Jason and Tim have a Bad Case of Middle Child Syndrome

by JustSomeStories

Summary

Jason and Tim don't care about each other. Saving the other is just an obligation. After all they're family. Fury is almost as annoyed by their denial of caring as he is with their presence in the Marvel Universe. They both want to get back before anyone notices that they're gone, because in all honesty their whole situation is embarrassing. Good thing no one has noticed yet.

Notes

Hope you guys enjoy it, I really like exploring the friendship and brotherhood of Jason and Tim. (Originally posted on fanfic.net)

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

It was a dismal parking lot where the pair found the presumed cause of the second anomaly. In a past life they would have been at a Walmart; the ghost of its letters could still be seen in the off coloration on the wall. Occasionally, when strong wind blew through, a shopping cart would roll across the tattered asphalt like an urban tumbleweed. Two sets of eyes watched such a sight, one irritated by the accompanying shriek the cart made from a faulty wheel. A repulsion blast broke the wheel further, along with the entire shopping cart.

"I could never have a child." Tony grumbled, stepping over the burning pile of plastic. His mask was flipped up revealing his heavy under eye bags and a bitter frown. His facial concoction of frustration, irritation, and exhaustion could only be achieved by someone who had been woken up at 3 a.m and sent to an abandoned Walmart. "Too squeaky."

"Don't tell Peter that." Steve warned. He scanned the parking lot, hands gripping his shield. "And let's try not to warn whatever caused this that we're coming."

Tony flipped down his mask and it shut with a clank that rippled across the parking lot. "Whoops." He took a couple steps further, each one causing a dulled thunder of metal hitting asphalt. The parking lot was riddled with muddy puddles from a recent storm. Tony made an effort to splash through every one he came across.

The Captain rolled his eyes. He would have preferred to spar the Hulk, rather than explore a parking lot with a sleep deprived toddler adorned in an expensive soup can. Unfortunately the world seemed to like to take from Steve, so there he was in an unnervingly open space with only a man child to back him up if he got jumped. Said child began rotating as he searched for heat sources.

"Peter's not a kid," Tony said. "he's a teenager." Nothing was coming up on his sensors except a pigeon that kept hopping around the lot like a middle aged soccer mom who'd forgotten where she'd parked. "He'll still probably give me an aneurysm though. Get that inheritance early."

"He's in your will?"

Tony shushed him. The pigeon joined in with Tony by chirping at the American legend. Tony gave the bird a nod. In a world where seemingly everyone loved the Capsical it was nice to have at least one ally, albeit a feathered one. Sadly, it was a fleeting moment as his clanking scarred the pigeon off.

"Did you get something?"

"I think so."

Tony picked up his pace, the clanking getting more frequent as a result. He sent a look over his shoulder at Steve who was jogging behind him.

"Looks human sized too, though I'm not ruling out a flight of pigeons yet." He tried to keep the mood light, knowing full well it was the former; and the temperature was dangerously cold. There was a woosh as he started flying towards the heat source.

Clank he flipped open his face plate again. They had come to where all the shopping carts got stuck on their spontaneous migration. It was a dip where the ground under the asphalt had started to collapse. It was like a snapshot of a tornado composed of carts, and right in the eye storm a body
It was a short male whose hands gripped his stained stomach. He was masked and costumed in black and red with a leather jacket several sizes too big for him hung around his shoulders like a blanket. His shirt had been torn near the middle partially exposing his mauled stomach. Tony landed beside the boy his mind screaming: don't be dead.

The boy's chest move slightly and with each breath he whimpered. Steve kneeled next to the boy moving his hands to examine the wound. "Tony." He called. "Get someone here." He didn't risk scooping the figure up, afraid of worsening the cut across his gut. "Paramedics, S.H.I.E.L.D, anyone."

He closed his mask and for the third time that day his face plate ringed out soundwaves across the walmart gravesite. "J.A.R.V.I.S, call Fury." The boy reached a bloodied hand towards Steve, gripping onto his forearm; It left a red smear across his arm.

"Jason?" He croaked. "I think B's gonna, gonna-" He struggled to get out words in between his shallow breaths. He held on tighter to the forearm pulling himself up slightly so he could get closer. "He's gonna-" He slumped back into the ground, staring blankly towards Steve through his masked eyes .

"It'll be alright, kiddo." The Captain consoled as the boy lulled back into unconsciousness. His hand was still securely holding onto Steve through it weakened the longer he didn't wake up.

"It'll be alright" He echoed. He shifted, repurposing the jacket to help slow the blood flow. The ground beneath the boy had turned a sickening shade of red that blended in with the feathered cape that he wore.

A few feet away Tony broke his conversation to Fury, "Who the hell is Jason?"

The first anomaly had fallen into the main hull of the helicarrier, and considering that he was the trespasser, he seemed overly pissed at Fury's crew. The man wore a red helmet with the basic contours of a human face. The helmet blocked out any facial expressions, yet the man compensated through his colorful langue.

"Where the fuck did the kid go?" The man's shirt was tainted red, and seeing that he was unharmed Fury doubted the blood was his. He ignored the people drawing guns on him, and instead he motioned with his hand a little higher than his shoulder. "He's around yay tall, real annoying."

Agent Coulson shot Fury a glance before cocking his gun and aiming it at the unknown figure. "Identify yourself." Fury watched with a raised eyebrow. Although the figure had talked airly, his stance was closed off and he was shifting his weight back and forth.

He gestured towards his helmet, tapping it twice with a gloved fingertip. "Red Hood." He let out an exasperated sigh, before turning towards Fury, rapidly identifying him as the one in charge. "I think you need to fire that one."

Coulson straightened his arms out further. The man, Red Hood didn't seem bothered by the twenty something guns pointed at him, though as time ticked down his posture got more tense. He was the human equivalent of a time bomb, Fury knew that much. His muscles were spring locked and it was only a matter of moments before the man did something.
"Put your hands up, and Identify yourself." Coulson reiterated.

Coulson's words cut the wrong wire on the bomb sending the spring loaded man forward. He grasped a nearby agent holding them in such a way to limit movement while holding a gun to his side.

"Look, I don't have time for this." He dug it into the side harder making the agent wince. He was a newer agent, having only arrived early that month. Fury was determined to keep the agent alive long enough to learn his name. "Tell me where Red Robin is before I waste a bullet"

The hand gripping the gun held it securely, though the finger rested lightly on the trigger. If Fury had more trust in the agent he might have played the bluff, If Natasha was the one being threatened he would have bid his own eye. He was pretty sure this agent had ended lost in the engine room the other day. Instead he changed the game they were playing.

"We'll take you to him." He crossed his arms. "But not until you let go of my agent."

He could feel the eyes watching him calculatingly, considering the repercussions of releasing his hostage. Said hostage had gotten progressively paler in the man's grip. "We don't want anyone to die right before Christmas, now do we?"

The agent was pushed forward and barely caught by the back of his sleeve. "Good decision." Fury commented. He eyed the gun in Red Hood's hand. He somewhat solemnly switched the safety on before reholstering it.

"If the Replacment's dead so are you." He warned.

Fury strode forward, completely unaware who Red Hood was looking for. "He's this way." The man didn't move, instead watching all the guns pointed at him. He gestured towards his own holstered gun. Fury signaled agent Coulson forward, everyone else sluggishly put their guns away.

"Good decision" Red Hood mocked while strutting forward. His bloodied chest made him look like a bird of paradise, though perhaps, he was more like a dodo, too confidant that there were no dangers that when one finally showed up he'd become extinct.

The trio had left the main control room and were making there way deeper into the underbelly of the ship. Fury was hoping he could make it to the detainment cells before the man beside him placed a bullet in his head, or at least tried to.

"So, who are you guys?" Red Hood asked. "You definitely aren't the League; some knock off of Ra's guys?"

"Ra's?" Coulson asked. The name was unfamiliar to Fury as well, and he knew everyone's name. Not knowing the intruder was largely why he wanted to dissect the inner workings of his mind, the wires that kept him ticking. Also, knowing which buttons to press always made things simpler.

Yet he didn't know any of the man's buttons, instead, for when the man chose to get aggressive, Hill was calling a certain agent who could easily detain the man... theoretically... hopefully.

"You really must be new on the scene." He crossed his arms, hands gripping tightly down on his upper arm. "I don't think Ra's likes it when others steal his toys." He uncrossed his arm to run a finger alongside the wall as they walked, the other clenched at the side of his hip, holding a phantom gun.

Whoever this Red Robin was, he was the only thing stopping a gloved hand from grabbing a real
gun. The only button he could press, at this point Fury was so reliant on it that it was more like slamming down on a lever till it broke.

The gears whirling inside the man's head were the most concerning thing to Fury. An aware, likely intelligent opponent, had always seemed more dangerous to him than a brutish one. It was a spectrum though, he still would take this man over the Hulk.

Each moment that passed, increased the odds that the man would call Fury on his BS. Of course, Red Hood could have already called his bluff and was merely biding his time. Waiting till they got further away from help. A worse decision in the long run, the man must have been clueless if he didn't know of the heavy hitter making her way to him.

"How's he doing?" Red Hood inquired. "The Replacement's alright isn't he? No major injuries?"

Shit. "Yeah, the kid seemed alright." Red Hood nodded. His hand started to clench again, opening and closing repeatedly. His steps became heavier.

"Good, that's good."

Things were not good. He had begun to get the feeling maybe he was the dodo. They went through a door that slammed loudly behind the trio.

His non visible face was not a hindrance, Hood's body language provided all the accommodations Fury needed; he was currently trapped in a hallway with a rabid dog whose tether was slowly getting loosened.

"You seem to care for him." Fury commented.

"More of an obligation."

Another corner turned. More seconds passing. A child getting more reckless as they ran out of time to answer questions. The anxiety of those last ten seconds. The hopeless last ditch effort to bubble in the final five questions. The aftermath of knowing that your time has run out.

They turned a corner and he was slammed to the ground. Coulson rushed forward, yet the figure grabbed his shoulders, redirecting him against the metal wall he had been inspecting. Coulson crippled to the spotless floor with an audible thump. He stuck something into the man's side that caused Coulson's muscles to start to relax.

"Minor sedative." The man reassured. He placed a boot atop Fury's chest. His hand gripped the gun aiming it towards Fury, the other reaching down to hold him up by the collar. "Now tell me who the hell you guys are and where Red Robin is." He clicked the safety off.

"You're bluffing."

The man chuckled darkly. Fury's fingers struggled to tap a button near his side. "I only need one person to get information." He let go of the collar causing Fury's head to bang against floor. "I don't doubt your lackey knows nearly as much."

"Does it seem like we know where he is? Who he is?" Fury starred past the barrel into his own reflection in the helmet. "You're smart enough to have realized that we don't have him."

The barrel shook slightly.

"Tell me where he is, I'm not going back to Gotham with a dead robin, I'm not facing Bats that
"way." He leaned closer Fury, denial reeking from his mouth. "So stop lying and start talking, it's in your own best interest." The gun rested on his forehead, it was slightly warm, it'd be shot recently.

"And to think I thought you were smart."

The boot pushed harder on his chest, he was lucky that a rib hadn't cracked yet. The radiation of hatred wafting off Red Hood was enough to give Fury skin cancer, or at least some suspicious moles. Fury increased his manipulative hold. He couldn't get the man to the holding cells from here, but he still hadn't failed.

"It seems like your little buddy must in bad shape, yet you're wasting your limited time interrogating someone who knows nothing."

"He's not my buddy."

The Hood's intensity to deny any relationship to his associate intrigued Fury. Something was complicated there, an obligation he had said.

"Say that when he's dead."

The man winced before gripping the gun tighter, shaking slightly.

"Shut up."

Fury's eyes caught sight of a shadow of red pass behind the man. He smirked. The pressure on his chest was extremely painful at the point, not that it would matter in a few seconds.

"Fuck you." Fury enjoyed seeing the man suddenly tense up at his words before spinning around. Natasha jumped towards the man who had turned around too late, her legs wrapping around his neck, she pulled back causing him to fall towards the ground. As he fell he shot the gun with it meeting its mark inside the bicep of Fury who braced the pain with a clench of his jaw that made his teeth hurt.

A syringe in Natasha's hand tried to make contact with the target. The two grappled on the ground, and each time that she got close he would flip her around. He tossed his weight around, while still being evasive enough to not get stabbed. "You'll have to speak to my pharmacist before you stick something in me." He flipped Natasha over rolling with her so that he was on top. Her hand holding the syringe was pinned against the ground.

Fury held the gunshot wound wincing as he went over to Coulson. A finger pressed against his neck assured that the man hadn't killed him, though if what had been administered was a sedative was still unknown.

Natasha had gotten Red Hood into and arm bar and was getting dangerously close to breaking his skin with the needle, as well as his arm.

"Oh hell no" He grunted, twisting out of the grip. He rolled her over again. The two were at a standstill neither able to completely overtake the other.

Fury's arm had taken out a loan, and its student debt was currently ransacking his nerves. He was slumped against the wall beside Coulson observing the man. Red Hood kept on trying to grab a something. Natasha kept on canceling his attempts. Her foot came down on his hand causing him to mutter out swears under his breath.
He had begun to get concerned that the battle would be never ending. When a voice came overhead through the speaker system. "A second anomaly has been detected."

Red Hood's head snapped up. "Red Robin." Though he was only distracted for a moment, it was long enough to break the cycle. Natasha thrust her hand forward bringing the needle into his side. He gripped it, before standing to his feet.

"I just want to reiterate." He pulled the needle from his side tossing it to the ground where he crushed it with a boot. "Fuck you." His hand grabbed the wall to help support himself. "I cannot emphasize that enough."

Natasha caught the man as he fell forward with droopy eyelids. "Fuck you guys so much." His dead body weight caused Natasha to grunt and adjust her grip. She glanced over to Fury.

"Sir, you and Coulson need to get medical attention."

"I know." He pulled himself from the ground. His hand was covered with a sickly substance. He had checked, and there hadn't been an exit wound meaning the bullet was still taking up quarters in his upper arm. "Let's find somewhere to set this guy first."

"Sir?"

"Yes?"

The man was slumped across her shoulder like a toddler who had eaten an entire wedding cake and had to deal with the childhood equivalent of a hangover; a sugar crash. A drop of drool was threatening to roll down her shoulder.

"Who the hell is Red Robin?"
Blame Game

Tim was prepared to face a lot of things when he woke up. He was expecting Jason to be a complete ass before reminding him not to almost die next time. He was expecting Alfred to be tutting over him somewhat passive aggressively, and possibly Bruce watching from the staircase, with Tim unable to tell if it was out of concern or disappoint.

But he was not in the Cave. No Jason being a jerk, no concerned Alfred, no emotionally stunted Bruce. There was just a blonde man sitting in an armchair watching him sleep. Definitely not unsettling in the slightest.

He could still feel the mask over his eyes, yet he was no longer in his Red Robin costume, instead some red and yellow scratchy pajamas. An IV was plugged into his arm, pumping him full of stuff he wasn't sure he wanted.

Blondie had noticed he was awake, but was waiting for Tim to do something first. Blondie's frame reminded him of Jason, just a bit taller with more muscle mass. Considering that Jason was built like a truck, it was unnerving to see someone built stronger. Blondie was possibly a meta, Tim had yet to determine that.

He took notice of the room he was in. A med bay. He eyes flicked to his bandage wrapped center. Whatever painkillers he was on did little to help the acheing, he'd grown an immunity to most of them. The pain and wound were just another variable to consider. The room was sparse for the most part, just his bed, the armchair, and the machines he was connected to as well as a window looking over the city. His heart rate pinged on the monitor behind him, slightly faster than normal.

A weapon would have been nice, the IV needle was a possibility, but getting it out and disconnecting it from the wire wouldn't be worth the time wasted. He was at a size disadvantage, injured, and in unknown territory. His best bet was to get Blondie to pity him more than he already was. Pity, Tim had found, was great for lowering someone's defenses and getting information.

He gripped his midsection, doubling over and letting out a weeze. The man's face contorted into concern.

"You okay, Red?" He asked.

So he knew who he was. He could still work around that. His self hatred hurt more than the pain, after all he'd gotten himself into mess. Probably Jason too, though he'd deal with that shit show after he got away from Blondie.

He shook his head. "It hurts." He pouted up towards the larger man who had begun to melt any defense. It wounded his dignity to have to act pathetic, but thankfully demon brat wasn't around to mock him. "W-where am I?"

"Avengers' tower."

"Where?"

Concern changed to confusion, he'd have to back peddle. He let out a second strained gasp, this one was more real as he had tried to sit up. Avengers' tower, that was a name to remember.

"Be careful, you don't want to rip your stitches." He could agree with Blondie on that. Then he'd have to restitch them and that'd be a pain without Alfred's help. Not preferable, but if required he'd
rip the stitches open like a child on Christmas who'd just found out his parents were getting a divorce.

"Can you help?" He winced. One hand wrapped around his center, the other grabbed the headboard. Blondie nodded, getting into arms reach to help Tim sit up. He didn't exit range afterwards.

"Why am I here?"

"I don't know if I'm classified to say."

Mysterious. Tim didn't mind a mystery, though he suspected Jason was a large reason he was stuck here. He grabbed onto the man's upper arm feigning a need of support; he succeeded in pulling the man closer. For some reason, Tim holding onto his arm seemed to spook Blondie.

"You were bleeding out in a parking lot." He caved. "You caused some sort of anomaly."

"Oh." Teleportation likely, he had definitely not been in a parking lot when he started to bleed out and he doubted that Jason would have left him to die in one. He didn't think Jason held a lot value for Tim's life, yet he hadn't tried to kill Tim in months. They'd been getting along better.

"Where are my things?"

"In the lab downstairs." The man pulled his breath in. "I wasn't supposed to tell you that." He smiled towards Tim who was hanging off his arm like a drugged up koala. "Not like you're going to grab them though."

"And Red Hood?"

That made the man stiffen. Of fucking course. Jason had made things worse somehow. As long as Hood wasn't dead Tim could fix this mess… somehow. He was still working some things out.

"Sorry kiddo, can't tell you that one."

Tim whimpered through the pain, hoping it'd work a second time. It didn't. Seemed like he'd gotten all the information he could, or almost all of it.

"Who are you?"

This sent the man for a loop. His eyebrows shot up. He onced over the injured boy, confusion poorly hidden behind his concern.

"Steve Rogers, Captain America."

Tim's lack of recognition seemed to startle Blondie more. Tim murmured something then motioned with his hand for Steve to come in closer so he could hear. His ear was turned to Tim.

"Sorry Steve, you seemed nice."

Tim brought his knee into the side of the man's head. His hand ripped the IV out and then stabbed it into Steve's shoulder. He vaulted over the man's shoulder his stomach whining after him, begging for him to go lay back down in the bed. The man's shocked voice called after him.

He closed the door behind him and hurried down the hallway. He didn't run, instead observing the
hallway he was in and looking for a tight space he could fit in that the man couldn't. He came to a
doorway. On the other side he could hear the chattering of voices. He caught sight of the
ventilation system on the ceiling. He opened the door a crack to confuse Steve before using the
wall to help himself reach the grate.

He could hear the heavy footsteps running down the hallway. He struggled to open the grate. He
was holding himself up only by his arms and his injured midriff was chewing Tim out for all his
life decisions leading up to that moment. Tim was able to open the grate enough to slip in, he saw
Steve pass below the grate and run through the cracked open door.

"Red Robin is out." Steve yelled. "Lock the building down." The following commotion made Tim's
time limited. The vents were not the ideal place to be, they were loud and after checking camera's
he would be compromised in minutes. Not to mention they were disgusting.

He allowed himself to check his stomach and was thankful to see nothing had torn yet, a few more
fancy flips and he'd be getting intimate with a needle. He could hear Alfred's voice patronizing him
for not letting his wounds heal.

"Master Timothy" He imitated. "You really should be resting."

He dragged himself through the vents wondering how his life had come to this. He really shouldn't
have chosen the vents. He had no idea where he was going. He was like a tourist trying to hard not
appear like lost, despite being totally lost.

"My life is a mess." He decided. He came to a grate and peaked out. He heard people talking
underneath it. He didn't recognize who was speaking.

"I can't believe you were beaten by an injured ten year old." Someone laughed. Tim bristled as he
wasn't ten years old. It was Damian's M.O to have his age confused, not Tim.

"He plays dirty." Steve said. "He was being all helpless."

"We told you he was likely dangerous." A female voice chastised. "Especially considering what his
accomplice was like."

Jason. They were talking about Jason. A more irrational part of him wanted to jump from the vents
and directly find out what they knew. That'd be an idiotic move. As much as Tim hated the vents,
it was better than placing himself in a losing battle against Blondie and Co.

"Has anyone told him about the kid yet?" The first voice asked.

"Fury's using him as a bargaining chip." The female replied. "Tell us who you are and we'll let you
know if he's dead or not sorta thing."

"That's cruel." Steve said.

And stupid in Tim's own opinion. Jason would always choose self preservation over Tim. Jason
would choose self preservation over anyone, it was just his nature.

"Did it work?"

"To an extent."

That was easily the most shocking part of Tim's day. He really needed to find Jason, before he
became too sentimental for his own good. Though he wouldn't find him if he stayed in the vent
being sentimental himself. It wouldn't take long for them to find out where he was.

He continued crawling, his vision was a little blurry from the pain. His teeth gripped on the collar of his shirt to stop himself from making any noise. The trio were not worried presumably as they thought he couldn't get out. He wasn't above proving them wrong.

A robotic voice overhead made his day significantly worse, if that was possible. "Sir, it appears as if Red Robin is somewhere in the ventilation system."

"Locate where yet J.A.R.V.I.S?"

"I will notify you when I find him."

Tim picked up his pace. He placed a hand down too hard on the metal causing it to cling out a noise. He winced, picking up speed. It was definitely time to leave the vents. He saw a grate above him.

He peaked his face over seeing a man with a quiver on the other side observing the grate. Arrow man let out a screech jumping back. "Holy crap, its Walmart boy."

Tim had so many questions, most of them were unimportant. Though he did have a few to ask. He kicked out the grate. Something ripped. He was definitely bleeding again. Today was just such a great day for Tim.

He launched himself out towards the man landing on his back and wrapping his arms around his neck and his legs around his middle like a child getting a piggyback ride. "I'm not being known as Walmart boy." He said. He slammed tightened his arms around the man's neck, choking him. "Extremely dehumanizing."

The man slammed backwards into a wall trying to shake Tim. When Tim wouldn't fall off he continued doing it, each time making Tim grunt in pain. The robot voice came overhead again. "Sir, please try not to kill the boy." Tim gritted his teeth harder. He didn't need some overhead voice to come to his aid. He was fine. Fine if you looked past the reopened gash on his stomach.

"Get the hell off."

"Tell me where Red Hood is."

"No way little dude."

Tim's place on the man's back left him positioned against the quiver. He recognized what seemed like some trick arrows similar to what Green Arrow used. Though he had no idea what they did, so he grabbed a normal one.

He brought it down into the man's shoulder blade. The shrieking continued and Arrow man backed into the wall one final time, Tim let go rolling away from him. The yellow parts of his shirt had started to turn red.

"You stabbed me!" He accused.

"You kidnapped my brother." He thought for a moment. "And me too I guess."

Arrow had one hand holding onto the arrow shaft, the other threw a punch at Tim. He didn't dodge fast enough and it grazed the side of temple. Sloppy on his part. If he wasn't slowly bleeding out, he could have dodged. He tried to kick at the man, but doubled over in pain. He gasped out trying
to see past his blackening vision.

"I am not falling for that, Kid." Arrow man said. He kicked out Tim's leg making him fall painfully on the ground. He tried to stop from crying out, but failed. His hands had become covered in his own blood.

Blondie burst into the room followed by the presumed male and female voices. Tim made eye contact with him through the pain. He tried to push himself off the ground, but only left bloody hand marks on the otherwise clean.

"Clint!" Steve yelled. "What are you doing?!"

"How is this my fault?!"

"What the hell Clint." The male voice said. "He's just a kid."

Clint gestured haphazardly at the arrow sticking out of his shoulder. "Hello? He literally stabbed me."

Tim chuckled a bit. He tried to push himself up again, but his hands slipped on the blood making him fall down again. He gave it one more chance, and was finally able to bring himself to his wobbly feet. He had lost this battle. It still didn't mean he was just going to let them just drag him off. He got into a defensive stance eyeing everyone in the room.

"How about one of you guys tell me where the hell Red Hood is." He swayed like a tree in the midst of a tropical storm. "Before I find out myself."

The male voice started laughing. He was a slight man with a goatee, just a couple inches taller than Tim. It was understandable to Tim why his was laughing, he must have looked pathetic, standing up in a puddle of his own blood, barely able to keep himself from hunching over. Not just pathetic, pitiful. He smirked before tossing his dead weight at goatee man.

Goatee man fell underneath him and Tim got up and started running. He hadn't run earlier, but now was definitely was the time for running. Or at least he thought he was running, he was more hobbling slowly from the four people.

"I understand now, Clint." Goatee man empathized behind him.

The back of his shirt was grabbed and he was pulled back by the woman. She was a redhead and exactly Dick's type. It was kind of amusing to Tim to imagine the two meeting.

"Hey." He greeted.

Bruce would have been disappointed in him. He hung like a kitten by the scruff of his neck. His body finally went limp as his adrenaline started leaving him. There was a bribe in Jason's future to get him to never speak of this mishap of a mission ever again. Once he found him that was.

"Hey." She replied. Steve was behind her watching him worriedly. Tim felt Blondie's urge to go check on him, yet the man stayed out of Tim's range. Smart.

She went over to Steve while still holding tightly onto Tim. "Take him back to the medical bay before he bleeds out." She narrowed her eyes. "And don't let him leave this time."

Tim was held bridal style by Blondie. Absolutely humiliating. Today really was the worst day. He still chose to Blame Jason, even if it wasn't his fault. He kept fading in and out of sleep.
Eventually, when he found himself mostly consciousness, he was back in his bed. There was an IV in his arm once again, his stomach was re-bandaged and Steve was back in his armchair. He tried to move his arms but found them restrained, same thing with his feet.

"Sorry kiddo." The man consoled watching as the boy strained against the restraints.

"Don't call me kiddo." He spat. Earlier the man's pity had been helpful, now it was just annoying.

The man got closer to Tim. "They aren't too tight are they?"

Tim glared through the mask. "Don't come any closer." He warned. "I can still head butt you."

The man retreated back to his arm chair and went back to watching Tim, sadly? Worriedly? Pitifully? He couldn't tell. He didn't like any off it.

"I don't know who you are Captain America." He said. "But you and your buddies are the worst."

He'd work things out. He figure out what to do.

There was a reason that Jason tried to stay away from the bats. Actually there were several reasons Jason stayed away from the Bats, and one was that things went bad whenever he interacted with them. Jason blamed the replacement for his situation. The baby bird had to accidentally cross paths with Jason, had to join Jason take down the drug ring, had to almost die. Now Tim was probably bleeding out somewhere, and it was Jason's fault, because he couldn't save him.

He was chained to a table by his wrists and his ankles chained to the chair. His clothes had been replaced with some surprisingly comfortable cotton ones. His belt was gone as well, along with his helmet. The only thing remaining was his domino mask which they hadn't been able to get off.

Across from his the one eye man was glaring at him with his arm wrapped up and in a sling with the audacity to use Timmy as leverage. The man, Fury, was some sort of leader to a spy organization. Jason was vaguely excited to gloat to Bruce about finding something he didn't know about. Things rarely went past Batman, things did like the Court of Owls, but it was rare. The thought of bringing up the spy organization was Jason's only source of joy.

Well that and the idea of getting revenge for them trying use the replacement as a chip in their game of poker.

"Who are you?" Fury asked.

"Already told you."

Fury tapped his fingers on the table eyeing Jason like a spider he was deciding on how to crush.

"That's too bad." He held a manila folder in his hands and started to flip through it. "I could have told you about your little obligation."

He kept on calling the replacement an obligation. It was fine when Jason called him that, that's what the kid was to him. He couldn't just let the baby bird go and get himself killed. When the man said it, it sounded wrong; like Tim wasn't a person.

"He's fine." Jason stated hoping it was true. The idea of having to carry Tim's cold body back to Gotham made his stomach churn like a Victorian country girl making butter from spoiled milk.

"I don't know about that." Jason clenched his jaw. He had been told that the replacement had been
doing better. An agent had taken pity on him and in passing of bringing food told Jason that the boy had gotten stitched up. "He ripped his stitches the other day, lost a lot of blood."

That idiot. Why couldn't he just lay still and wait for Jason to go find him. Isn't that what children were told to do when they got lost? Stay put and wait. Tim was supposed to be the smart robin.

"You better hope he's not dead when I find him." Jason threatened.

"I don't think you're in a position to barter." Fury closed the manila folder pushing it towards Jason, but just out of his grip. "Tell us who you are and I'll tell you whether we think he's going to live or not."

Jason knew what he was doing. The manipulative bastard held Tim's well being like a prize above him. Jason hated that it was working.

"I'm Red Hood. I work out of Gotham. I am the second Robin of Batman." He was hoping the name Batman would scare the man. He hated bringing Bruce into things, he hated bringing any of the bats into anything just look where it got him, yet his name did tend to have a certain effect on others.

The manila folder was so close; so painfully close. Then it was snatched away. Fury abruptly stood up taking the folder with him. Jason slammed his fists on the table.

"We had a deal!" He yelled.

"That deal required telling the truth, making up names will get you nothing."

"What the actual fuck are you talking about?"

Fury circled around Jason. He was observing Jason's body language. That jerk was always relying on Jason's body language. Apparently his words weren't good enough.

"I thought you would have some concern about the boy, I guess he really is just an obligation."

Jason slammed his fists down again. The handcuffs clanged on the metal table. It caught the man's attention who watched him with a insufferable raised eyebrow.

"You don't get to call him that." He spat. "I told you the truth so let me see what's in that folder before I pry it from your cold dead hands."

"Where is Gotham."

Jason thought he understood the mind games the man was playing at before, but now he was just confused.

"What do you mean where is Gotham?"

