After Isabella’s death, it would have been easy for Ed Nygma to take revenge in killing Oswald for his deed. After all, no one ever came closer to the Penguin than Edward himself. And though killing Oswald was a tempting idea at first, Edward Nygma decided he would do far more than just that. He would destroy Oswald from the very core and rip apart his entire empire in the process.
time in the past while Jim's take place in the present. The story is set right after Oswald came to Ed's rescue.
Gotham City - Kane Chemicals

The city was in darkness thanks to Jerome Valeska’s little stunt that found it's climax as Jerome exploded the power plant, throwing Gotham into complete darkness and into a night of blood and crime. Chaos reigned supreme over Gotham and he would have probably found this a very welcome change, would it not have been for the fact that his best friend had been kidnapped. Someone had dared to lay a hand on Ed Nygma and that he could not forgive. This was a night of danger even for him, the still reigning mayor of Gotham, maybe especially for him and it was probably not the wisest choice to leave his house but he would not stop until he had shed the blood of those who had stolen Edward from him.

This was not just because of the deep love he felt for his friend, at least that was what he was trying to tell himself as he got out of the car in front of the warehouse. Someone taking Ed from him was a sign of his crumbling power and influence. Someone thought he could get away with a crime like this against him and that he would not - he could not - stand for. No one fucked with the Penguin and could expect to get away with it. No one could steal from the Penguin and could expect to keep their life. And no one could hurt someone the Penguin loved and expect to be granted a quick and painless death. He would make everyone suffer who dared to put a hand on Edward.

Maybe that was a little possessive, otherwise, there would be no explanation for Isabelle’s death, he assumed and yet, his possessiveness was born out of love and out of the fear to yet again lose someone he so deeply cared for.

He arrived at Kane Chemicals in the dead of the night with two of his henchman and the comfort that Gabe would stay behind at Dahl Manor just in case Ed managed to call again. They were armed with flashlights. It were moments like this in which he cursed Fish more than he usually did. His leg was slowing him down and made everything in his life only harder and more complicated, even raiding a seemingly abandoned warehouse.

They walked slowly and quietly past a trashcan fire as they entered the warehouse, before them empty skeleton containers, barrels of various possibly deadly chemicals, and other equipment that he neither did know the names of nor cared enough about to learn them.

»Don't forget: Ed’s safety above all. Whoever kidnapped him will pay, but only after Ed is rescued!« He reminded his henchman, two burly Italians, as he limbed ahead. For once in his life, he didn't much care if he was appearing weak to his henchman because he worried so much about Ed - or about anyone for that matter. He didn't care how much his love for Ed showed to anyone who cared to look at his actions. He had been in this situation before, stumbling into a dark building in search of someone he loved and it had ended with that person dying in his arms only moments later. He would not have Ed face the same fate as his mother, a knife buried in his back with the light draining from his eyes as Oswald would be incapable to do anything about it. It was true what Ed had once told him, love was a weakness, love made him vulnerable and Oswald had the habit of loving entirely too much and too strongly. There was never a decent amount, it was always all or nothing. When he loved he loved with all his heart and when he hated he hated with his entire being. There was no middle ground, there was no in-between.

And maybe, yes, this love for Ed made him weak against his enemies, against those who were already grabbing for his crown and those who demanded his resignation as mayor after his disastrous TV interview the other day, but to Oswald, all these things did not quite matter at this moment. All
that did matter was Ed.

»Ed!« He yelled into the void of the warehouse, the only sound except for their footsteps and the sound of leather scratching above leather as his henchmen rearranged their grips on their guns behind him, was coming from the water drip-drip-dripping on the ground around him, ticking away his time - Ed’s time, perhaps. »Edward!« Maybe it wasn’t wise to scream out his name at the top of his lungs like this and telling everyone who might want him dead that he was here. If this was a trap, he had walked right into it with fanfares and a red carpet and yet he did not care about the danger he might have walked into.

His heart was racing a hundred miles per hour, the sound of his own blood rushing in his ears all he could hear, the fear of being too late of having lost another person he loved too blinding, too numbing to even consider that he himself might be in danger. Suddenly, there was the sound of footsteps again on the concrete floor, echoing from the walls around them and making it almost impossible to say from where those steps truly came before, moments later, a silhouette peeled itself out of the darkness surrounding them.

Oswald could feel how his henchmen shifted their position, he could feel their agitation as they made themselves ready to shoot. Questions could be asked later. That was what he loved about idiots like them. They were good at doing their job and never asked unnecessary or unwanted questions. They would never dare to question his motives or his plans and just do as they were told. One could never have too many mindless drones like them or good old Gabe.

The silhouette was that of a tall and slender man in a waistcoat and Oswald felt his heart jumping into his throat as the man walked out of the shadows of one of the many crates and stepped into the beam of their flashlights. »Ed!« He hardly recognized his own voice as Ed’s pale face stared back at him from the shadows. He didn’t care why he was alone, why he walked around freely and why there were no guns pointed at them yet as he gave his flashlight hurriedly to the man on his right side, forcing him to lower his gun in the process, before he stumbled his way forward to Ed, almost crushing the other man as he flung his arms around his neck having to stand on his toes to even reach up high enough. Usually, Ed would lean down a bit to make it easier for him, but he remained rigid, with his hands in the pockets of his coat, even as Oswald let go of him and put his hands on his biceps instead. »Are you alright? Tell me you are alright.« He demanded from his friend, his voice still unbearably shaky and his breathing still unbearably heavy in his relief of seeing his friend alive. Edward’s face was too calm as he looked back at him, his posture too controlled, but none of that was of importance to him now.

»I’m alright, Oswald.« Edward replied calmly, his eyes never leaving his and the light of the flashlights in the hands of Oswald’s henchmen gently bouncing off his glasses, reminding Oswald on the day he had woken up in Edward’s flat for the first time. There had always been a constant greenish tint to the world inside his flat coming from a bright neon sign just outside Edward’s window, always reflecting from Ed’s glasses. Back then, Oswald had been certain that Edward’s eyes were green and only later he had realized that they had the color of liquid amber.

He managed a breathy laugh at this and clutched his arms tighter. »Of course!« He grinned, pride all but oozing from his voice. »Where are they? Who dared to lay a hand on you?« To anyone around, he might as well look like a pit bull ready to rip apart anyone who came too close to Edward with his teeth and much less like a penguin.

»I’m alone.« Edward replied still so very calm and Oswald could not deny the moment of shock and surprise before pride was blinding him once again.

»You escaped?« He grinned with this shark-like grin that seemed to unnerve most of the people
around him but never made Edward flinch away from him. No, Ed had never seen the monster that all of the other people around Oswald always saw, never saw the freak that the good people of Gotham saw in him, not just the Penguin, but him, Oswald, the far too human man that he was deep down inside. »Yes you did, didn't you, you rascal?« He laughed beaming with pride for his friend. Of course, Ed had never been in serious danger, not Edward Nygma! He was too intelligent, too smart for random thugs to keep him for long. Of course, Edward would find a way to escape in no time and without a scratch even. His kidnappers were probably already dead because they were stupid enough to fuck around with Ed Nygma. He had chosen the man he loved wisely, as it appeared. He didn't need to be rescued by anyone, he could take care of himself, he would not be Oswald’s greatest weakness but the one person who gave him his biggest strengths in the years to come.

Edward answered his smile with one of his own. »Did you bring anyone else?«

-End of Chapter 1-
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Warning: Rape

Gotham City

When Oswald came back to his senses, he could see Ed’s face hovering right in above of him like the full moon and the stars hovering in a midnight sky, so close that he would be able to touch him even, would he extend his hand, blood splattered all over his face in an intricate spider web design. Beautiful in its intensity just like his stare. For this moment, he was only worried for Ed, for the man he loved so much more than any other person, except his mother. He was safe. He was still alive, still in one piece. Oswald let out a shuddering breath as he was finally able to will his right hand into motion and touch Ed’s jaw with trembling fingers as if to make sure that he really was there with him and not just a figment of his imagination and his shattered mind. These days his world was filled with phantoms and shadows taunting his every move and thought. »You are alive.« His voice was barely above a whisper, his breath hitching in his throat as he was saying these words.

Suddenly, just staring into Edward Nygma’s light brown eyes made him forget about his own injuries or the pain he was in. All that mattered was that Ed was saved, that he was alive, that he was breathing. He was sure that he had never felt like this before. The last time that he had been so ready and willing to drop his mask, his entire persona of the Penguin and just be Oswald Cobblepot, the last time he had been desperate to ensure another person’s safety above his own was when he had found his mother inside this filthy cell, right before Tabitha, Galavan’s psychotic sister, had stabbed his mother in the back. It seemed as if he was never able to save those he loved. He had lost his mother, he had lost his father and he was not going to lose Edward, no matter the cost. Not to some random woman who looked like the ex he had killed, not to death itself - not as long as he was breathing.

After he had learned of Edward’s kidnapping, he had been willing to tear Gotham apart brick by brick, to destroy everything in his wake, even his own life and empire if nothing else. Hearing Ed’s voice through the telephone as he had called to tell Oswald what had happened to him, had chilled him to the core and made him forget that he had more pressing matters to focus on than just one person. He had been willing to risk his empire, his job as mayor, everything, just to make sure Ed was safe because whenever Edward Nygma would put his eyes on him, the world would stop turning and he and Oswald would be the only two people in the universe that were of any importance.

Maybe he had even known that he was walking right into a trap as he had arrived at the warehouse of Kane Chemicals near the harbor and stumbled all too willingly right into it. He remembered seeing Ed emerge from the shadows and how he had clung to the other man for dear life, breathing in his cologne as he held onto him in this moment of reunion. He didn't remember much after that. No, that wasn't true at all. He just didn't remember what happened right after he had found Edward. There had been shots and then there had been darkness for the longest time. And after the darkness, there had been nothing but pain, an ocean of agony and he had been certain that he would drown in it.

He could see how Ed’s eyes were darting over his appearance now and though he had no concept of
what he looked like at this point or how much time had passed since the moment he had last seen Ed, he could imagine that he probably looked as bad as he felt. His whole body was a universe of pain, not a single inch of his body was not burning as the chilly air that came through the open steel door behind Edward hit his bare skin. He was naked like on the day he had been born and covered in his own blood from head to toe. Surely there was not a bone in his body left that wasn’t broken, at least it felt like it. He felt weak, unable to even hold his touch on Ed’s jaw as his fingers began to slip hand dropped from his jaw.

»Oswald … It took me ages to find you.« Ed replied softly and this time, it was Ed’s hand on his face, gently turning it to one side to examine the damage to it. His left eye was swollen shut and out of the right eye he could barely see, everything was a blur, the world a mishmash of dulled colors and dark looming shadows with just a tiny bit of light coming from behind Ed, painting the faintest halo around his head in this moment of rescue. »I’m sorry that I got you mixed up in this.«

»It's not your fault.« Oswald huffed dismissively although his head was swimming. »It's mine. They took you to weaken me. I should have known … I should have made sure you were safe, Ed.«

There was a flicker of emotion ghosting over Ed’s face that he couldn't quite name yet. It wasn’t important. »We have to get you out of here, silly Bird.« Ed mumbled more to himself than to him, before he pulled on Oswald’s right arm to make him stand. Needless to say, he was unable to do so as his legs gave in right away, causing a scream to tear from Oswald’s throat. Oh, he had been beaten down before, he had been tortured before. Nothing of this was new to him and yet he had never been in this amount of pure and utter agony.

»I can't.« Oswald breathed. »Just … go. Before they come back.«

»They are all dead.« Ed smirked, his face entirely too smug for this situation, but he was always smug - that was what he loved so much about this man. The blood on his face was not his own and somehow that made Ed only more beautiful in his eyes, as messed up as it might be. They were equals in every sense of the word. Equally insane, equally cruel, equally evil, equally intelligent, ready to do what it would take to achieve their own goals. Never in his life had Oswald been with another person and just be able to be himself with every aspect of his personality, no matter how disgusting or vile that aspect might be to others. Ed saw him how he truly was, saw him as who he truly was down deep and he still accepted him like this, even after he had confessed his love to him, even after Edward had rejected him. Before Oswald could say anything, he felt how something was wrapped around his shoulders. Out of the corner of his right eye, he saw a flash of emerald before he was scooped up on a set of firm arms only to be embraced by darkness and a world of nightmares once more.

There was pain, only pain as he came back to his senses. His entire head was throbbing in agony as he tried to pry open his blue eyes for the millionth time, knowing that he would regret it because all of this, the pain and the feelings, the world around him seemed to exist in a constant loop by now. He didn't know how much time had passed, he didn't know how many time he had been awoken by this much agony. His eyes fell shut again if just for a moment because the throbbing of his skull was unbearable for the time he kept them open and being blinded by the light. His impulse was to run and fight, but his limbs felt like dead weight on him and once he had closed his eyes, his eyelids refused to open again. He could feel that there was something wrong with his entire left arm. He felt as if it had been ripped out clean from its socket and was no longer attached to his body, lying somewhere on the ground uselessly while he was bleeding out on the dirty cold ground. He didn’t dare to look and he hated himself with a passion for his own cowardice at this moment. He was the Penguin, he was not meant to be such a coward. He was meant to take the pain and the humiliation and grow stronger from it like he did everytime before when someone had wanted to push him down and destroy him.
After a few seconds, he became more and more aware of being shoved into the ground underneath him face first by a crushing weight, his bare stomach and hips scraping against the ground mercilessly. He felt the cold air against his naked backside cutting into him like a blade while around him the air was stuffy and smelled like all the things he didn’t wish to think about. He was naked like on the day he was born, stripped out of his expensive suit after it had been cut into pieces by the men who held him captive for a million years. All of this, even the horrifying sensation of something moving inside of him, was an endless repetition that he was unable to escape. By this point, he wasn’t even resisting anymore. There was no point to it. Never in his life had he felt more helpless, not even on the day that had changed his life forever and simply because someone had refused to end his life. Somehow his mind always came back to that day at the pier with the muzzle of Jim Gordon’s gun pressed against the back of his head. Back in that moment he had felt helpless, yes, but never as crushed and broken down as he felt now.

His mind reeled, not wanting to comprehend what was happening to him as the fog started to lift from his mind. The voice of a man was muttering something behind him that he couldn’t quite make out at first, then another. It hurt. It hurt worse than Oswald had ever experienced something to hurt in his entire life, the pain ripping into him with each thrust of the man who had taken position behind him.

»Stop« He managed to get out sluggishly because his tongue still refused to cooperate as if it was glued to the roof of his mouth. When was the last time he had something to drink? When was the last time he had eaten? His captors were not interested in keeping him alive, their only interest was in punishing him, in humiliating him. Desperate to get away even in his haze, he started scrabbling against the ground with his right hand in a blind panic, not knowing what to do or make of the situation, not grasping the full impact of what was happening to him at all, even though he knew what happened. His brain was at war with itself. One part unable to cope with the situation, unable to put it into words, the other part calmly explaining it to him because this happened before and it would happen again. He would die in here, wherever ‘here’ was. Every day his captors would come in, break another one of his bones and think of something new to humiliate him. Almost instantly, the right forearm of someone was wrapped around his neck from behind. As he tried to pull away, he realized that it was impossible to escape. Worse even, his thighs were shoved farther apart by the legs of the man who was still behind him, effectively pinning him further down to the ground with his weight. He could not breathe. Black dots at the edge of his field of vision came threateningly back into focus again, urging him to just pass out once more. If he would just allow his brain to get dark again, all of this would be over and he wouldn’t need to deal with it.

»I told you, you are nothing but a little bitch and the entire city is going to see you as the worthless piece of shit you are, Mr. Mayor.« The words came from somewhere behind him, groaning out each word and accompanied it by a thrust of his hips, ripping him apart piece by piece while his mind was still not ready to accept what was happening. He should be used to it by now, as a more cynical voice inside his head supplied. It was the voice of Mooney he usually heard in situations like this, reminding him of the cold reality. She had always been great in pointing out the cruel truth to him and in a way that helped him. She had taught him so much about the world and would she be here now … What would she do or say? She would probably say that he should just close his eyes and try to ignore it, that he should cease fighting and just accept it, that he should wait until it would be his time to strike back. If anyone, Fish Mooney had been the one person who had taught Oswald that he would be able to come back stronger than ever before everytime he would get knocked down a peck. You can survive this, she would say. You will survive this and then your wrath will be legendary.

»You enjoy this, don’t you, lil’ Penguin?« The shallow thrusting did not even slow as the man behind him held Oswald while he squirmed in desperation against the chokehold, trying to pull free with oddly weak arms as if all his muscles had just defused like alcohol in an instant, as if he was David in his fight against Goliath, unable to even scream in pain while he felt every movement of the cock
that was buried deep inside of him.

Just stop fighting. Fighting makes it worse. He could hear Mooney’s voice so clearly as if she was beside him, crouching on the ground next to him in her awfully high heels, her long nails gently scraping over his cheek, her fingers lovingly buried into his hair like a mother and he couldn’t help but think about her at the moment that she had chosen not to kill him. That moment under the bridge had stayed with him and it would never leave him and neither would the moment he had confronted her about all of it. She had looked at him like a mother would look at her son and there had been pride in her eyes at the man he had become. Possibly the best thing was turning Oswald Cobblepot into the Penguin. Imagining her at his side now gave him a perverse sense of comfort because she would hold his hand through this. His real mother would have cried for him, yes, would have pulled him into her arms, yes, would have kissed his pain away, yes. But Fish Mooney, she would have held his hand and she would have held out with him, would have let her strength flow into him so that he would be able to survive and later she would have torn everything down with him and burned this world to a crisp.

»No...« He ground out, still pulling against the chokehold as best he could, but the man behind him did not seem to hear and neither did the man Oswald could see in the corner of his eyes standing beside him. »Please-« He tried again, but his choked voice came out only as a hoarse and empty plea.

When he felt the chokehold tightening further and heard the laughter of the people around him, Oswald realized with a gnawing sickness that it did not matter if he begged them to stop or how hard he struggled or if he struggled at all. There was no one to help him. He was not going to escape. For once, Oswald would not be able to escape and he would not be reunited with Edward. If Ed was even alive. In his nightmares, he would see Ed’s deathly pale face floating on the rivers of death because he had not been able to save the one person he loved. And if he would keep on fighting he would risk a collapsed windpipe or a broken bone or internal bleeding. The hopelessness of the situation was crushing into him and death suddenly didn’t sound too bad.

Don't you have any pride left, my little bird?

He could hear Fish’s voice in his ear. Do you wish to be found like this by your friend Jim Gordon? Naked and disgraced? Do you wish to become a footnote in Gotham’s history as the person who made Gotham great and was killed like this? You are stronger than this.

»You know, Ozzy ... There are rumors going around that you are pining for Nygma. Surely you enjoy this right here, but if it helps you could just imagine that I’m him. That’s what you want, don’t you? What a headline. Mayor Cobblepot wants to be fucked by his chief of staff.« His voice was low and barely above a whisper and yet it chilled Oswald to the core, bringing back the nausea he had almost forgotten about and buried deeply into his bowels with a new wave of shame washing over him. Edward could never see him like this. Swallowing his terror and humiliation, he tried, forced himself, to go still and limp, for that was all he could do and when he was finally released from the chokehold he sucked in air in gratitude. There, there, Fish crooned.

Oswald watched numbly as drops of blood fell from the tip of his nose, glistening in the agonizingly bright light of the fluorescent light above him, to land on the ground just inches away from his face. He would kill this man and every other guy in this room. He would rip them apart. He could live with being raped. He could live with the humiliation and the pain, but he would not let it go unpunished and he would survive this. That’s it, my little Penguin.

It seemed as if years had passed as he regained consciousness and there were several things he realized all at once. The first thing was, that he was lying in a bed. His bed. The second thing was, that there was the smell of lilies hanging in the air like the perfume his mother had liked to use that had always filled their tiny apartment in the heart of Gotham. He was home, undoubtedly, the house of his father with the paintings of long-forgotten Van Dahls on the walls watching over him quietly.
as Oswald pried open his right eye to have a careful look at his surrounding without moving. Sunlight was gently shining on his face as he did, falling into the room through the large windows to his left side, warming the swollen side of his face and making the pain a little more bearable. He felt warm in his bed, covered by several blankets like his mother used to put on him to put her precious boy into a cocoon of warmth whenever he had been sick or coming home from school crying. He could still hear her croon softly, asking him why the other children would bully him, not understanding how anyone could not love her beautiful little boy. One of his thin white chiffon curtains swayed gently in a nice little breeze coming through the window furthest away from the bed. Someone had opened it a little to let in some fresh air. Olga, perhaps. He could hear music playing softly in the background and he felt like he knew the song that was played, yet he was unable to put a name to it, unable to fully grasp its meaning. There was a voice, singing softly, words he knew by heart and he felt as if he had been here before, heard this before, felt this before.

A soft moan escaped his broken and brittle lips as he closed and opened his right eye again slowly, his left one still swollen shut. Not much time could have passed - not as much as he had thought at least. How long was he lying here? How much time had passed since Ed had found him? Or had this been a dream? Maybe he was still in this dark room, waiting for his tormentors to come back to him and his brain was just playing tricks on him. »I light another candle, dry the tears from my face. Nothing can protect me more than my mother's warm embrace...«

»Ed...« He whispered into the void of the room, giving into his first instinct, although he didn't wish to disrupt the moment or the song. Yet, while the music coming from his old gramophone in the corner of his room kept playing on, Ed’s voice died down right away.

»Oswald« He sighed softly. »You are awake, Sleepyhead.« He couldn't see much, but he felt the bed dipping under the weight of another person to his right-hand side before he could feel the warmth of Edward’s touch on his left cheek. He tried not to wince from the pain that the touch brought him because certainly Edward didn't mean to hurt him. Edward’s hands were those of a healer, at least in this very moment as he did not wish to destroy, as he did not wish to kill or maim, but to be gentle and loving. »I started to get worried. You slept for ages.«

Everything about this situation was so surreal that he almost didn't know if the last year had happened at all. Surely, all of this was in his head. Was he still on the run from Galavan and the police, holed up in Ed Nygma’s tiny apartment? It certainly felt like it and if he would close and open his eyes anew, he was certain that he would be back there, with this calming green hue all around him, lulling him into a sense of safety. Only the amount of pain he was in was different. »Is this a dream?« He found himself muttering quietly, his left hand searching for Ed’s to hold it where it was but even that bit of movement hurt like a bitch. Finally, the room around him started to take clearer shape again and Ed’s features became more distinguishable and sharp hovering above him just slightly.

»Of course not, Oswald.« He smirked and his eyes remained so full of warmth that he was unable not to smile back at him. His jaw felt like it was shattered into pieces as he did so. »This is real, I promise. You are no longer there. You are safe now. Oh, Oswald, I can't tell you how glad I am that I could save you in time.« A part of him wanted to scoff at him and ask what he meant. Did he mean before those assholes could have killed him? It would have been a mercy kill at this point. He had gone through Hell and not for the first time either, but this time it had been different than all those times before, the pain on a new level, the humiliation unbearable. Nobody could ever know what happened to him, no one but the one person he trusted the most.

Maybe it was true and he let his emotions get the better of him, but the way Edward looked at him, he couldn't help but to melt into his touch right away. »I’m sorry, Ed...« He breathed before he clenched his aching jaw shut again. »For everything that happened to you. My heart... has always
been my greatest weakness and my enemies know this too.«

»Oswald…«

»No, Ed … Please, just listen to me. This once.« He didn't know why it felt this important to him to talk about everything just now in this situation while talking had never felt harder to him in his pained state. Maybe he was just afraid that, would he not say it now, he would not get the chance because Edward would get snatched away from him again. »I am sorry for misreading the signs. I am sorry for putting you into this awkward situation, but my feelings still hold true, Ed. I still love you, but I don't wish this to stand between us. I just wanted you save - that was my biggest concern.«

»I know, Oswald.« Ed replied softly before he took Oswald’s right hand into his and pulled it gently towards his face only to plant a feather-light kiss on his knuckles. He had been beaten to a bloody pulp and every single touch, every bit of movement hurt like hell, except for this kiss that made his heart flutter like a mad swarm of butterflies. »I know, and you did what you could. I am grateful to have a friend like you, Oswald.«

»Come on, what did I really do in the end?« He found himself scoffing.

