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House of Cards

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Requirement

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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By

Matthew R. Lieber

November 2013

Advisor: Sheila Schroeder

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Author: Matthew R. Lieber  
Title: House of Cards  
Advisor: Sheila Schroeder  
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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to approach adapting a comic book into a film in a unique way. With so many comic-to-film adaptations following the trends of action movies, my goal was to adapt the popular comic book, *Batman*, into a screenplay that is not an action film. The screenplay, *House of Cards*, follows the original character of Miranda Greene as she attempts to understand insanity in Gotham's most famous criminal, the Joker. The research for this project includes a detailed look at the comic book's publication history, as well as previous film adaptations of *Batman*, and *Batman* in other relevant media. There are also narrative analyses of the prominent characters, settings and themes of *Batman*. These include Bruce Wayne/Batman, the Joker, Gotham City, feminism as it is represented in *Batman*, the recurring theme of broken families, and defining insanity in the *Batman* mythos. Also provided is the methodology for adapting these themes and concepts into a screenplay and a reflective essay analyzing the screenplay after its completion.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For my master's thesis project for the University of Denver's Media, Film, and Journalism Studies program, I wish to write an original screenplay set in the fictional world of the super hero and pop culture icon, Batman.

From a young age, I have always enjoyed comic books. What appeals to me is the combination of fantastical elements with complex moral ideas. Like in *X-Men*, where you have complicated plots about xenophobia, civil rights, and the moral philosophy of an oppressed minority played out in stories about men with eye lasers and metal claws fighting giant robots. Comic books create a world that can be both thoughtful and ridiculous at the same time.

As more and more comic books are adapted into films, I always find myself wishing that these films would take more risks with their source material. Action movies make sense when adapting a comic book, but I longed to see a film that would approach the adaptation in a different, telling a quieter story about complex characters and opposing ideals. So, I came to this project to prove that comic book film adaptations could be more than summer blockbusters.

I came to this project after attempting a different thesis. I originally planned to do a short film based on a Batman graphic novel called *The Killing Joke*, by Alan Moore. My intention with that project was to focus on the nature of rivalry. Specifically, I wanted to focus on comic book rivalry as comics have

offered some of the deepest and most influential conflicts in narrative fiction. Iconic characters like Superman and Lex Luthor, Spider-man and the Green Goblin, and of course Batman and the Joker have always appealed to me, and I wanted to do a project honoring these interests.

The more research I did into the world of Batman, the more interesting the topic became. I particularly enjoyed such elements as Batman as a critique of modernism, the emphasis on personal identity, and the nature of insanity and mental illness as it manifests in the characters.

It reminded me of a psychological concept I had always found interesting: Carl Jung's concept of the shadow self. In summation, every person carries in their mind a shadow, a place where dark feelings and weaknesses are repressed. It seemed to me that characters like the Joker, Twoface or even Batman himself represent this concept, as they've allowed these shadow aspects of themselves to run rampant.

After spending several months attempting to produce this short film, I began to realize that it was a project that was increasingly unfeasible. The specific locations I would need to adapt from *The Killing Joke*, such as an amusement park and the Batcave, would be difficult to replicate in a student film. Furthermore, the costume, makeup, and special effects needed were beyond what I could supply with my budget and resources.

When I decided to abandon producing a short film, I wanted to segue the research I had done into an original feature-length screenplay that focused on the elements of Batman I found interesting and appealed to my desire to see a

different type of superhero movie. Using Jung's shadow self as a guide, I began work on an original story that primarily focused on Jung's theories and how they manifest in the Dark Knight, such as the repression of identity, the emergence of dark forms of ourselves, and insanity as perspective instead of illness. My goal was to create a screenplay that pays tribute to the history of Batman's world and characters, but also explores the concepts of identity and insanity as they have been presented in the narrative of Batman.

The screenplay, titled *House of Cards*, is not canonically connected to any of the existing Batman films or adaptations outside of comic books. Rather, the setting of the script is closer to that of Batman's comic book canon. Gotham City exists as part of the larger DC Universe. Other fictional DC cities, such as Metropolis and Coast City, are mentioned, as is Superman. This is to demonstrate that Batman is not the only major superhero in the world, and that Gotham is unique when compared to other major comic book cities. In order for the reader of this proposal to develop a sense of the story, characters and themes I will explore, I will offer the following synopsis prior to exploring Batman history, my literature review and my methodology.

At the time of this screenplay, Batman has been active in Gotham for a little over fifteen years, placing him in his early to mid forties. Dick Grayson, the original Robin, is about thirty. He hasn't worked directly with Batman in about five years, having left the moniker of Robin in favor of his new persona, Nightwing.

All the major antagonists of the Batman universe, such as the Joker, Twoface and Mr. Freeze, have all encountered Batman numerous times. Some specific events from previous Batman stories will be mentioned, but the screenplay is written to exist independent of these events. The audience will not be alienated if they are not familiar with these events in question, nor if they are unfamiliar with many of these characters.

*House of Cards* does, however, assume that the audience is somewhat familiar with these characters. A person who has no concept of Batman or the Joker will have a hard time understanding the story, while a reader who is familiar with them—even superficially—will be able to understand the characters and conflict presented.

The protagonist is Dr. Miranda Greene, the new Head of Psychiatrics at Gotham's Arkham Asylum. Miranda has been making significant strides in a new field of psychology focusing on the mentality of super villains. She hopes that Arkham will provide new avenues for her research. She is especially excited about the idea of working with Gotham's infamous Joker.

Meanwhile, Batman is curious about Arkham's new doctor. He asks his old partner, Dick Grayson, to get close to her and find out if she might be willing to keep tabs on Batman's enemies, given her access to them. Grayson moves in next door to Miranda, and the two hit it off. As their relationship continues to develop, Dick starts to become torn between his genuine feelings for Miranda and his mission for the Dark Knight.

Miranda begins therapy with the Joker who initially proves reluctant to participate. Miranda negotiates with the clown, offering to be an audience for his twisted and insane views. The Joker agrees to open up on the condition that Miranda cannot try to treat him. She can only listen to what he has to say.

Miranda quickly realizes that she may have bitten off more than she can chew, as the Joker and Gotham's other criminals are worse than any she's encountered before. As the Joker and her other patients prove that she has no power over them, her resolve begins to fall and she confides to Dick her true interest in insane minds.

As a child, her father had a mental snap and murdered her mother. He tried to kill Miranda, but she survived. Her father was killed by the police, leaving her without answers. Miranda has become terrified that madness is like a disease, and her father's genes infected her. She studies insanity to find a cure before she follows in her father's path. Dick reassures her, citing lessons he learned as a child from his guardian, Bruce Wayne.

Miranda returns to Arkham and confronts the Joker with a potential cure for his madness, having diagnosed him earlier. The Joker refuses at first, but Miranda challenges him to accept reality and sanity. The Joker relents and starts taking his medication.

Dick, meanwhile, is unable to keep lying to Miranda. He decides to leave town rather than confront the situation at hand. Before leaving, he gets a call from Batman to investigate one of the Joker's old hideouts. Batman and Nightwing stumble into a trap, but make it out alive.

Back at the asylum, the Joker's treatments appear to be working and he is horrified at the things he has done. He begs Miranda to let him return to his madness, but she refuses. Instead, she pledges to help him find peace in the world. As the Joker is returned to his cell that night, it becomes clear that he has been lying to Miranda from the start about everything he has said in their therapy sessions.

The Joker's goal was to escape the asylum, and he used Miranda to do it. Miranda was so eager to learn from the Joker, she unwittingly brought him the things he needed to escape. The Joker releases the inmates of Arkham to cover his exodus and flees to the roof. Miranda finds a package on her desk containing a pistol with a card signed by the Joker. She goes after him and he tells her of their final game. Miranda is given a choice to either shoot the Joker and risk that the murder could trigger her descent into madness, or let him go knowing that he will do terrible things to the people of Gotham.

Miranda fires the gun, revealing that it was a fake. The Joker, with his last little victory, leaves the asylum and disappears into the city.

In the sections that follow, I will give a brief overview of Batman's history in publication, as well as an explanation as to how the character has changed over the decades based on changes to the comic book as a medium. I will also examine Batman in media outside of comic books, including film, television, and animation and examine the dominant themes and storytelling mechanics in each.

I explain how previous live action Batman films have chosen to depict the character and the themes of the narrative, as well as how my study and screenplay will differ.

After that, I will explore Batman as a character and as a symbol to understand what drives him and how he has changed the fictional city of Gotham as a result of his crusade against crime. I will also examine the Joker, Batman's archenemy and antithesis. Of all of Batman's villains, the Joker best represents both a counterpoint to the themes of Batman as a character, as well as the most extreme and interesting manifestation of insanity in the fictional world of Gotham City.

I will then provide a narrative analysis of what I believe to be the most interesting and influential themes present in the writing of Batman, specifically insanity, family, and the perception of women in Batman comics. I chose these three themes, because they stood out in the narrative as being the most interesting to me as a reader, and they were substantive enough to allow me to properly extrapolate them. I will also explain how I plan to use these themes to construct a story that encompasses Batman's rich history and narrative motifs.

The end result of this project will be a screenplay that incorporates these narrative elements while staying true to the style and writing of Batman comics, but presents a more character driven approach to writing a screenplay based on the character.

## Chapter 2: History of Batman in Publication

In this section, I will describe the history of Batman in the comic books. I will also explain how comic books as a medium have changed since Batman's creation, what influenced those changes, and how they affected Batman. Finally, I will explain what elements of Batman's storytelling and narrative structure I plan to incorporate into my own project.

Batman first debuted in *Detective Comics* #27 in 1939. Comic artist Bob Kane, drawing inspiration from Zorro, wanted to create a noticeably darker hero than had been seen before. The end result was a more brooding character who wore black instead of the traditional bright colors of superheroes in the era.<sup>i</sup> His original design was vastly different from the Batman we know today. The first drawings showed a bald man in sunglasses wearing a green body suit adorned with a large pair of bat wings on his back. When the man who would be his long time writing partner, Bill Finger, joined Kane the first contribution Finger made was a massive redesign. Finger redrew the character and created Batman's iconic look. The pointy eared cowl and cape, the bat emblem on the chest, and the spikes located along the gloves have been prominently featured on every subsequent redesign of the character.<sup>ii</sup>

Batman began life as a noir-themed crime fighter in the fictional city of Gotham, but the sudden popularity of the character led Finger and Kane to pen an

origin story for Batman's alter ego, Bruce Wayne, and although the nature of Batman's saga has changed over the years, the basic details are the same. As a young boy, Bruce Wayne witnessed the murder of both his exceedingly wealthy parents, Thomas and Martha Wayne, at the hands of a mugger named Joe Chill. Bruce grew up detached and withdrawn, but harboring his secret hatred of crime. While contemplating what could be done to rid the streets of Gotham of the disease that was lawlessness, a bat flew into his sitting room. He decided to use the bat as his symbol while waging a war on crime.<sup>iii</sup>

This is a very basic narrative used for the character well into the 1980's. It wasn't until Frank Miller's *Batman: Year One* that Bruce Wayne's genesis as a superhero was explored in greater psychological detail. Fear became the chief motivation of Gotham City. The criminals were operating with impunity, since the police were paid off and the system was riddled with corruption. Bruce decided to create a man who existed outside the system and the law, one who couldn't be bargained with or destroyed, one who would become a symbol of what awaited criminals if they didn't change their ways. His initial battles were with both the Mafioso themed bosses who ran Gotham City's criminal underworld, as well as an army of corrupt cops who didn't wish to see a change in the status quo. He eventually crossed paths with one of the last few honest cops in Gotham, James Gordon, who would eventually become police commissioner and Batman's greatest ally.

The update to Batman's origin story reflects how much America has changed since Batman's creation during World War II. During the golden age of

comics, heroes in comic books were meant to be inspirational and arouse hope. Batman was never challenged morally during this era, despite his killing of criminals. This is because America during the war strived to be a unified people. We had to support our heroes on the fronts of Europe and the Pacific, even as they killed their fellow man. Comic book heroes, Batman included, presented a world where good and evil were simple and our heroes fought, killed and died for the right reasons.<sup>iv</sup>

As the Cold War began to wane in the 1980's, we were no longer a unified people against a common enemy, continuing the youth disillusionment with authority that began in the 1960's. Furthermore, Reagan era politics began to divide the country in terms of economic disparity. Batman's new origins put him in a very different Gotham, where good and evil were not as simple to grasp. Corrupt politicians and police officers were a common threat for Batman in this era, reflecting a distrust of authority. Since we were no longer a unified people as we were during WWII, Batman now had to clarify which people he was fighting for. While the corruption of Gotham protected the wealthy elite, Batman fought for the people on the streets, the poor who had been left behind in this new era.<sup>v</sup>

Following his new origin, Batman became so effective that he decimated the organized crime in the city. What he hadn't anticipated, though, was that something else would rush to fill the void he created. A new breed of criminal was born, and it was one that didn't scare so easily. As the old model of organized crime become unsustainable for the criminals in Gotham, new criminals took their cues directly from Batman himself and embraced his theatricality and symbolism

as their own. As such, mob bosses with names like Rupert Thorne, Sal Maroni and Carmine “the Roman” Falcone were replaced by the likes of the Penguin, Poison Ivy and the Scarecrow. The Scarecrow, for example, wasn’t simply using a distinctive costume and a fear-inducing gas for the sole purpose of committing crimes; he was trying to pass himself off as the embodiment of fear itself. So, as Batman became a symbol of vengeance and justice in Gotham City, his enemies were inspired to also become symbols for their own twisted ends.<sup>vi</sup>

To understand the evolution of Batman as a character, we need to also examine how comic books as a medium changed since Batman’s creation. Comic books are thought of in terms of distinct eras, each with a unique narrative style. First was the golden age, an era defined by establishing the superhero genre in the 1930’s and 40’s, to the silver age, an era in the 1950’s and 60’s in which comic books became less violent and focused on fun and adventure, to the post-crisis or the modern age, starting in the 1980’s up to the present, in which comic books are more socially conscious and tell more complex stories.<sup>vii 1</sup>

The golden age of DC Comics is what was prevalent from the early twentieth century at the dawn of comic books as a medium up until about the late 40’s and early 50’s. The golden age had established many themes of popular culture at the time. Noir style characters, art deco aesthetics and antiheroes fighting for the downtrodden were common in the golden age, as they were occurring alongside the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>viii</sup> It was in this era

<sup>1</sup> There was a transitional era in the 1970’s known as the bronze age in which comic books started to become more socially aware. For example, drugs and race were addressed in the medium for the first time. This era is not elaborated on, since Batman retained his silver age characteristics until the 1980’s.

that the superhero genre was established with the publication of characters like Batman, Superman and Captain America.<sup>ix</sup>

Through my narrative analysis, I believe that the early Batman comics in this period can also be read as a critique of the values of the narrative movement known as modernism. More specifically, it challenged modernism's positive outlook towards urbanization. Modernism teaches us, simply, that new is better and cities are a testament to a progressive society. It was a movement born of the technological and industrial changes that were radically altering society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>x</sup> Skyscrapers, for example, are essentially a celebration of mankind's accomplishment, as our new technologies and academics allowed us to build our cities upwards into the bright sky. Gotham City, however, was dark, depraved, corrupt and constantly on the brink of falling into despair. The city features massive towers built atop one another creating an urban decay shrouded in darkness. To me, this is a statement about the dark side of rapid urbanization and industrialization, as it creates streets and alleys symbolically lost in shadows and where crime and corruption are allowed to flourish.

If Batman himself represents societal outrage at the notion of injustice-- which will be addressed further in this proposal--then Gotham City represents a failed society that created a figure like Batman in the first place.

The characters of *Batman* in his golden age debut were very dark, matching the setting. Although recent Batman stories have cemented the notion that Batman would never take a life, golden age Batman did so rather routinely. Dropping a hood off a building or failing to save a criminal in a dire situation was

par for the course for the detective antihero. This was, as stated above, a reflection of the struggles America was facing during World War II. As our heroes were fighting the Axis powers, America struggled to remain unified and in support of the troops. In this sense, Batman and other comic book heroes were a reflection of America's soldiers. To question why Batman was allowed to kill was to question the morality of killing in general. During a world war where thousands were dying, Americans were not interested in wondering if they were dying in vain. Therefore, Batman was allowed to kill in his golden age comics, because America needed unity and not hard questions about murder and violence.<sup>xi</sup>

The crimes in these stories were usually violent and Batman scoured the alleys of Gotham City to find the culprits. He relied heavily on his detective skills to track down his rogue's gallery, which was a necessity, as he had no super powers to speak of. This affirmed the notion that Batman's greatest attribute was his strategic mind and sharp investigation skills, earning him the nickname, "the world's greatest detective."<sup>xii</sup>

In the 50's, the increasing level of violence in comic books, such as the Batman series and EC Comic's horror anthologies, caused parent and watchdog groups to start cracking down on comic books, insisting that they clean up their act.<sup>xiii</sup> This coincided with the growing concern in the 50's and 60's over media content, and the events of McCarthyism, in which the media were under immense pressure to produce material that was pro-America and anti-communist.<sup>xiv</sup>

When scrutiny fell to comic books, publishers established what was called the Comics Code Authority, which, like the Motion Picture Association of

America or the Electronic Software Ratings Board, was a voluntary content ratings board created to head off congressional legislation and put parents' fears to rest. The Comics Code Authority would review every major comic being published and issue a stamp if they deemed it safe for all ages.<sup>xv</sup>

The Comics Code Authority changed comic books to such a degree that it became known as the silver age, recognizable by its child-friendly look into this world. Heroes are all upstanding citizens and beacons of moral absolutism. They are simple and good. Villains never do anything too terrible either, falling to the level of Saturday morning cartoon baddies. In summation, the silver age writers exclusively wrote stories and characters to be safe for all ages.<sup>xvi</sup>

During the silver age, Batman was anything but dark. He became saturated in the now family-friendly world of comic books. He was pleasant, worked well with others, and was an all around stand up guy. The best example of this era is the Batman television series that aired in the sixties on CBS, which featured a Batman who espoused the virtues of clean living and civic responsibility.<sup>xvii</sup>

By the 1970's, following the success of silver age publications, comic publishers had a problem. Their audience was growing up and was no longer interested in the fanciful adventures prevalent throughout the silver age. Furthermore, young people were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the values of the silver age and the country in general. With events such as Watergate, the Vietnam War, and growing unrest over civil rights, readers no longer looked for escapism in the adventures of silver age heroes.<sup>xviii</sup> As such, writers began to include more social commentary in comic books. Formerly taboo subjects like the

war in Vietnam, civil rights and drug use were becoming commonplace in comic books. A famous example was an issue of the Green Arrow in which the hero found out his partner had been using heroin.<sup>xix</sup>

By the 1980's, DC comics began to write their stories to appeal to a more adult audience to expand their reader base and starting what is known as the Post-Crisis DC Universe, also referred to as the modern age. Post-crisis refers to a storyline done in the Justice League comics called, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. This storyline was a noticeably darker one than had been seen in the silver age, and gave license to writers to start taking their characters back into dark places.

Writers such as Alan Moore, Alex Ross, Jeph Loeb and Frank Miller brought the medium into a more cerebral realm. Suddenly, it became more important to explain why the characters act as they do. The personalities of the characters were brought to the forefront, showing the audience that heroes can be, and often are, flawed. Morality became a looser concept for both heroes and villains.<sup>xx</sup> This trend emerged largely from the culture of Reagan-era America. In the final decade of the Cold War and with the wealth divide in the country expanding, the sense of community and common good present in both the silver age and American society in the 50's and 60's was eroding. With America's morality becoming more ambiguous, comic books followed suit and challenged the concept that good and evil were simple.<sup>xxi</sup>

Post modernism, specifically the movement's focus on identity,<sup>xxii</sup> was heavily influential in the modern age as well. Characters who had typically been straightforward, such as Superman or Wonder Woman, became much more

human. Riddled with doubts, contemplating their place in the world and so forth, writer's explored newfound depths made available in the modern age and its more adult tone of story telling.<sup>xxiii</sup>

In the modern age, Batman became one of the darkest good guys around. Bruce Wayne became deeply flawed, even going as far as to embrace psychopathic tendencies. An example would be in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* when Batman's tactics include paralyzing a man by breaking his back and whipping throwing knives into a man's arm. Bruce seems to have a hatred of criminals that supersedes his quest to make the world better. His goal seems to be to make criminals so terrified of his wrath that no sane person would dare commit a crime in Gotham. DC story editor Geoff Johns asserts that Batman, seeing an act of extreme cruelty as a child, has become convinced that the entire world is just as cruel as the alley in which he watched his parents die. Consequently, Batman has become a character who seeks retribution more than redemption.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Batman's return to darker themes was ushered in by Frank Miller, the writer of the graphic novels *Sin City* and *300*. He wrote and drew a graphic novel published in 1986 called *The Dark Knight Returns* that featured the darkest and most tortured Batman to date and resettled the character as the dark, brooding, antihero he is best known for being today.<sup>xxv</sup>

*The Dark Knight Returns* went far beyond just taking the character back to his dark origins, making him a borderline sociopath with delusions of grandeur and a dissociative personality. Batman's motivations are never extrapolated in

detail, but it could be read a number of different ways. He could be seeking redemption, perhaps a last hurrah, or maybe he feels responsible for Gotham's recent descent into chaos, or maybe he's just gone senile. I believe Miller left the narrative open ended as a device for Batman, and also the reader, to think on the history of the character and how the fun and adventure of the silver age led to such a dark place in the modern age.

This ambiguity about his true intentions would become a staple of the character throughout the post-crisis age. Bruce Wayne was now a deeply flawed and conflicted man, lacking the purpose and vision of his fellow super heroes.

By examining the history of Batman and what forces caused the character to change since his creation, I was able to determine what sort of setting and narrative tone I wished to use for my screenplay. Since it is the modern age that places greater emphasis on character motivation, my screenplay was written to adhere to the themes and concepts of this era. As such, morality is an ambiguous concept in the setting of *House of Cards*. Characters will not fall under the simple labels of good and evil, and it is their actions that must be analyzed to understand their morality or personal philosophies. The specific themes of the modern age that I hope to explore with my screenplay will be discussed further in this proposal.

### Chapter 3: Batman in Modern Film

In this section, I will examine the six live action films made about Batman since 1989 and explore the storytelling mechanics and predominant themes of each individually. I will also explain how I plan to incorporate these storytelling mechanics and themes into my screenplay.

Since 1989, six original live action films have been made about Batman, with a seventh currently in development. The first four of these are thought to exist in the same continuity, although references and story elements from one to another are slim at best. The most recent two films disregarded the original continuity and started a new storyline.<sup>2</sup>

The first of these films was released in 1989, directed by Tim Burton. Following the initial success of the *Superman* films, Warner Bros. and DC spent much of the 80's trying to get a similar Batman project off the ground. Burton wanted to move the character away from the campy nature of the television series and back into the darker realms of golden age comics.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The cast featured Jack Nicholson as the Joker, Michael Keaton as Bruce Wayne/Batman, and Kim Basinger as photojournalist Vicki Vale. The supporting cast included Alfred Gough as Wayne's loyal butler Alfred, Billy Dee Williams

<sup>2</sup>This section details the six live-action Batman films released between 1989 and 2008. The seventh film, *The Dark Knight Rises*, had not been theatrically released during the writing of this proposal, and is not used or referenced in any way. Had this project begun later, the film would have certainly been included.

as Gotham District Attorney Harvey Dent, and Pat Hingle as Commissioner Gordon.

The film follows Batman's first appearance in Gotham, as criminals have begun whispering about 'the bat' that is supposedly hunting them down. The rumors of the Batman bring photojournalist Vicki Vale to Gotham in order to catch a photo of the elusive figure. Meanwhile, a crime underboss named Jack Napier encounters the Batman in a chemical plant and ends up falling into a vat of acid, disfiguring him into the Joker. The Joker takes over organized crime in Gotham and begins poisoning the city's cosmetics as part of a twisted and sadistic practical joke. As Vicki Vale begins a relationship with Gotham socialite Bruce Wayne, she also catches the Joker's eye, and he begins to woo her in his own sick way, including poisoning an entire restaurant with nerve gas in order to get some alone time with her. As the conflict between Batman and the Joker escalates, the Joker calls Batman to face him on Gotham's centennial, where he uses parade balloons filled with toxic gas to poison the citizens of Gotham. Batman manages to dispose of the Joker's balloons and defeats the clown, sending him falling to his death from atop a bell tower.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The film opened to huge financial success, remaining the highest grossing DC comic adaptation until the release of 2008's *The Dark Knight*.<sup>xxviii</sup> The film decimated the preconception that people had of Batman as a campy figure as propagated by the 60's television series and brought him back into the darker narrative tones of his golden age comic origins. Furthermore, the film is directly responsible for kick starting the Batman marketing bonanza, as toys, cartoons, and

other licensed paraphernalia became hugely profitable again for the Dark Knight.<sup>xxix</sup>

While the film was a financial success, critical reviews and reactions from comic book fans were somewhat mixed. The reviews were generally, but not overwhelmingly, positive. Fans thought that many of the changes made to the story, such as the Joker murdering Bruce's parents, were disrespectful to the mythology.<sup>xxx</sup>

The main theme of the film appears to reflect the nature of violence as a tool. Bruce Wayne chose violence as his weapon to use against the criminals he blamed for his parents' deaths. As such, his attacks on street criminals or the Joker's men have a sense of brutality to them. Conversely, the Joker uses a more subtle form of violence in poisoning the citizens of Gotham as a particularly twisted practical joke of sorts. His crime has no logical end, as he doesn't list any demands or conditions under which he would stop the poisoning. He states in the film that he considers himself, "the world's first homicidal artist." This implies that violence is a form of expression, a medium through which he explores his own darkness.

In terms of writing my own screenplay, both Batman and the Joker are similar to these depictions. The Joker, as portrayed by Jack Nicholson, hones in on the manic tendencies and sadistic sense of humor that defines the character in the comic books. I chose to keep my version of the character close to this version in terms of his mannerisms and behavior, as I believe this was a very well realized interpretation of the Joker with respect to his depiction in the golden age comics.

And even though Batman is a minor character in my screenplay, the cold and foreboding demeanor is similar to how I want Batman depicted in my work. The key difference, however, is that Batman will almost always be seen with another character, allowing their reactions to him to foster how the audience sees him as well. This is because my screenplay is not about Batman or Bruce Wayne as a character or a protagonist. My goal is to examine Batman from the outside and how his existence affects the city and the people of Gotham.

I felt that the atmosphere of the film was important to focus on. The film is incredibly reminiscent of the golden age in both its art direction and story telling. Gotham City arguably has never looked closer to the comic book version than in Burton's film. The clustered art deco towers and stone gargoyles almost perfectly resemble the anti-modernist appearance of early Gotham. Gotham City feels like a dangerous city, where walking alone at night invites trouble. Crime isn't just taking place during armed robberies of banks or stores, it is happening everywhere. Every alley or dark street could be hiding a criminal in waiting. This is the atmosphere a city would need, in my opinion, to have a hero like Batman. It is also how I chose to depict Gotham City in my scene descriptions.

I feel it is important for the audience to see Gotham as a very dangerous and dark city. The audience must believe that Gotham City is almost malevolent, and that it is the only city that could create both Batman and the Joker. Since one of the major themes I wish to explore with my screenplay is how insanity manifests in Gotham City, I want the city to reflect a sense of constant fear and anger. Gotham needs to be a place where we believe that those described as

insane, such as the Joker, would seem at home. The point of this is to demonstrate that people transform to survive in their environment, so Gotham City must be seen in such a way to justify how it has created Batman and the Joker. I believe Burton's version of the city has done this, so I used it for the inspiration for my version of the city.

Burton clearly perceives his version of Batman as one who exists in the golden age, and continues this style into his sequel, *Batman Returns*. Keaton returned as Batman, and was joined by Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman, and Danny Devito as the monstrous Penguin. Christopher Walken also joined the cast as a corrupt department store mogul named Max Schreck. Alfred Gough and Pat Hingle also returned as Alfred and Commissioner Gordon respectively.

*Batman Returns* was noticeably darker than the film that preceded it. The movie opens with the Penguin's elitist parents dropping the deformed child into a sewer, where he grows up under the Gotham Zoo. The Penguin launches a plan to con the people of Gotham into accepting him as an upstanding citizen; a place he feels is his birthright. Little do they know he is a savage, vicious killer beneath the top hat and parasol.

Meanwhile, disgruntled secretary Selina Kyle has a mental snap after her boss, Max Schreck, attempts to kill her by pushing her out of a window. She becomes the seductive Catwoman and indulges her own dark side by robbing Schreck's stores of jewelry and viciously attacking a mugger. Catwoman is instantly intrigued when she encounters Batman for the first time, a feeling that is not reciprocated by the Dark Knight. Bruce Wayne, meanwhile, has struck up a

relationship with Selina Kyle, having become fascinated by her apparent dark side. The Penguin and Catwoman team up to frame Batman for murder, reducing him to a criminal in the eyes of the public. Batman manages to discredit the Penguin and expose him as a monster. After a confrontation in the old zoo, the Penguin falls dead in the frigid water. Catwoman arrives at the zoo in order to kill Schreck, whom the Penguin had taken hostage. Batman, having discovered her true identity, removes his mask, pleading with her to walk away and put her revenge behind her. She refuses and causes the building's generator to explode, seemingly killing both her and Schreck.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The film had a much greater level of depth than its predecessor, especially in terms of its characters. Batman, Catwoman and the Penguin are all essentially dealing with the same questions of identity and duality. *Batman Returns* explores the dichotic nature of super heroes in a way few other comic adaptations have. The idea of masks being used to hide one's true nature is a common theme in the film. Disguises, both as public personas and literal masks, are central to the story and character development, and manages to ask engaging questions about where Batman ends and Bruce Wayne begins.

This duality provided an interesting place from which to start my screenplay. Throughout the writing process, I was focused on the idea that a person can be one thing on the surface, but something else entirely different underneath. Conflict ensues from where these two personas begin to clash. As will be discussed further in my proposal, duality and a hidden self is a major theme for both my protagonist and antagonist.

While *Batman Returns* was a financial success, its dark tone was troublesome for the studio, as Warner Bros. intended for the franchise to have promotional tie ins and toy lines. The darker stories and sexual overtones of the film made this difficult. McDonald's even cancelled a planned promotion after deciding that the film was too adult.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The decision was made to clean up the movies and make them friendlier to children. Burton began production on a third film, but ultimately opted out of directing, staying on the film as a producer, as he did not want to make a more lighthearted film.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Veteran director Joel Schumacher was hired to replace Burton and he made a number of stylistic changes to the films. He moved the look of Gotham away from art deco surrealism and into a more colorful realm. The new Gotham was adorned with neon lights and towering statues that littered the city. Gangs wore face paint and everything was much more vivid. The visual change to the film was intended to soften the films and make them more appealing to a youthful audience, while still looking like a comic book city brought to life.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Keaton declined to reprise his role as Batman, so the role went to Val Kilmer. It was decided that Robin, Batman's iconic partner, should join the franchise, and Chris O'Donnell was cast as Batman's partner. Jim Carrey was incredibly popular at the time, so he was cast as Edward Nigma, aka the Riddler. Tommy Lee Jones became the villain, Twoface, and Nicole Kidman rounded out the cast as Dr. Chase Meridian, a criminal psychologist.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The film follows Batman's fight against former district attorney turned super villain Twoface. Then, a begrudged engineer at Wayne Enterprises named Edward Nigma creates a device that can sap the intelligence out of the people of Gotham. Nigma becomes the Riddler and allies with Twoface to find the true identity of Batman. Meanwhile, Bruce Wayne is struggling between his two identities. This conflict becomes worse when he takes in an orphaned acrobat named Dick Grayson after Twoface killed his parents. Dick discovers the truth about his benefactor and becomes the dark knight's partner, Robin.

The Riddler abducts both Robin and Bruce's girlfriend, Dr. Chase Meridian and holds each over a chasm. The riddle is to see, when given only enough time to save one, who will he choose: Batman's partner or Bruce Wayne's girlfriend. Batman, however, manages to save both. As the Riddler is confounded by this, Batman declares to the villain that he had to save both, as Bruce Wayne and Batman aren't two halves of the same coin, they are one united man.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Reactions to Schumacher's version of the Dark Knight were mixed, but *Batman Forever* was the highest grossing film of 1995.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Some found the lighter tone and brighter set pieces more accessible, especially to younger viewers, while others thought Batman was a character who could only be done properly with a heavier tone.

The film placed a greater emphasis on the psychology of Bruce Wayne and his decision to become Batman. The previous films were content with the miniscule explanation of his parents being murdered, but *Batman Forever* explored this decision more heavily.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The concept of identity is the main theme of the film. When the Riddler asks the question, “Who is Batman?” the question has a deeper implication than just his real name. Batman himself is struggling with that very question throughout the film. Bruce Wayne is wavering in his interest and decides at one point to retire as the Dark Knight and pursue a normal life. His return to the Batman persona reflects an idea in Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, that Batman is his true soul and Bruce Wayne is just a mask. In the film, however, Batman rectifies his two personas, realizing he was always only a single man who is both Bruce Wayne and Batman. This contrasts with the theme of duality in *Batman Returns*. *Batman Forever* seems to state that we don’t have a choice in who we are.

In my opinion, the film missed an opportunity to explore Bruce Wayne as a character through Robin. The characters’ histories are similar enough that Bruce Wayne reexamining his decision to be Batman could have been presented through his decision to train Dick Grayson as Robin. In my screenplay, I feature Dick Grayson as a prominent character and much of his personality is built on having been Batman’s partner for a number of years. Their relationship will be a complicated one, discussed further later in this proposal.

One notable change from Burton’s version of the character to Schumacher’s is how Bruce Wayne is depicted. Burton’s version of the character is shadowy, private and a little awkward in social settings. This plays to the idea of Wayne as a broken man who has withdrawn from society following his parents’ murders. Schumacher, on the other hand, portrays him as socially well

adjusted. Wayne is a confident, charming socialite who winks at reporters and has a beautiful woman on his arm. This is in line with Schumacher's less conflicted view of the character. Batman is more morally upstanding in Schumacher's films, consistent with the character in the silver age of comics. Burton, however, sees the character as an outcast, as evidenced by his lonely and secluded lifestyle.

My version of Bruce Wayne (that is to say Wayne when he is not Batman) appears in one scene, and is sort of a composite of these two differing approaches. On one hand, Wayne is a famous socialite known for his charm and wit. He also appears heavily intoxicated and makes a fool of himself. The truth, however, is that his inebriation is an act he uses to make people think he is a playboy, lest they wonder what the secretive billionaire does in his free time.

Production began almost immediately for the next film in the series, titled *Batman and Robin*. Val Kilmer declined to return as Batman, citing that he didn't enjoy the process of making the film.<sup>xxxix</sup> George Clooney ultimately replaced him. Arnold Schwarzenegger was brought in to play the film's main villain, Mr. Freeze. Uma Thurman was cast as the film's other villain, the botanical temptress, Poison Ivy. Chris O'Donnell returned as Robin, and was joined by the addition of Alicia Silverstone as the Dark Knight's next partner, Batgirl.

The film follows the schemes of Mr. Freeze, a scientist and Olympic decathlete trying to find a cure for his sick wife, who is cryogenically frozen while he searches. An accident causes Freeze's body temperature to drop radically, forcing him into a refrigerated suit to survive. Meanwhile, a botanist in South America named Pamela Isley discovers that her research is being used to

create super soldiers, including a prototype named Bane. An attempt to kill Isley fuses her with plant matter, and she becomes the seductive Poison Ivy.

