No Silver Bullet
by **MaskoftheRay**

Summary

Everyone knows Batman's origin story. Everyone has heard about Bruce Wayne's tragic past, and his orphaining. It's also common knowledge that Batman **doesn't like guns**. However, Bruce's PTSD and triggering because of guns isn't often explored...

Here are five times that Bruce was triggered, and one time something was different.
The league are having a movie night, and Bruce has joined them (out-of-uniform) for once. However, things don't exactly go to plan.

Finally decided to try my hand at a '5 + 1' fic. Also, I felt like I needed some more Bruce-whump in my life. Picture this taking place in the early(ish) years. So therefore, it is realistic for Clark to be surprised about things about Bruce. Also, Clark running away from a thunderstorm isn't canon (to my knowledge). But I liked it, so it got added to this fic.

TW: mentions of vomiting, if that bothers you.

It’s not their first movie night, but it is the first one that all of them are there for— namely, that *Batman* is there for out of costume. Bruce is in a black turtleneck sweater and a pair of light-wash denim jeans. On his feet are a pair of dark brown penny loafers. He looks out of place, but none of them mention it (except for Hal, in muttered-tones to Barry, before Clark glares him into silence) as they’re too happy that he’s even here. And when Diana passes the latest snack bowl over to their couch, Bruce even takes some of the chips.

His plate now has a few small, carefully-separated piles of trail-mix (Barry’s contribution), chips (Hal’s), and popcorn (Clark’s). This quietly amuses Superman; an occurrence which does not escape Batman’s attention. “Well, I’m here. And I might as well partake in movie night tradition,” Bruce grumbles at him. Clark snorts.

It had been Hal’s night to choose a movie, but he’d ceded his choice to Barry, after he whined enough. “We’re watching an early Tom Cruise classic: *Collateral*. I hope you all enjoy it,” Barry had said. Then he pressed play.

At first, Clark doesn’t notice anything wrong. Sure, Bruce is sitting a bit stiffly beside him, but there’s nothing too unusual about that (Clark had long ago learned that Bruce was sometimes stiff because he was socially uncomfortable, not just because he was injured). So Clark pays it no mind, and turns his attention back to the movie— it’s a typical guns-blazing action movie, so not his favorite— which is enjoyable enough. More so because of the company, and the snacks.

And then they get to the alley scene, and Max is tied to the steering wheel of his cab while Vincent is inside. He keeps honking the horn, and calling for help, but nobody answers. Then, a couple of gun-toting low-lives approach him, and start to cause trouble. The low-life in charge draws his gun, and steals the briefcase after threatening him. Vincent reappears, and shoots both of the punks. Clark hears Bruce’s sharp inhale.
Abruptly, Bruce stands. Flash pauses the movie. Bruce holds up his phone, as if in explanation, and says stiffly, “Something came up. Enjoy the rest of the movie.” Flash nods, Victor waves, and Arthur grunts in Batman’s direction. Diana looks sympathetic. But no one else really notices what Clark does: Bruce’s hands are shaking.

For a moment, he sits, and debates with himself whether he should go after Bruce or not— it could be that he was injured, and is suddenly not feeling well. Or, perhaps, something actually did come up in Gotham (the city is enough of a mess for that to be reasonable)… but. But, Clark hadn’t heard Bruce’s phone go off, and his hands had been shaking. His mind is made up for him when he hears the sound of vomiting coming from the kitchen-adjacent bathroom.

Miraculously, no one notices when Clark hurriedly slips away.

Initially, he walks quickly, but then, when he hears the sound of retching again, Clark flies the last few feet to the (closed) bathroom door. “Bruce?” he calls in a forced-calm tone. No answer but shaky breathing. “Bruce?” he tries again firmly. Nothing. So Clark places a hand on the door’s handle— fully expecting to find it locked— and it opens silently. The smell of vomit hits Clark like a hammer of kryptonite to the head. Still, he presses onwards, genuinely concerned now for Bruce, who still hasn’t answered.

“Bruce,” he says urgently. Clark steps forward, and flushes the toilet. The sound of running water makes Bruce flinch. He is still kneeled in front of the toilet, hands clenched into fists on the ground — his knuckles are white. Clark watches, worried, as Bruce’s face suddenly has a greenish-sheen. He’s sweating slightly, and his heartrate’s elevated. His eyes are— Clark swallows, feeling a huge spike of anxiety run through him. Bruce’s eyes are distant, and he’s clearly seeing something that’s not there. His fists tremble. No. All of him trembles.

Clark takes a step forward, and half-squats so he’s eye-level with Bruce. “Hey. Batman. I need you to talk to me,” he says firmly in his Superman-voice. This, thankfully, gets a reaction from Bruce. He half-turns his head to Clark, and seems to blink back to the present. Clark will never tell him, but seeing the awareness creep back into his gaze is one of the most relieving things he’s ever experienced. Clark exhales shakily.

Then, slowly, he sits against the opposite wall from Bruce, and pats the floor beside him. Bruce, equally as slow— and god, his heart’s still beating so quickly— slides across the floor and thumps down beside him. They’re silent for a long set of minutes (which Clark uses to study his friend). Bruce doesn’t even notice this—he just pulls his sleeve down and wipes his mouth on it.

Eventually, though, he rests his head against the wall, and closes his eyes. “I… The alley. It was too similar to—” Bruce trails off, unable to finish. He takes a deep, but shaky, breath. The pallor of his skin returns slightly. Bruce blinks open his eyes and looks at Clark. Clark frowns. Bruce is still watching him.

“I… I’m sorry— I didn’t know,” Clark begins weakly, “I didn’t realize that—”

“That guns still affect me this much?” Bruce mutters. He sounds angry— at himself. Clark sighs. Bruce regards him questioningly.

“I don’t like thunderstorms,” Clark confesses, “or strong wind.”

“Why not?” Bruce asks curiously (desperately).

Clark pauses, to recall his memories of it. “The only time I ever ran away from home— I was ten — was because of a thunderstorm. It was too loud, and it… it scared me. Before I knew it, I had
run half-way to Canada, and I got lost... Took me a week to get home. Ma and Pa were so scared; they’d told everyone that I’d been at home with a really bad case of the flu.”

Bruce looks less peaky, and less ready to vomit now. “I didn’t know that,” he says quietly.