»You came to save me and now look at you, Oswald … You almost got yourself killed for me. Those monsters … what they did to you … I can never make up for the sacrifice you made. I can never … I can never give you back what you lost to those monsters.« There were tears glistening in those amber colored eyes, so much guilt in them. Maybe he could try and get over what happened with Ed by his side.

»You are here now, Ed … That's enough.« Oswald breathed. His head hurt and he was barely able to keep his right eye open as he tried to find the proper words. »That's more I could ever have hoped for.« The smile that spread across Ed’s face, that toothy grin that he had always loved so much and that others found so creepy most of the time, was contagious.

»You should sleep a little more and we still need to get you patched up.« He didn't wish to sleep but the last time he had been in Ed’s care and healing hands and made a fuss about not wanting to rest, his friend had shoved a needle in his neck to knock him out. He didn't wish to repeat that scenario and falling asleep in his condition didn't seem hard anyway. Yet he feared what his dreams had to show him if he would fall asleep.

»Will you stay?«

»Certainly.« Edward smiled and brushed a hand through Oswald’s unruly hair. »And I will make sure that everything else is taken care of too, don't worry about a thing, my feathery friend.«

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Gotham City - Van Dahl Mansion

If there was one thing Jim Gordon had gotten used to after such a long time with the GCPD, it was seeing Oswald Cobblepot bloodied and torn up. Yet, usually the mobster came out on the other end stronger and somehow always proved himself victorious given any bad situation he managed to somehow maneuver himself into. He had been Fish Mooney’s umbrella boy, he had been the bitch of the two biggest crime families in Gotham, than he became the King, he went to Arkham Asylum and came out as the sole heir of the Van Dahl fortune only to move even further up into the position of mayor. No matter how bad the hand he was dealt got, sometimes it took Oswald Cobblepot only one sentence to cause unrest and chaos among the people who had the misfortune of being in his presence. He was a master in this game of chess and his chessboard was the entire city. Oswald was
always three steps ahead, always knew what would happen next, planting doubts into other people without them even realizing it. His genius was only matched by Edward Nygma, no matter how little Jim truly thought of the former GCPD forensic scientist. At least he could give him credit where credit was due, same with Penguin too.

They were insane, sure. A sociopath and a psychopath, a match made in Hell, but they were geniuses still, which in turn only made them more dangerous, of course.

Still, no matter in what bad shape he had seen Oswald before, no matter how often the Penguin proved himself to be the victor in the past, it seemed this time he had found his master. Jim had received the call in the early morning hours when the sun in these late December days had not yet risen and the city was still in a dull slumber. First, he had been certain that it was Harvey, calling because of some murder downtown but as he had managed a glimpse on the screen of his phone that brightly lit up the entire room, he had been surprised to find the name of their current mayor flashing on the screen.

It was not as rare as he wished it would be that Oswald would call him. Harvey once even joked about that Penguin surely had him on speed dial, but usually this only happened whenever Jim was meddling in his businesses in some way or if they had a common enemy that Oswald wanted to kill - which usually ended in them arguing about whether Penguin would get his way or if Jim would get the culprit behind bars. Needless to say, Oswald’s criminal endeavors had not died down just because he was the mayor now. It only meant more work for the crime boss and that he needed to outsource some of that extra work to people like Victor Zsasz or Barbara Kean. He had accepted the call, after hesitating for a moment and wishing to just go back to sleep instead. However, after he had pressed the green button, he had expected to hear Oswald’s smooth, yet annoyingly pitched voice barking orders at him or critiquing his very existence with as much eloquence and politeness as if he would be talking to the queen of England. Although he would hope that Oswald would actually be polite to the queen of England and not just fake it like he did with everyone else while throwing sarcastic and snarky comments at them the same time he tried to sweet talk them. Instead, there had been nothing for a moment, just the sound of breathing coming from the other side.

Jim Gordon still didn't know what it had been about this lack of communication from Oswald, but it had sent him into high alert immediately and prompted him into action as the choked breathing had continued to come from Oswald’s end of the line. There had been nothing but the sound of the pained breathing and for one strange moment, it had been like he was witnessing someone dying through the phone.

As he had arrived at Van Dahl Mansion that now belonged to Oswald, after his father’s death that had been followed by the mysterious deaths of his stepmother and step-siblings, he wasn't even met with security or anyone standing in his path. Of course, there was no way of telling if Oswald actually was home, but something was wrong and Jim had to start somewhere. As he opened the front door with his lockpick, not wanting to knock or ring the bell just in case there was a crime transpiring inside and thus ruining the moment of surprise for himself, he found himself wondering if it wasn’t a bit odd for him to assume that something had to be wrong with Oswald just because of that call and Oswald’s lack of talking during it.

Then again, Oswald Cobblepot would still talk even half dead. Hell, that boy had talked after being electrocuted and in the back of an ambulance which had ultimately led to Oswald blowing his own cover in front of Maroni! That he had not been able to talk - maybe not willing to talk after calling Jim had to mean something. After all, he would have expected him to call Ed Nygma first and foremost when he needed help with something. That he had been calling Jim instead was a bad sign for the cop because it meant that Oswald actually needed him and not his best friend.
There were many possible reasons why Oswald hadn't talked on the phone, of course. He could have accidentally called - but Oswald was not prone to do anything accidentally. He could be in grave danger, maybe even hurt so badly that he hadn't been able to speak after he had called, maybe even unconscious. Or maybe he was in the clutches of someone and had only been able to speed-dial Jim, hoping that the policeman would understand the predicament the mobster was in and come to his rescue. If the latter was true, Ed was probably with them and he too was unable to do anything. And then there was always the possibility that Oswald’s goons had finally turned against him after the latest debacle and the first voices calling for Oswald's resignation as mayor of Gotham. They all knew that it was only a matter of time until Barbara and her lackeys would turn against Oswald because that was what always happened.

As Jim finally opened the door to the mansion, he found it dark and silent. There was no light coming from any of the rooms downstairs that were connected to the front and entrance hallway, so he pulled out the flashlight from where he had looped it through his belt. He would have expected Victor Zsasz or any of those freaks Oswald had hired for his protection to lurk in the shadows, but apparently, Oswald felt so save as mayor inside his own home that he had no desire of having them around at night. It was either that or they were all dead. Or … Someone had sent them all away - someone who had a say in these matters, someone the Penguin trusted. Then again, Oswald only trusted one person, two if Jim was to believe the young man whenever Oswald would claim that he trusted his favorite detective.

It was true, they shared a strange relationship and a very strange sense of trust, but Oswald, if he truly was in grave danger, would not have called Jim of all people, would he not trust him. It was the same, the other way around too. He knew that, would he ever find himself in a situation he could not solve with his own expertise and way of handling things, he could always count on the young king of Gotham to come to his aide, like he did in this whole Galavan mess they had faced together. Oswald even went to Arkham for him, after all, and knowing a little more about Arkham now himself, he still felt guilty that he had not believed Oswald back then, when he had seen him there and when Oswald had pleaded with him to get him out because of the torture he had been subjected to.

As he slowly inched forward, with the flashlight in his left hand and his gun in his right, crossing his wrists in front of him, he could see a faint hue of light coming from upstairs and the shards of a broken vase on the ground right in front of the staircase. Lilies were scattered everywhere on the polished tiles and a small puddle of water had been left in front of the bottom step. This was certainly not enough evidence of a fight that may or may not have taken place inside the mansion, but knowing Oswald, he wouldn't have allowed a broken vase and flowers to lie around and not be cleaned away immediately. The silence inside the house was deafening. An old house like this always made noise, even if it would just be the wooden beams moaning under the weight of decades or wind blowing through cracks in the window frames and doors. However, as Jim shuffled closer to the staircase, it seemed almost as if the house had forgotten to make sounds or willed itself to silence.

He wanted to call out for Oswald or Ed, but he knew that this might be a grave mistake that could cost either man their lives if they were here and in danger. No matter how much he hated Nygma for what he did and what it cost Jim in the end, he didn't wish death upon this man. At least not anymore, as he should correct himself. As weird as it might sound, Edward Nygma seemed a little more grounded ever since he and Oswald became friends. He seemed a lot less psychopathic since Oswald had pulled the strings to get Ed out of Arkham and made him his right-hand man. Then again, Jim would never make the mistake of trusting Nygma and he was afraid that Penguin had made an awful mistake of putting his trust into Ed. It was clear to anyone with two eyes that Oswald felt deeply for the other man - maybe a little too deeply even. Something like this, a relationship like Ed and Oswald’s could only end in heartbreak.
Then again, who was he to care about stuff like this when he had more important matters to worry about, like the aftermath of the riots caused by Jerome and the blackout he had caused in the entire city to wreck havoc upon Gotham. He shouldn't be here in the first place. The entire country had been able to see that Oswald was losing his mind after his grandiose appearance on national television which he had ended with the words “To hell with the people”. He had looked like crap even then with dark circles under his eyes, thin and nervous and not at all like the Penguin Jim knew. Oswald was not usually a nervous guy. He was usually the smartest person in the room, always in control. Yet no one could truly blame Jim for not keeping tabs on the mobster after all the shit that had been happening lately, demanding his attention.

As he reached the top of the staircase his pulse was running fast, faster than he would have expected. This was routine, after all. It should be routine. Then again, maybe a part of him was afraid of what he might find upstairs. By now, years after he had first met this thin weirdo with the bird-like physique and the messy black hair, he was not as naive anymore to believe that Gotham would be better off without the Penguin. The Penguin was Gotham and would he die, chaos would turn this city into ashes.

Jim hesitated for a second on the first-floor landing as he let his gaze wander down the hallway he was facing now. He could see light coming from one of the rooms. Oswald’s bedroom, perhaps? Still, there was no sound to be heard and this complete lack of noise was starting to creep him out quite a bit by now. He moved forward, hoping that no one would jump out of the shadows to throw him down. To his luck, nothing like this happened and he was able to reach the door without incident. The door was ajar, allowing only a thin beam of light to escape into the hallway.

Slowly, very slowly, Jim peeked through the gap in the doorway but could not make out much before he gently pushed at the door, causing the first real sound inside the house: a long shrill screech coming from the hinges. There was no reaction from inside and thus Jim opened the door completely. No one was to be seen at first glance and he was already about to start looking around the room for hints, before he noticed the pale foot that was sticking out from behind the edge of the bed to his left-hand side furthest away from the door. He hurried towards the bed immediately and found the owner of the house lying on the floor beside his bed, face down in just a pair of boxer shorts and a dress shirt which seemed so very odd for someone like Oswald Cobblepot, that Jim instinctively took note of it. »Oswald!« He breathed in horror as he started to take in the state the other man was in. Even the bit of skin he could see already was littered with bruises and cuts that had already begun to fade as it seemed.

Jim was quick to fall to his knees beside the mobster to turn him on his side. He still held his phone in his right hand which fell to the floor as Jim turned him and gasped in horror at the sight of the man’s face. His left eye was swollen shut, bruises disfiguring his entire face, his nose clearly broken, a deep cut running through his lips and another through his right eyebrow. Wouldn't he have known who it was, he would have almost not even recognized Oswald. Whatever had happened to him, it was clear that Oswald had gone through Hell. »Oswald, come on!« He didn't want to slap him, but he did so anyway in hopes of waking him up before he pressed two fingers into his neck. He was still alive, breathing shallowly but his pulse was strong, his heartbeat unfaltering. Well, Oswald Cobblepot was no man who easily gave up. At first glance, his injuries were not fresh, so, whatever had happened had happened at least a few days ago and some of his wounds had been dressed by someone who had known what they were doing. His left hand and wrist were wrapped in bandages, probably strained or broken but there was a patch of fresh blood on his forehead. Maybe he had tried to get up, lost his balance on his bad leg and hit his head on the bedside table. There too Jim could make out a few drops of blood further cementing his theory.

»Hey, Oswald, wake up.« He tried again as he gently slapped his cheek once more, shaking him softly by his thin shoulders. »Don't you make me call an ambulance!« They both would not want
this. Oswald, in his weakened state and after his TV interview could probably not need the media attention that would result in him getting transported to the hospital and Jim would not want to answer to anyone who would be confused about what drove him here in the first place.

He was just about slapping him again, as Oswald opened his right eye, allowing Jim a glimpse of the icy blue beneath his eyelid. He seemed groggy and uncertain of his surroundings but as he had managed to fully open his right eye and looked straight at Jim, everything happened too quickly and Jim found himself with his arms full with Oswald as the mobster all too suddenly wrapped his thin arms around his neck and clung to him for dear life. »Help me!« Oswald gasped in sheer and utter panic. »Jim, help me!«

»Calm down, Oswald!« Jim found himself replying hastily as he tried to support the mobster while not dropping his gun accidentally. »Tell me what happened!«

»No, quick! Before he comes back!« He had never seen Oswald like this. He had seen him afraid before, panicked even and Oswald had never been too afraid to show his emotions neither to him nor anyone else, but this right here was new. This was almost animalistic. This was Oswald fearing for his own life in all sincerity and despite the grudge he held against the mobster, despite how much he would want to put him behind bars for good, the pure terror in Oswald’s voice was what made his protective instincts kick in with as much ferocity as if he would be dealing with his most trusted friends.

»Who?« Jim tried once again to make some sense of this situation at the very least. »Tell me, Oswald! Who did this to you?«

»Ed!« His voice was thin, shrill and full of panic as the gasp ripped from Oswald’s throat this time and this was what finally made Jim Gordon spring into action again.

-End of Chapter 2-
Chapter 3

Gotham - Van Dahl Mansion

He was pushed down hard on the cold concrete floor, his skull smashed against the ground. He could feel the hands on his body, he could feel nails biting into the skin of his hips, he could hear the roaring laughter and the taunts falling on his ears. He couldn't breathe. His throat was squeezed too tightly. He could not breathe no matter how hard he struggled. He could hear the blood in his ears, he could taste the copper in his mouth. The laughter and the taunts filled his whole world. He had tried to struggle, tried to fight, but he was helpless. Completely and utterly helpless. He could hear the screams ripping from his own throat but he couldn't feel them. He couldn't breathe.

»Oswald!«

He was pulled from the endless abyss of his dreams in a matter of mere seconds and as he ripped open his right eye, he started fighting before he even realized what was happening to him. »Don't touch me!« His own voice and the scream ripping from his throat were foreign to him as if none of that really came from his own mouth but from someone who was right next to him, so close he could almost feel that man’s breath on his neck. »Don't touch me!« The words sounded again, this time more desperate but still as panicked and the man who had previously grabbed his shoulders was quick to back away immediately, holding up his hands so that Oswald was able to see them as if he was dealing with a scared animal or a dangerous criminal wielding a weapon.

Only then did Oswald realize that he was clutching the small pocket knife that he had always right beside his bed - just in case - with its blade pointing straight at the man inside his bedroom. Edward. His heart was running a hundred miles per hour as he frantically looked around the room to see if anyone else but Ed was there.

»You had a nightmare, Oswald.« Edward’s voice was entirely too soft and too gentle but as Oswald didn't take down the knife, his friend quickly hurried to the corner of the room where the gramophone waited. A second later the tune of the song that his mother used to sing to him softly played again. It was silly and yet it calmed him down enough to realize that there was no danger waiting for him inside this room. Not anymore. Edward was here and he was alive and he was save. As Oswald dropped the knife, it fell onto the mattress first but then slipped from the silken sheets and down on the creaky wooden floorboards beneath. How long had he been sleeping? How much time had gone by?

The bed dipped to his left-hand side and before he knew it, he could feel Ed’s arms around him. Suddenly, he felt warm and save like in a cocoon with the music playing quietly and filling the room like it used to in his mother’s tiny crammed-up apartment where he had spent the best time of his still very much young life. »The path I had is dark. So dark I cannot see, but I will not fear...« He could feel the gently humming coming from Edward’s throat as he quietly sang again along to the song that Oswald knew by heart ever since his childhood, so close to his ear that he could feel the vibrations of his vocal chords. Finally, for the first time in weeks as it seemed, he was able to breathe again, not just gasp for breath like a fish on land but fully breathe. It was not just the warmth radiating from Ed’s body, not just the gentleness of his voice when he sang or hummed to him, it was the smell of his cologne, the strengths of the arms he had wrapped around him, the calmness of his breathing and the rhythm of his heartbeat as Oswald rested his head on his chest in search of comfort. »You had a nightmare...« Ed repeated gingerly. »It was just a nightmare, Oswald. You are safe now.«

»Y-Yes, yes ... I am safe.« He breathed against Ed’s collarbone before he quickly brushed the tears
from his face with his right hand. His left hand hurt like a bitch and he was certain that his wrist was at least sprained if nothing was broken. »I’m sorry, Ed.« He then huffed, looking up at the taller man only briefly before he gently straightened out the dress shirt Ed was wearing. »Sorry … Look at you … I messed up your shirt…«

Before he could further fuss over Ed and his clothes, the former forensic scientist had already grabbed his uninjured hand to stop him. »It’s alright. Everything is fine, Oswald.« Still, he cleared his throat awkwardly as he moved away from Ed again to bring a little distance between them. He didn’t wish for things to get more awkward, after all, he had confessed his love to Edward before and it was pretty clear that Edward did not reciprocate his feelings - especially not so quickly after Isabelle. He didn’t wish to be that guy who could not take no for an answer and who always overstepped his boundaries.

Even Edward suddenly seemed uncomfortable as if he was mirroring Oswald’s behavior, which was, of course, bullshit. Still, Ed drove a hand through his hair a little nervously before he got up from the bed and reset the gramophone so that the song would play again. »I am going to run you a bath, okay? I can imagine that you would like to … clean up.«

Until now, Oswald had not even thought about the fact that he wasn’t naked anymore or that Edward had found him naked in this cellar of which Oswald could only assume that it had been below the warehouse of Kane Chemicals. He had seen him. He had seen the state he was in. He had dressed him. He knew everything and yet he was willing to touch him, to even go as far as to pull him into his arms to comfort him while he was still covered in blood and grime and filth. Oswald managed a nod, but not much more than this before Edward left him alone. Carefully, he leaned back in his pillows and pulled his blankets tighter around himself and tried just to focus on the song playing. He tried to imagine his mother being here with him, comforting him and brushing her fingers through his hair like she always used to do.

The song had played two times before Edward came back to him with a nervous little smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. »Do you need help getting into the tub?« Oswald first shook his head and slowly pushed away the blanket before carefully started moving his legs out of the bed and setting his feet firmly on the ground. It only took him the first try to stand up to realize that this was not going to happen. His bad leg was screaming in agony and seemed even worse than ever before - if that was possible at all. Before he could collapse to the floor as his knees buckled under his own weight, however, Ed was by his side again, saving him from falling to the ground so gracelessly as he grabbed him under the arms, making Oswald scream out in pain a new. His entire body was in a world of pain and absolutely everything hurt, even breathing.

»Sorry!« Edward hissed as he pulled Oswald’s right arm around his shoulders to help him get the strain off his uncooperative legs while supporting him. His left shoulder, just like his left hand was only flaming pain and nothing else. Being supported by Ed like this meant that Edward either had to lean down while walking quite a bit or for him to walk on his tiptoes. It were moments like this when he would truly notice how much taller Edward was. They made their way towards the bathroom two doors down in an awkward choreography of hobbling on Oswald’s part and hunching over on Edward’s part. Still, they made it to the bathroom without accidents and as Ed helped him to sit down on the closed lid of the toilet, there was another moment of awkward hesitation between them.

»I’m … Well … I’m going to give you some privacy now … Call if you need me, I’m waiting just outside, alright?« Ed didn’t wait for an answer as he turned around and walked to the door, stopping only as Oswald rose his voice again.

»Ed?« He heard himself addressing the other man and looked up at him from his seat with uncertainty probably written all over his face. Edward turned around on the threshold, one hand
resting on the wood of the doorframe as he turned to look over his shoulder at him. »Thank you.« There was just a small smile tugging on ed’s lips again accompanied by a small nod before he left the room, leaving the door ajar behind him.

He had a hard time getting out of the simple dress shirt that Ed had put him in - probably because it was easier for him to get off after unbuttoning it. At least he didn't need to pull the shirt over his head and strain his injured shoulder. He left the dress shirt and the boxer shorts by the toilet before he slowly waddled over to the bathtub, trying not to think too much about the fact that Ed had seen him naked. He only briefly paused in front of the mirror, staring at a face he didn't recognize. His left eye was a black and blue mess, his jaw littered with dark bruises, some looking too much like fingerprints to deny it. A deep cut ran through his lips on the left side of his face, another through his right eyebrow. His nose looked as if it had been broken and waited yet to be fixed. He didn't need a look further down to know that the rest of his body was bruised just as badly as his face. Still, he winced as he caught a glimpse of his left shoulder in the mirror. It was covered in one huge purple bruise spreading up almost to his collarbone.

Oswald turned away from the mirror as quickly as he could before limping over to the tub, slowly sitting down on the rim. His right leg looked horrible. By now he was used to the way his right foot looked and he was used to the constant pain he was always in, but still, his right leg was covered in bruises from the beating he had received and he knew that those men had aimed to hurt him exactly where they did too. Purple marks framed his hips and he didn't wish to think about how they came to be. He got into the water slowly to not further hurt himself and wished to just sink under the surface and never get up again. He knew that the water would not wash away his bruises or what happened to him, but it could wash away the blood that was clinging to his body, the blood that Edward had not tried to clean off, the blood between his legs that would never really go away and would always remind him of what happened to him.

The water was comfortable hot, almost a little too hot, but it helped him to get his mind clear again. He had to put it into words what happened so that he would be able to deal with it. He was good at dealing with situations and chaos. He could deal with this. He just needed to put it into words. When he would have put it into words he could sort the situation out and get over it. You have to know your enemy’s name to know how to defeat them, you have to know what poisons you to find the proper antidote.

So, what had happened? He had found Edward in this warehouse of Kane Chemicals. He had been accompanied by two of his men. They had been shot. He had been drugged. A needle or a cloth? Needle. He couldn't remember if someone had pressed a cloth on his nose and mouth from behind but he remembered a slight pick on his neck. So, it had been a needle. He had been drugged with a needle. Then what? He had regained consciousness in some cellar of a warehouse. The same warehouse where he had found Edward? Possible. Ed had not been there when he woke up. Where had Ed been? He had escaped. Why hadn't he taken Oswald with him? There had been shots. Their attackers had guns. He had needed to flee without him to get help. Who had sent the attackers? Barbara? Maybe someone else? It was impossible to say just yet. He had been naked. Why? Humiliation. He had been beaten. Why? Punishment? Torture? Torture. He had been … He had- Oswald brushed a hand over his face and let out a shaky moan just thinking about it. He had been raped. Repeatedly. Why? Humiliation? Degradation? Punishment? Torture? All of it? Was it important? Yes, he reminded himself. It was important why that had happened. How many men had done that to him? He had lost count. The thought alone made him sick to his stomach. What had they done to him? He didn't want to remember. He didn't want to think about it. He didn't want to think about the fingers bruising his jaw. Had he fought back? Had he? »Did you?« He found himself asking out loud massaging his temples. He remembered flailing, kicking, punching. He remembered biting and scratching and cursing and shouting and spitting. He remembered the taste of copper in his mouth - not his own blood. He wanted to throw up.
»Oswald?« A voice from outside the bathroom put him back on alert. The water was cold. Since when was the water cold? »Everything alright?« he wasn't even able to move his mouth. »I'm coming in, alright?« His jaw was locked. It was made out of iron, unable to move and before he could even protest, Edward had entered the bathroom but paused in the doorframe again as they locked eyes just long enough for Oswald to look down on the milky water again. He couldn't move, his chin all but glued to his chest. Suddenly he felt very small under the gaze of the man he loved so desperately and who would probably never feel the same way as he did - especially not after what he had seen.

