Painted Black

by dooomninja

Summary

after capturing a shadows data cache the team mobilises fast to capitalise before the shadows slip away. Zeta squad lead by Red Robin find that, rather than a low grade lackey, they were up against the infamous Kasumi. She almost brings down the whole of Zeta team; including a speedster and a kryptonian before they can bring her down. The justice league wants to interrogate, then lock her up but Tim has the feeling not all is as it seems with the young girl.

Notes

quick note. abuse is a big part throughout, physical and mental, especially in the first few arcs as cass gets some distance and grows away from her upbringing (and in to harper ;-) ) and there are also death wish and panic attacks as well so i would suggest avoiding if any of that would be bad for you.

also should note cass pov is a translation she has no words at the start though she will get more skilled with them as the fic goes on
edit: as this fic comes to a close and especially if you are reading this after it is finished i want to make it clear that i have come a long way while writing this story, please don't judge me too harshly by the first half, it keeps improving throughout.

See the end of the work for more notes.
the girl glanced at him as he enters, eyes too wide, looking up at him through her eyelashes. it is hard to explain but it looks like she wants something, but not in a 'desire' way. she raises her eyes to the ceiling and tilts her head to the side. it takes him a few moments to realise that she wasn't simply avoiding eye contact but bearing her neck.

At his gasp she looks at him, he takes on a calming voice, “it's ok we aren't going to hurt you, we just want to talk”.

She narrows her eyes and almost seemed to slump into herself in response. she is carefully watching him out through her eyelashes.

“OK... can... you start with your name?”

…

“do... you know where you are?”

…

“how about, who you work for?”

…

“can you... tell us... where you learned to fight so well?”

…

he is interrupted by Zatanna's voice in his ear. “The League will take over from here, Tim”.

“I have to go now, one of my friends will be in in a minute, ok?” she looks at him with sad, dark, amber eyes, and he struggles to break eye contact as he moves to the door.

As he leaves Zatanna is waiting for him, “you shouldn't have been in there alone, she is incredibly dangerous”

“I'm not so sure” he mutters to himself

She closes her eyes for a heartbeat and he gets the sense she is resisting the urge to roll her eyes at him, “either way we will find out. now why don't you head up the watchtower, the others want to celebrate”

he gives a quick nod and she turns to talk to Tigress as he heads for the zeta tubes. He sets it to take him the bat-cave as he doesn't feel much like celebrating.

It's less than ten minutes later that he gets a call from the watchtower...

Barbara appears on the main screen, “well what do we have here.” she says causing Tim to jump, “skipping your own party to sit in the cave and look over case reports. You're becoming more like B every day, and not in a good way either.”

In response, Tim just mutters something like, “it's not just my party”

“no but you are the star guest, the best the rest of the team managed to get was Hook, you brought down Kasumi, hell she even beat Hawkwoman”

“look there is something really strange going on. she didn't kill Hawkwoman, or Kf, or me. From what I can make out her whole M.O. Is zero collateral, the only person she has hurt who wasn't obviously an intended mark was a bodyguard who was about to whistle-blow on his boss. and that's another thing, I've been looking through all her kills, she doesn't exactly take her time, most of them never even knew she was there. I dunno it just feels like there is something we aren't seeing, that there is more to her."
“ok boy wonder, take a breather. We both know the Shadows have a rule about not killing without being paid to, right? and look, I'll admit there is a lot we don't know, that's why Zee and Art are interrogating h- Oh hell” she curses as she glances left, before turning round to call to someone behind her.

Tim brings up the footage of the interrogation room the girl was put in, what he sees sends him running for the zeta tube, Barbara calling after him.

she can hear voices outside the room she is in. she knows they must be deciding on her punishment, she has never been allowed to lose control before. Maybe she will be in luck, she thinks, and they will make it quick.

The words they said made her feel so... strange. it made her body move, impossible to control, but impossible wasn't allowed to stop her before. She curls tighter into the corner. She hopes she will see the nice one again, it's strange they were nice even though she hurt them.

She hears the door open and squeezes her eyes shut, but she just hears a rustle across the room as the door shuts. She glances up warily, across the room next to the table she overturned they were sat, black and red cape fanning out onto the floor behind them. Her excitement at seeing the nice one quickly fades into confusion as to why they are here. She can see they are trying to be non-threatening, but she can also see tension, is it at her? or the others? it has to be her right? otherways that would mean they were trying to defend her. but they aren't angry. so maybe they are? she feels her eyes dampen at the very thought.

They shift forward on seeing her tears, palms forward trying to comfort her, concern in there every line and a calming voice. As they spot her smile they smile back relief obvious. With over-exaggerated gestures, they say they are going to a new room for her to rest. She can see there offer is genuine and they aren't hiding anything. in fact, she finds there over the top display funny, the strange noise that she makes course them to smile again. They move to stand and she follows.

Both of them leave the room the one who was with her turns right, to the left are two guards, one in orange with black stripes, sword and crossbow at her waist, the other in a black bodysuit and blue jacket, with a band around their neck. Both of them are cautious and watch her with barely concealed hostility. She can see a dozen ways of killing both of them. and wishes she couldn't.

The four of them head down the corridor. She thinks they are likely underground or deep in a building as there are no windows just a smattering of doors down each of the white walls. They come to a stop in front of a person dressed in red, marked with lightning bolts. who isn't even trying to hide their anger, she thinks she must have hurt someone they care about, by the way they move, to fast to be real, probably the fast one in yellow and red she fought earlier, the two of them
move the same. they look away to the nice one in red and black who says something to them, it's hard to understand from his back but the one in red nods and directs them to the door next to them. The nice one turns and smiles at her before opening the door and showing her in.

the room beyond is somewhat sparse just a bed in the middle of the room and several sets of draws around the outside. She also spots a dozen tiny cameras hidden around. The door shuts behind the two of them and they direct her to the bed indicating that it is time to rest. She bows her head in thanks and they smile at her again before leaving the room. She drops into the bed, it's far too soft, it feels like she sinks all the way to the floor, but as she doesn't know how long she will be allowed to sleep she focuses on calming her mind and falling asleep quickly.

when Tim makes it back to his apartment he is met by the smell of pizza and drops onto the couch next to Stephanie

“Rough day? must be hard being the star of the 'catch the baddie' party”

“no it's not..., it's just, I'm not sure how much of a 'bad guy' she is”

“wait, Barb said she was an assassin, you know... as in...”

“yes I know what an assassin is, but I... I don't think she wanted to, it's hard to explain. but we aren't even trying to help her, and I can't convince anyone to. isn't that meant to be the whole point of the league, to help people who need it?”

Tim sags as he says this showing how helpless he feels and Steph bites her lip trying to think of a way to help.

“you know the subconscious is good at solving problems while you are distracted?”

“that's now really true, it's more-”

“quiet while I'm being smooth” she interrupts putting two fingers on his lips to quiet him. He waves for her to go on while smiling under her fingers
“Well, how about I find something to distract you”

Tim barely has a chance to blink before she straddles his hips, his hands move up to her waist as she leans into a kiss...

Chapter End Notes

i was originally inspired by "Magicians and Tigers" by titaniumsansa so if you see any similarities in the starts that's why, and if you haven't you should check it out.
Chapter Summary

decisions are to be made as to Kasumi future, as she finds herself drawing for her future...

Chapter Notes

sorry for any poor characterization i'm not all that familiar with many of the justice league characters and more warnings for panic attacks and abuse this chapter

when he wakes up he is careful not to wake Steph as he pulls himself from the warmth of the bed. it's the bright and early time off... 10:30. ok not so 'early' but he only got back pass 3 damn it. He sets coffee to brew before having a quick shower. By the time he gets out and throws on civvies, the coffee is perfect. He can hear Steph getting up and going for a shower too. He leaves enough for a mug for her to reheat (she puts far to much sugar in it to taste it anyway) before heading to the hall.

It's past 11 by the time he gets to the hall but it is are still quiet. A lot of hero business is night work after all. He heads to the girl's room and sees that it is Conner on guard duty. Good news is that he has a good rapport with the Kryptonian clone, the bad news is that his cousin was one of those the girl brought down before being captured.

“hey Kon”

“Tim” he replies with a small nod “you know she is off limits...”

“...until after the meeting at noon I know. But look, it's not fair to judge someone unless we know there side of the story.”

“The last time someone tried to get her to talk Artemis got kicked across the room.”

“What if she can't talk though”
“What?!"

"if she can't talk then Zee's spell would have backfired, and if instead she was only taught to... well you know, not talk but... communicate through fighting that would explain what happened."

“that's a really big presumption there Tim, it's just as likely she has a magic mental block or some crazy training."

"it's not a presumption as much as an intuition, besides Zatanna would have picked up on any magic block right. and any training wouldn't have caused the result we saw, she clearly responded to the spell, just in a... unexpected way," Kon still looks unconvinced so Tim makes his final play, "just give me five, ten minutes with her, just to see if I can get anything out of her. it's not like there is much danger with you here."

"she hurt Kara."

"because Kara is inexperienced, you're not."

Kon sighs, “why would you even want to help her, she hurt Kara, you, and Bart.”

“justice must be tempered with mercy otherwise it is nothing more than revenge."

he laughs at that “that one of bat's?"

“Errr... something like that.”

he sighs again “ok, fine. Just don't be in there long.”

“Thanks, I owe you one.”

“I'll add it to the list,” Kon says smiling as he lets Tim into the girl's room.
She doesn't know when dawn was. She presumes it must be past dawn now. She can't tell, there are no windows for her to see the sky.

She has already gone through several training routines, though limited by space and lack of equipment, and still no one has come. She doesn't know if she is glad they aren't making her kill or scared of what they are going to make her do... or do to her.

Time drags on and she feels more and more trapped. She can taste the blood and sweat, the screams rattle in her mind, just like the bad days when she failed. She feels herself falling back into the pain and fear of the cell, the smell of anguish, the darkness pressing on her eyes. She begins shaking as she almost can feel sticky trails of blood running over her skin.

She spent so much time in that hellish cell; pressing silence for making noise, an agonising passing after a failed kill, and the harsh caress of knives for showing kindness. In the artificial glow of her new cell, she curls into a ball begging the memories to go away.

From what feels like forever away she can hear voices shimmering and a quick burst of laughter, not the cruel kind she is used to but one full of joy. The door slides open revealing two people standing beyond, the nice one from before, and one who moved like one of the others she fought like they are... out of place in the world, they seem to made independent of it.

The door shuts behind the nice one, she doesn't like the pity in their eyes, they talk in the same slow calming voice as before, it grates her worse than knives, she doesn't like being treated like she is stupid. They quickly shift tact seeing her annoyance taking a calm yet direct approach, she can see their nerves underneath. Their fear.

They place a piece of paper and a pen on the floor and pushes them over towards her. She glances down at it, then back at them, they have a look of indecisiveness on his face but she can read what they want in the subtle hand shift towards the symbol on their chest, the frustration in their shoulders and, there fitting eyes scared of her reaction. She goes back to the paper and begins to draw.

They make a noise but she ignores it till she is finished. When she does and pushes the paper back to him she looks up, watching as shock morphs into confusion then realisation and excitement. She grins as they scamper to there feet. Rushing to the door delighted with what she revealed and wanting to show it to someone else, just before they go they gesture to a side door. After she is alone again she looks through into the next room and sees a small bathroom with a shower. She smiles slightly as she strips off her sweaty, worn skin suit before stepping in for a much-needed
wash.

After Tim zetas to the watchtower he heads straight to the conference room, or more specifically conference room six, one of the smaller ones only meant for meetings between a few members of the league or team. Inside is a small 2 by 1 seat table the nearest three seats are taken so he steps past black canary and takes a seat opposite to green lantern (the second one (they need to define themselves better (though he is robin 3 of 4 so he can't talk), and atom.

“Thanks for letting me be here, I know it's not 'conventional' but this matters a lot to me”

green lantern replies in his calm professional voice, “well there are allowed to be consultants in league meetings, and as you are the only one who has managed to communicate”

Tim is saved from needing to respond by Dinah asking, “conner said you talked to her again today, did you get any information from her?”

“Yeah, she drew this.” putting the picture on the table, “when I asked about who her 'handler' was”

lantern and atom look at it blankly but Dinah starts and puts a hand over her mouth.

Dr Palmer asks, “is this supposed to mean something?” as he pulls the picture, that looks kind of like a lion's head, closer to him so he and John can see it clearly.

“It's the mark of Cain...”

“The what?” he asks again looking between Dinah and Tim then back again.

“He's an assassin,” Tim replies, “one of the best, though not active for a while, I think now we know why.”

“Her fighting style is so similar I'm shocked I didn't see it,” Canary says distantly.
“I didn't realise you had seen her fight canary,” states green lantern.

“I haven't. She was running through kata this morning from... around sixish.”

puts my 10:30 it perspective, Tim thinks

he refocuses when he realises Canary is still talking “...no dominant style and I don't mean she is anything like unskilled or self-taught or even a kind of 'street mix' but more like a mastery of many, she must have had a lot of very skilled teachers. one thing in particulate got my attention.”

she brings up the holographic display showing a recording of Kasumi moving through a routine flicking through for a point of interest. from what Tim can see the girl's movements are fast and sure, he recognises elements of kung fu but it seems different from any style he learned.

Green lantern sighs before asking, “and what are we looking at canary?”

“it's a type of kung fu called 'jade style', it's only known to half a dozen people, including myself, and requires a mastery of all the main styles,” she purses for breath snapping back to focuses away from the recording, “it would take many years to get skilled enough. she must have been training, hard, her whole life to be capable at all, and to this level... This is, of course, presuming she doesn't have some short cut helping her, like some... meta power or cybernetic enhancement.”

It is atoms turn to speak up. “Well we have already sent blood work to star labs and it came back negative for metagene and despite some abnormalities, it seems unlikely there are major cybernetic or genetic enhancements, besides there are plenty of prodigies and savants with none of those.”

“This brings us back the central point, she is incredibly dangerous, and she has shown an aptitude for killing, and little mercy.”

“I disagree she has had plenty of chances to kill which she hasn't taken,” Canary says, “not just red robin and kid flash but also hawkwoman and innumerable guards she has taken out without killing”

“It hasn't stopped her killing her marks though,” atom adds in agreement with Green Lantern.
“there may be more to it than that,” Tim interrupts, “she shows signs of torture both physical, like
the slow cuts on her inner arm and at her neck, and psychological, panic attacks and distress around
authority figures, as well as clear neglect, the lack of speech, and social knowledge. And I
managed to find something from a few years back, a business executive was attacked by someone
who wore something that matches the description of Kasumi’s suit. But here is the thing; she didn’t
kill him, but he did go missing a few days later. he was found much later and... well the coroner
described him as 'suffering an extreme level of torture unlike any I have even heard off'. So, while
a bit of conjecture on my part, I believe this indicates that he was used as a... an example for her.”

"But there is no real evidence to back this up?"

"We are working with very little here John. it is very impressive that Tim found so much. thank
you," Canady directs the final part to Tim. he drops his head to try and obscurer his blush.

"you make a fair point Dinah, but if there is nothing else to add we may as well get on and made a
decision."

“We would need the full league to make a long term decision,” Canary says, “and I'm all for
helping her integrate not just treating her like... 'they' did.”

“it probably will be best to keep her close,” Atom agrees, “she is just human it's not like she can get
out, in fact, it would be probably safer keeping her with us than belle reve.”

“I concur, she will stay in the hall, under guard, until the rest of the league gets back from Mars.”

“and it's ok that I keep seeing her?” Tim asks, “to keep her occupied and er... see if I can get more
information out of her...”

the leaguers glance at each other before giving him the go-ahead and dismissing him.

“Ray, you mentioned her blood tests?” black canary asks

“yes, it's not my area of expertise but some friends at star labs have pointed out some...
abnormalities.”
“What kind of 'abnormalities'?” John asks

“Well as I said there is no meta-gene at all but several hormones are at high, if not dangerous levels including; testosterone, somatotropin, triiodothyronine, thyroxine, and especially serotonin as well as minimal estrogen levels, and these were just the most notable...” he rattles them off from his phone.

John cuts him off exasperatedly, “what does all this mean Palmer.”

“Well the hormones would likely encourage muscle growth, many bodybuilders try and boost the levels of them, but the possible effect on a young growing body is worrying and may affect her long term health. but it's kind of an unknown, it's not exactly ethical to experiment on this kind of thing.”

“You mentioned low levels of estrogen?” Dinah asks, “is it possible she is still pre-puberty?”

“DNA markers would point to her being in her mid to late teens, the youngest she could be is 13 to 14.”

“That doesn't mean they can't of delayed it whether just via malnutrition or some other means.”

“That would be horrible neglect on someone as physically active as her”

“Yeah. I think we have already established Cain certainly abused her, female athlete triad is common enough with athletes who are just fighting for medals, imagine how bad it could be with her life on the line”

Tim wants to go back to talk to Kasumi but checking the sensors in her room, An invasion of privacy, yes, but a hard line drawn before she had been allowed to stay in the hall, show that she is still in the shower, or at least in the bathroom, the sensors aren't as detailed in there. So he heads to the cafetière on the watchtower for something to eat first.

The cafetière is mostly empty. Even on a good day it's quiet, but with a lot of the league and team on Mars, it is even more so. The only other occupants are Aqualad and Red Arrow sitting together and Tim decides not to disturb them.
He eats quickly before checking on her again, and she is still in there, and still using hot water. Tim thinks her idea of a quick shower must be a two-hour spiritual meditation. On his way out he runs into Black Canary

“heading down to talk to her again Tim?”

“well, she is still in the shower at the moment so...”

“still?” he just gives her a small shrug in response, “well could you drop these off for her then?”

She hands him a pile of fabric, “what...?”

“I took the liability of getting some new clothes for her.”

“oh thank you.”

after that, he heads down to the hall and after a quick exchange with Kon, who is still on guard duty, heads into Kasumi’s room. He places the clothes canary got for her, then he hears the bathroom door open. She steps out drying her hair off with a standard white hotel style towel. and nothing else.

Like nothing at all.

Completely naked as the day she was born.

Tim would later point out, in his defence, (to a laughing Steph) that he wasn't checking her out, for the several seconds he just stared at her, he was far too distracted by her scars. Said scars weave up and down her body from collarbone to hips and all the way down her legs, and criss-cross from her arms across her chest and down her stomach. There are also innumerable puncture wounds; some clean knife wounds, some more ragged from a serrated weapon, as well as bullet entry and exit wounds, some so large that he doesn't know what would be worse, them being from large weapons or them having grown with her. He knows her record, she has never had so much as a scratch on her missions so these must all be from training, as punishment, or just because the sick bastard wanted to hurt her.
Only after several seconds does he realise he has been staring. He quickly turns around to face away from her, he gestures to the pile of clothes on the bed for her to put them on. He hears her slip them on, then her dropping onto the bed. When he turns back around she is wearing a light tank top and sweatpants.

She looks at him almost... nervously, legs pulled up in front of her and she keeps glancing at his posture like she is looking for a reaction. Tim doesn't think this is from the whole 'being naked' thing, she was embarrassingly nonchalant about that. No, he thinks, it might have more to do with her annoyance earlier. He isn't sure how to reassure her with body language so he will have to verbalise it and hope she gets the message.

“it's ok to be angry with everything you have been through, and it's ok to hurt too, or cry or scream if you need to.”

she smiles back at him, eyes glitter with hope. he can't tell if it's what he is saying or just that he is being kind. There are several seconds of them just smiling at each other, he can now see her eyes have a thin ring of blue on the outside edge of each iris. Then he hears a low rumbling, gurgling sound that's source he can't pinpoint. He looks back at her and sees she is looking down at herself for a split second before her eyes dart back to him. Her eyes are wide and full of worry and embarrassment again and Tim thinks he knows where the noise came from.

He steps towards the bedside table, keeping his open body facing her so she can read him easier. He opens the thin top shelf and takes out one of the vacuum-packed bars inside. He rips it open and hands her the bar inside. It's about 8 cm long with 4 brake points on it and, Tim knows, tastes like chalk. Not that this seems to matter to her as she just bites into it hungrily, crushing the hard material between her teeth. Seeing her eating the gaunt lines of her face becomes all the more obvious.

She looks up as Tim hears a buzz in his ear.

“yes?” he asks tabbing his communicator

“it's Barbara, I'm just coming to check up on you.”

“I'm in 'her' room.” there is a second of silence where he can almost feel Barbara giving him a look, “but, you know that... obviously.”
“I'm outside now.”

“Can you hold a second for me.”

“ok...”

He turns back to the girl, “in a moment there is going to be a knock at the door, if you stay on the bed she won't come in.” as he says this he gives her a 'stay down' gesture and a 'stop' gesture to the door. she crunches up her face, eyes narrowed and eyebrows squeezed close together. he continues giving the opposite gestures, “if you stand up then she will come in. understand?”

Her eyes flicker between him and the door a few times before she gives a small nod.- When they hear the knock she slowly, carefully gets to her feet. Her eyes fix on the door, mouth slightly agape, as it slides open and Barbara wheels her way in.

“Giving her agency I see.”

“It's something 'they' can never take away,” he replies giving the girl a small smile. She grins back at both of them and presents her fist to Barbara who bumps knuckles with her laughing slightly.

“What have you been calling her?”

“I... don't... know... I guess I haven't thought about it that much,” he says feeling embarrassed. He glances at the girl again and sees her watching them.

“Well, that won't do. How about we give you a name then, unless you have one for us,” Barbara says the last part in a light voice like talking to a child.

Tim spots the slight contraction around her eyes and the drop of her smile and so interrupt, “don't talk down to her, she can understand everything probably better than us.”

“I thought you said she can't understand English...”
“yes but she understands body language to an amazing degree, even before you speak. if it wasn't for the dampeners I would say she was telepathic.”

"fair enough. I shouldn't be rude to you I'm sorry," she says putting a hand on her arm. After a slight pause, Barbara smiles, “but that gives me an idea for her name.”

they are all smiling again when she reveals a name which is so fitting.

Cassandra Cain

when Steph gets back from patrol Tim is staring at his laptop like it's personally slighted him, and his hair is a mess like he has been running his hand through it for hours.

“hey Timbo,” she greets kissing his cheek.

“Hey Steph,” he replies absentmindedly as she balances on the arm of his chair.

“what's up?” she asks gently putting a hand on his shoulder.

“The league is on it's way back and I need to explain to them why a killer who has taken one of them out before is actually a misunderstood victim who needs are help not to be thrown into a cell, like an animal which will just drive her back the monsters who have hurt her so much already and-”

Steph stops him with a second quick kiss.

“I'll get coffee,”

“wait, really?” Tim says, look of awe on his face.
“well I have a mountain of comp science to do, thanks to Barb, so I'm not going to sleep anyway. We might as well make a night of it.”

“I love you.” is all Tim can say as she heads for the kitchen.

“I know.” she smiles back.
Bat about the house: part 3

Chapter Summary

the newly named Cassandra Cain is enjoying her new world, there are puzzles and even better no killing! but enemies both new and old approach, and maybe even new allies

Chapter Notes

apologies for any ooc-ness of the leaguers in advance

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With the league having sorted out the accords, Tim knows they will be back any day now, so he has been spending time with Cass (they decided to call her that most of the time to distinguish her from wonder girl).

The day after that he had the meeting with the three league's he brought her a puzzle to keep her occupied. He was worried she might struggle and get frustrated with them. He soon found they had the opposite problem, running out of puzzles in the league gift shop. After she got through the first one, a classic Trinity one, in fifth two minutes dead, he started mixing it up, literally. Three or more puzzles mixed together. Her best time was two hours twenty-six minutes for; founders, collector invasion, and war world. At the end of the first day, there were only two puzzles left in the gift shop.

The next day he came back with a dozen from more from both Gotham and DC in a big bag. He knew she was still running through tough training each morning before he gets in and each night after he goes to patrol or goes off on a mission, but he hopes the mass of puzzles at least keep her from being stuck in her head too much. the time spent over the last few days have been fun, and Cass seems to be smiling more too.

He puts all this into his report to batman, with luck he will read it and be more onside by the time Cass has to stand in front of the league, as much as B hates killers he also has a soft spot for those in need, all of the Robin's show that. Canary seems to understand Cass's need too and as little as Tim like trusting chance he thinks they have a good one. He still doubts she will suddenly be accepted as a hero, but they have to do better than throw her in Belle-Reve. Barb has also been in a few times, from what he could tell she had been trying to help Cass speak or write, she hadn't made much headway barely even getting out a few half-formed words. but that wasn't going to stop Barb.
He just saves his final report to the league mainframe as he gets a buzz on his communicator.

"Yes?"

"Tim the league are just landing in the watchtower now," Barbara tells him over the headset.

"Errr OK I'll be right up," he bids farewell to Cass, who barely glances up from her to her latest mess, that is looking more and more like a collection of scenes from Central City. He passes Red Tornado with just a quick acknowledgement of each other.

As he heads to the zeta tubes the lights give a quick flash then die and his coms gives off a harsh buzzing, Tim rips it out to find that it is fried. Next, he checks his suit computer which seems to be working but he can't connect to the server. No need to panic yet, twice could just be...

Before he can finish that thought he hears a crash behind him. Racing back he finds red tornado face down on the floor, out cold... or more 'offline', Either way, he isn't going to be any help. Then he tries the door to Cass's room but, of course, an emp would take out the door motor, he is certain that is what must have happened. Tim is now sure that is what happened and he is the only one guarding the hall against whoever attacked it, so when he hears an explosion in the library he heads towards it using the luminescent strips, the only light in the dark hallways, on the floor as a guide.

Tim slips into the library a silently as possible, fortunately, the door was slightly open, just enough for him to slip in. The room is wide and open, large soft chairs scattered around and a small table in the middle of the room, the walls are covered in bookshelves and glass-fronted cabinets, there is glass on the floor under the broken viewing window but everything is quiet. To quiet. Tim hears a noise to his right and instinctively ducks, just dodging the discus sliding over his head.

"Well hello birdy, you have something of ours."

Unfortunately for Tim, Barbara wasn't looking at her screen otherwise she would have seen the 'could not connect' sign coming from the hall sensors. Instead, she was engrossed in a conversation with M'gann about the new equality laws on mars, that was until Batman comes over interrupting M'gann mid-sentence.

"Oracle, where is Red Robin?"
"We are not over coms, try again..."

What follows is a several second battle of wills that leaves everyone else watching feeling uncomfortable. Finally, batman dips his head slightly and starts again

"Barbara, do you know where I can find Tim?"

"As you ask so nicely" she replies smiling at him, "actually, he should be up here by now, probably just got distracted..." She stops as she sees the alert on the screen, "I have lost contact with the hall"

Batman races off to rally the league but with the hall out of action, the next nearest zeta tube is in Gotham giving them about a ten-minute eta. Ten more minutes of Tim in a building with possibly the most dangerous and valuable person in the world and someone willing to attack the league to get what they want.

Tim was lucky he had trained with the best, unfortunately, he didn't have much time working with Shiva, and while Batman was more than a match for sports master, Tim isn't at their level. Also despite him being unequipped except for a domino mask hastily planted on his face, sports master was simile lightly equipped, with just a javelin and discusses, the former he was trying to skewer the young robin with.

So far Tim thought he was doing fairly well, he only had one small cut on his arm and had just dropped a dozen books on sports masters head. He took the chance to glance at his watch, it had been almost ten minutes from the emp, which would be roughly long enough for the faster members of the league to get here, and Tim was starting to get tired.

Sports master lunged again, and Tim only just knocked the blow aside but still got barged, knocking him back. Now he found himself taking hit after hit, only just managing to keep from being impaled he was still being smashed around by elbow and knee.

He just managed to get a hit back, slamming his elbow into his opponent's jaw but the next strike against him smashed into his stomach winding him and rising bile in his mouth.

Next thing he knows he is being grabbed by his t-shirt and heaved up into the air.
After being released he only has a split second to realise how much this is going to hurt.

And he isn't disappointed

He hears the concrete crack as he collides, before dropping hard onto the ground.

Sports master is looming over him, “time to pluck a birdies wings.”

He raises a javelin tip pointing at Tim who shuts his eyes bracing for the pain.

There is a crash and the pain he expects doesn't come.

When he tentatively opens his eyes it isn't the large masked figure of sports master standing over him but the slender figure of Cass is crouched over him instead.

“What the...” is all sports master can get out before she is attacking him again blow after blow driving him back. He tries to step pass her but she kicks him into the wall and he only just dodges the next punch that shatters the wall where he was a split second before.

“Stop!” she does so but looks ready to attack at the slightest provocation.

“I'm here for you,” he says to her, “your dad sent...” he can't finish before she lashes out again smashing him back. Before she can get on him a third time he throws smoke bombs down and disappears.

Cass quickly moves to his side and motions for him to stay down. he tries to thank her but she quiets him before running fingers down his spine checking for injuries, he feels her put pressure on a few points resulting in a tingling replacing the pain on his back. Next, she strikes pressure points on his arm to stem the bleeding from the small cut there. He reassures her that he is fine as she looks at him, face full of concern.

She suddenly turns to face the main door to the trashed library, Tim is about to question her when he sees fingers punch between the doors and heave them apart. Through steps Superman followed by much of the league, Batman rushes towards him but freezes on seeing Cass stood over him.
Cass reacts to the waves of aggression coming from the league by dropping into a defensive stance over him.

"It's OK they're friends," he says trying to get up but Cass doesn't break her focus on the league, she just puts a hand on his chest seeming to say, stay down I'll protect you. He puts his hand on her forearm to try and reassure her but she barely spares him a glance, so focused on the league. Given how hostile the league is being he can't blame her. So he decides to change tact and his voice to a much more authoritative tone, the same one he uses on civilians, "justice league, stand down"

The leaguers shift back slightly on instinct. they all glance at each other in confusion but Batman just meets his eyes. They stay like that communicating silently before Batman's eyes dart back to Cass. He takes a step towards her and raises his hands in a pacifying gesture to get her attention.

The one in black steps forward watching her with caution. she can also see relief at the safety of the nice one, and in a fashion so strange to her, all love and kindness and care. He is speaking again and she again wishes she understood, a desire she had almost forgotten before coming here. Thinking back to her father she sees so much of him in this new figure; all the strength, confidence and, skill but lacking the malice.

The league shift nervously as Kasumi shifts into a combat stance, but batman recognise it, not as an aggressive stance or even a defensive one, but as a sparring stance, one for learning or gaining understanding. It was one Cain taught him, and likely her too. He raises a hand to stop the league before matching with the counter stance.

They are still for some seconds before moving in sync. she steps past his first blow, and he blocks hers. He quickly counters and she roles under it and strikes again. As they trade blows batman can see her phenomenal skill but something seems off. He shifts his pace trying to slip a blow past her guard but she just deftly slides past his attacks again. He does this again and she flows with him, never trying to control the fight, just moving with him.

*bam* his strike was blocked hard, her eyes staring him down, feet planted in front of Tim.

The next two blows are blocked too, their eyes still fixed on each other.

He lunges for her throat.
She lets him.

... 

He can hear gasps and muttering from the leaguers around the room but he keeps his eyes fixed on hers. She shows no fear, no stuttering or fast breathing, and no concern despite his fingers pinching her neck. They keep eye contact as he lets her go.

"Red Robin, report"

"Sports master attacked, presumably, with an emp to disable red tornado and the hall security systems. I intercepted him in the library but was bested, but Cass intervened. She was administering first aid when you arrived."

"Extent of injuries?"

"Bruised spine and minor lacerations."

Batman gives a small nod before turning to the league, "flash, get the power back online then find Red Tornado. Red Robin head with her back to the bat-cave, and get you both checked over by penny-one."

Many leaguers voice concern but it's Red Robin's that he answers, "I have read your report, and agree. Now head back, I will deal with the league."

Tim paused for a moment, a fleeting look of shock on his face, before smiling up at him and holding out his hand. After being helped to his feet he wraps an arm around the girl's shoulders, and she returns the gesture even though Batman doubts they need the help standing.

Tim hears Flash and Red Tornado return as they get to the repowered zeta tubes but they disappear before he can hear much of there revelation as to Cass's escape.

Upon their arrival in the bat cave they are met by a fretful Alfred, "Master Timothy, are you
injured? Ms Gordon called to say the was an incident at the hall."

"Only cuts and bruises, Alfie, thanks to Cass that is," he says nodding at her.

She slips her hand out to give the butler a small bow, fist to palm, as Alfred thanks her. They are then lead over to the medical area where Tim insists Cass is checked out first.

"I think she kicked through a wall to get to me"

"How wonderful, stubborn as master Bruce, and at such a young age," he replies drily, "I do suppose she will be joining you rooftop escapades then." noticing Tims hesitation he goes on, "I wouldn't worry about her... checkered past, master Bruce has always preferred to offer redemption wherever possible."

"What... Oh, Barbara must have told you."

"Ms Gordon does have the habit of making sure necessary information finds its way around. Now miss Cassandra, while there are only minor lacerations a general health check will be in order as soon as we can get you to Dr Thompkins. Now it is your turn master Timothy."

Back on the watchtower, the league is gathered in the main conference room, a view over the earth far below overshadows the scene, to discuss the events at the hall

"All I'm saying is that she has killed, a lot, with ease, and once you do that there is no turning back."

"You have killed too Diana."

"Only in battle, where there was no other choice."

"There is always a choice."
"Unless of course, someone breaks down those choices," Canary interrupts, "that is a common tactic of abuse, to make the victim easy to control like; a toy or..."

"A weapon," finishes red tornado.

"Are you trying to argue she should be considered innocent under duress defence?" Asks icon Canary is about to respond but Superman interrupts, "we are going off-topic, Batman what happened in your fight with her for you to decided to send her with Tim?"

"It wasn't a fight"

"Then what was it?"

"A conversation," Canary responds, "right Batman."

He nods, "it appears that was something Cain taught both of us."

"Cain taught you too?"

"Just because one can kill doesn't mean they must."

"What did she 'say' then?" Asks Superman trying to stay on topic.

"She was telling me about her life, how she had no control and just had to follow the lead, but now she wants to fight to stay, and is willing to surrender herself to us."

"You got all that from punching each other?" Asks captain marvel.

Ignoring captain marvel, green arrow asks his own question, "are you seriously suggesting she let you beat her?"
“yes. She might be the most dangerous fighter I’ve ever seen in action. If she is guided by another hand, she could be the most deadly enemy any of us have ever faced. Or she could be the best of all of us.”

"You want her to join the team," asks a shocked Aquaman.

"Perhaps eventually, but for now I want to keep her in Gotham, as such I will take responsibility for her," with that he gets up and leaves. No one tries to stop him.

On his way to the zeta tubes, he meets Barbara who moves to wheel with him and he drops his pace to match hers.

"I heard what you did about Cassandra and the League, and I have a proposition for you..."

As he returns to the cave, Tim is with Alfred and kat- Cassandra is stood a little way away watching them curiously. She is the first to notice him, her eyes flick to him and Barbara before snapping to the front and she drops into a military-esc pose; shoulders back, chin up and hands on top of each other behind her back, in line with her elbows.

Bruce wonders if this is how she stood for Cain. or even Ra's al Ghul. A very uncomfortable thought given Ra's attempts to force Bruce to become his successor. A small voice in the back of his mind whispers that this may be how the shadows started, as one person's collection of followers, but he shakes it off, he doesn't force his family to do anything he just helps them be the best they can.

As he approaches he can see a scar running down from the base of her ear to under the top of the tank top she wears, he knows there are more on her arms, stomach, and thighs, his stomach turns at the obvious nature of such a cut. He knows Tim's report said she was tortured but this... he focuses himself, one thing at a time.

He comes to a stop just in the edge of her peripheral vision to encourage her to shift from her stance to 'read' him. he kneels down so he is looking up slightly to meet her eye line, "You don't have to stand to attention for us or fear us. We won't force you to do anything, we just want to work with you, if you want to work with us." He presents his fist to her in the way Tim said she did in his report.
She glances at him then to Tim and Alfred, before her eyes dart back to him, taking in his form. He keeps it open and kind, letting her take the initiative. Slowly she drops the posture to bump her knuckles with his, before grinning widely.

Barbara moves up next to him then takes the package off her lap and presents it to Cassandra.

"It is a sacred trust,

"Honor it"

Cass opens the top of the package curiously. Inside is folded black fabric emblazoned with the golden outline of a bat.

"looks like your brats gone traitor, so much for that 'perfect training' of yours."

"what do you mean by that Crock?"

"means she was batting for there team now. and with that your no longer Ra's favourite toy. HA!"

"so what your saying is you failed to bring her back."

"Now look here! you're the one who failed. she was meant to-"

the other man's voice is cut off with the call.

"I will find you. I would go to the ends of the earth for you. I'll burn it all to the ground if that's what it takes."

Chapter End Notes

and that brings an end to the first arc of the story it's only onwards and upwards from
here to Gotham and the wonders within
Harper lands with a light roll, she is so proud of how far she has come. Once upon a time she would have stumbling on a landing and that time she threw down a Batarang instead of smoke, yeah better not to think about that. But now she is flying through the rooftops like, well, a bird, jumping clean off the roof at a run before shooting out a line to swing away. Almost like she knows what she is doing.

Landing at the meeting zone she feels a laugh bubble up. She rushed most of the way across Gotham only for Red Robin to be late too. She sits in the shadow from the next building and checks through her equipment. She has a new toy she wants to try, and after the last time, she promised Cullen; no more testing in the flat. They have enough problems with the landlord without random explosions, even so, she is sure it should be fixed this time.

She is getting worried after five more minutes pass and red is still a no show. That is until she spots spoiler flying in. “hey S, where’s Red?”

“busy with his 'project'."

“which 'project' is this?”

“oh, I'll tell you all about her.”

Her?!

“and he says she has, a lot of, scars everywhere”
“hu. wait do you mean like...”

“yup, he ran into her coming out of the shower, got the full show.”

“you’re remarkably ok with him checking other girls out.”

“he wasn’t ‘checking her out’, which was obvious by how red he went telling me,” spoiler laughs, “and even if he was he made it up to me.”

“t.m.i. spoiler t.m.i.”

spoiler laughs again, “he just took me out to a fancy restaurant.”

Bluebird sighs slightly before Spoiler continues.

“And he also went d...”[BANG]

Harper had never been so happy to hear a gunshot.

Harper kicks the gun out of the thug's hand as she lands and spoiler drives back the other one who had a man pushed up against a wall. She hears a crunch as she smashes her opponents face into a wall. then there is a bang and a burst of pain ripping through her shoulder as a bullet slams into her armour. It takes the hit but still hurts like hell. Turning she sees a third thug running. Harper smoothly flicks the gun off her hip and pulls the trigger.

a bolt of lightning shoots forth slamming into the runners back causing him to crumple and trip. There is a violent hiss from the gun and the beam stops.

“aww come on!”

as the thug struggles to his feet harper sighs but then he is enveloped in a splatter of purple goo, turning she nods to spoiler before making sure the would-be victim is safe
back on the roofs harper desperately wants to avoid questions about the burnout, and to stop Steph continuing the topic they were interrupted from, so she asks.

“So, when will we get to meet red's new friend?”

“whenever daddy Bats lets her out the cave...”

Chapter End Notes

i made a post on tumblr with a list of the arcs if you are interested, also reblogs are most appreciated!

http://dooomninjatumblr.com/post/165365301403/painted-black-arcs
interval 2

Chapter Summary

a second filler chapter, flash forward to a mother and child talking about morality

Chapter Notes

new chapter here old one was lame.

if it gets unclear who is talking just remember there are only 2 people

"Hey, Ma?"

"hmm"

"how... how do you know if y- someone is a good person?"

"well, that's a hard one... what set this..."

"nothing. nothing. it's just... thinking ya no"

"OK. it can be hard to tell if not... inside... like... people thought I was bad for a while"

"Really!"

"yup. didn't make a good first impression; knocked auntie Kara down, threw uncle Tim off a building... broke uncle Barts leg..."

"can you teach me!?"
"no... not till you get the basics down anyway"

"awww"

"now where... oh yeah. I had done bad things and that's all they could see. it is hard to see past. but uncle Tim did-"

"Even after you threw him-"

"Even then. and of course Nana Barb, Granddad, and Auntie Steph, great aunt Dinah..."

"And mum?"

"More than anyone else. she didn't see my past, just who I was underneath"

"Well of course she did"

"she didn't know the tricks then, she just gave me... didn't judge... the benefit of the doubt. Even if I didn't think I deserved it"

"of course you are good though, your..."

"I wasn't always. I did a lot of bad things when I was young but that didn't make me bad, and some people do good but are bad"

"how?"

"think... if you saved someone, but only did it to... look good or a prize. would that be good? or what if you saved someone to hurt someone else?"

"oh"
"intent! if someone is good or bad is about intent."

"I guess that makes sense..."

"Just remember intent is not the same as... thinking something. so... I was trained to see hurt... and how to hurt someone. like here."

"eeee! Ma! that tickles!"

"But if I pushed more it would have hurt, lots. but seeing it doesn't make me bad either. it's what you do and why that matters not just silly thoughts."

"so... so if I, hypothetically, wanted to hurt someone who was a bad person, like you do"

"We don't try and hurt bad people, just stop them. it is easy to hurt people but hard to... stop hurt. sometimes you can't not hurt someone, or they would do something much worse. and if you could, but didn't that would be bad too. understand?"

"yes"

"the best thing we can... do is... stop bad things without hurting anyone. but back to your question, just ask yourself, why. are you doing it to protect someone or are you doing it for... revenge, because revenge only ever courses more pain."

"errr"

"you don't have to answer to me. answer to yourself."

"ok..."

"did you have anything else to ask?"
"no, Ma. thanks, Ma."

"of course little one."
birds of a feather: part 1

Chapter Summary

Cass has made it to Gotham and has been given the mantel of a bat. this chapter we get to her first patrol and meeting new friends

Chapter Notes

so i was aiming for slowburn, got closer to mutual pining but oh well enjoy

tried fixing it, probably still not great, thats what happens when you try getting an ace to write fluff, i'm getting better but it still needs work

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two shadows watched the gang below splitting their spoils, unbeknownst to the painful future in store for them.

"Our primary concern is her incredibly low body fat, In all my years I have never seen someone with this little and that is saying something."

"I understand. we will make sure she gets all the food she needs."

"There is more to it than that Bruce," Lindsay replies concernedly, "she is incredibly malnourished, it will likely take months of square meals to get her back to healthy levels. Fortunately, I can't see any signs of eating disorders. Even so, I would suggest getting her to eat one of your 'bricks' a day along with Alfred's meals until she is up to a better weight.

"you know, starve bars were never meant as food replacement except in emergencies."

"Yet intent, and impact aren't the same thing."
Two men drag in a third between them, to jeering from the others. Above them, the dark figures move silently in the darkness. The gang boss questions the constrained man who spits back, and gets a smack across his already bloody face for the effort.

"Sixteen point one six seconds."

"Seriously, that's what... four, five seconds faster than me."

"And over one and a half faster than dick."

"Wow, that good?"

"She is not 'good' Tim, not even 'better than expected', she is perfect."

Tim signals for them to go. By the time he lands and sweeps the boss's legs out half the gang are out cold.

"You're going to give me the information I need to know. or you're going to give it to her."

"You can't send her out to be another weapon for you, she needs to heal and rest."

"I'm not. locking her in a hospital, or even a house, would be as bad as a prison; and moving her further from Tim now... Well, I know how easily love turns to resentment then hate."

"Bruce," she says putting her hand on his shoulder "that wasn't your fault. 'He' isn't your fault. and she isn't 'him"

"Perhaps, but this time I need to do better, and that means giving her the space to become human."
There is one of the guards left, they think they have escaped her attention are trying to sneak up on the nice one from behind. There is tension in the nice one, they know that someone is coming for them but doesn't react even as she takes them out, grappling them and cutting off the blood to their brain before lowering them to the floor. the nice one says something to the leader of the guards, who was watching her panic quickly drowning out all other emotion form them. it is strange though, the nice one could have taken the person who was trying to attack them, but they trusted her... she doesn't understand...

But there is a sudden noise behind her, the prisoner has grabbed a gun!

She moves on instinct.

"She's cleared then?"

"With you, yes. But you need to be with her at all times in the field and no leaving Gotham. If she does the league will know." The warning is left unsaid.

Tim gives a nod of understanding even if he isn't pleased. "What about Steph and Harper? Is it OK for them and Cass to work together?"

"At your discretion."

"OK... Where is she by the way?"

Bruce gestures up.

BANG!

Tim spins around to see the gangs prisoner out cold, a Batarang tumbling to the floor next to him, and a gun slack in his fingers. he can't tell where the gunshot went until he sees Cass rolling her shoulders stiffly...
His glare turned back on the boss is enough to make him almost wet himself, "Now I'm going to need to patch her up. so info. Now. Or you will wish she didn't just take that shot for you."

The boss quickly folds and Tim leads Cass back to his nest.

The nice one unzips her suit so they can work on the bullet wound. She wants to tell them not to worry after seeing how concerned they are, the bullet stopped in muscle, it doesn't hurt much. They dab something on the wound that makes it feel numb and tingly, but she can still feel the cold metal dig in. She can feel as the bullet moves as they get a grip on it and her muscles twitch at the pain as the bullet was pulled out. The nice one is speaking in a soft reassuring voice as they get some thread out to stitch the wound up, something she has done many times on herself, but it's comforting having someone else do it.

She hears the entry hatch to the base open and someone landing. She looks up watching the door. It opens and the person enters. they have a mask in one hand and a strange gun in the other. their bright blue and purple hair, is shaved back at the sides, but long down the middle of there head, and there bright, glittering blue eyes, are staring back at her. But rather than all this what catches Cass attention is how their body sings with energy, not nervous but direct, like lightning, it's nothing like Red's that seems to radiate outwards in all directions.

a heartbeat later they spin around so to not look at her, this is weird but something people keep doing, Red did it too. but after a few words between them and Red, the latter introduces them and they match her fist. she hopes she gets to meet more of Red's friends.

Harper lands gracefully on her toes so much better than her first, ass first, entry into red's nest. She unsecures her mask then hears red's voice from the command room, she expected him to be on patrol but she won't miss a chance to show off her genius, as long as her new toy doesn't burn out, again.

As the sliding door opens she walks into the com room, "hey red I know it's my day off but I just wanted to tes..." she stops when she sees that Red isn't alone...

She quickly turns before she sees more than the scars, but when she hears Red laughing at her she responds. "it's not like you can talk red, least I didn't just stand and stare"

"Ah... so Steph told you..."
"Yeah, she did."

"Well, that makes it easier for me at least. Cass this is Harper we will be working with her sometimes."

out the corner of her eye, she can see Cass raise her fist in something like a fist bump. Harper bumps her fist on Cass's making sure to meet her eyes. she can't help but notice the flares of blue spiking into the otherwise dark iris as they grin at each other.

"all set Cass," Red says patting Cass on the back and turning to Harper as she pulls her suit up. "so what were you saying, Harper?"

"Oh yeah I just wanted to check my latest fix," she says indicating her gun

"Right better make sure it doesn't explode this time"

"Hey! Only the first two exploded"

She pouts as he laughs again before they head into the test room.

Harper sets up the safe weapon tester then joins the others behind a safety screen.

