**Love & Malice**

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**Love & Malice**

by **MsMojoRisin**

**Summary**

With Selina Kyle by his side, Bruce Wayne returns to Gotham to fulfill his family's legacy. After a brutal crime, he learns that Selina's ghosts can no longer be ignored and he must investigate her mysterious past.
The Beginning

Chapter Notes

A/N: Just a warning that if you’re looking for Batman and Catwoman you won’t find them in this story. I understand the comics have different approaches to Selina’s backstory but it doesn’t seem like there’s a definitive history so I feel I can play away! All ideas are inspired by the Nolan movies. Thank you for reading!

Prologue

“You know, Bruce,” Selina said, taking his hand as she stepped out of the black Mercedes. “I believe this is the first time I’ve come to one of these things through the front door.”

“We could scale the wall and enter through one of the attic rooms if that’ll make you more comfortable.” Bruce’s arm tightened around her waist as if to ward off the icy bite of the December night air.

“And deprive that poor freezing man the opportunity do his job?” She nodded toward the extravagantly uniformed man that had just opened the heavy front door to the Wackford-Squeers mansion. “He’s probably grateful for the brief movement!”

They walked quickly toward the inviting warmth the open door promised. Bruce indicated his thanks with a slight nod to the doorman whose face was bright red from the cold wind. He sensed Selina’s irritation at paying a guy to stand in the cold just to open doors but she squeezed his arm to let him know she wasn’t that irritated.

Once inside the brightly lit entrance hall, they were greeted by a large, balding man impeccably decked out in an understated tuxedo. The man looked as imposing as ever, better suited for dock work than butler work but Bruce remembered his kindness and sympathy when he had visited the family as a teenager.

“Mr. Sykes, right?”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Wayne.” Sykes smiled, pleased at being remembered. “It’s very good to see you again.” His eyes passed quickly to Selina acknowledging her presence yet not expecting an introduction. “Lydia will take your coats, if you please.” He gestured toward a maid who had quietly approached. “The guests are gathered on the second floor ballroom. I trust you remember the way, sir?”

“I do, thank you.” Bruce turned to help Selina out of her black overcoat and sighed at what he saw underneath.

Her dress was a floor length gown that clung to her body elegantly accentuating her curves. The deep, dark purple fabric was deceptively sheer except for artfully arranged floral designs that hid the more intimate parts of her body. He speculated that a simple tug of the thin straps that held it up would result in the entire thing gracefully slipping down her naked form to pool in small bundle about her high heeled shoes.
His gaze met hers, her eyes filled with amusement and anticipation. She smiled back at him as she walked toward the broad staircase, her heels clicking authoritatively against the black and white checkered floor.

He glanced back to gauge the reaction of the straight laced butler. The cold look he saw in the man’s eyes startled him but, in an instant, the disturbing gleam vanished replaced by the blank gaze that was expected of good servants. Bruce inwardly sighed; it was going to be a long night.

“That’s quite a dress,” he commented, following her up the stairs.

She ascended a few steps ahead of him so he could get a good look at the deep cut of the back and the way the dress moved across her bottom.

“Do you like it?” She glanced at him over her shoulder, smiling with flirty promise, her hands smoothing over her hips, drawing his eyes back to her body. “I wanted to make a good impression for your friends.”

At the top of the staircase, she paused to wait for him. When he reached her, he leaned over to whisper in her ear: “They’ll especially love the peanut butter.”

The playful, sultry attitude vanished instantly as she twisted around to see her backside.

“Dammit! I thought I got it all.” She licked her fingers, dabbing at the spot uncaring to the maid and butler watching from below. “Why couldn’t it have been the grape jelly? At least it would have matched.”

They shared an amused glance as she finished cleaning the spot. “Better?”

He nodded and took her hand, kissing it lightly before tucking it into the crook of his arm.

It was a few days after Christmas; strings of white lights mixed with evergreen branches lined the walls of the expansive hallway. They walked unhurriedly toward the ballroom, stopping at the entrance for a brief moment as Bruce surveyed the room seeing many faces that were vaguely familiar. It was his first time to attend a social event as just Bruce Wayne and not spoiled playboy Bruce Wayne. He glanced down at Selina by his side looking lovely and elegant, very pleased he didn’t have to cater to any charades.

“I’m glad you came, Selina,” he said quietly as they walked inside.

“I suppose it’s the least I could do seeing that this is a big deal for someone you actually like and admire. And, I would hate for these people to think you can’t get a date.”

“Oh, Bruce, here you are!” Their hostess, Miriam Wackford, excitedly beckoned Bruce to her. On the other side of seventy, she looked at least ten years younger. As with most of her set, she paid much to stave off the appearance of age. She kissed both of Bruce’s cheeks before settling back to give him a fond look. “We are all so glad you’re not dead! Again! You are like Lazarus!”

“Or a zombie.” Selina added, her voice affecting an innocent tone.

Miriam looked surprised to be addressed by the stranger on Bruce’s arm.

“Miriam,” Bruce said, “this is Selina.”

“Hello.” Miriam’s tone became frostier unaccustomed to being introduced to one of Bruce Wayne’s women. “What a lovely dress, my dear.”
“Thank you. And may I say that your necklace is beautiful.”

“You may. It’s been in the family for generations,” she said dismissively before turning her attention back to Bruce. “It really is so good to see you, Bruce. Daniel said you were coming but I didn’t believe him.”

“I couldn’t refuse his personal invitation.”

“Oh, so that’s what it takes to get you out of Wayne Enterprises these days. He’ll have to issue more ‘personal’ invitations.”

She chattered on eager to relay bits of gossip she felt he would find interesting. Bruce listened politely as she informed him of the latest happenings in the family. Selina’s interest in the conversation was nonexistent but Miriam spared nary a glance in her direction and wouldn’t know or care what kept the younger woman’s attention. When Miriam informed Bruce that her dear daughter, “you remember Catherine, of course”, had recently divorced, Selina squeezed his arm before drifting away in the direction of the buffet.

Miriam seemed oblivious to her absence. “You must look up Catherine. Find the senator and you’ll find her. Have you met Senator Brass, yet? He is presenting the award to Daniel. The President was supposed to, you know, but some tragedy somewhere kept him from attending.” She sounded peeved that national affairs took precedence over her party. Bruce pushed his judgment aside reminding himself that this woman had been a good friend of his mother’s.

“It is quite an honor he’s receiving, Miriam.” Bruce said as he looked around the ballroom trying to find their host. “My father would have been pleased for Daniel.”

“He would, wouldn’t he? I’m impressed, Bruce. Here you are honoring one of Thomas’ friends. It’s a good thing to see.” Her look to Bruce was assessing but there was a spark of pride in her gaze until her attention was diverted by the arrival of another guest. “Please, excuse me. We really are happy to see you, Bruce.”

He found Selina across the room, looking bored, sipping champagne, and pointedly ignoring the younger man who hovered nervously at her side. As he wound his way through the crowd to her, he was repeatedly greeted by casual acquaintances but was able to swiftly yet courteously extricate himself from unwanted conversations. He saw Selina watch him work his way to her, amused at the laborious process.

“You do that very well,” she commented when he finally reached her. “Do they teach the art of blowing off people but not seeming to at those fancy schools?”

“First lesson ever.” He took a champagne glass from the waiter passing by, more for something to hold than to drink. Selina downed the last of hers before taking another glass.

“I’m a little disappointed in the so-called open bar,” she said with a little sigh. “It’s only wine or champagne. I had high expectations for expensive whiskey or some fancy concoction that only the very rich know about. Don’t people ever get stupidly drunk at these things?”

“It’s bad form to get drunk at ‘these things’. There’s a senator here.” He pointed to the man holding court on the other side of the room.

Selina did not look impressed. “Well, it’s very different from the parties I’m used to. Lots of drinking, loud music, yelling, fights, setting furniture on fire... The police are almost always called.”
“I doubt if the police have ever been on this street.” Beauchamp Avenue was the most illustrious and exclusive street in central Gotham. The families with residences here were true American blue bloods tracing their heritage back to the Revolutionary war. The street was so exclusive that the newest resident, a respectable man whose family earned their fortune after the Civil War, was still regarded with wariness and he had purchased his Beauchamp home thirty years ago.

“Oh, I’m sure someone around here has called the cops. I seem to remember reading about a theft at the house across the street.”

“These people don’t call the cops, Selina. They have private security to handle that kind of thing. That theft you ‘read’ about was definitely not in the newspapers. You are confusing that theft with another in a different neighborhood. You might want to keep all that straight.”

“They never call the cops? That would have been helpful information a few years ago.” She looked around the room speculatively like she had just been given free rein in a toy store. Remembering who she was with, Selina composed herself giving him an apologetic look. “I’m not going to steal anything, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I wasn’t. There’s no place to hide anything in that dress.”

“Oh, sweetie,” she cooed turning her body so her breasts brushed against his arm. “I thought you were more imaginative than that.”

He smiled, enjoying her. “Every man and some women can’t stop looking at you.”

“Tactics, Bruce. I’d rather some of these people not look at my face too closely.”

“Oh.”

“Besides, they’re looking at you. Me, they are dismissing as one of your many, many floozies. I understand you had quite a reputation concerning your dates.”

“Tactics, Selina.”

“Who have you been taking to these parties?”

“Models, actresses, dancers…” He looked down at her unable to remember the face of a single one of them.

“Poor baby,” she crooned softly. “What a tough, tough, tough cover. It must have been so hard.”

He smiled. “It was. I can think of something else that—” he started before a waft of perfume invaded his senses and two gloved hands slipped over his eyes.

“Guess who?”

Bruce felt a pair of not-real breasts press into his back.

“Catherine.” He was pleased he managed to sound happy it was her but he, most definitely, was not. As a teenager, he had spent a few holidays with the Wackford family. Catherine, being of his general age, initiated some rather interesting teenage exploration escapades. Years later, after he returned to Gotham, and when she was married, she made no secret that she thought an illicit affair would be an interesting diversion for both of them. He didn’t agree but to preserve his cavalier façade he offered the excuse about not wanting to upset her husband which was a little galling as she was married to a serial philanderer who was a coward in every manner possible.
And now she was single. She removed her hands and faced him. She looked much the same, a little harder around the edges, a lot bustier but still a very attractive woman. She also looked on the prowl.

“Bruce, darling,” she crooned, kissing him lightly on the lips. “I understand you’ve been back for weeks and I’ve yet to receive a call. How unbearably rude of you.”

“I’ve been busy at Wayne Enterprises.”

“Don’t you have people to do those kinds of things for you?”

“I do.”

“Bruce, really, rising from the dead has made you so serious! I understand Gotham’s favorite rogue is nothing but business these days. The gossips are dying for something juicy to say about you and you’re giving them nary a morsel.” Catherine turned her assessing gaze onto Selina, missing nothing about the younger woman’s appearance. “He wasn’t always this way, you know.

“What way?” Selina asked.

“So involved with…business things.” She twined her arm in Bruce’s. “Color us all shocked when you returned and, of all things, went to work.”

He risked a glance at Selina who looked more than a little amused at his discomfort. He disentangled his arm from Catherine’s in the politest way possible and stepped closer to Selina.

“Catherine, this is Selina.”

“Hello,” Selina greeted with an obviously fake friendly tone.

“And where did he find you?” Catherine’s gaze to Selina was filled with condescension.

“Around,” Selina said, not at all bothered by Catherine’s blatant snobbery.

“I’ll bet.” Catherine smiled insincerely before returning her predatory gaze to Bruce. “Daddy is delighted you came.”

“I’m pleased to see your father receive such an honor.” He felt like he had said the same thing to a hundred different people tonight. He sipped his champagne, remembering exactly why he hated these things. Selina proved no help, content to stand back and watch him squirm.

“So…” Catherine continued, she was either unaware or ignored his disinterest. “We’re going to Aspen after the new year. Daddy bought a new cabin and we’d love to have you there. It’ll be like old times. Remember how much fun we had? You should come.”

He forced a light laugh. “I have plans. Where is your father?” He asked looking around, wishing vehemently that she’d leave. “I’ve been wanting to say hello.”

“Some important powwow before the award presentation. He’ll be out for the senator’s speech.” She beckoned to another guest. “Bruce, have you met Congressman and Mrs. Gilly? Janice and I are great friends. We’re both heavily involved with the Pets for the Poor project.”

Mrs. Congressman took the opportunity to explain their charity but Bruce wasn’t paying attention. Catherine and the Congressman’s wife appeared oblivious to the tension in their little group. The Congressman stared at Selina in shock. Selina, for her part, gazed placidly at the Congressman.
“Don’t I know you from somewhere?” she asked, her face a picture of innocent curiosity.

“Uh…” he started, his face turning red.

“My husband is the Congressman from this district.” Janice Gilly looked at Selina with amazement as if she couldn’t comprehend someone not knowing her husband. “Surely you are aware of that?”

“Oh, no, I don’t follow politics. I just thought I knew him from somewhere else.”

Bruce had had enough. “Would you excuse us?”

He didn’t wait for an answer not caring if their exit was too abrupt. He led Selina to the dance floor. Taking her champagne glass, he deposited both their glasses on a side table before taking her hand.

“What was that all about?” Bruce asked as he slipped his other hand against her naked back.

She shrugged, trying to show him the situation was not important. “He’s under the impression that I kidnapped him.”

“What?” He almost lost his step.

“A misunderstanding.” She coolly scanned the crowd, before sheepishly meeting his eyes. “You didn’t know about that?”

“No, I didn’t.” He saw the Congressman worriedly looking at her. Bruce hated the unease that crept over him. Before their return to Gotham, he had questioned her extensively asking if there was anyone - enemies, old boyfriends, angry marks – anyone that would object to her showing up again and pose a threat to them. She had assured him no and contrary to what he might think, she wasn’t in the habit of making enemies. He wasn’t buying it so she gave him a few names of people who might bear her ill will. After a few inquiries, Bruce decided the people were no threat and she had probably given him the names to pacify him. She definitely did not mention any elected officials. “Do we have a problem?”

“No.” She said, looking contrite.

He waited for her to expound on the situation but, as expected, no additional explanation was forthcoming.

“Selina…” Bruce replied. “You have to tell me if this is going to be trouble.”

“It’s not. Really. He’s just surprised and probably a little embarrassed.” Her eyes met his. “Believe me, he doesn’t want anyone to remember his little…vacation.”

Bruce stared at her, mentally calculating how much he would have to donate to the Congressman’s reelection campaign as well as Gilly’s wife’s ridiculous charitable cause.

“So,” she said in a tone signaling a drastic change of subject. “If this area is so great, why don’t you have a house here?”

“My family preferred country living.”

“Country living? Is that what that’s called? Maybe your ancestors realized they didn’t want to live near a bunch of assholes.” She looked around hoping no one overheard.

“Your disdain is showing, my dear.”
“I know these Wacky people were kind to you when you were young but the rest of them make it so easy to hate them. They’re so smug and humorless and full of themselves and…”

“We’ll see Daniel, say our congratulations then leave.”

“I’m sorry,” she apologized looking contrite. “It’s just these people were more interesting when I was trying to steal from them.”

After dancing in silence for a few moments, Selina asked: “Do you like being here?” The careless way she said it was too careless.

“No. But I do like that dress.” He pulled her closer, trying to distill the conflict that cropped up between them. His hand slid from her back to cup her bottom, pulling her closer against him.

“What are you doing?” She said in a mock shocked tone. “In front of all these fine Gotham socialites?”

“Checking for peanut butter.”

“I bet this house has all kinds of interesting nooks and crannies.” She whispered into his ear before lightly licking the spot on the back of his ear that was one of his weak points. She’d found them all but that was the one that was the most socially acceptable.

“It does but we’ll miss the Senator’s speech.” He nodded in the direction of a raised platform where people were gathering.

“Oh, a speech! This really is the best kind of party isn’t it?”

The music stopped and the clinking of a champagne flute signaled the commencement of the speeches. As he climbed to the dais, Daniel spotted Bruce and waved causing a number of people in the room to look his direction. Used to be the center of attention, Bruce nodded in acknowledgement and waited for the senator to begin the presentation.

As he listened to Senator Brass extol the virtues of Daniel Wackford, he pushed aside the sadness that usually accompanied him when he visited his parents’ friends. After their death, Daniel had reached out to him, periodically inviting him for holidays and family vacations. The family had meant well, but Bruce had always returned to Wayne Manor feeling more hollow than when he left. But he was happy for his father’s friend. As the senator droned on, Bruce couldn’t resist indulging in a little ‘what if’ imagining his father accepting such an honor.

The clapping that erupted through the ballroom brought him back to reality. Daniel took center stage giving a short speech. As usual, his affability shone through. His speech was self-deprecating, charming, and funny in all the right places. As he concluded he looked directly at Bruce.

“Many of you know that Thomas Wayne and I practically grew up together. He, of course, decided to head west to Stanford then on to the Peace Corps where he met his lovely Martha. They were great friends of ours and always missed. But, happily, their son, Bruce, is here. We’re all thrilled to have him back from the dead. Again.”

A laugh went through the crowd. Bruce smiled good naturedly as Daniel approached him, shaking his hand vigorously.

“Even though I told Miriam you’d be here, I didn’t believe it myself until I saw you. You look…
“Say, I want to talk to you about a deal I think you may be interested in. I’ll have my man call yours to set something up. I think you’ll be interested in what I have to propose.”

“I look forward to hearing it. Daniel, I want you to meet someone.” Bruce reached for Selina whom he thought was just behind him and was surprised to find her gone. He scanned the crowd searching for her. “She must have stepped out,” he said, trying to quell his irritation.

“Too bad. I’m always interested to meet your young ladies,” Daniel replied with a wink.

The senator approached the two men requesting an introduction to Bruce. Bruce politely greeted the politician while inwardly he fought his aggravation at Selina for disappearing. After an acceptable amount of time passed, Bruce excused himself to search for Selina who was nowhere in sight.

He found her just outside the ballroom.

“I’m ready to leave,” she said as soon as she saw him. She looked distracted and agitated.

“Did something happen with the Congressman?” He looked back toward the ballroom worried that the politician would be a much bigger problem than he thought.

“I just remembered why I hate these people,” she said, bitterly.

“That’s a little harsh, Selina.”

She raised a hand to her forehead. “I just got a really awful headache is all.”

“What just happened?” Bruce’s anger transformed to concern. There was a look in her eyes that he’d never seen before.

“Nothing!” She said, angrily. “Can we just go? Please?” Without waiting for him, she headed down the hall toward the staircase.

Bruce watched her walk away realizing that even though he had spent the last four years of his life with her, maybe he didn’t know Selina Kyle at all.
The afternoon sun shined brightly through the wall of massive windows bathing the spacious
Gotham penthouse in a warm glow. The early spring day was the kind of day that signaled the end
of winter and the beginning of a new cycle of life. It was the kind of day that was filled with
promise and optimism.

Just not for the man who felt like his world would soon be crashing upon him.

Alfred Pennyworth fussed about the bright penthouse desperate to fill idle time that was good for
absolutely nothing except forcing upon him ample opportunities to nurse his worries. Worries that
increased each and every time he compulsively checked his watch.

He walked through the upper level of the penthouse pausing just outside the master bedroom
which, despite the comfort of the bed and the fashionable furnishings, seemed to be shunned
equally by both Master Bruce and Ms. Kyle. The bed had not been slept in. Again.

He shook his head and made his way to the lower level where his search for a task was rewarded
when he found one of the cleaning staff scrubbing determinedly at the tricycle tire marks that
marred the expensive Italian marble. Even as he instructed Shanti on the proper care of marble, he
couldn’t help glancing at his watch again.

Well, the Thief has finally done it. Finally absconded with the thing the master loved most in this
world.

His face must have betrayed his emotions as Shanti fearfully apologized in her stilted, heavily
accented English. Alfred patted her shoulder assuring her she was doing fine. She smiled shyly,
with only the slightest hint of hesitation and fear before returning to her task.

After checking the time again, he sighed, unhappiness sweeping over him. This wasn’t what he
wanted for Master Bruce, wasn’t at all what he envisioned as he spent three years pondering the
life Bruce would lead when he eventually returned to Gotham.

Alfred had scarcely recognized the man who returned after almost four years away. The Bruce
Wayne that greeted him at the private airport on the outskirts of Gotham was vastly different in
every respect from the man who had closeted himself away from the world pining for a fantasy
life. Like the man who returned the first time, he was a man with a plan, not a plan of becoming a
symbol to rid Gotham of crime and corruption but a plan to assume the Wayne mantle and live the
life Thomas and Martha Wayne had once dreamed for their son.

Alfred could not deny his own happiness and pride at Bruce finally choosing to live up to his
illustrious family’s legacy. Ever since that night three years ago when Bruce had contacted him
out of the blue, Alfred knew it was inevitable that Bruce Wayne would return to Gotham. How
could he resist the pull of six generations of Waynes after the arrival of the newest one?

“Alfred,” Bruce greeted in a soft voice. “How are you?”

“Quite well, sir, despite my heart attack at the suddenness of your call. Don’t worry, though, the
paramedics will be arriving shortly.”

Bruce laughed quietly then asked: “How is England?”
Alfred’s racing heart calmed enough so he didn’t have to work so hard at sounding casual. He knew Bruce knew the truth of it but he liked to put on a show for his wayward ward. “Quite dreary really: cold and rainy. And how is wherever you are? Sunny and warm, I trust?”

“Cold and snowy,” Bruce clarified speaking in the same soft tone. “Look, Alfred, sorry to spring this on you but I need to not be dead anymore.”

“Oh?” Alfred sat down trying to contain his curiosity and concern. Batman had died a spectacular death and he was not interested in seeing him resurrected in any manner. “Ah, so you’ve heard Lucius triumphed over the fraud and had your fortune restored and now you mean to deny me of my inheritance?”

“Sorry to keep doing that to you,” Bruce said quietly but not without humor and Alfred detected something very different and entirely foreign in his voice. “I want this taken care of with no fuss and no publicity, Alfred. Keep it very quiet.”

“Are you returning to Gotham, sir?”

A slight hesitation then a soft, “No.”

“Are you in trouble, sir?”

Bruce laughed, a sincere, heartfelt kind of laugh that Alfred hadn’t heard from him. “Huge trouble, Alfred. Check your email.”

The sender of the new email had a name that was such a jumble of letters and numbers that Alfred would have dismissed it as spam and deleted it without a second thought. There was no subject and no message just an attachment that, when opened, stunned him as little had before.

The sight of a well-swaddled baby held snugly in Bruce’s arms shocked him even more than seeing not-dead him across the café in Florence last summer. Alfred’s eyes watered and he had no words for what that picture communicated to him. They both were quiet; Alfred gazing at the picture that Bruce had just snapped and Bruce staring at the real thing.

“Her name is Helena,” Bruce finally said and Alfred now understood that indefinable something that he heard in Bruce’s voice: happiness.

“Well, this is unexpected,” Alfred commented, still reeling and at a loss for words.

“Tell me about it,” Bruce replied and Alfred could hear the smile in his voice.

“How old is she?”

“Eight days. I’ll send over the specifics so you can make sure everything is set for her.”

The orphan in Bruce wanted to leave nothing to chance in case the unthinkable happened. As soon as he hung up, Alfred called the elderly attorney who had served as a trusted advisor to the Wayne family since Bruce’s grandfather’s time. The retired lawyer contacted the firm that still bore his name and everything was set in motion. Trusts were formed, iron-clad wills cemented as well as a barrage of documents, forms and other miscellaneous paperwork ensuring that the newborn was now the indisputable heiress to the Wayne family fortune.

And no one found out about it. All papers that were filed with the courts were filed in the most wordy and boring fashion so that anyone with the slightest curiosity would blanch at having to wade through hundreds of pages of legal jargon. One of the senior partners accustomed to Wayne
secrecy was dispatched to Russia to secure the necessary signatures and documentation. It was well over four months later when Alfred received a cursory call from the partner confirming that everything had been settled. Alfred later received a call from the nonagenarian attorney joking about the inheritance that seemed to keep slipping through his fingers. Alfred laughed along with the man delighted about the reason he was no longer a billionaire.

So instead of finding a little house in the English countryside and living the life of a retired gentleman as he once thought he might do, Alfred returned to Wayne Manor and bided his time until the not-so-young master returned to Gotham. He didn’t mind though, his duties as caretaker kept him pleasantly busy. Most of the children appreciated the beautiful surroundings of their new home and Alfred enjoyed the vibrancy of their presence after so many years of silence and gloom. Some of the children with authority issues lashed out threatening to be a problem but they soon learned that the ‘Old Man’ was not one to be trifled with and gave the house the respect it deserved. The more difficult of the difficult were parceled to Blake whose kindness and patience only seemed to increase with the angriest of orphans. Blake was always a welcome visitor to the manor not only helping with the children but furtively sealing off all entrances to the underground caverns from the main house.

When Bruce’s call finally came, seven months ago, Alfred happily turned over his manor responsibilities to his trusted assistant and returned to the Gotham penthouse to prepare for Bruce’s arrival. While the penthouse did not have many fond memories for Alfred, the joy that Helena brought did much to dispel Alfred’s initial trepidation over the living arrangements.

After they first arrived, Bruce spoke of finding a more suitable place with Ms. Kyle joking that they should just kick the orphans out of Wayne Manor but talk of new residences had vanished as well as the easy rapport that Alfred had observed between Master Wayne and Ms. Kyle. Or, as he was thinking of her lately, The Thief.

Alfred’s gratitude to the woman who seemed to be the root of Bruce’s newfound happiness shifted to suspicion. That distrust led him to take a closer look at what she did when Bruce wasn’t around. Which was becoming more and more frequent.

Alfred had seen it before, how Bruce obsessively threw himself into something, his tunnel vision shielding him from unwanted truths. Yet, even as busy as he was at Wayne Enterprises, Bruce always made time for his daughter and, unless he was out of town, made sure he was with her for every breakfast and dinner, staying home until she went to bed then excusing himself to continue working in his office at home. Or, as he was more recently prone to doing, returning to Wayne Enterprises. There always seemed to be some project or an important transcontinental conference call pulling his attention from the woman who restlessly prowled the penthouse.

Something was going on with her, something that Bruce seemed unable or unwilling to face.

Three months ago, the first time Bruce travelled away on business, Selina had unexpectedly knocked on Alfred’s door. Handing him a monitor, she told him she had a terrible migraine and was going to take something and would he mind listening just in case Helena woke up in the night? He hadn’t minded in the slightest because, at that point, he couldn’t imagine that the woman would sneak out of the penthouse and not return until the crack of dawn.

Two more nights of migraines, then she had Isha spend the night telling them she was visiting a friend. No other explanation was offered as she avoided Alfred’s questioning gaze.

He didn’t know how she was masking her absences from Bruce but when she returned from her twenty-four hour disappearance Alfred confronted her unable to stand the thought of her doing anything to cause Master Wayne pain.
“Are you gonna tell on me?” She asked in a manner that let him know she knew he wouldn’t.

“I don’t know what you’re playing at but I needn’t remind you who you’re dealing with,” Alfred said.

Her gaze remained steady and inscrutable. “Maybe he needs to remember who he’s dealing with.”

He wanted to rage at her, this slip of a woman who had too much power over Bruce and, consequently, over him. Why the man couldn’t find a sweet, uncomplicated woman with no checkered past was beyond him.

His bluff was called; Alfred hadn’t forgotten the last time he had delivered an unpleasant truth to Bruce and he had to be certain of the facts before he approached that territory again. So he waved off his cowardly behavior, telling himself that the master would soon discover her shenanigans on his own. Weeks passed and the only thing that changed was the ever widening distance between them.

It was a vicious circle that Alfred could no longer watch. The woman was making a fool of Bruce, he was sure of it, and that was, quite simply, unacceptable. So he hemmed and hawed, watching for the right opportunity which never seemed to present itself. Until Monday morning when Bruce said he was going to Washington, D.C. for a few days and Alfred knew he could keep quiet no longer.

“Can’t you do your work from here?” Alfred asked as Bruce prepared for his trip.

“I could but I want to meet this investor in person.” Bruce was far more cautious about who he did business with than he had in the past. Potential business allies and partners were subject to more vetting than top level CIA operatives. “I can’t ignore the rumors about Mr. Gupta but –”

“But you are ignoring other matters, sir,” Alfred interrupted.

“Such as?” Bruce looked confused and Alfred marveled that sometimes Bruce could be the dumbest genius he had ever met.

“Such as the woman who used to share your bed.” Alfred’s frustration caused him to be more blunt than he intended. He waved his hand as an apology.

“I know you don’t like her, Alfred,” Bruce replied, his tone one of exasperation mixed with a bit of warning. “What do you want me to do? Arrange a therapy session between you two?”

“No, sir. I want you to open your eyes.” Alfred braced himself for the worst part absolutely hating having to be the bearer of ugly truths but he had a painful lesson on the price of evading them which is why he squared his shoulders and plunged on. “You both spent the last few years living the ideal life as besotted new parents, travelling the world. You know Selina the mother, the lover, the traveler, but what do you know about Selina Kyle of Gotham? The woman who once had an extensive criminal record?”

Bruce didn’t answer so Alfred pressed on. “I want you to ask Ms. Kyle where she is spending her nights when you are away.”

Bruce stared at him in shock before defensive anger settled over his features. “Where are you getting this? She wouldn’t leave ‘Lena. You’re letting your dislike of her get the better of you.”

“Isha spends a lot of nights here when you are away,” Alfred replied. “The last time you were away, Ms. Kyle left every night you were gone and did not return until early in the morning.”
Bruce turned away. “I’ll deal with this when I get back on Thursday,” he said, quietly.

Alfred handed him his garment bag. Without looking back at him, Bruce left but returned a few moments later to assure Alfred he wasn’t angry with him. That was yesterday.

This morning, less than twenty-four hours after their discussion, Alfred had not been terribly surprised to see Bruce back at home. He carried Helena down the staircase, holding her upside down and tickling her like it was a normal morning. Alfred followed them to the kitchen where Bruce sat Helena on the expansive granite counter while he got her something to eat. The mood was light until Ms. Kyle walked in and though there was no outward change in Bruce’s demeanor Alfred felt the mood shift instantly.

Selina was all smiles and kisses for Helena but neither Bruce nor Selina looked at each other once. They put on a good show for their daughter who, at three years of age, should be and was oblivious to parental strife.

When Bruce prepared to leave for the office, he carried Helena to the elevator for their customary goodbye routine then as she reached for her mother, Bruce and Selina’s eyes met, Bruce’s darkening as if facing a threat, a warning clear in his expression.

“What are you doing?” Alfred asked Selina less than fifteen minutes later as she gathered Helena and Isha, ushering them to the elevator.

“Taking Isha home. Is that ok with you?” She looked tired and tense and Alfred realized she’d worn that same look for months. “We’ll be back by naptime.”

Naptime was hours ago and that look that he observed between Bruce and Selina haunted him. The expression on Bruce’s face was one he hoped never to see again. He looked down at his watch and winced to see that it was now almost three.

Shanti appeared, shyly handing him the wastebasket from the master bedroom, averting her eyes. Inside was the shattered remains of Selina’s cell phone. Alfred thought again of the hostile look that had passed between Bruce and Selina and wondered if the broken phone was a message from Ms. Kyle.

Shanti’s eyes widened and with a respectful nod quickly disappeared. Alfred took a moment to compose himself before he turned to face Bruce whom he knew was approaching.

“Where’s Selina?” Bruce asked tersely, the anger showing on his face the reason for Shanti’s quick exit. He started up the staircase to Helena’s room which, if she were here, is where she would be napping or playing at this time of day. “Her car’s not downstairs.”

“I don’t know, sir,” Alfred responded. “Helena’s not here either.”

That stopped Bruce. He turned to face Alfred giving him a grim look.

“They haven’t been here all day. I spoke with Isha and she confirmed they dropped her off this morning around eight. I checked for accidents and there’s nothing…” He shrugged his shoulders in a helpless gesture.

Bruce stared at him for a few moments, his deepening anger evident in the narrowing of his eyes. He reached for his phone.

“I’ve been calling but…” Alfred showed him the smashed phone.
Bruce sighed, sliding his phone back into his pocket. “I forgot about that.”

“Beg pardon, sir?”

“I did that,” he responded quietly and Alfred wondered again what had happened the night before. Whatever it was, he feared it was bad enough that Bruce was under the impression Selina may have taken the child and left.

“For what it’s worth, and I may not be Ms. Kyle’s biggest supporter, she wouldn’t just take her and leave you forever.” Whatever Alfred felt for Ms. Kyle, he could not deny her consuming love for her daughter and, up to now, he never considered that she would do anything to remove the child from the love and safety of her father.

“Wouldn’t she?” Bruce asked. “As you reminded me earlier, I really don’t know anything about her other than she is a thief.”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it.”

The doorman signaled from the lobby announcing they had guests.

“I’ll take care of it, sir,” Alfred said unnecessarily as he walked to the monitor to see who dared show up at this very inopportune time.

A nervous looking young blonde woman appeared on the screen. Then Helena’s face appeared and Alfred quickly summoned them to come up, calling out to Bruce.

When the elevator doors opened, Helena rushed to her father, her face and hands sticky with the remains of chocolate ice cream.

“And you are…?” Alfred asked the young woman who looked around the foyer with awe.

“Jenn, right?” Bruce said, holding Helena tightly unmindful of her sticky hands on his clothes.

“Yes. Hello,” she said without smiling, and gave them a look, indicating she wanted to speak but not in front of Helena.

Bruce called out for Shanti, asking in Hindi for her to get Helena cleaned up. He handed his daughter to Shanti with a kiss and another tight hug.

“Where is she?” Bruce demanded as soon as Helena was out of earshot.

“I don’t know.” Jenn looked at him helplessly. “She was supposed to be back hours ago. I’m worried. I’ve been calling her and calling her but… So after the kid woke up from her nap, I came here.”

“Where was she going?”

“I don’t know. She doesn’t tell me.”

“Doesn’t? This isn’t the first time?”

“I’ve been watching Helena a couple mornings a week.”

“And you don’t know where she goes?”

Jenn shrugged. “She just said not to concern myself with it.”
Bruce stared at her for a few moments before asking, “Who is she with?”

She averted her gaze from him, looking guilty. “No one,” she said unconvincingly.

Bruce pressed her, looking angry and dangerous.

“I don’t know! I swear! She drops Helena off at my place then leaves. I gotta go. Tell her to call me when she gets in, ok?”

She started to leave then paused and said to Alfred: “She usually gives me something for watching Helena. It’s not like I’m charging but…it’s helpful.”

Alfred gave her the only cash he had: a fifty.

After she left, he turned to see Bruce scrolling through his phone.

“What is it?” Alfred asked when Bruce became still, his face losing all expression.

Bruce checked his watch. “A text from three hours ago from an anonymous phone: ‘352 Riverside. Help!’ ”

The address was in the warehouse district across the river outside of central Gotham.

“With afternoon traffic, it’ll be 45 minutes. If you’re lucky,” Alfred called out as Bruce played voice mail messages on his speaker phone, deleting the inconsequential calls he often received.

The fourth message stopped him cold. When Selina’s weak, defeated voice came through, Bruce looked up and met Alfred’s distressed gaze.

“Bruce…I’m sorry…I didn’t…They killed him…I’m so sorry…Tell Helena…” Her voice trailed off then silence. The last sound on the message was the clatter of the phone falling.

On his way out, Bruce hung up then made a call and when that one wasn’t answered, quickly made another. As the doors to the elevator closed, he told Alfred to find Jim Gordon.
The Allies Arrive

Chapter Summary

Commissioner Gordon and John Blake try to help Bruce Wayne.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Allies Arrive

Gotham politics had always been a dirty game but since it was no dirtier than any other major American city, Jim Gordon didn’t concern himself too much with how the game was played. Except when he was obliged to play along to appease the higher ups which was always a waste of time. The meeting the mayor had forced him to attend today was a perfect example.

An agent from Homeland Security had spent the last two hours lecturing Gotham’s top officials on Disaster Recovery. Gordon figured they had more experience in that area than anyone else in the country but the mayor was courting federal funds and demanded all top officials be present. She specifically ordered Gordon to attend the meeting telling him that she would not accept any made up police emergency excuses. He didn’t need to manufacture emergencies, they happened all on their own without his assistance but, nevertheless, he instructed his staff not to interrupt even if the devil himself showed up.

So when his phone vibrated, he frowned in irritation and slid his hand into his pocket to reject the call. Thirty seconds later when it vibrated again he felt the first spark of concern. As if she sensed his phone going off, the mayor glared at him. He nodded an apology then powered off the phone hoping that the meeting would end soon but the Fed passed out yet another bulky handout to discuss.

Five minutes later, one of the mayor’s assistants discretely beckoned to him from the doorway. Feeling the mayor’s irritated eyes on him, Gordon shook him off. One minute later, the aide walked over and excitedly whispered in his ear: “Bruce Wayne is on the phone!”

Gordon looked at the man, uncomprehending what he heard, but the assistant eagerly nodded clearly in awe at who was calling. Forgetting about incurring the mayor’s displeasure, Gordon rose and quickly exited following the assistant to a desk close to the conference room.

“This is Gordon.”

“I need you to send a unit to 352 Riverside. It’s in the warehouse district.”

Gordon turned away from the overly curious aide and quietly asked, “What am I sending my people into, Mr. Wayne?”

“I have no idea.”

“What’s going on?”

A pause. “I don’t know,” he said, roughly. “It’s… personal.”
A simple word from a not so simple man dispelled any hesitation Jim may have had.

“I’ll call it in.” Gordon hung up and mumbled something to the waiting aide about an emergency. As he hurried to his car, he called dispatch ordering the closest units to proceed directly to the warehouse district address warning that the situation was unknown and to contact him as soon as officers arrived at the scene.

It had been a long while since Gordon had driven his city issued vehicle with the dashboard light flashing. He sped along the crowded streets feeling simultaneously exhilarated and anxious. He missed working with the masked mystery man who disappeared and appeared like a ghost in the night, missed his partner who shared his fervor to rid Gotham of crime and corruption. Who would have thought that the darling of the tabloids was really the dreaded enemy of Gotham’s criminal underworld?

Gordon had never been anxious to discover the identity of Batman. Once he learned that the billionaire, Bruce Wayne, was the man behind the mask, he wasn’t particularly shocked. He remembered the child sitting forlornly at the police station so long ago and the revelation made strange sense to him.

Just before Bruce Wayne returned to Gotham, Alfred Pennyworth, whom Gordon hadn’t seen since the funeral, called to give him the news. Gordon perceived the man’s happiness as well as the man’s polite emphasis on Mr. Wayne’s intention to carry on with the family business and nothing else. Gordon was curious why the man chose to return but, then again, he was curious as to the whys of much of what Bruce Wayne did.

The papers had been positively gleeful in the second return from the dead story about the Prince of Gotham. Despite himself, Gordon couldn’t resist looking at the photos with the titillating headlines and, each time he did, he felt sad that no one knew the truth and Wayne had to live under such an unsavory and undeserved public reputation. For the first month of his return, the paparazzi had dogged Wayne’s every step trying to capture the current iteration of Gotham’s ever changing prodigal son. It was clear that they hoped for the more interesting Playboy Bruce Wayne to appear but since Wayne did nothing remarkable other than work in his family’s company, the gossip columnists engaged in some pretty wild theories involving mystery women. Gordon was greatly relieved when the paparazzi grew tired of waiting for Wayne to do something interesting and turned their attention elsewhere.

A few weeks after Wayne returned they had bumped into each other in the financial district. Amidst the crowd of passersby, Wayne intimated that the other one was dead and would not be returning. Gordon nodded, wishing he could express the depth of his gratitude to this man whom had accomplished so much, this man with whom he had shared dark secrets, but he had no gift for words and awkwardly wished him well. Bruce smiled and nodded as if he, too, wished to say more. After shaking hands, Gordon watched as he climbed into an understated black Mercedes and drove away. Bruce Wayne was shedding the more ostentatious façade of wealth.

The warehouse district was on the other side of the East River in a depressed and mostly deserted part of outer Gotham. A few businesses still existed in the area, mostly salvage and junk dealers, but, for the most part, old and battered For Sale signs lined the streets. He turned onto Riverside Road which was nowhere near the river and saw the flashing lights of two patrol cars in front of a three story brick warehouse that looked like it had been abandoned decades ago. He parked behind one of the patrol cars and as he exited his vehicle, a familiar black Mercedes pulled up behind his car.

“The officers’ initial report is that the building appears to be deserted,” Gordon said by way of
With Gordon close behind, Bruce hurried toward the large front door that the officers had broken through to enter the premises. As they neared the entrance, a young officer burst outside, gave them a quick apologetic look before vomiting on the sidewalk.

The two men exchanged a glance before heading inside, Wayne’s expression was blank but the set of his mouth was familiar.

The warehouse was dark and had that eerie quietness of long abandoned buildings. Gordon called out to the other officers his voice echoing in the darkness.

“Up here, sir!” A male voice responded. “We got a body!”

Wayne pushed past him, running up the stairs toward the sound of the officer’s voice. They made their way through a maze of empty offices until they saw the light of the officer’s flashlight at the end of the hall.

The few windows in the room were clouded by years of grime. As a result, the setting sun provided little illumination but there was enough to see the body that lay on a sheet of plastic. More identification would not be immediately forthcoming as the head had been gruesomely bashed in. Smashed to the extent that what was once a man’s head was now a bloody, pulpy mass of blood, brain, and shattered bone.

“Who is that?” Gordon asked.

“I don’t know,” Bruce replied grimly. He turned to the young patrolwoman who was trying her best to hide her disgust. “Did you find anyone else?”

“No, sir,” the officer answered then looked to Gordon, confused about the civilian at the crime scene.

“Who are we looking for?” Gordon asked.

Wayne ran his hand distractedly through his hair as he took in everything in the room. “A woman. Five-eight, long dark hair, brown eyes…”

The description fit the woman Gordon had seen the last time he had seen Batman. Gordon’s recollection of the day Gotham had been saved from the bomb was vivid, the smallest of details not forgotten including the woman whose presence had so surprised him. When he had emerged from the back of the semi, he’d thought to see Batman but instead there she was. He hadn’t known anything about her other than she had helped Batman save the city and then she disappeared. He’d only seen her for a few moments but her features that were visible from the mask were etched in his memory and it pained him to realize that she may have met a violent end.

Another unit arrived. Gordon divided the officers between searching the grounds and the remainder of the warehouse ordering them to stay out of the room with the body and not touch anything. The property was overrun with weeds, trash, and scrap metal, fenced in by a tall chain length fence topped with spirals of barbed wire. A perfect place for unlawful criminal meetings.

Sensing that Wayne wanted to find the woman and disappear, Gordon delayed calling homicide as long as he could. The tabloids would have a field day if they caught a whiff of Bruce Wayne being touched by another violent crime.

As he searched the building, Bruce kept calling a number on his phone, listening vainly for the
sound of a phone ringing or vibrating. They confirmed that there was no one else in the building then joined the other officers searching the empty lot.

Gordon studied the derelict building, glad to be on the outside and away from that body. The sun was close to setting, daylight savings hadn’t hit yet, and when the sun shone against the east side of the building, he saw a smear of blood over one of the second story windows.

“Mr. Wayne.” He pointed up to the window.

They both discerned more smudges of red against the faded brick and rushed back upstairs to the third floor. Gordon looked for roof access as Wayne pushed open the second story window and climbed through following the blood trail up the side of the building.

Gordon soon found a panel that would open onto the roof. Sliding a dusty metal desk under the panel, he pushed his way through and when he emerged onto the roof heard Wayne cry out, “Selina!”

A woman was slumped in the narrow space between a pair of battered, dirty HVAC units, her head sagging down so that her chin rested on her chest, a cell phone on the roof beside her.

Wayne gently touched her bloody face, whispering to her. She did not respond.

Gordon decided to be optimistic and called for an ambulance. He just couldn’t imagine that Bruce Wayne would lose someone like this and that Gordon would have to be present as he lost another person important to him.

The woman had hidden well and it was difficult to get her out of the cramped space without causing more damage. He helped Bruce gently pull her out of the tight space and laid her out on the roof.

Her face was covered with blood, one eye on its way to be swollen shut, her hands were also bloody, so bloody he almost didn’t notice that one of her hands, which had been nestled protectively in her black leather jacket, had been smashed.

Bruce touched her neck feeling for a pulse. “She’s alive,” he said, as much to Gordon as to himself. He smoothed her hair back from her head, assessing her many injuries, frowning as he stared at her mangled hand.

“The ambulance will be here soon. Let’s get her downstairs,” Gordon said quietly.

Gordon climbed down through the access and Bruce, as gently as possible, lowered her through the narrow panel to Gordon’s waiting arms. He jumped down and took her from him. Holding her close, he carried her down the stairs.

As they waited for the ambulance, Gordon anxiously scanned the area looking for any sign of the media, hoping that a body found in the warehouse district wasn’t enough to draw the attention of the evening news.

“I’ll take care of your car,” Gordon said later as Bruce climbed into the ambulance. Bruce tossed him the keys, his fingers red with blood.

As soon as the ambulance pulled away, Gordon called homicide. The officer who had thrown up earlier stood beside the front door looking as if the last thing he wanted to do was go back in but Gordon ordered him to round up everyone and to stay away from the body upstairs. With any luck, the crime scene hadn’t been compromised too badly by the search.
“Was that who I think it was?” John Blake asked, coming up from behind him. “I heard your name on the police radio and thought I could help.”

“This doesn’t concern you, Blake. Off you go.”

“It was him, right?”

Instead of answering, Gordon gave the officers who gathered outside a clear message that the civilian who just left needn’t appear on any report. Each and every one of the officers received a long, steady look in the eye to emphasize his point. Most had never dealt with the commissioner before and were new enough to the force that they wouldn’t dare disobey. Still, a few gave him a disbelieving look like they couldn’t believe he, of all people, would bow down to Gotham’s elite. Gordon hated that no one here knew who this man was and what he had done for their city.

Blake stood behind him in a manner that suggested he had a right to. Which he did not.

“This is a crime scene, son. Bystanders can stay here,” Gordon said gruffly before reentering the warehouse.

“Come on, Commissioner,” John said, following him. “You’re not still mad about that?”

“There’s a way to do things and a way not to. If you would’ve stuck with being a detective, you would’ve known that.” Gordon ascended the stairs wanting to get a last look at that room before Homicide arrived.

“So why was he here?” John asked.

He was uncomfortable discussing Bruce Wayne with anyone even John Blake yet he wanted Blake here, someone to appreciate and understand the whys of Gotham’s police commissioner concealing evidence. They reached the room with the body so he didn’t bother answering John since Blake would figure out the whys soon enough.

This time when Gordon entered the room, he was prepared for the gruesome sight of the dead man. Unlike Blake who muttered a horrified, “Jesus” then dispensed with the questions. With the eye of a detective, Gordon surveyed the room searching more for something that might connect this horrible scene to Bruce Wayne than evidence to the crime. Let homicide deal with the body, he told himself, he would do his best to shield his friend from his life being scrutinized too closely.

Other than broken glass that littered the floor the only other objects were an overturned metal chair and an old metal desk against the wall.

“If our friend wasn’t involved, I would think this is a drug deal gone bad.” Blake squatted beside the body pointing at the corpse’s arms. “Track marks. Long time user by the looks of him. Shouldn’t be too tough to ID this guy.”

Blake lifted his gaze, his brow furrowed as he saw something of interest. Reaching under the metal desk, he held up a set of keys.

Since one of the keys on the ring was for a very expensive car, Gordon assumed they belonged to Bruce Wayne’s friend. As Blake held them up, he could see the flecks of blood and tissue.

“Looks like these were used as a weapon,” Blake said. “Who was in the ambulance, Commissioner?”

Gordon sighed, “A woman friend of his. Someone important to him.” He looked at Blake steadily.
willing the young man to understand why he was doing what he was doing. He reached for the keys, pushing aside the guilt that he was about to remove evidence from a crime scene.

Blake spared him, pocketing them himself. “Seems a waste to throw out all the effort he’s been making to keep a low profile because of his girlfriend.”

The way Blake said ‘girlfriend’ caught his attention.

“Don’t jump to conclusions, hotshot,” Gordon said.

“Don’t you know who that woman is, Commissioner?”

“I do,” Gordon looked at him carefully. “Do you?”

“I’m just saying she’s not…an innocent.”

Gordon sighed again and looked around the room. “Who is, Mr. Blake? Who is?”

When Homicide arrived, Blake cringed to see who the lead detective was. Detective Jessica Massey was Homicide’s rising star and the worst possible detective they wanted on this case. She was notorious for her hatred of cold cases, doing everything she could to solve the crime and keep her close rate the highest in the department. She was also a friend.

“Jess! Missed you last Friday at Gallagher’s. Heard you had a date.”

“Yeah. With a corpse,” she sighed. It was a joke that someone as pretty as Jessica had a terrible love life. “Seems like those are my only dates nowadays. And here’s my newest one.”

Her face betrayed no emotion as she examined the body. “Why are you here?” She asked without looking up.

“I was in the neighborhood,” he replied then decided it best to leave her before she asked him more questions.

The Commissioner followed him down the stairs.

“What do you need me to do, Commissioner?” John Blake asked as they walked outside, eager to help with what he knew would be a touchy situation to Jim Gordon.

“You can take him his car,” Gordon passed another set of keys to Blake.

Blake started to protest feeling he deserved a more important job than delivery boy but quieted as Jessica approached them.

“Well, that guy pissed off someone in the worst way,” she said as she slipped off her latex gloves. “I understand someone was removed from the crime scene.”

“Yes,” Gordon said. “She’s been transported to Gotham General. I doubt you’ll get much information from her.”
“We’ll see, Commissioner,” she replied, looking at him closely.

“She was in pretty bad shape. I’m not sure when she will be well enough to question her.”

“I can wait. Frankly, I’m just tickled pink I might have a witness. This thing smells like a drug deal gone bad so it’ll be great if I can actually talk to somebody.”

“What have you got so far, detective?” Gordon asked.

“The way I see it, there was a helluva fight up there but that plastic makes me think this might have been planned. My guess is that the perp did not intend for a body to be found. Something scared him or her off…maybe the cops. Who were called by whom exactly?”

“The victim, you think?” Blake asked, wanting to put off the inevitable as long as he could. Jess would find out the truth soon enough.

“Victim? You sure?”

“How would we know?” Blake shrugged then grinned his flirtiest grin. He liked Jessica, had gone out drinking with her and a few other friends from the force many times over the years.

“Uh huh,” she muttered, smelling a rat. “So what brings you here, Commissioner?”

“A crime, detective,” Gordon answered, his tone reminding her who he was.

She got the message but Blake knew Jess. A spark had been lit in that investigator brain of hers. The Commissioner’s presence at the homicide of an apparent junkie was definitely odd.

With a look to John, the Commissioner went back inside the warehouse.

Jess gazed at Blake, her eyes narrowing as she waited for him to level with her. He didn’t. He couldn’t even if he wanted to; it just wasn’t his information to give.

“Whose Mercedes is that?” She finally asked.

“Mine for today,” Blake said, reaching in his pocket to jingle the keys before remembering that one set had blood on them.

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, right. Since when does a bounty hunter afford a hundred thousand dollar Benz?”

“Hey, business is booming!”

“I bet. Well, whoever that belongs to, you better get it back or it’s gonna get stripped. Even with all the cops around.”

The commotion had attracted a few vagrants who were eyeing the expensive car. The rims alone would fetch a nice sum.

“So, Jessica, buy you a beer later?” Blake called out as he headed toward Wayne’s car. “How about when you’re through here? I know a great new bar over on 15th.”

“Don’t you have any lost dogs to find?” She smirked, enjoying their usual flirty banter. “Besides, it’s Tuesday. Some of us have regular jobs, you know.”

“Every day is Friday for me, Jess.” John watched her walk away then proceeded to talk to a few
of the bums who milled about the scene, asking about what they had seen. Once he was confident no one had witnessed Wayne enter the premises, he slid into the car and took off.

As he crossed the bridge to Central Gotham, Alfred called asking him to come by the penthouse to pick up clothes for Master Wayne and to make certain that his vehicle was returned in the shape he found it in. Between the Commissioner and Alfred, John was starting to feel like an errand boy.

For Bruce Wayne, Blake gladly accepted whatever jobs helped him. He was, after all, his mentor even if the guy didn’t want to acknowledge it.

Blake had been very curious when Bruce Wayne returned to Gotham so he kept tabs on him, “accidentally” running into him, getting him to buy him a burger at what passed for a cheap joint in the expensive hotel Bruce owned and lived in. The fifty dollar burger was good, better than the conversation as Blake told Bruce about what he’d been up to, making some money as a private detective, making even more money as a skip tracer and making no money at his other ‘job’. Bruce gazed at him in a way that Blake couldn’t figure out if he approved or not.

As far as John could see, Bruce Wayne had become boring. Well, almost as boring as when he decided to stay in his house for years. All John Blake could see was that that the man worked then went home to his luxury penthouse at the top of his luxury hotel. Then late one night a few months ago, he saw him with a woman and Blake was shocked to see that it was none other than Selina Kyle. The last he’d seen of her was when he had escorted her to the MCU for booking.

As he pulled into the parking garage at Gotham General, he thought about the woman he had always suspected had something to do with Bruce’s disappearance just before Bane took over the city. It didn’t make sense to him to see them together so he checked to see what she’d been up to the last few years and received another shock: there was no mention of her in any database he searched. He knew without a doubt that the woman had quite a record but he couldn’t find evidence of her existing at all. Even though he knew what he’d find, he went to the station to look at her paper file and wasn’t surprised to find that her very large file had gone missing but that wasn’t nearly as big a mystery since at the time of Bane most police station records had been destroyed.

And here she was possibly wreaking more havoc on Bruce Wayne’s life.

The route to the emergency room was all too familiar to Blake. He quickly found Bruce Wayne arguing with a hospital administrator.

“Don’t say the word insurance to me again!” Bruce almost yelled at the middle aged woman in crumpled business clothes.

“Sir, this is not a charity hospital,” she responded patronizingly. “We need to get her over to St. Theresa’s. These beds are for insured patients.”

“Lady,” Blake interjected. “Do you know who this is? The bills will get paid, trust me.”

She gave him a look, taking in his scruffy attire, and promptly dismissed him.

“Sir,” she said to Bruce. “You aren’t even a family member. You have no legal right to make decisions for this person. We don’t accept ‘boyfriend’ as a recognized legal status.”

A man in a business suit quickly approached, shaking Bruce’s hand, apologizing profusely. He identified himself as the hospital administrator before admonishing the woman whose face was now red with anger and embarrassment. Apparently deciding she couldn’t get away with being
rude to Bruce Wayne, she glared hatefully at John before stalking off in a huff.

As the man stammered more apologies, a team of medical personnel soon appeared and wheeled Selina out of the emergency room and into a waiting elevator. The administrator gestured for Bruce to proceed to another elevator. Without being asked, Blake followed them, both Bruce and John ignored the babblings of the nervous man.

They emerged on a floor Blake had yet to visit. It was an exclusive part of the hospital that Blake never knew existed. The hustle and bustle of the emergency seemed very far away. The administrator led them into a comfortable waiting room. He offered coffee and looked like he was about to sit down to wait with them. Bruce gave Blake a quick nod of his head and John, with very little diplomacy, told the guy to get lost.

“Alfred sent you some clothes,” he said, after the man left. He handed Bruce the leather bag Alfred had sent. Wayne was a mess; his suit was smeared with blood, his white shirt had a huge red circle from chest to belly, dried blood on his neck. “You should get cleaned up.”

“Yeah,” Bruce said absently as he took the bag.

Five minutes later, he came out of the bathroom wearing jeans and a black T-shirt. He stuffed his suit in the large trash can by the door.

“What happened?” John asked as Bruce sat down next to him.

“I don’t know,” he said, sounding sick of saying that.

“Why was she there? Who’s the dead guy?”

Bruce glared at him.

“The homicide detective thinks it’s a drug deal gone bad. The John Doe has the look of a heroin addict.”

“Track marks on his arms,” John explained at Bruce’s questioning look.

“I didn’t notice that.”

“Yeah, I guess not. Are these hers?” He held up the keys he had retrieved from the crime scene.

Bruce looked at them for a moment, taking in the blood and tissue that clung to them. “Yes,” he said taking them.

“Looks like she used them to defend herself,” Blake said quietly though he was pleased they were hers. On the drive over, he worried that he may have unnecessarily tampered with evidence.

Bruce nodded then leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees, staring at the keys.

“I talked to some of the bums in the area but they didn’t see anything. Didn’t see any cars coming or going. Didn’t see you. I’m friends with the detective in charge, Jessica Massey…” Jess was a straight up cop but John thought he might be able to convince her to not look too closely at things Bruce didn’t want looked into. “What can I do to help?”

“Don’t prevent her from doing her job.” Bruce gave him a steady look.

“She’s gonna want to talk to…her…Selina.”
“If she’s a good detective she will.”

“Wait,” Blake just realized something. “How did she get there? Selina, I mean. Other than your car and the cop cars, there was nothing. No buses go to that part of town.”

Bruce didn’t respond. The room was quiet as they waited. Bruce stayed perfectly still while Blake fidgeted, fingers drumming on his knee, getting up and walking around before sitting back down.

Then he started talking, telling Bruce more about what he’d been up to. When they met the first time, he’d left out a good bit of details including getting in trouble with Gordon. He knew he was babbling but sitting in silence never worked well with him. He also got the feeling he was wearing out his welcome but he didn’t want to leave Bruce alone.

Bruce slid his phone out of his pocket then made a call. He gave Alfred Selina’s status, telling him she was in surgery and that they hadn’t heard from a doctor yet. With a quick look to John, he walked outside the waiting room. Blake watched him through the big glass window, surprised to see his face change, opening up, smiling as he talked. He didn’t think he was talking to Alfred.

As Bruce talked, Blake received a text message from Alfred telling him it was okay to leave Mr. Wayne alone. The old guy thought of everything.

“What can I do?” Blake asked when Bruce returned.

Bruce checked his phone, accessing the GPS function, then showed Blake a map with a blinking blue dot. The dot was at the Gotham Promenade Shopping Mall.

“You want me to go shopping?”

“No, I want you to get her car.” He reached into his pocket and took out the bloody keys. He looked at them before taking one of the keys of the ring. He also gave him cash to call a taxi after he dropped off her car telling him to take a cab home. He emphasized home with a look letting Blake know he didn’t want him returning to the hospital.

“I get it,” Blake said. On the way out, he paused by the door. “The Commissioner and me? We just want to help you.”

Chapter End Notes

At this point, I’m sure many of you are thinking that for a Bruce and Selina story there sure isn’t a lot of Bruce and Selina. Just know that the last two chapters were setting up the story. While Selina is going to be unconscious for awhile, the story centers on her and her relationship with Bruce. Thank you for reading!
Chapter Notes

A few bits of profanity here and there. If you don't like the F word, you probably might not like the direction of this story. Not that it will be filled with F words but later chapters will explore some very dark themes. So consider yourself warned. J

Also, thanks for reading and reviewing! This story is quite a departure from my comfort zone so it's great to get feedback.

Interrogations

The Chief of Surgery, Dr. Andrew Rathburn, escorted Bruce to Selina’s room. On the way, he detailed to Bruce the extent of Selina’s injuries assuring him that she would make a full recovery with the possible exception of her left hand that suffered extensive damage. He advised getting a specialist and told him he would contact the best hand surgeon in the country knowing that cost was not factor. When they reached her room, the doctor lingered outside seemingly to give Bruce privacy when he finally saw her.

“It looks bad,” Dr. Rathburn said, preparing him the best he could. “But she will recover. She’s sedated and won’t wake for a few days but that’s good. It keeps her out of pain and gives her body time for her injuries to heal.” He shook Bruce’s hand and said, “I’ll make that call now.”

Bruce nodded, eager for the doctor to get on his way.

When he entered the hospital room, his first impression of her was that she seemed peaceful. The lights were low, masking the worst of the damage until he walked closer. She looked worse than when he found her on that rooftop. No blood to obscure the damage wreaked on her face and body. Her right eye was swollen shut, cuts were scattered over her face, her lip was split, and a bandage covered a deep gash on her forehead that went past her hairline. Her wrists were bandaged in a manner that looked like she had attempted suicide but the self-inflicted gashes on her wrists were from her cutting herself free of the rough rope that bound her hands. Her neck was a mottled mass of purple and black.

Bruce swallowed his anger as he took in the ring of bruises that encircled her neck, picturing someone using all their strength to choke the life out of her. What he could not see now but remembered vividly as the paramedics had worked on her in the ambulance was the almost stab wound on her chest. A one inch cut where her assailant had readied to plunge a knife into her heart.

Someone had done his best to kill her. Bruce ruled out a former mark because this was not the work of someone trying to get payback for getting robbed. This was something else entirely; there
was an air of cruelty to her injuries, an excessiveness bordering on sadistic. The person who had done this had taken pleasure in it.

But she had fought. Her fingers and hands bore witness to the lengths she had gone to survive. The tips were bandaged where a few of the nails had been ripped off, her knuckles covered with medical tape to cover the deep cuts. It had been a bad fight.

He moved a chair to the right side of her bed so he could hold the hand that was not encased in a temporary cast. There was no response to his gentle squeeze, her fingers were warm but alarmingly still. Propping his elbows on the bed, he stared at Selina’s bruised and battered face trying to make sense of what had happened and how everything had gone so wrong between them.

What about the other man? The man whose head had been beaten to a bloody pulp. The man with the tattoos covering his arms, with the silver skull rings on his lifeless fingers. In her last message, she had said ‘they killed him’. Who was this man to her? Bruce chased away speculation unwilling to let last night’s hurt creep back in but his thoughts swirled around their devastating fight, their angry words replaying over and over in his mind.

Yesterday morning, he had told Alfred he would deal with Selina when he returned home from D.C. Yet, as he sat in the meeting with Senator Brass and other executives, he couldn’t focus on the intricacies of forging this international deal that would not only provide much needed jobs in a very poor region of India but clean accessible water to those in dire need. The implications of her spending her nights away from the penthouse was something he didn’t want to think about but as the meeting continued on, his thoughts centered not on helping drought ridden regions access water but on who Selina was spending her nights with.

When one of the visitors from Rajasthan looked at him in dismay, he realized he was not hiding his escalating anger very well. Since he was useless to the proceedings, he abruptly excused himself, wincing inwardly at the knowing look Brass gave him. He was doing his best to shed his irresponsible playboy image and hated that his sudden departure would play into that preconception. His anger to Selina deepened.

As he hailed a taxi, he phoned his pilot, telling him to be ready to depart within the hour. The plane neared Gotham and Bruce gave in to an impulse he had been fighting for hours: he checked the GPS on her phone. The blinking blue dot indicated she was where she was supposed to be. It was just past eleven at night when he pulled into the parking garage at the penthouse. He parked next to Selina’s black Range Rover, very relieved to see physical proof that she was home.

When he went to their bedroom, he found it vacant. A thorough search of the penthouse revealed that she was not there. After looking in on Helena, he checked the guest room next to Helena’s room confirming that Isha was indeed spending the night just as Alfred had said. While he hadn’t doubted Alfred, he hadn’t wanted to believe him either.

Bruce returned to their room and called Selina. As he waited for her to answer, he heard a vibration sound in the drawer of the nightstand. Opening the drawer to the nightstand, he found her phone, ‘forwarding call’ visible on the screen.

“Bruce?” She finally answered just before the call was sent to voice mail. “Is everything okay?”

“Fine,” he said, lifting the phone out of the drawer. Despite the adrenaline that passed through him, his voice remained calm. “I just thought I’d see what you were doing.”

Bruce glanced around the room confirming, again, that she was not there.
“Nothing really. I’m just… getting ready for bed. You worried me calling so late.”

As she was talking, lying, he paced the floor trying to calm his heart hammering in his chest. After they hung up, he stared at her phone before hurling it across the room where it shattered against the wall.

He turned off the lights, choosing to sit in the dark to look out at the lights of Gotham as he waited for her to come home. The hours ticked by, his anger turned cold as he imagined the things she might be doing at this moment. At two a.m., he admitted to himself that he hoped she was stealing rather than cheating. She wouldn’t do that to him, to them, he told himself before the dark part of him remembered other things. It’s not as if she hadn’t betrayed him before...

At three a.m., she returned, dressed in unfamiliar clothes: skinny jeans, zipped up black leather jacket, and thick-soled lace-up black boots. Not the kind of attire worn while burgling a house, he noted. Unaware of his presence, she dropped a backpack on the floor then started to unzip her coat but stopped when she noticed her broken phone on the floor.

Her body tensed and she took a few seconds to compose herself before turning to face him. They stared at each other for a few long, uncomfortable moments, each outwardly communicating nothing yet everything.

“I didn’t expect you back,” she finally said.

“Obviously.” Bruce said, his voice cold

Selina remained standing in place, keeping a safe distance between them. “It’s not what you think.”

“Really?” Bruce drawled, waiting for an explanation, watching her scheme her way to a believable story.

“I…” she started but stopped and gave him a look like he had no business asking her anything.

With effort, Bruce controlled his temper. “Either you’re thieving or you’re screwing around. Which is it?”

“Neither,” she replied, keeping her face clear of expression.

He sprang up out the chair, furious with her nonexplanations as well as her months-long withdrawal from him. Her startled eyes never left his as he closed the distance between them to stand directly in front of her.

“Where were you?” He demanded.

A slight flicker of doubt appeared in her eyes. “Out with a friend.”

“Who?” His voice fell deeper.

Her gaze never wavered from his. “No one you know.”

In that instant, he felt exhausted. He didn’t want to beg her for scraps of information. “For Chrissake, Selina, you have a child. You can’t run around the city in the middle of the night doing whatever it is you’re doing. We didn’t come back here so you could screw everything up.”

He had touched a nerve with that one, her eyes flashed with guilt before anger took over.

“You don’t know me at all, Bruce.”
“You got that right, Selina,” he laughed, bitterly. The months of gradual estrangement had finally taken their toll on him. “How can I? You never tell me a goddamn thing!”

“Oh, Bruce, face it, coming home has shown us what a sham we are together. We were living a fantasy life and now that we’re back to reality…” She turned, walking away to stare out the window. “I’ve just realized how much you and I don’t belong together.”

The hurt that her words elicited tore through him. “Did that just occur to you while you were out fucking somebody?”

The tensing of her body showed that he had succeeding in wounding her. His already seething anger increased that she would dare act the role of the injured party.

“No, it didn’t.” She looked away from the window back at him, her face set in determination. “I’ve known it forever.”

The sadness in her voice surprised him but his anger held fast and he didn’t respond to what could be an opening to fix this mess. He felt like he was being carried off on a wave with no control over where he was going. His mind could not get beyond his heart-sickening suspicions, imagining things she may have been doing with someone else. He wanted to rage at her, to demand the name of who had lured her away from him.

She started to walk away, dismissing him, but he grabbed her arm and spun her around to face him.

“If you think you’re taking my daughter and setting up in some Old Town dump you can forget it!”

She wrenched her arm free, backing away from him. “You don’t get to tell me what to do!”

“When it comes to Helena I do.”

“I could take her and, believe me, you would never find us.” She looked away quickly, maybe realizing she had gone too far.

He stared at her in shock, unable to believe she had said such a thing. He loomed over her, backing her against the wall, his face coming dangerously close to hers. She unflinchingly met his furious gaze.

“Do not threaten me,” his voice was dangerously calm.

Her chin lifted in defiance. “You have no idea what I’m capable of.”

“Oh, Selina, I know exactly what you are capable of.”

Her eyes widened. It was an old guilt that had never been resolved between them. Never mentioned but there nevertheless. She pushed him away from her as she fled to the safety of the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Over the years, Bruce had been in many, many fights but the confrontation he had experienced with Selina left him raw and beaten without a single punch being thrown. Leave it to Selina to get that out of him; she had always made him feel too much. If he had been thinking clearly, which he had so not been, he would not have approached her the way he did. Now that he was calmer, he knew his mistake. Selina never reacted well when her back was against the wall and he had literally had back her against a wall. He had trapped her and when Selina felt trapped, she lashed out, her bandaged fingers attesting to that fact. As did his battered psyche.
He stared at her, listening to the beeps of the hospital equipment, and realized the extent of his mistakes concerning Selina Kyle. The most grievous one was that she didn’t know he loved her.

To visit or not to visit. That was the question Jim Gordon agonized over most of the night and a good part of the morning. There had been distinct boundaries to his friendship with Batman, if it could be called a friendship, that is. But it was, Gordon thought, remembering the masked man’s visit to his hospital room years before. He decided what the hell, go see the man and find out what he could do to help. Even if help meant stonewalling a police investigation.

As he waited in mid-morning traffic that was at a standstill, he checked the Gotham news sites both happy and concerned that he found no mention of yesterday’s homicide. Happy that Bruce Wayne may be able to get through this without his name being tainted and concerned that a junkie’s violent death apparently did not warrant any attention.

The route from the hospital garage to the lobby was all too familiar to Gordon. With over twenty years on the force, he had plenty of opportunities to visit injured colleagues in this hospital. He stopped by the information desk, flashed his badge, then realized other than ‘Selina’ he didn’t know the woman’s name. The attendant was friendly and wanted to be helpful to law enforcement, taking extra time to search the records until she found Selina Kyle’s room. “On the twelfth floor” she told him as if that was something special.

The elevator doors almost closed before a hand appeared in the middle, forcing them open. Jim was not surprised to find that the hand belonged to John Blake holding a breakfast sandwich in his mouth and a coffee in the other hand.

“Good morning, Commissioner,” Blake greeted, his mouth full of food.

“Do you have a GPS on my car, Blake?” Gordon asked, not feeling as exasperated as he sounded.

“I knew you’d be here sooner or later.” Blake said, with a cheeky but charming grin before taking another big bite out of his breakfast sandwich. “I thought I’d come by and see if any more cars need moving around. I’m hoping he left the Lamborghini somewhere far away.”

“I don’t think he drives that anymore,” Gordon remarked.

“Yeah, he’s trying to be low key and fall off the media’s radar.” John looked up at the floor indicators above the elevator doors, watching as they approached the twelfth floor. “You know, he’s going to all this effort to be a good citizen, in the public’s eyes, and she’s dragging him down into the mud.”

“You don’t know that.” Gordon waved him off as they emerged from the elevator and walked down the long hall toward the waiting room.

“A woman with that kind of criminal past is trouble. Seriously, Commissioner, her file was like this thick.” Blake held up his thumb and index finger about three inches apart. “She kidnapped Congressman Gilly. And, I know she had something to do with Bruce Wayne disappearing just
before Bane took over.”

Gordon frowned, that information was new to him. “I only remember her helping save the city just before the bomb went off.”

“Really?” Blake looked skeptical.

“I don’t want to gossip about this,” Gordon said. “Ms. Kyle is Mr. Wayne’s private business.”

“That private business is going to become very public if the press gets wind of this,” Blake said quickly and softly as they neared the waiting room.

“Let’s make sure that doesn’t happen.”

They found Bruce talking to a physician. Not wanting to interrupt, they hung back a discrete distance. Bruce nodded to them as he listened to the doctor.

“Have you talked to Detective Massey?” Gordon asked as they waited. After yesterday, he looked into service file and was impressed with her arrest record.

“Not since the crime scene. She knows something’s up.”

“Tell me about her,” Gordon said.

“She’s good at what she does. She likes catching bad guys especially people who end other people’s lives.”

“Am I imagining it or are my ears burning?” Massey asked, coming up from behind them.

“It’s your imagination,” Blake responded with an embarrassed grin.

“Hello, Commissioner Gordon, I didn’t expect to see you here. So are you guys all buddies or what?”

“What brings you here, Jess?” Blake asked.

At his adversarial tone, she straightened as if expecting a battle.

“I need to question one of my suspects.”

“Suspect?” Gordon asked. “You mean the victim and I don’t think she’s up to it.”

“She’s not. She’s in surgery. And I did mean suspect.” She nodded in Bruce Wayne’s direction.

“Your rich friend over there.”

Gordon and Blake stared at her incredulously.

“No,” Blake said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Gordon looked at her steadily. “Detective, you’re wasting your time.”

“All due respect, Commissioner, but it’s you that’s wasting my time. I don’t understand what’s happening between the three of you but I do know that I got a dead body and the guy may be a lowly junkie but he died badly. Viciously. I’m going to find who killed him which means exploring every possible lead. That includes your friend in there.”
“Look, Jess,” Blake said. “No way he’s part of this.”

“How do you know?” She asked.

Blake looked at Gordon. “We just know. He’s a friend.”

Bruce and the doctor had finished their conversation. As Bruce started towards them, Gordon intercepted him needing to talk to him before Massey began her questioning.

“A detective is here to ask you some questions. I can order her to wait…”

“Don’t go out on a limb for me, Commissioner,” Bruce said, shaking his head. “It’s fine.”

“Yes, but, she thinks--” He stopped as Blake and Massey joined them. “Mr. Wayne, this is Detective Jessica Massey.”

Bruce reached out to shake her hand. Massey looked at it, then up at his face before taking it. She wasted no time with pleasantries. “Why were you at the crime scene, Mr. Wayne?”

Blake discretely rolled his eyes at all their efforts of hiding Wayne’s presence were wasted.

“I received a text and then a voice mail from Ms. Kyle.”

“What time were those?” She took out her notebook, preparing to take notes.

“The text was about 1:30.”

“And the voice mail message?” She asked without looking up as she wrote down his answers.

“About half hour after that.”

“What did she say?” She looked up from her notebook.

Bruce hesitated, uncomfortable at having to divulge personal information. Gordon started to intervene but Wayne shook his head.

“She said that she was sorry and that ‘They killed him’.”

“Sorry for what?”

“We had an argument,” Bruce replied.

“Over what?”

Bruce stared at her for a few seconds before responding. “I don’t remember.”

Massey’s eyes narrowed. “Do you still have the voice mail?”

“No.”

“Do you know the deceased?”

“No.”

“Ever seen him before?”
“Not that I know of.”

“Yeah, it’d be hard to recognize him now. Our John Doe was bludgeoned about the head with what we think was a club wrapped in barbed wire.” She waited for his reaction and when she received none, she continued. “I’ve also read the report on Ms. Kyle’s injuries. You know what strikes me, Mr. Wayne? This person was furious. This wasn’t the work of someone mad about money or drugs but someone who wanted to punish, to inflict pain and suffering. You sure you can’t remember what you and Ms. Kyle argued about?”

Bruce folded his arms and looked at her with a guarded expression

“I’m sure.”

“So what started out looking like a bad business transaction is starting to smell like a crime of passion. The kind of crime where a husband or boyfriend just loses it in a fit of jealous rage.”

“Now, wait a minute, Jess,” Blake said. “Mr. Wayne would not do that. Believe me!”

She looked angrily at Blake as if she felt betrayed by his siding with a suspect before turning her assessing gaze back on Bruce. “I checked into the warehouse. Guess who owns it?”

“I have no idea.”

“You do, Mr. Wayne. Not Wayne Enterprises, not any of your other corporations or LLCs or other entities you rich seem so fond of but you, Bruce Wayne.”

Bruce looked surprised at that information but hid it quickly. “I have a lot of properties.”

“I’ll bet. So, let me get this straight. You get a text asking for help but don’t respond for two hours?”

“I had my phone off.”

“Uh huh. Then, your girlfriend leaves a cryptic message and you don’t respond to that for an hour?”

“Like I said, my phone was off.”

“Might I ask where you were?”

Bruce smiled humorlessly as if this had all suddenly turned horrifyingly funny to him.

“Is there anyone who can confirm your whereabouts from noon to three?” Jessica asked.

“Nope.”

Massey shook her head in disgust. “I think I have all I need here. I’ve left word with the nurse’s station to be notified the moment Ms. Kyle wakes up.”

She started to leave then turned around to face Bruce again. “Just because you’re rich, doesn’t mean you’re above the law. If you had something to do with this, I’ll figure it out. Even if you can intimidate your girlfriend and,” she looked at Blake and Gordon, “your friends into silence, I’ll find the truth.”

With a long glare at Blake, Massey left
“Sorry about Jess,” Blake said. “She’s a little sensitive about boyfriends killing girlfriends. Her sister was murdered in a domestic abuse situation.” Blake cringed when he realized what he was saying. “Not that’s what’s happening here but she has a thing about this kind of thing. Or what she thinks is this kind of thing...”

“It’s okay, John,” Bruce said, still watching her as she waited for an elevator. “She’s doing her job.”

“What are you gonna do?” Blake asked.

“Wait for Selina to wake up. Who better to ask than her?”

“John,” Gordon asked. “Is Massey the kind that likes media attention? I mean, will she leak unsubstantiated information to the press?”

“No,” Blake emphatically shook his head. “Not at all.”

“Good.” The last thing they needed is for an attention-starved detective jumping at the chance to be in the media spotlight by implicating Bruce Wayne in a homicide. Gordon looked at Bruce. “She’s just fishing. She has nothing and she’s eliminating all possibilities.”

“I know,” Bruce said. “Though I don’t think she’s eliminated me.”

“Are you worried?” Blake asked.

“Not about that,” Bruce said as he glanced quickly in the direction of Ms. Kyle’s hospital room.

“Is she going to be alright?” Gordon asked.

“She’ll recover,” Bruce replied. He looked distracted before settling his gaze on Blake. “John, there is something you can do for me.”

“Anything.”

“I need you to find Selina’s friend, Jen.” He gave him her description and last known address, the walk up in Old Town. “Sorry, but that’s all I know about her.”

“No problem,” Blake said. “This is right up my alley.”

“Also, see what you can find about Congressmen Gilly and what he’s been up to lately. I don’t think he had anything to do with this but let’s... eliminate him from the suspects if we can.”

“Suspects?” Gordon asked. “As in plural? Who else do you have in mind?”

“Other than me? No one.”
Visitors

As soon as she awoke at her usual six a.m., Helena sensed something was wrong, spending the morning crying for her mother and fussing at Alfred. After an hour of trying to placate her, Alfred called Isha fervently hopeful that the two would be able to communicate via telephone without their usual reliance on hand gestures or facial expressions. He managed to get his point across and Isha told him in her best English that she would be there as soon as she could find a ride. Alfred quickly responded, "Taxi. Please. Now. Please. Thank you." hoping she would understand that he would pay the cab fare if she would just get here immediately.

When Isha arrived less than a half hour later, Helena calmed down. Holding the older woman close, she fixed an angry glare at Alfred as if she blamed him for her mother's absence. Dressed in a bright blue sari, her graying black hair in a tight bun, Isha soothed Helena, speaking softly to her in Hindi.

Bruce called periodically during the day but after speaking with her father, Helena seemed to reject whatever peace Isha had instilled and acted out in a very vocal manner. Isha, unfazed by the tears and tantrums, admonished the girl to behave, gently chastising her at her rudeness to Alfred. The girl listened solemnly then hugged Alfred giving him a sweetly sincere "I'm sorry, Pop Pop" before dashing back to Isha.

After Helena woke from her nap, the afternoon promised to be a repeat of the morning. Alfred begged Isha's forgiveness for leaving and went to the hospital.

"Oh, dear," he said when he first saw Selina. Whatever he felt about Ms. Kyle, her vividness could not be denied. Alfred knew why Bruce found her so appealing, not just her physical allure but there was life to her. Quite the opposite of what he was seeing now. "It's a little shocking to see her like this."

"She put up quite a fight," Bruce said, looking tired and drawn.

"I'm not surprised," Alfred replied with a small smile before pulling a chair to sit next to Bruce. "Any idea who did this?"

Bruce shook his head. "The homicide detective suspects me."

Alfred frowned, concerned that the new public persona Bruce had carefully cultivated over the last few months would be all for naught if the tabloids caught a whiff of a Wayne scandal. "What are you going to do?"

"Wait for her to wake up," Bruce responded, his eyes on Selina. "Then we'll work with the police to get whoever did this."

Alfred gave him a disbelieving look. "Ms. Kyle doesn't strike me as the sort to rely on the police to solve her problems."

"I'll convince her that's the right thing to do," Bruce said, sounding like he was trying to convince himself as well.
A nurse arrived to take Selina's vitals and change her IV bags. The young woman worked quickly and efficiently but with tender care for the patient who was oblivious to her ministrations. After she left, Bruce filled Alfred in on the details of Selina's injuries, explaining how the hand surgeon, flown in from the west coast, had carefully set her shattered hand. As he talked, Bruce sounded detached and emotionless but Alfred knew better. Gazing at the man who was like a son to him, his concern swelled as did his irrational anger at the woman causing such distress in both father and daughter.

As they sat together, Alfred chatted quietly telling Bruce about Helena's day.

"I forgot how exhausting toddlers could be," Alfred commented before realizing Bruce was not paying attention.

"I can't believe I thought she'd taken Helena and left!" Bruce exclaimed. "She would never do that."

Alfred's silence indicated he was not convinced. He knew nothing about this woman except she had once stolen from them and then gave birth to Bruce's daughter. His eyes went to Selina's left hand, focusing on the metal pins protruding outside the cast.

"There was a reason we came back, Alfred." Bruce looked at Alfred, willing him to understand. "It was for her."

"I know, sir." Alfred patted Bruce's arm comfortingly, wanting him to know that, as usual, he understood the whys of everything he did. "Speaking of which, it's getting late, sir."

"Yeah?"

Alfred gave him a steady look. "She's asking for her mum, she doesn't need to wonder where you are, too."

"I know," Bruce agreed, looking abashed before looking back at Selina. "I just…I just can't leave her. I don't want her to wake up alone."

"She won't be alone; I'll stay with her until the morning. Then you can bring Isha for a visit. She's quite anxious to see her."

Bruce nodded. "This will upset her."

"Yes," Alfred agreed. "I've noticed she's quite fond of Ms. Kyle."

On his way out, Bruce paused by the door.

"She's really not as bad as she likes to make you think," he said quietly as he met Alfred's doubting gaze.

Before Alfred could respond, Bruce was out the door leaving the older man alone with his thoughts.

As soon as Bruce walked through the elevator doors, Helena ran to him, hugging his legs tightly until he lifted her. Holding her close, he pushed away his guilt for leaving her scared and wondering at her mother's abrupt absence. She immediately asked about Selina but Bruce was prepared for her questions, giving her answers about Selina visiting a sick friend, smiling as he talked so she would know that everything was okay. Helena looked at him doubtfully but she
seemed to accept his explanation. His flimsy excuses would not hold for long, Helena was a clever little girl and even at three she would understand that her mother would never not call her but Bruce refused to subject his daughter to the sight of her beaten mother unconscious in a hospital bed.

Isha met him with a worried look, eager to ask the questions that could not be asked in front of Helena. Fifteen minutes later, after securing Helena in her car seat in Selina's Range Rover, he closed the door and assured Isha that Selina was going to be alright and he would take her to see Selina tomorrow. Isha nodded and asked no more questions that she sensed he did not know the answers. She climbed in the back seat alongside Helena.

Bruce sat in the driver's seat then took Selina's keys out of his pocket and, just before sliding the key into the ignition, he noticed the unfamiliar keys on the ring. Frowning, he stared at the keys realizing for the umpteenth time in the last few days that there was so much he did not know about Selina. He started the vehicle, took note of the mileage, then looked around the car seeing that, save for the area around Helena's car seat, the vehicle looked hardly used. Alfred had purchased the SUV for Selina just after they returned to Gotham six months ago but the vehicle felt impersonal, as if it was a borrowed rental car. Nothing like Selina.

On the drive to Isha's row house in downtown Gotham, Helena chattered happily, telling Isha her version of where her mother was. Isha nodded encouragingly, her eyes sometimes meeting Bruce's in the rearview mirror.

They soon arrived at the modest house where Isha, her daughter, Shanti and Shanti's four children lived together. Before arriving in Gotham, Bruce had researched neighborhoods that the women would be comfortable with and this particular one had a strong Indian presence that seemed to suit the family well.

When they entered the house, Helena ran to play with Shanti's two youngest children. Shanti's oldest son, Sushil, rushed to Bruce, happy to see the man he idolized. He shook Bruce's hand, telling him about school until Isha shooed him away leaving the adults alone so Bruce could explain to Shanti and Isha what had happened. As expected, they offered to help in any way possible. Isha, in particular, wanted to see Selina and stay with her. Bruce promised to take her tomorrow.

With surprising little difficulty, Bruce gathered Helena to leave. She usually playfully hid from her parents when it was time to go but, today, ran to Bruce when he called her, holding his hand tightly as she waved goodbye to Isha and her family.

"Are you hungry?" Bruce later asked as he buckled Helena in her car seat.

"Pizza!"

Bruce smiled at her. The kid had not had pizza until six months ago and could not get enough of it making Bruce wonder what pizza makers were putting in the stuff to make kids wild for it.

They ended up in a garish pizza place that's claim to fame was not the food but the huge play area. Helena's eyes were huge as she took in the big colorful crawling tubes that traversed the length of the restaurant. Pulling her father's hand, she tried to lead him over but he insisted on eating first. Or trying to eat as the pizza was awful but Helena did not notice. After eating her customary five bites, she excitedly pulled him over to the play area where she promptly jumped into the ball pit.

Bruce sat down on a bench in the play area, smiling at Helena as she happily waved to him.

"Gosh, there's nothing more depressing than being at Pizza Fun! on a Tuesday night."
He looked up to see an attractive woman smiling down at him.

"My first time," he said.

"Wow," she replied as her hand went to her blonde hair, smoothing it away from her face. "How did you manage to hold out so long?"

"We've been out of town."

Interpreting his terseness for shyness, the woman sat down next to him.

"How old is your daughter?"

"Three."

"Ah…that's a tough age," she said, with a flirty smile. "I was so happy when we got past the terrible twos then you discover that the threes are even worse!"

"So, I've heard."

She sighed prettily then said, "It's tough being a single parent."

"Oh," Bruce replied. "I'm not single…not a single parent."

"Sorry," she said, more irritated than embarrassed. "I didn't see a wedding ring."

Her interest in talking to him waned considerably for which Bruce was exceedingly grateful. She started to rise but then she gave him a look, the one Bruce had seen many times when people tried to figure out how they knew him. Before she was able to figure him out, he rose, bid her a polite goodbye, and found Helena.

"May I have ice cream?" She asked hesitantly as they looked for her coat.

"No, sweetie, you already had some earlier."

"No, I didn't, Daddy." She said shaking her head, looking at him wide eyed.

He started to correct her then remembered that it was yesterday Jen had given her ice cream.

"Ok." He grinned at her as he wondered how Blake's search for Selina's friend was panning out. Since he had not heard anything, he could only assume Blake had no luck.

Helena ate her ice cream in the car which ended up being a bad idea on his part. As he lifted her out of her car seat, he found clumps of melting ice cream on her clothes and seat. If Selina were here, she would give him that look, the look that said he let Helena get away with too much. If it had been six months ago in India, she would have smiled at him and, together, they would clean up the mess. He missed that Selina and wondered where that woman had disappeared.

After giving Helena a bath, Bruce started to take her to her room to tuck her in but Helena shook her head vigorously, tears in her eyes. He squatted down in front of her, the signal for her to crawl on his back for a piggyback ride. She clung to his neck until he tickled her toes making her squeal with laughter. After tossing her playfully on the big bed in the master bedroom, he lay down beside her. She scooted up close then asked again why mommy did not call. No cell phone reception, he explained which the three year seemed to accept. She soon fell asleep and even though Bruce was exhausted, he lay awake thinking about Selina's keys and all the other clues he missed, hoping she would wake soon.
Four Years Earlier

The train to Florence was to depart in an hour and Selina was nowhere to be found. Bruce had woken to an empty room which was not entirely unusual since Selina sometimes felt the need for an early morning run. He ordered breakfast and when she did not show after a few hours, called her. Then called repeatedly as the time when he wanted to get to the train station approached. He wasn't worried. He was irritated.

While the last few months with Selina had been anything but boring, there were times, like today, when he questioned the reasons they were together. His eye fell on the bed, remembering one of the reasons why. The prior month, Bruce had spent recovering from knee and back surgery. Selina had made the recuperation particularly interesting, finding fun in him being laid up in bed.

Selina finally arrived looking vaguely like something the cat dragged in and not at all like she'd been out for a run but Bruce ignored her wan appearance in favor of his irritation at her almost causing them to miss their train.

"I'm not going," she said, looking very guilty.

"If you think Alfred is going to lecture you about stealing from us, he won't. We probably won't even speak." He had explained the whys of what they were doing in Florence. She had looked at him oddly then shrugged as if she wasn't even going to try to understand the mysterious relationship between Alfred and him.

"No," Selina said, looking him straight in the eye. "I think this is where we need to part ways."

"Why?" Up until yesterday, everything had been good. Sure, they had their ups and downs, sometimes their personalities clashed spectacularly but they had managed to keep the deep stuff out which they both sensed their relationship might not survive.

"It's just better this way," she said, watching him zip up their bags. "We've had our fun together. Why ruin a good thing?"

"What did I do to piss you off?" He stepped close to her, looking down at her face trying to remember when she first seemed…different.

"It's just…" She trailed off, shrugging helplessly. "I'm not mad at you. It's just that…I'm…really tired."

He stared at her trying to understand what she was not telling him. Never let it be said that he would figure out Selina Kyle but they had plans and whatever was going through her head would have to wait. "Well, sleep on the train because we have to go," he said as he grabbed their bags and headed out the door. When he reached the foyer of their small Swiss hotel, he realized she was not behind him. He hailed a taxi, handed their luggage to the driver, turned to go after her but then she appeared at the door her huge dark sunglasses covering her eyes.

The train was crowded and they were late so they could not find seats together which seemed to suit Selina fine. Without a word to him, she sank into the first available seat and did not seem to care that she was squished between two other passengers. Bruce found a seat in another compartment amidst a group of German tourists who did not get the hint that he was not interested in polite chitchat.
In Milan, they changed trains.

"What is it?" Bruce asked as soon as they sat down in an empty compartment. Selina's uncharacteristic silence was worrying him.

"I can't say it," she said as she looked nervously at the young family that entered the no longer empty compartment. "It's embarrassing," she whispered.

Embarrassing? He did not think Selina got embarrassed over anything. Nothing seemed to faze her except whatever it was that was causing this reaction. He studied her as she looked out the window, her brow scrunched in concern. As they neared Florence, he started to get an inclination of what the problem was and then felt the seeds of something that could be called panic settle over him. He was not sure he was ready for what he thought she was going to tell him.

By the time they reached their hotel room in Florence, Bruce had his response to her announcement firmly in mind. It was a good plan, he decided, with kind, gracious words designed to let her know, as gently as possible, that while he liked her a lot and liked being with her, he just did not feel the same way.

As soon as the door closed behind him and they were truly alone, Selina came to life.

"I can't believe it!" She exclaimed as she paced the floor. She did not spare a glance at the sumptuous surroundings or look out at the dazzling view. "It's not like I haven't done things to prevent this from happening but…" She looked at him accusingly. "Leave it to you to get past my barriers."

Bruce sat down on the bed, now almost positive she was about to spring the L word on him. He did not want her to say those words because that would change everything, and while everything had been so very good between them, he was not even close to being on that level with her.

"I guess it's karma…All the times I felt so superior at people this happened to..." She shook her head ruefully before she looked back at him.

He braced himself for her uncomfortable emotional declaration and was wholly unprepared for:

"I'm pregnant."

He stared at her. Stunned. She stared back, her eyes wide with horror at the voiced word.

"Wait," he said, trying to process her words. "What?"

She resumed her pacing. "I mean how could this happen? Now? In this day and age? It shouldn't happen, that's what!"

Bruce continued to stare at her, she had said the one thing he had not considered in all his imaginings of what could be wrong with her. He forced himself to focus on what she was saying.

"...my mistake," she continued, still pacing. "This is my fault and I'll take care of it."

"I thought..." he began, intending to remind her of the oh-so-brief conversation they had months ago when she assured him that everything was taken care of in the contraception department.

"Yeah, well I thought so, too." She sat down on the bed next to him. "I don't know why I'm telling you since I am not going to have a baby." She glanced at him quickly. "What do you think?"
"I don't know," he said and put an arm around her wanting her to know that he felt exactly as she did.

The next afternoon they went to the café on the Arno and Bruce almost chased Alfred down needing him more than ever but he remembered that he and Selina were definitely not going to have a baby and why put Alfred through all that. After Alfred rushed off, Bruce looked at Selina who was staring into the distance deep in thought.

"Let's get the first train out of here," he said before he gave in to the compulsion to find Alfred and the man talked Bruce out of doing what they were considering.

By the time they arrived in Munich, they had convinced each other that they were not the kind of people to have a baby. They hardly knew each other and Bruce was, in Selina's words, a little fucked up.

"Mind you, I'm not saying I'm a picture of mental health but between us, we're the last people who should be bringing a kid into the world." He took exception to the fucked up remark and they fought a good part of the night until they realized having a baby together would not be so terrible.

The next day, they changed their minds again. A wailing infant and a food-throwing toddler who pitched an ear-shattering tantrum on the floor of the restaurant mocked their decision.

"I never ever thought I would have a kid. Ever," Selina said after the appointment was made.

Bruce had thought about it, had entertained fantasies about married life with Rachel at Wayne Manor with Rachel and him fulfilling the role his parents had left behind. His imaginings had been clouded with perfection. No, this was not how he imagined becoming a father. Certainly not with a former jewel thief who was still a mystery to him and whom he did not fully trust.

Then, in the middle of the night, Selina turned to him and calmly said that as a kid who heard her mother say, on numerous occasions, that her life would be better if only she'd had an abortion, she didn't think she could go through with it.

