply. Bruce responded enthusiastically, cupping Dick’s buttocks as he ravished Dick’s neck after the kiss.

They both fumbled with buttons and clasps, eager to shed their clothes. They finally shed their garments and fell onto the bed, hungry for the taste of skin as the excitement of the triumphant evening boiled in their blood.

“Want you,” Bruce breathed.

“Always,” Dick gasped.

Tongues thrust into mouths as groins rubbed together, the friction causing Dick to moan. Bruce could not resist cupping a firm buttock, stroking and squeezing the warm flesh. Dick wrapped a leg around Bruce as he devoured his mouth.

They were wild with passion as they moaned and gasped. Fingers gripped tightly, leaving bruises as the hunger was far from satiated. They rutted shamelessly against each other, finally sparking orgasms that left them panting and almost passed out. They grinned as they clung to each other.

It was a grand way to end an evening that had started out badly, Bruce thought in sleepy satisfaction.
Chapter Summary

Dick gets Bruce involved with decorating the Manor for Halloween and invites special guests to dinner.

A field of dreams
Stretched out
As far as the eye
Could see,
And the taste
Was as simple
As apple
Pie.

Morvath Brecker
"Field Of Dreams"
1888 C.E.

The Gotham Ballet Company did, as one critic declared, “a land-office business”. Every performance was sold out and the reviews were glowing. Dick and Selina were the toast of the town, and Bruce carefully maneuvered his lover away from Selina, but it was inevitable that they would sometimes go out together at night in addition to their work. Bruce did not join them on those evenings. He trusted Dick to keep their secret, but he did not trust Selina to keep hers. He preferred not to tempt her by his presence.

“Sir, why not tell Master Dick?” asked Alfred.

“I can’t.”

“Keeping secrets never works.”

But Bruce felt as if this secret should be kept, at least for now.

& & & & &

“You know Roy, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

Dick and Bruce were sitting out on the small flagstone patio behind the kitchen, affording them a splendid view of the ocean. The weather was crisp on this brilliant fall day, but it was not uncomfortable to sit outside. A small white-painted wrought-iron table was set between them, and Bruce rested an elbow while smoking a cigar. Dick was reading the latest reviews.

“I was thinking about inviting him and Donna here, if that’s all right with you.”
“This is your home, Dick. Invite whomever you like.”

Dick grinned. “Great! I’d like to invite them tomorrow night. We don’t have a performance.”

“All right. I wasn’t planning on staking out any mansions until the weekend.”

“The robberies have died down.”

“Yes, but this burglar isn’t finished yet, mark my words.”

Dick picked up his glass of cranberry juice from the table. “I always mark your words.” Mischief sparkled in his eyes.

Bruce chuckled. “As well you should.” He blew out a ring of smoke. “Make sure to consult with Alfred about dinner.”

“Of course.” Dick drank the juice. The tartness pleased him. “I can’t believe that we’ll be celebrating Halloween again.”

Bruce smiled. “We’ll do it up right, this time with pumpkins instead of turnips.”

“Of course, nothing less.” Dick finished his juice. “Can we start decorating?” he asked eagerly.

Bruce’s smile grew fond. “Surely we can.” He blew out another ring of smoke. “Again, that’s Alfred’s domain.”

“I’ll go ask him right now.”

Bruce felt a sense of peace as Dick hurried inside. He had not felt such a thing for years. Peace had been unattainable after what he had witnessed in Crime Alley.

He flicked the ashes off his cigar. After the death of his parents, everything had been washed-out gray, no matter where he went or what he did. Everything had changed that night in Rome at La Scala when he had first seen his beautiful dancer. Color had come back into his life, reflecting a myriad of emotions.

I won’t let Selina or anybody else destroy that.

A strange calmness settled over him. He would do whatever it took to keep Dick. His eyes glittered through a haze of smoke.

& & & & & &

Alfred was game for some early decorating. The next day Dick eagerly persuaded Bruce to come out to a farm that sold a bumper crop of pumpkins. His eyes grew big at the seemingly-endless patch of pumpkins as it stretched out over the field toward the edge of the surrounding woods. He was delighted to see baby pumpkins, medium-sized, large, and giant specimens.

“The shapes are all different: round, oblong, and…what are these shaped like swans?!”

“Gourds.” Bruce picked one up. “These are all different colors: green, red, yellow and orange. The Mother Hubbard squashes are a light-green or even blue.”

Dick roamed up and down the rows of pumpkins. Soon he filled a cart with all different sizes, including gourds. The sizes varied from the latter, too, from small to gigantic. Bruce also chose some specimens, and they filled two carts by the end of their perusal.
“Alfred will be delighted. He always wanted to go all out.” Bruce picked up a gourd and inspected the shape of its swan’s neck. He ran a finger down the elegant curve, reminded strongly of Dick.

“He says he’ll get streamers and we can get started as soon as we get back. We’ll be all set for tonight.”

“Let’s have fun.”

Dick laughed. “Glad to hear you say that.” His eyes softened. “I like that a lot.”

Bruce swallowed. “Yes, well, we’d better get back and start decorating.”

“I’ll have my boy Cyril hitch up the wagons and deliver all this your place, sir,” said Farmer Higgins, a grizzled man in overalls.

“Thanks. We need it right away.” Bruce produced a crisp, twenty-dollar bill. He had already paid for the pumpkins and gourds and this was in addition to that amount. He knew that money talked.

Higgins took the money. “Right away, Mr. Wayne.”

& & & & &

While waiting for the delivery, Bruce and Dick helped Alfred decorate the foyer with orange-and-black streamers, fake cobwebs and some broomsticks. They put a few orange and black candles in each room and Dick whimsically taped a large black paper cut-out of a bat over the mantel in the front parlor.

“Doesn’t that look positively Gothic?” he asked with a theatrical sweep of his hand.

“More like Poe,” Bruce drawled.

“Hmm, yes.” Dick rushed out of the room. At Bruce’s puzzled look, Alfred shook his head.

Fifteen minutes later, Dick returned with another black paper cut-out and put this one on the wall between the windows.

“A raven?” Bruce crossed his arms.

Dick grinned. “Nevermore, my love.”

& & & & &

The Manor was ablaze with light as Donna and Roy alighted from the hansom cab. He paid the driver and they ascended the steps.

“Look at all these Jack O’Lanterns. Nice painted faces,” Donna said.

“Probably figured it was too early for carving.” Roy used the doorknocker.

“And gourds shaped like swans! Oh, I love those.” Donna bent for a closer look, tapping one on its ‘beak’.

The door opened after a few minutes and Alfred said, “Welcome, Miss Troy and Mr. Harper. Please come in.”

Alfred took their outer garments and placed them in the foyer closet. He then led his guests to the
front parlor and departed.

Donna laughed as she saw the bat over the fireplace. “I call shenanigans with the name of Dick Grayson.”

“I’d say you’re right.” Roy pointed to the raven. “Very Poe-tic.”

Donna groaned. “You’ve been hanging around Dick too much.”

Roy laughed. “He’s the worst when it comes to puns.”

“I’d say the best!”

The visitors turned and smiled as Dick walked in. He hugged them both.

“You look great.” He admired Roy’s dark-green suit and pale green vest with matching cravat and Donna’s rich burgundy dress with a ruby necklace. It was a fake borrowed from the company’s props but a very good imitation, along with matching earrings. Her hair was set in a fashionable pompadour.

Donna looked admiringly at Dick. He was wearing a pale pink suit with a scarlet vest and cravat. A ruby stickpin sparkled on his lapel. It was outré even for him, but he could pull it off.

*Funny how the King of Savile Row, Bruce Wayne, is such close friends with someone with Dick’s fashion sense.*

It amused her, though. She wasn’t sure if Dick was genuinely oblivious or just didn’t care. Either way it was charming.

“You don’t look so bad yourself,” Roy said with a smile. “Though I admit I’ve never seen a suit that color before.”

Dick grinned and pirouetted. “It’s one-of-a-kind.”

“No doubt.”

Alfred came in with a tray of root beer. “Master Dick informed me of your fondness for this drink.”

“Thank you, Alfred.” Donna took a frosty mug. “He was correct.”

“Dinner in fifteen minutes, sir.”

“Thank you, Alfred.” Dick drank from his mug.

“Not the usual before-dinner drinks, I’d bet.” Roy took a long sip, looking at the mug appreciatively.

“Well, you know me, Roy, always unconventional.”

“And dazzling while he does it.” Bruce stood at the entrance to the parlor. “Welcome to my home, Miss Troy. Nice to see you again, Roy.”

“A pleasure, Mr. Wayne,” Roy greeted.

“I echo that sentiment.” Donna was impressed with Bruce Wayne up close. Effortlessly elegant, he was dressed in a black suit with white vest threaded with silver. He wore a white silk cravat with a diamond stickpin. “Thank you for inviting us.”
“Dick was most interested in your presence tonight.”

They chatted until Alfred appeared. “Dinner is served, sir.”

“Then let us go to the dining room. Miss Troy.” Bruce offered his arm. Donna happily took it, followed by Dick and Roy.

Donna and Roy were impressed by the magnificence of the dining room with its crystal chandelier and mahogany furniture. The ‘company’ china was set out, and fresh flowers smelled sweet in the center of the table, flanked by white candles in silver candlesticks. The flowers were pink and white, fresh from the estate greenhouse.

The first course was turtle soup and French bread. Donna buttered a slice of bread and asked, “I read about your Grand Tour, Mr. Wayne. It must have been quite enlightening.”

“Oh, it was.” Bruce added salt to his soup. “I learned a great deal over there. The cultures are fascinating. Their art is incredible.”

“Italy is jam-packed with great art.” Donna caressed her wineglass filled with red wine. “Did you see Michelangelo’s David?”

“Yes, I did.” Bruce’s gaze flicked over to Dick. “Magnificent piece of sculpture.”

“Its pictures don’t do it justice, I bet.” Roy took a spoonful of soup.

“No.”

Donna stared down at her soup bowl. She had seen the look Bruce had given Dick: swift as it was, she had caught it.

*Everyone thought that Bruce Wayne was following that ballet troupe because of Natasha Romanoff, its prima ballerina, but what if he was following Delectable Dick? Romances between men were not shocking to her. After life in the theater, one knew about such things. True, it was only a brief glance, but in connection with Michelangelo’s David…*

Alfred removed the soup bowls and returned with crystal bowls of crisp salad with shredded carrots, grape tomatoes and cucumber slices. A light Italian dressing was drizzled over the lettuce.

“Delicious,” Donna said.

“Yes, I agree.” Roy ate a bite of salad.

Bruce talked about Italy, describing the magnificence of the Colisseum. “Remember, Dick?”

“I sure do.” Dick picked up his wineglass. “It was amazing. Imagine being there two thousand years ago!” His eyes glowed. “Living history is exciting.”

After salad the main course was brought in: roast beef, caramelized onions, roasted Maine potatoes, green beans almondine and wild rice. Donna was very impressed.

“This is the best food I’ve tasted in ages.” She cut a piece of roast beef. “Your man Alfred is a treasure.”

“He certainly is.” Bruce drank some wine. “I would say he rivals Europe’s best.”

“I’d second that,” Dick agreed. “I wasn’t sure what to expect about the cuisine here in America.”
“Did they say we ate nothing but steak and potatoes?” asked Donna in amusement.

“Pretty much,” Dick laughed. He cut a piece of beef. “They said with so much cattle here, people ate beef like Europeans ate pork or chicken: it was cheap and plentiful.”

“It’s plentiful, but unfortunately not cheap, at least the finer cuts.”

“Yes, like in all things, money talks.” Dick speared a piece of potato. “Though many peasants in Europe believe the streets are paved with gold.”

“And here we have places like the East End in Gotham or the Glades in Star City,” Roy said as he stabbed a potato with his fork.

“The overcrowded tenements of New York’s Lower East Side were exposed by the reporting and photographs of Jacob Riis in the 1890s,” Bruce said. “There was outrage for awhile, but it all died down.”

“No reforms were enacted?” Dick asked, his knife and fork poised over his meat.

“Some were, but the tenements are still overcrowded.”

“But the Progressives are fighting hard,” Donna objected. “Look at the food safety laws once Upton Sinclair exposed the meatpacking plants and their horrendous conditions last year. It caused quite an uproar while you were away, Mr. Wayne. They’re pushing for shorter hours and better pay for workers, and more protection for women and children.”

“As workers?” Dick asked, shaking pepper over his rice.

“Yes. It’s a disgrace that little children work in factories for a dozen hours or more in dangerous conditions. Women are suffering, too, and the men aren’t much better.”

“Wayne Enterprises doesn’t allow such terrible conditions,” Bruce said firmly.

Dick smiled. “Good.”

Donna wondered if her host was telling the truth. Rich men like Bruce Wayne who had inherited their money had often been the recipient of fortunes made on the backs of workers. It was easy to accumulate millions if you paid your workers only a few cents an hour for fourteen-hour days. She hoped that Dick would not be disappointed.

*Or maybe disillusioned would be a better word.*

“You don’t keep valuables here at the Manor, Mr. Wayne?” asked Roy. “That Gold Coast Burglar is doing quite a business: first jewels from the Winchesters and the Faberge egg from the Collinses. What’s next?”

“Nothing here. We’ve got some *objets d’art* but hardly on the level of what was stolen.”

Donna was skeptical about Bruce’s statement but she politely hid her feelings.

“I wonder who will be hit next?” Roy asked again, finishing his green beans.

“There are possibilities.” Dick put his knife and fork down. “The mansions here are veritable treasure troves. They should really upgrade their security.”

“I think the First Families of Gotham will take care of it.” Bruce finished his wine.
After the dishes were cleared away, Alfred served dessert.

“Apple pie! My favorite,” Donna said happily. “And French vanilla ice cream to go with it.”

“Simple but delicious,” Bruce said with a smile.

“Mmm,” Donna said as she took her first bite. “Dusted with cinnamon and warm.”

“Correct,” said Alfred as he poured coffee.

“Exquisite.”

“Thank you, Miss Troy.”

“I think the greatest treasure here on the Gold Coast is Alfred.”

