Hi everybody, I’m Alexandra Monir, the author of the upcoming novel, *Black Canary: Breaking Silence* for Penguin Random House, which is the fifth book in the D.C. Icon series, which I have been a huge fan of since well before I found out I was even going to get to write for this series so this whole project has been such a thrill for me, and I’m really excited to share the opening pages with you right now as part of Book Your Summer. So, if you want to read along with me, I am actually pulling this excerpt up from *Entertainment Weekly*—they recently revealed the opening pages, so I’m going to read that to you right now. And *Black Canary* comes out at the end of December, so just consider this a little sneak peek until you can read the whole book.

Chapter 1.

The weeds climbed from soil to sky on all sides of Robinson Park, shrouding the abandoned grounds from the rest of Gotham City. Dinah Lance had grown up driving past this stretch, watching the once-flourishing park fade over the course of her childhood. The greenery had been the first to go, shriveling up and turning the color of mud. An army of vines came next, emerging from the ground and crawling up every bench, slide, and swing, until soon the whole space was too overgrown to see through. It used to be just another grim sight Dinah passed on her way to school, a reminder of all the ways the Court of Owls had failed their city. But today was different. Today she knew what was hidden inside.

“Please tell us you’re not serious about this.” Dinah’s best friend, Mandy Harper, shuddered as she stared across the street. “That place looks like a hangout for serial killers.”

“Yeah, it’s clearly been shut down for a reason,” Ty Carver, the third member of their trio, said with a grimace. “And traipsing around a sketchy old park was not what I had in mind for our second-to-last day of summer. Especially when we could be at Natasha Wycliffe’s party right now.”

“You guys can chicken out if you want, but I’m going in,” Dinah said, striding ahead of them. “What we’re about to uncover easily beats some party that—I hate to break it to you, Ty—we’re not even invited to.”

“Wait.” Mandy gripped her arm. “What if someone sees us? Is your plan really worth the risk of—”
“Rotting in Arkham Asylum?” Ty finished her sentence. “Um, of course not. C’mon, let’s go.”

Dinah paused midstep. She couldn’t exactly blame them for their reservations. Trespassing on closed government property was, technically, a crime against the Court—one that could warrant the Owls’ favorite punishment. A prison sentence at Arkham used to be reserved for the most dangerous, deranged criminals in the city, but these days there was an entirely different group behind bars. The Court had “repurposed” Arkham, warping it into a torture chamber for anyone who dared to oppose them. It was a place where roles were reversed, with known criminals running the show and would-be heroes languishing in their cells. The kind of place you tried to avoid at all costs.

Still . . . Gotham City’s rulers had far bigger fish to fry than high school students poking around a run-down park. Dinah hadn’t heard of anyone their age winding up in Arkham—yet. Getting caught was a long shot. And for better or worse, her want was greater than her fear.

“It’s totally deserted. No one’s going to know we were ever there, much less throw us in Arkham over it,” she said. “And if we did somehow get caught, I would be the one to take the blame anyway.”

She looked back at the two of them as a beam of light from a streetlamp crossed their faces, highlighting Mandy’s gold-flecked brown eyes, dark brown skin, and wary expression and Ty’s pale skin and light blue eyes, jittery behind his glasses. Dinah felt a twinge of guilt for talking them into this.

“You don’t have to come with me if you really hate the idea.”

Mandy gave her a wry smile and pulled a tiny can of pepper spray from her skirt pocket. “I mean, we’re obviously not going to let you go in there alone.”

“We’re not?” Ty cracked. Dinah wouldn’t have been surprised if he was only half kidding. As much as he cared about her, Ty also happened to be the furthest thing from a risk taker.

“This just better be worth it,” Mandy added.

“It will be.” Dinah grinned at her two oldest friends, looping an arm through each of theirs as they crossed to the darker side of the street.

The towering curtain of weeds rose up to meet them. It surrounded the park’s perimeter, blocking every entrance.

