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Detective Comics

Issue 4: "Old Foes, Part Two: A Date With the Dead"

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"Mom? Dad?"

"Yes Bruce?" my father comes to life and replies.

"B-but I thought you were... "

"Dead? Of course we're dead, son. And so are you."

I breathe for a second, as I try to comprehend what he is saying. "Dead?" I reply.

"You lived your life trying to save victims of crime and now you yourself have become one. You were yet another victim of what Gotham has become." My father almost seems disappointed about something. "At least you put up a fight 'till the end," he continues, "just like your old man."

"The end?" I ask. "When was that?"

"The Mad Hatter," my father says grimly, "He killed you. After he used his machine to put you to sleep, he had Schneider murder you in cold blood."

That's right, the Mad Hatter! It takes me a while to recall what happened, but the whole scene eventually comes back. Breaking into Waynetech, closing in on the Hatter, a hypnotized Schneider pinning my arms behind my back, it all strangely seems like an eternity ago. So I was

killed by the Mad Hatter? I always pictured my death being almost a 'duel to the death' epic battle with someone like the Joker, or Ra's Al Ghul. That, or some punk kid getting lucky with a knife. But never, ever did I see myself being killed by the Mad Hatter. However, life doesn't always involve epic battles, and anyone has the power to kill.

"Untimely death runs in the family son," my father continues. "Your great-grandfather was killed in the war. Your grandfather Jack died of a heart attack caused by an over aggressive businessman. Your mother and I were killed in a random stickup. And now your death adds to the family history.

The Wayne name was one of the few good names left in Gotham," my father adds, with almost no emotion whatsoever. "Your mother and I have been watching you from here for all these years, praying that death had left the Waynes. You were all that was left of us."

There is a moment of silence. I look into the endless blackness surrounding us. "What is this place?" I ask.

"This place," my father says, "has no name. There's absolutely nothing here. It's just a realm where souls go after they die. There's nothing to fear here, and nothing to enjoy either. All we have is each other's company. But it's a far better place than what we had on Earth."

I feel myself gulp as I look down at the ground. Am I really dead? Is this really it? I work hard all my life and get killed by a storybook wanabe, and this is where I end up?

I look back up at my father. "You said you were... watching me?" I ask, still curious about this place.

"Yes," my father replies. My father holds out his hands as if he were holding a globe. Inside of them, a small bulb of light emerges. The light rapidly grows bigger and bigger. I look into the light, which does not appear to have the slightest impact on the blackness around us.

Slowly, a picture begins to emerge. The first thing I notice is the sky,

which is filled with dark rain clouds. I look down near the ground and see my parent's huge gravestone. The initials on the fancy Loscaso coffin sitting next to it read "B.W." I turn my attention to the people standing around it. The first person I notice is Alfred, dressed in his usual tuxedo and holding a black umbrella over Dick (***Author's Note: This issue takes place before Nightwing #1—Moreau**). Alfred has seen way too many funerals. I think of how good he was to me. As corny as it sounds, he was like a second father. Even before my parents died, Alfred was always there for me. I still don't fully understand why he went along with my whole "Batman" idea. Through all of the tough times, Alfred was always there for support. I wouldn't be able to thank him enough, and I wish I had.

I look down towards Dick. In some inexplicable way, his thoughts become visible inside the bubble of light my father is holding. He's thinking about his future. Part of him is wondering if a Robin can exist without a Batman. But mostly, he's experiencing a flashback to when his parents died. He may be an adult on the outside now, but the effect of a death in the family is always the same. His dreams of a father are shattered again.

I look on the other side of the coffin. A woman is holding an umbrella. She's dressed almost exclusively in black, with hair to match. Her eyes are a dark brown. She looks sad—almost lost. Selina Kyle? Catwoman? Why is she at my funeral?

"She knew all along," my father says, "about your secret."

"What? How?" I respond in confusion.

"Ladies know ways of finding things out, especially if a lover is concerned." He looks down at my mother and smiles. She smiles back. "The truth is, Ms. Kyle wholeheartedly loved 'Batman', and wanted to know the man of her dreams behind the cowl. She searched hard, until she found someone who knew. He agreed to help her under one condition: that she pledge allegiance to him and enroll in his league. Come on, Bruce. Do you think people are just born with the ability to back-flip off the side of buildings and survive? Do you think any normal woman would have the training necessary to survive Gotham's underworld using nothing more than just a simple whip?"

"Of course," I reply, realizing what he is saying. "She's a member of the League of Assassins..."

