

SUDDENLY,
FROM THE SHADOWS,
A WEIRD, EBON-CLOAKED
AVENGER OF VIL STRIKES--!

*Batman was
a hero. For
children.*

YAAA-AA!

I DON'T
THINK SO,
BOYS!

*A little morbid,
perhaps. Bruce
Wayne, orphaned
as a child in a
tragic robbery,
but that wasn't
the point.*

BULLETS
DON'T STOP
HIM!

*The point was that
he devoted his life
to training himself
to physical and
mental perfection,
so he could fight
crime.*

*A harmless
fantasy.*

*Or at least, that's
what I'd have told
you back then.*



My name is Alton Frederick Tjerson. But this story concerns my niece's child.



**BRUCE?
C'MON, KIDDO.
FINISH UP,
HUH?**



UH-HUH...

Bruce Wainwright.

The name was probably why he'd fastened onto Batman so thoroughly.

WE'VE GOT TO GO SOON IF YOU WANT TO HIT THE ZOO WHILE I DROP YOUR DAD AT THE AIRPORT.

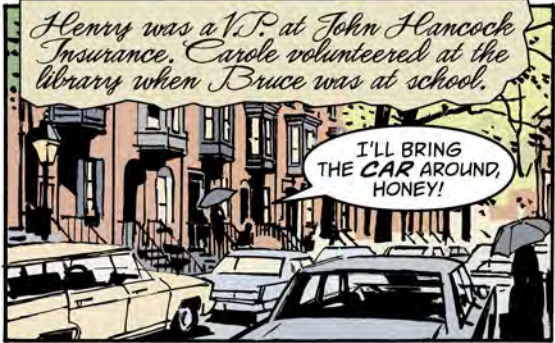
YEAH, OKAY!



Though Carole and Henry were hardly high-society millionaires.



**DONE!
I'M GETTING MY
COAT!**



Henry was a V.P. at John Hancock Insurance. Carole volunteered at the library when Bruce was at school.

I'LL BRING THE CAR AROUND, HONEY!

But I suppose they'd do just fine, if you wanted to imagine them the Waynes of the comic books.

**UNCLE ALFRED!
HEY, UNCLE ALFRED!**



Plus, Bruce had an Alfred.



*GODNESS!
YOU'RE IMMENSE, YOUNG
WAINWRIGHT--HAVE YOU BEEN
GROWING BEHIND MY
BACK?*

*YOUR
ANCIENT UNCLE
CAN'T LIFT THIS
MUCH ANY
MORE!*

*Alton Frederick.
Al... Fred. It
made sense to
an eight-year-
old, at least.*

*I was his great-
uncle. The only
living relative on
either side. I
doted on him,
enjoyed his
energy.*

*Playing Batman games
passed the time, and gave
him a focus for his
boundless imagination.*

*And I swear, he read at
years above his age level,
thanks to all those
comic books.*



*ABOUT
AN HOUR,
ALTON.*

*TAKE
YOUR TIME,
DEAR. WE'LL
MEET YOU AT
THE CAFÉ.*



*C'MON, LET'S
GO SEE THE
BATS!*

*AN' CALL
ME "MASTER
BRUCE"!*

*He enjoyed being
an almost-Batman.
He'd pause when
saying his name, to
separate the "Wain"
and the "wright."*



*He even dreamed about
being Batman at times,
he told me.*

*Harmless, I thought.
What child wouldn't
want to be Batman,
after all?*

It was Halloween Night, 1968, that it happened. Or started. I'm not sure which is more accurate.



NA NA
NA NA
NA NA
NA NA
NA NA
NA NA!



He liked living in Boston, he'd told me.

Properly, Batman should live in New York, because "Gotham" is a nickname for New York, from some old stories by Washington Irving.

(And think of that, an eight-year-old knowing Washington Irving!)



WHAT DO YOU SAY, BRUCE?

THANK YOU! HAPPY HALLOWEEN!

But New York was Metropolis, too, and that was Superman's home. Boston felt more like Gotham City, he said.



*The old buildings,
the crooked alleyways,
the shadows at night.
It felt like mysteries.
Mysteries...*



...and danger.

WANNA
STAY OUT
LONGER...

YOU'RE
HALFWAY TO
DREAMLAND
ALREADY, KID.
TIME FOR
HOME.



IT'S
COOL AT
NIGHT.

ALL DARK
AN' SPOOKY, LIKE
THE PENGUIN MIGHT
COME JUMPIN' OUTTA
THE DARK.

OR THE
JOKER...

NOT ON
HALLOWEEN, KID.
YOU KNOW WHAT
CRIMINALS ARE
LIKE.



SUPERSTITIOUS
AN' COWARDLY...

