## Baby, I'll Be Your Huckleberry

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### Summary

In which Jason and Tim develop a relationship when Jason first becomes Robin.

It changes everything while at the same time changing absolutely nothing.
Every Story Has a Beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tim was eleven years old when he first saw the second Robin.

He wasn't really surprised when it happened. He'd had some suspicion about that since Bruce Wayne had taken in Jason Todd. Dick Grayson had moved to Bludhaven and Batman was working without a Robin so it didn't seem farfetched to Tim that Bruce's new son would become his new Robin.

What did surprise him was how different Jason was from Dick.

They had the same mantle, but there was such a clear difference between them that Tim couldn't people who thought they were the same boy.

Dick had been smooth, fluid acrobatics and light feet. Intentionally or not, Dick's Robin had been a performer. He'd been free and fun.

Jason was all strength and emotion. He made heavy hits with eyes that burned with anger. Whenever he pulled off moves that Dick or Bruce seemed to do without thought, he radiated happy surprise like he couldn't believe he'd pulled it off.

Dick Grayson was everything Tim wanted to be, but Jason Todd was everything Tim wanted from other people. Jason never failed to make his feelings known, whether because there was hatred in his eyes or because his body was loose and relaxed with someone he liked. It was simple and uncomplicated. There was none of the guess work that was so present in Tim's life. Tim never had to guess what Jason thought the way he had to with his parents.

He was all the emotion and passion that Tim had never been exposed to wrapped into one person.

It drew Tim to him like a moth to a flame.

He climbed out of bed more often for Jason's Robin than he had for Dick's. He spent his nights crouched on rooftops and burned through film.

Occasionally, he would see Jason during the day - Tim's parents weren't home often but when they were they were sure to drag their son out to every event possible for the sake of appearances - and those days were always hard for Tim. He wanted nothing more than to speak to him, to do something that would get Jason to direct just a little bit of that emotion his way. He didn't even particularly care whether it was his ire or his kindness.

In the end, Tim was always too scared of Jason treating him with the same indifference as his parents and contented himself with watching from afar

The incident with Batman's tires aside, Jason was good at knowing when he was being watched.

It was a necessity for a kid like him. For a thief like him. He had to know when someone was aware of him and when they were watching someone over his shoulder.

He'd been feeling the prickle at the back of his head since his first few runs in the Robin suit.
At first he’d thought maybe it was Bruce watching him, making sure that Jason was obeying his orders and putting his training to use, but Bruce always seemed to be looking at the world around them instead of at Jason.

Then he’d thought maybe it was one of the criminals in the city, but the gaze didn't have the consistency of someone on a stake out and it didn't really feel like it wanted to harm him.

It was just there.

Jason knew he should have told Bruce about it, but he liked knowing something his mentor didn’t.

Most days he didn't feel like he measured up to Dick, much less the Batman. Keeping this one thing to himself, knowing that he had caught something Batman hadn't, made him think that maybe one day he would be as good as they were.

And the longer Jason kept the secret, the more he started thinking of the person watching him as his. They weren't his guardian angel or anything like that, but they were his because they were watching him and they had been since he'd started.

Thinking about them that way triggered a change. Jason started feeling their absence more acutely than their presence, finding himself a bit easier to rile up when he couldn't feel them there. Jason started wondering about what sort of person they were and what their motivations were.

Jason started wishing they would do something more then just watch.

By the time he reached that point, however, it had been weeks since he'd first felt their eyes on him. Jason felt like if they were going to do more then just watch him they would have done it by now.

Jason decided he was just going to have to find them and ask them what the deal was himself.

He didn't want Bruce to find out, though, and Bruce didn't trust him to go on patrols alone.

So he waited.

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Tim sat on a wooden crate in an alleyway just off Batman and Robin's patrol route, close enough that he would hear anything in the area they might react to. He was hidden just under the ledge of a building so they wouldn't see him from the roof tops.

He had his camera lifted up, taking some shots of the area around him so he could make sure it was adjusted well for the light. It wasn't usually a good idea to have such an expensive piece of equipment, despite the money his family had his photography equipment was really Tim's only indulgence, in the area but Tim had learned years ago which areas were safe for him when he was taking pictures and which areas to avoid.

He took one more shot, bringing it to even ten test pictures, before lowering it from his face.

He had just begun to flip through the pictures he'd taken when there was a sharp, obnoxious sucking sound off to his left. It was followed by someone asking, "Do you want a smoothie?"

Tim looked up and felt his breath rush of his lungs.

Robin was standing in front of him with a yellow smoothie in each of his hands. One of them was lifted towards his mouth, just far enough away that it wasn't touching his lips, while the other was being held out for Tim. There was a slight, teasing upturn to his lips and a spark of satisfaction in his
Apparemly Tim didn't answer fast enough because Robin added, "It's mango pineapple. I would've gotten strawberry banana, but they're kinda overrated."

Tim didn't really have a brain-to-mouth filter when he was staring down one of his idols, so he said, "Strawberry banana is not overrated. It's a classic. What kind of heathen are you?"

"Did you just call me a heathen?" Robin asked, his smile growing. "Do you even know what that means? You look like you're ten."

"Eleven and a half," Tim corrected. He felt his face heat with abrupt warmth, realizing as soon as the words left his mouth that that wasn't really all that better.

Robin laughed, the sound sharp and delighted. "Aw, you're just a baby."

"You're only fourteen," Tim said, feeling defensive. "That's not that much older then me."

The laughter cut off abruptly.

Robin's eyes widened a little bit.

Tim realized all at once that he'd just made a huge mistake.

"How do you know that?" Robin asked.

Tim fumbled for an answer. He wondered if it would be better to lie and tell him that it was just a lucky guess, but settled for the truth a few seconds later. It was better to come clean to Robin when Tim had control of it then later. "Because I um...know who you are, Jason."

For a minute, he looked as though he was going to deny it. But something in Tim's eyes must have changed his mind, because instead Jason just slumped and his teal eyes went a little sad.

"Fuck, seriously?" he said, his voice low and dejected. "I've only had the costume for three months and someone already figured me out? B's never going to let me out again."

"It wasn't you who I figured out first though," Tim said, because he'd been wanting to be on the receiving end of Jason's attentions for a while and no matter how much he told himself it didn't matter what kind of attentions those were he much preferred the smiling and teasing to this. "I saw Dick Grayson perform before um...before. I was taking pictures of Batman and Robin one day and recognized one of his moves. I figured if Dick Grayson was Robin then Bruce Wayne had to be Batman. Then Bruce adopted you and it was pretty clear who the second Robin was."

"Oh." Jason seemed to perk up a bit, but there was still a lingering disappointment in his eyes. "You're a fan of Dick's then."

"Kind of," Tim said. And because he still didn't really have a filter, he said, "But I like you more."

Jason's eyes widened, clouding with surprise and a hint of awe. "Seriously?"

"Yup," Tim confirmed with a small nod. He didn't elaborate on why, not wanting his desperation for attention to make him sound like a baby.

"That's awesome." Jason stepped closer, holding the smoothie out again. "So do you want this?"

"Sure." Tim reached out, taking the plastic cup from Jason. He lifted it to his lips and took a sip. As
he did, Jason crossed the remaining space between them and sat on the edge of the crate with Tim. They sat in silence for a while before Tim asked, "Shouldn't you be with Batman?"

"I convinced him to let me come out early," Jason said. He stared down at his straw and pushed it around with his finger. "I wanted to figure out who you were. I mean, not you specifically? But I kept feeling someone watching me and I wanted to know who it was."

"Isn't that dangerous? I could've been the Joker or something."

"Nah," Jason dismissed with a shake of his head. "You didn't feel threatening."

"I know four types of martial arts," Tim said. "I could definitely be threatening if I tried."

"You're eleven. I could crush you."

"You're not that much bigger then me," he argued.

"I absolutely am." Jason pointed out, "I've got fifty pounds and a good five inches on you."

Tim couldn't really deny that it because it was true. Instead, he took another sip of his smoothie before asking, "How'd you find me? And how'd you know it was me?"

"I went back to the places where I felt you and started searching," Jason said with a shrug of his shoulder. "As far as knowing it was you, I didn't really? I just had a feeling that I was in the right place."

"You found me on a feeling?" Tim echoed. Jason gave a nod. "That's ridiculous."

Jason just gave another shrug. "B says that listening to your gut is one of the most important rules to being a detective."

They sat there for a while, drinking smoothies and talking quietly. Tim had assumed that if he ever did talk to Jason Todd it would be primarily about Batman and Robin, but they didn't really talk about that at all.

Instead they argued about Star Wars (Jason was horrified that Tim preferred the prequels over the original trilogy). Instead Tim listened to Jason rant about how it was a good thing they were reading Romeo and Juliet in class because he might have had to fight his whole class if they destroyed any other Shakespeare play the way they were destroying it. Instead Jason asked about Tim's photography and Tim moved even closer so he could show Jason the photos he took that weren't of Batman and Robin.

When Jason got up to meet with Bruce, Tim decided to put his camera back in it's bag and head home.

It wasn't as though he didn't want to take pictures anymore, honestly talking to Jason just made Tim want to photograph him more, but that Tim knew no picture he took tonight was going to be as great as the fact that he'd just met and talked to Jason Todd.

He didn't think anything in his life was ever going to rival that.
1) This is one of my favorite troupes for JayTim but I feel like there's not a lot of it? So... I wrote it?

2) The age difference between Tim and Jason is between two and three years in this fic - which is about what it is in canon. This makes Tim a little young for dating when they first meet, but Tim's a genius and kinda emotionally advanced for his age so I figure it's OK? They're gonna get together when Tim's pretty young (like twelve honestly) but yeah it's not like their having sex soooo.... I don't know, let me know if you think that's too young? It's mostly just gonna be an innocent thing and I definitely know twelve year olds who are doing the whole dating thing, but I can stretch the timeline if it seems off to anyone?

3) I'm a little uncertain about whether or not Tim's initial crush on Jason is a bit creepy, so let me know if it comes off that way? I'm actually uncertain about Tim in general in this first part.

4) I'm also unsure about Jason's motivations? Like...I think sensing someone watching you and beginning to consider that someone as yours would be pretty standard for a child but Jason is fourteen when this fic starts? Is that too childish for him?