For the second time in a matter of days, her words stunned him. Bruce could not imagine hearing something like that from a parent and he couldn't help thinking of the child subjected to such damaging words. Selina gave him a don't-you-dare-feel-sorry-for-me look and in her eyes, he could see the tough kid putting on a brave face masking her mass of hurts. It was the truest thing she had offered him in months.

"I don't expect anything from you," she said quietly. "I don't want to trap you..." *Again* was the word that went unspoken but hovered in the air.

"Alfred always warned me about this sort of thing happening. I should've listened more closely." He tried for a light tone, wanting her to know that he did not blame her and that they were both culpable.

She nodded her head in agreement, her eyes wide with indecision and anxiety.

From Munich, they travelled east, slowly making their way through Austria then to Hungary. For months they existed this way, travelling from country to country and if they were trying to outrun her ever expanding bump, they didn't own up to it. Bruce was hard pressed to figure out who was the most appalled at the situation. Of the two, Selina was the most calm. At least until Kiev when, at seven months, the reality of the coming baby seemed to finally hit her.

"I have no business doing this!" She cried, angry at the tears rolling down her face. "Fucking
"Selina," Bruce said. "I think it's going to be ok." And for the first time, he believed it.

"Really?" She asked, desperate to believe him.

"I think we both know what is going to happen," he said quietly, his hand on her belly.

"That's what scares me." Selina replied, putting her hand over his.

As he looked at the woman lying next to him, her dark eyes shining with fear and hope, he realized he would not want to be in this situation with anyone else.

After a restless night, Bruce woke with Helena's feet in his face. He rearranged her before putting his arm around her, pulling her close. She slept deeply, not rousing at the movement. Waiting for her to wake, he remained thus until six o'clock rolled around and she woke asking about her mother. He reminded her of the reason for Selina's absence telling her mommy would be home soon then distracted her with talk of pancakes.

He spent the day driving all over town. First, Bruce dropped off Helena with Shanti as he took Isha to the hospital. He and Alfred watched helplessly as Isha tearfully fretted over Selina, smoothing her hair over the bandages, stroking her uninjured hand. Her eyes lifted and met Bruce's. The question very clear in her eyes: What was he going to do about this? With a slight shake of his head, he told her things were different here and they would wait for the police. She frowned then told Bruce she would stay until he returned later in the night after Helena went to bed.

Dr. Rathburn arrived to brief him on Selina's progress. He assured Bruce that Selina would wake soon as they were reducing the sedatives. Bruce was torn, wanting to be there when she woke but knowing that Helena needed him more than her unconscious mother did, he told Isha to call the moment anything changed.

After picking up Helena, he took her to Wayne Enterprises. They took his private elevator to his office in a nondescript part of the building. Wanting to escape scrutiny, he had chosen an office in an underused and insignificant area. Helena fell asleep on his couch while he worked to salvage the business deal that was supposed to be finalized in DC before he unexpectedly left.

By the time he returned to the hospital at eight, he was exhausted. The prior two nights of uneasy rest were taking its toll, he was out of practice for sleepless nights.

He called a taxi for Isha and as soon as she left, sank in the chair by Selina's side and fell asleep. Waking only when a nurse arrived to replenish Selina's meds. When he looked up, the nurse smiled at him before returning to her work.

Rubbing his eyes, he almost went back to sleep but then he noticed something very wrong about the nurse. At her ankle, he saw the distinct outline of a holstered gun. As she prepared to inject something into Selina's IV, he sprang up, knocking the syringe out of her hand. The woman whirled around, deftly delivering a surprisingly powerful punch to his face. Undaunted, he grabbed her, meaning to throw her to the floor but she skillfully fought back. Her eyes showed her surprise as she recognized a trained fighter when she met one then her eyes narrowed in irritation. It was obvious she was not expecting any resistance from Bruce, thinking this hit was going to be easy money.

In the blink of an eye, a blade was in her hand and before he knew what was happening, she slashed his arm. When he reacted, she kicked him in the abdomen then she reached for her gun.
Bruce grabbed her hand, yanking her off balance then kicked her knee sending her crashing into the IV stand. A nurse arrived, horrified, Bruce yelled at her to call security. The woman rose from the floor, gun in hand. Bruce swatted it away, the Glock sliding across the floor under the bed. Unmindful of the pain in his arm, he managed to subdue her, pinning her to the floor. The woman, however, had no intention of getting caught and after feigning surrender; she head butted him then punched his throat causing him to release her. Springing up, she quickly looked for her gun but the commotion of hospital security nearing made her change her mind.

Before making her escape, she turned to Bruce and said, "She's not worth it, Mr. Wayne."
Three Years Ago

The late January night was bitter cold and the heater in their apartment did not heat as it should. Under mounds of covers, Bruce and Selina lay together, on their sides, dressed warmly. Bruce slept deeply, his arm over Selina, holding her close. Selina lay awake, one hand absently stroking his arm, the other rested on her belly feeling the baby move within her. Her thoughts, however, focused not on the baby or the man sleeping next to her, but on home and her old life. Never would she have thought she would miss Gotham but sometimes on nights like this when it was cold and sleep eluded her, being thousands of miles from home made her lonesome.

With two Selina's due date rapidly approaching, Bruce had found a well regarded birthing clinic in a small city on the Black Sea. The town was a noted summer vacation destination with beaches, an amusement park and a boardwalk lined with garish tourist traps but, in the winter, the town was devoid of tourists except for Bruce and Selina who sometimes wondered why they ended up in this place of all places.

They found a cozy apartment in a building where they were the youngest residents by at least thirty years. The other tenants regarded the young American couple with distant curiosity until they realized Selina was pregnant then the gaggle of widows enthusiastically welcomed them, eager for a chance to hold a newborn. The women fed the American couple regularly, offering Selina Russian comfort food that they promised was good for the baby. Being fussed over in such a manner was entirely foreign to Selina but her irritation at being the center of matronly attention didn't last long. Mostly because Bruce liked her receiving so much attention, especially with the home cooked meals.

Bruce did not wake as she slowly scooted away from him to get up, his unconscious mind accustomed to her restlessness and need to get up often in the night. After raiding the tiny kitchenette for the closest thing to peanut butter she could find, she shrugged on Bruce's heavy coat, slid on gloves and a hat, grabbed her phone and stepped out into the hall of the apartment house. As expected, it was quiet and cold but she welcomed her solitude in the communal space that would remain empty until daybreak.

With some difficulty, she eased down, sitting on the top step in the stairwell. She called home, checking in with friends to see how they were doing and get the latest gossip but mostly just to hear their voices.

"What is this talking?" A gruff voice boomed at her from the first floor.

Selina did not have to look to see who the angry speaker was. When she and Bruce moved in, an ancient former Soviet soldier who lived in the apartment directly below them, eyed the young American couple with suspicion and dislike, barking at them to keep their American dancing to daylight hours as he liked to go to bed early. In the few weeks since they arrived, he had not wavered in his ire and always sent them a grumpy glare before disappearing into his apartment.

"I'm on the phone!" She yelled at him, affecting her most intimidating lower Gotham accent.

"I hear that!" He shook his cane at her. "It's the middle of the night, American girl!"
"Not in Gotham," she murmured but ended the call with a whispered, "I'll call you later."

The elderly man remained outside his door, watching her as she awkwardly stood up. When she was on her feet, he loudly cleared his throat and beckoned her to his apartment. She gave him an apprehensive look, not at all eager to receive a lecture from the stern man.

"Yes! You! Come!" He bellowed, banging his cane on the floor.

Selina slowly descended the stairs, feeling like she was being called into the principal's office. He did not wait but went inside, leaving the door open for her. Selina stepped across the threshold and almost sighed in pleasure. The old man's apartment was deliciously warm.

"So here's where all the heat's going," she commented as she looked around the surprisingly comfortable room. She had imagined the man lived a Spartan life with a cot, a single metal chair, and whatever else military types favored to decorate their homes. She was unprepared for the dozens and dozens of pictures that lined the walls; military pictures, simple paintings, but mostly family photographs.

"Sorry I woke you," Selina said with an apologetic look, finally seeing the lonely man behind the gruff exterior. Since she was feeling a little lonesome herself, she recognized a kindred spirit.

"You didn't wake me," he replied as he walked slowly to his kitchen that was as small as Bruce and Selina's but felt bigger somehow. Homier. "I sleep not so good myself."

Selina followed him to the kitchen, watching as he filled a pot with water, and then set it on the stove.

"Then why do you get so mad?" she asked.

"I'm Soviet officer," he said as if that explained everything. "Americans make me suspicious."

"Afraid we'll get all your Soviet secrets out of you?" She asked, liking the man.

He smiled. "You are not nearly as loud as I feared."

"I'm not exactly in dancing shape."

Selina studied the old man as he studied her, each dropping their earlier opinions of each other.

"You are lovely," he said with an amiable look.

The unexpected compliment surprised her. Maybe because she was feeling decidedly unlovely, despite Bruce's assurances to the contrary, but the old man's kind words touched her, making her feel uncharacteristically shy. "Thank you."

"Your husband is wondering where you are now?" He asked as he handed her a cup of hot tea.

Selina shook her head. "He's a surprisingly heavy sleeper," she said, deciding not to correct him about her marital status.

"Surprising?" He asked, his curiosity piqued. "Why? He is soldier? He has soldier look about him, yes?"

"He does, doesn't he? But, no, he's not a soldier," she said, thinking that Bruce was, in many respects, soldier-like, leading a pretty regimented life. Now that his knee and back were healed and even though they'd spent the last few months travelling almost continuously, he managed to keep a
vigorous exercise routine that made Selina tired thinking about it. Though she never minded watching his daily push up routine.

"Why are you here?" The man asked, settling into an easy chair. He beckoned her to sit in the comfortable chair that matched his.

"You invited me," Selina replied with a mischievous grin, knowing what he meant.

"None of that," he chided. "Answer question, American."

"It's a long story."

He gazed at her expectantly, waiting patiently for her to speak.

Where to start? Selina wondered. How could she describe her odd but intense relationship with a billionaire whom she met while robbing him. How she was eight and half months pregnant by a man who used to suit up and fight criminals. Of which she used to be one.

"Well…we…uh…" she began, trying to think of a way to explain Bruce and her and their relationship without really explaining anything.

"I thought it was a simple question," he commented with a smile in his faded blue eyes.

"You thought wrong."

"How about an easier question?"

"Yes, please," she replied, taking a sip of her tea.

"What did you do in America?"

So much for easy questions. "Um…I was…self employed."

"What is that?"

"It means that I had my own business."

"Ah…You are a capitalist."

"Yes," Selina agreed, nodding, liking how the word applied to her. "Exactly. A capitalist."

"And what did Miss Capitalist do?"

"Acquisitions."

He shook his head, not understanding the word.

"I acquired things," she explained but he continued looking at her uncomprehendingly. "I persuaded people to part with things they didn't want to part with."

He smiled. "I imagine you were very good at that."

She grinned back at him. "I was."

"But now…?"

Her grin softened into sincere smile. "Now I'm waiting to have a baby."
"Have you been married long time?"

Wow, Selina thought, this guy sure had a knack for asking the wrong questions.

"Were you a KGB interrogator?" She asked.

"No. And I thought that last question very easy."

Selina started to offer some random number of years then stopped. Lies didn't spring quite so easily to her lips anymore. Half-truths and outright withholding of information were more her style now but stories designed specifically to deceive? She had no interest in telling this lonely and grouchy old man fabrications. Despite herself, she liked him. "We're not married."

He looked pointedly at her belly.

"Yeah, well, this caught us by surprise."

"Good surprise, yes?"

She reclined back on the chair, her hand stroking her belly. "I'm starting to think so."

"And him?"

"He's more excited than he lets on." That was an understatement. After a few months and as she started to show, their constant state of shock had made way to wary anticipation. Only in the last weeks did Selina think about the baby with excitement. With Bruce, he had given over to excitement long before her, reading everything on the subject of pregnancy and childbirth.

"That is true for most men. When my wife have baby…" He trailed off, his eyes misting before going to one of the photographs on the wall. "I don't wish to talk of my wife," he said quietly.

Selina looked up at the photo of a beautiful woman, smiling happily, her dark hair prettily styled in the fashion of fifty years ago. She imagined the old man in front of her as a young man taking the photo, the object of the woman's love-filled gaze.

"Do you play?" He asked, gesturing at the chess set, wanting a change of subject.

"Sorry, no. But I'm sure Bruce does," Selina added at his disappointed look.

"Who?"

She pointed upstairs and, speak of the devil, her phone buzzed indicating a text message.

"That's him," Selina said, knowing exactly who it was without having to look.

"He worries you are giving birth now."

"He's just wondering where I am in the middle of the night."

"Trust me, American girl, he thinks the baby will give birth in a dark alley surrounded by wolves."

"Yeah, probably." She said as she texted Bruce that she was fine and would be back in bed soon. "But I have no intention of doing that. I want a comfortable room with access to painkillers. I should go…"

She pushed herself up, walked to the door, already missing the heat. She paused at the door,
turning back to the man who remained in his easy chair. "I'm Selina, by the way."

"Vladmir Dmitrovich Balashov."

As she opened the door, he called out, "Bring him for chess tomorrow."

It was not an invitation but an order.

She nodded, thanked him for the tea and stepped out into the hall that was at least forty degrees colder.

At the landing between floors, she saw Bruce at their door, intending to look for her. He looked relieved when he saw her.

"You don't have to come out here to make a call," he said, as she walked up the steps.

"I didn't want to wake you," she replied and that was partly true. She hadn't wanted to wake him but the real reason, and Bruce knew it, was there were still parts of herself that she wasn't ready to share with him. Not yet, anyway. Sometimes Selina felt like she was being consumed by him, by their baby, her life careening out of control. Preserving that bit of her life that was all hers was of great importance to her. Bruce seemed to understand that, not pushing or prodding, maybe sensing that some skeletons should stay in the closet.

"You're warm," he said, as he led her into their room, closing the door behind her.

"You'll never guess where I was," she said, unbuttoning his coat.

He looked at her inquisitively as he helped her out of the overlarge black coat.

"Colonel Cranky's place."

"Really?" He asked, surprised. He tossed the coat on a chair near the door. "Did he yell at you for something?"

"Not really. He's actually very nice."

"If you say so," Bruce replied, sounding doubtful.

"I told him you would play chess with him."

"You didn't."

"I did."

"Why in the world would you say that?"

"Because I feel bad for him. And, he's lonely for his wife. And," she added just in case the lonely old man scenario didn't persuade him. "I'm hugely pregnant."

His hand touched her belly and he smiled that smile that made her forget her homesickness. "You can only use that excuse for a few more weeks."

"I know," she gazed back at him, unable to keep the happy smile from her lips. "I've got to use it while I can."

"I guess I can't complain since you're using your power for good," Bruce said before kissing her.
By the end of the week, Balashov was their new best friend.

The first chess match between Balashov and Bruce was particularly interesting. Bruce had severely underestimated the ninety-three year old's chess ability.

"The American thinks he can beat Russian at chess?" Balashov asked, chuckling at Bruce's confounded expression when he announced checkmate.

Bruce quickly set up another game, eager to meet the challenge.

Bruce and Selina fell into the habit of spending their evenings in Balashov's warm apartment with Bruce and Balashov playing chess while Selina read. After a few days, the old man felt began talking about his beloved wife of seventy years who had passed away the year before.

"She was the most beautiful woman in Russia. And she loved me." He smiled at them.

Selina liked listening to him and even though Bruce appeared engrossed in the game, she knew he listened and was as interested as her. Maybe it was that they were alone together in a strange city waiting for a stranger to take over their lives, but Selina sensed that Bruce, like her, craved stories of people with truly happy lives.

Selina's due date came and went. Balashov encouraged her to have a shot of vodka to help chase the little one out. Selina was almost tempted but Bruce's horrified expression convinced her otherwise. She thought it best not to tell him that since her mother dropped acid while she was pregnant with her, she didn't think a little shot of vodka could be too bad. And she was so very ready for this baby to be born.

She sat on Mrs. Balashov's chair with her feet propped on a little stool, reading a horrible book that was the only novel in English she could find in the city. Bruce plotted his next move against Balashov as the old man recounted the story of how he met his wife. Selina listened as she read, the book was not good enough to warrant her full attention. As she read a wholly unrealistic description of a safe-cracking plot, she felt the first contraction.

"What time is it?" She asked, her body going still.

Bruce checked his watch as he prepared to move his bishop. "9:08," he said absently, typically offering a precise answer which Selina had been expecting.

Selina took a deep, quiet breath, relaxed and waited, listening to Balashov while gazing at the pictures that told the story of Balashov's life. She felt oddly peaceful, quite unlike what she had imagined would be her mental state at this time. The next contraction hit, confirming to her that her labor had begun.

"What time is it now?" She asked after the contraction eased and her voice would sound normal. She had little interest in causing a stir.

"What, you have date?" Balashov asked, scanning the chessboard trying to figure out Bruce's plan.

She stood up and moved the clock on the mantle so she wouldn't have to ask and sat back down.

The minutes ticked by and Balashov stopped talking as he watched her watch the clock, then nudged Bruce to look at her. The game forgotten, the two men watched her. Just as she was about to tell them to stop she felt another contraction.

"Ok, yeah, this is it," she said and Bruce rushed to her looking both excited and worried.
"This is very exciting!" Balashov announced as Bruce helped her to the door.

"Is it bad?" Bruce asked, looking over her anxiously.

"It's not too bad. Better than I thought," she assured him feeling like a super woman but ten hours later she was singing a different tune. Demanding, in sharp language she wasn't sure the Russian midwife could understand, something to ease the never-ending pain.

Another two hours, almost a year to the day since the bomb went off, their daughter was born.

Each morning, Alfred woke before the sun rose, set a pot of tea to boil in the electric teapot on the sideboard in his private sitting room. While the water heated, he went out to fetch the Gotham Herald that was delivered to the penthouse by six a.m. then enjoyed his English Breakfast in the comfort of his favorite chair as he perused the day's news. It was a cherished ritual. This morning, however, he found a yellow post-it note affixed to the chrome kettle. 'Helena is with me. Will call when you get up. Be nice to David.'

David? Alfred didn't like the sound of that. As soon as he emerged from his room, he met a thirtyish man with a military style haircut in a dark blue suit.

"Good morning, Mr. Pennyworth," he greeted with a friendly smile. "I'm David."

"Good for you," Alfred replied, irritably. He hated early morning mysteries. "And what are you doing here?"

Instead of responding, David handed Alfred a cell phone.


Alfred frowned; that particular tone meant Bruce would soon be delivering troubling news.

"What's this about?" he asked as he eyed the tall man who gazed at him emotionlessly.

"I'll explain when you get to the storage container. David will drive you."

"He will, will he?"

"Alfred. Please."

Bruce's serious tone gave him pause. Alfred looked at the man standing before him more closely, seeing the muscular physique as well as the slight protruding of something under the man's suit coat: a shoulder holster. Alfred's eyebrows lifted in consternation. Something serious must have happened for Master Wayne to allow an armed stranger into their house.

"I'll be there in half an hour," Alfred said.

"Thank you. Bring some milk for Helena, please. And cash," Bruce said before ending the call.

"Bloody hell," Alfred murmured as he handed the phone to his new best friend.

Fifteen minutes later, Alfred and David took the private elevator to the parking garage. When he
stepped out, Alfred noticed a deliberately nondescript van parked near the entrance. David nodded to someone sitting in the van before opening the back door to the Rolls Royce and waited for Alfred to get in. Alfred's eyes narrowed, not liking being driven around. He was the driver, after all.

"I have my orders, Mr. Pennyworth," David said in a slightly less friendly tone than earlier.

As they drove out of the garage, another vehicle, a black sedan, pulled up behind them. David did not seem alarmed and the vehicle soon fell back a safe distance ensuring that no one followed Alfred. They took a confusing route to the storage container, taking an extra half hour to get there. Alfred recognized the tactic of losing any possible tails and his worry grew.

They finally reached the storage container that Alfred hoped he would never revisit. David parked the car just outside the gate, got out and unlocked the gate, holding it open for Alfred.

"Mr. Wayne instructed me to wait here," he explained as he closed the gate behind him.

Alfred made his way through the throng of containers until he reached the familiar red one. Closing the door behind him, he rode the lift downward, not liking the feeling that he had stepped back in time.

His sense of familiarity increased when he saw Bruce perched at the console, all screens active. The familiarity ended, however, when Alfred saw that, at his feet, Helena lay under the console. Resting atop folded blankets, she was busy eating what looked like a Pop Tart and watching a laptop propped in front of her on the floor.

"I could have brought her something better than that," Alfred called out as he walked toward Bruce. He squatted down beside the console, unscrewing the cap to the thermos then pouring out the cold milk into the cup. Helena smiled and thanked him as she took the milk then returned to watching her favorite show about a blue octopus.

"You've been busy," Alfred remarked, gesturing at the new hardware plugged into the computers. He decided to wait to ask about the bandage on Bruce's forearm that was just barely revealed under the long sleeved pullover Bruce had donned, probably to hide the injury from Helena.

"I had to update the systems," Bruce replied.

"In the middle of the night?"

Bruce stood and beckoned Alfred to follow him so they could talk without Helena hearing.

"Someone tried to kill Selina last night," Bruce said, quietly as if he worried the words would carry to Helena from even this distance.

"Is that what that is?" Alfred pointed at the bandage on Bruce's arm. "Do I need to have a look at it?"

Bruce shook his head. "I finally learned that if you're going to get slashed with a knife, a hospital is a great place to do that."


"She's exactly the same, Alfred," Bruce said woodenly before turning to face him. "It was a professional, Alfred. A good one but she wasn't expecting me."
"No. I suspect not," Alfred replied. "How good was this person?"

"Good enough to do this and get away." Bruce gestured at his wounded arm and then Alfred saw a flash of that angry look he'd seen all too many times on that much loved face.

"I'm sure Ms. Kyle will wake soon then answer all our questions," Alfred offered, trying to stave off the inevitable.

"Alfred, that hit woman and I fought. Fought hard and loudly, knocking things over. Enough of a racket that the nurse heard the ruckus fifty feet away but Selina didn't hear a thing. Didn't move a muscle. Nothing." Bruce looked away, his anxiety about Selina's welfare clear. "I don't think she's going to wake anytime soon and there's no way I'm going to sit back and wait for them to make another move on her."

"The good ones are expensive," Alfred observed, his mind shifting gears into investigative mode.

Bruce nodded in agreement.

"Yet," Alfred said with a sigh. "We're left with the same questions as before."

"But now we know that there's someone with money behind this. Someone with the resources to hire a professional killer." Bruce looked over at Helena, watching her munch on her pop tart, blissfully oblivious to the drama unfolding around her. "Someone who wants Selina dead and will pay good money to see that happen."

He walked to Helena. "I'm going to talk to Pop Pop okay?" He said before pulling her, laughingly, along with her pallet across the floor to rest outside of earshot. He kissed her head then went back to the console. Alfred set her milk and the laptop in front of her.

With a quick look at Helena to ensure she was engrossed in her show, Bruce turned on the monitors.

"I think whatever Selina was doing," Bruce said. "She was protecting her identity. She knew who she was up against. That's why she went to great lengths to keep her identity protected. The day she was…injured, she parked the SUV at 8:50 a.m. in a mall parking garage that gets lots of traffic." He pointed to the screen with the image of Selina leaving the Range Rover in the parking structure. She was dressed as Alfred had seen her that dreadful morning, in casual workout clothes. 'Mom clothes' she sometimes called them.

"Then," Bruce continued. "She left her car, the vehicle that could be traced to us. I searched the security feed but can't find how she leaves the mall. She found a blind spot somewhere, then disappeared and can't be picked up on any other mall camera."

"Then she takes another vehicle. One not traceable to us." Alfred nodded, understanding. "So she was successful at keeping her secret up until…"

"Until I showed up at the warehouse," Bruce said, grimly.

"And now they know who she is."

"And who is important to her."

Alfred smiled. "I'm flattered you included me in the 'important to her' category, sir."

"I'm not taking any chances, Alfred. I don't know what's going on here or who we're up against. I'm
not going to assume some local thugs are angry about a drug deal gone bad. Our visitor from last night says otherwise."

"What are you going to do?"

"What I should have done the moment I found her."

Alfred didn't miss his quick glance to where the suit once rested under the floor.

"Don't blame yourself, Master Wayne. You did the right thing," Alfred said. "That part of your life is over. Batman is dead."

"And he stays dead. This is now about me. They know who we are, who our daughter is. If they can't get to Selina, they may find a way to use Helena as leverage against her." Bruce's voice turned hard and cold. "That is not going to happen."

"You can't go around town beating up people as Bruce Wayne!" Alfred exclaimed, always concerned about Bruce and the obsessions that sometimes overtook him.

"Worried about lawsuits?" Bruce asked.

Alfred sighed, knowing he would never persuade Bruce to abandon something once he set his mind to it. He didn't blame Bruce, though. With the little one threatened, even indirectly, her father simply could not sit by and rely on hired security to keep her safe. He wanted, and deserved, answers.

Bruce turned back to the computer, bringing up the image of the man found at the crime scene. "I think whatever she was doing involves him," he said quietly, a tinge of jealousy in his voice.

Alfred studied the photograph of the body found at the crime scene. The photo was cropped so that the damage to the head was not visible.

"That's a prison tattoo," he said, pointing at one of the tattoos on the man's hand.

"Yes," Bruce said. "But he's not in the system."

"That's impossible. If he's been in prison, he has a record."

"Not if you have a program that erases you from every database."

"Is there such a thing?"

"There was," Bruce said, looking steadily at the image of the dead man. "I gave it to Selina and she used it to eradicate her past."

"I wondered about that." Alfred had been perplexed at the lack of data regarding Ms. Kyle when he specifically remembered her having a detailed and long record.

"I think she used the Clean Slate on this guy. It's the only explanation why his prints came up with nothing."

Someone from her past, Alfred thought, but who? And, what was he to her? He thought of Rachel and the pull of people from the past.

"Blake mentioned that the John Doe looked like a heavy drug user," Alfred pointed out as much to assure himself as well as Bruce that he did not think Selina would pine for an addict.
"The police should have a toxicology report soon but…," he said, as he glanced at Helena. "I just can't see Selina involved in a drug deal. That doesn't feel right."

"Well, that Clean Slate makes it difficult to find anything about our John Doe, sir."

"It does."

Alfred studied Bruce, taking note of the tiredness and tension in his bearing. "Blake can help," he said.

"That's not necessary."

"Why not?"

"For one, I heard he gets into trouble with Gordon."

"He got in trouble because he got shot," Alfred explained.

"He shouldn't be getting shot!" Bruce exclaimed, shaking his head. "I shouldn't have…"

"No, you did just the right thing. I admit he's not as flashy as you were but he does help. And nothing would give him greater honor than helping Batman. He's very useful, you know. Useful for more than moving cars."

"If you say so."

"I do say so. You need him. He can go places, talk to people that Bruce Wayne can't." Alfred gazed at Bruce intently, willing him to understand. "Unless you're planning on inventing a new persona…"

"I'm not."

"Good," Alfred said. "I'd hate to have to think up another costume. No telling what animal you would choose."

"Helena is partial to koalas," Bruce said, grinning at him.

"Only you could make those scary."

"Don't worry, Alfred. I can be very low key. Even without a mask."

"I know that, sir," Alfred said with a quick glance at Bruce's bandaged arm. "Just take Blake with you if you're going anywhere…iffy."

"Alright, Alfred," Bruce agreed.

"Very good, sir," Alfred said with a grin, feeling as if he'd won a major battle.

Bruce nodded, knowing he'd pleased Alfred enormously. "Oh, can you call Miriam Wackford and get a guest list for that Christmas party?"

"Why? Are you adding a soiree to our already busy schedule?"

"The party's where this all started. Selina was different after that night. Something must have happened."
"A victim?"

"I don't know but this…” he gestured to the screen that still showed the photograph of the John Doe. "Seems excessive for someone who got robbed."

"Maybe she did more than burgle houses," Alfred said quietly.

"Maybe." Bruce replied before he called out to Helena to gather her things and shut down the laptop.

"Who's with Ms. Kyle now?" Alfred asked.

"A security detail," Bruce said as he powered down the computer systems. "Her room will be watched 'round the clock. They'll keep out anyone not on my approved list of visitors. Until I figure out what is happening, David up there is your shadow."

"And Miss Helena? Is she staying down here the whole time?"

Bruce looked over at her, smiling as she looked up at him. "I thought about it," he said with a wry grin. "But no, nothing changes for her. I don't want her to sense anything is different. She's already worried about her mother. She doesn't need to be afraid of something we don't understand."

"What do you want me to do?" Alfred asked.

"You can take her to Prospect Park. Or, if you're feeling daring, there's a God awful pizza place with a ball pit."

"We'll stick with the park." Alfred had heard of those places and had no interest in setting foot in one.

"Good. I've already alerted the security detail and they are setting up a perimeter."

"Sounds fun."

"She won't know they're there," Bruce said. "Also, David is our new chauffeur in case anyone asks."

"A butler with a chauffeur? I'll be the envy of house servants everywhere."

After Bruce shrugged on his coat, Alfred handed him a thick stack of cash, all hundred-dollar bills. "I didn't know how much you'd need."

"You don't want me beating up anyone, so I'll have to get answers with cash," he said, as he tucked the money into his pocket.

"Much less painful that way, sir."

Bruce turned to his daughter. "Helena! Turn that off! Now!"

Helena looked alarmed, unused to her father raising his voice at her. Bruce went over to her, hugged her in apology, and talked quietly to her until she beamed at him. Then, smiling and teasing, he helped her get her things together. She took his hand and they walked back to Alfred.

"I need to pick up Isha and take her to the...H-O-S-P-I-T-A-L," Bruce said. "Then I'm going to check out a few things but I'll be home for dinner."
"What sort of things?" Alfred asked, taking Helena's other hand.

"I'm going to the…" he looked down at Helena who was more interested in trying to get them to swing her as they walked. "…C-R-I-M-E scene."

"In broad daylight?"

"I own the building, Alfred," Bruce said with a grin as the three headed to the lift. "Why not?"
A/N: Apologies to any Russian readers about how I've mangled Russian names and customs and whatnot.

Russia- Three Years Earlier

Bruce and Selina engaged in their new favorite pastime: watching the baby sleep. Which she did non-stop. The quiet of the small apartment was interrupted only by the small sounds of the baby, each noise bringing a smile to the besotted new parents. With the newborn between them, they lay on their sides gazing wonderingly at the tiny person who had taken over their lives.

"We should probably give her a name," Selina said quietly, alternating between watching their daughter and watching Bruce as he stared at the baby.

"Probably," Bruce agreed, touching the baby's soft hand. "Any ideas?"

"So much pressure," Selina replied, thinking that this perfect creature deserved a perfect name. "She'll be stuck with whatever we choose forever."

They tossed names back and forth not finding one that fit and it was another two days before they finally found the perfect one.

Balashov had invited them for dinner, luring them out of their apartment with promises of warmth and Borscht. It was his wife's special recipe and the elderly man was proud to prepare his favorite dish for the American couple who had become important to him in such a short time. They couldn't refuse such an offer and left their apartment for the first time since they had returned with the baby.

The baby slept silently in Bruce's arms as they crept down the stairs avoiding the creaky steps. They hoped to evade the attention of the other tenants who always found the slightest excuse to knock on their door to see the newborn. Selina was far more tolerant of the intrusions letting the elderly widows hold their daughter while Bruce hovered close waiting to catch the baby if one of the women happened to drop her.

They entered the apartment to find Balashov seated on his favorite chair. He beckoned them closer, holding out his arms to hold the baby.

"You think I know nothing of babies?" Balashov asked at Bruce's concerned look. The aged man radiated fragility but Selina suspected the old soldier had the strength to safely hold their daughter.

"Don't be offended. Bruce thinks everyone is going to drop her," Selina said as she gave Bruce a fondly teasing smile.

"Never," Balashov said as Bruce placed the newborn in his arms. "It's been decades since I've held one but I know not to let go."
Bruce sat on the edge of his chair, nervous, for a few minutes until he seemed to persuade himself to relax and trust Balashov. Knowing how difficult it was for him not to worry, Selina patted his shoulder before sitting on the arm of his chair. The apartment fell silent as they all gazed at the newborn.

"She brings you joy, yes?" Balashov asked them.

Joy. There was the word that had eluded Selina to describe what she had been feeling in the days since the baby's birth. The word was a familiar one, of course, but she had never experienced that emotion and now Selina finally understood the meaning of joy.

"She does," Selina said, leaning over to caress the baby's soft dark hair.

Balashov angled the baby to present her to the photo of his wife. The cherished photograph sat on the little table next to his chair always within his sight. "Helena, look at this precious baby!"

Selina's eyes met Bruce's and they knew they had a name for their daughter. If Selina had thought about it, which she assuredly did not, she would have marveled and been slightly alarmed to find herself so in sync with another person. It had happened naturally enough; the last months of pregnancy, the birth and now the arrival of the love of their lives had forged a unity she had never experienced.

Upon learning of the baby's name, Balashov beamed with pride. Unashamed, his eyes teared as he thanked them for the honor.

"She will do very well with such a name," Balashov told them. "My Helena will watch over yours."

Weeks later when Bruce received the paperwork formalizing Helena's existence as the Wayne heir, he paused over the last name.

"It's gotta be Wayne," Selina said. Other than her existence, her name was the only thing her parents had given her and it was pretty worthless at that.

"We could hyphen it," Bruce replied, casting her an uncertain look.

"Bruce, my name doesn't mean a thing to me. But yours?" Her gaze returned to the baby nursing at her breast. "Your name opens every door for her. Mine…not so much."

That was another something Selina had not expected about motherhood; the desire for everything to be perfect for the little person that she brought into the world. Helena as Selina Kyle's daughter was all well and good but Helena as Bruce Wayne's daughter was momentous.

"I want her to have…everything," Selina said softly, feeling an unexpected rush of emotion.

Bruce set down the stacks of papers and sat next to her on the bed. She didn't have to explain what she meant, why it was important that Helena have choices and options that she never had. He got it.

"But I get to pick the middle name," Selina added with a mischievous grin. In their search for a name, Selina had come up with a few that, from his expression, pained Bruce to hear.

"Prudence?" He asked, going through her list of names. "Lucy? Julia? Rita?"

"Lovely Rita…" Selina recited.

"Let's hope she aspires to more than being a meter maid." He kissed her lightly before continuing
her list of names. "Michelle? Eleanor?"

"Helena Eleanor? I'm not a cruel person." Privately, Selina thought Pearl would be a good one but she didn't want to lie to her daughter when she would eventually ask how she ended up with such a name. "Elise."

"I don't know that one."

"A sad song," Selina said as she passed the baby to him. "But one of my favorites."

Bruce nodded not understanding but any other follow-up questions were forgotten as the baby distracted him. Just as Selina had known would happen. She was very clever with the parceling of information about her past and if Bruce noticed, which he undoubtedly did, he never called her on it.

Finding any excuse to knock on their door, the widows of the building continued to bring food and gifts. Helena had amassed quite a collection of homemade booties, sweaters, hats and blankets. The women offered many suggestions on baby care as they passed Helena between them. Ever vigilant, Bruce watched, uncomfortable, but trying not to be rude in his desire to get Helena back.

"They could drop her. Or get her sick," he complained later when they sat down for dinner at a café. He handed Helena to Selina who curled the baby close as she took the menu the waiter offered. "You don't seem very worried."

"I'm not," Selina said absently as she tried to decipher the menu. "If I survived infancy, anybody can."

"What does that mean?" Bruce asked sharply.

Selina looked up to meet his concerned gaze. "It means that my parents were two idiot teenagers who probably never visited a pediatrician and definitely never consulted a baby book and I lived." Her words sounded harsh and defensive to her ears. She didn't want him feeling sorry for her but telling stories about her parents invited pity. Pity she didn't want or deserve because she'd long ago accepted the reality of the people her parents were. To an outsider, her relationship with Jimmy and Lisa would seem sad but it wasn't sad to her. Not anymore.

"I'm just saying kids are tougher than they seem," Selina added, closing the door on the parents she had gladly excised from her life. At his knowing look, she felt a tinge of guilt and cracked the door on a safer aspect of her life.

"One of my best friends has three kids," she told him. "The first one she worried about everything. The second one, not so much. The third? Well, the kid could eat off the floor and nobody cared. And they are all healthy, happy kids."

Selina smiled at him, feeling pleased with herself. Bruce looked like he knew what she was up to but he also looked like he wanted to return to the previous topic.

"DeeDee," she answered the question he didn't ask. "My most legitimate best friend. Legitimate in that she's not a criminal but a mom with a real job and a real husband. I know," she said at his surprised look. "Shocking, isn't it?"

"It is," he agreed, leaning back in his chair waiting for her to elaborate. Her guilt surfaced again at how absurdly interested he was in the few crumbs of information she offered.
"DeeDee is…my equal friend. She doesn't need anything from me except friendship which is a refreshing change. I can rely on her, have fun with her and the best thing is I'm not responsible for her."

Their food arrived. Selina shifted Helena so she held her with one arm while she ate.

"You remember Jen?" she asked after the waiter left. "I tend to find people like that. People I have to take care of or…mentor."

"Mentor?" He asked, amused at her choice of words. "So, she was your protégé?"

"Yes!" She nodded, grinning at him, feeling more comfortable with the direction of the conversation. Strangely enough, it was the tales of thievery and conning that she felt most comfortable imparting to him. She hadn't shied away from providing details of jobs gone wrong and very right. "Now there's a career path I could follow. I could be like the Yoda of thieves. Not sure how I would advertise my services though…"

Over the next month, Selina settled into a peaceful existence that had eluded her all her life. The extreme anxiety that plagued her throughout her pregnancy had vanished and Selina couldn't understand what she had been so worried about. DeeDee had told her she would fall head over heels for the baby but Selina hadn't been able to see past her fear to heed her friend's words. DeeDee was so right.

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Gotham – The Present

Hoping for some inspiration on an otherwise dead end case, Detective Jessica Massey returned to the scene of the crime. Three days following the homicide, workable leads continued to elude her. Despite sporting bona fide prison tats, the John Doe was not in any database. Her other victim who had barely survived the assault still slumbered the sleep of the deeply wounded and her sole suspect was protected by the Commissioner himself.

Sitting in her car, Jessica went over her notes, trying to see what she missed when an expensive black Range Rover pulled up behind her. Bruce Wayne had a lot of cheek to show up here.

"This is a crime scene, Mr. Wayne," she called out to him as she slammed her car door closed.

"It's also my property, Detective," he said with a grin that probably caused most women to go weak in the knees.

Jessica wasn't most women.

"Bet you think that charm gets you out of just about anything," she said, her eyes narrowing. Jessica hated it when suspects were too handsome for their own good. "I think you're too used to getting whatever you want."

He regarded her for a few moments. "Not really," he said and she believed him.

"I heard what happened at the hospital." The duty nurse had described him as quite a fighter. Her words had described him as "amazing" but Jessica refrained from adding to this man's already inflated ego.

"Does that clear my name?" He asked.

Even though Wayne was fading in her estimation as a viable suspect, Jessica still wasn't quite
prepared to let him off the hook. Her instincts, which were usually spot on, told her this guy didn't have it in him to commit such a horrific crime. Besides, Jessica reasoned, if he wanted his girlfriend dead, a guy like him could afford to hire the best in the business. Fly them from the moon if he wanted to. Still, she knew from painful experience that seemingly benign men were capable of monstrous acts. Crimes of passion were exactly that, crimes committed in a haze of rage and jealously, often with no warning.

"You could have planned that in an attempt to deflect suspicion," she answered.

"That seems a lot of effort."

He didn't sound worried. Was that an act? She hated that she couldn't get a handle on this man. The man standing in front of her was different from the man portrayed in the tabloids. More down to Earth than she expected.

"What are you doing here?" She asked.

He looked around the deserted street, before settling his gaze on the warehouse, studying it. "Seeing if there's anything that's been overlooked."

"Not much faith in us, huh?"

"No, that's not it," he said, giving her an earnest look. "I know Selina. How she thinks. I may see something you wouldn't know to look for."

"And you would, of course, share that with us?"

"Of course," he said, not even bothering to lie convincingly.

He followed her inside the darkened building.

"You want the story our crime techs tell?" Jessica decided this might be a good opportunity to observe him. She hoped she wasn't getting fooled by a handsome face.

"Yes," he said, his voice carefully neutral.

The portable lights the Crime Scene Unit had employed were long gone but Jessica knew where every speck of blood had been found. As they walked up the steps to the second floor, she described the scenario they believed occurred. Wanting to gauge his reaction, to break through his tight control over his emotions, she was cold and blunt, not sparing him the harshest of details.

"Ms. Kyle was subdued by a shotgun blast to the chest." She paused, letting that sink in. "The shells were filled with salt. We found salt residue on her clothes. Not lethal but painful. Won't break the skin but it will stun you. So, we're thinking she got stunned with the blast over here." She pointed to a darkened hallway. "She falls over and then gets injected with a very mild tranquilizer that would knock her out for a short time."

His eyes followed her hand as she gestured to the points of interest.

"She's moved to the kill room," Jessica said, watched him closely. As she had hoped, her choice of words elicited a glimmer of emotion. He hid it quickly but she had seen the flash of pain at her brusque words. Another point in favor of innocence.

"Do you want me to go on?" She asked, her voice softening with sympathy.
"Yes."

"She was tied to a chair, her hands bound with rope behind her back. She must have had a knife on her so she was able to saw through the rope, her wrists cut in the process. Most of the damage on her left wrist, causing her to bleed, allowing us to follow her trail. Her hand was smashed with the same weapon used to kill the JD. By the layering of the blood, it looks like the JD was killed first, then the murder weapon used on Ms. Kyle. The coroner believes the murder weapon to be a club, or bat, wrapped in barbed wire."

If she had any doubts about his innocence, his unguarded look of pain at that piece of information chased away any lingering suspicions. All in all, it was a pretty horrible story and Massey could tell it was affecting Wayne.

"At some point, there was a helluva fight here. Your girl gave as good as she got and caused enough damage that they bled."

Bruce looked up sharply. "They?"

"Yeah," Jessica replied. "We've got blood from two other people in addition to Ms. Kyle and our John Doe. We also got DNA from under her nails and the DNA is consistent with what was found at the scene. I ran the DNA on the perps but haven't had any luck yet." She paused, looking at him searchingly. "There's also nothing at all about Ms. Kyle or our John Doe in any of our databases. And that is especially odd considering the JD did time."

"That is odd," Bruce agreed with an impenetrable look.

She stared at him knowing he knew something she didn't.

"Anyway, I don't know how she got away but she did." Jessica led him out of the kill room and down the hall pointing at the bits of blood that were found, revealing the trail Selina had left. "I think she threw something down the stairs so the perps would think she went that way. Then she hid under this desk until the coast was clear and she could climb out the window."

As they walked down the darkened hall Jessica pointed out blood traces that had been found. "The perps did a thorough search of the area but I guess they didn't think to check the roof. Maybe if they had more time but I think the cops scared them off. There's a back alley where I suspect they parked."

They walked toward the stairwell that had been discovered by the crime scene techs. The locked door had been obscured by a barricade of desks and chairs. After opening the door, Jessica paused and turned to Bruce.

"I think it was a trap," she told him as they walked up the stairs to the roof. "These people planned this, laying plastic on the floor and over the windows. The only thing they didn't count on was Ms. Kyle. As a result, other than the blood evidence we have nothing. No fingerprints, no signs of forced entry. This place is clean from top to bottom. Which is unusual for a building abandoned for over thirty years."

They emerged on the roof.

"And here's where she ended up," Jessica said, looking at the bloodstained spot visible under the harsh early afternoon sunlight. "I gotta hand it to your girlfriend. Most people wouldn't survive this kind of thing. Makes me think she's got serious street smarts."

"She does," Bruce said absently as he looked around the roof.
"I cannot even begin to imagine how she climbed to the roof with a smashed hand but I believe that's what saved her life."

"Selina is..." he started before giving her a quick glance, not willing to share private feelings with a stranger. "...very resourceful."

In her research on Bruce Wayne, Jessica hadn't come across anything about Ms. Kyle. That relationship was very low profile but, Jessica supposed, for a man who grew up under intense media scrutiny, his privacy must be a precious thing indeed. Protecting that which was most important to him.

After observing his reactions inside the warehouse, she had no doubts about his regard for the mysterious Ms. Kyle. She wondered how gossipy John was feeling. Probably not very concerning this guy. It was weird but she got the impression that John harbored some kind of hero worship for the filthy rich former playboy who had once dazzled the tabloids with stories of models and dancers and throwing money away like it was garbage.

"So," Jessica started, wanting to get back on track and stop with her speculating. "Why the roof? It's not the usual method of escape. Must be because she couldn't have climbed past that double layer of chain length fences with razor and barbed wire. Which, why is there so much of? I mean for an abandoned warehouse, it sure is locked up tight."

He shook his head, not knowing the answer. They stood on the edge of the roof, looking out over the adjacent field. From this spot, the oddness of the double layer of fencing stood out.

"Must be nice to have so many properties you can't keep track of them all."

"It's a pain in the ass, actually," he said, his gaze speculative as he looked at the fencing. "Especially now."

"The phone she had was a burner phone. The only number called was yours," Jessica said, looking up at him. "I think maybe it was an emergency only phone. So why would she call you and not the police?"

"You'll have to ask her that."

"I will."

"Why is he protecting you? The Commissioner?" Jessica asked, unable to contain her curiosity on that matter. "He never struck me as the kind to get bought off by the wealthy."

"He's not," Bruce replied, a tad defensively. "We're old friends."

She heard fondness in his voice.

"How does he get to be friends with the likes of you?"

"We shared the same interests," he replied, his gaze steady on hers.

"Like what? Polo?"

He smiled. "I don't play polo."

"It's of interest to me, the Commissioner's regard for you. And John's," she added. "It doesn't make sense."
He shrugged unwilling to offer an explanation.

Her phone rang. She looked at the caller then apologized and took the call, walking away from him.

"Goddammit!" She said as soon as she hung up.

"Problem?" He asked.

She waved him off. "I have to go. You coming down?"

"No. I'm going to look around."

She nodded, distracted, and started to leave but stopped.

"Look, I'm sorry about earlier," she said, turning to face him. "I'm paid to find killers not be friendly. But I shouldn't have been so… insensitive to what you're going through. For what it's worth, I'm not getting a killer vibe from you but I'm not paid to listen to vibes. Wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't think with my brain. And, as you may have heard, a high percentage of women who are murdered are killed by their significant other. So I had to take that approach."

"I understand."

She handed him her card. "I doubt you will but if you come across anything, please let me know. I'm not here to get into your business. I just want to find a couple of killers."

"So do I, Detective," he replied, putting her card in his pocket.

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_Russia – Three Years Earlier_

Spring arrived and with it the annual shindig that had the town aflutter. The festival was a spring bash for the locals to celebrate the end of winter and the time before tourists descended on the city for the summer. It was a huge deal and even though they weren't locals, Bruce and Selina weren't tourists either so their attendance was desired. The ladies of the apartment house devoted the last few days persuading them to come along. Even Balashov promised they would have a great time and had intended to accompany them but cried off at the last minute feeling ill yet insisting that they go.

"I've used the word 'cute' more in the last hour than in all my life," Bruce commented as they walked toward the town center.

"It is alarming." Selina agreed, glancing at the baby in Bruce's arms. She wanted to hold her but it was Bruce's turn and he would not relinquish his precious charge for anything other than a feeding. If they had arguments nowadays, it was mostly over whose turn it was to hold Helena. "I just can't believe how ridiculously happy I am with her outfit. The hat Petrova knitted matches perfectly with the little sweater from Zetseva. And I don't even think they planned that."

"It's all pink, Selina," Bruce said, smiling down at Helena who at two months was showing more awareness of her surroundings.

Selina exaggeratedly rolled her eyes. "Different shades and patterns and textures, Bruce. Don't you know anything?"

The sounds of Russian folk music indicated they were nearing the city center. Selina looked
forward to the evening out, happy to have an occasion to dress up a little. She and Helena had their first mother-daughter shopping excursion while Bruce was out for a run. She'd forgotten how good it felt to get dolled up for the evening. Dressed in a fashionable black short skirt and a tight black cardigan with red four inch pumps, Selina wound her arm through Bruce's feeling uncharacteristically carefree.

They circulated through the crowd knowing more people than expected. The ones they didn't and who had heard of the American couple with the baby introduced themselves eager to visit with the foreigners who had inexplicably ended up in their town. Bruce showed off Helena and managed to not pull her away every time someone reached out to touch her. Which was often. These people didn't seem to understand boundaries very well. Maybe that's why Selina liked them.

Bruce did most of the talking for his Russian was far better than hers. He had taken the time to learn grammar and proper syntax whereas Selina was content to pick up a smattering of the language by watching Russian game shows and soaps and talking with their neighbors.

Finally, Helena got hungry and Selina smiled at her as she took the baby from Bruce. Finding a seat by a group of women from the apartment house, she settled Helena, draping a blanket over the baby as she nursed. Bruce went off to find food.

One of the younger tenants, Zetseva who was a spry seventy-five, scooted closer to talk to Selina. They chatted amiably for a few minutes until Selina suspected the woman had ulterior motives.

"We don't have many men," Zetseva explained. "Especially attractive ones. It would make us all so happy if you could persuade your husband to dance with us."

"Us?" Selina asked.

"You will not be jealous?"

"I'll try to live with it," Selina replied in English then shook her head to indicate to Zetseva that she didn't mind.

The woman clapped her hands in delight. "He can start with Vera," Zetseva said. "She is too shy but she wants your husband to ask her to dance."

At first Selina didn't think she translated the words correctly but when she looked past Zetseva, she saw an attractively aged woman dressed in Russian folk clothes looking apprehensively at Selina.

"I'll see what I can do," Selina replied, her eyes on the lonely woman.

"Thank you!" she said quickly then moved away when Bruce arrived with their food.

"You know those women that keep bringing us food and clothes for Helena?" Selina asked as Bruce handed her a blini.

"Yes," Bruce replied, sitting next to her.

"They are all very good to us."

"They are," Bruce agreed before taking a bite of his food.

"They bring us food…"

As he chewed his food, he nodded in agreement.
"They give Helena stuff..."

He continued nodding waiting for her to elaborate on what she’d gotten him into.

"And they don’t ask for anything."

At that, he gave her a look reminding her of the many, many knocks on their door with the flimsy excuses to ogle the baby.

"Ok, so they're kind of a nuisance but they've outlived all the men around here and just want to dance with a handsome guy."

He stared at her blankly.

"That would be you," she said, smiling at him. "Aren't you glad you shaved for this?"

"May I eat first?"

"Yes," she replied, fixing her cardigan then putting Helena on her shoulder, softly tapping her back. "And, could you ask her friend to dance before the others?"

"Who?"

"The woman standing by Zetseva. Don't look," she said but he looked anyway. "Now you're committed. She saw you looking at her and she'll be hurt if you don't ask."

"Fine," he said, finishing off his dinner.

The look on the woman's face was priceless when Bruce asked her to dance. Selina whispered to Helena that for a crime fighter her daddy wasn't so bad.

The other women crowded around her, talking excitedly. Selina struggled to follow what they were saying but gave up and watched Bruce charm woman after woman. After each dance, another of their neighbors appeared and Bruce never let on that he wanted to do anything but dance with them.

Selina wondered how she ended up with someone who had such perfect manners. He really had been brought up right. At least until…

Deciding to rescue him, she passed Helena to Anna and made her way to the dance floor.

She tapped the shoulder of Marta, smiling at her as her eyes met Bruce's.

"I was getting jealous," she said as he took her hand then slid his other behind her back.

He looked over her shoulder to see who was holding Helena.

"She's fine," Selina said. "We know those people."

"Yeah but…" He trailed off not wanting to give voice to all the bad scenarios his brain could imagine.

"I'm starting to feel like a bad mother trusting those women."

"No, it's fine," Bruce said looking back at her, smiling a little apologetically. "It's just…anything could happen."
"Yeah. Like a meteor could fall from the sky and kill us all. Why worry about stuff like that?"

"It's not meteors I'm worried about."

Selina shook her head. "God help the person that lays a finger on that kid."

Her calm was momentarily intruded by a quick thought of what she would do if anyone dared harm Helena. She pushed it away, not willing entertain the paranoid thoughts Bruce had trouble getting past.

"I can't believe I'm the trusting one in this relationship," she murmured.

"Who's that?" He nodded toward the younger woman who now held Helena.

Selina didn't need to turn around to see who he was talking about. "That's Anna's daughter, Galina. I interrogated her for a solid five minutes so she's okay. Should I have gotten her prints first?"

"A DNA sample would be preferable," he commented. "You never know how accurate prints can be…"

They danced in silence, gazing at each other remembering the last time they had danced. It felt like a different life with different people. The fears and worries that plagued her then seemed alien now. All thanks to the man in her arms.

Her hand slid from his shoulder, lightly brushing his neck as it travelled to his other shoulder. She curled her arm behind his neck as she shifted closer to him. Her high heels allowed them to stand face to face. His eyes went to her mouth but he didn't kiss her, aware of the crowd of people and also aware that he wanted more than a quick peck. She leaned closer to him, her face at his neck. Her eyes closed and she breathed in his scent. She felt his lips hovering just above her nape, his breath warm against her skin.

"Do you think she's out for awhile?" He whispered in her ear.

"I think we have a couple of hours," she replied huskily, lifting her head to meet his eyes. What she saw in his heated gaze caused a stab of lust to go through her.

"You get Helena," he said, not wanting to be entangled with their neighbors again. "I'll wait over there."

She nodded then walked quickly to the group of women.

"I'm sorry but we have to go," Selina said as she collected Helena.

"If he were mine, I would want to go home as well," Galina said in English, handing Selina her oversized purse that doubled as a diaper bag.

Selina shared a grin with the young woman then went off to where Bruce waited. He reached for Helena, holding her with one arm, then took Selina's hand and led her away from the crowd. They grinned at each other then quickly made their way to their apartment.

Bruce tucked Helena in the Moses basket then turned and kissed Selina. Her arms went around his neck as she held him tightly against her. Their tongues met and the passion between them rose. They made their way to the bed, shedding their clothes on the way.

Bruce lay down, pulling her on top of him as he hands slid over her body. He touched her in all the
right places, eliciting soft sighs. Unsure of how much time they had before Helena woke, they were
quick and quiet.

"I have to start running again," Selina said, after, sounding out of breath. She slid off him to lay on
her back then turned on her side to look at him. When she faced him, he was already looking at her
and in his face and eyes she saw everything she never knew she needed.

She looked away, irritated at herself for thinking such a thought. The baby stirred and Selina was
grateful for the excuse to hop out of bed. Shrugging on a short silk robe, she padded over to where
Helena still slept. A loving smile appeared on her face as she gazed at her daughter. The kid was
undoubtedly the best thing that ever happened to her by far.

But what about the man she'd just left alone after a passionate bout of extremely satisfying
lovemaking? The little voice inside her asked. Selina pushed that thought aside. Too dangerous.
The baby was one thing. The man was another.

Yet it was difficult to guard her heart when it was so open. Helena had broken through the last of
her defenses. If Selina wanted to be honest, she would acknowledge that those defenses had already
been breached by Bruce Wayne. But Selina was an expert at lying and deceit. Even if she was only
fooling herself.

-Gotham - The Present-

Bruce watched Detective Massey drive off then called Alfred asking him to look into the
warehouse. He gazed out at the vacant lot enclosed by the double layer of chain length fence. The
fence seemed relatively new, certainly nothing like the fencing surrounding the other abandoned
buildings along the street. Most of those were old and sagging with holes vagrants used to slide
through seeking the relative warmth of empty buildings. He told Alfred to check on all expenses
relating to this property.

Helena got on the phone, chattering about the duckies at the park, asking if she could have one. He
smiled, telling her the standard "We'll see." She asked if he was bringing mommy home. Feeling
guilty at leaving her confused about her mother's continued absence, he offered her the same lie.
After assuring her he would be home before dinner, he ended the call.

He turned to assess the roof, keeping his gaze away from the bloodstained spot where Selina had
been found. Bruce could see what Detective Massey could not: how Selina had arrived at the
warehouse. She had crossed over from the building next door.

The gravel near the ledge indicated someone had put down there. Without a second thought, he
jumped the five feet to the next building. His knee protested at the landing and he felt a swell of
anger as he imagined Selina making the dangerous jump. He continued over four more buildings
until he reached a building adjacent to a small abandoned parking lot. Across the lot, he noticed a
slight indentation on the weary barbed wire that traversed the length of the chain link fence. On
the ground, was a folded piece of cardboard, probably used to cover the barbed wire to get across.

Climbing down the same way Selina had climbed up, Bruce felt his anger rise again. Selina had
gone to enormous trouble to shield her arrival at the warehouse making him believe she knew she
was up against dangerous foes.

On the other side of the fence, sitting on the ground waiting to be reclaimed were two Yummy
Donut coffee cups. Using the discarded cardboard, Bruce climbed over the fence. As he jumped to
the ground, he scanned the area not seeing another soul or an abandoned car. On the ground, near
the cups, were a few cigarette butts. He picked up one of the paper coffee cups, recognizing Selina's shade of lipstick.

Across the street, there was a scrap metal dealer with way too many security cameras. Bruce almost grinned at that piece of luck. One of the cameras was pointed in the direction of the parking lot.

A bored receptionist, who perked up when he entered, greeted him with a happy smile.

Bruce flirted a little, feeling bad at flattering the woman who looked like she didn't get many compliments. After a few minutes of polite chit chat, he persuaded her to check the security feed, sliding her a hundred dollar bill. She looked at the bill then back up at him, worried about what he wanted. He told her he was a private investigator looking into a cheating husband. She nodded, approving of the bastard getting caught and led him to the back room.

She hovered at his shoulder as he found the file with the correct camera's feed. As he searched, he kept up the flirty banter all the while calculating the time he needed to access. He had the timeline in his head. Selina parked her SUV at 8:50 a.m. at the mall parking garage. Depending on morning rush hour traffic, the warehouse was between forty and fifty minutes away. He started searching at 9:30, finally finding her at 11:17.

For the first time, he could see the John Doe. Not a clear enough picture to see his face but there he was, walking along with Selina only a few short hours before he would be dead. He was talking, telling her a story if his gestures were any indication. They arrived at the fence, the John Doe spotting the cardboard then laying it over the barbed wire. Selina set down her coffee, talked earnestly to him, handed him a phone, and then stepped into the JD's threaded hands as he hoisted her over the fence. The way they moved together made Bruce think that wasn't the first time they'd performed such a maneuver. Selina disappeared out of sight.

Bruce fast-forwarded the video, watching as the JD smoked cigarette after cigarette. He drank his coffee, checked the phone, drank Selina's coffee, and smoked more cigarettes. Bruce could identify when the guy started to worry. He paced, running a hand through his jet-black hair, looking around anxiously. Finally, at 11:50, he climbed the fence and disappeared.

The first text Bruce received that day was at 12:16 and he could only assume that the sender was the John Doe. Bruce continued fast-forwarding through the security feed, seeing nothing of interest until a patrol car sped past, its lights flashing.

"So, that's it?" The receptionist asked, sounding disappointed there wasn't anything juicy on the feed.

"Afraid so," Bruce replied, standing up. He smiled at her, infusing his most disarming grin. "The guy's a real jerk. Trying to get custody of the kids. So if anyone asks if anybody was looking into this, could you…?" He handed another five hundred dollars to her.

"I won't tell a soul. Hope that guy gets what he deserves."

On his way out, he asked where the closest Yummy Donuts was.

"Real close. Just over on Wilshire."

"Is it walkable?"

"Sure, if you're into that kind of thing."
He nodded his thanks.

Wilshire was a ten minute walk away and Yummy Donuts another five. When he asked the cashier if she remembered a woman with long dark hair from three days ago, she gave him an impatient you've-got-to-be-kidding-me look. He bought a coffee, leaving her a big tip.

Standing on the street, outside the bakery, he scanned the area, taking note of the high traffic, both cars and people. It was a busy neighborhood, working class with lots of hustle and bustle. A great place to blend in. Across the busy street, he noticed a beat up car with several days' worth of parking tickets. As he walked closer, he noticed that the old Camaro wasn't nearly as beat up as it seemed from across the street. The paint job was faded, the car had once been black but it was now a faded dark grey. The car also looked like it hadn't been washed in years.

On a hunch he took out Selina's keys and wasn't surprised to find one slide into the lock. The door opened with the creak of older cars. He sat down and looked around. The car may appear beat up on the outside but, inside, it was kept up beautifully. The upholstery looked to be updated but kept with the original style. Red.

This was her. Selina. For the first time in a long time, he was feeling the Selina he'd first met years before.

He noticed a picture lying on the passenger seat. The photo was of a sad faced young woman who would have been quite pretty if she hadn't looked so petrified. Messy blonde hair with clear blue eyes that were filled with despair, fear, pain…who was she?

In the backseat, he found Selina's old satchel that had been their constant companion for four years. Looking through it, he found the clothes she'd been wearing when she left the penthouse that morning. He also found a piece of paper with the address of the warehouse scrawled in unfamiliar writing. Other than that, there was nothing. Again, she'd taken precautions ensuring that whatever she was doing would not lead back to them.

He opened the glove box and found a loaded pistol. Frowning, he emptied the chamber, tossing the bullets in the glove compartment and stuffing the pistol under the seat. As he did, he found another gun.

"Jesus, Selina, what's the use having these things if you're not taking them when you need them?" He asked aloud.

After unloading the second weapon, he rifled through the glove compartment finding the car's registration. The 1969 Camaro was registered to 'S. Gallagher, 1414 Canton Street, Gotham'. The registration did not match the license plate. After running the plate, he found that the plate had been lifted from an airport rental car.

He then performed a thorough search of the car, finding another pistol duct-taped under the trunk.

Removing the parking tickets off the windshield, he started the Camaro. The engine noisily roared to life. The well maintained engine was powerful, emitting that low, loud rumbling found in American muscle cars.

As he listened to the engine idle, he called Blake.

"Can you pick up my car for me?" He asked, revving the engine.

"Are you serious?" John asked, not sounding offended.
"I am."

"Is it the Lambo?"

"No."

"Are you ever going to drive that and leave it somewhere?"

"Selina's Range Rover is parked in front of the warehouse. Alfred will leave a key with the doorman. Any luck with Jen?"

"No, she left that apartment years ago but I think I'm close to finding her."

"And the Congressman?"

"In Europe with the wife since March. Their usual ski trip. Gordon's asking around about him, seeing if he has a less than savory reputation. Well, worse than it already is."

Bruce had suspected as much.

"Keep on Jen. Let me know as soon as you find her."

He ended the call then picked up the photo of the young woman. This is it, he thought. Here's why Selina was doing what she was doing.
The worn and faded exterior of Selina's Camaro provided a perfect disguise for the vehicle's excellent condition. Unlike the Lambo, her car drew no excessive attention as Bruce rapidly wove through the afternoon freeway traffic. He liked how the Rolling Stones song that shuffled on the iPod plugged into the newish radio complemented the loud and raw rumble of the engine. By the end of the song, he reached the turnoff entering an area of Gotham that was not great but certainly not the worst.

The neighborhood was a balance of blue collar workers, the unemployed, and people engaged in various petty crimes. It was rough and unwelcoming to outsiders but the Camaro fit in. No one paid him any mind as Bruce made his way to 1414 Canton.

The Who shuffled on and Bruce remembered Selina's off-hand remark that she had gotten kicked out of Central High. That particular educational institution had the reputation for being the roughest in all of Gotham. It was also in the vicinity of the address on the registration.

Whatever he had hoped to find at the address was dashed when it was immediately apparent that the home had been abandoned long ago. The other houses surrounding the property looked abandoned as well though there were signs that the other homes were used by vagrants or kids looking for a place to party. No graffiti or broken windows marred the house giving the impression that people in the neighborhood knew better than to mess with 1414 Canton.

After parking across the narrow street, he put on a Gotham ball-cap that he found in Selina's bag, pulling it low over his face; his best means of disguise. As he crossed the deserted street, he looked right and left seeing no signs of life anywhere. He peered through the dirty windows of the house and soon concluded that no one had entered the place in years. If any city inspectors saw the house, it would take them all of five seconds to condemn it. He circled around looking for anything to indicate Selina's connection to the house.

In the back, he found an old garage that looked like a gust of wind would blow it over. The doors were chained shut inviting speculation that something of value might be inside. Using one of the keys on Selina's keychain, he unlocked the lock and slid the doors open. Inside, cinder blocks lined the walls making the shack far more secure than it appeared on the outside. Shelves and boxes also lined the walls but the layers of dust suggested that no one had any interest in any of the odds and ends contained within. The middle of the garage was empty but a large rectangle free of the dust that covered the rest of the cement floor indicated that a car had been parked there for some time.

Toward the back of the garage, a line of old, dented aluminum trashcans with boxes stacked on top obscured what rested behind. As he moved the boxes to the side, clouds of dust polluted the air. Waving away the dust, he lifted another tarp and stared, stunned to find his Batpod that Selina had hidden away years before. Unexpectedly pleased to see it again, he touched it reverently. Covering it again, he pushed the cans back and replaced the boxes making note to return at night to get the pod. Or, he grinned to himself, send Blake after it.

After locking the garage, he walked back to the car to find a young woman sitting on the hood of the Camaro. Dressed in tight, revealing clothes, the young woman looked like she was trying to
appear older than she was which Bruce suspected couldn't be older than sixteen. Her long dark hair hung straight down her back and if she wasn't wearing so much makeup, Bruce suspected she would be pretty.

Upon noticing him, she looked surprised then frowned and slid off the hood.

"Who said you could drive this car?" She asked angrily.

"A friend," he replied.

She looked back toward the house. "Where is she?"

Bruce debated how much he wanted to tell this stranger but she did seem to know Selina and he needed a break.

"Gotham General," he answered, watching her carefully.

"No shit!" She exclaimed, excited at the news. Bruce couldn't tell if it was concern or if she was eager to have fodder for gossip. "What happened?"

"She was…injured."

"Is she okay?"

"She will be," he assured himself as much as her.

She looked at the Camaro then at him. "Why do you have her car?"

"She's letting me borrow it."

"Bullshit!" She scoffed. "Selina don't let anyone drive her baby."

He held up Selina's keys as if that proved she had given him permission to drive the Camaro.

"How do you know her?" He asked.

"I don't really know her," she answered, shrugging. "She has friends in the neighborhood. She was gone for a while. Was she is prison?"

"No, she wasn't," he clarified wanting that to be clear to the teen. He pointed at the rundown house. "Who lives there?"

"Does it look like someone lives there?" She gave him an offended look. "Sheesh, you must think we're a bunch of animals down here. Who are you?"

"Who are you?" He asked back.

They stared at each other for a few moments. The young woman seemed not the slightest bit moved as he affected his most disarming look.

"I asked first," she said, folding her arms.

"I'm…" Bruce started, thinking of the word to describe Selina and his relationship. Significant other? Lover? Father of her child?

"Her boyfriend," he finished, hating the word that failed to accurately describe the depth of their
"Prove it," she challenged as she leaned against the car enjoying what she perceived to be a position of power.

"How am I supposed to do that?" He asked, forcing himself to not sound impatient.

"Let me see a picture."

"I don't have one."

She rolled her eyes. "Some boyfriend you are."

The girl was starting to irritate him. He was also beginning to doubt that she had any useful information.

"Do you know her friend?" He asked as he reached into his wallet and held out a hundred dollar bill. "The one with black hair and the tattoos?"

At that, her stance changed. The flirty, coquettishness was replaced with suspicion. She looked at the money then back up at him before taking the hundred but she didn't answer the question. She must not know how this whole bribery thing worked.

"Do you know her friend?" He asked again.

"What's his name?" She asked, sliding the cash in her front pocket.

"I don't know but he has black hair and tattoos. Sound familiar?"

The girl with the cynical eyes just looked at him belligerently.

He took out another hundred. She reached for it but he held it just beyond her reach.

"I don't know that person," she finally said. "At least I don't think so. Know lots of guys with tattoos, you know?"

"You said Selina has friends in the neighborhood. Who?"

"What kind of boyfriend are you that don't know her friends?" She asked as she glanced around the street.

He ignored that question. "Is it DeeDee?"

She glared at him then snatched the money out of his hand. "I have to live here, you know. Someone finds out I've been talking to a psycho ex-boyfriend, I'll get my ass kicked."

"I'm not a psycho ex-boyfriend and there's another hundred in it for you."

Once again, she looked around to see if anyone was watching. "How about I just blow you for it?"

The interrogation had taken a turn for the worse. Bruce wished he was questioning a crooked cop or a criminal, using his fists and fear as an effective means of getting answers.

"How old are you?" He asked.

"How old do you want me to be?" She responded suggestively.
He stared at her, feeling sad for the girl. "Old enough where you realize you don't want to do what you're doing."

"Gawd," she said, making a face. "For a cutie, you sure are a drag." She looked at him closely then asked: "Are you on TV?"

"No."

A BMW drove up and parked behind the Camaro. The driver who looked like a college student regarded them quizzically but stayed in the car. The young woman waved at him, smiling a flirty grin then turned back to Bruce.

"You seem okay but I don't know you. Maybe Selina left you for that tattooed guy and you're trying to stalk her. Maybe you put her in the hospital and are looking for her boyfriend. You don't look like a psycho but the really crazy ones look perfectly fine, you know?"

"I know," Bruce agreed. He held up a finger indicating her to wait while he reached into the car. He found the picture of the mysterious woman. "Do you know her?"

She looked at the picture and shook her head no. He believed her.

Wishing he'd had the foresight to get an extra phone for such an eventuality, he reluctantly gave her his phone number. "Get her friend to call me and I'll give you a thousand dollars."

Her eyes widened at the sum. "Sure you don't want a BJ? It'd be worth it. Brian there will agree."

Bruce shook his head, trying not to let his disgust show. "Shouldn't you be in school?"

She laughed and headed toward the BMW.

"A thousand bucks, right?" She called out before opening the passenger door.

He nodded and watched as she got into the car. She gave the college kid a long, open-mouthed kiss before she waved to Bruce and they sped off.

Bruce leaned against the Camaro thinking that if Selina's friends were anything like the one he just met, it was going to be a long and irritating process getting any information.

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**Russia – Three Years Earlier**

With Balashov between them, Bruce and Selina strolled along the crowded waterfront promenade. Balashov enjoyed the daily excursions as did Helena who, at four months, was becoming more attentive to the world around her. Bruce held the baby against his chest, facing outward so she could take in her surroundings. He paused by anything bright and colorful, his face breaking out in an unguarded smile at her animated responses to the visual stimulation.

The elderly Balashov gripped Selina's arm for support as they slowly made their way through the throng of summer tourists. Today was a good day for Balashov so they ventured out further than usual past the tourist area. The crowd thinned and they almost turned back until they noticed a small group of people gathered around the edge of the pier. By the looks of their faces, the gawkers did not look appear enthralled with a riveting street performance.

Wanting to avoid whatever was going on, Bruce stopped. Like Selina, he knew the indicators for bad news but Balashov tugged on Selina's arm wanting her to walk him closer.
"What is this about?" Balashov gruffly demanded of the lone official who scribbled in a small notebook.

"A woman was murdered," the young man responded, his eyes flitting to the dark area under the pier.

Balashov looked around. "Where are the police?"

The man looked up from his notebook, his young eyes offended at the old man's question. "I am the official in charge of this investigation."

"You're it?" Balashov asked gruffly, looking over the man who looked far too green to handle a murder investigation.

"Our detectives have more important matters to attend to at this time," the official replied.

"More important than finding who killed a woman and dumped her body on the beach?" Selina couldn't resist interjecting.

"The woman was just a prostitute," the man explained as if that fact explained everything.

Selina stared at him as he resumed his note taking.

"Hookers don't merit a full investigation, huh?" Selina asked the question in English without realizing it until she became aware of the man's blank stare then asked the question again in Russian.

His eyes narrowed at her cold tone. "This does not concern you," he replied tersely, dismissing her.

She felt Balashov's gaze on her but couldn't look at him. Instead, her eyes traveled over the sparse crowd to rest on a pair of women standing on the edge of the 'crime' scene. The women, working girls from the look of them, stood apart, their stance angry. One of the women looked up, her teary eyes looking straight at Selina. They stared at each other for a few moments until the other woman pulled her friend away. With a last scornful glance at the disinterested official, the women hurried off.

"Nice to know some things never change," she drawled, unable to keep the anger out of her voice.

"Things are different here…" Balashov began, visibly agitated at her sudden coldness.

Selina shook her head. "It's not any different here than it is every place else." Her eyes dulled as she watched the attendants load the body bag into a van.

Balashov tugged on her arm, bringing her back to the present. They walked back to Bruce and Helena who waited on the edge of the promenade. Furiously trying to quell the onslaught of long-dormant feelings, Selina avoided Bruce and Balashov's speculative gazes. Unable to bear their scrutiny any longer, she took Helena from Bruce, brusquely telling the two men she would see them back home.

Impatient to get back to the privacy of the apartment, Selina rushed through the crowd holding Helena close against her heart. Wanting to avoid her neighbors, she picked the lock on the back door to the apartment house and silently made her way through the darkened vestibule. As if sensing the stealth, Helena was quiet, aiding Selina in evading chatty old ladies.

As soon as they were safely inside the apartment, Selina's hand went to her phone in her front
pocket but after punching in five numbers, she stopped and looked down at Helena who looked
adoringly up at her mother. The baby smiled and reached for her face. Despite her sadness, Selina
smiled back at her daughter before kissing her tenderly on the forehead.

Selina sat on one of the kitchen chairs they had set in front of the window and watched Helena
nurse, her face tender. After Helena fell asleep, she repositioned the infant so the baby's head lay
on her shoulder, her face against Selina's neck. Settling back, she rested her bare feet on the chair
opposite and allowed melancholy to invade as she stared out of the viewless window.

"Are you alright?" Bruce asked when he returned.

"I'm fine," Selina lied, avoiding his eyes.

"Selina?" He prodded, concerned. "I'm trying to understand why this is affecting you."

"Because no one in their right mind would care if a prostitute is found dead on a beach?"

"That's not what I meant…"

"I know…" Selina replied looking at him for the first time since he returned. "I just forgot that it's
okay to kill women that fuck for money."

The crude word felt unfamiliar on her tongue. She patted Helena's head in apology.

"Who says it's okay?" Bruce asked.

"Did it look to you like that crime was being taken seriously?" She returned her gaze to the
window, her mind not seeing what her eyes perceived. "You know very well that if it had been a
tourist, the entire police force would be scouring the city looking for the killer."

"You don't know how things work here."

"I know apathy when I see it!" Her sharp tone caused Helena to stir against her. Selina rose and
placed the sleeping baby in her basket then walked back to Bruce. "Maybe your powers of
perception are keener than mine but if that detective kid spends more than an hour on this case I'd
be shocked."

He took her hand, pulling her down to sit on his lap.

"It's just a jolt of reality I wasn't expecting," Selina explained as she draped an arm over his
shoulders. "Being here with Helena and you makes me forget how the world works."

He nodded. "Whoever committed the crime is probably long gone by now."

"Why would he leave if no one is looking for him?" She asked, sadly, leaning against him.

After a restless sleep, she woke at 2 a.m. to find Bruce gone from the apartment. She brewed a cup
of tea and sat back on the chair next to window to wait for him. Her melancholy deepened as she
stared out at the night. Helena made a noise in her sleep which Selina took as an opportunity to
gather her daughter and stretch out on the bed, snuggling the baby close, breathing in her scent.

When she awoke again, the sun was shining through the window. She felt for Helena but the spot
was empty.

"I tried waiting up for you," she said sleepily. She didn't need to open her eyes to know that Bruce
sat at the kitchen table with Helena.
"Took a little longer to decipher the filing system at the police station than I anticipated." He sounded distracted.

"They already filed the case away, huh?" Selina rolled onto her side. Curling an arm under her head she opened her eyes, blinking against the bright sunlight.

Bruce sat at the small kitchen table studying a document. With one arm, he held Helena who was content to gnash on a soft plastic otter until her mother approached. Bruce willingly surrendered her to Selina.

As she fed Helena, she looked over the papers spread over the table.

"This is more detailed than I thought the police would be capable of," she observed.

"No. This came from the police." He held up a single piece of paper. "The rest came from the coroner's office."

"You broke into the morgue, too?" Selina teased. "I don't know whether to be impressed or appalled."

He grinned then yawned. Late night activities that didn't involve a baby or making love were a thing of the past.

"I'll take Helena downstairs so you can sleep," Selina said. She gathered a few things for spending time at Balashov's. At the door, she turned and gave him a soft kiss. "Thank you."

_Gotham – The Present_

When Bruce called, John Blake had been snug in the bed of a woman he'd met the night before. Like him, Sandy was a night owl and balked at the early call. Using his most charming grin, John persuaded her to drive him to the warehouse since he had left his motorcycle at the tavern where she tended bar. She in turn persuaded him for a quickie before they ventured out into the harsh late morning sunlight.

As they drove to the hotel to pick up the keys, he received a text from Bruce with a picture of a sad faced woman with the message to ask Jen about her. Wayne was certainly confident in Blake's ability to track down the elusive thief and, thanks to Sandy, Bruce's faith in John was not misplaced.

Following a lead that had led him to the bar where Jen supposedly hung out, he hadn't found Jen but he had found the attractive bartender who knew Jen well in a casual, friendly way. So in the interest of not appearing like a stalker, John had flirted, showing the attractive bartender that he was an okay guy who didn't bear Jen any ill will. Sandy, with a good feel for people, lost her wariness and flirted back. Sometime after midnight, she finally trusted him enough to tell him the address of Jen's apartment building, trusted him enough to drive him to Jen's where they found her not at home. After a few steamy hours waiting in her car they concluded Jen wasn't coming home and made their way to her place.

"Hey, that's a nice car!" Sandy exclaimed later when they reached the warehouse. Glancing around the neighborhood, she seemed apprehensive at the desertedness of the area. "Why'd you leave it here?"

"It's okay," he assured her as he exited the vehicle, eager to escape the inevitable farewell awkwardness.
"Call me!" She called out, seemingly more interested in him when she saw what she thought to be his expensive Mercedes.

John smiled again and waved goodbye as he planned his hunt for Jen. The expensive car barely made a sound except when John peeled out. It was too silent so he turned on the radio, bypassing the news channel Bruce favored for the Indie station. As he pulled onto the freeway headed back into Gotham, the Commissioner called.

"Any luck with Ms. Kyle's friend?" Gordon asked.

John turned down the volume. "I gotta current address for Jen."

"Is that where you're headed?"

"First I have to drop off Wayne's car at the hotel."

"I'll meet you there," Gordon replied before ending the call.

Great, Blake thought as he turned the volume back up, with the Commissioner along he'd have to behave.

The phone buzzed again. Thinking it was the Commissioner he didn't bother checking the ID.

"I know you're working my case," the female voice that was definitely not Jim Gordon growled.

"Good morning to you, too, Jessica."

"It's past noon, Blake," she chastised.

"Already?"

"I thought I should tell you I've removed your friend from my suspect list."

"I knew you would," he said, relieved at that news. While he had known Jessica was smart enough to figure out Bruce's innocence, he still didn't want her looking too closely at him.

"And now I have zero suspects," Jessica complained with a heavy sigh. "So...I've been thinking about the JD's tats. Lots of music tattoos. The Stones. Black Flag. Zeppelin."

"A music lover..."

"Yeah, though that doesn't help much now. All I know is he's into music and drugs."

"That really narrows things down."

"Are you looking at tattoo shops?" Jessica asked. "Cause if you are I don't want to go to the same places."

"I checked out a few but, you know, Jess, we're not going to find anything there."

"I know but I don't know what else to do. I hate waiting for Ms. Kyle to wake up. I get the feeling she's not one to talk to the cops."

"You got that right," Blake said.

"So you know her, then?"
"Little bit," he replied, deciding not to tell her that he arrested Selina once.

"So…her and Wayne…What's up with that?"

"I have no idea," John replied. He still could not understand what Bruce Wayne was doing with a criminal like Selina Kyle. An image of Kyle as she appeared at the airport that day flitted through his brain and he figured at least one reason for Bruce's infatuation. But was physical attraction enough to keep a man like Bruce Wayne interested for four years?

"I saw him at the crime scene this morning," Jessica said.

"Yeah?" John had already figured Bruce had been there and wondered why he didn't drive the car that he'd arrived in.

"He seems to know a lot about crime investigation."

"Really?"

"Would you stop that?" Jess sounded exasperated.

"Stop what?"

"Acting stupid."

"I can't help it!" Blake laughed.

"Yeah, I guess not." Jessica was quiet for a bit. "He's interesting, isn't he?"

"I guess so."

"Jesus, Blake, can't you give me something?" Her exasperation turned to anger.

"I don't know anything to give you!"

"I really hate this feeling like you know about my case than I do."

"I know, Jessica," he said, feeling guilty for holding out on a good friend. Only for Bruce Wayne would he do this to her. "Can you just trust me on this one?"

"What's going on, John? Why do you care about this guy so much?"

"Bruce was…uh… a patron of the orphanage I lived in."

"Oh," she said, not expecting that answer. He rarely talked about his childhood. "I didn't think about that."

They were both silent for a few moments. Blake could imagine the cute scrunching of her brows as she thought.

"I better not get an unsolved because you all fuck it up," she finally said. "I mean it, Blake."

"You won't," he assured her. *If Bruce Wayne is looking into it, it'll get solved.*

**Russia – Three Years Ago**

He sat on the edge of the roof keeping watch over the red light district that was contained within a
few blocks. It was just past midnight on a cool summer night which might have been peaceful if Bruce wasn't occupied with watching women and men trade their bodies for money. With each transaction, he couldn't help but wonder at the reason Selina was so affected by a stranger's death. Ever since that evening three days ago, she'd been distant, her eyes forbidding him to ask the whys for her sadness that she could not hide from him.

Needing to stretch out his knee that always protested when he was still for too long, Bruce stood then walked along the narrow ledge of the roof keeping an eye on the scene below. Getting back to investigative basics without relying on his high-tech gadgetry would have been more exhilarating if Bruce's investigation hadn't revealed that the woman, Marina Pitushka, was the third prostitute in the last month to be murdered.

At that piece of news, Selina just shrugged in an attempt to convey indifference but Bruce saw the flash of anger on her face. Again, he didn't demand answers and as he observed yet another young woman get into a stranger's car he thought that maybe there were things about Selina he would rather not know.

Just as Bruce was about to sit back on the ledge he saw something out of the corner of his eye. If the man hadn't lit a cigarette from the shadows of the alley, Bruce wasn't sure he would have seen him. Jumping to the next building, Bruce crept closer, his eyes never leaving the man. The man didn't approach any of the women he watched but kept himself well hidden. He was hunting, Bruce was sure of it.

For the next hour, Bruce watched the man watch the women until the man slunk away. Bruce texted Selina letting her know he would not be returning for the night. Now that he had the man in his sight, he wasn't about to let him kill again.

Keeping to the roofs, Bruce followed as the man made his way through the darkened streets toward the tourist area near the seashore. Once the man's hotel was identified, it was easy to discover that Olaf Agapov, a bureaucrat of no import from Volgograd, had spent the last month in the hotel. That fact itself was not incriminating enough for Bruce so when Agapov left the next morning for breakfast, Bruce searched his room finding objects that couldn't possibly belong to the middle aged man. Trophies, he suspected, that had belonged to the victims. He put the objects back where he found them for the police to find.

The next night, Bruce followed Agapov from his hotel. After hours of hiding in the alley shadows, the man made his move and so did Bruce. He was on him before the man's fist connected with the face of the pretty girl he had lured to a darkened alley. In seconds, the man was out cold. With a horrified gasp, the girl looked at Bruce then ran away without a word of thanks. After dropping Agapov off on the steps of the police station, Bruce placed an anonymous call guiding the authorities to evidence supporting the man's guilt.

Less than a day later, the Agapov was free with no impending charges.

Bruce didn't have to tell Selina the outcome of the police's involvement in the case. She correctly determined the source of his anger but didn't join him in his indignation. Instead, she just stared at Helena sleeping peacefully in her basket.

"What are you thinking, Selina?" His voice rose, hating the feeling of futility, hating the pull of solving problems that were not solvable, hating that he didn't understand what she was thinking.

"I don't want you to waste any more of your time," Selina replied.

"Waste my time?" He almost yelled as he fought his frustration. "Aren't you upset at this
"Why would I be upset about it?" She asked quietly, not looking up from the baby. "I never expected anything different."

"I thought you cared," he said, softly, before sitting next to her on the bed.

"Some things just are what they are. It sucks but that's the way the world works and who can get worked up over every unjust thing that happens?" She was silent for a few moments before she looked up and met his eyes. As they gazed at each other, she said, "Bruce, you will drive yourself crazy trying to make things right."

He couldn't argue with that. She looked away again, her gaze settling not on Helena but the window that had no view. She seemed so far away.

"What are you going to do?" He asked sharply, not liking her cold expression. She looked as though she had reached some conclusion that he knew couldn't be good.

She looked up at him as if surprised at the question. "I'm going for a run," she replied, giving him a long look before getting up.

He grasped her hand pulling her to him. She kissed him lightly before gently extricating herself from his embrace. "I won't be long. Just need to be by myself for a bit."

That night, he couldn't sleep trying to envision ways to make Agapov pay for his crimes even though the law didn't seem to care. Selina slept fitfully.

The next evening, Bruce understood why Selina hadn't lost any sleep worrying about what to do with Agapov. The death of a tourist was big news in this small city. The widows of the apartment building offered whispered details to Bruce and Selina. The yet to be identified middle aged male tourist was found dead near the seashore. The Chief Inspector vowed that the killer would be found and a massive search had been implemented.

"Now that they're looking into," Selina scoffed with a bitter laugh as they climbed the stairs. Bruce waited until they were in their apartment and Selina had put a sleeping Helena in her basket.

"What did you do?" He asked, quietly.

"I didn't kill him, if that's what you're thinking," Selina replied as she set a kettle to boil, going about the motions like it was just a regular evening.

"Selina, what did you do?" Bruce repeated.

She turned away from him and opened a cabinet to look for tea. "I just dropped his name to some people who would be interested in what he's been doing."

He closed the cabinet door loudly, forcing her to look at him. "You set him up to die."

The sound of the door slamming roused Helena but neither Bruce nor Selina moved to get her.

"I didn't know they were going to kill him," Selina said, trying to move past him to get the baby. He caught her arm, holding her tightly.

"And that makes it okay to you?"

"Would you rather I pretend I'm sad?"
"No," Bruce answered, his eyes boring into hers, trying to find answers without asking the questions.

They silently regarded each other for a few moments, each understanding that they treaded a slippery slope with regards to her past.

"Selina…" Bruce began though he wasn't sure what he wanted to ask her but Helena cries grew louder, demanding their attention. Selina picked her up, kissed her head before handing her to Bruce.

"You know what, Bruce?" Selina asked once Helena had settled down in Bruce's arms. She didn't wait for him to answer for it wasn't that kind of question. "I lied. I knew they would kill him."

Selina fixed him with a steady, unapologetic gaze before leaving him alone with Helena. Gathering Helena and a few of her things, Bruce went downstairs to Balashov's needing to escape the apartment which suddenly felt small and shabby instead of the usual warm and cozy.

The elderly man greeted them happily before settling into his usual chair. He beckoned his interest in holding Helena. Carefully, Bruce set her in Balashov's arms where the older man and Helena spent the next few minutes gazing at each other. Bruce wouldn't have pegged the old soldier for being such a softie but Balashov's delight in Helena never failed to cheer him.

Balashov soon returned Helena to Bruce, his frail arms unable to hold her securely any longer. Propping his feet on the footstool, Bruce stretched out on one of Balashov's easy chairs, getting comfortable enough to settle in for the evening. He listened as Balashov talked of the past, of his wife whom he hoped to see again soon, of friends and family long dead. As he talked, Balashov kept his eye on Helena who lay against Bruce's chest, smiling at her expressions.

Sometime in the night, they all fell asleep until Bruce woke to Selina's soft touch on his arm. At her expression, he startled, worried about the cause of the unshed tears in her eyes.

"Selina?" He asked, his hand going to Helena's back to hold her against him.

Selina looked toward Balashov and Bruce immediately saw what was wrong. He handed a still sleeping Helena to Selina and went to Balashov's still form. With his wife's picture cradled against him, the old man had passed in his sleep.

"He looks happy," Selina whispered.

Hours later, the owner of the building bustled in gleeful for the chance to sell off the belongings that no one would claim since Balashov had no friends or family. Save for Bruce and Selina. Bruce, towering over the landlord, forbade the man from selling off Balashov's possessions to disinterested parties. The thought of strangers dismantling and taking Balashov's precious possessions rankled.

"What are you going to do with this stuff?" Selina asked him later. She stood in the doorway watching as he carefully boxed the remnants of Balashov's life.

"Send them home," he replied as he considered his use of the word 'home'. He hadn't thought of Gotham as home in a long while.

Selina left him then returned a few minutes later after leaving Helena with Zetseva. Without talking, they worked together, the sadness of their task overshadowing their earlier estrangement.

"I know what you're thinking. What I've allowed you to think," Selina said after almost an hour of
"What?" Bruce asked, absently. He sat on the floor, legs crossed, with his back to her, packing the framed photos that had covered the wall into a box.

"That your daughter's mother was a whore."

His heart stilled at her words that filled the silent room.

"Bruce, there's plenty about me that, believe me, you'd rather not know about but…" She paused as she moved to sit in front of him on the floor. "That's one illegal activity I never engaged in."

A burden that he had been carrying shifted. He focused his gaze on the photo in his hand, a happy picture of Balashov and his wife at their wedding.

"Don't look so relieved," she said, her anger returning. "I don't know why it is that because a woman sells her body to earn a living that makes her unworthy of basic human decency."

"That's not it, Selina!" He snapped, looking away from the photo to meet her angry eyes. "I understand why that happens and the desperation that drives someone to do that. It's the desperation that I hated imagining you living in."

"Oh," she said, turning her gaze to the photo in his hand. "I didn't mean to...There's some things that are difficult to say."

"Selina, that, I understand," he said, gently, as he took her hand.

"I know you do," she said, meeting his eyes. She took a deep, steadying breath. "When I was a kid, we lived in the Narrows. My parents left me alone all the time. I think I was alone more than I was with them. Then Angela and her son moved next door and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Angela was…she was more of a mother to me than my mother. She was also a drug addict and a prostitute but I didn't know that was unusual."

She smiled at him, the kind of smile that showed she was okay even if her voice trembled.

"She was there for me when I really needed a mother. She wasn't a hooker with a heart of gold by any means. She was tough and if anyone messed with her or those she protected, she would beat you down. When I was thirteen, she was murdered by one of her John's."

Her eyes dulled and her voice hardened as she continued her story.

"The cops responded by making crude jokes about the whore who was stabbed to death. I can remember them laughing." She shook her head as if to banish the sound of that laughter. "She made some really bad choices but she didn't deserve to be murdered and ridiculed like she was nothing. So, I get a little upset about men who get away with killing women because society has deemed those women as unimportant. I won't apologize for what happened to that guy and I can't pretend that I feel bad about it. He deserved exactly what he got."

Bruce had neither the inclination nor the heart to debate the ethics of killing killers. He was just content that she hadn't done the deed herself.

"Did they ever catch the guy that killed Angela?" He asked.

"You're assuming they looked for him," she replied with a disgusted expression, then stood. "I need to get the baby."
"But, no, they never found him," she said, quietly, from the doorway. With a small, sad smile, she went to get Helena but soon returned bringing their daughter and her Moses basket. She and Bruce spent the rest of the evening packing and by the time of the funeral, the apartment was bare.

"Let's go," Bruce said as he surveyed the empty apartment.

Holding Helena close, Selina nodded, as eager as he to leave the small city.
Jen Helps

Gotham – The Present

Luckily for Jen, the tenant in the apartment across from hers was doing a thirty day stint in County. Like the good neighbor she was, Jen watered his plants on a regular basis, checked his mail, and kept watch over the place for the no-count thieves that preyed on the poor. She felt that her generosity justified camping out in his temporarily empty apartment while she figured who was looking for her.

Through the peephole, Jen watched the two men as they stood in front of her apartment across the darkened hall. They talked low, making it difficult to understand their words but she had a good idea the men were discussing her. Pressing her ear against the door, she strained to listen. The older man with glasses and a mustache asked of the younger man: "You're not thinking of breaking in, are you?"

"Of course not!" The cute, dark-haired, younger man exclaimed seemingly offended at the question before sheepishly asking: "Is that why you're here? Making sure I behave?"

The older man looked vaguely familiar. He reeked of cop-hood so Jen concluded she must have had a run in with him in the past. Way in the past since he looked like he'd spent the last few years sitting behind a desk. Yet, cops don't break into people's apartments. At least not cops on the up and up. Jen frowned thinking that two timing Gotham's most powerful man wasn't the wisest thing Selina had done and it looks like she was going to pay for it.

Jen hadn't thought anything of Selina's sudden request that she watch Helena for a few hours that morning. She had already figured out that Selina only asked Jen to watch the kid when she didn't want anyone knowing what she was up to. What Jen believed Selina was up to was not particularly surprising for Jen simply could not imagine that the Selina Kyle she knew would be satisfied living the high-life with a billionaire.

Jen couldn't understand what had happened to her friend in the years since she left Gotham. Seeing Selina doing the mommy thing was surreal and it was difficult to reconcile the two versions of Selina Kyle: the hard-as-nails thief who had saved Jen from that pimp so many years ago versus the adoring mother who looked at her daughter in a way that Jen had never been looked at by her own mother.