RIGHT. THEY STAY IN
ON HALLOWEEN. WOULDN'T
WANT THE GOBLINS
GETTIN' 'EM!

ESPECIALLY
ON BEACON HILL.
THEY WOULDN'T DARE--

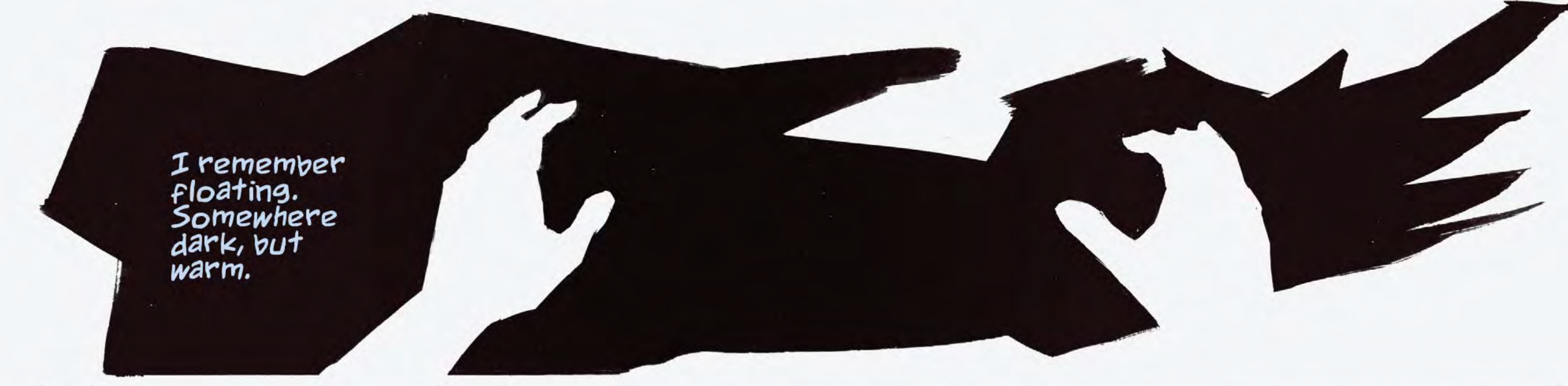
HENRY?
THE DOOR--




I
DIDN'T LEAVE
IT OPEN. WHAT'S
GOING--



I DON'T
BELIEVE IT!
WE'VE BEEN--




I remember floating. Somewhere dark, but warm.



And I wasn't alone. There was someone. Someone else.

And whoever it was came real close...




...and I could hear him without hearing anything.

SAFE.

YOU SAFE.



HE'S BACK!
WE HAVE A PULSE!



HE WAS-- HE WAS GONE, FOR ABOUT FORTY SECONDS! HE DIDN'T RESPOND TO--

HE'S BACK, NURSE. LET'S SUTURE HIM UP--

--HE'S GOING TO BE FINE.