5) I said I was uncertain about whether Tim came off creepy in this, but actually I'm suddenly unsure whether or not the whole thing came off creepy in the beginning? Also i'm sorry my endnotes are so long, I write down things I want to clarify with readers as I'm writing so by the time I get to the end of a chapter this big it's ridiculous. Also is it odd that Jason starts to think of someone he doesn't know as his instead of being cautious? I don't think it's that out of character for a kid who doesn't really have anything (or didn't pre-Bruce) to latch onto something but he's also fourteen and I'm not sure I'm balancing the Jason who clings to Bruce and reads nerdy literature well with the Jason who is an angry street kid?

6) I'm also a bit worried that Jason gave up his identity too quickly but I think he would be able to tell the difference between someone whose just speculating and someone who genuinely knows.

7) Originally this first part was going to go all the way up until Jason's death and then I remembered that a) I work better when I can get feedback as I go and b) I prefer to write chapters between 1-3K because then their at a length where I feel like it's not inconvenience if someone is in class or something when I update? Like it's not going to take more then maybe 10 minutes. You would not believe how many fics I dropped because I got the update at the least convenient time.

8) The naming process of this fic went "I need a title about finding each other....Maybe a lyric from you found me? holy shit i forgot how depressing this song is....maybe something about childhood sweethearts actually??....Oh my god, I forgot Toby Keith wrote that song Huckleberry and even tho it's about berries we can pretend it's Huckleberry Finn because Jason is a literature nerd".

9) you see, the joke in the last line is that Tim has absolutely no idea that he's going to do things with Jason Todd that are way better then just meeting him.
When Tim walked out of school the next Monday and found Jason Todd sitting on the brick wall that lined the walkway, he didn't think the boy was there for him. Tim wasn't really expecting Jason to talk to him again after their chat in the alleyway. Jason had figured out who was watching him and Tim was pretty sure the only impression he made was one that painted him as a fairly pathetic Robin fanboy.

As Tim walked nearer to him though, it became obvious that it was him Jason was looking for.

"Tim," Jason called out. He raised one hand in greeted and flashed a smile. "Come here."

Tim glanced around quickly, trying to figure out if there was some other boy named Tim around, before walking over.

When he was standing in front of Jason, the older boy's grin widened. "Hi."

"Hi, Jason," Tim said. His fingers were playing with the straps on his bag as he tried to process the situation. He wondered if Bruce Wayne had found out Tim knew about Batman and Robin and sent Jason to get more information out of him. He'd told Jason pretty much everything about that last time they'd talked, but it was possible Bruce wanted to talk to him himself. "What do you need?"

"Nothing," Jason said with a shrug. "How do you feel about kiwi strawberry?"

Tim raised an eyebrow in question. Jason gestured to his side. When Tim followed the motion, he found there were two pink smoothies sitting next to Jason.

"It's alright," Tim said after a moment.

"Great," Jason chirped. He grabbed one of the smoothies and held it out for Tim. When Tim took it, he grabbed the other one then hopped off the wall. "Do you have a driver?"

"Um...No," Tim answered. He amended, "Well, yes, but he travels with my parents so I take a cab to school."

"Curfew?" Jason started walking down the pathway.

Feeling lost and a little dazed, Tim followed.

"Our house keeper leaves at seven so I have to be back by then if I want her to make me dinner," Tim said. "But other than that I'm free to come and go."

Jason's eyebrows knitted together. "She just leaves? She doesn't make sure you eat or anything?"

"I'm eleven. I'm more then capable of making myself a grilled cheese or ordering take out," Tim said with a shrug. They were at the end of the street now, waiting for the light at the cross walk to change colors. "Jason, where are we going?"

Jason looked around them as he took a drink. "You know, I actually don't have any idea."

"You...don't know?" Jason gave a small hum of acknowledgement. "You didn't have a plan when
you came to get me?"

"Nope."

"What?" Tim said. "Why would you come see me if you didn't have a plan?"

"I just wanted to talk to you," Jason said. He pushed his straw around in the cup before taking a deep breath, looking as though he was steeling himself for something. "It's fine if you don't want to talk to me. I just thought it'd be nice if we were friends."

There was a stretch of silence as Tim tried to comprehend that. The idea that Jason Todd, who was strong and brave and spent his nights saving people in ways that Tim never would, would want to be friends with him was something he didn't have any defense for.

"I do want to talk...to be um...friends," Tim said when he remembered that going quiet after someone asked you if you wanted to be friends would likely not be taken as acceptance. "I just don't get why you would want to be friends with me? You've gotta have a ton of friends already and they're probably cooler then I am."

"Not really," Jason said. There was a downturn to his lips that made Tim wish he could've just accepted this without question. "Bruce adopting me doesn't change the fact that I'm a street kid and everyone at school knows it. They like me well enough, but I'm never going to be one of them and I don't want to be. And my old neighborhood isn't really the type of place where kids could wander around. Most of us were too busy taking care of someone to talk to each other."

That...was all too easy for Tim to accept. Because he'd heard what his mother and her friends said about Bruce Wayne and his wards. He'd heard them talking about Bruce could try all he wanted, but Dick would always be a circus kid and Jason would always be street trash. He knew most of Gotham Academy's student population thought the same as their parents.

"What about your...after school job?" Tim asked. "Aren't you friends with any of your co-workers?"

Despite the heaviness of their conversation, Jason's lips twitched just a bit at Tim's description.

He shook his head, the motion wiping the smile back off his face. "I'm a member of the team, but I'm not their friend. I'm not Dick Grayson."

"I don't think that's a bad thing," Tim said. He got the feeling people didn't tell Jason that often enough and this was only their second conversation.

Jason didn't answer, just gave another small hum.

That was as pretty clear sign that Jason didn't want to talk about it further, so instead of pushing Tim said, "There's a museum around the corner. We could go there?"

"You only just got out of school and you want to go to a museum?" Jason said, sounding like he couldn't believe the words coming out of his mouth. Tim shrugged. Jason let out a small disgusted sound. "We are not doing that. We are never going to do that. Let's go to the arcade."

"I've never been to an arcade," Tim said.

Jason made another sharp, harsh sound. "We are definitely, definitely going to the arcade."

Jason picking Tim up from school became a daily occurrence.
Tim would walk out the front doors and Jason would be waiting there with two smoothies. They crept their way down the Jamba Juice menu as Jason never bought the same flavor twice.

With smoothies in hand, they would go off on the kinds of adventures that Tim knew would have his mother seething about how "middle class" he was acting.

They went mini-golfing. Jason hit the ball so hard it went sailing over the fence and Tim laughed so hard he cried. They went ice skating. Jason tried to teach Tim how to do a few jumps and Tim went home with cheeks that were bit red from the cold, bruises on his knees, and a smile on his face. They went to play laser tag. They both took it too seriously, because that was the type of people they were. Jason walked out scowling because Tim had scary aim and Tim bought a thing of cheese drenched nachos to coax him out of sulk.

Tim saw parts of Gotham that he didn't know existed, the ones that his mother would never have scolded him for because she never would have imagined them.

Jason took him to a diner where the vinyl booths were cracking and the lights flickered. The waitresses had ruffled Jason's hair and called Tim adorable as they took their order. The fries had tasted like heaven on Tim's tongue and the pie they shared afterwards had him moaning. Jason took him to a small park with a creaky roundabout and a tire swing with frayed rubber on its chains. Jason sat on one of the swings and pumped until he was practically upside down. Tim had seen him do way more dangerous things when he was in his Robin costume, but he still shrieked when Jason jumped off. Jason teased him for the rest of the day, comparing the sound to the squawk of a baby bird. Jason took him to a bookstore where the owner sat behind the register with a cigarette in his hand and the books all had cracked spines. They stood with their shoulders touching as they flipped through books. Jason would nudge Tim occasionally to show him some of the things that had been written by the books previous owners. Tim went home with a bag full of books so large that getting his arms around it was a struggle.

On their adventures, Tim learned things. He learned that Jason didn't understand math or science, but he was a master with words in any language. He learned that Jason would leave a waitress with a tip that doubled their bill and would box leftovers to take to kids who were too small, too thin, too pale. He learned that Jason was incapable of sitting still during a baseball game and wouldn't hesitate to put someone in their place for cat calling or shouting slurs.

Tim had never understood people who dismissed Robin as nothing more than Batman's sidekick, but now he didn't understand how anyone could dismiss Jason Todd as anything less than amazing.

Jason could feel the frown on his face deepening as he followed Tim through his house.

Jason had been piled down with homework, so the two of them had decided to go to one of their places to work instead of going out. Tim had offered his place, but the longer they were there the more Jason started feeling like whisking Tim off to the manor.

This place didn't feel even feel lived in, much less like a home. There were no photos on the walls, not like Wayne Manor were it seemed like you couldn't find a hallway without seeing Dick or Jason's face on the wall; there was no clutter on the entertainment system, the one at the manor was covered in DVD cases for the movies Jason refused to let Alfred put away just in case he couldn't find them again; and the couch looked brand new, there were no indents from people sitting there too frequently or someone forgetting their weight after patrol and collapsing into it.

"Hey, Timmy," Jason questioned as Tim lead him through the living room and towards the staircase. "Where are your parents?"
"I already told you this, Jay. They're in Chile."

"Still?" Jason said, unable to keep the surprise from his voice. Tim had told him his parents were in Chile almost a month ago, when they'd first started hanging out after school. He couldn't imagine Bruce leaving him alone in the manor for a month.

"Uh huh. I think they're going to Brazil this week though," Tim said. He paused for a second, looking up as though he was thinking about something. He started walking again as he said, "Actually, they might be in Brazil already."

"When are they coming back?"

"I don't have any idea. They're in South America on business, so they'll be gone however long it takes for them to get the results they want."

They'd reached the second floor now and Tim led the way down the hallway. He pushed one of the doors open, gesturing for Jason to go in ahead of him.

Jason glanced around quickly and realized he would have been able to tell this was Tim's room without any context.

There was a large window with a tree near it. The bed was pushed against it. Jason wondered briefly if Tim ever had to use the tree when he went out to take pictures of Batman and Robin, or if he went out the front door even when his parents were home.

Across from the bed there was a desk with a laptop and Tim's camera bag sitting on it. Hanging above it was a map of Gotham with sharpie running through what Jason knew were Batman's patrol routes. Surrounding the map was a collection of Batman and Robin stickers that Tim must have commissioned some artist for because Jason knew Wayne Industries trademark on Batman didn't allow for that kind of thing on a mass scale.

