Drunken calls from ghosts

by shauds

Summary

"Dick, are you sure that's Jason?"
"'M not Jas'n, 'm Nosferatuuuu, 'n Bruce is old"

The one where Dick takes Jason up on his offer to get drink with him in New York, then another, and they wind up drunk dialing a very confused Bruce.

Notes

This was supposed to be funny, but an angst monster bit me.

The cave was silent if one ignored the ghosts that lingered on the edges of everything, poking their noses around corners, scuffing their little feet against nothing.

Bruce Wayne was well accustomed to ignoring ghosts, had gotten all practiced one could ask for. A flash of black leather and Bruce angled the microscope away from the case still standing prominently on its dais, turned his absolute focus on the slides of spores he'd gathered from Ivy.

Yes, Batman was well accustomed to ignoring ghosts, even those that were more than fresh. So still, the cave was silent. Bruce reached for another slide, reveled in the scrape it made against the workbench. It slid in easily into its proper place, he bent over the scope peered in.
The sound of the entrance at the top of the long staircase shattered the silence, footsteps tapping rapidly, getting nearer and nearer. Too rapid, something was wrong.

"Master Bruce!"

Bruce abandoned the microscope.

Alfred was pale in a way his British stoicism didn't often allow for, his mustache twitching and a cellphone clutched tightly in his shaking hand. Bruce didn't waste time asking questions, he grabbed the phone, already heading to the computer so he could start up a trace, half a million horrible possibilities playing through his mind.

'Bruuuuuuce.' Except that one. 'Hi Bruce. T's me, Dick.'

"Dick?" Bruce's feet stilled, Dick must have turned the phone away from himself, because the, the 'giggling' that filtered through the speakers was muffled, so was the pirates impression of Dick's words that followed.

'Arg, it's me dick.' A voice that was 'not' Dick. The Dick shushing that voice and muttering in a very slurred voice about how it's supposed to be a surprise.

"Dick…." Bruce sighed, dropped into his chair. "You're drunk."

'Not… that'sh s'not important Brushe, Bruce. G't someone here waaaant's to talk to you.' There was a loud rustling on the other end, a thump of the phone dropping. Someone muttered about changing their mind, then more rustling, Dick calling. 'Jashun!' and ice flooded had been injected into Bruce's bones. 'Br'ce, put us on video call.'

Bruce did so numbly, as his fingers flew across the computers control pad to bring up the tracker of Dick's phone. He got just a glimpse of Dick's face before he pressed the phone against someone's cheek and there was only a fuzzy orange around the barrier of the screen.

'H'llo Br'ce.' Jason said, his voice slurred as well, hesitant but unmistakably him. Bruce transferred the call to the monitors in the batplane, his numb fingers incapable of holding the device. 'F'rgot what was s'pose t' say.' Then he pulled the phone away from him and Bruce got his first look of Jason's face, flushed eyes unfocused, since 'that' night. The angle was bad, was terrible, but it was Jason, muttering lowly, too low for Bruce to hear off to the side.

'Were g'nna say sorry.' Dick whispered, still very loud in his drunkenness.

'Oh,' Jason frowned deeply then pressed the phone against his ear, cutting off Bruce's sight again. 'Br'ce, 'm shorry you're sooo 'old". Dick burst out laughing and Bruce's heart froze painfully in his chest, hands almost crushing flight controls without knowing 'why'. 'Wai' thatsh not righ'.'

"Dick are you, are you 'sure' that's Jason?" Bruce asked, a tremor running through his voice.

Jason groaned and Bruce could see them again, could see when the boy toppled over and Dick was laughing again, straining to hold his brother up. "M not Jas'n, 'm Nosferatuuuuu, 'n Bruce is old.'

'You're 'heavy'.Dick grunted under the effort, but managed to haul Jason back upright on what appeared to be a concrete park bench. Then he picked up the cellphone and pressed it against Jason's cheek again and Bruce wanted to shout at them that they were defeating the whole purpose of it being a video call, but he was too dumbfounded to form the words.

There was some more of Dick's very loud whispering, but it was too harried and slurred for Bruce
'BRUCE!' Jason shouted suddenly, and Bruce, who'd thought he'd trained any capacity for surprise out of himself jumped at least a foot in the air. 'Bruce, 'm shorry I crime lorded. Did ya know, Dick killed, Jok'r? Dead!' 

"Jason." Bruce forced his son's name out, hope and guilt and too much else to name straining to keep him from talking, from saying the wrong words again. "Jason, how much did you have to drink?"

Jason dropped the phone and Bruce got a look at his face again, comically serious as he muttered to himself, trying to count out a number that was 'much' too high on his uncoordinated fingers. 

Dick took the phone held it in front of his grinning, flushed face. 'I got h'm three drinks I swear.' 

'D'ck no.' Jason snatched the phone back. "M talkin' to…' He peered into the screen, at Bruce, his teal eyes narrowed at the man. Bruce? BRUCE!"

