



THE MAN BEHIND THE BAT, THE WOMAN BENEATH THE CAT  
THE LIFE BETWEEN THE PANELS, THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MASKS

#5

# Cat = Sales

*Such an Idiot*



by Chris Dee



**CAT-TALES**  
**SUCH AN IDIOT**



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## SUCH AN IDIOT

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I'm human. As a man of science I can say that as a statement of fact, free of passion, prejudice, or subtext. The Batman is human. I admit it every time I put on a Kevlar chest plate.

That bit from Shakespeare:

*Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands,  
organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?*

That's how we got here, isn't it Selina? Batman has the same organs, the same senses, and the same passions as any man. You understood that when no one else did. You understood before I knew it myself.

*If you prick us, do we not bleed?*

Batman is human. I admit it every time I put on the Kevlar. I hate that you know those people. I hate that you're on friendly terms with Riddler and Penguin and Two-Face. I hate that you called him "Eddie." I hate that you have in-jokes and pet names for Dick and Helena and Jean Paul. I hate that those people are a part of your life and I hate the part of your life they're a part of. Most of all, I hate myself for feeling this way. I've tried, Batman has tried, to make this a moral issue: they are criminals and it's wrong to have anything to do with them. Period.

But deceiving myself is not a luxury I can afford. I've only done it once, in denying my feelings for you all those years, and even that was idiotic and dangerous. I was lucky. You felt the same way. You found it 'cute.' Another type of woman would've taken advantage and... So you see *I can't afford* to delude myself the way others can.

It's not a moral judgment; it's not that they're criminals. I just don't like them. And I don't want them to have this part of you, this secret part of you, that's intimate and carefree with people that try to kill me on a regular basis. This can't be. It has to stop. It stops tonight.

"I thought we'd order in tonight instead of facing the Saturday night hoard at d'Annunzio's"

She raised an eyebrow as though it were a scandalous suggestion ... I suppose it was a transparent excuse: Bruce Wayne never waits for a table at d'Annunzio's or anywhere else... but I wanted us to be alone to talk seriously and she jumped to another conclusion entirely.

"And after I got all dressed up," she sighed prettily. "Okay, menus are on the desk over there. Have a look while I get comfortable."

She disappeared into the bedroom while I started rehearsing in my own mind: *I'm human. As a man of science I can say that as a statement of fact. I admit it every time I put on the Kevlar...*

"Unless of course you want to undress me yourself," came a playful chant from the next room. The tone set off a familiar quiver... I wanted to talk seriously and she wanted to play. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

She returned a few minutes later, tank top, simple cotton skirt, looking cool and casual and sweet. One of those moments when I almost forget she's Catwoman.

"The sesame noodles from Little Saigon are good, or if you still want Italian, Antonio's delivers." She stopped with a self-conscious half-laugh. "What? You're staring."

*I can't keep doing this, Selina. I'm human. I can't stand it that you're friends with those people.*

"I... was wondering if you'd come with me to the Watchtower later. I've got monitor duty. If it's a slow night, it can be pretty boring. I could use the company."

Not exactly a lie. Monitor duty makes me crazy. Being away from my city, missing patrol to babysit equipment... I could easily rig something up to relay anomalies to the cave or Batmobile terminals—but for Clark and his 400 objections.

"What if it's not a slow night?" she asked. "If something happens while I'm there and the others show up. Will we tell people we're 'just enemies?'"

She knew there was something else going on. How many times had we played that scene, she and I, voices saying one thing, eyes saying another?

"C'mon, you've helped the League before, more than once, nobody'd bat an eye."

"Sure, I can tag along on your JLA jaunt, if that's what you want."

It was a cue to change the subject. Which was fine with me since the Watchtower wasn't what I meant to be talking about in the first place.

"Sesame noodles, you said?" She nodded and I reached back to the desk to get the menu. In doing so, I bumped her computer mouse and the screen flickered to life. My peripheral vision picked up her instant messenger flashing in the lower corner. I handed her the menu and while she called in the order, I asked if I could check my e-mail. She nodded absently. It was so natural. It was so casual... It was one of the shittiest things Batman has ever done. She once broke into my desktop because it was necessary for the job I asked her to do. I was invading her privacy because I was... I don't even know. Suspicious? Jealous? Possessive?

I didn't read her mail or hunt through her address book. I'm sure I would have stopped myself anyway, even if it wasn't for *that infernal sound*.

"HAHAHAHAHA"

As soon as the computer logged on, the messenger launched itself. And there they were—my enemies, in a neat color-coded scrolling list: Clayface, Croc, Freeze, Harley, Hatter, Ivy...it was amazing. One name, labeled "J," was flashing—the backlogged messages, obviously—and the speaker made a sickening cackle: "HAHAHAHAHA"

Selina hung up the phone, walked over to the desk, and (politely under the circumstances) slapped my hand away from her mouse and keyboard. Knowing the only decent thing to do was turn away, I stood my ground and read over her shoulder as she opened the message:

:) *Catty, babe, Harley walked out again. Remind me how to set the VCR.*

:) *Catty, you there? Emergency! No Harley. And I need to tape Who's Line is it Anyway?*

Selina rolled her eyes and typed:

^^ *Serves you right. Go away, I'm busy.*

:) Good, you're there. Remind me how to set the VCR ?

