confusion worse confounded

by amsves

Summary

Robin and Terra go on their first joint mission since Robin’s internment. It's a change of pace, to say the least.

[Bad Things Happen Bingo]

Notes

Anon requested 'Communication Suddenly Cut Off' with either Robin or Terra being injured and the other freaking out. Ask and ye shall receive!

Also guess who keeps changing the name of her series because she can't decide? Me!

See the end of the work for more notes

It had been a long time coming, but Robin was finally clear to return to work.

Terra had been working alone during his internment and recovery, but solo missions were nowhere near as thrilling as joint ones. Robin knew she was just as excited as he was that it was time for them to return to their routine.
Slade outlined the plan, but Robin could hardly focus. Terra was practically vibrating beside him, so he hazarded a guess that she wasn’t paying much attention either and focused in all the harder on his Master. It would be bad if neither of them knew what they were doing.

“Any questions?” Slade asked, and his apprentices shook their heads. They were ready. Slade nodded. “I expect your success. Go.”

They didn’t need to be told twice.

The wind whipping through his hair, the crisp Jump City night air, the feeling of free-fall, it was all Robin had been missing and more. He couldn’t stop a smile from stretching across his face as he and Terra made their way to the location of the heist: an independent science lab formerly under military control. Their advancements in remotely-controlled nanoprobes were perhaps a little too advanced, and Slade wanted to get a hold of their current project before it became a major threat later on. Easy enough.

The place was guarded both by humans and by computers. Terra dispatched the security officers silently, dropping on them under the cover of darkness and knocking them unconscious before they even knew they were under attack. Robin handled the technological security, overriding the alarms set to go off when the guards didn’t check in and disabling the electronic locks on the nanoprobe containers. They were good at what they did, especially working in tandem. The plan advanced. Slade would be pleased.

“Robin,” Terra hissed in his ear, “Slade said there were thirty total people I needed to take care of, right?”

“Correct,” he murmured back, fingers flying over the keys on the computer keyboard.

“Then why are there only twenty-eight?” she asked. “Is the intel bad? Or did they just get sick or someth--”

Robin thought his head might split in two as Terra let out a bloodcurdling scream of pain. And then, it stopped. That was probably bad. “Terra! What’s wrong?” he gasped, but the only answer was static. Whatever had happened to her, her communicator had been turned off.

Or smashed.

Robin switched his communicator to the hideout instead. “Slade! I think Terra’s hurt. Can you track her suit?”

“I can,” his Master answered smoothly, apparently unfazed. “What’s the mission status, Robin?”

“Unfinished. Terra only got to twenty-eight guards, and all the cybersecurity is down but I haven’t actually grabbed the probes yet. Permission to find--”

“Denied.”

Robin sucked in a breath. “Slade, Terra might be--”

“Finish the mission, Robin,” Slade said, voice cold. “Bring the probes to me, and then we will find Terra. Do you understand?”

“But this mission is for two people,” Robin argued. “How am I supposed to--”

Once again, Slade cut him off. “You used to work solo for me all the time, Robin,” he said shortly.
“Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten how, now that you have a partner to pick up your slack?”

“Of course not.” Robin sighed. Slade was seriously telling him to ignore Terra and focus on the probes? Wouldn’t it make more sense to go after Terra first? He could do it, realistically. She couldn’t be far. The time it would take to finish this job by himself, bring the probes to Slade, and come back would be too much. Shouldn’t he--no. He should listen to Slade. Slade knew a lot more about what was going on, while Robin worked on a need-to-know basis. He should trust Slade.

A shiver ran up his spine as he remembered what Slade had said after taking him from that cell. But that was then. This was now.

“I won’t let you down,” he promised after a few seconds of silence.

“I know,” Slade answered, and cut the communication. Robin was alone.

He took a deep breath and started down the corridor towards the nanoprobes.

He’d already done all the hard work, and all he had to do now was grab the tech and get out of there. Easy.

