

I Nychterída

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11293482) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/11293482>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	DCU (Comics) , Batman (Comics) , Batman - All Media Types
Relationship:	Dick Grayson/Bruce Wayne
Characters:	Dick Grayson , Bruce Wayne
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Fantasy , Alternate Universe - Xena: Warrior Princess
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-06-24 Words: 4,656 Chapters: 1/1

I Nychterída

by [BitterlyBisexualBard](#)

Summary

Bruce knows what he is.

He is the son of a mighty, fallen King, a Warlord in his own rights, a powerful man. A killer.

His name is known throughout Greece and beyond, his reputation stretches almost as far as that of the mighty daughter of Hippolyta, Diana, though his is far less heroic. Far more bloody. If he was to turn to the west he would find allies enough to retake his army with ease.

He keeps true north.

Notes

Happy Belated Birthday to my bestie! I'm sorry this took me so long, I hope it's worth it.

Please forgive any OOC behaviour, some of it is bleed off from Xena and Gabrielle. The rest I have no excuse for.

Some knowledge of the Xena universe is recommended but this should read okay without it. Xena is always recommended though, that show was awesome.

Bruce knows what he is.

He is the son of a mighty, fallen King, a Warlord in his own rights, a powerful man. A killer.

His name is known throughout Greece and beyond, his reputation stretches almost as far as that of the mighty daughter of Hippolyta, Diana, though his is far less heroic. Far more bloody. If he was to turn to the west he would find allies enough to retake his army with ease.

He keeps true north.

"Hey! Get off me!"

Bruce turns at the terrified voice. Young, male, strong voice. Likely target for slave traders in this area.

Scanning the sparse trees he sees light glint off metal and urges his horse, Alfred towards it.

Five armed men. He's had easier fights, but he's also had much harder. Bruce doesn't hesitate in his attack, taking down the first two so quickly the other three barely have chance to notice. The boy, maybe eighteen years old, is struggling forcefully enough that two of his attackers are occupied in the attempt at subduing him. The one remaining barely clashes swords with Bruce before falling to the ground in a growing circle of red.

The boy wisely backs away as his attackers release him to turn on Bruce.

Bruce raises an eyebrow at their swords, shaking in their hands, and they turn and run.

Situation at hand dealt with, he turns to the boy. "Are you alright?"

The boy nods.

Bruce scans him briefly for injury and turns to the slave traders lying dead or dying on the ground. The one nearest him is groaning weakly with pain. Bruce raises his hand to brush back his hair, longer now than he usually keeps it and getting in his eyes, and catches sight of the red. He freezes. The urge to vomit is sudden and strong, though he swallows it back.

The man on the ground moans again and Bruce kneels, turning him onto his back and examining the wound. It's treatable. If Bruce acts quickly he can undo some of the damage he's caused; prevent yet another life from staining his sword hand.

It's always been a policy of his not to kill. As if the starvation and pain he inflicted was somehow mitigated by the fact he rarely ended their lives by his own hand. As if death would not follow his actions as surely as day follows night. As if it made him better than he was.

He presses a hand over the man's wound searching for any available cloth he can plug it with to stem the bleeding.

The boy's hand appears in front of his face, thin, slightly tanned and shaking but resolutely holding out his scarf. "Use this."

Bruce does. "Hold it there, press it firmly," He orders the boy.

As soon as the task is transferred, he heads back to Alfred to search his saddle bags for medical supplies. He finds a little leftover salve, not really suitable for such a deep wound, but the best he currently has, and some powder that when mixed with water and swallowed should help with the bloodloss. He has nothing for the pain. He used it all on himself already.

No one speaks as Bruce tends the wounds and administers the powder, all focus on conserving a life, but as soon as the task is done, the slave trader mounted and secured on Alfred's back, the boy speaks.

His name is Dick, or Richard, he's from a village only a short distance away, he's an orphan seeking his fortune as a performer. And he's extremely talkative. All this Bruce learns before they're halfway to Dick's village.

