Accomplice

by batwayneman

Summary

When Detective Jim Gordon joined the GCPD, he swore to himself that he would be different from the cops that he grew up with. He would be honest, trustworthy, and not bought and paid for by the criminals that ran Gotham. It was far from perfect, but he prided himself on always putting Gotham's citizens first.

And then the Batman showed up.

This complicated things.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
It started with a civilian walking in the GCPD headquarters with a tip.

They are supposed to take every civilian tip off seriously, but it’s been a long time since people bothered to come in. Some officers, like Jim himself, still record civilian tips, though he doesn't know of any that have paid off.

And based on this man’s impassioned rantings about a huge bat monster, Jim doubts that this tip will lead to anything other than a cautionary tale about drinking too much.

“It was huge, just fucking massive! It came outta nowhere, outta the shadows and just about knocks me out with one punch!” Said the man angrily. He uppercutted the air over Jim's desk to demonstrate.

“Can I record your name Mr…?” Jim asked, impatient despite himself. He had been trying to work on his human trafficking case before the man had interrupted.

“Penn, I’m Mike Penn. You guys have to do something about this, there’s a devil on the streets-”

“What were you doing when you saw this… thing, Mr. Penn?” Based on the alcohol that Jim could smell across the desk, and the black eye, Jim had a pretty good idea already.

“Well, I –” Penn suddenly looked rather sheepish, “I was on my way home from the bar, and I saw someone walking by themselves, and I… I pulled a knife and tried to take their wallet.”

“You pulled – are you here to confess to a mugging?” Jim asked incredulously.

“Of course not, don’t be stupid,” Penn said, suddenly agitated again, “I didn’t fucking steal anything because this goddamned bat-monster came down and just about killed me before I could! It was 8 feet tall, with huge wings and pointy ears, and–”

Jim looked at the man over his glasses as he continued raving. Though the black eye was very impressive, he was able to gesticulate a lot for a man who claimed to have nearly died the previous night.

“Sir, did the bat-monster attack the person you were mugging?” Jim interrupted.

“What? No, they ran off. I’m the one who got their face punched in!” He pointed at his swollen eye for emphasis.
“Right,” said Jim wryly, as looked back at the computer to finish typing.

It didn’t take a genius to figure out what happened to Mr. Penn the night before. After a night of heavy drinking, he had decided to cushion his bar tab with someone else’s money, and was too inebriated to see the person who clocked him, whether it was a particularly heroic civilian or his would-be victim.

Jim finished writing the report, including the detail description of the 8-foot tall Bat-thing, and got Penn a drink of water. He helped him walk to the front doors; there was no point in arresting him for the attempted mugging, as he apparently hadn’t taken anything. Besides, the GCPD was far too busy to write a report for a crime that hadn't happened.

“Don’t let us here about you mugging anyone else,” Jim threatened, though even he could tell it was missing his usual heat. Penn looked at him like he was stupid.

“Of course I won’t be mugging anyone, there’s a fucking monster out there!” Penn snapped as he staggered out of the building.

Jim took a deep, calming breath, and returned to his office; to his current case. He expected that to be the last he heard of a bat-demon terrorizing the criminals of Gotham.

Jim was very wrong.

———

It continued to happen. A squad attempted a drug bust only to find all the suspects unconscious and tied up. A rape case was called in, and the police arrived to see the described suspect with a broken nose, hanging upside down from a street light. Harvey Bullock had been negotiating with the mobs for weeks to get permission to interrupt an artillery import, only to arrive at the scene to see everyone tied up, all evidence untouched.

(Later, Bullock told Jim, “That was supposed to one of Maroni’s shipments. Whoever is doing this is playing a dangerous game if they’re ballsy enough to play around with him. He’s not happy.”)

Most of the criminals hadn’t seen the person who had attacked and bound them, but those who had reported similar things.

Sometimes it was a huge monster with wings, who grabbed them and flew into the air before knocking them out. Sometimes it was a shadow demon with the strength of 50 men who moved impossibly fast. Jim convinced about the flight or the speed, but the sizeable bruises that the culprits wore spoke for themselves; the assortment of black eyes, bruised jaws, fractured arms, and broken noses was more than enough proof for him.
Jim had listened to Bullock interrogate one of the arms dealers about what had been able to take down all 14 people involved in the deal.

“It was some kind of Bat-man hybrid thing, with the wings and ears and everything. It came from nowhere and took everyone out, one by one. I tried to shoot at it, but it knocked the gun out of my hand” Her voice had trembled as she spoke.

“Did it say anything?” Bullock had asked, exasperated.

“No. I don’t think it can speak. Or maybe it just has nothing so say.”

Jim couldn’t remember a time when the GCPD hadn’t been divided. Bad and good, corrupt and honest, lazy and hardworking. They were unsurprisingly equally split on their opinions of the Batman of Gotham.

Some, (mostly the lazy and corrupt, Jim noted) thought the whole ordeal is hilarious. Remarks like, “He’s doing our job for us, we might as well give it a badge and go home!” and “I’m going home early; Bat Demon has got my shift covered,” were fairly common in the department building.

The majority were paranoid and scared. They feared that the Batman was a new player on the board that was already stacked with too many mobs. He was a hitman hired to either lure the police into a false sense of security before an attack, or a weapon from one of the mobs who was spending his downtime by beating up people for fun. Jim figured that they were likely scared that the Batman would turn his sights inward and start attacking them for their illegal activities.

Few, like Sarah Lopez, a fellow detective, were just angry at having to deal with a vigilante on top of all the normal Gotham crime.

“As if we didn’t have enough to deal with,” she told Jim over lunch one day. “I have to investigate this robbery AND look out for a vigilante.”

“We haven’t gotten any instructions to take Batman down,” Jim pointed out mildly, taking a bite of his sandwich.

“Stop calling him Batman like’s he’s your friend.” She said, narrowing her eyes. He raised his hands in surrender, trying to keep the smirk off his face. They had had this conversation many times in the two weeks since the Batman’s first encounter.

“We would have a whole team looking for him if we had a commissioner who actually gave a shit,” she muttered fiercely as she stabbed at her pasta. “We’ve got no one looking for clues, no one talking
Jim knew that she was right. Someone with such obvious disregard for the law shouldn’t be allowed free reign to beat up anyone they saw fit. And the fear that the Batman really was just new hitman for the mob was a dangerous possibility that he didn’t take lightly.

Still, Jim couldn’t help but admit that it was a welcome change of pace; that the person breaking the law was, paradoxically, on their side for once.

“I don’t like it either, but he has been helpful,” he said.

“Oh whose side are you on?” she asked bitterly, glaring at him. Jim stared back.

“Sarah. I obviously don’t want a violent vigilante running around Gotham beating up everyone,” he said, raising his eyebrows at her, “But even you’ve got to admit it’s been a nice week.”

It had been a relatively relaxing week, by Gotham standards. Criminals being left incapacitated at the scene of the crime, surrounded by untampered evidence, had given the GCPD a much-needed relief from their heavy and chaotic workload. And when Jim had looked into the number of crimes reported, and though the sample size was small, he had been unsurprised to find that their numbers were below average.

They were still higher than most of the country, but it was something.

“That’s not the point Jim! What happens when he murders someone? We can’t just let this civilian running around doing whatever he wants! And we have no evidence! We’ll be so behind when he does fuck up, and—”

Jim furrowed his eyebrows at her, truly frustrated for the first time in the conversation.

“I don’t need a lecture on the law,” he said shortly. She sighed, and rubbed her temple.

“I’m sorry, I know. I just—” she trailed off.

“It’s fine,” Jim said, taking another bite of his sandwich. They were both on edge, with the vigilante running around unchecked. They, like most of the GCPD, were waiting for the ball to drop and take Gotham with it. And Sarah had always been very passionate about the letter of the law, even at the best of times.

They all coped with Gotham in different ways.
“Your case not going well?” Jim asked, to change the subject.

“No,” Sarah said as she rolled her eyes. “The chemical company is being ridiculous. I’m assuming it’s because they don’t want me sniffing around and finding out what illegal shit they’ve been doing, but how I’m supposed to find who stole their shipment when they won’t even tell me what was in the shipment is the real goddamn mystery,” she huffed.

“What about yours?” she asked, after a short pause. Jim exhaled through his teeth slowly.

“It was reassigned to Tolbert yesterday,” Jim muttered.

She looked up sharply, her fork halfway to her mouth. “The human trafficking one?”

Jim nodded slowly, taking another careful bite of his sandwich.

“Fuck.” She looked at him sadly. “I’m sorry Jim.”

It was well known that there were certain officers, not that they deserved the title, who were middlemen for the mob. If your case was assigned to them, you could bet that it was connected to the mob’s activities. The ‘officers’ would botch the case, destroy evidence and erase records, so that any ties to illegal activity connecting the case to the mob were gone. Disobeying orders and continuing to work on your case was endangering your life.

Jim had only risked it a few times.

The most recent being a few years ago, when Jim had been working on a serial killer case with Renee Montoya. After she discovered that the killer was working for Falcone, she was told that the case had been reassigned. She had refused to let her it slip through the cracks to be forgotten. Taking out a feared hitman for the biggest mob in Gotham was too big a catch to throw away.

Though she had gotten the killer/hitman convicted, she had had to flee Gotham with her girlfriend before Falcone could have her killed for interfering.

So as much as Jim wanted ignore orders, solve his human trafficking case and take the criminals off the street, he knew full well the danger of resistance. It wasn’t just his life he’d be risking, but Barbara’s, and anyone else that he might have helped in the future. He had to think that it was better to keep his job, and his life, so he could solve other cases. At least by gritting his teeth and laying low he could still help some people, and keep Barbara out of the mob’s sights.

He was more useful to Gotham alive, working on cases, that he was if he died as a martyr for one investigation and leaving behind countless future cases unsolved.

This thought didn’t make him hate himself any less when he had to abandon cases, or help him sleep at night, but it kept him going to work in the mornings.
(And if he keeps collecting evidence, working with Bullock and Sarah to keep tabs on mob activities in secret, waiting for a chance to use them, no one needs to know.)

“There are other crimes that need solving,” he finally said, shaking himself out of his thoughts. Sarah pursed her lips, frustrated, but nodded.

Knowing Gotham, it wouldn’t be long until he was knee deep in another case.

“‘Well, you’ll let me know if you find anything about the vigilante?’ She asked, starting to get up from the table.

“‘Course,’” he said, smiling at her.

She met his gaze with a small smile of her own, and went back to her office.

A few minutes later, he followed suit, and went back to work.
Chapter 2

It didn't stop.

Officers on the night shift responded to calls every night that lead to unconscious, bound criminals. When Jim came into work in the mornings, the holding cells were full of people sporting a variety of injuries. Most common were broken noses or bruised cheekbones, with the occasional sprain.

Once, Jim saw the shadows of a knuckle in the bruise that formed on the suspect.

They've had to take six criminals to the hospital so far, one for a broken arm, two for broken ribs, and the others for bad concussions.

Jim knew that he was not alone in waiting for the day one of Batman's victims came in with a gunshot wound. But it hasn't happened yet.

Jim exhaled a breath of smoke into the night air. It was two in the morning, and there were still four hours left in his shift before he could go home.

Midnight shifts had always been a part of his job, but he only really started hating them once it was just Barbara and him. Having to leave her with the babysitter grated on his nerves every time he kissed her goodbye.

It was just last week when she had asked when she would be allowed to stay home by herself, citing her sixth grade teacher's comment on her report card of "mature and intelligent young woman" as evidence that she didn't need a babysitter at night, but Jim was reluctant. It wasn't a matter of trusting her, he knew that she could handle it, but he was all too familiar with what Gotham could do.

He wasn't sure that Barbara fully understood what it meant to live in a city like Gotham, and he wasn't eager to have that conversation.

He had just finished his with his pipe and was turning to head back inside when Sarah burst through the door.

"Robbery on Chambers Street, security alarm just went off," she said, tossing his jacket at him and running past him towards the car.

Jim, with the ease of years of practise, slipped his jacket on and took off towards the car without missing a stride. Sarah had beat him there, started the car, and was already pulling out of the parking spot when Jim jumped into the passenger seat.

"You think it's Batman?" Jim asked, leaning over and flicking on the familiar sirens.

"Don't know. But Chambers is only a block over. If it is him, we might be able to catch him." She was leaning forward in her seat, urging the car to go even faster.
“Or get any leads at all,” Jim muttered under his breath. Two weeks of the Bat in Gotham, and the only proof they had of his existence was the criminals left tied up at the scene of the crime.

Only moments later, Sarah slammed on her breaks, and pulled over to the side of the road. "It's the one next to —" she started to say, fumbling with her seatbelt, but Jim had already spotted the building, and was out the door.

The building in question, which he now recognized as the little family-run general store that he drove past every day, was the only building with its lights on in the middle of the deserted street. The front window had been broken in; jagged pieces of glass were distorting the fluorescent light that came from the shop. It didn’t look like anyone was inside, but Jim drew his gun anyway, and right behind him heard Sarah do the same.

Keeping his gun steady at his side, he walked quickly towards the window, and ducked through the broken glass into the store. He met Sarah's eyes, and without speaking, they turned and walked in opposite directions.

He prowled slowly along the edge of the aisles, listening desperately for anything, but all he could hear were his soft footsteps. Distantly, he was aware that his heart was racing, pounding much faster than it normally would for a robbery case.

The idea of possibly catching, or even just seeing the Batman was enough to make him feel like a rookie on his first case again.

“Jim!” Sarah called suddenly from the other side of the store. His heart jumped to his throat, but even as he pivoted and ran towards her, he knew from her tone of voice that she hadn't found what they had been looking for.

At the back of the store, where Sarah was waiting, was the first sign of a struggle in the otherwise spotless store. Against the wall, in between shelves of magazines and candies, was the cash register, gaping open and broken. There was cash scattered all over the ground, presumably stolen from the register.

It almost looked like confetti.

Sarah was standing in front of a man, lying facedown on the ground. Jim could see the characteristic bonds holding his wrists together.

“This is Batman's work,” Sarah said, breathless with excitement. She had also recognized the restraints.

“I'll deal with this," she said, at the same time that Jim said "I'll look for him outside."

Back in the cool spring air outside the store, Jim allowed himself one deep breath to steady himself; it would do no good to be too eager and miss clues. Especially when he was likely as close as he had ever been to the Batman.

The street was lit up with the flashing blue and red from the sirens, which made it easy to see that there was absolutely nothing of note to see. They had had a few uncharacteristically dry days, so there weren’t any puddles to reveal footprints, nor were there any disturbances to the litter that lay in the gutter and on the sidewalk. Jim would have to just drive around and hope that he found a witness, or saw Batman jaywalking away from the scene.

"Goddammit," Jim cursed under his breath as he maneuvered himself into the car, and flipped the sirens off. By turning them on in the first place, he had broadcasted to the entire block that the police
 Surely anyone who was smart enough to fight criminals nearly every night and not be seen would be smart enough to clear out when there were sirens around. Batman would probably be long gone, even with their mad rush to get to the crime scene.

Still, he thought as restarted the car and maneuvered back into the street, he could at least check around the block, and the few alleys between the buildings. The robber might have an partner that could be hiding somewhere nearby, and any sign of the Bat’s existence would be a breakthrough.

But after almost ten minutes of scouring the block for any trace of Batman, or any witnesses or clues at all, Jim admitted defeat, and returned to the store. He sighed, rubbing at the bridge of his nose under his glasses for a moment before climbing out of the car, which was made more difficult by his unwillingness to adjust Sarah’s seat to accommodate his larger than 5’2 frame.

He nodded in greeting at Sarah, who was speaking in Spanish on her phone. The would-be robber was now awake, though he looked like he would rather not be. The restraints had been replaced with police handcuffs, and he was sitting on the ground, leaning against the counter. There was already a wicked bruise forming on his forehead, and when Jim stepped further into the room, he could see that the would-be-robber’s head had hit the floor so hard it had cracked a square of ceramic flooring.

"The owners are on their way over," Sarah said, having finished her phone call. "Do you want to take him to the car? He already confessed." She motioned her chin at the dazed man on the ground. Jim nodded.

They each grabbed an elbow and hoisted the man onto his feet. "He said that he didn't see who attacked him," Sarah continued, sounding a little strained under the man's weight. "He was grabbing cash out of the register; next thing he knew, he woke up on the ground. He doesn't remember anything else. And with that bruise, I'm not surprised."

Once they got the robber settled in the back of the car, they stood outside the store, waiting for the owners to arrive. Jim lit his pipe and took a deep breathe of the smoke. Sarah shot him a look, but didn't say anything.

"I didn't find anything outside," he finally said, the words disappearing into the air as smoke.

"I figured. When you didn't say anything," she replied softly.

"Thought that we might have had him this time," he said, letting the disappointment that had been curdling in his gut colour his words. Sarah huffed quietly in agreement, but stayed quiet.

"He had to have been fast," Jim continued, "There was a delay of what – one minute? maybe two minutes? – from the time the alarm went off and us getting here. So he noticed the store being broken into, took out the robber, and disappeared. In one minute." Jim took another breath of the smoke, willing the thick air in his lungs to calm him down. "He didn't even knock anything over!"

"We'll get him, Jim," Sarah promised solemnly, interrupting Jim's hopeless tirade. She met his eyes soundly. "He'll make a mistake eventually. And we'll be ready."

Jim met her gaze. With the backlight from the light of the store behind them, her bob created harsh lines on her face, and with her sharp brown eyes, she looked ethereal, like she could will Batman into handcuffs with her determination.

He wished that he could share a shred of her conviction.
Jim, in his career as a police officer, has faced down murderers, rapists, serial killers and gangsters. He's dealt with other vigilantes in the past; people who had had enough of the corruption in their city and decided to kill those keeping them down. But there was something about Batman that told Jim that this was nothing like anything he had ever seen.

A few days and too many shifts later, Jim was picking up a coffee for himself and tea for Barbara at the little coffee shop that is on his way home from work. He went there so often that the barista, Liana, didn’t even ask him his order when he walked over; she just smiled at him and started working on the drinks. She had added colourful blue streaks to her braided hair since the last time he had seen her.

It was even quieter in the shop than it usually was; just the gentle sounds of her preparing the drinks. The sun was just beginning to set, which casted the entire shop in an orange glow. Jim took his time pulling the cash out of his wallet, enjoying the rare peace of the evening.

"So what’s new with you, Detective? New exciting case?" she asked him jovially.

Jim wanted to say 'A flying Batman monster is trying to take over my job'.

"Nothing right now," he said instead.

"Well that’s something, at least." She put the drinks on the counter. "Large black coffee, and milk with some tea." She said with a smile and a wink.

Barbara had decided a few months ago that drinking tea would be fun, though had quickly discovered that she didn’t like the taste of any actual tea that she tried. Adding a small amount of tea to warm milk had been the solution.

"Thanks," Jim said, putting the money down and grabbing the drinks, already looking forward to getting home to Barbara. But as Liana started to reach for the cash, he froze.

"What happened to your arm?" He asked, leaning over to get a better look. There were 3 long, shallow scratches down he length of her forearm.

They looked like fingernail scratches.

Looking closer, he could see a bruises in the unmistakable shape of fingerprints peeking out from beneath the t-shirt on her bicep, darkening her already dark skin.

"It’s not as bad as it looks," she said nonchalantly. Jim frowned, and looked up to meet her eyes.

"It doesn’t take long to file a report," he said slowly, softly. "Did they take anything, or hurt you?"

She rolled her eyes at him. "Really, it's fine! They didn’t take anything, I’m OK."

He raised his eyebrows at her.

"Detective!" Liana exclaimed, amused and exasperated at Jim's concern.

"You're sure you're alright?" he asked, worried despite her protests.
"Oh my god, fine—" her eyes flitted quickly around the shop, double checking that they were alone, then leaned over and rested her elbows on the counter. "Ok. Few days ago some dude tried to grab my arm when I was walking home from the night shift. I got away from Johnny long-nails, but he had a buddy up ahead with a knife," she said.

Jim stayed silent, listening. He had heard this kind story many times before, but usually the person it was about wasn't alive to tell it.

"Before I could scream or run, Batman flew down." Liana paused and smirked, relishing in her story. "He punched out the guy closest to me, then took down the one with knife. Tied him up and left him with his friend."

"Batman?" Jim repeated, astounded. This was the first time he had heard a civilian mention him. They hadn't specifically been told not to talk about him to the public, but Jim knew that no one was being forthcoming with the information.

Her eyes lit up.

"Oh, do you cops know about him? I haven't seen anything in the news, so I wasn't sure." Very politely, she ignored the stupefied expression that Jim just knew was written all over his face. "He’s been around for about a month now," she said casually.

Jim was flabbergasted. He had only known about his activities for two weeks.

Batman had apparently been fighting criminals all over Gotham for a whole month, without being caught or killed.

Maybe the Batman really wasn’t human.

"A month?" Jim clarified, feeling a step behind in the conversation.

"That's what I heard. My friend across town swears the Batman saved him from being killed 'bout a month ago. And they’re saying Batman interrupted my dumbass ex’s drug import down at the docks the other day," she smirked.

"He's out of jail?" He asked, momentarily distracted. Jim had met Liana when her then-boyfriend had tried to frame her for murder when he shot someone over a bad drug deal, despite eyewitnesses seeing a 6'1 man flee, not a 5'4 woman.

Leaving the murder weapon in her sock drawer wasn't exactly ironclad proof of her guilt.

"He was," she said, “But I heard that everyone at the docks was arrested, so he’s probably on his way back to Blackgate by now,” she paused. "I hope Batman knocked him hard in the head. Do you think that could have knocked some sense into him?" She pulled out her water bottle from under the counter and took a drink.

Jim furrowed his eyebrows, suddenly remembering something.

"Did you hear which drug it was?" He asked, hoping that he didn’t sound as desperate for information as he was.

"Um, cocaine. I think. Why?" she asked, suspicious.

Jim had helped catalogue a shipment of cocaine that had been stopped by the Bat a few nights ago.
How civilians had found out that it was Batman who had stopped the drug trade was a mystery to Jim. Maybe people already assumed that any crime stopped properly had to be the work of Batman, instead of the police.

He didn’t say anything, but the look on his face must have confirmed what Liana already knew, based on the look of triumph on her face; that Gotham’s new celebrity was the one who stopped the import.

"So after Batman saved you, he just tied up the muggers and... flew away," Jim asked to change the subject.

"Yup. Tied ‘em up and disappeared. I called the police to get them to pick ’em up, and went home." She looked smug.

"Did you see the Batman directly? Could you give me a description?" he asked eagerly. The only people Jim knew who had seen Batman were criminals, and it would be helpful to have a description from someone who didn't have a probable concussion.

She looked at him for a long moment, and pursed her lips, looking torn.

"I didn’t," she said hesitantly, "It was dark, and he moved too fast," she paused, and met his eyes firmly.

"You’re one of the good cops, Detective," she finally said, "and I appreciate what you do, but if you were planning on stopping him, I don’t think I’d tell you anything, even if I knew. Batman is helping this city."

"He’s a vigilante," Jim protested, but his tone wasn’t even convincing himself. He wasn't sure what to think.

"Well it seems to me that he’s following the law more than most of the cops do," she said cheekily, daring him to disagree.

Jim shot her a look, making her laugh. but he couldn't really argue with that. He grabbed the drinks for the counter.

"You be careful out there," he said. She rolled her eyes at him and held up her water bottle as a mock-salute.

"See you again, Detective!"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait for this chapter! The good news is that Chapter 3 is already finished, and should be up in a few days.
Chapter 3

Buildings had started burning down around the city.

It wasn’t unheard of for structures to catch on fire, especially in the older, poorer parts of the city that hadn’t had their electrical systems updated in decades. They were lucky that there hadn’t been any casualties so far, but Jim didn’t trust that luck to hold. And after three buildings burnt down in under two weeks, even their passive commissioner couldn’t ignore it anymore.

After all, it was hardly in the best interests of the mob if their buildings started going up in flames.

Jim didn’t envy the officers assigned to the very public case. Arsons were notoriously difficult to solve, as most clues burned up with the building. With no witnesses coming forward, all the detectives could do was interview the owners of the buildings and hope that the fires were connected, and not randomly chosen locations.

Or, that’s what the officers would be doing, but the people who were assigned to the case seemed content to just wait until the next fire came in and hope for more clues then.

They didn’t have to wait long.

Jim had just started going through his paperwork for the night when Bullock pushed his way into Jim’s office.

"C’mon, we gotta go." Bullock threw Jim's jacket at him.

Jim caught it, standing up from his desk. "What?" He asked anxiously.

"Lopez needs us on Stonehill Road," Bullock replied, watching Jim shove the papers that he had been working on into semi-neat piles.

"Would it kill you to explain things all at once?" Jim glared at him over his glasses as he slipped his jacket on and grabbed his keys.

"I was trying to be discrete, because she wants us to look at evidence about the Bat infestation before the assigned officers show up and fuck it up," Bullock said cuttingly, as he stood beside Jim as he locked his office door. "But if you want me to explain that to everyone..."

"Alright alright," Jim grumbled, as Bullock smirked. "But I'm driving."

Once they were in the car and on their way across the city, Bullock began to speak again.

"Lopez called me a few minutes ago. I guess she was on patrol and a call came in for a fire alarm. When she got there, everything was under control. The arsonists were all unconscious."

"The Batman." Jim confirmed.

Bullock nodded. "And she wants us to come look at the scene before anyone else gets there."

"Wait- Is she by herself? Who was partnering with her on patrol?" Jim asked.

"It was just that dipshit Porter. I guess he left as soon as he saw that everyone was tied up. The shift was almost over."
"Fucking moron," Jim muttered fiercely. Porter wasn't known for his brains or morals, but to purposely leave a police officer by themselves, at the scene of a vigilante attack, was truly incredible stupidity.

Jim wasn't surprised by the incompetence anymore, but still found himself disappointed.

Bullock looked at him out of the corner of his eye. "The firefighters should be there, she won't be by herself," he said, correctly reading Jim's worry.

Jim didn't reply, except by speeding up the car.

Sarah was waiting outside for them when Jim skidded to a stop.

The building hadn't burnt to the ground, nor did it have any burn marks on the outside, like the others had had, but it still stood out on the quiet street. It was a newer building, or maybe an older one under renovation. The exterior was clean, and looked out of place without the grime coating it, or the graffiti on the sides that its neighbours wore.

As Jim stepped out into the street, he was taken aback by the thick smell of smoke that was dense enough to overpower the familiar smell of Gotham's smog that would only get worse as the spring turned to summer.

He must have made a face at the smell, because Sarah smiled a little as they walked over to her.

"We have a lot of smoke, but no fire. Well, there was a small one, but it was out when I got here. The firetruck just left," she said, pointing down the street with her thumb.

"How many suspects are there?" Jim asked as he walked past her to hold open the door for them. He didn't bother asking if she had checked the building for Batman; they all knew he would be long gone by now.

"Five. Three males and two females, all pretty young. In their twenties and early thirties, if I had to guess."

The scent of smoke grew worse as Jim stepped inside the building. The only light came from their flashlight beams, and meagre streetlight from the windows.

In the dim lighting, he could see that it was completely barren, with no furniture or decorations on the white walls. The only furniture were two chandeliers; one on the ground, and one attached to the high ceiling.

Jim took a few more steps into the building. There were stairs against the right-hand wall, leading up to a landing, and then to the second floor. At the base of the stairs was the pile of Batman's victims, which was creating a weird shadow-puppet on the wall behind them. Jim could see even from across the room how still they were; how deeply unconscious. No one twitched as Jim shined his flashlight over them.

It felt like a ghost town, despite being a brand new building. Between the white, barren walls that revealed nothing, and the acrid smell of smoke that spelled of recent disaster, Jim felt like he was intruding, like he was trespassing on someone else's tragedy.
Jim had been a detective long enough to be very good at ignoring that feeling.

Their footsteps echoed as they made their way towards the bodies.

As Jim got closer, it was apparent what the source of the smoke was; the wall beside the suspects, though covered in a fine white powder, was clearly charred. He vaguely recognized as the powder that came from fire extinguishers from some long outdated training.

"Batman the firefighter," Bullock grumbled under his breath.

Jim turned his flashlight to the suspects, shining his light over each face. Most showed evidence of their recent fight with the Batman; one's nose was slowly leaking blood, and a brown haired man had a mighty bruise forming on his cheekbone.

"Don't worry, they’re all alive, I already looked," said Sarah.

Jim froze.

It hadn’t even crossed his mind to check for pulses. It seemed natural, already, after just over a month of Batman being active in Gotham, that his victims were left injured, never dead.

_Sloppy. Stupid_, he told himself sharply. He was acting like a rookie that he hadn’t been for ages, letting himself make assumptions like that.

"What's that?" Bullock asked, interrupting Jim's mental scolding. Jim's gaze followed Bullock's flashlight beam to what looked like a pile of papers on the ground.

Sarah walked over and carefully picked them up. Her eyebrows furrowed closer and closer together as she scanned the first page. She quickly started rifling through the other pages.

"What is it?" Jim asked, walking over to stand behind her. He caught a glimpse of the name 'Garfield Lynns' printed on the top of the page next to a picture of the brown-haired man before Sarah flipped the page.

"It’s… a profile on all of the suspects."

"Lemme see," Bullock said, walking over. Wordlessly she split the pile in half and handed some to him.

"No, wait, these ones are different," she said, flipping more rapidly through her half now. She froze at one page, biting her lip. She looked over her shoulder at Jim.

"This looks like evidence that links them all to some online chatroom."

"A chatroom? For what, planning the fires?" Jim asked, confounded.

"I guess!" she said, throwing both hands in the air and spinning around to face him. "What the hell is this? Batman's a hacker now?"

"There's crazy details in these profiles too," Bullock said slowly. "This is more than a quick search, this is..." he paused, searching for the right word. "This is insane," he finally said.

They all stood there for a moment, silent.

Before this, Batman was someone running around Gotham at night beating up criminals. He had been a threat, but only a physical one. Now, apparently, he was running in-depth analysis and had
the resources to track online, hidden chatroom activity. What else could he find online? Bank records, hospital files, insurance information.

Police data banks.

Batman certainly wasn't trying to hide his activities online; casually printed the evidence out and left them next to the unconscious bodies of the arsonists. He felt no fear at letting them all know exactly what he could do.

Jim cleared his throat, trying to get the familiar taste of fear out his mouth. It didn't work, and instead spread from his throat, prickling down his neck and through his arms before settling heavy in his gut. He has worked in the GCPD for years, trying in vain to help the crime capital of America, while trying to tread water against the flood of corruption that was always threatening to drown his city. But at least with them, he knew what he was fighting. Batman was an unknown, a mysterious presence that Jim didn't know how to deal with.

"Shit," Jim said, with nothing else to say.

"I want to go through these files some more, see if I can find any discrepancies," Sarah said.

"I'll help, I've been on my feet all day," Bullock said. "Or do you want me to help look around?" He directed the question at Jim.

"It's fine." Jim replied. He had never minded looking at a crime scene by himself, having got in to the habit for when he was working with careless partners. Bullock was far from incompetent, but it would still be nice to look around without his inevitable chatter in his ear.

Sarah nodded in thanks, and walked over to the wall with Bullock, to sit down and spread out the pages.

Jim shined his flashlight, looking around the room for somewhere to start. Normally he would start at the suspects, and try to work backwards. But...

But something about chandelier on the floor stood out like a beacon in the night, so he walked over there first.

