Laughter

by EmilyTT

Summary

Robin never tells them what these people want.

In which the whole Team is captured with seemingly no endgame on the baddies' side. At least, everyone but Robin has no clue about any endgame.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

• Inspired by there's catastrophe in everything I'm touching by aFigureofSpeech
Laughter

The Team didn't know how long they'd been there. There were no windows, no way of keeping track of passing time. The only clue they had was by tallying how often they were given food and water—and even those had long breaks in between—when they were taken to go to the bathroom, and whenever he was taken for who knows what. Interrogated and probably tortured. The torture was confirmed from the bruises and dried blood—sometimes it was still fresh—they'd see glimpses of when he'd be brought back and the whimpers of pain that'd come from his cell on occasion.

Robin never tells him what the people want, and their own sessions are far less regular than his. The only clue they even had as to who caught them is the clown masks the men wore. During their sessions, they were never asked any questions, only beat just enough that they wouldn't be strong enough to attempt to break out, even if they could with the inhibitor collars around their necks (except Artemis).

Either they were horrible at their job, or they weren't even the true target. The Team was willing to bet it was the latter if the masks were any indicator.

Their individual cells formed a big circle and were bigger and taller than Robin's, though all were made of metal bars. While theirs were five feet by five feet and about seven feet tall, Robin's was about four feet by four feet and five feet tall. He couldn't even stand up straight, the height was so small. They each had two big, thick, fuzzy blankets and a pillow each, while Robin was supplied with what seemed to be a very thin bed sheet that would be used in the summer and what looked like a moldy pillow.

The room was always cold, and when Robin was on occasion in the room for a long period of time—or, what they considered to be a long period of time. He only seemed to be in there when he was given a chance to sleep, and even then, he was taken back out the moment he woke up, almost no time to talk to his teammates at all—his teeth would start to chatter and he'd curl into a tiny ball, his bed sheet and pillow tightly wrapped around him in an attempt to stay warm.

When he dared to stay awake for a bit when forcibly thrown into his cell, he'd stretch his arm through the bars as far as he could. His friends would do the same and their fingertips would barely one another's. No one would mention it, but the small little sigh of relief that came from Robin scared them every time and only increased their worry over what was being done to their little bird.

Their uniforms were taken away from them awhile ago, though Robin is left with his for some reason that they don't know of. He never explained why. Either way, they'd been given the choice to either take theirs off and change into the tee-shirt and sweatpants carelessly thrown at them or face the wrath of the hose.

Their masks make identification impossible and they never call each other by their name, usually just a 'you there! Yeah, you' was said, so Wally mentally named each of them in his head. Well, at least every one he'd seen or encountered. Chubby. One Eye—he never seemed to see people approaching from his left side. He'd whip around only when their presence was made known through some form of noise). Shrimp. Grumpy. Giraffe. Jittery. Laughter. Sweaty Hands.

Sweaty Hands was the one who took care of Wally. A slick wetness would cover his face every
single time he'd grab Wally's gorgeous face. Not to mention ruining his good looks by leaving fingerprint sized bruises on his cheeks.

Sweaty never broke or dislocated any of his bones, so Wally had to guess that they either assumed he'd recover from those just as fast as everything else, or they were too dumb to realize that he healed fast and didn't bother. Even with his powers restrained from the collar, the healing factor remained for a reason Wally didn't know why.

The bruises might've been more welcomed if he were beaten for trying to withhold information, but Sweaty Hands never asked questions. He began to wonder if they didn't care about all the secrets all the baddies knew the sidekicks knew. So what was their endgame? Play a massive game of hide and seek with the Justice League? The clowns were certainly crazy enough to do such a thing.

That brought back the question of why more harm wasn't done to Wally. If the laughter and evident smirk hidden behind the mask whenever he announced the end of the session was any indicator, Sweaty Hands enjoyed beating him down to the ground.

On more than one occasion, he could've sworn he heard muffled cries coming from behind the walls.

oOo

The Team ensured Robin that the League is looking for them one night (they guesstimated at least ten days had passed by then) when he was carelessly thrown back into his cage and simply lay in the certainly awkward and pained position in which he landed on his side—an arm seriously shouldn't be bent behind one's back so much, even for an acrobat. They figured it was as twisted as it could possibly be without dislocating the bird's shoulder—but they never figured out if he'd been listening to them at all that night. If he was, he never gave any signs. That, and his breathing was too quiet to be able to tell if he was asleep.

When he'd been dragged into the room, one arm each being held over two goon's shoulders, the light from the hallway behind revealed that he'd been stripped of his costume and was instead in a ripped tank top that stopped at his stomach and a ragged pair of shorts that barely clung onto his waist. His mask was left on for some strange reason. The room stank a combination of burned clothes, skin, and hair that night so badly that all of their stomachs lurched dangerously. The threats and words of anger fell to deaf ears, and Robin was pushed into his cage, the metal door slamming shut behind him, though not before the Team heard the painful smack of his body colliding against the metal floor below.

Robin returned with that same burning smell for the rest of their stay, and sometimes the Team could've sworn they could see smoke radiating off the Boy Wonder's head, though they shrugged it off and blamed it on bad lighting.

That night they stayed awake and all spoke words of encouragement to the young boy, even after they were positive he had fallen asleep. When morning came, Grumpy and Laughter took Robin before he'd even woken up. The cry of pain the Team heard the moment that dreadful door shut and shutting them back into the dark made them all flinch and Megan began to cry.

Wally finally told them about his growing suspicion of their food being drugged. He said he thought something was laced in it to not kill them, but keep them unsteady and unable to stay standing upright.

They clearly didn't want them dead, so what did they want?

oOo
Robin tells them what is done to him when he's taken away just as much as he tells them what the clowns want with them: nothing.

Sometimes are worse than others when he's brought back to his cage. Sometimes he's bleeding and others he's grinning and telling them that the clowns will never get what they want. When he says that, the Team swears he isn't talking to them but rather the three obvious one way mirrors on the wall with the door. It's those nights that he's the first one to initiate contact, the rustle of his bed sheet wriggling across the wall informing the others that he's reaching through his cell, and so they reach as well. They try their best to squeeze hands. One night they all felt a bit stronger and pushed themselves harder until their hands were actually on top of one another's. Robin's the one who puts his hand on top and squeezes all of theirs. It's also on the following day of those nights that he comes back more bloodied than usual.

There's one time where Robin was left in his little cell that each member of the Team was taken to be beaten down. They're attacked harsher than usual to the point that they all scream in agony at some point. Robin is taken away when they're brought back, of course, but even so, he comes back a grinning idiot despite blood dripping from a wound somewhere on his head. Considering they'd never heard him scream before, they try to push the thought of what could've been done to the Boy Wonder that would inflict a scream so loud that they could hear from who-knows-how-far away.

He talks about everything and nothing but what's been happening to them and why they're there. Kaldur can't help but feel proud at how mentally strong Robin was. He's positive that, if his guesses for what Robin is experiencing are accurate, he would have broken by now, as would most, if not all, other members of the team.

His screams are heard more often after that, and Artemis asked if they thought Robin could hear them scream.

At one point he's brought back and his head and upper chest is sopping wet.

He comes back his head soaked once more and uncontrollably laughing another time, and he never stops. It's at this point that even Kaldur and Conner become absolutely terrified. Robin's laughter doesn't even stop when Giraffe and Jittery pick him up and take him away. He continues to return that laughing, soaking, jumbling mess.

oOo

They fight. Every time Robin is taken, they snarl, threaten, spit, and hiss. Wally and Artemis even begin to swear.

And every time Robin is taken, he turns to them and says, "Don't worry. I got this," and that determined grin is plastered to his face despite how hoarse his voice is from all of his laughing.

They aren't relieved with his will to fight anymore; that smile becomes more crazed and so not Robin every time.

Wally screams a low, guttural, screech of anger once. He can't even bring himself to care if he startles him friends awake. It doesn't dawn on him that Robin might be in his cage. Wally just needed to let out his growing frustration. Sweaty Hands comes in and laughs, but Wally manages to knock the bastard out cold and it takes three clowns to pin him down.

Even as they drag him from his cell, Wally continues to snarl and thrash in their grips. He only stills, his body frozen as the enraged shouts coming from his friends echo down the halls, though it's not theirs that causes him to halt. It's the animalistic roar and clanging of bone and flesh against metal that
slightly budge coming from his best friend.

oOo

Laughter and Shrimp are literally tugging a sobbing fourteen year old boy behind them. They each have a grip on his wrists and tug him into his cell.

Superboy snarls. "Let Robin go!"

Shrimp responds by tapping Robin on the cheek. "Remember what you learned today." This was followed by another word that none of the others could hear, but when Robin doesn't look up, Shrimp frowns and slaps him across the face. When Robin lands on his side, Shrimp kicks him in the ribs and a cry of pain was heard over his sobs. "Are we understood?" he questioned, once again dropping his voice so no one else could hear him except probably Laughter. Robin looks up, and it's then that the Team realizes that Robin's mask has been removed from his face to reveal beautiful blue eyes.

When did that happen? Wally thinks to himself, mind racing as he tries to figure out if it'd just never been noticeable before.

Shrimp nods in contentment.

A small light appears above Robin's cell after the clowns leave, and Artemis winces. His tank top is nearly destroyed and burn marks are clearly evident through the tears. She's experienced being burned before for not being quick enough and she knows how painful it is. She calls out his name and curses under her breath when it comes out scratchy and hoarse and not sounding like her own voice.