Clark sighs. “Yeah, well... I didn’t know either—” he slides closer to Bruce, enough that their shoulders touch. He hopes this small action is helpful. “Maybe… maybe we should come up with a list, yeah?” he suggests cautiously. Bruce remains silent beside him. Clark is surprised that he doesn’t immediately ask: ‘A list of what, Clark?’ Instead, Bruce lets his head tip back to rest against the bathroom wall again.

“Maybe we should,” he says simply. Clark stays with Bruce until he is feeling steady enough to go home.

Chapter End Notes

This can be read as pre-slash if you want to, or just gen friendship.

*Collateral* is a real movie, and you can watch the scene from it that I describe [here](#).

In case you're wondering, you can find more information about the symptoms of PTSD at this [website](#).
A History Assignment (Tim's Computer)

Chapter Summary

Tim, sleep-deprived Robin that he is, falls asleep while doing homework in the kitchen. The problem? He manages to knock over a glass of water and soak his poor computer. Bruce is to the rescue. Feels ensue.

Chapter Notes

Yeah, yeah, Tim probably could have fixed the computer by himself, but I didn't want that to happen. Also, I know Jason's supposed to be the writer of the family, but in-canon Tim is artistic too (his photography) so I feel like writing wouldn't be beyond him. Picture this taking place during Tim's sophomore or junior year of high school.

“NOO!”

The anguished shout immediately has Bruce out of his seat, and rushing towards its source: the kitchen. He half-skids across the wooden floors, but pays this no mind as he takes in Tim’s slumped-over form, seated at the kitchen island. Bruce’s heart lurches for a moment, before his visual sweep tells him that there’s no blood, not even a single sign of violence. “Tim?” Bruce insists anxiously, “What’s wrong?!” Tim jolts upright, and gives him a semi-apologetic glance.

“Oh. Bruce… sorry to worry you,” he says, sounding slightly flustered. Bruce doesn’t try to correct him— Tim, of all his sons, has always been best at thinking like Bruce.

“Yes, well… that was quite the shout,” Bruce says mildly. Thank god he isn’t actually hurt. He allows for one shaky sigh to escape, and wills his adrenaline-fueled heart to slow.

Tim sighs, and runs a hand through his hair. Bruce takes that as an invitation, and steps closer. Then he sees the source of Tim’s outrage distress. The now-empty glass lies on its side, and its contents have spilled over Tim’s laptop. “I was doing homework,” Bruce’s middle child explains ruefully, “and I must’ve fallen asleep— somehow I knocked over the glass, and…” he gestures to the results: a watery laptop.

Bruce frowns for a moment at the mess. “Hm,” he says.

Tim sighs again. “I had important projects on there,” he groans. Dramatically, he thunks his head against Bruce’s shoulder. Bruce runs an affectionate hand through his hair.

“I may be able to help,” he says cautiously.

Tim’s head jerks up, and one of his eyebrows is raised. “Really! You think you can save it?”

Bruce glances thoughtfully at the soaked device. Then, hesitantly, he nods. “I may only be able to retrieve a few documents, or nothing, we’ll see. But I can still take a look. Now, off to bed with
you.” Bruce gives Tim a firm look. His sleep-resistant Robin groans, but the sound doesn’t contain as much attitude as usual. He must be very relieved then, that Bruce is willing to try and save his laptop.

“G’night, Dad,” Tim mumbles, as he trots off to bed. Bruce chuckles, and feels a spark of warmth bloom in his chest.

“Goodnight, Tim,” he replies to the empty room.

Bruce closes his eyes, and sucks in one final calming breath: nothing had happened, and his son is safe— and opens his eyes. He wipes up the spilled water and takes the computer down to the cave. His… if not good then acceptable, mood lasts until he manages to revive the computer.

And then he finds the history essay— well, technically, Bruce manages to get the device running, and then tiredly transports it, and himself, back upstairs. Now that the device is relatively safe, he feels it’s reasonable to put it aside and go to bed. So Bruce does just that. He finds the essay the next morning.

After a whole four hours of sleep, Bruce pads back into his office and carefully sets his steaming half-full coffee on the floor beside the desk; wouldn’t do to ruin all of his hard work last night by re-dampening Tim’s computer. He turns on the device, which hisses for a moment, and waits. The screen is twitchy, and if he sits here long enough it will give him a headache. But other than that, and the slight lag, the laptop seems to be functioning. More or less. Bruce is slightly pleased with himself, that he’s been able to help Tim, even if it’s in such a small way.

Bruce goes into ‘Documents’ and scrolls to a benign-seeming file labeled ‘School.’ He clicks on it, intending to open a file at-random to test if he has actually managed to fix the hard drive, when he sees the essay. It’s labeled, non-descriptively, ‘Modern Gotham History.’ Curious (Bruce knows Tim can write well, but he’s rarely read any of his work outside of patrol reports, birthday cards, or the occasional text), Bruce clicks on the Word document.

He reads: “Though the definition of ‘modern’ can be argued over, most local historians, and citizens, will agree that ‘modern’ Gotham City history really began some time closely after 1987…” Bruce blinks, and the pit of his stomach falls out from inside of him. He feels distinctly hollow, and distant, in that moment. Why hadn’t Tim told him he was writing about this? Perhaps masochistically, Bruce keeps reading; he feels compelled by his son’s words.

This is how his middle son finds Bruce: sitting in his office, over the recently-resurrected computer, bawling his eyes out as he reads his son’s history essay on Gotham, and the (long) section about the death of the Waynes— his parents— and the impact that had on the city. As Bruce reads, he reflects: he had no idea that Tim was such an elegant writer.

Tim comes into the room, his mouth already-open to say something. He’s dressed for school. He looks at Bruce and actually takes a step back. He blinks, and resets. Bruce, still sniffing, tries to say, ‘Hello,’ ‘Good morning,’ or even, ‘I fixed your computer,’ but all that comes out is garbled sounds. Now looking significantly more worried, Tim briskly steps around to Bruce’s side of the desk, leans over his shoulder, and scans the computer screen.

Bruce manages to regain some of his control, and watches his son’s face as his eyes sharply flicker between the document and Bruce’s face. His brow crumples. Tim straightens up. He steps away from Bruce, looking slightly-sick. “I totally forgot this was on here,” his son half-whispers, “my history teacher is new to the school, and she didn’t know that I was— our family situation. I felt bad, and didn’t want to cause a hassle by making her switch people’s assignments. God, Bruce, I’m an idiot. I’m so sorr—”
Bruce sniffs, and then interrupts: “It’s fine, Tim. It’s not your fault...” ‘that I went snooping, and saw something that upset me.’ He cringes internally at how thick his voice sounds. “You write beautifully.” Tim blinks. He untucks himself, and floats a step closer to Bruce.

