

Untitled by Micah Kinard

“Another day with no crime to report. I tell ya, I’ll never get tired of saying that, Joan.” “You can say that again, Tom, and it’s all thanks to...”

The broadcast blinked to black with a mash of his thumb.

“That’s good...” he muttered, “for everyone but me” he continued in thought.

His robe gathered a wake of empty bottles and random, barely-touched takeout boxes as he shuffled across the great bed chamber.

His head pounded as he slouched against the great hardwood door and depressed the intercom, “Al?”.

There was no answer.

“Al, I’m thirsty, can you bring me a bottle... something.... Brown.”

There was still no answer.

“And some BC Powder... please.”

Nothing.

“AL!” after another moment of silence he released the intercom, “For fuck-sake I’ll get it myself”.

He heaved open the giant door and made his way down the vaulted hall to the grand staircase.

Burps arose and sputtered from his lips as he jostled without rhythm down to the atrium.

A set of keys, motorcycle jacket, and muddy boots lay discarded across the floor, he laughed “whoops, don’t remember that... *burp* guess I made it home.”

A moment later he was in the staff kitchen where a note stuck to spirit cellar read, “Al’s gone, you fired him. - Bruce”

“Oh yea, thanks me. Shit, how many days has it been?”

Rubbing his eyes he descended into the cellar and returned with a dusty bottle.

Wiping off the top, he bit the cork and plopped into a barstool at the large prep island.

With a pop, he pried the cork and spit it to the floor, staring once more at the aged bottle, “Thanks Dad, always said I’d never touch your private stock... guess things change.”

He put the bottle to his lips and pulled hard, his Adam’s apple bouncing as he guzzled until tears squeezed from his squinting eyes.

He gasped and slammed the bottle down, “woooooahhh Pop, you were a stout bastard weren’t you.... Or maybe you just liked the burn... the pain...”

His head nodded toward his feet where he saw a black mask on the ground.

He snatched it up by one of the pointed ears and set it on the table in front of him.

“Welllllll, how nice to see a familiar face...” The black visage stared back silently with hollow eyes, “hey, I see you look’n at my bottle... you want some this?”

The dark domino continued its stoic scowl.

“Well you can’t, sorry you’re done... plus it’s my dads.”

He continued to stare at the mask while taking another large pull from the bottle.

“Hey, stop fucking looking at me...” neither broke their stare, “You don’t know shit, and you’re done, you here?”

His jaw tightened and lip sneered, “You’re done!” He screamed as he backhanded the mask, sending it flying across the room to bounce off the wall and roll back to his feet.

He laughed, “forget it, I need some air.”

As he shoved himself out of the stool and to his feet the room spun, “Ohhh yea, dad and I, we like the strong stuff.”

He staggered back to the atrium and crouched over the boots quickly loosing his balance and rolling onto his back with bottle hand held high, “I didn’t spill! Haha... don’t worry dad, I’m not... wasting... your stock.”

The room dimmed as he slipped from consciousness into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Bruce sat on the edge of his grand 4 post bed and rubbed his eyes as the news blared over the tv, *“A pressure system in the north’s actually brought us clear skies today, sunny with a high of 76 and a low of 72.”* “Wow, couldn’t ask for better...”

“Shhhhhhit”, he exhaled as he bent over, picked up his robe and shoved to his feet.

He searched the covers for the remote as the news continued,

“Another day with no crime to report. I tell ya, I’ll never get tired of saying that, Joan.” “You can say that again, Tom, and it’s all thanks to Champ...”

The broadcast blinked to black with a mash of his thumb.

“That’s good...” he muttered, “for everyone but me” he continued in thought.

He made his way to the intercom, “Al?”

There was no response.

“Al, I’m thirsty...”

After receiving no response from his multiple calls he conceded, “For fuck-sake, I’ll get it myself”

He made his way down the stairs, through the atrium where his jacket, boots, and keys lay strewn about, and finally to the spirit cellar in the staff kitchen, where a note to himself reminded him that he'd fired his beloved butler, "Oh yea, thanks me."

He grabbed a dusty bottle from his late father's private stock, he just felt led to it, so he bit the cork and began to drink himself into a stopper at the prep table.

He found a black mask laying near his barstool and set it on the table in front of him.