"...So I thought, 'Dick, the time has come. You're a man now. Life isn't just going to come knocking at the door, you've got to go out and find it'. My parents were performers, I think I already told you that, so it seemed, I don't know, fitting to follow in their footsteps. You probably heard of them. The Graysons? They performed in every royal court between here and Athens..."

And so it went on.

"Not that I'm against the decision or anything, even scumbags deserve a chance at redeeming themselves, but why'd you save him?" Dick asks.

Bruce stares resolutely at the fast approaching village and tries not latch on to earnest and easy forgiveness the boy can give even his attacker.

"Strong but silent type, huh?" Dick says when no answer is forthcoming, completely unoffended. "That's okay. Suits you I guess. I'll just work it out myself, I like a good mystery. Let me guess, you're some kind of mysterious defender of the people, sworn to protect every life you can. You seek out danger and malice and thwart Hades at every turn. You-"

"Enough," Bruce interrupts. "I'm just..." He flounders. How to describe what he is and has been? A murderer? A tyrant? A repentant?

"A Hero?" Dick suggests.

"No."

They've reached the first line of houses, if they could be called houses. Closer to huts, windowless and daubed with straw. Bruce knows from experience they burn easily and but are easier to replace than more sturdy dwellings.

Dick turns to the left and Bruce thinks at first that he's leaving, but he pauses and waves Bruce to follow. "Healer's this way."

He leaves his charge with an elderly woman with a distinct lack of teeth and overabundance of hair, but a seemingly thorough knowledge of healing, if a rather theatrical approach. Dick follows him out.

"Did I thank you? For saving me I mean," Dick asks.

"Yes. Several times," Bruce replies, amused despite himself. "It's fine. It wasn't a problem."

Dick laughs. "I'll say. You took those men out like some kind of Titan. You aren't, are you?"

"Am I really that tall?" Bruce asks drily.

Another laugh. "Close. But seriously. You're not a demi-god or something? Because what you did back there..."

"Came from years of practice against much better fighters," Bruce says. "Aren't you going to go let your family know you're okay?"

Dick pulls a face. "I already told you, I don't have a family. I've been living with friends of my parents since my family was killed. They won't miss me."

"Don't you want to go get a warm meal, tell your story to an audience that didn't experience it first hand?" Bruce tries.

"Nope. Well, the food part sounds good. But I'm supposed to be halfway to Anchialos by now, so it's probably best I get back on the road," Dick replies. He doesn't seem to be joking for once.

"What happened didn't tell you something?" Bruce asks.

Dick blinks. "Like what?"

"That travelling so far on your own is dangerous? That maybe it isn't for you? That maybe the best thing you can do is stay home and pray to the Gods that you stay out of harm?" Bruce rants. He knows even as he speaks that staying home is no guarantee of safety.

As if echoing his thoughts, Dick scoffs. "You think travelling is any more dangerous than staying here? As proven very recently, there are slave traders practically at our door. Warlords to either side of us. My family didn't die on the road, they were killed where they should have been safe." He pauses and seems to calm himself from the mild frenzy he was building to.

"Besides. I'm not alone. I have a big strong warrior to protect me."

"No."

"Why not? We could keep each other company. I can tell a pretty good story, you know. You'd be surprised at how fast a story can make a journey pass. And you can keep your mind at ease over my safety. What's not to like?" Dick asks.

"I'm not going to Anchialos," Bruce says.

Dick shrugs. "That's fine. I'm not really going anywhere in particular, I'm just... Going."

"I travel alone," Bruce argues.

"Why? Sounds pretty boring to me. No one to talk to but yourself, no companionship. Sounds like you should try travelling with a friend," Dick argues right back.

Too exasperated to press the issue for now, and with no idea how to tell the boy what he's trying to sign up for, Bruce says nothing. "We stay here tonight. I could use a hot meal and a softer place to sleep than the ground."

η νυχτερίδα

Dick sleeps easily. Bruce can hear his quiet breathing across the hut, along with that of his honorary aunt and cousin, as he pulls his boots on and leaves.