"I mean where is Gotham."

Jason snarled, but still chose to play the man's game. It wasn't like he was telling the man anything that he couldn't figure out. "East Coast, New Jersey."

The man looked at the double sided glass for a moment before handing the folder to Jason. He left not saying anything as he left the room.

It was difficult to flip through the files with his chained up hands, but he managed. Some were
reports on his condition, others were pictures. They hadn't been able to get Timbo's mask off either. He saw a picture that showed they had restrained Tim to his bed, a note under it read: *limiting movement to prevent escape or the re-tearing of stitches*. Jason chuckled, they were underestimating the replacement. The restraints weren't even metal.

Overall it was reassuring to see that Tim didn't seem to be about to die. Jason still planned to get out of wherever he was before the idiot worsened his injuries again. He stopped looking at Tim in the photos instead looking at where Tim was. A pane of glass in the room showed several tall buildings that Jason planned to use to find Tim. Wherever he was, he was in a skyscraper. He just needed to identify the other buildings once he got out.

The door reopened, Jason didn't look up. "Fuck off, Fury."

"Langue." A voice that wasn't Fury said. Jason snapped his head up to observe the new figure.

"Are you supposed to be American man or something?" Jason asked. The man was dressed ridiculously, it was like he'd gotten tangled in an American flag and then decided that the look was flattering. It wasn't.

"Captain America." He corrected. "You can call me Steve though."

"Yeah, no."

The man sat down in the chair across from him. Jason had seen this man in the corner of one of the pictures. The creep had been watching over the replacement. He glared towards the man.

"So you ruffled the replacement's feathers?" He didn't try to mask the hatred in his voice. It was enjoyable to watch the man squirm. "Nothing says American hero like beating up a helpless kid." Tim wasn't helpless, far from it. Tim had just turned 17 though and was badly hurt and the man across from him was holding the boy against his will.

"That wasn't me." He protested.

"Just your friends."

They sat in silence, Jason was annoyed by the presence of the man. His virtuous aura was all a mask and Jason was thrilled for the moment when he could beat it out of the man. That'd be satisfying. Other people weren't allowed to pick on any of the bat bunch, it was a Gotham masked freaks exclusive club. Well a Gotham masked freaks and Alfred exclusive Club.

"Are you guys ever going to let me see him?" The continued silence answered the question. Jason humphed setting the file down and staring into the table.

"He said you guys were brothers."

Jason kept staring into the table. That was out of character for Tim. He supposed that they were. In their messed up family, that was what they were, brothers; and family didn't let family get held captive by some creepy spy organization.

"Technically."

It didn't matter if this was all Tim's fault. He wasn't about to let the replacement rot. All he had to do was bide his time and play the right cards and then he could bring Armageddon down against the people who dared to mess with Jason, or worse those Jason was required to care about.
He'd find Tim, he'd fix this. Then he'd bribe Timbo so that he didn't tell Bruce that things had gotten as bad as they had.

Things would work out. He kept telling himself that. Things would be fine. He'd get them both out of Tim's mess.

Why did things always have to be complicated for Fury. For once he wanted a simple case. Not mysterious anomalies who were conveniently related. He was mainly determined to keep brothers from joining up, before he learned why they were here. They were manageable apart, yet together he wasn't as sure.

Unluckily, since life regularly tossed horrible situations at him, he was handed two individuals who were determined to find each other. Though maybe, if he manipulated the situation right…

"Agent Hill."

"Fury?"

He handed her Red Hood's file. "I need you to leak some information to anomaly 2. He needs to know where the other one is." She grabbed the file and loitered with a question.

"Won't he just come find him? Sir I don't understand the intention."

"The first anomaly won't be here." He picked up his own file leaving to go give the man the folder, but not before picking his brain first. If life was nice to Fury for once, then the man would take the prize, unaware of the poison riddled inside of it.

Things would work out. People were predictable.
Insecurities

A part of Steve was thankful that he couldn't see beyond the soulless whites of the mask. What hid behind them made Steve uneasy. Maybe a lingering intelligence that hid in the background only to snap forward in a moment's notice or an unhinged violence that had to be coerced out or worst of all precise calculating eyes that knew more than they should.

Steve suspected it was the latter.

They'd decided to call the kid, Red- though Tony and Clint preferred Walmart Boy and had managed to sway Natasha. As of yet, Red hadn't made a separate attempt of leaving, though something in the hidden gaze suggested nothing good of his seeming compliance.

Red Robin was always asking questions, dodging in and out in a verbal fencing game. He'd parry whenever someone interrogated him only to counter with a loaded question. Steve felt afraid to tell the kid what he had for lunch two Sundays ago. Who knew what he could do with that.

After a mishap with the accomplice, security around Red had been tightened. Although the boy seemed intrigued by this, having lifted a masked eyebrow, he didn't seem concerned. His lips had quirked a bit after finding out he'd be moving.

It wasn't long before he was in the Avengers section of the towers. Fury's requested to always have eyes pinned on the boy. Tony seemed fairly happy with this, he enjoyed decoding the boy's brain almost as much as Red seemed to like to pick theirs.

Clint wasn't as happy.

Hence the situation that Steve walked into. He'd just gotten back from his morning jog to see the rest of the present team awoken by a different type of alarm clock.

"Give that back!" Clint yelled chasing after the handcuffed teen who held a mug of coffee in his hands. The teen pranced around the archer while drinking the coffee as if it'd be his last.

"What's happening?" He asked as he ambled over to Natasha, his eyes never leaving the one sided squabble.

"Walmart Boy stole Clint's coffee." She supplied. Her body was tense on the chair, and she leaned her weight forward to watch intently. A hand dancing on the arm rest.

"I didn't realize he'd been allowed outside his room yet."

In the dance between Clint and Red, it was apparent who was the ballet instructor and who was the kid that'd stumbled into the wrong class. Clint's fruitless grabs were to Steve like getting sucker punched with a balloon. Bizarre, harmless, yet unpleasant all the same.

"He wasn't."

"Then how'd he?"

"I don't know."

It wasn't just her head that was un-moving, but rather her entire body except for her set of pupils following the boy around the room.
"Are you hearing me, Kid?" Clint asked.

The teen didn't respond, instead just drinking faster. Tony was watching from behind the counter, leaning forward slightly on his elbows. Natasha's gaze sapped in every detail of Red's movement. Her gaze was permeable to all information and her frown deepened the longer she watched.

Clint did a dash at him to which the boy twisted into the limbo instinctively before twirling around to look at Clint before darting off towards the bar. A slight limp now apparent. Natasha's hands flickered with a slight clench at Clint's failures.

"Be careful Clint." Steve said. "I don't think Fury wants either of you to get restitched again."

While Red had torn his stitches fighting Clint, Clint had torn his from reaching for a jar of pickles on the top shelf.

"If he doesn't give it back he'll need more."

Clint made another grab at the boy who turned, rolling off of Clint's back and dropping down only to use the momentum to jump onto the bar. With a look of defiance on his face, and one of defeat on Clint, the boy chugged the last of the coffee before dropping it onto the bar where it dully clattered.

"You can have it now."

He climbed off the bar, his limp had worsened from the extraneous movement. He would wince every couple of steps, although he had a small smile that hadn't left since Steve first saw him with the coffee mug.

He turned to Steve. "I'd like to return to my room."

Clint had picked up the empty cup and glared at Red. The teen didn't give Clint the gratification of a glance, instead staying focused on Steve. "So I can lay down before I have to speak to Fury."

The whiplash form the change in tone made Steve feel as if he was strapped to the top of a roller coaster by his arms and told to enjoy the ride before being tossed out to face whatever loops came up. And boy were there loops.

"Uh." Clint was sadly staring into his mug of coffee, Tony seemed about ready to dissect the teen, and Natasha was still just watching. "Sure, kiddo."

Red Robin began to walk towards his room. His hands jingled from handcuffs. His limp was now more apparent than before. Steve gave him an arm for him to lean on, the hair on the back of his neck stood up apparently thinking he'd given his arm to a vulture. Who knows, maybe he had.

"Thanks." He grumbled.

It didn't take them long to get to the room, and they were both fairly quiet on the journey. The boy's stare was ahead, his fingers tapping on the side of his leg. The boy was drowning in his thoughts and was too far in to notice the door.

"Hey Kid?"

The boy's fingers stopped. He sized up the door.

"Oh."
He scuffed the ground with his foot. His fingers began to tap on his leg again. The door handle remained hand-less.

"Are you going to?" He gestured at the door.

He didn't need to see the boy's eyes to understand the look shot his way. It was as if the apparently mundane situation had led the boy into a comatose state of boredom.

"It's locked."

"But how'd you get-"

Red sucked in his breath. His hand let go of Steve's arm to hold his center. Steve was quick to have Jarvis unlock the door. His question now gone, the new tenant being mild concern. He helped the teen to the bed, reattaching the cuffs to a chain that was near the leg of the bed.

"You really shouldn't push Clint like that." Steve said. The boy had started to sink into the bed, his tiny frame getting lost in the assortment of blankets, pillows, and throws. A couple of them had been stained in blood and would have to be replaced.

The teen shrugged. "I was on coffee withdrawal."

"You shouldn't drink too much cof-"

The boy pouted at Steve. A parry that made Steve clamp his mouth shut. His fingers were still tapping away on his leg. He never stopped pouting, and a hand still supported his center.

"Have you heard anything about Hood." With every parry inevitably came a counter, and Paired with his pout his counter should be classified as a weapon of mass destruction.

"I haven't heard very much." Red's gloom intensified. The boy let out a sigh, that Steve suspected he wanted him to hear, but was still quiet enough that he couldn't be sure. "Just that he's a handful."

A smile reclaimed ownership of Red's face. He wished that the teen would do it more rather than try and rip Steve's heart out like a commercial that had teary animals. "That sounds like him."

"So he's a good brother?"

Steve was fully prepared for the parry. Steve considered leaving the room before he would inescapably reveal more than Fury wanted. Getting an actual answer left Steve more dejected than a sidestep would have.

"It's complicated."

"Family can be tough." Steve tried. Bucky was like family and that was a rocky road if Steve had ever had to drive down one.

The teen laughed, though he wasn't in the room with Steve. Red had traveled somewhere Steve doubted he'd ever know about.

"You have no idea."

Steve wasn't in the room very long before he made his move to leave. The teen had stopped making conversation, and had gone back to swimming through his tsunami of thoughts. Steve wondered if that's what the boy's eyes looked like, a tsunami. A wave that rolled in with the intensity to level buildings.
It wasn't till he closed the door and locked it he realized he'd missed the biggest parry yet. It had been the re-clicking of the lock that had triggered it. He shook his head in defeat.

"Damn."

Red Hood was completely different than his supposed brother in Tony's opinion. The kid was entertaining, with a hidden wit that Tony hoped rivaled his own. Not to be vain or anything. The man across from him was not witty, most of his punchlines were born from a swear. Not exactly breathtaking.

Tony had been waiting for the moment to meet the first anomaly, and there was no real reason he should be here. It was really just that he was taking an unsupervised vacation until Fury got finished talking to the Kid or found out why Tony had gone out. Until then…

"So, you're Jason aren't you?"

The masked man was frankly physically imposing, especially considering, his 'brother' looked like a twig, the difference was startling. Even if not for the muscle, his presence made the room crowded as he bore down on Tony with a sharpened glare. It was more satisfying than Tony would admit to see the man splutter, even if it was barely noticeable. The brief break in his threatening demeanor was worth the inevitable hit now on his head.

"Sorry, I don't know a Jason."

The man's hands were chained to the table though Tony was still conscious to not put his hands within scratching difference.

"That's the name the boy mumbled while he was half dead." He re-looked over the man's build. "You kinda look the man he thought Jason was, similar build."

The man pushed against the handcuffs but didn't say anything. Tony was immensely uncomfortable with the silence, assuming that the man, Jason, was planning his murder in the void of talking.

"That kid's real smart isn't he."

Silence.

"Is he really your brother?"

Silence. A set of clenched hands.

"He keeps asking about you."

Bang. Tony jumped as Jason's hands slammed on the metal table. He found his voice caught in his throat wishing he had come in the Iron-man suit.

"Who the fuck are you even supposed to be?"

Swearing- so creative. Jason's articulation mastery was not Tony's primary prickling though. Tony wasn't used to being asked who he was, sworn at sure, but never asked for a name. Maybe Jason and Walmart boy were really related, they probably grew up under the same rock if they both didn't know him.

"Tony Stark." He grinned mimicking repulsion blasts. "You know, Iron man." His smile was not returned.
"Am I supposed to know who that is?" Jason paused. "Or care?"

Tony spluttered a second time unsure if this was a mind game or if Jason really had been living as a nomad in an uncharted desert for the past twenty years.

"What do you care about? Bleaching a single strand of hair?"

Said strand stood starkly out on the head of ebony as a streak of ivory. Unfortunately Tony would never learn of the why, as Jason ignored his question. Clueless and manner-less Tony thought.

"Cut the shit, where's Red Robin?"

"You haven't found him yet? He's chilling in Cancun."

Slam. Tony didn't need to see the man to feel the heat of anger exploding out of Jason. He could have been in Wisconsin and still have been in the blast radius.

"Why does everyone here think this is a joke." He latched onto Tony's hand which had inched too close to the muzzled dogs that Jason had for hands. Tony was pulled forward, his shoulder slammed into the table making him splurge out a muffled sound. "Someone's going to come for the us, maybe friendly maybe not. I need to find him, it's in both our best interests."

Nails dug into his hand, it was being twisted causing him to curve with it to prevent spraining or breaking. He didn't risk pulling away fearing that he'd hear a snap. This was significantly less fun.

"I'm gambling for the friendly ones." He pulled tighter till Tony's wrist couldn't be strained any further. "You guys should hope its the other ones." Then Jason pulled more. Excruciating. Harrowing. Agonizing. The limit had been hit and-

Snap.

Tony almost didn't hear what Jason said next over his own screaming.

"So are you going to take me to my brother or not?" Tony had backed near the two sided glass. Jason watched fuming from his place chained to the table. "Or do you want some bats to come break the other hand?"

Bats... Walmart boy had never mentioned any bats. That was a problem for future Tony, current Tony was just prepared to get as far away from the psycho brother as he could.

Jason was still yelling as Tony turned tail and backed out and slammed the door, triple checking that it was locked.

Perhaps the brothers were more similar than he had originally thought. They both held a skill for manipulation. Even if the methodologies were rather different in Tony's person opinion, though it was hardly subjective.

Well that and their ability to slip out of unslippable places. A set of dislocated thumbs had gotten another agent a broken leg and a concussion after Jason had gotten out of his cuffs. Walmart Boy's increased security was justifiable in Tony's perspective.

At least things were going fine with Walmart Boy.

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If Tim had been with Tony he would have hummed in agreement with that sentiment. Things had been going just fine. All it took was sedating Black Widow with a sample of his fighting style and
he'd gotten a sense of how his door locked. Well that and a returned pain in his stomach... The coffee had been worth it all.

He was getting antsy though. Tim took after Bruce, with his long convoluted plans; Jason on the other hand, Jason was not a master of subtly. He'd been slipped by Fury where Jason was, probably bait based on how easy it was to find. Sometimes though, when a fish is given the option of starving or biting into a suspicious worm, it's worth taking the bite and risking meeting the fisherman on the end of the line.

He doubted Jason had taken the bait. He'd seen it no doubt, though there was most certainly no Cavalry coming for Tim. Hence why Tim had to find Jason, because Jason would not find Tim even if fully equipped to do so.

They just weren't close like that.

He wondered why Nightwing hadn't come yet, or Batman. Not Robin though. Damian, much like Jason, didn't care much about Tim. Dick though, he cared about everyone, and Bruce; Bruce he would have come if he knew. Tim kept telling himself that.

His mind drifted to others. He'd called for Kon. He hadn't come. Neither had Bart, or Cassie. None of them. Casandra hadn't. Steph hadn't. Babs hadn't. They just didn't know. That's why he was alone in the room, his arms chained by a group of people he had never heard of.

They just didn't know.

Tim was glad that they didn't know. The situation was embarrassing. He glad that no one had come. Glad. He was glad the one person who did know wasn't coming. If Jason did come then there went his meticulous planning. Good thing he wasn't.

No one was.

His door swung open and there in all his one eyed glory was the bastard himself, Fury. Tim didn't like Fury. Fury reminded him of a Batman that cared about Tim's in the way a hunter cared about a deer.

"Come on kid." He went over to Tim unhooking his lock from the bed so that Tim could move beyond his bed or bedpan. He held onto Tim by the chain linking the handcuffs. Tim stumbled forward his stomach hurting slightly still. He should have twirled less while messing with Clint.

Fury led him out the door where two agents followed them as they walked. Tim had been in the possession of the Avengers for just over a week at this point and Fury had come to visit every day he'd been conscious.

It always sucked.

Sure, it was a great time to learn information. Fury let it slip out all the time. Even taking Tim for walks was a mistake on Fury's part. On past days he would lead Tim to the lab to look at his suit and ask questions about it. Tim often contemplated the larger intent, Fury, Tim suspected, was not as careless as he let on.

He really wanted Tim to take the bait, and Tim was prepared to take it hook, line, and sinker. His plan accounted for it. It accounted for if Fury knew his plan accounted for it. Tim wasn't too full of himself to say that he sometimes overthought things. Overthinking things is the only reason Tim's alive though, so he'd deal with the paranoia. It was just a bat thing.
"So kid." They got into the elevator. It wasn't a tight fit, there was still a lot of space in the elevator, but Fury's constant watch made him claustrophobic and the elevator emphasized it. "Who are you?" He didn't wait for Tim's parry continuing before he could cut him off. "I don't mean your civilian identity, who is Red Robin?"

They had come out at one of the unused floors that Fury often liked to take Tim to where he could avoid the Avengers and the general public. Tim considered the question. The genuine tone unsettled Tim as Fury never seemed genuine. The guy was a total snake.

"I work in Gotham with Batman."

"Who is Batman."

Tim stopped in his tracks, though he was jerked forward a bit as Fury didn't stop immediately and still had a hold of Tim.

"You aren't one of the people who thinks that he's a myth still right?" Tim asked. "People haven't believed that for years."

"I have never heard of a Batman until I met you and your uh…"

"Brother." Tim supplied. It felt weird to say. That's what they were though, in some tangled way of the word. Didn't make it anymore normal.

"Brother," Fury continued, smirking as he said it. "Brought him up."

Tim hummed while thinking, his fingers tapping on his leg. Everyone knew of Batman, it was only the superstitious who thought he was a myth. A myth can't punch someone in the face though, and Batman could do that, he'd seen it plenty of times.

"Batman watches over Gotham." He watched Fury intently. Fury was nodding as Tim talked, he had begun to drag him along on their walk again. "A vigilante I guess."

"And your connection to him? You said you worked with him?"

Tim didn't like answering the questions everyone knew the answer to. It made him queasy when the ulterior motive wasn't present. Everyone had an ulterior motive.

"He trained all the robins."

"There's more of you." Concern edged into Fury's voice.

Tim ignored Fury as they stopped to look outside of a window. The sun held high in the sky and the city below them was bustling. Below them, as they were so high up, it was nice; almost like being on the rooftops of Gotham again. Just cleaner and brighter.

"I'm going to ask some questions." He stated. He reached a hand out to touch the glass. Sure the city was nice, but he'd prefer to be home. Even if no one was looking for him, Gotham was still his home with or without Nightwing, Batman, and all the others. Sure, it was lonelier, but home is home.

They just don't know.

"Who are the Avengers?"

Tim was too busy being homesick to notice the shadow coming towards the building.
Jason had found it extremely stress relieving to break the wrist of Tony. Sure, he still hadn't been able to cross examine where he thought Tim was with what someone else knew, but it'd have to do. He needed to find Tim.

When Tony had left, he'd been expecting someone to come in and tighten his restraints more, that's what they'd done the last time. He was just hoping they didn't remove his bathroom privileges. That'd just be inhuman- and remove the only time when he wasn't chained to that stupid metal table. His only time to attack. He needed that privilege for several reasons.

No one came for at least two hours. When someone finally did stalk in, he recognized her as the woman he'd fought in the hallway. The one he could've beat if stupid Tim didn't have to be on the cusp of death.

He hoped Tim wasn't dead.

She watched him with disdain. He offered her his most charming smile.

"I promise I didn't mean to break him."He put his hands in the air as much as he could feigning innocence. "It's just that bones, well you know how they are." He made a crack noise with his mouth.

"I'm not here about Tony."

"Then let's agree to forget what I just said."

"It's about Walmart- Red Robin."

Jason stiffened a bit, but tried not to let on how intently he was paying attention now. He tried to remain lax, knowing full well that both agents saw through his bullshit.

"What about him?"

"Do you know of any masked Assassins?"

Jason knew this would happen. It happened because these thickheaded agents couldn't get it through their brains that he had to find the replacement. His rage started to bubble, building up inside him. He didn't care if they knew he could undo this handcuffs. That they were child's play. He didn't care if they took away his only lock pick.

He worked on the one discreetly. He slammed his other hand on the table redirecting attention to it. Another slam on the table disguised the click as the right one popped open. "What do you mean masked Assassins?"

He didn't care if she saw him unlock the left one, he could do it before she made it to the table. If they took Timmy…

Widow took notice of what was going down. She jumped forward as the left one clicked off. She was tackled mid jump by Jason who soared over the table towards her. They crashed against the ground with her taking the blunt of the fall.

"What happened to Red Robin?"

The assassin had found his rulers prize. Sure he had gotten away at first, an inter-dimensional
mistake. There he was though. The Detective. The one Ra's had sent him for. The charge was at the window completely unaware.

He hadn't expected it to be so easy. The teen held himself strangely, the cut on his stomach inflicted by another Assassin hadn't healed yet. He was without his gear, his belt, his mask.


The buildings defenses had been overturned two rooftops ago. Now it was just a matter of getting in, grabbing the Detective, and getting out.

He braced preparing the jump.

He wasn't used to his jobs being this easy.
Sorrow filled his chest as starred towards the city with his head lulled against the glass. He could almost imagine the coolness of it was the night air hitting his face as he danced across rooftops. His tugging thoughts of home grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him till he ached all over. Gotham was disgusting compared to New York, but he couldn't help but imagine it through rose-colored glasses.

"You don't know who the Avengers are." Fury said without inflection. "Neither did Hood; though he seemed more… pissed off about it."

*How eloquent.* Tim didn't stop looking from the window. "Your detective skills continue to astonish me."

It would have seemed merciful to onlookers, Fury letting Tim watch the skyline. It wasn't. It was locking a starving coyote inches away from an abandoned Thanksgiving dinner and hoping it submit before it chewed its own leg off. He could gain some freedom, he just needed to divulge all Bruce's secrets.

Yeah, no. He'd rather chew off his own leg

"You aren't from around these parts are you, kid?"

"Suppose not."

He'd long since figured out Fury didn't mean it at face value, the drastically different New York city had been hinting how far from home he was. Tim wilted deeper into the floor; the pain of longing for something he wasn't sure how to return to overwhelming. His only feasible connection to home was locked in a Helicarrier probably stewing with hatred for Tim.

At least some things stayed constant.

"The Avengers are the good guys; they help people. You can trust them."

"Everyone thinks they're one of the good guys. I think I'm one of the good guys, but you don't trust me."

Fury paused. His shadow perched over Tim shading him from the moonlight even further than the glass already did. "Suppose so."

He hugged his knees as they lapsed into an uncomfortable silence. He'd sell one of his kidneys if it meant he got to feel the brisk night air and have a shot of adrenaline. And he'd thought coffee withdrawal had been bad.

When he had wished for a thrill though, he hadn't meant for someone to cut the lights. Still, it got
his heart pumping nonetheless. He stood up, back against the window. "That wasn't you was it?"

"Was about to ask you the same thing, Kid." Click. Fury pulled out his gun, snapping the safety off. "Could be Stark's fault."

"As if we'd be that lucky. You know, I'd be a lot more help if I wasn't handcuffed."

"Not happening." Well, he tried. Fury grabbed him by the arm tugging him behind him. "Stay close, coms are down."

Tim bent his knees into a fighting stance. "Lovely." He squinted into the darkness, he thought he saw movement to the left. Upon turning, he was met with shadows.

Absolutely fucking Lovely.

Tim reasoned that maybe whoever broke in wasn't there for him. After all, he was stuck in a different dimension surrounded by people with Wikipedia pages dedicated to who had personal vendettas against them. What were the odds that the intruder had come for him? Close to null.

That thought was tackled out of his mind as he himself was tackled. He scratched at the hands, an irritated puff leaving his mouth. "Are you kidding me?! Seriously? You guys" He pulled his head into intruder's face. "Tell Ra's to leave me the hell alone."

"You know these guys, Red?" Fury began running, his gun held up as Tim's attacker made for the stairwell. "Mind shifting a bit, so I don't shoot you?"

The arms that held him were squeezing into his abdomen. It took all he had to not hiss in pain. "I would if I could." His arms were trapped and his feet dangled over the floor in a way Dick and Jason had grabbed him before to tease him for his tiny stature.

"Shut up." The assassin glared down at him. The arms tightened and his midriff slapped him full of pain.

"Someone's cranky."

Behind him, Fury was losing purchase on the assassin. They neared the stairwell and Tim groaned. "Don't use the stairs! There's an elevator right there." He twisted to bite the man's arm, it would have been effective if not for the body armor, instead he got a mouthful of fabric.

_Clang._ The door banged against the wall and the man jumped over the side of the railing, skipping a flight of the stairs. Tim cried out on impact, his eyes clamping shut at the shots of pain radiating from his midsection. Fury had started running up the stairs towards the Avengers level.

"Holy fucking hell, do you want me to bleed out and die?"

_Pat. Pat. Pat._ Fury's footfalls were erratic. He doubted Fury or the Avengers would be able to stop the assassin in time. Not unless Tim put up one hell of a fight. His brain did a record scratch and he reconsidered the thought; he stopped fighting.

Why waste such a beautiful opportunity?

The assassin left the stairwell after climbing down two floors. Tim took sight of the sizable cut in the pane of glass. He whistled, mock impressed. "Wow, how'd you get the alarms off."

"Shut up."
The assassins made for the hole and Tim could feel the wind hitting his face. The actual wind whipping across his face, it was illustrious. He took a breath enjoying how it felt against his scratchy throat. Gold and red blocked his indulgence.

"That's not very nice," Iron-Man said. "Why don't you set Walmart Boy down and we can discuss proper etiquette together."

Tim would have dragged his hands down his face if he could move his arms past his elbows. *I can't believe that stuck.* He just wished to whatever divine figure chose to make his life a living joke that Jason or Damian never caught wind of the name; he rather liked his dignity.

He was tugged forward as the assassin jumped on top of Iron-Man, tossing something onto his back before diving off like an Olympic swimmer into a decent guided by a grappling hook.

In the distance, he heard a crack of electricity accompanied by the distinctive sound of metal hitting concrete. Right as the crash of Iron-Man doing a water-less cannonball sounded out, the assassin's feet hit the nearest rooftop running.

Tim clenched his jaw through the jarring pain waiting until the tower was out of sight. It took a good ten minutes of rocky running before Tim acted. The man took a jump for the next rooftop and Tim pulled himself forward mid jump making off balancing the man into an uneasy roll.

"Thanks for getting me out of there, what's you're tipping policy?" He was still held, and he elbowed his way out of the grip. "You know what, I'll just Venmo you or something."

He was grasped by the ankle and pulled back into the ground. The man climbed back on top of him, snarling face glaring down not pausing before he sucker punched Tim in the jaw.

He caught the second punch in the chains of his handcuffs twisting till the guy tipped over. Tim shook the cuffs -each shake ringing out a *ting*- till the assassin's hand got free.

Tim jumped up, kicking towards the man's rib with a barefoot as shoes had been deemed too dangerous for him. If he had been on the fence on if the Avengers' treatment had been dehumanizing, being denied proper footwear would have been the tipping point. At least let him have slippers or something.

The barefoot barely snapped back before the hand grabbed it. The assassin got up, rubbing his side and eyeing Tim's hunched body. Even if his posture had been up to Alfred's impossible standards, the other man would have still loomed over him.

"You can't win this."

Tim rolled his eyes and his shoulders; something popped. He tightened his jaw glaring up at the man. "I've heard that too many times for it to mean anything, buddy." He ground his teeth like a determined herbivore. "Try harder next time."

He launched towards the assassin, his fist catching the assassin's jaw, he punched a second time with his wrist being caught mid-swing. He brought his elbow into the man's kneecap freeing his wrist.

When he tried to back up out of reach, the front of his shirt was grabbed and he was hauled into the air. He kicked against the chest fruitlessly. "You can't win this." The man repeated easily hefting Tim up.

Tim caught sight of the bare hands. He spat at the man's face before biting into the bare fingers.
Blood hit his tongue leaving him wanting to reel from the metallic taste, nonetheless, he kept clenching down till something snapped.

He was dropped and landed roughly on his knees and he yelped as his ankle twisted. He got up despite his ankle stabbing him with a thousand little knives-and regained his stance while blinking through the pain. "I said, I've heard it a million times."

The man made another dash at Tim and he was hit dead on and pulled into the ground. He had his breath knocked out without time to regain it as he was pummeled by elbows and fists.

For the most part, the assassin avoided his stomach apparently not wanting him to bleed out. At least wherever Ra's was, he didn't want Tim to die; It wasn't a soothing thought, but at least someone was somewhat considerate of him- even if they had sent an assassin after him.

The man paused, a grin appearing on the only visible part of his face. "Nice try, Detective."

In the pause, Tim brought his head into the head of assassins and grabbed onto the man's elbows and rolled with him till he was on top. He kept hitting the man till he stopped groaning.

He got up shakily from the rooftop, wiping his bloody fists on his pajama pants. "Fuck you." He'd been about to leave when his foot met a piece of loose gravel. After letting out a string of swears Jason would be proud of, he made his way to the assassin. He took off and slipped into the stolen shoes that were several sizes too big.