Alfred smiled as Dick and Roy applauded and Bruce nodded.
Chapter Summary

The Raven and the Nightingale encounter the Gold Coast Burglar up-close-and-personal.

\[\text{He stole through his life} \\
\text{Like a thief in the night,} \\
\text{His heart glittering} \\
\text{While the stars wept.}\]

Randall Simon
"Greek Love Poems"
1886 C.E.

Bruce and Dick staked out a few more houses but missed the next robbery at the Crandall estate. Valuable miniatures were taken, easy for the thief to carry. The uproar was louder than ever and Police Commissioner Alexander Teague was under siege. The editorial pages of the newspapers called for his resignation.

Dick was excited about Halloween and all its traditions. He was fascinated by a holiday display in the window of Molieres Chocolates. Bruce saw familiar things through fresh eyes and was delighted with his delight. As the full glory of autumn blazed in the countryside, Bruce felt his happiness increase.

Dick returned to the Gotham Public Library one crisp morning. He smiled at Barbara, who was working at the Reference Desk.

“Well, good morning, Mr. Grayson.”

“Good morning, Miss Gordon.” Dick unwound his scarf. “My books are due tomorrow. May I renew them?”

“Yes, no one has requested them, so you may.”

“Thank you.”

“You can see Miss Brown at circulation. Oh, Mr. Grayson?”

“Yes?” Dick had turned to go to the Circulation Desk but faced Barbara again.

“I think I know where the next robbery will be.”

&&&&

“So your librarian thinks she knows the next target?” Bruce asked. He and Dick were sitting in their
own library at the Manor.

Dick nodded. “She’s really smart. What she says makes sense.”

Bruce set aside his Meerschaum pipe. The rich smell of the tobacco always reminded him of his father.

Dick opened the book they had been consulting the most often, Treasures of Gotham’s First Families. “The Woodbridge family has a priceless collection of rare books.”

“Yes, Marriott is something of an expert.”

“Well, she found this item in The Bibliophile Journal. The latest issue published this month has an interesting item.” Dick produced the magazine. “I have to bring it back tomorrow.”

Bruce smiled. Special privileges, eh? He picked up the magazine. “What item?”

Dick pointed to the middle of the page. Bruce read the item with interest. “So a rare Shakespearean folio was bought at auction in Boston by Marriott and will be shipped here.” He read a little further. “According to this, the folio should have arrived already.”

“Bet our thief knows all about it.”

“I’d bet you were right.”

“So the Raven and the Nightingale ride tonight?” Dick asked with a gleam in his eye.

“Get your costume ready.”

Dick’s smile blazed.

& & & & & &

Dick rode Daisy, a dappled gray mare, and Bruce rode Ebony, a black stallion. The Woodbridge estate was too far away to walk. Bruce also wanted to have transportation handy in case they encountered the burglar.

“Let’s go.” Bruce adjusted his mask.

They rode at a steady pace through the woods, using bridal paths. Dick hoped that they were lucky and would catch the thief. He sensed that something would happen tonight.

They arrived at Satinwood, the estate of Marriott and Corella Woodbridge. An iron fence surrounded the property. Dick and Bruce tied their horses in the woods, creeping toward the iron fence.

“There’s a break in the fence around here unless they’ve fixed it.” Bruce looked behind a stand of thick shrubs. “Ah, ha! Still broken.”

“How do you know it’s here?”

“I was running from Carissa one day.”

Dick clapped a hand over his mouth to muffle his laughter. “What?”

Bruce smiled. “A story I’ll tell you someday.”
They entered the grounds through the break in the fence, glad for the darkness to cloak their movements. Clouds blocked the moon.

“This way,” Bruce whispered.

Dick followed him, glancing at the house. It was dark. Everyone had gone to bed early. Somewhere an owl hooted.

They hid in the formal gardens behind a boxwood hedge, watching as the minutes ticked away. Dick amused himself by trying to picture Bruce running from Carissa Woodbridge.

An hour later the duo heard a noise around the corner of the house. They stood and stretched their muscles, waiting for the thief to emerge.

Suddenly there was a racket in the house. Lights went on, and shouting could be heard even through the closed windows. They could see into the study now and there were three people running around: Corella Woodbridge, a man who was probably her husband, Marriott, and a figure clad in black.

“Let’s go,” Bruce said.

They ran to the French doors and yanked them open. Corella was shrieking and Marriott tried to grab the thief, but he eluded his grasp. Bruce grabbed his arm but the burglar wheeled and kicked his knee, getting away for a second but Dick barred his way with his cane.

The burglar knocked away the cane, pushing Dick back and elbowing Bruce in the stomach. The burglar’s moves were quick and startling, knocking Bruce and Dick off-balance. Before they could react, the burglar ran out into the night. Bruce and Dick ran after him but the burglar had vanished.

“This way,” Bruce growled.

He and Dick sprinted to the break in the fence and went through it, and Dick saw something glitter in the bush outside the fence. He grabbed it and stuck it in his pocket as he ran with Bruce to the horses.

“Listen!” Bruce said. Dick heard the hoofbeats on the road. “Let’s go!”

They mounted their horses and headed for the main road. Once there they urged Ebony and Daisy into a gallop, hoping to catch up with the burglar.

“There!” Dick cried as he spotted the horse and rider several yards ahead.

Ebony pulled out in front as the chase continued. The powerful stallion began to gain on the thief’s horse.

Dick studied the rider. The cloak hid what manner of man he was, but Dick had seen the slender build of the burglar during the fight.

The rider also was expert at handling a horse. His cloak flapped in the wind as the rapid clip-clop of Bruce’s horse indicated how fast Ebony was going. Dick kept Daisy at a steady pace but refused to push her to match the stallion’s speed. He was not going to hurt his horse, thief or no thief.

Just as it seemed as if Bruce was going to catch up with the burglar, the thief made a daring move. He spun and ran his horse right at Bruce, spooking Ebony. The stallion reared and nearly threw his
rider off.

Dick spurred Daisy forward but the burglar swept past him, throwing something in his face. The fine dust glittered in the air as Dick coughed violently. Bruce put a hand on his arm.

“Go!” Dick rasped.

Bruce sent Ebony pounding down the road. Dick kept coughing, waving his hand to dissipate the dust.

No hoofbeats sounded on the road and Bruce reined in Ebony, returning to his partner. “I lost him,” he growled.

Dick coughed again. “Slippery bastard.”

“I agree.” Bruce sighed in frustration. “So close! Some crimefighters we are.”

Dick cleared his throat. “We’re still new at this, you know.”

“No excuse.”

Dick smiled fondly at his lover. “Let’s go home, Raven.”

They turned their horses toward the Manor.
Brand-Spanking New

Chapter Summary

The Raven and the Nightingale make their debut in the headlines while Bruce and Dick continue sleuthing.

“Now we’ve got masked vigilantes running around Gotham!”

Mayor Augustus Sandstone
Gotham City
October 16, 2007 C.E.

MASKED HEROES ATTEMPT TO STOP BURGLARY!
MYSTERIOUS CAPED CRUSADERS TRY TO CATCH GOLD COAST BURGLAR!
WHO ARE THESE MASKED MEN?

Bruce perused the headlines of the various papers spread out on the breakfast nook table. “It appears we have made our official debut,” he said dryly.

Dick laughed as he read the headlines. “No publicity is bad publicity.”

Bruce raised an eyebrow. “I think you mean even bad publicity is better than no publicity.”

“That, too.”

Bruce rolled his eyes. “Help me clear this table or Alfred will have my hide.”

They had the newspapers stacked on the sideboard just as Alfred brought in two steaming plates of eggs and bacon. He poured orange juice and coffee and asked, “Toast, sirs?”

“No, thank you.”

Bruce sipped his coffee. “I’ve been thinking.”


“Ha, ha.” Bruce scooped up a forkful of eggs. “I think we should visit some of the fences in town.”

“But surely the objects stolen are too unique to be fenced.”
“Yes, but Gotham fences have unique connections.”

“How so?” Dick drank his cold orange juice.

“So much stuff is stolen in this city that a Gotham fence can handle anything.”

Dick smirked. “Sounds like Paris.”

“Hmm, yes.” Bruce was thinking. Dick called it ‘cooking something up’.

Dick devoured another slice of bacon “What’s your plan?”

“I happen to know a fence.”

“You do?” Dick’s tone was amused.

“Yes, I do.” Bruce pushed the eggs around his plate with his fork. “Back in my Harvard days, a friend of mine got involved with a fence in Boston. I learned his brother was in the same business in Gotham.”

“So you plan on talking to him?”

Bruce picked up his coffee cup. “Not as Bruce Wayne.”

Dick grinned and ate another crunchy slice of bacon.

Max Bernstein dusted off his display case with a cloth. He ran a respectable pawnshop, though his clientele was far from respectable.

His shop was crammed with all sorts of objects that desperate people had pawned for money. He made a small profit on this business, though his customers were usually so poor, they only had low-quality items to pawn.

Good thing my ‘side business’ is so profitable.

Max smiled to himself. He adjusted his glasses, shuffling as he walked to the back room, his shoulders stooped. He would have to take another dose of Dr. Hiram’s Amazing Elixir to ease the ache in his bones.

In the back room he pulled on a chain, the bare lightbulb turning on above his head. His table was littered with paperwork, and his bottle of elixir was set on a shelf.

“Bernstein.”

Max looked around. Had someone whispered? He saw no one. Shrugging, he reached for the bottle.

“Bernstein.”

Max whirled. “Who’s there?”

“The Raven.”

“The what?”

A shadow moved. “Max Bernstein, I require information.”
“What sort of information?”

“What you fenced the goods from the Gold Coast robberies.”

Max snorted. “Why would I tell you, Crow?”

“Raven.” The voice sounded momentarily annoyed. The shadow moved again and the Raven came into partial view. Max taking a step back. He stumbled and grabbed the table, swiftly opening a drawer and producing a pistol.

“Now we’ll see… argh!” Max yelped as a cane came down hard on his hand and he dropped the gun.

“Meet the Nightingale,” said the Raven.

The Nightingale picked up the gun and joined the Raven. His bright colors distracted Max.

“Now, where did you fence the goods?” the Raven demanded.

Max massaged his hand. “Several people took them on.”

“Who is the clever thief?”

Max shrugged. “Who knows? The swag is dumped off here and I leave the cash in this box.” He pointed to the satinwood box on the table. “I never try and catch the thief. Our arrangement is mutually beneficial.”

“Do you recognize this?” The Nightingale held out an emerald-and-silver brooch.

“Nice piece, but never saw it before.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really!” Max snapped.

The Nightingale’s gloved fingers closed around the brooch. His companion warned, “Watch yourself, Max Bernstein.”

The two masked men melted back into the shadows and were gone. Max took out a handkerchief and wiped his brow.

*This town is crazy!*

& & & & & &

The tenements quietly crumbled around them as the Raven and the Nightingale perched on a rooftop opposite the pawnshop. Their cloaks undulated gently in the breeze.

A cat meowed far below in the alley as a horse clip-clopped as it pulled a carriage along the street. Somewhere a couple argued while a baby cried.

The vigil was maintained until midnight. After no activity, the Raven and the Nightingale disappeared.

& & & & & &
“Damn, looks like a lot of staking out in our future.”

Dick sprawled on the bed as Bruce combed his hair. He had already showered and dressed.

“You’re lazy.”

“Am I?” Dick stretched, showing off his assets to full advantage. He was naked and lying on top of the rumpled sheets.

Bruce took a deep breath. “You are a tease.”

Dick smiled lazily. “I have to get my jollies somehow. Sitting on that rooftop until the wee hours isn’t exactly a chucklefest.”

“It’s what we do.” Bruce was watching Dick in the dresser mirror.

Dick ran his foot up and down his leg. “It’s what we are.”

“That, too.” Bruce put down his comb and picked up his cravat. He slipped it around his neck and began tying it. “Why are you so indolent this morning?”

“Keeps me on my toes.”

“Your en pointe toes?”

« Very good. » Dick grinned salaciously. “You’re a fast learner, darling.”

Bruce finished tying his cravat. “You are insufferably smug today.”

Dick laughed, the rich sound warming Bruce’s heart. He turned around and admired the nude body of his lover displayed for him. He approached the bed.

“I need you to stop being a tease.”

Dick smirked. “Make me.”

Bruce lunged and turned Dick over, smacking his buttocks with his open hand.

“Hey!”

Bruce gave him another swat. “You’re being a brat. Brats get spanked.”

Dick wiggled on the bed. “Are you my punisher?”

“Of course.” Bruce caressed Dick’s slightly-reddened buttocks. “When you’re bad, you need discipline.”

“Give it to me.”

Bruce walked to the dresser and picked up the hairbrush. He returned to the bed and brought the back of the brush down on Dick’s buttocks. The other man yelped, squirming as Bruce brought the brush down again.

“Ow!”

Bruce gave Dick a few more licks, ceasing as he pinched one buttock. Dick moaned and rubbed his nipples against the cotton sheets.
“Punish me some more, Daddy.”

Bruce’s groin was telegraphing his excitement. He threw aside the brush and opened his pants, climbing up onto the bed. He spread Dick’s legs, leaning back to grab the lotion in a tin atop the nightstand. He quickly prepared the two of them and spread the delectable cheeks.

Dick clutched the sheets as Bruce entered his body with a firm thrust. Bruce sped up his rhythm, pounding his lover into the mattress. Dick cried out as Bruce hit his sweet spot over and over. Stars sparkled in front of his eyes as the pleasure thrummed through his body. He thrust back, impaling himself deeper on Bruce’s cock.

When orgasm came, it ripped through him in a glorious burst of sweet pleasure. A cry of joy was torn from his throat as his body shuddered.

Bruce thrust a few more times and came, lovingly caressing Dick’s back. “You’re mine,” he purred. “And always will be.”

Dick felt warmed by such words. He laid his head on the bed and closed his eyes as Bruce kissed his shoulder and withdrew, leaving Dick to drift asleep.

Bruce went off to his meeting in the city with the glow of good health and happiness in his heart. It made him a little nervous.