Maybe this was the worst of all of this. Now that Ed had seen him at his weakest and at the lowest point in his life, he would never see him as a man worthy of his love again. From now on, Ed Nygma would always just see that pathetic broken bird in him, and that he could just not stand.

»Oswald?« Ed asked as he was carefully inching closer. He looked positively uncomfortable. »Is everything okay? Do you need help?« He wanted to shake his head and say no but in the end, he found himself nodding sharply as he was pressing his lips together into a thin hard line. Ed was at his side in no time after this and helped him out of the water. »The water is freezing! Why didn't you call me sooner?« Within seconds, he was bundled up in a thick soft towel while his friend tried to rub a bit of soothing warmth in his arms. Oswald, however, only rested his forehead against Ed's collarbone and tried another deep breath standing on shaky legs. »Come … We're getting you back to bed, okay? Enough water sports for the Penguin for today.«

It was meant as a joke but who would ever take him seriously again after what happened? Surely his attackers had taken pictures to blackmail him. That was what he would have done at least, would he ever have stooped this low in his career. »I am ruined.« He breathed. This time there was no going back for him. Not even he could find a way out of this mess! For once, he wished that Fish would be here to give him advice. Wasn't that messed up?

»Shhh, that's the least of your worries now Oswald.« He could not resist Ed as his friend led him back to his bedroom and began patching him up thoroughly. While Ed was bandaging his wrist, he looked so lost in thought but Oswald didn't dare to ask until Ed himself broke the silence. »After Isabella … Hell … When I found you, I thought I was too late. I thought I'd lost you too and all that because I got scared after your confession. I was such a moron, Oswald. I shouldn't have run. I should have stayed by your side. Had I been stronger, less of a coward, all of this wouldn't have happened. I wouldn't have survived losing you too.« He couldn't help his heart beating a little faster at Ed's words, no matter how stupid it was, no matter how selfish the murder of this woman had been. Maybe it was his selfishness what had cost him Ed in the end. He should have let her live and wait for the inevitable to provide comforting arms for his friend after he would have killed her - That and someone to clean up after Ed. Sooner or later, Ed would have been able to see that Oswald was the right one for him, that he needed someone who shared his darkness and didn't reject it like this woman would have inevitably done.

»What I meant to say, Oswald, is that I hope you don't think I rejected you because I would have been disgusted by your love for me - or by you in general for that matter. It was all too much at that moment - the grief and the pain and then this. Hell, look at me, always thinking that I am the smartest person in the room and still I was unable to see how you felt for me, right? Though maybe I did see it and just couldn't believe it to be possible that someone I admire so much would ever be able to see me as an equal, let alone fall in love with me.«

»What has two eyes but cannot see?« Oswald found himself mumbling as his eyes never left Ed's face, desperate to cling to his every word, maybe even hoping that all this suffering had been worth something in the end.
Ed hummed as he gently tucked the remaining bit of gauze under the bandage that was now securely wrapped around Oswald’s bruised ribs. His hand lingered a moment too long on Oswald’s chest and Oswald was sure that Ed would feel how fast his heart was beating as the taller man leaned forward all of the sudden. The brush of their lips took him completely by surprise so that he found himself gasping like a fish at this new sensation before he found it in himself to melt into the kiss all too willingly.

Ed was the first to pull away after just a few seconds, and though he quickly averted his eyes and took off his glasses to rub over them like he did when he needed to clear his thoughts, Oswald did not feel like Ed regretted kissing him. Maybe that was only wishful thinking. »I’m sorry, Oswald. I shouldn’t have done this … Not after what you’ve been through. I should have given you more time … I-«

This time it was Oswald who quickly grabbed the collar of Edward’s shirt to pull him down to his level and into another kiss, and thus effectively silencing his ramblings. The second time around their kiss was deeper, their lips locking with much more enthusiasm and need behind it, making it impossible to deny that this was how things were meant to be even for the stubborn Edward.

He didn’t know what the appropriate reaction would be in a situation such as this because Edward was, of course, right. After what had happened to him he wasn’t quite up to physical contact of any kind and yet … This was Ed. His Ed. He loved Ed and Ed would never hurt him like this or in any other way, for that matter. With Ed, he could feel safe, maybe even for the first time in years. And yet, the moment as Ed’s tongue breached the barrier of his lips and found Oswald’s own tongue in the safety of his mouth, he started to feel nauseous and had to pull away slowly with a silent gasp for breath, still clinging to Edward as for dear life now. He expected Edward to look annoyed at his withdrawal or at least confused, but instead, Ed just brushed his thumb over his cheek, smiling in understanding.

»I love you, Ed.« He found himself breathing so close to Ed’s face that he was sure that Ed could feel the ghost of these words brushing over his skin. Ed’s smile widened a little.

»You never cease to amaze me, Oswald. After everything … After the way I’ve been abandoning you, after how I let you down when you needed me, after I put you in harm's way, you still love me.«

»I would have torn this city apart brick by brick would something have happened to you, Ed.« He couldn't be happier as Ed leaned his forehead against his, taking a deep breath. The gesture was so intimate, so gentle and loving. How would he ever be able to go without his touch? How was it possible that he had never known that he was missing this kind of connection in his life?

»I know.« Ed smiled before he finally removed his hands from Oswald to finish patching him up and providing him with a fresh set of pajamas. With Edward’s help, he managed to put them on. He still felt self-conscious about his body and about being naked in front of Edward and yet, he had put his heart on display for Edward, how much more naked could he get anyway?

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**Gotham City - Jim’s apartment**

Jim had not been able to get much more out of Oswald after he had found the younger man in his bedroom with Oswald continuously repeating the same things, pleading for his help over and over again, his fingers never leaving Jim’s shirt, hooked in the fabric with as much strength as if his claws were made of iron. For that moment, he wasn’t the mayor of Gotham, he wasn't even the King of Gotham’s underworld, not even Penguin, but the trembling and absolutely terrified boy that he had
once pulled out of the trunk of Harvey’s car at that pier where he should have found his end. Oh, how far did they come since then … It was true, one had to admire Oswald knowing where he started and what he became since then.

The real worrisome part in all of this, as Jim thought when he took a glance at the man resting on his sofa, covered in blankets, was that he claimed that Ed had been the one who had hurt him. It was not impossible, of course, and he thought Nygma capable of much more than beating Oswald up like this and leaving him, but it was also possible that Oswald wasn’t fully there and just saying the first things that came to his mind. It was clear that he was troubled, it was clear that he was going through rough times, if anything his TV interview had proven that. He was having a mental breakdown and there was no denying of that. So how much truth held his words?

He was asleep for now after they had arrived at Jim’s flat. Oswald had not quite allowed him to check him over except for the wound on his forehead, which Jim had quickly cleaned up and bandaged. He could only hope that there wasn't something more worrisome and that the mayor would not suffer from a greater wound without Jim knowing about it. Still, he was suffering from a slight fever and that only added to Jim’s concern about how much truth was behind his words after Oswald had claimed that Edward had hurt him. The least he could use right now was Penguin dying on his dirty old couch.

He found himself sitting in his armchair with a glass of whiskey clutched in his hands and his eyes remaining fixed on the sleeping young man on his couch. Oswald liked to say that they were friends, but were they? To him, the answer had always seemed clear: Of course he was not friends with a mobster. Still, despite how much Oswald could be a pain in the ass at times, he had done also a lot of good since he became mayor and helped Jim out more than once when he had found himself in a particularly bad situation. Oswald even went to Arkham Asylum for a crime he had not committed, for a murder that had been on Jim’s hands. And now Oswald was here lying on his couch, injured, feverish, and vulnerable. It would be so easy to cut his throat or smother him with a pillow and just dump him somewhere, to rid himself and Gotham of the Penguin forever. But Oswald had called him in his hour of need, so how could Jim Gordon, the good Jim Gordon, even think about doing something so vile to Oswald Cobblepot?

By now the sun had risen and Gotham had awoken to it's chaotic and cruel reality. He should be out and about by now, walking into the precinct and getting a job to make money, chat with Harvey over a package of fresh donuts, something like that - or at least try to get a hold of Nygma to find out what truly had happened to the mayor. He shouldn't sit around and play babysitter for Penguin, but could he leave him alone in his flat in the condition he was?

He had been sleeping for a few hours now and could probably use something to eat when he would wake up. Needless to say, Jim was not the best cook and he didn't feel the desire of cooking something up for Oswald either. Maybe he should just go downstairs to the store and get something for the mayor and on his way, he could call Harvey to call in sick. He decided to do just that, placed his glass on the coffee table and got to his feet as Oswald began to stir on the couch. That man had just horrible timing.

Jim didn't quite know if he should make his presence known or just leave quietly as if he hadn't noticed that Oswald was waking up, but then he decided to lean down a bit and gently put a hand on Oswald’s left shoulder. Immediately the man flinched as if in pain, suddenly wide awake with his good eye staring at him in horror for a split second. »Hey … It's just me.« Jim quickly took a step back from Oswald again, raising both hands to show him that he didn't mean harm to him while he wondered at the same time why this was even necessary. Oswald had been beaten up quite often since Jim knew that little creep but he had never reacted that afraid or been this jumpy afterward. Being beaten to a bloody pulp was just part of his business, after all. And yet, Jim could not shake
off the feeling that this time something was different. There was this knot in the pit of his stomach when looking at the bruising on his jaw and neck that he couldn't quite name. »It's Jim.«

»Where am I?«

»At my apartment. In downtown.« Jim sighed and brushed a hand through his dark blonde hair. »Hey, listen, Oswald. You can stay, for now, okay? I'm just gonna run down to the store to get something to eat for us. I don't want to torture you with my cooking - You don't look like you would survive that in your condition. You can take a shower if you want to in the meantime. Towels are in the bathroom and if you want to change clothes, just take something from my closet.« Although his clothes were probably too large for the much thinner and a bit shorter man. As if to emphasize his point, Jim gestured a little awkwardly at the door leading to his bathroom. As per usual, Oswald’s stare was a bit unnerving to him when he didn't speak. When Oswald remained silent, Jim just nodded and made his way to the door of his apartment, feeling strangely as if he was driven out of his own home by his guest.

»Thank you, Jim.« It were the first words the Penguin spoke that were not a frantic plea for help since he found him, but Jim just turned his head enough to look over his shoulder with yet another nod.

»I won't be long. The store is just downstairs.« He found himself saying and had already opened the door as he turned around again. »Don't open the door to anyone, okay? I have a key. You are safe here, Oswald.« He didn't know why it was so important for him to say these things to the younger man, especially after knowing what Oswald was capable of, but it felt like it was and now that he said it, he could leave in peace.

Still, all his way down to the store up to the point where he walked out of it again with a bag full of groceries and a few freshly made sandwiches from the small bakery inside the store, he felt uneasy. It was all too possible that someone would have managed to enter his flat while he had been out. This was Gotham, after all. He didn't even know if someone might have followed him and his charge as he had left the Van Dahl mansion. He could have left Oswald there, of course, but taking Oswald out of his own home and taking him to his flat had somehow seemed more sensible. At least at his apartment, Jim was in control of the situation and would not get surprised by random assassins walking in on them. In his own four walls, he didn't need to explain himself to anyone. And in addition to all of that, he doubted that Oswald’s attacker, or attackers, whoever they were, would consider the possibility of Oswald staying in the protective custody of a member of the GCPD.

As he stepped out into the crisp morning air of Gotham, there was a moment, the tiniest moment, when he felt as if he was being watched by someone lurking in the distance, their eyes never quite leaving him. If he would be honest, he had actually felt like this ever since he had arrived at the Van Dahl mansion only hours ago. It was probably just his paranoia that came naturally with the job as a policeman. Still, he couldn't deny that he hurried up the stairs a little faster than usual to re-enter his apartment with a bag full of different foods, that Oswald might like, in his arms. He could not recall ever having seen the bird eating, though. What a weird thing to think. Then again, it was often all too easy to not see your enemies as human beings and though he wouldn't quite put Oswald into this category, despite knowing that he would belong in it, he sometimes seemed to forget that even Oswald Cobblepot was only human with human needs.

As he entered his flat, he did so with the decision in mind to find out more about what happened. Whether Oswald would want to talk to him or not, he needed to know what had happened between him and his best friend that escalated in such a way that Oswald would call for help even. Usually, Oswald always knew how to handle himself and did certainly not need Jim’s protection. If it came to the point where Oswald was desperate for his help, it was very possible that Ed Nygma was a danger
not only to Oswald and needed to be stopped straight away.

The shower was running as he closed the door behind him and thus Jim decided it would be best to make his presence known to Oswald by shouting out his return before he was setting down the bag on the coffee table in front of his old grey couch. Oswald had left his nest on the couch behind as if he wanted it to be ready to just slip back into his cocoon of various blankets that Jim had found in the cupboard, not knowing that he even possessed so many different blankets and not too sure if some of them were left over from the previous owner of his apartment. Who would have thought that Oswald liked to wrap himself in numerous blankets to sleep? Well, that was just one more human thing he was discovering now, apparently. He was not sleeping like a vampire or hanging from the ceiling like a bat. Odd how he had never thought about the fact that even Oswald had human needs and habits while he was all too human and in tune with his feelings most of the time. Unlike other gangsters, it was usually easy to tell Oswald’s emotions and he didn’t even shy away from shedding a tear or two. That was rare for any man but even rarer for a man like him on the top of the underworld in a city like this.

Minutes passed which Jim used to prepare breakfast for the both of them, although his preparation consisted in taking plates that he rarely even used out of his cupboard above the sink and setting them down on the coffee table, and switching on the coffee machine. Somehow the silence from the bathroom was starting to unnerve him a bit, after all, he had found Oswald with a head injury, no matter how small it might be - it had sufficed to knock him unconscious before, so there was no real telling of how impactful it really was. He might have lost consciousness in the shower while Jim had been out - or he might just enjoy long showers.

He forced himself to stay put for a moment longer, but after he started fidgeting with the cutlery that he was placing onto the plates in a sorry attempt of making his preparation seem more sophisticated than it was in lack of napkins that he could artistically fold for Oswald, he decided that he would risk a look. Better safe than sorry. There was still no other noise than the running shower as he walked up to the bathroom door. Oswald had left it ajar, either out of habit or out of precaution, just in case something would happen to him. He was a smart man, after all. Jim knocked on the door, making his presence known to the other man because he really didn't wish to catch Oswald butt-naked doing god-knows-what. »Hey, Oswald? I’m making coffee, you want one?« No response.

It was then that Jim had enough and gently pushed the door open a little further. Almost he would have expected to find Oswald unconscious on the floor of his bathtub-shower-combination, bleeding to death from another injury or already dead, but to his relief, that was not the case. He did find Oswald on the floor of his shower, but neither unconscious nor dead, but trembling as he looked up with his right eye full of dread. »Jim…« He mumbled. Hadn’t he heard Jim before?

»What happened?« Jim was at his side in an instant, switching off the water that was quite cold by now as he realized when he got some of the running water on his hands. No wonder he was shivering. How long had he been sitting there? Jim knew how awful the water was in this apartment complex and how quickly the hot water was usually gone.

»I fell.« Oswald replied and decided to look everywhere but to Jim now. »Couldn't get up.«

His leg, probably. He had never seen Oswald’s bad leg up close before he had found him in his bedroom, but as he now caught a glimpse of it, it was even worse than he had ever imagined it to be, mainly because his leg was littered in bruises - just like the rest of him. Of course, Jim didn't wish to stare, but he still noticed the shape he was in. Oswald was looking incredibly thin by now - and not his usual thin either, more like he hadn't eaten in quite a while. His entire body was bruised, his ribcage looked as if he had either fractured or broken a few of his ribs and his left shoulder was one huge dark purple bruise. No wonder he had winced when Jim had touched him before. He pushed
aside the thought of why Oswald hadn't switched off the shower or why he hadn't called out to him when he returned. It was not important just now, so instead he took one of the towels from the towel rail above the heater, where he found Oswald’s clothes resting on his laundry basket together with a used bandage, and laid it on the rim of the tub before he leaned down and grabbed Oswald under his armpits to help him up. The situation was beyond awkward and never in his life would he have thought that the day might come when he would have to pull a naked mobster out of his own shower like a newborn kitten.

»There you go…« He sighed as he helped Oswald into a sitting position on the rim of the tub, only to thrust the towel at him right away. »Do you need help?«

»I would not want to make the situation any more uncomfortable than it already is.« Came Oswald’s quite modest reply. Sometimes it was easy to forget that Oswald Cobblepot was not always just some vicious little rage monster but could actually be quite civil and friendly.

Jim couldn't help but laugh at that. »Seriously?« He huffed. »Oswald, come on. I just saw you naked, how much more uncomfortable can it get? So, spit it out already. We are both grown man, after all, and you do not possess any body parts that I wouldn't have seen already in my life. If you need my help, ask. I don’t wish you to injure yourself anymore.«

There was the ghost of a blush on Oswald’s face but it was hard to tell by the overall discoloring of his skin so that Jim wasn't even quite sure if he had seen it at all. He was probably just imagining things after the long night and the general weirdness of it all. »It's my leg.« Oswald finally gave up his resistance with a sigh. »Stupid thing won’t cooperate. I think I might have sprained my ankle or hurt my knee … Who knows anyway.«

»Alright.« Jim huffed. »Just wait here, okay? I’ll go get you some clothes and we’ll get you dressed.« He politely turned away as Oswald began patting his body down with the towel, before he moved to the door. »And try to not scheme my murder while I’m gone, okay?« It was meant as a joke, but Oswald’s response was all too sincere.

»I would never plot to murder a friend of mine, Jim Gordon.« He stated quietly. »I have too few of them left by now.« Whatever that meant, Jim was not yet about to ask him about it, mainly because he doubted that Penguin would give him an honest answer anyway. He went to his bedroom and back to the bathroom in the span of not even three minutes, after he had plucked a few items of clothing out of his closet that would keep the mobster warm and comfortable, already imagining how weird it would be to not see Oswald in something that was not a three-piece suit. He had seen him in different clothes, of course, like the Arkham uniform or the weird combination of various warm articles of clothing that he had acquired (only God knew how) as he had been on the run for the murder of Theo Galavan and yet it was always a little like he was seeing him naked when he would not wear his usual armor of an expensive custom tailored suit.

Without much fuss from Oswald’s side, Jim was able to work together with the Penguin to get him into a pair of boxer shorts and sweatpants. »Okay, let me patch you up real quick, right? We can look at your leg later. Although I still think we should get you to the hospital to have you checked up properly.«

»Going to the hospital would be not very wise, Jim. Don't forget, I am still the mayor and people will start asking questions about my reason for being there.« As always, despite suffering from a fever and being badly injured, his logic never seemed to fail Oswald.

»You are also the king of Gotham and it's not unusual for you to get down and dirty.«

»I don't wish anyone to find out about the nature of my injuries, Jim. My career is already damaged
thanks to this TV interview—« It seemed he wanted to say something else, but some part of his mind was blocking him from saying it. »I just don't wish to make it even worse. Plus, that's not my first rodeo, right? I am back on my feet in no time.« This was probably true, knowing Penguin.

»Okay then.« He huffed a small laugh before he took the first aid kit out of the cupboard underneath the sink. It didn't take long for him to tightly wrap Oswald’s chest after he had carefully assessed the damage done. Clearly, there were at least two fractured ribs by the way they felt under his fingertips as he was carefully prodding and probing at his chest, but as long as Oswald would not swallow his pride and accept the offer of being driven to the hospital as discreetly as possible, Jim wouldn't ask again. Yet, he couldn't help but think about what he said. The nature of his injuries. What was that supposed to mean? Whatever it meant, the knot in the pit of his stomach was back again and stronger than before.

He helped Oswald back into the main room of his small flat and to sit down on the old couch before eating. Oswald ate as if he was starving and he probably was judging by how thin he became ever since Jim had last seen him in person. »So, tell me what's wrong.« He finally gave up his silence as they sat and ate together, as if one of them was not the crime boss of Gotham and the other person the policeman who wished to end all crime in the city. »What happened to you?« He knew that he might be the last person Oswald would want to talk to and yet, he was the person Oswald had called in his hour of need. That had to count for something. »You can trust me. Whatever it is, we’ll find a way to deal with it. Preferably without the use of murder this time.«

Oswald didn't look pleased as he lowered his sandwich, his lips pressed tightly together into an uncomfortable looking line, but instead spitting insults at him, he lowered his eyes on the last sandwich between them on the table. »Is that tuna?«

Jim found himself nodding in confusion before he shoved it closer to Oswald’s plate with a small smirk. Suddenly, he realized that he still had a long way to go before Oswald would be willing to open up about what had happened to him, yet he knew that the mobster would do just that, if he would give him a little more time, because, no matter how much good reason Oswald would have not to trust him, there was an unspoken bit of trust between the two men after what happened with Galavan.

»What's so funny?« Oswald finally chimed up as he finished his sandwich and quickly grabbed the last one.

»I've just never seen you eat before.« Jim smirked and could at least draw a small eye roll from the mobster. »And I thought about the day I saw you in Arkham. I never apologized for not believing you. I should have known that you wouldn't say these things without damn good reason. I should have believed you.«

»I was an insane criminal, Jim, and you had your hands full with good old Victor freezing people to death. You are forgiven. I wouldn't have believed me either.« It was odd how easy it seemed to sit here, eating, drinking coffee and talking to this man after everything they had been through together.

»True, yet, you went there for a murder I committed and I should have listened to you.« He glanced at Oswald carefully before he decided to prob one again. »Even more surprised I was that you would call me for help.«

»I knew you would come.« Oswald shrugged. »It was my first thought as I realized that I couldn't get out of this by myself. I knew if anyone would come to help me, it would be Jim Gordon.« Was his trust really this big in him or was it just Oswald trying to sweet talk his way out of telling what had happened to him? Maybe he shouldn’t pry. Whatever had happened to Penguin, it clearly made him uncomfortable and uneasy. His cheeks were tinted red by now, just like the tips of his ears and
his nose.

»You should rest.« Jim sighed as he rose from his spot on the armchair and grabbed their empty plates. »You have quite the fever.«

»I take it you don't believe me.« Wouldn't he know it any better, he would say that Oswald sounded disappointed, maybe even hurt as he looked up at Jim with his left eye still swollen shut and his right glazed over by his fever. »But it's true, Jim. I knew, if I would call you, you would come to find me and if I would have been dead, you wouldn't have rested until you would have caught my killer. We are old friends, after all, and sometimes I don't know if I deserve such a good friend.« Oh, he was starting to ramble. He needed rest and medicine and a doctor. In the past, he would have called Lee in a situation like this but now that was not a possibility anymore. Besides, whatever had happened to Oswald, he didn't wish to drag her into this mess.

»When I arrived at your place, you said it was Ed who did this to you, over and over again.« Jim softly asked again and felt almost as if he was talking to a scared child as he did. The way Oswald flinched at him even saying Ed’s name didn't escape him. »What did Ed do to you, Oswald?«

But Oswald remained silent for a very long moment until Jim was all but certain that he wouldn't even get an answer. He was about to walk over to the kitchenette he all too rarely used these days ever since he was working for the GCPD again, as Oswald managed to raise his voice again. At first, Jim didn't even recognize it as Oswald’s voice, so thin did it sound. »I thought he was my friend.«

-End of Chapter 3-
Gotham - Van Dahl Mansion

Oswald woke up to the feeling of drowning in an icy ocean, unable to reach the surface as he was being dragged down to the bottom of the endless abyss by large stones that were fastened to his ankles. He was shivering and every bit of movement as he desperately clung to his blanket was sending waves of nausea and pure fire through his entire being. He was burning up alive and yet he felt as if someone had left open his bedroom window and allowed the cold December air to turn his bedroom into an industrial freezer. As he was finally able to take in his surroundings, he noticed that he was no longer wearing his pajamas but somehow reverted back to a simple white button-down shirt and boxer shorts, judging by how exposed his legs felt underneath his blanket.

»You are awake.« Edward’s voice sounded tired as he walked into the bedroom, carrying a ceramic bowl in his hands. Before he understood what was going on he could smell the chicken soup. 