^^ Sigh. TV to 3, VCR to 3, Cable to 66. Enter twice—set the time. Power down.

:) Thank you Catty.

:) You know, Harley's left me again. You could come be my sidekick.

^^ I've told you before, Jack, it's not going to happen. Catwoman is nobody's sidekick. And I don't like your habit of smacking the girlfriend around either.

Jack? JACK? I read the next line through a blur of escalating rage.

:) But just think how ol' Batsy would freak out. HAHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

She started to answer ^^ Give it up J when I pushed her aside and typed: FUCK OFF, JOKER. MENTION IT AGAIN AND THEY WON'T FIND ENOUGH OF YOU TO ID THE BODY then swiftly yanked the modem cord from the wall and turned to Selina with icy calm:

"Can we have dinner now that the psychopath can tape his favorite show?"

Most often, she'd have answered that tone with white hot temper or else brazen sexiness, but tonight was a controlled calm that matched my own.

"That was really stupid, y'know that. That is a dangerous man whose nose you just tweaked using my name, which would be bad enough if I had asked you to stick your oar in or if it served any purpose at all except some macho—"

"I'm human, Selina. I'm flesh and blood, and I hate that those people are a part of your life."

She considered this, as if it never occurred to her I might object to her palling around with my worst enemies. When she spoke, however, it was clear that she only paused to work out how to explain this to my limited male intellect.

"And I hate that they're a part of *your life*, Bruce. They don't generally try to end mine."

"I'd almost rather they did," I muttered. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that the way it sounded, I just... really *hate* that you're friends with them."

"The Joker is not my friend. He's a homicidal maniac. Scarecrow is a homicidal maniac. Ivy is a homicidal maniac that dyes her hair. I avoid them. When I can't do that, I humor them... and I handle them. But they're not my friends."

"Riddler is your friend. Two-Face is your friend."

"Harvey is my friend... and yours if I'm not mistaken."

"I suppose. Once."

"Between you and me, I find the other half pretty annoying, what with all the two-references. But it goes with the territory."

"The 'other half' is a lot more than annoying. He's a dangerous killer."

"He's sick. You don't write off a friend because he's sick—at least I don't."

I had no answer for that. This wasn't where I expected the conversation to lead. The doorbell rang—it was the dinner we'd ordered. We ate and talked of other things, then abruptly found ourselves back on the original topic:

"You called him 'Jack,'" I began.

She answered with the naughty grin I hadn't seen in months.

"Darlin' I'm a 38 double-D with 3-inch heels and a leather whip, I get to call anybody anything I want."

It's a valid point.

“Well,” I tried to make the best of it, “at least after all this time I finally learned his real name.”

“That’s not his name. Nobody knows his name.”

“Then why—”

“‘cause it pisses him off. You should see him froth at the mouth whenever I do it. It’s beautiful.”

Sometimes I truly love that girl.

It's getting harder to tell where Batman stops and Bruce begins. Or maybe it's the other way around.

The others tell me I'm naïve about Batman. That he's sneakier and more manipulative than I give him credit for. I've always chalked this up to my fellow rogues being idiots. I mean, at the time I could always read his thoughts like a book: His mouth said "You're a thief and I'm taking you down" his eyes said "Run away now or I can't stop myself from kissing you."

It turns out not all his thoughts are as easy to read as that particular one. He was hurting last night; I could see that. But that's all I could see.

The Watchtower was awkward. He only asked me there to avoid coming clean about the other thing—when it finally came out what was really bothering him, my supposed friendship with the other rogues, it set up a weird point/counterpoint: I had my ties to the rogues just like he had ties to the JLA.

I thought it made a good parallel and I said so. "Just because you work with these people doesn't mean you're all friends, does it?" I knew damn well it didn't. I'd seen enough of the JLA to realize he scares the crap out of them. His mind games with the Joker are nothing compared to the number he's doing on Green Lantern.

I knew they weren't all friends. But I didn't know how vicious it had gotten. I can't say I was surprised to hear about the protocols. Batman is hell on wheels when he thinks he's right and you're wrong—which would be all of the time. And personal considerations will buy you exactly nothing (well, almost nothing) in those situations. Nobody knows that better than I do.

If one of the heroes turned, no friendships, no years spent on the same team, would make a bit of difference. He'd do what he had to. Rather than wrestle with it in the middle of a crisis, he planned ahead. Perfectly in character. Perfectly understandable to anybody that knows him. How odd that these people who thought they had such a bond, didn't grasp something so *obvious*.

He says I understand because we're alike in that respect.... After all, he was my enemy as much as I was his, and Catwoman never let her feelings for him stop her from doing whatever I pleased.

They tell me I'm naïve about Batman. He's manipulative, unprincipled, and untrustworthy....

It's amazing, the dayshift we relieved at the Watchtower pulled me aside and said there's something I should know if I'd be working with Batman. What would they say, these self-important pinnacles of justice and heroism, if they knew they were telling me exactly the same things the rogues say about him: I'm naïve; he's manipulative, unprincipled, and untrustworthy.