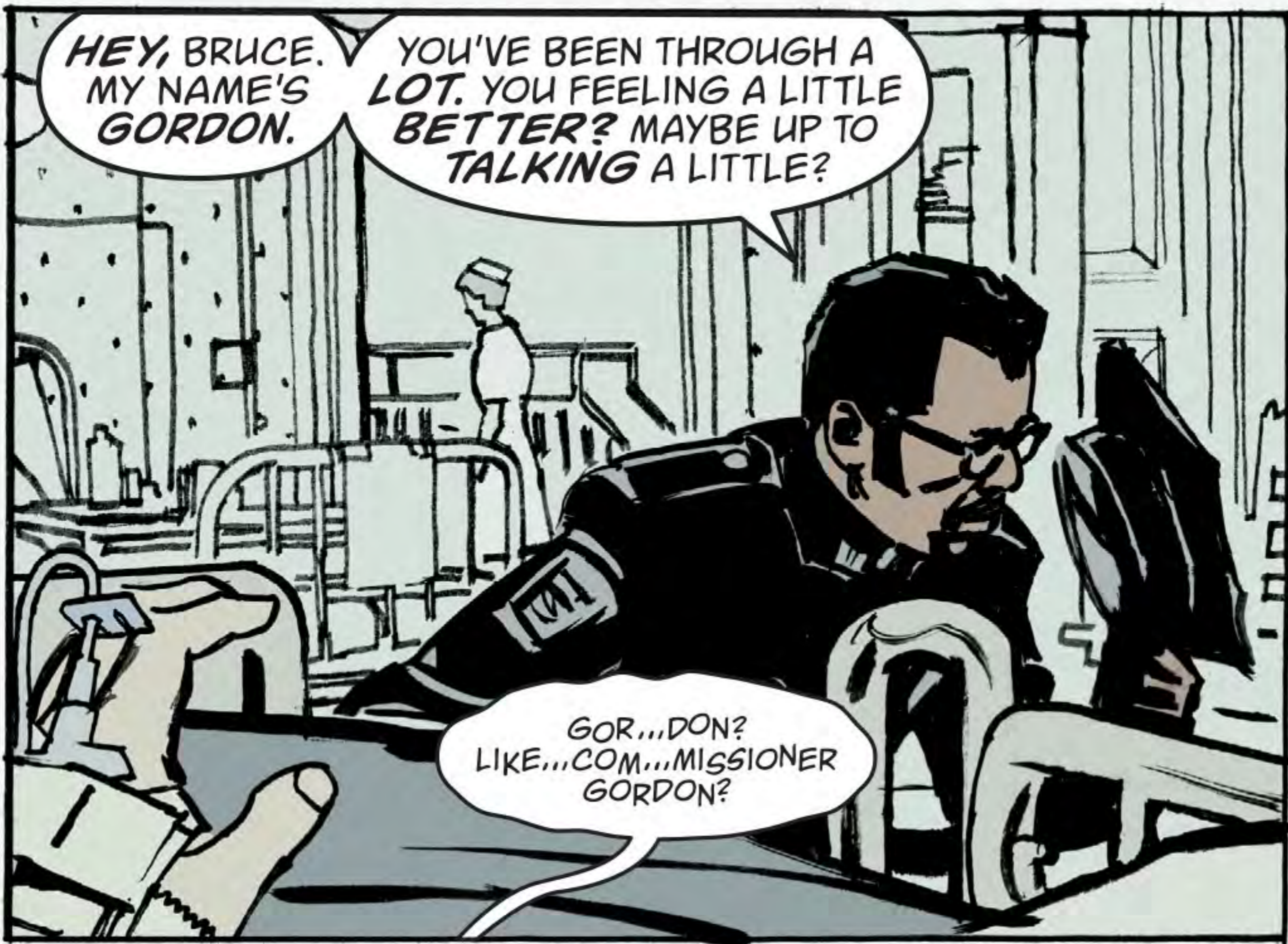
SAFE.



I met Officer Gordon when I woke up.

KID? KID, YOU AWAKE?

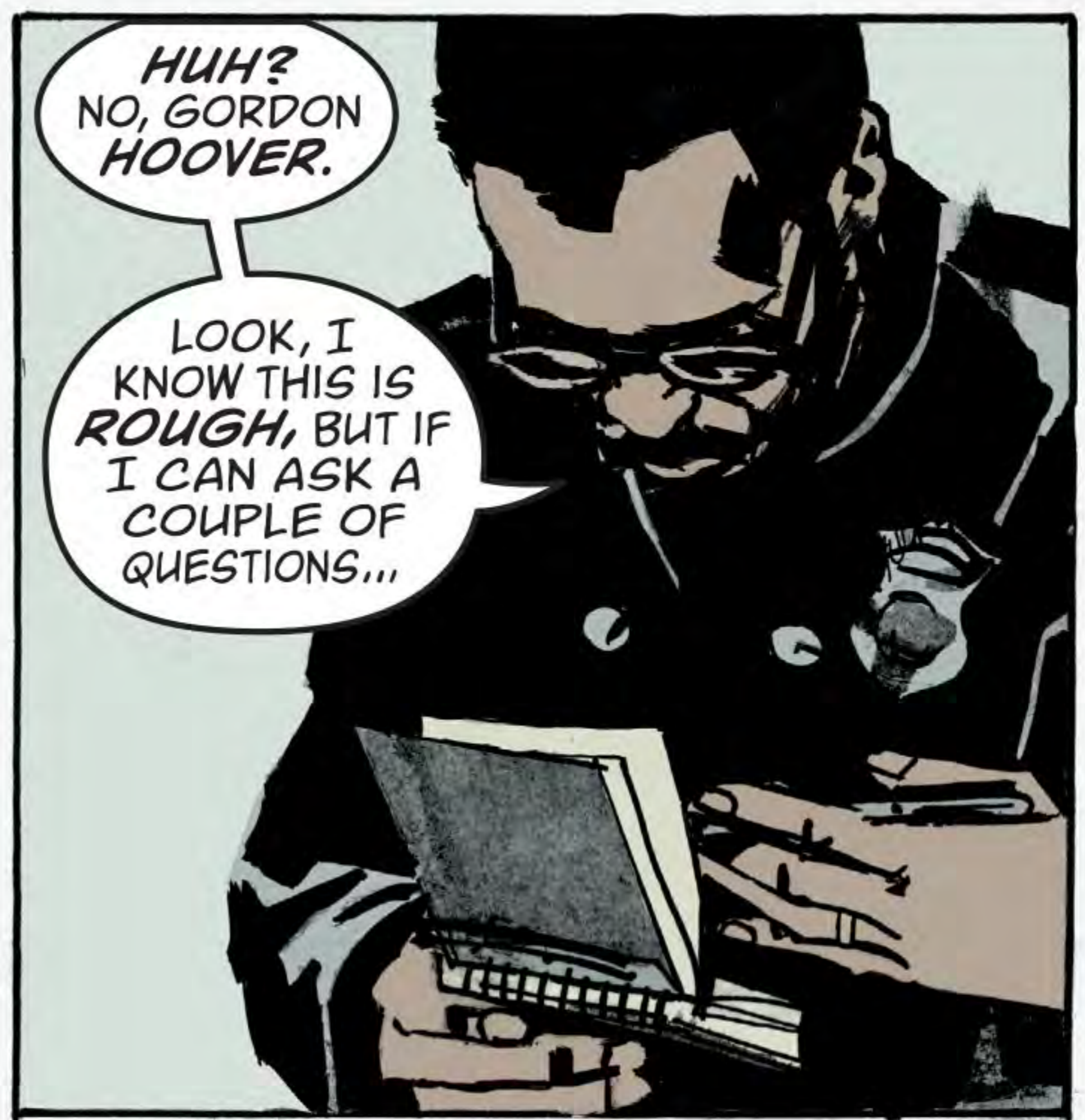
HNH...