Jim had first thought that it had been abandoned there, left to be installed on the ceiling another day, but as he got closer he could see the damage. Some of the arms on the chandelier had cracks where they rested on the ground, and several had actually broken off from the main structure. It must have fallen from a considerable height to maintain so much damage, even if it was made of cheap material. It would have made quite the noise when it hit the floor.

He shined his flashlight up to the ceiling, but he couldn't see from his angle if the chandelier had fallen because it hadn't been installed properly, or if it had been meddled with.

Meddled with.

Somehow.

From the ceiling.

Jim spun the flashlight in his hand absentmindedly. He supposed that it was possible that the chandelier fell after it was attached, by itself, but his instincts told him otherwise.

Presumably, it was Batman who had caused it to fall, as he hadn't noticed any wings on the tied up
suspects, nor were there any magic carpets around.

Lots of the criminals had described Batman being able to fly or turn into smoke, but Jim hadn't put much stock into the rumours; thinking it was too outlandish even for Gotham.

But *someone* had reached the ceiling to meddle with the damn thing, and there were no damn ladders around.

Suddenly, he noticed that his knuckles were starting to ache, and consciously relaxed the hand holding the flashlight. The beam of light bobbed slightly, and just barely out of the corner of his eye, he saw a glint of light. He froze, adrenalin spreading throughout his chest in a wave.

Walking towards where the reflection of light came from, he felt the familiar excitement of discovery rise in him; the rush of finding clues and putting them together. He kept moving the flashlight back and forth, scanning, until-

There, lying innocent on the ground, was a black object. He took the last few steps up to it, shined his light on it and stopped dead.

In the centre of the circle of his flashlight beam, was the unmistakable shape of a bat. It looked to be made of metal, though most of it had been coated in something to make it more matte, less reflective of light. It was lucky that Jim had seen it in the first place.

Here, at long last, was physical proof that Batman really existed, and wasn't just a ghost story in the minds of Gothamites.

He knew, *knew*, that he shouldn't touch it, that tampering with evidence was exactly the kind of incompetence that he regularly complained about, but he was drawn to it; desperate to touch it, to hold the proof that the Batman existed beyond just the stories of criminals and tormented civilians.

With steady hands he bent down to gently pick it up, barely touching it with his fingertips.

The bat-thing was thin, though it had surprising weight to it. Around the outside of the bat, the border had been tapered into a even thinner edge. He put the flashlight in the crook of his neck, freeing his other hand to test the sharpness by brushing it with his thumb.

Razor. It was razor sharp.

It might have actually been sharper than his own razor.

Jim found himself barely able to contain a hysterical giggle. How convenient it was; how very considerate, that Batman was apparently so committed to maintaining his brand that his weapons were modelled after himself.

It certainly made it easier to recognize who it belonged to.

Jim let his breath hiss out through is teeth, trying to refocus himself.

What was the bat-knife, an obvious weapon, doing in the corner, away from all the action of the fight that had happened on the other side of the room? And none of the criminals had the kind of gashes this...bat shaped ninja star would make.

He looked around the room. Sarah and Bullock were still working on the files, kneeling over the pages they had spread out on the ground.
He turned and headed towards for the stairs that lead up to the landing above their heads. He hoped that there would be a better vantage point from higher up, the help him make the connection between the pieces. The bat-knife hung heavy between two of his fingers as he walked.

"You alright Jim?" Bullock called as he got closer. Jim must have had a weird look on his face.

"Hang on." Jim didn't wait to see Bullock roll his eyes before he walked up the stairs two at a time.

From the landing, which was closer to the ceiling than it was to the floor, the building looked even more lonely. Shining his flashlight across the room, he could still make out the chandelier on the floor. He was closer to the other chandelier from this spot, the one still on the ceiling. Turning his flashlight on it, he saw, with another rush of adrenaline, that the chandelier wasn't bolted to the ceiling, like he assumed it would be.

It was hanging from wires.

The assemblers must have wired them before, but left screwing them into the ceiling for another day. Which meant...

Jim looked down at the metal bat in his hands, then shined his light to approximately where the fallen chandelier had once hung. He could just make out the ends of cut wires, hanging from the ceiling.

Grinning smugly, he let himself slump against the wall. So then, the Batman had thrown his bat-shuriken to get the far chandelier to fall to the ground, that's why it was in the corner. The sharp weapon in his hands had never been used as a weapon in the first place.

And Batman hadn't had to fly to meddle with the chandelier, and Jim could feel vindicated that he didn't have to believe in men that can fly.

He rubbed the hand that wasn't still clinging to the bat-knife down his moustache and chin. Dropping the chandelier must have been a distraction then, to take the arsonists attention away from the fire they were trying to set.

But, no, that wasn't quite right. If all the arsonists were focused on setting up their fire, as they usually were, then there would be no need to distract them. Jim looked down at the suspects, who were all still unconscious. He narrowed his eyes.

Had one of them been guarding the others? If someone was armed, that would be more than enough reason to want to cause a distraction before swooping in. And if Batman was well known enough that some civilians knew about him, then surely people actually planning crimes would know about him too, and want to arm themselves.

"Bullock!" Jim hollered, leaning over the stairs to look at him below.

"What?!" Bullock yelled back.

"Could you go look around the room for a gun?"

"Why don't you come down here and do it?"

"What, you seriously can't scan a floor by yourself?! It'll take one minute."

Jim heard Bullock's angry grumbling and heavy footsteps, and knew he was going to look.

"Did you find anything Sarah?" Jim called down, shining his flashlight like a spotlight over where
she was working.

"Nope! It all checks out perfectly!" she sounded very upset over the perfect paperwork.

Jim could barely keep himself from fidgeting while he waited for Bullock to return. He knew that this was what had happened, he just needed the clue, the last bit of evidence to solidify the story.

Unable to wait any longer, he called out again. "Find anything Harvey?"

"Would you hold your damn horses? I'm coming," came Bullock's exasperated voice from across the room. Jim smiled.

"Here you go, your highness," Bullock said with a little mock bow, coming back into the view of Jim's flashlight. He was carrying some kind of assault rifle, though Jim was too far away to tell which model it was. In his other hand he was dragging a plastic gas can, which a large dent in the side of it.

Jim thought back to the man with the huge bruise on the side of his face. Had Batman actually hit one of the arsonists with their own gasoline canister?

But the gun. The proof that Jim was right. A thrill of understanding, of having put the puzzle back together unfurled in Jim's chest.

He could practically watch it play out. Batman had been here, on the same landing Jim was now standing on. The arsonists were all clustered around the wall, hungrily watching as their fire grew. Except for the one, who was facing away from the fire; on lookout for the Batman. To distract the gunman, Batman threw the bat-shuriken, severing the wires and sending the chandelier crashing down. While they all spun and looked, Batman came down, like the demon they all said he was, and knocked the gun out of the criminals hands. He had probably kicked or thrown the gun across the room, just to keep it out of the fight. Probably knocked the gas can away during the fight too, to keep it from exploding. And then-

Well, Batman would have done what he normally does; beat up the criminals, tie them up. He had put out the fire, and left the arsonists for them to deal with.

"You almost done Jim?" Sarah called, breaking him out of the scene in his mind.

"Yeah, I'm coming down," He replied, adjusting his grip on the bat-ninja star, so that it wouldn't spin and slice his finger.

At the base of the stairs, Sarah and Bullock had gathered all the pages of the report back into a neat pile again.

"Anything interesting in the report?" Jim asked.

"Jim. The level of detail was absurd. He had studied the chatroom for so long that he figured out their motive. I guess they thought they were real smart in trying to 'stick it to the Man' by but their method was to burn the new developments around the city out of spite, so they were mostly just shooting themselves in the foot," Sarah said.

"What about you? You find anything?" she asked dejectedly, not excepting anything new from the vigilante who had left them so little to go on. Bullock came closer, looking at Jim.

"Actually..." Jim said, and told them how he had found the bat-throwing knife, and put the scene of the fight back together.
When he had finished, Bullock let out a long string of heartfelt curses, took his flask out of his pocket and took a swig, walking a few paces away.

"Can I see it?" Sarah asked hesitantly, holding out her hand.

Jim carefully lay it flat in the palm of her hand. Similar to how Jim first reacted, she carefully traced the outline of the bat.

Her brown skin, already pale in the harsh light of the flashlights, became even paler. She met Jim's gaze, her eyes wild. "This could kill someone."

He nodded. He had been trying to not dwell on it since he first discovered it, but the edge was easily sharp enough to seriously hurt, or kill someone. As reluctant as he was to share the evidence with the rest of the police force, this was too dangerous to keep a secret.

Still, he couldn't help but notice that it had been thrown away from people, so that it couldn't possibly have hit anyone.

"There is no goddamn way it's the same person," snarled Bullock, walking back over to them, staring at the bat in Sarah's hand. "One person? The man who can throw a sharp, fuckin', fuckin' BOOMERANG and hit a wire, and regularly beat up criminals at night, is supposed to be the same person who can hack into chatrooms and make profiles on people?! That's more than one person. 'The Batman' is probably a whole team of people!"

Bullock, chest heaving, took several deep breaths, trying to calm himself. He took another sip of his flask. Sarah and Jim were quiet, used to Bullock's frustration.

"That would make sense," Sarah agreed slowly.

Jim pursed his lips. "Maybe," he finally said, though he didn't agree. He had a feeling, with no real proof, that Batman was one person. As much as it made sense to have a whole team of 'Batmen' working the city, it seemed unlikely that a larger group would be as effective at leaving no trace, that not one person had made a mistake. But he didn't want to disagree with Sarah and Bullock now, when they were all riding the high of finally having physical proof of Batman.

One of the bound arsonists groaned faintly, and shifted slightly. The three of them turned to look at them.

"We should head out," Jim said, "So you can call it in before they wake up."

"Yeah," Sarah sighed, running a hand through her hair. "Thanks for coming out to help guys," she said, with a small smile on her face.

"Aww, don't worry about it Lopez," said Bullock, starting to walk away. "But you do owe us. Big time."

Jim looked at Sarah, who rolled her eyes. "Thank you Jim."

"It was nothing. Don't let them take that thing though, I want to look at it later," He said, nodding at the metal bat in their hand.

"I won't. They'd probably accidentally kill themselves with it anyway," she said, smirking slightly. She waved at him to go as she pulled out her radio and officially called the station to report the crime.

Jim and Bullock waited in the car, parked around the corner, until they saw the backup arrive, then
started driving back to the station.

Jim didn't say anything on the drive back, and neither did Bullock, both thinking on what they had found at the building.

As exciting as it was to finally have real proof of the Batman, it was shadowed by the encompassing feeling that Jim was totally, wholly, out of his depth.

The Batman could take out a whole slew of criminals with ease, and find enough online evidence to create complete profiles and tease out a motive.

How on earth was Jim supposed to keep up with that?
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Flashback begins and ends with two lines.

Jim looked at the clock on his desk. It was 6:03 in the morning, eight hours after he had returned to his office after finding the bat-boomerang, and it was finally time to go home and get Barbara off to school.

He took off his glasses and rubbed tiredly at the bridge of his nose. For a night that didn't have any homicides, he was unfairly exhausted. Getting up from his desk he stretched, feeling the burn of stiff muscles, and the slight tug on the scar tissue in his shoulder that still didn't move right, years later.

The messy piles of paper on his desk could wait to be tidied until the next time he was in his office, he decided, as he shut off the lights and locked the door behind him. He walked down the hallways of offices, which led to a medium sized break room that looked smaller than it was because of all the clutter. There were usually various magazines or old memos scattered on the table, but today someone had left a sizeable stack of newspapers from the Gotham Gazette in the middle of it.

He walked closer to where the newspapers lay, wanting to read the headline. He had a subscription with the Gazette, but they weren't always consistent about delivering.

He read the headline three times before picking up one of the newspapers and turning around, heading to Bullock's office. He knocked once, then opened the door.

"What." Bullock deadpanned, not looking up from his computer. Jim walked over to him and held up the newspaper in front of the monitor. Despite the circumstances, it was incredibly enjoyable to watch Bullock's face change from exasperation, to shock, to concentration that pulled his thick eyebrows close together, before finally settling on tired resignation.

"Well, that was fast," Bullock said.

Jim flipped the newspaper around to reread the headline again.

"THE DARK KNIGHT OF GOTHAM" read in bold, black print across the top of the page. "The Batman Stops Feared Arsonists" was printed on top of a picture of the would-be burned building they had investigated just hours ago. The article took up most of the page, and continued on to the next, though a small introduction to a story on sports (the Knights had lost again) and a small piece on a new building that Wayne Enterprises was investing in had been squeezed in.

"Someone seriously wrote that whole article that fast?" Bullock asked. "They would have had what, 3 hours, maybe? To write that before it had to be printed."

"It's a Vale piece," Jim said, spotting the byline.

"Oh, that explains it," Bullock muttered, and Jim huffed out a laugh. Vicki Vale was well known for trying to expose corruption in the city; speaking out against corrupt businesses, the mobs, and their bought and paid for police officers, as well as anyone else she could get dirt on.
It was frankly amazing that she hadn't been killed yet.

"Sarah's partner must have squealed," Jim said, exasperated, scanning the article.

"He probably just got drunk and started bragging in some bar," Bullock said, rolling his eyes.
"Anything new in there?"

"No," Jim said, handing the paper to him. "She talks about how an 'anonymous source' said that Batman was the one who stopped the arsonists. And she's interviewed people on the street who have had an encounter."

Vale, as usual, had put a lot of care into her article. She had clearly been holding on to the interviews with civilians, waiting to find the story that she could fit them in. And once Sarah’s useless partner had told her about how Batman had stopped the arsonists, she had jumped all over it.

Bullock tossed the newspaper on his desk and barked out a laugh. "Nice of her to imply there at the end that Batman may be responsible for all the cases the police have solved."

Jim smiled wryly.

Bullock sighed, and rubbed tiredly at his eyes. "This is gonna whip everyone into a frenzy."

"Who? All the police already know about him. I guess some civilians will be concerned, or do something stupid to see him, but-"

"The mobs Gordon!" Bullock interrupted, looking at Jim like he was an idiot. "They've all know about Batman too, what with him fucking up their operations all over the place, but having it openly acknowledged, publicly like this?" He shook his head in a short, jerky movement. Jim frowned. It had been a long time since he had seen Bullock so unnerved. "They were already getting anxious. Maroni and Bertinelli have been sensing weakness from Falcone for months, if not years, and Fish is just biding her time too. And now with this Batman news, they're all going to get brave, and try to take advantage," Bullock said.

Jim didn't reply. For the entire time they had known each other, Bullock had been much more involved in the mobs and their dealings than he ever had been.

When they had first started working together, years ago now, Bullock's ties to the mobs had been a common argument. But over the years Jim had watched Bullock time and time again use his connections and knowledge of the mob to help Gothamites, when he could do so safely.

And now Bullock's involvement in the mob was just another thing they had to dance around when they were trying to solve crimes.

"It's been years since there was so much tension between everyone," Bullock said, looking desperately at Jim. "Remember Zsasz? That's probably the last time it was this bad," Bullock said solemnly

Oh.

Jim remembered Zsasz.

How could he ever forget?
It was years ago now when the first victim was found sitting on a bus stop. Her murderer had propped an umbrella against her, hiding her face, and passers-by thought she was just waiting for the next bus.

Her throat had been slit open.

They gave the case to Renee Montoya, and she asked Jim to partner with her.

They were careful in their examination of the body, but the unknown killer had been just as cautious, and neither of them came up with anything to follow. They were forced to assume that her murder had been a one-off tragedy, one of the hundreds of terrible crimes that are never solved.

Then another victim showed up.

This body was also a young woman, though she was found on the other side of the city, this time near the water. She was placed on one of the public tables near the pier, made to look like she was eating by the way she was hunched over.

Then there was a middle aged man, killed in his own apartment. His slit throat had left blood all over the bathroom, soaked into the rugs and towels.

The woman who was killed and then moved to a bathroom in a club. The other woman in the alley. The man in the parking lot, sitting up in his car that was left running.

The girl in the park, only 14 years old, sitting against a tree. That body had been hard to examine.

All of them were found with their necks slit, gaping open.

Sometimes the blood had been left to drench their clothes and drip onto the floor; sometimes the bodies had been cleaned, and put in fresh clothes (but never new, never anything they could track). The bodies were all propped up, made to look lifelike from a distance, except for the terrible stillness of a body that would never move again.

Automatically Jim took in the scene of the murder of the eighth victim as he walked through the door to the apartment. She had been murdered in her kitchen, based on all the blood there. She - it - because she was already dead at this point - was dragged onto her couch, where the body was watching the TV with sightless eyes.

"Jesus," Renee said from right behind him. She walked over to the body and crouched in front of it. "I'll give you three guesses how she was killed, but the first two don't count," she said wryly, looking closer at the slash on the neck.

Jim huffed quietly, walking to the kitchen, being careful not to step in any of the blood on the floor.

Unfortunately, the murderer had also been careful, and so there were no treads from shoes to track.

Sometimes it was difficult to glean any information from blood splatters, but this particular scene was pretty self-explanatory.
The victim had been cooking - the pot was still on the stove, though the element had been turned off - when the murderer came in. She had backed up against the counter, probably trying to get away, but the murderer had grabbed her and cut her neck. The spray of blood was thickest around the counter, but was also all over the stove and ground. Some blood had landed on the element that she had been cooking on, and had burnt.

Jim grimaced, and walked to where Renee was still studying the body. She met his eyes as he got closer, and stood up and stretched.

"I hate serial killers," Jim said, taking her place in front of the corpse, looking for anything Renee might have missed.

"No shit. Sorry," she said in one breath. Jim shrugged it off. She walked over the stove, similarity checking for anything that he had missed.

They had a system.

"But he's still not leaving a signature. Nothing taken, nothing added to the bodies," Renee continued to speak as she looked in the cabinets quickly.

"Not even a sticker," Jim replied, getting up and joining her in the kitchen.

Renee allowed a small smile to grace her face.

At the police academy together, they had worked through an example case of a serial killer whose calling card was leaving smiley face stickers on his victims. It had quickly become something of an inside joke; they used to leave smiley stickers on each other's reports and desks or lunches.

The officer who had designed the fake case had insisted with grave eyes that the smiles were supposed to be creepy.

Jim hoped that he would never find himself in a position that a smile would scare him so much.

"No sign of a break in. Again," Renee grumbled next to him, both of them looking at the blood drenched kitchen.

Jim frowned. Lack of a break in would normally mean some familiarity with the victim, or with the building, but this wasn't the first time this killer had forced their way into a building without leaving a trace. He seemed to be able to go almost anywhere in Gotham without running into a lock he couldn't open.

He looked sideways at her. "He'll make a mistake. We'll get him," he said, trying to sound more confident than he felt, if only for her sake.

They all had cases that hit them harder than others, and he knew that this particular one had gotten under her skin.

"Yeah. Sure," she said, accepting his empty positivity. "What time is it?" she asked.

"Four forty," Jim replied a little too quickly. He had been trying to not let her see him check his watch while they were driving over, though apparently he hadn't been stealthy enough.

He was supposed to pick up Barbara from the babysitter at five, and he knew that the traffic would be bad at this time of day.
Renee smiled at him, this time a real smile. "Get out of here Jimbo, I'll wait for the others."

"I can wait." It wouldn't be first time he had to pay the babysitter extra because a case had run late.

"Go. Get her ice cream and say it's from me. I'll hitch a ride with them."

Jim smiled gratefully, and nodded at her. "Let me know when you hear from the coroner."

"Will do."

Jim was at the base of the door, arm already reaching for the handle when he froze.

There were a few drops of blood on the floor. Neither of them had noticed it when they walked in, being too concerned with the dead body on the couch.

He looked up, to the counter where the victim had been killed. It was too far away for the blood to have sprayed all the way to the door. And most of the blood had hit the wall and stove; there was no way the blood spray was angled in a way to reach where he was standing.

"Renee," Jim called, keeping his voice calm.

"What?" She looked over "You find something?" She asked eagerly, walking over.

"Yeah. Just here," He said, pointing to the tell-tale droplets. She narrowed her eyes.

"Is that blood?" She asked, leaning closer.

"Looks like it." It was so easy now, to recognize blood. "Can you have the lab check it separately?"

"You don't think it was from the victim?" Renee looked at him, eyebrow cocked.

Jim nodded his chin towards the kitchen. "It's too far. And the angle is wrong," he said, frowning as he looked around the room for something else they missed.

"True," she allowed, with a tilt of her head, "Victim's blood could have dripped off the killer," she pointed out.

"He walked out the door dripping blood, and we don't have one witness?" Jim said doubtfully.

"It is Gotham..." Renee muttered under her breath. "So you think this is the killers? Like she hurt him and he didn't notice the dripping blood?"

"It's worth checking," Jim said. This was their first real lead they had had.

"Oh, I think so too, I was just making sure we're on the same page." Renee took a deep breath. "Now, uh, not to kick you out of my crime scene, but get out." She said with a smile.

Jim shot her a look, which she ignored. He took one last look at the dead body on the couch, which was easy to see from his perfect angle in front of the door, and left to pick up Barbara.

Jim walked into his office the next morning to be greeted by a maniacally grinning Renee sitting in his chair.
"We got him."

"What? Who?" Jim asked, dumping his bag on the ground and running to the back of the desk to look over the paperwork that she had spread out.

"The killer: Mr Victor Zsasz." She picked up a file with a picture of a pale, bald man, and started reading from it. "His file says that his parents died in a boating accident seven years ago. Then he blew all his inheritance gambling and drinking, and his file ends with him losing badly at Falcone's casino few years ago, and causing a scene and storming out. Nothing after that."

"But it was his blood at the scene?" Jim confirmed eagerly.

"Yes, lab said it was a confirmed match," she said, turning to look up at him from where she was sitting. She grinned.

"Renee this is-" Jim started to say.

"I know!" She interrupted. They grinned at each other for a moment, enjoying their moment of triumph.

A sudden knock on the door shook them out of self-congratulatory thoughts. Sharing a confused look with Renee, Jim walked to the door and opened it.

Bullock was waiting on the other side, holding a cup of coffee in each hand, and one in his teeth. He must have known Renee was in his office. Jim grabbed one of the coffees from Bullock and let him in.

"Thank you," Bullock said, grabbing the coffee from between his front teeth. "Here you go Montoya, it's as sweet as you," he said.

"Oh how considerate of you," she said sarcastically, accepting her black coffee.

"You two look awfully smug, what'd you find?" Bullock asked, taking a sip of his coffee.

"We got the name of the serial killer we've been hunting for the last three months," Renee said with a smirk, handing him Zsasz's file.

Bullock hummed appreciatively, scanning it quickly. "You know where he is?" He asked.

There was a poignant pause.

"No," Jim finally said.

"Hey!" Renee said, snatching the file out of Bullock's hand, "If I knew you were going to rain on my parade I would have bought an umbrella!" Her words were softened by the slight smirk on her face.

Bullock raised his hands in surrender.

"Did the report for the victim come back too?" Jim asked her, taking a sip of his coffee.

"Yup. Ms Veronica Bilideau. And I know this will be a shock, but they think it was the massive cut to her arteries that killed her," Renee said, raising her eyebrows theatrically.

Jim smiled morbidly and took another sip.

"Did you say Bilideau?" Bullock asked woodenly. He had gone very still.
"Umm I think so," Renee said, grabbing the typed report from one of her piles. "Yeah, Veronica Bilideau, aged 28. What's wrong?"

"Bilideau is dating one of Bertinelli’s kids," Bullock said slowly. "Well, she was."

Both Jim and Renee had also gone very still.

"Could be a coincidence," Jim said, but he didn't sound convincing.

Renee ruffled through her reports to find her carefully maintained list of victims.

"Yolanda Suarez," Renee said.

Bullock nodded his head. "I've met Suarez. She and her husband work for Maroni."

"Riccardo Bruno," she continued.

"He's with Maroni too, down at the docks. Fish was complaining about him a few weeks ago," Bullock said, emotionless.

Renee and Jim made eye contact. "Lily Montgomery. The 14 year old.

"Montgomery is in with the Bertinellis. Lily could be his daughter," Bullock said slowly, like he was giving a death sentence.

Renee kept reading off from her list, and Bullock kept replying, but Jim had stopped listening, had heard enough, had already made the terrible connection and was trying to wrap his head around the scope of the thing.

Zsasz was working for Falcone. The largest, meanest gangster in Gotham has a serial killer murdering for him.

It was silent in Jim's office; Renee had finally run out of victims to list.

"Zsasz isn't just a serial killer. He's a hitman for Falcone," Renee said, dumbstruck, having reached the same conclusion as Jim.

"He's both," Jim said dully. He put his coffee on his desk, it didn't taste as good anymore.

"It explains why he was able to get into all those places, Falcone owns half the city, he just had to borrow the keys, fuck," Renee said, holding her head in her hands. "Falcone is using him to threaten or intimidate the other gangs. And I suppose killing girlfriends and brothers and daughters is pretty fucking effective."

"If he's using a serial killer as a hitman to get at anyone who pisses him off, that doesn't just mean rival gangs. If we get on his bad side..." Jim trailed off.

"He won't even need an excuse. We're all fucked," Bullock said hoarsely.

Another knock of the door made them all tense.

"You're popular today Jimbo," Renee murmured, taking a sip of her coffee.

Again, Jim walked over and opened the door.

This time it was Sarah waiting on their other side, her bag slung over her shoulder.
"I'm heading out," she said with an easy smile.

"Did you come to gloat?" Jim asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Mostly. But I heard that the commissioner wants to talk to Renee."

They all turned to look at her. She got up slowly from the desk.

"I'll walk down with you," Sarah said happily, unaware of the tense atmosphere she had interrupted.

The door closed behind them.

"We have to tell her about Zsasz," Jim said immediately.

"Jesus Jim, let her enjoy her day off," Bullock said. Jim sighed, but nodded his head in reluctant agreement. Silence settled over the office, and Jim took a sip of his bitter coffee, staring at nothing.

"He's probably at one of Falcone's places," Bullock said suddenly.

"What?" Jim said, turning to look at him.

"Zsasz. Falcone would want to keep him in one of his own buildings, easier to keep him a secret."

Jim walked around the desk and sat down, putting down his coffee so quickly that some sloshed over the side. Opening his desk drawer so hard that the papers inside shifted, he dug under the recent case reports to grab his carefully maintained files on the mobs.

"I thought he just controlled those two apartment buildings," Jim said, ruffling through his files, though most of it was committed to memory.

Bullock said nothing. Slowly, Jim stopped moving and looked up at him.

He was biting his lip and clutching his coffee tightly, clearly fighting with himself.

Jim stared at him, anticipation tight in his gut, but he would not ask. It had to be Bullock's decision to share his information; he had secrets that would cost him his life if they got out.

"That hotel on Main is his too. Fish let it slip a few months ago," Bullock finally said, like the words were wrested from him.

"The fancy one? That’s a nicer place than any apartment building," Jim said slowly.

Bullock nodded. "It's got Falcone's own security everywhere, so if Zsasz is hiding anywhere, it's as good a place as any," he paused. "But you didn't hear it from me."

Jim took a deep breath, steadying himself. If they went to this hotel, if Zsasz was really there, then there was a terrifying chance that it would get back to Falcone that Bullock was the one who betrayed his secret.

But Bullock had given his information freely. He knew how important it was to take down the mob employed serial killer before he could kill anyone else.

A crash of the door opening signalled Renee's return, and made both Jim and Bullock jump.

"Everything alright?" Jim asked hesitatingly to a thunderous-looking Renee.
"Fine." she said, sounding furious. "We have to find Zsasz, any ideas?" She asked shortly. Jim and Bullock shared a look.

"We think he might be at the hotel on Main," Jim offered.

That shocked her out of her anger, but she quickly recovered. "Great, let's go."

"Wh- Right now?" Jim asked, incredulous.

"Now Jimbo!" She said, turning on her heel before turning around to face them again. "Bullock, if we're not back in an hour, you still can't have my lunch."

"You have your gun?" Renee asked Jim without looking away from the road as she turned into the hotel parking lot.

"Of course I have my damn gun. Do you have a plan?"

She parked the car. "Of course I have a damn plan," she retorted.

Jim raised an eyebrow at her, and she softened, slightly.

"Ok I have half a plan. Which is more than you have, by the way!" She said, stepping out of the car. Jim huffed and followed her.

"How are we going to find out where he is?" Jim asked, catching up to her fast paced walk.

"I'm just going to ask the reception desk," she said, turning to look at him with her fake smile already firmly in place.

"You think that Falcone's security is just going to give you the room number of their prized hitman?" Jim said, twisting his eyebrows sceptically.

"I'll just use my lesbian charm, works every time," she said, winking at him. Jim snorted out a laugh.

They both took a steadying breath as they reached the lobby, refocusing, letting the full weight of what they were trying to do wash over them.

They were walking into Falcone's hidden palace; trying to take out the prince. No backup, because risking someone tipping off Falcone would cost them their lives, and probably the lives of their families too.

But they both knew they had to act now, before Falcone could possibly know that they were on to him, before he could send Zsasz after them.

"You go wait by the elevators, I'll find out what room he's staying in," Renee said, pushing her dark, wavy hair behind her ear as they stepped together into the lobby.

"If he's here," Jim pointed out.

Renee didn't dignify his pessimism with a response, she just walked confidently towards the desk.
Jim had to consciously keep himself from touching his gun. He tried to look calm as he looked passively around the lobby, which looked fancier than it had any right to. It was early enough in the morning that the hotel was still mostly empty; only a few people were lazing around on the clean hardwood, or sitting in overstuffed furniture.

He let his gaze idly drift to the large vase next to him. Up close, it was easy to see that the expensive looking silver monstrosity was fake; it was coated in something to make it look silver. Jim smirked slightly. Maybe things weren't always as perfect as Falcone would like everyone to believe.

It couldn't have been more than a minute later, but felt like much longer, when Renee sauntered back into his field of view. She flashed him a quick-fire grin, and Jim felt himself relax, just a little. He pushed the button to summon the elevator, which dinged pleasantly.

"Lesbian charm strikes again Jimbo!" She exclaimed happily, walking past him into the elevator. He huffed a laugh, following her in. She had already pushed the button that would take them to the highest floor, besides the penthouse, and was leaning casually against the side.

"Renee. How on earth-

She smirked. "I gave the desk girl a fifty and told her I would double it on our way out if she told me where Zsasz is. Falcone must not be paying her very well if she was willing to sell out for one hundred bucks."

Jim slowly shook his head to keep himself from doing something inappropriate, like bursting into laughter.

Bribing a gangster's receptionist was not the stupidest thing they had ever done, not even close, but it was up there.

They both watched the numbers in the elevator tick upwards as they rose. As each number increased, so did the tension in the elevator. Jim checked his gun.

When the elevator chimed again and opened on their floor, Jim and Renee were ready. They stepped out, Jim following her by half a step. There weren't many doors in the hallway; the rooms were so large there were only a few of them.

Renee led him down the hallway to the door at the very end. They paused; but a muffled noise from within caused them jump into action.

Jim lifted his leg and kicked the door down with a resounding crash.

"Freeze, GCPD!" Renee yelled, holding up her gun as she entered the room, Jim right behind her.

He took in the scene quickly. A bald, shirtless man - Zsasz - was sitting at the kitchen table, close to the door. On the floor was a young woman, wearing hardly anything at all, eyes wide in terror. She was gagged with a piece of fabric tied around her head, covered in small cuts, and one large one on her bicep.