Any guilt he feels at the deception is overridden with his strong desire to keep Dick away from the life he leads. And to keep him away from knowing what Bruce really is. The thought of Dick's eyes, fearless and friendly, filling with that knowledge, filling with fear... He knows he deserves that. He should be feared. He used to relish in it. But that small taste of being Dick's saviour has him desperate to preserve it, if only in memory.

So he leaves, fixing firmly the memory of Dick's voice as he called him a hero.

Dick opens his eyes as the door closes and sighs quietly. He'd hoped Bruce, whose name he'd finally extracted over dinner, would keep to his word, but he'd seen it in the man's eyes that he wasn't one to change his mind so easily. Luckily for them both Dick could be very persuasive, as Bruce would soon find out.

His bag's still packed by the foot of his bed and he shoulders it as he shoves his feet into his boots, not caring much for stealth. Martha and Conner would sleep through a visit from Zeus himself, thunderbolts and all.

Dick was never much of a tracker, but growing up on the road with his family had necessitated a basic level of survival skills, and Bruce had made no effort to disguise himself, so Dick follows behind him confidently out of the village and beyond.

The plan, when Dick had finally stopped to think of one, had been to reverse Bruce's vanishing act and set up camp nearby as Bruce was sleeping. When Bruce woke up to find him there, Dick would joke about it and endear himself as quickly as he could. The rest was up to the Gods and his own natural charisma.

He didn't count on Bruce being near nocturnal.

Once Bruce finally did appear to sleep, Dick had snuck in with more care than would have been necessary had Bruce been any normal man, but here he found himself with a thick arm around his neck and Bruce's barely disturbed breath in his ear.

"If I hadn't known you were following me, you'd be dead by now."

Dick laughs. He can't help it. He saw the look on Bruce's face as he fought the slave traders, the determined way in which he saved the one he could.

Bruce lets him go. "You shouldn't have followed me."

"You shouldn't have snuck off in the middle of the night," Dick counters. "Then I wouldn't have had to follow you."

Bruce gives him an impressive glare.

"Wow. Next time we get into trouble you should just give the enemy that exact look. We won't even need to fight," Dick says.

"You're not fighting anyone," Bruce says.

Dick nods. "I won't have to. You're scary enough to ward off Ares himself."

Bruce's mouth twitches. Just a little. Dick's sure of it.

"So, where are we headed?" Dick hazards.

"*We* aren't headed anywhere. *You* are headed back home," Bruce answers firmly.

Dick smiles. The smile that always gets him seconds at dinner. The smile that his mother said was a gift from Peitho herself.

Bruce looks unimpressed, but Dick can tell he's wearing him down.

"You know, I'm going to be travelling anyway. You can't *make* me go home, or stay there. Best you can hope for is to keep an eye on me, keep me out of trouble," Dick says.

Bruce frowns.

Dick smiles even wider. A dimple appears in his cheek.

"I don't think all of Olympus could keep you out of trouble," Bruce grumbles. "We travel together as far as Dimini. That's it. You're on your own from there."

η νυχτερίδα

"I swear it wasn't my fault this time," Dick says as Bruce unties the vines wrapped around his limbs, getting covered in sticky grape juice in the process.

He already knows this, but Bruce opts to let Dick try to explain himself.

"I thought it was just wine, and she seemed normal!" Dick babbles drunkenly. He waves a hand vaguely. "Then there was the sacrificing. Well, no, then there was the fun. With three of them and a looooooot more wine. But then there was the sacrificing. And it wasn't my fault!"

Bruce is impressed at his coherence. Offerings to Dionysus are usually practically catatonic.

Dionysus isn't as impressed. "Hey! You're killing the party here," He says. His worshippers are a little occupied and naked to do his dirtywork for him and he sighs. "Brucey, come on. We used to be friends! Women, wine and song used to be your speciality. Less the song than the other two, but you were entertaining. Now you're... Brooding. It doesn't suit you."

"I'm not so sure the people providing the women and song would agree," Bruce answers.

Dick looks horrified for the first time since Bruce met him. "The women, you didn't..."

Bruce tries and fails to smile reassuringly. "No. I didn't. But my 'fun' always came at someone else's expense."