“I do?” he asks cautiously.

Bruce dabs the corners of his still-watery eyes with the sleeve of his sweater. “Yes. Although you perhaps overuse em dashes a touch... I can help you with your research, if you want,” he tells his son. Tim smiles. Bruce inhales shakily.

Tim, looking somewhat hesitant, steps closer, and places a hand on Bruce’s shoulder. “Yeah... yeah, that’d be great, Bruce,” he answers. Then, errantly, his eyes flick to his wristwatch. “SHIT—sorry, I’m going to be late. But... I can—”

Bruce grunts. Tim removes his hand and steps back. “I’ll drive you,” Bruce says matter-of-factly. “We can work on your essay later.”

Tim mouths words for a moment, before settling on: “Thanks. For driving.”

Bruce nods stiffly. But then he sees his son’s continued reluctance. His hesitance. He’s still worried that he upset Bruce. That is unacceptable. “Anytime,” Bruce says, more gently. Tim grins.

“Can we take the Bugatti?” he asks slyly.


Two weeks later, Bruce is informed that Tim’s essay received an A.
Halloween

Chapter Summary

Halloween night in Gotham is always challenging— just not for this reason, usually.

Chapter Notes

Or, in other words: “My name is Jason Todd. You triggered my father, prepare to die.”

I know that Jason dies roughly when he's fifteen in the comics, but for the sake of letting him watch The Princess Bride in-theaters with Bruce, let's just say that he dies *right after* turning sixteen here, okay? And you bet he read the book before seeing the movie*.

TW: foul language. Jason's fault, of course.

It is the night of October 31st— also known as the worst night of the year in Gotham, to pretty much everyone. Even Bruce, who says he has no taste for such dramatics, admits this. Not every year is as terrible as the others, and Bruce even remembers a few Halloweens-past with fondness (there was the year that Jason had dressed up as the Dread Pirate Roberts, as he’d recently finished reading The Princess Bride) but on a whole, the 31st of October is not a time he looks forward to.

However, tonight is— as far as recent memory goes— one of the worst Halloweens Bruce has ever experienced. This is because he’s stuck in the Manor. On candy duty. This is not by choice. It happened because his children (and Alfred) are all mutinous traitors. Actually, come to think of it, so are Clark and Diana. Yes, Alfred, Clark, Diana, Dick, Jason, Tim, Cassandra, and Stephanie are all traitors. Damian is the only exception. Maybe he’ll have to make Damian his favorite child...

Anyway, almost all of Bruce's children are traitors. Just because he's returned from an (admittedly harrowing) deep space mission literally less than twenty-four hours ago does not mean that Bruce is unfit for patrol. Gotham needs Batman, tonight most of all.

Bruce is only kept from being completely put-out about this unwanted turn of events because Jason is staying in with him. On top of this (unexpected but pleasant) happening, his son is wearing a costume… a scaled-up version of the Dread Pirate Roberts outfit he wore trick-or-treating years ago. This does a lot to improve Bruce’s mood too, though he’ll never admit it (his children have far too much blackmail information on him already).

Bruce, both in protest, and out of lack of time, is wearing a suit— minus the jacket, tie, cuff links, and the pocket square. He looks like a debauched gentleman. So, in a way, Bruce’s ‘Halloween costume’ is himself— well, Brucie Wayne, anyway. This is something which is privately amusing to him, and to Jason. “Not a drop of creativity,” his butler had muttered earlier, when he’d seen what Bruce was wearing. On Halloween, Alfred always indulges in his more theatrical side. This year, he’s dressed as Nosferatu, complete with eerie black-and-white makeup. Bruce is, despite
himself, a little impressed.

But for the moment, he’s alone; Alfred is preparing the back-up bag of assorted candy and Jason is taking a bathroom break. The manor’s doorbell rings, and Bruce rises from where he’s seated on the entry hall’s bench. He’d been checking his cell phone for the nth time, half-hoping to hear from someone who’s out on patrol, half-praying that he won’t. He strides quickly to the door and tucks his phone into his pocket.

Bruce picks the mostly-empty bowl of candy up from the table and opens the door. He throws on his best society smile— only it’s a little more genuine, since he’s dealing with kids— and asks, “And who are you all dressed as?”

There is one aspect of Halloween-night candy duty that he likes: seeing the various kinds of costumes (and which costumed heroes are currently most popular). Unfortunately, Batman and Superman costumes are tied for most-common, but at least he hasn’t seen any Green Lantern costumes… yet. Wonder Woman costumes are a close third (Bruce has even seen a few little boys wearing them) and then the rest of the Gotham heroes more-or-less are tied.

This current batch of trick-or-treaters (five of them) have a wide-range of costumes. One is Batman, another is Flash, and the third is a mermaid (or maybe an Atlantean?) The other two are harder to figure out— Bruce thinks that one might be a gangster (which he tries not to be annoyed about) and the fifth is… some kind of robot-zombie? The two teenaged-chaperones look a bit bored, and their only ornamentation is neon face paint.

For a while after Bruce asks the question, there isn’t a reply; this he kind-of expects. Instead, the kids eagerly swarm the candy bowl while the teens hover behind. Bruce gestures to them once the children have each taken some candy. The teens step forward, careful not to appear too eager. “Thanks man,” one of them says. Bruce nods.

The other teen taps one of the kids— probably their younger sibling— on the shoulder, and says, “Hey, don’t be rude. Answer the question.” Apparently, the rest of the kids take this as an order. Bruce is bombarded with answers (the robot-zombie is actually a ghost-Transformer). And then the last kid, who’s been (shyly) hovering in the back of the group, steps forward. He’s the one who Bruce thinks is a gangster.

“Joe Chill— I asked my dad who Gotham’s scariest gangster was, and that’s what he told me,” the kid, no older than Damian, replies. Bruce blinks, feeling as if he’s been caught in a bolt of Livewire’s lightening and Mr. Freeze’s freeze ray at the same time. The gaggle of kids falls silent, expecting a response: ‘Your costumes are very creative,’ or ‘Wow! He is Gotham’s scariest gangster,’ but instead there is nothing but a lurching, abrupt silence from Bruce.

