Twitter Thread by christmas cheer liz bruenig



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one of the things i like about Batman is that it's fundamentally about being orphaned, and being an orphan — how this guy stays tethered to the world in his own weird, abstract, extrajudicial way when he feels that his link to it has been violently severed

Batman does this by permanently recapitulating his own trauma: solving crimes for other people, protecting them. But that's actually just the beginning; he also recapitulates his own experience of orphanness by essentially raising several orphans

Dick is an orphan in the traditional sense: dead parents. Batman sees it happen. Jason, less so: missing dad, known mom who eventually dies. Tim, even less so: parents are around a while, and involved, before both dying. Carrie, even less than that: negligent parents.

Steph: evil father, who openly works against her. And then there's Damian, whose parents are both alive and yet both have identities that totally obliterate their role as his parents. He doesn't relate to them as a mother and father; he can't, and neither can they.

In all these different cases, Batman tries all these different ways of making orphanness for them not what it was for him: Either by trying to teach them the (arguably poor) coping skills early that he learned over a very long time, or by literally legally adopting them, etc.

It never quite works, not in any final way. It's a primal wound, in each case: Someone who should be there is, in some key way, absent, and all the money in the world and adventure in the universe can't change that. Couldn't change it for himself, can't change it for them.

And in the end, these narrative loops where Batman takes in some kind of orphan always return to the same place: Even he world's greatest detective can't find something that simply isn't there. And that act of futile searching is what, for his world, defines orphanness.

I have a hunch that a lot of kids out there got to learn from these stories that there are a lot of ways to be an orphan. Negligence, abuse, abandonment, etc. — it's not /you/, /you're/ not the reason you can't find what you're looking for. It's just not there.

And it isn't sugarcoated in any way; it's hard, it hurts, it's lonely and disorienting. The negative space is always black. But it's not about you, not a defect in you. You can still do things. You can look for other things, and you can find them. You can be a hero.

done~