

SHADOW OF THE BAT

I: CAPES

112 - "A Serious House"

Batman and related characters were created by Bob Kane & Bill Finger and are owned by DC Comics and Warner Brothers. This is a work of transformative fiction... aren't they all?

EXT. ARKHAM ASYLUM - DAY

Establishing shot of the Asylum in Autumn.

**SI: THREE MONTHS AGO...**

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING CHECKPOINT

CHARLIE, an Arkham guard, sits in his checkpoint booth, scrolling on his phone.

HARLEEN

Hey Charlie.

Charlie glances up from his phone to see Dr. Harleen Quinzel standing at the booth window. She is, as always, bespectacled, clad in a labcoat, and carrying her clipboard.

CHARLIE

Oh, hey Doc, nice to see you down here. You just visiting?

HARLEEN

Actually, I requested a transfer.

CHARLIE

To Max?

HARLEEN

It's where the action is. A-Wing is an easy assignment, sure, but I didn't take my residency *here* just to chit-chat with riddle-obsessed geeks.

CHARLIE

Well good on ya, Doc. Though I am gonna have to see your badge.

HARLEEN

Of course.

Harleen places her badge in the booth's tray.

Charlie slides the tray toward himself, retrieves the badge, and scans it. He places it back in the tray and slides it toward Harleen.

As Harleen retrieves her badge a green light turns on, accompanied by a loud BUZZING.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE  
Welcome to M-Wing,  
Doc. Congratulations.

The main door releases and opens.

Harleen steps through.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING, THERAPY CELL - CONTINUOUS

**worm's-eye view:**

Low to the ground, close up, we see a foot, a leg, a chair leg. An inmate is shackled to a chrome chair; the chair itself is bolted to the ground. The room is illuminated only dimly.

The CLICK-CLACK of approaching footsteps can be heard in the hall outside, echoing in the sterile environment.

In the deep background, the door to the therapy cell opens and bright light beams into the room, landing on the inmate. A female figure is silhouetted in the door frame.

The woman, Dr. Harleen Quinzel, flips the light switch. Bright fluorescent lights bathe the antiseptic walls with an electric hum.

HARLEEN  
Patient two-eight-one-four?

She waits for a response. None is forthcoming.

HARLEEN (CONT'D)  
I'd rather be able to call you by  
your birth-name... if possible...

She waits.

HARLEEN (CONT'D)  
I'll be conducting your sessions  
from now on. My name is Dr.  
Harleen Quinzel.

**close-up:**

The inmate's red mouth cuts a large, toothy smile across his pale face. The shackled inmate can be none other than THE JOKER.

OPENING TITLE CARD: SHADOW OF THE BAT

ACT ONE:

EXT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, MORNING

Establishing shot of the Asylum in Winter, snow falling.

**SI: "A Serious House"**

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, HEARING ROOM

Nigma stands before a bright-white tribunal bench, behind which sit, from his left to his right; Harvey Dent, JEREMIAH ARKHAM, and Hugo Strange. Dr. Crane sits in the gallery at the back of the room, behind Nigma.

**SI: TODAY**

JEREMIAH

Having heard the relevant testimony, I find myself ready to render a decision. Mister District Attorney?

Dent glances around nervously.

DENT

I am ready.

JEREMIAH

Doctor?

STRANGE

I also am ready.

JEREMIAH

Mr. Dent, in the matter of the release of Edward Nigma, what is your decision?

As he speaks, Dent looks down, he looks to the side. He can look neither Nigma nor his fellow tribunal members in the eye. He is uncomfortable rendering this verdict.

DENT

Mr. Nigma is not a dangerous man. Though he has eccentricities, he is not criminally insane. He is here of his own volition, not by legal decree. Asking for his release as he is, I... *have no choice* but to acknowledge the progress he has made in recent months, and vote to grant his release.

(CONTINUED)

Nigma smiles graciously.

JEREMIAH

Although I do not deny that Mr. Nigma has made progress, I must remind the tribunal that his ailment is a kind of addiction. As such it would be foolish for us to brand him healed and thrust him out into the world of temptation after a mere ninety days of sobriety. I must therefore decide against release.