He reckoned he looked ridiculous in his oversized pajama pants and shirt. His look a of child who'd snuck into their parents' clothing only accentuated further by the ankle boots that went up a great deal past his ankles. The only thing that would have stopped a possible passerby from laughing would have been the blood covering him; some of it his own, most of it not.

He made his way to the edge of the roof climbing down onto the fire escape, wincing with each step. As the adrenaline wore off he started to realize how many bad life decisions he'd actually made. Nonetheless, he climbed down the ladder coming into the alleyway with a new vigor spurred on by the lucid night air.

I've made it this far, now I just had to find a Helicarrier. He struggled to not let a grimace accompany the thought. He'd be fine.

Somehow.

The back of Widow's head slammed against the floor. Jason glowered as he punched her face. "What happened to him?"

Jason's life was a dumpster fire that smelled of rotten bananas and Tim was the damn discarded cigarette butt that ignited it. He would have preferred to have been kidnapped with Goldie or even the demon of all people. Fucking Tim.

The likelihood of Tim bleeding out in a ditch didn't seem high to Jason, but then again, Tim was a goddamn idiot so who knew. If he was, Jason would slap the life back into him… and steal his shoes, Jason's feet were freezing.

"We don't know what happened to him."

"Bullshit." He pulled her into a headbutt. "What did you bumbling bitches let happen?"
"Maybe let me speak and I can explain." Jason was mildly impressed; he'd expected more yelling and scratching after he'd broke his cuffs. He stood up, pulling her with him.

"What happened."

"Well-" The door banged open and looking like a child who'd walked into to his father dressing up as Santa Clause, stood Hawkeye with his bow drawn. "Clint-." Hawkeye was apparently enraged by finding out the behind Santa's beard that he shot an arrow towards Jason. Instinct kicked in and he caught the arrow blinking down to where it would have entered his side before he brought it down into Widow's thigh.

That's when the yelling really started-not just Widow-but everyone in the room, himself included. "I think we need to all calm down," Widow said grabbing at the shaft of the arrow.

"I think we're past talking things out!" He brought his knee into Widow's gut and her breath jumped out of her throat. "I have to find the idiot before he gets himself fucking killed"

"Goddammit guess we have to do it this way." Widow scaled him wrapping her legs around his neck. He was punched in the gut by Hawkeye. Jason pushed the arrow shaft in deeper making Widow's off-balance for a moment in which he shook her off by running into a wall. Repeatedly.

She fell to the ground still clutching where she'd been stabbed. "Now I know how Walmart Boy felt."

Hawkeye punched at him with his right hand the other one guarded and wiggly as it hung outside of its sling. Jason pushed it out of the way, his own hand darting towards the quiver like a lizard spitting out its slimy pink tongue to catch a fly. Though his fly was sharp and metal.

Unknownst to Jason, Hawkeye was having some serious déjà vu as he was stabbed in the shoulder yet again. "Holy shit, you guys are related." He pushed Jason off of him.

Jason grabbed him by the cuff of the neck pulling him back in. "Thanks for making my day." He brought Hawkeye into his elbow and he crumpled onto the floor. "I've really enjoyed this." He stepped over Hawkeye towards Widow who was trying to steady herself.

"Fury won't let you reunite with him unless it's on his terms." She had grabbed a concealed pistol aiming it towards him. "It'd be better to just give up now."

"Fury hasn't met a bat before." He slapped the pistol out of her hand and it clattered away from them. He headbutted Widow causing her to topple down beside Hawkeye. The two of them looked like discarded origami figures abandoned by their unskilled creator do to their disfigurement.

His glanced at Clint's boots a small smile forming. He left the room locking it behind him, a new pair of boots laced up tightly. He hadn't realized how much he had missed shoes.

Things had gone alright, now he just needed to find the Replacement and try and save them both from whatever mess the moron had gotten them into. Fucking Tim.

He hoped he wasn't in a ditch.

Sam had been about to eat a bagel. It was a rather nice bagel with a spread of strawberry flavored cream cheese on it. He had been prepared for that bagel, the perfect end to a great day. He'd finally gotten to go on the Helicarrier and that bagel was going to be his big finale, his triumphant ending
He never got to eat his bagel.

Fury made his way to the table where he'd been preparing his crowning glory, a bagel of such magnificence that its legacy would live on in his bloodline. The bagel had been mere inches from his mouth when Fury had to indignantly pipe in.

"Jason's got out and I suspect Red Robin is trying to get here."

He dropped the bagel back onto the plate with the splendid, evenly spread, rose-colored cheese smudged against his face. "Goddammit." He picked it back up, trying to hold it around the cheese as to keep his fingers clean.

He failed; cheese got everywhere.

"Do you need me to go find him? Either of them?" He reluctantly dropped the bagel going to reach for his nearby napkin that he'd laid the plastic cream cheese covered plastic knife on. After wiping his hands off, he leaned back in his chair a smidge making it creak.

"We need Jason to leave. He can't know that Red is coming to him."

"Why?" Sam pulled out the chair next to him a bit. He immediately regretted it as Fury glared at it. Right. Not the time for sitting. He scooted out from his chair, a screech drawing the attention of the others in the room.

"He doesn't know where the kid is, he'll go check at his last known location."

"Avengers Tower."

"Exactly. That's where the others will be waiting for him." Fury's shoulders were tense with a vein threatening to implode right above his left eyebrow. Sam tried very hard to not look at it, he really did… it was just so prominent.

"So we need to find the kid when he gets here."

The vein flared more. Under the silent intensity of Fury, he decided he'd rather die eating his sublime bagel than never getting a taste of it's sweet and salty juxtaposition. He picked it back up not caring of consequential the mess.

"We think he may already be on the ship."

The bagel wavered near his mouth. "You what? You guys, don't know?" He placed a steadying hand behind him. "How do you guys not know if he's on the ship?"

It was a wonder that the vein didn't just pop, but also didn't physically leave Fury's forehead to go and murder Sam where he stood and pin it on his closest living relative. "Just set down the damn bagel and come on."

He did such, leaving it behind on the paper plate he had grabbed. It was one of his proudest moments; not shedding a tear as he had to part with his life's greatest work. He sighed, following Fury out of the cafeteria.

"So where do you think he'd be?"

"The vents."
Sam looked up apprehensive at the ceiling. It made him squirm to think of someone crawling through the air ducts like a human rat. "I didn't even know you could get up there."

"Neither did I."

Fury led Sam through the labyrinth of a Helicarrier, his lips held in a thinned line the entire time. As they walked they came upon two men knocked out cold and left-leaning on the wall.

It was reminiscent of toys left strewn out by a toddler after who'd broken into tears after accidentally breaking them. It caused a shiver to run through his body starting at his neck and scaling down into his toes.

*Freaky*

Sam pressed a hand against their necks. "Which one do you think it was? Little red or big red." Fury said nothing but called someone in to come to pick the pair up.

"Let's keep going."

Fury's long coat billowed behind him as they walked. Sam couldn't help but find it a tad dramatic, but he did regularly dress up as a bird, so who was he to judge?

They'd opened up the stairwell and started walking down. It was awkward, their silence only filled with the slight pitter-patter of their footsteps. Sam swallowed wishing for anything to cut through the awkward atmosphere that suffocated them.

He wishes were answered when a scream sounded out followed by a body tumbling down the stair. Fury didn't even bother to give Sam an overdramatic, knowing look before he started running up the stairs. Sam checked on the woman's neck before following Fury up the stairs.

He'd seen that woman early in the main hull of the Helicarrier. She'd been nice, told him where he could get a good bagel.

When they got to the top of the stairs, the door was opened and the tiny figure of a teen engulfed in oversized clothes was getting smaller. He wore oversized boots that clunked against the ground.

"5th level, heading north towards detainment." Fury yelled into his collar. Sam hoped there was a com there and Fury wasn't just shouting into the distance. He didn't take Fury as the insane type, but he had denied Sam his bagel so who knew. No sane man denied someone their bagel.

"You bring your suit, Wilson?"

"Nope."

The kid was fast, too fast. Red's pajama pants were stained red and Sam decided not to question whose blood it was.

Fury could deal with that shit show.

"What is this kid's problem?" He wheezed to Fury. They'd nearly lost him twice when the boy had made sharp turns or doubled back. His speed hadn't decreased, though some of the overly intense jumps or turns he had to do caused him to swear.

Something was up with his ankle. He suspected adrenaline was the only thing holding Red up, like the strings attached to a marionette to make it dance.
A door opened ahead of them and Agent Coulson popped out in front of the kid. Like a quarterback preparing to tackle the opponent, he bent his knees and held out his hands.

Red jumped, grabbing the shoulders of Coulson and propelling himself past. "Shit, shit, shit," Red said as he landed. A stumble in his step almost allowed Coulson to rebound and grab his arm.

He snatched his arm back and dashed off again. The stumble had caused him to slip up enough though; Fury raised his gun taking aim at Red, Red who couldn't be older than a minor.

Sam pushed Fury's arm down. "He's just a kid, what are you doing?"

Fury pushed Sam off of him. "It's a tranquilizer. Wilson, let go of me." He did so and Fury brought his arm up and let a shot out.

Red ducked down the dart sailing over his head. He looked over his shoulder at them. "Nice shot, not nice enou-" His voice slurred as a second shot entered his leg. "Well, crap."

He took off running again. Sam was starting to hate the teen more with each second he had to chase after him. What kinda kid took a tranquilizer and could push it off for that long. He just wanted to catch Red so he could get back to his bagel.

So Sam ran. He ran for his bagel.

The kid was going surprisingly fast considering the dart sticking out of his calf. Though with each second his run became less of a steady trot and rather an uneasy hip hop; like running after a bunny brandishing a knife.

As they turned the corner, Fury swore beside him. If Sam hadn't been accustomed to categorical dangerous figures, he might have thought the tall man was just a lost employ who'd wandered into the bilge of the Helicarrier.

The man's head jumped up and he half expected to be asked which way to the food court, instead, the man stayed silent though Red Robin ran with more vigor. It wasn't till the kid barreled into the arms of the man that it started to set in.

"You're a fucking idiot, Red" The man picked up their target balancing him on his hip, a pistol brandished in his other hand. "If you guys like your kneecaps you'll back off."

That's when reality finally caught up to him, seeing the heaving teen separated from them by the hulking figure. The barrel of Widow's stolen gun waving at them. They'd done the one thing Fury had told them not to do: They'd let Jason find Red.

Goddamnit.

Sam and the others stayed fast despite the weapon paraded towards them and the almost annoyed look on Jason's face. Red got more noodly and was held a bit tighter. "Fine. I'm going to fucking enjoy this."

Sam didn't think he'd get to have his bagel.
There in all his sickly, coffee dried glory was the fucker who’d gotten him into this mess in the first place. Fucking Tim. Tim who had the pure gall to look worse than the last time Jason had seen him.

The Replacement had been having brunch with death beforehand, but he’d somehow upgraded that to a three-course meal? *What the fuck Tim.*

Of course, there was also the people gunning for Timbo.

Tim, who was half dead, was getting chased by not just one person, but three. His annoyance at Tim’s condition, though still present, melted away into anger- because who the fuck thought they got to do that the Replacement?

Well, Ra’s, Scarecrow, Dr. Light. He could make a rather extensive list if he wanted to with his own name at the bottom scratched out; a thin-faced lie to cover it once being bolded and circled on the list.

Before Jason could grab the moron Tim crumpled into him. Tim’s chest heaved against him. “You’re a fucking idiot, Red.”

Jason slung his arm around Tim, hefting him up onto his hip. He glared at the people who’d been chasing Tim a snarl snapping off his face at them. “If you guys like your kneecaps you’ll back off.” None of them did, typical. “Fine. I’m going to fucking enjoy this.”

Fury, the leader of the crusade, stepped forward, palms extended. “Jason put him down. He doesn’t have to be your obligation anymore. Give him to us.”

He tightened his grip on Tim, Tim who, while in a hazy daze surrounded by people hell-bent on kidnapping him, laughed. *Fucking laughed.*

“Heh… You called me an idiot. At least I didn’t let them know my name.” Tim’s words slurred together as though he’d stumbled into a winery and went to town. A victorious finger wiggled in the air, his other hand holding onto Jason by the neck, with his head wobbling into his shoulder. God did the kid have a bony face.

“Sorry, Red. That’s on you too.”
“Ah damn. Really?” He mumbled into his shoulder. He dropped his hand to join the other around Jason’s neck. Tim’s hold should have been tighter, it shouldn’t have felt like balancing a drunk spaghetti noodle with a vengeance to slip his grip- be it a conscious effort or not.

“Yeah, ya Dipshit, Really.” If Jason hadn’t known better some of the eyebrows of the ‘Lets Harrow Tim’ club had softened. “Now move your bony nose some, I can feel it denting me.”

Tim responded by groaning and digging his face further into Jason’s shoulder. “No.”

Jason just felt he had to reiterate: fucking Tim. No trademark could emphasize it enough; no circle ‘R’, no ‘TM’, could possibly indicate how much the word ‘fucking’ should be associated with Tim’s goddamn name.

Out of the trio chasing for Tim, he recognized two of them: Fury and Agent Coulson. Both were complete bastards in every sense of the word.“So, about those kneecaps.”

“Give us Walmart Boy, he’s hurt. We can help both of you”

Tim lifted his head to glare. “Fuck you.” His head sagged into Jason’s shoulder with more vigor. Ouch. Jason readjusted his grip, so he held Tim half bridal against him with his head hanging off his shoulder instead of into it.

Jason saw their tense shoulders, all of their mouths mid-opened prepared to ask him something. To tell him to put Tim down, why even give them the chance.

.He didn’t hesitate though the world did as he pulled the trigger. The bullet made its way, through the thick molasse of time, towards Fury’s kneecap.

Like a racer paces from last, getting hit with their second wind, the world sped back up, desperate to get 38th out of 39th. The bastard with cheese on his face pushed Fury aside-the bullet whizzing past both of them-and he dashed arms outstretched for Jason.

Scratch that- not for Jason, for Timbo.

In his tranquilized journey through hell, Tim’s arm had slipped and hung down. The bastard grabbed onto Tim’s twig arm and started to pull. Tim’s eyes squinted, confusion clouded them over.

“Hgh?!?” Tim’s body started to slip as he mumbled disorientedly.

Hell no.

Jason pistol-whipped the man across the cheek sending him reeling, a second gunshot grazing his thigh. “Let’s all back the hell up. The next one won’t cut so close.”

“Sam, pull back.”

“But-”

“Pull back.”

The bastard did such. Tim had retracted his arms gripping onto Jason’s shirt instead, a glossy look reminiscent of a corpse in his eyes.

“Look here, this is what’s going to happen.” He gestured with his gun, taking a moment to point it at each member of the trio. “I’m going to take Walmart Boy and you guys get to keep your ability
to walk. Capisce?"

“Fuck You!” Tim slurred, hands pushing against Jason. “Not my nam-” His words dropped off as his eyes closed, the sedative finally settling in.

Fucking Tim. What a moron. He adjusted his grip nonetheless.

“Capice?”

All three of them took a collective step back. Jason doubted Fury hadn’t called in some backup so he himself, backed up while waving his gun towards them.

“I’m going to leave and if I see anyone... well you know what will happen.” He backed towards the stairwell he had come out of.

“Just give us, Red.”

Why couldn’t Fury comprehend it? Why couldn’t he drag it through his one-eyed, thick-headed skull lacking a brain bigger than a pea that Jason wasn’t about to give him Tim like some lost puppy he didn’t know what to do with. Tim wasn’t a puppy and Fury sure as hell wasn’t an animal shelter.

“I’m not giving you my fucking brother, so stop asking.”

Said brother was currently drooling on him. Ew. Maybe he was more like a dog than he’d originally thought. Fucking Tim.

He tried to open the door and an awkward moment passed between the four as he struggled to find the door handle without turning around. His hand grabbed it and pulled the wrong way.

“You have to push, it’s not a pull door.”

“Just shut up.”

He pushed into the stairwell gun aimed forward. He hadn’t expected to reach a wall so soon. The door closed and before he could determine why someone would put a wall there, an arm grabbed and spun him around. Captain America, the absolute bitch, held him up by the collar. Fury’s backup had gotten there sooner than expected.

Only the tips of his toes touched the ground, but Jason shifted-to the best of abilities- to shield Tim with his body. Captain America hesitated in the punch he’d been about to throw. His face oddly soft despite the gun pointed at him. Jason didn’t care about whatever sentimental realization the man was having; he shot that fucker in the foot.

Jason ran up the stairs tossing a: “Fuck you!” as he got further away. Every So often, he’d jangle Tim a bit too roughly making him gasp in his drugged up state. Why couldn’t he get cut open somewhere more convenient? The stitching on the stomach made everything so much more difficult.

He reached the top level, both thankful and annoyed no one had intercepted him as he’d climbed the stairs. On one hand, it’d made things easier, but on other, he really wanted to let his anger out.

He tried the door and found it locked. He shot the gun at the handle, but it clicked; of course, he’d wasted the last bullet on Captain America. He let out a long sigh before he slammed the gun against the handle repeatedly.
Sometimes you just had to things the old fashioned way.

The handle fell of clattering past his foot and bouncing down the stairs. *Plat, plat, plat.* He kicked open the door which had taken longer than he wanted to open.

*Better than it not being able to open it all.* He pushed the thought away, he wouldn’t run out of time again, not with his moronic replacement depending on him.

No more timers clicking down to zero.

The air slammed across his face, another complication arising. Since when had they’d been in the air? Tim let out an indiscernible murmur. He seemed immensely less annoying asleep; more like a child from Crime Alley than the irritating asshole who’d replaced him.

“Alright, Red. Let’s steal a helicopter.”

The roof was covered in them, large and small. He took off with his accomplice climbing into one to his left that had an open middle section. He swung into the cockpit, though in doing so, he accidentally banged Tim’s head against the roof.

Tim groaned, Jason swore.

He lowered Tim into the co-pilot seat, managing the unconscious fuck up with more care. He figured the less Tim hit his head against things the better off he’d be. Just a hunch though.

After buckling Tim in like a sugar crashed toddler, he got to work on hot-wiring the Helicopter. His head ducked under the controls his fingers dancing through the wires with a proficiency only a previous Crime Alley child turned protégé of Batman could manage.

“Blondie?” Tim’s words slurred out of his mouth. A sweltering stew of nonsense boiled over a flame of sedatives.

“Replacement, I need to shut your mouth for a hot second. I gotta focus.” He pulled two wires together and the engine started to hum.

Hell yeah.

“Blondie,” Tim mumbled with more urgency, the stew reaching a boil. Jason got out from under his seat, his hands gripping the controls. Tim reached over and slapped him, it was a light slap. No real power behind his sluggish movements. Still, *what the hell Replacement.*

“Blondie,” Tim raised his hand for a second slap, Jason caught his wrist.

“What the fuck are yo-” He looked past Tim out the window. “Oh shit, Blondie’s right.” Captain America, was dragging himself across the landing pad towards their helicopter, blood trailing behind him from his foot.

Hell No.

He pulled back on the controls, the helicopter starting rise as his version of Michael Myers lumbered towards them. Though, instead of a butcher's knife, his reckoning held a star-spangled shield full of more promises than any bloodied knife could hold. Promises of pain, defeat, and just a plain bad day.

Things he’d rather not deal with at that moment.
Their ascent was stalled when the shield banged against the side. He tossed a hand out stopping Tim from jerking forward too much. He was a pizza delivery man, and Tim, his box of precariously stacked pizzas.

“Fuck.” The helicopter steadied out and the shield bounced off in a way that broke nearly every rule of physics to return to Captain America’s hand. “Replacement, hold onto something- did you seriously go back to sleep?”

He was going to murder that kid. Tim’s head rested against the window, with small snores escaping. This kid could stay awake for days, but one tranquilizer and he decided that Captain America trying to kill them was good white noise to nap to.

Fucking Tim.

The helicopter lifted off and he pulled it towards the edge of the landing zone. It was pulled to a stop as if tethered to the roof; he hadn’t seen anything holding it down though. He glanced out Tim’s window.

“What the actual fuck.” Captain America was holding onto the edge of the helicopter with sweat plastering his face as he pulled, his other hand gripping a pole on the roof. “Let go, dude.”

He didn’t, just ground his teeth harder. Jason clicked the helicopter onto autopilot, the end location a random wheat field. He stole Tim’s oversized boots and held onto the door frame as he leaned outside the helicopter.

“Seriously, drop Fido.” He threw Tim’s steel-toed boot with much force as he could towards Captain America. It hit him square between the nose, leaving a red mark. Still, his grip didn’t break.

“Just stop the plane and we can help both of you.” He spoke through rough breaths. “The Avengers help people, let us help you.”

“I just threw a shoe in your face, you’re holding onto my plane, and you think now’s a good time for a lecture?” He tossed the other shoe harder. “Oh my fucking god, let go.”

He grabbed his empty gun throwing that as well. It hit with more volume and an audible thump. Still didn’t work. He swore some more looking for other throwable things in the helicopter. It was stark besides the parachutes, and he wasn’t about to throw those. He wasn’t an idiot.

“Looks like your out of things to toss. Calm down and we can talk things out. You’re acting unreasonably.”

“Don’t act like you have any dignity in this situation.” He crawled out of the safety of the hull and grabbed onto an outcropping pole on the exterior of the helicopter. He kicked his foot downward. “Cause we’re both fresh out of dignity.”

He’d have to play this up for Timmers if he asked what had happened. He didn’t want to lose any of his hard-earned reputation of being a badass. Not that he cared what the Replacement though of him of course.

He kicked down at Captain America’s hand. “At this point, this is honestly just sad.” Captain America grunted as Jason’s foot smashed against his hand. “Why don’t you let go and we can both never speak of this?”

The wind tore against Jason turning him into a paper airplane in the midst of a tornado. It was a
bitter gust, cutting through the thin clothing they’d given him. The spy organization seemed rather well off, they didn’t have to skimp on the quality so much- just plain rude.

“I can see you care about him. I won’t let Fury tear him from you again.”

“Shut up-” Jason stomped on the hand again, channeling all his anger into its descent-“Don’t act like you know me.” He brought his boot down a third time, he could see it in the grip, the fingers were losing the battle for the helicopter.

“Rogers?” Ting. A bullet embedded itself in the metal beside Jason. Well shit. “What is going on?”

With his final stomp, Captain America’s grip broke and the plane started to rise. Jason still dangled off the side, a monkey who’d climbed a palm tree in the midst of a tropical storm. More bullet shots hit the helicopter, he yelled as one entered his shoulder.

“Holy shit, do you guys want me to fall to my death?”

He started to pull himself back into the plane. It was difficult, with only one hand. He managed to get himself half in half out, unable to gather the last bit of strength he needed. His breath hitched as his altitude and his chances of going splat against the roof were directly proportional.

The ground was sure far away.

He tried to pull himself in more but banged back against the floor. His grip started slipping, the tropical storm whisking away his monkey self. He grit his teeth. The gunshots had stopped.

Hopefully, it was because they didn’t want him to die and not because he was too far gone for them to care.

He steadied himself. The ground beneath him, tiny. The odds of getting the floor under him, tiny. The Replacement in front of him, tiny. Wait.

“Sit your scrawny ass back down.”

“No.”

Tim was holding onto one of the chairs, his other hand grabbing Jason under his bad shoulder. “If you fall off this plane, I will make your life a living hell, Timbit.”

Tim’s eyes lacked awareness, still foggy from whatever they’d pumped into him. For all he knew, Tim could have been sleepwalking during a fever dream. If so, muscle memory had kicked in hard, even if Tim’s grip wasn’t very strong, the anchoring was enough for Jason to pull himself into the helicopter. His chest heaved because ouch.

Tim collapsed on top of him, the final stash of his energy pitching him past his limits. Jason scooped the kid back up, his steps wobbling as he headed to the cockpit. He slid Tim back into his seat, not hitting his head on anything that time.

Wherever Jason had been was long past their sights, past the clutches of whatever new spy organization had sprung from the cesspool that infected their screwed up world.

He buckled Tim in before falling into his own seat. He gripped where the bullet had entered. That’d be hell to deal with. He sunk deeper into the seat, the only thing visible to him the clouds.

The clouds were beautiful; the rising sun had turned them a rosy lilac color. He watched them with
hooded eyes, they were especially dazzling without the threat of falling through them.

Thank god for fucking Tim.

A bird squawked, shocked to see a gold and red metallic one gliding beside it. Tony offered it a salute before speeding up his thrusters and letting out a *boom*. A beeping GPS led him to his Christmas gift for Fury; it was already gift wrapped in a metal lining.

*How thoughtful.*

He set down inside of the helicopter, his feet clanging upon landing. “Hey Brothers Red.” Usually, he would have opened his faceplate to boast, but the two had the tendency to break stuff. He felt his face was too beautiful to be broken.

“Jason? Walmart Boy?” He looked into the cockpit and saw a good deal of blood, but neither of the men. He sighed placing his hands on his hips looking a great deal like a parent who’d just seen their child’s report card. He scanned the blood, deciding a sample would likely be useful in the future.

“It appears the two have vacated the helicopter. Would you like me to call Fury for you?” Tony groaned instead of answering and flopped down into one of the not blood-soaked seats. “Sir? Are you alright?”

He ran a metal hand down his metal face. It let out an unfavorable screech of metal rubbing against metal. “No, I’m not alright! Now I’ll have to get Fury a gift card instead!”

Tim woke up feeling like he’d been run over by not just one truck, but at least seven. He sat up and decided it was more likely to have been eight. Below him, an old shirt acted as his pillow and his arm was handcuffed to the column beside him.

“What the fuck, lay back down-” Jason came into the room holding a paper bag. “Before I handcuff both your hands.” He spoke without looking at Tim, dark circles under his eyes.

Tim pulled against the chains. “What the hell, Jason?”

He stopped midstep, breaking the rhythm of his steady trot. “Oh, you’re actually conscious.” Jason set down the bag, Tim took notice of his bandaged arm. “I liked you better when you weren’t talking by the way.”

Tim jangled the cuffs. “Will you just take these off? Why am I even handcuffed?”

An accusatory finger wiggled at him and Jason made no motion to get closer. “Drugged you is the worst. You kept waking up and making stupid decisions. You tried to eat my sandwich the wrapper still on,” He paused, adding as a side thought: “And you kept almost pulling your stitches cause you wouldn’t stay fucking still.”

“Just uncuff me. I need to talk to you about a complication.”

“Wow, I take it back, non-drugged you is way more annoying.” He played with a bobby pin he’d pulled out from behind his ear, a smirk on his face. “You haven’t even said thank you yet for me saving your tranqued up ass.”
“Jason—”

“You know, it's so easy to lose bobby pins, Replacement.” He twirled the bobby pin between his fingers. “I was actually talking to Steph and Babs about it a week or so ago, how you can just drop one and it seems to pop out of existence.

Tim rubbed his temple with his free hand. “Jason, will you just unlock them?”

Jason fumbled with the bobby pin. “Whoops, almost lost it.”

Tim took a deep breath that he instantly regretted. Wow, his abdomen had not liked that. Jason winced alongside him. He waited for the pain to pass. “Thank you, Jason.”

That had hurt even more than the breath had.

“That’s the spirit, Timbo.” Jason crouched beside him, sticking the bobby pin into the cuff on his wrist. It popped off and clattered against the floor. Tim started to stand up, but Jason pushed him back down. “You aren’t about to start cartwheeling, are you? Because I don’t want to have to stitch your sorry ass back up.”

“I’m not Dick.” Jason glared and Tim continued. “No, I’m not about to start doing acrobatics, Jay.”

“Hell no, you’re not.” Jason went over to his paper bag as Tim stood up, a steadying hand on the column beside him. It looked like they were in an old factory of some sort, the scent of charcoal still hanging in the air.

Classy.

Jason threw something at Tim from the bag, a large sweatshirt and a pair of pants. “I couldn’t find the kids’ section, so the pants are going to be big.”

“Jason, I’m seventeen. I don’t shop in the kids’ section.”

“Wow! Thank you, Jason.” His voice rose several pitches as he mimicked Tim whose voice was not that high. “How thoughtful of you, Jason.” He dropped back to his normal tone and he tossed Tim a belt. “Here, so they don’t fall off.”

“Thanks.” He mumbled trying to ignore Jason’s victorious lopsided grin. Jason went back to rumbling through his bag and pulled out two wrapped sandwiches, but put one back and started chomping down on his own.

“You can have your sandwich after you change. Bloodstained isn’t a good look, Timmers.” Jason turned around letting Tim change in privacy. Tim slid on the pants and was regretfully thankful for the belt as they were too big. After securing the buckle he sat back down, his midsection aching.

“By the way, we’re in a different dimension.”

Jason turned around mid-bite. “Wow, and I just thought B was being a bitch.” He gave Tim his sandwich. “Let’s be honest, he probably being one anyways though. And Timbo, I kinda figured out when Dick wouldn’t take my calls. Oh, and when I found out Gotham doesn’t exist.”

Tim rolled his eyes and took notice of the chill entering his feet. “Where are my shoes?”

“Tossed them out a plane.”

They’d been in a plane, he certainly didn’t remember that. Everything past his initial chase was
hazy. He mostly remembered a lot of yelling, though that could have just been his internal monologue. “Why?”

“For reasons I won’t discuss without my lawyer present.” A smirk flowered from knowing something Tim didn’t. He was hit with a splitting headache fanned by Jason till it became a flame of omnipresent annoyance.

“Jay, I had to fight an assassin for the shoes.”

“Oh boo hoo, who hasn’t? We can go to Target later and get you some light up Sketchers- so Ra’s is after you?”

“Guess so.”

“Better you than me.” Jason’s eyes didn’t meet Tim, instead looking over his head at the column. “Why’s he such a creep anyways? You ghost him on tinder or something?”

“Don’t ask me.” Tim hugged his knees and started to eat his sandwich. It was a damn good one too. Shame whatever sandwich shop Jason got it from probably didn’t exist in their dimension. “I think he’s just predetermined to be creepy.”

Jason laughed and sat opposite to Tim. “Seems about right. He’s all ‘hello Detective’ to B. Like what the fuck?”