At their entry, Zsasz had started to get up, pale eyes bulging with rage. He reached for his knife - a long, sharp thing that had no place at the breakfast table - but Renee was already there, smacking it out of his hand and forcing his arm behind his back, slamming his chest into the table.

As if through a fog Jim walked towards the woman, gently removed the gag and untied her arms. He listened to her pleas of "please, please he's going to kill me, help me please", but kept his eyes on Renee as she was cuffing Zsasz. Everything seemed to be happening from very far away.
Because Jim had seen the scars on the gaunt, pale skin of Victor Zsasz and understood.

He and Renee had thought, had been forced to assume, that Zsasz was a serial killer who didn't leave a trophy.

But Zsasz did have a trophy, but instead of leaving it at the scene, or taking something from the bodies, he carved his victims into his body, collected them as tally marks.

It explained why his blood was at the crime scene in the first place. He had cut himself too deeply when carving Veronica Bilideau's death into his skin.

But there was something wrong, there were too many fresh cuts, too many healed scars - Jim's head reeled for a second, looking at the visual proof of how many lives had been lost - than he had victims to match up. He felt a terrible swooping sensation in his gut.

They didn't know about all of his victims.

How many people, homeless people and prostitutes and other people that Gotham had forgotten, had he killed? If they checked the waters around Gotham, how many bodies with stab wounds with pockets weighed down by rocks would they find?

Jim felt sick.

Zsasz was unnaturally calm, watching Jim and Renee with his eerily colourless eyes.

"I'll slaughter you," he finally said, apparently speaking to both of them. His voice was deeper than Jim would have thought. "I'll cut you, and when you're a zombie I'll carve you into my skin."

Jim looked past him to Renee, who was wholly unbothered by the threats. Still keeping a tight grip on Zsasz, she gestured her chin toward her shoulder, and Jim got up slowly and walked to her. Keeping one hand on Zsasz, she pulled out her second fifty dollar bill, and nodded at him. He shot her a look, but took it with a slight smile on his face.

Renee looked triumphant as she hauled Zsasz up by his cuffed wrists and marched him out the door, leaving Jim to take care of the injured woman.

It had taken a long time to convince the woman to tell him where she lived so he could get her home safely.

She had let him look over her cuts, which weren’t as deep as they had initially looked, but had been afraid that Jim would arrest her or the other girls for prostitution if he knew where she was staying.

Jim didn’t think he had bothered to arrest a single prostitute since he started working in Gotham, but knowing his co-workers, her fears were not unfounded.

Later, when Jim was finally back at the station, he let himself feel light and relaxed for the first time since they had discovered that Zsasz worked for the mob. He knew that Renee had someone she trusted watching him, to make sure none of the traitorous police officers tried to break him out. And then Zsasz would certainly be carted to Blackgate Prison. With their evidence, which included catching him in the act, it would be hard for even Falcone to bribe the jury.
He was smiling as he walked the familiar path to Renee's office, intending to celebrate the rare good day at work. But as soon as he entered, he could tell that something was wrong.

Renee was kneeling next to her desk, shovelling her things into an old cardboard box.

"What the hell?" he asked, closing the door behind him.

"Oh, hey Jim," she replied, looking up at him quickly before going back to packing.

"What are you doing?" he asked, stepping further into her office. She had already removed all her many posters off the wall, and the office already looked bare and terribly empty.

She rocked back on her heels, and looked up at him mournfully. Some of her hair had fallen from her ponytail and lay haphazardly around her face.

"I have to run Jim," she said softly.

"What are you talking about? What happened?" He was unsuccessful at keeping the edge of panic out of his voice.

"Before we went to the hotel, when the commissioner called me into his office. He," she pursed her lips angrily, "he assigned the case to Tolbert."

Jim froze. Tolbert; the mob's favourite officer to use when they needed a case to disappear.

"I didn't -" he started to say, aghast.

"You didn't know because I didn't tell you." She looked at him dead in the eye. "Zsasz had to be stopped; we had to take him out. We couldn't do our jobs with him hanging over our heads as a threat. But..." she trailed off.

But she hadn't told Jim that they had been removed from the case. Because if the mob found out that he also knew they were working actively against them, it wouldn't just be Renee who had to flee.

"Abby is packing up our apartment, we'll be leaving as soon as I'm done here," Renee said, almost succeeding at sounding casual, despite the anguish on her face.

Jim felt a pang in his stomach. Not only was Renee being driven out of Gotham like a criminal in an old Western, but she had to take her girlfriend with her, uproot their whole life.

He unfroze his legs, walked a few steps towards her and wrapped her in a hug, and she leaned heavily against him.

"They know you didn't know anything, you and Babs should be safe," she whispered into his chest.

"We'll be fine, worry about yourself." They were both all too aware how deep the mob's web went; how much danger she was in.

Slowly, reluctantly, she pulled away. "I'm sorry I didn’t tell you, but Gotham needs you here."

Jim nodded, slowly, taking a step back.

She took a deep breath and looked around her empty office. "You should leave, so no one sees you here. I'll call you once I'm secure."

"Ren..." he trailed off again, at a loss for words. They had worked together for so long, had trained
and been through so much. And now he would have to pretend that she had betrayed him, that of course he would never have taken down Zsasz if he had known it wasn't his case anymore. He could practically taste bile already.

"Don't, Jim. We had to take him down." She smiled sadly, "Just try to keep Gotham in one piece for me until I can come back, ok?"

It was late at night, Barbara had gone to bed hours ago, and Jim should be following her lead, but with the prospect of two days off in a row, he didn't mind staying up. He was idling flipping through channels, nursing his beer that was quickly going flat.

It had been a tense few days at work, waiting for the mobs to react to the Batman story going public. Eventually they would adjust to the change in the game, and the demonstrations of power would begin. And people would die.

Jim sighed, and took another sip of his disappointing beer.

The phone ringing made him jump, and it took several extra seconds for him to reach it. His vague anxiety was sharpening, poking at his stomach.

Who was calling at this time of night?

"Hello?"

"Jim? It's Sarah."

Jim sat up straighter, readjusted the phone in his hand.

Sarah had been working.

"Do you need me to come in? What's wrong?" Because the only reason she would call at this time of night was if something was terribly wrong.

"No, no, stay where you are, we have it handled but." she cleared her throat, and he could hear her shift to the tone that Jim knew well, the tone that she used when breaking bad news. "There was a breakout at Blackgate. Only three men got out but," she paused again, and Jim's stomach dropped, "Zsasz was one of the ones who got out Jim, he's free."
Chapter 5

The weeks after Zsasz's breakout were some of the most hectic of Jim's career.

The mobs had erupted into action as if a race official had pulled the starting piston; nearly everyday Jim walked into work to the news of a new attack. The blood hadn't stopped running down the sidewalk since the breakout.

Public displays of power by the mob had always been a part of Jim's life; growing up and working in Gotham. The constant struggle of the back and forth balancing act between the mobs was punctuated with shootings and robberies, stabbings and chaos. It was a rhythm that had defined Jim's entire life, and since the breakout, it was a screaming tempo that no one could hope to keep up with.

Not even Batman.

Apparently the sudden spike in crime was too much for a nine foot tall winged demon to handle on his own. Now some crime scenes were left untouched, the way they used to be before the Batman had ever shown up in Gotham. He was still active; just the other day he had brought down one of Falcone's drug dealers that had been plaguing the blocks around the South Side for months.

The dealer had been taken to the hospital with a broken jaw.

But there was no time to even celebrate the capture of the criminals that Batman did manage to bring in when there were three more that got away for every one that was arrested; two more mob attacks for every one thwarted.

Jim couldn't imagine how bad a situation they would be in if they didn't have Batman helping prevent casualties.

Since the breakout, he estimated that the mobs had killed fifty seven people. He was trying to keep track of all their names in the files in his desk, but it was difficult, sometimes, to differentiate between random crimes and organized ones, especially when the mobs were waging all out war.

How could you distinguish between low-level mob members and just frustrated civilians picking a side, or using the chaos to exact revenge on an old grudge?

Normally he could check with Bullock and Sarah to share information on who was or wasn't part of the mobs, that he had barely spoken to either of them since the attacks began.

The last time he had really spoken to Bullock, beyond short greetings in the hallways, he had pulled Jim aside into a deserted hallway. He had made him swear up and down that he would "keep his head down, and his moustache out of the mob's business, for fuck's sake." As if it was possible to do anything in the city without the mob knowing about it.

As if he didn't know how likely it was that Zsasz would want revenge on the people who had locked him up.

As if he didn't think about how easy it was to break through a door every time he locked his apartment for the night, with just him and Barbara inside.

Jim wasn't scared for himself, not like he was terrified for her. He was kept awake at night thinking of Zsasz breaking into their apartment, or grabbing her when she was waiting for the bus, or when she was at school. And if the uncertainty and chaos of the mobs continued into the next few months
it would spill into her summer vacation, where most of her supervision during the days were her
gymnastic coaches, or overworked, underpaid teenager counsellors.

He was already having a hard enough time hiding his stress from her now, after only a few weeks of
having Zsasz on the loose. He wasn't sure he'd be able to continue the illusion of peace for the
months when she was at home more.

While walking towards Bullock's office, Jim double checked that he had put his pipe back in his
pocket, and that his phone hadn't fallen out during his smoke break.

This was the first time that he, Sarah, and Bullock were all able to meet up; three in the afternoon, on
a drizzly Tuesday, three weeks after that terrible phone call.

He opened the creaky door, and Sarah, who had beat him to the office, gave him a one handed
wave. Bullock was lounging, resting his feet on his desk.

They must have been able to smell his smoke, but for once neither said anything.

"You alright Gordon?" Bullock said by way of greeting.

"I'm still alive," Jim replied wryly. "You?"

Bullock smirked slightly, but nodded.

"Have you heard anything?" Jim asked, moving further into the office and shutting the door behind
him.

"No, no one has mentioned any deaths that match Zsasz's pattern. Though that might not mean
much. No one's in a talking mood. They've all locked themselves down like they're goddamn Fort
Knox."

Jim snorted.

"What I don't understand -" Sarah interjected -"is why Falcone risked breaking Zsasz out if he's not
going to have him kill anyone."

Jim furrowed his eyebrows. "Everyone already knows he has Zsasz. No need to risk his hitman
being taken out in all the fighting right now," he paused, "or risk Batman getting to him and putting
him back in prison."

Sarah rolled her eyes at the mention of Batman, but didn't dwell on it. "But then all Falcone has done
by breaking Zsasz out is draw a lot of heat on himself! Everyone is attacking him so why-"

"Everyone is attacking everyone," Bullock interrupted shortly, moving his feet off his desk and
sitting up. "Maroni is against Falcone. Falcone is against Maroni. Fish is trying to fuck them both
over, and what's left of the Bertinellis are pretending that they still matter at all. Hell, some of
Maroni's gang is even fighting amongst themselves. Killed that poor goddamn kid at the pier the
other day."

Jim grimaced. The nineteen year old had been dead for hours before the police had found him. He'd
been beaten to death.
He forced the thought aside, turning slightly to look at Sarah. "Besides, just because we haven't seen Zsasz's work on the streets doesn't mean that he's not with Falcone. He could be working behind the scenes. He was smart enough to avoid me and Renee for months when he was active, he's not a complete moron."

"I guess," Sarah said, lips twisting into a frown, "But it just seems strange that he took this huge risk in breaking Zsasz out of prison - painting a huge target on his back - and hasn't done anything with him." She shrugged. "I just thought that he would want to gloat a bit more."

Bullock snorted loudly. "He doesn't need to gloat. All the police, the other gangs, the Batman too probably, all know that he's got a serial killer with him."

"But we don't know that Zsasz is with him! We have no proof at all that he's with Falcone. Hell, we don't even know if he's even in Gotham at all!" She said loudly, turning her angry eyes on Bullock.

"Alright, alright," Jim interrupted their bickering before it turned into an actual argument, "Even if Zsasz isn't here, we have to act like he is. We can't assume that Zsasz isn't around just because no one has seen him." Since the news had first come in, Jim had resigned himself to living as if Zsasz was in Gotham; he had to. If he was wrong, it wouldn't just be his life he was risking.

Sarah took a deep breath, the tension in her shoulders slowly drained and she leaned back. "Sure. Yes, you're right." She ran her hand through her hair. "I hate this." She muttered.

Bullock huffed a laugh. No one had to ask what 'this' was.

It was quiet in the office.

Jim cleared his throat to interrupt the silence. He should feel relief that Zsasz hadn't killed anyone that they knew of, but he had lived in Gotham for far too long to take good news without expecting bad news right around the corner. He could practically hear the horror movie music getting louder and louder, though there was no monster in sight.

"Well, if there's no news, I should get back to my reports." He finally said, pushing his paranoia aside. The piles on his desk were getting downright ridiculous, and dwelling on Zsasz helped no one.

"Me too," Sarah sighed. "I was up all night and barely made a dent."

Jim turned and held the door open for her.

"See you Bullock," he said, looking back at him and nodding.

"Watch yourself Gordon!" He warned absentmindedly, putting his feet back up on the desk and leaning back.

Jim yawned as he walked through the front doors of his GCPD building, pausing to shake some water off his hat.

He had been out late the night before, having taken a robbery case just before he was supposed to leave for the night. The call reported that the thief had taken a few thousand dollars worth of electronics at gunpoint, and ran.
Luckily Jim had been by himself when the call came in, so he had gone alone without worrying about a partner. As he was driving to the store, he had seen someone in a bulky, too-warm sweatshirt for the hot night. When Jim had pulled over next to him, the man had panicked and tried to run, but had turned into a dead end alley.

Jim had spent a lot of time in Gotham, he knew just about every alley in the city, and where they lead.

Some were more famous than others.

Jim's wet shoes squeaked on the clean floor. The building seemed a little emptier than usual, he noted, as he walked the familiar halls towards the largest break-room, where he had stashed his food in the fridge for later. He had considered dropping off his damp hat and coat in his office, but it was too far for his stomach to wait.

When he turned down the hallway, Sarah was sitting on a bench outside the double doors. He noticed her before she saw him, and even from down the hallway he could see how anxious she was, how she was bouncing her leg up and down and biting her lip. His eyebrows pulled together slightly in confusion as he walked up to her. When she heard his footsteps, she jumped up.

"What's wrong?" He asked before she could say anything.

Her eyes were huge on her pale face. "He was here Jim."

"Who was? What are you talking about?" He asked slowly, trying to calm her down.

"Batman! He dropped off these, these goddamn files and left!"

"What?"

"Oh just come see," she exclaimed shortly, whirling around to open the door.

It seemed like every officer in the building had crammed themselves into the room; Jim couldn’t even see the table through the crowd. Lots of people turned their heads when the doors opened, but when they saw it was Jim they went back to speaking in hushed undertones to the people around them. The air was hot and thick with so many people in the room, all their anxiety in the small space.

As he walked further into the room, Sarah right at his back, some of the crowd parted so he could see the table in the centre. There were enough pages of paper on it to cover it completely.

He picked up the closest page to him, and noted with quiet, reluctant amusement that the formatting was the same as the pages that Batman had left when he had stopped the arsonists.

At the top of the page was several pictures, dated from around two months ago. They showed a woman - a prostitute, based on how she was dressed - leaning against a car, and the man inside clearly showing cash. The other picture was the woman entering the vehicle with him.

The prostitute’s face had been blurred out, but looking closer, Jim could see, with a dull pang of shock, that the driver of the car was Tolbert; the officer who wiped cases for Falcone. He was even wearing his police uniform in the pictures.

He quickly scanned through the rest of the report. It described the timeline of Tolbert picking up the prostitute in almost unnecessary detail.

The pictures were damning enough.
As he finished scanning the page, Jim's mouth twisted in a wry smile. Though Batman clearly knew the identity of the prostitute, her name in the report had been blacked out every time; it was classified.

Jim picked up another page, putting the prostitute one down.

This one was from last month, a week before Zsasz had been broken out. It showed Tolbert being guilty of possession and sale of drugs, complete with chemical analysis of the drug (62% cocaine purity). Batman had taken pictures of Tolbert with bags of the small white crystals, and him accepting money from the other dealer. This time the other person's face hadn't been blurred, and Jim recognized him as the drug dealer that the Batman had brought in a few weeks ago; the one with the broken jaw.

It mentioned that the drug's were sold for Falcone by name, and made a point of saying that Tolbert was likely a middle man to move money between the crime boss himself and the individual dealers.

Jim could feel that his eyes were wide, and his pulse was pumping furiously under his skin as he put the drug report down and looked around the rest of the table.

He had known that Tolbert was a dirty cop, known it like he knew his own name, but that was different than seeing it all presented to him in an easy to follow format.

Sarah, still standing behind him, nudged him in the elbow. He turned and looked at her, and she nodded her chin to the centre of the table. He followed her solemn gaze to a big report; this one several pages long; kept together with large, heavy duty black staples.

The first page had a different formatting than all the other reports that Batman had left for them. It was, Jim recognized with another pang of dread in his gut, lifted directly from the GCPD's own records on guns. This particular record showed all the details of Tolbert's service gun, from the date it was activated as an official police gun the service number on the side.

He flipped the page.

The pictures on this page, like all others in the various reports, was taken from a high vantage point. The roof, maybe. The focal image in this photo was not Tolbert, but two clearly dead bodies lying in the shadow of a building. Batman must have gotten to the scene too late to save the victims, but he caught an image of the still smoking gun.

The next image was the view of the gun zoomed in.

Tolbert's gun's serial numbers were clearly visible.

In Batman's examination of the two dead bodies, he had found a piece of paper with the name of the street corner where they had died, as well as Tolbert's name. It was also pictured as part of the report, seemingly an innocuous afterthought for the chaos it would cause in the city.

In the following pages, Batman had pointed out that the men were both members of Falcone's and Maroni's individual arms trade, though from opposite sides. Batman had estimated, and Jim would agree, that the men were trying to negotiate a cease-fire in that area, as the mob violence would be hurting both businesses. Tolbert was supposed to supervise, to make sure it didn't get violent.

And he had shot both of them, including the fellow member of Falcone's mob.

Jim took a slow breath in, and exhaled equally slowly, fighting against the rush of adrenaline. He wasn't surprised that Tolbert was a murderer - that was practically expected of the bad cops of Gotham - but that he had betrayed _Falcone_ of all people.
People had been tortured and killed for much smaller transgressions against Gotham's oldest gang.

Jim looked back on the first page of the report.

It was dated three days ago.

He tossed the large report back onto the table, rubbing at his moustache and shaking his head slightly. There was so much information, almost too many changing facts to keep of all at once.

But before he could even begin to process his emotions - horror at the death of the two men, fear of how much Batman knew, at how apparently easy it was for him to get police records, petty satisfaction at seeing Tolbert exposed for the dirty cop that Jim had known he was for years - the door opened. Jim's head joined everyone else's in turning anxiously to see who it was.

The captain of the station, the tall, wide man that he was, was the first person that everyone saw. Right behind him was Tolbert himself. He was as rat-faced as always, with a pointed nose and small eyes that always looked beady, even when he wasn't walking around like he was better than everyone else. The room buzzed loudly at their entry; a hive of bees all speaking at once, before going silent.

"What the hell is this?" Asked the captain, who was very taken aback to find half the GCPD waiting for him. Tolbert's eyes narrowed slightly in confusion, but otherwise his smug demeanour didn't change. Despite himself, Jim felt a thrill of anticipation at the idea of watching Tolbert realize just how fucked he was.

The whole room shifted again, moving to let the two men reach the table, like they just had with Jim.

It stayed silent in the room as the newcomers started reading through the reports, as they slowly reached the same conclusion that everyone else in the room had already figured out. Jim watched as the captain's face grew more and more pale, and Tolbert's face and ears flushed a raging red.

"So how was the sex?" An unfamiliar voice called from the other side of the room. The tension broke, slightly, as some people started chuckling.

"What?" Tolbert demanded furiously, looking up from the page he was reading to find who was speaking. He must not have found the prostitution report yet, Jim noted.

"With the prostitute. Was she any good? Asking for a friend." More laughter rang around the room.

For the first time, Jim noticed Bullock, standing quietly across the room. He barely recognized him; he was looking so pale and withdrawn. Jim nudged Sarah, and nodded his head towards Bullock. Her eyebrows pulled together in confusion.

"Did you really kill those people?" Another voice asked, more quietly this time, making Jim turn away from Bullock. Once again the break room fell silent, but this time it was as dry and as sharp as ice.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Tolbert snarled.

"It's all in the big report there," Jim said causally, gesturing to the stapled report. He hadn't meant to respond, but the words were out of his mouth before he had thought them through.

Tolbert whirled around to stare at him, his tiny eyes bulging more as he recognized Jim. Behind him, the captain picked up the report with trembling hands.
"You've got no proof," he spat, taking a step towards Jim threateningly.

Jim met his eyes without flinching. "Well, actually the Batman put the proof in all of those. So."

Sarah inhaled sharply behind him. Tolbert took another step towards Jim; they were now eye to eye. His furious red face made his thin blond hair look even lighter.

The room held its breath. Jim's heart was pounding with adrenaline, but he didn't let it show on his face.

"Enough! That's enough." The captain said, grabbing Tolbert's shoulder and hauling him back a step. "We're going to the commissioner."

Tolbert didn't move, and neither did Jim. If Tolbert wanted a fight, let him be the one to start it, in front of everyone. He may be good at shooting unsuspecting people at close range, but Jim knew he could take him in an actual fight, if he needed to.

He clenched his fist.

The captain, who had been moving towards the door with the damning report grasped in his hand, suddenly noticed that Tolbert wasn't following.

"Now!" He said sharply.

Tolbert's jaw twitched angrily, but he slowly broke Jim's gaze and stormed out of the room, and the tension followed him.

"Don't the rest of you have jobs to do? What are we paying you for?" Yelled the captain as he followed Tolbert out of the room. The door slammed shut behind him.

It was the most authoritative that Jim had ever heard the captain sound in the seven years he had known him.

The crowd started to disperse sleepily, like it had just realized that the show was over. Some started to leave, most continued to talk among their friends. Bullock, however, had made a beeline for the door. Sarah and Jim, without having to say anything, moved to follow him.

He rolled his eyes and made an ugly face when he noticed that they were following him, but otherwise didn't fight as they caught up to him and continued as a group to Sarah's office, which was closest.

Bullock entered first, walking to the corner only to turn and cross his arms over his chest defensively.

Jim closed the door behind himself and Sarah. "What's wrong?"

Bullock stared at him incredulously. "What's wrong with me? What the hell is wrong with you? Damn near starting a fight in the middle of the break room."

"Tolbert wanted a fight, all I did was point out which report proved him to be a traitor," Jim said shortly, shaking his head slightly.

"Oh my god," Sarah muttered, rubbing at her forehead with her hand.

Jim turned to look at her, eyebrows furrowed. "What? I didn't start anything."

"No, technically you didn't do anything," she admitted exasperated, "But you weren't subtle when
you publicly stood up to a traitor and name-dropped *Batman*, you moron. That isn't exactly keeping a low profile!"

Bullock snorted loudly. Jim glared at him, but he just shrugged.

"But," Sarah continued, "Jim getting *testy* is the least of our problems. How the *fuck* did Batman get into the break room that's in the middle of the building, in the middle of the night when so many people are here?" She looked back and forth between them.

Jim sighed, pushing the last of his anger aside. He thought back to the room, trying to picture it.

He rubbed his moustache with one hand. "Isn't there that air vent in the corner?" he finally said.

"I think so," she replied frowning. "But wouldn't someone have heard him?"

"No, that's not it," Bullock interjected. "He obviously teleported away by turning into pure shadow, or whatever the rumour of the week is," he said bitterly, lacking any of his normal humour.

Sarah rolled her eyes, but Jim's mouth twitched downwards in a frown.

"What's bothering you Bullock?" Jim said slowly, staring at him over his glasses. "This wasn't really anything new, Batman has had written proof of guilt when he's taken down criminals before."

Bullock tilted his head slightly, again looking at Jim incredulously. "You fucking idiot. This is completely different. I know you had a history with Tolbert, but he was a cop. Batman went after a *police officer*." 

"Tolbert was more gangster than cop." Jim said stubbornly, narrowing his eyes.

"I'm not happy about him going after police now, but I'm much more concerned that he's hacking official police records to get some of his information," Sarah said.

Jim inclined his head in agreement, before going back to looking at Bullock. "Tolbert's a criminal. He's as corrupt as they come, he's a bad cop, and if the mob didn't run this city he would have been gone years ago," he finished bitterly.

"Sure he was a shit head, but he was good at covering his own tracks! And Batman pulled apart all his lies like a parent scolding their five year old." Bullock shook his head back and forth in short, jerky movements. "I'm a bad cop too Jim! Who's to say that he isn't going to expose me next for having ties to the mob?" he finished shortly, staring at Jim.

"But you're not a fucking *murderer* Harvey!" Jim stopped just short of yelling.

"Is that going to matter?" Bullock asked, taking a step towards Jim. "What rule book is he following? What if he decides I'm the next bad egg that needs to go? What’s your plan then?"

Sarah bit her lips, looking back and forth between them. They stared at each other.

Jim looked away first. He wanted to reassure Bullock, because the idea of anyone going after him when there were so many worse cops.

But he couldn't. Because he truthfully didn't know what Batman would do next, who would be the next person that he chose to target.

Jim didn't know that Bullock wouldn't be next.
"Dinner's ready!"

"Ok, I'm coming," Barbara replied from her room as Jim finished putting the spaghetti in the two bowls. He had meant to make something more elaborate, but after the... eventful day at work, all he had been up for making was the simple pasta.

She met him at the table a minute later, throwing herself into the seat.

"Hard homework?" He asked, looking over his glasses at her.

"No, there's just a lot of it," she replied, already starting to dig in. Jim smiled slightly, before following her example.

"Didn't you have a math test today? How'd that go?"

She rolled her eyes. "It was easy, I finished early," she paused to take another bite, chewing and swallowing quickly. "I don't think that Mr. Sosa really cares anymore, some of the questions were the same as they were in the homework."

Jim chuckled. "Really?"

"He didn't even change the numbers!" She said with a sly grin.

"Oh, so it was really easy," Jim said, wagging his eyebrows and matching her grin.

She giggled, taking another bite of spaghetti.

A knock at the door made them both turn and look. Jim slowly put down his utensils and walked to the door.

He exhaled slowly before checking the peephole. Relief flooded his body; it was just the newspaper delivery. He could see the delivery man across the hall.

He darted out the door and picked up *The Gazette* off the ground. Waving in thanks at the delivery man, he returned to the apartment, and locked the door behind him.

The front page, once again, was all about the Batman, or the Gotham Bat, or the Dark Knight, or whatever term Vale had coined this week. She had been relentless in her coverage; writing a new article almost every day, despite there rarely being any new information.

*The Gazette* was reaching record numbers of sales, so she must have been doing something right.

"Is it about Batman?" Barbara asked from the table.

Jim turned to look at her, astonished. "How do you know about Batman?"

"We talk about it during lunch at school," she said casually, taking a bite of food.

He slowly raised his eyebrows at her, and she sighed exasperatedly, but smiled. "Keisha was telling everyone that her older sister saw him when someone tried to take her purse. And then Benny said that Batman saved his dad during the fight in Newtown from a few weeks ago," she trailed off,
watching to see how he’d react.

Taking deep, controlled breaths, Jim put the newspaper on the table and sat down.

The fight at Newtown had been a nasty skirmish between Fish and Falcone’s people. It had been a shootout in a car repair shop. Six civilians had been killed. Batman had been at the scene - all the surviving gunmen had been found disarmed and tied up - but had obviously been there too late to stop the fight before people had got hurt.

It was comforting, somehow, that Batman had apparently rescued some of the people in the building.

It was less comforting that he was hearing new information about Batman from his twelve year old daughter.

“I suppose you uh, talked about that during lunch too, huh?” He finally said.

She looked sheepish, or at least pretended to look sheepish. “Yeah. Everyone kept asking Benny all sorts of questions for a while.” She paused. “I think he really liked the attention,” she said, taking another bite.

Jim’s mouth quirked up in a half smile, before settling back into a frown. When had she grown up so much? She seemed too young to be discussing things like vigilantes and mob attacks at the lunch table.

He remembered discussions of the mob when he was in school. Everyone knew whose family was in what mob, and who was responsible for the shooting, who was selling the drugs and for who. Jim knew lots of classmates who would disappear from school, only to turn up a few weeks later, either arrested or dead.

Barbara was still far to young to be having these discussions at school.

Or maybe Jim was just getting old.

Either way, it made him sad.

“What else are people saying?” He asked, hoping to sound casual.

“About Batman? A lot. Like Jia Huang doesn't like him. She said that her dad said that Batman is a criminal menace who should be taken down-“ That wasn't surprising, the Huangs had been with the Falcons for years - “and she keeps saying that her dad is going to go to the mayor to complain.

Jim huffed. “Oh yeah?”

“Yup. A few people even agree with her,” she nodded seriously.

“Sounds like there are lots of mixed feelings then.”

Barbara nodded because her mouth was full.

The kitchen quieted as Jim considered his daughter.

“What do you think? About the Batman?” He asked, still looking at her.

Her mouth twisted slightly downwards, thinking the question through carefully.

“I think that he’s a hero. He’s helping people, and that is what heroes do. Like you,” she said like it
was an easy statement, like it was just another fact that she had memorized.

Jim swallowed his food, and swallowed his initial flash of anger at being compared to a lawless vigilante.

“How do you figure that? He's breaking the law.” He asked, desperately keeping his voice even.

“Well,” she paused again, still thinking her of her answer carefully. ”what if a house was burning, and there were people inside who were trapped, and the firefighters weren't there yet? If someone broke into the house to rescue the people inside, they’d be a hero, right? Even though they're still technically breaking in. It’s like that.”

Jim exhaled slowly and deliberately through his nose, forcing back the mess of words and emotions desperate to escape. He should be revulsed, furious, or scared even, that Barbara thought that Jim's job was the same as a vigilante's.

But his initial spark of anger at the comparison was already cooling, leaving him with the familiar bone-deep exhaustion. He even couldn't manage indignation, and that in itself was frustrating.

When had the line between his job and Batman gotten so thin? When had he gotten so comfortable with Batman working in his city that he couldn't find it in him to argue with his daughter that he's different that the Bat?

Because he couldn't argue that he was helping people, more than Jim or anyone else could help alone. And though there were plenty of people fearful of the Batman, more and more were coming forward with stories of how he had saved them.

Jim had spent his life defending the law, and Batman was blatantly disregarding it, but it was feeling more and more like they were on the same side, even though Batman had made a point of going after a police officer.

But how could he align himself to dangerous vigilante, even in spirit, when he had spent his whole life fighting against criminals, and fighting against other police officers who worked with them?
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Friendly reminder that this is rated mature for Gotham suckyness, and a specific chapter warning for discussions of dead bodies and torture.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sound of loud, rambunctious voices made Jim suspicious as he walked into GCPD for the beginning of his shift.

It had only been a few days since Batman had literally dropped all of Tolbert's crimes on them, and those days had been filled with silence, punctuated only by sporadic whispering of worries and conspiracy theories.

Neither Tolbert nor the captain had been seen since they had left the break room.

The exuberant voices grew louder as Jim walked down the hall, until he turned a corner and nearly ran into the source of the noise. The group of officers quieted slightly.