Nigma looks disappointed, but understanding.

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

Dr. Strange. in the matter of the release of Edward Nigma, what is your decision?

Strange readies himself, choosing his words before speaking.

STRANGE

Mr. Nigma checked himself in. He could, legally, check himself back out again. That he has, instead, opted to ask the tribunal, and to abide by our decision, is all the proof I need that he is recovered. I also cast my decision for his release.

Both Nigma and Crane celebrate; separately, briefly, and nearly in silence. Jeremiah bangs his gavel a single time.

JEREMIAH

Very well, Mr. Nigma will gather his belongings and Admissions will be prepared for his release no later than five PM today.

Jeremiah bangs his gavel once more.

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

Dismissed.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING, THERAPY CELL - MEANWHILE

Harleen sits in her chair, legs crossed, clip-board in hand, smiling. Her hair is down; this is the first time we have seen it out of her signature, severe ponytail.

HARLEEN

I watched those Buster Keaton shorts you recommended. You were right, I've never seen anything so funny.

THE JOKER sits across from her, only one of his ankles shackled to his chair. His posture betrays ease and comfort; this is not the interaction of a therapist and patient, this is the interaction of two individuals enjoying each other's company.

JOKER

Like in "One Week" when the house *isn't* hit by the oncoming train-

HARLEEN

-but it's destroyed by a second train anyway! Or in "The Boat" when there's a leak coming from the boat wall-

JOKER

-so he drills a hole in the bottom of the boat to drain the water!

The two laugh together.

JOKER (CONT'D)

In...

Joker can barely stop laughing long enough to speak. He catches his breath.

JOKER (CONT'D)

In "Sherlock Jr.", he was walking the wrong way across the top of a locomotive. As he approached the end of the train, he reached out for the chain of a water-tank spout.

The story starts to take on an oddly serious tone. The frivolity has been replaced with almost therapeutic tones.

(CONTINUED)

JOKER (CONT'D)

The bit wasn't planned, but there was about to be air under his feet and he grabbed for what he could. He rode the spout halfway down to the ground, the gushing water did the rest. When the torrent slammed him back-first onto the railway tracks, it broke his spine.

For a few brief moments, there is what seems to be an awkward silence.

Both Harleen and Joker break out into hysterical laughter. Joker wipes a humor-tear from his eye, still chuckling.

JOKER (CONT'D)

He just wanted to make people laugh.

HARLEEN

He was a very brave man.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, A-WING, NIGMA'S CELL - A LITTLE LATER

Nigma places what few objects he has inside a cardboard box. The door to his cell is open and unguarded.

As he places a copy of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" in the box, Dr. Crane peeks around the door frame.

CRANE

I hope I'm not intruding.

NIGMA

Doctor, come in!

Crane enters, glancing around the stark cell.

CRANE

A few books in a box, and suddenly it's like you were never here.

NIGMA

I'll remember. I want to.

CRANE

I have to say, Edward, it was a real pleasure having you as a patient. Don't get me wrong, I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CRANE (cont'd)  
find it rewarding to work with the hard cases, but it's been nice to come to work knowing I have an intelligent conversation waiting for me in A-Wing. I'm sure we'll all remember you too.

NIGMA  
I appreciate that, Doctor. I hope to validate your opinion of me.

CRANE  
You've changed, the tribunal saw that. And call me John.

Cornelius Stirk, clad in a standard inmate jumpsuit, bursts into the room through the open door.

STIRK  
Eddie! Tell me they lie, Eddie!

CRANE  
Mr. Stirk, you should not be wandering free right now...

Crane pauses as he is softened by the pathetic look on Stirk's face.

He looks to Nigma, who gives a small shrug accompanied by a compassionate smile.

CRANE (CONT'D)  
...which is why I'll be back in five minutes to escort you to the common area. Is that understood.

STIRK  
Yes, sir. Of course, sir.

Crane gives Nigma a final look, then walks through the door frame.

NIGMA  
John.

Crane stops just outside Nigma's cell.

NIGMA (CONT'D)  
Thank you.

Crane smiles, then walks away down the hall.