Years before, Selina had advised Jen to avoid entanglements. "Entanglements make you vulnerable," she had said. "Never give anyone power over you." Knowing the mantra had served Selina well over the years Jen had listened to her friend. But Selina forgot to take her own advice and look where that left her: on the run from a jealous boyfriend.

The two men milled about in the hall for a while longer, casting questioning looks at the doors to the other apartments. Good luck with that. No one in this building has time for talking to cops.

They approached the door she hid behind. As the knock penetrated the silence of the apartment, Jen shrank back against the wall, holding her breath in fear that they would hear the slightest sound through the heavy door. When she realized what she was doing – hiding like a frightened child – she got mad. She'd had enough of hiding out waiting for Selina to call to assure her Bruce Wayne wasn't going to send overpriced and well-dressed goons after her.
Checking out her image in the bathroom mirror, she fluffed her hair liking the new bright red color. Satisfied that she didn't look like any mug shots, Jen slipped out via the fire escape and made her way to the front of the building to wait. Fifteen minutes later, the two men emerged. The disgusted looks on their faces confirmed what she already knew about her neighbors' willingness to speak to the law.

As they crossed the street, she put her cellphone against her ear and carried on a seemingly animated conversation. After distractedly bumping into the older cop, she hurried away, ignoring the dark haired man's hollering at her about common courtesy.

Before she could disappear into the alleys, the older man realized he'd been pick-pocketed. Without looking back, Jen tore off fully confident in her ability to shake the two cops. She dared a quick glance behind her to see that only the younger man was chasing her. Squeezing behind a dumpster, she emerged in the narrow passage behind a theater. Looking around, she grinned when she didn't see her pursuer. Turning another corner, she stopped, her smug smile morphing into one of perplexed innocence. Waiting patiently, the older man blocked the only other exit in the alley.

"Miss Robinson?" He kept his hands up in a gesture meant to convey he meant her no harm. "You aren't in any trouble. We just have a few questions for you."

"Go ahead," she called out as she inched backwards until she bumped against the younger man.

"That's real smart," the dark haired man said as he reached in her pocket to take the other man's wallet. "Picking the pocket of the police commissioner."

Commissioner Gordon? Jen almost groaned aloud as her aggravation with Selina rose. See what happens when you leave your friends for a rich guy?

"I just needed to know who was asking about me." She shrugged showing her lack of concern as she looked for an escape route.


Jen snorted. "Selina does not cop friends. Did her rich boyfriend hire you?"

"No," Blake responded angrily. "The police commissioner is not for hire!"

"Then why did you say you were friends of hers?" Her bravado returned as she assessed the two men. "I know my rights. If you aren't arresting me, then you can't keep me here."

Jen started to leave but Blake blocked her path. "Aren't you curious about what happened to your friend?"

She was but there was no way she was going back to ask Bruce Wayne what happened.

"Whatever is going on between the two of them, I'm not getting caught up in it," Jen said. "I don't want the Prince of Gotham mad at me just because Selina got bored and took off."

"Why do you think that?" Blake asked.

"That guy is freakishly rich and people like that run over people like us," Jen replied, deliberately misunderstanding his question.

"Us?" Gordon asked.
"Selina and me," Jen said, clinging to her illusion. "Look, I don't know where she went. I swear!"

"Ms. Robinson," Gordon said with a look that bordered on pity. His kind manner irritated her. "We're not looking for her. We know exactly where Ms. Kyle is."

Jen stared at Gordon, her heart beating heavily as she realized how terribly stupid she'd been. It was easier thinking Selina had run off with the motorcycle guy but deep down Jen knew Selina would never leave that sweet kid.

"What happened?" She asked.

"That's what we're trying to find out!" Blake exclaimed with great exasperation.

Gordon gave him a censuring look before addressing Jen. "Ms. Kyle was found severely beaten at an abandoned warehouse. She's at Gotham General but has not yet regained consciousness."

He paused for a few moments, giving her time to digest just how bad things were for Selina. Out of habit more than anything, Jen kept her emotions in check unwilling to allow the two men to see how the information affected her.

"Last night, someone visited her hospital room with the intention of killing her," Gordon continued. He looked disappointed at her lack of emotion. "I know you want to look out for your friend, think you're helping her by keeping quiet but we need information if we're going to help her."

"I don't know anything," Jen repeated but she was worried. Who else might think she had answers?

"Anything would be helpful, Ms. Robinson," Gordon said gently.

The effort of maintaining a calm façade was wearing on her. Feeling tired and stupid, she looked from Gordon to Blake seeing only sincere concern. "Selina's always been secretive about her life. She tells you only what she thinks you need to know. Which usually isn't much."

The men exchanged a frustrated look.

"So you got nothing? Truly?" Blake asked.

Jen nodded, a little embarrassed that Selina had kept her in the dark. "I really did think she was… you know…with Oliver."

"Oliver?" The way the older man went still made her realize she had just provided a nugget of information they were looking for.

"Yeah, Oliver," Jen said. "Her…friend."

"Does he have tats and dark hair?" Blake asked.

She nodded, worried that she was betraying her friend.

"What's his last name?" Gordon asked.

"All I know is his name is Oliver. If they ever told me his last name I forgot it years ago."

"So they've known each other a long time?" Blake asked.

"Yeah."
"And you have no idea what they were up to?"

"I said I didn't!" It wasn't a lie either. The trouble with being a regular liar is that no one ever believed you when you told the truth. "Why don't you ask him?"

"Because he's dead," Blake said.

Her efforts at keeping her emotions in check wavered. She quickly did a mental rundown about all the things that had just turned awful for her friend.

"I can ask around," Jen offered, quietly. Years of not talking to cops, of evading the truth, were hard habits to break but the image of how Selina looked at Helena wouldn't go away. "I can find out who he is."

"We can do that," Blake said. "Just give us the names of people to ask."

"The people I'm thinking of will definitely not speak to the two of you," Jen stated, giving them a hard look.

Blake took the phone that was still clutched in her hand. He called his phone so she would have his number.

"Let me know the minute you find something," he said as he pressed her cell back into her hand. "It's important."

"Yeah, I get that," she said.

"Do you know this woman?" Gordon asked as he showed her a picture on his phone. The photo was of a woman with a sad, fearful face.

"Never saw her before in my life," Jen said, truthfully.

Gordon nodded, accepting her answer. He gave her a business card. "In case you can't get in touch with John."

She looked down at the official card thinking that this was the first time she ever entertained the thought of calling a cop. They started to walk away.

"Am I in trouble?" She called out. "With him, I mean?"

"No," Gordon said, shaking his head. "He just wants to find out what happened to your friend, Ms. Kyle, and keep her safe."

She nodded, believing him. "I don't know what was going on with Oliver and Selina. If there was anything...you know...between them. But I do know that Ollie is...was...important to Selina."

As Bruce drove the all-too-familiar route to Gotham General, he called John Blake, hoping he and Gordon had finally found the elusive Jen. Blake briefed him on his and Gordon's encounter with Selina's friend who didn't know nearly as much as they expected. So now they were back to playing the waiting game; their next move would be determined either by Selina's comrade in thievery or by the unreliable teenage stranger he had just met. Or if Selina returned to the land of the living.

"Anything else?" Bruce asked as he parked the Camaro in the hospital garage.
An infinitesimal pause before Blake responded.

"Not really," he replied in a subdued tone.

After the call, Bruce remained in the car, his hands clenching the steering wheel as he considered the thing Blake was not telling him and could only surmise that Blake had learned something about Selina's relationship with the John Doe. Oliver. A name he had never heard pass Selina's lips.

He slammed the car door shut, a little too hard but the sturdy Camaro seemed to not mind. As he walked to the elevators, he remembered how Selina sounded on the voice mail message. "They killed him," she had cried in a broken, defeated voice.

The elevator was crowded. Bruce ignored the curious looks of recognition. He was very good at projecting the 'don't even think of talking to me' vibe and no one dared to speak to him.

By the time he reached Selina's floor, the elevator was empty. The doors opened and his first sight was of the two person security detail he'd hired. They were where they were supposed to be; keeping an eye the elevator and on Selina's room. He nodded to them as he passed and since they had nothing to report, they nodded back but did not engage him in conversation.

He paused at the doorway to her room, indulging in the hope that when he entered, Selina would be awake, happy to see him and eager to tell everything that happened over the last few months. But when he stepped inside, he found that she slept on, keeping all her secrets safely intact.

Isha sat on the chair next to Selina's bed, passing the time embroidering elaborate patterns on a bolt of cloth. When she noticed Bruce, her calm expression changed into one of concern. He smiled to let her know he was fine but by the tilt of her head and her sudden watery eyes, she let him know she wasn't fooled.

She set aside the red material that fanned over her, rising to give Bruce the chair next to Selina. He gestured for her to remain seated, then handed her a takeout container from the Chinese restaurant she favored. At first, his offering embarrassed her; kindness was not something Isha had experienced for the majority of her life. Her eyes fell before she took a moment to shake the instinct that generosity came with a painful price, then looked back up at him and smiled her thanks.

He pulled a chair to sit on the other side of Selina's bed; the side next to the mangled hand. Only her fingers, bruised and scratched were visible, the tips still bandaged. Though still a mottled mass of bruises, the swelling on her face had gone down. Her right eye was no longer swollen shut but swollen to almost shut. The doctor had expressed concern about her vision but they needed her to waken before they knew the extent of the damage.

When he was away from her, Bruce entertained thoughts of bursting in the room and shaking her awake so she could tell him what the hell happened but seeing her now… She looked like a stranger: so fragile and helpless. So beaten.

"She will be fine," Isha said, seeming to know his thoughts and wanting to comfort him. "The sleep heals her."

Bruce nodded, not agreeing yet reluctant to express his worries to the woman that adored Selina. His thoughts returned to Oliver. Someone from Selina's past, but who? He thought of Rachel and the pull of old loves.

"What was she doing, Isha?" He asked in Hindi.

He didn't have to see Isha's face to know that the question discomfited her.
"I just want figure out who did this and protect her," he continued, his voice gentle, wanting to assure her that he wasn't angry.

She gave him an uncertain look, hesitant to betray Selina, to expose her to potential danger. Bruce had expected as much and waited patiently for her to work through her fear. A lifetime of abuse at the hands of men couldn't be overcome in a few short years.

"I do not know," she finally said, making herself meet his eyes. "When she left those nights, I thought she was…doing American wife things. She didn't explain and I didn't think to question her."

It was not in Isha to believe anything but the best about Selina.

With a tender look, she reached out to smooth Selina's hair over the small bandage on her forehead.

"She found me," Isha whispered as if she had to justify her loyalty.

"She did, didn't she?" Bruce said quietly and they fell into silence as they watched the woman that had brought them together.

His phone vibrated.

"Alfred, is everything alright?" Bruce asked.

"All is well, Master Wayne," Alfred said. "Miss Helena is napping after a busy day at the park. She rather likes our new chauffeur."

"Good," he said as he stepped into the hallway.

"I spoke with Mrs. Wackford earlier. She is getting us the guest list from the party. She also asked that you call Daniel. Something about that business deal that was supposed to be finalized this week?"

After ending the call from Alfred, he leaned on the wall outside of Selina's room and called Daniel Wackford. Daniel, as usual, was not prone to idle pleasantries and got right to the point.

"I hate to be pushy but there's a bit of a deadline on this, Bruce," Daniel said, sounding apologetic at his persistence. "Foreign investors are circling. I want to keep this local, if you know what I mean."

Bruce did know what he meant; Daniel was well known for championing local stimulus, fighting the tide of foreign entities that wanted pieces of Gotham.

"Come by the Club on your way home. I won't keep you long."

Sliding his phone in his pocket, Bruce took a moment to mentally skim over all the important meetings he had ignored in the last few days. The responsibilities he'd shouldered in the pursuit of restoring the good name of the Wayne family weighed heavily on him.

"I'll be back after Helena goes to sleep," Bruce told Isha.

"You stay with your daughter. I will stay here, Sri Bruce," Isha insisted, waving away his reservations. "Or Shanti will stay. We are happy to do so. You both have done so much for us. I can never repay-"

"You've done enough."
"I think not," Isha said quietly, shaking her head.

"No, Isha," Bruce asserted, looking her square in the eyes. "You have and we'll never forget it."

They held the look until Bruce took his leave. On the way to the elevator, he instructed the security team to make sure Isha got a good dinner.

Fifteen minutes later, Bruce arrived at the Gotham Club to meet Daniel. The entrance to the Club was located on a discreet side street. When Bruce pulled up to the valet station, the attendant frowned at the beat up Camaro. Cars such as Selina's were a rarity at the private and oh-so-very exclusive Gotham Gentleman's Club.

Since the late eighteenth century, the Club steadfastly remained in the heart of Gotham's financial district proudly existing behind a nondescript façade that invited no notice from the many Gothamites who passed by as they conducted their daily activities. It escaped the mob's wrath during Bane's occupation of Gotham simply because only the elite of the elite knew of its existence.

It was also the only place in the city that did not welcome Bruce Wayne.

Alfred once told him that Thomas Wayne kept his membership as a courtesy to an old aunt who insisted a Wayne must always be a member. She had been a staunch traditionalist, a champion of Gotham's Old Guard, dedicated to preserving the integrity of the Wayne name. If old age hadn't killed her, the very public nature of Bruce's antics surely would have. Bruce never knew her for she passed shortly after his birth so he had never felt any interest or loyalty to the Club that was populated with his father's peers and their sons. He was the first Wayne in six generations not to be a member.

After his first return from the dead, the Club had extended an invitation to resume the Wayne membership. Not only had the playboy Bruce Wayne shockingly refused the invitation but he had insulted the Club with a contemptuous rudeness that would never be forgiven. The manager, who had inherited his position from his father (who inherited it from his father) felt personally responsible for the scandalous affront to the Club's prestigious reputation.

The valet attendant's glower turned to disbelief when he recognized Bruce Wayne. Stunned and rattled, he knew the Club's history with the youngest Wayne, the attendant hurriedly picked up the phone attached to wooden podium.

Bruce didn't wait for permission. Without handing the keys to the man, he said, "I won't be long" and proceeded inside. Knowing that he was violating a code, Bruce couldn't bring himself to care. He really hated this place. The Club would invariably be filled with his father's friends who could not resist mentioning Thomas Wayne over and over, giving Bruce that slightly pitying look that he would never know Thomas the way they did. They all meant well but today, especially, he wasn't in any mood for reminisces about his father.

He made it ten feet into the foyer before he was greeted by the manager. The man, radiating indignation, stood in front of the massive mahogany doors that served as the Club's barrier to the outside world. It was the same man who had extended the invitation so many years ago.

"If you are here for membership, Mr. Wayne, I'm afraid we have nothing available for you," he said self-importantly, looking positively gleeful to refuse entry to the arrogant Bruce Wayne. Bruce suspected the man had held out the hope that Bruce would beg to be allowed entry into the club now that he was respectable.
"I'm only here to see Daniel Wackford," Bruce said.

Upon hearing the name, the man's haughty demeanor lessoned but righteous umbrage at allowing an unsuitably attired person into the club prevailed.

"Armani is down the street, sir," he drawled, taking particular delight in insultingly surveying Bruce's clothes. The jeans, casual black cashmere pullover and black leather jacket Bruce wore were all equally unacceptable. No one stepped foot in the Gotham Club in anything less than tie and jacket.

Bruce stared at him, thinking that intimidating this pompous twit would be a bright spot in an otherwise depressing few days. "I'm sure there's some spare jackets laying around."

"I hardly think-" he began before a voice behind them interrupted him.

"Is there a problem, Paul?"

They both turned to find Daniel standing in the foyer. The manager's pretentious manner withered. While the Wayne family was the most publicly prominent family in Gotham the Wackford-Squeers family was just as old and distinguished. Since Bruce refused to take the mantle of the social leader, it had fallen to Daniel to assume the position.

"No, sir," the manager replied. "I was merely informing Mr. Wayne on the rules of the club."

Daniel smiled the smile of one who enjoys power and expects his every whim fulfilled. "Mr. Wayne is my guest. He won't be here long so I feel we can make an exception. This one time."

Daniel did not wait for a response. He beckoned Bruce to follow him into the hallowed Gotham Club. Paintings of esteemed former members lined the dark, wood paneled walls. Bruce recognized several of his family members including his father whose portrait hung in a place of honor above the grand fireplace in the center of the great room.

"Are you throwing a party?" Daniel asked, sitting down on one of the leather chairs in front of the fireplace. It was the best seat in the house and Bruce suspected that when Daniel was in residence, no one dared sit there.

"Sorry?" Bruce asked as he took the chair opposite Daniel.

"The guest list?"

Bruce shook his head, wondering how he could ask Daniel which of his guests capable of committing murder. Or hiring someone to do their dirty work. He glanced around the room, noting the other patrons. Probably more than he would like to know.

"Someone caught your fancy, then?" Daniel asked

It took Bruce a few moments to catch his meaning. "Ah…no."

"Oh, yes. You were there with a young lady, if I remember correctly?"

Bruce nodded, his attention momentarily distracted by his father's portrait. The face that stared down at him was different from the one he had known at home. His father's business face stared blankly down at him – so very different from the caring, smiling man Bruce remembered all too well.
"It would be nice to see you settled down with the right woman."

His attention quickly returned back to Daniel. "About that property?" Bruce asked, leading the conversation away from women.

"That's quite a smooth transition, Bruce." Daniel smiled a knowing, indulgent smile before straightening to talk business.

"My attorneys have met with yours. Everything is just about ready to be finalized. We just need your perusal and approval." He reached into the briefcase next to his chair, withdrawing a few documents. "Here's a summary of the transaction. Your attorneys have already examined this to make sure we're not being…shifty."

"Of course not," Bruce said absently. The waterfront development project that Daniel was involved in interested Bruce not the least. Usually, his army of attorneys tended to these matters without his involvement, but Daniel's status as his father's friend earned the older man the privilege of Bruce's more personal attention. He didn't want to insult Daniel's efforts so instead of just signing off on the deal he told him to give him a few days to look it over.

Daniel nodded approvingly. "Can we expect your response by, say, the end of the week?"

"I'll have it for you then, if not sooner."

"Excellent!" Daniel smiled broadly. "I won't keep you any longer. I know you're a busy man."

He stood, indicating Bruce to do the same. "I'll walk you out. That way Paul won't accost you again."

"It's fine," Bruce said.

"Your newest project…Clean water, is it?" Daniel asked conversationally as they retraced their steps toward the foyer.

"Yes. Something as basic as clean water shouldn't be elusive to anyone."

"Well done, Bruce," Daniel said, pausing to study Bruce. "Sign me up for a donation to this most worthy charity."

Bruce shook his head. "It's not meant to be a charitable endeavor. I spent some time in India and some of the regions lack access to clean water. The project is designed to not only provide clean water but help poverty stricken areas become self-sustaining as well as earn a profit for a group of Indian investors. The point is to encourage…" He trailed off, uncomfortable with showing how important the project was to him.

"Your mother would love that," Daniel said, looking at Bruce carefully. "She was a great believer in the 'teach the people to fish' sort of thing."

Maybe it was the emotional last few days and Bruce's defenses were down, but Daniel's words touched him. His mother, indeed, would have been very proud.

"Thank you," Bruce said, extending his hand. "I'll be in touch."

As he walked out of the club, ignoring the glare of the manager, he received a text from Blake. They found where Oliver lived. Looks like he had another detour before heading home.
Within a week of Balashov's funeral, a new top-of-the-line Land Rover arrived. Packing up their few possessions, Bruce, Selina, and Helena - comfortably fastened in the safest car seat Bruce could find - headed east for no other reason than the Black Sea was to the west and they'd already been up north.

For the rest of the summer, they drifted; driving from the Black Sea to beyond the Caspian Sea, deeper and deeper into regions that hadn't the slightest idea who Bruce Wayne was. The lifelong burden of living under public scrutiny faded more each day he went without receiving that odd look as though someone was trying to place him.

They were both freer, Selina thought as she watched him play with Helena. That nagging always-look-over-her-shoulder feeling was almost forgotten. Almost. Maybe the cops weren't on her tail but she couldn't help but think that everything was just too...perfect.

"Haven't you ever spent the night outside?" Bruce asked after seeing her wary expression at his suggestion they go camping for a few weeks.

"Sure. Lots of times," Selina replied, sitting down next to him on the plush rug to watch Helena's efforts at rolling over. "Just not by choice."

"Let's go before the weather turns cold. It'll be fun." He smiled that cheeky grin, knowing her definition of fun did not include sleeping outdoors.

Since Selina could not remember him proposing anything he would characterize as 'fun', she could hardly refuse. Dimly, she worried that maybe this would be the Thing that would go Wrong. It was inevitable that something would kill this idyllic nomadic life with Bruce and Helena.

Yet nothing went wrong and camping proved to be not nearly as awful as Selina thought it would be. Though she wouldn't be sad if she never spent another night outside, on a mountain, in the middle of nowhere.

"There's supposed to be a huge cave we can explore," Bruce said the first night after they made camp.

"Feeling homesick?" She asked, inching closer to him and his warmth. Helena was long asleep in the small green tent.

He put an arm around her, pulling her close. "Caves are always interesting," he said, nuzzling her neck.

"Just so you don't lecture us on geology, I'm game," she teased before darting a worried glance toward the tent that was no more than ten feet away.

"There's no dingoes here," he said before kissing her worry away.

Selina hated the caves immediately but she followed him without a word of complaint, her instinct to not show weakness stronger than her aversion to confined spaces. Bruce's enthusiasm in explaining nature stuff to a five-month old was a source of endless amusement and went a long way to quelling her unease.

"What is that noise?" She asked, stopping still, her hold on Helena tightening protectively.

A grin spread over his face. "Bats."
Selina reluctantly looked up toward the ceiling, not nearly as amused as him. "No offense, but if a bat touches my hair, I'm going to puke."

He laughed. "In that case, I'll hold Helena."

Back at their campsite, after Helena was asleep, they sat quietly in front of the small campfire. Bruce's earlier amusement had vanished, replaced by melancholy. He stared at the flames, his mind a million miles away. Though curious why bats seemed to have such an affect on him, Selina didn't ask any questions. Instead, she turned her attention to the night sky, so full of stars that it made her feel small and inconsequential. It was not an unpleasant feeling.

Sensing his eyes on her, Selina turned and they gazed at each other until he looked back at the fire and quietly told her about the bats. When he finished, he didn't look at her but kept his gaze on the campfire. She took his hand, holding it as she considered the unfairness of it all.

He probably had had no idea the world was such a cruel place until that night. Cocooned in the warmth of unconditional parental love then mercilessly thrust away from that safety into the cold reality of the world she knew all too well. Yes, it was all so horribly unfair. Too many times she'd seen people destroy their children through neglect and abuse. Yet they continued to live, even when their children would be far better off if they were dead.

She turned her gaze back up to the starry sky and whispered, "It's enough to drive a person crazy."

He nodded, knowing all too well the insanity that had consumed him.

Selina rose. "Let's go watch Helena sleep," she said, pulling him toward the tent.

They continued their travels. For the next few months, they made their way deeper into Asia, stopping to pass the harsh winter in a snowy town deep in the Altai Mountains. Bruce, very Zen about their confinement, seemed impervious to the cabin fever that claimed Selina. Snowed in a cozy cabin on the outskirts of a pleasant village, she soon chafed at the jail-like confines.

Helena helped dispel her anxiety but the days were short and the baby slept soundly through the long nights. Too much time to think never worked in Selina's favor. If she was planning a job, Selina had no problem closeting herself away for days without feeling like the walls were closing in on her. More and more Selina's thoughts turned to Bruce's parents, especially now that he mentioned them more often since their visit to the cave. They would be so very happy with their granddaughter, he told her with a delighted smile as Helena crawled toward him for the first time.

But not their granddaughter's mother, Selina thought. If Thomas and Martha Wayne had lived, they would never know Helena for Bruce would have long ago married some lovely society beauty and had a few well-bred, mannerly, sunny faced children. Instead, here he was with a woman of the same streets that had taken his parents' lives.

Someday, he was going to admit that she was all wrong for Helena and him.

"Jesus, Selina, what devil is in you?" He demanded one night after Selina successfully pushed him to losing his temper.

She wondered the same thing herself and realized that the Thing that would go Wrong was probably her. Ashamed at her satisfaction in provoking him, she shrugged carelessly ever afraid in revealing too much about herself.

Selina didn't do shame or guilt well so she smoothed things over with him the best way she knew how. He succumbed to her very physical apologies. When the furor of their copulation calmed and
he moved slowly within her, he held her face between his hands, staring into her eyes as if trying to penetrate her very essence.

Later, with her head laying on his chest, she listened as his heartbeat slowed to its normal rhythm. Bruce absently played with her hair and she felt sorry for him for getting tangled up with a woman like her.

"Next winter we'll be somewhere warmer," Bruce promised.

But that meant planning a future beyond a few months and neither of them were prepared for that.

Once they could dig out the Range Rover and it was safe to drive, they took off, veering south toward sunnier climes. With Helena asleep in the back seat and Bruce driving, Selina looked out at the vast foreignness that she found herself in. She smiled, happy to be moving. Leaning over, she kissed Bruce's cheek then told him one of her favorite thieving stories that involved robbing an A-List actor in Hollywood. Bruce smiled, genuinely amused then took her hand and kissed it.

The months that followed were like a dream. Just the three of them with no one knowing who they were other than an American family travelling in places few Americans ever visited. Neither Bruce nor Selina wanted to admit it but the aimless wandering was growing tiresome.

Until they found themselves in a small city in Kazakhstan and discovered their purpose.

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_Gotham – The Present_  

Willow Street, near Old Town, was a small avenue off the busy main thoroughfares that traversed Gotham. It was the type of street where people moved when they earned enough to get out of the Narrows but couldn't afford anything better. Finding a parking spot wasn't terribly difficult as few people in the area could afford the expenses associated with owning a vehicle in Gotham.

Blake visited the corner store to get some coffees and Gordon used the time to check in at the station.

"Any progress on the photo?" Gordon asked the officer he set to the task of identifying the woman in the picture that Bruce had sent him earlier.

"No, sir," the officer replied. "We've run the image through our database as well as Motor Vehicle records. So far nothing but we're expanding our search to nationwide databases."

Gordon nodded, unsurprised because thus far, everything about this investigation was nothing but dead ends.

By the time Blake returned with two coffees, a faded black Camaro pulled up behind Gordon's unmarked police car. From the look on Wayne's face, Gordon surmised the man hadn't had the best of days.

"Ms. Kyle's friend wasn't able to get Oliver's full name but she did find this address," Gordon explained as they walked to the building. "Well, not an address. She just learned he lived in the apartment over The Wet Whistle."

Next to the bar, they found a battered door that creakily opened onto a narrow staircase. As they climbed the narrow stairs, they could hear the dull thud of music from the seedy tavern Gordon hoped they would not have to visit.
"Who the hell are you?" A middle aged woman glared at them from her barely open door. Both the security chain which kept the dingy door mostly closed as well as the smoke from the cigarette dangling out of the side of her mouth prevented her full face to be revealed.

"We're here about Oliver," Blake told her, waving away a cloud of smoke as she exhaled.

"It's about goddamned time. Do something about that goddamned dog of his, would ya? It's been barking for days. I keep calling his goddamned girlfriend but she's not answering."

"His girlfriend?" Wayne asked as Gordon and Blake exchanged a quick, worried glance.

"Yeah, though I don't know what she sees in him. A real goddamned bum, that one, to leave his dog like that."

"We'll take care of it, Ma'am," Gordon said.

They waited for her to retreat back into her apartment. She didn't.

Mindful of the nosy neighbor, Blake pulled out a lock-picking kit as surreptitiously as possible. Gordon took a step back, uncomfortable with his involvement with breaking and entering. Wayne gestured for Blake to wait as he withdrew the key ring Gordon and Blake had found at the crime scene. The second key he tried was a winner and the door unlocked.

As soon as Bruce opened the door, a small, scruffy dog jumped on him, scratching at his knees. The little, cream colored dog was beside himself with happiness at human contact. Wayne's attention, however, was not on the dog but on the tiny apartment.

Blake squatted down and greeted the joyful dog, scratching behind his ears. The dog rolled over, baring his belly. "Mr. Tibbles," Blake read on the heart shaped ID tag.

"One of you's gonna walk that goddamned thing, right?" The woman called out.

"John?" Gordon asked.

"Yeah, I'll see to it." He took the leash that hung next to the door and took the dog outside leaving Bruce and Gordon alone.

The woman continued to peer at them from the safety of her apartment. With a tight smile, Gordon closed the door, listening vainly for the sound of her door to close.

It was always a strange feeling being in the home of the dead, their belongings sitting patiently waiting for their owner to never return. There weren't many possessions in the very small studio apartment rented by Oliver. For a junkie's place, it was far cleaner than expected. The only mess was the one left by the dog who had been polite enough to use a corner near the tiny bathroom.

Wayne walked around the room, his gaze missing little. A framed photo of a young man and woman hanging on the wall drew his attention. If Gordon wasn't mistaken, the woman was a younger Selina Kyle. The man's arm hung around a smiling Selina, holding her close. The photo had been taken in the summer, the sleeves were cut off from the man's t-shirt showing off his many tattoos.

For the first time, they could see Oliver clearly. In the photo, his spiked hair was dyed extra black. His lip, eyebrow, and nose were pierced, jagged pieces of silver giving him a dangerous look that did not carry to his clear blue eyes. Gordon's impression was that this was a man who made an effort to not only seem rough and dangerous but he wanted to hide his good looks.
"So that's our John Doe," Gordon muttered as Wayne re-hung the picture on the wall.

"Oliver Preston," Bruce stated a short while later as he rifled through the junk mail on the tiny kitchen table.

"I'll run the name but since the prints and DNA came up with nothing, I don't expect we'll find anything."

Gordon picked up a drawing pad that rested on the bedside table. The book was filled with sketches, mostly abstract in nature, some of trees and flowers but toward the end, there were pages of drawings of one subject: the woman from the photo Bruce had found earlier.

"Mr. Wayne," he said, holding up the sketchbook. "There's no name to identify her but it looks like she was on his mind."

Blake returned with dog. The dog hopped on the sofa and watched the men search the apartment. They found nothing of interest. No phone, no computer, nothing that gave the slightest indication what Oliver and Selina had gotten into.

"Wonder who this is?" Blake handed Gordon a picture he found on the refrigerator door. The photo was of a very cute little girl with dark hair and dark eyes, smiling happily for the camera.

"Daughter? Niece?" Gordon mused. "Maybe related to the woman in the sketchbook?"

Bruce took the photo, staring at it with a very blank expression on his face. Gordon could see where someone had written on the back of the picture. *Can you believe this kid? Gets cuter every day!*

Gordon met Blake's eye briefly as they both noted that Wayne didn't put the picture back onto the refrigerator but stuffed it in the inner pocket of his leather jacket.

There was one moment when Gordon thought he had made a significant discovery. Behind an opened bag of chocolate chips, he found an older model digital camera. He scanned through photos - mostly of odd city scenery that a junkie might find interesting - before finding a video taken a month ago. It was a brief video of Selina entering the apartment and the dog jumping on her. She laughed and picked him up, cooing at him, letting him lick her face. The brief video ended with her asking the dog if he wants her to steal him away, then she looked up and, there was no mistaking the fond look in her eyes, told Oliver to put the camera away.

The guy clearly had a relationship with Selina.

"What do we do with Mr. Tibbles?" Blake asked, dispelling the awkward silence that fell over the room. "I don't think that neighbor is too keen on dogs. And I can't have a dog at my place."

"I'll take him," Bruce said, picking up the dog and without another word left the apartment.

"Well…" Blake said as soon as they heard the street door close. "That was uncomfortable."

"Did you check the trash?" Gordon asked.

Under the kitchen sink, Blake found the trash bin. Wadded up under several days' worth of coffee grounds was a handwritten list of addresses. Most of the addresses had been crossed out.

"Looks like we have something to look into after all," Gordon said.
"I'll call Bruce," Blake said, reaching for his phone. "We can check these out."

"Give them to him later."

"But-"

"Later, John," Gordon said as he sat down at the table looking around the cheap, run-down apartment someone had tried so hard to make homey. It was pitiful and it made Gordon sad that the owner who seemed to have taken pride in so little lay dead in a morgue drawer. "Tell me what you remember about Ms. Kyle's record."

Blake turned, giving Gordon a quick, curious look. "Thought you weren't interested in gossip."

"Not interested in gossip, John," Gordon admonished.

Blake nodded then sat down. "Remember when we had that rash of high-end burglaries about five years ago? You know the really expensive jewels getting stolen left and right? The papers referred to the perp as 'The Cat'? I'm pretty sure that was her."

"Pretty sure?" Gordon shook his head. "How about you tell me something you know for certain."

Blake fell quiet for a moment. Hopefully, he was sorting out the facts from the speculations. "Her arrest record was…considerable. Most of the arrests were from her younger years until she seemed to get good and smart. Each arrest was accompanied with a notation about the lengths she went to resist arrest."

He went on to recount the long and varied criminal history of Selina Kyle. As he spoke, Gordon looked up the addresses relieved to find that none appeared to be of interest to a thief. Instead, the addresses were of warehouses or offices. All in areas that were either abandoned or industrial areas, good places for conducting illicit business.

"Also…" Blake paused as he looked steadily at Gordon. "Even though there was nothing in her file, she definitely had something to do with Congressman Gilly's disappearance. And I don't need to tell you how that turned out."
“They call him Mr. Tibbles,” Bruce announced to an ecstatic Helena when he arrived home and presented her the dog found at Oliver’s apartment.

“I love him!” Helena exclaimed, petting the small, cream-colored, dog carefully but with great enthusiasm.

“Mommy sent him to you,” Bruce said, squatting down to pull her close. “She’s very sorry she can’t call you so she sent Mr. Tibbles to keep you company.”

“She did?” Helena’s trusting brown eyes were wide. The gap in logic of her father’s story escaped her.

“Yes,” Bruce said, hugging her to him. “She wants you to take care of him until she gets back. Do you think you can do that?”

She nodded solemnly, serious with the task her mother entrusted to her.

“Mr. Tibbles?” Alfred asked, eyeing the dog with suspicion. “Is that a name you came up with, sir?”

“No,” Bruce replied, his smile fading as he rose to face Alfred. “Selina’s friend, Oliver, named him.”

“Oliver?” Alfred’s interest was piqued.

“The John Doe,” Bruce replied under his breath though that was not necessary as Helena was thoroughly enthralled with the newest addition to the Wayne household.

“What do we do with him?” Helena asked.

“Well,” Bruce replied. “He’s been cooped up for awhile so how about you and I take him to the park?”

Helena, with the dog following, ran upstairs to get her jacket.

“I see you’ve had a productive day,” Alfred commented.

“If you consider finding a car and a dog productive, then, yes, it was.”

“So nothing substantial then?”

“Only more questions,” Bruce said as he texted the security detail of his intention to walk Helena to the park. By the time father and daughter walked the five blocks, the highly trained personnel would have the entire ten acre park secured.

“And Ms. Kyle?” Alfred’s voice lowered.

“The same,” Bruce replied quietly.
“The dog is a nice distraction, sir, but it won’t pacify Miss Helena for long.”

“I know,” Bruce said, looking in the direction of the staircase. “I don’t want Helena to see her mother until she’s awake.”

“And when will that be?”

“I have no idea,” Bruce replied quietly, his tone one of frustration mixed with worry.

“If it’s much longer, you’ll need to reconsider before Miss Helena thinks her mother’s abandoned her.”

Bruce’s pensive expression changed to a smiling one when Helena ran down the stairs, the dog following on her heels. Eager to leave, she rushed to her father and grabbed his hand.

“Up for another trip to the park, Alfred?” Bruce asked, as he fastened the leash to Mr. Tibbles.

“Tempting but I think I’ll sit this one out.” Alfred regarded the unkempt little dog with a wary eye envisioning the mess the thing would make on the Italian marble. Mr. Tibbles regarded him curiously before shifting his happy gaze from Bruce to Helena back to Alfred then abruptly started licking himself.

“Lovely,” Alfred murmured as he eyed the dog that looked like it had been found behind a dumpster. “Shall I call a grooming service?”

“What do you say we give him a bath when we get back, Helena?” Bruce asked, zipping up Helena’s jacket.

After sliding on a ball cap, he handed her the leash cautioning her to hold it tightly. Bruce adjusted the cap so it partially shielded his face from the casual observer. Now was not the time for the press to discover Bruce Wayne had returned to Gotham with a daughter. With his paws sliding on the floor, Mr. Tibbles led them toward the elevator.

“Oh, and Alfred?” Bruce said as he pushed a button in the elevator. “Don’t panic when you see the car parked next to the Rolls.” Bruce grinned a mischievous grin that Alfred hadn’t seen in awhile.

After the elevator doors closed, Alfred went to check the security feed for Bruce Wayne’s private section of the underground parking garage. He had no trouble locating the source of Bruce’s amusement. The incongruous the sight of the rusty, dented, American muscle car flanked by a late model Rolls Royce and the hardly driven Lamborghini would have been far more amusing if things weren’t so dire in the Wayne household. There was no mistaking the owner of the vehicle.

Twenty years ago, Alfred’s greatest fear was that his young charge would fall victim to unscrupulous fortune hunters eager to exploit the vulnerable heir. After Bruce returned to Gotham from his eight year absence and assumed his Batman persona, Alfred’s worries unexpectedly turned in another direction, and he often yearned for the days when his only concern was whether an unsuitable woman would ensnare the lonely billionaire. When he learned the identity of the mysterious woman that had changed Bruce’s life, his old fears resurfaced but he had no choice than to trust Master Wayne’s judgement that, frankly, wasn’t the best when it came to women.

After spending time with Selina, Alfred’s fear of Bruce falling prey to a gold digger proved unfounded. Considering how she first became acquainted with Master Wayne, Selina’s indifference to Bruce’s money surprised Alfred. She was not impressed with the penthouse, had no desire to mix with society, and, most pleasing to Alfred, made no demands for jewelry, expensive clothes or anything else Alfred had imagined when he indulged in his worries.
When they first arrived from India, Alfred had presented Selina with an impressive array of no-limit credit cards. Alfred had anticipated a greedy glimmer in her eye but she merely regarded him blankly for a few moments before offering a breezy comment about hitting the jackpot. In the six months since they returned, other than petrol, a few things for Helena, a dress for the Wackford party and a fashionable athletic outfit, she bought nothing.

Switching off the security monitor, Alfred stared at the blank screen a few moments before tending to household duties which now included checking Selina’s voice messages. Other than her friend, Jen, there had been no other texts or messages left for her in the last few days. Anything prior to the incident at the warehouse had been deleted by Selina and, thus far, proved irretrievable. Until today.

With a small amount of guilt, he listened to the voicemail that had been left earlier in the afternoon. He called the number but it went straight to voicemail, he decided against leaving a message not knowing the proper protocol of informing a stranger of bad news. As he began to trace the number, Bruce and Helena returned.

“Are we really gonna put him in the tub?” Helena asked.

“We are,” Bruce replied as he helped her take off her jacket.

“And wash him with shampoo?”

“Yes.”

“Are we gonna dry him with a dryer?”

“No.”

“Have you ever washed a dog?”

“No.”

“Will he drown?”

“No.”

“Can I get in with him?”

“No.”

“What’ll he do in there?”

“That’s the mystery,” Bruce said, smiling at Helena. “Take him up to your room and I’ll be right there, okay?”

Mr. Tibbles followed her until he understood the direction she was taking him, then ran ahead, prompting her to run after him.

“Would you like any help with...this process?” Alfred asked.

“I wouldn’t do that to you, Alfred,” Bruce said. “Besides, I have a job for you.” He handed Alfred a list of names. “Miriam’s guest list. See if anyone grabs your attention.”

He turned to follow Helena up the stairs.
“Mr. Bashir called,” Alfred called out. That bit of information was not what he wanted to impart but broaching the subject about accessing Selina’s private phone could be touchy. “Isha told him about Selina. He and the little one wanted to go to the hospital. I put them on the list of approved visitors.”

“That’s fine,” Bruce said.

“They also wanted to come by to bring Miss Helena a gift. They seemed concerned for her.”

“She’ll like seeing them,” Bruce replied as he headed toward the staircase.

Alfred hesitated; he hadn’t told Master Wayne that he had managed to access Selina’s private phone. The one thing that she kept strictly separate.

“Sir…I’ve been monitoring Ms. Kyle’s incoming calls. In case something helpful turned up.”

Bruce stopped and turned to face him.

“What did you find out?” He asked, looking at him with apprehension.

“Nothing bad,” Alfred assured him, wanting to put him at ease. “All of the messages and texts have been from Ms. Kyle’s friend who dropped off Helena. That is, until today.”

Bruce still had that guarded look.

“It’s a woman,” Alfred said. “A friend from the sound of the message. I had hoped she would have something helpful for you but…”

He beckoned Bruce over to the computer so he could play the message.

“Girl, you are not going to believe this. Kev’s ex showed up and asked if she could live with us! Is that fucked up or what? What kind of person does that? Anyway, I’ve got this weekend off so I thought maybe we could get together. I’m going to work now. I’ll call you back over my break.”

“The number is registered to Ms. Desdemona Lonargin with only a Northpoint P.O. box listed as an address,” Alfred said.

“So that’s DeeDee…” Bruce said.

“A friend of hers?”

“A good one” Bruce nodded. “Earlier today, I stumbled onto someone who knows her. I left my number for her to call. If we don’t hear from her, we’ll give her call. Helluva way to meet her.”

“You haven’t met her?” Alfred frowned. From what he could tell from the message, this DeeDee was gainfully employed and probably not a criminal. He tried to think of reasons why Selina chose to keep Bruce so in the dark about her life. “Ms. Kyle doesn’t seem the sort to be ashamed of her friends.”

“It’s not them she’s ashamed of, Alfred,” Bruce replied. “Let me know if any interesting names show up on that list.”

After Bruce left the study, Alfred helped himself to a snifter of fine brandy and sat at Bruce’s desk. He studied the list; he did indeed know more about these people than most would expect. Alfred had always been the receiver of what people considered titillating society gossip. Thinking that Bruce Wayne’s top servant would return the favor, other highly placed servants eagerly shared.
juicy stories about their own employers. Even though Master Wayne had once told Alfred to “give ‘em something to chew on” Alfred felt it would be a betrayal to Thomas and Martha Wayne and refused to say anything at all. His only concession to furthering the Bruce Wayne Society Playboy facade was to offer a mysterious smile that invited whatever speculation someone wished to draw.

Miriam Wackford’s guest list held no surprises: politicians, business moguls, society mavens ...the creme of Gotham society was all there. Other than consummate snobbery, ruthless business dealings and a few sexual escapades, the guests were not known to be involved with any criminal activity. If Selina had robbed one of the people on the list, there was no one that Alfred could see who would resort to such extreme measures to exact revenge. The crowd was certainly influential but, in his opinion, a passionless lot. He made note of a few names that could possibly have lurid connections but a few phone calls later and he was back to having no suspects.

After finishing his brandy, Alfred rose. He was curious to see the state of the elegant bathroom after father and daughter bathed the newest member of the Wayne household. He found Helena lying on her parents’ bed, coloring and watching television.

He kept his frown to himself at the sight of the newly washed dog lying on an expensive towel next to her. Sitting on the bed away from the dog, Alfred spent a few moments admiring the pictures that were intended for her mother.

After checking the bathroom - and noting that it was perfectly clean - he went to find Bruce. The master bedroom was suited with two separate dressing rooms, each with adjoining closets that were bigger than Alfred’s first flat. Bruce’s was full to the brim as Alfred had contacted Bruce’s former tailors who were more than happy to refit one of their best customers.

Bruce, however, was in Selina’s closet. He sat on ottoman in center of the mostly empty closet, staring at the dress she’d worn to the Christmas party. Laying by his side was the picture of the mystery woman.

“The dog washing was successful, was it?” Alfred asked.

Distractedly, Bruce nodded. He had a faraway look in his eye as he considered something. Whatever it was pleased him for he smiled. Alfred stepped closer, waiting for Bruce to share in whatever it was that seemed to lessen some of the tension he had carried with him in the last few days.

“I know what you all are thinking,” Bruce said. “Up until about five minutes ago, I thought the same thing. But, that’s not what’s happening.”

“What?”

“That Selina was cheating on me,” he replied, quietly. “It’s just not her thing.”

“She’ll steal but won’t cheat?” Alfred asked, trying to keep the scoff out of his voice.

“Oh, she’ll cheat...,” Bruce said, with a quick grin before becoming serious. “Just not like this. If she found someone else, believe me, she would let me know. She has her standards.”

“I see,” Alfred said.

Bruce’s attention returned to the gown hanging all alone in the large closet. “There’s two things about Selina that I let myself forget.”

“Such as?”
“One of her biggest fears is people will realize she has a heart. Selina is a sucker for hard luck cases and she spots them easily. Did I ever tell you how we ended up in India?”

“No,” Alfred said, sitting down beside Bruce.

“We were in Kazakhstan. Selina was out for a run, Helena and I were at a sidewalk cafe having breakfast. Selina shows up with this woman, Isha, who seemed terrified. The woman didn’t speak English and Selina didn’t speak Hindi but somehow Selina learned that the woman’s husband had recently been killed and she was destitute. Alone in a foreign country, not speaking the language, and treated like a slave by her brutal husband, the woman ended up begging on the street. If it had just been me, I would’ve given her money then moved along but Selina saw the woman’s desperation. Paid attention to it. She saw this lonely, frightened woman and wanted to help. She sees people, not the big picture. Not the forest, but each and every downtrodden tree.”

Alfred picked up the photo of the woman. “You think something like that is happening here?”

“Yes.”

“Then why the secrecy?”

Bruce shrugged. “If this has something to do with her past, it must involve something she doesn’t want me to know about.”

“What was the other thing, sir?” Alfred asked. “You said you had forgotten two things…”

Bruce looked at him steadily. “I forgot that Selina’s the best thing to ever happen to me.”

Alfred smiled.

“Daddy!” Helena rushed over to her father. “Mr. Tibbles pooped on the carpet!”

The dog who had followed Helena, sat down and looked up innocently at Bruce.

Alfred rose to take care of the mess but Bruce waved him off.

“That’s not in your job description. Helena and I will take care of it.” Bruce said as he followed Helena and Mr. Tibbles to the scene of the crime.

“I knew this was going to happen,” Alfred muttered. And he was not talking about Mr. Tibbles.

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*Somewhere on the way to India – Two Years Ago*

The dusty Land Rover travelled through a region that was as dangerous as it was picturesque. Not that anyone in the vehicle could see the beauty of their surroundings. It was the dead of night, not an ideal time for travelling, but Bruce and Selina had decided to push through until they safely crossed the border.

Slowing periodically to navigate the treacherous twists and turns of the winding road as they ascended higher and higher into the mountains, Selina easily maneuvered the vehicle through the mountain passes. She swerved to avoid yet another pothole. At least this portion was paved though no one was sure if that was a good sign.
In the backseat, nestled comfortably in her car seat, Helena slept deeply. The long hours spent in the car were difficult for the toddler, and, as a consequence, everyone else. During the day, they made frequent stops, finding isolated areas where Bruce and Selina felt comfortable allowing their daughter to roam around. Freed from the carseat, Helena spent her time participating in her new favorite pastime: running from her parents.

Beside Helena sat Isha. It had been three months since Selina had found her, begging for food on a side street that saw few charitable pedestrians. The first few weeks with the Americans were terrifying and confusing. Isha could not understand the whys of their kindness and stories of enslavement swirled about her mind but as she lay in a comfortable bed with her belly full, she decided that if these people were slavers, it was a far sight better than living in the streets.

Unable to sleep, the older woman, with her sari wrapped protectively around her, gazed out the window seeing nothing but inky blackness. The black of the pre-dawn hours invited dark imaginings of what lurked about them as they travelled the deserted road. Isha looked away from the window to meet Selina’s eyes in the rear-view mirror. Selina gave the older woman a reassuring smile and, despite her anxiety, Isha responded in kind because the sight of Selina’s grin on this tense night calmed her, reminding her of when they first met.

Selina’s was the first kind face Isha had looked upon since her husband had taken her from India. The worthless man had recently died which was no great tragedy but for the fact that he’d left her alone in a foreign country with no money, no papers, and no family or friends. Except for supervised trips to the grocery store, he had forbidden her from leaving the small apartment keeping her isolated and unable to become familiar with her surroundings or learning to speak Kazakh, Russian or any other languages of the region.

Absently, Isha’s hand caressed Helena’s head, liking the feel of the soft, dark hair against her rough skin. The little one had helped ease her terror of trusting strangers. Helena was a joyous creature and Isha had never seen two people so devoted to a girl child. People who had such a lovely and loved child couldn’t be too bad.

As Isha spent time with the small family, her initial terror faded although she couldn’t shake her fear of The Man, as she thought of him. Seeming to sense her anxiety, Bruce kept his distance, leaving the communication to Selina as he consulted an electronic device, quietly feeding her Hindi words and translating what Isha said. Before long, he no longer required an electronic translator.

“Bruce,” Selina said quietly as she slowed the vehicle. Her tone was calm but there was no mistaking her urgency.

Instantly, he was awake, leaning forward to see what had drawn her concern. The headlights of a crowd of vehicles cut through the blackness of the night revealing that the narrow road was blocked.

“Turn around,” he said, keeping his voice low.

Selina nodded but before she could put the car in reverse, the headlights of another vehicle approached from behind. The truck travelled in the middle of the very narrow road, blocking their escape.

They quickly traded places, Selina rising up so Bruce could slide beneath her to sit in the driver’s seat. Instead of sitting in the passenger seat, Selina climbed into the backseat. Isha handed her a long, black scarf to cover her head. This area was not kind to women improperly dressed.

A bearded young man, complete with a too large gun slung across his torso, walked toward the
“Is she secure?” Bruce asked, as he studied the vehicle behind them in the rear view mirror.

“Yes. You think we may have to break through?” Selina asked, arranging the scarf so that only her eyes were visible.

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that,” Bruce said.

The young man gestured for Bruce to roll down the window. Bruce affected a deferential manner which seemed to allay the man’s suspicions. It also helped that Bruce’s appearance did not suggest that he was a Westerner. In the months that they had been travelling, his beard had grown in, his hair almost touching his shoulders. Perhaps by design - it was Isha’s impression that this man was prepared for anything - Bruce’s appearance slowly altered so he blended in better than he would have when she first met him.

As he accepted the passport with a false identity that Bruce passed to him, the young soldier scanned the interior of the vehicle. Selina bowed her head submissively but her eyes were alert. One hand rested protectively on her still sleeping daughter. The man’s eyes rested ever so briefly on the women in the backseat before dismissing their presence of no consequence and returning his attention to Bruce.

When the soldier spoke English, Bruce feigned ignorance of the language. It took the men a few tries before settling on a language they both spoke: Russian. Throughout the exchange, Bruce’s bearing was relaxed, indicating he had nothing to hide, but Isha knew him enough to know that he was not relaxed at all. There was nothing at all in his bearing to indicate otherwise but Isha recognized a man preparing to strike. For once, the realization did not frighten her.

“What’s going on up there?” Isha whispered to Selina as the men talked. The weeks of travelling afforded ample opportunity for Selina and Isha to learn enough of each other’s language to communicate without Bruce’s help. “What does he say?”

“Something about catching someone;” Selina whispered back in heavily accented Hindi. “That can’t be good but it’s not our problem.”

Satisfied with whatever story Bruce concocted, the man beckoned Bruce to move the vehicle forward. All within the car were silent, the quiet only interrupted by Selina’s shocked intake of breath as they approached and could see the scene ahead.

In the middle of the road as a group of armed men screamed at them, a man and woman knelt on the jagged pavement. The man was bound and gagged, the woman tearfully trying to calm the situation. Her words were unclear but there was no doubt that she was begging for their lives. The armed men yelled and punched her husband who couldn’t cry out. With each punch to her husband, the woman cried out in pain on his behalf.

“See who’s behind us,” Bruce said quietly.

“Give me a minute and I’ll make sure you have no surprises.” Selina checked to see that Helena was still sleeping. Satisfied the toddler still slept, she opened her door to exit the car. Before slipping out into the night, she looked at Isha. “It’s alright. We’re going to be okay.”

Bruce nodded, his eyes not leaving the scene ahead. He, too, started to exit the vehicle but any plans or strategies the couple had silently communicated vanished when one of the men put a pistol against the crying woman’s head and fired. The woman crumpled to the road. A young girl
appeared, screaming as she ran to crouch next to her mother’s lifeless body.

Shocked, Isha looked to Bruce but he had disappeared, the driver’s side door left open. As the chaotic sounds of a fight broke out ahead, Isha leaned forward to close it. She put a shaky hand on Helena, willing the child to stay asleep, then rearranged Helena’s blanket, bunching the soft material around her little ears. When the sound of gunfire penetrated the vehicle, she placed her hands over the blanket hoping to muffle the sounds so the child wouldn’t awaken.

An explosion of gunfire rang out from behind. Isha covered Helena with her body, darting a quick glance up to see that it was Selina who fired a gun. The sounds from outside and the jolt of Isha’s body covering hers finally woke Helena. Isha comforted the scared toddler, who looked bewildered at being suddenly awake.

Another shot rang out, Isha risked a look to see what was happening. She saw Bruce towering over the man who pulled the trigger that killed the woman. The illumination from the headlights gave her a clear view of his angry face as he delivered blow after blow to the man. As she watched, Isha remembered her first impression of Bruce. After her husband’s death, their landlord quickly evicted her from the dingy hotel that had been her home for the past year. Not only did he thrust her out into an unfamiliar world but he kept the precious few items of value she owned. Including her clothes. When Bruce and Selina figured out what happened, Bruce disappeared, returning a few hours later with her clothes. A violent man, Isha had concluded as she noticed the fresh cuts on his knuckles. She watched him warily, waiting for the inevitable male temper to rear its head, waiting for him to angrily lash out at the woman or child. Despite Selina’s adamant assurances that Bruce would never lay a hand on her, Isha’s fear remained.

But, at that moment, seeing him, his hands bloodied, his face a cold mask of fury, she understood that he would never hurt her. This was no coward to prey upon the weak and helpless.

Selina rushed to the little girl who remained next to her mother’s body. Holding the crying child against her, she touched the stunned man’s shoulder, prodding him to get up. “We need to go!”

“We’re not leaving her!” Bruce yelled, as he dropped the last of the soldiers to the ground. The rest of the gang lay unconscious, their unmoving forms strewn about the road.

Leaving the man kneeling next to his wife, Selina carried the little girl to the Land Rover. Isha opened the door, her arms open to accept the child that she pulled onto her lap. Helena’s cries subsided as her eyes found the newest passenger.

Selina opened the rear door, rifling through their few possessions, throwing out unnecessary items until she made a space.

As the man watched, numb with shock, Selina helped Bruce wrap the dead woman in the large blanket they had picnicked on earlier that afternoon. Gently, Bruce placed her body in the back, arranging her to fit with as much respect as he could.

Selina led the man to sit in the passenger seat. Instead of getting in the car, Selina went to the big truck that was blocking the road and climbed in.

Selina moved the truck out of the way, making a path for Bruce to drive the Land Rover past the other vehicles. As Selina moved the truck back to where it was, Bruce went to disable the other vehicles. After they were satisfied that the road was sufficiently impassable, Selina returned to the car. A few moments later, Bruce returned, holding a doll Isha had seen laying in the road. He wiped off the flecks of blood from the face before handing it to Selina who was trying to calm Helena.
“Someone’s coming!” Isha exclaimed.

Bruce put the car in gear and tore off. The little girl continued to sob, Isha held her close rocking her. Selina dug through her leather satchel until she found a knife. She scooted to sit on the console in middle of the front seat. After cutting the rope around the man’s wrists she helped him remove the gag. As soon as she slid back to her spot next to Helena, the man reached behind to touch his daughter who still cried in Isha’s arms, murmuring something to her in their native tongue.

“If that’s their people, it won’t take them long to clear the road,” Selina said as she coaxed Helena to accept the last-resort pacifier.

Bruce nodded. His hands clenched the steering wheel, his whole bearing was different, tense and coiled. He glanced back, his eyes taking in the scene behind them before briefly resting on Helena.

“She’s fine,” Selina said softly, reaching up to touch his shoulder.

It was another ten minutes in the tense but not silent car before they saw the gleam of headlights in the distance behind them.

“They’re getting closer!” Selina cried, casting nervous looks behind her.

Still silent, Bruce nodded in acknowledgement. He accelerated, taking the dangerous curves faster than what was comfortable.

“Let’s hope they don’t have friends ahead of us, we’ll be cut off,” Selina said, looking at Helena who seemed to be on the verge of falling back asleep. “We need to get off this road.”

“There is a village east of here.” It was the man who spoke, his voice tired and sad, his English perfect. “You cannot get to it from this road. It is quite remote.”

“Are we going to have problems there?” Selina asked.

He shook his head. “It is safe. I have family there. That is where we were headed…”

He trailed off, staring out the window.

“Won’t they know that?” Selina asked with another quick glance behind them.

“I don’t know why they would,” he replied.

“Even if we get there, they’ll keep looking for us,” Selina said. “We’ll be putting your family in danger.”

“Not if they think they don’t need to look for us,” Bruce said, his eyes meeting Selina’s in the rear view mirror.

“How far a walk is this village?” Selina asked.

“A few hours.”

Bruce nodded.

“The sun’s almost up,” Selina said, picking up toys that Helena had tossed around the back seat. She stuffed them in the leather satchel at her feet. “We need to do this now.”
“There!” Bruce pointed up ahead. “This is as good a place as any.”

He pulled to the side of the road. In the first strains of the light of dawn, Isha could see that he parked next to a cliff. She looked back at Selina who nodded her head.

“There’s no other way,” she said as she unbuckled Helena, gently lifting the sleeping girl and holding her close. She took a moment to smooth the little girl’s hair, settling her head on Selina’s shoulder.

The man took his wife’s body from the back of the car, carrying her to the other side of the road to wait for the others. His daughter kept close, one hand clutched her doll, the other held one corner of the blanket wrapped around her mother.

There was no time to waste, Isha helped Bruce as they gathered only necessities. They could take only what they could carry.

Bruce got back in the car and drove back a few hundred feet. Selina nudged Isha to the safety of the wooded area next to the road as Bruce turned the car around. He accelerated, the car sped up quickly, heading for the cliff. Just as it appeared he was a lunatic about to drive over the edge, he slammed on the brakes. A loud screech tore through the early dawn as the vehicle abruptly stopped next to the cliff leaving a long trail of black skidmarks on the pavement.

Without turning the car off, Bruce climbed out, found a rock and placed it on the gas pedal. After cautioning everyone to stand back, he put the Land Rover in gear then jumped back as the vehicle went over the edge of the cliff. The sounds of the car crashing down the mountain echoed through the air.

Selina went to stand next to Bruce at the edge of the precipice to watch the descent. After the last of the crashes, they looked at each other, their expressions inscrutable to Isha but she knew they understood each other’s thoughts.

The rumble of a truck approaching prompted everyone to move to the safety of the forest. As the group started up the steep incline to go deeper into the woods, Bruce stopped.

“You go on,” Bruce said with a quick look at Selina. “I’ll catch up.”

Reluctantly, Selina turned away and followed the man who carried his wife into the forest. Isha waited for her at the top of incline.

“He’s going to make sure our ruse worked,” Selina explained, her face betraying her concern.

“I’m sure he’ll be fine,” Isha said, remembering him as he fought the group of men.

“It’s not that...No one will see him. It’s just...,” she nuzzled Helena’s head with her face. “That was upsetting. For all of us but different upsetting for him.”

Isha could see that there was more to it than that, but she said nothing. They moved slowly, the terrain was rough and overgrown. By the time Bruce reached him, everyone was exhausted. Since the ruse had worked and no one was looking for them, Bruce said it was safe to stop and rest. Everyone found a place to sit except Helena who ran around the clearing squealing with happiness at the freedom. The ground was uneven and rocky, and Helena was still unsteady on her feet so she fell a few times but jumped up without hardly a pause. When she started to run toward the grieving family, Bruce collected his daughter, taking her a respectful distance away.

Selina went to them, handing Helena a snack. While the girl ate, Selina regarded Bruce closely.
His hand absently rubbed Helena’s back as he watched the little girl and her father whose silent sobs contrasted with hers.

“I’m fine,” he said, his gaze not straying from the devastated father and daughter.

The snack eaten, Helena was eager to be on the move. She fidgeted, wiggling until her father put her down. She started to run away but Selina grabbed her hand, leading her to Isha.

Isha smiled at Helena, drawing her to her, distracting the toddler as her mother went back to Bruce. Selina touched his face as she talked to him. He drew her close, his head dipping to rest on her shoulder.

Isha looked away, embarrassed at spying a vulnerable moment for the man who had earlier seemed invulnerable. She entertained Helena with a song from her childhood. Helena responded with chattering that included both English and Hindi.

Selina returned, sitting next to Isha as Bruce went to the father and his daughter. Squatting down, he talked quietly with them, his attention mostly on the little girl who regarded him with dull, shocked eyes.

His name was Atash Bashir, his daughter Maliha, Bruce told Selina and Isha when he returned. The group soon continued on to the village, arriving just before nightfall. They remained in the very small village until after the funeral when a trusted cousin drove them across the border using roads that were not on any map.

They continued travelling until they reached a town with a satellite phone.

“Where will they go?” Isha asked Selina several days later as they watched the plane land on the dirt road that doubled as a landing strip.

“Gotham,” Selina replied, with a hint of wistfulness. “Bruce knows someone who will help them get established.”

“That’s your home?”

“It was.”

Isha had often wondered about the people who had found her and then took on the mission of returning her home. Money seemed no object, the man hadn’t batted an eye at the destruction of an expensive vehicle. And then there was this plane, flown to a very remote region for the sole purpose of taking Bashir and his daughter to safety.

“It’s alright to leave me here,” Isha said to Bruce, as they watched Helena wave enthusiastically to Maliha. “It’s too dangerous. Take your family and go home.”

“We said we’d take you to your daughter and we will,” Bruce replied.

Her daughter. That had been the purpose of this trip but since Isha had little experience with having wishes and wants fulfilled she never considered that it would actually happen. She met his steady gaze, the first time she made eye contact with him, and realized what safe felt like.
Shades of Selina

Gotham - Present Day

John Blake never failed to feel a little intimidated by the elegant opulence of Bruce Wayne’s hotel. When the mood struck, he would swing by and wait for the elusive billionaire to make an appearance. The hotel lounge, John soon discovered, was a terrible place for waiting. The drinks were grossly overpriced and the women coy teases who seemed to sense how broke he was. The one time Bruce did show, John suspected that the man had grown wise to his lurking and decided to take mercy on him.

Even though he had never been up to the penthouse, John knew exactly how to get to it. He passed the lounge, the exclusive restaurant that was impossible to get into, then through a maze of corridors. When he reached the private elevator, he found a large man in a blue blazer standing impassively in front of the doors.

As he observed John’s approach, the man spoke to a seemingly invisible person. When John reached the guard, he noticed the comm unit at the man’s ear. He looked up to see a camera trained on him.

“He’s expecting me,” John said. That wasn’t entirely true but he figured he earned the right for a drop by.

“May I see your ID, sir?”

Blake handed him his driver’s license. After scanning it to confirm its authenticity, the man’s shrewd gaze assessed John. His head tilted a bit, indicating someone was speaking to him through the earpiece.

With a nod, he handed the license back to him.

“You may go up,” he said, stepping aside so John could enter the elevator.

On the ride up to the penthouse, John considered the flimsiness of his excuse to pop in unannounced. The list of addresses he and Gordon had found at Oliver’s hadn’t panned out but it was enough of a reason to drop in. He watched the floor indicators as he ascended, pondering the whys Selina Kyle was worth all this trouble. Unable to shake his prejudice, John couldn’t help but wonder why Batman, of all people, was shacking up with a criminal.

The elevator doors opened to reveal Alfred waiting for him.

“How do you like the dog?” Blake asked, by way of greeting. He would have loved to have seen the old butler’s face when Bruce arrived with the dog.

“Mr. Tibbles is a welcome addition to the household,” Alfred replied, not as irked as John thought he would be. In the last few years, they’d spent a fair amount of time together and one thing John knew about Wayne’s faithful butler, the man liked an orderly house.

“Yeah, right.”

Alfred smiled, then gestured for John to follow him. “Master Wayne has visitors. You may wait with me in the kitchen.”
As expected, the penthouse was stunning. Ultra modern furnishings spread out over the massive space gave the living areas an elegant yet, John decided, cold look. The kitchen, however, was different. Cozy. The room, replete with the latest in kitchen gadgetry, had a more lived in look than the other living areas.

In the middle of the large marble countertop island, were three large pizza boxes.

“Wow, you guys really are the gourmet types aren’t you?” He helped himself to a slice, surprised to see they’d ordered in from Venezia’s. Sure they had the best pizza in town but he didn’t think billionaires knew that. “So...any change with Ms. Kyle?”

“I’m afraid not,” Alfred replied.

“You know I arrested her once,” John said conversationally as he took another big bite.

Alfred paused in his task of straightening the barstools that flanked the island. “Did you now?”

“Yeah, she had quite a record, too.”

Alfred gave him a look. “That was in the past.”

“Is it?” John leaned against the counter. “Sometimes things from the past have a hold on you and you can’t break free.”

“No one here will dispute that.”

John hesitated. Their friendship had grown over the last few years but John didn’t think that included Alfred confiding his thoughts concerning Selina Kyle.

“Look,” John began. He’d never been very good at keeping quiet. “I don’t want to speak out of turn but maybe he’s not thinking straight about all this. I mean, we know who he is…was…but I’m just saying he wouldn’t be the first guy to think with the wrong head.”

“None of that, Mr. Blake,” Alfred gave him a stern look, slamming the door shut on that topic.

Bruce came in, followed by a Middle Eastern man, a young girl, and Mr. Tibbles. By the quick look Bruce shot his way, John thought he might have overheard him.

After Bruce made the introductions, Alfred and Mr. Bashir chatted amongst themselves as Bruce talked to the little girl, Maliha. Bruce listened attentively as Maliha excitedly described the science project she was working on. He asked questions, not patronizing or absent-minded queries, as though he was genuinely interested in the kid’s elementary school project.

As they talked, another child dashed in and grabbed his leg, hiding her face from John. Without pausing in his conversation, Bruce lifted her. She wrapped her arms tightly around him, burying her face against his neck.

Shocked, John looked at Alfred who nodded.

Without a glance at John, Bruce kept chatting until Mr. Bashir said it was time to go. As he left to walk them to the door, the little girl mustered enough courage to look at him briefly from the safety of her father’s embrace. John saw that it was the girl from the photo they found at Oliver’s house.

“They have a secret kid?” He asked Alfred when they were alone.

“Miss Helena’s not a secret,” Alfred replied as he gathered the dishes that were littered across the
Mr. Tibbles bounded back in the kitchen followed by Bruce and Helena who, when she saw that John was still there, lifted her arms for her father to pick her up again.

“This is Helena,” Bruce said, as Helena went back to hiding her face against his neck. “Helena, can you say hello to Mr. Blake?”

At the shake of her head, Bruce said, “Give her a minute.”

John nodded, still trying to process the fact that Bruce had a daughter. With Selina Kyle.

“I stopped by to bring you this list Commissioner Gordon and I found in...Oliver’s trash,” John said as he handed him the crumpled up paper.

“This isn’t her handwriting,” Bruce replied, moving strands of Helena’s dark hair away from his face.

“I don’t think it’s...uh...the other guy’s either.” John stammered, following Bruce’s lead on not using names in front of the little girl. “I checked them out. There was nothing there. Just a bunch of abandoned, junked out places in bad parts of town.”

“Any connections between the properties?” Bruce asked.

“Not that I could see,” John replied, smiling at the girl who seemed to be losing her shyness. Instead of hiding her face, she peered at him through her fingers. He wondered who put her hair in the cute pigtails: Bruce or Alfred? “I checked ownership and they look to be owned by different entities. Don’t worry, you don’t own any of them.”

“I would like to see the list of owners,” Alfred said, looking over the paper. “Sometimes it’s not obvious what entities are Wayne entities.”

“And you want to check them again?” Bruce asked. Sensing that his daughter was more comfortable with the stranger in their home, he put her down.

“Sometimes things happen after the sun goes down,” John said. “These are all pretty isolated. If anyone was up to no good, these would be ideal locations.”

“That’s Mr. Tibbles,” Helena said. “My mommy sent him to me.”

“Yeah?” John said, squatting down to pet him.

She mimicked John, squatting beside the dog. “He pooped on the carpet.”

“Dogs’ll do that sometimes.”

She laughed. “It was funny.”

“Yes, it was very funny,” Alfred said, with a fond smile to Helena.

”Do you know my mommy?”

“I do,” John replied, feeling a flash of guilt about the thoughts he had been entertaining about this sweet girl’s mother.

Bruce’s phone rang. Soon after answering, his expression changed and he left the room. Alfred
and John exchanged a look.

“Miss Helena,” Alfred said. “How about we gather Mr. David and take the dog out so we can avoid any further funny business in the house.”

“Mr. David?” John asked.

“Our new...chauffeur,” Alfred said with a long look before going to help Helena get her coat.

“Everything ok?” John asked Bruce when he returned.

“I think so. That was the security detail at the hospital. Looks like Selina’s friend decided not to call me but showed up at the hospital. She was angry at not being able to see her and made quite a scene.”

“Think she knows anything?” John asked as Bruce prepared to leave.

“Let’s hope so.”

Alfred and Helena returned with Mr. Tibbles leashed and eager to leave.

“David’s coming with us,” Alfred said at Bruce’s concerned look. “As well as whoever else is keeping watch.”

“You’re not coming?” Helena asked her father, her eyes suddenly watery.

“I’ll be back before bedtime,” Bruce said. “Promise.”

Her lip jutted out and she looked suspiciously at John as if to blame him for this turn of events. John waited for one of those tantrums he’d heard kids made but Mr. Tibbles pulled at his leash making her follow. Alfred walked with them, whispering something about ice cream to her, causing her to smile.

“Selina’s not going to be happy with what we’ve been feeding her,” Bruce said.

“Yeah, moms always have to be the ones to keep us on the straight and narrow,” John said.

They were both quiet for moment.

“I’ll come with you,” John said, not caring if he was being a nuisance.

Down in the garage, Bruce bypassed the expensive choices of cars and settled on an older model Camaro.

“Whoa...this is nice,” John commented as Bruce revved the engine. “Not your usual style.”

“It’s Selina’s.”

“It’s not stolen, is it?” The comment was meant as a joke but as soon as the words escaped his lips, John realized it didn’t sound funny.

“Get out!” Bruce glared at him.

“I’m sorry,” John said. “I didn’t mean anything.”

Bruce continued to glare, waiting for him to get out.
“I’m still getting used to the idea you have a kid. I have to revise my entire opinion of her. Not just your girlfriend but somebody’s mother. I get it.”

Bruce stared at him a moment longer, a warning clear in his hard gaze.

“The last I saw of you before you disappeared,” John explained. “I dropped you off at her place. Then, when I arrested her, it seemed like she had a pretty good idea what happened to you. So what else was I supposed to think?”

“That was a long time ago.” Bruce put the car in reverse and backed out of the parking spot.

John noticed he didn’t deny or defend her innocence.

“So...Oliver Preston,” John said, not caring if his attempt to change the subject was obvious. “You think he’s a brother or something?”

“I’ll go with ‘something’,” Bruce said. “Selina doesn’t have any siblings.”

That ‘something’ didn’t seem to ignite any jealousy in Bruce. Not like earlier that afternoon when they visited Oliver’s apartment. Something changed within the man from a few hours before.

As they drove to the hospital, they discussed the case.

“I really thought it had something to do with drugs,” John said. “But then you found that picture of the woman.”

“If we can find her, I think we’ll find out who’s behind this,” Bruce said. “I can’t sit still and wait for Selina to wake up and explain this...situation. I’m concerned that someone will try to use Helena as leverage against her.”

“That won’t happen,” John said, fully understanding what was at stake. “Has the security detail reported anyone suspicious at the hospital?”

“No. It’s been quiet since that woman made a move against Selina last night. Or, rather,” he said, with a quick glance at his watch. “This morning.”

He smiled. “It’s been a long day.”

“I guess with a kid, all nighters are a thing of the past.”

“Not since she was a baby.”

It was early evening, and the hospital was quiet but when Bruce and John reached Selina’s room, they found more people than usual. The Indian woman sat at her usual spot near Selina but on the chair on the other side sat another woman. She was African American, fortyish, dressed in a nurse’s uniform. She smoothed back Selina’s hair, talking to her friend. At the foot of the bed, a Caucasian man leaned against the wall, looking concerned.

When Bruce walked in, the woman looked up.

“DeeDee?” He asked.

She nodded, then rose to shake his hand.

“Is she going to be okay?” She asked, looking down at Selina. “Isha said she’s been sleeping for days. Why isn’t she waking up?”
“The doctors say she’ll be fine and she’ll wake up when she’s ready.”

“She looks awful! Who did this?”

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out. I hoped you might know something.”

DeeDee shook her head. “Lately, she seemed kinda off so I knew something was going on. At first, I thought it was something between the two of you but she would’ve told me if it was that. Finally, I got sick of her shit and asked. We sorta got into a fight about it.”

“Don’t feel bad,” Bruce said, with a companionable smile. “You’re not the only one.”

She smiled back, and they shared a moment until DeeDee’s temper rose.

“She looks awful! Who did this?” DeeDee exclaimed, suddenly angry. “So mysterious, thinking she can do what the hell she pleases. Thinking she can keep her life in pieces without them touching. Sometimes she’s so fucking stupid!”

She went to Selina, touched her hand encased in a cast. Her anger spent, tears sprang to her eyes. “Is she really gonna be ok?”

The other man went to her, putting his arm around her.

“This is my husband, Kevin.” She waited for the men to shake hands. “Has Helena seen her?”

“No,” Bruce said.

“That’s good. Selina’d hate for her baby to see her like this.”

“You have any idea who we could talk to who might know what she was doing?” John asked.

DeeDee looked at him with surprise, she hadn’t noticed him skulking by the door.

“This is John Blake,” Bruce said. “A friend helping me.”

“I take it the police aren’t involved?”

“They’re involved but…we’re looking into things ourselves.”

DeeDee nodded.

“What about that guy?” Kevin asked his wife. “You know her friend that she went to Vegas with that time?”

“Bobby?” DeeDee considered the name. “Yeah. He’s a good friend of hers. He might know something.”

“Do you have a last name?” John asked. “An address?”

“Sorry,” she said. “I haven’t seen him since before Selina left. But I think Selina said he was still working over at that bar on Charles Street. What’s it called, Kev?”

“Babe, I wouldn’t know that.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’m not saying you go there I’m just trying to think of the name.”

“You don’t have to jump all over me! I don’t know! Only met the guy a few times and that was
years ago.”

“I’ll find out then text you the name,” she said. “You could try Ollie. He might know something.”

“Oliver Preston?” Bruce asked.

“You know Ollie?” DeeDee sounded surprised.

“I haven’t met him but—”

“Is he involved in this?” She asked disgustedly, then continued without waiting for an answer. “I should’ve known this mess would involve him. He’s a disaster. Damn him, what did he get her into? Selina doesn’t think straight when it comes to him. Good luck finding him, though. He’s probably high in a hole somewhere.”

“He’s in the morgue,” John said.

“What?” DeeDee went still.

“He was killed,” Bruce said, more gently than John. “They were together. Selina got away. He didn’t.”

“Ollie’s dead?” Her stunned eyes travelled from Bruce to her husband.

“Oh, shit,” Kevin said, shaking his head.

“What happened?” DeeDee asked.

Bruce explained, his eyes on Selina’s still form.

“This is bad,” DeeDee said, sitting back down.

“Don’t call him, Dee,” Kevin said. “Not ‘til Selina’s wakes up. He’s going to freak.”

“Who?” Bruce asked.

“Trouble we don’t need now,” Kevin replied, looking at his wife who stared defiantly back at him, her hand holding her phone. “A friend of theirs who won’t shed any light on what happened but will make things more complicated.”

Bruce checked his phone, looking over a text he just received.

“I have to go. It’s Helena’s bedtime and I promised her I’d be there,” he said.

“How’s she doing without her mama?” DeeDee asked.

“She’s confused.”

She nodded. “Go to your girl. I’d like to stay here with See.”

“Of course,” Bruce said.

“Babe, I’m going, too,” Kevin said. “My mother’s probably exhausted from the kids.”

As they started to leave, Bruce showed DeeDee the picture of the mysterious woman. She looked closely but said she had never seen the woman before.
DeeDee kissed her husband good bye then went back to Selina’s side. Instead of sitting in the chair, she lay on her side, next to Selina, putting her arm around her. “So I’m here now and you need to wake up, ok?”

Kevin left with Bruce and John. They said nothing until they were alone in the elevator.

“Who was she talking about?” Bruce asked.

“Her brother, Daryl. Or, half-brother,” Kevin said. “Different fathers.”

“And this guy might be trouble?” John asked.

“Just to whoever did this.” Kevin’s tone was grim with a touch of worry.

“What does that mean?”

Kevin waited until they vacated the elevator, walking into the garage away from anyone who might walk by.

“He’s...uh...not exactly the law abiding type.”

“Oh, what a shock,” John said, earning him a quick glare from Bruce.

“He’s like a gangster but without a gang,” Kevin said. “Likes to take matters in his own hands. He and Selina are similar that way. They do things on their own. Not rely on anybody.”

“How much do you know about Selina’s prior...business?” Bruce asked.

“Not much, man, honest. Selina’s business was hers. Dee didn’t want to know what she was up to and Selina didn’t want what she was up to touching Dee. You know?”

“How does she know Selina?” Bruce asked.

“Through Daryl. Daryl and Selina grew up together. In the Narrows. I’m sure a guy like you has no idea but it was a pretty miserable place.”

“I heard,” Bruce said. “So they’re close?”

“Close as in calling and chatting and going out to dinner? No,” Kevin replied. “Selina and Dee are close. What Selina, Ollie and Daryl have is different. Daryl might be DeeDee’s blood brother, but he’s Ollie and Selina’s street brother. They got a thing, a bond. Let’s put it this way, if he called Selina and asked her to go kill somebody. She’d do it. That tight.”

“That’s pretty tight,” Bruce said.

“I guess that’s what you get when you grow up in a ghetto with shitty parents. Though, I gotta say, from what I heard, Daryl and Dee’s mom wasn’t too bad. For an addict and a prostitute, that is. Dee didn’t really know her. Her dad, when he figured out what was happening with his ex, swooped in and took her.”

“That’s pretty rough,” John said, “Getting taken from your mother.”

“Best thing to happen to her. Her dad is a good guy, tried to help Angela, and when she was murdered, he wanted Daryl to come live with him but Daryl refused. I don’t think he wanted to leave Selina and Ollie. He’s very protective of them. Oh, man, he’s not going to take this news well.”
He checked his watch. “I’ve got to go. My mother’s watching the kids and I told her I’d be there before eight.”

As he walked away, he stopped, and turned around. “Hey, if you catch this guy, what are you gonna do?”

“Turn him over to the police,” Bruce replied.

Kevin lingered, thinking. “I know Dee. She’s pissed and worried. She’s gonna call Daryl.”

“So what if she does?” John asked.

“Better hope you find whoever this is before Daryl. There won’t be anything left of him to turn over to the cops.”

Northern India – One Year Ago

After weeks on the road, at the mercy of every form of public transport in Northern India, it was with great relief for Bruce and Selina to find themselves in a city big enough to warrant an almost four-star hotel. The first night of which, Selina spent a good half hour in the shower enjoying the hot water, before collapsing next to Bruce and Helena in the wide, comfortable bed. Isha slept in the room next to theirs, her eyes big as she took in the room that may have seemed modest to Bruce but, to her, it was the grandest room she’d ever seen.

The next morning, the search for Isha’s daughter began. The last Isha heard, Shanti’s husband worked in a factory and that was all she knew. It was easy for Bruce to locate which one as there was only one factory in town. After breakfast, Bruce left to make inquiries leaving Selina, Isha, and Helena free to explore the small city.

The women eventually found a crowded market that was loud and colorful. Selina inhaled the exotic scents very much liking the hustle and bustle of the Indian city. Wearing khakis and a loose white blouse, Selina felt very much the exotic traveler. Except, instead of a camera around her neck, she toted a two-year old on her hip.

Helena kicked wildly, wanting to be let down. With visions of losing her child in the crowd, Selina tightened her hold on her daughter, refusing to allow the kid the slightest inkling of freedom. Ignoring the kicking, Selina lingered in front of a basket vendor as she waited for Isha to catch up to them. She distracted Helena by pointing out the blue toy elephant that was crudely fashioned but Selina knew that in a matter of minutes, she was going to overpay for it. One look at the sad eyed man listlessly overseeing his modest crafts and she was a goner.

“More?” Isha asked when she saw Selina’s purchase.

Selina shrugged, grinning at Isha’s concerned look that Selina was being taken in by unscrupulous vendors. Selina Kyle a sucker? Hardly.

“They will take advantage of you,” Isha insisted. Now that she was in her home country, she felt comfortable in displaying her protectiveness of Bruce, Selina, and Helena. Her burgeoning
confidence pleased Selina.

“Don’t worry about it,” Selina said, switching Helena to her other hip.

“Look!” Isha pointed to a selection of colorful saris. “This would be beautiful on you.” She held up the dark purple silk against Selina, admiring how the color complimented her skin. “I will teach you how to wear this.”

After purchasing saris with matching choli and skirt for both of them, Selina and Isha continued through the market, making their way slowly through the crowd before emerging onto a street lined with restaurants.

As soon as they sat down in a small cafe off the main road, Bruce called.

“Any luck?” Selina asked, leaning her head back so Helena couldn’t take the phone.

“Shanti’s husband no longer works here but Mr. Mittal, the owner, is making inquiries.”

Selina relayed the message to Isha who didn’t seem surprised at the news.

“How do you feel about dinner?” Bruce asked.

“I love dinner,” Selina replied.

“I mean we’ve been invited to a dinner.”

That got Selina’s attention. Bruce wasn’t known for making friends so quickly. Selina handed Helena to Isha then walked a few feet away to a quiet alcove. “Really?”

“The factory owner, Mr. Mittal, invited you and me. Since he’s looking into Shanti’s whereabouts, I feel it would be rude to refuse...”

They were quiet for a moment.

“She loves Isha,” Selina said. “I doubt she’ll even miss us.” But it wasn’t the possibility of Helena not missing them that gave them pause.

“I have to say that an evening with other adults is appealing. It’ll be good for us.” Selina leaned against the wall, waiting for Bruce’s internal debate to sway to her side. She, too, was apprehensive about leaving Helena for the first time but she thought a night out would be good for them. For him. Since their midnight encounter last month, Bruce had been subdued, working through the bad memories that experience had dredged. “Besides I have a lovely new Indian outfit to wear.”

Selina knew it wasn’t the idea of her new outfit that changed his mind but she was glad he let go of his anxiety.

When Bruce returned to the hotel a few hours later, he brought Isha a new cellphone. He showed her the only functions that he felt was necessary: how to call Selina or him and how to answer when they called. For her part, Helena seemed unconcerned that her parents were leaving as she explored their newest temporary home.

Selina took the phone from Bruce and gave it back to Isha. “Thank you for watching her, Isha. Just call if anything comes up.” She sounded more relaxed than she felt but she really did want to go and Isha looked very pleased at Bruce and Selina entrusting their precious daughter to her care.
Kissing Helena on the head, Selina held her close and it was Bruce who handed her to Isha.

“You’ve got us at the best hotel in town, Bruce. We’ll only be away from her for a few hours,” Selina said as they walked through the lobby. Her words were as much for his benefit as her own. “It’ll be fine.”

“You’re too trusting,” he said, opening the door for her.

“I’m too trusting?” Selina paused to give him a long look. “Excuse me, did you really just say that?”

“I did,” he replied, grinning at her before paying the valet to hail a taxi.

Once they were settled in the back seat, the cab driver sped away, rapidly weaving in and out of traffic that could only be described as chaotic. Selina settled against Bruce, looking out the window. It was a little odd being alone with him. They’d been three for so long.

His arm went around her before dropping a kiss on her head. “I like this,” he said, fingering the soft silk of her sari.

“You’ll have fun later figuring out how to unwrap me.” She turned to receive his kiss but the taxi driver swerved the small car, jolting her away from him. “If we live through this cab ride.”

They did, indeed, live through the cab ride. Selina felt a moments irritation at Bruce’s seeming calmness throughout the ride that had her gripping the door handle tightly.

But the haveli was breathtaking and Selina’s irritation was immediately forgotten as they approached the old but beautifully preserved palace. They were greeted by Raj and Gunjan Mittal. The couple, in their late thirties, were pleased at their foreign guests interest in their house. As their hosts took them on a tour of their home, it became clear that this was a family heavy on history but light on money. Selina knew all about that and, for a thief such as her, it was important to maintain standards. She had quickly learned to rule out the impoverished people that still clung to society, spending what little remained of their trusts to keep up appearances. These people, however, seemed to have no interest in appearances. Their home was huge, a palace for certain, but most of it was closed off and the living areas the family occupied were comfortable and modest.

The Mittals were the most prominent family in the city and had once been princes of the province but that was so long ago that no one cared. The only ones who did remember were the Mittals themselves who didn’t regard the fact as something that elevated them but instilled a responsibility over the city.

Though Raj wasn’t aware of his connection with Bruce in that regard, Selina certainly was and shared a smile with Bruce. Maybe because he found a kindred spirit but Bruce took to Raj and Selina found she liked the couple more because of it. By the time dessert arrived, the conversation had turned to business matters that Selina had little interest in paying attention to.

“Do you have children?” Gunjan asked Selina, also seeming to tire of the conversation topic.

“Yes. A daughter. She’s two.”

“Ah...the age where they begin to feel most independent,” Gunjan smiled the knowing smile of a mother well acquainted with children. “Does she miss her home?”

Selina ignored the pang at the thought of Helena not knowing a home, not having a room of her
own with too many stuffed animals or whatever belongings two-year-olds had. Were they being selfish dragging a two-year old from country to country just because they couldn’t figure out where they wanted to be? Or, who they wanted be? Selina couldn’t help but wonder when she and Bruce would settle somewhere. Gotham? Was he ready to go back?

“Do you miss being home?” Selina asked Bruce on the way back to their hotel.

He hesitated, looking at her carefully. “No. Do you?”

“Of course not,” she said, thinking that it wasn’t really a lie if she wanted it to be true.

Eager to check on their daughter, they quickly made their way through the lobby, grinning at each other over their parental anxiety. Selina knocked softly on Isha’s door. Within seconds, the woman answered, opening the door wide enough so they could see Helena but not so wide as to let in the harsh light in the hallway, giving them assurance that their child was sleeping soundly. With a quick look at Selina, she suggested that Helena stay the rest of the night with her.

“How about that?” Selina said, leading Bruce to their room next door. “You can be as loud as you want to.”

“Convenient, huh?” Bruce responded. He closed their door and went to work at divesting Selina of her sari.

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Gotham - Present Day

Laying next to his daughter on her bed, Bruce read to Helena. As he read, he received a text from DeeDee. Without missing a word, he surreptitiously glanced at the screen.

The Sly Dog on Charles Street. He’ll be there tonight.

He forwarded the message to John who was downstairs with Alfred eating the last of the pizza.

Though anxious to get going, he continued to read to Helena. When she begged for another book, he quelled his irritation which wasn’t difficult when she looked up at him with adoring eyes. Halfway through the next book, she fell asleep but Bruce continued to read just in case. She didn’t wake up when he rose from the bed, turned off the light, and quietly closed the door.

“Ready?” Bruce asked John, as he slid on his black leather jacket.

“Why don’t you let Mr. Blake handle this one?” Alfred looked to be in his fretting mode.

“Why would I do that?”

“Because The Sly Dog is a gay club,” Alfred replied. “While we have no judgment on that matter, one picture of you there and you can kiss your hard earned privacy goodbye!”

“You’re the one that didn’t want me wearing a mask.”

“The tabloids are finally losing interest in you because you’ve been boring,” John said, holding up
an Ipad which displayed the club’s website, featuring photos of the club’s recent Mardi Gras celebration. “Bruce Wayne at a gay club is the opposite of boring. At least let me go in, figure out where he is and get him to come out to talk.”

“Fine. Though I’m not sure you’re dressed right,” Bruce teased, enjoying John’s brief bout of discomfiture. Alfred did, too, by his quick smile.

The Sly Dog was located downtown in a district filled with bars and clubs. It was a popular area with both college students and young professionals. After giving John a couple hundred in persuading cash, Bruce dropped John off at the front of the brightly lit club, then drove to a side street behind the bar to wait. The next ten minutes of waiting were spent cursing the paparazzi. Bruce chafed at being on the sidelines and was on the verge of going in, privacy be damned, when he received a text from John telling him to meet him at the back door on the east side.

John was waiting for him at the door. “I paid a guy a hundred bucks to let me back here. I think he thinks I’m a client or something.”

The outer door closed, shutting out the sounds of the street. As they walked further inside, they heard a group of men talking and laughing. Following the sounds, they walked down a hall. Others bustled about paying them no attention. John asked about Bobby and was pointed in the direction of a door at the end of the hall. The door was open, revealing a group of men getting dressed. The men, wearing bright, garish clothes, and sporting elaborate wigs, laughed and joked amongst themselves as they applied layer after layer of makeup preparing for a show.

“I’m looking for Bobby,” John said to the man closest to the door.

Without seeming to look up, the man bellowed in a deeper voice than expected: “Bobby! There’s a cutie here for you!”

A man, with an impossibly high blonde wig, approached.

“Well, well, well,” he drawled, smoothing his hands over his skin-tight black satin dress. “I may waive my usual sandwich fee for the two of you. Who can I thank for referring you to me?”

“Selina Kyle,” John said.

“She did?” He looked confused.

“So you know her then?”

The man’s flirty demeanor instantly chilled.

“Sabrina?” He asked, looking mystified. “I don’t know any Sabrina. Anyone here know a Sabrina?”

A chorus of no’s answered him but the rest of the men regarded them with suspicion.

“Sorry. Can’t help you,” he said, maintaining a false friendly tone as he gestured toward the door. “The girls and I have a show to put on so it’s time you leave. Thanks for stopping by.”

“We need to talk to you,” John said.

Bobby stood straighter. He was wearing platform high-heels and he positively towered over Blake.

“We may be a gaggle of queens but we can throw you both out of here painfully,” he said, his
threat credible. Under the glitter and glamour, this was a muscular guy. “Don’t be fooled by the makeup and heels.”

“Yeah,” Bruce said, stepping forward. “I learned that awhile ago.”

Whatever retort Bobby had, faded as he stared at Bruce. He had that look Bruce had seen many times: he was trying to place him. After a few moments, his face changed into shocked amusement.

“You and Selina?” He asked.

Bruce nodded.

“Oh, Jesus! Selina’s baby daddy is Bruce fucking Wayne!” He laughed again as he clapped his hands. “That girl! She just said he’s ‘employed’! Which for Selina is saying something!”

He laughed again until he suddenly became serious. “Why are you here?”

“Selina’s been injured,” Bruce explained.

“What? Is she alright? Where is she?”

“She’s going to be alright,” Bruce replied, relieved that this man seemed to be a friend. Hopefully one with helpful information. “She’s at Gotham General.”

“She’s in the hospital?” Bobby asked, looking dumb with shock. “What’s going on?”

“Is there somewhere we can talk?” Bruce stepped back, wanting to get away from the many eyes that were on them.

“What about Ollie?”

“Is there somewhere we can talk?” Bruce repeated.

Bobby just stood still. “You’re scaring me. Is Ollie ok?”

“No,” Bruce said, softly.

“What does that mean?”

“I’m sorry,” Bruce said, shaking his head. “He’s dead.”

As he stared at Bruce, everything about Bobby’s bearing changed. His face slackened, his shoulders slumped. He looked like he’d just been punched in the gut.

Dragging the blonde wig off his head, he stared at Bruce, stunned.

“Come on,” he muttered, leading them out of the dressing room. They followed him down the hall and upstairs to his apartment.

“Gimme a minute,” he mumbled before disappearing into his bedroom and closing the door.

“I don’t think we’re going to get anything out of this guy,” John said, as he walked around the apartment. “Too respectable. Like DeeDee.”

Bruce sat on the plush, white couch. The room was decorated in various shades of white with large windows that faced south. The room was warm and inviting, giving the owner the vibe of
being a positive guy. Since the room was attached to the club, Bruce surmised that Bobby was the owner of The Sly Dog. Selina wouldn’t do anything to endanger his legitimateness.

“Maybe he’ll know the woman in the picture,” Bruce said, scrolling through the photos on his phone to have the picture ready. “Then we’ll leave him alone. He seems pretty upset.”

John handed him a framed photo. It was of Selina and Bobby sitting at a table littered with beer bottles. They smiled happily, if a little drunkenly. Dressed fashionably in a low cut black dress, Selina looked very much like the woman he had first met five years ago. Bruce studied the picture, noting the glimmer of lights of a casino behind them indicating they were in Las Vegas.

So this was him, Bruce thought. Selina had told him about Vegas. Telling him about of her friend and how they lived there for a year. Each plying their different trades, he trying out show business and Selina, honing her grifting and thieving skills.

Some of the pieces were fitting together.