"Whoa, sorry Gordon," said the man - Jim recognized him as Aaron Brenner. He made no move to get out of the way.

To Jim's knowledge, he wasn't actually affiliated with any of the mobs, but was far too eager to demonstrate and abuse the power that he had as an officer for them to be anything more than coworkers.

Brenner, and the rest of the group he was with were displaying the same frenzied excitement in person that their voices had been, shifting around restlessly, grinning at each other.

He looked them over quickly, immediately spotting a new model of bullet-proof vests that they were all wearing. Brenner and a few others were also carrying guns that Jim didn't recognize as the officially sanctioned models that they were supposed to carry.

One of the men mock-held the gun as if he was going to shoot the ceiling, tilting it to admire in the light, and Jim caught the edge of the GCPD logo on the side.

Oh.

The never-underfunded GCPD must have gotten a new shipment of weapons in; these ones looked like they were more suited for the military than the police.

"New guns?" He finally asked, taking the bait. The way they were flaunting their guns around made it clear they were desperate for someone to ask about them.

“Oh, this?” Brenner held up the gun like he had only just noticed it in his hand. "Commish put together a task force to take down the Bat vigilante. Spoke to the Mayor and got us some new gear to protect us." He was unable to keep a smirk off his face as he thumped his vest.

"Right," Jim said, inflectionless, hiding the anger flooding his veins.
They had gotten bullet-proof vests to protect against someone who had never once used a gun, and guns to shoot someone that few people had ever seen.

It was such a transparent, dishonest reason to bring more dangerous firepower into Gotham that Jim saw red. Last week Batman took down an arms dealer and they had celebrated, and today the commissioner brought in new arms himself.

How long would it take this time for the mobs and criminals to get this new model onto the streets?

It might already be too late, if the commissioner and Falcone used the same manufacturer.

Jim bit his tongue. Not only was the commissioner using Batman as an excuse to endanger Gotham's civilians by giving trigger-happy cops bigger and better guns, but he only seemed to care about the vigilante because Batman had gone after a cop for the first time.

The commissioner had ignored a potential threat against Gotham for months; only bothering to care after a move had been made against a police officer.

And the fact that Batman had probably already brought in more criminals than Brenner had in his whole career did not make Jim any less bitter.

"Well, good luck," Jim finally choked out, starting to side-step around them.

"Wait! Wait-wait, I just remembered!" Brenner said, suddenly excited again. "The commish wanted to see you in his office! Wanted to talk to you, or something."

Jim froze in place for a second, dread and annoyance settling heavy in his stomach.

"Great, thanks," he said, more sarcastically than he meant to, but the group didn't seem to notice his irritation.

When he ducked into one of the side hallways to go upstairs to the commissioner's office, Brenner and his friends had gone back to talking loudly in the middle of the hallway, ready to interrupt the next person to brag about their new guns.

Jim knocked once before entering the commissioner's office, not bothering to wait to be invited in.

He had once made Jim wait for half an hour outside of his office while he was on the phone, and Jim didn't intend to give him the chance to do so again.

"You wanted to see me?"

Commissioner Fred Eaton looked up from his computer, and his mouth ticked downwards into a frown.

Even just sitting behind a huge, rather ugly desk, Eaton had the air of smugness to him. He was a fit man; all the charity fundraisers and mob dinners didn't weigh on body him like it did some other men. Grey hair that was always kept perfectly neat, and a clean-shaven face with his expensive suits made him always look presentable for phoney photo ops.

He didn't look particularly ready for a picture now though, with his face twisted into a look of faint
disgust, like he smelled something rotten but he was trying not to show it.

Jim's face probably looked the same.

"Yes, Detective Gordon. How's your, uh," he paused, "your, uh, case going?"

"It finished a few days ago, the paperwork will be done soon."

"Good, good," he said with a fake smile, glancing down a pile of papers on his desk.

"What do you want?" Jim said, sparing both of them from this going on any longer than it had to.

Eaton's mouth twisted further into a scowl, but he didn't say anything about Jim's rudeness.

"You were there, the other day, when the... Bat vigilante... left those files in the break room, yes?"

"Yes," Jim agreed slowly. Surely he wasn't in here to be punished for the near-fight with Tolbert, when other man had literally betrayed the most powerful mob in Gotham?

"Detective Tolbert has had to...leave the city, and-"

"Yes, I don't imagine that Falcone likes it when his people kill each other," Jim interrupted frankly. Eaton swallowed, visibly reining back his anger.

"As I was saying, Tolbert has had to leave Gotham, but unfortunately it seems Captain Graham has followed suit."

It took Jim a few seconds to process what the commissioner had said. "The captain left too? I didn't know he was named in any of the files."

"Er, no, he wasn't," he broke off again. The silence stretched between them, as Eaton tried to think of a reasonable excuse for why someone would abandon their prestigious job as a captain, that wasn't 'he was going to be killed by the mob'.

"You can admit that he was with Falcone too, it's not a secret," Jim said sourly.

Sighing, Eaton ran his hand over his face, suddenly looking exhausted and forlorn.

"Captain Graham was supposed to be supervising Tolbert's... activities," Eaton admitted.

Jim twitched his eyebrows down slightly. "Funny, as a captain, I thought he was supposed to supervise all of the detectives, not just the ones in the mob's pocket," he said, trying to keep the tension out of his voice.

They stared at each other for an instant, before Eaton huffed out a bitter laugh with a small shake of his head.

"Well Detective Gordon," he said, grabbing some papers off his desk and straightening them, before walking around his desk to stand in front of Jim, "since you know so much about being captain, why don't you do it?"

Jim stiffened, looking at the paperwork in his hand and back at the man himself. "Excuse me?"

"The reason that I called you to my office was to tell you that you're replacing Graham.
Congratulations," Eaton said, voice dripping sarcasm. He was unable to keep the smug smirk off his face, thoroughly enjoying one-upping Jim.
"What the hell are you playing at?" Jim demanded, angry now. He had been qualified for years to be a captain, and he knew that it was his stout refusal to do business with the mob that had kept him from the promotion.

Until now, apparently.

The commissioner just tilted his head in mock-confusion.

Jim exhaled through his teeth. "Why now?" He clarified, once he was sure that had control of his voice again.

"Because it is required that someone is named captain for our files. Don't worry, absolutely nothing else is changing. It's a puppet title; all decisions will be made by me," Eaton smiled maliciously.

"If you don't want someone to do the actual job, there are lots of other officers who'd be better at it, I'm sure," Jim spat.

"Of course! But at least you'll actually be able to complete the paperwork." His fake smile faded into a deep scowl when Jim didn't respond. "Believe me, you were not my first choice. But here we are. So...?" He gave the papers in his hand a condescending shake and looked at Jim expectantly.

In an ideal world, Jim would like nothing more than to slap the pages out of the commissioner's hands and tell him to go fuck himself; to go find another pawn to do his bidding.

But Jim wouldn't. If he could do even one thing as a captain to help Gotham that he couldn't do as a detective, if he saved even one more person this way, then it would be worth it any indignity that Eaton could dish out.

Jim reached out and grabbed the paperwork from Eaton's hands.

"Wonderful," Eaton grinned, walking back behind his desk and sitting down.

Gritting his teeth, he turned to leave, but stopped before he reached the door.

He turned to look at the commissioner, who sitting peacefully again in his office, happy that he had gotten his way. For a moment, the image of the new firearms that Eaton had brought into Gotham - a city already drowning in bullets - was all that Jim could see.

"I ran into your new task force downstairs," he exclaimed, meeting Eaton’s eyes.

"Oh really? What did you think?" He flashed his poisonous smile again.

"I think that Falcone must be really upset with you for losing Tolbert and the ca- the former captain. It seems pretty desperate; trying to get back into his good books again by taking down the Bat," Jim said pleasantly.

Eaton's smile disappeared in an instant, and his hand clenched where it was sitting on the desk. "Just get to work Gordon," he grumbled, looking back at his computer.

Jim smiled slightly, and closed the door softly behind him.
The following months saw the last of Gotham's spring fade into a hot, humid summer, punctuated with intense bouts of thunder and rain storms.

As Commissioner Eaton had promised, nothing changed at the GCPD.

The mob fighting had fizzled out gradually, in fits and starts, as casualties on all sides became too high for anyone to continue their warpath. The only thing left behind from the months of fighting was a pile of bodies, and further strained relationships between the mobs.

Gotham's summer heat and storms had not deterred Batman, who still seemed to stop crimes nearly every night. Predictably the task force had had no success in hunting him; the closest they had come to finding something new was when they discovered a dulled bat shuriken, which they had officially called batarangs. The dulled ones seemed to be used in combat, while the razor sharp ones were always found far away from the fighting.

Jim hadn't been able to get his hands on any of the dulled ones; the only batarang - which he thought was a stupid name - that he had was the original one from the would-be arsonist case. It was kept hidden in the bottom of the drawer in his desk that also housed his secret mob files in his desk.

Despite himself, Jim found himself begrudgingly grateful that Batman was sticking with Gotham for the summer. After all, Gotham in the summer was hardly a nice place to be, the longer days and warmer temperatures caused an increase in general crime every year. The humidity brought out smog that was thick and heavy in everyone's lungs, and the stench of the hot litter mixed with seawater was known to make entire blocks on the east side reek during hot spells. And then the dampness, the humidity and fog, the endless drizzly days and torrential downpours that soaked the city.

Jim loved Gotham in the summer.

He loved it throughout the entire year of course, but the summer meant going to Robinson Park with Barbara, now that she was done school for the summer, and getting ice cream from the little shop on the corner that had been there since Jim was a kid. He could go to her gymnastic classes more often with the summer schedule. When the instructors told her that though she had executed the flip perfectly, but that she should work on being more graceful, she found his gaze in the viewing area and rolled her eyes before throwing herself back in, and he was so proud.

And if all the extra shifts and extra crime made things more difficult in the summer, having Batman helping out this summer was certainly making things easier.

When the call came in for a dead body found in Old Gotham, Jim chose Bullock to come with him. Sarah was technically available, and absolutely would have come if he needed her to, but she had never been as comfortable with dead bodies.

Besides, the body was found right outside one of Falcone's main properties, so Bullock's familiarity with mob politics might be needed, if the crime turned out to be mob related.

"Where's the body again?" Bullock said, starting the car with vigour. Jim was letting him drive for once.

"Two blocks north of Crime Alley. Body was found near that new bus stop they put in."
"Aye aye," Bullock responded with a smirk and a waggle of his eyebrows. It had taken nearly two months for Bullock to stop responding to everything Jim said with "yes sir Mr Captain", but apparently he wasn't quite finished with the pirate jokes.

Yawning, Jim took off his glasses and ran his hand down his face. There wasn't much time left in his shift, and it had been a busy night. Just a few hours earlier Batman had beat him to the house of a suspected kidnapper by just a few minutes. Jim had been in his car on his way to arrest the man when the call had come in that Batman had already been there, and the suspect was apprehended and the victim was safe.

Jim was mostly just glad to have that messy case done with, and was only slightly bitter that Batman had beat him by mere minutes.

The drive seemed to take a long time, or maybe Jim was just too accustomed to racing around at breakneck speeds.

There wasn't much need to rush when the body was already dead and there were no witnesses.

When they finally did get to the crime scene, Jim took his time, pausing to wrap his trench-coat more firmly around him. A cold front was starting to blow in, bringing with it a promise of a storm that would break the heat wave they had been in. The wind ruffled his hair as he followed a few steps behind Bullock towards where the body was.

He must have been a little more tired than he realized, because it took him a second to realize that the dead body wasn't lying anywhere on the ground. He peered around Bullock's large frame, looking for it.

Jim froze, exhaustion replaced by alarm in an instant. Dread and fear formed a hard pit in his stomach; radiating cold throughout his whole body, all the way to his fingertips.

They hadn't described the body on the call, and Jim had assumed that it would be like most dead bodies in Gotham; lying on the ground from a gun-shot wound.

It wasn't. The body was sitting upright on the bus stop; umbrella propped up next to it.

And Jim already knew that the man had died of a slit throat.

"What?" Bullock asked, sensing that Jim had stopped moving, turning to look at him. "Gordon?"

"This is Zsasz's work," he said dully, walking up and standing squarely in front of the body of the dead man. The hat had been pulled low on the corpse's face, hiding its neck from view.

Bullock froze too, whirling to stare at the body.

"Could be a copycat killer," he pointed out optimistically.

"No, we kept all the details of the murders out of the press, specifically to prevent imitators. This -" Jim gestured to the whole scene in front of them; the recreation of the first murder scene from years ago- "was only ever in police records."

"Yeah, but those police records aren't exactly private anymore." Bullock chuckled darkly under his breath. "Hey, do you think that maybe Batman-"

"Oh, what the hell is wrong with you?" Jim snapped at him.
"Alright, alright, sorry," Bullock said, not really sounding sorry at all. He took a closer look at the body, lifting the dead man's hat off his head, and leaning closer, before suddenly recoiling slightly. Humour drained from his face like water into a storm drain. "Oh fuck."

"What?" Jim leaned closer, the ball of dread growing larger. What could possibly make Zsasz's return worse?

"This is Dan Gotti," Bullock stepped back, revealing the middle-aged, balding, dead man. "He was in charge of controlling Falcone's labour unions. He's tight with Falcone, has been since forever."

Jim ran his hand down his moustache, forcing himself to think around the fear knotting in his stomach. "Why would Falcone have one of his own men killed? Unless Gotti betrayed him?"

"Not Gotti," Bullock shook his head firmly, "He and Falcone were real close. Falcone even had him under his own personal protection." Bullock paused. "I guess not anymore."

They both stared at the body; the sightless pale eyes and the gash along the neck. Bullock swore vigorously under his breath, walking away from the body, pulling his flask out of a pocket, and taking a swig. Jim took a deep breath and knelt down closer to study the corpse.

It looked similar to all of Zsasz's victims; slit neck, propped up in a terrible parody of life. But looking closer, there were differences with this one.

Jim furrowed his eyebrows. This body's lip was split, and there was a purpling bruise on the right cheek.

In theory, Jim supposed that the man could have just gotten into a fight before he was killed, but his instincts told him something else. He rolled up the man's cuff, on a whim.

There was a ring of bruising around the wrist; like the man had been tied up too tightly before he had died.

And the hands themselves, Jim now noticed, had several broken fingers, with three fingernails missing.

"Harvey, come look at this."

Bullock lumbered back over. They were both quiet while he looked over the body the same way that Jim had.

"So, Zsasz had some fun before he killed him, I guess," Bullock said, standing up and taking another sip from his flask.

"But none of the other victims ever showed any signs of physical torture before. It was always just the slash to the neck. Why is this one different?" Jim asked, narrowing his eyes at the body.

"Maybe it really is a copycat killer," Bullock said, but he sounded more bitter than optimistic.

"No, this is definitely Zsasz's work. Something else has changed." Jim pursed his lips together tightly, trying to rearrange the facts in his head into a something that made sense. "He killed one of Falcone's own men. Tortured him and left his body outside Falcone's main territory but why-" he broke off, a terrible thought taking hold of his brain - "You're sure that he couldn't possibly be a traitor?" Everything would be so much easier if he was.

"No, he was as loyal as they come."
"Goddammit," Jim swore under his breath.

Only one explanation was left then, and it was the last thing he wanted to deal with.

Jim heaved himself to his feet. "Zsasz isn't working with Falcone. Someone else must have broken him out in the first place, and now that person is using him against Falcone." Jim looked at Bullock desperately, hoping that he might have hidden information about who could have pulled off using Falcone's former hitman to murder his right-hand man, and leave the body in his front yard.

"Well, it's not Fish or Maroni. There's no way they're patient enough to wait this long before using Zsasz." Bullock sounded so much older, without his typical humour colouring his words. "I didn't think..." He trailed off, muttering under his breath.

"What?" The dread that had been slowly disappearing as Jim managed put together the story returned with full force, cold and heavy in his chest.

"There were... rumours... months ago, of a new guy trying to start up his own gang. Apparently he was the one who took out one of Fish's men a while back. She was furious, but never found him. They barely recognized the body after everything the Penguin did to him. I guess torture is his thing."

Jim raised his eyebrow. "He's called 'The Penguin'? Seriously?"

Bullock snorted, a harsh, abrupt sound, but didn't say anything more.

"You never mentioned him before," Jim said mildly.

"Didn't really think he was the real deal. Definitely didn't think he had the balls to taunt Falcone."

The rumbling of a stuttering engine made them both look up, as a crime scene cleanup van rolled up. Jim nodded at them as they got out of the car, signalling that they were done with the body.

He spared one last look at the dead man, before walking to stand a little ways away, Bullock right beside him. He leaned against the rough stone wall of a nearby building, momentarily sheltered from the cool wind that was getting harder and harder.

He pulled out his pipe, loaded and lit it quickly, the actions automatic from years of practise.

"Seriously?" Bullock said, staring pointedly at the pipe.

"What?"

"You were smoking when the call came in!"

He exhaled smoke and glared at him witheringly over his glasses. "I'm not accepting any judgement from a guy who carries a flask in his pocket," he said, holding the pipe between his teeth as he spoke.

"You can't prove that it's not a healthy smoothie," Bullock said indignantly, but he couldn't quite keep a smirk off his face.

Jim snorted loudly.

They stood by the wall for several minutes, Jim smoking and Bullock drinking side by side. It could have been a nice night, except for the gruesome murder, and the knowledge that there was yet another gangster to worry about.
And this one, in a city known for being gruesome, was considered ruthless by *Fish* of all people.

In the quiet of the night, Jim started to chuckle lowly under his breath.

"You wanna share the joke Cap’n?" Bullock looked at him sideways.

"It's just, it's just that," Jim forced back a near-hysterical chortle, "we've got Fish, Batman, and now a Penguin." He turns to look at Bullock. "We're in a fucking zoo!"

Bullock burst into barking laughter. "What'll the next exhibit be?"

"Well," Jim said between chuckles, "Maroni always kinda reminded me of a peacock. Always trying to show off."

"Not to mention his fucking strut!" They both broke into renewed laughter, ignoring the strange looks the clean-up crew was shooting them.

"Do they even have peacocks in Italy?" Jim snickered.

"I don't fucking know," Bullock said, wiping tears from his eyes. "Wait - wait. What does that make Falcone?"

They both fell into silence, thinking. A gust of wind blew some litter down the street, which disappeared into the shadows.

"He's a snake," Jim finally said, taking one last draw of his pipe. Bullock huffed quietly.

Cunning and deadly, choking the life out of Gotham to feed himself; the metaphor worked well for Gotham's longest reigning gangster.

Jim's exhaled smoke floated away, as the weight of Zsasz's return and the Penguin's entry weighing on them again, stealing the good-natured laughter from before.

"It's a helluva zoo," Bullock muttered under his breath.

Jim furrowed his eyebrows, staring into the dark shadows of the street corner.

"Batman doesn't know about Zsasz," he said suddenly, giving a voice to the unease in his chest.

"What are you talking about? Batman's been in the police records for months. He can definitely find out about Zsasz."

"No, I mean - " Jim broke off, trying to put his distressed thoughts to words - "I mean that he doesn't know about how Zsasz worked for Falcone. I left that out of the official reports, after Renee had to leave."

"So?" Bullock sounded exasperated now.

"So Batman won't see that this murder was a threat against Falcone. It'll just look like Zsasz the murderer is back, not that Zsasz the fucking mob hitman is back."

"Jim," Bullock said, eyebrows climbing increasingly higher on his face, "are you worried for the Batman?"

"No," Jim said quickly, but his gut twisted when he realized that he wasn't sure whether he was lying or not, "No, I'm just pointing out that Batman doesn't have all the information this time. He can't
exactly fly in and solve the case like normal without the info."

Bullock continued to look at Jim like his hair had turned bright blue. "Well, what are you going to do about it? And since when have you cared about what Batman is doing in the first place?"

"I was just pointing it out," Jim repeated, sounding meek even to his own ears.

Bullock stared at him, but thankfully let it drop, and they fell into silence again, watching the crime scene cleaners move to gather up the dead body.

"We might as well head back. If Penguin was confident enough to taunt Falcone with the body of his right-hand man, he's not going to leave clues around," Jim said dejectedly.

"Want me to drop you off right at your apartment?"

"You are not driving after chugging your flask," Jim said, raising his eyebrow, judging. "And I have something I need to do in my office anyway," he added on, an idea blooming in his mind, despite the pang of the anxiety in his stomach.

Jim's office was very similar to most other offices in the GCPD building. It wasn't used for impromptu meetings with Sarah and Bullock as often as their offices were, because Jim's was tucked away far from the hustle of high traffic hallways. There were only two things in Jim's office that made it unique. One was the window, with a view of eastern Gotham. The other was the stack of files, hidden under more mundane paperwork, that detailed all the information that Jim been gathering about the mob over the years.

The official police report may not mention that Zsasz had anything to do with Falcone, but Jim had kept a record nevertheless. The file in his desk had held all the details of the case, including the records and proof of how Falcone had used Zsasz as a hitman to intimidate and attack the other mobs.

That particular report was no longer sitting hidden inside his desk.

Jim splashed cold water on his face, trying to shake himself out of his thoughts. It was nearly dawn, not that anyone could tell with the pouring rain outside. It had been hours since he had gotten home, and he hadn't been able to stop himself from fixating on the stupid pile of paper.

He still can barely believe that he dared take it out in the first place.

But he had, had taken Zsasz's truthful report and had haphazardly cleared a spot of it in the middle of his cluttered desk and-

He sighed, staring at his reflection - blurry without his glasses - in the mirror. "You can't even admit it to yourself," he muttered at his reflection, which thankfully didn't reply.

When he had returned to the GCPD building, he had gone to his office and put Zsasz's accurate report on the middle of his desk. He put new batteries in his biggest flashlight, and he had propped it up against some files so that it shone out the window. He had left the window closed, but unlocked. Most people who could see it from the street would just assume that he had left his lights on.
Jim's plan really counted on Batman's ability to recognize the difference between the normal lighting and a single flashlight.

He sighed again, breaking eye contact with himself as he rubbed tiredly at his moustache.

At the office, he had been so full of anger and fear at Zsasz's reappearance in Gotham, so full of desperation to do something more than just send a mere memo to the GCPD and tell them that a serial killer was back. And so he had left out a clue for a vigilante.

The guilty writhing in his stomach forced him to bend, leaning against the sink, with his head in his hands.

He couldn't even explain to himself why he had done it. Whether leaving the information was a cry for help, showing Batman how dangerous Zsasz really was, to try to get him to take him down - or whether he was just trying to warn the vigilante, so that Jim wouldn't have to respond to a call that ended with the Batman with his neck slit.

Even now, despite the horror and shame he felt at what he had done, the image of the shapeless form of Batman's dead body on the ground made his blood turn cold.

But did it even matter why he had left the information? He had done the one thing he said he would never do.

He had colluded with a criminal.

He had willingly shared information - information that was so outrageous that it had literally driven Renee out of Gotham - with a vigilante that he knew almost nothing about. His whole career had been spent lamenting and complaining about his fellow officers' dealings with the mobs, only to turn around and do the same thing.

But it wasn't the implied plea for help, or the nonsensical worry for Batman that was making Jim feel like scum, and it wasn't even the fact that he had shared information with a criminal.

It was that he didn't feel remorseful at all for leaving Zsasz's information. The fact that he couldn't bring himself to regret his actions was by far what was making him feel like his gut was digesting itself.

He had made a solemn promise to himself, when he first got his badge, that he would never work with criminals; that he would be different than the corrupt police that he had grown up with and worked with. He should be mourning his broken promise, cursing himself for doing the unthinkable.

He was not.

Because times had changed; there was a vigilante flying around Gotham nightly, and for Jim to continue to deny that Batman was helping Gotham far more than he was hurting it would be negligence.

He met the gaze of his own reflection again. Was it was better to break his promise, and give information to Batman; or to uphold it, and let Gotham suffer for his stubbornness?

His mouth twitched slightly upwards. He already had his answer, much as it pained him; had had it since he had shone his flashlight out the window. It was a decision made of months of watching Batman save people, months of fewer muggings, of drug dealers off the streets, of murderers and rapists and child abusers put behind bars.
If his ultimate purpose for being a police officer was to truly help Gotham, then he had to give
Batman - someone who had proven again and again his commitment to putting away its criminals
without killing them - every opportunity to help, to do more than Jim could.

And if Jim's information helped Batman at all in bringing down Zsasz, it was absolutely worth all the
guilt and pain that the decision was causing him.

Helping Gotham always came first.

Besides, he thought, finally settling back into his bed, even if Batman did see his meagre signal for
what it was, if he would have to be able to reach it.

And Jim still wasn't convinced that Batman could fly.

Chapter End Notes

After about a year or two, once they know about not only Fish and Batman and
Penguin, but also Robin and Catwoman and Killer Croc and Man-Bat, Bullock
absolutely gets Jim a plaque that says "Associate Zoo Manager" but like a plaque
designed for kids from their first trip the zoo, and nails it in Jim's office :)
It took a lot of self-control to not sprint up to his office as soon as he finally arrived at the GCPD. He was already itching with anticipation to check on it, and the traffic had seemed particularly bad this morning, as if taunting him.

He truly didn't know what to expect in his office, and the suspense was making his heart pound like a jackrabbit in his chest.

Jim walked quickly through the halls, deciding on the spot to duck through one of the large break-rooms as a shortcut to get across the building. The sunrise was just starting to light up the room orange when he walked in. Like he had hoped, it was deserted; the only movement was the TV on the wall.

Just as he was about to reach for the door handle to continue his trek to his office, it opened towards him, and he had to back up to avoid being hit.

"Oh! Sorry Captain Gordon!"

Jim looked up. One of the newest rookies, Detective Fatima Hamid, was standing in the doorway.

"It's alright Detective Hamid. Busy shift?" He asked, noticing the haphazard way she had packed her overstuffed bag.

"Yeah, it was. Actually, I've got some paperwork for you in my office, if you can wait a minute." She must have noticed his hesitation, adding on, "It's only just down the hall."

"Sure, of course," he said, keeping his reluctance out of his voice. She turned around and darted back out of the room.

Begrudgingly, he had to admit that it would be nice to have the paperwork as early as possible. He set his bag down on the table with a slight sigh, idly watching the TV as he waited.

Someone had left it on the news, the station with the comically overproduced and overdramatic hosts. As Jim watched, they transitioned from the new government scandal to a panoramic shot of the Gotham skyline, with the words 'The Gotham Bat' underneath. The news of Batman had finally reached outside of the city.

Jim sighed. At least they weren't in the news for a famous murder this time.

The TV volume was turned down too low for Jim to catch every word, but Jim didn't need to hear what they were saying when he could clearly see the amusement on the news anchors’ faces.

This was nothing new.

Gotham had been a national joke as long as Jim had been alive. Particularly violent crimes from other cities were described as 'Gotham-esque', their crime rates mocked. Of course their resident vigilante would be a prime source of entertainment for the rest of the country.

The door creaking open announced Fatima's return.
"Oh, are they still going on about him?" She asked irritably, walking up behind him and looking up at the TV. "They've been making fun nonstop about 'the Batman myth' for two days now."

"They always do this when something interesting happens in Gotham. They'll be bored in a few days."

"I guess," she said skeptically. Fatima had moved from out of state recently to work in Gotham, and wasn't used to living in the county’s punchline. "Though they wouldn't be calling him a myth if they had seen what he did to the kidnapper last night."

A sudden shot of adrenaline set Jim’s heart start pounding in his chest again.

Now he knew that Batman had been out the night before. The only question left was if he had seen Jim's signal and found the files.

"He's fine, just really really beat up," she said quickly, misinterpreting the look on his face. "He deserved it anyway. The kids were fine though, they're back with their mother now. It's all in the report." She held out her small stack of paper.

Jim pushed his lips together in a half smile. "Thanks, I'll have a look," he said, grabbing his bag from the table and taking the report from her hand.

"Busy day ahead?" she asked, leaning back slightly as she looked him over. If half the apprehension that he felt was showing on his face, he wasn't surprised she was checking what was going on.

"It's always busy here," he said with a small smile, hoping to reassure her. "It's actually little less busy now with Batman here, if you can believe that."

"You're right, I don't believe that!" she said with a smirk. "Have a good shift captain!"

He raised his hand in goodbye as she left the room.

What a strange thought, the idea that Batman had been working longer in Gotham than she had. Jim shook his head slightly as he made his way across the room towards the stairwell.

The GCPD building had seemed to triple in size since yesterday, but after ducking through a few more hallways he was finally at his office.

It was only for years of practice of keeping his hands steady when stressed that allowed Jim to unlock and open his office door without fumbling with the keys.

Somehow entering his own office felt like he was entering someone else's home, like he was intruding.

The rising sun was trying to peek between the buildings to get into the office, but Jim turned on the lights anyway. The small room was filled with the familiar hum as they flickered on.

Jim swallowed, then walked over to his desk.

There were no big clues, no big signs that said 'Batman was here!', and Jim hadn't expected there to be, after so many months of the main signs of existence being the numerous bruises and a few batarangs.

The first thing that Jim noticed, with a rush of adrenaline, was that his flashlight had moved from being propped up near the windows. He spun on the spot, and quickly found it where it was lying
innocuously on his desk. It was on top of Zsasz's file.

He picked it up slowly and looked at it, huffing a quiet laugh of astonishment when he saw that someone turned it off.

No. That the Batman had turned it off.

He let himself slide into his chair, taking off his glasses and rubbing his moustache as he looked at the flashlight and the file on his desk. Supposedly, Batman had moved the flashlight on top of the file to demonstrate that he had read it.

The mix of trepidation and relief nearly overwhelmed him; he could still barely believe that his hasty plan to communicate had worked in the first place.

The flashlight made a slight thunk as Jim put it on his desk. He put his glasses back on, and narrowed his eyes. The flashlight wasn't the only thing in his office that had changed.

Last night, in his mad rush to leave out Zsasz's file before he could second-guess himself, he's certain that he had messily pushed all the other paperwork on his desk to the side in sloppy piles.

Jim narrowed his eyes. The surrounding paperwork had all been straightened up, organized into perfectly straight piles.

It looked like he had even grouped them by case number and date.

In theory, Jim supposed that Batman could have been checking to see if any of the other files had to do with Zsasz, and put them back in order. But that's not what his instincts said.

He had a twelve, almost thirteen-year-old daughter, and he knew when he was being teased.

The Dark Knight of Gotham was unquestionably fucking with him.

He slowly put Fatima's report on the desk as he stared suspiciously at the paperwork like it might spontaniously become messy again.

When he had been unable to sleep last night, terrified of what he might find in his office, he had never considered that Batman would passive-aggressively mock Jim’s organizational skills.

Still, a sense of relief filled him, sitting at his desk as the sun came up. At least now everyone that could help bring Zsasz down had equal amounts of information.

He had done his part, and all of Gotham’s protectors were on the lookout.

"Wait, wait run it by me again."

Jim forced back a frustrated sigh, instead opting to take a long drink of his coffee. He wasn’t mad at Sarah’s question, but at the fact that they had been up all night, that the case they were working on wasn’t coming together, and that the coffee at the GCPD was shit.

They had been there so long it had gone cold, which didn’t help.
"In the last eleven days, four restaurants were all robbed at gunpoint in the evening, usually a few minutes before closing. The most recent one was two nights ago," Jim started to summarize, not for the first time that night.

"Right, right - But which restaurants are with the mob?" she interrupted, fiddling with her pen as she stared down at her notes in front of her. "Do we know?"