Stirk stands silent, shaking like a leaf. He frowns, a single tooth jutting over his upper lip. His eyes begin to water.

NIGMA

It's true. I'm leaving.

STIRK

But how will I continue without you, Eddie?

NIGMA

You're stronger now, right  
Corny? And braver? And calmer?

STIRK

Because of you, Eddie. Because you help me.

NIGMA

That's right. I helped you. I helped you, and now you are stronger. You are braver. That's you now, no matter where I am.

STIRK

I am afraid, Eddie.

At first, Nigma isn't sure what to say. Then a response occurs to him.

NIGMA

I am born in fear, raised in truth,  
and I come to my own in deed. When  
comes a time that I'm called forth,  
I come to serve the cause of  
need. What am I?

STIRK

I... I don't know...

Nigma places his hand on Stirk's shoulder reassuringly.

NIGMA

When the time comes, you will.

Nigma breaks the moment and turns his attention away, picking up his box.

NIGMA (CONT'D)

I actually really enjoyed knowing  
you, Corny.

Nigma, box on chest, turns back to face Stirk.

(CONTINUED)

NIGMA (CONT'D)

When you get out, look me up.

Stirk cannot speak, his lip quavers, his eyes are so wet that the absence of tear-drops seems to defy physics.

NIGMA (CONT'D)

You'll be okay... you'll make it.

Stirk nods, wiping his nose. He looks away, unable to meet Nigma's gaze.

Nigma waits a moment before saying his final goodbye.

NIGMA (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Corny.

Stirk still can't bring himself to look at Nigma.

Nigma exits with his box, leaving Stirk alone in the cell.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, ADMISSIONS, OBSERVATION ROOM - LATER

Jeremiah stands at a large window which is actually the back side of a one-way mirror. He looks out at the Admissions Office where Nigma is receiving his belongings and finalizing paperwork.

Strange enters, quietly shutting the door behind himself. He walks up to Jeremiah and stands beside him.

JEREMIAH

What the hell was that, Hugo?

STRANGE

You mean, why did I enter a decision to release him?

JEREMIAH

You know damn well that's what I mean. You haven't entered a release decision since you've been here. You've voted down Malitt's release three times, and he's practically a vegetable. Why do you want Nigma on the streets so badly?

STRANGE

Dr. Arkham, I am in the business of healing the sick. Once they are healed, I can relieve myself of my

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STRANGE (cont'd)  
responsibility to them. But your  
responsibility is to your father,  
and now you will never be able to  
heal him, and so you cannot let go  
of the responsibility. You choose  
to relieve others of their genetic  
legacy, rather than address your  
own, so you cannot let go of the  
fear.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, ADMISSIONS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Nigma walks by the one-way mirror, reflected in its surface  
on his side. He is on his way out of the Asylum.

STRANGE (CONT'D) (V.O.)  
You feel responsible for Nigma-

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, ADMISSIONS, OBSERVATION ROOM -  
CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah and Strange watch Nigma pass.

STRANGE (CONT'D)  
-even though he is in no need of a  
doctor. You fear what he might do,  
even though he is not fearsome. I  
have no such fear. And I no longer  
feel any such responsibility. So I  
entered a decision to release Mr.  
Nigma.

JEREMIAH  
Understood.

Nigma disappears from sight. Strange heads to the door.

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)  
Dr. Strange.

STRANGE  
Yes, Dr. Arkham.

JEREMIAH  
If you try analyzing me again you  
better have the want-ads handy.

STRANGE  
Understood.

Strange exits the observation room, quietly shutting the door behind himself.

EXT. ARKHAM ASYLUM - A LITTLE LATER

Nigma walks the winding path down to the Iron Gates of Arkham, the last remaining vestige of its previous, Gothic incarnation.

He arrives at the gates, looks through them, then looks up at a security camera. The gates open out automatically.

He looks back at the asylum one last time, then steps beyond the gates.

FADE TO BLACK:

**ACT TWO:**

FADE FROM BLACK:

EXT. ARKHAM ASYLUM - AFTERNOON

Establishing shot of the Asylum in snow.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING, ZSASZ'S CELL

Zsasz's distinctive confinement cage is at one side of the room. Crane sits in a folding chair at the other, arms crossed.