It's possible I'm being played.

It's possible he planned the whole scene at my apartment to set up the rogues/JLA parallel in my mind, then told me about the history with the protocols and planted the suggestion of how alike we were... all to get to that one moment—just to ask that half-joking question:

"Do you have any protocols, Kitten?"

It was so light and off-hand, the voice and manner that charms every socialite on the Upper East Side.... But he wasn't gossiping about Bunny Wigglesworth's fourth divorce; he was asking if I'd hand him plans to take down the rogues.

"Okay, not *protocols*," he went on, "but you know, inside information that might help take one of them down?"

"You're kidding, right?"

"No."

"You're serious?"

"Does it strike you as something I would joke about?"

"No."

"See."

"But you're not generally inclined to joke about anything at all."

"But if I were, this wouldn't be it."

"Right."

"So do you or don't you have protocols? 'Cause if you do, I'm just saying I'd really like to see them."

...It's really getting harder to tell where Bruce stops and Batman begins.

A silent puff of air came from between the Batman's lips. He opened his eyes as the 30 minutes finally elapsed. He placed his hands on the steel cable in which his ankles had been supporting him, and flipped himself around and downward. An acrobatic triple followed, with a tumble raising him into fighting stance as he struck at the dummy in front of him... shearing the head clean off. He stood motionless for a moment. Then calmly spoke out loud to the recording device near his practice area.

"Exercise failed. Excessive damage to dummy indicates either a loss of equilibrium after protracted inversion, or a deteriorated mental faculty due to inactivity. Daily regimen must be increased."

He stopped speaking and walked toward the car. "Sloppy." The word echoed in his head. "You've grown sloppy."

In the past, periodic lulls in criminal activity made him restless, and he'd channeled the restlessness into longer and more vigorous workouts. This time, what had he done with the precious boon? Played footsie with Catwoman.

No, that wasn't fair. Romancing Selina was the first non-Batman decision he'd made in a long time that worked out okay. If his concentration was off—and it most certainly was—it didn't take the World's Greatest Detective to work out why: As the Batmobile cruised downtown the day's headlines scrolled over a lighted marquee in Gotham Plaza: FOUR DAYS SINCE ARKHAM ESCAPE! CRIME WAVE CONTINUES! POLICE STYMIED...

Batman stymied.

Other than Catwoman, the only criminal he ever felt conflicted going up against was Two-Face. Harvey Dent had been a friend and an ally. Dent, Gordon and Batman had taken an oath, like some medieval brotherhood, to draw a line against the evil and drive it from Gotham for good. Where would they all be now if the acid hadn't scarred Harvey's face and shattered his mind before they could even begin the task.

It was never pleasant taking down a friend. Batman dealt with it by telling himself that this monster wasn't his friend—Two-Face was the thing that killed his friend.

Except Harvey Dent wasn't dead. Harvey, it turned out, was Selina's friend. He dragged her to karaoke bars the way he had once done his colleagues from the DA's office. He'd told her the same stories: the time his fraternity rigged the dance marathon and how he took the bar exam with a hangover. He extorted the same hopeless wagers from the rogues on the eve of the Harvard-Yale game as he had once done from Bruce Wayne.

Harvey Dent was very much alive inside Two-Face, and both Bruce and Batman had written him off completely.

Now Two-Face had escaped—yet again. What the hell were they running at Arkham anyway, a Bed and Breakfast for the criminally insane? It was less than a month since Dent was captured.

Now he was free again, and almost immediately he'd embarked on a crime-spree—but not a typical Two-Face crime spree. There was no Gemini or Janus tie-ins at any of his targets, no 2s in the addresses or dates.

It wasn't possible. Obsessive psychotics don't wake up one morning and simply drop the core symbol of their psychosis. Something very bad was happening, and

Batman knew if he didn't figure out what, there was going to be a double-digit body count.

What was even stranger than Two-Face's break from his theme was the peculiar silence of the witnesses. There were police and lawyers at some of the locations, people who normally remain calm and observant in a crisis, but their recollections were just as vague as the civilians who were too terrified to notice much of anything.

Batman's reverie was cut off by the appearance of the signal.

Damn.

Probably another useless status-report. Gordon would've known not to bother him with trivia Batman could get from news reports. The replacement hadn't learned yet.

As always, Batman neared the roof of Police HQ to observe before making his presence known. This began as a simple precaution: in the early days, his alliance with the police was uncertain and strained. He had to be prepared for a double-cross. In the years that followed, it became his trademark. He knew Gordon wasn't planning anything underhanded, but he watched and waited anyway, picking his moment to materialize without warning, like a spirit of the night.

As he watched now, Batman couldn't quite believe his eyes.

There *was* a figure from the past waiting for him, but it wasn't Gordon... It was Harvey Dent.

Fifteen minutes later, Batman understood why none of the law-enforcement witnesses volunteered any details: They weren't random by-standers. Two-Face was deliberately seeking out Harvey's old friends, allies and colleagues, forcing them to witness his transformation—not into Two-Face, but into a personification of raw rage and pain.

Before Batman could make his presence known on the rooftop, a hapless patrolman arrived on the scene. Gordon's mutton-headed replacement couldn't be bothered to check on the unauthorized use of the signal himself and had sent this rookie. Idiot.