This goes on for a few more seconds, until a hand suddenly clamps down on Bruce’s shoulder— making him jump— and then Jason is saying, “Wow! He is Gotham’s scariest gangster. And I love the rest of your costumes too. Happy Halloween.” The door is then gently, but quickly, shut. Distantly, Bruce hears the voices retreating. “What kind of asshole dickwad sicko lets their kid go trick-or-treating as Joe Chill?” Jason mutters angrily. He pauses, looking sideways at Bruce for confirmation. When he gets none, Bruce feels the gentle weight of Jason’s hand on his arm. “Bruce? You alright there?”

Bruce remains where he is, and stares thoughtfully at the door, imagining the journey of the trick-or-treaters down the Manor’s driveway, and the long path that follows. Maybe if he visualizes that, he won’t have to see pearls, or blood, or think about the real Joe Chill. “I mean, Jesus Fuckin’ Christ, B— can you believe the nerve?” Jason mutters angrily. He pauses, looking sideways at Bruce for confirmation. When he gets none, Bruce feels the gentle weight of Jason’s hand on his arm. “Bruce? You alright there?”
The doorbell rings. “Shitfuck motherfuckin’ dickass,” Jason hisses. With a testy sigh, the Red Hood pries the candy bowl from Bruce’s clenched hands, and answers the door. “Hey, guys and gals! Happy Halloween. Who wants some candy?” Bruce watches the scene detachedly. The kid’s words replay in his head on a loop: “Joe Chill— I asked my dad who Gotham’s scariest gangster was, and that’s what he told me.” “Joe Chill— I asked my dad who Gotham’s scariest gangster was, and that’s what he told me.” “Joe Chill— I asked my dad who Gotham’s scariest gangster was, and that’s what he told me—” “Goddamnit, Bruce. Come on, let’s go sit you down on the bench,” Jason says tiredly.

Bruce starts, and blinks at his son’s face, which swims disconcertingly before his eyes for a moment. He feels as if he’s moving through water, but manages to follow Jason’s lead (which consists of his son tugging on his arm until they reach the bench). Jason gets him sat down just in time for the doorbell to ring again. “Christ on toast,” Jason says. He gives Bruce a worried gaze, and jogs back to the door. Bruce sits stiffly on the bench and tries not to see pools of blood in the maroon carpet.

Eventually, he blinks back to a semblance of normalcy (his breath is no longer a thing that is sieved through the hollow pressure of the lump in his throat) and Bruce is no longer seeing ghosts. He merely feels a bit cold, stiff, and jittery. Abruptly, Bruce realizes that there is another person sitting next to him. Bruce looks over, and sees Jason.

Jason is leaned back against the wall, arms crossed, one booted foot balanced on the very edge of the bench. Casually, he straightens up, and fixes an unreadable gaze on Bruce. “Wasn’t sure what to do with you there, B. I don’t know how you react when you’re having flashbacks. I know what I’d do, though,” his son explains.

Flashbacks? Bruce questions mentally. Oh. Of course.

Bruce blinks. Jason sighs, and then mutters something indecipherable under his breath. He stands, and steps in front of Bruce. His son offers a hand up, which Bruce accepts. Once Bruce is back on his feet, Jason says, unexpectedly, “Come here, you fuckin’ lump,” and his arms wrap gently, so, so gently, around Bruce. This is such a rare (unheard of, really) occurrence that Bruce remains stuck in place for a moment. Since when had Jason gotten so goddamn big? Surprising himself, Bruce brings his arms up around his son’s broad form and squeezes back.

Bruce doesn’t know how long they stay like that for, but, eventually, Jason says, a bit wheezily, “Jesus, B. You’re like a python— give me some breathing room here,” and Bruce self-consciously releases him. Bruce looks at his son. Jason looks at Bruce. “Better?” Jason asks. His gaze is intent, and earnest. Concerned, even. The remaining lump of… something within Bruce’s chest melts.

“Y-yeah,” Bruce replies. He manages not to wince at the crack in his voice. Jason makes no comment.

“Wanna watch a movie?” his second-eldest asks.

Bruce nods. After a beat, he smiles. “Yes. That sounds great, Jay.” Jason nods, and starts to walk away. Bruce follows. But after a few steps, he jerks to a stop. Jason half-turns, an expression of mild irritation on his face. “The- the trick-or-treaters,” Bruce explains.

Jason waves a hand. “I put a few bags of candy out in the bowl earlier. Let ‘em sort it out,” he replies. When Bruce makes no move, Jason sighs, and rolls his eyes. “C’mon Bruce, live a little. The kids’ll be fine without us handing out candy.”

Bruce throws one last, hesitant look at the door. “I suppose,” he agrees reluctantly.

Jason pats him on the shoulder. “There ya go, B. I’ll ask Alfie if he wants to join us. Go on ahead
and choose a movie.” Bruce smiles at his son and is delighted when Jason smiles—really actually smiles—back.

“How do you feel about re-watching *The Princess Bride*?” Bruce inquires.

Jason snorts. “Is that even a question?” Bruce grins. *Tonight might not be a total loss after all.*

Chapter End Notes

*Jason's twelve when he becomes Robin in the comics (March, 1983), and TPB movie came out in 1987.

This might be my favorite chapter yet.
Loud Sounds

Chapter Summary

Alfred reflects on the Fall of Gotham, post Wayne-murders, and on the changed nature of one young boy. Later, he notices a man's unusual reaction to loud sounds.

Chapter Notes

I FINALLY got Alfred in here! Didn't think that was gonna happen, originally.

Somebody asked me last chapter to give Bruce some happiness... that isn't going to happen here. Sorry.

TW: none? Just kind of really sad?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Immediately after the event— in the postlapsarian era of his life, so to speak— Alfred knows that nothing will be the same. This ‘nothing’ includes himself, the young master, and Gotham proper. And so, Alfred Pennyworth, soldier then actor-turned-butler-become-guardian, shudders as he contemplates the changes that such darkness will, inevitably, wreak within them all. But of those affected in this group, there is a special kind of fall for Bruce Thomas Wayne.