Moments pass. There is no movement, no sound.

ZSASZ

I wonder what you hope to accomplish by giving me the silent treatment.

There is further silence.

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

I suppose, if one were to take conversation as a zero-sum game, then the less you speak, the more speaking is left for me. And, of course, the more I speak, the more I might say something that will give you a glimpse into my mind.

Crane gives no response, verbal or otherwise.

(CONTINUED)

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

You might try looking into my eyes,  
Scarecrow.

Crane shifts in his chair, annoyed.

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

Oh, but that's only part of it,  
isn't it?

Crane stops shifting, uncomfortable.

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

Yes, you've given up on me, haven't  
you?

Crane starts upright in his chair, both offended and  
ashamed.

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

You don't want to admit it, so you  
come, every day, at four o'clock,  
and you sit in that chair. But  
you're too smart. You've figured  
out what no one has been able to  
figure out in three years.

Zsasz stops speaking. His unfinished thought hangs in the  
air. Crane leans forward in his seat. He waits a moment,  
listening. Finally he speaks.

CRANE

What is that?

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

I can't be fixed. I can't be  
fixed, because I'm not  
broken. This is who I am, this is  
who I'm supposed to be. So many  
zombies struggle their whole lives  
to find meaning, to find  
purpose. I've found mine. I've  
managed to become the most perfect  
version of myself possible, and no  
amount of therapy would persuade me  
to give that up.

Silence.

Zsasz's smile is framed in the cylinder's cutout.

(CONTINUED)

ZSASZ (CONT'D)

Dr. Crane?

CRANE

Yes?

ZSASZ

It's four-thirty.

Dr. Crane's digital watch CHIRPS an alarm. He turns to look at it, uncomfortable.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING, THERAPY CELL - MEANWHILE

Harleen perches on her chair, sitting on her own legs, having curled them under herself sultrily. Her ponytail has migrated to the side of her head in the style of a 1980's teenager.

Joker, meanwhile, lays upside down on his chair, his legs curling over the back and feet dangling behind just as his head hangs down its front. He twirls the keys to his former shackles on his downstretched finger with the practiced ease of a seasoned circus performer. He seems almost bored.

HARLEEN

You know, I wanted to be a comedian when I was young.

Joker shows mild interest; he discontinues his key routine, but isn't holding out hope for her comedic sensibilities.

JOKER

Really?

HARLEEN

Yeah! Well, a humourist. Novels, short stories, that kind of thing.

JOKER

(disappointed)

Oh.

Joker resumes twirling the keys.

JOKER (CONT'D)

Then what's with the lab-coat?

Harleen is struck by the question, almost as if considering it for the first time. A thought comes to her, meaningful but unfamiliar.

(CONTINUED)

HARLEEN

There's a common idiom that goes  
"comedy is tragedy plus time."

JOKER

Yes, I've heard it.

HARLEEN

What most people don't realize is  
that the equation as stated is  
flawed. Comedy is tragedy plus  
comprehension.

Joker perks up.

HARLEEN (CONT'D)

Time merely affords comprehension.

Joker sits up correctly in his chair. His smile reaches  
full width.

JOKER

Harley, my girl... we'll make a  
humourist of you yet.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, A-WING, STIRK'S CELL - MEANWHILE

Hugo Strange perches on a steel chair near the door, his  
legs crossed at the knee, his laced fingers wrapped around  
his outer knee. The fluorescent light in the ceiling glints  
off his dark glasses.

Stirk sits at the edge of his bed, but he is curled in on  
himself. His head is low, his shoulders slumped in as if to  
protect it. His arms are folded limply in his lap.

STRANGE

And still you have not experienced  
any... senses, such as before?

STIRK

I cannot sense the fear while I am  
starving, sir. I eat no hearts,  
sir, and so I sense nothing.

STRANGE

Do you miss the extra-sensory  
stimuli?

STIRK

Yes. I feel... hollow.

(CONTINUED)

STRANGE

And if you could eat a heart, to  
bring back those sensations,  
without legal consequence, would  
you?