*Something’s bound to go wrong with life so good.*

He conducted his business in town, deciding to walk to take in the air before returning home. He found himself on the side street where the Gotham Public Library was located.

*As a member of the Board, I should stop in.*

He ascended the stone steps and entered the quiet building. His footsteps echoed in the cavernous vestibule as he approached the Circulation Desk. A pretty blond girl was working at the desk and she looked up. “Can I help you, sir?”

“Yes, Miss…?”

“Brown.”

“Can you tell me where Miss Gordon is, Miss Brown?”

“Yes, she’s in the room to the right at the Reference Desk.”

“Thank you.”

Bruce tipped his hat and entered Reading Room No. 1, according to the brass plate above the door. Patrons were reading at the long tables or in the comfortable chairs by the windows, brass spittoons gleaming. He saw the redhead sitting at the Reference Desk and headed her way.

“May I help you, sir?” she asked. He could not be certain if the flicker in her eyes meant she recognized him or not.

“Yes, I’d like to find some books on finance.”
She led the way to the card catalogue. She opened the drawer containing the letter ‘F’. “Any specific area of finance?”

“The stock market pre-Civil War.”

Barbara helped Bruce choose some possibilities, whose Dewey Decimal numbers he wrote down on slips of paper provided by the library.

“Thank you, Miss Gordon.”

She looked at him warily. “You know my name?”

“Dick speaks very highly of you.”

Her face lit up. “I’m glad to know him, Mr. Wayne.”

“Guilty as charged.”

She smiled. Dressed in a pale green frock trimmed with lace, she was exceedingly pretty.

_No wonder Dick comes here so often._

“Thank you for your help.”

She nodded and returned to her desk. Bruce went in search of the books.

&D &D &D &D

Dick performed a turn as he held Selina, gently lowering her to the stage. Jean-Paul clapped his hands imperiously.

“No, no, _no!_ You must hold her for two more beats! And you, Miss Kyle, must _aaarch_ back like _this!”_

After more berating, Jean-Paul threw up his hands and stalked off as much as he could with a bad leg. The troupe relaxed once he disappeared.

“He’s a tyrant,” Selina said with a smile.

“Situation normal.” Dick rubbed his sore calf.

“Right. Never met a ballet director yet with a good temper.”

“Me, neither.” Dick carefully stretched his leg out after sitting down on the edge of the stage.

Selina sat down, too. She rubbed her shoulder, letting her legs dangle over the edge.

“So your director in Boston was demanding?”

“Oh, yes.” Selina laughed. “He was Polish.”

“French or Polish, still impossible.”

“Very much so.”

“Ballet must be big in Boston.”
“Yes, they love their culture. They call themselves the Athens of America, you know.”

“I’ve been to Athens.”

“Really?”

Dick nodded. “The Mediterranean is beautiful whether in summer or fall. We…I had the good fortune to be in Italy during the autumn and Greece the following summer.”

“How lovely.”

“Did you get much of a mix in the audience?”

“In Boston? Yes, I’d say so. Plenty of Brahmins from Beacon Hill, but merchants and Harvard students were part of our crowd, too.”

“Of course. Harvard students would have plenty of money to indulge in their tastes.”

“That is correct.” Selina tried to work the kink out of her shoulder. “Harvard is for the rich and privileged and only the sons of the best families are admitted.”

“Ah, so no surprise that Bruce went there.”

“No, no surprise.” Selina crossed her shapely legs. She swung one leg lazily. “A fine gentleman like Bruce Wayne would have earned a ‘Gentleman’s C’.”

“Probably. I’ve never discussed his grades with him.”

“He’s a very generous patron.”

“Quite generous.”

“Yes.” Selina rested a hand on Dick’s thigh. “Be careful, luv. The rich have a way of taking over people’s lives because what they want, they get.”

Dick felt resentment at Selina’s statement, but he kept his smile. He did not want her to know his reaction. He had learned long ago that revealing everything was not the best idea.

“All right.” Selina withdrew her hand. “Just be careful, my friend. These sophisticates enjoy our company, but they ultimately discard us.”

Dick felt his stomach tighten. He knew that was the way of things, but Bruce was different.

Bruce had to be different.
Chapter Summary

Bruce and Dick hit the pawnshops while a special invitation is delivered to Wayne Manor.

*No greater joy hath a man than domestic bliss as King of his castle.*

Mrs. George (Morvath) Kensington
"*The Art Of Domestic Womanhood"*
1901 C.E.

Max looked up as the tiny bells jingled over the door. He observed a man in a flashy brown-and-white checked suit with a vest and buttons that sparkled gold. He wore a brown fedora pulled low over his eyes, and a matchstick was stuck in his mouth. A flashy gold pocketwatch chain stretched across his vest.

“Hey, Mister! Ya got a nice place here.”

“Thanks.”

“The name’s Matches Malone.” Matches leaned on the display case, working the match in his mouth. “Ya got any of those little pictures?”

“Little pictures?”

“Yeah, you know, pictures that are teeny-tiny.” Matches used his hands as a frame.

“You mean miniatures?”

“That's it!” Matches snapped his fingers. “Ya got any of those?”

“No, I don’t.”


Max pointed to the case. Matches peered at the cheap jewelry.

“Nothin’ fancier?”

“That’s what I got, sir.”

“Hmm. I need somethin’ a little, um, more posh.”

“You’re in the wrong neighborhood, bub.”

Matches grinned, nearly losing his matchstick. “Pr’bly so, pr’bly so.” He leaned closer, lowering his
voice to a whisper. “I hear that pawnshops might be carryin’ some of the goods from the fancypants mansion robberies.”

Max shrugged. “I don’t know anything about that. That’s stolen goods, bub.”

Matches winked. “Yeah, but a smart pawnshop owner like you would know the score.” The matchstick jutted upward from his mouth. “Maybe ya got some stuff in the back room, huh?” He winked again.

Max leaned closer. “Listen, buddy, even if I had those goods, you couldn’t afford ‘em.”

“You’re pr’bly right, sir.” Matches sighed. “Well, I’ll see ya around, buddy.”

Matches sauntered out of the shop. He stood on the sidewalk and lit a cigarette with his match, looking up at the sky. It was gray today. He passed a ragged bootblack, who watched him go down the street.

& & & & &

“No suspicious characters that I could see,” Dick said as he cleaned off the soot from his face. “But I did make a dollar-fifty shining shoes.”

Bruce grinned. “That’s good. Supplements the income.”

Dick laughed. He surveyed himself in the dresser mirror. “I need sharper clothes than these rags.”

Bruce put his checked suit into the closet. “I was hoping that you might spot someone who we could follow up on.”

“Well, Bernstein only had a few customers. One was an old lady who pawned a ring and another was a middle-aged Negro man who was drunk. He pawned a banjo and looked really sad.”

Bruce felt a twinge of sympathy. “Unfortunately, pawnshops cater to people down-on-their-luck.”

Dick rummaged in the closet and chose a dark-purple shirt with black pants. He pulled a fresh pair of underdrawers out from the dresser.

“I hired the kid who was hanging around the pool hall to watch the place for us. I doubt anything will happen even tonight.”

“Probably not, but we need an eye kept on the shop.”

Dick paused on his way to the bathroom. “Bruce, do you ever think we’ll catch this thief? So far he’s eluded us every time.”

“No guarantee, true, but we might get lucky.”

“Luck and skill, my dear. Luck and skill.”

Bruce smiled as Dick disappeared into the bathroom. He finished fixing his watch chain to his vest and admitted to being stymied. What to do next besides waiting? More stake-outs? That kid watching the pawnshop was probably unreliable. And there were other pawnshops in town. Bernstein’s might not be the right one, though the set-up he had with the thief was probably true. Why would he lie? It would make more sense to deny knowing the Gold Coast Burglar instead of making up a story about being in partnership with the wily thief.
Bruce sighed. This case was frustrating. As Dick had said, the Gold Coast Burglar was maddeningly elusive. They had no idea about his identity underneath the mask.

He opened Dick’s jewelry box and lifted the emerald-and-silver brooch out. This was a clue. Time to follow up on it.

“Sorry, sir, I didn’t sell this brooch.” The middle-aged man behind the jewelry counter adjusted his pince-nez on his long nose. “Though I did sell a similar brooch. It was sapphire-and-gold.”

Bruce felt excitement. He had put on a red wig and dressed modestly. He disliked Bruce Wayne being connected to this search of the jewelry stores.

“Whom did you sell it to?”

“Mr. Ellery Townsend.”

“Thank you.” Bruce left the store. The brooch was designed as a bouquet of flowers, very intricate and well worth the gems studded in the silver.

The Gold Coast Burglar must have robbed him. No publicity, but it anyone could keep it out of the papers, it’s Townsend.

Odd, but sometimes life was that way. Resigned to doing more work, Bruce hired a hansom cab to bring him home.

The fire crackled in the front parlor hearth. Bruce approved of the autumnal touches Alfred and Dick had added: pumpkins flanking the fireplace, on the coffee table, and on a side table. A colorful basket of Indian corn was set by Bruce’s favorite chair. He had changed out of his disguise, scrubbed off his make-up, and now wore his deep-blue smoking jacket and sleeping pants, his feet shod in comfortable slippers.

Dick was sitting cross-legged on the couch in gold lame sleepwear and a canary-yellow robe. He wore green socks and looked delicious as he read a book.

“You look all in for the night,” Bruce observed.

“I assume we have the night off?”

“You presume correctly.” Bruce held the evening paper in his hands and settled in his chair. “The ballet off?”

“For now. We have a push right after Halloween.”

“Is Jean-Paul still opposed to staging The Nutcracker this Christmas?”

“He says it’s too trite.”

“Yes, well, I’ll speak to him.”

“He won’t be happy.”

“When he owns a ballet company, he can be as grumpy as he likes.”
Dick grinned. “’So quoth the millionaire’.”

Bruce harrumphed and Dick laughed. “What did you find out, Mr. Holmes?”

“Well, Mr. Watson, I discovered that our mystery brooch was bought by Ellery Townsend.”

“He wasn’t robbed.”

“Maybe he was.” At Dick’s puzzled look, he explained, “He’s got enough juice to keep a robbery out of the papers.”

“Juice?”

“Influence.”

“Ah.” Dick savored the slang word, delighted any time he learned a new one.

It grew quiet as both men read, the only sounds that of the crackling fire and the turning of pages.

*When did we get so domestic?*

But Bruce liked it. Happiness had been a fleeting thing for him for so long that he had barely recognized the feeling. He was becoming more accustomed to it now.

*All because of you.*

He looked affectionately at Dick, who was absorbed in his book.

Alfred brought in tea and lemon cookies. “A light supper tonight, sir?”

“That will be perfect, Alfred.”

“Very good, sir.”

Alfred departed and quiet reigned again. Bruce relaxed as he read the newspaper.

The stories were the usual variety of national and local. Nothing more about Gold Coast robberies, but that was not surprising. The thief had been on a successful run. Perhaps he wanted to lay low for awhile or had moved on. It would be good for the city’s millionaires if the thief was gone for good.

He read some of the international stories. There was always saber-rattling in Europe. The Kaiser was doing it this time around, making sure his fellow Europeans were sufficiently nervous.

*Same old tune. Never changes.*

He skimmed the bombastic speech, anyway. All of Europe seemed armed to the teeth. Each major country’s armies were large, and new weapons were being built all the time.

*Guess that’s why Teddy pushed to beef up our navy with all those destroyers and dreadnaughts they built.*

Japan had come up in the world with its rapid Westernization since 1854 and Perry’s arrival on their shores, opening their closed feudal society to that same world. They had defeated the Russians in their war two years ago. The President had brokered a peace agreement with the two warring nations. It had earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.
“An invitation came in the mail,” Dick said.

“Oh?”

“Yes, from Mr. Ellery Townsend.”

“I see.”

“Apparently he’s throwing a big Halloween party.”

“Bruce hid his smile behind his paper. “Really?”

“Yes.” Eagerness vibrated in Dick’s voice.

“That’s nice.”

He could practically feel the disappointment radiating off his lover. He pretended to read for a few more minutes, then lowered the paper to see a pouting Dick looking down at his book.

“What do you want to go as?”

The smile from Dick was dazzling as he looked up.
The Greek Way

Chapter Summary

Donna celebrates freedom in many ways. ;)

When the King
Stood tall,
He knew
That his Beloved
Was right
Beside him,
In the days
Of glory,
And days
Of old.

John Addington Sylvester
"The Great Friendship"
1883 C.E.

Donna stretched, enjoying the freedom her leotard gave her. Sometimes she hated the clothes she had to wear, especially the whalebone corsets.

“Your ankle is healing.”

Donna opened her eyes and saw Selina standing over her. She looks fabulous as always.

“Hi, Selina.”

Selina sat down on the edge of the stage. “You’ve got talent.”

“Thank you.”

Selina rubbed her towel on the back of her neck. “I call ‘em as I see ‘em.”

“Well, that’s good to know.”

Selina chuckled, swinging her legs back-and-forth. “It’s good to be in a leotard. Womanly clothes can be a lot of fuss.”

“Not to mention discomfort.” Donna grimaced as she ran a hand over her stomach.

“Ah, yes. Corsets.” Selina ran her tongue over her lips. “You know, there was a movement back in the 1880s to give women more freedom of movement. The New Woman Movement of the 1890s was part of that.”
“Hmm, that sounds intriguing.”

“Come on with me.”

Selina helped Donna to her feet and led her to her dressing room. The older woman rummaged in a chest of drawers and drew out a soft undergarment. She held it out to Donna, who fingered the material.

“This is light as a feather.”

“And just as comfortable.” Selina dug into her drawer again and produced a tissue-wrapped package. “These are some new girdles. Use these, if you don’t mind not having a perfect hourglass figure.”

“In order to breathe, I’ll give up the hourglass.” Donna smiled as she looked at the package. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome, my dear.” Selina smirked knowingly. “You’ll still attract the Sunshine Boys.”

“Who?”

“Dick and Roy.”

Donna laughed. “We’re just friends.”

Perhaps.”

Donna could not help but smile. “Thanks again, Selina.”