Batman and Robin are having troubles of their own, as Bruce's strict tutelage and Dick's desire to move out of his mentor's shadow creates a rift between them. Poison Ivy, with her pheromones, fosters the rivalry as the two each start vying for her affections. Ivy and Freeze then decide to join forces and plan to freeze Gotham City with a giant ice gun, allowing Freeze his frozen paradise and Ivy a city returned to nature. Their problems get worse when Alfred, Wayne's loyal butler, falls sick. His niece, Barbara, comes to visit him and she eventually figures out Dick and Bruce's secret. Bruce and Dick decide to trust each other and unite to stop Ivy and Freeze. Barbara too, upon learning their secret, equips herself with Batman's tools and rushes to their aid. The three fighting together manage to destroy Freeze's ice cannon and defeat the villains.<sup>xl</sup>

Despite a solid opening weekend, word-of-mouth caused a massive drop in the film's second week, making *Batman and Robin* the lowest grossing Batman film to date.<sup>xli</sup> Critics hated the film, as evidenced by low aggregate scores, and audiences tended to agree. The common complaint was that it was so campy that it could be compared to the *Batman* television series, which is what the previous movies were trying desperately to avoid.<sup>xlii</sup>

Trust was the main theme of the film, as Batman and Robin were failing as a team due to their lack of trust in the other. Robin was becoming tired of just being Batman's sidekick, and the pheromones of Poison Ivy turned them into romantic rivals as well. Conversely, Mr. Freeze and Poison Ivy worked well

together, even though, unbeknownst to Freeze, Poison Ivy tried to murder Freeze's wife to focus him on revenge. Batman and Robin were only able to succeed in the film when they decided to trust each other and work against Poison Ivy. Batman even manages to reason with Freeze at the end and get him to surrender.

This ending implies that enemies need only understand each other in order to stop their fighting. This could be a parallel to the end of the Cold War, but it also speaks volumes about the state of America prior to 9/11. In this world, enemies can peacefully resolve their differences. The next two Batman films would show a much darker, more unreasonable type of enemy similar to terrorists.

Trust as it is depicted in the relationship between Batman and Robin is an element that I am including in my screenplay. Their relationship is a complicated and fascinating one, and in this oft-derided film, I think it is the strongest element. It encouraged me to better understand the intricacies of their partnership and examine who these men are as a result of knowing each other.

What I discovered was a theme of broken families and abandonment. This will be explained in greater detail later in my proposal, but I was inspired to include Dick Grayson as a character in my screenplay because of how he represents this theme. In my screenplay, Grayson is very bitter at his former mentor, but still rushes to his aid when called. My goal was to hint at the complexity of their relationship, as Dick has a hard time understanding his feelings towards the man who took him in and trained him to be a warrior.

The film also had a brief subplot involving the idea of female empowerment. This movie did feature only the second female villain in the series, and was the first to introduce a female hero in Batgirl. Schumacher stated in the director's commentary for the film that he was under immense pressure from the studio to incorporate as many characters, costumes and vehicles as he could into the film for the purposes of selling toys and memorabilia. As such, Barbara was primarily added for marketing purposes. Beyond toys and products, Barbara also was intended to appeal to more female viewers.<sup>xliii</sup> While Barbara's character could have easily descended into simple tokenism, Schumacher's portrayal of the character remains generally positive.

For example, the climax of the film has the two women facing off in combat, while Batgirl derides Ivy for using sex and good looks to further her own agenda. Batman even jokingly comments on the political correctness of the name Batgirl, wryly suggesting Batwoman or Bat-Person instead. Another scene of note is a moment when Robin and Batgirl are falling from a building together. Robin tries to save Batgirl, stating "I've got you," but Batgirl beats him to it, grabbing him and firing a cable to pull them to safety, then remarking, "No, I've got you." From this, it seems Schumacher wanted to give more substantial roles to women in his films. Specifically, a female character who was more than a damsel in distress at the film's climax. This is in line with her character in the comics, as Barbara is considered one of the stronger female characters in comic book history. Her character and history in the comic books will be discussed further at length in section 8 of this proposal.

Barbara's inclusion in the story and the prominence of her character suggest a rebuttal of the idea of superheroes needing to be men common in both comic books and action movies in general. If Barbara's inclusion was simply tokenism, then she wouldn't be rescuing Robin or holding her own in combat as well as she did. Schumacher's intention seemed to be to show a female superhero alongside the men who, despite comments made about her gender, has earned her place on the team. This parallels the changes being made to how women were being depicted in DC comic book lines in general, as female characters were given more substantive roles, and were being used less as convenient damsels in distress for male heroes to rescue.<sup>xliv</sup> Therefore, I believe Barbara's inclusion and depiction in *Batman and Robin* reflects female characters advancing culturally in their depiction in comic books while also acknowledging where they were coming from.

Batman stories have done very well in creating strong female characters, and that inspired me to make my protagonist a female who was in control of the events in her life. While Lois Lane was waiting for Superman to save her yet again, Batgirl and her contemporaries were fighting super villains alongside the Caped Crusader. From this, I was inspired to write a female lead that was complex, interesting, and also deeply flawed, like most main characters in the world of Batman. I'm writing Miranda Greene to be a character hiding her true intentions from the world. Her success in the field of psychiatry demonstrates her to be intelligent and ambitious, but her success is also a mask for her obsession with the nature of insanity. After her father's mental break, Miranda is terrified

that she her sanity will inevitably shatter too. Her success as a psychiatrist is really her attempt to take control of something that may be beyond her control.

After the poor performance of *Batman and Robin*, Warner Bros. decided to reboot the franchise from the beginning and take it back to darker storytelling. Initially, they hired Darren Aronofsky, director of *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*, to direct the reboot. Aronofsky collaborated with *Batman: Year One* writer Frank Miller on the project, but ultimately decided not to direct the reboot in favor of working on another film, *The Fountain*.<sup>xlv</sup> Warner Bros. then hired an up and coming director named Christopher Nolan to helm the production. Nolan was receiving a lot of well-deserved hype for his films *Insomnia* and *Memento*, and it was thought he could put intelligence back into Batman films.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Warner Bros. released *Batman Begins* in 2005. Christian Bale took over the lead role as Bruce Wayne, and led a noteworthy cast. Katie Holmes played Rachel Dawes, a childhood friend of Wayne's. Michael Caine assumed the role of Alfred, Morgan Freeman was cast as a Wayne Enterprises engineer named Lucius Fox, and Liam Neeson was the film's villain, Ra's Al Ghul. Finally, Scottish actor Cillian Murphy was brought in to portray the Scarecrow.

The film opens with a distraught Bruce Wayne touring the world in an effort to understand crime. He gains the attention of a secret society known as the League of Shadows and its mysterious leader, Ra's Al Ghul. After Bruce receives tutelage in combat, stealth tactics, and the methodology of crime, he learns the league plans to destroy Gotham. He rebels, seemingly killing Al Ghul in the process.

When Bruce returns home, he concocts a plan to rid Gotham of its corruption and crime by creating a man who exists outside of the law. Using prototype weapons from Wayne Enterprises, Bruce creates the Batman and goes to work attacking the city's mob bosses. He soon uncovers a larger plot to decimate the city using a fear toxin that will send the city into massive rioting. Arkham Asylum's Dr. Jonathon Crane created the gas, and he is revealed to have been working with Ra's Al Ghul from the start. Bruce manages to save the city, with help from a police officer named James Gordon. The film ends with Gordon wanting Batman's help to face a new threat: a criminal who always leaves a joker card at the scenes of his crimes.<sup>xlvi</sup>

The goal of reestablishing the franchise was met and then some. In his review of the film, Roger Ebert, film critic and confessed Batman fan, stated that it was the first Batman film that got it absolutely right.<sup>xlvii</sup> Critics and audiences appreciated the more intelligent look at Batman, as well as a more grounded and realistic take on the character.

Realism seemed to be the most important aspect of the film, as Nolan's Gotham felt like a real American city instead of a stylized comic one. Furthermore, Batman's equipment and abilities are also kept somewhat grounded. The Batmobile, for example, is not a twenty-foot long, jet powered tank, but a repurposed armored vehicle originally built for the army.

*Batman Begins* also placed a greater emphasis on Wayne's motives for becoming Batman in the first place. Great care was taken to explain the circumstances of Gotham as a failed society, as well as Bruce Wayne identifying

a way in which he could affect real change. The film also explains why the bat became Wayne's symbol, something the other films curiously glossed over. As a child, Wayne was terrified of bats. When he decided to take his fight to the criminals of Gotham, he modeled himself after a bat, hoping to make them afraid in the same way he was as a child. This ties strongly to Batman's golden age origin story, where Wayne famously remarks that, "Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot."<sup>xlix</sup>

By explaining to the audience why Bruce Wayne chose to become Batman in terms of the state of Gotham City and its corruption, the film did a remarkable job at justifying the existence of a vigilante crime fighter dressed like a bat.

The film was also the most character driven, as Batman didn't appear onscreen until about halfway through the movie. The film took its time to introduce Bruce Wayne, and gave significant screen time and presence to secondary characters, such as Wayne's butler Alfred Pennyworth, Jim Gordon and Wayne Enterprises engineer Lucius Fox. This added to the film a sense of how big a project Wayne was taking on in reforming Gotham. He couldn't just be a man who was good at fighting; he needed a lot of help. Batman was not one man's project in this film, but many people doing their part for a common goal.

It should be noted that this was the first Batman film produced since 9/11. The realism of the story and characters, as well as the literal use of fear as a weapon, indicate that Nolan's version of Gotham is a reflection of American society during the early years of the war on terror. The climax of the film features a large section of the city under the influence of the Scarecrow's fear toxin and

attacking each other in their panic. The implication of this is that a society riddled with fear will tear itself apart attacking anything that is different. Fear can be defeated, however, by hope. As stated by Gordon at the end of the film, Batman has returned hope to Gotham as the criminals are running scared. The thematic parallels between Nolan's Batman and the war on terror continued in the film's sequel, *The Dark Knight*.

I also wanted to adhere to this style of writing for my project. In my screenplay, we focus on an element that has never been seen in a Batman film: what happens to his enemies when they get caught and locked up. By focusing on Arkham Asylum, the fictional prison that houses Batman's enemies, we see that just because he taken them off the streets doesn't mean they aren't still dangerous. Furthermore, I am also stressing in my project that Batman is not an island, but uses many people to complete his goals. Some knowingly work with him, others are manipulated.

*Batman Begins* had reestablished the series' reputation after the failure of *Batman and Robin*. After a hiatus for Nolan to work on another film project, he returned to Batman to helm the film's sequel, *The Dark Knight*. Most of the cast from *Batman Begins* reprised their roles in the sequel, with one exception. Katie Holmes was replaced by Maggie Gyllenhal for the role of Rachel Dawes. Although rumors were persistent, an official reason was never given. Heath Ledger was cast as the Joker and gave a performance that would garner huge critical acclaim, acclaim he would not hear due to his untimely death. Aaron

Eckhart was the film's other major addition, portraying Gotham's new district attorney and eventual bad guy, Harvey Dent.

As the film opens, Batman appears to be winning his war on crime. The mob bosses are backed into a corner, and in their desperation, they hire a man known as the Joker to get rid of the Batman once and for all. Bruce is paying close attention to Harvey Dent, the new district attorney. He believes that Dent's meteoric rise as Gotham's new white knight could be the key to taking back the city from its corruption once and for all.

The whole city is tested when the Joker begins his campaign of terror to draw out Batman. He begins murdering city officials to bring the city into a state of chaos. During an attempt on Dent's life, the DA is horribly burned on the left side of his face, and he adopts the moniker he was given when he worked in internal affairs: Harvey Twoface. The Joker escalates his plans, removing the old crime bosses from power and trying to make the city snap under the weight of his sadistic games. "This town deserves a better class of criminal, and I'm gonna give it to them," he declares. He begins forcing the citizenry to commit acts of violence, lest they face the Joker's retribution.

As the city is on the brink of descending into anarchy, Batman goes after the Joker, believing that the people are still good and will resist the Joker's twisted games. Batman manages to stop the clown and the people of Gotham prove that they won't be bullied by this new breed of criminal with their refusal to play the Joker's games. The Joker, however, announces his ace in the hole: Dent. He had gotten to Harvey and convinced him that chance was the only true justice.

Dent had kidnapped Gordon's family, blaming him for his predicament. Batman and Gordon confront Dent, blaming themselves for working outside of the law in order to help society. Dent flips a coin to decide whether to kill Gordon's son, but Batman tackles Dent and the two fall over the edge of the building, killing Dent. Batman decides he will take the wrap for Dent's crimes in order to preserve his legacy, lest the Joker prove he was right about the nature of morality in society. As Batman, now a fugitive, runs from the police, Gordon explains to his son that Batman is not a hero. "He's a silent guardian, a watchful protector... a dark knight."<sup>l</sup>

*The Dark Knight*, became the best reviewed and highest grossing Batman film to date, being one of only fifteen movies to ever gross more than one billion dollars world wide as of March 2013.<sup>li</sup> Positive reviews were near unanimous from critics, and the film dominated the cinemas in the summer of 2008. Critics and audiences apparently adored the movie's incredibly deep story, its gritty realism, and Ledger's performance as the clown prince of crime. Ledger died many months before the film opened, but so strong was his performance that it landed him a posthumous Academy Award. The film also has the honor of garnering the most Oscar nominations for a film based on a comic book.<sup>lii</sup>

Thematically, *The Dark Knight* continues to base Batman in a more real and grounded world like *Batman Begins* before it. The Joker abstains from laughing gas and repurposed gags in favor of guns, knives and bombs, and his face is simple face paint as opposed to have been bleached by acid as in his comic book origin.

The film's major themes, however, seem to be influenced heavily by America's controversial tactics in the war on terror. The Joker is consistently referred to as a terrorist throughout the film, and his acts of random violence cement that reputation. A pair of scenes discuss the morality of torture, as Batman drops a mob boss off of a building for information. He then chastises Harvey Dent for interrogating a man at gunpoint, claiming that if Dent were to be caught in the act, his reputation would be ruined. The implication is that torture, despite its effectiveness, tarnishes those who engage in it. Another subplot of the film involves Batman having built a device that can listen in on every cell phone in Gotham, even when not in use, thus abolishing any notion of privacy. This mirrors the real life controversy of the government tapping phones without warrants. The film's message on these issues is that extreme measures must occasionally be taken if the threat is grave enough, but morality must not be sacrificed to do so.

What makes these themes so effective is that the movie is taking place in a world of real consequences. This is not a dumb movie, to put it bluntly, where characters aren't held accountable for their actions. Morality and what defines a hero are discussed almost philosophically in the film, and that inspired me to do something similar in my screenplay. I chose to focus on characters and their personal philosophies in such a way that it can be seen throughout the screenplay as dictating their actions. By slowing down in my story so that we understand the characters and where they come from, their actions as the story progresses will

have more weight and meaning. This will be discussed further in the methodology section of my proposal.

The realism of Nolan's films is not an element that I choose to replicate. I see Batman as existing in a slightly less real world that allows for a certain suspension of disbelief. In summation, Batman in my screenplay drives a gigantic armored Batmobile, and I am not as concerned with explaining to the audience where he got it or where he takes it for a tune up. While it is difficult to say specifically, I see the level of realism as leaning slightly closer to the comics or Burton's films than Nolan's films or a wholly real world. This allows me to include characters or events that could not exist in Nolan's real universe, such as the villains Clayface and Mr. Freeze. The former is a shape-shifting mass of living clay, and the latter is a man whose body temperature needs to be kept below freezing to survive. Both characters make small appearances in my film, and both would be impossible to depict in a real world setting as they are.

Despite the fact that only a few of the films are canonically connected, they do have a number of things in common beyond subject matter. Each one was a big budget summer release. The films also feature large action sequences that move the story forward. Even Nolan's more realistic and insightful films still have car chases, sword fights and battles on speeding trains.

It is my belief that even though the Batman universe does allow for solid action movie adaptations, the universe is rich enough with character and atmosphere that a film does not need to feature action to be compelling. One of my main goals with my screenplay is to prove that a slightly different genre, a

psychological thriller, can draw from the same source material and create a different type of story. My screenplay does not have long or elaborate action sequences, and what few moments there are that seem action oriented are there to serve the plot. My goal is to keep the conflict and the tension based on characters, not car chases, and even though the modern Batman films are all considered action movies, they have provided me with some useful storytelling tools to help write my screenplay.

## Chapter 4: Batman in Other Media

In this section, I will examine the world of Batman as it has been interpreted in media outside of film. I will explain what made each adaptation unique and what elements I am using as I write my adaptation of the source material.<sup>3</sup>

Batman's most famous appearance outside of film and comic books is undoubtedly the 1966 television series, *Batman*. *Batman* starred Adam West as Bruce Wayne/Batman and Burt Ward as Dick Grayson/Robin and featured the Dynamic Duo's adventures as they went up against their many enemies. Several high profile actors of the day made appearances on the show as the rogue's gallery, including Burgess Meredith as the Penguin, Julie Newmar as Catwoman, and Vincent Price as the Egghead. Caesar Romero portrayed the Joker, but famously refused to shave his thick moustache, making it noticeably visible under his face paint.<sup>liii</sup>

Throughout the series, Batman was a more upstanding citizen than his golden age past. He constantly preached to anyone who would listen about the perils of drinking and the importance of being active members of your community. He even would take time out from crime fighting to perform his

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of my project, this section is focused solely on adaptations that influenced my screenplay. It is worth noting that there are many more adaptations beyond what is listed here, but recent cartoons like *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* and *Young Justice*, as well as film serials from the 1940's did not provide insight into the themes and trends that I am writing about.

signature dance, the “Bat-tusi.” Fight scenes were goofy and over the top, with large, animated word bubbles that read “Oof!” or “Wham!” popping up every time a punch connected.

The show was highly reminiscent of Batman’s silver age comic books, which also focused on campy adventures. Like the silver age comics, the television series was obviously aimed at children. This is a Batman without moral ambiguity protecting a Gotham from the crime of the week.

I used this series to represent Batman and Robin’s relationship as it was in a more innocent time. In this adaptation, Robin is eager to be Batman’s sidekick and they are unflinching as a team. Since I am using this version of Robin as a main character in my screenplay, I think of this series as how Robin used to think of himself and his adventures with Batman. There were no real consequences in this series, and my version of Dick Grayson used to feel the same way. To clarify, I’m not stating that this series is canonical with my script, nor is it meant to be an adequate representation of the past. I’m stating that my version of Dick Grayson used to believe that his life as Batman’s partner was full of adventure and fun, but as he grew up, he needed more from his relationship with Bruce Wayne than what he was getting.

In 1992, an animated series based on Batman was commissioned for the Fox network. Producer and Writer Bruce Timm and Paul Dini respectively took their cues from the Burton directed films. They sought to make a darker tale, but one that was still suitable for children.<sup>liv</sup> *Batman: The Animated Series*, debuted on Fox in 1992, and has received widespread critical success. The series drew

heavily from the golden age in its art style and storylines, but incorporated many silver and post-crisis elements as well. It followed a veteran Batman, and chronicled the rise of many of his villains.

The show had an undercurrent of tragedy, transforming many characters into heartbreaking versions of their former selves. Villains who had typically been simplistic or uninteresting were reimagined into sympathetic enemies of the Dark Knight. The cold fetishist, Mr. Freeze, became motivated by his cryogenically frozen wife, for example, and thuggish Killer Croc went from hired muscle to an ostracized outcast, seeking revenge against a society who scorned him.

The series won four Emmy awards for writing and animation, and was nominated for six more in its brief run. Comic fans also lauded the show's faithfulness to its source material, having been called by some the best adaptation of Batman to date.<sup>lv</sup>

The show took its characters very seriously, often making the emotional stakes quite high. The Emmy winning episode, *Heart of Ice*, for example revamped the origin story for Mr. Freeze, making him both fearsome for his complete numbness to all emotion, as well as heart breaking as the details of his revenge story come to light. While the stories had Batman taking on his various enemies in spectacular battles, they always remained very grounded with a strong emotional core. This idea is important to my project, because I am attempting to write a screenplay that is less action-driven than the existing Batman films. *Batman: The Animated Series* demonstrates the value of fleshing out characters, especially antagonists, to give their actions added weight.

*Batman: The Animated Series* provides one of the most faithful adaptations of Batman to date. A television series has the benefit of being able to introduce many of Batman's villains and secondary characters over a longer period of time. The show featured a robust roster of antagonists as well as many of Batman's partners from the comic books. This created a much richer and fully realized adaptation of Gotham City than one is capable of doing in a feature length film. One episode in particular that is noteworthy called *Almost Got 'em* features five of Batman's enemies playing poker together while debating who has come the closest to killing Batman.

I like how the series feels like it has a strong sense of history. Batman is not new, nor are many of his enemies. This is a Gotham City where Batman and his enemies have been feuding for years, and this history informs us as viewers as to where Batman and Gotham City are at present. The citizens of Gotham are used to Batman's existence and names like the Joker and the Penguin are as famous as they are feared.

When approaching my version of Gotham City, I wanted the city to ape this sense of history and scope. But since my screenplay does not follow Batman as the main character, we see how he is treated by people who've never met him. Batman is a subject of gossip and speculation for the people of Gotham, since they do not know anything more than they read in papers.

Furthermore, my screenplay also focuses on the villains of Gotham City existing almost as a subculture. In my screenplay, the villains know each other personally and have opinions on their peers. One scene in particular has the

protagonist asking the Scarecrow, a former psychiatrist, for his insights into the other patients of Arkham Asylum.

When this series wrapped production, Warner Bros. asked Dini and Timm to produce a second Batman animated series that featured a teenage Batman. Rather than force Bruce Wayne into the role, they decided to set the series in the same universe as their existing show, but far into the future.<sup>lvi</sup> *Batman Beyond* followed Bruce Wayne taking on a teenage protégé to become the new Batman in a futuristic Gotham City. Bruce Wayne was well into his eighties when he took in a new trainee named Terry McGinnis. McGinnis became the new Batman, wearing a robotic bat suit and dealing with the new breed of criminals infesting a futuristic Gotham, as well as a few of Wayne's old adversaries who were still hanging around. This medium shows a post-crisis Bruce Wayne living with the consequences of his life. He is alone, reclusive, generally miserable, and his only companion is a Doberman named Ace (a subtle nod to the silver age's Ace the Bat Hound). He is very short tempered with Terry, as he was with his previous partners, but Terry seems more tolerant of it, perhaps because he reminds Terry of his own authoritative father who was killed in the series' pilot. Future Gotham looks like the natural progression of the art deco style. It still has high towers that shroud the cities in shadow, but they've been made over with black concrete and steel and are adorned with sharp lights that make the buildings appear as if they're giant computers.

The element of *Batman Beyond* that spoke to me the most was Bruce Wayne's loneliness in his old age. The writers clearly conceive of Wayne as

someone who will slowly but surely push everyone away from him until he is alone. Since this is a continuation of *Batman: The Animated Series*, the moments of conflict he has in the earlier show with his partners resonate more strongly when we see Wayne in solitude in the future. Although Batman is only a minor character in my screenplay, I foresee his future looking similar to this. Comments made by his former partner, Dick Grayson, will indicate that my version of Wayne also pushes people away and is on track to remain alone in his old age too.

A straight to DVD movie was produced based on *Batman Beyond*. *Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker* followed a seemingly youthful and reinvigorated Joker reigning havoc on the futuristic city of Gotham. As the new Batman, Terry McGinnis, goes after the Joker, Bruce Wayne remains unconvinced that this is the true Joker, as he was present the day he died. The story has echoes of the past, as McGinnis learns of the events leading up to the Joker's death, how Batman's team fell apart, and how the Joker is able to return after forty years of supposedly being dead.

The film is relevant to my project for one specific scene. The scene is a flashback to the night the Joker died. It is revealed that the Joker kidnapped and spent weeks torturing Tim Drake, the third Robin. Drake eventually revealed Batman's secret identity to the Joker, to which the Joker responded with disappointment. "Behind all the stern and batarangs, you're just a little boy in a play suit crying for mommy and daddy. It'd be funny if it weren't so pathetic." The Joker then decides to end the game and kill Batman once and for all. What I read from this scene is how the Joker views the world. To him, he and Batman are

playing a high stakes game where the prize is the soul of Gotham. The Joker, however, only wants to play the game if he feels his opponent is worthy of him. Upon discovering Batman's true identity and motivations, he now sees the game as hollow and boring. To him, Batman was mythic, but Bruce Wayne is just some rich kid with a sob story.

I took this sentiment and made it part of the Joker's character. The Joker will be discussed at length further in this proposal, but from this moment in *Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker*, I see the character as someone looking for worthy challengers to his twisted ideals. He will only respond to someone he believes is worthy of being beaten by him. As such I wrote my protagonist to be someone the Joker will want to test himself against, but as more of a hobby since Batman is his only true equal, or so he believes.

Although Batman has been featured numerous other adaptations outside of film and comic books, I believe that these interpretations have influenced me the most in my writing process and have given a solid foundation to create my characters and my vision of Gotham City.

## Chapter 5: Batman as Character

In this section I will explore Batman as a character in terms of what motivates him and what his war against crime means to him and Gotham City. I will also explore Gotham City as a failed society and how it created a hero like Batman.<sup>4</sup> Even though Batman himself is a minor character in my screenplay, this section is relevant because Batman is the center of his narrative universe. The supporting characters and antagonists are defined by the context provided by Batman. Without understanding the forces that drive him, we have no center to understand the rest of Gotham City and how their motivations connect to Batman's.

Bruce Wayne chose the bat as his symbol based on his personal fear of them. His intention was to make himself into a mythic figure capable of striking fear into those who felt they had nothing to be afraid of. He hoped that the bat would become a symbol for an avenging spirit, ruthlessly hunting criminals through the dark alleys and towers of Gotham City. Wayne conquered his fear of bats and made that fear his enemies'. Fear is the most common motif associated with Batman, as he uses criminals' fear of him to his advantage. "Criminals are a cowardly, superstitious lot," Wayne famously said in his origin story.<sup>lvii</sup> This idea

<sup>4</sup> This section focuses on Batman as a character. Although there are several other characters relevant to him and his war on crime, such as his butler and confidant, Alfred, and Police Commissioner Jim Gordon, they are not very relevant to my project and are not discussed at length. A broader examination of the character, however, would almost certainly include them.

has carried on across the decades, as Batman has used his persona to make criminals believe there was a mythic or supernatural force behind the Dark Knight. Batman's use of stealth tactics and high tech gadgets has further fostered this belief, making criminals believe there might not be a man behind the mask.

Batman's first story, *The Case of the Chemical Syndicate*, introduced the character with cover art that revealed the black caped Batman swinging through the air with a mobster clutched in his arm. These early stories showcased Batman chasing down mobsters and investigating organized crime. Although modern Batman has a strict code against ever taking a life, golden age Batman felt little to no remorse over taking a life. This cemented his reputation early on as darker figure when compared to other early comic book heroes.<sup>lviii</sup> The change in Batman's moral code was likely due to Batman's interpretation as a darker hero, possibly even an antihero, in the post-crisis age. Frank Miller and Jeph Loeb in particular made Batman into a more brutal, less forgiving crime fighter in works like *Batman: Year One* and *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. If Batman were to exist as an antihero with no moral code to speak of, then villain seems a better label to attach. He has even encountered villains, such as Prometheus and Azrael, who tried to follow his example, but did so by killing criminals. Batman was forced to differentiate himself from well-intentioned murderers.

Since Batman's conception, he has consistently and understandably been compared to another major hero in DC's line up: Superman. While both were widely popular, they achieve two different academic goals. As I interpret the

characters, Superman is a paragon of a shining city on a hill, while Batman is a Dark Knight in a dark and dirty city. Superman is a representation of the best the modern world can bring us. He represents man's ascension as brought about by growing our technology and cities to a utopian state. His world is bright and clean. He stands for the best of it through his crusade, which has made him the symbol of, in his words, "truth, justice, and the American way."

This coincides with the idea that cities are cultural centers and the values of the urban environment exudes to surrounding countryside. It is when these influences begin to converge that the spirit of the cities meld together. Society essentially becomes like a web of the influences of cities forming the cultural and civic foundations of society.<sup>lix</sup> If urban environments truly represent the best of mankind, than the city of Metropolis, as I see it discussed in the DC universe, is the beacon of all that is right in the world.

Batman, however, stands as a symbol of where the modern world has failed us. Gotham City's massive urban sprawl covers the city in pollution and darkness, with a sky that seems perennially smoggy and bleak. Massive government corruption and a city ruled by crime are the result of unchecked civic and industrial growth. Bruce Wayne recognizes that the enemies of peaceful society are so strong, that they can eliminate anyone who stands up against them, so the only option is to become something they can't eliminate. Wayne creates a ghostly symbol of fear and punishment designed to terrify evildoers without repercussion.<sup>lx</sup>

In this narrative, the modern city is a centralization of the problems of society. Greed, corruption and economic inequality run rampant in a city that is too hastily constructed. The fear then is that the influence flowing out of cities is not a positive one, but pervades smaller portions of society and creates a network of crime and corruption.<sup>lxi</sup> Gotham stands as the center of the worst of the modern world, and the kind of hero inspired to save it would have to be one that is at home in the shadows. Gotham cannot be saved by playing fair, so to speak, so a hero that emerges from the city will need to be as dark as the city itself.

So, if Superman represents hope for a better tomorrow, Batman represents angst for a dark today. Since Miranda is from the city of Metropolis, her views on society are positive and hopeful for the future. When she arrives in Gotham, she remarks that the people there are very cynical. As she spends more time in Gotham, she will come to the conclusion that, for the reasons listed above, they have earned their cynicism.

Batman's most notable attribute in recent years has been the moral ambiguity of his crusade. His motives have ranged from a thirst for justice to a need to punish criminals. More than that, it's been argued that Batman himself doesn't even know what his end goal is or when he will achieve them, which puts him at odds with many of his fellow super heroes with a more traditional moral compass.<sup>lxii</sup>

He knows surrendering his crusade would put him face to face with his own neuroses... and also that prevailing will eventually wear him irrevocably down. But the question becomes whether or not he will know. When he finally loses it, will he know?<sup>lxiii</sup>

In the end, it seems Batman was not solely created to allow Bruce Wayne to fight back against crime, but as a means to survive. His parents' murder left him damaged and frightened, and Batman makes Wayne feel whole again. Batman's quest will likely never end. Even if Gotham doesn't need Batman anymore, Bruce Wayne always will. This coincides with Batman's complete commitment to his campaign without any sort of endgame in mind. Batman has no criteria under which he would stop being Gotham's Dark Knight. Therefore, it stands to reason that a goal of a crime-free Gotham City is impossible, and this is known to Batman. He will never be satisfied by the state of Gotham City, and thusly he will always have a justification to remain Batman.

In a larger sense, Batman represents an outrage focused at the many failings of society. He does this as a catalyst seeking to restore society as an agent acting from the outside. As Batman perceived the problems of Gotham, most notably in *Batman: Year One* and *The Long Halloween*, there was no balancing force between good and evil. By virtue of having bribed or threatened most of Gotham's police and elected officials, the major criminal elements could operate with impunity. Batman, however, cannot be bribed or threatened, and essentially serves to impose his own concept of social order while taking advantage of criminal's inherent guilt or superstitions.<sup>lxiv</sup> This is evidenced in *Batman: Year One*, as well as Tim Burton's *Batman*, in which scared criminals tell fantastic stories about "the Bat." They describe him as being supernatural and seeking to prey on the blood of evil-doers.

In approaching a screenplay based in the world of Batman, but one that does not feature the title character as the main protagonist, the goal was to write a world that feels the impact of Batman's existence. People largely talk about Batman from afar, much in the same way one would discuss a celebrity or gossip. Others, however, refer to Batman with trepidation, either not wanting to accept the necessity of his existence or questioning the morality of his crusade. I decided to write the citizens of Gotham who have essentially accepted that their city is home to a costumed vigilante, but his usefulness and effectiveness are topics for debate among the citizens.

The main protagonist, Miranda, is not attempting to save the city of Gotham, only her patients and, by extension, herself. So convinced is she that insanity is a path that you walk down, she attempts to map this path. In her mind, if you know the way down, you can also know the way back. What she doesn't understand about her patients, or even about Batman, is that they aren't looking for the way back. Their respective descents were how they adapted to survive the cruel world of Gotham City. Much of her arc as the protagonist is discovering what Batman already knows, that once you transform yourself, there is no coming back.

It was also important to me to approach writing Gotham from a cultural standpoint. I wanted to demonstrate the Batman's existence has a significant cultural impact on Gotham City, showcased in the form of art, graffiti and tourism. The intention was to show that Batman does not exist in a vacuum. The citizens of Gotham are very conscious of his existence and it shows in the culture

of Gotham City. A piece of graffiti near Miranda's apartment, for example, depicts a large bat that others have crudely tried to paint over. Another moment in the screenplay has a street preacher holding up a sign with Batman's insignia, stating that the Batman is the first sign of the end of days.

Finally, I wanted to demonstrate the differences in philosophy and outlook that is shown in the dichotomy of Superman and Batman. As I've stated above, Superman was an embrace of hopeful ideals and Batman stands as more of a post or anti-modern figure. I wanted the Gotham City that I depict to reflect this sense of distrust towards modern society, since it was because Gotham failed to protect its citizens that Batman exists at all. This has left the citizens of Gotham jaded and afraid, as Batman's presence is a reminder to the people that their city remains unsafe. As stated above, Miranda comes from Superman's hometown of Metropolis, and as such her demeanor is generally a positive optimistic one. Those who come from Gotham, however, tend to be more cynical and dour in their opinions.

## Chapter 6: The Joker

In this section, I will summarize the origins and inspirations for the famous Batman villain, the Joker, as well as how the character has evolved from his original inception. I will also explain why the Joker is considered Batman's main archenemy, as well as why I have chosen to use the character in my screenplay as the main antagonist.

The inspiration for the Joker came from a 1928 film called *The Man who Laughs*. The movie, a silent picture, featured a bone white corpse hung up like a puppet. A ghastly smile is forced onto the man's face as he chillingly dances for a crowd. Bob Kane and Bill Finger saw the movie and thought to make a villain that matches the twisted visage of the puppet man. Rather than a corpse, however, Finger and Kane depicted the character as a sociopathic clown who approached crime and murder with a sense of levity. The bleached skin, green hair, purple suit, and ghastly smile became staples of the character, still in use today following his debut in *Batman #1*, 1940.<sup>lxv</sup>

Golden and silver age Joker, like many villains of the day, was depicted as a mobster with a shtick. While Penguin's gang stole things that resembled birds and the Riddler marked his crimes with puzzles foretelling his next caper, the Joker was a prankster. He relished in bad comic clichés, such as whoopee cushions or rubber chickens, but he wasn't above pulling out a gun and killing

someone either. Playing cards were also a common motif with the character, as he usually had a deck close at hand. Batman would remark that the Joker was a wild card, to use a pun, who didn't seem to have a logical ideology.<sup>lxvi</sup> The golden and silver age version of the Joker isn't nearly as dark as today's incarnation, but he did mark his kills with his chilling laugh.

The Joker now exists, since his psychological makeover in *The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Killing Joke*, as the opposite of Batman's persona taken to the absolute extreme. While Batman is trying to return a sense of order and justice to society, regardless of his motivations, the Joker wishes for society to continue down its dark path. The Joker views the things that hold society together--a sense of community, morality, and law--as bad jokes. In his mind, society compels people to act in a way that is opposed to their true natures, and all it takes is for people to see how silly these artificial constructs are in order for people to embrace what the Joker himself covets: anarchy, death, and insanity.<sup>lxvii</sup>

The Joker believes that he and Batman are forever destined to be opposing forces and relishes in that fact. The Joker is completely obsessed with Batman and sees his own twisted acts as the counterpoint to Batman's heroic actions. *The Dark Knight Returns*, for example, shows a catatonic Joker completely without purpose after the loss of Batman. When Batman does return, the Joker adopts his trademark smile and starts planning a welcome back party for his old foe. In this continuity, the Joker is drawn with markedly feminine features and often coos affectionately, referring to Batman as "Darling."<sup>lxviii</sup> This seems to say that the

Joker's obsession with Batman goes beyond their polarizing philosophies, but could be considered romantic or even sexual in the Joker's mind.