Stirk rocks back and forth ever so slightly, not responding  
immediately. He answers truthfully, but it is hard to  
admit.

STIRK

No. I must not eat the hearts  
of... people. I must not kill.

STRANGE

If there were a way to regain your  
senses, your projections, without  
consuming human hearts; if you  
could retain your gifts without  
bloodshed, would you accept them?

STIRK

No, sir. No. They are a curse, a  
temptation. The things, inside  
people... terrible things.

STRANGE

And yet, you miss them.

STIRK

We are all of us terrible,  
sir. Each of us carries  
darkness. The best of us control  
it.

STRANGE

Controlling means  
acknowledging. It means  
harnessing.

STIRK

What is the time, sir?

STRANGE

It...

Strange sighs and pulls out his pocket-watch.

STRANGE (CONT'D)

It is half past six.

(CONTINUED)



STIRK

I would like to visit the library  
before it closes. May I be  
excused, sir?

STRANGE

Of course.

Strange rises, folding his black steel chair.

STRANGE (CONT'D)

Though we will continue this  
discussion tomorrow. Good evening  
Mr. Stirk.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, THE LIBRARY OF AMADEUS - MEANWHILE

The library is unlike any of the rest of the New Arkham's interior. It is a remnant of the Asylum's previous form; it is oak-paneled, warm and autumnal, simultaneously regal and cozy. The walls are bookshelves, filled to the last with sturdy, serious-looking books. The dull, chaotic light of a roaring fireplace flickers across the room.

Jeremiah stands in the center of the room, hands in pockets. He does seemingly nothing, staring ahead and slightly upward, ostensibly at the wall of books before him.

A KNOCK percusses from the door. Taking a beat, Jeremiah moves neither his body nor his gaze.

JEREMIAH

Come in, Doctor.

Doctor Crane opens the door and enters, carefully closing the out-of-place modern security door behind himself as he speaks.

CRANE

You recognize my knock?

Jeremiah does not answer. The two men stand in silence, Crane facing his superior's back. Finally, Jeremiah speaks.

JEREMIAH

Did you know my father, John?

Crane looks to his side, above the fireplace, at the portrait painting of Amadeus and Elizabeth Arkham. Jeremiah keeps his gaze on the bookshelf.

(CONTINUED)

CRANE

I- not well. I only met him... maybe two times before.... Well he was already... a bit reclusive by the time I was hired.

JEREMIAH

You're choosing your words very carefully there. Are you worried about offending me?

CRANE

Family is a complicated issue. I wouldn't want to overstep my bounds and-

JEREMIAH

(interrupting)

My father was a madman. Ending his life was the sanest thing he ever did. If you had any idea-

Jeremiah whips around to face Crane. He is worked up, but not crazed.

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

-of the things he's done, the horrors that he-

Jeremiah catches himself. His face momentarily betrays shame before being replaced by a measured hardness.

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

What is it you came for?

CRANE

I... wanted to ask for the Stirk case. With Nigma released, I have a hole in my schedule, so-

JEREMIAH

(interrupting)

You'll have to talk to Strange. Whatever you two work out is fine. Is that all?

CRANE

Yes, doctor.

Crane closes the distance between himself and the door, but stops as he reaches out for the handle.

(CONTINUED)

CRANE (CONT'D)

Was there something you wanted to ask me?

JEREMIAH

About what?

CRANE

About... your father.

Jeremiah crosses his hands behind his back. He hangs his head.

JEREMIAH

John, am I... am I too cautious?

CRANE

I don't-

JEREMIAH

(interrupting)

Am I too afraid of making a mistake? Too unwilling to take chances?

Crane thinks about how to word his response. Jeremiah turns back to the books.

CRANE

You are responsible for hundreds of the most criminally insane people in the most densely populated, statistically dangerous city in the western world. Thoroughness and caution are not out of place for someone in your position.

They stand there a while in silence.

CRANE (CONT'D)

I'll talk to Hugo about taking over the Stirk case.

Crane reaches for the door.

JEREMIAH

Very good.

Crane exits quietly. The door shuts conclusively, a secure tone beeps as a green light turns red.

Jeremiah stands alone.