“Fucking weird.” Tim agreed, taking another bite of his sandwich. “I don’t really remember a ton after the sedative started to kick in. How’d you get out?”

“Let me tell you, Walmart Boy, I had to use all my ass-kicking capabilities.”

Tim choked on his sandwich, his face paleing. “What did you just call me?”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know your guys' thoughts. I'll probably have another chapter up in a week
**Prank Call**

Chapter Summary

The Avengers and Fury discuss Tim and Jason, Jason just wants to buy groceries without interference

Chapter Notes

Just so you guys know, I switched J.A.R.V.I.S out for F.R.I.D.A.Y that way I could add Vision at some point. Hope you guys like it!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Our trans-dimensional assailants are likely to have headed towards the city seeking both medical help and supplies-”

Tony choked on his scalding coffee. “Excuse me, but you need to cha-cha slide and take it back now y’all. They’re what?”

Shoulders tensed as Fury’s sightlines narrowed in on Tony. His eye became a beady slit promising a cold end; if he died under dubious circumstances and Fury wasn’t convicted he’d haunt everyone in that room.

“Heading towards the city for medical help and-”

“We both know that’s not what I meant, Captain Hook. Trans-dimensional? They aren’t just like Canadian or something?” If he was going to die young, he was going to go out in proper swashbuckling manner while figuratively flipping Fury off the entire way.

Natasha clicked nails on the table with a slight smile. “You thought they were from Canada?”

“They seemed nice and polite, and we’ve never heard of them so...”

Sam took a seat beside Steve. “Nice and polite? One of them broke your wrist, Tony.” Tony’s wrist did ache under its plaster casting; maybe they weren’t quite that polite.

“The little bastard stole my coffee,” Clint sat arms crossed. “And they stabbed me… twice!”

“We get it, Clint, you don’t like the Brothers Red. We’re past that. Now I think we’ve all gotten a bit sidetracked.”

Clint’s complaining had been non-stop ever since he’d been found bleeding in Jason’s holding room. ‘They stabbed me!’ So what? As if not just about everyone in the room had been injured from the brothers. He did a once over of the room- okay everyone had an injury. Alright. Okay.

Everything was fine.
“You’re the one who brought up Canada.”

“Yeah, Nat. In the margins, I hadn’t meant for- you know what, let’s just drop it. What do you mean trans-dimensional?”

Fury held a pencil like a knife and looked at each present Avenger before he spoke. “‘Based off what they’ve said, the world they described doesn’t match with ours. Different heroes, different cities. Combined with the energy surges the natural assumption is-’”

“That is not the natural assumption. Trans-dimensional? We know of spacial abnormalities- teleporting and such-but we can’t just assume past that without doing proper tests.” Tony ran a hand through his hair. “For all we know, the energy surges fried their brains and that’s why everything’s so jumbled. It could be anything.”

Fury was connecting the dots, not through small jumps in judgment, but though canyon clearing leaps whilst wearing cement shoes. Fury was probably a conspiracy theorist. He replayed the thought in his mind and snorted.

Fury was definitely a conspiracy theorist.

“So find them.” Fury’d gotten gloomier after the snort and narrowed an eye at Tony. “Unfortunately, we can’t run tests through pure hypotheticals and circumstantial evidence. As I’m sure you’ve all realized, Big Red made off with Little Red which returns me to the more pressing point: they’ve likely headed to the city for-”

Considering Steve’s foot was too screwed up to do some slow dance from the 40s, let alone jump, his ability to leap into conversations remaining at peak condition was astonishing. “They want to get home. Or at least the big one does.”

Fury’s pencil snapped falling in pieces on the mahogany table. “Will anyone let me finish my damn debrief?”

“I saw Jason that day, his intent wasn’t malicious. He just wanted to get Red and get out.”

“He shot you in the foot.” Natasha’s voice of reason tried to break through Cap’s sympathies, to crumble it at its foundations. Instead, the cracks re-sealed tighter with a reason resistant super glue.

“And we shot his brother with a tranquilizer.”

Damn. They had.

Fury’s palms slammed against the table making the tattered pencil jump. “You all are supposed to be Earth’s greatest heroes, so why are you guys having side conversations like preschoolers post snack time? Shut your mouths and listen up.”

They all did and sat up or stood a bit straighter. The broken pencil a warning of what would happen if any of them squeaked out another side comment.

Fury cleared his throat. “Anyways, it is probable that the two anomalies-”

A phone rang out and a collective gulp of sympathy was taken by the Avengers; a sorrowful goodbye to whoever had forgotten to silence their phone. Whose phone even still made noise? No one had kept their phones off of silent, besides middle-aged fathers, since the 2000s.

Tony suspected it was Steve’s phone.
What the-” Fury pulled out an older looking communicator of some sort, not quite a phone but reminiscent of one- “this isn’t supposed to ring.” He answered and dropped a couple octaves. “Who is this?”

A silence settled over the Avengers same as an ocean receding before a tsunami came crashing in sweeping away all those who hadn’t taken notice of the break-in tidal patterns. They all held their breaths and waited for the flooding.

How the hell did you get this number?” He covered the speaker and spoke in a hiss to Tony. “Triangulate the signal.”

The crescendo of a wave swept all the Avengers away. “Who is it?” Tony asked while his nanotech glove materialized over his good hand.

Fury pulled his ear back to the phone ignoring Tony per usual. “F.R.I.D.A.Y, you heard the man, let’s track John Doe”

As the A.I got to work, Fury took a seat in one of the open chairs. “You know we can’t do that,” A moment’s pause that felt eternities longer. “What time and what conditions?” He waved his hand at Tony in a spinning motion. Let’s speed this up.

Tony ignored him and kept scrutinizing the holographic image emitting from his glove. F.R.I.D.A.Y couldn’t get through, it’d been jammed too well. He gritted his teeth and took over manually.

“Fury, who is it?” Steve got up from his chair and inched towards Fury who held up a finger to silence him.

Despite a mix of skill and muscle memory, Tony felt his breath hitch. It shouldn’t be this hard.

“He mouthed something, Walnut Boy? Why would Fury mouth Walnut- “Oh!” A brick of realization hit him as Fury spoke back into the communicator.

“I’m not sure I want to play your game either.” Fury thinned his lips. “Yes, I’m alone.” He covered the speaker staring straight into the deepest depths of Tony’s soul. “Work around it, Stark.”

Tony clenched his jaw as he worked. “Ask Walmart boy if he’s Canadian.”

“Seriously, Tony?” Steve motioned for the communicator. “Fury, let me talk to him.”

Sam abandoned his seat going to stand beside Steve. “Ask how he fought off the sedative so well.” Natasha nodded with support for his question.

Clint slumped against the table bumping into his coffee mug causing it to puddle beside him. “Tell him to fuck off.”

“Will you shut up?” He’d forgotten to cover the speaker and Fury quickly pulled the communicator back to his ear. “No not you. I’m alone, promise.” A pause filled with clenched teeth. “I was yelling at the air conditioner, very noisy, irritating actually... the bane of my existence.” He stared rather pointedly at the Avengers as he said it.

“No, I haven’t tried turning it off and on again. This air conditioner doesn’t work like that; it’s more irksome, a hive mind without a sense of self-preservation” Another death glare at the Avengers. Tony gulped.
“Yes, there’s really an air conditioner. Look, I don’t know why you can’t hear it. It’s over the phone, it’s hard to pick up on noise.” A frightful scowl and a hand massaging his under eyes. “Fine, it’s the Avengers. Clint, he says ‘fuck you too’ don’t worry though, it’s sent with love.”

Tony glared at the holographic image that mocked him. “I can’t triangulate him.”

Fury looked about two seconds from drawing his gun and shooting Tony where he stood, but Red on the other side of the phone drew him back. “No don’t hang up-”

The communicator clattered against the table beside the broken pencil. Fury leaned, elbows on the table, with a heavy sigh. It was a prolonged moment until someone spoke.

“What did he want” Steve asked.

“To meet up, alone, and discuss his situation.”

Steve pursed his lips and furrowed his eyebrows. “Don’t tell me you’re going to backstab the kid.”

Fury stood from his seat brushing his coat down. He headed towards the door pausing in its frame to look back at Steve. “I’m going to backstab the kid.”

Jason considered the juice boxes trying to determine which flavor would be the most personally insulting to Tim. He struggled between grape and green apple and finally chose the one with the disturbing apple mascot. Why would anyone ever draw an apple with teeth?

He didn’t spend long considering the artwork deep in the uncanny valley as he’d left an awake and alert Tim alone. A combination that if allowed to fester too long would catalyze into at least two catastrophes; that is if he was generous and rounded down. He hurried to the cashier.

His cart had a bad wheel that’s squeaking reminded him of a murderous Damian. It was stacked with the best first aid kit he could scrap up as well as some clothes, bananas, and newly obtained juice boxes. His left hand was holding two cheap sets of shaded sunglasses.

The cashier scanned the juice boxes and set them into a reusable purple bag. “My grandbabies love this flavor.” The silver-haired woman had eyes that crinkled in a genuine way he often didn’t see; people in Gotham never smiled like that. “You have some little ones at home?”

Jason smiled, leaning against the counter as he opened the stolen wallet. His nonchalance was difficult to pull off while he thought of Tim who was probably getting himself killed as they spoke. “Just one.”

“How precious! Boy or girl?”

“Boy,” He set down the sunglasses. ”I gotta say, absolute handful.”

“Oh do I hear you! Good thing you’ve got such a well-stocked first aid kit; no doubt you’ll need it.” Some gray sweatpants got scanned. “My Jackie once tried to pet a raccoon in our trash can; I wish I’d had more bandages for that. They get into so much trouble.”

“You have no idea.” She really didn’t.

With a beep, she added the bananas to the bag. He let his hand rest on the counter, money in his grp. “I bet, being a single father and all,” Jason’s spluttered as she continued checking out eyes
glancing at his hand. “I didn’t see a ring.”

“Oh,” He brought it back to his side shifting a bit. “Nope, I’m just looking out till daddy dearest comes back into the picture.”

Who knew if Bruce had even noticed their absence. If it’d been Goldie or the Demon brat, he and his bat-themed cavalry would have already ascended, grappling hooks blazing. He wished one of them had gotten sucked in with Tim, at least then someone would notice the Replacement had gone missing.

“Brothers then.”

“Sorta... I guess?” He slid the stolen S.H.I.E.L.D money towards her. “It’s complicated.” A bigger understatement than saying Brutus and Caesar just had a minor falling out.

A wrinkly hand held his shoulder. If he hadn’t seen her face he would have thought the comforting hand was Alfred’s. “It’ll be okay, you’ll figure things out.” He stiffened.

“Thanks,” What he would have given be bleeding out in an alleyway rather than there.

She handed him his grocery bag with an empathetic smile. “It’s nice to see people caring for others, you don’t have to do what you’re doing.”

The weight of the bag made his arm ache. Parachuting with a bullet wound and a drugged up teen had not left him feeling good. “More like I have to. He’s my obligation.” Though, saying that had somehow hurt worse.

With a curt but stiff goodbye, he left the store with the hounds of regret biting at his heels. No matter his pace, their snapping was ever-present. He shifted the bag so he held it with both arms.

It was bordering on twilight as he left the store. He walked through a shadier part of town, though it wasn’t quite as dingy as Crime Alley. It was beside the Hudson whose polluted water left a sour stench in the air. He tried to breathe through his mouth; it didn’t help.

Footsteps. He heard a new set of footsteps.

There was a man behind him, following. Jason listened intently to the failed hollow steps that came out as thundering footfalls. For someone trying to rob him, he was terrible at stalking unnoticed. Nonetheless, whether the assailant was skilled or not, it was only a matter of reaching an alley before he’d get a gun waved in his face.

He ground his jaw. His arm hurt, his side hurt, his head hurt. He was not in the mood to deal with some amateur who’d no doubt bought some low-quality handgun from a rundown, smoke-filled shop.

A glint of rusted metal came into his sight line; a fire escape, the man-made rainbow that led to a dubious backstreet rather than a blessed pot of gold. He held back an irritated sigh as the corroded staircase built of broken building codes got closer.

Fuck alleyways, nothing good ever happened in them.

Just as he was beside familiar shadows hidden from overlooking windows he was pushed into their darkness; their embrace comforting instead of terrifying. He straightened up and turned around whilst making sure nothing fell out of his bag.
“Hey dude, be careful; I’ve got precious cargo.” He drew attention to his grocery bag by hefting it up a bit.

“Your wallet,” A barrel rose up between his eyes. It shook at the end of a pale hand with skeleton fingers wrapped around it. “Give me your wallet.”

“I have like three dollars.” Not a lie in the slightest, the S.H.I.E.L.D money had run out quickly. *Maybe I shouldn’t have bought those juice boxes.* He thought of Tim’s indignant scrunched up nose and snorted. *Nah, I had to buy those juice boxes.*

“Don’t laugh at me.” The mugger knocked Jason’s bag out of his hands where it clattered against the cracked pavement. “Give me your wallet or I’ll shoot.”

“*I had bananas in there!* A rage he hadn’t felt since the Lazarus pit reemerged as he knocked the gun out of the mugger’s hand and grabbed him by the shoulders. “There were bananas in there!”

He’d pushed the mugger against the wall underneath the fire escape. The assailant’s feet dangled and he spoke through a gulp. “I-I’m sorry?”

“You better be damn sorry; do you have any idea how easily bananas bruise?!”

“I-” Jason didn’t let him finish bringing a right hook into his temple and letting the robber crumple under the fire escape. *Goddamn inconsiderate mugger.* He kneeled down to pick up his bag which had spilled out its contents and grab the fallen gun. The bananas had some new brown spots. “Fuck.”

“Excuse me, Mister, are you alright?” He found a blue and red silhouette hanging above him. He held his grocery bag tightly, but not too tight as to further damage the bananas.

He narrowed in on the spider on his chest. “Who are you? Bug Boy? The Arachnid Wonder?”

The figure jumped down landing in front of Jason who held steady. The newfound security of a gun in his pocket was a weighted blanket over his heart. “Spider-Man.”

“Ah shit, that was gonna be my third guess.”

“Sure thing, Mister. Whatever you say.” Spider-Man rubbed his neck looking like a teenage boy about to ask his crush to Homecoming rather than a masked man asking about a crime. “Were you mugged?” Jason eyed the unconscious man at his feet and toed him with his boot.

“I handled it,” Masked eyes narrowed with a click and a question. Jason shrugged. “I’ve got a good right hook,” Though one not quite as good as Steph’s.

“So you’re good?” Spider-Man scuffed the ground with his boot looking immensely lost.

“Peachy.”

Jason was debating just pushing past Spider-Man but chose not to. He’d have to ask Tim about the guy and whether he worked with or for S.H.I.E.L.D; if he did he hadn’t recognized an unmasked Jason.

“Are you going to call the police or…”

“I didn’t bring a phone.” More like he didn’t own one. He’d have find one at some point and one for both him and Tim. That was a more pressing issue for when Jason eventually let Tim patrol
though.

*Shit, I’ll have to get a job.* He couldn’t just rob S.H.I.E.L.D agents till he could afford coms. Having no references would make finding work difficult, well that and not legally existing.

“Oh, okay. I can do that then.” Spider-Man shot something at the mugger a sticky substance that layered the man. A web? Jason let sunglasses topple from the bag and in his grapple to pick them up he swiped a sample of the stuff.

“So I’ll just be going. Erm- I hope I don’t see you around Spider-Dude. Nothing personal, just that this has been a horrible experience.”

He moved aside letting Jason pass. “Oh, alright. Bye, Mister,” Spider-Man gave a loose wave as Jason left, but dropped it when it wasn’t reciprocated.

Back on track to his illegal dwellings, he walked with a persistent stumble in his step. Not from the pain per se, but because his already subpar day would worsen from whatever trouble Tim had gotten into in his absence. What should have been the sensible part of his mind argued that Tim was seventeen and highly injured so he couldn’t make too big of a mess.

But that wasn’t the sensible part of his brain, his actual voice of reason knew Tim was a fucking idiot.

His sentiment was immediately confirmed when he climbed through the upper-level window into the attic space of the charred factory. “Hey, Timbo.”

“Tell him I say: ‘Fuck you too’... sent with love”’

There was a lot to unpack in the scene he’d stumbled into; he felt like a therapist talking to a child with a lot of baggage; enough baggage to fill one of Bruce’s private jets. “Where’d you get a phone?”

Tim cupped his hand around the burner phone turning away from Jason as he whispered, “I gotta go.” Tim hit end call and faced Jason eyes peeking towards the groceries. “What’s in the bag?”

He put off handing him a juice box and calling him a toddler in favor of glaring. “Who were you on the phone with?”

Tim scuffed his foot much in the way Spider-Man had. “Fury.”

Jason’s posture sunk and he rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Replacement, I was gone for an hour; what the actual hell?”

“I just wanted to show them that there’s no point looking for- what are you grabbing?” Jason was a forty-niner shifting through his pail of groceries to find gold. He stuck a straw into his juice box.

“I’m grabbing a goddamn juice box, Timbo.” He took a long sip and re-looked over his replacement able to physically feel his hairs turning grey. “I have to drink my sorrows away somehow.”

Chapter End Notes
Tim's got a reason for what he's doing; it's just a convoluted one. Let me know what you guys thought; thanks for reading! <3
Schemes Galore

Chapter Summary

Jason and Tim disagree about the plan

Chapter Notes

Hope you guys enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to not hate you right now, Replacement? I should get a Nobel Peace Prize for having any restraint when dealing with your bullshit.”

Tim rolled his eyes at Jason who was sprawled on the only chair in their factory. It was a rotting one Jason had found on the side of the road. It shook like leaf in a blender and threatened to shred like one as well.

Tim refused to sit on it; he suspected it had termites.

“Jason, you regularly shoot people you wouldn’t get a-”

“Where’s my goddamn Nobel Prize, Timmy? Where is it? Out the fucking window because I am this close.” Jason pinched his fingers together leaving a tiny gap between which he glared at Tim. “This fucking close.”

“At least you don’t hate me, right?”

“This close, Timbo.”

“Alright, on that note let's get back to the plan,” He cleared his throat and repressed a smile at Jason’s annoyed scowl. “As you’ve realized, I called Fury. I’m going to distract him and send a message: leave us the fuck alone.”

“Did the genius responsible for this plan happen to consider that one of the participants has the tendency to slide into Death’s DMs because I feel that should be considered,” Jason took one last, drawn-out sip from his juice box. He gurgled it down as though a nomad wandering the desert for days before stumbling upon his salvation, processed apple juice.

“Would all audience members be so kind as to leave their comments for the end of the presentation?”

“Get off the stage!” Jason booed, tossing his juice box at Tim. He didn’t bother catching it letting it bounce off his shoulder onto the ground where they both watched it for an extended, uncomfortable moment.

Tim blinked at it. “Anyways, I’m going to distract Fury while you go and steal back my suit.”
“See this is where one of my problems arise.” Jason swapped into a serious tone as though he hadn’t just tried to splatter Tim with a faux rotten tomato. Tim felt his faith in humanity splattering beside the cardboard box.

“Please,” Tim clasped his hands together, a sinner begging a fellow sinner for remission, “Let me finish.”

The chair creaked and threatened to implode under Jason’s weight like a branch with one too many blue jays on it. He held his fingers close together once again, an eye peeking through at Tim, the judgment bottlenecking through the gap.

“After I ditch our stalker and leave an appropriate distraction, we reconvene and grab yours,” He sat on the cold floor looking up at Jason. “Okay, now you can talk.”

“Well, foremost,” Jason spoke with mock formality, looking oddly like Bruce at a board meeting with a particularly snobby associate.

Am I the snobby associate? Tim wondered. I better not be the snobby associate. If he was the snob he was going to throttle someone and Jason was the closest.

“You aren’t going to talk to Fury. Moreover, your gut is hanging on by a thread, so you aren’t going to talk to Fury. Finally, and perhaps most in need of emphasis, you aren’t going to talk to Fury.”

“You could have said it just once, and yes I am.”

“Uh, no I couldn’t; I was doing my best Bruce Being a Shady Bitch™ impression, and no you’re not,” Jason said.

His life. This was his life. He rolled his eyes to the point he was briefly afraid they’d get stuck, or worse, complete a 360.

“Well, your impression was shit-too many contractions-and you can try and stop me,” Tim said.

Maybe not the best assertion to make to his wayward, slightly murderous, sorta sibling; one with a grudge swept under the rug. Nonetheless, He didn’t break in his threat, Jason was too lazy to have to patch Tim up after beating him senseless.

“Okay, wow. You walk into my abandoned factory, come up to me in my favorite chair whilst I’m drinking my favorite fine wine,” Jason channeled a sommelier as he swirled his new juice box, “and tell me my impressions are shit.” He dropped back into his Bruce voice. “It is not that I am mad, Timothy, just disappointed.”

The melodrama was suffocating; Tim should have brought a rebreather.

“I thought that was supposed to an impression of Bruce, not my mom.”

“Fuck you,” Jason said, “Actually, double fuck you if you go through with this. Timmy, you’re a Girl Scout banging on death’s door right now trying to sell him overpriced Thin Mints™. If you go to Fury, he’s going to kick down the door and let you in.” He glared. “And death gives horrible tips- trust me, I know.”

“Well-” Tim rubbed the back of his neck-“I’m going to ignore half of that because we do not have enough time to unwrap whatever you just said. I’ll be fine. I didn’t think you’d care this much.”
Jason stood up from his rickety perch and stalked away from Tim to lean against the window, partially blocking it; Tim wasn’t sure if it was intentional or not.

“Not so fast, Timmers, your Thin Mints™ are made of lies because I sure as hell don’t give half a fuck. Still, you don’t get to go die, not after all the effort I put in to keep you from croaking. That’d be plain rude; what would Alfie say?”

“I’m so sorry for my manners. I’d just hate to be impolite.” He drawled out. “You know we have to do this. We can’t get home without our gear.”

“We can get it later; we don’t even have coms. We have a singular burner phone made from- I don’t even know… a toaster?” Jason squinted at the phone his lip curling in distaste. Tim didn’t remember him swiping it. “Not exactly Wayne tech.”

Tim snatched it back, sliding it into his left pocket. “Too many unknowns. They could move our things, destroy them, discard them. We can’t afford more variables.”

Jason sat on the window sill completely blocking the exit with his broad frame. He groaned into his hands. “For once, Tim, please try and stop thinking logically and instead think reasonably.”

“Those are synonyms,” Tim said.

“But they have different connotations.”

“Book nerd,” Tim glared. “Come on, Bruce always does gambits like these. You know him, I know him; this is what we need to do, what’d he’d want us to do.”

Silence filled the room, the only other sound the gentle hum of the pigeons loitering around New York. Jason huffed adding his own voice to the chorus of bird chirps.

“Fine.” He stepped aside leaving the window open. A cool wind blew in without Jason’s body blocking it. “But if I have a stroke from you almost dying again, I will personally ensure that you only get to patrol with Damian till your great grandchildren have dentures.”

Tim ignored him and slid towards the window. He started climbing out when Jason coughed. It could have merely been a cough and not meant to catch his attention, but this was Jason. It was probably some backhanded comment.

Jason stood stiffly, his arms crossed and eyes glazed over Tim’s head. “Be careful, idiot.” He turned around heading further into the attic of the factory to gather his own things.

He hadn’t expected that; hadn’t calculated for that. Adjusting himself he pushed past his bewilderment to stare out the window and enjoy the beauty of the evening.

He stepped into the brisk night, the stark air a familiar conversation. He let it whisper into his ears; it’s reminiscent tone and prose left him feeling warmed from its chill physicality. A rooftop was as close to home as he could get at the moment.

He’d just have to fix that.

The park bench was cold under him. Steve suspected all their park benches were cold, not that he could see anyone. That is unless he counted the tip of Fury’s head, which he didn’t.
He hadn’t signed up for kidnapping, someone must have put it in the fine print. That’s what Bucky used to tell him: ‘always read the fine print’. When Bucky couldn’t anymore, Tony unknowingly took up the bulk. They were both his Jiminy Crickets, though instead of tutoring his morality they told him not to be an idiot. He liked to think he was their morality crickets.

He must have been a bad one; he hadn’t helped them both.

“You in position, Capsicle?” Tony’s voice was shaky over the com.

“Affirmative. You?”

“Checkadoodle, O Captain! My Captain.”

Had he really said Tony was his voice of reason? He’d have to reevaluate that; he must have forgotten to carry the two somewhere.

“Tony,” Natasha said. It was enough and the coms fell silent to create a beautiful moment. A short figure with a hood pulled over his head made his way past Steve ruining his tranquility. There was a flash of sunglasses that were out of place when the only light came from the lamp post beside Steve. He half thought of not calling him in.

“Target making their way towards Fury.”

He wished he hadn’t.

“Got it, Captain Nationalism.” Tony sucked in his breath as an epiphany physically assaulted him with a golf club. “You know nationalism was a large cause of World War One and was closely tied with militarism. You kinda represent both of those. Cap, you aren’t going to start World War Three are you?”

Steve watched the short figure get tinier as he made his way towards the top of Fury’s head. In a few moments, he’d drop into his blind zone and Steve would move closer.

Steve got up from his bench, his boots crunching on the gravel. Perhaps it was a trick of the light, but the teen’s shoulders seemed to tense. He kept his voice a whisper. “Maybe just a Civil War.”

“That alright, more mild. Keep it in the family and all that.”

“Tony, please never say that again,” Natasha said.

“Too Alabama?”

“Just shut up.”

Steve blocked out their voices as he made his way closer to the figure making sure to drop behind a tree. What had happened to keeping com silence? Fury had let hell freeze over then enabled it to defrost with his now unfrozen teammates ransacking Steve’s sanity.

The shorter head bobbed to sit beside Fury and the two heads converged as they dove into a conversation. There were still some people around, though not many. A young couple held hands as they walked. New voices silenced the demons he had for teammates.

“You and I have different definitions of alone.” Red’s voice was quiet. Steve had to listen for it in the background of Fury’s com.

“Then why come?”
Steve peaked from behind the tree, getting an odd look from a man taking an evening stroll. He shrugged apologetically and got a scowl in return.

“I don’t have anything to worry about.”

“Is that so? Care to expand?”

Red sat rather casually on the bench though his hands clenched around a pipe of some sort. Looked like it could have once been a part of a washing machine at one point, maybe a curtain rod.

“Because you wouldn’t be able to stop me.” He said it as a fact. Cut and dry. Only objective without even its subtext having a waft of subjectivity.

Steve hadn’t remembered the teen having such a complex. Tony laughed in his ear. “Is this kid serious? He’s barely out of diapers.”

“That’s rather egotistical of you.” Fury said.

The teen shrugged indifferently. “Maybe so, but-” His voice cut out and Steve jumped out past the tree. The teen had been pinned to the ground by a muscled arm. Red kept his indifference as he glared up at the offender. “I’ll be honest, I didn’t account for the terminator showing up.”

Red’s pipe expanded out into a pole nearly slamming into the attacker’s face. A metal hand caught it. Red whistled. “Wow, who are you?”

He didn’t answer; for Steve he didn’t need to. Steve knew the arm. He knew the face. He knew the man.

“I didn’t know you were having a reunion, Cap,” Tony said.

Steve stumbled out past the tree. It’d been a while since he’d seen the ghost who’d haunted him. He wanted to choke out the name, call out to him. He couldn’t though, not while his internal monologue was screaming till it turned his head into a pinball machine with the name banging around his hippocampus.

“Are you guys going to help or?” Red asked. His lips were twisted into a frown as no one responded. “Fine, I’ll do it myself.” He punched the Winter Soldier. Red briefly looked at his hand then back at Bucky who’d barely flinched. “That’s unfortunate”

The pole closed and opened once again this time making contact with Bucky’s face. He reacted that time jumping up and pulling Red with him.

Steve found himself moving towards the two his buffering voice finally catching up. “Bucky?”

“You’re name’s Bucky? I cannot see you as a Bucky.”

What was that kid’s problem?

“Hey Dami, have you talked to Tim recently?”

“You are asking the wrong person about that imbecile; I try to avoid Drake when all possible.” Damian was laying on the couch, eyes closed, with Alfred the Cat sleeping on chest emitting a constant purr. “Ts. I can feel your indecision, Grayson.”
“Maybe I should call Jay, see if he’s heard anything.” Dick sat beside Damian and the couch sunk, disturbing the cat who let out a gurgle before scampering away.

Damian opened a single eye to watch his cat leave. “As if Todd would answer.” He sat up looking immensely less peaceful than he had seconds earlier. “Is there something else you wish to discuss or was bothering Pennyworth enough havoc for you.”

“I have a bad feeling.”

“I believe that's just the paranoia father instilled into you throughout adolescence. Something that bled into your adult life leaving you with lingering obsessive tendencies,” A robotic hand patted Dick’s shoulder. “Nothing to worry about.”

“Thanks... that really helped.”

“You are welcome. If someone must make you see sense I suppose I can make the sacrifice, though somewhat begrudgingly.” Damian slid off the couch.

“Where are you going?”

“To appease Pennyworth. Once again, another case example of how I have to clean up after your messes.”

“Wait, what about Tim?”

“Tt, Drake is fine. If you are truly unnerved then talk to the teen titans. It’s not as though Todd would know of his location, he isn’t exactly fond of Drake.” Damian clicked his tongue. “When is the last time you spoke to Drake? He seems temperamental, maybe it is simply the silent treatment.”

Dick couldn’t recall his last conversation with Tim or Jason. Though if he went to check on them they themselves would boldly add a tally to characterizing him as overbearing. He took a breath; they’d be fine.

If so, why did his stomach still churn?

Chapter End Notes

The part between Jason and Tim was pretty dialogue focused. Let me know if that was alright or if it came off as messy. Hope it was enjoyable!
Maybe he shouldn’t have gone to meet with Fury. Foresight, however, was something that only helped with future events. Current situations… well, foresight did little beside leave Tim with even less breath than he already had; like a sucker punch to the gut.

Oh, how life mocked him.

Good thing his stitches had been healing well. The repetition of losing his breath and nearly bleeding out again would have left him wishing he’d become a recluse in some off the path redwood forest far from any caped individuals; be them friendly or not.