It always surprises Bruce how easily Dick trusts him, as now. Dick grins. "These days it's usually at my expense."

Dionysus pouts. "This is boring!"

"We'd be happy to leave," Bruce says;

"No!" Dionysus looks murderous for a split second before reverting back to playful. "You're trying to steal my toy. I don't like that." He waves a hand and Dick's face glazes over as he sways towards Dionysus.

Bruce reaches out to catch him.

"Why don't we share?" Dionysus grins.

Dick curls back into the sturdy arm Bruce had put around him. He makes a pleased noise and rubs his nose along Bruce's throat.

Bruce starts to flinch back, but Dick stumbles and Bruce's arm automatically tightens.

"See now? This is much better. Have a drink. I insist."

The cup Dionysus holds out is full to the brim with deep burgundy wine that smells crisp and spicy. Bruce knows better than to take it.

"No? Then I suppose we'll have to find another way to deal with you." Dionysus waves his free hand and Bruce is surrounded by vines, tugging at his arms and legs, wrapping around his throat. He can't reach his sword to cut himself free. "They called you something, didn't they? When you were a warrior instead of... whatever this is. What was it? I Nychterida?"

Bruce says nothing, the vines too tight around his throat to even try.

"Yes, I think that was it. The Bat. It's funny, I have a history with bats. Have you heard of my Minyades? They were party poopers too," Dionysus says. "It didn't end well for them either."

Dick has fallen asleep, bound to Bruce's chest.

Dionysus smiles. "Are you sure you won't have a drink?"

Bruce glares as he approaches and presses the cup to Bruce's lips.

"Just a small sip? It can't do any harm. At least, not more than I'll do to you if you don't," Dionysus says. When Bruce still refuses, Dionysus laughs and turns to Dick. "Such a pretty thing. Are you worried what a lack of inhibitions will have you do to him? All that pent up bloodlust, and just plain lust. All let loose."

In all honesty Dionysus is more right than he probably knows. Which is why Bruce can't surrender.

"Of course, as entertaining as that would be, we can still find other ways to entertain ourselves, whether or not you are willing," Dionysus gestures and the vines relinquish Dick, though Bruce is still held captive. "You can just watch the show."

"Fine!" Bruce snaps urgently. "I'll drink it. If you leave him out of it."

"Where's the fun in that?" Dionysus asks. "I'll tell you what, how about I promise I won't touch him, neither will my disciples. But he stays. He gets to see the real Bruce, the real Nychterida."

Bruce struggles with the decision for only a few seconds. He wouldn't hurt Dick, inhibitions or no. He's nearly certain of it. "Agreed."

The cup presses against his lips again and this time Bruce drinks.

η νυχτερίδα

Dick is laughing so hard tears stream down his face. He can barely walk but they're still making good speed, his arm slung across Bruce's shoulder, both leaning against each other to stay upright, only walking in roughly straight line through luck and urgency. If they can get far enough fast enough Dionysus might lose interest when he wakes up.

"Shut up," Bruce pouts.

"You...You..." Dick tries to speak but gives up, lapsing back into laughter.

"Yeah, yeah," Bruce mutters. Hopefully when they sober up neither of them will have any memory of what just happened. Dick gives up on moving his legs and Bruce stumbles, trying to adjust to the dead weight. "It wasn't that funny! Get moving or I'll leave you here."

"Nuhuh!" Dick says with emphasis. "You saaaaaved me. You wouldn't leave me now."

Bruce says nothing. Dick snorts another chuckle right down his ear and Bruce drops him. "That's it. You can walk by yourself." He starts to walk away and promptly ends up lying on the floor only a few feet in front of Dick.

Dick laughs even louder.

η νυχτερίδα

The next morning Bruce wakes up with no memory of where he is or how he got there. He must have got up again and made his way back to the inn, but it's nothing but a blank in his head. Unfortunately, everything before then is still vividly present. Probably a parting gift from Dionysus.

Dick rolls over and smacks Bruce in the face with his arm. Bruce shoves him off the bed.