Donna returned to her dressing room and eagerly opened the package. She tried on the undergarment and sighed happily. It was a whole new day.

& & & & & &

Donna walked down the street, pleased at how she no longer felt winded. She did a little skip as she turned onto Maple Street, whirling around lampposts as she danced down the street. She noted the library building with interest and went up the steps.

Donna was immediately struck by the peace and quiet in the venerable old building. She smiled at the perky blond girl working at the Circulation Desk.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning,” the girl answered. “May I help you?”

“Yes. I would like to apply for library card.”

“Certainly.”

Donna filled out the form and received her card from Stephanie, noting her nametag. “Where is the card catalogue located?”

“In Reading Room Number One.”

“Thank you.”

Donna entered the room and noticed no one was around. She walked over to the card catalogue,
found the drawer marked ‘Man--Mys’ and began riffling through cards. She was in the mood for a good mystery.

She found some titles that looked interesting and jotted down the information on a small pace of paper provided for patrons. She wandered off into the stacks and saw a pretty redhead shelving books.

“Hi.”

“Hello.” The redhead picked up a book off the cart. “May I help you?”

“No, I have the proper call numbers here.” Donna waved her slip of paper.

“Well, if you need help, please let me know.”

“Thank you.”

Donna went to the proper section and picked out her titles, browsing through the shelves and picking out another. She left the stacks and Barbara nearly bumped into her with her cart.

“Oh, sorry,” Barbara apologized.

“Perfectly okay.”

“Oh, a Jean Loring mystery. I approve.”

“You’re a fan?”

Barbara nodded. “Miss Loring has a vivid imagination. She can spin a good tale. That one is about a man able to miniaturize himself.”

“I know. The frontispiece sold me.” Donna smiled. “I admire that. A good writer is a true artiste.”

Barbara laughed. “Creative types are so temperamental.”

Donna’s blue eyes twinkled. “I agree.”

Barbara checked the timepiece pinned to her blouse. “Goodness, it’s almost eleven. I…” She paused. “You look familiar.”

“Perhaps you saw my performance.”

“Performance?” Barbara’s eyes widened. “You dance with the Gotham Ballet Company!”

Donna smiled. “That’s right.” She held out her hand. “I’m Donna Troy.”

“Barbara Gordon.” They shook hands. “I’ve seen you more than once. I’ve loved every show I’ve seen.”

“Thank you. It’s exciting to dance with such talented people.”

“Like Dick Grayson?”

Donna’s eyes sparkled. “Oh, yes.”

The two women shared knowing looks.
“You’re very lucky to work with him,” Barbara said.

“He’s a good friend.”

“The redhead, too?”

Donna laughed. “Him, too.” She glanced around. “You have a lovely library here.”

“Thank you.” Barbara riffled through the books. “I have something here you might like.” She found the book and presented it to Donna.

“Oh, a novel by Silver Spring. She does such wonderful historical epics.”

“She does. I loved her novels about Alexander and Hephaistion.”

“A great romance.”

Barbara looked at her. "A very special friendship."

Donna raised an eyebrow. “Both, I would say. It was the Greek way.”

The wariness left Barbara’s eyes. “Yes, the Greek way. The modern equivalent?”

“Ballet dancers.”

Barbara smirked as she bent down to set the books upright on the bottom of the cart.

Donna checked out her books and walked back to her room at Mrs. Corrigan’s boardinghouse. She would start reading the Loring mystery right away in the small backyard’s gazebo. The big sugar maple tree was a glory of gold and a beautiful background for reading.

She enjoyed her book as a slight breeze blew, bringing down showers of yellow, red and orange leaves from various trees in the yard. It was a pretty scene, and despite Gotham’s reputation as an ugly city, she found the scene charming.

She liked the librarian she had talked to this morning. A smart woman, as many librarians tended to be. It was a good profession for a woman. Underpaid, of course, but that was an infuriating fact of life. It was a good job that offered some security. Her aunt had been a librarian for twenty-six years.

“Hi!”

Donna looked up and smiled. “Hi, Roy.”

Roy stepped up into the gazebo. “Mrs. Corrigan says it’s okay for me to sit out here with you.”

“But not above the first floor inside.”

“No, not above the first floor.” Donna set aside her book. “What’s up?”

“Just felt like visiting.”

Donna felt it was more than that but she played along. “Would you like something to drink?”

“No, I’m fine.” Roy sat down on the bench that encircled the wooden gazebo. “Beautiful day.”

“It certainly is.” Donna rubbed her arms. “A bit chilly but not uncomfortable.”
“Autumn’s tricky. Sometimes it’s warm and sometimes it’s not.”

“True.” Donna leaned back against the railing. Discussing the weather was a delaying tactic. She waited for Roy to say what was on his mind.

Roy turned his cap around in his hands. Finally he asked, “What do you think of Dick’s set-up?”

“What do you mean?”

“His living arrangements.”

“Oh, that.” Donna waved her hand airily.

Roy looked up. “You’re pretty cavalier.”

“What?”

“Dick living with Bruce Wayne!”

“You saw the Manor. Plenty of room.” Donna rested her hands in her lap. “Why does this bother you? Stars get special treatment all the time.”

Roy was still worrying his cap. “Do you think that Dick is…?”

“What?” Donna asked softly.

“Do you think he’s sleeping with Wayne?”


“You know Dick’s history. He’s been hurt before by rich suitors who have tossed him aside.”

“I know, but if he chooses to go that route, there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Roy grumbled. “I suppose you’re right.”

“Of course I am.” Roy rolled his eyes and she laughed. “Now, let’s go into the parlor for some tea and cakes.”

“Sounds good to me.” Roy stood and offered his arm graciously, which Donna took with a little curtsy.

She just hoped that Roy’s worries were unfounded.
Rainy Interlude

Chapter Summary

Bruce and Dick enjoy a lazy, rainy afternoon.

Rain sluices down
Like tears from Heaven,
Quiet and clean,
Cleansing the soul.

Sir Attwood Terrace
"Melancholy Season
And Other Poems"
1899 C.E.

“I love you.”

Dick snuggled up to Bruce as rain pattered on the windows. His declaration of love warmed Bruce, if his smile was anything to go by.

“Mmm, I love making love in the early afternoon.” Dick stroked his lover’s bare stomach. “You are incredible.”

Bruce smirked. He stroked Dick’s hip as a gust of wind rattled the windows. “Nothing better in the afternoon.”

“Delicious.” Dick rubbed his foot over Bruce’s leg and shivered.

Bruce immediately pulled up the sheets and blanket. Dick pushed closer and they shared body warmth.

“The ocean is wild today,” Dick observed.

“Like you.”

Dick laughed. “Always, my friend, always.” He looked at the windows. “No patrol tonight?”

“No, wiseguy.”

Dick smirked. “Do you think the Gold Coast Burglar is gone for good?”

“Possibly. There haven’t been any robberies lately.”

“Except Ellery Townsend?”

“Maybe there was no robbery there.”
“So how did the Gold Coast Burglar gain possession of the brooch?”

Bruce gazed out the window. “Maybe it was a robbery interrupted and the thief only able to grab one piece. Or maybe he’s just a talented pickpocket.”

Dick yawned and listened to the sound of the rain drumming on the roof. Rain always put him to sleep. As he drifted off, an idea crossed his mind. He would attempt it tomorrow.

& & & & & &

Bruce awoke, aware of Dick’s warm body in his arms. It was a pleasant feeling, to be sure. He was incredibly contented. Rainy weather suited him. As he listened to the sounds of the storm, his mind went over the robberies. Sometimes small details were simply that: the brooch might not have any significance at all, though somehow he did not quite believe that. He was missing something.

He relaxed as he listened to Dick’s even breathing beside him. He might be a ball of energy, but even Dick needed rest.

He remained in bed for another half hour, then carefully disentangled himself. Dick stirred slightly, then curled up against his pillow to sleep soundly. Bruce touched his hair and smiled fondly.

Slipping into his robe, he put on slippers and went downstairs. He opened the front door and smelled the damp earth as wet leaves fell from the trees and stuck in the mud. The sky was dark pewter as the rain fell in a steady drumbeat. It was a melancholy world, which Bruce would have identified with strongly once upon a time.

Maybe the missing piece is agitating me. The brooch…that brooch…

He sighed. He should just let it simmer for awhile. It would come to him.

He took in a breath of damp air and smiled. It would come to him. His work as the Raven was sharpening his intellectual skills.

He quietly closed the door. Bed sounded really good to him.

As he ascended the staircase, he thought about what costume to wear for the Townsend Halloween party. It would have to be clever, to be sure. Should it be thematically matching, as couples often did? Of course they couldn’t really do the couples thing, but there were acceptable pairings, like Sherlock Holmes and John Watson.

Bruce smiled as he rested his hand on the master bedroom doorknob. That would be a good choice, indeed. He would keep it as a back-up, just in case.

Turning the doorknob, he entered the bedroom.
Rainy Afternoon

Chapter Summary

Rainy weather is the backdrop for relaxing pastimes.

“Is there anything cozier than a rainy afternoon?”

Edna Cuthbert
American Actress
1901 C.E.

Autumn weather could be one of two things in Gotham: gorgeous days of blue skies and colorful trees worthy of a drive in the countryside or chaotic days of rain and wind, reminding the populace that harsher days were ahead as winter crept closer.

Rain swept the coast as the good citizens of Gotham struggled against the wind. Umbrellas were useless as they would snap inside-out and nearly fly out of people’s gloved hands. Leaves swirled madly about, plastering to walls and fences as the skies grew sullen.

Dick used the word ‘cozy’ for the Manor, laughing at the raised eyebrows of Bruce and Alfred. “Sure, this place looks like a haunted house from the outside, but we know better inside, hmm?” Both men merely shook their heads as Dick laughed again.

He spent some of his time exploring the Manor. The multitude of rooms and hidden nooks and crannies reminded him of Bruce: so many facets of hidden treasures! And he loved treasure hunting.

Dick went up to the highest floor, curious to see what wonders were up there. He found mostly bedrooms, but one room held the treasures he sought.

A rocking horse rested in one corner, painted in bright circus colors, and a train set was laid out on the floor. Picture books were neatly arranged in a bookcase with a top tilted on top. Dick smiled at the thought. Other toys were placed around the room or were presumably in the toybox located against one wall.

“It’s a playroom,” Dick murmured.

He was charmed by all the wonderful toys. As the rain drummed on the roof, he went to his knees and studied the train set. He was delighted to observe the incredible detail of each car, including the little red caboose.

*It’s an electric train set. Must have been one of the first ones out. It probably cost a fortune.*

He remembered the set of handcarved circus cars that his father had made for him. Lost in the fire that had burned their wagon during the night of the attack on their camp, he could still recall the vivid colors. His mother had done the painting.

He caressed the engine, wishing he still had that circus set. Wiping away his tears, he concentrated
on the train. He plugged it in and was happy to see it chug along the track. Hills and trees formed a
countryside that led to a picturesque town, complete with buildings and figures strolling, skating and
running.

Dick played with the train for half an hour, read through the books and found a hoop and stick. He
opened the toybox and found toy solders, stuffed animals and building blocks.

_ALL of these toys are a part of Bruce._

He felt warmed by the thought. He imagined Bruce as a child playing with these toys. As he closed
the lid of the toybox, he wondered if Thomas and Martha Wayne had ever arranged for playmates
for their only child.

_He never talks about childhood friends. Well, at least he had Oliver Queen when he was at
Excelsior._

Dick took a book from the bookcase and picked up the teddy bear that was residing in the rocking
chair. It was a well-loved bear with a red ribbon around its neck. He placed it on his lap as he sat
down in the chair by the window. Presumably it had been put there as a convenience for an adult
watching Bruce. A child-sized rocker was in the corner.

Dick gently rocked as he read through the adventures of Robin Hood, a favorite of his. He chose to
dwell in the past on this rainy day. There would be time enough to deal with the future.

_I'm not a meticulous planner like Bruce. I go where the wind takes me, where the road goes. Dick
closed his eyes as he rocked. I don't know if Bruce and I will remain together forever. Society is not
kind to our sort of love, but I intend to enjoy whatever time we have. And who knows? We might get
lucky._

He smiled as he continued to rock.

& & & & &

The rain pattered on the windows as the waves rolled restlessly in the ocean. Bruce read in the front
parlor while Alfred made tea in the kitchen. Dick’s presence in the playroom was unknown, but they
knew that he was in the house.

Bruce rested his book in his lap as he rubbed his eyes. He closed them to give them a rest. The novel
was good but his mind was ready to return to the Gold Coast burglaries again.

He and Dick had gathered information but it had led to nowhere so far. Perhaps the thief had moved
on. Not a satisfying conclusion, but someone else might catch him if he got careless.

Except for the dropped brooch, he hasn't made any mistakes.

Bruce listened to the rain as he pondered. It was not the most auspicious way to start his
crimefighting career in America but he would accept it. The experience would prove invaluable, at
any rate.

He thought uneasily of Selina. If only there was some way to get rid of her! She was far too clever
for his own good, and combined with what she knew…

He shifted in his chair. It was a pity that she was so good at her job. He could not pressure Jean-Paul
to get rid of her without arousing suspicion.
He picked up his book again, stymied by his dilemma but determined to figure something out.

Donna read in the parlor of her boardinghouse, relaxed and comfortable on the couch. She far preferred it to the horsehair sofa, which was hard and uncomfortable. How people sat on those things was beyond her.

She turned the page. This latest Jean Loring mystery was excellent. Her writing was less flowery than most popular authors. She seemed to understand that florid prose did not equal good description.

The fire crackled in the hearth, keeping the cold at bay. She had gone out for a walk earlier that morning, umbrella in hand, and it was a raw cold. When rain had hit her skin, it had stung.

As she turned another page, she thought of going to the kitchen for a snack when the doorknocker rapped against the front door. Mrs. Corrigan, a white-haired lady of considerable girth bustled out from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Here, now, if you’re a visitor, mind drippin’ over my clean floor! If a tradesman, back door for ya!” she nattered as she opened the door, holding onto her lace cap as the wind gusted in, bring the rain. “Ach! Come in, Miss!”