The probes in their protective casing fit perfectly into his toolbelt, and Robin raced home as fast as he could. Flying through the city and slinging himself from building to building wasn’t fun anymore. Now it was just time-consuming, a reminder of how limited he was in his abilities when compared to people like Slade and Terra and another enemy to fight on Terra’s behalf.

Robin grit his teeth and pushed himself to the limit, making it home in record time. He dumped the probes into Slade’s open palm and grabbed his Master’s arm. “Can you find her?”

“Of course, Robin,” Slade assured him, dragging a heavy hand through Robin’s hair. “Calm down. She will be found.”

Robin did not calm down, and Slade definitely knew that, but it didn’t matter at the moment. He let Slade walk him over to the computer and averted his eyes as Slade typed in the key to allow the tracking of Terra’s suit. In just a few seconds, an orange dot blinked on the blown-up map of the streets of Jump City.

“Terra,” Robin breathed. He turned towards the door, ready to run, but Slade caught him by the back of the collar and he choked.

“Not so fast, little bird,” Slade hummed. “We need a plan.”

“We?” Robin repeated.

“I’m going too,” Slade affirmed. “If she has been captured by the people who run the lab, it could very well be too much for you to handle by yourself. Follow me.”

Slade explained the plan as he led Robin to a part of the base that he’d never been to before. He threw open the large doors and Robin gaped. “Slade? How long have I been your apprentice?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Slade hummed. “A while, for sure. Why?”

“How come I didn’t know you had a garage full of cool cars?” Robin demanded, flitting from car to car and taking in the sights. “Do you have any motorcycles? Do you have a car as good as the Batmobile? What’s the best car you have--”
“Robin, focus,” Slade demanded, and Robin took a deep breath.

“Right, sorry. Anyways, which sweet ride are we taking tonight?”

“This one,” Slade said, slapping the roof of a … beige sedan.

Robin deflated. “Really? An entire room full of fancy cars, and we’re taking the one that looks like it’s driven by a grandma?”

“It’s inconspicuous,” Slade explained, slipping into the driver’s seat. “Now get in.”

Robin did as he was told, and soon they were flying through the streets of Jump towards the blinking dot. “Y’know,” Robin said once they were on the road, “This car isn’t very inconspicuous when you’re going fifty miles over the speed limit.”

“I thought you wanted to hurry up and save Terra?” Slade said, and Robin was quiet. Even going eighty miles an hour, it still took them far too long to get to Terra’s location, and Robin would have chewed his nails to stubs without his gloves protecting them. As it was, he had to settle for chewing his lip, which resulted in him tasting blood.

“Kid, try and have some restraint, would you?” Slade sighed. “There are some napkins in the glove compartment. Clean your face up.”

“Napkins in the glove compartment?” Robin echoed. “Wow, I was wrong. This is the perfect car for you. Is there a sudoku book in the back seat, too? Do you have caramel candies in here somewhere?”

Slade shot Robin a side-eyed glance and his apprentice fell quiet again until they reached their destination. Robin threw open the door and rolled out before the car had even slowed down. Slade cut the engine and they were off, running through a dingy back alley in the darkness.

Slade’s suit beeped, and he stopped. “We’re within twenty feet,” he explained. “Keep your eyes peeled.”

They crept forward, and Robin could hear his heartbeat pounding in his ears. Slade’s suit beeped again. “Ten feet.” It beeped again. “Five feet.”

Robin looked around the alley warily. “But where?”

“I’m here,” a voice said weakly, and Robin jumped. It seemed to be coming from behind an overflowing dumpster. He padded over to it slowly and peered behind it.

There, huddled inside a mound of trash, was Terra.

Robin felt a wave of relief flow through his body, and he stumbled backwards. “Oh, thank God,” he said as his knees went weak.

“Careful,” Slade said as he caught Robin from behind. “I don’t need your dramatics right now. Terra, explain.”