"You want some of this?" He asked the dark visage, "You can't, you're done"

After more attempts at conversation failed, its silence enraged him, it mocked him, he screamed, "You're done!" He slapped the mask across the room and lurched himself to his feet.

He needed some air so he sauntered to his boots, but collapsed reaching for them and slipped into a dreamless sleep muttering assurances to his father's ghost.

The front door creaked open and a gaunt man in a lab coat scurried over to the sleeping Bruce. Behind him trailed a team of orderly assistants who waited patiently around the dr and his study.

"Behavior identical.... Vitals... in positive rate of decline" he extended his hand expectantly queuing the nearest orderly to fumble a clipboard into his hand.

After scribbling down his findings he stood, straightened his coat, cleared his throat and pronounced, "Today marks the 100th loop, subject's health is in steady decline while behavior remains identical. Estimated time of death, in 5 days, 6hours, and 37min, the precise moment midnight will strike on Champion's Day. Sir, you've done it, you've caught the bat."

A towering figure darkened the doorway drawing the gaze of everyone present.

"All hail the eternal victor, Champion!"

At that, the attendance dropped to their knees and bowed as a gilded boot stepped forth ushering a golden golem of a man, skin shining like the sun.

"Today, I prove my namesake yet again, for I have achieved where all before me failed. I have purified this land of the villainous swine this fool before you warred with time and time again. Lacking the mettle to bring true justice, the finality of death, to those who would do harm to innocents only cost more lives than he ever thought spared. Blinded by false righteousness, this impostor locks evil away in matchstick cells, strong enough only to allow him to feed upon the glory of half-victory, staying drunk on heroism bestowed by the people he puppets, before the cells break, evil escapes and his encroaching sobriety yearns another fix. The only true defeat is death, the throne seats but one. In 5 days time, this last villain will fall as the people of Gotham celebrate true heroism, crowning me their protector, while this false knight dies in the very shadows he lived."

“All hail Champion!” The enraptured doctor exclaimed.

“Hail!” The attendants repeated.

The golden adonis turned toward the door and commanded, “Reset the loop, double check the doses, and feel pride, for your master, the unconquerable, is pleased.”

“Thats right, Kittens, everyone’s new favorite hero going by the name, Champion, lead a team of volunteers equipped with adorable kittens to visit the Childrens hospital today. Together, they cheer to our little angels in the fight for their lives.” “Wow, that warms my heart, Tom.” “Mine too Joan, you know what else does? This weather! Can you tell us about it?” “I sure can, Tom, a pressure system in the north’s actually brought us clear skies today, sunny with a high of 76 and a low...”

“Uggghhhhhh.” Bruce blinked away the fog as he searched his surroundings.

“Oh good, I made to bed.” He rolled to the side of the bed and kicked his feet off.

“Shhhhiit”, he exhaled climbing to his feet, dawning his robe, and searching for the remote.

“Another day with no crime to report. I tell ya, I’ll never get tired of saying that, Joan.” “You can say that again, Tom, and it’s all thanks to Champion...”

The broadcast blinked to black with a mash of his thumb.

“That’s good...” he muttered, “for everyone but me” he continued in thought.

After failed attempts to contact the butler he forgot he fired, he found himself in the spirit cellar dusting off an old bottle.

Next he was arguing with a mask in the kitchen and finally he wobbled over his boots in the atrium before collapsing into a dreamless sleep.

The door creaked and a gaunt man followed by a team of orderlies rushed into the room.

After assessing the sleeping Bruce, the man stood and cleared his throat, “Today marks the 100th loop, subject’s health is in steady decline while behavior remains identical. Estimated time of death, 5 days, 6hours, and 37min, the precise moment midnight will strike on Champion’s Day. Sir, you’ve done it, you’ve caught the bat.”

“Remarkable.” A caped figure stood in front of a monitor and two way mirror as hospital staff assisted a gold skinned giant of a man strapped to a table and hooked to a myriad of tubes and wires crescendoing in a massive head-piece that resembled an old divers helm retrofitted with screens and the days latest tech in the other room.

“I honestly should say the same to you sir, we thought him completely unbeatable, yet here he is, tamed and alive, all thanks to you.” The man operating the monitor said glancing up at the masked observer.

“There’s no victory here, just a sick man who wanted to rid the world of evil... in all the wrong

ways.” The caper turned and took a step toward the door.

“Uhh, sir, how’d you know how stop him?” The technician asked.