Donna snickered as she continued to read. She pitied anyone out in this weather for more than a few minutes. She glanced up and was astounded to see…

“Selina!”

The prima ballerina handed her cloak to Mrs. Corrigan, who fussed as she said, “Go on into the parlor.” Her tone clearly indicated that she thought that Selina was crazy for visiting on a day like this one.

Donna stood. “Come on in!”

Selina plunked her umbrella in the stand reserved for that purpose. She swept into the parlor with regal grace, wearing a smoky midnight-blue dress with gray feathers lining the top of her bodice. A large sapphire choker adorned her white throat.

“What brings you out on a day like this?”

“Boredom. I couldn’t stand looking at the walls of my suite one more minute.”

Donna smiled while she thought the elegance of Selina’s suite would alleviate her boredom. She knew that the diva had rooms at the Gotham Arms Hotel, the fanciest establishment in town.

“I wanted to see your place. You spoke so highly of it.”

“Well, it’s not that fancy but here it is.” Donna swept out her hand while they sat on the couch.

Selina took in the tasseled furniture, the elaborate antimacassers, the curio cabinet jammed with geegaws, and the heavy brocade drapes. The wallpaper was patterned with gold-flocked fleurs de lis and pictures of stiff people in sepia tones.

“Typically Victorian,” Donna said with a rueful smile.

“Many houses still retain the old décor. It’s actually quite charming, in a way.”
“Even the stuffed bird?”

Selina laughed as she looked at the stuffed bluebird in the curio cabinet. “Poor birdie.”

Donna pointed toward the foyer. “I was just going to get a snack. Would you like some tea?”

“Yes, very much.”

“Be right back.”

Donna crossed the foyer to the kitchen, where Mrs. Corrigan was busy baking an apple pie. “Your guest gone already?” asked the landlady.

“No, she’s going to have tea with me.”

Mrs. Corrigan lifted an eyebrow. “Isn’t she that fancy ballerina you work with?”

“That’s right.” Donna brought out the teapot and measured out the tea.

“She seems rather grand to be sittin’ in me poor little parlor.”

“Oh, she’s just a dancer like the rest of us.” Donna put the kettle on.

“Maybe so, but she’s still a bit hoity-toity for this place.”

Donna bustled around to get the gingerbread cookies that the landlady had baked yesterday for her tenants. “She’s all right, considering she’s a star.”

“Hmph.”

The landlady’s sniff amused Donna. She waited for the kettle’s whistle and placed the teapot on a tray with yellow-rose-sprigged teacups, saucers, and plates. She put the plate of cookies on last and picked up the tray.

“You set a fine tea table, Mrs. Corrigan.”

“Off with ye, ye blarney tongue!” The Irishwoman flapped a dishtowel at Donna, who laughed.

“Here we go,” she said as she entered the parlor.

Selina was standing in front of the curio cabinet. “I appreciate all the fuss.”

“Hey, it’s the least I can do for the lady who freed me from the torturous corset.”

Selina laughed. She followed Donna to the small table in the corner as Donna arranged the tea set. Both women settled into chairs and drank the delicious hot tea.

“Ah, Darjeeling.” Selina sipped delicately.

“The very best. We have Ceylon tea, also.”

“Mmm, tea is so civilized, don’t you think?”

“I do.” Donna offered the plate of iced gingerbread cookies. “Try one.”

Selina took one and bit into it. “Mmm, very good.” She cocked her head. “Yours?”
“No, Mrs. Corrigan’s. She’s quite the baker. Great cook, too.”

“You know, this isn’t a bad little place.”

Donna smiled. “It’ll do.” The comment was unconsciously condescending, but she doubted that Selina meant anything about it. She sounded sincere, in fact.

They chatted about the weather, Selina declaring, “Gloomy Gotham seems to be a fitting appellation with all this rain!”

“We’ve had some great weather, too.”

“Yes, the East Coast gives all sorts of weather. When I danced with the Boston Ballet Company, we had rain, snow, freezing cold, intense heat…”

“Sounds like Gotham,” Donna grinned.

Selina’s green eyes sparkled. “Very true.”

“How did you enjoy your time in Boston?”

“Very much. It’s a fascinating city, keenly interested in the arts. The ballet was a huge draw.”

“I’ll bet you had plenty of admirers.”

“Oh, definitely.” Selina’s smile was sly. “They came from the finest families in the city, and from without. The young men from Harvard were all quality.”

Donna knew the type: privileged, arrogant and wild. They were free spenders but not one in the theater was a candidate for marriage for these sons of wealth.

*Have a good time and dump ’em.*

She suddenly remembered that Bruce Wayne was a graduate of Harvard and also remembered Roy’s concerns.

*If Dick is sleeping with our benefactor, will Wayne dump him when he’s done with him?*

“Of course, some of them are pretenders.”

“Oh, yes.” Donna had no idea what Selina was talking about. She hoped she could catch up.

“No young man wants such a…predilection…known.”

“Oh, no.”

“I know that some of those dandies preferred their fellows’ company.”

“Ah, yes.” Donna stirred her tea.

“Of course, in our profession, inverted are common, but the general public isn’t as forgiving.”

“No.”

“Any of those scions would be ruined if their true proclivities were known.”

That was true. Dick would endure contempt and backlash but he would also continue as a great
dancer. Bruce Wayne would be ruined.

*Let’s hope they’re discreet.*

Dick living with Bruce would not arouse suspicion. If he was female, tongues would wag, but people of the same sex living together drew no comment. Inversion was so out of most people’s minds that they could barely conceive of it. ‘Boston marriages’ were clever covers as people could not wrap their minds around the thought of two women of the same sex enjoying a commitment as their opposite-sex brethren did, for instance.

“Well, let’s hope that gentlemen and ladies keep such knowledge to themselves.” Donna shook her head.

“Yes.” Selina delicately sipped her tea.

Donna nearly sighed. This was a strange conversation.

*Or maybe just two women chatting over tea.*

They spoke about events in the ballet world and Donna found herself relaxing. Selina could be quite the charmer when she wanted to be.

& & & & & &

Dick slipped silently down the stairs and into the library. He didn’t want to talk to anyone right now. The mood was just too perfect to break it up with talk. He watched the rain pour down outside the windows, strong gusts of wind bending the trees in a macabre dance.

*Appropriate, I suppose, since it’s close to Halloween.*

He was so excited about his first Halloween in America. Alfred had promised pumpkin pies in addition to the pumpkin muffins and breads he had already baked. Dick was addicted to the taste of pumpkin, to Bruce’s amusement.

He rested his shoulder against the ancient grandfather clock. The movement caused the weights to make a jangling noise. He moved away and swore as he stumbled, knocking it again when the back popped away from the wall.

“What?”

There was an opening in the wall. Dick could smell mustiness as he noticed a stone step. Curiosity burning, he entered the tunnel, touching the cold stone walls. There was condensation on the stones. Despite the darkness he was sure-footed as he descended, but suddenly he stepped on a loose pebble. There was nothing to grab onto as he pitched forward headfirst into the abyss.
Chapter Summary

Bruce and Alfred search for Dick.

PART THREE
SAPPHIRE

October 26, 1907

Falling
Into the dark
Snatches
The breath
From my soul.

Bruce closed his book and stretched. He had enjoyed a very relaxing afternoon and was looking forward to an equally relaxing evening. He rose from his chair and stretched again with a yawn. He had fallen asleep for an hour after listening to the rain. Working the kinks out, he wandered out to the kitchen.

“Have you seen Dick?” he asked Alfred.

“Not for several hours.”

“He must be exploring,” Bruce said fondly. “I’ll see if I can find him.”

“Good luck, sir.”

Bruce smirked at Alfred’s dry tone. He was well aware of Dick’s ability to stay one step ahead of him, but Bruce knew this house far better than his lover did.

He hurried up the staircase and checked the bedrooms. All were empty. He went up the stairs to the third floor but every room was empty, too, including his old playroom. He paused inside the room and gazed at the rocking horse. Memories flooded him, as always bittersweet for what he had lost. He smiled gently at the teddy bear in the rocking chair and quietly closed the door.

“Where is that tease?” he muttered.

Bruce even checked the attic but only breathed in dust, resulting in sneezes and a few curses. He went downstairs and met Alfred coming out of the kitchen.
“Could Dick have gone down to the stables?” Bruce asked.

“Possibly, but the horses are in the capable care of Mr. Regan.”

“Yes, I know.” Bruce rubbed his chin. “Would you check the rooms on this floor? I’m going to check the bedroom again.”

“Very good, sir.”

Alfred set aside the potatoes he had been peeling and went to the study. Empty.

His next stop was the library. At first glance he saw nothing amiss, and made a quick round of the room. Something was off.

That was when he saw the grandfather clock slightly ajar. Frowning, he went to investigate.

“What?” He felt a cold rush of air before he saw the aperture. “Master Dick?”

It was too dark to see anything. He would need a lantern.

Alfred hurried out to the foyer. “Master Bruce!”

Bruce appeared on the landing. “What is it?”

“Come to the library.”

Bruce quickly followed Alfred to the library. His jaw dropped as Alfred asked, “Were you aware of this opening, sir?”

“No. What is all this?”

“It appears that it is a series of stone steps.” Alfred grasped Bruce’s arm. “Wait until I get some lanterns, sir.”

“But what if Dick is down there?”

“You will not see him in that darkness unless you have eyes like a cat.”

Alfred swiftly went to fetch the lanterns.

Bruce waited impatiently, but Alfred was right. It was too dark to see anything.

“Dick?”

His voice echoed and he strained to hear anything, but except for the faint drip-drip-drip of water, nothing reached his ears.

Alfred came back in record time with the lanterns. He lit both and they began their descent on the stone steps. Bruce touched damp stone as he carefully went down the steps, shivering a little at the cold air. It reminded him of the Cave of the Winds in Niagara Falls. As he and Alfred got lower, he could hear a strange squeaking.

Gradually a panorama opened up before the explorers: a huge cave with the rushing sound of water
off in the distance.

“What…?”

“Master Bruce, over there!”

Bruce followed Alfred’s pointing finger and saw the crumpled body a few feet away. Gasping, Bruce ran over.

“Dick! Dick! Are you all right?”

A foolish question, Bruce thought distractedly, but he was desperate to find out the answer. He touched the younger man’s shoulder.

Dick groaned, moving slightly. “Ow!”


“Umm…” Dick appeared to be taking inventory. “No, no shooting pains. Just a lot of scrapes and a headache.”

“Before you sit up, young sir, can you move your legs?” Alfred asked.

Dick concentrated and for a chilling moment, he was motionless, then his legs moved. Both Bruce and Alfred exhaled in relief. Bruce helped Dick sit up.

“Are you all right?”

“Just banged up.” Dick looked around in awe. “It’s a cave! An honest-to-goodness cave!”

“And it sounds like a waterfall nearby,” Alfred observed.

“Why is there an entrance down to a cave from your library?” Dick asked Bruce.

“I don’t know. Unless…”

The rustling of wings caught their attention. All three looked up.

“Bats!” Dick’s tone was astonished.

What appeared to be a dozen bats flew from the heights of the cave ceiling and disappeared into a dark tunnel.

“Let’s go explore!” Dick started to get up.

“Whoa, hold on there, buddy.” Bruce helped Dick stand up with Alfred’s capable assistance. “You’re going to bed for the rest of the day.”

“But…”

“You were out cold from a knock on the head. In fact, I’m calling Dr. Robbins.”

“I’m perfectly fine,” Dick protested.

“I must concur with Master Bruce, young sir. We should get you checked out,” Alfred said.

Dick sighed. “All right, I can’t fight both of you.”
The progress up the steps was careful, and once they reached the library, Bruce firmly pushed the clock shut. “We don’t want any bats up here,” he joked.

They managed to get Dick into bed and comfortable. Alfred propped double pillows up against the headboard while Bruce went down and called the doctor.

When he returned to the bedroom, Alfred left to brew some tea. Bruce fussed with the pillows until Dick clutched his arm and said in exasperation, “I’m fine.”

“You have a headache.” Bruce was implacable.

Dick sighed again, obviously aware that he was outmatched this time. He leaned back against the pillows.

Alfred brought up the tea and Dr. Elliot Robbins arrived soon after. White-haired and wearing pince-nez, the doctor examined Dick, clucking his tongue and admonishing his patient.

“No more falling down the stairs, young man.”

Dick laughed. “I’ll do my best, Doc.”

By mutual agreement, the cave discovery was not mentioned. The elderly doctor put away his stethoscope in his black bag.

“Here’s a powder for your headache.” He handed the packet to Alfred. “You should stay awake the rest of the day. No falling asleep!”

“Yes, sir.”

Robbins closed his bag. “If the headache persists into tomorrow, give me a call.”

“We will,” Bruce assured him. He held out his hand. “Thank you for coming by, Doctor.”

“You know I would, Bruce. I’ve been your family doctor for years.” Robbins smiled.

“This way, Doctor,” Alfred said.

Alfred escorted Dr. Robbins out. Dick thumped the blanket with his fist in frustration.

“Calm down,” Bruce said placidly.

“I am going to be bored.”

“Maybe.” Bruce’s smile was unsympathetic.

Dick huffed. “Before the bats appeared, you sounded like you had an idea about that cave.”

“I did.” Bruce looked thoughtful. “I think it might’ve been a hiding place on the Underground Railroad.”

Dick’s eyes widened. “What? How?”

“My parents told me some stories about it. Grandfather William and Grandmother Emily were part of it.”

“That’s amazing!”
“Yes, they were grand people.” Bruce fussed with the blanket. “They were leaders in the Gotham City Abolitionist Society. They were instrumental in raising funds and such.”

“I like the ‘and such’.”

“Yes.” Bruce brushed the hair out of his lover’s eyes. “The cave would have been a perfect hiding place in those antebellum days.” He smiled fondly at Dick. “And you want to explore it right away.”

“Yes!”

Bruce laughed. “Tomorrow. For now, let me get the cards and help you stay awake.”

Alfred brought fresh tea and Dick and Bruce played cards for the rest of the day. When Dick was finally allowed to get some sleep, Bruce went downstairs to the library. He stood in front of the bookcase and pondered.