Robin doesn't move except to curl himself into a ball and press himself against the wall of his cage as far away from his friends as possible. Wally tries to catch his attention by pleading for him to talk to them. Robin responds by tightening the ball he curled himself into and resting his face against his knees, his new position covering his eyes and the tear tracks staining his cheeks.

Megan catches sight of the burns and lets out a gasp. "Robin," he half whispers, half cries, "what have they done to you?"

He still doesn't respond, and his friends desperately try to get him to talk to them. Superboy's angry rant is what throws them all for a loop. "Why won't you tell us anything? What are they doing to you? To us? They don't want answers or they'd have interrogated us. If they wanted us dead, they'd have killed us by now. So what do they want? Why won't you tell us! We deserve to know, Robin!"

Robin glances up from his hunched form and his eyes instantly widen in fear. All the clowns barge through the door before Kaldur can even think of asking why he was so scared.

Chubby and One Eye don't even bother to take Robin out of the room. They simply unlock his cage door, grab him by his hair, and drag him, struggling and begging, "Please, please don't! I'm sorry! Please don't! I won't do it again! Please!"

He's dropped on the floor and in surrounded by the clowns. The beating begins and not a single member of Young Justice isn't crying or screaming murderous threats as they watch blow after blow raining down on Robin. Conner just about breaks his hands slamming them into the walls of his cell in a vain attempt to get his strength back and break out.

Fists and boots thump into Robin's body and his crying increases as he feels a rib give way under all the pressure. A second and third rib follows the first before the beating finally comes to a halt.
Robin tries to curl into a ball again, but a boot smashes into the small of his back while another steps on the back of his throat. The pressure on his back and neck increases, and Robin struggles, oblivious to the pleading and screaming of his friends, but the attack refuses to relent. Robin's body stills and the force pauses.

He doesn't see Laughter giving a bunch of hand motions to the others, but he does notice when the weight on his neck disappears. The boot on his back vanishes for the briefest of seconds before nailing him right on the center of his back. Any breath he'd regained left his body and a sob wracked his body.

One Eye lifts him to his feet and twists his left arm behind his back, the pressure itself threatening to shatter his shoulder. It's only when One Eye whispers in his ear that he realizes his friends are yelling. "Boss wants to speed things up a bit, Jay" he whispers. A low chuckle rumbles from deep in his throat. "We're ending this tonight."

Robin tries to jerk his head to the side to see if he could squirm his way out of the brutal old on his arm, but One Eye wasn't having it. He snaps Jay to the side and all but throws him into the doorway. Jay's head rebounds off the doorframe with a sickening crunching noise and he slumps to the ground, where he remains.

Wally cries out in horror, snot and tears streaming down his face. "Let him go you sonofabitch! Let him GO!"

One Eye laughs and carelessly slings Robin over his shoulder before walking away. Robin's eyes are open but unseeing, blood dripping over his head, down his bangs, and onto the floor, his brain still trying to comprehend what just happened. The door quietly shuts behind them.

They stay in silence albeit their crying and Conner's random growls of pure and unbridled fury. It remains this way until a long time has passed. The faint yet somehow loud, agonized shriek sounds so inhumane that it completely convinces Wally a new type of alien arrived and was attacking the Earth until it lowered in tone and sounded suspiciously like Robin fills the air. Ice creeps up their hearts and chills them to the bone, and they all subconsciously move as close to each other as they can in their cages and reach their arms through the bars to remind themselves that they are still here. All except for one, that is. Their hands remain latched together long after the shrieking died away.

Though they never got an answer out of Robin, they have a sneaky suspicion as to what the clowns want and all they can think is, they got him.

oOo

When he wakes up, he finds himself chained to a concrete wall, his shirt lying in shreds on the floor, making him arch his back away from the wall in an attempt to get away from the cold. Wally looks around and sees that there are two potential openings/exits: one to his left and one directly in front of him. He tugs on the chains holding his hands above his head and isn't surprised when they don't give. He glances up and sees the handcuffs wrapped in a metal that disappears up in the ceiling. More shackles hold his ankles to the ground, though his toes are barely touching the ground.

He looks around and sees his friends have been given similar treatment (Artemis and Megan are luckily left in at least a bra to cover them) except he, Artemis, and Conner are the only three without gags. Their cheeks are sunken in and their stomachs bloated. That, and all the bruises and cuts that Wally also has.

Wait... has? Wally blinks in confusion and glances down as far as he can without the collar around his neck biting into his skin and cutting off his airflow. His body is littered in bruises that weren't
there the last time he can recall being awake. This only makes him even more confused...

He doesn't know how long he's been out, but if the eerie laughter is anything to go by, Wally would have to guess that it's far too late for anything to be done. *This must be it*, he thinks to himself. *They're finally going to end us, just like they ended Robin.* He doesn't notice that a tear rolled down his face until he tastes salt in his mouth.

Wally looks up once more and looks around the area they're in. When he strains himself and peers his head into the shadows, he can make out two figures hidden deep in the far corner of the room.

Laughter steps out of the shadows just as his friends awaken. Artemis throws herself against her chains and spits in his general direction. Laughter... well, laughs. His laugh is familiar though. Strangely familiar. Chillingly familiar. Dreadfully familiar.

The missing pieces fall into place in all of their heads and they feel like idiots. They should've known!

No one feels as dumb as Wally though. He uselessly jerks against his chains with a strangled cry. His jaw trembles. How could he have been so blind to what was right in front of him?! Of course he should've known! No other villain on the face of the Earth had an obsession with the Boy Wonder quite like Laughter!

Artemis hisses in pain, and Wally snaps his head to the side so quickly that his neck cracks. "Artemis, stop!" he hollers in an attempt to get her to not rip her shoulders from their sockets. She's tugging at the chains that harshly.

A giggle echoes around the room and Wally's body goes ice cold. He can't even bring himself to turn his head. Apparently the same thing happens to the others because none of them turn to look to try and locate where the giggle is coming from. Wally doesn't need to glance to see. He already saw where on his second scan of the area. What he isn't prepared for, however, is the giggly, high pitched voice to start talking.

"How random that you're here, Missy 'Mis!" Robin giggles. It's as if his voice is all they needed to hear to unfreeze themselves, because five heads turn to face the owner of the voice.

When he steps out of the shadows Wally's stomach lurches despite the fact that there's nothing in his stomach to retch. Dressed in a clown outfit designed to be a small replica of the Joker's, his face bleached white with a maniacal grin stretching from ear to ear, is their broken friend. Joker puts his hands of Robin's shoulders and directs him to stand in front of him, their smiles a perfect match and never wavering. Robin's lack of reaction—even a flinch to show that he was faking this would have sufficed—makes his heart drop. His heart drops even more when he realizes Robin has been holding his arms behind his back with purpose this entire time. He's not even sure if he wants to know what his best friend is holding.

Kaldur makes a muffled yet weak and disbelieving noise that sounds like, "Robin..." but no one hears it (except maybe Joker and Robin, but probably not because they're both laughing) over the pounding of their hearts.

M'gann barely manages to choke back a sob. Conner is the first to recover from the horrific sight in front of them. "Robin, what happened to you? Where are the other clowns?"

Robin's grin turns feral. Joker releases his bruising grip on the boy —since when did he take off his mask? No time to think about that, Wallman! Save your friend!— and Robin dramatically pulls his hands out from behind his back. The object waves around several times before coming to a halt. It
takes all of Wally's willpower to not puke up acid, but even that wasn't enough to prevent it from happening. A bile taste is left in his mouth, but he would rather be stuck with the taste than look back up.

He doesn't want to see the tattered remains of Robin's uniform. Doesn't want to see the black and yellow-turned-red cape. Doesn't want to see the slashes that are noticeably visible from even twenty yards away. Doesn't want to see the burn marks all over the remains, the sure promise of electrocution. Doesn't want to see the once yellow latches going down the front covered in dry puke and blood. Doesn't want to see the 'R' that is perfectly unscathed.

Robin's head tilts to the side. "Robin is dead," he sing songs. "Ashes, ashes, they all fall down."

Wally's jaw drops but no sound comes out. He honestly can't believe the implications he just made. The reference that only he (and maybe Artemis) could understand. Can't bring himself to. Doesn't want to acknowledge it to himself to realize that this is real.

Robin's smile widens if that is even possible, and Wally thinks for sure that he's going to say something to him. Apparently he isn't done with Artemis yet.

"What? No spelling bee this time?" She offers no response. He doesn't appear to be bothered. "Not C-O-O-L. Oh well. Maybe-"

"Leave her alone!" Conner doesn't even realize he said anything until Robin is suddenly right in front of him, those distant eyes and white face boring into his, a knife suddenly pressed against Conner's throat.

Joker doesn't wait to see what Robin was going to do. "Here you go, sonny boy!" he hollers, a gun that looks like a Smith'n'Wesson .44 rifle appearing seemingly out of nowhere and flying towards Robin. Robin deftly turns and catches it.

He looks at it for a few seconds that feel like minutes to Wally. He almost thinks Robin won't do anything. Of course he's wrong.

Robin takes several steps back until he's only a couple feet in front of Joker. "I really must be thanking you for being such wonderful participants in helping me create the perfect boy," he admits, that sinister laughter quickly following until he's doubling over. He soberes up just enough to instruct Robin. "Make Daddy proud; deliver the punch line."

Their combined laughter that quickly turns into a full blown cackle would've frightened them all if they weren't already petrified. Even Conner can't so much as stir a muscle. Robin aims the gun at Artemis, one eye closing as he aims. He bites his lip in anticipation. Wally's breathe hitches. Artemis stares down Robin, no longer terrified but simply accepting her fate. M'gann doesn't move, but tears are relentlessly pouring down her face. Kaldur's face warps into grief and that of failure. Conner's eyes narrow into slits.