"I mean this is a bit unnecessary, it's not gonna blow, worst case there is a fizz and nothing happens." Cass is watching her with a slight smile on her lips. Harper knows she doesn't 'get words' as Steph put it but she looks like she is 'listening' intently. Red robin still just looks amused.

"Well, now you're just stalling."

Harper swallows down the small spark of nerves before pressing the button. 
There is a high crackling whining noise, and a shimmering, snaking beam of electric blue lightning jumps from the end of the gun. It jumps and dances dozens of times over the next second before flickering and dying, leaving a burn mark on the bullseye.

Harper gives a whoop and glances at the others, Cass is still staring at the firing range, eyes wide and lips parted; whereas Red is looking back at her looking impressed.

"How long do you think you could keep it working for?"

"It's just a matter of power now, I can drop the range or voltage, as this was stress testing so it will normally shoot for longer, and this is only handgun size, bigger would mean more power, and the bigger guns can have more...”

She is cut off by red robin raising a hand and then pressing it to his ear.

"Go ahead Oracle... OK, we're on it.

"Hey Harper, up for a field test?"

Chapter End Notes

first thing thanks to Smokeycut/victoria-october (ao3/tumblr) for helping me a couple of times with this arc

there are several things a want to talk about but there wasn't space/ they didn't fit well

starve bars: super compact food stuffs with all the micro and macro nutrients needed. it was invented for speedsters and was sold to militaries and donated to disaster relief efforts, but some people had to ruin it by trying to use them to replace food stamps resulting in a legal mess for ages

taking the bullet out: apparently taking the bullet out can be a bad idea as it can cause more damage at least until the immediate trauma has healed and then only with proper equipment not just yank the thing out, unless of course leaving it in may make the injury worse. tbh i just wanted cass to be topless when she met harper ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

harpers weapon is an Electrolaser, Wikipedia has a article which outlines how it works. think little laser ionizes the air then send a current down it
Chapter Summary

Harper has a lot on her mind, but mostly Cass, whereas Cass is a very excited badass who deserves (and gets) hugs and makes new friends. Oh and they tag team killer croc.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They spent the rest of the night searching through the filth of the sewers, talking to street people in all their forms, and setting up surveillance. But even after hours of searching, they found only the slightest hints of killer Kroc's presence, but without a trail to follow they call off the search at dawn.

Harper is surprised by how little she regrets getting no sleep even by the end of her shift at the clinic. And even after needing a dozen energy drinks to keep herself from passing out during her afternoon lecture she was still excited for that night's patrol.

After grabbing food she has a nap, awaiting nightfall when she can meet up with red robin and batgirl to continue their hunt. She dreams of blue-brown eyes and warm touches.

Harper is woken up before her alarm by Cullen excitedly shaking her awake. She is a bit dazed so blanks out on what he is saying as she shuffles into the kitchen, downing the last of the drink she had left from class and puts some leftovers in the microwave.

She only starts paying attention when Cullen says, "...you have to win her heart."

"What?"

"that got your attention!"

"what are you even talking about?"

"Seriously? Were you listening to anything I said?"
"No? I just woke up. And aren't you meant to be at your boyfriend's?"

"He has work early, and this was on the way home."

"So what happened?"

"Well I was taking a short cut back when some gangers decide to mug me."

"You got mugged!" interjects Harper

"No. a bat saved me."

"Oh thank god. Which one?"

"If you let me tell my story you'll find out." she gestures for him to go on as she starts eating, "it was just past twilight on a dark and stormy night-"

"Dude. Skip to the good bit. also, it's barely raining."

"Fine. Fine. They were doing the threatening thing, you know, then I noticed one of them had just vanished, and as I watched another one was eaten by the shadows, it just enveloped him like something out a horror movie. Then the boss said something like 'teach him a lesson' only then do they realise there was a girl in black, right in the middle of them, like she appeared out of thin air. Before you could blink two of them went down, the next swung for her only to go down too. The boss tried to knife her but that didn't go well, for him anyway. She was amazing and as I said totally your type."

Ignoring the last comment Harper asks, "were there any other bats there or just her?"

"Oh yeah, red robin showed up, and made sure I was safe..."
"Damn. she took down five guys solo."

"six"

"Damn, I know she is good but damn..."

"you know her then?"

"Yeah, Red introduced us yesterday. she definitely is pretty... er pretty cool." She says thinking of the myriad of scars like... that Japanese thing where that use gold to fix broken pottery.

"Well thank her for me would you"

"Of course," she says hugging him, "I need to go now, you be safe"

"Dude, you're the one about to jump off a building."

Harper laughs giddily and only partly at Cullen as she downs the last of her drink and goes to get her gear.

Red Robin had spent most of the day on a mission with the team. On getting back to the cave he finds Alfred with Cass helping her set her latest puzzle in a stand. If he was being honest Tim didn't expect her to have finished 3D puzzles of the earth and moon adding up to sixteen thousand pieces that quickly. Tim gives his heartfelt congratulations, Cass grins back happiness radiating from her. He asks her to get her suit, she grins again and raises her fist, then gives a quick bow to Alfred before rushing off.

They wiz out the cave in Redbird heading to some of Tim's informants. As they fly between them they stop some minor crimes. As it is mostly uneventful so he takes the chance to start trying to teach her action-orientated words, as he was advised to by some linguists he contacted, just simple things like stop, safe, and go. She hadn't tried to copy any sound yet but he knows it will take time.

He finally got the info he needed and was heading back to his nest to sort it with the data they got
yesterday. They stop as they notice an attempted mugging in the alley below. He gestures for Cass to sweep in behind them. He drops to a position just above the to be victim only to realise it is Harper's brother. Cass drops in on one, drags down another then wipes the rest all in a matter of seconds.

Even having seen her fight several times he was amazed by her speed and skill, but even more so by how gentle she is. If Tim dived into those guys he would probably leave them with several broken bones and probably down just as they are hurt too much to fight, but Cass, Cass sweeps past leaving them basically just asleep behind her. It's both intimidating and awe-inspiring.

He signals for Cass to tie them up then drops down silently next to Cullen, "she is kicks ass right."

"What?!" He looks like he in a state of shock.

"My sister in heroism," Tim says indicating batgirl as she ties up the last of the muggers.

"Oh, er, yeah"

"Now you should head back to your family now, we have some birdies to meet up with."

She is following red in the direction of the base, which was weird as neither of them were injured. She manages to catch their eye after they drop into the base, they smile at her confused expression then puts their hand on there head, fingers hanging loose to the side...

Cass is confused for half a second until she realizes that they are imitating blue's hair. Her enthusiasm makes red laugh happily. they look at her like they are planning something, she can't tell what but she thinks it must be to do with her and Blue. he is nice so it must be a good thing, and with Blue it can't not be.

Red leads her into the main room where they bring up a map on the biggest screen. They indicate a point not far from where just fought then to where they are now showing how far away blue is, she indicates her understanding and they smile back. Red turns back to the screens, she can see there focus in the lines of their shoulders, but also the joy in their movements. it's nice watching them work as they wait for blue, how he flows just like the masters she watched to learn combat, but instead of pain symbols dance on the screens.
Cass hears someone enter the base and smiles as she sees blue come into the room. Red makes a light remark, laughter on his voice. Blue ignores them as they make eye contact with Cass. She finds she can't break the gaze, even as blue walks closer, it's far too intense, full of wonder and gratitude.

Cass feels transfixed in the gaze of those deep blue eyes, even as they pull up and throws there arms around her. Blue is squeezing so tight she can feel it through her armour, both hands high on her back, fingers digging into her muscles. She is frozen for a heartbeat, lost in the newness of the intimacy. She takes a deep breathtaking in the rich smell off berries and the slight metallic tinge of ozone.

Cass releases the breath as she sinks into blues neck and snakes her arms under blues jacket, feeling the soft give between armour and the lines of their muscles. All the while blue whispers into her hair, voice full of emotion...

"Koff koff"

Blue brakes off, they look embarrassed but also pleased while Red radiates amusement. They speak about tonight's hunt, Red is pleased he has a lead on the mark, Blue asks about someone else, an ally, Red grins and gestures for them to go outside. Cass pulls on her mask as she leads them out.

Steph is waiting for them in Robbinsville, Tim greets her with a quick hug. They agreed to keep PDAs to a minimum in costume, both to protect their identities and reduce the crazies trying to kidnap one of them to get at the other. Then he introduces Cass to her, she can't tell but she thinks Cass looks almost amazed watching her and they fistbump.

"Bluebird and spoiler work down the east side next to the river, me and Batgirl will head up the west. If we get to cape Carmine without finding killer croc, then I'll have to report back to B, and we will see from there."

"Um, why doesn't Batgirl come with me one way and you two go the other way." Red Robin and spoiler give each other a look as Harper hurriedly continues "I mean I'm not really as good as you two but she is even better, so, um, it would give us all the best chance whoever finds Croc."

"It's a good idea bluebird, but Batman told me to keep an eye on her, at least for now."
"What did she ever do to deserve being treated like... Like a criminal!" Even Cass turns to look from her position at the edge of the building, at Harper's outburst.

"Well she did kill those people" intercedes Steph eyebrows raised.

Harper tries to argue back but red robin cuts her off, "look, Blue, most heroes aren't used to how messy this can get like we are. So yes I agree with you but we have to play along, and trust that they will see what we do in her."

He lightly slaps her on the shoulder "now come on we have a job to do"

Steph pats Harper on the back and mutters "nice try."

"I have no idea what you mean."

Tim leads Cass through the under streets, the sewers and interconnecting web of maintenance tunnels running beneath Gotham's streets. He tries to stick to the cleanest routes while still searching everywhere for signs of killer croc. He notes it's time for check-in so stops on a gantry away from the worst of the smell.

"Check-in. Spoiler, Bluebird anything to report?" The line is staticy but understandable.

"Except that this place stinks?" put in a dejected sounding Spoiler.

"We're good Red," reports Harper, "this place maybe even worse then I remember it, but no sign of croc"

"Hey, blue wotcha you think this is,"

Tim is about to remind Steph about radio discipline when there is a yell, crash, and a roar.

"Red it's ..." Harper's line descends into static. Tim barely spares a second to map the quickest
route to there last known location before sprinting off.

Cass is following close behind red as they race through the dark, dank, tunnels. Red makes no attempt to hide the haste in every movement as they fly over, past, and sometimes through the worst muck people produce. To all this Red is heedless, and despite how much she wants to race ahead to help Blue and the new one, who shines like the sun, she can't as she doesn't know where they are or even how to get there if she did.

She hears a distant roar from ahead and sprints towards the sound leaving red trailing behind. Shooting into a larger tunnel she sees Sun limp against one side, whereas Blue was still conscious but was on the ground, weapons just out of reach. But the source of the roar was a massive person with scale-like skin, oversized teeth and claws, that is now charging at Blue!

She sends one of the odd bat-shaped throwing weapon in a smooth arc into the creature's path. It struck into its eye on the side away from where Cass was silently running at it. In its confusion, it turned away from her leaving its back exposed to her attack that sends it slamming into the wall. She doesn't let up slamming a kick into it's exposed midriff as he turns back, then a strike under the kneecap. In its pain and fury, it's wild swipes are child's play to dodge and leave it exposed to more devastating attacks, but even as she hammers blow after blow into weak spots it keeps coming.

People would be afraid with such a creature attacking them, but Cass isn't a person and she knows monsters intimately, this thing, doesn't score. Yes, it's vicious and apathetic to the harm of others, but not malicious with a love for it. She calmly dodges the next blow that hammers into the wall behind her, turning she smashes it's elbow the wrong way. It roars in pain and frustration, and a warmth rises in her chest, it's quickly overwhelmed by a sense of disgust as it reminds her how much of a monster she is.

landing a kick on its face she checks on the others. Red had rushed in and runs straight over to Sun, and Blue is with them. Cass lost sight of them as she rammed a smoke bomb down its throat, leaving it coughing and smoking. As she throws it into a wall again she sees blue working at a box on the wall and red carrying sun out to safety, even with such a quick glance reds worry was obvious.

Cass hears a call from Blue while bypassing another wild slash she sees Blue is calling for her to get clear. She jumps up onto the creatures back and leaps into an overhead pipe, looking down she is blinded by a cacophony of light and sound fulling the tunnel below...

Chapter End Notes
this is what i meant about missing slow burn, what can i say i love harpereass

you might have noticed tim being a bit manipulative, this is on purpose, he will be
called on it eventually, if i’m doing it right all the characters have problems, this
means they can grow.

oh and "that Japanese thing" is called Kintsugi
the pair fight to bring down killer croc, and a chance for some R&R. and things go downhill from there

warning: referenced homophobia and racism and a drunk but only in passing

Harper is desperately searching through the wires in the access panel for one that is; compatible, and live, but not so live it would blow her up. While, all the while she can hear the crashes and roars of Cass fighting against a massive anthropomorphic crocodile, and as red robin had rushed off with the badly injured Steph they had been left alone. Given her last attempt Harper knew going hand to hand was just going to get her hurt, so she was left struggling through a mess of wires while Cass fights for her life.

She finely finds a serviceable access point and starts linking herself into the grid. It's barely any time till cables are running from the; wall, to her suit, to her gun, and back again. She flicks some switches and her suit starts to buzz with excessive energy. She raises her gun, aiming for the battle being fought down the tunnel.

"Batgirl, clear!"

Cass barely spares a glance before jumping on top of killer croc and leaping out of sight. Harper doesn't hesitate in unleashing a storm of fire, or more accurately electricity, at the monster. Harper has set the gun to maximum, in every way, so the blast completely envelopes croc, extends out of sight, and is as bright as the sun.

It lasts less than a second before there is a chain of explosions and the next thing Harper knows is that she is on her back, Cass leaning over her. It takes several seconds for her brain to restart. When it does she remembers where she is then how much everything hurts. she looks down her body and sees why, all the batteries on her suit had exploded. Harper pulls herself up and sees that Cass is still right next to her, concern in her body language easy for even harper to read.
"I'm OK... suit is a Faraday cage... feedback just overloaded the batteries... Where's croc?"

Cass points to a heap a little ways away, harper can now see that he is both bound and a little singed

"Awesome, I'll call Red..." Her com only gives off a buzz, it seems there may be more damage than at first impression.

"hey batgirl you got com?" Putting her finger on her ear. Batgirl throws one over and harper precede to call red robin

"Hey blue you got out OK?"

"Dude, we kicked his ass."

"Nice work! Wait, is batgirl with you?"

"Yup, she's watching croc."

"Awesome," he sighs, obviously relieved, "I'll pass your position on, wait for pick up"

“you don't trust her to have stayed"

"Trust but verify"

"Isn't that an oxymoron"

"Only for a sith... Cops on their way just wait for them then call it a night, she isn't meant to be out without me."

"Sir yes sir," harper replies sarcastically
"Save that for batwoman... I have to go Red Robin out."

Nancy Strode had been having a good day, well night, that was until the call came for her and her partner to go into the sewers to collect a crocodile man with a taste for human flesh. The tunnels are dank and poorly lit, and that's to say nothing of the smell. Seeing an even darker tunnel they give each other a look, before getting out torches and heading into the darkness.

As they advance the other smells are overwhelmed by the sharp tang of ozone and the stench of burnt flesh. Raising her torch over her head she can just make out two figures at the edge of the light. One is distinctly feminine, whereas the other figure looks younger, but it is hard to tell with there cape reaching down to the ground. She glances way at a call from Hector drawing attention to the heap she previously overlooked, now seeing it's a very singed looking killer croc. They exchange a practised look and he calls it in, remembering the two figures she looks back only for them to be gone.

Harper slipped through her window followed closely by Cass. She carefully unclips her mask, careful not not set off the booby trap, and turns back to see Cass has taken hers off too and is watching Harper.

you know she's kinda pretty...

"We did really good tonight, and um you fight amazing, and I... well... It was fun. Hopefully, we can do it again. I mean patrol, and fighting baddies and stuff." She is interrupted from her rambling by Cass stepping up to her and wrapping her arms around her in a hug Harper gladly returns.

Shifting back so Cass can see her she asks, "...wanna go get some food?"

Cass just grins up at her in answer so Harper leads her out of her bedroom only to see that Cullen is lounging on the sofa with a box of ice cream.

"It's you!"

"Harper your back!"
"It's you who gets through all the icecream! I was raging at Steph for it."

"Well... I mean she does too, and my boyfriend," he says looking sheepish.

"Seriously? it least share now you have it open."

"You know where the spoons are..." He purses looking slightly startled at a point just past Harper. following his gaze, she sees that Cass had silently slipped in past her and was watching their exchange.

"Oh right Cass this is my brother, Cullen, and this is Cass, she works with red, spoiler and me."

"Wait, was she..."

"Yup, she was."

Cullen quickly gets up, almost spilling ice cream all over the floor in his haste, and embraces Cass. Harper slips into the kitchen to get more spoons for then, a smile on her face as she thinks about how Cass sank into Cullen's hug and how she must have grinned like that when they hugged too. When she comes back the others are sat on the couch. She throws them two of the spoons, which Cullen grabs to his chest and Cass deftly catches before Harper throws her jacket on a stand then sits between them. Only then does she see what is on the TV.

"No! No! We are not dealing with anime tonight! We just fought a sewer monster! Noooo..." She wines

"And you smell like it."

"Please Cullen, please. You get call when you have someone round."

"I don't smell like sewage though."
"No, you just make noises all night while some of us are trying to sleep." to Cullen's shocked look she responds, "yes, your not as subtle as you like to think."

"OK, you win." he hands her the remote.

Before she can change channel she realises there is a shaking, looking over at Cass she realise she is doubled over in silent laughter. Harper finds herself grinning back.

She puts on some political sitcom then grabs the ice cream. Cass takes a scoop when Harper offers and on putting it in her mouth her whole face lights up, Harper thinks she could have all of it and Harper would be happy.

She hears Cullen mutter something like "not even watching it" reminding her to stop staring.

It's not long after the ice cream is finished that they all fall asleep in a heap.

Harper was drifting on the edge of sleep. Her armour was digging in slightly but not so much it would have woken her. No there was something else. It took her an embarrassingly long time to realise that she was lent up against the end of the couch, legs tangled with Cullen's.

Cass!

Harper's eyes snap open. Looking around she sees Cass just a little ways away working through some combat movements. She glanced over and smiled at Harper.

"Monin, if ya wanna showwa afta its DAT way, I'll join ya in a bit"  

Cass smiles back before continuing her routine. Harper glances blearily at the screen seeing a 'are you still watching' notification, then sees the controller resting just out of reach. She'll get it in a sec, after just resting her eyes for a moment.

Next time she wakes up she smells egg cooking, and behind that can just hear the sound of running
water. She gets up and heads for the kitchen where Cullen is making eggy bread

"Any for me?"

"Get changed then you can have the next one."

Harper gets back quick after swapping her gear for yesterday's plaid and jeans, with how bad she needs a shower she isn't going to put on fresh clothes. When she gets back Cullen slides a plate over and she tucks in hungrily.

As she does so, he asks, "so Cass then?"

Harper just glared back, mouth full of food, so Cullen continues, "she's... cute, could definitely kick your ass, big hugger. So... what's your hold up?"

"It's been like, two days, not going to 'Umove' that hard. and besides, it's not like I even know if she is into girls."

"two days is like a year in lesbian time. Seriously though get that gaydar- bifi whatever- going. Like... look she has a bi Bob, the only way that could be any gayer is if she dyed it pride colours," he says gesturing at Harper's as if to prove the point.

"Dude no pink. And anyway she was basically born and raised under a rock I don't think she knows enough about gay culture for it to be much of a guide. I think the haircut is mostly functional."

"then surely she would have a buzz cut."

"and that would be even gayer."

"exactly! and anyway, gay culture is kind of everywhere, it's hard to avoid."

"When I said 'under a rock' I meant it. She doesn't even know how to talk"
"...Well, I guess that explains why she's so quiet, but it raises more questions, to be honest."

"I don't know much more. Steph and Red haven't said much, I'm not sure anyone knows that much about her." They hear the bathroom door squeak quietly, then harpers bedroom do the same. "Sounds like she is done, hopefully, we still have some hot water left,"

Cullen calls for her not to count on it as she goes into the bathroom to find a single towel and Cass's gear in a heap on the floor, the implication is clear and Harper tries to keep her mind away from it. Before she can start getting undressed however the doorbell rings. She can hear Cullen go to get it but when she hears him yell in shock and fear she rushes out. She sees Cullen on the floor looking up at... their father. Harper steps between them.

"Stay away from him!"

It takes him several seconds for his eyes to focus on her.

"We have a restraining order on you. Get. Out. Of. Our. Home."

"ungrateful goof. Ma own blood. Afta all I did for ya afta Miri kicked it..."

"Don't you dare talk about mum!"

"Don't interrupt me ya stupid..." He starts to swing for her but his hand is caught by Cass, who slipped unnoticed from Harper's room. Harper feels a strange spike in her chest when she sees that she was wearing one of Harper's plaid shirts.

"Sdop"

Wait did Cass just... The word was broken, like it was completely alien on her lips.

Wow
Her father hadn't seemed to notice Harper and Cullen's shock through his homophobic and racist raging. Then, despite what basic reason would say about someone with that many scars, he tries to punch Cass. It goes even less well than would be expected as the moron keeps his thumb in his fist. There is a crunch when Cass catches his fist, followed by more screaming and yelling.

By which point harper had had more than enough of her former (now emancipated) father. She dives for her backup-gun she keeps hidden in the main room.

Taking aim she yells. "I said get the hell out our house!"

The blast of electricity smashes him off his feet and out of the doorway.

Panting slightly from the rage Harper lowers her aim. she should have used lower power but that is the least of her concerns.

Cass is first to her "S... S... Sa..."

"It's OK Cass"

Cass puts one hand on harpers shoulder, "S-aff"

It takes a second but Harper works it out, "yeah we are safe, thanks to you"

Cullen joins them and pulls them together into a hug, in which they stay till the cops come.

Apparently, yelling and explosions get cops called even in Gotham. who knew.

"God Harper you stink"

"You could let go"
"Not a chance."

"well..."

"we can't find where she has been taken the league did not even report her capture. it may be very hard to find---"

there is a gurgling as a body hits the floor.

"you. you are now in charge, find her or end up like this useless twit."

"right on it sir."

Chapter End Notes

i suck at physics/electricity stuff so sorry if that sucked

'Only for a sith' comment was about "only a sith deals in absolutes" so tim was saying "Trust but verify" is only a contradiction if you think of trust as black and white
interval 3

Chapter Summary

a certain kitty cat shows up

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She is flying through the city with Red by her side. Blue and Sun aren't with them, but she is still happy; she is free, isn't treated like a monster, and best of all isn't made to kill.

Soon she spots someone on a rooftop ahead. They are dressed in tight black material and have cats moving around their feet. Red is calm as they land on the roof when Cat turned she can see lines of amusement that morph into shock upon laying eyes on her. She looks back at Red who has laughter on his voice as he greets Cat, who is smiling again, even so, she could see that they were still unnerved by their furtive glances.

Cass can see both Red and cat are relaxed around each other and so feels there is little chance of them fighting, so she decides to sweep the area looking for threats. The area around them appears abandoned and damaged like the area was war-torn, the only life visible are the cats on the roof with them. Red and cat are still talking so she drops down to her haunches and watches the cats, they watch her curiously, a few moving closer to get a better look. She has less practice with animals and very little with cats, it wasn't something her father taught her, so she drops down passively while mimicking their gestures.

Selina could say her curiosity had been piqued, and you know what they say about curiosity and cats. A little girl who is stealthier that Batman and some even say that given how fast and dangerous she is, that she must be a meta. All Tim had said is that she is the new batgirl. So Selina curiosity was growing by the moment.

When she finishes telling him what she knows about a couple of runaway rogues (if they don't follow the rules that there problem) she looks back over at batgirl. She is playing with the cats, and not in the normal way people do, you know by petting them or anything like that, but instead, she seems to be acting like one of them. It's like watching a strange, large cat; head bop, rub up with and generally play with a lot of smaller cats.

"Are you sure she isn't more of a 'catgirl'" she laughs
“She was playing with the bats in the cave too,” Tim replies

“Where do you think she gets it?”

“We don’t know, but she is an expert in nonverbal communication so my guess is some of that extends to animals or perhaps she was also trained to ‘read’ them”

“Sounds like she had an... Interesting upbringing. Where did batsy find her?”

“He didn’t. I did.”

He watches batgirl to avoid Selina’s questioning look. Looking back at the cats she sees Isis watching batgirl, who rolls onto her back letting Isis approach. Salina smirks to herself, Isis never liked people, but then she just struts up to batgirl and (much to Selina’s dismay) gently bumps her head into batgirl’s.

It took a while for Tim to stifle his laughter but when he does she asks, “is she meta?”

He gives another small laugh, “No. No not as such. Well, no tests show any sign anyway. But I'm sure you've heard she is very... capable?”

She nodded though capable was an understatement from what she heard. but then thugs are never the most reliable, especially when looking for an excuse for their own failings. That said she currently had a particularly small cat sat on her head so looks less than threatening.

"Whatever you have heard, doesn't do her justice." he ignores her questioning look letting silence fall between them until he gets a call. He thanks her as batgirl carefully extracts herself from the pile of cats before following Tim off the building and into the night.

Isis approached her and rubbed up against her legs and Selina mutters down, “traitor”

Chapter End Notes
for those wondering Tim is referring to the bit in chapter 6 where B tells him cass is up, she is with the bats i wanted to include it then but i didn't fit

i always thought it was a massive flaw in her training that she didn't know how to fight anything not human given how many aliens, Gorillas, and shapeshifters there are. so in this au she was taught to fight some of them and how to learn a creature's body language quickly
Blood of the coven: part 1

Chapter Summary

with Tim out of town with the team Cass has been left with Steph, and kept in by batman's rules. they are in for a nasty shock...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hey Timbo, know when you're getting back yet?"

"Bad news, it looks like we will be here for a few days at least..."

"So I'm stuck playing babysitter, and I can't even go out."

"It's not... Think of it more like a sleepover."

"Oh yay we can chat about our crushes, do each others hair, and have a pillow 'fight'."

"Steph, are you still salty about that?"

"narh, not really. I'm more pissed about being stuck in, it gets so boring."

"Harper should be free tomorrow, and in the meantime just order a ton of junk food and watch TV, like you do when Harper comes over..."

"Tim! Have You been looking through my card," she says with fake indignation.

"It's MY card!"
"Yeah well only one of us has a bottomless wallet oh my god."

"What is it?!"

"You're my sugar daddy AHAHAHA."

"Oh god no."

"Am I going to have to call you daddy now?"

"Please don't."

"Whatever you say ~daddy~."

"Tim did she really just call you daddy?"

Tim groans and drops his head into his hands as Steph bursts out laughing.

"Talk later Steph."

"Tim is there something you're not telling us? Why aren't you answering my questions?"

"Shut up Bart." is the last thing Steph hears as Tim cuts the call.

When Steph manages to contain her laughter she turns from her laptop and sees that Cass is in the doorway watching her.

"Hey, you up for a chill night in then?"
Cass replies by tilting her head to the side then using her hand to imitate Harper's hair.

"Nope, Harper's at the clinic tonight and Tims out with the team so just us. You have a preference on what we eat?" She just shrugs, so Steph directs her into the living room while she orders them something.

When she finishes the order Steph joins Cass on the sofa, who had put on what turns out to be trashy reality tv which (if Steph is being honest) is a guilty pleasure of hers. Steph is glad it is just them, Tim and Harper don't enjoy this kind of thing much and it is much more fun laughing along with Cass than listening to them moaning and groaning.

It's not long 'till its dark outside and Cass is basically scratching at the window. When Steph tells Cass that they can't go out she looks utterly dejected, almost to the point of looking heartbroken, Steph can only agree but does have a plan. After Harper said that she had eaten all of hers, Steph had got a whole tub of chocolate ice cream. With that, she managed to get Cass to stay content until they fell asleep watching the really weird shows that only seem to exist at three am.

Steph wakes with a start. The first thing she notices is the blood. Then that Cass appears to be covered in it, but mostly on her hands and around her belly and legs.

"Are you OK? Cass! where are you hurt?"

Steph then sees just how terrified Cass looks, and that she was still wearing the same set of Steph's T-shirt and shorts that she was earlier, and that they didn't appear dirtier. As her eyes start to focus properly Steph can tell there is a lot less blood than it first looked and that Cass was curled up with one hand on her lower belly and the other between her legs.

"Hu... Oh... OH!" she sighs with relief but sees Cass scared and now confused too. "It's OK, I get it's scary but its normal and you're going to be OK... Now let's get you cleaned up shall we."

Steph leads Cass to the bathroom to let her clean up then steps just outside the bathroom to call... Who. Tim was on a mission and probably wouldn't be much help anyway. Bruce would be even worse and not exactly someone she wanted to call. Barbara would probably be more helpful but she is probably really busy and it's not like they know each other well. Then Steph remembers that Tim said Dr Thompkins helped with Cass before, she could ask her!
Harper had just finished changing a bed when her phone rang

“Hey, Steph, what's up?”

“Hey... is Dr Thompkins there?”

“Steph, it's me, Harper. You really need to get to sleep,” she jokes.

“I know who you are Harper! I just meant if I could talk to her,”

“what's wrong Steph?” Harper, says as she goes of the find Dr Thompkins.

“I'm fine, I just wanted a word about Cass.”

Harper stops on the spot and the person following her walks into her, she manages to get out of there way as she asks, “what's wrong with Cass? Is she ok? Do you need me to come over?”

“she's fine Harper don't get your panties in a twist, I just want some advice.”

“ok... Wait I think I found her give me a sec,” she pushes open the door she thought she heard Dr Thompkins voice from behind, “Dr Thompkins can I have a word.”

“one moment Harper.”

in the small side office Harper, can see Dr Thompkins was fitting a man's ankle into a support boot. He has shaggy brown hair and stubble lining his face. He also seems to be wearing body armour styled like an owl.

“you're... Talon right?”

“What?!” Harper can see his mind working. He isn't exactly well known, she only knows him from
the one time they worked together, and she can see the moment he works this out. “wait... Bluebird? You should probably be careful with your I.D.”

“ummm,” she says gesturing to him and his mask on the bed next to him

“the bad guys coming after me already know who I am.”

“well, I don't really have any 'bad guys' so I'm pretty safe.”

“for now...”

“If you two are done,” Dr Thompkins interrupts, “Mr rose you need to limit how much strain you put on your ankle for at least the next two weeks, walking should be ok but nothing more intense and if it hurts you stop. come back in a few weeks and I'll review it then. Now Harper what was it you needed?”

“oh right spo... Steph wanted a word about Cass.” and hands Dr Thompkins her phone then turns to Talon, “I'll show you out the back.”

“sure, thanks. Sometimes I do miss the healing factor...”

as they leave Leslie put Harper's phone to her ear, “Stephanie you wanted to speak with me.”

“oh... um... hey Dr Thompkins. Yeah, it's... about Cass...”

“go on.”

“well... she'shavingherperiodandIthinkit'sherfirstone.”

“hum... that's not overly surprising given how malnourished she was.”
“really? So... no, need to panic? Or anything?”

“that's right! Just keep calm, make sure she has sanitary products available, you may need to help her with this, and make sure she eats plenty.”

“oh that I can manage... but I... well my mum... well... wasn't around much when I was... er starting, so I had to just kind of guess a lot of it and well...”

Leslie sighs, “ok, well I need to get back but I can send Harper over to help, you two are both very capable young women, I'm sure you can work anything out.”

“I don't want to drag her away.”

“it's ok her shift is almost over anyway.”

Steph thanks her then they say their goodbyes. Steph puts her phone away then goes back into the bathroom.

She is more afraid than she can remember being. There was blood and hurt. It feels like her organs are falling apart. She wants to die in battle, not like this. But maybe... maybe it's all she deserves. Sun's panicked body language didn't reassure her, even more so as they were trying to hide it.

She could hear when Sun finishes talking, when they come in there voice is calmer but she can't look up as she is so tensed up with fear. She feels a hand on her shoulder and looks up, Sun is smiling back body far more relaxed. She can feel the not in her chest relax slightly but the hurt in her gut still throbs.

Sun hands her a dressing that she moves to put on the bleeding area but then sun stops her and shows her that the dressing has a sticky patch on the back, and puts it on her underwear then mimes putting it on. She thinks this is weird (surely you would want to just stop the bleeding) but does as indicated, it's not like it's the weirdest thing she has done since coming here.

Sun smiles again and turns to lead her out but she stops them and gestures to the pain. Sun blinks a couple of time in confusion before realisation roles across there face, smiling they lead her back to the seat. They gesture for her to sit then disappear leaving her to set the tv, which she worked out
from watching Blue and Sun. Sun moves back and forth first putting a box of the cold food which she delightedly digs into, then next a wobbly bag/sack that is hot to the touch. Sun indicates for her to put it on where it hurts. She does so and can feel herself relax from the ache that had been with her for a few days, it doesn't go away, but is less than it was. Sun lets out a light laugh before sitting down with her a mug in her hands.

they had gotten through all their ice cream/coffee by the time Harper finally joins them. Steph basically pushed her and Cass out so they could go to a nearby coffee shop for her to get her fix, and for them all to have a proper breakfast.

Steph had been there before so she went up to the counter to order. Cass goes with Harper to sit at one of the round wooden tables. Harper takes a chance to look around, the place looks nice, clean wall with interspersed paintings and posters and the floor is clean, with black and white chequers. Steph came back looking tired, especially compared to Cass whose eyes kept flicking around watching the few other people with them in the shop.

After a few minutes stifled conversation a cute girl comes over carrying there drinks and breakfast. She's pretty, with cute piercings, nose stud, and a pierced eyebrow, but then anyone handing her a massive pile of food is always going to be attractive in Harper's books. Steph digs straight into her waffles but Cass's eyes shoot to she small of the girls back where there is a spider tattoo, Harper's mind flicked to the bluebird between her shoulder blades, she should really get round to getting more.

“how's the tea, Cass?” Steph asks between mouthfuls.

Cass grins back holding the mug close.

“tea?” Harper asks, raising her eyebrows.

“yeah.” Steph replies, “Brenda recommended it, it's not like Cass needs coffee, and it seems to be a winner.”

Harper hums in agreement. There conversation peters out into a comfortable silence. The lack of sleep is catching up to both Harper and Steph as they finish so they decide to go back to the apartment and sleep in for a while, Cass spends the hours running through training routines.

When they wake up Steph and Harper join in training but quickly get sore, so they decide to stop
and make sure Cass eats something. After that Steph gets out the Switch and they spend most of the rest of the day playing around on party games. Cass does very well on most of them except some more strategic games where she slips up a few times, she looks embarrassed but relaxes as they keep playing.

They eat through almost all the (junk) food in Red Robin's apartment by the time they get a call from him

“oh thank god all three of you are there...”

Chapter End Notes

i don't know lots about talon but this is roughly set some point after he loses his healing powers

pads are easier to explain without going into more detail than i want to in this fic. also it's not like bruce wouldn't have picked up on how annoying they can be from barb and made some super pads that work even under more extreme circumstances

edit: forgot to say what cass has is hypothalamic amenorrhea cursed by stress, low body fat and extreme over exercising
“oh thank god all three of you are there. We have an emergency. You need to get to Blackgate now!”

“What’s going on red?” Harper asks leaning back in her seat.

“haven’t you seen the news?”

“pfff no. who do you think we are?” Steph replies.

“It’s been on the news all day!”

“But some of us sleep, T...Red.”

“Guys,” Harper interrupts, “what’s going on at black gate Red?”

“There has been rioting all day, and about fifteen minutes ago it turned into a full-on breakout, almost everyone else is out of the country so we need all three of you to help the GCPD out.”

“We have any backup?” Harper asks as the three of them start getting on their gear.
“The knights are busy but will come as soon as they can and the rest of us are out of the country, but the GCPD should be capable of keeping this contained, which kind of makes you the back up, just in case there are metas or something else above there pay grade. Oh and Harper you should get your BFG,”

“Really?”

“yes just don't go blowing everything up...”

“Me? Never.”

The three of them rush through Gotham. Harper cuts away as they fly over finger river onto the southern island, she will meet them at Blackgate bridge after getting the BFG. As Cass and Steph fly pass Wayne tower Steph can see cop cars rushing around below, they are heading the same direction the two girls are, towards the chaos around Blackgate.

They swung past the outer blockade on the first bridge and onto the buildings of the island between Blackgate and Gotham proper. a few seconds later they are overlooking the main police line. There looks like there was already a battle between the cops and escapees, half a dozen cops are back some way getting patched up and more than a few dozen escapees are contained. Beyond them was the police line, at the far side blocking off the bridge is a line of police officers with shields, behind them are small groups with grenade launchers ready to throw tear gas and pepper spray into advancing group, following them are another line of cops with shield broken into groups to help fill in any breaches in the first line.

Beyond the formed up lines of police, stretching up the winding bridge to the gates of Blackgate are a veritable horde of prisoners. At the front small groups move from the crowd to throw stuff at the police line before falling back into anonymity. Along the road and into the parking lot crooks have climbed on top of cars and vans to get a better look down. Steph doesn't recognise any faces in the crowd so hopefully, most of the high-security prisoners are still contained.

“hey Batgirl,” Steph says tapping Cass on the arm, she jumps slightly but Steph continues regardless, “can you keep a watch for anything **big** and **bad** that looks like it might hurt someone?” Batgirl raises her fist in what Steph presumes is agreement.

Steph swings over to the multi-storey car-park (yes Gotham needs multi-stories for its prisons) where she saw the commissioner had set up. She slips in behind the three cops looking over the forces on the bridge and silently takes a seat on a car behind them.
“’ey there commish,” she says putting on a thick low Gotham accent, a mix of narrows and crime alley.

The three cops jump and spin to look at her, Bullock gives an annoyed grunt before asking, “so, which one are you?”

“spoiler, ’ere from batsy, ta keep an eye on fings”

“well tell him we have this under control.”

“neva’ hurts havin' backup though,” she says wiggling her eyebrows at him. Turning to the commissioner she says, “oh and I gotta ask ya to not use water cannons Blue is bringing her BFG and that won't end well.”

“whats a BFG?” asks Montoya.

“Big Fryie Gun. Does what it says on the tin.”

“Right...”

after a pause, the commissioner says, “thank you, Spoiler.”

her comms buzz and Harper says in her ear, “all set up, I'm turning on now.”

“Ooooo! time for the light show.” spoiler says hopping down and moving to the edge of the building as the cops give each other confused glances.

“only if this goes really wrong... three, two, one...”

the only noticeable change is the noise from the crowd. What was a mix of cheering and jeering turns almost instantly to yells and cries of discomfort. The whole crowd shifts back, trying to fall
back towards the prison, Steph can just see how the figures are covering their faces like they are being blinded.

She could hear confused murmurs from the cops watching next to her as well as rising from the main force. Steph looks around as a new police officer comes up (she shots spoiler a couple of nervous, or maybe curious, glances Steph can't really tell) before focusing on her leaders, asking them for orders. Steph is curious so listens in until she hears two sharp beeps in her ear, a sign from Cass. She flicks out binoculars from her belt and surveys the crowd, she spots the problem instantly and jumps into action.

“get your men clear!” she calls to the cops as she volts off the building and swings away to the bridge. Gordon is followed by Bullock, Montoya, and the newly arrived Strode to the edge of the building to see what was going on. Smashing there way down the bridge like a herd of elephants are four over-sized, muscled monstrosities pushing aside anything in their way. Cars get tipped as they smash past and some of the prisoners get thrown over the edge of the bridge into the water below, to be picked up by the police boats.

He calls for SWAT teams as the four monsters clear the mass of retreating prisoners and release a roar.

Fear runs through the line as the monsters accelerate there pace.

The bridge shakes from the impacts of there running feet.

Rage shaking the cops as much as their roars.

unstoppable engines of destruction.

Then from nowhere.

**BAM!**

The lead monster comes crashing down smashing his face on the tarmac before tumbling with his momentum, coming to a hard stop face down leaving a trail of destruction in his path.
The two flanking the first are tripped by explosions at their feet. The final monster bringing up the rear swings at the shadow who had just taken his comrades out only to get smashed around the face then sent flying by another kick to the face.

In the middle of the four downed monsters, a figure almost seems to coalesce out of the twilight shadows. She crouches low, cape pooling around her.

Gordon can hear cries from the police line and the crowd from Blackgate. “Batman?” “Batman!” “can't be they are too small” “she's a chick!” “but she just took them down” “the hell…” “oh god look!”

they watch as three of the brutes pull themselves to their feet. The shadowy figure rises to her feet, dropping into a combat stance as the three of them come at her. The first slams a fist into the ground where she was stood only a moment before cracking the ground with the force of the impact. The second swings wide and is thrown smashing into the third. She raises her hands to her side in a shrug as though she is saying ‘is that the best you've got’ her opponents pull themselves to there feet and come at her again... and again... and again...

the fourth monster pulls himself to his feet between the ongoing battle and the police line. Wiping blood from his eyes he looks back at his three companions battling batgirl before turning his back on them and moving towards the police line. Orders are called out and grenades launched covering the advancing creature in a cloud of tear gas and pepper spray but he keeps advancing. Just as he picks up speed explosions rake him knocking him back again as a figure cloaked in dark purple speeds over the line, rolling to a stop and flicking out a three-part-staff.

“hey asshole, you wanna fight someone? You fight me!”

the beast tries to focus on her, almost blind from the broken nose, tear gas and blood in his eyes. Steph takes the chance to smash him around the face, as he steps back he swings at her but she ducks under the attack and delivers a blow to his knee knocking it from under him. An instant later he drives back to his feet and she barely dodges his ferocious assault.

She counters a backhand with a strike from her staff and flips over him. She only then realises the ends of her weapon have been broken and buckled. Steph has to flip back to dodge the next attack. she is forced onto the defensive, weaving past his wild, blind, but destructive strikes. She sidesteps a two-handed smash that rocks the ground, as she counters lashing her weapon across his face she spots tubes sticking out from his neck. but then she is thrown from her feet as he rips the ground up under her. Landing hard she blinks stars from her eyes as he advances on her menacingly...
meanwhile- way outside of Gotham city

“report in. how's clean up going?”

“Interpol just showed up. They are taking Bane in now.”

“batwoman we got an RSVP. Looks like his forces went ahead without him, there's a big riot at Blackgate and... hell looks like there are a few guys on venom there.”

“ok, Azrael meet us at the hanger, batwing get the plane ready to go.”

Kate hurries to the hanger, entering the Batplane, “all set?”

“just waiting for Jean-Paul.”

just then Azrael enters too, “Interpol have it locked down here.”

“then no time to waste, Luke get us to Blackgate” the plane zooms out of the compound and towards Gotham “what's are eta?”

“About fifteen minutes at top speed, but it looks like someone else has beaten us there, look”

Luke brings up a low-res security camera footage overlooking the bridge to Blackgate. They can see the police line in the distance and the rioting escapees in the foreground.

In the centre of the shot, they can see four of Bane's venomed up goons fighting two vigilantes. Kate recognised Spoiler fighting hard against one of them even landing a few solid, even if not telling, hits. The rest of the fight was harder to track cleanly, the three of bane's soldiers seemed to be fighting a small cloaked figure dressed all in black. Her movements are difficult to track due to her speed, the quality of the camera, and the darkness of her gear. But even so, her amazing skill is obvious by the fact she is still alive, and even more amazingly, winning.
“damn, did you see that right hook, that would have made wildcat proud.”

“focus on flying Luke,” he tells her it's autopilot but she isn't really listening, more focused on the girl's techniques. In a matter of seconds, she grapples and delivers a flurry of blows likened to krav maga, then throws her opponent with a textbook judo throw, followed by a spinning high kick smashing another in the face, a move Kate had only ever seen shadows pull off.

“Are we sure they need our help them, they seem to have it handled.” Jean-Paul says to her, “that one seems to be able to take the world on, on her own, and stepping on their toes won't help”

“She is good, but even the best can make mistakes especially when outnumbered, and all it takes is one mistake... Like that," they can see spoiler on her back with one of Bane's soldiers above her. There is a flash of light blinding the camera that flickers on and off seeming to push back the brute. In the few frames they have clear, Kate can see spoiler seems to be talking to someone on comms before going on the attack again.

with her main weapon keeping the crowd at bay Harper was forced to rely on her “handgun” though calling it that is like calling a supercar a horseless carriage, technically correct but also a massive understatement. Even so, she fired shot after shot into the big guy attacking Steph to absolutely no effect, beyond a little room for Steph to get to her feet, and pissing him off.

“ blue can you get a shot on his neck?”

“only if you can get him to turn around.”

“peace of cake, ” Harper can hear the smile on her voice.

Steph turns and calls, “hey asshole.” he looks at her but almost instantly something hits him in the face that bursts covering his eyes with a sticky mess. It only takes him a second to rip it off but that's all she needs to vault passed him lashing him with her staff. Steph ducks under his swing and spins to face him and Harper can tell she is smirking knowing that she has won.

Harper lines up the shot. A bolt of lightning jumps from her gun and slams into the big creeps neck just where there seem to be some tubes sticking out. For a split second there is a high-pitched whining noise and then a detonation. Spoiler only just roles aside from the massive body slamming down where she was a second before. They both watch the unmoving form curiously as the muscles shrink back to normal size
“We did it!” Harper says in relief

“one down. three to go,” jokes Steph

“err problem I only have about 3 shots left,”

“well then don’t miss!”

“easier said than done.”

she slips pass a heavy strike letting them slam into the next coming up behind her and slams a blow onto there face with a force that would have killed most people but it barely knocks them back. Her father had always made her train against people who were much bigger and stronger than her, so this was simple, if not easy, they are trained like the groups her father had made her fight (and kill) before.

She didn't kill anymore, that made the fight harder, but so much better. She felt lighter than she had in years as she slips under the thirds attack and hammers a volley of strikes into the weak spot under there ribs. She jumps over a clumsy blow that cracks the ground and flips over another attack as she hears an explosion.

She takes the chance to sweep one of her opponents off their feet and charging in to attack the others who are distracted looking over at the explosion. She manages to spare a glance as she grapples one of their heads, throwing them to the ground. The forth was on the ground twitching in pain as their muscles shrink and wither. Behind is Sun looking over at Blue perched on a rock to the side of the road shifting her weapon up to her shoulder.

Her focus was brought back to the fight by a punch aimed at her head. She swayed aside letting them slide passed her. Passed the swirling of the fight she can see blue taking aim, frustration in the line of their shoulders, and focus in the tilt of there head. Driving back her assailants with a flurry of kicks she understands what she needs to do.

She drives at the opponent nearer the disorganised crowd, away from Blue. She dives under there clumsy grapple and roles between there legs jabbing a strike into a point on there leg weakening and dropping them to their knees behind her. She spins to look at the three of them as they move to
follow her. A smile lights her face as Blue take the shot she set up, making the person hit by the bolt of lightning spasm in pain then be thrown to the ground by an explosion.

She smirks as they turn to look at blue realising how much of a danger they are in. she throws herself at them slamming a kick into the closest face spinning them back towards her, then drops low smashing their groin, before bounding back up kneeing them in the face, stunning them and knocking them back. Blue sees another opening and takes the next shot.

Another drops leaving one pulling themselves to their feet from where she took them down. They dash for a dented-in car and rip one of the doors off.

She can see what they aim to do.

She moves on instinct.

