Drinks with ghosts

by shauds

Summary

Dick accepts Jason's offer of a drink in New York in an attempt to pry some information out of the formerly dead Robin. What happens isn't anywhere near according to plan, but that doesn't mean it's not quite possibly the best outcome he wouldn't have dared hope for.

Notes

Prequel to 'Drunken calls from ghosts' where they actually make the call to Bruce. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed.

Jason was planning something, he had to be. And even if he wasn't, his little crime spree in Gotham matched up way too well for it to have been totally separate from what the Society of Supervillains had be up to right at that time, too well for it to have been a coincidence.

Dick hadn't wanted to take Jason up on the offer of a beer, won bet or no. He'd wanted to punch that cocky grin off his face, demand to know what Jason thought he was doing in 'Dicks' suit, but the truth was, Dick himself wasn't even sure what he was doing in the suit anymore. And in Dick's experience, answers pried out by means other than violence were generally more accurate and useful than anything he could have beaten out of the other man.

So, there he was, pockets crammed full of whatever tools he could get away with for when Jason
inevitably lashed out, he expected it, he was ready for it, he only hoped he could get some info out of Jason before that.

Jason had to be planning something, there was no chance he genuinely thought that Dick would willingly work with a murderer again, did he? After tarantula, and Slade though, it sent a chill down Dick's spine to think that he'd inadvertently broadcast some kind of message to the criminal underworld that he was open to teaming up with whoever came his way.

Dick had chosen the bar though; far away from his usual stomping grounds, to be sure Jason didn't have time to set up any kinds of traps or ambushes. Still, Dick had spent quite a bit of time debating on whether or not to show up at all. Jason could have been there already, had the time to do something while Dick had dwelled on his indecision.

He jogged the last few block to the bar.

Jason was already waiting, leaning against a phone booth along the side of the street, his shoulders loose, both hands in his pockets as he scowled down at the shoe he was scuffing against the loose gravel patching the ill-maintained sidewalk. Too any random passersby he was just some other guy loitering around. Dick knew better.

When Dick approached Jason's head shot up, eyes widened and his mouth parted in surprise, an expression he wiped away within seconds.

"Was starting to think I got stood up, Dickie." He said, kicking off the phone booth, that cocky grin back in place.

"Won the race, might as well enjoy the prize." Dick shrugged, but kept his distance as they entered the dimly lit bar.

Some guy minding the door gave Jason a scrutinizing frown, but the younger man just shoved his hands deeper into his pockets with an even wider grin and slipped in a few feet ahead of Dick. Once they'd gotten inside, Dick's eyes roamed around the interior, looking to pick up on anything that seemed out of place – nothing he could see, yet – while Jason strode ahead to the bar tender.

"ID?" The gruff man behind the counter's voice pulled Dick's attention from the trio of thugs he'd been eyeing in a corner. His head snapped to the bartender, but the man wasn't even looking at him.
Jason huffed out a curse in a language Dick didn't speak and produced a – obviously fake – driver's license for inspection, something that could almost be called a pout on his face. If dangerous, trigger-happy crimelords 'could' pout.

Dangerous, trigger-happy, 'underage' crimelords.

"Oh my god." Dick sighed, dropping into a stool next to Jason. "You're not twenty-one yet, are you?" He scrubbed a hand over his tired face, only to flail it in panic when one of Jason's hands shot out to clamp over Dick's mouth and the older man very nearly reached for one of the electrified wingdings hidden up his sleeve.

"Quiet, fuck." Jason peered over the bar where the bartender was digging a pair of beers out of the fridge. "I can't pay for your beer 'f I get booted outta here." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder

"Was just hoping to 'not' get hounded by cops tonight." Dick pushed the hand away from him.

The beers were set in front of them, and Dick had just popped the cap off his and downed a good fifth of it – hey, a free drink was a free drink – when he turned to look suspiciously over at Jason, who was directing a similarly suspicious look at his own drink.

An odd feeling flickered through Dick at the almost hesitant way Jason opened his beer and took a miniscule sip. Dick pushed it aside. Information, there had to be something Jason knew about the whole thing. "So uh, the crimelord thing got old or you just decide to take a break?"

"Wasn't meant to permanent, just a stepping stone to bigger things," Jason smirked into the neck of his bottle. " Sides, I wanted to go back I'd a had to build from the ground up again and fuck that. Heard you worked as an enforcer in some mob, you have a lot of fun with that 'Crutches?'"