His windpipe closed from a metal arm; the crushing pressure made its presence known. It was no time for dying lest he have to deal with the consequences beyond it. Not the unknown aftermath of whether the darkness gave way to a halo of light or instead stayed stagnant in emptiness. Death was one thing, what came after another, but Jason was his own weight class of ‘fuck no’.

If he died he’d have to deal with Jason being a little bitch. Even death couldn’t protect him from Jason’s: ‘I told you so’ or ‘I thought replacements were meant to be better.’

He’d rather choke on artificially strawberry flavored ghost peppers for all eternity. An agonizing existence made that much worse by poorly paired flavors; even Gordon Ramsay wouldn’t wish such a fate.

“Bucky?” Captain America had been repeating himself in the background like a nagging beatbox to the mixtape of Tim’s suffering. Bucky? … Bucky? … Bucky?

At least Tim knew the guy’s name. He could run to the Starbucks and get him a peppermint cappuccino that brandished a mutilated resemblance of his name. Bookhaye it would say in a hastily scribbled font that left everyone side-eyeing the other. A modern day western show off: had Tim forgotten Bucky’s name or had the barista just not been listening? No one knew beside the company themselves as they upheld their branding with a silver-tongued laugh.

God, he needed a coffee. He’d entered the final stage of withdrawal that made the air smell of freshly brewed perfection.
“Bucky…

“Sorry I didn’t catch that,” Tim croaked out with one of the sparing breaths allotted to him. “His name is Bookhay?”

Someone slap the life back into him before he was too far gone. There was no halo at the end nor was there perpetual darkness, just a tall glass of steaming caffeinated utopia he’d gladly drown in.

Maybe the lack of air was getting to him.

“Jesus, how tight are you holding him?” A clatter beside him. Metal hitting the ground though at a slower velocity than when he had left the tower with his League of Assassin mandated uber. Ra’s should consider opening a taxi service, it was a booming industry.

“Why are you here?”

Another breath and his throat stung. He glared into Bucky’s face and was watched back with softening eyes. Nope. Nope. Nope. He was not dealing with some more human than robot cyborg taking the sympathetic approach.

The grip loosened along with the glare. He had a complicated relationship with pity; it a crazy ex who he kept finding himself beside the morning after.

The air on his throat entered with hollow breaths while he balanced himself on his tiptoes. Bucky’s normal hand held Tim’s right arm up, pulling him partially off the ground. Tim’s makeshift staff taped against his light-up sketchers as he danced on his toes.

Once he saw Jason again, he’d beat him with those shoes till he too lit-up. They were not a comfortable weight on his dignity, especially as he mimicked a toddler learning to walk with overbearing parents. Parents who believed he’d fall and crack his head open if they let go.

“Sorry, it doesn’t look like you’re on the clipboard,” Tim grunted. “It’s invitation only so please-” he relished another breath “-fuck off.”

Confusion met him. Bucky’s concoction of riled, worried, and baffled, left Tim wondering how deep his emotional problems went. It was almost on par with Bruce’s own emotional constipation. Though not quite, to overtake Bruce would be an uproar in which the Phelps of emotionally troubled lost his gold medal to the Uncle Joe.

“Set down Red,” Fury said

Like he was a hoodie caught in the midst of being stolen by a younger sibling. The weight of the weapons aimed at him -be it a repulsion blaster or a gun- grounded him as he dangled.

“Set him down,” Fury’s perception of him was more dehumanizing than being used as an actual human shield.

“Is anyone going to ask if I want to get put down?” All eyes turned to him. “I mean, I want to; I’d just like for my opinion to be considered.”

“Why are you here?” Steve asked.

“I read about you in a museum,” Bucky said. “Captain America. The First Avenger.”

At least the guy was educated. Tim tried his best to hold himself up by grabbing the metal arm
with his free hand. His fingers scratched into it unable to do any damage.

“What’s going on. Bucky?”

“Hydra. A.I.M, all of them,” Bucky shifted his grip on Tim, it did nothing to help with comfort. “Dimension travel interests them.”

“Set him down and tell us what they want,” Captain America’s voice didn’t waver, but still sounded broken. As though each word was a needle to his heart, each leaving a mark. “Please.”

“You know what they want,” Tim was hefted up by a single arm, the other grabbing under the armpit for support. His feet dangled above the ground and Tim was not having it.

Tim pulled his legs up and braced them against Bucky’s knees. He pulled forward until the knees gave out. Falling into a tumble, Tim elbowed into Bucky’s gut till the hand against his throat gave way.

He got up, scrambling out of the man’s reach. He propelled him past Iron-Man’s stiff arm instead using it as a springboard to launch himself into the air.

Reaching into his pocket he threw the burner phone at Fury. It hit him across the nose and fell into the grass as Tim’s own light-up feet docked down. Tim had imagined sending the message with more finesse, instead, it seemed he’d have to channel Jason.

Chaos could be beneficial at times.

“You little shit.” Fury lept at him. Tim jumped past him narrowly avoiding a kick from Widow as he rebounded. As soon as Bucky lost his human shield named Tim, the gunshots and repulsion blasts exploded around the metal-accented man.

The grass was torn up leaving it speckled with topsoil. Lovingly planted flowers were crushed underfoot. The poor landscaper would be devastated. Hell, Tim was devastated, he could appreciate a good gardening job.

Bucky made his way towards Tim but was tackled to the side by Iron-Man. The two fell tumbling into the grass, a tornado of metal coated human limps making their way towards the pond.

Tim ran away from the anarchy, hearing a splash as either Iron-Man or Bucky was pushed into the pond. He was pulled off his feet and into a bearhug by Steve.

“Fury, you call Spider-Man yet?” Iron-Man asked. The sound of splashing water persisted and Tim caught sight of both figures fighting in the shallow bank of the pond.

“He should have been here by now,” Fury had waded into the pond and the mucky water reached up to his ankles. He held up his gun and aimed at Bucky. He shot and a bullet ricocheted off of Iron-Man’s armor with a ping that sounded out through the discord.

Wet grass met Tim as he dropped. He rolled over in it as Captain America scurried towards Bucky pulling his shield off his back. “Fury, stop!” The one-eyed man shot another bullet that Steve blocked.

Grotesque fascination and a sense of nostalgia washed over him. The present Avengers and Fury paddled through the water yelling at each other as Bucky sloshed around them. It was like he was back home.
He blinked at the image half expecting Dick to come flying out of the waves as a murderous Damian joined forces with a collected Cass to gain justice for being pushed in. He didn’t emerge. No Steph or Jason on the beach strumming up more terror as they cheered. No Duke watching astonished beside a grumbling Alfred. No Bruce hiding his own amusement through pursed lips.

Just Tim.

He left during the chaos, melting into the shadows as a way to gain back the familiarity he had just felt. The darkness was nice but lonely. It missed out on his fellow bats hiding alongside him.

He left the park after grabbing his staff and headed to congregate with Jason. The thought -meeting up with Jason- had never been comforting before. More so, it’d had always been distasteful, but now it held a comfort: a welcome reminder that in this place he’d been forced too, he wasn’t alone.

It wasn’t exactly nice but it was okay.

Jason pulled his cap further down, hiding any condemning white hair. He wasn’t that stupid; he wasn’t fucking Tim. He reached up to tighten up his tie followed by brushing down his khakis.

His pants had a clipped ID that’d been inside the stolen S.H.I.E.L.D wallet. All it’d take was a flash, or at least he hoped on it. A gambit that would have made Bruce proud if he had the capability to feel anything other emotion besides vengeance.

Vengeance was a way of lifestyle for Bruce; like veganism but for injustice.

“Excuse me,”

Jason internally groaned, he’d been standing arms crossed in an elevator waiting for the doors to close when a grumpy man and jubilant teen beelined for the doors. Was it too late to give up on life and open a sandwich shop?

“Sorry, Mister.” The teen apologized. Jason stiffened and pulled the cap down further. He’d originally thought the sunglasses made him look slightly too douchey, but now he was blessing the fraternity gods and their frat boy devotees.

Why the fuck was Spider-Man in the elevator with him?

He grunted an acknowledgment and stared at the numbers as the elevator rose. Floor 3. Floor 5. Floor 7. They had a while to go. He could have settled down and have fathered three children by the time they got to his floor.

“You got the briefcase, Kid?” Grumpy asked. Spider-Man nodded quickly and shifted foot to foot. “Is it here?”

Another nod. “That’s why Mr. Stark called?” Spider-Man wore a hoodie that he held his hands in. His eyes glowed as he stared up at Grumpy. “He needs the uh… briefcase? I thought that he didn’t need help today.”

Well fuck. They were going to call in Spider-Man on the Replacement.

“A complication arose. Why don’t we talk about this when we get upstairs?”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.
“Oh, it’s okay,” Jason said, deepening his voice. He flashed his badge, carefully covering the face with his thumb. “Hey, Spidey. I’m a huge fan,” He shook Spider-Man’s hand. “Director Fury’s overworking us trying to find Walmart Boy too.”

“And Jason,” Spider-Man added. “Mr. Stark said they just need one.”

Jason smacked down his frown. His inauthentic smile caused Grumpy to stare with narrowed eyes. “Smart plan. Catch one, catch the other.”

Fury was really about to attach Tim to the end of another line and cast him out. Horrible plan really. It was as if Fury hadn’t even met Tim; if Tim was a worm, he was a goddamn slippery one.

“Kid-” Grumpy said. “-We don’t know his clearance.”

“He’s S.H.I.E.L.D,”

Floor 40. They were getting out on floor 93; him, floor 90.

“Yeah, I’m S.H.I.E.L.D,” That easily sounded more incriminating than even eleven-year-old him defending to Alfred as to why his hand was in the cookie jar. “I’m just venting. They knocked out some of my friends the other day.”

Together he and Tim had knocked out around thirty-two. Though Tim had only gotten twelve, an unofficial victory in his books. “My kids are huge fans,” Jason grinned. “They won’t believe that I met you.”

Floor 53.

Grumpy glared at him before dictating his goofy grin as harmless. “Barnes made an appearance,” Spider-Man straightened out and tilted his head.

“Why? No one’s seen him for months.”

Fucking Tim.

“Is he alright?” Jason asked.

The elevator felt like being locked in a casket. The combined stares of the people casually talking about kidnapping his replacement rose his desire to scratch his way out from their gazes.

“It’s just, he seemed young,” Jason pulled his hat down again. “Can’t help but think of my own Kiddos.”

Floor 71.

“He’ll be fine,” Grumpy said. “If it helps, Red’s probably thirty-three with a mortgage. He might just be short.”

Wrong.

“I guess,” Jason shoved his hands in his pockets as the elevator passed floor 76. How hadn’t Tim joined the Dead Robins Club with him, Damian, and Steph? He’d let Tim do one thing and suddenly he’d coerced some war criminal out of hiding.

“What do you know about him?” Spider-Man asked. “Mr. Stark hasn’t told me much.”
“Not a lot,” He lied. “Good luck, Spidey,” Jason fidgeted with his ID in his pocket, twirling it between his fingers.

Floor 90.

The elevator jolted to a stop and Jason paused in the open doorway. “I know you get this all the time, but can I get an autograph?”

Grumpy stepped between him and Spider-Man. “We’re kinda on a schedule-”

“Yeah, I understand. It’s just- wow I can’t believe it’s you,” Jason kept his voice choppy and flustered. “I think I’ve got a pen, somewhere.” He rifled through his pant pockets that held a ballpoint pen in the back left. He was careful to check there last.

“We’re in a hurry.”

He grabbed the pen thrusting it out. “Ah, here it is,” Jason shifted for a drawn-out moment. “So sorry, do you have a pad of paper?”

“Look here, Bud-”

“I’ve got some paper in my bag,” Spider-Man slid off his backpack and squatted down as he rifled through it. He rose back up with a beat-up blue notebook. Jason handed him the pen.

“Kid, we need to hurry.”

“Come on, Happy, I’m already writing,” Spider-Man ripped out the paper and handed it back to Jason. “Here you go, Mister.”

“Wow! My kids are going to be siked. Thank you so much,” He grabbed Spider-Man’s hand again and shook it. He didn’t stop till Happy—his name was unfitting; he had about as much joy as a lawyer who’d failed their bar exam—grasped the teen by the shoulders and pulled him away.

“Bye,”

“Bye!” Jason waved staying in the doorway until Happy pushed him out and onto floor 90. The metal doors shut and Jason swiveled to find people dressed in suits or lab coats watching him with questioning gazes. He fidgeted with his hat again and crumpled the paper in his hand. “I just met Spider-Man.”

The people who’d been heavily focused on looking on him now made every effort to not meet his eye. The shit he did for his idiot replacement. As he passed a trash can he tossed out the autograph. The shit he’d never let Tim know he’d done.

He walked with the fabricated confidence of someone who regularly strolled the lab halls. It was false to the point that the FBI should have crashed through the glass windows and arrested him for counterfeit. Well, that and the drug money.

Batman had his rogues; Jason had the FBI.

“Have you got any idea where the Red Robin suit is?” Jason rested his arms on the counter of the information desk. His smiled glowed not to the same extent as Dick’s but enough to make the woman blush.

“Do you have an ID?” She asked.
“I know Spider-Man, isn’t that ID enough?” He teased. “As I’m sure you saw, we’re pretty close,” He pulled out the S.H.I.E.L.D card flashing it before sliding it back away. “If you ask nicely, I could let you meet him,” He let realization slide onto his face. “Though that’d require your number.”

“I can’t, I’m sorry,” She showed a gold tinted ring on her left hand. “I’m flattered though,” She brushed a strand of hair behind her ear, still unable to look into his sunglasses. “Room 34A, it’s to the left,” Through her floundering, the woman hadn’t so much as glanced at the stolen ID.

He hesitated at the counter, smiling again. “Thank you,” He headed down the hallway.

The floors were too clean and the entire hall smelled too sanitary, like some had drenched a hospital in bleach before setting it afame. The juxtaposition of the grease-covered tech to the smell of disinfectant made his gut bubble like carbonated pop. It was unnatural, unnerving. As though there was a tiger lurking behind him waiting to sink its teeth into his sense of reality and normality.

Just like everything in this new world, it was slightly off.

He turned open the door and saw a familiar man sat beside the suit. He hadn’t bothered to learn his name. Jason coughed to gain his attention. “Hey, I’m with S.H.I.E.L.D. Is this the Red Robin suit?”

“Sam,” He introduced. “You have a way to crack it?” Sam motioned to the utility belt on the table. Jason grabbed it and ran his fingers along the seams.

“You don’t know how to open it?”

“You do?”

Jason shrugged and set it back down on the table, fiddling a smoke bomb from the belt into his pocket. “Nope, but that’s why I’m here,” He headed over to where the rest of the suit was.

Roadkill. The only description he could give. The fabric and body armor was tattered and had been cut open down the middle. Cracked blood still coated it, especially at the midsection.

“You guys really did a number on this,” It’d take a while to repair it so Tim could actually wear it. He grabbed one of the boots and found the rebreather hidden in the heel.

“Well, they had to cut the Kid out of it.”

Jason flinched. He hadn’t meant to, but Tim’s stupidity broke his self-control. Bruce needed to keep a closer eye on his son; Tim was far past getting drunk at high school parties. He was instead almost getting himself killed on the streets.

“Ouch. Must have been hurt pretty bad,” Jason slipped the rebreather into his mouth. The smoke pellet slipped out from his fingers. As the noxious air swirled around them Jason relished in it; an off-brand normality was reinstated in the off-kilter world he’d been thrust into.

“What the? You set off a booby trap?” Sam was a silhouette in the smoke. Staring through a foggy screen, Jason rounded on the man. Sam’s eyes got droopier with each breath; his sleeve over his mouth unable to filter the air.

“We need to get the door open,” Sam waved his arms through the gas. “You alright?” Jason cracked Sam across the face with the boot. Mixed with the air, it was enough for him to crumple to the ground.
Jason stepped over him back to the metal table. Jason couldn’t smell any sterile air through the mask and neither could Sam as putrid Febreze engulfed the clean environment.

He grabbed the torn gear, wrinkling his nose. He’d been about to leave, but an old leathery friend was laid on a plastic fold-out chair. His face contorted at the blood caked across it.

Of course, he couldn’t expect Tim to take care of his things.

Adding the leather jacket to his pile, he stepped back over Sam. “Jason?” He wheezed. Sam’s head lolled onto the shiny floor.

Jason laughed, finally able to drop the guises he’d been forced to uphold. “Hell yeah, it is.” He did finger guns and made his way to the window. Clipping on Tim’s utility belt had been humiliating, but luckily the only witness was too out of it to notice. Its x formation across the chest was not a one size fits all design; it turned into more of a diagonal strap across his torso.

He placed charges on the window and pulled Sam away from the blast zone. The C-4 would draw the others attention on the floor, but the grappling gun in his hand would whisk him away before anyone got halfway down the hall to his door.

The pernicious gas mixed with the smoke from the bomb. He turned his back as the glass shattered. A few nicked him on the arm, leaving drips of red running down them. He raised the grappling gun and stepped out of the broken window.

Tim would have gone for something more subtle, but Jason had dropped his guises and he wasn’t going to put another one on for his Replacement. No, while the wind greeted him he was just Jason. The world’s judgment as intangible as he felt.

Now he just needed Tim to not be dead.

“Where’s the kid?”

Fury couldn’t recall which voice said it, except that it wasn’t him or Steve. He hadn’t intended to go for a swim, but nonetheless, he found himself shoulder deep in a manmade pond. Across him, on a piece of floating litter, a frog croaked at him.

“Wasn’t Steve holding him?” Natasha asked

Steve held Bucky in a headlock. “I was, but then Fury started shooting Bucky.”

“So you dropped him?” Natasha asked. The water reached just above her waist, but she sunk at Steve’s confession, letting it reach to her neck.

“People are looking for them,” Bucky said while he thrashed in Steve’s hold. “They’re going to find them.”

“Just calm down, Manchurian Candidate,” Tony pulled himself out of the pond. “Where would he have gone?”

In the distance, a red and blue figure grew. Fury watched Spider-Man run towards them. He stopped in front of them and took a deep breath. “I’m not built for parks.”

“Hey, Kid,” Tony helped Natasha out of the pond. “You missed the other kid.”
Fury climbed out of the pond nearly slipping back in as his boot squelched on some mud. He squeezed the corner of his jacket to get a minuscule amount of water out.

“Hey, Mr. Stark. Sorry I’m late. I had to give a S.H.I.E.L.D agent my autograph. Did you know there’s S.H.I.E.L.D agents to Avengers’ Tower?”

“I didn’t.” Tony swiveled, his faceplate opening as he glared at Fury. “Stay the hell out of my tower.”

Fury caught eyes with Natasha. His jaw clenched. “I haven’t sent any agents to your tower.”

“Then who was… oh! Oh!” Peter jumped back and forth as realization crept up on him from behind.

“Kid?” Tony asked,

“Oh my god! That wasn’t a S.H.I.E.L.D agent!” Like Kevin McCallister finding out he’s home alone, Peter pulled his hands to his face. “Crap. You need to get back to the tower.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I think I gave Jason my autograph!”

Fury groaned and pulled out his phone. Sam was at the tower, at least he’d gain some semblance of competence. The others still chirped in the background with chatter.

“You have a metal arm? That’s is awesome, dude.”

Fury sighed as the phone dialed into nothingness. He called a second time and made his way to where Red’s phone had fallen. He picked up the thing that looked less like a phone the longer he looked at it.

Turning on the scrap yard inspired phone was easy, unlocking it was easier. It only had two apps: a phone and a camera roll. He opened the camera roll to find a single picture on the phone.

His call went to voicemail a second time as he tried to comprehend the thing Red had left him.

Jason had taken the photo -a selfie- of him and Red smiling at the camera with their middle fingers out. Fury closed the phone and blinked at his reflection in the darkened screen. He reopened the phone to look at it a second time.

Red had met up with him to flip him off. He wasn’t sure what he was feeling except that it sure as hell wasn't happiness. The image’s message read loud and clear; their grins paired with the collective three middle fingers held a clear-cut moral: *fuck you.*

The subtext wasn’t an invitation, but a challenge: a power move. Their smiles mocking and daring; *come find us, you won’t be able to.* He held restraint and didn’t crush the phone. Instead, he pocketed it and headed towards the Avengers and their plus ones.

He wasn’t above taking the Brothers Red up on their dare.

Chapter End Notes
Let me know what you guys thought. The Spider-Man here is more like the MCU Spider-Man who's more lenient with his secret identity than other incarnations. Hope you guys liked it!!

<3
Coffee Run

Chapter Summary

Jason makes a quick stop and Sam’s day gets worse

Chapter Notes

Some more characters get introduced :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jason’s life was one of regrets. He shouldn’t have gone to Ethiopia, shouldn’t have tried to kill his entire family, shouldn’t have been standing in a Starbucks line with two baristas glaring at him while Tim moped across the street.

Why did Tim’s order have to be so long? Why did Tim have to write down the instructions? Why did it consist of three different coffees?

When Tim had shown up 18 minutes and 37 seconds late to their chosen rendezvous location, Jason had been expecting a ‘let’s be quick! We don’t have a lot of time.’ Instead, he got an ‘I need a coffee before I accidentally cross B’s line.’

Jason had compiled, not wanting to be the first victim of Tim’s rampage. He prodded Tim by making him wear light-up shoes (a perk of being the only one buying groceries) not by threatening his caffeine supply.

While the baristas glowered, all of his regrets converged into a singular line which created the boss level of ‘my life is a goddamn mess’. The barely hidden murmurs as he ordered three complicated coffees five minutes before closing time only catalyzed his epiphany.

Fucking Tim.

Jason took a seat beside the window looking out towards the silhouetted Tim in the alleyway. Tim had been peeved when Jason made him wait outside like a dog chained to a fire hydrant. Jason hadn’t had so many threats against his life since… actually, Tim may have set a new record.

However, the kid’s neck held a colorful necklace of purple, blue, and yellow, so unless Jason wanted the cops called on him or for the baristas to think Tim was into something kinky, it was a strict stay outside and wallow.

Tim could sure wallow when he wanted to.

The bell on the door jingled as two lost employees from the Renaissance Festival waltzed in. The lanky one fiddled with a knife? Dagger? Whatever it was, it was pointy.

Jason just hoped they weren’t about to stick up the store; he was far too done to deal with that.
"Brother," Stabby slipped his sharpened object into his sleeve, out of slight. Jason narrowed his eyes. "The Spider-Child made it apparent that we were to hurry."

Jason could have slammed his head against the table; he almost did. Spider-Child. He was new to this universe, who knew how many spider-themed individuals roamed around. If this world was anything like his, there’d be at least 27; just look at how many bats there were back home.

"The Spider-Child will be swayed by a hot chocolate!" Stabby’s brother said in an outdoors voice. It must have sucked to have a hangover in the same house as that guy. "We will have two frozen drinks with the sugary toppings and one hot chocolate."

"You’re Thor." The barista stuttered.

The other barista had stalled in making Tim’s third coffee in favor of staring at Thor and Stabby. Jason groaned, checking to make sure Tim wasn’t being pushed into any white vans, before rubbing his under-eyes.

"And this is Loki." The man introduced pushing the lanky figure forwards. At the sight of the growing frowns of the baristas, he continued quickly. "Loki’s good now, he no longer wants to rule New York. Correct, brother?"

"Correct."

Surprisingly, this did little to sway either barista. The one at the cashier rubbed the back of his neck and tapped the counter with his other hand. "Erm- what size do you want?"

"The largest size!"

Jason rolled his eyes; someone was compensating. His only semblance of relief came when the barista holding Tim’s final coffee cup started to fill it up. Jason watched mildly amused as Thor set out a trail-mix of currency. He caught sight of some euros, a few Canadian dollars, monopoly money, and three U.S pennies.

"And I’ll need a name."

"The strongest Avenger."

Jason did groan that time. Maybe he was mistaken about not being a meta; maybe his superpower was the ability to be a magnet to all Avengers within the same zip code as him.

If Spider-Man or Captain America wandered in he was about to throw hands first and think of consequences later.

"I believe that man does not think you’re the strongest Avenger," Loki said. He smirked in a way very intimate to Jason; it was the same smirk he did whenever he was about to start some shit.

"Who do you think is the strongest Avenger?" Thor watched him with intently, as though he genuinely cared for his response. Jason scratched his brain trying to remember the Avenger’s names.

He didn’t remember many of them as he preferred to refer to them as 'that bastard'. He snapped upon thinking of one.

"Spider-Man."

“Then who the hell is he?” Jason asked. Was Spider-Man some tag along who no one could recall when he’d shown up but felt too awkward to make leave? Was he a stalker who they didn’t know how to ditch?

Both of them shrugged. “I think he is the illegitimate child of Iron-Man.” Loki said.

Thor’s eyes widened and he clasped Loki’s shoulder. “That would make sense! I must ask friend Stark next time we see him.”

Jason looked out the window again, thankful Tim hadn’t been kidnapped yet. Weird people walked around outside at night and they weren’t all as good-natured as his Renaissance buddies.

“Coffee for Bruce.”

“Oh thank fuck.” Jason stood to grab the drinks. The name was absolutely mutilated over all of them, consisting of two ‘O’s an’ ’S’ and somehow no ‘B’s. It was kinda impressive.

If Jason had been a white girl on Instagram he would have posted it with the sepia filter.

He grabbed the cup holder and headed to the door. Thor’s hand caught his shoulder. Jason gritted his teeth; he hadn’t thought the man knew who he was. He gripped one of the coffee prepared to give him second-degree burns.

“Your input is appreciated, although incorrect.” He patted Jason’s shoulder. “The Spider-Child is not the strongest Avenger.”

Jason shrugged Thor off of him. His lips quirked in the same way Loki’s had. “Seems like he is.”

“He is not.” Thor said as Jason made his way out of the Starbucks to the hunched figure of Tim. He was shaded in the darkness, hard to see unless you knew he was there. Tim took a step forward, enlightening the alleyway.

“What took you so long?” He asked grabbing the first coffee within reach.

“Met some more Avengers.” He grabbed Tim’s wrist, pausing his gulping of coffee. “Slow down before you burn off your throat.”

Tim grumbled and took slower sips of the coffee. “Fuck you.”

The two of them walked out onto the street, Jason on the outside of the sidewalk. They headed towards the bay where a certain Helicarrier had set down for prison transfer. The night was brisk and reminiscent to many nights he’d felt in Gotham.

He’d been gone from home far too long. Hopefully, they’d be a step closer to the grungy underbelly of his birthplace.

Sam had gone from watching one suit to watching another one. He was mostly intending to not get knocked out a second time. He found Fury placed far too much trust in him: maybe Fury just wanted him to endure all of life’s sufferings.
Nonetheless, he’d been discovering that he was feeling less admiration for people, yet more respect. He wouldn’t share a beer with Jason -was he even old enough to drink?- but he could respect him breaking into the tower and stealing back his brother’s suit.

Do his family member a solid, it would have seemed sweet to Sam if it didn’t include him getting knocked out.

Clint sat opposite to him with two half-drunk cups of coffee and a five-hour energy. He was jittery in his seat. "Those little bastards are going to show up.” He wasn’t permitted his bow due to his double shoulder incisions. Instead, he held a knife in both hands that bounced with each foot tap.

"If Fury placed us on it, I doubt it.” Sam said.

He was aware that the Winter Soldier had done a number on the younger of the Reds. Fury seemed to think they’d retreat. Most of the Avengers were combing the city for their hideouts.

Fury treated the search like a mother getting the tangles out of her daughter’s hair before a ballet recital. By the end, the city would be pained, but without an unchecked corner.

It seemed personal to him. As though the brothers had defaced Fury’s late grandmother’s grave with amateur self-portraits. Fury’s eye twitched dangerously whenever the Reds were mentioned.

That was a recurring thread as Clint also twitched whenever either was brought up; he tended to be more vocal with his distaste than Fury.

"Well, then I hope they show up.” He got up from his chair pacing around the table brandishing the red helmet, guns, and miscellaneous items.

"Clint, please don’t stab them.”

Clint spun to glare. "I’ll stab whoever I want.” His pacing picked up. "I’m like really tired, but I also feel as though I’ve ascended to the next level of consciousness. You know?"

Sam shook his head. "Uh, no?” He worriedly watched as Clint chugged his original cup of coffee that had become lukewarm. Should he step in? Was be being a bad friend if he didn’t?

"It’s sorta like I can hear colors, which is doubly impressive because I usually can’t hear anything.” Clint grabbed the second coffee and swallowed that one as well.

"You okay?” Sam asked.

"Nope.” Clint poked at some of the miscellaneous items on the table. "I really need a nap. This out of body experience I’m having right now is super trippy. I feel like I’m on all the drugs.”

Sam rubbed his neck. “But you’re not… right?”

“None.” Clint made his way to his chair. “Do you think Fury will know if I go to sleep?” He continued before Sam could answer. “Probably will, that dude’s got eye’s everywhere. Super creepy.”

“Yeah,” Sam said, hoping they’d divulge into silence. He played with the rebreather he’d been given after passing out earlier. Clint did not let the silence rest.

“Do you think they’re actually related?” He asked.

“Yeah. Do you not?”
Clint stared off into the distance likely chatting talking to God in whatever lucid state he’d placed himself into. He spoke suddenly, cutting out of his dulled expression.

"I think they are. They seemed annoyed enough at each other to be brothers."

"Then why’d you ask?"

Clint crossed his arms, frowning at Sam. "Well I’m sorry that I like to gain multiple perspectives." He waggled a finger at Sam- or tried to. He actually managed to keep his finger stationary while moving his entire arm.

"It’s okay if you want to take a nap. I’ll watch out.” Sam said, his concern growing for Clint each moment he spent with the archer.

"I’m far beyond sleep. I’m illuminated."

"What the fuck, Clint?"

The lights overhead cut off, dropping the two of them into darkness. Sam preemptively put in his rebreather. He’d been about to make Clint do the same only to see he’d underestimated the archer.

Clint had his rebreather in; his eyes had regained their steeliness and his hand expertly held the knife. He motioned towards the door with his hands. Sam nodded, pulling out a gun he hoped to not use.