In the film, *The Dark Knight*, the Joker believes that he and Batman have only one difference between them. Batman has only a single rule, which is never to take a life. The Joker has one fewer rule, believing that anarchy is the only way to live in such a crazy world. If Batman were to break this rule (which he did not in the film), then he would be free to execute his brand of justice however he wished. So, if we have a figure who operates outside of the law, free to murder as he wishes for whatever reason, would he really be that much different than the Joker? Both feel they're helping society, both are operating without consent, both have a personalized code of ethics, and both are completely unbound.<sup>lxix</sup>

*The Dark Knight* also explains that the Joker is enthusiastic at what Batman has done to the world of crime, a theme also explored in the graphic novels *The Long Halloween* and *Batman: Hush*. He sees himself in the film as taking his cues from Batman, in essence trying to transform crime in the same way Batman has changed law enforcement. "This town deserves a better class of criminal, and I'm going to give it to them," the Joker remarks in the film.

Jack Nicholson's version of the Joker in Tim Burton's *Batman* shares this instant connection with the Dark Knight. After Batman caused him to fall into a vat of chemicals, transforming him into the Joker, he smears blood on a newspaper featuring the Dark Knight and remarks, "Wait 'til they get a load of me." The Joker then goads Batman into confronting him throughout the film.

Batman consistently denies any such kinship with the Joker, and yet no other villain in his rogue's gallery has the same effect on him as the clown prince of crime. In Batman's mind, the Joker differs from his other villains in that there is nothing left in his broken mind to be reasoned with. Enemies like Ra's Al Ghul, the Penguin, and the Scarecrow all have something they want, something that can be understood. But not the Joker; the Joker has nothing that he covets beyond chaos in the name of humor. His crimes "make sense to him alone."<sup>lxx</sup> In *The Dark Knight*, Alfred comments on the Joker that, "Some men aren't after anything logical...Some men just want to watch the world burn." In *The Killing Joke*, Batman obsesses over the fact that, for all the years he and the Joker have been feuding, he doesn't really know or understand him. "How can two people hate so much and not even know each other?" he asks rhetorically.

To the Joker, insanity is not a defect, but the only way to truly live in the world. When the Joker's mind snapped as depicted in the *The Killing Joke*, the Joker suddenly saw himself as free from the burdens of society. He viewed all the things that people strive for--happiness, financial security, home and family, etc.--as directly contradictory to how man was supposed to live. It seems then that the Joker and Batman are similar in how they see Gotham as a failed society. Where the Joker differs is that he believes society was inevitably going to fail, because mankind is inherently selfish and evil at heart. The Joker saw the rampant crime and corruption that had infected Gotham City and believed that was how man truly wished to live. After all, if everyone in Gotham had wanted the city to

celebrate the virtues of civilization, why were there so many who were acting selfishly and preying on others?

He is, in essence, the polar opposite of Batman in a number of ways, most specifically in how the Joker is trying to cause society to completely dismantle while Batman works to restore it. And while Batman is a stoic symbol of justice and retribution, the Joker is a representation of anarchy and lawlessness taken to its extreme.

So, given that the Joker is the chaotic extreme of Batman opposite, and that the Batman believes him to be unreachable and outside the realm of human compassion, one question must be asked: why not kill the Joker? It seems an easy decision, to murder a man who will only do more evil before his time is through. And yet, Batman keeps dragging the Joker back to Arkham Asylum, the revolving door of state mental hospitals.

Firstly, Batman in the post-crisis age has taken a solemn vow never to take another man's life. To say that the Joker is an exception to the rule is to acknowledge that the rule has exceptions. Not to get sidetracked on the philosophical ramifications of murder, but once Bruce admits that there is a point at which a murder is justified, is he not then ethically obligated to murder everyone who meets that standard? And since Batman already exists on such tenuous moral ground, this could easily become a slippery slope for the oft-frustrated Dark Knight. And finally, since Batman is already a vigilante operating outside of the law, would his kills be different than those of his enemies because he's only killing "bad" people? Batman has given himself this one rule for a

specific reason: to avoid becoming the type of person he's devoted his life to stopping. The moral issues presented in murdering even someone as terrible as the Joker could too easily trigger a transformation in the already damaged psyche of Bruce Wayne.<sup>lxxi</sup>

This is representation of the Joker's true motives: to make the rest of the world embrace his perspective. The Joker believes that the cornerstones of society, things such as morality, law and order, and social norms, are just bad jokes. They are ways human beings deny their true nature as violent and selfish. The Joker's fixation on Batman is born of the fact that Batman, in the Joker's mind, is clearly someone who sees that society doesn't work as it is supposed to. But while Batman believes that society needs an agent acting from the outside to restore societal function, the Joker seeks to tear it all down and have Gotham embrace anarchy. In summation, if Batman were to kill the Joker, then the Joker would win as he has made Batman compromise the most important rule he established for himself.

The Joker is, in this regard, a representation of the corruption of crime and amorality that has plagued Gotham. He is especially dangerous in that his primary goal is corruption itself. He seeks to change everyone around him to be like him. This has been a constant theme of his character in various post-crisis works of Frank Miller, Jeph Loeb, and Alan Moore.<sup>lxxii lxxiii lxxiv</sup> The Joker stands as Batman's greatest foe by being his antithesis, but his true power is his ability to make people question what they've thought true and leave a lasting impression on everyone he meets.

When approaching the Joker as the main antagonist of the script, the initial difficulty is in depicting him as something other than Batman's foil. Without the Dark Knight as the protagonist, the Joker cannot be written as a counter to Batman's ideals or symbols. Since the Joker embraces the anarchy and corruption of Gotham, I let that idea influence his character within the story. While Batman is the center of his obsessions, his end goal is to get the entire city of Gotham to abandon its sense of morality and embrace man's anarchistic nature. Therefore, the battles in the screenplay are between the protagonist, Dr. Miranda Greene, and the Joker. Their weapons are influence.

I let the setting of an asylum allow for therapy sessions in which the Joker can explain to the audience what he believes, how his views were formed and ultimately what he seeks. Miranda wishes to understand the depths of the Joker's insanity as a means to understand insanity itself as a disease. Her goal is to use the Joker to create a road map to insanity, one that will prevent her own mental demise. The Joker, true to form, is attempting to turn her efforts back onto her. While she attempts to understand what led him down his path, he is trying to lure her to follow.

The Joker's primary goal throughout the story is to escape the asylum, tricking Miranda with his lies. The Joker feels that his time at Arkham is a temporary setback keeping him away from Batman. Therefore, escape is his only true option. When the opportunity to escape presents itself, however, he stays just a bit longer in order to obtain his larger victory over her. His real game was not just to bring Miranda, a character terrified of insanity, to the brink of insanity

itself. The real game was to see if he could get her to choose to go over the edge. In the Joker's mind, Miranda is not worthy of his attention the way Batman is, however he views her as more than a tool for his escape. He sees her and her descent as a pet project to pass the time, as well as an affirmation of his beliefs.

The climax focuses on the implications of murdering the Joker. The Joker gives a gun to Miranda and goads her into making a choice to kill him or not. If she refuses to pull the trigger, then the Joker will escape and be free to rein chaos on Gotham City. If she does kill, she will have murdered a man and possibly started her own descent into insanity. Miranda doesn't know that the pistol is a fake until she pulls the trigger, meaning that the game was rigged and the Joker won either way. This was his last victory, and represents what he has been trying to do to Batman for years. If the Joker is able to goad Miranda or Batman, people who believe in the positives of society, into killing him, then he wins by proving them wrong.

## Chapter 7: Insanity and Obsession in Gotham City

In this section, I will explain the theme of insanity as it is represented in the narrative of the Batman comics. I will also explore the unique way insanity manifests itself in the world of Batman and how I plan to explore that concept in my screenplay.

The idea of an origin story is one that is central to a comic book. Super heroes and villains are often given elaborate back-stories that are altered more than once to explain where their abilities stem from, as well as why they chose good or evil respectively. Batman stories are different in that almost none of the heroes and villains actually have any super powers with a few notable exceptions. In Batman's world, where characters are defined by their obsessions or particular brand of insanity, the origin story serves as a means to explain psychological motivation.

In the world of Batman, past transgressions can never simply be overcome. A person's past is often their most important defining feature. The tragedies they have lived through and their coping mechanisms often foreshadow their descent into a dark persona. By examining the origins and psychoses of various Batman characters, a pattern emerges that most characters in the narrative adhere to in multiple different comic origin stories and retellings across the decades. Even for characters who have multiple origin stories, like Batman

himself, certain themes and motifs remain constant from Batman's golden age beginnings to the present.

The extreme personalities present in the characters of Batman are seldom attributed to anything as simple as mental illness, which is to say no one ever seems to be born insane or evil in Gotham. Insanity in the Batman narrative is more often an extreme obsession brought on by tragedy and leading to radical transformation in how the subjects identify themselves. I will explain this process in greater depth.

It begins with tragedy, and tragedy leads the characters into obsession. Obsession fundamentally changes these people to the point where their methods of self-identification are insufficient to deal with their new mental states. The only way for them to deal with these radical changes is to create an alternate persona under which these new sentiments make sense.

To understand this pattern, let's start by examining the nature of tragedy in the world of Batman. In Gotham, bad things certainly happen to good people. Thomas and Martha Wayne were generous, benevolent, charitable people before they were murdered, and certainly an eight-year-old Bruce Wayne had not done anything to deserve such a tragedy. Even the Joker was a relatively good person before his transformation into the Clown Prince of Crime. His first crime was one he was reluctant to commit, and only did so to prevent he and his pregnant wife from being evicted from their home.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Two-face and his signature coin flip most accurately represent this concept in the narrative. Two-face came to believe that morality and karma are nonexistent.

Therefore, if there is no guiding force behind the injustices that befall the people of Gotham, it must be pure random chance. “Chance is everything. Whether you’re born or not, whether you live or die, whether you’re good or evil, it’s all arbitrary,” Twoface states in *Batman: The Animated Series*. Twoface believes in the chaotic nature so strongly that he himself will never kill anyone without fate’s approval, which he is granted or denied by flipping a coin.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

In summation, no one necessarily deserves the cards they are dealt in Gotham City, as there is no greater sense of morality that punishes evil or rewards good. It’s all essentially a coin flip and retribution, vengeance and justice are things that can only be dealt with by men.

After tragedy occurs, it is seldom for characters in Gotham to deal with their despair in a way that could be described as healthy. Bruce Wayne became an antisocial misanthrope; Mr. Freeze became completely numb to emotion; and the Riddler became obsessed with asserting his own intelligence. Tragedy consumes them until it becomes their entire life.

As obsession overtakes the minds of those wronged in Gotham, the final step is to create an alternate persona, which is more befitting of the victim’s new way of thinking. These alternate personas, however, are not created in a vacuum. The culture of Gotham contributes to their transformation, and there is nothing more culturally relevant in Gotham than Batman.

Jeph Loeb’s graphic novel, *The Long Halloween*, and Christopher Nolan’s film, *The Dark Knight*, each make a similar case for why the criminals in Gotham manifested as they have. In short, if Batman wishes to know where his enemies

took their inspiration, he need only look in a mirror. There was a system in place before Batman's arrival in Gotham City. It was a broken system of crooked cops and organized crime. There was no momentum to restore the criminal justice system as it was meant to operate. Then Batman appeared and began to attack this system from the outside. He upset the establishment and demonstrated himself to be a catalyst. The obsessive minds of Gotham saw Batman as a source of inspiration, and many attest to feeling kinship with him. By pouring his own darkness into a persona that could accommodate it, Batman inadvertently created a new avenue for others to do the same.

Their obsessions found home in these new personas, and like Batman, they felt that these identities were powerful enough in influence to affect the change they wished to see. Whereas Batman's hope was to restore the criminal justice system to what it should have been, the antisocial and malevolent nature of Gotham's other victims make them want to change the city to their twisted ideals.

To use an example that is relevant to my screenplay, I will examine the transformation of the character Dr. Jonathan Crane into his super villain persona, the Scarecrow. Crane was a resident psychiatrist at Gotham's Arkham Asylum. Previously, his doctoral work was focused on the study of phobias and fear. He came to believe that fear was the only true emotion, as it guided all of our decisions. A man gets married, for example, to ward off the fear of being alone.

His early years at the asylum did not go well, as he was terrified of most of his patients. Over time, he realized that to gain the upper hand, he would need to make them afraid of him. He began a series of sadistic therapies, tormenting his

patients with their fears. Eventually, it stopped being about the treatment, as he just enjoyed tormenting people with their phobias. When his research came to light, he was fired and his medical license was revoked.

Crane, feeling scorned, continued his research in secret and developed chemical methods to induce fear. Most notably, he created a hallucinogenic gas that made people envision that which they most feared. Crane decided to use his gas to become the embodiment of fear itself, making people terrified wherever he went. He assumed the name and appearance of a Scarecrow and began a life of crime. The riches he stole, however, were secondary to the joy he felt watching people tremble in fear.

Crane's tragedy was being afraid of his patients, which is a minor and personal tragedy, but very real to him. His obsession fell onto fear itself and grew over time. He then adopted the persona of the Scarecrow in order to live in such a way that his sadistic fascination with making people afraid could seem normal to him. In Crane's mind, he is not a man in a scarecrow mask; he is fear itself.

In my screenplay, the Scarecrow has a small but substantive role. Miranda, feeling that she is not making adequate progress with the Joker, decides to consult the Scarecrow. Being both a trained psychiatrist and super villain, he offers unique insights into how insanity manifests in this world. His obsession does get the better of him when he starts pressing Miranda on her fears. He is able to discern that her deepest fear is that she may be harboring her own dark character inside, like all the patients of Arkham.

In the case of Bruce Wayne, his tragedy was obvious: the sudden and brutal murder of his parents before his eyes. Unable to properly deal with the random act of violence before him, he became withdrawn and focused on his obsession: injustice. The very notion of injustice outraged Wayne, and he came to believe that the world itself was a cold and cruel place. He stopped blaming the sole gunman who killed his parents and turned his fury on all those he thought allowed injustice to prosper. Crooked cops and bribed public officials who looked the other way, street thugs who preyed on the innocent, and mob bosses who stole from the hard working were all to blame for making Gotham City into the place it was.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

But underneath that outrage, Wayne was almost crippled by fear. He saw firsthand just how quickly one's fortune could change in Gotham. He also saw that same fear in the people who genuinely wanted to change Gotham for the better. What remained of the good cops and politicians were crippled by threats from criminals who held all the power. Injustice was only allowed to reign in Gotham because the bad guys could use fear to prevent change.

His outrage fueled him through his years of training as he gained the tools he thought he would need to take the fight to his enemies. When he returned to Gotham, he had the physical and mental training to effectively fight crime and corruption, but he lacked a delivery system for his training. He decided to use the bat, based on his personal fear of them, as an iconic image. The bat became synonymous with a balancing force, something that targets criminals exclusively and hunts them relentlessly.

But it should be noted that Batman is more the exception than the rule. After all, most of his villains are extremely antisocial, with some even trying to actively destroy Gotham City. Batman, on the other hand, seeks to protect society from these individuals and restore a sense of order and balance. So what is it exactly that makes Batman different, given that his life has followed a similar trajectory to his antagonists? Like his enemies, Batman conceived of a new persona to lose himself into, but I believe the difference is in empathy. Bruce Wayne suffered a terrible tragedy, which led to feelings of alienation and victimization. Wayne, however, empathizes with other victims and that guides his actions. Wayne may be cold, calculating and socially withdrawn following his parents' murder, but he does not want other children to experience what he did. The villains, on the other hand, empathize with the forces that made them feel alienated, wishing to take that power or fear for themselves. Essentially, they are more like bullies, picking on the people who make them feel so powerless to begin with, whereas Batman never forgot the plight of the victim.

Also of note is the Joker's diagnosis or lack thereof. The Joker's manic behavior, sociopathy, extreme antisocial tendencies, and fixation on the clown motif lack any real analogous mental illness. A theory proposed by a doctor in Jeph Loeb's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* is an interesting idea. The character believes that the Joker is not insane by the traditional definition, but rather "super-sane." The accident that bleached his skin also augmented his central nervous system, keeping him at a heightened state of awareness. The Joker's senses are basically super human and his brain cannot

process the huge amount of sensory bombarding him all the time. Therefore, he is unable to focus or care about anything in front of him and instead embraces the chaos he perceives. He chose the clown as a motif because circus clowns are also bright, loud and, some would say, scary. To everyone else, he is acting crazy, but the way he sees the world, we're the crazy ones for not doing the same. I used this diagnosis to help write the character. A similar diagnosis is presented within the screenplay, but it is left ambiguous if this is his actual mental disorder. After all, the Joker was telling lie after lie to arrange a situation in which he could escape. This includes misleading Miranda about his diagnosis.

Since I consider this theme to be the most pertinent in examining Batman in the modern age of comic books, I essentially formed the story of my script around this idea. I wanted the reader to be able to see this formula-tragedy to obsession to reinvention of character-in action in the script, as well as have access to previous examples of it. Therefore, the protagonist is studying the insane of Gotham City to discover this formula for herself, but she is unaware that she is on her own dark descent into personal madness. The antagonist, the Joker, is the end result of this formula. The main conflict of the story comes from these two opposing characters each trying to draw the other to their way of thinking.

The main character identifies herself as a Jungian psychiatrist. This is because the work of Karl Jung, with its focus on the brain's interpretation of symbols, makes for an interesting view into the world of Batman's rogues. After all, many of the villains of Batman, not to mention Batman himself, are symbols

for their inherent tragedies. Bats come to represent social outrage, clowns represent chaos and anarchy, scarecrows represent fear and so on.

When insanity does take over the criminals of Gotham, they usually spend some time in Arkham Asylum, Gotham's home for the criminally insane. Arkham began in comics as a general prison to house the twisted minds running rampant, but over time, the asylum has taken on a life of its own.

*Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* took a greater look at the asylum, including its history and its effect on the people who work within its walls. According to this seminal text, Arkham was built by Amadeus Arkham in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a minimum-security facility. Following the murder of Arkham's family, Arkham changed the facility to a treatment facility for the criminally insane. Arkham, growing increasingly disgusted with the amorality of his patients, began to torture and murder them. Amadeus ultimately was imprisoned in the same asylum he had built. There he spent his final days, scribbling on the walls about how he planned to "treat" his remaining patients.

Amadeus Arkham was the first employee of Arkham Asylum to eventually end up as a patient, but not the last. Jonathon Crane, Hugo Strange, and Harleen Quinzell all were changed by their time at the asylum, following the same trend of tragedy, obsession and insanity that dominated their patients and turning them into villains.

With so many of its workers turning to insanity, one must ask what exactly happens behind the walls of Arkham? No one ever seems to be cured by his or her treatments at the facility, and breakouts are all too common. Arkham Asylum

seems to have become the villains' equivalent of Bruce Wayne's Batcave. It is a place where criminals contemplate their madness, but the seemingly haunted walls of the asylum do little to alleviate their mental suffering. Rather, when surrounded by the darkness of their peers and the asylum's twisted history, their madness intensifies. Arkham is no longer a place where one goes to receive treatment. It is now simply a prison to keep the madness away from the city at large. It is a place where the corruption of evil and insanity is concentrated, seeping into all who spend too much time within the haunted halls.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Given that the idea of personal corruption is so palpable within the narrative of Batman, I thought it best to stage a majority of the story in the place where this corruption is on display like a zoo. Arkham Asylum, with its dark history and monstrous patients, can show the reader the worst of what Gotham has to offer both in the physical sense of the nightmarish prisoners, as well as the spiritual sense of what those prisoners represent. Furthermore, it is a convenient place to have a majority of the Batman villains in one place for narrative purposes, and allows the protagonist to interact with them in a way that doesn't feel contrived.

## Chapter 8: Feminism and Batman

In this section, I will explore how Batman comics have implemented female characters and state why I believe that Batman was among the first in comic books to feature positive portrayals of women. I will do this by examining some of the important female characters in the Batman narrative and explain why I perceive them to be positive portrayals.<sup>5</sup> I will also explain how I plan to use this analysis to create a female protagonist for my screenplay.

From the golden age, comic books have faced criticism over their depictions of women. Too often, female supporting characters were merely interchangeable damsels in distress. Beginning with the murder of Gwen Stacy, Spider-Man's former fiancé, comic writers have viewed the death of a love interest as a potential game changer for both narrative structure and a character's outlook. The term, "Women in Refrigerators," was coined in the late 90's and referred to this trend in comic books. The name comes from a story arc in the *Green Lantern* in which the titular hero's girlfriend was murdered and stuffed into a refrigerator. Criticism falls not with the act itself, but introducing and murdering a female character and using it primarily as a plot point for her boyfriend.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Comic books have too often received flack for not giving strong roles to female characters. Even Lois Lane, now seen as a strong, feminist icon, spent her

<sup>5</sup> My analysis is limited to the female characters I deem important to the analysis of the positive depiction of women in Batman comics. This is not an all-inclusive analysis of every major female character.

first 40 years in the comic books getting captured week after week so Superman would have someone to save. Batman has bucked this trend by largely having strong female protagonists and imposing female villains.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Many members of the Bat Family have used the monikers Batwoman and Batgirl over the years. The first two women were Kathy Kane and Betty Kane respectively. Kathy and Betty were introduced in the 1960's, largely in an effort to stop the rumors of a homosexual relationship between Batman and Robin by giving each a love interest.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Kathy Kane was introduced first as Batwoman, with her niece, Betty, joining her later as her sidekick, Batgirl. Batwoman and Batgirl were hardly leaps forward for women in comic books. Much like other women in comics, they required a lot of rescuing from the men in their lives. Even though Kathy was often described as a skilled and capable crime fighter, Batman had to consistently come to her rescue. The romance between Batman and Batwoman never took off the way writers had hoped, and Kathy eventually slipped into obscurity. The character was jettisoned in 1964 when Julius Schwartz took over the editing of Batman after sales started to decline. Batwoman and other characters such as Ace the Bat-Hound and Bat-Mite were dropped to return to the comics to just Batman and Robin in the hopes of reigniting interest in the Dynamic Duo.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Batwoman was the first attempt at introducing a female super hero in the Batman world, but it was a largely forgettable effort. The notion that the character was only introduced as a love interest made her more dependent on the men in her life. Kathy Kane was introduced in the 1960's, when second wave feminism was

prevalent. Second wave feminism as it pertains to media depictions of women focuses on an increasing level of independence and empowerment of women.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> As such, Kathy Kane in her original run in the comics was not in keeping with these ideals. Her relaunch, however, in 2006 was another story.

In 2006, DC decided to relaunch the character of Batwoman, giving her a drastic makeover. Katherine Kane became Kate Kane, and from a continuity standpoint, was considered to still be the original Batwoman. Kate was given a complete visual makeover, an expanded back-story, and a new sexual orientation. Batwoman became the most prominent homosexual character in comic books, a move that was covered by major news outlets such as CNN and *USA Today*. Writers from DC have stated that his new version of Batwoman was not meant to be controversial, but to better reflect modern diversity.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> From a marketing standpoint, I believe this move was designed to appeal to a new audience. Similarly, DC added a Muslim member of the Bat Family named Night Runner for similar reasons. These new characters were designed to add figures that broke from the white males who made up most members of the Bat Family.

After Kane was written out of continuity in the 60's, female villains such as Catwoman and Poison Ivy were enjoying a huge surge in popularity, leading DC to try again at creating a female hero in the Bat Family. They had clearly learned from their mistakes and created a stronger and more independent female heroine than almost any seen in comics before. Aided by a huge marketing push from DC, this new Batgirl has become the quintessential version of the character.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

Before she was Batgirl, she was Barbara Gordon, the redheaded daughter of Commissioner James Gordon. A gifted gymnast, librarian and highly intelligent young woman, Barbara adopted the mantle of Batgirl almost by accident. While attending a costume party in a Batman suit, she walked into an attempted kidnapping of Bruce Wayne and managed to help him fight off the abductors. This not only gave her the crime-fighting bug, but also brought her to Wayne's attention. Before long, she was out in the field with Batman and Robin, fighting as an equal.

Barbara's skills in combat and detection were at least equal to that of Robin's, and she even exceeded Robin's abilities in certain respects. This was not a girl waiting for a man to save her. While there were certainly moments where Barbara required help from her mentor, she was often captured alongside Robin, dispelling the depictions of a simple damsel in distress. Barbara went on to receive a doctorate in library science and, unlike other members of the Bat Family, stayed very close with Bruce Wayne, even in the darkest hours.

Barbara was the center of controversy in Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* when she was shot in the stomach and paralyzed from the waist down by the Joker. The Joker was trying to drive her father insane, and to do this, he stripped her naked while still bleeding from her gunshot wound and took pictures of her that he then showed to Commissioner Gordon. While not explicitly stated in the graphic novel, there is a strong feeling from the writing that she was also sexually assaulted.

Many felt that his act was needlessly misogynistic, as depicting a male villain using, at the very least, the implication of rape as a psychological tool was going too far. Since Barbara was considered one of the stronger female characters in comic books, the writing seemed designed to break her down as a woman in the worst possible way.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The other side of this argument is that the act resonates because Barbara was such a strong character. This made the act of crippling and violating her into a truly shocking moment to demonstrate the Joker's pure depravity.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> After all, the Joker, whose worst crimes are terrible acts of immorality, would certainly not be above sexual assault. The Joker sees his crimes as means to an insane end, so a sexual assault would be a tool from his perspective. He is aware of the extreme nature of rape and used it as a weapon to torment both Barbara and her father.

I think it's important to note that the Joker, as far as we can be sure, had no knowledge of the fact that Barbara was really Batgirl. This means that his act of brutality was not any sort of retaliation against the Bat Family. This adds an element of callousness to the Joker's actions, since Barbara was essentially an innocent bystander whose sexual assault was used a means to an end.

This also shines a light on something not often discussed in comic books, and that is the very different set of risks faced by men and women. As I said earlier while discussing the idea of women in refrigerators, female characters were used as convenient plot devices to add conflict. Having a women held hostage by the antagonist, the traditional damsel in distress trope, you create a simple story that revolves around women being plot devices instead of characters.

When female characters started moving to the forefront of the story, becoming the protagonists themselves, they didn't cease to be women. In a real world setting, it's an important distinction that men and women face a very different set of risks, particularly in the context of sexual assault. As comic books entered the Post Crisis age, the real world was finding its way into comic book settings.

Looking at this event in the context of the arguments for and against it, I'm inclined to believe that the event was a commentary on the damsel in distress trope. In *The Killing Joke*, Barbara was attacked as a bystander, not as a superhero, thus the writing seems to be using the trope of a woman in peril to advance the story, but taken to a much darker place. Sexual assault seems to be the damsel in distress taken to its extreme. It was a rather ugly way to frame a trope that had become so common, the feminist, cultural, or societal implications of it were lost on the larger audience. There can certainly be a well-reasoned debate as to whether this event was too extreme for a comic book or the Batman mythos, but as it is written, I believe it represents a mirroring of reality that women must face with an antiquated trope regarding the role of women in comic books.

Barbara Gordon best represents the ideals of third wave feminism, in which female characters can retain aspects that would define them as feminine without it being seen as a weakness. In Barbara's case, she was allowed to be a beautiful woman in a costume that highlighted her physical feminine features, such as her hair and body type, without the depiction being purely sexual. As is the case in third wave feminism, women juxtapose the items that make them

feminine with a sense of personal strength and individualism. This, in essence, retakes features we think of as feminine and defines them as independence and strength.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Barbara was a beautiful and feminine woman, but she was also intelligent, capable and strong without any of these ideas contradiction one another.

Even though Barbara herself is not present in my screenplay, her legacy as a strong female character provided me with a framework when creating my own female protagonist. Like Barbara, Miranda's impressive set of skills is taken in conjunction with her gender. Throughout the story, Miranda must fight against the sexist views of her coworkers, earning their respect and proving herself in her field. While at work, she strives to be strong and independent amongst her peers, but her feminine side is allowed to show during her courtship with Dick Grayson. Therefore, her work life echoes second wave feminism<sup>lxxxix</sup> and her personal life reflects third wave feminism.<sup>xc</sup>

Of Batman's many villains, two female villains surged in popularity shortly after their introduction. Catwoman and Talia al Ghul became popular and substantive characters in the narrative and did so while embracing their femininity in different ways.

Catwoman dates back to Batman's first solo run in the comics in 1940. She was introduced as a cat burglar who took the name a bit literally and, like most villains of the day, lacked any real depth of character. She was often portrayed as a female equivalent to Batman in respect to physical ability, as she could evade him in rooftop chases using her advanced agility and conditioning.

Catwoman's real name is Selina Kyle and her motivations and background were often changed depending on the era and writer. She has been written as a former prostitute turned thief targeting the wealthy elite she despised, as well as an embittered animal rights activist funding her activities with stolen loot. All interpretations though agree that Catwoman is a world-class athlete, master thief, and a flirtatious presence in Batman's world.<sup>xci</sup> Her original design was based on pinup model, Bettie Page, suggesting that her appearance was supposed to be sexual in nature.

The idea of making her into a love interest for Batman seems an obvious one. For one thing, their costumes and motifs were quite similar, and their relationship had always consisted of a fair amount of flirting. Batman found himself able to look past her criminality, as she never stole from anyone who couldn't afford to be stolen from, and people seldom were hurt during her crimes. This suggests that Catwoman could be seen as a representation of the frustration of Gotham in terms of income inequality. If we see Gotham in terms of rich and poor, then Catwoman is bitter at Gotham's elite for hoarding their riches while the rest of Gotham suffers from the crime and desperation on the streets.

Throughout the golden and silver ages, she constantly shifted between a straight up villain and an ethically challenged but traditionally good person. In the post-crisis age, Catwoman's origins were divided, depending on the writer and setting. In some continuities, Catwoman's alter ego, Selina Kyle, was seen as a wealthy heiress, seeking the thrill of the hunt to escape her privileged lifestyle. The other version, and arguably the more popular amongst writers since its debut

in *Batman: Year One*, was that Kyle started out as a prostitute and dominatrix before finding success as a cat burglar. The latter has persevered more so likely due to the sex appeal of the character in general. There's an argument to be made of the practicality of wearing tight, black leather when your goal is to sneak in and out undetected, but the added effect it had on her many male pursuers was probably not coincidental. Catwoman was a skilled hand-to-hand fighter, often utilizing a whip in combat in what is a likely throwback to her time as a dominatrix. This continues the idea of Catwoman as sexually empowered, like her pinup inspired past and adds to the sex appeal of the character.

Her relationship with Batman was complicated to say the least. Their first few occasions of being romantically linked were met with deep reservations on his part, which is true of every long-term relationship Bruce Wayne has ever had. In the case of Catwoman, however, it began with his trepidation of dating a criminal. Their relationship did develop over the decades with Bruce even marrying Selina during the silver age. In the Post Crisis age, the marriage was ignored and they continued a flirty, hesitant courtship.

Catwoman was a character introduced largely as a means to add a sexy, flirtatious woman into the Batman narrative. Where originally, women were like objects for male characters to play off of, they now exist as independent, unique characters with their own devices. While initially, Catwoman could be seen as a sexy figure designed to titillate male readers, the character has attained greater independence over time. This suggests that, in keeping with the definitions of second and third wave feminism used above, that the character has developed

over time to retake her sexuality and make it a positive force rather than a cynical attempt to excite male readers. This is in keeping with the emergence of third wave feminism as it was reflected in media. In this movement, female characters are allowed to be described as sexy without the implication of sexual objectification.<sup>xcii</sup>

Catwoman, being the first major female character in the Batman comics, can be seen as a metaphor for the changing role of women in comics, from her beginnings as a pinup model-inspired thief, to her modern depiction as an independent and powerful woman. Miranda differs from Catwoman in that Miranda does not use sexuality to further her agenda. Miranda, as stated above, is more in line with the teachings of second wave feminism. As such, she is striving to prove that her prowess as a psychiatrist has nothing to do with her gender.

In the modern age, Talia al Ghul has emerged as another strong female character in the Batman narrative. Talia al Ghul was the daughter of the immortal Ra's al Ghul, the head of a secret society known as the League of Assassins. Ra's and Talia's goal and tactics were similar to Batman's, but on a global scale. They used their limitless resources and army of well-trained assassins to try and correct the mistakes of society and preserve both civilization and the longevity of the Earth itself. It's been hinted that Talia's almost immediate attraction to Wayne was influenced heavily by his similarity to her father. Both were powerful men devoted fully to a cause. While Talia at times disagreed with her father's methods, namely his vigilant acts of terrorism, she sees Wayne as a more moral version of her father's ambitions.

Talia was largely added to provide a new love interest for Bruce Wayne, as well as expand on his rivalry with Ra's al Ghul. Taking cues from Catwoman, the writers knew that any potential mate for the Dark Knight would need to be formidable, serving as a challenge to him. Batman, in his modern setting, wouldn't give a second thought to a woman who needs to be rescued, but a woman who could beat him in battle is sure to get his attention.<sup>xciii</sup>

Talia never made her attraction to Bruce Wayne a secret, often referring to him as, "beloved," even when he rebuked her advances. Wayne did, on several occasions, attempt a relationship with Talia, but her unquestioning loyalty to her father made things difficult. Talia even gave birth to Bruce's child. Kept secret from him, Talia raised their son, Damien, to follow the path of his father. Damien was trained by the League of Assassins, Ra's al Ghul's secret society, in the ways of combat and strategy. Upon learning of his existence, Bruce took Damien in and made him the fifth Robin. While Talia hoped the three of them could continue Bruce's work as a family, Bruce was never able to forgive the deception and never trusted Talia again, as depicted in 2008's, *Batman and Son* by Grant Morrison.<sup>xciv</sup>

The implication of having a child out of wedlock and essentially being raised by a single mother away from the father is in keeping with the theme of broken families and abandonment prevalent in Batman comics. This idea will be discussed further in this proposal, but in terms of Talia and Damien, it suggests a commentary about single motherhood. Damien was raised by Talia to be as intelligent and capable as his father, but lacking in his moral guidance. Damien

was an effective fighter and investigator by the time he was thirteen, but never learned the moral implication of violence. This coincides with the depiction in media of single mothers being unable to adequately raise a mentally and socially healthy child without the presence of a father.<sup>xcv</sup> This also is aligned with the concept of family in the Batman narrative, which will be discussed in the next section of my proposal. In summation, many of the protagonists of the Batman universe come from broken families. Talia and Damien too are outside of what could be called a normal family structure, which, according to Batman's narrative, leaves one as a broken or incomplete person.

Given that Damien was trained by Wayne, upon discovering the existence of his son, this suggests a point made further about the Bat Family emerging from broken homes. People like Damien and Dick Grayson who come from broken homes need to look to a father figure for guidance, which is the role Bruce Wayne plays in their lives. Damien, unlike Grayson, had both a mother and father who raised him, albeit separately. Therefore, Damien was more complete, having had both parents, whereas Dick was unable to be a complete person, as he only had a stern father and no nurturing mother. Grayson's upbringing will be discussed at length in the next section of this proposal.