Robin pulls the trigger, his eyes still having shown no sign of recognizing any of them as friends or family.

Artemis blinks and stares in numb disbelief at the flag sticking out of the gun. The flag says 'BANG!'

He aims once more, but this time, his hands are shaking. A small trickle of hope spreads through Wally's body. Joker takes a step forward, his face showing that of impatience.

"Do it!"
Robin’s face turns determined, the corners of his lips tugging back impossibly far. He repositions his grip on the gun, both hands now holding the barrel. This goes unnoticed by the Joker, who takes another step forward. Robin whips around with impossible speed and perfect accuracy, that butt of the gun striking home.

Joker falls to the ground, blood quickly obscuring half of his face. A loud BANG echoes around the room and red eyes turn dull and lifeless.

Robin leans down while the Team is stunned and begins patting the back of Joker’s suit. He makes a disappointed noise and rolls the clown onto his back. This time he stuffs his hands into the purple jacket. He seems to find what he's looking for because a pleased sound comes from him.

Wally risks a glance at Artemis, and by extension the others, and sees that her eyes are closed, her bottom lip bit but not quite covering up the trembling going on there. Kaldur is trying to flex his jaw to try and get the gag out of his mouth. M'gann is visibly shaking, thought out of fear or anguish, Wally doesn't know.

"What say you, KF?" Robin is taking slow, lurching steps to the speedster. Wally's pit of dread returns. Balanced on the back of his neck with his hands grasping either end is a crowbar. "One hit for every single damn time I was held there and forced to watch you be beat?" His steely bluish red gaze rakes over them all. "Or two hits for every. Single. Time. That you promised me the League was coming? Told me they'd be there at any moment?"

His gaze rests on Wally, and Wally can't recognize anything within those blue orbs. Once lively, brilliant, dark blue eyes are now artificially cheerful and bright, completely lacking anything that made him Dick Grayson.

Robin raises the crowbar high above his head and prepares to bring it crashing down on his once best friend's skull. Wally's eyes widen in despair.

Blue eyes flicker to the side for half a heartbeat and he suddenly moves a step back with near impossible speed for a human. He doesn't have a chance to wonder why because Flash suddenly halts in front of him, masked eyes the size of saucers and jaw fallen. He turns to his partner to say something at the same time as Wally tries to give him any sort of warning. The next second he's slumping to the ground.

Robin pulls back and, without any sign of regret, stabs the fork of the crowbar straight through Flash's leg. He moans in agony, but that doesn't compare to the shriek as Robin ruthlessly pulls it right back out.

"Nu-uh," he sing songs, "No interrupting our playdate, flashy boy!" He giggles at this before suddenly going quiet.

Wally peers at his face and doesn't know what's scary: that bleached white face that's always associated with a smile not having one or the fact that Robin isn't smiling, meaning something is terribly, horribly wrong.

Then that damned smirk appears again and he stares at the crowbar in admiration, white fingers stroking the metal and experimentally flicking droplets of blood off of it. "Do you really think I don't see you?" he asks, and this time (of course it just has to be this time) he sounds so undeniably like Robin -no, Richard Grayson- that if everything else didn't prove that this wasn't him, Wally would have believed it to be Robin. The normal, sarcastic, hacking, insecure, pranking Robin that always managed to brighten everyone's mood.
Wally looks around to try and see who he's talking to but sees nothing. He jumps in the chains, well, as much as dangling with toes barely touching the ground allows for jumping when another presence is made known.

"I expected nothing less." *Batman.*

Robin cocks his head so far that it creaks and cracks, sending shivers of repulsion up Wally's body.

"Three weeks," he drawsl, the smirk once again feral and promising murderous intent and it sounds so much like his best friend that Wally wants to scream and cry and die at the same time because it's so obviously not. "I waited for you for three weeks. But you never came, did you, Brucie?"

He watches Robin turn around without another word and plunge himself into the shadows, arms raised with the crowbar like a madman. Wally doesn't know he bit through his own lip until he nearly chokes on his own blood. He also doesn't know how long passed, but he's suddenly *standing* and it feels so good to be able to walk and move his arms and not have them dangling above him.

He glances around the room and sees Batman and Robin both on the floor. The crowbar is lying several yards away and Batman has Robin's arms pinned behind his back. Batman is crouched over him, one hand holding Robin's arms still and a knee is pressed on the small of his pack to keep him from squirming away. Robin's feet and legs thrash around like a fish out of water, and the damn laughter is *still* echoing around the room and something inside Wally snaps.

"You fucking asshole!" he screams, moving forward, hands clenched into fists at his sides so harshly that the knuckles crack. His face twists into a nasty and grotesque snarl. "What gave you the right to go and leave us all alone? What gave you the right to just go and let them turn you into this?"

He doesn't know why no one is stopping him, but his anger only grows when Robin stills, the only movement being his head whirling to make eye contact, all the while cackling that damn cackle that'd become his worst nightmare. "Stop laughing! STOP IT JUST STOP! YOU DON'T GET TO YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT! NO RIGHT TO GIVE UP JUST BEFORE THE LEAGUE COMES! WE'RE SAVED SO STOP BEING AN ASSHOLE AND LAUGHING YOU JERK!"

He stops his rant with a sob and his shoulders slump, hands falling limp at his sides. Robin's eyes never leave his own and they trace his even as he slumps back and falls on his butt. He pulls his legs up to his chest and hugs them tight, his head pressing into his kneecaps. Sobs overtake his body. He doesn't acknowledge why he was truly yelling at his best friend.

A hand touches his back and he looks up, eyes red brimmed and cheeks slick with tears. Batman keeps a steady gaze. "Wallace." Something in Batman's tone makes Wally drag his head over to where he last recalls him being. Robin's unconscious body lays there, and it's then that he remembers that he's not the only one suffering from this.

He looks back at Batman and pushes himself up on shaky legs, M'gann, Artemis, Conner, and Kaldur quickly embrace him in a hug, Robin's deranged laughter still rumbling around in their ears long after they're brought home.
Batman tightens his jaw as he stares at the limp, smiling face of the Joker lying on the ground just feet in front of him. Time seems to freeze for a few seconds as his mind grasps the connection to the dead body and the gun resting inches from that frozen, hated smile on the slack face of his biggest enemy to the crowbar in the boy with bleached white skin and dreadfully familiar ebony black hair dressed in an agonizingly painful clown costume’s hands.

His gaze snaps up to look at said boy when he hears him saying, “What say you, KF?” in the innocent tone of voice that once made Bruce’s heart melt. He’s still tensed, his mind trying to comprehend how Joker could have done something like this to his boy in a span of three weeks. The boy’s small speech continues, every word seeming to melt the ice that’s preventing the Dark Knight from moving.

“One hit for every single damn time I was held there and forced to watch you be beat. Or two hits for every. Single. Time. That you promised me the League was coming? Told me they’d be there at any moment?”

He’s glad that the boy hasn’t turned around yet, because Bruce doesn’t know what he’ll do once they inevitably face each other. There’s so much that needs to be fixed… so much to explain… so much to apologize for…

Apologizing for not finding him sooner, apologizing for not knowing that Joker was behind the drug dealings that he sent the Team to look into. Santa Prisca was Bane’s land, and the oversized man on steroids was even seen on the island. That combined with kobra venom traces were enough for Batman to send the Team to look into it. He should’ve known better. Should’ve…

Hands raised to bring the crowbar smashing into Wallace’s skull, and Batman removes a batarang from his utility belt. It’s millimeters from leaving his fingers when the boy lurches backward with a speed that, despite the circumstances, made Batman’s heart flutter with pride. Of course he taught the boy how to move quickly and increase his speed to peak human conditioning for a fourteen year old.

The Flash skids to a halt right in front of Wallace and turns to reassure him. The boy moves before Batman can open his mouth. He watches Flash crumple to the ground, and it’s at this point that Batman’s suspicions are confirmed. He takes half a step back, obscuring himself entirely in the shadows of the room. He gaze sweeps across all members of Young Justice; Miss Martian’s tears, Superboy’s anger and potential fear, Kaldur’s broken walls of defense, Artemis’s face struck dumb with shock and realization, and Wallace’s somewhat blank face, his previous look of numb acceptance rivaled with a concealed shriek as he watches Robin plunge the fork of the crowbar through Flash’s leg.

“Nuh-uh,” he sing songs, “No interrupting our playdate, flashy boy!” He giggles at this before going deathly quiet.

The quiet shatters Bruce’s heart. Dick has always been such a lively boy, so full of charisma,
enthusiasm, good vibes, a warm heart, and the desire to always be moving or talking. All the traits that made Bruce come to love the boy and think of him as something very close to a son. He dare not think son because Bruce knows that he is no father, nor does he want to strip that title from John Grayson.

Batman can feel rather than see the lack of smile over the boy’s face. His shoulders tense in preparation.

Dick strokes the crowbar admiringly, drops of blood flinging off the fork of the metal and making a wet plopping noise as it hits the ground, the drops now providing the only noise. Even Barry has gone quiet. “Do you really think I don’t see you?” he asks, and this time—it of course it just has to be this time—he sounds so undeniably like Robin, no, Richard Grayson, that Bruce’s heart metaphorically *shatters* and if it weren’t for the actuality of the situation that confirmed this moment to be real, Bruce would have thought himself to be having a nightmare, but it wasn’t. You wake up from nightmares. This is hell itself, and it’s giving Bruce the biggest middle finger in the universe right now.

He takes a quiet yet deep breath, because despite everything this is still his boy and he made a promise to two gravestones five years ago that he intends to keep. He doesn’t want to set the boy of it at all possible. “I excepted nothing less.”