»Sorry, I had to change you out of your pajamas earlier. You have a fever and sweated right through it. I couldn’t let you lie in your own sweat, for I feared that it would have made your condition worse.« Under different circumstances, he would feel terribly embarrassed. Oswald had always been a very proud and self-reliant man and being here now, being seen at the lowest point in his life, as it seemed, by the man he loved was not at all easy for him and yet he was grateful to have Edward still with him, willing to care for him and nurse him back to health. That was more he could have ever hoped for.

»Thank you, Ed.« His voice was hoarse as he spoke, but Ed just rearranged his glasses with this flustered little gesture he hadn’t seen him do in a long time now, before he sat down on a chair that he seemed to have pulled up to the bed somewhere along the lines. »How long have I been out?«

»Don’t mention it. I asked Olga to make you chicken soup to get you back on your feet.« After he had placed the bowl on the bedside table, Edward gently helped Oswald to sit up and fluff his pillows so that he could lean back a bit more comfortably. »Two days now. I was starting to get worried.«

»I can’t thank you enough for your kindness, Ed.« Oswald found himself addressing his friend once more. »Last time I ever had someone in my life who was willing to even come close to me, let alone do all of this for me when I was weak without wanting something in return, was my mother. Usually, I have to pay or threaten people to even stay in the same room as I.« Or he would find himself in fear of his throat getting cut while he was asleep or vulnerable like this.

»Idiots.« Ed smirked with this little twinkle in his eyes that he loved so much. »All of them. Except one.«

»Then you should be glad that I restricted access to your house for as long as you are recovering. No petitioners allowed, dear Friend.« His first impulse was to scold Edward for making a decision on his behalf, but instead, he placed the tray with the bowl on his lap. »I also managed to put out a statement about your appearance on TV before your disappearance. Hell … I should have been there, Oswald. This idiot Tarquin … I would never have allowed this interview had I been there.«

»Why not?«

»Because that woman, Margaret Hearst, is a snake, Oswald.« He huffed. »Yes, I would have set up
an interview like that, in fact, I made it possible that this could happen, but I would clearly have
checked the questions she wanted to ask you first and made sure that she would not have asked
anything inappropriate like she did in the end. Tarquin just didn't do his job, properly. If I wouldn't
know any better, I would almost say that he wanted the interview to go south.« While Oswald ate,
Edward watched and wrinkled his forehead just a little now. »However, now that I’ve seen the
Interview … You seemed awfully nervous from the get-go, not at all like I know you. Did something
happen beforehand?«

He pressed his mouth into a thin line as he considered answering truthfully. No one ever seemed to
take him seriously whenever he would talk about believing in ghosts. »The remains of my father
have been stolen from his grave.« Oswald finally sighed as he let his spoon sink into the bowl with a
pained little grunt. »And I saw his ghost … He wanted to tell me about Tarquin’s betrayal, and that
he was the one who had stolen his remains. I found them in the closet of his office and I … Well, I
bludgeoned him to death with some stupid little award he had on his desk. I will not lie, Ed, not to
you. When you left, I was devastated and I didn't know what to do. I hardly slept and when I did I
was roused by the ghosts of this house. I was so certain that I had killed Tarquin … But when I got
back to his office, after I ran out of the interview … He wasn’t there anymore and neither were my
father’s remains. Maybe I am going crazy, after all.«

»He probably didn't work alone, Oswald. I doubt that you imagined killing a man. You are not going
crazy, Oswald, never believe that.« Edward’s hand was so warm against his cheek as he cupped his
face all too gently.

»What did you tell the press?«

»Well, I told them the truth.« Immediately, he felt himself tense up, but Edward’s sly wolfish smile
took the better of him. »That our mayor has been sick during the interview and fighting off a serious
infection for weeks beforehand. I told them that you couldn't continue the interview because of your
worsening condition and didn't want to worry the good people of Gotham. Of course, you didn't
mean what you said about them. You retreated back to your home, Van Dahl Mansion, to get better
so that you can go back to work with new energy to be the change Gotham needs. I wouldn't lie, had
your latest figures not been that good, we might not have been able to save your reputation. But the
people of Gotham still love you and forgave you your little slip-up. The resonance to the statement I
ushered was positive for now and you received many well wishes from all the important people. I
stored their cards in your office, in case you want to get back to them.«

»Ed … I know you don't want to hear that, but I really don't know what I would do without you.«

He was flabbergasted by how quick his friend had been to find excuses that would make Oswald
seem more likeable to the public even after what he had said on national television. He truly seemed
to have found his calling in his job as Oswald’s chief of staff.

»Well, for starters, you would not lie in this bed all messed up because you would have never felt the
need to save me from my kidnappers and put yourself in harms way instead of just sending your
lackeys after me.« Edward smirked as he leaned back in his chair a little. »So, I should be the one
thanking you. They might have killed me, had it not been for you.«

»I'm just so glad that you could escape.« Oswald said before returning to his soup. He felt tired and
feared that this feeling would never leave him. He could not even recall when he had been sick the
last time. Not injured, but sick. Now it was as if his entire body was trying to kill him and as if he
was burning up alive.

»You should try and rest a little more. And don’t worry, I’ll take care of everything. You can count
on me, Oswald.« With these words, Edward took the tray from him after Oswald had finished his
soup and left him with one last smile over his shoulder. Maybe he had needed to go through Hell for the murder of Isabelle, to reap his rewards now and be happy with Edward. Looking back on his life, Oswald would have never thought that he would find a person he would be able to love like he loved Edward and, furthermore, who loved him back. Romance had always seemed to be something only other people experienced. Now it seemed in reaching distance to Oswald and that gave him hope for the first time in a long while. Edward did not shy away from touching him, despite the fact that Oswald could still feel the hands on his skin, that he could still feel the pain of being forcefully taken, that he could still feel the dirt on his body. He could get through this. He knew that he could with Ed by his side.

Oswald clenched his jaw shut, unwilling to make any sound. Nothing he could say or do would matter anyway. He was no longer in control as he was being pulled backward with no way out. He could feel the blood running down his thighs, burning into his icy cold skin as if his own body was trying to further insult and mock him. He willed his mind not to think about it. He tried to stifle a whimper of pain, his numb fingers clutching desperately at the little cracks he could feel on the cement floor beneath him.

It was too much. All of it was too much for him as another scream that he couldn't bite away was ripped from his lips and roaring laughter all that was filling his ears, burning hot like lava. »Always knew that the King of Gotham is nothing more than a little cocksucker! I always told you that he had to have sucked a few important people off to move up the ranks so quickly!« He knew these men. Although they were wearing masks whenever they came to see him, he knew them. Or were it just those voices and insults that would forever haunt his dreams?

There were fingers grabbing his jaw, digging into the skin so hard they would bruise and more fingers buried in his hair, pulling at it and twisting it until he thought they would rip off his scalp. Pain, once again clouded his vision - not that it would have made much difference. His jaw was aching and Oswald was unwilling to think about it, to not linger on the thoughts of what was happening as foul tasting fingers were shoved into his mouth at once. He was sure that this would be the only thing he would be able to taste from this moment onwards.

Oswald was not naive enough not to know what was going to happen to him and he had known it from the moment he had first woken up in this cellar, bound and gagged and naked and there was nothing he could do about what was happening next as he was forced to his knees. He didn't try to think about it as he felt the pressure against his closed lips that became so forcefully it actually split them open and tore blood from them. He forced every little thought about this whole situation out of his brain. The pain he was in, the taste on his tongue, the weight on it as his mouth was filled, the nausea in the pit of his stomach, the need to gag that bordered on pure and utter agony at one point. »Don't even think about biting or I'll punch out your teeth.«

And yet, it was exactly that threat that pulled something inside of Oswald back to the surface that he had feared those men had already beaten out of him completely. Suddenly, he was that man again who had attacked a random teenager with a broken beer bottle in some car, not caring if the driver of the car would drive into a ditch out of shock. Suddenly, he was that man again who had charged at Fish Mooney and threw her off a building when the chances had been too high that he could die doing something that reckless. Suddenly, there was that man again, who was willing to do what it would take and before Oswald knew it, his teeth came down hard, tearing through flesh and drawing a high pitched scream as he drew blood with a sick kind of satisfaction he had never felt before. And as the man he had bitten stumbled away from him in horror, Oswald grinned through bloodied teeth and swallowed. As long as there was still fight left inside of him, he would fight. Almost he could see Fish’s proud grin right in front of him.

He didn't know just how long he had been sleeping but when he woke up the next time it was dark
outside of his bedroom window and a full moon stood high in the sky. His first instinct was to look for Edward but the chair he had been sitting on previously was empty. Well, he could not expect his friend to remain by his side nonstop, he assumed. His head was still swimming and he still felt dizzy. He was probably staving off infection for now. Suddenly, a crashing sound from downstairs made him jump out of his skin and sit up with a jolt on his bed despite the pain shooting through his body that made him grit his teeth.

It sounded almost as if one of the windows downstairs had been trashed. At first, he didn't think too much about it but then it occurred to Jim that he and Ed were all alone in this big house. And although Ed Nygma could handle himself, if he would get ambushed … Oswald was out of the bed in an instant and didn't even think about putting on a robe or grabbing his phone from his bedside table. His aching body was demanding him to rest, but since when did he listen to his body’s demands? He had proven in the past that he had a high tolerance for pain and that was not about to change anytime soon. Maybe that was foolish but at least he quickly grabbed his gun from the top drawer before he hastily limped out of the room. His legs didn't quite want to cooperate but at this moment, Oswald had no desire to give into his pain, not with Ed possibly in danger downstairs. After all, he had been through, he would not allow anyone to put a hand on Ed.

Oswald was careful as he made his way down the hallway and tried to make as little sound as possible on his bare feet. He reached the stairs and tried to make out movement downstairs. There was a bit of light coming from the salon and so he slowly made his way down the stairs clutching the railing for support. There was no noise, no hint of a fight, but he was long enough in this business to know not to trust silence. Instead, he clutched his gun tighter and pulled off the safety with one flick of his finger.

He couldn't think of anyone stupid enough to break into his home and yet it was not impossible. What if Ed had not taken out all of the gangsters who had held Oswald captive? What if they came to finish the job? As he reached the bottom of the stairs, there was sudden movement in the corner of his right eye, a dark figure in the doorway to the salon too small to be Edward so he fired a shot out of pure instinct and without thinking twice about it.

The figure gave a moan as the bullet grazed their arm. This voice. Though only a moan Oswald couldn't help but freeze at the sound. He knew that voice! Why wasn't he dead? The figure dove into the shadows and was gone but Oswald pulled himself out of his stupor and rushed after him. He would not be a victim in his own house and he would show this man that he had been messing with the wrong guy. It was like Fish always said: If they want a monster, show them a monster. He limped into the salon with his breathing already shallow and quick but there was no trace of his attacker only a gush of wind from a broken window.

There was only one other way out of the salon and so Oswald hurried to the door that led into the dining room. Suddenly it seemed that there were shadows everywhere. Not just darkness but shadows moving in the dark over the walls of his house. Until now, he had always felt safe here but that safety seemed gone now. Invaded, ravaged. There was no escape. The shadows were moving in on him and they would get him. It was only a matter of time until his attackers would get him now! And Ed … Where was Ed? Not even being threatened with a gun by a high-class mobster had made the panic levels rise so much in his body. His instincts told him to flee, to just run and never stop running until he would be somewhere safe at last, but how could he even begin to consider leaving Ed behind in such danger?

»Ed?« He found himself calling out and he hated the tremble in his voice, the pure fear that distorted it so much he could hardly recognize it as his own. Not fear for his own life, but fear for Ed. »Edward!« He tried again as he hurried from the salon to the dining room and onwards before the sound of someone whistling a tune made him froze once more. He turned around sharply on the heel
of his left foot and nearly fell as he saw the dark figure approaching.

»Hello, pretty Bird.« The man hummed as he came closer, his face only illuminated by the pale light of the full moon shining in through the large dining room windows. »I missed you. We had so much fun.« There was a part of his brain that simply shut down in the eyes of the man who had viciously attacked him before. He could still feel this guy’s meaty hands all over his skin and as he stared at him wide-eyed in terror, he felt as if he was pushed backward into a whirlwind of memories. The part of his brain that shut down was the one that would usually keep him from doing anything that might hurt his pride or reputation as a tough mobster. As the man stepped closer to him, his grin widening on his round face, Oswald whirled around once more and started running as best he could, farther away from him and into the next room. It was pure instinct, fight or flight and he had decided to flee.

»Edward!« He screamed out in terror knowing that he wouldn’t stand a chance when the man would try to catch him. He was quick, even with his bad leg, but not nearly quick enough to ever escape such a situation in a condition as bad as his. »Ed! Help me!« It was pathetic. Absolutely and completely pathetic that he screamed for help on the top of his lungs in his own home although he held a gun in his hand, as if he had suddenly forgotten how to use it. His attacker just laughed at him as he followed slowly while Oswald made his way through the next adjoining room and out into the hallway, his goal, the front door right in front of him as he tripped on a rug and slammed down on the ground face first, his gun flying out of his hand only to slither across the floor and down the hallway, his right leg screaming in agony.

For a moment, Oswald was too dazed to get up or understand what happened. Pain was shooting through his right leg and he couldn’t even think straight anymore. Nothing seemed to make sense, all of this had to be a nightmare. There was no other explanation. The nightmare felt all too real, though, as Oswald scrambled to get back to his feet and failed, his right leg unable or unwilling to cooperate. The next moment, the air was pressed out of his lungs as the foot of his attacker slammed down on the small of his back and turned his world into one of pure agony. It sounded like a shot as his spine broke under the impact. That was what he thought had happened, at least. He was certain that his spine had just snapped in half and that he would never be able to walk again, that he would be reduced to crawl away from his attacker in a hopeless attempt of saving his own miserable life.

As he lay on the ground, he tried to breathe desperately, waiting for the pain shooting through his body to knock him out for good. It never came, instead, he could hear something next to him fall to the ground heavily and as he turned his face, he stared straight into the dead grey eyes of the man whose face would from now on forever haunt his nightmares. It seemed as if an eternity had gone by before he was even remotely able to do anything again and as he did, he raised his head to look at the door and felt his heart jump straight into his throat. »Ed!« He breathed and was finally able to scramble back to his feet as if all the pain was no longer relevant. Before he knew it, he was clinging to Ed like a drowning man and he positively felt the way too. »Ed! You’re alive!« That was all that really mattered at this moment, at least to him as Ed lowered the gun and wrapped his other arm around Oswald’s waist to support him.

It was pure desperation and relief and panic that prompted Oswald to raise high enough so that he could kiss his friend once more and the kiss in itself was just as desperate as he did. Edward’s hand remained on the small of his back just on the spot where the foot of his attacker had slammed down just seconds ago, holding him tight and pressing him even tighter against his chest, as he almost lifted him off his feet with such ease as if he would weigh nothing more than a feather. Their kiss was deeper than the last, hungrier on Ed’s part even, all tongues and teeth. It was sloppy and messy as if both of them needed this more than anything else just at this very moment and neither of them was willing to pull away. Yet, after a while, Oswald did exactly that to catch his breath. For the longest moment, he just locked eyes with Ed, as if there was not a dead criminal lying on the ground behind
him. Then again, that really was nothing new. He felt stupid for being so panicked in the first place, he felt stupid for losing his mind so easily and not shooting the man himself. He was no damsel in distress, never had been, never would be. Still, he could not deny, he was still filled with terror, even now as Edward ran his free hand gently through his mop of messy black hair, putting the other arm around him now instead. »I thought I had killed them all.« Edward hummed as Oswald rested his forehead against his collarbone in exhaustion, melting into the embrace desperate for it to never end. Maybe after everything that had happened to him he was allowed to be a little more on edge than he usually would be.

Usually, an attack at night would never get him to become this emotional, but it was different this time. His heart was still racing, he still felt sick, his knees were still wobbly. Then again, what had happened to him was not the usual either. He had never before felt so vulnerable and that one of those men had snuck into his house had made it even worse. He wasn't safe in here anymore. Not even in his own home.

»Sorry, Oswald.« Ed continued but Oswald only shook his head against his chest quickly. »I should have known that this bastard would become greedy. Well, hired help is not what it used to be these days, am I right?« First, Oswald only blinked in confusion but it was what Ed said next, that managed to let his blood run cold. »God, who am I asking? You of all people should know that, right? I mean, the guy you hired to cut Isabella's brake pipes could have at least done a better job of making it look like an accident.«

»I … I don't understand what you—«

»Bulshit!« Edward’s voice thundered through the house and made Oswald stumble backward and out of the suddenly far too tight embrace. As he stared at his friend now, there was nothing but disgust and anger on his face. »Just admit it!«

At this moment, suddenly, everything seemed to fall into place for him as if he was waking up from a dream. »M-my father appeared to me.« He found himself stuttering as he stared at Ed with wide eyes, suddenly very aware of the gun in Ed’s hand and the way his friend held himself. »I saw him!«

»No!« Ed grinned. »You saw a man that I met at Indian Hill - does killer impersonations. Ghosts aren't real, Oswald!« He said with a laugh, his voice all but booming now, vibrating in his skull.

»My father’s remains … You stole them from his grave?«

»Yupp! But don't worry, h'e's at peace now. I gently placed his remains inside a dumpster behind a Chinese restaurant. « There was glee written all over Ed’s face while Oswald felt like he would throw up any second now. A part of his brain understood everything that had happened, but there was still the rest of his mind that tried to block out the possibility that all this was real, that all this was Edward’s doing. No, this was just a fever dream. It had to be. And as Edward slowly stepped forward, Oswald found himself stepping backward out of pure instinct, his back to the corpse on the floor and to the staircase. The backdoor was always locked at night, the only way out was behind Edward. It had been a trap. All of this.

»You … Did you orchestrate this? All of this?« He couldn't say the words. All of this was too horrible. »You were never kidnapped.«

»Ding-ding-ding, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a winner!« It was then that Oswald hit the bottom stair with the back of his left foot and instinctively moved up one step. His phone. If he would be able to reach it, maybe he would be able to get help in time. In time? In time for what? Before Ed would be able to kill him. His rational mind sounded all too much like Fish.
»Ed … You are angry … I understand that … I even forgive you … But all of this … killing me is not the way.«

»So you admit to killing Isabella?« Isabella. Of course. This was because of this woman that Oswald didn't even bother to remember the name of! Would the situation be any different, he would have laughed.

»If that's what you want from me, yes! Yes, I had her killed! But we both know what would've happened if I hadn't!«

»Yes! I could have lived a life with the woman I loved!«

»No, Ed … You would have killed her, the same way as you did the other.« Maybe it was the punch that followed that startled Oswald enough to make the part of him that he had held under lock and key for those past few days come back to the surface as he stumbled on the stairs and almost fell. »You couldn't have helped it!« He found himself screaming and Ed taken aback by surprise. »And afterward you would have hated yourself!«

»Well« Edward’s voice was dark now. »We’ll never know, will we?« As he rose the gun and aimed at Oswald’s head he knew that there really wasn't much he would be able to do to escape from him. And maybe he didn't want to either. He felt crushed by the reality of it all. Edward had played him and yet there was still this childish part of him that was not willing to give up as he felt the tears threatening to spill out of his right eye.

»I did it for love.« He muttered all too quietly.

»What?«

»I did it because I love you.«

»Shut up!« Edward yelled as he leapt forward once more grabbing Oswald by the jaw so harshly that it would probably add to the bruises he already had. »Love is about sacrifice. It's about putting someone else's needs and happiness before your own. The truth is, Oswald, you would sacrifice anyone to save your own neck - Even me.«

As he let go of Oswald’s jaw there was a moment when Oswald could just frantically shake his head, desperate to get it all in, to understand all of this, to wrap his feverish head around the true horror of this entire situation. Edward had played him. He had tricked him. »E-Ed … I can change, please. The fact that I love you proves that I can and I … I won’t hold it against you what you did … I deserved it … All of it … Just give me a chance!«

Instead of screaming at him again, Edward suddenly let out a shaky little laugh. »And how could I ever love something like you, Oswald? After all you’ve been through? Look at you now, Oswald: Not so high and mighty anymore, are we? No, of the great Oswald Cobblepot is nothing more left than a used piece of garbage. How could anyone ever love you now? You are disgusting inside and outside and I want to drink bleach just to get the taste of you out of my mouth. You have no idea how much effort it cost me not to throw up everytime you kissed me, how much strength it cost me to play along and act as if you would not be the dirty little whore those men made you. Oh and, yes, that was my idea too. I thought it would be a nice touch, after all that was what you wanted anyway, right?«

Oswald reacted before he could think about it. There was a vase on a small podest right next to the stairs and if Edward had realized what was coming, he didn't act fast enough as Oswald grabbed the vase and slammed it over Edward’s head, sending lilies and water flying everywhere. His words
were burning straight through him and yet the other Oswald, Penguin, perhaps, had taken back control and was running up the stairs as quickly as he could. He was down the hallway as he already heard Edward’s thundering footsteps coming up the stairs. Still, no matter how hopeless it was, Oswald was quick to reach his bedroom, quick to retrieve his phone from the bedside table and flip it open.

There were not many people he could call, no one would care about his fate and he was not naive enough to believe that he had any friends left in this city, but he had someone left who would not rest before he would have gotten justice even for a criminal like him. As he pressed Jim Gordon’s number, Ed had already reached the bedroom and before the policeman could pick up the phone, Edward’s hand was in his hair, ripped his head back and slammed it forward onto the bedside table. His world was turning dark in an instant, but his brain refused to just give up like this. He found himself on the ground, hearing faintly the voice that came from the phone that was still in his hand after he fell to the ground. He could even hear Edward’s voice but couldn't make out what he was saying before he finally fell into unconsciousness.

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Gotham City - Jim’s apartment

Three days. It had been three days since he found Oswald in his bedroom and brought him back to his own apartment so that the mobster could recover and heal from whatever he had been put through. His fever had taken him out of commission for most of that time, leaving him asleep on Jim’s couch for the most part and thus quite easy company. Of course, Jim could not stay with him the entire time. There was work to do, after all, and would he not have returned to the precinct regularly, Harvey would have probably realized that something was off and that could simply not happen. Not yet, at least, not with Oswald being this vulnerable in his care. Up until this point, he had continued to evade Jim’s questions about his condition or about Nygma.

And now, three days after he first found him, he almost wished that Oswald had continued to keep his mouth shut.

Throughout these past years in Gotham with the GCPD, Jim had never heard a tale like Oswald’s and he still wished that he hadn’t. When he ended Oswald finally ended his story in the safety of Jim’s living room, huddled in his usual cocoon of blankets on the couch, Jim felt as if he came straight out of a horror movie. A part of him wished to believe that Oswald had just made it all up, but usually, that was not Oswald’s style. He was a liar and a killer, yes, but this … Not even Oswald Cobblepot would fabricate a story such as this. And deep down inside he could still feel the knot in the pit of his stomach that all too clearly told him that it was true what Oswald had told him. He had seen his injuries. He had seen the tell-tale signs all over his body, the fingerprints on parts of his skin where they didn't belong, but refused to accept what he saw as truth. He couldn't deny that he felt sick to the stomach and that he wished that he had not pried answers from Oswald.

One might ask how he even got Oswald to finally open up to him in the first place, but it had been simple. He had nursed Oswald back to health for three days and even for someone like Oswald Cobblepot that meant something. Maybe this between them was not yet friendship and not really something like real trust, but he had shown to Oswald that he cared and that he would not just throw him into the streets and leave him to fend for himself. He had proven to Oswald that he was one of the good guys, that he would even help someone like him in a time when it would have been all too easy to betray him, even despite the fact that Oswald had eaten him out of house and home these past three days. Tonight this had paid off, as he had sat down with him for dinner and finally confronted him again. He had told him about his workday as it had become their routine these past three days and Oswald had told him what he had read or seen on TV, before Jim had turned to him with hard
eyes and demanded to know everything, with a silent threat hanging in the air between them, that he would throw him out would he not open up at last.