Talia represents a woman who separates her feminism from her other skills. She will allow herself to act in an overtly sexual or feminine way when courting Bruce Wayne, for example, but becomes a cold and ruthless warrior when in battle. This suggests a second wave feminist approach, given that her professional advancement is completely apart from her character as a woman.<sup>xcvi</sup>

This framework was similar to my approach with Miranda. Miranda separates her personal traits, including her sense of femininity, from her professional work. This is because she does her best to completely separate herself from her work in every way. She wants her therapy to be clinical, not personal, lest she betray the reason she has come to Arkham. It is in her encounters with Dick where we see a more personal side of the character come through. With Dick, she is less guarded and almost lets slip details about herself that she is trying to keep hidden. In summation, I see her interactions with Dick as her outlet for the repression of herself she does at Arkham. With Dick, she is allowed to feel hurt and powerless, which is something she cannot show either her patients or her coworkers at the asylum.

Batman was unique among comic books in that the narrative embraced female characters as more than damsels in distress. Barbara Gordon is still considered one of the most positive female portrayals in comic books, and subsequent Batgirls and female members of the Bat Family have benefitted from her inspiration. Female villains were written with depth, having their feminine attributes serve as strengths in conjunction with their other skills.

Given Batman's generally progressive view towards female characters, I decided to make the main character and protagonist of my screenplay female. Dr. Miranda Greene is written to be an accomplished and highly intelligent psychiatrist. It was important to me that her flaws as they are presented in the script be seen as related to her character and not her gender. For example, a scene in which she has a therapy session with the Scarecrow ends with the villain

tormenting and attacking her, alluding to a dark event in her past. Miranda's panic as a reaction is not a result of her being a weak woman, but comes from him citing an incredibly traumatic experience on par with the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents.

I look at Miranda in the tradition of second wave feminism, as she does not conform herself to typical gender roles, nor is she a woman with profound femininity or sexuality. I see Miranda as a woman who does not define herself by such simple characteristics as age, attractiveness or gender. Her obsession with her mental state is her defining characteristic, and it has made her socially oblivious. She is fiercely driven towards getting what she wants in terms of her career and her research, and she acknowledges no barriers between her and what she wants, especially as pertaining to her gender. Furthermore, I believe Miranda views herself through a very cold and objective lens to avoid having to face her emotions in regard to her past. She does her best to avoid being labeled by any of her defining traits to keep in control of herself. This has her firmly rejecting traditional gender roles or notions of modern femininity in an effort to understand herself and maintain her perceived sanity.

A subplot involving her relationship with Dick Grayson (Robin) was designed to flesh out each of their personalities in a candid setting. My intention is not to have this become a romance, and it was not a pressing concern that any of my protagonists find love by the end of the script. The romance is used in part to show Miranda's feminine side that is she is unable to at the asylum. Even though she has difficulty in defining herself as anything other than someone

fighting off insanity, her relationship with Dick allows her to slip out of her shell and experience life as a person without defenses or barriers. This allows her to gradually become comfortable with herself as a woman.

Furthermore, her role as a woman in a position of authority is not something to be glossed over entirely. As stated earlier, Gotham has a very antiquated sense of culture and style. Therefore, I believe that, despite the canon's progressive outlook towards women in general, men still dominate most key positions of authority in the fictional world. In terms of Miranda's character, I believe that her work will be praised by her coworkers when she performs it in a way one could describe as masculine. Conversely, a feminine act will be seen as weakness by the antiquated status quo.

It should also be noted that Miranda is the only major female character in the script. This, and the generally patronizing attitude of many of her coworkers in the script, is a subtle commentary on the role of women at large in the world of comic books. Because of her gender, Miranda has to try that much harder to prove herself amongst the "boy's club" of both her new job and in the world of comic clichés she has been written into. To accomplish this, it is important to depict Miranda as strong and unflinching in the face of adversity. Comments about her occupation and her gender will be common, but end with Miranda standing firm and asserting herself as strong and self-reliant. It is possible that this theme might not be as obvious as I see it from my research and writing, but at the very least, it will avoid the idea of tokenism by demonstrating Miranda's uniqueness is a

character and her character traits that allow her to fit into the narrative of the Batman canon.

## Chapter 9: Robin and the Broken “Bat Family”

In this section, I will explore the character of Robin, Batman’s famous sidekick, as a symbol for the theme of family and abandonment within the Batman narrative.<sup>6</sup> I will also explain how I plan to use the character to explore this theme in my screenplay.

Most modern Batman films have displayed Batman as a loner, not seeking out relationships that can’t help him in his crusade. In the comics, however, Batman spends much of his time working with a team of individuals collectively known as the Bat Family. The first addition to this team, as well as the one who best represents all of Bruce Wayne’s relationships, is his iconic partner, Robin the Boy Wonder.

The original Robin was named Dick Grayson. In his early life, Dick was a child acrobat as part of a family act known as the Flying Graysons. When an extortionist failed to gain protection money from the circus, he retaliated by fraying the trapeze lines. Dick was safely on the platform when the line snapped, but his parents were not so lucky. Bruce Wayne was in attendance that night and took Dick in. Before long, he began training the boy as Robin, the Boy Wonder.

<sup>6</sup> Although many of the topics and themes discussed in this section could apply to multiple members of the Bat Family, this section focuses on the first Robin, Dick Grayson, because he is the only member of the Bat Family besides Batman himself who is relevant to my overall project.

This story was first depicted in *Detective Comics* #38, but has since been expanded in the graphic novel, *Robin: Year One*.

From a writing standpoint, Robin was added to the continuity less than a year after Batman's solo series debuted mainly to give Batman someone to talk to. Too often, Batman would have long passages where he would be talking to himself to deliver exposition. Robin broke this up by playing the part of Watson to Batman's Holmes. Robin also made the titles more attractive to young readers who may not have instantly gravitated towards the noir and pulp elements of early Batman titles. Robin gave kids an easier perspective to grasp than that of the thirty something Batman.<sup>xcvii</sup>

Robin stayed a teenager from 1940 until the mid seventies when they started gradually aging the character. As comic books in general began to explore darker story elements, Robin had a hard time fitting in as Batman's plucky sidekick. Robin ultimately left Batman to start a solo career under the name, Nightwing, in Gotham's sister city of Bludhaven.

Grayson's departure from Wayne was not easy or colloquial. Wayne shunned Grayson for years, thinking of him as a traitor to the cause but nothing more. Wayne would lament how the relationship fell apart in later years, almost grudgingly acknowledging that they were something more than just partners.

Grayson, however, held a deep resentment for Wayne, mainly due to the fact that Wayne failed to serve as a father figure. Grayson was never as badly scarred by his parents' murder as Wayne was, allowing him the chance at a normal life that Wayne never had. Perhaps this is due to the presence of Bruce

Wayne in Dick's life, as Dick did not have to go through this tragedy alone as Wayne did.

Wayne thought, from the very beginning, that he was training a partner and little more. Dick, conversely, thought of Bruce as a surrogate father. As he waited years for his feelings to be reciprocated, it became clear to Dick that he would only ever be a sidekick. His departure was a coming-of-age moment for Dick, as his childhood relationship with Batman has been referred to as an "oedipal nightmare," in that Robin had to defeat his father, so to speak.<sup>xcviii</sup> Dick abandoned Bruce and spent years denouncing Batman's cold tactics and Wayne's even colder demeanor.<sup>xcix</sup>

Robin and his departure represent how Bruce ultimately viewed the Bat Family. Batman provided the training and equipment these people would need, but demanded absolute loyalty in return. It was understood that these people were there to assist in Batman's war on crime, and earned their place on the team as long as they were useful. The first and most important rule Wayne demanded that they follow was to always obey his orders, no matter what.

While this was Batman's perspective, the rest of the "family" saw things differently. Many saw Bruce as a surrogate father, the patriarch of the Bat Family. They trusted him, because he had earned it with his performance in the battlefield. They trusted that Batman was playing the bigger game and his guidance would keep them alive to fight another day. But many of his partners, Dick Grayson chief among them, were drawn to Bruce because of shared tragedy. Grayson, and Robins two and three, Jason Todd and Tim Drake, all featured dead parents. It

wasn't just gunfire and thugs they learned to survive from Bruce, but also how to find peace in a world that was so cruel to them.<sup>c</sup>

The fact that most of the Bat Family came from broken homes speaks to the world that Batman himself inhabits. Batman is essentially a man seeking a way to fight back against a society that made him a victim of violent crime. Therefore, when looking for partners, he seeks people that he believes can be made to understand the world as he does. In this way, Bruce Wayne draws a literary parallel between the Dickens character of Fabian in *Oliver Twist*. Like Fabian, Wayne took in youths and used them to his own ends, and neither character ever stopped to consider if it was in the best interests of the children they took in, as they were blinded by selfish desire. It also seems that the type of person Wayne looks for in a potential partner suffers from the actual psychological condition of Child Abandonment Syndrome.

Many of the symptoms of Child Abandonment Syndrome mirror many of the traits of Batman and his children. Alienation, social withdrawal, rage, fear of uncertainty, resistance towards others and guilt are all symptoms of Bruce Wayne and most of the Bat Family.<sup>ci</sup> Another symptom of the syndrome that Wayne did not have is clinginess. Children who feel abandoned often cling to parental figures in an effort to reproduce a family. This is exacerbated when Wayne begins training them as partners, as a sense of common work and goals nurtures these feelings.<sup>cii</sup>

It seems from this perspective that Grayson and the other youths in the Bat Family, assuming that they were suffering from CAS, were made to feel a

fondness for Wayne and a sense of family that stemmed from his acceptance and attention. However, all of Wayne's partners eventually learn the same thing about Bruce Wayne, and it's ultimately what drives each of them away. Bruce has not found peace and is just as haunted by his parents' murder in the present as he was when he was eight years old. The choice becomes either to stay with Bruce and commiserate, or move on and try to rebuild their lives, as there is no family to had in Wayne Manor.<sup>ciii</sup>

The murder of Jason Todd and the crippling of Barbara Gordon both demonstrate how Batman feels towards those who join him in his war. Any feelings of attachment he feels towards his partners is secondary to their usefulness. Emotion does not change him. When the Joker murdered Jason Todd, Bruce was shaken, but did not lose his faith in his war on crime. Over time, he rationalized Todd's death by casting out any personal feelings he had for the boy and seeing him only as warrior. "Jason was a good soldier. He honored me. But the war goes on."<sup>civ</sup> This allowed Wayne to continue on his crusade without having to reevaluate his tactics or consider the personal cost of training children to battle crime.

Batman's partners who survive long enough to grow away from him ultimately do, and attempt to spread their wings alone. From Dick Grayson's Nightwing, to Tim Drake's Red Robin, his partners gladly use the skills they learned from their mentor, but don't wish to have any sort of personal relationship with Wayne. This is cemented by the fact that every major story that has been written about an elderly or retired Bruce Wayne, from the animated series,

*Batman Beyond* to Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, agree on one thing: Bruce Wayne is alone. This says to me that many writers of Batman agree that the choices he makes in how he treats his wards will ultimately drive them away. As previously stated, Wayne is not a father and has no interest in being one. Therefore, when his "children" leave the nest, it isn't surprising that they don't come back.

No one is ever quite able to let Bruce Wayne out of their lives completely. He leaves a stamp that never quite goes away. In the recent *Blackest Night* story arc, Batman was perceived to have been killed, but was actually (in true comic book fashion) lost in time. This instigated the *Battle for the Cowl*, in which former partners and allies of Bruce Wayne each vied for the title of Batman in Wayne's absence. Dick Grayson won the fight and became Batman until Wayne's return. Grayson reasoned that Batman was too important to Gotham. If the Dark Knight simply vanished, Gotham would descend into anarchy.

Dick Grayson was the first partner, the original Robin, and the one that Bruce Wayne will always compare others too. Although Bruce would never come to think of Dick as a son, he never stopped trusting Dick. Inversely, Dick will undoubtedly always harbor a certain level of resentment for what Bruce wasn't able to give him, but he still respects what Batman stands for. He knows that Bruce Wayne will never be the father he wanted him to be, but he also knows that when he gets a call saying that Gotham needs help, it must be important.

What Dick Grayson represents better than any other members of the Bat Family is the inherent flaw in how it functions as a family. Almost all members of

the Bat Family were somehow separated from a normal family structure. To view the relationships within the Bat Family as you would try to with a “normal” family, dysfunctional is the only word that seems apt. The problem, in my opinion, is not a lack of shared genetics. This “family” had no hope of functioning normally since it was built around Wayne, who had no interest or ability to be the head of a family.

One possible reading of the Bat Family’s inability to function is that it is intended to be a commentary on the non-traditional or non-nuclear family. The implication of this would be that broken families create people who are lost or tortured, never regaining the support system of loving nuclear family. By having been removed from what one could define as a “normal” family structure, Wayne, Grayson and the rest of the family are broken beyond repair. I disagree with this interpretation, as I don’t see broken families being commented or denigrated in the writing or narrative of the comics.

Instead, I believe that the implication of the Bat Family’s failure to function as a normal family implies that a family cannot be formed under duress. Bruce Wayne took in his various partners when their families were taken from them, but he never offered to replace their families with something comparable. He offered them a way to survive the pain of losing the lives they were supposed to have had. The family unit they formed was a pale imitation of the families they had before. The members of the Bat Family are reflecting a culture that sees a stable nuclear family as safe and innocent. When their respective families were violently murdered, that safety and innocence was gone, leaving them to try to

rebuild with a much bleaker outlook. A loving family can never be replaced when it is gone, according to the world of Batman, and any attempt to create a new family cannot compare to a family that still provides safety and innocence.

For too many, the goal of being in the family was to earn the respect and admiration of their patriarch, but Bruce Wayne withdrew from societal norms to such an extent that he lacked the human qualities to ever truly reciprocate complex feelings.

Dick Grayson presents a fascinating standpoint on both Bruce Wayne as a character and the nature of his war on crime. From the young boy who wanted nothing more than to grow up to be just like Batman, to the adult who detests the ways in which they are similar, Grayson allows a perspective of Batman that is simultaneously heroic and cynical.

My interest in the character encouraged me to include him in the screenplay in such a way that highlights his individual views of Batman. At first, he is introduced as Miranda's neighbor, but he is actually there at Batman's behest, having come from Bludhaven and renting the apartment next door to study her and find out if she would be a valuable ally, given how closely she works with Gotham's worst criminals.

As Dick begins to develop true feelings towards Miranda, he is torn between his duty and his own desires. He ultimately decides to abruptly leave Miranda rather than continue to deceive her. This action is meant to have significance, as his biggest criticism of Bruce Wayne has been the man's inability to let people get close to him and his constant efforts to push people away. Dick

now is repeating this action, but he doesn't yet understand what it really means: that the life he has chosen for himself forces him to make certain sacrifices.

Wayne has made his peace with this fact, but Grayson has just started learning.

His actions here are meant to have an irony to them. He leaves Miranda because, unlike his mentor, he was unable to remove his emotions from the mission. Grayson would rather fail the mission than continue to let his and Miranda's feelings develop when he knows that there is no future for them. However, in doing so, he does the very thing for which he constantly criticizes Batman: refuses to get close to people for the sake of the mission.

Dick's scenes with Bruce Wayne/Batman are intended to demonstrate his conflicted feelings towards his old mentor. Dick is cold and short when he speaks to Wayne, and other scenes in the screenplay have Dick describing Wayne as someone who he could never depend on. Conversely, Dick does not hesitate to do what is asked of him by Wayne, indicating that part of him is still trying to get Wayne's admiration. Near the end of the film, when Batman and Nightwing have walked into a trap set by the Joker, we see the two put their feelings aside and operate as a flawless team. This is meant to briefly harken back to when they were unbeatable when working together as the Dynamic Duo. In a larger sense, the implication is that Dick and Bruce may not connect in the ways a typical family should, but that isn't to say that they don't share a connection. Family can be whatever makes one feel part of a whole, and Batman and Robin evoke this when together. They may not be a "normal" family, but they have found a way to share a connection in their own unorthodox way.

## Chapter 10: Methodology

In writing *House of Cards*, I took the thematic elements outlined above and tried to make them as central to the characters, story and conflict wherever possible.

The main theme of the script is the nature of Gotham's culture of insanity. The story adheres to the formula I have laid out for character progression into insanity within the narrative context of Batman comics: tragedy, obsession and transformation. The central plot of the film, a battle of wits and perspectives between Miranda and the Joker, showcases this formula at work.

Even though the Joker is lying to Miranda about most of the details of his life, he nevertheless adheres to the formula I have proposed, although he is taking the reader through it backwards. In his early scenes, the Joker is guarded but enjoys mocking Miranda and trying to get a reaction out of her. This is the Joker's insanity, the end result of the formula.

As Miranda persuades him to open up more, he outlines the details of the next two steps: obsession and transformation. He outlines his anarchist philosophy to Miranda, using a literal house of cards as a metaphor for the perpetual lies a society is built on. He also gives somewhat factual details of his transformation and his perception of events the night he fell into a vat of chemicals and became the Joker. The incredibly skewed way he remembers

Batman being there explains his subsequent fixation on the Dark Knight, as well as provides the catalyst for his transformation.

Although two different films, *Batman* and *The Dark Knight*, have featured the Joker as the main antagonist, the character's portrayal in each film was not used as the primary inspiration for his character in *House of Cards*. His philosophy, mannerisms and speech patterns were drawn more directly from the works of Alan Moore and Frank Miller in *The Killing Joker* and *The Dark Knight Returns* respectively. Jack Nicholson's performance in the role of the Joker was used to also determine the Joker's speech patterns and mannerisms, but the character is not intended to be the same character. His values and philosophy are more in line with the comics than the film.

Finally, we see the Joker's tragedy in the form of a dark childhood memory of his mother's suicide, and his abusive father in hysterics over it all on the night the Joker first went to the circus. This tragedy laid the groundwork for his progression through the formula, but both Miranda and the reader will not realize until the end that it was all a lie.

The details of the Joker's childhood trauma were manufactured by the Joker, and meant to be eerily reminiscent of Miranda's own childhood trauma at the hands of her father. This twist at the end explains that this story was not a retelling of the Joker's origin or progression into madness, but rather foreshadowing Miranda's path. The Joker concocted a scenario at the end of the script designed to test her obsessive views of insanity and place her in a situation where the right and wrong answers are obscured.

The Joker serves as a representation of the corruptive power of Gotham City. His efforts to break Miranda are similar to how the city itself makes people transform into something psychotic or violent. Miranda will come to understand just how easy it is to fall victim to this corruption. This is the true power of Gotham City: to push morality and sanity to their breaking points.

There are several details that are meant to conform to the Joker's motifs and themes as a character. The Joker almost constantly has a deck of cards on him, a detail that goes back to his earliest appearances in the comics. The cards in the film, and in the title, represent lies. Often when a specific card is detailed in the scene descriptions, it is a tell that someone is about to tell a lie. The jack of clubs, for example, is unique to Dick and indicates he is about to tell a lie.

The larger idea is that many of the characters are, in essence, trying to play a game using the other characters as their pieces. Characters use lies to push each other in the direction they wish to move the game. Often, many characters think they are in control of the game, only to find they've been manipulated. As the final pieces come into play in the last act, it is revealed that the Joker was winning from the start, as he had set the other characters' trajectories into motion.

In the most literal sense, the title, *House of Cards*, refers to a scene in which the Joker builds a house of cards as a metaphor for how society is primed to collapse once all the lies come to light. In a more figurative sense, the house of cards in question is the asylum. In one sense, it refers to the asylum being home to Batman's family of villains. In a larger sense, however, the house of cards refers to the lies Miranda tells herself to convince herself she is not insane. The Joker's

aim in the script, then, is to demonstrate how easily a house of cards can be knocked down.

In thinking about the potential audience for the film, I am aiming for something in between a completely mainstream movie audience and a Batman fan base. I want the film to be approachable to an audience that does not have an encyclopedic knowledge of Batman and his world, but a certain level of foreknowledge will be somewhat necessary to completely understand some of the events and actions in the story. For example, little information is given about many of the other patients of the asylum, meaning that if the audience has never heard of characters like Mr. Freeze or Clayface, the screenplay will not inform them of their back stories or histories to any complete extent. While these details have little impact on the overall plot of the script, they will provide a more robust picture of the setting.

Audience members that do have a preexisting knowledge of Batman will undoubtedly enjoy the story more, as I believe that they will benefit from a Batman story tailored to fit with existing comic book canon and narrative. I am aware that writing the story to fit with the comic book narrative definitely limits the overall appeal to a general audience. With that said, I feel that in assuming the audience will have some foreknowledge of Batman, this allows me to jump right in, so to speak, and begin telling the story with the world and setting already, at least partially, established. Upon hearing the name Dick Grayson, for example, well-informed audience members will know right away who he is and will begin to speculate why he has moved in next door to Miranda, not believing it is pure

coincidence. Knowing that Dick was Batman's former partner and is currently the vigilante, Nightwing, this allows the audience to concentrate less on technical questions of who he is and why he is there, and instead focus his immediate struggles in the story, such as his conflicted feelings towards Miranda.

I would also hope that audience members who know little if anything about Batman would be inspired to learn more based on this screenplay. Specifically, I would desire that it is the narrative elements in play, not the characters or settings as much, that intrigue the audience into wishing to further their understanding of the morality and philosophy present in the Batman mythos. In terms of story and the script's function as a psychological thriller, I want to have written a story that will remain appealing to someone without this knowledge of Batman based purely on its own narrative merits. Even for someone completely ignorant to Batman, the build and twist of the story would hopefully be satisfying and entertaining.

In summation, I believe that the more an audience member already knows about Batman and the canon, the more appealing and enjoyable the film will be overall. However, a complete knowledge of the Batman mythos is not necessary. Knowing facts like who the Joker is and what he represents, Batman's view on crime and society, and that Dick Grayson was once Robin, to list a few, would be helpful in getting the full enjoyment from this story. Someone with little to no knowledge of Batman will definitely be more than a little confused at times, but the story itself should not be completely unapproachable to this segment of the audience.

The decision to make the main character female was a deliberate choice to showcase the story from a woman's perspective. Furthermore, it celebrated Batman's progressive view on showcasing stronger women in comics more than others had been writing. Miranda Greene is meant to come across as a strong, confident, self-assured woman. Her character flaws and eventual downfall were never intended to be correlated to her gender. To avoid this depiction, I am not defining Miranda by her femininity, but highlighting her character flaws as a result of her tragic past in which her father murdered her mother and tried to kill her, leaving both physical and mental scars.

Miranda, however, is the only female main character for a specific reason. Miranda is meant to represent the changing attitudes in how women were approached in the comic medium following the social awareness and narrative revolution of the post-crisis age. Arkham Asylum is meant to have the feeling of a "boy's club," much like comic books in general. And like the women of Batman comics, Miranda feels compelled to earn her place through actions and works.

Miranda's optimism and confidence, however, are not meant to come across as naiveté, but as coping mechanisms for dealing with her own inherent darkness. Much like the case of Barbara Gordon, the intent was to take a strong character and build her up so the inevitable fall will have more impact. As the story progresses, Miranda faces the truth about her obsession with insane minds and initially becomes stronger for it.

Looking at Miranda's background, I envisioned her education as very studious and to the point, as she probably did not have much of social life. It was

her obsession that led her to into psychology and that would have consistently been the most important thing in her life. Thus, we see a woman without much interest in a life outside of her work. It is only through Dick's insistence that their relationship develops. Furthermore, her focus on Jungian psychology seems a natural fit for her, since the world she lives in has the insane creating archetypal personas for themselves.

It is through her interactions with Dick that she allows herself to drop her guard and behave in a less clinical fashion. Much of her character's skill and reputation as a psychiatrist comes from her clinical view on human nature. It seems almost counter intuitive to describe her as both socially inept and a brilliant psychiatrist, but her knowledge of human behavior originates in textbooks, not life experience. Dick and their unusual relationship allows her to experience life as something other than clinical or objective for the first time, coinciding with her bold approach to the Joker's treatment at the beginning of the third act.

More importantly than her education is Miranda's belief that her unique experience with the insane allows her a different approach to treating her patients. She sees mental illness through an academic or objective lens initially. This clouds her judgment by not allowing her to take into account her own history or personal views when forming diagnoses. As a result of this, I believe she's quick to see significance where there may be none. Miranda is confident of her theories to a fault, and this allows her to be fooled by the Joker's phony rehabilitation and set off the events of the climax. I believe that Miranda chooses to believe that mental illness exists in a specific way, because she cannot separate herself from

her view of insanity. She subconsciously chooses to believe that insanity is like a trail that can be walked down and back again, because that's what she wants to believe about herself. To think of insanity in anything but clinical terms is to accept that it can be abstract, and that is unthinkable for her. She needs to believe that it is both black and white, and treatable. Otherwise, she is powerless against insanity, and that is unacceptable to her.

During the climax, Miranda's choice is essentially to destroy or not to destroy. By shooting the Joker, she would be destroying herself by giving in to her personal demons. Through her interactions with Dick, however, she has learned that she doesn't have to lose herself to her demons and be destroyed herself. By following this moment with her quitting the asylum and then placing the Joker's flowers on her mother's grave, we see her ending a life that leads to more destruction and obsession, and creating a new life for herself.

It's in this ending that I see Miranda at her most honest, hopeful and feminine. At this point in the story, Miranda abandons her obsession with understanding her innate mental nature and moves forward with a newly minted life. She will always have her demons, but she will no longer be defined by them. It is in both in this choice and this creation that I think Miranda stands for feminism. Her refusal to be defined, even by herself, grants her the freedom to be her own woman and I envision her future following this story as one defined by good works.

Also of note is Miranda's hometown being Metropolis, the comic book home to Superman. This decision was meant to accomplish two things. First, this

script is not trying to depict Gotham City in a microcosm or vacuum. This Gotham is meant to be one more closely associated with the comic books, and by establishing that Metropolis exists, is protected by Superman, and features its own rogue's gallery of villains, it can be assumed that more of the DC Universe is also present though unmentioned in the context of the script.

Second, the inherent dichotomy between Metropolis and Gotham as a reflection of Miranda's outlook plays against the outlook of the average Gotham citizen. Miranda begins the story as confident in her ability to help the inmates of Arkham, believing they can be saved from mental illness. Everyone else in the story, however, believes she is foolish for trying, as if there is no hope.

This difference in perspective is meant to speak volumes about the uniqueness of Gotham's crime problem. For starters, Miranda's hope about the ability of people to overcome insanity and darkness is an ideal constantly represented in the annals of Superman comics. Metropolis is a city of hope, but Gotham is a city of fear. Her Gotham coworkers have lived in Gotham's shadows, and their concept of a hero is drastically different than Miranda's, who grew up seeing the Man of Steel. Gotham citizens, however, have watched crime and madness tear their city apart time and time again. It's understandable that they are much more cynical than Miranda. This leads to one of Miranda's main struggles within the script, trying to hold on to her hope while embracing the reality of Gotham's darkness.

Characters constantly discuss the past in the film as a means to explain who they are in the present. As such, memory and the past are constantly called

into question, as the truth of what happened and how one chooses to remember are often in conflict. This enables an element of choice into the framework of the formula. By choosing to dwell on certain details of the past, characters unwittingly foster their own obsessions. As Dick points out within the script, there is always the choice to fight against that which haunts you and overcome it. In most cases within the script, the past is left ambiguous, leaving the notion that the truth is irrelevant when one wishes to believe things actually happened a different way.

Batman was originally not going to be in the story at all, only being mentioned at times. As his absence became difficult to justify as I wrote the script, I first established Bruce Wayne as a love interest for Miranda Greene in hope of finding a new cinematic approach to the character, but quickly scrapped that element as it seemed too coincidental and forced.

Much of the framework of that relationship was salvaged as I added the character of Dick Grayson to fill the role and provide a window into how the Bat Family operates. Dick's experience with Bruce Wayne and Miranda's traumatic childhood at the hands of her own father allow these characters to establish a mutual understanding of confusion and apprehension towards their fathers.

Dick, in essence, resents his father figure for not giving him what he believed a father ought to give a son. Miranda, on the other hand, is terrified of what her father may have given her in the way of mental illness or permanent emotional scars.

Dick's attitudes towards Bruce Wayne are incredibly reminiscent of their relationship in the post-crisis age. Throughout the story, Dick has few kind words to say about his surrogate father, and is openly hostile towards him on several occasions. But later in the story, we see that Dick does harbor an almost secret respect for Bruce. He talks fondly of how Bruce helped him survive in the wake of his own parents' murder, but how he had to ultimately leave Bruce behind.

The implication of Dick leaving Bruce's home and tutelage is that he no longer wishes to be in a "family" with Bruce. But the fact that he is still willing and able to assist his mentor shows the grudging respect he still holds for Batman. In keeping with the father/son dynamic, Dick is never quite able to cut his perceived family out of his life.

Dick pursues Miranda romantically in an effort to get close to her and gauge her attitudes towards the Joker specifically. He does so at Bruce's request, understanding the importance of keeping tabs on the Joker, but becomes increasingly reluctant as their attraction grows.

Dick halting his relationship with Miranda near the end of the story marks a noticeable difference between him and Batman. Batman chastises Dick for getting too close to Miranda emotionally, something that Batman himself would not have done. Batman would have had no trouble manipulating Miranda to his own ends, while Dick could not bring himself to hurt her by continuing the lie. This would be a failing in Batman's mind, as emotion should never trump the mission. That belief alone explains why Dick left in the first place.

*House of Cards* is also meant to break the trends of the modern Batman films in terms of storytelling, pacing and scope. While the modern Batman films have attempted to simplify the continuity of the comics or establish their own, *House of Cards* is meant to be more accommodating of the comic book canon, but not be shackled by it. Events mentioned, such as Aaron Cash losing his hand to Killer Croc and Dick establishing himself in the city of Bludhaven are all specific references to story arcs in the comic continuity. But while I made every effort to keep a level of continuity in tact, I never compromised the story to fit within the context of a preexisting canon.

By not embracing Batman as the main protagonist of the film, we're allowed to see Gotham from a different perspective. The notions of Batman's contributions to the emergence of the super villains and his impact on Gotham as a whole have been used in the films of all three modern Batman directors, but I am taking a different approach.

*House of Cards* looks to take a step back and look at Gotham City more holistically. The central idea of the film is to examine the strange nature of Gotham's heroes and villains from a distance, not to pass moral judgment but to understand what drives men and women to act as they do. As I've witnessed in my narrative analysis of the comic books and graphic novels of Batman, I would argue that Gotham is the catalyst that changes these characters. The corruption and overwhelming despair of the city is what pushes them into breaking, Batman himself included.

With that being said, Batman did serve as the inspiration for his enemies' costumes and motifs, but their decline into obsession and insanity was not his doing. While Batman provided an inspiration for an outlet of insanity, he did not cause the mental breaks that turned his enemies insane or evil.

Action is meant to be almost nonexistent within the story, marking a sharp break from all other modern Batman films. What few scenes there are in the script of action or violence are not meant to be audience-pleasing spectacles, but serve specific plot or narrative purposes. A scene building to the climax, for example, features a jailbreak from the inmates of the asylum. The scene is written with specific and elaborate depictions of the Batman villains murdering guards and fighting their way to freedom. This scene is meant to juxtapose Miranda's view that despite their insanity, they are still human beings with Aaron Cash's opinion that they are in fact dangerous killers.

What few scene descriptions there are that describe the look of Gotham City, Arkham Asylum, and the culture of the citizens are written to evoke a golden age aesthetic, very much in the style of the Tim Burton films. This is not intended to connect continuity with his films in any way, but rather to point out the fact that his art direction masterfully captured the look and feel of Gotham City as it had been depicted in the comics.

Finally, I tried to infuse the script with a sense of history that is lacking from the modern films, as many tend to introduce characters to each other for the first time. I wanted there to be a noticeable feeling that this was many years into Batman's crusade. This is not a story about meeting these characters for the first

time, but to show where they are after about 15 years. Although readers might not know the comic book storylines of how Robin became Nightwing, for example, by the end of the story they will have an idea of the emotional implications of that event. The script, therefore, will need to work on two levels. For those familiar with the characters and their history, the reveal of Dick Grayson as working with Batman will be forecast from very early in the script. For those unfamiliar, the script will need to convey the history between Grayson and Bruce Wayne to have the appropriate impact when his true identity is revealed.

My hope is that the final draft of *House of Cards* will fit thematically with the current state of Batman's comic series, as well as providing a new and different approach to how the story elements and characters of the Batman universe can be conceived in film media. The overall message I wish to convey with the script is the power of perception, in that how we see the world defines us as individuals. By the end of the screenplay, we will understand the difference in outlook from the Joker, Miranda, and Dick and how that defines them as characters. Their actions through the story will be in keeping with their perceptions, and allow the audience to understand why they act as they do as it is bound to what we know about them and how they see the world.

## Chapter 11: Proposal Conclusion

The goal of my screenplay is to demonstrate a method of writing a film adaptation of Batman and his fictional universe that stands in contrast with how others have approached the character.

In having analyzed the Batman universe as adapted to other media, it seems clear that the creators of this media believe that Batman is primarily an action hero who, in some form or another, requires violence to propel a story. It is my belief that this is incorrect. Batman himself and a number of peripheral and antagonist characters, such as the Joker, provide such a level of psychological complexity that it is entirely possible to tell engaging and thrilling stories within this narrative that do not rely on action or physical stakes. The complex psychology and methodology of character transformation allow for stories to be told that focus on subtle character development and drama that is not dependent on action to move the story forward. Furthermore, Batman himself does not need to be the focal point of a script set in his fictional universe, as both characters who live in Gotham surrounded by his cultural impact and characters who know him personally can provide a different view of both Batman himself, and the personal and societal costs of his war on crime.

Given Batman's largely progressive approach to writing female characters, it is my belief that female characters should be presented as more than

love interests or damsels in distress, and should be held to equal standards as the prominent male characters.

If successful, my screenplay, *House of Cards* will follow the narrative tropes of Batman comics to ensure that it feels as if it could exist within the same continuity, as well as avoid the action heavy plotting of existing Batman films. The screenplay will celebrate the character complexity and personal drama that defines Bruce Wayne as well as the notable citizens of Gotham City.

## Chapter 12: Post Thesis Final Thoughts

When I first started thinking about my master's thesis for the University of Denver's Film, Media and Journalism Studies program, I knew I wanted to focus on the narrative criticism and analysis aspects of the program. As a lifelong reader of comic books and graphic novels, I wanted to use what I had learned and apply it to the surge of comic book film adaptations in recent years. In my opinion, these adaptations too often focus on their action sequences and fight scenes first and on the characters and motivations second. As such, I've always had a desire to see a film adaptation of a comic book that was not written as a summer blockbuster or big budget action movie, but one that told a smaller, more personal story that drew from the major themes of the comics. I saw Batman as an excellent test case for my idea, as Batman provides over seventy years worth of publications to analyze as well as numerous examples of adaptations into other media, such as film and television. With all of the Batman films to date taking the route of an action film, I wanted to prove that this mythology could lend itself to a film that was about the themes present in the world of Batman. After extensive research into the Batman mythos to identify what I believe are the prevalent themes, *House of Cards* was conceived as an example of a film that was faithful to its source material without relying on action sequences to move the story.

As I am now nearing the end of the revision process, I feel that the finished project is very much in tune with my original proposal and outline, even as some of my

original ideas changed to meet the needs of the script. While the revision process was daunting at times, I feel that every subsequent draft became clearer and better handled the intricacies of the story I wanted to tell.