The boy’s head tilts to the side impossibly far, and Batman is mildly surprised that he didn’t just snap his neck right there and then. The creaks and cricking noises it makes as his spinal cord cracks confirm something to Batman. He’s getting his muscles ready for a fight. There’s no walking out of this one without a fight.

“Three weeks,” Dick drawls, his tone making him sound entirely sane and unbroken.

Batman takes another half step back, refusing to allow himself to be fooled into what Dick is doing. He’s not going to allow his defenses to fall by trying to explain himself now. He makes a mental note to add serious mental trauma to the list he’s already created for possible factors Joker used in order to break his boy.

When Dick whirls around, crowbar raised high in the air and plunges himself exactly when Batman is hiding, he’s ready. He knew Dick would use that single sentence he spoke to calculate where he was hiding in the shadows.

Smart boy. Weak boy. Strong boy. Broken boy. Intelligent boy. Unstable boy. Precious boy. Batman jerks to the side, and Dick staggers as his attack misses by a long shot. He puts his hand in his utility belt and pulls something out as Dick lunges once more. The batarang expands and Batman brings it up. The two metals clash and he grabs the crowbar with one hand.

Dick’s inhuman smile and soulless eyes seem to dare Batman to hit him, and dammit does he not want to have to. But he knows that he must, so he swallows back the hard lump growing in his throat and forces back the memory of fighting Robin on the Watchtower almost a year ago.

Batman tugs on the crowbar, pulling it harshly towards him, ignoring the chuckling consuming his boy. Dick’s grip is relentless, so Batman raises his knee. The boy’s stomach collided with his knee, and the breath is knocked entirely out of him, but his hands remain glued to the metal.

He tugs it towards himself two more times before the force is enough to rip the crowbar out of Dick’s hands, the weapon landing somewhere behind him. He slumps to the floor, his arms wrapped tightly around his chest. The Dark Knight’s jaw clenches. He’s pretty sure the crack he’d heard came from
his boy’s ribcage.

Bruce leans down to check, but Dick rolls himself away and uses one hand to propel himself to his feet, his face warping into a half scowl, half smirk.

He lurches forward to launch another attack, his fists raised, that shaggily black hair stabbing his eyeballs and making him thrash his head back and forth as if to rid himself of it. Batman steps to the side at the last possible moment, his own arm shooting out and snagging Dick’s right before using the boy’s own momentum to slam him stomach first on the floor.

Batman quickly grabs Dick’s other arm and wrenches it behind his back, a knee pressing down on the boy’s back to keep him from getting away.

Dick squirms and struggles, his feet trying to find a foothold somewhere, harsh laughs ripping his vocal cords and crushing Bruce’s soul.

“You fucking asshole!” Batman hears Wallace screaming from somewhere behind him. He takes note of the anger in his tone of voice and can picture him walking up, his hands clenched into fists at his sides and his face twisted into a snarl. “What gave you the right to go and leave us all alone? What gave you the right to just go and let them turn you into this?”

A sob sounds and is quickly followed by a thud, indicating that Wallace has collapsed to the floor.

Batman carefully slides the needle into Dick’s neck, his thumb pushing down and administering the sedative. Dick’s struggling continues for a minute while the drug spreads through his system before slowing down, his chuckling finally dying away as he falls unconscious. The amount of time this took worries Bruce. Dick had to have been exposed to sedatives and who-knows-what-other-drugs during the past three weeks numerous times if he was starting to build up a tolerance to it.

It’s only when he’s positive the boy is out that he stands and looks around. Martian Manhunter and Superman have freed the rest of the Team by now, and their inhibitor collars lay in a broken mess on the ground, leaving only Wallace left who still has it on.

They stand in a small circle, all of them pointedly refusing to look in his direction and face the bleached white face of their teammate. He makes eye contact with Barry, who nods silently at him while he slowly stands up and tests his leg. Another sob sounding from the young speedster causes Batman to jerk in his direction.

He walks towards him and places a hand on Wallace’s shoulder. Years of taking care of Dick taught him that children tend to appreciate physical contact when they’re upset. He looks up, his hands still wrapped tightly around his legs, and makes eye contact with the Dark Knight. “Wallace.” He doesn’t say anything else, and he’s suddenly glad Dick chose Wally to be his best friend, for Wally seems to understand what he wants to say but can’t, both out of risking bruising his ego and because he isn’t a man that can explain feelings or gratitude.

Wally glances at Dick’s unconscious form, and Batman follows his gaze. He senses Wally looking
back at him before pushing himself up on shaky legs. While Wally moves toward his friends, Bruce moves back to his boy.

He stops a foot away and simply stares down, his eyes finally noticing all the little details he missed in his first scan of the boy when he had first entered the room. The sunken face, the thin hands, the slight smell of burnt skin that made his nose curl and damn it he wants to wring Joker’s neck for electrocuting his boy, and the barely visible scar that looks suspiciously like a J engraved into his cheek. And who knows what else is currently hidden behind that clown outfit.

He starts to lean down but stops, his hands clenching into fists at his sides. He should’ve done more… spent more time awake… should’ve known Joker was the only criminal crazy enough to do something like this.

A hand touches his shoulder, and when he doesn’t react, it hesitantly yet reassuringly gives a small squeeze. “This… this wasn’t your fault, Bruce,” Superman says. Batman whips his head around and glares, now completely recomposed. “Right. No names in the field. Regardless, this wasn’t your fault. Are you bringing him up to the Watchtower?” he asks, his hand falling back to his side.

Batman turns back to the boy and removes the cape from his back. He wraps it around Dick’s thin frame before lifting him up, one arm under his knees and the other under his armpits. “No. I have a friend.”

“Alfred?”

“No. Go help Conner.”

oOo

Month: 1

Day: 1

Dick knew the rules; when captured, try to escape. If you can’t, try to avoid harm. If you can’t do that, don’t let your actions get you killed. And above all else, stay alive.

Bruce scowls in distaste after watching the horrific clip of Dick’s torture from the last three weeks. He didn’t follow the rules, but Bruce couldn’t bring himself to blame the boy. He only could’ve been put through so much before the instinct to purely try and escape overcame any rational thinking he should have been able to conjure.

He knows that Joker did not put everything he did to the boy on the old tape. As much as he refuses to admit it, he’s scared of that fact. He has already watched the tape three times to pinpoint any faces to track down and to give Leslie and Alfred all bruises and wounds they should be looking for. Alfred knows Bruce is just looking for something to do to avoid looking at the heavily sedated boy.

Much to Alfred’s disagreement, Dick is strapped to a metal table in case he wakes up while being washed. Even sedated, Dick’s body gives little twitches as if trapped in a nightmare, though he doesn’t whimper or jerk around like he usually did before his abduction.

Alfred dips the cloth into a pink tinted bucket of water before bringing it back up and rubbing circles around the boy’s arm. This process continues for several minutes before he stops to clean the bucket and get a fresh batch of water. He brings more band aids back on the way and purposefully doesn’t look at the boy’s other arm which is littered with band aids from scabs breaking open during cleansing.
He’s not sure if he’ll ever get the memory of a terrified Bruce jumping out of the batmobile and scooping up a purple, white, and green lump of something out of the passenger seat. The only other time he’d seen the man so scared was when his parents died. It was only when that lump turned into Richard that Alfred felt fear. He didn’t know what was going on at the time, but he knew who had the boy and that the sight he was seeing wasn’t a good sign, even if he’d been rescued. Stripping the boy revealed a multitude of bruises and contusions covering his entire torso, the black-purplish markings standing out even over the obviously bleached skin.

It’s when he moves to get a new cloth that the boy starts twitching in his restraints. Eyelids flutter for a long time before red rimmed, blue eyes snap open, a feral grin plastering itself across his face. A loud growling noise rumbles in the back of his throat.

Bruce is alerted by the strange noise, and Dick all but throws himself against his restraints the millisecond he steps through the door. He half snarls, half growls as he jerks at the restraints on his arms.

Bruce holds his arms out in front of him. “Calm down, Dick. Everything is going to be okay.”

Dick ignores the man’s voice and continues to thrash around, neck craned forward and teeth snapping as if trying to reach far enough and bite him.

Alfred, who had backed up to Bruce’s side, approaches Dick’s side, his body stiff and eyes assessing the situation. He gazes down at the young boy, his face softening. “Master Dick…” he murmurs. He’s not sure if it’s the familiar sound of his soft, English accent or just the gentle tone of voice he used, but Dick’s bucking and thrashing halts. Blue eyes flicker up to meet his own, recognition flashing across the boy’s face. “I must say,” he continues in that same, gentle voice, “Despite the circumstances, it is good to have you home, sir. I have missed hearing your voice at the dinner table.”

Dick tilts his head to the side, a soft smile gracing his young face.

Bruce observes from the doorway, his body tense and ready in case the boy was to try anything on the butler. He trusts Alfred to be able to protect himself and not let his guard down, but right now, Dick’s behavior is unpredictable and there is no way to guess what is going on inside his mind.

Dick’s mouth opens as if his wishes to speak and he smacks his lips together several times, his tongue flicking across his lips to wet them. When he does speak, his voice is hoarse from abuse. “… Alfred?”

The corners of Alfred’s lips twitch upwards a centimeter. “Indeed, sir.”

Dick turns his attention to Bruce and stares at him for a long time as though waiting for him to speak. Bruce, however, is too busy trying to read the boy’s face and figure out what he is planning. That and his mouth went dry when he said Alfred’s name.