His fall is graceless; more-closely evoking a faceplant than an epic descent from divinity into diablerie. Bruce’s fall is much more human, and oh-so terrible because of it. His fall consists of a swift loss of innocence and a complete and total warping of worldview. Alfred knows first-hand the horrors that can be inflicted when there is a connection between torturer and tortured; only a human mind can devise such heightened torments for a human prisoner. It is the special sickness of their kind.

But, even knowing that change has come, and that something wicked has paled and weakened the state of Gotham, Alfred is still… unprepared for the results. It is as if the event has beguiled the citizens of this once-hopeful city into sinfulness. Into debauchery. Into forgetting everything that Thomas and Martha Wayne ever stood for. And that is only a part of the tragedy.

Bruce— once such a curious boy, if not the most sociable— has fallen silent. He is cold, and curls inwards, as if his feeble, youthful form is trying to reflect the turmoil in his soul. He flinches at touch. He cringes at sudden movements. He fears separation from Alfred, even if it is only momentary. Noise, of almost any kind, triggers tears (or worse, screams). Gone is his youthful exuberance. Gone are his awkward (and endearing) explanations of the natural phenomena around him. Gone are his questions about every subject he is unfamiliar with. Disappeared is the son of Thomas and Martha. In his place is but a pale imitation. A ghost. It is as if Bruce Wayne also died that night in the alley, with his parents.

Alfred Pennyworth refuses to let this continue.
He will resuscitate the young master himself, a thousand times, and a thousand again, if need be.
He will not abandon Bruce. He swears an oath: the son of Thomas and Martha will live yet. He will live, and do so happily, Alfred thinks, grimly, even if that is not what the boy wishes, at the moment.

Progress is slow, as necessary things often are. Some days are better than others. Sometimes, even getting Master Bruce out of bed is a battle. Others this is easily accomplished, but finding him once he is dressed and fed becomes another matter. Tears, and sudden outbursts, are frequent. Sullen silences too. But, through the battles, Alfred does not lose sight of the war, and victory (though slow and painful) eventually appears imminent. In this way, the first year, then two, then three, then five then ten pass. Bruce blossoms as a Gerbera flower from the dirt of his trauma.

More time passes. Bruce leaves. Alfred is alone. But he does not forget his promise, his sacred oath. Even when the young master is presumed dead— Alfred does not know this to be true, so it will remain untrue until otherwise proven. He cannot help but think: “The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated,” and pray that he is right. He waits. Bruce returns, a man. A man, full of new hurts, new skills, new secrets. Patiently, Alfred waters him with love, and kindness, and Bruce flowers anew.

More years pass. A family of Daffodils and Gladioluses blooms around Bruce’s Gerbera. Alfred nurtures them all.

And then, one day, while Dick, Damian, Tim, and Duke are playing Clue (a household favorite) Alfred notices. Damian has lost another game, and he kicks the table in protest. Bruce, who is reclined in the corner of the room, reading, jumps at the loud thwack. Alfred pauses with his tray of refreshments, but puts it up to his son’s penchant for deep concentration in matters of personal interest. “Damian!” Dick chastises. And the youngest addition to the Wayne household looks as if he may protest.

Ah. Time for intervention, then.

“I believe, Sirs, if you are done with your game, refreshments are in order,” Alfred declares smoothly. Dick, Duke, and Tim give him grateful looks. Alfred acknowledges their thanks with a slight nod. The budding argument is forgotten.

Jason returns home, and the sharp retort of his motorcycle (a most unfortunate choice of vehicle) startles Bruce, who is outside playing fetch with Damian and Titus. Alfred’s eyebrow, feared by all residents of the Manor, rises.

Tim drops his backpack on the office’s floor, unannounced. Bruce stills.

Stephanie, after practicing roundhouse kicks with Cassandra for most of the month, manages to knock over a punching bag. Batman, sharpening batarangs, lets out a muffled curse. He has managed to cut himself by jerking the sharp end of the weapon across his thumb.

Clark is playing soccer with the children while Master Bruce relaxes (naps) on the back patio. The soccer ball collides with one of the Manor’s walls with a pronounced bang! Bruce nearly falls out of the lawn chair. “Sorry, Bruce!” Clark calls sheepishly. After collecting himself a moment— he is pale— Bruce lobs the ball back out across the decorative hedge.

“Be more careful next time,” he grumbles. Alfred frowns. A pattern is becoming apparent.

Alfred decides that he has seen enough of Bruce’s startling. But he feels that this conclusion may fall on unappreciative ears if it is voiced this early in the morning. So he waits for a more proper time to disclose his findings. Bruce is, still, rather fond of empirical evidence, so he should appreciate his butler’s well-documented observations… Or, more-than-likely, given his boy’s bull-
It is mid-afternoon when Alfred finally approaches Bruce, who is in the living room. He is either doing research or filling out W.E. paperwork, given the severity of his frown. Alfred clears his throat. “Master Bruce.” Bruce pauses, blinks, and looks up. “Recently, I have been reminded of certain necessary adaptations from the past that I had forgotten. I believe it is of some importance to discuss these adaptations with you again.” At his (deliberately) obscurely-worded statement, Bruce frowns. He sets down the laptop. Alfred is pleased.

“Yes, Al,” Bruce says, sounding amused and hesitant, “though I’m not sure what you’re referring to.” He adjusts his position on the couch so there is some room for Alfred (Bruce hasn’t been anything even close to small or scrawny or compact for many years now). Alfred smiles softly at his accommodation. He sits, then gives his charge a level look. Bruce is silent; they are aware of how the other thinks.

“It has come to my attention that you have been dishonest with me” Bruce opens his mouth to protest, but Alfred holds up a quelling hand, “about your well-being. I confess that perhaps, in this case, I bear some of the blame, for I had thought the issue resolved. I am speaking, of course, of your aversion to loud sounds,” he begins.

Clearly, Bruce is not expecting this. He frowns, before trying to make an objection. “Al,” he says, exasperatedly, “I don’t have—”

“During Clue, you were alarmed by a sudden loud noise. This was also the case during Master Jason’s most recent visit to the Manor, and Tim’s appearance in your office, and the episode following Miss Stephanie’s vanquishing of the punching bag. Need I go on?”

Bruce is silent for another minute. Then he sighs, looking smaller; Alfred can almost see an echo of that long-ago boy. He feels a pang ripple through him, then shakes it off. Such sentimentality is not fitting for an English gentleman, or a major domo, at that. “I do not mean to shame you with my observations, Bruce,” he says more gently, “merely to raise awareness.”