These elements that I will discuss are the ones I initially laid out in my proposal and how I feel the project progressed from these early ideas into a screenplay. Firstly, I will elaborate on the Joker's role as the antagonist and his representation of the themes of insanity and radical transformation of identity. Then, I will summarize Batman's role in the story as it evolved throughout this process. I will then describe Dick Grayson and how his duality became central to the character. I will also discuss what went into creating the story's protagonist, Miranda Greene, in terms of developing her as the main character while balancing the themes of insanity and feminism in Batman's mythology. Finally, I will describe the technical challenges I faced in the writing and revision process.

The element I felt stayed closest to my original proposal was the character of the Joker. As stated in my proposal, one of the key elements I wanted to explore in the Batman mythos was the transformation of characters, with the Joker serving as a symbolic representation of that transformation. On a character level, I feel confident that my portrayal of the iconic villain meets the goal I established, which was to keep the character as he is depicted in his Post-Crisis comic book iteration. I feel the Joker I have written in *House of Cards* meets this goal in terms of his actions and his voice, and his characterization was consistently the element of the screenplay that I felt the best about. I find this gratifying as one of the main reasons I initially showed an interest in Batman's mythos was the rich gallery of antagonists. Given that the Joker is the most iconic of

these villains, I take a certain amount of pride in being able to adapt the character in such a way that felt consistent with his role in the comic books.

For the most part, I found that writing characters that had already existed in the comic book continuity was easier than I feared it would be. I credit this to the amount of research I put into the characters beforehand, giving me an understanding of their personalities and how they would respond to a given situation. Furthermore, I enjoyed peppering the setting with characters from the Batman mythology that added a sense of flavor to the world and added to the idea that this was a larger universe that is typically explored in a Batman film. The shape-shifting villain, Clayface, for example, was a minor background character with no relevance at all to the plot. Yet, I found that adding him to the story and making use of his shape-shifting ability for both comic beats and dramatic twists added a sense of personality to the story. While there are many villains on display within the screenplay in very small roles, I made sure that each one was consistent with their origins and that none did anything that could be described as out of character.

One element that changed drastically from my original proposal is the role of Batman/Bruce Wayne in the story. As stated in my proposal, the original intent was to keep Batman relegated to the shadows, away from the main plot. This was to avoid focusing on Batman's struggles and concentrate on the world that he played a significant role in shaping. I am comfortable with his added presence in the story, however, since most of his scenes have to do with the character of Dick Grayson.

Batman does serve, though, as an interesting symbol of one of the story's central components: the thin line between sanity and insanity. Batman himself has an intimate

knowledge of what causes a person to change so drastically, having seen it both in himself and in his rogue's gallery of villains. Since he did not become a villain after his radical transformation, he represents, as also stated by Dick, the process is not just about tragedy, but also what the individual chooses to do with their inherent darkness. This is also indicated in Batman's brief discussion of Nietzsche with Miranda, as he quotes passages from Nietzsche's work that suggests morality and sanity are both subjective and slippery slopes.

I also wanted to show that Batman, despite his prowess as a superhero and what he has done for Gotham, is kind of a jerk, to put it bluntly. I've always enjoyed the fact that Batman is a cynical and cold hero, as opposed to many of his peers in the superhero canon. When he's not the main character of the story, his interactions and tone would have him look less like an action hero and more like a terrible friend or cranky father figure to Dick. This is an element of the story that I thought came across very well, and I think it added a weight and history to his scenes with Dick, alluding to but not directly addressing their sordid past.

Dick's struggle in the story, which I feel was poorly defined in the first draft, was to show him torn between his desire to move out of his former mentor's shadow, while still attempting to gain Batman's approval. With more scenes of him conversing and arguing with Batman/Bruce Wayne, we get a much better sense of his ambivalence and the history shared between the two, and his character became more interesting to the overall story.

The added material of Dick and Bruce proved to be my favorite of the changes I made to my original draft of the story. I enjoyed their conflicted relationship and find it to

be one of the more interesting aspects of my script. It reminded me of when I was first making a plan for my thesis some time ago and I was considering two different ideas. One was the story I ended up going with: an analysis of the psychology and corruption of Gotham's bizarre personalities. The other idea that I abandoned in favor of *House of Cards*, was to focus on the relationships and conflicts of the Bat Family on a very human level. After thinking back on the scenes between Bruce and Dick, I believe that this idea has potential and might make an equally interesting project as a future screenplay.

As Dick's role was expanded in revisions of the script, his conflicted nature became the centerpiece of the character. In particular, I enjoyed adding a scene where his alter ego, Nightwing, is confused for Batman, leaving Dick noticeably annoyed and frustrated. Another addition to the script is a scene where Bruce Wayne, pretending to be drunk, intentionally misremembers the name of Dick's new persona, calling him Wingnut instead of Nightwing. These scenes, to me, suggest an unspoken resentment between the two. Bruce resents Dick for leaving, and Dick resents Bruce for not respecting him as an adult. Despite the fact that these two are superheroes, I enjoyed writing and seeing this very human relatable family dynamic play out between such bold characters.

Upon a suggestion from my advisor, I expanded Batman's role in the climax of the story. In the original draft, Batman was intentionally absent from the asylum as the various prisoners mounted their escape, and the scene ended with multiple inmates escaping. The scene was chaotic and did not have a definitive ending. By adding the appearance of Batman to the climax, I was able to provide a more satisfying ending to the climax. I was originally ambivalent about this change, but now I feel that it provides a more exciting way to end the story. Even though my goal, as stated earlier was to limit

the role of Batman in the story and avoid using action to move the plot, this ending provides a better sense of closure and finality to the story. The climax remains a contest of wills between Miranda and the Joker, so adding Batman to this scene did not violate my goal of using the actions and goals of characters to move the story forward instead of action sequences.

This ending, however, suggests that the action elements of the Batman film franchise are, in fact, keeping with the Batman mythos. I made a point of stating in my proposal that almost all comic book adaptations follow the route of action movies, and I wanted to adapt Batman in a way that wasn't focused on this sort of problem solving or plot development. Despite my intentions of a character driven script, the simple fact is that violence and action are an integral part of Batman's storytelling in all media. Much of my project was about identifying the major narrative elements of Batman and making those central to my original story. It should be noted that, even though I set out to make a story that was not action oriented, violence is still a major component of the Batman mythos, both in comics and films. Therefore, the only way to write a Batman film with no action whatsoever would be to never write a situation or encounter that could only be solved with a violent solution. Since the ending of my script became chaotic and violent, there was no other way to end this scene in a satisfying way. The alternatives were to just end the scene abruptly without resolution, to show more of the villains escaping, or to not have other villains present in the breakout attempt. All three of these, I believe, would have made the ending less satisfying and fun for the audience. Thusly, despite my intentions, Batman needed to show up in the end and save the day.

Interestingly enough, this could be read as a comment on Batman and Miranda's differing approaches to the villains of the world. In a larger sense, this could be read as seen as a statement on my approach to this story. I may have set out to write a screenplay that focuses on characters over action, but in the end, I still needed Batman to throw a few punches. In some ways, this inhibits the ability of a writer like myself to move away from that action, since it is inevitable in an adaptation that is trying to be faithful to the source material. The fact is, Batman's world is violent, and sometimes action is the only way to solve the problems of this world. I don't lament going this route, however, since everything leading up to the climax is in keeping with my stated goals, and I don't believe Batman's action violates this. Rather, it was a situation that grew beyond Miranda's control and required the tried and true approach of Gotham City's heroes over her pop psychology.

Looking back now, I feel that the biggest challenge was in writing the main character of Miranda Greene. One of the first problems was in figuring out how to write the character in such a way that resonated with the points I made in my proposal about feminism in the world of Batman's comic book canon. There I stated that Batman's writing was very progressive in its portrayal of female characters when compared to other comic book mythologies. Batman's various writers typically wrote stronger, more capable female characters than were seen in other comics, so my challenge was in attempting to strike a balance between making her a strong, capable woman and having her be deeply flawed with respect to her blossoming insanity simultaneously.

To address this, a friend who I looked to for notes and peer review of my screenplay suggested I was over thinking the problem and should focus more on defining

her as a character regardless of gender and let her personality dictate the direction of her arc. An example of this would be in the scene where she encounters Batman in her living room. The scene was at first very clunky and awkward because it was attempting to balance too many perspectives: Miranda as a woman, a psychiatrist, and as a person with a superhero in their living room. Upon a suggestion from my aforementioned peer, I rewrote the scene focusing just on Miranda's views as a psychiatrist and person with a personal stake in Batman's knowledge of the Joker. This was essentially my stepping stone into rethinking my approach to the character and keeping the focus on her wants and needs within the story.

This coincided with another problem that arose with the character. The character was poorly defined in early drafts. Looking back, there were inconsistencies in terms of her temperament. Miranda would fluctuate between being scared of her patients and standing up to them almost arbitrarily. This inhibited her arc by making her actions difficult to comprehend. Furthermore, this also stood in the way of her character's secret of studying her own propensity for a psychotic break. Subsequent drafts gradually improved the character, enhancing her motivation and making her more consistent in her interactions. As I see it, her character developed a sense of false bravado and odd mannerisms to demonstrate to the audience that she was not as well put together as she initially seemed, which provided greater resonance to her actions in the climax.

Nevertheless, the foreshadowing and subtleties of Miranda's potential psychosis remained a challenge to write. In hindsight, I believe the problem was in attempting to balance Miranda's oddities with the fact that she was also the central protagonist. Making her too bizarre would have alienated the audience, making it difficult to find an entrance into

the story. Making her not bizarre enough removes the impact of the plot twists surrounding her character. In my final draft, I feel I have finally struck a careful balance between making the character approachable to an outside audience, but odd enough to raise questions.

From a technical standpoint, one of my biggest challenges was the length of the story and finding ways to show rather than tell. Since many of the key scenes in the story are therapy sessions between Miranda and a patient, I was struggling to find ways to keep the script from simply being two people talking to one another. To deal with this problem, I would often have characters playing with something. In the case of the Joker, it was most often a deck of cards. I also tried to use flashbacks as a way to get around this problem by having characters narrate events as they unfold on the screen rather than just talk about them. I feel that in the end, I was able to write these as tightly as I could without sacrificing the purpose of each therapy scene.

It's worth noting at this point that in between the time I had written much of the story and settles on the title, *House of Cards*, a television series of the same name debuted on Netflix's content streaming service. Although the titles are identical, the Netflix series is a political drama about Washington insider politics and shares no similarities with my work. Nevertheless, while I feel my title is apt for the story, I would undoubtedly have to change it if this script were to move forward into production.

As a writer, both in the academic and creative sense, I have always had a difficult time keeping things short and knowing when I have made my point. This directly leads to me writing too much and basically not trusting the audience to understand my point. As I received input from both my advisor and peers who provided critiques, this was the main

area where their help was appreciated. I find that work shopping a script improves my writing by making it more succinct. I would say the clearest example of a scene that improved with this input was the scene in which Miranda confessed to Dick her secret past. The first version of this scene was long and very expositional with little room for interpretation, as Miranda basically just sat there and told the story to Dick and the audience. Subsequent versions were improved by using quick visual cues and less dialogue to tell the story. This worked, additionally, with added emphasis on Miranda's potentially blossoming insanity, making the scene more of a reveal to the audience, rather than simply exposition through dialogue.

To be honest, working on this script has made me rethink my approach to writing creatively. My strategy is usually to intentionally write too much and include every idea and scene I want for the script in a first draft without regard to length or quality. Then, I fine tune the script, see what works and what doesn't to eventually cut the material together and come closer to a finished product. This experience has taught me I should be more discerning in the writing process from the beginning and start with a much tighter focus on what the story needs rather than what I want. An example of this would be a brief scene involving the villain, the Riddler, who is now completely absent from the script. The scene in question was initially written and added because I had thought of a funny line for the character and didn't want to cut it. At the end of the day, though, I couldn't justify keeping a scene just for one comic beat and nothing else. With a different writing approach, I might have found a place for it elsewhere, but as I neared completion, I needed to be editing the script down and removing tangential or peripheral scenes and characters.

The last phase of my revision focused on tightening and trimming wherever I could, be it in scene descriptions or getting right to the point with dialogue. I know am much more comfortable with the writing in general, as I believe it is much tighter and more focused than previous drafts. If I should write another screenplay in the future, I believe that I would like to try taking the opposite approach to this one, which is to say that I would write each scene getting straight to the point and moving on. Once all the scenes were in place and the story arc took root, then I would go back and add more character and personality to the writing. Essentially, I would try to be a more succinct writer and less of an indulgent one.

My finished screenplay is just short of 124 pages, making it slightly longer than a standard 110-115 page script. While it would have been preferable to shorten it to this length, I feel that the current form of the script effectively reflects the project I initially laid out in my proposal. To me, every scene is essential in moving the story and thematic elements forward, so any additional cuts or edits would hinder the narrative.

In summation, I feel the finished product, while definitely different than the script I had originally planned, meets the goals I set out for myself in my initial proposal. I am comfortable with Batman/Bruce Wayne's expanded presence in the script, since I feel his role didn't violate my goal of keeping him away from the center of the plot and not relying on action to move the story forward. Also, I feel I was able to convey the cultural presence of the Dark Knight within the fictional Gotham.

The character of Dick Grayson stayed close to my original concept of his character, with the changes and additions furthering his struggle of being torn between two worlds. The Joker, too, did not deviate much from how I envisioned him in the story.

And although Miranda provided a lot of difficulty in fine-tuning her character and establishing her backstory and motivations throughout, I feel the end result has elevated the character to be more interesting and engaging than the one I originally sought to create.

I am content with the finished draft of *House of Cards* and feel it exemplifies the themes and ideas from the Batman mythos I wanted to emphasize. The concepts of defining insanity and personal transformation, the culture of Gotham City and its colorful citizens, and the underlying theme of broken and reformed families all came across as I had hoped, leaving me satisfied with the completed project.

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## Appendix

House of Cards

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An Adapted Screenplay by

Matthew R. Lieber

---

Based on the DC Comics Publication, *Batman*

Created by Bob Kane

FADE IN

EXT. CRIME ALLEY - SUNSET

We open on a dark street in Gotham City, an Art Deco American metropolis whose filth is both literal and figurative. Beyond the vapid towers of downtown is "Crime Alley," a neighborhood worthy of its name. Picture: thick bars on windows and doors, Graffiti, including one noteworthy piece that shows a red bat on a brick wall with the words, "THE BAT MUST DIE." Focus on one street in particular, lined with 20<sup>th</sup> Century townhouses built elbow to elbow. TWO MOVERS carry a sofa from a truck, up the steps into a townhouse.

MOVER 1

So there are these two guys in a lunatic asylum, right? And one night, they decide they don't want to be locked up anymore.

MOVER 2

Sounds reasonable.

MOVER 1

So they climb up to the roof and the first guy jumps across to the building next door. But the second guy, he doesn't think he can make the jump.

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

The two movers carry the couch into the front entrance and into a living room. The room is thick with boxes.

MOVER 1

So the first guy takes out his flashlight and says he'll turn it on and hold it over the gap so the second guy can walk across the beam.

And do you know what the second guy says?

The two movers set the couch down in the living room.

MIRANDA (OS)

Do I look crazy to you?

The two movers look to the other side of the room, where DR. MIRANDA GREENE stands by a desk. Miranda is a tall woman in her early 30's. She has short, black hair and wears professional looking clothes. She empties a box containing file folders and framed photographs.

MIRANDA

You'd turn it off when I was halfway across.

MOVER 1

Heard that one before, have you?

MIRANDA

Spend as much time around mental hospitals as I do, you'll hear that one a lot.

MOVER 2

Mental hospitals, huh? You don't look crazy to me.

Miranda gives them a sly look, as if to say "maybe I am, maybe I'm not." She smiles to herself and goes back to work, pulling a magazine out of the box and dropping it on the desk. The magazine, titled "Modern Psychology," has a picture of Miranda on the cover. There is a sub heading that reads, "A look inside the heads of super villains with Dr. Miranda Greene."

INT. BATCAVE - SAME

In a dark, dimly lit cavern, a pair of gloved hands holds an identical copy of "Modern Psychology," with Miranda on the cover. The man sits with his back to us

in a large chair in front of an enormous computer console. Although we only see the back of his head, the pointy ears on his cowl are unmistakable. This is BATMAN, Gotham's Dark Knight. Batman reaches for a phone built into the console. After a moment, he speaks into the phone in a gruff, growl of a voice.

BATMAN

How soon can you get to Gotham?

Batman opens the magazine and turns it to Miranda's article. The title reads "Nietzsche's Conundrum: Examining, Diagnosing, and Treating the Mind of the Super Criminal." By Dr. Miranda Greene.

BATMAN

I need a favor.

Batman looks closely at the photo of Miranda.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

The movers have gone, and Miranda removes a framed diploma from Metropolis University, followed by a framed photograph of her shaking hands with none other than SUPERMAN. Her face indicates fond memories. She sets it down at the desk and removes a stack of file folders from the box, placing them on the desk. Underneath the folders is one last item, a framed photograph of Miranda as a child standing with her very ordinary looking MOTHER and FATHER. For a brief second, she sees a black inkblot over her father's face. She quickly places the photo back in the box. She starts looking through the stack of file folders on her desk. She sets aside files labeled Harvey Dent, Jonathan Crane, Waylon Jones, and Basil Karlo among others. She pauses on one. The name on the tab reads "Janice Black." She stares at it for a moment before setting it aside too and continuing her search. Finally she finds the file she's looking for, but the label can't be seen. She flips through the various papers for a few moments. She pulls out one piece of paper and stares at it intently. After a moment she sets the paper down and walks away from her desk. As

she leaves, we can see it is a photocopy of a playing card. A joker.

EXT. ROAD TO ARKHAM - LATER

Miranda drives a sedan down a wooded, winding road at night. She drives past a small 24-hour diner amidst the trees with a large, blue sign that reads "Mad House Diner." A sign in the window reads, "Go crazy over our breakfast specials!" Miranda continues driving down the road and passes a large sign that reads, "DO NOT STOP. HITCHHIKERS MAY BE ESCAPING INMATES." Miranda rounds another bend in her car and the towers of Arkham Asylum come into view, ominously lit by large searchlights. Miranda pulls up to a heavy, wrought iron gate connected to a large imposing fence with thick barbed wire along the top. Guard towers adorned with floodlights. Sirens. ARMED GUARDS patrol the perimeter of the campus.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - NIGHT

Miranda pulls up in front of the large mansion that serves as the administration building. She confidently walks up the steps to the front door. Next to the door is a stone placard that reads "Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane. Est. 1939."

INT. RECEPTION - LATER

Miranda enters through the front door into a waiting room. The reception desk behind a thick pane of glass currently sits empty due to the late hour. On the desk is a framed plaque that reads "You don't have to be crazy to work here, but it helps!" Miranda reads the plaque for a second, then jumps when she sees the reflection of a dark man in the glass. She spins around and sees DR. JAMES MORRIS, Arkham's Chief of Medicine. Mousy and middle-aged, he wears a traditional white lab coat.

JAMES

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sneak up on you, Dr. Greene.

MIRANDA

Good to see you again, Dr. Morris.

JAMES

James, please. We weren't expecting you until tomorrow morning.

James crosses the room and shakes Miranda's hand.

MIRANDA

I know, but I called ahead and found out you were on call tonight and, well...what can I say? I'm anxious to get started.

JAMES

Right, I'll show you to your office.

James walks toward the front door. Miranda stands for a moment in confusion. James stops and turns back to her.

JAMES

This building is for administrative personnel and those with up to medium level security clearance. Your office is in the special detention ward.

Miranda nods and walks towards the door with James.

EXT. ARKHAM ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - SAME

James and Miranda emerge from the large doors of the administration building and stand outside.

JAMES

I called our chief of security. He'll be here in a moment to escort us.

Miranda and James stand on the front steps of Arkham's administration building.

JAMES

So how does our hospital compare to the famous Belle Reve?

Miranda eyes the numerous guard towers and the fence.

MIRANDA

If you've worked in one prison designed for super villains, you've really worked in them all.

JAMES

I'm sure you'll do great here. Your recommendations from Belle Reve were glowing and we're all excited to see you apply your techniques to our prisoners.

MIRANDA

Don't you mean patients, Doctor?

JAMES

Yes, of course.

A jeep with the words "Arkham Security" written on the side pulls up and out steps the driver, AARON CASH. Cash is a large, black man wearing a blue security uniform. His face is craggy and worn.

JAMES

Miranda Greene, Aaron Cash, our head of security.

MIRANDA

A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Cash.

Miranda extends her arm for a handshake, when Cash holds up his right arm, revealing a hook where the hand should be. Miranda smiles and reaches to grab the hook. She gives it two shakes and releases it. Cash and James both look surprised.

MIRANDA

Ready when you are.

CASH

Uh, right.

Miranda and James climb into the jeep. Cash shifts into gear, as Miranda notices the shifter has a large ring at the end, clearly designed for his hook. The Jeep drives towards the rear of the campus.

CASH

We'll need to talk you through some protocols before issuing your security clearance for the special detention ward.

MIRANDA

I'd also like to see the therapy rooms and the patients' living conditions. The sooner I can integrate myself as a regular part of life around here, the better. It might even help to interview some of the staff who've worked here for a few years. They might have insights...

CASH

(interrupting)

Want some advice?

MIRANDA

Uh, sure.

CASH

Drop this first day of school bullshit right now. These animals, they can smell it on you. Any weakness at all, they find it and they won't hesitate to stick a knife in it.

Miranda is visibly taken aback.

MIRANDA

I would hardly call them animals, Mr. Cash.

Cash holds up his hook.

CASH

Killer Croc didn't get that memo.

MIRANDA

I've read his file. Killer Croc, as you like to think of him, is a man named Waylon Jones who suffers from a terrible disease. His harlequinosis made him a victim of social alienation, so he never developed the skills that you and I take for granted. He needs compassion, not more stigmatization.

CASH

I'm sure you'll be fast friends.

The jeep approaches the special detention ward. The building has a central door large enough that it could be on an airplane hangar. There is a smaller metal door next to it with a card reader adjacent. Numerous cameras are fitted all around the building. The three exit the jeep and walk towards the door. Cash walks to the card reader and swipes his security card. There is a brief pause, and then a loud BUZZER goes off. Cash grabs the handle and pulls the heavy door open. He salutes with his hook.

CASH

Welcome to the madhouse, Doctor.

Miranda looks at Cash for a moment, and then marches eagerly into the building.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - SAME

Miranda enters the building a few steps ahead of Cash. Next to the door sits WALLACE, a balding, middle-aged security guard seated at a desk. When he sees Miranda, he gives her a brief ogle.

WALLACE

You must be the new Doc. I'm Wallace.  
If any of these freaks give you a  
scare, you just let me know.

Miranda ignores his leer.

MIRANDA

I'm sure I'll be alright, thank you.

Miranda looks around the ward. The main floor resembles a large warehouse with specially designed cells around the perimeter. The catwalks above have ARMED GUARDS patrolling. Miranda walks slowly into the room to get a better look at the inmates. In one cell sits MR. FREEZE wearing an Arkham jumpsuit over his icy blue skin. He sits motionless and expressionless while clutching a snow globe of a ballerina. Vents in the ceiling of Freeze's cell are pumping in frigid air. In another cell is POISON IVY. Her cell is a glass dome with thick, humid air inside. Ivy reclines on her bed with her thick red hair flowing over herself. She is also wearing an Arkham jumpsuit, but hers is open down the front, displaying her cleavage. When she sees Miranda, Cash and James approach, she changes position to sit seductively on the end of the bed. Miranda turns to another cell and is surprised to see herself behind a glass wall.

WALLACE

Don't worry, I've got this.

Wallace starts to move towards the cell with Fake Miranda. The real Miranda sees a sign next to the cell that reads "Warning: Inmate can Impersonate Anyone. Do Not Approach." The real Miranda steps ahead of Wallace and approaches the cell.

FAKE MIRANDA

See anything you like?

MIRANDA

You must be Mr. Karlo. I'm Dr.  
Greene. I look forward to working  
with you.

Fake Miranda looks disappointed, and the color drains from her, turning her skin and clothes a muddy brown. Her shape then seems to melt into an androgynous man who appears to be crudely made of clay. This is CLAYFACE. Miranda looks back to Cash who gives her an approving nod.

INT. MASTER CONTROL ROOM - LATER

Miranda, Cash and James enter a sophisticated control room with THREE GUARDS operating the terminals. There are security monitors and all manner of sophisticated surveillance equipment.

CASH

Everything in this building is controlled from here. In the event of an emergency, this room locks down, so don't come here looking for help. If the room itself is breached, every door in the building seals shut to prevent escape. Only a master security code entered from the admin building or a fire alarm can open the building back up. If you're in here during a lockdown, that's your way out.

Cash points to a ladder in the corner that heads upwards through a hatch.

MIRANDA

So in the event that this room is breached, what should I do?

CASH

Couldn't hurt to pray.

There is a loud BUZZER, and the door opens again. Wallace walks in carrying a cardboard box.

WALLACE

This was all just cleared, awaiting approval for disposal.

Cash takes the box from Wallace.

CASH

Good timing. For you, Doc.

Cash sets the box on a table and slides it towards Miranda.

MIRANDA

My welcome gift?

CASH

I suppose you could think of it like that.

Miranda opens the box and sees a very random assortment of items, including children's toys, books on various subjects, and a black bottle.

CASH

Like all major prisons, we get our share of contraband. Since our inmates tend to be nut jobs, some of the stuff they try to smuggle in is kind of weird. After we make sure there's nothing dangerous, we need you to look it over and try to figure out who it was intended for.

Miranda opens the box and rifles through its contents, removing the black bottle, labeled "Methyl Bromide."

MIRANDA

Methyl Bromide? Never heard of it.

JAMES

Soil sterilizer.

Miranda and Cash look to James.

JAMES

I garden.

James takes the bottle from her and puts it in his pocket. Miranda looks to him confused.

JAMES  
Biohazard.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION CORRIDOR - LATER

James tosses the bottle of soil sterilizer in a secure looking biohazard waste bin outside of the master control room. The three leave the room on their way to the cell block.

INT. CELLBLOCK - LATER

Miranda, James and Cash stand in a long corridor with prison cells. Each cell door has a window the size of a cereal box with a built-in intercom.

MIRANDA  
Can they see us?

CASH  
One-way glass. Sound proof and shatter resistant.

Miranda strolls down the hall, peaking in at the residents. She passes a short, gawky looking man sipping tea from a china teacup. This is JERVIS TETCH, also known as the Mad Hatter. She walks further and sees HARVEY "TWOFACE" DENT, a man whose face is split down the middle. The right is classically handsome, while the left is horribly burned. Twoface sits idly, flipping a coin. In the next cell ARNOLD WESKER, a nerdy man in glasses who can't be heard through the door, but can be seen visibly arguing with his ventriloquist dummy, Scarface, who is dressed as a 1930's gangster. Miranda looks down the corridor, and at the far end is a much heavier door than is on the other cells. Miranda walks closer, but the cell is too dark to see in.

MIRANDA  
And that door?

CASH

Who do you think?

Miranda walks closer to the door and nearly presses her face to the glass. In the back of the room, she sees a thin man obscured by shadows. He sits cross-legged, playing solitaire with a deck of cards. In the dark, he is unrecognizable, but in the light, he's anything but. The white skin, green hair, gaunt features and otherwise twisted visage are all the trademarks of Arkham's most feared inmate, THE JOKER.

CASH

Sorry about the view. He goes nuts if we don't keep the lights off.

MIRANDA

That makes sense. He doesn't want to be watched.

Cash and James both look to Miranda. She turns away from the window.

MIRANDA

He can't tell if anyone is looking in, and that bothers him. Clowns are performers. Without an audience, he's lost.

JAMES

He certainly does like to put on a show.

MIRANDA

I guess I'll see for myself.

James and Cash trade a nervous look. Cash and James start to walk towards the exit. Miranda turns to take one last look at the Joker, who is now on his feet, his face still covered by shadow. Miranda stares at him for a moment before turning to walk away.

INT. JOKER'S CELL - SAME

The Joker is shrouded in darkness. Focus on the Joker's mouth, which forms a smile.

EXT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Miranda exits her car and walks toward her townhouse with a thick packet of papers tucked under her arm. As she walks, she hears a second set of footsteps from behind her. She takes a quick glance over her shoulder and notices a DARK MAN holding something she can't make out following her. She quickens her pace and hurries towards her front door. The footsteps of the Dark Man also hasten. Miranda looks again and sees something in his hand, something that might be a knife. She sees a black inkblot over his eyes for a split second.

DARK MAN

Hey!

Miranda trips to the pavement and holds up her hands defensively as the Dark Man is practically on top of her. Suddenly, a figure lunges forth and grabs the Dark Man in a headlock. This man is DICK GRAYSON. Dick is tall, fit and appears to be in his late twenties. He wears the uniform of an EMT. Miranda climbs to her feet and watches the scuffle. After a second, she picks up her packet and tries to hit the Dark Man in the head.

DARK MAN

Here, take them!

The Delivery Boy/Dark Man throws a bouquet of purple lilies on the ground, as opposed to a knife. Dick, surprised, releases him from the headlock, as both he and Miranda see he is a delivery boy wearing a shirt that reads "24 Hour Delivery."

DICK

Oh. Sorry, man.

DELIVERY BOY

Is one of you Dr. Greene?

Miranda slowly raises a hand, also looking embarrassed. He angrily produces a clipboard and Miranda reluctantly signs the receipt. The delivery boy points at the flowers on the sidewalk.

DELIVERY BOY

Those are for you.

The Delivery Boy sulks away.

DELIVERY BOY

I hate this city.

Dick picks up the flowers.

DICK

It wasn't just me, right? That guy looked creepy.

MIRANDA

Absolutely, he did. And if those flowers were really the knife I thought I saw, I would be very grateful right now. Miranda, Miranda Greene.

DICK

Dick Grayson, I think I'm your new neighbor.

Dick hands the flowers to Miranda.

DICK

Boyfriend or secret admirer?

MIRANDA

Coworker, I think. The card isn't signed.

DICK

Well, someone is thinking of you.

MIRANDA

Yeah. What girl doesn't love flowers?

Miranda smiles and smells them. Dick snickers.

DICK

You're from Metropolis, aren't you?

MIRANDA

Uh, yes. How did you know that?

DICK

Posture. People from Metropolis always seem to stand just a little bit taller than the rest of us.

Miranda takes a couple steps in Dick's direction.

MIRANDA

And I can tell you are definitely a Gotham local.

DICK

Oh?

MIRANDA

You have the same pervasive cynicism that everyone in this city seems born with.

DICK

Touché. So, what brings you to Gotham?

MIRANDA

Work.

DICK

That's funny. Most people leave Gotham to find work.

MIRANDA

It just so happens that Gotham has an abundance of something that my work requires, something that's a little harder to come by in Metropolis.

DICK

What's that?

Miranda thinks for a moment, choosing her words.

MIRANDA

Misfortune. It was nice meeting you,  
Dick.

Dick nods in response and Miranda turns to walk into her house with her flowers.

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE-NIGHT - SAME

Miranda enters the townhouse and dumps her belongings onto a table, including the flowers. She starts to walk away, but stops and looks at the card again. It reads "Welcome to the Madhouse."

EXT. MIRANDA'S BACK DOOR - LATER

Miranda steps out of her house with the bouquet in hand. She walks to a garbage can, DUMPS the flowers and walks back to her house. As the door CLICKS shut, a shadow moves. Dick silently moves towards the garbage can. He opens it, removes the flowers and reads the card.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION WARD - MONTAGE

Miranda sits outside of Mr. Freeze's cell with a pen and notebook. Freeze sits in a chair completely motionless, staring back at her.

MIRANDA

How are you feeling today, Victor?

Freeze doesn't move an inch. Miranda smiles widely, but Freeze's face remains motionless. Miranda's smile drops and she makes a note.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION WARD - MONTAGE

Miranda stands in front of Poison Ivy's glass cell. Poison Ivy uses a rigid plant stem to file her nails.

MIRANDA

There must be something you'd like to talk about.

POISON IVY

I've always found that talking gets in the way of a perfectly good time.

Ivy turns away from Miranda. Miranda makes a note.

INT. THE VENTRILOQUIST'S CELL - MONTAGE

Miranda sits across from Arnold Wesker, who has his dummy, Scarface, on his lap.

MIRANDA

I would really prefer to talk to Arnold.

SCARFACE

That dummy? Don't waste your time. I'm the brains of the outfit.

Miranda rolls her eyes and makes a note.

INT. TWOFACE'S CELL - MONTAGE

Twoface is chained to a chair, but his hands are free. Miranda sits across from him. Twoface flips his two-headed coin and catches it in his hand. He opens it to see the scarred, "bad" side of the coin. He looks at Miranda for a second and then lunges towards her, but held in place by his restraints. Miranda sits in her chair, unimpressed, as Twoface reaches for her, fighting against his chains. Miranda sighs and makes a note as Twoface continues to struggle.

INT. KILLER CROC'S CELL - MONTAGE

Miranda sits in a large, concrete room with heavy sewer grates imbedded in the floor. Beneath the grates

is KILLER CROC, a brute with reptilian skin. Miranda walks through the room peering through the grates.

MIRANDA

Mr. Jones? Are you down there? I'm  
Dr. Greene, I'm the new...

Miranda stops midsentence as she sees a pair of yellow eyes in the water beneath the grate. She looks closer and Killer Croc leaps from the water towards the grate, letting out an animal-like ROAR. Miranda stumbles backwards away from the grate and falls to the floor. An animal like LAUGH comes from the grate. Miranda sighs and makes a note.

INT. MADHOUSE DINER - MORNING

Dick Grayson sits in a booth. One hand stirs a cup of coffee, the other holds a folded copy of "Modern Psychology" as he reads Miranda's article. As he reads, a man sits in the booth across from him.

DICK

Did you read this?

Dick looks across the table to see BRUCE WAYNE, Gotham's playboy billionaire. Wayne is classically handsome with dark hair and a strong jaw.

DICK

(reading)

"Dissociative persona disorder most often manifests as a result of severe emotional trauma, leaving the victim unable to process psychological injury and creating an alternate identity to redefine the tragedy. It is therefore, an elaborate form of denial." Sound like anyone you know?

BRUCE

Clark seems to think she's onto something, but I'm not as easily impressed.

DICK  
Tell me about it.

A WAITRESS approaches the booth with a coffee pot in hand. She refills Dick's coffee.

WAITRESS  
What can I get...

The Waitress GASPS and freezes as she recognizes Wayne. She fails to notice that Dick's coffee mug is overflowing onto the table and Dick's lap. He jumps and pushes the pot away.

WAITRESS  
You're...you're...

Bruce smiles at the Waitress.

BRUCE  
Bruce Wayne, nice to meet you. Coffee will be fine.

WAITRESS  
I'll make you a fresh pot, Mr. Wayne.

The Waitress rushes away as Dick takes a wad of napkins to clean up the coffee mess on his pants.

BRUCE  
Just keep your eyes open and let me know if you see anything...odd. In the meantime, I think this is your flower man.

Bruce removes a photocopy of an Arkham personnel file with Wallace's picture. He slides it across the table.

BRUCE  
Wallace here just bought a new car. Given his salary and credit history, I'm guessing he's Arkham's leak.

DICK

I'll take care of it. I haven't been out for two weeks. I'd love a chance to stretch my legs.

BRUCE

Just make sure you get the point across.

Dick nods and they sit in silence for a few seconds.

DICK

So, how's Alfred?

BRUCE

He's good. Look, I can't stay. I have a lot on my plate today.

DICK

Well, you know where to find me.

Bruce rises from the booth and leaves. Dick turns back to the magazine and focuses on Miranda's picture. The Waitress then returns with a new pot of coffee.

WAITRESS

Where did Mr. Wayne go?

DICK

Hopefully, to buy me some new pants.