Steph watches in amazement as Cass manoeuvres the 3 monsters into position for Harper to take them down. Harper's aim is true and the first creep goes down, then Cass sets up another and Harper shoots them down too, Leaving just one left.

He tears a door of a car and spins to throw it at Harper, but it slams into Cass who had jumped in the way. She is sent flying and crashes to the ground. Harper yells and takes the shot but he shifts and the shot glances off his shoulder

Harper swears over comms, “I'm dry... ok I'm going to have to run for my BFG”

“let me give this a shot first.”

“you sure?”

“I'm almost **fifty** per cent sure **nothing** can go wrong.”

“Yeah, I'm gonna go get it just in case.”
“no faith at all.” Steph jokes to control her nerves as she starts running towards the creature that has gone back to battling Cass who (at least to Steph) seemed a little slower, still weaving around his attacks but now not looking quite so dominant. She jumps on a car and vaults onto his shoulders, then flips over landing next to Cass kicking him in the face as she passes.

It really hurts his face is like iron and Steph is certain if she wasn't wearing armoured boots she would have broken something but manages to smirk up at him before flipping away as he grows and lunges. His lunge quickly becomes a face plant when the bomb she planted on his neck explodes slamming him into the ground and ripping off the tubes connecting to his neck.

“to the spoiler goes the victory.”

“wait, you really say that?” says harper sounding bemused.

“Shutup!Shutup!Shutup!”

past Harper's laughter, Steph can make out a small giggle. Looking over she sees Cass has both hands over the bottom of her mask, where her mouth is. Steph opens her arms and says “come on.” Cass buries her head in Steph's shoulder.

Harper swings in and crashes into them and they almost topple over. “whoo sorry this is a bit heavy”

“wait that's the BFG... so what's holding them back?” spoiler says pointing at the prison.

There is a rumbling overhead and a sheepish looking Harper points up at the Batplane hanging above them, “that?”

Steph glares at her sheepishness even as Batwing and Azrael fly out of the plane and start coercing the prisoners back to Blackgate.

“what's the betting they get all the credit?”

“glory just means you have more enemies.”
Harper and Steph spin to where Cass was looking and see Batwoman standing over them. “I err... we... it... well um...” Harper stammers looking embarrassed.

Batwoman smiles slightly as she says, “you three were impressive. rough around the edges. but you have a lot of talent in there too.” Steph feels her heart skip a beat at the praise and Harper seems to almost glow. Next to them Cass is frozen in what Steph can only presume is shock. “you should head back to your base, go check yourselves for injuries, we'll deal with mopping up.”

“right thanks,“

“Hopefully we can work together at some point?” harper says a little breathlessly

“we'll see soldier.” batwoman replies smiling then she notices Batgirl's raised fist, her eyebrows raise under her mask before bumping her fist into her smaller counterparts. The three younger girls grapple away as Renee, Gordon, and Bullock approach her.

“nice of you to join us,” Renee says teasingly.

they share a glance but the commissioner interrupts, “is the prison secure?”

“with your people, it will be, this is the last of Bane's forces and I don't think 'they' have much fight left in them,” she replies indicating the prisoners.

“it was impressive what Spoiler and her friends managed, especially that 'black bat' or whatever her name is”

“I think she is going by 'batgirl'.”

Renee hums in thought “I thought she was...” she glances fleetingly at Gordon “retired”

“She is. This is a 'legacy hero', or 'successor' if you will. but I think it suits her very nicely.”
"you better have good news"

"We have a solid lead. we believe she has been taken by the league to Gotham, but sir Gotham is difficult to operate in the-

"I don't care about that fool in a batsuit. find my daughter."

Chapter End Notes

i think my idea of 'low gotham' maybe ~60% cockney so sorry i suck with accents

forgot to mention last chapter, what do you guys think of 'wandering' pov? like where it slides from one person to another without a break, it's kind of useful to be but i understand if it gets confusing
Harper takes Cass out on a **date** explore to gotham botanical gardens. mishaps 1. rogues befriended 2.

**Chapter Notes**

yes i know it's been a while this was being a problem, good news though i have some from the next chapter done so there should be less of a wait next time

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Playing tag was different since Cass joined them, they had never really played with red robin (he could be a bit of a 'stick in the mud' as Steph puts it) and they rarely ran into any of the other bats, so it was only ever her and Steph. Harper knows they aren't 'great', but after seeing Cass pull off some amazing feats she realises just how much better she could get.

She could tell Cass was playing with her, keeping a pace just a rooftop ahead, each time Harper gets close she slips away darting from rooftop to rooftop as easily as a cat. She flys across a wide gap between buildings, Harper presumes (or hopes at least) that she is smiling behind her mask. Harper stops at the edge, she can't make it. She turns to look for another way but there is nothing to grapple off, but maybe she could...

"No," harper looks up to see Cass shaking her head, then she beckons to her "come!"

"I can't make that jump."

"Yes."

Harper wants so much to prove her right, it's been a long time since she has wanted to prove someone right. Wanting to prove someone wrong seems to happen every time she sees Batman, or her dad or, her boss or... Well, it happens quite a lot, but wanting to prove someone right...

"Come!" Cass insists beckoning again.
"Catch me." she can't bring herself to say it out loud but Cass nods so Harper takes a few steps back and runs.

There is a moment when she thinks she is going to make it...

Then she realises how much this will hurt...

She has a split second of regret before...

CRUNCH!!

Harper's midriff slams into the edge of the roof knocking the wind out of her. She almost slips but a pair of strong hands grab onto her arms and drag her up and over. They land together in a heap, giggling and spluttering.

It took a few moments for Harper to realise the position that they're in. She is on top of Cass, elbows resting each side of her head, and she could feel Cass's hands resting lightly on her shoulders. There is a heartbeat of hesitation when Harper really doesn't want to get up, then she comes to her senses and jumps to her feet, she tries to apologies but Cass just gives her a look that she presumes is bemusement so she gives up. Cass touches her arm looking up at her, head cocked to the side, looking around for a distraction Harper sees that they are next to the park.

"Looks like we're here." She says before swinging down followed by Cass.

The two of them walked through the dark when they hear a yell

"Don't interrupt date night!"

"Whoa! whoa! whoa! we're not here to fight!" Harper says even as Cass steps between her and Harley Quinn who was advancing on them with a bat. "I'm just showing Batgirl around, she hasn't had much of a chance to see the city yet’
“ah! you’re on date night too!”

“I never said that!”

"Now now, why don't we just make it a double date,” says a beautiful woman in a mottled green dress walking up behind Quinn. She is easily recognisable by her bright red hair woven with leaves. Poison ivy.

"Great idea Pammie! Come on girlies, Pam knows everything 'bout anything.”

“only if 'everything' refers to the world's flora.”

“that what we callin' it now red?” Harley Quinn replies with a wink

Harper had given up trying to protest, she didn't even really have a crush on Cass. Admiration, sure. Infatuation, maybe. And it's not like she would 'oppose' dating Cass but...

Her thoughts and the others conversation are interrupted by Cass shrugging and walking past ivy and into the gardens.

"Well, I guess we've made up our mind," Harper says flatly

"Good to see you getting over your denial hon. I'm sure she is a cutie, under the faceless mask and the creepiness."

"It doesn't mean anything..." Harper says following Cass and ivy into the garden

"Sure it don't," Harley says skipping alongside as they follow on.

Ahead Cass is looking at the plants, running her gloved fingers through the leaves, and gently touching the flowers. Ivy catches her attention, drawing her to a flowerless plant, she runs a single long finger up the stem and, much to Cass's amazement a flower bloomed from the tip. Cass bounces up and down on the balls of her feet with excitement, next to ivy is smiling proudly at her obvious awe.
"Dawww! ya know, I see why you like her," Harley says to Harper as they watch Batgirl and Ivy moving through the plants, admiring.

"It's not like that," Harper says biting her lip.

"So what's it like then hon?"

"It's a long story..." Harley watched her as she drops her gaze to the ground waiting for Harper to continue. "When we first met it was... I don't know... Well, then I found out about her... Upbringing..."

"A rough one was it?"

"ha, my upbringing was rough, hers... completely different league," Harper says stopping herself before saying too much but not wanting to offend Harley Quinn.

"and how do you feel that affect your relationship?"

"It's not a big deal for me," Harper says pondering for a second before continuing, sounding a little embarrassed. "Maybe that's why I feel we get on, to much Gotham blood in me to judge someone for surviving."

"Do you find other people do?"

"I'm sure you're used to how people jump at anyone who is out of the ordinary."

"do I ever!" Harley laughs in agreement.

"Well add in the league not getting that someone can do bad things without being a bad person..."

"Ah yes, those self-righteous pricks! That's why us rogues like batsy, bit grumpy but least he gets..."
his hands dirty sometimes."

“are you two going to keep up, I don't think Batgirl understands what I'm saying and I would like if this guided tour wasn't entirely wasted.”

“sorry, Pammie!” Harley says skipping over and taking ivy's hand

Harper feels a gloved hand grip hers. Her heart skips a beat in what she can only presume is surprise as she looks down and sees batgirl pulling her towards one of the larger plants Ivy had made flower. Harper looks at it suspiciously, she is far too Gotham to trust something a rogue made.

“don't worry it's non-toxic, in fact, it's being explored for a new antiviral drug compound.” Ivy answers her unasked worry. Ivy continues to show them around the gardens. Almost all of her explanations fly way over harpers head, not her area. but hanging out with Cass is nice, and Harley and Ivy are surprisingly... sane.

Around one AM they leave the gardens, Cass and Harper to patrol and ivy and Harley to 'not sleep' as the latter put it. When Harper reports the meeting to Oracle the voice on the end tells her not to worry, that Ivy is gone clean, and Harley is technically in Belle Reve but is on temporary release. So as long as they weren't committing crimes there is nothing to worry about.

Chapter End Notes

i’m probably going to rewrite some of this at some point, but then this whole fic needs some editing but that will probably wait till this arc is done.

also before i forget this is all set between YJ season 2 and 3
Dick shows up and is not happy. and Cass fails to punch a guy.

"Bruce what is wrong with you." It wasn't a question so much as an accusation.

He turns in his chair giving Dick a look, he had expected a more friendly greeting from him as they had been in a good place when he had left for Mars, or at least he had thought so...

"You know exactly what I mean what the hell are you thinking, dropping an assassin on Tim."

Oh... "He has it under control." He says turning back to the bat-computer but Dick stops his chair.

"No Bruce he's a kid and-"

"He's older than you were when you went solo."

"I started fighting gangsters, not the god damn Mist!"

"He is the best person to work with her."

"What the hell Bruce! she will cut him apart first chance she gets!"

"she won't."

"What?! Why?! since when did you get all trusting?!"
Bruce sighs realising he is going to have to explain, "Cass isn't going to hurt Tim because she trusts him, she was willing to try and fight the league to protect him."

"Um, that's undercover one oh one, along with 'i don't join teams'," Dick replies still utterly unconvinced.

"Barbara agrees with me."

"Barb also gave her batgirl. It's clear she is trying to live vicariously through her."

"Well, she wouldn't try with someone she didn't trust."

"If anything that's proof she isn't thinking straight!"

Bruce raises an eyebrow, "do you want to tell her that?"

... 

"That's not the point, you should be the one training her, or at least have me do it, we would have a better chance than Tim."

"No. We wouldn't. And..." He looks across at the glass cases with the past suits. "What do you think would happen if I told her that she serves yo-"

"I didn't say-"

"It doesn't matter that's what she would hear and then everything Tim and Barbara had managed would be for nothing."

"It's not... That's not..."
"We can't have her just become another 'good soldier' Dick, you know how that turned out..."

"Get your head out your ass Bruce! This isn't about Jason or your guilt complex! This is about Tim getting killed by the world's most dangerous assassin!"

Bruce's face is unreadable but his hand is gripping the arm of the chair in frustration, "come with me."

"Really? now what?!"

Chronos tabs something on his wrist.

“Now try hitting me you dumb burger!”

Tim tries but he just dodges every strike easily like he can see it before it happens. it's like trying to fight Cass.

Chronos taunts him, “I can see a full second into the future to learn what you're going to do.”

“fine,” Tim sighs resting on his stave.

“What?”

“well, I can't get you we have shown that.”

“you're letting me go?”

“no. she is taking over.”
“hu” he turns to where red robin is pointing just in time to dodge batgirl's punch. Chronos struggles to stay ahead of her much faster attacks but he does, for a while at least. it's all to fast for him to understand what's going on. he is glad he is recording this or else he would have had no idea what happened, watching back later Tim can see that she was gauging his reactions and learning his patterns before shutting down his options and trapping him. This culminates in her making a strike for his face and when he steps back stamping on his foot, as he falls she pounces with cat-like grace knocking him out cold.

before he has a chance to congratulate her he hears, “good job batgirl.”

“I don't think I've ever heard you say that B!” he jokes back to his mentor who had just shown up, Nightwing watching from a little ways away.

Batman gives him a look as Tim they both know he has, “you both did good, now head off I'll hand him off.”

“and give me a call Red!” Dick yells after them as Tim and Cass grapple away.

Chapter End Notes

i know fanon has Cass and Dick being besties but the comics show a more... complexities. you know like cass kicking him through a wall and dick being the last person to trust her when she comes back from the dark side. and given in the au he has a lot of good reasons not to trust her yet and to feel protective of tim it's by no means ooc

also jason and the infamous 'good soldier'. my interpritation is that that was for batman to remember not to treat kids like soldiers rather than about jason being a good soldier

i'm not sure what red-robin sells we don't have them in the uk but the internet says burgers so that's what i'm going with

i can't promise new fics every week but if you like my writing and want more harper/cass you should check out Sugar bird and fruit bat

oh and if i forgot to mention before this next arc is 4 chapters so one more filler left
interval 6

Chapter Summary

Tim makes some observations and a double date.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tim ducks under a punch before flicking up his cape to obscure his opponent's vision long enough for him to sweep his feet out from under him, then he demands to know what they are doing raiding a dance studio of all places. Normally it can be hard for him to intimidate someone half a foot taller than him, but knocking them to the ground helps make him a bit more intimidating, and being able to look past him to see Cass tearing through the rest of his gang like children doesn't hurt either.

Once he gets what he needs Tim knocks the guy out then looks back at Cass. She is staring almost transfixed at a screen showing a group of dancers going through a routine, she seems to bounce with excitement as they jump and pirouette.

"Batgirl! time to go."

she follows his lead, fixation gone and seemingly forgotten, but not by Tim...

Oracle tracked the mark to a charity gala. When they arrive they catch Drakon about to bust in. Together they take him down. Well Cass does most of the work, Tim stays a distance so as not to get under her feet, but he does land a Batarang in Drakon's shoulder letting Cass take him down.

Tim locks him down while Cass watches the party, making sure no one else is going to show. And again she seems to be more focused on the dancers than any threat of an assassin, the dances for their part seem blissfully unaware of how close they came to disaster.

The next evening, sometime before they would need to patrol Tim takes Steph, Cass, and Harper to the Gotham Metropolitan Ballet. He led them up to the Wayne box, which would often be auctioned off for charity or lent to the Ballet company, but today it is just for the four of them.
Steph and Harper were trying to badger him to tell them what the Ballet was about, and what was going to happen so they could understand, but he tells them to just watch and see what they can work out. Cass meanwhile is looking over the rapidly filling auditorium. It's only a few minutes later that the lights drop and the curtain raises.

The dancers flow out on to the stage, shifting and flowing together until a new figure takes centre stage. She is dressed in a flowing pink dress, even without his prior knowledge, it would be clear she is the leading lady, especially when the leading man comes out to meet her. There is a small gasp from the audience (and a stifled giggle from Steph and Harper) when it becomes clear that the male lead [Solor] is wearing a cut-down imitation of a Batman mask.

Tim can work out what is going on thanks to knowing the story but he suspects Steph and Harper are understanding less. A theory that is vindicated when Steph bumps him to get his attention.

"so Tim you getting any of this."

"the woman in white (Gamzatti) is betrothed to the man in blue, but blue and pink are in love. And now pink is trying to kill white."

"is that from watching or reading up beforehand."

He sheepishly responds, "more of the latter."

Steph stifles a laugh and Tim turns back only to be nudged again second later. Steph gestures across to Harper who appears to have decided that Cass is more interesting to watch that the ballet, they share a look of amusement before he directs her back to the ballet.

She stretches out the tight muscles in her back and wiggles the feeling back into her feet. She feels a little embarrassed; she was always trained to pay attention but she entirely lost herself entirely in the dancing, in the beauty, it was like meeting someone who speaks the same language as you for the first time, only to find you can barely articulate the crudest grunting and they can sing.

Even though the dancing had stopped and the lights were up she could tell it wasn't over, there was still so much to tell. She looks over at Blue and Sun who are talking, they are relaxed and seem to be discussing the dancing. Red had stood up and stretched before heading back into the halls. Cass
slipped over her chair careful not to disturb the others to follow.

Red turns and sees her as she is following down the hall they came up to get to there seats. At first, she shrinks back instinctively worried but Red just smiles and gestures for her to come with, and says something that probably means the same, she tries to hold on to the noises but they are so hard to keep together.

She follows him into a room off to the side. Inside there are almost a dozen people, most are stood around talking with drinks in hand, completely ignoring her and Red as they walk past. They stop facing a man stood behind a barrier covered in packets of food, he is professional but dismissive of them until Red says something, then a wave of shock passes over him before a mix of embarrassment and respect then he quickly puts down the drink he was pouring to rush off.

He comes back a moment later with a large box that he hands to red who nods in thanks and replies to something the man says. Then the two of them head back to there seats. On there way Red hands her the box, then gestures that he is going into the room next to them with a very simplified picture of a person on it. She shrugs and heads off.

back in the box, Blue and Sun are still talking but they stop when she walks in and presents the box. Sun takes it excitedly and rips it open revealing lots of little packets, Sun starts handing them out. she takes the first one sun gives her and rips it open revealing a white cube. she bites into it, and it tastes really sweet. she likes it.

they are through a few each when red gets back. he looks a little exasperated at sun who just laughs back, blue says something to them and they freeze for a moment before Sun grabs three and starts eating as fast as they can. Red says something shocked and Blue bursts out laughing. in all the excitement the three of them hadn't noticed the lights dimming, she remembers the word used to make people...

"Shutup!"

"so Harper, you get any of that or were you to busy watching Cass?"

"of course I was- least I wasn't talking over the whole thing." Harper snaps back indignantly but Steph isn't going to let her off the hook that easy.

"I'm surprised you noticed, too busy staring into Cass's pretty green eyes."
"they are blue/brown," Steph just smirks back, "that doesn't prove anything."

"can you actually say anything about what has happened so far?"

"more than you, I bet."

they keep on like that until Cass comes back with a box labelled 'for Wayne'. Steph guesses it must be the food Tim ordered, ripping the box open she passes out some of the contents

Harper remarks, "in a box, really, how posh are these people"

"it just means that you don't get crushed muffin." replies Tim who just showed up, "also you could have waited for me."

"but food!"

"come on Steph if you don't give him some he will never grow."

Steph thinks for a second then mutters, "then I would be the taller one!" before grabbing the nearest food items and begins trying to eat them as fast as possible.

instantly Harper just starts laughing and Tim yells, "oh come on Steph." and starts going for the food but Steph tries to fight him off.

in their excitement, they don't notice that the light in the room had dimmed until they hear...

"Shutup!"

there is a moment of stunned silence where Cass glares at them before turning back to the show that was just starting, the rest of them share a glance before following her example.
after the performance is over they go down to the autograph lines, Cass and Steph head forward while Harper and Tim stay back. Tim makes note of Cristine Montclair who had played the role of Gamzatti, and Tim knows she is also one of the dance instructors, he wonders if he could get her to-

"I still can't really believe that they could spend three hours telling a five-minute story."

"It's the spectacle of the thing, and besides 'she' can see more than we can." he replies taking note of her folded arms and glancing back between Cass and the dancers. "come on we should get ready for later they can join us when they're ready.

Chapter End Notes

first draft the fight with drakon was a lot longer but it was slowing everything down in a bad way so it got cut

i have never been to a ballet if that wasn't painfully obvious but this was based off La Bayadère (i.e. The Temple Dancer) but i like the idea that the gotham ballet troupe makes somewhat scandalous references to batman in there performances

in to the next main arc next chapter should be out soon (tm)
Clouds on the Horizon: part 1

Chapter Summary

a normal mission, Cass gets asked to help Gamma squad on a raid. what could possibly go wrong!

Chapter Notes

i'm going to go do a full edit/rewrite soon so that is something to look forward too, and if you've forgotten wtf is going on (which is fair) and want to reread feel free to wait for that it should only take a few week depending on how much rewriting i need to do

Up in the conference room, Batman and Batwoman are sitting in silence with the merest undercurrent of awkwardness, normal for them but it still sets Tim on edge. Bruce starts as Tim takes his seat. the last week had been quiet so there was only one thing that they wanted to talk about.

“There is something we need to talk about.”

“yes. I know you said she wasn't meant to go out without me but it was an emergency no one else was available it wasn't like anyone was hurt the three of them did everything we could have hoped for they worked together really well and it all turned out OK, right?”

“I agree, Tim. You made a good call.”

“Oh right.”

“and Tim” Kate says leaning onto the desk, “you should bring your friends here at some point, they have talent that we can work on.”

“sure, can do.” he feels a weight lifted off his shoulders but makes a mental note; something else he needs to keep an eye on, “is that everything?”
“here yes, but the team needs you at the watchtower there has been a new lead on the smuggling case.”

“right I will need to get going then, tell me if you need me back.”

“I'm sure we'll manage.”

“so, what's with the goofy wings Rob?”

Tim sighs at Bart's Question, “it's a glider so I don't need a shoot or rope for insertions.”

“but they look so silly.”

“that's not...” he stops himself then turns to wonder girl piloting the bioship, “where have we gotten to.”

“just getting over central Gotham now.”

“ok drop me here. I'll meet up with batgirl, start your attack... E-minus 30 minutes.”

“Neptune's beard, I don't know why we have to work with her.”

“you're not. I am.” he replies glaring at La’gaan before dropping through the hole Cassie opened in the floor of the bioship.

He wishes the others could trust Cass like he does. He guesses it must be harder to think of someone being anything other than pure good or evil when you weren't brought up in Gotham, with all its greys. He thinks all this as he turns face down, facing said city bellow him. He spreads his glider at just under two thousand feet levelling out his flight path to glide past the upper stories of the Wayne tower before heading for his nest.
Cassie silently manoeuvred the bioship alongside the aft of the ship that looks like a tanker, but they know it contains worse than just oil. Bart hopped out onto the ship, and Lagoon Boy drops into the water muttering something about always getting the water jobs, but Cassie ignores him and once they are both clear she takes the bioship high to overwatch the ship.

sign off,” Cassie says trying to focus on the matter at hand, “anyone find something for me to punch?”

deck is clear, gonna scout the main hold now,” Bart responds

take care KF don't need to alert them,” she replies

all clear down here... Wait what’s that... oh...” static buzzes over coms interspaced by La'gaan's choicest curses

"Lagoon boy? La'gaan!? Are you there? Sign off Lagoon boy” she calls over coms trying to stay calm

"We got a mammoth problem here too, and he's brought shimmer."

Before Cassie can reply something is thrown from the water onto the boat followed by a larger something. It takes a second to recognise the first as La'gaan now laying unmoving on the deck. Over him stands, well 'stands' is a loose term as it doesn't have legs, instead, it has the tail of a massive serpent and the body of, not a man but as if someone tried making a sea monster out of a man with wing-like fins, and pincers around its mouth.

Just as Shimmer and Mammoth close on La'gaan, a bright yellow blur dashes past them grabbing La'gaan and zooming away. The serpent creature screeches its displeasure, undertoned by Mammoths low growl, and Shimmer calling guards onto the deck. Bart dashes round all of them, sending Mammoth falling into Shimmer but he quickly ends up cornered at the ship's bow, being advanced on by the humongous serpent.

She is in free fall before she can think. She lands hard enough to dent the deck. A flash of her lariat sends many of the black-clad guards tumbling to the deck. But the serpent lunges at her, slashing with a great claw. The blow hammers into her bracer, knocking her back. She surges forward, blocking his other claw as she drives at him, and slams her forehead into his jaw knocking teeth
loose. She binds back one of his arms and tries to rip off one of his mandibles with her free hand. Then she feels his tail wrap around her, and with surprising speed throws them both overboard.

!No! Stay out the water

She exerts her will to hold herself up. A normally easy task made much harder by the thrashing serpent still constricting her. She tries to lash out but her gauntleted fist passes straight through him, like punching water. Fortunately, his attacks were just as ineffective, claw wrapped around her neck failing to pierce her armour. She knows she needs to end this. Now.

give into your rage

She reaches down, letting her anger flow up, filling her. Even as she feels the armour nibble at her soul, power fills her. It races down her veins, filling her muscles and bones, finally coalescing in the lariat. Which surrounds them in three of angled rings. Then bolts of lightning jump between antipodes straight through them. Cassie can feel her skin burn as the electricity zaps through the armour, but that is nothing to the screeching from the creature still locked in combat with her. In its thrashing, it pushes away and falls towards the water.

!No! Catch it!

Her lariat flicks down lassoing his tail, claws reaching desperately for the water as Cassie pulls him up.

!Yes! Yes!

Binding him in her lariat she unleashes another wave of rage-fuelled lightning.

!HAHAHA!

She can see him shift back from monster to man.

!KILL! KILL!

"Enough!"

hssss

The power cuts and he goes limp in the lariat. She drops him with a thud on the deck before surveying the ship. Many of the guards and been disarmed and Shimmer looks like she just took a big hit and was still getting up. Cassie spots Bart taking down more guards but then he slips on the wet deck and ends up sliding on his ass, coming to a stop in front of Mammoth.

Move! Attack! Weakling!

Bart desperately tries to get away, his feet slipping on the wet metal as Mammoth brings down his massive fist. There is a crunch as Mammoths fist slams into Cassie's crossed vambraces. Bart yells a hurried thanks as he gets his footing and goes to stop Shimmer and the others.

!destroy!

She blocks the next blow, rage still fuelling her strength. They both try to headbutt each other at the same time. The crash proves her armour is tougher than his skull. She presses the attack as he staggers back, slamming a gauntleted fist into his gut courses Mammoth to double over, then she knees him hard in the chest sending him flying across the ship disappearing into the bridge in a
shower of glass.

Panting, she looks around for Kid Flash. There are still plenty of guards, not that they pose a threat to her, any that are stupid or brave enough to get close get swatted aside. In her search, she finds a hole that looks like Bart may have fallen down.

Cassie feels a hand come down on her pauldron and grip tight.

She feels shimmers power spread through her armour...

...trying to turn her it to stone...

...then to sand...

...then ice...

...and all she can hear is the laughter of thirsty gods...

She was in the weapon room where Sun had left her. They did that sometimes, she could only presume they had better things to do, but they did always look happy to see her so they can't hate her that much, right.

She picks up a long stave like the ones Red uses. She practices the movements they use, shifting the grips, trying to focus on copying all the strikes she has seen them do, both in the field and when she was watching them train with Blue, Sun and his master, the Bat. She kept repeating their movements in her mind while mimicking them with her body just to keep the dark thoughts and memories away as they circle closer. Even as she feels like she is going to be overwhelmed she hears Red's voice.

"Cass!"

It's not one of the more common words they use, but it is one they use a lot around her, she thinks it may be what they call her. She pulls on her mask wishing to hide any sign of distress in case that
they would punish her, not that they have, she just doesn't want to give them a reason to.

Upon seeing her red smiles and gestures behind him to the entrance of the base. They lead her across the city until they are looking over the water at the city’s edge. In the distance, just on the horizon, she can make out the lights of another city.

The two of them drop down together next to the water, they gesture for her to remove her cape. She does so a little reluctantly, she likes the feeling of its weight it reminds her that she isn't in her old suit, that that isn't her any more. It becomes clear why though when two Shapes emerge from the water. Red gets out a rebreather from his belt and jumps into the water, she copies feeling the ice chill even through her armour.

They both grab onto the shapes that she realises must be a form of transport. She holds on tight as it pulls her alongside Red into the dark water. Her fingers are getting stiff as red signed for them to stop and surface next to a large boat. Red points her through a window in the ship's side and she slips through.

Inside she finds a dozen men. By the time they realise she is there, half are out cold. None of them make it to the alarm.

Red smiles at her proudly when he slips in a few seconds later and passes over her cape, before leading the way through the door and into the ship. They bypass several more patrols running past as they move through the ship. She can feel the thrill of the hunt building as they climb towards the bridge. They reach a guarded door and they take them out silently. She knows this is their objective. Red counts them down; three... Two... One...

As the door bursts open they attack hard and fast taking the defenders by surprise. They recover quickly but are no match for Red and her. Red glances outside before moving to a computer. She secures the room but her mind wanders; she recognised the styles of the guards as soldiers of the cruel one who her father worked for, the one who made her kill.

It had been a few years since her first kill, she had almost run but her father's grip on her shoulder stopped her, his proud smile tainted by the dead person's terror. Her father kept a close eye on her after that. She tried to refuses to kill. Once. After her father made her watch...

This day was worse though she could feel something bad, evil, about this person as her father lead them in to meet her. She felt like an object as they spoke about her (she couldn't understand them but their bodies were clear). With a gesture, a dozen black-
clad figures rush her. She takes them down with ease, but her father just looks disappointed as he turns to leave. It all gets worse after that...

She is broken from her reverie by movement in her peripheral vision. A large figure was flying, backwards, towards them. Towards Red.

She moves on instinct...

The mission had been going so well...

He had slipped onto the ship with batgirl. The team had launched their attack drawing of the shadow's security away allowing him and Cass into the command centre to get the information on the shadow's movements.

He just finishes copying the last of the files when Cass slams him to the side. Before he can respond there is a massive CRASH! As mammoth smashes into the front of the bridge like a meteor, ripping through the floor. Tim just manages to jump, grabbing on to overhanging wires, but Cass and Mammoth fall through the collapsing floor...

"Batgirl!" Tim can't see where they disappeared to through the shadows. He shouts again but there is no response. He takes a deep breath before dropping down into the darkness. With a flick of his wings, Tim lands softly. He calls out into the murk as his eyes adjust, "Batgirl? You OK?"

The only response he gets is a blood-curdling roar. He dives to the side slashing behind him as Mammoth charges past. They turn to look at each other in the low light before rushing together. Tim ducks Mammoth's massive fist, slashing him with the sharp edge of his wings. It's clear that he has an edge on skill and speed but Mammoth is unstoppable, the cobra venom running through his system makes him heal as fast as Tim can injure him and makes him powerful enough to smash Tim aside with a single hit.

The fight is hard but Tim just needs to find a way to get Mammoth out the way and find the data stick and rendezvous with Cass, he presumes she has withdrawn after dropping from the top floor of the bridge. He bates Mammoth into charging into a support beam with a satisfying crunch, then the side of the crate next to him falls on top of him.

Inside, one leg bound with metal and wooden splints, stands Batgirl...
She flips away to his side as Mammoth smashes free.

"You OK," he can't tell if she even looks at him, but he can tell she is hurting even if she tries to hide it. She is favouring one side which he has never seen her do before, but even so, she is laser-focused and ready to battle.

Together they have a clear advantage but they can't manage to bring him down long enough to search for the memory stick. If Cass was in better shape he would have broken off to look, but with an injured leg, he doesn't what to leave her to fight someone able to go toe to toe with the likes of Superboy.

It's just as he strikes high slashing across mammoths shoulder and Cass hammers an attack into his shin that there is a loud high scream from the deck of the ship. Mammoth brushes off there attacks and turns towards the bow of the ship. Tim and Cass try to attack again but Mammoth takes off running, he smashes straight through the wall to the main deck. He moves to follow but stops when he hears a call from behind them

"Rob?!!"

He turns to see Bart struggling up behind them, using a metal pole as a crutch.

"Could you fix my leg up, it's ..." He glances at Batgirl "... Like last time"

Tim checks, feeling indented joint at his hip, "how did you manage this"

"Shimmer dropped the floor on me, hit every pipe on the way down, had to wait for the brakes to fix but my leg didn't get better so I..."

Tim cuts him off, "you're right it's dislocated, relax it." He wraps his arm around Bart's leg then pull so the joint snaps back into place. Bart gives a small moan of pain then vibrates his leg through movements. "Now we have to go help Cassie and La'gaan, they will be facing Mammoth and Shimmer."

"La'gaan got taken out by some sea monster, but wonder girl's got it."
"YOU MEAN SHE IS OUT THERE ALONE!" Tim clambers past the wreckage of the wall and on to the main deck. He can't see any sign of Cassie, or of Mammoth and Shimmer. "Wonder-Girl!?"

"Over here!"

He runs over to where her voice is coming from, and he finds her resting sat against a barrier, she looks uninjured just tired, a hand fiddling with her new bracelet. There is a little bit off blood on her cheek but she wipes it off as he rushes over, "are you OK? Are you hurt?"

"worrying over your ex? if you keep this up spoiler will get jealous," She smiles but sounds exhausted. Standing up she continues, "Shimmer and Mammoth bugged out with the guards, but the guy who was the snake thing is still out cold along with La'gaan."

Tim hurries over and checks them both for injuries, La'gaan doesn't seem to have any broken bones but he may be concussed so they need to get him back to the watchtower asap, they other guy (who Cassie had said he had been a snake, Tim guesses that he was dead water but can't be sure) had burns running over his body in thin lines, he can't tell how deep they are so will be important to check too.

Just then he notices Cass stumble a little. She looks like she is in pain so Tim tells her to sit then checks her leg. He runs the back of his hands down her leg, stopping sharply when he feels a hard lump sticking out of her calf. He swears loudly to the shock of the others, "Wonder girl get the bioship down here stat."

She shoots skyward and Bart moves to Tim's side, "what'swrong? Whydidyousendcassieoff? Isthereanythingicanhelpwith?"

"There is a memory stick somewhere in there," he gestures to the broken mess that had been the ship's superstructure, "Can you find it?"

"On it boss man!"

All was quiet on the watchtower. Barbara was watching over half a dozen minor missions, leaguers helping with monsoon season, and the team is on a few missions, mostly recon but Tim is leading
a raid too, and with the team's capacity to turn a simple mission into a fireball, she can't just relax.

And that's when an alarm starts buzzing...

Her stomach sinks as she looks for which it is. It doesn't take long for her to spot that it is the tracker on Cass, it was set to go off if she leaves Gotham. Her first thought is they she must be with Tim, and the ship they were raiding was just out of range of the Gotham receiver, so she checks the one in Metropolis, but that sends back negative too. And on top of this gamma isn't responding to her calls.

She is about to call the league, despite not wanting to, she has come to like the young girl after 'talking' with her several times, sometimes about her but more often it just comes down to making sure she gets something like a normal life. She is interrupted from her indecision by an incoming call from the bioship.

"Oracle here: go ahead gamma"

"Approaching watchtower with wounded. Requesting rapid entry."

"Granted, way is open for you," she says tapping at the keyboard, rapid entry only ever means bad things, "report on team status."

"Lagoon boy may have concussion, batgirl Has a broken tibia," Barbara feels her heart skip at that as she sends a warning to the on duty-med staff, "the rest of the team have no long term injuries, they are holding awaiting back up,"

"Understood, dispatching leaguers to their location," Black Lighting is listed as available so she shoots him a request

"Roger approaching watchtower now."

Arthur had been helping the league deal with a major storm, he had asked Mera to come with him; and her, along with Kalder, had a simple time protecting the people of the coastal communities from storm surges. Along with them M'gann, Clark and himself had been providing muscle, to help protect from any other damages and get people to safety. Humanitarian work was always popular
among leaguers, no big monsters trying to kill you just people to help, even with Luther making it harder and harder by the day.

He is interrupted from his musings by a beep from his communicator. "go ahead Oracle"

"Are you free to return to the watchtower?"

"I can be." most of the dangerous part is over, with the storm past the coastal communities the others will be able to prevent any more loss of life. "What am I needed for?"

"Its La'gaan, he was injured on his latest mission with the team..."

"Is he OK?!"

"J'onn says the concussion is only minor, he will make a full recovery. I just wanted to inform you before he wakes up."

"Thank you Oracle, I will be up shortly," he signs to Mera as he leaves [returning to base][you are in charge] she signs her affirmative as he dives into the raging river and zooms out to sea. "What do you know of what happened."

"preliminary reports suggest dead water, fighting with the shadows..."

She continues to fill him in as he makes his way to the nearest Atlantean outpost with a zeta tube, he feels she is also using the chance to send the report to others in the league.

When he gets to the watchtower he heads straight for the med bay.

He runs into J'onn outside, "how is he?"

"He will be fine given a full nights sleep Arthur, let him rest. Besides we have a meeting to go to."
"I need to be with La'gaan when he wakes up."

J'onn nods once, "very well I will tell the others. also, Cassandra is in there too, please keep an eye on her, make sure she doesn't leave the healing field before her bones settle. Tim will be in soon, and it is likely Barbara will want to visit too."

Arthur agrees and they go there own ways, J'onn to the league meeting and Arthur into the med bay. At the far end is a young-looking girl with her legs in what looks like an MRI machine, it is made from alien tech and is designed to encourage cell replication and repair.

He ignores her however as she is out cold on an IV drip. His focus is on the Atlantean near the doorway. As Arthur approaches he stirs to look at him.

"My king, I'm sorry I failed," he looks angry at himself but Arthur interrupts him.

"You failed no one, dead water is more than a match for me on most days, you did well"

He takes a seat at La'gaan's bedside, the league meeting is going to be a mess he is glad he is missing it, even if they are going to make a decision on Cassandra it would need a full meeting and that is a problem for another day.

Chapter End Notes

ok yes i am referencing quite a few things from new 52: i think tim's glider suit is a cool idea under certain circumstances, it is a wingsuit and would be helpful if he needs to fly around, sure most of the time he would use his normal robin suit but at times when he needs it. and yes Cassie is in her silent armour, i know n52 cassie is taboo at this point, imho the biggest problem with her is that they tried writing late 2000s cassie without the background so rather than jaded and scared she just appears to be a bitch, to some degree prefer later cassie but they did it really badly. that said the silent armour itself was kind of a cool idea and i have cool ideas about it, it will only come out a little in this fic but if you want to hear about it hit me up on tumblr

oh i almost forgot i was playing with the silent armour making cassie pseudo schizophrenic that was the audio hallucinations.

i like the idea of using military like sign language, at least for aquaman and the bats, as a way of communicating silently and quickly, it's not meant as a way of making proper sentences btu can get an idea across quickly
Chapter Summary

skip a few weeks ahead: the league is ready for the big meeting about Cassandra Cain. this could take some time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Now that we are all finally here..."

"It's not my fault bats, Tarpit broke out and I needed to stop him."

"Can we not today, we have a lot to get through" Diana interrupts before the argument gets out of hand. She waits for a moment to make sure she has quiet before continuing.

"Let us start with the simpler motions before we get to the main focus of today's meeting. First up, an application by one 'Kori'." a hologram flickers to life showing an orange-skinned young woman with bright, almost glowing, hair. "She has received support from Nightwing already, and he is willing to speak in her support if requested- go ahead, John."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible."

"Why is that?"

"That is princess Koriand'r of Tamaran. She was a hostage of the Citadel by a treatise overseen by the guardians. As such we are not permitted to side with her, or even offer her asylum, but we also don't have to hand her over unless she does something to warrant it. The best we can do is to keep the Citadel from coming to earth, which we do anyway, and Savage's Warworld on top. Earth has quite a rep at this point, Koriand'r isn't the first asylum seeker who has come here."

"How come we haven't picked up on that."

"Well most of them keep their heads down, after all, all the reasons that make earth attractive to
come to also make them not want to get noticed. But as John said we can't offer more to Koriand'r than that." The newest green lantern finishes with a shrug.

After a moments silence, Diana continues, "well that's decided, two vetoes, motion failed. Up next, another applicant," she presses a key and the image of Koriand'r in front of them disappears to be replaced by a pale girl with short, dark hair, in a long, black, hooded cloak. "She goes by raven but we don't know much more about her except that she appears to be a magic-user, and seems to be warning of a major threat in the near future- yes Doctor Fate.

"She can not be permitted to join the league. There is darkness in her heart that can not be allowed to propagate."

"What do you mean by 'darkness' Fate, we have no prior record of her?"

"She is a daughter of Trigon."

Most of the league just look at each other confused, batman just narrows his eyes, but Zatanna brings a hand to her mouth as her eyes widen. Then she makes a point down triangle with her fingers and mutters something under her breath. Diana thinks she has heard the name before but doesn't understand Zatanna's reaction, Bruce beats her to asking the question.

"Do you want to fill them in Zatanna?"

"Sure... It... He is basically Satan, or well, he is technically the inspiration for Satan. He is an inter-dimensional conqueror, he has butchers his way through worlds. If she has any connection to Trigon, then..." She looks a little pain like she always does when agreeing with Doctor Fate, "then I second Doctor Fate."

"Well then-" Diana begins but Kal interrupts her

"Wait a moment. We shouldn't pass judgment on someone because of their family."

"Even without intent demonkin are dangerous."
"What do you mean fate?" Diana asks

Zatanna responds before Doctor Fate can, "what Fate means is that even if she hasn't done anything wrong, and may not even want to, she could course damage to both our physical and spiritual health just by proximity. Think of it like she is carrying an infection, dangerous even if she doesn't mean to be"

...

"Very well motion failed."

"Before we move on, I think that we should give them both some way of contacting us. In emergencies."

"I'll second you on that Batman," Kal says in agreement

"Well before we move to the vote; green lanterns, doctor fate, Zatanna, do you have anything to add?"

Zatanna and fate shake their heads and remain silent respectively. John, however, answers Diana, "we can't be apart of any communication with koriand'r, but neither of us will oppose it," The other lantern shakes his head in agreement.

"OK we go to the vote," there is a pause as the league votes. When they are all in Diana continues, "we have a majority, motion passed. Now with that done let us move to the main topic of today's meeting."

"One moment Diana," Batman interrupts, "is there any follow up on Cassandra Sandsmark, her reports from her last missions have been... lacking."

"I'm restricted on what I can say," Dinah replies, "but it is clear she is going through a... difficult spell at the moment,"

"Would it have something to do with the collapse of the dig site her mother was working on?"
'You know I can't tell you, Batman, even if she told me.'

'I too have noticed her acting more independent since the disaster,' Diana puts forth, 'last week she asked me about dealing with djinn, but declined my aid. That said I don't believe there is cause for concern, she has always been honest if she has had a problem, and kids grow up after all, as you know more than most Bruce.'

There is a murmur of agreement and amusement from around the table. As it dies down Batman says, 'even so there is something up, keep an eye on her'

'We always do bat.' if anyone else had said something like that Diana knows Dinah wouldn't have responded so politely, but they know Batman by this point, and that his suspicion isn't a sign of mistrust but off concern.

'Very well with that settled, shall we move on?' Kal's question meets agreement from the league

'M'gann and I assessed her mental state and capacity, while she was still recovering from her injuries.' J'onn is stood addressing the league on the topic of 'Kasumi', also known as Cassandra Cain. 'When we first arrived we found Red-Robin trying to teach her chess. We decided to observe the proceedings to get our preliminary assessment.

'From what we could tell, she understood the rules very quickly but was struggling with the game anyway. From the analysis of her games, and from what Red-robin told M'gann, as well as our own observations, she has difficulty planning future moves, she regularly makes the best move in the moment but tends to full into longer turn traps.

'I will also note that she felt a great deal of frustration whenever she made, or perceived she had made, a mistake; or whenever she was anything less than perfect. A noticeable deviation was the dread she feels whenever she lost, despite how much she trusts Red Robin she still fears or, more so, expects retribution.'

He lets the silence hang for a moment as he summons up the rest of his assessment. It had been a long time since he had met such a deeply hurt soul, and it had never been a good sign for peaceful things in there future, or for those around them.

'From that basis, we began directly assessing her mental state. We had some difficulty establishing communication, she doesn't think in the same way most do, it appears to be that Red robin's hypothesis was at least mostly correct, it does appear that she thinks in movement rather than
language in the traditional sense. This was compounded by her minds... Complexity."

"What do you mean by 'complexity' J'onn? is it possible there is something hidden in the depths of her mind?"

"Not at all Kal', she is not hiding anything, it is... Hard to explain..."

"Perhaps a visual aid could help." Diana offers

"I will try it." J'onn says bowing his head to her, "but recognise that this is highly simplified."

J'onn extends his mind to the rest of the league, and they let him in. In their minds, he brings up a score of glowing lights, and after a few seconds, the pattern becomes clearer. There seems to be a focus on the centre of the glittering mass, as one light flows closer it glows brighter, and when one moves away it dims, or even fade out entirely. It is almost as though they are pinpricks in a screen moving in front of a single light source. They seem almost the be taking turns being at the centre while others orbit, only to move aside as another comes to replace them.

"The brightness shows the strength of the thought?" Batman's voice rings clear through the mind link.

"In a manner of speaking." J'onn replies, "as you can see in most people there can only be one main focused point. how great the focus, or how dispersed, changes depending on circumstances, and can be controlled by training.

"And this would be a rough representation of Cassandra's mind," The lights seem to swirl faster, hanging in the centre for, maybe, just a little longer than before, almost as though they are battling for the space as opposed to flowing freely. Much more notably, another bright light has resolved much further out, while not as bright as the centre it is a lot more so than the smattering of pinpricks around it.

"For the most part her mind is not unusual for someone trained to keep track of many things at a time, but you will notice the extra light outside the norm. This is not something I had seen before, but fortunately, M'gann had. She noticed similarities between Cassandra and Barbara's minds."

"Is this just the structure of their minds or is there more than that?"
"No, it is just the structural similarities, and only then in this kind of model. in Barbara's mind, this extra focus point is her eidetic memory, whereas in Cassandra I can not be sure but I believe it to be linked to her body language reading skills."

"Why would body language be such a big thing?"

"You say that like language isn't a 'big thing' for the rest of us Flash,"

Diana interrupts before Barry can snap back at Bruce, "with spoken language you 'can' chose to not speak, whereas body language is constant. I can understand it in combat somewhat but it takes effort. But we are interrupting, apologies J'onn, please go on."

"There is not much more for me to add," he says as he relaxes his mind letting the images fade, "Only that it is clear to me that she has been through a great deal, even more than maybe any of us can understand. This must be taken into account when we pass judgment on her."

"So I believe Doctor Fate was the next to assess Cassandra." Diana looks over at the parasite, she misses her old friend, Zatara, but she respects his choice to allow Fate to use his body and understands the need for the Lord of Order.

"Yes. I was tasked with assessing her will. to this end, I invoked dreams to probe her subconscious with the goal of breaking down any blocks in the recesses of her mind.

"The dream I invoked was a scenario that encourages her mind to decide to kill. in other words what would make her willing to kill."

He turns to J'onn, "Martian, if you would not mind sharing the vision with the rest of the league."

"Of course."

Diana finds her mind slipping into darkness. when she awakes it is on a gloomy rooftop in what she recognizes as Gotham. she hears a voice from behind her but strangely can't understand the words, it's as though they slip past her mind without forming. she turns and sees batman watching her. He beckons for her to follow and leaps away, she follows on light feet.
She then finds herself in what appears to be a run-down amusement park. She follows Batman into the shrubbery just to the side of the path. Waiting for them are three people all watching the main tent; The first is a girl in some kind of blue armor, matching the shade of her hair; they smile with joy when they see her approaching, the next another girl in purple with fabric pulled up over her face, bright blue eyes glittering from under the hood, and last a boy in red with a black cape, matching his armor who is speaking to the girl in purple fondly.