Bruce looks a little less chastened. But he still asks: “Then why bring it up?”

Alfred sighs. Ah yes, here is that emotional recalcitrance. “What did I tell you when you were growing up?” he asks pointedly.

Bruce blinks. He says, slyly, “I don’t know, Al. You told me a lot of things.”

Alfred offers an unimpressed sigh. “That I did. However, Master Bruce, I am referring to what I told you about personal issues, and how we deal with them.”

Bruce gives a small, hesitant nod. “It is okay to have hang-ups, or feel uncertain in some situations. However, these doubts can become problems if they interfere with your happiness. At that point, a problem is best acknowledged, and then dealt with,” he recites. Despite himself, Alfred smiles.

“Very good. And so?” he prompts.

Bruce sighs. “It needs to be dealt with,” he concludes.

Alfred stands, pleased with the outcome. “I’ll leave you to it, my boy.”

That night, Bruce texts the family group chat: “It has come to my attention that I may react adversely to certain external stimuli. In order to avoid future incidents, I would appreciate it if everyone could refrain, as much as possible, from making sudden, loud noises while in the manor.
Thank you.”

Alfred sighs. Well, it is not exactly done with grace, but it is a genuine attempt. For that, he is grateful. And when he is forced to answer (somewhat tedious) queries about what Master Bruce is saying—and why—the next morning… Well, that is not entirely unexpected.

Alfred still does his best to explain the matter patiently.

Chapter End Notes

You can read more about flower symbolism [here](#).

I reference Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The quote about death that Alfred thinks of is attributed to Mark Twain.

**Postlapsarian**: referring to the state of humanity after the Fall of Adam and Eve (i.e. loss of innocence, freedom from death, and other privileges).
Chapter Summary

Wonder Woman may know English, but idioms sometimes elude her. Thankfully, Batman’s something of a scholar of languages, so he can help. Diana wants to know the meaning of the idioms: ‘shooting the breeze,’ ‘big shot,’ ‘guns blazing,’ and ‘a cheap shot.’

Chapter Notes

This is also set in the early-ish years; but it is also slightly AU. Picture the timeline of the formation of the Justice League to be essentially the same as in the JL cartoons, but (for some reason) Diana joins a bit after the rest of the founders. This means that Bruce has known Clark for longer than he’s know her, and has had time to become good friends with Superman. This also means that Batman is still getting to know Wonder Woman.

I based Diana’s characterization largely off the JL cartoons too.

TW: foul language (Bruce’s fault) and descriptions of an verbal argument.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Batman!” Wonder Woman’s voice cuts through the background noise; Bruce had been doing lab work, upon Clark’s request, but is now taking a (rare) break in the Watchtower’s cafeteria. He pauses, tray hovering over his solitary table. When she sees that his attention’s been caught, the Amazon waves, directing him to join her at her own isolated table. Sighing, Bruce collects his patience, and walks towards her. Think of it as an opportunity to learn more about Diana, he tells himself.

Wonder Woman— Princess Diana of Themyscira— is somewhat new to the league. So far, she has proven herself to be a great asset, and quite knowledgeable about many subjects. But, that being said… Bruce sometimes finds her personality to be a bit grating. He tries not to, but she is so forceful, so certain in her morality that it makes his teeth gnash. Batman does not think he sees the grays, and Wonder Woman does not think he sees the brightness. However, aside from some of his petty personal quarrels with the woman, he respects her. Bruce also finds that, somehow, she seems to hold him in similar regard. This is how their unofficial… arrangement begins.

Diana, for all her accumulated knowledge and longevity, feels awkward in the English tongue. She is fluent, but not so much in the dialect of ‘Man’s World,’ as she puts it. In other words: Wonder Woman doesn’t understand the finer points of slang. Bruce, through his mastery of many human languages, and disguises, does. So she comes to him with questions, or observations. Occasionally, she will approach Batman to rant about the idiosyncrasies of English, and the ways Ancient Greek differs (and is better for it). By her keen, focused stare today, Bruce suspects that their topic of conversation will fall under one of the latter themes.
“Hey, Batman. What’s up?” she asks, eyes gleaming.

Bruce doesn’t give her the satisfaction of sighing. Though he really wishes to. “Not much. I’m doing lab work at Superman’s request. και εσώ?”

Diana’s brow raises in either surprise or satisfaction. “Μιλάτε Ελληνικά?” Bruce sits across from her, and sweeps his cape aside.

“Some. It’s a work in-progress. Now what did you want to ask me?”

Wonder Woman laughs appreciatively. “So direct! Very well. I am… curious about the abundancy of weapon-related sayings. Isn’t the modern world supposed to be less inclined towards violence?”

At this, Bruce does sigh. Well, that is the aspiration, he thinks darkly. But like so many hopes, it is futile. He takes a sip of coffee, mulling over the best response.

“You’re not exactly wrong— ‘supposedly’ might be the best word for it. If anything, these phrases are… a demonstration of humanity’s ambivalent response to changing our habits. Can you give me a few examples of what you’re confused about?”

Diana looks thoughtfully at her salad. Then she looks up, blue eyes wide and curious. “Yes! ‘Shooting the breeze,’ ‘big shot,’ ‘guns blazing,’ and ‘a cheap shot.’ These all seemed… very peculiar to me, and I wish to understand. Especially in light of your country’s proclivity for owning various firearms.”

Bruce blinks, feeling his mood take an abrupt dive toward aggravation. “Not everyone in America is a fan of guns,” he snaps, before thinking about it. Diana blinks, looking more confused. Bruce takes a breath, and tries to settle the irritation that has begun buzzing beneath his skin. “As I said earlier: a sign of our ambivalence towards change.” Bruce’s jaw feels stiff around these words, and he forces himself to relax. This shouldn’t be so difficult. It’s only a conversation.

“I take it you are not a fan of guns?” Diana asks politely.

Bruce chastises himself mentally. Wonder Woman is the defender of truth. Of course she’d sense his… feelings on the subject. Still. Best not to let her know how deeply they run— or why. “You’re not wrong,” Bruce replies. He suppresses his desire to smile at the oversimplicity of that statement.

Diana looks more puzzled, for a moment, but seems to drop this thread of the subject-at-large. “Very well. I shall keep that in mind… however, I am still confused. Can you explain?”