He walks, slowly, to the bookshelf ahead of him.

(CONTINUED)

He retrieves a large, hardbound book devoid of markings, with a slip of fabric acting as a book-mark between its pages. He can barely bring himself to look at it. He holds it shut like it might open of its own free will and flood its contents upon the world.

Jeremiah walks slowly, but deliberately, toward the fireplace.

Once there, he reaches the book out toward its flames. He cannot look, either at the book, or the fire, or both, but he clearly intends to throw the book in.

He hesitates.

He cannot do it.

Ashamed, he trods back to the bookshelf.

Lifting the book up to its place, he actually looks at for the first time since retrieving it. He tenses, squeezing the book as though he would like to strangle it, but after a moment his grip loosens.

He returns it to its place.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING, THERAPY CELL - MEANWHILE

Harleen sits perpendicular across her chair, her back resting on one arm, her legs draped over the other. Her hair is now in two pigtails high on either side of her head. Her labcoat is slung across the back of her chair; her dress-shirt is untucked, its sleeves rolled up, its top few buttons unclasped. The zipper that ran the bottom half of her pencil skirt is unzipped. Her glasses slid to the end of her nose, she reads a glossy celebrity magazine, the cover of which has a red-carpet photograph of Basil Karlo and the headline "WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MAN OF A MILLION FACES?"

Joker leans over a yellow legal-pad, scribbling with an over-sized pencil.

HARLEEN  
Watcha workin' on?

JOKER  
A new gag.

HARLEEN  
Need any help?

(CONTINUED)

JOKER

As a matter of fact I do! There's some business with a prop I don't have access to-

HARLEEN

(judgingly)

Prop comedy...

JOKER

Oh, that's right. The humourist is above such simple pleasures as "prop comedy." Nevermind.

Joker goes back to his pad.

Harleen's face falls, she might even be about to cry. In an instant she is all smiles again.

HARLEEN

Aw, come on Mister Jay, you know I was only joshin' ya. I can get you anything you need.

JOKER

I don't know, toots...

HARLEEN

No, really! You need whoopie cushions? I know a guy.  
(SILENCE) Rubber chickens? The DA's cracked down but I can probably get you some rubber duckies.

Joker almost chuckles at the duckies line.

HARLEEN (CONT'D)

I can get it. What do you need?

JOKER

A gun.

FADE TO BLACK:

**ACT THREE:**

FADE FROM BLACK:

EXT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, NIGHT

Establishing shot of the asylum in snow.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, A-WING, MINIMUM SECURITY LIBRARY

The library is small, stark, empty. The majority of the minuscule room is filled with tables and benches while paltry, half-filled bookshelves line the walls. A guard sits in the corner, leaning back in his chair, reading an automotive periodical.

Stirk sits at a table in the center of the room, reading a single issue of the "Gothic Romance" comic book.

We focus on him, engrossed in the comic-book. He is startled by a voice emanating from immediately beside him.

DUKE WILSON (O.S.)

Hey Bozo. Where's your mouthpiece?

Stirk starts to shake in abject terror. He seems meek, harmless, completely vulnerable. He takes his eyes from his comic and looks to his side.

His regular tormentor, DUKE WILSON, stands there. Arms crossed, flanked by two slightly smaller, but nonetheless intimidating lackeys. Stirk's response is measured, deliberate, but the desperation under the surface is all too apparent.

STIRK

Excuse me, sir, but I am reading right now, and do not wish to be disturbed.

The guard looks up from his magazine and sees the commotion. He places the magazine on his chest, commits fully to his backward lean, and pulls his cap over his face as if he is going to sleep.

DUKE WILSON

I don't give two runny shits about what you wish ya jackolantern-lookin' piece'a crap, I asked you a fuckin' question.

The goons on either side of Duke practically lick their lips at the thought of imminent violence. One of them slowly converts his expression of ravenous savagery to one of childlike confusion.

(CONTINUED)

GOON OF DUKE  
Which question is that?

DUKE WILSON  
(to his goon)  
Nigma, dumbass! (to Stirk) That  
green piss-stain ain't around to  
protect you no more, is he?