Two-Face leveled a gun at the rookie's head, produced his coin to give the condemned man the customary 50-50 chance for a reprieve—but instead of tossing the coin, he railed against the night sky like King Lear, screaming with a passion seldom seen outside of grand opera.

He denounced the hypocrisy of law, grounding tenets of freedom in a legacy of slavery...

He damned lawmakers, insulating their own power rather than any upholding any concept of right and wrong...

He cursed lawyers that care more about winning than punishing the guilty or freeing the innocent...

He denounced a police force mired in racism and corruption...

And then he looked directly at the blackness where Batman lurked and condemned the hypocrisy of vigilantes, claiming to be instruments of justice while violating every principle of due process and constitutional protections...

It might have been an eloquent argument if he was addressing the Supreme Court, or perhaps making the nominating speech at a political convention, but it was a horrifying display delivered only to the moon and stars by a madman.

It was a horrifying display, even to those (especially to those) hardened to the dementia and violence of costumed criminals. No one who felt any sense of commonality with the one-time district attorney could escape the haunting idea that, but for a wrong move or a quirk of fate, *they* could become *that*.

With a trembling hand, Two-Face held out his coin and screamed that chance was a faithless bitch. Good side up, he would shoot the patrolman, scarred side up he would shoot himself. Then he hurled the coin off the roof, and with a lightning move sent the patrolman after it. Batman acted quickly, firing his grappling line in time to save the patrolman. Unable to prejudge the arc of descent or the effect of the patrolman's added weight, the landing on an adjacent rooftop was rough and painful. By the time Batman recovered himself, Two-Face was long gone.



This was going to be tricky. Selina hadn't been herself since I asked her about protocols. I played it badly. I may have awakened the cat.

I didn't think it through beforehand. It was impulsive: *if she knows them so well and isn't friends with them, let's make the best of it.* Idiot. Now I really need her insight, and I may have poisoned the well.

The cats inside alerted her to my presence the moment I landed on the terrace. Too late, I thought that Batman might be the wrong face to put on this. Bruce Wayne should have brought a bottle of wine...

"Yes?" Not exactly hostile, but I couldn't help but notice she had joined me on the balcony rather than inviting me in.

"I need your help with something."

"Monitor Duty again?"

Her tone was cold and mocking. If she was in costume, I would have been bracing myself for the claws.

"I'm serious. There's a situation brewing—a bad one—and I need your help before people get hurt."

"This must be the 'tude Nightwing complains about. You just take it for granted that everybody will be at your beck 'n call 24/7 and do anything you ask—"

"Damn it, Catwoman, this is important!"

Cold steel slammed down behind her eyes. Calling her Catwoman was definitely a mistake. And asking for her help so soon after the protocols debacle ... Damn it what was wrong with me. I used to be able to handle this woman and her tempers and her impossible unfathomable ideas of ethics....

Yeah, right.

I used to handle her.

And Green Lantern wears yellow skivvies.

Selina returned to her apartment without a word. She didn't try to throw me off the balcony or anything, but I sensed that she might if I tried to follow her in. It was completely unacceptable. Why did she have to make everything so difficult? I couldn't get bogged down in this right now.

I flipped open my phone and dialed her private line. Miraculously she answered. Before she could start with the objections I blurted out "It's Harvey. Two-Face. That's why I need your help, okay? It's Harvey."

Without warning, the bedroom window shot open and there she was—changed into her Catwoman costumed except, I noted with amusement, for the gloves, whip, and one boot which she carried in her hand as she poured onto the balcony.

"You manipulative son of a—" *—zipped up the boot—*

"...How dare you think that just because I give you a tumble now and again—" *—left glove—*

"...He is my best friend." *—pulling at the other boot—*

"...He's more than a friend; he's a brother." *—claw caught on the boot, glove came back off—*

"...He's a nice guy who's very isolated." *—reboot—*

"...has nothing in common with the likes of Joker or Penguin or those lowlife thugs—" *—zip—*

"...just cause we have sex now doesn't mean everything's changed." *—left glove redux—*

"...cold-hearted bastard to think you can just use me to get to..."

"Selina, stop. Please. Harvey, *your friend* Harvey, is in real trouble. He's having, I don't know, some kind of breakdown. I don't understand what's going on with him, and that's why I want your help. Understand? I am *asking* for your *help*. I'm not trying to use you, not trying to take advantage of our relationship. I am simply asking you to calm down and listen to me for five blessed minutes."

I didn't add that while having sex may not change everything, watching her clumsily pull on the costume while chewing me out was unquestionable the most adorable sixty seconds I would ever spend with any criminal and definitely a point of no return.

She did stop. She looked up at me with those gorgeous green eyes and listened. She said she'd talk to Harvey, as a friend, and find out what was wrong. She agreed to help me.

That's what should've happened.

Except I didn't say *Please Stop your friend Harvey is in trouble*. I asked why she was protecting those people. I asked if she had no concept of right and wrong. I said all evil needs to thrive is for good people to do nothing.

She said I insulted her intelligence. That I was using her to get at those I couldn't beat in a fair fight. She said I was sneaky and manipulative, trying to play her...