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Miranda sits at her desk and inserts a syringe into her arm. She draws blood from her arm. She removes the syringe as it fills and starts to put it away. James steps into the doorway and knocks on the frame. Miranda quickly hides the blood sample in her desk drawer.

JAMES

Do you have a minute?

MIRANDA

I've got a session in five.

JAMES

I just saw your adjustments to our treatment charts.

James reads from a sheet of paper.

JAMES

New medications for Dent, Tetch and Wesker. Raising the temperature of Freeze's cell five degrees. Dietary changes for Croc. Dr. Greene, are you trying to get us all killed?

Miranda stiffens in her chair and leans forward.

MIRANDA

I can't treat patients who have no incentive to seek treatment.

JAMES

Dr. Greene, these were specific treatments designed to keep our patients...content.

MIRANDA

Science requires risk, James. If I have any hope of getting through to my patients, I need them to be more...pliable. If that means keeping them worked up or withholding their creature comforts, so be it.

JAMES

I hope you know what you're doing, Miranda. Really, I do. But please understand that you are not in Metropolis anymore. Our criminals play a very different game here.

James walks back out of her office, but stops in the door.

JAMES

And, Doctor, I know who your next session is with. For everyone's sake, please don't rile the clown.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda enters the therapy room, which has a large mirror in the wall and a single metal table with two chairs bolted to the floor. Seated across the table is the Joker. He sits just outside of the light given off by the single hanging lamp, making his white skin stand out from the shadows. A strap wraps around his chest, restraining him to the chair, and heavy chains encircle his feet. He has a deck of cards in his hand and he lays the cards into four piles in no particular order. Miranda carefully sits across from him. She waits a second to see if he will look at her, but he continues playing his cards.

MIRANDA

Hello. My name is Dr. Miranda Greene. I will be handling your treatment from now on.

No response from the Joker, who lays another card on the table.

MIRANDA

I've read your case file and the notes left by your previous doctors. I thought we'd start today by just getting to know each other.

The Joker lays another card.

MIRANDA

Is there anything that's been on your mind lately? Anything you want to talk about?

Another card.

MIRANDA

Maybe we could start with why you're  
in here. Do you...

JOKER

(interrupting)

Got a light?

Miranda is surprised that he spoke at all. The Joker  
continues looking down at his cards. She fumbles into  
her jacket pocket and pulls out her lighter and a pack  
of cigarettes.

MIRANDA

Uh, yes. Yes. Do you want a  
cigarette? It's allowed if you do.

JOKER

Don't smoke. Disgusting habit.

MIRANDA

Then why did you want a lighter?

JOKER

Just curious if you had one.

MIRANDA

If you change your mind, I bring  
cigarettes into sessions in case  
patients want one.

JOKER

Do you smoke?

MIRANDA

I quit a few years ago.

JOKER

Your parents must be so proud.

The Joker still stares at his card piles.

MIRANDA

Your file only lists your aliases, so why don't we start with your real name.

JOKER

What does that matter?

MIRANDA

I need to know what to call you?

JOKER

Joker will suffice.

MIRANDA

I won't call you that. It's not your name.

JOKER

If it isn't, then I'll need to call my travel agent and get him to change the name on my trip to Fiji next month.

MIRANDA

It would be helpful for both of us if you would give me a name to call you.

The Joker, still looking down, chuckles to himself.

MIRANDA

Did I say something funny?

JOKER

Nope. You're taking this too seriously for it to be any fun, but don't worry.

The Joker looks up at her for the first time. He leans towards her and into the light, showing her the faint smile on his lips.

JOKER

I'll help you with that.

Miranda leans forward in her chair.

MIRANDA

You seem to have this backwards. I'm here to help you.

JOKER

Do I look like a man who needs help?

MIRANDA

I don't know if you're joking right now.

JOKER

Then I'll make it easy for you. Everything is a joke.

MIRANDA

That will certainly make it difficult to help you.

JOKER

If you want to help someone, then you're in the wrong building. No one in this place is crazy.

MIRANDA

The state doesn't agree.

JOKER

Of course not, because they're the ones who really need help. See, the real crazies live out there. Politicians, accountants, secretaries, zookeepers, oh my, plugging away as if their special little lives are somehow meaningful.

Miranda sits a little taller, a little more confidently.

MIRANDA

Wow, three minutes in and I'm already getting all the famous talking points. Well, I don't buy it. We need accountants and secretaries,

zookeepers, and even politicians.  
They help keep the world turning.

JOKER

And God forbid your precious little world stops turning. They're interchangeable people, living lives that have already been scripted for them. The only reason they're out there and I'm in here is because I went off the books. And you want to know what my name was when I was like all of them? If you throw a rabbit into a blender, you can call what's left a lot of things, but you most certainly cannot call it a rabbit.

Miranda leans back thoughtfully.

MIRANDA

Then how about a compromise? I won't press you to give me a name, but I will not refer to you as Joker.

JOKER

As you like.

The Joker turns his attention back to his cards.

MIRANDA

Am I boring you?

JOKER

More than words could possibly express.

MIRANDA

Is there anything you'd like to know about me?

JOKER

Please. I already know everything about you.

Miranda looks confused.

MIRANDA

What do you know about me?

The Joker looks up from his cards again and smiles.  
The smile is much darker this time.

JOKER

Enough.

Miranda stirs in her chair.

MIRANDA

Look, there's got to be something..

The Joker suddenly lunges a few inches forward and  
beats his hands on the table. Miranda is startled but  
remains composed.

JOKER

How are you still not getting this?  
I'm not in the mood to perform, so  
get out!

The Joker stares at Miranda for a beat.

MIRANDA

I can see I'm wasting my time here.  
I'll leave you alone now.

JOKER

Was that really so hard?

The Joker returns to his cards while Miranda walks  
towards the door. She stops and turns back to him.

MIRANDA

One last question before I go.

The Joker is unresponsive but she persists.

MIRANDA

You do know your real name, right?

The Joker is about to place another card, but pauses.  
He slowly looks up at her.

MIRANDA

I don't think you remember anything before you became like you are now. I can't imagine how awful it must be to know nothing about who you were or where you come from, but if you just want to keep making it up as you go, that's fine so long as you're prepared to die in this asylum. If you ever want to give reality another shot, I work in the building.

Miranda KNOCKS on the door which is opened by the GUARD. She is about to leave when the Joker calls back to her.

JOKER

Hey, Doc?

Miranda turns to look at him. The Joker now holds the entire deck of cards in his hands. The backs of the cards are facing Miranda.

JOKER

Pick one.

Miranda walks over and pulls a card from the deck. It's a queen of hearts.

JOKER

What's the difference between you and a man trapped in quicksand?

MIRANDA

I don't know. What?

JOKER

I'll tell you later.

The Joker starts shuffling his cards.

MIRANDA

Are you at least going to guess my card?

JOKER

Not just yet. See, Doc, funny is doing what they don't expect when they don't expect it. Night.

Miranda looks at the card for a moment before licking it and sticking it to her forehead. The Joker slightly tilts his head.

MIRANDA

Good night.

Miranda smiles. Then turns to leave the room.

EXT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Miranda walks from her car to her house and spots Dick sitting on his stoop. A whiskey bottle sits next to him and he reads a newspaper. He looks up as she approaches and gives her a wave. She waves back as she ascends her stoop.

DICK

By the way...

Dick reaches down and produces a purple bouquet of flowers nearly identical to the one delivered the day before. Miranda takes the bouquet from Dick.

DICK

Someone must really like you.

MIRANDA

Trust me, the men in my life right now aren't exactly the flowers and candy type.

DICK

So, want to thank me properly for saving you from the most evil delivery boy in Gotham and have a drink with me?

MIRANDA

You think you're really cute, don't you?

Dick's face grows serious.

DICK  
I'm not going to lie to you, Miranda.

He leans in a little closer, as does Miranda.

DICK  
I prefer ruggedly handsome.

Miranda laughs.

MIRANDA  
One drink.

Miranda climbs over the railing that separates their stoops and plops down next to Dick. She takes the bottle and drinks from it.

DICK  
I was thinking like a bar or something.

MIRANDA  
Don't complicate this.

She takes another drink from the bottle passes it to Dick who takes his turn. Miranda and Dick continue to drink and pass the bottle as they talk.

DICK  
So I'm guessing doctor?

Miranda is surprised.

MIRANDA  
What gave me away?

DICK  
You work nights, professional dress, comfortable shoes. Mostly, though, the Arkham ID badge clipped to your belt was a pretty big giveaway.

Miranda looks to her waist and sees her ID dangling.

MIRANDA

How do you know I'm not a guard?

DICK

Not in that skirt. Psychiatrist?

MIRANDA

Head of psychiatrics.

Dick lets out a long WHISTLE.

DICK

So, I have to ask. Why is Arkahm's head of psychiatrics living in Crime Alley instead of, say, a loft in Park Row?

MIRANDA

Call it research. Most criminals come from impoverished or high crime areas. So, when in Rome, I guess.

DICK

Did you live in a high crime area in Metropolis?

MIRANDA

Metropolis doesn't have high crime areas.

Miranda pokes at the patch on the shoulder of Dick's EMT uniform.

MIRANDA

Paramedic?

DICK

EMT if you want to get specific.

MIRANDA

Well, either way, I like the uniform.

DICK

(under his breath)

You should see my other one.

MIRANDA

Pardon?

DICK

Nothing.

Dick notices the spot on her arm where she drew blood earlier.

DICK

Forgive me for prying, but did you just get out of the hospital?

MIRANDA

Uh, no. Why do you ask?

DICK

Your arm.

MIRANDA

Oh, I just had some blood drawn the other day.

DICK

You have scarring around the vein, like you've had an IV or a lot of blood drawn.

Miranda hesitates at what to say.

DICK

Sorry, it's none of my business.

MIRANDA

It's okay. Thanks for the drink, but I should probably get going. See you around.

Miranda picks up the bouquet off her stoop and enters her home. Dick watches her leave. As soon as her door shuts, Dick pulls out a cell phone and begins texting.

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

Miranda enters her townhouse and pulls the card off the flowers. She walks over to the garbage can and is about to drop them in when she opens the card. At first she looks confused by it, then her eyes go wide as she reads it and the bouquet slips from her fingers to the floor. On the card is the answer to the Joker's riddle: "To the queen of hearts, only one of you knows when you're in over your head."

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

The Joker sits at the table still playing his cards when Miranda enters and sits across from him. She stares at him, waiting for him to acknowledge her. He doesn't.

MIRANDA

How did you do it?

JOKER

It's not hard. Just brush twice a day and don't forget to floss. Flossing is really the most important part.

Miranda stares at him, clearly not amused.

JOKER

Wait, are you talking about my winning smile?

Miranda holds up the card from her flowers.

JOKER

You know, with lilies, you really should change the water twice daily.

Miranda leans in.

MIRANDA

No one is listening in. It's just you and me, so answer my question.

JOKER

Refresh my memory?

MIRANDA

I'm not going to play games with you.

The Joker laughs to himself.

MIRANDA

What's so funny?

JOKER

Presently? You, thinking that this isn't a game.

MIRANDA

So the flowers are...what? You showing me that you don't care if you're in here? Did you bribe a guard or get a hold of a phone?

JOKER

Is that all you want to know, Doc? How I sent some flowers? What do you really want from me?

MIRANDA

I want to help you.

JOKER

I'll spoil the ending for you, Doctor. There's no curing me of what I am.

MIRANDA

Then what have you got to lose by actually talking to me?

JOKER

Same as I have to gain. See, to me this is just a carnival game, rigged, unfair and run by someone who looks like they dropped out of middle school.

MIRANDA

It's not a game to me.

JOKER

Just give me one reason I should care what you think.

MIRANDA

Because I could help you live a normal...

JOKER

(interrupting)

And that's all, folks. Guard!

Miranda's desperation shows on her face.

MIRANDA

You're crazy!

The Joker meets her eye.

JOKER

Go on.

Miranda looks troubled, but the words are already out.

MIRANDA

You are crazy. You are as crazy as crazy gets. From what I know about you, you just might be the most insane and yet high functioning person on the entire planet.

JOKER

Resorting to flattery, Doctor?

MIRANDA

Maybe there is nothing I can do for you, but I want to listen to you and hear what you have to say.

The Joker tilts his head slightly.

MIRANDA

Continue therapy with me, answer my questions and I will listen and do my best to understand you. I won't judge, I won't preach. I will hear you out on every depraved detail and all you have to do is talk. You clearly know how to do that. I just want a chance to figure out why you are the way you are.

The Joker leans back and rubs his chin mockingly.

JOKER

And just why are you so interested? What do you think you're gonna find rolling around my noggin?

MIRANDA

What it is exactly that makes you different than me.

The Joker now leans forward slightly. The Joker's smile grows.

JOKER

Okay. I talk, you listen. That's the game, but don't try anything funny, like actually trying to cure me. Got it?

MIRANDA

Okay, then I will see you later this week. Oh, and if you send anything to my house again, I will tell Cash and you'll have guards watching you twenty-four hours a day.

JOKER

Whatever. I'm over you anyways.

The Joker looks back to his cards and slides one across the table face down.

JOKER

So you don't forget.

Miranda takes the card and flips it over, a king of clubs.

INT. ARKHAM CORRIDOR - LATER

Miranda walks down a corridor, still holding the Joker's card. She shakes her head and slips it in her pocket. Miranda arrives outside of a door marked "Laboratory Services." The inside of the room appears dark, as if the techs have gone home for the day. Miranda removes a plastic bag from her pocket that contains a vial of blood. She slips it into a drop box adjacent to the door and walks away.

EXT. GOTHAM STREETS - NIGHT

Wallace walks down a dark street. He constantly checks over his shoulder to make sure he is alone before slipping down an alley. He walks deep into the alley and stops at a garbage bin. He looks around for a second to make sure he's alone and reaches under the bin, removing an envelope. The envelope contains a modest amount of cash. Wallace puts the envelope in his jacket and starts to exit the alley. He makes it a few steps before a cable fires from out of the darkness and wraps around his legs. The cable goes taut and Wallace is lifted high into the air. A dark figure is perched on an adjacent fire escape holding the other end of the cable as Wallace hangs. He wears a black armored body suit with a blue falcon emblem over the chest. His face hides behind a mask over his eyes. This is NIGHTWING, Dick Grayson's alter ego, but it is too dark for Wallace to properly see him.

WALLACE

What...what the hell is this? Let me down!

NIGHTWING

Smuggling messages out of Arkham,  
Wallace?

WALLACE

Oh, God, it's you! Look, I didn't  
have a choice! They threatened me!

Nightwing reaches into Wallace's jacket and removes  
the envelope.

NIGHTWING

You'll understand if I don't believe  
you.

Nightwing lets the cable slide a bit. Wallace SCREAMS  
for a moment before the rope goes taut and Nightwing  
pulls him back up.

NIGHTWING

Here's what's going to happen,  
Wallace. I have enough on you to put  
you away for a long time. Or we could  
deal with this just you and me.

WALLACE

Just don't hurt me. I'll do whatever  
you want.

NIGHTWING

You're out of the smuggling business.  
What's more, if I even think you're  
working for the Joker, you'll wish I  
had left you strung up here. Got it?

WALLACE

Right. No problem. I'll do whatever  
you say, Batman.

Nightwing looks annoyed.

NIGHTWING

You think I'm... godammit.

WALLACE

Just promise to leave me alone and  
I'll do whatever you want, okay? I  
don't want any trouble with you.

Nightwing's speech comes across as more annoyed than  
intimidating now.

NIGHTWING

Whatever. Look, just don't forget  
what I said.

WALLACE

Okay, whatever you say.

Nightwing releases the rope, and Wallace SCREAMS as he  
falls. His fall slows and comes to a stop a few feet  
above the ground. Back on the fire escape, Nightwing  
gathers his cable.

NIGHTWING

I don't even wear a cape.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda and the Joker sit across from each other at  
the table. Miranda holds up a series of Rorschach  
cards. The Joker is giddy in his responses.

JOKER

That one looks like two coyotes  
fighting over the body of a  
roadrunner that fell off a cliff.

Miranda doesn't react to his assessment and moves that  
card to the back of the stack and presents another.

JOKER

Ooh! That is the Battle of New  
Orleans, but retold with dinosaurs  
wearing oversized sunglasses.

Miranda shows another card. The inkblot on this card  
is most decidedly in the shape of a bat. The Joker's  
smile fades and looks intently at the card for a  
moment before staring hard into Miranda's eyes.

JOKER

A flower.

Miranda turns the card around and stares at it coyly.

MIRANDA

Hmm, you know what I see?

The Joker takes the Rorschach card and starts examining it in a mocking, exaggerated fashion.

JOKER

I suppose, if you squint maybe. But it could just be a rat with wings.

MIRANDA

How about we both stop playing coy and you tell me about him.

The Joker mockingly rubs his chin.

JOKER

What's there to say? No sense of humor in that one. And believe me, I've tried to get a laugh out of him. Doesn't even crack a smile. I give him nothing but the A material, and all he gives me in return is that straight man shtick of his. I worry that as we've both gotten older, we've fallen into a routine. Slaughter, showdown, Arkham, repeat. But that's the game. Not exactly racquetball, but to each his own.

MIRANDA

When did you first meet Batman?

JOKER

Why the sudden interest in our dear, Dark Knight? Aren't you shrinks just supposed to blame everything on mommy?

MIRANDA

You're thinking of Freudian psych.  
I'm a Jungian. So, you and Batman...

JOKER

Jungian, isn't that the alien  
religion that brainwashes movie  
stars?

MIRANDA

It's a field of psychology that  
focuses on the mind's interpretations  
of symbols. Stop changing the  
subject.

JOKER

What was the question, again?

MIRANDA

When did you first meet him?

JOKER

Oh, yes. That's right. Now let's see,  
I think it was spring. No, winter. I  
remember it being cold, or maybe that  
was later. Hmmm, what year is it now?  
Oh, I remember that day. The details  
are iffy, but I know it was dark. It  
was a much less fun time in my life.  
Oh, the things he showed me.

MIRANDA

What did Batman show you?

JOKER

That it was all ridiculous. I mean,  
what else can I say about a world  
populated by a giant bat? He gave me  
my first taste from the crazy  
fountain and a look to match.

Miranda lowers her notepad and leans in closer.

MIRANDA

Are you saying that Batman was there  
the night you became...like this?

JOKER

He was a little more than just there.

INT. ACE CHEMICAL PLANT - FLASHBACK

The Joker runs on a metal catwalk above a series of open vats that contain churning chemicals. The Joker wears a tuxedo and a large red hood and cape pulled tightly over his face. GUNFIRE rings in the distance.

JOKER (VO)

I don't remember why I took the job, or who hired me. Doesn't matter anymore. Certainly didn't matter when the shooting started. I do remember the hood, though. Smelled of old sweat and fear.

The Joker stumbles across the catwalk.

JOKER (VO)

They said it was to protect my identity, but that was the problem. I needed them to see that I didn't belong there. If only they could see.

The Joker tries to tear the hood off. He stops when he notices the shadowy figure of Batman above him, resting on the girders of the ceiling.

JOKER (VO)

But I couldn't fool him.

The shadowy figure's arms fly to his sides and black, leathery wings snap up from his back. Batman leaps from the girders with outstretched arms straight for the Joker. As he draws closer, the Joker sees Batman's glowing red eyes, the fangs in his mouth, and the talons at the ends of his fingers, making Batman appear as a true monster. Batman slams into the Joker, sending him reeling backwards towards the railing.

JOKER (VO)

I thought he wanted to kill me, but I hadn't earned that yet. He just wanted me to see.

As the Joker catches himself on the railing, it snaps free and the Joker teeters on the edge of the catwalk, trying to keep his balance. Batman reaches for him and grabs the hood, yanking it free just as the Joker falls over the side. From the Joker's eyes, he falls from the catwalk. He watches the spot he fell from and sees Batman, clutching the red hood and staring coldly down at the Joker as he falls.

JOKER (VO)

I thought he looked crazy. But then it hit me. He wasn't crazy at all. No, he was the sanest man I had ever seen. In a world that never made sense to me, he did.

The Joker's body plummets into a vat of chemicals. The surface of the chemical begins to bubble. Playing cards float to the surface, slowly disintegrating.

JOKER (VO)

It was so clear to me right then. If the world is crazy, then the only sensible thing to do is go crazy yourself. And it's surprisingly easy doctor, you just...let go.

INT. THERAPY ROOM

The Joker has a smile that apes the one on the card.

JOKER

You know the rest. It was all about sharing what I know, tearing down the lies.

MIRANDA

Lies?

The Joker picks up his deck of cards. He places a Rorschach card face down on the table.

JOKER

It all starts with the big lie. We should all be good, productive, and most of all, sane. And from there, we built on the lie.

He takes two playing cards and holds them upright on the Rorschach card.

JOKER

Then we add more lies. Law and order.

The Joker expertly releases the cards and swipes a third card and settles it on top of the two upright cards.

JOKER

Morality. Religion.

He adds another level to the cards with incredible speed and delicacy.

JOKER

Quality education. Neighborhood watch.

More cards are added to the structure.

JOKER

401ks, and the Clean Air Act.

More cards.

JOKER

And you just keep piling the lies, all the false choices on top of one another until...

The Joker pulls his hands back and an impressive house of cards has been erected on the table.

JOKER

...you've got yourself a lovely house of cards. Of course, it's all built on the biggest lie of all.

The Joker places two fingers on the Rorschach card underneath the house.

JOKER

And what happens when you show them the lie they've been living?

The Joker pulls the Rorschach card out from under the house of cards. The motion was so fast and smooth that the house of cards doesn't even wobble.

MIRANDA

It stands.

JOKER

Only because people have been living the lie for so long, that they've started to believe it. But here's the thing about a house of cards, Doc.

The Joker removes a joker card from the deck and flicks it into the house of cards. The house topples to the table.

JOKER

It wasn't really that sturdy to begin with. That's the choice we make. Live in our lies, or knock the whole thing down and see what it really is to be alive.

MIRANDA

So if all of these things are just lies, then what is really important?

JOKER

Nothing. That's why it's so funny.

MIRANDA

So everything society has spent generations building, like democracy, free markets, art and culture, these are just lies to you?

JOKER

They're lies to you too, Doc, and I can prove it to you. If your sanity and your precious society worked, if people really are good, if all we need is to just hold hands and work together, then why does he exist?

The Joker holds up the Bat Rorschach card.

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Miranda sits at her desk. The bat Rorschach cards sits on the corner. She sets the card down and writes notes into the file named "Janice Black." She then activates a tape recorder and voices a memo.

MIRANDA

Patient file number 7139. Janice Black. Patient remains in a state of positive mental health. Any fear that a change in environment or living conditions would exacerbate preexisting conditions seems unfounded, as evidenced by a recent physical and psychological examination. Blood work, hormone levels, brain activity and general physical health all remain...

Miranda looks at the edge of her desk and sees the bat Rorschach card.

MIRANDA

...normal.

There is a KNOCK on the door that startles her. She quickly collects the papers on her desk and inserts them into her desk drawer. She walks over to the front

door and looks through her peephole. Dick is standing with a wide smile on his face. Miranda opens the door.

MIRANDA

Please tell me you don't have flowers for me.

DICK

It looks like your secret admirer has moved on, which is great for me. Do you have any plans this weekend?

MIRANDA

Not really, why?

DICK

The Wayne Foundation is having their annual dinner on Saturday, and it just so happens I have two tickets.

MIRANDA

Sounds fun. Who are you going with?

Dick stares at her for a second, waiting for her to get it. She doesn't seem to, as she just stares back.

DICK

Would you like to go with me?

MIRANDA

Oh. Oh! I mean, it sounds nice, but are you sure you don't want to take someone else? We don't really know each other that well.

DICK

Fair Enough, so why don't we get to know each other?

Miranda thinks for a moment.

MIRANDA

Okay.

Miranda reaches for her coat.

DICK  
Wait, right now?

MIRANDA  
Why, are you busy?

DICK  
Um, no. I guess we can go now.

MIRANDA  
Perfect. Where are you taking me?

Dick thinks for a second.

DICK  
You know what? I know the perfect  
place to have a relaxing  
conversation.

EXT. GOTHAM CARNIVAL - NIGHT

Dick and Miranda are at a cotton candy stand in a crowded carnival. Large rides adorned with lights, and CIRCUS MUSIC plays through the night. Miranda watches a CLOWN twist a balloon into the shape of a Tommy gun and hands it to a LITTLE GIRL. The girl pretends to shoot the gun at the clown, who theatrically puts his hands up. Dick hands Miranda her cotton candy and the two walk into the carnival.

MIRANDA  
You know, your definition of  
"relaxing" is very different than  
mine.

DICK  
You don't find carnivals calming?

MIRANDA  
Well, lately they just remind me of  
work.

DICK

I guess I forget that not everyone  
grew up in the circus.

MIRANDA  
(sarcastically)  
Yeah. Ha ha.

DICK  
I'm serious.

MIRANDA  
You grew up in a circus?

DICK  
I was an acrobat until I was  
thirteen.

Miranda looks at him wryly. Dick reaches into his pocket and hands Miranda his wallet. There is a photo of Dick as a child wearing a red and yellow uniform, standing next to his mother and father in matching uniforms.

MIRANDA  
I was sure you were lying.

DICK  
Why would I make up the fact that I  
was an acrobat?

MIRANDA  
A severely misguided attempt to get  
me into bed?

DICK  
I'd like to think that I could do a  
little better than that.

MIRANDA  
So would I.

Miranda notices a second photo in the wallet. Dick appears to be a teenager in this photo and looks noticeably less happy. He stands next to a man in his thirties who Miranda recognizes as Bruce Wayne.

MIRANDA

Is this you with...

Dick snatches the wallet back.

DICK

Yup.

MIRANDA

How do you know Bruce Wayne?

Dick pauses for a moment.

DICK

Bruce took me in after my parents were killed.

MIRANDA

Oh, I'm...I'm sorry.

DICK

The circus was doing a show in Gotham. I had always heard that crime was bad here, but no one expected that a traveling circus would be hit up for protection money. To make their point, they sawed through the trapeze ropes so they'd break during our act. I was standing on the platform and I saw the frayed line a second before it snapped.

MIRANDA

That...sounds like it was awful.

Miranda and Dick drift towards a row of carnival games. The closest one is a dart throwing game with stuffed animals hanging from the walls as prizes. The BOOTH WORKER calls out to them.

BOOTH WORKER

How about you, sir? Think you can pop three balloons and win a prize for your lovely lady friend?

Dick takes a step towards the booth and Miranda stops him.

MIRANDA

Dick, don't. These are rigged.

Dick smirks at Miranda and steps up to the booth. He hands the Booth Worker a ticket and picks up three darts. Dick aims carefully and quickly throws all three darts. All three go high and miss the balloons by a wide margin.

BOOTH WORKER

Better luck next time.

Dick hands the Booth Worker another ticket.

MIRANDA

You should cut your losses.

Dick ignores her. The Booth Worker hands him three darts, but he sets two on the countertop.

DICK

I only need one.

Dick throws the dart, and it also goes above the balloons. After a second, there is a CREAKING and we see that the darts didn't miss. Dick was aiming at a rope that holds up the back wall of the booth. The cable snaps and the wall falls inwards. There are many POPS as the balloons are crushed under the weight of the wall. Miranda and the Booth Worker are shocked. The Booth Worker aimlessly hands Dick his prize, a cute, plush Batman toy. Dick smirks as he hands it to Miranda. Miranda takes a step towards the booth worker.

MIRANDA

Can you set up so he can go again? I want one of those stuffed dogs too.

EXT. CARNIVAL FERRIS WHEEL - LATER

Miranda and Dick sit in the cab of a rickety Ferris wheel that lifts them high above the carnival. Miranda still clutches the Batman doll, as well as a stuffed dog.

DICK

I hope this doesn't make me sound like a stalker, but I googled you the other day and read some of your articles. Of what I could understand, they were interesting.

MIRANDA

I hope you're not a stalker. You live next door. That'd be like checkmate for you.

DICK

So, let me ask you something. If you believe that psychological trauma can fundamentally change a person, why does it take so long? Why can't we see it coming?

MIRANDA

It's not just the tragedy, Dick, it's the denial too. Psychological wounds are like any other injury. If untreated, they get worse. It's like putting on a mask and trying to convince the world it's your real face. No matter how good the mask is, it's still a lie and the wound underneath only grows worse. When the mask falls away, the real self emerges, and if left in the dark too long, that self could be a monster.

DICK

That...actually makes a lot of sense to me. You either find a place for that darkness, or you lose yourself to it.

MIRANDA

That's the short version, yes.

DICK

So, now that you know about my childhood tragedy, how do I seem to be coping?

MIRANDA

Well, you seem sociable, engaged, extroverted, and kind of sweet. But you are a little strange, too.

DICK

Do you like strange people?

MIRANDA

Obviously.

The Ferris wheel car reaches its apex, and Miranda looks towards the city skyline. She sees the Bat signal, a huge spotlight with the silhouette of a bat, shining in the sky. Miranda throws the stuffed Batman.

MIRANDA

Go, the city needs you!

Dick looks perplexed for a second, then starts laughing.

DICK

You're crazy.

Miranda turns to face him suddenly.

MIRANDA

Why do you say that?

DICK

I didn't mean literally.

MIRANDA

Oh.

DICK

It would be a little ironic if the head psychiatrist at Arkham turned out to be crazy, but then you wouldn't be the first.

Miranda looks confused.

MIRANDA  
What do you mean?

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda enters the therapy room. Seated across from her is DR. JONATHAN CRANE, the man also known as the Scarecrow. Crane is very thin man with gawky features. He is presently restrained in a straight jacket.

MIRANDA  
Dr. Crane, good afternoon.

CRANE  
Dr. Greene, I presume. Normally, I would stand and shake your hand, but...

Crane tugs his arms within the straight jacket.

MIRANDA  
Think nothing of it, Doctor.

Miranda pulls a chair close to Crane and sits down.

CRANE  
I was wondering when I would get to meet you. I'm always interested to get to know the people who occupy my old position.

MIRANDA  
The reason I wanted to see you, Doctor, is actually for a consult. Dr. Crane, you're in a rather...unique position to help me.

CRANE  
And what position is that?

MIRANDA  
You have experience as both a psychiatrist and as...well, the sort of person my day is spent treating.

CRANE

No need to be hesitant, Doctor. I know what I am.

Crane gives a wicked grin.

CRANE

That which all men fear. Fear itself.

MIRANDA

Right. Tell me about the Scarecrow. What drew you to that imagery? Was it the archetype? Folk lore?

CRANE

You seem to have it backwards, Doctor. I didn't create the Scarecrow. I just...let him out.

Miranda looks much more interested.

MIRANDA

But where did he come from?

CRANE

He was always in me, Doctor, it just took me time to find his voice, his face.

MIRANDA

When did you first notice the change? Was there a mitigating incident? Physical changes?

CRANE

Dr. Greene, why don't you just ask me the question you seem afraid to? What do I make of the clown?

Miranda looks surprised.

CRANE

I can think of no other patient of yours that would warrant such extreme

measures as a consult from a convicted murderer like myself. It's understandable, of course. To a psychiatrist, he's a fascinating case study. Unfortunately an undiagnosable one as well.

MIRANDA

Why is that?

CRANE

Too broken.

INT. CHEMICAL PLANT-FLASHBACK

The Joker enters a warehouse wearing a long purple overcoat with a matching suit underneath. He has a deck of playing cards in his hands he theatrically shuffles as he walks.

CRANE (VO)

Alliances in our confederacy of villains are frowned upon and short lived at best, but the clown and I both make use of chemicals that can be difficult to procure. An evening's truce could be tolerated.

A SECURITY GUARD stands on the catwalks above the main floor. He aims his gun at the Joker, but notices a shadow fall over him. He turns to see the SCARECROW standing over him. The Scarecrow has a menacing face etched onto a burlap sack over his head, and his clothes are old and musty. He holds out his hand and a wisp of smoke shoots from his sleeve into the Guard's face. The Guard starts sweating and breathing heavily as if he is terrified. The Scarecrow leans in, holding his face inches from the Guard's.

SCARECROW

Boo.

The Guard SCREAMS in terror and leaps over the railing to escape. A moment later, he plummets to his death in front of the Joker. The Joker continues to walk, casually stepping over the dead Guard. Two more SECURITY GUARDS emerge on the floor. The Joker palms his deck of cards and flicks the top two cards towards the Guards as if he were dealing. Each card sinks deep into the necks of the Guards. The Guards fall to the floor dead as the Scarecrow drops down from the catwalk. The two villains exchange a look before heading to a series of chemical drums, their prize.

CRANE (VO)

Even after I had left medicine, the Joker piqued my curiosity as a doctor and I wished to learn more about his motivations. Motivation, as you well know, always begins in fear.

The Joker inspects a drum while the Scarecrow stands him. The Joker turns just in time to catch a cloud of the Scarecrow's fear toxin in the face. The Joker starts COUGHING and holding his chest as the Scarecrow watches in anticipation.

CRANE (VO)

It was exciting to know what a man so demented and perverse sees in his nightmares.

MIRANDA (VO)

What was it? What was he afraid of?

The Joker stops coughing and his head snaps up to face the Scarecrow.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - SAME

Miranda and Crane are still seated in the therapy room. Miranda leans towards him eagerly while Crane has a wicked grin on his face.

CRANE

You first.

MIRANDA

Uh, excuse me?

CRANE

What are you afraid of, Doctor?

MIRANDA

Dr. Crane, we're not here to talk about me.

CRANE

Well, that is my price. It's a simple question. What are you afraid of?

Miranda shakes her head in frustration.

MIRANDA

I'm not particularly fond of spiders.

Crane leans forward aggressively.

CRANE

I'm not asking what makes you uneasy. I want to know what thought terrifies you when you sit alone in the dark? What, in the deepest part of your soul, brings you here to Arkham to sift through the demented psyches of people like me?

MIRANDA

I don't know what you're talking about.

CRANE

Your arm. Frequent needle use.

Miranda looks to her elbow and puts a hand over the scarred needle mark.

MIRANDA

That's enough.

CRANE

Obviously not an addict, and diabetic seems unlikely. No, you're extracting, testing it, but for what? What are you afraid you have in your blood?

MIRANDA

I said stop. Guard!

CRANE

And yet, you are wearing short sleeves, not trying to hide it all. It's like you want to be found out, but for what? That's it, isn't it? This rigid belief that we can be cured, your subtle fascination with our masks, our personas. It's not that you're afraid of any of us.

Crane leaps to his feet and encroaches on Miranda. She scrambles out of her chair as he nears. He backs her up to the wall and he leans in, inches from her face. Miranda BANGS on the door.

CRANE

No, you're afraid you are one of us.

The door swings open and TWO GUARDS rush in and grab Crane. They begin dragging him out as Miranda is visibly shaken.

INT. BREAK ROOM - LATER

Miranda sits in the tiny break room with a Styrofoam cup of coffee in hand. She doesn't notice Cash enter and stand in the doorway. He sees the coffee trembling in her hand. He knocks on the frame with his hook, causing Miranda to jump.

CASH

Sorry, I was actually making an effort not to sneak up on you.

MIRANDA

Well, try harder next time.

CASH

I heard Crane gave you a bit of a scare.

MIRANDA

Sort of his MO, so I probably shouldn't be surprised.

Cash sits down across from Miranda.

CASH

All right, come on. It's time for your real Arkham orientation.

INT. ARKHAM SHOOTING RANGE - LATER

Miranda, wearing goggles and ear protectors, squeezes off five shots from a handgun into a target on a shooting range. The bullets hit sporadically, suggesting she's never fired a gun before. Cash, also in protective gear stands behind her.

MIRANDA

When you're right, you're right. This is way better than coffee.