Stirk takes a stuttering, shallow breath.

STIRK  
Sir, I would rather-

CRANE (O.S.)  
(interrupting)  
Mr. Wilson!

Everyone's attention snaps toward Crane, entering from the hallway.

CRANE  
What are you doing in the Library?

DUKE WILSON  
What's up doc? My privileges been  
revoked without me knowing?

CRANE  
Oh nothing like that. It's just  
since you're illiterate I can't  
understand why you'd come  
here. (to Duke's goons) Why don't  
you two gentlemen direct your  
friend to an area more in line with  
his abilities. Perhaps the  
Gymnasium.

DUKE WILSON  
(to his goons)  
Come on boys. I just remembered I  
hate the scenery in here. (to  
Stirk) See you later Cornelius.

Duke and goons exeunt.

STIRK  
Doctor Crane-

CRANE  
(interrupting, to Stirk)  
I'd wait here a bit before  
returning to your cell. (pointedly,  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CRANE (cont'd)  
to the guard) And perhaps you'd  
consider doing your job before you  
lose it. (to Stirk) I'm sorry, Mr.  
Stirk. I would stay but I have  
Asylum business to conduct.

STIRK  
I understand, sir.

Crane heads for the door.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, STRANGE'S OFFICE - LATER

Strange sits in his desk-chair studying his computer screen,  
on which is displayed brain-scans, EKG readings, MRIs, and  
other medical charts.

There is a KNOCK on the door.

Strange reaches out and turns off his monitor.

STRANGE  
Come in, Dr. Crane.

The door opens, Crane enters.

STRANGE (CONT'D)  
Have a seat, of course.

CRANE  
How did you...?

STRANGE  
To what do I owe the pleasure?

CRANE  
Well, as you know, Edward Nigma's  
release has cleared some room on my  
docket, and I was hoping I could  
resume working with Cornelius  
Stirk. He and I had a rapport-

STRANGE  
(interrupting)  
Quite impossible, I'm afraid.

CRANE  
But surely you have administrative  
duties that could use the extra  
time-

(CONTINUED)



STRANGE

Those duties have become so numerous that to cope I reduced my therapy schedule to a single patient.

CRANE

Stirk.

STRANGE

Indeed. I have worked with him the longest, since Blackgate.

CRANE

That's true. Then why hand me the case over the summer?

STRANGE

I was... busy negotiating the phobium contract, with Queen Industries.

CRANE

The contract you didn't tell me about until my signature was needed.

STRANGE

Surely you understand how these things are done, Doctor... the large corporations with their non-disclosure clauses and various privacies.

Crane stares at Strange for a moment, almost as if he can't be sure whether he sees something or not. His face breaks its concentration, returning to normal.

CRANE

Of course. Of course, I, uh... is Malitt available? Quinzel's been spending most of her time in M-Wing, I could take him off her hands.

Strange rotates the computer monitor even more toward himself before turning it on.

STRANGE

Let me check...

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, A-WING, HALLWAY - MEANWHILE

Stirk, arms wrapped around himself, head dipped timidly, scurries down empty halls.

He turns a corner and nearly jumps out of his slippers in surprise. Duke is there, flanked by his goons, seemingly awaiting Stirk's arrival.

DUKE WILSON

What's up, Raggedy Andy? You goin' somewhere?

STIRK

I- I-

DUKE WILSON

(mocking)

"I- I- I- I-"

Duke slowly steps closer to Stirk, utilizing the simmering-calm style of intimidation.

DUKE WILSON (CONT'D)

You're a creep. You're a freak. And you can do the little scared rodent thing all you want; you're still a serial killer. Outside, I got a crew. I got friends. I got *family*. But nobody's gonna miss you when you're gone.

The fluorescent lights go off, replaced by spinning and flashing red lights. A SIREN blares. Duke's two goons react with fear and confusion, but Duke doesn't even seem to notice.

DUKE WILSON (CONT'D)

So I figure, why wait?

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, STRANGE'S OFFICE - MEANWHILE

Strange and Crane sit as before.