He began searching through the books and found a slender, black-bound volume with the title stamped in gold: **MY JOURNAL**. He carefully leafed through the pages, their brittle, yellowing leaves filled with fading blue ink in an elegant hand. He began to read:

& & & & & &

**September 27, 1859**

*Our latest group of runaways arrived this evening. We have provided them with blankets, hot food, and thick pallets on which to sleep, well away from any inquisitive persons.*

*This is necessary. Slavery is a blight on our country. I fear the righteous wrath to come for this unpardonable sin.*

& & & & & &

Bruce closed the journal. Written by his grandfather with passages also by his grandmother, it promised to be an amazing journey. He placed it back in the bookcase.

*Dick and I will read it together.*

Satisfied, Bruce left the library, thinking of a busy day ahead tomorrow.
Dick was sore the next morning but no amount of persuasion would keep him in bed. Bruce did not bother to try. As long as Dick was headache-free, he was eager to start exploring, too.

They dressed in hiking clothes, including sturdy boots, and Bruce insisted they take ropes. “If we’re going spelunking, we’re going to do it properly.”

“Spelunking?”

“It means cave exploring.”

“Ah.” Dick paused in pulling on his pants. “I thought you said ‘spanking’.” His eyes twinkled.

Bruce buttoned his shirt while studiously avoiding meeting Dick’s eyes. “You are incorrigible.”

“I try.”

They went downstairs to the library where Alfred was dusting. “All prepared, sir?”

“Yes.” Bruce picked up a lantern from the desk. He also picked up a miner’s helmet with an unlit candle in the center. “We’re ready.”

Dick picked up his lantern and helmet and Alfred handed them sturdy ropes and matches.

“Do be careful, gentlemen.”

“We will, Alfred.” Dick winked at the butler, who smiled back as the dancer followed Bruce down the stairs.
The cave was just as magnificent as it had been yesterday. Bruce was as excited as Dick to see the glittering stalagmites as they moved along the rocky floor. Bats rustled up in the ceiling as the explorers charted a large chamber. The ceiling had to be dozens of feet high, as it was difficult to see at all.

There were dark holes in the cave wall in front of them, and the faint sound of rushing water off to their right. Bruce gestured to the right and Dick nodded, following the older man in that direction.

They found the chamber stretching off into darkness and carefully trekked their way to the sound of the water. Their lanterns swung as they walked, creating spooky arcs of light on the cave walls.

“Careful of sinkholes,” Bruce cautioned. “You could break an ankle.”

Dick grimaced. Such an occurrence was a nightmare for dancers. He looked down at the uneven floor.

They walked for several yards, and the sound of water grew louder. They swung their lanterns and the walls glittered with mica, lending an ethereal cast to the scene. The sound they were tracking became a roar.

Dick could feel cool mist on his skin and smell that distinct damp smell that gallons of water produce. They walked around a large stalagmite and were astounded by the waterfall that suddenly appeared.

It was a roaring lion of magnificence, cool and blue and beautiful. Dick closed his eyes and let the mist touch his skin. It was better than any shower.

When he opened his eyes, Bruce was looking at him with love in that way that never failed to send a shiver through his body. He smiled and saw Bruce blink.

“It’s beautiful,” Dick murmured.

“Yes.” Bruce was still looking at him, not the waterfall.

Dick watched the cascade of water, shifting from foot-to-foot.

“You want to dive in under that water, don’t you?” Bruce’s voice was amused.

“I do! But I don’t fancy walking around in wet clothes, either.”

“Wise decision.” Bruce tapped his chin with his index finger. “You know, cataracts like this usually have a space in back. We could go behind the waterfall, possibly without getting drenched.”

They hiked over the wet rocks, reaching the edge of the curtain of water. Bruce poked around.

“Okay, here.”

Dick followed him, the waterfall splashing them but not completely drenching them. They emerged into daylight and the smell of the ocean.

“The water is trickling toward the open sea,” Dick observed.

The riverbed was filled with stones smoothed by the passage of water and time. It emptied into the sparkling ocean.

The day was beautiful, the kind of clear air and brightness that comes after a storm. Dick took a deep breath, smelling ocean salt and sea air. Bruce seemed to delight in all the sights and smells, too. He climbed up on a rock to get a better view.
“This waterfall is difficult to get to from land or sea, so the cave entrance is safe.”

“Safe?” Dick shielded his eyes from the sun.

“From overly-curious interlopers.”

Dick’s smile was gentle. “I believe Freud calls that being paranoid.”

“He’d be right.”

Dick snorted as he climbed up beside Bruce and was greeted by the sparkling sea. The lighthouse at Point Spruce was clear in the daylight. Tonight the lighthouse keeper would turn on the great light to serve as a beacon for ships.

“We should come out here at night,” Dick said.

“Oh?”

“Sure, with the lighthouse on and the moonlight sparkling on the sea, it’d make a perfect picture.”

“It’s all about setting the stage for you, isn’t it?”

Since Bruce’s tone was affectionate, Dick answered in kind. “Of course! What is life without setting the stage?” He swept his hand out to encompass the vista of beauty stretching out before them.

“Seize the day, my friend, because who knows what may come on the morrow.”

Bruce squinted at him “That sounds suspiciously like a quote from a play.”

Dick smiled smugly. “I’ll never tell.” He put his hand on Bruce’s arm, ostensibly for balance, except that Bruce knew that he had perfect balance.

Dick grinned saucily. He loved teasing Bruce. His lover was able to play along or sigh in exasperation. This time he said, “Careful. Watch your step. The rocks are slippery.”

Dick was aware of the broken ankle danger and tightened his grip. “I’m always careful despite what it may look like.”

Bruce raised an eyebrow and Dick stifled his laughter. He rested his chin on Bruce’s shoulder and they watched a freighter chug toward Gotham Harbor. A flock of seagulls flew by, screeching and squawking.

Dick felt content. He could smell Bruce’s aftershave mingled with the rich smell of tobacco from his pipe. These were smells that were rapidly becoming ‘home’ to him, much like the smells of rich spices in his parents’ wagon. He gently squeezed Bruce’s arm.

Whatever would come, they would always have this moment on a day for which the word ‘perfect’ was invented.
Amongst Dusty Tomes

Chapter Summary

Intense research is the word of the day.

Amongst dusty tomes
The light shines in
Through rainbow-paned
Windows,
As the thirst for
Knowledge
Lives among
Marble busts
And polished floors.

Annabelle Huckabee
"Ode To Learning"
1888 C.E.

Barbara entered the last of the daily statistics in her ledger. It was extremely quiet in the library as it was only a half hour before closing time. She appreciated the lack of patrons. There would be fewer to herd out through the door.

She closed the ledger and plugged the inkwell with its cap. She put away her pen and rose from behind the Reference Desk. Time to start the preliminary closing-up.

She frowned as she heard the front doors opening and footsteps heading toward the Circulation Desk. She disliked last-minute patrons. They rarely considered the staff’s desire to end a long shift.

She went through the lower rooms and drew shut the drapes. Heading up the back stairs, she did the same for the upper rooms, putting books left on tables onto carts for tomorrow’s shelving. She went downstairs, hoping the late patron was gone.

To her delight, not only was the patron still there but she was…

“Miss Troy!”

“Oh, hello, Miss Gordon.” Donna smiled, looking lovely in lavender, complete with large-brimmed hat and sweeping ostrich feather.

“Hello, Miss Troy.”

“I’m sorry to stop by so late. I just wanted to return my books. The Jean Loring mystery was excellent.”
“I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

“Silver Spring’s historical epic was a great read, too. It’s as if she lived back in ancient times!”

“Speaking of ancient times, have you ever read Ben-Hur by General Lew Wallace?”

“No, of course I’ve heard about his novel but have never read it.”

“I can recommend it. A bit too slow in parts, but a good yarn being spun. It’ll take you awhile to read it but you’ll remember it after you’ve finished.”

“Well, then, I consider that a good recommendation.”

“I know exactly where the book is. Would you like to check it out?”

“Yes, I would.”

Barbara lifted her skirts and went swiftly up the stairs, grabbing the book off the shelf. When she returned, Donna was laughing over a joke that Stephanie had made.

“Here it is. Miss Brown, would you please do the honors?”

“Certainly.”

After Donna signed the book’s card, Stephanie stamped the insert in the book with the due date and filed the card. She handed over the thick book with a smile.

“Thank you.” Donna placed it in a canvas bag and looked at Stephanie. “You should go on the vaudeville circuit with that wit, young lady.”

Stephanie laughed. “Thanks, Miss Troy.”

“And, you, Miss Gordon, would you care for a cup of coffee?”

Barbara blinked. “Yes, I’d like that.” She turned to Stephanie. “Could you close up for me, Steph?”

“Sure thing.”

Barbara got her hat and coat and pulled on a pair of gloves as she and Donna went outside.

“What a beautiful night,” Barbara said, taking a lungful of fresh air.

“It is.” Donna pulled on her own gloves. “I know a little café.”

“Lead on, Miss Troy. I could use a bracing cup of hot coffee.”

The two women walked briskly down the street. They went to The Coffee Bean, a small café tucked away on a side street. There were a few patrons at various tables as Donna and Barbara took a table by the window. They ordered coffee and cream pastries.

“Thank you for the invitation.” Barbara placed her napkin in her lap.

“You’re welcome.” The waitress brought over their orders. Donna put cream into her coffee and stirred. “You’re a very smart woman, Miss Gordon. I need your help.”

“Certainly.”
“I need you to research Bruce Wayne for me.”

Barbara raised an eyebrow. “What kind of research?”

“Oh, his personal life. I want to know the romances he’s had in the past, how they ended up, who broke it off…”

“That sounds like work a Pinkerton detective might do.” Barbara took a bite of her pastry.

“Well, it’s also information you may be able to obtain, too. I’ll pay you.”

“There’s no need. As a librarian…”

“…you aren’t paid much. There will be intense research. Please, I would feel better if I could pay you something.”

Barbara hesitated. “All right, I will do some very intense research for you.”

Donna smiled. “Thank you.”

Barbara did not ask why Donna wanted the information. That was her business. Besides, Bruce Wayne was an interesting subject.

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“Good morning, Miss Gordon.”

Barbara looked up, startled. “Oh, hello, Mr. Grayson.”

Dick smiled ingratiatingly at her. “Do you know off-hand if there is a definitive history of Gotham right before and during the Civil War?”

“Hmm.” Barbara closed her book and stood. “I think I have just the thing.”

Dick followed her to the stacks. She took her key ring from her belt and unlocked a door at the back of the room.

“This is our Special Collections Room. I’ll get you what you want.”

Dick waited as Barbara went inside the darkened room, re-emerging with a large tome. “Let’s go over here,” she said. They settled at a long, wooden table and Barbara opened the book.

“See, this section covers the 1850s, particularly the latter part of the decade.” Barbara turned the page. “There’s an extensive section on the War years, and even some postwar.”

“This is exactly what I’m looking for. Does it mention the Gotham Abolitionist Society?”

“Let’s look.” Barbara turned to the index. “Yes, a whole chapter.”

“That’s great.” Dick checked out the index. “I take it this book doesn’t leave the library?”

“You’re correct. As a Special Collection book, it stays here, but you can request to see it any time.”

“Thank you.”

Barbara left Dick to his research and returned to her desk. She was glad that he had not noticed the
picture she had been looking at when he had come over.

She opened the book, *Society Swells Of Gotham*, and found the page she had been reading. The chapter was a glowing puff piece about the Prince of Gotham but gave many details. She made notes and learned that Bruce Wayne was the inheritor of a name that had been privileged even as far back as the Colonial era.

*There wasn’t a generation of his family who wasn’t of the silver spoon.*

Barbara found the chapter fascinating. Not a native of Gotham, she had not grown up with the Prince’s legend.

*Mr. Grayson, you’re involved with a very aristocratic man. Is that what appeals to you? His resemblance to European aristocracy?*

Barbara knew that ballet dancers often practiced inversion. It was not proof that Dick was sleeping with his patron, of course, but if he was, that was his business.

She wondered if Donna was in love with Dick. Was that why she wanted Bruce’s romantic history? To prove to Dick that his handsome patron was not serious with his romantic partners?

*It would be satisfying to know, but I’m sure she’ll keep her own counsel.*

Some of his romances were listed in this chapter. Some women were socialites while others were actresses and ballerinas. It was an impressive list.

*Keeps busy for a member of the idle rich.*

She wrote down the names and professions. How they broke up was not mentioned. She continued reading and paused. Her eyebrows rose.

*Well, now that’s interesting.*

She wrote down the name and quickly finished the chapter. Closing the book, she re-shelved it and wandered over to where Dick was sitting.

“How’s the research going?”

Dick looked up with a dazzling smile. “Very well, thank you. How was *Society Swells*?”

Barbara managed not to look surprised. “Some light reading.”

“That’s good. You probably read such deep stuff that some fluff is necessary, eh?”

“Um, yes.” Barbara fixed the bow at the back of her dress.

“I bet you read *Harper’s* and *The Atlantic Monthly.*”

She smiled. “I do.”

Dick nodded in satisfaction. “I knew it.”

“Do you need any further help?”

“No, thank you.” Dick smiled again. What did you think about the *Atlantic* cover story last month about…?”
Barbara found herself drawn into a serious discussion as she sat down, impressed by Dick’s intellectual prowess. Most dancers were self-absorbed, but this man seemed interested in the world.

“The writer really laid out the facts,” Barbara said.

“Wasn’t he the same writer who reported on the San Francisco earthquake last year?”

“You know, I believe you’re right.”

Dick put his pencil down and flexed his fingers. He had a long list of notes on his paper. “When we read about it in the European papers, we were shocked.”

“It certainly made news here in the States.”

Dick looked pensive. “Of course, I didn’t know Bruce yet, but we discussed it after we were acquainted with each other. It must have been hell on earth.”

“Yes.” Barbara was impressed by Dick’s seriousness. He was usually so cheerful. “Please feel free to ask me or Miss Brown if you need help.”

“Thank you.”