“His name; Champion.” The hooded man glanced over his shoulder.

Befuddled, the technician repeated, “His name?”

“A true Champion will never stop until he’s won. The only way to beat him without killing him is to make him believe he’s won.” The caped crusader took another step toward the door.

“So that’s what this thing does?” The tech persisted.

“Every day it manifests what he perceives as his greatest victory in a neurally stimulated virtual reality while keeping his body sedated.” The figure explained.

The tech puffed his cheeks, “Man, he must really hate you.”

The dark knight glanced over his shoulder once more, “Every here at Arkham hates me... Just keep the power running.”, and in a puff of smoke, the giant bat-like figure was gone.

Untitled Song by Ben Orthey

If you wanna tell me how I could have done it better

Honey, I’m all ears.

But I gotta be honest,

Shit got a little too complicated

To be measuring myself with someone else’s code of ethics.

So no offense, but I would guess

I’m just gonna keep on doing what I do the best, and

If you wanna tell me how I could have done it better

Honey, I’m all ears...

Push by Maddie

...I’d forgotten how gentle the push was, that was sending me over the edge. Somehow the softness of it makes it easier to accept as I silently descend. For the past seventy years I’d gone through stages of sickness, dread, anger, avoidance, then surrender, acceptance and finally anticipation, of my final moments, falling.

Ultimately I wouldn’t change anything about my past.. and I knew with absolute certainty that

the young girl who had pushed me had no chance at all in breaking the cycle. I had taken a fateful misstep when I had crossed my own time stream and set my existence balancing on a sharp line. Veering off would mean the slow collapse of everything. So I had gone back and told myself what I'd have to do... how I'd have to live... that I'd have to kill to keep that balance in check.

When I was young, I didn't know it was myself who I had pushed, nor did I see myself in the face of the middle aged woman who had come to me a year before with the command. She had let me remain blissfully unaware for a little while longer. I didn't know this at the time but she had only just discovered that it would be herself there, withered and waiting.

How had she convinced me to commit this murder? It was horrible, the idea of pushing an old helpless woman to her death. I was no murderer... But somehow she knew how to persuade me, as if she knew the inner workings of my own mind.

Now here I am, looking at the hunched back and wispy white hair of someone I don't recognize. I don't call to her. I don't want to see her face. I approach her with one hand raised, and carefully, gently, push...

Never Healed by Brian

I was just lying there. Ankles crossed beneath the layers of blankets, hands over the top layer slightly chill from the fans running full speed. I found myself staring at the one on the ceiling, a blur of rotating blades and shadows. My mind began wandering as it almost always did, but with more intensity.

Thoughts of doubt, regret and loathing typically assaulted me at the forefront of these interactions. Jumping atop me and holding me down like my older brother would do when we were kids. The dark musings threatening to saturate me like the dangling string of spit from my brother's mouth that he would slurp back up just in time. Reminding me he was in control and could hock a snotty mess on me whenever he wanted but chose not to.

The only difference between these two likenesses was that my mental adversary, who more often than not was actually my own self, oh so regularly failed to hold back the wet saliva of negativity and I would become stained with its odious mess. I grow so accustomed to this now that I all but forget that it's spit and I find some sort of sick comfort in it. Like a breezy rain-storm after a hot day. It feels good, a relief in many ways. An excuse for why things are the way they are.

But when it all stops and I see myself in the mirror, I'm drenched with false sentiment and the clothes stick to my skin. It's quite the effort to peel them from my body and even after they lie in a wet pile on the floor my will to clean myself of it all pretty much doesn't exist.

So I climb into bed, ripe with a musty film across my body and tell myself sleep will heal me.

And it never does. Morning comes either too quickly or I am caught in a spell of anxiety and fear that has me ever wakeful. The echoing tones from my alarm send me into a panic. Forcing myself to focus my blurred and weak vision enough to press a shaky finger on the screen to end the electronic screams.

Another day ensues and I crawl through it, clouded by pain, pushed by need, wrapped with fear. The journey back home is oft weighed down from the day and as I slowly climb the many flights of stairs to my room I sigh heavy sighs and breathe heavier breaths.

Planting myself on the edge of my bed, I remove my shoes and cast them aside.

Alone again with my many thoughts. I was just lying there. Ankles crossed beneath the layers of blankets, hands over the top layer, slightly chill from the fans running full speed.