They greet Batman who directs the boy in red and the girl in purple to follow him, and the girl in blue and her to take up a position near the road. She runs with the blue girl to where they were directed, they share a glance and smile at each other. She feels a warm bubbly feeling in her stomach.

Then there is a deafening explosion!

The two of them spin to look at the big top that is burning, secondary explosions still ripping through the structure. Nothing could survive that.

There is the sound of maniacal laughter behind them. A man with a white face walks towards them and says something that has the girl in blue armor go for her gun, but in the moment she looks down for the grip the crazy man fires.

She can't move. She wants to dive in the way. to block the shot. but she can't. She watches as the other girl jerks like a puppet with its strings cut. There is one last moment when their eyes meet terror and pain plane in her eyes before she drops to the floor.

She can't feel anything.

Just the cold white agony.

The man says something she can't understand. She can barely even hear it. She senses more than sees him raise the gun again, she moves so fast the bullet misses.

In a beat of her racing heart, she makes it to him and grabs his arm away from her. She pulls him towards her and slams her other elbow into his down-pointed nose with a crunch. She yanks him back again slipping her arm under his sharp chin and a hand behind his skull then flips him over her shoulder. Just before he hits the ground she reverses the motion. in a horrifying crunch, she
feels his neck shatter.

Then Diana wakes up.

the league is quiet, stunned. looking around most of them are openly disturbed, the others with superspeed look the worst, Barry looks decidedly green, and many others are looking at their hand where moments ago they felt bones break. Diana knows exactly what the others are feeling because she is feeling it too, the disgust, pain, and horror only made worse by the knowledge that she wouldn't have done anything differently.

the noise begins again as Barry vanishes in a flash of lightning, probably to be sick. several of the others make remarks of horror and shock. and the, spell broken, the shouting begins...

"what the hell was that fate!"

Dinah is the one who yelled, to the surprise of precisely no one.

"It was simply what you asked of me."

Diana really wants to punch fate in his shiny gold mask.

"No wonder that girl is hurt so much. with what she knows. and then you go and haunt her dreams with horrors like that!"

"Do you truly believe that was her first bad dream?"

"That doesn't make it better! we should-

"Enough!" Diana interrupts them before fighting breaks out, "Everyone. Take a break, go get some air, we will meet back here in thirty minutes"

the league slowly files out Diana goes with superman leaving batman in front of a monitor, likely checking in on his kids.
Barry runs into them outside, "sorry for ditching I just..."

"it's ok Flash, the day you get used to that kind of thing is a scary day for the rest of us."

he smiles a little at that and Diana is about to go when Barbara wheels up to them.

"is it over? already?"

"no we are just taking a break, after that last... well we all need it. now if you would be so kind I need to make a call,"

Barbara apologises a little sheepishly as Diana steps past her. he answers on the third ring "Hey angel! what's up?"

Chapter End Notes

i'm sorry to any brain people/specialists for my gross distortion of your field, J'onn's model was based of something i heard a while back about how thoughts work in the mind and i kind of ran with it, so don't take it as in any way True it's just a reinterpretation of something i half remembered.

and that is the only way the clown is going to make it into my writing.
Chapter Summary

the tests continue. Cass gets bored, then gets very not bored.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cass was bored.

she was sitting in a field with nothing to see but grass and sky.

before she had been brought here she didn't think there could be that much sky or grass... or sheep.

it had been a night since she had been dropped off here, she doesn't know what will happen next but she wishes she would get to see Blue and Sun again. but she must have done something wrong.

she had done all the practice she could think of including all of the new ones... and hasn't seen any other people all day, they went out that morning and left her with the sheep... maybe this is her life now... punishment for the wrongs she has done... well, it's better than the box...

the sheep stay far away from her so she stares into the sky. she watches the clouds imagining that they take the shape of spires, parapets and balconies. she sees herself walking through it, high in the sky. she lets herself dream that blue is there with her, looking over the world from the tallest tower. they lean together... but a change on the wind catches her attention, drawing her from her daydream.

the sheep are suddenly nervous they shift and paw at the ground, baying at something unseen. she scans the area that is the focus of their distress. There, she spots it among some longer tufts of grass. dogs. well, kind of. there are two of them, they look very sleek and aggressive. But the flicks of their ears betray the fear they are trying to hide.

Cass carefully gets to her feet and walks towards them. her dad had made her fight dogs before to learn, most of the fights were with blades, only once had she fought bare hands. she still had the scars. but she learnt. she pulls off her top and twists it into a rope to bind one of there mouths, the
other she can attack with her legs.

She expects to get bitten at least once, but that just makes her blood sing.

her heart rate picks up as she visualizes the fight to come.

she licks her lips at the sight of pinned back ears.

The fire of battle fills her veins with fire.

Torn between fighting and fleeing.

They pick neither in time.

suddenly she throws herself to the ground as bright red beams of light and heat burns past her at the dog things. the funny white dog that she had seen in the house flies past, literally. the new arrival has no problem driving the other dogs off.

she rises to her feet to watch them flee feeling a mix of disappointment and disgust with herself. she wanted that so much. To feel the blood and pain and fire. This is exactly why they hate her, she is nothing but a monster. She tries hard to swallow down the thrill of their fear and to keep herself from crying, Blue would NEVER want to...

there is a cold hand on her back guiding her back towards the house. Cass can sense another two, one moving unnaturally following the dogs, the other tending to the sheep as she is taken inside and shown to the shower.

"you mean your 'nice quiet recovery period' resulted in a fight with a pair of coyotes!"

Clark mutters something that does nothing to abate Dinah's fury. Batman is seriously considering updating his file. Superman: weaknesses; kryptonite, magic, angry woman...
"and don't you look like that Bruce, you are not much better, I am this close to chewing you out too for sending her out like that into Gotham of all places"

"did you try and tell her not to?"

“what do you think? it's the only reason I'm not chewing you out right now too.”

Zatanna messages Batman interrupting him from the destitution. "The next witness has arrived, but is not a member of the league, as such we must vote to allow them to join the meeting," he says from his position at the head of the table. The vote options flick up on the screens in front of all the leaguers. A few seconds later all the votes were in and batman nods to Zatanna who goes to get their guest.

When she returns she is accompanied by a figure dressed in gold armour, a yellow tabard marked with a black bird, and a long deep red cloak. Zatanna offers them her chair then summons up a new one for herself.

Superman addresses the new figure "first of all, could you please introduce yourself."

"I am Sir Ystin, the last knight of Camelot."

"Camelot, really," Flash sniggers, "with a magic cup and sword?"

Many of the other leaguers look sceptical too, notably though, Batman and Wonder woman don't, for their part Ystin just looks annoyed and Zatanna quickly intercedes on the part of her friend, "around this table there is; an Amazon, Atlantean, magician, and what? four types of alien. What is so strange about Camelot?"

Barry looks a bit embarrassed now, "well Camelot, Arthur, the knights of the round table. It's a myth. Isn't it?"

"So was Atlantis... Until," Arthur raises his hands to his side to indicate himself, "it wasn't."
"I have been alive a long time," Sir Ystin says "long enough to see men turn to legend, then myth, now it's strange to see them become mortal again." She bows her head at Diana and Arthur.

"very true." Diana replies smiling back, "how about you share your assessment of Cassandra."

"Zatanna asked for her to join us when she heard some of the Seven Soldiers and I, were going to be part of The Gentle Man's break." The leaguers know about the Seven Soldiers Of Victory, a group Zatanna joined/founded when she was on a break from the league, who mostly deal with lower scale problems and interdimensional threats. “For those who do not know The Gentle Man fights against The Hordes Of The Gehanna, in a world out of time. Some members of several groups take turns giving him a break from the endless horde. Guardian, Frankenstein, and I took Cassandra on that mission.”

“I'm sorry to interrupt,” Superman interrupts, “but the Seven Soldiers Of Victory number... well seven, so why only three of you go to fight this horde”

“for the same reason you, and many other leaguers haven't; powers don't work there. And so the most important thing is fighting prowess, and between us, we have many lifetimes of experience fighting monsters.”

“very well, please continue.”

"well, I'm sure you have all heard about how skilled a fighter she is, up there with some of the best I have seen? so I am going to skip over that. but there was something I noticed that could be of interest to you. it relates to why she fights. you see there are many reasons why someone would fight, punishment or rewards of various kinds are common, as I'm sure you know, but others are less common or well known.

"while cruelty is often attributed as a motive, I have found that it is rarely the case, mostly they prefer to have power over whoever they are hurting than to be in any kind of a fair fight. I believe there may however be some element of fighting to protect, she did risk her life several times to try and save each of us, even in situations where there wasn't much risk for us. But such is the curse of excellence.

"All that said, I think Cassandra is a less common case still. One I have seen myself only a few times, as it in many ways goes against the most fundamental part of human nature.
"It is my belief that she fights to die."

"you think she is suicidal?" Dinah asks eyebrows raised

"No, not as such. That would imply an attempt to die, it's more along the lines of... a final goal. The most recent people I fought alongside who it can be compared to is the Knights of Saint Lazarus."

Zatanna notes that Batman's eyes narrow for a moment then realization flashes across his face, "Leper Knights?"

"Yes. I fought alongside them early in there existence and... well I won't go into the exact circumstance, but it was clear their main focus was protecting the non-combatants even if they would have all preferred to give their lives to the effort.

“I haven't been told why you wanted to investigate her, only to keep a close eye on her. So if you want my summary; she is an honourable fighter, certainly no liability in combat, I would be honoured to fight with her again.”

Zatanna can see the league is deciding on how much to trust Ystin, given that they find it harder to lie than Wonder Woman does, Zatanna has to resist rolling her eyes. It only takes a few moments for wonder woman to nod and say, “thank you for your assistance. Zatanna, could you please show them out”

the two of them walk out together and as they pass through the door Clark asks, “can anyone corroborate what she said?”

“yes,” “yes,” Dinah and Diana say at the same time. Diana gestures for her to go ahead but Dinah says, “no, no, you should. I was with her last and I have other things to say”

“very well.” Diana spends a moment bringing up a video file, "I asked Batman to see if he could find any recordings of her past combat encounters."

the hologram lights up showing security footage looking down a long hallway. three pairs of patrolling guards, and another at the end of the hall by the double door. suddenly all the guards turn to look at the doors. the two nearest look at each other and move to push it open...
before it moves more than an inch the doors smash open throwing them both back. before they can even blink Katsumi has knocked both of them out and is flying up the corridor.

the next two don't last any longer, not even getting their pistols drawn before she is on them. one has his feet swept from under him and the other gets a knee to the face.

the third group just get their guns on point as Katsumi gets to them. A blade knocks a gun aside as she closes the distance then throws him over her into the guard she had knocked down before, entangling both of them. she doesn't spare the other more than a backhand blow from the hilt of her blade

the last pair hesitate to shoot in fear of hitting their comrades and the shots they do take meet nothing but air. reaching them she throws herself into the air grabbing one between her knees and spins, throwing him to the ground, striking the other with the flat of her blade as she passes. as she lands she rolls out of sight.

"There were quite a few things there that I want to draw your attention to," Diana restarts the recording but this time she comments over the footage directing the leagues attention. "her blades are sixty to sixty-five centimetres long with a tanto point, these give her good reach, much better than her opponents, but we only see her use it...

"There. She knocks a pistol off line. but that is the only time she uses the reach. To those of you who don't know reach is one of the most important features of a weapon, Amazon training puts a great deal of emphasis on it.

"on top of that, watch her movement. she keeps her momentum recklessly high, not slowing to disable her opponents or even really protect herself. I noticed it when we sparred too, she showed a needless level of aggression putting herself in grave danger and seeming not to care about being attacked back.

"This lines up with what Sir Ystin said about danger seeking behaviour and is certainly something we should keep an eye on but I don't believe it is a sign of her being a danger to anyone other than herself. In fact, I would go as far as saying it may be evidence of the abuse, some have suggested as the reason behind her killing."

"Diana," Arthur says, "you mentioned sparring with her? did you discover anything during that?"
Diana takes a moment to think back...

Wonder woman was stood opposite to the girl. Cassandra. And where Diana was faced side on, shield ready, sword held back ready for the battle. Cassandra was stood casually, face on, with her sword and shield held loosely. To most, her posture would look unready, but Diana's trained eyes could tell it was an attempt to disguise her intentions.

The moment Steve blew his whistle Diana ran forward, but Cassandra's feet remained planted. Instead, she swung up her left hand, throwing her shield at Diana who only just brings hers up to counter. It's only on instinct that she brought her leg up as their shields clash of each other, as the action blinds her to what Cassandra does. Its lucky she did however as Cassandra's blade glances of her greaves as she dives past.

Diana swings her sword back as Cassandra spins bringing their swords together in a clash of metal. turning to face Cassandra she punches with her shield faster than most could blink, but Cassandra spins aside again slipping behind the shield and Diana has to drop as Cassandra's sword swipes over her head. Swiping with her shield Diana expects Cassandra to have to take the hit and readies to strike low, but Cassandra surprises her again. She feels her shield get dragged up giving her a moment to chose; lose her shield or her balance. She chooses the former.

Recovering she thrusts as Cassandra lands but her blow is turned aside, and she has to block the lightning-fast counter. Slash after slash fly at her, she counters only for her blows to be knocked aside too. As Diana kicks aside a blow aimed to skim her thigh and swipes for Cassandra's off-hand she hears a loud whistle. They both brake off spinning away from each other.

There is a crash of a shield hitting the ground as Diana looks over at Steve, he indicates his cheek. Diana checks hers but her fingers come away clean. She looks up at Cassandra; who is staring, eyes wide, at the smear of blood on her fingers matching the tiny smear on her cheek.

There is a second clang as Diana walks over to Cassandra, who shuts her eyes tight and clenches her hand. Standing in front of her Diana thinks that she looks a lot smaller than she did just a few seconds ago as their blades clashed. She puts her hand on a Trembling shoulder. Cassandra glances up glistening eyes still wide with fear.

Diana smiles down, "you fought very well."
"She is no Amazon, but even the fact I make such a comparison should say a lot. I can also say with certainty that she is not a killer, she can kill, but it is as unnatural for her to kill as for me to lie.

"when fighting on nothing but instinct she never goes for the kill."

"Shayera what's your take?" superman asks, "you are the only one here who has fought her before her capture."

"she also almost cut my gut out, so I'm biased. But that said it was always something I wondered about. Even days after I woke up I could tell that she was too skilled to have missed so many of the, comparatively, easy opportunities she had.

"that and the number of times doctors told me I was lucky to be alive, that if she shifted her weapons an inch either way she would have cut my spine, Even if she had simply twisted or sliced with her blades, then it is unlikely we would be talking now.

"but even then it didn't feel like any luck was involved, there were simply too many ways it should have ended badly. and now well..." she shrugs a little.

the zeta tube in the belfry whirs and Barbara wheels out. Harper rushes over, a towel draped over her shoulders. some way behind her Cass is sat next to the training mats watching carefully but not anxiously so. Barbara meets her eyes as Harper asks, "well? is there... I mean have they..."

"No. they just went on another break."

Harper bites her lip nervously, league taking breaks, does that mean heated debates or too many... bad things...

Barbara interrupts her thoughts clearly understanding her fear, "don't worry, that they are taking a long time is a good sign, it means they have a lot to discuss, which is better than them coming to a snap judgment."
"I guess so." Harper stands a little awkwardly as Barbara wheels over to a computer panel, then turns back to see Cass looking at her expectantly, "fine let's go again." she sighs looking forward to getting taken down more than she wants to admit.

and she does. after landing on her back three times in quick succession she calls for another break. surely Cass can't be learning anything from this but at least she is enjoying herself...

"your footwork is all wrong."

she hears Barbara call over not even looking up from the computer

"what would you know about footwork! Wait no! sorry, that came out wrong."

"you know I was the original batgirl right?"

"dude really! you have to have some amazing stories," Barbara glares at her, "come on I need a break from getting my ass kicked and your code is compiling, so you got nothing else to do."

Barbara looks back at her screen that shows it is nowhere near done. Harper just about hears her mutter, "I could find something."

"yeah like telling us stories about your badass exploits!"

she sighs but smiles, "fine..."

Chapter End Notes

i had to research quite a bit into fighting of dogs to get my references. lets just say, do not recommend.

also knights of lazarus, they are interesting. batman was of course thinking about lazarus pits, but from what i can tell the knights patron is the other lazarus in the bible. yh that gets confusing, there are two lazaruss in the bible, the beggar who died and jesus friend who he resurrected, and i heard people disagree over which the knights followed but imho it makes more sense for the order who looked after lepers to be
associated with the beggar as he is more associated with lepers as well as the poor, as well as dogs. but then the other one is also associated with dogs but that may just be because cross confusion... this is why you don't have two characters with the same name.

i'm not exactly a sword nerd but DC calling the swords cass used in jle (i.e. her time as kasumi in the comics) katana makes me sad, those swords are straight so not katanas. tanto is mostly a term in knives from what i can tell so sorry if i used it wrong. edit: Chokutō it the name for japanese straight swords like cass used, but cass's blades differ from the historical examples quite a lot so i'm not going to call them that
Clouds on the Horizon: part 4

Chapter Summary

the final reports are coming in and the league is making its decision

Chapter Notes

i'm going to repeat. sorry if any or all of the leaguers feel ooc
also psych eval by someone who is very much not a shink, so sorry if it's just silly
also you may have noticed i've been testing out different styles, it gets a bit stark in
this chapter so sorry if that gets confusing, i may tweak in future editing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"right so... that would be me."

The league's focus shifts the younger of the green lanterns in the black, white, and green suit. he
looks nervous beneath his large mask. Kyle Rayner, Diana thinks his name is.

"I was set for 'boot camp' so John suggested we just take her with us to that, Kilowog is the trainer
of the green lanterns, he has trained the best-"

"Sorry to interrupt," Superman says, "but surely she would have problems with lantern training,
given that she has no ring, and so can't make constructs."

"Er... this was only the will power training I have no problem making constructs but the guardians
also need to make sure we don't break under pressure," he responds "right... so... Kilowog dropped
us with a couple of other recruits in a volcano-"

Quite a few people interrupted this time shouting out there horror until the other lantern stands for
attention. "please. It is perfectly safe Kilowog was there the entire time to save them, it has been
years since anyone died in training, and that was hostile action- it is an important part of training to
make sure the lanterns can overcome their fear."
"Yeah well..." the first lantern continues, "the volcano test went well enough, Kilowog waited till it nearly erupted but he pulled us out safely so no one was hurt. Then he dropped up in a frozen valley to 'cool off' as he put it. one of the other recruits fell into the river but Cass jumped in before Kilowog could get him out and saved them. Kilowog got them clear and said something about them freezing to death together then she did a thing and kind of started steaming off the water..."

"Tummo. Buddhist monks use it to raise their body temperature. I'm not surprised Cass knows how to." batman says calmly

"...sure... well Kilowog took us off to make camp for the night. somewhere warm as the rest of us can't do that... Ta'mo thing. we had settled in for the night when Kilowog got a call, telling us to go respond to a distress beacon. so he gave us back our rings and we took Cass with us... it was only a minor thing it was perfectly safe and sensible, better than leaving her there anyway..."

"what are you getting at lantern," Diana says to cut off his rambling.

"it was Tetrapterex."

the outroar is instant.

most of the noise came from icon but, much to Diana's shock, also from J'onn. this was added to by many other members asking questions all over each other. next to her Clark had gone pale and Bruce's eyes had narrowed dangerously in a way that shows her that; he doesn't understand and doesn't like it.

Diana stands and says loudly and clearly. "Quiet! everyone return to your seats."

she glares them down as they do so. The lanterns look notably embarrassed where Icon and J'onn look angry, or as much as J'onn does anyway, "Thank you. now lanterns please tell us who is Tetrapterex?"

"Not who. What. and what they are is monsters"

"Icon. please do not interrupt. lanterns?"
"he is right for the most part," it's John Stewart who answers her, "they are a race of creatures who
don't see anything else as sentient. when the corps first found them we thought they may be a hive
mind... err have just one consciousness behind the whole species, that has happened before. but we
later found out they are more like packs of sharks, they just don't care and only see us as food."

"That was only after they almost killed a guardian though!" Icon says. Rocket tries to calm him but
Diana's focus is on the lanterns.

"did they?"

"well yes. a guardian tried to make contact with a group of them, only to be ambushed by the rest of
the pack, he was injured by the poison some of them have, but he is going to make a full recovery
and the lanterns with him all lived too," he adds quickly

Diana does not miss his choice of words, but it is Bruce who speaks next, "what happened when
you found the Tetrapterex attacking the colony?"

"oh right," the new lantern looks a little sheepish with the leagues focus back on him, "well there
where only a small pack there and one had already been killed by the colonists, Cass even managed
to stop one that tried to sneak behind us and we cleared out the rest of the pack."

"you make it sound like you killed them."

"don't feel sorry for them batman, they can look after themselves, they are more than capable of
killing lanterns if they get the chance."

Diana understands Bruce's annoyance but sometimes killing is the only way, especially for things
that aren't people, "so lanterns what happened from there?"

"well with the battle won we all got our badges, and I came back with Cass to drop her off with you
but you have already said her piece so..."

“My turn then?” Dinah asks to general agreement.
"it took me a long time to get her to even engage with me, I found she mostly just sits and watches unless directed to act."

The strange person had been with her for what feels like forever. At first, she thought they were going to spar, as they have the grace and direct control of a fighter, but instead, they sit her down and talk. Almost as bad as Sun, it is a while until they realise that she isn't going to respond, they get up and she is about to follow but is gestured back. she doesn't understand, everything about them marks them as a fighter, they move with good pose and fluidity so why don't they? everyone else has wanted to train her or make her fight for them. Sure, Blue, Red, and Sun don't most of the time, but they aren't fighters like she is, but this one is...

"it took me a while to gain any level of trust, but once I did she was willing to communicate as best as she is able. as J'onn outlined earlier I am sure she does have global aphasia, severe impairment to both producing and understanding language."

She liked drawing. It was a chance to do something different. A break from the killing, or now just fighting, even if she enjoyed some of it, it was nice to getaway. but this time was... weird. people always ignore her when they didn't need to get her to do something. But this time, one was watching her. Even more than that they don't just watch but guide her to draw more on her little scratches out sketches or prompt her with a picture of their own. They remind her of a bird, always watching with sharp eyes and with strong precise movements. not a predatory bird, but a sharp one.

"There are clear signs of abuse, even outside her many scars, her behaviour showed that she is wary around authority figures, she spends most of her time quite clearly anxious trying to keep to herself and not draw attention. She also seems to spend quite a lot of time thinking about Tim Drake, Harper Row, and Stephanie Brown."

Bird was trying to communicate something, ask something? about the drawings she made of Blue, Sun, and Red. she was trying to show how much they mattered to her, how much she wanted to see them again, but Bird kept indicating the photos she was holding, that were also of Blue, Red, and Sun, only lacking the energy. This kept going and she got more and more frustrated, she almost lashes out before looking at Bird in horror.

"she clearly cares about them a lot, it would be advised that they are not kept apart. as for the rest, well I think my position is clear; she needs help, support, and guidance. Not punishment, she has had far too much of that in her life already."

"I do have a question, Dinah. how were you able to communicate with her, I found the task almost
impossible." Diana asks to the agreement of some other members of the league

"Pictures and drawings for the most part. She isn't an amazing artist, neither am I for that matter, but we were mostly able to get the general idea across eventually, with plenty of patience on both our parts. She required repeat reassurance that I was not going to hurt her whenever she got frustrated."

"Would we be able to see any of these pictures?" asks Clark

"No. they fall under Confidentiality."

Batman says. "Dinah you mentioned to me that you went on patrol with her before returning her to the belfry."

Bird had ordered her to get equipped and to be ready. She could already feel her excitement building at the prospect of letting off some steam, the past few hours had dragged, she wasn't used to being so inactive, even when Red was out she spent most of the time training. But Bird had had her drawing and trying to talk.

Bird gets her to join her on her bike as they head out. she tracks there position from her memory of the streets she picked up from swinging over them with Red, Blue, and Sun. They are heading to the warehouses by the docks, though it feels like there are warehouses everywhere and no matter what way you go you can't help but run into another dockyard. They arrive on the outskirts of a complex where she can smell the sea on the wind, and Bird tells her to dismount and then directs her to the rooftops. she gets out her grapple and pulls herself up.

"We had gotten a report of Yakuza moving through Gotham last night, so I told Oracle that I would deal with it and took Cass along to see what she is like in combat for myself. throughout the Yakuza's base, the only way I could tell she was close was the Yakuza being left knocked out everywhere I went. It was much like working with any of the other bats, except there are differences. it is not easy to put into words but think of it as... the bats favour a hit and run style, striking and fading into the shadows, Cass is more... like Diana highlighted; she keeps pushing forward very aggressively, and with her skill, it works, but I am worried what would happen when she meets someone truly dangerous. Someone beyond a 'normal' meta."

She swept up behind a guard and takes them down with quick nerve strikes before moving on to the next patrol. She was tracking Bird who was following her up as they stalk through the warehouse. she drops on the last roaming pair before they can make
a sound, a moment before Bird moves around the corner, they gesture ahead and she nods in agreement. The rest are that way.

She jumps up into the shadowy rafters above while Bird works through the lines of crates approaching their mark. Bird gestures for her to flank them and draw them away from the van that was preparing to leave, she raises her arm in acknowledgement, before flying off ahead as silent as the wind.

She drops down on the far side opposite the van that Bird was sneaking up to. She is still invisible in the deep shadows cast by the lights overhead, but the moment she sees Bird slip into position she presses a device on her belt that instantly shuts off the power to the building. The only light left is the glowing man who is leading the group guarding the van. There is an instant that they panic until one of them spots her. She sees there terror rise quickly, but their arrogance wins out, with the largest yelling at them to attack.

While anyone could tell they had some training they are all lame and inept compared to her. They fall in as many heartbeats. Leaving just her and the leader, he calls out something skin glittering with electricity, all bluster and bravado, behind him Bird is busy getting the children out of the van and to safety. She looks back at him and smirks.

By the time bird gets back he is bound up between metal pillars, all energy spent.

Barbara is watching the cameras near the entrance. Harper is walking up and down outside. she is trying to look inconspicuous, a feat she is failing at spectacularly, even more than normal given how glittery she is today. Dick's fault probably.

She gets a ping that Dinah and Cass are approaching. Dinah guides the bike into a parking space and barely has the chance to dismount before Cass jumps off and runs into a hug with Harper. Barbara gets a sudden surge of protectiveness before she squashes it down, Harper has known Cass almost as long as she has and anyone could tell she cares about her a lot too.

Dinah joins them and leads the other girls inside. The security man at the front desk barely looks up, Barbara had told him that the blue-haired girl hanging around and two others would be coming up. As they enter the elevator she switches to a camera watching them and continues on the work she was doing.
"Hey, Barb! ready to go up?"

"Just waiting on you," she calls back to Dinah who just entered the main control room, Cass and Harper, in tow. Cass darts forward to hug Barbara too but Harper stays back looking shocked.

"your Barbara Gordon! the police commissioner's daughter!"

"that's me!"

"I didn't know you worked for Batman"

"I don't. he works for me."

at that Dinah bursts out laughing and Harper looks stunned and amused, for her part Cass just smiles at the frivolity. That is until they hear someone clear their throat.

"oh hey B! we were just talking about you," she says as batman steps out of one of the other rooms

"are you two ready," is his only reply. when Barbara and Dinah say that they are he turns to Harper and Cass, "you two, stay in the tower until we get back."

"what are you going to do?" Harper asks, "make a decision on her future? Like some gods from your tower in the sky."

"Harper," Dinah responds, "do you think she is a bad person?"

"no of course not!"

"then trust that they will see it too," with that they leave, via zeta tube, to the watchtower.
Dinah walks alongside Batman as they emerge from the zeta tube hours later. Barbara is working at one of the computers, setting everything up in the belfry. Harper and Cass are a little way away, Harper is sat with a towel around her neck and Cass is drinking from a sports bottle. All three look up as they enter.

Barbara and Dinah share a look. Cass watches them both curiously but she doesn't seem worried. Dinah does notice however that Harper's hand drops to her holster at her hip. He is not sure she would pick a fight with them if they brought worse news but he doesn't think he would put it past her either. Dinah glances over at Bruce, even through his cowl she can tell he saw it too.

She has a slight smile as she says, "They have given her a full pass," she goes on to explain that this isn't legally binding, but that that is a problem for later.

Batman adds, talking to Cass specifically, "Until we finish setting up the belfry I am going to ask you to stay working with Red Robin in Gotham. OK?" Cass grins back raising her fist in agreement before Harper pulls her into a hug.

Barbara asks them quietly, "How smooth was that verdict?"

"Eh," Dinah replies, "A few hold outs, but no one is going to complain for now."

"We are sorry to interrupt."

"You had better have good news."

"We do sir, we do."

"Well."

"We found her... spies following other members of the justice league saw her being tested by them... she was wearing a bat."

"God damn it... you found her in Gotham yet."
"we have some rumours, we are working on substantiating them as we speak sir."

Chapter End Notes

Tetrapterex is an oc based off tetraperix, a stage of four winded ancestor of birds, hopefully i will go into more detail later.

Cass's aphasia it a weird topic in this and her early runs she had/has global aphasia. the rest of post crisis she has a whatever the writer felt like at the time. and in n52 she has a kind of non-fluent aphasia where she can repeat and comprehend, and they seem to be treating it really well. so that's nice.
interval 7

Chapter Summary

what Harper was up to while we have been with Cass and the league

Chapter Notes

editing is done. well up to the end of arc 3 anyway so if you want to go back and reread now is a good time, i also dropped in a few new bits at the end of each and completely redid interval 2 so you should check that out. unless you only just started reading in which case: welcome! thank you for making it this far!

also this chapter is the first prompted interval! sort of... based off Vaders_Apprentice's prompt of 'prank war'. i took some liberties so it's closer to Hazing but only because it was getting too long so there will be more prank war action in the next.

anyway i hope you enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harpers week had started normally, except for the fact that Cass was MIA. She talked to Steph but she just said that Cass went on a mission with Red-Robin a couple of days ago. Red-Robin's nest is empty so she heads for the belfry. when she shows up she sees Red-Robin talking to Nightwing, a Luke fox, and a blond guy who she doesn't recognise.

"Hey Red! Any idea where Cass is?"

He looks a little shocked and embarrassed when he turns to face her. "...she's... up in the watchtower."

"What!" harper is horrified Cass was meant to be safe in Gotham. She is just about ready to go pick a fight with the league when Red-Robin interrupts her

"No, wait, it's not like that, it's just that she was injured when we were on a mission and is getting medical attention."

"She is injured and you didn't think to tell us!"
he looks sheepish as he replies, "I was busy, besides the league has a machine that can fix broken bones easy."

"she broke a bone!"

"what he means to say," Nightwing interrupts, "is that he is very sorry, will make sure you can visit her and will do better to keep you informed next time... right."

"Yeah... sorry Harper."

Harper realises the others are watching them and that she was yelling, she feels flustered as she says, "right... ok... I'll go fill in Steph, as you were too busy."

as she leaves Tim turns back to the others, Luke and Jean-paul are trying not to laugh at him, and Dick is giving him a look with his eyebrows raised. Tim sends a pleading look back, asking him got to lecture him just yet.

"so it looks like she is over admiring anyone who wears a bat."

"she still got a bit tongue-tied around Kate."

"yeah but I think that's more a... celeb' crush kind of thing-"

Tim blocks out Jean-paul and Luke's discussion when dick turns to him grinning

"you know they are right, she really is getting to be part of the fam' now, and you know what that means..."

Cullen hears Harper swear very loudly. She has been in a bad mood for a few days but she had been happier since visiting Cass up on the watchtower, i.e. in space! or at least he thought she was happier. he watches as she stomps past throws a damp mass into the laundry pile with another curse then stomps back to her room. He follows cautiously and sees her using a rag to clean up the
inside of her boot. "is everything ok?"

"No. Someone put an egg into my boot, and I'm going to kill whoever did it."

Cullen tries to school his features from amused to horrified, not wanting to get the rag thrown at him, "Wow. do you know who did it."

"Not a clue, my gear is locked away but none of it had been tampered with," with one more curse she throws the rag aside and pulls on the boot looking disgusted, "look I need to go I said I would meet Steph for patrol. Love you."

"Love you too!"

Steph had met up with Harper at Tim's 'nest' to grab their equipment, the kind of stuff they can't leave lying around like bombs and Harper's bigger guns, as well as 'consumables' i.e. drinks, snacks, and special first aid kits. then they went on patrol, the two of them had an area to work at the direction of Oracle.

They stopped a minor mugging about half an hour in. they sat on a nearby building to watch as the cops come to collect the bad guy. the warm glow of street lamps blends with flickering neon lights illuminate them through the haze. the taste of the smog hanging in the air is so normal to them they don't even notice it as they get out a snack bar each, these are small around the size of a stick of gum but have a lot of calories and stimulants to help them stay active all night. Steph glances over at Harper only to see an odd look on her face as she chews on her snack...

That odd look becomes watering eyes and pained expression as she spits out what's left of it, and gestures for a drink. Worry rising, Steph passes hers over, the response is instant. Harper spits out the liquid and throws the bottle down swearing, Steph sniffs the bottle and smells... vodka.

it takes a heartbeat for her to put it together, someone put Tabasco in Harper's snack and switched their drinks for vodka. The second later she jumps off the building heading for the store beneath them. She dashes in and out throwing the money at the startled clerk who barely got a glimpse of eggplant shooting in and out of the shop, not that he paid much attention, late-night shifts be like that.

When Steph gets back the passes a carton of milk to Harper who grabs it desperately like a man in the desert grabs for water. When she has mostly recovered Steph asks her, "have you interacted
with Nightwing recently?"

"sure when I went to ask about Cass, he was there with a couple of others? why?" when realisation shines on Steph's face she gets more insistent, "what is it Spoiler?"

"I think they're hazing you..."

"what? why?"

"I guess you are part of the fam' now!"

"what a dick!"

"you have no idea."

Cass was coming back that morning. She had been at the clinic working the graveyard shift when Steph told her via text. Dr Tompkins gave her the OK to go a little early so she could welcome her back. So there she was, walking up and down in front of the belfry's tower, morning mist hanging in the dawn light, the first morning commuters and dog walkers move along the pavement not far away. she tries to not draw too much attention, a task made harder by her hair doing an imitation of a disco ball.

The day before she had a training session, and so had worked up a sweat. In the middle of her after-workout shower, she noticed something funny as she rubbed in shampoo, specifically gritty specks in her hair...

"so yeah jokes on them I love it," she had told Steph on their way home.

"I'm going to need to bug red on what glitter this is, how come it doesn't come out?"

"not a clue, it's like it's stuck in."
"they are really slipping. They put alcohol in my waffle batter," she says conversationally.

"what?"

"yeah. Almost set my kitchen on fire..."

"what?!"

"twice..."

"really Steph!"

"what I just thought my waffle maker was bust- stop laughing at me it was hell on earth!"

Harper is woken from her reverie by the sound of a bike drawing closer. She feels butterflies in her stomach as Cass and a woman in a leather jacket and fishnets pull up. Cass jumps off into a hug with Harper.

“You will not believe the week I've had,” she says as Cass plays with her hair seeing how glittery it is. The woman who came with Cass introduces herself as Black Canary and suggests they all head inside.

Chapter End Notes

Tabasco and vodka is apparently really bad. don't know i haven't had this misfortune but the internet says so. and we know we can always trust what someone says on the internet :D

edit: forgot to say but i will be editing one arc at a time from now on, so once i have done arc 5 i will edit up to the end of 4 and so on
interval 8

Chapter Summary

prank war part 2: revenge

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Batman hadn't been paying much attention to his eldest son as he stomped around getting ready for the night's patrol. Even when he heard him curse loudly from the equipment locker he didn't look away from his work. It's not until he hears his name called that he looks around.

Dick is standing nearby in his full suit except for mask and boots, "Do you know who put an egg in my boots?"

Dick presents them to Batman who can easily smell the odour of egg coming from them, "just use your spares."

"I would, but they're the same, and my armoured backups in the vault, and the old ones I'm not meant to keep in my room but I do anyway, and even the ones I have hidden on top of your locker so the others don't find them!"

"Your a detective Dick, work it out," Batman is sure who it is already but it's not up to him to fix their problems.

There is a pause as Dick thinks, "Tim. He must think I dobbed him into Dami, I mean who else would it have been... But Dami was a bit harsh on his payback too... It was just silly getting duke involved..."

Batman sighs to himself, way off Dick, "Use my spares, they're the same size."

"But they are so heavy," Dick complains semi-jokingly before heading off to get them.

Batman waits until he hears Dicks bike leave the cave, he has what he needs to go, but pauses for a
moment after standing.

"Cassandra!"

He calls into the seemingly empty cave. Everything is still for a moment. Then a dark figure drops just in front of him. She looks at him, head kinked over to one side, eyes slightly wide. She is an image of innocence, even given that she was sneaking around the cave.

He waits a moment then gesture her down. "I know what you have done. Don't shrug at me, young lady. Just bring it down OK, they will do the rest now. You understand?"

She blinks a few times before breaking into a grin and raising her fist to bump with his.

Of course, Dick would pick the brats side. Even after what 'it' had done. They all knew he was on a date with Steph. He is lucky she thought the video was hot, but it does kind of raise questions as to where a five-year-old (OK like twelve? Whatever) found THAT. But the Red-Robin/Signal 'fanart'... That was just...

And now. Dick is such a dick. Tim hadn't even done anything to deserve it... this time. But now he felt perfectly justified taking payback. He was just lucky Harper was round with Steph, she has a lot of practice making hair dye work.

Tim had managed to persuade Duke to help him 'modify' Dick and the little dick's suits. He was very much looking forward to the demon brats horror on seeing the Robin symbols replaced with a variety of letters. Some Ps some Es some Ts and a few As for good measure.

whereas he was hoping Dick wouldn't notice how much... Lighter his suit was, at least until he was somewhere well lit, with lots of cameras. Let us just say that he left it just opaque enough in just enough places to be decent. Just.

Tims only worry is that it is a bit too subtle.

It doesn't even take to the end of the night for him to be proven wrong.
The double D dDicks revenge was swift and merciless, if a bit on the boring side. Doing the same prank twice is just tasteless, and meant Tim had the antidote for the itching powder on hand. He was just setting up his payback (they want him to go full supervillain, he will show them just how bad he can get) when he gets a call from Bruce.

"hey B. what do you need?"

"Meeting at the manor. six PM."

"OK... what's going on?"

"you'll see. also don't do anything until then."

"anything' is quite a broad statement. do you want to specify a little..."

"Six PM Tim. Don't be late."

the tension in the air was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Hell at this point you could cut it with a spoon. Duke just really wishes Tim hadn't gotten him involved. Sure even before that, he had been hit with a few pranks, but it wasn't too bad, ok chocolate eggs don't make a great omelette but they aren't bad, and OK eating all his chocolate ice cream was... weird. but Damian took it a bit far with the itching powder.

there is a creak as the large doors swing open and Bruce and Alfred enter. Bruce sits at the head of the table with a little sigh and Alfred stands at his right shoulder, "so I hear there has been an incident."

instantly the room erupts, the others all talking over each other, Duke sighs and drops his head to his hands, this is going to be a long day.

"quiet," it takes several seconds for the three boys to stop talking, "I do believe you had all agreed to keep the pranks from getting out of hand."
"But father! Drake started it!" "don't blame this on me demon brat!" "you didn't have to drag me in." "oh don't act like you don't always pick his side." "that's because he is intelligent Drake." "what would you know about that!"

ye all freeze as one when Alfred clears his throat. "speaking over each other is very rude, and I would be disappointed if my cooking was to go to waste, if any of you had to leave early."

that works to shut them all up.

"thank you, Alfred. I am also disappointed that none of you worked out who set this all off," stifled confusion meats this statement, "from the top. motive. do not assume. think."

there are several seconds of silence of them just thinking. Duke honestly doesn't have a clue, then Dick says. "Harper? but there is no way that it could be her, right?"

"don't get ahead of yourself Dick. it's only a motive. now means."

after a few more seconds of silence, then Tim slams his palm on his forehead and mutters. "Cass."

"the assassin," Damian says, Duke can tell that was meant as a question.

"you can't talk," Tim says under his breath before continuing, "she loves Harper, she one hundred per cent would go for revenge, and can easy enough."

"exactly. well done Tim."

"tt," "but how did she find what we lived," Dick and Damian look at Tim.

but it's Bruce who answered. "she followed you. yes, she can do that. the point is, stop taking it out on each other. and don't bother getting payback."
halfway across Gotham Harper looks up from her soldering, then turns to Cass who is laying upside down watching TV, ballet probably. "why does it feel like I should say 'Karma's a bitch'"

Cass looks over the shrugs in response, Harper returns the gesture before returning to her work.

Chapter End Notes

#gayscan'tusechairs [cough cough]

i'm not 100% happy with how this chapter turned out, i may go give it a rewrite when i get to it but it does set up a part three, but i have something else planned for the next one.

that said i'm running a little light on ideas for these, i need 6-7 and have 3 good and 2 meh ideas. like i can probably manage to come up with more but any prompts would be amazing
interval 9

Chapter Summary

Harper got herself injured so Cullen managed to persuade her and Cass to come to anime night

Chapter Notes

this is a few days latter than i would have liked but i was waiting for the show to finish (gen:lock if anyone is wondering. it's really good.) this is set up as a kind of blow by blow/ live blogging style, but you shouldn't have to have watched the show to get what's going on, and i aimed to be mostly spoiler free, but there are going to be a few minor ones.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Why did I agree to this?"

"cos your an idiot and broke your ankle?"

"it's only twisted..."

"can you go out on it... exactly! so, anime night!"

Harper moans, "just what I love about TV ... reading."

"don't be like that. I picked an English one, just for you," Cullen says tapping as something on his computer.

"so just terrible dubbing then, remember the last one."

"it wasn't that bad, and no English as in made in America. it's got mechs, awesome tech, and hot people, everything you could ever want. and you get Cass with you," he gestures to the other girl
who is going through a martial arts routine. "does she ever stop?"

"nope. and you could have got your boyfriend to come, I don't mind that much."

Cullen blushed a little, "he had work."

"awww, poor you," she says hugging him almost crushing him forward onto his laptop.

"get off! it's ready. hey Cass come on over," Cass drops into the middle of the sofa, next to Harper, and Cullen squeezes onto the end. he turns on the TV as the show opens on a shot of new york city in the near future.

...

"dude is that-"

"shhh"

....

"no way they kill their big star on episode one!"

"could just be a cameo..."

"but- ow- OK OK shutting up."

...

"no comment on the mechs?"
"eh, they're cool, pretty utilitarian, but 'lest they're not just people robots."

"what's wrong with people?"

"nothing! just there is no reason to stick with the shape if we could make a better one."

"alright, shh it's starting up again."

...

"there! I said he would be back! no! people robots!"

"shh."

...

as the ending credits play Harper says "so he's not dead? he just ditched them all for like four years, or something? that's kind of a dick move."

"look. damn it, you missed it 'cos you were talking. look at this," Cullen says, he plays back the video showing just a moment when they can see the protagonist had a mask on and wires running up like he is on life support.

"oh, I guess that explains why he was using a hologram. still pissed about people-bots though."

"are we sure they are robots? the bad guys couldn't hack it. maybe it doubles as super life support and he is in it."

"but then what about the other lady pilot she was in the other one. but then that one got impaled- oh your the best Cass!"
Cass had just got back from the kitchen with food she cuddles back between them with it on her lap for them both to take as they need.

"ready to find out then?" Cullen asks and the girls give him a nod to set the next episode going.

...

"ah... I guess that explains why they are human-shaped. irritated comment withdrawn."

...

"cute girls, cute accents, I'm down."

"I said you would enjoy this!"

"oh shh- wait I have to read... err! I don't watch tv to read!"

"you barely watch TV at all."

"yeah, but if I did I wouldn't want to- ow!"

she jumps as Cass nudges both of them hard to shut them up, "sorry Cass," they both chorus together.

...

"damn, dude! cold!"

they watch as the charts show that the spy flatlined. but suddenly Cass gets up and rushes off. Harper says, "I got this," to Cullen before following her into the kitchen.
Cass is stood looking out one of the kitchen windows. Harper approaches slowly, grabbing a glass off the side and filling it before handing it to her.

"hey. you ok?" Cass just shrugs, "yeah silly question... I'm sorry Cass I should have checked to see if it had something bad in it..."

"no. good."

“you don't have to be if your not.”

“no. this.”

"oh yeah, it is. but don't tell Cullen I said that, I would never hear the end of it," Cass smiles at that. "but I just mean, I don't want you to have to watch something that's uncomfortable is all."

"no. this."

"OK, well we can wait a little, if you like."

"no. good."

"no. good."

...

"ohhhh sh-"

"good for her though. moving on."

"sure but still..."
"this got real, fast!"

Cass and Cullen make sounds of agreement, and the latter says, "almost too real given your night job."

"so let's lighten it up," Harper says, "favourite character go."

"Scottish girl is cool,"

"I thought you would go for the Japanese guy-"

"I'm not a weeb!" Harper makes a sound of disagreement, "...that much. anyway, what about you?"

"eh Scottish chick is awesome, but I would not say no the sniper, like wow."

"Christ Harper," Cullen says dropping his face to his hand.

"don't judge me! what about you Cass?" Cass seems to think for a second before shrugging. Harper replies "fair, we haven't seen that much of them yet."

"so with that," Cullen starts the next episode

... 

"awk-ward"

"shh... 'least they are being adults."
"wonder what that's like."

...

"she's such a nerd."

"look who's talking!"

"shh- oh god, she can do splits!"

"and he has a guitar!"

...

"wait. wait. hold up. she's a furry!"

"wow, he's a hot guy!"

"I saw them first."

"one hundred per cent not how this works!"

...

"uh oh."

"bad."

"couldn't agree more Cass!"
"well, that was..."

"you ok Cass?" she nods but is a terrible liar.

"maybe we should give it five," Cullen says making to get up...

but Cass stops him, shaking her head and motioning at the screen "go."

Cullen shrugs, "hey I'm not one to argue."

... 

"training montage!"

"got to feel for her, it's rough feeling like there is someone better at whatever you try to do. especially when you are actually, really good at something."

"guess it can be hard to see sometimes..."

... 

"then look, she is actually, really good."

"she's too smart, her head gets in the way."
"she is being kind of..."

"scared? they did just get him back from the dead."

"I was thinking more 'possessive'"

"I think she is just scared for him, it just means she cares."

"still feels almost patronizing, you know."

...

Harper reaches up stretching her hands over her head, "well looks like the upgrades helped!"

"so it was; sword, sniper, drone, wings, and laser hands? I think heat vision would have been cooler."

"guess they didn't want to copy Superman. and there is the four arms of the bad one."

"I wonder how that works, I mean two hands is hard enough... and why would they need to steal another one if they already have one."

"well, theirs seems a bit janky. only one way to find out..."