Bruce sighs. This ‘short break’ isn’t going as intended. Clark’s lab work will have to wait. “Sure. ‘Shooting the breeze’ is actually a fairly simple one. It means making small talk, or catching up socially with acquaintances or friends.”

Later, much later than intended, Batman excuses himself from the rather exhausting impromptu-luncheon with Wonder Woman. He feels tense, like a compressed spring. The outletless energy makes him angry, and, somehow, more tired. Bruce reminds himself that Diana did not mean to cause harm. And he can hardly blame her when he has not disclosed his identity, and all its accrued baggage. Wonder Woman is— not gentle— but… kind. She strives to improve things around her. Making a— making someone like Bruce explain the nuances of gun culture in America via idioms is not kind; she would never do it intentionally. But this does not change the way Bruce reacts.

He is angry, and tired, but in a non-physical way. Batman initially turns towards the command center, and the teleporters, but then remembers his unfinished lab work. Superman will be disappointed. Bruce, even if he tells himself otherwise, does not like to disappoint Clark. “Fuck,”
he mutters. Bruce turns around swiftly, before his mind can persuade him otherwise, and heads back to the labs.

“Goddamnit.” Bruce’s earlier sense of frustration and unplaced tension has morphed into fatigue and frayed patience. He feels balanced on a pin’s edge—ready to snap. And, Bruce thinks, he may have just experienced the trigger. He sucks in a breath, and tries to unclench his jaw.

“B? Everything okay in here?” comes Clark’s (jarring) voice. Bruce groans internally, and straightens up from the microscope.

“No,” he barks. “You were right—it is a new form of artificial kryptonite.” Superman frowns. Then he steps fully into the lab so they can have a more private conversation.

Bruce huffs, and runs a gauntleted hand over his mask. He feels distracted, and frustrated—both about the alarming reality that Luthor’s somehow managed to manufacture another strain of Clark-killing badness and about earlier events. Bruce frowns, and furiously scribbles down more of his observations of the artificial k. He can feel Clark’s anxious presence hovering over his shoulder. Bruce does his best not to bristle at his (best) friend.

This continues for a few more minutes. Bruce feels as if he is the one under the microscope. Tension slowly builds inside him. Batman idly wonders how much more he can withstand before his emotional pressure threshold gives out. Then Superman cracks the silence. “What’s wrong?” he asks in an all-too-patient tone. Bruce grits his teeth angrily, and aggressively caps his pen.

“Nothing,” he growls.

Clark sighs, and steps into Batman’s peripheral vision. He’s now hovering a few inches behind Bruce’s left shoulder. “Bruce. I know something’s up. Just tell me.”

Bruce slams his papers—which he’d been idly shuffling—onto the metal lab table. It makes a satisfying (if overly-revealing) bang. “Alright, fine. You want to hear about my problems? How about this: I’m mad because of Diana and her nonstop questions about English-language idioms. That not enough detail? Well, Clark, since you asked, I’ll give your journalistic heart more, so you have enough to write your tell-all. She asked me about American gun culture, and what ‘shooting the breeze,’ ‘big shot,’ ‘guns blazing,’ and ‘a cheap shot’ meant. Guess what? I resent that. Illogical, yes—Diana couldn’t have known the impact of what she was asking—but I do still. What’s wrong is that I can’t even deal with talking about fucking idioms.”

Clark sighs. It is not exasperated, but not exactly understanding, either. Bruce imagines Clark thinking, ‘If you would just tell her your identity, you wouldn’t have these problems’ or something else of the sort. “Bruce—” Clark starts.

Bruce spins, and gives Superman a caustic glare. “You have your answer. But unless you want to wait longer for me to finish analyzing these—get out.”

Clark stands there for a moment, shoulders tense (Bruce prepares several barbs to push him away) but then he runs a frustrated hand through his hair, and sighs again. “Fine—fine, I’ll let you get back to work, Batman. Let me know what your findings are,” his friend says. Then Clark leaves.

Bruce sighs, and turns back to the microscope.

A month later, Bruce is sitting in the conference room, along with the other ‘founders’ of the league. It has been two weeks since he formally disclosed his civilian identity to Wonder Woman; she is fast becoming close to him in a manner like Clark is. Their meeting has just concluded, and
most of the heroes are either wrapping up personal conversations, or leaving. Bruce stands, intent on getting back to Gotham. “Batman!” Diana calls. Bruce stills. Diana is standing behind her seat, on the opposite side of the table. Bruce tilts his head in her direction: yes? “Can I talk to you?” she asks.

Bruce doesn’t sigh. But it is a near thing. *He loves Diana, but this habit of hers is something he needs to nip in the bud— dammit.* He steps around to her side of the table. “That depends on what you want to talk about. If it can wait, I need to get back to Gotham. Otherwise…”

Diana frowns. Bruce feels, abruptly, more concerned. “I am afraid it is not a trivial matter.” Bruce does his best not to jump to irrational, paranoid conclusions.

“Very well then.” They wait until the last of the others have filed out of the room.

Bruce sits on the same side of the table as Diana, and they angle the chairs so they are parallel. Diana allows silence to blossom between them. Annoyed, Bruce thinks, *this is another difference between Wonder Woman and I.* Finally, though, Diana states, “I think I owe you an apology, Bruce.”


Diana crosses her legs, and her dangling foot bounces a little. She sighs. “A few months ago— we were having one of our ongoing talks of English, and its peculiar idioms— I was unintentionally ignorant of your… sensitivities,” she explains. Bruce’s stomach lurches. *Oh.*

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says evenly.

Diana’s coiled lasso glows faintly against her hip. Her bouncing foot stills. A rare, frustrated look flashes over her face. Wonder Woman sighs. She gives Bruce a disapproving look. “I think you do.”

Bruce frowns. There is an awkward pause in their conversation. “You didn’t know,” he says finally.

Diana frowns gently. She lays a hand upon his gauntlet. “That is true. But I still apologize for any discomfort I may have inadvertently caused.” Bruce grimaces. With a slight chuckle, Diana removes her hand. Bruce stands jerkily. Less hurriedly, Diana follows suit. “I will strive to not repeat my error in the future,” she says.

Bruce pauses in his abrupt retreat. He nods at her, genuinely grateful for her consideration, if equally mortified by it. “Thank you,” he says. Bruce departs. Diana stares thoughtfully after him.