*She* called *Me* sneaky and manipulative... *SHE* called *ME*.... Well it takes one to know one, Lover!

Then I said... I said ... I said unforgivable, hateful things. I brought up the past. I reminded her of all the times that... I implied, I knew it wasn't true, but I implied that she just played up to me—sexually—to keep me off balance, that the whole affair was "just business."

It wasn't heated after that. We both got so eerily calm it scares me. A high school debate has more passion. We could never and would never agree on the deep moral issues. White is white and black is black. We were kidding ourselves. It was over.

Bruce did a backflip off the hanging rings, somersaulted in mid air and landed hands-first on the sidehorse, then flipped again to land on his feet while swatting the practice dummy—which blocked his punch—causing him to overbalance on the landing.

The figure that stood in the practice dummy's spot gave a mischievous grin.

"You would've grounded me for life if I'd fallen for that."

"Put the dummy back on its mark before you go."

"Aw shucks, boss man, I was just havin' some fun."

"You here for some purpose other than sabotaging my workout, Dick?"

"Yeah, matter of fact, I am."

"Well?"

"You and Selina have a fight?"

Bruce turned with a scowl that could reduce entire planets to ash.

"What possible business is that of yours?"

Rather than answer, Dick sat, put his feet up at one of the several computer workstations, and leaned the chair backwards until it balanced precariously on the rear wheels. Then he reached over his head to take a bottle of water from the mini-fridge behind him. Bruce found the performance annoying. Dick was making a point of his easy familiarity with the cave.

"I got an interesting e-mail the other day: seems you've been running Tim ragged with extra training—including big bad Zogger"

"Strategic self-mutating defensive regimen 4," Bruce corrected automatically. Why Dick had to make up silly nicknames for the various training programs was beyond him.

"And Barbara tells me Cassie's practicing twice as long too. So I ask myself: Self, what was the one occurrence that always brought on double-time training sessions with big bad Zogger? Yes, it was a run-in with Catwoman!"

Bruce gave an exasperated sigh. This was none of Dick's business—but it was simpler and faster to just tell him and make him go away.

"We broke up, okay."

"Pah. You'll be back together by the end of the week."

"We broke up, Dick. There are... differences... we can never get around."

"The differences are what make it fun, Bruce! That gobbledygook about couples that are two halves of the same person is all bullshit. I know women that are just like me—I can't stand 'em. You and Selina click off your differences, you always have."

"It's over, Dick."

"Do you still love her?"

"Yes."

"That was a mighty fast answer."

Bruce said nothing.

"You still love her. You had a fight. You'll make it up."

"We never fought like this before."

"You never fought before."

"Dick, this is Selina we're talking about. We've been fighting since—"

"That wasn't fighting. Whatever the hell that was that you used to do with Catwoman was a turn-on for both of you. That was foreplay. This was a fight. Now you know what one is. You fought, you make up. It's not the end of the world."

Bruce considered this for a long moment. Dick was his junior by ten years. He had no business doling out advice in this condescending manner. But, he had slightly more experience with "normal" relationships than Bruce—slightly. It was just possible he might be right.



In his ravings, Harvey Dent said Fate was a faithless bitch. He'd accepted her as the only thing that was holy—men lived or died, countries rose and fell at her whim. A shake of her head and a message goes awry, the lover swallows poison and his bride impales herself on his sword. A smile from her lips, a song on the radio reminds a quarreling couple of their first dance. Harvey had accepted Fate as the one force that shaped men's lives—and she betrayed him.

She mocked him now –from the television– two people on a sitcom were arguing about a musket:

*Dana:*

*Guns kill people, Sam. They're macho and they're redneck. And they're disgusting, and frankly, despite all your faults –*

*Sam:*

*The world isn't really like that, Dana. It's a more interesting place than that.*

*Dana:*

*Than what?*

*Sam:*

*Black and white. Here.*

*Dana:*

*You're a member of the anti-handgun coalition?*

*Sam:*

*Francis Marion was a farmer from South Carolina, Unschooled, unsophisticated, but when the king sent his army to terrorize the colonists, who wanted nothing more glamorous than their birthright, Marion and 100 other farmers fought them off with this. They stood up to the British Empire. With that crappy piece of tin. You've got to learn to separate the stuff ...From the stuff.*

Harvey had accepted that life was duality, male and female, 1s and 0s, night and day, life and death, and yes BLACK and WHITE. Everything was 50-50 and it took only a flip of the coin, an exercise of faith in Fate, to decide. She betrayed him.

Life was not black and white. And if it wasn't black and white, it couldn't be decided by the coin. And as he sat at the mirror trying to decide whether to shoot his reflection or himself, the television mocked him. He could shoot himself or his reflection—he did the impossible and opted for the third choice. He shot the television.

This time it was Alfred who interrupted Bruce's workout—with a soft cough rather than hazardous pranks with the practice dummy. He informed Master Bruce there was a visitor waiting upstairs. Entering the study, Bruce was surprised to discover the visitor was Selina.

"I talked to Harvey," she began without pleasantries. "He's in nine kinds of pain. You should've told me."

"I didn't really get the chance, did I?"