Cash pushes a button and the paper target slides towards them. He pulls it down and readies another.

CASH

This time, don't pull the trigger so hard. Just breathe slowly and squeeze it gently.

Miranda nods and picks up the gun. She aims down the range at the new target, which Cash has sketched to look like a scarecrow. She turns to Cash who smiles at her. Miranda aims the gun sideways, holding it like a gang member. Cash reaches over and levels the gun properly, and places her other hand on the hilt to steady it. Miranda fires and is far more accurate this time.

MIRANDA

Why did no one tell me that shooting stuff is so fun?

CASH

If you don't mind me asking, what did Crane say that got to you?

MIRANDA

He said...he just hit too close to home.

Cash withdraws the target, and prepares another.

MIRANDA

You know, I'm actually a little embarrassed. You'd think I was some scared little girl in over my head.

CASH

This place is creepy as hell, the second you stop looking over your shoulder here is when you should worry.

Cash takes a deep breath and leans in, lowering his voice slightly.

CASH

There was this one guy who had your job a few years back. He was about the most nervous little guy I had ever seen. Scared of his own shadow. Every day he just looked more and more terrified of that place, but after a while, something changed in him. I couldn't tell you what, but you could see it in his eyes. Something in Arkham got to him and he wasn't the same anymore.

MIRANDA

So what, did this guy go home and kill his cat or something?

CASH

Nope. He became obsessed with fear, started a new life as a super criminal, and most recently, was on your couch.

Miranda stares at Cash for a moment.

CASH

It's this place, Dr. Greene. It can change you if you let it.

Miranda nods solemnly.

CASH

Now, this time I want you to slow down and try to group your shots.

Miranda picks up the pistol and aims it. The target is now a man wielding a large knife. For an instant, she sees an inkblot over the eyes of the target man. Miranda hesitates for a moment and lowers the gun.

INT. DICK'S TOWNHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Dick's front door is visible and a loud KNOCKING is heard. Dick appears wearing a full and expensive looking tuxedo. He opens the door and sees Miranda dressed in a dark blue evening gown with her hair and makeup ornately done.

MIRANDA

Ready?

Dick hesitates as he looks over Miranda.

DICK

Definitely.

Dick notices the very edge of a scar on her side through a gap in the fabric.

INT. RITZ GOTHAM BALLROOM - LATER

Bruce Wayne stands at a podium before a ballroom full of DINNER GUESTS in fancy dress. Behind him is a large banner that reads, 'The Thomas and Martha Wayne Foundation.' Miranda and Dick sit at a table near the front of the room.

BRUCE

This city is suffering. It's hard to say that sometimes, because this city is also our home. It's easy to think of Gotham as cold and cruel, and some of us have seen its cruelty with our own eyes. It's all too easy to be a victim in Gotham City, but we mustn't think that we're powerless. All it takes is good men and women to stand up for what they know is right. My parents believed that, and so do I. Even when the night seems darkest, we must hold on to who we are. If we lose ourselves in this fight, then what do we have left? Every dollar we raise tonight will go to the victims and families of those affected by violent crime. Please, give generously and know that if you don't, I will throw on a cape and some long underwear and come to each of your houses and shake you down.

The crowd laughs politely.

BRUCE

Let's agree not to be afraid anymore and work together to create a Gotham without victims. Thank you.

The room applauds Bruce as he waves from the podium.

INT. RITZ GOTHAM BAR - LATER

Dick and Miranda stand at the bar in an adjacent room to the ballroom holding drinks.

MIRANDA

You'd expect someone who was ninety minutes late to his own charity dinner to at least have slides or something.

DICK

Punctuality was never his strong suit.

Dick and Miranda look back in the ballroom where they see Bruce sitting at the head table and finish a glass of scotch in one big sip. A WAITER steps in to refill it, but Bruce takes the entire bottle out of his hand and hands the Waiter a hundred dollar bill. Bruce refills his drink nearly to the top of the glass.

MIRANDA

He seems to be making up for lost time. Not a bad speech though.

DICK

I guess, if you're into naiveté.

MIRANDA

Too lofty for bitter Dick Grayson?

DICK

I know you're new in town, but a Gotham without victims would be like a Gotham without creepy art deco towers everywhere.

MIRANDA

See, that's what's wrong with Gothamites. No hope.

DICK

Can you blame us? Your city got the all American man of steel. We got a dark knight in a Halloween costume.

MIRANDA

And Batman is proof of what happens to someone without hope.

Dick's attention becomes more focused.

DICK

How so?

MIRANDA

He has to be the victim of something. Likely violent crime, which would explain why criminals are his targets.

BRUCE

An interesting theory.

Dick and Miranda turn to see Bruce Wayne approaching.

BRUCE

Batman as a victim of violent crime. Of course, in any other city, that might narrow it down. Bruce Wayne.

Bruce drunkenly slurs his speech as he offers his hand. Miranda hesitantly shakes his hand.

MIRANDA

Miranda Greene.

BRUCE

Greene. You're Arkham's new shrink, correct?

MIRANDA

There are about a half dozen terms I prefer to shrink, but yes.

BRUCE

So tell me, Doctor, in your professional opinion, is Batman crazy?

MIRANDA

I don't know about clinically insane, if that's what you're asking, but he's definitely compensating for something.

Dick hides his snicker.

MIRANDA

It's all over him. I've only seen grainy pictures, but his costume, his demeanor, they're trying to tell a story. That has to be a man who suffered some tragedy, some injustice and he wants everyone to know his outrage.

DICK

Sounds about right to me.

BRUCE

Well, it seems like every city has their own Batman knockoff these days. Dick, that do they call that guy in Bludhaven? Wingnut?

Dick stares at Bruce hard for a moment.

DICK

Nightwing.

Miranda looks past Bruce and sees COMMISSIONER JIM GORDON, a gruff older man with a white moustache, standing at the other end of the bar ordering a drink.

MIRANDA

Would you two excuse me for a moment?  
I've just had a thought.

Miranda grabs her purse and walks away. Bruce's demeanor sobers up ever so slightly as she leaves.

DICK

Laying on the act a little thick tonight, don't you think?

Bruce turns and gives a hard look to Dick.

BRUCE

You should talk.

At the other end of the bar, Miranda approaches Gordon. Gordon is preoccupied trying to scoop a cherry out of his drink with a spoon.

MIRANDA

Excuse me, Commissioner?

GORDON

Why do fancy bars always feel the need to add some kind of food to your drink? Cherries, shrimp. I swear I saw a guy walking around with parsley in his martini.

MIRANDA

Maybe it just looks fancier?

GORDON

Yeah, well if you're buying a drink for its looks, you're doing it wrong.

Gordon appears more frustrated as he tries and fails to scoop out the cherry. Miranda steps forward and quickly snatches the cherry out of his drink with two fingers. She pops it into her mouth while Gordon stares at her.

MIRANDA

Commissioner, my name is Miranda Greene. I work over at Arkham...

GORDON

I know who you are.

MIRANDA

Right, well, I was hoping that I might ask a favor of you.

GORDON

The GPD is always willing to lend a hand at Arkham, what do you need?

MIRANDA

I would like to speak to Batman.

Gordon coughs on his drink and stares at her intently for a few seconds, gauging if she's serious. She is.

GORDON

Officially speaking, Batman is an outlaw and will be arrested on sight.

MIRANDA

And unofficially?

GORDON

He doesn't make house calls.

MIRANDA

Ask him to make an exception. I just want to pick his brain for a few minutes. Now are you going to help me, or should I go buy my own spotlight?

Gordon takes a long sip of his drink.

GORDON

No promises, Doctor.

MIRANDA

Thank you.

Gordon takes his drink and walks away, shaking his head. Miranda walks towards the ladies room.

INT. RITZ GOTHAM LADIES' ROOM - LATER

Miranda stands before the mirror in an ornate bathroom. She removes eyeliner from her purse and touches up the makeup around her eyes. As she gently applies the makeup, she sees a flash of black ink over her face for a brief moment in the mirror. A hand falls on her shoulder. Miranda spins suddenly, raising the eyeliner as if it were a knife. A frightened PARTY GUEST stumbles back as Miranda raises her eyeliner. Miranda stops herself and lowers her arm.

MIRANDA

I'm so sorry, you scared me. I mean...why would you sneak up on me?

The Party Guest, still shaken, holds out a tube of lipstick.

PARTY GUEST

You dropped this.

Miranda stares for a second, snatches the lipstick from her hand and marches out of the bathroom.

EXT. CRIME ALLEY - LATER

Dick and Miranda walk towards their respective townhouses, still in their eveningwear.

MIRANDA

Are you sure you didn't mind leaving?

DICK

It's fine, really. And sorry again for Bruce. He has a tendency to...over do it.

MIRANDA

I read the society page. I knew what to expect. Was that the first time you've seen him since you've been back in town?

DICK

We grabbed coffee a couple weeks ago, but it was...brief.

MIRANDA

I know it's none of my business, Dick, but do you want to talk about it?

DICK

Are you asking as a psychiatrist?

Miranda stops and looks to Dick.

MIRANDA

No.

DICK

I don't think it's that complicated, Miranda. He took me in because he could relate to me, and I to him. We got along great for the first few years, but things started to change. Or I guess I did.

MIRANDA

How so?

DICK

I got tired of my life being defined by tragedy. But Bruce, that's all he knows. I just realized one day that he is always going to be an eight-year-old boy in a dark alley, afraid to be close to anyone. I wanted a real life.

MIRANDA

So you left?

Miranda and Dick arrive in front of their townhouses.

DICK

Smartest thing I ever did. But enough of my dirty laundry. I'd really like to know about your family.

MIRANDA

Oh, come on. That can't be the only thing on your mind right now.

DICK

That sounds like a dodge.

MIRANDA

So what if it is?

DICK

You're not getting off that easy. I just opened up for you. You have to tell me something. I don't care what, just tell me something I didn't know before right now.

Miranda thinks to herself for a second.

MIRANDA

Okay, there is something. This is something that I have never told anyone, ever.

Dick nods and leans forward slightly.

MIRANDA

The thing is, Dick...I hate flowers.

DICK

You hate flowers?

MIRANDA

I really hate them. What is the point? You bring in these pretty things and you just watch them get uglier and deader. Why should I swoon over a rotting chunk of plant matter?

DICK

I will make a note that gifts should consist of candy or plush super heroes.

Miranda leans in and kisses Dick.

MIRANDA

Good night, Dick.

DICK

Night, Miranda.

The two walk into their respective houses, exchanging coy looks as they do.

INT. DICK'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Dick closes his door after entering and leans against it.

DICK

Dick, what are you doing?

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Miranda plops onto her couch. She slips out of her coat and notices something in the pocket, a program from the charity dinner. She walks to her garbage can and holds the program over it, but stops. She looks it over for a second and decides to keep it. She places it on her desk and sits back down. After a few seconds, she has a thought and reaches for her phone.

MIRANDA (INTO PHONE)

Hi, Cash. Sorry to bug you on the night shift, but I just had a quick question. Does Arkham keep patients' personal effects?

INT. PATIENT STORAGE ROOM - LATER

Miranda opens a door in the basement of the special detention building. The room has rows of metal shelves covered with boxes. She opens one box and finds Crane's scarecrow mask staring back at her. She spots a box labeled "Joker" and opens it. She starts removing the items: a purple suit, a pair of white gloves, a cane with a gilded jester hat on the end. At the bottom of the box is a clown doll that resembles Canio from the opera, *Pagliacci*. Miranda sees a plastic ring on the back connected to a draw string. She reaches to grab it but hesitates. She takes a deep breath and grabs the ring. She pulls the string and holds it a second before finally letting go. The string slowly pulls back into the doll while a voicebox lets out a sound that falls somewhere between laughing and crying.

Miranda starts to walk towards the exit when she sees a heavy door with a biohazard sign on it, and a label that reads "Maximum Security Clearance Required." Miranda walks over and slides her ID through the slot. There is a heavy noise of locks CLICKING and the door opens into a vault. The vault contains much more exotic items than the storage room, including Mr. Freeze's giant refrigerated suit, plant cultures from Poison Ivy, and catching Miranda's eye, a series of tiny, bullet-shaped canisters sitting on a shelf. Miranda picks one up and inspects it and notices the label on the shelf. There is a chemical designation, followed by the words, "Phobinol. WARNING: Chemical exposure causes hallucinations, panic attack and intense fear." She slips one of the canisters into her pocket.

INT. CELL BLOCK - LATER

Miranda stands in the cellblock corridor talking to Dr. Crane, who is in his cell. They talk through an intercom embedded in the glass window.

MIRANDA

The way I see it, Dr. Crane, is that you got what you wanted. You scared me. So, the Joker, what was he afraid of?

Crane ponders for a moment, then walks to the glass.

CRANE

That's fair I suppose. His response was...an anomaly.

MIRANDA

How so?

CRANE

He had no reaction. I've never seen someone with no reaction. Even Batman has succumbed to my fear, but not the clown.

MIRANDA

I'm assuming your gas works by over-stimulating the amygdala, which would mean the Joker suffers from something neurological in nature.

CRANE

Good guess, but completely wrong. The gas' effect isn't chemical, it's psychological.

MIRANDA

That's not possible, Doctor. You can't make a drug that reaches into a person's psyche.

CRANE

Spoken like someone without imagination. You see, Doctor, fear is not just some chemical kick in the brain. It's in every part of us, telling us to do one thing: survive. It's fear that holds us hostage by always hiding just out of sight. You pretend you don't see it, but you know it's there, and all my gas does is bring it out of the shadows. From there, you see what you want to see. As for the clown, I don't why he saw nothing. Maybe he's too broken, maybe he actually isn't afraid of anything. What I do know, Doctor, is that he is truly free.

Miranda and Crane stare at each other for a moment.

INT. DICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dick crosses his dark living room and reaches for a bottle from an under-stocked liquor cabinet. He pours himself a drink.

DICK

Want one?

Dick turns around with drink in hand. Batman now stands in the center of the room.

DICK

Or are you still on the clock?

BATMAN

Anything to report?

DICK

She seems genuine, Bruce. I know you're worried about her methods, but I think she's the real deal.

BATMAN

Gordon says she wants to speak with me. Any idea why?

DICK

Probably to compare notes. She's unconventional...and a little odd, but I think she may be on to something.

BATMAN

What do you mean, "odd?"

DICK

Not in the way you're thinking. Why so concerned?

BATMAN

She fit a profile.

DICK

That's it? Scarecrow and Hugo Strange go screwy so you assume everyone in that job will?

BATMAN

There were other concerns.

Dick abruptly steps towards Batman.

DICK

Like what?

BATMAN

Doesn't matter. I don't think she's in any danger. Get an alibi together and go back to Bludhaven. I don't need you here.

Dick steps back.

DICK

I was actually thinking of sticking around for a little while.

Batman stares at Dick for a moment, then takes a step towards him.

BATMAN

I knew as soon as I saw you two at the fundraiser that you had gotten too close.

DICK

You know, Bruce, you're the only person I know who thinks being close to someone is a problem.

BATMAN

Not a problem, Dick, a weakness.

Dick looks at the floor.

BATMAN

Look, I know I can't tell you what to do. You made that very clear when you left. But you know how this life works. It's all in or not at all. I hope she's worth the risk, and I will take that drink.

Dick and Batman stare at each other for a moment. Dick turns to pour Batman a drink.

DICK

I really wish you'd stop lecturing me. I'm not a kid anymore. I don't need you to...

Dick turns back around with the drink and sees that Batman has disappeared.

DICK  
(mumbling)  
Holy passive aggressive, Batman.

Dick downs the drink he poured for Batman.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda PLOPS the doll down on the table between her and the Joker. The Joker looks at it for a second before returning his eyes to meet Miranda's. The Joker plays with a lump of clay.

JOKER  
If they were going to steal my likeness, they could have at least done a better job.

MIRANDA  
You know where I found this?

JOKER  
Inside one of Clayface's folds?

Miranda notices that the Joker seems less energetic than usual. His posture is more slouched and his voice lacks its usual edge.

MIRANDA  
Are you all right? You seem a little glum today.

JOKER  
Bananas for breakfast. No thank you.

MIRANDA  
I'll make a note you don't like them. But about the doll...

Miranda pushes it across the table. The Joker takes the doll in his hand. As soon as he picks it up, he DROPS it again onto the table very suddenly as if he grabbed a hot coal.

JOKER

Nope, not mine.

MIRANDA

Are you sure? The paperwork said this was found when the police raided one of your hideouts. Could someone else have brought it there?

JOKER

Santa Claus for all I know.

MIRANDA

Maybe this will help you remember.

Miranda pulls the drawstring and the doll begins to laugh/cry. The Joker's eyes suddenly go wide. He leaps up from his chair and lunges across the table at Miranda, his cards scattering over them like confetti. Miranda falls backwards in her chair. The Joker reaches for her throat, but stopped by the ankle restraints holding him to the floor.

JOKER

What's wrong? Why aren't you laughing!

Cash and Wallace burst through the door and use stun rods to subdue the Joker. They place restraints on the Joker's hands and drag him out as he continues flailing.

JOKER

Let's hear you laugh!

They finally get the Joker out of the room and Miranda remains on the floor, panting heavily. Miranda looks at the clown doll, sprawled on the floor. Lying next to it is a king of spades.

EXT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Miranda walks up her stoop. The clown doll and her mail are in her arms. She doesn't notice that Dick watches her walk up from his window.

INT. DICK'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

As Dick watches Miranda climb the stairs, he picks up a sophisticated looking radio.

DICK (INTO RADIO)  
At least try to be polite.

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Miranda walks into her townhouse carrying her mail and the clown doll. She enters her living room and turns on a lamp, not noticing that Batman stands in the darkness of the hallway. She sits on the couch and begins sorting the mail. Miranda jumps violently as she sees Batman standing in the hall. He stays out of the lamp light, preferring the shadows. She can see enough to make out the iconic profile.

MIRANDA  
I, um...it's you. You're, well you know who you are.

BATMAN  
You wanted to see me.

MIRANDA  
Right, well, where to start? See, I've been trying to figure out certain...markers for determining...

BATMAN  
I'm familiar with your research, Doctor. It's provocative, if not also naïve. Personal tragedy as a means to psychotic transformation makes a

certain amount of sense. But the idea that it can be undone is where you lose me.

MIRANDA

Then I look forward to proving you wrong. Tell me something. You know the Joker probably better than anyone. Do you have any thoughts about his mental condition to help formulate a diagnosis?

BATMAN

He's insane.

Miranda stares silently, waiting to see if he's going to add to his statement. He does not.

MIRANDA

Is that it?

BATMAN

The delusions of grandeur and inflated sense of self worth and importance are in keeping with a diagnosis of sociopathy, as are his compulsions and constant lies. The manic behavior, however, is contradictory, as most sociopaths are charming and calculating. He is high functioning and has no loss of reasoning or problem solving. The clown motif suggests a dissociative personality disorder, but his anti-social nature and altered perceptions of reality suggest either schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. In summation, he has symptoms of over a half dozen mental disorders, but no clear diagnosis. Is that helpful?

Miranda takes a moment to collect herself.

MIRANDA

No, actually. I could get that from his case file. I'm asking what you think.

BATMAN

He thinks of himself as a catalyst, trying to make the world into the one he sees in his head. He doesn't deny that he's insane. Frankly, he doesn't care.

Miranda sits back down on the couch while Batman stays in the darkness.

MIRANDA

Do you know anything about his life before he was the Joker?

BATMAN

Nothing concrete. The trauma to his skin altered his appearance and stripped his fingerprints. No dental records, no DNA in the system.

MIRANDA

One of his former doctors was working on a theory that he was a chemical engineer at Ace Chemical, the plant where the accident happened.

BATMAN

I've looked at that too. It would explain his advanced proficiency in chemistry, and why he was breaking in to Ace on the night he tripped into that vat.

MIRANDA

Tripped?

Batman takes a single step closer to Miranda.

BATMAN

What did he tell you?

MIRANDA

That you knocked him into the chemicals as he was trying to flee.

Batman stares at her from the shadows.

MIRANDA

Look...Batman, I just want to know why he fixates on you.

BATMAN

I know what you want, Doctor, what you're really looking for. You won't find it in him.

MIRANDA

What is it that you think I'm looking for?

BATMAN

Janice Black.

Miranda stirs.

BATMAN

It's a dangerous road you're going down, Doctor.

MIRANDA

You don't think he can be cured, do you?

BATMAN

No.

Miranda chews her lip for a moment.

MIRANDA

Then I have to ask. If you know what he's capable of, why do you keep bringing him back to Arkham?

Batman breaks his stare for the first time.

BATMAN

You mean why don't I kill him?

Miranda stares at Batman for an uncomfortable second.

BATMAN

You quote Nietzsche in your article.  
*Uber Mensch*. Why?

MIRANDA

*Uber Mensch* was surprisingly prophetic. Personality disorders and criminal behavior have begun to manifest themselves into the creation of new identities, new outlooks. The principles laid out by Nietzsche are surprisingly applicable in the psychology of these criminals. They see themselves as ascended and better than normal people. You can't tell me you don't agree. Or is dressing up as a bat to fight crime normal behavior?

BATMAN

You'd be amazed at what passes for normal in Gotham.

MIRANDA

You know, I actually met Superman once, and he told me that heroes are meaningless if they only fight for themselves.

BATMAN

Superman is an overgrown boy scout with an antiquated sense of morality.

MIRANDA

Nevertheless, faith can be a powerful motivator.

BATMAN

Nietzsche said that a casual stroll through a lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything. The truth, Doctor, is that I was there the night he changed. I don't know his version, but I didn't push him.

What I did was worse. I failed to save him. He is my greatest mistake, Doctor. I have wanted to let myself believe he was an exception to my most important rule, but it isn't that simple. If you knew him like I do, if you knew what was really at stake, you would understand that the hardest thing I have to do is not kill him.

Batman turns and starts to walk out, but stops himself.

BATMAN

He hasn't had a physical exam in over a decade.

MIRANDA

What?

BATMAN

The Joker's been exposed to hundreds of toxic chemicals in his life. I've wondered what that's done to his physiology. If you're serious about diagnosing him, that might be a good place to start.

Miranda turns away and reaches for a pad and paper.

BATMAN

One more thing, Doctor. I know you believe that there is something to find in the walls of Arkham, but tread carefully. Stare into the abyss, and it stares back.

INT. MRI FACILITY - AFTERNOON

Miranda stands by an MRI machine in Arkham's medical building. The Joker enters, fully restrained, and escorted by FOUR ARMED GUARDS. A TECHNICIAN stands

next to Miranda watching as guards cart the Joker into the room. The Joker looks up at the machine.

JOKER

I bet that makes one hell of a snow cone.

MIRANDA

It's an MRI. It uses magnets to create an image of your brain so we can spot any abnormalities.

JOKER

It'd probably be faster to look for the normal spots.

One of the Guards snickers.

TECHNICIAN

You'll need to put him in plastic restraints.

JOKER

I heard there were budget cuts coming, but plastic?

The Guards apply the plastic restraints before removing the handcuffs.

MIRANDA

If we left you in the handcuffs, they would rip your hands off when we activate the machine.

JOKER

Now I'm really glad I didn't get my nipples pierced.

The ORDERLIES move the Joker into the MRI while Miranda and the technician move into the control booth. Miranda activates the microphone.

MIRANDA

(into microphone)

All right, once we activate the MRI, I'm going to ask you a series of questions. We're going to see what parts of your brain become stimulated.

JOKER

(through MRI speaker)

And then it's on to the swimsuit portion.

Miranda turns off the microphone and nods to the technician, who activates the MRI. The machine HUMS to life and a map of the Joker's brain appears on the screen. The entire brain is illuminated, as if the whole thing is under heavy stimulation.

TECHNICIAN

What the hell?

MIRANDA

Has this machine been calibrated?

TECHNICIAN

This morning.

MIRANDA

This can't be right, can it?

TECHNICIAN

I've never seen anything like this. What do you think it means?

Miranda leans in closer to the monitor while the Joker giggles to himself within the MRI.

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Miranda rushes in with an MRI printout in hand. She barely notices James waiting for her.

MIRANDA

James, you are not going to believe this! Look at...

JAMES

(interrupting)

I just got off the phone with a Dr. Emil Hamilton from Star Labs.

Miranda goes quiet.

JAMES

When I read your glowing letters of recommendation from Belle Reve, I had no idea it was because they were desperate to get rid of you.

MIRANDA

It was no secret that Dr. Hamilton and I didn't see eye to eye on the best way to treat patients.

JAMES

He quit in protest, said you were dangerously exacerbating the mental conditions of your patients.

Miranda sits at her desk and stares at James

MIRANDA

Science requires risk, Dr. Morris.

JAMES

Dangerously close to torture. His words.

MIRANDA

James, I am getting close to something that could prove huge for my research. If I have to rile a few of my patients to get there, so be it.

James stares at Miranda for a few seconds.

JAMES

What I'm worried about, Dr. Greene, is that our staff is at risk from you keeping super villains on edge. We've had complaints from members of security who don't want to be in the building during your sessions. Not to mention the excessive lab work you've ordered on this Janice Black, who we have no record of.

MIRANDA

That's a case study I'm working on as part of my research.

JAMES

Dr. Greene, the overall safety and well being of everyone in this facility is my responsibility. You know I am obligated to share Dr. Hamilton's assessment of your work with the board. I hope you have some concrete results to defend yourself with when your contract is up for renewal.

James rises and leaves. Miranda sighs and looks at the MRI printout.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda sits at her desk, looking over various items. There is the Joker's MRI report, opened textbooks, and the Janice Black file. She closes a book in frustration and leans back in her chair. After a moment, she opens her desk drawer. Inside sits the framed photo of her and her parents. Next to it, a vial of drawn blood rolls around, as well as the Scarecrow's toxin canister. Miranda picks up the canister.

MIRANDA

Science requires risk.

Miranda walks around her living room, checking the locks on the door and drawing the blinds before returning to her desk. Carefully, she prods at the canister with a pen, jumping in surprise as it makes a loud CLICK. A wisp of gas starts seeping from the canister. Miranda takes a deep breath before leaning into the gas and inhaling it. A few moments pass, and nothing. She looks around the room waiting for something to happen, but nothing. Miranda sighs in disappointment and leans back in her chair. She picks up the framed photo again and drops it in shock. Her father has disappeared from the photo. Miranda leaps up as she hears a loud BANGING, like someone trying to kick in a door. She begins frantically looking around the room.

EXT. DICK'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Dick walks up the stairs to his house when he hears a scream coming from Miranda's house. He jumps over the divide of the stoops and KICKS in her door.

INT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Miranda watches her front door fly open, but standing there isn't Dick. It's a DARK FIGURE holding a large knife. Miranda focuses on the Dark Figure's eyes, which have inkblots encircling them. Miranda runs farther into her home, entering the bathroom. She slams the door and locks it. She leans against it in a state of total panic.

Dick stands in her living room and notices the canister on her desk. He runs over and inspects it, recognizing it as the Scarecrow's design. Dick runs out of the living room back to his townhouse.

INT. MIRANDA'S BATHROOM - SAME

Miranda remains pressed against the door, trying to hold her attacker at bay. Suddenly, the door starts lurching as her attacker tries to kick it open. She

holds as long as she can, but the door finally breaks from the frame. Miranda falls back into the bathroom and cowers on the floor. The attacker enters and raises the knife high. Miranda again focuses on the ink around the attacker's eyes.

MIRANDA

Please, please not again, Daddy!

Miranda struggles with her attacker, trying to wrest the knife away. She fails, as the attacker pushes her down and holds her. The knife comes down into Miranda's shoulder. Her attacker leans in, and she sees that it is not her father. It's her own face covered in ink looking back at her.

Miranda suddenly spasms, and her hallucination begins to break. She sees it's not a knife in her shoulder, but an empty syringe. The attacker no longer resembles Miranda. It's Dick, breathing heavily with his hand still on the syringe.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Miranda sits on her couch with a large blanket wrapped around her. Dick walks in carrying a steaming mug and hands it to her.

MIRANDA

I've said 'I'm sorry,' right?

DICK

Several times.

Dick sits on the couch next to her.

DICK

You know how crazy that was, right?

MIRANDA

Yes, I do.

Miranda takes a long sip from the mug.

MIRANDA

Not that I'm ungrateful, but how did you know...

DICK

(interrupting)

This isn't the first time I've seen Scarecrow's gas at work. Being an EMT in Gotham prepares you for moments just like this.

MIRANDA

Lucky for me, I guess.

DICK

Miranda, I don't want to pry, but you were shouting "Not again Daddy."

Miranda takes a deep breath and leans back.

INT. MIRANDA'S CHILDHOOD LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

Miranda at age 12 sits on the floor and does her homework with a fountain pen while her MOTHER reads a book. Miranda looks up and sees her FATHER standing in the doorway, holding a bouquet.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Miranda walks over to her desk and retrieves the Janice Black file. She hands it to Dick. Dick leafs through it, looking at medical reports and a police file. There is also a newspaper clipping from the Daily Planet that reads, "Metropolis Man Attacks Family, Kills Wife."

DICK

Who is Janice Black?

MIRANDA

I am. When I was twelve, my father murdered my mother and tried to kill me.

Dick turns to her suddenly.

DICK

My god.

MIRANDA

My father worked nights and would always come home really late. One night, he came home earlier than usual. He brought my mother a bouquet, put them in water, and then...

INT. MIRANDA'S CHILDHOOD LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

Miranda's Father cuts her Mother's neck, and she falls into a pool of blood. He turns to Miranda and starts walking towards her. Miranda flees the room, still clutching the fountain pen.

INT. MIRANDA'S CHILDHOOD BATHROOM - FLASHBACK

Miranda locks herself in the bathroom and leans against the door. Her father BEATS on the door.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

MIRANDA

Then he came for me.

DICK

How'd you get away?

MIRANDA

I didn't.

Miranda lifts her shirt to reveal her abdomen. There is a long jagged scar just below her ribs.

INT. MIRANDA'S CHILDHOOD BATHROOM - FLASHBACK

As her Father storms into the bathroom, Miranda stabs the pen into his face. The pen breaks and ink mixes

with the blood from the wound, covering his face. Her father only slows for an instant before plunging the knife into her stomach.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

MIRANDA

A neighbor called the police.

EXT. MIRANDA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - FLASHBACK

Miranda's Father, wielding his knife while covered in blood and with ink on his face, charges a pair of police officers outside their home. One fires his gun, and the bullet hits her father in the forehead. His head snaps back and he falls dead, with the large inkblot visible on his face.

INT. MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

MIRANDA

What makes a person change like that?  
There has to be a reason. People  
can't just be fine one minute and  
turn into monsters the next.

Dick motions to the file in his lap.

DICK

You're studying yourself. That's why  
you went into psychiatry and why you  
work with super villains. You want to  
make sense of it.

MIRANDA

No, Dick. I just don't want to end up  
in a padded cell. What if I'm like my  
father and just change one day like  
those inmates, those...monsters? I need  
to know how to save myself.

DICK

Miranda, I think it's normal to be at least a little concerned, but...

MIRANDA

I'm not concerned, Dick, I'm obsessed. I keep testing my blood, giving myself MRIs and self psych exams, looking for anything that can tell me what I am. In Metropolis, I thought I was on to something huge. The progress I made, the improvements in people that society thought were lost. But they all doubted me so I came to Gotham, to really put my theories to the test against the worst minds the world has to offer. And do you know what the only thing I've learned here? They were all just like me once. Even the Joker, Dick, was just a guy who had a bad day and became what he is. But what really scares me is that the Joker might be right.

DICK

Miranda, I want you to listen to me. You don't have to tell me how unfair the world can be. I thought hatred was all I would ever know after my parents were murdered, but Bruce taught me that we have a choice. We can let ourselves become just as terrible as we think the world is. Or...

Dick reaches out and gently lifts Miranda's chin to make her meet his eye.

DICK

You can refuse to let tragedy define you. You would be amazed at what you're capable of when you just stop being afraid of who you are.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda sits across from the Joker.

MIRANDA

I want to try something different today.

JOKER

Great idea. How about jai alai followed by martinis at the Iceberg Lounge?

MIRANDA

I told you when we first met that I wanted to know what made you and I different. What I didn't tell you was the real reason why. See, I'm scared that we're not so different, that I'm a bad day away from being just like you.

JOKER

Oh, I bet we have more in common than you want to admit.

MIRANDA

I think you're right. We do have something in common.

The Joker tilts his head slightly.

MIRANDA

I'm afraid to be like you, and you're afraid to be like me.

JOKER

You think I'm afraid of sanity?

MIRANDA

I know you are. That's why the Scarecrow's gas didn't affect you. You know that you're safe from reality so long as you hide in insanity. But not anymore.

Miranda removes an orange pill vial from her pocket and places it on the table.

MIRANDA

They're enriched potassium supplements. No serious side effects, no risk. You're suffering from hypokalemic overstimulation. Very rare. Remember last week when you were more lucid than usual? Bananas. You said you had them for breakfast. Essentially your body chemistry is altered from toxic chemical exposure. By righting the imbalance, your sensory overload should subside.

JOKER

We had a deal, Doctor. No treatments, just stories.

MIRANDA

I've heard all of your stories. Now I want to know if they're true. Here's what I think happened. You had a really bad day once, but rather than try to be strong, reality was just too much for you, so you ran from it. Now that I've placed a cure in front of you, you're scared that it might just work.

JOKER

You're the one who's afraid, Doctor. You're terrified of the simple truth that some of us just take to being crazy. That it's not a disease, it's a calling.

MIRANDA

How about we both stop being afraid...

Miranda slides the pill vial closer to the Joker.

MIRANDA

...and see who's right.

The Joker stares at Miranda, looking closely at her and then back at the pills. After a moment, he picks up the pill vial, opens it, takes out a single potassium pill, and throws one into his mouth. He swallows it, then opens wide to show Miranda his empty mouth. Miranda grins.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Dick approaches a restaurant in downtown Gotham. Through a large window, he sees Miranda seated and waiting for him. He moves towards the door when his PHONE RINGS. He takes it out and answers it. The voice on the other end is unheard.

DICK

Yeah? (pause) I'm a little busy, why?  
(pause) Do you really need me on  
this? (pause)

Dick looks up and sees the Bat Signal in the dark sky.

DICK

Right.

Dick looks back and forth between the signal and Miranda, then lets out a sigh. Dick turns and walks away from the restaurant in a hurry. He dials his phone as he walks. Through the restaurant window, we see Miranda answer her phone.

INT. THE VENTRILOQUIST'S CELL - MONTAGE

Miranda sits across from Arnold Wesker, the Ventriloquist. He fidgets nervously in his chair.

MIRANDA

I'm starting to think you don't even  
want a life of crime, Arnold.

Wesker looks to the side of the room where Scarface sits on the floor with a blank yet angry look on its wooden face.

MIRANDA

Don't look at him, look at me.

Wesker looks back at Miranda who is smiling warmly.  
Wesker returns the smile.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - MONTAGE

Miranda stands next to the glass dome which houses  
Poison Ivy. She has a potted rose plant. Poison Ivy  
motions at the flowers, giving gardening tips.

INT. TWOFACE'S CELL - MONTAGE

Miranda is in the therapy room with Harvey "Twoface"  
Dent.

MIRANDA

It just seems to me that the same  
things that fuel your actions as  
Twoface-the notions of unbiased  
morality, emotionless judgment, and  
the idea of fairness-are the same  
things that made you study law and  
become district attorney. I think we  
should talk about this more.

Twoface looks blankly at Miranda for a moment before  
picking up his coin off the table. He flips it high  
and catches it in his palm. Heads.

TWOFACE

Okay.