A large bookcase spanned the length of the wall directly opposite the door. Most of the titles were crime thrillers and mystery novels. As long as it was, the bookshelf wasn't very tall. There were a few small metal boxes on the top of it. From the size and shape of them, Jason got the impression they were holding Tim's photographs. On the wall above the bookshelf was a large cork board. There was a mess of things on the board, most of them were foreign to Jason. There were a few he recognized though - the plastic gecko Tim had bought with his coupons at the arcade on their first trip, the photos the two of them had taken in the booth at the roller rink, a flyer for the go-kart track they'd visited earlier that week.

The room screamed Tim and that made Jason want to hustle him out of this house even more. He hated the idea of Tim containing himself to this one room in such a huge, empty house.

"Do you want to sit on the bed or the floor?" Tim asked.

"Floor would be easier to write on," Jason said. He shrugged his backpack off and dropped it onto the floor before flopping down next to it. He shifted so his back was against the foot of Tim's bed then pulled his backpack into his lap.

Tim settled on the floor across from him and did the same.

Sitting with Tim when they were silent and working was a lot like going out with him. Jason's happiness was less manic, easier and more comfortable, but there was no less of it and it wasn't any less warm in his chest.
As they sat there, Jason occasionally asking Tim to check his math problems because Tim was more then capable of doing high school math and Tim occasionally speaking French aloud so Jason could correct his accent, Jason decided that he was going to do his best to make sure Tim spent as little time as possible in this place. It was more a mausoleum than a home and Tim deserved so much more than that.

He hadn't invited Tim over because he was scared. Not scared of Tim, not ever of Tim because Tim was so much more than he realized, but of how Bruce would react. He knew Dick had brought people around the manor before, but those had mostly been people who knew about his identity. People who Bruce knew about Dick's identity, because Tim knew Jason was Robin but Bruce didn't know that and that made all the difference.

Jason had never had someone in his life like Tim, someone who so obviously cared and wanted Jason around, and the idea of Bruce finding out that Tim knew about Batman was terrifying because it was all too easy to imagine Bruce doing something that would drive them apart. Jason knew Bruce would be doing it with some idea of protecting them, not to be needlessly cruel, but that didn't mean Jason wanted it.

But, that was a fear Jason was willing to face if it meant that Tim was with him more often instead of alone in this place.

They still went out after school, but now Jason would find excuses for Tim to come back to the manor with him afterwards instead of going home. He asked Tim for help with his Chemistry homework, scoffed when Tim wanted to get a book from the library and offered his own copies instead, insisted that Bruce would kill him if he kept going off diet and made Tim come with him to eat a healthy Alfred cooked meal.

Jason remembered the way Alfred had looked at him the first time he'd dragged Tim into the manor, the same soft and fond look he gave Jason anytime he did something that showed that he saw the manor as home, and how he had brought the two of them tea and cookies to eat while they worked on their homework. He remembered the look on Bruce's face when Jason and Tim answered Alfred's dinner call that night. How he had looked surprised but not upset. How it had settled into that expression of fatherly fondness that always made Jason feel warm and safe and loved.

He remembered what their faces had looked like when Bruce asked Tim about his parents. How Bruce's face had been thunderous and his fingers had tightened around his silverware. How Alfred had stopped in the middle of serving and frowned at the food.

After that, the two of them seemed to be just as interested in getting Tim to stay as Jason was. Alfred would insist it was much too late for Tim to be going home and it would be better for him to just stay the night even though it was only nine o'clock. Bruce would offer to drive Tim home on rainy nights, only to change his mind as soon as he opened the door because even if Tim only lived next door it was far too dangerous to be driving in this kind of weather. No matter what day of the week it was, they would relent to Jason's sleepover requests with the only requirement being that neither boy put up a fight when they had to get ready for school in the morning.

Jason got the impression that Tim knew what they were doing, but that he didn't mind it very much. There was always a look of immense relief and gratitude when Tim was told he could stay.

Jason's bedroom became Jason and Tim's bedroom. There were two laptops sitting on the desk and two sets of textbooks. The dresser became a mix of Jason's ratty tee-shirts and Tim's polos. An extra bottle of shampoo joined Jason's in the shower off the bedroom and a second toothbrush appeared on the sink. The bed gained a extra pillows because Tim kept stealing Jason's and a second blanket
because Jason was apparently a huge blanket hog.

Jason and Tim's friendship was new, but the two of them twined together and become a pair in a way that felt natural and right.

Chapter End Notes

1) All good things come in threes. It's a pattern you're gonna notice in this story.

2) I'm not sure if it's clear or if you can tell from their ages but Tim is sixth grade and Jason is a Freshmen in high school. They both go to Gotham Academy, but they're in different buildings and get out at different times. Hence why Jason can wait for Tim to get out.

3) Jason is charming as fuck but I just can't see him connecting very much with people, espesically not the people he would be around at this point in his life. He doesn't fit in any group very well - too street for the rich kids, too rich for the poor kids (at least that's how their gonna see him with Bruce having adopted him), too violent for the superheros. Plus, I considered the fact that in canon he has friends but their very few and their people who don't quite fit in either.

4) I know Jason was in both the Teen Titans and Young Justice for a brief time, but it doesn't really line up with what I say in this fic? We're just gonna pretend he was a member of both teams for way longer then he actually was.

5) It may seem like Jason and Tim grow close too quickly, but consider this: Jason is absolutely the type to latch onto people who he deems important and they are spending literally every day together. They went into this with the intention of becoming friends and so they're open with each other rather then tentative.

6) So my description of Wayne Manor might be a little off since Alfred would never let the place turn into a pigsty, but there's a certain point where parents of teenage boys (or caretakers as it might be) learn what can and can't be taken care of. I mean, Bruce might have the money to buy a new couch all the time but does he really want to do that every time Dick or Jason do something to break it?

7) I'm not sure what Tim's room /actually/ looked like? So have a new one and I hope you agree that it sounds like the kind of room Tim would live in?

8) I wanna cry how did this chapter get so long??

9) Jason's section doesn't have nearly as much introspection as Tim's does? I hope that doesn't bother anyone? It's not that I think Jason is incapable of deep thought, it's just that in the situation I think he's definitely more likely to just be like "Yeah. I'm doing this." then to to analyze it intensely.

10) Why doesn't Tim sleep in the guest room? Mostly because then they would have to talk to him about the fact that he's basically moved in and no one wants to spook him out and make him feel like they don't want him there. Also because the most inseparable
Tim and Jason are now, the more it's going to hurt when Jason dies! How does Bruce not know Tim knows about Batman and Robin when Jason and Tim are sharing a bed? Well, Jason probably just told Bruce that Tim was a really heavy sleeper and didn't wake up when he left the bed.

11) Jason and Tim are very co-dependent which could be very creepy since you really only get that some Jason's POV so I want to assure you that it is absolutely two-sided? I'm not sure if that needs to be said which is worrying because I should probably have more confidence in my ability to show that, but I am just not?

12) Never fear!! Dick Grayson will show up next chapter!! He was gonna be in this one and then I realized it was already too long and the scene wasn't flowing the way I wanted? Though I warn you, it's not necessarily going to be Dick-positive? It's not gonna be bash-y either just...you know? It's a rough situation between Bruce/Dick/Jason rn and Tim's kinda caught in the middle.
Ohana Means Family and Family Means No One Gets Left Behind

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Alfred! Tim and I are back! We're gonna grab something to eat and-

Jason had been shouting as he walked through the house, but he cut himself off abruptly and came to a stop when he reached the dining room.

Dick and Barbara were seated at the table. Dick was leaned backwards with one arm slung over the back of Barbara's chair, his fingers resting gently against her shoulder. Barbara had her forearms braced against the table and she cradled a steaming cup of tea in her hands. Alfred sat across from them, his cup lifted to his mouth as he took a sip.

Jason stared at them until he felt a body crash against his back.

He jerked a bit at the impact as Tim groaned, "Jason! Why'd you stop!"

Tim set his fingers low on Jason's hips to steady himself. He gripped a little tighter and Jason could feel Tim trying to leverage himself enough to look over Jason's shoulder to peer at what had stopped him.

It was easier to find his voice when he knew Tim was there with him.

"What are you doing here?" Jason asked.

He straightened himself up so Tim wouldn't be able to look around him. A few weeks ago it would have been because he didn't want to risk Tim being like everyone else in his life and preferring Dick. They were a pair now, though. Jason couldn't imagine Tim leaving him alone like that. He was bulking himself up because the last time he'd seen Dick, he'd listened to Dick rage at Bruce about taking Jason in. He wasn't going to risk Dick, who Tim practically worshiped, saying anything similar about Tim.

"Master Jason," Alfred said, his tone chiding.

"It's fine, Alf," Dick dismissed, waving one hand a bit. He smiled at Jason, his eyes crinkling at the corners and his teeth showing. "We just wanted to drop by and say hi."

"Drop by, huh?" He folded his arms over his chest. "Like you were just in the neighborhood or something? Like you didn't specifically pick a time when B would be gone?"

Dick's smile faltered.

Alfred opened his mouth to chide Jason again, but Barbara spoke first, "Jason, come on. I love you, kid, but you're talking about things you don't understand right now."

"I don't understand?" Jason said. He could feel himself filling with anger and irritation. Usually he liked Barbara, but right now all he could see was a line drawn in the sand and Barbara standing opposite him. "You don't understand. I don't know what happened between him and B. I don't even care what happened between him and B. I care that he came in here screaming the day he found out I was living here. I care that he had the nerve to come in here and shout at Bruce for giving me a real life instead of leaving me on the streets. I care that he's acting like he had anything to do with that
decision. News flash, Dick, you didn't. Just because Bruce adopted me after you were gone doesn't mean he adopted me because you were gone. Correlation does not equal causation, asshole."

Silence stretched across the room. Barbara's expression was filled with shock. Dick had a look on his face that was one part horror, one part sadness, and one part anger. Alfred seemed to be debating between scolding Jason for swearing, addressing what he'd said, or keeping quiet.

"Jay." Tim's voice washed over Jason. It worked as a restraint, letting Jason stomp down on the intensity of his emotions because he refused to let Tim see him like that. He didn't remember his father much, but he remembered how angry he'd get and how he'd take it all out on his mother. He refused to be anything like that. "That's not fair."