The smoke came first. It engulfed them both and he took thankful breaths from his rebreather. He could make out the outline of Clint in the smoke, but that soon disappeared as well.

His visor informed him of when the two figures entered the room; their body heat popped up amongst the smoke. They didn’t come from the door, instead, they fell from above, one after the other. Both held warm items in their hands.

Jason made for the table while the little one, Walmart Boy, made for Clint. Sam pursued him not wanting the likely minor to end up shish kabobbed at the end of Clint’s dagger.

He returned to normal vision, finding it hard to disconnect Clint’s body heat from Red’s. A foot came from the smoke, kicking him across the face. He reached up to grasp the skinny ankle but found it gone before he could grab it.

"Hurry up, Hood, my company’s feeling stabby.” Red said. Sam slipped the rebreather off figuring it the kid could talk in the smoke he was likely fine. The stuff smelled unsavory but was preferable to the purified air of the mask.

"Hell yeah, I’m feeling stabby, you little shit!” It was a wonder Clint heard Red. Perhaps his hatred for the kid transcend physical boundaries; he probably just had his hearing aids in.

"Shut up and hold on, Baby Bird, I’m trying to focus over here.” Jason yelled over the smoke.

Sam was hit in the gut by a staff. He wheezed, doubling over where he caught sight of lights reflecting off the opaque smog. "Look for the feet!” Sam yelled. "The kid’s got light-up Sketchers on! I think they’re Captain America themed!”

A few feet from the left, he heard a crash as Clint tackled Red.

"Fuck you, Hood! Fuck you so much.” Red said, his voice carrying from the ground.
"Holy shit, the kid’s got coffee. Give me that-“ Clint’s voice cut out.

An increased shuffling sounded out that Sam worked his way towards. He could make out Clint and Red tumbling on the ground over a travel coffee cup. The Kid’s shoes were definitely Captain America themed; he’d have to let Steve know.

"Did you guy seriously makes a coffee run before robbing the Helicarrier?” Sam asked, bewildered.

"Fuck no, I’m not being judged by kidnappers for my life choices. No matter how bad they are!” Jason yelled, still across the room.

Sam paused in searching for Red. Is that what he was? A kidnapper? Another kick snapped him out of his thoughts; this kick held more weight behind it. Jason pinned him to the ground with his forearm, holding a coffee with his other hand.

A red helmet covered his face. How did he expect to drink coffee? "Let’s get out, Replacement- and take your goddamn coffee so I don’t have to hold it anymore.” So that coffee was also for Red; too much for a teenaged kid.

"I have to finish this one first. I only have two hands!”

"You were trained Batman; you can manage.” Jason pressed down harder as red lights blared overhead. "Ah shit, these guys narced on us.”

Piercing alarms accompanied the flashing lights.

"Break out.” Sam said, his breath strangled. “Containment level break out.”

Jason popped off of him, heading to where Red and Clint scuffled. “That’s our cue, Runt. Now take your shit.”

The smoke started to clear and he saw Clint’s crumpled form beside the abstracted figures of the two brothers.

He raised the gun towards Jason’s voice and pulled the trigger not expecting to hit anything. The wail afterward made him wish he’d never even upholstered the weapon.

It was Red who cried out, sounding immensely youthful, but Jason who fell.

He gripped his ribs looking up at Red. ”Ah fuck, sorry about your coffee.” He turned over in the spilled caffeine “It was way overpriced, so like, sorry to myself too for buying it.”

Red raised his bo, glaring at Sam from behind his masked eyes. He tensed but didn’t move, not at first. The boy pounced, fighting electrically while Jason’s blood mixed with the spilled coffee.

Sam was pushed again the wall, the bo, pushing against his throat. “I didn’t mean t-“

“Left!” Jason yelled.

Red turned to catch a masked ninja across the face. The man rebounded catching Red’s second advance. His voice sent shivers down Sam’s spins. “Hello, Detective. Ra’s still requests your presence.”

Who the hell was Ra’s and why did he want to talk to some teenaged boy?

As though things couldn’t worsen, Sam petrified as an oversized head tried to fit through the
doorway only to fail once, twice, and a third time. The head mumbled before crashing its way through the wall.

“M.O.D.O.K also wishes to speak to you.” The egg-like being with tiny legs and arms said.

“What the hell is that thing?” Jason asked. His voice was full of horror until he ultimately collapsed beside Clint.

Red and Sam retreated from their closest threats until they were back to back. Red’s shoulders tensed against his. “Fury told me the Avengers are supposed to help people. Mind giving me a little help?”

Sam raised his gun towards M.O.D.O.K. “It’d be my pleasure, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys like it!! I’m going on vacation so I probably won’t have an update next week, sorry!
Friends and Foes (but mostly foes)

Chapter Summary

Tim and Sam bond over near death. No one wants to be on the ’dream team’

Chapter Notes

This took a really long time to write partially because I’ve been super busy this summer and partially because I didn’t want to write M.O.D.O.K out every single time (I was using my phone and word didn't let me copy and paste :) )

I've already started on the next chapter, so it'll be out much sooner!

Again, sorry for the wait. I hope you guys enjoy :) )

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Looking at M.O.D.O.K had him reeling as though he’d been punched in the gut, gasping for air that wasn’t coming, only he had to deal with the emotional pain alongside the tang of a physical assault.

His mere presence was a crime so horrid that Gaea herself should have reclaimed the demon into the soil in order to repent M.O.D.O.K’s existence.

The ugly baby head fluttered and floated above the ground as even the dirt didn’t want him. though the word ‘fluttered’ should never be associated with the egg monster. Fluttered brought to mind a monarch butterfly arriving in Mexico after completing its migration south- that was something beautiful: The payoff to a perilous flight, a sense of completion and closure.

This thing that insulted his senses was more reminiscent of a caterpillar partway through metamorphosis in which it became a disintegrated mush. The longer he blinked at M.O.D.O.K the more fitting he found the description: M.O.D.O.K was a soup of caterpillar that reformed into an ugly baby from a medieval tapestry. No amount of vibrant thread could salvage its faux beauty.

Tim, wasn’t someone to judge merely based off of looks; he’d read Frankenstein, Victor being an unprovoked bitch to the creature was the source of 90% of his problems. However, The evil baby man had burst through the wall with the intent to kidnap so he felt relatively justified and guiltless in his stabbing descriptions.

First impressions were everything, and M.O.D.O.K had flopped with his.

“I am M.O.D.O.K and you will come with me.”

Ew. The caterpillar soup was talking to him.

He was standing back to back with Sam, a man who barely a week ago had helped tranq him. People change, life is fleeting, and not wanting to die is a rather completing incentive.
“Sorry, stating your name’s a taken shtick—“

He tapped Sam’s back hoping he’d brace himself and Tim wouldn’t end up just kicking him. Thankfully, Sam understood, and Tim launched himself off Sam’s back and didn’t make the man face-plant to join Clint and Jason in unconsciousness. A satisfying crack broke the air as he kicked M.O.D.O.K’s oversized face.

“—and Batman has really good lawyers.”

Across the room, Sam kept his distance from the assassin. Shooting as a means to keep the figure away. “Batman? Was he bit by a zombified, radioactive Babe Ruth?”

“You’d think so, but no.”

Tim did a front handspring onto M.O.D.O.K’s head. Tiny baby arms flailed, grabbing at him. It was nostalgic to a degree, reminiscent of Damian reaching for something on the top shelf. Tim snorted thinking of the demon brat; this floating monster baby could contend for Damian’s title as ‘worst aspect of Tim Drake’s life’.

He held onto the thing’s armor with one hand, and the other jammed the staff between where the metal met skin. He ground his teeth as M.O.D.O.K began spinning, transporting Tim to a bucking broncos ride.

And he’d scoffed when Dick had suggested bull riding lessons. Wish he’d had those now.

“Whoa there, Betsy.”

“I am not Betsy, I am M.O.D.O.K!”

Tim’s left foot started slipping. He readjusted before the rest of him went flying.

“Use your indoor voice; this is not a playground, mister.”

Tim clicked the button, activating the electric shock. The intensity of the spinning increased alongside his nausea. He kept low with a desperate grip on both his staff and M.O.D.O.K’s head. At least he’d had exposure to g forces or he’d have lost his stomach by now.

M.O.D.O.K most certainly was not using his indoor voice now. The persisting shock had left him heaving his displeasure in loud exclamations. Tim held on only by trying envisioning Kon. Kon, who’d laugh at him if he fell off. That was enough for him to endure his carousel of horrors.

Although the nauseating twirling left him an intoxicated ballerina, he could catch sight of the room. the assassin had broken Sam’s defenses and Sam retaliated by using his gun as club. Most of his pistol whips missed, but a particularly hard one he got in was countered by a nasty cut to his shoulder.

Or it looked nasty, Tim couldn’t exactly see details at the moment.

Farthest from him, Jason and Clint lay collapsed beside one another, both coated in Jason’s growing puddle of blood. Tim’s gut -already sinking from the gyrating M.O.D.O.K- dropped more.

Someone must have whacked Tim upside the head with a thesaurus because his internal monologue had descended into synonyms of bad. The words tumbled inside his mind like a group of uncoordinated school children playing tag. Substandard, poor, horrible, negligent, inadequate, nothing could quite verbalize how not good things were.
Jason chilling in a pool of blood and coffee: unpleasant. Ra’s messenger boy sizing him up in between stabs at Sam: boy howdy, was that disagreeable. Some floating ugly baby from a renaissance painting: was life even real? If so, it was detestable.

He’d hadn’t even been on the helicarier an hour and things had gone to shit. Frankly terrible service. Ra’s cradle had been more enjoyable and that place was a bees’ nest of creepy ninja men who used Tim as their Schrödinger’s cat.

His yelp review was going to be scalding.

“Will you stop spinning?!” Tim yelled, his voice wiggling in his throat, the words coming out as a whine.

“Aghhhh!” M.O.D.O.K screamed back, the baby arms now reaching for the bo rather than Tim. “Ahhgjgkg!”

“Is that a no?”

Tim clicked off the electricity finding the screaming alongside the spinning a tad too overwhelming. The abrupt stop sent Tim sailing off the baby, egg man and into the wall. He clattered to the ground beside his staff, gasping for the air that he’d lost.

He steadied himself against the cool floor, stealing another glance towards Jason who was getting paler in the limelight. Rising to his feet, he wobbled: courtesy of extensive twirling intertwined with a haughty meeting with a wall.

“Oh, that’s it. Get yourself some good lawyers because I’m suing for emotional distress.”

“M.O.D.O.K has no need of lawyers, M.O.D.O.K is designed only for killing! M.O.D.O.K cannot be sued!”

Tim snorted. “Like that’ll hold up in court.”

Sam puffed somewhere to his left, presumably from another slash of a knife. “That’s what you’re suing for? Not attempted kidnapping or something?”

Tim got up grabbing his staff. “Watch it old man, you’re on thin ice with that bird getup.”

Tim didn’t think he could sue cross dimensionally, but he hadn’t been lying when he said Batman has some really good lawyers. Who knows? They could work something out.

He limboed past a beam sent out by M.O.D.O.K. “You wanna gift swap?”

“And fight that crime against nature? I’ll pass.”

Tim tried to limbo past a second beam, but he severely over estimated his flexibility and was hit square in the chest. Whatever the beam did, it left his skin tingling and electronics sizzling; his light up shoes had stopped glowing.

Jason was going to be so sad when he woke up.

He was immobilized, every limb pricking as though it’d fallen asleep and was waking back up. His body faced the broken wall allowing him full view of escaped inmates as they ran by.

In ducked an average looking man.
He had a bullseye on his head and after doing a once over of the room, he backed straight out, having observing the mess that was Tim’s life. “This is not the exit.” The man said before leaving, his metal boots clanking into oblivion.

If only Tim could do the same.

The temporary distraction allotted to Sam getting slashed across his forehead. Sam took up gardening, letting out a colorful bouquet of swears.

Alright, let’s swap.” A drone smacked into M.O.D.O.K’s eye making him drop the beam. Tim fell, becoming a wet rag on the floor. He straightened up only to duck back down as the assassin's kick sailed over his head. A tang of metal on metal sounded behind him as the drone slammed into M.O.D.O.K from all around.

“Kid, meet Redwing.”

“I had a car named Redbird, once. Pretty similar.”

“You can drive?”

Tim took a punch to the jaw, swearing alongside the crack of knuckles to bone. “Watch your mouth, gramps, or i’ma forcibly help you cross the road.”

“So long as you stay off my lawn, we’ll be fine.”

The assassin went for a stab and Tim caught the hand between his own and twisted till the knife dropped to the floor. He kicked it away so it joined the pile of ones Sam had already disarmed (how many knives did this guy have?).

He narrowed in on Jason turning paler beside a knocked out Clint before redirecting his attention. They needed to hurry things up.

The assassin grinned before pulling out another knife; Ra’s knife budget must rival Bruce’s Batarang one.

“Dude how’d you slip so many knives past security?”

The pile has reached the point of comically large and was reminiscent to the time Tim witnessed a particularly peeved Bruce make Jason remove his guns before entering the cave.

Theories existed connecting Bruce to the mob. How couldn’t they, with a man so wealthy in a town so dirty? It was natural to assume it wasn’t all clean. If someone were to have waltzed into the sitting room the flimsy ‘evidence’ most scoffed at wouldn’t have seemed so paper thin.

There had been so many guns.

Just a few too many for the beloved Brucie to just have lying around. In the end, no surprise special guests broke down the door to discover a false mob connection whilst a damp cave unknowingly twiddled it’s thumbs beneath them, housing so much more.

Bruce’s face had almost turned purple though. Jason had left rather quickly after patrol that day, taking his wheel barrel of guns with him.

Tim was brought back to reality as he poorly dodged a slash towards his thigh. Seething, he slapped the knife to the ground. His sweatpants had been little match for the steel and a cut on his
thigh peeked through the rip in his pants. Tim didn’t bother to suppress a groan as the man pulled out yet another knife.

“I swear, I’m going to frisk you if you so much as pull out a butter knife.”

The tanging of metal in the background had blended into a white noise broken only by M.O.D.O.K or Sam’s decelerations.

“This drone is beneath me. Face me, avenger, for I am M.O.D.O.K.”

Sam grunted and his feet pattered across the room. “Nah, you’re what I see after eating all the shredded cheese at two am.”

“Slander! I am M.O.D.O.K!”

“Cheese demon!”

They divulged into a yelling match with the consistent thumping of a drone, a background beat.

Tim roundhouse kicked the newest knife away, grimacing as his side cried out. He’d have a nasty plume of purple decorating his side tomorrow; the wall hadn’t been soft and he was going to have words with Fury about replacing the walls with pillows.

The assassin reached into his pocket and Tim was about to start screeching if another dagger made its way into his man’s hands. He’d find his own pillowed room when he checked himself into Arkham, because he was fully prepared to lose it.

His sanity was retained as the man extended a bo. “What do you say, detective, care to fight?” The assassin readied his staff.

It was almost polite, the man waited for Tim to raise his own while grinning at the prospect of a challenge. Tim internally apologized to Alfred for not remembering his manners before he yelled: “Nah!” And dropped smoke pellets at his feet.

He whacked through the fog feeling multiple thuds as he connected the metal pole to the assassin. A crack to the head, dropped the man to the floor. Tim brushed down his shirt and retracted his staff, stepping over the assassin to get to Jason.

“That was a fair fight.” Sam said dryly, still evading M.O.D.O.K

“Bitch, I’m on speed run mode,” He hoisted Jason by the arm pits. “Geez Jason, chill on the juice boxes, next time.”

Jason didn’t say anything, he just bled.

“What’s the plan, kid? Me and Freaky didn’t hit it off so well.” Something exploded beside Sam. The man hit the floor and rebounded back up to gesture wildly at M.O.D.O.K. “See!”

“It’s multi-step. Step 1: don’t call me kid.”

Sam vaulted a beam and turned to salute. “Sure thing, Walmart Boy.”

Tim grunted, Jason was an oversized fish: slimy, slippery, and squiggling. “Okay, new step: don’t call me Walmart Boy.” Tim’s foot squelched in the puddle of blood, coffee, and a bit of Clint’s drool. “Ditch baby arms and come grab Clint.”
“I know Clint looks like a good projectile but—”

“...at least not, yet.” Tim winced as a beam soared over his head. “That’s plan K.”

“Can we speed run to that plan?”

“No.”

M.O.D.O.K was twisting around, arms dancing to try and avoid or whack Redbird out of the air. During his flailing, Sam ran across the room and grabbed Clint in a fireman’s carry.

Clint’s eyes flickered open. “It smells like cranberries in here,” He dozed back off.

“If he starts drooling I’m skipping to plan K.”

Tim fiddled with a smoke pellet between his thumb and forefinger. He started to count down with his fingers. 5… 4… 3…

“M.O.D.O.K can see your fingers!” The floating egg said. “M.O.D.O.K can count.”

Tim shrugged, skipping the last two digits and dropping the pellets. The familiarity of smoke surrounded him and he snatched Sam’s wrist, guiding him towards hole. Sweat dribbled from his brow down to his chin.

Jason was heavy.

“See, no need for plan K.” Tim said.

“No need to rub it in.”

They made it through the hole, with M.O.D.O.K screeching behind them. Tim grabbed a batarange -an explosive one- and waited for the rubble to cover the hole. Satisfied that hole had shrunk to prevent an immediate chase, he and Sam made their way down the hallway. Freed inmates parting around them.

Tim didn’t recognize any of them -a blonde haired girl accompanied by a man with an axe, a man seemingly made of water, a dude who looked like a green Keebler elf- and he doubted they recognized him or Sam. If they had, they’d been too preoccupied with reaching freedom to make any threats against their lives.

Sam caught his arm as they passed a doorway. It led to a small supply closet where they both unceremoniously dumped their baggage. Tim tried to set down Jason carefully, but he was a big guy and they do say the bigger they are the harder they fall.

Jason fell pretty hard onto the floor.

Tim’s leg was still bleeding profusely and Sam had to regularly wipe blood away from his eyes. Maybe that’s why the inmates hadn’t intervened; why kill someone who already looked dead? Dead… something Jason was going to be if he didn’t hike up his sleeves and do something.

He started pulling the necessary material out of Jason’s things. His belt had fried from the beam, leaving him, hopefully temporarily, unable to open it. There hadn’t been an exit wound, so he prepared to go fishing for a metal pellet.

“Look away if you’ve got a weak stomach; if not, I could use an extra pair of hands.”
“Don’t worry, I’ve got this.”

He rolled back Jason’s shirt and Sam stiffened beside him.

Tim would come to realize Sam did not ‘got this’.

Tony was the one who found the attic and keyed in Fury and the others. When Fury entered the building -having to climb through an isolated window- he was met with Tony casing the place.

“At least two people have been squatting here,” he gestured to the two makeshift beds, neither of which had a proper mattress. Instead, both were a patchwork of clothing, blankets, and oddly enough parachutes. “Can’t say for sure if it’s them yet, but I don’t know a lot of homeless people with parachute access who can scale a building.”

Natasha climbed through the window. “You don’t know any homeless people, Tony.”

He stalled, placing his hands on his hips. “Touché,” Tony paced the grounds, eyes looking around. “If you and Captain Crunch could start looking for a blood sample, I can confirm if it’s them.”

“Captain Crunch doesn’t even wear an eye patch,” Fury said, slightly disappointed in Tony’s floundering analogy. If one were to compare him to a pirate figure, they might as well do it correctly.

“Irrelevant,” Tony waved Fury aside. “I stole some blood from the helicopter a week back, so let’s get searching, Dream team,” Tony clapped his hands together.

“We are not the dream team.” Natasha said.

“You’re telling me you’d rather be with Spider-Man and Thor?”

“Yes.”

Tony paused and dropped his head. “Me too.”

Natasha smirked and headed towards the beds. They’d been set up in such a way that window access was easy, but visuality from the outside was unlikely. Fury walked to the food, taking a mental list of their supplies. Tony… kinda just stood there.

Fury pulled out a box from against the wall to find it full of juice. Not bottled juice, but genuine juice boxes. The same brand he had drank as a child; though with an updated, oddly disturbing, mascot. Why would anyone draw an apple with so many teeth?

The insolent clank of metal prefaced Tony leering over his shoulder. “Who needs that much juice?” Tony bent down, metal knees squeaking while Fury felt his patience convulse.

There was indeed, as he’d already mentally noted, a large amount of juice.

“That’s a lot of juice,” Tony said, reiterating the same point yet again.

Fury’s eye twitched. “Where would we be without you?” He muttered.

Clank. Tony’s faceplate popped up. In a fluid motion he pushed the straw into the juice box and
began sipping. Fury resisted the urge to slap the man to instill any sense of urgency in him.

“You’d be doomed is what you’d be,” Tony said between sips.

“Stark!”

Tony froze, tilting his head at Fury. He took another slurp of the drink. “What? You want one too?”

Tony tossed another towards Fury who did not catch it. It bounced off his crossed arms, landing dented on the floor.

Fury gave into the prodding voice in his head chanting: *slap him! Slap him!* and did just that across Tony’s armored neck.

The man stumbled in his drinking, choking on a sip and gurgling the juice onto the floor. Fury swatted Tony’s juice box down and promptly stepped on it, ignoring the splatter of juice and Tony’s horrified expression.

“Stay focused.”

“I was drinking that!”

“See what else they have.” Fury walked away ignoring Tony’s indignant outcries.

He squatted beside the pillar where a purple bag housed clothing. The sizes varied from large to small indicating the two brothers didn’t separate their clothing.

He dumped the bag out and a roll of gauze unraveled across the floor alongside a box containing first aid material. He supposed the material must have been on the newer side if they hadn’t been put away yet.

Or maybe the two brothers just didn’t like organization.

He clicked his coms, checking in with the others. Spider-Man, who was with Thor (and apparently Loki), said the downtown wasn’t yielding any results. Steve was holed up with Bucky back at the tower and didn’t bother to answer. Neither did Clint or Sam from the helicarier.

He was going to have a serious talk about com usage after this.

Only a month ago, he’d finally gotten them to stop discussing the latest episodes of the *Say Yes to the Dress* -which they all claimed to watch ironically, but he’d once walked in on a heated debate between Steve and Tony on lilac dresses- over the coms. When he had said 'keep it relevant’ he hadn’t meant for them to go on a com strike.

“I think I’ve got something.” Natasha was on her knees, pulling away at the smaller of the makeshift beds. Underneath, a stain of red had been hidden.

“Yeah, that should work.” Tony waltzed over to them half way done eating a banana. “They’ve got everything here! Juice, bananas, what else do you need? I feel like I’m in a goddamn Costco!”

Natasha snorted and took a sample of the dried blood. “Remind me to give Pepper my condolences.”

“Hm?”
“I can’t imagine the grief of living with you.”

Tony pulled a hand to his chest, squawking. “I came here expecting disappointment, but instead I got blasphemy,” He shook his head and finished off the rest of the banana so his face plate could close. “I’m heart broken, really- F.R.I.D.A.Y, run scans.”

Natasha hummed a song under her breath to pass the time, a lullaby Fury couldn’t place. Tony began to tap his foot, the metal banging harder to ignore than Natasha’s song.

Fury too, wished he was on Spider-Man’s team.

He rechecked in with Steve, Clint, and Sam and was met with more radio silence. Yes, they were going to have words after they found the brothers.

“Bingo!” Tony’s faceplate clanked open again. “Unless a mysterious third party nearly died in the helicopter and then this building, we’ve got a match.”

“So, they live here?” Natasha pressed her lips into a thin line. She shifted the blankets with her foot. “When winter comes, it will not be very hospitable.”

“They won’t be here when winter comes,” Fury said. “We’ll have detained them by then.”

“Right, the kidnapping,” Tony had grabbed the entire bunch of bananas. He started peeling one.

“Detainment.”

Tony gestured at him with the banana. “Whatever you have to say, Mace Windu,” He took a bite out of it. “It’s been a good year for bananas, real pity watermelons haven’t been all that great.”

"I had some pretty good watermelon yesterday.” Natasha took a banana.

"Where’d you get it from? Pepper can’t eat strawberries, but she loves a good fruit salad, so I have to compensate with other fruits.”

The two descended into the schematics of a farmers market a short while out of the city where Natasha had befriended a farmer named Kevin who apparently had the best selection of fruits in the market. Tony nodded his head along as she listed his crop.

"Fury?” Agent Hill’s voice prickled in his ear. "There’s been a mass break out on the helicarrier; we’ve only just been able to re-establish communications.”

Clint and Sam got a pass for their silence this one time. Steve however, was another matter.

"Do not go to Janice’s stand, her grapes-”

"Quit your small talk,” He said, cutting off Natasha and Tony’s conversation. ”we’ve got places to be.”

Red was stitching up Jason with the precision of a war medic. The needle went: in and out, in and out. The bullet had already been removed and was tossed aside into the corner alongside where Sam had thrown up.
There had been a lot of blood. There still was a lot of blood.

He was covered in it, Red was covered in it, Clint was covered in it, and, of course, Jason was covered in it- it was mostly his blood.

Red kept his jaw clenched through the process. In, out. In, out. In, out. He completed the cycle one last time before closing off the stitch and facing him with low hanging shoulders. “I’ll have to disinfect it better later so he doesn’t get an infection, probably redo some stitches that’ll pop when we try to move him. For now he should be okay,” He shuffled over to Sam. “I’ll get started on your forehead.”

Red headed over, supplies ready.

In and out. Sam winced at the first stitch, yet didn’t let himself jostle.

“What’s your deal, kid?” Sam leaned his head against the metal wall enjoying the coolness of it against his neck. “How come you can do all this?”


“So, you’re really from a different universe?”

The kid stiffened a bit, his lopsided smile dropping into a frown. “Well, yeah,” He didn’t halt in the stitching. "I’d rather be there than here. You guys have weird floating egg men and the ‘good guys’ want me dead. Offense fully intended, it sucks here.”

Sam hissed, and dug his fingers into his palms. In and out.

"I’m almost done," Red said, keeping his motions fluid.

"I’ll let Tony know- the dimension thing, not my stitches. Warning you, I think he was planning a partial dissection to disprove your whole… otherworldliness.”

Red smiled again, the glint of his teeth holding a mischievous edge. "Next time have him play twenty questions before jumping to mutilation. It’s easier for everyone involved.”

They fell into silence as explosions and footsteps thundered outside their broom closet. A mop and bucket tumbled off the cabinet when a boom shook the floor, both landing on Clint’s face. The man grunted in his sleep.

He and Red blinked at Clint and proceeded to ignore him. Sam wheezed as Red finished the final stitch. To his extreme horror, Red began prepping to stitch up his own wound. Sam reached out, taking the materials from him.

"I’ll do it.”

"You sure? You puked last time.”

Something constantly reminded through its hanging putrid presence.

"I’m not making you stitch yourself up,” He bit back some vomit and examined the wound. He too a deep breath echoing the process in his brain: in and out, in and out. He slid the needle through, immediately more alarmed as Red didn’t flinch.

"Bud, you’re way to good at getting patched up for a twelve year old. When I was twelve I tripped
and cried for twenty minutes.”

Red shrugged. ”Not twelve,” He didn’t explain any further.

Sam watched more closely, noticing the tells Red was hiding: twitching fingers with each in, a clenched jaw with each out. The gash on his leg had been worse than Sam’s head injury -although his had bled more- and bits of frayed fabric rested in it.

”So, what’s your deal. Who’s this Batman dude.”

He was observed through masked eyes before Red let out a puff and started explaining. ”He’s my partner. I work with him and his other allies.”

"Like Jason?"

"Eh, he doesn’t hang around much with bats. I got other brothers I work with time to time. One who is more irritating than Jason, a genuine feat..” Red’s fingers twitched more noticeably. ”The girls are less annoying: Black Bat, Spoiler, Batgirl.” Red tilted his head at him. ”Forewarning, all this is googleable back home and I’m telling you because talking about the weather would be way worse.”

”So this isn’t super secret vigilante time?” Red snorted but otherwise stayed silent. Sam continued, also not wanting to talk about the weather of which neither of them knew. ”Is Batman just enlisting families to work for him?”

Red grimaced and looked away.

“Shit, Batman’s isn’t your dad or something, is he?”

“Guess you could say we’re all involved in the family business.”

”Usually I’d be glad that isn’t an allegory for the mob, but that’d almost be better.”

Child soldiers. Sam had only ever met one before: Wanda. It seemed he’d managed to knock that number up to three with Big Red and Little Red. By association he now knew of at least five more.

“Better than my super epic ninja skills?”

Sam frowned. ”That’s sorta fucked. Having kids to make them into creepy justice children, no offense.”

“Eh, valid point.”

“How can he just force you too—”

Red laughed and Sam almost slipped with his rhythmic stitching: in, out. In, out. Red caught on too, wincing for the first time since Sam has started.

“We all elbowed our way into the life. I think he’d rejoice if one of us quit. He can be… overprotective.”

”Overprotective?”

”Think stalker.”

Sam nodded and the two of them settled into a comfortable silence. Chaos unfolded in the
background, mostly explosions that made Sam’s hands shake. One went off on the other side of the wall, rolling the fallen bucket until it stopped at Red’s feet. He picked it up and started to fiddle with it.

“Do the Avengers really help people?” Back there, you helped me, but-”

“Of course they help people, kiddo.” He paused his stitching to rest a hand on Red’s shoulder. They both looked at it and he quickly returned to his work on Red’s leg. His throat closed, he didn’t like where this conversation was going.

We should have talked about weather. He thought.

Red cleared his throat. ”Does Fury consider us people?”

He had not expected that: a philosophical question of how Fury personally viewed Red and Jason. The alarm must have reached his face as Red was quick to continue, stumbling over his words.

“Not in the biological sense, cause were obviously that. I’m not trying to imply we’re aliens, not that aliens are bad; I know some sick ass aliens. But, does Fury see us as people in need; if we ask for a way to get home, whose to say he doesn’t just lock us back up?”