Barbara returned to her desk, smiling slightly. So Dick had noticed her book. Somehow, she was not surprised.

*Well, I doubt that he knows this little fact: that Bruce Wayne had a torrid romance during his Harvard years with prima ballerina Selina Kyle.*
Of Pubs 'N' Bistros

Chapter Summary

Boys' and girls' nights out are enjoyed.

"Good food and good company are life's joy."

Sir Malcolm Bridges
English Literary Critic

The rain cleared and swept out to sea. Brilliant days followed, and it was autumn’s last burst of glory for 1907. The last of the harvest poured forth its bounty in the form of shiny, red apples, yellow, orange and green gourds, and fat, orange pumpkins.

Halloween approached, and everyone in Wayne Manor prepared for it. Alfred baked apple and pumpkin pies, making fresh ones as soon as the older ones were consumed. Dick rhapsodized about the flavor of pumpkin and conducted extra work-outs hard after eating pie every day.

Bruce and Dick decided on their costumes, and with Alfred’s help, came up with top-notch outfits, as Bruce said in satisfaction. Dick agreed, pleased with his costume.

“I can hardly wait for All Hallows’ Eve.”

“Soon, darling, soon,” Bruce said fondly.

Dick did a quick twirl across the parlor rug. “Can’t wait.” He grinned saucily.

Bruce rolled his eyes while Dick laughed. “I have to go into town. Would you like to accompany me?”

Dick nodded. “Let me get my work-out clothes. We have rehearsal this morning.”

Regan drove them into town, the horses’ hooves clip-clopping on the road. Once in town they made plans to leave for lunch and parted ways as Bruce went to the Wayne foundation Building and Dick to the Gotham Opera House.

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“Whew, Jean-Paul sure gave us a work-out, huh?” Dick wiped his face with a towel.

“That’s for sure.” Donna wiped her neck. “What bee is in his bonnet?”

Dick grinned. “Who knows? If he’s not complaining about something, he’s not happy.”

She laughed. “Very true.”

“How’s your ankle?”
“Just about as good as new.” She flexed it.

“Good.” He stretched, arching his back. “Once we start the second half of the season, you’ll get more prominent roles because of better stamina.”

Donna sighed. “I hope so.”

Dick squeezed her shoulder. “I know so.”

She smiled. Roy came over and clapped Dick on the shoulder. “You ready for tonight?”

“Yes.”

Donna raised an eyebrow. “What’s on for tonight?”

“Boys’ night out,” Roy said loftily.

“Well, la-di-da.”

Dick grinned. “You won’t miss anything. Just dark bars with lots of cigar smoke and chest-puffing.”

“You’re right, I won’t miss anything.”

Dick and Roy grinned.

“I don’t smoke.”

Roy regarded Dick skeptically. “You drink, don’tcha?”

“You know I do.”

“Then you’ll fit right in.”

Roy approved of Dick’s outfit of tweed jacket and pants. He had warned his friend not to wear his usual flamboyant clothing.

“We want to blend in, and trust me, purple pants don’t cut it.”

Dick had made a face but he followed Roy’s advice, and now both walked down a dark side street in conventional tweed and corduroy, wearing bowler hats and brown kid gloves. Roy twirled a cane and Dick approved, using his own decorative cane to knock the pavement as he strolled.

“Ah, here’s where we start,” Roy said in satisfaction.

A very weathered sign swung in the wind, creaking as the faded words O’Malley’s Pub showed beneath a painted green shamrock. As Roy pulled the door open, a burst of raucous laughter tumbled out.

“Always something going on in an Irish pub,” Roy said with a wink.

Dick followed him into a dark interior. Smoke wreathed the denizens’ heads as mugs of ale were raised. A vigorous dart game was going on in the corner, and several men in a booth were lustily singing a bawdy song.

The walls were decorated with shamrocks and pictures of Ireland. One area featured framed political
cartoons and an old piano was shoved up against one wall. Peanut shells littered the floor and crunched beneath their shoes as Roy led Dick to a corner booth as he signaled the grizzled bartender for two beers.

Dick slid into the booth as Roy did the same from the other end. It was a circular booth and Dick smiled as he soaked up the atmosphere. One of the bawdy singers staggered over to the piano and sat down, running his fingers over the keys.

“This place is certainly as advertised,” Dick said with a twinkle.

“Yes, a place for manly men,” said Roy as he thumped his chest.

The bartender brought over the beers. Dick tasted his and was satisfied.

“I don’t think lavender would fly here.” Roy took a long sip of his beer. The piano player began a tune, joined by the impromptu band of singers.

“Yeah, I think you’re right.” Dick observed the men here. They might be willing to spend money on a ticket to the ballet (though most would not be able to afford it) to impress a woman, but they would not tolerate flamboyant ballet dancers in the midst of their manly enclave.

Pretty narrow-minded attitude, but they’re not alone.

“Do you come here often?” Dick asked his companion.

“Occasionally.” Roy tipped his bowler over his eyes. “No one knows me except as the guy who shows up once in awhile.”

Dick could understand the desire for anonymity. One of the things he liked best about being Nightingale was the mask. He enjoyed the freedom it gave him like an actor upon the stage.

“So, how’s life at the Manor? Breakfast in bed every morning and pheasant-under-glass every night?”

Dick laughed. “No, we all have to come down to breakfast. And the pheasants only once a week, tops.”

Roy laughed, too. “I bet you have plans for Halloween.”

Dick nodded. “We’ve got invitations to the Ellery Townsend masquerade ball.”

“Wow! That’s one of the big social events of the season, I hear.”

“Should be interesting.” Dick took another sip of beer. “The costumes and settings are usually creative. The rich ones’ money can come up with grandeur, but the people are often crashing bores.”

Roy signaled for fresh beers and soda bread. “Does that include our oh-so-generous benefactor?”

“Bruce can be a bit stuffy at times.” Dick smiled his thanks as the bartender brought over the food and drinks. “He’s a lot less pompous than the rest of his set, though.”

“Good to hear.” Roy split off a hunk of bread. “Good for you, too.”

“Oh, yes.” Dick sampled the bread and nodded approvingly. “It’s much easier to be the houseguest of an interesting man than a bore.”
“I’d say so,” Roy said in amusement. “Do you think our prima ballerina will stay on with us?”

“So far I’d say yes.” Dick pulled apart his bread into bite-size chunks. “Selina hasn’t indicated to me any desire to move on.”

“She’s a talent, all right. She made a big splash in Boston, I hear.”

“I heard that, too.” Dick took a sip of beer. “She would do well in Europe.”

“Well, if we lose her, it’ll be for the bright lights of New York.”

“You’re probably right.” Dick propped his chin on his hand. “She’s certainly as talented as you say.”

Roy leaned back. “She’s an interesting woman.”

“I agree with you about that.”

They both sighed, appreciative of feminine beauty, and a raucous burst of laughter accompanied the piano.

“So, what are your costumes to be?” asked Roy.

Dick smiled enigmatically.

& & & & & & &

“To us, ladies.”

Stephanie and Donna clinked glasses with Barbara’s as they drank their wine in the charming little bistro that Stephanie had recommended. It was a little on the bohemian side, allowing three unescorted women inside and ordering alcohol. It was definitely not an ice cream parlor or tearoom, offering sarsaparilla and herbal tea.

Barbara was impressed. Apparently her spunky librarian associate had hidden facets. She filed away that observation for the future.

“So, what’s it like to dance?” Stephanie asked Donna. “Is it fun or a lot of work?”

“Both.” Donna took a bite of her green beans. She had chosen steak and au gratin potatoes sprinkled with red pepper flakes. “Your feet take a beating.”

“Ouch.” Stephanie scooped up some creamy mashed potatoes. “It must be worth it to you, though.”

“Oh, yes, it is. You can only survive rehearsals if you love to dance.”

“That dreamy Dick Grayson is a patron,” Stephanie sighed.

“A patron? Oh, you mean of the library.”

“Yes. ‘Customers’ isn’t quite right, as most of our services are free.” She ate an asparagus spear as she cut a piece of pork loin.

Barbara was happy with her haddock and French fries. Here in Gotham, fish was fresh off the docks. She added a touch of vinegar to her fries and coleslaw.

“Vinegar?” Donna raised an eyebrow.
Barbara smiled. “A little something I picked up in Canada. Here, try one.”

Donna accepted a fry and her eyes widened. “That is good. Are you Canadian, Miss Gordon?”

“No, I had a fellowship for the University of Toronto as part of their foreign exchange program. And you might as well call me Barbara now that we’re bistro buddies. And you ate my French fry!”

Emboldened, Donna took another fry with her fork while Stephanie giggled.

“Did you get your library degree in Toronto?” asked Donna after munching on the vinegar-laced fry with satisfaction.

“I did. Toronto’s a beautiful city. Very cosmopolitan.”

“And French-Canadian gentlemen of note?” Donna wiggled her eyebrow.

Barbara laughed. “They’re mostly in Montreal. They do have wonderful culture in Toronto, including a world-class museum and a ballet company.”

“So it’s not all moose and beavers?”

Barbara chuckled. “No. They do have handsome Canadian Mounties in red serge all over the place.”

“Do they always get their man?” Donna asked slyly.

“I expect they do.” Barbara ate a piece of haddock with a gleam in her eye.

Stephanie knew something was up. She rolled her eyes and declared, “Loose women.”

Barbara patted Stephanie’s arm. “You’re part of us now.”

“Cheers!” Stephanie raised her wineglass and her companions clinked it again.

They chattered amiably and Stephanie left to visit the ladies’ room.

“Bruce Wayne is a definite playboy, but did you know that he and Selina Kyle enjoyed a whirlwind romance in Boston when he was an undergraduate at Harvard?”

“Who dumped whom?”

“That I don’t know. It’ll require further research. Has she mentioned knowing Wayne before?”

Donna shook her head. “Not a word.”

“Well, maybe she isn’t the kiss-and-tell type.”

“Maybe.” Donna sipped her wine. “Keep digging, especially on Selina.”

“All right.”

Barbara briefly wondered if her new friend was gathering information for less-than-honorable purposes. She had been following stories on the ballet company since Dick Grayson had joined, and if Donna had not injured her foot, she might have given Selina competition for the lead roles in the productions.

As Stephanie returned, Barbara filed away her thoughts. She liked Donna, but ambition was a powerful thing.
“Dick Grayson is definitely a dreamboat,” Donna was saying to Stephanie.

Definitely keep an eye on Donna Troy.
Bruce and Dick attend Ellery Townsend’s Halloween Ball.

Magic is in the air,
On this Night of Nights,
Like sapphires dropped
From Heaven.

Mallory Revere
"All Hallows’ Eve"
1901 C.E.

Dick put the finishing touches on his costume as the doorbell rang. He raced downstairs and watched Alfred hand out candy to children costumed as a Witch, ghost, and clown. Their chorus of “Trick-or-treat!” when he had opened the door made Dick smile. He watched as they scurried down the walkway.

“What a charming custom.”

Alfred closed the door. “Out in the countryside they tend more toward pranks. Here in the city the children are more interested in sweets.”

“So am I.” Dick winked as he snatched a sweet off the tray that the butler had set on the pier table.

“Master Dick, those are for the children!”

Dick grinned as he semi-danced down the hall. Reaching the library, he said breezily, “Don’t you look dashing, Mr. Holmes?”

“So do you, Mr. Watson.” Bruce bowed.

Dick strutted in his Victorian-style suit. “Appropriate costumes as we’ll be working as the Raven and the Nightingale tonight.”

“Yes, thanks to Miss Gordon’s tip. Her sharp eyes noticed that item in The Gotham Gazette.”

“I wonder why it was such a small item?”

Bruce adjusted his cravat. He liked the black color of his suit. “I suspect Ellery had a hand in that. He didn’t want a big splash to attract attention, especially the Gold Coast Burglar, if he’s still around.”

“Then why put the item in the paper at all?”

“Ah, men like Ellery can’t help themselves. His acquisition of the Star of Isis is simply too good not
to let the world know.” Bruce picked up his hat off the desk. “We should get going.”

“Can’t we stay for a few more minutes?”

Bruce looked at his lover fondly. “All right, we can watch for a few more kids.”

“Think you know me well?” Dick teased.

“I don’t think so, I know so.”

Dick led the way out of the library to the foyer. Over the next half hour they saw a princess, ballerina, cowboy, another ghost and Witch, and a scarecrow. His delight continued unabated.

“Ready?” Bruce asked as the clock struck 7:30.

“Ready.”

Reagan held the carriage door open and the lovers stepped inside. They were off, “like Cinderella to the ball,” Dick said saucily.

Bruce laughed and Dick was happy to see it. Bruce tended to be a little too serious, in his opinion.

They arrived at the Townsend estate, and Dick admitted silently that he was impressed. The mansion was huge but graceful with white Ionic columns and a red brick façade. It was lit up with shining electric lights and decorated with grinning Jack O’Lanterns and candles. Dick approved of the overall effect.

“Remember, no introductions. Everyone’s anonymous until midnight,” Bruce said.

Reagan would take the carriage back home. Since the Manor was close, Bruce had told him that they would call when they needed him back. The groom touched his whip handle to his hat and drove off.

The Townsend butler opened the door. A distinguished-looking Negro, William offered a gracious greeting. Bruce and Dick nodded silently as they stepped inside, handing over their cloaks. Each retained his hat as part of his costume. While Bruce wore a simple but well-cut black suit with deerstalker cap and short cape, Dick wore a tweed suit with leather elbow patches and a bowler hat. Both wore glittering domino masks.

The foyer was draped in black crepe and the chandelier was festooned with fake cobwebs. Music drifted into the foyer from the ballroom. Bruce led Dick down the hall to the ballroom, a cavernous room with muted lighting and more black crepe draping the walls. The crepe was decorated with luminescent ghosts, bats and cats. The chandeliers were draped in black-and-orange streamers as the low-wattage bulbs cast an eerie glow.

The orchestra was dressed in skeleton costumes as they played ragtime tunes and dancers whirled on the floor. Bruce and Dick skirted the edge of the dance floor. Bruce took out an oversized magnifying glass and pretended to scrutinize the buffet table.