...

"wow, she's so angry!"

"wait. wait. it is him... damn."
"language."

"that does not count! and they are saying way worse."

...

"this is some soma e- madness."

"the what?"

"later. later."

...

there is a stunned silence for a few seconds as the end credits start.

"no way they kill of most of the cast. no way."

"don't challenge them. and you said that about the main character as well," Cullen replies.

"and I was right," Harper says, "he was fine. well, not 'fine'. in fact, there are two of them now."

"well let's hope they save at least some of the others."

Harper thinks for a second, "it looked like the colonel was ordering something when the smoke came in, maybe something will come of that."

"yeah no way they will let that go-" he jumps as Cass pokes him, " OK OK starting."
"oh... it's in their network. it can track them through it."

"oh... how can they stop it then, they can't just never go on again."

"not a clue, sci-fi tech magic probably."

"awww! OK, I ship them."

"dude you ship half of them."

"yeah. your point?"

"so that's like private military, on (probably) American soil. what happened?"

"I know you don't have much time to watch the news, but come on."

"Luther or Wayne?"

"my guess. Luther and villain of season two."
"oh yeah, one hundred per cent Luther."

...

"so; awesome, awesome, slender, weeb, and full furry." Harper lists off.

"he's not a weeb. he's Japanese. it doesn't count."

"weeb."

Cullen looks utterly infuriated, and Cass is silently giggling. Harper for her part looks proud of herself.

...

"wait. wait. is that the tech guy?"

"so they did live."

"see, I was right!"

"I never disagreed with you."

...

"ha! she got heat vision too."

"we should tell sups to sue."
"OK, now I ship that too."

"you really do just ship all of it."

"what can I say they are all cute!"

"they really needed to plan this better."

"wouldn't be exciting if they had a plan that actually worked."

"yeah. I know. it's just frustrating."

"well you seem to have enjoyed yourself," Cullen says looking over.

"oh shush."

they are all in a bit of a daze, Cullen says he is going to bed, he's not used to staying up to two AM, but Harper has plenty of stuff to do so she grabs a drink. when she gets back she sees that Cass has changed into her patrol gear.

"going out then?"

"yes. good."
it takes Harper a moment to catch what Cass is referring to, "oh yeah it was. we should do it again sometime."

"yes!"

"you should get going..."

"yes!" Cass grins and waves before jumping out the window. Harper actually finds she is looking forward to it, what is the world coming to.

Chapter End Notes

if you can't tell i really enjoy writing siblings, inspiration was drawn from my and my little sibs interactions

i really like the mechs in gen:lock they look like something that could exist

this is about the limit Cass can talk at at the moment

by the end their favourite characters had changed a little Cullen really like Chase by the end, Cass like Yas, and Harper is split in that she like lots of them and doesn't really have a favourite

soma is a horror game, one of the big things is copying minds.

i 100% get frustrated when characters who should know better rush in without any real kind of plan
Lending A Blind Eye: Part 1

Chapter Summary

with the league off their backs the girls get some well deserved down time, before someone throws another wrench into the works, but then maybe it will turn out to be a blessing in disguise... maybe

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Reports continue to come in from San-Francisco following the apparent alien attack earlier this week. After sporadic skirmishes with the group who identify themselves as the Teen Titans the alien ship was destroyed and crashed into the bay.

“The Teen Titans have taken over the wreckage and seem to be refurbishing it for their own needs. What having this group, that seems to be led by one of the Batman's prodigies, Red Robin, means for the city has yet to be determined. The justice league and chancellor Luther have yet to comment.”

Batman shuts off the report before turning back to the rest of the league, "Catherine has recommended that we decide how we are going to respond before this blows up."

"Do we have to do anything?" Diana asks "it's not like this is the first time there has been another superhero team around, even one unaffiliated with us; Seven Soldiers, Shadow Pact, Birds Of Prey... the list goes on."

"Yes, but it isn't often they include someone so closely associated with the league, and even less so that they are that... public, especially with Luther tightening the noose," John replies.

"We also don't want to get dragged in if they do anything..." Captain Atom says letting his voice trail off leaving it clear what he means.

"But we do have a duty of care," Dinah objects, "if something happens to any of them and we could have stopped it. It is our problem."
"So what I'm hearing," superman says eyebrows drawn together in thought, "is that we want to show them that we are there for them if needed, the rest of the world that we are keeping an eye on them, all while keeping enough distance to disavow us with their actions. Does that sound about right?"

There is a general murmur of agreement from the league, and they settle into hash out the exact wording of their public statement and inform the team of their official stance. After half an hour batman is done with it. he has had to fix enough public statements in his day job, he didn't think he would have to here as well. but at least they are finally done.

"You heading down to the belfry?" Barbara asks him as he approaches the zeta tube.

He nods, "need to redistribute now Tim has moved. can you call the knights and the girls?"

"I think the knights are already there, but the girls might be a problem." he gives her a questioning look. "it's almost noon."

Harper feels something poking her face. in her not quite awake state she knocks it away. only for it to come back. she knocks it away again, moaning. she can hear something that sounds like laughter and the poking is back.

She blearily opens her eyes and sees Cass leaning over her, she mumbles something incoherent and takes her hand, moving it from her face.

"Wake up sleepy head."

It takes several seconds for her to realise what she heard, she thought she was still dreaming for a moment, "what did you say Cass?!"

Cass just smirks at her. then Harper hears the voice again clearly not from Cass this time, "try again!"

Then she sees that Barbara is watching her from her laptop, "God. Barbara? how did you get on my computer?"
"Skype?"

"I don't have Skype."

"You do now!" Barbara says laughter on her voice

"But how? my laptop was off?"

"'Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies'."

"Urrg it's too early," Harper says falling back on to her bed

"It's midday," Harper just swears to herself, "we need you to come to the belfry."

"What happened?" Harper asks

"Nothing yet, we are waiting for you."

"Then you can wait a little longer."

"Oh, what's this folder here?" ... "why an extra junk folder? and weird names? what if i-"

"NO!" Harper dives up and slams the top of the laptop down. she looks over at the bemused looking Cass, "fine let's get going then."

Steph yawns arms wrapped over her head. Barb and Bruce refused to tell her anything until Harper and Cass get there. so she just waits, nursing her coffee to the sound of tapping keys. she really wants to ask how close they are, but also really doesn't want to push Barbara too much.
Steph in on the edge of asking again when Barb preemptively responds, "they're here"

A moment later one of the doors to roof access slides open and Harper and Cass enter. "nice of you to join us..."

"Yeah yeah... where's Red at?"

"Not a clue, they are being cryptic..." Steph responds to Harper's question, then they both look over at Barbara.

She sighs before looking up from her work. "we weren't being cryptic we were being patient, something you could try. I don't like to have to repeat myself and B's not exactly a big talker. And anyway, how do you not know where red robin is?"

"What do you mean by that?" Steph feels a little insulted, Tim and her are dating not literally tied together. but the way Barb and Batman look at each other makes her stomach plummet. "what is it? is he OK?"

It's Batman who responds this time, "from now on Red Robin will be working in San Francisco with a new team he started. the Teen Titans."

"He... that..." obscenities come to mind one after another, each greater and more terrible than the last, but none do anything like justice to her anger.

"Wow, Tim really can be an ass," Harper turns in her chair to look at Cass who is sat on the table, "boys."

For a moment Steph forgets her considerable anger at Tim. Harper knows his name!? they had been working so to make sure none of them tipped her off. but she knew!

"Oh come on," Harper says looking around at the rest of them, "it wasn't that hard to put together. I mean look, everyone knows you and Wayne are tight, of course, he would adopt your little robin

"What! it is pretty obvious if you know what to look for, really, I know Wayne tech when I see it,
and it's not like he doesn't get a lot from you running around. making his billions has got to be easier when the city doesn't have a gang war every five minutes, and you stress testing all his tech can't hurt."

"Have you considered that he may actually care."

"I mean sure he does but he lives up his ivory tower (or glass I guess) it's not like he can see what is really going on, don't get me wrong, better him than Luther, and I know he is 'trying' but I ain't going to kiss his feet."

"OK this is great and all but I need some air before I hit something," Steph says getting up and heading back through the door Harper and Cass came from.

Harper watches her friend go. she was trying to see this from both sides but there really wasn't any way that Tim didn't come out looking bad, even if it had been one hundred per cent spontaneous he still should have told her not let someone else.

"Well that's fantastic," Barbara says. "I guess we wait till she gets back."

"Or just fill us in. I don't think Steph is going to care that much, at least for a while," Harper looks over at Cass, "you OK with that?"

Cass just shrugs still looking after Steph. Harper isn't sure if she really understands what is going on, she has been in a good mood since the league. it's is also clear she wants to follow Steph too but can see as well as Harper, probably better even, that she wants to be alone.

"Fine," batman says in response, "Red Robin hasn't filled us in on the exact level of training you have received. as such we will be testing your skill levels, and assess what kind of training you will need."

"We are going to get to train with you?" Harper was excited by the prospect, she had only gotten to work with Batman a couple of times, she had always worked with Red. but this... this is the big leagues. well not like that 'big', but still, Batman.

"Nope. you will be training with us."
Harper spins in her chair to look at the door where three people just entered. She recognizes Luke fox, and the blond guy who Steph had identified as Azrael, and a woman in a dark tank top with red hair cut back in a buzzcut. It takes her a moment to realize that she must be Batwoman. Batwoman! That's even better!

... 

There is a moment of silence just long enough for Harper to realize she said that out loud.

"Yes, that's why Batman asked us to put you through your paces. and you can call me Kate by the way."

"Oh. OK," Harper's voice is a little higher than normal.

"Barbara has given us a basic rundown of your schedules, but it would be good if we could sit down with you and Stephanie to see if the training times we have plotted out are acceptable."

"Sure thing. I mean... I don't think she will be that long... umm... a thought though, what about Cass," she gestures at her, "I mean she already got tested by the league-"

"But not by me."

Harper doesn't have any kind of response to that so doesn't try.

"You will still have free days when you won't be at school, training or, in your case, working at the clinic," Barbara says, "I want to make it clear that you are free to go on patrol. in fact, we would appreciate if you did. Tim's a workaholic, we are a little rushed catching up on all of the cases he was working on."

"You want me working on cases?" Harper is a little shocked, she had helped Tim with a bit of tech stuff before but that is it.
"If you have a chance to look over some files sure. but really, a lot of what we need is 'boots on the ground' so to speak," Kate replies.

“Cass," Barbara looks directly over at her, "we need you to help too, you are free to go solo now. understand?"

Cass grins in agreement and raises her fist in that way that means she does. Barbara beckons her over to show her some tone signs so they can communicate over coms, but Harper is prevented from listening in when Azrael sits next to her.

He asks her about the free clinic, as he is about to start volunteering there too. Batwoman, Batman, and Luke talked to each other by the computers. Harper is nervous but excited to get some proper training at last.

She likes being free to go solo. she likes being with Blue, Red, and Sun too, of course. but she hadn't been allowed to go off on her own since Red saved her. it had been frustrating sometimes having to hold back so they could keep up with her, and keep an eye on her.

But now, going solo she can let loose. she revels in the chance to push herself as hard as she can. muscles aching, fingers stinging, feeling her pulse throughout her entire body. she sees someone with a gun and doesn't even slow from her dead sprint.

Her mask cam automatically sends a photo to the police even before she throws the first blade. the first disarms, knocking their gun out of their hand. the second disorientated, throwing up a cloud of smoke obscuring the scene. the third? strikes them in a critical point, dazing them.

As she passes overhead she tags them with a grapple and suspends them from a wire shot out to link the buildings. as she pulls out her own grapple and flies away she looks back to see that they are now dangling from the suspended line.

She keeps roaming around the city. stopping crimes. saving people. Helping.

Despite her new freedom, she does miss the others; Sun's continuous chattering in the background, Blue's steadfastness she always feels more stable around, and Red's knowledge always getting them in exactly the places where they can do the most. she gets the feeling he has left, from the way they were acting she thinks it was a shock. she didn't see any sign of them thinking about leaving like she has before, so maybe even they didn't.
It is while pondering this that she notices something strange. the whine of an engine. now this in and of itself is not strange in the city, but the fact that the noise is coming from above her is, and that she can't see where it is coming from. she throws herself high into the air coming to rest on the dark side of a water tower.

From her vantage point, she looks out over the surrounding districts searching for anything unusual. she finally spots movement through the tops of the buildings and rushes to investigate. as she chases closer and closer she gets a better and better idea of what it is. it looks like a white, part bike part plane, and seems to be ridden by someone dressed in white.

She loses sight of them for a moment then hears a [crunch] sound from ahead. slipping into the shadow of a building she watches the figure in white as they look around from their perch on a broken sign. they have a long cape draped over their shoulders, overly-large ears coming off their helmet, and oversized gauntlets.

The figure takes off down the street away from her, and she follows carefully not to give her position away. she watches as the figure jumps from a building to the street below, landing heavy and cracking the ground beneath them. by the way they move and the dirt they kick up as they move they are a lot stronger than they look at first glance, she will have to be careful.

She watches as they look around then go up to one of the doors lining the street leading into a building decorated with white stone, a moment later they kick it in and enter. she tries to track them as they move through the building. for a moment they appear to be searching blindly, but then they shift having picked up a trail to follow. they disappear into a room in the middle of the building and she loses sight of them.

A moment later a child runs out trailing a chain. her instincts scream at her to run in, but her training keeps her patient. she takes a photo of them through the window with her cowl cam, and another as they run through the door. she feels the double beat telling her that they get the message. she is going to shift forward for a better look inside when she sees a burst of flame.

Before she can think her grapple is out and firing across the street. as she feels the pull dragging her forward she sees a new figure running out the other side of the area the first had entered. it is clear even from a momentary sight that they are a bad person, their vitriol, their malice, and their love of it are all clear to her in just a fleeting moment. a monster. a kind she knows. personally.

She changes her launch, twisting and pushing across the angle of the pull. a moment later she is flying directly at the window as the monster appears at it. she sees their surprise a heartbeat before impact.
Violet rips down the weird orb that the children were tied to, smashing it in her hands, and yells for them to go! she struggles to shake off the flashbacks of Gather House as she pushes forward into the flames. her suit is proof to most of the heat but it is still uncomfortable and the clogging smell of smoke fills her nostrils even through the filters. she gets to the door 'Gala' escaped through, it's built like a bank vault.

The time it takes her to rip out the hinges and pull the door aside Violet is sure she must have already gone, but follows anyway. maybe she will find something to track her with.

"What the..."

She can see 'Gala' lying unconscious. standing over her is a figure dress all in black, with a long cape obscuring their body stretching all the way to the floor. they are so short they must be a girl... or a kid... maybe both... probably both... guess that's Gotham for you.

"She's mine!" Violet's voice echoes around the room distorted as it is by the voice her helmet, it's clear the girl understands. yet all she does is shake her head... "Move!"

Again she just shakes her head. Violet needs to deal with that witch, she isn't going to let her hurt more kids, but all her instincts are telling her to be wary. she tenses up for a fight and the other girl does the same but...

"FREEZE! GCPD!" a cop busts in on them pointing his gun at the three of them. Violet knows her armour can stop a small bullet, on the other hand, she does not want to pick a fight with a cop, she doesn't need to be on their s- "oh. Batgirl!"

Oh, great a bat... is the first thing that comes to Violet, now she has turned she can see the symbol on the other girl's chest.

"So that's the woman the kids mentioned?" the cop says looking at Batgirl.

When she doesn't answer Violet steps in, "yes."
"I don't... which are you again?"

"Mother Panic."

"Right... look if Batgirl doesn't have a problem with you, neither do I. She saved enough of us at Blackgate," he then stops checking Gala and looks back at Violet, "wait... one of the kids said something about a woman in white. that you?"

"Yes."

"Then good job- I mean... thanks, we have been looking for those kids for a while now, I don't... well let's just say, thanks for your help. but you should probably get going we are meant to arrest you."

Violet nods and disappears up the building. so Batgirl seems... weird. She disappeared like smoke even before Violet did, but as long as they don't get in her way she ain't going to get in theirs.

Chapter End Notes

Tim isn't as much of an ass as it looks, he it trying but he is only one person but refuses to accept that he is.

mother panic is a fun comic, not as much of a fan of AD and i'm not going to have her be a big part off this fic but it is fun to try and write her given that she swears a lot and i'm trying to not in this, not 'real' swears anyway.
Lending A Blind Eye: Part 2

Chapter Summary

business as usual; training, violence, and attempted murder. you know normal teen stuff

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harper vaults over the barrier then drops to role under the next. clambering to her feet she barely dodges the incoming projectiles. she pushes forward, exhaustion making her muscles burn and her breaths come in short gasps. diving forward through an opening, she misjudges the landing but manages to tuck her head in just in time so as not to face plant. and she tumbles across the finish line before collapsing flat on her back.

It takes her a few minutes to get her bearings. the lights of the holoroom spinning against the dark, and her pulse beating like a drum in her temple. as she catches her breath she sees that Batwoman is standing over her. Harper quickly roles over and pushes herself into a sitting position, "so how'd I do?" she asks breathlessly, only mostly because of the exercise.

Batwoman looks down at her appraisingly, "nowhere near as bad as I feared, you show a lot of promise," Harper feels her heart soar, "but you still have a lot of work to do," and back down it comes.

Harper sighs. "how bad was it..."

"two seconds over par... if you don't include your penalties anyway."

Harper blows hair out of her face, "how does that compare to the others?"

"one point six from Steph, sixteen from there to Luke, and he's almost eight off me, then John-Paul and Cass are a way further on. but don't bother comparing yourself to them, they have done this their whole lives. looking at it, your way out was actually on par, we just need to get your endurance up-"
"oh yay... endurance training."

doctor: "don't worry we won't have you on treadmills. I'm nowhere near that nice," Harper moans and flops back, she knows (or at least hopes) Batwoman is half-joking but still. Batwoman offers Harper a hand and says, "come on soldier we'll save that for later."

Harper takes the offered hand and she pulls her to her feet. They head back through the doors to the main area of the belfry where the others are waiting. Harper greets Cass and Steph while Batwoman exchanges glances with the Luke and John-Paul.

Kate says to the three of them, "you have fifteen. go grab a drink or such. then Cass will be with John-Paul in the training room, put her through her paces see if you can find a weakness; Harper with Luke, do your geek thing; and Steph, with me." Steph is the least excited looking of them as they leave, when the door shuts behind them Kate turns to her companions, "well?"

Luke and John-Paul look at each other then the latter says, "she is angry."

"can you blame her?"

"I never said it was unjustified, just something we need to take into account."

Kate nods, "and you Luke?"

"it might as well be magic for all she cares. It's not that she doesn't use tech, it's just she doesn't seem to care about how it works. that's not even just the illiteracy, it seems she is focused, purely on combat, to the exclusion of everything else."

"not a huge surprise for someone as skilled as her, but I agree it could be something exploited."

She slips under a wild swing and slashes off its arm. There is a moment when the image glitches, before the mud that makes up it's arm slips and falls to the floor. A roar echoes around the room, as the creature lunges forward with its other arm, while the other is reabsorbed back into the mass.
she strikes low severing a leg, throwing off its balance, just as the one she is training with jumps high slashing flaming blades through its head. she can read them easily, they are like her, trained to fight like she was. not exactly, but close enough. fighting with them is easy, especially compared to their opponents. she is sure they are testing her verses, strange creatures. first was a robot, she had faced them before so she had an idea how to fight them, they are not as easy as people but she can manage. this new one is harder, but their movements are simple enough that she can predict them even if it's not as neat or precise as she would like.

working together the two of them slice it into pieces. It tries to pull itself back together but she hits it with a volley of blades that explode in a wave of holographic blasts, scattering the mud into a million tiny pieces that shimmer and disappear.

the person training her had put away their flaming blades. Even without them, they make her think of fire, great ability to be dangerous or protective, reckless or controlled, a healer or a warrior. they are watching her back, trying to assess her, or make a decision. she is ready for any challenge, she has Blue and Sun back, she isn't going to give that up for the world.

Harper and Luke are working in his workshop, dismantling electronics, upgrading systems, and refining their gear. while doing this they talk, about their; schooling, work, and equipment. but more than anything else they talk about Cass.

“aren't you afraid of her? I mean she could kill you,” Luke says

“so could any human. So could a dog. So could a dedicated duck!” she snaps back.

"ok fair. but she is a bit more skilled than most. you wouldn't get much warning."

"She's not crazy, she will give plenty of warning if you pay attention, she's really easy to read like that. besides your buddy, Azrael killed people too."

"that's complicated! he wasn't in control."

"yeah! funny how that works."
"so how's this going to work? we can't use the holo-room so I'm not getting the same treatment as Harper. Cass didn't say much about what you did with her... in fact, she just kind of shrugged, though that's her response to a lot of things... so..."

"Sparring."

"is that it?" Kate replies by simply raising an eyebrow, "OK fine. you want to start or-

Steph barely slips past Kate's strike and moves to counter, but Kate is expecting her. even after only a few moments Kate can tell just how smart a fighter Steph is, she keeps shifting her attacks to try and make Kate slip up, shifting ranges to find a weakness, but Kate can also see her weaknesses. she holds back just enough, pushing Steph to keep throwing herself in but not going all out.

It only takes a few minutes and Steph is already starting to slow down. she doesn't manage to avoid Kate's grapple and gets pinned. Steph struggles for a few moments before going limp and tapping out.

When they get up Steph is clearly out of breath. as they grab their drinks Kate can tell that Steph is disappointed in herself. "you are very talented Stephanie. and driven. but you also fight like a young person."

"And that's a bad thing?"

"Not always, but it can be. it just means you throw yourself at problems holding nothing back. if it goes well this is great you take your opponents down no problem. but if they survive you just wear yourself out."

"So endurance training for me too?"

"No. well yes. but you also need to learn to pace yourself"

"You sound like me to my last boyfriend!"
Steph was hanging out with Cass at her flat. well technically it's Tim's but like hell is he getting it back. normally Harper would be with them too but she was working at the clinic after school, and as Kate was out doing something with the Knights, so they had to wait. so it was just the two of them.

Steph was trying to keep her mind off... recent events. so had been trying to teach Cass some English. T- he had been working on it before, even so, it was slow progress, exacerbated by the fact that Cass was nowhere near as dedicated to this as she is to fighting and that she keeps getting distracted. OK so leaving the TV on probably wasn't the best idea, but still, Steph wanted to keep up to date and without him keeping her informed she found the news helped.

she looks up from the picture she was trying to use to see that Cass is again watching the TV. this time however she seems to have a laser focus staring at the person on the screen. it was a report on some Gotham socialite who had been interviewed in New York a few days before.

"Cass come on." Cass barely glances at her then points at the screen then imitates... spikes? off her head. "what do you mean Cass?"

she points at the screen again and says, "out."

it takes Steph a while to work out what she means, "wait. you think she goes 'out' like us?"

Cass doesn't reply and Steph can't even tell if she understands what she said, but Steph grabs her laptop and looks through his database. she manages to find 'Violet Paige' after a few minutes, and sure enough, there is a picture of her dressed all in white with a spiky eared helmet under one arm.

Steph calls Cass over to show her. Cass quickly gets excited, but then looks back at the TV. it seems like a clip from an interview is being shown, Steph turns up the sound. from what Steph can tell Violet is talking about her Dad's death, something about him getting killed by his friend for protecting her.

she relays it to Cass in simpler terms but Cass only says, "no."

"what do you mean?" Steph asks but Cass just repeats herself, so Steph makes an educated guess, "do you think she is lying, that that didn't happen?"
Cass just shrugs and Steph sighs, "well we need to go anyway, let's pass it on to the others when we get to the Belfry."

Harper is finishing tidying up at the clinic and one hundred per cent not stalling. even so, if she is honest with herself, she is nervous that batwoman will say she isn't good enough, not that it would stop her, but even thinking about not being able to work with Cass and Steph brings an ache to her chest, almost as bad as her worst nightmare, losing Cullen. if she didn't have so many commitments in Gotham, and if not for how he had treated Steph, she would go off and join Red's new team. Harper thinks Steph would still try meeting up with her but Cass... well she is on thin ice anyway, and Harper refuses to get her in more trouble.

she is interrupted by someone calling her name, "excuse me, you're Harper, right?"

she is confused as she turns to see John-Paul, he knows her, "yeah..."

"I'm John-Paul. I moved into Gotham recently and just started working here, Leslie said I should introduce myself around."

oh, right we don't know each other out of masks... it's too early for this, or late. whatever she hasn't slept enough, "oh, cool. it's nice to meet you. I was just finishing up for the day."

"sure thing. I'll be seeing you later then."

"I'm sure we will."

she hears a yell and dives past her opponents, she jumps into the fray putting herself between them and Sun. she tears them apart and they shimmer as they full. in only a few moments they have gained the upper hand, but then she sees more of them clambering up to Blue's vantage point and she races off. striking fast the sweeps them from the walls and lands back to back with blue who is fighting hard too. they sweep the roof and Blue stops to breathe but she sees that Sun is being threatened again and jumps off back into the fray.

"she is good yes, incredible even, but she keeps running around trying to save everyone, even if they don't need it." Luke says tracking her on one of the cameras in the holo-room, "but I guess that's what happens when you are that good, it's hard to see everyone as capable of doing it"
themselves."

"I seem to manage," John-Paul interjects.

"you do. but there is less difference between us than with them, and it took some time for us to get this accustomed to working together." Kate replies, then asks, "and now, what about the others?"

how long are they going to keep this going! Steph charges forward hammering attacks into the holograms scattering them. she knows she has taken quite a few hits and they will probably tell her off for being 'reckless'. she tries to be aware of where Harper is, Cass is just all over the place, a moment ago she was behind Steph covering her back, but now she can see her on the platform made to look like a building with Harper. she is glad that she took Kate advice to heart and paced herself, but they just keep coming.

it's not like they can't fight off these holomooks. they aren't that bad and Kate knows it. so what is she trying to test for? she kicks away three more only to see that she is surrounded. she knows she isn't going to be hurt but Kate is going to be annoyed, it's not like she wouldn't be paying attention in a real fight it's just that this is so boring! she dives in to meet the charge and then Cass is by her side and they take them apart in seconds.

"nice work," she says to Cass who bumps fists with her. only then does she realise that she must have got turned around in the fighting. "where's Harper?"

Cass gestures up and over the building to her left. Steph tells her to lead the way.

She has no idea where Cass and Steph have gotten off to. they had had a good position on top of this 'building' but now Harper was getting overwhelmed. she only realised one of the 'holomooks' as Steph calls them was behind her after it had got a few hits in, she hits him in the face only for three more to appear behind him. she is saved when Steph smashes through them and Cass flips over their heads, landing behind Harper driving back the rest. together they make short work of the rest of them on the roof.

Harper looks off only to see that there are so many more swarming towards them like a tide washing in. she is still panting trying to even breathe, Steph doesn't seem in much better a state, and even Cass looks winded.
she hears Steph call, "that's enough! Call it already!"

Batwoman's voice replies, "this session hasn't ended."

"Spoiler. Override B four three six!" as soon as she says it all the holograms shimmer and fade, the building they are on fades back into a simple platform. the three of them hop off and head back out of the holoroom. "was that really necessary? Tim made this to challenge Batman."

"yes. we needed to see how your forms broke down. because they did. Harper; you were too static, you let yourself get surrounded and overwhelmed, don't give up the initiative so easily."

"I would have been fine if I had any of my equipment."

"you can't always trust that you will, you have to be ready for anything," Luke replies.

Harper rolls her eyes, she has heard that enough times from Red, she is doing just fine Mr robot suit.

"Cass." Batwoman says to the other girl, who looks almost sheepish at the focus, "don't try and do everything, you will just fail. keep focused and trust the others to look after themselves. Understand," Cass shrugs in the way that they have learned means that she does, but doesn't feel like being cooperative.

Steph sighs from her spot up against the wall. "so how bad did I do then?"

"you actually did the best, points-wise."

"what?!" the three of them exchange looks of shock and confusion, "I beat the super ninja?"

"she got more hits than you, but you took less, and we score not taking hits more highly. that said Cass blocked a lot of hits aimed at either of you. You still need to work on your positioning, you overextended a few times and Cass had to bail you out."
"I'll add it to the list..." Steph says with another sigh.

"but tonight," Batwoman says, "you need to rest. I pushed you hard today, and we don't need you getting hurt. you're not benched, I'm just recommending you get some sleep."

Cass was out alone again, even though they had been told to rest, she wasn't tired. She had been told what to avoid in the city. the one who told her made it very clear, more ordering than anything else, but in a way that was so clearly caring more than anyone else. yes Blue, Sun, and Red care about her, and even the master does, certainly more than any before, maybe even her father. but this one... even though they can't run with the rest of them, to her it was almost like having a mo-

There is a yell from a few streets over and she runs to investigate, previous chain of thought all but forgotten.

she grabs onto the ledge over the alleyway filled with refuse, stacked fences, and symbols lining the dirt-encrusted brick walls. below there appears to be a person in a black body bag, like the ones used for... bodies. they are pointing two guns at... white? it's the one in white from a few days ago. not in the suit, instead in a black and white jacket, their hair is short and they have metal in their ears just like blue.

But white isn't afraid.

They are angry.

she just watches from above as the person in the body bag walks closer. talking. it's hard to tell what, the bag hides his body and their voice is hard to make out. the moment they lower their guns White attacks, smashing them down in a single heavy blow. White kicks them down again and again, so she gets out a throwing blade to stop it. but then White spasms and collapse to the ground twitching in pain, the Bag stands back up and points a gun at White.

She drops like a stone towards them, blade flying knocking the gun aside a moment before she strikes. it's all over in a heartbeat. She grabs onto them at speed and throws them down the alley. they land hard then go limp.

she looks back at White as she presses the button to call the police, they look a little shaken but much more, angry. they want to hurt the person in the bag but is wary of her. she pulls the person out and binds them so they can't get away.
White pushes forward. they are directing their anger at her now too. she can't tell what they are saying and thinks that's probably a good thing. they size up with her, but suddenly their eyes go wide and they jerk, collapsing to the ground again. they lash out cracking the ground and spilling blood.

she acts as fast as lightning.

Chapter End Notes

i was trying to keep up show don't tell but i'm not super happy with how i did, may go back and rewrite at some point :/

you may ask why not taking hits is more valued than landing them, and it's a good question. the thing is that heroes are often outnumbered or out matched they can't afford to trade blows, not when there are that many lives on the line.
Lending A Blind Eye: Part 3

Chapter Summary

some loose ends to tidy, and a few more to pull free.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Violet wakes with a start. she is still in the pants and top that she was wearing the night before, but she is in her bed at the hotel. how much did she have to drink? she doesn't feel hungover... at least not yet.

That's when she remembers that that freak in the bag attacked her. she had him but then her implant... he had a gun to her head... the Bat! what had he done! he knows where she lives! the f-wait where is he? Mom!

She dives for the door sprinting down the stairs, heading to the garden. what if he took her? what if he is still- she is- what?!

Her train of thought comes crashing to a halt as she does in the entrance to the garden. past the oversized mushroom trees, through the foliage, and flower beds is the Bat. well not 'The Bat'. but a bat. A bat who is also a teenage girl. The one from the night with Gala by the look of her suit. But she has not even got a mask on, she is just having tea with her mom, brazen as sh-

"There you are Violet, have you come for tea?"

"Mom please..." she implores, Dominic was one thing, but a bat...

"Come, dear, it's nice seeing you be more social, and the night is such a good time for a tea party"

"Sure mom," she directs the next question to the bat, "what do you want?"

In reply she just blinks a few times, then looks over are Violet's mom like she doesn't understand and is looking to be told by her instead. she doesn't say anything, instead, her mom answers, "a
little shadow brought you home, and I invited her for tea.”

Violet sighs again, this is going nowhere. then she feels a rat scurry past her foot, and she spots a few more near the table and round the rose bushes. she can feel the waves of fear coming off Otis as he sidles up behind her, trying to keep her between himself and the bat, "what is a bat doing here?" he mutters, "and why doesn't she have a mask?"

One of the rats scampers towards the bat and she lets it hop onto her arm and scurry up to her shoulder, where she offers it some cake...

“She doesn't wear a mask anymore. if she did, she wouldn't be able to see.”

Violet and Otis are stunned by her mom's statement, for several seconds the only movement is her mom sipping tea, and the bat feeding a rat. then Otis says, "um the doctor said to get you, it's almost time for you to go..."

"Not while there is a bat here," she replies, the bat is watching them, she may act stupid but she knows exactly what they are talking about.

"You must excuse my daughter, she has too much under the skin, and it bites... you would know all about that wouldn't you, my dear," the bat smiles, almost sadly, back, "but that will have to wait for later, the little ones must go to school you see."

The bat smiles again, then stands bowing to Violet's mom with her fist against her palm. she then turns towards Violet and Otis, grins and raises her fist before grappling up the building, vanishing into the shadows above.

Violet swears and Otis replies, "yeah they do that.”

“You know, for an orphan, she has so much family...”

Barbara is at her workstation in the Belfry tracking the family as they run on patrol. Bruce in on east side, probably fraternizing with, sorry, tracking Catwoman. the Knights are looking into rumours of the church of blood trying to sneak back into the city. Tim is still in LA with his new team, it looks like they are trying to find some kind of insect creature running around Hollywood,
she had pinged him, but he had assured her that he was on top of this one. Then there is Dick who is still working a case in Bludhaven, and still insisting that he doesn't do teams any more... despite having already found a group of ex-cons to look after. never change Dick.

Then there is Cass. she is getting so much better, even piecing words together sometimes, at least when she's comfortable. Steph and Harper have been a great help with that, especially since Tim left. she gets why he did, the situation with the league is almost untenable, but he can be such an idiot at times. but right now Cass is hanging out at The Pike hotel of all places, the home base of Violet page, i.e. Mother Panic.

Barbara wants to check up on her, but after Hush's break-in they have had to cut down the suit controls... she knows she shouldn't worry, Cass is incredible but she can't help breathing a sigh of relief when she sees her GPS ping has moved away from the Hotel.

The rest of the night goes smoothly enough, nothing by any of the big names, the closest being Ojo getting picked off by Cass, and the quiet of the early hours gives Barbara a chance to make some progress on the cases Tim left them. as the first light of dawn tints the sky everyone who is out starts heading back to their bases. mostly this means that they are heading to the Belfry, Batwoman's final assessment is today.

She knows Harper and Steph will also be on there way soon enough, Harper was at the clinic tonight and should be heading over, and Steph was taking the chance to sleep. well, at least one of this entire lot is well adjusted. not that she can talk Barbara tells herself, she has been up for three days with only scattered catnaps.

It is Cass who makes it back first around the same time as Harper gets to the base of the tower. Cass drops in through the skylight almost silently and lands like a shadow. she comes over to Barbara and hugs her over the back of her wheelchair, Barbara can smell the smoke, dust, and sweat. a smell unique to Gotham's skyline that makes her nostalgic for the old days...

But she shakes it off, turning back to Cass and says, "I hope you had a good night, but we need a word missy."

"Bad?" Cass sounds concerned, worry etched into her face.

"Not at all Cass, I'm just worried. Mother Panic isn't exactly the best person for you to look up to," Cass kinks her head to the side, clearly showing that she doesn't understand. so Barbara brings up Violet Page's file, showing pictures of Violet both in and out of her suit as well as known associates, including the ex-Arkham inmate Ratcatcher and the shady as hell Dr Varma. when Cass
sees the picture she points up grinning, "No Cass they are dangerous. maybe bad."

"No." god she is more stubborn than Bruce. she turns her chair around to face Cass properly.

"Look, I understand, you feel like kindred spirits, but not everyone is like you, making that kind of conscious choice is incredible but not something you can force on others. understand?" Cass narrows her eyes, Barbara can't quite tell if that means that she doesn't understand, or is rejecting it. she sighs then raises a hand to Cass’s cheek, she can feel the scar under her ear as Cass rubs into the gentle physical contact, "I'm not going to order you to do anything, but I am asking you, please don't go seeking out Violet again, ok."

Cass pouts a little before replying, "k."

There is a noise at the door then Harper enters, "hey guys. Steph or the others here yet?" Barbara can instantly see that something is off, her smile is just a little forced, and she isn't making eye contact with either of them. she wonders how long Harper has been in earshot. And there is no way Cass can't see more than she does. she walks over to Harper and puts a hand on her cheek in imitation of the way Barbara just did to her, "I'm fine Cass just a long day."

You know Barbara doesn't think she has ever heard that said less honestly, and that is saying something.

"No." Cass is getting good at saying that now, and this time Barbara agrees with her.

"Cass..." Harper whines

Barbara had turned back to her station to see where the others are but spins back when she hears what Cass says next.

"Ha-pa."

Harper and Barbara share a stunned glance. "what..."

"Ha-pa." Cass says again more clearly this time. Harper is speechless, so just pulls Cass into a tight
hug. Harper looks away from her, but Barbara can see the tears of joy in her eyes.

“well?”

“They each have glaring weaknesses that could be a dangerous liability in the field.”

Bruce raises his eyebrows slightly but says nothing waiting for Kate to continue.

“However working together they do have potential. Take Cass for example, even not mentioning her combat skills she would be amazing at tracking and identifying someone in a crowd, but give her a written clue and she has nothing. the others are the same in their own ways, and that sets them up perfectly for working as a team.”

"There being more teams may encourage criminals grouping up to face them. We don't need that kind of escalation,” Batman counters, he isn't against it but is interested to hear her answer.

"That brings me to my second point, they aren't ready to face high-grade villains at all yet, not unsupported. don't get me wrong in a fair fight they can hold their weight but..."

"Fair fights aren't common," Kate raises a hand in agreement, "what do you have in mind."

"This... Tim had been working on it and Luke has finished getting it up and running."

Batman nods in agreement, it will fit with something he has been looking for for a while too.

Steph yawns, apparently the night had been quiet except for Cass learning a new word. Obviously, Harper was ecstatic, Cass was still a little embarrassed, and Steph for her part was happy for them both. still, there was the question of where Kate was, she had asked them to be here but it was Barb who was keeping an eye on them while working on cases. Her question is answered when Kate and Bruce enter the room still in full suits, though that's normal for Bruce.

"Good to see you are all here," Kate says, drawing attention to herself. the three of them look over
from where they had been sitting and head over to join Bruce and Kate on the central round table.

"So did we pass then?" she asks.

Kate and Bruce share a glance, "it wasn't a pass or fail test..."

"Yeah. yeah. so you keep saying. but did we pass?"

Kate sighs, and Bruce gestures for her to fill them in, "none of you are fit to be free running solo, as such we will be assigning you joint responsibilities."

"You're telling us that we have to work together?" Harper asks

"That is the gist of it yes."

"We are also looking to assign areas to focus on," Batman says, interrupting their celebrations, "with Oracle keeping us coordinated."

"So where have we been assigned boss man?"

"The suburbs. from Burnside up as far as the 40th, but you shouldn't need to go that far. Most of the traffic stays in the districts nearest to the city."

"OK but that's still a bit of a round trip, and some of us have lives. It would be a bit suspicious if Cullen and me suddenly up and outed to the suburbs."

Batman looks over at Kate and nods. Kate taps at something and brings up a map of the west side of Gotham and Burnside, there are a set of routes not on most maps, Kate explains that there are underground tunnels that they have set up for quick transport. most of these tunnels are in Gotham, but there are a few snaking-out onto the mainland and one leaving off the top of the map. Steph also notices that there appears to be a hub under the Belfry where a lot of the routes connect.
"It was designed for fast transport and connected with the mainland subway, but the project was
cancelled due to a myriad of reasons, but it will allow you access to much of your territory quicker
than any other way."

"OK, but there is still one little problem." Steph says, "the suburbs are, well suburbs; not that many
tower blocks to swing off and in lots of places there aren't any buildings at all, so we can't fly like
we do in the city... unless you're giving us a plane... are you giving us a plane?"

Kate grins and even Batman gives a little half-smile, Steph hadn't really believed Tim when he told
her that he could.

"Not as such." Batman replies, "why don't we show you."

Harper and Cass look just as confused as Steph feels as they are lead to the main elevator and down
all the way to the parking lot. this confusion changes very rapidly to shock and awe as they see...

Three state of the art motorbikes coloured to match the three of them.

"Sir, our agent in Gotham appears to have been taken out, he only managed to send a single
message, telling us that 'she' took him out."

"So she is active?"

"Yessir. with our other sources, we believe her to be going by Batgirl..."

Chapter End Notes

violets mom is really interesting to write, getting the balance between inane and
insightful is a challenge, hopefully one i pulled off. and yeah i couldn't help but throw
in the orphan line

if it wasn't clear enough harper overheard some of the exchange between barb and
cass, and that's why she was upset

ok so the geography for gotham is... bad. we know it's in new jersey, somewhere. just
based of the water (on the east and south) it would have to be on the southern or eastern coasts. my three best guesses are; where atlantic city is, further south around wildwood, or on the other side of cape may in delaware bay. the last makes the most sense, with kane country to the north, burnside and bludhaven to the east, the latter on the atlantic coast, only problem being it requires the map being flipped east-west. so f*** knows.

i wanted to keep going on this chapter but it was getting really... meh. it was just kind of dragging in a really bad way so i cut back. i'll fill out the rest in a... filler. add that with doing one on TT thanks to some prompting (or at least poking) from sasam and i think i only really need one ish more, maybe, depends on how things go. that said if you have any ideas don't hesitate to throw them at me, even if i don't incorporate them i may do them in a future fic i'm planning running parallel to s3 yj.
interval 10

Chapter Summary

Harper and Steph take Cass and Damian to a circus. hilarity ensues. or well something ensure anyway (⚆‿‿‿□°)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three bikers stop atop a hill looking over a valley filled with shining lights and spectacular displays.

"What?" asks the rider of the sleakest black bike looking over at the others.

"Wow, I haven't seen something like this since I was a kid..." says the girl on the bulky blue bike.

The final biker, who rides the deep purple bike, replies, "I think they mostly avoid the city, they don't want to draw the bad kind of attention."

"We should go. show Cass what's up."

"Sounds like a plan! I'll get Dami to come too, he needs to get out more."

"Sure. works for me."

"Just don't take anything he says too seriously, he is always trying to push people's buttons."

"So standard tween insecurity stuff then. come on we still have work to do, and it looks like they are closing up for tonight anyway."

"Tomorrow it is then."
The three bikes glide into parking spots and four people hop off. Damian barely takes the chance to get his helmet off before he is back to complaining about how ridiculous this all is. Harper just rolls her eyes, Steph mentioned about his upbringing and how he takes it out on everyone else, but seriously it must be exhausting being that mean to everyone all the time, and people act like she is crazy for trusting Cass.

Speaking of Cass she is practically bouncing with excitement and Harper has to race to keep up with her as they get their tickets and head into the circus proper. by the time Steph and Damian catch up, they have gotten candy floss for each of them.

They wander around the sideshows for a while. Harper has a go at a duck shooting game, using pellet guns to shoot at pop-up ducks scrolling past, after the first couple of shots she gets a feel for how it performs and has no problem landing the rest of her shots. Damian shows off acing the ring toss in one throw, but Harper notices that his prize (a plastic glowing sword) doesn't end up in his backpack but gets handed to a nearby kid who was looking at it longingly. maybe he does have a heart in there after all.

As they pass a coconut stand the man calls them over, he shows off a grand prize (a giant teddy) that he is offering anyone who can get fifty points in five throws. a feat that doesn't look possible given that there are only four ten-point coconuts. but when they point this out the man shows them another target even further back, behind a screen that he will reveal if someone can get all four tens.

"So no missed shots?" Steph asks

"Exactly! think you're up for the challenge?"

Cass is rolling one of the balls in the palm of her hand, when Harper says her name she looks up and smirks, spinning the ball in the air as Harper passes over a token.

Her first shot ricochets down the centre line knocking down a coconut from the second, third, and fourth rows. everyone is watching stunned and several passersby stop in their tracks dumbfounded by the display. Cass picks up a second ball and sends it spinning down a line to the right, it glances the coconuts in the second and third rows, sticking on line thanks to the balls spin (that if Harper remembers correctly is called the Magnus effect. see she does listen in class) and so it manages to hit the target in the fourth row dead on.
The third shot is no less spectacular, it hits the coconut almost dead on then sails high into the air almost hitting the canopy before falling directly on top of the next target. bouncing into the air again before using the destabilized coconut to spring forward knocking off a coconut in the fourth row too.

Harper and Steph cheer along with quite a few of the crowd onlookers, the guy working just looks on stunned as Cass picks up a fourth ball, but Damian stops her. "She won already. seventeen points on all three shots, for fifty-one points total."

The man takes a moment to count up the points himself then says, "You are most correct young man. Here you go miss, a prize well earned! You should consider having a word with the big man in the big top, you could put on a wild show!"

Cass is paying zero attention, she is to busy burying her face in the teddy. Harper shakes her shoulders to congratulate her, feeling the muscles shift under her skin. Cass lifts her head and grins before pulling Harper into a hug. Steph joins them and pulls Damian in too, who tuts in annoyance but doesn't try and pull away.

As they leave Harper can hear the vendor offering a new deal for anyone who can pull off the same kind of shots as Cass did, that and the crowd they drew gets a lot of (mostly guys) to give it a go, to show anything a little girl can do they can do better. Harper is sure he will have made back the cost of the teddy in no time.

And on the subject of the teddy, Cass turns and hands it to Harper! Cass looks almost as embarrassed as Harper feels as she takes it and swings it over her back like a giant backpack. Her face is really warm. She can't seem to make eye contact with Cass as she thanks her.

"tt" "OK, love birds! come on, we have more to see!"

Harper decides not to dignify Steph's comment with a response. as they walk Steph and Damian argue about why the latter didn't try showing off at the coconut toss, all the while Harper and Cass desperately avoid each other's gaze. Harper tells herself it's because of how silly the others are being, but even she kinda doubts it.

Steph challenges Damian to a dance-off on the dancing machine. Damian pulls himself up to his not very considerable height and struts over to them with Steph, it would look way more impressive if he was even five foot tall.
To start with Steph gets a considerable lead but Damian keeps it close enough that he isn't knocked out. as they get to the second and third songs they start to draw a crowd, Harper nudges Cass and suggests they go get some food, for when they finish, and Cass is more than happy to comply.

As they are on their way back they hear a cheer from the crowd around Steph and Damian. the two of them rush back. the crowd is starting to disperse as they get in sight of the dance station. they push through and Harper sees Steph sat on the ground breathing heavily with Damian standing nearby looking smug. well even more smug than normal. Harper hands Steph a bottle of water and she takes the top off and pours it all over her face.

"Careful, your top will go see-through."

"Meh. sports bra." Steph replies face less-red than it was.

"tt. not like there is anything to see," Damian says taking the other water from Cass.

Steph looks decidedly murderous but Harper cuts her off, "eh. more than a handful is a waste anyway."

Steph starts coughing on her water, and Damian turns his nose up in disgust, Cass turns to look at Harper who grins back feeling very proud of herself.

After Steph finishes catching her breath they continue through the circus, they have already seen most of the sideshows but they do stop at the Ferris wheel. the cars are only two-seater so Steph and Damian get in the first and Cass and Harper hop on the one following them. it's pretty chill, to be honest, they are used to going much higher and much faster than the wheel, but it is nice. they can get a good view over the whole circus, there is still a small crowd near the red and white coconut stand where Cass showed off, and she can spot the flashing lights of the dance-off, and the big top that they had yet to get to.