»I loved him, Jim.« His voice sounded too broken to come from Oswald the Penguin Cobblepot and reminded him far too much of the night when Oswald had tried to kill Galavan, screaming at Jim that he had killed his mother at the top of his lungs, that she had died in his arms, filled with endless grief. »I loved him…« He would have hugged him if that would do any good in this situation. Maybe it would make it all worse because he could not imagine that Oswald would want to be touched.

For the longest moment, Jim needed to be quiet and let it all sink in. »You had his girlfriend killed because you were jealous and not willing to share.« He quietly began as his mind was still trying to make sense of it all.

»I-« But Jim didn't let him speak, just rose his hand to prompt Oswald into silence. He needed to hear it with his own voice, all of it, to fully understand it. At this moment in time, he was not a cop, it was not his concern who Oswald had killed.

»Nygma found out. He made you confess your love to him only to reject you, he vanished and set up this plan to drive you insane, including stealing your father’s remains, faking a ghost with this freak who once impersonated me, making you kill his replacement and making you lose your marbles on national television.« There was the ghost of a nod coming from the smaller man. Oswald was huddled in the blankets he seemed to have adopted as his own by now and looked even smaller than ever before the way he sat on the sofa, his hair a mess and his face even paler than normal.

»Then he faked being kidnapped and made you come to this warehouse where he had your lackeys killed and knocked you out cold to leave you to those men he hired for the job. They tortured and raped you only so that Edward could swoop back in after two whole weeks of this, killing the men and freeing you. And after that, what? He acted as if he would love you too? He acted as if he was your friend?«

»He gave me hope.« Oswald replied quietly and his voice seemed shattered into a million pieces. »Hope that … he might reciprocate my feelings one day. Hope that there might be a chance for me still and that everything would turn out well in the end.«

»But that was all a rouse to destroy you even further.«

»Yes.«

»So we can assume that this attack in your own house after which I found you was also staged.«

»I believe it was.« Oswald replied after a moment with a deep sigh leaving his lips.

»That slimy bastard…« He found himself huffing before he dragged his left hand over his face. Suddenly, he felt extremely old. All of this was stuff nightmares were made of. However, it were moments like this when he was thankful for his training and when Jim the policeman inside of him was all too glad to take over from Jim the civilian. »Okay, good. Listen, Oswald, I think it's safe to assume that you are not safe here and that he is not yet done with you, right? Edward will only stop when you are dead, so whatever it is he is planning, we have to get you into safety so that he will not be able to fulfill his sick plans.«

As Oswald looked up at him now he seemed utterly lost and confused as if he was unable to understand that Jim Gordon was, in fact, willing to help him, willing to get him somewhere safe, willing to make sure that Edward couldn't get his revenge. He couldn't imagine the way he felt, the pain he was going through, the betrayal, the utter hopelessness of all of this. He had loved this man,
he had trusted this man and something told Jim that Oswald still loved Edward. Maybe that was the worst of it all. He still loved Edward and he would forgive him if Edward would cease his murder plans for Oswald.

It seemed impossible to align this Oswald in front of him to the Oswald he had known for the last couple of years. It wasn't so much that he seemed weak to Jim but more the fact that Oswald was so willing to forgive Edward for what he had done to him. He could understand it if it had just been torture or beatings, and that in and of itself should be worrisome enough to a third party when it came to Jim's own mental health, but rape? It was possibly the worst thing to do to another person and it was clear that in Oswald’s case it had been about humiliation, about degradation, about breaking his pride and apparently Edward had succeeded. Would it have been worse had he done it himself? Maybe it was worse because he had hired a group of men to do the dirty work. He didn't wish to think about it too much. It made him sick to the stomach considering all of this.

»What should I do now?« Oswald breathed and Jim drove a hand through his hair. Hell, as if he would know! As if he would be the right person to give advice to the king of Gotham! »I take it … everything he told me were lies, right? He never ushered a statement about my behavior, right?«

»Not as far as I am aware, no. Your polls went down drastically after that interview and after you vanished for over two weeks.« But that was the smallest of his problems.

»And there are probably already crime bosses gnawing at the throne, first and foremost that bitch Barbara Kean. I wouldn't be surprised had she worked with Edward.« The spite in his voice gave Jim hope that the Penguin was still in there somewhere.

»I can't say that I would be surprised either.« Barbara was a special kind of crazy by now but that was not the most pressing matter as of right now. He needed to think his next steps through. Where should he bring Oswald to keep him safe? The GCPD was not an option, Arkham was not an option, their safe houses were too easy to be compromised and Ed probably knew their locations anyway. Wayne Manor was the one place where he was certain no one would expect Oswald to be and yet, he could not just call Bruce Wayne and ask if he could bring Oswald over for a couple of days - or weeks. Knowing Bruce he would probably accept, after all, Oswald had killed Galavan to save him but he didn't wish to drag Bruce into all of this mess. He needed to call Harvey and tell him everything. He needed his partner to deal with all of this mess.

»Listen, Oz … If you have any idea where Ed might be right now … Or if there is any way you could get in contact with him, maybe we could set up a trap for him.« It was like grasping for straws at this point and he knew that luring Edward Nygma into a trap would be far from being easy.

»A trap? For Edward Nygma?«

»Hey, I will admit, I might not always be able to follow your or Ed’s little mind games or exceptional schemes, but you, Oz, know this man. You know how he operates and though Ed Nygma always thinks he is the smartest person in the room, we both know that he could never hold his own in your presence. You are a mastermind when it comes to all of these things. You started a mob war and you destroyed Fish Mooney’s alliance with Maroni with just one sentence! One, Oswald! One sentence that led to Maroni’s death and to you becoming the King of Gotham. We might not always have seen or will see eye to eye, but I can give credit where credit is due. No one would have managed to do what you did.« He couldn't believe that he was here, rebuilding Oswald Cobblepot’s self-esteem while he should be glad that it had been shattered.

»But Barbara will-«

»To Hell with Barbara, Oz!« He frowned. »We both know that, if she is in an alliance with Ed, that
they are betraying each other front line and center while we speak. And even if Barbara manages to get to the top in the aftermath of all of this mess, she will not hold herself at the top for long. She is not intelligent, not clever or cunning enough to do that. She is a spoiled brat. But you, no matter our differences, either as mayor or crime boss, got things done in this city and everyone knows this. So don't crawl under the rug just yet. We could take down Nygma together and make him pay for what he did to you. And no, I don't condone your killing of his girlfriend, Oz, but the way he retaliated … That was monstrous, Oswald, and there is no way around that. He has to face punishment.«

»What punishment? Black Gate? Arkham? Don't be silly, Jim.« Oswald grunted and lowered his gaze, his thick black hair falling into his blue eyes as he did.

»Together we can send him to Arkham forever, Oswald. We can get him put into a padded cell for the rest of his days.« For once, Jim extended his hands to him only to grab Oswald’s own hands that were lying uselessly in his lap. Up until now, touching Oswald Cobblepot had always been weird and always seemed like being defeated in one of Oswald’s little games, but this time it didn't. This time, him grasping Oswald’s thin hands, was a gesture of friendship and not to seal some deal he had to make in order to save his own ass. »All you need to do is set a trap for him, tell him you want to confront him and to settle the score and he will come running.«

»He wouldn't be so stupid, Jim.« Oswald muttered with his eyes still averted and resting on both their hands now. His left eye still looked horrible, but at least by now he was able to open it again and didn't seem to have any lasting damage to it.

»He was stupid enough to let you live. He could have killed you before I came to find you, but he didn't.« Jim urged him on as he squeezed the hands that he had still in his own, brushing away his surprise that Oswald wouldn't pull away.

»That's because he is probably not yet done with his grand plan. He has something else in mind for me, I can feel it.«

»Maybe, but then we have to be one step ahead and who would be better to do just that than you are, Oswald?« Oswald produced a snort as he pulled his hands out of Jim’s at last. »Yes, he tricked you as he claimed to have been kidnapped. Yes, he tricked you as he acted as if he would care for you and nurse you back to health, but that does not mean you can't return the favor, Oz. You know the truth now so you will not fall for his traps as easily again. You were blinded by your love for him and that is something no one is equipped against, right? It happened to me more than enough times by now to know how easy it is to fall for a trap when someone you love is in danger.«

He watched Oswald getting up from the sofa and how he was wincing in pain as he did. For a moment, Jim wanted to reach out and pull him back, but then the moment was gone and Oswald limping over to one of the windows that was overlooking a small alleyway between his building and the next. At night, when the windows were open, the silence would only be disrupted by the alleycats and the noise they made while trying to get into trash cans or the occasional robbery. Back in the day he would not have been able to sleep through the night with the sounds of crime from every corner, but these days he almost found it to be relaxing.

»You and me together, Oswald, we can do that. We can bring Nygma to justice. All you need to do is to be strong now like I know you can.« The next time Oswald snorted at his comments Jim found himself rising from his spot on the armchair only to slowly walk over to the smaller man by the window. He looked oddly small in Jim’s clothes although Jim was not that much taller than the mobster. He didn't even quite know what it was about Oswald these days that made him want to comfort, maybe even protect the king of Gotham - although it was debatable if Oswald still was the king or the mayor, or anything for that matter. His empire lay in ruins. As he reached the window he
put a hand on Oswald’s good shoulder to make him turn around to face him again, hating nothing more than to speak to the back of someone’s head. »Don't act like you wouldn't know how strong you can be. I watched you rise to the top of Gotham from being Fish Mooney’s umbrella boy that I were meant to shoot and throw into the harbor. So you cannot let someone like Edward Nygma or Barbara Kean take your crown so easily, right? They do not deserve it. They didn't work as hard as you for it.«

»Do you ever regret not doing that?« Oswald finally looked up at him now and the light of a neon sign just outside his window made his eyes look green for a moment.

»In the beginning I did. I just saw the chaos that having you alive meant. But now, would I be able to go back, I would do it all again. You brought many good things to this city too, Oswald. And, if you really want to, you are stronger than him.« Oswald rolled his blue eyes but for once Jim did not even feel angry. It just felt odd that he, of all people, was here to tell these things to Oswald. »You are.« He urged again. »I mean who is Ed Nygma anyway? He couldn't even escape Arkham on his own. He needed you to do that. He killed a few people, yes. He is cunning, yes. But who is he in the end, Oswald? You are the king of Gotham, the biggest baddy in town, the one everyone quivers in fear from, you even managed to get elected as mayor, fairly and without pulling any stunts or bribery.«

»That was because Ed convinced me not to rig the election.«

»Yes, because he knew what you are capable of and that the people of Gotham would see it too. But everything you achieved in those past years was your doing, not his. You did this. Ed Nygma is nothing to you, Oz, nothing to this city. He will never be able to compete with you.« He could see the flicker of protest in Oswald’s eyes as if his first instinct was to tell Jim how wrong he was and how wonderful and clever and smart Edward truly was. It hit him then that Oswald still loved this man who had done such horrible things to him and that his first instinct was still to defend him. »Tell me where he is, Oswald. Call him. Help me to set a trap for him.«

»Why aren't you calling?« Oswald replied finally, his voice low as he stared at Jim and it was then that he knew that Oswald, even after his little speech, would not betray Ed. It was gut-wrenching.

»Because Ed is not stupid, Oswald. he will know that I’m on your side in this and that you are here. He probably saw that you called me, he can put two and two together.« Jim sighed. »But if you would call, you could say that you escaped from my protective custody - if you want to call it that - and that you are now willing to face him and repent for your crimes.«

»I don’t think he would fall for that.«

»Oswald, if you want to live and get back on your feet, rebuild your empire, you have to give up Nygma.«

There was a moment of silence between them as Jim’s hand remained on Oswald’s shoulder, squeezing lightly. They were not exactly friends and Oswald had no reason to trust him except for the fact that Jim had been willing to help him these past days. Would he still be the same cop that he had been not even a year ago, they both knew that Jim would not hesitate to throw him into some moldy old cell and then send him straight back to Arkham. Of course, that was what he should do anyway, but he felt for Oswald. It wasn't pity and nothing would be a bigger insult to the crime boss than being pitied by James Gordon. He felt sympathy for him. Sympathy for the devil, so to say. Oswald was a human being with human flaws and an all too human heart. He had made the mistake of falling in love with Ed Nygma, maybe fallen in love for the very first time even, and now here he was, beaten down by the man he loved just for loving him.
Oswald’s eyes dropped to the floor between them as he seemed to consider his offer but when he spoke again, Jim knew that it was hopeless. »You are right.« Oswald breathed. »I should want him dead, I should want him to be thrown back into a padded cell forever.«

》Should?« Jim replied with narrowed eyes before he leaned down a little, grabbing both his arms now as hard as he could without hurting him. »Oswald, you loved him and he betrayed you in the most gruesome of ways.« It was like talking sense into a three-year-old having a tantrum. How could this man be so stubbornly in love with a man who had done so disgusting things to him? »He had you kidnapped, beaten, tortured, and raped. He made you believe he was your friend. He made you believe that he loved you back. He made you believe that he would be there for you as he was already plotting your death!«

》A-Actually I don't know that I did love him.« Oswald replied quietly and with a face as if he was almost in shock of the revelation he seemed to have at this very moment. »Not really. He was right. I thought I loved him because he saw me as no one has since my mother. But I killed Isabelle. Because I wouldn't share him. Ed said love is sacrifice. I should have been able to sacrifice my own happiness for his. I couldn't. But I'm ready now.« He was mad. That was all Jim could think of as he stared into these hopeful blue eyes staring back up at him with the tiniest smile tugging on his lips now. »I deserved everything he threw at me for what I did, for how I betrayed his trust and friendship. I won’t call Ed. I won’t let anyone hurt him.«

It was unbearable to Jim as he had to witness how Oswald sunk even further into madness. He had seen Oswald going crazy, had seen him in Arkham, had seen him beat the crap out of Galavan with a baseball bat and had always known him to be insane but this … This was more than just madness, this was utter heartbreak that was driving him to the brink of insanity. It was only one step that kept Oswald from falling off the cliff. Maybe not even that. He was holding onto sanity with one finger by now. »So you’d rather lose everything you have, maybe even your life, than to give up the man who tried to kill you?«

》I would!« Oswald laughed with tears in his eyes. »Isn't that crazy?«

》Yes.« The voice made Jim’s body froze in fury as he saw the change on Oswald’s face going from this distorted mask of a smile and laughter into one of pure and utter terror as his eyes shifted to look at something right behind Jim. »It is.« Jim knew what was coming and yet he wasn't prepared for it as his world turned black all at once.

-End of Chapter 4-
Gotham - Van Dahl Mansion

A sharp slap was what pulled him back into the world of the living. »Ah! Good, you are awake, wonderful!« Edward chirped beside him before another light slap made Oswald groan in protest. »I'm glad you woke up so soon, we don't have all day, after all.« Ed laughed but his voice was shrill and unbalanced and not at all like the calm voice he was so used to. No, this was utter madness seeping right out of his throat. His head hurt and he was slowly but surely getting sick of this feeling. It took him only a few seconds to assess the situation he was in as he found himself tied to the chair at the head of his dining room table, the warmth of a fire crackling silently in his back.

The room was dark except for the fire that was gently crackling in the fireplace behind him, the curtains were drawn and only allowed a glimpse of the nightly sky through a small gap between his heavy damask curtains. His jaw hurt but this time not because of the beatings he had received earlier, but because of the gag that Edward had crudely pushed into his mouth and secured with one of his most expensive violet silk ties.

He couldn't deny the fear he was experiencing, especially not in front of Ed Nygma who knew him better than anyone else. But although he was afraid being the captive of Edward Nygma, his fury clearly overweight his fear. He had trusted this man. It was like Jim had said. Ed had got him kidnapped. Ed had sent his goons after him. Ed had ordered them to torture, beat, and rape him. Ed had made him believe that he loved him back only to betray him even worse than he already had. Ed had wanted to completely and utterly destroy him. He had taken his empire, taken his sanity, taken his dignity, taken his heart, taken everything. He was supposed to hate him. He was supposed to want him dead and yet, despite all of this, his own words still held true. He loved this man. He loved him more than anything in his life ever and he would forgive him, would Edward ask him to, would Edward want him to.

He would do it in a heartbeat.

But despite that fact, he was furious. He was angry at himself for the most part. How could he have been this stupid? How could he have been blinded by Edward so easily? Love had made a fool out of him. Love had completely blinded him and made him unable to see the reality of the situation. He had allowed himself to mope, he had allowed himself to be a victim, to be weak, to be fooled, allowed himself to be broken down by Edward’s false love and by the assault he had suffered all the while Fish Mooney’s voice had remained in his ear, reminding him that he was stronger than that, stronger than the pain and the humiliation, stronger than his empire.

He would not sit here, cry and beg for mercy. He would not plead with Edward. So, as he looked at him now, his eyes were full fury and not full of tears because of his irrational love for this man. »You look angry, Oswald.« Edward smirked as he leaned over him, before, in an instant, he had swung his left leg across Oswald’s lap and took position on Oswald’s thighs, resting his forearms leisurely on his slender shoulders. Would the situation be any different, he could have liked that, now, however, Ed’s weight on him was unbearably painful. »I thought you wanted to spend more time with me. I thought you wanted not to share me. Somehow I feel you don't really know what you want, Oswald. I mean, look, I rescued you from Jim’s clutches and took you home so that we could spend time together, so that we could have a bit of fun and now you look at me as if you are already plotting my murder - which wouldn't surprise me, or anyone for that matter.«

Instinctively, he pulled on his restraints with a grunt all he was able to produce through the gag. But
all this fighting against the ropes was silly and pointless and they both knew that he wouldn't be able to free himself.

»Oz, Oz, Oz … Oh, can I call you Oz? Jim called you that and I just wondered since when you two were that close that you give each other stupid nicknames. Do you call him Jimmy? Jimbo? Or do you prefer James?« Ed grinned, entirely too close to his face at this moment. A few days ago he couldn't have been close enough. A few days ago, everytime they had shared a kiss, Oswald had believed he would melt into a puddle on the floor but now … this … He couldn't breathe. Ed was too close. He couldn't breathe and his heart was beating too fast. It would explode, would he not get a chance to take a deep breath and as if Ed knew that it was his closeness that made him panic, he leaned in even closer, brushing a few black strands of Oswald’s unruly hair out of his forehead as he leaned in closer, the light of the fire reflecting from his glasses. He could feel the tip of Ed’s nose brush against his own. It was too warm, too close, unbearable and the breath he was desperate to get in through his nose got stuck in his throat. »You know … watching you guys the last few days … I can't deny that I got a bit jealous, Oz. I thought you loved me and yet you use the first opportunity that I am not with you to throw yourself at the next available man. I would have thought your love would mean a little more, after all, you were willing to kill my girlfriend for it, right? But you were all too willing to open your legs for Jimbo, right? Well, of course, my friends taught you that, so I shouldn't complain about it, huh?«

He felt nauseous. To Edward, this was all an act and Oswald knew this. He knew that this was not what he truly felt or thought but just an act to freak him out, to unnerve him, to make him panic, to humiliate him. This was not Ed, this was his inner monster shining through, cruel and ugly - and it didn't fail to achieve its goals. He could already feel the bile rising in his throat. Suddenly, even the aftershave he usually loved to smell was making him gag and he was still fighting for air like a fish on land. If he would just be able to reach something to cut his ties, if he could just get off his gag! He could feel how he was starting to hyperventilate and as he noticed how Ed’s eyes widened in surprise at that, Oswald decided that maybe it was time for a bit of an act of his own. He let his eyes roll back into his head as he allowed his body to hyperventilate and his nostrils to flare until Ed finally had enough of it. »Oh no, I’m not letting you off the hook so easily, little Penguin.« Ed groaned against his cheek as he pulled down the tie he had used to keep the gag in place and pulled out the handkerchief he had used for that to throw it to the ground without much care, allowing him to gasp for breath finally.

Edward was not the only manipulator in this room and Oswald’s charade only just begun. Edward, though a genius, was new to this little game. Oswald, on the other hand, had years of experience in putting on an act for other people, of showing other people what they wanted to see. »I’m sorry!« He managed to get out between breaths as he stared at Edward desperately, nudging his nose against that of the man above him, as Ed remained in this position. He was fighting against the bile in his throat now, fighting not to throw up. Yes, he loved Ed, but at this moment he was making him sick and he was doing it on purpose. »I never meant to make you jealous.« As their noses brushed against each other, Edward allowed the kiss that Oswald stole from him before he had to pull away to gasp for breath again all too soon. »I was afraid … I didn’t think straight. Of course, you would never hurt me.« His voice was all but a whisper as he stole another sloppy kiss from Edward, drawing him in even closer as his stomach was making somersaults in protest.

It was enough to distract Edward from what his hands were doing, though. »You are sick, Oswald.« Ed snarled as he pulled away from the kiss, but he allowed Oswald’s open-mouthed kisses alongside his jaw and further down his throat. He let his guard down. It would have been all too easily for Oswald now to bite a chunk out of his throat and make him bleed out and it wouldn't have been the first time he did that either. Yet, Edward let him do it, his act clouding his better judgment as Oswald managed to draw a moan from him. It was then that Oswald was finally able to get the fingers of his good hand close enough to the back pocket of Edward’s pants. He was a man of habit and Oswald
knew that Ed had a pocket knife in his pants at all times. Just as he pulled the knife out carefully, he playfully sunk his teeth into the skin right above Ed’s shirt collar and found himself rewarded not only with another moan from his captor, but with Ed’s left hand on his neck. »Had I known you would enjoy being fucked by strangers, I would have thought of something else, but all it seemed to have done is to make you horny.« His words were poisonous and like acid they burned their way through him, but he couldn’t sink down now, he couldn’t cave in now. If he wanted to survive and if he wanted to prove to Ed and anyone who dared to fuck with him that it was not wise to anger the Penguin, he had to go through with this act of his.

»But I only want you.« He breathed against Ed’s neck, looking up at him the way he knew Ed would like, the way Isabella or Kristen had probably looked at him with their big eyes. Edward was not only a man of habit, he was also a man of exceptional genius and those men usually liked it very much when someone looked up to them. For Oswald, this was usually not hard, after all he was much shorter than Ed and usually hunched over a bit too, but it had a different effect on Ed now as their eyes remained locked and maybe even an effect that Ed had not thought possible either. Ed was, after all, only a man and they much too close for Oswald not to feel certain changes.

»I had you raped, Oswald.« Ed breathed too close to his face for Oswald not to feel his breath on his skin, his voice low with a soft growl.

»I forgive you.« He replied hastily.

»I had you almost beaten to death.«

»I forgive you.«

»I had you tortured and humiliated.«

»I forgive you.«

»I betrayed you.«

»I love you.« He had never used those words as a weapon before but this time he did and it worked because in the end, Edward Nygma was a man much like Oswald was. They were both desperate for a companion, both desperate for love no matter how toxic it might be. As Edward grabbed him by his jaw so hard that it would most certainly add to his bruising again to pull him into yet another deep kiss, Oswald finally managed to cut the rope of his right hand enough to wiggle his hand free thanks to the knife cutting into his skin and his blood acting as lubricant.

»You are disgusting, Oswald.« Ed grunted against his lips but only drew a small grin form Oswald in return as he grabbed the pocket knife harder with his right hand.

»I am, aren’t I?« He hummed against Ed’s lips before with one swift move he slammed the blade down and rammed it into Ed’s left thigh. The scream that tore from Ed was more startled than one of actual pain. The blade too short to do real damage, but it sufficed for the moment as Oswald pulled it out and sank it quickly into ed’s left side. The result was that Ed jumped from his lap and as he saw how Oswald aimed for his stomach next, Ed’s punch sent Oswald cum chair flying to the ground.

Oswald was quick to use the moment of surprise to his advantage as he cut through the rope of his left wrist enough to pull it out and scramble to his feet as quickly as possible while Ed was clutching the wound in his side.