“What are we supposed to do now?” Ty asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Just . . . follow me.”
Dinah took a deep breath and slid sideways into the weeds, feeling them part just enough to let her through before swallowing her up in stems and leaves. They scratched at her skin as she elbowed her way forward, toward a half-buried entrance gate. A tangle of bare branches poked through the gate’s iron bars, like spindly arms pushing her away. Still, Dinah moved closer.

The latch was rusted shut after so many years untouched. Dinah cringed—this wasn’t going to be pretty, especially in her mandatory Gotham City girls’ uniform. A starched white button-down and knee-length wool skirt weren’t exactly made for fence jumping.

She tied her blond hair into a ponytail and backed up a few steps before breaking into a run, leaping up onto the gate. Her skirt snagged on the bars, and branches clawed at her bare legs, but she managed to hoist herself over to the other side, landing knee-deep in brittle, browned grass. And for the first time, Dinah was inside Robinson Park.

It looked wild, feral, in the twilight. Dead leaves and twigs littered the path ahead, ivy snaked around every surface, and even the trees drooped to the ground, as if hiding their heads in shame. Still, there were hints of the happier place this used to be. A pair of swings creaked as the breeze rattled their chains. A paint-chipped carousel swayed in the same wind, sending its porcelain horses on a slow turn they would never get to finish. Dinah stepped up to the horse nearest her, a gray Thoroughbred with a cracked white mane. Its mouth was open in an expression meant to be a smile, but time had reshaped it so that the horse now appeared to be baring its teeth. Dinah shivered, stepping back.

Just then Mandy came hurtling over the gate, landing with a flying leap. She actually managed to make it look graceful, even in her constricting uniform, and Dinah couldn’t help but clap as her friend’s feet hit the ground.

“Think of the gymnast I could have been,” Mandy joked, dropping into a playful bow. It was a running gag between her and Dinah, albeit not a very funny one: remarking on all the different things they could have done or become if they had just been born a generation or two earlier—back when girls were allowed to be athletes.

Mandy’s smile fell as she took in the scene around them.

“Yikes. It’s even more of a dump than I imagined.”

A loud thump sounded behind them as Ty tumbled to the ground, glasses flying off his nose.

“Why is it that I always seem to wind up bruised whenever we follow one of your plans?” he complained, fumbling through the grass for his glasses.

“Sorry, T.” Dinah reached out to help pull him back up to his feet. “But I promise—if what I overheard is even half true, you’ll be thanking me for dragging you here.”

“If you say so.” Ty shook his head at her but then fell into step as Dinah led the way.
For a while, the only sound was of their shoes crunching leaves—until Mandy stopped abruptly and elbowed Dinah in the ribs. “Look.”

Dinah glanced up and drew in a sharp breath. An old stone monument loomed ahead of them, like a temple plucked straight out of ancient Greece. Its front facade was bordered by twelve statues and, half buried among the leaves, twelve ornamented gravestones.

“The Forum of the Twelve Caesars,” she murmured as they approached it. “That’s what they used to call this—this mausoleum. I remember reading about it.”

“Okay, well, you forgot to remind us there’s a freaking graveyard in here,” Mandy said with a gulp. “I vote we turn back now.”

“I second that,” Ty said quickly, but Dinah was already crouching to brush the leaves off the first headstone.

“Martha Wayne,” she read, a pit forming in her stomach. And she knew, without looking, who lay in the surrounding graves: Bruce and Thomas Wayne, James Gordon, Renee Montoya, and the rest of the heroes from Gotham City’s past. These legends were the reason the Court of Owls had left Robinson Park to rot as soon as they took control of the city.

Suddenly, a sense of movement in her peripheral vision jolted Dinah from her thoughts. She could have sworn she had just seen a shadow flitting between the graves across from them. Dinah blinked, telling herself it was nothing, or that she’d imagined it—until she heard Ty jump.

[Author speaking]

All right, so I’m gonna leave you with that but if you want more from Chapter 1, there is a little more of this excerpt up on EntertainmentWeekly.com. And, stay tuned in the weeks and months to come, I’m going to be sharing more teasers and more info about this book. I can’t wait for you to read it. And thank you so much for listening! Bye!