“They snuck up on me” she said quietly. “the last two guards, I mean. They tried to knock me out with a rock, but all they did was make my head bleed. I fought back, and that made them mad. I think they broke my wrist,” she added, and held up her arm. Sure enough, her hand was hanging at an unnatural angle. “They shoved me in a van and drove me to a building just a few blocks away, but when they opened the door to let me out I broke their noses and ran.”
She took a deep breath before finishing her story. “I heard them shouting to go after me and then
dogs barking, so I got as far as I could but I was bleeding so that wasn’t far. I crawled behind here,
hoping that the trash would hide my scent until you got here if there really were dogs after me.”

“That was smart,” Slade said, extending a hand to help her up. “Let’s go back to the base.”

Terra pulled herself up, and Robin grabbed her by the waist and helped buckle her into the backseat
of the sedan. Slade pressed the pedal to the floor, and they were on their way home.

Getting Terra cleaned up was Robin’s job, but Slade cast her wrist. After it was done he gave her a
painkiller and sent her to bed early. Robin tucked her in and breathed another sigh of relief before
rejoining Slade in the main room.

“Robin,” he said slowly, and Robin stilled, “I know you considered betraying me today.”

It was like a punch to the gut. “No!” Robin protested, fear coloring his voice. “I didn’t. I swear. I
would never do that! Please, Slade. You know that. You have to.”

The slap across his face had Robin stumbling backwards, though he stayed on his feet. Slade stared
down at him with his signature intimidating gaze. “Disobeying even one of my orders is tantamount
to complete betrayal, Robin,” he said coldly. “I know you considered it, thinking of ways you could
save Terra first and complete the mission second. But that is not what I asked. Any failure to follow
my orders to the best of your ability is akin to you attempting to rebel, and you know what that
entails.” Robin nodded. “Answer me.”

“Yes, Master.”

“You understand what I can and will do if you attempt to deceive me.”

“Yes, Master.”

“You remember the promise I made you on the very first day, when I told you that any misstep of
yours would result in my pressing the trigger button, which is kept on me at all times.”

“Yes, Master.”

“And, most importantly,” Slade finished, closing the gap that had formed between himself and
Robin, “You know that I will absolutely keep my promise.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Good boy,” Slade said, and Robin relaxed his posture slightly. “Now, tell me why you considered
disobeying me earlier.”

“It’s …” Robin clenched his fists and took a steadying breath. “I just … I couldn’t help but think of
when you took me out of that cell, and I’d trusted you but that was wrong, and--” he felt his throat
closing up as tears threatened to spill over his cheeks. “I just--I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to trust
you this time either.”

“Oh, Robin,” Slade said, and there was so much genuine pity in his voice that Robin broke down.
He flung himself into Slade’s arms and cried into his Master’s chest for the second time in recent
memory. Slade petted his hair comfortingly as he assuaged his apprentice with his words. “The
torture exercise was never intended to break your trust in me. That was an unfortunate and
unforeseen side effect. I was simply trying to make you stronger, trying to bring out your untapped
potential. I apologize for betraying your trust in me.”
Robin laughed weakly. “You’re apologizing to me? This day just keeps getting weirder.”

“Watch it,” Slade said, but his usual venom was absent. “Listen to me, little bird. I did not wish to give you doubts. You may trust me unconditionally, and you will. That is an order. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Master,” Robin mumbled into Slade’s chest, feeling better already. “I trust you.”

“Good.” Slade gave Robin a pat on the shoulder before peeling the younger boy off of himself. “Now, get cleaned up and go to bed. You need to rest.”

Robin nodded, but hesitated.

“Something wrong?” Slade prompted.

Robin shook his head and gave Slade another quick hug before running off to bed.

His dreams that night were of the Titans, writhing on the ground in agony due to his misdeeds. Robin was pleading with Slade to stop this, but Slade simply gazed down at him with his singular frigid eye. “You did this,” he said calmly. “Isn’t this what you wanted?” Robin screamed no, no of course this wasn’t what he wanted, even though he wasn’t their teammate anymore he still didn’t want them to hurt like this, didn’t want them to die, but Slade was unmoved. “Your words say no, but your actions from earlier say yes,” he said, and Robin woke up in a cold sweat just as the Titans stopped screaming because they were dead.

End Notes

Title is a line from 'Paradise Lost'
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