"No," she admitted, "I flew off the handle." There was a pause where the words *I apologize* were notably absent. "I'd been getting angrier and angrier since—"

"The protocols."

"Yes. I felt used."

"You're not alone, Tim and Dick have both taken heat from Young Justice and the Titans. The assumption seems to be that I have everybody I know spending their spare time figuring out how to sandbag their teammates."

Selina smiled in spite of her determination to remain angry.

"Young Justice? Wouldn't the merest hint of the senior heroes taking them out to the woodshed put a stop to any shenanigans?"

Bruce produced the Batman twitch-smile.

"That's what Tim said—adding that of all the senior counterparts by whom one wouldn't want to be taken out to the woodshed, he had it worse than anybody."

Neither actually laughed, but the tension eased somewhat. Then Selina spoke seriously:

"Harvey is... really cracking up, isn't he?"

"Looked that way to me. Any idea why?"

"When I saw him, he said he was 'drowning in the gray.' He said Francis Marion beat Redcoat with Brown Bess, and Leonard Berlander was dead. Any of that make any sense to you?"

"Berlander, Berlander—C'mon."

Ten minutes later they were in the cave, hunched over a monitor displaying a casefile.

"Leonard Berlander was one of Harvey's first successful prosecutions as DA," Bruce noted, skimming the file. "Low level racketeering, numbers, protection. Sentenced to 12 years, paroled in '96, busted on possession in '98, 1 year suspended, busted again—this guy isn't a very good crook is he?—this time as muscle for Penguin. Just got out in March. You said he's dead?"

Selina nodded, and with a few swift keystrokes Bruce switched from the courthouse records to the newspaper obituaries:

"Suicide off the Longbend Bridge. No spouse, no next of kin."

"Not enlightening."

"No. What was the other name?"

"Francis Marion."

More typing and then:

"Nothing."

"How about Redcoat, wasn't there somebody in Star City with that handle a few years ago?"

"Not that I remember... No, nothing. What about 'drowning in gray?'"

"That one's pretty obvious, isn't it," Selina asked with an un-amused smile.

"It is?"

"Gray. That'd be, you know, that stuff between black and white."

"What do you want from me, anyway?"

"I'm just saying, Harvey Dent is very big on black and white. Duality—yin and yang—polar opposites."

"Yes, he is. So how does gray enter into it?"

"I don't know."

The next morning Alfred brought a sleeping Bruce Wayne the telephone on a silver tray.

"What time is it?" he asked bearily.

"It's just after six, sir."

"In the morning?"

"You have a call, sir."

"You couldn't take a message?"

"It's Miss Selina, sir."

Oh. Alfred wouldn't want to get into the middle of that. They were back in limbo—not exactly done with the fight, but done fighting.... More or less working together on Two-Face, unless that was just for that one visit.... Yep, he had no idea where Bruce or Batman stood with Selina or Catwoman—back in limbo.

"Hello?" Bruce managed groggily.

...:*It's the Redcoats*::... squawked the earpiece.

"What?"

...:*The Redcoats, the actual Redcoats—Lobsterbacks—the British Army—the Revolution*::...

They were all like this—Ra's, Scarecrow, Freeze—he could be knocked out, gassed, beaten half-senseless, and the moment he came to, they started babbling incomprehensible nonsense.... Bruce didn't cover the receiver as he asked:

"Alfred, could you bring me a pot of very strong coffee, please."

...:*Hey, Sherlock, you listening? It's the actual Redcoats—Francis Marion drove the British out of Charleston during the American Revolution, his men carried something called a Brown Bess Second Model Muskatoon*::...

"The American Revolution?"

...:*Yep*::...

"What does that have to do with Two-Face or Gray or Leonard Berlander?"

...:*I have no idea—but I can't wait to find out*. ::...

"How do you suggest we do that?"

...:*Your way? You sit in an overstuffed chair in the Diogenes Club and ponder the puzzles left you by the bad guys. My way- I GO ASK HIM! This is fun, you know that!* ::...

She hung up. Now she was having fun. Incomprehensible woman.



"Selina, this isn't a game. Couldn't you just tell me where to find him and wait here?"

The argument resumed as soon as they hit the rooftops.

"I am not about to abandon my friend to your medieval black-and-white notions of..."

"Justice is not an abstract notion to me, Selina. I'm not some mystery novel detective that only cares about winning a war of wits with an adversary and the victims are incidental. There are REAL, INNOCENT PEOPLE I am trying to protect, people who are going to get hurt or killed if that mad dog isn't brought down. I can't reduce those people to some philosophical discussion about shades of gray."

"So you're free to do anything you want and use anybody you can because the ends justify the means, is that it?"

"Maybe you'd feel the same way if your own ends were a little more defensible."

"Oh, that's just cold, Sport."

The voice was Two-Face's. He stood before them with wild eyes and a double-barreled shotgun.

"Harvey?" Catwoman asked tentatively. Two-Face continued to address Batman.

"Don't get me wrong, there was a time we would've sung Amen, Halleluiah—Black and White! Right and Wrong! Good and Evil!"

He swung around to Catwoman and gestured wildly with the shotgun.