All thoughts of reading the boy abandon his mind when Dick’s gaze turns to something behind him and his eyes widen in fear. His chest heaves. Bruce whirls around, fists raised in defense. Nothing is there.

A ripping noise behind him.

A whoosh of air.

A smacking noise.

A grunt of surprise.
Bruce turns around once more, already bolting for the bed, expecting Alfred to be on the floor, but he’s wrong. Rather than the butler on the ground, Bruce sees Dick’s left fist uncomfortably close to Alfred’s face, his wrist caught in Alfred’s grip. He’s not even sure how in the hell Dick managed to slip out of the leather strap.

Dick begins screaming through already torn vocal cords and rips his arm free from Alfred’s grip. Fear unlike anything Bruce has ever seen before lights in Dick’s eyes the moment he catches his arm and presses it back against the bed, his free arm struggling to find the leather strap. Alfred assists in keeping the boy’s arm still, and it’s a struggle even then.

Head rolling across the pillow in desperation, Dick moans and a tear rolls down his face. “No… god, please… let me go… someone help me, someone please help me!” His chest heaves desperately for air, the smirk gone from his face and his teeth clenched tightly together.

The strap is finally latched to the boy’s wrist. Bruce turns to Alfred and speaks loudly in order to be heard over Dick’s shrieks. “What’s going on, Alfred?”

Alfred walks over to the medical table and pulls up a syringe filled with a sedative and returns. He gazes sadly at the young boy he’d helped raise over the past five years. Dick’s eyes are hazy and unfocused, yet still filled with fear. “… I’m not sure, Master Bruce. I do not believe that it is us he is seeing.”

Dick has stopped moving, his chest halted as though terrified to the point that he physically cannot move. Bruce grasps the boy by his shoulders, ignoring how bony he is beneath Bruce’s hands, and starts shaking him in an attempt to snap him out of it. Dick doesn’t respond.

“Dick!” Bruce shouts desperately. He repeats the boy’s name several times over. Still no response or confirmation that he’s been heard. Brilliant blue eyes start to flutter closed from the lack of oxygen.

“RICHARD!” he hollers with a harsh jerk on the boy’s shoulders.

Dick gasps loudly, air sweeping into his lungs so forcibly that Bruce was positive it had to have felt like acid rushing down his throat. He continues to gasp, and giggles find their way from his mouth, the smirking planted back across his face. He twists against Bruce’s grip and rolls his head as far to the side as he can. He eyes the syringe in Alfred’s hand, eyebrows furrowing.

A sweaty hand runs over his hair. “Dick… it’s okay, Dickie… you’re okay… we’re going to fix you…”

He glances through his peripheral vision, not wanting to move. “I knew… you wanted… me dead,” he manages to say between gasps and chuckling. “Go… ahead. Prove him right, Bruce.”

Bruce sits on the corner of the bed and bends over his damaged ward, his palm directly against his temple. Fingertips curl a little, a grieved, soft smile crossing Bruce’s face. He notices the burning forehead of his boy for the first time. “No, Dickie… no. I’ve got you now. I’m not going to hurt you. Everything is going to be alright.”

 Apparently Alfred, who had been slowly inching his way towards the duo, took too big a step. Panicked eyes dart back to the old man and the syringe. He’s starting to panic again, his breathing labored and forced once more.

He pulls against his restraints, twisting beneath the unforgiving hold of the leather. “Let me out of these things!” he shrieks, fighting even harder when Bruce tries to calm him. “Let me out let me out
LET ME OUT!” His joints and muscles creak and groan, threatening to snap as he twists them in ways that not even an acrobat were meant to go.

“Calm down, Dick! Just calm down!” And then, “Alfred, he’s going to hurt himself! I’ll hold him down!”

He fights even harder when a hand pushes his head down against the pillow while an arm pins his chest. “Please, no!” he screams. “Don’t!”

Bruce places a gentle kiss to Dick’s head. “Dickie, I… I’m so sorry,” he murmurs into his ear.

And then the needle pierced his lower neck, liquid already seeping into his vein and spreading throughout his body. He slowly started relaxing, his body giving into the lull of the drugs. “He was right,” Dick gasps weakly, waterlogged eyes starting to slip closed. “… You’re going to kill me…”

The two adults could only stand and watch in horror as the drugs took full effect. Bruce stood up and brought his hands to his sides. Silence ensued for a full minute after the sound of garbled, protesting murmurs came to a halt.

“You think he’s seeing Joker and the other bastards that helped him.” His face curled in disgust. “You really think certain actions will send him back to what he endured at the old Arkham building?”

“It would not be the first time the young master has hallucinated something that was not there,” he responded in a despondent tone. “I will make some scones for when he arises from his ‘slumber’.”

oOo

Month: 2

Day: 15

Alfred journeyed stiffly through the halls of Wayne Manor with a tray of food and tea held in his fingertips. The steaming liquid barely swirls with each quiet footstep as he balances the tray with all the experience of his age. He makes his way past the ballroom, through the parlor, and walks through the massive grandfather clock that hides the headquarters of the infamous Batman, protector of Gotham City.

Weeks had come and gone with very few changes noticed in the boy’s behavior. A brief discussion with Leslie Thompkins over where Dick should recover in resulted in his moving up to his own bedroom. All furniture minus his bed had been removed in order to make sure he could not harm himself—or others—as well as to ensure the adults that he couldn’t try and hide anything anywhere. Bruce now bore the scars of that mistake.

Leslie advised putting up posters and pictures of friends and family on the boy’s walls to try and bring him out of the hole he’d dug himself in to protect his teammates. That tactic hadn’t worked, and several photos were found torn and strewn across the barren floor the day after they were put up. They changed their method of having photos of friends on a different wall as the poster of the Flying Graysons as the pictures of Alfred and Bruce. The poster was the only thing ever left untouched, and they quickly realized that Dick must be avoiding staring at that wall, for when they put all pictures on that wall, they remained whole and untouched.

Bruce, however, never witnessed these troubles himself. Alfred informed him of them when the man requested updates, but otherwise has yet to see his ward ever since that first night. In fact, Bruce has
been spending most of his down in the batcave, only ever seeming to leave when it’s necessary—a villain breaking out of Arkham, or to make an appearance to the media, business, and social world as billionaire playboy Bruce Wane.

But he hasn’t visited Dick since the night he brought him back to the cave. Not once.

Alfred reaches the end of the long staircase, strolling into the main room of the cave. Bats flutter around and screech from the shadows as a greeting, and Alfred sets the platter down on the computer module and takes off the lid.

Bruce turns his chair to look up at the old man, the lights on the ceiling illuminating his face, and it’s then that he gets his first good look at Master Bruce in over a week. Dark circles encompass his eyelids while blood red is the neighbor of his blue irises. It’s obvious he hasn’t shaved in quite some time, for a small beard and mustache is beginning to take over the once smooth chin and face.

“I brought some dinner for you, sir,” he says, glancing pointedly at the platter.

Bruce stares at the ham and bean soup for a few seconds. “I’m not hungry, Alfred,” came the blunt response.

Alfred frowns and places the lid back on the thin sheet of metal. “I already have one child refusing to eat, sir. I do not need a second.”

“… He’s still not eating?”

“I am afraid not, sir. At least, not of his free will. I still must insist upon showing him that poster to get him to eat.” He continues, his voice sounding flatter than usual. “Dr. Leslie Thompkins is upstairs with him as we speak, but she has yet to make any progress with him.”

When Bruce does nothing except to run his hands over his face, Alfred continues. “Perhaps… a psychiatrist would be most helpful in-”

“No, Alfred! Absolutely not!” Bruce intervenes. He levels a glare at the butler and earns himself one in return. He sags back in his chair after a long moment. “I don’t want anyone else involved in this. Not if it can be avoided.”

Alfred raises an eyebrow. “If I may, sir, everyone became involved the instant the Joker took the Young Justice team.”

“No. Dinah is not being dragged into this. Leslie has this covered.”

“Then you pray that Miss Thompkins will be enough,” he replies coolly, his eyes chips of ice. “If she is unable to help the young master back to health, I will take it upon myself to ensure he receives the help necessary.”

Without another sound from either men, Alfred leaves, the platter of steaming food left behind along with the echo of Alfred’s threat. Leslie is there to meet him when he exits from the grandfather clock.

He settles himself into a chair while Leslie watches in awe. Of all the years she has helped Bruce, she has never once seen Alfred sit down in the house, and was coming to believe the old butler never sits, sleeps, or eats until now.

“Has Bruce seen him at all?” she questions, breaking the silence after a full minute of nothing. She glances away, as if the sight of Alfred sitting is something that no one should ever see.
“Only once, I’m afraid,” comes the steady reply.

“Then what has Bruce been up to?” Her voice grows steely and suspicious. “I haven’t seen him once since you called me for help, and that was almost two months ago. Is he getting himself into trouble again?”

“When is Master Bruce not getting himself into trouble?” he retorts, sounding so uncharacteristically unlike Alfred that Leslie actually has to take a step back in surprise. Even then, his sarcasm is hidden, but years of experience and encounters allow her to pick up on it.

She squints her eyes and studies his figure, taking note of the many scratch and bite marks littering his arm. It’s then that she realizes that Alfred is truly stretched thin, weary and tired. If she didn’t know any better, she would guess Alfred wouldn’t mind a bottle of wine.

Instead of mentioning this, she responds. “What’s he gotten himself into this time?”

He hesitated and leaned back in his seat, concerning Leslie. “He has convinced himself he is of more use finding those responsible for Master Dick’s condition than to pay him a visit.”

A second passes. Then: “What?”