Carving stations offered roast beef, turkey and ham while platters of fresh French green beans, yellow beans, and radishes were mixed with dishes of pickles, green peppers, and deviled eggs in a plate especially designed for the latter with a ceramic chicken in the center. Chunks of lobster rested on beds of cracked ice, along with salmon and rainbow trout. Bread included dinner rolls, Wonder Bread and raisin bread. There was pumpkin custard with shaved cinnamon, pumpkin and apple pies, and Black Forest cake. Beverages included sparkling champagne, wine and icewater with lemon and lime slices.
Dick picked up a plate and immediately chose lobster, French green beans and dinner rolls. Bruce took turkey, peppers and two deviled eggs. They both chose wine and ate hearty as they watched the couples on the dance floor.

“Let’s go find the Star of Isis,” Bruce murmured after they polished off pieces of pumpkin pie. Dick nodded and they left the ballroom, setting a leisurely pace toward the library.

Two policemen guarded the entrance and another man stood in a corner of the library. The Star of Isis was nestled on a lavender satin pillow on a marble dais. The flawless sapphire sparkled in the light of two black candles. Dick smelled the scent of patchouli.

He was surprised that there was not a crowd viewing the jewel. It was a testament to Ellery Townsend’s events planner (he had no wife or daughter) that people were having so much fun that they had forgotten about the Star of Isis.

He approached it with the proper reverence. Any gem with its own name deserved such treatment.

The jewel was a star sapphire, its beauty breathtaking. Dick feasted his eyes on it as his fingers itched to touch it.

“Here.” Bruce handed him the magnifying glass.

Dick eagerly took it, viewing the sapphire and noting its flawless beauty. “Magnificent,” he murmured.

“I agree.” Bruce glanced around. “Good security, but…”

“Yes.” Dick was thinking of the Gold Coast Burglar. “If he’s laying low…”

“…he’ll definitely try for this score.”

The presentation was excellent with the satin pillow and the tiny ebony cat statues flanking the display. Their eyes were set with sapphire chips. Dick handed the glass back to Bruce.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, it appears that Mr. Townsend has a winner here.”

“Quite so, Dr. Watson.”

The guard stifled a smile at the badinage. Dick tut-tutted as he responded, “The mysteries of Egypt are an amazing thing.”

“Ancient questions and answers do fascinate.”

“Quite, quite.” Dick was satisfied with his British accent.

He could hear Bruce stifle his laughter. “We should pop over and get some fish ‘n’ chips tomorrow night.”

“That would be ducky, guv’nor.”

They left the library and stopped in the hall. Dick asked, “What should we do next, Sherlock?”

Bruce’s teeth gleamed in a predatory smile. “We wait for the Gold Coast Burglar.”

Dick agreed that the infamous thief would try for the sapphire. “Should we stay close to the library?”
“Too suspicious-looking. We’d better get back to the ballroom. Mingle for about ten minutes, then go outside and work your way around to the library. I’ll keep an eye on things in here.”

Dick nodded and separated from Bruce as they entered the ballroom.

& & & & &

Bruce was certain that the thief would show up. The Star of Isis was far too tempting.

*It’s a perfect scenario. Everyone’s masked and while there’s security, I doubt this master thief will find it daunting.*

In his opinion, it was the height of foolishness to display such a precious gem on a night when everyone’s identity was hidden.

*You can’t tell some millionaires anything.*

He danced with Marie Antoinette and next with Martha Washington. He bowed and drifted out of the ballroom, drinking a glass of icewater with a lemon slice as he strolled down the hall.

& & & & &

Dick also danced twice, once with an Oriental dancing girl and, ironically, with a ballerina. He gradually disentangled himself and went outside, glad his heavy tweed jacket warded off the chill. He admired the gardens, resplendent with orange, gold and dark-red chrysanthemums. Several pumpkins were arranged in the flowerbeds, too.

He strolled through the gardens, pretending to simply be taking the air. He came upon the library and sat on a marble bench to commence his vigil.

& & & & &

Bruce somehow managed to remain inconspicuous, drinking his icewater and talking with people walking by. Several gushed about the Star of Isis, which Bruce agreed with. One woman dressed as a Roman in toga and black wig gushed about it.

“Oh, I would love to own that beauty!”

Other partygoers swept by as he talked with her, most in costumes from ancient times. A woman dressed as Cleopatra glanced at them, her circlet’s beads clacking.

“It’s perfect in every way,” said Roman Woman.

“Oh, very much so. Much like you.”

She laughed prettily. “Thank you, Mr. Holmes.” She walked away, swinging her hips in a way guaranteed to keep Bruce’s attention. He sighed in appreciation.

He continued his vigil, keeping his mind sharp as he tried to figure out what costumes friends like Eleanor Winchester was wearing. Had he talked to her without even realizing it?

The group in classical costumes came back from the library, but Cleopatra was not with them.

*Dick must be in position by now. I think it’s time to make a return visit to the library.*

Suddenly, the lights went out.
Dick stretched, looking up at the moon. He kept an eye on the library with his peripheral vision.

*If the Gold Coast Burglar is going to strike, it should be soon. This is the hour with the most attendance. The best cover is now.*

He wished Bruce was out here with him. It was romantic out here under the stars. He could *feel* the magic in the air.

He heard a clacking sound just before he literally saw stars of his own, slumping down to the cold ground.

Bruce had come prepared. He dug a candle out his jacket pocket and lit it with a match. The long, black candle would burn a long time before the flame reached his fingers. He hurried toward the library.

The two guards at the entrance were slumped to the floor, broken wineglasses next to them. He entered the library, the flames from the candle flickering eerily on the walls. The other policeman was on the carpet. Cleopatra was reaching for the Star of Isis, the gold bracelets on her upper arm glinting in a shaft of moonlight.

“Stop right there, Your Majesty.”

Cleopatra froze, her white silk gown hugging every curve. She turned her head, the beads clacking. “I don’t think you’ll stop me,” she said in a breathy voice.

“I think so, Selina.”

A sensuous smile spread across her face. “So you knew.”

Bruce reached into his pocket and took out the emerald brooch. “Green was always your favorite color.”

“You knew right away?”

He shook his head. “No, but I gradually figured it out. I figured you’d have a good idea of the set-up since you’ve been seeing Townsend.”

Selina’s green eyes glittered through the holes in her domino mask. “A good guess, Bruce. You were always smart, one of the things I liked about you.”

“Thank you.” Bruce edged closer. He wondered where Dick was. “Turn yourself in, Selina.”

Her smile grew predatory. “I don’t think so.”

Bruce’s stomach fluttered. “I’ve caught you red-handed.”

“Maybe so, but you’re going to let me go.”

His mouth was dry. “And why would I do that?”

“You know why.”
“Damnit, Selina…”

She raised a finger. “Tsk-tsk, my dear. Perhaps you’ll be more careful in the future with your…
private life.” He could hear the bitterness underlying her admonishing tone. “Now just let me take
my prize and I’ll be gone.”

“Selina…” Bruce hated the entreaty in his voice but he had no choice.

Selina plucked the Star of Isis from its resting place. Her face lit up as the candlelight from her own
candle illuminted the sapphire. “Beautiful.”

Bruce remained still as a statue, his muscles so tight that they hurt. The light from his candle danced
crazily on the walls as his hand shook.

“Enjoy your romance with your luscious dancer, my dear. He is truly a beautiful specimen. Helluva
dancer, too.” Selina carefully deposited the sapphire in a blue velvet pouch. She quickly snatched the
two cat statues. “Come to Catwoman, babies,” she crooned.

She put everything into a larger bag and threw on a black cloak. She paused in front of the French
doors. “Happy Halloween, Mr. Holmes.”

She slipped out of the French doors into the moonlit gardens, the faint scent of patchouli trailing after
her. Bruce’s candle flame guttered, then winked out in the cold gust of air.
Chapter Summary

The morning after the Halloween Ball.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"It was a wild night at the Halloween Ball."

Vicki Vale
"THE STAR OF ISIS STOLEN!"
The Gotham Gazette
November 1, 1907

Dick ruefully touched the back of his head, Alfred tut-tutting as he offered him a hot cup of tea on a tray.

“Thank you, Alfred.”

“Drink up, Master Dick. It will do you good.”

Dick was stretched out on the couch in the front parlor in his gold lame pajamas and yellow robe. A fire crackled in the fireplace.

Bruce entered the parlor. “How are you?”

“Still a bit of a headache.” Dick sipped his tea. “That thief packs quite a wallop.”

“Er, yes.” Bruce leaned over the couch. “Quite a bit of excitement.”

“No kidding, Sherlock.”

Alfred was looking steadily at Bruce. “Care for tea, sir?”

“Yes, thank you.”

The butler left the parlor and Bruce came around the couch and sat down. “I hate it that you got knocked cold.”

Dick grinned ruefully. “I’m not crazy about it myself.”

“What a night.”

“It’s such a shame that you got to the library too late. That burglar is one fast cat!”

“Cat?”
“Yeah, as in ‘cat burglar’.”

“Oh, yes.”

Dick sipped more tea. “Are you all right?”

“Of course. I wasn’t the one who got knocked on the bean!”

“Don’t blame yourself.”

Bruce rubbed Dick’s thigh. “Some Raven I am.”

“Well, I wasn’t much of a Nightingale! I guess we’ll have to check on our friendly neighborhood fence.”

“I’ll do that.” Bruce accepted the teacup that Alfred proffered to him. “You just rest.”

Dick let out an exaggerated sigh. “Yes, sir.”

“Hmph.”

Bruce and Dick talked while Alfred returned to the kitchen. When they had exhausted the topic of the robbery, Dick asked, “Did you read my notes on the Abolitionist Society?”

“I did. Hard to believe that Ellery Townsend’s ancestors were members.”

“Truly.”

“Yes, well, descendants are often different.”

“Mmm.” Dick set his teacup on a coaster on the coffee table. “Do you think the Gold Coast Burglar will strike again?”

“I think…he…will not be seen again.”

& & & & & &

Barbara read the paper as she waited at The Taste Of Paris Café. She ate a buttery croissant while drinking a demitasse. It was too cold to sit at one of the sidewalk tables, and the owner would be putting them into storage soon, anyway.

It was a good breakfast crowd. Maybe she would order another croissant. The tiny bells over the door jingled.

“Sorry I’m late,” Donna apologized as she set her parasol against the wall and took the chair opposite Barbara.

“Perfectly all right. I know it’s early for a ballerina.”

Donna chuckled. “Try lead ballerina.”

“Yes, I’ve been reading the story. So Selina Kyle decided not to re-sign with the Gotham Ballet Company?”

“That’s right. Roy told me that she’d decided a few days ago.”

“She’s already signed with the Metropolis Ballet Company.”
“She must have gotten the offer before telling Jean-Paul she was done.”

The waiter came over and Barbara suggested, “Order the croissant.”

Donna took her advice. After the waiter had left, she leaned forward. “What have you got for me?”

“Bruce dumped Selina.”

“Hmm.” Donna leaned back. “I suppose it’s not unusual. Once a rich kid is done with a dancer or actress, he usually dumps her.”

“Selina the type to take getting dumped without protest?”

Donna smiled knowingly. “Not unless it served her purposes.”

“Ah.”

Donna’s croissant and demitasse were brought. She thanked the waiter and asked Barbara, “I suppose it’s front-page news about the robbery at the Townsend Halloween Ball last night?”

“Banner headline.” Barbara showed Donna the paper.

“I’ll have to get the dope from poor Dick.”

“Poor Dick?”

“Yes, apparently the Burglar conked him on the head in the gardens.”

“Oh, dear! Is he all right?”

“Mr. Pennyworth assured me he’s fine when I called this morning. I’m going for a visit after rehearsal.”

“That thief is one bold gentleman.”

“I agree.” Donna skimmed the story. “He even took the priceless ebony cat statues!”

Barbara took a bite of her croissant. “He seems pretty thorough.”

Donna laughed. “Apparently.” She turned the page. “Ah, here’s a story on Dick. Nothing too detailed, just what Mr. Pennyworth told me.”

“Who’s Mr. Pennyworth?”

“The butler.”

“Of course,” Barbara said dryly.

“Thank you for the information on Bruce and Selina.”

“I got it from a ballet publication. I had to do some digging as it was some years ago, but it was a glossy little publication that happily included gossip.”

“Ah, the lifeblood of the theater: the grapevine!”

Barbara chuckled. She took back the paper and read the item about Dick. “I wonder if we’ve seen the last of Miss Selina Kyle?”
“I would bet no.” Donna bit into her flaky croissant.

“What is it, Alfred?”

Bruce entered the kitchen as Alfred prepared lunch. The butler looked at him with a neutral expression.

“Did you let her go?”

Bruce automatically looked over his shoulder. Of course no one was there. Dick was still on the couch.

Bruce turned back to Alfred. He did not bother to ask who the woman was whom Alfred had referred to.

“Yes.”

Alfred stifled a sigh. “A most dangerous move, sir.”

“Not one taken lightly.”

Alfred resumed chopping carrots. “What about Master Dick?”

Bruce looked guilty. “I can’t tell him.”

“About last night or 1903?”

“Both.”

Alfred paused in his chopping. “Master Bruce, if your young man ever finds out you kept all this from him…”

“I’m well aware of the consequences but you know it’s more than Selina knowing my…tastes. I could survive that scandal as rough as it would be, but the other secret she knows?” He shook his head. “I can’t tell him.”

“Very well, sir.”

Alfred’s tone indicated his disapproval. He could see the sadness in Bruce’s eyes, so restrained himself from further comment. Bruce left the kitchen to return to the parlor.

“I do hope you are correct in keeping this from Master Dick, sir, but I fear this will blow up in your face someday,” Alfred said quietly.

With a sigh, he resumed chopping the carrots for lunch.

Chapter End Notes

Looks like Bruce dodged a bullet this time! Will he do so a second time in The Book Raven And The Nightingale Book III: Cherry Blossoms? Hint: Selina returns!
Join Bruce and Dick as they journey to Washington, D.C. and become involved in intrigue, political and personal!

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