“Well the first restaurant is definitely Maroni’s, he's been using it for smuggling for years," Jim took another big gulp of his coffee to finish it off. It continued to be disgusting. "The name of the latest crime scene sounds familiar. I think it is Falcone’s, but I’d have to check my records."

"So we don’t even know if these are mob crimes."

"No," Jim grumbled in agreement, leaning back away from the table they had been working on.

"But you think they are," she said, trying to force a straight answer out of him.

Jim's face twisted into a grimace. "Yes. I don't have proof, but I don't think robbing Maroni and Falcone in less than two weeks could be an accident. Most people would know to avoid robbing those two," he paused heavily, "I think this is the Penguin, messing with both of them even more, or trying to distract them from Zsasz."

In the two weeks since Jim and Bullock had discovered that Zsasz was killing again, another dead body with the characteristic slit neck had been found. Her link to the mob wasn't known, but she had been left in Maroni territory.

Sarah swore exhaustedly. She had not been happy to learn about Gotham's new gangster, and his pet serial killer. Holding a hair elastic in between her lips, she wrestled her hair back into a ponytail as Jim stared unseeingly at all the case notes on the table in front of him.

“It's too late for this,” she declared when her hair was off her face again, “I’ll clean up here, you go find that file in your office and check if the latest robbery was at a Falcone place. We’ll come back with a fresh head tomorrow.”

Jim's sigh was long and drawn out, reluctant as he was to leave the case on a bad note.

He was barely paying attention as he walked to his office, most of his attention was going over and over the case facts, though they had long since blurred together in a mess of numbers and locations. Sarah was probably right, recommending that they take a break for the night.

He unlocked and entered his office, kneeling down in front of his drawer to look the file with the name of Falcone’s restaurant. It was only from last year, and it didn’t take him long to find it. He closed the drawer, and went to put it on top of his desk so he could confirm the name of the restaurant.

He froze.

There was already a file, lying face down on his desk. His goddamn flashlight had been moved so that it was sitting upright on top of the file.

He picked it the foreign file and flipped it over. Batman’s now-familiar formatting looked up at him; a picture of a dead woman prominent.

"My window was locked this time," he complained to the empty office.
He hadn’t tried to communicate with Batman since he had left out Zsasz’s file two weeks ago, having nothing new to share.

Apparently, Batman had something for him.

Which seemed different, somehow, than when Jim had left out his own file. Jim had been offering a warning at least, or if he was being honest, directly asking for help in taking down the serial killer. Batman leaving his own information seemed to carry an implied expectations; a test.

No, not a test. Something more like trust.

Jim pushed back the nagging guilt and started to read.

The file was about the shooting and murder of twenty-two-year-old Angelica Garcia, dated from the night before. Jim furrowed his eyebrows, rubbing at his moustache with the hand that wasn't holding Batman’s report.

Why had he sent Jim a file of a random murder? Batman had never had trouble taking down murderers by himself, so it seemed unlikely that he was asking Jim for help, especially since he had nothing to do with this case.

The file continued, describing how Garcia had been shot three times in the chest. She had been killed in the early hours of the morning, outside of the restaurant she worked. One of her coworkers had found her body, but there had been no sightings of the murderer.

Which was tragic, but still didn't explain why Batman wanted Jim to see this file in particular.

He flipped to the next page, which went into more details about her murder, including the name of where she worked. Eyes suddenly widening in realization, Jim grabbed at his own file, quickly flipping through it to find the name of the restaurant. He found it fast enough - he had been right, it was one of Falcone's places - and looked back at Batman's file. They were the same.

Jim leaned back, thinking. So the woman, Angelica Garcia, worked for the restaurant that had been robbed, and had been killed the day after the robbery.

The two crimes were too linked to not look into it further.

Batman had considerately included the police's case number in his report, and it didn't take Jim long to find it on his computer.

The officers on the case had already brought in a suspect, who was already in a holding cell.

He grabbed both his files and Batman's and left his office, walking back to the break room where Sarah was waiting.

"What took you so long?" she greeted him when he entered the room. “Did you find the file?"

"No, I found it. I was right, the latest robbery was a Falcone place. But we have to get to the interrogation area, we might have a suspect.”

"What? Where'd you pull a suspect from?" she paused, looking him over suspiciously. "What's the other file in your hand?"

There was no point in trying to play it off.

"It's... a Batman file," Jim winced.
Her eyes widened in shock, before narrowing again. "That really only raises more questions, Jim," she deadpanned. "Where on Earth did you find one of Batman's files?"

"It was just sitting on my desk."

"He broke into your office?!” she sprang up from where she was sitting.

"Apparently." She was unapplied, staring at him with one eyebrow raised. "His file is on a murder case, and I think that it might be related to our robberies. And Batman does too,” he said.

"How did he know to leave a file on your desk in particular? Last time he left his files in the break room." He didn't reply. "Jim. What is going on?" She asked, softening slightly.

He took a deep breath, and told her about how he had left out Zsasz's file for Batman a few weeks ago.

"Oh my God Jim," she whined when he finished, sounding like she was pleading with him to tell her that he hadn't really shared information with a vigilante, that he was playing a joke on her.

"He had to know about Zsasz," Jim said stubbornly, repeating what he had told himself that night he had left the file.

"So your solution was to invite him into your office?! That's insane. You're insane."

"I had to give him a chance to help with Zsasz." Jim sighed explosively. "I didn’t realize that I was giving him a free pass to come to my office whenever he wanted!"

She scoffed harshly, and dragged her hand down her face.

"Let me see the file," she said shortly, holding out her hand. Jim smiled slightly as he handed it over.

Honestly, she had taken the news that Jim had communicated willingly with Batman better than he thought she would.

Now they both had to wrap their minds around Batman communicating back.

"The suspect they found is in interrogation?" she asked, handing the file back to him once she had finished reading.

"Yes, we can go talk to him right now." With a new lead to go on, the desperation to go investigate made the idea of waiting any longer unbearable.

He held open the door for her as they left the room.

"I’m still not happy about this," she muttered to him. "You working with a criminal."

"Does it help if I told you it wasn’t an easy decision and I felt guilty about it?" Jim looked at her out of the corner of his eye.

She paused, tilting her head slightly. "Actually it does, a little."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Maybe you haven’t completely lost your mind," she smirked. "I’m still tattling to Bullock though."
Jim sighed.

The officer in charge of the murder case was surprised to see the captain coming to ask to speak with the suspect, but didn't mind giving Jim all the evidence he had collected and letting Jim and Sarah in.

The suspect himself was a short, twenty-something-year-old man, who looked terrified to be sitting at the interrogation desk.

"Hi, Zackary Gibbs right? Can we ask you a few questions about Angelica Garcia?" Jim asked, sitting down in front of him.

"I didn't kill her," Zackary said immediately, looking at Jim with wide, red-rimmed eyes.

"Ok," Jim accepted for the time being, "Can you tell us about what happened the day she was killed?"

"Or the day before," Sarah chimed in from behind him.

"I..." he trailed off, biting his lip and looking at the table.

"It says the report that you lived with Garcia. The officer arrested you for a domestic homicide," Jim said, reading off of the file.

"No! No, it's not like - I'm gay!" He blurted out. "She's my friend, we're rooming together, I didn't know anything until they came into the apartment and said that she, that -" he broke off with a wet gasp.

Jim met Sarah's eyes for a brief second, catching her nod of agreement. "It's alright. I don't believe that you did it. I think something happened at her work. But we can't help you, or find out what happened to her, unless you tell me what you know," Jim said softly.

"She was really scared when she got home from work a few days ago, she didn't want me to tell anyone," Zackary blurted out in a rush.

"What happened?" Jim asked lowly.

"She was in the back when the place was being robbed, she didn't see anything or who did it, or anything. But, but when she was putting the garbage out, right before she left for the night she saw -" he gulped in a staggered gasp of air, "She saw one of her coworkers stuffing bills into his vest and realized that he was the one who had robbed it. She said she tried to pretend like she didn't see him, but that he was staring at her when she got on the bus."

"Did she mention at all what the robber looked like?"

Zackary's face twitched into a hard expression. "His name is Todd. She was always complaining about him. I tried to tell her not to go to work the next day but..." he trailed off again, sniffing loudly and wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

Jim could finish the story from here. She had gone to work, and the robber had been waiting for her there. And he had tied up his loose end.
Sarah left and came back a moment later with a cup of water, which she pushed towards him. Zackary quickly swallowed it back.

"Thank you for all your information, it's gonna be a big help," Jim said, starting to stand up. He paused. "I'm very sorry about your friend."

"Thanks," Zackary sniffed heavily, before starting to speak loudly again, "I tried to tell the other officer, but he-"

Anger sparked through Jim's chest at the mess the other officer had made of the case. "I understand. He'll be spoken to, I promise." Jim said grimly, forcing back his anger.

Jim took care to close the door softly, to not let his rage bleed out to affect Zackary.

Together, Jim and Sarah started walking towards the cars, to drive to the restaurant.

She must have picked up on his fury.

"Spit it out Jim," she said.

"The officer just took in the closest suspect he had? He didn't think at all, just took in the man she was living with, just assumed! To make his life easier. It's just fucking lazy police work," he snapped as they walked out the front doors.

"Yes it is," she paused, letting him fume as they walked.

He didn't say anything.

"You can yell at him later. You should be happy though! Batman breaking into your office totally paid off!" She said with a shit-eating grin.

He glared at her.

"Are you going to leave him a thank you card on your desk?"

"I hate you," he grumbled halfheartedly, and she laughed, the prospect of having a solid lead to go on beginning to lift both their spirits. They climbed in the car.

"You know," Jim started to say, carefully keeping a smirk off his face, "Between the officer, and having to deal with Batman's delivery service, I think I should be able to smoke in the car, just this once." He watched her out of the corner of his eye for her reaction.

She let out a loud gasp of a laugh as she pulled into the road. "There is NO smoking in the car, you asshole!"

"Worth a shot."

It hadn't taken them long to go to the restaurant and find the man that Zackary had described. He all but proved his guilt himself by drawing a gun and trying to fire on them when they questioned him, though Sarah knocked the gun out of his hand before it could be a real threat.
A search of the robber's apartment had turned up the stolen money; enough to come from each of the restaurants he had stolen from, not just the one that he had worked for.

They had combed his apartment, but hadn't found anything tying him to Penguin.

Bullock, once he had finished calling Jim a hypocrite for communicating with Batman and laughing himself silly, had been as unnerved as the rest of them that one of Penguin's guys was working undercover at a Falcone place. They had all thought that Penguin was new to Gotham, but if he already had established undercover agents, he had either been there longer than they thought, or was smarter than they realized.

So it was just as well that they didn't have any case against Penguin. Jim would rather know a little more about the gangster before directly antagonizing him, especially with Zsasz still an active threat.

It had been a rare quiet night of patrol when a panicked, static-y call interrupted the calm, blaring a call for help over the car's radio.

"Active gang fight, shots fired, calling all backup to a warehouse by the docks on Industrial Street and Basins Road, I repeat -"

With fluid movements made from years of practice, Jim flicked on his sirens with one hand as he screeched into a U-turn with the other, screaming down the road the way they came. At the same time, Bullock responded to the radio, telling them they were on their way.

The drizzle of the rain coated his windshields with droplets of water, sending the light from the streetlights scattering across his dash, interrupting the dark night around them, but Jim didn't let up from the accelerator for a second.

"Give me the details Bullock," Jim said tersely, taking a sharp right turn and accelerating again towards the docks.

"Gang shootout, between Falcone's people and someone else. A team was investigating a possible drug deal location and happened to be caught in the crossfi-"

"What team?" Jim asked before Bullock had finished talking.

"Not sure. One of the rookies and her partner. That Fatima girl maybe? It was her partner on the radio I think. Turn right here."

"Fuck," Jim swore savagely as he cranked the car around. It was bad enough that any team was in the middle of a gang fight, but it was so much worse that a rookie was involved, who didn't necessarily have the experience to handle a dangerous situation like a shoot-out. Things could go wrong so quickly. "Fuck!"

"Lopez was also on patrol, she and her partner are heading over too. Everyone else is further away."

Even with the way Jim was driving, it seemed to take forever for them to finally turn onto Industrial Street, only to have to slam on the breaks as another police car - Sarah's - turned onto the road in right front of him. He followed the car to the warehouse; which was only a few minutes down the street, but it felt like the road had quintupled in length. Both cars pulled up just down the street from
the warehouse, and everyone stepped out at once.

Automatically Jim scanned the building from afar as he shut the car door and drew his gun. The front doors of the big concrete building were closed, and there were no windows to look through to get a clue what was inside.

"No eyes to the inside," a voice echoed Jim's thoughts. It the officer who Sarah had been patrolling with - Aaron Brenner, the trigger-happy cop from commissioner Eaton's task force.

Which wasn't ideal, but they'd have to make due.

"Is there a side entrance?" Jim didn't like the idea of walking straight through the front doors, especially since whoever was still alive had had time to prepare for them.

"I think there's one on the west side wall," Bullock said. Sarah nodded in confirmation.

As a group, they stalked towards the building, using the scattered shipping crates as cover where they could. When they had to cross in front of the main entrance doors, Jim kept his gun trained on the entrance, but there was no movement, either from the officers inside or from the mobs.

It wasn't a good sign, that there was no one responding to them being out in the open. The radio had been silent since the first call for backup.

They found the side door quickly; there were lights attached the wall above that bathed it in light. They all crept quickly up to it, two people on either side of the door.

When everyone was in position, Bullock - being the largest of the four - stepped up in front of the door and resoundingly kicked it in. Jim and Sarah immediately moved to flank him, holding their guns in front of them as Brenner covered the space behind them.

It led to a little hallway inside the door that was separate from the main warehouse. Old light bulbs that hung naked from the ceiling were the only light, colouring the hallway in a harsh orange. The bulbs were so spaced out that they left pockets of shadow throughout the hall, leaving more hiding space than Jim would prefer.

"It's quiet," Sarah noted in a hushed whisper as they started walking. Jim had noticed the unnerving lack of noise as well.

Normally shootouts were terribly noisy, charged with screaming and swearing, and the bursting explosions of gunfire. The only noise in the building was their own heavy breathing and muted footsteps.

The silence was damning.

They turned the corner quickly, Jim leading the way with his gun clutched tightly, but steadily, in both hands. He scanned it quickly, and though he didn't flinch at all, was startled to see the first sign of people in the warehouse.

Someone - or someone's body - was on the ground, leaning against the wall underneath one of the light bulbs.

His heart dropped painfully to his stomach when he recognized Fatima's hijab.

He walked quickly towards her, hardly able to stop himself from running. When she moved, turning her head to find the source of the noise, only hard-fought experience kept him from gasping in relief.
"Captain Gordon?" She asked weakly as they came closer.

"Are you alright?" He kneeled down in front of her, letting the others provide cover for them. Immediately he saw the source of the problem; she was clutching a bloodied bandage to her shoulder. She'd been shot.

"It's fine, it's really not that bad." But she let him gently peel back the bandage to look at the wound. True to her word, the bullet wound didn't appear imminently serious.

The nagging sense of wrongness of the scene suddenly occurred to Jim.

"...Where did you get a bandage?"

She jolted as if reanimated by the question, frantically grabbing at his arm with her good arm and meeting his eyes with a feverish glint.

"He was here," she gasped.

"Who?" But even as the words were coming out of his mouth Jim realized who it was. Premature relief slowly started to spread through Jim, starting in his chest and radiating outwards.

Maybe the silence of the building wasn't a death sentence for everyone inside.

"Batman! He- Tanner, my partner, and I were investigating rumours of a drug deal when everyone started coming in from the doors. There was yelling about a murder, and revenge and the shooting started," She gasped a stuttering inhale and continued, "We tried to get out, and we were almost at the door, but there was someone waiting there and-" she gestured meekly to her shoulder with one hand. She paused, catching her breath.

Jim wanted to give her more time, but the clock that had been running in his head since the call first came in continued to tick.

"Then what happened?" he asked as gently as he could.

"A - a shadow came down and knocked out the man who shot me. Batman pulled me out of the room into this hallway, pushed this bandage on my shoulder and went back in. It was really loud inside for a while, but it's been quiet for a few minutes. No one has come out the door since."

"What did he look like?" Bullock asked lowly.

"Huge. Huge and fast, I couldn't really get a good look at him. He was like a blur. He had wings though! Big black ones."

"Alright," Jim said, thinking. He turned to stare at Brenner. "You say here and guard the hallway. Call for an ambulance, but don't let them in until we've secured the building." If the shooting started again, Jim didn't want the impulsive shooter joining them in the main warehouse, spraying more bullets everywhere. Someone needed to watch Fatima anyway.

If Brenner was upset at not being allowed in the actual warehouse, he didn't show it; only checking his gun and getting into position.

"Detective Hamid," he said turning back to look at Fatima, "You're going to be fine, you did everything right. Good job."

"My partner was still in there," she groaned, worry plain in her voice.
"It'll be ok," he said with confidence that he only half believed.

With a nod to Sarah and Bullock - no words needed with them - the three walked toward the door to the main warehouse.

It had been left slightly ajar, making it easy for them to enter quietly; there had still been no noise in the building.

If there was such thing as a good place for a shootout, the main warehouse was it. Pallets and shipping containers created lots of space for cover, though it also created lots of places for an ambush. It was better lit that the hallway had been, throwing everything in harsh fluorescent detail.

"Split up, search the room," Jim said, his voice barely a whisper.

They set off.

The smell of blood and freshly dead bodies was already starting to spread, Jim noted as he crept along the wall. He stopped at an intersection of two shipping crates; the body of a man with half his head blown off was on the ground, which had left scattered bits of skull and grey matter and far too much blood on the ground. Jim stepped over his torso and kept moving.

The next body Jim saw wasn't blown to bits, was merely unconscious on the ground. One of the dull batarangs was lying next to the man's gun a few feet away, and if Jim nearly sagged with relief.

Not everyone was dead. Batman had been here - Fatima had been right - and he had gotten here in time to keep both sides from completely killing each other. So many shootouts that Jim had arrived at too late had ended with everyone on all sides dead. He allowed himself one deep breath, let himself revel in this new Gotham that didn't always let everyone die.

It was several long minutes of carefully creeping around every shipping container; of checking each corner before stepping around it before something interrupted the rhythm of seeing dead and unconscious bodies.

"Jim," Sarah's voice came from a few shipping containers over, but carried no urgency. She sounded more shocked than anything else.

He made his way towards her voice, still checking every blind corner as he went.

She was standing in a small clearing, facing the front of the warehouse. Turning when she heard him coming, she gestured slightly with her gun to whatever was in front of her. Jim walked into the clearing and immediately understood her awe; it was enough to make him freeze in his place.

Zsasz was lying unconscious on the ground, arms wrapped around one of the vertical supports, possibly by handcuffs. He was easily identifiable; without his shirt, his hundreds of scars were thrown in sharp relief by the harsh lights. His nose was bleeding steadily on the ground, and bruises were already starting to swell, darkening the skin on his ribs, making the deadly scars stand out more.

Jim's breath caught in his throat, his head spinning with something akin to whiplash.

The last thing he had expected to see was the infamous serial killer, here, in the middle of a gang fight.

"Captain?"

Jim started, whirling his head to the source of the voice.
Tanner Peal, Fatima's partner, was standing beside where Zsasz was bound. Jim hadn't noticed him at first. He had a wild look in his eyes that Jim had long since associated with an adrenaline high, but looked uninjured.

"I stayed in here to make sure no one came back for him," he said, speaking quickly. "The fight was over so fast, I was looking around and found him and -"

"No, that was good thinking," Jim said, though he couldn’t keep his eyes off Zsasz.

"I don't know where Fatima is," he said, sounding desperate.

Jim tore his eyes away from Zsasz's scarred body. "She's in the hallway outside, injured, but she's -"

The sound of heavy footsteps interrupted his thought, and three guns were immediately trained on the source.

Bullock stepped into the little clearing, arms raised in sarcastic surrender.

"It's just me. The building's clear, why are you all -" Bullock froze, noticing Zsasz for the first time. "Jesus fucking shit."

"Peal," Jim said, finally starting to recover from the shock of seeing the nightmare that had haunted his summer tied in front of him, "Go into the hallway outside, tell Brenner that the building is clear and to send the ambulance in for Fatima. If other officers have shown up yet they can come in to help too."

He nodded and left without another word.

That left the three of remaining in the middle of the warehouse, all staring at Zsasz.

"I thought some of the wounds on the guys back there looked like stab wounds. Thought I was just losing it," Bullock muttered.

"What was he even doing here? Look, he literally brought a knife to a gunfight, it's right there!" Sarah exclaimed, pointing to the ground where there was, in fact, a bloody knife, half hidden in a shadow.

"Those dead guys back there thought he did just fine," Bullock pointed out.

"It doesn’t matter right now, we can deal the why he was here later," Jim interrupted before it could turn into an argument.

A sudden twitch and low groan from Zsasz made them all flinch and turn their guns on him. The entire building seemed to hold its breath, and the bright lights felt like a spotlight as they watched him slowly wake up.

He looked up at all of them, blinking blearily as he tried to orient himself, but went still when he met Jim’s cold gaze.

They looked at each other. There were several new scars on Zsasz's collarbone that had been hidden from view before, though they were still freshly bleeding. He must have cut himself immediately after stabbing the men that Bullock had found. Jim swallowed, but didn’t otherwise move.

When Zsasz finally recognized Jim, he tried to lunge forward with a shrieking snarl, but was held back by his bound arms, falling back against the pillar with a pained grunt. His earlier rage was
quickly replaced by an unnatural stillness, and he smiled.

"I remember you," Zsasz sneered in his deep voice that didn't match his spindly frame at all. "I never did get around to killing you. I won't make that mistake again." His face softened around the word 'killing', caressing it.

"Pretty hard to stab anyone when you're cuffed like that," Jim replied steadily. "Considerate of Batman to leave you like this, wasn’t it?"

Zsasz bared his teeth. He fiddled with his cuffs with small movements, trying to hide what he was doing, but couldn't suppress his wince. Maybe a fractured arm or wrist then, based on how gingerly he was holding himself.

He deserved it, if that was the case.

"The Batman won't always be around," Zsasz snarled, narrowing his eyes.

"Maybe," Jim agreed nonchalantly, recognizing Zsasz's angry bluff for what it was. "But I'll take my chances. It's paying off so far. Definitely worked better than your failed team up with the Penguin."

Zsasz's face went slack in surprise, then went carefully blank, though he couldn't hide his furious flush.

Jim smirked. So they weren't supposed to know that Zsasz had been working for the Penguin.

Sarah and Bullock shared a look of glee with him.

It didn't happen near as often as Jim would like, but the joy of knowing more than the criminals did, of catching them off guard, would never get old.

The following hours were filled with a tornado of activity. Securing Zsasz in a cell, leaving Bullock to guard him and come up with a list of other officers who could be trusted to watch him, to make sure that Penguin's guys didn't come to break him out, or keep Falcone's people from killing him. Organizing a clean up of the warehouse, setting up a perimeter in case either Penguin or Falcone's people came to see what happened. Checking on Fatima, ensuring that her injuries were as non-threatening as they had first appeared, which they thankfully were.

It wasn't until much later, sitting in his office as the sun tried to rise, attempting and failing to start the paperwork before he had to go home for when Barbara woke, that Jim truly realized what had happened that night.

The tip that Jim had left for Batman those weeks ago had paid off, better than he could have imagined. Batman must have been following Falcone's actions when he had come across Zsasz; it was the only reason Jim could think of for how Batman had gotten there and stopped the fight so fast.

Because of Jim's given knowledge, Zsasz was going back to jail. The road of a guilty conscience and sleepless nights had lead to the killer being captured and put away.

And if this - the warehouse that wasn't completely dead inside, the rookie still alive and expected to
fully recover, the killer back behind bars, the city *safer* - if *this* was Jim could expect when he worked with Batman, then he wasn't going to feel guilty about helping him anymore. How could he possibly feel bad, when Batman had proven again and again his commitment to helping Gotham in a way that didn’t end with more people dead?

When Batman had first appeared in Gotham, Jim had waited for the day he would find one of Batman's victim’s shot, or at the very least dead. Somewhere along the way, Batman’s appearances had started to automatically mean lives saved, not lost.

Gotham had seen enough death. And if Batman wanted to help Gotham like Jim did, he would do everything he could to help.

He smiled and huffed a laugh to himself in his quiet office. He just couldn't argue with the results, and he was done trying.

Chapter End Notes

This is not the end! There are still some snakes in Gotham to be taken care of >:]
Chapter 8

Jim was only halfway through his shift when he started to head towards the commissioner's office, simply because his mountain of paperwork was beginning to take over his desk. Most of it was paperwork that had to be taken to commissioner Eaton, and Jim tended to put that off as much as possible to avoid the man.

Even the one thing they might have found a common ground in - the arrest of a serial killer - had been soiled, because Jim had known that Eaton was only happy because Zsasz and Penguin had been going after Falcone, and locking him took the pressure off Eaton.

It hadn't been enough to completely spoil their victory, but it had been a rude reminder that the fight against the mobs wasn't close to being done yet.

His arms hadn't quite gotten tired of carrying his files when he opened the door to the hallway that led to the commissioner's office. He turned a corner and was surprised to see that he wasn't alone in this part of the building, considering that the sun had gone down, and that most civilians weren't allowed in this area.

The couple was staggering down the hallway, leaning heavily on each other. An officer was walking behind them, trying and failing not to look sheepish as he escorted them.

The look on their faces made Jim stop dead. The man was openly weeping, tears rolling down his face; his black skin shining in their wake. But the expression on the woman's face was one that Jim had seen far too often. She looked torn between screaming in rage and crumpling - like her whole world had already collapsed, and she was trying to figure out what to do next.

It was an expression Jim very rarely saw outside of giving terrible news to family members when tragedy stuck.

"What's wrong? What can I do to help?" Jim asked urgently, ignoring the officer standing behind them.

"Just get out of my way. Please, just -" Her voice caught on a sob as Jim backed into the wall to get out of the way as they slowly hobbled down the hall. The officer with them looked at him, but didn't say anything before following.

Jim watched them leave, mind swirling with confusion. There were only so many things that could make a couple look like their world had ended, and only so many reasons that civilians would ever make it to this hallway. He looked from where they had come from, narrowing his eyes.

Anger steeped hot fury into Jim's veins as he walked to the commissioner's office, opening the door so forcefully it slammed into the wall.

"What the hell was that?" He asked as a way of greeting, letting his files bang sharply on the desk.

"Captain Gordon, thank you for the paperwork." Eaton sat calmly at his computer, looking up at Jim with his rehearsed smile.

"Who was that couple, coming from your office?" he demanded. The commissioner's blasé attitude was doing nothing to calm his trembling anger.

Eaton lowered his eyes and sighed, visibly rallying himself as he realized Jim wasn't going to let it
drop. "That couple is in... *hysterics* because they believe their twins have been kidnapped. It's all under control, and none of your business Gordon."

"If their kids are missing then we can file a report. It's not that late, if we need to start searching it's best -"

Eaton's expression turned hard. "*I said* that it is under control. There is *no point* in looking for those children."

Jim opened his mouth to retort, but paused. There was something, something in Eaton's expression, or something in the way he said 'point', in the way he couldn't quite meet Jim's eyes.

Terrible realization bloomed in his mind, as he unwaveringly put pieces together from a case he was supposed to have left alone months ago.

"Where did they go missing?" he asked quietly, dread clenching tight in his gut.

Please, not this.

"Gordon -"

"At the corner of 26th and Eagle? Around the bus stop right? Their kids didn't come home from school, and now no one can find them. *Right?!* Jim all but snarled, words coming faster and faster.

He just *knew* that the missing kids were connected to his old case - his human trafficking investigation, the one he had been working on when poor Mike Penn had walked in, talking nonsense about a "Batman" that would soon prove to be true. Jim may have been removed from the case in lieu of Tolbert, but he had never forgotten the details, not really. Adults yes, but mostly children going missing around a particular corner. Falcone's human trafficking cartel that the commissioner had protected then.

The same one he was protecting now.

"You son of a bitch," Jim growled. "It's Falcone's kidnapping ring. You're *covering* for him. Tell me I'm wrong."

Eaton scowled fiercely but didn't deny it. "It's business, Gordon."

"BUSINESS?!"

"AND," Eaton raised his voice over Jim's, standing up, "You will leave this case alone, do you hear me?"

"Fuck you. Go to hell."

"Gordon-

"YOU ARE ASKING ME TO PUT A GANGSTER'S PAYCHECK OVER *CHILDREN'S LIVES!*" Jim roared.

They stared at each other, Jim heaving in anger.

"Yes, I am." Eaton said, quieting suddenly, deadly serious when he met Jim's stare. "This is Gotham, you knew what you were getting into."

Jim shook his head. "No."
No, Gotham didn't have to be this way. No, Jim wasn't going to ignore this case because a goddamn gangster wanted him to.

"Fuck you," he repeated for good measure, turning to leave.

"I hope they kill you Gordon," Commissioner Eaton said, sitting down again with an oil-slick smile. "I really do."

Jim slammed the door shut.

It wasn't until Jim had been driving in his car at breakneck speeds for over five minutes that it occurred to him that he may not have thought his plan all the way through.

He didn't have nearly as many clues as he would prefer, to be out driving around like a madman. He remembered that the disappearances kept happening around 26th street and Eagle Boulevard, but once he had started sniffing around in Falcone's territory any further, he had been removed from the case.

So he was flying blind; his only new knowledge was that twins had gone missing from the area he had already known was suspicious.

Since he had left the GCPD, the weather had turned ferocious. An intense rain had started; slamming huge raindrops against his windshield. His wipers were moving so fast it seemed like they would fly right off the car, but the rain continued to blur the road ahead regardless.

Reluctantly, he slowed the car to a slightly more reasonable level, but didn't stop until he reached Eagle. It didn't take very long; most people had been scared inside by the weather, leaving him free to speed.

When he arrived, he pulled over with an abrupt jerk of his arm, trying to think past his furiously pounding heart. There was so much potential area to cover, and the kidnappers had had hours to flee and hole themselves up with the kids somewhere.

He took off his glasses, pinching the bridge of his nose as he took slow, deep breaths, forcing aside the useless anger that had pulled him to the middle of Gotham, alone, without a clue where he was going.

Inhale.

He had to find the kids; the longer the wait the less chance they had of making it back to their parents.

Exhale.

He was the only one looking, and he had to start somewhere.

He put his glasses back on, anger sharpening into focus, and pulled back onto the street. He would just have to drive around, maybe visit the bus stop that he had once thought was suspicious to see if there was something he could find.

He hadn't even made it to the end of the block when he slammed on the breaks, just barely catching
movement out of the corner of his eye.

A man had jumped out of an alley at the side of the road, waving his hands in the air. He didn't stop even after Jim screeched to a stop, instead stepping further into the road and coming around to Jim's driver-side door. Up close, Jim recognized him as one of Gotham's homeless, from the scraggly beard and the old, dirty coat he was clinging too.

He was speaking, but Jim couldn't hear what he was saying over the pounding rain on the roof of his car.

Making a snap decision, he pulled his trench-coat tighter around himself, and stepped out of the car, locking it behind him. The man, seeing that Jim was going to talk to him, ran back towards the alley he came out of, checking to make sure that Jim was following.