The bedroom door opened. Bobby emerged then sat down on the other couch opposite Bruce. Dressed in a plain white t-shirt and jeans, with his face wiped clean of makeup, Bobby looked very different.

Bobby wiped his eyes. “I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m so shocked. By him being dead, I mean. Guy like him.. it’s actually a miracle he lived as long as he did.” He looked at Bruce. “He didn’t OD though, did he?”

“No. He was murdered.”

Bobby stared at him. “And Selina?”

“They were together when he was killed.”

Upset, Bobby looked away. “Who would kill him? The only person he ever hurt in his life was himself.”

“That’s what we’re trying to find out,” John said.

“Do you have any idea what they were up to?” Bruce asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Did anything seem...different about them?”

“Well, Ollie was in a funk but that wasn’t unusual. And Selina was her same secretive self so, nothing seemed different.”

Bruce showed him the photo of the woman. “Do you know her?”

After peeling off his false eyelashes, Bobby studied the photo carefully, taking Bruce’s question seriously. “No, I’m sorry, I’ve never seen her before.”

“Did Oliver have a girlfriend?” John asked, sitting next to Bruce.

“No...Ollie wasn’t into that.”

“Women?”
“Women...men...he just had no interest.”

“We think they were searching for the woman in the photo,” John said.

“Why?”

John shrugged. “All we know is that someone killed your friend, put Selina in the hospital, then tried to kill her there.”

“I know Selina hates cops but aren’t they involved?”

“They are,” Bruce said. “It’s just…”

“It’s best if the cops don’t find out too much about Selina,” Bobby said, finishing Bruce’s sentence.

“You’ve known Selina a long time?”

“Since we were teenagers. It was Ollie and me who were friends and I knew her through him. Back then...things were pretty messed up. I was strung out on H but I kicked the habit. I’ve been clean for nine years and you can’t be with people who are using. So Selina and I became close, bonding over trying to keep Ollie from killing himself.”

“Did she ever talk to you about her...work?” Bruce asked.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “Never. I knew what she did but she liked to operate solo. Not answer to anyone. She certainly doesn’t like people asking questions about her.”

“When’s the last time you talked to Oliver?” John asked.

“About a month ago? It’s not unusual, though, he’d get clean and come around and then he’d disappear and you knew he was using again. So, not hearing from his was not unusual. But I thought maybe this time he’d stick it.”

“Why now?” Bruce asked.

Bobby’s expression turned grim. “Selina wouldn’t let him see her...your kid ‘til he was clean.” He shook his head sadly. “God, that’s gonna eat at her. You said Selina’s still unconscious?”

Bruce nodded.

“I guess that’s a good thing,” Bobby said. “She’s going to be mess over this.”

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Northern India – One Year Ago

Bruce met Raj at his factory in the center of the city. The factory was the backbone of the city, providing work for thousands. As Raj led Bruce toward his office, the man apologized, again, for not yet finding the whereabouts of Isha’s daughter and husband. What he didn’t say but Bruce surmised was that Isha’s daughter’s husband changed jobs quite a bit, taking his family from city to city in search of better work. Finding her might be more difficult than he hoped.
“We make something that no one will need in five years,” Raj confided once they reached the privacy of his office. “My father anticipated such a problem. So, instead of training as a businessman, I trained as an engineer, hoping to keep our factory viable.”

Suddenly embarrassed, Raj busied himself with pouring tea then handed Bruce a cup. Although Raj was as friendly as the night before, Bruce could tell something was distracting him - and it wasn’t his failure in locating the family.

Raj sat down and sighed heavily. Maybe because Bruce was there at a weak moment or maybe Raj sensed a kindred protector, Raj shared the problem.

“You are looking at a ruined man,” he said, his voice tired. “The last few years, I’ve sunk everything into a project. A project that will allow my factory to continue for many years.” As Raj explained the mechanism that would keep his factory in business for a long while, his excitement grew until some thought caused a shadow to cross his features.

“But…” Bruce asked, thinking of a way Wayne Enterprises could invest and help this man out. “You need an investor?”

Raj shook his head sadly. “I don’t need money, I’ve already spent enough money as it is. You see, my wife and I came up with an idea. A good idea, if I say so myself. We’ve spent everything we had, borrowed far beyond our means to develop a project that will save this city. We had it! Everything worked and I had an investor lined up who would help make the necessary modifications to our equipment. But now…” He looked away, upset. “Everything is gone. The specs, the backups, even my notebook which detailed every step in my research process. I could reconstruct the work with that but the thief was very thorough and left me nothing.”

“Do the police have any leads?”

“I haven’t yet gone to the police. I believe the thief to be my business manager, Daman Batra, who has mysteriously disappeared.”

Bruce calmly sipped his tea. He could already see what Raj, in his good heartedness, failed to see: he had been set up. Bruce had little doubt that the business manager, Daman, was a fairly new employee. Probably planted by the nameless benefactor who, Bruce suspected, wanted a cutting-edge invention without having to pay for it.

“It’s a heavy responsibility you’ve shouldered,” Bruce commented, thinking of the hustle and bustle of the factory floor and how thousands of people depended on the factory for work.

“I apologize for burdening you…” Raj said, misunderstanding Bruce’s comment. “Sometimes we share things with strangers we don’t share with our closest friends.”

“I’m sympathetic to your plight,” Bruce said, setting down the tea. He leaned forward. “I might be able to help. I have some experience with this sort of thing.”

“With thieves? Con artists?”

Bruce smiled. “Let’s just say I understand something about the responsibility you feel.”

Raj studied him for a few moments. “I suspect you do.”

“Here’s the deal,” Bruce said, his mind already focused on finding Damon the business manager. “I’ll find what was stolen from you and you find Shanti Singh and her family.”
“That hardly seems fair,” Raj said. “I believe my search for the Singh family will be satisfied with a few phone calls.”

But Raj’s protestations were merely a formality as he welcomed any help he could get. After providing Bruce with the few bits of information he had on his former business manager, they shook hands, and Bruce went to work. As Bruce suspected, Daman had been in Raj’s employ for only a few months and few people knew him. The general consensus had been that he was a hard worker - staying late after most had left for the evening - and that he kept to himself.

Several hours later, Bruce sat in a small restaurant across the street from where Daman lived. If the waiters were curious why a foreigner chose to while away hours in a district that tourists rarely visited, they never asked. Each coffee refill and each order of food presented to Bruce was answered with a sizable tip. When Bruce asked about the man who lived across the street, the waiters were sorry to not have helpful information other than he hadn’t been home in days.

Sipping his coffee, Bruce kept his eyes on the Daman’s door. The street was still too cluttered with people to risk breaking in now. Besides, Bruce felt bad about depriving Selina of such an opportunity. With a small smile, he called her.

“Do you think Isha’s up for more babysitting?” He asked Selina.

“I think so. Why?”

“How do you feel about a little B&E?”

“A little B&E?” That was not the answer she had been expecting. “Why it’s not even my birthday!”

He filled her in on the details and told to be at the address after sunset.

An hour and a half later, a taxi stopped down the street. Selina got out and strolled toward him, looking very nonchalant and not at all like she was about to do something illegal.

“That’s quite an outfit for breaking and entering,” he commented, taking in her white capri pants and red silk top.

“Well, we both can’t go in looking like thieves, can we?” Bruce wore dark trousers and a black t-shirt. It hadn’t been intended as burgling attire - it was just good fortune that he’d been wearing the dark clothes.

“It’s called an exit strategy,” she said. “If someone asks, I’m just a lost tourist.”

“And what am I?” He asked, leading her toward their target.

Selina grinned. “My clueless husband who thinks this place is our hotel.”

They approached the building that noone would ever mistake for hotel. Bruce looked at her doubtfully.

“You don’t think I could pull off that story?” She asked, tilting her head.

He didn’t doubt her abilities in the slightest but he wanted to be in and out without anyone the wiser. After handing her some tools for picking locks, he stood to the side to conceal her actions. Picking the lock, however, was not necessary.

"Wow,” Selina said as she pushed open the unlocked door. "You sure know how to challenge a
thief. This place is like Fort Knox."

Bruce stepped in ahead of her. After she closed the door, they waited for their eyes to adjust to the darkness. As there were no windows that faced the street so they felt it was safe to turn on a light. A single bulb hanging from the ceiling provided dim but adequate illumination.

"You've got to be kidding me," Selina said as she surveyed the room.

Daman’s home was a mess. Not a mess like someone had tossed the place looking for valuables or information but a mess like a slob lived here.

"So…" she said still standing near the door, reluctant to walk further into the messy room. “You want me to find paperwork, in Hindi, which I don't read, in this place?”

"Yes," he said, very happy that she was here with him.

She sighed. "OK."

Bruce sat down at the computer that was the newest and cleanest thing in the room. “Look for anything that looks like a money transfer. From what I learned about this guy, there’s no way he’s the brains behind the theft.”

“After seeing this place, I don’t think this guy is the brains behind anything.” She tossed aside some food wrappers. “A competitor, maybe?”

“Maybe,” Bruce responded absently as he plugged in a device that could penetrate any computer safety measures.

“This reminds of a job in Detroit,” Selina said, as she rifled through the disorganized papers that littered the apartment. “Real rich guy and…” she gave him a significant look, “...a shut in. He was known for his hatred of banks so there was supposed to be cash galore in his place. I broke into his mansion then got right back out. Not only was he a real shut in but he was a hoarder! Imagine this place just a thousand times worse. With garbage and dead animals. The smell was unbelievable. He could've had the Hope Diamond in there but I wasn't about to go looking for it.”

Bruce paused in his work and watched her. As she shared her criminal history with him, she hadn’t glossed over the less than glamorous aspects of her life as a thief. Sensing his eyes on her, Selina met his gaze, and guessing what he was thinking, gave him a quick smile before returning to her search.

“I’ve got it!” Bruce exclaimed a short time later. “Three days ago, someone wired him enough money to not only get out of town but set up somewhere else.” He powered down the computer realizing it was probably futile as the previous resident would most likely never return. “We’ll track down the account details back at the hotel.”

“These should help narrow down where the guy was headed.” Selina handed him some papers.

Bruce nodded as he looked over a receipt for a train ticket and hotel reservations. He looked up and gave her a wry grin. “Guess we’re going to Mumbai.”
Mumbai – One Year Ago

Helena squealed as she ran away from her mother. Her little feet carrying her as fast as they could over the wet tile.

“No running!” Selina exclaimed as she caught up with the giggling toddler. It was not the first time Helena had heard the admonishment from one of her parents. “You’re gonna slip and fall and you won’t find that funny!”

Keeping a firm grip on Helena’s little hand, Selina walked her back to the pool where Bruce waited inside the glistening water. With visions of cracked skulls dancing in his head, he affected a stern look to his daughter who only responded by smiling happily before jumping into his arms.

“You can jump in but don’t run,” Bruce told Helena as he lifted her out of the pool to resume her new favorite pastime.

Yesterday, Bruce and Selina first took Helena to the elegant rooftop pool of the four-star hotel that towered over the Mumbai city centre. The two-year old clung to her father until, under the watchful eyes of her parents, she gradually lost her fear of the water. Now that she felt confident enough to jump in from the side of the pool, she couldn’t get enough of it.

Selina sat on the edge of the pool, ready to spring up to chase Helena if necessary.

“I know you’re a smash and grab kind of guy but…” She said to Bruce, continuing their conversation that had been interrupted by Helena’s running.

“It would be nice to get in and out without anyone being the wiser,” he replied, nodding as he considered the obstacles to helping Raj and Gunjan Mittal. The night before, after a sumptuous dinner on the balcony of their presidential suite, Bruce had left to follow the trail of Daman Batra. Daman, who never imagined a man such as Bruce Wayne would assist the seemingly helpless Mittal, was all too easy to find. When Daman finally emerged from his apartment, Bruce silently grabbed him, dragging the bewildered man into the shadows of a deserted alley. Less than a minute later, Daman eagerly supplied Bruce all the information he knew. It was, Bruce later told Selina, somewhat disappointing.

As expected, Daman didn’t know much but he did have the name of the man who hired him. Within a few hours, Bruce learned the identity of the shadowy figure who employed the man who hired Daman. But recovering Mittal’s designs from the very rich and very powerful Basu Nanda was going to be more of a challenge than he and Selina had anticipated. That, he decided, was not disappointing.

With Helena napping in a newly purchased stroller, Bruce and Selina had spent the morning casually walking past the Nanda mansion, taking time to observe the considerable security measures. The palace was a fortress with round the clock armed security. Nanda, himself, seemed unapproachable; Bruce and Selina barely caught a glimpse of the man as he was whisked away to his office in his bullet-proof Bentley that was surrounded by an armed escort.
Bruce smiled at Helena who swam toward him, a big, proud, look-at-what-I’m-doing grin on her face. Gathering her to him, he kissed her cheek then let her go to swim toward the steps of the pool.

“There is another possibility,” Bruce said, his eyes never leaving Helena as she splashed about on the steps.

“Are you ready for that?” Selina asked, sliding into the pool. “News like that will spread fast.”

“I’d feel like a real bastard letting all those people lose their jobs just because I want anonymity.”

“I guess so.”

“Throw me! Throw me!” Helena exclaimed.

“Nanda is not going to meet with a stranger,” Bruce said, tossing Helena to her mother. “But…”

“He’ll certainly meet with Bruce Wayne,” Selina said.

They continued the game with Helena, each thinking of ways to access a very inaccessible man. Even knowing that they would have little difficulty breaking in, neither Bruce nor Selina found getting shot at as exhilarating as it once was.

“He’s well protected, always surrounded by bodyguards,” Bruce said. “I can’t see another way to get at him without engaging the security detail.”

Helena, tired of being thrown, cuddled to her mother. Her head resting on her shoulder. Selina’s attention focused on her daughter, gently bobbing in the water until Helena said she was hungry. Tired from the waterplay, Helena held on to Selina as Bruce draped a big, fluffy, white towel around them.

Returning to their room, they found Isha and ordered room service. If Isha had been impressed by their last hotel room, she was positively astounded by this one. The presidential suite was bigger than most apartments. Situated on the top floor of the elegant hotel, the suite was flanked on all sides by a wide balcony which prompted Bruce to immediately inspected to confirm that it was safe for Helena.

After Isha took Helena to bed, they resumed their research.

“From what I can find, Nanda’s all business. He works then he goes home to work more. That’s it.” With a quick grin to Selina, he added: “So I don’t think an alluring, American woman will tempt him.”

“Well, there goes that idea,” Selina said.

The next morning, Bruce sat with Isha and Helena enjoying banana pancakes on the balcony when Selina joined them. Dropping a quick kiss on Helena’s head, she casually chatted with Isha about her breakfast but Bruce could tell she found something.

“I’ve got an idea,” she finally said.

“I’m all ears,” Bruce replied, pouring Helena another glass of milk.

“Batu Nanda may be unapproachable but he’s not the only Nanda.” She set the laptop on the glass table. “Here’s our ticket in: Param Nanda.”
As Bruce scrolled through the images she had compiled of Nanda’s youngest son, Isha took Helena inside to play.

“He’s like you pretended to be,” Selina said. “He’s a bored rich kid with too much money and too much free time. He’s also the youngest of three brothers who are heavily involved in the family business. He’s in the business, too, but it doesn’t look like he’s all that involved.”

“So you think I should meet him with a business deal of sorts?” Bruce asked, skeptical because the pictures of the young man indicated he was interested in anything but business.

“Oh no,” Selina said. “You go in there looking like a businessman with a sound business offer, he’ll be bored silly and won’t give you the time of day.”

“What do you suggest?”

“Look at this guy, Bruce.” Leaning over him, Selina accessed Param’s social media accounts, which consisted mainly of selfies. In most of the photos, he wore gold chains and baggy clothes. By emulating American rappers, he hoped to project a threatening image. He succeeded in not looking dangerous but like a rich kid trying to look dangerous which never could be taken seriously.

“He wants to be bad,” she said. “But not too bad.”

“What do you have in mind?” Bruce asked.

“You sweep in, looking like a bad ass gangster type, and give him a taste of something the tiniest bit illegal, he’ll pay attention.”

“Pretend to be a criminal?”

“That shouldn’t be new to you.” Selina grinned. “Oh, sweetie, this is going to be good. It’s always nice sticking it to somebody that really deserves it.”

He gave her a look.

“Not that it was that way with you.” She nibbled her lip, her one physical manifestation of guilt. “This guy personifies why people resent the wealthy. And there could be no good reason why these people stole Raj’s designs. They’re just a bunch of creeps that the law wouldn’t think of touching and I hate that they take advantage of weaker people.”

He pulled her down to sit on his lap. She tilted her head to meet his kiss, her arms going around his neck.

“You can’t go looking like this,” she murmured against his lips before leaning back to look at him. Her fingers stroked his beard, then touched his hair that brushed his shoulders. “You look like a hippie. Sexiest hippie I’ve ever seen but you meet him looking as you are and all he’ll think you want to offer is a subscription to High Times.”

“We can’t have that,” Bruce said softly before kissing her again. The kiss getting more involved until he felt Helena’s small hand on his knee. She regarded them innocently, used to seeing the sight of her parents kissing. With a last quick kiss, Selina hopped off his lap and went to find Isha and gather supplies.

When Selina began cutting Bruce’s hair, Helena’s eyes went wide. Standing at his knee, she held his leg, her eyes showing her confusion.
“It’s okay, sweetie,” Selina said, giving Helena her loving mommy smile. “Daddy’s just getting a long overdue haircut.”

As Helena had no memory of her father looking anything other than the man before her, she regarded the changes with confusion. When Selina turned on the electric clippers, she burst into tears. Gathering her to him, Bruce and Selina consoled her.

“See, baby,” Selina said, holding out the clippers for Helena to touch. “It just makes a funny noise.”

Isha held out her arms, holding Helena as they watched Selina work. When Selina finished, Bruce ran a hand over his head, feeling the unfamiliar sensation of very short hair. Far shorter than he was accustomed. He grinned at Helena, leaning over so she could touch his head. She smiled back, still a little teary but comforted that the man before her was still daddy.

Selina completed the transformation by shaving his cheeks and trimming what was now a goatee. Standing back to survey her work, she nodded in satisfaction.

Isha shook her head in dismay, frowning at him. “You make him look mean.”

“That’s good!” She took Helena from Isha who now had her job to do. “And now for the piece de resistance.”

“Really?” Bruce eyed the black ink Isha set on the table.

“Yes. You have to fascinate him. These will help.”

“What’s that design?” Bruce asked, seeing the an image of a grim reaper that Selina had printed out earlier.

“It’s the mark of a biker gang out of California. Normally sporting a biker tat when you’re not a member gets you an unforgettable ass-kicking but they’ll never know.” Selina showed Isha where she wanted it on his neck, just below his ear. “That way you’re not being obvious about it but Param’s security will definitely notice and they’ll figure it out. Since biker gangs don’t keep organized records, there’s no way they can confirm you’re a member. Clever, right?”

Bruce nodded, his hand absently stroking his bare cheeks. “Why this gang?”

“They’re known arms dealers.”

“And you know that how?”

“Here, baby,” Selina said to Helena, ignoring his question. She intercepted Helena’s hand just before she dipped her fingers into the black ink. Planning for such an occurrence, she produced a set of finger paints and big sheets of paper to occupy Helena.

Isha, with a steady and competent hand, carefully applied the ink to Bruce’s neck. When that one was finished, she went to work on the second one. On the back of his hand, just above his wrist, she painted a tribal tattoo that would barely be revealed by long sleeves. The design gave the impression that would continue up the length of his arm.

“Mysterious, huh?” Selina said, nodding her approval to Isha. She looked at the clock on her phone. “I guess I should go. Param probably leaves for his night out after the sun sets.”

“Don’t let him see you,” Bruce reminded which earned him an impatient eye-rolling.
“Yeah, yeah, I got it. I’ll let you know where he’s heading.” With an admiring look at him, she kissed him then headed off.

Two hours later, she returned.

“He’s going to a swanky restaurant/nightclub called Aurus. His ‘posse’ includes three bodyguards.” Selina sat on the bathroom counter, watching him as he got ready. “This guy is such a little prick, you’ll have no trouble with him. He’ll be impressed with you and he’ll want to impress you. The great thing about this is, you don’t even have to act like you’re not impressed with him!”

“I never doubted you, Selina,” Bruce said, shrugging on a black jacket.

“Very nice, Bruce.” Selina stood behind him, her chin resting on his shoulder as she looked at him in the mirror. “Looking like this, no one would mistake you for Bruce Wayne.”

Wearing black trousers, a dark grey shirt with a black jacket, Bruce conceded that Selina had a point with the radical physical changes. Dressed as he was, with his closely cropped hair and thick goatee, no one, except those who knew him, would recognize him.

“Let’s hope this works,” Bruce said. He needed to get inside Nanda’s corporate offices. If he could get invited, so much the better.

With Helena on her hip, Selina followed him to the door.

“Go get ‘im, Tiger!”

“Yes, tiger!” Helena repeated, getting a kiss on the forehead from Bruce.

“Wave bye to Daddy and wish him luck.”

“Bye luck!” Helena waved enthusiastically.

Armed only with a gift, Bruce left for one of Mumbai’s trendiest hotspots. Cash to the host granted him a table close to Param. After a half hour of observing Param preen in front of his friends, Bruce made his move.

Beckoning the waiter, Bruce paid him to deliver the ornate wooden box to Param’s table. The box was intercepted by the bodyguards who opened it with exaggeration caution. After determining the present was not dangerous, the head bodyguard handed it to Param.

Within the box, nestled in soft velvet, was a ridiculously expensive bottle of tequila. Obtaining it turned out to be one of the trickiest parts of the plan but Selina figured the distinctive liquor would get his attention since Param most likely received champagne regularly. Their gift was not only expensive and uncommon but well known enough that Param’s interest would be piqued.

Param’s eyes widened in pleasure as he held up the bottle for his friends to see. His excitement dimmed slightly when he read the attached note: “New business opportunity. Interested?” Without sharing the details of the note with his bodyguards, Param carefully placed the bottle back in the box then signaled the waiter who pointed him in Bruce’s direction.

“I must thank you for your most generous gift,” Param said a few moments later. Pressing his palms together, he bowed his head but kept his eyes on Bruce.

Bruce rose, reciprocating the greeting before gesturing Param to sit.
“I am most intrigued why a man such as yourself would send me such an expensive bottle of tequila,” Param said, leaning forward.

“I wanted to get your attention,” Bruce replied.

“And why would you need my attention? Your note mentioned something about a business opportunity?” Param’s gaze strayed from Bruce’s face to the tattoo on his neck.

Param’s bodyguards were also studying him closely but remained standing a discreet distance behind Param.

“I’m hoping the rumors about you are true,” Bruce said.

“So many rumors about me!” Param exclaimed. “You must be more specific!”

“That you’re a man who can get things done with discretion.” Bruce almost choked on the word. Nothing about Param was discrete. Selina said Bruce’s guise would work because he wouldn’t have to work at charming Param which was a good thing because everything about the young man irritated him. Param tried to affect the persona of a tough guy but he fooled no one. Thanks to his wealth and father’s influence, few dared to openly mock him.

“Oh, yes, that one,” Param said with wonder. Of all the things that had been said about him, that was not one of them. “I am. I most certainly am that person.”

“You have access to freighters, do you not?”

Param carried the title of Vice President of Logistical Operations which was to imply he was the head of the shipping arm of Nanda’s vast business. There was no way that a successful man like Nanda entrusted such an operation to this son. Bruce suspected that all Param did at his office was update his Instagram.

“I do.”

Bruce leaned forward, his voice lowered. “I’ve run into a problem with my usual transporter. I have cargo I need moved and it’s not the kind of cargo that can just sit around.”

Param fiddled with one of the two Rolexes that he wore. He glanced back at his bodyguards who watched but could not hear what was being said.

“I will make it worth your while,” Bruce said. “My buyers in Japan do not appreciate delays.”

“The Yakuza?” Param asked, trying his best to hide his excitement.

Bruce looked around, then gave Param a stern look. “Customers I don’t want to disappoint. Understand?”

“What do you need to transport?” Param asked. “I need to know because if it’s human cargo, we have special containers for that.”

If Bruce had any reservations about using the naive young man, they were now fully dispelled.

“Nothing like that,” Bruce said, disdain creeping into his tone. “Let’s just say my Japanese friends are in need of re-arming.”

Param nodded but warning bells were going off. He may be a wannabe gangster but he wasn’t stupid. “I don’t know…”
“I thought you were a player,” Bruce remarked, leaning back in his seat. Selina had advised when in doubt, wound Param’s ego.

“I am!”

Bruce remained silent, letting the young man believe he was trying to make up his mind about him. The silence was making Param nervous. As Selina predicted, Param was now seeking his approval.

“I’m sorry I wasted your time,” Bruce said, rising. “Enjoy the tequila.”

“Wait!”

Bruce’s back was to Param and his bodyguards so no one saw the satisfied expression that briefly flitted across his face.

“Come to my office tomorrow,” Param said. “If that’s convenient for you?”

Bruce turned, a doubtful expression on his face. “I’m not much of an office guy…”

“Yes, well, our shipping data is there,” Param said, sounding apologetic. “I cannot access our server from anywhere but my office computer.”

That was not news to Bruce.

“It would be best, of course,” Param said, “If you come after business hours. Shall we say seven?”

“I’ll be there,” he said.

“Perfect!” Param rose to shake his hand. It was only then that the bodyguards moved forward, preventing Bruce from shaking his hand.

“Bodyguards are so sensitive,” Param said, but he didn’t re-extend his hand. With a slight nod, he returned to his table and when he looked back in Bruce’s direction, Bruce was already gone.

“Getting the access card will be difficult,” Bruce said to Selina later. “The bodyguards aren’t much but they won’t let Param be touched by a stranger.”

“Not a problem,” Selina said, getting into bed.

“No, Selina, it might be.”

Sitting up with his back against the ornate headboard, Bruce re-researched the Nanda Corporation’s security system. He scrolled through the office specs he had gathered earlier, looking for any flaws in the plan. Without the access card, it would be much more of a challenge getting Mittal’s data. It could be done, Bruce recalled nabbing Lau in Hong Kong, but he much preferred getting in and out without anyone knowing.

“Just let me know which pocket to pick. Easy peasy.” She curled up against him, her customary position for sleeping.

Still wired from his meeting with Param, Bruce continued going over the details of the plan. As he studied the particulars of Nanda’s security system, he absently stroked her back. The plan hinged on Selina getting the access card but Bruce had no doubts about her abilities.

“Don’t kiss him,” he said.
“But that’s the easiest way to get the card!”

“I remember.”

He set the laptop on the nightstand, then rolled over so he lay atop her. Nuzzling her neck, he slid his hands over her hips, bringing her out of sleepiness. He kissed her neck, making his way up to her mouth. As she met his kiss, another thought occurred to him. He lifted his head, looking down at her.

“And don’t let him kiss you, either,” he said, then kissed her again, satisfied he closed all the loopholes.

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Gotham - The Present

“Massey! Yo, Massey! Think I got somethin’ for ya!” Detective Jefferson Boyd called out as Jessica waited in line at the food truck that was parked outside MCU.

“Yeah?” Expecting one of Jefferson’s infamous off colored jokes, Jessica hardly spared him a glance. She was not in the mood to feign amusement and only wanted to retreat to the privacy of her office so she could sit, eat her lunch and bang her head on her desk to ease her frustration. If she had ever had a more unproductive morning, she couldn’t recall. Every person she questioned regarding her victim either pretended ignorance or just stared at her, their distrust and fear of the police plain.

“Bout your JD?”

As of last night, the victim was no longer a John Doe but no one in the department knew that yet as the information had been delivered in a non-official capacity.

“Oliver Preston,” Gordon had said when he called her late last night.

“Great!” Jessica exclaimed. Since she was in the comfort of her own apartment with her comfy clothes on, Jessica made little effort at disguising her sarcasm. “So you guys got a name, huh? Find the killers yet? Will you maybe let me know when you do so I don’t look like an idiot to my superiors?”

Kissing ass had never been her thing, and, even though Commissioner Jim Gordon was her boss’ boss’ boss, she could not hide her frustration at being cut out of her own investigation.

“I’m letting you know now, Detective,” Gordon said, gently but firmly. To his credit, the Commissioner didn’t seem unaware of the awkward position they were in and that they were circumventing procedure.

“Sorry, Commissioner,” Jessica said, with true contrition. This was, after all, the man who had fought the good fight in ending the corruption that had once ran rampant throughout Gotham’s police force.

“We also have an address,” Gordon told her. “But nothing else at this time.”

We? Jessica wondered. Gordon and Blake? Or, Gordon and Wayne? And there was the biggest
mystery: Bruce Wayne. Why did the billionaire have such an effect on two very different men. Two men that Jessica would have thought above being starstruck. Was that what it was? Why was Blake so interested in a man who seemed to be a bit of a flake? Why would Gordon go out of his way to protect him?

Jessica soon discovered that having the name of Oliver Preston was about as helpful as when the murdered man had been nameless. After finding nothing in every database she could access, she spent the rest of her morning on a fruitless expedition questioning his neighbors. She was tired of finding only dead ends.

With a nod to the patrolman who waited in line behind her, Jefferson stood next to her. As he scanned the menu, he said: “Guy with tats and such?”

Jessica braced herself for another ‘humorous’ dig at her lack of leads in the Oliver Preston murder. A bawdy joke was more preferable over yet another tired wisecrack from one of her coworkers. Her first dead-end case was a subject of much teasing in the homicide department.

Leveling Jefferson a look she hoped would scare him off from any jokes, Jessica waited for him to leave.


“What?”

“It’ll cost ya!” Jefferson nodded toward the food truck.

“It better be good,” Jessica said, her doubt replaced by cautious hope. Jefferson looked excited, and not in the excited because he was about to pull a prank way. Everyone in homicide was all too familiar with that look.

“Best lead you’ve had so far. Come on, it’ll only cost you a dog and a pop.”

Jessica followed her instinct and paid for his lunch.

“You heard about the Mag Mike thing?” Jefferson asked as they walked to her office.

Jessica nodded. The victim, if he could be called that, was a man by the name of Michael Shepherd AKA Magnum Mike, a name given to him by none other than himself. Magnum Mike was known by those in the law enforcement business as one of those unattainable drug dealers who always managed to evade prosecution. Two days ago Magnum Mike and three of his goons were found shot to death in Mike’s uptown home.

“So the guy had security cameras all over the place,” Jefferson said.

“That’s a break.”

Jefferson shook his head. “Nah, our shooter destroyed them all. Real good about it too, we can’t get a thing from those.”

“But…?” Jessica asked.

“As you know, Mag Mike was a real violent asshole but to no one’s surprise he’s also a major swinger.”

“How so?”
“Sex stuff everywhere. And, the guy didn’t just have security cameras all over the place, he also had a camera hidden in the business end of an X-rated statue.”

“Nice.” Jessica pushed open the glass door that opened to the Homicide Department

“Yeah, the guy really enjoyed himself,” Jefferson said, following Jessica inside her cramped but well organized office. “Orgies and whatnot. Which isn’t as exciting to watch as you’d think.”

“Better you than me, Jeff,” Jessica said, sitting down at her desk.

“Anyway, we’re going through the feed and...” Jefferson sat on the extra chair next to her desk. He paused in his story to enjoy two big bites of his hot dog. “Guess who shows up? Your vic and the woman that was found with him.”

After wiping ketchup on his pants, Jefferson reached into his pocket. While displaying his smuggest grin, he held up a flash drive. “Interested now?”

Jessica, frustrated at being spoon fed information from Gordon, Blake and Wayne was more than interested.

“Let me see what you got.” Jessica plugged in the drive. The only indication of her eagerness to see the video was the tapping of her index finger on her desk.

Jefferson spared her the less desirable elements of the video by telling her the exact time that Oliver and Selina showed up at Magnum Mike’s house.

“Believe me, Jess, there’s nothing interesting before that. At least there wasn’t an orgy that night. Real boring stuff, Mag Mike’s just sitting around smoking crack and watching My Little Pony.” Jefferson scooted the chair next to her to have better access to the mouse.

“This is from the night before Oliver Preston’s murder?”

“Yeah, just past midnight,” Jefferson said. “Your vic will be dead in twelve hours.”

The camera had been placed at an angle that captured most of the living room. A little after midnight, two visitors arrived. If not for Oliver’s distinctive presence, Jessica would not guessed that the woman was Ms. Kyle. Selina wore a Gotham ball cap low to obscure her face. There was no audio and even without seeing Ms. Kyle’s face, it was obvious she was uneasy. The only time Selina’s face became visible was when she glared at Oliver as he took a puff off the crack pipe offered by Magnum Mike.

Mike must have sensed her disapproval because he focused his attention on her. With an insultingly long leer at Selina’s backside, he walked up to her, standing very close. Selina didn’t react as they talked until Mike reached out to caress her hip. His fingers barely touched the fabric of her jeans before Selina grabbed his hand and jerked it behind his back. As the man fell to his knees, three men rushed in, each pointing a gun at Selina. When Oliver started to rise from the couch, one of the men turned his weapon on him.

For a few tense moments, no one moved until Selina released her hold on Mike and held up her hands. The situation was defused when Mike gave Selina an admiring and respectful look then beckoned his men to put away their weapons. To show he had no hard feelings, Mike offered Oliver another hit on the pipe which was refused. As Selina and Oliver started to leave, a woman who had remained out of the camera’s eye, approached them.

“What’s that?” Jessica asked. “Go back a few seconds.”
If Jessica hadn’t been watching the video so closely, she would not have noticed the woman surreptitiously place something in Selina’s jacket pocket.

“Thanks, Jefferson!” Jessica smiled. “You’ve made my day!”

“Thought you might think so,” Jefferson said, pleased to be of help.

“Did this camera get the shooter?” Jessica asked.

“Oh, baby, did it ever! Crystal clear shot of our lady killer’s face.”

“A woman?” Jessica excitement grew.

“Not only a fine looking woman but a stone cold professional by the looks of her.” Jeff fast forwarded to a few days later.

The killer must have done her homework about how to get in to Mag Mike’s place with little difficulty. Dressed in a tight, revealing dress, she sauntered in, oozing sexuality which earned the undivided attention of the three men. In less than thirty seconds, Mag Mike and his three associates were dead.

Jessica glanced at the time stamp, “Mag Mike and his boys were killed about two hours before the attempt on Ms. Kyle’s life at the hospital...” She checked her notebook with all the pertinent details carefully laid out in an order only Jessica would understand. “This woman matches the description of the woman that tried to kill Ms. Kyle at the hospital but I’ll confirm that with Mr. Wayne who got the best look at her.”

“Busy night.” Jefferson commented. “Looks like someone’s cleaning up. With the exception of Ms. Kyle, everyone on this video is dead.”

Jessica shook her head. “And that woman who handed Selina something.”

Jefferson’s face turned serious. “Better find her before that hit woman does.”

Jessica stared at the woman’s blurry face, hoping she could find her in time. Her earlier gripes about Gordon and Blake’s involvement in the investigation were instantly forgotten as soon as she realized that she was dealing with someone who had no problem eliminating loose ends.

“Let’s go to Tech and see if we can extrapolate a better image of her,” Jessica said as she ejected the thumb drive. “Do you mind...?”

“Happy to help, Jess,” Jefferson said. “I’ll check the usual databases while you do the legwork.”

“Thanks, Jefferson, I owe you more than a dog and a pop.”

On the way to the Tech Department, they met Jim Gordon. Gordon nodded to Jessica as he passed.

“Hey, Commissioner!” Massey called out, quickening her pace to catch up with him.

Jefferson hung back, suddenly uncharacteristically shy around the Commissioner. He, like the other detectives, had no idea about Gordon’s involvement in the case. The cops who were at the crime scene had enough sense to keep their mouths shut when specifically requested by Gordon. Such was the effect of the man that his police officers kept quiet when they had a juicy story to tell.

“I wanted you to know we may have something.” Jessica filled him in on the video that was
“We’ve got to find this woman before this hit woman does.”

“Yes,” Gordon said. “But I’m not sure how cooperative people will be. I found anyone who knew Ms. Kyle or Mr. Preston to be remarkably close mouthed when talking to the police.”

“Yeah, I got that, too. Maybe I was a little harsh on Blake and Wayne and they might help.”

Gordon smiled. “I’m sure they can. I’m meeting them at the hospital in a few hours.”

“I’ll have a copy of the video for you by then, sir. We’ll need Mr. Wayne to confirm whether Mag Mike’s killer is the same that tried to kill Ms. Kyle.”

Gordon regarded her carefully. “Why don’t you meet us?”

Jessica smiled, ridiculously pleased to be included. Gordon started toward his office but Jessica wasn’t finished.

“I know why you have a soft spot for the guy. For Mr. Wayne, I mean,” Jessica called out.

Gordon stopped. It was a few moments before he turned to face her. His expression was guarded.

“You do?”

After her conversation with Gordon the night before, Jessica gave in to her curiosity and resumed her research on Bruce Wayne trying to find the connection between him and Gordon. She’d already been through the lurid tabloid articles about burning down his mansion in a drunken stupor, throwing away his money on whims, shocking high society with his choice of escorts before, inexplicably, closing himself up in his mansion in the Palisades.

It was Bruce Wayne’s premature obituary that proved to be the most helpful. The sentimental writer opined about how the handsome playboy had never truly recovered from the murder of his parents, the benevolent Thomas and Martha Wayne. Sensing she was onto something, Jessica focused her search on the crime and as she read more articles about the death of his parents at such a young age, she couldn’t help but wonder at how that trauma played into his scandalous behavior. Every instinct in her told her that had to be it but she still found nothing solid that involved Gordon. Arriving extra early at the station that morning, Jessica ventured down to the basement. The decades old file on the Wayne killings finally answered her question.

“Yeah,” Jessica said. “You were there when his parents were killed.”

He looked surprised. “Yes, I was.”

“I guess it’s hard to forget something like that,” Jessica said, as she imagined the picture splashed across the Gotham Times of the forlorn little boy as his butler took him from the police station. “Something like that changes you forever.”

“It certainly does,” Gordon said with a tight smile. He seemed uncomfortable and eager to be on his way.

“Okay,” Jessica said, embarrassed at conjuring an unpleasant memory for the man. “I’ll see you at the hospital. Hopefully with a good photo.”

She returned to Jefferson, who had been watching the exchange out of earshot.

“Since when are you friendly with Commissioner Gordon? I don’t think the guy even knows my name.”
“Don’t take it personally, sweetie, he’s a busy guy.”

“He’s a legend!”

“He’s a good Commissioner, Jefferson.”

“Yeah but before he was the Commissioner, he was a damned good cop. Helped this department get it’s good name back from all the bad police.”

“I get it, he’s your hero,” Jessica said, smiling at Jefferson’s awe of the Commissioner.

“And don’t forget he and the Batman were buds.”

“What?” Jessica asked, stopping so suddenly someone who was walking behind her bumped into her.

“Don’t tell me you’ve never heard of the Batman?” Jefferson asked.

“Of course I’ve heard of him!” Jessica exclaimed. “I just forgot about him and Gordon working together.”

Jessica followed Jefferson to Tech not nearly as confident that she had found the true connection between Gordon and Wayne.

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Mumbai – One Year Ago

The Mumbai nightclub was no different from the clubs Selina had once prowled. Los Angeles, Las Vegas, London, Gotham...they all had a sameness to them despite slight variations in decor and fashion. But the music, the people, and the way over-priced drinks were all the same no matter the continent.

Still, Selina enjoyed wandering through the vibrant crowd as she waited for Bruce. As she made her way through the fashionable elite of Mumbai, she couldn’t help but notice every wallet, every purse that would be so very easy to pinch. This place was a thief’s dream. Any regrets over her newfound legitimacy were dispelled when she saw Bruce arrive their mark.

Looking dangerous and oh so very sexy, Bruce followed Param as they made their way through the partiers. Bruce looked like he hated every inch of the loud, boisterous club. Thinking it was time to rescue him, Selina started to intercept them but just as she drew close, a bodyguard guided Param to a roped off area that was clearly not meant for anyone except VIPs. One of the three bodyguards stationed himself at the entrance to the exclusive area making it virtually impossible to accidentally bump into Param. So much for that plan.

Selina’s difficulty in getting close enough to Param to pick his pocket increased when the men were joined by a group of pretty young clubbers. The women were the typical party set and all were vying for Param’s attention. While the bodyguards presented no difficulty, the flock of nightclub groupies with a rich whale in their sight presented a real problem that Selina had not foreseen. Getting close enough to pick Param’s pocket was not going to be as easy as she expected.
As Selina headed for the bar, she surreptitiously studied the group, trying to find a way through that blasted velvet rope without arousing the bodyguards’ suspicion. She and Bruce wanted to be in and out of the Nanda’s offices with no one aware that his security had been compromised. To do that, they needed Param’s access card which, as Bruce had informed her earlier via text, rested safely in Param’s inner jacket pocket.

Two of the women broke away from the group. As they made their way across the dance floor to the ladies’ room, Selina finally saw an opportunity. Timing it perfectly, she managed to get in just ahead of them in the line.

“I love your shoes!” Selina exclaimed to the taller one, hoping the women spoke English. “Prada?”

“Jimmy Choo,” the taller woman replied, in a tone that indicated it was unforgivable that Selina not know the difference.

“Well, they’re just fabulous!” Selina said, managing to keep her tone enthusiastic without appearing desperate. It really was too bad Param’s posse consisted primarily of women - conning men was so much easier than befriending young, beautiful women who were competing with each other for the attention of a very wealthy boy-man. She had to play her part carefully, needing to communicate that she wasn’t interested in stealing any men from them. Chattering amiably, Selina confided of her travels with a husband who preferred business to partying. She tilted her head in the direction of a group of men at a far table then rolled her eyes in exasperation.

The mention of a husband helped to thaw the woman’s icy demeanor. And after assessing Selina’s Versace ensemble, the woman seemed to accept Selina as non-threatening and introduced herself and her companion.

Leela and Devi were sympathetic to her plight of a bored wife and casted her ‘husband’ a glare on behalf of Selina. Or, Veronica as Selina had identified herself.

“Let me irritate him and buy you two a drink,” Selina said a short while later as the three primped in front of the lighted mirrors in the bathroom. “You can tell me what’s fun to do around here.”

As Selina expected, the women couldn’t imagine turning down a free drink. Devi accepted her drink then promptly returned to Param, elbowing aside another woman who dared to take her place next to him. Leela, the more confident of the two, struck Selina as more interested in having a fun night out rather than cozying up to rich young man. The women chatted about fashion until Leela’s new favorite song blasted through the speakers. Taking Selina’s hand, she led her to the dance floor.

“Who’s your friend over there?” Selina had to shout her question.

“I don’t know who that guy is,” Leela shouted back, misunderstanding who Selina was asking about. “Param hints that he’s an American mobster. He has not been able to take his eyes off me!”

Selina smiled then asked about the other one.

“Oh, him! He’s Param Nanda. A big deal in this city.”

Selina managed to look impressed. The song ended. Leela took pity on the forgotten wife of the businessman and invited Selina to join them. “Param buys everyone’s drinks,” she said as they walked to the roped off area.

One bodyguard held a hand up blocking Selina. As he looked her over, Selina met Bruce’s appreciative gaze. Her black, form fitting dress was longer than most of the clubgoers, the hem
just above her knees with a slit cut to her hip and a neckline that had had Isha frowning in consternation.

The bodyguard decided Selina posed no danger and allowed her to pass.

Param was flanked by women but Leela eased next to him, letting the other women know who was in charge. Devi, on the other side of Param, gave Leela a resentful look. Staking her claim, Devi kissed his cheek, curling her body against him. Used to such games, Leela ignored her, and introduced Selina to Param.

Selina turned her attention to Param, thinking she would pick his pocket using the tried and true accidental stumble method. But Devi hung onto Param’s arm, keeping him from shaking Selina’s hand and giving Selina no reason to approach him.

Selina sipped her drink, all too aware that the other woman was not about to let her anywhere near Param. Selina continued to chat with Leela, seemingly uninterested in Param hoping her disinterest would interest him. For his part, Param’s attention rested solely on Bruce, trying his best to impress his new friend. Selina glanced at Bruce who gave her a quick, amused grin at her efforts to get close to Param. After pointing to his watch, he gave her a challenging look.

Conscious of Bruce’s eyes on her, Selina assessed the situation. Devi, still clinging to Param, kept glancing at her, trying to gauge her threat level.

Sauntering up to her, Selina touched the expensive bracelet on Devi’s arm before her fingers lightly caressed younger woman’s dark skin. She moved to stand directly in front of Devi, her change of position succeeded in drawing all eyes on her. Keeping her attention solely on Devi, Selina leaned closer to her, aware that Param’s gaze had shifted from Bruce to her.

“Do you wanna get his attention?” Selina whispered in Devi’s ear. “I mean really get it?”

Devi didn’t answer but Selina knew she was intrigued. When she was confident that she had everyone’s attention, Selina kissed her. As she moved her mouth over Devi’s willing lips, Selina put one hand on Devi’s cheek and her other hand in Param’s pocket. Only when she had the card secure in her palm did she stop.

When she leaned back, all eyes of the small group were on her. She shrugged as if there was nothing special about what she had just done.

“Shall we dance?” Selina asked, then led the bemused woman away. As they passed Bruce, she dropped the card into his suit pocket. He looked a little stunned.

From the dance floor, she saw Bruce leave. He would head to the roof where she was to join him within fifteen minutes. He was adamant about the timing, worrying that he was leaving her in danger. Sighing, she had given him her most exasperated look at reminded him she used to do this sort of thing long before she met him.

“Just be there. Fifteen minutes,” he’d said.

Ten minutes after he left, she pretended to get a call from her husband then disappeared into the crowd. When she arrived on the roof, Bruce was preparing to fire a rappel line to the building next door. A slight tensing in his stance was his only acknowledgement to her presence.

“Was that necessary?” He asked as he expertly fired the rappel line to the opposite building. He had successfully persuaded Param to visit the nightclub conveniently located in the building adjacent to the Nanda corporate offices.
“I thought so,” Selina replied, liking whatever it was he was feeling. “You said not to kiss him. Or let him kiss me. I didn’t.”

“After you,” he said, gesturing to the line he had secured. He looked down at her very high, strappy heels.

“I’ll be fine, dear,” she said. Taking a deep breath, she grasped the handle and slid over to the next building. Her landing was a little bumpier than she was used to but that was expected since it’d been years since she had rappelled between buildings.

Bruce, on the other hand, landed perfectly then immediately went to work taking down the lines. He had already planned out their exit route which didn’t include another dangerous trip hundreds of feet in the air.

“Are you angry?” She asked.

“No.”

“I mean you were there. How else was I to get near him?” She rambled as she helped him take down the lines. “The only option was a cat fight. And that chick looked like a hair puller and I really, really hate that.”

“Selina, let’s just focus on what we’re doing. See if you can find a box or something for me to stand on.”

While she looked, Bruce went to work. Using an impact driver, he quickly opened an access panel. Within a few minutes, he manipulated the feed to the security cameras. Watching him work, Selina couldn’t help but being impressed at how meticulous his planning was. He meant for them to get in and out completely undetected and that included not leaving any evidence of a break in. The program he designed to alter the feed of the security cameras would destroy itself in one hour, leaving no trace.

“You would’ve made a great thief,” she commented as he closed the access panel.

“But we’re not stealing, Selina,” he said, moving toward a ventilation shaft. “We’re recovering someone’s property.”

Standing on the crate Selina had found earlier, he unscrewed the door to the shaft. Sliding out of her shoes, she placed them near the rooftop door. An unnecessary gesture as Bruce would not overlook the slightest detail. He handed her a small tool then threaded his hands. She placed her bare foot in his hands and he lifted her so she could reach the ventilation shaft.

“Remember, left then right then right,” he said as she crawled inside the shaft. “That should leave you near the door.”

The ventilation shaft was cold but at least it was clean. Selina quietly shimmied her way through the vent, hoping her new Versace dress wouldn’t be ruined. As she crawled, she heard Bruce replace the cover. Once she reached her destination, she used the small tool to pop out the screws on the cover. Before popping off the cover, she listened and when she didn’t hear anyone, she pushed the cover off, then dropped down.

After disabling the sensor, she opened the rooftop door. Bruce entered, handing her her shoes. They made their way downstairs to an access room near Nanda’s offices. Although Nanda employed a separate security system for the rest of the building, his system proved to be just as vulnerable to Bruce and Selina.
The Nanda corporate offices were exactly what Selina expected. Elegant, ultra-tasteful and designed to convey to all who entered Nanda’s status in the business world. Selina followed Bruce through the maze of halls until they reached Nanda’s surprisingly small office. The man really was all business. Too bad that involved stealing other people’s livelihood.

Bruce removed a painting of the Nanda family to reveal a wall safe.

“Oh, dear, It’s not one of those uncrackable ones, is it?” Her grin was not returned. She thought she had a pretty good handle on how Bruce’s brain worked. But now, she couldn’t tell what he was thinking as he gazed at her.

“We have less than an hour,” Bruce said, handing her a black notebook exactly like the one that had been stolen from Mittal. “I’ll be in Param’s office.”

She looked behind her to make sure Bruce had gone and wasn’t witnessing one of her peculiar rituals. Safe cracking was a solitary business and she never liked having an audience. Even for a safe as the one in front of her, not unlike the safes she had practiced on when learning her trade. Nanda, relying on the strength of his security system, had not splurged on a safe.

Sliding on gloves, Selina ran her hands over the safe, spending a few moments getting to know it before she invaded. She rested her ear against the cool, black steel and listened as she searched for the combination.

After placing the duplicate notebook in the safe, Selina replaced the painting then took her time as she strolled through the offices to find Bruce. Traditional Indian artwork lined the walls, the colors clear even in the semi-darkness. She wondered about Wayne Enterprises and if it was as fancy as this one. Bruce had said that he did have an office there but it was mainly for show. His real office had been in a dark cave.

One painting caught her attention. A depiction of a man and woman dressed in traditional Indian garb, hands joined in unity. Selina had a few memories locked away but that painting brought out one in particular, reminding her of the couple who operated a small grocery store in the narrows. She was fifteen, angry, impulsive, and poor. One night, she smashed and she grabbed, making off with a week’s earnings. The next day, Selina watched the woman weep as she swept up the glass of their shattered window. Her husband, hammering a board to replace the window, paused to put an around around her. It was then Selina realized the enormity of what she’d done. It was the last time she stole from someone who couldn’t afford it.

Memory lane had never been Selina’s favorite place to stroll so she turned away from the painting to find Bruce.

Sitting at Param’s desk, Bruce was intent on his task of extracting all traces of Mittal’s designs and replacing them with bogus data. The card they’d gone to such lengths to get, inserted into the hard drive. Access to the computer was impossible without it.

Selina sat on the desk, her hip just next to the monitor. She crossed her legs, the slit in her dress falling open to show her thighs. Bruce kept his eyes on the screen but she knew he noticed. She gently swung her leg, knowing she was distracting him.

“Almost done,” he said. “I just need to eradicate all traces of these files. Which would be easier if you would stop what you’re doing.”

“I thought your training made you impervious to distractions,” Selina said, shifting a little so that the more of her legs showed. “I guess your teacher never planned for a woman in a tight, black
“Versace.”

“It is a nice dress.” He looked up at her, his eyes quickly roaming over her body. “You look beautiful.”

“Well, I was going for sexy but beautiful will do,” Selina said, hopping down from the desk. She leaned over to give him a kiss on the cheek, making sure he got a good look down her very low cut dress. “I’ll gather our things and meet you in the lobby.”

Within a few minutes, he joined her. Just before they opened the door, they heard voices approaching. Standing still, they waited, hoping whoever was out in the hall would pass by to another office. The sound of a card key swipe dashed those hopes. Before the door opened, Bruce pulled Selina behind an ornate screen in the lobby.

In an instant, the fun of the evening vanished replaced by the familiar fear Selina thought she’d never feel again. With his back against the wall, Bruce pulled her close, holding her against him. Selina took a deep breath, willing her anxiety away. She wasn’t alone now; she and Bruce could certainly fight their way out. Adrenaline pulsed through her in anticipation of a fight.

Three men entered, including a security guard. The guard waited at the door as one of the men went off to an office to retrieve something. The guard and the other man chatted politely until the other man returned. Instead of leaving, the three lingered in the lobby just a few feet away from where Bruce and Selina hid behind the screen. Even the feeling of Bruce’s strong body behind her didn’t help to calm Selina.

The three men showed no signs of leaving as their conversation turned to juicy gossip about a coworker. Selina was too tense to roll her eyes at the men. As if bored with listening, Bruce moved her hair off her shoulder to expose her neck. Before she could guess what he was up to, he placed the softest of kisses against her nape.

A comforting kiss, she thought until she felt his hand slide over her hip to stroke her breast. Turning her head, she gave him a shocked look which he answered with a devilish grin before his hand slipped under her dress to cup her bare breast. The contact of his hand on her skin almost made her moan in pleasure.

Well, this is what she got for teasing him earlier.

Bruce continued his fondling, one hand playing with her breast while the other slid down further, his fingers skillfully caressing her. He was doing his damnedest to make her cry out knowing full well that she wouldn’t.

If she wanted, she could put a stop to this but that was not at all what she wanted. Her head lolled back onto his shoulder, her earlier tension and anticipation replaced by an entirely different feeling.

“They’re gone,” Bruce whispered against her ear.

They? Selina’s eyes snapped open as Bruce’s hands left her body.

“What was that?” Selina demanded, not at all liking when he stepped away from her.

“You’re not the only one who likes to distract,” Bruce said, picking up their bag.

“That was mean,” she said, pouting a little, feeling flush and unsated.

“Was it?”
“Very,” Selina said before winding her arms around his neck to kiss him.

The bag Bruce was holding dropped to the floor with a quiet thud as he wrapped his arms around her waist. They both knew the kiss was getting a little out of hand but neither could pull away, kissing just until they reached the point of no return.

“We should go,” Bruce said, reluctantly.

Selina nodded, as eager as he to get back to the privacy of their room. They managed to keep their hands off each other as they made their way down ten flights of stairs. As they emerged from a service entrance onto a small alley, they grinned at each other before Bruce took her hand and kissed it.

Once inside their bedroom, their restraint fled. As Bruce bent her over a desk, Selina briefly wondered if sex with him would ever become boring. She doubted it. Even after years together, longer than she’d ever been with any man, his touch made her weak in the knees.

Later, after she checked in on Helena and Isha, Selina found Bruce on the balcony looking over Mittal’s designs.

“Raj is onto something here, Selina,” Bruce said. “But he needs a trustworthy investor to see this through.”

“Hmm...I wonder who that will be?”

“If Raj agrees, I’ll forward these to Lucius Fox at Wayne Enterprises.”

“Is that the guy from the place?”

Bruce grinned. “That’s him,” he said before turning his attention back to the laptop.

There was a different kind of excitement about him now. Raj’s designs sparked an interest that Selina hadn’t seen before. Bruce’s mind was churning with plans and ideas.

Sitting beside him on the double chaise lounge, Selina leaned back to look up at the pre-dawn sky. The light from the rising sun was barely piercing the night. It wasn’t a sight she’d seen in a long time. In the past few years, the times she had been awake at dawn were either spent trying to get an infant to go back to sleep or waking in Bruce’s arms to make love before Helena woke.

“Do you miss it?” Bruce asked.

“I thought I did. But tonight…” Selina paused, putting her head on his shoulder. “I didn’t like the fear. I especially didn’t like the thought that we’d get in a fight. I don’t miss bruised knuckles.”

He nodded his head then took her hand, running his thumb over her knuckles.

“Everything’s different,” she said quietly.

He set aside the laptop and put his arm around her, curling her close. “That it is.”
Domestic Projects

_East Coast of India - Eight months ago_

By the time she returned home, Selina had almost convinced herself that everything with Isha and Shanti was okay. Shanti's husband was friendly enough; when they arrived a month ago, he greeted them warmly, seemingly happy that his wife's mother had suddenly arrived but there was an angry gleam in his eye that both Bruce and Selina noticed. It was because of him that Selina and Bruce lingered in the small seaside town. Both unwilling to abandon Isha to an unknown fate.

Slowly, Selina climbed the narrow stairway that led to their small beachside apartment, forcing herself to present a bright expression so that Helena wouldn't sense her worry. Upon finding that the cozy flat was empty, her facade relaxed and she allowed herself the luxury of slamming the front door shut.

The small apartment was nothing fancy with two small bedrooms, a tiny kitchen, and what Bruce called a 'cozy' living area. But what the apartment lacked in charm, it made up for with the breathtaking view. Selina stepped outside onto the spacious walkout. What some might call a terrace was really an open space connected to their second story apartment. It was the feature that enticed Bruce and Selina to rent the place. The gorgeous view of the Indian Ocean did little to lessen her trepidation but the sight of Bruce and Helena playing the beach helped considerably.

Hours earlier, Selina had left them both sleeping. Helena had recently taken to protesting naptime. Bruce, happy for an excuse to take a nap, offered to lay down with her so Selina would have an afternoon to herself. Selina, giving him a knowing grin before kissing his cheek, was not fooled.

Selina returned inside to put on her swimsuit.

The beach was populated with tourists, but not overly crowded. She found Bruce helping Helena build a sandcastle. 'Helping' meant he was building it as Helena ran around throwing sand into the ocean.

"Very nice," Selina said, squatting down to assess his handiwork.

"Yeah," Bruce said, his gaze was fixed on making the structure as sturdy as possible. "She has a real talent for castle building."

"I see that."

Helena ran to Selina, throwing her arms around her mother before returning to stand at the edge of the surf.

"Were you able to get her to wear sunscreen?" Selina asked.

"Barely."

"I see her hat is tied on with a knot that a sailor couldn't untie."

"It's staying on, isn't it?" Bruce looked up at her, his smiling countenance quickly turning concerned. He made no comment as Helena excitedly returned with her pail full of water which she
wanted to dump over the sand castle. Bruce persuaded her to pour the water into the moat he had built around the castle. Selina smiled at his efforts to preserve the intricate castle he'd painstakingly built.

They played with Helena until the surf washed away the castle. When Helena spied some cows who had wandered onto the beach, they walked over to take a look with Bruce darting questioning glances in her direction. She'd gotten sloppy in the hide her feelings department. Helena, tired from the play, reached up to Bruce for him to carry her.

"How were things in town?" Bruce asked, as the three walked back to their apartment.

"I suspect he's on his best behavior."

"Maybe we're wrong about him," Bruce said.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we were?"

He pulled her closer to him, dropping a kiss on her head. Both aware that their instincts about Shanti's husband were not wrong.

Later, Selina woke to the pale light of a full moon and the sound of the ocean. She moved to curl up against Bruce and was not surprised to find his side of the bed empty. As she became more alert, she heard the soft, indistinct sound of his voice from out on the terrace. She hovered over sleep, content to listen to the quiet but comforting sound of him as he worked on his newest project.

Her phone lit up, silently indicating a text.

*r u ever coming home? Ever?

Ollie. She rolled over onto her stomach and stared at the message; brief, to the point, and crushing. She had no idea how to respond so she opted for the best nonresponse.

U ok?

That was always a tricky question with Ollie.

fool me, you do not

Selena smiled. The smile quickly fading as she contemplated her answer. She opted for truth.

I don't know

And she didn't. She did know that she and Bruce couldn't continue wandering aimlessly around the world. Their sweet toddler was growing far too fast and she deserved a home for building good memories.

YOU don't know!? What does baby daddy think?

The baby daddy was far too complicated to communicate to Ollie via text.

U dont even wanna know ;)

From there, their exchange turned lighthearted and fun. But even though he was a longtime heroin addict, Ollie was still no fool. He knew he'd touched a nerve, and, friend that he was, he wouldn't press her.
After they shared their goodbyes, Selina was left feeling melancholy. Without moving, she stared at her phone's screen, unable to shake the worry, the guilt that accompanied the thought of Ollie alone in Gotham. He'd only recently returned, dropped off by Daryl who had found him strung out in Memphis.

Living the life of a hippie had suited him well but old demons could not be vanquished so easily. Striking up a friendship with a woman whose own struggle with heroin rivaled his own proved to be his undoing. Half a year ago, the two had left the refuge of the commune, and quickly resumed their deadly habit.

*I'm ok. Stop worrying!*

And with that, Selina missed him terribly. The last time she had seen him was when she left him in the rehab/commune in New Mexico. Good thing, too, because he never would have survived Bane taking over Gotham. Junkies had not fared well during that time.

Sleep was now an impossibility so she got up, checked in on Helena then joined Bruce on the terrace. Bruce sat at a rickety plastic table, his laptop bright in the darkness. The desire to tell Bruce about Ollie, about Daryl, was strong. She knew what he would do and what he wouldn't do. He would be polite and welcoming of both of them, for her. He wouldn't make a big deal about their less than stellar pasts. He was, after all, a very decent man.

Resting her chin on his shoulder, she looked at the screen seeing Raj's specs that they had gone to some trouble to reclaim for him. Her fingers rested on his neck, massaging lightly. In response, Bruce leaned his head slightly, encouraging her to keep at it as he continued his conversation.

Lucius Fox, Selina assumed, was on the other end of the call. Fox, in Gotham, was working on international patents ensuring that Raj's designs would not be appropriated by unsavory businesses whose eye was on profit and not humanitarian endeavors.

Bruce was saving people instead of the world, and it impressed Selina more than she would let on. Still, impressed as she was, Bruce's conversation was boring so sat on the edge of the terrace, enjoying the middle of the night air.

When he ended the call with Fox, she turned toward him, ready to talk. He met her eyes. At her expression, his brows lifted in question.

But she turned to look back at the ocean. Telling him about Ollie and Daryl would lead to questions she wasn't ready to make, inferences about her life she didn't want made. She simply didn't want him to know how bad things had been for her when she was young.

She rose, reaching her hand out to him. "Come to bed," she said softly.

Accustomed to her mysterious ways, he didn't say anything. Taking her hand, he led her to their bedroom where Selina communicated her feelings the only way she could.

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_Gotham - The Present_

The usual thrum of activity was notably absent as Lucius Fox made his way through the halls of Wayne Enterprises on a quiet Saturday morning. He didn't notice, though, too preoccupied with his recent conversation with Mittal who, like Fox, scrambled to reschedule meetings with the carefully selected group of investors. Wayne had amassed quite a group of wealthy individuals eager to spend money on humanitarian projects that would decidedly not provide a return on their investment.
The point was to find a way for mega corporations like Wayne Enterprises to partner with small businesses in developing nations, to foster employment and other opportunities for those in need. It was tricky work, persuading wealthy CEOs to look beyond their own inflated salaries and bloated bonuses to provide assistance to those that couldn't possibly repay them. Tricky indeed, but Bruce managed to convince a select few that it was the right thing to do. Fox had been skeptical of Bruce's ability to be nonviolently persuasive but he shouldn't have doubted him. He was, after all, Thomas Wayne's son.

Nodding to the few employees who shared his love of Saturday morning work, Lucius continued to his office not wanting to field questions from concerned people who couldn't help but notice Wayne's sudden disappearance. They had become accustomed to him being an integral part of Wayne operations. Most were young enough that rumors of his unsavory past were dismissed because the man of the rumors was quite different from the dedicated head of Wayne Enterprises newest division centered solely on humanitarian projects.

Bruce's time in India seemed to have a profound effect on him. After his most recent homecoming, Bruce returned to his family's company. Eschewing a high profile position, he focused not on save the world projects but on how to make the world a better place world was not focused on ridding the world of criminals but on preventing young people from falling into the criminal life by targeting the problems that led desperate people into desperate actions. The technologies being developed were clever but basic. No risk of someone highjacking it to make a bomb which was always nice.

Just as he reached his office, Lucius was met by one of the young engineers tasked with the Mittal project.

"Wayne's here," was all she said before returning to her own office.

Surprised, Fox turned and headed away from the executive offices. Not only had Bruce eschewed a high profile position but he had been adamant about not displacing anyone and had been content to accept whatever workspace was available. It was a big space, windowless and thoroughly unglamorous. If memory served, it used to be a copy room back in the days when a such a thing was necessary.

Fox paused just inside, giving Bruce time to finish his phone call. From the sound of it, Bruce was calming the last of the investors who had been offended at his sudden departure from DC.

"Is he back on board?" Fox asked when Bruce's call ended.

"Maybe," Bruce replied, looking irritated at the effort.

"You've made considerable progress in shaking off that bad reputation you cultivated for yourself. I just hate to see people think they are proven right."

Bruce nodded, rubbing his eyes and Lucius realized how exhausted the man looked. Lucius also became aware of a small face peeking out at him from under Bruce's desk. When he smiled at her, she promptly disappeared.

"Who have we here?" He asked, settling into a chair, giving Helena a chance to warm to him.

The next time when she peeked at him, Fox was ready with a funny face that made her giggle before retreating back under the desk.

"Come out and say hello to Mr. Fox, Helena," Bruce said, gently coaxing her from beneath the
"Oh," Fox said, when he finally got a good look at her. "She looks just like Martha!"

Bruce looked at her closely, searching her face for signs of his mother. Fox felt a brief moment of sadness for the man who had been denied the chance to know the lovely Martha Wayne as a person other than a beloved mother.

"It's her impish grin," Fox mused. "Your mother had a impetuous side to her.

"I didn't know you knew her so well."

"Knew her before your father did. She and my ex-wife, Alice, were close friends since they were teenagers. We all went to the same college. Alice and I got married and Martha ventured off to join the peace corps and found your father."

Fox smiled, thinking back to those early days when they were just two young couples in love. His eye fell on Helena, sparking vivid memories of the past that for just a moment didn't feel like they occurred fifty years ago.

"Fifty years..." he muttered softly, then looked up to meet Bruce's very interested gaze. Lucius knew the man hadn't received many stories about his parents' own past. Everyone who had known him, knew that one did not mention the parents to Bruce. At least not in any extended fashion.

But Helena had no interest in stories about her grandmother. Sensing her father's attention was elsewhere, she tugged on his arm. When she didn't get the response she wanted, she fell into a full-fledged, bona fide tantrum that children her age excel at.

"She's not usually like this," Bruce explained as Helena threw herself on the floor. He lifted her up but she relaxed her body, sliding out of his grasp back onto the floor. "Selina's better at dealing with this," Bruce said, sheepishly.

"I'm sure she is." Lucius couldn't help but grin at Bruce's difficulty wrangling a three year old. The sight of Batman being bested by a tiny girl was a wondrous sight indeed. "I find it best to just ride it out. She'll get tired of it."

Bruce gave him a doubtful look.

"I have grandkids, you know."

"Really?"

"I have been known to leave this building occasionally." Fox smiled as he leaned back in the chair signalling to Bruce that a little girl screaming on the floor wasn't anything to kick up a fuss about. Bruce sat back at his desk and they resumed their conversation. Despite the commotion, Lucius enjoyed the opportunity to talk about the Martha and Thomas Wayne he had known before they became parents and pillars of Gotham society.

"They really would be pleased with what you're accomplishing here. How you are using this company to foster change," Fox said. "It's not the Wayne Enterprises your ancestors built, it is yours. Yours to keep, improve and..." He winked at Helena who had quieted but remained on the floor, "...pass on."

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East Coast of India - Eight months ago
Bruce and Selina relaxed on the walk-out of their small oceanside apartment. It was late evening and quite dark save the light from Selina's e-reader. Bruce gazed out in the direction of the ocean which couldn't be seen but was certainly heard. His attention, however, was not on the calming surf, or the cool summer breeze, but on the flurry of ideas that working with Raj had elicited in him.

Idly, his fingers caressed Selina's legs that rested on his lap as he considered the success of Mittal's project. The man had set about to figure out a way to save his factory, save his city, and by God, the man had succeeded. And no mask was needed.

Something long dormant but not forgotten had awakened inside Bruce.

"What do you think about going home?" He asked Selina before the second guessing began.

She was quiet for a moment. "What do you think about it?" She countered without looking up.

Bruce pushed aside his irritation at her typically evasive response. "No, really, Selina, tell me."

Selina set aside her reader, looking at him closely. "I never meant to be gone forever."

"I did." He didn't have to explain what had changed. She knew. She probably knew before he did.

"What do you have in mind?" She asked.

He considered the question, seeing the layers of queries in those few words.

"Instead of fighting crime," Bruce said. "I think we could fight poverty."

Selina laughed, not unkindly. "You never do like to do things half-way, do you?"

He grinned, not at all put off by her teasing. His goal sounded drastic and dramatic, but why exercise restraint when the world needed saving?

"Alfred wanted me to use the considerable resources of Wayne Enterprises but I couldn't get past Batman."

"You can't just throw money at it…" she began.

"You're saying money won't solve the problem?" Bruce kidded.

"As if I would ever say that!" She smiled, but the smile quickly faded as her mind went places he couldn't begin to guess.

"You know what poverty is?" Selina asked after a few moments, meeting his concerned eyes. "It isn't just lack of money, it's lack of...hope. Feeling like you're in the world but not of it. Feeling very alone because you're surrounded by desperate people who won't hesitate to take anything you might happen to earn."

"Or steal," she added.

"Any ideas?" He asked. "You're the expert here."

"No...but I do know that we loved it when do-gooders ventured into our part of the Narrows. We took advantage of their good will. They may have offered something long-term but we were all about picking their pockets, getting their credit card numbers, stealing their cars..."
"Not everyone is like that."

"True. So those are the people you should focus on. Some of the most depressing situations were people trying to live honestly, holding down two to three jobs just to barely scrape by."

Bruce nodded, seeing more problems than solutions. And with that, Bruce's deliberation deepened, focusing on how to utilize Wayne Enterprise's considerable resources but without depleting them and putting his family's company in a vulnerable position. Though initially hesitant to embark on another of Bruce's 'save the world projects,' Lucius Fox was now firmly committed to the enterprise.

It was late in the afternoon during their latest conference call when Bruce received an unexpected text from Selina.

**Pick us up at the marketplace**

Without hesitation, Bruce ended the call and hurried out to meet them.

Bruce had a suspicion about what prompted Selina to make the change in her and Helena's travel plans. As soon as he saw Selina's face, his suspicion was confirmed. Though she tried to hide it for Helena's sake, he could see that she was furious - more angry than he'd ever seen her. Even more worrisome to him was that Helena seemed uncharacteristically subdued, clinging to her mother.

"What happened?" He asked, taking Helena who wrapped her arms around his neck.

"We were right about him," was all Selina could spit out as she climbed into the SUV. The ride home was quiet with Bruce trying to distract Helena with cheery talk. Selina stared out the window, her fist clenched on her lap.

Much later, after Helena had fallen into a troubled sleep, Selina vented her anger and frustration.

"We were all there... the whole family and Helena and me and he comes in and I could tell from Shanti's face that something was very wrong. So I thought if we stayed, he wouldn't do anything but he was drunk. Isha tried to get me to leave but I...I just couldn't." Selina's fist clenched as she began pacing the small room.

Bruce waited as she took a few calming breaths before she continued.

"He dragged Shanti into the other room," she said, her voice flat. "We could hear him yelling at her. Then... then, the unmistakable sound of him striking her. Bruce, everything in me is screaming to get up and kick the ever loving shit out of that bastard but Isha's pleading with me to just leave because I'll only make things worse. But sweet Rishi, who tries so hard to be the man of the house when he's father's away, is holding my arm wanting me to stay."

She sat back down next to him, he took her hand as she met his eyes.

"So I just sat there, holding Helena - who definitely knew something terrible was happening - feeling like the worst mother ever as I listen to Murad slap his pregnant wife around. Then I look at Shanti's kids and feel horrible for wanting to spare my privileged kid the reality of their lives."

"Oh, Bruce, they were all looking so scared. I asked Isha if money would make him go away so I gave Rishi the little cash I had to give to his father. That seemed to satisfy him so he left. I can't believe I paid off that asshole!"

She gave Bruce a helpless look.
"It's killing me that I didn't go in there and show him a woman who knows how to fight back. God, I can't believe I just sat there."

"You did the right thing, Selina," Bruce said. "They have to live with him. It would've made things much worse."

"Their lives would be better if he was dead."

Bruce looked at her sharply. "What are you saying?"

She shrugged, looking away.

"Selina, he is those kids' father."

"He's just the sperm donor!" Selina jumped up to resume her furious pacing. "He's not a father! All he contributes to that family is fear! Bruce, believe me, some kids are better off without a person like that in their lives."

"You don't get to make that decision."

"Why not? You seemed to be pretty okay with making decisions for the good people of Gotham."

"I never murdered anyone!"

"You say that like it's a bad thing," Selina said, with angry flippancy.

"You're kidding, right?"

She crossed her arms and regarded him steadily. Her gaze never wavering from his.

"How are you going to do it, Selina?" Bruce went to her, so very aware that they both had different methods of handling difficult problems. "Shoot him? Stab him?"

"I would think you would jump at the chance to take care of a person who terrorizes those who are weaker than him. A vicious bully is what he is and I think we both know how to deal with that sort!"

"So, you'll kill him and I'll Just help you dump the body somewhere?"

She looked away.

Sensing her uncertainty, Bruce pressed further. "Don't expect me to help. This is one thing I will not do for you."

"Fine, I can take care of it on my own." Selina turned away but he caught her arm, turning her back to face him.

"No, Selina, we figure this out."

"I'm sure the local police will be all over this! Once they arrest and imprison him, we'll just dump Isha and Shanti and the kids at one of the many women's shelters I've seen around then we can hightail it back to Gotham where we can focus on saving more worthy people."

"Don't!" Bruce said, his frustration at the situation boiling into anger at her. "These family dynamics are complicated, we'll have to find a local attorney and-"
"Bruce, this is the poverty you wish to fight! It's messy and complicated and there are no easy answers but we have to act. We have to help," Selina trailed off, her earlier vehemence fading. "Don't you see, Bruce? Shanti is reliving her mother's life. It doesn't end. Shanti's daughters will probably end up with men like that thinking that is normal. Her sons will beat their wives. It needs to stop!"

"I understand that, Selina. Really, I do."

She rubbed his arm. "It's a shitty situation, Bruce. But we knew that."

They sat together in silence, feeling helpless. A feeling very much hated by the both of them.

"I don't expect you to kill him," Selina said, turning to him. "How about you just beat the shit out of him? Just once? I'd do it but I'm worried with his ingrained misogyny that he'd just take it out on her later. But you? You could really put the fear of God in him. Please?"

"How about I try talking to him?" Bruce asking, imagining a nonviolent way to deal with a violent man.

"Talking?" Selina smiled, her skepticism evident in her eyes. "You?"

"I can be a persuasive talker."

The next morning, Bruce went to the house to give the man a good talking to. Isha answered the door, averting her face and when Bruce saw the damage, his intention to talk vanished. Apparently, Shanti's husband hadn't been content with taking out his anger on his wife and included his mother-in-law. The worst had obviously been rendered after Selena had left because there was no way she would not violently react to the damage that had been inflicted to Shanti and Isha.

Bruce asked after the children, Isha assured him they were fine. Seemingly calm, he looked them over, making sure there were no broken bones. After assuring himself that no further medical attention was needed, he asked Isha where to find her son-in-law. Without hesitation, she told him.

Bruce found the man at a nearby street in a small shop that doubled as something resembling a bar. He surveyed the dark room, noting that it was a very sorry place indeed. After confirming that the few men milling about posed no danger, Bruce approached Murad. Murad looked up, surprised, then smiled when he recognized Bruce. Gesturing for Bruce to join him for a drink, Murad started to wave to the bartender but Bruce grabbed his arm, wrenching it behind his back. Murad cried out in pain. The sound was a satisfying one. After fixing a steady glare at the other patrons to warn them from interfering, Bruce began hitting him. Bare fisted, he pummeled him.

"Never again!" He hissed, hitting him until the man sagged to the floor. Bruce let go of his arm, letting him fall. He crouched down next to him so the Murad would better hear him. "You hit your wife, Isha, or any of your kids, I will come back and you won't like what I do to you then."

As he left, Bruce took a dishtowel from the horrified bartender, wiping the blood off his hands. "Sell him another drink and I'll come back and do the same to you. Got it?"

"Happy?" Bruce asked Selina later as she cleaned his knuckles.

"Yes," she smiled, and kissed him. "But he'll do it again."

"I know." Bruce sighed. "When we go back to Gotham, we should take them with us…"

"Take?" Selina asked, her brow raising slightly. "Maybe we should ask if that's what they want to
do. We can't bend them to our will just because it would make us feel better."

The next few weeks were spent in secret talks with Isha and Shanti as they considered leaving India and Murad. Trusting that Bruce and Selina would not abandon them in a new country, Isha was on board with the idea. Shanti, not so much until one night Murad got wind of what was happening and beat Shanti so badly she miscarried. At six months, it was painful and life threatening for her. If not for Bruce's paying for better medical care, she would not have survived.

Within a week, Murad disappeared.

"Is he coming back?" Murad's eldest son, Rishi, asked.

"No," Bruce answered, feeling the first twinge of regret as he looked into the eyes of the boy who would probably never see his father again. The freighter that Bruce had thrown Murad on was bound for Rio and by the time Murad ever figured out how to get back to India, his family would be long gone.

The boy studied Bruce for a moment, before a relief flooded his features. "Good."

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**Gotham - The Present**

As soon as Bruce Wayne and John Blake left his apartment, Bobby spent the rest of the night calling old friends. Even though their once tight knit group had lost contact over the years, each friend expressed sadness to hear of Ollie's death. No one was particularly surprised at the news until they learned that he was murdered. The shocked responses were all the same: who would hurt Ollie?

With thoughts of Ollie and their shared past, the old craving gnawed at him. The sleepless night thinking about old times didn't help. It had been a long time since Bobby felt the compulsion that had once threatened to destroy him so strongly.

After the sun rose, he jogged to an early morning meeting needing the support that strangers like him could provide. The meeting helped and Bobby felt better when he returned home to spend the rest of the morning fielding calls as news of Ollie's passing spread. With each call, he asked if anyone had talked to Ollie, if anyone knew what he'd been up to and if anyone thought of anything, no matter how insignificant, to give him a call.

It was almost noon when he mustered the courage to go to the Quad. Since no cab drivers would venture so deep into the Narrows, Bobby walked. The Quad, as it was known on the street, was a haven for addicts and had been for years. For street people, the buildings were sacrosanct, the only rule was not to do anything that would attract the attention of the authorities.

The Quad consisted of a group of four buildings that was once an ambitious housing project that, over time, fell into disrepair until it was a vacant shell, forgotten by the city but not forgotten by the current squatters that haunted it like ghosts. A bystander passing by would have no idea that dozens of people existed within the crumbling walls.

Not wanting to go inside, Bobby lingered in the courtyard waiting for someone to emerge. He'd only been inside the big building once and that was enough.

"Is Toby around?" Bobby asked a woman who wandered outside.

She looked him over warily until she decided he was not a threat.
"Twenty?" She asked, hopefully.

Bobby nodded, passing her the money. "Tell him Bobby needs to see him."

As she disappeared inside, Bobby noticed a faded W that was etched in the stone near the entrance of the tallest building. Finding the cleanest bench in the courtyard, Bobby sat down hoping it wouldn't collapse under his weight.

It had five years since he set foot inside when he had accompanied Selina to find Ollie who'd gone on a bender. Toby was the one who had found Selina, telling her Ollie needed help and if Toby thought someone was in bad shape, that meant someone was likely going to die soon.

Selina, being familiar with the layout, led them to where Ollie was holed up. Bobby never asked how she knew which apartment Ollie would be in as there had to be hundreds in the quartet of buildings. As they made their way through the darkened halls to the fifth floor where few junkies expended the effort to climb the stairs, Bobby was struck by how wretched a place this was and if he wavered in his commitment to sobriety, one trick he would employ was to remember the bleak atmosphere.

They found Ollie, crouched in a corner. When he saw her, Ollie cried. Selina, accustomed to his behavior, calmly took him in her arms and held him, her hand smoothing back his filthy hair. He sobbed against her, holding her tightly, murmuring how sorry he was for everything. Such was the way with Ollie, he'd be relatively fine for a few months until he inexplicably crashed and burned.

Bobby's sponsor knew of a commune in New Mexico that might help so he and Selina hauled Ollie across the country. The commune, situated in the mountains near Taos, was like a sanctuary. Bobby, still finding his way in the world of sobriety, decided to stay with Ollie while Selina, having business in Gotham, returned home. A month after she left, when he couldn't take any more campfire songs, Bobby made plans to leave but just as he was about to board the train, there was a breaking news story that a maniac had taken over Gotham.

"Hey, Bobby!" Toby called out as he shuffled slowly across the courtyard. Toby was Ollie's best drug buddy and was the sort of person Ollie would have become if not for Selina and Daryl's frequent interventions. For whatever reason, those two always had his back. When one was away, it fell to the other to keep Ollie alive.

Toby looked, more or less, the same; too skinny, unwashed, and very jumpy. Not caring about the filth, Bobby hugged his old friend; the embrace heartfelt. He'd been through a lot with this guy.

"Still straight?" Toby asked, taking the pack of cigarettes Bobby had brought for him.

Bobby laughed, knowing Toby wasn't referring to his sexuality. "Almost gone a decade."

"That's good, man! So you're not here for a taste then?"

Bobby shook his head. "I got news that I didn't want you to hear through the vine." He indicated they should sit. "It's about Ollie."

Toby's reaction to the news was exactly what Bobby expected. Not good. The two had been friends since they were teens. Bobby patted his back as Toby sobbed.

"He's my boy," Toby said later. "Why'd someone do that to him?"

"I don't know. I was hoping you might have an idea what he was up to."
"I don't know what he was doing but he sure as hell was spooked about something," Toby said, wiping his eyes. "I mean more scared than usual but also angry. I never really saw him mad so it made an impression."

"Did he say why?"

"I think so," Toby said, looking off trying to remember.

"I'm going on about how some people treat us like we're nothing." Toby tried to light his cigarette, his shaking hands unable to navigate the flame to the tip.

"Us?" Bobby asked as he took the lighter.

"You know...street people," Toby said, taking a deep drag. "Nobodies."

"Blonde girl?"

"Yeah. He and Selina were checking with shelters around town looking for her."

"Why? Who is she?"

Toby shrugged. "Ollie just said she's one of us. He got that look in his eye. You know the one he got before he went off on one of his things."

"Yeah, I know it," Bobby said.

Toby looked to the building, his hands shaking as he wiped them on his pants to calm his fidgeting legs. Bobby knew he'd gotten all he would from Toby.

"Where is he?" Toby asked.

"The morgue, I guess."

"I'm going to put together a thing for him."

"That's good, Toby. He'd like that."

"Ollie was always afraid of dying alone and forgotten," Toby said, tears rolling down his cheeks. "Like he never existed at all."

Bobby nodded, understanding perfectly the feeling. His time living on the streets gave him plenty of opportunities to mull over his insignificant place in a crowded and cold city. He passed Toby a twenty which didn't bring out Toby's customary pleased reaction. Toby stared at the bill, shaking his head, but he pocketed it. With a last lingering embrace, Toby retreated back inside the Quad.

Bobby hurried home, eager to get changed. For Selina, he donned his new Tom Ford pullover and trousers. Selina was the one who got him out of jeans and flannel, telling him that if you looked good, dressed nice, and acted like you belonged, you could fit in anywhere. Her advice kept them from starving when they had fled for a new life in Vegas. One of their first stops was Neiman's where Selina shoppedlifted them proper outfits. The clothes were transformative for them both. Shedding their faded and torn jeans and threadbare T-shirts and donning fashionable, flattering
clothes almost made them feel like they were regular people. Almost.

Even as young as they had been, no one questioned their presence as they ventured to hotels that were favored by business types to take advantage of the complimentary food and drinks. Selina was far bolder of the two. Using the excursions as research and with all the bravado of a young woman with nothing to lose, she brazenly introduced herself to businessmen and women, engaging them in extended conversations as she observed their mannerisms, how they talked, what they drank. She liked seeing how far she could get, talking about businesses she knew nothing about, about vacation spots she'd never heard of, making note of when her ruse was on the edge of exposure.

On his way to the hospital, Bobby stopped by a florist, picking up a bright bouquet of spring flowers. Bobby never thought flowers were all that threatening but the security guard outside Selina's hospital room seemed to think differently.

The expressionless man regarded the bouquet suspiciously as he spoke to someone through his com. He described Bobby and then waited a few moments for a response. As they waited, Bobby glanced around seeing another guard who watched the only other entrance to hospital unit.

"You may go in, Mr. Gibson."

"Please let Mr. Wayne know that I might have some information for him," Bobby said.

"Mr. Wayne will be here soon," the guard replied. "You can tell him then."

Seeing Selina was unsettling. The woman with the bruised face, laying so still was so far removed from the vibrant woman he knew all too well.

"I brought you flowers," he said to her, setting the bouquet on the tray table near the bed. "They're yellow and purple like that awful comforter you used to have. Remember that?"

He sat on the chair near her bed, feeling awkward. Helpless Selina was not something he had been prepared for. Selina was the strongest person he'd ever known. When they were in Vegas, he still had a habit to feed so he fell back to turning tricks but, unlike in Gotham, he had no pimp which was great for the money but not so great for the security. When one of his Johns got too rough with him, Selina could always be counted on to take care of the guy.

"Hey, Bobby!" DeeDee greeted, coming over to give him a quick hug. "It's been awhile."

"Yeah," Bobby said, returning her embrace. "This is not the way I'd thought I'd see you again."

"Guess not."

"Is she in a coma?"

"No," DeeDee said, pulling up another chair to sit beside him. "She's just getting herself together."

He didn't believe her. "Is her head okay?"

"Has it ever been?" DeeDee smiled. "Really, Bobby, she's going to be fine. She's been out for five days. She'll wake up when she's ready."

"That doesn't seem right."

"The body takes care of itself."
"What about the mind?" Bobby mused.

"That's up to her."

DeeDee's calmness comforted him. If she wasn't worried about Selina, then his friend would be okay. At least physically.

"Did you know who he was?" Bobby whispered, feeling guilty but dying to know what DeeDee knew.

"Yeah."

"Well? How does that happen?" Bobby asked. "What's she doing with a guy like that?"

"I think they met when she was robbing him."

"Duh," Bobby said, affecting an exaggerated expression. "But how does it go from that to having a baby and being all...together?"

DeeDee shrugged. "You know Selina's not big on talking about feelings,"

Bobby nodded.

"I thought they stuck together because of Helena," DeeDee said. "But after spending some time with him, I don't think that's it."

Bobby leaned closer.

DeeDee looked around to make sure no one was near enough to eavesdrop.

"I got here really early this morning, like six, and he was sleeping in here," she said, her voice low. "Well, not really sleeping just sitting there in the dark all brooding. I felt like I was intruding on an intimate moment."

"He does seem worried," Bobby said. "He and his friend are looking into who did this. I think he understands Selina's aversion to cops."

DeeDee nodded. "The nurses are fascinated by him. They say he's spent several nights here with her, holding her hand, just waiting for her to open her eyes."

"If I had that face to look at, I'd open mine!" Bobby joked.

"Have you seen them? The nurses?" DeeDee grinned. "I tell you night shift nurses don't usually pretty up this much when they're working."

Through the open door, they saw Bruce walk in accompanied by a man and a woman.

"Speaking of cops," Bobby said, able to identify the law even when they weren't dressed in uniform. "He'd been nabbed a few times in his hustling days. "They're only looking into it because of Wayne."

"Maybe," DeeDee replied. "Bruce does have a lot of influence."

"Bruce?" Bobby was impressed with her familiarity.

"Oh, we're tight now." DeeDee laughed. "We talked. He asked about the kids my job. He's very
"well mannered."

"Aren't all rich people 'well mannered'?"

"I'm mean he's not fake polite. He's..." DeeDee paused, searching for the right word. "He's... courteous. Like when he heard I was an RN, he asked me to sit in with him and the doctor this morning. He didn't have to do that."

"So he's nicer than her," Bobby said. "That's no surprise."

The woman detective carried a laptop case. Bruce gestured for the three of them to go into the adjoining waiting room.

"I'm going to see what they're looking at," Bobby said. "Maybe I can help."

In the waiting room, the three of them were standing around a table where the detective had set up the laptop. Bruce, the only one who noticed Bobby's entrance, stood aside so Bobby could see the screen.

When Ollie took a hit off the crack pipe, Bobby shook his head knowing Selina would have let him have it for that.

"I can't figure out why Selina would take Ollie along to something like this," Bobby commented when the video was over.

"Why do you say that?" The woman asked. "And, who are you?"

Bruce quickly made introductions. At the mention of the Commissioner, Bobby's eyes widened in surprise. Bruce's influence was indeed great.

"Because," Bobby said, answering Jessica's previous question. "It feels like he's playing the back-up role and one person you cannot rely on for back-up is Ollie. Especially when they are going to a drug dealer's house."

"What do you know about this guy?" Jessica asked, pointing to Mag Mike.

"I've heard of him, of course, but he and I move in different circles so I've never had the pleasure."

"Why would they be there?" Commissioner Gordon asked.

"I have no idea."

Jessica replayed the section of the video where a woman handed something to Selina. Bobby leaned in to get a better look.

"Do you know her?" Gordon looked at Bobby closely.

"No," Bobby lied.

Gordon, Jessica and Bruce all looked at him but Bobby maintained a blank expression. He only half paid attention as the three returned to talking about the case.

As soon as the Commissioner and Detective left, Bruce turned to him.

"Do you know her?" Bruce repeated Gordon's question.
"Yes," Bobby said.

"Why lie?"

"Old habits, Mr. Wayne."

"Bruce. Please," he said. "Guess Selina's not the only one who's not a fan of the police."

"I don't mean to be misleading but I don't want to get her in trouble," Bobby explained. "Cops showing up to her place of...employment could be bad for her."

"What does she do?"

"She's a stripper over at The Palace," Bobby said, and at Bruce's blank expression - of course the guy would not have heard of a place like the Palace. He clarified: "It's a real sleaze joint. It's not one of those fun strip clubs where the women are young and pretty. Palace women are older, strung out, hard living women whose best days, if they ever had any, are long behind them. And the men who frequent those places...Just...yuck."

"Ok, I get it," Bruce said. "I'll go see her tonight."

"She won't talk to you."

"I can be persuasive," Bruce said.

"I'm sure you can but I want to help find who killed Ollie. You might slide her some Bens and she'll tell you something but she won't give you anything good."

"Will she talk to you?"

"Probably. I haven't seen her in a while but we could try."

Bruce checked his watch. "I need to get home to Helena. How about I pick you up later? Say nine?"

"I'll be ready."

"Anderson said you had some information?"

"Anderson?"

Bruce tilted his head in the direction of the hallway. "The guard."

"I called around to Ollie's friends but no one knew anything. Except Toby who's might be a strung out junkie but he loved Ollie."

Bobby told Bruce what Toby had said about the woman Selina and Ollie were asking about.

"Do you know what shelters he was talking about?" Bruce asked.

"I think so," Bobby replied. "I'll go around and see what I can find."

"Thank you," Bruce said.

"I put out the word that if anyone knows anything to call. Trust me, if someone knows something, they'll reach out to me. Ollie had a lot of friends. We all feel the same way."
"What's that?" Bruce asked.

"That whoever did this to him needs to pay."
Gotham - The present

Nighttime in a bad area of Gotham; it was a very familiar feeling to Bruce. But instead of perching on top of a tall building using high tech surveillance gadgetry to watch over the city, he was street level, using the most low-tech of surveillance tools. His eyes took in every little detail of the city block - from the newly stained sidewalk in front of the strip club, to the dealers and hustlers ambling from one corner of the block to the other.

Once again, Selina’s Camaro blended perfectly with the neighborhood and drew no undue attention. Bruce, however, did attract attention. A small group of prostitutes kept eying him. Every few minutes, a different one would wander over to inquire if he was looking for a date. After the fourth such inquiry, the women hanging around the street corner seemed to get the message that he was not buying anything they had to sell.

Feeling their curious eyes upon him, Bruce settled back in the seat, waiting for John Blake and Selina’s friend, Bobby, to emerge from The Palace. He allowed Blake to take the lead in the questioning as keeping a low profile was preferable to all involved, including the woman they sought. Everyone else who had made an appearance in the security video found by Detective Massey had met a bad end. Or almost.

With his mind’s eye, Bruce replayed the few seconds where the man had held a gun to Selina’s head. Over and over, he saw the slight tilt of her chin as stared down the dealer, challenging him. She had put her life in that man’s hands. Why? Why hadn’t she kicked the gun away as Bruce knew she could easily do? Why the hell was she there? What was she playing at? His anger rose as the image of the gun swirled in his head.

It had also not escaped his attention that the incident had taken place a few short hours before his and Selina’s terrible fight. Now he understood why she’d been raw with him. On edge from the harrowing encounter and rattled from Bruce surprising her, Selina had felt backed into a corner. When cornered, she couldn’t help but fight like hell. For his part, if he had known then what he knew now, that Selina had been at a dangerous drug dealer’s house where one of said dealer’s men had pointed a loaded gun at her, Bruce would have been even more furious than he had been.

His phone vibrated. Perfect timing - his temper lightened as he looked at the photo Shanti texted
him. Helena was cozy in bed with Shanti’s two young children whose ages were on either side of Helena’s. His daughter’s excited, carefree grin was a balm to his dark mood. She was having a good time, forgetting about her mother’s absence. Shanti had been correct that a fun distraction was what she needed. Another photo followed, this one of Mr. Tibbles with a bright green scarf tied around his head, Helena leaning her face next to his as he licked her cheek. Bruce couldn’t help but smile as he stared at the happy photo. Until he remembered just how close Helena had come to losing her mother.