A heartbeat of consideration is taken before she tears herself down the stairs, ignoring Alfred’s cry of, “Wait!”

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Month: 3
Day: 2
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Bruce sighs in resignation as Dick spews another mouthful of mashed vegetables right back into Bruce’s face. He silently wipes it off with a napkin and tries once more.

Dick falls back from sitting on his bed and rolls onto the floor with a loud thud. Chuckles quickly follow, indicating to Bruce that dinner time is over. He gazes at the barely touched container of mush and sighs once more.

“I’ve studied every one of Joker’s habits at Arkham both before and after I took you in,” he murmurs to the figure jerking around on the floor, “And he never behaved this way, so why are you acting so differently?”

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Month: 4
Day: 7
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Another plus side to moving Dick to his room, Bruce and Alfred were both quick to realize, is that they can tell whenever he’s up to something at night. Bruce’s room resides directly across from the boy’s, while Alfred’s is a little ways down from that.

In the beginning, the chortled laughter late in the night haunted Alfred and prevented him from getting much sleep unless he move elsewhere, but now the thumps, thuds, and cackling provides comfort for the two other residents. Noise promises that Dick is exactly where he needs to be and that Gotham City is safe.

The thudding only stops after Batman comes back from patrol, though he seems to somehow sense
when Bruce takes a night off, for silence ensues the house just after midnight.

Over the three days, however, noise has been a promised constant. Neither men dare to go through another scenario of pinning Dick down while trying to jam a needle into his body to sedate him, especially with a straightjacket only securing his arms. Those legs and feet certainly delivered a lot of damage to Leslie’s stomach the first time she invaded what he apparently deemed his personal space.

It was easy enough the night Bruce brought Dick back to take one look at that stark white face and clown suit and picture Joker’s face instead. But once all the bleach had been removed… it was almost a nightmare within itself to see Dick’s face twisting into such horrific postures, his once brilliantly beautiful blue eyes glazed over and crazed, begging for blood and gore.

Now it pains Bruce to look at that face and try to get him to eat something… anything.

There was silence, a constant. It plagued Bruce, a constant that didn’t end.

oOo

Month: 6

Day: 17

The start of healing

Pure silence meets Bruce’s ears as he ascends the stairs to go to his room. Alfred is in the kitchen on the other end of the house making himself a cup of tea, having told Bruce when he came back from patrol that Dick had gone dead silent the second he left for patrol. Something told him that there wouldn’t be much sleep on anyone’s end that night, and so he’d simply sat in Dick’s bedroom, watching as the teenager merely gazed upon the pictures of his friends and family. It was when Bruce came back that he left his vigil.

Already prepared for the worst, his whole body tensing in anticipation, Bruce is still dumbstruck at the dead silence in the hallway. It was too silent. Unsettlingly silent.

He races to the doorway leading to Dick’s room and pauses before opening it. If Dick is asleep, he doesn’t want to wake the boy. It could be counterproductive in Dick to be woken after finally sleeping before Batman returned.

Taking a deep breath, Bruce pushes the door open without a noise. The room is exactly as he imagined it. Pictures of Dick with various heroes, a poster of the Flying Graysons, and a picture of Dick, Bruce, and Alfred all smiling cover the wall opposite of him while the others lay barren. A big bed lays next to the wall on his left. Everything else is completely barren minus the windows with bulletproof glass to his right. The curtains were shut.

Dick is sitting criss-cross in the middle of the floor, his back to Bruce. His head is tilted slightly to the side.

“Dick?”

No response. In fact, there’s no sign that he’s even heard anything or noticed Bruce’s presence.

He carefully makes his way around to the boy’s front. Dick’s face is grim, his lips pressed into a thin line while his eyes have a stare down with the wall. Following his gaze, Bruce finds himself staring at a photo of Dick, Wally, and Roy making faces at one another. *This was taken on his twelfth birthday*, he recalls.

Returning his gaze to the teenager, he witnesses a single, silent tear snake down a (thankfully,
naturally) pale face and drip onto his shorts. Still, no indication is made that Dick is aware of Bruce being in the room.

He kneels down and slowly, carefully pulls Dick into a hug, gently running a hand through greasy, black strands of hair, much like he did when he first took him in and witnessed firsthand the agony of watching a child cry after a nightmare. Bruce is quick to decide the teenager needs a bath soon. He’ll have to sedate him while he’s between his stage of groggily waking up and snapping into erratic behavior. *And a haircut*, he notices dully. *I’ll add that to the list of things to get done tomorrow.*

Bruce pulls him in tighter. Nothing happens for several minutes, and then giggles erupt from the back of the boy’s throat. He backs away and returns to the doorway, his eyes closing while he runs a hand through his own hair. “It’ll be okay, Dickie,” he promises before the giggles could become too loud to be heard over.

He’s overstayed his welcome. The door closes with a soft swishing noise, quickly accompanied by the clink of a lock.

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*Month: 8  
Day: 24*

Alfred blinks once. Twice. Three times.

After attempting one night of allowing Dick to roam around his room without a straightjacket hugging his arms at his sides, the one thing he did not expect was to find Master Dick curled up in his bed, the palms of his hands covering his eyes. The curtains are still closed while every photograph taped to the wall was flipped around.

“I brought you lunch, sir,” he announces after taking the sight in.

“You should go,” Dick croaks in reply, his voice raspy from misuse. “I- I could hurt you, Alfie.”

“You would do nothing of the sort.” Though he’s reassuring the boy, he remains at the doorway with the platter of food, waiting for him to take it.

Over the past two weeks, the teenager seemed to be taking more control over himself and restraining from returning to the snappish, unpredictable personality he’d assumed while taken hostage. After going five days without letting out any sort of laughter or lashing out, Alfred decided to give him a chance to prove himself. So seeing him curled up and covering his eyes from the world was not at all what he had expected.

Alfred fixes the boy with a scrutinizing stare. He squirms on his bed. “I must insist you eat, sir. If you are to feel well, starving yourself is not the way to do it.”

“… I hurt them, Alfie,” comes the quiet response. “I… he’s here, Alfie, he’s always here, always watching…” He shudders violently and peeks up at the butler through his parted fingertips. “Always laughing…”

Alfred blinks again. He takes a few steps forward until he’s right in front of the teenager and puts a gentle hand on his shoulder, the other hand putting the platter of food on the small table next to the bed. Dick flinches as though expecting to be hit. “I beg your pardon?”

“… Joker… he’s here right now, whispering in my ear, laughing, telling me I’m just as bad as he is.
That we’re both the same!”

His shoulders slump. It’s time to get some outside help. “Master Dick.”

“I can never return to normal, Alfie… you know this. I can never be the Batman. He doesn’t kill. He doesn’t give in…”

His gaze hardens and he removes his hand from the teen’s shoulder. He waits patiently until Dick looks up at him. “The bloody hell do you think you are saying, sir?”

Now he has Dick’s full attention. Never had the boy ever heard a cuss word leave the butler’s mouth. But Alfred isn’t done speaking. “Someone can represent what he stands for. The ideals that made Batman: justice, consequence, and ironclad resolve to protect, and there is none other has the wherewithal to uphold those ideals than you, Richard Grayson.”

“I’ve tried to change for him, Alfred. Look where that got me.” He huffed and gestured to the barren room. “I tried so hard to prove to him that I could lead the team that—“

“You don’t change for someone else. You change for yourself.”

Dick smiles softly and eats his food in thoughtful silence. When Alfred leaves, he covers his eyes again.

oOo

Month: 10

Day: 6

Dick?

…

Dick, it’s me. Dinah Lance.

…

Alfred called me in. He said you never remove your hands from your eyes. Why is that?

… he’s here…

There’s no one here, Dick.

Yes there is…

… Okay… who is here? Can you see them?

No…

Then how do you know someone else is here?

I just know…

Are they saying anything?

No…
Dick, there’s no one else in here but me, I promise.

… Swear it?

I swear it.

…

All right, so how are you feeling?

…

Shrugging isn’t an answer. How are you feeling, Dick?

… Okay, I guess…

I see… what are you doing?

Just… laying here…

Then why are you covering your eyes like that?

… He’ll see them…

Who? Who will see your eyes?

… Have to protect everyone… can’t let him see me…

‘He’? Who is he?

... *Him*…

Alright, can you see him right now?

…

There’s no one in here but us.

… I know…

Then why are you covering your eyes?

Can’t take the chance…

What chance?

… Dunno what’s real…

Dick…

… You’re not real, are you…?

… Of course I’m real, Richard-

Don’t call me that…!

I’m sorry.
… Only seven people get to call me that… and five of them are dead…

I’m sorry, Dick. I didn’t mean to upset you like that.

…

You don’t need to hide in a corner, Dick… There’s no one here but us. You trust me, right?

…

You can’t spend the rest of your life hiding behind your hands like that.

…

Okay. How about we go back to talking about-

No…

No what?

… No more talking… I don’t want to talk anymore

How about we make a deal?

…

If you move your hands from your eyes for twenty seconds, I will leave you alone for the rest of the day.

…

Take your hands all the way away- good, just like that. I’ll count, okay?

…

One… two… three… four… five… six… sev-no, Dick, you can’t turn and face the wall. That’s still hiding. There you go, just look right at me. Seven… eight. Nine…

Oh, god, please…

Ten… eleven… twelve, see? Is this all that hard?

…Yes…

Almost there… thirteen, fourteen, fif- no, you have to keep your eyes open… fifteen…

Make it end, please…

Sixteen… seventeen… eighteen, almost there… nineteen… twenty! See, was that all that- Yes, god yes… now get out… please just get out…

I will, but, Dick, did anything happen at all? Did you see ‘him?’