Dick looks around the bar again just in case that was a more ominous threat than Jason's easy tone implied it would be. There's nothing, the guy's in the corner are still playing poker, the one at the door's still watching the door, and there's nothing else jumping out at him. Bartender was still giving them the side-eye, but maybe that was just because Jason's driver's license was a bad fake.

"Yeah, fun." With a sigh, Dick sunk back into his chair and got his beer half finished to the sound of Jason ripping up the label on his. The bar was quiet, almost peaceful, and Dick though he could have almost relaxed a little, at least until he was done with his beer.
"So, why New York of all places?" Jason asked. "The weather? Woulda thought anyone from Gotham'd shrivel up without the rain. Though guess you're not really 'from' Gotham, makes you exempt, right?"

The many other superheroes filling the place up was why, plenty of people to reach out to if something like Blockbuster ever came after him again, he'd learned his lesson there. By the time Dick had finished his beer, Jason's was barely a third of the way gone, and he still hadn't made any overly threatening moves. Dick was tired of waiting.

"What are you here for Jason?" He pushed the empty bottle aside.

"'S how you're s'pose to negotiate a partnership, right?" He brought the bottle to his lips again. "Course, we could always follow the old capes 'n tights convention of beating the crap outta each other first, but that's a pretty crap convention."

The idea of Jason beating him in a straight up fight gets a short laugh out of Dick. "A partnership, you can't think I'd seriously work with someone whose M.O is popping a cap in anyone they think deserves it Jason."

Jason's shoulders tightened for a second, his eyes widening before he turned back to his bottle and they narrowed petulantly. "Guess ol' Desmond was just special then."

"Stop bringing that up." Dick kept his voice low, but did nothing to stem the vitriol that poured out with it, jabbing a finger at Jason to keep himself from shouting. "I didn't do that, I fucked up and it'll be on me till I die, but I didn't pull the trigger."

Jason sighed, puffing his cheeks up, he rubbed a hand over his eyes and finished off his beer, this time grimacing plainly at the taste. "Yeah, this aint gonna work." He said, getting off his chair, it took him a second to get his feet under him. "You do your bit an I'll stick out of it, kay Dickie." He patted Dick on the shoulder a little clumsily and made to walk away.

"Wait." Dick grabbed Jason's arm before the younger man, fuck, teenager could leave, he stood and peered closely into Jason's teal eyes, noting the redness around the edges and the sluggishness with which they followed the fan spinning above their head.

"Er… you okay there?" Jason said, pulling as far back as he could with Dick's hand still around his wrist.
"Negotiations not over till I buy you a drink too." Dick dragged Jason back to his seat, not understanding what reason other than blind curiosity could be driving him, maybe the beers were just stronger than the usual kind. "Come on, we got lots to talk about."

"But you just fucking said…"

"Said I don't want a partner who kills." Dick dropped Jason back in his seat and flagged down the bartender. "Couple double brandy's." Dick watched Jason's face morph to something that was close kin to horror. "What, just because you're cheap doesn't mean I am. We got plenty to talk about, partner."

Dick took maybe a little too much pleasure in seeing Jason squirm at the word the same way it had made Dick squirm not long before. He gave himself just a second to wonder of this is some kind of trick too. Jason was not small enough for a beer to have him close to tipsy.

Jason made a soft choking sound at the back of his throat. "Those beers weren't cheap."

Dick gulped down his brandy in one sip as soon as it was set in front of him feeling as though his insides were melting at the hot burn that spread from it, but he forced his expression to stay neutral, and looked at Jason expectantly. If he was going to carry on this interrogation without blowing up he was going to need to be at lot more relaxed than he was, and Jason had to be at least as drunk as him if that was going to yield any results. If there was one thing he'd gained from his time as a bartender in Haven, it was a very clear idea of his own alcohol tolerance.

"The trick is to swallow before you taste it." Dick said, resting his chin in his hands.

Jason sighed loudly then with his eyes screwed shut; he attempted to do just that. He only got about half the drink down, then promptly broke into a coughing fit and shriveled up into a tight ball that made him look half his size.

"Fucking hell, what crazy fuck had the bright idea to invent 'that'?” He somehow managed to hunch even further into himself, looking torn somewhere between furious and absolutely miserable, "And why did he put it in his mouth?"

Dick couldn't stop the laughter than shook his whole body at the sight, and the indignant glare Jason fixed on him in retaliation. Even if this was an act, it was worth it for that alone. He doubted
there were many who'd work under a crimelord who reacted like that to alcohol.

"You not gonna finish it Jayjay?" Dick needled, nudging Jason with his elbow. "We can order you a glass of milk if it makes you can't handle it."