*Leave it to the police*, Alfred had advised. *You’re too close to this one*. But Alfred had not seen the video. Unbidden, the image of the gun to her head came back to Bruce, but this time, the trigger was pulled and Selina crumpled to the floor.

Bruce rubbed his eyes, forcing himself to not imagine Selina dead by gunshot. He returned his attention to the low rise building that housed The Palace. A name that in no way fit the atmosphere of the establishment. The place was an eyesore in every way imaginable and the clientele weren’t any better. It wasn’t the kind of place guys went to for bachelor parties, or for inane male bonding activities. It was...well, Bruce couldn’t figure out why anyone would frequent such a decrepit looking place.

A woman emerged onto the fire escape from a third floor window. Bruce hurriedly exited the Camaro, dodging the light traffic as he darted across the street. By the time the woman jumped down, he was there, blocking her exit out of the dark alley.

“Excuse me,” he called out.

She jumped in surprise. Seeing him, she slowly backed away, glancing behind her to figure out where to run.

Bruce then realized how it must look to her. A man, clearly hiding his face, standing between her and her only means of escape.

“Please,” he said softly, tilting his face so he didn’t seem so suspicious. He got a good look at her, she wasn’t the woman from video. “I’m looking for a woman who works here. I only want to ask her a few questions.”

“Roxanne ain’t stupid,” the woman said, edging back to the building. “She knows what’s going on.”

“Then she knows she’s in danger,” Bruce said. “Not from me. I can help her.”

“Maybe. Maybe not,” she scoffed, looking doubtful. “I don’t know where she is anyway.”

Her lie wasn’t very convincing. As Bruce reached into his jeans pocket, she stiffened, her eyes widening in fear. He held up a hand, hoping to reassure her, while he fished out some cash.

“Like I said, I can keep her safe. I know she’s in danger.” Bruce scribbled the number of his new burner phone on the hundred dollar bill. “Have her call me. The sooner the better.”

She took the bill, glanced at the number. “She split as soon as she heard about Mag Mike.”

“Was he a friend of hers?”

She gave him an incredulous look. “She was paid to go there.” Duh.

“Who paid her?” Bruce asked.
She hesitated, fear coming back into her eyes. She glanced back toward The Palace then shook her head and shrugged her shoulders.

“This guy bothering you, honey?” A female voice from behind Bruce called out.

Bruce turned around to see the small group of prostitutes behind him, blocking his way out of the alley.

“Yeah he is,” she said as she shot him a look before she stuffed the hundred in her bra. She scampered past him to stand behind the hookers.

“I don’t want any trouble…” Bruce began.

“Neither do we,” said the leader. “How about you get out of here?”

Gladly. Bruce could see past the women where Blake and Bobby were waiting by the car. Blake looked suspiciously like he was laughing.

“Bitches, this is not your side of the street!”

All of their attention turned to the man who emerged from the strip club’s back door. Even though it was night, he wore dark sunglasses with a black fedora pulled low on his forehead. He was thronged by two large henchman.

When the women saw who it was, they quickly retreated to their side of the street.

“What the fuck is goin’ on out here?” The man bellowed. “Sandy? Get your ass back in here. Drinks don’t serve themselves!”

“I’m not doing anything, Larry!” The woman now identified as Sandy called out, fear plain in her voice. “Just out for a smoke and this guy started bothering me.”

Larry turned his attention to Bruce. “You botherin’ one of my girls? That costs, you know.” As he spoke, he reached out to pull Sandy in front of him, he arm closed around her.

Now Bruce had been in a terrible mood for almost a week. Nothing would make him happier than to beat the everlasting shit out of this man. The impulse intensified as he noticed that Larry had ‘bitch slapper’ tattooed on the back of his hand. For that alone, he needed to have a boot to the face.

Before Bruce could do anything remotely satisfying, one of Larry’s guys whispered into Larry’s ear. Even though Bruce couldn’t see the man’s face clearly, it was apparent he was surprised.

“Yeah. He is, isn’t he?” Larry said, looking Bruce over. He laughed humorlessly. “Bruce fucking Wayne in my alley. Imagine that! It’s a real privilege and honor to have you here. Why don’t you come inside and we’ll have a drink?”

“No thanks,” Bruce said. He could sense John Blake standing behind him.

“Your friend’s been asking questions about one of my girls,” Larry said, nodding toward Blake. “Roxie’s not here but I got plenty for you two to choose from. My girls know how to obey a man. Them uppity bitches across the street - you don’t want that.”

Sandy’s scared eyes silently pleaded with Bruce to leave. He nodded to her, hoping she would contact her friend before her friend ended up dead like so many involved with this case.
“Thanks for the offer, Larry,” Bruce said, his voice dripping with condescension and derision. “Another time.”

As he and Blake walked away, John gave Larry and his goons a mocking wave. “What a sleaze! I’m going to figure out a way to run that guy out of town.”

They approached the car to find an excited Bobby. “I got something! Something real! A friend just called me and told me he saw Ollie and Selina a few weeks ago. They came in asking a bunch of questions. He knows what’s going on!”

It was approaching midnight when Bruce, Bobby and John Blake pulled up to a quiet, narrow building in South Point. The street was already lined with cars forcing them to park up the block. The neighborhood was quiet enough but one could sense there was life about, even at this late hour.

Blake was not unfamiliar with the area. While it wasn’t exactly crime infested, some of his investigations had taken him here on more than one occasion. The area was populated by shops, bars, and other businesses favored by people who chose to live on the fringe of society. Not exactly criminals but those that certainly liked to keep a low profile.

“So, this guy, Lax, he owns a bar around here?” Blake asked Bobby as they walked past another palm reading shop.

Bobby seemed more subdued than he had earlier in the day. John had spent his afternoon at the hospital with Bobby, DeeDee, and Jessica, getting a completely different picture of Selina. A picture that seemed to explain Bruce Wayne’s strong feelings for her. Blake had always held on to the belief that Selina was an unrepentant thief who almost certainly had a part to play in Bruce’s disappearance so many years ago so it was difficult to reconcile his perception of Selina to the woman who was so important to a man he regarded highly.

For her part, Jessica reluctantly agreed to not take part in the evening’s investigation. Bobby had assured her that answers would not be forthcoming if questions were posed by cops. Everyone associated with this case was the ‘don’t talk to cops’ type. And even though Blake had not been a cop for some time, Bobby said he still smelled like one. Whatever that meant. Jessica agreed but not before extracting a solemn oath from him to keep her in the loop.

“Oh yeah,” Bobby said. “Well...not really a bar but a club.”

“Like your club?” John asked.

“Um...no.” Bobby turned down a small alley then stopped in front of a side door. The alley was dark and would have been scary for anyone other than them.

He touched the doorbell just to the side of a thick steel door.

“So...guys...” Bobby said, as they waited, his tone indicating he was going to talk business. “Lax’s place really is...uh...different.”
“How different?” Blake asked. “Dangerous different?”

“No...just weird. It can be a little shocking but don’t worry, there’s no cameras and no one here has any interest in selling stories to tabloids.”

At that, Bruce raised a questioning brow.

A slot in the door opened to reveal a menacing pair of eyes, until honing in on Bobby.

“Bobby!” he greeted, friendlier than expected.

“Hey, Milo,” Bobby responded. “Lax is expecting us.”

The guy nodded, sliding the little door shut. They heard the sound of the steel door being unlocked then it swung open to reveal Milo in his leather and tattooed glory.

“Your friends know the rules?” Milo asked, casting an assessing look at Bruce and John as he motioned them into the small vestibule.

Bobby nodded. “They’re not interested in anything except seeing Lax.”

“Remember, fellas, no cameras or I’ll kick you out. No matter who you’re friends with.” Milo opened a second steel door, the steady beats of hardcore electronic music filled the small room.

Standing aside to let them pass, Milo gave each of them an amused grin, his gaze pausing on Bruce. “I guess I don’t have to worry about you taking photos, Mr. Bruce Wayne. Worry not, my rich friend. People don’t come here to get recognized. No one takes photos, people respect privacy here.”

Bobby led the way through the doorway. The music became louder as they descended a flight of stairs. Toward the bottom, the stairwell took on a bright red glow that only became brighter as they entered the club. When they reached the entrance, Bruce and John paused briefly to take in the sight. Bruce’s amused gaze met John’s. They were the only ones not wearing masks or leather. Everyone else from the customers to the bartenders were clad in leather or shiny black vinyl outfit with their faces hidden behind an assortment of masks, from ones just over the eyes to ones that covered the entire head.

The place was an assault on the senses. The electronicore music was brutally loud, the red lighting weirdly bright with a strobe effect, and smoke from both legal and illegal sources filled the air.

They walked deeper into the club where a few patrons steadily regarded them, giving John the a distinct feeling of outsidersness. Some of the people were leashed, led around like dogs. Others held whips as they stalked the room. One person was down on all fours acting as a coffee table for a group of people engaged in animated shouting conversation.

They soon reached the back of the club where a door cracked open. A hand quickly beckoned them to come inside. No sooner had Bruce closed the door behind them then a tall, thin man rushed to Bobby, embracing him tightly. Bruce and Blake hung back giving the men time and space to mourn their friend.

“It’s my fault! It’s all my fault!” Lax cried, after a few moments. His distress and tears were at odds with his physical appearance which would have caused many to cross the street to avoid him. His bald head was covered in tattoos that extended to his face which included numerous piercing. Blake suspected the man was not in his usual uniform, his grief over Oliver keeping his thin muscular body in an unthreatening green track suit. “I told them! Goddammit, I told them!”
It took him a few moments to get calm. His hands still shook as he lit his cigarette. He sat down in a chair in a quieter part of the room. “Oh, Jesus, man, I got them killed.”

“Selina’s not dead and unless you were in that room, none of this is your fault,” Bruce said, softly with kindness.

Lax looked up, seeming to realize that there were more people in the room than just him and Bobby. Bobby made introductions. Lax didn’t seem to comprehend who Bruce Wayne was.

“Lax,” Bruce said, pulling a chair to sit across from him. “Start from the beginning, please.”

After a couple of quick drags of his cigarette, Lax took a deep calming breath. “So Ollie calls to talk to me about pornographers.”

“When was that?”

Lax took another deep drag as he thought. “Maybe a month ago? He wanted to know about for hire guys. You know, guys that will do specialty stuff. Custom stuff. He’s also asking about private parties for men. Very exclusive stuff. I’m, you know, alarmed because…” He looks at Bobby. “…you know. But he won’t explain why so I give him a few names ask him if he’s staying clean but he wasn’t. I could tell.”

“What names did you give him?” Blake asks, as he pulls out a small notepad.

“Don’t bother. The names were unhelpful because a week after that he and Selina come in. Selina, who I don’t really know that well, kinda got into my face. She knew I wasn’t giving Ollie what he was really asking for but, man, why the hell would I? After everything he’s been through? I’m not throwing him to the wolves.”

He and Bobby held a look.

“So Selina demanded to know who to go to for the real ultra hardcore stuff. Illegal stuff. Stuff that could get you arrested and thrown in prison. She was very persuasive. I warned her that there’s bad fucked up shit out there, man, you don’t jump in there without it polluting you.”

“What did she say to that?” Bruce asked.

“She said that I had no idea how bad some things were. The way she looked at me...I don’t know her too good but I could tell she was unnerved. I mean she was edgy as hell and Ollie seemed more shook than usual but they were determined. They were on a mission and so I helped them.”

“Names?” John prodded.

“Mag Mike...he’s the most connected of pornographers. He’s got the setup and the equipment but I heard he’s more into the drug scene. More money.”

“And?”

“Only one other sleaze I could think of. Larry Pond who runs The Palace. Jesus, that guy’s a creep. I mean I know a lot of creeps but him? A whole other level.”

“I think we had the pleasure of meeting him earlier,” Bruce said. “Charming tattoos on his hand?”

“Bitch slapper? Yeah, that’s him.”

“Looks like we need to pay another visit to that asshole,” Blake commented, not at all liking where
this investigation was going. He preferred going after drug dealers or the organized crime that was encroaching back into Gotham. He handed the list of addresses to Lax. “This your handwriting?”

“Yeah.”

“I visited each and every one of these addresses and there’s nothing remarkable there. What’s the significance?”

“Because nothing happens there during the day. My sources tell me it doesn’t really get going on until well after dark. The Market, as they call it, moves around between those addresses.”

“The Market?”

“Look,” Lax said. “I like deviant as much as the next guy but consensual deviant. Things between two adults is great and, obviously, I don’t judge anyone’s proclivities. My place? It’s weird and hardcore as hell but everyone wants to be here. It may seem twisted but no one’s hurting anyone. Yeah, there’s whips and stuff but there’s no torture. People are here to have a good time, live out their fantasies, be with people who have the same kinks. It’s all cool, you know?”

He took a few drags of his cigarette.

“But then you get...well, you get the very dark side of the sex trade. These are off the grid places. Horrible, sadistic shit you don’t even want to know exists. That is what The Market peddles in. I told them not to go to these places, but they insisted.”

“Did they ask you about a young woman?” Bobby asked.

“No, but they did ask about this,” Lax went over to his desk, rifled around under he found a drawing that he handed to Bruce. “Ollie sketched this.”

The drawing showed several views of an ominous looking full head dark red, almost black, leather mask. The bigger drawing revealed the front view showing a small zippered opening for the mouth, two small eye holes, and two tiny slits for the nose. The smaller drawing showed the back view, only a long zipper. The side views showed a design stitched in black.

“Where did he see this?”

“I don’t know but it freaked him out. He asked me to look into who may have made it.”

“Did you find out anything?” Bruce asked.

“Oh, yeah. As you can tell, I have a lot of resources into the world of bondage wear. The design here is a Chimera. From what I can tell it’s Italian. Not cheap, man, not cheap at all. That’s as far as I’ve gotten. It’s tough getting info from people who don’t know me. Someone this good won’t give customer info for no good reason.”

“Mind if we take this?” Bruce asked.

“Yeah, go ahead but I’d like it back. Because, you know, the last thing he drew for me. I know it’s morbid but...”

Bobby patted his arm. “No need to explain.”

“Do you think The Market’s open now?” Blake asked.

“I don’t know why it wouldn’t be. Don’t know where they are tonight but one of those addresses
should do the trick.”

“Up for it?” Blake asked Bobby. He already knew Bruce was chomping at the bit to get over there.

“You ever been?” Bobby asked Lax.

“Nah. I’m a fan of off the grid sex shops but my sense is that The Market is a pretty horrific place.”

Bobby looked at Blake then Bruce, clearly not wanting to go but if he could do something, anything, to help find who killed Ollie, he had to do it. “If Ollie had to go, I’m in.”

“Ollie was a monumental fuck up,” Lax said. “But he was the kind of guy who’d do anything for his friends. I’ll go, too. Besides, I’m not sure they’d let any of you in.”

The men split up to search the addresses on the list. Before Lax and Bobby took off on Lax’s motorcycle, Lax told them not to go in without him as he was almost positive Bruce and John would be turned away.

“So what should we focus on? The woman in the picture? Pornographers? What?” John asked as they drove to the first of the addresses they would check out.

“We ask about a woman asking questions. I doubt many women go to those kind of places at all.”

“So someone should remember her,” Blake commented.

“Yeah.” Bruce replied absently. Selina’s erratic behavior in the last few months was starting to make sense. If she had descended into Gotham’s darkness, exploring the illicit sex trade, it was no wonder she had zero interest in him. Their alienation hadn’t been just emotional, the physical estrangement had been bewildering and, Bruce conceded, her rejection had stung which further exacerbated the increasing tension. For the millionth time, he wondered why hadn’t she told him about all this?

John’s phone buzzed with a text notification. “They found it, 17th street,” he told Bruce who then made a quick, illegal u-turn in the middle of the empty street.

He parked the car some distance away, not wanting anyone to notice the vehicle. He and John walked the few blocks to the back entrance of an old office building. There were a few men loitering in the shadows. If one was driving by, the men would not be noticed, but Bruce certainly noticed them. Noticed the outline of a gun under their coats. His dread increased.

After noticing Bruce and John’s arrival, Lax and Bobby approached the guards. Lax did the talking and whatever he said worked, as one of the men beckoned to them to follow him inside. They walked through a maze of concrete hallways, then down a flight of stairs until they reached another guard standing watch in front of a locked door. As they neared, they heard a knock from the other side of the door. The guard opened the door to let a man out. The man avoided looking at them, as he tightened his hold onto whatever he kept under his coat.
The guard nodded at them to go in then locked the door behind them. They found themselves in a large room which gave the impression that it was usually empty except for this night when it was filled with about a dozen or so vendors sitting at makeshift tables selling their wares. The lighting was drab, the only sounds in the room were the turning of pages and the quiet shuffling of footsteps. It was one of the most depressing rooms Bruce had been in.

Bruce took the lead, approaching the vendor nearest to the door. On the square folding table, he took in the selection of videos, dvds, books and magazines and thought of Rha’s Al Ghul, remembering their first meeting. At this moment, he would love to see what Rha’s would do with this crowd. He shook off his memories and addressed the small man who regarded him with boredom.

“What’s your pleasure, mister?”

Bruce refused to look back down to what was being sold. He held up a fifty.

“A woman and man were in here a few weeks ago asking questions. Remember them?”

“Maybe,” the man said, reaching for the bill.

Bruce held it out of reach.

“They was looking for exotic stuff.”

“Like what?”

Bruce could see the man trying to think of an answer that would get him that fifty. He knew nothing.

They moved on to the next table. When Bobby got a look at what was being sold, he shook his head and went to wait by the door. With a grimace, Lax followed him.

Bruce and John shared a look. Both wanting to get out of the hellhole they’d found themselves in. Seemy and vile, this place was an aspect of Gotham Bruce couldn’t believe he hadn’t been familiar with. It hadn’t entered his mind to look into something like this, that a place such as this even existed in his city.

They continued questioning the various vendors. No one remembered her until one woman knitting a hat remembered them both.

“Yeah” she said, pocketing the fifty, “They were asking if I knew a girl from a photo. Blonde girl.”

“Do you?”

“Never saw her before. She looked like she may have been one of the girls Pond picks up at the bus station.”

“What do you mean?” Bruce asked, adding another fifty to the one he offered.

“Larry from The Palace is known to pick up his girls from the station. He’s sends a roper out to find the pretty runaways who have nowhere to go. She looks like she may be one of those.”

“Anything else?”

“Yeah,” she said, waiting for more money. Bruce presented another fifty. “There was a real ruckus
at Ernie’s stand. The man who was with your woman became very angry at something then ran out. I think they shot their way out. I couldn’t see clearly but it was a big scene. We don’t get too many of those over here.”

“Is Ernie here?” John asked.

She nodded. Bruce hated funding this vile woman who sold things that nauseated him to his core but he needed the information. Besides, she would be going down real soon.

She pointed to a stand that they had already visited. The stand was now empty.

He presented two hundred dollar bills. “Back door?”

“Over there,” she said, nodding her head in the direction. Sensing that the interview was over, she sat back down resuming her knitting.

John texted Bobby to get Lax out while distracting the guards and meet them at the street. He and Bruce waited as Lax picked a realish looking fight with Bobby which drew the attention of the guards as they escorted both men out.

Bruce and John exited through the back door unnoticed by anyone except the knitting woman.

They found themselves back in the maze of concrete corridors. No trail to follow and no way back inside. The back door had automatically locked and nothing other than brute force would get it open again. Ten minutes later, they made their way back up to the door they had first entered.

Bobby and Lax were waiting for them by Lax’s motorcycle. “What did you learn?”

“That scum Larry’s name came up again,” John said. “We should pay him another visit tonight.” He looked at his watch. “This morning,” he corrected.

“Hey, Lax,” Bruce said. “Those guards know you? Anyone there know you?”

Lax shook his head. “Nope.”

“Good,” he said, giving John a look.

John nodded. “I’m calling it in now.” He walked off to make a call.

“Who’s he calling?” Bobby asked.

“His friends at the police department,” Bruce replied. “That place is getting shut down tonight.”

“Yeah, so I don’t think I want to be here for that, ok?” Lax said, sliding on his helmet. “Let me know what’s going on, would you, Bobby?”

“Absolutely,” Bobby answered. “I’ll also let you know when we set up a memorial service for him. I want to wait for Selina before getting that going.”

After Lax sped off, the three men walked back toward the car. As they passed an alley, they were met by a group of men who indicated with their guns that Bruce, John, and Bobby should proceed directly into the dark alley.

“It’s okay, Bobby,” Bruce assured him, not feeling the slightest fear of the men. He only wanted answers and if he got to punch his way to answers, so much the better.
His eyes met John’s. They were in perfect agreement.

The leader of the group stepped forward.

“Ernie, I presume,” Bruce said as he unobtrusively took count of the number of men and guns. “We were looking for you.”

“So, I heard you were looking for that bitch that stole my son.”

“Excuse me?” Bruce couldn’t help but be surprised.

Ernie gestured for the biggest of his guys to stand close to Bruce to intimidate him. When the man glared down at Bruce, Ernie said: “That stupid bitch and that fucking dipshit stole my boy! Now, where are they so I can get him back. He’s probably really scared.”

Bruce turned his attention from the very large man standing in front of him to Ernie. “Did you call the police?”

“Uh, not yet. We was just about to when you came in.”

“Well, let’s call them right now, shall we?” Bruce said, reaching into his pocket.

“Hey now,” the large man said, taking a step back. “Easy there, let’s see your gun.”

Bruce smiled, “Don’t have one. Never had the need.”

The large man didn’t see the punch coming. A quick jab to the windpipe and the man dropped his gun. Holding his throat he backed up knocking another guy off balance. John took care of the other two while Bobby grabbed the guns that fell to the ground. It was over in less than ten seconds.

Bruce walked over to Ernie who turned and ran as fast as he could. Bruce thought of giving chase but realized the man had no information worth the effort.

“Can we get our guns back?” One of them sheepishly asked.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” John said. “Scram, you worthless idiots!”

Watching the last one run around the corner and out of sight, Bobby said, “We should go before they come back. What do I do with these?” He held out the guns he had collected.

“I’ll take them,” John said, stuffing them in his pockets and in the waistband of his jeans. “I know a good way to get rid of them.”

They hurried back to their car only to find it gone.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” John said again, looking around to confirm they were in the right spot.

Bruce stared at the spot wondering what else was going to happen. His temper simmered below the surface.

“I saw someone take your car,” a quiet voice called out from behind a dumpster.

“Why didn’t you do anything about it?” John asked.

A young man emerged from his hiding spot. Clearly he was not capable of fighting off car thieves.
He was thin and cagey, more suited for hiding than fighting.

He approached them, standing closest to Bobby who seemed the least threatening.

“That kid Ernie’s talking about is not his son. Know what I mean?”

Bobby nodded. “Yeah. Do you know what happened?”

The young man was fearful, looking around trying to see if anyone was watching him. “It was cool what they did. Them two run out of there, the guying holding that kid like a hero. It was cool as shit. But I thought the woman got shot. Did she?”

“No,” Bruce said. “There was a gunfight?”

“Yeah, she was shooting, they were shooting. It was crazy. Never seen anything like that before.”

“When was this?”

“Like a week ago?” He looked around again. “I have to go, can’t be seen talking to you. But it was real good them saved that kid. They did a real good thing for sure. Wish someone had been there for me like that…”

He starts off but is stopped by Bobby.

“You don’t have to do this,” Bobby said. “I got a place, ‘The Sly Dog.’ It’s a legitimate place. You come by and I’ve got a job for you. A real job so you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.”

Bruce looks him in the eye as he gives him cash. “Use it for a fresh start. Take him up on his offer, you can come with us now if you want.”

The young man took the money. “I got people I can’t just abandon but I’ll think about it.”

He walked away then stopped. “Hey, did they find anything out about that girl?”

“What do you know about that?” John asked.

“Just that they were trying to find out if anyone knew anything about her,” he said. Then with a quick wave, he disappeared into the shadows.

Bobby watched the kid disappear feeling depressed. The young man was so familiar. He was him. He was Ollie. He hoped like hell he would take the lifeline offered to him.

“I’ll call an Uber,” he said. “Though I’m not sure anyone will come around here this time of night.”

“Forget it,” John said. “The cops are on the way and I’ve arranged for a friend to pick us up.”

Bruce looked at him questioningly.
“Jess,” John said with a shrug.

“Jesus, I can’t believe someone stole Selina’s Camaro,” Bobby said. “She’s gonna be so pissed! She’s had that car forever. Got it from her granny.”

“A grandmother had that car?” Bruce asked.

“Yeah, weird, huh? It used to be a total wreck but Selina had a mechanic boyfriend that was more than happy to fix it up with her.” Bobby remembered who he was talking to. “Uh, sorry.”

Bruce gave a gesture indicating he didn’t care about stories of old boyfriends.

“We drove across country in that thing. Twice. That was our Vegas car and she treated us well. Spent a few nights in it. As great a car as it is, I have to confess it’s not the most comfortable to sleep in.”

“I bet not,” John remarked. “Looks like there’s a crap all night diner not too far off. Let’s wait for Jess there. I need coffee.”

The three men headed to the diner. Bruce asked Bobby about living in Vegas with Selina.

“She speaks of living there fondly.”

“Yeah, it was great. I’m learning my thing. She’s learning hers. She was the best roommate I ever had until she got popped.”

Again with the oversharing, Bobby cursed at himself.

“Don’t worry, Bobby,” John said. “Her history is not unknown to us.”

“Whatever you saw in a file, that doesn’t paint the right picture of her. She never took from someone that didn’t deserve it. Never, never from someone who was regular working types. She beat up a few johns that gave me trouble. Yeah, Vegas was a good time. And she was fun, you know, but there was definitely a dangerous edge to her. She was fearless.”

“Still is,” Bruce said.

“Always,” Bobby replied. “She wouldn’t have gotten popped if she hadn’t been working with a bunch of jerks. She was working with a crew, they got caught. Selina was the only one who kept her mouth shut which earned her a year in prison. When she got out, rather than report to a PO, she hightailed it out of there. Went to Detroit, I think. Never worked with a crew again.”

They soon reached the diner finding it surprisingly busy for three a.m. A tired waitress led them to a booth in the back. They sank into the red booth and ordered coffee that turned out to be quite good.

“What do you think they did with the boy?” Blake asked.

Bruce shrugged. “ Took him someplace safe. Maybe back to his parents?”

“Sometimes parents aren’t the safest place to be,” Bobby said which earned two confounded looks from John and Bruce. It took him a moment to remember that Bruce had been orphaned at a young age. “There’s a guy that takes in kids like that. It’s a shelter but not public. He doesn’t want any attention because the pimps will try to get the kids back.”

“How does he do that? I mean, how does he afford to do that?” Bruce asked.
“Man, he does it on his own. He works his job, and just does it. I give him what I can as do others who know about him. He’s a goddamn bona fide hero is what he is. You need someone to give your money to, he’s a good candidate.”

“I’ll look into that,” Bruce said and Bobby knew he would.

They fell quiet again. The events of the evening zapping away the effort it took to make light conversation.

“I can’t believe Ollie didn’t have a nervous breakdown in that place,” Bobby said before thinking. He hadn’t meant to keep talking about the past but that awful place dredged bad memories. Memories he had thought had no more power over him.

Bruce and John regarded him steadily, interested in what he had to say.

“Ollie and I met very young,” he explained. “We had the same sadistic pimp and when that pimp...got killed. We were on our own but still turning tricks to feed a habit. It was not a good time in my life.”

Bobby looked up expecting to see judgement on Bruce Wayne’s face but he only found compassion.

“As bad as it was for me it was worse for Ollie. I had parents that were determined to beat the gay out of me so I ran away from home at seventeen. Thinking I would become an actor or a dancer or something like that, I made my way to Gotham. It doesn’t take long for people like Larry Pond to find you. They prey on these kids, kids running away from home who are vulnerable and scared. Damaged. I know because fifteen years ago that was me. But Ollie…”

He looked away, his gaze on the window. Only the reflection from the inside was visible.

“Ollie grew up with Selina and Darryl, right?” Bruce asked, prodding for more information. “Do you know Darryl?”

“Yeah, we’re not great friends or anything but, back in the day, we knew each other. Because of Ollie. He would help out Ollie when he could which also meant helping me out.”

Bobby took a sip of his coffee. “Darryl and Selina were super protective of Ollie when they were growing up but there’s only so much kids can do. Ollie’s parents were junkies. Hardcore junkies. And Ollie was...well, Ollie was a beautiful little boy. Selina said he looked like an angel. Blonde curly hair, blue eyes. A kid like that should not have parents like he had.”

“Christ,” John muttered, shaking his head. “I don’t understand how a person could do that to any kid, let alone their own.”

“There’s evil in this world, that’s for certain,” Bruce said. “I think Selina and Ollie were chasing that evil. After hearing about his history, I can’t imagine what it would take for Ollie to dip his toe back in that world but he did. It had to have been for a good goddamn reason.”

A pair of headlights penetrated the window.

“Jessie’s here,” John said.

“How do you know Detective Massey?” Bobby asked.

“The police academy,” Blake answered. “There’s a group of us that have kept close since we were
Bobby nodded. Bane’s occupation of Gotham had not been kind to police officers. Bobby, never a fan of the police, even felt sorry for them during that time.

“So you and her?” Bobby asked.

“It’s not like that.” Blake shook his head, looking embarrassed. “She doesn’t like cops.”

“You’re not a cop,” Bruce reminded him.

“Yeah, tell that to her,” John said, rising as Jess approached the table.

“You boys been busy, I see,” Jess sat down in the empty spot next to Bruce. “I heard there was a helluva raid on an underground sex operation. That was you?”

“Yeah,” John said. “You should thank me to eternity for not bringing you to that shithole.”

“That bad?”

“Worse. I want to go home and take a shower in bleach.”

“Did you learn anything helpful? About Ms. Kyle?”

“Only that she and Ollie were gathering information about the woman,” Bruce said. “After seeing the kind of things that were sold at that place, I’m worried for her.”

“What do you mean?”

“Jess, it was hardcore secret vile stuff,” John said. “From what I could tell from the few covers I looked at, the actresses don’t seem exactly consenting, if you know what I mean.”

“Rape films? That could be staged.”

“I don’t know,” Bobby said. “After being in that place, seeing the people who were there, there’s just something bad going on.”

Jess nodded. “What do we do next? How do we help find her? Between the woman in the picture and the stripper on the video, I get the feeling they need to be found sooner rather than later.”

“We have a lead we’re going to follow up on later tonight,” Bruce said. “We’ll let you know if anything pans out.”

“I have news of my own,” Jess said.

“Anything about Selina?” Bruce asked, alarmed.

“A few hours ago, hospital security reported someone skulking around the hospital. I checked with your security guys, Mr. Wayne, but they’re focused on her room and didn’t observe outside activity. The hospital security gave chase but didn’t catch the man. In the stairwell, outside of Ms. Kyle’s floor, they found some flowers with Ms. Kyle’s name on it.”

The waitress brought her coffee and refilled the other cups. Jess nodded thanks then continued.

“Since flower delivery companies don’t usually operate in the middle of the night, it was suspicious.”
She sipped her coffee, smiling slightly in appreciation. “Even more suspicious was that the flowers appear to have been lifted from a cemetery.”

“A cemetery. Like funeral flowers?” Bruce asked.

“Exactly,” Jess replied. “So I’m thinking it’s a message?”

“ Weird message to send when you already sent a hitman...” John said. “Excuse me, hitwoman to do the job.”

“Yeah,” Jess said. “That makes no sense.”

“Maybe since no flower shops are open in the middle of the night, someone had to improvise,” Bruce said. “They probably weren’t expecting a security detail.”

A loud unfamiliar ring tone interrupted them. It took a moment for Bruce to remember his new burner phone.

“Yes?” he answered.

Everyone waited in silence, watching him as he listened to the caller. We’ll be there in twenty minutes...Alone, yes....Yes, I’ve got cash.”

He ended the call.

“We need to go. Now.” He tossed a fifty on the table. “Detective, if we could trouble you for a ride?”

“Of course, but I should interview her.”

“She only agreed to talk to me. She sounded scared so I’m worried she’ll run if anyone else shows up to the meeting. Though, John, I want you for back-up in case she does run.”

Bruce and John walked off, discussing their strategy.

“They tell me everything I need to know?” Jess asked Bobby as they followed behind.

“Yes, everything you need to know,” he said with a look that indicated there was more that he couldn’t tell her. He’d spent the afternoon with Massey, liked her more than he thought he would like a cop. She seemed to sincerely care about Ollie and that meant a lot to him. “We need to find that woman in Selina’s photo.”

He opened the door for her, remembering another crucial bit of information. “They’re also looking into someone who makes illicit pornography. Someone who may make private movies only to be viewed by a very select few.”

“God, this case is gross.”

She didn’t even know that half of it.
On her way to taking Bobby home, Jessica dropped off Bruce and John near the appointed place. They were a few minutes early, enough time for John to get in position at the other end of the alley to keep Roxanne from running off before they got all the information they needed from her.

She was, Blake thought, someone who might have actual helpful information instead of providing more questions. Roxanne had given Selina that address that led her and Ollie down that fateful path. She probably had been sent to hang out at Mag Mike’s just waiting for Selina to show up. Someone knew the path Selina would follow and had trapped her perfectly.

From his hiding place, John studied Bruce who paced the alley waiting for Roxanne to show. Bruce kept himself together pretty well but John suspected the man was boiling below the surface. As for Ms. Kyle, the more John learned about her the more he understood what Wayne saw in her. He feared for her, something told him someone with power and influence wanted her dead.

As he waited, he stretched relieving his tired muscles. He was used to the late nights. Bruce not so much but the man did nothing to let on that he probably hadn’t slept in twenty four hours. John grinned, remembered Alfred’s words to him before he left to take the late night shift of sitting by Selina’s bedside.

“Would you mind terribly getting Master Wayne home at a decent hour?” He had politely requested of John. Somehow John suspected that 5 a.m. was not what Alfred had had in mind.

A woman walked quickly past him. She looked behind her as if to make sure she wasn’t followed. She didn’t see him as he quietly followed her. His plan was to stay in the shadows but close enough so she wouldn’t run off.

“I know who you are,” she said to Bruce. “I bet people would be interested to know the kind of places Mr. Bruce Wayne likes to go. The kind of women he keeps company with.”

John rolled his eyes. Lady, he thought, you are all kind of stupid.

“Are you here to blackmail me?” Bruce asked. “I thought you were going to give me information. Believe me, giving me information is the better deal for you.”

“Yeah, okay, I was at Mag Mike’s. I saw her there. Her and her boyfriend.”

“You gave her something?”

At that, she was surprised. She backed up. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I was there, I saw her. What else do you want to know?”

“I want to know,” Bruce said, taking a few steps closer to her. “Why you gave her this piece of paper with this address?” He held up the scrap of paper with 352 Riverside scrawled in girlish handwriting.

Again, she looked behind her. John knows she’s about to run so he steps out from the shadows. He holds his hands up. “We’re not going to hurt you. We only want to know who gave you that address.”

“Nobody did!”

Since his time away from the force, John had picked up a few habits that were not allowed for police officers but sure was handy for a guy fighting crime on his own. As she backed up closer to him, he quickly reached into her purse, tossing the phone to Bruce.
“Hey, that’s my private property! Don’t you dare look at my texts!”

Bruce ignored her as he accessed her phone. It was an older model that did not require any passwords.

“Let’s check your deleted items, shall we?” He scrolled for a few moments then held up the phone for John to see. In the dark, John can clearly see a text from ‘Boss’ that read “Good girl. give them 352 riverside.” The date stamp was Monday, just after midnight.

John and Bruce’s gazes met. They knew exactly who Boss was. Everything in the last few hours pointed to Larry Pond.

The alley grew quiet. Very quiet as Bruce stared at Roxanne. “You sent them to die, you know,” he said.

“I didn’t know! I didn’t know that! I wouldn’t do that!”

Bruce turned around, scrolling more through her phone. He found the text she sent just before receiving the response from Boss on Monday. He held up the phone which showed a photo she’d taken of Selina and Ollie along with a text ‘asking about stuff.’

Suddenly angry, he lashes out. “Who is this? Why is he after them?”

“I don’t know!” She’s scared, so very scared. She insists that she doesn’t know the name but they all know she’s lying.

“I know what happened to everyone at Mag Mike’s! I just need some money then I’ll get out of here. Forever.”

“I’ll give you enough to get out of town. You just need to calm down and answer my goddamn questions.”

“Fine!” She spat out. “Make it quick!”

“Who is Boss?”

“Larry. Larry Pond.”

“Why is he after them?”

“I have no idea! You think he tells me shit? I had to stay at Mike’s for like a week waiting for those two to show up. They showed up, I let Larry know. End of story!”

That wasn’t even close to the end of the story but Blake knew they had gotten everything they were going to get out of her. John reached out his hand to Bruce who put a small stack of cash on his palm.

“This money is to keep you alive. To do that, you need to get the hell out of town, you got that?” John said, holding the cash out of her reach. “You don’t go anywhere but to get a cab to take you out of town. Out of town, you get a train, a bus, a plane, a boat, anything that takes you as far away from here as you can. You’re a loose end. They’re killing their loose ends.”

“As if I don’t know that!” Roxanne snatched the cash from his hand then ran off.

“Think The Palace is closed by now?” Bruce asked, looking at his watch.
“Good time to go snooping before we head home.”

The Palace wasn’t too far to walk to. By the time they reached it, it was nearing dawn but still dark. They climbed the fire escape, Bruce jimmyed the window, climbing in with John not far behind.

The place was still, indicating to them that everyone had gone home for the night. They explored the second story soon finding a locked door labelled PRIVATE. The lock was trickier than expected but wasn’t any match for either of their skills.

The office was cluttered in an organized sort of way. There were stacks of files with payroll info, invoices and other things that held no interest for them. They soon came across stacks of photos of naked women.

“Oh, God,” John said as he realized he had to go through them. There was nothing sexy or inviting about any of the photos but he looked hoping to find the missing woman.

“Find her?” Bruce asked. He was looking through a different stack of photos. Larry Pond was a disgusting sleaze who really did have his hands deep in all manner of sex trades.

“Nothing,” John called out. “I found no more photos. Thank God.”

“Look for an address book, anything with a list of names and numbers,” Bruce said, riffling through the desk drawers. “This guy can not be in charge. He doesn’t have the money to hire the quality of hitwoman that tried to kill Selina. He’s taking orders from someone.”

“Agreed,” John said as he picked the lock on metal file cabinet. The last drawer proved to be the winner. “What have we here?”

He held up a battered laptop. Shining his phone flashlight on it, he could discern specks of blood on it. “Check it out.”

“That’s it, Blake,” Bruce said. “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

“Good, cause I can’t take much more of this shit.” John had worked plenty of cases both on the force and off, but this one was a whole other level. One that we would rather not ever re-visit but knew he would. Now that he knew this world existed, how could he ignore it?

They made their way back outside. As they emerged from the alley, the first rays of daylight filtered through the tall buildings.
As Alfred gradually awoke, it took him scarce a moment to realize that he was not in his comfortable bed at the penthouse. Instead, he had spent the night stretched out on a surprisingly comfortable Gotham General Hospital chair that reclined to form a bed of sorts.

Knowing Bruce wanted someone with Selina at all times and that Isha had spent the last two nights with her, he gladly volunteered for the overnight shift. Isha had not wanted to leave Selina but since Helena was staying over with Shanti and Isha’s grandchildren, she hadn’t put up much of a fight.

Looking over at Selina, Alfred hoped to find her awake and eager to spill her secrets but she slept on looking eerily peaceful. With a little effort, he stood, pleased to find that he had no undue aches and pains from the unfamiliar sleeping position. Peering closely at her face, he saw that she looked just as she had the night before. He detected no signs of movement though her color seemed a little better. That, at least, was something.

Alfred had only the vaguest recollection of the servant he had sent up to Master Wayne’s rooms with a tray of food five years ago. While he couldn't remember her face he did well remember the spark her brief visit had lit in the reclusive, depressed Bruce.

“Here, let me help you with that, sir,” a nurse said, kindly, as Alfred started to restore the chair back to the sitting position. “How was your evening?”

“I read her some John D McDonald,” Alfred replied. “Thought she might enjoy a little Travis McGee.”

“It’s nice to see so many people care about her,” the nurse said, moving over to change Selina’s IV.

Alfred thought of Selina as she had been when he had truly met her. Coming out of the private airplane holding Shanti’s youngest while Bruce carried the sleeping Helena. It was the middle of the night when they returned from India. All of them looking well, particularly Bruce who radiated a contentment that warmed Alfred’s old heart.

Isha arrived promptly at seven to relieve Alfred. They exchanged pleasantries with her assuring him that Helena had had a lovely night and was already up and playing with the other children. He waited until she was settled in the chair, her sewing work spread out. With all the time waiting on Selina to waken, her project was nearly complete.

One of Bruce’s hired security men escorted him downstairs. Waiting for him in the parking garage was David, his new best friend. If the man had slept in the Rolls, he didn’t look any worse for wear. But Alfred was warming to the man and they chatted amiably on the ride home.

He returned to the penthouse to find Blake sleeping soundly on the couch. Bruce, he found, was in his office.

“How is she?” Bruce asked, his attention occupied with a wrecked looking laptop he was tinkering with.

“The same,” Alfred responded, concerned with Bruce whose exhaustion was apparent. “You’re up
Bruce looked up at him, with a look vaguely reminiscent of when he’d done something wrong as a boy. “Haven’t been to bed yet.”

“Ah, reliving the good old days of staying up all night, are we?” Alfred frowned.

“Couldn’t be helped.”

As Bruce recounted his evening following Selina’s trail through Gotham’s seedy underworld, Alfred’s unease grew. When Bruce described the place known as The Market, he had been evasive about what went on there but Alfred clearly heard what he wasn’t saying.

“I don’t know why she didn’t tell me about all this,” Bruce said, sounding exceedingly frustrated. “She knew she was up against dangerous people.”

Alfred’s gaze on Bruce was fond. “You don’t know?”

Bruce looked up, his expression blank.

“It’s quite clear to me, sir.” Alfred regarded the man that was a son to him. “She didn’t want to drag you in the mud.”

“I’ve been in the mud.”

“Not like this,” Alfred said. “I have no doubt that Ms. Kyle knew you would jump at the chance to help her. But look what a toll looking into all this took on her. I don’t know her well but she was not the same woman I met six months ago. She wanted to keep you out, wanted to spare you this darkness.”

“Maybe,” Bruce said, turning his attention back to the laptop.

“You expect to find something there?” Alfred asked, gesturing to the laptop.

“Every lead we followed pointed to a strip club’s owner. We found this in his office.”

“Let me have a go at it,” Alfred said. “Helena will be home in the afternoon and you need to sleep.”

“I just—”

“—need some sleep so you’re rested for your daughter. This will all keep. Besides, Ms. Kyle’s color is up. I think she’ll be waking soon.”

“Let’s hope so.”

Alfred followed him out of the office to make sure he didn’t get distracted by Blake or anything else on the way up to bed. It was a familiar feeling.

Once he was sure Bruce was following his order, Alfred went to the kitchen to make some tea, taking his time as he mulled over the direction of the investigation.

Sitting at Bruce’s desk, Alfred regarded the wrecked laptop at a loss where to begin. He was out of practice with all this electronic investigating.

“Any luck?” Blake asked.
“None as yet,” Alfred replied. “I’m getting back into the swing of things.”

“Bruce still up?"

“No. I sent him to bed.”

“Did he tell you about our night?”

“A bit. Sounded bad.”

“Worse than he probably let on,” Blake said, then checked his phone. “Let Bruce know that Bobby was right about where they took that kid. He’s safe.”

“Do I want to know what that’s about?”

Blake gave him a long look. “Probably not.” He turned to leave. “Looks like I was wrong about her.”

“You weren’t really wrong,” Alfred said. “You just didn’t have the full picture. Neither did I.”

“Something’s really rotten here,” Blake said. “Something that needs exposing. Selina was trying to do that.”

After Blake left, Alfred resumed his work cursing at the myriad of obstacles in the new tech.

David, now assuming the role of his new manservant as Alfred liked to think of it, announced a visitor wished to come up.

“A Mr. Lucius Fox, Mr. Pennyworth.”

“Perfect! Yes, of course. Send him in, please.” Alfred hurried to greet him. “Lucius, what brings you by?”

“A few pieces of paper that I could have messengered over but I wanted a face to face with him.”

“You’ll have to come back tomorrow for that,” Alfred said. “He just went to bed.”

Lucius’ brows rose in surprise. “Like old times, huh?”

“It’s feeling like that.”

“How is Ms. Kyle?” Lucius asked. Alfred recalled that Fox had met her soon after she and Bruce had returned to Gotham. The dinner party with the Mittals.

“No change, I’m afraid.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Lucius said. “I finally met the little one, you know. I see her grandmother in her.”

“Oh, yes,” Alfred said. “If her hair were blonde, the resemblance would be particularly striking.”

“How is she with all this?”

“She has a lot of people to keep her occupied. Bruce and Selina’s friends who came with them from India have children her age. She’s with them now.”

“I’m surprised Bruce doesn’t have her barricaded.”
“There’s more security in that neighborhood right now than there is at the White House!”

“Of course. I would expect nothing less.”

Alfred gestured for Fox to follow him to Bruce’s office. “If it’s not too much trouble, Lucius, could you give me a hand with this?”

Lucius pulled up a chair and went to work. Whatever encryptions and firewalls the strip club owner had put on his laptop was no match for Lucius Fox who managed to bypass all the protections in a manner of minutes. He ran a cable from the laptop to the desktop so all four monitors could be used to track down whatever mysteries the device held.

The mysteries, Lucius and Alfred soon found out involved lots of pictures of women, in various states of undress, audition videos for porn. All very distasteful.

“What are you looking for?” Lucius asked, his tone ringing with disgust.

“I don’t know, exactly.”

“Well,” Lucius said. “Best of luck with all that. I have a meeting I need to get to.”

Alfred saw him out then settled back down at the desk.

“Let’s see what we’ve got here,” Alfred said, leaning forward, getting into full investigative mode.

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Gotham - Six months ago

Selina’s current life in Gotham was drastically different from her former Gotham life and she wasn’t sure how to reconcile the two. They’d settled in Bruce’s penthouse atop one of the swankiest hotels in the city. She’d been to that hotel, of course, finding marks. Never did she think she’d be living in it. With the owner.

They’d been back a week. A week of jet lag, getting nine people settled and acclimated to a new country. A whole new world really. Selina included herself in figuring out a new world. Here she was back again with no fear of prison hanging over her head, no worries about paying rent. She felt like a stranger in a strange land except this was home.

The first few nights Helena had slept with her and Bruce in the huge bed in the huge room designated as a bedroom. After years of sleeping in smaller beds, in tiny rooms, it felt weird to have so much space. The three of them, Helena between Bruce and Selina, didn’t even take up half the bed. At least not until Helena’s feet kept kicking Selina awake causing her to move to curl up on Bruce’s other side.

It was another week before Bruce was ready for it to be known that he had returned to Gotham. Selina and Bruce agreed that it was best if Selina and Helena kept a low profile. Neither of them were willing to subject Helena to the scrutiny that Bruce expected if it was discovered she was his daughter. Returning from the dead for the second time was a huge story but Bruce Wayne returning from the dead with a daughter would send the already intrusive media into a rapturous tizzy.
Still, the media furor surrounding Bruce’s second return from the dead surprised Selina. “Slow news day,” Bruce commented seeming impervious to the uproar.

“I seem to have forgotten just how fucking rich he is,” Selina muttered to herself as she scrolled through the Gotham Gossip website. That ‘news’ outlet had made it their mission to hound Bruce every time he left the building. It was that kind of predatory paparazzi that made them more protective and vigilant against Helena’s identity becoming known.

Bruce handled himself well with the paparazzi, ignoring them for the most part. Selina wasn’t sure she could do that. The first time some paparazzi asshole shoved a camera in her face, Selina imagined, that photographer would learn quickly what a mistake that was. Even worse if they swarmed Helena, frightening her. But, Selina realized, she couldn’t punch her way through a paparazzi storm. Bruce would be forced to settle lawsuits on her behalf, and she’d be damned if those vultures would make money off of her.

They had one close call. Selina and Helena waited for Bruce in a restaurant in an unfashionable part of town. They had chosen an early hour hoping that the restaurant would be mostly deserted at that time. Bruce arrived via cab but he had underestimated the lengths the media would go to to get an insight into his private life. Sniffing a story, why would Bruce Wayne go to an out of the way middling restaurant, the paparazzi swarmed him before he could enter the building.

Seeing her father outside the window, Helena waved excitedly. Bruce couldn’t respond which, Selina knew, was probably pissing him off. Bruce crossed the street, finding a coffee shop to duck into.

“Where’s daddy going?” Helena asked, pressing her face against the window. “What are those people doing?”

“I don’t know, sweetie.” Selina pulled her away from the window, scooting Helena closer to her in the booth.

Bruce texted: *Pick me up in 10 minutes. Alley.*

After waiting five minutes, Selina beckoned to the waitress.

“I’m so sorry! I got my time wrong,” Selina said, hoping the waitress would not figure out why they were leaving soon after the scene outside. The fracas had, of course, drawn the attention of the employees and the few patrons.

“Yeah, it is really early for dinner,” the waitress said, gathering the water glasses. “Usually, only the senior citizens eat now.”

Selina tipped her for her trouble then she and Helena slipped out without drawing the notice of the paparazzi who were waiting for Bruce across the street. She circled the block, paused in front of the alley where Bruce jumped in the back seat, slumping down in the seat as they drove past the photographers. Helena thought the sight of her father hiding in the back seat very funny.

They ended up going through a drive thru and eating in the car which Helena loved. Unbuckled from her carseat, she crawled into the back finding it far more interesting than her happy meal.

“Nice dinner,” Selina said, sipping her diet coke.

He grinned then kissed her but she knew he was angry at the intrusion into their private life.

So, Bruce decided to hold a press conference, hoping that if he answered questions publicly, the
paparazzi would lose interest.

At the press conference, he seemed so aloof, not at all like the man she knew so well. Patiently responding to a flurry of questions, he managed to give answers without providing any real information. He also succeeded in turning the subject to Wayne Enterprises’ newest environmental project and to the Wayne Foundation.

“Wow,” Selina said. “He just made himself seem incredibly boring.”

“I prefer boring to what he used to pretend to be,” Alfred replied.

They sat together in kitchen, watching the press conference on a laptop.

“Jaded playboy?” Selina asked, sipping her coffee.

“I must confess I didn’t care for that cover at all.”

It was the first time they had just sat alone together. They were both exceedingly polite to each other, understanding that, at least for the time being, all they had in common was Bruce Wayne.

But by the time Thanksgiving arrived, Selina felt more comfortable with Alfred. Together, they planned the meal. Selina choosing dishes that were both traditional American and a few that would be more familiar to Isha’s family.

“We haven’t really had a proper Thanksgiving meal since before the Master went to college,” Alfred told her.

That made her sad. She could imagine Alfred trying to be the family Bruce needed.

“I went to Princeton,” she said, needing to lighten the mood.

“Did you now?”

“Don’t act so shocked,” she teased. “Although, I must tell you I wasn’t exactly a registered student.”

“I’m shocked,” Alfred deadpanned. The butler had a wicked sense of humor.

“Yeah, I just went to classes to take off the rough edges,” Selina said, mildly surprised to be sharing such information with him. “You know, hang around with normal people to see what they were like.”

What she didn’t tell him was that it was through Princeton she met the old man who taught her everything about safecracking. Good times.

She knew Alfred was aware of her former profession and she had yet to see any kind of censure from the man. But he wouldn’t do that; he was too happy for Bruce to have a family now. Even if it was with a woman who had robbed them.

“Do you want to watch Helena swim?” She asked.

Of course he did. They went down to the hotel pool which was deserted. Helena loved showing off for Pop Pop. No one could figure out how she’d arrived at that name for Alfred but he certainly did not mind.

Selina liked that Helena had another person in her life who could fill the grandparent role. She had
no intention of inviting her parents into Helena’s life.

With Alfred’s assistance, Bruce and Selina helped Isha and Shanti and the children get moved into a nice townhome. Atash Bashir, pleased to be asked by Bruce to find something appropriate for the women, had found the house. He lived in the neighborhood and vouched that the family would feel comfortable in the area favored by many Indians. A good Indian grocery store within walking distance.

Selina and Helena spent their days at the townhouse, helping Isha and Shanti get moved in. It was fun shopping with them and Helena always loved spending time with Shanti’s children. Rishi, Shanti’s stepson, loved everything about Gotham. Selina suspected what he probably like best was that his father would never find them there.

Isha watched the children while Rishi, Shanti, and Selina explored their new neighborhood. Selina showed them all the public transportation stops, explaining how it all worked. It was a good way to stay busy but Selina knew it wouldn’t last. The family did not require a permanent guide to Gotham.

“Maybe you should have another baby,” Shanti suggested seeming to sense Selina’s restlessness.

“Maybe,” Selina replied, but she didn’t want to think about that.

She and Bruce relaxed on the couch in the Penthouse watching as Helena played. Bruce helped Helena put a rubbery outfit on a little toy animal she had which amused Selina to no end.

Bruce may have been able to instill terror in the most hardened of criminals but he could be a real chump when it came to their daughter. Selina had the ability to deliver a stern ‘Helena’, fixing the child with a look that invited no misunderstandings and Helena listened to her mother. Bruce had yet to master the stern dad look. When he tried, Helena merely giggled.

“She’s gonna walk all over you, you know,” Selina said, not for the first time.

“I don’t care,” he said, smiling at Helena who crouched near him, taking off the outfit that he had just put on the little elephant to put on another animal.

“You’re going to care when she’s a teenager,” Selina said, placing her cold feet against him. “Especially if she’s anything like me.”

He rubbed her feet until Helena needed him again.

Selina felt she had a silly grin on her face but she didn’t care. He was a good man and Selina was again struck by the thought that she had no business being with a good man. But when she looked at him, or her daughter looked at her, she could almost forget all the things she’d done that marked her as not a good woman.

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_Gotham - The Present_

It was afternoon when Bruce finally awoke. While he had set his alarm to go off hours ago, strangely enough, it had not gone off. Alfred. He checked his phone hoping for news of Selina but there was nothing save business communications of which he had no interest in.

The hot shower helped wake him more. He was sorely out of practice for all-nighters and didn’t
remember it being so draining. Alfred had left a sandwich and a pot of coffee on a tray. Bruce quickly downed the a cup of coffee before helping himself to another.

His hands were full with the sandwich and coffee as he made his way down to his office to find Alfred still at work on Pond’s laptop.

“Find anything?” Bruce asked between bites of the sandwich.

“Oh, lots of things.” Alfred’s voice was filled with contempt. “But nothing useful to us.”

“Well, keep looking,” Bruce said. “I’m going to make another of these.” Bruce held up the last bit of sandwich before popping it into his mouth.

Alfred rose. “Allow me, sir.”

“I can make a sandwich, Alfred.”

“Of course you can, but I need a break from all this.” Alfred said, leading the way to the kitchen.

“Everything I find about Larry Pond suggests he is small time, with no imagination,” Alfred said as he gathered ingredients. “He runs the strip club, is involved in pornography. What I found suggests he desires to be more of a player than he is.”

“Doesn’t sound like someone who could lead Selina on a months long chase.”

“No,” Alfred replied. “And, someone I doubt could set up Ms. Kyle.”

Bruce had no doubt of Larry Pond’s involvement but it felt right that the man was working for someone else.

“Any idea of his finances?” Bruce asked.

“I found nothing to indicate Pond has the kind of resources to hire an assassin of the caliber of the woman you fought with at the hospital.”

“Yeah,” Bruce said. “She was good. Not someone found on Craig’s List.”

Bruce quickly finished his second sandwich then left to pick up Helena. As he pulled out of the hotel parking garage, Bruce felt a strong sense of being watched, and not the kind that he often experienced. People glimpsing a famous person, trying to not seem like they were looking as they stared. He’d experienced that enough to know the difference.

He waited to pull onto the street, idling the Range Rover as he observed all the cars in the vicinity. The car behind him honked impatiently but Bruce still did not move. He gave it another few moments before slowly easing out to the street. He drove like an asshole, too slow, not signalling, running a red light, all intended for the tail to give himself away. After a few blocks, Bruce began to doubt his feeling but he continued to drive to Shanti’s in a manner to bring attention to a person if they were following him.

He parked a few streets away from Shanti’s townhouse. After waiting to confirm that no familiar cars followed him, he cut through the alleys. As he approached the back of Shanti’s house, he was pleased to find that the security he was paying a small fortune to had not only noticed him but were starting to intercept him. As they got closer, they recognized him then retreated back to their positions allowing him to jump the fence.
Before he could knock on Shanti’s back door, she opened it, seemingly unsurprised to see him. Smiling kindly but shyly, she stood aside to let him inside her home.

“How was she?” Bruce asked in Hindi.

“Very good, of course,” Shanti responded in English.

Helena ran past him squealing with laughter. She and Prisha, Shanti’s four year old, chased Mr. Tibbles around the living room. The small dog, who looked less than thrilled at the attention, ran under the guard’s chair. Giving up the chase, Helena noticed her father.

As if she suspected her father had returned to take her home, Helena pulled Prisha and started to run upstairs. Bruce, slightly stung at his daughter’s disinterest in him, caught her before she could run upstairs. Helena suffered his hug, wiggling to get down.

“It’s time to go home, Helena.”

“No!” She yelled then did that thing where she slipped out of his grasp.

Bruce caught her hand before she could run off but that only succeeded in initiating a full blown tantrum. She dropped to the floor, crying and kicking.

Bruce met Shanti’s understanding gaze. “We would be most happy if she stayed with us.”

Knowing that Selina would not have tolerated such a display from Helena, Bruce hesitated. “Please, Helena needs to forget her worry about her mother,” Shanti said quietly so Helena could not hear. Not that the child was listening to anything while in the throes of a tantrum. “She and Prisha will play until they are exhausted. No time for fear or worry.” Shanti said in her customary quietly hesitant way, but Bruce was surprised, and pleased, that Shanti had found it in herself to stand up to him.

Bruce decided now was not the time for discipline. Helena was being happily distracted from her fears and worries about her mother. He crouched down, hugging her to him as her crying subsided.

“Do you want to stay with Prisha?” He asked, knowing full well what the answer was.

Helena’s little arms held him close, her wet face against his shoulder. She was slowing losing the tantrum and took a few moments in her father’s arms to get control. When she was calm enough, she nodded her head.

“Mrs. Shanti said she would make us Jalebi,” she said with a slight post tantrum hiccup.

“That sounds good,” Bruce said, cleaning her face. He smiled at Prisha who had watched the scene in fascination.

Prisha took that as an okay for her to grab Helena’s hand so they could resume playing. They ran back upstairs, followed by Shanti’s almost two year old who toddled valiantly behind them.

Bruce looked after them feeling torn. doubtful. His feeling of being watched very fresh on his mind.

“Mr. Wayne,” Shanti said, placing her hand comfortably on his arm. “You have people out there...everywhere. And inside,” she gestured to the woman who sat at her dining room table, situated where she could see both the front and back doors.
“We have not observed anything out of the ordinary, sir,” the guard spoke up. “No one is getting into this house who’s not supposed to be here.”

Shanti was, of course, right. Helena needed to play and have fun and she could do that under the protective eye of a dozen men and women who were the best in the security business. And blissfully unaware of her father’s anxiety Selina’s voice reminded him.

A stab of longing for Selina tore through him.

With an abrupt goodbye, he quickly left before he changed his mind. Even though the sky was overcast, he slid on his sunglasses, nodding curtly at one of the bodyguards positioned near the alley entrance where he’d parked his car.

He called Alfred.

“Helena’s going to stay at Shanti’s again,” Bruce said. He didn’t elaborate on the tantrum she threw. It was almost spectacular.

“More fun with Shanti’s little ones is just what she needs.”

Bruce nodded, in full agreement but he couldn’t shake the feeling he was being observed. Maybe not now, he conceded, but someone was certainly keeping an eye on him. He scanned the area again. The neighborhood itself was no cause for concern, Bruce had made sure of that before buying the home for Shanti and Isha, but now, he was seeing danger in the most innocuous places.

“I feel like I’m being watched, Alfred.”

“You are! We’ve spent a small fortune on the private army that now surrounds Isha and Shanti’s home.”

“No, it’s not that…it’s just..” Bruce thought for a moment. “I feel like I’ve landed in someone’s game without knowing the rules or the players.” Something beyond his control was happening around him and Bruce Wayne did not operate well with an unknown someone pulling the strings, strings that affected his family.

With that last thought in mind, he abruptly ended the call.

It began to rain as Bruce drove to the hospital. He felt an overwhelming need to see Selina, hopeful that when he got there, she would be awake and put an end to this confusing mess. He knew what to expect but, as always, Selina’s stillness unnerved him. The swelling on her face had gone down, leaving a mottle of bruises over her face.

Isha sat in her usual spot, patiently waiting for something to change with Selina. It was a comfort to him having her here with Selina. He nodded hello which she returned with a small smile.

They talked for a bit until Isha, probably understanding that Bruce wanted to be alone with Selina, left to go to the cafeteria.

Bruce sank into the chair by Selina’s bed. The late nights and little sleep catching up with him as he let himself feel exhausted for a few moments.

Over the last few years, they’d been together constantly. Maybe Selina had sometimes minded that it was just the two of them but Bruce never had. He never felt any less than fascinated by her. Exasperated sometimes, angry and irritated on occasion, but never bored. She kept him grounded
in more ways than she realized.

He missed her terribly. He could now admit that he’d been missing her for months. He’d managed
to avoid dealing with that feeling by immersing himself in work at Wayne Enterprises, letting
himself forget how they’d been together before everything fell apart. And Selina had encouraged
that. She hadn’t wanted his attention on her, he could see that clearly now.

The doctor arrived and they discussed her condition. The doctor assured him she was fine and that
her unconscious state was nothing to be alarmed about.

Isha returned to the room and Bruce returned to the penthouse.

He stepped into the parking garage elevator but before the doors could close Blake and Detective
Massey hurried over to him.

Bruce could see on their faces that they had news.

“What is it?” he asked, concerned. Jessica looked angry.

“Roxanne, the stripper we were looking for was found dead,” Jessica said.

Bruce was sorry to hear that. He had hoped the woman would take Blake’s advice and get out of
town but either she hadn’t listened or someone got to her before she could.

“What time did you speak with her?” Jessica asked.

“Before sunrise. It was about four in the morning.”

John nodded, agreeing. “We met her at Third and Piedmont.”

They emerged from the elevator.

“She was found in a dumpster about three blocks away,” Jessica said. “She was shot then
dumped.”

“Check with Larry Pond,” Bruce said. “His name keeps coming up and I wouldn’t be surprised if
he had something to do with it. She worked for him at his strip club.”

Jessica nodded. “I’ll question him later. What else do you know about him?” She gave John a
quick look. “Blake here was a little cagey about what you two found.”

“Jess…” Blake said.

“I know, I know,” Jessica replied. “Just figure out a way to make what you found admissible, ok?
Don’t forget the point isn’t only to find these guys but to send them to prison.”

She received a text. When she read it, her eyes widened in surprise. “Huh.”

“What?” Bruce asked.

“Someone stole Oliver Preston’s body from the morgue,” she said.

“You’re kidding,” Bruce said as they walked further into the penthouse.

“I wish I was,” Jessica replied as she looked around, trying to not seem impressed.
Alfred appeared. He looked shaken.

“Did you find something?” Bruce asked.

Alfred looked at Massey.

“Look, guys,” she said. “Stop treating me like I’ve got no business here!”

“It appears Ms. Kyle may have taken something.”

“What?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but these people are anxious to get it back.”

“Who?” Bruce asked.

“Someone is in charge. Someone who is not getting his hands dirty. He has underlings for that sort of thing.”

He handed a photo to Bruce. It was a screenshot of a hand with the words ‘bitch slapper’ tattooed on it.

“Larry Pond,” Bruce commented, passing the photo to Massey.

Alfred handed another printed screenshot to Bruce. The photo showed a large looking man wearing a leather mask. The same mask from the sketch Selina and Ollie had given Lax.

“Where did you get these?” Jessica asked.

Alfred paused, looking nervously from Bruce to Jessica. “From a video.”

“Great!” Jessica said. “Let’s have a look.”

“Let’s not,” Alfred said. “I’ve given you the pertinent information. Those two men don’t reveal their faces. Pond was wearing a ski mask but didn’t have the sense to wear gloves. The file is from a video conference. The other speaker, the one who seems to be in charge, his voice seemed to be disguised. There’s really no other information other than they are looking for something Ms. Kyle has. And they believe she was hired.”

At this point, Bruce realized Alfred was hiding something. He also knows that Alfred only hides information that would cause Bruce pain.

“Alfred?” Bruce gave him a steady gaze.

“It’s from that day,” Alfred said. “With Selina.”

“What are you saying?”

“The entire incident was recorded.”

Bruce went straight to his office, followed by Alfred, Jessica and Blake.

“Please don’t, sir,” Alfred said, standing in front of the computer screens. “You have what is necessary. All you need to know is that want they whatever it is she stole. Let’s focus on that.”

“There may be something you missed,” Bruce said, gently nudging Alfred to step aside.
Alfred did not move. “Then let Detective Massey and Mr. Blake watch it. Don’t put yourself through it.”

“Alfred,” Bruce said, a warning in his tone.

But Alfred wasn’t intimidated. “These are vicious men who like to hurt women! The man in the leather mask is clearly a sadist. All you will see from watching that disturbing video is Ms. Kyle being horribly beaten. There’s no need to put yourself through that.”

Alfred probably suspected that there was no way Bruce would not watch. He reached around Alfred and pressed play.

The video began with Pond, his face in a ski mask, talking to the laptop camera. The disembodied voice was disguised.

“Got her,” Pond said.

“Bring her in,” the voice replied.

Pond left for a moment. The room was as Massey theorized, already set up as a kill room. In the middle of the sheet of plastic laid down to protect the floor was a lone chair.

Pond entered the camera’s view, carrying an unconscious Selina over his shoulder. Her hands were bound behind her back. Pond put Selina’s unconscious body on the chair, her head fell forward, her chin resting on her chest, her hair hiding her face.

“Excellent work, my friend,” the voice said. “Wait for him. He’s on his way.”

The him being referred to was the man in the leather mask who arrived soon after Selina regained consciousness. From the look Selina gave him, she knew exactly who he was. She knew who everyone was including the voice from the computer.

When the violence began, Alfred looked away. Bruce did not and by the end of it he was in a cold rage. Without a word to anyone he left the room. Dimly, he heard Alfred call out to him but he ignored it. The elevator door closed before Blake could follow him in.

Bruce selected his fastest motorcycle and raced to The Palace. It was early enough in the evening that the place wasn’t too crowded. Bruce climbed up the fire escape. The window he’d opened earlier was still open. He climbed in and found Larry in his office.

“What the-” Larry said before Bruce dragged him off out of his office chair and threw him against the wall. The man got no more words in as Bruce threw him around the room. Bruce felt cold inside, hitting the man made him feel less cold. His anger was almost uncontrollable. Pond tried to get away, making it out to the hall but that just worked better and Bruce threw him through the window to land painfully on the fire escape.

Larry scrambled down, quicker than Bruce expected. He landed in the alley then ran toward the street. Bruce gave chase, almost losing him until someone in a black hoodie up ahead tripped Pond, sending the man sprawling on the sidewalk. The guy in the black hoodie disappeared by the time Bruce reached Pond. No one else loitering around the street seemed to care as Bruce dragged Pond to another alley.

“Hey,” Larry said, breathing heavily. “I know you’re mad about your girlfriend but she poked her nose where it didn’t belong. Riled some powerful people so don’t get mad at me.”
Bruce punched him in the gut.

“She had spirit…I respected that.” Larry said, when he caught his breath.

“Really?” Bruce hit him again, feeling the teeth loosen in the man’s mouth.

“I know who you are, asshole,” Larry said, panting with anger. He wasn’t scared. Not yet. “I’m going to sue you for this!”

Bruce smiled humorlessly. “Then let’s make this good.”

At Alfred’s frantic gesture, Blake ran after Bruce but the elevator doors closed before he could get in. He pressed the call button repeatedly willing the elevator to hurry the hell up. The look on Bruce’s face worried him, he understood why Alfred hadn’t wanted him to watch the video.

The wait for the elevator felt like forever. Blake paced while Jessica stood still, impatiently tapping her foot. Alfred seemed calmest of all but Blake knew better. The man was worried.

The elevator finally arrived. Jessica and Blake got in. Alfred gave him a long look, silently reminding him to keep Bruce out of the attention of press and police.

In Jessica’s unmarked police car, they sped to The Palace. Jessica, expertly maneuvering through the rainy, crowded Gotham streets.

“We need to get him before he kills my suspect,” Jessica said as she turned on the police lights.

“He won’t kill him,” Blake said.

“That look on his face…”

“Yeah, but he won’t.”

“Tell me everything you haven’t told me,” Jessica said. The video had shaken her, too. The video feed had abruptly ended when Selina had been thrown against the table where it had sat. “We’ll figure out what you found that we can use for the arrest. Because we are definitely arresting those men.”

They pulled up to The Palace as Pond was running away from Bruce. Jessica double parked, keeping her police lights on. They followed Bruce, seeing the unknown person trip Pond then promptly disappearing.

By the time they arrived in the alley, Bruce had caught Pond. Bruce was hitting him like he hit her, blow for blow. In between punches, he growled out his questions.

“Who’s the man in the mask?”

Pond looked confused.

“We found your laptop in your office. I know you were there at the warehouse with Selina.”
At that, Pond finally looked alarmed but he didn’t answer the question. Another few punches followed.

“Who was the man in the video? The one in charge?”

“Fuck you!” Pond spat out.

One time about a year ago, Blake came across a paroled mobster that liked to tell stories of his run ins with The Batman. Usually it was the same story but one night when he was drunk, he confided that he had been terrified. The man he had met that night had been like walking rage. Tonight, Blake could see that.

“Tell me who’s running things! The voice on the video?”

Pond took the next few hits, shaking his head.

“How the hell should I know?” But Pond’s bravado faltered.

“Who is this woman?” Bruce held Pond against the brick wall. He nodded his head to Blake. John approached, showed the picture of the woman to Pond.

“Who is she? Why is Selina looking for her?”

Pond looked around, confirming no one else was around, then laughed.

Bruce punched him again.

“Stupid cunt,” Pond said, spitting out a mouthful of blood. “She’s doing all this for some dumb bitch she doesn’t even know.” He laughs. “It’s pathetic.”

“What?”

“She doesn’t know her. I don’t know her.”

“Why is she looking for her?”

“Ask her!” Pond yelled.

Bruce grabbed him then forced his face in a large puddle in the dirty alley.

Jessica took a step forward. Blake, too, had a moment of doubt that Bruce would actually kill the man. He decided to give Bruce ten more seconds of dunking Pond’s face.

Bruce lifted Pond’s head out of the puddle.

“Who’s in charge?” He demanded. “Who’s giving the orders?”

“I don’t know! Hand to God I don’t know! Think they invite me to their house?”

Bruce pulls him up, shoving him against the brick wall.

“What did Selina take?”

“She--” Pond started to say but then a small red hole appeared in the middle of his forehead. A second later, the back of his head was blown off.

They whirled around trying to find the shooter.
“There!” Jessica cried, drawing her gun. She pointed to the roof of a two story building across the street. They started to give chase but a series of silent shots whirred past them, one grazing John’s arm.

“You okay?” Bruce called out from behind a dumpster.

“Yeah!” John responded. “You see him?”

“No.” Bruce took a tentative step away from the building.

“I’m calling this in,” Jessica said, reaching for her police radio.

Deciding the coast was clear, Bruce and John ran across the street, trying to find where the shooter would get down from the building. Their search was short and fruitful. Behind the building, they found an unconscious body, all trussed up and waiting for them.

When they got closer, they realized he was a she and her high powered rifle was lying next to her.

“That’s the woman from the hospital,” Bruce said, crouching down to get a closer look. “She’s alive.”

“And that’s the second time tonight someone’s lent a helping hand,” Blake said as he helped Bruce lift her. Bruce carried her over his shoulder.

“What’s this?” Jessica asked.

“A present from someone,” Blake said.

“It’s the hitwoman from the hospital,” Bruce told her as she opened the back door to her car. Jessica cuffed her before Bruce placed her in the back seat. By then she was awake, watching them both.

“We meet again, Mr. Wayne,” she said.

“I don’t suppose you’d like to share who hired you?” Bruce asked, sounding calmer than he had since be. The woman was in custody and he doubted Jessica would appreciate him roughing up her suspect.

“Funny,” she said, seemingly not at all worried about sitting in the back of a cop car.

Bruce stepped closer to the car, his demeanor threatening. Jessica slammed the door shut before he could get to her.

“She’s a pro,” she said. “You know she’s not going to say anything.”

In the distance, the sound of sirens approached.

“Bruce…” John said.

“Go,” Jessica said. “If she says anything at all I’ll call you. After they revive me from fainting with shock.”

John walked with Bruce back to his motorcycle.

“You okay? John asks.
“Fine,” Bruce replied, sounding anything but.

When they reached the motorcycle, thankfully still parked in the alley outside the Palace, they found someone had left a large envelope on the seat.

Blake felt a stab of dread knowing nothing good would be in there.

Bruce opened it. His expression was blank as he stared at the single 8x10 photo. The photo was of Bruce carrying Helena. There was a circle around Helena’s face.

“What do you need?” John quietly asked.

“I need Selina to wake up.”

“What do you need from me?”

Bruce looked at him. His blank expression had turned thunderous. He called Alfred, demanding that Alfred get the security team to bring everyone to the penthouse.

“Yes, everyone!” He said, folding the envelope and putting it in his jacket pocket. “Shanti and her family, too. They all stay and no one comes in.”

He got on the motorcycle. “I need you to watch my family.”

“Where are you going?” Blake asked.

“I’m going to wake Selina up.”

________________

_Gotham - Six months ago_

If Selina ever had a day that perfectly symbolized her current life in Gotham it was a cold day in early December.

A winter chill had swept through Gotham, reminding Selina of her last winter in the city. It was when Bane had taken over. It had felt colder then, maybe because the usual bustle of the city was gone. Maybe because of her guilt. She had not liked herself very much that winter.

By the time she got to the diner, she had made a list of all the winter stuff Helena still needed. The kid would be thrilled when it finally snowed which, Selina hoped was not too soon. Selina had just dropped her off to spend the night with Isha and Shanti. She had Bruce would be so disappointed not to be with her for the first snow for her to play in.

Selina walked into the very familiar diner. Midday at the Narrows restaurant was not terribly busy. This place did most of its business after midnight. She and her friends had spent many after midnight hours hanging out,downing cheap coffee, keeping warm, laughing together.

She found her two closest friends sitting in what used to be their favorite booth. Selina took a moment before approaching, needing a few seconds for the rush of emotion to subside. Daryl saw her first, meeting her eyes. She could tell he felt the same way. It had been a long time.

After long, tight hugs, they settled in the booth in their usual spots. Selina and Ollie on one side
They fell into their familiar rhythms with each other. Jokes and teasing intermixed with catching each other up on things they didn’t say through texts. Ollie talked with his hands, every story punctuated with gestures and wild facial expressions. Daryl and Selina were both much calmer, always had been.

“I think this is the first time in forever that we’ve gotten together and everyone is doing good!” Ollie said, beaming at his friends.

“Yeah, Ollie, we’re really proud of you,” Selina said, giving him a one armed hug. “And you look great!”

“Bobby put me in touch with a group near my apartment. It’s a good group. I’m thinking about sponsoring someone. I think I’m up for that.”

“Good deal, man,” Daryl said, lifting his coffee cup in silent salute.

Since Selina and Daryl had heard the same thing several times before they couldn’t muster too much excitement. Still, they never pissed on his parade and hoped that his sobriety would actually stick this time.

“How long has it been?” Selina asked.

“Hundred and fourteen days.”

Selina and Daryl deliberately did not let their eyes meet. Daryl had had to handle the last two ‘Ollie Incidents’ as they referred to them. If there was another one, it would fall to Selina to take care of it.

“We’re having people over for dinner tonight,” Selina said, changing the subject.

“A dinner party,” Daryl said, exchanging an amused look with Ollie.

“No, it’s not like that,” Selina insisted. “We’re having people over for dinner.”

“A dinner party,” Daryl repeated, unable to resist teasing her. “It’s okay, See, we’re not judging you for having a dinner party.”

“We’re judging you for pretending it’s not a fancy thing,” Ollie said, grinning. “So will there be a dinner serving staff? What do they call those people? Footmen? Valets?”

“It’s not going to be like Downton Abbey,” Selina said before briefly worrying if that is what it was going to be like. She had no idea what Alfred had planned. Maybe she should have participated more in the arrangements.

Selina shoved her plate to Ollie so he didn’t have to sneak the rest of her fries. “I’m not ready for dinner parties, okay? Besides, it’s not like I’m cooking or doing anything, really. I just have to show up and look good.”

“That bother you?” Daryl asked.

“Why would it?” Selina responded.

He gave her a look.
“No, it doesn’t bother me.” Selina beckoned the waitress for more coffee. “I actually know the people who are coming. A married couple from India who I’m looking forward to seeing and Bruce’s associate from work that I met very briefly years ago.”

They quieted while the waitress refilled their coffee cups. Daryl lightly flirting with her. The woman was a hard sixty, at least, but enjoyed the banter.

“Are you gonna marry this guy?” Ollie asked, after the waitress left.

“Don’t.” Selina held up a hand, having no interest in the topic being pursued further.

“Interesting,” Daryl said, looking steadily at her. She stared right back, her gaze hardening, warning him to drop it. But Daryl got her. Completely. She didn’t have to explain anything.

“Are you still seeing Luna?” She asked, happy to put him in the hot seat.

He shook his head.

“Why not?” Ollie asked. “I really liked her.”

Selina knew Daryl had more than liked her.

Daryl shrugged, projecting a nonchalance she knew he didn’t feel. “She was chomping at the bit to have a kid.”

“Having a kid isn’t so bad,” Selina said. “It’s actually pretty great.”

“I guess.” Daryl was quiet. Ollie and Selina waited for him to sort through whatever was on his mind. “But, the mama, she’s got to be something else.”

Selina nodded, knowing Daryl was thinking of his mother. It was hard not to. The apartment building they had all lived in as kids was only a few blocks away. Angela had brought them to the diner many times.

“If you had had shitty parents like Selina and me, you wouldn’t have this problem,” Ollie said, eyeing the uneaten food on Daryl’s plate.

“It’s not that,” Daryl said, waving his hand.

“I thought you were really into her?” Ollie said.

“Ollie,” Selina said. “Let it go. So, Daryl, what’s with the new look?”

“Like it?” Daryl smoothed a hand over his head that was usually kept shaved close. “I’m aiming for a massive ‘fro. The kind that makes white people nervous.”

“Does Luna like it?” Ollie asked.

“Enough, Oliver!” Daryl growled.

They soon reached the two hour limit imposed by the diner. That rule was something new but understandable as the place couldn’t make money with people ordering coffee and sitting for hours getting free refills. Something they had done quite frequently.

“On me,” Daryl said, tossing a fifty on the table.
“Selina should pay, she’s rich now,” Ollie said.

“No, I’m not,” Selina said. “Bruce is, not me. Keep that straight, would you?”

They walked out together, Daryl between Selina and Ollie.

“When are you heading back to Detroit?” Selina asked.

“Few days. I have some business to take care of.”

If it had been five years ago, Selina would have helped him with whatever he had going on.

“Do not feel guilty. I’m glad you’re out,” Daryl said, sliding an arm over her shoulders. “And my business isn’t exactly illegitimate. Close, but not enough to get me pigged. My days of getting cuffed and stuffed are over.”

“Yeah, we’re too old for that shit,” Ollie said.

“And, I’m not gonna squander my clean record,” Daryl said.

“It feels good, doesn’t it?” Selina said. “Not having to worry about the cops.”

“That it do!”

They each headed different directions.

“Hey!” Ollie yelled out to her. “Does he look as good as he does in the pictures?”

“Better!”

She had to walk a few blocks to where cabs actually showed up. On her way, a young man jumped in front of her. He pointed his gun demanding her purse.

“Fuck off!” She grabbed the gun then punched the mugger square in the face.

“Can I have my gun back?”

“Get out of here!” Selina yelled.

He didn’t need to be told twice. Continuing on her way, she dumped the bullets in one trash can. Then, as she walked, she quickly disassembled the small handgun, throwing away pieces in different trash cans.

She was home an hour before their guests were to arrive. As she spruced up her make-up, she noticed her knuckle that definitely looked like it had met someone’s face.

Up until then, she hadn’t given a second thought to the incident but when she considered the words she would have to use to explain to Bruce what happened, she realized the significance of it all. Mugging. Gun.

She changed her top, opting for a sleek black turtleneck with extra long sleeves to partially cover her hand. That, combined with a little concealer should do the trick.

“You look lovely, Ms. Kyle,” Alfred greeted her as she descended the penthouse staircase.

“Thank you, Mr. Pennyworth,” Selina returned. “I don’t suppose there will be footman and
Alfred laughed. “Sadly, no.”

Bruce arrived with their guests, Raj and Gunjan Mittal, and Lucius Fox. Selina enjoyed their guests, and, it seemed, Bruce did, too. A few times throughout the evening Bruce and Selina’s eyes met, amused that they were doing something so...domestic.

The Mittals were a little shocked at the opulence of the penthouse. Bruce and Selina had lived quite modestly when they met the Mittals so the couple could not have expected to be greeted in such a style. At some point in the evening, it was decided that the next day, Selina would give them a tour of some of Gotham’s more interesting sights. Selina had to figure out what those were before she picked them up.

After dinner, the talk turned to business. Selina’s mind wandered, focusing only to listen when Bruce became particularly animated. She very much liked it when he was in save the world mode. Unoffended, she gave Bruce a quick wink and drifted to the windows to look out over the city. She loved seeing it again. The view of Gotham from Bruce’s penthouse, of course, was the best in town.

“Missed it?” Lucius asked, coming up to stand beside her.

“More than I thought,” Selina said. “It’s good to be home”

She could feel his eyes on her. “It’s good to see you again,” he said.

“Better circumstances,” Selina responded, remembering the moment they met. That felt like another life.

“So, this clean water project,” Selina said. “It seems to be coming together.”

“Yes! The Mittals’ design is working nicely. I’m please you and Bruce were able to...uh...recover that for them.”

Selina smiled, remembering what would probably be her last chance to break into a safe.

After the party, she helped Alfred straighten up. He stopped protesting weeks ago. When they were finished, Selina went to find Bruce in his office.

She sat on his desk, crossing her legs. Bruce’s interest in whatever he was doing disappeared as he turned to give her his full attention.

“We’ve been invited to a social event,” he said, his hand resting on her leg.

“We?”

“Well, me but I want you there,” he said.

“Your plus one.”

“What if I said I need you there?”


She caught his look at the word bachelor. His look changed, softened. And whenever he drew too
“Sure,” she said, breaking eye contact as she sat on his lap, pulling him closer, nibbling on his ear.

“Will Lucius be there?”

“Lucius?” Bruce teased. “Should I be worried?”

“I enjoyed talking to him tonight. I can see why you trust him.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think he’ll be there,” Bruce said, thinking. “I don’t know that he and Daniel are friends. Maybe through my parents but Lucius has little interest in high society stuff”

“I knew I liked him for a good reason.” She kissed him. “Let’s play a game. I’m the boss and you’re the secretary.”

“Before we do that, why don’t you tell me how your knuckles got bruised?”

“Oh, that…” She looked down at her hand, the concealer she had used had been cleaned off when she was washing the wine glasses. Careless of her.

“Looks like you punched someone,” Bruce said.

“I did.”

“Why?”

“It’s not important,” she said. “Really, don’t worry about it.”

“I wasn’t worried before but now I am.”

“It was just someone hoping I had some cash to spare.”

He was silent for a few moments. “Was there a gun?”

Her silence was his answer.

“Hey, Bruce, don’t worry about me,” she put her hands on his face, kissing him softly. “No one pulls a gun on me and gets away with it. I’m fine. I know what this is doing to you which is why I didn’t tell you earlier.”

His arms tightened around her and he returned her kiss.

She lifted her head and looked into his eyes. “You don’t have to worry about me. Ever.”
Dazed and Determined

Gotham - the present

It was evening when Isha returned to the hospital. Selina’s friend, DeeDee, had sat with her friend since the afternoon giving Isha time to go home and spend time with her family, including Helena. Isha figured they had another day before Helena would be crying for her mother again. Prisha and the other children could only distract her with play for so long.

The guard outside asked her if she wanted anything. She declined but appreciated that the young men and women keeping guard over Selina were so polite. It was not too far in past that Isha had forgotten what it was like to live life without courtesy. She’d gone so long without it that she hadn’t remembered people could treat others with care and respect.

Bruce and Selina had helped her find that again and for that, among other things, she would be eternally grateful. Isha had never met a couple like Bruce and Selina. After her only daughter was married off to another brute and before her good for nothing husband had made them leave India, Isha’s one joy was the cinema. If she was able to set aside any money for herself, which was rare, she always found a way to go to the movies. Even if it earned her a beating when she got home.

But the beating was worth it for her to escape into another world for a few hours. She loved romances most of all, seeing people in love, imagining Shanti’s marriage to be one of love rather than the bitter reality.

Bruce and Selina were the first couple she met to be in love. It took her awhile to understand that they hadn’t acknowledged that fact to themselves or each other. But she had seen the way they looked at each other. It was better than any movie she ever saw.

A nurse came in to check on Selina. Isha knew them all by now and this one was one of her favorites.

They were chatting about crafts when Bruce burst into the room. He had a look on his face that Isha hadn’t seen since that dreadful night on their way to India.

“What is it?” She asked, alarmed.

Bruce didn’t respond to her.

“Wake her up,” he almost shouted to the nurse. “Now!”

“What do you mean?” The nurse said, confused.

“She needs to wake up!” Bruce went to Selina, his touch was more gentle than his voice. “I don’t care what you do but you need to wake her up!”

“I won’t do that, sir,” the nurse said, calmly.

“You don’t understand,” Bruce said, walking to her, standing close. He looked down at her, doing his best to intimidate her. “It’s important she wake up. Now go get something!”

“You want me to get her something like adrenaline?” The nurse asked, her tone becoming angry.
Isha knew enough about the woman to see she did not respond well to someone trying to bully her. “Something that will jolt this traumatized patient awake?”

“Something else then,” Bruce said, slightly abashed.

“I need the doctor to prescribe that and she won’t be here until the morning,” the nurse replied, looking to Isha.

“We don’t want to make this worse for her, do we, Mr. Bruce?” Isha asked in Hindi, putting her hand on his shoulder. “We want her to wake when she’s ready, don’t we?”

“Then stop giving her sedatives,” Bruce said, eying the IV.

“She’s not being sedated, Mr. Wayne,” the nurse said, her tone losing the anger. “Sometimes people who experience extreme trauma take longer to wake up. It’s as if their brain is protecting them from facing what has happened. Or, maybe her body is waiting until it’s healed enough to send the signal that it’s ok for her to wake up. We don’t the whys but I’ve seen this before. She will wake when she’s ready. There’s absolutely no reason to force her into consciousness.”

He returned to Selina, his hand smoothing back her hair. He whispered something to her.

“Let me get something for your hand, Mr. Wayne.” With a comforting pat on the arm to Isha, the nurse left.

Bruce’s hands were cut and beginning to swell.

“What happened?” Isha asked.

“I found one of the men that did this,” Bruce replied, taking Selina’s hand.

The nurse returned. She quickly and quietly treated him, sensing that he was in no mood for small talk. She also asked no questions about his injuries and left within a few minutes.

“They threatened Helena.” Bruce said quietly, in Hindi.

Shocked and worried, Isha took a step back. Bruce looked at her and she could see his fear. For a few moments, Isha allowed herself to feel fear and worry then she looked back at Bruce. His eyes were back on Selina as if he was willing her to wake.

“No one will get to your daughter, you know that,” Isha said.

“I do,” Bruce said, quietly. “I just…” He looked back at Selina, his expression inscrutable. “I need her to wake up.”

“She will.” She gave him another comforting pat on his shoulder. “Go back to my home and see Helena. Be comforted that she is fine.”

“Oh, right. About that…” Bruce said. “Everyone that was at your house is now at mine. Everyone.”

Isha smiled. “Of course you thought of everything.” She settled back in her chair, picking up her sewing project.
Gotham – two months ago

You could take the girl out of the street but you would never take the street out of the girl. That was Selina’s thinking as her booted foot connected with the pimp’s face as he lay on the concrete sidewalk. He’d made the serious mistake of pointing a gun at her and Ollie. An even more serious mistake when he accidentally fired it, missing her head by inches. Rage coursed through her as she joined Ollie for a good old fashioned ass kicking. If Selina had been thinking a little clearer, she would have been slightly appalled at how cathartic it felt to hit someone.

And it really did feel good. It was the first time Selina had felt in control in a month. The first week after the party she existed in a fog. She supposed she did a good job hiding her turmoil because no one seemed to notice she was coasting through the day on autopilot. She barely remembered those days except of feeling of numbness.

When the dreams began, the numbness and fog went away. Bruce, ever the heavy sleeper didn’t perceive her being startled awake, breathing heavily and sweating. He didn’t notice when she curled up as close as she could against his side, pulling his arm over her. Unwilling to go back to sleep, she lay awake, listening to his steady heartbeat.

Later, she told Bruce she was sick, that something she ate wasn’t agreeing with her. Anything to cover for the fact that she was hiding in the bathroom, running a hot shower while she cowered in the corner, shaking.

“You’ve got PTSD,” Ollie said when she told him what was happening to her.

“I don’t think so,” Selina said, irritated that he would think such an affliction would happen to her.

“It’s no joke, Selina,” he said, passing her his cigarette so she could take a drag. “And you don’t deal with stuff well.”

“What are you talking about, Oliver?” Selina glared at him. She didn’t take a drag but kept the cigarette, liking how it felt in her fingers. “I deal very well with things.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, you’re adaptable,” he said, lighting another cigarette. “But shit catches up to you.”

“Not if I catch up to him,” Selina said, allowing her street instincts to take over. If someone hurt you, hurt them back. If someone was a depraved, evil human being, then that person needed to be ended.

“You’re a mom,” Ollie said, appalled. “You can’t kill people.”

He whispered the word ‘kill.’ They were at the diner, nursing a couple of coffees that had gone cold awhile ago.

“Sure I can,” Selina said but not without some hesitation. She had never plotted someone’s murder before.

Ollie stared at her. “Do you want your daughter to have to visit you in prison?”

“As if I’d get caught,” she said, but again, she had her doubts. This man wasn’t some nobody the police didn’t care about.

“Bruce won’t let me go to prison,” she decided. Or would he if she was found guilty of
premeditated murder? He knew she’d killed before but that was in self defense. Or, to save him.

“Please don’t do it,” Ollie said. “It’s...wrong.”

“Even him?” As she thought of him, the increasingly familiar feeling of nausea rose up. It had been her constant companion these last weeks, forcing her to choke down food as her body recoiled. It wouldn’t be long before Bruce commented on her losing weight. “He’s lived too well for too long, there’s no telling how many people he’s hurt.”

“It’s not for him, it’s for you.” He fell quiet. Selina knew he was thinking about Angela.

“He deserves it, Ollie,” Selina said, taking his hand, giving it a squeeze. “You don’t have to be involved. I’ll call Daryl.”

Daryl, she knew, would jump at the chance to right a wrong that had haunted him for years.

“Don’t do that yet. Just think it over,” he said. “Please?”

She thought of nothing else as she made her way back to the Penthouse that was her current place where she was residing. Nothing about it felt like a home. It was cold and far too luxurious, seeming to mock her with its opulence. Everything about it screamed, look how fucking rich I am.

When the nightmare woke her that night, Selina realized killing was too good for him. He was not going to get off that easy.

“I’m thinking about doing the right thing,” Selina said to Ollie the next day.

“Which is?” Ollie asked.

Like her, it never occurred to Ollie to take this matter to the police. The police had never done anything for them, why would now be different? Except, Selina reminded herself, she was shacking up with the most powerful man in Gotham. The police would probably care if Bruce made them.

“We need to find dirt on him,” Selina said. “Real, solid fucking facts to bring him down.”

Asking questions had led them to this reprehensible pimp who was currently lying prone on the sidewalk. The man had no helpful information at all. He thought he’d show them what a powerful prick he was by waving his gun around. Since he’d certainly dished out plenty worse to the young women and men he trafficked, Selina felt zero guilt as she felt his rib give way.

The beating only stopped when her phone indicated a message had been received.

“Oh shit,” she murmured, not needing to look to see who it was. The electronic ping conveyed the very pissed-offed-ness of Bruce. “We gotta go. I’m so late!”

I’ll meet you there she texted.

Where are you? Bruce responded.

On my way

As Ollie drove the Camaro, speeding down side streets, Selina applied her makeup, taking a critical look to make sure there were no stray cuts. She looked at her hands, so very glad she’d been wearing gloves.
Another day and Selina wasn’t as lucky. She and Ollie were jumped by a few men who did not like them asking questions of their prostitutes. They managed to get away but not before one of the guys delivered a few solid, painful punches to her side.

“God dammit!” Selina cursed as she got a good look at the damage done to her side. She gritted her teeth as she twisted around to see the full extent of the bruising that was bound to get worse by the end of the day.

“Just tell him you tripped and fell,” Ollie said, handing her a bag of frozen peas from his freezer.

“He’ll know.”