HEY, BRUCE. MY NAME'S GORDON.

YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT. YOU FEELING A LITTLE BETTER? MAYBE UP TO TALKING A LITTLE?

GOR...DON? LIKE...COM...MISSIONER GORDON?



HUH? NO, GORDON HOOVER.

LOOK, I KNOW THIS IS ROUGH, BUT IF I CAN ASK A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS...



Hoover tried to get descriptions from Bruce.

All he could say, though, was that it was dark. They were big. One of them had longish hair.



OFF...OFFICER GORDON?

COULD YOU...ASK...ARE THERE ANY...COMIC BOOKS?

YEAH, SURE, I'LL ASK ONE OF THE NURSES. YOU LIKE BATMAN, AM I RIGHT?

AND...MY...MOM AND DAD...



...WHERE ARE...MY...MOM AND DAD...?

He wouldn't believe it until he saw the graves. And even then, I don't think he fully accepted it, not at first.

It might have been different if he'd been able to attend the funeral. Had the comfort of ritual, such as it was. But he'd been in a coma almost two months, and no one knew if he'd come out of it.

We hadn't been able to wait. So Carole and Henry...they were just names on granite by then.

He must have felt so terribly lost.



He was moved to a private-care facility for the next six weeks.

And he spent a lot of time writing in his journal.

It had started as a school assignment, but he'd kept going, off and on. Later, Dr. Lester told him it would help organize his thoughts.

Before, his mother would tease him about it sometimes, call it a diary.

He'd howl and complain, saying diaries were girl stuff. It was a journal. A journal!

Afterward...

I GUESS... SHE CAN CALL IT WHATEVER SHE WANTS...

Today, that bone doctor brought me more Batman comics. From when he was a kid, ones I've never seen.

They're pretty good.

But I can't help thinking—

If Batman was real, if Batman had been there—

He could have— he would have—

10
Dais
SHOOT
AN

If I'd been able to take him, if he'd felt like he had family, things might have been different.

Still, the Cornerstone Academy was an excellent school. I'd gone there myself.

It would provide a first-rate education. Give young Bruce the knowledge, connections and standing to do well in life.

Particularly for a boy of his means. His parents had amassed a respectable portfolio, and their insurance made it all the larger.

Still, if I'd been able to take him...

I DON'T WANT TO LIVE HERE!

I WANNA LIVE WITH YOU, UNCLE ALFRED! I WANNA LIVE WITH YOU!

DEAR BOY--

ALFREDDD!

Uncle Alfred's the executor of Mom and Dad's estate. That means he takes care of their money until I grow up.

But he won't take care of me. He doesn't want me.





And then there was me.



I saw him every week. Usually at the zoo.

Never at my home in Bay Village. That just wouldn't do.

BRUCE--
DEAR
CHILD--

--YOU KNOW I'D LOVE NOTHING MORE THAN TO HAVE YOU COME LIVE WITH ME-- YOU'RE CAROLE'S CHILD, MY ONLY BLOOD KIN--



--BUT--I LIVE ALONE--AND MY... LIFESTYLE--

--THE CHILD WELFARE AUTHORITIES JUST THINK YOU'D BE--BETTER OFF AT--



NO! YOU'RE LYING!

YOU DON'T WANT ME! YOU JUST WANT MOM AND DAD'S MONEY, THAT'S ALL!

I HATE YOU!



I HATE YOU!

BRUCE--