"Yes Jason." Bruce struggled to hold back his smile, the burning behind his eyes.

'Bruce 'm drunk.' He glared at his brother accusingly. 'D'ck go' me drunk.' He sagged miserably against the bench. 'Jus' wan'ed a beer.'

"You're nineteen, you shouldn't be drinking at all Jason." Thrown for a loop, Bruce's voice was stern as it would have been had he caught any of his children in the same situation because god, what else was he supposed to say?

'YOU should' be drinking 't all.' Jason shot back with a scowl, his expressive brows knot closely together. 'Yer so OLD Br'ce. 'M fucking god, 'why're' you so old? How're you ev'n alibe… alibe.' He growled, his nose wrinkling in frustration at him inability to say the word and Bruce couldn't contain his amused snort. 'ali… not DEAD.' He nodded curtly, satisfied with his accomplishment.

When Jason looked back, Bruce was still smiling, and a grin started to form on the boy's face as well, but it crumpled as sudden as a clap of thunder and Jason, folded both his hands against the phone as he pressed it to his forehead, hiding everything again from Bruce's view.

"M sorry Br'ce." Jason sobbed, his breathing hitched and he carried on, fast and almost too slurred for Bruce to make out. 'Wan'ed to make you hurt, cause it, it hurt wh'n you…' He sniffled loudly. 'Though' you r'place't me an', an' he's still there like I w'sn't... Fucked me up. 'M sorry.'

Very suddenly Bruce couldn't breathe, something clogging up his throat and restricting the flow of air to his brain, he might have even checked the stats being monitored by his suit had he the presence of mind to do so.

"It's okay Jason." Bruce choked the words out but they sounded so soft, so far away, he hoped to god Jason could hear them. "I'm sorry too, I should've found you, should have lookes harder, god I'm so sorry."

'My chance to 'plogize fi'st Bruce shhhhhh.' Jason took in a long, deep, shudder of a breath and the little Bruce could see on screen shook. "Ya got the new kid ta, to be Rob'n." He swallowed thickly. 'Shouldna took it ou' on h'm, h'rt h'm. 'M sorry." He said more, but by then he really was blubbering too badly for Bruce to pick out the individual words.

Bruce's heart clenched at what his youngest son had been put though, and as much as he wanted to wipe that away, tell Jason it didn't make him love him any less, there was just no way he could've
done that for Tim.

"That's not okay Jason." Bruce said tiredly and Jason's watery gasp filtered through the speakers, followed by a jerky shaking of the screen that was Jason nodding. "You'll have to apologize to Tim yourself."

Jason's side of the line was a mess of something that sounded vaguely like an affirmation and more ugly, hoarse crying. Bruce tried to find more words, but none would come, he was spent.

'That's enough I think.' Dick's face appeared again, looking much less inebriated than he had at the begging of the call, a worried line between his eyes. 'I'm gonna have hang up on you 'n call us a ride…'

"No!" Bruce shouted out before Dick could turn the phone off, the irrational idea that doing so would erase the conversation from Bruce's mind, from Jason's and he'd never get the chance to hear his son's voice again. "Stay on the line, I'm here."

'You're…' Dick looked up, must have seen the batplane passing overhead, he rolled his eyes. 'Unbelievable."

"Don't hang up." Bruce repeated, he switched the call back to his cellphone and searched for a place to land the plane.

Dick cried out and dropped the phone, going after Jason who'd slid out of view again. Bruce growled out a command for Alfred to take control of the plane and leaped out the hatch. Soon as he landes he broke off running for the signal, scanning by the darkened trees for himself. There was nothing more important in that moment than reaching them before they were gone.

Just as he got nearer, could hear Dick's muttering from just ahead, his feet stopped of their own volition, near terrified at the prospect of going on. This was where the dreams would have ended, and he'd wake up with a cup of cold coffee at his elbow and a crick in his back from falling asleep at his work.

Jason would be gone, or lost as Bruce had assumed him to be after he hadn't been able to kill the Joker and Bruce would have only a suit in a glass case to help him hold onto happier memories of the boy. Rather he leave now, pretend he hadn't come at all, then he could pretend things could have gone better instead of…

"Bruce!" But Dick had seen him already, was waving him over, his other hand still tucked under the figure he was trying to turn over. "Gimme a hand here, he's a lightweight but he's not exactly a light in weight." He got Jason suiting up and propped against the bench. "Damnit Jay, you're goin' on a diet."

Jason whimpered out a demand to be left to sleep, tried to push Dick away, and Bruce swallowed down his fear, crossed the space between them and finally, finally reached his son. He bent down to lift Jason, limp, and shaking, and soaked in what Bruce hoped was water, up off the ground. He 'was' heavy, very heavy, so, so much heavier than the little boy broken in that flaming wreckage had been.

But Bruce could take it, he could do this much for Jason at least.

"Why is he wet?" Bruce turned his eyes on Dick, his eldest was swaying on his feet, reeking of brandy, but there were was no visible bruising or any other signs he'd been hurt.