»OSWALD!« Ed’s voice thundered through the entire mansion as Oswald hobbled out of the dining room as quickly as he was able to with his bad leg and all these new injuries. This was his home and he knew all the shortcuts by heart. He might not be able to hide from Ed for too long, but he could
buy himself some time as he pulled the dining room door shut behind him and blocked it with a chair from the other side. Ed would need to use the door to the kitchen now to come around and that would at least cost him a few precious seconds that Oswald could use to his own advantage. He ran out of the salon and straight into the entry hallway. His eyes fell upon the front door but he imagined that Edward had been clever enough to lock it beforehand. Instead, he quickly grabbed one of his walking sticks that he kept next to the door in an umbrella stand and smashed the window right beside the door. Only then he hurried up the stairs as silently as he could, using even his hands to all but crouch up the stairs on all fours.

He had just arrived at the landing as he heard Edward’s thundering steps running down the hall and towards the front door. However, Edward was not stupid and he would know right away that this had only been a trick, so Oswald didn’t stop. He hurried onwards, crouched down like an animal as he made his way to the bathroom, the closest room to the stairs. He managed to get inside just as Edward reached the broken window and put two and two together. As quietly as he could, Oswald locked the bathroom door and remained in the darkness for a moment, his eyes darting through the tiny room to look for a weapon, but in the darkness, it was impossible to find something adequate. Instead, he found the small window. He would be able to squeeze through it, unlike Ed. With quick steps, he had managed to wobble to the window above the toilet and he could already hear Ed’s footsteps rushing up the stairs, as his yell tore through the mansion once more.

Oswald’s stomach was about to catch up with him at the sight of the toilet, but if he would throw up now, Edward would find him right away. So he gulped down hard on the vomit that he could already taste in his throat and forced his shaking fingers to open the small window with a creak just as he heard how the knob of the door was rattled. »Oswald! I thought you wanted to have some fun!« Ed yelled through the door but Oswald quickly climbed on top of the toilet and was out of the window just as he heard how something heavy slammed into the door, effectively bursting it out of its hinges. There was no awning he could have fallen onto as Oswald effectively jumped out and no trellis he could climb down on either, only a bush of very thorny roses to cushion his fall. He landed in the bushes with a shout of his own. The impact was not exactly doing wonders for his fractured ribs or the other injuries that were not yet healed, but he had no time to beweep his misery. For a second, he lay there and let a moan out of his throat but the next moment, he saw Ed’s face appear as he shoved his head out the window, the moonlight allowing Oswald a darn good look at his wide toothy grin as he seemed to smell victory over Oswald.

His survival instincts kicked in right away as Edward looked down on him and instead of running, he moaned louder in feigned agony, clutching his bad leg with both hands. »My leg … fuck!« He groaned loud enough for Ed to hear it and his response, a giddy little laugh was imminent. As soon as he disappeared from the window, Oswald dropped his act and jumped to his feet to run. He couldn’t make it to any of his cars and neither would he be able to make it to the front gate because Edward knew that he wouldn’t be dumb enough to try either of that so Oswald did the first thing that came to his mind, as he pulled off his right sock - Jim’s right sock, as he should say - and threw it as closely as he could to the brushwork of the small forest that was surrounding his property. Maybe that would throw Edward of his trail as Oswald instead ducked into the shadows close to the house and hurried his way to the backdoor that would lead him into the kitchen. Of course, the door would certainly be locked, Edward was not an idiot, after all, but this was Oswald’s home and he knew his way around. There was a spare key no one knew about because Oswald himself had put it there only a short while ago and changed it’s locations frequently. This time, he had hidden it on the underside of the watering can that was never used because it was leaking.

He could still hear Edward yell his name in the distance and could only hope that he had caught the bait and ran towards the forest. Then again, Edward knew him better than anyone else and he would probably soon realize that Oswald had tried to trick him. The sock was a too perfect hint of his path
that the Penguin would never leave behind if he didn't want the hint to be found. He could only hope that Ed was still underestimating him and overestimating Oswald's panic.

This time, as he reached the backside of the house and hurried to the watering can, he was unable to gulp down the bile as the thought hit him what Edward might do to him would he catch him. It was impossible to say what he had planned for Oswald but he would much rather not find out. Before he knew it, he threw up over his stepmother’s priced roses, which gave him a certain sense of satisfaction even after her death. Would the situation not be as tense right now, he would have laughed.

As there was nothing left in his stomach for him to throw onto the flowers, he wiped his mouth with his bandaged hand and finally grabbed the watering can. Turning it around, he found the rusty old key taped to the underside and ripped it off cleanly. Stumbling back to the kitchen door he could hear Edward already, back on his trail. Fuck. Still, he hasty jammed the key into the lock and unlocked the door, closing it silently behind himself after he had slipped inside. There was no place in this house where he could hide from Ed and hope that he wouldn't find him and he knew that he was playing for time so that Jim might reach him and help him. He hated the thought of that! He hated needing help. He shouldn't need help! But Edward was quicker and stronger than him and he was not stupid enough to think that he would be able to beat him would it come to a fight, but he could try to surprise him, at the very least.

Quickly, he locked the kitchen door behind himself again and grabbed the first thing he found on the table in the middle of the room where Olga liked to prepare his food. It was her wooden rolling pin and he remembered how his mother once beat a burglar with one of these when Oswald had been a child and the burglar made the mistake of breaking into their flat in the middle of a stormy night. Edward just reached the back of the house as Oswald took his position next to the door where the shadows were the darkest. He waited for the inevitable and certainly enough, there was Edward, rattling the doorknob before impatiently ramming his elbow through the window of the door to unlock the door from the inside after he had shoved his hand through the hole. Oswald held his breath as Edward barged into the house, his name tearing from his throat once more like a curse. He looked disheveled at this point and Oswald found a sick joy in seeing him like this, knowing that he had destroyed his wonderful plan and how much Ed hated it when he did that. Edward had not expected him to put on a fight.

He waited for Edward to take another step into the room before he striked out and slammed the rolling pin on the back of Ed’s head as hard as he could. It was not enough to knock him out because he couldn't build up enough force with just one hand and he wouldn't be able to use his left for it either, but it sufficed to make Ed stumble and lose his balance as he fell forward and slammed against the table in the middle of the room. Oswald used the moment to escape through the side door and into the tea room. He had to get his hands on a weapon or his phone - anything! But before he had the chance a sharp kick to the small of his back send him flying to the ground and disabled him for a moment to get up again, but it was enough for Ed to regain control over the situation as he was suddenly crashing all his weight into Oswald’s back, making him scream out in pain and black dots appear on the edge of his field of vision. Ed sat on his back but in an instant he had managed to turn Oswald around, grinning down at him. He tried to struggle against Ed, to claw at his face, but his vision was blurry and his head swimming, his movements sluggish.

»Oswald, you are such a tease.« Ed grinned before he grabbed Oswald by the hair harshly, ripped his head up and slammed his head back down on the ground. That was all it took for Oswald to lose consciousness once more. After that, he regained and lost consciousness a few times, as if he was only blinking very slowly, or drifting in and out of a deep slumber. He could hear Ed talking every now and again, then there was darkness for a long time and the feeling of vibrations running through his entire body as if he would be sitting on a dryer, before his brain turned off every bit of feeling
He was awoken, once again, by a sharp slap and when he ripped open his eyes he was staring into Ed’s face and beyond his shoulders, a cloudy sky extended in every direction. Cold air was hitting his face and made him gasp. It was freezing and only then did he realize that he was lying in the trunk of a car. Probably one of his. »Wakey-wakey, Sleepyhead.« Ed grinned down at him. He didn't wait for Oswald to regain control over his body as he pulled at his tied hands. He forced Oswald out of the trunk and made him effectively fall to the ground face first. »Oh, I’m sorry!« He laughed before he pulled him back to his feet. Only then did he notice that Edward had redressed him. He was no longer wearing Jim’s clothes but one of his best suits, his most favorite dark purple vest with a matching tie and handkerchief in the breast pocket. The thought that Edward had stripped him and redressed him made him sick.

Apparently, Ed had noticed his surprised and even horrified look at his suit as he grabbed him by the arm. »Oh, that?« He snickered pointing widely at Oswald. »I wanted you to look your best when you go to Hell.«

»E-Ed … What is going on?« He managed to stammer as he looked around frantically. He could hardly stay on his own two feet, but Ed dragged him forward by his left arm anyway. They were at the harbor. »Ed!«

But Ed’s face had lost all movement and was nothing more than a stony mask by now. He was Ed again, the same Ed he had found in this warehouse when this nightmare begun and this same Ed was dragging him down the pier now with quick steps and his gun in his left hand, pointed at Oswald. Cold, calculating, uncaring, spiteful Ed. It would be comical, under different circumstances. He always seemed to come back to this pier.

»I thought you would like having it end here where it began.« Ed hummed as he dragged him further and further down the pier. »You told me the story before, how Oswald Cobblepot died at this pier and was reborn as the Penguin. I believe it is my turn now to be reborn and for that I only need to kill you.«

As they finally stopped, Ed positioned him with his back to the water. The river had the color of steal as dark clouds hung above a freshly awoken Gotham and promised the first snow of the year to fall soon while a thin layer of the early morning fog lay over the deep waters of the docks. Ed pointed the gun at him unwavering. There was no act, this time, no play, no charade, nothing. Just Ed Nygma, his friend, the man he had fallen in love with, not some violent psychopath, ready to finally kill him without any more tricks.

»Ed…« He begun silently as it began to drizzle ever so softly, trembling in the freezing cold of the docks. »I love you and I know you believe that now.« His pleas were falling on deaf ears and that he knew but he didn't want to leave this world without saying what he had to say. »So you need to listen to me when I tell you that by doing this it will change you.«

»I killed before, Oswald.« His voice was low and cold, dismissive of his claims.

»Not like this!« Oswald breathed with trembling lips. »This won’t be a crime of passion or self-preservation, this will be the cold-blooded murder of someone you love.«

»I don’t love you.« His word were cold and though he didn't hear them for the first time, though Ed had told him worse than this, he still found himself reaching for him in despair, shivering and with shaking fingers. He couldn't even fight the instinct of reaching out to him. After everything, he still thought that there would be a possibility for them to reconcile, for Ed to forgive him, for them to be together - as friends, if nothing else. And yet, Ed slapped his hands away once more.
»You need me, Edward Nygma, just as I need you! You can’t have one without the other!« He found himself raising his voice now, his last resort in a desperate situation such as this.

»You killed Isabella.«

»The point is—«

»THAT IS THE POINT! You can't talk your way out of this, Oswald! I have wanted you to suffer as I suffered. You killed her - so you die.« He searched desperately in his mind for something to say to Ed, for something that would make Ed see that he was right and that he couldn't do this, that Oswald had suffered more than enough for the death of that woman. And then it struck him, that he not once had thought of this woman by her real name, that he had not even bothered to remember that it was Isabella and not Isabelle, that he hadn't cared when he should have cared. And no, that didn't change anything. What Ed did to him was still monstrous and not something any sane person could fathom, but still … as his friend, he should have cared. And the problem was, perhaps, that neither one of them was sane.

»When I met you, you were a nervous, jittery loser! You were nothing! I created Edward Nygma! And I am the only one in the world who truly sees you as you are - Who you still can become! You can't do this!« He couldn't help the tears spilling this time and had never been happier for the slight drizzle that could mask his tears, as it collected drops on Ed’s glasses when the taller man lowered his gaze for a moment lost in deep thought as if he was honestly contemplating what Oswald had to say. After all this madness, finally a moment where Ed listened to him and that was enough to get his hopes up again. »Ed are you listening to me?«

»I must think.« His voice was husky and the grip he had on the gun in his right hand started to falter ever so slightly. It would have been easy now for him to wrestle the gun from him even with tied hands and maybe it was naive that he didn't do it. He should take the gun from him and shoot Ed for what he did to him. He should kill him because what Edward had done had crossed the line of taking revenge on someone, but Oswald still held onto hope that Ed might change his mind, that they would have time to work through all of this. He could forgive everything and that was his greatest weakness whenever he loved someone.

»Say something!«

»I loved her, Oswald.« As their eyes met this time, there was only exhaustion and regret in those amber-colored eyes that he loved so dearly. It was exactly this moment that Oswald knew that he had lost and that there was no way of him coming out of this situation alive. »And you killed her.«

At first, Oswald didn't recognize that he had been shot in the guts. The loud shot still rang in his ears but he couldn't connect it to the gun in Ed’s hand. There was no pain at first, only the realization that he had been hit as he pressed his bound hands to the wound in his abdomen and felt the blood gushing out of the wound with a shocked gasp. Up until this point in his life, he had always been able to weasel his way out of situations as this but he knew, right in this moment, as Ed grabbed the collar of his shirt and shoved him backwards, that there would be no escaping this. When he sunk to the bottom of the harbor, he could still see Ed’s face above him, before his world was tinted into darkness for the last time.

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**Gotham City - Jim's Apartment**

As Jim had regained consciousness, he found Harvey staring down on him with a mixture of amusement, annoyance and worry painted on his gruff face, too many emotions in just one face, as it
seemed at first glance. One last little slap at his face prompted Jim to fully find his way back into reality as he cursed quietly under his breath and clutched the back of his head.

»Wild night?« Harvey tried to humor, but Jim only took a small glance around his flat to realize that something was missing - no, someone was missing.

»Where’s … Where’s…«

»Who?«

»The tiny one!« Jim breathed and snapped his fingers as his brain still tried to come up with the name of the man whom he had protected for the last couple of days. »Bird-dude … Penguin! Where’s Oswald?«

»Cobblepot?« Harvey replied with a frown. Outside it was still dark, but it was only a matter of time now until the sun would rise. How long had he been knocked out? If Nygma had taken Oswald, which was a safe bet at this point, he could be long dead. Of course, it wouldn't be much of a loss, one criminal less in Gotham, but he had promised to keep him safe here and he hadn't done it.
»What's your business with this little freak? And why would he be here?«

»Because he's hiding from Nygma, Harv.«

»He's hiding from his boyfriend at your place?« Jim shot him a glare at this and pressed his hand to his head once more. There was no blood as he pulled it back, but only because he could feel it clumped in his hair. Now was hardly the time to lament his injury though as he grabbed his jacket and gun. »Hey, where you going?«

»Van Dahl Mansion!«

»Penguin’s place?«

»Yes, Harvey!« He snarled as he quickly made his way to the door already with Harvey following suit. »If you want to ask more stupid questions feel free to tag along, I can tell you everything on the way but now we have to find Oz before Nygma kills him!«

»Oz?« He could hear the smirk dropping off his voice but the glare he shot his partner over his shoulder was enough to shut him up for good this time. They were outside and in Jim’s car in a heartbeat and Jim was quick to shove his own injury aside as they were rushing through Gotham and towards the outskirts of town where the old Van Dahl Mansion stood watch on a small hill as if it came straight out of some horror movie. This place was truly fitting for someone like Oswald Cobblepot, a relic of time and long forgotten decadence. The sun was already rising as they reached the house. »I can't believe this story, Jim.« Harvey breathed and dragged a hand over his face. Suddenly he seemed to have aged by ten years throughout the last couple of minutes as he had given him the rundown of what had happened.

As he had told him Oswald’s story he had considered leaving out the details, but in the end, he had told them anyway. Harvey was his partner and he trusted no one as much as he trusted him and when he wanted him to understand the urgency behind all of this, he needed to know what giant piece of shit Nygma truly was. »You should've seen Oswald, Harvey.«

»What a complete psychopath!« Harvey spat as Jim finally parked the car right outside the house in the driveway. »Unbelievable that he was our colleague! We were working with a monster!«

»Yes, we were, Harv, now would you focus?«
»Do you really think that they are here?«

»I don’t know, Harvey but we have to start somewhere, right? Now get your ass moving, we’re running out of time, if Oswald isn’t dead already!« For once, there was no question why he cared so much and no stupid remark about how awesome it was that the criminals were now killing each other.

They snuck up to the house with their guns drawn right away as Harvey quickly pointed out the broken window near the front door. To their surprise they found the front door unlocked as they tried the doorknob. One look to his partner signalized that they needed to be careful. This might as well be a trap for them, Nygma was no idiot, after all, and he wouldn't put it past him to have boobytrapped the front door of the mansion. Jim was the first to slip into the house and felt painfully reminded of the first time he came here. It felt like one massive sick deja vu to him. Last time he had been here, he had found Oswald in his bedroom but how were the chances that this would happen again now? They walked into the house slowly and as silently as possible. Ed Nygma was unpredictable and might as well wait for them with a rocket launcher as he probably knew that Jim would come back to this house in search of Oswald. Harvey turned right and slowly walked into the salon while Jim already turned to climb the stairs.

»Signs of a fight.« Harvey muttered quietly from the next room. »Looks like they had quite the brawl, Nygma and Penguin.« At least that meant Penguin had actually fought back and not just taken whatever Ed had thrown his way. A step in the right direction for sure. Jim had just reached the landing as there was a sound startling both him and Harvey as his partner shot out of the salon again, a car driving off with screeching wheels. Jim was down on the ground floor in a heartbeat, all but flying down the stairs and rushing over to the wide-open front door of the mansion.

»Harvey! Quick!« He shouted running back towards their car and jumping inside as he saw how the black Mercedes was leaving the property through the iron gate at the end of the motor court.

»Was that Nygma?« Harvey thundered behind him as he tried to catch up, before he was finally at the car and climbing into the passenger’s seat.

»Of course, that was Nygma, Harvey!«

In spite of Jim jumping on the gas to rush after Nygma, they soon lost the sly bastard. At least Harvey had called the situation in right away and so, as the sun was rising over Gotham the dispatcher alerted them of the fact that the car they were looking for had been caught by traffic cameras on its way towards the harbor.

»The harbor.« Jim cursed. »I should have known he would go there!« He could feel his blood boiling in his veins as he forced his car down the main street and through Gotham's thick early morning traffic. Suddenly every single person in Gotham seemed to be on their way to work or somewhere else to slow them down. It was the third red light that made them stop what caused Jim to slam his fists against the wheel in anger.

»How could you have known he would go to the harbor, Jim? It's not your fault.« It was a sorry attempt of Harvey to calm him down, not that he wouldn't be grateful for it anyway. And yet, Jim hated himself for not being cleverer. After all the shit that had happened these past months, he couldn't even keep a man save that had been literally in his own flat under his unofficial protective custody! What kind of detective was he when he couldn't even do that?

»Because Ed has a compulsive need to do things a certain way, Harvey. He probably heard the story of how I should have killed Oswald at the pier and decided that this would not only be a nice callback to the day when it should all have ended the first time around, but also he would get rid of
the body this way too right away.« Jim groaned and leaned his forehead against the steering wheel for a moment as he tried to collect his thoughts while he was taking a deep breath. Harvey was right in trying to calm him down. Now was not the time to freak out - and why would he freak out about Oswald anyway? They were no friends and though he hadn't mind taken care of the young man the last couple of days, he should be happy to be rid of him. Yet he wasn't. Then again, Oswald did represent something in his life, a decision he made years ago that made him the person he was today. Not the puppet of some random mobster who had wanted him to kill a snitch, but his own man who made his own decisions and who wasn't always liked by his colleagues because he was uncomfortable in their eyes, because he wouldn't just play along. And in addition to all of that, Oswald was not half as bad to be around as he would have initially thought. Although he had stolen all his favorite chocolate. »Fuck, Harv … by the time we’re there … He might be dead already.«

»You actually like that lil’ weasel do you?« Harvey huffed but as Jim turned his face that still leaned against the wheel to look at him, there was not even a hint of disgust or judgment in Harvey’s eyes, just honest surprise. Slowly, Jim lifted himself up again and grabbed the wheel a bit harder.

»Maybe. But this isn't about Oswald or whether I like him or not.«

»It isn't?«

»No, Harv.« He snarled as the light finally turned green and he set spurs to his car again. »This is about a man who was the victim of a horrible crime and about the man who committed that heinous act. We have to catch Nygma. He is completely unhinged and a danger for society and Oswald, for once, deserves to get justice for what was done to him.«

»Oswald killed this woman, though.«

»Yes and Nygma could have called it in and have us, the law, deal with Oswald. Instead, he decided to set a trap for him and have him tortured. Harv, ever since I came to Gotham, I tried to stand for something in this city - for law and order, for doing things the right way. So, we will get Ed behind bars and we will get justice for Oswald, whether he truly deserves it or not, whether he is a criminal and murderer or not, he is still a human being. And we lost so much this year already. Just once this year I want to do something right.«

As they reached the harbor finally, the sky was of a heavy steel grey and a slight drizzle forced Jim to use the windshield wipers before the drizzle would become a full-blown rainstorm. There was never nice weather in Gotham and the freezing cold that was lingering over the deep waters of the harbor promised of snowfall. By Christmas, this city would sleep under a blanket of snow. As Jim drove into the harbor, he spotted the car they had been following close to the pier and stopped a little farther away. If it would come to this, they needed the moment of surprise on their side so Nygma could not hear them coming under any circumstances. The trunk of the car was wide open which led Jim to two possible conclusions. The first one was that Edward had killed Oswald at the mansion and put his body in the trunk to dispose of him here. Since he couldn't see any blood on first glance on the inside of the trunk, he would have needed to roll Oswald in a sack or plastic or anything that would keep the inside of his car clean. Version two was that Oswald had been still alive during the drive, but possibly unconscious in the trunk. He really hoped version two was what had transpired because then they would have the chance of saving their mayor.

They pulled out their guns and with one glance at each other, they slowly made their way towards the pier. It was then, as they rounded the corner of a shipping container, that they saw them. Even from a distance, it was clearly them. Oswald stood with his back to the water, Nygma had his gun pointed at him. While they were carefully inching closer, Jim could see how Oswald reached out to Ed, one last sorry attempt of reminding Ed of their initial affection for each other, to no avail as it
turned out. Jim could feel that knot in the pit of his stomach again as he had to witness the desperation of the king of Gotham. True, he had done heinous things himself, yet, Jim could find nothing but sympathy in his heart for Oswald at this point. This city was rubbing off on him.

As the shot rang through the harbor and Oswald fell, a shout left Jim’s mouth but he couldn’t recognize his own voice. »No!« He thundered and stormed off without any care for the possible danger that Ed might pose to him. Edward, startled by the sudden appearance of the two detectives, whirled around on his feet, fired two, then three shots in their general direction with the surprise and fear of being caught disabling his otherwise perfect aim before he started running.

»I’ll get him, Jim!« Harvey thundered as he took off after Edward, meanwhile Jim didn’t even waste a second thought as he ran down the pier and jumped into the icy cold waters of the harbor. He knew that it would be futile to search for Oswald in the murky waters of the harbor, but he still had to try it and as he dove into the river and swam downwards to the bottom, he searched blindly for the man, not wanting to think about how many bodies were lying on the ground of this basin. As his air was beginning to run short and he knew that he needed to get back to the surface, he instead did one last stroke downwards, his left hand searching frantically for anything in the darkness as it finally found a bit of fabric. He clawed at whatever it was and yanked it up with him, desperately hoping that it was not just some random body or piece of fabric.

Just as he breached the surface with a loud gasp, there was a shot ringing through the docks and a scream that was undoubtedly not Harvey. Harvey would have cursed a storm would he have been injured by Ed Nygma of all people, but no matter what happened, it was of little importance now as he dragged his findings to the surface. He had never been gladder to see Oswald’s pale face as he dragged the man back to the surface. Blood was clouding the water from the wound in his abdomen and Jim found himself calling out for help before he could even check his pulse.

Everything that happened after that was only a whirlwind of colors and emotions. Harvey had been entirely too pleased with himself as he returned to the pier, dragging an unconscious Ed after him. He had shot him in the leg and knocked him out cold afterward before he helped Jim to get Oswald out of the water with Jim climbing out himself shortly after Harvey had pulled Oswald into safety. Waiting for the ambulance had been a nightmare and despite how much he had been freezing himself out there in the open, his only worries had been to keep Oswald alive. He had found his pulse beating faintly under his fingertips as he had applied pressure to his wound. Never had a person been closer to death than Oswald in the moments that they had anxiously awaited the arrival of the ambulance.