“I believe this would be an appropriate time to use the phrase: ‘better late than never,’” she mutters.

Chapter End Notes

This was an interesting list of *phrases and idioms.*

Translation of the (not-ancient) Greek:
Bruce: “And you?”
Diana: “Do you speak Greek?”
Gun

Chapter Summary

The one time that Bruce isn’t triggered happens when he and Clark capture a criminal… and he ends up holding the gun.

Chapter Notes

And here’s the ‘plus one!’ Somehow, I wound up writing a Bruce + Clark scene again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No, you won’t be,” Batman says coldly to the man with the gun. Neither he nor Superman are quite sure if the weapon has been altered to contain Kryptonian-lethal bullets, or if this particular criminal is just that stupid. The man raises his hand—Bruce is a blur (figuratively speaking) of action.

His grapple extends across the empty space and clamps around the gun. With a swift tug, the weapon goes soaring. It arcs through the air in a neatly-inverted parabola as Batman retracts the grappling line. He re-attaches it to his belt, gun still hanging loosely from the grapple’s hook. “Superman,” he growls.

Clark snaps out of his semi-trance. Bruce impatiently gestures at the still-frozen criminal with a sweep of one of his black gauntleted hands. He is standing stiffly, as if anchored to the spot. Clark takes another half-second to spring into action because of this.

“Right. On it,” he mutters. The criminal barely has time to blink before Superman has flown across the gap between him and the two heroes. Clark tucks the man’s arms behind his back and keeps a tight hold on both his wrists. Batman, still moving somewhat stiffly, comes to an abrupt stop just in front of Superman and his restrained company. This concerns Clark quite a bit, as he hadn’t seen Bruce get injured.

“You should consider yourself lucky he’s here,” Batman hisses. He turns his fiery gaze on Superman. This doesn’t faze Clark, as the ire behind Bruce’s look isn’t intended for him (this time). “I’ll be here,” Batman says dismissively. Superman takes the hint, and rises into the air—the criminal in his arms lets out a startled yelp.

Clark gives Bruce one last considering look before he leaves.

After a few minutes— it always takes longer when he has to talk to people—Clark returns. For some reason, he’s anxious about what he’ll find at the scene. But Batman, Bruce, is still standing there… right where Clark left him. He hasn’t moved at all. Clark frowns, and takes a few urgent steps forward as he lands.

“What’s wrong?” he demands. Bruce blinks, and looks puzzled for a moment. Then he registers Clark’s concerned gaze on him and scowls.
“Nothing,” Batman insists as he adjusts his stance. The gun— still clutched in the grapple, which is still attached to his belt— sways, and clinks against the armor. _Oh._

Grimacing slightly, Bruce unhooks the gun and holds the weapon as if it is the detonator for a nuclear bomb. Then he efficiently removes the bullets, and holds them in his slightly trembling left hand. Clark peers at the small objects, and then _into_ them. They’re completely normal; not a threat to Superman in the slightest.

The unloaded weapon— which Batman points resolutely at the ground— is just a gun. It’s not modified to be dangerous to Superman in anyway. But Bruce’s gaze flickers watchfully between the bullets and the gun as if they _are_ part of some otherworldly weapon of mass destruction, and not just components of a mundane tool.

Clark’s heart squeezes tight in his chest. _Oh, Bruce…_ “Here, let me,” Superman says calmly; Bruce seems disinclined to move without further interference. He takes a small step forward.

Bruce hands him the bullets one at a time, like their cool metallic weight is something that Clark has to _adjust_ to holding. Once he’s been handed all the bullets, Clark closes his fist. The metal forms a small ball, imprinted with the lines and texture of the inside of his hand. Bruce’s shoulders twitch, but his heartrate doesn’t resemble that of a bass drum as much anymore. “Now the gun.”

Bruce blinks. His hand doesn’t shake as he holds out the gun for Superman to take— it’s too tightly clenched around the weapon. Clark tries not to be annoyed by Bruce’s over caution. Batman, he knows, is far too careful in most situations, let alone when _a gun_ is present.

It does not matter that Bruce could shoot Superman point-blank in the face and not harm him. It does not matter that he could stick the barrel into Clark’s mouth, or point it at one of his eyes, and nothing would happen. It does not _matter_ that Clark is invincible (well, to _regular_ guns at least) because Bruce will never act like it. He will always act as if he _can_ injure Clark with the weapon in his hand, because Bruce knows the power of a gun, and he is afraid that this one might suddenly cause something horrible to happen.

Clark blinks, and realizes that their hands are both clutching the weapon, and have been held parallel to the ground by the opposing force of their grips. “Batman,” he says gently, “let go.” Bruce blinks, and swiftly releases his grip. His hand drops to his side as if weighed down. He sighs softly, and flexes his fingers.

Clark pretends he doesn’t see this.

Bruce turns his gaze to Clark, in a semi-questioning manner. Clark smiles. It’s not often they have a situation that is so quickly and easily resolved, these days. “Hold on a minute,” he mutters.

Superman crushes the gun so that it will fit more easily into his palms. After that, he holds both the crumpled bullets and the crushed weapon in his cupped hands, and uses his heat vision to melt them. The glowing metal leaves a foul smell, but the multicolored molten streams swirling together are strangely beautiful. Then Superman uses his freeze breath to cool off the steaming liquid. He inspects the strange lumpy shape, trying to decide what it is (and what it can even be used for).

“It’s a paperweight,” Clark finally declares. He holds out the rather… _artisanal_ item to Batman.

Bruce hesitantly accepts Clark’s creation, and hefts it in one hand. “You realize that most of my work is done digitally,” he says. But then he frowns thoughtfully at the strange gift. “I suppose I could use it in the cave… Thank you.”
Clark is well-aware that he is not being thanked for the haphazard present. “You’re welcome.”

Bruce takes a step forward, and eyes the nearest building. He tucks the gun-turned-paperweight under an arm, and fires his grapple. Over the sound of the retracting grapple, and the thump of Bruce’s boots Clark hears a disembodied, “See you next meeting, Kal.” Then all sounds of Batman become so distant that Clark stops listening. Where his friend is and what he’s up to now are no longer Superman’s business.

Not quite sure how to proceed, Clark sucks in a breath. He glances around the empty would-be battlefield. “Well,” he says aloud to himself.

Clark lifts off, and darts up, up, and away.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I had fun writing this.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!