"Tlie… Tried to sober him up before we called you…" He shook his head, then dropped it in to his
palms, stumbling slowly after Bruce. "Didn' work."

"Br'ce." Jason muttered and slapped his hand against his ear as though he were still holding the cellphone, his face crumpling in confusion when he realized he wasn't.

"I'm here Jay." Bruce said, tightening his hold on his son as he stepped onto the platform that had descended from the plane hovering over his their heads. Jason dropped his head on Bruce's shoulder, and next to them Dick chuckled. "I'm bringing you home."

They were lifted up and into the plane almost too fast, and Bruce was loath to let go of Jason. It wasn't fair on Alfred to make him pilot the plane all the way back to Gotham, Dick was in no condition to pilot his own feet, and Bruce didn't trust the autopilot system right then, refused to take the risk that there was even the tiniest glitch that could jeopardize him bringing Jason home.

It had to be either a dream or the worst, the cruelest of nightmares.

Bruce set the shivering boy down in one of the seats, not even a little grateful for the removal of the strain on his back. His hands moved to cup the back of Jason's head, run his fingers through the hair, too short for the curls that gave him so much grief as a child to be visible.

Jason hummed, leaned into the touch, then he clumsily brought an arm out, hand batting ineffectually to push the man away. His eyelids cracked open just a bit, enough for Bruce to get a glimpse of the bright color, just a shade off from what he remembered.

"Bruce?" He lifted his head closer to Bruce, so close his features became distorted beyond recognition and Bruce caught a whiff of something sweet laying under the much stronger scent of brandy on Jason's breath.

"Jason." Bruce caught Jason's flailing hand, brought it up under his chin, tearing up at the warmth, the pulse he felt beating beneath his son's skin. Oh god, his son was 'alive'.

Jason's free hand swung out, almost hitting Bruce in the face, and settled pointing in the general direction of the front of the plane, where Dick was watching them from.

"Dickie's 'm favorite." Jason slurred, and Dick laughed and after a short moment, so did Bruce.

He let the sound bubble up out of his chest and wrapped his arms around the boy, now too big to be tucked against Bruce's chest, but still there, and warm, and breathing, and Bruce had almost given up on him hadn't he. He'd almost…

His arms tightened around the boy and Jason groaned, planted both hands on Bruce face and pushed it away. '"M gonna throw up."

"Not in the plane!" Dick yelled, having gotten up to his feet.

Jason just groaned again, muttering out a string of foreign curses while he glared at Dick, until a shudder ran through him and he hunched into his soaked jacket. "Cold."

Bruce took off his cape and slung it over Jason, tucked it in between the boy and the chair. He curled into the warmth and was asleep in seconds.

"I feel like I should lecture you for getting a teenager drunk." Bruce brushed the bangs back from Jason's brow, let his hand linger for just a moment before he left for the front of the jet. "Or thank you for finding him and sticking with him long enough 'to' get him drunk.
"Wasn't hard." Dick dropped into the copilots seat and groaned into his hands. "Kid could just hold the beer."

Bruce leaned over and pulled Dick out of his seat, his eldest let out a surprised squawk as Bruce crushed him in the tightest hug he could without hurting him. "Thank you, Dick." His breath hitched, and the words don't do nearly enough to express his gratitude, they never did and Bruce couldn't regret that any more.

"Yeah." Dick awkwardly returned the hug, patting Bruce on the back. "Really not looking forward to 'this' hangover though, think you can help me get outta there 'before' I get A's third degree?"

"We'll talk about it when we get to the cave." When they got to the manor, got 'home', he released Dick from the hug, but kept his hands on his son's shoulders.

"Home." Dick scoffed, fell back into his chair, he cocked his head back at the teen passed out in the seat behind him. "He's gonna be pissed when he wakes up."

"'Alfred' is going to be pissed when he wakes up." Bruce returned got into his seat. "We'll deal with it then."

Dick nodded and settled in to his seat, already dropping off to sleep himself. Bruce kept his eyes on Dick until his first son was well and truly settled into the land of dreams, then back at his second, snoring softly, his head hidden in the folds of the cape.

It wasn't perfect, there were still problems, so many of them to work though. Ghosts lingering at the edges of everything, poking their noses around corners and scuffing their little feet against nothing. Only these weren't the kind of ghosts Bruce could ignore. He'd have to confront them soon, deal with the chaos Jason had wrought in the name of his vengeance, Bruce's failure stop that chaos before it had escalated to such a point.

He clicked on the comm. "I'm bringing them home Alfred, both of them."

'My god, are they alright?' Alfreds voice shook.

"Not yet." Bruce gave the boys another glance in the reflection of the windscreen. "But they will be."

Bruce would make sure of it. He'd deal with all the parts that weren't alright once he knew his sons were safe and warm, and dry at home.

No, it wasn't perfect, but now at least there was the hope that someday soon, it could damn well be close.

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