When she returned to the Penthouse, Helena ran to her, hugging her tightly. Selina buried her face in Helena’s neck to hide her grimace of pain. That asshole seemed to have cracked a rib.

“Where were you?” Bruce asked. He didn’t seem to have noticed her pained expression.

“Shopping,” Selina answered, not meeting his eye.

After Helena was asleep in bed, Selina slipped into the master bathroom.

“Oh, shit,” she said, as she looked in the mirror. Sure enough, her side was mottled with bruises. There was no way to explain these away.

Preparing for bed, she dressed in layers, tank top under a t-shirt under a light cotton zip up jacket that was supposed to be worn for yoga. All that coupled with a pair of soft sleep pants should keep everything covered up nicely.

“How was your day?” Selina asked Bruce, making herself sound normal.

“Good,” Bruce replied, looking suspicious. Selina figured she failed at the normal sounding. “How was yours?”

She started to say ‘boring’ but decided that was too provoking. She didn’t need Bruce asking her any more questions.

“The usual,” she eventually responded, giving a nonchalant shrug which caused her a twinge of pain.

Bruce reached for her, they usually fell asleep with his arm curled around her. Not possible with her side being what it was.

“I just have this really awful headache.” Christ, was she really using that cliche?

“Are you okay?” he asked, looking at her closely.

“I’m fine,” she said. “Jesus, Bruce, what’s with all the fucking questions lately?”

His eyes narrowed. “Something’s up, Selina, don’t think you can anger me into forgetting that.”

“It feels like you’re wanting me to check in with you.” Selina scooted away from him, causing her side to throb. “That you require knowing where I am every second of the day.”

“You know that’s not the case,” Bruce said, taking her hand before she could move further away. “I just want to know what’s going on with you.”
Selina was reaching the end of her ability to keep the pain from her face. “I’m going to find another bed to sleep in.”

And so the estrangement began.

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_Gotham - The Present_

The rain had started again. Bruce Wayne drove his grossly expensive motorcycle with little regard for the slick streets. Actually, the man was driving like a bat out of hell which would have been a problem for someone trying to follow him but since he knew where Wayne was headed, it wasn’t important to keep him in sight.

So he took his time getting to Gotham General, making a pitstop at an autoparts store to get new windshield wipers for the Camaro. Another pitstop to get a couple of slices and a coke then he pulled into the parking garage at the hospital. Luck was on his side when he found an empty spot next to Wayne’s motorcycle. He backed into the spot then waited for Bruce.

After witnessing the way way Wayne beat that scumbag in the alley, he decided he’d had enough of skulking in the shadows. The man certainly had more mettle than he expected. Who would have thought a rich dude could wail on a guy like that?

When Bruce emerged from the elevator, he got out of the car. Casually leaning on the hood, he waited for Bruce to see him. Wayne was on the phone and hadn’t noticed him. He ended his call, and started for his motorcycle but when he saw Selina’s Camaro parked next to it, he stopped short.

“You must be Daryl” Bruce stated, walking over to him.

Daryl was impressed he’d made the connection, and that he managed not to sound completely pissed at being stranded in a crappy part of town.

“You must be Bruce.”

“You stole my car.”

“Not stealing if you have a key,” Daryl replied, folding his arms. “And, it’s not your car.”

They regarded each other quietly, sizing each other up.

“You gonna beat on me like that dude in the alley?” Daryl asked. “Selina won’t like that. Besides, I’m smaller than you. Wouldn’t be a fair fight.”

“Something tells me that you’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, I will,” Daryl said, grinning. “But it really is a waste of energy. Look, Bruce, I don’t mean for us to get pissy here. If you’re worried I’m an ex-boyfriend, forget that. I’ve known Selina since we were five and we’ve never had the inclination to go down that road.”

Daryl detected a flicker of relief in the man’s eyes.

“You’re the one who brought the flowers?” Bruce asked.

“Yeah,” Daryl said. “Did she get them?”
“Well, no,” Bruce said. “We misunderstood the message behind them.”

Daryl nodded, not expecting that his flowers would be misconstrued as a threat.

“So,” Bruce said, leaning next to Daryl on the Camaro’s hood. “How long have you been following me?”

“Wasn’t following you,” Daryl said with a side glance. “I was following the guy following you.”

“Since when?”

Ever since DeeDee called him with the news about Ollie and Selina, he’d lost all sense of time.

“Let’s see, I got into town yesterday. Tried to see my friend who was in the hospital, but couldn’t...” Daryl gave him a look. He was already feeling raw and upset about Ollie but finding round the clock guards keeping him from seeing Selina hurt. It felt like she was already getting swallowed up in her boyfriend’s richness.

“You could’ve said something,” Bruce said.

“Don’t like cops,” Daryl said, the best explanation he was going to give.

“They aren’t cops.”

“Don’t like rich men’s private security,” Daryl snapped. “I shouldn’t have to ask permission to see Selina.”

“I’m sorry,” Bruce said. “I have my reasons.”

“Yeah, I’m getting that,” Daryl said, lighting a cigarette. He’d quit years ago but couldn’t resist stopping to get a pack. He took a calming drag. “So your tail... He seemed to be real interested in where you were going last night. After you parked, I thought I’d do you a favor and take the car. They followed me, as I thought they would. You’re welcome.”

“Why didn’t you introduce yourself earlier?”

“Look, man, I don’t know you,” Daryl said. “I assume you’re cool because Selina wouldn’t be with you if you weren’t. But, no offense, I don’t trust rich people, let alone super rich people.” He laughed. “Although, I gotta admit, you’re the first one I ever met.”

He had wanted to get a feel for the guy before meeting him. Sure, Selina liked him well enough, but Daryl just couldn’t believe the Selina he had known his whole life would be happy with a rich playboy type guy. It had to be the kid, he told himself, but there were times he picked up something in Selina’s voice that made him think she had genuine feelings for the man. After seeing Bruce fight like he did last night, Daryl suspected Selina was privy to a side of the billionaire that few saw.

“You figured out what’s going on?” Daryl asked. “Who killed Ollie?”

“No.”

“When Selina wakes up,” Daryl said. “She’ll tell me. I’ll take care of it like I take care of everything.

“How about we leave this for the police?”

“Is that what you’re doing?” Daryl laughed. “Maybe they’ll care since you’re involved but they
wouldn’t give a shit about Ollie. I’ve looked out for him since we were kids, I’m not going to stop now.”

Daryl looked away, a swell of emotion. He’d been expecting Ollie to die for years but now that it had finally happened, he wasn’t prepared for it. Wasn’t prepared for the rush of emotions and the memories long dormant. And the way he died...

“You took his body?” Bruce asked, quietly.

“T’d,” Grief did crazy things to people. Daryl knew that but he hadn’t expected the pain he’d feel when he imagined sweet, sad Ollie locked in a morgue drawer.

“Where is he?” Bruce asked, eyeing the Camaro’s trunk.

“A friend at a funeral home owes me a favor,” Daryl said. “You really don’t have any idea who’s behind all this?” Daryl asked.

“No,” Bruce said. “Every time we find someone who knows something, they turn up dead.”

“So just wait for her to wake up. She’ll clear this whole thing up.” Even as Daryl said that, he knew she probably wouldn’t. At least not to the cops and probably not to her boyfriend.

“I can’t do that,” Bruce said as he walked around the Camaro. “Help me search her car. Selina took something. Let’s see if she hid it here. I searched it the other day but I only found guns.”

“I was wondering where those went,” Daryl said as he popped the hood. “What are we looking for?”

“No idea, but someone wants it bad enough to leave a trail of bodies.”

Daryl looked around the engine in a hiding spot he knew about. From a crevice behind the right headlight, he pulled out a small steel box that had been duct taped to stay in place.

“What’s that?” Bruce asked, reaching for the envelope that had been in the small steel box.

“Nothing to do with what’s going on.” Daryl opened the envelope, showed Bruce the cash that was inside. “Selina always has cash stashed places. Her emergency running money.”

He replaced the envelope in the box and returned it to the hiding spot.

They continued to search but found nothing. As they searched, Bruce told him what they had found out so far. Daryl was concerned when he learned the search had taken a turn into the underworld of the sex business.

“Any ideas about other hiding places?” Bruce asked.

“I’ll think about it,” Daryl said. “But first I need to get through that security you have upstairs. I want to see Selina.”

“No, really,” Bruce said. “If you have any ideas about what’s going on, please share.”

“Just wait for her to wake up,” Daryl said, unwilling to air his vague suspicions.

“I can’t!” Bruce growled then reached into his jacket pocket. He unfolded a photo, thrusting it at him. It was of Bruce carrying Helena. The only message a circle around her head. The threat was clear.
“Oh, shit,” Daryl muttered. What the hell had Selina gotten into?

“I don’t have time to wait for Selina to wake up,” Bruce said as he took the photo back. He didn’t look at it again before he folded it and slid it back in his pocket. “She’s not sedated and the doctors seem to think it may be psychological.”

“I don’t look like it right now but, believe me, I’m angry. Ever since DeeDee called me, I’ve thought of nothing but getting the fucker that did this. But seeing that...” He looked back down at the photo, shaking his head. “Who does that? That’s fucking evil.”

“I agree but we may differ on what should be done with the evil bastard.”

“Probably,” Daryl said, handing the photo back to Bruce. “I’m going to visit Selina. I’ll see what I can figure out.”

Bruce shook his hand then got onto his motorcycle. With a quick nod, he tore off. The roar of the motorcycle echoing through the garage.

Daryl watched him go. Whatever had gotten Selina and Ollie on a trail that involved the illegal sex industry, it had to be bad. And Daryl was afraid he might have an idea why.

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Gotham – six weeks ago

As Selina sat in the director’s office, she made herself go over her plan for tomorrow night’s home invasion, trying to find any scenarios that she overlooked, any holes in her plan. There really was no reason for her to go over her plan at this moment but it was better than having to listen to the conversation Bruce was having.

Sensing that she wasn’t paying attention, Bruce pointedly asked her a direct question. His look commanding to play along. Any other person would be quaking in her boots at such a look but not Selina.

“Selina?” His eyes narrowed.

“Whatever you think is best, dear,” Selina replied, with an obviously fake smile. She had no idea what question they had asked her nor did she care.

If they hadn’t been sitting with another person, Bruce would have allowed his anger to show. But since they were not alone, he slipped into his ‘Bruce Wayne’ mask.

Selina turned her attention to the woman who sat in front of them. Usually prospective parents met with an admissions counselor but not them. Because of who one of the prospective parents was, they got to meet directly with the Director of the school herself.

Her desk was the picture of perfection befitting the woman who ran the most prestigious preschool in Gotham. Selina had done some checking and this was the school parents were dying to get their kids onto. The waiting list began when most of the kids were still in utero.

Even before they pulled up to the address, Selina hated everything about the elitist school. Hated it even more as she and Bruce were given a tour of the school.
Selina felt the woman’s eyes on her and met her gaze. She detected more than a little judgment in the other woman’s expression.

Bruce, of course, was impeccably dressed in his usual three piece suit looking like a million bucks. Selina wore faded jeans, a dark burgundy turtleneck, an old leather jacket and high heeled Doc Martens. She had designer clothes far more suitable for this interview but Selina could not bring herself to dress the part.

The woman gave the briefest look over of Selina’s outfit. There was a tinge of condescension in her gaze as if to say she knew that the only way a woman like Selina was sitting next to a man like Bruce was because she had trapped him.

There was no such judgement for Bruce Wayne, though. Getting his daughter to attend her school would be a monumental coup. She had even happily agreed to sign the nondisclosure agreement Bruce’s attorneys had sent over. Bruce was taking no chances of Helena’s existence being leaked before they were ready.

And they were so not ready. Things had taken a turn for the very cold between them. It was, Selina knew, one hundred percent her fault.

Her eye fell on one of the elegant brochures advertising the benefits of the school. Every page featured rich, happy children. She thumbed through the rest of the pages, feeling a little sick at the obscene tuition for a pre-school. Whoops, the name was The Winthrop Nursery School for Exceptional Children. The ‘Exceptional Children’ part had been recently added to the school name which made Selina hate it all the more.

All of a sudden, Selina felt claustrophobic. She gripped the armrest of the chair, taking a deep breath. Is this who she wanted her daughter to be? One of those spoiled girls who had Daddy wrapped around her finger?

When the woman began explaining their immersive language program, Selina couldn’t take any more.

“Thank you so much for your time,” Selina said, interrupting her. “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

She tapped Bruce on the shoulder. He looked completely astounded at her taking command of the meeting, at her being so rude. But he did follow her out, after a brief handshake with the confused woman.

“What the hell was that?” He demanded as soon as they were outside.

“That school sucks,” Selina replied. “Why did you even ask me to be there?”

“Because you’re Helena’s mother,” Bruce growled at her. “You might want to try acting like it.”

And that was the wrong thing to say to her.

“What? I’m being a bad mother because I didn’t kiss that woman’s ass?”

He took her arm, angrily pulling her away from the school. “No, because you’re scorning an excellent opportunity for our daughter.”

“I hate everything that school represents,” Selina said vehemently. “And I hate every person that sends their kids there.”
“I went there.”

Of course he did.

“Maybe I don’t want my daughter turning out to be an unbearable elitist snob,” Selina said, stopping on the sidewalk. They were about a block away from their car.

“She won’t,” Bruce said, ignoring her jab about him being an elitist snob. “This school is a good school. It will prepare her for the best schools in the country. In the world.”

“It’s a fucking preschool!” Selina raised her voice.

“I thought you wanted the best for her!” Bruce’s tone matched hers.

They were having an honest to god fight on the street. Something even Bruce seemed not to notice. She must have really pissed him off today.

“We have very different ideas of what is best for her,” Selina said. She quieted her tone as they were earning a few looks from people passing by. “Let me get this straight, Helena has to go there so she gets into the right grammar school, then the right whatever you people call junior high and so on and so on. She’ll have all the right friends. Everything will be so perfectly planned for her until she reaches the age of, what? 30? That’s what you want? Every step of Helena’s life planned out?”

He didn’t answer. Selina knew that he planned everything out of concern over Helena. Controlling her life kept her safe. Or so he thought.

“Don’t worry, Bruce,” Selina said, walking away from him. “Like they’re gonna turn your kid away. Even with me as her mother.”

He did not follow her as she hurried away.

That evening, their family meal was more subdued than usual. Both of them doing their best not to let Helena sense any disharmony between them. Helena seemed out of sorts and grouchy without anything to do with them. At one point, Bruce snapped at Selina and she came this close to getting in a fight with him in front of both Helena and Alfred who had just come into the room.

“How about you take her to bed since you’re leaving tomorrow?” Selina gritted out to him wanting him away before she lost her temper.

Alfred, of course, noticed and rightly blamed her. She glared at him. He glared back.

Escaping to the privacy of their room, she knew Bruce wasn’t about to come up. He was going to San Francisco on business early tomorrow morning. Alfred had already packed his bags so Selina had the room to herself.

As she washed her face free of all make-up, she went over all the details of her plan again. She had never planned a break-in as thoroughly as she planned this one. There could be no mistakes. She took a deep, calming breath. She also had never been this nervous about a job before. But this wasn’t a job. This was personal and she was going into the belly of the beast, trying to find something that would ruin him.

She had almost despaired of getting the timing right but then Bruce said he had to go to San Francisco which coincided with when the house would be vacant of all residents. It couldn’t be more perfect. Now she didn’t have to figure out a lie to Bruce why she was spending the night
away from home. She just had to lie to Alfred which wasn’t difficult. She had long ago figured out that he didn’t tell Bruce everything. That he didn’t tell Bruce things that would hurt him.

Splashing cold water on her face, she told herself she wasn’t really hurting him. When he found out he would be fine. Or would the damage be irreversible?

What was she doing? He didn’t deserve this.

She looked at herself in the mirror. Her face clean of all make-up, her hair pulled back in a sloppy ponytail. She realized this was the first time they would be a part in a long time.

Tell him, she told herself. Tell him everything. He could break in with her, settle her nerves. He’d understand why she descended into crazy. Crazy is how she felt now. Insane with this obsession that took over her life.

Before she changed her mind, Selina silently hurried down to his office.

He was standing behind his desk, deep in thought as he stared at some specs. His suit coat, vest, and tie had been discarded, haphazardly tossed onto a plush chair. He looked divine in just his white dress shirt and trousers. Selina stared at him trying to find the words to describe her state of mind since the party. Since the night everything fell apart and she remembered precisely who and what she was.

He looked up from his work, expecting to see Alfred. When he saw her, his gaze hardened, his defenses went up.

“I’m sorry about this afternoon at the school,” she said from the doorway. His wary look hurt. She’d done that to him. To her.

“No, you’re not.” He sounded tired.

“Yeah, Bruce, I am,” Selina said, walking deeper into the room. “I’m not sorry about how I feel but I am sorry about how all that went.”

She stood opposite him with his massive desk between them. If it had been a few months ago, she would have been sitting on it, teasing him as she playfully kept him from work. The world owed her a favor, she supposed, she had freed him to focus on this project that would help a great many people.

“I didn’t mean-” Selina started.

“We talked about all this before we came back.”

They certainly did not talk about sending Helena to some uppity school but Selina didn’t feel like bringing that up.

“We? You have a plan,” she said, quietly, trying her best at normal communication. “We are living the life you decided is best for her.”

“No! That is not fair, Selina. We planned this. We made the decision to return home. You were quite eager to come back and now I’m wondering if there’s more to it than I thought.”

She shook her head, refusing his bait. “It was a mistake, I see that now. You want to live your parents’ life. I can’t pretend like I want to try to live up to that.”
“I don’t expect that.”

“I’m just trying to figure out if you know you’re lying,” Selina said.

“What?” He snapped.

Selina turned away, she hadn’t come down to fight. At the doorway, she stopped.

“I just realized this will be the first time…” She felt foolish for saying it. The first time they’d been apart in almost five years.

“Forget it.” Selina left the room, willing herself not to hurry.

Selina was halfway up the staircase when Bruce caught up to her. She stopped, feeling him behind her, feeling his breath near her ear. She turned, and he was right there on the step below hers. They were eye level and so very close. They spent a few moments just looking at each other before he took her face in his hands. When he finally kissed her, Selina leaned into him, practically falling into him. Her hands slid up over his chest, clutching his shirt.

At first, there was anger in the kiss. From him. From her, there was apology but all that gave way to their rising passion. Anger and unspoken apologies gave way to their need to just be together.

Bruce’s hands trailed from her face, to her back to settle at her thighs. Grasping each thigh, he lifted her, pulling her knees up beside his hips as he carried her to their room.

Once inside, he slowly lowered her to stand in front of him. He kept her close, his head dipped down to kiss her again. She returned his kiss with abandon, near desperation. She missed this, she missed him.

Unbuttoning his shirt, Selina let her fingers drift over his skin as she slid it over his shoulders. Her lips followed her fingers, kissing his collarbone, his chest then returning to kiss his mouth.

She unbuckled his belt, kissing him deeper as she unzipped his fly. His hands went to her upper arms, his grip tightening imperceptibly as her fingers stroked his hardness. With her other hand, she divested him of the rest of his clothes.

Their breathing became more jagged and more audible. They made their way to the bed, stripping Selina of the rest of her clothes.

The light of the nearly full moon illuminated the room.

Naked, Selina stretched out on the bed, waiting for Bruce to come to her. He stood beside the bed, taking her in. He parted her knees, opening her up to him, but his eyes were on hers. He kissed her knee, then kissed his way up her thigh, only breaking eye contact as his mouth found her vulva.

Selina arched her back, her moans of pleasure getting louder as she neared orgasm. One hand gripped the sheet, the other was tangled in his hair. How had she forgotten how good he was at this?

She came and she could swear she felt him smile.

Taking his hand, she pulled him toward her, giving him a hot look which he returned. She pushed him to lay down. At that point, it could have gone much wilder. Both of them were on the verge of it, losing themselves in physical play, forgetting their anger and hurt.
But their eyes met again. Selina knew a flash of vulnerability must have shown on her face because Bruce tenderly touched her cheek. She closed her eyes, relishing the tenderness for a moment. The moment passed. She didn’t want tenderness. She wanted fire and passion from him, wanted him to make her feel everything that had been numbed.

Selina rose up to sit beside him, taking his hands and putting them on her breasts. With his hands on her, she moved to sit astride him. Their eyes locked on one another as she took him inside her.

She started slow, drawing him in and out of her. They didn’t say anything. Neither wanted to break the spell. Besides, words had not been working so well for them as of late.

Increasing the pace, Selina liked how Bruce was on the verge of losing control. Bruce, however, had a different idea. He moved his hands to grasp her hips, slowing her down. She was bringing him near to climax too soon. Selina leaned down, her breasts brushing his chest. They were both slick with sweat which Selina loved. Loved how their bodies moved with one another.

Selina put her hands on his, holding his hands as she stretched his arms above his head. She held him thusly, her face inches from his as she picked up the pace again. She knew he had the strength to free himself, that he had the strength to do anything to her.

She tightened her grip on his hands. Dipping her face to his neck, she licked him liking the salty, sweaty taste of him.

By the sound of him, he was near to coming but she beat him to it, just barely. She was feeling the last throes of her orgasm when he reached his. She remained on top of him but released her grip on his hands. He put his arms around her, hugging her close.

He rolled them on their side.

“Selina...”

“Don’t...” she whispered, barely audible, putting her finger over his lips. He looked at her questioningly, imploring her to say something but he didn’t push.

They lay entwined on the big bed. Selina lightly touching his arms and chest, Bruce absently trailed his fingers over her thigh, over her hips, over her side and back again.

Soon the touching turned to stroking and fondling.

With each of his caresses, she could feel his question.

*What is going on with you?*

He rolled her onto her back, fitting himself between her thighs. They lay like that for a moment as Bruce looked intently at her, wanting to penetrate her mind as he was about to penetrate her body.

*Talk to me.*

She kissed him, moving her pelvis to urge him to enter her.

*Tell me.*

Their eyes never left each other as he moved slowly within her. She relished each exquisitely slow thrust, loving the feeling of him.

Unable to respond to his unspoken questions, she took his face in her hands.
Don’t give up on me

They kissed while moving together.

I love you

I love you

***

It was just after dawn when she awoke. Bruce was moving quietly about the room getting ready to go. Their eyes met but they didn’t say anything. As the morning light filled the room, the atmosphere grew colder.

He knew the truce was over.

Selina dressed then went downstairs to find a helicopter parked outside Penthouse. She was irritated to find herself surprised by that. After all, the place did have a landing pad.

Alfred came in with someone from the helicopter crew who collected Bruce’s bags.

Bruce and Helena were having breakfast in the kitchen. Helena excitedly told her about the ‘heelycomper’ that was going to take daddy in the sky.

Selina followed Bruce as he carried Helena out of the kitchen to the main living area. They walked to the glass windows where he pointed to the rotors explaining to her how the helicopter worked. Helena listened, seeming interested in the lesson.

Selina waited at the doorway as Bruce took Helena outside for a closer look inside the helicopter.

When they returned, he put Helena down next to Selina.

He said something to Alfred, patted the top of Helena’s head, gave Selina a guarded look then started to leave.

Before he walked outside, Selina caught up to him, touching his arm. He looked at her questioningly.

Winding her arms around his neck, she kissed him. Much like the time she had kissed him before he flew away with the bomb so long ago. It was a kiss of good bye, good luck, and whatever else he wanted to make of it. She broke the kiss then returned to where Helena and Alfred stood.

“Wave bye to daddy,” Selina said. Helena complied and waved wildly as she jumped up and down. She clasped her hands over her ears as the helicopter roared to life then flew away.

Selina glanced at Alfred who had a hopeful expression on his face. He hadn’t been unaware about what was going on between Bruce and her.

“Would you mind if Helena stayed with you a bit today?” Selina asked.

“Of course not!” Alfred looked fondly at Helena.

She gave him a nod then went back upstairs. She had an intrusion to get ready for.
Bruce returned to the penthouse to find a very full house. No one seemed the slightest bit bothered at the abrupt change of location. Helena ran to him, her arms outstretched wanting him to lift her for a hug. Bruce happily obliged, hugging her close. Bruce carried Helena with him as he went through the penthouse checking on everyone’s welfare. Prisha followed, taking his hand, skipping along. Both girls totally unaware of the turmoil within Bruce.

Rishi quickly found him, excitedly telling him about getting to ride in the big, fancy black SUVs with guards that all wore sunglasses. It was the coolest thing ever, he exclaimed. His English was near perfect and he was fitting in nicely at his school.

Alfred hovered, still concerned about Bruce.

“I’m fine, Alfred,” he said. “Much calmer.”

“If you say so, sir,” Alfred replied, still not looking convinced.

They found Shanti in the kitchen making dinner. She looked at Bruce with concern, he gestured to her that he was fine.

“Smells great, Shanti,” Bruce said as he sat Helena on the counter, then lifted Prisha to sit next to her friend. “That’s a lot of food.”

The Penthouse had a huge kitchen that up until recently was rarely ever used. When Bruce and Alfred had lived here years ago, most of the food came from the hotel kitchens.

Already familiar with the kitchen, Shanti had all the burners going on the six burner stove.

“I am cooking enough for all the guard people,” Shanti said, stirring the sauce. She eyed the bandages on Bruce’s hands but didn’t say anything.

“You don’t have to do that, Shanti,” Bruce said.

“I told her that,” Alfred said. “But I must admit to not putting up much of a fight. Shanti’s Indian food sounds lovely.”

“Thank you, Mr. Alfred,” she said with a slight head bow. “I want to be of help.”

Bruce looked over at Helena who still sat with Prisha on the counter. “You’re helping more than you know.”

John Blake came in. He greeted Bruce not giving indication that when he last saw him, Bruce very nearly beat within an inch of his life.

“Anything?” Alfred asked.

“Nothing,” Blake replied.

At Bruce’s questioning look, Alfred quietly told him they were conducting a thorough search to see if they could find whatever it was that Selina took.

“If it was dangerous, she wouldn’t have brought it here,” Bruce said.
“This smells great,” Blake said, walking over to Shanti.

“Leave it to him to finish his search just as food is about to be served,” Alfred said then went to gather dishes. He enlisted Blake and Rishi to set the table.

Bruce ended up carrying both girls to the dining room table. Shanti’s two youngest were already upstairs asleep in one of the guest rooms.

“What happened to your hands, sir?” Leave it to young Rishi to ask about the bandages which Bruce explained as a very minor motorcycle mishap. Rishi looked impressed.

Bruce was quiet but he liked having everyone around. John and Alfred kept most of the conversation lively. Rishi was entranced with Blake.

The dinner was a pleasant diversion to all the recent madness. Helena wanted to sit on her father’s lap which was welcomed since he was still feeling a little raw about the photo. And the damned video. Helena, seeing a sad expression on his face, touched his face to make him smile.

The video had been upsetting, to say the least. Over and over, he saw the masked Pond punch Selina square in the face.

“They think someone hired her,” Alfred said, after the children followed Shanti back to the kitchen. “What do you make of that?”

“She wasn’t hired,” Bruce said. “This is...personal. I met Daryl. He’s the one that took Selina’s car.”

“Does he know anything?”

“Probably, but he’s not telling me. He wanted to see Selina. Maybe after he gets a look at her, he’ll feel like talking.”

“Let’s hope so,” Blake said. “Jess let me know that the woman that killed Pond is one cool cucumber and hasn’t uttered a syllable since she was arrested.”

“The woman’s a pro, a good one at that,” Bruce said. “If she knows who hired her, which I doubt, she won’t tell. People like her get hired for a reason.”

Shanti came in with Helena and Prisha, both dressed in their pajamas. “Do you want her to stay with us?” she asked Bruce.

“No,” Bruce said, reaching for Helena who looked too tired to put up a fight. “She’ll stay with me tonight.”

“That means no nightly excursion?” Alfred asked, relief plain in his voice.

“Fraid not, Alfred,” Bruce lifted Helena who put her head on his shoulder. She was almost asleep.

Bruce carried Helena upstairs. By the time they reached his room, Helena was asleep. He put her in the middle of the bed knowing that at some point she would scoot over and he’d wake with her feet in his face. The thought made him smile.

Sure enough, when Bruce woke the next morning, it was to find Helena laying sideways with her feet by his head.

Bruce checked his phone hoping for news of Selina. He’d forgotten to give Daryl his number so he
texted one of the guards to give it to him. The guard responded that Daryl had left a few hours ago.
Helena woke ready to play.

“What do you want to do?” Bruce asked her.

She looked around the room which really had nothing interesting to offer a three year old.

“Let’s play in the secret room,” Helena said.

“Secret room?” Bruce asked.

As she pointed to the wall, she began to jump on the bed.

Of course Selina had discovered it. Helena followed him as he crossed the room to open the panel. Inside the small room he found Selina’s stash.

The cell phone was dead but the cord was near by. He plugged it in then went through the stack of papers that were on top of a laptop.

A few of the papers were more sketches of the leather mask that had been given to Lax. Bruce suspected these were Ollie’s sketches and the best one was given to Lax. Most of the papers were of printouts of missing persons reports. Each paper had about twenty faces. Bruce realized there were over fifty pages of missing person reports.

The laptop was unfamiliar and Bruce wondered if this was the thing she had stolen.

Under the laptop were blueprints. They had been printed out on regular paper and had to be put together to form a complete picture.

He studied the plans thinking the house seemed familiar but he couldn’t place it. An idea began forming but it was soon chased away as he realized Helena was jumping on the bed. It was as if she sensed his attention was elsewhere so she wanted to see what she could get away with.

“Helena, stop!” Bruce said, looking back down at the blueprints.

But Helena jumped and jumped, seeing how high she could go. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that she was jumping dangerously close to the edge of the bed.

“Helena!” Bruce said, getting up to go to her. Just before he reached her, she jumped then landed at the edge of the bed, sliding off, bumping her head painfully on the side of the nightstand.

She looked up at him stunned, by the time he gathered her in his arms, she was wailing. The blueprints would have to wait.
Revelations

Gotham - The Present

Alfred emerged from his rooms to find Mr. Tibbles waiting for him outside his door. He looked around anxiously hoping the dog hadn’t made a mess anywhere. Gesturing to one of the guards, he asked him to take the little dog outside. Bruce was paying these people enough that no one would dare complain of such a request.

Making his rounds through the Penthouse, Alfred checked on the status of the many people that were there. He rather liked having a full house. Except, of course, for the armed guards that, for the children’s sake, acted as if they were houseguests.

He found Bruce in the kitchen making pancakes for everyone.

“My, my, my,” Alfred said, bemused. “Times have changed indeed.”

“Helena was hungry,” Bruce said, expertly flipping a pancake. “Why not make forty?”

“That’ll feed Blake alone,” Alfred chuckled at his own joke.

“Look at me, Pop Pop,” a little voice said. Helena stood before him, her chin trembling, her face looked as if it was ready to cry. She pointed to a Hello Kitty band-aid on her forehead.

Alfred knelt down, ignoring his creaking knees. “What’s this then, luv?”

“I jumped on the bed and fell,” she said, her voice wobbly.

“Oh, dear, I’m so very sorry to hear that.” He hugged her, loving this little girl who brought so much joy to Master Wayne.

“And I can’t find Mr. Tibbles,” she said.

“Ah, he’ll be back before you know it. One of our friends took him outside.”

Helena expression cleared then out of the kitchen to find Prisha.

“That happened an hour ago,” Bruce said, with a gesture to his forehead. “She’s just angling for sympathy.”

“And I’m happy to give it to her.”

“I found Selina’s hiding place,” Bruce said after determining no other children were around.

“Where?”

“Actually, Helena reminded me,” he said. “The secret room upstairs.”

“Well, of course she found that!” Alfred could have kicked himself for overlooking such an obvious hiding place.

“What’d who find?” Blake asked. He’d slept on the couch which he claimed was more comfortable than his bed at home.
“Master Wayne found Ms. Kyle’s hiding spot.”

“What did she take?”

“I don’t know yet,” Bruce said, pouring more batter on the griddle. “I found a bunch of papers and a laptop. Not sure if the laptop is what they’re looking for.”

Their discussion was interrupted by the arrival of four hungry children followed by Shanti holding her youngest.

After breakfast, Bruce, Blake and Alfred went to Bruce’s office where Bruce had gathered the things he had found in the secret room. Their conversation turned to the woman that Selina had been asking about. Several of papers found in the secret room were sketches of her.

“If they know her, why are they looking through missing persons?” Blake asked as he rifled through more of the papers. “This feels like they’re trying to find a name.”

“Pond indicated that Selina didn’t know her,” Bruce said.

“Then why do you think it was so important to her?” Blake asked as he handed Alfred a stack of papers to look through.

“Because Selina has a tendency to help people that are abandoned and unwanted,” Bruce said, as he scrutinized the blueprints. “I think I know this house…”

“Wait a minute,” Alfred said, adjusting his glasses as he read one of the pages Blake had just given him. “This can’t be good.”

He handed Bruce a page with more search results that seemed to have been printed from a Gotham Public Library printer. The printouts were descriptions of Jane Does from the morgue. The search encompassed the last few years.

“Oh, no,” Bruce said.

“I’ll check with Jess,” Blake said, looking concerned. They had all spent considerable time pondering the mysterious woman whose grainy photo Selina had been carrying around. The idea that the woman in the photo was dead was troubling to them all. “Maybe Jess’ll have more information on any unidentified women found in the last few years.”

As Alfred walked him out, he received a message that Mr. Fox was on his way up.

“Mr. Fox,” John greeted as he stepped into the elevator Fox had just vacated.

“Mr. Blake,” Lucius responded with a friendly nod before the elevator doors closed.

“Lucius,” Alfred said. “Always good to see you. Are those for Master Wayne?”

Alfred indicated the files in Lucius’ hand.

“Yes,” Lucius said, as they walked to Bruce’s office.

Alfred listened as Bruce and Lucius talked business. He actually welcomed the topic of the workings of water purification systems and a new engineering problem that had cropped up.

Bruce received a call that he needed to take. Rather than expecting Lucius and Alfred to leave the room, Bruce stepped away giving them an opportunity to chit chat.
Alfred and Lucius had known each other a long time, first meeting when Lucius, then a young engineer, had moved to Gotham to work with Thomas. After Thomas and Martha’s death, their friendship had grown as Lucius was the one who filled Alfred in on the inner workings of Wayne Enterprises. That was, however, until Earle banished him to the basement. Even then, the men were remained chummy, both taking a fatherly interest in Bruce.

“Problem?” Alfred asked Bruce when he ended his call.

“Not really, just an…annoyance,” Bruce said, glancing at his watch then back at the laptop and the printouts on the desk. “I have to go to Daniel Wackford’s to give him those legal documents.”

Lucius looked at him oddly. “Wackford? Daniel Wackford?”

Alfred was surprised to hear the contempt in Lucius’ voice.

“You know him...” Bruce said, also confused by Lucius’ tone. “He was one of my father’s closest friends.”

Lucius scoffed. “Says who?”

Bruce and Alfred exchanged a stunned look.

“What do you mean?” Alfred asked. He was, quite simply, astonished. There were some things that one never doubted, never even gave a second thought to. One of those things was Daniel’s friendship with Thomas Wayne. It was common knowledge that Thomas and Daniel had first been boyhood friends, remaining friendly as they grew to be young men of the same age living next door to each other. Well, as close as two mansions over a mile apart could be.

Lucius waved his hand, indicating they should forget what he said. He looked as if he bitterly regretted opening his mouth.

“I’m sorry,” he said, as Bruce went to look at the blueprints. “I shouldn’t speak of things that happened thirty years ago.”

“What did my father and Daniel not friends?” Bruce asked, his tone carefully measured which indicated to Alfred that he was close to becoming angry. Alfred gave Lucius a look hoping the man understood the mine field he was about to walk into.

“Because,” Bruce said. “My impression was they were practically best friends.”

“I bet ol Danny spread that around,” Lucius said, crossing his arms. His dislike for Wackford could not be more clear. “Maybe they were friends when they were kids, but...”

“Did Master Wayne, Thomas Wayne tell you something?” Alfred asked, with a quick glance to Bruce who managed to look both rapt and distracted.

“No,” Lucius said, looking from Alfred to Bruce. “Your father and I had a good friendly relationship. We worked well together, but more than that, our wives were close friends. So we spent time at dinners and parties but we didn’t bare our souls to each other.”

“Yet you know enough to tell us they weren’t friends,” Bruce said, as he reached for the blueprints he was looking at earlier.

Lucius was evasive. “I understood there to be a falling out between them.”
“Why?”

“It’s all just gossip, Bruce, I don’t really know anything,” Lucius said, gathering the papers he had brought. “I should be getting back to Wayne Enterprises.”

“Mr. Fox,” Bruce said, frowning as he scrutinized the blueprints he held. “Wait. Please.”

Lucius looked between Bruce and Alfred, he seemed very uncomfortable.

Bruce sat down behind his desk. He plugged in the laptop and went to work bypassing Selina’s password.

Alfred gestured for Lucius to sit.

“Please, Mr. Fox,” Bruce said as he worked. “I want to hear what you know.”

“What I’m telling you is I don’t know much of anything. I doubt very much that what was being gossiped about was true. I don’t even know how such a story got around. I only know what Alice told me which wasn’t much. She and I were...in the midst of a divorce.”

Alfred remembered Alice Fox very well indeed. When Lucius and Alice had first come to Gotham, Martha had been so happy to have her friend living near her. Alfred well recalled her and Martha’s friendship as being a warm one and the Foxes had visited often in the early days, less so after Bruce was born. Alfred had been very sorry when he heard that Alice had passed away a few years after Martha.

“Alfred,” Bruce said, handing the plans to him as he continued looking at the laptop. “I just now realized that these blueprints are of Daniel’s Beauchamp Avenue home.”

“Ms. Kyle broke into Daniel’s house?” Alfred asked.

“Seems like it. She was investigating him,” Bruce said. He turned the laptop around to show them the screen. Selina’s search history showed that she was investigating Daniel Wackford.

“From what I can tell,” Bruce said. “She didn’t find anything scandalous. There’s nothing here that we don’t already know about him. His awards, his businesses, his social connections...”

“It seems she was attempting to find links between these corporations,” Lucius said, adjusting his glasses to better see the screen. “Tricky stuff but I can see where she was trying to go with it.”

“She spent a lot of time looking into him,” Bruce said as he closed the laptop. He looked at Lucius. “Anything you can tell us that would shed a light, dim though it may be, would be helpful. I need to know the kind of man Daniel really is.”

“Well, for that,” Lucius said. “You may want to call Andrew Roberts.”

“My father’s attorney?”

“Yes,” Lucius said. “I recall Thomas meeting with him quite a bit.”

“What about the rumors you mentioned earlier?” Bruce asked.

Lucius’ uncomfortable look returned.

“There were a few...whispers about Daniel,” Lucius looked at Alfred for help, and Alfred was suddenly quite dreading his next words.
“What about him?” Bruce asked, not seeming impatient at Lucius’ reluctance to talk.

“About him…and Martha.”

“What?” Both Bruce and Alfred

“That’s impossible!” Alfred would have heard something. Or would he? Some things were too personal to share with the help. Though he had been more than help to Thomas.

Bruce slid the desk phone to Alfred.

“Call Roberts, Alfred. Set something up for this afternoon,” Bruce said. “I need to know why my mother’s name is linked with his.”

“I would love to, Master Wayne, but Andrew Roberts has been dead for over thirty years.”

“He worked for old man Moore, did he not?” Bruce asked.

“Yes,” Alfred said, slightly rebuking Bruce. “He worked for Mr. William Moore.”

“Call him.”

As Alfred dialed the number, he worried about long buried secrets surfacing. He hadn’t heard the gossip but he did remember Daniel visiting on several occasions when Thomas wasn’t home. He hadn’t given it a second thought. Thomas and Martha were too in love for him to ever suspect anything scandalous.

“Will! It’s Alfred Pennyworth,” Alfred greeted. “How are you?”

It was impossible for Alfred to neglect the niceties of polite conversation. He ignored Bruce’s impatient look.

“Alfred!” William replied, his voice sounding older than Alfred remembered but just as friendly. “I’m still alive so I must be doing pretty good. What can I help you with?”

“I’m here with Bruce Wayne,” Alfred said.

“Mr. Wayne! You must be so proud of him,” William said. “I’ve been following him in the business reports. Good things, he’s doing. How is he?”

“Yes, yes, he’s fine,” Alfred said. “Would you mind if I put you on speaker phone?”

“No! Not at all!” William responded.

“Hello, Mr. Moore,” Bruce said..

“Mr. Wayne,” William replied. “It’s very nice to hear from you. What can this old man help you with?”

“We’d like to talk to you about Daniel Wackford.”

There was silence at the other end of the call.

“Hello?” Alfred asked. “Wiliam, are you still there?”

There was another long pause before
“Please let me call you back. I need to contact someone.” The voice on the other end said quietly. William’s good natured tone had turned cold.

Bruce sat back down at his desk as Alfred went to show Lucius out. He stared at the laptop screen, seeing the images that Selina had compiled of Daniel Wackford. A different kind of dread welled in him. It was troubling, to say the least, for his mother’s name to be raised in connection with this investigation. He thought of his mother, beautiful and loving. If there was anything worrying her, she had certainly never let on to her young son.

Try as he might, Bruce couldn’t remember ever seeing Daniel and his mother together except at the parties his parents had hosted at Wayne Manor when he was young.

“Get me a driver, Alfred,” Bruce said as he headed upstairs. “Make sure the Rolls is stocked with bourbon.”

On his way to his room, he checked on Helena. She and Prisha seemed to have tired of each other’s company somewhat and played by themselves in Helena’s room under Shanti’s watchful eye. Bruce took time to look at her latest drawing which was of Bruce, Selina, Helena and Mr. Tibbles.

“Mommy will love this,” Bruce said.

Helena followed him as he made his way to the master bedroom and then on to his enormous closet. He carried her as he looked through his clothes, trying to find something that would make him look like a rich sap. He settled on an overly expensive button up shiny gray shirt and black trousers. He handed Helena the shirt to wrinkle as much as she could.

“Yes,” Alfred said as he perused Bruce when he was dressed and ready to go. “That will do nicely. Scuff the shoes a bit more as you leave, sir. They’re still looking a bit too polished.”

Bruce thanked him then kissed Helena goodbye. He took the elevator downstairs to the ground floor. As he walked through the lobby, he kept an eye out for someone who was watching him too closely.

The older model Rolls Royce was waiting for him just outside the lobby entrance. Upon seeing Bruce, the driver who was waiting beside the vehicle, opening the door for him. On the drive over, Bruce thought of everything he knew about Daniel. He’d spent time with the man’s family, had gone on a skiing trip to Aspen with them when he was a teenager. Nothing about the man indicated anything was amiss with the man.

The Rolls Royce turned onto Beauchamp Avenue, finding a street where the expensive car fit right in. Lined with old, stately oak trees, the street was relatively small with only about twenty homes. Each mansion was huge, at least a century old and no less than three stories tall. At the end of the street was Wackford’s which was the nicest of the nicest on the street. It was also their part time home as they had another grand mansion in the Palisades. Bruce had passed their gated entrance many times on his way to and from Wayne Manor.

As they arrived at Daniel’s, Bruce dabbed some bourbon on himself as if it were cologne. Just
before stepping out of the Rolls, he downed a shot of bourbon. It had been quite awhile since he’d had anything stronger than wine but he needed to smell like he’d been drinking.

The driver rushed around to open the door for him. After rubbing his eyes, Bruce exited the vehicle, stumbling ever so slightly on the curb.

The front door to Daniel’s house opened, a man waited for him inside the foyer. Unlike the doorman at the Christmas party, this man was armed, his gun in a shoulder holster under his jacket. Bruce also noticed two cameras that he would swear had not been there before.

Bruce was led to Daniel’s study where he was to wait for Wackford. The man inquired if he wanted anything, Bruce asked for a Scotch. After handing him the glass, the man left him alone. In the most discreet way possible, Bruce poured out the drink in a plant.

The room was a traditional dark wood paneled study. The furniture was comfortable and masculine. It was adorned with pictures of Daniel from college, with foreign dignitaries, politicians, and other powerful men. There were no family photos, just photographs communicating Daniel’s influence. It was a bastion of maleness.

Behind Daniel’s desk hung a photo of Daniel and Thomas Wayne when they were teenagers. Bruce stepped closer to get a better look at the youthful image of his father. He was distracted enough that he did not hear Daniel come in.

“That was just before we went off to college,” Daniel said, coming to stand beside him. “I went to Harvard and your father went across the country to Stanford. It was quite shocking at the time.”

“Yes, so I imagine,” Bruce said, remembering to add a slight slur to his words. “You two were pretty close, weren’t you?”

“Oh yes,” Daniel said, looking at him closely. “It’s difficult not to when you grow up next door to each other and are of the same age.”

“Next door?” Bruce laughed. “It’s at least a half hour walk between the mansions.”

“Ah,” Daniel said. “But that was when Wayne Manor had horses.”

“Of course,” Bruce said, he had forgotten about the horses. His mother had loved them. After they died, any trip to the stables was painful so Bruce never went. Alfred had eventually found good homes for the animals.

“Your mother was quite the rider,” Daniel said.

“I remember,” Bruce replied, somewhat abruptly.

“You usually don’t like to discuss your parents.” Bruce could feel Daniel watching him.

Bruce shrugged then lifted his empty glass, indicating he wanted another.

“Sykes,” Daniel called out. “Bring our friend another drink.” Daniel took his empty glass and set it on the desk. He gestured for Bruce to sit. “You have something for me, Bruce?”

Bruce looked confused for a moment, then feigned like he had just remembered something, “Oh, Daniel, I can’t believe I left those papers at home. I’m really sorry.”

Daniel’s irritation showed. “Send your man to go get them.”
“Yeah, maybe,” Bruce said, leaning back in the chair. Touching his forehead, he looked down at his shoes, looking defeated. “It’s just...I’ve been distracted with some personal problems.”

Daniel sat down in one of the chairs next to Bruce. He leaned toward him, encouraging Bruce to confide in him.

“About that party you had a few months back... In December,” Bruce said, looking back up at Daniel. “Do you know of any guests that may...I don’t know...may have been not quite on the up and up?”

“I don’t invite those sort of people to my home.” Bruce detected a note of censure in Daniel’s voice.

“Of course, not. It’s just...there’s this woman...” Bruce began.

Daniel nodded in understanding. “The woman you were with at the party?”

“Yes,” Bruce said. “She’s got herself in some trouble. Trouble that is affecting me.”

“One must be careful of unsuitable women”

And then Bruce knew that Daniel was the guy. Not only was there a contemptuous note in Daniel’s voice when he said ‘unsuitable’ but how else would Daniel know that Selina was not of their social standing? That she was, as he referred to her, unsuitable?

“Your whiskey, sir,” Sykes said, handing him a glass filled with more than a single shot of whiskey. As Bruce took the glass, he noticed a bit of bruising on Sykes’ knuckles. Even gloved, knuckles would get bruised. Were those the hands that had tried to strangle Selina?

Every bit of training Bruce ever had came into play when he noticed a deep scratch mark just above Sykes’ collar. Bruce quickly looked away but the image of the scratch did not go away. He knew it was Selina who had put that there. Sykes was the big masked man in the video.

To cover his reaction, Bruce took a drink of the whiskey. His heart hammered in his chest, his breath quickened. Daniel, sitting beside him, looked at him with interest. Sykes, stood in front of him, silently menacing.

Bruce realized he was in a room with two predators. Daniel may be old, but his eyes were alert and showed no sign of weakness. It was Daniel’s disguised voice on the video feed. And Sykes, Bruce surmised, was Daniel’s muscle, his means of exacting physical control.

“Apparently she took something that wasn’t hers,” Bruce said, hoping that the slur in his voice covered for any anger he was unable to contain.

Sykes moved to stand behind him, between Bruce and the door.

“Any idea what?” Daniel casually asked.

“None,” Bruce said, taking another sip of his drink. “We’ve looked everywhere. I know she won’t tell me anything...She just...” Bruce trailed off weakly.

Sykes and Daniel exchanged a look.

“I should go,” Bruce said, standing up. He went to set his glass on the desk but tripped and fell toward the desk. He grasped it firmly to keep from falling to the floor. As he did so, he stuck a
“Get yourself together, man!” Daniel seemed embarrassed for Bruce. He stood up, standing in front of Bruce. “I thought you had gotten past all this nonsense. Remember who you are! Who your family is! Make this woman tell you, make her give you what she took. You’re the man, here. You’re a Wayne! Are you going to let a woman take charge of you?”

Daniel gestured for Sykes to open the door. Taking Bruce by the arm, Daniel led him out of the study. As they walked to the foyer, Bruce looked upstairs and noticed another security guard. He’d seen two so far.

“Bring those papers tomorrow, will you?” Daniel said as they approached the front door. “My investors want to close this deal by the end of the week.”

“I’ll have them for you,” Bruce said.

“Don’t disappoint me, Bruce,” Daniel replied with a stern look that was soon transformed into a genial smile.

As Sykes escorted Bruce to the Rolls, Bruce noted that the man walked as if his foot pained him. He didn’t comment, he didn’t need these men noting how observant he could be.

The bug he left in Daniel’s study was connected to his phone. As the Rolls drove away, Bruce listened to Daniel and Sykes discussion when they returned to the study.

“It’s a shame a man like him fell under the spell of street slut like her,” Sykes said, his Liverpool accent becoming more pronounced.

“The woman is like most of her ilk,” Daniel said. “She has him by the balls, but once her grip is loosened, he’ll forget her soon enough.”

“She’s landed a billionaire, she’s not going to loosen anything.”

Daniel laughed. “We’ll loosen it for her. We just need our little project back.”

“You don’t think he has it, do you?” Sykes asked.

“No. he’s scrambling around trying to find it. I doubt he even knows what he’s looking for.”

“He did go to the Market...” Sykes said. Bruce could hear the sound of a heavy door opening. He didn’t think it was the door that led to the rest of the house.

“Where he found nothing,” Daniel said. “Fear not, my friend, there’s nothing there that connects to us. When the woman wakes, she’ll talk. She has much to protect. Really, Sykes, I’m not worried about this situation.”

“I don’t know...I still feel someone put her up to this,” Sykes said. “Why rob you? There are easier mansions to hit...”

Another sound of a heavy door being closed then silence.

Bruce looked out the window, seeing the usual hustle and bustle of Gotham. Sykes was wrong. Bruce knew no one had hired Selina. The question remained: why did she break into his house?

Bruce returned home, finding a very quiet penthouse,
“Nap time, sir,” Alfred said, walking with Bruce up the stairs. Bruce was eager to shower, both to get the alcohol smell off him and to wash away the unclean feeling Daniel and Sykes had left him with.

“Everything about him is a lie,” Bruce said after telling Alfred of his visit. “He and Sykes, that butler of his, have their hands very dirty. Selina knew what they were up to. She found something incriminating. It’s got to be bad because they’re killing people to get it back.”

“I suspect we’ll get a better picture of Mr. Wackford when we visit Mr. Moore,” Alfred said. “He called back to ask if we could be there at five.”

Bruce checked his watch and nodded. He needed to know why his mother’s name was linked with Daniel’s and hoped Mr. Moore could help.

After a long, hot shower, Bruce went back to his office downstairs. Sitting at his desk, he scrolled through the images of Daniel that Selina had amassed. There was nothing in her search to indicate any reason why Wackford was a target.

“Shall we, sir?” Alfred asked from the doorway. He had on his overcoat, ready to drive Bruce to the attorney’s home.

“I’ll drive, Alfred,” Bruce said, shrugging on his leather jacket as they walked to the elevator.

Instead of one of Bruce’s vehicles, they drove a huge black SUV with tinted windows provided by the security company. Since Bruce had little time to play games with whomever might be following him, he enlisted the security company that was being well paid to help him. One of the guards who bore a passing resemblance to Bruce drove the Mercedes in the opposite direction, seeming to go to Wayne Enterprises. Two more guards trailed Bruce and Alfred in a nondescript sedan, staying far enough behind to ensure that no one was following them as they drove to see William Moore.

Sharon Danvers struggled with the heavy briefcase as she dug in her purse to find coins for the meter. Finally finding enough quarters to give her a few hours of parking, she slung the strap of the briefcase over her shoulder and made her way across the street.

In front of the expensive apartment building stood a doorman who gave her a cursory assessment, but he opened the door to let her inside. There wasn’t much threatening about Sharon who was just over seventy. She projected an aura of absent-minded frumpiness. The frumpiness was certainly accurate but the absent mindedness was not.

While she waited for the doorman to call William to confirm she could come up, a sleek black SUV rolled by, turning to park on a side street a block away from William’s posh apartment building. Sharon had a good idea who was in the vehicle.

Her hunch was correct. She watched Bruce Wayne as he and an older man walked toward the building. He was, she decided, much better looking in person.

“Mr. Moore says to come right up,” the doorman said, gesturing she could proceed to the elevator.
Nodding her thanks, she went to the elevator and waited for Mr. Wayne and his friend.

They stepped into the elevator to carry them up to William’s floor. The older man with Mr. Wayne gave her an absent smile. She could tell the man was worried and she knew why.

“We’re going to the same place,” she told them when Bruce asked what floor she needed. “William’s?”

“Oh?” Alfred asked.

“Yes, he called me over to meet with you,” she said.

Wayne didn’t ask why but offered to carry her briefcase. Sharon happily accepted his offer.

At the apartment, a weathered old man opened the door. He was over ninety but still looked like a distinguished attorney. He had chosen to greet Bruce Wayne dressed in a snappy cardigan with tie and dress trousers. He enthusiastically shook Bruce’s hand, commenting that Bruce looked just like his grandfather who had been Moore’s friend some fifty years ago.

“Sharon! There you are!” William said, gesturing for them to follow him to his study. The going was slow but they eventually reached the room where a group of chairs had been arranged for a meeting.

“Mr. Wayne, Mr. Pennyworth,” William said, gesturing to her. “This is Sharon Danvers.”

She shook both of their hands, firmly and with confidence.

A young man came in bringing a tray of tea and cookies. William indicated they should all sit. “My great grandson,” he told them. The man said hello then quickly retreated.

“Mr. Moore tells me you’re interested in Daniel Wackford,” Sharon said as she reached for her briefcase.

“We need to settle some gossip, please,” Alfred said, helping himself to some tea. “We heard something... alarming about Mr. Wackford and...Mrs. Wayne.”

Alfred had taken it upon himself be the one to tell William, sparing Bruce from having to do so. Mr. Wayne had elected not to sit, Sharon sensed he was on edge and eager to find out what she and William knew.

“Something about an affair, I presume?” Sharon sounded offended. The thought of people whispering about Martha and That Man, even if it was decades ago, rankled. “There was no affair, I assure you.”

“I’m sorry but who are you?” Alfred asked as politely as he could.

“Mrs. Danvers is the private investigator your mother hired,” William said as he settled himself into his chair.

Bruce was taken aback. “My mother hired you?”

Sharon nodded. “Martha asked me to look into Wackford.”

“Why?” Bruce asked.

“She heard stories about him, rumors among the staff,” Sharon said. “Stories about what the maids
at the Wackford mansion in the Palisades had to endure.”

“I never heard of such a thing,” Alfred said, frowning.

“Mr. Pennyworth, some stories women keep among themselves. Especially when the stories concern wealthy, powerful men,” Sharon said. “Martha knew Wackford was a childhood friend of Thomas but she’d heard these troubling stories and wanted to find out if there was any truth to the rumors before airing them to her husband. What she found on her own was disturbing so she hired me to dig deeper.”

She glanced at William who nodded for her to continue.

“During my investigation, I learned that even as a young man, Daniel proved to be quite a problem for any attractive young woman working at the Palisades mansion. His parents managed to cover up his ‘indiscretions’ as they referred to them. The family began spending more time in the city and hired only men in that house.”

“Wackford’s father, Marcus, was a formidable man, indeed,” William said. “I believe there was some resentment on his part that the Wackfords were the second most prominent family in the city. But, I digress...Sharon, please continue.”

“I found that in over a five year period, two women that were in the employ of the Wackfords had gone missing.” Sharon passed two photos to Bruce and Alfred. Both were school photos of pretty young women. “I interviewed their families who were tight lipped. I finally found a maid that had been fired by Wackford’s mother. She had been a friend to one of the women who had gone missing. It was her belief that both women were dead.”

She paused in her narrative, allow that distressing information sink in. Even though he knew all of this, William looked sad. She took a sip of her cold tea.

“Martha was still making inquiries on her own and discovered that Daniel was spending more time than usual pursuing a business opportunity. She learned that he had targeted a young woman whose father ran a small import business out of a warehouse near the docks” Sharon handed them a photo of the Martin family. It was a small family, a man and his wife and a teenaged daughter and young son. “Martha and I figured out that Daniel was threatening to ruin that young woman’s father if she didn’t...comply with his...wishes.”

She looked away, the old anger at Wackford returning. Her gaze met Mr. Wayne’s who recognized her anger.

“Cathy Martin’s father was ill equipped to deal with someone like Daniel. How could someone like him protect his daughter from a man of Daniel’s wealth and power? It was then that Martha told Thomas everything.”

Sharon remembered when she and Martha had visited Cathy’s Martin’s home. The young woman had wept, feeling ashamed and guilty for causing misfortune to her family. Martha had assured her everything would be fine. “It’s time to tell Thomas,” Martha had said as they walked to Sharon’s car. “We can’t let him get away with this.”

The next day, Martha and Thomas both came to her see Sharon. Thomas Wayne in person seemed quite different from the man she’d seen in the papers. In her office, the two of them had sat side by side holding hands. Thomas did not require Sharon to present any evidence of Wackford’s guilt. His wife’s word was enough for him.
“Between the three of us, we settled on a plan to save the Martin family. The solution was simple for a man like Thomas.”

“He bought the building,” Bruce said.

“Yes, he bought it before Daniel could thereby depriving him of his fun and ensuring that Mr. Martin would not lose his family’s livelihood.”

She passed more documents for Bruce to peruse. He nudged Alfred, pointing at the address of the warehouse.

“You know it?” Sharon asked.

“Yes,” Bruce said, returning the paper to her. “There was a murder there a week ago. It’s abandoned and I had no idea I owned it.”

“It was a rush job,” William explained. “Andrew Roberts, one of our rising star attorneys, was working with Thomas at the time. The property was not filtered through the usual entities but was bought by Thomas personally who, I believe, paid cash for it. And when I say cash, I mean Thomas showed up with a case of paper money. He was determined to get that property before Daniel could.”

“Needless to say, Wackford was not pleased,” Sharon said. “We thought we had beat him but…”

“What?” Alfred asked after Sharon fell silent.

“Cathy Martin went missing a few weeks later,” Sharon said quietly. The disappearance had shocked and shaken them. “We realized we were in over our heads and needed to get help so we met with Andrew at Mr. Moore’s firm to see how to proceed. To find out who at the police department could help.”

Martha had been devastated at Cathy’s disappearance. “I promised her,” she had said, her eyes filling with tears. Thomas had settled into quiet fury. Sharon was sure the wealthy and influential man had never felt quite so powerless.

“I gave Andrew copies of all my notes, all my interviews, everything I had compiled on Wackford. But it wasn’t enough and Martha was adamant that we have solid evidence to present so there would be no way for Wackford to slither by,” Sharon said. “So Andrew and I focused on widening our search for witnesses. While we did that Thomas and Martha made discreet inquiries among their set. I believe it was then that the rumors about Martha and Daniel were first bandied about. My guess is that the source of the rumors was either Daniel or his wife, Miriam. Miriam was a classic social climber and wanted nothing to sully the Wackford name.”

“A social war was brewing,” William said. “The Waynes versus the Wackfords. It was titillating gossip for many of the elite.”

“I had no idea,” Alfred said, looking at Bruce.

“Well,” William said. “Another story eclipsed all that…”

They all knew what he meant. The murder of Thomas and Martha made society forget all the rumors and innuendos.

“Wait, do you think…?” Bruce had gone completely still. He looked pale,
“No,” William said. “But don’t think we didn’t think it. Andrew and Sharon spent considerable time trying to find if Daniel had anything to do with your parents’ deaths. There was nothing at all to indicate Daniel was involved but just that we suspected him should tell you what we thought of him. It was just a horrible coincidence.”

“Did you and Andrew Roberts continue with the investigation into Wackford?” Alfred asked Sharon.

“We did,” Sharon replied. “Of course, we first went to William here and explained everything. He asked us to look into,..what happened to Martha and Thomas. After we determined Wackford had nothing to do with that, we refocused our efforts to find evidence against him.”

“As a friend of Thomas’ father,” Williams said. “I felt personally compelled to follow through with Thomas’s wishes.”

“And?” Alfred asked.

“And there was nothing to find,” Sharon said. “Wackford’s parents did an excellent job covering up for him. They paid off people, fired and intimidated others. After their deaths, I suspect Wackford learned not to play in his backyard. As for Cathy Martin’s family, they were scared and grief stricken. They packed up and moved to Minnesota. There was absolutely no evidence against him.”

“Even if we had someone to come forward,” William said. “Andrew came to believe that Daniel had a few police officers in his employ. I don’t know if you know this, Mr. Wayne, but the police department was quite corrupt not too long ago.”

“Yes, I heard something about that,” Bruce said. “But the investigation was abandoned?”

William and Sharon exchanged a glance. There was shame and embarrassment in their eyes.

“Roberts was killed in a car wreck about six months later,” William said. “His brakes failed. Sharon here, had a near miss herself.”

“If I hadn’t had training while in the army,” she said. “I would have been killed. My daughters were with me at the time!”

“Soon after that, Daniel visited me,” William said. “And while he said nothing overt, there was simply no mistaking his threat. I was already on my way to being an old man. I have to confess that I was afraid.”

“We understand, William,” Alfred said. “He was out of your league. No shame in that.”

“No,” Bruce said. “Sounds like Daniel is far more dangerous than I ever suspected.”

“Yes,” Sharon said. “I’ve kept an eye on him over the years. There is nothing at all that would suggest the kind of man he truly is.”

“Why did Mrs. Wayne begin looking into him?” Alfred asked Sharon. “What made her question the maids? This isn’t something they would have volunteered to the mistress of the house.”

Sharon hesitated. Martha had never confided the reasons she had started asking questions about Daniel Wackford. Sharon was not only perceptive as an investigator, but as a woman, she could tell when another woman was on the receiving end of a man’s troublesome advances.
“She never told me why,” she said, preferring to stick to the facts.

“And you, Mr. Wayne,” William said. “Why are you asking about him now?”

“My...girlfriend, was looking into him.”

“Your daughter’s mother?” William asked.

Bruce nodded.

“Why was she interested in him?” Sharon asked. “There’s really nothing about him that invites scrutiny like that. Unless she knows something.”

“I don’t know,” Bruce said. “She’s unconscious at Gotham General. I haven’t been able to ask her.”

“The murder you referred to earlier?”

“Yes, she was there. She’s lucky to be alive,” Bruce said. “She and her friend were looking into a missing woman and into illegal porn. Really disgusting stuff.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Sharon said. “I didn’t find anything like that but Daniel was a budding sex offender at a young age. Those kind of impulses do not go away. If anything, those impulses intensify and escalate. Especially if unchecked.”

“Money like he’s got can keep him in the shadows,” William said. “Wackford is dangerous but quietly dangerous. I suspect he has enormous influence, more than meets the eye. I, too, have been following him in the papers. He’s friends with Senators, visited presidents, he counts as his friends some very powerful people. You just shouldn’t cross him, Mr. Wayne.”

“Don’t worry about me, Mr. Moore,” Bruce said. “I can take care of myself.”

“What do you make of all that?” Bruce asked as he and Alfred drove back to the Penthouse.

“I don’t even know what to think of it,” Alfred said. “I keep thinking back to that time, trying to remember something, but…”

Bruce understood. His parents’ murder seemed to muddy all memories of that period just before they died. Except for the bats. That would always stay with him.

“Since she took such precautions, Ms. Kyle must have had an idea of how dangerous he was,” Alfred commented. “Do you think she knew about your mother’s involvement?”

“No,” Bruce said. “She would have told me if she figured out my mother was involved.”

Selina well understood Bruce’s feelings about his parents. He reckoned he spoke to her about them more than he had anyone else. It was Helena’s arrival that nudged him to remembering his parents without being overwhelmed with pain.

The nomadic years after Helena’s birth had been perfect for them but more and more often, Bruce’s thoughts turned to family traditions, ancestors who had made an indelible mark on the city
that had been so good to his family. As he watched Helena grow, he wanted more for her, wanted her to have everything including a family history to be proud of.

“Martha and Selina were after the same thing,” Alfred said.

“To expose Daniel for what he is,” Bruce replied, still reeling from all the revelations about Wackford.

“I think about the trips you took with that family,” Alfred said. “I never…”

“Don’t worry, Alfred,” Bruce said. “You were an excellent guardian. How could you have known you were sending me off to vacation with a murderer?”

Alfred glared at him.

Bruce shrugged, finding the macabre humor in all this. He must be tired indeed.

Just before they reached the hotel, Bruce received a call from Isha who told him Daryl wanted to meet him.

“The East River Projects?” Alfred frowned when Bruce told him where. “You don’t want to bring a nice vehicle there.”

“Let me worry about that,” Bruce said.

After dropping off Alfred at the hotel, Bruce drove to meet Daryl at the projects which were not too far from the Narrows. The streets encompassing the group of four buildings were empty. Bruce parked in front of the cracked sidewalk that led to courtyard that was surrounded by the buildings. He got out of the car and waited for Daryl on the one bench that had not been destroyed.

The buildings had been abandoned for decades. Bruce wondered if the city had even bothered condemning them. It didn’t look like they had received any attention from the city in twenty years. It was an eerie part of Gotham, one that seemed to have been completely forgotten.

A lone person approach, coming from the walkway between two of the buildings opposite where Bruce had parked.

“That’s pretty bold of you,” Daryl said. “Waiting outside your safe truck there.”

“Where’s Selina’s Camaro?” Bruce asked.

“Oh, I wouldn’t park that anywhere near here. It’s safe with friends of mine.” Daryl looked around. “How you like the Quad?”

“That’s what this is?” Bruce asked.

“Yeah, that’s what we call it. It’s probably still called that.”

“Looks like it should be condemned and the buildings torn down.”

That seemed to offend him.

“Here’s the deal, Bruce. If she stole something that’s important, she hid it in there.” Daryl said, nodding his head toward the tallest of the four buildings. “And I know exactly where she would put it.”
“What do you want in return?” Bruce asked.

“I get the man that killed Ollie,” Daryl said. “I think you have a pretty good idea who that is.”

“I’m not turning over someone to be executed.”

“Who said anything about executing him?”

“You’d give him to the police?” Bruce asked.

Daryl laughed. “I can’t even pretend that’s what I’d do.”

“No deal,” Bruce said, looking back up at the building.

“Seems to me like whoever behind this is rich,” Daryl said. “Guess you rich people look out for each other.”

“You guessed wrong, Daryl.” Bruce shook his head.

“I mean we can wait around until Selina wakes up and she’ll tell me,” Daryl said. “Believe me. She’ll want that guy dead and I will be more than happy to oblige her. You won’t ever find out what it was she stole. What someone is killing people for.”

Bruce had a feeling Daryl was truthful about knowing where Selina would hide something. Whatever she took from Wackford was important. He thought about his parents working to bring him down.

“I won’t deliver him to you, but I won’t stand in your way,” Bruce said.

“Fair enough,” Daryl replied. “I’ll go get it.”

“I’ll come with you.”

“You probably won’t want to do that,” Daryl said.

“Why not?”

“You ever been in there?” Daryl pointed to the towers.

“No.”

“It ain’t pretty,” Daryl said. “In fact, for civilians such as yourself, it can be shocking.”

“I’m stronger than I look,” Bruce said.

He and Daryl walked to the main entrance. The glass door had shattered long ago so they just had to step through the frame.

Bruce discovered that the building was abandoned only in the official sense. As they made their way through the first floor, they found the dregs of humanity lingering about. Daryl was right, the sight of the people existing in this place was shocking. Most were drugged out. They look like ghosts, some were acting wildly crazy while others seemed to be hallucinating their way through the darkened interior. Many just lay on the floor sleeping or staring vacantly into space.

Daryl led him to a stairwell where they saw a few more people on their way up to the seventh floor. These did not look as hard core as the ones on the first floor. They looked skinny and
desperate but not out of their minds.

Out of the corner of his eye, Bruce saw a child. The small boy saw him then turned and quickly ran away. Bruce turned to go after but Daryl shook his head,

“You won’t catch any kids ‘round here,” Daryl said, looking in the direction the kid had run. “They know not to get caught. Feel me?”

Bruce’s stomach clenched as he thought of Daryl’s implication.

They finally reached the seventh floor which seemed to be completely deserted. Bruce followed Daryl down a long hall until they reached apartment 7C.

“Why here?” Bruce asked.

“We lived here once,” Daryl said.

“We?”

“Me, Ollie and See,” Daryl said. “It wasn’t so bad. We kept track of each other.”

“How old were you?”

“Young,” Daryl said as he opened the door. They walked through the empty apartment. The light of the setting sun cast an orangey glow over the room. In one of the back bedrooms, Daryl slid open a closet door. He pushed aside a few boxes revealing a large hole in the wall. Climbing through, he gestured for Bruce to follow him into the adjoining apartment.

Unlike the other one, this apartment looked as if it had been used. It was still a dusty mess but there was an old couch against the wall, some empty beer cans and a few take out containers on a makeshift coffee table.

“This was our place,” Daryl said. “Looks like either Selina or Ollie has been here recently.”

He dragged an old kitchen chair to the middle of the room. Standing on the chair, he removed a vent cover.

“Her stash,” Daryl said as he handed Bruce a black duffel bag. “Only reason you’re getting this is cause of the kid.”

He stepped down off the chair. “Look through it and see if you need anything. Don’t take anything that doesn’t have to do with what’s going on.”

Bruce looked through the bag finding her black outfit she had worn when she was working as a cat burgler. He couldn’t resist rubbing his thumb over the fabric, finding it softer than he expected. Feeling Daryl’s eyes on him, Bruce set the suit aside and continuing digging through the bag finding cash, two fake passports, driver’s licenses, two pistols and...

“This is it.” Bruce used the fabric of her suit to hold up a small, round film canister. He shook it gently, confirming that there was a film inside.

“You sure?” Daryl asked as he carefully repacked everything in the bag.

“Everything else in there is hers, her security blanket,” Bruce said, perfectly understanding the whys of her stash.
“But this? This is definitely not hers.”

He looked around for something to use to carry the canister. He did not want his fingerprints anywhere on it.

They left the apartment. Daryl replaced the boxes hiding the hidden entrance. Quickly, they made their way downstairs and outside. Both men relieved to be out of that place.

“Good luck with that,” Daryl said.

“Don’t you want to see what this is?” Bruce asked Daryl.

“No,” Daryl replied. “No, I most definitely do not want to see what’s on that. You know it’s going to be bad.”

Bruce nodded. Daryl was right, whatever was on this thing was going to be very bad. Bruce dreaded having to see what was on it.

“Daryl?” Bruce called out before the man walked further away. “There’s kids in there.”

“Yep.”

“You don’t seem concerned,” Bruce said.

“Always been kids in there,” Daryl replied.

“How many?”

“I don’t know…most stay pretty well hidden.”

Bruce looked back toward the building, feeling the inhabitants’ eyes on them. “Someone should be called about this.”

“What good would that do?” Daryl asked. “Deprive a lot of people of a roof over their head is what that would do.”

“You can’t think that’s a good situation for those people in there?”

“What’re the cops gonna do about them? Throw them in jail? Then what? They’re not doing anything bad cept to themselves.”

“Even those kids?”

“How about you not talk about shit you have no idea about?” Daryl was angry. “Those are our people. Selina and me and Ollie. Not everyone in there is a drugged out loser. Those people stay hidden because they know better. We don’t need rich do gooders telling us how to live.”

He shook his head in disgust. Bruce had touched a nerve. “And those kids?” Daryl said. “Well, ask Selina how much she liked going to a foster home.”

Bruce watched him as he disappeared back inside the towers. He looked up, finding the seventh floor and imagined young Selina living there.

On his way back to his vehicle, he called Alfred. “We need a film projector.”
New Realities

Gotham – Two Months Ago

Sitting at Mawbry’s, their old favorite bar in Old Town, Oliver and Selina planned for her break-in of Wackford’s Gotham mansion. Less than two weeks ago, Selina had infiltrated home with a catering group getting a good solid look at the place. Ollie had offered to go in her place but Selina insisted, patting his arm with a look at his tattoos and piercings that couldn’t be covered up.

Selina did agree that he could keep a watch out from the rooftop of a next door neighbor. She’d already scouted out everything, had the whole neighborhood mapped out, which houses gave the best view of the target mansion, what time people went to bed, how many servants were in residence. She overlooked nothing. Ollie had never seen her quite so...professional. He remembered her fumbling through burglaries when they were young. Predatory pawn shops had been her favorite haunt as a teen.

Still, he had never been involved with something like this before. Selina assured him breaking into the Wackford mansion was easy peasy; she’d gotten into far more fortified places without incident. So they plotted and planned with Selina taking time to allay his many reservations. The only hold up was the when of the burglary.

They had to wait for the Baby Daddy to leave town.

Selina didn’t like it when Ollie called Mr. Bruce Wayne the Baby Daddy so that meant he couldn’t stop calling him that.

“He’s not an asshole, Ollie,” Selina said later, taking a sip of her warm beer. It was afternoon at Mawbry’s. The place was busy with people who had nothing better to do than get drunk on a weekday afternoon.

“He burned down his own mansion while he was drunk!” Ollie said, looking at his Sprite feeling proud that he was continuing with his latest bout of sobriety. Selina had been hesitant at them meeting at a bar but Ollie reassured her that he had just earned his six-month sober chip and had every intention of earning his seven month chip.

“That’s not true,” Selina said, scanning the dismal crowd.

“It’s what Google says.” Ollie still could not believe Selina was with a rich guy. Not just a rich guy, but a super rich guy. Like the top 1% of the top 1%.

“You think I’d be with an idiot who would burn down his own multi-million dollar family mansion?” Selina asked, sounding offended. She was getting mad at him which usually happened when he kept trash talking her boyfriend.

“I guess not,” he said, swirling his Sprite. “So...I just hang out on a roof?”

“You don’t even have to do that. I’ll be fine.”

“But you’re a mom. You need someone to watch your back.”

It was Selina’s momness that caused him the most worry. She was a good, loving mother with a
sweet, beautiful girl. She shouldn’t be out doing something that could get her in prison or worse. But Selina was obsessed, had been for over a month. Obsessed with ruining a very powerful and dangerous man. It made Ollie more than a little uneasy at the gleam in her eye when she mentioned Wackford’s name. But she was right. The man was a predator, preying on the vulnerable and he deserved to be taken down.

“I’ll be fine,” she said before getting that deep look again. The look that told him she was thinking about how to ruin Wackford. “I want him to burn,” she had told him.

“It was my fault,” he said, quietly.

“None of that,” Selina said, looking at him as she gently slid her arm over his shoulders, hugging him to her. “It’s so not your fault.”

But it was. She’d never blamed him, not once. Not a hint or a whiff of accusation ever came from her. Most of his past was a blur, and there were few things he remembered as clearly as that day so long ago when he’d stood there frozen, unable to speak up and warn her.

“Really, Ollie,” she said earnestly. “Don’t think like that.”

“Let’s just burn his house down,” Ollie said.

“That’s the spirit!” Selina raised her glass in a toast. “But no, sweetie, I’m getting in there and you know what I’m going to get?”

“What?”

“Evidence.”

“Evidence? What are we all CSI now?”

“You bet,” Selina said.

“Because he won’t believe you if you don’t have something solid on Wackford?” Ollie looked down at his drink.

“Oh, he’d believe me alright,” Selina said but she didn’t sound as confident as she tried to. “I mean this asshole is a family friend. His dead dad’s best friend, for Chrissakes! So when I tell him, I just want something to prove it so he doesn’t have to go hunting on his own.”

“He’d do that?” Ollie asked. “I would think a dude like him could hire the best investigators in the world.”

“He could,” Selina said but she offered nothing further. Glancing at her phone, she said she had to go.

On the night of the break-in, Ollie was a nervous wreck. That day, he’d already smoked over a pack of cigarettes as he downed cup after cup of coffee. He and Mr. Tibbles went out for an extra long walk. Too long as he ended up having to carry the dog back home earning him more than a few amused looks.

He met Selina several blocks away from the mansion. They walked through a maze of alleys until they reached the rear of Wackford’s neighbor’s house.

“They’re out of town,” Selina explained. “And their security does not extend to their roof.”
She helped him climb the three stories to the top. From there they could see the Wackford house. Big and silent and, to Ollie, menacing. There was no reason for that but, nevertheless, it looked to him like it was ready to swallow him up.

You won’t see me, Ollie,” Selina whispered. “I’m gliding over then getting inside through a window on the lower level. Ok?”

He nodded.

“Just stay here. Keep low and if anyone looks like they’re going to the house, send me a text. Got it?”

“Yeah, yeah, I got it.” He hadn’t played look out for her in decades but he remembered the essence of it.

Selina gave him a phone with one phone number programmed into it. “If something goes wrong, if I’m not out in one hour, call that number.”

“Who’s number?” He asked.

“That’s Bruce,” she said.

“What’s he going to do? Call the cops?” His tone was contemptuous when he mentioned the police.

“Just tell him the address and that I need him,” she said. “He knows someone who will help if it comes to that.”

Ollie looked at her skeptically.

“Look, Ollie, I know it looks like I don’t trust Bruce but I do,” she said, looking at him earnestly like she wanted to tell him something. “Bruce is far more capable than you would think. Don’t believe anything you read about him online, okay? He’s a good man.”

With that, she disappeared into the night.

Ollie had plenty of dark experiences in his life, more than his fair share, but nothing prepared him for the film Selina had found at Wackford’s. He had a friendly acquaintance who ran an old timey peep show near South Point. The man gave them a bored glance when Selina told him not to touch the film without gloves but boy was he happy he never touched it after they all got a look at the film. After they watched it, the man simply said, “You’re gonna get killed over this one.”

Ollie managed to stay sober another day after watching the film. After that, he found Toby and holed up for a day in the Towers falling into a meth haze. Being back in their old room in the Towers was comforting. As he looked out over the Quad, his fog cleared and he remembered the crying woman. He took a few more hits off the pipe until her image faded from his mind.

But he couldn’t stay in a haze forever. Selina found him, dragging him out the Towers. She understood what he was feeling, she was haunted by what she’d seen, too.

All Oliver could think about was that girl. Who was she? Was she destined to be forgotten? To be one of the forever missing women that was not as unusual as it should be?

So instead of going to his meeting, Ollie started visiting shelters and other places he knew runaways hung out. It was, he decided, one of the most important thing he’d ever done. A mission.
Selina and Ollie fought because Ollie decided Selina wasn’t as serious about finding about the girl as he was.

“Of course, I care!” Selina’s yelled. “But how are we going to link him with that film through her? You know he had someone pick her up off the street!”

“She doesn’t deserve to be forgotten like she never existed,” Ollie said, quietly.

“Hey!” Selina responded. “We’re going to find out who she is. She won’t be forgotten. She won’t get lost. I promise you that.”

His friend at the peep show, as haunted by the film as they were, gave them the name of a woman who hired out for specialty gigs.

Jaxi Jane met them at the diner in the Narrows. Nothing about her screamed sex worker but she and Ollie shared a knowing glance, recognizing a compatriot in the trade. But unlike Ollie, Jaxi had gone into the profession willingly, with her eyes wide open. From the looks of her, she was doing quite well for herself.

“We found a movie,” Ollie said, trying to find the words to describe the despicable thing. “On film..”

“Not the kind for distribution but for private use,” Selina said, helping him out. “But it wasn’t like a home movie or anything. There was lighting and some kind of production went into it.”

“Sounds like maybe a club movie,” Jaxi said. “Like for private entertainment. Not meant for anyone but a very select few.”

Selina and Ollie shared a quick glance.

“That sounds right,” Ollie said. “What do you mean about club movie?”

“There are clubs and then there are clubs that people don’t know about,” Jaxi said. “Clubs that people don’t just stumble on. Then there are the ones that are high end, prestigious. Then there are those that are secret, not meant to be discovered. Whispered about.”

Selina nodded. “What do you know about those?”

“Why are you asking?”

“We found a film...” Ollie repeated.

“Yeah?” Jaxi asked politely. “Good quality stuff?”

“No, not at all,” Selina said. “But we do know a rich guy was behind it.”

“I don’t think the woman was...willing,” Ollie said, feeling sick just having to say the words. “Wait, no, she was definitely not willing.”

“Oh…” Jaxi said, taking a sip of her hot tea. “Maybe it’s not as bad as you think. I’ve been hired out for jobs like that.”

“What do you mean?” Selina asked.

“They wanted to pretend to rape me,” Jaxi replied, leaning in so they could hear her. “They paid really, really, really well. It was a group of men. Rich men, all wearing masks. It was creepy as
hell. But, like I said, they paid me enough that I didn’t have to work for six months and got to go on a vacation.”

“They filmed this?”

“Yes, and I got a feeling some of the men there didn’t know that,” Jaxi said. “Not that it would have mattered. They were all wearing hoods and robes trying to look Satanic or something. It was kinda stupid really. Something rich dudes probably think is menacing.”

“Who hired you?” Selina asked.

“The Pussy Palace’s owner,” Jaxi said, making a face. “Pond Scum...Excuse me, Larry Pond. He has his hand in everything deviant. Not deviant fun but deviant...scary.”

“So he hired you,” Selina said. “Just for that job?”

Jaxi hesitated.

“Please,” Ollie said, sensing she was holding back. “This thing we found. It’s bad. Really bad.” He gave her a look showing how serious he was.

“They hired me for another job, This wasn’t a gang bang but a group of men standing around while one man pretended to rape me. He had an English accent. Big Guy. Wore a leather mask. He kept getting mad at me because I didn’t look scared enough. So, he slapped me and it got rough after that. Too rough for my taste.”

She turned away, upset at the story.

“He raped you,” Ollie said, gently.

“Yeah, at some point I had no say in what was going on.”

“Been there,” Ollie replied. Selina nudged him with her shoulder, giving quiet comfort to him.

“I don’t suppose you have any names?” Selina asked.

“Sorry, sweetie,” Jaxi said.

“What about an older man?”

“They were all masked so I couldn’t tell you anything about the other men in the room. Assuming, of course, that they were all men. I did notice that the big guy kept looking at another guy. There was nothing outwardly different about that man but he definitely seemed to be the boss.”

“Where was this?” Selina asked.

“Not sure,” Jaxi said. “They picked me up in a limo with darkened windows. The driver didn’t say anything and I didn’t ask. Kinda goes with the job, you know?” She looked at her watch. “I hope you got what you needed ‘cause I need to go.”

“Thank you,” Ollie said, rising to give her a small hug.

“Please be careful,” she said. “These men like the shadows. And that big guy, well, I’ve dealt with my fair share of men and he scared me. He was a sadist. I feel like I was lucky to walk away from there.”
Gotham - The Present

The blue, city-issued Ford was a conspicuous blight amid the sea of shiny Bentleys, Jags, and other European vehicles that surely cost more than a year’s salary. Parked outside Gotham’s most fashionable hotel that Bruce Wayne owned and lived in, Jim Gordon ignored the curious glances of hotel guests as he sat in his car. His attention was occupied by a file until a pair of young women with too much money and too few clothes sauntered past him, giving him their best haughty look. As if he couldn’t help himself, he darted a quick glance at their retreating forms.

“Nice view, huh, Commissioner?” Blake drawled through the open window as he watched the women walk away. They gave him a more suggestive look. If it had been any other day, he probably would have followed them.

Gordon frowned at him as he rolled up his window.

“What brings you by, Commissioner?” Blake asked as they walked to the hotel.

“I’d rather not email this.” Gordon patted the folder under his arm. “We learned the woman’s identity. The missing persons report came through recently and hadn’t been logged in,” Gordon said. “I had people calling and we got lucky.”

He passed the folder to John.

“Her name is Kellie Ross, from Iowa,” Gordon said as they walked to Bruce’s private elevator. “She ran away from home about a year ago. Her mother finally got a bad feeling about not hearing from her and reported it.”

“Prettier than in Selina’s picture,” Blake said, looking at the photo in the file. In this picture, the young woman looked happy, beaming at the camera. She was very pretty with bright blonde hair and clear blue eyes. “What’s the news about the woman that killed Pond?”

“To no one’s surprise, she hasn’t uttered a word except ‘lawyer,’” Gordon said. “And she got a good one, too.”

“Is she already out?”

“By tomorrow, I suspect she will be,” Gordon said, as they approached the security guard.

After confirming their identities, the guard let them into the elevator.

They arrived to find the house alive with activity. Gordon had known of the threat against Wayne’s family. When Blake had told him of Mr. Wayne’s and Ms. Kyle’s daughter, Jim had smiled, absurdly pleased at the news.

A woman in a green sari, holding an infant greeted them. Blake introduced her as Shanti.

“Mr. Bruce is not yet home,” Shanti told Blake. “Mr. Alfred is in the office.”

She gestured the direction.

On their way to the office, they were greeted by two little girls and a small dog. One of the little girls waved at Blake before running off with her friend.
“That’s Helena,” Blake said, as he led Gordon to Bruce’s office where they found Alfred setting up a film projector

“Movie night?” Blake asked.

“Not bloody likely,” Alfred said, looking grim before turning to greet Jim. “Commissioner Gordon.”

“Mr. Pennyworth,” Gordon said. “What’s with the projector?”

“Master Wayne has apparently found a movie,” Alfred said as he fiddled with the projector.

Bruce soon arrived, surprised to see Gordon. Gordon handed him the file with the woman’s information.

“Yes,” Bruce said, looking at the photo in the file. “That’s her. She’s from Iowa? Any Gotham connection?”

“None that I found,” Gordon said. “I suspect that after she ran away she simply ended up here. Like so many other runaways.”

“Maybe this will explain things,” Bruce said. From his jacket pocket he withdrew an object wrapped in a handkerchief. He placed it on the desk, unwrapping it in a manner that his fingers did not touch the tin.

Gordon looked closely at the cannister, vainly looking for any company descriptions or any other markings.

“What’s on it?” Blake asked, eyeing it warily.

“No idea,” Bruce said. “But someone’s willing to kill for it.”

“Someone?” Gordon asked, picking up something in Bruce’s tone. Something he could do more easily now that the man wasn’t forced to disguise his voice.

Bruce didn’t respond. He pulled out a pair of gloves then nodded at Alfred to dim the lights.

Gordon and Blake sat down on the plush sofa to face the wall that had recently been vacated of artwork.

“I’m sure that is going to be perfectly awful,” Alfred said from the back of the room.

Alfred’s prediction was correct.

The film began with a close up on the crying face of the young woman Selina was looking for, Kellie Ross. The picture from Selina’s phone was a photo taken of the movie.

Within a minute of starting the film, Bruce stopped the projector.

“If anyone wants to go, this is the time,” he said, quietly.

Alfred left. “I’m too bloody old for this,” he muttered. “I’ll keep everyone well away from this room.”

After Alfred left, Bruce went to lock the door.
The three men exchanged a look, resigning themselves to what they were going to have to watch.

The film was more horrifying than any of them could have imagined. It lasted just around twenty minutes but it was among the longest twenty minutes of Gordon’s life. Eventually, Blake looked away, keeping his gaze fixed on his shoes. The sound, however, could not be avoided.

Only Bruce and Gordon watched the entire thing.

When it was finally over, the men sat in silence, the only sound in the room was the projector spinning without a film.

“That’s fake, right?” John asked, shakily. “It has to be. Snuff is a myth.”

“People don’t kill for fake snuff,” Gordon said, quietly. He looked down at the photo of Kellie Ross. He had hoped that the search would lead to finding her alive and ready to be returned to her family. Now, the best they could do was to find her body to return to Iowa.

Gotham - One week ago

After the fight with Bruce, Selina locked herself in the bathroom. She couldn’t believe it had come to this. Leaning against the door, she took deep calming breaths. The confrontation with Bruce was desolating.

Bruce had looked shocked at the horrible things she’d said. She, herself, had been equally appalled at the words that spewed from her mouth. But he knew she would never take Helena and run off, didn’t he? Why wouldn’t he? a small voice reminded her. It’s not like you haven’t betrayed him before...

She avoided looking at herself in the mirror as she splashed cold water on her face. She’d gone too far, she supposed. Pushed him so far away that there was no turning back.

Ever since they’d found that film, her world had been turned upside down. More so than when she saw Wackford at the party. She figured that seeing Wackford had actually righted her world. Jolted her from the fantasy life she’d been living for the last few years.

It was impossible not to obsess over the film, not to obsess over how to make a powerful man pay for his crimes. And she was so very sure there were decades worth of them.

She had learned everything she could about Wackford. Poring through old newspapers at Gotham’s main library, she learned that he was a bastion of society, and, more distressing, best friend of the sainted Thomas Wayne. The two men had grown up together at neighboring mansions then went off to different colleges. After medical school, Thomas joined the Peace Corps then met Martha. Daniel went to Yale, then Harvard business school. Then after Thomas and Martha’s death, he served on the Wayne Enterprises Board, and championed some of Thomas’ favorite charities until they dried up. He was expected to go into politics but he never ran. Several gossip columnists speculated on the whys he never ran as he was ripe to go far but Selina knew why. The man had deep secrets.

Finding those secrets was proving to be more difficult than Selina expected. The man was good, but she was better. And she had connections to the underworld that he seemed to dismiss as
inconsequential unless he was looking for victims.

Her life was now split into two halves and she was having a harder time straddling the two worlds. She didn’t want to bring this darkness into her relationship with Bruce and Helena but she couldn’t keep it out. More and more it encroached until here she was, hiding in a bathroom after screaming horrible things at the only man she ever loved.

Knowing he would still be up, she called Ollie.

“This thing is ending,” she said. “I’m checking out that address tomorrow. If we don’t find anything there, I’m going to this Pond guy Jaxi told us about.”

“Ok but let’s not rush,” Ollie replied. “You told me you suspected that was a trap.”

“I won’t get trapped,” she said. “I’ll go in nice and early. They won’t be expecting us yet. In and out. No problem.”

“I don’t know, See,” Ollie said. “We’ve been so careful up to now. Maybe wait a bit-”

“I’m about to lose everything over this fucking thing!” Selina moved away from the bathroom door. She was sure Bruce had left, he didn’t want to revisit that scene any more than she did. “Ollie, I’ll be fine. I’ll call you when I’m out.”

“No way!” he exclaimed. “I’m coming. You need a look out.”

They agreed to meet at nine sharp which really meant 9:15 for Oliver who was never on time for anything.

Selina slipped out of the bathroom into the dark bedroom. Grabbing a few things, she went to Helena’s room. Sliding in bed beside her daughter was the comfort she desperately needed. Feeling the warmth of her daughter’s body and listening to her breathe helped lull Selina to sleep.

After a tense morning with Alfred and Bruce, Selina and Helena left the penthouse to take Isha home. As she got out of the Land Rover, Isha gave Selina a worried look.

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” Isha said, quietly. Of course the woman had been aware of the chasm between her and Bruce.

Instead of answering her, Selina waved goodbye then tore off, needing to drop Helena at Jen’s then stash the SUV, get her car and get across town before nine.

They planned to meet a few blocks away and walk over to the warehouse. Selina did a quick drive by confirming that the place seemed to be deserted.

Parking a few blocks away, she goes across the street to Yummy Donuts to get a couple of coffees. Ollie is later than usual so she gives his coffee to a homeless guy, sitting and chatting with him while she waits. She also buys him a breakfast sandwich and gives him ten bucks for liquor.

He thanks her by giving her a cigarette which she accepts. Why the hell not, she decided, as she leaned over for him to light it. Her life was circling the drain as it was. There really was no undoing this, she thought. It was as she always expected: the Thing that Would go Wrong with them was her.

Ollie finally showed up at ten. He looked high which was enough to exacerbate her already fraught nerves. She starts to yell at him but realizes she shouldn’t waste her time.
They head over to the area around the warehouse with Ollie telling her a funny story to lighten her dark mood. The story was actually one she hadn’t heard before and he managed to get a smile out of her by the time they reached an empty lot.

“This is it,” Selina said, looking over the lot. “I’ll hop over buildings and come in through the roof. No one should see me coming.”

“I think I should go with you,” Ollie said.

“No, you’re the look out,” she said. “If someone is going to drive there, they have to go past you. You just let me know if any cars are headed my way.”

He nodded, then gave her a leg up, hoisting her over the fence.

“I’ll be real quick,” she said. “I need to pick up Helena at noon. If we have time, we’ll swing by the Assessor’s office to see who owns this property.”

In and out she reassured Ollie before climbing up the side of a dilapidated building. In the last few months, she had gotten herself in back in shape. Her extensive running routine included running through Wackford’s neighborhood on a daily basis. No one ever gave her a thought as she was decked out in an expensive track suit with her hair in a fashionable ponytail.

She shimmied up the wall to the roof where she made her way across two more roofs before the warehouse was in sight. Before she made the leap over to that one, she paused to survey the area. There were no cars parked around the building, no sign of life. The place looked like it had been abandoned years ago. The fence that surrounded the property, she noted, looked pretty sturdy and would be difficult to get out of. She would have to leave the same way she got in.

Selina dismissed the uneasy feeling, determined to take a look around then get out. She made the last leap to land silently on the warehouse’s roof. Before descending into the building, she took another look around not seeing any signs to indicate there was another person about.