Jason breathed out, pushing air out of the corner of his mouth in a loud rush. He craned his head so he was looking over his shoulder. Tim was still lifted up on his toes, trying to look over Jason's shoulder, so the shift put them close enough that Tim's lips were practically brushing Jason's cheeks.

Jason focused his gaze on Tim, knowing that he would hear it if any of the people at the table went to get up. "You weren't there, Tim. You didn't hear the things he said."

"No," Tim agreed. "But I can imagine how he felt. Jay, you may not have replaced him but think about how it would look. Think about what you would do if you and Bruce weren't talking and then he's suddenly got another kid."

Jason took a second to mull it over. He figured that if he didn't know the circumstances he would think he'd been replaced, that Bruce had gotten so sick of his bullshit that he'd decided he wasn't worth it and found himself a fresh slate.

"Okay. You have a point," he said at last. He turned away from Tim, focusing on Dick. "He has a point. I still think you're an asshole, but I guess you aren't a complete dick."

"Jason," Tim whined, sounding exasperated. "You're not supposed to say that kind of stuff to your family."

"He's not family."

Alfred cut him a sharp look and finally spoke to give a harsh, "Master Jason."

"No," Tim agreed because Tim always agreed on Jason with the important things. "But he could be one day. I think it would be nice to have a brother."

"You have me."

"You're not my brother," Tim said.

If it were anyone else, Jason might have been offended by the implication that Tim could see Dick as family but not him. But this was Tim and Jason knew exactly what he was saying. Jason and Tim were never going to be brothers because they were something more than that.

Jason let his eyes rake over Dick before shrugging one shoulder.

"Okay," Tim said, knowing that it was acceptance rather than dismissal. "Can we get a snack and head up to your room, please? We spent way too much time playing with the animals at the shelter. I don't know if I can finish my homework before dinner."

"Oh my god," Jason said, letting out a huge put upon breath. Even with the other people in the room,
talking to Tim was making it easy for him to relax. "You are such a nerd, babybird. You're not gonna die if you don't do your homework immediately."

"I might actually."

It wasn't that funny, but Jason let out a loud bark of laughter because that kind of shit was just like Tim.

"Okay." He started crossing the room, not needing to turn around to know Tim would follow. "Alfred, Tim and I are going to take something to eat up to our bedroom so we can do our homework."

"We promise not to grab anything too messy," Tim said. Jason resisted the urge to roll his eyes at how polite he was being. "And it was nice to meet you, Mr. Grayson! Ms. Gordon!"

Jason was genuinely impressed that Tim managed to wait until the kitchen door closed behind them to let out a breathy, choked, "I just met Nightwing and Batgirl."

Jason wasn’t sure if it was Jason's rant or Tim's quiet confession that spurred it on, but Dick started coming around more after their brief confrontation. He came around once or twice a week, depending on when Bruce was going to be out of the house since they still weren't talking, and dragged them into doing something with them.

The first time he looked surprised when he bounced into the living room to find Jason lying on the couch with a worn copy of To Kill a Mockingbird and Tim sitting cross legged between Jason's ankles with a highlighter in his mouth and textbook open on Jason's knees. He recovered quickly. He slid a firm smile on his face as he extended his invitation to help Jason with his tumbling into an invitation to teach Tim.

It only took three or four visits before Dick got used to Tim and Jason's co-dependency. When he came into the living room a few weeks later to find Tim sitting on the back of the couch with his legs hooked over Jason's shoulders so that Jason couldn't move away from his homework, he barely paid any attention to it. He just complained loudly about how homework was for losers and Tim should stop bullying Jason into doing his so that the three of them could go to SkyZone instead.

Jason liked Barbara, she cracked jokes over the comms and always listened to him when he started sprouting random facts during stake outs, but their interaction outside of patrols had been limited. After the kitchen confrontation, she started dropping by the manor more often too.

Unlike Dick, she never seemed thrown by how close Tim and Jason were. When she walked into their bedroom to find them lying on the bed together, Jason lying stomach-down across Tim's thighs with his eyes closed as he bobbed his head to the Italian pop song playing while Tim tapped away at a laptop that was settled on Jason's lower back, she didn't even blink. She'd just flopped down onto the floor, demanding that Jason help her paint her toenails, and started humming with the music.

Sometimes the two of them would come together. They'd take Tim and Jason out to eat at one of the real restaurants, the kind that the two of them never really thought to go out to when they hung out after school because they were usually filled with families, in town for dinner. It was always a casual affair, the kind of thing that had Jason grinning like an idiot and Tim flushing with laughter. It made Dick comfortable enough to ask about Bruce and Barbara start sharing stories about growing up in a police station.

Jason would never admit it to them, but he liked having them around.
After a few visits, it started feeling just like Tim had predicted it would.

Dick and Barbara started feeling like their family, like their siblings. Weird, kind of incestuous siblings but siblings nonetheless.

Jason had never felt unhappy with Bruce, but he had never been quite comfortable.

When it was just him and Tim, he'd pushed his discomfort aside because he couldn't bring himself to care what anyone other than Tim thought of him.

Now though, he felt settled and comfortable and happy. He didn't look at the strange, high class foods that Alfred cooked for them with suspicion because he knew Alfred would only ever feed him something he'd like. He didn't hesitate to ramble about his day when Bruce asked anymore. He laughed when Dick jumped off of a swing and into simple tricks instead of frowning to hide his jealousy. He learned the names to every shade of lipstick and nail polish Barbara owned and stopped scoffing when she asked him which he thought looked better.

They were his family and his home was with them.

Tim was lounging in an inner tube on the river when his phone started ringing.

It was one of the rare times when Bruce took a day off work to take Jason, and now Tim, out somewhere so they could spend time together. He had picked them both up from school with swimming trunks and towels pack already, declaring that he was taking them tubing.

It took him a moment to answer. He hadn't been asleep exactly, but the rumble of Bruce and Jason's voices drifting down the river to him and the warmth of the sun on his face had him loose and relaxed.

When he'd wrestled his phone from his pocket, he lifted it up to his ear and greeted, "Ilo?"

"Timothy, that is not how you answer a phone. Think about what your business partners will say if you answer the phone so casually in the future."

Tim felt like his heart stopped the moment he heard his mother's voice, sharp and reprimanding. He scrambled to sit up, crossing his legs under him and balancing precariously on the tube. Jason was still talking to Bruce, but Tim could feel Jason watching him now as he tuned in to Tim's distress.

"I'm sorry, mother," Tim answered. He knew better then to argue with her, especially when it was about his status as the heir to Drake Industries.

"Don't do it again," she said. He heard her take a breath before she spoke again, her tone calming and losing some of it's judgement. "How are you, love?"

"I'm good," Tim said. His tube shook a bit as something bumped into it. He felt knuckles, rough and a little scabbed, skim across his lower back. He didn't need to look to know who they belonged to, but he cast a glance over his shoulder anyway. Jason and Bruce had been floating a few feet behind him before, but now Jason's tube was right up against his and his fingers were wrapped around the handle on Tim's to keep them together. Bruce was still a little further back, but he was watching them with the kind of fatherly focus that made Tim's chest warm. "How's Argentina?"

"Absolutely lovely," she declared. The wistful, happy quality in her voice made Tim's chest hurt.
Neither of his parents ever sounded like that when they were in Gotham with him. It wasn't as if his parents weren't happy when he was around, his mother always radiated fondness when he joined her for breakfast in the sunroom on Saturday mornings and his father would smile quietly when Tim sat in his office to do his homework, but they were always so much happier when they were away. "The country is beautiful and the food is fantastic. When we get home, I'll have the chef make Sorrentinos for you to try."

He hummed, "What's that?"

"It's a pasta dish. Ravioli with ham and mozzarella cheese," she informed. "I think you'll like it."

"It sounds delicious." He looked up, blocking the sun from his eyes with his free hand. "Do you know yet when you'll be home?"

"Well, that's why I called you," Janet said. "Your father just closed the deal we were here for, so we should be home by Monday."

Tim felt horrible for it, but in that moment he found himself wishing that his parents would just stay in Argentina. He had spent so many years wanting nothing more then for them to spend more time at home so that they could be a real family.

And this time, Tim had found a different family in their absence.

He'd found Alfred who never minded staying up late to pick Jason and Tim up when they wanted to go to a concert or event that was late at night. He'd found Bruce who never scheduled a dinner meeting because somedays it was the only time he would get to listen to Jason and Tim talk about their days. He'd found Dick who made trips from Blüdhaven just to flop on the couch and watch some crappy movie with Jason and Tim. He'd found Barbara who made Jason paint her nails because she knew he didn't mind as much as he pretended to and braided Tim's bangs because she knew he liked having it played with.

He'd found Jason who stayed by his side because he wanted to, because he was happier with Tim than he was when they were apart.

Tim had found a family while his parents were gone and he knew that his parents would try to tear him away from them.

He'd heard what his parents thought about Bruce, what they thought about Dick and Jason based on where they came from.

Tim tightened his grip around the phone in his hand.

Jason reacted to it immediately. He kicked out a foot and wrapped his ankle around Tim's.

He made it easier for Tim to breath.

Jason wasn't letting Tim go and Tim wasn't letting him go. In fact, they were both holding on tighter.

He took a deep breath and plastered on a smile, hoping that it would allow a bit of fake happiness to seep into his voice, "That's great, mother. I can't wait to see you guys."

Tim's routine changed when his parents came back from South America.
He still went out with Jason after school, but he made sure to be back by dinner just in case one of his parents made it home in time. They usually did, but there were nights when he sat at the table and ate alone. He learned quickly not to tell Jason about those nights, because when he did Jason would frown and his fists would clench.

The nights when his parents had business dinners, he would have dinner at the manor. The first time he'd gone back with Jason, Alfred had stopped the meal he'd been in the middle of cooking in order to make Tim's favorites instead. Tim had tried telling him not to bother, but Alfred had shushed him and told him that he did the same for Dick or Bruce when they returned after having been gone for a while. When Bruce came into the dining room that night to find Tim sitting at the table with Jason, he'd lit up.

The whole experience had been enough for Tim to know he'd made the right choice.

He couldn't be with them all the time, but at least this way he could still be with them occasionally. He still had his family.

The hardest part about his parents being back were the nights.