"Was, a member," my father says, cutting me off. "Once she got what she wanted, she realized she couldn't remain loyal to a mass murderer. One night, she was able to sneak out of her sleeping quarters and run away from his castle. She and Ra's al Ghul never crossed paths again. Since then, most of her robberies have been bait to get your attention. She tried to reel you in, Bruce, but you were too stubborn, too loyal to your vigilante quest. You sought a justice that doesn't exist. Now, Ms. Kyle is a widow who never had a husband. You could've had her, had kids, and carried on the family name. But you didn't, and now the family name has perished. All because you had to play dress up every night and waste your time trying to obtain an unobtainable goal!" My father is enraged. "No one man can put an end to crime in an entire city! How foolish could you be!"

I try to get angry, but I can't. "Dad, the only reason Gotham hasn't burned to the ground yet is because I was there to stop lunatics like the Joker and Ra's Al Ghul!"

"You created more problems than you solved," he says angrily. "If it wasn't for you, a simple robbery at the Ace Chemical plant would've been just that. Your intervention created a homicidal maniac! As for Ra's Al Ghul, the only reason he ever came to Gotham in the first place was because he was in search of a challenge from the legendary 'Batman'. Batman, BATMAN!" My father becomes furious. "That costume you're wearing is a joke! 'Batman', called an urban legend, the protector of Gotham City! Criminals see him as a man who can't die! And you know what? He found a way! And he left behind what? NOTHING!! No family, no memories, his entire life dedicated to some futile quest to end crime! Drugs are still being sold. People are still robbed and murdered in the streets! It's no different at all from when you started your impossible 'quest'."

"No... no... it's not that way," I say as I try to convince myself otherwise.

"The Wayne name used to be respectable in Gotham! Now all it brings to mind is the image of a self-centered playboy who gets his fun by dating

girls whose names he doesn't even know!"

"No!" I say, as I think about my date from a few nights ago.

"You thought you were better than the law! You thought that just because you brought 'justice' to scum, that the law didn't apply to you! You thought you were better than everyone else! Well, you're still mortal!"

"B-but I was only trying to- "

"Your father's right Bruce," my mother says softly as she cuts me off. My mom had a way of cutting your sentences off that made you regret even starting them.

"Mom," I say like a little kid who just did something wrong, "I-I mean-I-trying."

"You tried, but you failed," my father says sternly.

"No! It's not that way! No!"

"With the money my mother and I left you, you could've done so much more with your life! But you didn't."

"I d-didn't-I only-wanted-t-to," I find myself on the ground almost in tears.

When I regain control of myself, I look up. My parents are gone. Everything around me turns white again. I look at my hands, and realize I'm still in my Batman suit. I take a deep breath. Almost immediately after I let my breath out, I become extremely tired. I try to fight it, but it does no good. My eyes shut themselves. I slide back to the ground. I feel the life leave my body.

After what seems like an eternity, I feel water dripping on my eyes. Slowly they open of their own accord. I moan. Two tall structures block the left and right sides of my vision. Straight ahead of me, I see only dark

grey. The ground is cold, hard, and wet. I feel groggy. I look at my suit, which appears to have a large number of rips and tears in it. There is blood dripping out of some of them. It begins to drip down onto my suit. My arms move themselves above my head. One of them slams into a trash can.

I stand up. I've been lying in a Gotham City alley. I quickly brush myself off as I try to regain my sense of direction. A black alley cat walks out of the trash can I hit, looks up at me, screeches, and runs away. Am I dead? What happened to my parents? The conflict with The Mad Hatter, talking with my mom and dad, did it ever really happen? I begin to feel dizzy. I need to get back to the cave.

I reach down for the button to call the car, or "Batmobile," as some call it. As I begin to open the pocket on my belt with the remote in it, I notice something strange on the pocket. A bullet hole? I open the pocket and take out the transmitter inside. It sparks for an instant before dying. The bullet is lodged in the device. The gadgets in my belt are built to take a bullet, not to survive one. How could this have ended up here? Who could've shot me?

I take my grapple out of another pocket and shoot it up onto a rooftop. I brace my arms and let the grapple lift me to the roof. Once there, I land and roll. As I look around, I realize how unusually dark this night is. Rain clouds completely cover the stars, which is strange, because it isn't raining that hard. The only illumination comes from the working streetlights, which are few and far between in this rundown section of the city.

I jump from one rooftop to another towards Wayne Manor. To get there, I'll have to cross the entire city. My rooftop path eventually leads me to a more developed section of the city where I see more people.

A young man, around 18, is staring out his apartment window, which is about level with the roof I'm swinging towards. The man instantly notices me when I hit the rooftop. As fast as he can, he grabs the window, slams it shut, locks it, and pulls the curtains closed behind it. I've gotten reactions before from people looking out of their windows, but never like that. I wasn't even looking directly at him. The costume works too well sometimes.

I continue along the rooftops towards my destination. I keep thinking about my parents. Could I have really talked to them? Do my parents truly hate what I've done with my life since their death? How did I end up back in Gotham?

I slowly descend onto a rooftop that is quite a bit lower than the one on which I was just standing. This one has a billboard. I slowly begin to walk past it. Suddenly, the darkness of the night is broken by a huge police spotlight aimed right at me. I curse myself for not seeing it sooner. I look down off the edge of the building.

"Batman!" Lt. Detective Gordon yells into his megaphone. "Get on the ground and put your hands behind your head. You are under arrest for the attempted murder of Mayor Hill!"

I notice another spotlight creeping over the corner of the building to the right of me. It is followed by a police helicopter, which begins to bear towards me.

"You have five seconds! Four... three..." I hear from the loudspeaker on the helicopter.

I run to take cover behind a chimney.

"Two... one..." The guns on the helicopter start firing. Once I realize the bullets are coming too close, I dive head-first off the roof. As I fall, I shoot my grapple. It wraps itself around a flagpole. While dodging bullets, I swing and land on another rooftop. The helicopter's spotlight begins to catch up with me. With a leap, I stretch my cape tight as I touch down onto the railing of a fire escape, then bounce off and glide to the street below. I start running down the street, realizing that I'm an easy target for the helicopter. The spotlight chases behind me until it finally catches up with me so that the light blinds me. I quickly jump sideways into the alley which connects Finger Street with Aparo.

I pause to catch my breath as I think about what is happening. The police, who have just begun to tolerate my presence in the city, are chasing after me in full force and accusing me of assaulting the mayor. Someone obviously set me up. But who, The Mad Hatter? I have personally talked to the mayor once or twice before, so how could he fail to realize that his

would-be assassin wasn't me? Unless...

Suddenly, the spotlight blazes down on me again. I quickly run out, as my cape stretches itself almost the entire width of the alley.

I hear the thud of the bullets pounding into the pavement behind me as I run from death. I duck into another alley. The helicopter roars over me.

I look up. I'm near an abandoned factory by the docks, completely opposite where I want to be. There is an old, heavy wooden door that leads into the factory. I pull on the handle in an attempt to open it. Doesn't budge. I step back and size the door, calculating its weak point. I kick it in the target area, and watch the door smash into the building.

The odor of rust hits me immediately as I step over the threshold. The building is completely empty. The ground is wet and full of mold. There is an old rusted machine to the left of the door. A faded newspaper is trapped under the corner of the machine. It is an Evening Edition of the Gotham Gazette, dated May 11, 1939. The article on the front page discusses the things that President Roosevelt is doing in an attempt to get America out of the Depression.

Across from the door is a rusty, metal staircase. I hear sirens coming closer. Without a second thought, I dash towards the stairs and follow them as they spiral up the walls of the building. Once I get about four stories up, I reach the door to the roof. Suddenly, four armed police officers come in through the door below. "Freeze!" they yell. With all my might, I slam the door to the roof open. A bullet strikes the railing of the staircase as I dash out the door. With a great leap, I jump off the edge of the roof and land on the one adjacent to it.

I leap from rooftop to rooftop, not pausing to take a breath. My legs say 'stop', but my brain says otherwise. I begin to think about the conversation with my parents. Could it really have been just a dream? It just seemed so... vivid. "... you thought the law just didn't apply to you," I remember my father saying. I sigh, realizing the situation I'm in now and still not fully comprehending how I got here in the first place.

After I leap across countless rooftops, I stop. I take a deep breath. My legs hurt badly. I feel tired. I look behind me, and realize thankfully that

no one is coming. The streets will be easier to traverse than the rooftops. I stretch my cape tight, and glide down to the street below. Once I hit the pavement, I walk about six steps before I realize my fatal mistake. Police cars swarm me from all directions. Even before the cars come to complete stops, the officers are stepping out and pointing their guns in my direction. The fat, unshaven Detective Bullock steps out of the car in front of me.

“Get down ya filthy piece of scum,” he says in his ‘I don’t care if you were my mother’ tone of voice, “and put yer hands in the air.”

I look at the cops around me, as I consider my next move. As I start to raise my hands, I unsnap one of the pockets on my utility belt without them noticing. What I’m about to do is way too risky, even for me. But I can’t afford to go to jail with the Hatter still on the loose.

Detective Bullock walks towards me. “Let’s go punk,” he says as he grabs my arm. He attempts to pull me towards the car. I purposely exaggerate the effect of the tug, and allow two flash-bang capsules to fall out of the opened pocket.

Before they even realize that something has hit the ground, I close my eyes tightly and slam the protected sole of my boot onto the capsules as hard as I can. The police are quickly blinded, and they all cover their eyes. In that brief moment, I quickly reach for my grapple and shoot it up into the air. I watch as the grapple shoots up into the air and the end sinks into a chimney on a roof. Within a second, I’m off.

I change body position in mid-air so I can land on my feet when I hit the roof. I watch as my two feet seem to hang in mid-air, just above the roof. BANG! I hear come from below as I see a bullet just clip the side of my leg. An officer must’ve been lucky with a blind shot. My once stable legs give, and I fall onto the rooftop on my side. I look at the blood dripping from the side of my leg. I got lucky. Way too lucky.

I somehow manage to stand back up and brush myself off. It hurts, but I have to keep going. With more effort than usual, I leap to another rooftop. A light suddenly blazes on my back as I hear rapid-fire shots coming in my direction.

“There he is!” I hear yelled from some sort of radio. I turn around to see the same police helicopter that was chasing me before. The rotary machine guns start to fire. I hide myself behind a chimney as bullets slam into the pavement beside me. I quickly come out of cover and whip a batarang at the searchlight on the helicopter. It bounces off like bullets bounce off Superman.

As the helicopter turns to make another pass over me, I flee to a different rooftop and hide behind its ledge. The machine guns start firing, and the bullets land right next to me.

As I look towards the bullet holes in the pavement, I notice two bricks broken off from the ledge. I pick up one in each hand. As the helicopter turns to try and hit me again, I run to hide behind the raised portion of the roof on which the door is located. As the helicopter comes towards me, I quickly pop out from cover and throw one of the bricks at the searchlight. The helicopter shakes as the brick collides with it. It cracks the outer glass of the searchlight, but the light is still working fine. I throw the second brick with all my strength, and quickly glide to another roof so they lose sight of me.

“He destroyed our searchlight!” I hear the pilot say over the radio.

Half dead, I make it to the front door of Wayne Manor without any further police encounters. I knock. I’m really hurting, and I’m extremely fatigued.

Alfred opens the door to find me breathing hard and holding onto the doorframe with my right hand. “Master Bruce!” he exclaims. “Are you all right?”

“I’m in need of your s-services, Alfred,” I say. “The M-Mad Hatter. Need to get to the c-cave.” I limp past Alfred towards the ancient grandfather clock in my study. I turn the minute hand until the clock reads 10:47, the time of my parents’ deaths. The clock slides away, opening the portal from one life to another.

I keep all of the medical supplies in the cave. People would start to

wonder if I kept a supply of neck braces and bandages upstairs. Alfred follows me down the stairs and into the cave.

“Master Bruce, might I state that you look terrible,” he says as I sit down. He immediately gets the bandages.

“Sir, you’ve been in the papers quite a lot lately,” he says as he begins bandaging my back. “You’re wanted for attempting to assassinate Mayor Hill. You were obviously set up...”

“Not set up, Alfred,” I interrupt, “I did it.”

“Excuse me, Master Bruce?” he says as he stops bandaging and his face lights up in shock.

“I did it, but not intentionally,” I explain. “The Mad Hatter mind-warped Max Schneider with a new invention of his that allows him to take control of people through airborne signals. He then mind-warped me and forced me to attempt the Mayor’s murder unconsciously.”

Alfred takes a deep sigh of relief and goes on with his work. “Oh, I see. The papers say that you attempted to assassinate Mayor Hill in his office—in broad daylight. A security guard claims that he was standing outside the Mayor’s office when he heard something strange and decided to investigate. When he got inside, you had the Mayor by the collar and were just about to strike him. The guard says that he pulled out his firearm and fired as quickly as he could. However, oddly enough, he claimed that the bullet didn’t even faze you. Is that what this wound on your leg is from?” he says as he quickly begins to tend to it.

“No, that’s a souvenir from my encounter with the police,” I say as I think about the bullet in the gadget that saved my life. “The Hatter is planning to release his signals on the whole city.”

“Good Lord!” Alfred says as he finishes cleaning up the cut. He pauses momentarily. “But won’t the police be looking for you?”

“I have no choice,” I say to Alfred. “I have to stop him before it’s too late.”

To be concluded!

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