Maybe he was a little too invested, maybe he was a little too panicked for Oswald’s life at this point and he couldn't fully drown out the way Harvey looked at him as he put Nygma into handcuffs, but just as the ambulance arrived with sirens blaring in the distance, Oswald opened his icy blue eyes again for just a second. There was not much that happened, only a second in which they locked eyes and he wasn't even sure if Oswald realized that it was Jim looking back down on him before his eyes fell shut again, but to Jim, this was enough, at least for the moment.

-End of Chapter 5-
Chapter 6

Gotham City - Gotham General Hospital

»I would not have expected that I would ever see the day when Detective James Gordon would come to my bedside with a box of … Are those my favorite chocolates?« He hated how frail his own voice sounded, but, he assumed a gunshot to the stomach would do this to a person and maybe the fact that he was no longer the mayor of Gotham had added a bit to his general discomfort. He blamed seeing Aubrey James’ stupid face on the morning news after which he had decided to never switch on the TV in his room ever again. Not to mention the awful hospital food and the fear that came with the fact that he was probably the most hated man in this town who was lying in a hospital bed, hooked up to an IV and unable to defend himself should someone feel the desire to kill him. Outside of his room, the GCPD had stationed officers that would be there 24/7 for his protection although Oswald would prefer Victor Zsasz at his side for the job instead. »I feel honored that you know what kind of chocolates I like.« He hummed quietly as Gordon closed the door behind him. »I wasn’t aware that we were this close.«

Jim shot him his trademark full-teeth annoyed smile that highlighted his crow-feet and made him wrinkle his nose as he stepped closer with the box of chocolates in his left hand that he finally leisurely dropped on Oswald’s bedside table. »Don’t flatter yourself too much, Oz. They are my favorites too and I happened to notice that you gobbled all of them down during your stay at my place. I doubt that you ever intended on replacing them.«

»What can I say? I’m a criminal, Jim.« He smirked and immediately let his slender fingers travel from his blanket to the box of chocolates on his nightstand. »I don’t have a conscious.« But before his fingers could reach the box, Jim slapped them away with a smirk. He was probably enjoying it to see him weakened like this, unable to do much. Days, almost two weeks had passed since the incident at the pier judging by the date on the newspaper that one of his remaining lackeys had brought him earlier this day, and most of that time he had spent asleep.

»True.« Jim sighed as he finally pulled over a chair to sit by his side, grabbed the box of chocolates and opened it gingerly. Expecting to be fed one of the sweet surprises, Oswald tried to sit up a bit more, but the chocolate Jim pulled out of the box never made it into Oswald’s mouth. Instead, he had to witness in horror how the detective ate it himself. »That’s why I’m here to retaliate.«

»It’s not nice to torture a dying man, you know?« He frowned. »I am pretty sure that there is a law against that.«

»Oh, come on, you are not dying.«

»Anymore.«

»Anymore, good okay, true.« Jim huffed a laugh. »So a little torture can’t hurt that much, I believe.«

»Except it might worsen my condition and then you are going to be sent to Blackgate for the murder of the former mayor of Gotham. you wouldn’t want that, James. I have my eyes and ears everywhere in this city.« Despite the fact that his empire was in shambles and Barbara Kean, that bitch, ruining what he had built up because she didn’t understand how this town really worked, with her girl-power bullshit. She was very much like the Queen of Hearts from Alice in Wonderland. She would decapitate anyone who dared to look at her the wrong way, unable to realize how important diplomacy was in this field sometimes, not understanding that threats and violence were not always the right way forward. He had spent years and years and years to learn how all of this worked under
Fish and Falcone, and Barbara Kean could never even hope to match his intellect. Even Tabitha Galavan was smarter than her and knew exactly when to act and when to stay put. Barbara would ruin everything in no time - but then his time would approach when he would be there to rebuild it all anew.

»Mhm…« Jim hummed before stealing another piece of chocolate from the box much to Oswald’s annoyance. »Oh, they’re good.« He added between bites as Oswald just rolled his eyes. »But since you still have your eyes and ears everywhere, I think I don't have to tell you about Ed.« His voice finally got more serious again as he became the James Gordon he knew and … tolerated. Still, he couldn't deny that he was tensing up all too visibly as Jim dropped Ed’s name. The wound in his stomach was healing slowly and itched and stung by the mention of Edward Nygma.

»I have.« He replied.

»I wanted to come here and tell you myself.« Jim sighed. »You know, after everything that happened.«

»I feel flattered, Jim. But I can assure you that … where I once felt a deep love and warmth for Edward Nygma, now is only indifference and the wish for revenge left.« This wasn't true and Jim was not stupid enough to believe it. Love was not so easily to be switched off, not even after being shot by the person one loved, not even after what this person had done. And Oswald was smart enough to know that this love would remain in his heart, possibly forever, but safely stored away in a corner of it, sectioned off with yellow crime scene tape, reminding him on that grave mistake he had made.

»Oswald…«

»Jim, I am honored that you care so deeply for my … emotional well-being, but I can assure you that I have learned from this situation.« He cut him off quickly but shied away from meeting Jim's eyes as he instead looked towards the door. He could see the back of the head of one of the officers through the window in the door. It was the one who always sweated so much. Sometimes, Oswald caught himself counting the drops of sweat running down his bald head and collecting in the fold of his neck. »Edward Nygma taught me my greatest weakness and I will be cautious from now on, never again to fall into this trap.« Only then his eyes met Jim’s again and he found Jim’s rich blue eyes, that were so very far removed from his own ice-blue ones, a little too full with sympathy. »And now I really would like a chocolate … The food in this place is a crime against humanity.«

Knowing that Ed had been sent to Arkham Asylum for an indefinite amount of time meant little to no comfort. He knew that Ed wouldn't be able to easily escape this place, not from where he was stored inside the fortress-like building. Even if the unlikely event would take place in which Edward would be declared sane again - and this time not because Oswald had pulled some strings - he would not be let go but send to Blackgate Penitentiary instead for his crimes. It was only thanks to Jim that the more disgusting details of Ed’s crimes against the former mayor of Gotham had been withheld from the public, but as it always was the case in a city like Gotham, people talked and Oswald was not nearly naive enough to believe that the amount and nature of his torture and injuries would not be public knowledge at this point.

Knowing that the people of Gotham and those who had cowered in fear of the Penguin before would now look at him and know what had been done to him, was almost more crushing than Ed’s betrayal. He was back at the end of the food chain again would he leave this hospital. He had been crushed and humiliated and everyone knew this. How could he even think about staying in Gotham with this in mind? How could he expect to garner respect or at least fear from his former supporters and underlings after that? And to whom could he talk about these things? He was all alone now, but
he still had himself, he thought and up until this point, that had always been enough. He had never needed friends to climb the ladder of the organized crime in Gotham, not really, anyway. All he had achieved, he had achieved out of his own strength and intelligence and still, he had never felt more lost than he did these days.

While all he really wanted to do was to hole up in his mansion and cry about his destroyed empire, he was bothered by doctors and the few lackeys and petitioners he still had on a daily basis. Apparently, a gunshot to the abdomen was quite bad (Who would've thought?) and his recovery process slow - much too slow for his liking, thanks to the infection he had caught from the dirty harbor water, not too mention the hypothermia caused by being thrown into the icy Gotham river and nearly freezing to death while waiting for the ambulance in his already weakened state. He wouldn't expect to make this hospital room his base of operation and for that, he would have needed a plan of how to operate to begin with.

One thing was true, though, a person only ever realized how alone they truly were when in hospital. He hadn't expected flowers or get-well cards or daily visits from anyone in particular, especially not from Jim Gordon, but after Jim’s visit, there had been no one who cared about seeing him without wanting something in return. Every day, he was visited by Gabe who would bring him the newspaper and brief him about the latest of the underworld and how Barbara was terrorizing the crime world with her lack of understanding it, dishonoring contracts that Penguin had made with certain people left and right, dishonoring the very figment of his kingdom. With every day that passed, he only grew more and more restless and angry.

So, as he was greeted with the face of Jim Gordon once more, over a week after his first and last visit to Oswald’s room, he was, in fact, surprised to see the man. Jim, even before saying anything, wrinkled his forehead and knotted his brows when his eyes fell upon the portable desk on Oswald’s lap, that Gabe had brought him a few days ago, on which Oswald was eagerly scribbling away with his most trusted fountain pen. Almost, he had not even noticed the arrival of a visitor but after Jim had entered the room he had cleared his throat in the same fashion a disgruntled and disapproving father would while catching his son watching porn or doing drugs.

»Jim!« Oswald chirped and did his best to give Jim his most winning smile. Of course, Jim didn't believe the toothy grin. He knew Oswald too well by this point to fall for his acting skills. »What gives me the pleasure of your visit? If that's about the murder of Tommy the hammer, I can assure you that I had nothing to do with that.«

Was this a smirk on Jim’s face? »No, Tommy just accidentally fell out of the window on the seventh floor of a building after talking shit about you.«

»Accidents happen.«

»And around you, they happen a lot more often than not.«

»Well, what can I say? It's not my fault that I attract clumsy people.« He winked but it was missing its usual mirth, as he assumed without being able to look in a mirror. »Anyway, I didn't do it, I was here, after all.«

»Witnesses?« Now he was just teasing him and wouldn't he know it any better, he would almost claim that Jim Gordon was flirting with him.

»Except for the guards in front of my door?« He smirked. »No, I was all alone, I'm afraid. These days no one cares for the Penguin anymore.«

»Oh, boohoo, I think I'm going to cry.« Jim huffed stepping closer before he pulled something out of
the pocket of his seemingly new beige trenchcoat and waved it in the air. He looked good in his suit and this new addition to his wardrobe, almost as if he had taken extra care of himself today. He was probably out to woo another poor woman later this evening and then it would be only a matter of time until that poor girl would wind up just as crazy as the last two.

»Chocolate again? You are spoiling me.« He smirked with yet another wink.

»I'm afraid I am.« Jim sighed. »Look at it as a peace offering.«

»I swear I didn't do anything.« Oswald huffed and raised his hands in surrender.

»I heard you are terrorizing the nurses.«

»I did not do such a thing.«

»Apparently, you threw a bottle at one of them because she wanted to draw blood.« Despite his critique, there was still amusement all too visible on Jim’s face as he was scolding Oswald.

»I don't much like needles.«

»And you threatened to smother another one with your pillow if she would, and I quote “dare to wear that cheap whore-smelling perfume again when coming into your room”.«

»I don’t much like the smell of cheap perfume either.«

»Oswald.«

»James.«

»Your doctors say you are getting restless.« Jim sighed sitting down again on that same chair he had sat on last time and put the box of chocolate on his portable desk, forcing Oswald to take his hand and his pen away and sighed deeply. »And now I’m coming here and see you working on … Oh, you know what, nevermind, I don't want to know what you're working on or otherwise I’m pretty sure I would have to arrest you on the spot.« He ended with a snort as he was waving at the documents in front of Oswald. Well, he would most certainly not even try to argue with him on that point. Jim was not stupid, after all.

»Well, you know, Jim, rebuilding my criminal empire does not come without a lot of work.« Oswald rolled his eyes. »I know, you policemen sit in your comfortable chairs all day and think that being a criminal is oh so easy, huh? Robbing a bank, killing one or two people. But let me tell you, Jim, being a criminal mastermind and building an empire out of it, is a lot more hard work than it looks like - and it demands a lot more organizational skills than leading the police force of Gotham Central.« Jim actually chuckled at that.

»Do tell that to Harvey, he’s getting grey ever since he had to take over from Barnes.« He shook his head a little. »You know what? At this rate, I would actually consider that you might be a much better police captain than anyone else.«

»I would bring order and discipline to that precinct.« Oswald smirked and opened the box of chocolate eagerly.

»Yeah, I bet you would.« Jim smirked and extended his fingers to the open box, but this time it was Oswald's turn to slap his fingers away, before he grabbed his fountain pen like a dagger threateningly.
I will not hesitate to stab you with this, Jim.« He threatened and Jim raised his hands in surrender. «I am surrounded by idiots on a daily basis, after all. I need my strengths and I need sugar. Anyway I don't believe that the reason why you are here is because some nurse would have complained to you about your misbehaving friendly neighborhood Penguin.«

Jim sighed deeply and sank back in his chair as Oswald quickly shoved the first chocolate in his mouth. How could he have ever survived so long without that? »Okay, you want the truth? I wanted to see you, see if everything is alright.« Though those words actually took him by surprise, Oswald was all too eager to brush them off again. Of course, Jim did not really care about him. He just cared to see if Oswald would soon mean a threat or not. He had enjoyed his time with Jim during the few days he had been living with him and Jim had actually done a fine job of getting him back on his feet, but he doubted that Jim felt anything but disdain for him at this point. And why would he? Despite what Oswald liked to say, he knew that they were not really friends, at least not as long as one didn't have anything the other would want.

»Nothing is alright, Jim, I have lost my empire, I am no longer the mayor of Gotham - even though I clearly did an awesome job in this position, thank you very much - and I am the butt of the underworld’s jokes because someone who was involved in Edward’s trial or in treating me at this hospital could not keep their mouth shut.« Oswald sneered. The chocolate in his mouth suddenly tasted a little sour, but who was he to complain? »And instead of being out there and rebuilding what I’ve lost and prying my empire from Barbara Kean’s greedy and tasteless manicured fingers, I have to lie in this bed, stare at this ceiling and listen to stupid nurses and even stupider doctors when they are trying to tell me how I am feeling. So no, Jim, nothing is alright.«

»Oz…«

»And besides all of that-« He clenched his mouth shut quickly and only grabbed the pen harder. Oh, how much would he give for one of those stupid nurses to come inside so that he could stab his pen straight into her eye right now! Instead, he took a deep breath. »Besides all of that … I have no clue how to face this city when I am getting out again.« It wasn't what he had originally wanted to say and yet it was still a very silent admission of his defeat. No matter how weak he had been or how low, he had always face this city with his head held high and not a single inch of fear.

Jim, who had listened to hear him rant was still staring at him with this look in his eyes that reminded Oswald a little too much of a beaten puppy at times, his forehead in wrinkles, his eyes lightly hooded, his chin tilted downwards, his eyes looking up at him, his back slightly hunched. A look of sympathy and understanding. Sympathy for the devil - or what was left of that persona anyway. There was a moment of silence spreading out between them as Oswald dropped his eyes from Jim back to the box of sweets in front of him. Only looking at the chocolate made his stomach turn over. »Oswald.« His voice was too soft. They should be mortal enemies and yet here he was, Detective Gordon who had promised to bring law and order to this city when he arrived in Gotham, trying to comfort a mobster. »You will face this city as you always did, with your head held high, an umbrella in your hand, two of your goons behind you and your wits intact. Barbara might have taken over for now, but she will not be in charge for long and you know that. The underworld is in unrest ever since she took over. There is no method to her chaos and we all know that the underworld only works if there is method, if there are rules, if there are contracts to uphold. Barbara’s reign is anarchy and that will cost her her head in no time. Not to mention that your good old friend Butch would gladly stab her in the back.« As Oswald’s look of surprise hit him, Jim smiled. »I did my homework, Oz. He wants Tabitha Galavan back at his side and Barbara is treating them both like … Well, like Barbara treats other people. You would only need to swoop right back in and give Butch what he wants.«

»Which is Tabitha.« Oswald sighed. »And I might be persuasive, Jim, but in no way would I be able
to deliver on that promise if Tabitha doesn’t want to leave Barbara."

»Power, Oswald. He wants power. Give him back a little bit of it, just enough to lure him back in. He wanted to be your chief of staff and he is still cranky that you chose Ed instead. Make him your right-hand man and show him that it's a union of trust.« Trust. How would he be able to trust Butch? Then again, he had not been the one betraying him, that had been Ed. Butch had wanted to help him during his campaign and maybe his motives had not been quite as pure during that time, but Oswald could respect that.

»You know what, Detective Gordon?« Oswald sighed as he picked up another chocolate and finally extended it to Jim who gingerly took it with his teeth right from the tips of Oswald’s fingers.

»Sometimes you are far less of an idiot as I mistook you for when I first met you.«

Gotham City - Jim’s Apartment

The air inside the room was a lot more stuffy and hot as he would have expected. For some reason, he had always associated Oswald with coldness. Maybe it was the name. The Penguin. Whatever it was, he had always been certain touching Oswald Cobblepot would be like touching an ice figure, instead, his skin was hot under his tongue as he dragged his mouth down the delicate curve of his long neck. Needless to say, that Jim had never thought about ending up in a situation as this, with Oswald Cobblepot of all people on his lap as he was dragging his calloused hands down the naked sides of his slender body. Oswald was by no means ugly, but he was not his usual prey for certain and yet nothing about this felt wrong, especially not Oswald’s long thin fingers in his hair or his hot breath against Jim’s throat as he tried to regain a bit of control over his trembling body.

Had someone ever told him he and Oswald would end up like this one day in his crappy little apartment in downtown Gotham, he would have laughed. He had never believed that Oswald would be a sexual being in the first place, and yet here they were and not for the first time either. Looking back on everything, Jim had no idea how their relationship had developed into this weird thing they had going on right now where either one would arrive unannounced at the other’s doorstep and pull the other into their respective bedroom. But also he couldn’t claim he wouldn't like that with a clear conscience.

As Jim sat with his legs crossed on his already messed up bed and Oswald in his lap like this, he felt actually at ease. »You look relaxed, Detective.« Oswald teased as his teeth scraped over Jim’s jaw.

»Knowing my favorite criminal’s whereabouts and what you’re up to always relaxes me.« Jim replied with a smirk before his fingers slowly trailed down over Oswald’s thighs. He was not cold at all. »It allows me to focus on more pressing matters and I don't have to worry about whether I have to put you behind bars again or not.«

»You flatter me too much. I’m going to start thinking you would like me.«

»Don’t worry, I only like to know that my favorite criminal is in safe custody.«

»So this is custody?«

»If you want to see it like this.«

Most of their trysts were rushed and hard and quick because of the risk they were taking in being together like this and the fear of someone bursting in on them, be it Harvey or some random criminal or any of Oswald’s men, but now, in this instant, Jim meant to take his time. He was not naive
enough to believe that the people who shouldn't know about them did know about them anyway. Zsasz always knew what his boss was doing, for a start and there was no law they were breaking in fucking either - at least as long as Oswald would not give him a reason to investigate against him, again. However, not only Jim risked something in sleeping with his enemy, Oswald too had much to lose when word would get out that he was fucking a policeman - or rather getting fucked by him, for the most part.

»I could get used to being in custody if that's what it would be like. I always like myself a bit of roleplay, Detective.« Oswald hummed before he lifted his chin a little, giving Jim more room to explore. His skin was soft and tender, even his hands were and Jim was even surprised that it surprised him. They were like the sun and the moon, complete opposites of each other.

Leaning down he kissed his way down the path of sensitive skin of Oswald's throat, grazing the perfect curve of his collarbone with his teeth. »You are awful.« Jim hummed. He loved the low growl Oswald produced and how his back was arching ever so slightly as Jim's mouth continued down-down-down his body, his tongue, and lips, and teeth devouring every bit of skin they found as he gently pushed Oswald backward a little. Not enough to send him onto the mattress, only enough to be able to explore every valley and every rising of the muscles of his chest. His lips grazed over scars, some fresher, some older but he tended to every little one of them, searching for new bruises on Oswald's lanky body and found none, only shadows of the past nightmares he had gone through. Oswald was much thinner underneath his layered clothes than he would have expected, even now, after he was fully healed and up to no good again.

As his mouth went lower, he enjoyed hearing how Oswald held his breath in anticipation and how it was him, Jim Gordon, who was sending shivers running down his body just by kissing his skin, just by dragging his tongue down his chest until he couldn't go deeper without having to push him off his lap. He enjoyed the feeling of being buried deep inside Oswald far too much to do that, though. He enjoyed feeling how his cock was twitching back to life at the soft moan that escaped the mobster when he bit down gently on his left nipple. And he enjoyed the feeling as Oswald impatiently bucked against him, drawing a moan from Jim in return before he tightened the embrace of his slender legs around Jim's waist. For some reason, Oswald seemed to fit perfectly into his arms and into his lap, almost like puzzle pieces clicking together.

»Jim…« Oswald tried to protest as Jim continued to lazily drag his fingertips over the silken flesh of Oswald’s thighs, bringing them close to his groin and retreating every time he was almost there. He could feel how Oswald’s cock was already digging into his stomach again, just as desperate as Jim himself for round two. They never knew when one of them would be called into duty again and so they tried to make the best of what they had, that much was certain. Not that they wouldn't have been caught already by Zsasz once. Jim had never seen Victor Zsasz portraying any kind of normal emotion but as he had walked in on Jim bending his boss over his desk one time, even the seasoned hitman had changed color for the fraction of a second. At least Zsasz could be trusted with keeping his mouth shut because he just didn't care for the politics of Gotham.

»Jim what?« Jim grinned as his lips had returned to Oswald’s left shoulder. He remembered the shoulder being badly bruised because of the fractured bones beneath the paper thin skin but now there was no evidence left that there had ever been something wrong with this shoulder, only a few freckles that were lazily splashed all over them, as if some artist had used their fingernail to splatter the excess paint on his almost dried paintbrush to spray it on a painting.

»Jim please…« Oswald moaned too close to his ear for Jim not to shudder and feel his cock fill with blood rapidly.

»Jim please what?«
»Jim please move…« At least he was polite enough not to cuss at him, for now.

»You’re on top.« He grinned sheepishly. Oswald liked to be on top, but he didn't like to top. It was funny in a way but Jim clearly was none to complain about always doing the hard work, not when it meant he could actually witness the terror of the underworld unravel because of him and becoming nothing more than a shuddering, moaning mess on Jim's bed sheets. He would never say it, because he would never mention the name in Oswald’s presence if it wouldn't come from Oswald first but, he was even thankful for Nygma not seeing what he could have had with Oswald.

Oswald only produced a disgruntled little sound that finally prompted Jim to rock his own hips upwards just slightly to meet him, his hands settling on Oswald's waist to steady him as he took his cock deeper and deeper inside his tightly strung body. It was quite hard not to use too much pressure with his rough and calloused hands, so he wouldn’t bruise Oswald, like he was so prone to doing by now, but it was almost impossible to concentrate on this little detail, especially when Oswald then decided to drop his patience completely and slowly started to move on top of Jim. All of this was entirely too intimate and loving for it to be a tryst between two people who shouldn't be doing this and Jim forced himself not to further think about that. At least not right now, not with Oswald riding him, panting heavily as he enjoyed the sweet pain and the little burn of Jim's thick cock plunging into him, ripping him open and filling him to his desire.

Their hips rolled together, synchronized in mutual pleasure. Oswald's short nails dug into the flesh of Jim's flat stomach, into his muscles while he steadied himself to fasten his pace, moaning as if the last time he had had sex laid back ages. It wasn’t long until Jim couldn’t stand it anymore, the sensation of Oswald's body welcoming his, the sight of Oswald’s naked frame on top of him, his skin glistening with little drops of sweat – close enough that Jim could easily count each and every little one of them – the sound of those deep immoral moans coming from the deep of Oswald's throat that he would have never thought him capable of producing. He scrambled to prompt Oswald into a lazier pace now as the younger man sat comfortable on his lap, his long legs closed around Jim's hips, unbearable close and yet never close enough.

He could feel Oswald's hardened cock pressing into his stomach as he grabbed him tighter, closing his arms around him in a tight embrace. Oswald's hot breath in his ear started to drive him insane before he forcefully grabbed his jaw with one hand to pull his lover into a deep kiss, all tongue, and teeth, sloppy and with no finesse at all. When he finally lost it and came deeply engulfed inside his lover, only for Oswald to follow him suit over the edge of the cliff without even the need of being touched by him at all, Oswald continued to ride him through his orgasm, as he was being filled with Jim's release, some of it lazily dripping down those beautiful thighs.