Jason flipped him the bird and raised the glass again, finished of the drink and he shuddered, his face turning a shade of green that Dick was very familiar with from his bartender days. He almost felt, no right them he 'did' feel bad for Jason. Why did he have to look so much like a kid right then and not an immensely threatening thorn in the family's sides?

"Hey, you got any Irish cream back there?" Dick called to the bartender as he nudged Jason and regretted it almost immediately when it got a moan out of Jason and a very concerned look from the bartender. Dick did 'not' want to be cleaning up puke tonight. "Hold on Jay, milks coming, and if you throw up, I swear to god Jason…"

Two short glasses of creamy liquid were slid in front of them, earning Dick another glare from the teen. He returned it with a shittiest of shit eating grins and took a small sip of his glass.

Jason took deep gulps of air until he had his stomach under control then still shuddering he reached for the glass. He brought it to his lips like a man staging his own execution, but dutifully swallowed it down. He relaxed a little at the much sweeter, milky taste, still fixed his glare – about as threatening as a puffed up cat, wouldn't have him avoiding alleys, but still give him a shock if it appeared out of nowhere – on Dick.

"But, you worked with…" Jason gave up on looking angry and just took another, much larger sip of his drink, holding it in his mouth for a second before he swallowed. Must have really killed his taste buds with the brandy if he actually 'liked' the way it tasted. "Wha' wazzer name?" He wiggled his index and middle fingers in front of his lips as though they were fangs. "Spiderchick?"

"Tarantula." Dick swallowed and even past the alcohol brining through his system, or maybe because of it, knowing that Jason really had heard about that made it feel like the ground had dropped out from under him. "That was… the worst decision I've ever made."

Jason's eyes widened at Dick reaction, a spark of clarity shining in his cloudy eyes before he gulped down another mouthful of alcohol. "Sucks."

"Yeah." Dick clamed himself down, then looked over at Jason's glass, much emptier than his own,
he was beginning to wonder is he could keep up with the way Jason was drinking that night at all. "Slow down there, we've got the whole night to talk here, rather do it sober, huh?

"Hmm." Jason looked over at him with a subtle shake of his head. "Yeah, okay."

"So, what have you been up to the last few years? Doubt you sprang out of your grave twice the size you went in." Bruce hadn't gone very far investigating Jason's death and return once he was sure it really was Jason. Dick could guess at a few reasons as to why, but that didn't mean he shared the same sentiments

"Don' 'member all of it." Jason laid his head down in the table, his hand loosely wrapped around his glass and face most obscured by a folded arm. "Was training after, learning stuff."

"Learning, learning what?" Dick leaned down so his face was level with Jason's and he could see one green tinted blue eye slip open to watch it.

"Bad stuff." The eye slid closed again and he turned his head further into the wood of the bar. "Bad teachers." He shuddered again. "M'st of 'em 'r gone now."

Gone. Dick swallowed down more of his drink, waited for the revulsion to come at him again, but the alcohol was starting to work its way into his system and he was more relaxed than he had any right to be. "Where'd you uh, find these teachers?"

"H'd a sponsor." Jason grumbled a little under his breath, drew the glass closer to his mouth, but stopped when he realized he's have to actually sit up to take a sip."Don' ask, not tellin."

"Yeah well, th'tsh…" Dick shook his head and counterproductively sipped at his drink again. "That's not fair. I can't work with someone 'f I don't know what I'm getting into. You've gotta tell me something. What they get out of sponsoring you?"

"Hell if I know." Jason sat up with a loud tired sigh and finished off his drink. God, Dick wasn't going to be able to keep up with him like this. "First it'sh, don' kill Bruce, Jason, th'n itsh make him suffer J'son, an' th'n keep yer head down an' outta Gotham fer a while Jason." He his face scrunched up and he shook his head wildly.

"Really, that'sh all yer, gonna." Dick swallowed, his mouth feeling dry. "That'sh all you're gonna
Jason didn't answer; his head was lying on the bar again, his face hidden from Dick's view while he hummed the tune of the song blasting from the stereos under his breath.

"Damnit Jason, can you be serious about this for just…" Dick grabbed Jason's shoulders and pulled him upright forced him to look at Dick while he spoke, a feat the teen seemed entirely incapable of, his unfocused eyes aimed somewhere way passed Dick's head. "Jason are you drunk?"

"No!" Jason said too loudly, flinging out an arm to break Dick hold on him and almost falling off his barstool in the process. "M not…" He squinted at his empty glass, then the one in Dick's hand. "R'you gonna f'nish that?"