Miranda smiles.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - MONTAGE

Miranda stands in front of Clayface's cell. Clayface  
morphs into the form of Cash wearing a tutu. Miranda  
laughs, but then notices Cash standing behind her in  
the reflection of the glass. Miranda turns and sees

him staring angrily at her. She looks back to Clayface who now mirrors Cash's angry look at her.

INT. KILLER CROC'S CELL - MONTAGE

Miranda sits with her notepad in Killer Croc's sewer cell. Her chair is next to one of the thick grates in the floor.

MIRANDA

And how did that make you feel?

The only response is a deep, animal-like roar.

MIRANDA

I'm just going to put angry.

INT. CELL BLOCK - MONTAGE

Miranda stares into the window of the Joker's cell. The light is still broken, making it hard to see. She watches him pull his tray of food across the floor to his bed. He picks up his potassium pill from the tray. He holds it for a second before tossing it into his mouth and taking a long sip of water to wash it down. Miranda smiles to herself.

EXT. DICK'S TOWNHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Miranda walks up the steps to Dick's townhouse and rings the bell. No answer. She rings it again, holding the button longer this time. After a few moments, Dick finally answers the door.

MIRANDA

About time. I don't know if you have plans tonight, but I was wondering if you wanted to come over later and try what passes for my cooking.

DICK

Miranda, this isn't a good time.

Miranda looks past Dick and sees moving boxes in his house.

MIRANDA

Something you want to tell me, Dick?

DICK

I'm going back to Bludhaven.

MIRANDA

Oh, I see. Well, Bludhaven is only about an hour away, maybe I could come down and help you get settled.

DICK

I don't think that's a good idea. Miranda, I haven't been completely straightforward with you.

MIRANDA

So, what then? Married? Gay? Serial killer? What?

DICK

Trust me, I wish it were anything that simple.

Miranda's phone starts RINGING in her pocket. She quickly pulls it out and mutes it.

MIRANDA

Then what? Did I do something?

DICK

No, it isn't you, believe me.

Dick takes a deep breath and shakes his head.

DICK

I really wish I could explain, Miranda, but I can't. And if I could, you'd probably hate me.

Miranda's PHONE RINGS again in her hand. Again, she mutes the ringer.

MIRANDA

Why don't you let me decide how I feel instead of you telling me?

DICK

You have to trust me, Miranda. This is just the way it has to be.

MIRANDA

I don't get a say in this?

DICK

No, you don't.

Miranda crosses her arms. Her PHONE RINGS again. She pulls it out and answers it this time.

MIRANDA

What?

James is heard on the other end of the line.

JAMES (OS)

Miranda, we need you at the asylum right now.

MIRANDA

Is anything wrong?

JAMES (OS)

It's the Joker. He's demanding to see you. I think you should get here as soon as possible.

MIRANDA

Now's really not a good time, James.

JAMES (OS)

Miranda, he's crying.

MIRANDA

What?

JAMES (OS)  
He's crying and wants to see you.

MIRANDA  
I'll be right in.

Miranda hangs up her phone and puts it back in her pocket. She turns to Dick who is still in the doorway.

MIRANDA  
I need to go to Arkham, so I guess  
this is goodbye.

DICK  
I guess so.

Miranda starts to walk away, but stops and turns back.

MIRANDA  
You know, Dick, if you really don't  
want to be like Wayne and push away  
the people who care about you, this  
isn't a good step.

DICK  
The irony is not lost on me. For  
whatever it's worth, I'm sorry.

MIRANDA  
Me too.

Miranda turns and walks away. Dick watches her walk down the steps.

DICK  
Miranda?

She turns to face him.

DICK  
I meant it when I said you had a  
choice. For your sake, mourn your  
mother and bury your father. The road  
only gets worse from here.

Miranda doesn't respond and walks away.

INT. DICK'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Dick shuts the door and leans against it. He takes a deep breath and goes back to his packing. After a moment, his cell PHONE RINGS. He picks it up off the table and the screen reads "BLOCKED NUMBER." He answers the phone and places it to his ear.

DICK

Hello?

A beat passes.

DICK

On my way.

EXT. GOTHAM NARROWS - SUNSET

On a rooftop high above the Gotham slums known as the Narrows, Nightwing in his black and blue costume stands on the edge just as darkness is starting to ebb into the city. He leaps off the edge of the roof, falling for a moment in a graceful dive when his hand pulls something from his belt. He produces a sleek-looking gun and fires a grappling hook. The hook snags a gargoyle and Nightwing's dive turns into a swing. As he swings back up, the cable ejects from the launcher and Nightwing's momentum carries him through the air and onto a rooftop. He rolls as he lands and is back on his feet in an instant. Batman stands on the roof with his arms crossed.

BATMAN

Still showing off?

NIGHTWING

Still brooding? What do you need?

BATMAN

Joker's crew finally made a mistake. Gordon recovered a stolen truck with a toll receipt heading southwest. A block of warehouses was just

purchased in the area by an unnamed buyer who paid cash.

NIGHTWING

I'm guessing this is a little more than recon.

BATMAN

Gordon thinks they're now running drugs for Black Mask, but I'm not convinced. I'm hitting the place tonight and I could use a second set of eyes.

NIGHTWING

Let's go.

The two walk towards the edge of the roof.

BATMAN

I'm not keeping you from date night, am I?

NIGHTWING

Actually, I'm heading back to Bludhaven.

Batman stops and looks at Nightwing.

NIGHTWING

You were right. The job comes first.

BATMAN

Good to have you back, Robin.

Nightwing turns and stares at Batman.

BATMAN

Sorry. Old habits.

Batman and Nightwing both leap off the roof towards the street below.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

The Joker sits on the other side of the table, his arms wrapped around him like he's cold. Miranda enters the therapy room and takes the Joker's medication out of her pocket. She opens the bottle and places a pill on the table next to a glass of water.

JOKER

I don't want it.

MIRANDA

What's the problem?

JOKER

(shouting)

I don't want it!

The Joker slaps his hand across the table, hitting the deck of cards and scattering them across the table.

MIRANDA

Has something happened?

JOKER

I don't...I don't feel right. Things in my head, they seem different.

MIRANDA

Different how?

JOKER

I see...I see all these things I did and I don't understand them anymore. I don't know what I was thinking when I did them. These faces, they're all smiling back at me and I don't know why they're smiling. It's like...it's like I don't get the jokes anymore.

MIRANDA

It means your mind is healing and your memories are starting to make sense.

JOKER

But I don't want to see the things  
I've done.

MIRANDA

It wasn't you, though. It was your  
psychosis. Your delusions.

JOKER

What's the difference? They were my  
hands that did it, my eyes that  
watched it.

MIRANDA

But now you see things as they are,  
the more you remember...

JOKER

I don't want to remember! How am I  
supposed to live with all this, all  
the things I've done?

Miranda stares at the Joker for a moment. She reaches  
into her coat pocket and produces the clown doll.

MIRANDA

What is this to you?

Miranda places the clown doll on the table. The Joker  
lifts his head and slowly reaches out. He clutches the  
clown doll close to him.

JOKER

My father gave this to me. I  
remember, it was my birthday and he  
took me to the circus.

MIRANDA

I'm guessing you liked the clowns?

JOKER

They seemed so happy. Even the sad  
ones were happy. I wanted to be that  
happy. I wanted to stay with the  
clowns and laugh all the time. But I  
had to go home with my father. Watch

him drink himself into delirium every night. He'd yell and laugh. When my mother couldn't take the beatings anymore, she hung herself. He was so drunk when he found her that he just laughed and laughed, like it was the funniest thing in the world. What was so funny about it?

MIRANDA

I am so sorry.

JOKER

I remember crying a lot, but that was before I could see the humor in it too. And now, nothing is funny. The world just got serious on me and I can't live like this. I just can't. Who wants to live in a world that isn't funny and cry all the time

Miranda places her pen down and leans closer to the Joker.

MIRANDA

So there are these two guys sitting in an asylum. One night, they decide they want to escape. They climb up to the roof and the first guy jumps across to the roof of the building next door. The second guy, though, he doesn't think he can make it. So the first guy takes out his flashlight and says that he'll turn on the flashlight and the second guy can walk across the beam of light. The second guy says, "What, do you think I'm crazy? You'd turn it off when I was halfway across!"

Miranda smiles and laughs a little. The Joker sits motionless for a moment, and a smile begins forcing itself on his face. He begins to laugh, quietly at first. Both the Joker and Miranda start laughing very hard for a few seconds.

MIRANDA

There's always something to laugh about. I can't imagine how terrifying it must be for you right now, but I promise you that I won't give up on you. If you keep taking your medication and talking like you did tonight, I know we can do this. I can help you to see the world the way it really is, and if you still want to laugh at it, then it will be okay. I'll laugh with you.

The Joker sets the clown on the table and takes his pill.

JOKER

I'm tired, Doctor.

MIRANDA

Come on. Let's take you to bed.

Miranda gets up and walks towards the door. As she walks, she steps on one of the Joker's playing cards on the ground, an ace of spades.

INT. CELLBLOCK - LATER

The Joker walks towards his cell door, clutching the clown doll in his hands. Miranda has a hand on his shoulder, walking alongside him. TWO NERVOUS GUARDS walk close behind. They arrive outside the Joker's cell and the door swings open. The Joker stares into the dark cell.

JOKER

Can I ask for something?

MIRANDA

What?

JOKER

Can someone fix the light?

The Joker lifts his head up and looks at Miranda.

JOKER

I don't want to be in the dark  
anymore.

MIRANDA

I'll make sure they fix it tonight.

Miranda gives a hard stare back at one of the Guards.  
The Guard nods.

JOKER

Doctor, I...I...

The Joker struggles to make eye contact with Miranda.  
Suddenly, he leans in and embraces Miranda tightly,  
catching her off guard. The Guards move to pull him  
back, but Miranda holds up a hand to stop them.

MIRANDA

It's okay, guys.

Miranda places her arms around the Joker, returning  
the embrace.

MIRANDA

It's okay.

The Joker pulls away.

JOKER

Thank you for being the only person  
to take me seriously.

MIRANDA

It's what I do, Joker.

JOKER

That's not my name.

The Joker steps into his cell. The door shuts behind  
him. Miranda smiles to herself.

INT. JOKER'S CELL - LATER

The Joker stands in his cell and pulls on the doll's string, and it laughs into the darkness of the cell. A sinister smile slowly forms on the Joker's lips as he holds up Miranda's lighter, having stolen it during their embrace. He flicks it to life.

EXT. GOTHAM STREETS - SUNSET

A POLICE OFFICER stands at an outdoor hotdog stand on a busy Gotham street. On the other side of the road, another POLICE OFFICER leans on his patrol car. The Police Officer at the hotdog stand doesn't notice that a MAN IN A CAP stands behind him, staring down to hide his face. The Police Officer takes the hotdog and turns around to face the Man in the Cap. The Police Officer is startled for a second, and then the man in the cap looks up to reveal crudely drawn clown makeup on his face. He then draws a gun and fires it at the Police Officer, killing him. The Police Officer on the car watches in horror. Before he can react, more people all wearing clown makeup have produced guns and are SHOOTING wildly at nothing in particular. The street explodes into chaos as people scream and run for cover. The Police Officer leaps behind his car, draws his weapon and screams into his shoulder radio.

POLICE OFFICER

I need backup now! 45<sup>th</sup> and Trenton,  
shots fired, officer down!

DISPATCH OPERATOR (OS)

Copy. What is the situation?

POLICE OFFICER

This whole place just went crazy!

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Miranda sits behind her desk, with the Joker's medication on the corner of her desk. She opens her desk drawer and removes a syringe. She starts to prepare her arm for a blood draw. She hesitates for a moment before putting the materials back in her desk

drawer and closing it. Cash appears in the door. He has two boxes, one large and one small.

CASH

Got another box of contraband. Also, a package came for you.

MIRANDA

Flowers?

Cash holds up the smaller of the two boxes.

MIRANDA

Thank you.

Cash sets the boxes on her desk. Miranda instantly recognizes another bottle of methyl bromide on top. She grabs it and hands it to Cash.

MIRANDA

Would you?

Cash nods and takes the bottle.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION CORRIDOR - SAME

Cash drops the bottle of methyl bromide in the biohazard bin outside of the main control room when a pair of GUARDS and a MAINTENANCE MAN approach.

CASH

Remember guys, change the bulb and get out. Never take your guns off him until you're out.

GUARD

Yes sir.

Cash watches the three head back to the cellblock.

INT. JOKER'S CELL - SAME

The Joker rips open the clown doll on his cot and pulls out the voice box and then the large red marble

that serves as the clowns nose. He places the voice box under his pillow, but keeps the marble in his hand. He hears the locks on the door opening and quickly moves the clown doll out of sight. The door opens and the Guards enter the room holding their guns.

GUARD

Up against the wall!

The Joker moves slowly and placidly to the wall and places his hands against the concrete. The two Guards move nervously into the room and each keep their guns trained on the Joker. The Maintenance Man follows, lugging a toolbox.

GUARD

Make it quick.

The Maintenance Man nods and sets the toolbox down. He looks up at the broken light and starts to make the repairs. He removes the cover on the light and a couple of pints of water pour from the fixture onto the floor.

TECHNICIAN

What the hell?

The Joker, still pressed against the wall, smiles slightly when the marble drops from his hand. It hits the floor and rolls towards the three men in the middle of the room. The Guards and Maintenance Man stare at the marble for a moment as it rolls into the newly formed puddle. The marble hisses for a second as it reacts with the water and suddenly explodes into a cloud of gas. The gas only takes a second to affect the Guards. It starts slowly with them trembling. Then they start to giggle. The three collapse on the floor, now laughing hysterically. They're laughing so hard, they can't breath. The Joker casually saunters over to his bed and picks up the voice box. He flips a hidden switch on the device and it starts hissing static. He presses the side of the box and holds it to his mouth.

JOKER  
(into voicebox)  
It's show time, boys.

INT. JOKER'S WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

THE CHEMIST, a fat middle-aged man, is slammed onto a table with Batman's gloved hands gripping his collar. Batman leans in menacingly. They stand in a warehouse filled with tables. On each of the tables are large piles of fine, reddish powder. Nightwing examines the powder on his gloved fingers.

BATMAN  
I don't ask twice!

CHEMIST  
He just had me make the stuff, I don't know what he plans to do with it! I don't even know what it is!

Nightwing rubs the powder between his fingers.

NIGHTWING  
Doesn't look narcotic.

CHEMIST  
They just gave me the recipe and told me to cook it up. I've never seen that compound before.

BATMAN  
How did he get in touch with you?

CHEMIST  
I never spoke to the clown. Someone in his gang placed the order.

BATMAN  
When are they collecting it?

The Chemist doesn't answer. Batman reaches to his belt and takes out a small knife in the shape of a bat wing. He inches the knife closer to the Chemist.

CHEMIST

Tonight!

Nightwing and Batman both look to each other.

CHEMIST

They were supposed to be here an hour ago.

Nightwing looks up and sees a shadow move behind the window of a second story office in the warehouse.

NIGHTWING

Batman, up there!

Batman looks up to the office, but before he can do anything, the metal door of the warehouse SLAMS shut and a heavy LOCK is heard. The pipes in the ceiling's SPRINKLER SYSTEM begin to groan. Batman and Nightwing exchange a quick look and both instinctively reach to their utility belts producing gasmasks that fit over the nose and mouth. They get the masks to their faces an instant before the sprinklers spray the room with water. The water reacts with the powder on the tables, making a thick gas that quickly fills the room. The Chemist is quickly exposed to it and starts cough. His coughing worsens considerably, but slowly begins to transform into a laugh. He starts spasming violently, falling to the ground and laughing louder and louder. Batman and Nightwing watch silently, as they've seen this gas a number of times and know there's nothing they can do. The Chemist is laughing so hard now, thick veins line his neck and temples and his face flushes red. He laughs so hard, he can't take a breath. His head falls back as he suffocates, a large grin plastered on his face. Batman reaches to his belt and produces a bat-shaped projectile. He presses a button on the device and a red light starts blinking. He whips the batarang at the door, which embeds deep into the metal. The blinking light speeds up as Batman and Nightwing take cover.

EXT. JOKER'S WAREHOUSE - SAME

The warehouse door EXPLODES and flies away from the building. The thick smoke billows out of the warehouse, soon followed by Nightwing and Batman. They run from the smoke and towards the Batmobile parked in the middle of the vacant lot. Once they clear the smoke, they remove their masks.

NIGHTWING

We should have known it was a trap.

Batman stands silently, staring at the warehouse. The gas appears to be thinning out and vanishing into the night.

BATMAN

Get in the car. Now!

INT. JOKER'S CELL - LATER

The Joker stands over the three men, now dead with ghastly smiles on their faces. He grabs one of the Guard's guns and then reaches into the Maintenance Man's toolbox, removing a screwdriver. The Joker opens his mouth wide and sticks his tongue towards the back of his mouth. The potassium pill slips out from a false tooth. He takes the pill out of his mouth and walks over to his bed. He tears open his pillow and takes out several dozen more of his medication. He takes the screwdriver and uses the handle to crush the pills down into powder. He scoops up a handful of the powder and slips Miranda's lighter out from his sleeve.

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - SAME

Miranda sits at her desk looking through the contraband box. She stops suddenly and looks up. She reaches for her phone and dials James' extension.

MIRANDA

James, it's Miranda. There was another bottle of methyl bromide with the contraband.

JAMES (OS)

And?

MIRANDA

Something is bothering me about it. You're sure there's no other use for it?

JAMES (OS)

It's just a soil sterilizer. No clinical uses.

MIRANDA

Is it toxic?

JAMES (OS)

Yeah, but I doubt it was going to be used to poison someone. There are a half dozen things in the janitor's closet that would be more effective. Why smuggle in a special chemical?

Miranda reclines in her chair and notices the Joker's medication bottle sitting on the corner of her desk.

MIRANDA

What if you mix it with potassium?

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

A CONTROL ROOM GUARD watches the video feed from the cellblock hallway. A man wearing the jacket and hat of a guard walks with his face downwards. The control room guard leans in and watches carefully as the guard in the video comes to the control room door.

INT. ARKHAM CORRIDOR - SAME

The Joker stands before the heavy door to the control room, wearing the jacket and hat of a guard. He takes out the ground up potassium tablets and coats the lock and hinges with the powder. He then pries open the biohazard bin with a hammer and pulls out the bottle of methyl bromide. He unscrews the cap and splashes it

over the powder. The chemicals react and a bright, violent burst of flame like thermite encompasses the lock and hinges, melting them.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

The door falls inward, causing the THREE CONTROL ROOM GUARDS to jump to their feet. The Joker stands in the doorway, clouded in smoke.

JOKER

That's right, ladies and gentlemen!  
For one night only, Joker's back in town!

The three guards all reach for their guns, but the Joker is faster and opens fire.

EXT. GOTHAM OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

The sleek, black Batmobile charges through the darkness, racing towards the city, whose towers are visible in the distance.

INT. BATMOBILE - SAME

Batman sits behind the wheel of the Batmobile with Nightwing in the passenger seat.

BATMAN

I should have known.

NIGHTWING

It's the Joker, why wouldn't there be a trap?

BATMAN

It wasn't a trap. It was a distraction.

Nightwing turns to Batman.

BATMAN

We're forty miles southwest of Gotham.

NIGHTWING

And?

BATMAN

What's at the northeast end of the city, what we're at least an hour away from?

A look of realization crosses Nightwing's face.

NIGHTWING

Then stop driving like an old lady!

Batman flips a row of switches on the dashboard.

EXT. GOTHAM OUTSKIRTS - SAME

The Batmobile comes to an abrupt stop on the desolate road. The car begins to transform, as the cockpit slides forward and the wheels retract. A large rotor engine rises from the chassis, and a helicopter's tail emerges from the back of the car. The helicopter engines ROAR to life as the Batmobile lifts off the ground and races towards Arkham.

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - LATER

An ALARM begins to blare. Miranda looks around the room confused.

MIRANDA

James, what is that?

James takes a second to answer.

JAMES (OS)

Control room breach. The building is going into lockdown. Stay in your office and lock the door.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

The three Guards in the control room lie on the floor unconscious or dead. The Joker grabs a handful of papers and stuffs them into a metal garbage can. He takes Miranda's lighter and ignites the paper. He places the can near a smoke detector in the wall. Joker looks at a computer terminal which is flashing in red the words, LOCKDOWN ACTIVATED. As the fire alarms activate, the words change to green and read, FIRE DETECTED, LOCKDOWN OVERWRITTEN. The Joker smiles as he walks over to the terminal and grabs a public address microphone.

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - SAME

There is a hiss of static over the PA system and Miranda looks up as a voice fills the halls.

JOKER (OS)

Attention guests and residents of Arkham, I have a special announcement to make.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - SAME

We see SEVERAL GUARDS along with Poison Ivy, Mr. Freeze and Clayface staring upwards as they listen to the Joker's announcement.

JOKER (OS)

Because some of us have been on our best behavior lately, I've decided we deserve a little treat.

INT. CELLBLOCK - SAME

Two-face, the Ventriloquist and Crane stand against the glass of their cells and listening to the Joker's announcement.

JOKER (OS)

Well folks, we've always wondered  
what would happen, so let's find out.  
In Arkham for one night only, let's  
let the inmates run the asylum.

The Joker's laugh fills the halls and finally fades  
out only to be replaced with a deep, heavy SIREN  
accompanied with red lights going off throughout the  
halls.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - SAME

There is a series of HISSING and CLANGING noises as  
the various cells for the inmates of Arkham open. The  
PRISONERS begin to leave their cells and run loose in  
the asylum and start attacking the guards. As his cell  
door swings open, Twoface flips his coin to decide  
what to do next. He catches it in his palm and slaps  
it on his wrist. Tails. He smiles slightly and walks  
out of his cell to join the chaos.

INT. MIRANDA'S OFFICE - SAME

Miranda looks around in a panic as distant GUNFIRE and  
SCREAMS can be heard. Her eyes rest on the smaller  
package that arrived for her. She notices the label  
with her name is peeling and something is written  
underneath. She pulls the label off and sees the  
words, "Open immediately in the event of insanity."  
She tears open the package and inside is a pistol and  
a note that reads, "Come find me," followed by a  
smiley face. Miranda picks up the pistol and looks at  
the door for a moment. She steels herself and marches  
out of her office.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - SAME

The building has become a warzone as inmates slaughter  
the guards. Wallace runs through the chaos with his  
gun out. He sees Poison Ivy standing in front of him,  
holding a large potted plant. He trains his gun on  
her, but she only stares back. After a second, Wallace

lowers his weapon, confused. Poison Ivy looks at her plant and rubs one of the leaves. Suddenly, a thick root emerges from the plant and impales Wallace through the stomach. Poison Ivy smiles and holds the plant affectionately.

INT. JAMES' OFFICE - SAME

James Morris' office appears empty, until his head peaks up from behind his desk. He sees a shadow in the hall and hides again. Twoface walks by his office door and sees James feebly hiding under his desk. Twoface flips his coin. Good side. Twoface leaves as quietly as he came.

INT. SPECIAL DETENTION MAIN FLOOR - SAME

ANOTHER GUARD looks around the room in a panic when a blast of blue light strikes him. In a flash, the guard is frozen solid in a block of ice, and Mr. Freeze wearing his freezer suit stares coldly through the glass dome of his helmet. Another guard tries to level his gun at Crane as he pulls on his Scarecrow mask, when the monstrous form of Killer Croc rears up behind him. With a ROAR, Croc descends on the guard who screams as the monster's teeth rip into him. Miranda watches the scene in horror. She clutches the gun as she surveys the room, trying not to be noticed.

CASH

Dr. Greene, over here!

Miranda looks over and sees Cash waving to her nearby. She runs to him.

MIRANDA

Cash, it's the Joker.

CASH

I know.

Cash grabs Miranda by the throat and picks her up off the ground.

CASH

Remind me to send him a Thank You card.

Cash raises his hooked hand above his head. The hook suddenly changes shape, become a larger, vicious looking claw. Cash smiles widely as he prepares to strike. A GUNSHOT rings out and Cash lurches back, dropping Miranda to the ground. She looks back to the shooter and sees a second Cash holding a shotgun, balancing the barrel on his forearm. Miranda looks back to the first Cash and sees him stumbling on his feet. His head, where the shotgun blast hit him, is splayed into chunky brown streaks that are pulling themselves back together, revealing him to be Clayface. Cash fires again, hitting him in the torso and blasting another clay-filled hole in his body. Clayface collapses into a muddy puddle and slithers quickly away into the chaos of the asylum.

CASH

Head back upstairs to your office. You'll be safe there.

MIRANDA

Cash, the Joker set all this up. He's trying to escape.

CASH

Tell me something I don't know!

Cash leaves her to enter the melee. Miranda picks up the pistol from the ground and runs towards the control room.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - SAME

Miranda enters the control room and sees the dead guards on the ground, but no sign of the Joker. She looks around, clutching the gun tightly and notices the escape hatch in the ceiling which currently hangs open.

EXT. SPECIAL DETENTION ROOF - SAME

Miranda bursts through the door to the roof. The ALARMS and distant GUNFIRE can still be heard from the chaos below. The Joker stands on the far side of the roof facing the door. He is holding a folder containing all of Janice Black's test results. A big smile is splashed across his face and once again he sports his purple suit. Miranda's hand tightens on the gun as she walks towards the Joker.

MIRANDA

How long?!

JOKER

Now Doctor, I think that's too personal a question.

Miranda draws nearer to the Joker and raises the gun.

MIRANDA

How long have you been playing me?!

The Joker's smile finds room to grow.

JOKER

Since before we even met.

Miranda's hand begins to shake and she struggles to keep the gun aimed at the Joker.

MIRANDA

How?

JOKER

I hate having to explain the joke. Takes all the funny out of it.

MIRANDA

How?!

JOKER

Well, if you must know. See, Doc, it occurred to me not too long ago that I'm not getting any younger. I just don't have the energy anymore for

those smash and burn type of escapes. So I decided to plan my next one before I was even caught. It wasn't hard, but to pull it off, I would need someone on the inside to bring me a few things I couldn't get otherwise. And of course, we all know the best audience is the one not in on the joke.

Miranda takes a step back from him.

MIRANDA

No, that's not possible.

JOKER

It was pathetically easy. Loved the article by the way. I knew you'd be perfect. And when I found out about your fuzzy childhood, I knew you'd be fun too.

MIRANDA

No, I heard about the job through a headhunter.

JOKER

A Mr. Jack White of Laughlin Hiring Services?

Miranda is now speechless.

MIRANDA

I interviewed.

JOKER

And I bribed a couple board members. Also had your predecessor killed, but I don't hear you thanking me for that.

MIRANDA

Your diagnosis! There's no way you could have known that I...

JOKER

(interrupting)

Grrr, I sure hate those bananas. They make me act all sane!

Miranda struggles with her composure and can barely keep the gun leveled.

MIRANDA

Is anything you told me true? Your father?

The Joker holds up the file.

JOKER

Loosely based on your own.

MIRANDA

Where did you get that?

JOKER

Swung by the records room to pick up some reading material for the flight. For future reference, you should put a bit more effort into your pseudonym. Unless you wanted everyone to know it was you. Really informative. You know, Scarecrow may be a little kooky, and from me that's really saying something, but he's right about one thing. Fear tells you everything you need to know about a person. And you, Doctor, are afraid of being crazy.

MIRANDA

You don't know anything about me!

JOKER

You study insanity, try to take away its power over you by learning all the fancy ways to call someone crazy, but it's just more lies. You've built a nice house of cards to keep out the

crazy, and you haven't been free a day in your life.

MIRANDA

I am not like you.

JOKER

Not yet. But if you should have learned one thing in Arkham, Doctor, it's just how easy it is to destroy a house of cards.

Miranda's grip on the gun tightens.

MIRANDA

You won't get away. The police will be here any second.

JOKER

Half of Gotham's finest are on the other side of the city, as is Batman. In fact, the only thing keeping me here is you. I mean, I couldn't just leave after all we've been through. Not without giving you a goodbye present.

Miranda looks to the gun in her hand.

JOKER

I thought I'd give you one last chance to see how the other half lives.

MIRANDA

You think I won't shoot you?

JOKER

I think it doesn't matter. That's the joke you just don't seem to get.

A helicopter appears above the asylum, its engine ROARING. A spotlight flashes down on the roof, wavering over the roof. They start YELLING over the beat of the helicopter's motor.

MIRANDA

What are you talking about, what joke?!

JOKER

It's ALL a joke! You trying to find sanity in all this, in me? Now that's really funny! You want to know the big secret? Huh? You want to know what makes us all the way we are, me and the rogues gallery down there?

MIRANDA

If it's so simple, then tell me.

A rope ladder swings into view from the helicopter above. It moves closer to the Joker, but he ignores it and takes a step towards Miranda.

JOKER

I'll do a little better than that.

The Joker takes another step. Miranda tightens her grip on the gun and levels it at the Joker's head.

JOKER

Go on. It's easier than you think.

MIRANDA

I am not like you. I am nothing like you.

JOKER

Give it a try, you might like it.

Miranda's eyes dart between the Joker and the gun. For a brief moment, Miranda sees the inkblot on his face.

JOKER

But that's what you're afraid of, isn't it? Being just another nutcase in the serious house on serious earth.

MIRANDA

And you'll just be dead.

JOKER

But I'll go a happy man. Go on,  
they'll probably thank you for it.  
Might even throw you a parade. And  
all you have to do is get a little  
blood on that nice white coat.

Miranda takes a step back as the Joker nears. She sees the inkblot on his face again.

JOKER

So what'll it be, Doc? Let me go and  
watch me burn this city to the  
ground, or kill me and take my padded  
cell all to yourself?

Miranda tries to train the gun on the Joker again, but her hand shakes too much to steady the gun. Back at the door to the roof, neither Miranda nor the Joker notice the masked face of the Scarecrow staring out at them.

JOKER

It's not so easy, is it? When you see  
that the world is laughing at you,  
suddenly it gets a little murkier.  
Right and wrong don't seem to make as  
much sense as they used to.

Miranda lowers the gun.

MIRANDA

We always have a choice.

The Joker takes another step forward and opens his mouth to talk, but Miranda brings the gun back up and presses it against the Joker's forehead. She stares at him with fire in her eyes.

MIRANDA

And I choose to survive this.

The Joker looks genuinely shocked.

MIRANDA

That's funny, right? Doing what they don't expect?

The Joker's devilish grin returns to his face. He takes a step back and raises his arms to the sides. He bows slightly, lining his head up with the barrel of the gun. The Joker chuckles while Miranda starts to squeeze the trigger. The flash of the spotlight casts a shadow over her face, a shadow that looks like an inkblot. She closes her eyes as her fingers tighten on the trigger, pulling it back and...nothing. No flash, no bang, no kick. Miranda opens her eyes to see a tiny flag protruding from the barrel of the gun that reads "Bang." Miranda stares in horror at the pistol, then back at the Joker who can barely contain his laughter.

JOKER

You should see the look on your face!

Miranda drops the prop pistol to the ground and it CLATTERS on the rooftop with the flag still extending from the barrel. Back at the door, the Scarecrow takes a few steps out onto the roof and heads towards Miranda, who has her back to him. The Scarecrow is covered in blood and wields an equally bloody knife.

JOKER

You have been a lovely audience, but that will be my last encore of the evening. Doctor, I hope you learned something tonight.

Miranda remains stunned as the Joker saunters over to the helicopter's rope ladder, still dangling over the roof. The Joker steps onto the ladder and the helicopter slowly starts moving away.

JOKER

And remember, Doc, always leave 'em with a smile!

The Joker's LAUGH can just barely be heard over the beating of the HELICOPTER. The chopper soon disappears into the world beyond the asylum. Miranda watches the chopper fly away, not noticing the Scarecrow sneaking up behind her. There is a BOOM from below and Miranda runs to the end of the roof. The large doors of the special detention building have been blown off and the various inmates flee out into the night. Suddenly, the Scarecrow spins her around and raises his blade.

SCARECROW

Are you scared yet, Doctor?

Scarecrow lifts the blade higher, but a dart strikes him in the neck. Scarecrow grabs the dart, but the sedative it contains goes to work and he falls to the ground. Miranda looks to the source of the dart and sees Nightwing standing on a guard tower holding a dart gun. He is far enough away that Miranda cannot recognize Dick. There is another HELICOPTER beat as the transformed Batmobile hovers over the Arkham yard. A bright spotlight lights up the inmates. A pair of rockets shoot down from the copter and explode, filling the yard with smoke. A panel in the bottom of the copter opens and Batman shoots outward. He soars in the air for a moment before swooping down and delivering a two-legged kick into Killer Croc, knocking him to the ground. He then quickly whips a bola at Poison Ivy, which wraps tightly around her. Mr. Freeze takes aim at Batman, but Nightwing drops on him from above, wrestling him to the ground. Nightwing fires a dart from his gun into Twoface, who collapses. The yard looks quiet as all the inmates are downed. A NONCHALANT GUARD steps out from the building.

NONCHALANT GUARD

Good work, Batman.

Batman stares at the Guard for a second and then throws a batarang from his belt. It hits the Guard in the chest and sends electricity coursing through him. The Nonchalant Guard spasms and his shape dissolves, revealing him as Clayface. He falls into a brown, quaking puddle.

BATMAN

I thought so.

INT. THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Miranda sits in a chair in the therapy room, but not her usual one. She's seated on the opposite side, where the patient sits. The door to the room hangs open as numerous POLICE OFFICERS and GUARDS rush back and forth. She stares blankly at the table where the Joker's cards sit. She looks up when she notices Batman standing in the doorway.

BATMAN

Any idea what he might be planning?

Miranda thinks for a moment.

MIRANDA

I have no idea what's on his mind.

Batman nods and starts to walk away.

MIRANDA

I get it now.

Batman stops and turns back to face Miranda.

MIRANDA

If you killed him, he would change you. And that's all he wants, to change us into something more like him. He pushes us and pushes us until we're ready to break. And if we do, he wins. That's the joke.

BATMAN

I've never been one for jokes,  
Doctor.

Miranda nods and Batman walks away. Miranda rises from her chair and walks over to James who fills out a form on a clipboard in the hallway outside.

MIRANDA

I'm going home, James.

JAMES

Fair enough. Get some sleep.

MIRANDA

I'll have my resignation ready in the morning.

Miranda walks away before James can protest.

EXT. SPECIAL DETENTION WARD - NIGHT

Miranda walks out of the building toward her car, as the grounds are illuminated by the flashing of red and blue police lights. She doesn't notice that Nightwing stands on the roof of the building, watching her walk away.

EXT. MIRANDA'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

Miranda walks up to her door, but stops when she sees one last bouquet placed on her doorstep. She picks them up and walks over to the trash can along the side of her house. She lifts the lid and is about to drop them, but she stops. She looks over at Dick's townhouse.

EXT. METROPOLIS CEMETARY - AFTERNOON

A bouquet of roses is placed in front of a large headstone that reads "Evelyn Greene: Beloved Mother." Miranda stands in front of the grave for a moment before walking away. In the background, we see not the art deco towers of Gotham, but the bright, modern peaks of the Metropolis skyline. On her walk back through the cemetery, she passes a PRIEST with his back to her, hidden under a wide brimmed hat and his dark clothes. Miranda passes by him nonchalantly, walking towards the iron gates of the cemetery with the Metropolis skyline in the distance. As she leaves, the Priest walks to Evelyn Greene's grave and stands

over it, his face still shrouded under his hat. As he stands there, looking at the flowered grave, he begins to chuckle. It's quiet at first, but slowly builds. The chuckle grows into a loud and very distinctive laugh. The Priest can now barely contain himself, as his psychotic laugh fills the cemetery. A single playing card slips from his hand, landing on the grass next to the flowers. A joker card.

FADE OUT