It was not much later that Jim found himself lying entangled in his bedsheets, gently brushing his fingertips over Oswald’s left side as he rested next to him on his back, seemingly completely exhausted and ready to fall asleep straight away, which was something that he couldn't actually do, of course. The risk was too big and yet, for some reason, Jim would have nothing against having Oswald in his bed when he would wake up tomorrow morning. Oswald’s black hair was a tousled nightmare, more so than usual, as Jim rested his head on his flat stomach and enjoyed the feeling of Oswald’s slender fingers raking through his own dark blonde hair, he even enjoyed the little tune that Oswald was quietly humming as if he wasn't aware that Jim could hear him.

It was hard not to fall asleep when he felt so comfortable and warm right now, but his eyes found the scar slightly to the left side of Oswald’s flat stomach. It was ragged and gruesome to look at and to know where if came from and to know how Oswald was hunching over ever so slightly more ever since he got that scar. He probably didn't even know that he was doing it. He was probably too used to walking slightly hunched over because of his bad leg anyway. Being so close to him now, Jim couldn't help but gently press a tender kiss to that scar that caused Oswald’s breath to hitch in his
throat and stumble over the melody that was leaving his mouth.

»What are you doing?« Oswald quietly muttered and Jim wished he would just continue to hum. Then again … Oswald never stopped talking and everyone knew that. Not that he would mind much now that he knew how to shut him up.

»Reminiscing about the past.« Jim hummed quietly. He didn't wish to elaborate on it and Oswald seemed to understand that without him having to actually spell it out for once because he didn't ask but continued his humming instead. If he would say what he was thinking, it would hurt Oswald, it would make him stumble back into the abyss Jim had had a hard time pulling him out of the first time around. Nevertheless, Jim could not deny that he found his thoughts traveling back to the beginning of this thing they shared again and again.

He had found him at his worst, so he assumed it wasn't too surprising that he remembered it again and again. After Oswald had left the hospital by the beginning of January, he had stayed under the radar for quite a while, using the advice that Jim gave him to rebuild what he had lost. He hadn't seen him for weeks and hadn't even realized how much he would miss talking to him until Oswald had one night reappeared on his doorstep, dressed his best as usual. If someone would ask him, Jim had truly no idea how they became lovers in the first place. They had started to talk again, Oswald seemed to have been happy to have found someone to confide in, someone who had been there. They had enjoyed drinks together and sometimes just moments of silence stretching out endlessly between them as they had been lost in their own thoughts, and then in their half-drunken state something had led to a kiss and the kiss had led to more. In the beginning, he had been hesitant and afraid to go too far too soon. Oswald had survived a horrible crime, he had never asked him, but he could only assume that Oswald hadn't had much experience before his kidnapping when it came to sex and so the thought that Oswald only knew violence when it came to intimacy had scared Jim. Still, if there was one thing Oswald Cobblepot was not, it was being a coward. And still, he remembered that Oswald had been afraid of him the first time. He hadn't said it and he had tried not to show it, but Jim had felt it anyway.

Now as they were lying like this in his bed, there was no such thing as fear standing in the way between them any longer as it seemed. Maybe they even shared something akin to trust, maybe even more. Who was he to say what this between them was? And still, he sometimes feared that Oswald was pushing himself too far too soon, but he was wise enough not to educate him on his worries because Oswald would probably threaten him with murder would he do that. Rightfully so, one might add. Oswald was, after all, not a child. He was the most feared criminal Gotham had to offer - he knew what he was doing, most of the times at least.

»I am going to see Ed.« Oswald’s words ripped him from his idle thoughts and finally caused Jim to sit up straight again to look at Oswald. The smaller man didn't even seem surprised about his reaction as he rather used this change in position to sprawl out like a cat and then curl in on himself on his side a little. To Oswald, this was a set deal. He didn't ask Jim for his advice, he didn't ask him for his permission. He told him what he was going to do and Jim knew that there was no way of stopping Oswald.

»Do you think that is a wise decision?« He still found himself asking as he decided to mirror Oswald’s position on his bed. He didn't want him to go to Arkham to visit that psycho. He didn't want Oswald to come within a five-mile radius to Edward Nygma ever again, but what was he supposed to do about that? Instead of saying these things, he brushed one of the messy strands of hair out of Oswald’s face. Up close, he was much prettier than he had thought the first time he had seen him. Back then, Oswald had just been a weird little freak to him with yellowed teeth and dirty fingernails, but these days, ever since he had money and took better care of himself, he really was nice to look at with his delicate features, his sharp cheekbones, and his overall bird-like slender
physique.

»Don't you?« A trap. He was pulling him into a trap.

»No.« He sighed. »No, I don't think it's a wise decision.« He expected wrath but it never came. Instead, Oswald remained calm at his side and looked at the mattress as if lost in deep thought before their eyes met again.

»You are afraid I might fall for him again.«

»Oswald … you never stopped.« Another deep sigh tore from his throat. »You still love this man, I know that. I'm just … I'm afraid that he’ll say or do something that-«

»That makes me trust him again so that I get him out of there again?«

»No, I don't believe you to be stupid, Oswald.« Ed would try, of course, because he had always underestimated Oswald. »But I'm afraid that whatever he says might get to you, hurt you in any way.«

Again, there was a moment of silence between them, but Oswald broke it not too soon after when he gently placed his left hand on Jim’s cheek and drove his thumb over the skin. »You are too good to me, Jim Gordon.« He hummed silently. »But I have to do this. I have to … I have to make a cut, to draw a line. I can't move on otherwise.«

Jim found himself nodding but not saying anything before Oswald surprised him as he not left his bed but turned his back to Jim instead, pulling his blanket up to his shoulders, a silent statement that he would stay, a silent invitation for Jim to stay too. So, Jim did just that as he moved in closer to Oswald to wrap his arms around him from behind. »I would be the last person who wouldn't understand that, Oz.«

-End of Chapter 6-
If there was one sight Oswald Cobblepot surely had not missed to behold and which still was haunting his dreams from time to time, it was the sight of Arkham Asylum towering in the distance behind a tall locked iron gate. He never wanted to see Arkham Asylum ever again, not from the inside and not even from just standing outside of it to admire its complex architectural beauty or it's gothic charm when the moon would stand just right above it to make the dead trees around the premises look all the more intimidating. Really, that place could have been a nice hospital, a place of healing, would those in charge just take a bit of money to make it a little more beautiful - which would never happen. This was an ugly place, a place of depravity, not a place of healing and no one should make the mistake of ever believing this especially now that Hugo Strange was no longer in charge. He almost felt a bit pity for Ed to be locked up in there with the likes of Jerome Valeska. At least when he had been locked up in this place, he had been the most feared of the inmates, at least that was what he had chosen to believe.

Oh, how much would he like to see how Jerome Valeska would mop the floor with Edward’s face. He would even pay good money to see that! Hell, maybe he should. Maybe he should ask Jerome very politely to do that and let him watch.

As he walked through the corridors of Arkham with Zsasz trailing behind him silently, nothing seemed to have changed in this place. The people, the endless maze of hallways, the checkered floors, the paint peeling off the walls, the smells, the sounds, everything was just the same as when he had been locked inside this nightmare of a hospital. Hugo Strange’s therapy would forever be ingrained in him and he couldn't wait for the day he would finally get his hands on this little man to take his revenge. He had made him weak, he had made him abulic, he had taken away his power and his confidence and made him someone who let himself get pushed around and bullied by people below him. Even thinking about retaliating, no matter how faint or subconsciously these thoughts were, had caused him physical pain beyond belief. He was almost a bit sad that Hugo wasn't here any longer because he would have very much liked for Edward to have to go through that same experience. No amount of suffering that his former best friend could experience in this hell hole seemed enough for what he did to him, for how big his betrayal had been.

»Do you want me to come inside, Boss?« Zsasz’s quiet voice ripped him from his thoughts as he finally reached his destination and paused in front of the door behind which his old friend was located and waiting for him.

»No, I’ll be fine.« Oswald replied with one glance over his shoulder at Victor whose eyes never left him and were as intense as always. It was never easy to say what was going on in this bald head of the hitman, but Oswald could only assume that he was worried that Ed would manage to sweet-talk him in any way. Everyone seemed worried about that. Victor, however, would never question his boss and so he just nodded and gracefully slid back into the shadows of the door as it was opened by the guard in front of him.

»No touching, hands were we can see them, no exchange of gifts of any nature.« He knew the drill from his own time in here although his imprisonment had been far less strict than Edward’s was. Then again, he paid good money to have the guards on their toes when it came to Ed, so he was pleased to see that his rules were enforced, even when it came to himself visiting this man. He nodded before entering the small room. There was only a metal table in the middle of it with two chairs on each side, a small barred up window that allowed just enough light from outside to give the
impression of not being in a cell and another barred door on the opposite side of the room. To his glee, Ed was already inside, sitting at the table on the side farthest away from Oswald’s door, his hands chained securely to the table in front of him and his stare over the rim of his glasses murderous.

He had never been more joyous seeing another man as disheveled and messed up as Ed was now. He had a nasty cut running over his nose, another right underneath his left eye and his jaw was bruised all over. It was some sight to behold for certain. Maybe Jerome had already mopped the floor with Ed’s face. He could all too well imagine Ed saying something sarcastic to Jerome only to have that weird ginger kid snap at him.

»Came to gloat?« Ed growled as Oswald took a moment to take it all in before he limped closer to the table and sat down on his side of it.

»Maybe a little.«

»I heard you are back on track? Back at the head of the table. Color me impressed.«

»Back on track and stronger than ever.« Oswald smirked. »Which should have taught you that someone like you will never be able to destroy someone like me.«

»More cockroach than penguin, I see.« Ed sighed as he dropped his gaze on the table between them only to raise his eyes at him again, his look dark and threatening. »Anyway, I will get out of here, Oswald. And then you’ll bleed.«

»I’d like to see you try.« Oswald replied and schooled his face into an honest expression, almost like a parent encouraging his kid to try something new for the first time. As he noticed Edward’s surprise, he chuckled. »Do you really think I wouldn't have taken care of the possibility that you might want to escape? Of course, I pay good money to the guards to keep an extra close eye on you - and of course, I threatened to kill their families and everyone they love and care for in case the money isn't motivation enough. You are not going to get out, Edward, not as long as I do not wish you to get out. And I take it that you already met Jerome Valeska, judging by the state of your face.«

He could watch how Ed’s face turned into a grimace of pure hatred and disgust as Oswald leaned back relaxed in his own chair and crossed his legs leisurely as he watched his old friend in amusement. He thought he would experience a little more glee would he finally be here and see Ed like this, but he truly didn’t enjoy it as much as he thought he would. Too heavy weighed the memories of the past betrayal on Oswald’s mind.

»You know what, Oswald?« Ed finally spat. »Sure, I’m in here, together with a bunch of lunatics, but you are no less trapped than I am.«

»What's that supposed to mean?«

»I can see it in your eyes, Oswald. You are still in this cellar I put you in. You are still where I found you, naked, alone, weak and humiliated. You will never leave that place - not even with the help of your precious detective. As long as I live, you are mine. And you know that. As long as I live, Oswald, you will have to deal with the fact that I am a part of you, that you are mine and that I will never love you back, no matter what you try or what you do. I will always look down on you in disgust. Looking back at it, this might be the far better revenge than killing you. You don't deserve a quick death for what you did to Isabella. You deserve to suffer as I did for the rest of your life, you deserve to live with the shame of what I did to you and of everyone in this city knowing the truth about you. You deserve to be miserable for the rest of your pathetic existence - and you will never be free of me.« His voice was laced with poison and almost Oswald could see the acid he was spitting
He tried his best to keep his face calm, to stay grounded in the face of these taunts and threats, to keep a level head, but it wasn't easy and Ed had always been able to look straight through his poker face when he tried to act like his words wouldn't affect him. »I can live with that.« He replied finally as he rose his chin and looked at Edward down his nose. »I have survived much worse than you, Edward Nygma, and as you can see, your pathetic revenge only made me stronger in the end because I am here, free to go wherever I want, with the support of every crime family behind me. Because, tell you what, Edward, yes they know what happened to me, they know what you did to me, but those men and women do have a kind of moral compass that you will never possess. If you would ever make the grave mistake of escaping and remaining in Gotham, they would all gladly deliver your head at my doorstep to rise in my favor. What you did to me turned you into the most despicable piece of shit any one of these people ever saw and they do not take too kindly to people like you.«

He got up from his chair in one swift motion even though his bad leg screamed in agony as he did, he didn't show it. He had learned not to show in what amount of pain he truly was throughout the years of dealing with this injury. »And now, I have nothing left to say to you. I would wish you a prosper and long life, but we both know that it's only a matter of time now until you are being thrown in a shallow grave in the backyard now. Farewell, Edward.«

He turned around sharply, grabbing his cane harder as he made his way back to the door. A small knock with his cane alerted the guard on the other side of his wish to be let go again but Edward had waited for this exact moment, as the door was opened again, to speak up once more.

»It's only a matter of time now, Oswald, until your detective will see you for what you are and then he'll be disgusted for ever laying a hand on you. You will never be happy, you will never find love. You will die alone and people will spit on your grave. Everything you build up will fall apart and you will remain a sad little footnote in the history of this town.« He didn't turn around to respond to these words because that was what Edward wanted. Before him in the hallway, he could see Victor waiting, two fingers on one of his two guns. He had heard Ed’s words, undoubtedly but he didn't change expression in any which way and Oswald was thankful that he didn't. Right now, he didn't wish for comfort or words or anything except silence as he left the room, prompting Edward to jump from his chair in anger. »OSWALD! Did you hear me?« He shouted. »You will never get what you want! You’ll always be mine!«

For someone who claimed not to be in love with Oswald, he was quite obsessed with claiming him. But the door slammed shut behind Oswald and he made his way down the hall slowly with Ed’s shouts ringing after him and echoing from the naked walls of the hospital. He had thought that he would feel better after having seen Ed one last time and setting straight what happened. Maybe he had even hoped that he would feel more whole again, but as he left Arkham, all he felt was a chill running down his spine.

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Gotham City - Jim’s Apartment

It was late when Jim finally got to throw his aching body on his comfortable sofa and close his eyes for a moment to just relax and let the events of the day slip from his mind. This city … he doubted that it would ever change, but at least they had finally managed to distribute all the antidotes to the Tetch virus and gotten rid of the last remaining infected people that had still reigned havoc over the streets. Finally, things started to become a bit more calm now. The threat of Fish Mooney no longer loomed over Gotham as she had succumbed to the effect of Strange’s serums that made her into the
creature she became in the first place and the heavy rain that was now hitting the city seemed more like a cleansing storm than anything else. Tomorrow would be a new day, with new threats. This was Gotham, after all, but for now, the city could breathe again. He would deal with everything this city and its criminals had to throw at him when the sun would rise tomorrow again. His aching back would thank him for that.

It was far past midnight at this point and Jim already aware that he would not get much sleep until Harvey would call him and make him leave the safety of his own bed, still, he could enjoy this moment of relaxation while it lasted, he assumed. And yet it seemed that he couldn't even get this as there was a knock on his door that was almost swallowed whole by another loud roar of thunder rolling through the sky. With a moan, Jim got up from his position on the sofa and slowly dragged his tired feet through the room towards the door. Whoever it was, Jim felt tempted to kill that person and yet, as he ripped open the door with an annoyed »What« leaving his mouth already, he found his anger dropping at the sight in front of him.

Oswald had probably never looked more like a ruffled bird than he did at this moment as he stood in front of Jim’s door, completely soaked from the rain outside, even his most favorite fluffy coat a tragic mess hanging from his shoulders.

»And what happened to you now?« He found himself smirking at the sight of the disheveled crime boss but Oswald rolled his eyes and demanded entry into Jim’s flat as he squeezed past him.

»The storm ruined my umbrella, I had to discard of it.«

»Yeah … but you didn't come all the way on foot, right?« The way he clenched his mouth into a thin line told Jim that this was exactly what the bird did and he could only huff a small laugh at that. »I feel flattered.« He grinned as he closed the door and looked after Oswald who dripped so badly that he was actually leaving puddles behind with every step. »And you really should get out of these clothes right now.«

»Now I am the one who feels flattered, James, but I’m afraid I’m not in the mood for anything of the sexual nature tonight.« This little weirdo and his way of talking would be the end of Jim one day, yet he chuckled. A few moments ago, he had wanted nothing but sleep and act as if this day had never happened and now he was here, amused by Oswald’s general weirdness. Well, who could blame him?

»No, silly Bird, not for sex. You’re dripping all over my floor. Come on, strip and get in the shower, we can’t risk the terror of Gotham to catch a cold. I mean what would that look like!« This even pried a smirk from Oswald’s face, although the smile didn’t quite reach his eyes. Something was clearly troubling the young man, otherwise, he would have never walked all the way from his club to Jim’s apartment in downtown Gotham, not with a leg as bad as his. His limp seemed even worse than usual as he walked towards the bathroom now, disposing of his coat, suit jacket, and vest on the way so that Jim would need to pick the clothing items up. Teasing little bastard.

When Jim reached the bathroom, Oswald was already climbing over the rim of the bathtub and had evidently a hard time pulling his right leg up while he did so before he drew the shower curtain shut. Jim really wouldn't mind a hot shower himself right now, but then he decided to leave Oswald alone for the moment. He just picked up the rest of his clothes and placed them on the heater inside the old-fashioned bathroom before he set it on full blast. »You care for a drink after?« Jim called over the sound of the loudly running water. Soon enough the steam of the hot water would fog the mirror. He only got a hum in return before he left, noticing how oddly normal all of this felt. Having Oswald Cobblepot, a man he should want to arrest, and had arrested on other occasions in the past, showering in his apartment, having him come over when he seemed tormented by his demons. All of
this almost felt like they would be a real couple while they both knew that this could never happen. Anyway, that too was a thought for another day because tonight Jim only wanted to relax and turn a blind eye to all the problems he might be facing tomorrow.

With the sound of the running shower and the little humming that came from Oswald in his ears, he walked back into the living room and prepared two glasses of the best whiskey he owned before he let himself slump back on the sofa and turned on the TV for a little bit of background noise. It wasn't the first time that Oswald would be here and so, Jim decided, he could take care of himself if he wanted something to slip into while waiting for his stuff to dry. Unlike Oswald, Jim had never acted as if he would be a good host anyway and usually, Oswald didn't even seem to mind his lack of politeness.

It only took a few minutes before the shower was switched off and Jim, who had by now changed channels on his old rabbit-ear TV to mindlessly watch the late news, had his ears pick up on the sound of naked feet pitter-pattering out of the bathroom and further down the hall towards his bedroom. He smiled to himself as he listened to Oswald rummaging through his dressers and took a sip of his drink. It took Oswald only a few more moments before he came back to Jim and Jim did his best to not even acknowledge him before Oswald slumped down on the couch, grabbed his glass from the coffee table and downed the whiskey in one swift sip. He had put on one of Jim’s old black shirts and boxer shorts, his hair was still wet and sticking out in all directions and at his eyes, he could see that the little bird was a little too far away in some corner of his mind for his taste. With a sigh, Oswald put the glass back and lowered himself on his back, spreading out on the sofa like a cat and gently placed his legs on Jim’s lap.

All of this was beyond weird. He had a seasoned criminal, the king of Gotham’s underworld, lying on his sofa with his legs on his lap watching TV and wearing Jim’s clothes. How did it come to this? And despite the weirdness of this whole situation that Oswald seemed so easily to embrace, it felt right and easy to be with Oswald. He enjoyed a moment of silence as they were watching the news, with Oswald just snorting at one or two of the statements made during the broadcast, before Jim began absentmindedly rubbing Oswald’s right foot. The injury that Fish had once caused her umbrella boy had never properly healed, his ankle and foot broken in more than one place with the bones never growing back together as they should have. He had paid for being a snitch back then and his foot would forever remind him of that, as it would forever be turned outward. He knew that Oswald was always in pain thanks to this injury, but he did a damn good job in masking his pain. Jim couldn’t do much about it either, but he could at least try to massage his ankle a little, feeling the strained muscles relax under his fingers while Oswald hummed in appreciation.

»I will never understand why you are not looking for a surgeon who can repair your foot.« Jim sighed quietly and the answer came swiftly.

»There’s nothing to repair, Jim. The damage is done and now it’s a part of me. I can live with that, as I can live with every scar I collected over the years. It made me who I am today.« He wasn’t even lying, yet Jim knew how much Oswald hated hospitals, not to mention that he didn't trust his lackeys to not stab him in the back while he was vulnerable.

»Like Ed too?« Jim carefully probed. He had not forgotten that Oswald had met his former best friend only two days ago, and he was all too aware that he had not heard of Oswald ever since his visit to Arkham.

»Maybe.« Oswald replied quietly and slightly turned on his side, but left his legs were they were so that Jim could continue the massage, as he was clearly enjoying it.

»How was your visit at Arkham? I started to get worried after you didn't call since then.« Oswald
rolled his eyes at his words, clearly annoyed by Jim worrying about him, while he secretly enjoyed even that much more than he would ever be willing to admit. »I take it, Edward was a bitch as usual.« At least that managed to pry a snort from Oswald.

»Pretty much.« There was more but he wouldn't pry it from Oswald as it was clear to Jim that the Penguin didn't wish to talk about it. He could imagine it anyway. Edward had tried to poison Oswald with whatever he had to say to the young man and Oswald, though trying to push these things away and out of his mind, was fighting that poison still. He could see it in the way he seemed so lost in his thoughts even now.

»You know, there are people who can't understand why you didn't kill him already.« Jim mumbled.

»Since when do you condone murder?«

»I'm not. I would not condone it.« Although he wouldn't mind Ed having an accident after everything he did to Oswald. »But there are people wondering if you are ever going to do that and maybe even hoping to bust your ass for it.«

»Don't worry, I'm not going to kill him or have him killed inside Arkham. If anything happens to Ed in there, it has nothing to do with me, that I can promise you.« What good was a promise from a man like Oswald? Then again, he couldn't say that Oswald was truly a dishonest man. He said what he meant, usually, as long as he was not doing business and even then he usually wouldn't outright lie without damn good reason.

»Do you still love him?« Where did this question even come from? He couldn't deny that thinking that Oswald possibly still loved this man angered him and made that ugly green-eyed beast rear its head, but Jim did his best to shove these feelings aside.

»He was the one time I let love weaken me. And I want him alive as a constant reminder to never make that mistake again.« Hearing these words from Oswald with so much sincerity wasn't easy to stomach. It sounded so final, so much like Oswald closing a door that Jim hadn't even quite realized had been open in the first place. As if Oswald knew what he was thinking, his eyes met Jim’s but he remained where he was, only clutched one of the pillows on Jim’s couch a bit tighter to his chest now. »You do realize that this between us does not have a future, right? This can never work out, Jim. I am a criminal, the head of the underworld and you are a cop and one day you will be captain, maybe even commissioner, who knows.«

And Oswald Cobblepot was a hopeless romantic, so Jim could not hide the grin creeping on his face at his words. Oswald was good in pushing people he liked away from him to get them out of harm's way and to prevent himself from getting hurt again, this held especially true since Edward. »Did you see my ex-girlfriends, Oz?« He smirked. »No offense, but I seem to have a bit of a habit of sticking my dick in crazy. At least with you I already know what I’m in for.«

Oswald produced a small snort at that and rolled his eyes again, though he couldn't mask how flustered he truly was. It was all too evident by the way he dropped his gaze for just a second, and by the tiniest bit of color creeping into his cheeks and the tips of his ears. »What if I rub off on you? I do not wish to corrupt you like I corrupt everything else.«

»What if I rub off on you? Maybe, when I’m done with you, you are a paradigm of righteousness, my feathery friend.« Jim smirked before he grabbed Oswald’s ankle a bit tighter and lifted it up to place a soft kiss on the paper-thin skin on the back of his foot just between his fingers.

»Jim Gordon, you would be best advised not to waste your heart on someone like me.« Oswald sighed quietly as he stared him directly in the eyes, but Jim only lowered the abused ankle again on
his lap and smirked at him.

»Don't tell me on who to waste my heart.«

-End of Chapter 7-

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