The thud of Dick's body hitting the floor is immediately followed with a groan and, after a moment during which Dick presumably regains consciousness, a burst of laughter.

"Don't say a word," Bruce warns.

"You kissed him!" Dick cackles.

Bruce rolls his eyes. It wasn't like he'd locked tongues with Dionysus for fun, he'd been distracting him. It'd seemed like a good idea once the enchanted wine had hit.

"And he... he..." Dick breaks off into hysterics once more, apparently no less amused now that the alcohol is gone and time has passed.

Bruce knows what he was going to say. He was there after all. Dionysus had snapped his fingers and Bruce had been in different, more... party appropriate clothes. Clothes Bruce then proceeded to divest himself of for Dionysus amusement. It was humiliating, but nothing Bruce could honestly claim he had never done before. And more importantly it had worked. Once Dionysus had his eyes on Bruce, Dick was able to rouse his disciples who then provided enough distraction and amusement that Bruce and Dick were able to escape without much trouble.

Dick is still giggling on the floor when Bruce has washed and dressed, and Bruce begins to worry that maybe that wine had been longer lasting than the regular kind. "Get up. We leave in half an hour. If you haven't eaten then you don't eat," He says and leaves his companion to it.

Downstairs the inn is bustling, travellers all rising early, eager to be on the road and reach their destination. Breakfast is a slab of bread and a bowl of porridge, better fare than Bruce had expected for the price, and he's nearly finished by the time Dick finally makes his way down the stairs and gets his own.

"Thank you," Dick says apropos of nothing.

Bruce raises an eyebrow over his spoon.

"For saving me. Again," Dick says. "I don't think I said it before. But if you hadn't come-"

"I was always going to come," Bruce says, almost involuntarily. It's true. For all that he's tried to part ways, he can never bring himself to abandon Dick when it comes to it. He's honestly not sure what he'd do without him these days. He serves as Bruce's conscience and companion, he keeps the madness and the nightmares at bay. Even thinking about that short time between the beginning of his penance and meeting Dick makes his chest clench with dread.

Dick grins so widely Bruce's fears about the wine resurface.

"How are you feeling this morning?" Bruce asks him.

Dick shrugs. "Not so bad, actually. No headache or anything, which is weird, I mean I'd have thought magic wine would be worse than the regular kind."

Bruce remembers just for a moment how close he came to taking advantage of his friend and shudders a little. "It is."

"If you say so." Dick shakes his head. "All I'm saying is I'm more than happy to avoid the hangover of the Gods."

They leave as soon as Dick has finished, a good few minutes later than Bruce has said they would because for all of his intentions he can never deprive Dick of anything.

It's only a few days later that Dick gets himself involved in another bad situation. It's like the kid is a magnet for trouble.

This time it's a pretty classic damsel in distress situation. Some girl Dick had been talking to when he went to buy supplies had ended up being that month's sacrifice to the giant that lived in the small mountain range less than a league away from the village. Dick, of course, had taken issue with this and now they were in a cave hiding from a hungry giant whose dinner just got rescued.

The girl is entirely too handsy for Bruce's liking. She's had herself wrapped around Dick's right arm ever since they untied her. It's a hazard. What if Dick needs to use that arm?

The giant lifts the rock they've been hiding behind and Bruce steps forward, sword raised for all the good it'll do him. He knows how this goes. The giant's weak spot is at the front of his skull, and though Bruce has often been told he has the stature of a God with his height and broad shoulders, he isn't tall enough to deal a blow that high up.

The girl is cowering somewhere to Bruce's left, having finally let go of Dick's arm. It's appalling behaviour. When Bruce had been a warlord, he'd seen hundreds of girls get sacrificed to some god or another and the majority were terrified but they still took any shot they had to survive. One or two even managed it.

"It's alright. We're going to get out of this. It'll be fine," Dick's words reach Bruce's ears, and once again he's reminded of the difference between them. Dick is pure and good, and even when they don't deserve it, he helps people without thought. Unlike Bruce who can never save as many people as he's hurt.