… not this time…

Did you expect him to?
You don’t have to hide.

Right, no more talking. I’m leaving…

Dick?

It’s okay, Dick. Everything is going to be okay, you don’t have to cry… it’s okay…

“Hey, chum,” Bruce greets his ward. Dick hardly glances up from his nightstand. Colored pencils lay strewn across the wood. “What’re you drawing? Mind if I take a look?”

Dick shrugs and rolls his chair back some to give Bruce room.

Bruce swallows hard. It’s a drawing of Batman and Robin with many shadowed figures behind them of what could only be Gotham baddies. “Dickie, about Robin-“

“I know,” he cuts it. Bruce stares in shock, surprised that he isn’t going to fight against it. “I agree. Heroes aren’t murderers,” he growls, turning his head to glare at the ground.

“That wasn’t your fault.”

“It was entirely my fault, Bruce! I should’ve…”

“What?”

“I should’ve known better!” he screams, grasping his hair and tugging harshly. He pulls his knees up to his chest. “I should’ve been better. You never would have fallen for such an obvious trap!”

“I sent you and the team on that mission,” he reminds the teen. “Hey, look at me, Dickie. Everyone makes mistakes. It’s how we become better. You learn, and you correct.”

Dick turns his icy gaze up to his guardian. “I’m not like you, Bruce! I’m not! You would never kill anyone!”

Bruce kneels. “You were left with no choice, Dick. You’re right. You’re not like me. You’re better than me. I became Batman because I could never get over the murder of my parents. You became Robin to honor the lives of your family. That is something I can never do because deep down, I’m not a good person, but deep down, you are. It’s not who we are underneath, but what we do that defines us. I’m the one raising you, but you’re the one that gets to decide what kind of man you are going to be.”*

You don’t have to hide.

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Dick lands the quadruple flip with a pleased grunt. He starts when someone starts clapping and casts a mortified glance at his legal guardian, who is sitting on the bench. Even Alfred is smiling at him. He didn’t hear them come in; he’d been so focused on his workout and acrobatics.

No one says anything for the longest time while Dick slows the pounding of his heart and heaving chest. Sweat pours down his face and body. He glances at the clock. 5:28. He’d been working out for over five hours. After a year of minimal exercise, he has to work extra hard to gain back the muscle and skills lost. He’d done fairly well over the past month.

Deciding there’s nothing to say, Dick sprints back to the parallel bars and uses them to fly up to the miniature trapeze. He swings, flips, and twists for several more minutes, performing feats that impress Bruce and Alfred.

This continues for several minutes until Dick’s hands, which could only be covered slick with sweat, slip from the bar. He flails in the air before twisting and landing in a tumble just before he would’ve landed flat on his back.

Bruce shoots to his feet and hurries his way over to Dick, who is crouched over his knees, head resting against the floor while he trembles, his body shaking fiercely. Bruce crouches next to him in concern.

“Dick?” He reaches out carefully and put a hand of the boy’s shoulder. Dick jerks away.

“Don’t,” he gasps out. “Don’t- Don’t touch me…”

Bruce frowns.

A long silence follows. No one speaks. No one moves except for the slowing tremors coursing through Dick’s body. Bruce just watches, ready to help when Dick is ready. He leans back after a long while, his knees drawn up to his chest while he wipes his hand down his face, getting rid of some of the sweat that had formed.

“Bruce…?” he asks after a long time, refusing to meet his guardian’s eyes. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course, kiddo,” he replies.

Dick says nothing, his eyes glazing over and staring blankly at the wall. He wonders if the teenager is imagining something else, but then Dick shakes his head and wearily looks up at him. “If… If you were sent back in time to the night my family fell, knowing everything that has happened… all the trouble I would cause… would you still have taken me in all those years ago?”

Bruce doesn’t hesitate. It doesn’t take anything thinking or pondering. “In a heartbeat.”

He stands and offers Dick a hand. Dick gladly takes it, and Bruce glances up at the bars hanging above before returning his warm and prideful stare to his son. He smiles. “In fact, I think you could teach me a thing or two.”

A bright smile grows across Dick’s face, but no one is concerned. They’ve long missed the smiling boy that brightened their lives. It was about time he found his way home.
Month: 18
Day: 1

It is time.

After months of recuperating, recovering, training, and overcoming, it is time.

He stares at the zeta tube before him, his face grim. He hasn’t seen them in so long… he doesn’t know how much they’ve changed… they don’t know how much he has changed. He’s worried for this reason. The last time they saw him he was going to kill them. He can only hope they’ve overcome that trauma. He can only hope they were given as much help as he was.

He doesn’t smile much anymore, but when he does, it is well called for. He shouldn’t startle any of them at all for that reason. Things have changed… he has changed.

No more clowns, no more torture, no more murder.

He told Bruce everything that happened to him and his friends two months prior to this moment, glad that Bruce had waited for him to be ready to talk about it instead of flat out demanding.

He’s proud of the progress he’s made, and can only hope he can earn back his friends’ trust. After all, he is still a member of the team.

Rubbing his hands off on his sweatpants for the tenth time in what felt like an hour but was actually only a minute, he slowly lets out a deep breath.

He’s dressed in a blue tshirt and black sweatpants, his sunglasses locked up in his room. No more secrets. None of it. It is just him, which makes him glad that Bruce is away at work and not here, because he doesn’t know if the man is okay with the team knowing their secret identities. But that doesn’t matter. What matters is that he’s ready to return and take whatever they have to throw at him over the whole situation.

Discretely, he wonders how much they’ve changed in the past nineteen months. He doubts Megan is still innocent. He feels horrible for that. He traumatized them all. He doesn’t have to even see them yet to know that. But he’s going to try and make up for it.

"Give me one hour, Jay, okay?"

"One hour, Dickie-bird, and that’s it."

The sixteen year old lets out another deep breath and steps forward. Dick feels the familiar whoosh of the zeta tube turning on.

Recognized: Robin B01

Today is the day.
Reconciliation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Silence is the only greeting offered to anyone who dared visit Mount Justice—well, more like visiting the team. Many months have passed, along with several therapy sessions with Black Canary, though no words were ever spoken about the subject of desired attention. Then those came to a halt, and Black Canary stopped coming altogether. They were never offered any reason why, nor did they ask for one. It was just a quiet acceptance that she knew they needed to work it out amongst themselves. Even then, it was rare for everyone to be in the mountain at once, and if they were, even rarer that they could all be seen in the same room. It brought back horrible memories of a boy on the verge of killing his best friend.

The teens are residing in what has been deemed the living room, the kitchen directly behind them in case they decide to grab something to eat. Kaldur is sitting on the arm chair next to the entrance/exit of the small room. Wally, Artemis, Conner, and M’gann are all on the L-shaped sofa in front of their leader, though Wally and Artemis are on the portion facing the television while the other couple is facing toward Kaldur.

Kaldur spent more time in Atlantis that up on the surface world now. He briefly debated quitting the team, but ultimately decided that as leader, he could not. He acted as the stable rock for them to stand on; ready to leave and follow his own path once they too were stable. He’d hoped that each individual member of the team would be better by now, but even after a year and a half, little conversation was ever made. They have improved, but most of the time they would sit in the living room—much like they are now—in awkward yet comfortable silence. He stares now at the static screen of the television, lost in thought.

Being an ex assassin and used to being betrayed, Artemis was the least fazed and therefore the furthest along to fully returning to her old self. She has hardly been seen patrolling with Green Arrow, though she appears whenever it seems he desperately needs help. The thrill and surge of adrenaline doesn’t hit her nearly as much as it used to, and she’s debating retiring from any and all hero work. Senior year is about to start, so she needs to focus on getting into a good college. Squeezing Wally’s hand softly, Artemis tilts her head so that it rests on his shoulder.

As a speedster, most would assume that Wally would be the first to overcome the trauma of what transpired during the chilly winter. That speed and quick thinking is exactly what has prevented him from being able to move on. Millions of ‘what if?’ scenarios fill his mind every day, and with each one, he can’t help but become angry at his best friend for giving into the clown. Regardless of showing that some, albeit small, part of him was still in there by killing the Joker, if only he’d held on for one more day… Wally releases bits and pieces of his anger every time he goes out running with Uncle Barry, whether it be punching a thug harder than usual, showing signs of aggression towards the Rogues or even towards his uncle, it’s been made apparent that he’s the most damaged and heartbroken. He too is debating on retiring and is tempted to ask Artemis to go with him to college so they can live in an apartment together. Turning his head, Wally places a kiss to her temple and wraps an arm around her side, his hand brushing up and down her arm. He pulls her a little closer until they’re flush against each other.

To say M’gann was changed by the experience would be an understatement. No more is she the same innocent, bubbly, naïve, food-making Martian the team had come to love. Now she is always serious whenever around her teammates, and has spent the last few months increasing her mental
abilities. She just recently discovered that she can pull information from anyone’s mind, though it leaves her ‘donator’ in a catatonic state. She has yet to show her new skill to Conner, though she plans on it soon. As well as that, her hair is now short and her face more matured. She absentmindedly studies her friends and boyfriend, using her powers to check on their emotions without their being aware. She comes up with nothing but a desolate, eerily calm feeling.

Of all of the team members, Conner had benefitted the most from that night. While Superman had finally started paying attention to him after the League was saved from being under Vandal’s Starrotech. That attention equated to almost nothing in comparison to when they were saved just before Robin could murder Kid Flash with a crowbar. Not only has Clark been helping him in figuring out his limits in strength, but he is now welcome to stay at Clark’s apartment or his grandparent’s farmhouse whenever he wants to. He aids his half-father at least twice a week, sometimes even more often than that. Unnoticed by his teammates, Conner’s head tilts as he hears something he never expected to hear again. Still, he remains seated rather than getting up and finding what he heard.