Red’s world had good aliens? Sam hadn’t met many aliens; he’d met Thor, a nice dude, but he wasn’t sure if Thor classified as an alien. The aliens in New York hadn’t been friendly, though he’d heard of some Guardians (of the galaxy?), who were supposedly friendly. Red it seemed, lived in a world where he knew a great deal personally and-

“I just want to go home.”

Sam had been lost in thinking of aliens and he half missed Red speak. The boy kept a hushed tone, his eyes downcast. He seemed younger than the kid who’d used M.O.D.O.K as a carnival ride.

”I sorta pissed Fury off -fully intentionally- and at this point, I don’t know what he’ll do.” The kid flipped the bucket in his hands. ”I thought someone would have come for us by now.”

“You’re going to get home. If Fury tries anything, I’ll slap him for you. The people back home, they just don’t know.”

Red rolled the bucket away were it ended up rested against Jason’s feet. ”He’s noticed we’re missing.” Red said and Sam blinked at him. ”stalker, remember. I think I might be micro-chipped.”

“You think you might be- Wow that’s… that’s a whole lot,” Sam rubbed the back of his neck. ”That’s good though… right? He knows where you are cause your blips gone on his tracker?” Red nodded as he spoke. Sam echoed, mostly to himself: ”You aren’t sure?”

Red shrugged indiscriminately. “So he knows we’re missing, but why isn’t he here?” He stayed silent and took a quick breath. “What if he doesn’t care?”

Sam finished off the stitch, immensely proud to have kept his stomach. He looked down at his hands, red with this boy’s blood, and nearly lost it a second time. He swallowed, keeping the bile down. He chose to focus on the conversation.

“Five seconds ago, you said he had you micro-chipped. Drop the frown or keep your story straight. I’m sure he cares-” He dropped into a mutter. “-in some sort of convoluted way.”

Red scuffed the ground. Sam stood up offering him his hand; Red took it and was hauled to his
feet. The kid took a couple steps, testing the stitches. He walked to the wall, his stitches still intact, and leaned his weight against it.

"You gonna sell me out to Fury?"

"Nah, that dude needs some people to keep secrets against him. Massive hubris, thinks he knows everything- probably does."

Red grunted and relaxed his shoulders. "Thanks, for everything."

Sam smiled. "Let’s get these lugs out of here."

Escaping the helicarrier was embarrassingly easy- well, embarrassing for Fury. Sam and Red snatched up their respective responsibilities and left out of one of the many holes in the side of aircraft. The two made their way to Sam’s car and had just finished stacking Clint and Jason in the back seat when Sam’s phone went off.

He tucked it under his ear and slid into the drivers seat. Red did likewise in the passenger’s seat. Red had offered to drive, and although the kid claimed to have owned a car, Sam wasn’t about to let a six year old behind the wheel.

Hence why Red was so pouty.

"Y’ello?"

"Wilson." Sam fumbled with the phone at Fury’s commanding voice. "I’ve been informed of a mass break out at your location."

"Yep, real bad. M.O.D.O.K was there."

"And the targets?"

Sam pulled out of the parking lot side-eyeing Red who was inspecting his stitches. His review mirror showed Jason slumped on top of Clint.

"Didn’t show."

"Is it Fury?" Red asked and Sam nodded alongside giving an eye roll.

"Wilson." Fury barked. "What is Barton and your’s status?"

"Clint was knocked out, I got him out and I’m current bringing him back to my place for medical treatment."

Fury didn’t respond or offer a reply. The guy just hung up, removing the last amount of guilt Sam had from harboring two fugitives. That guy was an asshole. Sam had half the mind of invite M.O.D.O.K to stay with them as well just to truly piss Fury off with some mass scale fugitive sleep over.

Fury hadn’t let Sam eat his bagel; yes, he was still mad.

"We’re heading to your place then?"

"I’d drop you off at your’s -wherever that is- but Fury’s probably had the Avengers sniff it out by now."
"Cool."

They drove in silence. Sam’s place wasn’t too far away and he had enough medical supplies and food that they wouldn't have to stop for groceries either. As long as Fury didn’t break and enter -a real possibility- or go through his trash -another real possibility- then maybe, maybe, everything wouldn't go to shit.

"Whaaas… What’s gonna onnn?" Clint slurred. "Aand why did the lil’ baastard get shotguunn n’ not me?"

Oh, right.

Clint.

Chapter End Notes

I figured Sam’s still new to being a hero so he’s probably a little iffy with fixing injuries. He was in the military, so he had experience with it, but I wrote him as squeamish.

Next chapter has strong dumbass energy, so beware. It has Tim, Sam, Clint, and Jason interacting and they manage to have collectively a whopping 0 brain cells.

It will be out much sooner than this one; already 1k in

:))
No One Likes a Group Project

Chapter Summary

Clint, Sam, Jason, and Clint make no progress

Steve and Bucky do

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Stop pouting, Clint,” Sam said

Clint crossed his arms and for good effort popped out his bottom lip. "No."

The kid and he were sharing the love seat, both leaning as far away from the other as possible, displeasure on their faces.

The coffee pot beeped from the room over and Sam left, a frown on his face.

Red inched even further, halfway off the couch. “If anyone’s pouting, it should be me.”

Red had a blossoming bruise on his cheek from Clint instinctively punching him after waking up. Another one was atop Bucky’s, where Clint had pulled the kid into a chokehold from the back seat. There’d been a great deal of frenzied screaming by all involved parties.

First, the kid had stabbed him, then stole his coffee and his front seat. Clint felt no remorse (despite Sam trying to sway him with periodic disappointed glances).

Clint scoffed. “Shut up, I was kidnapped into illegal activities. I’m going to pout.”

Sam entered the living room, carrying three mugs of coffee. He walked slowly, careful not to jangle anything out of them. Two droplets hit the carpet and he deeply sighed, before handing off an Iron-Man mug to Red and a Hulk one to Clint. Sam kept a grey travel mug for himself.

“That must have been a horrible experience: being kidnapped,” Red took a long sip of coffee watching Clint with masked eyes above the mug’s lip. “I can’t imagine what’d that’d be like.”

“I’m going to gut you.”

“Jesus Christ, Clint,” Sam set his mug down. “No one gutting is anybody.”

“Except Fury when he finds out,” Clint said. “And he always finds out. None of us can lie well enough to keep this up- and I was a freaking spy who did all that James Bond’s shit.”

“I lie to Batman.”

“I don’t care,” Clint did his best to ignore the little basted to his left, but the boy was Clint’s own personal headache. Seeing his face gave him a splitting migraine. He could try chucking some baby aspirin at him, but Clint doubted the validity of that. “Fury’s going to freaking pop through the skylight—"
“I don’t have a skylight.”

“-Fury’s going to make a skylight and materialize like some spooky ass ghost-“

“Do you guys have ghosts here?” Red asked.

Sam shrugged. “Eh, probably.”

“-and then he’ll squint at us and have us arrested for treason or something. You’ve seen him squint; he’s so judgmental,” Clint shuddered, envisioning Fury’s glare. Red and Sam shared a look and Clint seethed. “I’ve worked with him the longest; he’s going to find out.”

And he likely would.

They’d wake up at two am to some rustling outside and Sam would check the trash cans for raccoons, but it’d be him: Fury, rummaging through their trash. Or maybe, they’d turn on the lights to check on Jason, but he’d be gone with Fury in his place, laying arms crossed, eye open like a dead corpse.

A judgmental dead corpse with no respect for privacy and an affinity for dramatic coats.

Red declined further on the couch, putting too much effort into acting nonchalant. Clint saw the tells: tense shoulders and a clenched jaw. The kid wasn’t as detoxed of stress as he was leading them-or at least Sam-to believe. If Red thought Clint couldn’t tell; he must have thought him an idiot.

“If he shows up, we just turn off the lights and yell: ‘surprise!’ We’ve got a 1/365 chance of getting it right,” Red rubbed his chin. “Assuming he wasn’t born on a leap year that is... He’ll be so flattered that he won’t arrest us.”

Clint glared at Red. “I hate you. So much,” He drank the coffee, relishing in its warmth. “We aren’t doing whatever you said.”

“How stupid do you think I am? I wasn’t being serious.” He spun round to Sam. “This dude thinks I’m an idiot.”

“I mean you are.”

“Clint,” Sam stooped his head between his hands, groaning into them.

Clint got the impression that Sam was about to pull over and cancel this ‘interdimensional fugitive sleepover’ and it hadn’t crashed and burned enough for Clint to accept that. If they were going to fail, might as well do it properly. You know what they say: do first and desperately avoid legal charges later.

Maybe he wasn’t remembering that phrase right.

Nevertheless, if he was going to see this to its likely untimely end, he couldn’t have Sam calling their parents to come to pick them up just yet. Also, Batman apparently had some kick-ass lawyers; always a good thing.

He relented; the word breaking his very soul.

“Sorry.” He wasn’t.

“Look, Clint, you can leave. Promise not tell Fury that I’m housing thing 1 and thing 2-“ Sam
started. Had he always had those dark circles under his eyes?

“I call being thing 1, thing 2’s an asshole.”

Clint whacked the kid’s shoulder “Then you should definitely be thing 2,”

“-and leave. Fury doesn’t have to know you were here, he doesn’t have to know that they were here. It’ll be fine,” Sam leaned forward, hands on his knees expectantly. Clint rolled his eyes. As much as he despised the brothers- one sitting beside him, the other hidden in the mud room- he wasn’t going to toss them to the hounds. Fury had descended into hysteria looking for them, and Clint wanted them rid from his dimension. As if that would happen: passing them off to Fury.

If he did that, they end up in some jail and they’d just break out stab him again.

However, if he helped them get home, he wouldn’t have to deal with them. A dimension liberated of the vigilante horrors: that’s somewhere he’d want to live.

“Too late, I’m invested.”

“Then stop whining.”

Red, brushed a hand through his hair, frowning. “I hate to say this -and I mean really hate; I cannot emphasize that enough- but Clint’s got a point,” Red winced at his words.

Wow. Rude.

“Okay. Are we going to ignore that sass? Cause I’m not prepared to ignore that sass,” Neither of them spoke up and Clint huffed, sinking back into the couch. He mumbled: “Alright, looks like we’re ignoring it.”

“Jay’s half dead and barely cohesive from all the pain meds. When Fury shows up -as it’s a matter of when not if- we can’t be here.”

“Good point.”

“Hello?! That was my point.” Clint’s mouth hung open. He shook his head. “Why even kidnap me into this, if you’re just going to ignore me?”

“We weren’t trying to kidnap you into this. You woke up too soon,” Sam’s eyes were heavy. “Now we’re stuck with you.”

“Do not blame the kidnapping on me! I can’t control when I wake up!”

“Guys!” Red thunked his mug against the table, their heads snapped to him. “Clint can press charges later, for now let’s drop it. We’re in agreement that Fury finding us here is bad. Jason and I can find somewhere to go, we did it once, we can do it again. Fury, however, found that place once. How do we stop that from happening again?”

Clint nodded. “I got this,” he reached towards Red’s face, specifically the domino mask, and his hand were slapped away. “Dude, I said I got this,” he reached again, gaining the same effect. Clint pouted. “Last time I help you.”

Red narrowed his, unfortunately, still masked eyes. Was it ‘Shoot Down Clint’s Super Mega Awesome Ideas’ day? Because if so, no one had bothered to inform him, but they were definitely involving him in the festivities.
“Secret identities, Clint. They might not be all that big around here, but back home they’re everything.”

“We’ll you’re not home are you?” Clint asked. “Two normal looking kids won’t reach his radar and we can’t help unless we know who those normal looking kids are. Show us the true Walmart Boy.”

“Sorry, kid, but Clint -unlikely as it may be- has a valid point.”

Ouch. Why’d he have to be stuck with these dweebs and not Thor? Thor was the shit. These two…decidedly not the shit.

“If you two are trying to hurt my feelings, congratulations: they’re hurt.”

Sam continued, not even twitching in Clint’s direction. It was as though he hadn’t even spoken. He’d thought it once, thought it twice, and would likely think it twenty more times within the next ten minutes: how rude.

“We’re risking a lot helping you. Risk something for us.”

“Yeah, you’re in risk debt. Checkmate, little shit.”

“Risk isn’t a currency. But, alright.”

Little bastard. The kid was stalling. Red wasn’t an idiot -despite appearances- and the sense of foreboding radiating off Red, was notary enough of his realization. The kid was deep in denial of what he had to do.

But stalling? Fury was probably sorting their paper recycling from their glass as they spoke. They didn’t have time to stall.

Clint fumbled with his mug, dripping coffee on the table. “Rip it off like a bandaid, before I do it for you.”

Red’s fingers traced the outline of the mask, stopping at the corners, tensing as he prepared to pull it off. The kid faltered, unmoving while holding the corners of the mask. Clint quirked his head to the side, feeling like lucky the dog, as Red regulated his breathing.

The kid looked freaking creepy.

“You good?” Sam asked.

Clint stood up, stretching his stiffing limbs as a feign to get away from the creepy alternate-dimension ninja child. “I’m not. I’m immensely uncomfortable. You’ve got a demon child on your couch.”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Red took a couple more breaths. “I’m just- god, B’s going to kill me.”

“B for Batman. We need some some nicknames, I’ve already got yours,” he pointed at Red, who floundered while gripping the corners of his mask. “Your little bastard and-“ he pulled his thumb towards the hallway down which Jason’s room was. “-he’s big bastard.”

“Read the room, Clint.”

He’d say he read the room perfectly. Red loosened his shoulders, with a smile tugging at his mouth. “I can get behind Jason’s name,”
With a swift movement, this kid held his mask in his hands blinking down at it. Clint had been expecting demonic eyes, instead they were a calculating blue. Still creepy, but more in the all knowing way rather than demonic one.

“Hey,” The kid said.

“Aw shit. You’re like thirteen.” Clint leaned closer, poking Red’s cheek in wonder. “When does ninja training start on your world?”

“Seventeen,” The kid corrected and pushed Clint’s hand away. “I’m Alvin.”

“Seems fake, but okay.”

Alvin was just a fake sounding name. Like Bob or Jeff. If someone walked up to him and said their name was Jeff, he’d start screaming stranger danger, cause that dude’s a skrull who doesn’t know human culture.

Was Alvin a Skrull? Probably not. He poked Alvin’s cheek again- just to double check.

“We’ll it’s not.” He pushed Clint’s hand away again, pointedly less gentle that time. “When should Jason be awake and moving?”

“At least a day,” Sam said. “The bullet hit his side and-

Like something out of horror movie, Jason made his way down the hallway. He moved as a tinman who’d been tossed around too much by a toddler. His movements were robotic, but decidedly not right. His feet moved in tandem, as a windup toy’s would, But they dragged in a way they shouldn't. Scuffing the ground as though he was the grim reaper, trailing matching scythes behind him.

His eyes were blank, nothing behind them. He must have removed his mask at some point in his drugged fog. They managed to hold everything in their gaze while comprehending none of it. His lips were locked in a grimace, that didn’t twitch to the stimuli around him.

The haunting image was ruined by the grinning frog umbrella he used as a crutch. Clint didn’t see Sam as the guy to like frogs, but you learn something new everyday.

“Jason?” Alvin asked. “You alright?”

The man paused at his voice, and shifted his pointless wander towards them.

“Don’t get his attention. He can’t think straight, he’s going to see us and throw hands,” Clint ducked behind the coffee table. “He’s going to fucking deck us.”

“He needs to lay back down,” Sam said. “He wasn’t shot all that long ago.”

“Jason,” Alvin had stood up. “How are you?”

“Not well, Replacement,” Jason’s head was towards, Alvin, but his eyes were unfocused. “I feel like I was shot.” He started his shuffle towards them again, using Alvin’s voice to lead him. “You aren’t dead are you? B and Dick are going to be sad if you’re dead.”

“Not you and Damian?”

“Only a smidge.” Jason was blinking. He rubbed his hand with an eye and leaned on the umbrella
with the other. He proceeded closer towards them. “I’ll be more mad; told you not to die.”

“Sam, get little bastard to be quite,” Clint whispered. “He’s leading big bastard towards us.”

“Get him to lay back down, kid,”

“I’m trying to get him to the couch, its closer than the mud room.” Alvin patted the couch cushion beside him. “Come over here and sit down.”

“Shut up,” Clint waved wildly at Alvin in big ’X’s’ a cross universal symbol for: mayday, no sir’ee, and stop dude.

”I’m right here.”

Or maybe less cross dimensional than he thought.

“You traitor: you want him to punch me.”

Jason was a large dude. Even if his movements were lucid, a punch would pain his face and his dignity. Now that he thought about it, his dignity had taken a lot of blows ever since the brothers had shown up; yet another reason to kick them back home as soon as possible.

Jason started forward again only to pause in the middle of the room. He looked around, eyes still blank. “Shit, where. I can’t- my brain’s fuzzy. Someone stole my brain, I want it back. I want it back, Ti-“

“No one stole your brain, it’s okay. We’re over h-“

Yep, this kid wanted to see him beat.

Rude.

Clint grabbed Alvin’s wrist, pulling him against his chest. He covered the kid’s mouth. Hissing: “I’m going to wring your skinny little neck if you don’t shut up.” He hasn’t said it nearly as quietly as he should have.

Jason’s thoughtless gleam slipped into a haughty anger driven through misconception. Jason started towards them, recognition behind gaze. Not the good kind of recognition.

This had not been one of Clint’s (soon to be trademarked) ‘Super Mega Awesome Ideas’. This had been one of his ‘Super Mega Terrible Ideas’.

He hated when it was one of those ideas.

“You!” Jason yelled, hobbling faster than anyone recovering from a bullet wound should.

Clint shoved Alvin away from him and tossed his hands up in surrender, smiling at Jason. “I was kidding, I wasn’t actually gonna-“

Whack.

Clint stumbled backwards onto the couch, face stinging from the blow. That frog umbrella was most certainly not made for whacking people with, but it did a surprisingly good job.

Jason descended towards him with fast, tinman movements. His glower growing, Jason pulled his arm back, raising the umbrella high. The grinning frog mocked him, it’s toothy grin condemning
him to his fate.

Ah shit. He thought, as Jason brought the umbrella down. I messed up.

Whack.

Bucky.

The name was everything. Pain, joy, hardships, victories. A contradiction in and of itself. The name belonging to the man, thought to be dead who was alive: a contradiction. One couldn’t be alive and dead.

Was a shell of a man dead? Had Hydra done what the fall hadn’t?

Steve didn’t know. He was just glad that Bucky could be a contradiction. A contradiction in this case was good. It meant alive: breathing, seeing (though not necessarily alive: living, being). Bucky, the man who’d pulled him from the water. A dead man couldn’t do that; a contradiction could.

Hell, Steve was a contradiction: a dead man walking. Mourned one minute, defrausteing like frozen chicken the next.

Was he the same man who entered the ice? He didn’t know. Is change synonymous with death? Death of an idea? Death of a belief? Steve still didn’t know. Change: a constant state of death and rebirth. A cycle.

Bucky cleared his throat, Steve met his gaze. Two contradictions staring each other in the eyes. Dead men couldn’t do that.

“Stop being philosophical. You’re terrible at it.”

“Sorry I was just—“

“Staring. You still get the same look in your eyes, like you’re going to be the next Plato. I seriously doubt that,” Bucky chuckled, it came out harsh. “The same man who put rolled up newspapers in his shoes.”

“You read that in a museum too?”

Bucky tested his restraints. “Maybe,” He was in a metal chair, hands chained to the table. Similar to how Jason had been held. “Or it’s just your dumbass bringing me back to a simpler time.”

“Glad I could be of assistance.”

“Captain America,“ Bucky stopped pulling on the chains and looked expectantly up at Steve. “-always assisting those in need.”

“You saying you’re in need?”

“I’m hardly saying I’m alright.”

Steve leaned again the wall, chin to his chest. He shouldn’t have been smiling, even if it was a tiny one. The others all all thought it: that this wasn’t Bucky. They thought Hydra had taken the man, and rung him out till he was dry of everything that made him him. He’d disagree, you can’t read
The key gained weight in his pocket. If he hadn’t been sitting it would have dragged him to the

everything in a museum.

The key given for emergencies was feeling rather heavy in his pocket.

The silence dragged out, he calmed his nerves. “What are they planning to do to those kids?”

“Hydra, A.I.M, or Fury?”

“Bucky.”

The man clenched his hands. The metal one clinking as metallic fingertips met metallic palms. He shrugged, looking towards the table. “Dunno. Nothing good.”

Several beats passed. Two bodes of silence, each taking ten paces, only to falter on the last one. Steve spun, his question the bullet that broke their shared quiet. “Will they stop coming, if they fail?”

Bucky’s lip twisted. “They found me on a mountainside to spite you. I don’t think lack of effort’s one of their problems.”

Steve leaned closer, but broke his eyes away to stare at anything else. They were on the shared floor of the tower. Whatever he did, F.R.I.D.A.Y would snitch to Tony. He found himself fixated on a smudge of purple on the carpet where Clint had spilled jelly.

“Will they make them like you?”

Bucky didn’t answer, not that he had to. A confirmation or denouncement, wouldn’t have swayed the mind Steve made up the second he saw Bucky. Bucky was alive, he’d known that, but somehow, even in his strange state of being and not being, Steve found himself believing further that Hydra hadn’t killed the man.

No matter how hard they had tried.

“What are you going to do about it?” Steve asked. Bucky looked up at his voice. “You came to help, now what?”

“I can’t do much sitting here,” He jangled the chains again, raising his eyebrows as if to say: ‘see?’.

Steve pulled a stool from the island to Bucky. The chair was too high, and his knees bumped against the table. He shifted trying to find a comfortable position; it was fruitless. At Bucky’s squint, he stopped, accepting his awkward fate.

“The last person who saw one of them was Sam.”

“I’d talk to him,” Bucky said. “Find out what he knows.”

Steve looked at the jelly again. Clint would probably hate him for trying to help the brothers, considering how much the man despised them. The others, they’d be pissed he freed Bucky, only moreso if he helped the brothers too.

Red and Jason. They were both… prone to violence. The former had stabbed him after lulling him into a sense of security; hardly meant he deserved to undergo what’d happened to Bucky. No one deserves that- even Red Skull himself.

The key gained weight in his pocket. If he hadn’t been sitting it would have dragged him to the
floor.

“I’m not the same guy, the one you knew.” Bucky said.

Biting the inside of cheek, he slipped the key, to snap Bucky out of his restraints. He held out his hand and Bucky observed it for a beat before clasping it. Steve pulled him to his feet, not breaking hand or eye contact.

“Neither am I.”

Two contradictions, grasping hands.

Dead men couldn’t do that.

Whack.

This was not how to make a good impression. Jason was taking the M.O.D.O.K position on greeting someone: beating them around. Much in the way Tim hadn’t been a fan of the methodology, Clint wasn’t either. His forearms blocking his face as Jason whacked him with the - rather cute looking- frog umbrella.

As Jason rose his arm back for another strike, Tim latched on, digging his feet into the ground to slow him.

“Jay, Stop. You’re making a scene.”

He was swung off his feet as Jason brought his arm around to observe him. His eyes -which had been rage fueled- softened in recognition, and Tim was slung over Jason’s shoulder feeling more like a sack of potatoes than usual.

“Out of my way, stupid. I got this.”

“Jason, no.”

“Jason, yes!” He brought the umbrella down on the cushion where Clint has been cowering and Jason stalled. “Where’d he go?” His motions were lucid, he spun around in a sloppy circle trying to figure out where Clint had scurried to.

In his drugged out daze, he missed spotting Clint three separate times.

“I’ll find him, Timmy.” Jason said as he spun past Clint yet again.

Clint snorted. “So much for ‘Alvin’”

Jason’s eyes narrowed.

Whack.

“Holy shit!” Clint jumped back. “Timmy, control your brethren.”

“Don’t talk to the idiot,” Jason wiggled the umbrella at Clint. “Death by umbrella is a pathetic death.” Tim was readjusted so the back of his knees were pinned to Jason’s chest. He pointed the
umbrella at Clint: a judge prepared to drop the gavel. “Pathetic like you.”

Tim personally, was feeling fairly pathetic at the moment; Sure it wasn’t Clint level, but he was getting there. If Jason wasn’t still injured, Tim would have wormed his way out, but Jason was indeed indisposed. Although it hardly felt that way with Jason slinging his weight around like a teenage girl showing off her new driver’s license.

“Look, there’s been a misunderstanding.” Sam took a half a step forward; the wrong thing to do in hindsight. “I’m not going to hurt him.”

Whack.

“Okay, fuck you,” Sam had a red spot between his eyes where he’d been hit.

Tim squirmed in Jason’s grip. Jason grumbled, letting out an irritated puff as he tightened his hold on Tim’s legs.

“Shhhh, No wiggling,” Jason slurred.

This wasn’t happening. No, he’d just been transported to some version of hell where Jason had freaking shushed him, like a squabbling puppy or fussy baby. Fairly telling of the faith drugged Jason had in him. Was it too late to crawl into a hole and become a hermit living amongst the worms?

Probably.

“You’re hurt.” Sam reached a hand towards Jason. “Lay down before you open something,” Tim wasn’t surprised at the whack that wrung out as Sam’s hand got to close. “Mothefucker!” Sam pulled his hand back “Stop doing that!”

Jason held Tim tighter and raised the umbrella. “Square up, kangaroo-man!”

“What about me resembles a kangaroo?” Sam mumbled.

“I think he means emotionally.”

“Clint, what does that mean?!” Sam sounded more distressed than he should have. Near hysteria and on the verge of tears.

“Jay,” At Tim’s voice, he tensed. “I need you to put me down, okay?”

The hand brandishing the frog umbrella relented its pursuit of Sam for a brief moment as Jason roughly patted his head. The umbrella slapped across Tim’s face accidentally- or maybe it was Jason’s subconscious coming to the forefront.

“It’s okay, Timmy; I’m whack these fop-doodles,” Jason stepped forward raising his umbrella prepared to strike Sam and Clint down again.

Clint grabbed a pillow for defense. “Fop-doodles? Now I’m insulted.”

Jason stumbled forward, preparing a war cry and was hit by a pillow to the face.

Sam popped out from behind the arm chair. “Clint, be careful! He’s still recovering!”

“I threw a single pillow! How can I possibly be more careful?! Please, Sam, I’d love to know!” Clint reached for another one. “I’d let him hit me, but he might bruise his fist. And we can’t let that
happen; he’s still recovering!” Clint cupped his jaw, mouth agape in mock horror.

“This is not the time for this!” Sam said.

Whack. Whack.

Tim was raised higher as Jason straightened his posture, hands on his hips. Tim could envision the pride on his face as he got a double hitter: a shit-eating grin mixed with a sly side-eye.

“You see that replacement? That’s how you whack someone. B won’t teach ya that.”

Tim chose silence over acknowledging him. The absolute travesty of Bruce not teaching him specifically how to hit someone with an umbrella; that’s what his life’s been missing. Not like he was trained in hitting people with a long stick already. Real pity Lady Shiva hadn’t had an umbrella amongst her weapons.

Maybe then his life would have been complete.

Clint was doubled over, gripping his midsection. “Okay… ouch. Look out bitch and be glad I’m only throwing pillows, cause the monkey brain inside of me is saying: use teeth and pull hair.”

“Do not bite anyone,” Sam pleaded.

“Hair pulling’s chill though?”

“Clint.”

Tim grabbed Jason’s shoulders, trying to pull himself out of the grip. Jason just help tighter and let out an irritated puff, as if disappointed.

“Let’s all calm down.” Tim said.

“I for one, can’t wait till these two get the hell out of our dimension,” Clint was playing babysitter with Jason, circling the table with Jason parallel, copying him.

“We’re in a different dimension? Shit, we died didn’t we?” Jason stopped circling and slumped to the ground. He held Tim out in front of him, hands on his shoulders to stop him from leaving.

“Timmy, we’re dead!”

“No one’s dead and stop calling me Timmy.”

Jason shook his head. “I dunno, I feel pretty dead, Timmy. I think you’re just to stupid to have noticed. And you don’t get a say, I’m the only one who’s died already.”

“Already?” Clint asked.

“We’re not dead!”

Sam squatted beside him. Clint did not, he was hiding behind the love seat with a nasty glower on his face alongside many red marks. “Uh… you’re definitely not dead, but you will be if you don’t lay down.”

Jason’s eyes traveled to Sam. “YDude, did you kill us? You can tell us, I won’t be mad,” He held up a hand blocking Sam off as he whispered to Tim: “I’m lying. I will be very mad.”

“He didn’t kill us, Jason. We’re not dead.”
“Yeah and if anyone in this room would have killed you, it’d have been me.” Clint’s eyes peaked over the couch towards them.

“Clint! Dude, why? Just why?”

“I wanted to get it off my chest.”

Jason punched Tim’s arm and gave a wink. “Be right back, I’m going to go avenge us.”

With a lunge forward, Jason headed towards the couch. Sam intersected him, pinning him on the ground.

“So I can’t throw a pillow, but you can fucking tackle him?”

Jason was quick to toss his weight around, easily flipping around on top of Sam. From behind the couch, Clint threw his pillow -with frankly impressive accuracy- hitting Jason in the face. Tim took the moment of bewildered confusion to put himself between the two, pushing Jason back.

“Get off, you freaking zombie man.”

Jason held Tim with one arm and reached around try to hit Sam with the other. Sam, wizened by past blows, deflected the umbrella, accidentally sending it careening towards Tim. As if the world slowed, Tim saw his fate before it happened, pinned in place by Jason while the umbrella headed towards his face.

Whack.

Like getting clubbed. How did this umbrella manage to hurt more than the Penguin’s? And that thing had a Tommy gun it.

“Hoy shit, what kinda umbrellas are you buying?!”

“Don’t touch my idiot replacement!” Tim was grabbed by his stomach and Jason chucked him in the direction of the couch. By near miracle, he landed on the cushions and not the coffee table- something he’d be eternally greatful for.

Clint popped his head up. “Sup.”

Now free of the weight of his responsibilities, Jason pounced on Sam and began repeatedly hitting him with the umbrella. Clint’s calm exterior disintegrated as Jason didn’t slacken his assault on Sam.