"Yes." Dick downed the rest of his drink and was taken aback by the kicked puppy look Jason was suddenly sporting.

He turned to wave down the bartender, who was staying on the other end of the room, called still a little too loudly even before the man reached them. "Wanna try 'n f'nish a brandy 'gain."

They were quiet until they both had another finger of brandy in front of them, Dick clicked his jaw, biting down on his temper until they each had a finger of brandy in front of them and the bartender was safely out of earshot.

"Was your sponsor with the society? Were you with the society?" Dick demanded, and Jason froze, the brandy glass halfway to his lips.

"No, hate thoshe, tho…” he moved the glass closer to his mouth, but Dick plucked it out of his fingers before he could consume it and downed the burning liquid himself. Jason scowled at him, but made no attempt at retaliating. He just scrubbed a hand over his face before laying his head in his arms again. "Hate those ashs-hats. Blew upppa shitty… city, but, was..." he chuckled at his own mispronunciation for a second before his countenance turned twice as grim as Dick had seen him so far. "Fuck, 'm shorry D'ck. 'F I knew they were gonna…” He sniffled. "An' when I saw, didn' le' Bruce go. Wash so angry, was g'na leave me again an' I didn'… Don' know why I didn't shtop an think."

Jason couldn't really be 'that' drunk, he was bigger than Dick and had to have some in here with about as much suspicion. What possible reason could he have had for letting his guard down that
'Because that's how you start a partnership.'

"What happened to you Jason?" Dick asked, slumping over the counter. "Getting you back should've been…" He sighed, shaking his head. "I don't know, not a body count and what you did to Tim."

Jason mumbled out an answer, but all Dick could make out of it was the word 'alphabet', if that. Dick wanted to yell at Jason, tell him he could have just come home, squished himself right back into the spot he'd taken from Dick all those years ago. The spot they never been able to fill, but he really doubted Jason would remember any of it in the morning at that point.

Slowly, Jason dragged his head up, leaning heavily on his elbows for support and snagged the shot of brandy from Dick, downed it before the older man had the chance to stop him, this time not even grimacing at the taste. "Wha' hap'ned t' 'you'?" Jason asked, fixing his eyes somewhere way over Dick's head. "Use ta be…" He blinked a few times, his eyes very wide. "Dick."

Yeah screw it, whether he remembered it or not wasn't really the point right now, was it?

"An you use to be Jason." Dick said. "Used to hang off every word Bruce said and make him read your school essays and, you'da gone off on anyone who tried to hurt him. He, he loved you 'so' mush an, now ya, you 'hate' him so mush you jus, throw everysing…"

Jason tried to put his hand over Dick's mouth again but missed completely, winding up smacking Dick in the nose instead. Not that Dick could really feel his nose tight then.

"Kay, I'm…" the hand slowly dropped away from Dick's mouth so Jason could point one of its fingers at Dick's nose. "…ma leave ya th're…" Jason slammed the glass down and swung his uncoordinated legs off the stool.

Dick would have left him to go that time, stuck around himself to get as hammered as Jason was. But a second later, before his conscious mind had even gotten a chance to catch up, Jason went from vertical to not-so-vertical, and Dick was on his feet, his arms hooked under Jason's armpits in what was almost a hug to keep Jason from face planting and braining himself on the edge of a stool.
Jason was heavy, really heavy, and Dick almost dropped him, before Jason got his feet down under him and put some weight on them, groaning miserably into Dick's chest. Alright, Dick was willing to admit he had severely overestimated Jason's drinking abilities, 'twice'.

"Lemme go." Jason batted his fist weakly against Dick's shoulder. "Dun wanna ta'l 'bou Br'ce."

And also, there was no way he was leaving Jason alone in a bar, in this part of the city when he was like this. New York wasn't Gotham, or Bludhaven, but it still had plenty of dark nooks and crannies and Dick didn't want to think about the things that could happen to Jason if the kid wound up passed out in one of them.

The bartender was definitely giving Dick the stink eye now. Dick, not Jason which was… weird. Dick flashed him a smile and dropped some folded up bills on the counter with a salute before beginning to drag his incredibly inebriated drinking companion out of there.

"I thin' my brother's h'd 'nough." He tried to feel like his soul wasn't being crushed by the random bartender and realized now that he was standing that 'he' had definitely had enough too.

Halfway to the door he shifted Jason's weight off his chest and slung the boy's arm around his shoulder so he could drag him the rest of the way with a little more ease. Trained acrobat or not, Dick was one man, and Jason was 'heavy', damnit. How had this kid ever been so tiny?

"Where you stayin' Jay?" Dick asked, giving Jason a light shake.

