

It's lonely at the top. That truism has always applied to Selina, ever since she took over the Calabreses, but after ordering Nick's death, she's more isolated than ever. The issue opens on three panels, one of her sitting in a car with Antonia, another of her surrounded by revelers at a party, the third alone in the shadows of an empty room. Three different settings, but they all depict the same thing: whatever burdens she carries, she carries alone. There's every indication that this isolation is self-imposed. Despite the tension between her and Antonia, the latter still dutifully carries out her commitment to Selina and even makes an attempt to close their distance. To explain the Falcones' shortage of manpower, Antonia comments, "They're more about power than family. More fool them," giving Selina a significant look. The statement reaffirms Antonia's loyalty, yet it only seems to depress Selina more. "Maybe she knows the costs better than I do. Maybe she'll forgive me someday. That would make one of us." While avoiding Antonia's overtures, she outright pushes Batman away. There's no clearer illustration of their respective moral anchors than Selina's willingness to let a shipment of guns go in exchange for shutting down a heroin delivery, and Batman refusal to tolerate either. Batman might recognize her noble intent ("I'm trying to get everybody out with no fatalities."), but he can't accept such pragmatic means. His second intervention goes nowhere, leaving them painfully at odds despite a couple moments of intimacy. I don't mind it; it gives a star-crossed quality to their romance that beats unbridled sexual attraction any day. But Selina can't really afford to continuously reject everyone who reaches out to her. She might have more control that way, but it limits her reach and information, both fatal against an opponent who already has the advantage of fighting without honor. She got a good read on Sionis when she brought her killer heels in response to his expression invitation to come unarmed, but she won't always be able to outthink him. He's already eroding her supports, shaky as they are, and there's no sign that she knows it's happening right behind her back. There are also those nasty surprises she never sees coming. Her focus—and ours—is so fixed on the competing crime families that she overlooks a presence as major as the Penguin. Aside from Batman's curtailed appearances, Catwoman has been remarkably free of superhero nonsense, so Oswald Cobblepot's decision to enter the field is an exciting game-changer, especially since his plan is simply to eliminate the "unnecessary" party. To keep herself from landing in that category, Selina needs to know his standards, and for that, she'll need Eiko (who's on the good side of the head Son of Forster reporting to Cobblepot). At the moment, the only person Selina seems ready to trust is the one person she least wants to. Ward now goes out of his way to be helpful. Maybe he was sufficiently impressed by her decision to off Nick last issue, but Ward's now going out of his way to be helpful, in contrast to his earlier, dubious behavior. To be fair, Selina doesn't so much accept his assistance as he foists it upon her, claiming brotherly devotion as an excuse. But if Nick's death proves anything, it's that family doesn't have nearly as powerful a hold on these criminals as they say it does. Occasionally, Brown's art hits an extreme of roughness that makes it look like he'd only just finished a preliminary sketch and forced Loughridge to fill it in. Basically, any panel that isn't a close-up risks losing definition altogether, a series of rudimentary shapes assembled into the suggestion of human figures and objects. Brown's emotional range is narrow, but that's to be expected from a series that operates mostly on a single note of suspicion. The bigger problem is he's not really up to action sequences (it takes a couple readings and heavy reliance on Valentine's script to understand that Selina skewered Sionis' man with her shoe),\* and there's no way action can be avoided in a mafia tale. Some Musings:\* So would we call those f--- them pumps? The post Catwoman #38 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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