The alarm begins to sound, the lights flash red. They look up.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, M-WING, HALLWAY - MEANWHILE

Joker and Harleen run through the red-flashing halls. Joker carries a gun in one hand, and drags Harleen along with the other.

HARLEEN

Oh my god, are we really escaping?

JOKER

*I'm escaping, you're my-*

HARLEEN

(interrupting)

Partner?

JOKER

I was going to say "hostage," but I suppose it's a matter of perspective.

Joker stops and leans down at a wall, tapping on it. He puts his ear to it as he taps.

HARLEEN

What are you doing?

Close-up of the Joker's smile widening.

He stands up and shoots the wall.

A section of brick wall, behind the modern white wall we see, starts to rotate mechanically, violently tearing the new wall from itself in a small avalanche of building materials.

Joker leaps through the new opening, Harleen SQUEALS as she is yanked through as well.

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, OLD ARKHAM, HIDDEN PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

They make their way through dark stone passageways.

HARLEEN

What the hell was that?

JOKER

I've been here before, honey! A new coat of paint doesn't change Arkham. Not deep down.

Harleen sighs.

(CONTINUED)

HARLEEN  
Isn't he dreamy?

INT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, A-WING, HALLWAY - MEANWHILE

Duke intimidates Stirk.

DUKE WILSON  
So me and my boys here, we're gonna  
beat you. To death. With our bare  
fists. It shouldn't be too hard,  
what with you bein' all brittle and  
weak-

Duke's goons approach Stirk from around Duke's sides,  
closing in on him.

DUKE WILSON (CONT'D)  
and then, maybe... I'll eat your  
heart.

STIRK  
(screaming)  
NO!

As Stirk screams, the three bullies' heads jerk in a strange  
way, their eyes roll back, and they start trickling blood  
from their nostrils and mouths, crumpling to the ground  
almost immediately.

Stirk staggers, but catches himself. He brings his hand to  
his head as if feeling for a wound.

Strange and Crane run around the corner but stop dead in  
their tracks at the scene. They see the bodies, they see  
Stirk.

Crane is shocked, confused.

Strange smiles.

EXT. ARKHAM ASYLUM, BACK LAWN - CONTINUOUS

Joker crawls out into the snow, from a small opening at the  
base of a large wall, gun in hand. Harleen is behind him,  
yammering.

HARLEEN  
And I could have an outfit, like a  
sexy female clown!

(CONTINUED)

JOKER  
(disinterested)  
Uh-huh.

Joker, no longer caring to keep track of Harleen, books it for the fence. Harleen runs after.

HARLEEN  
I'll need a name. Jokestress?

JOKER  
I don't think so, honey.

HARLEEN  
We can work it out later, I don't care! I love you and that's all that matters!

They reach the wall, which is twice the height of a man.

JOKER  
Yeah, will you give a boost here, doll?

HARLEEN  
Of course, Mister Jay!

Harleen gets down one knee and laces her fingers. Joker steps into them.

HARLEEN  
Alley-oop!

In one fluid motion she lifts him up so he can grab the lip of the wall. He pulls himself up onto the top of the wall.

BARKING dogs can be heard approaching.

HARLEEN (CONT'D)  
Help me up!

Joker hesitates, straddling the wall; one foot toward freedom, the other toward the asylum.

HARLEEN (CONT'D)  
Come on, Mister Jay!

Several guard dogs round the corner. Voices can now be heard further back.

Joker sighs and reaches out his hand, Harleen grasps it.

(CONTINUED)

HARLEEN (CONT'D)

Oh thank you, puddin', thank you!

As he starts to pull her up, the fastest dog has already arrived, and latches his jaw onto her ankle. She SCREAMS.

There is a brief tug of war between Joker and the dogs, with Harleen playing the role of the rope.

Joker sees flashlight beams begin to round the side of the asylum, the voices now clear and close.

JOKER

(practically shrugging)

Sorry, doll.

Joker puts the gun right between Harleen's eyes, which widen in shock.

He pulls the trigger. Her face is decimated, her corpse crumples, falling back into the dogs.

As the guards round the corner, Joker slips off the wall to freedom.

He prances like a madman into the surrounding snowy woods, laughing maniacally.

FADE TO BLACK: