



Detective Comics #8
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Detective Comics

Issue 8: "Grim, Part 3: Bang Bang. You're Dead."

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Batman shoots first. As planned, the lights go out; it's harder for someone to shoot him if they can't see him. He can't tell but it is almost a sure bet that next to sound off is Reaper. Moments after Batman knocks out the light, bullets start to fly and the room flashes with intense bursts of illumination. Batman instantly drops the gun and leaps for the gunmen, sweeping their legs out from under them, and hoping they drop their weapons on the way down. The Reaper shrieks as he hits the floor and continues to fire as he falls, shattering jars and blowing holes in the paper-thin walls.

Gordon reaches to the floor to regain his weapon as the Batman and Reaper scuffle together. As the fight progresses, Batman slowly gains the upper hand. Finally, Gordon touches the metal barrel of his gun and begins the search for his glasses.

Batman and Reaper stand up and begin exchanging blows on their feet until the Reaper attempts to kick Batman. Batman sidesteps, catches Reaper, and throws him back onto the floor. Now with handgun and eyesight restored, Gordon aims quickly at the pile of swirling capes on the floor and fires away. The fighting stops and Gordon lowers his gun and walks over to the two men. "Batman," He says putting his hand on the cape crusader hunched over the Reaper, "Did I... Are you..." Batman rolls off and two large holes are newly visible in the Reapers studied leather armor. Batman looks down at Reaper and up at Gordon saying nothing as the man on the floor rolls his eyes back in his head. It to the floor.

I was like him once... once long ago. So full of delusions of heroics. That was long ago, long before I met the Demon, before I became more powerful than He could ever imagine. I try to teach him, I try to show him the truth but he won't listen, he won't understand. It's as if I don't exist, as if my story falls on deaf ears. He beats me to a pulp but... but it only makes me stronger. I AM death, whether He chooses to acknowledge it doesn't matter because at the end of the day, I will still be death. That was the deal. It was when I died that I met the Demon that I was granted eternal life, the ultimate curse the ability to live on forever... but there were terms. My own life source fed of the loss of others: with each kill, the emptiness inside me lessened and I grew stronger. My thirst was quenched, but I did not stop. They started to raise eyebrows, they started to question my methods. They said I had to be stopped. They were wrong. One night, just like every other I, reached out for the sweet taste of death. They said I had gone too far, but I had just begun; the thirst became an addiction and that night I took more souls than ever. For the first time in my existence, I felt full, but they wanted to stop me. I slaughtered ten cops that night and I could not, would not be stopped. Gotham was ignited by my rage The streets ran red with the blood of all that challenged me.

They said I crossed the line. They said I went too far. I had just begun.

Despite their best efforts, my massacre continued. The ten cops called for reinforcements, and they were able to overpower me. My fatal touch never reached them, and they shipped me off to the asylum. They created me, I and they cast me off. They should have been in the Asylum.

He will see that too. He will know Their treachery. I did it for them; they would not be safe unless I felt the sweet caress of death.

In the Asylum, it was not long before I became weak. I played along and followed their rules and it killed me. Being so far away from what gave me life, literally and metaphorically, tormented me. I needed Death; it was essential to my well-being. I knew that if I was able to fool them into believing I was what they wanted me to be, then after a period of time, I could convince them to let me free. I knew where I had to be. Here, where people came and went without being recognized, I could pluck life whenever I chose and the police and the others would never find me. I would be lost in a vast pit of them without anyone to take note of my secret indulgence. They never knew I never left. Instead, I feasted on the dregs of their precious society keeping reserves in my small rotted dwelling. It

was here that I learned that the closer I came to death, the more powerful I would become. When the little mutants that walk the streets of Crime Alley beat me nearly to death the thrill and power filled me; I fed off of the presence, I became whole.

They said I crossed the line. They said I went too far. I had just begun. Hundreds of rats, dogs, cats, children, babies, woman, and men died by my blade. I lived on. .

I was able to ignore them until I saw him. He was a bat out of Hell, like me. He craved it, I could tell. I was wrong. That night, when he fell before my feet and I threw one of my quarry before him, I saw it wasn't there. I knew then I had to teach him; I had to show him what would happen. I had to show him the betrayal they would undoubtedly cast upon him. He had to change; He had to accept death so that we could unite. I am not alone...

A moment of silence is broken The Reaper's eyes open abruptly and the ghastly figure rolls himself backwards onto his feet. Quickly, he leaps out the window. Eerily, his wilted body moves more nimbly than ever and he lunges onto the fire escape. Gordon reaches for his gun again and the Batman follows the Reaper outside. As Batman jumps out the window, he is floored, again, by a kick to his ribs. The Reaper lets out a whimper and kicks again before he leaps onto the railing of the escape and hoists himself to the next level. Gordon looks out at the scene as he reloads his gun. He slams in the new clip in as he makes his way after the Reaper. The Batman finds his feet and as Gordon climbs out the window, he points the police officer in the direction of the stairs. He drops through the gap between the steel panel floor and the railing, he kicking to build momentum, then swinging upward clutching the steel ridge of the next level. Gordon dashes up the stairs as the Reaper stomps on the Dark Knight's gloved fingers as they cling desperately to the edge of the floor above him. Gordon swings an elbow to the back of the Reaper's head dazing him. Batman's fingers slip and he drops back to the bottom level. As his boots touch the railing, his body folds. He feels his thighs tense up and he jumps back up, this time over the ledge and onto the railing of the second level where he finds Gordon is using what little martial arts training he has to fight off a sadistic zombie in red leather.

Batman pulls his torso over the railing and the Reaper uses all his force to kick Gordon over it. Batman quickly lets go with one hand and snatches Gordon's ankle before he plunges to his death. The Reaper lets out a cackle and spins back to the stairway to make his escape. He needs power, his jars are gone; he needs to taste death again. Batman uses all of his strength and momentum to toss Gordon back to safety. With one swing Gordon lands on the steel platform and Batman grunts orders to follow after the Reaper, "Go... NOW!" Gordon again makes his way after the Reaper up the steps clutching his shoulder with one hand and holding his gun in the other. Batman reaches up with his now free hand and pulls his weight over the railing once more, hoping the Reaper isn't there to knock him back over again. Gordon is able to make up the distance, and he sees a line of black rope shoot up beside him followed by a bat out of hell. He cocks his gun, shakes his head and sprints up the steel stairs. The Reaper makes it to the top and places his boots into the rungs of the ladder that leads to the rooftop and he sees the Batman land beside him. His eyes dart quickly around the rooftop and before Batman can reach out, he sprints two jumps to the ledge and makes one final bound across the gap to a close by similar looking apartment building. Batman throws a line to the next building as the Reaper lands and jumps gracefully to the next building.

Batman lands on the rooftop and the Reaper spins around. He looks nervously to each side and smiles behind the blood scabbing over his face. He raises his arm to Batman and slowly stretches out his finger. Batman grits his teeth and takes a step forward. "It shouldn't take Gordon more than ten to fifteen minutes to get over here; you've got all the time in the world to teach me. Show them Reaper."

The Reaper cackles and springs towards Batman. He moves to avoid the blow. As Reaper plunges down he grabs a handful of Batman's cape and pulls down pulling on Batman's neck and forcing his back to slam onto the floor. The Reaper jumps to cover Batman, but the dark avenger rolls onto his stomach and Reaper misses by inches as he slams again to the floor. Batman tackles the Reaper as he gets up, slamming his shoulder into the Reaper's chest, but as he continues the attack, he is caught off-guard and the Reaper's spiked gauntlet slices again across his chest, as the crimson-clad madman shoots his fist up wildly to defend himself.

Batman clutches his wound, and the Reaper reaches behind his back, once again pulling out a scythe that gleams in the night as he raises it high above his head.

Across the street, on the shaky the fire escape Gordon curses wildly. He sees the two men dart wildly back and forth in their attack, and he peers down sixteen stories to estimate just how much distance he is going to have to cover on foot. Twenty minutes to the next building is his approximation, twenty minutes if he's lucky. He makes his way down the first flight of stairs and reaches into his coat pocket for a cigarette but tosses the carton off the fire escape to kill temptation. Times like this, he wishes he quit smoking back when Barbara first told him to, he thinks as he continues his rushed descent through the brick apartment building. As he makes his way back down to where he had started from, he finally reaches the open window of The Reaper's apartment. Conveniently, it is not barred. He climbs inside, once more.

The Reaper slashes down violently at his wounded enemy who rolls away quickly as the blade plunges. Unfazed by his failed attempt, The Reaper snarls and wildly swings his deadly scythe again. Once more, the Batman rolls out of harm's way. Before the Reaper can attack again, Batman reaches into his utility belt, pulls out a handful of smoke pellets, and slams them into the floor as hard as he can. The shells burst and release a thick cloud of smoke, which to conceals him momentarily. The Reaper slashes the fog to loosen it up. When it clears, nothing is there. He whips his head around but before he can rotate it fully. a haymaker shakes him to his core and crumples him Batman kicks him in the ribs lifting him off the floor and back onto his hands and knees.Reaper looks up in fright and Batman's fist impacts back of his head knocking him flat on the floor.

Gordon sprints down the twelve flights of stairs in ten minutes flat. He clutches his side with one hand and checks his pulse on his throat with his other. Once he catches a second wind, he whips out his gun, kicks

open the door of the neighboring apartment building to make his way to the staircase. He plans to climb straight, no need to brave fire escapes or force open locked doors, not when he has a bullet as his master key. Open's almost every door in Gotham.

Batman straddles the grounded Reaper and lays in several blows to the back of his head. He can feel the body of his opponent weaken beneath him. Each punch causes a "pop" and a "crunch" and each time his fist rises from the mess of flesh bone, and blood beneath him it returns bloodier than before.

He rolls the Reaper over and looks him in the eye. Now, he can end the war that started days ago on the rooftops once and for all. Instead of a face, Batman sees is a bloody lumpy mass of flesh that used to be the sharp-featured countenance of Judson Caspian, the Reaper. Blood flows from countless lacerations on the Reapers face, and Batman raises his fist once more. He freezes. What has he become? Again, Batman looks down at his victim and him squirming in pleasure, of being pummeled to the edge of death and some part of him felt fulfilled. These past few days, he had felt more pain than ever since he had first donned the cape and cowl. Not physical pain, not the kind of pain that aches and stings when he sleeps, rather, it has been the kind of pain that haunts. Something was wrong; he knew it.

"Do you see?" The Reaper says mockingly as he twists in agony, "They said I crossed the line..." Batman says to himself looking beyond his bloody fist, "They said I went too far..." The Reaper smiles through the blood, shredded skin, and gravel that disfigured his face.

"My god... I had just begun that day..." Batman looks again down at The Reaper whose demonic smile shows through his wretched features. What he sees is a man alone in the world, he sees himself, what he could easily become. He has pushed away Dick, Barbara, and even Alfred. "Things have to change" Batman says to himself lowering his head.

"So you finally see?" The Reaper bursts out, still squirming. "You know what you need to do... They will turn on you, They already have. We are the same, You and I. That's how you found me, that's how you knew

where to look, don't you see? We are the same; the change has been made, make the final step..." The words tear at Batman more than any bullets or blades. The Reaper continues in his excitement, "You can taste it tonight... Death is in the air, I can smell it; I can taste it... Listen, do you not hear?"

Batman looks down at the Reaper and reaches for his utility belt. Pulling out a pair of black handcuffs, The Reapers swollen eyes widen at the sight. "Y-y-you want to take me back don't you! You want to deprive me! You want to lock me away! You are not one of them!" With every exclamatory remark the Reaper's will seems to come back and his face twists as his mouth utters the words. "I should have known: you didn't learn a thing, nothing is going to change! Cross the line damn you! Who are you? Who?" He screams trying to buck Batman off of him as Batman struggles to put the cuffs on him.

Batman manages to get a cuff around one of The Reapers flailing wrists, but is distracted when the doorway of the stairwell entrance busts open and Gordon emerges from the dark hall into the moonlit night. The Reaper takes advantage of the distraction and kicks Batman off his chest but as he gets up to run, Gordon shoots him in the back. Gordon aims the gun as The Reaper collapses to his knees and Batman hurries over to cuff him again. The Reaper picks up his fallen scythe and flings it at Gordon, slashing him across his right leg. Batman rushes to Gordon's aid as the Reaper jolts towards the injured police chief. Just before The Reaper reaches him, however, Batman knocks the hooded menace to the floor and turns back to Gordon. Gordon's face tightens in pain as three gunshots ring out.

Batman drops to the floor instantly. On his knees, the Reaper laughs manically, still pointing the gun. Gordon's expression of pain turns into a grim face of anger and he punches The Reaper in the jaw stunning him momentarily. Before the staggering madman can react, Gordon kicks him in the chest sending him to his back, continuing to kick him while the Reaper frantically tries to regain his footing. Suddenly, Batman still on his stomach grabs the Reaper's cuffed wrist and attaches the other cuff to a steel pipe. The Reaper's head whips around, and he pulls hysterically but to no avail. Batman drops back onto the floor into a pool of blood and Gordon reaches to the floor and picks up his dropped pistol.

Sweat pours down Gordon's brow as he holds his gun against the Reaper's mangled face. As Jim Gordon's finger firmly grips the trigger, he feels the Reaper's head squirm against the warm barrel of his gun. With a little more pressure it could all be over; there wouldn't have to be a long trial, there wouldn't be a prison cell, there wouldn't be taxes to pay for his room and board in Arkham like all the others they shipped there, seemingly on a daily basis. The only thing stopping him is lying on that Gotham rooftop trying hard not to bleed to death.

"Gordon..." Bruce mutters as he tries to pick himself up off the floor, "Don't..." The rough voice sends chills down Gordon's spine. He remembers the first time he heard that voice and how it never failed to overwhelm him every time he pushed words out of his scratchy throat. "Not... like this." His words are spread far apart in long echoing gaps.

"Batman, I know what you are thinking, but I have an obligation to my department. And to my city." Gordon stares the devil in his bloodshot eyes. "You may have reservations about killing I know, but the fact of the matter is that this badge means that that I answer to a higher calling: the law; not your reservations."

"You know... that's not what I mean." Bruce answers finding his feet and leaning against a steel chimney. Gordon stares down at Reaper waiting for Batman to continue. After a short time, Bruce speaks again, "When you wear that badge, you are on the side of justice, so am I. We may be miles apart about how we achieve justice but we want the same thing. We want the wrongs of this world to be righted, I know right now you may find this odd coming from me, but you have got to take my word, this isn't the right way."

Gordon looks first at Bruce, and then at the head at the end of his gun. "Ever since you showed up, Gotham City has had to deal with these kinds of criminals. Not thieves or murderers but psychos, Batman. We ship just as much of them to Arkham as we do to Blackgate. And that's fine, because you have always been here to catch them when they break loose, but one of these days Batman, one of these days, you're not going to be here. By the looks of it," Gordon says, nodding at Bruce's bleeding wounds, "That day isn't too far off."

"Gordon, the things I do... I can't be confined by the same limitations as

you, I respect the law, but I am willing to bend it to achieve justice...”

“You can only bend things so far before they snap, Batman. If we ship him off, he’ll be back, I am sure of it. I can’t say the same thing for you... not after what I have seen tonight.”

“Don’t worry about me, Gordon. I always find my way home in the dark...” Gordon looks at Batman again and he no longer sees a mythical creature who stalks Gotham’s criminal underworld, he sees a man. Just now, when he heard Batman speak, for the first time, he heard the words of a man. Gordon drops the gun to the floor and lifts his radio to signal for backup, but as he does so, one last report of gunfire echoes through Crime Alley. Gordon and Bruce look down in unison. The Reaper’s head is completely blown off, and onto the ledge of the concrete apartment building. Batman looks Gordon in the eyes, “You’re right Jim, something has to change.”

Epilogue

On a cold winter night, Jim Gordon makes his way up the stairs of the Gotham City Police Department. With coffee in his system, and the Commissioner on his back, he has trouble; there have been rumors of heavy-duty weapon smuggling that can only be described as ‘foreign’. He gets to the doorway and walks through making his way over to the bat signal when a hand grasps his shoulder tightly, stopping him in his tracks. “I have got a case for you,” Gordon says calmly handing the file over his shoulder.

“So how are you, is the ‘goddamn’ Batman retired for good?” Gordon asks, smirking as he turns around to face the shadowy figure.

“Yes,” Batman says as a light flicks on and he begins flipping through the folder Gordon handed to him.

“Frankly, I am glad he survived retirement,” Gordon says as he takes off his glasses and wipes off the lense with his shirtsleeve. Batman’s hand reaches out offering a small micro fiber wipe.

“He didn’t, I did.” Batman says not taking his eyes away from the

papers.

“Heh, So how’s the kid?” Jim asks, handing back the small cloth to Batman.

“I haven’t spoken to Ro... Nightwing for months.” Batman says roughly putting the small rag into his utility belt.

“That’s a damn shame. Especially with what happened to Batgi-” Batman looks up and Gordon stops talking. He nods his head as Batman hands him back the file. As he flicks through it again, he asks. “So what do you got?”

“A few leads. I will meet back with you when I have something worth showing. Until then, try not to fall of the sides of anymore buildings, I might not be there to catch you.”

Gordon and looks up from the file to respond only to see the view of Gotham City and the edge of the building.

“Yeah, you too...” Gordon says to himself aloud as he makes his way back inside to headquarters.

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