It stops being so relaxing as they get most of the way to the top. that's when Harper notices that the couple two carts ahead of them is just that, a couple. she can see them pull each other closer as they reach the peak of the wheel, legs intertwined.

Next Steph and Damian get to the top. Steph pulls him closer then kisses the top of his head and he pushes her away in annoyance.
Then it's Cass and Harper's turn...

You know kissing is fun...

And kissing Cass would probably be fun too...

But Harper doesn't want to push her...

In the end, it's Cass takes the decision out of her hands, while Harper is still silently arguing with herself, and presses her soft, warm lips to Harper's cheek.

Harper wants to say something... anything, but Cass has dropped her head onto Harper's shoulder and shuts her eyes.

Harper's cheek is tingly where Cass's lips pressed almost like electricity running through her skin, but not like actual electricity because that hurts, where this just tingles happily fulling Harper with a warm glow.

When they get out Steph makes some teasy comment, Damian Tuts again saying something about the big show that they are meant to be here to see, but Harper isn't listening.

Nor is she as they walk towards the big top.

Nor is she as the main show begins.

She is still at the top of the Ferris wheel. maybe this time it broke down... or maybe she turned at just the right moment... or maybe...

Chapter End Notes

i basically don't read anything with Damian in it, so i got his characterisation from the DCOAU. like the obvious references to Justice League vs. Teen Titans.
edit: 50k words achieved!!!
interval 11

Chapter Summary

visitors from a far off land, one off who peques Cass's interest with their special abilities.

Chapter Notes

sorry this took a little longer than i was hoping.

i also realise that the last time i said that it had been like three months rather than just over one...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They had been called back from their hunting early. Cass tries to shake off the feeling that it is somehow her fault. Blue and Sun don't look angry or accusatory, just confused as they ride up the elevator. as the doors open, Sun steps out first calling into the room but stops up short when they see who is there. Blue seems similarly confused about the two people with Bat in the main room. one is dressed like Bat with a long cape and dark gear, but looks more heavily armoured, not that it covers their jaw... or would stop them being thrown... or having their limbs dislocated... the other is dressed lightly in bright colours, a red cap with a green feathers on their orange hair plaited all the way down their back.by the way they move together, the older one taking the lead they are a teacher and student, or maybe parent and child?

There are a few moments of awkwardness as Bat introduces them, then the colourful one steps forward to greet them, she is shocked with how clear they are 'speaking' to her. About how she knows about her and isn't afraid. how she calls herself 'Squire'... that is like student, or disciple. how they are going to be working together to take down a bad guy. she expresses her agreement and they bump fists.

The others look at them like something amazing happened, which it kind of did. she just wishes she could talk like that with everyone. Bat shakes his head a shadow of amusement on his lips, before giving them their orders. the four of them, Blue, Sun, Squire, and herself will be tracking the bad guy from the airport. their job is to run them down and drive them into the trap the older vigilantes will be setting. a classic hunting tactic.

They then spend some time arguing over the details of the plan but Cass isn't really paying care; she does, however, manage to get Squires attention and the two of them talk for some time. she can't remember ever having something like this, just being able to communicate. her Dad could
keep up with her, but he was always so... violent... so guttural, always fight, fight, fight. it really puts such an ache in her chest. she wishes she could communicate with Blue and Sun like this too.

Not long after they head off on their hunt, they go from one site to the next, going from weapon stores to informants to safe houses, staying just a few steps behind. after the fifth Cass is getting irritated, surely they could just hit him now, but Squire tells her that they need to play it smart, that this guy has killed before and won't hesitate to do it again. Cass isn't worried about getting hurt, or even killed, she has seen too much to care. but on the other hand, she knows Blue, Sun, and even Squire are at more risk and she doesn't want to see them get hurt.

Squire then gets Cass to tell her about Blue and Sun. she feels kind of awkward about it but ends up telling Squire bits and pieces. Squire stops her when she mentions what she calls them in her head. they are alone on a rooftop getting ready to drop in on their next target, and Squire asks if she knows if they are called 'Harper' and 'Steph'. Cass takes a moment to reply.

First, she points at herself, "I'm not... you see..." she bites her jaw shut hard, why are words so hard.

But Squire nods in understanding. we all see the world, and each other, differently. and she goes on to try and explain her powers, how she can 'talk' but it's all so alien to Cass that she can't even begin to understand it. they are interrupted by Blue and Sun giving them the go-ahead so they dive from their hiding spot.

Later on, Squire asks her if she can tell the others; for a moment Cass hesitates, she doesn't want them to think she is silly or childish, but she gives Squire a small nod who smiles back. Cass pretends to be focused on their marks moving back and forth below, lit by the glow of the city in the background. but out of the corner of her eye, she watches Blue and Sun for their responses.

Sun laughs out loud with all the energy of her namesake, not in a malicious way at all, she is so full of life and energy! and Blue looks excited or at least interested, and at Squires words she just kind of 'softens'; it's harder to read her face because of her helmet but she is smiling softly at Cass in a way that makes her heart beat faster than it has in forever. she is glad she is wearing her mask, her face is so hot.

She focuses on the street below, more to distract herself than anything else. she is fortunate in that the fancy car they were waiting for has shown, she gets there attention and the four of them drop together. the car flees the scene but not before they hit it with trackers.

They are watching through binoculars at the bad guy pacing back on forth, he looks like some kind of grey-skinned statue with little spiky horns. despite his odd appearance, his terror at ending up
face to face with the two older vigilantes is obvious. he tries to put up a fight but the Bat is way ahead on him.

The Bat looks proud in a way her father never did when they report... maybe... no, you don't get to choose your families... do you?

Chapter End Notes

so knight and squire. more random characters thrown in for almost no reason... yay

seriously though knight and squire was a really good mini series that you should check out if you get the chance. as for squire she has 'language abilities' different writers have interpreted that differently from just being good at languages to full on meta powers.

also quick update my end i've been on a writing course, it's about half way through now, but i'm looking at editing through this fic again, probably after i finish this arc, because there is a lot i want to fix up. i'm being good edit will be done once i finish the fic
yesterday’s enemy: part 1

Chapter Summary

the girls have a mission but what happens when it turns out to be part of something bigger? and is what they say about yesterday's enemy true?

Chapter Notes

what's this 2 updates in a month! i know right! this one went really smoothly

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is a crash. and another. and another!

Steph lands on a car held aloft on a lift, armour taking much of the impact as she rolls off landing lightly on another car on the ground in the middle of the workshop. she swings her staff and gives her best confident smirk, despite the tingle of nerves chewing at her gut.

"All right guys. you know the drill. drop anything even remotely like a weapon. or you get your gangster asses handed to you!"

Harper is positioned on top of the car Steph landed on ‘rifle’ in hand. Cass is on the car behind her in a feral stance, teeth and fists bared. Silence fills the workshop except for the creak of metal and the drip of oil. the car thieves are scattered around the workshop in various states of shock.

That is until one of the biggest guys postures forward, crowbar in hand, "you're kidding right? you think we're afraid of three little backup dancers?"

"Oh little chop shop guy, you have no idea what to be afraid of here. we don't work for the bat, no, he stays out of our way. so I'm going to ask you one last time." she raises her staff threateningly, "put down the junk!"

He reflexively raises his crowbar and Steph strikes him down. "warned you!" she faces down the next two that come at her with clean strikes while hearing the sounds of fighting from behind her and a couple of shots from Harper's gun. "I got three of them. I can help you get the rest-" behind
her is carnage where nearly a dozen guys lay on the floor in various states of unconsciousness. "-aww man Cass you always do this."

"Fft. they are just lucky she took them out before I got my angry face on." Harper replies still up on her perch.

"Did you get any of them?"

"Yeah! the runner." Harper points Steph attention to a guy laying nearer the doors.

"Wrong..." Cass says, she still looks tense, they weren't expecting a fight, car thieves don't have the reason, or courage, to stand up to that kind of beating.

When Steph express this Harper replies, "yet here we find ourselves."

Before they can say anything else there is a screech of tires and a car comes rushing towards them. Cass is away in a heartbeat, hand to hand on a moving vehicle isn't safe at all, even for her, but Steph is better armed to deal with the situation. as Harper takes a couple of covering shots, Steph runs forward.

She jumps on top of the car bonnet, "I really need to learn to think things through," she mutters to herself.

The guy in the passenger seat raises his gun at her and the driver tells him to shoot at her in a rather obscene manner, "careful with the language. seriously."

She dives to the side vaulting around the windscreen to dodge the gunshot that sends shattered glass flying, "oh man, okay, you guys mess with us..." she lands on the back of the car and pulls out one of the new kind of bat-a-rang, "... that means we..." she dives from the back of the moving car throwing the modified blade into the face of the stunned looking gunner, "get to mess you up."

She lands on the ground with a couple of rolls, but her armour takes most of the force. she stands up and dusts herself off as Cass runs up, followed by Harper. She greets them, "got to love the goop-a-rang, you have not lived until you have covered two sketchy dudes in goop."
Cass looks somewhere between disgusted and amused and Harper says, "err."

"I know what I said, OK. Sheesh."

Way up in the watchtower the girls' report comes through to Barbara at her battlestation, "Oracle. the trunk and the entire garage are filled with rocket launchers, RPGs, he whole shebang. they're not car thieves they're gun runners. what the hell is going on here?

"I have an idea," Barbara says more to herself than to Steph, "Girls. head back to base. I have a specific mission for you soon."

She gets a series of affirmatives in response, then she pings Kaldur.

He and M'gann join her less than a minute later, "I have something on the case we were working on."

"You know this is my last day," Kaldur says, "so it is more M'gann's area now."

"Surely you would prefer to 'go out with a bang' Kal. and besides, I don't take over until tomorrow."

Kaldur smiles back at M'gann then asks Barbara, "so what lead was this?"

"It's something the girls in Gotham found. it was the same kind of thing as the others, it's like they are taunting us... and yes I know this is Gotham, but it doesn't have the fingerprints of any of the known players, and even if it did it is well out of the city, far from the normal areas most of them operate."

"So you think it's our new mystery player."

"It is their MO. what's more, it looks like there is a distribution centre not far away. if we can hit that we may be able to get a lead into their operations, see if they have any link with the Light."
"And a chance to bust up their plans."

"And even if it is not, we can't let them keep smuggling high-end munitions," Kaldur says before starting to call up a strike team.

As he does Barbara tells him, "I'll get the girls to work with you on this one, we all know the chance of this being a trap so their knowledge will be a big help."

Kaldur sighs looking over the list of available operatives, "and we are running short on people with stealth training."

“What about 'the evil dad club,’” Steph says jokingly.

“But yours are a master assassin and a supervillain,” Harper says gesturing to Cass and Steph in turn, and she can't keep the bitterness out of her tone as she says, “mine is just a dumb grunt. Not really even evil, just rubbish.”

Cass bundles her with a hug in response “you ha-pa”

“Exactly, you dad was an asshole plain and simple, but you matter,” Steph says joining in the hug. they are back in one of their safe houses waiting for the call from Oracle. It's a cosy little house far out into the suburbs. Clean wallpaper, affordable but new furniture, and a lawn with a white picket fence. to be honest, Harper is more comfortable in the buzz of the city but it works for them.

As they break apart Steph asks, "so anyone else have an idea," Cass looks thoughtful for a moment before shrugging. Harper ponders for a while too, they want something distinct but not something that denotes one of them as more important than any other. they had already rejected; league of batgirl (only one of them is actually batgirl), the network (way too generic), titans east (Steph vetoed for obvious reasons), and the new birds of prey (not their name to take).

Harper thinks she isn't the best person to pick their name, she picked hers because she likes blue and in imitation of robin...

The quite is interrupted by Oracle flicking onto the TV screen, "thanks for agreeing to help girls,
you're going to be a-

"That's it!" Steph interrupts

"What," Barbara sounds as confused as Harper feels.

"The name. Gotham Girls. no, wait even better Gotham Girl Gang!"

Harper thinks about it for a moment. she can't see anything wrong with it, it's fun, unique, and alliteration to boot. Harper makes a noise of approval and Cass laughs, Barbara looks even more confused, "I repeat. what?"

"Oh... as a name for us as a group. you can't just keep calling us 'you lot' all the time," Steph explains

"We were all just calling you 'the girls' and that's probably what we would end up shortening it to anyway."

"Say it just this once at least!" Steph insists.

Barbara sighs as the girls stare at her expectantly, "Gotham Girl Gang, we-"

She is cut off by a cheer from the three of them, and she waits for a moment like she is waiting for them compose themselves, but Harper notices that she is smiling a little as she continues, "we are sending a group of the team on a mission nearby and would appreciate your help."

"Who you sending?" Steph asks...

"And what's the mission?" Harper adds

"The team is looking like six people, lead by Aqualad and Miss Martian. as for mission, they are looking for a particular person of interest operating in that area or information towards them. we don't want to show our cards too soon, and that's where you come in, you will be providing local
knowledge and stealth skills in the hopes that this won't end in a battle and explosions."

"You may have jinxed that now, you know?"

Barbara sighs again, "I know. Kaldur will fill you in more when he gets there, they will be meeting you on the edge of town. Get it done girls."

"Gotham Girls- oh whatever" Steph tries to correct her but Barbara has already ended the call, "you know I've always wondered, do Martians even look like that? I mean they are alien shapeshifters, it would make sense for them to take a human shape so we don't freak out."

Harper can see an obvious floor in that theory though, "Kryptonians look human, don't they? and whatever Icon is, and..."

"OK OK, I get the point, it's not exactly a rock-solid hypothesis," Steph replies pouting a little as they go to get their bikes.

"You should still ask her when we meet them, it can't hurt."

"Oh I can only see that ending well 'hey Miss M I was wondering, do you actually look like something out of a Japanese porno?'" Harper tries and fails to control her laughter as she unplugs her bike. when she calms down she hears Steph ask, "hey Cass what do you think about aliens?"

Harper looks over curiously at Cass who is already astride her bike, helmet resting on the handlebars. she looks thoughtful for a moment before replying, "weird."

"Now that is something I can agree with," Harper says bumping fists with Cass before they all pull on their helmets and speed out of the safe house. as they pick up speed turning at the intersection out of town Harper asks, "Anyone else you hope shows up?"

"I would love to meet Wonder girl."

"You mean so you can rag on your ex together?"
M'gann was talking quietly with Kal by the edge of the quiet tarmac road, the others a little ways away, sitting or standing around on the grassy curb, all waiting for their contacts to join them. Oracle had said they are on their way, and they felt it was better to wait for them than push too far into Gotham county. Batman isn't as strict about the county as he is the city, but they still don't want to make a mess if they can help it.

"Hey," Supergirl calls quietly, "Someone is coming."

"Is it them?" Kal asks walking up to her side where she is looking down the road.

"I... I don't know... maybe..." Kara sound unsure, M'gann can feel the waves of nerves coming off her, it is the first time she has met the girl since the incident a couple of months back. she has been fine on missions since but it might be best if M'gann keeps an eye on her. and the other girl...

Kaldur tells them to get to the cover of the nearby hedgerow. M'gann's thoughts are still on the girl, everyone else calls her batgirl now, but Barbara will always be batgirl to M'gann. it's not like with Dick who gave robin up Barbara was forced to lose it. and while she knows that Barb did give the girl the mantle it still sits wrong with M'gann, just like that new robin.

She passively feels for the new minds as the three bikes zoom almost silently closer. two feel like normal humans but one is weird, still human just odd. she is sure it is them but waits for Kal as the bikes skid to a halt parallel with them.

"Hey y'all, hope you haven't been waiting too long!" one of the girls calls out looking directly at them, before taking off her helmet and flicking out long blond hair, "I'm Spoiler, that's Bluebird and Batgirl," She indicates the others, the first in a blue shirt and leather jacket also takes her helmet off revealing blue and purple hair, the last sat astride the sleakest of the bikes just watches quietly.

"How did you know where we were?" Kal asks

Spoiler grins before answering, "one, we knew you were here somewhere so that helped; two, that
tree keeps hitting something invisible, presumably your bioship; and three, Supergirl's boots are showing. I mean nice boots, but a bit flashy"

Kara looks embarrassed stumbles over apologizing and thanking her, but Spoiler just laughs it off and given that M'gann hadn't noticed that the bioship was so obvious she wasn't in a position to talk.

"And this is why we need your help, do you have anywhere less conspicuous for us to talk?" Kal says smiling and nodding his head at the girls

"Sure, we've got a base near to your target, under the community centre," Bluebird replies, "it is sure to be a good place to set up."

"Show us the way we will follow on in the bioship."

Spoiler tells M'gann to land on the roof, and that there is a 'sneaky way down', her words. then they pull the rest of the team away back to the ship. all the while there is something. something in the back of M'gann's mind. something nearby. something familiar and dangerous. something that she can't quite put her finger on...

Chapter End Notes

ok so a bit of the start of this was drawn from batgirl futures end, which is the best batgirl story to come out in the last... decade give or take. fight me.

with that you may have noticed that i made some tweaks to how i write steph, she was feeling a bit... generic. so i was looking for inspiration, and working through some of the character advice we were given on the writing course i'm on. when i reread batgirl futures end i all just clicked into place, thrown in a dose of some people i know and boom really fun shoutly person. or at least she is for me.

side note; i don't know who came up with the name gotham girl gang but it's really cool so... hey it's not like i own any of this ip so \_(ツ)_/\
yesterday’s enemy: part 2

Chapter Summary

the team and Gotham Girls Gang are set and prepping for the mission. then some talking about powers and languages and the like. and nothing goes wrong. nothing!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cass was watching the people they will be working with. The two leaders are talking with Sun and Blue while looking over a chart of the target building. one of these leaders is tall, with dark skin marked with black markings, kind of like Blue's, but these are thick and black rather than bright and colourful. he also has light, almost white hair, and what looks like gills? not the strangest thing she has ever seen. like the other one for example. she... they... Cass can't tell they are so... malleable, it's like trying to mark water. shapeshifters are so hard to read, they could be about to attack them and she wouldn't be able to tell. she wants to protect Blue and Sun but aggravating them isn't going to help and none of the others act like they think anything bad is going to happen, so she shifts her focus around the group.

There are two boys a little way back, one has ropes of hair pulled back across his head and the very air around him sings with static, like whenever Blue uses her guns. the other is one she has met before a few times, he is dressed in yellow gear and always seems to be 'buzzing', all his movements faster than she can follow.

Across the room are two more, girls this time, one she fought before, the same time as she first met Red. she is a weird one too, she appears... apart from the world, at least physically, emotionally... less so. on the surface she is nervous and unsure, just like she was on that night... but under all that there is a smouldering rage like the midday sun hidden behind clouds. Cass just hopes that neither Blue, Sun, or herself and anywhere nearby when it bursts through. she is talking to the last member of the new arrivals, at first glance she seems less strange, powerful too yes, but in a very natural way that flows with the world, rather than through it. there is something about her though, something about the metal bracelets at her wrists, something deep under her skin, so deep even Cass can't see it. something terrifying. and terrible.

The dark-skinned man calls for their attention. it looks like they have come up with a plan. he motions to Blue then the two other boys then points at something on the map. from what Cass can tell they are being split off to deal with some other objective. Blue grins at the boys hiding her nerves better than they do.

Next, he gestures to the weird green alien, himself, and then at Cass. she nods in understanding as
he directs them to the main building on the map. Their job is to infiltrate and deal with the targets. Simple enough, and they are clearly the best for this kind of work, skilled and powerful enough to deal with almost any threat, but also sneaky enough to not raise unnecessary commotion.

Lastly, he points to the last three girls and uses his hand to imitate something flying above the map, then strikes down. So they are reserves just in case something goes wrong, and something always goes wrong. But Cass can't keep back a little giggle as Sun joins the other two, all shining brightly.

Everyone looks at her and she bites her lip feeling embarrassed, she catches eyes with Sun and then Blue, both smile encouragingly and the later motions for her to go on. She takes a small breath and points at the three and then up at the sky, "Sun."

Kaldur doesn't understand, what does the sun have to do with anything? But Spoiler and Bluebird seem to as they share a glance then bite back their own laughter.

"I guess we are." Spoiler says turning to Supergirl and Wonder girl, "so how does it sound girlies!"

"I still don't understand." Wonder girl says, "like, I get with supes is solar-powered but what about me? and you for that matter?"

"Beautiful hair?" Spoiler replies flicking hers with a grin, "that and wonderful personalities."

She puts her arm around Wonder girl's shoulders who looks bemused but laughs before saying, "I still don't really get it."

Steph goes on to explain that Cass has names for each of them based on who they are and that she supposes that Wonder Girl and Supergirl fit the bill for the 'Sun' nickname too.

But Kaldur's attention is drawn to Kid flash who says, "crash! we all need team names! how about 'team lightning!'"

"I like it." Bluebird and Static say on top of each other
Then a bouncing Supergirl asks, "and what about the last team?"

“We could just stick to normal code names,” says Kaldur, not that anyone is paying attention any more, except for M’gann who pats him on the arm.

"Sneak!"

"Nice Cass!"

“Well with that settled let us get back to the mission brief,” says Kaldur more forcefully this time, the final little bits of chattering die down as he stares them down one at a time. it takes them through the whole mission plan again making sure they all know their part, this has already been harder and more complicated than he would have liked, but with any luck, this will be the worst of it.

Oh how very wrong he was...

"Come on then suns!" Spoiler says jumping up the rickety stairs three at a time. Kara laughs and flies after her, Cassie rolls her eyes at the others enthusiasm but smiles as she runs after them.

On the rooftop, the door of the bioship opens automatically to let them in as the approach. Spoiler whistles as she enters looking around the hold. Cassie can see why Tim likes her, or at least did, even just a few minutes with her and she can't help but smile. it's not like she had any bad will to her before, she was the one who broke up with Tim before he started dating Spoiler, and now with Tim ditching her she can't help but feel a bit sorry for her.

Cassie follows Spoiler into the flight deck but stops up short when she sees that she has taken the pilot's seat. not only that, Cassie can see that she knows what she is doing, running through a pre-flight check, and as she takes the controls Cassie can feel the bioship responding.

"I didn't know you could fly?" Kara asks coming to stand next to Cassie

"I can't." Spoiler replies matter of factly, but her smile gives her away
"You know what I mean. how did you even learn?"

spoiler grins, "we have a sim, how did you think T-" she cuts herself off before she says his name. "the rest of us got so good?"

Teams report in.* Cassie hears Aqualad's voice say in her head

Just getting airborne now* she broadcasts back, she mostly blanks Bart's report as she turns to Spoiler and says, "just Kal-"

Yeah, I heard, Ms M, linked us in." Spoiler replies before biting her lip and saying over the mind link *hey Ms M, can I ask you something?*

Go ahead spoiler.* M'gann replies

Like, you don't have to answer if you want if it's too personal I'm just being curious and-*

Don't worry spoiler I've probably heard worse, what's your question?"* M'gann interrupts

Well... what's your true form?* there is a silence over the mind link for a few moments, Cassie gets the feeling that M'gann is surprised by the question *sorry. I didn't mean to say something.*

No it's OK... it's just no one has worked out that this form isn't unprompted before. but to answer, something like this...*

An image rises in Cassie's mind, and presumably, everyone else's, it shows a set of creatures that look... well like deranged bats, with long bony limbs, sticky-out muscles and bony hips. their colour ranges from white, through to dark green and even one which is red.

That's so cool*

Thank you spoiler* M'gann sounds pleasantly surprised, *most people are afraid of us in that
*Well I don't blame them, you're going to kick off a prey response... you look like a predator... and not, like from the movies, and you don't look like the Alien either. you know I'm beginning to think those movies aren't very authentic.*

Before anyone else can reply to that Kaldur cuts in *we are getting to the objective now, keep the mind link mission-related only.*

"How did you know that Martians aren't humanoid? before I mean-" Kara asks, looking up at Spoiler

"I didn't." Spoiler says shrugging, "I just guessed, because she is an alien, what are the odds of all aliens looking the same as us... there are Kryptonians of course... I mean from what I can tell..." she scans Kara up and down, "for all I know you could have... Idon't know a tentacle or something."

Kara looks disturbed for a moment, bringing her hand across her body, self consciously, before replying, "I assure you I do not."

"Good to know..." Spoiler says winking as Kara who rolls her eyes. Cassie isn't sure what to think, on one hand, Spoiler seems to act like the is flirting, but on the other hand, it might just be how she is.

Spoiler guides the bioship into position above the set of buildings then they tell Kaldur that they are ready. while they wait they get Kara to tell them the basics of Kryptonian, just simple things like 'ehrosh bem' for hello or goodbye, 'ikaogh' for act or use, and 'kluv' for thank you.

Cassie looks out the window and spots a fancy looking black car driving down the road towards the buildings team sneak had just entered, "hey spoiler, you see this?"

"Just call me Steph." Sp- Steph says as she joins her looking out the window, "Huh. Supergirl what can you see?"

"Why me?" Kara asks, "and I prefer Kara."
"well, Kara, which of us has x-ray vision again?" Kara makes a cute little head gesture conceding the point. She reports that it looks like there is a strange woman in the car along with the driver. There is a moment then Steph says, "can anyone get through to Ms Martian? I can't seem to get a connection.

Cassie tries too *Ms M? Aqualad? anyone there?* but she receives only silence as a reply, it's funny she can still feel the connection...

"You two want to step outside. just in case." Kara and Cassie nod in agreement but just as she gets to the door Steph calls, "Wonder girl, you never gave us your name..."

"It's Cassie..."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Cassie."

*We are getting to the objective now, keep the mind link mission-related only.* Kaldur says over the mind link and the other teams fall silent. M'gann can still feel them in the distance refocusing on their tasks.

*Nervous?* she projects just to him

*Dick always said it was stupid not to get nervous on missions.*

*That's not what I mean.*

*I am trying not to think about it. I am happy for my king, but taking his mantle is intimidating.* he replies still skirting around the subject

*And taking on leadership of the league...*

*That too.*
She looks at him sadly as he jumps silently over the fence, she follows phasing through it. she can feel that the girl is up ahead disrupting the security cameras. *they wouldn't have asked you if they didn't have complete faith in you.*

*I don't think Batman has faith in anything.*

*He is a very... sceptical person. but that he wants you to lead says a lot about his trust in you even if he doesn't show it*

*Thanks M'gann,* he smiles slightly as they press up against the wall of the main building, *where is... our third.*

She notes his pause but doesn't comment, it seems she isn't the only one who still has misgivings about 'her'. she points up to the roof where she can feel 'her' presence but has to track her down as she drops to the same level as they are on. they hurry to the corner and M'gann looks around and sees that she dropped on two guards who were about to round the corner into them. whoops.

The girl uses her head to gesture to a door into the building and goes to unlock it with a set of lock pick tools like she has seen all of the bats use from time to time, but M'gann stops her and phases through the wall. after checking to see if anyone is watching she opens the door from the inside letting the others in.

Inside is lit with dim orange lights and as decrepit as the outside. M'gann can sense the taint of rot and damp soaking up through the concrete, the air hangs heavy with the taste of cigarette smoke and worse. There are piles of crates stacked up throughout the warehouse area, between which they can make out vans fulling the loading area and men scurrying around moving stuff back and forth.

After hiding the guards that they had knocked out, they stalk through the building looking for a control room, or a central office, somewhere where they can hack in and find out exactly how big this operation is and what they are planning. They get reports from the other teams as they wait for a patrol to pass, and M'gann takes the chance to scan their minds and direct the girl where to look.

*How much can you tell about what she is thinking?*

*Not much. it's hard to understand, she thinks so... differently. it's like she is an alien.* she can almost feel Kaldur raising his eyebrows, *you know what I mean, like a new alien. it was hard enough with uncle J'onn, and I don't want to... force it.*
The two of them move along a gangway towards the girl. as they approach she signs the room and then five. so five people inside then... they join her next to the door and Kaldur signs three... two... one...

He forces open the door and flicks out with his water-bearers as M'gann extends a psychic field numbing their minds. the girl dives in stunning one with a thrown weapon then takes down two more. she turns to take out the last but M'gann beats her to it extending an arm and wrapping around his head so he quickly blacks out.

Kaldur goes to the computers and starts downloading everything he can, time is very much of the essence. but now M'gann can feel... something at the back of her mind... something strange... but also somehow familiar...

She half hears Cassie's voice like a whisperer on the wind. *Wonder girl?* but there is no reply

"Do you think you are being blocked?" Kaldur asks, voice little more than a whisper

"I don't..."

"OK, we better stick to analogue until we get out, we don't know if they can track it," he replies grabbing the memory stick just as a car pulls into the building.

The girl, who had been keeping an eye out, joins them as they make a break for the exit as the car stops and they hear distant voices. It is far too late that M'gann realises what the presence is.

And that this was all a trap after all.

"Your really good at this," Virgil says trying to keep the admiration from his voice, but not really succeeding, "how did you get so good? I mean I've picked up some stuff back in Dakota but...

"Dakota ain't Gotham. the whole electrical grid here is held up by duct tape, string, and wishes. and we have been short on the last of those for years- ok you know what-" she rips out a tangled bundle of wires from the panel, Virgil feels the jumping of the current as it sparks through him and
he redirects it back into the system at the other side. She looks apologetically at him as she says, "sorry should have warned you. Hey KF can you get a set of wires from the safe?"

"this what you're looking for?" Bart replies holding a bundle of wires before Bluebird can even finish

"That's it!" she starts plugging the new wires in and apologizes to Virgil again, "sorry Static, almost done."

Virgil keeps his breath steady just like Black Lightning taught him, to not let the power own him but to own it. He takes a deep breath smelling the filth of the sewer and lets it out each time he feels the power surging through him diminish, until finally, Harper tells him that they are done and he can let the system take the power back. For a few minutes after he clenches and unclenches his hands trying to pull the power back to the imagined centre point, safe and under control.

"All set here let's head up," Bluebird says leading the way back to the surface. As she shakes the dirt off her fingers she asks, "your powers seem really useful, you can actually control where the electricity goes?"

Virgil feels a tingle of embarrassment, she seems; cool, confident, and in control, and she knows way more about electro-physics than he does. "a bit. I mean some things make it harder, like water or metal can short it sometimes. water is kind of like my kryptonite."

"That makes sense, kinda... but do you know how you can make it go where it doesn't want to normally? I mean I have to use lasers."

"I... don't know... I guess it's kind of like an extension of my body, I just will it and it happens..."

So cheaty meta bull'." she jokes shaking her head

Virgil laughs, "I guess so."

"I have cool powers too!" and Bart is back from running ahead

"Uh-huh. you're fast got to be useful." Bluebird replies, kind of like she is feeling somewhat
dismissive of him.

"It's not just super speed." Bart insists, "I'm a speed force conduit." he then goes off on a very long, very fast explanation that is brought to a halt as they have to climb up a ladder to the surface, then up a fire escape to the roof where they can overlook the buildings that team sneak have entered.

Bluebird bites her lip in concentration for a full second when she gets to the top then turns to the boys and asks, "can either of you contact Ms M? I can't seem to get through."

Virgil shrugs and projects *hey Ms Martian, are you there? ... can you hear me?*

"nopenothinghere. I hope nothing has gone wrong. she normally doesn't block them, ever!" Bart says just a hint of worry sneaking into his voice.

"It's probably nothing, they could just be in 'stealth mode,' the bats do it all the time."

"But she normally uses it when stealth is important," Virgil replies.

Bluebird looks thoughtful for a second or so, "well maybe she just needs to focus on something and doesn't need us distracting her, I mean you've met spoiler!" the other two nod in agreement, that probably does make sense. they sit on the roof, in the shadow of a larger building so they can keep an eye out without being spotted. "hey Static, you got any other cool tricks up your sleeves?"

There is something that only a couple of people on the team have seen so far, and he isn't very good... but why not he has been meaning to show it off. he pulls the soft metal disk from inside his jacket, "well there is this."

"Wow. wow. that's really- whoa!" the sarcasm is knocked out of her voice as he pushes electrical power into the disk, turning it solid and making it levitate.

"It takes quite a bit of focus." he explains, "I'm working on being able to ride it but I'm not that good yet."

"That's so crash dude, you can actually fly"
"KF, you said you can 'vibrate' through things right." he confirms that he can and Bluebird smiles, "then I propose a little race."

Harper is watching the two boys through her binoculars, she gave each of them spare headsets and now gives them a countdown, "three. two. one. go!"

She can track them as they race down the street, Static weaving around lamp posts, and Kid Flash vibrating through the cars parked in a line. KF gets ahead whenever there is a space between the cars, and Static closes it again when KF gets stuck going through something bigger.

She gets a weird feeling and suddenly she realises that she can't move. She can barely even breathe. Still looking through her binoculars she sees static tumble off his board and KF hit a car and crumple on the ground. But how. How are they all suddenly frozen...

Chapter End Notes

how did peeps find the foreshadowing, or i guess more tension building in this chapter? it's something i have been working on

i used kryptonian.info for my kryptonian translations so all credits to them for that.
yesterday’s enemy: part 3

Chapter Summary

and everything goes wrong... and then everything goes worse.

Chapter Notes

Sorry, I meant to get this out yesterday but got ruined by a migraine :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

M'gann couldn't move. She can see Kaldur looking at her in a mix of shock and fear, all three of them are completely unable to move. The three of them are lifted off the ground and carried telekinetically through the building. She tries to resist but it's like her mind is locked. Her only option is to see how this plays out and try and turn the tables whenever she gets the opportunity.

They are brought before a woman who has bright red hair in a pixie cut. Not that it is natural for them. For they are not human. The human driver is watching them along with quite a few of the workers there to greet the 'woman'.

One of the men approaches, "they are from the league! They are going to be worth a fortune!"

"Don't be ridiculous." says the woman with red hair looking disgusted, "we have something far more important in store for them."

"Listen here you b-" he doesn't get to finish because she clicks her fingers and all of the humans in the room give out a moan of pain then collapse to the floor. M'gann can feel Kaldur and the girl tense then go blank too to the wave of psionic energy.

*Now that we are alone white. Let us return to our *true* forms.* The woman shifts, limbs extending and twisting, skin changing in colour from Caucasian to... red. M'gann recognizes them, they are a major opponent to Martian equality. Ma'alefa'ak. They continue, *still hiding in that form? Fine I will do it for you.*

M'gann's body throbs with sharp pain she can feel her skin stretching, muscles tearing, and bones
reforming out of her control. She falls to the ground, paired claws digging into the hard ground as her skin pales from green to white. As the pain mostly subsides, she looks up into their red eyes boiling with contempt. But she has control of some of her powers back now. She knows how strong she is. She will beat them.

*Isn't that better? Back in your proper form...*

*H'ronmeer take you!* She tries to close the mind link to free her comrades but she can feel Ma'alefa'ak holding it open, using his power to paralyse them all.

She can feel their maniacal laughter at her attempts, as well as her words, *the gods blessed me with my power! Are you so foolish as to think that they would take your side! Let me show you...* She barely throws up a shield in time to keep the waves of power from crushing her.

They laugh again, *you will learn your place!* She yells out pushing the psionic energy back. The pain still racking her body from the forced transformation, it feels wrong even looking at the claw she is holding out to keep them back. Even so, their battle of wills is close, she may even have the slight edge, after all this is everything for her, whereas it is little to him, just another 'white'. *We are stronger together! We are more not less!*

*We are better when the white know their place! You would have been better off doing as you were meant to. But no you just had to destroy all of it! That's all you whites ever do.*

The world narrows to their battle, the world falling away, every last drop of their psionic power goes to pushing the other back.

She draws on her rage at the mistreatment of her kind,

And her love for all those who care about her.

She can feel their belief in their own importance,
Their anger at losing something they feel is owed to them,

Their fear of losing everything they know.

And the battle burns on...

And on...

Until...

CRASH! CRASH!

Two figures smash through the roof. One behind Ma'alefa'ak and one directly between the fighting Martians!

M'gann pulls back her powers so she doesn't fry her teammate, just trying to shield them from Ma'alefa'ak, but Kara seems completely unaffected by the psionic battle raging around her, whipping her hair and cape around like a gale. In fact, the pure, blind rage coming off her in waves is almost overpowering.

There is a moment where Ma'alefa'ak and Supergirl just stare at each other, then a pillar of fire throws the Martian back. Kara yells in her wordless rage as heat pours forth, M'gann feels the panic rise in her chest as the inferno fills the room.

As her powers wane in the overwhelming heat she feels the mind link collapse and M'gann doesn't know if it's that or something else but Kara stops her attack. Looking up she can see Ma'alefa'ak crumpled in a heap and next to them Cassie just starts to stir when Ma'alefa'ak grabs her as a shield against Kara's attacks.

“No fire alien, not unless you want your 'dear friend'—”

“Ikaogh!”
M'gann doesn’t understand what Cassie yelled but it sounds a bit like Kryptonian-

**VRINGGG!**

Kara's renewed attack startles M'gann and shocks Ma'alefa'ak who is pushed back releasing Cassie, who... it almost looks like she is absorbing the beams of fire into her circling lariat. As the seconds drag on it becomes clear that it is exactly what is happening, and Kara can't seem to break the beam. She pulls back shaking her head back and forth but the power keeps being drawn from her, feeding into Cassie...

Who doesn't look like herself any more. M'gann can barely feel her mind like she is asleep but not dreaming.

It is then that M'gann notices the *metal* ripping through Cassie's skin! barbs price out from her; arms, chest, jaw, knees, hips... anywhere bone gets near the surface. strands of the golden bronze weave from the spines down her arms and legs, across her chest and covering her face in a cruel parody of armour. anywhere not covered in metal gains glistens red like a film of blood to sticking to her skin. There is a flash of red from the slit in her helm like eyes of fire and death blinking open.

Ma'alefa'ak tries to back away but Cassie's lariat binds them like it has a will of its own. M'gann can only look on in horror as Ma'alefa'ak moans in pain and collapses, their very life fading from them... into Cassie who is hovering in the middle of the room. or maybe it is the armour 'possessing' her?

M'gann and Kara share a glance, they can't let Cassie kill them. Kara takes the hand that is holding the lariat, "Cassie. stop!"

In response, she gets backhanded across the room! she crashes through a crate and comes to a stop in a tangled mess of crushed weapons. Kara puts a hand to her face and feels the blood that comes off on her fingers. there is so much! she didn't know she could bleed this much! her pulse is pounding the inside of her skull like a drum. A fiery rage is building in her chest threatening to consume her. but she can't let her friend do something she will regret!

She pushes through the wreckage of her impact and sees that the white Martian (who Kara is pretty sure is M'gann) is now the one bound in Cassie's lasso. Kara can feel the rage overflow all over again, now directed at whatever it is controlling Cassie.
Kara explodes forward slamming into the other girl. there is a shock wave that shakes the whole building. as dust falls around them like snow a gauntlet wraps around Kara's throat, her breaths come in short bursts and her head feels light. but she reaches too. stretching forward she tries to dig her fingers into the slit in the visor, if she can pull it off maybe, just maybe Cassie will get back some control.

CRACK!

The agony is instant, absolute, and overwhelming. it's far worse than kryptonite. worse than anything she has ever felt before. Beyond even her worst, phantom zone fuelled nightmares.

Distantly she can feel herself flying across the room and through a wall before everything fades to black...

Harper coughs a few times and shakes her head trying to clear it. the mind link has gone down and with it, she finds that she can move again. she can see that the boys are still on the ground in the street below so she vaults off the building and rushes over to them.

By the time she gets there both of them are sat up, Kid Flash is holding his jaw like it's broken and he waves Harper off, motioning that it is fixing. Static seems fine and replies that his suit took most of the impact. They have no time to waste.

"KF can you run?"

"Sec..."

"Broken jaw doesn't stop you running. we need to move, you know what no mind link means..." please be safe Cass. she thinks but doesn't say.

She hops onto KF's back, he is a little short for it to be comfortable but it works well enough for them to race over to the buildings. Inside they can hear the cracks, blasts, and yells of a battle in progress. Harper swings her 'rifle' off her back, as Static joins them. they are about to bust the wide vehicle entrance door when one of the walls is smashed outwards!
Supergirl is out like a light, she seems to have taken the impact with the wall but there is blood flowing from a wound on her head, though it doesn't seem to be too bad, for a head injury. through the hole in the wall, she can see that Cass in a crumpled heap along with Kalder, spread over the rest of the messy warehouse between the crates of contraband and thugs, the rest of the team, and what looks like several Martians are too are scattered around, but in the middle of the room is... what can only be described as a floating suit of animated armour! it is a new one for Harper but a bad guy is a bad guy. she barks out some quick orders, "Static high. KF low. stay at range, n' shock 'em down!"

Kid Flash takes off fast, getting behind the suit and circles to build power then throws bolts. Static soars into the rafters and unleashes a storm of powers. Harper pulls Supergirl to the side making sure she is safe, then squeezes some shots into the bad guy too...

It is obscured for a moment by the brightness of all that electricity. Then there is a flash of red light and Harper barely dodges the crack of a whip that smashes a fist-size chunk off the wall. realising that it must be immune to electricity she stows her gun and pulls out a set of throwing charges. looking back out, KF has swapped to hit and run strikes, coming from behind the armour no matter what way it turns. and Static is magnetizing bits of metal and throwing them at it. but their attacks seem to do little more than annoy it.

Harper spots an opening and throws a couple of charges into its face making it reel back, and Kid Flash follows up striking the small of it's back sending it flying. it does a full flip before landing on three points. they have it on the ropes and Harper sees her opening, she throws a 'goop-a-rang' and traps both its legs and hand in the sticky mess.

"Static! trap it!"

A moment later several car doors and a bonnet envelop the suit of armour and crush in imprisoning it in a ball of tangled metal.

Harper's thoughts go quickly to Cass as KF gives out a victory cry, but both are cut off by Static screaming in pain!

A white-hot bolt of lightning rips through him, for a moment Harper thinks (or hopes) it must just be feedback from his powers until he falls from his disk like his strings have been cut!

She is about to run to him when the metal holding the armour explodes! the armour is still active and is in the process of freeing itself from the goo. KF is tripped by a bronze rope whipping across the floor that hammers the wall Harper dives behind to avoid the strike. she can see that the fight
has turned against them, they need a lot more firepower to have a chance. and that's not even
mentioning the whip that seems to be able to move on its own that they have no way to contain.

"KF, get everyone out. I'll cover." she dives from her cover throwing blades at the now freed
armour. it responds by lashing out with its whip again and she narrowly dives behind the other side
of the wall in time. "Spoiler if you're still in the ship get down here we need evac!"

"I can't find Cassie!"

Harper looks around, she isn't sure who Cassie is, but the only blond she can see is Supergirl...
"what about Spoiler?"

"I'm here." Steph says as she walks past them through the hole in the wall, "leave this to me."

Kid Flash and Harper exchange a look of bewilderment.

"Hey, Cassie." KF starts with shock as Steph continues, "the battle is over. we are not here to
fight."

Harper stops him trying running in telling him that they should trust Steph, he nods then motions
that they should make sure the others are OK. she sees Cass still out cold, but her breathing is clear
and so is her pulse, it's almost like she is asleep, she looks so soft, not trapped by her normal
nightmares. Harper pulls her into her arms and carries her to the bioship where KF is checking on
Aqualad and Ms Martian.

All the while they can hear Steph talking Wonder Girl down, using all the de-escalation techniques
that; Batman, Red Robin, and the Knights, taught them. it is made a bit harder by the fact that
Wonder Girl can't, or won't, talk in her current form. Harper mostly tunes the calming words out,
instead, she focuses on applying burn dressings to Static's wounds, that is until she hears Steph yell,
"No wait!"

She doesn't sound in distress but Harper pulls the dressing tight then rushes out on KF's heels.
Steph is staring up at the sky, looking disappointed.

"What happened? Where's Cassie?" Kid Flash says in a rush, and in response, Steph points at a
retreating dot disappearing against the sky. "that armour thing."
"No. She came back, but... she's scared."

KF moans her name again but Harper cuts him off, "come on we need to help the others."

"Yes! M'gann! we can follow her." Harper doesn't catch much of what he says before racing back to the bioship. She and Steph roll their eyes at each other before racing after him.

"And after that?" asks Dinah, looking across the table at the two leaders of the team, one of whom is about to take over the whole league. or at least all league operations on earth.

"Bart woke me up, and I woke up the rest of the team, but I couldn't find Cassie. She must have already been out of range."

"Given the state of some members of the team, we decided that it would be prudent to make our way back to the watchtower. I am sorry we failed to meet all mission parameters."

"You made the right call Kaldur, it's thanks to that that Virgil will make a full recovery. as for the mission, Ma'alefa'ak plans were discovered and stopped, that's as much as anyone could ask for. we have leaguers looking for Cassie so we can find out what happened, we don't want to make any assumptions just yet. is there anything else you want to add?"

"It's not directly about the mission." M'gann begins, "but what about seeing about recruiting the Girls we worked with, I think Barbara called them the 'Gotham Girl Gang'?"

"Yes Barb briefed me already, she says what it may be best to let them get comfortable with their new routine in Gotham first, so maybe give them a couple of weeks. which will also give both of you time to get used to your new positions. now we just have to hope nothing goes drastically wrong in the meantime."

"Don't jinx this for us!" M'gann laughs and even Kaldur cracks a smile.

"Seriously though, are both of you ready?"
"Nervous but prepared." Kaldur replies

"That's good to hear. now I think that's everything?" the others agree with Dinah and they make to leave the meeting room. At the door she touches M'gann's arm, "I noticed you didn't change your skin colour back..."

"Oh yeah... I... I realised that... people like him would always hate me no matter what form I take. no matter how I describe myself. so... so I think it's better just being myself... there is a quote by a human, I don't remember..."

"'Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.'"

"That was certainly an experience," Harper says flopping down onto one of the chairs in her apartment.

"Were the boys that bad?" Steph asks from the kitchen

"No... it's just that it was all rather chaotic."

"Well, 'no plan' and all that."

'No plan survives contact with the enemy' so stay flexible. was something Batwoman had drilled into their brains, "yeah, I just hope most of their missions go better than that."

"From what- I understand explosions are their forte."

"Sounds like fun," Harper looks over at her friend as she drops into one of the other threadbare chairs. she is smiling into her coffee, “you look like you had a good time.”

“Hanging out with hot girls is fun, you should know,” Steph replies with a wink
“You know she can probably hear you right.”

Steph opens her mouth, closes it again, then opens it again to call, “hey Kara if you can hear this call me!”

“Does she even have your number?”

“Doubt it.”

“2305-”


Meanwhile on the other side of the country Kara lowers her phone from where she was copying in the number looking disappointed.

"Report."

"We have identified the areas where she is most active, and identified her closest allies. with your permission, we would start recruiting a force to take her in."

"Do it. spare no expense. but make sure they know she must be taken alive, she is no use dead and if Ra's gets his claws on her, she is worse than dead to me."

Chapter End Notes

it was interesting to try and write a racist character like Ma'alefa'ak, trying to get across that he feels righteous, it's so easy just to make them crazed maniacs but i real life people do think that they are doing the right thing or at least what needs to be done.

and btw Ma'alefa'ak in this is like the one in the Martian manhunter story (v3) rather
than the one from YJ that is meant to be basically martian rabies or post crisis where they are Martian manhunter's brother.