"Get her out of here, I'll hold him off," Bruce orders, ignoring the giant's laughter.

"Puny mortal," the giant taunts. "How are you going to hold me off with that toothpick?"

Bruce looks around, finding nothing that he can use to keep the brute away from the others long enough for them to escape.

He sees Dick run forward out of the corner of his eye, too late to stop him. Dick rolls neatly under the giant's clumsy arm. "Hey, ugly! Over here!"

The giant turns and the girl runs, keeping close to the cave wall. Dick grins and meets Bruce's eye. "Do you remember that story? About Goliath?"

Of course Bruce remembers it. "I'm sorry to tell you, David, but we don't have a slingshot."

Dick darts around the giant's next attempt to crush him and now he stands directly behind the giant. "No, but we have plenty of rocks. Do you remember that time you deflected that

arrow?"

"Which time?" Bruce asks, slightly confused but he thinks he's starting to get it.

"Doesn't matter. Incoming!" And he pitches a rock between the giant's legs.

Bruce hits it with his sword blade, as hard as he can and aiming it upwards. It's nearly all luck that it hits true.

The giant collapses, the ground quaking under his weight.

"Yes!" Dick crows and raises his arms in triumph.

Bruce sheaths his sword wearily. If that hadn't worked...

Dick climbs over the huge corpse as if it's just a tussock in a field. "Let's go. Iliana's promised us a cooked meal!"

They find Iliana outside of the cave, peering in fearfully. She practically jumps Dick when he emerges, plastering herself all over him. It's with no small amount of satisfaction that Bruce sees Dick peel her free in favour of slinging an arm around Bruce's shoulders.

"Guess who just slew a giant with nothing but a rock?" Dick brags. "And, well, a sword. But still..."

And Dick tells her the whole story, including the parts she was there for, with a level of exaggeration almost more impressive than the battle itself.

When they reach the village and Iliana runs off into her grateful parents' arms, Dick turns to Bruce. "Face it, you wouldn't have won that without me. You'd have been helpless!"

Bruce smiles. "Or I wouldn't have been in that situation in the first place."

Dick scoffs. "Like you'd ever leave an innocent girl to die. You're a hero."

η νυχτερίδα

They leave the village after a two day feast in their honour, and even as they lay down to sleep the first night out, Dick is still talking about his own ingenuity and Bruce's heroic nature. It's the same whenever they run into these problems, but Bruce will never tire of it.

"Alright, alright. Can the brave heroes get some sleep now? We have a lot of ground to cover tomorrow," Bruce interrupts with mock irritation.

Dick grins at him in the dark. "Sure. Though now is usually the part of the story where the hero wins the heart of the fair maiden."

Bruce scowls. "You're the one that turned her down. She was all over you."

"Maybe she's not the love interest in this story," Dick suggests. His nonchalance is entirely unconvincing.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Bruce asks grumpily. He doesn't like the reminder that some day Dick is going to rescue the right girl and settle down, and Bruce will have to carry on alone.

Dick sighs. "Well, I'm thinking this is more of a legend, you know? Like Hercules with his twelve tasks. One giant isn't the point of the story."

"Then what is?"

Dick shifts a little closer. "Maybe the point is the two heroes travelling the land, fighting evil and saving the day. You know, together."

Bruce freezes.

"Maybe we don't need any fair maidens," Dick says, more tentative now.

"Are you saying..." Bruce can't finish the question.

"I'm saying, we have a destiny together. Maybe in more ways than one," Dick answers. He shifts closer still. "If you want."

Bruce smiles falteringly, still unsure. "So what? The hero doesn't get any princesses?"

"No," Dick says firmly. "This hero doesn't want a princess."

"What does he want?" Bruce forces himself to ask.

Dick shrugs. "Another hero."

The kiss, when they finally move, is every bit as legendary as any of Hercules's tasks.

When it ends they share a grin.

Then Bruce rolls over to sleep. "We rise before dawn. Get some sleep."

"Not a chance!" Dick protests, and pulls Bruce back to face him.

They sleep until nearly noon. They need to, they didn't sleep at all until dawn.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!