She entered through a third story window. The floor was dirty and littered with discarded office furniture. She made her way downstairs to the second floor. Creeping silently down the hall, she walked toward one of the offices where she spied a laptop on a folding table. The screen was turned on but was blank. When she noticed the sheet of plastic draped over the floor, Selina immediately turned to get away. Just as she turned around, she was punched in the face. Stunned, she backed up against the wall. A bright light shone on her face, preventing her from seeing who hit her. Before she could react, a blast of something hit her square in the chest knocking her over. The man, Pond, she surmised, leered at her before plunging a needle in her arm.

When Selina woke, she was sitting on a chair with her hands tied. The first thing she saw was the laptop. The webcam, with the light indicating it was on, was pointed at her. The screen was still blank. No matter, she knows who’s on the other side of that feed.

“She’s awake,” a voice said through the laptop. It was electronically modified. Not that it did him any good.

Pond, now wearing a ski mask, walked over to her.

“Hello,” he said. “Did not expect someone like you to show up.”

“Wait until he gets here,” Wackford instructed him.

“He thinks you’ll screw this up,” Selina said.
Selina saw the tattoo ‘bitch slapper’ on his hand a moment before he painfully backhanded her.

“Hurts like a bitch, don’t it?”

She nodded before spitting out a bit of blood.

“Prettier than I thought.” Pond leaned in to touch her, running a finger up her arm. “You’re poking your nose where it doesn’t belong.”

“Who hired you?” Wackford asked.

Surprised at his question, Selina looked up but she covered her surprise in an instant.

“Who do you think?” She asked looking directly into the webcam.

The sass earned her another punch in the face. “Answer him!”

“Gimme a minute, ok?” Selina said. “It’s been awhile since I’ve been punched in the face.”

Pond laughed.

Selina glanced around the room, taking inventory. The plastic on the floor caused her the most concern. She only saw the one man, Pond. If she was going to make a move it had to be before Sykes showed up.

“I didn’t get a name,” she said. “They said they’d transfer funds.”

“What did they hire you to get from me?” Wackford asked.

“Fuck you,” Selina said, needing to get punched again.

Pond obliged allowing Selina the opportunity to tip over the chair as she got punched. On the floor, she quickly reached into her boot to get the small knife she had kept hidden there for just such an occasion.

After pulling her off the floor, Pond sits her back in the chair. He does not notice the knife in the palm of her hand. As Wackford peppered her with more questions and she responded with more lies, she cut through the rope freeing her hands.

Not wasting any time, Selina jumped up and started beating Pond. He fell to the floor giving Selina an opportunity to get out the door. Before she could escape, he grabbed her foot, pulling her down with him. She booted him in the face and was about to get up when she was roughly grabbed from behind. Dread washed over her as she looked up to see Sykes. Even though he was wearing his mask, she knew he was smiling.

“Oh, we’re going to work you over, honey,” Pond said, standing up.

She forced herself to roll her eyes, knowing these guys fed off fear. She was not about to give them the satisfaction of seeing her frightened. Sykes let her go, throwing her at Pond.

“Sometimes I love this job,” Pond says as he hit her again.

Selina managed to get in a few good kicks but Sykes picked her up then tossed her onto the folding table. The table and the laptop came crashing over her. For the briefest of moments, Selina planned to get the laptop but thoughts of getting more evidence against Wackford were replaced by the urgency of self preservation.
Before she could pick herself up, Sykes presented a nasty looking billy club. The club, a special design, was modified with spikes.

As Pond picked her up, Sykes lightly touched her face with one of the spikes. Asking the same questions Wackford asked, Pond gripped her hand painfully behind her back. His other beefy arm was around her neck, keeping her prone. While he asked her questions, he whispered vile things in her ear.

Selina remained defiantly silent, refusing to show any emotion.

Tired of her silence, Sykes pulled out a familiar knife and placed the tip over her heart, just like what he did when he killed that woman in the movie.

Selina stared at him, unblinking while the other guy urged her to talk before things get really painful, he tightened his hold on her neck, cutting off her air.

In the corner of her eye, Selina spied Ollie near the door.

“Get away from her!” Sweet Ollie, looking so scared as he pointed the gun at Sykes. “Get away from her!” He screamed louder, clearly upset, panicked, and scared. The gun shaking in his hand.

“Shoot him, Ollie.” Selina said, calmly.

Still holding her, Pond laughed. “You’re shaking so bad, you’ll probably shoot your girlfriend here.”

“Shoot him, Ollie.”

His shaking intensified. “Get that knife away from her. Now!”

The gun went off unexpectedly, the bullet hitting the wall.

Sykes sheathed the knife in a holder at his side.

“Shoot him!” Selina yelled, seeing that Sykes is approaching Ollie. “Shoot him now!!”

“Just let her go,” Ollie cried “We’ll go away and you won’t hear about us!”

“Too late.” Sykes finally spoke. He got close enough where he swatted the gun out of Ollie’s hand. Grabbing him, he threw him to the floor.

“Obviously you’re the one with the balls in this group,” he said to Selina as he picked up his billy club.

“Please don’t!” All defiance is gone as she realized Sykes was going to kill Ollie. “Please, please don’t!”

Sykes took a practice swing, just over Ollie’s head. Pond tightened his grip on her.

“We’re not working for anyone!” She babbled, stuttering over her words as the Sykes circled Ollie who was kneeling at the center of the plastic. “No one hired us!”

Sykes hit Ollie in the back causing Ollie to fall forward, gasping for breath.

“I swear,” Selina cried. “We’re just trying to find who she is!”
“You’re going to die for some dumb bitch you don’t even know?” Pond laughed. “That’s sad.”

She struggled until Pond held the knife she had dropped earlier to her eye, forcing her to be still.

“Where’s the film?” Sykes asked.

“I’ll get it to you. Just don’t…”

Sykes hit Ollie again with the club. Ollie cried out in pain and terror.

“Please, don’t!” Selina cried. “We’ll get it to you.”

“I know you will.” Sykes said, moving to stand behind Ollie, who was crying and looking at Selina. Sykes touched the top of Ollie’s head with the club.

“Please,” Ollie pleaded. “Don’t See-”

The club crashed down splitting his head.

“No!”

“Oh, that’s a mess,” Pond said, looking over Ollie’s body.

Sykes walked to Selina. Just as he got near, she kicked him in the balls as hard as she could. As he fell to his knees, she slammed her head against Pond’s forehead causing him to let her go. She frantically fought to get away, but Pond grabbed her, knocking her off balance.

She fell down. Before she could get up Sykes crashed the club down on her hand. White hot pain blinded her. She closed for a moment. When they opened, she spied the gun near the wall. Cradling her hand, she made a desperate scramble to get to it but Sykes saw her plan, stomping on her injured hand, stunning her.

Dragging her by the hair, he threw her down next to Ollie’s body. Confident he had her beat, he called Wackford giving him a status update.

Selina sobbed as she reached into Ollie’s front pocket to get his phone and his pocketknife, surreptitiously sliding the phone into her front pocket. She waited for Sykes to approach her again. With a last burst of energy, she sat up, getting to her knees which amused Sykes until she drove the pocket knife into his foot. On her way out of the room she kicked Pond in the gut knocking the wind out him.

Pretending like she ran down the stairs, she kicked debris on the stairwell. She managed to hide under a desk just before they burst out of the room. Willing herself not to pass out she waited until she heard them pass. Staggering to the window, she quickly got herself up on the sill.

Thinking of Helena, she made herself climb up. With her injured hand cradled inside her jacket, she pulled herself up, her toes finding niches in the brick wall to help. There was a moment when Pond was in the yard below, looking for her. By the time he looked up, she had rolled onto the roof out of sight.

The leap to the other building was impossible so she looked for a place to hide. Squeezing herself between a few old, dirty refrigeration units, she took a moment to listen for Pond and Sykes quickly deciding they had not figured out where she went.

With a shaking hand, she fished the phone out of her pocket, cringing at the pain. As she dropped
the phone, a silent sob tore through her. Forcing herself to focus, she picked up the phone, her shaking fingers barely able to punch in the numbers.

She called Bruce, crying when she got his voicemail. Not even Bruce’s voice to listen to one last time on the message greeting. She whispered her message, then heard the men looking for her. She clutched the phone as she waited for them to find her but they don’t.

Selina tried calling Bruce again but there’s blood in her eyes and her vision blurs. The phone slipped from her fingers. She doesn’t bother picking it up.

Resting her head on the wall, Selina thought of that time on the beach in India when she and Bruce walked along the surf each holding Helena’s hand as they swung her. Up and down, up and down, over and over. Helena laughed happily, a child’s giggle that made them both smile and laugh with her.

That was a good memory to die to. Selina closed her eyes, the memory comforting her as she passed out.

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*Gotham - The Present*

“Where did this come from?” Gordon asked. “Do you know who that man is? What about the men in the background?”

Bruce was silent.

“This is a police matter!” Gordon said. “You can’t just expect me to walk away from one of the most nauseating things I’ve ever had the misfortune to witness.”

“I don’t expect you to,” Bruce said, looking at the film that hung innocently on the projector. He couldn’t wait to get it out of his house. “But right now, the police will never be able to use this.”

“Can you get it back to where it came from?” Gordon asked. He didn’t need Bruce to explain that the film had been illegally procured.

“We can just treat it as an anonymous tip,” Blake said.

“Maybe, but,” Bruce said as he returned the film to the cannister, then turned on the lights. “This person is connected. Not mob connected. Connected with wealth and social status. He will have the best attorneys in the country. We have to tread very carefully here.”

“This someone you referred to,” Gordon said. “Is it the big man in the mask?”

“No, that hulking freak is on his payroll,” Bruce said, walking over to his wall safe. “He may be one of the men in the background.”

“In the shadows so he’ll never be identified,” Blake said.

Bruce closed the safe then looked at Gordon and Blake. His friends. He sat down on the chair next to the sofa.

“Where did Ms. Kyle get this?” Gordon asked. “I’m assuming it was she who found it.”

Bruce nodded.
“The man’s name is Daniel Wackford,” Bruce said, feeling better at the thought of unveiling Daniel’s wall of secrecy.

“Never heard of him,” Blake said. Bruce was not surprised. Why would a young person keep track of old socialites?


“That sounds right,” Bruce said. Of course, Wackford would insinuate himself with law enforcement.

“Any idea why she targeted him?” Gordon asked.

“None,” Bruce responded. “But her friend, Oliver Preston, that was found dead had ties to sex trafficking. Maybe it has something to do with him. Maybe he knew something.”

“I can’t unsee that!” Gordon exclaimed suddenly. He stood up to pace the room. “Everything in me is recoiling at not doing anything.”

“Give me two days to come up with a plan to get him,” Bruce said. “I want to ruin him. I want him to publicly burn for this and that means we have to figure out a way to get this back in his possession and a way for the police to discover it before he gets rid of it.”

“We have to do this right,” Gordon said. “He is rich and he is powerful and he is a friend to the police department.”

“Maybe there’s something in his past we can find,” Blake said.

As Bruce walked the men out to the elevator, he told them about the missing women from thirty years ago.

“I’ll get Massey to look into him,” Gordon said as he stepped into the elevator. “She really is one of the brightest investigators I’ve worked with. I think she about has you figured out, Mr. Wayne.”

Jessica Massey discovering his identity did not concern Bruce in the slightest. He returned to his office thinking of ways to expose Daniel. It almost felt like he was trying to frame the man but Daniel was guilty of being a part of that film and probably much more.

Sitting at his desk, he gazed at the photo of Kellie Ross feeling sad that she had met such an end. In front of a group of silent bystanders, Sykes had raped the crying, scared young woman and when he was done, he had taunted her with a nasty looking knife, holding it over her heart. He allowed her to plead for her life, begging him to let her go before he slowly eased it into her heart.

It was a cold depravity that chilled Bruce.

“You were smart to leave,” Bruce said when Alfred came in. Without going into too much detail, he explained what was on the film.

“I think Selina found it by accident,” Bruce said. “I don’t think she was expecting that.”

“No one would expect that,” Alfred said. “Sounds like she was looking for something incriminating.”

“We need to return that...thing...to his house, then get the police there to find it in his possession.”
“Still flimsy,” Alfred said.

“There has to be more to find on him,” Bruce said. “A man who has been preying on people for forty years must leave some kind of trail!”

“I’ve already contacted my friend at County Records Office,” Alfred said. “He’ll find if there are any updated blueprints. The ones Ms. Kyle worked off of were at least twenty years old. Something tells me Daniel may like a hidey hole or two.”

Bruce nodded.

“He needs to be exposed for the vile sadist he is,” Alfred said, looking at the picture of Kellie. “He may not have been the one to stab this poor girl in the heart but it was his hand that was responsible.”

With some difficulty, Bruce had to put his musings about Wackford on hold as he needed to see to his daughter and their guests. Shanti had again cooked an enormous feast.

After reading to Helena and Prisha, Bruce left to go to the hospital. Isha reported no change, patting his arm in sympathy as she left.

Alone with Selina, Bruce dragged the chair closer to her. As he fell asleep, he mentally went over the blueprints of Wackford’s home, seeing places where hidden rooms could have been built. If they couldn’t find anything at the Beauchamp Avenue residence, they would have to extend the search to the Palisades mansion which would be much more difficult. He finally fell asleep with thoughts of his cave leading him to dreams of Daniel and bats and his mother.

He startled awake to find Selina staring at him.

As she returned to consciousness, Selina remembered begging. She had a hazy recollection of the sounds and smells of that room but she pushed the memory away, not letting it surface. She became aware of the quiet and the coolness of the room she was now in. Not that room but another where she was laying down, comfortably with her head on a fluffy pillow. Her hand felt heavy, she tried to move it but couldn’t.

Even before she opened her eyes, the tears began. She wanted to go back to sleep, to escape. When she tried to move her hand, pain shot through her pulling her more out of the semi sleep she’d been in. Opening her eyes, she fixed her gaze on the ceiling, letting herself become reacquainted to the world around her. Her world was pain, she could feel it in her hand, in her muscles, in her heart.

Slowly, she came to the realization that she was in the hospital. She could feel the IV in one of her hands. She moved her fingers to confirm that they were okay. The other hand, she didn’t want to think about.

She didn’t need to see him to know that he was there. Of course he would be. She looked over to see him sleeping peacefully and the tears started again.

To avoid thinking about things that would crush her, she settled on watching Bruce as he slept. She needed this last reprieve before he opened his eyes and reality intruded. While she waited for him to wake, she kept her mind blank, thinking only about taking one breath at a time.
When he did wake, his eyes noticed hers right away. The compassion and sadness in his was her undoing. As tears filled her eyes, he leaned forward, taking her hand.

“It’s okay,” he whispered, but it wasn’t.

She shook her head, willing herself not to get lost in the abyss that floated around her. She indicated for him to help her sit up.

“Easy, now,” he said, quietly. “You’ve been out for a week.”

“A week?” Selina’s voice cracked. He handed her a cup of water which she sipped before pushing the covers off. Even though everything in her hurt, she intended to get out of bed. “Helena?”

“Don’t,” Bruce said, gently pushing her back to the bed before covering her back up. “She’s fine, she’s confused.”

“I need to see see her,” she said.

“I’ll get her,” Bruce said, gently. “When she wakes up.”

“What time is it?”

“About five in the morning,” Bruce replied. “I’m getting a doctor.”

As soon as he left the room, Selina struggled out of bed, slowly walking to the bathroom where she got a good look at herself in the mirror. The bruises and swelling had faded. She must have looked a serious mess when they first found her. She couldn’t see Helena looking like this; she didn’t want to scare her little girl more than she already had.

Bruce and the doctor returned, both frowning to find her out of bed. Bruce helped her back to the bed then hung back, leaning against the wall as the doctor examined her. Shining a light in her eyes, asking her a bunch of questions that began to exasperate Selina. She explained to Selina the surgery on her hand and what she could expect. As the doctor droned on and on, Selina’s attention drifted. Now that she was awake she wanted to get the hell out of here.

As if he knew what she was thinking, Bruce asked the doctor how long until she could be released.

“Oh, I’d say a few days,” the doctor said, studying Selina’s chart.

“You should just take me home now,” Selina said when the doctor left.

“I don’t think so,” Bruce replied. “What are you planning to do?”

“Call someone,” she said, quietly.

“Who?” Bruce asked, gazing at her steadily. “Daryl?”

He knew. He had a week to piece together what had happened and he knew everything. Or thought he did.

“I’m going to pick up Helena,” Bruce said. “Don’t do anything, Selina. Don’t call him. You wanted this handled right and it will be.”

As soon as he left, Selina used the hospital phone to call DeeDee. Her friend arrived not long after with makeup and a bright fluffy robe to help Selina get ready for Helena.
“What do I need to know? Bruce knows about Daryl?” Selina asked as DeeDee applied a little makeup to give Selina color and to hide the bruises.

“He’s met him,” DeeDee said. “He also met me, Bobby, and Kevin.”

“So everyone knows about…?”

DeeDee gave her a small hug. “Yeah, See, we know. I was just about to put on mascara. Do you want me to wait to put it on?”

Selina nodded. DeeDee took her hand, squeezing it.

“She’ll be here soon,” she said.

As she put the finishing touches on Selina’s makeup, Selina asked: “Daryl’s here?”

DeeDee hesitated. “Yes.”

“I need to see him,” Selina said. He’ll take care of what she should have done months ago. If only...

Helena arrived and Selina forgot about getting revenge. Selina hugged her daughter close, Helena clung tightly to her mother. For the rest of the day, Helena sat with her mother on the hospital bed, not wanting to leave her side. Bruce left Helena with her, leaving to do something that Selina suspected had to do with Wackford.

“Daddy said Prisha’s at the house,” Selina said. “Are you having fun?” Are you letting Anil play with you?”

“Oh huh,” Helena said. “I thought you were getting me a brother!”

When she told Selina about Mr. Tibbles, tears sprang to her eyes. She’d forgotten about the dog but she managed a smile and told Helena that her friend would be so happy that Helena was taking care of him.

_Don’t think about it._

“If you clap like this,” Selina told Helena, clapping her hands sideways. “He’ll roll over.”

That information delighted Helena. Selina spent most of the day just looking at her daughter whom she thought she would never see again.

Eventually the police came by. DeeDee took Helena outside the room while the police questioned her. Selina recognized Commissioner Gordon but he wasn’t the one that asked the questions. A woman, Massey, asked her a series of questions that Selina only answered ‘I don’t remember.’ She got the feeling that both Gordon and Massey knew the details of the case, probably working with Bruce. Still, old habits died hard and Selina did not talk to cops. Even the friendly ones.
She’s awake, then?” Alfred asked when Bruce returned home after taking Helena to be with Selina at the hospital.

“Yes,” Bruce replied, looking more exhausted than ever. The last week had been hell.

“How is she?” Alfred asked, following him to his office. He ignored all the unspoken signals from Bruce communicating that Bruce wanted to be alone.

“She’ll be fine,” Bruce said, not turning around to face Alfred.

“No,” Alfred said, persisting. “I mean how is she about her friend, Oliver?”

“I don’t know, Alfred,” was all Bruce could say.

“Did you talk about what happened?” Alfred walked around Bruce so he would have to face him.

“What’s there to talk about?” Bruce exclaimed. “I know what happened.”

“Does she know that?” Alfred peered closely at Bruce.

“She’ll figure it out,” Bruce said hoping his tone would indicate to Alfred that he was done talking.

But Alfred wasn’t ready to leave him alone. “So we wait then?”

“Wait for what?” Bruce snapped. “For Selina to share with the police why she broke into Wackford’s house? Or should we wait for Wackford to make his move?”

“Of course, not,” Alfred said. “I think you should infiltrate his secret room.”

Bruce looked at him. “Secret room.”

“As someone who has had experience designing secret rooms, it was fairly easy to find,” Alfred said, feeling pleased. “Ms. Kyle only had access to the blueprints on record but I was able to dig and find where Daniel had made extensive structural changes to the Beauchamp home thirty years ago.”

Alfred showed Bruce the new plans that, if one knew what they were looking for, revealed a set of basement rooms accessible only through a door in Daniel’s study.

“The door should be right here,” Bruce said, pointing to Wackford’s study on the plans. “There was no door there but the place is lined with wood paneling.”

“Ah, a classic way to disguise a hidden door,” Alfred said. “If there’s secrets to be found, they’ll be there.”

Bruce nodded.

“One other thing,” Alfred said. “I found Ms. Kyle’s safe cracking tools in our own secret room.”

“That’s good,” Bruce said. “Because I’ll need those.”
“You and Blake will need those,” Alfred clarified, always the worrier.

Bruce didn’t reply as a guard informed them that Blake and Detective Massey were on their way up.

“Ms. Kyle said she didn’t remember anything from that morning,” Jessica said after they were shown into Bruce’s office.

Alfred would have fallen to the floor in shock if Selina had given any information at all to the police.

“Commissioner Gordon asked me to look into a woman’s disappearance from thirty years ago,” Jessica continued.

“Cathy Martin,” Alfred stated.

Jessica nodded. “I found nothing about her disappearance in any MCU records.”

Commissioner Gordon soon arrived. He had tracked down Cathy Martin’s parents who confirmed what Martha’s private investigator had told them. That Daniel had targeted their daughter and they believed he was behind her murder.

“They hope that we will find her body,” Gordon said. “I didn’t tell them that I doubted we would ever find her after such a long time.”

Together they planned how best for the police to find what they needed to find to arrest Wackford. Blake had obviously told Jessica about the film because she didn’t bat an eye when Blake talked about breaking in to replace the film.

“We need to do this as soon as possible,” Bruce said. “I think tomorrow night should work. Wackford will be at his Palisades home.”

“How do you know that?” Gordon asked before he waved his hand. “Never mind.”

Sparing the two members of the police force the illegal details, Bruce told them that he would get the film replaced and he would look into the secret room. With any luck, he told them, everything they need to prosecute Daniel should be there.

“There must be probable cause for the police to go inside,” Gordon reminded them.

“Call 911 from a house phone then set it down,” Jessica said, fully on board with the plan. “When you leave, leave the front door open.”

“Massey and I will be ten minutes away, looking into something unrelated,” Gordon said. “She’ll have the radio on so it will not be too terribly unusual for us to show up. Wackford being a generous benefactor to the police and all. That should earn him more personalized service.”

“The safe in his study will be left open as will the door to his secret room,” Blake said.

“We just need a reason for the police to go down there,” Gordon said. “Wackford’s attorneys will rightly claim we had no cause to search every inch of the house.”

“We have until tomorrow night to figure that out,” Bruce said.

“You sure we’re not rushing this?” Blake asked after Gordon and Massey left. “We’ve got to make sure we’ve got this guy dead to rights.”
“We need to move before Selina calls Daryl and asks him to take care of Wackford,” Bruce said. “I’m sure that’s what she’s thinking. Easier for Wackford to be dead.”

“And that’s a bad thing?” Blake said, getting a look from Alfred. “Sorry, I can’t drum up much sympathy for a guy that gets his kicks watching a woman get raped and murdered.”

Blake had misunderstood Alfred’s look. He was sorry to admit to himself that he wouldn’t mind if Wackford and his butler ended up dead either. All the talk of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne had dredged up memories of them before their deaths.

Alfred had always been consumed with picking up the pieces for young Master Wayne that he never reflected on the time prior. He had a vague recollection of Mrs. Wayne being upset. He had caught a glimpse of Thomas gently reassuring her about something. It was a tender scene and Alfred had quickly looked away, embarrassed to have intruded on something so private.

Without telling Master Wayne, Alfred had taken it upon himself to contact Lucy Dawes. They spoke briefly about Master Wayne and his new situation. Lucy’s tone was happy, tinged with a bit of sadness, when she heard about Miss Helena. She did say that Rachel would have been very pleased for him to find happiness.

He debated telling Bruce what she told him about Wackford.

“Somehow he got it in his head that Mrs. Wayne was interested in him,” Lucy said. “She most certainly was not and she was very clear about that. My impression was that he’s not used to being rejected. So he did his best to make her life hell but she wouldn’t have it. She ignored him and I think that spurred him on even more.”

Martha had confided in Lucy quite a bit. Telling her of the ways Daniel had contrived to bump into her. She loved riding her horses but even that simple pleasure was ruined when Daniel figured her schedule. Apparently he bought horses and learned to ride them just to accidentally run into her as she rode over the Wayne estate. Soon he stopped pretending that his meeting her was an accident. She changed her riding times but that didn’t help. Martha was forced to abandon her favorite activity. It was then that Lucy noticed and questioned her about it. Frankly she was hoping Martha was pregnant and was shocked when Mrs. Wayne confided to her the reason.

“Eventually he made, what they called back in those days, a pass at her. These days, I think they’d call it sexual harassment bordering on assault,” she said, pausing for moment. “But Martha was stronger than people gave her credit for. As you well know, Mr. Alfred, people who did not know her well dismissed her as a rich, blonde beauty. She was that and so much more. Brave, honorable, courageous...she could definitely take care of herself. So when Daniel made his move, cornering her at a party, she kneed him in the...privates.”

“I had no idea,” Alfred said as his mind raced to remember signs he must have missed. The party sparked a recollection. Something had made Martha angry. He and Thomas had been confused about why she disappeared in anger but Thomas had to see to their guests. If he had known what was going on, Alfred was certain, the party would have had a very different ending.

One time, Lucy confided, Wackford had even cornered her, trying to pry information about Martha from her. He had scared her but knowing his friendship with Mr. Wayne, she had gone to Martha instead. When she told Martha, she was so angry. She’d had it with him and his creepy games. She wanted to get the message through to him that she was disgusted by him.

“Although for a man like that,” Lucy said. “They never seem to get the message.”
“She and I started to quietly question the maids at the Wackford Mansion. When we found out what they had to say, Martha hired a private investigator,” Lucy continued. “After that, she told her husband. Unlike many men, Mr. Wayne believed her. He didn’t doubt her for a moment.”

“All this is very distressing,” Alfred said. “I didn’t know…”

“Mr. Alfred,” Lucy said. “Women are used to dealing with aggressive men or men who don’t understand when women don’t share their interest. We don’t always report it because it happens so frequently. But Daniel Wackford was different. He was obsessed with her.”

Selina managed to keep herself together for Helena which wasn’t easy as Selina felt panic threaten to overcome her. It hovered just below the surface, waiting for her to weaken.

For most of the day, Helena sat on the bed next to her with Selina’s arm around her, holding her close. Bruce had brought her Hello Kitty backpack filled with crayons and paper to keep her occupied. Helena was more than content to stick close to her mother. When Selina’s mind drifted to things she didn’t want to remember, she squeezed her daughter, asking her a silly question. Helena’s happy giggle was the balm she needed.

The child comforted her but she also provided a shield for Selina. No one wanted to question her in front of her daughter. At least not until the police arrived.

DeeDee gently coaxed Helena to find a vending machine knowing that the little girl would find that interesting. Selina’s heart almost broke again when Helena looked back at her and asked her if she would still be there when they got back. She smiled broadly assuring Helena she would be. The smile vanished as soon as her daughter left the room.

Gordon stayed quiet allowing the Detective, Jessica Massey, to question her. Her questions revealed to Selina just how much Bruce had found out. Not surprising since he had a whole week to discover why she was nearly dead on the roof of an abandoned warehouse. When Massey asked about the film, Selina knew Daryl had become involved. No way Bruce would have found her stash at the Towers.

“Of course I’ll call you if I remember anything,” Selina said to the officers when Jessica concluded her questioning.

Massey and Gordon didn’t bother to act like they believed her but the look they gave her wasn’t one of suspicion. The compassion in their faces was almost her undoing.

“We’ll get the man that killed your friend, Ms. Kyle,” Gordon said.

She met his concerned gaze and willed her eyes not to tear up. Kindness from the police? It was more than she could stand right now. She was skirting the edge of totally losing it.

“Could you ask the nurse to come in?” Selina asked brusquely, dismissing them.

The nurse came in followed by DeeDee and Helena. Selina gestured for Helena to come back to sit beside her on the bed. DeeDee looked at her with concern.
“I’m fine,” Selina said after the nurse left. “I just wanted them to leave.”

Isha arrived and DeeDee left to go to work. Selina knew what they were doing, conspiring to keep her company.

Later in the afternoon, Isha let slip that everyone was staying over at the penthouse. Selina knew why. Wackford. Now that he knew her identity, he’d probably made some anonymous threat against Bruce, or worse. But, how much had Bruce pieced together about Wackford?

Helena’s presence precluded honest talk about the whys Shanti and Isha’s family was staying in the penthouse under guard.

By the time Bruce returned for her in the late evening, Helena was fast asleep. She didn’t wake as he gently lifted her out of the bed. He avoided looking at Selina. He was angry. Now that he knew she was ok, he could allow himself to be mad at her. Selina thought about the last words they had spoken. No, she corrected, the last words they had yelled at each other.

They had no chance to clear the air from that last fight. Selina supposed she should apologize for the horrible things she’d said to him but she just didn’t have it in her to talk right now. Not about anything.

Needing to be alone, Selina told Isha it was okay to return with Bruce to be with her family. She felt like she was going to scream.

Rather than think about Ollie, Selina went to the window and looked outside seeing nothing but her reflection in the glass.

Of course Bruce figured it out. He’d probably found her laptop in his secret room and discovered that she was investigating his father’s friend. Was he mad about that? Did he understand? Had he found out something about Wackford that she didn’t know?

Back at the penthouse, Bruce tucked the still sleeping Helena in her bed. He was relieved that when she woke tomorrow morning, it would be with the knowledge that her mother was okay and that she could see her.

The house was quiet, everyone save the one guard on duty, had gone to bed. He went to the kitchen finding leftovers from Shanti’s latest meal. He didn’t bother to heat the food, eating it straight out of the container. As he ate he thought about Selina. His worry about her physical health and given way to worry about her mental health.

With Helena, Selina had put on a happy front but Bruce could tell that she was devastated. She had a shocked look about her that concerned him. A wild eyed, haunted look indicating that what happened in that room at the warehouse would stay with her. Was his Selina gone?

They had no opportunity to talk which was probably for the best as Bruce wasn’t quite ready to spar with Selina. Now that Selina was awake and well on her way to recovery, Bruce wanted to give in to his anger with her. He knew it was irrational but his anger that had simmered all week, held in check by worry for her, and was finally ready to be released. As he pictured her face when
she first woke, he couldn’t summon any feelings of anger at her.

When Alfred told him about Selina’s nocturnal activities, it had taken a while for the anger to set in but set in it had. The fight with Selina had unleashed a fury in him that he hadn’t felt in quite some time. It was not something he ever hoped to feel again. Then he had found her broken and battered on the rooftop...

He tossed the empty container in the sink.

Feeling restless, Bruce went back to his office to go over the blueprints and think of ways to expose Daniel in the most legal way possible. As he looked over the plans, he received a notification from the bug that he placed in Daniel’s study indicating it was picking up sound.

“----you’re certain?” Daniel asked.

“My source said she woke sometime today. He wasn’t sure when,” Sykes said.

“We need more and better guards,” Wackford said. “I’m not concerned about the police but if she tattles to Wayne, he may try something.”

“He’s spent a fortune on his private security,” Sykes said. “He may try to use them to break in. To find something on you.”

“That won’t happen,” Wackford said. “I want this place fortified.”

“I’ll get on it in the morning,” Sykes said.

“Oh, and Sykes?” Wackford said. “Maybe it’s time we clean the rec room?”

“Yes, sir,” Sykes responded.

There was no more discussion as Bruce heard the sound of the study door closing. Daniel and Sykes were now in damage control. Bruce needed to get in there before they covered their tracks.

For a moment, Bruce considered calling his friends to tell them of the change in plan. He dismissed the idea, realizing that he would prefer to go alone and spare them having to lie for him more than was necessary.

Dressed in black, with a black ski mask tucked into his pocket and his tools in a backpack, Bruce slipped out of the penthouse. Without alerting his guards, Bruce took off on a motorcycle he had kept outside their watch. Parking the cycle in a garage over five blocks away, he made his way to Beauchamp Avenue through a variety of back alleys.

As he approached the house, he slid on the ski mask. It was almost midnight and there was no activity whatsoever on the street. He scaled up the side of the house just next door to the Wackford’s. When he reached the roof, he had an excellent view of the house and could see that the front door to Wackford’s home seemed unguarded. There was a camera keeping watch and Bruce was certain that there would be a guard just inside the door.

He turned his attention to the roof where two guards kept watch on the street below. From the neighbor’s roof, Bruce targeted the guard patrolling the southwest corner with a dart, quickly rendering the man unconscious. The second man fell even faster leaving the way clear for Bruce to rappel over.

With both guards unconscious and trussed up, Bruce entered the residence from the rooftop door.
The home was familiar, he hadn’t needed to consult designs of the house to make his way around. Donning the night vision goggles, he silently walked through the darkened house. He well remembered the time he had spent here as a teenager. He was still shocked about Daniel’s true nature. Nothing in any of his interactions with Daniel would have indicated such depravity.

As he passed the master suite, Bruce paused at the closed door debating whether he should check on Daniel. He decided against it. Older people were light sleepers and he couldn’t risk Daniel seeing him.

From the top of the staircase, Bruce could see the guard stationed just outside the front door. The grand entryway was dark save for a small light just above the man’s head. Careless. Wackford was right, this security detail wasn’t nearly as good as the one Bruce had hired.

The guard was easily taken care of. Bruce dragged the man’s unconscious body to the coat closet where he left him with his hands and feet tied, and his mouth taped shut. Two more guards were found at the rear entrances to the house. Both soon joined the other guard in the coat closet.

Bruce went to Daniel’s study, quickly finding the wall safe that Selina had cracked a month ago. Using her tools, he opened the safe which was empty until he put the film inside.

The false door was behind Wackford’s massive desk, behind the part of the wood panelled wall that proudly displayed the photograph Daniel and Thomas Wayne. Upon closer inspection, Bruce found that the photograph was not hung in the usual manner but was affixed to the wall.

As he turned the photo 180 degrees, the panel slid open to reveal a steel door. Using Selina’s safe cracking tools and accessing a dark website about opening locks, Bruce was able to open the steel door after a frustrating and harrowing ten minutes.

Pushing the heavy door open, Bruce gazed into darkness. With the night vision goggles he saw that there were stairs leading down to the basement. He conceded that now may have been a good time to have Blake at his back.

He slid the wood paneled door shut behind him but kept the heavy steel one slightly ajar. He started down the stairs, descending into inky blackness. After Bruce determined the area was empty, he shut off the goggles, opting for a flashlight.

Bruce was in a large room, comfortably decked out with a large, overstuffed sofa and a few easy chairs. Alongside the opposite wall was a worktable next to two steel file cabinets. As Bruce stepped further in the room, he got a good look at the area the sofa faced.

His gut clenched as he realized he was in a torture chamber. A camera on a tripod pointed to a chain hanging from the ceiling over a drain. There was another sort of workstation area with nasty looking tools.

He went to the file cabinets. Going through the files, Bruce found that Wackford was meticulously organized. There were files on very powerful men with compromising photos and notes about weaknesses to exploit. The other file cabinet was smaller, a speciality cabinet with narrow drawers each labelled with numbers indicating a span of years. The drawers were just wide enough for photos. Most were photos of nude women of varying ages.

Another set of drawers labelled ‘Birds’ were arranged in chronological order. The photos, mostly polaroids, were close up shots of faces. Most were of very young women but a good many were of girls and boys. The polaroids each had a little note jotted on them; “worth remembering,” “some life to her,” “boring.”
With considerable dread, Bruce opened the drawer from two decades ago. He held his breath as he flipped through the photos until he found the one with the familiar face. She looked about eleven or twelve, skinny with curly hair but those eyes. Those were Selina’s eyes, angry, defiant, and contemptuous. The description Wackford had wrote read “Feisty!! Worth another go to tame!”

What a shock it must have been for her to see Wackford’s face after so many years.

The silence of the room was cut with a whispered shout. “Get out!”

Bruce whirled around but didn’t see anyone. For a moment, he thought he imagined the whisper but then he heard the sound of the steel door slam shut.

A soft hissing sound filled the room. Bruce struggled against the heavy drowsiness that quickly overtook him. Holding his breath, he fought to keep his mind clear. Still holding Selina’s photo, he staggered to the stairs trying not to breathe in the gas that was filling the room.

Sykes, with a gas mask and a billy club, greeted him at the stairs. Bruce barely managed to dodge the swing of the club but it was getting more difficult the more the gas clouded his brain. Unable to continue holding his breath, Bruce was forced to inhale more of the noxious air. He backed up, stumbling over the couch.

From the stairs, blocking his only means of exit, Sykes watched him, patiently waiting for Bruce to pass out. With a last burst of energy, Bruce rushed at him. Surprised, Sykes fell back into the stairwell.

“Give it up, Bruce,” Daniel said from an intercom. “You’re locked in and we’re very good at locking people in. There’s no escape.”

Bruce grabbed at Sykes’ gas mask but the vapor that filled the room was winning, confusing him, leading him to darkness. Bruce fought, punching at Sykes, landing blows that he knew would have no effect on the big man. He fought until the billy club crashed on his shoulder. The pain gave way to blackness as he passed out.

He waited for her to be alone before he visited. The guards knew him now and nodded to him as he approached her room.

Daryl found her standing by the window, looking outside. She looked beaten. Not just physically but the set of her shoulders was different from the Selina he had always known.

“You can say it,” Selina said, not turning around.

“I’m not saying anything.” Daryl sat on the chair near her bed.

“You’re thinking it,” she said still not looking at him. “I’m thinking it. It’s all I can think about.”

“Think about how we’re getting those guys,” Daryl said.

“I don’t care anymore.” Selina turned around.
He knew why she had avoided looking at him. She needed to keep herself from falling apart.


She didn’t say anything, just looked at him with those big eyes that threatened to tear up.

“Don’t start,” Daryl said. “If you start I’ll start and we won’t be thinking what to do here.”

She began to walk the room, pulling the IV pole behind her.

“It was him,” Selina said quietly.

It took Daryl less than five seconds to realize who she was talking about.

There were few days he could remembered as clearly as that one. One was the day his mother died. Another was a day when he and Selina had taken Ollie to hide from his parents. As they made their way to the Towers, Selina picked a pocket that had two hundred dollars in cash. They splurged and went to the Gotham amusement park. They rode the stupid rides, played the rigged games and ate way too much junk food. It was one of Daryl’s favorite memories.

The other day clearly burned on his brain was not his favorite. It was one he hated to think about, the day Selina had been picked up.

He stared at her. “Why didn’t you tell me?” He asked as he started to rise. He hated that day. He remembered seeing her as she was in the back of the car being driven away. He hadn’t worried until he saw the look on Ollie’s face. Ollie knew who had taken her.

“I wanted him to suffer,” Selina said. “To be humiliated, to lose his status the society that reveres him. He’s an incredibly wealthy man, widely respected in the community.”

“So you want the cops to get him?” Daryl said. “He’ll get out of jail before they have a chance to pocket the key.”

“I don’t care anymore,” Selina said. “I really don’t. They got me. They got me again.”

“Wrong answer, Selina,” Daryl said, coming to stand in front of her. “Keep saying that and you might just convince yourself it’s true.”

They looked at each other, not saying anything. They didn’t need to, each knew what the other was thinking.

“So...Who am I killing?” Daryl asked.

“His name is Sykes,” Selina said. “He did it…”

“He at that address you told me to have watched?”

She nodded. “But, I don’t think we should do it right away,”

“We? I thought you didn’t care.” He waved his hand, indicating she should overlook his dig.

“If he turns up dead, the police know we were looking into him,” Selina said. “I don’t want you to get a murder rap.”

“Hey, I’ve got a clean record, remember?” Daryl still couldn’t believe Selina had found something
to wipe out their criminal histories.

“Come on, Daryl,” Selina said. “They’re not stupid. And I don’t know how Bruce feels about me right now.”

“He loves you,” Daryl said. “And you love me so he’ll hire me a good lawyer.”

“I don’t know…” Selina said. “He probably has something planned…”

A worried look came over her face.

“I need to get out of here,” she said, looking out the door in the direction of the guard.

“Why, Selina?” Daryl asked.

“I just have a feeling…” she began but was interrupted by a text coming to Daryl’s phone.

“Huh,” Daryl said. “Looks like your boy just broke into that house.”

Bruce awoke to find that he was hanging from the ceiling. The room was now bathed in the light of industrial fluorescent bulbs. His hands were fastened to the chain above. When he tried to stand, someone standing behind him, Sykes, hit the back of his knees. At least the pain got the adrenaline pumping helping him to emerge out of the fog from the gas.

Sykes stepped in front of him. Wearing a plain white undershirt and black trousers, Sykes looked very casual. Except for the leather mask he had donned.

“No need for the mask, Sykes,” Bruce said, pulling slightly on the chain to test its strength.

“I like it, Master Wayne.” Sykes replied, circling around Bruce, trying to intimidate him.

“Bruce, what am I supposed to do with you?” Daniel was sitting comfortably in one of the easy chairs. A crystal glass with amber liquid on the small end table next to him. He looked as though he were in his study, conducting a meeting. “This is all very aggravating.”

“Sorry for the inconvenience,” Bruce said, moving again so that he could stand.

Sykes approached as if to hit him again.

“Stand down, Sykes,” Daniel said. “He’s not going anywhere. It’s a waste of your time attempting to break those chains, Bruce. Sykes tested them personally. Go ahead, give it a good yank.”

Bruce complied, pulling down on the chain with all his strength. His wrists protested at the effort but he confirmed that these chains were inescapable.

“See?” Daniel took a sip of his drink. “I bet you thought an old man like me would be sleeping away. Gone to bed by nine p.m. What you don’t know is that the night is mine.”

Now that it was fully lighted, the horror of the room was more apparent. Bruce’s eyes fell on the
drain at his feet and wondered how much blood had been washed away down those pipes.

“Don’t care for our little rec room, do you?” Daniel drawled.

“Not really,” Bruce replied, taking a deep breath hoping to clear the last of the gas that had muddied his brain.

“We’ve never had another man down here,” Daniel said. “It’s an odd feeling, isn’t it, Sykes?”

“Odd, no,” Sykes said. “Irritating, yes. I’m not looking forward to cleaning up his mess.”

“Yes,” Daniel said. “There’s no fun in this for you. But for me…”

Daniel laughed.

“Sykes, don’t forget to fire the guards,” Daniel said. “Without pay. They were completely useless. Bruce, what security company are you using?”

Daniel looked at him expectantly, waiting for his answer.

“You’ve got to be kidding, right?” Bruce asked.

“Oh, Bruce, there’s really no reason to dispense with the niceties,” Daniel said. “We can get through the next few minutes like civilized men.”

Bruce could sense Sykes behind him, ready with the club to deliver another blow if needed.

“It doesn’t matter,” Daniel said. “I won’t be needing any more security after tonight.”

Daniel watched Bruce, waiting for a reaction at his pronouncement. Bruce detected disappointment in Daniel. This was a man who liked to inflict hurt wherever he could. It was now clear to him that everytime Daniel brought up Thomas Wayne to him, it was to hurt him.

“I must say, Bruce,” Daniel said, taking another sip of his drink. “I’m a little perplexed at how easily you were able to get past my five guards. Worthless though they turned out to be, there were still five of them and one of you.”

“Just lucky,” Bruce said, flexing his hands. Standing with one’s hands chained above his head was difficult even for someone who kept in shape.

Daniel went to the back of the room to pour himself another drink. As he did so, Bruce saw him cast a long look at a big box with a heavy blanket draped over it.

“While we have you here,” Daniel said, his back still to Bruce. “You can settle a little bet between Sykes and myself.”

He walked back to Bruce, standing just out of reach if Bruce lashed out.

“Sykes doesn’t think so but I suspected you were the Batman, is that true?” Daniel peered closely at Bruce.

“That’s quite a leap there, Daniel,” Bruce said, surprised the conversation had taken such a turn.

“When the Batman was out in full force, Sykes was concerned the man would figure us out,” Daniel said. “But since we weren’t connected with the mob or sold drugs, why would he be interested in our little enterprise?”
“I think he would have been very interested in whatever it is that you do,” Bruce replied.

Daniel smiled. “I thought so, too, so I paid attention to him. Noticed that his toys were expensive and...familiar.”

“How so?”

“You remember William Earle?”

“Yes.” Bruce could well remember Wayne Enterprises former CEO. He was also reminded that the man was weak. No telling what dirt Wackford had on him.

“Well, Mr. Earle owed me a favor or two so I had access to more of the goings on at Wayne Enterprises than the other Board Members.” Daniel leaned close. “It was those vehicles that really caught my eye.”

Bruce met his steady gaze.

“You know the ones?” Daniel asked.

“I’m not sure that I do.”

“Come now, Bruce, play nice,” Daniel said. “Fess up. It was you. You had me fooled with your drunken buffoonery but that was an act. I can see that now.”

“Fraid I can’t help you, Daniel.”

Daniel took a step closer. “I remember your anger as a teenager. So terribly mad at the world that took your parents from you. Then you disappeared. After years away, you return and then who else shows up in my city?”

“The Batman,” Sykes answered when Bruce didn’t.

“Yes,” Daniel said. “The Batman who styled himself Gotham’s protector. Tell me, Bruce, who else would have the arrogance to assume that role?”

Bruce remained silent which prompted Sykes to give him an unfriendly nudge with the billy club.

“I don’t know, Daniel,” Bruce said. “How about you tell me.”

Daniel smirked. “Only Waynes are that arrogant.”

Bruce heard the contempt in his voice. How long had Daniel carried a grudge against his family?

“But he died,” Bruce said.

“He did, after heroically saving the city,” Daniel said. “That was around the same time everyone thought you died. Again. Strange, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Bruce conceded.

“Look at him, Sykes,” Daniel said. “Not a drop of fear in him. We’ve got him hanging about to die and he doesn’t bat an eye. He’s him.”

“I’m almost convinced, sir,” Sykes said.
Daniel went to his work table.

“Worth another go,” Daniel read before turning to face Bruce. He held up the polaroid of Selina. “This is your girlfriend?”

“I wish I could remember her,” Daniel continued when Bruce didn’t respond. “I know you didn’t have your parents around to help guide you in these matters but Bruce, my young friend, you don’t bring these women home.”

Bruce ignored him, choosing to focus on keeping his arms from falling asleep. These men were going to make a mistake, Bruce was sure of that. He needed to be ready when they finally did.

“Your father would be so embarrassed to see the kind of woman you’ve allied yourself with,” Daniel said, shaking his head.

“I don’t think you knew my father as well as you like to think you did.”

“I knew your father all too well!” Daniel exclaimed, angrily. “Always thinking he was better than everyone else. Do you want to hear a story about your daddy?”

“No,” Bruce replied.

Daniel laughed. “I’ve got nothing. Tommy was boring as hell. How he got your mother to look at him was beyond me. All he had going for him was the Wayne money and the Wayne arrogance. Your family always fancied themselves as the guardians of Gotham. A bunch of sappy do gooders.”

“You know, Bruce,” Daniel said leaning close. “Very few things in this life have given me more satisfaction than Thomas Wayne getting gunned down in a dirty alley by a some street nobody that his family probably tried to save.”

Daniel’s mask had slipped. The face revealed to Bruce was one of malevolence.

“Funny, isn’t it?” Daniel said well aware of the effect his words had on Bruce.

“But I get no pleasure in your mother’s death,” Daniel said. “It was a terrible shame your mother had to die that night. She was so beautiful…”

“You’re delusional, Daniel,” Bruce said. “My mother would never have had anything to do with you. She was onto you.”

“Yes, she was,” Daniel said, nodding. “Look at this, Bruce.” Daniel gestured to a barely visible scar across his cheek. “Your mother gave me that.”

He looked proud. “She didn’t slap me like any society cunt, she hauled off and punched me. Her ring did this. It was one of the most exhilarating moments of my life.”

Bruce gripped the chain tightly. As if sensing his anger, Sykes moved closer to him, allowing the club to rest menacingly on Bruce’s shoulder.

“Then she went and told Tommy Boy. Oh, yes! I’d never seen Thomas mad before,” Daniel said. “It was quite a sight. Can you imagine your father furious?”

Bruce could not.

“It was actually quite amusing. Your old dead dad was out of his league with me.” Daniel said
before turning his attention to Sykes. “I hired you after Thomas died, didn’t I?”

“Yes, sir,” Sykes said.

“You must know, Bruce,” Daniel said, sitting back down on the easy chair. He took a sip of his drink, relishing Bruce’s attention. “Your father wouldn’t have lived to see Christmas. I had my own plans in motion but that mugger saved me a couple grand from hiring someone to kill him.”

Daniel grinned, looking so pleased with himself. Bruce kept his expression blank refusing to show Daniel that his words affected him as deep as they did.

“But I wouldn’t have harmed your mother,” Daniel said, looking wistful. He turned away so Bruce could no longer see his face. “Not a blonde hair on her beautiful head.”

He rose from the chair, looking to the back of the room. “Your father did not deserve a woman like that.”

“That’s a helluva grudge you’ve got there, Daniel,” Bruce said, deciding it was time to try to provoke Daniel. “Did my father know how jealous you were of him?”

“Jealous!?” Daniel whirled about, his face suddenly a picture of rage. “How dare you presume to know anything? You’re about as ignorant as your father. What a waste…”

Daniel went to pour another drink which he downed in one swallow.

“Well,” Daniel said to Sykes. “That was cathartic.”

“Sir,” Sykes replied. “Should we wrap this up?”

Daniel nodded. “I’m actually happy we were able to have this little chat, Bruce. Happy for you to know that not everyone venerated your dear father”

“But on to other matters,” Sykes said, sounding bored as if he’d heard these rants from Daniel before.

“Of course. First, I must thank you for bringing my film back to me. It’s one of our newest additions so we haven’t had a chance to get bored of it yet.”

Bruce couldn’t hide his disgust.

“You watched it,” Sykes said, coming from behind him. “You’re friendly with the police commissioner. What does he know?”

Bruce didn’t answer. Daniel nodded to Sykes who hit Bruce in the side with the club.

“You’re going to die here, Bruce,” Daniel said. “We can make your death quick if you cooperate. Or we can make it painful. What do you prefer?”

“The police know everything,” Bruce said. “They just needed probable cause to get into your house. They have it now.”

“What did you think would happen?” Daniel laughed. “Do you really believe that I will go to prison? Did you not notice the names in my filing cabinet? I spent years cultivating those people, finding their weakness, exploiting their secret sins. Those are powerful men that I have in my control.”
“They’re all going down,” Bruce said.

“I think he really may be the Batman,” Sykes commented.

“Yes, well, I’m no longer interested in that,” Daniel said. “I’m not concerned with the police. They won’t get down here. I’ll phone my attorney as soon as we’re done here.” He turned back to Bruce. “Before we kill you, there’s one last thing...I don’t suppose you brought those signed papers?”

The absurdity of it caused Bruce to laugh. “You want to close a deal. Now?”

“Well, you’re going to be dead soon so now is good.”

Bruce finally saw the mistake. This man’s hubris was astounding. If he could just play along for a little while longer, he could get out of this.

“Will you sign, Bruce?” Daniel asked.

“Why the hell should I?”

“Ah, yes, why the hell should you?” Daniel sounded gleeful. “How about this?”

Daniel held up a photo. It looked like it had been taken as he and Alfred took Helena and Mr. Tibbles to the park.

“That old man’s going to have to take care of another Wayne orphan. Do you think he’ll live long enough for her to reach adulthood? Who will care for her then? That ignorant rabble you brought back from India?”

Daniel held the photo closer to Bruce’s face. His finger tapping Helena’s image.

“Do you think they can protect her?” Daniel whispered.

“I’ll sign,” Bruce said, making his voice sound defeated.

“I’m going to uncuff one hand,” Sykes said. “I’ll be right behind you if you try anything.”

Before Sykes unlocked one of the cuffs, Daniel stopped him.

“I tell you this, Bruce Wayne, you make this happen for me, your death will be quick and painless. And I will live your little girl alone. But try anything, and we’ll kill you, kill that slut in the hospital, kill that butler. We’ll take your precious little girl where no one will ever find her. I know places that take them young….Got it?”

Bruce felt ill at Daniel’s words. “So do you have papers for me to sign or what?”

Daniel smiled triumphantly. “As a matter of fact I do.”

He went to the work table, picking up a folder. “The terms have changed slightly from before. More beneficial for me but that won’t matter to you, will it?”

He nodded to Sykes to unlock one of the cuffs.

“Don’t forget our deal,” Daniel reminded him. “I give you my word as your father’s closest boyhood friend.”
Bruce laughed at that. As soon as he had one hand free, he grabbed Sykes pushing him down so that Bruce could use his legs to wrap around his neck. It was agony on his one arm still chained to the ceiling but Bruce did not let up his grip as Sykes thrashed about trying to free himself from Bruce’s choke hold.

Daniel rushed over to the work table with the tools. Holding what looked like a cattle prod, he cautiously approached Bruce.

“Let him go, Bruce,” Daniel said angrily before touching Bruce’s back with the cattle prod. Bruce didn’t let go, the room was silent save the small grunt from Sykes as he struggled against Bruce’s grip. With his free hand, Bruce grasped the chain above his head, trying to alleviate the weight on his chained arm.

Once more, Daniel approached with the prod, Bruce reached out with his free hand to take the prod away from Daniel. Sykes thrashed violently, knocking Bruce off balance giving Daniel an opening to jam the prod to his side. Daniel kept it there until Bruce loosened his hold on Sykes.

“Big mistake, Bruce,” Daniel said as Sykes punched Bruce in the side.

Sykes picked up his billy club but before he could hit Bruce again the loud sound of a shotgun being racked pierced the room.

“Step away from him.”

Bruce looked up to see Selina. She stood there looking small and tired, still wearing a hospital gown but covered up with the blue robe Isha had brought her. Her feet were covered in thick socks, her left arm was in the cast. In her right hand, she gripped the shotgun tightly, her finger hovering over the trigger.

Selina felt her hand threaten to shake but her will refused to let that happen. Her body was tired, still feeling battered. Everything was sore and her hand...well, the doctor said the pain in her hand was a very good sign so that was something. Despite all that, her ‘good’ hand was steady as she pointed the shotgun at Daniel.

Stepping further into the room, she quickly glanced around. This was the room she had wanted to find when she broke in last month. Bruce with all his secret rooms probably had little trouble finding it. If only she had found it a month ago...

Daniel laughed at her, the sound was painfully familiar. “Little girl, you look like a gentle breeze would knock you over.”

Selina didn’t respond to him. She didn’t even look his way but kept her gaze fixed on Bruce who was still held by Sykes.

“You’re brave for wanting to save him alone,” Daniel said, inching toward her.

“Oh, I’m not alone,” Selina replied coolly, still not looking at him. “I just needed your attention on me while my friend got behind him.”
Before Sykes could turn around, Daryl hit him in the head with a baseball bat. Sykes fell to the floor with a thud.

Bruce and Selina’s eyes locked and held on each other as Daryl secured Sykes’ hands behind his back. Selina stepped away from the doorway letting Daryl’s two friends enter the room.

“Get out of my house!” Daniel sputtered, backing against the wall. He seemed indignant that such people were in his sanctum.

No one paid him any attention. Selina refused to look at him at all, keeping her gaze locked on Bruce.

“Per our deal, I’m taking this one,” Daryl said to Bruce as he nodded to his friends to help him with Sykes.

“Find the key first,” Bruce said.

Daryl quickly found the key. He waited for his friends to carry Sykes up the stairs. When they were gone, Daryl unlocked the shackles.

“How dare you!” Daniel exclaimed. “Remember what I said about the people I own? Powerful men! I own them! No one will dare touch me!”

Without a word to him, Bruce moved to stand behind Daniel, putting him in a chokehold. When Daniel passed out, Bruce let him slide to the floor.

Selina looked around the room, spotting the polaroid that had dropped to the floor. She picked it up, gazing at the girl in the photo. Daryl came over to see what she was looking at. When he saw the picture, he looked up at her. The photo upsetting to him.

“How dare we letting him live?”

“Public humiliation, loss of status,” Bruce said, rubbing his wrists. “Killing him is too easy, too good for him. He needs to answer for his many crimes.”

“He’s rich as shit,” Daryl said. “He probably has half the politicians in this city on his side.”

“I’ll take care of that,” Bruce said, looking at Selina with concern.

“Selina?” Daryl asked.

Selina looked up from the photo. She had heard their conversation, she just couldn’t bring herself to care.

Shrugging her shoulders, she sank onto the couch then stood back up when she realized where she had sat.

“Someone called the police,” Bruce said. He had retrieved his phone and read his texts. “A group of African Americans were seen entering the residence.”

“That means the police will be here sooner rather than later,” Daryl replied.

“You better go,” Bruce said. “We’ll leave as soon as I make sure there’s nothing down here connecting us to him.”

“What about him?” Daryl asked nodding toward Daniel.
“He won’t say anything,” Bruce said. “I doubt he’ll utter a word to the police. He feels they are beneath him.”

“You sure, See?” Daryl whispered. “I’ll kill him now.”

They shared a long look before Selina looked away to meet Bruce’s eyes. He looked concerned. She shook her head. Daryl gently squeezed her shoulder before running back upstairs.

“Selina,” Bruce said quietly. “We’ll leave in a moment.”

He opened the rest of the drawers. What was he looking for? Selina wondered. Whatever he was looking for he found. He withdrew several files, stuffing them in the black backpack he had brought.

“Ready?”

She nodded weakly. They started to the stairs.

“Help me!” A woman’s weak voice cried out. “Please don’t leave me!”

The voice came from the direction of a big box looking thing covered by a heavy blanket. Bruce pulled off the blanket to reveal a small, square cage.

The nude woman in the cage shrank back, afraid of him. Selina gestured for Bruce to back away as she went to the cage, sinking to her knees, her eyes level with the woman. The woman grabbed desperately at Selina.

“Please…” she cried.

“Shh...it’s okay,” Selina soothed, ignoring the pain as the woman grabbed at her bruised arm. “We won’t leave you.”

“Selina…” Bruce said quietly as he handed her a blanket to cover the nude woman with. “We need to not be here when the police arrive.”

“We’re not abandoning her!” Selina tried to stuff the blanket between the bars of the cage. The woman shrank back when Bruce approached to help her. He got the blanket inside then backed away. Selina reached into the cage to help the woman wrap the blanket around her.

Bruce went to find the key. His gloved hands opening and closing every drawer.

“What’s your name?” Selina asked.

The woman just shook her head, tears falling down her face.

“No key,” Bruce said before looking into the backpack for something to pick the lock with. He paused. “Maybe the police should do this.”

Tears sprang to Selina’s eyes. He was right but it felt so terribly wrong.

“I’m going to see if there’s another way out of here,” Bruce said before disappearing out of the room.

“It’s okay,” Selina said to the woman. “It’s almost over. The police will be here. They’ll get you out. You’ll be safe.”
“Him…” The woman said nodding in Daniel’s direction. He still lay unconscious on the floor where Bruce had dropped him.

“He won’t hurt you. He’ll never hurt anyone again.” Selina grasped the woman’s hand in her good hand. “You’re almost finished with this and each moment after is another moment away from all this.”

“There’s a back door,” Bruce said. “We’ll get out that way.”

“Please,” the woman begged, tightening her grip on Selina. “Please don’t leave me here.”

“You’re hurting her!” Bruce exclaimed.

“I’ll stay with you until the police get here,” Selina said, ignoring the pain. “Everything is going to be okay.”

Bruce paced as they waited, keeping his distance from the traumatized woman. Selina kept close to her, touching her softly.

“You’ll be okay,” she said quietly. “You’ll get past this.”

Jessica Massey found Commissioner Gordon on the rooftop of the MCU. As she walked on to the roof, her eyes couldn’t help but stray to the signal light that Gordon always turned on on the anniversary of day the Batman had died saving Gotham.

She’d never been up here before. The rooftop was Gordon’s domain and few dared to intrude.

“Nice night,” she said. It was true, the night was one of the spring nights, cool but not cold. It was clear out, the moon bright.

“What brings you up here?” Gordon asked.

“This case…”

Gordon nodded. “Everything about this case is troubling.”

“That film…Blake told me about it,” Jessica said. “It really freaked him out.”

“Freaked us all out,” Gordon replied, then leaned toward his radio to listen to the police chatter. Jessica understood that this was Gordon’s second office, his night office. “I recommend you avoid watching that film at all costs.”

On the wide ledge of the roof, Gordon set down the file he had been looking at. It was the file of the missing woman Selina Kyle had been looking for. The woman that had been murdered.

“I’m tired of talking to families of missing women,” Gordon said, closing the file. “But I think there’s more missing women that are dead. Wackford’s had many years to prey upon vulnerable women.”
“I’m worried they’ll beat this,” Jessica said. “There’s too much that could go wrong. And he’s got money…”

“So does Bruce Wayne,” Gordon said.

They fell into silence as they looked out over the city.

“My sister’s murderer served the least time possible. Now he’s trying to get custody of their son. The same son that he murdered his mother in front of,” Jessica said. “And he’s not rich. He’s got enough to afford a low class lawyer but the guy is winning for him. So if a guy with nothing can do that, what about a man with millions in his pocket?”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Detective,” Gordon said. “Have you hired an attorney?”

“Yes, but the guy’s the father. And he’s getting married. The bastard even sent me a wedding invitation. What woman would marry a guy that killed his last girlfriend?”

“I have no idea.”

“People are so fucked up, you know?” Jessica said before looking abashed as she realized who she was talking to.


“The judge even implied that it was my sister’s fault. That she shouldn’t have made him so mad.” Even after all these years, Jessica was still infuriated to remember the judge as he condemned her dead sister.

“Which judge?”

“Keller.”

“I have nothing good to say about Keller.” Gordon leaned in to listen to the radio again. It was just routine police chatter.

“How about a coffee, Detective? I’ve given up trying to sleep since I saw that horrible film,” Gordon said, tucking the file under his arm.

“Sounds good, Commissioner.”

As they started to leave the roof, the police radio went active, calling for available units to respond to a break in on Beauchamp Avenue.

In shock, Gordon and Massey looked at each other.

“You don’t think he…” Massey began.

“I don’t know,” Gordon said as they hurried down stairs. “He wouldn’t get caught..”

Massey drove, speeding through the nearly empty streets. Gordon called Wayne but kept getting voicemail. He then called Blake telling him to meet them there.

When they arrived, the police were just entering the residence with guns drawn. The first unit on the scene had already found the closet with the security guards tied up.

“Don’t touch them,” Gordon advised. “Go upstairs and see who’s up there. The Detective and I
will search the rear of the house.”

Jessica and Commissioner Gordon headed to the study. There were no open doors for them to access.

“How do we get in?” Jessica asked.

Gordon’s phone buzzed. “It’s him!”

“We’re here,” Gordon said as he answered his phone. Listening, he nodded then went to the photo behind the desk. When he turned the photo, the wood panel slid open revealing a steel door that had not been shut all the way.

“You’re to go in first,” Gordon said. “They’re down there. I’ll keep the other units away from this room.”

He left her alone. Shining her flashlight, she walked down the dark, narrow stairs. At the bottom of the stairs, Bruce was waiting for her.

“You won’t need that,” he said, indicating she should holster her gun.

She complied. Seeing him in the shadows, dressed in black he looked very different from the dapper billionaire.

But thoughts of Bruce Wayne’s possible identity fled as soon as she saw Selina Kyle kneeling in front of a cage holding on to a terrified woman.

She and Selina exchanged a knowing glance. Jessica knew what to do.

“I’m Detective Jessica Massey,” she said softly, inching toward the woman. “We’re getting you out of here.”

She heard Commissioner Gordon’s shocked intake of breath when he arrived on the scene. Bruce beckoned for him to keep his distance from the frightened woman.

“Just let her go,” Jessica said to the woman. She kept her tone soft and gentle. “She needs to not be here.”

“Do you understand?” Selina asked the woman. “We want him to pay for his crimes. Us being here might threaten that.”

The woman nodded then released Selina’s hand. Jessica reached out to her, offering her hand in replacement.

Bruce helped Selina up. Selina looked as if she was about to pass out. Bruce must have reached the same conclusion as he swept her up in his arms, carrying her as they disappeared out of sight.

Gordon went to find a way to open the cage. When he returned, Jessica said: “Jesus, he’s really him, isn’t he?”
Loose Ends

John Blake met Bruce and Selina just outside the servant’s entrance at the Wackford home. As they emerged out of the door, Blake quickly closed it behind them after checking to make sure they weren’t followed.

No so mysteriously, the police had not yet begun to search the part of the house and property where they hid. Gordon was good but there was only so much time he could keep the police from this area before drawing notice.

Before stepping out of the shadows to the small driveway, Blake looked around the corner to confirm the coast was clear. There was no one close enough to see them but the narrow driveway was blocked by a squad car at the street entrance.

“There should be a service gate to the alley at the back of the house,” Bruce said. “We need to get there soon before the police block off they alley.”

The sound of sirens shattered the peaceful quiet of the night. Quickly, they made their way through the small but immaculate garden to find a gate hidden behind a wall of shrubbery.

Blake jimmed the lock on the gate, pushing it open for Bruce to carry Selina through.

“Put me down,” Selina whispered to Bruce as John closed the gate behind them. “Your wrist…your side…I can tell you’re hurt.”

“I’m fine,” Bruce said.

After securing the gate, Blake waited as they continued their whispered discussion. When Selina finally slipped out of his arms, Bruce winced in pain earning an ‘I told you so’ look from Selina.

Bruce gently took her uncasted arm and held on to her as they followed John through the dark alley toward where he had parked his car.

Their pace was slower than Blake would have liked. He was anxious to get as far away from the police activity as they could get. They hadn’t done anything wrong. Not really, but Wackford could claim he was framed or his lawyers could dream up something just as bad. No, best for all to not be found anywhere near the mansion.

As they approached the intersection of Pratt Avenue, they paused, shrinking back into the shadow of a wall when another squad car sped by. If they were spotted, there was no way a police car would not stop them. Selina looked every inch like a refugee from a hospital and Bruce, decked out head to toe in black, looked like he was going to rob someone. John, dressed in jeans and a hoodie, just looked like he was too poor to be in such an wealthy neighborhood.

When the coast was clear, Bruce swept up Selina again and carried her as they rushed across the wide street. Selina did not look like she could stroll across the street let alone run. John finally noticed she was only wearing socks.

“Not much further,” John said.

As they got farther away from the crime scene, they slowed their pace. Selina walked between Bruce and John.
“I know you,” she said to Blake.

“Still mad?”

She shrugged, indicating she had bigger problems than him. Bruce glanced at Selina, making sure she was okay.

“I’m okay,” Selina said to him. “I just want to get home.”

“You mean the hospital,” John said.

She and Bruce exchanged a glance.

“God, no,” Selina said. “I’ve had enough of hospitals.”

Bruce and Selina sat in the back seat of John’s nondescript Chrysler Fifth Avenue. It wasn’t his vehicle of choice but always used he didn’t want to attract attention. In the rearview mirror, he could see Bruce drape his arm over Selina’s shoulders pulling her close to him. She let her head fall on his shoulder as if she were about to go to sleep. Her eyes didn’t close but remained fixed on the window.

“How do we know he won’t say anything?” John asked.

“He won’t talk to the police,” Bruce replied. “They’re beneath him.”

John wanted to ask more, find out what had happened that left Bruce looking so beaten and for Selina to leave the hospital in the dead of night. Sensing that Bruce did not want to talk about what had happened, John kept quiet, keeping his many questions to himself.

Alfred waited by the elevator door not sure what to expect. He had been surprised to discover that Bruce had gone off to Wackford’s alone after everyone had gone to bed. Then, more shocked, when Blake called to tell him he was on his way with both Bruce and Selina.

“Sorry to get you up so early,” Selina said, as she stepped out of the elevator. Her voice was weak and tired.

“It’s fine,” Alfred said, going to her. He would have taken her arm to help but Bruce was already holding onto the one that wasn’t in a cast. “Shouldn’t you be in the hospital?”

“No.” Selina couldn’t seem to muster any more explanation. She leaned heavily on Bruce who led her up to their room.

Following them upstairs, Alfred noted Master Wayne appeared to be injured.

“Would you mind getting Helena?” Selina asked Alfred. “She can sleep with us. If anyone is getting sleep, that is.”

By the time he returned, Selina had changed out of the hospital clothes into soft clingy pajama pants and tank top.
Helena did not wake as he lay her down next to her mother.

“Do you want anything?” Alfred asked Selina.

“Just see to Bruce who is hurt worse than he’s letting on,” she said as she closed her eyes, snuggling closer to Helena.

“Let me see to whatever’s been injured.” Alfred motioned for Bruce to follow him.

“The hatred he harbored for my father…” Bruce said as they walked downstairs to Alfred’s private apartment. The only room in the penthouse not filled with people. “Even after so many years, he never gave up his grudge.”

“Jealousy?” Alfred asked. “One would think Wackford had nothing to be jealous about.”

“I don’t know,” Bruce said. “It seemed like he didn’t like that his family was not the most prominent family in Gotham.”

Alfred shook his head, bewildered at everything they were learning about Daniel. Once inside his room, he motioned for Bruce to sit down.

“You were chained up?” Alfred was aghast to find one of Bruce’s wrists bloody and raw. The other had a ring of abrasions.

“They had knock out gas,” Bruce explained as he assessed the damage.

“Well, we’re going to need something stronger than Hello Kitty band-aids.” Alfred went to find the medical kit that hadn’t been needed in years.

They were quiet as Alfred gently washed the wounds. Alfred’s ministrations were as tender as ever.

“We found a woman,” Bruce said quietly.

Alfred paused in wrapping Bruce’s wrist. “A woman?”

“In a cage.” Bruce met Alfred’s appalled gaze.

“Is she alright?”

“I hope so,” Bruce replied. “I overheard Daniel and Sykes talk about ‘cleaning the rec room.’ I think they meant her.”

“Then it was a good thing you went there,” Alfred said. “I still cannot believe he is this person. When I think of all the times you visited as a young man…”

“He fooled a lot of people. I think there are some powerful men who have much to be worried about now,” Bruce said before telling Alfred about all the incriminating photographs that were found.

“I’m going to finish what my parents started,” Bruce said. “He won’t get away with this. Even if some of the most powerful men in the country are afraid of him.”

Bruce reached for the backpack he’d brought back from Wackford’s. The movement caused a sharp intake of breath.
“I think I may have a cracked rib or two,” Bruce said, wincing as he removed his shirt.

Alfred frowned as he saw the mass of welts across Bruce’s torso. The bruising had not yet started. By tomorrow, Bruce would be black and blue all over.

“Daniel’s man did all this?”

“Most of it but Daniel helped a little.” Bruce’s winced again when Alfred lightly touched his side.

“He did?” Alfred looked closer at the injuries having a difficult time seeing how a man over seventy could harm Bruce.

“Cattle prod,” Bruce answered his unspoken question.

“We’ll leave the ribs for the doctor,” Alfred said. “Ms. Kyle should be seen as well.”

“Yes.” Bruce said, gesturing for Alfred to hand him the backpack. Reaching into the backpack, he withdrew a thick file folder. “I found these.”

Alfred opened the file to find photo after photo of Martha Wayne.

They were quiet as Alfred sifted through the photos. They were all wonderful shots of her. Whomever Daniel had hired to surveil her did a good job. The photos showed not only her beauty but her personality. Many of the photos were of her and Bruce as they went about their day.

“I almost want to thank him for these,” Bruce said, his eyes taking in all the images of his mother. “But they’re all tainted. Taken without her permission, under the vilest of circumstances.”

“Something so meaningful taken so wrongly.” Alfred paused over one photo, a snapshot of Thomas and Martha walking with Bruce between them was. Each holding his hand. It was a picture of a happy family. Martha smiling at Bruce who was saying something and Thomas looking tenderly at Martha.

“I talked with Rachel’s mother who knew about Daniel,” Alfred said. “Well, about Daniel’s obsession with Martha.”

“Mrs. Dawes knew?”

Alfred nodded. “It wasn’t her place to go to me or your father. Your mother trusted her. Rightly so, I might add.”

“How is she?” Bruce asked.

“She’s doing well, sir,” Alfred replied. “She’s married now. Her husband has grandchildren who give her much joy. She was happy to hear about Miss Helena.”

There was no more to do for Bruce so he headed upstairs to get some sleep. Alfred, however, remained awake, looking through the photos. They brought up memories of happier times. Times he hoped the family would experience again when all the dust settled over this mess.

Several hours later, Alfred went upstairs to check on everyone. Helena was on sitting on the bed playing with a set of little animals while Bruce lay near her. Not sure if he was awake or not, Alfred continued to the dressing areas meaning to gather all the clothes from the night before. Spying the blue robe Selina had worn, Alfred picked it up. He wanted everything that had been in Wackford’s basement to be sterilized.
A photo fell out of the pocket of her robe.

Alfred studied the photo, immediately recognizing the girl who stared so defiantly at the camera.

“Yep,” Selina said quietly, coming up from behind him. “That’s me.”

“Ms. Kyle...” Alfred started. ”Selina...”

He looked at her, feeling overwhelmingly sad for her.

“Don’t feel sorry for me,” Selina said. “At least not about that. That was just a natural consequence of growing up where I did.”

“I hardly think so,” Alfred said.

“It’s fine,” Selina said, taking the photo to look at it. “It was a long time ago. It doesn’t feel so important now.”

She sounded defeated, a tone he would never have expected to hear from her.

“Without you,” Alfred said. “That woman would probably be dead. And others...”

“Yeah,” Selina replied. “He’s a real piece of work, isn’t he? I guess I’m just lucky he hadn’t discovered he liked murder when he had me picked up.”

“Picked up?” Alfred asked. “Who picked you up?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Selina said, handing the photo back to him. “Burn this, will you? I never want to see it again.”

Mercifully, Wackford had not woken up before the young woman could be escorted out of the basement. As soon as Gordon had unlocked the cage door, Jessica reached inside to help the young woman out. She shook with fear and shock but was able to walk out on her own.

As soon as Daniel Wackford regained consciousness, Gordon arrested him. It had been years since Gordon had the pleasure of putting cuffs on someone who deserved it as much as this man did. For a man just over seventy, Wackford was in surprisingly good shape but he didn’t struggle as Gordon pulled him up to stand.

Wackford did not react as Gordon read him his rights. Instead, his eyes went to the now empty cage then looked at his file cabinets that were open. His eyes hardened but he didn’t say a word.

As soon as Jessica notified Gordon that she and the woman were in the ambulance, Gordon led the cuffed Wackford out of the basement. The older man didn’t utter a single syllable, acting as if he barely registered Gordon’s presence.

Gordon admitted there was something very intimidating about the man. He projected an aura of power that was not negated with the handcuffs. In fact, it felt as though the man were leading Gordon out of the basement rather than the other way around. It was this dominance that made Gordon handle the man himself rather than giving him over to the patrol officers.
As they emerged from the study, Wackford started to head to the rear of the house but Gordon guided him toward the front.

“You would take me out my front door?” Wackford asked. “There is a back entrance, you know,”

“I know,” Gordon replied pulling on Wackford’s arm.

“Trying to humiliate me? I’ll remember this.”

Gordon was sure there was nothing about this situation that Wackford would forget.

When they passed the shamefaced security guards near the front door, Wackford glared at them all contemptuously. Gordon was oddly relieved to find here was someone Wackford was more angry at than him.

After putting Wackford in the back of his vehicle, Gordon met with the sex crimes unit that had just arrived. He briefed them on the woman that had been found as well as what to expect in the basement. There was, of course, no mention of Bruce Wayne or Selina Kyle. He wasn’t sure how to explain the security guards that had been immobilized so he just left that as a mystery. He hoped to lead the investigators to speculate that one of the men Wackford had bribed had instigated the break-in. Even in the small amount of time he had spent with Daniel Wackford, Gordon was certain the man would not say anything to the police let alone mention Bruce Wayne.

By the time Gordon and Wackford reached the MCU, an attorney was already waiting for them. Gordon led Wackford through the station as the lawyer listed all the ways the arrest was illegal. He was soon joined by two more high powered attorneys who, despite the earliness of the hour, looked crisp, professional, and ready to earn their obscenely high billing rates.

As soon as the District Attorney, Barry Atkins, arrived, Gordon suspected the case was going to be buried. In disbelief, he watched as Atkins conversed with Wackford’s attorneys, laughing at some joke as they looked his direction.

Disgusted, Gordon went over to them.

“We found a woman in his basement,” Gordon informed the D.A.

“Why were you in his basement?” Atkins asked. “What possible cause was there to be there?”

“We heard a cry for help,” Gordon replied, falling back on the agreed upon story. It was true that the woman had cried for help, just not to him. But Gordon felt no guilt. The people who should feel guilty were the attorneys who had their eyes on wealth and not the plight of a traumatized young woman.

“So you searched his entire basement?” Atkins asked.

“Not yet,” Gordon said. “We have a unit there now.”

“Stop them,” Atkins said. “Call them now!”

“No, I will not,” Gordon replied, keeping his voice calm. “There was probable cause and there is evidence of extortion and rape.”

He did not mention murder as he could not let on that he had seen the film that was ready to be discovered by the evidence gathering team.
“Where is this woman?” Atkins asked, ignoring Gordon’s comments on evidence.

“She’s just been admitted to St. Agnes.”

“I’ll send someone to interview her,” Atkins said.

“I have a detective there now.”

“Who?”

“Jessica Massesy.”

“A homicide detective?” Atkins made it sound like Gordon was an idiot for letting a homicide detective deal with a case that did not involve murder. “That’s no good, Jim.”

“This case is related to a homicide Massey is investigating. She’s the best one for the job now,” Gordon responded. “Besides, she was there when we found her and the woman is in shock. I doubt she is ready to be interviewed just yet.”

“We’ll determine that,” Atkins said.

One of Wackford’s attorney’s approached. With extreme arrogance, Henry Butterfield questioned how long his client would be held. Even Atkins could not blatantly circumvent the law which meant Wackford would remain in custody for at least a few hours.

“What’s that all about?” Blake asked. He had arrived a few minutes earlier but had the good sense to hang back, away from the D.A. “The D.A. sure looks friendly with Wackford’s attorneys.”

“Now we know what kind of man Atkins is,” Gordon said with disgust.

“It’s depressing that I’m not surprised.”

Gordon nodded in agreement.

“Where are you going?” Blake asked as Gordon walked away.

“To call a friend at the US Attorney’s Office,” Gordon replied. “Some of those names in the file cabinet were U.S. politicians. There’s got to be someone interested in this case.”

Wackford was released just before noon. He stayed in custody longer than Gordon expected which was primarily due to the two federal agents who arrived, expressing an interest in the case. With federal oversight, Atkins was not able to bury the case as Gordon suspected he had meant to.

Atkins did, however, flex some of his muscle as he ordered Gordon to keep quiet to the press. Gordon would have to answer for any leaks originating from the MCU. Wackford’s attorneys added to the pressure by threatening legal action if their client was discussed by anyone from the MCU.

Gordon didn’t argue, knowing Bruce Wayne would handle the press in a way that would not implicate him or any of his officers.

When Gordon went back to the Wackford mansion to make sure the film was found, he was disappointed to discover no media presence. He had hoped that some reporter had heard the APB on the police radio. A crime scene at the home of a very prominent, wealthy Gothamite was curious indeed. Wackford’s attorneys were earning their pay.
The Wackford home was cordoned off, allowing the investigative teams to gather evidence. The teams had already ruled out all rooms in the house except the basement. Even Sykes’ room had nothing incriminating. The men had apparently kept all their activity confined to the secured basement.

Gordon later received a call from Blake telling him they received intel that the police could find Sykes at the warehouse and that the police should dig up the yard.

Gordon called Massey who left the hospital to go immediately to the warehouse.

She called him an hour later, telling him Sykes had been found hogtied but alive. A note pinned to his chest instructed to dig a hole under where he was found. That is where the first body was had been buried.

Now that the Wackford case was tied to a murder, the DA would have to pay attention. By the time Gordon arrived at the scene, two more bodies had been discovered. Jessica requested more teams to assist with the search. She did so via police radio hoping that the media outlets that monitored police communications would hear.

Gordon was nearing exhaustion so he left the scene in Jessica’s capable hands. On his way home, he stopped by the penthouse.

“I wanted to tell you before the news,” Gordon said when they were in the privacy of Bruce’s office. The penthouse was still bustling with activity as the children played. “The warehouse...It’s a graveyard.”

“Kellie Ross?” Bruce asked. There were several bruises on his face. Gordon couldn’t help but wonder what the man had looked like after a night out of being Batman.

“Yes,” Gordon said. “It looks like she was killed sometime before the winter. But there are more bodies.”

“How many more,” Alfred asked.

“We’ve found nineteen and we’re still looking.”

“Good lord!” Alfred murmured.

“That property was my father’s,” Bruce said. “He bought it to prevent Daniel from doing something horrible. Wackford chose that place out of hatred for him.”

“Other than Sykes and the film, there is nothing to connect the bodies to Wackford,” Gordon said. “If someone had stumbled across those bodies, we never would have found out who was behind it.”

“There may be more films…” Bruce said.

“That’s what I’m both hoping for and afraid of.”


“Sykes was found alive,” Gordon replied. “He was beaten up but he’ll live. He’s at Gotham General now, under guard. When he’s released, he’ll go directly to the MCU.”

“And Daniel?” Bruce asked. “What are his lawyers up to?”
“They’ve got the D.A. running scared,” Gordon said. “They’ve filed motions, injunctions, you name it and they’ve filed it.”

“I haven’t seen anything in the news about his arrest,” Bruce said, leaning against his desk.

“I’ve been ordered by the D.A. not to leak anything,” Gordon replied. “A few reporters showed up at the warehouse but, no, nothing about him nor the police activity at his residence.”

“Hmmm,” Bruce said. “I’ll see what we can do about that.”

The old, abandoned warehouse was now teeming with activity. There were at least thirty people carefully combing every inch of the grounds. The bodies that had been found had not yet been moved as the crime techs searched for any evidence about what happened to the women.

Jessica suspected that other than the bodies, the massive crime scene would not turn up anything tying Wackford and Sykes to the crimes. The film that Ms. Kyle had found was the only link. The team working at Wackford’s mansion had just discovered it but had not yet viewed it. The film was merely part of all the evidence in the process of being gathered and boxed to be transported to the MCU. It was their smoking gun and Gordon himself made certain it was properly photographed and catalogued.

She walked through the grounds, avoiding looking at the bodies. They still remained where they were found but all covered were covered with white sheets. It was a sobering sight.

Outside the fence, there was a gathering of news vans all trying to get the scoop on what was happening behind all the tarps that had been hung over the fence. The tarps had not been hung to hide the activity from the media but to preserve some measure of dignity of the victims who were buried there.

It was the only time Jessica remembered being happy to see the media. Even if they were forbidden from talking directly to the press, only someone from the D.A.’s office was allowed to speak about the case, the presence of the media meant attention. And this case needed all the attention it could get.

“Someone here to see you, Massey,” one of the patrolmen who was guarding the entrance said.

John Blake waited for her outside the crime scene with a cup of coffee. Jessica gratefully took the drink, needing the caffeine. She smiled her appreciation when she took a drink, finding the coffee was exactly how she liked it.

“How’s it going?” John asked.

“We think we’ve found them all,” Jessica replied, taking another sip of her coffee. “Now we just need to figure out who they are.”

“Gordon getting in your way?” John kidded.

The Commissioner was helping the techs catalogue the evidence. It was a job far beneath his
position and Massey was impressed that the man pitched in to do whatever needed to be done.

Technically it was Massey’s case but she certainly didn’t mind Gordon’s assistance. He helped not because he thought she was incapable but to help learn the identities of the women. They would later learn that the vast majority of the women found were not Gotham citizens. Most were runaways from different parts of the country.

“He believes the oldest body that we found is Cathy Martin’s,” Jessica said. “She disappeared thirty years ago…”

John nodded, grimacing. “This whole thing…”

“Yeah,” Jessica agreed. Sometimes crime scenes were rife with the gallows humor of the officers involved but not this one. All the techs worked in grim silence, trying to right by these forgotten women.

They stood in silence sipping their coffees as they looked over the news trucks.

“Guess he got the word out,” John said, not needing to clarify who he was talking about.

“It’s a step in the right direction. There’s still nothing about Wackford.”

“Give him time.”

“I believe in the Batman,” Jessica said, looking at him carefully.

John didn’t confirmed that Bruce Wayne was Batman. But, she noted, he hadn’t denied it either.

Jessica downed the last of her coffee. “What do you think about going to see Selina Kyle with me?”

He grinned. “Need backup, huh?”

“She is a little intimidating,” Jessica said. “And that was after she’d been unconscious for almost a week! I can’t imagine what she’s like well rested.”

“Tough, Jessie, very tough,” John replied.

But Selina didn’t look so tough when they met with her an hour later. Alfred showed them to a sitting area near the staircase. While they waited, they went to the windows to check out the stunning view of the city.

“Not bad, huh?” Selina asked as she came over to stand by them.

Even though she was no longer dressed in a hospital gown, Selina looked even frailer. Wearing soft black pants and a black tank, she looked thin and tired. Her eyes, when she looked at Jessica, were sad.

“How are you doing?” John asked, following Selina as she she sat on one of the chairs facing the couch. John and Jessica sat next to each other on the sofa.

“Fine,” Selina said as she wiggled her fingers. “They say that’s a good sign and that I should get this thing off in a few weeks.”

“So no permanent damage?”
Selina and Jessica’s eyes met. If there was permanent damage it wouldn’t be physical.

“I just wanted to say that...without you and Oliver...” A pained expression briefly flickered across Selina’s face as Jessica mentioned her friend’s name. “...Those women wouldn’t have been found. They would have been forgotten forever.”

Selina nodded. “How many did you find?”

“Twenty-three,” Jessica replied. “We don’t think we’ll find any more.”

“What can I help you with?” Selina asked, shifting uncomfortably in her chair. “I don’t have any more information for you.”

“No, I’m here about Melissa Cantrell,” Jessica said.

“Who?”

“The woman from the... basement.”

“Oh,” Selina said. “How is she?”

“She’ll be okay. Her parents just arrived. They had had a huge falling out. She ran away from home. As soon as she arrived at the Gotham bus station, she was picked up…and we know the rest.”

Jessica and John exchanged a brief glance. She was pleased that he had agreed to come with her. Selina seemed very detached. Not cold as if she didn’t care, just distant. Jessica supposed it was understandable given what the woman had been through but she had hoped to have more of a connection to this woman that she found she admired.

“She wanted me to tell you thank you,” Jessica said. “She had given up hope, then she saw you and you were so kind to her. She’ll never forget it.”

“Well, I won’t forget it either,” Selina replied.

“Bruce mentioned that there is a memorial for Oliver Preston,” John said. “Would you mind if we went? I would like to pay my respects.”

“In what capacity?” Selina asked sharply. “The people going don’t need to see cops…”

“Of course not, I’d like to go for Melissa,” Jessica said. “I told her about him...She wanted you to know she was sorry for her friend, wanted you to understand that she knows what he did for her even if he didn’t know he was saving her..”

Selina was silent but Jessica could tell her words affected her.

“We want to show that he mattered,” John said. “That he didn’t die for nothing.”

“The memorial will just be a gathering of his friends who are mostly addicts, prostitutes...people that aren’t exactly friendly with the police.”

“No one’s going to wear a uniform,” John replied staring steadily at Selina.

She shrugged, giving up trying to dissuade them. “It’ll be at the Towers. Not sure when.”

“The Towers?” Jessica asked. “As in those abandoned buildings by the Narrows?”
“Yes, that’s right,” Selina responded. “Still want to go?”

Alfred invited them to stay for dinner. When John learned that Bruce and Selina’s friend, Shanti, had made Indian food, he silently begged her to agree to stay. She was happy she did because the food was amazing.

By dinnertime, Bruce had returned so there was almost a dozen people sitting around the formal dining table. Jessica noted that Bruce and the older Indian woman’s gazes kept straying to Selina who barely touched her food. Jessica considered the woman Selina was and how deep some scars run, how stuff comes back to kick you in the ass when you think you’re over them. She wanted to tell her about her sister, have something to bond with her.

“Like I said, she’s tough,” John remarked later as they stepped into the elevator to head back to the parking garage. “She was in Blackgate for crying out loud, she’ll get through it.”

Jessica hoped so.

The following day, Jessica met Bruce and John in front of the Gotham Courthouse. It was the day of the Grand Jury Indictment. Usually those things were secret but somehow, not through the MCU, the press had gotten wind of Wackford being charged. They swarmed the courthouse awaiting his arrival.

Jessica heard the rumors through the press circuit that the mass graves that had been found on the east side of Gotham were somehow connected to Daniel Wackford. When one reporter asked her about it, she did her duty and replied ‘no comment.’

“Happy they’re interested in someone besides you?” John asked Bruce as they waited outside the courthouse for Daniel to arrive.

“Yes,” Bruce said.

“You know, guys, we should have met at the Batman statue inside,” Jessica said innocently.

Bruce and John exchanged a glance pretty much confirming all of Jessica’s suspicions. It now made sense to her why they stuck up for him. She was happy to discover the truth and even happier to have the honor of meeting the man who had saved millions of lives not so long ago.

“Have you seen it?” Blake asked.

“I’m trying not to,” Bruce replied.

Gordon soon arrived, excited with good news. The detectives charged with searching the basement rooms had just found a hidden safe. They were working on opening it and would report back to him as soon as they had it opened.

“All the photos and documentation from the basement are about ready to be transported to MCU. Or to the FBI. Whoever is willing to see this thing through,” Gordon said as he surveyed the crowd gathered around.

“We’ll see how this indictment goes,” Bruce said, frowning. “If that grand jury can overlook a kidnapped woman in his basement…”

“The US Attorney is ready to take the case if Atkins blows this,” Gordon replied. “Wackford headed a very secret, very elite club. Other members being some of very influential men. Men that if they’re watching the news should be afraid.”
“Fearful men equals dangerous men,” Jessica said, as she checked her phone. An incoming urgent call.

“Massey.” She said as she stepped away from the crowd, better to hear the phone call. Her expression must have betrayed her shock as Bruce, John and Commissioner Gordon all looked at her expectantly.

“Sykes is dead,” Jessica told them as soon as her call ended. “He was processed only yesterday and was shanked in the cafeteria.”

“That was...fast,” John said.

“Too fast,” Bruce replied, looking in the direction where Wackford would be arriving from. “There he is.”

They watched as Wackford’s Rolls Royce, escorted by the police, slowly approached the courthouse.

As they waited, Gordon received a text.

“The safe has dozens of films,” Gordon told them excitedly. “These films should be the nail in Wackford’s coffin. I’m sure of it!”

The Rolls Royce finally pulled up to the Courthouse. A well dressed chauffeur exited the vehicle then opened the back door.

Daniel Wackford stepped out of the Rolls, looking like he was going to a society event and not going to his own trial. Dressed superbly in a conservative dark suit, he smiled for the reporters. Shaking hands and greeting bystanders as he made his way through the crowd. From their vantage point on the top of the steps, they could clearly see the confidence on Daniel’s face. The man showed little concern for the upcoming proceeding.

Gordon then received a phone call. Keeping his eyes on Wackford, Gordon answered the call.

“What?!” Gordon exclaimed a few scant seconds later.

“There was an explosion at the Wackford home,” Gordon explained to them as he listened to the voice on the other end. “The officers…”

“How many were there?” Bruce asked.

“Five,” Gordon replied, ending the call.

“Loose ends…” Bruce said.

Their eyes all turned to Daniel who still slowly made his way through the throng of reporters. As he approached the top of the steps, his eyes fell on Bruce. He smirked then winked at him.

A moment later, he was dead on the courthouse steps. A clean shot through his forehead.

Jessica looked wildly around for the shooter. The reporters, stunned, quickly realized what happened then fell to the ground, with cameras still snapping.

“I didn’t hear anything!” John exclaimed. “Must have a silencer!”

“There!” Bruce pointed to the top of a building across the street. A woman, the hit woman that had
attacked Bruce, that they had arrested for Pond’s murder, waved at him then disappeared.

The courthouse was chaos.
Selina Implodes

Chapter Notes

Note: If there are any ‘Scapers out there reading this, you will recognize something that was blatantly ripped off. Let’s call it an homage, ok?

It was Selina’s silence that was getting to him. She was like a ghost, haunting the penthouse, there but not really present.

Bruce told Alfred that he now understood how Alfred must have felt all those years ago. Helpless.

The helpless feeling was not only with Selina but how the Wackford situation had played out. Daniel Wackford had remained in control until the very end. Giving nothing away, betraying no one, dominating, he ended his reign on his terms.

All the evidence against him had been destroyed in the explosion. The explosion that, coincidentally, managed to only destroy the basement. There had been fire safeguards in place that prevented the rest of the house from being damaged. Daniel had indeed planned well.

Gordon was determined to find someone to answer for the murders. He had good reason to believe others were involved, their names that had been found in Wackford’s files. All were powerful men who should be out of a commissioner’s reach but Gordon had Bruce’s backing and Blake’s tenacity to prove the men’s involvement in Wackford’s secret, murderous club.

The embarrassingly opulent funeral for Daniel was held a few days ago. Wanting to get a look at everyone who showed up, Bruce Wayne attended even though it meant sitting through speech after speech about Daniel’s greatness. It was one of the most disgusting things Bruce had ever sat through. As one Senator extolled Daniel’s generosity to those less fortunate, Bruce had had enough. He had been seated toward the front so when he got up to leave, everyone noticed and whispered about how Bruce Wayne had snubbed the Wackford family.

As Bruce left the Gotham Cathedral, he called the Times reporter he had researched and deemed an honest investigative journalist. Masking his voice and his telephone number, he fed her enough details of the case to keep her busy for the next few months.