"That's the way it is, pet, all your equivocating is just—talk. Cheap lawyers tricks. Heh Heh—"

He swung back to Batman.

"But it's not so. Turns out Good isn't Good. How s'pose to make EVIL the opposite of GOOD if GOOD ISN'T GOOD ANYMORE, HUH?!?"

"Harvey," Catwoman repeated, firmly this time, trying to get through the delirious ranting. She failed.

"HYPOCRITE! HARVEY WAS A HYPOCRITE! Law and Order, it was the FAST TRACK to the GOVERNOR'S MANSION! WAS NEVER ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG! Just Politics. Leonard Berlander is dead. He didn't do it. The racketeering charges, chief witness was sister of some old girlfriend he knocked up, frame up. I found out later... kept quiet. Was onto a big case—important victory—couldn't be bothered fixing past mistakes... Leonard Berlander. Now he's dead. Couldn't've got legitimate work after prison, could he? Back in jail, back out, now he's dead.... Harvey wasn't such a good guy. No hero in a white hat. Gray. In between. How can we be the opposite of that? Huh? How can we?"

Catwoman didn't know what to say. There was no answer for what had happened to him. He'd built his life around Two-Face being Harvey's opposite. Harvey said Right so Two-Face said Left and the coin told them which it would be. Berlander's suicide forced him to remember that Harvey wasn't a flawless embodiment of good, just a man.... He'd been doing it all wrong. Two-Face no longer knew how to be Harvey's opposite, and the coin couldn't tell him what to do.

It was Batman who finally spoke.

"It isn't gray that's between black and white, Harvey. That's just in old movies. In life, what's between black and white is color... Reds and Blues and Purples..."

Wouldn't the world be a sad place without them. You want to know something interesting? In painting, black is the presence of all colors, the more pigments you add, the closer you get to pure black. In lighting, black is the *absence* of all colors—total opposite—you mix all colors together you get pure white light. Isn't that something?"

"The opposite?" Harvey croaked. It was a plea, Oliver Twist asking for more gruel.

"Total opposite," Batman nodded. "You want to put the gun down?"

He did. Before Batman could blow his advantage with a clumsy move for the batcuffs, Selina chimed in:

"You need help, Harvey. I know Arkham isn't anybody's idea of a success story..."

"But you think they can get us back to only as crazy as we were before?"

She gave a radiant first-date laugh, then added, like it was a private joke:

"I'd give it a 50-50 chance."

Two-Face nodded sadly.

Tim sat on a cot in the Batcave medical facility as Alfred bandaged the outcome of the latest training session with “big bad Zogger.”

“You’re telling me the two of them worked together on Two-Face, talked him down without throwing a single punch, that the crux of Two-Face’s whole problem was the very Black & White thing Bruce and Selina were fighting about, and they’re still not making it up?”

“I wouldn’t like to be put into the position of gossiping about the Master’s private affairs, young sir,” Alfred answered cautiously. “I can only confirm that the Two-Face situation has been resolved, mercifully, for once, without violence. And that when I asked the master about his plans for your father’s birthday party next week, he replied that, ahem, ‘Bruce Wayne’ would be going stag.”

“Oh hell, if he’s calling himself ‘Bruce Wayne’ like that, that means it’s Bruce the Buffoon that’ll be coming.”

“It is the role he’s most apt to play in Society, Master Timothy.”

“My family’s not ‘Society,’ Alfred, my dad’s self-made. The people he knows are all industrialists and businessmen, not those inbred social register types. He could’ve come as Bruce Wayne, the CEO. My Dad could respect that. Instead he’s going to wonder why I bother knowing a dilettante fop.”

Alfred frowned. He too found this perceived need to sully Bruce Wayne’s reputation at every opportunity to be one of the most distressing aspects of Batman’s activities, but he didn’t like hearing the sentiment from Tim.

“Master Bruce has been living this kind of life a good deal longer than you, young man. You must trust that he knows what’s best.”

The snort of disgust Tim made in reply was more disturbing than the fop remark.

“Like telling Spoiler who I was? Christ, if anybody interfered with his relationships the way he tampered with mine...” Tim stopped and grinned in a way Alfred would have found more disturbing still if he had seen it. But he’d turned away to put the bandages back into the first aid kit.

It was indeed Bruce “the fop” Wayne that entered Jack Drake’s birthday party. It was the fop who bypassed the receiving line and made straight for the bar. It was the fop that leered shamelessly at Bunny Wigglesworth and told the bartender—in a too audible stage whisper—that he’d been waiting out that fourth marriage for years. It was the fop that finally sauntered up to his host and, rather than shaking hands, handed him his scotch—then his handkerchief, cel phone, and wallet while he fished a wrapped gift from his jacket pocket ...but it was Bruce, the real Bruce, who felt Batman’s sixth sense stir the hairs on the back of his neck... his performance was being watched too closely.

Jack Drake was saying something about “another friend of my son’s” escorting his brother tonight. Drake’s brother, Tim’s Uncle Derek, was a well-known travel writer who dabbled in breeding very fast horses and racing very fast cars. He was a glamorous figure; certainly he didn’t need fixed up with some friend of...