Jason shook his head and tried to pull away from Dick again, but he didn't do a very good job of it. "G'n tell Br'ce."

Dick groaned and shook his head, a big mistake; he realized when it sent his world tilting on its axis. That brandy had been strong, way too strong, and Dick didn't even trust himself to get both him and Jason safely to his loft on the other side of the city without getting hit by a truck, let alone track down wherever Jason's place was. He propped them both up against a wall to get there bearings and then resigned himself to walking them round this area until they sobered up enough to get 'somewhere' safely.

There was a park nearby that Dick had walked past on his way to the bar earlier that night, and he angled them in that general direction. Silently thankful for all the situational awareness training Bruce had put him through to made him capable of finding the place in his state.
"No' like, I did it f'r fun." Jason slurred, managed to lift his head high enough to catch Dick's eyed for a second before his dropped between his shoulders again. "K'lled 'em. 'Ey were." He paused to suck in a breath. "M'insters."

Dick really didn't want to listen to a spiel about how killing was the answer right then, He'd heard it way too often enough and he didn't 'want' to do that right then, He was about to tell Jason so when the boy, still tripping over his own tongue, carried on.

"Jus', n'dded to sho Bruce tha' it 'works', tha' some of em'll jus' never ge better an' you gotta take em ou' an it 'works'." He let out what Dick was uncomfortably sure was a sob. "Thought the he'd a f'nished the, the Joker." Jason sniffed loudly and Dick had to adjust his hold again to keep from dropping the boy. "I can't do it, n, n cops won' do it. B'tman's... 'Batmans' s'pose to do wha' the cops won't, right?"

"'You can't k'll J'ker?" Dick swallowed, stumbled forward a few more steps. "Why not? I did."

"Huh?" Jason's legs just stopped moving, his legs locking and refusing to allow him to be pulled along any further. "No, you didn'."

Dick looked down at the boy he was carrying, unmasked and without that irritating smirk, the overdone bravado, Dick could match this face, the expressive eyes, the color just a couple shades off, but the shape so right, the line of his jaw, now without all of the baby fat. He just looked so 'young' and so 'confused' and hopeful, and for the first time since Jason had come back, Dick could let himself look at this Jason and line him up to the boy he'd mourned for so long. The one he'd taken on that disastrous ski trip and given his number to and told he would be there for only for it to turn out that he 'wasn't'.

Now he was lugging that boy through the freezing city, neither of them capable of walking in a straight line for long distances. He let out a bitter chuckle and pulled Jason's arm more securely around his neck. This was not how he's expected it to be when Jason came back either.

Tugging lightly on Jason's arm to get him moving again, Dick forced himself to keep talking past the knots twisting up his insides. "H'rt Tim." Dick cleared his voice. "B'stard was laughing 'bout you, 'bout, like, like it wasn't bad 'nough he brought you up 'at all', but he jus k'pt laughing, like, like what he did to you w's some big fucking joke." Dick's arms tightened around Jason further, suddenly feeling a lot less drunk. "Bruce brough' 'im back."
"Bastard." Jason sobbed, any strength vanishing from his body, he crumpled to the ground, almost dragging Dick with him into the puddle he'd collapsed into. "He's, he's such a…" Jason buried his face in his arms and just sat there shaking.

"Didn't wan' me to have that on my conscience." Dick sighed, and kneeled next to Jason, but from somewhere dry. "Doin' that it, it 'does' things to you Jay, he just, he worries for us."

"Not me." Jason was full of crying now, sobs wracking his whole body. "He didn' even look for me after."

"He had to take a whole year off Batman because of what happened that night." Dick rested his hands on Jason's shoulders, partly to keep his own balance. "How often do ya hear of 'Bruce' taking a vacation? And a whole year? He can't, he can't kill the Joker for you Jason, but anything else. Anything jus to get you back."

Jason shook his head and sniffled loudly, already slumping from even his kneeling position even more to the ground. Dick caught him before he got even more soaked on the wet ground and, almost falling backwards himself, managed to haul both himself and Jason to their feet.

"Y' think I'd 'lie' to you?" Dick scoffed at the dry laugh Jason let out. "C'me on then , we'll we'll call him righ' now." He shot an arm out to the park that was just in sight. "Bu' from tha' bench, cause we're gonna fall again an' this ground is filthy."

Not that moving would do Jason much good, though, he was already soaked. Actually, maybe Dick would find a gas station somewhere and get a few bottles of water before they made that call. He doubted 'wasted out of his mind' was how Bruce wanted to meet Jason again.

/p

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