“Don’t let Wackford be remembered for being a good man,” he told her before ending the call. He tossed the phone on the seat next to him. He hadn’t intended to personally call a reporter but the stories that were presently circulating were beginning to sound gossipy with no hard facts.

A few days later, Miriam Wackford happened to bump into him as he was leaving Wayne Enterprises. As usual, she looked impeccable in a smart black Chanel suit. She wore her mourning well.

The sympathy he felt for her began to fade as he saw the angry, determined gleam in her eye. There was nothing in her expression to suggest she was a recently widowed woman mourning her husband of forty years.

“I assume you’re behind the smear campaign against Daniel,” Miriam said, sounding haughty and
“Why would I do that?” Bruce asked, innocently.

“You embarrassed us at the funeral,” she said. “Why not let this rest with Daniel?”

He stared at her as realization set in.

“You knew what he was, didn’t you, Miriam?” He asked, his fists balling in anger.

She did not look away but kept her unintimidated gaze firmly fixed on his.

As their gazes locked, Bruce quickly figured out that standing here before him was the woman who had severed all the loose ends. It was she, not Daniel, who had hired out the hit woman to kill Selina. Daniel and Sykes had wanted their film returned so they wouldn’t have tried to have her killed before getting it back. No, it was the elegantly cool and composed Miriam Wackford, complicit in her husband’s crimes, determined to maintain her social status.

“No one of any consequence was affected. Except, of course, your...girlfriend,” she said with an indifferent shrug. “Honestly, I don’t know why you’re making a big deal out of this. Even your parents understood the rules of our society.”

Daniel had profoundly offended Bruce. Stalking his mother, laughing over his father’s death, threatening Helena, putting vile fears into Bruce’s mind and and Selina…

He looked around, making sure no one was watching then stepped closer to Miriam. He towered over her, allowing his most menacing visage to be revealed to her.

“Do not mess with me, Miriam,” Bruce growled aggressively, pleased to see her eyes widen in shock. “You don’t know who you’re dealing with. I suggest you and your family get out of Gotham and do not come back.”

“How dare you!” She sputtered then gestured for her chauffer to escort her out. She threw Bruce a deathly glare over her shoulder. He was violating some kind of rich person’s code but he didn’t care.

As he watched her walk away, he called his attorneys to inquire how Melissa Cantrell, found in Daniel’s basement, could sue the Wackford family. He then called Gordon, telling him who was behind the explosion that killed his officers at the mansion. Gordon vainly tried to find evidence tying Miriam to the explosion but without the hitwoman who would never talk, all he would find were dead ends.

What followed was a war in the media. Bruce was determined to decimate the public reputation of the Wackfords. It was the kind of war that had threatened some thirty years before when Thomas Wayne confronted Daniel Wackford. In response to Bruce’s anonymous assault, someone in the Wackford camp fed stories of Daniel’s innocence to the Gazette, indicating that the police were framing Daniel because of a grudge, that they were being led on by the opposing political party that wanted to unseat the incumbent congressmen that Wackford had heartily supported. It was far more sordid than Bruce was used to.

But all that hardly mattered now as Bruce stood beside his friends at The Towers.

Bobby had organized the memorial service for Oliver which had taken longer than expected. Bruce found that surprising as few of the people who attended appeared to have jobs. The reason, Bruce suspected, had much to do with Selina and her state of mind which seemed to be getting worse.
Bruce’s eyes went again to Selina who stood by herself, leaning against a graffitied wall in the Quad. Dressed in black with her eyes hidden by sunglasses, she looked so distant, so stoic and unapproachable that Bruce could scarcely believe she was the same woman he had traveled the world with.

He had to remind himself that he knew her, knew everything about her, what made her laugh, irritated her, angered her, what turned her on. Knew everything save that part of her she had kept entirely to herself. Selina was the strongest person he knew but he had known that cracks were there, little bits of vulnerability she did her best to hide. Now those cracks had been blown wide open.

The memorial gathering was held in the Quad at the Towers. No effort had been made to pretty up the place. Trash still littered the grounds, broken bottles and used needles as well as the random shoe that everyone had to step over.

Clearly the outsiders of the group, Bruce, Alfred, Blake, Gordon, and Jessica all hung back. No one paid them any attention. Gordon shifted uncomfortably when the smell of marijuana drifted their way but he made no move to identify the smoker. Which would be nearly impossible in this group.

People continued to drift over, most huddled in groups until Bobby began his eulogy. Bruce listened as Bobby, then friend after friend spoke about Ollie. The stories contained a great deal of drug use and hard times but everyone mentioned his good heart and that despite everything, Ollie managed to retain an air of innocence about him.

Neither Daryl or Selina spoke, both had the same detached look about them.

“What’s going on?” A man pushing a cart ambled over. “There a body over there?”

“No,” Blake answered. “It’s a memorial service for Oliver Preston.”

“Who?”

“O-L-L,” a woman in front of them whispered.

“O-L-L’s dead?”

“Shut up and listen!” She hissed before turning back around.

“Watch my cart, would ya?” The man asked Blake. Without waiting for a response, he headed into the crowd where he soon shared his own Oliver story.

DeeDee went to stand by Selina who barely acknowledged her. DeeDee met his eye and gave Bruce an encouraging smile. She saw what was happening with Selina, too.

It was a mistake coming back, he knew that now, too many ghosts. Bruce Wayne of the Wayne family didn’t have to live in Gotham but he had wanted the family legacy for Helena and Selina wanted what was in Helena’s best interest.

And, Bruce reminded himself, Selina had wanted to come home. Without the warrants for her arrest, she could finally kick back and enjoy her home city. Something she had never really been able to do before.

Selina had always been so matter of fact about growing up in poverty that he almost believed it wasn’t a big deal. Poverty and neglect shaped her, forced her into choices that kept her always
looking over her shoulder, her freedom threatened.

He was jarred away from his musings at Daryl’s angry below:

“Toby! Shut up, man!”

“Wha?” Toby looked around, confused until he saw Daryl’s furious expression. “Uh...no...I meant she kicked that pimp, not killed! Kicked. Selina wouldn’a done that...”

Did that guy just say Selina had killed someone? Bruce glanced at Gordon who just looked at his shoes. Blake shook his head trying to not look amused. DeeDee looked angry, glancing at Jessica and Gordon to gauge their reaction. Selina stared ahead, expressionless.

Daryl shoved Toby back into the crowd as someone else began to talk.

After the service, as they stood around waiting for Selina, Bruce noticed a very faded W near one of the entrances to the Towers. He pointed it out to Alfred who nodded his head.

He went over to get a closer look. Wiping away the grime, he read the inscription about his grandparents who had the buildings erected after the war to honor all those who died fighting injustice.

“This your building?” Daryl asked as he read what Bruce was looking at.

“Probably the city’s building that my grandparents paid to build.” Bruce replied.

“Don’t listen to anything Toby has to say, He does not know what he’s talking about,” Daryl said as he looked back at the group that was beginning to disperse. “Are your friends going to do anything?”

“No,” Bruce replied. He caught a flash of movement as a child darted inside the broken down building.

“Kids live there,” he said.

“Kids always live there.” Daryl shrugged. “It may not look like it but it’s a refuge for many people.”

“What do you think would help them?”

Daryl regarded him for a few moments. “Can’t just throw money at it. And if you fix it up too much these people will have nowhere to go.”

“You think it best to do nothing?” Bruce asked.

“I’m not saying that. I’m just saying it’s more complicated than having a fundraiser and throwing money at it.”

Bruce nodded, hearing what Daryl was saying. He looked at Selina who was standing with Bobby and a few other people.

They walked back to where Alfred and the others waited by their cars.

“You know,” Daryl said as he looked at Gordon standing in the distance. “It was cops that picked her up that day.”
“What?” Bruce stopped short.

“What. We thought she was getting arrested but they took her to him. She wasn’t the only one they had done that to either.”

Bruce stared at him. He knew very well how corrupt the Gotham Police Department was but picking up kids to be delivered to a predator was more evil than he expected. Even the mob had had standards when it came to that kind of thing.

“Policemen put her into a police car then took her to Wackford?”

“Yes,” Daryl said. “Might be nice if someone found who those assholes are.”

“Yes, it would.”

“Oh for Chrissakes…” Daryl muttered disgustedly.

Bruce turned to see what had caught Daryl’s attention. An older man, who while not looking like a homeless man, had a slovenly, unkempt look about him, ambled over to Selina. In his hand, he carried a bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. A lit cigarette dangled out of his mouth.

“Hey,” he greeted her. “What’s going on over here?”

“Nothing,” Selina responded coldly.

“What happened to your arm?”

She shrugged dismissively. “Nothing important.”

“Why you mad?” He asked looking surprised. The surprised look, however, soon gave way to greed. “Bet they gave you some good stuff for that.” He gestured to her arm.

Selina stared at him as he looked at her expectantly. Her expressionless mask finally broke revealing hurt. She threw her purse, a small purse containing pain meds that Bruce knew she was not taking, at him. Without a word, she stalked away.

As she passed Bruce, she said, “Let’s go!” Then walked to Alfred who waited by the car.

Bruce and Alfred exchanged a questioning glance as Daryl went to the man and grabbed Selina’s purse. He tossed it to Bruce then shoved the man who stumbled back, almost falling. To add insult to injury, Daryl threw the man’s gin bottle against the wall, shattering the glass.

Daryl cast an angry look at Selina who had already gotten in the car and was looking out the opposite window. For a moment, it looked like Daryl was going to go to her to have it out. A small part of Bruce wished he would, anything that would jar Selina out of her lethargy. But Daryl thought the better of it and walked off, soon disappearing from sight.

“Who was that?” Alfred asked DeeDee who had come over to see what was happening.

She looked at the man who had found a group of people willing to share their joint with him. He clapped them on the back, grinning with triumph as he took a hit.

DeeDee shook her head in sad exasperation. “That’s Selina’s father.”

On the ride home, Selina remained silent. As soon as they returned to the penthouse, she disappeared upstairs not to be seen again until later that evening when she suddenly appeared in
Bruce’s downstairs office.

He was trying to get his mind back on work. The India project was nearing completion. Mittal needed answers about some last minute details. Bruce had trouble focusing enough to solve the issues, staring blankly at his computer screen.

“Would you take me to his place?” She asked quietly from the doorway.

They took the motorcycle. Selina’s casted arm between them, her good arm around his waist as he drove them to Oliver’s apartment. She rested her chin on his shoulder and for the time it took to get from the Penthouse to Old Town, Bruce could almost believe everything was alright between them.

Bruce stood by the door as Selina walked around the small apartment, touching objects, picking up clothes, and looking at everything that Oliver had left behind.

“I don’t know what we should do with all this,” she said.

“We can box it up, put it in storage.”

“Put it with Balashov’s stuff?” She asked as their eyes met, remembering their old Russian friend. “So do we rent out special storage for dead people’s things?”

“What do you want to do?”

For a moment, it looked like she was going to actually answer his question. Truly communicate something real to him which she had not done in ages.

But she replied with her now standard “I don’t care” and brushed past him to leave the apartment.

As he locked the door behind him, Oliver’s neighbor poked her head out of her apartment.

“She doesn’t look so good,” she said with more concern than Bruce would have expected. “Is she going to be okay?”

“I don’t know,” he murmured then followed Selina downstairs.

Selina waited for him on the motorcycle. He climbed on, sitting in front of her. As he drove away, she did not put her arm around him again but held herself as far away as she safely could.

On their way back to the Penthouse, they drove through the Narrows.

“Son of a bitch!” Selina exclaimed twisting around to see behind her. “Stop!”

Before Bruce could come to a complete stop, Selina jumped off the back of the motorcycle, running through traffic, narrowly getting hit by a car that screeched to a stop.

Bruce quickly turned around, ignoring the honks and brakes screeching as the other cars swerved to miss him. He saw Selina run into an alley. He got there in time to see her throw a bottle at a man and woman who had not known she was following them.

By the time he parked and got off the motorcycle, Selina was on the man, punching him in the face. She alternated hands with each punch, her casted hand doing the most damage. The woman with him began hitting her on the back, trying to get Selina to stop hitting the man.

Bruce pulled her off Selina, shoving her away as he picked up Selina. She struggled against him,
managing to kick the man in the leg. Bruce took a step backward so she couldn’t lash out the man who was now laying in a fetal position in the alley.

“You bitch!” The woman screamed at Selina. The woman looked like a hardcore, lifelong drug addict with leathery, scabby skin, teeth missing, and unkempt hair. The man writhing on the ground looked even worse.

“Let me go, Bruce!”

“Selina!” Bruce tightened his grasp, trying to avoid hurting her. “What are you doing?”

“You didn’t even bother to come!” Selina yelled at the couple. The woman was trying to get the man to stand up. “Your son’s dead and you can’t be bothered to show up!”

“And get our asses kicked?” The man on the ground asked.

“You lied about us, Selina! You and Daryl told everyone lies about us!” Ollie’s mother yelled.

“Turned the neighborhood against us!” Ollie’s father said as he drew a dirty but sharp knife that Bruce, still holding Selina, immediately swatted from his hand.

Selina writhed out his grasp and struck the woman who lashed back at Selina slapping her face. Angrily, Bruce pushed the woman away knocking her into some bags of trash.

“Do you know what they did?” Selina cried, backing away from him. “Do you know what they did to him? To their own son?”

“I do,” he said, reaching out to her. “Selina, I know.”

Selina stopped backing away, allowing him to get to her, enfolding her in his arms.

“You shut up! Go back to prison!” Ollie’s mother screamed at Selina as she struggled to get up out of the mess of garbage Bruce had knocked her in.

“Get out of here!” Bruce growled at the couple. They heard danger in his voice and ran out of the alley onto the street.

Bruce held Selina as she finally broke, his face buried in her hair as sobs wracked her body.

In the alley, Selina had been so overwhelmed with emotion she had not been able to pull herself out. The tsunami of grief, remorse, and sadness that she’d managed to hold at bay was finally unleashed. Most of it was a blur except him. Bruce held her tightly to him, his hands sliding over her back as her sobs ravaged her. When she calmed enough, he gently guided her away from the street to cry more.

When the worst of the sobs had subsided, he tenderly wiped her face before leading her back to the motorcycle. Knowing she was weak, he kept his arm wrapped protectively around her, holding her close.

He asked if she’d rather take a taxi home. She shook her head no.
“Just drive,” she said, wrapping her good arm around him. This time she held on for dear life as they drove through the streets of Gotham.

They drove for hours. The night was theirs. Selina rested her cheek against his back, needing his strength. She closed her eyes, listening to the roar of the motorcycle, smelling the good and bad aromas of the city, feeling the wind through her hair. As the tears streamed down her cheeks, she tightened her arm around him.

Just before dawn, they returned to the Penthouse. Bruce helped her off the motorcycle. A fresh round of tears had started, she struggled to not dissolve into a puddle of water.

She looked up at him, seeing his concern and his understanding.

“They got the best of me, Bruce,” Selina whispered brokenly. “They really did. My heart is broken.”

“You’ll get through this, Selina,” he said, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear.

But he was wrong.

For the next few weeks, Selina existed, quietly drifting around the Penthouse when she bothered to leave her or Helena’s room at all. She confined her crying to the privacy of the shower, letting the hot water pour over her as her grief overcame her. Bruce could tell when she’d been crying. He didn’t confront her about it but she could see his worry and sympathy.

The huge Penthouse was too crowded with people who worried over Selina so she sought refuge in her daughter’s room or the master bedroom. When in the master bedroom, she slept which kept Bruce from asking her how she was doing. When she was in Helena’s room, she sat with her daughter at the little table and colored with her. No one wanted to interrupt her time with Helena so they left her alone.

It was a good plan, Selina decided.

She was relieved when Bruce deemed it safe for Isha and Shanti to return home with their family. Isha and Shanti meant well but Selina felt bombarded by their concern. Isha trying to get her to eat and Shanti fretting over her physical injuries. Still concerned about their safety, Bruce kept a security guard detail posted at their modest townhome until he was sure there was no further danger from the Wackfords.

At the Penthouse, Bruce retained one guard on duty. Bruce knew the day when the media learned about Helena’s existence was only a matter of time. Little girls with rich fathers were a target and Bruce was very good at imagining the worst of possible scenarios.

Since Helena was already familiar with him, David took the day shifts. He sometimes acted as the chauffeur, driving Selina to her doctor’s appointments or wherever else she wanted to go. She felt like he was keeping tabs on her, reporting about her to Bruce but she knew that wasn’t the case.

She simply didn’t do enough to warrant being told on. Other than visits to the doctor, she rarely ventured out of the penthouse during the day. Choosing to spend her time alternating between Helena and sleeping, Selina told herself she was focusing on getting well again but she was actually busy rebuilding her walls that had been shattered.

After the alley, she did her best to avoid being alone with Bruce, irrationally conflating her emotional breakdown with his presence. She got so good at ignoring Bruce’s increasingly troubled looks and brushing off his overtures to comfort her that she stopped noticing them altogether.
Alfred was more subtle in his concern. Surreptitiously, he left snacks and pots of hot tea for her. She had no appetite but he seemed to suss out the things she couldn’t resist. He left an huge assortment of colored pencils and adult coloring books for her on Helena’s play table.

“It’ll be good for your hand,” he said kindly.

She and Helena spent hours together, watching tv, reading, and coloring. Selina knew she was failing her daughter, especially when Helena looked at her with a concerned look that no three year old should have. “Why are you so sad, mommy?” she asked more than once. Selina hugged Helena to her but gave her no answer.

When Helena was asleep, Selina could let down her guard. She genuinely tried to be more lively for her daughter, tried to remember how she was with Helena before That Morning. But trying to be what she once was exhausted her and she was hard pressed to recall how she was then.

After Helena was asleep in bed, Selina often found herself on the expansive balcony of the Penthouse. The first few times, Bruce hovered nearby hoping she would invite him to sit with her. She, however, needed her solitude more than she needed him.

Mostly, they left her alone, giving her space. The only intrusion was when Alfred quietly brought her a pot of tea, always with a matching tea cup. He set the tray on the little table next to the chair she had dragged over to sit next to the railing. She liked the quiet of the night and the coolness of the air. Leaning back in the comfortable patio chair, she could let herself almost forget all her turmoil as she basked in her solitude.

Some nights she slipped out, roaming her old haunts.

“Do you have a tracker on me?” She asked him one night as she sat on the edge of her old building. She looked out over the neighborhood she had once called home. Nothing on the street had changed.

“No,” he said, sitting down beside her. “I just figured out where you’d be.”

She looked at him suspiciously.

“This isn’t the first place I checked,” he admitted.

Selina stood up, stretching her still achy muscles. She walked along the edge of the building, keeping her eye on the street below.

“Getting your balance back?” he asked, sounding uneasy.

“My control.”

When she reached the corner of the building, she stepped closer to the edge. She wanted to lift her arms, much as she used to do when she was about to jump off the building to land on her fire escape.

“God, I want this thing off!” She eyed the cast that weighed her down in so many ways. The cast had become the bane of her existence. A constant reminder of things she didn’t want to be reminded about.

“A few more weeks,” Bruce replied, looking back down at the street. Even at the late hour there was much activity.
“That’s what the doctor said last time,” Selina said, trying to keep the whine out of her voice.

“She’ll do,” he said, coming to stand behind her on the ledge. Unlike her, he had no difficulty with balance. “What do you think about trying to find the police officers...that picked you up?”

Selina stiffened. “Who cares about them?”

“I care,” Bruce said “Ever since Daryl told me about what those cops did to you, I can’t stop thinking about them. I imagine them living on a boat, drinking with old buddies, living the good life of a retired cop. It’s driving me crazy to think that there’s two cops out there not paying for what they did!”

“Then go do something about it!” Selina cried, turning away from him. “I won’t stop you but I’m not going to help. I’m over all that.”

“How could you be?” Bruce gently grabbed her arms, turning her to face him. “They sold you!”

“I know that!”

He looked away from her, taking a moment to control his frustration. “They need to spend the rest of their days in prison.”

Selina scoffed. “Good luck with that!”

“What about the other kids? Was Oliver one of them?”

“Do not bring him up to me, Bruce!” Selina felt her eyes fill with tears. Abruptly, she pulled away from him which caused her to briefly lose her balance. Before he could reach out for her, she righted herself then jumped down from the ledge, landing on the fire escape. Even with her one arm in the cast she made it down the four flights quickly and easily. The ladder that should have extended to the ground was broken. Getting down with one hand proved problematic until she felt Bruce’s hands on waist, lifting her down to the ground.

“Don’t say anything!” Selina said. “Please!”

They walked through her old neighborhood not talking until Bruce took her arm, stopping her. They stood near a dilapidated playground. It was a sorry place during the day but in the night, it exuded a sense of danger. At least to most folks in Gotham with any sense.

They stood under one of the few working street lamps. In the light, she could see Bruce’s face so clearly. Unlike her, he had not been getting much sleep and it showed.

“Selina...” he said. “I’m the last person in the world to give advice on dealing with grief. Do you want to see someone about all this?”

“Therapy?” Selina asked, surprised that he suggested such a thing. “Bruce, we don’t do therapy.”

“Well, I did,” Bruce said. “I saw plenty when I was growing up.”

“And how did that work out for you?”

“Not bad in the end,” he said, looking at her meaningfully.

“I’ll be fine, Bruce,” Selina said folding her arms which was awkward with the cast.

“It’s in there...it festers,” Bruce said. “What happened to you…”
“What? Getting Ollie killed?”

“No!” Bruce exclaimed. “That wasn’t your fault!”

“Getting my ass kicked six ways to Sunday?” She asked as she looked warily at two men who were eying them from the park.

Bruce took her arm, propelling her to move quickly away.

“We could take them,” Selina said. “It might be fun.”

“Would it though?” Bruce asked as he looked behind them. The two men had opted to stay in the park.

They continued walking. As they entered a better part of town, their pace slowed to a leisurely stroll.

“Besides,” Selina said, continuing their conversation. “I figure I deserved a good beating.”

“How so?”

“You know…”

Bruce stopped. Selina turned to face him. It was something she had wanted to say for a long time. Something that had never been resolved. At least for her.

“You shouldn’t feel guilty about that,” he said. “I’ve never expected…”

“Oh, I know, but you should,” Selina said. She forced herself to not look away.

“You had your reasons. I get that.”

“You’re too forgiving,” Selina said. “Do you have any idea how hard it is being with someone you did something awful to? Sometimes I look at you and I so clearly remember leading you down there. I knew what you were up against.”

“I did ask,” he said, trying to lighten the mood.

She glared at him, not at all pleased with his attempt at levity.

“What would you have me do?”

“Stop being so goddamned nice to me!” Selina exclaimed. “I turned you into Bane, I left you to die there!”

“Selina, I made my peace with that in the pit,” he said, softly. “I wouldn’t have found you after if I had a grudge. I know they threatened you.”

They had. Bane himself had loomed over her, filling her small apartment with his menacing presence. She had no great love for the Batman so it wasn’t a difficult decision.

“I didn’t know it was you,” she said.

“Would you have done it differently?”

“I might have warned you,”
“Selina, the way I was feeling, I probably would have gone ahead and met him.”

She moved away, signalling she didn’t want to talk anymore. They continued their walk passing through the

“About Ollie...It’s not your fault, Selina,” he said, quietly.

She looked away as tears sprang to her eyes.

“Oh, but it is,” Selina said, bitterly. “It very much is.”

“No--”

“He shouldn’t have been there,” she said, her voice full of emotion. “I knew better than to take him for back up. I got him killed.”

“No, Sykes killed him.”

“Yes but he shouldn’t have been there if not for me. I rushed us. I took him there. Me, who damn well knew that Ollie simply is not equipped to deal with people like that.”

“You can’t blame yourself, Selina,” he said gently.

She didn’t doubt his sincerity. He’d been plagued by guilt for his parents deaths’ for years. She wasn’t ready to let go of her guilt. The truth was that she absolutely should not have involved Ollie in her scheme to get Wackford. It was too much for him. He not only sacrificed his newfound sobriety but his life. For her.

As they walked, Selina told Bruce about Ollie. How she and Daryl, sensing vulnerability, had first bullied the small and shy Ollie. When Daryl’s mom, Angela, figured out what they were doing there was hell to pay. With tears in her eyes, Angela implored them to watch out for the little boy with the horrible parents. They hadn’t understood then why she was so upset but as they came to understood what was going on, about the horror of Ollie’s existence, they banded together to protect him, keep him as safe as they could.

“He was afraid of you, you know,” Selina said.

“What do you mean?”

“Ollie was afraid of Batman,” she said. “Afraid he was going to get him. Hang him from a roof.”

Bruce looked alarmed. “I wouldn’t…”

“Criminals at the bottom of the food chain were not what you were going for,” Selina said. “I understood that, he didn’t. He just saw himself as one of the city’s undesirables.”

She didn’t tell him that Ollie had thought very highly of the Joker. Believed the Joker was one of them, a product of the insanity of Gotham’s slums. She herself had been impressed with Joker. That is, until, he murdered that poor scared guy on tv.

Eventually, Bruce took her to his favorite roof atop an old Gothic style building. Sitting on the ledge with their feet dangling, Selina looked out over the city as Bruce kept his eyes on her. She wondered if he thought she was going to jump. All the things that had happened to her, she had never once been suicidal.

Selina breathed deep, relishing the cool night air. It really was beautiful up here. Dawn was still an
hour away and the city was at its most quiet. The peace of the night only interrupted by the with
the stray sounds of the city below them.

“I keep looking at those pictures of my mother,” Bruce said, breaking the silence. “Seeing images
of this beautiful woman that I hardly remember. She’s so...vivid. I’m absurdly grateful for them
and I feel awful about that. They were taken without her permission, stolen from her and I can’t
stop looking at them.”

She turned to him, seeing him in the nighttime lights of the building. “You shouldn’t feel bad
about that.” The dead don’t care, she thought.

“The photos shouldn’t exist at all,” Bruce said,

“But they do and you have so few of them.” she said then noticed she had placed her hand on his.

“They are wrong,” Bruce replied. “And when I think of him looking at her…”

“Forget about him,” Selina said, looking away, her gaze not seeing the expansive view of the city.
“I have.”

“Have you?” He asked, unconvinced. “Have you really?”

“Do you mean have I forgotten I was raped by Wackford when I was twelve?” She asked,
purposefully being harsh with him.

“I don’t think you’re over that as much as like to think you are,” he said, squeezing her hand
gently. “I can’t imagine what a devastating experience that was.”

She pulled her hand away. “It’s not even in the top five bad things to happen to me.”

And that’s where they differed. He had one major tragedy that broke him while she had had many
misfortunes, as she thought of them, that shaped her. She’d never really felt broken. Until now.

“The clean slate erased my identity but it didn’t erase my past. Even if I pretended it did,” Selina
said. “I let myself forget who I really am. Now I remember.”

“Who are you?” He asked, looking at her. When she refused to look at him, he gently touched her
face, nudging it to turn to him.

“I’m a thief and a killer, Bruce,” Selina said, looking him directly in the eye. “I told you about
Angela, Daryl’s mother. That the cops never found out who killed her... Well, we knew. We both
had seen him the night he killed her. He wasn’t one of her regulars but we’d seen him a few times
before. So for about a month, every night I fixed up and waited for him on Angela’s corner. One
night he finally came by. I took him to an abandoned building where Daryl and Ollie waited. I led
him to a room then locked him in...Sound familiar?”

He didn’t answer so Selina continued. “We killed him. And, his body is still rotting at the bottom
of an elevator shaft.”

“How old were you?”

“Thirteen,” she replied. “I also killed that pimp that Toby so kindly mentioned in front of the cops
at Ollie’s memorial. So, yeah, I’ve killed.”

She looked at Bruce who was looking down at the street below. He couldn’t be surprised by her
confession.

“No innocents.” He stated, looking back at her.

“No,” she replied. “Everyone I killed had it coming. But that’s not what you do, is it? You have a code.”

“I do, but if you think I’m judging you for things in your past, you’re wrong.”

It wasn’t his judgement that was the problem but she didn’t tell him that.

One evening not too long after her rooftop confession, Selina took the monorail, two buses and a cab to the Towers. It was not quite full dark so was able to persuade a cab driver to drop her off near the Quad. As the cab sped off, Selina had the most peculiar feeling. Fear.

The Towers could be a scary place but she’d never felt fear. As she approached the tower, she was very aware that she was alone, unarmed, and still compromised from her injuries. She wasn’t in any shape to fight someone off.

With relief, she saw Daryl approach. It was the first time they’d had a chance to talk. The first time since they were ready to talk.

When he walked up to her, they stood, quietly staring at each other.

“You’re looking better,” he said.

Her surface injuries had all faded, save for the gash on her forehead which was turning into a lovely scar,

“You’re hand will be okay?” He asked, nodding to the cast.

“I’m worried my pickpocketing days may be over.”

“Nah, you’ll figure something out.” Daryl dropped the cigarette, stubbing it out with his foot. They went back to the uncomfortable quiet until Selina spoke again.

“Daryl…I’m so sorry,” Selina said, “I shouldn’t have…”

He was quiet. She was afraid he was going to agree with her.

“I don’t think you should blame yourself, See,” Daryl finally said. “I was mad at you. Really mad but it had to go down that way. If it had been you...well, we both know he wouldn’t have survived that.”

“I know that, I keep reminding myself but...I let you down. You’ve never let me down.”

“That day…” Daryl reminded her.

“How were you supposed to know? We were stupid,” she said. “We didn’t know any better.”

“Ollie did,” Daryl said, quietly.

“Yeah, he felt worse about it than I did.”

“He never got over that.”
“No, he didn’t,” Selina agreed. “You told Bruce about the cops.”

“Yep.”

“Why?”

“Because I thought he might find out who those guys were!” Daryl did not look the least bit abashed and “He seems pretty tight with the police. Wouldn’t it be nice if those guys got thrown in prison?”

“I just…” Selina paused as she watched a rat darted across the Quad. “I just don’t like thinking about that day.”

“Neither do I,” he said gruffly.

Together, they went upstairs to their old room. The room that Ollie always felt safest in. He loved hiding out here, spending time with his friends.

From his backpack, Daryl withdrew a large tin box. He set it on the rickety table where they both stared at it.

“Just leave him here?” Selina asked, taking his hand. “We could put him with your mom.”

“This was his place,” Daryl said. “He loved this god awful room.”

They decided on a cabinet that had been his spot of choice for whatever drugs he had been hoarding. Sure enough, when they opened the door, they found a few baggies that they put in with him.

“C’mon let’s go,” Daryl said. “You shouldn’t even be here.”

“What do you mean?”

“This isn’t you anymore.”

“Are you saying I don’t belong here?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Neither do I.”

In her Camaro, he drove her back to the Penthouse. He pulled up to the front entrance of the posh hotel.

“He’s not so bad...For a rich guy,” Daryl said before she got out of the car.

“He deserves better,” Selina said.

“I did not just hear that from you.”

“No, I mean better as in...he deserves someone like him. Educated, professional, a regular person.”

“Uh huh,” Daryl muttered.

Selina got out of the car.

“He’s not your parents, Selina,” Daryl said before she could close the door.

“You think I don’t know that?”
“I’m not sure you do,” he replied before peeling off, earning a few frowns from the stuck up hotel guests.

Selina found herself in a strangely isolated place. One of her own making. She began to feel like a drag for everyone. She couldn’t explain that she was simply unable to get herself out of that room, couldn’t unsee what happened to Ollie. When she did start to get past it, guilt brought her back.

It had been almost two months since That Morning, as Selina referred to it. She no longer felt like she was walking around a nightmare; she had woken up and was facing reality.

Bruce’s India project was nearing completion. He was expected to go back to India, he and Lucius Fox were meeting with Raj and Gunjan.

“Lucius can take care of this,” Bruce said, not wanting to leave her.

“No, he can’t,” Selina replied firmly. “This is your baby, you figured this out and you should be there with Raj and Gunjan. It’s a big deal for them. A very big deal for their city. They would be so disappointed for you not to go.”

“Come with me,” Bruce said. “You and Helena.”

“I can’t…”

“Selina…”

“Not now…”

The India trip had not been mentioned again. He was due to leave the next morning and would be gone for at least two weeks. Raj had brokered deals with other towns in the region that could well benefit from the new technology.

Selina was looking forward to more solitude.

“That’s the reporter?” She asked Alfred who looked at her with surprise.

These days she was curious about nothing. She couldn’t even be bothered to care about Bruce’s efforts in finding the other men in Wackford’s sinister circle. When Bruce had told her of his belief in Miriam Wackford’s complicity she felt not a sliver of surprise. Of course the rich wife would protect her husband and her social standing.

“Yes, Ms. Victoria Vale,” Alfred answered. “She’s done an excellent job at identifying Wackford’s cohorts. She has solid leads, good sources. The story should be made public soon.”

Selina was surprised to see the woman at the Penthouse. Surprised that Bruce had trusted the reporter enough to bring her to his home, trusted that she would protect his identity as an anonymous source to some very scandalous allegations.

From the top of the stairs, Selina watched them as they discussed the case. Vale, looking very chic and professional, seemed quite entranced with Bruce, touching his arm, lightly flirting with him. The woman was educated, bright, and confidently sexy. She even managed to make Bruce smile at a joke.

Vale’s eyes widened as she noticed Selina descend the staircase. Dressed in black yoga pants and a black cami top, Selina presented a picture of casualness. Her long hair was up in a careless ponytail and she wore no makeup.
Bruce’s eyes lit up as he saw her. She avoided his hand as made introductions, offering it instead to the reporter. Shaking Selina’s hand, Vale looked disappointed to meet her. Bruce did not seem to notice.

As Bruce and Vicky resumed their conversation, Selina listened, watching her carefully. Now that Selina had joined them, Vale was all business but she kept darting glances at Selina, trying to figure out who she was to Bruce.

When Bruce walked her to the elevator, Selina went out to the balcony. She looked out into the night and waited for him to come to her.

“So…” Selina said to him when he came to stand next to her. “Vicky seemed nice.”

“She’s doing a good job with the investigation. She found a solid, verifiable link between Senator Brass and Wackford.”

“Hmmm…Do you like her?”

Bruce looked at her, warily.

“What are you doing?”

“Ask you a question.”

He stuffed his hands in his trouser pockets as he regarded her, trying to figure out what she was up to.

“Jealous?” He asked.

“No.”

“Could you pretend to be?”

“Why?” She leaned her hip against the railing as she faced him.

“Selina, what are you doing?”

“Trying to fix things for you.”

“Trying to fix…” He stared at her blankly.

“It’s for your own good, Bruce.” Selina said matter of factly. “I’ll just keep dragging you down.”

Watching Bruce and Vale, it had become so clear to her that the sexy, professional, educated woman would be just what Bruce needed. Someone like Rachel.

He laughed, humorlessly. “You’re doing this. You’re setting me up with another woman.”

“Yes,” she said. “A woman like that is who you should have ended up with.”

He knew she was thinking about Rachel. A ghost that never really hung between them but was there nevertheless.

“That was a fantasy, Selina,” Bruce said. “A link to a happier time in my life. I see that now. You once accused me of wanting to live my parents lives. And you were right but I’ve realized that’s not me. I don’t want that.”
“What do you want, Bruce?” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she regretted them.

“I want you.”

“I’m all wrong for you,” she said gently.

“What are you talking about?” He asked, his voice rising in anger.

“The only thing between us is…” She said, Her implication is their physical attraction that has never waned.

“I thought we had a daughter between us.”

Selina’s eyes hardened. “And we’re supposed to keep going on so she can have the illusion of a happy family?”

“It wasn’t an illusion a few months ago,” he said.

“We were happy because we were being the people we wanted to be,” Selina said. “Not the people we really are.”

“I don’t know what that’s supposed to mean.”

“I’m just seeing things very clearly now.”

“Are you?” Bruce scoffed. “I’m glad one of us is.”

“We were living a dream, Bruce,” Selina said. “The last four years were not reality.”

“Helena’s not real enough for you, Selina?”

“Of course she is!” Selina replied, a spark of anger penetrating her apathy. “You know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t,” Bruce said as he ran a hand through his hair.

“What is real is this: I’m a thief and a murderer, I’m a high school dropout, I’ve been to prison. Several times. All of that is so amazingly incompatible with everything you are. Can’t you see that?”

“I don’t care about all that.”

“Of course you do,” Selina said “You’re you!”

“We’ll talk about this when I get back,” he said, sounding exasperated. “You need to think about what you’re saying.”

He walked away from her, heading to the door. He was angry and she was so...empty.

“I know exactly what I’m saying!” Selina called out to him just before he opened the door.

Instead of opening the door, he turned around, walking back to her.

“Bruce, I’m not trying to hurt you,” she said. “I just think-”

“I love you, Selina,” Bruce said, interrupting her.
Selina stared at him, shocked he’d actually said it.

“No,” she said, shaking her head. “You don’t.”

“I love you,” he said it again, taking her hand. “I want us to get married.”

“Please stop!” Selina cried, pulling her hand away to tightly grasp the railing. “I don’t want that. And you don’t need that with me. We had a good run but it’s over. You have to see that.”

He shook his head.

“I’m trying to do the right thing here, Bruce!”

“You’re not!” He exclaimed, his anger returning. “You’re running away! You think you can just clean slate us away?”

“Of course not!”

He took a calming breath.

“I love you,” Bruce continued after he controlled his anger. “I know your past, the things you’ve done. I don’t care.”

“But you do care!” Selina cried. “You’re Gotham’s Knight, incorruptible, honorable. You have a code. I violate that code in every way possible.”

“I’m not the same person I was,” he said. “You and Helena have changed me, made me better.”

She shook her head, needing him to stop talking.

“Just like Helena and I have changed you…”

He kissed her. It was gentle but insistent, he needed her to understand how he felt. In that kiss, he communicated to her how he felt, what she meant to him.

She closed her eyes, kissing him back, wanting to feel something.

“What does that feel like?” He whispered against her lips.

“Yesterday,” she replied sadly.

He backed away from her, she forced herself not to turn away from the hurt in his eyes. It was better this way, she told herself. Better for him.

When the door closed behind him, she turned away, tears streaming down her face.
Alfred drove Master Wayne to the small private airport just outside Gotham’s city limits. He usually liked mornings like this, the rain reminding him of home but, today, the rain didn’t evoke the same nostalgic feeling.

All was quiet within the Rolls Royce. Alfred drove slower than usual hoping the Master would say something but Bruce remained silent, looking out the window, deep in thought. Alfred didn’t pry, hoping his presence was one small comfort to whatever turmoil Selina Kyle had caused.

“Get her whatever she wants, Alfred,” Bruce said as he took his travelling bag out of the trunk. “Just make sure she’s in a decent part of town.”

It was worse than Alfred had expected but there was no opportunity for questions as Lucius Fox arrived. Polite pleasantries were exchanged before it was time to go. With a quick pensive look at Alfred, Bruce followed Fox to board the private jet that would fly them to India.

Alfred remained by the runway, watching as the jet took off. Only when the plane was out of sight did he return to the car. On the way back to Gotham, Alfred had plenty of time to consider the Kyle problem that was more dire than he thought. But Alfred couldn’t muster any feelings of anger at the woman that was clearly suffering. By the time he reached the Penthouse, he had come to the firm conclusion that it was time for him to act.

He found her in the kitchen. Selina sat with Helena as she munched on a sandwich. Even with the company of her daughter, she gave a lonely impression. Briefly, her eyes met his. Alfred thought he detected more than a tinge of regret in them.

Alfred admitted to himself that he had allowed unfair comparisons between Selina and Mrs. Wayne and even Rachel to creep in, coloring his estimation of the woman he had privately questioned as suitable for Master Wayne. But now he knew. She was perfect for Master Wayne, and, he was perfect for her.

Waiting until she put Helena down for her nap, Alfred made his move. As she quietly closed the door to Helena’s room, she turned to find Alfred waiting for her.

“What are you doing?” He asked, his voice gentle.

She didn’t bother to pretend she didn’t know what he was talking about. “Fixing things.”

“Fixing how?”

“Untangling us from our accidental relationship,” Selina said. “Freeing him.”

“You’re making a mistake.”

“No, I’m correcting a mistake.” She headed into the master bedroom. Before she could close the door, Alfred followed her in.

“Ms. Kyle...Selina,” Alfred said, looking at her tenderly.
Maybe it was him using her name that nudged the angry defensiveness away. Maybe she was just exhausted from pushing everyone away but her shoulders relaxed.

“I can’t get past this, Alfred,” she said, sinking into one of the chairs.

“You will,” Alfred said, gently. “You have to forgive yourself.”

“But it’s my fault!” She exclaimed. “It is 100% my fault!”

“No,” Alfred said, shaking his head. “It was Nigel Sykes’ fault. Daniel Wackford’s fault. 100% their fault.”

“No, you don’t understand,” she said, tears filling her eyes. “Ollie shouldn’t have been there. He had no business being there.”

“If he hadn’t been there you would most likely be dead!” Alfred sat in the chair next to her. “Selina, I don’t want to imply he wasn’t important but…You have a child. It’s different.”

“Just ‘cause I got knocked up, my life is more important than his?”

“Yes!” Alfred exclaimed. “I’m sorry but that’s the way it works!”

“It’s not right,” Selina said, stubbornly. “Bruce loves her enough, she would be ok…”

Alfred stared at her a moment, shocked at her words.

“How dare you dismiss the effect of losing a parent! In this house!”

Abashed, she looked away, knowing she had gone too far. Unconsciously, her hand went to her cast, as if reminding herself it was still there.

“Selina,” he said, taking her hand “I understand what guilt and grief can do to a person. I’ve lived with that for thirty years. It is a terrible thing to see and I don’t want that for you.”

“You mean you don’t want that for him.”

“That is true, yes,” Alfred said. “When you two returned I finally saw something in him that I always dreamed for him.”

“Sorry I’m ruining--”

“I want that for you, too.” Alfred squeezed her hand, prompting her to look at him. “I see now the woman you are. Not the woman you show to the world but the person you really are.”

Alfred studied her, taking in her wan appearance. Wearing her usual black lounging clothes, her long, dark hair was in a low ponytail, her face thin and pale. Her eyes, sad and tired. He could hardly remember how she looked when he first met her but he well remembered her mug shot photo Bruce had shown him so long ago.

“You fight so hard to hide your vulnerabilities,” he said quietly.

“Oh,” Selina said, with a ghost of a grin. “I’m not hiding anything anymore. This is me. Laid bare.”

“This is you reeling from a horrifying experience.”
She shook her head. “I think a variety of horrifying experiences have just caught up to me.”

“Maybe so.” He gave her hand another reassuring squeeze, wanting her to understand that he was on her side. She squeezed back.

“I’m a mess, Alfred,” Selina said, looking down at her cast, her finger rubbing the small indentation on the plaster that looked like she had hit something hard. “I’ve never been a mess before, I’m not dealing with it very well.”

“You’re in luck,” Alfred responded with a grin. “I’m quite excellent at dealing with messes.”

She met his gaze and smiled. “I bet you are.”

They sat together in companionable silence, looking out the windows. Alfred checked his watch. Helena would be waking from her nap any moment. Rising from his seat, he extended his hand to Selina.

“Now get dressed,” he said. “You, Miss Helena, Mr. Tibbles and I are all going to the park.”

He half expected her to refuse, choosing to remain in the penthouse as she had done for the last month. But she didn’t disappoint him and they spent a lovely drizzly afternoon in the park. Miss Helena finding joy in jumping in each and every puddle. Even the smell of wet dog could not detract Alfred’s satisfaction.

After their talk, something shifted in Selina. That aura of isolation lessened, even more so when her cast was taken off.

As they waited in the comfortably appointed doctor’s office, Selina paced. Earlier she had confided to Alfred her worry that the extensive trauma to her hand would leave her permanently damaged. That she would have a near constant physical reminder of the horror of that day. Her fears, however, were unfounded.

The doctor was pleased with how well her hand had healed.

“The scars will fade in time,” the doctor told her. “Keep up with the finger exercises and you’ll be good as new in no time.”

On the way back from the doctor’s appointment, Alfred drove them to Gotham’s West Village. Selina looked at him quizzically.

“You’ll see,” he said with a mysterious smile.

Selina rode in front with Alfred, encouraging their burgeoning relationship. He respected Selina’s preference that he not maintain the facade of being a servant. He truly had not assumed that role in over thirty years.

Alfred recalled the man from the memorial service who had been identified as her father. How indifferent he had been to his daughter. Anyone with half a brain could see she was hurting but the man had not seen that, had not inquired about his daughter whom he hadn’t seen for years. It was a disheartening sight to see.

Alfred parked the Rolls in front of an old, abandoned brownstone. The late nineteenth century building was the last of a group of four equally deserted townhomes that took up one side of a small, tree lined block in a sleepy area of the West Village. The home was well built but abandoned for several years and the neglect was showing. Across the narrow street was an
identical set of brownstones. Unlike the one they were looking at, these had comfortable, lived-in
looks, and were all well maintained.

“There’s a park around the corner,” Alfred said when they stepped out of the Rolls. “From what I
gather, it’s a nice neighborhood. Some professionals, some families, older people. Three blocks
over is an area favored by starving artist types.”

Selina’s expression was stoic.

“And the restaurants…” Alfred continued. “There's quite a lovely variety of restaurants within
walking distance. Sadly, no Indian restaurants.”

“Sounds almost perfect,” she replied, sounding wholly unenthused.

Alfred bent down to retrieve the set of keys that been placed under a dusty welcome mat.

“Why are we here?” Selina asked, looking skeptically up at the home.

“Master Wayne told me to get you anything you want.”

They stepped inside to a dusty room that was lit by the sunlight that filtered through dirty
windows.

“Hardwood floors throughout,” Alfred said as he led Selina through the rooms. “The kitchen is
outdated but that can be easily fixed.”

“It’s fine,” she said woodenly, unconsciously flexing her fingers.

They continued up the stairs.

“There’s three floors,” Alfred said when they reached the second floor landing. “Two bedrooms
here and another on the top floor.”

“It’s a little big…” Selina said, looking dubious.

“Oh, no, not nearly.” Alfred replied. “All four of the houses on the block are also vacant. We’ll
buy them all and combine them to form one house.”

She stared at him.

“Just imagine the possibilities, Selina,” Alfred said, leading her to the larger bedroom that
overlooked a small backyard. “These are fine homes, well built and sturdy. Each even has a
basement that we can transform into an enormous garage.”

“What are you doing?” She asked, folding her arms across her chest.

“Fixing things,” he replied.

“Alfred…” She said as she walked around the room, taking care to not let herself become
interested. “I really screwed things up. Like...maybe beyond repair.”

“Oh, I doubt that.”

“I said some hurtful things to him,” she said. “I’ve...I’ve done things…”

Selina started to confess something she had done to Bruce soon after they first met. Alfred held up
“Leave it,” he said. “It doesn’t matter now.”

“But it does. I ran away from my past and it came back to bite me in the ass.”

“And now you pick yourself up and get on with your life,” he said. “When you stumble, when he stumbles, you have each other. That’s the way it should be.”

They went back downstairs, Selina’s hand trailing along the oak banister.

“You deserve to find happiness,” Alfred said when they went out to look at the small backyard. “Don’t deny yourself that.”

“I just don’t fit in his world,” she said, voicing the last of her fears.

“What world would that be?”

“Good point, Alfred,” Selina said. “Thank you for the reminder.”

“You two would be quite a force for this city,” Alfred said. “There’s much you can do.”

“What like throw parties and stuff?”

“And stuff, yes,” Alfred replied. “You can make a difference, Selina. You have compassion and a desire to truly help people. With the Wayne resources, there’s nothing you couldn’t do. I wanted that for him, you know. Not for him to dress up and go out at night and fight crime. But for him to use his influence, his family’s wealth and his knowledge but he couldn’t get past Batman. Now he has, he truly has.”

Selina sighed. “You do know I’ve been to prison, right?”

Alfred patted her arm. “So has he, my dear.”

“Yeah, but…”

“You’re worried about embarrassing him?” Alfred asked. “Embarrassing the man who was content to let the world think he got drunk and burned down his ancestral mansion?”

“I forgot about that.”

“Then you’re the only one,” Alfred said, still profoundly annoyed by Master Wayne’s distasteful public reputation.

“Do you always do this?”

“What?”

“Find the perfect words, the perfect place.”

“Hardly,” Alfred replied. “I’ve tried for years to solve all his problems and I failed. Then you came into his life.”

He looked at her fondly. “So what do you think?”

“I like it,” she said as they walked back inside. “We could fix it up. Make it ours. I do like fresh
“Just remember to make a spot for me.”

“Like a room in the attic?” Selina teased. “Some little room with a tiny window that barely opens?”

Alfred laughed. “A Dickensian servant’s room?”

They walked outside. As Alfred locked the door behind them, Selina took in the other homes and the street.

“This neighborhood’s great,” she said. “But we move in, it’ll go to hell with rich people wanting to be Bruce Wayne’s neighbor.”

“I’ve already got a plan for that.”

“You’re pretty pleased with yourself,” she said, smiling at him.

Alfred saw she was happy with the place, that she had allowed herself to hope and look to the future instead of the past. He saw Master Wayne where he had wanted him to be since he was a baby. He looked back up at the house. Big enough to house them all and with enough bedrooms to welcome any new additions to the family. So, yes, he was pretty damned pleased.

The day began with Selina and Alfred making French Toast. It was not the first time they’d shared breakfast duty. In the last few weeks, they’d fallen into a companionable routine. Selina was surprised to find herself charmed by the old butler. More so than when she had first arrived back in Gotham. Then, their connection was Bruce but now, they were foraging their own relationship.

“I still cannot believe Master Wayne became a cook,” Alfred said as he poured Helena a glass of milk.

“Yeah...when he sets his mind to something, he pretty much conquers it, doesn’t he?” Selina slid a plate to Helena who frowned when she saw her breakfast.

“Daddy makes shapes.”

“That’s a shape, sweetie!” Selina said, leaning over the counter to smile at her daughter. “A square.”

Helena made a face, not amused by her mother. “Don’t like squares.”

“But squares are the most interesting of all shapes,” Alfred told her, pointing out about four corners and equal lines. Helena was not impressed.

The laptop that had been placed on one corner of the granite counters pinged, indicated an incoming video call.

“Daddy!” Helena ran over to push the button to answer the video call. In the almost three weeks since Bruce had left, Helena had become quite proficient with the workings of video calls. Several times she had called Bruce when no one knew. Not understanding anything about time
differences, she called in the middle of the night India time. Bruce did not complain.

Selina hung back, just out of view of the camera. Selina still wasn’t ready to see him. Well, she was more than anxious to see him, aching for him to return so she could tell him about all the things she had fearfully withheld from him, about how sorry she was for the things she had said to him. She just didn’t want those moments moments to be over a computer.

“When are you coming home?” Helena asked after they had their usual chit chat which consisted of her asking about any animals he had seen and telling him how she had spent her time since they last talked.

It was a question she asked every time they spoke. “Thursday,” he replied, patiently. “How many days away is that?”

She whispered to Selina, asking what day it was. Selina whispered back then let Helena figure out how many days away. As they were near to ending the call, Selina peered over to catch a glimpse of Bruce. He looked good, as usual, maybe a little on the tired side. He and Raj had spent the last three weeks travelling throughout the province visiting small villages that would benefit from the clean water project.

Three days, Selina reminded herself. She was both excited and nervous. Alfred was right, Bruce would forgive her but how many times was she going to need forgiveness from him? No more, she decided. Feeling clear headed and strong for the first time in a long time, and with her old confidence nearly fully returned, she headed upstairs to get changed.

The only damage to her calm was David who skulked around dutifully protecting Helena.

“Aren’t you a little over qualified to be a chauffeur?” Selina asked as they rode in the elevator down to the parking garage.

“I’m not a chauffeur,” he replied. “Hello, Miss Helena.”

“Hello, Mr. David,” Helena returned.

He really was a nice person but Selina greatly disliked having someone accompany her whenever she left with Helena. Still, she couldn’t complain too much as it was she who had introduced the danger into their lives. Danger, she felt, had died when Wackford had. But Bruce was Bruce and if it gave him peace of mind, she could go along with it. Sort of.

“Well, Helena and I are going to Isha’s house. I’m driving my car so you can stay here and do whatever it is you do.”

“Ma’am,” he replied, politely nodding his head.

As Selina turned out of the parking garage, she noticed David in the car behind her. When she arrived at Isha’s, he had parked a discrete distance away. Holding Helena’s hand, Selina walked over to him.

“If you’re here, you might as well be of some use,” she said as she held up a paint can. There were three more in the back of the Range Rover which David brought in.

They spent the afternoon painting the bedrooms. Rishi had picked a bold blue while Shanti had picked cheerful green for the younger kids.

The children had long since lost interest in the endeavor leaving Selina, David and Shanti to finish
the painting.

“You really didn’t have to do this, you know,” Selina said to David.

He paused in his job of taping around the doors and windows. “I know,” he said. “It’s fine. Shanti has made me plenty of delicious food over the last month. I owe her.”

Selina went to find Shanti who was putting the finishing touches on Rishi’s room. Shanti smiled at her and continued her work, softly humming.

“Have your classes started yet?” Selina asked.

“Oh, yes,” Shanti replied. “It was scary at first but I am liking it very much.”

Shanti excitedly told her of her experiences at the Gotham Community College. In the months since they arrived in Gotham, Shanti had changed a great deal, gaining confidence, feeling free to exhibit her sparkling personality. The changes in her since That Morning were striking.

“You’ll stay for dinner?” Isha asked later. “You and David are more than welcome.”

“I don’t want to impose,” Selina replied.

“Impose?” Isha laughed before winding her arm through Selina’s. “Silly girl, you’re family, you can’t possibly impose!”

After the meal which David could not stop praising, Selina stayed to help clean up.

“We are thinking of opening a restaurant,” Shanti said, passing her a plate to dry.

“Oh, Shanti, that is an excellent idea!”

“Would you help us get that started?” Isha asked. “Get a bank loan, I think that’s what we need?”

“You don’t need a loan,” Selina said, turning to look at Isha. “Bruce will give you the money.”

“He’s already done so much for us,” Isha said, shaking her head.

“And we figured out that our rent is far too low for this neighborhood,” Shanti said.

“Don’t worry about that,” Selina said, as she put the last of the plates away. “He’s rolling in money. Besides if you get a bank loan, he’ll just buy the damn bank.”

The money thing was still complicated to Selina. For someone who had spent the majority of her life scrambling to make ends meet by any means necessary, finding herself in love with a very, very wealthy man was more problematic than she would have expected.

“Are you going to be awkward now?” DeeDee asked as they reclined on the comfortable couch. She had the afternoon off and her kids were all in school. She and Selina were spending their time hanging out in the Penthouse. “You get a guilty look every time I vent about money things? I’m not asking for a handout.”

“No, I know that!” Selina fidgeted uncomfortably. “It’s weird and feels unfair when he has so much.”

“It’s the way it is.” DeeDee shrugged. “We’re not desperate, you know. Just because Kev blew a thousand bucks on some stupid scheme isn’t going to break us. It pissed me off and I want to vent
about it to you but I can’t if you’re going to think everytime I bring up something that involves money that you think I’m asking for money.”

“I don’t think that,” Selina said.

“Let’s get this straight right now,” DeeDee said, as she leaned closer to Selina. “Stop being embarrassed about all this. Your poor friends will still like you.” DeeDee leaned back against the fluffy couch pillow and folded her arms. “We just expect you to pay for dinner when we go out.”

Selina laughed. “Fair enough.”

“So should I go on? Or do you want to talk about you for awhile?”

“Oh please,” Selina said. “I’m so sick of talking about me, thinking about me…”

“Good!” DeeDee said, settling in to get more comfortable on the couch. “Because I’ve got a story about Myra…”

Selina smiled as she listened to her friend talk. This time with DeeDee was just what she needed. For the next hour, Selina forgot about all the heavy things that had been weighing on her. When Helena woke from her nap and wandered downstairs, DeeDee pulled her on her lap, asking her questions that three year olds loved to be asked.

“I thought you might enjoy a snack,” Alfred said as he approached carrying a tray.

“I kinda expected cucumber sandwiches or something like that,” DeeDee said, eying the tray of cheese and crackers. “Something with caviar…”

“Would you like caviar, Ms. Desdemona?” Alfred asked, perking up. “We’ve got cases of it. No one ever eats the bloody stuff.”

“Then why do we have it?” Selina asked.

“I got a deal,” Alfred replied, as if that explained everything. He returned to the kitchen with Helena and Mr. Tibbles following close by.

“Didn’t you spend the last few years eating fancy food and living in five star hotels?” DeeDee asked.

“No,” Selina replied. “We stayed in some very regular places. Off the beaten path kind of places. It was nice…better than nice.”

“You’re looking forward to him coming home.”

“Yes but…I don’t know…I hurt him,” Selina said. “I said things.”

“You were hurting,” DeeDee said, taking her hand. “Everybody knows that.”

“Not a good excuse.”

“No, but it was a reason,” DeeDee said. “We all react differently to grief. Some people clam up, some people lash out. You’re a lash outer.”

Selina nodded. “But I have a ways to go to get to your level.”

“Oh, you know it!” DeeDee laughed. “I finally figured out that Kev tunes out my yelling so now
when I’m really mad, I get quiet and talk soft. When that happens, he knows he’s in trouble. You’ll smooth it over. The guy is head over heels about you.”

It was odd that DeeDee had gotten to know Bruce while she lay in the hospital, unconscious. They had formed a friendship without her. Which wasn’t bad, just weird in a world’s colliding kind of way.

“So…” DeeDee said, looking closely at Selina. “Jimmy came by the bar asking Kev all kinds of questions about you.”

Selina sighed. “He noticed the Rolls, didn’t he?”

“Of course he did. He wanted to know where you were living. Kev did tell him this hotel. Please don’t be mad at him. You know what a pushover he is.”

“No, it’s okay,” Selina said. “I hope Jimmy tries to come here. Security will throw him out in less than a minute.”

“When he figures out you’ve got money...that you’ve got access to money…” DeeDee amended at Selina’s look. “He’s going to try to be your dad.”

“I know.” Selina curled her newly castless fingers almost into a fist. They still wouldn’t cooperate fully but they were feeling stronger every day. Thinking about her father angered her, exasperated her. Two very familiar feelings that were much better than the ones she’d been feeling for the last few months.

“He’s kinda like a dad.” DeeDee nodded her head toward Alfred who approached with a silver tray.

“I have a dad.”

“No, baby, you do not,” DeeDee said then looked excitedly at the tray Alfred set down on the ottoman. “Now this is what I expected rich people to have for afternoon snack!”

Alfred had outdone himself. The array on the expensive silver tray was a work of art. Crystal flutes for champagne, one filled with milk for Helena, fine serving plates, and he had presented the caviar in a little crystal bowl setting delicately atop a bowl of ice.

DeeDee smiled.

“Thank you Alfred,” Selina said as he poured them each a glass of Armand de Brignac champagne.

He raised his glass to suggest a toast. “Here’s to afternoon snacks that do not involve goldfish crackers,” he said with a wink at Helena who held up her flute of milk.

“This is not bad,” DeeDee said after trying the caviar.

“It better be,” Alfred said, sitting down next to her. “It’s four thousand dollars an ounce.”

Selina and DeeDee exchanged a wide eyed look.

“Oh, that’s just wrong.”

Selina helped Helena slather a little bit on a cracker. Helena looked suspiciously at the black food.

“Wait!” DeeDee pulled out her phone. As Helena took a tentative bite, DeeDee started recording.
“Oh baby!” Selina laughed as Helena couldn’t get the food off her tongue fast enough.

“It’s an acquired taste, sweetheart,” Alfred said, handing her her glass of milk to wash away the taste.

“You like this stuff!” Selina exclaimed.

Alfred grinned. “I must confess I really do.”

“Selina was giving me a tour of the house, Alfred,” DeeDee said as she took another sip of champagne. “You know what I noticed?”

“What’s that?”

“Her closet is pitiful.”

“You’re right, Ms. Desdemona,” Alfred replied, smiling at Selina.

“Your man is coming home after three weeks,” DeeDee said. “You have major making up to do and you don’t have anything good to wear. You need to look good. She needs to look good, doesn’t she, Alfred?”

“Yes, she does.”

“I’ll find something,” Selina said, downing the last of her champagne.

“No!” DeeDee cried. “Selina, you’re not thinking this through girl! We have a Pretty Woman opportunity here!”

Selina met her friend’s excited look. Something dormant within her flickered to life.

At Alfred’s confused look, DeeDee explained.

“What do you think, Alfred?”

“I think no one ever does anything fun with all this money,” Alfred said, looking nearly as excited as DeeDee. “We’ll go to Athenian place!”

“Yes! That’s perfectly snobby!” DeeDee said. “They’ll take one look at me and will be calling security.”

“Oh, we don’t want that,” Alfred said.

“Alfred, you’ll swoop in being the supremely proper butler that you are and it’ll be fine,” Selina said. “Dee, we’ll take turns saying ’Big Mistake!’”

“Of course!” DeeDee said. “I am so glad I glammed up for this visit. You, Selina, will go just as you are. Well, maybe change into a pair of jeans. And put on some mascara. And fix your hair...”

The experience was more diverting than Selina expected. The ruder the people were when DeeDee first walked in, the more clothes they tried on without buying anything. Helena had fun going with her mother, watching her try on outfit after outfit while she played with her favorite panda bear. Even Alfred enjoyed getting deferential treatment. Any Athenian Place shopkeeper worth their salt knew exactly who Alfred Pennyworth was.

“This,” DeeDee held up a dress for Selina’s inspection. “You need to meet him in this dress.
What do you think?"

It was not her usual style. The knee length lace dress with a boat neck was dusty rose colored, far lighter than she usually wore.

“Oh, that’s lovely,” Alfred said.

“And, no,” DeeDee said, handing the dress to Selina. “It does not come in black.”

As Alfred paid for the crazily expensive dress, and so happy to do so, Selina ignored the speculative glances from two of the shop girls who whispered among themselves as they eyed Selina and Helena.

Selina had never cared much for other people’s opinions but she found herself very much caring about people’s opinion of Bruce.

“I just don’t want people to think badly of him because of me,” she told Alfred later as they took an evening walk through the park. Helena walked ahead of them, holding tightly to Mr. Tibbles’ leash. “He’s already working off such a ridiculous reputation. I don’t want people to think he fell prey to a golddigger.”

“He doesn’t care about that.”


“I do,” Alfred said. “I admit it was upsetting to me how apathetic he seemed to be about his family’s name.” He patted her hand that was holding his arm as they walked. “All that’s over now. These humanitarian projects he’s working on will do much to change people’s mind.”

“Until someone figures out the woman Bruce is shacked up with a woman who has been to prison,” Selina said. “More than once.”

“There’s no record of that,” Alfred replied. “And look at you, as lovely as you look, no one would believe it!”

The shopping spree had helped raise her spirits. Clothes had always been something she enjoyed shoplifting or, if necessary, splurging on.

“You look fantastic!” Bobby said that night when he picked her up. Selina had finally agreed to go with him for a night on the town. “What a pair we’ll be tonight!”

They did look good together, they always had. Both decked out in dark club clothes. Selina’s naturally curly hair was styled in her preferred way, falling perfectly straight down her back, almost reaching her waist.

“Who is that guy?” Bobby asked as they stepped into the elevator.

She didn’t need to ask who he meant. “Helena’s bodyguard.”

“Is he single?”

“Yes.”

“Is he gay?”

“I don’t know.”
“How could you not know?” Bobby exclaimed. “You’re always finding men for me…”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been a little preoccupied.”

“Not tonight, sweetie,” he said, offering her his arm. “Not tonight!”

Alfred had arranged a limo that whisked them away from the hotel to a new club. They bypassed the long line, ignoring the angry looks as the bouncer waved them in.

After less than an hour, they left. Both tired of the loud electronic music and the long waits for drinks. They found their way to a sports bar where they were supremely overdressed but no one cared, focused as they were on the Gotham Knight’s baseball game.

Bobby brought up Ollie often, making sure Selina wasn’t feeling guilty, prodding her for funny Ollie stories of which there were many.

The day before Bruce returned home, Selina did something she never thought she would ever do: willingly enter a police station.

On her way, she stopped by Jen’s apartment to see if she was home. Jen had been avoiding her, ignoring her texts, phone messages and her notes on her door to call her.

Just before she reached Jen’s building, Selina saw her crossing the street. Quickly finding a parking spot, Selina jogged through curious pedestrians toward where she suspected Jen was going.

“What the hell, Jen?” Selina exclaimed when she caught up to her.

“What?” Jen affected a surprised look. “I’ve been busy.”

“Are you ok?”

“Better than you,” Jen replied. “I’m surprised Mr. Bruce Wayne lets you come down here.”

Selina was already nursing a slight hangover headache and Jen’s attitude was not helping.

“I don’t understand where this is coming from,” Selina said.

“I just expected more from you,” Jenn looked at her angrily. “You disappointed me.”

“What?”

“Living with people like that? Who do you think you are?”

“I think I’m me.”

“No! Going to fancy parties, living in expensive houses...That’s not you!”

“I know that, Jen!” Selina exclaimed. “I’m trying to figure that out how I fit with all that.”

“You’re just with him for the money. Everyone knows it.”

Selina sighed. She could see the jealousy in Jen.

“If that’s easier for you to believe, go ahead,” she said, feeling sad for her friend. In a weird way, she could understand Jen’s anger, her feeling of abandonment. “I didn’t come down here to fight.”

“Why’d you come down then? Laugh at the rest of us stuck in this dump?”
“C’mon, Jen, that’s not fair.”

“Not fair? You’re standing there telling me about what’s not fair?”

“Why can’t you be happy for me?” Selina’s anger flared.

“Happy that you’re rich?”

“No, happy that I found someone I love who loves me.”

Jen hadn’t expected Selina to reveal an emotional truth to her.

“I just wish things were back to how they used to be. Remember how great things were?”

“No, Jen, I don’t. I remember feeling desperate and afraid. Prison loomed over me all the time. I didn’t like myself very much.”

“I liked you,” Jen said, sadly.

“I’m still me,” Selina said, gently. “Do you really think I’m going to turn into a rich snob? Really?”

“I guess not.”

“C’mon, let me buy you lunch,” she said, taking her arm. “You’re not going to believe where I’m going later.”

Later, she took a deep, calming breath before she opened the door to the MCU. When she stepped inside, she almost expected sirens to go off and every officer in the place to draw their gun. But no one hardly glanced at her as she made her way to the front desk where she politely asked to see Commissioner Gordon.

“No, I don’t have an appointment,” she said. “Would you just tell the Commissioner that Selina Kyle is here to see him?”

“We’ll see…” the desk sergeant replied then pointed at the row of seats for her to wait.

As she waited, she looked around the room, remembering when John Blake had escorted here. She rubbed her wrists, remembering the weight of the cuffs. She turned her thoughts away from that day that saw her at her most despairing, when she thought Bruce most likely dead at Bane’s hand.

She reminded herself why she was there. Bruce. What do you give for the man who has everything? A trip to the MCU to identify some corrupt cops, that’s what.

“Ms. Kyle,” Gordon said, extending his hand to her. “I’m so sorry you had to wait.”

“No, it’s fine,” she said, standing up. “I didn’t have an appointment or anything.”

He beckoned her to walk with him to his office. It was a strange feeling walking through the police station without handcuffs on. She recognized a few faces, some on the law side, some on the criminal side but no one said anything to her. Dressed as she was, looking urbane and sophisticated, no one would confuse her for someone who needed to be arrested.

When they entered Gordon’s office, he indicated for her to sit in one of the chairs in front of the desk. Instead of sitting behind the desk, he sat in the chair next to hers.
“How are you, Ms. Kyle?” He asked, seeming genuinely concerned.

“Much better, thank you,” she said. “So...Commissioner-”

“Call me Jim, please.”

“Jim,” she said, suddenly feeling uncomfortable. “Did Bruce tell you about the police officers? From back then?”

“Yes,” he said, looking grim. “I understand they picked up kids to deliver to Wackford and his cronies. Oliver, too?”

She nodded. “He wasn’t the only one though,” she said as she met his concerned gaze.

“Ah...I didn’t realize you were one.”

“Yes,” she said, waving off his sympathy. “I was willing to let sleeping dogs lie but it was driving Bruce crazy.”

“Me, as well, Ms. Kyle,” he said, an angry gleam sparked in his eyes. “I thought we had cleared out most of the corrupt cops but I was looking for those with mob contacts. Not men pimping out kids.”

“The more I thought about it,” Selina said. “The more I realized it was wrong of me to turn away from helping find who they are. Ollie and I weren’t the only kids that happened to.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” Gordon said, nodding in encouragement. “I have my suspicions but a witness would make a big difference.”

He went to his desk, unlocked a drawer and brought over a binder. He showed her a series of photos of police officers and detectives from twenty years ago.

Selina slowly flipped through the pages, worried that she might not remember the faces of the men who had made her think she was being arrested but instead, drove her to a downtown apartment.

“He’s one!” She pointed to a friendly looking face. It was a photo from twenty years ago when he looked very much like the man who had lured her. She remembered him well, remembered that he had seemed so nice for a cop.

Jim wrote down the man’s name as she flipped through the rest of the binder until she found his partner. This guy’s face was not nearly as friendly.

“That confirms it,” he said. “I already had these two pegged for the culprits. Your confirmation removes any doubt.”

“If you need me to testify...I don’t know how that will go. I mean I would but they’ll ask questions about my past...Twist things...”

“Yes,” he said. “That could be a problem. I don’t want to mess things up for you.”

“I do know some other kids this happened to who have pasts that aren’t as checkered as mine,” Selina said. “One of them is a pitcher for the Gotham Knights.”

“Think he would?”

“Oh yes,” Selina said. “I haven’t spoken to him in ages but he’s not one to feel ashamed for what
happened to him."

"The more people we have testifying, the more likely those two will see the inside of a prison."

Selina rose from her chair. "Well, that wasn't nearly as difficult as I thought it would be."

"Oh?"

"I've never been in a police station of my own volition," she said, smiling at him, enjoying his brief discomfiture.

"Bruce thinks very highly of you," she said as they made their way back downstairs. "For a cop, you're not so bad."

"Thank you, Ms. Kyle."

"Selina," she corrected. "Where is Detective Massey?"

"Her office is right this way," he gestured to follow him through a maze of offices until they reached the homicide division.

Detective Massey was putting on her jacket, just about to head out. She attached her holstered gun to her belt then headed for the door, almost knocking into them.

"Commissioner!" she exclaimed, then realized who was standing next to him. "Ms. Kyle!"

"Thank you for your help, Jim," Selina said, politely dismissing him.

"You're on your way out," Selina said to Jessica. "I'll walk out with you."

"I'm just meeting John for lunch. It's okay if I'm a little late."

"I won't keep you," Selina said. "I just wanted to thank you for caring about him. About Ollie."

"Oh!" Massey said, flustered. "I'm just doing my job."

"No, you cared about a nameless addict. Bruce told me you were pretty hard on him...thank you for that, too. Not many people would have treated him like a regular person."

"He wasn't mad about that?"

"On the contrary," Selina said. "He was impressed."

"Have you heard from her?" Selina asked as they walked outside.

Jessica knew exactly who she was talking about. "Her mother contacted me. She's doing better, she's under the care of a good psychiatrist. She'll heal. At least this thing that happened seemed to have healed the serious rift in their relationship."

"Well, that's something," Selina replied. "He's your lunch date, huh?"

She nodded in the direction of John Blake who was waiting by the food truck.

"Oh, no, he's not my date, just my lunch friend."

"Selina Kyle!" Blake called out when he noticed the two of them. He looked questioningly at Jessica who shrugged. "What brings you down here?"
“Strolling through memory lane,” Selina purred. “Remember our last time here?”

John grinned, not at all embarrassed. Selina liked him for that.

“I’ll leave you two to your lunch,” she said. “I need to get back to Helena.”

“Get me two tacos and a diet coke,” John said to Massey as he handed her a ten. “I’ll walk you to your car, Ms. Kyle.”

They walked in silence until they reached her Range Rover.

Selina looked back at Massey. “Bobby will be so disappointed. He had hopes you might switch teams.”

John laughed, then stopped when he realized what she meant.

“Her?” He looked back at Massey as if to confirm she was out of earshot. “That’s not a thing.”

“Sure it is, sport,” Selina said. “Thanks for sticking with Bruce. Keeping him from being publicly embarrassed on my account.”

“I was happy to help him. Help you, too,” he said, extending his hand in a peace offering handshake.

She looked at him a moment before accepting the gesture.

“Selina,” he said. “I’m glad things worked out for you. Glad you found each other.”

“Thanks, John,” Selina said, meaning it. “So am I.”

Back at the penthouse, Selina, Alfred and Helena went downstairs to one of the hotel’s more casual restaurants to have dinner. A habit they had fallen into the last few weeks.

“What are they looking at?” Alfred grumbled as he noticed two of the bussers who kept looking in their direction.

“I think they think I’m your mistress and Helena is our love child,” Selina replied, scanning the menu. “They think you’re too old for such a thing.”

“Oh, Good Lord!” Alfred glared at them which only made them giggle.

“We should invite them over for a social thing.”

“They?” Alfred looked appalled.

“No, them as in Gordon, Massey, and Blake. Fox, too.”

Alfred brightened. “An actual party to entertain friends?”

“Lots of fake parties, huh?” She asked, as she distracted Helena from grabbing at the lighted candle.

After putting Helena to bed, Selina went out on the balcony. She breathed in the cool night air, glad that summer was almost here. She thought about Ollie and noticed the pang of guilt did not hit her. That, of course, made her feel guilty.
“A lovely night,” Alfred commented before noting the expression on her face. “Is everything alright?”

“I’m trying not to feel guilty for not feeling guilty,” she said. “If that makes any sense.”

“It does,” he said. “You ready for Master Wayne to return tomorrow?”

“Not quite…” she said, as she turned to him. “Think you can arrange something for me? I’m sure there’s some overpriced hair salon around here.”

“I can do better than that, my dear.”

He arranged for a day spa, the best in the city and one of the most divine, nonsexual things Selina had ever experienced. Of course, she had splurged on getting mani/pedis or getting massages but not like this. And not with the company of Helena who loved every minute of it.

With a new haircut, and a splendid manicure and pedicure, Helena and Selina left the spa. Instead of heading to the penthouse, Selina drove them to the house she and Alfred had looked at.

“So what do you think?” She asked Daryl who was waiting for them there.

“Needs work,” he said. “But nice.”

“Helena, this is mommy’s friend, Daryl,” Selina said, so happy to have Helena meet him. “He’s kind of like a brother.”

“Yeah, you call me Uncle Daryl, Little Bit,” Daryl said squatting down so he was eye level to her, shaking her hand.

“Ok,” she said.

“I heard you have a dog named Mr. Tibbles,” he said, as he and Selina exchanged a quick glance. Helena nodded vigorously, always happy to tell people about her dog.

“It’s a good neighborhood,” Daryl said as they walked to explore the nearby park. “I like any neighborhood where I don’t stand out like a sore thumb.”

“Alfred chose well.”

“Your butler!”

“His butler!” Selina corrected. “Am I getting my car back any time soon?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I fixed that leaky fuel line and and the transmission needed some work. You’re good to go.”

Selina hugged him. “We don’t go another five years without seeing each other, ok?”

“Ok,” he said, hugging her back. “When I get back to Chicago, I’m going to see if Luna wants to go south with me.”

“I want to meet her,” Selina said. “We shouldn’t keep important people in our lives from each other.”

She and Daryl found a bench while Helena made friends with two neighborhood children.
“Bruce was asking about the Quad,” Daryl said. “He noticed the kids there.”

“Always been kids there,” Selina replied.

“Yeah, but…” Daryl shifted, leaning forward on the bench. “You can do something about that with the kind of money he’s got. I know you’ve thought about it.”

“Maybe.”

“You could make a difference in their lives,” he said. “You come from their world. You’re not one of those rich kids slumming it for a semester.”

Helena rushed over to give Selina a handful of sand with a rock in it. “Thank you, baby!” she said, dropping a kiss on Helena’s forehead before the girl raced back to the sandbox.

“You were right,” Selina said, looking over the rock Helena had given her.

“About what?”

“About Jimmy and Lisa, about how being abandoned by them was keeping me from Bruce.”

Seeing her father at Ollie’s memorial had upset her. For a moment, she thought he had heard what had happened, that he came to see how she was doing, that he came to express condolences for someone he knew was important to her.

“When I first saw him at Ollie’s thing, I thought…I hoped…he had come for me.”

“Yeah, I know…” Daryl took her hand, squeezing it.

“That cut pretty deep,” she said. “Having Helena made me realize what a raw deal I got with them. Angela was the only good parent I knew…She cared and she paid attention. You don’t have to be rich to do that.”

Daryl was quiet. It was still difficult for him to speak about his mother.

“You shouldn’t be afraid to have a kid,” Selina said.

Daryl scoffed.

“No, really, it’s pretty great,” she said. “And you love Luna.”

“You like them so much, you should have another,” he said.

“Maybe.”

“You gonna get married first?”

“We’re not getting married,” Selina said, shaking her head. “That’s not a good idea. He’s him, I’m me…We’ve done just fine without having a piece of paper making it official.”

“He wants to get married,” Daryl said. “He’s that kind of guy.”

“I’ll talk him out of it.”

“You’ll try…”

“Oh Daryl,” she said. “He’s coming back in five hours. Before he left, I said some horrible things
to him.”

“Of course you did.” Daryl turned to her, looking her in the eye. “Selina, face it, you’re going to have to apologize. And you’re going to have to tell him you love him. Actually say the words.”

She looked at him, a fearful look in her eyes.

“You’re in for an emotional moment, Selina. Brace yourself.”

As the jet descended into Gotham, Bruce’s apprehension escalated. He didn’t know what he was walking into. He had not heard a word from Selina since their balcony conversation that Bruce would love to forget.

To add to his worry, after he had first arrived in India, Shanti had answered the phone at the Penthouse. When he had asked to speak to Alfred, she told him that Alfred had taken Selina to look at a house. Even though he had told Alfred to fix things up for Selina, he hadn’t expected it to happen. Or to happen so quickly.

So after that, the only person at the Penthouse he had talked to was Helena. His twice daily video calls with his daughter had not revealed a glimpse of Selina. And that was all he needed; a glimpse of her to gauge how she was, if she was still feeling as she felt that night.

But then he had received that text from DeeDee. A ten second video of Helena eating caviar including two seconds of Selina’s ‘Oh, baby!’ followed by a laugh. DeeDee had no idea what that few seconds of video communicated to him. Then she sent him a quick follow up text a few hours later. She’s fine was all she wrote. She had not meant Helena.

He looked out the window, seeing the lights of Gotham. Home, he thought, allowing himself to be hopeful for what awaited him when he landed.

Standing near the gate, she looked as beautiful as he’d ever seen her. In her arms, she held Helena whose head was resting sleepily on her mother’s shoulder. Selina’s expression was inscrutable when she saw him. She nudged Helena, pointing to him. Suddenly awake, Helena squirmed out of her arms to run to him.

He knelt down to sweep Helena into his arms, hugging her tightly. She squeezed his neck, raining sloppy kisses on his cheeks.

“Your face is scratchy!” she complained.

Their eyes met, both remembering when she cried over newly clean shaven Bruce. Selina broke the look, walking toward where she had parked the car. Bruce grinned as he noticed her impossibly high strappy shoes that she always pulled off with finesse.

“She took a long, late nap so she could be awake to see you,” Selina said, when he and Helena caught up to her.

“It’s a good surprise,” he told her, giving her a look.

“What did you bring me?” Helena asked, remembering his promises of a present.
Still holding her, he set the bag on the hood of the Rover, rifling through it until he found a stuffed tiger.

“They say these scare away elephants,” he told her.

“Oooo,” she said, her eyes wide as looked at the tiger, a little afraid. “Why?”

“Sometimes elephants trample people’s crops.”

“What’s a crops?”

“Food, sweetie,” Bruce said as he handed her the stuffed tiger. She regarded it solemnly for a few moments. She tentatively touched it, confirming it was as soft and cuddly as it looked.

“Oh!” she said, clutching the tiger to her. “Did you bring Prisha anything?”

“Of course,” Bruce answered, smiling at her. “And Vinay and Rishi and Navi.”

“Navi and Vinay are too little for presents.”

“Yes, but they’ll still like them, don’t you think?”

“I’ll drive so you can talk to her until she falls asleep,” Selina said as he fastened Helena securely in her car seat.

The drive from the airport to the Penthouse was almost a half hour. Helena fell asleep within five minutes.

“That didn’t take long,” Bruce said, turning to face forward. “She fell asleep mid sentence. I think that’s a first.”

“I think so,” Selina replied, looking terrified as she clutched the steering wheel, refusing to look at him.

“How’s your hand?”

She held it up for his inspection, he noted the light scarring on the fingers. She wiggled her fingers showing him that most were working well. The index finger was still at an odd angle.

“I like what you did with your hair,” he said.

Her dark hair was poofier than usual, resting a few inches below her shoulders, the long bangs hiding the new scar on her forehead.

“Thank you,” she said. He could tell she rolled her eyes at her own awkwardness.

Bruce looked at his watch, deciding to give her three more minutes before she mustered the courage to talk to him. For such a brave, fearless woman, she was coward about emotional honesty. But, then again, so was he.

It took a full two minutes before she spoke.

“You’re not going to say anything?” She asked, irritably.

“Nope,” he answered, settling back in his seat.
She expelled a heavy sigh. “I don’t know how to say I’m sorry for all things I said to you.”

“You have a mean mouth, Selina.”

“I know! That’s why I’m apologizing, dammit.”

“You’re doing a terrible job of it.”

“You’re not making this easy.”

“Am I supposed to?”

“It would be helpful.”

At the red light, she stopped the car and turned to him.

“Bruce, I’m so sorry,” she said with sincere regret. “I felt guilty, I hated myself. I think I wanted you to hate me, too.”

“That won’t ever happen,” he said.

“And then that fight right before...Ollie...That horrible fight when I told you I’d...take her away.” She shook her head, still unable to believe she’d said such a thing to him. “That was awful. I’m sorry. You know I would never do that, right?”

“When I calmed down, yes, I knew that.”

A horn blared behind them. The light had turned green.

“Why are we having this conversation in the car? With our daughter asleep in the back seat?” He spied an empty parking lot off the road. “Pull over there.”

Selina had barely stopped the Range Rover before Bruce got out. He walked to the driver’s side and waited for her to open the door. When she didn’t, he impatiently tapped on the window.

“That night you first slept in another bed.” Bruce said, closing the door behind her. “What was that?”

“Oh, that...someone had kicked me in the ribs.” Selina explained, as they stepped to the back of the car, away from Helena. “I had bruises all over.”

“I knew it!” Bruce looked out at the drab parking lot, controlling his anger.

Standing with her back to the SUV, she took his hand pulling him to her.

“You almost died, Selina.”

“I know,” she said as she put her hands on his face.

“I thought you were dead.”

“I know.”

“Do you know what that did to me?”

“I’m sorry for that most of all,” she whispered against his mouth before she softly pressed her lips to his.
Bruce lifted his head away, not quite willing to let her off the hook. “And sorry for trying to set me up with another woman?”

“Well, yeah, but I knew you weren’t interested in her so it was a safe set up.”

“It was weird, Selina,”

“I know, I’m sorry! Jesus, I’m sick of saying I’m sorry! And you ruined a moment!”

“I did, didn’t I?” He grinned as he kissed her. Her arms wound around his neck as he pulled her tight against him.

“Bruce?”

“What?” He murmured against her neck.

“I have things I need to say to you,” she said.

He placed a kiss behind her ear then lifted his head to look at her.

“Oh, you don’t have to look at me,” she said.

“But I want to see you as you fumble your way to whatever it is you’re going to say.”

She tilted her head slightly to the side. Really?

She took a deep breath before continuing. “I’ve had a lot of time to think over things. These last few weeks were good for me. I think I was carrying around a lot more baggage than I thought. Or, rather, I think I had stowed all that away in some far away storage container never to be opened again. And then everything happened and I couldn’t handle it. And then my stupid father showed up not caring about anything except if I had any good drugs and it just shut me down.”

He leaned his forehead against hers, his hands caressing her face.

“But I’m fine now,” she continued, looking him in the eyes. “Maybe not 100%. Ollie...I don’t feel so guilty and that makes me feel guilty so I’m working though that. But I’m ok, Bruce, and I want to be with you forever. I love you. I don’t know why that scares me. Daryl thinks I have abandonment issues because of Jimmy and Lisa and I think he’s right.”

“But you’re okay? Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you can repeat that one part that you buried in all that thinking I wouldn’t notice.”

She smiled. “I love you.”

He smiled back. “I love you, too.”

Under the flickering light of a semi-broken parking lamp, they kissed again, telling each other the words they’d been afraid of for so long.

“The world didn’t end,” he mused.

“Now what?”
He grinned. “Selina, I hate to use this word on you but I want this to be legal.”

“Why would we want to mess up a good thing?”

“It’s what people do, Selina, they fall in love, get married, and have babies. We’ve got it a little out of order but why not?”

“Somebody called you Baby Daddy, didn’t they?”

“Yes, they did and I never want to hear that again.”

“Bruce, we should get Helena home. Let’s talk about this later.”

“She’s not waking up until tomorrow,” Bruce said as went down on one knee. He took her hand. “Selina, will you marry me?”

She looked torn between being pissed and being enchanted. Enchanted won.

Selina leaned down to kiss him. “Yes, if you insist.”

“I do,” he said, standing then kissing her again. He knew she would scheme and plot her way to putting off a wedding for a decade. As he kissed her, he pulled out his phone, holding it behind her.

“What are you doing?” Selina asked.

“Finding a place to get married.”

“Now?”

“Here we go...it’s just outside the city limits. Only twenty minutes away.”

He escorted her to the passenger side, opened the door, nudged her to get inside, kissed her, took the keys then closed the door before she could say anything.

He started the engine, looked back to make sure Helena was still asleep. She was.

“Don’t you want a big wedding and all that?” Selina asked.

“Do you?”

“Not really but you like to be showy about things.”

“Relax, Selina, we’ll be in and out. No big deal,” he said as he peeled out of the parking lot.

“What’s the hurry? It doesn’t close until…” She looked at his phone. “Oh, it’s one of those twenty-four hour wedding places. Two Hearts Chapel of Love? That’s a little redundant, don’t you think?”

“It’s perfect,” he said, running a red light.

“You haven’t even shaved,” she said. “I’m sure that’s bad luck.”

“Good point, there’s a drug store on the way…”

“Bruce, really, be serious,” she said. “This is actually a bad idea.”

“Actually?”
“For starters, you need a pre-nup.”

“No I don’t.”

“I could take half of everything you own. I am a thief, you remember.”

“I do remember,” he said as he kissed her hand.

“Your lawyers will be freaking out if you spring a marriage on them.”

“That’s what I pay them for.”

Traffic was light as he sped through the county road. The wedding chapel was just outside Gotham’s city limits with less stringent wedding laws. The area had been popular with couples since the fifties.

They soon pulled up to the Two Hearts Chapel of Love. It was easy to find, being illuminated by red and pink neon.

“What do you think?” He asked, grinning up at the tacky sign.

Instead of looking at the chapel, she put her hand on his, nudging him to look at her. “You think it’s just me but it’s not. I have uncles and aunts and cousins most of them are horrible people. People who will be so happy to sell their stories about me to some tabloid. And, Bruce, most of those stories will be true.”

“Selina, let me handle that,” Bruce said, squeezing her hand. “Tabloid stories don’t bother me. I love you. I want to be with you and never have to refer to you as my girlfriend again.”

“I love you, too,” she said as he leaned over to kiss her.

“I have a grandmother in prison,” Selina said just before he opened his car door.

Bruce wasn’t expecting that. “Really?”

“Yes, really. She’s doing a fifteen year stint for manslaughter.”

He almost wanted to laugh. Of course, Selina had a felonious grandma. “That seems a little long for a manslaughter charge.”

“There were other felonies involved,” she explained. “She was running a meth lab in her home, it exploded, a guy got killed.”

“I still want to marry you.”

“You’ve been warned,” she said.

“Is that all?”

“I think so.”

“Then, let’s do this.” He unbuckled the still sleeping Helena and carried her to Selina’s side of the car. Taking her hand, they walked inside the chapel.

“Hello,” Selina said to the bored man behind the display of wedding paraphernalia. “He would like to get married.”
The man looked confused.

“We would like to get married,” Bruce clarified.

“You’re in luck! We’ve got our Thursday night specials. If you want to wait til after midnight there’s another ten percent off.”

They looked at each other as if mulling over the prospect. “I think we’re okay for doing it now.”

He gestured to wedding menu. “Our most popular deal is the $99.99 package which includes an 8x10 of the happy couple which would be you.”

“How about the Super Love Deluxe?” Bruce asked. “It includes rings.”

“Excellent choice, sir! Our Thursday special for that is $149.99.”

“Do you have any real flowers?” Selina asked.

“Sure do! But there’s an upcharge of twenty dollars,” he said, then thought the better of it. “I mean thirty dollars.”

“I don’t know, honey,” Selina said. “What do you think?”

“Sounds like a good deal,” Bruce said, shifting the sleeping Helena to his other shoulder.

“You know, folks,” the man said. “For an additional $29.99 you can get a set of mugs with your wedding picture on them.”

“We’ll take the mugs,” Selina said.

“You keep buying everything he’s offering, we’ll never get married,” Bruce said. “Is that your plan?”

“No,” Selina replied, kissing him on the cheek. “I’m all in now and I really want a wedding mug.”

“Really, Selina? Mugs?”

“I just decided I’m going to send them to the family members I despise the most,” she said. “Hey! Can we get the mugs personalized?”

“Don’t put any expletives on that,” Bruce said, knowing exactly what she was thinking.

“Never mind,” she told the man.

When he started to record their names on the wedding certificate, he messed up Bruce’s name in shock as he realized who he was.

“Uh...let me get another form,” he said with a nervous grin.

The man who ran the register was also the Wedding Minister and his mother was the Wedding Organist who played beautifully. She was very excited to witness the wedding of a celebrity.

“You won’t mind keeping this quiet, would you?” Selina asked her.

“Who the hell would I tell?” She laughed before giving them both a warm hug.

Bruce lay Helena down in the front pew. Her eyes fluttered open, then she curled on her side and
went back to her sound sleep.

The wedding was brief but, surprisingly, emotional for such a garish place.

Selina held his gaze as the minister stumbled over the words in nervousness. But they hardly noticed, smiling at one another, each of them slightly awed to be here together. When the minister pronounced them husband and wife, they grinned then kissed as the organist played a Beatles song.

It was, Bruce decided, a perfect wedding.

On their way out, Selina gave the address for all the wedding stuff they ordered. Before leaving, Selina took the man’s hand as if to shake it but she held it firmly.

“If any of those photos find their way to a tabloid or online, we’ll know where it came from. You don’t want to get on our bad side, do you?”

“Did you have to threaten the minister?” Bruce asked when they stepped outside.

“Somebody has to protect the Wayne name since you’re so cavalier about it. Marrying a girl from the wrong side of the tracks and all.”

By the time they reached the Penthouse, it was nearly midnight. Alfed had long gone to bed.

“I’m starving,” Bruce said, realizing he hadn’t eaten since sometime over the Pacific ocean.

“Go put her to bed and I’ll fix something.”

“Make me a sandwich, wife!”

Selina rolled her eyes.

Helena did not wake as he lay her on her bed. Selina had already anticipated that Helena would be asleep by the time they got home and dressed her in pajamas. He kissed her forehead.

On his way back to the kitchen, he made a detour to his office. When he returned to the kitchen, he paused by the doorway, taking in the sight of her as she moved about the room.

She had soft music playing, Louis Armstrong. He had missed that, the sound of whatever music she was into at the time playing softly in the background. Selina was a music lover, different types of music followed them as they traveled the globe, usually played through her phone.

He went behind her, putting his arms around her. She turned in his arms kissing him deeply before lightly pushing him away as she finished the sandwich, pushing the plate across the granite counter.

It was a peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich.

“We have a huge kitchen and this is all we have?”

“Yep,” Selina said, opening the bottle of champagne they had received as part of the deluxe wedding package. “Alfred, Helena, and I have been eating out a lot.”

“You have?” Bruce was pleased they were getting along.

“He’s not so bad,” Selina said. “Not nearly as stuffy as I thought.”
“We went to that pizza place with the balls.”

“I would have liked to seen him there.” He quickly ate half the sandwich, meeting Selina’s amused gaze. “Shanti said you and Alfred were looking at a house.”

“Alfred found us the perfect house.”

“In the Palisades?”

“Better. The West Village.”

“There’s nothing but a bunch of old Brownstones there. We can’t all fit in one of those.”

“He found a whole row to buy and put together.”

“You like it?” Bruce asked.

“I do,” Selina said as she opened the bottle of champagne.

Finding the best crystal flutes in the house, she set them on the counter and poured the champagne. She handed him a glass.

“Here’s to our cheap wedding rings.”

“Here’s to PB&J for a wedding dinner.”

They smiled as they clinked their glasses and drank. Bruce placed his glass on the counter and reached into his pocket.

“Remember the night of the monsoon?” He asked, taking her hand.

“When we thought we were all going to get killed by rain?”

He nodded. “That’s when I wanted to marry you. So I’ve had time to find this.”

_La Vie En Rose_ shuffled on as Bruce handed her a small black box. She opened it and her eyes went wide.

“It’s obscene!” She held out her hand for him to slide the ring on her finger then held it up for them to admire. “I love it!”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Chapter End Notes

And they lived happily ever after. Thank you for reading!
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