Clint descended into panic.

“Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit.” His eyes landed on Tim and he tapped his forehead with two fingers. “Don’t worry I got this.” Clint wrapped his hands around Tim’s neck, not holding on, merely laying them there. “Hey, big red! I’m wringing the idiot replacement’s neck!”

“Idiots,” Tim groaned as Jason changed his sights. “You’re all idiots.”

“I’m going to wring your neck!”

“Holy shit. Holy shit. Holy shit.” Clint cried as he scurried away into the kitchen with Jason close behind. Tim followed, hoping he could do some damage control. He passed Sam along the way, who rolled over, groaning as blood leaked from a broken nose.
Clint climbed cabinets, the wood squeaking under his weight. Jason waggled the umbrella whilst Clint kicked at the weapon all the while gripping the storage unit for dear life. Tim tried once again to stop Jason’s umbrella strikes getting a similar result as the first time.

Jason grumbled at him and scooped him up by his midsection. “Don’t worry Timbo, I’m great at wac-a-mole,” He was held like luggage, tucked under Jason’s arm away from the ‘foo-doodles’ whilst Jason whacked at Clint, chanting: “vengeance!”

It was a lie, Jason was horrible at wac-a-mole. He, Damian, and Jason had once’s been pulled to the carnival by Dick. Dick and Damian soon forget about the two of them -per usual- and Jason dragged Tim to the game booth. After missing the first three moles, he changed his sights to Tim. Tim spent the next thirty minutes running from Jason, the booth worker chasing both of them, begging Jason to drop the mallet. Tim resorted to hiding behind a deep frier for ten minutes, after which he emerged, only to get whapped on the head by a stalking Jason.

It was nice to have his attacks sent on someone else.

“I feel sorta flattered. Should I feel flattered?”

“No. You should not,” Clint yelped from his perch. “He’s going to kill me!”

Jason took a swipe, knocking out a cabinet door. It fumbled to the ground, splintering as it hit tile. Sam’s groans increased from the other room at the sound of the destruction.

“Vengeance! Vengeance! Vengance!” Jason chanted.

It was, perhaps the worst time for Bucky and Steve to appear, climbing through Sam’s window.

Chapter End Notes

~tada~

I hope you guys liked it, it was pretty dialogue focused (especially in the beginning)
Steve had stumbled into a fever dream that he couldn’t lumber his way out of; each variable was a new wave of nausea overtaking him like a flu-ridden child who’d skipped on their medicine. He and Bucky stood frozen by a frantic tension; postponed by three sets of eyes, each with individual brands of bedlam, staring at them.

Red, Jason, and Clint had been driving a car during the layover of a rainstorm, unaware of bystanders till their car sloshed through a puddle, spraying Steve and Bucky with gutter water. And, as their crazed, unmasked eyes became concerned, the trio realized the consequence of their actions.

Steve and Bucky hadn't moved as they’d walked in on something they weren’t supposed to see: something cursed. Nobody should have seen Jason holding a bloodied umbrella and chanting the same anthem on repeat while Clint cowered atop the cabinets.

“Vengeance! Vengeance! Vengeance!”

It was far from Steve’s choice of music, but catchy nonetheless. Jason’s vibrato broke as he dropped Red on the floor and raised his frog-themed weapon towards them. “You guys broke my rhythm,” He said.

“Thank god,” Clint exhaled. “I felt like I was being sacrificed in some half-assed cult ritual.” A grumble came as Red picked himself off the ground. Clint scowled. “If I’m going to be sacrificed there better be catchy background music; none of that repetitive elevator shit.”

Perhaps, if Steve hadn’t been seeing stars, he would have questioned what kinda elevators Clint had been using. Instead, he needed to lie down for a bit. He rubbed his forehead right above his left eyebrow.

“I thought it was catchy,” Jason’s said, his stress rising at an alarming pace. “I- were you guys not going to tell me it was bad? Fuck you guys. Especially you, Tim, I’m embarrassed. I thought we were supposed to be bros.”
Clint crawled down off the cabinet, keeping a wide berth from Jason. “My screams were not for an \textit{éncore}.”

Red, apparently Tim, stepped in front of Jason who’s knees wobbled. Tim guarded his face with raised hands; his knees bent till they tensed while facing Steve and Bucky “And we’re far from \textit{bros},” Tim’s eyes were everything Steve had feared that day, seemingly so long ago, back in the tower: analytical, smart, and \textit{cold}. “Go back to the mudroom.”

“Fuck you!” Jason sloshed, supporting his weight on his frog umbrella. “You’re not Alfie; you can’t send me to my room!”

“I’ve got his snap.” Tim didn’t twist to look at Jason. “His insta, his phone, his everything. Try me.”

“Bullshit-” Jason shook his head too viciously and took a moment to steady himself-“That’s not how dimensions work.”

Oh. Tony was going to pissed when he found out. The two of them had money riding on this. Though it looked like Steve would be several -specifically six- dollars richer. A lighthouse in the midst of this storm.

“So Cap,” Clint rose his hands, palm out. “Are we fighting or?” \textit{Whack}. “That wasn’t directed to you, jerk.” His face was red across the forehead. Clint took a step out of range.

Jason dangled the umbrella towards Clint. “Fuck you. you killed us.”

“He didn’t,” Tim said with a sigh far too old for his face. Jason punched his shoulder. Tim sighed harder.

A groan broke through the doorway. Drawn out and full of anguish mixed with annoyance. “Is Cap here? Why’s Cap here?” Sam’s mumbled from the other room. It was ignored by all present parties.

Jason stiffened at the disembodied voice. His head spun around. “Fuckkkk, I told you we died. We’re one with the ghosts. We are them and they are us. I can \textit{hear} them, Timmy,” He waved his hand in front of his eyes. “The specters walk amongst us: unfit for Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory. All doomed to roam the earth in an eternal slumber.” Jason gaped at Tim. “That’s us now. \textit{We’re eternal slumber}.”

“Is he okay?” Steve asked.

“Big Bastards been having some mood swings. This guy needs something and the devil’s lettuce was not it,” Clint said.

There was a beat of silence. Bucky shifted beside Steve.

Tim rolled his eyes. “It was pain medicine.”

“The good shit,” Jason added.

Perhaps that’s why Steve felt like he was wobbling his way through someone’s fever dream. Apparently, he was. Jason’s shoulders rotated as a tin-soldiers would. Though, as he fumbled his way around the kitchen, his robotic motions maintained an element of lucidity- as though he wasn’t quite there. He wasn’t most of the time until he looked at Tim and remembered something that made his eyes refocus. Though it’d be just a moment before he was back to watching seemingly
invisible butterflies flutter about the room again.

For such a large guy, Jason seemed more fragile than anything to Steve. The deterioration made Steve squirm. A symbol of sturdiness reduced to a chipped teacup held an unsettling familiarity: like a soldier who’d had their mind played with or a human weapon who’d been crumpled by realization. No man or woman should have to make such a fall; no one deserved to become a teacup.

“So, Cap, you here for the kids? Because I’m invested now, so I sorta can’t let you. Technicalities and all that- I didn’t read the fine print,” Clint tilted his head at Bucky. “Isn’t that guy our war criminal?”

Clarity returned to Jason’s gaze and it lingered. “War criminal?! Do you have any idea how hard Tim is to walk around with when he’s wearing a choker of bruises? I’ll tell you: it ain’t easy bud,” Jason raised the umbrella, glowering. “It’s actually really hard and a genuine inconvenience.”

Bucky tilted his head. “I’m sorry?”

Tim spluttered. He fell out of his stance for half-a-second, before his knees rebent and his ready stance renewed. “Why are you apologizing to him?” His neck was still a patchwork of purple, though it had deepened in color as though another bruise was on top of it.

“I’m double sorry?”

Tim’s hand traced the bruise. “I’ve heard better apologizes from murderous pre-teens. Try harder next time.”

Silence.

The kitchen was a mess. The cabinets hung in shambles and drips of red led back to Jason and his goddamn frog umbrella. Steve hadn’t noticed Sam’s kitchen was botched when initially entering. He’d been drawn to more concerning aspects- like the attempted murder weapon in Jason’s hand. It had someone’s blood on it, but no one in the room was disheveled enough to justify such a stain.

Though Sam did occasionally groan from the room over.

As they stood in the wreckage of a once homely, albeit diminutive, kitchen, it seemed even the muted tang a prick of a needle might make against a window pane would be enough to trigger a total war. Years of his life had been dedicated to war; he’d rather skip out on this one.

Sam came hobbling in from the living room, a stained, cardinal rag to his nose. He supported himself on the wall and left red echos behind. Each hand print: evidence to what Steve had suspected. Sam faltered upon seeing Jason still flaunting his umbrella. Sam blinked at all of them, waiting till the silence flittered into awkwardness before speaking. “How have none of you disarmed him?”

“It’s just an umbrella,” Clint said.

A second, pause followed. It was longer than the first. “I…did you actually?” Another beat. A groan. “Clint- I…” Sam ran a hand across his face, dragging it slowly as though scrubbing the last remnants of his soul as he did so. His face flashed pure anger that lived only a brief moment before it was replaced with a frightening amount of disappointment. “You really think I’m above murder; don’t you?”

Clint backed up a smidge.
Sam turned to Steve. “What are you doing here, Cap?”

“I think you know.”

“Cap,” Sam let go of the wall and rose to his full posture with wafer-paper knees. “We’re helping the little guy. You gotta understand that before you sick your cyborg on us.”

Jason’s head flung around, his motions: dreamy. “That’s not Cyborg, you idiot.” Jason’s torso pivoted towards Tim. “How’d these pair of fop-doodles take us down, Walmart Boy?”

“Cap- Steve,” The dripping inflection of Sam’s words matched the pleading look in his eyes. “We can’t take you- not right now. We don’t want a fight.”

“You just want to piss Fury off,” Steve said.

Tim’s took a step forward but was flung behind Jason as the older brother took the foreground. He held the umbrella forward, an invitation Steve could choose to accept. “Hell yeah, we do.”

Steve stepped forward, into the range of the umbrella against his better instincts. Though, with Bucky behind him, the threat of a whack seemed minuet. It was an engraved marble plaque on the beach: its etched warnings eroded by the reliability of the tide. Steve pushed the tip of the umbrella down, smiling towards Jason.

“Consider it mutual.” He said.

Plumes of smoke peacocked above the citywide bonfire engulfing New York. The criminal underbelly added more and more logs to the fire till it was a flare for all moths in the Tri-State Area to see. While pests and scum may have been seduced by the capering flames, most anyone else would see a rather different message in the billowing lights: things were not okay. They were bad even. The villains were loose and the city was on fire.

New York was burning.

The scent of it told the deaf, the crackles of it told the blind, and the overwhelming heat of it told anyone who hadn’t noticed. A smoke curtain blotted out the sky: an entrapment that told the people there’d be no phoenix rising from the ashes- no victorious resuscitation. Not when New York was burning.

Peter was on the bus before the first fire started: wedged between two Asgardian gods with a cup of hot cocoa.

And it was on that bus, that Peter would have raised an eyebrow at the turkey clucking at him from the elderly woman’s handbag, but he was dressed in spandex with his mask tucked up over his nose so he could take periodic sips of his hot chocolate. He'd seen stranger things than a controband turkey.

Loki, the man who’d tried to take over New York awhile back, was hiding indulgement for a caramel frappuccino. His eyebrows, tilted up in surprise, betrayed his enjoyment. Thor was leaning past Peter to observe Loki’s reaction, his smile growing each time he seemed satisfied with the drink. Loki took notice and feigned distaste.

The turkey clucked again and Peter shrugged.
Who was he to judge?

He couldn’t discern why Thor had made them ride the bus. Its aroma was a mix of gas exhaust and body sweat. Thor could fly, why had he subjected them to this?

The turn single clicked on and the driver took a frenzied left, jangling all the riders. The total five people—excluding the driver—kept themselves in place by grabbing the nearest stable thing. Loki grabbed the standing pole, Thor grabbed an empty seat, and Peter grabbed Thor.

Across from them, The turkey lady grabbed the bottom of the chair, her voice cooing to calm the turkey. A businessman hiding a puppy in his suit jacket tried to stop it from barking at the distressed turkey—to little avail.

The driver’s eyes flickered in the rearview mirror but made no further acknowledgment.

Hence his second qualm: why had they all sat so close together when the bus was nearly empty?

“Hey, Thor?” He asked. The thunder god grunted for him to continue. “Why are we on the bus?”

“I wish to support public transportation.”

“Oh. Alright.”

He leaned his head against the window, watching streetlights pass by. It was mesmerizing to the point he almost didn’t notice the smoke encasing the night sky. If that hadn’t caught his attention the bus being knocked off the road would have.

In the sweeping motion that pushed the bus aside, he jumped forward to grab the two passengers. Thor made for the driver. Loki stayed still, taking another sip of his drink. His eyes lit up at the chaos.

The door of the bus was peeled off like the lid of a cat food tin. One robotic arm snaked its way in, followed by seven more.

Outside the window, figures took over the city streets. It’s what he imagined Armageddon would’ve looked like. A splatter of criminals freed of their bindings took out their temporary imprisonment on New York. They kept on coming, like ants evacuating their anthill. Some he recognized others he hadn’t.

Doc Ock, for example, was familiar in the bus’ limelight. He looked just as shocked to see Peter as he was to see him.

It was oddly familiar to a meet-cute. Peter felt like he’d been walking his imaginary dog and it’s leash had wrapped around him and Octavious. Though instead of sexual tension it was mutual distaste.

The sirens outside sang a horrible tune. A tune that made his throat close on behalf of Manhattan. The discord blanketed the cityscape as a weighted blanket. It closed off the sky leaving him breathless.

“Spider-Man?!”

Ock asked.

“What the?”
Outside, the city went up in golden flames with steel blue highlights. A bonfire set to the tune of sirens. Spider-Man's heart wouldn't have clenched and his breath wouldn't have stumbled. Spider-Man wouldn't have frozen, eyes glassy towards the earthbound sunset muddying the iconic skyline. But he wasn't Spider-Man at the moment. He was Peter

Spider-Man wouldn't have hesitated.

Peter and Octavious looked at each other, neither moving. Their moment was broken by Thor swinging at Doc Ock. Peter internally thanked him. That god had his shit together, but New York did not.

New York was burning. Time to get the buckets.

Somewhere between Hawaii and the Marquesas Islands, a cruise ship bobbed on top of the waves. In the largest suite, a somewhat unwilling passenger rested, trying his best to enjoy the rhythmic swaying. Instead, he felt sick.

Bruce Banner was on vacation.

It'd been Tony's idea to take a cruise and it'd been a horrible idea. Him and the Hulk, resting in the middle of the ocean: a prison full of civilians. Though the Hulk had been less overwhelming as of late, it still bubbled inside with persistent anger.

The ocean was all-consuming. It pulled ships and lives into its depths. It wasn’t something to be trivialized. A tropical gale outmatched the damage the green thing inside of him could do. It made his stomach sick the same way thinking of the Hulk often did.

It was beautiful though. It’s destruction was overlooked because it had lovely white waves and a calming salty sent to it. People built houses beside it, aware of the threat of hurricanes and tsunamis to listen to the beat of its crests. Hence, it was at the destruction that the similarities ended.

People didn’t choose to stand next to Bruce. He held no allure.

There were storm chasers. There were volcano appreciates. Their anarchy was tinged with an enticement that drew people in despite the risks. His brand of destruction sent people packing the way a tornado or eruption would, yet it didn’t bring anyone back. His most glamorous aspects remained repulsive. A life saved for a smashed car. His usefulness in a crisis his only lure; his only magnetism tied him still to catastrophe.

Who’d choose a monster over the ocean?

No one.

His phone rang. He waited till the third ring before he picked it up. It cradled the space between his neck and ear. Heavy breathing reminiscent to the influx of the ocean trickled on the other side.

“Y’ello?” He asked.

“Banner,” Fury’s harsh tone, made him stiffen. “We need you back in New York. There’s been a mass break out.”
Bruce grabbed his already packed suitcase as Fury spoke. He did a glance over of the room, before heading out of his suite towards the deck. He watched the ocean, unable to push away the feeling of strained camaraderie. A family down the deck leaned over the rails to watch the water hit the hull. He seemed to be the unfavorite child.

“Banner?” Fury asked.

No one chose a monster over the ocean until a tsunami came.

“I’ll be there soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys liked it! And again, sorry it took so long. All of you guys commenting nice things even after the longish time was super appreciated, so thank you <3
Zebra's Aren't Masters of Disguise

Chapter Summary

Steve and Sam gave it their best; but hey, they were in a time crunch.

Chapter Notes

Hope you guys enjoy the story <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alfred Pennyworth was not a forgetful man.

That’s why there was something deeply unsettling about his lingering sense of wrong. Something was strutting across the tip of his tongue and swatting him when he couldn’t remember. Had he been a younger man with fewer responsibilities, he might have dug deeper. But no, he had wounds to clean, tea to brew, snark to give, and a manor to clean.

He was currently dusting off the portraits in the main hall. Most of the older ones still kept their muted colors, but the newer ones regained a vibrant and glossy sheen. Nearly all oil paintings and of the same style: classical.

There had been a watercolor one by Damian, though he’d purposely left out Tim, so Bruce told him to keep it hung up in his room instead. That had been a… difficult day.

Damian’s hobbies were more in line with that of trying Mortal Kombat moves on his siblings so it wasn’t often that one of his interests didn’t involve disembodiment. Hence why there was a cow in the Batcave and only a slight slap on the wrist for blatant sibling exclusion.

No one wanted him to regress.

He dusted the faces of Martha and Thomas Wayne, revealing their pointed, dead stares.

If he hadn’t lived in the manor so long, perhaps the multitude of lingering eyes would have sent shivers down his spine. Though even if they had, he was an old man and often cold. It was getting harder and harder to determine when something was actually troubling him or if he was only becoming cold-blooded.

He brushed off his favorite portrait —tiny dust bunnies floating down in a snowstorm that dulled his recently shined shoes— and smiled at the family. His family.

The portrait was hidden somewhat in the hallway. Better to not have people questioning who Stephanie Brown, a low-class Gothamite with no logical means of knowing Bruce Wayne, was. No need in wondering how a dead boy had risen from his grave just to grumble in the background.

Some questions were better off not asked.
Alfred had hung it up despite Bruce’s wishes. Lord knows the world’s most observant man could be just as oblivious—Bruce had yet to notice. Alfred would’ve had to turn himself in if he hadn’t framed and hung it; it’d have been criminal to omit it.

All of them were there. The Batman and his allies—civilian and otherwise—together and happy. It wasn’t often that the Masked Freak Club™ weren’t at each other's throats. He uncovered Cass’ face, followed by Harper’s. He got to Tim and Jason, letting their blue and green eyes shine through respectfully.

Alfred shivered. Had Bruce skimped on the heating again? He left the hallway, heading to the thermometer, pausing in the doorway. Blue and Green stares caught in an everlasting moment of glee: given forever through a paint stroke.

He straightened his tie and continued on. The children really did need to drop by more.

It’d been ages since he’d seen Jason or Tim.

“Hey, Jason,” Tim sat in a chair, knees curled up to his chin. “Apparently New York’s burning—fire departments and all—so I’m gonna head out. I figured we can come to an agreement: I don’t die and you don’t die. Fair, right?”

Tim leaned forward, poking Jason’s cheek. Jason stayed asleep.

The bastard.

“Alright, sounds good, Tim!” He said, dropping his voice down into Jason octaves. “This is such a fabulous agreement. I’m so glad I was awake to hear it!” Tim slapped Jason’s cheek, he didn’t stir. Tim sighed, getting to his feet. “I’ll be back soon.”

“The big brat still napping?” Clint asked, leaning against the doorway. Tim stayed silent so Clint stole the conversation because of course he did. “Don’t worry, the grandpas are going to watch him. He’ll be fine.”

“I’m not worried,” Tim grumbled. He slouched from the room, Clint following behind.

Clint just smiled.

Tim was going to destroy everything Clint loved— or maybe just ask for them to get takeout from someplace he didn’t like. But then arose another problem: Clint was a human garbage disposal.

Tim could have given him a fork coated in sugar and it was in the air whether or not Clint would eat it. Though it would likely go down as a fork in a garbage disposal. That is to say, not at all.

Maybe broccoli. Clint gave him strong 'aversion to vegetables' vibes. The man had a blood flow of fruit loops. He could be a donor to Dick.

Dick who was a world away with better things to do.

“What’s wrong? Feeling guilty about your countless atrocities against me?”

“I’m fine.”

“Whatever, little dude,” Clint pushed him towards the kitchen. “Life gets hard sometimes, but give
it the middle finger by not letting it affect you and push you down,” Clint clasped his shoulder. “Sucker punch life in the eyes like its some monster who stabbed you multiple times— uh, for example.”

Tim pushed Clint’s hand off. “I’m not new to this. I don’t need the pep talk.” He started to grab the new uniform, Steve and Sam had made it from some of Sam’s old war gear, Goodwill items, and a great deal of sewing.

It looked terrible.

It was very loose-fitting, meant to hide his stature. Steve had given it vertical stripes of camo and black stating that: “Vertical stripes make people look taller.”

Which, sure, go off.

The real fashion disaster arose from Sam’s creation of the pants. Sam had used horizontal stripes countering that: “Horizontal stripes make people look wider,” There’d been a miscommunication in the costume department, to say the least. Them tossing it together in twenty minutes had not helped the execution.

He was going to burn this costume later.

He looked like a five-year-old who’d made their Zebra costume themselves while only knowing what a Zebra was from their boomer uncle describing it in a rambling aside. That is to say, the costume did an amazing job of visualizing his current mental state.

He pulled on the pants, which needed to be belted in place, and slid the top over his head. It was at that point, Clint started laughing. Tim chose to be the bigger man —as that was what this uniform was all about, wasn’t it?— and ignored Clint. He pulled his new mask over his head, it was more confining than the domino mask he’d already been wearing.

His hat hair was going to be deplorable.

He made to put on his shoes, they were wedges that added an extra two inches to his height. Not only was his hair going to be terrible, his feet were going to sting. They hadn’t even given him band-aids if he got a blister.

Clint laughed louder.

Tim spun, glaring at the still taller human mess. “What’s your problem?”

Clint heaved over. Holding his stomach, he held up a single finger. “One— one sec… I just gotta —” Clint grabbed a chair and dropped himself into it. After taking a few seconds to calm himself, Clint glanced over Tim again.

“This is not going to fool anyone.” Clint giggled.

Tim’s shoulders slumped as though Atlas had tossed him the world for a quick five-minute break; Tim buckled under the new weight. He rubbed his temple, avoiding Clint’s gaze.

“I know.”

“Well, let's get this trainwreck over with. Sam’s in the car.”

The two started towards the door when Steve came in with Bucky. The two had been bringing in
groceries from the garage. Steve dropped his bags; Bucky caught them. Tim wished he was legal so he could take a swig of something hard— vodka maybe. He wouldn’t be too picky as to what.

“Would you look at that,” Steve held his hands on his hips. “We’ve got Fury fooled.”

Tim just sighed.

When Jason woke up, he felt like shit. He peeked one eye open and then the other. Two men waited in the doorway, both vaguely familiar. One was Steve and the other… well, Jason just felt that he knew him.

The two chatted back and forth, their conversation charged and awkward. Both being short with each other.

“It’s good to have you back, Bucky,” Steve said.

It took a good while for Bucky to respond. Jason listened to Steve shift back and forth while waiting: the sound of fabric rustling together. Jesus, Jason was getting second-hand embarrassment.

“Yes.”

What the hell? He'd dealt with that build-up for that. And people said he and Bruce needed to see a counselor; these two were much worse. Sure, he and Bruce tended to beat each other up every other Friday and the man had left him and Tim stranded so far in a different universe and—

What was the point he was trying to make again?

“How are you?” Steve asked.

Oh yeah. Their awkwardness.

“I’m okay.”

Yeah, he wasn’t going to deal with this. Jason sat up in bed, looking for something blunt to knock them over with. He was in a mudroom of sorts, but someone had placed a bed inside. It was also missing all whackable objects: no shoes, no hoses, no umbrellas.

Whatever. He could improvise.

He took a step and crumbled. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* The awkward conversation ceased and the two turned around to look at Jason, lounging on the floor in a decidedly uncomfortable position.

“You alright?” Steve asked, bending down to offer Jason a hand. He slapped it away because *fuck that.* “Go back to bed, soldier.”

“Like hell I will. You two are some creeps watching me sleep.” He helped himself up, supporting his weight on the bed and gabbing out with a fist. His gaze flew around the room. One door, no windows.

Steve’s placating hands fanned Jason’s fuming flames. He stepped towards Jason “We weren’t trying to—”
“What did you guys do with Red? Where is he?”

“What’s left of the others took him out,” Bucky said.

Jason fell backward, head spinning. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* “They killed him?” He grabbed his head; something was wrong, he was missing something. “He’s— fuck he’s not even eighteen yet! What sorta mob shit are you guys into?!”

“No! No one killed anybody,” Steve said, moving a bit too close. “Bucky meant they took him on a mission. They’re in downtown New York right now.”

Jason peeled himself from the bed, sitting upright instead. He clenched and unclenched his hands. “So, you and him are allies? That seems sorta suss,” He pushed Steve backward, the man faltered out of range. “Tell me where the fuck the little bastard is or I’ll rewire your insides so they can power a battery.”

Steve pulled out his phone and began… texting? Alright, these goddamn Avengers had no class. He’d given an ultimatum and this man couldn’t even bother to respond. When he could move without falling he was going to— well, he already specified what he’d do hadn’t he?

Steve made a final tap on the phone and held it for Jason to see. Jason slapped it out of his hand because if this dweeb was going to be rude, he was going to be rude right back.

As Steve went to pick it back up, Jason caught sight of a familiar, albeit distorted, form in the cracked glass. He pushed Steve over, snatching the phone up. He held it close squinting at the image.

“Tim told us to show you this in case you didn’t believe us. You might not be able to tell it’s him because of our—”

How they knew Tim’s name was a future matter. Currently, the only thing on his mind was:

“What the fuck is Tim wearing?”

Bucky snorted from the doorway. “He’s a zebra. Can’t you tell?”

Jason squinted closer. It was Tim alright, taking a photo with all the people they’d beaten up—plus Bucky. Whatever he was wearing could not be defined as clothing. It was horrid, it was terrible, it hurt him more than the bullet wound in his side.

“Which part is supposed to be the zebra?”

“All of it.” Steve was peeking over his shoulder at the photo. Something that could be described as pride alight in his eyes. “Zebras have stripes, what else do you need?”

Jason’s eyes burned. Good lord, he was never going to let Tim live this down.

“Uh, cohesion.”

Steve snatched his phone back. “We didn’t have a lot of time,” He slid the phone into his pocket. “All that matters is that it’s good enough to fool Fury.”

“That couldn’t fool a blind lion,” Jason said. His heart quickened a second time. Something was very wrong about this. So very, very wrong. “Why would he need to fool Fury?”

Bucky and Steve looked at each other. What garbage dimension was this? What terrible, horrible,
no good world did he now persist in? Someone dismember his insides to make a battery; God knows it’d be less painful.

“Why would he need to fool Fury?” Jason repeated, words quickening.

“Well, you see…”

Jason dropped his face into his hands, shaking his head back and forth. It was a good fifteen seconds before he could bear the sight of them. This world was terrible. He hated this world.

His disbelief came quieter. A mere whisper of the panic racking him.

“What the fuck, you guys?”

Fury was blindsided when Sam and Clint walked up to him with a new vigilante calling himself The Zebra. Someone might as well have knocked him over with a ladder like it was some WWE championship.

Sure, it was always strange meeting a new hero. He had to address their threat concern, consider adding them to S.H.I.E.L.D, and more abnormal considerations that had long since become mundane.

But he’d never judged one’s uniform before.

Whoever had designed this vigilante's garb did not know what a zebra was. Whoever had designed this had never seen a zebra before. Whoever had designed this thought a zebra was the gunk that rested at the bottom at a trash can.

And it was his men who designed it because that boy was clearly Red Robin.

Fury was feeling a lot of emotions when Sam and Clint walked up. He’s not sure he could verbalize what they were. If he tried, he’d say something along the lines of all the stages of grief mixed with a smidge of repeatedly hitting his funny bone on something.

Life was cruel in this terrible, horrible, no good world.

Zebras didn’t look like that. These men were under his employment and they had never seen a zebra. These people protected the world and didn’t know how to make someone look zebra-esk.

Dear God, all they needed were black and white stripes. Why was there purple? It wasn’t even a good shade of purple. It was the type of purple that appears when someone is trying to fix their night sky painting with neon orange—it was nearly more brown than purple.

But New York was burning and this incompetence was not his first priority. He would deal with them afterward. Not as though it’d be hard when they’d waltzed the boy right to him.

Soon through he’d get closure. Right now, New York was burning and he had a job to do.

Phoenix wings were turning the city to smoke. It was the playground of an arsonist, and if Fury dissociated, he could understand why someone could find it enticing. The dancing flames lapping up buildings in a dazzling tango that spiraled outwards. Unjust in its beauty.

That was the worst part: that it was so bewitching. The wrongness of it made his gut swirl. In a world where something so alluring was undoubtedly austere and destructive, it made sense why
flies flew into the light. People have always chased storms; they’ve always lived by the sea.

That’s why he called the right man for the mission.

A missile hitting down. Fury saw green legs before anything else. His gaze traveled upwards, landing on the monstrous, moss-toned, face of the man who’d helped save New York all those years ago. People always said not to fight fire with fire.

Whatever.

Bruce Banner’s vacation had been collateral. And now they had the Hulk.

He watched while Clint leaned over to whisper to ‘The Zebra’. His mouth moved crisply, the words easy to read.

“We’re Fucked.”

Hell yeah, they were. Just after they put out this fire.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you thought. Also, which heroes you want to work with Tim during their efforts to save New York. Any of the one's who've popped up in this multidimensional mess so far are good with me :)

Thanks for reading <3

End Notes

Please, leave reviews of what I can do better and what's alright.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!