In the short amount of time it took them to reach the shelter of tarp on top of two large trash bins pulled close together, Jim was absolutely soaked. They both ducked under the tarp quickly, Jim shaking the water off his glasses so he could see.

Not that there was much in the make-shift shelter to see. The man had a well-worn backpack leaning against one of the bins, and a plastic grocery bag next to it, tied with a knot on top. The man himself was slightly hunch-backed, with wrinkles sitting deep in his withered face, beneath the thin grey hair that had been plastered to his scalp by the rain.

Despite the storm, he was smiling; hints of missing teeth could be seen through his lips.

"I thought they weren't sending anyone!" The old man exclaimed happily, eyes alight.

"I'm sorry, what are you talking about?" Jim had to yell to be heard over the thunderous sound of the rain hitting the tarp roof. The neighbouring buildings weren't doing much to protect them from the downpour.

The man's face fell slightly. "You ain't here for the weird building?"

"I don't - What building?" Jim asked, frustrated at feeling a step behind in the conversation. He had thought the man was flagging him down because there was a crime. The nagging sense that he was wasting time was like fire under his skin.

"That old factory on 26th," the man said.

"On 26th?" Jim confirmed, tasting anticipation in the back of his throat. His stomach dropped even as his heart started pounding with excitement.

"Yeah! I've seen this weird truck going in and out, in and out. And the building lights on at weird times. And -" his face crumpled slightly, looking distraught - "I swear I saw a kid in the window once, but there wasn't nothing I could do. I tried to tell the police station 'bout a week ago, but the officer there wouldn't listen, and kicked me out."

The flash of anger at the officer was quickly quelled by the thrill of having a lead. "Where's the building?"

"Just a few minutes north on 26th after a left turn. Are you going to check it out?" His eyes were lighting up again.

"Yes, I am," Jim promised. "You stay here, alright? Where it's safe and dry." He paused, suddenly realizing something. "What's your name sir?"
"The name's Johnson," he said, sounding faintly relieved.

Jim shook his hand quickly."Thank you Mr Johnson," he said sincerely, before ducking out from under the tarp and sprinting back to his car, taking off again into the storm.

Tucked into an alley hidden out of sight from the factory in question, Jim picked up his phone for the first time that night and dialled Sarah's number automatically.

Sarah and Bullock - and Renee, when she had still been in Gotham - always got so mad when Jim didn't wait for backup to arrive, especially in situations like this one, when he really shouldn't go in alone.

He was going to anyway.

Every instinct told him that the missing twins were in there, and he wasn't going to make them wait a second longer to be rescued.

But at the very least he should call and ask for backup, even if he had no intentions of waiting.

"What's wrong?" Sarah greeted him with when she picked up the phone after only two rings. Jim's lips quirked up in a half smile; they both knew that there weren't any good reasons to call each other in the middle of the night.

"I'm about to enter that abandoned factory on 26th. It's where Falcone was hiding his human trafficking ring, there are kids in there now and -"

"Jim slow down, I can barely understand you. You need backup?" She asked, interrupting his tirade.

"Yes, at the abandoned factory on 26th street. It's number 386," he added, squinting through the rain at the address.

"You can't call it into the station? Get backup from someone who's supposed to actually be awake?"

Jim thought of Eaton, sitting at his desk, and the officer who had ignored Johnson's tip. "No, I can't."

"OK," she accepted immediately. Even through Jim's jittery desperation to get into the factory he felt a rush of relief, of gratefulness that Sarah had understood why he couldn't call to the rest of the GCPD for help, and was willing to trust him.

There was a brief second of silence over the phone.

"Just stay where you are Jim, I'll be there as soon as I can, I'm just going to-"

"Sorry, no time." Jim cut her off, leaving only the echo of the phone beeping between them, trusting that she was on her way.

He was sorry, in theory. He felt bad about hanging up on her, but wasn't apologetic at all about going in alone to rescue the kids.

As Johnson had mentioned, the building in question was easy to spot; being the only one on the abandoned street with its lights on.
Jim held his hand over his glasses as he jogged toward the building, trying ineffectively to shield his glasses from the rain. Staying out of any potential lines of sight, he positioned himself near the closest door. He put his ear to the door, but the still pounding rain made it impossible to hear if there was anyone directly on the other side.

Crouching down, he routinely checked his gun, before opening the door as slowly as he possibly could.

It was only when he was halfway done easing himself through the door silently that it occurred to him that he had left his bulletproof vest at the GCPD. He allowed himself one second to dwell on his own stupidity, before continuing through the door.

The door did not make a sound when it closed behind him.

The building itself had clearly been a factory at one point, though what it had once made had been lost to time. The room only lit from one side; creating slanted shadows. Crates and heavy-duty boxes had been added to the building, where they blocked his view of the main room, but peering around them, it seemed that the whole room was divided into a maze of corridors, created by the boxes and crates.

The sound of the rain had died off when Jim had shut the door, and he could hear voices coming from what seemed to be the center of the room. He paused where he was crouched near the door, but couldn't hear anyone approaching him, so he started walking.

His heart was thudding through his whole body as he made his way slowly towards where the voices were coming from, taking care to check all around him before moving, painfully aware of his own lack of backup.

From around the corner of a particularly large crate, he saw his first clear line of sight to the middle of the room.

A group of men- maybe a dozen or so - were either sitting or standing around a radio that sat in the middle of a table. A few of them had their guns clutched in their hands, on guard, but most were relaxed, sitting casually.

One of the men turned slightly, and as the light hit the gun Jim recognized it as the same model as the ones that Eaton had brought in for his Batman task force. Jim ducked back behind the crate, letting the wave of fury and adrenaline subside - hasty, angry actions would do nothing to help him right now.

Now that he was closer to the noise, he could make out their individual voices over the radio. One of the men with the military guns was muttering something about the truck being on its way.

Jim exhaled slowly. It was good to know that, even if he was horribly outnumbered, at least he knew had made the right choice in entering the building as soon as he could, instead of waiting for his own backup.

He peaked back around the crate, scanning for - there - nearly hidden in the shadows of a shipping crate were the missing children, hunched together tightly.

Thankfully they were sitting far enough away from the main group that Jim could sneak over to them while staying out of sight.

As he got closer to them, he could see that their young, thin arms had actually been *bound* with some
kind of rope; standing out harshly against their dark skin in the industrial lights.

He forced himself to think apart from his anger - there would be plenty of time for that once the kids were safe. He positioned himself just on the side of the shipping container, hugging the shadows as much as he could. He'd just have to hope that they wouldn't make any noise.

"Shhh, don't say anything. I'm a police officer, and you're going to be alright, but I need you to be really quiet, ok?" he whispered to them, head ducked low, making sure to keep his voice calm and soothing; fighting against the instinctive tension in his muscles from being so close to the danger.

One twin - the young boy - jumped at the sound of Jim's voice, but thankfully didn't make a sound. His sister twisted her head around to look at him, the look of terror on her tear-streaked face steeling Jim's resolve.

Here, in his element, it was so much easier to be brave when there were children right in front of him who needed help.

He glanced over his glasses at the large blurs that were the kidnappers, but they were all too engrossed in the game on the radio to be watching the kids.

"I'm going to cut the ropes, so you need to stay as still and quiet as you possibly can, alright?"

He waited for both of them to nod before he silently slipped his knife out of its holder. It would be useless in a fight, but he always carried one just for a situation like this.

It seemed to take him forever to cut the ropes; the fibres were tougher than they looked, every move had to be made so carefully - so deliberately - so as not to accidentally hurt one of the kids, or make a noise.

A sudden burst of loud cries of anger rang from the table. The twins flinched back, and Jim froze halfway through cutting through a strand of rope, thinking they had been discovered, but it had only been one of the Knight's players striking out.

A cold trail of water ran down the back of his neck from where it had dripped off his hair from the rain.

When the last bit of rope finally fell off their wrists, he let himself feel a brief thrill of triumph before refocusing.

"As quietly and as quickly as you can, you're going to come around behind this crate, OK? Go now," he said, voice still just barely above a whisper.

The kids scurried away, a little faster than what was probably prudent, but Falcone's men seemed more entranced in the Knight's attempt at a come-back to be paying close attention.

Jim followed right behind them until they were all crouched around the corner of the crate, truly out of sight for the first time. The twins looked unhurt, though he noticed with a pang of sorrow that they were still clutching each other; probably only around seven years old but looking far younger with fear all over their faces.

"What are your names?" He asked gently, trying not to sound as rushed as he felt. They were by no means out of danger yet, and all of their lives relied on them trusting and listening to him, and he knew they would be more comfortable if he knew their names.

"I'm Kayla and my brother is Kevin," Kayla whispered, so quietly that Jim could barely hear her.
Jim smiled softly. "You guys are doing great. You're going to walk ahead of me, we're going to the door." He wanted to keep himself between the group of men and the kids, if he could.

They nodded shakily. They all set off, ducking around and between the containers and crates on their way towards the exit.

They hadn't made much progress when noises that didn't come from the radio rang around the room, and Jim's heart dropped in his stomach.

He should have known their luck wasn't going to hold out.

Shouts of anger and swearing rang out around the building, but Jim could clearly hear "Just spread out and find them!" over the cacophony of sounds.

His heart dropped in his chest, bitter disappointment and fear flooding the back of his throat.

"Go, go hide!" he whispered harshly, heart starting to pound anew. Eyes wide and terrified, Kevin let his sister pull him away from Jim, and they ran. He watched them, crouched slightly against a metal shipping container, as Kayla pulled her brother into a crack between two shipping crates.

Once he was satisfied that they were as safe as they reasonably could be, he started walking down the little hallway, drawing his gun and clicking off the safety.

He didn't have a chance of hiding; the best he could do was try to defend where they were hiding without giving them away, and hope that they could escape themselves, if it came to that.

As plans went, it was pretty fucking awful.

Jim stood beside one of the shipping containers, about fifteen feet from where the twins had disappeared between the crates. The room had gone completely silent; all Jim could hear was his own harsh breathing and the stupid radio. His hands tightened around his gun.

He crept along the shipping crate, moving to check around the corner. He started.

Right in front of him was one of the men, clearly also in the process of looking around the corner. The man reeled back in shock. As if in slow motion, Jim saw him starting to bring his gun level to shoot.

Jim didn't even try to aim his gun - they were too close together. Automatically he pulled his hands back, slamming them down as hard as he could, pistol-whipping the man before he could get a shot off.

The man crumpled, falling to the ground with a hoarse yell that was like a cold dagger in Jim's gut.

Everyone would have heard the shout - everyone knew where he was.

He didn't even have time to curse, whirling around at the sound of heavy footsteps behind him. Another gangster emerged from the other side of the shipping container, grinning as he held up a long knife threateningly - they had been trying to flank him.

This time the man was far enough away that Jim had time to level his gun and aim. His lumbering steps got faster, the cruel grin fading to a snarl as he saw the gun in Jim's hand, but he didn't pause. Light glinted off the knife in his hand.

Jim pulled the trigger. The bullet hit the man in his shoulder, ripping through his shirt and into his
body. The charging man didn't even flinch, taking another bounding step towards him.

Great. The man was so high that he wasn't even feeling fucking pain.

He was close now, nearly on top of Jim. He fired another shot, aiming for the chest this time, but the man lurched to the side at the last second, and the bullet hit him the shoulder again. He raised his knife, moving to stab Jim.

Instinctively, Jim let go of his gun with one hand, moving to block the incoming knife. It stopped a few inches above his chest, but the gangster took advantage of Jim's looser grip on his gun, knocking it out of his hand with a rough smack. It clattered as it skipped and bounced on the floor; landing where Jim couldn't see it.

He didn't waste any time mourning the loss of his weapon. Still holding the man's wrist in one hand, he punched the sensitive joint as hard as he could. The man ripped his hand out of Jim's grip with a shout as it went numb, this time the pain making it past the drug-addled brain. The knife slipped out of his unfeeling fingers, landing far away.

Much fairer. If Jim didn't have his gun, then he wouldn't let him keep his knife.

The gangster didn't seem bothered by the loss of the weapon, clenching his fist and swinging his hand to try to punch Jim in the face. He dodged it easily enough, managing to land his own glancing blow across the other man's cheek before stepping back slightly. He could barely feel the ache in his knuckles over the pounding of his heart.

The gangster came in again for another punch, but this time Jim was too focused on finding an opening to end the fight to recognize the man's other fist coming at his face until it was too late.

Jim's head snapped back with the force of the punch, nose and cheekbone exploding in pain. He staggered back a few steps, one hand automatically coming up to ensure his glasses stayed on his face. Hot blood gushed out of his nose, covering his mouth and his chin. Opening his eyes - he wasn't sure when he had closed them - he was able to dodge another punch just in time, ducking out of the way, hearing the rush of air as the fist narrowly missed his ear.

He kept moving in the direction of his dodge - out of the way of the wildly swinging fists, before coming in again. With a loud grunt, Jim slammed his fist into the gangster’s diaphragm. While the man was gasping for breath, Jim shoved him against the shipping container, holding him with one hand even as he pulled the other one back, clenching his fist. The gangster brought his own hands up, ready to block or attack.

The lights went out.

Jim flinched back slightly, eyes automatically darting around, trying to find the threat. In the back of his mind, he noticed the gangster doing the same.

There was a moment of silence in the darkness, the tension in the air wound tight as a tripwire - when everything was frozen. The only sound was the muffled, still-playing radio.

The stillness shattered. The radio turned to static as bursts of gunfire and screams filled the air, some in anger, most in fear.

Jim froze, staring at the gangster in front of him. He could just make out his outline, and the whites of the wide and terrified eyes.

The man tried to bring up his hands to block his face, but he was sluggish, still staggered from the
Jim punched the man as hard as he could in the temple. The lights flickered back on as he hit the floor.

Jim didn't get a second to relax. With a jolt, Jim recognized the sound of approaching footsteps over the screaming. He turned around to face the hallway, only to be slammed into the shipping container himself.

This gangster - taller and heavier than the last one - wrapped his thick fingers around Jim's neck, squeezing against his attempts to breathe. Jim could feel his own rapid-fire pulse trying to push back against the man's hands. He was already dizzy.

He didn't waste time trying to attack the man's arms - the angle was off. With all the force he could muster, he kicked the man's knee with his heel. He was rewarded with a sick popping sound.

The man roared, hands automatically leaving Jim's throat to clutch his knee. Jim gasped in a desperate breath, swinging his elbow at the man before he recovered. Jim had been aiming for his temple, but his elbow striking the man's jaw worked just as well. The gangster fell to the floor, unconscious like the others.

Jim heaved in a deeper breath, rubbing at his neck. It didn't seem seriously injured, - only bruised - and a quick check of his nose revealed that it wasn't broken, though it was still bleeding.

He looked both ways down the deserted hallway. It had gone quiet in the room, though this did nothing to reassure Jim.

Down the hallway, maybe ten feet away, Jim spotted his gun lying innocuously on the floor. He stalked towards it, eager to get his weapon back in his hands.

He had only taken a few steps - though his hand was already stretched towards his gun - when a man threw himself into the hallway. The man looked around, locked eyes on Jim's gun. He glanced up at him, then back down at the gun.

They both took off running towards the gun, but even as Jim's feet slapped the ground as he ran, his heart was sinking. He was further away than the man, he wasn't going to get there in time -

The gangster picked up Jim's gun, pointing it directly at him. Jim froze. In the light he could make out the man's face, grinning even as blood dripped down his face from a cut on his forehead.

Instinctively he tensed his legs, ready to dive out of the way, even as he knew it would never work. The hallway was too narrow to avoid bullets for very long- the man too far away to disarm.

Sorrow pulsed through his body, immobilizing him far more effectively than the fear had. Sorrow for the twins, who had relied on him to get them out safely.

Sorrow especially for Barbara, who always was so worried when he went on a dangerous case; who he would be leaving all alone.

Jim stared down the barrel of his own gun, grief strangling him.

Out of nowhere, a huge shadow came down from above, striking the man's arm that held the gun, though the man managed to hold on to it. Jim flinched when the gun fired, but it missed wide.

The shadow moved impossibly fast, knocking the gun out of the man's hand with a crack so loud
that Jim could hear from his position. The gangster tried to hit him, but might as well have been moving through molasses for how easily his attack was blocked, the shadow that wasn't a shadow moving fluidly out of the way and behind him, looping a rope around him and hitting him hard in the head in a single motion.

The gangster hit the ground, unconscious, at the same time the gun did. The silence echoed around the room, and Jim just knew that the fight was over.

And now he understood why the people who saw him didn't think he was human.

The whole world froze as he and the Batman looked at each other. Instinctive terror clenched tightly in Jim's gut at the sight, but he didn't move. Neither did Batman - and the moment between them stretched on.

Contrary to the rumours, Batman wasn't actually eight feet tall, though he was still extraordinarily large. A huge black mass - a cape, Jim realized with a faint jolt - trailed over his shoulders and behind him, stopping just above the ground, making him look even more immense. Through the shadows that appeared to flex to surround him, Jim could just barely out the shape of a bat emblazoned on his chest.

He couldn't tear his eyes away from the mask. It covered most of Batman's face, leaving only the lower face exposed. The blank stare was incredibly off-putting, and being unable to see beneath the material covering his eyes only made him more terrifying.

But maybe the most unbelievable thing about Batman, now that Jim was actually seeing him for the first time, was that he was undeniably human, not the bat-hybrid demon the criminals had been promising for months.

After what felt like years, but probably only lasted a few seconds, Batman spoke.

"Are you hurt?" Batman asked. His voice surprised Jim - it was deep and gravely, but somehow still more human than he had expected. It seemed, from the way he stood and dressed, that his voice ought to have shook the building to its foundations, or else been a barely-there whisper.

"No." Jim was rather proud that his voice didn't shake. Batman appeared to look at his bloody nose, but didn't mention it.

"Where are the twins?"

Out of reflex, Jim briefly considered not telling him, but pushed it aside quickly.

Batman wasn't a bad guy he needed to hide information from.

"They're hiding behind some crates. They're safe." He inclined his head behind him, roughly towards where the kids had disappeared.

Batman held his gaze for a moment longer before walking past him, heading towards them.

As he passed by in front of him, he paused to kneel in front of the unconscious gangster that Jim had shot. When Batman moved on, Jim could see a field bandage covering the wounds, stopping the bleeding.

Jim stared at him as he walked down the hallway, moving silently towards the crates.

Now that he was out of immediate sight of Batman, Jim took the opportunity to take a deep breath,
trying to force himself to exhale slowly. The adrenaline rush that he had staved off during the fight hit him all at once; the tingling rush weakened his legs and made his heart thud uncomfortably in his chest.

It had been a long time since there had been a call quite that close.

He inhaled forcefully, steeling himself again. He tried to wipe some of the blood off his face before it dried sticky, smearing it into his coat ineffectively.

His gun was still lying on the floor, next to the bound gangster that Batman had taken down. He took a few steps towards it, gingerly picking it up. He looked back at Batman, and firmly put it back in its holster.

Jim turned to follow Batman towards the kids. He was crouched next to one of the huge crates, his cape making a puddle of darkness on the ground as he slowly edged the massive crate away, clearing a way for the twins to get out easier.

When the gap was big enough, the twins crawled out. They both threw themselves at Batman; Kayla grabbing his cape and Kevin clinging to one of his arms.

As Jim got closer, he heard the surprisingly gentle sound of Batman murmuring to the kids. With a pang of sadness, he saw the recent tear streaks on their faces - results from their terror during the fighting.

When Jim was behind them, Batman looked up and over his shoulder at him, though he made no motion to stand up and dislodge the twins.

"Their names are Kayla and Kevin Wilson," he said, still looking at Jim.

"Yeah," Jim agreed, though he hadn't known their last name. "How did you..." he trailed off. How had he known the kids were missing, how did he find the missing kids in a city the size of Gotham?

"Their parents have a group looking for them around the streets."

At the mention of her parents, Kayla started to move, dislodging herself from the cape, grabbing her brother and backing away from Batman. Not fearfully, Jim noted, but calmly, secure in the knowledge that they were safe.

Batman waited until Kevin had completely let go of him to stand up. He was damn near impossible to read, between the mask and the stern mouth, but Jim imagined he was looking them all over, ensuring they were all as unharmed as they appeared. Jim wanted to say something, but the words wouldn't leave his tongue.

"Thank you!" Kayla said suddenly, before ducking slightly behind Jim's leg. Kevin nodded furiously from Jim's other side.

Batman's face - the part that was visible anyway - softened, a barely perceptible thing, but undeniable.

Apparently satisfied that they were all alright, he moved past them, positioning himself under one of the roof beams.

A horrible thought struck Jim.

"There's a truck coming," he exclaimed. He had forgotten about the gangsters' inbound backup in the
"It's already taken care of," Batman replied gruffly, not pausing in pulling something out of his belt.

Of course it was.

Jim shook his head slightly in disbelief. He had probably followed it here in the first place. The two of them had arrived at the same scene from opposite threads; Batman from knowing about the missing children and the truck, and Jim from learning about the case from the commissioner and Falcone.

Wait.

"This is Falcone's trafficking ring!" he blurted out.

This time Batman froze, turning solid. He hadn't known about Falcone's involvement.

"How do you know?" His non-eyes seemed to be staring right through Jim.

"The commissioner took me off the case because Falcone told him to." With every word he spoke his heart dropped further in his chest, as he realized the full effect of what he had done.

Falcone would find out that his human trafficking ring had been stopped. He would go to the commissioner, who would be happy to sell Jim out.

Panic started to rise, hot and constricting, in Jim's chest. Do you know what I've done? He wanted to ask him. Do you know what happens to people who directly go against the mob in this city?

I'm already dead.

Batman didn't say anything, though his face seemed to harden, impossibly making him look even more severe.

Jim's panic receded, just a little.

Batman understood.

"You'll have enough proof to arrest Falcone by the end of the night," he growled solemnly, looking right at Jim.

He finished taking something out of his belt, pointing it towards the roof. A rope shot out of the device in his hand, and without another word to them, he ascended towards the ceiling, cape fluttering, until he melted into the shadows.

Well. That explained the 'flying' rumours.

"Wow," Kevin said, quietly awed.

Jim huffed a quiet laugh.

They were all still watching the shadows where Batman had disappeared when there was a noise of
the door opening made them all tense up.

Jim's hand jumped to his gun automatically, body tensing. Had Batman actually chosen this night, of all nights, to miss someone?

"Jim!" Sarah's frantic hiss carried through the warehouse, and he relaxed.

"We're here," he called to her. "It's OK," he murmured to the twins when they looked up at him in alarm, trying to reassure them that Sarah was a safe person.

The sight of her turning around the corner had never been more welcome, despite the wild and furious look in her eyes.

"What the fu-" she broke off at the sight of the twins -"What the heck is going on?"

"It's a long-"

Before he could finish his thought, someone else followed Sarah into the warehouse.

"Jesus Christ Jim, we leave you alone for fucking five minutes and you run off by yourself. You're like a stupid puppy," Bullock snapped, standing behind her.

Unlike Sarah, Bullock didn’t look at all ashamed at all to swear in front of the kids, making them duck further behind Jim. Also unlike Sarah, he was actually in his police uniform, and didn't look like he had just crawled out of bed. Jim hadn't known he had been working that night.

"You brought Bullock?" Jim looked back at Sarah, eyebrow raised.

She shot him an exasperated look. "Yes, I picked up Bullock on the way, because you sounded like a madman on the phone. Your backup brought backup. What happened?"

Jim didn't say anything, glancing significantly at the kids at his side. They'd been through enough tonight - they didn't need to hear about how the police commissioner had been complicit in their ordeal.

She visibly forced herself to relax, bending over to look at them in the eye.

"I know you guys have been really brave tonight. Can you be brave again and go stay with my partner behind me for a few minutes?"

Neither twin moved, reluctant to leave Jim's side.

Sarah's mouth twisted wryly.

"I can understand why you wouldn't want to go with him. He's just so ugly!"

Kayla giggled loudly, then abruptly covered her mouth. Sarah's smile grew.

"I mean, I don't like being seen with him in public either. I mean, he's so scary looking! Look at his teeny tiny eyes and his weird mouth! And what is up with that weird tie?"

This time both kids giggled, sharing looks of hidden glee with each other.

"I know he looks like the troll from under the bridge," Sarah continued, "but he's so big and scary that I promise that no one is going be able to get close to you. He'll scare them away, OK?"
"Like an ogre," Kevin snickered.

Bullock rolled his eyes as the kids laughed some more. He was used to it. Bullock, being the tallest and widest of all of them, was the one that kids were usually most scared of. Renee had been the first to discover that insulting him to his face usually made the kids more comfortable with him; by using his larger size to reassure them.

Not for the first time that night, Jim missed Renee sorely.

"That's right, but I'm the ogre who will let you play with the siren, if you want," Bullock grumbled, once he decided he was done being laughed at by children.

Hesitantly the twins separated themselves from Jim, sticking close to Bullock as they weaved away between the crates and shipping carts towards the exit. Jim and Sarah followed them.

From the doorway they watched the kids climb in the police car that Sarah and Bullock had arrived in, and the lights immediately filled the street with the familiar blue and red.

"So you want to tell me what the goddamn shit is going on?"

She listened patiently as he retold her what had happened that night, starting with entering commissioner Eaton's office. She didn't interrupt until he told her about Batman saving him, which was apparently her threshold for silence.

"The Batman saved your life?!!"

Jim sighed. "Yes."

She pursed her lips together unhappily, but didn't say anything more until he was finished.

They were both quiet in the doorway. The pouring rain had regressed to a more gentle rain, which was creating waves in all the puddles in the street. The police lights were still flashing across his vision, reflecting and scattering in the water.

"So what are you going to do now?" Sarah asked quietly. "Do you have to leave Gotham?" She also understood the perils of going against the mob.

"I..." Jim trailed off. It was hard to think, with the adrenaline still rushing through his body, a thousand thoughts racing through his head. It wouldn't be long until Falcone would know that he was involved in stopping his trafficking ring.

A dark, fearful rush of emotion rose in him, and for a second he couldn't breathe, couldn't see.

Barbara was by herself in the apartment.

"You need to call Barbara?" Sarah furrowed her eyebrows as he fumbled with his phone, again showing her uncanny ability to read his mind.

He knew it was late, but he also knew that Barbara knew to answer the phone at this time of night.

"Hello?"

"Barbara, are you alright?"

"Dad? Of course I am. Are you? It's-" she yawned -"It's late."
"I know, I'm sorry. I'm fine. I just...wanted to call."

"OK." He could hear how sleepy she sounded, even over the phone, and felt a pang of guilt.

"Jim..." Sarah whispered, staring right at him.

"You know not to open the door right? Not for anyone?" He blurted out, needing to voice his fear, however simple it sounded out loud.

He could hear her roll her eyes. "Yes Dad. I'm not an idiot."

"I know, I know," he said, smiling despite the anxiety still writhing in his gut. The puddles on the ground were still flashing red and blue. "I love you Barbara."

"I love you too Dad."

The dial tone was blaring in his ear, but he couldn't bring himself to pull the phone away. He was paralyzed, unable to move through the fear of someone hurting Barbara, of it being his fault.

"JIM!" Sarah snapped, staring at him. She must have been calling his name for a while. "Is she alright?"

"She's alone in the apartment," Jim moaned, voicing the only thought circling his mind. It'd be so easy for someone to get in, break open the door, and shoot her, blood on the floor, blood on the wall and-

"Jesus Jim, breathe," Sarah took his phone out his hand, resting her other hand on his shoulder. "You said that Batman is going to get information to arrest Falcone?" She asked slowly.

"I- yes," Jim said, the non-sequitur breaking him out of his spiralling thoughts. "What-"

"OK, here is what is going to happen," she said, gesturing to Bullock in the car to join them by the door before looking back at Jim, "I am going to drop to drop those kids off back with their family, and then I am going to sit in your apartment with my gun, and I won't let anyone get in."

He stared at her, uncomprehending. "She won’t answer the door at this time of night."

"Then I'll wait outside. I won't let anyone in, OK? She'll be safe," she repeated earnestly.

"Sarah..." How could he voice the relief and gratefulness that was steadily replacing the fear?

"Falcone won't get to her," she vowed, and Jim took a deep breath, relaxing slightly. He believed her the same way he believed that Batman was collecting evidence against Falcone right now.

"What's that plan?" Bullock asked, finally joining them. Sarah turned to look at him.

"You and Jim are going to help Batman arrest Falcone so he doesn't murder Jim."

"Oh is that all," Bullock deadpanned sarcastically.

Sarah looked back at Jim, softening ever so slightly. "It's going to be alright. But you need to pull yourself together and fix this, because you are not leaving Gotham."

"Thank you Sarah," he said sincerely. Knowing that Barbara would be guarded made it possible to think around the terror, though it wouldn't go away until Falcone was taken care of.
Her smile was like quick-fire, as she turned and walked to the police car. Without a word, Bullock and Jim headed towards where he had hidden the car.

The night was far from over, and there was so much work to do.
Chapter 9

"Did I get it all?"

Bullock looked over at Jim. "No, your moustache is still even more ginger than usual."

Jim swore under his breath, bringing the bloody tissue back up to his face. He had waited too long to try to wipe off the blood, and now it was drying sticky, resisting his attempts to clean up. As Bullock had noted, a great deal of it was in his moustache.

He gave up, tossing the tissue on the pile that had formed on the bottom of the car. Bringing his pipe to his lips, he took a deep breath.

He was lucky that Bullock had agreed with him that - just this once - smoking in the car was warranted.

The smoke was the only thing that could get the taste of blood out of his mouth.

They were both sitting in the car, parked on the street far away from the warehouse. As they had wound their way around the streets, Jim had told Bullock what had happened, about Commissioner Eaton, about the fight, about Batman saving his life.

He hadn't been as good a listener as Sarah had been, constantly interrupting with questions and sarcastic comments, but had eventually let Jim catch him up on what had happened.

Bullock shifted in his seat, fingers drumming on the steering wheel, clearly thinking hard about something.

"What?" Jim asked, taking the pipe out his mouth to speak.

"Do you really think that Batman is going to be able to get dirt on Falcone?"

Jim exhaled smoke. "That's what he said. He's gone up against the mobs before."

"Yeah, sure he's messed with some of the mobs' operations before. But this is Falcone." Bullock looked at Jim, eyebrows raised in question.

He busied himself emptying his pipe's ashes out of the car window instead of answering.

Bullock, unfortunately, had a point. Falcone was much more than a mere drug dealer, more than a random mobster with a gun. He had been the gangster mastermind who had effectively been running Gotham since Jim had been born. His ruthless touch was all over the city, from some of the unions and the politicians, to the drug trade and arms dealings, and of course the GCPD itself.

His reign had been challenged over the years but never successfully - Maroni and Fish had been threatening for years but had made almost no real headway. The idea that he could be taken down,
let alone taken down in one night was laughable.

On the other hand, they had never had a Batman on their side before.

"I think he's our best chance."

Bullock huffed, doubtful, but didn't otherwise object. "So we just wait for him to fly down and deliver you proof that people have been looking for decades."

Jim furrowed his eyebrows. He hadn't even considered doing nothing.

He supposed it would be easier to sit back and let Batman handle everything, let him go after the mobs himself and draw all the fire. It'd be much simpler and safer to let Batman clean up the city himself.

The very idea made his lip curl slightly in distaste, resolve solidifying in his gut.

Jim had never been particularly good at doing nothing, and there was no chance that he wasn't going to do his part in taking down Falcone.