H'ronmeer, the martian god of death, also probably one of the Endless, Death... obviously.

i don't want to say too much about the silent armour here, just that it is a... specialist tool not a general weapon so that's why it's power level is all over the place

the "be who you are..." quote is often misattributed to Dr. Seuss but seems to mostly come from Bernard Baruch

edit: yeah Steph still thinks she's straight...
int 12

Chapter Summary

where did wonder girl go last time? and what has Tim been up to this whole time?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The wind feels good in her hair. It is nice just getting some distance from everything that had just happened. She can still see the fear in their eyes, a half-remembered memory from another world. One of violence, and madness. But she remembers doing all of it.

She focuses on flying on and on, into the rising sun. Across vast oceans. She flies down to skim the tops of the waves, her fingers cutting through the wave's crests, washing away the blood on her skin, mostly hers but some from her friends. She flies through a wave letting the saltwater wash her face, mixing with her tears.

She raises into the sky letting the ocean wind dry her skin. She sees land in the distance and glides in low. landing in a sleepy Portuguese holiday town she washes the salt off her skin, and her hair, in a beachside shower. The only person she sees is a sleepy-looking dog walker who barely even glances her way as she leaps into the air.

She flies further east over the med' as the dawn light transitions into the morning warmth. She soars over Italy staying high above, but by the time she gets to Greece, she feels a pang of hunger. She drops into a small tourist town and buys some food from a small cafe.

The cashier looks starts then gives her a wide smile when Cassie orders in fluent Greek, and brings her order over to her table by the window. she thanks them then looks back over the mountain view, through the morning mist hanging heavy over the foothills she can just make out Mount Olympus in the distance. she is in half a mind to go up there and let out some of her frustrations, but decides against it, she is pretty sure that is somewhere Diana would look for her and she doesn't feel much like being interrogated.

she finishes her food then heads further east driven by something, but she is not sure what. that is until she gets sight of the Himalayas peaking over the horizon and remembers that Kiran is with her parents on a dig, or at least she was last time they spoke, so she heads for where she thinks they should be, skimming high through the frozen peaks. it takes her almost an hour to find the dig site, she looks through the camp quickly blanking the conversation going on around her.
In the end, it's Kiran who finds her, "hey, Cassie it's been too long. what are you doing in India?"

"Hey, Kiran. yeah. I just need someone to vent to I guess..."

she stops in her tracks eyes wide before smiling widely at Cassie, "sorry it's just your Hindi has gotten really good! and your always welcome, let's go get lunch, it's not far. come on?"

Cassie stands frozen at what Kiran had said. "I'm not speaking Hindi... I don't think..."

Kiran laughs, "well it certainly sounds like Hindi! or is this something new?"

"I think so..."

they sit at the worksites cafeteria, but Cassie declines the food, partly because it had only been about an hour or two since she last ate, but also because she feels like she might be sick. She tells Kiran about everything that had happened from her getting the suit, all the way up to the disaster near Gotham. it's nice getting it all off her chest and Kiran doesn't interrupt only prompting her when she gets stuck on her words.

"So what's your plan from here?" Kiran asks.

"I have no idea. I don't what to go back. they will hate me."

Kiran raises her eyebrows clearly showing how sceptical she is of that But doesn't directly comment, "isn't there that new team in America too? The Teen Titans..."

Tim had meant to call the moment he decided to stay in San Francisco, but he had been busy with the whole alien invasion that came to try and take Starfire back. they had fought it off with the help of Raven, then he had been working on getting the ship stable after it landed in the bay. he had to learn Interlac to even begin working on the coding and that meant having to work out the whole coding language too.
Tim had meant to call, but then a new insect meta started running around in the hills. It was a battle trying to find her before the mecs and cops did, but after a running battle through the sewers, they did manage to save her and get her back to their base. They are lucky the mayor is in favour of them after they saved her during the alien attack.

Tim was going to call before they got dragged off to gem world. And after they got back from that they had to race off with their new ally, one of the gem world’s princesses, Amethyst. She was a big help dealing with the rogue robot monster, who turns out to be an alien in a mechanical suit in battle with Psimon and allies, who prove to be a match for the Titans. That is until Psimon hits Raven with a blast that makes her lose control and almost destroy all of them!

Tim was about to call but they barely recover when a couple of new kids show at the Tower, one with powers like Blue Devil but in red, apparently, something happened between them; and the other can make purple psionic bricks. And we are still trying to refurbish here with the help of Minion (the cyborg alien). And that’s not even going into all the villains who have been gunning for us!

"so a busy month then?" Cassie asks smiling

"that's to say the least. I didn't even manage to call Steph, I bet she is mad."

"Yeah, she is..."

"Oh... so you saw her then?" Tim asks, preparing for the worst

"Yeah, we had a mission and... well she is definitely pissed at you..." Tim can see something in her movements, she can't seem to meet his gaze and she is fiddling with her bracelets, in that way she always did. "what is it, Cassie? what happened?" he asks softly, and she tries to reply but she can't and just shakes her head. She looks like she is fighting back tears and Tim doesn't think he has ever seen her like this. "did something go wrong? is everyone OK?"

"I don't know. I think so. I just..."
"Need some distance?"

"I guess so..."

he puts his hand on her shoulder, "you are always welcome here Cassie. no matter what."

"I don't know. I can't..."

"it's OK. you don't have to tell us, I trust you, and all of us will be here if you ever need to."

Cassie half laughs, "that's not quite how trust works."

“Trust isn't knowing everything about each other, it's knowing that you are there for each other when needed.”

“dude, two exs say talking to each other helps, but thanks. Tim.”

"Dude your names 'Tim'?" a voice says as a portal opens next to them. Out step bunker and Starfire. Tim rolls his eyes at Cassie, but she is focused on the dark portal that they came from, hands clenching and unclenching. interesting.

Starfire puts a hand on Bunkers shoulder then asks, "who is this Robin?"

he gestures around introducing each them, then asks, "what did you need?"

it's bunker who replies, "Skitter needs a word, something about sleeping arrangements."

"Sure I'll go talk to her, and I need to make a few calls. Star, you mind giving Wondergirl the tour?"

the two girls head off back into the tower and Tim and Bunker step into the portal. he is already
mentally adding things to the checklist. He is going to need to call quite a few people. Starting with Steph.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry there has been so much not GGGs, the last arc will a bit of a filler and I needed to tidy up some loose end before we get into the home straight.

Yet another cameo, this time to Kiran i.e. solstice. She got gutted worse than anyone else by new 52, post crisis she only got to appear in a few comics mostly just the final arc of Teen Titans and a one off Wondergirl comic, but she was really interesting and had so much potential. and then New 52 happened...

You are under no need to forgive Tim, Steph hasn't, neither has he for that matter, but given time they may be on speaking terms at least.

This will be the only filler this time, only two chapters in the next arc but we are getting into the, if not home straight the last curve at least so things are going to start getting more 'interesting'
Chapter Summary

the Gotham Girl Gang are called to action when the loose cannon fires

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There is so much blood.

It sticks to her hands, under her nails, in her hair.

It's all she can see.

Her vision is tainted by it.

As she looks at them knowing it is all her fault.

It's all she can ever be.

A monster.

After everything they did for her.

She killed them.

She wants to run.

She wants to hide...
She wants to die.

But she struggles, held back by tendrils of guilt, forward towards the red mess on the ginger, gold, and blue. They are still shifting but there is nothing she can do. She has done enough already. She can see the wounds and knows how she did them. The only parts of their skin not covered in their blood is the lines where their tears washed it off.

She wants to hold them.

She wants to save them.

She wants to be there for them.

But she can see the hate, disgust, and revulsion, in their eyes. She knows it is all she deserves. It is all her fault. No matter what she does she is a monster. She only ever makes everything worse for anyone whose life she touches. She is nothing but death.

She wants to hate it.

She wants to deny it.

She wants for there to be anything else.

But in the end, there is no escape for her. Not from this nightmare of her own making. She should never have lied to herself. This is all she could ever have been, and what's worse? She can't even say sorry. That would mean she didn't enjoy the thrill of killing the people she loves. There is nothing else. Not for monsters like her.

She wants nothing but for this nightmare to end.

But the fear, the pain, the horror, just keep on coming, twisting her mind into the darkest reaches of her soul.
There is no end.

No escape.

A few hours earlier...

"So are you ready to kick some bad guy but now then?"

Harper tries to stifle a yawn, "I need to let out some of this frustration, yeah."

Steph looks over at her from where she is getting the bikes in place on the train pods, "I didn't think you would be one to struggle at school... they hitting you hard?"

"It's not that bad." Harper replies, "just essays. way too much 'what is the fancy name for such and such' blah blah don't care, so I really need to let out some frustrations is all." she bangs her knuckles together making it clear what she means.

"Come on then, Cass is all ready wa-"

Steph is cut off by a Klaxon as warning lights flashing orange along the high wall of the underground station. Cass jumps out of the train car looking curious and walks along the old concrete of their secret station as Steph gets out her phone to call Oracle. But a few moments later she lowers the phone shaking her head, then shrugs, showing them that Oracle didn't pick up. Harper suggests they head up to find out what is going on.

Fortunately, the lift is still working, it feels a little out of place the shiny metal and plastic a sharp contrast to the concrete of the abandoned metro station. The ride to the top of the tower is tense but mercifully short. when they enter the control room at the top of the tower, (also known as the bell room for clear reasons) with a wide, open, almost panoramic, view of the city below. they are shocked to see how busy it is, it looks like everyone she knows is here... and a few more besides.

Harper can see Kate and the Knights looking as worried as she has ever seen them, surveying a map spread over the central table. Azrael is gesturing to multiple areas but Luke shakes his head and points something out, Kate interjects saying something else. Past them, Talon is heading out, through the open windows. The light of the city below glittering off the bronze scales of armour on
his arms and highlighting the ornate owl shape on his chest, Harper can't help recalling the old poem about the 'Court of Owls' and how they send 'Talons' out to kill people... must be where he got the inspiration. Hey, it's still more inspired than a bat...

Stood by one of the computers is a woman in a red bodysuit with double silver bands running across her body with more narrow silver lines imitate knee-high boots, while larger plates cover her neck, shoulders, and forearms down to her fingertips. she exchanges a quick word with Oracle before grabbing her glowing staff and rushing through the doorway access to the roof.

The three of them head towards Oracle who is sat at her workstation. Next to her is Catwoman of all people, she is bent over from the waist (something Harper presumes she is doing on purpose), they are talking quietly, but with haste, as they approach. Catwoman points at the screen and Barbara replies with the same urgency. Steph tries to interrupt but Barbara waves her off.

While they wait Harper looks around at who else is there. she realizes that she can't see Batman even in the shadows that he has a nasty habit of skulking in, not that that is much of a surprise. the Knights have all rushed off too, without even stopping to greet them, she can just see the lights of Luke's suit disappearing into the Gotham dusk.

The only two people she recognises left, apart from Barbara and Catwoman, are Nightwing and Damian, checking their equipment over to the side away from the windows. Damian looks about the same as normal, sullen and arrogant, but if Harper isn't mistaken he looks, if not happy, at least at ease working with Nightwing. Who for his part doesn't look like Harper remembers last time they met, then he was all laughter and joking, now he looks laser-focused and maybe even worried.

Harper is really concerned about what the hell is going on... which is only heighten when Steph bumps her arm to get her attention. she is pointing up at one of the screens to the side of Oracle's workstation, it is showing a live news report of Vicki Vale looking out of a helicopter at, what looks like north island. the scene is... well to put it simply, on fire. a word in the subtitles catches her attention and she focuses on trying to read them...

"...police request that everyone stay in their homes for their own safety. Batman and associates have been seen across the city despite requests by the mayor and police commissioner, this may lead to them following through with their threats to tighten legislations around vigilante activities,"

Harper rolls her eyes, no one complains when they save the city from the joker for the umpteenth time.

"Below you can see Batman himself engaged with a villain." the camera zooms in, showing
Batman and some guy fighting in the half-light. They tumble out in a grapple and Harper sees the tally marks covering the other man from head to toe. Zsasz, if Harper remembers correctly he's a black gate one, right... or she hopes at least. "Up until a few hours ago Victor Zsasz was an inmate at Arkham Asylum..."

Only one very short, very explicit word comes to Harper.

"Yeah..." Steph agrees.

Despite what some people think Arkham breakouts aren't actually that common, it's only a few times a year that even one person breaks out. But a mass breakout is something different, not only are the capes and cops spread thin but all the psychos end up competing over who can cause the most damage. Even if the rest of the country thinks everyone from Gotham is crazy, Arkham is far worse.

"So what's the plan boss?" Steph asks looking over at Barbara who had just finished talking to Catwoman, who in turn is heading down the way that they came in.

Barbara answers without looking up from her screens, "We have teams working all over the city, setting up surveillance on known villain bases, and taking down any that are attacking openly. Despite what the press is being told we are working closely with my dad to deal with this as fast, and as safely as possible."

Steph holds her breath for a moment expectantly before asking, "And what about us? Where do you need us?"

Barbara turns in her chair and looks directly at Steph, almost like she is sizing her up, "You three are going to be working together performing a most important role. Your job is to protect our lines of communication and transport."

"Wait." Steph says, "You have us on guard duty! Really? After all we have done. Do you have that little faith in us? We have Cass!" Cass turns to look at them, head kinked to the side in confusion/curiosity.

Barbara sighs, "Cass is one of the big reasons that we want you defending here."
"she is one of the best fighters in the w-"

Barb cuts her off with a gesture, "and yet she has little experience with the special kind of villain that are on the loose tonight-"

"and we can help her-"

"Steph, there are going to be a lot worse out than Cluemaster tonight. Many are going to be on their home turf making them even worse." Steph still looks mutinous but doesn't interrupt as Barbara goes on, "and to help us deal with that we have a strong transport and communication system which will let us get an advantage on them, but only if they don't attack here and shut us down. as good an idea as having a strong base in the middle of the city is, having it in such an ostentatious location is sure to attract opportunists looking to make a name for themselves."

"wait..." Harper says looking confused, "you put us in the line of fire for all of them? surely that will be worse than having us go to them? wasn't that what Kate told me about taking the initiative?"

Barbara takes a moment to think through what she needs to say, she doesn't want to undermine what they have been learning by putting this poorly, "you aren't wrong Harper, keeping the initiative is important... but there are also advantages to making a stand on terrain you know, and have set up for you. for example,"

She clicks some buttons and the next station over changes to show the full security grid in the building, "cameras, alarms, security devices, on top of the fact that we know the layout of the building, and have extra eyes on the lookout too," Barbara points out the guards looked safely in a panic room type command centre. "this is going to be the linchpin of our operations and it is set up to reflect that."

Harper is looking at the systems in wide-eyed amazement, Steph has her lips pursed sceptically but it might just be her feeling put out, and Cass looks back and forth between the three of them still trying to work out what this has all been about. Barbara says one last thing completely honestly and earnestly

"Please. we need you."
Steph had been expecting many things from her first mass Arkham breakout (at least since she became a vigilante). Terror, panic, Stress, hard-fought combat, and crazy parkour. one thing she didn't expect to feel was overwhelming, all-consuming, Insurmountable... boredom.

She was laying on her back on the floor, feet up on the table, arms out wide, slowly letting her feet go numb despite the pressurized suit. To her left, she can see Harper playing around with her equipment, though it looks like it is more out of habit rather than because she is trying to tweak anything. To her right, Cass is doing the usual workout stuff, but Steph can see her stifle a yawn too. The only one of them who is busy is Barb, still working on keeping everyone coordinated.

"Very bored..." she announces to the room, "this isn't what I was told to expect when I started. In fact, I remember being told I was going to get myself killed, but the only thing that is going to kill me here is boredom!"

"Don't tempt me," mutters Barb before saying more clearly, "it's no worse than stakeout."

"Nah ah. then we get to focus on something not just sit around waiting on nothing!"

"Then come up with something for us to do. Or do you just like moaning"

"wouldn't you know." Steph jabs back at Harper, "hey I know... maybe we should share secrets with each other?"

"like what?"

"like... how long have you had a crush on Cass?"

Harper coughs on her water before showing Steph one finger, who just laughs harder.

"someone check the cameras." Barb interrupts, "there was a disturbance..."

"...in the force..." Steph mutters to herself before swinging her feet down. she shakes out the pins and needles in her feet as she goes over to join Cass who had already rushed over. the other girl points at one of the screens just as a shadow moves across the image, but it's gone before she can
get a proper look.

she asks Barb if they can rewind the footage and she slides across the appropriate program. she
zooms back to the frames where the shadow cuts across and it looks like... just that, an indistinct
shadow...

she says as much to Barb, "probably just someone flying past outside..."

Barb looks sceptical and asks what camera it is. Steph tells her and she looks even more worried,
"that's an internal corridor. no way for outside light to affect it..."

In reply Steph groans, not just because of what Barb said but mostly because she just spotted one of
the cameras lose its signal. people in movies always think that that's a perfect way to stop whoever
is watching from thinking anything is wrong; but one of the first things she was taught in stealth
training is that there is no better way to raise the alarms than to knock out cameras, 'if you can't get
a hack on them it is better to just walk past confidently, if you look like you are meant to be there
you will raise a lot less attention than breaking things.'

Unfortunately, she didn't have a good look at what was in that room before it went down, so she
asks Barb. who proceeds to swear, check the number to be sure then swears again, "that's the
guards' safe room."

"Any chance it was an accident?" Harper asks but they all already know the answer.

"nope. they have all stopped playing cards on their computers too. go check it out girls, we can't let
anyone bring down our communications, not to mention all the lives on the line."

"raise the pressure why don't you..." Steph says grabbing her mask from the table and heading to
the elevator along with Harper and Cass.

"not boring anymore is it?"

"now you said that it's just going to be Kiteman..."
"still someone to hit right?"

Cass leads Blue and Sun out of the elevator and down the well lit and cleanly kept corridor. Sun had shown her the floor plan on their way down so she knows how far they had to go, a left then a right... they cut through a room with a large table as a shortcut.

Cass can feel that she is at a fine edge just waiting for the inevitable ambush. she had seen the same image Sun had, the bad guy could hide in shadows, or maybe something even worse. Either way, they aren't going to attack head-on. On top of that, they can also make themself difficult to see so she has to focus on her other senses just as much.

She almost images she can smell the tang of iron and taste the blood on her tongue despite them still being a few rooms from where the guards are. But she does pick up a dusting of dirt on some of the carpets, it's grainy and rough not the kind someone would have walked in from outside, it's the kind that comes from the rooftops. they are on the right track. she listens to the silence past the hum of electricity flowing through the building, the buzz from the streets far below and the controlled breathing of her comrades behind her, but it's not that that saves their lives it's a kind intuition, a subconscious guide, a feeling of the arrogance and pride that they radiate. Just as she felt on her hunts...

The three blades spin to a stop on her fingertips. she didn't even really see them before she reacted, she just knew where each would be for the perfect kill shots. they are a professional, someone experienced. but then, so is she.

They step into the low light from their hiding place while the others are frozen with shock. They grin widely with a mix of admiration, anticipation, and an almost predatory hunger. the same kind beating in her heart, just waiting for this.

he says something mocking trying to get her to show her hand but it is Sun who responds, and in the moment that he's eyes dart away she takes her chance. she jumps of one of the pots that hold a plant that line the hallways and dives over his head grabbing the blade on his back and pulling it free.

she spins it around testing the weight, not perfect, far from the best she has handled but much further from the worst. then she looks at it closely making sure it's not poisoned. but neither the sword or there throwing blades are. good. poison makes things harder. not only would she need to be more careful not to even be scratched, but also careful not to cut anyone else.
"nice... want?" she asks over her shoulder before starting to run, bad guy hot on her heels.

As she turns a corner she sees Blue and Sun rushing off. Good, she didn't want them to follow they would just be in danger, and there are still the people the Shadow attacked. She parries another set of throwing stars with the blade, before smashing through an interior window. She needs more space; if they can bounce off shadows she needs to draw them somewhere where they aren't many in reach.

She finds what she is looking for in a small open plan office lit by the glow of the lights from outside the windows. She embeds the blade in a window cracking it with a spider's web of silvery lines and turns to face him as he rushes in after her.

"let's go." she says inviting him to attack.

Now while acting does give you a head start it also shows a lot more of your skills than defending, if you are good enough to survive the onslaught. And she isn't just good. His moves are fast and unusual, flowing between sharp finger jabs, sweeping punches, and direct kicks. but she is better.

Despite having never seen the moves before, they don't even seem to share much with anything she has been taught, she was however taught to learn fast. And one of the most powerful feelings is turning someone's strength against them, nothing works better to throw someone off than to be hit by exactly the same attack as you just tried to hit them with.

From where mere moments ago he was all pride and confidence, now he looks shaken, shocked, scared even. He demands to know where she learned the moves, who taught her...

She smiles, this is already over he just doesn't know it yet, "you did. just now."

She pushes her advantage, he wants to try and run having realised that she has been controlling this fight since before it even begun, but she doesn't even give him the chance to breathe hammering him with blow after blow. He is forced to use his powers, again and again, to stave off her assault, but just as she makes a strike for his head, he doesn't.

At the last moment before impact, she sees his eyes go wide and she tries to prevent the impact but it is too late.
He drops to the ground like a puppet with its strings cut...

She failed...

Yet more blood on her hands...

Yet more death...

Arrogant...

It is all she deserves...

She is never good enough...

She can't be good...

All she does is bring death...

And pain...

Movement. Sun is there.

"Please..." is all she can manage to say through the tears pouring down her face. "Help."

Sun hurries over and drops down next to them. She shifts his chin up to check his breathing, she already knows he isn't, but Sun isn't perturbed she tells Cass to call Harper before leaning her weight on and off his chest.

"Ha-pa." she can hear Blue respond on the other end of the communications, but it is harder to understand when she can't see the other person, "come. Please."
It takes a minute or so for Blue to get to them. in that time Sun gets her to take over leaning on his chest alternating with Sun breathing air into his lungs. When blue arrives panting at the door, Sun tells her something and Blue gets a gadget out of her belt and attaches wires while she keeps up pushing down on his chest just like Sun did.

They tell her to move then Blue shocks him. He jerks then goes limp again. So Blue shocks him again. But again he jerks then goes limp. She can start to feel the dread rising in her chest like a great sea of black rising to overwhelm her. Then Blue shocks him for a third time. This time however when he jerks he starts to cough and gasps for air.

She collapses to the ground in relief, Blue locks the bad guy's wrists, ankles, and neck, leaving him on the floor, limp, tired, and broken. She feels almost as heavy as him, not from the fight, but from the fear that nearly consumed her. She feels Sun's hand on her back, "didn't... mean... please..."

"Hey. Hey. All I see is an unconscious villain." Sun replies, "can you stand?" She pulls herself, slightly unsteadily, to her feet, "OK let's go."

"Thanks... Seph."

"...always."

She was so weak...

She had always been the weakest...

She never really even tried...

Always playing around at being a hero...

But never putting the work in...

Happy to work at what she could do...
But too lazy to push herself...

And now...

This is all she had coming...

Her mom's eyes reach towards her with a look of terror that she had never seen on her face when she was alive. And now she watches as her mom falls limp to the ground blood pouring from her throat, hair released by the demon her face drops onto the floor. And she is lost in the world, no one left to protect her.

She can't move...

She just watches...

She lets the demon strike again...

Her closest, and only real friend, for so long has tears rolling down her cheeks. She expects her to do something, but she can't even breath as the blade disappears next to her neck, deep into her heart. And Harper can feel hers breaking. But she can't do anything. Even as her heart is cut down trying to do something, anything to stop the monsters bloody advance, she can't do more than watch, her blue eyes meeting the blue and gold as the life fades from the latter.

All the fighting...

All the brave faces...

All the last stands...

And now she can't do anything as the person she has dedicated her life to protecting has his body cut to ribbons by the blooded blades of the demon. The blood of her loved ones drips from its long clawed fingers, it turns to look her down emotionless eyes meet tear-stained, blooded to bloodshot.
She falls into the darkness in those eyes...

Blood of lost loves fills her...

Until there is nothing left...

But the darkness...

And the pain...

Forever...

Chapter End Notes

i've been working on my descriptions, what do you think? does it feel better? paced better? help you visualize it? or do you think it is worse? do you think there is a better way of doing it?

the unnamed woman is kate spencer aka manhunter. she worked with the BoP a few times, and is now part of event leviathan that i haven't been reading so idk

forgot to say, Harper has no concept of how often "normal" prisons have breakouts, and note most "breakouts" are just people how don't report in when they are meant to, and even then from what i read 1/1000 is a good ballpark figure. a far cry from "a few a year"

and also cpr generally can't bring someone back, it's more of a "keep them alive" thing to restart someones heart you need a defib. which is what Harper has so

a final note, i "leveled up" as a writer (to give it a positive spin) so now i hate all my writing... i'm toying with if i want to rewrite this fic to make it less rubbish,[strike] but i think it's most likely i'll just do a big edit when i finish before i start on the follow up fics[/strike] not going to bother i have like 8 ideas i want to work on more
Playing with the loose cannon: part 2

Chapter Summary

trapped in an abandoned office. with one of the nastiest of Arkham. sounds like a party!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The walk back to the elevator is more sedated than when they had to chase Cass and Shadow Thief. luckily for the guards, he had just knocked them out, but it does seem that at least some of the escapees had zeroed in on the belfry.

Honestly, Steph feels sorrier for the people who are going to have to work here tomorrow, they already managed to trash one floor. as they walk along shattered glass crunches under their feet like fresh snow. some of the lights have been smashed and others are flickering irregularly, it gives the whole place the feeling of being something out of a horror movie. she tries to clear some of the broken glass from the frame as they pass, crushing it against the frame with her armoured gloves, but even with them, she can feel the sharp edge digging into her palms.

Ahead Harper and Cass move a cabinet aside from where the latter had cut it down to slow her pursuer, there are still a couple of shurikens embedded into it. Steph takes the chance to look out the window just as a group of cop cars zoom past, flashing blue lights glittering off the glass of the buildings. in the distance, between the towering glass monoliths, she swears she can see a cape flickering past and fires glittering like dancing LEDs.

It takes them several minutes to get back to the hidden elevator that can take them back to the top of the tower. but when she tries to open the entrance nothing happens. She sighs to herself and gives Harper a withering look, it's not exactly her fault but it makes Steph feel better.

"What!" she replies, "it was the only way to stop him, besides you told me to-"

"I know I know, I'm just annoyed." she calls up Barbara, hopefully she won't be to annoyed at them, "Hey O, the elevator is bust, I think Harper went overboard."

she grins at Harper's angry exclamation but they are cut off by Barbs reply, "yeah I'm working on resetting the systems now, just give me a minute." Steph sighs to herself again, it's not like it's
much of a problem for them. bore here, bored there. but Barbara goes on, "keep your eyes open the security was knocked out too, so we are blind and wide open until I get it back up and running."

"Gotham Girl Gang **beat down** is open for business!" Harper laughs in response and Cass bangs her fists together, clearly saying that she can't wait.

"Please try to take this seriously. There is a lot worse than shadow thief on the prowl tonight. look just do a sweep, by the time you're done I'll have this all fixed."

so that's what they do for the next half an hour, wandering around spooky, poorly lit offices, taking whatever chance they get to look out of the windows on the off chance that they can see one of the others doing something interesting. Harper finds a TV in one of the rooms and tries to turn the news on so they can find out what is going on in the rest of Gotham, but just as she turns the channel to the same as the one in the Belfry was, the Signal is cut, which is... bad. but then things go from bad to worse as the power dies throwing them from scattered lighting to almost nothing, just the glow seeping in through the outer windows.

"Wonderful." Steph says to herself, "hey Oracle! now we have no ligh-"

but she is cut off by Barb's urgent voice, "...you need to... girls!... do you copy..."

they can barely make out what she is saying, "repeat Oracle. the signals **trash**. what's going on?"

"...get... I need you... it's the... he's here... the girls..." then they lose the signal again.

"It sounds like she is in danger!" Harper says concern evident in her voice.

"Help!" Cass agrees

"OK let's head back to the elevator."

they only make it about halfway back before they hear the screaming...
it turns out that it is coming from the guard's safe room. They bust the door down to find that the 
guards are still inside in a state of hysterical terror. One is scratching at their skin like there is 
something crawling under it, another is sat in the corner shaking to themself, and the third rushes 
them in a flight of insane panic, but Cass puts him down before the other two can even react.

The whole room smells worse than a boys locker room... one where everyone had been sick in it... 
because of a gas leak... that someone had put a stink bomb in... needless to say, not nice. Even with 
the first whiff, her mind feels loose, like something is clawing at the edge of her mind. She knows 
the symptoms. Tim had told her one time about it, about how it can overwhelm even the most well 
prepared. Fear Toxin.

Steph covers her mouth and pushes the others back from the door. She can see the fear on Harper's 
face when she says what happened to them. Cass shakes her head like she is trying to clear it. Steph 
can feel it too, the Fear toxin is starting to do its wicked work. They were lucky they had such low 
exposure, and that they had been inoculated. Not that that works great most of the time, he keeps 
changing the formula, and inoculations to toxins don't last that long anyway.

"what do we do?" Harper asks, an edge of panic slipping into her voice, "can we really go up 
against the Scarecrow?"

Steph can see that Cass is scared too, her arms wrapped around herself like she is closing herself off 
from the world. She can feel it too, her heart is jumping wildly up her throat like it is trying to 
escape, her fingers feel numb, and every time she blinks there are little after images in the edge of 
her vision. But now is not the time for fear. Now is the time for action!

"the way I see it we only have one option. If we hide or bunker down he will find us sooner or 
later. If we run not only do we leave Barb to deal with him alone, but we leave all the others 
without the base that they asked us to keep safe. So I say we hunt him! Take him down before he 
gets the chance! We're the Gotham Girl Gang! He won't know what hit him!" 

Her speech has the intended effect, and Harper and Cass agree to hunt him down. It's funny how 
powerful having a purpose, a fixed goal, is. When you can see what you need to do, and how to do 
it fear takes a back seat. All of their worries, dreads, and unease, pushed aside by the simple act of 
setting a target to aim for. This is their time to shine! This is their time to show the others what they 
can do! No one will think of them as second rate after this!

They stalk through the corridors and meeting rooms, at every turn expecting to be face to face with 
Scarecrow. But each time they find nothing but another poorly lit hallway or room. The adrenalin 
that they had been running on since finding out that he was somewhere in the building had faded
into an omnipresent sense of tension, they know he is going to be hunting them just as they are
hunting him, and that this is anyone's game.

Cass is on point, first to enter every room weapons at the ready, she probably has plenty of
experience hunting down dangerous people, certainly more than the others, probably even
combined. Steph is bringing up the rear, she has a few tricks up her sleeves too, each time they
move on she plants little warning sensors and traps to hopefully give them an edge, this is a hunt,
after all, in a straight fight she is sure they could take him, hell Cass probably could on her own,
but Scarecrow isn't going to give them that chance if he can help it. Between Cass and Steph,
Harper covers all the long lines, like down corridors they pass, her longer-range weapons able to
take down her marks from further than he can strike back, but only if she gets the shot.

They find what they think is Scarecrows entry point, it looks like he followed Shadow thief up one
of the fire escapes, after he had shut down the security. silently they look around trying to find a
trail to follow but the clean floors give away nothing as to his whereabouts, not even if he is alone.
it's not something they discussed, honestly Steph hadn't even thought about it, what if Scarecrow
had brought allies with him. even just low-grade thugs could make this a lot harder.

She tries not to focus on it, it doesn't change that much, if they can find him they have a fighting
chance, if not... well they are just going to have to make do. she flexes her fingers out trying to get
the feeling back into them as they move on, she can feel the Fear Toxin working on her, or maybe
it's just the tension of the unknown.

Her mouth is so dry it is painful to swallow but she doesn't want to move her mask at the risk of
letting in any of the gas. Harper has a rebreather on doing the same job as the filters in Steph's and
Cass's masks, but even so, Steph knows they don't have forever. not only can little bits of the toxin
slip through (he has made ones that go through the skin before) but also because they only have so
long before he finds something important, and the others are forced to stop helping the city and
come back to do their job for them.

They all react when they 'hear' an ultrasonic pulse from one of the traps Steph had left behind. they
share a look and rush towards where it came from. this is their chance. Steph can feel her heartbeat
throughout her body, pulsing in her veins, pounding a beat in her chest. her breaths come in short
pants, she is so tense she is jumping at the shadows in every room they pass.

But after all, that when they get there there is... nothing. no disturbances, the small puddle where
they put a whole in the water cooler is still clean, no water having been trodden around. Steph
sighs, her adrenalin drops off fast and she feels almost light-headed with relief, sure they want to
find him but still, going up against one of the 'big 'B Bad guys is scary. and the fear toxin isn't
helping that either.
Cass signals one of the rooms, something is going on. Harper gets her gun ready and the two of them burst through Steph hot on their heels, throwing blades at the ready. but again it is deserted. the only thing out of place is most of a roof tile that had been knocked down by something that had come through the cracked open window. Honestly, at this point Steph just wants to find him and get this over with, the lack of action is killing her, hell she would almost settle for him finding them. almost.

Unfortunately for her, her wish is granted sooner than any of them would have expected.

In the moment Steph delays resetting the alarm the other two step outside.

and seal their fate.

There is a bang, and Steph bursts through the door before freezing in place. Cass is shaking like a leaf in a storm, staring at her hands in abject terror. on the other side of the corridor, Harper is curled into a ball, tears pouring out of her mask that had been knocked askew. in between them, stood proud in his victory, is Scarecrow. he is dressed in his full getup, ragged old clothes bound in rope, old sacks wrapped around his hands and face in a perverse imitation of gloves and a mask, and a wide-brimmed pointy sat almost jauntily atop his straw-like hair.

She barely dodges the splash of liquid that he sends her way, she stumbles and trips in her desperation to get some distance between them. she needs to get away. and get him away from her friends, the small amount of her brain that wasn't paralysed with fear adds.

he leaps forward fists spewing toxic gas. she barely dodges leaping to the side and kicking at his face. she feels her foot connect with his jaw but he doesn't seem to care. he strikes again tearing a hole in her suit with a razor bladed scalpel.

the terror multiplies instantly. her mind is a clouded mess as she stumbles away. her vision is a mess. the hallucinations are starting to mess with everything. a door slammed shut by her dad. the Bat's scornful look from a shadow. the Knight's silent judgment. her mom losing herself in drugs rather than care for her. and Tim.

"miss me?" it's him. he calls to her. from where she fell she can see him standing over her. but a little voice in the back of her mind tells her it's not him.

"you're not good enough, and you never will be. when are you going to get that through your thick
skull." she tries to dodge aside but a blade punches into her shoulder. the pain is sharp, stabbing all the way from her fingertips to the depths of her mind.

"You aren't a good enough 'hero' to save this city. Hell, you weren't even good enough to keep me from leaving." no... he left because the league... isn't that what he said... but he could have been lying...

In a moment of lucidity, she sees Scarecrow, dressed up as stupidly as ever. she kicks at him, striking between his legs and he folds for a moment giving her a chance to pull back away from him and struggle to her feet. pulling free the scalpel that had been stuck in her shoulder, it lessens the pain, after a moment, and is the only way she can keep on fighting but the blood flows more freely, she is on the clock even more than before.

"oh you work hard don't you, but your still so slow. the one in black almost saved both of them. but you just follow on like a good soldier. it must be hard. the rest of them are Batman's chosen. you could do so much better, I see your potential. they don't trust you. your no one to them. they just want you out of the way."

"sounds about right." he's stalling...

"God, you must be dimmer than I thought. they don't trust you. Don't you care? you're just a sacrifice to them, yet you stand here like a good little soldier."

she laughs out loud, "Wait. Hang on." she can feel the toxin isn't as bad as it just was, the inoculation is working. at least somewhat. "is this you trying to mess with me? you thought... what? you could poke at my insecurities until I did what you wanted? cos spoilers, that doesn't make you a genius, it makes you just like half the guys in town."

"yet you still reek of fear!-"

"sure, but I'm not going to be afraid of it. and certainly not ashamed."

"... no shame makes you just like the rest." he sounds hungry again, just like all the other creepy guys, "embracing fear makes you so much more. Harder to break but so much more rewarding-"

she raises her hand to stop him and shakes her head, doing her best disappointed expression. "you
really think you can break me? make me run?" she smirks, "but running means giving up on everything you are..." she steps forward knocking aside his attack and jabbing him in the face feeling his nose crunch under her fist. "I prefer to stay. be who I want to be."

"but then you would be forced to face yourself. no one is brave enough to face who they really are!" maybe the toxin has gotten to him now because, unless she is very wrong (and she doesn't think she is), he sounds afraid.

"Well it's a good thing I'm 'no one' then!" she steps up onto a box and leaps forward, kicking him in the head and sending him tumbling to the ground, out cold.

Dinah is sat in a small room in the belfry. the door opens and a young woman with blue and purple hair enters

"hey, your Black Canary right?"

"you can call me Dinah. you must be Harper. please take a seat." Harper nods and does so as canary asks "how have you been?"

"you mean apart from the fear gassing?"

"if there is something else you would prefer to talk about. I'm here to help you."

Harper gives her a hard look, she clearly doesn't trust her, not yet, "and B listening in?"

"he wouldn't dare he is too afraid of me." she's not lying. Bruce tried to bug her once. once. Harper doesn't know how to respond, she opens her mouth then shuts it again. still glaring at Dinah who sighs then says, "if you are still worried, cover your ears."

Harper does so looking confused. Dinah takes a deep breath and lets out a scream that quickly fades into the ultrasonic. after a second or so she lets out what is left of her breath, then coughs to relieve her throat, ultrasonic is always uncomfortable. across from her Harper shakes her head, the noise was too high for most people to hear much of it, but younger ones are more affected than the older, and Kryptonians, but this room is soundproof against them. Tim included it in the belfry just encase Dinah ever needed to do any sessions here. she tells this to Harper who looks... more
nervous than before.

"so did you want to talk about what happened last night?"

"ok I- I guess..." Harper's voice is very quiet, it can be hard for people who are used to others being dependent on them to reach out when they need to.

"Fear Toxin can be nasty stuff, but it is important to remember that the things you saw, heard, and felt were caused by the Fear Toxin, not by you. It doesn't show the 'real you', and it doesn't have the ability to affect the world in any way, past, present, or future."

"I know! I know. but that doesn't..."

"What?"

"I thought it didn't matter. I told myself that I was OK with her. but I saw..."

"What did you see Harper? who was there?"

"Everyone. and Cass..."

Dinah thinks she understands what happened, "and what did she do?" Harper half starts but clamps her jaw shut tight and shakes her head. "Harper. remember that it was just a hallucination, nothing about it is real, what you saw doesn't reflect reality-"

"I know. I know. it's not that it's real. it's..." Harper stops herself again, blinking rapidly, it takes her a moment to compose herself. Dinah waits in silence for her to continue, she is about to prompt Harper, then she says something so quietly that Dinah can barely hear her, "I can't help her."

"what do you mean?"

"she is so strong, and brave, and independent, and it feels like I can't do anything for her. I need to help her but every time I try to do anything she has already got it, and she keeps getting hurt
because of me. she's a real hero, not just some idiot playing pretend, like a child messing around in the big kids' pool. it just feels like everyone could do better if I wasn't in their way. even when I try I...

Dinah puts a hand on Harper's as she trails off, jaw tight, "OK how about we break this down a bit? one step at a time."

Bird was here to talk to her again. but she doesn't have anything to say.

she knows what she saw wasn't real.

but it was.

to her.

because in the end, that is what she is. no matter if she tries to be a person she isn't. she is just a weapon. Even her instincts cost them all. the best she can do with her life is to be useful.

she can't have friends. they are for people. people who feel things. and can talk. and live. all she can do is be helpful. then maybe, just maybe, they won't throw her away. like she deserves.

she almost flinches when bird brings out pictures of H- Blue. she doesn't deserve her real name. Blue is a real person, who has the right to live, and love, and... be. that's not something that is part of her... existence, it's not for her. And after all, it's her fault they got hurt.

Bird tries to coax her to draw again. she tries to say that she doesn't want to, all that would come out is blood and pain. she doesn't deserve to create. she is a destroyer. bird tries to give her a pen again so in frustration she takes it and snaps it in half and tosses the pieces across the room, before hiding her face behind her knees.

Bird doesn't leave immediately, but eventually, they give up on her, as they should. she follows them out and avoids Sun, she doesn't want to talk to them either. she manages to get all the way to the armoury, gets changed into her new gear and almost to the window exit before someone finds her.
she hears her name called from behind and pauses. she hears wheels rolling over the ground and tries to bite back her emotions. this is one of the encounters she didn't want to happen. she feels a hand press against her arm. she hears that they are talking, but doesn't look at them so she doesn't know what she is saying. there is a sigh then the hand squeezes her arm before letting go. she glances round at her m- the one who... assigns their mission, she is smiling kindly back at her. it hurts. she doesn't deserve that. she turns away quickly before jumping out the window and flying into the city warmed by the first touches of twilight.

"The schedule had to be pushed back due to the breakout but we have managed to get a couple of 'them' on side. we will be ready to go ahead in two days"

"good. I will bring her back myself."

Chapter End Notes

soooo after that little misadventure. what do people think of the horror elements? i've been working on expanding my tool box, so to speak. horror really isn't a genre i know much about but there are a lot of parts that can help me become a better writer, and well it had the desired effect on me when i was editing. so. good? bad? mixed?

you can see a lot of the thing that i was talking about not being super happy with this story here, like what even are the character arcs? what story am i even telling? *sigh* guess it's something i have learned for future

one more arc left, with any luck it should be done by the new year
interval 13

Chapter Summary

pre showdown banter and chill. plus showing off something new.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hey, girls look what I got," Harper says showing off her right arm. It is covered in a clear plastic wrap.

"wow, nice! it's us right?" Steph says hopping over the back of the couch to come and have a closer look.

Just as she gets close Cass materialises by Harper's side, "What?"

"Tattoos. They represent us like Steph said," she says pointing out some of the details of the tattoo. "The purpl-"

"It's eggplant! I've told you enough times."

She rolls her eyes "Close enough."

"It's not! They are completely different! It would be like calling you 'azure bird'."

"But that's not even alliteration, besides that's a shade of blue, not the other way round," Harper is finding it harder and harder to not laugh at Steph's indignance.

"It's a different shade-"

She can't help but grin as she turns back to Cass and continues, "Fine, fine, whatever. Sorry, Cass, back on topic. The 'eggplant' birds are Steph, the little blue, or 'azure'."
"That's not what I meant damnit!"

"- lightning bolts are me..." she finishes as though she hadn't been interrupted.

"So... Me..." Cass says gently touching her finger to the string of bats interwoven with the other two.

"Yup. you are the black bats."

"Hot." ...

There is a moment where both her and Steph freeze, stunned, then Harper half coughs, half laughs and Steph demands of the amused looking Cass, "Who taught you that Cass?... No Shrugging isn't an answer. Harper!"

she composes herself enough to put on her best-insulted expression, "It wasn't me. Maybe Barb?-

"Really. You are going to push this off on Barbara of all people!"

for once it actually wasn't her, so she feels a little irritated that she will probably get the blame, "Well it wasn't me! Maybe she overheard you talking about your new girlfriends..."

"Are you still jealous?" Steph replies smirking.

"Me!" Cass interrupts, pointing at herself.

"Yes that ones you, Cass," Harper says a little dismissively before turning back to Steph.

"No. Me!" Cass says again, this time more insistently, pointing at her own arm.
"oh no! No way. Not a chance."

Harper is still lost and feels even more confused with Steph's horror. "What do you..."

"She wants one too..." Steph says like it is obvious.

It takes a moment for Harper to piece it together, "That's an amazing idea!"

"Don't even think about it! Barb is going to kill us, then B will throw us in a Lazarus pit so he can kill us again. Then Kate will, then-"

Harper cuts Steph off, "Naa, have you seen Kate's tats! Only way she would kill me is if she stepped on me!"

Steph Stops herself, making a very entertaining expression like she is image got stuck in her head, "Christ Harper! the thirst is real!"

Before Steph can compose herself enough to stop them Harper takes Cass's hand and leads her back outside, "Are we getting tats or not?"

"I never said I wanted a tattoo!" Steph is hot on their heals as they head down the drive.

"Yet you're following us... So..."

"Well one of us has to be the voice of reason." Steph is now walking alongside them as they head up the street towards the tattoo parlour, they would normally drive but they don't have to go that far from their base in this town.

Harper can't stop herself shooting out a quick jab at her friend, "First time for everything."

"Ow- damn it looks like a fetish dungeon!" Steph says looking at the shop in some concern.
Harper can't deny it. The shop front is painted black, with heavy metal type writing on the signs. In the windows are common tattoo designs, there are quite a few bats, as well as some birds, flowers and 'tribe' designs. Harper can't help but shoot another jab at Steph though, "You're such a prep."

"Take that back!" while the two of them squabble Cass had already taken the lead and heads into the shop.

Harper follows her lead calling back as she enters, "Get in here and make me."

Cass was admiring the new bat on her forearm. She runs a fingertip over the crest of the wings. she can feel where the skin is ridged along the line of the scar, now marked by the leading edge of the bat's wings.

She remembers when she first saw the bat symbol. It feels like forever ago. She hadn't been meant to see it. But even then it had made her think of hope. A chance that she never had thought of as possible. Now after everything... She isn't sure.

The symbol is everything she imagined and more. Hope, safety, determination, the terror of those who seek to hurt, and the belief it inspires. It's just she isn't sure if she will ever deserve it. No matter how hard she works she always needs to do more. But right now there are more important things. Maybe one day she will live up to it. Maybe it's the trying that matters most...

Harper pushes through the door back into their apartment, so is so focused on Cass still admiring her new tat that she doesn't notice that they aren't alone.

"So where have you been then?" Oh god, the helicopter parent. Before her of Steph can say anything to calm Barbara, Cass runs over to show off the bat on her forearm.

There is a moment when Barbara glares at them and Harper almost wishes that she was back fighting scarecrow. Almost. Then Cass steps between, saving her yet again, and says, "No. Me."

"Really, Cass... Something like that could make it impossible for you to have a normal life."
There is a moment or two of silence, then Cass responds, "...so..."

Harper tries in vain to bite back a laugh. Barbara glares at her again, and Steph looks at her like she just laughed at a teacher who was scalding them. but the person Harper is focused on is Cass, while it is harder to tell from behind she swears the Cass is grinning when she looks over her shoulder at Harper. "I just mean... I asked the tattooist, Bats are the most common tat' by miles. From what he said all the top four that that place does are bats. I don't think anyone is going to presume she's Batgirl because she has one."

"There is more to it than that..."

"Yeah, there is. She has been through so much she deserves the chance to make herself something new, to take all the horrible things that have been done to her and make them something better, all the pain that they caused made into a chance to do better. Isn't that what the whole point of Batman is? To take something bad and turn it into hope for everyone, a chance to be more than the bad."

Barbara gives her a hard look but Harper is sure she is smiling slightly through her pursed lips, "how long have you been working on that speech?"

Harper laughs nervously, longer than she wants to admit. At the moment she drops her gaze Cass appears right in front of her. To her credit she doesn't jump, she has gotten too used to Cass's ninja skills. Before Harper can say anything Cass wraps her in a hug. Out of the corner of her eyes, she can see Steph shrug at Barbara who is watching Cass affectionately.