Nothing is said for several more minutes until Artemis and Wally both apparently decide to speak at the same time. “I have something to tell you-“

Wally flushes red in embarrassment. “You first, babe.”

Artemis looks like she’s about to protest but instead sighs after several long seconds. Four sets of eyes are locked on her face, curious about and waiting to hear what she has to say. She tugs the sleeve of her shirt down.

“I’m retiring,” she says at last.

Kaldur leans forward in his chair, his face looking relieved as though a heavy weight has just been lifted from his shoulder. And yet, he also looks full of remorse, confusing Artemis.

“What? Why?” Conner’s voice draws her attention to him. His head is tilted slightly to the side, trying to figure it out, but it’s the look of horror and maybe even betrayal on M’gann’s face that makes her throat feel dry.

Wally, however, remains quiet.

She pulls on her sleeve again to have an excuse to not meet the troubled gazes. No one sees Conner’s eyes look up at the room’s exit and remain there, staring something down. “As much as I love the thrill of being a hero, that’s not all we are, and not who we’ll always be. I want to have a life outside of the hero business.”

“I’m retiring, too,” Wally cuts in, and now it’s time for Artemis’ head to snap up and look at him. When nothing is said, whether it be out of surprise or loss for words or trying to find something to say or a combination of all three, he offers more for them to digest. “I’ve been offered a chance for a really great scholarship, and a college I’ve been interested in is now interested in me. There’s more to life than hero biz, like Arty said.”

Kaldur offers both a warm smile. “You will be missed, my friends. Will you continue to visit at times?”

They exchange a glance before nodding.

M’gann is about to stand up and give them hugs of good wishes, but a familiar voice halts her in her tracks, and the whole room freezes up with her.
“College? It really has been that long, hasn’t it?” He’s upset, that much is evident with the way there’s a slight tremor to his voice. Even so, his voice is noticeably deeper, a sign of puberty.

Wally is up and in Robin’s face before anyone can so much as blink. One millisecond he is just standing there, the next there is a loud thud as the younger teen’s body is slammed up against a wall, Wally’s forearm holding him several inches above the ground and pressing harshly against his throat. Angry tears burn in Wally’s eyes, and he ignores Artemis’s cry to let him go.

Robin doesn’t react except to widen his eyes in surprise and subconsciously grasp Wally’s arm with his hands and attempt to push him off. Wally refuses to relent and pulls back before slamming the boy once more into the wall, applying more pressure against his throat.

Robin’s eyes are now bulging and he is making wet, smacking noises as he tries desperately to get air into his lungs.”W-Wal-ple-“ he struggles to say.

Behind him, Artemis, M’gann, Conner, and Kaldur are still frozen in shock, unable or unwilling to help the boy who, the last time they had seen or heard of him, had killed one person and had been on the verge of making it two.

Kaldur is the first to snap out of the daze. He’s leader, so it’s up to him to take control. Rushing forward and placing a hand on the speedster’s shoulder, he says, “Kid, let him go.”

“Get off of me!” he snaps back in response, bringing up an elbow and connecting it with the Atlantean’s face before planting a boot into his stomach. “M’gann, check him over,” he snarls.

Surprised and in shock, she complies. Her eyes gleam white, and Robin’s hands flying up to his head, clutching it with all his strength and somehow managed of a groan of pain as the Martian forces her way into his head, digging through his head to make sure he isn’t the killer.

After several moments he goes completely limp in Wally’s choking hold, the sound of his shoes scrabbling against the wall coming to a halt. M’gann’s eyes turn to normal.

“He’s all clean,” she reports, and it’s only then that Wally lets him fall. He lands in an unceremonious heap on the floor.

“Kid,” Kaldur snaps harshly, angrily.

“We had to know!”

Kaldur glances at Robin, who had started coughing as Wally spoke. One hand is curled around his neck in a protective manner as he gently massages it, his shoulders shaking with his coughing. “That may be, but what you did was uncalled for.”

He crouches down and hesitantly puts a hand on the boy’s shoulder. When he isn’t shrugged off, he slips his hand under his arm and helps hoist the younger boy to his feet.

Robin’s stunningly blue eyes stare at Wally. “Ow.”

Artemis joins Kaldur and together the two of them gently help Robin to the couch. They then gradually return to their initial seats with Wally protectively planting himself between her and Robin. For a minute, no words are uttered, all of them choosing instead to think about what they want to say to one another. It has been far too long for them to treat Robin like their younger brother anymore, for they no longer know who it is they are dealing with. Even Robin is uncertain of what to say. His uncertain gaze flickers between Wally and Kaldur as though willing one of them to speak first.
He scuffles his feet against the ground, and Artemis takes note of it. Her stomach churns in grief and guilt. Robin was never uncomfortable. He was supposed to be the unbreakable one, the one who found something to smile at even during the darkest of times. Maybe that’s why the thought of seeing his smile now terrifies her as much as it does… that wicked grin, eyes uncaring and murderous staring them down while a crowbar rests gingerly in his hand as though it has every right to be there…

She forces herself to shake the thought away. That was then. This is now. If he was able to trust her when he knew of her origins without telling the Team, then she owes it to him now to somewhat return that favor. So it’s her who manages to speak first.

When Artemis does speak, however, her voice contains a hint of a squeak in it that makes the Boy Wonder visibly wince, and it’s so not asterosus sounding that she smacks her mouth shut a moment later. “You’re back.”

And oh god is the sight of him wincing so revealing yet so discrete at the same time. Frankly she only notices it because she’s been studying his posture for the last minute. That and everyone’s startled gazes snap towards her at the sound of her voice.

“Yeah,” he replies back. For a fraction of a second, it looks like the corner of his lips start to tug up into a smile, but the moment vanishes and a haunted look appears in those uncertain baby blues. It’s one of the most depressing things that Artemis Crock can say she’s seen in who-knows-how-long.

Wally mouth opens and then closes. He tries again. “I thought you were never coming back.” It sounds like he tried to appear friendly, but it comes out harshly instead.

Robin shrugs it off. “What can I say? I’m just that amazing!”

It would have come off as his old self if it were for anything but what their histories now hold. Had it been said after the return of some deadly injury or poison where they were certain the bird was benched, Wally would have burst out laughing, joking calling him “more unstoppable than Batman.”

But that wasn’t what happened. And the trauma provided them with ruined innocence and the maturity of the Justice League themselves.

“No one expects you to be okay, Robin,” M’gann offers. “Black Canary told us it’ll take years to fully overcome this…”

“And you’re only human,” Conner gruffly adds.

When Robin scowls and opens his mouth to respond, Kaldur finally intervenes. “You are human, my friend. You are allowed to cope like one.”

‘No one expects you to ever be okay again’ is left unspoken but heard.

Robin stares at the floor and rests his elbows on his knees, his hands between his legs. “I know you never expected to see me again, and I know I screwed up. I’ll even admit that I’m not feeling traught right now, but I’m trying, okay?”

He suddenly brings his eyes up to meet Wally’s, a determined look they haven’t seen in a long time reminding them all of what could have been. Who could have been. There’s no mistaking that this fifteen year old in front of them would have been the most successful sidek-partner of them all. The chances of that same person being somewhere under that broken exterior may very well still be somewhere in there deep down, but the possibility of such a thing resurfacing are slim to none.
“I’m trying,” he repeats, and Wally’s rigid form slowly loosens, hardened eyes slowly softening.

Warm air seems to flood the room, and Robin makes sure his renewed confidence is revealed before speaking again. “I’m trying. And the first way to start with that is to be truthful.

“Changing is always harder than staying the same. It takes courage to face yourself in the mirror and look beyond the reflection, to find the you that should have been. Batman always told me that we fall so we can learn to pick ourselves back up. I realize now that he’s wrong. We fall because someone pushes us. We get up to push back. Whenever I look in the mirror I see Joker sitting there, laughing, telling me I’m just as bad as he is, that we’re both the same. But I’ve been trying to push back. I have to. And not for me either. For you. You’re my family and I failed to protect you, and for that I’m sorry. You deserve better.

“My name is Richard John Grayson…”

Chapter End Notes

I'm back! This is now part three of four! It is officially now a four parter, not a three parter. This is because I felt as though there was too much to include and too much going on for everything to be put in part three, so here is the result. This is a direct setup for part four, and part four will start off right after he tells the team his backstory. I'll leave it up to you as to his telling because there are too many stories out there about him telling them his identity to even attempt to make it original. So part four will indeed start off right before he explains what he went through. Sorry for taking so long to post this short bit!

End Notes

Wally's rant at the end isn't because he's mad at Robin, but because he's mad at himself. He couldn't keep his best friend safe, so he blames himself for Joker being about to break Robin. The laughter/cackle (something that used to represent their fun and great memories and is now representing animalistic and demented tendencies) triggers the anger, so he uses the source material (Robin in this case) to vent.

Also, whenever I put "that night" or anything along those lines, they normally aren't taking place during the night. Because of the lack of method for them to keep track of time, and they all typically go to sleep at night and not randomly during the day, it's easier for the Team to imagine that Robin is brought back at night due to that giving them some grasp of how much time is passing, even though they're wrong.

I think I might do a follow up of when Robin returns to normal and talks to the Team. Would you like to read something like that?

One reasoning for why the followup may happen is because I have implied references in here as to what Robin witnesses and goes through (besides stuff blatantly said) that some of you may catch. The followup would be Robin explaining what happened to him and apologizing.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!