"No. No, we should try to go after Falcone any way we can. If we can - I don't know - sabotage him or pin a crime on him. Anything to distract him and make his life harder tonight." And, if they did fail and Jim did have to flee Gotham, at least he would know that he had done something to get back at Falcone.

"We'll only get one shot..." Bullock muttered absentmindedly, staring straight ahead through the car's window.

Jim turned and looked at him. It was unlike him to be this subdued. "Yeah," he paused, "Haven't there been a few murders around one of his clubs the last few days? Think they have anything to do with him?"

Bullock's grip hardened on the steering wheel.

"No. Well yes, those are his murders, but that's not what we're going to nail him for." Bullock paused, turning to Jim with a slightly manic look in his eyes. "I know where his main drug lab is."

"I thought he had drug stashes all over the city?" Jim asked, staring uncomprehendingly at him.

"No Gordon, where he makes it. Most of the coke he sells comes from this one lab." Bullock paused in his story, looking away from Jim. "It's what got him killed a few months after that. He was too proud of knowing about the lab to stop bragging." He faded into silence.

Bullock didn't talk much about all the work he'd had to do for the mob over the years. It was easy to forget that his connections and information had come with a cost, and that he had never been allowed to separate himself from them. Of course taking down Falcone - someone who had directly held
power over Bullock for years - seemed even more impossible to him than it did to Jim or to Batman. It really only made Jim more determined to take down Falcone. Tonight.

"Let's go."

The car clunked into gear as Bullock immediately started to drive off. Any nervousness and emotion he had shown as he told his story was gone, replaced with a focused hardness that was equally rare.

"You know, even if we can link this lab directly to Falcone, he can probably find a way to worm his way out of it. It'll take more than one charge to take him down. Not to mention his bodyguards," Bullock pointed out.

"Doesn't matter," he replied grimly, "We have to start somewhere."

What a thought - that the biggest gangster in Gotham might actually have something to fear for the first time in his life.

Bullock, after parking the car in an alley a few blocks away, led Jim down a downtown street with little shops that lined both sides.

"It's that one there," Bullock said pointing to one of the shops.

"Falcone's drug empire starts at a downtown clothing boutique?" Jim asked with one eyebrow raised, walking a half-step behind Bullock. It was suspiciously the only shop on the street with its lights on, but was otherwise completely innocuous.

Bullock ignored him, stopping in front of Jim on the sidewalk while they were still out of the line of sight of the front window.

"I'm going to try and talk us in, you stay here," he said abruptly before turning and walking to the front door.

"Harvey!" Jim hissed, but was ignored again. A little bell rang as Bullock entered the store, and Jim took a deep breath to try and calm himself.

Resisting the urge to fiddle anxiously with his gun, Jim shrank back closer to the shadows, eyes locked on the front door where Bullock had disappeared.

He had probably only been standing in the drizzling rain for a minute - though it felt like a year - when Bullock finally poked his head out of the front door, calling Jim in with a wave of his hand.

The inside of the store was as unremarkable as the outside, with racks of colourful clothes scattered around the floor and folded stacks in nooks in the wall. The easygoing pop music that usually played in these stores had been turned off, leaving the room eerily quiet.

The only unique thing about the store was the unconscious body that Bullock was dragging behind the checkout desk.

"Don't give me that look, I tried talking to him first," Bullock grumbled before Jim could say anything. "He was never going to let us in. Besides, you already got your chance to punch some
Jim resisted the urge to sigh heavily, instead walking further into the store. He ignored the aisles of clothing, heading straight towards the back. If the employees were in on it - and they must have been; Bullock didn't go around beating up random people - then the 'employees only' room would be the next place to look.

There, in the offensively brightly lit room, was the first real sign that there was something criminal about the little store. There were a few cardboard boxes on the ground, full of extra clothes, but the majority of the miniature employees only room was taken up by what was clearly thick metal double door.

An equally heavy duty chain was wound around both handles, though the padlock that usually held them together was unlocked, hanging limply on one side.

Jim's pulse spiked sharply with the discovery.

"It's unlocked," Bullock noted, coming up behind him, "Think there are people on the other side?"

"Maybe," Jim said, taking out his gun and checking it quickly, "Or maybe they were expecting someone later."

They shared a significant look, before Bullock followed Jim's lead and took out his gun. Without saying a word, he moved to the side, pulling open the door for Jim, who immediately walked through the door, gun pointed resolutely ahead.

Jim was unprepared for the size of the lab. It was massive - stretching far past the boundaries of the store they had entered from. Rows of lab benches ran down the room, industrial lights and clean white floors made everything look unnaturally sterile.

His footsteps echoed slightly as he stepped further in. Bullock followed him in.

"Holy shit," Jim breathed. Falcone must have bought all the stores on the street, and turned the back half of them all into one massive lab. It hit Jim again, in a rush of angry heat, just how much power Falcone had over the city.

"Holy shit," Bullock agreed.

Jim made his way around one of the benches, on the lookout for people, but mostly just stared in horror at the piles of chemicals and tools along the benches. He looked closer at a bag of the sealed white powder, letting his guard down - all his instincts told him they were alone in the room.

"Think that's an office?"

Jim turned, following Bullock's gaze to the small room that was nearly hidden next to what looked like a door to the outside.

"OK," Jim said, a plan forming in his head, "I'm going to look in there for anything with Falcone's name on it. You do whatever you have to, to stop production. Mess with ingredients, destroy the tech, I don't care." Even if they all failed tonight, at least some drugs would never make it to the streets.

Bullock met his gaze with a harsh smile that cut an angry, determined line across his face. "Happy to."
The door didn't squeak when Jim opened it and stepped inside. The office was smaller than it had appeared from the outside, or maybe the wooden desk inside was simply enormous - it was nearly as wide as the whole room.

Walking closer to the desk, Jim saw that it was incredibly cluttered - so much so that even his desk would look organized next to it. Piles of paper were scattered haphazardly over the entire surface, spilling into each other.

He sat down at the desk chair, picking up the paper closest to him and scanning it quickly for anything important. It looked like a rudimentary shipping manifest, detailing who and where a particular shipment was going to be delivered. And - Jim noticed, bringing the paper closer to his face - it had been delivered right in the middle of Fish's territory.

Jim furrowed his eyebrows. He seriously doubted that Fish knew that she was buying from Falcone. Which meant that he was controlling even more of the drug trade in Gotham than they could have possibly imagined.

He put the paper down, picked up the next pile and started sifting through it.

It detailed a pickup of a shipment, dated for later that night. He sighed, setting it aside and moving on to the next one, urgency burning through him.

With every passing minute Jim only grew more and more frustrated. The papers were all similar shipping paperwork as the first, some going back months - which at least explained the mess.

Jim flinched harshly at a loud bang from outside the room. Before he could rise from the desk and investigate, he heard Bullock from outside the office. His voice was too muffled to make out exactly what he said, though he clearly wasn't panicked, so Jim sank back into the desk chair.

He took off his glasses, rubbing at his eyes before replacing them so he could glare accusingly at the desk, and all the papers on it.

Any other night Jim would have been thrilled to have even one of these damn pages. But knowing where the facility was shipping drugs to wasn't good enough tonight - he needed to link this place with Falcone directly if he wanted to have any chance to impact him at all.

It wasn't that he didn't trust that Batman was working to bring Falcone down before he could have Jim killed - he did. But he had to do something too, even if it was only distracting Falcone with a few incriminating files so that he couldn't focus on going after Jim, or Barbara.

Frustration stained with fear rose like a wave in him, threatening to overwhelm him again. He exhaled heavily against his tightening throat.

His eyes fell on the drawer on the left side of the desk. Scooting the desk chair closer, he reached out and pulled it open hard enough that mess of papers inside shifted with the force.

These documents were different than the ones on the desk. Instead of shipping memos from around Gotham, these papers in the desk looked like import records. It was hard to be sure what they were bringing into the city through the mix of half-English, half-Spanish code that it was written in, but Jim guessed it was about the materials they used to make the cocaine.

He grabbed a few from the top of the pile - presumably the most recent ones - and put them on top of the desk. None of them would mention Falcone, but if they survived the night, they might be able to track down suppliers later.
He turned his attention to the drawer on the other side, pulling it open.

Jim froze, hand hovering over the contents. Instead of being full of papers like the other drawer, this one only had a few pens, a stapler, and a closed, thin binder in it. It was neat and orderly - completely at odds with the rest of the desk.

He picked up the binder out of the drawer, surprised at how light it was. He grabbed one corner and opened it.

The binder was completely empty.

Disappointment dropped like a stone in his stomach, but he pushed it aside in favour of suspicion.

Why would they keep an empty binder in a drawer?

He stared at the empty rings for a moment longer, then tossed the binder on the ground with a careless flick of his wrist, looking back inside the drawer.

There had to be some reason for it being included in the one organized desk, but the only reason that Jim could think of was -

Was it physically covering something up.

He reached his hand into the drawer, scattering the carefully placed pens in his haste. Hand spread flat, he felt along the inside of the drawer where the binder had been. He wasn't sure what he was feeling for, but he knew the binder had been put there for a reason.

No sooner had he thought it, that the edge of his finger caught on the slightest raised edge in the bottom of the drawer.

His heart lurched in excitement at the discovery, and he frantically followed the ridge with his hand.

The edges came together to form a slightly raised rectangle in the bottom of the desk, right where the binder had been. Without hesitating, he pushed down on the rectangle as hard as he could, and was rewarded with a dull click.

On the underside of the drawer, a panel popped out. A secret compartment.

That at least explained why they kept an outrageously large desk in the small office.

He smiled breathlessly. He got off the chair, kneeling next to the drawer so he could look at the contents of the no-longer-a-secret compartment.

The newly exposed drawer was narrow, only a few inches wide. Jim maneuvered his fingers in the tight space, pulling the contents into the light. It held a few pages, folded tightly to so they fit inside.

His heart was pounding so hard that he could feel his pulse in his fingers, but his hands did not tremble as he carefully unfolded them.

They were completely unlike all the other files in the desk. Instead of dense text decrying locations and shipping information, these were short messages, almost list like. They were instructions - who to buy from, who to sell to, which places to avoid.

But by far the most important info on the newly exposed files was the name scattered throughout the memos.
'Falcone wants...'; 'On orders from Boss...'; 'Falcone said...'.

The private memos weren't written by Falcone, but by someone close to him - someone who was too lazy to bother with code names.

He smiled savagely. The someone thought that the secret drawer in the office would hide his carelessness and laziness in failing to hide his boss' name. Jim was very happy to prove him wrong.

He looked up at the sound of the door opening, as Bullock's slightly flushed and sweaty face entered the room.

"Did you get anything?" Bullock asked, looking apprehensive.

"These have his name all over them." Jim held up the paper for Bullock to see.

Bullock leaned in, skimming through the page, his smirk growing as he read further and further down.

"Well, that's something," he grinned, meeting Jim's fevered gaze. "You got everything you need?"

"Yup," Jim said, grabbing some of the pages and shoving them in a pocket on the inside of his coat and standing up. Bullock closed the door behind them.

The main lab was thoroughly trashed - most of the benches had been cleared off, equipment and supplies laying broken all over the floor. Jim stepped over a pile of broken glass as he walked towards the door.

They were still in the middle of the room when Jim heard the door click. Adrenaline burned in his gut as he grabbed Bullock and forced them both behind a bench. For a moment, the only sound in the room was their quick breathing, until the sound of the door opening and heavy footsteps entered the room.

Jim stayed crouched, hidden behind one of the lab benches as Bullock peeked over the edge.

"It's one of Falcone's guards," Bullock said breathlessly, ducking back behind cover. His eyes were wide, uncharacteristically caught off guard. "There are usually five of them. Falcone doesn't go anywhere without them anymore." He paused, narrowing his eyebrows. "What the hell are they doing here?"

"One of the deliveries was supposed to be tonight," Jim whispered, thinking back to the file he read on the desk, "They probably came to make sure no one interrupted the transfer, and when they saw the unconscious guard outside..."

"Who's there?" The guard yelled out suddenly, making Jim duck down more, kneeling on the floor. He and Bullock stared at each other, barely breathing. Jim's hand hovered over his gun.

"Wha-" The guard's shout turned into a shriek that was quickly muffled. Jim reflexively grabbed his gun, but didn't otherwise move, listening as hard as he could.

There was a series of muffled noises, then silence.

Jim didn't move for one breath, then two, before creeping slowly along the bench, Bullock following him. He peeked around the corner, looking down the hallway.

The guard was in a heap - clearly unconscious.
"What the fuck?" Bullock gasped. They both ducked back behind cover.

"It’s Batman," Jim said quietly, something like hope starting to grow in his gut.

Bullock turned and stared at him with wide eyes. “How do-"

"He’s taking out the guards," Jim interrupted, speaking more to himself than to Bullock. "You said Falcone always has his five guards with him. Even if we had all the proof in the world, we would never get close to Falcone with them around. But if they’re gone-" Jim broke off as the door started to open again, scurrying back to cover.

Once he was out of the line of sight of the door, he quickly glanced over the edge. There were four more armed men spreading throughout the room- the rest of the guards. If they were surprised to see what had happened to the first guard, they didn't show it. One of them barked instructions to the rest, and they split into pairs and started searching the room.

They must have come to the same conclusion as Jim had about who had attacked the guard, because they were searching the beams of the roof just as much as they were looking on the ground.

He looked around the room. Both pairs were far enough away from where they were hiding that he and Bullock weren’t in immediate danger, but they couldn’t stay for long.

From where he was crouched behind a lab bench, in the middle of Falcone's most secret crime lab as guards searched for intruders, Jim found himself scanning the roof for Batman. He had only been working with him for a few weeks, had only seen him once, and it was already instinct to seek him out.

The slightest movement from across the room caught his eye - the shifting of black against black. Batman was perched on one of the beams, staring right at him. His heart automatically stuttered in his chest, but it was easier to push aside this time. Batman didn't move, and Jim wondered if the motion he saw had been deliberate.

Rough voices made Jim flinch, tearing his eyes away from Batman to look at the pair of guards who were steadily making their way down the hallway. In a minute or two, they would be right underneath where Batman hid in the shadows.

Jim exhaled slowly, and felt Bullock shift nervously behind him, where he was facing the other way.

He was certain that Batman had absolutely faced worse odds than two on one, or hell, even four on one. He was pretty sure that if he did nothing, that Batman would probably be able to make it out of this unscathed too.

But he also knew that his desire to help Batman wasn’t just because he was working with him bring down Falcone. The suit looked bulletproof, but Jim didn’t want to put that to the test. He had to help.

"At my signal, head for the back door," Jim whispered to Bullock, a plan forming in his mind. The pair of guards was getting closer to Batman's position, but the other pair was on the far side of the building, out of the way.

Jim reached up on the desk, blindly feeling around with his hand for anything that he could - there. He pulled the object down and looked at it. It was a keyboard that Bullock hadn't thrown to the floor.

The guards came one row closer, checking benches and beams with their fingers on the triggers.

The keyboard would have to do.
He looked back at Batman, who looked away from the armed men, staring again at him. Jim met his gaze solidly and nodded, just once.

He scanned the room quickly, checking to make sure none of the patrolling guards were looking.

"Now," he said to Bullock and with a smooth motion, threw the keyboard towards the middle of the room. He wasn't trying to hit anyone - he just wanted it to make noise. Bullock took off towards the door, but Jim hung back long enough to hear the crash of the keyboard hitting the floor; the keys scattering everywhere. The guards both whirled towards the noise, inadvertently turning their backs to Batman.

Mission accomplished, Jim turned to follow Bullock out the back door before the guards realized the noise wasn't Batman. He was almost at the door, close enough to see the tense look on Bullock's face as he held the door open for Jim, when he heard a yell.

Jim sprinted the last few feet to the door, but even as he crossed the doorway he realized it was a scream of fear. He grinned.

Bullock slammed the door shut once he was through. He had been right, it was an exit door that led to a narrow alley

He and Bullock stared at each other, both heaving slightly from the near-miss.

The screaming inside had stopped.

"No more guards," Bullock said between gasps.

"No more guards," Jim agreed solemnly. With a final glance at the closed door, they started walking back to the car.

"What do we do now?" Bullock asked.

Jim paused, pursing his lips together as he thought. "We go to my office."

He was sure that if Batman was taking out Falcone's guards, then he already had the proof they needed to bring him down. So Jim would go back to the only place they had ever shared information.

It was difficult, on the drive back to the GCPD, to not constantly check his phone for a message or update from Sarah. She hadn't tried to contact him, and though he knew that no news meant that nothing had happened, he still wanted desperately to call and make sure that she and Barbara were alright. Only the idea of calling and distracting Sarah from something kept his hand off the phone.

The GCDP was mostly quiet when they finally arrived, and Jim was grateful that the hallways were deserted as they made their way towards his office. He really didn't want to run into the commissioner.

"So you think that Batman has enough evidence to get Falcone?" Bullock asked as they turned a corner.

"Yes," Jim said, certain, "There's no point in getting rid of Falcone's guards if there isn't enough
proof to actually arrest him. He took them out so we could go after Falcone tonight."

Bullock huffed. "I must have missed that memo," he muttered sarcastically.

"What? It doesn't make sense to take them out if we have nothing -" Jim started to protest.

"No no, I'm just wondering when you started predicting the Batman's actions. It's just funny," Bullock said with a wry smile.

Jim shook his head rather than respond to Bullock's amusement. It was hard to explain why he was so confident in Batman's plan, but every instinct and past interaction told him that he was right.

He pushed open the door to his office.

The lights were off, like he had left them hours ago.

But Jim's flashlight had been moved. This time it was standing upright on his desk and turned on, making a circle of light on the ceiling.

"What the fuck?" Bullock asked, walking into the office behind him.

Jim didn't even try to explain how Batman was messing with him with a flashlight, he just flicked the lights on and rushed to his desk. Anticipation that had been growing since he saw Batman in the drug lab peaked, so intense it was almost painful.

He practically threw himself in his chair, and then had to pull himself closer to his desk when he overshot it. He quickly turned off the flashlight and pushed it to the side, heart giving a painful thump of exhilaration when he took in the huge stack of paper below it.

Bullock, having figured out that Batman had been there, walked to the window, testing to see that it was locked. "How did he even get in here?"

Jim ignored him, flipping through pages almost faster than he could read the titles, which were thankfully very descriptive.

Murder, smuggling, illegal gambling, kidnapping, another murder, another murder, tax evasion, bribery, drug trafficking, human trafficking - the evidence was damning in every file. He paused at one page - the start of a long, detailed report of Falcone's money laundering empire. The date, which was carefully recorded in all the reports, was from almost a year ago.

Jim leaned back in his chair, staring at the page blankly.

Batman had been keeping track of Falcone's crimes since before he had started patrolling the streets as Batman. He had clearly been saving them - just based on the sheer amounts of damning evidence that went back months, and how fast he had gotten it to Jim's desk.

He must have known, as Jim did, that taking out a man like Falcone had to be an all-or-nothing gambit, so as to not give him enough warning to weasel out of the charges and disappear. Batman had been waiting for the right moment to bring down Falcone.

And he had decided that the right moment was when Jim was in danger. He swallowed against an emotion that he couldn't name.

"Is it good?" Bullock asked, and Jim jumped slightly. He hadn't noticed Bullock move to stand behind him.
Jim tore his eyes away from the paper, craning his neck to look at Bullock.

"Yes, it's good," he said, pride colouring his voice. The evidence that Batman had left would surely be more than enough to put Falcone away, and the proof of past bribery and corruption might even be enough to take him to a court out of his own sphere of influence. "It's really good Harvey.

Bullock smirked ferociously, eyes bright with malice. "Then let's go get the fucker."

It didn't take them long to get to the main floor - only a quick detour to pick up Jim's bulletproof vest slowed them down - and they were almost at the doors when Bullock stopped so abruptly that Jim almost ran into him.

"What is it? What's wrong?" Jim asked, stepping slightly to the side and looking at Bullock. He recoiled at the outright hatred on his face that was turning it a dull red. Jim followed his gaze towards the door, and his blood curdled in his veins.

Commissioner Eaton was walking across the lobby, but Jim was more surprised to see who he was with.

His companion was Mayor Colleen Fletcher. She was a tall woman, light brown hair pulled back off her face neatly, even though it was the middle of the night. Jim hadn't seen around the building in months, though admittedly had hadn't been on the lookout for meetings in the middle of the night.

A hot swoop of anger burned through him at the sight of them. At the memory of the commissioner's willingness to sacrifice children's lives to the mob earlier that night, at the fact that the only reason for the mayor to be meeting him at this time of night is to discuss their shared mob business, at the fact that they didn't even have to hide that they were working with Falcone together.

The commissioner noticed them across the room. He changed course and headed towards where Jim and Bullock were standing, the mayor trailing slightly behind him.

As the pair stood in front of him, Jim was suddenly acutely aware of his slightly throbbing, swollen nose that the mayor was trying and failing not to stare at. There was dried blood on his face and his still-damp coat was heavy on his shoulders. Eaton and Mayor Fletcher were in business clothes, not a spot of water on them and certainly no blood, unafraid of being seen in the middle of the night together, discussing secrets that they didn’t need to hide.

Rage rolled tight in his gut.

"Gentlemen," Eaton greeted them with a smug smile. The mayor nodded at them with a smaller, meeker smile.

Neither Jim nor Bullock responded, their furious scowls unwavering. Mayor Fletcher finally noticed the furious gazes and tension in the group, and shifted uncomfortably, eyes flickering uncertainly. Jim ignored her.

"Where are you boys off to?" Eaton continued jovially, when it was clear that they weren't going to answer him.

Jim pursed his lips together tightly. He turned his head and shared a quick look at Bullock - who met his gaze with a slight nod of agreement before looking back at Eaton like he was trying to set him on fire.

"We're going to arrest Carmine Falcone," Jim said unflinchingly, looking back at the pair in front of them.
The mayor's reaction was immediate. She gasped, and looked at him with wide eyes; blood draining from her face in a rush.

Eaton, on the other hand, laughed out loud, like Jim had told him a great joke. It took several long moments for him to quiet, and even then he continued to shake with laughter.

"Is this your resignation Gordon?" he asked with a final snicker.

Jim stared at him. Eaton was still grinning arrogantly; confident that Falcone's reign would last - so confident that the very idea of taking him down was hilarious. Jim thought of the stack of papers locked in his office upstairs, of the unconscious guards in the drug lab, and grinned.

"No," he said calmly, "It's yours."

He didn't wait to see Eaton's reaction, instead turning around and, without a word, he and Bullock exited the building.

In all the years to come - years of clowns and scarecrows; plant women and riddles, - he always remembered the night they arrested Falcone, though it had lost sharpness with time.

He remembered how long the drive to Falcone's was; it was tucked far away from the hustle of the heart of the city - far from the streets that Falcone had spent his whole life ruining. It was easy to find - that had never been the problem - but it was a place that few people dared to go.

He had called Sarah on the drive there, telling her they were going to arrest Falcone, and asking her to meet them at the station when they returned. He remembered the way her voice had shaken with happiness, and the way it sounded like she may have burst into relieved tears at the news.

When they did finally reach the house, and the short butler let them in and took them to meet his master on their insistence, Jim remembered being darkly amused that Falcone didn't even know that he had a reason to be afraid yet.

Time blurred after that, memories tainted with adrenaline, but he would specifically remember watching the smug, haughty look on Falcone's wrinkly face drain into shock and anger when he realized that this wasn't a joke, that he was really, actually being arrested.

That he had no guards or influence to protect him. That he wasn't untouchable anymore. That his criminal empire was finished.

He remembered the look on red-hot satisfaction Bullock's face, as he shoved the handcuffed gangster in the backseat of a police car. Bullock would never again be forced to work for the mob.

Jim especially remembered taking one last look at Falcone's once-imposing house before driving away, and seeing the shadow, impossibly darker against the dark roof. He nodded his head in thanks to Batman, trusting that he would know what it meant.

When he looked out of the car window as he was driving out, the shadow had disappeared.

True to her word, Sarah had been waiting for them outside the station, eyes red-rimmed by triumphant, and helped them get Falcone to a holding cell.
Bullock had volunteered to guard Falcone, and together he and Sarah managed convinced him to go back to his apartment.

Jim didn't remember the drive home, but had vague memories of passing out on the couch with a bag of frozen peas on his nose.

But he would never forget what it felt like when Barbara woke him up a few hours later, already starting to lecture him about getting hurt on the job again. He wrapped her in a long, tight hug, and just breathed. As he made them breakfast, they watched sunrise shine light and warmth through the windows, and it felt like hope.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Firstly, let me apologize for the long wait for this chapter, it actually ended up being the longest one of whole fic (I think), so that's something.

But more importantly, thank you everyone who ever commented, or left kudos, or talked to me about this fic, or if you enjoyed it silently from afar. I couldn't have finished this without all of you, and am so grateful. I hope you enjoy this final chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took a few days for the news of Falcone's arrest to really take hold of Gotham. The city itself seemed to move slower than usual, like it had woken from a deep sleep and was still trying to get its bearings. The only exception was The Gotham Gazette, which, with Vale's lead, had pounced on the arrest as soon as the news broke, and hadn't slowed down in the slightest in the days since.

Even gangsters, like Maroni and Fish, who had been waiting and scheming for years in attempts to take over Falcone's regime were caught off guard by his sudden disappearance from the city. In the days it took them to catch up with the news, Penguin had already taken control of a sizeable chunk of Falcone's more valuable areas. Maroni had to settle for what was left.

That was going to be a problem.

But a problem for another day.

The problems of today were mostly making sure that Maroni and Penguin didn't destroy Gotham in their skirmishes for what was left of Falcone's territory. Fish, luckily, had seemed content to just tighten her rule over her few blocks.

There was practically nothing left of Falcone's gang - they had fractured, merging with whatever group they thought was the most powerful, or at least the least likely to kill them.

The few loyal men that Falcone did have had tried to break him out exactly two times. The first attempt was stopped by Batman, who left the three gangsters hanging upside-down from one of the lamp posts outside of the GCPD. The other had been stopped before it started, when Bullock caught a police officer trying to sneak into the cell.

The next day that officer was in the jail cell, and Falcone was moved to a federal prison, under constant guard.

Because of the extensive evidence Jim had been able to provide of Falcone's long history of bribery and corruption, it had been quickly decided that his assets must be frozen, and that he should be held and tried in a federal court far away from his sphere of influence.

After all, Gotham wasn't the only place that wanted Falcone locked up. Though most of his time and money had been spent thoroughly devastating Gotham, he had had connections all over the country, and a lot of people wanted to see him gone. It wasn't official yet, not with the literal piles of evidence to sort through, but it seemed everyone already knew what the outcome would be.
Falcone would never live outside of jail again.

Jim was glad that the court was far enough from Gotham that he wouldn't be able to worm out of the charges, but it was a shame that he wouldn't have to face the city itself.

It was a good thing then, that former-commissioner Fred Eaton's trial would be held in Gotham, and he would have to face what he had done to the city, in the city.

It had been a helluva shock to come in the day after they imprisoned Falcone to find Eaton sitting in a jail cell next to him. As soon as Jim had left the GCPD that night, Sarah had immediately gone to Eaton's office and arrested him on charges of abuse of power and police corruption, among a long list of other things.

His trial was in a few weeks. Jim had circled the date on his calendar - Sarah had drawn a happy face next to it; Bullock had opted for crudely drawn middle finger.

Eaton's arrest, while a wonderful surprise, had left the GCPD without an official leader. Now there was no one to organize the officers, deal with the never-ending wave of criminals, oversee the paperwork, and try to keep everyone all moving forward in the chaos of the aftermath.

So Jim did.

It hadn't been easy, or simple, but it had been natural to step up and organize people, to lead the GCPD. Sarah and Bullock had joked that it was because of his natural inclination for bossing people around, but truthfully it was born from a desire to take care of his city.

It was almost archaic, maybe, in the way the officers had taken to listening to Jim with such little resistance. Jim had arrested their leader, so, for now at least, they were listening to him.

The acceptance definitely wouldn't last, but he was thankful for it, for the time being.

And though nothing about the job was uncomplicated or easy, it was something that he could do.

And he found that he wasn't even half bad at it.

In the few weeks he'd been acting as the de facto leader of the GCPD, he had mostly been able to avoid crowds of people coming to his office with concerns. Apparently, even without Falcone or Eaton being in control, people were still wary of visiting the building.

The rarity of physical visitors in his office meant that he was completely unprepared when Bullock barged into his office in the middle of the day and announced that he had a visitor. It took Jim a second to understand what he had said, as he was too busy noticing the thunderous fury on Bullock's face.

Adrenaline rushed through Jim and he shot up out of his chair, making the paperwork on his desk flutter with the motion, worst case scenarios racing through his head.

Instead, Mayor Fletcher stepped quietly into his office behind Bullock, hands clasped in front of her and shoulders hunched slightly.

Oh. That explained it.
The adrenaline rush fizzled out, leaving dull, tired anger in its place.

Bullock levelled another glare at Jim and the mayor before slamming the door behind him, leaving them alone in an awkward silence.

"I'm--" Jim started to say, unsure of how to apologize for whatever Bullock had said to her before he brought her in. Last time either of them had seen her, she had been standing beside Eaton, on the side of Falcone.

Jim didn't know if she had chosen to work with Falcone or had been coerced into it, but he did know that she was one of Gotham’s longest standing mayors, and that the city hall had been upgraded just a few weeks after Falcone had made a fortune selling arms a few years ago.

"It's alright. It's been a difficult time for everyone," she interrupted, looking around his office. Jim tried not to grimace. If his office had been messy when he worked as a captain, then it was now an absolute clusterfuck. It probably would have been polite to ask her to sit down while they talked, but the second little chair he kept in his office was currently wearing a stack of paper that was nearly two feet tall, so they both stayed standing on opposite sides of the desk.

"I don't mean to impose, I'm sure you're quite busy," she continued, wrenching her eyes away from his piles of paperwork to look him in the eye.

Jim didn't say anything. He had an idea why she had come out to talk to him, but he was waiting for her to spell it out.

It was terribly petty, but after the years of her working in city hall, taking Falcone's money then watching him ruin the city that had elected her, he wasn't feeling particularly charitable.

And the fact that she had waited so long to come to the GCPD - waiting to see how the dust settled before making any moves - did not help.

"I know that you've been acting as the leader since the arrests, and the whole city is extremely grateful," she paused, watching him, but continued uninterrupted, "and I think it's about time to make it official. I'm making you commissioner of the police department" she said with a smile, squaring her shoulders and looking pleased with her rehearsed speech.

"Don't you want to get permission from the mob first?" he raised an eyebrow, anger hardening all at once to a hot stone in his gut.

Her smile faded from her face, eyes widening slightly in surprise at his rebuke. She looked like she had the night of Falcone's arrest, when he saw her with Eaton.

"Falcone is going to jail," she said cautiously, eyes shifting back and forth.

"Yes, but he isn't the only gangster in the city. The Penguin's got all of Midtown and then some, and Maroni took what's left." He took a deep breath, trying to rein in his rage. "One day one of them is going to come to your office with a list of demands. Will you work with them like you did with Falcone?"

Fletcher slumped, suddenly looking very small. "What was I supposed to do?" she asked, pleading.

"Supposed to do..." he repeated, staring at her in disbelief. Fury escaped his tight hold and exploded through him all at once, the fire loosening his tongue. "Something! You were supposed to do something!" he snarled over the angry rushing in his ears.
Mayor Fletcher didn't say anything, just stared at Jim with wide, shocked eyes.

"Instead," he continued, "you sat in an office - that Falcone paid for! - and watched him do everything he could to destroy this city, while you did nothing!"

Jim's words echoed around the office, leaving silence and stillness in their wake. His heaving chest was the only motion in the room.

Finally, she looked up, staring directly at Jim. He noticed, for the first time since she had entered the office, that there were deep circles under her eyes, the pale, drawn pallor of her skin.

"I know," she paused, closing her eyes tightly and pinching her lips together before looking at Jim again, "I thought...I know. It's not going to happen again," she vowed.

They looked at each other for a minute, until Jim broke eye-contact, shaking his head slightly as he turned away. All of his anger left him at once, leaving him exhausted in its wake.

It was just too tiring to maintain his anger at Fletcher, when the person that he, that they, truly had a problem with was sitting in a jail cell under federal guard.

She wasn't innocent, but being easily manipulated and scared was a far cry from Falcone's destructive greed, or even Eaton’s eager neglect of the city. And Jim couldn't maintain any anger in the face of her remorse.

"Will you take the job?" she asked with a sigh.

"Yes," Jim replied, pinching the bridge of his nose, "yes, of course." Whether he would take the job had never been the question. Everything he had done, the entire reason he was a police officer in the first place was to help the people of Gotham.

So of course he would take the job - it wasn't even a choice.

"Wonderful," Fletcher said, her sagging shoulders betraying away her relief, "I'll organize a press conference and let you know the details."

"Great," he replied, keeping his sigh internal. He might as well get used to press conferences - he was the commissioner now, there would be lots in his future. "Was there anything else?"

She opened her mouth, then closed it again, conflict molding her face. Jim just raised an eyebrow and waited.

"Have you see him?" she asked, so quietly he had to lean in to hear her.

"Who?"

"Batman! Don't be stupid," she scoffed, rolling her eyes, showing maybe the most human reaction he’d seen from her since she’d walked into his office.

"I've seen him," Jim said slowly, "Why? Have you?" he asked, furrowing his eyebrows.

"No," she said quickly, rushing past his question to ask her own. "Can he actually help Gotham?"

"Yes," Jim said immediately. Funny, how that used to be a difficult question.

"Are you going to work with him?" she asked, leaning closer across the desk. Like all of Gotham, she must have been aware of Batman's involvement in the arrest of Falcone, or even the arrest of
Zsasz, going back further.

"That's the plan." There was no point in lying, especially not considering some of the half-formed ideas that had been floating in his head the last few weeks. "Is that going to be a problem?" he asked flatly.

"Oh God no," she snorted, "It doesn't matter to me. Give him a badge for all I care. I just want to know which variety of angry calls to expect at my office."

As if it had been summoned, her phone chimed brightly, and she looked down to check her message. Jim looked away, taking a deep breath and exhaling slowly. The sun was just starting to set, the shadows cast by the buildings lengthening.

"I'm afraid I've got to get back to the office," she said, already turning towards the door. "I'll have the paperwork sent over tomorrow."

"Sure," he replied. He'd clear a spot on his chair.

Mayor Fletcher was almost out the door when she stopped abruptly and turned to look back at Jim.

"Commissioner Gordon," she called, voice clear, "I did do something. I made you commissioner."

He stared at her for a moment, before his mouth twitched up in a half smile, and he nodded at her as she shut the door behind her.

Jim grunted slightly as he pulled another pile of folders out of a drawer and dropped them on the ground.

He hadn't really planned on sorting through his ex-boss' office today, but it was raining too hard to complete his original plan to go on the roof with a measuring tape. So instead he was making an absolute mess of Eaton's office.

Unfortunately, it had quickly become apparent that his small room was unprepared to handle the paperwork that came with leading the GCPD, and it just so happened that there was a spare office that no one was using anymore.

And removing Eaton's nameplate from the door had been incredibly satisfying.

There weren't any personal artifacts in the office, and anything that linked Eaton to Falcone had been removed by Sarah as proof the night that Eaton was arrested, so all that was left for Jim to go through were the more routine files left behind before moving himself in.

Strangely, the most interesting part of the office was the desk. It was the exact same model as the one in the drug lab - the one with the hidden compartment.

Jim had laughed out loud when he realized - at the image of Falcone bargain-hunting for ugly desks so he could buy them in bulk for all his cronies.

It looked even stupider in the office than it had in the drug lab.

The first thing Jim had checked was the secret compartment. Instead of keeping incriminating files
there, Eaton had hidden money, nearly $8000 if Jim's quick counting was right. It was certainly dirty money - money Eaton had made from his dealings with Falcone, or else made through bribes and coercion of Gotham's people.

The pile of bills was now sitting next to him. He'd deal with it later.

As time passed, the fun of going through Eaton's things had worn off, as he tried to decipher what was garbage (which was most of it) and what had to be filed away into long-term storage.

It was truly an effort in futility going through them, because Eaton had clearly not cared about keeping his paperwork in reasonable order. Cases that should have been filed away in the basement years ago were still in drawers, some cases were missing pages, and entire files had been mixed together.

From his place on the floor, leaning against the wall, Jim flipped open the folder and pulled some of the files into his lap. It was one of the last he had to go through before he could call it a day, and this one in particular had been at the very bottom of the desk.

He skimmed through the first page quickly, but paused halfway down. Shifting to sit more upright, he started reading from the top again.

There were lots of information gaps throughout the case-file, but it seemed to be about an illegal fight club in the South Side docks that hadn’t been investigated. At the top of the file someone - probably Eaton - had written a name that Jim recognized as one of Falcone's men, who'd been significant enough that any charges had never stuck to him. Jim pursed his lips together, staring hard at the paper.

Maybe Falcone's man had been involved in the fight club, betting on it or selling entries, and so Eaton had made sure it wasn't investigated and shut down.

Jim shot a suspicious look at the rest of the files in the folder. Maybe all of them were of the cases that Eaton had shut down to protect Falcone's interests.

Which was an absolutely horrifying thought, because based on this preliminary report alone, at least one person had died at the fight club. The officer who had been on the case before being stopped had noted that the dead body had been brutalized, describing shattered bones, a torn off arm and 'animalistic bite marks'.

Jim winced, closing his eyes tightly and taking a deep, slow breath before turning the page to look at another case.

This one was from Gotham City University, a series of complaints from the psychology department about experiments that one of the professors was conducting that had never been properly investigated. Someone in the university had paid Falcone a steep price to stop any investigation, to prevent any scandals being linked to the university. The officer with this case had either been criminally lazy, or Eaton had shut them down quickly, because there was no record of what the complaints actually were.

Jim shoved the pages off his lap, letting them land sloppily on the folder next to him. He brought his hands up, letting them take the weight of his head as he stared blankly ahead. He desperately wanted to taste smoke in the back of his throat, but didn't move from his place on the floor.

Years. The negligence and blatant obstruction of justice had been going on for years. And it hadn't started with Eaton and Falcone; Jim couldn't think of a single time in Gotham's long history were the
law-enforcers hadn't been steeped in corruption. It hadn't infected the GCPD; the GCPD had been born from it.

And now it was Jim's job to fix it.

Reactions to his new role had ranged from Sarah launching herself at him for a hug, to scattered congratulations in the halls, to open glares of hostility and disgust. It wasn't exactly a surprise: the arrest of one gangster and an amoral commissioner alone couldn't change the longstanding corruption that infected the GCPD, and the officers who were used to working with criminals wouldn't be eager to stop.

Jim remembered, as a kid growing up in Gotham, his parents warning him to stay away from certain streets where gangs frequented, and to stay away from the cops in the same breath, because they were both just as dangerous. A legacy of abuse and corruption had rightfully eroded any faith that Gotham's people had had in law enforcement.

And if people were ever going to be able to trust them again, if they were going to deserve any trust, the entire culture in the GCPD had to change, from the ground up.

The very first thing he had done was set about enforcing a zero-tolerance ban on all associations with the criminal activity that should have been enacted generations ago. It had surprised exactly no one who knew and worked with Jim; and the people who didn't surely assumed it was all lip-service from another commissioner who was pretending to care. Hopefully Jim would be able to convince those people otherwise, given time.

The real difficulty wouldn't be cleaning up the GCPD, but navigating the retaliation. Maroni, and possibly the Penguin, wouldn't be happy to lose their insiders in the police force, nor would the officers and detectives themselves be happy to end the benefits they had enjoyed by working with the mob.

Truthfully, it was the officers who were probably going to be a bigger problem. There hadn't been any outright inside attempts to sabotage or frame him, or even outright murder him, but Jim wouldn't be surprised when it happened.

He was going to need more help. Batman, though Jim hadn't seen him in person since the arrests, was still stopping criminals most nights, doing far more than the GCPD could accomplish themselves. And Sarah and Bullock were great, were wonderful, and he would never have gotten to this position without them, but they could all use some more allies in the force itself.

He sighed, stretching slightly and loosening his already loose tie. He'd been going through Eaton's office - his office now - for hours. If he wanted to get home in time to eat breakfast with Barbara, he'd have to leave soon.

He checked his watch.

Ok, he'd have to leave now.

It only took a few minutes to haul himself up off the floor and clean up. The folder with the formerly-hidden files went back in the drawer to be looked at next time he had the chance.

He took one last look at his new office before locking the door behind him. It was unfortunate that this office didn't have any windows, but if his plan worked, then it wouldn't matter.
He hadn't called her in a long time, and she hadn't called him, both all too aware of the risks. But he certainly hadn't forgotten her number.

It only rang twice, despite the late hour.

"Hello?"

"Renee? It's-"

"Jim." Of course she had been expecting him. "Oh, sorry, do you go by Commissioner Jimbo now?"

Jim chuckled. It had been years, but apparently Renee hadn't forgotten how to make fun of him. "How do you know already? The press conference was just a few days ago."

"They showed some of it on the news. The whole country is pretty interested you guys right now, what with your jailed mob bosses and your vigilante bat-people," she said, voice crackling with amusement, but even through the phone Jim could hear the undercurrent of seriousness, the slight questioning to it.

"What'd you think of the conference?" he asked, ignoring her question for now.

"I think you probably need acting lessons or something. You looked constipated the whole time," she teased, and through the phone Jim could hear the warmth, and he laughed with her.

"But you're commissioner now," she continued, "How many people have you fired so far?"

Jim scoffed. "No one yet. Give me some time, it's only been a few days!" Besides, if he fired everyone who had worked with the mob, he'd barely have any officers left.

"Slacker."

"I'm actually more interested in hiring right now," Jim smiled into the phone, "We've got a vacancy for captain, now that I'm commissioner."

"Jim..." Renee said, voice turning serious.

"You wouldn't happen to know of any brilliant detectives looking to be a captain, who has experience in Gotham? Maybe someone who had to leave for a while to escape a mob boss?"

There was silence on the other end. It wasn't often that he got to make Renee speechless, and it had been a long time since he had even had the chance to try, so this quiet was especially satisfying.

"You want me to be captain?" she asked, breathless even through the phone static.

"Only if you want to," Jim said quickly. He did want Renee to work with them in Gotham again, but also he knew that the city's crime came with a specific, inherent danger, and he would understand if she didn't want to deal with that anymore.

"If I want to," she said, pitching her voice absurdly deep as she mocked him. "When can I start?"

"As soon as you can get over here."

"Give me a few weeks to quit and move. No no, wait, I take it back. I have two conditions first."
"Of course you do," Jim said, amused.

"I want a big office."

"Hmmm," Jim hummed loudly, pretending to think. "Well, you can have either the janitor's closet, or my old one with the window."

She sighed. "Yours will have to do. But!" she paused, voice dripping with satisfaction, "I want to be the one to tell Bullock."

Jim burst out laughing, and Renee joined him, and it felt like the past few years hadn't happened. They hung up a few minutes later, but Jim stayed awake by his phone a while longer, waiting for Bullock's inevitable phone call of faux-annoyance that masked his glee, which would be followed by Sarah's call of real happiness, and anger that he hadn't told her he was inviting Renee back.

His gaze drifted to the window as he waited. The sun had long since disappeared behind the buildings, though he had only managed to convince Barbara to go to bed a few minutes before he had called.

It had been raining all day, but now the only proof of the weather was the water falling through the glowing pockets of light from the few apartments that were still awake, and the street lamps lining the street in orange further below. There were, Jim noted with slight smiled, all sorts of shadows where Batman could be hiding.

Jim still hadn't seen him in person since Falcone was arrested, but what was more perturbing was that it had been a few days since anyone had been found tied up or unconscious. He wasn't concerned yet - periods where Batman went missing for a few days were usually followed by entire groups of people being arrested, or exposure on a big case that they had been stuck on.

But, for tonight at least, Batman was more shadow than man. To some people who wrote for *The Gotham Gazette*, that was all Batman was: a ghost made up by the desperate police department to scare people into obedience. The idea that the GCPD could have done half the things that Batman had accomplished was funny enough, but what was funnier was for each scathing report, three more editorials were published that described how Batman had helped them and was a hero.

The one written by a seven-year-old calling the columnist a "butt-faced liar" was Jim's personal favourite.

Not that he could blame people for doubting Batman's intentions, or even his existence. After all, Jim had been skeptical himself for a long time, and he had had more experience with Batman than most Gothamites. People - well, people who weren't criminals - who had an encounter with him mostly trusted him, but the majority of the city had no proof that he was even real.

With some luck, his plan would convince them that Batman was real, even if it probably wouldn't do anything for the people who thought he was a GCPD-planted myth.

Jim took off his glasses, slowly polishing them on his shirt before replacing them on his nose. He might as well look over his designs one more time while he waited for Bullock to call. Barbara had been enthusiastic about them when he showed them to her, but he wanted to go over his measurements one last time before going to the buying the materials tomorrow.
It had taken longer than he was comfortable with to find time to get out of the office. Jim had been right, and Batman's absence had abruptly ended with the exposure of an entire arms smuggling operation that had been thriving all across Gotham.

Batman had left a file, next to the bound criminals, detailing places where they had been selling their guns, how they might lead back to Maroni, or Penguin, or the smattering of smaller-time gangsters in the city. It was undoubtedly helpful, though it left Jim trying to pick officers who could be trusted to investigate the leads without stealing the weapons.

However, despite all the delays in the office causing Jim to arrive later than he had planned, Eagle Boulevard was no less lively, and hadn't seemed to have gotten the memo that the sun had finished setting, and night was starting to take hold.

It wasn't raining tonight, though it was chillier than normal for an August night. Lights from bar windows illuminated the people who were milling around on the sidewalk and street. This area wasn't usually busy, and had been damn near deserted the night that Jim had driven down it in the rain, but the dry summer's night was keeping people from their beds.

As Jim walked down the street, he saw a few tipsy men leaning against the wall outside of the bar talking to each other. They didn't notice him, at first, too busy staring openly at the women who were almost certainly prostitutes across the street.

A group of teenagers were shuffling along the sidewalk towards Jim. Their oversized, heavy sweatshirts and flickering eyes betrayed their guilt over something, though it wasn't obvious what.

Everyone on the street stared at Jim as he walked, their gaze shifting like old paintings whose eyes followed every step. He wished that he had had time to change out of his uniform before coming, but even that might not have helped, with how much his face had been on the TV and in the newspaper recently.

The unspoken question filled the street with noise as Jim passed, accusing and curious eyes all asking the same thing: What are you going to do? Who are you going to be?

Jim wished he had a way to reassure them, but there wasn't anything he could say that they would believe.

After all, no one could be expected to take his word that the GCDP would no longer tolerate corruption in its rank after only a few official announcements, and he didn't expect them to.

But for now, they all let him past, unchallenged - aside from their stares - which was more than he had anticipated.

It was actually a bit of a relief that no one stopped him, not because Jim didn't want to connect with them, but because he was breaking one of most first rules people learned about walking around Gotham at night.

He was carrying a lot of cash with him.

Continuing past the glow of the bar, he walked further down the street, where the businesses had retired for the night, leaving just the light from the streetlights shining on the stone and bricks to guide the way through the darkening night.

He had only walked past a few more buildings when the source of the kids' guilt became apparent.

There was a large shadow of a bat, spray painted black on top of the bricks, its shape recognizable
even in the dim light. They had taken great care to make the symbol of their graffiti evident.

He stared at it for a few moments longer. If this was all the kids had done tonight, they hadn't needed to worry about Jim - he certainly wasn't about to harass some kids for spray-painting a building, not when there was nothing vulgar on it, and not when there were so many worse things they could be doing on a summers night.

And if it helped those teens, or anyone else who saw it, feel a little more safe, a little more protected, then all the better.

He continued down the road, heading towards the alley. There were fewer people in this part of the street, though the gargoyles keeping watch from above kept Jim from feeling too alone.

In the lights of the street lamps he could barely make out a waterline along the buildings, left there from the flood a few years ago that had never been cleaned up properly. Jim shuddered to think of the water damage and mold in the buildings themselves, but there was nothing he could do about that right now, so he continued his trek towards something he could do.

It only took a few more minutes to reach the alley, and Jim was happy to see that the tarp was still stretched on top of the garbage bins. He had been afraid Mr. Johnson may have moved on to a new part of town since Jim had last seen him.

Jim entered the alley and knocked gently on the side of one of the bins.

"Mr. Johnson?"

The old man's head popped out from around the edge of the bin, wariness fading to warm recognition when he saw Jim. He was clutching a blanket around his shoulders.

"Mister Commissioner!" I've seen you lots in the paper!" he exclaimed, clamouring out from underneath his tarp to stand in front of Jim. "What brings you round here?"

"I had to come and talk with you. How have you been?" he asked with a slight smile. Johnson looked the same as he had last time Jim saw him; albeit this time the grey hair and wrinkles were no longer soaked from rain. His eyes lingering on the dark blanket around the old man's shoulders, familiarity nagging at the back of his mind, though he didn't remember seeing it last time.

"Ahh, can't complain. But," his face suddenly fell, eyes widening in fear, "what happened to that building? I didn't see any news about it anywhere..." he trailed off.

"That's part of why I came. The building you told me about was being used in a human trafficking ring, which we shut down," Jim paused, looking directly at Johnson, "You helped save the lives of two kids that night. They're safe and back with their families." Jim had spoken to them just the other day, to make sure the family was doing alright, or at least as well as could be expected.

"Oh, thank the Lord," Johnson gasped, his body crumpling in relief.

"I couldn't have done it without your help."

"It was nothing," Johnson protested, shaking his head.

"No, it was something. And when people help us solve a crime there are funds that we can give out." Ignoring the shocked look spreading across Johnson's face, Jim reached into one of his inner pockets and pulled out the bundle of bills, holding them out to him. "I want you to have this. It's about 2500 dollars."
The money came from Eaton's stash. Technically speaking, the money should have been surrendered as evidence against him. But considering how much proof they already had, Jim wanted to return the money directly to the city it was stolen from.

He had divided it in threes, and had already anonymously dropped off a few thousand dollars at a rehab centre, and another few thousand at a woman and children's shelter.

Mr. Johnson's face was slack with shock, eyes full of tears.

"Please take it, its the least we can do, for all your help," Jim implored, holding the money closer to Johnson.

He reached out with shaking hands and took the bills.

"Thank you, for saving those kids," Jim repeated.

Johnson hadn't recovered his ability to speak yet, but he nodded silently, bringing the hand holding the blanket up and wiping his face.

"That looks like a nice blanket," he said, nodding at it. He hadn't noticed at first, but it looked like one side was waterproof.

"I think," Johnson paused, seeming to be fighting with himself, trying to keep the words back before giving up, "now don't you laugh at me, but I think that the Batman gave it to me. I just woke up one day and it was there!'" His voice was full of reverence as he said Batman's name.

It was suddenly obvious why the blanket had stood out to Jim. Mr. Johnson's blanket wasn't the exact same material as the cape that he remembered, but it was similar enough in colour for the connection to be clear. The blanket itself looked thick and plush; hopefully enough to keep him warm through the winter. Something warm unfurled in Jim's chest.

Mr. Johnson was still watching him, wary of his reaction.

"You're right. I think that Batman gave it to you, he must be looking out for you," Jim agreed, matching his hushed tone.

The look of happiness, of security, on Mr. Johnson's face stayed with Jim as he left the alley and returned to his car. It didn't fade as he drove home to catch a few hours of sleep before heading back to work to deal with the arms smuggling, and remained for a long time after that.

Jim resisted the urge to unplug his answering machine as he listened to yet another message. He'd been listening for what felt like an hour but probably was only a few minutes. Most of the messages were general issues, things that, even after weeks of being commissioner, still had not been taken care of.

One message was from Mayor Fletcher, about the upcoming district attorney election that was only a few months away.

Another was an invitation to some charity gala that Jim was going to have to attend. It was
apparently being hosted by Bruce Wayne, whose return to Gotham must have been overshadowed by Falcone’s arrest.

The vast majority of the messages had come straight from Vicki Vale, asking for interviews or quotes about anything and everything: the GCPD, Falcone, Batman, and more. Really, she was asking about anything that she thought she could get out of him.

He'd been ignoring her for a while now, because after tonight she was going to have a lot more questions, and he’d rather get them all out of the way at once.

He took off his glasses, rubbing at his eyes before running his hands down his face and across his moustache. Without a window, he couldn’t see how dark it was, but by the time on his watch he knew the sun had been down for a few hours now. Fall had technically arrived, though the weather hadn't started to cool off yet. School had started last week, which meant it was time for Jim to start thinking of a birthday gift for Barbara.

And that meant finding where he could buy the computer that she had been dropping unsubtle hints that she wanted.

He got up from his chair, looking around his office to ensure that everything had been put away. He had finished moving in a few weeks ago, and the room had yet to succumb to disorganization, though he trusted that Gotham would find a way to help him mess it up again. But for now, all the paperwork was filed neatly away, including those from the crimes that Eaton had kept hidden.

Jim had finally found the time to go through them. Among other things, there had been a cover-up of an 'accident' at a botany research lab that had left one scientist missing, presumed dead. Another case had numerous files appeared to be about Falcone's offshore arms dealings, though some of the papers were in what appeared to be Arabic, so Jim couldn't be sure.

He took a deep breath, trying to slow the flight of the butterflies fluttering with anticipation in his stomach. Despite preparing for this night for weeks, it had managed to sneak up on him anyway. His eyes fell on his desk, where he knew the secret compartment was.

At first, he had planned to leave it empty, but had found something to put in it as he was cleaning out his old desk.

Now, the first batarang - the razor sharp one he'd found at the arson case - lay hidden in the desk.

He had accepted his decision to work with Batman, knowing that it was the best option he had for making a real difference in Gotham. Batman seemed at least open to the idea of working with Jim; he had continued to leave files at the scenes of certain cases, now that Jim was commissioner.

But despite his belief that he was doing the right thing, Jim needed to remember the risk he was taking. Gotham needed Batman, yes, but that didn’t mean that Batman wasn’t dangerous.

The stakes were too high for Jim to pretend that there we no stakes at all, and so the razor-sharp reminder would stay hidden in his desk, and he would work with the vigilante, for as long as Batman was helping Gotham.

With one final glance at his office, he closed the door and headed towards Renee's office. She'd only arrived in Gotham a few days ago, and had spent a lot of that time at the GCPD.

He narrowly beat Bullock - who was carrying one coffee in each hand - to the door, and held it open for him.
"Here's your coffee Montoya. 18 sugars, right?" Bullock said, entering the room.

"Fuck you Bullock." Jim heard Renee reply casually as he followed him in.

Sarah was also inside, and he nodded a greeting at her. She gave him a tight smile, and took the coffee cup that Bullock offered as Renee took the other one.

The walls of the office were still barren, though the boxes scattered around the room made it look fuller. It appeared that the only thing that Renee had unpacked was her little rainbow flag, already attached to the front of her desk.

Jim didn't miss the look of excitement that passed between Sarah and Bullock as Renee raised her cup to her lips, and was instantly suspicious of her coffee.

Sure enough, as soon as the drink hit Renee's mouth she convulsed, face twisting in disgust.

"Ugh, shit! How much sugar did you put in this? Four cups?" she demanded, face still wrinkling in revulsion as Bullock barked in laughter, and Jim tried to repress a smile.

"There are only two spoonfuls," Sarah said, also laughing. "Here, this one's yours. No sugar," she promised, switching their coffee cups.

Renee turned to Jim. "What do I gotta do to get you to fire them?" Jim laughed out loud.

"Hey, it was Sarah's idea!" Bullock immediately protested, holding his hands up. They all turned and stared at her where she was standing, looking entirely unrepentant.

"That," Sarah said, smirking, "is what you get for leaving us with to deal with Jim by ourselves for years! He was damn near having tea parties with a bat-hybrid in his office!"

"Not to mention what he did to the searchlight," Bullock added.

Jim shot them a look, furrowing his eyebrows. Though, unfortunately, he couldn't exactly argue with them, especially given his plans for that night.

"I don't know why you think I would be able to - or want to - stop Jim's questionable decisions. You guys just hate me and my superior taste in coffee," Renee grumbled, but visibly relaxed after taking a sip of her coffee.

"Thought you'd be up on the roof by now," Sarah said to Jim, interrupting the quiet that had fallen over the office. She had an unreadable expression on her face, mouth in a slight frown.

"I'm heading up now."

"Good luck with the vampire," Renee said, saluting him with her coffee cup. She had been very accepting of his decision to work with Batman, taking one look at all the people he had helped them bring down and agreeing that it was a good idea.

Bullock nodded at him. "Play nice," he called as Jim left the office.

He was more than halfway down the hallway when he heard Sarah's voice from behind him.

"Wait, hold on a second Jim. I have to say something."

His stomach clenched in apprehension, but he paused and waited for her to catch up.
"I... You know that I have... reservations... about Batman and—"

“Sarah, do we have to do this now,” he sighed. He knew that she was still deeply suspicious of Batman, but hadn't thought that she would bring it up now.

"Let me finish," she stated, one eyebrow raised, and Jim shut up. "You know that I'm worried. I just can't understand trusting a vigilante," she said in a rush, before pausing, and taking a deep breath. Her brown skin looked slightly flushed as she pursed her lips together, thinking of what to say.

"But," she continued, lifting her chin and looking him right in the eye, "I trust you. And if you think that working with him is what's best for Gotham, then I believe you."

"It is," Jim confirmed, replying to the second half of her comment instead of responding to the heat spreading through his chest at her trust.

"OK," Sarah said with a small smile and a nod. "Just be safe."

"And," she added over her shoulder as she headed back towards Renee's office, "for fucks sake Jim, please don't fall off the roof!"

It started with Commissioner Jim Gordon standing on the roof of the GCPD, next to a modified searchlight.

If - when - he switched it on, there would be no going back. Once the light was in the sky, he would be associated with Batman for the rest of his career.

Jim would always be known as Batman's accomplice.

He turned it on.

To be honest, it looked better than he had expected - he'd been worried that no one would be able to tell that the shape was a bat. It was unseasonably warm tonight, but a storm was brewing, and the clouds and the smog made the bat in the circle of light stand out against the otherwise dark sky.

It was windy, up so high on the roof, and the breeze pushed Jim's trench-coat against his legs as he looked out over Gotham. No matter where people were in the city, they would be able to see the light above them.

He couldn't argue against the effectiveness of Batman's flitting around like a shadow in the night, but to most of the city he was still just a myth, a ghost story told to terrify people. Gotham needed something more. They all needed a tangible signal, to show them that there was someone out there protecting them, that he was real, that their hope was not misplaced.

The light was for the people who had never stopped fighting, and believing in their city, despite everything, who needed to know that they weren't fighting alone. It was to inspire the people who might be able to change, like Mayor Fletcher; to remind them that things could be better. It was to for the criminals, letting them know there was something to fear in the darkness.

Hopefully it would mean something to Batman too.

Jim would never use the word 'peaceful' to describe Gotham, but the city seemed to move slower
from up above. The warm night was keeping people out late, or maybe the incoming storm was making people stay out while they still could. The brick buildings cast black pillars into the sky, and the gargoyle statues that dotted the buildings seemed to keep an eye on the city below them.

He wasn't sure if Batman was going to show up, but even if he didn't, Jim was glad for the chance to shine the light in the sky, and see Gotham from up high. He considered taking out his pipe, and twisted around slightly to pull it out of his pocket.

It took barely half a second for him to notice that he wasn't alone on the roof anymore. He jolted, hand automatically going to his holster before he caught himself, and stopped.

Batman waited until he had stopped moving before walking a few steps closer, though he stayed on the perimeter of the light that the searchlight had created.

He looked mostly the same as he had the last time Jim had seen him. The blank, white lenses that hid his eyes were no less unnerving, and the cape billowed in the wind, making its own shadow for him to hide in. It was easier now to see the outline of the bat across his chest, outlined in yellow just enough to make it stand out.

In the light, Jim could also make out the shadow of a bruise beneath the cowl. The reminder of Batman's humanity was slightly comforting, but mostly just upsetting. It was hard to imagine someone landing a hit on him.

"That's not subtle," Batman finally said, voice a low rumble, as he twitched his head towards the searchlight with his emblem on it.

"Well," Jim cleared his throat, "the flashlight was a little small, and I was getting tired of replacing the batteries so--" he kicked lightly at the base of the light-- "big flashlight."

Batman turned his head, looking to be observing the city, but Jim could have sworn he saw his mouth twitch into a smile. He followed his gaze, listening to the muffled sounds of the live city below them.

"None of the leads on those arms dealers went anywhere," Jim finally said, "Most were dead ends, and none of them led to Maroni. Or the Penguin."

"Cobblepot."

"Excuse me?" Jim asked, blinking.

"The Penguin," Batman said, turning back to look at him, "His name is Oswald Cobblepot."

"Huh," he huffed thoughtfully, "Why does that name sound familiar?"

"He runs the Iceberg Lounge in Midtown," Batman explained, "And is unfortunately much better at keeping his name separate from his crimes than Falcone was," he growled.

"Good to know," Jim muttered, making a mental note to check for any officers that were frequenting that area more than they should be.

And speaking of dirty officers.

"Eaton left some files behind. Of cases that he and Falcone were keeping unsolved." Jim launched into the cases he had found there, the fight club, bribery, suspicious accidents and arms trafficking.
As he went over the crimes, the nerves that had been plaguing him all day melted away as the familiar rhythm of giving a case briefing took over. Batman, unsurprisingly, was a good listener, taking in the details quietly, occasionally asking a question, or adding his own information that Jim hadn't known.

He had relied on his observational skills his whole life, and though Batman's expression had barely changed since he had materialized on the roof, Jim could tell that he too had relaxed, if only slightly.

The wind continued to pick up, both Jim's coat and Batman's cape fluttering more aggressively in the wind.

He was almost finished going over the last details from the cases when he flinched, automatically turning towards the disturbance before he had even processed what it was. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Batman doing the same.

A mere second later Jim heard the wailing of multiple police cars, their lights blazing blue and red as they streaked off towards something.

"Do you--" he started to say, turning back towards Batman.

His eyes darted around, searching, but Batman was nowhere in sight.

Jim was alone on the roof.

"Batman?"

He - feeling incredibly stupid - leaned over the edge of the roof, scanning the side of the building, but there was nothing to see. He stood up, and sighed deeply, walking towards to door.

Batman had definitely done that on purpose.

"Guess I'll meet you there," he muttered to the empty rooftop, and headed back down the stairs, towards whatever came next.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to the rest of your life Jim!

End Notes

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