Chapter End Notes

not sure i did the best job describing harper's tattoo but i was trying to get a slow reveal
the tattoo place was inspired by one that was near me, it shut down a few years ago though
Chapter Summary

Gotham Girl Gang hit the movies! by which i mean watching. or crying. or sleeping.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harper wasn't expecting to be the first one here. But as she looks around, from the soft cushy seats by the windows, the shop selling overpriced treats, the numbers doorways, and the ticket machines, she can see no sign of either of her friends. Which is quite annoying given this whole trip was Steph's idea.

She is getting more and more anxious. The movie was starting soon, OK the adverts would be starting soon, but they need to goof around getting drinks and queueing for the toilets. OK, maybe it's nothing... It's probably nothing... It's not like Steph is known for being on time for everything, but Cass is good at being where she is needed.

As these thoughts swirl in her mind, Harper feels a hand against her elbow. Most Gothamites are trained from an early age to be wary of unexpected contact, but Harper has gotten all too used to Cass showing up out of thin air.

"There you go again appearing like a ninja!" She says turning around and hugging Cass in greeting. She warmly reciprocates and when they break apart Harper asks, "any sign of Steph?"

Cass shrugs and shakes her head, Harper sighs again, and pull out her phone. As she does so however she gets a text, she skims it quickly before rolling her eyes and reading it out, "'soz can't come, mom needs help trashing dads old stuff..." It's a good sign that Crystal is getting over Cluemaster but the timing is annoying.

"No ste-ph?"

"Nope. Looks like she is flaking on us. Up for watching the movie then, just the two of us?" Harper realises what she said a moment too late, and tries to cover it with a laugh. Fortunately, Cass doesn't seem to have noticed, or maybe is pretending she hasn't.
Harper wonders, not for the first time, what Cass sees in her. Not in a self-deprecating way, just about how she sees the world. What it's like being able to read people's intentions as clear as day. There must be so much the rest of them don't see. How much more colourful the world must be.

They bought overpriced drinks and the tickets from the college kid behind the booth. It takes them a little bit to find the right door, but for once she finds it before Cass. She calls Cass over and they head in to grab their seats.

The room slowly fills as the adverts play. After a few minutes, most of the room is full, but there are plenty of spaces left, so they put their snacks on the seats next to them. The lights drop and the normal warnings about phones and filming, play before the next round of adds starts.

It feels like forever before the film begins. It is some generic action flick, the action is only mediocre, relying more on explosions than believable combat. Harper is both irritated with, and very appreciative off, the skin-tight leather the girls are dressed in. The starting action winds down and the movie zooms to the main protagonist, generic white guy number whatever. This one seems to be less lucky than most. He manages to get himself kidnapped and tortured in the first ten minutes. It's kind of silly really, and Harper is about to whisper this to Cass, but she looks... less amused.

Her knuckles are white against the arms of the seat. She is staring out a thousand yards past the screen. Tears slipping out of her eyes and running down her cheeks unchecked. Harper touches her arm but she doesn't seem to notice. Harper forces Cass to look at her with a hand on her cheek. After a few seconds, Cass seems to refocus, then the tears start to flow a lot harder.

Harper takes her by the arm and leads her out the auditorium. Outside the corridor is mostly deserted and no one looks there way as they got into the bathroom. Harper gets some tissues to dry Cass's eyes then damps some to help reduce the puffiness. There wasn't much point asking what happened.

She is such an idiot. She should have checked if there was anything bad before they chose the movie. But that doesn't matter right now. Now the only thing that matters is that Cass is hurting. Harper also knows that words aren't going to be of much help. That's not how Cass thinks. Instead, Harper hugs Cass tight. Letting her actions speak. Cass leans into her and they stay like that for a while. Cass sat on the sink and Harper standing against it. Slowly Cass begins to breathe normally again.

"So-rry."
She shakes her head, rubbing her chin on the top of Cass's head, "you have nothing to be sorry for," Harper pulls back slightly, their arms are still wrapped around each other but far enough to look into each other's faces. Harper uses her thumb to wipe away the last tear from Cass's cheek, "let's see if we and sneak in and see a better movie!"

Cass gives a little smile and nods. They head out of the bathroom and slip into one of the other viewing rooms without anyone noticing, they take seats at the front near the entrance. The movie is pretty bland, clearly aimed at kids, so it's very light-hearted and a little bit cringy. About halfway through Harper notices that Cass is resting her head on her shoulder. By the end of the movie, it becomes clear that Cass is fast asleep.

Harper doesn't want to disturb her, even as the movie finishes and the credits scroll past. The auditorium is almost empty now, but Harper can't bring herself to wake Cass until a member of staff comes around to clean up and asks if everything is OK. Harper sheepishly asks if he can give them a minute, he has to hold back his laughter but tells her that he will do the rest first.

"Hey Cass," Harper gently nudges her awake. It takes a few goes but eventually Cass's eyes flutter open blearily, "morning sleepyhead, time to go."

Cass shakes herself awake then takes Harper's offers a hand and they walk out together.

Chapter End Notes

and that concludes the last filler. there was going to be another one but it didn't work, it was messing with my head and i was pretty sure it would make me a lot of enemies so i just didn't bother. 

oh and yes Steph 110% tried to hook them up. i mean it kind of worked.

given how angst the next arc is i think we all needed a little bit of a fluff fest. but that will have to wait, probably until just before the end of the year is the plan, so see you then <3
Barbara watches them yelling at each other. How did it all go so wrong? Even after all that has happened to her and all she has seen, she doesn't know if they can come back from this. They will need a lot of time. And even then the two of them will never be the same again...

CLONK. CLONK. CLICK.

Blue shifts nervously behind her, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. Her weapons are drawn and prepped. They have been worked hard chasing a lot of bad guys down over the last week.

CLONK. CLICK.

Sun lets out a deep breath, her sharp eyes watching for a sign that they are ready to enter. This is their third major hunt since the battle at the tower. Some have been easy, some harder, but none have pushed them as hard as that day.

CLICK.

This time they are well into the outskirts of the city. They have spent a lot of time out here, especially considering she was almost always sent to cities before. The change is nice. Everything is so quiet she can hear animals moving around even now. But this house has an aura of death that makes everything avoid it.
The lock turns. She looks up at the other two. Blue nervously rolls her shoulders before raising her gun at the door ready to breach. Sun holds her gaze for a second, her blue eyes like the sun-drenched sky, (currently hidden by the onset of the night) she gives her the go-ahead.

The door opens silently and they start to move through the house, their heartbeats the only thing that any of them can hear. There are layers of dust over the rickety furniture and threadbare carpets, that stifles their movements and leaves a trail of floating particles where they disturb it. Inside the stench of death is heavy on the air, the slightly metallic smell of spilt blood, the weight that surrounds bodies, and the lingering touch of pain hanging throughout the building.

She hears a voice call them over. Begging for help. It is distorted by the thick air, but it also sounds wrong somehow. There is an echoing quality to it that there shouldn't be. but they knew their opponent might try this and it means that they are on the right track. She beeps the buzzer through their comms to tell the others to be careful and that the bad guy is here.

As planned they regroup in the kitchen, the same place the voice resonated from. A warning beep sounds just before she gets to there. Glancing around the door frame she can see why. There are two bodies slumped at the table in the middle of the room. Definitely dead. They have no life to them whatsoever. She can see Sun at the other entrance and signs across that they are dead just as Blue steps up behind her. Sun nods and signs for them to move on.

But before they get the chance there is movement. She freezes watching for it again. And then it does. one of the bodies moves. Not like it is alive. No, it just shits in a strange imitation. They raise to their feet, chairs falling over in a CRASH that splits the silence.

She moves before the others even have a chance to react. Her strike smashes the firsts chest, she can feel their ribs crack as they are thrown back crashing into the cupboard doors on the outside of the room, dropping glass in a shower all over them. But it barely slows them down. The other swings a knife and in response she shatters its arm.

There is no way she can deny the thrill of the fight. Finally being able to go all out. With no guilt. No holding back. No cushioning her blows to keep anyone from being hurt. No need to be soft with puppets. Even though their actions are hard to read, they break more easily than a normal person too. And she is faster than the puppet-master can track.
The first attacks again as she pins the second's arms to its chest with its knife. She returns to the first knocking it back again with a blow to the larynx that splits the cartilage, then pulls it back towards her, slipping past and cracking its neck.

Even as she does the second is back again. It moves haphazardly with its limbs pinned to its chest, but it still tries to bite with rotten teeth. She counters with a single strike. a blow that shatters its nose back into its skull. An instantly fatal blow. A Leopard Strike.

She can't tell if it's the damage she caused or the puppet-master giving up on this fight but the body-puppets don't rise from the floor. Even with all the death she has seen, (she has more blood on her hands than most people will ever see) this disturbs even her. Their movements were so wrong. Everything about this is. She looks at her hand, the one that a moment before shattered bone, it is dripping blood, but as she looks again she realises that that is just the blood of the past, very little blood came from the bodies now dropped at her feet. They must have been dead for a long time.

She hears a splattering from behind her. She looks around and sees that Blue has been sick into a bag. Sun doesn't look much better. But she doesn't think that their disgust is directed at her, it seems to be focused on the now still bodies. Sun throws her a set of restraints, for her to bind them with. If the bad guy can make the dead fight then they can't be sure they won't make the bodies come after them, even after the damage she did.

Harper still feels nauseous. What happened to those people. It's indescribably horrible. What kind of person could do that... they are lucky Cass took them out as Harper doesn't know if she could. It always seems so easy in zombie games. Just shoot them and they go down, nothing to worry about. But what they don't talk about is the smell... she doesn't think she will ever forget it.

Fortunately, Cass handled... everything they needed to do in that room, so they can leave it behind them. They move on to the second floor, up an ancient staircase they take great care to keep their weight on the outsides of the steps, not only so they don't give away their position but also so the stairs don't collapse!

If downstairs was horror, upstairs is... bizarre. The first room they open is set up as a stage facing towards them, and they are the audience. And the strange continues, there is a wooden puppet sat on the high stool in the middle of the stage holding onto a mic and smoking a cigarette. And even worse than that, when they walk in it greets them.

"Oh la la! ladies, ladies! there is enough of me to go around!" the three of them share a glance, all equally confused, "a pity none of you are the big names. But I suppose even the best have to start somewhere! And you are going to set my meal ticket on the path to fame and glory!"
At that moment it jumps off the stool diving towards with drill blades projecting out of its hands. As it flies forward it calls, "it's all scandal now! if it bleeds it leads!"

Harper barely gets a chance to aim her gun before firing, but the blast of electrical energy has no effect (of course it is made out of wood after all). She throws herself backwards to get away from the spinning blades bearing down on her.

But before they can reach her, Cass's foot materialises in its way, and it gets sent flying back into the blood-red stage curtains. Unfortunately, Cass didn't get away unharmed. There is a gash split across her lower leg dripping blood onto the floor. Harper is reaching for a med' kit when the puppet starts running towards them again.

"Stay put toots! This only hurts for a seco-" It's cut off when a blade digs into its head, "Hey sweetheart! Case you didn't notice, it's not like I got a brain to cut inta, genius!"

Harper spots it a moment before Steph calls it out, "it's not a razor-rang, it's concussive... Bang!"

The blast sweeps past Cass and Harper almost knocking both of them flying, but the puppet is affected much, much worse. They can just see it bouncing high into the air, through the bright flash of the explosion. And when the smoke clears they see it's tattered remains in a twisted and burning heap.

"You coulda just said no." it seems to say, though Harper isn't sure how it is still talking, or how it was talking in the first place for that matter.

"What have you done!? what have you done to my love!?" Round three, this time a crazy looking lady in a plane pale-dress, with messy almost matted hair, runs at them screaming about how she is going to; put glass in their eyes, pour metal down their throats, and cut them apart. or words to that effect.

This time Steph beats them to the punch, she throws a blade at the lady but it freezes mid-air then starts flying back at them!

For the third time today, Cass comes to their rescue putting herself cape first between the blast and a stunned Steph. The blast knocks both of them back crashing into the far wall. Before Harper can
do more than call after them her HUD starts flickering. Through the mess, she tries to read the warning signs. There is a massive amount of electricity flowing through her armour. All her weapons are firing at once.

She's not in any danger, her armour is siphoning all the power back into her suit's battery, which just recharges her weapons, there is not much load on the system, just wasting power. She finally realises it must be the lady (their mark, Ventriloquist), she must be telekinetic and is trying to get Harper to shoot herself or blow herself up, but all her equipment is electronic.

Harper laughs at the expression of utter confusion marking Ventriloquist's features, and without giving her a chance to recover she punches her in the face. There is a crunch where her nose gives way under Harper's blow before the electrical current that had been stuck going round and round finds a new outlet. The pain of the impact and taser like shock knocks Ventriloquist out like a light.

After a moment of feeling smug, Harper remembers Cass and Steph. She rushes over calling to them then Steph exclaims, "Boom-o-rang!" Harper is pretty sure Steph must have hit her head, "I'm such an idiot!"

"No disagreement here," Harper says as she takes over from Cass who was patching her leg up. Then holds up three fingers to Steph, "How many fingers?"

"Three. I'm not concussed! I'm annoyed!"

Stepping out into the fresh air is such a relief. Steph hadn't realised how hard it was to breathe in the house, everything was just so horrible. Even now she can still feel it sticking to her skin. She isn't even really sure what 'it' is but she does know that she desperately needs to get this gear off and have a long shower.

Even just outside the house, everything they saw inside feels very distant. The neighbourhood is very normal, picket fences and all. But given the distance between the houses, and that this is Gotham there is a good chance that no one even called the cops if she hadn't got Barb to do it that is.

She zones out from her surroundings, which turns out to be a mistake when Cass bumps her to get her to look at the person who is walking up to them. They are a woman, probably in their thirties, with curly platinum hair coming down to past their shoulders. She is wearing a grey-blue dress and matching boots, along with a lighter blue scarf. Steph can just hear her mutter as she approaches, "dear Shauna, how did you fall this far."
"Can we help you?" Steph says stepping forward to make sure the stranger doesn't get too close to Ventriloquist.

"You already have deary," she says smiling at Steph, behind her she can see Harper get ready for another fight, "don't worry I will not take her from you. She needs this."

"You know her?"

"Oh yes. We were... Friends of a sort at one point, almost family in fact. But Shauna chose to throw it all away."

"More..." Cass says. Steph looks back at her, she doesn't look accusatory, or hostile, more like curious...

The woman looks at Cass too, "I'm sorry where are my manners. My name is Jeannette, this will sound odd, but I am a banshee." Steph suddenly feels a lot more on edge, she remembers reading about banshees, they have the full gen-spread of powers plus, sound manipulation and maybe immortality? but the woman continues like they didn't just tense up, "I can sense death, it hangs heavy on this house. but not just past. I'm sorry, there will be more deaths tonight."

Before any of them can work out how to respond to such a statement they hear a siren blaring down the street, and a moment later a cop car pulls up in front of the house when she turns back Jeannette is gone. Steph doesn't get the chance to look around before the cops approach them nervously, they haven't gotten used to the three of them running around around yet.

She steps forwards towards them, "here for the super villain delivery?" she says pointing towards Ventriloquist

"Damn they weren't kidding!" the lead cop says before telling his partner to call this in.

"And get forensics! we got two bodies inside!" Steph calls after before turning to the cop who was still near them, "in the kitchen. They may be a little worse for wear. She's telekinetic, or at least partially, and sicked the bodies on us," the cop goes from concern to shock to mistrust in very quick succession, "Given the vein discolouration they have been dead a few days."
That stops him trying to arrest them then and there but he still doesn't look happy, the fact that her two friends have disappeared around the house probably doesn't help...

The two of them take the chance to have a well-earned rest while Steph deals with the cops. They have found a spot in the back garden where there is a bench looking over a corps of trees and above that cloudy night's sky. Not that it is that dark, off to their left the light pollution from Gotham stains the sky an orange tone. Even so, it's peaceful.

One downside of all this peace is now Harper can hear her thoughts, generally something she tries to avoid. Just thinking about how easy it would have been for her to die tonight already, how easy it would be for that crazy 'banshee' to be right. She is a teenager, after all, it is normal for her to grapple with her own mortality and the like... right.

But if she is being honest, Harper is more afraid of other people dying that she is of dying herself, not that she wants to die by any means. She can't even imagine what Cullen would do, or what she would do without him. Their lives have been intertwined since... well since he was born, but more meaningfully since their mom died. From then on it was always up to her to be the responsible one, their dad had always been on the useless side and that only got worse.

That's the thing though. Now. Now it isn't just Cullen that she needs to look out for, now there's Cass, and Steph, and the whole of Gotham for that matter. But she isn't stupid she knows Gotham is just too big for her to make a meaningful difference to, all she can do is focus on the people in front of her.

Honestly, these last few weeks, with the three of them, the 'Gotham Girl Gang' as Steph dubbed them, it's been amazing. They have been able to do so much good, making a real difference. Not just one mugger at a time, here and there but real good. Stopping whole gangs, hunting down super villains, fighting with young leaguers.

She doesn't know if this is what Batman and Barbara were planning but she does feel real responsibility for everything that happens in their little slice of the world. In a way, it has forced them to work so much harder, even when they aren't out Harper can't help but think about the next time they will, what they need to do. She has been working her but off, they all have, she doesn't even know if the big shots have noticed, but to be honest, it doesn't matter they have a job to do.

She looks over at Cass sat next to her who is also lost in thought, she has been working so hard too, maybe even more than the other two of them. She throws herself at everything, trying to save everyone, no matter what, how anyone can think of her as bad...
With that thought on her mind, Harper checks the bandage on Cass's leg and notices that it slipped slightly and blood is starting to seep around it. Wordlessly Harper moves to put a better one on and takes the chance to make sure the wound is one hundred per cent clean. The cut doesn't look that deep, enough to bleed but it didn't get past the skin.

"You've got to stop letting yourself get hurt like this." Harper says glancing up at Cass who is watching her sheepishly.

"K."

She sighs as she pulls the bandage tight over the wound, "no Cass. It isn't. You can't keep this up. I know you hate seeing us hurt, but we hate seeing you get hurt too. You have to promise me, Cass. No more getting yourself hurt stupidly OK? We can help you. You don't need to do this on your own."

Cass looks away from Harper, like she can't look her in the eye, before shrugging non-committally.

"No Cass. You have to promise me." Harper says standing up and putting her hand on Cass's cheek to move her face back to look at her, "I know you can say it. Please, Cass. Even if you can't promise yourself for whatever reason. Promise for the people who care about you. Promise for me."

Cass catches her gaze for a moment before giving a quick nod, then quietly says, "prom-is."

Harper can't help but smile, "Thank you. We look out for each other OK? No matter what."

"OK," Cass says before standing and hugging Harper, though it may be as much to hide her face as it is affection on Cass's part. whatever it is doesn't matter really.

The nearly full moon peeks out from behind a cloud, lighting them with a soft silver glow. When they shift back so they can see each other Harper can still feel Cass's hand resting on her neck, even through the armour. Cass seems almost hesitant like there is something she is struggling to say. Harper gives her a moment and finally, she says, “Bue-ta-ful ha-pa”

“your beautiful too Cass.”
Harper's gaze drops from her crystal blue eyes, with their ring of bronze, almost golden around the outside, down to her lips, slightly parted like they are inviting Harper forward.

Stop. You are friends. Just stop. She tells herself. This is why we can't have nice things.

Harper looks away slightly but stops as Cass's warm hand presses against her cheek, gently guiding her back, face to face with her friend, just as she had done to Cass a few moments before.

Cass moves forward softly pressing her forehead and nose against Harpers.

They are now so close together they can feel each other's eyelashes as they blink.

Harper swears Cass's eyes have the same passion and hunger as her own.

The air between them warms with their panted breaths.

She can barely hear over the pounding of her heart.

There is a static pulling them together.

But before they touch they are jarred apart by an urgent buzzing in their ears.

Chapter End Notes

both this Ventriloquist and Jeannette appeared in secret six, and Ventriloquist also showed up in batgirl V4, the fight at the start took several points from the latter.

oh and btw I did go back and do some edits on the rest of the story, I kept going back and forth but then I started using Grammarly for one of the fillers, then I kind of did for the whole fic and made other tweeks along the way, don't feel you have to go back and reread the whole thing but I am more proud of this now so that's nice.
Chapter Summary

Time to find out about the interruption form last chapter. Then a couple more interruptions!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Barbara looks out of the watchtower window at the earth far below. She always felt that it is so fragile from up here, like even a tiny spark could do so much damage. Of course it could, there are enough nuclear sparks to do a lot of damage, one of the biggest fears of anyone in the Justice League is a nuke in a populated area, not one of them has the power to help in that scenario. But even outside of mass destruction, even a tiny nock could change the fate of the world forever, just one thing could go wrong and take them all down a horrible path.

"Hey Barb, Checking out the weather? Storm clouds over Gotham... again."

"Hey Dinah, Wasn't that bad when I left. If anything it just helps clean the air."

"We both know no amount of rain could make Gotham clean."

Before Barbara can reply M'gann floats up through the floor, "sorry I kept you waiting." Her pale skin and bald head catch Barbara for a moment, not in a bad way, it's just like when a friend changes their hairstyle after having the same one for ages.

"No worries, I just got here," Dinah replies, "and Barb was admiring the view."

"It always freaks me out if I'm honest, everything seems so small from up here," M'gann replies before asking, "what about the girls? Do you think they are ready to join the team?"

"I'm not sure. Not after they got caught up in the middle of the breakout last week. They took a big hit, we shouldn't push them too hard."
"I disagree," Barbara interjects, "they have been pushing themselves harder than anyone, only the knights have brought in more escapees since the breakout than them, and they keep showing us that they can do great things. Maybe even more than that they need to know that we trust them, that we know how much work they have put in, they are still teenagers, after all, a little bit of recognition can go a long way."

M'gann smiles, "I'm just imagining what we would have said if we found out adults were deciding things above our heads."

"We know what you would have said because you did, 'we are going to do this whether you help us or not' was, I think, what Kon said."

They all smile at the reminiscents, then M'gann asks Barbara again, "so how about that? You ask them to come up here so we can show them around, then we let them decide how they want to continue."

"There might be quite a bit of squealing," Barbara warns.

"Wouldn't be the first," M'gann replies, "how long do you think we have to prep?"

"An hour or so, some of the tunnels have been damaged and until they are fixed the Girls will have to ride back."

"That should be fine, we will see you then," Barbara returns M'gann's smiles as they part ways, M'gann towards the training rooms and Barbara for the zeta tubes

"I'll come with you," Dinah says.

The two of them enter the zeta tube side by side. The world around them warps as they travel thousands of miles in a heartbeat. The first time people go through one they always say that they expected to feel something more, but there is almost no sensation at all in the moment of nowhere before arriving.

The Belfry is quiet, everyone is out on normal patrols, except for Bruce, who was keeping an eye out on them all and the Girls, who are hunting down one of the last escapees, as they wheel up to Bruce she asks, "how have they been doing?"
"Mission successful. Shauna Belzer is in custody, ready to be transported back to Arkham."

"Good to hear. Mind if I take over?"

Bruce gives her a nod, stepping away from the workstation so she can take over. As she does he pulls up his cowl and heads off, to his own patrol most likely.

Barbara sets the station to drop to the height she needs and gets herself set up before selecting the Girls' radio frequency, giving them a quick buzz to get their attention, "Girls, you copy?"

There is a moments delay before she hears Harper respond, "we're here Oracle, Spoiler's debriefing the cops. what do you need?" if Barbara isn't mistaken she sounds very slightly breathless.

"We need you to head back to the Belfry asap."

"Everything OK?"

"We are all fine here. It's something for you actually."

"Whatever it was it was Spoiler."

"You know I'm on here too!" Steph snaps back

"It's nothing bad. If anything it is a good thing. We will fill you in when you get back."

"so it was probably Cass then..." Harper says, an edge of laughter on her voice.

"Most likely. Forensics just got here with the transporter, we should be able to head out soon." Steph replies, one of the cops is watching her trying to guess at who she is talking to, "Blue, mind getting the bikes?"
"Oh yeah, sure." Harper sounds a little distracted in her reply, Steph wonders if Cass has anything to do with that, but before Steph can ask a detective walks over to her.

Turns out he just wanted her to reiterate what happened with the bodies, but the forensics team had confirmed what she had said, that they had been dead for a few days at least, maybe even a week or more. Even so several of the cops are watching her hands a little too close to their handcuffs, she can tell they are intending to arrest her if given the chance, but thanks to commissioner Gordon giving them some leeway around the Arkham breakout, none of them act on it. At least before Harper and Cass show up with the bikes.

As they speed away they pass a few more cop cars going the other way. Now normally Steph likes riding on a night like this, cloud cover keeping off any sharp light, washing the whole ground in a dull grey, but also no rain to soak their equipment. But tonight there is something in the air, maybe it is just what that banshee said but there is a certain menace to the sky that has nothing to do with rain. What she wouldn't give to head back through the much safer-feeling tunnels but they haven't had a chance to fix them up, they aren't exactly a top priority but still.

It is only fifteen minutes or so after leaving the house that they are starting to get into Gotham proper, even though they are still away from the islands the buildings are starting to grow in size, from the two-story houses in the suburbs, to the flats and offices of the metropolitan area, the towering shapes of the skyscrapers on the horizon.

There is a low rumble that they can make out over the hum of their bike motors. At first, she thinks it's thunder, the sky is bleak enough. But then another sounds far too close, and not from above but from a nearby building as they pass.

The next is closer still. And this time it is clear what is happening.

The building in front of them explodes!

Almost simultaneously so do the ones all around them!

A mess of metal, radio masts, and concrete fall all around them. They have to split up as they weave through the debris. They are forced apart by a chunk of concrete landing between them. Steph can see Cass racing ahead with her faster bike, and Harper had to serve hard away from Steph to avoid the power line that almost took her out. There is almost nothing they can do for each other, just survive, they can meet up after.
Steph forces her bike to jump over something metal but her landing is bad, the back wheel starts to make grating noises and is showering sparks everywhere. The handling is shot. She has to fight to not smash into a wall and ditches before it spins wildly. She only just makes it into the cover of a mostly intact building before something smashes down behind her. She curls up into a ball covering her head and prays it will stop soon. It's all she can do.

It seems to have stopped. Or at least the explosions have. Harper can make out the sound of distant sirens racing towards them. She coughs painfully and checks her exposed skin, she doesn't seem to be bleeding, so there is that. Everything else has gone to hell though. Her beautiful bike is gone. Something hard hit it in the front crushing into the wheel. Have to make do though.

She gets up from where she was thrown. Her ribs hurt from the impact but her armour took the force, or at least enough of it to stop her bones from being broken like so many toothpicks. Her diagnostics show some damage but nothing too bad. She heads over to collect what she can from the bike. It is easier not thinking of it as hers any more. But the weapons and medical supplies she managed to salvage from the storage will be of help.

When she plugs her suit into the radio booster on her bike there is a sharp crackling then she can just about make out Steph's voice, "....anyone copy... mess here... civvies...."

"I'm here, bikes out though..."

"...bikes... mine too..."

"...safe..." that's Cass. so they are all OK.

Steph responds again, "...good... civvies... help them..."

Harper agrees with her and she can make out Cass doing the same but before they can say anything else there is a sharp buzz making Harper flinch with pain. then there is a new voice, one that is harder to make out, "... Safe... Birds... Jam... girls?... get..."

Harper thinks it must be Barb but she couldn't make much sense of the message through all the interference. And before she can try to get a better one her radio whines loudly then dies. Today just keeps getting better and better.
But they had already agreed, they are heroes. It is up to them to help people and there are a lot of people hurt by the explosion. She doesn't know what kind of crazy did this but it is up to them to stop it before anyone else gets hurt.

The extent of the damage becomes clear as Harper heads off, every building looks damaged in some way, the lucky ones just have a few windows knocked out, whereas the worst are little more than rubble. Who would do something like this, and why. It's not the normal M.O. of any of the escapees that she remembers, most want their face on more things. Was it someone else. A new player. These thoughts race from her mind as she hears a cry for help.

She rushes over to find two kids, who must have been playing on the street. One of them is trapped under an unrecognizable metal frame. They recognize her instantly, or at least that she is a hero. She tells the free kid to pull his friend free when she lifts the metal, "On the count of three. one. two. three."

She braces her legs, tenses her arms, and straightens her back. with a great heave, she takes the immense weight of the metal, off the kid just long enough for them to be pulled free before dropping it with an almighty smash. Her arms feel like they have been pulled out of there sockets and her legs burn. She takes several deep breaths to get oxygen back into her head.

The kids are OK. Now anyway. Harper asks if they know of anyone else who might need help. The two of them show her back to their foster parents' place. Everyone there is fine too so Harper recommends that they get out of town as fast as possible, something like this is only going to get worse before it gets better.

She carries on helping everyone get out of the buildings that look most likely to come down, patching people up where she can, and helping people trapped in the rubble. But she is lacking much of the essential equipment for this, she lost too much on her bike and they didn't exactly tool up for disaster response. This was meant to be a 'catching a bad guy' day, not a... 'everything is on fire' day.

She starts seeing EMTs and cops after what feels like forever but was only fifteen to twenty minutes. But this is also when everything does get worse.

The first thing she sees is a group of people running around a corner looking behind themselves in terror like something is following them. She rushes over and manages to catch one of them, "what's going on?"
But they don't get the chance to reply before she hears another voice, loud and clear over the chaos around them, "Oh look here! I find the prize of the day!"

He's a massive man, more than a foot taller than Harper, he has an electrical burn scarring the left side of his face, and heavy bulky armour with wires running from over his back to his chest plate and more running down his arms to oversized gauntlets. Harper thinks she remembers him from one of the files Barbara made her read, he calls himself 'Electrocutioner'. Stupid name. Being electrocuted isn't something to be proud of, it just means your an idiot. And she tells him as much.

"Ha! Little birdy thinks she's smart!" He swages forward. Behind her, Harper can hear the civvies getting out of the way, "shocking me only makes me hit harder!" As if to show off he grabs onto a sparking wire sticking out for a pile of rubble and the sparkling electricity jumps into his suit making his gauntlets hum dangerously.

So his suit channels charge the same way hers does, so any electricity used in this fight will be a waste, lost to resistance and nothing else. Unfortunately, his fists are going to hurt her a lot more than anything she has left, sure the months of training she has received might help but no way will that be enough.

She might have a play though. It's risky. Ninety-nine per cent odds that this goes horribly wrong, and even that's relying on him making the same mistake she did. She holds up a hand for him to stop as he advances saying something along the lines of "I'm going to crush you like a bug!"

"One question!" Her voice sounds a lot braver than she feels.

"I ain't here to talk. I'm here to kick your ass!"

"Yes. Yes. But one brilliant electrical engineer to another," he doesn't stop but has slowed down, a little. Harper can feel her heart racing in her chest, but it feels distant, like she knows that she is scared, but in a detached kind of way. The clock is ticking that last per cent away every-one of her short breaths, "my suit works the same way. I was wondering how you overcame the 'blowback' problem?"

He pauses mid-step then opens his mouth before shutting it again, her guess is right he doesn't know!

She flicks the power on her gun up to max and sends a pure bolt of lightning slamming into his
chest. He raises a hand to keep the sparks from blinding him. This gun is the most efficient she has made yet but she can still feel it heating fast. The buzz of power is deafening and her goggles are almost black to stop the light from burning out her eyes.

The power levels in her suit are dropping fast. Maybe a second left. But that second seems to last a lifetime. Everything hangs on how much capacity his suit has. And how much he has used. It's a massive gamble. And if it fails she is one hundred per cent dead. And so is everyone behind her.

The beam cuts off. Her heart plummets. There is a moment where she thinks that she failed. She can see is angry eyes past his armoured fingers. Then...

**Boom!**

She doesn't have time to dodge completely as detonations rip his armour apart.

Something hits her. She isn't sure what. But a moment later she is laying against the wall of a building, coughing painfully. she takes a few deep breaths but they hurt. She doesn't think anything is broken though. She gets up and is about to look for Electrocutioner when she hears something almost silent behind her. Her first thought is Cass but then she's hit on the back of the neck and she thinks no more.

Chapter End Notes

Electrocutioner is from Arkham Origins if anyone didn't know.

OK so you know how I got all excited about this being the end of this last chapter... that was a lie. well not really a lie, but a half truth. there will, in fact, be two sequels running in parallel. I don't plan for them to start before the summer, I am looking to work on an oc story first, or at least the first draft of it, and catch up on some SBFB too.
Chapter Summary

Time for us to catch up with Cass and Steph. and time for the bad guys to...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As she moves she can feel their eyes on her. They are trying to hide but she is better than that. They are good enough to hide their numbers however, she estimates seven at the highest, and it's always the highest. She should be trying to help the people around here but with the warriors hunting her, she would just be putting them in danger.

The first strikes from behind her, coming out from a building and launching a chain at her. It was meant to grapple her head but she sees it coming a mile off and ensnares it around her arm.

She surveys him in a heartbeat. He is a medium man, larger than her but not massive. He has facial hair around his mouth and long hair running down his bare-back, he is wearing heavy boots, blue trousers, and metal straps around his wrists connecting to the chains. A stupid mistake.

The straps around his wrists let her pull him in when he is still off-balance from the throw. He doesn't have the chance to react before she strikes, and he drops to the ground. Alive but no longer a threat.

Others are still watching her. She will have to be careful, they may not all make such easily exploitable mistakes.

That, however, isn't a problem with the next one. The heavy blade misses her by inches and it's weight embeds it in a metal trash can. He dives forward fast striking out with the other blade. She knocks the blow aside but before she can close he kicks at her. There is something about his movements that is familiar, she can't place it yet though, and with more to come, she doesn't want to take the time. She ducks under his blade on a heavy swing that left him open to her counter, she leaves him with the first.

The next is in no rush so she decides to hunt them down. And she can feel more eyes on her.
An unthought instinct tells her to move as she heads down a narrow street. She barely dodges the falling debris, but even as she does to more falls. The damage to the buildings has given them much to use. But she is very fast. Even so, it takes all of her skill to dart through. Her cape is cut to ribbons trailing behind her like whipping tails but she is unharmed.

He doesn't give her a moment to rest now though. A foot swings at her face and she has to take the blow, rolling with it to keep it from breaking her jaw. She counters by throwing him aside but he rolls in the air to land gracefully on his feet.

This one is much better than the last two. He is slighter than either of them, only a little larger than her but he moves like an animal; precise, fast, strong, tough, and cunning. His preference for close combat lets her keep up the act. His movements are lightning-fast but she has studied animal movements too, she traps a snake-like strike pinning its jaw, and he keeps coming trying to pounce on her. As she knew he would. She has the edge in the grapple and manages to pin him holding tight until he slips into unconsciousness.

She wonders how many more will fight her. They are getting better but they still have a long way to go to beat her. But maybe she will at least get a workout. Perhaps from the figure that has taken up presence at the end of the street. He is a slender man, the same kind of build as her, but a head taller. He is in the same blue robes as the others, with a red collar, boots, belt, gauntlets, and a mask covering his lower face.

He approaches slowly, patient and confident. She matches him, even as he picks up his pace. He leads with a flying kick that she slides under and before she can turn he is kicking again, a swipe then strike, strike. but she has an advantage now, she knows who trained them. She feels stupid for taking so long to put it together, they have all favoured reach and fast kicks. Exactly the same things the Armless Master taught her. She also knows the holes in his teachings.

On the last kick she counters strikes at the nerve cluster behind his knee, he shifts just in time to stop her from disabling his leg but that leaves him off balance for her to sweep his leg from under him. He kicks out as he falls but she manages to pull him into a grapple like the last one. This time though he manages to get his hands around her neck. She can't quite get a clean blow on his arm or keep him away, so her free hand sweeps out to find an edge. And finds one in a shard of metal. She rams it into his exposed arm making it spasm, pulling him in close enough for her to land a finishing blow to his temple.

She takes a moment to bind the wound on his arm. Many may take what she did as dishonourable, but her father taught her from a young age that anything is a weapon, and that victory is the only measure of worth. She has learnt the value of many other things too; kindness, wisdom, empathy. None of which he could ever understand.
Her thoughts are rudely interrupted by her next opponent. A soundless flash of metal comes within a hair's breadth, as she shifts aside from the chained weight. It cracks the concrete wall behind her, a single blow would do much worse to bone. The woman lashes with the flail, again and again, keeping her back with lighting fast movements. Cass shots forward when given the slightest opening, she needs to take away her advantage. This one is much better than the first though, she counters Cass's rush expertly. If she was anyone less the blow would have cracked Cass's jaw letting a follow up from the flail finish her off. As is Cass only just manages to skim past making the blow glance her throat. Now with the tight reach within her weapons arcs, Cass has all the advantages. The fight is over in two more counters and a lightning strike.

Two more opponents to go. Cass is certain that they will be the hardest. They give her the chance to catch her breath as she exits the alleyway, or maybe they just prefer an open space. As she gets back to an open street she notes the smoke drifting around, muffling the distant sounds from other people. This area was hit particularly hard by the bombs, fires still burn in some of the buildings, but those living there are long gone, replaced by a crowd of red-dressed warriors. It seems none of them want to get that close to her, she just wonders where their master is hiding.

A few of them make probing attacks, a thrown blade or a grappling chain, but Cass pays them little heed, swatting them aside or returning them from whence they came. All the while she surveys them watching for their master. It takes only a few attacks for them to realise that it will get them nowhere and they drop a wall of smoke all around. she stretches out her senses, reaching out to spot...

He's massive. Moving through the smoke like a titan. She barely comes to his elbow. As he consolidates out of the smoke she sees that he is in the same red and blue as the others. He is more lightly covered than any of them though, bulging muscles on display. A simple attempt to intimidate. His head is almost completely covered though, only beady eyes piercing out from the red cloth.

He strikes like a snake. she counters, trying to trap his wrist as she did on one of the ones before. But he responds expertly almost taking her head off with a horizontal strike that she barely ducks under. Then she has to throw herself back to avoid the follow-up kick.

This is all just feints though. Preliminaries. He has been watching her the whole time. Reading her techniques. Gauging speed. Her strengths. Her weaknesses... all of them lies.

His first strikes focused on keeping her at a distance. She had made sure to teach all of them watching that she favours striking hard and fast. That she would close them down and crush them. But she doesn't have such weaknesses. She has the scars to prove it.

He flies forward, kicking at her hard again. A killing blow. Far faster than any of the others.
She throws his strike off. Guiding it past and vanishing into the shadows before he lands. This is how *Bats* fight. In and out of shadows. Strike hard and fast, then fade away again. His moment of confusion gives her an opening. But as she strikes dropping on him from a building he turns. Countering again he tries to strike her away but she rolls past it, striking at his head as she flips aside. He manages to take the hit on his shoulder.

Now he is cautious. He knows she has been holding back on the others. This fear is as much a weakness as his ignorance. She strikes forward at his ankles. Keeping the pressure up as she imitates the movements of his master. The armless master. Quick kicks and amazing mobility. His bewilderment and shock cripple him even more, slowing his movements enough for her to land a few blows. His pain now adds to all the other weaknesses affecting him.

In his desperation he closes with her, going for the grapple, trying to crush her with his massive arms. She weaves past. Striking at his head. His kidneys. His groin. As he stumbles back in pain she pushes forward again kicking him hard onto his back. She is impressed that he is still conscious. If only barely. She uses a modified version of a killing blow to the front of his skull to put him out for good... or a few hours at least.

She wonders where the last one is. She was sure there was one more.

But she doesn't have to wonder long...

There is an explosion in the next street. But it sounds weird. Not like one of the many bombs that blasted the town apart. She grapples up and away onto one of the buildings, careful to stick to the most intact roofs. She looks down from the shadows to see another warrior in blue and red. This one is a man with two long thin blades, he doesn't look as intimidating as many of the others, but then neither does she, on the other hand, *she* is still conscious...

Over him stands the reason *he* isn't. She is dressed in dark-red armour marked with silver lines, her dark hair is pulled back into a ponytail, and has a glowing staff in one hand. Cass recognizes her as someone who has been around before, working with the bats.

As Cass drops to the ground silently she notes the other woman is looking around, like she is sweeping the area, or searching for something. She says something, from what Cass can tell she is relaying information to someone on a headset. Cass steps out into the light of the moon as they look her way.
The flashes of emotions are a blur. First is easy, shock, her eyes flash wide and her muscles tense, but then she goes soft, releasing a breath with relief. There is still fear in her eyes, in the way she holds her staff, and how she looks both ways despite no threats being anywhere near, but for once it doesn't feel like it is directed at Cass.

She calls into her headset again as she rushes over. Cass is bemused by her attention, she tries to wave it off but she is insistent. She is starting to feel the pains from the fights, the spikes from the cut on her leg, the aching of her jaw from the hit she took, and the numbness in her muscles. But none of it is serious.

Her bemusement becomes confusion then worry when a plane zooms in above their heads. It's one of the ones Sun showed her that is sometimes used to get around the city quickly. If they feel they need to get her out of the combat area quickly either there is somewhere much worse she is needed, or more worryingly, she is the mark. And that could mean Blue and Sun are in danger too. She takes the offered rope that pulls her up into the cockpit and the plane flies itself back to the main base.

"It's too early to presume the worst. Signal, see if you can pick up a trail, she might just have gone to help others. Canary, see if you can get anything out of 'him', your a leaguer, hopefully, the cops will at least give you a chance," Both of them give affirmatives but before Barbara can say anything else she gets a blip that Cass's plane is back, then a moments later Cass drops through the roof hatch of the Belfry.

Barbara wheels away from her station letting the knights keep up coordination, and moves over to her young prodigy, "Cass! are you OK?"

Cass gives her a quick nod that almost looks like it is hiding her rolling her eyes, then she tilts her head to the side and asks, "what?"

"The attack was targeting you," Barbara doesn't waste time on preamble, Cass doesn't need it.

Cass gestures to herself then flexes her arms showing that she is strong, so she doesn't need protecting. As if any of them could forget.

"It's not that we think you're weak. But they are coming after you, and don't care who they hurt to get you."
"Who... they?" She sounds angry, hatred or annoyance bubbling forth and rightfully so.

That's the question of the hour, isn't it? They had seen an uptick in mercenary activity for the week since the breakout, but they just couldn't find out who was pushing it. But it seems Gotham is the place to be and whoever put the hit on the Girls is sparing no expense and is affluent enough to back it up, "we don't know yet... we are working on it."

Cass gestures to herself again, "help"

"The best thing you can do now is stay here, and stay safe."

The fears and worry of her drifting thoughts are probably visible to Cass who narrows her eyes, and looks around at the other people in the room then asks, "where Ha-pa, St-eph?"

"We are on Harper's trail it shouldn't be long until we catch up. As for Steph... it would be easier if you follow me..."

Some time ago...

She got lucky, in that she wasn't buried alive in the rubble. But she is down on equipment, lost her bike entirely... oh and is stuck inside a thrift shop with the terrified employees. She had to focus on helping them initially, after she lost contact with Harper and Cass, mostly just patching up minor wounds. After the shock of what had happened wares off some of the staff starts to help out, dealing with the customers who were in the store when everything went off or people who took refuge inside just as Steph did during the worst of it.

This gives Steph a chance to try and find a way out. The front is completely blocked off by rubble; metal frames, concrete, and brickwork, blocking them off from the street completely, and the Staff door out the back is also blocked from opening. Steph does have a charge that could clear them a way out but if she blows it in the wrong place she could find that there is also rubble there, or even worse she could bring the building down on them!

This normally wouldn't be a question, people from outside could clear the rubble in a few hours and they would all be fine, but that's not going to be good enough. Not after one of the old ladies starts to clutch her chest in pain and can't reply to Steph when she asks about it, instead she just wheezes and pants. Steph tells her to chew one of her painkiller pills (they are stronger than the off the shelf kind), gets her to sit with her knees elevated, and makes sure that she has one of the
She hears the sounds of sirens further down the street. It is much the same as the one on the other side where they were when the attack happened. Lots of small shops line the streets advertising themself with colourful signs, but not as much of the neon of the main city. People are out on the street some lightly injured but they look like got lucky, most of the damage is to the buildings, not the people, and buildings can be repaired. There is a pair of ambulances at the far end of the street, EMTs handing out medical supplies.

One of them looks up then narrows their eyes suspiciously as Steph runs over. This suspicion doesn't go away even when Steph tells them about the lady, but one of them does agree to follow her back.

She stops when they get back to the alley to the shop, the EMT asks her what's wrong but she just tells them to go ahead. They roll their eyes and shake their head before heading in. She can tell that they don't think very highly of vigilantes, but this isn't the most important thing on Steph's mind.

She had felt a spike of pain in her arm, she must have pulled open the cut Scarecrow gave her. She pulls herself up to the roof out of the way, the EMTs have enough to focus on without her little cut. When she moves her cloak to see how bad it is she sees that her under gear is torn, something must have cut it. That's when she sees that her hand is shaking like a leaf in the wind.

The stress must be getting to her. She decides to have a little sit-down, just to catch her breath, it is so hard to take deep breaths with this armour on, she just can't seem to make the air stay down. Her graceful attempt to sit becomes more of a collapse as her muscles become don't answer to her. Her eyelids are heavy.

She hears a laugh from somewhere nearby, somewhere on the roof with her. She tries to look
around but her head is so heavy. a hand takes her jaw and lifts her head to meet the sharp yellow silted-eyes looking back at her. Steph wants to say something but she can't take a breath.

The woman looking down at her speaks instead, Steph can barely hear it, "I love watching this part." she has pointy, fang-like teeth, and a forked tongue, "Pero mi veneno es la muerte. Now, sleep."

No... she needs to... something... sleep does sound good... she fights to pull in a wheezy breath... she needs to keep fighting...

The face's smile is suddenly wiped off by an explosion of noise!

Cass presses her hand against the glass. Steph in laying still in a hospital bed, oxygen being pumped into her lungs by an external set, stood next to her bed. Dr Midnight is still with her, working on making sure she survives the night. He had told them that that is the most dangerous time, if she makes it to dawn she is probably safe.

But they said the same about Barbara when the Joker shot her.

Barbara hates seeing her like this. Steph has always been the most lively, courageous, vibrant, person Barbara has ever known, she feels terrible for all the times she had wished Steph would be a little less so.

Cass turns to look back at Barbara, tears pouring unheeded down her face. She falls onto Barbara, awkwardly sitting on her lap and wrapping her arms around Barbara's neck. She pulls the other girl in tight, holding on, just giving her something to hold onto when everything else is falling apart.

Chapter End Notes

the group Cass fought were the Disciples of Armless Master, in the comics Shiva siced them on B as training after Bane broke his back. don't know why they are working for [redacted] here but it doesn't really matter.

End Notes
first things first thanks for reading :D

the formatting of this will be releasing in ~8 arcs of ~3 chapters each interspersed with shorter fillers. each arc will be released in quick secession (3-4 days apart) then a break as i right the next chapter with the fillers coming out during that break

i do have most of the arcs planned out but if you have any ideas for the fillers i would love to hear them, even if it's just "meet catwoman" or "go to a fair" so i can add them to the list, that would be amazing

harper/cass will be very slow burn but i promise the last words will be "i love you" shared between them

finally if you want, go check out my tumblr for snippets every few days

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!