Tim materialized, Alfred-like, next to his father’s wheelchair and deftly helped him juggle the contents of Bruce’s jacket pocket. While Tim tried to hand back the items,

Bruce managed to dislodge and drop the battery off the cel phone. Then bending to pick it up, he spilled the drink on his shoe and, startled by the spill, dropped the phone and the wallet.

The sixth sense quivered again, and Bruce turned.

Across the room, entering on Derek Drake's arm, was Selina Kyle. She was breathtaking in a plunging evening gown of intense purple that set off her dark features. And she was looking at him like he was the world's biggest idiot. Tim handed him his wallet and the boy's eyes said it all: Spoiler. Zogger. Payback.

Bruce "the inbred idiot Fop" had a difficult evening after that.

During cocktails, his peripheral vision caught a glimpse of intense purple... and he missed a chance to confuse Paris, the character from Greek mythology, with Paris, the capital of France.

Later he heard a familiar silvery laugh—and understood Ingmar Bergman to be the famous Swedish director and not the blonde actress from Casablanca.

Taking Bunny Wigglesworth in to dinner, he caught a whiff of Selina's perfume—she and Derek were walking directly behind them. Rather than the tasteless joke he'd prepared about Bunny's rumored divorce, he heard himself saying "I'm so sorry about you and Chester. Don't give up hope, sometimes these things aren't as permanent as they seem."

At dinner, he sat across from her and saw she was wearing one of the cat pins he'd given her. What did that mean? Could it be a sign she was willing to make up, or did it mean she's there as Catwoman? Maybe it meant nothing at all; she might not have even known he'd be there. She might consider it just another piece of jewelry.

So preoccupied was he with these questions, he absentmindedly made several intelligent comments about the NASDAQ, the first hundred days of the Luthor Presidency, and the new conductor at the Philharmonic.

When the band arrived, instead of loudly requesting a medley of Abba's greatest hits, he glanced in Selina's direction, discreetly slipped the leader a fifty and whispered: "I believe the lady likes Cole Porter."

Bruce the Fop was a playboy and a rake. Selina was the most stunningly beautiful woman in the room, and there was nothing to stop him from brazenly cutting in on another man's date. But it was still an awkward moment as he took her hand...

*"Do you know why I love you?" she once said, "Because you suck at the candlelight and violins as much as I do.... It's the most adorable thing in the world that you put on that ridiculous playboy character just to give me a romantic evening."*

"Kitten," he thought, "how did we ever get here from there?"

*"Sneaky and manipulative,"* came the answer, *"using me... medieval notions of right and wrong."*

Ah yes, that was it, wasn't it.

*"You had a fight,"* Dick had said. *"Now you know what one is. You fought, you make up. It's not the end of the world"*

What did Dick know anyway?

"I went to see Harvey the other day," Selina whispered while they danced.

"How's he doing?"

"Surprisingly well. It turns out this new doctor at Arkham actually knows something about Asian philosophy. Showed him the Yin-Yang symbol—pointing out that inside the white half there's a circle of black and inside the black..."

"...there's a dot of white. I'll be damned, there is, isn't there?"

"So he's happy now, he has a neat two-sided image to view life through again."

They danced in silence for a moment before she asked:

"Did you mean what you told him, about color & light?"

"What I told him is true, if that's what you mean. Physical science isn't something you believe in or not, it just is."

"Hm. I just wondered because—for someone who takes it so personally, for whom right and wrong aren't abstract philosophical concepts—the analogy seemed very... philosophical and abstract."

More silence before she went on.

"Tim says that if we were really fighting about the black and white thing, we should've made it up after the Two-Face episode. He says the fact that we haven't means we were fighting for another reason. He thinks we were bored after the first pent up passion died down and had a fight because, well, we were never bored in those days."

"Tim said that?"

"Mhm."

"Tim is an idiot."

Selina laughed at this pronouncement and they danced for another moment. This time it was Bruce who broke the silence.

"Dick says, you'll love this: we don't know how to behave like a couple and took a perfectly normal squabble and prodded & pulled at it until it became Batman and Catwoman on a rooftop."

"Dick said that?"

"Yep."

"Dick is an idiot."

"Dick is right," Bruce pronounced. "He's right. I don't have the luxury of deceiving myself about my actions the way ordinary people can. Dick is right. There was a moment that night, I could have been a guy whose girlfriend was giving him a bad time. And I could have calmly and rationally said that I wasn't trying to use you, I was asking for your help. And instead I spouted platitudes about right and wrong that didn't really have anything to do with—"

"And I could've given you a knowing smile and said 'don't try to handle me' or 'you're so cute when you're stupid' instead of 'cold-hearted bastard.'"

"It was 'sneaky and manipulative' that hurt."

"You *are* sneaky and manipulative. You'll do whatever's necessary to accomplish your ends, and go straight for the jugular if anyone challenges you. That's what's kept you alive. It makes you *You*. It makes you dangerous."

The last word was hungry. And it was spoken by Catwoman.

Bruce pulled back to look into her eyes... he saw desire, affection, acceptance, and invitation...

"Did we just make up?"

“Well,” the voice too was full of desire and invitation, “maybe we could keep the feud going for just a few more hours... There’s an emerald in Tiffany’s window I wouldn’t mind having a go at.”