He'd gotten used to sleeping with Jason. He was used to falling asleep with Jason in bed with him, used to waking up when Jason left for patrol and again when Jason crawled back into bed afterwards. He was struggling to get to sleep and having a hard time staying asleep when he did.

The dark bags under Jason's eyes were making it pretty clear that Jason was having the same problem.

Part of him wanted to sneak out the window like he did when he went to take pictures and get Jason to let him into the manor, but he'd never stayed out all night before. When it came to taking pictures, he always left and returned at the same time. He didn't think his parents still checked on him in the middle of the night, but he wasn't willing to take the risk that they would.

They found ways to work around it.

Some days when Tim went out to take photos, Jason would sneak away from Bruce for a while. They both slept better on those nights, like the still lingering warmth of shoulders and thighs that had been pressed together while they sat together was enough to fool their bodies into thinking they were together.

Some days, the two of them went to the manor after school and collapsed onto their bed to take a nap. When Bruce or Alfred woke them up so Tim could head home, there was always a flash of regret on their faces.

Once upon a time, Tim had been upset by how often his parents were out of country.

Now, he felt nothing but a rush of warm relief when they left after only two months in Gotham.

Two weeks after Tim's twelfth birthday, one week after his parents had left and two weeks until Jason's fifteenth, the two of them found themselves alone in the kitchen.

They had spent the morning out at the pool, the early August heat was unforgiving, and by the time they pulled themselves out of the water Alfred had left to go grocery shopping.

Tim sat on one of the stools at the island, a white towel wrapped around his shoulders even though they'd made sure to dry off outside so they wouldn't be trailing water through the house, while Jason
rummaged around in the fridge.

"I can do sandwiches," Jason said. Tim slouched against the counter, stretching one arm out so his wrist dangled off the edge and folding the other in so he could bury his mouth against his forearm. "And I think we still have some of those snack sized chip bags. We could have that for lunch?"

Tim gave a soft hum and tilted his face so he could speak, "You've got to have some kind of fruit or vegetable with yours. Diet, remember?"

"Bruce isn't here. He's not going to know that I had a bag of chips instead of an apple for lunch."

"I could tell him," Tim pointed out.

"And tell him what? That I'm not following my Robin diet?" Jason questioned. He looked at Tim over his shoulder, his lips pulled in a bright smile and his eyes warm with teasing affection. "Let me know how he reacts to finding out you know."

Tim uncurled his fingers so he was pointing at Jason. "You have a point."

"I usually do."

Tim was smiling as he turned his face back into his arm.

He closed his eyes for just a moment. When he looked back up to find Jason searching through the fridge again, he had a sudden vision of an older Jason in the same position, taller with a back even wider and more muscular then it was now.

He knew that any other twelve year old may have been spooked by the idea that they'd already met someone they would be with for the rest of their lives, but Tim just found it comforting. He couldn't imagine not having Jason by his side. He didn't want to.

"Jay," he said, speaking loud enough that he wouldn't have to move his face.

He cast another glance over his shoulder. "Yeah, babybird?"

Tim didn't say anything in reply, just held his open palm out towards Jason.

Jason watched him for a moment before glancing up at Tim.

Their eyes caught for a moment before a smile blossomed across his lips. He reached out and caught Tim's fingers. He gave a quick, tight squeeze before letting go.

"Compromise?" Jason suggested, not needing to discuss what had happened to understand Tim's intention.

Tim felt his smile widen against his arm. "Hit me."

"We eat chips with our sandwiches, but we make up for it by drinking something healthier then soda."

Tim hummed in thought before requesting, "Can we have the green machine smoothies that Danielle Beausoleil gave Alfred the recipe for?"

"Uh...." Jason glanced into the fridge again before giving Tim a small nod. "Yeah. I can do that."

"Let's go for it then."
Tim stayed seated for a minute, but once Jason had pulled the ingredients for their sandwiches and smoothies out he rose to his feet.

They made lunch quietly, though not silently. Jason mumbled song lyrics under his breath as he measured the ingredients for their smoothies and Tim hummed along as he spread mayonnaise on their bread. Jason wiggled his hips as he held the blender lid in place and Tim danced out of his way with toppings in his hands and quiet laughter on his lips whenever Jason nudged him. They had a small argument because Jason wanted to use his matching Superman and Wonder Woman pint glasses, but Tim thought it was a little ridiculous that Jason refused to use any other cup when the Wonder Woman one was clean. It ended with Jason chugging half the blender before pouring the rest into two Wonder Woman mugs that he owned and Tim laughing so hard that they had to wait to carry the plates over to the island in fear of dropping them.

It was the kind of soft, quiet afternoon that had Tim feeling warm, fond, and grateful that he'd have many more like it.

Chapter End Notes

1) Hello again, fam! Thank you to everyone whose given me so much support on this fic!

2) I feel half like the first scene in this chapter came off very rushed? But I really wanted to do a chapter on family and I thought Dick would be a good place to start that. Because I know everyone really likes to write Jason and Dick as being these happy brothers....but they weren't? Dick and Jason didn't spend much time together because Dick and Bruce weren't really speaking? Everything about Dick's canon relationship with Jason and his reaction to his death makes no sense to me, so I wanted to fix that? Hopefully everyone understands what I mean?

3) I also tried to showcase how Tim and Jason's relationship works, how they balance each other out, but I feel like it mostly just came across as Jason giving in way too easily? And I hate that because it was supposed to showcase how Tim's rationality can temper Jason's raging emotions.

4) friendly reminder that we are playing fast and loose with canon. So while canon events may happen, they don't necessarily happen at the same time as in canon.

5) There's some intimate positioning in this chapter. It's not sexual and I don't see it as being harmful or odd for two people who are with each other as constantly as Tim and Jason are? Personal space kinda...stops existing when you're like that? Especially when your sharing a bed like they are. But if it seems like its too much or something, let me know so I can reign it in?

6) I'm a tad worried Tim comes off as too mature for a kid who's only eleven and a half? But like I said - Tim's always seemed to be mature for his age? Let me know if it's too much though.

7) Jason's feelings about Tim and their relationship is kinda intense and I'm worried there's not enough precedent for it? They've known each other for less then six months at this point. The thing is that I see them as getting along so quickly and so intensely because of what they mean to each other. Tim is the first person that has accepted Jason
for being Jason. Who thinks he's good as both Robin and Jason. Jason is the first person Tim knows to show him so much emotion and so care. There will be others in his life later, but Jason will always be the first. Hopefully this comes off in the fic? Because I think if I need to explain this for you to get it, then Jason and Tim's relationship progress will seem unnatural to you and the story isn't going to be as good as I want it to be? If you don't comment on anything else - please comment on this bc I'm genuinely worried about it.

8) For anyone who doesn't know - SkyZone is a giant building that is covered from wall-to-wall floor-to-ceiling in trampolines. It is absolutely the type of place Dick Grayson would /love/ no matter how old he was.

9) I feel like i'm messing Jason up?? I think he's coming off too jaded - too much like post-death Jason and not enough like Robin-Jason.

10) On that note: do you guys want more addressing the fact that Jason is Robin? It hasn't come up a lot since no one else KNOWS Tim knows and Jason doesn't want them to find out, but I feel vaguely like I'm ignoring the whole thing?

11) Things to address: In this chapter Tim muses on some of the feelings he gets from his parents and I wanted to specify that he's attached to Jason because Jason's emotions are so much more apparent. Jason is an open book constantly, not just sporadically

12) I didn't actually write Tim's parents home coming, just kinda skimmed over it, because I thought that Tim's reactions to the event were much more important then the actual thing. I wanted to focus more on what Tim had now and the ways he found to keep that instead of going back to the cold, empty house he'd had before.

13) The intent at the end of this chapter is for Tim and Jason to be in a relationship, but I'm unsure if it came off that way? I didn't want them to kiss or anything because Tim is twelve, so I tried to come up with another way but I'm not sure if it worked. Is it clear to you what happened or should I just use that as a moment to signify a change in feelings and clarify further next chapter?

14) I worry that Jason and Tim's relationship comes off as way too seriously for people their age? On one hand, it is /serious/. I think Jason and Tim both probaly know from the very beginning they are it for each other. On the other hand, I think Tim's barely twelve years old and Jason's just shy of fifteen and they're relationship is mostly just going to be light hearted and fun even though they know that? Please let me know if I'm completely fucking it up? Writing a relationship between young people can be really hard (though that's not so much an excuse as my attempt at an explanation).
A pond stretched out in front of Tim with large stones bordering it on all sides. Tim sat on one of the stone with his legs crossed under him. There was a small, opened bag of birdseed sitting in the space between his legs. Jason was standing to his left, toeing off his sneakers.

"Jason," Tim said, his voice portraying just how horrified he was by the sight in front of him, "do not stick your feet in the duck pond."

Jason ignored him. Tucking his shoe laces into his sneakers, he set them to the side before sitting down. Tim watched with increasing panic as Jason grabbed the top of his sock and pulled them off. "Jason! Come on! The water is disgusting!"

"It's not like I'm going swimming in it," Jason said. His leaned over to shove his socks in with his shoe laces. He braced his palms against the stone and scooted closer to the edge of the stone. Tim couldn't help the way he flinched when Jason's toes first hit the water. This was really really unsanitary. Jason kept moving until he was ankle deep in water. When he stilled, he turned and flashed a smile at Tim. "See! It's fine. I'm not dying of dysentery or anything."

"You'd have to drink the water to get dysentery," Tim pointed out. Jason's gaze flickered down towards the water, looking mildly like he was considering something. Tim felt like he wanted to simultaneously sigh and pull his hair out. "Do not drink the water, Jason."

"Chill out, Timmy. I wasn't actually going to do it. I'm not that stupid." "Uh huh...." Jason wasn't stupid, but Tim had seen Jason do a lot of stupid things in the names of curiosity and spite.

"Shut up," Jason said. He patted the area next to him. "Come up here with me."

Tim shook his head. "I'm not putting my feet in that water, Jay."

"I'm not going to make you put your feet in the water," Jason said. Tim pursed his lips, narrowing his eyes as he watched Jason. While Jason usually accepted Tim's idiosyncrasies, he also wasn't above forcing Tim to deal with them. Jason let out a loud sigh. "Tim, come on. I swear I'm not going to do it. I just want to sit with you."

"Alright..." Tim scooted up until his knee was bumping against Jason's. He watched with a weary eyes as Jason reached over and grabbed his hand. "Jay-"

"Shhh," Jason shushed.

Tim had been expecting a sharp tug that would send him crashing into the water, but it never came. Instead Jason twined their fingers together and set their joined hands on their knees.

When a beat passed without Jason letting go, the older boy focusing instead on clicking his tongue at one of the ducks and trying to beckon it towards them, Tim felt his face begin to flush.

For weeks now, Tim's personal space had been Jason-and-Tim's personal space. When Jason was
reading on the couch, Tim was always on the floor with his shoulders touching Jason's legs or tucked between Jason and the back of the couch so that he could catch a quick nap. When they were waiting in line at Jamba Juice, Jason would stand next to Tim with his elbow on Tim's shoulder and body his leaned towards him or behind him with his chin resting on Tim's head and his fingers on Tim's hips as he examined the menu. Even when they were just walking down the street, they stayed close enough that they were constantly brushing shoulders or elbowing each other.

However, for all of their physical closeness they had never really held hands. Not like this. On occasion, Jason grabbed Tim's hand to pull him along when Tim wasn't going fast enough for his liking or Tim grabbed Jason's hand to close his fingers around a pencil so that he'd stop putting off his math homework, but this was new.

This was nice.

"Hey." Jason ducked his head as he reached over with his free hand to grab some of the birdseed from the bag in Tim's lap. "This is okay right?"

"Yeah," Tim said, his voice coming out soft and happy. He squeezed Jason's hand in his. "'Course it is."

They stayed like that for the rest of the afternoon. Jason lazily kicking his feet in the water as he tried to coax the ducks over, Tim criticizing Jason's technique, and their clasped hands sat between them.

The hand holding became pretty common place.

At first it was always Jason initiating it, his fingers catching Tim's while they were walking down the street and then lacing together without much fuss or stealing Tim's pencil from his hands when he was annoyed with getting ignored for homework and keeping Tim's hand in his after he'd tossed it away.

Tim became so accustomed to it that when Jason picked him up from school one day and didn't immediately grab his hand, he felt a little out of place. He went through the whole afternoon trying to figure out what he had done wrong. When they got back to the manor and Tim asked him about it, Jason had looked at the floor and muttered something about thinking that Tim didn't like it since Tim never reached for Jason first.

After that, Tim started reaching for Jason as well. When they were in the back of the car, Tim would take one of Jason's hands in his and play absently with his fingers. When Jason got a little too animated while ranting about something, Tim would reach up and pull Jason's hands into his. With the threat of getting smacked in the face gone, Tim would nudge his shoulder against Jason's to encourage him to go on.

As with most things in their life, the family adjusted.

The first time Alfred saw them holding hands, they were sitting on the stairs out in front of the manor blowing bubbles. Alfred had been out running errands, but he came home to find Tim's palm was pressed against the steps with Jason's lying on top of it with his fingers slotted between Tim's. Jason had his head thrown back, laughing as Tim blew bubbles at his face, so he didn't see the look that flashed across Alfred's face but Tim did. He saw the initial surprise, followed by a look of steady fondness and joy. He didn't say anything about it, though, just warned Tim to be careful of Jason's eyes as he walked pass them and into the house.

The first time Dick saw them holding hands was when he took them out after their first day of
school. He'd been waiting with Jason when Tim walked out of the middle school. When Tim approached them, Dick had insisted that they needed to get milkshakes to commiserate the start of their school year and whisked them off to a fifties style dinner. They sat on stools at the counter, Dick on the far right and Jason in the middle. One of Jason's hands hung between him and Tim and Tim hadn't even thought about it before grabbing it in his own. Unlike Alfred, Dick wasn't silent when he noticed. Instead he'd teased them, brotherly affection in each of his jokes.

Tim couldn't bring himself to care about Dick's teasing when holding Jason's hand made him feel happy and warm and safe.

Jason saw Tim the moment he exited the school building.

His gut was a simmering pot of nerves and excitement, but seeing Tim had it all boiling over.

He took a deep breath and straightened his back. He stretched his legs out, rubbing his sweaty palms against his thighs.

He knew Tim would be supportive, because Tim stood by Jason's side even when he was doing stupid shit like mouthing off to men twice his age, but he wasn't sure how Tim would react to finding out that Jason had been keeping a secret from him. He was worried Tim would see how careful Jason had been to keep this from him - and it had required a lot of effort on Jason's part to keep Tim from finding out about this - as some kind of betrayal instead of seeing it as the precaution it had been. He knew it was stupid since most days Tim seemed to understand Jason's motivations better than Jason did, but the worry was still there.

"Hey!" Tim weaved his way through the crowd of students leaving the school. Even feeling as tense as he did, Jason couldn't help smiling at him. Jason was sitting on the brick wall that surrounded the school and when Tim reached him he slotted himself between Jason's knees as he always did. "What are we doing today?"

Jason licked his lips before saying, "I thought maybe we could go to the bakery and get some cupcakes to celebrate."

"Celebrate?" Tim said. His lips twisted in thought and his eyes flickered over Jason's face as if he thought he could figure what was going on just by looking at him. "What are we celebrating?"

"The um..." Jason took a deep breath. "The high school's putting on a production of A Midsummer Nights Dream and I tried out last week. I found out today that I'm going to be playing Puck."

Tim was quiet, staring at him unblinkingly.

Though Jason knew it was Tim processing what he'd been told, he felt his worry rise. It was making him feel sick, dizzy. He wished he'd just Tim that he was trying out instead of keeping it a secret. But he hadn't wanted to risk not getting the part and disappointing Tim. Asking Bruce for permission had been tough enough.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you," Jason said, needing to break the stifling silence between them. "I know I should've, but if I hadn't got the part then-"

"I am so," Tim interrupted, speaking slowly like he was still trying to process the situation, "so proud of you."

Jason's mouth clicked shut. He spoke softly as he asked, "You are?"
"Of course I am," Tim said. A wide grin spread across his face. He reached up, putting his palms on either side of Jason's face. "You love this play."

He nodded as best he could with Tim holding him in place. "Yeah."

"What made you decide to try out?"

Tim's beaming smile and obvious pride had stomped out Jason's nerves, making it easier for him to talk about the whole thing. "Someone was talking about college a while ago and it got me thinking about the future. I wanna keep doing the bird thing, but it's not exactly a day job. So I need to start thinking about what I want to do with my life. Bruce probably wants to leave Wayne Enterprises to one of us, but I don't think I really have the brain for that stuff."

"So...acting?" Tim asked.

Jason shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe? I thought a good place to start would be to take something I love, like A Midsummer Nights Dream, and try doing something with it that I hadn't done before."

"Makes sense," Tim said.

They fell quiet for a moment before Jason spoke again, "So yeah. My practices are going to be every Monday and Wednesday as well as alternating Fridays starting next week."

"Would it be okay for me to walk over the high school once I got out and watch them?"

Jason arced an eyebrow. "You wanna?"

"Well, yeah," Tim said. "I'd rather be there with you than at the manor without you. I'll just work on my homework while you're practicing."

"As long as you want to, I don't have any objections and I don't think the director will either." Jason reached up and patted his hands against Tim's. "Let me go and let's get walking. I deserve a few banana split cupcakes and a caramel mocha."

"One cupcake with the mocha. Two without," Tim insisted.

"You know that thing I said earlier about wanting to keep doing the bird thing?" Jason said. He waited until Tim nodded to finish, "Yeah, I've changed my mind. I'm going to drop that just so I can eat without you and Bruce keeping me on this stupid diet."

"Liar. You love the bird thing and you don't even mind the diet. You wouldn't be able to eat two cupcakes and drink a mocha without feeling sick."

Jason gave a one shouldered shrug, not willing to confirm or deny.

Tim let out a small laugh at that.

Jason expected for him to step away after that so they could get moving, but instead Tim watched him for a beat. His smile went a little softer at the edges and the look in his eyes faded into a quieter sort of happiness.

"Seriously, though, Jay. I'm really proud of you." Before Jason could respond, Tim ducked forward and pressed his lips against Jason's cheek. Jason didn't need a mirror to know his face was bright red. Tim stepped back and turned away from Jason too quickly for him to look at his face, he was still stunned from the kiss, but Jason could see the bright cherry blush on the back of Tim's neck that
made it clear he was just as flustered by his actions. "Come on. Let's get going."

Jason felt a wide grin break out on his lips. He hopped off the wall and moved to Tim's side. He took Tim's hand in his and locked their fingers together. "Yeah, alright. Cupcake time."

The kisses didn't happen very frequently, but they started popping up occasionally.

When Jason had a particularly brutal patrol and crawled back into bed with bandaged knuckles, Tim would press his lips to them before falling back asleep. When Jason was struggling not to fall asleep on the couch while Tim was working, exhausted from school and play practice and patrol, he would press a kiss to Jason's eyelids and give him a firm command to go to sleep. On the days when Jason didn't have play practice he would pick Tim up from school with a smoothie and a bag of candy, his small way of making up for the days that they didn't get to go out since Jason had practice, and get a peck on the cheek in return.

Jason didn't hesitate to return the gestures. When Tim stirred as Jason left bed for patrol, he would brush his lips against Tim's forehead and whisper for him to go back to sleep. When they watched a movie that had Tim turning his face into Jason's shoulder, usually he was either shaking with laughter or groaning about second hand embarrassment, he would kiss the top of Tim's head. When Tim was looking frustrated or concentrating to hard, he furrowed his eyebrows. Every time Jason noticed, he draw Tim in to kiss his temple, taking his attention away from the problem for at least a moment. It seemed to work well enough because every time he did, Tim would go back to work looking a little more relaxed.

Barbara was the first one of their family to see one of them kissing the other. She was sitting on the couch with Tim on the floor between her legs as she braided the long strands at the back of his hair. Jason had went to the kitchen to grab them all drinks, he knew Alfred would have brought them to them but it felt rude to ask him to do it when Jason wasn't doing anything, and when he'd set Tim's water in front of him Tim had smiled and dragged Jason down to kiss his cheek. Jason hadn't thought anything about it, just murmured a soft 'you're welcome' because he was used to this, until he went to hand Barbara her soda and found her staring at them. There had been something assessing in her gaze that had Jason straightening his back defensively.

She didn't verbalize what it was that was bothering her, but Jason realized what it was a few days later when Bruce saw them kissing each other of the first time.

Jason had been in San Francisco with the Titans over the weekend so neither of them had slept well to begin with and on top of that Jason had to deal with the toll it took to spend days with a bunch of people who thought he wasn't good enough for the suit, so they were curled up together on the couch with the intention of taking a nap. Jason was lying on his back while Tim was draped over him, half of his body draped over Jason and the other half squeezed in the space between Jason and the back of the couch. Tim had buried his face in Jason's neck. They'd been exchanging sleepy chatter about their weekend, Tim telling Jason about the project he'd been working on over the weekend and Jason ranting quietly about all of the stupid things that'd happened in San Francisco over the three days he'd been there, while they drifted off. Tim's words had started to slow and slur. Knowing that meant he was getting close to dropping off, Jason pressed his lips against Tim's temple. It had been right then that Bruce returned from the office.

The second he spotted Jason and Tim, he'd gone stock still and his expression had closed off. He hadn't done more than nod at them in greeting before stalking up the stairs.

It had been confusing in the moment, but it'd been wiped from Jason's mind by Tim saying his name to catch his attention.
When Jason met Bruce down in the cave for patrol, Bruce had directed Jason to a chair and told him they needed to talk. It had taken a few minutes of Bruce reminding Jason that Tim was a few years younger than him and a suggestion, the type that heavily implied it was an order, that the two of them stop sleeping in the same bed before Jason understood what exactly had caused Bruce odd behavior, as well as Barbara's before him.

The second he got it, Jason went off. The idea that anyone could think he was going to push Tim further than he was ready for was sickening, but the idea that Bruce thought that was something entirely different.

Bruce had witnessed so much of Jason and Tim's relationship that he had to know how important Tim was to Jason. He had to know that Jason didn't give two shits about anything as long as Tim was still by his side.

So the idea that Bruce thought Jason was going to push Tim into taking their relationship further than he was ready for just because Jason was older was absolutely maddening.

Jason didn't go on patrol that night.

Instead, once he'd finished yelling at Bruce, he'd stormed out of the room with a comment about he was crawling back into bed with Tim and Bruce could go fuck himself on a cactus if he thought he was separating Tim and Jason.

Chapter End Notes

1) I struggled a LOT with the title of this chapter. Eventually I settled on "when we solidified" because I think before this point in the story Tim and Jason were in this relationship that didn't really have any solid name? They were more then friends, just left of brothers, and yet not really boyfriends either? I don't think they NEED a label to their relationship, but I think acknowledging their relationship would really take it kind outside of the realm of "what we will be" to "what we are" and thus solidifying it? I hope that makes sense?

2) HEY! SO: This is your last chapter of happiness before we get super sad for a few chapters. Jason Todd's gonna go through some shit next chapter and then he's gun be dead. I feel safe telling you bc it's not really a spoiler? I mean ya'll knew it was coming. I told any of you that asked when I was responding to questions.

3) Jason and Tim do some relationship stuff in this chapter (well, it's pretty much all relationship stuff) and I hope I'm still hitting that sweet spot of teenage romance? Let me know if I tipped it too far in either direction - too innocent or too adult - and I'll revise.

4) So apparently you aren't supposed to feed ducks bread? It's bad for a lot of reasons. However, you can feed them grapes cut in half, oats, barley, cracked corn, or birdseed as Tim does.

5) This chapter touches on the fact that while Tim and Jason do a lot of touching, it's their first time holding hands that makes Tim blush. I don't think that's too out of place. Hand holding is kinda universally acknowledged to be romantic in some context (which is not to say you can't hold hands platonically? Just that popular media sees it as romantic) and I think it would mean a lot more to Tim then the casual touches that he's
used to.

6) I'm sure you guys have picked this up, but the interludes are not always written chronologically? like for the most part they are, but some of the details aren't. Like, the first time Tim grabs Jason hand comes after the first time Alfred catches them because otherwise Tim wouldn't be holding Jason's hand in the car. I hope that makes sense and it isn't confusing for anyone when reading?

7) I know Jason liking baseball is canon, but I really love literature nerd Jason (which i feel is also canon given the pride and prejudice scene) and I wanted theater Jason. And I'm betting that you guys either wanted that too/are realizing how badly you wanted that. I debated /so fucking much/ on whether to cast Jason as Oberon or Puck in his play and thats ridiculous bc it's mostly an off hand mention?? Like omfg. Eventually I settled on Puck for two reasons - while I feel like Jason's body type would be better suited for Oberon, I think his personality is better suited to Puck. Which, you know, as much as you play another person on stage you always do /so much better/ in the roles that resonant with you like that?

8) On the note of Jason, please don't take this as me saying you need to know what you want to do with your life when your 15. I just know that for me and a lot of my friends, that was when we started thinking about it because we did jobshadowing that year. I wanted Jason to be considering potential careers without knowing for sure what he wanted to do with his life. Especially since he has this whole world open to him that wasn't there before Bruce took him in.

9) I think this is clear, but this is long haired Tim bc everything should be long haired Tim.

10) This chapter deals a little bit with what its like to be a teenager dating someone younger then you (and I think that's a lot different then being an adult dating a younger adult because maturity levels and shit, you know?) and other peoples perception of that relationship. I tried to handle it tastefully, but let me know if I missed the mark.

11) Also: I mentioned in the early part of this end note that Jason's dying soon and the bit that handles Bruce's perception of Jason and Tim's relationship also kinda leads into the deteriorating relationship of Bruce and Jason. I feel like a lot of Bruce and Jason's problems pre-death come from Bruce not understanding Jason and Jason being upset about it rather then trying to explain himself. I hope I properly portrayed that, but once again if I missed the mark let me know.

12) I think I mentioned already that I can't actually remember if Jason was a Titan and a member of YJ, or if he wasn't around long enough as Robin to do that stuff, but we're going to pretend he was. I mean, it BARELY comes up in this chapter but just to remind you. Does anyone even know who would have been on the teams at this point? I'm going to have to look that up.

13) Bruce's issue with Tim and Jason sleeping together. It's Bruce seeing an older teen in a relationship with a younger one and making assumptions based on that, instead of seeing who it is and what they're actually doing.
Tim set the first aid kit down on the bed before sinking down to his knees in front of him. Jason spread his legs a little bit, letting Tim crawl in-between them.

They were quiet as Tim popped the kit open, pulling out a few antiseptic wipes and bandages and a small tube of ointment.

"Lip first. I don't your lips to dry out and crack it more. Face after. We'll wipe your knuckles off and bandage them last. Alright?" Tim said, breaking the silence that had settled over them since Tim had pulled Jason out of the fight and shoved him into a cab so they could go back to the manor. He waited until Jason nodded to twist the cap off the ointment. He dabbed a bit onto his index finger. He'd been leaned back on his haunches, but now he pushed himself up and further into Jason's space. Jason flinched a bit when Tim's finger touched the open cut on his lips, but he settled down quickly. Tim spoke again as he tapped the pad of his finger against the wound, not wanting to rub and irritate it further, "I can't believe you actually started a fight with that guy."

"He deserved it," Jason said. His voice was rough and gravely post fight, a mix of explosive anger and approaching exhaustion. His lip bumped against Tim's finger as he spoke, dragging against his skin. "Those girls weren't any older than you. That little prick didn't have any business saying shit like that to them."

"I'm not saying what he was doing was right," Tim answered. He lifted his eyes, meeting Jason's for the first time since the fight. The blue had darkened, turning the color of the evening sky, with Jason's emotions running rampant. Anger, frustration, irritation. Tim had never been afraid of Jason's emotions, had been attracted to the way Jason wore them so openly, and he still wasn't. He wasn't afraid of Jason's emotions, he was afraid of what they would lead Jason to do. Not afraid of what he would do to Tim, but of what Jason would do to himself. To his body and his psych. "It wasn't. But a few weeks ago you would have prioritized getting the girls out of the situation over starting a fight that scared them more. You would have offered to walk them where they were going or pay for a cab for them."

Jason let out a huff of hot air. "I've been getting into fights the whole time you've known me."

"Not like this and not if you could avoid it," Tim said. He moved his fingers off Jason's lips, pressing his hand against the top of Jason's thigh instead. He let his gaze drift away from Jason, moving over his face to take in the injuries that were scattered on his skin. The other guy had caught Jason just under the left eye with his knuckles, splitting the skin open there. There were a few other splits, oozing blood that he let run down his face uninterrupted, but the one right under his eye was the worse. "Jason, what's going on with you?"

"Nothing," Jason dismissed. If it was any other situation, Tim might have found it amusing that Jason thought he could lie to him without Tim figuring it out. At this moment though, Tim just felt hurt. It must have shown on his face because Jason let out another harsh breath and looked up at the ceiling. "Fuck, Tim, don't look at me like that." Tim didn't say anything, knew he didn't have to for Jason to go on. He heard Jason take another breath before he said, gaze still directed upwards. "I'm just frustrated, okay? Things with Bruce fucking suck right now because I'm still pissed off that he doesn't want us sleeping together and I don't know if it's just because I'm annoyed but recently I've been starting to think that Batman's way doesn't work. It seems like every-time we get someone
behind bars or in Arkham, they just break out and come back to hurt people even more. I don't know how to stop them from hurting people and it fucking sucks."

Tim took a moment to consider Jason's words. On one hand, he completely understood what Jason was saying. Batman protected the people, yes, but only for so long. On the other hand, he didn't see any alternative. Putting the Joker back in Arkham was the best they could do without killing him.

"Jason," he said at last.

"Yeah?" Jason said, sounding exhausted.

Tim pressed his lips together. He was unused to not knowing what was on Jason's mind. They were so intuned to each other that most of the time he didn't have any problem guessing and so open with each other that what they couldn't guess was usually shared openly between the two of them. Now though, he had no idea where Jason was and Jason wasn't going to tell him.

Possibly, he thought, Jason didn't know where he was either.

That bothered Tim. It made him want to push Jason for answers, coax his thoughts out of him and sit on their floor debating until they came to a conclusion that worked for them. But nothing good ever came out of Jason being pushed.

Jason was at his best when he came to things on himself. When he was struggling with something he'd let them help him, he'd ask Tim or Alfred for their opinions and never minded when Dick or Bruce found ways to point him in the right direction while talking, but ultimately he needed to do it on his own.

"Chin down," Tim said, instead of asking Jason for clarification. He reached up and tapped Jason on the chin. "We've got to get your face disinfected."

Jason grumbled a bit before turning his chin down. There was still a tension in his shoulders, anger and frustration ever present in the line of them, but he had softened in a way. He looked exhausted, like he was so sick of everything going on in his head.

He looked at Tim for a minute before giving a weak smile. "Hey. Love you, Timbo."

"Love you too, Jay," Tim answered without hesitation. He ducked forward and pressed a single kiss to the tip of Jason's nose. Then before he pulled away, he popped an unwrapped disinfectant wipe right onto the cut under Jason's eye.

"Oh!" Jason squeaked, flinching back from the unexpected sting. "Warn me next time will ya?"

Tim just rolled his eyes as he pulled back so he could see what he was doing. "How about you work on making sure there isn't a next time?"

Jason was on a hair-trigger and Tim having to stop him from getting into fights became a trend.

Whereas before he reacted to girls getting cat called by glaring at the boys from across the street or asking the girls if they'd feel more comfortable if Tim and Jason walked them to their destination, now he was shouting at them to knock their shit off. Sometimes Jason would dart out of Tim's reach so quickly that he already had someone grabbed by the collar before Tim realized what had happened. Whereas before Jason would react to the drunks coming into their favorite diner with gritted teeth and a fork crushed in his hands, now he was snapping at them to keep it the hell down and getting to his feet the second one of them did. The first time it happened their usual waitress, a
single mother named Trisha who doted on Jason endlessly, looked a little proud of Jason. The fourth and fifth time she had looked concerned. The seventh and eighth times, she threatened to call the cops on the drunks and Jason. Whereas before Jason would intercept dealers in the vicinity of the schools, be it Gotham Academy or Gotham Public, and send them crawling back to Crime Alley with nothing but a few words and a good glimpse at how big Jason was, now he was in a dealer's face the second he saw them. Tim had pulled him away from glinting metal more then once.

Even when they weren't in the immediate vicinity of someone doing something wrong, Jason was snappy and standoffish. Jason had been getting along with his castmates, the boy playing Oberon had practically become his best friend and the girl playing Titania was always batting her eyelashes at him, but now they steered clear of him as word of his foul mood spread. It hurt Tim to see Jason letting this tear him away from the tentative friendships he'd made.

Worse of all was the cycle Jason and Bruce were trapped in. As Jason grew more aggressive, Bruce got more irritated. The more irritated Bruce got, the more frustrated Jason got. The more frustrated Jason got, the more aggressive he got.

Tim was relatively certain that Bruce could help Jason reason things out if he just sat down and talked to him, but the two of them had been avoiding each other outside of patrols. They would sit at the dinner table together because neither wanted to handle Alfred's wrath if they didn't, but they didn't speak to each other. The only time they looked at each other was when Jason and Tim walked in, usually holding hands, and Jason would give Bruce this glare like he thought Bruce was going to rip them apart.

Tim wished they could just fix that as well. He'd been upset with Bruce at first as well, angry that he would even consider separating them, but now that he'd calmed down he understood where Bruce had been coming from. He'd just been worried about Tim. He just wished Bruce would have explained that and listened to what Jason and Tim had to say instead of sticking so firmly in his opinion. Even now that it was clear Bruce had realized his mistake, if he thought he was right in his assumption about Jason and Tim's physical relationship he would have forced them not to sleep together no matter what, he refused to own up to it.

Tim really just wanted the two of them to talk it out before things got any worse.

Jason felt panicky and hysterical and like everything was just too fucking much. His breath was coming out in heavy pants. Hot tears streamed down his face, blurring his vision. His heart felt like it'd been cracked open in his chest.

"Jason, Jason, Jason." Tim's voice was a calming mantra. He'd been lying on the bed with his phone in his hand, but the moment Jason entered the room he had rolled up onto his knees. Jason moved to him, weak kneed and off balance. He didn't stop until he was close enough that Tim leaned forward, putting his hand on either side of Jason's face and taking up the entity of his field of vision.

"He doesn't fucking believe me," Jason said. When Batman had arrived the night before to find Garzonasa lying dead on the cement and Jason standing next to him, he'd been eerily silent as Jason related the events on the rooftop. Jason thought it had just been because he was disappointed in Jason for not being fast enough to stop Garzonasa from falling or maybe considering how to handle the situation. When Bruce had called Jason into his study though, making sure to emphasis that he couldn't bring Tim with him, it had become rapidly apparent that wasn't what Bruce had been thinking about the night before. "Bruce thinks I pushed Garzonasa off that roof last night and he doesn't fucking believe me when I say I didn't!"

Tim's eyes widened, his fingers twitching minutely in reaction. "What?"
"Tim," Jason choked out, his voice pleading, "please don't make me repeat it."

"No, of course you don't have to repeat it," Tim assured. His fingertips ghosted over Jason's skin, a constant touch to find just a little bit of warmth and comfort in, until he had his arms wrapped around Jason's neck. He tugged Jason into him.

Jason sagged against him, wrapping his arms around Tim without caring how awkward the angle was. Tim was sitting up on his knees on the bed, so Jason shoved his face into Tim's shoulder.

"Why does he think I'd do that?" Jason questioned. His words were muffled, but still audible. "Does he not trust me that much? Does he think I'm that bad a person? I was pissed that he was going to get off free, but I wouldn't have-

"No," Tim said. The interruption had a wave of cold relief brushing over Jason, so happy he didn't have to repeat that he wouldn't have killed Garzonasa. "You wouldn't have. Of course you wouldn't have, Jason."

"You believe me?"

Jason heard Tim suck in a sharp breath. Panic flared through him, suddenly terrified that Tim agreed with Bruce. Before he could wiggle out of Tim's grasp, Tim was pulling Jason even closer to him.

"Of course I believe you, Jason," Tim said. He bent over to press his face into Jason's hair. It was an awkward angle, but Jason was finding too much comfort in the hold to worry about Tim's spine. "I'm always going to believe you. You've never lied to me before and you aren't going to start now. Not with this."

"I don't think I even could lie to you," Jason said. "You'd catch me in a heartbeat."

"Yeah I would," Tim agreed.

He felt Tim press a kiss against his head.

There were still tears dripping down Jason's face, but Jason felt steadier. The force of Tim's belief wrapping around him like a thick, comforting blanket.

It still burned that Bruce didn't believe him, that the only father he had ever known thought he would become a killer so easily, but even without Bruce it wasn't going to be Jason against the world again.

It would never be Jason against the world again, because Tim was by his side and he always would be.

In the aftermath, Jason and Tim pulled away from the others.

At first it was just avoiding Bruce, but then Jason found out that Barbara had told Bruce there was a darkness in him and they pulled away from her. With Dick off world and Alfred usually at the manor with Bruce, Jason and Tim withdrew into their bubble.

They spent as much time as possible out. Some days they'd go to the arcade and collect tickets until the sun had gone down and they could buy the most expensive prize possible. Some days they'd go to the nature preserve or museums, Jason complaining the entire walk there, and wander until they'd walked every path or seen every exhibit and read every plaque. Some days they didn't do much of anything, wandering around downtown simply because they didn't want to go home yet.
When they had too much homework to go off, they would lock themselves in their room instead of sitting in the living room. When Jason craved the ability to exercise and run energy off the way he had as Robin, benched for now while Alfred and Bruce considered the situation with Garzonasa, they would go to the gym uptown where he could practice acrobatics or the one downtown where he could spend hours punching a bag. When they were hungry, they went out to eat instead of eating with Bruce. Tim made sure they only went to fast food restaurants once or twice a week and made sure Jason always ordered some kind of vegetable when they were out.

It was during this time, when their family was shattered by hurt and distrust, that they found out that Jason's mother wasn't his mother biologically. After a few days of agitation and confusion, Jason told Tim that he wanted to try and find her.

As with most everything, Tim supported him but only after he corrected Jason's plan to something that made more sense. Jason wanted to jet off around the world to search for her, Tim convinced him it was a better idea to stay put and use the resources at their disposal to track her. So they spent a few weeks combing through security footage and paper trails until they found her in Ethiopia.

The day they tracked her was the night Jason's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream opened, so Jason put off his hunt until the weekend had ended.

The plays opening night had Jason at the happiest he'd been in weeks. The dressing room was covered in flowers for all of the actors and among them was a bouquet of flowers that Dick had sent to him before going off world. There was a note attached apologizing for not being there in person, telling him how proud of him he was, and wishing Jason lots of luck. He took dozens of pictures with his cast-mates, throwing an arm over the girl who had played Titania and pulling the boy who had played Oberon into an affectionate headlock, and another dozen of just him and Tim. He hadn't invited Bruce, he'd mentioned the opening night weeks ago but hadn't so much as said hello to Bruce in the hallway since the night of Garzonasa's death, but he felt his father's eyes on him the whole night. For all the problems they were going through, Jason couldn't help how good it felt to know Bruce had taken a day off to come see the play. Everything just felt silly and fun and amazing.

Nothing could ruin the weekend for Jason.

When the curtain closed on their final show, Jason felt nothing but pride.

It was late that Sunday night that Jason left for Ethiopia. He waited until he was sure Bruce had gone out on patrol to leave.

He sat on the edge of the bed, putting his hand on Tim's shoulder to shake him awake. With Tim sleepy and out of it, their conversation was a short one. Jason let him know he was heading out, promised to be back by Thursday night or at least call if something happened to delay him, and pushed Tim's bangs back to kiss his forehead.

Tim stepped into the foyer of the mansion Thursday morning feeling exhausted.

Sleep had been hard to come by with Jason gone. On top of his already documented struggle to sleep without Jason next to him was a feeling of unease that settled in his gut the night Jason left. He wasn't sure if it was a side effect of being completely separated from Jason for longer than a few hours, which hadn't happened since they had first met, or if it was just his paranoia flaring up, but it certainly wasn't helping Tim fall asleep.

He was debating whether or not the two of them could skip school the next day to sleep, Bruce had been absolutely livid Monday morning when he found out Jason was gone and chased after him so he probably wouldn't be all that keen on Jason staying home after missing four days of school but
Tim was fairly certain they could get away with it considering Bruce would need to catch a fourteen hour flight once Alfred let him know Jason was back home, when he heard Alfred say his name.

Tim snapped out of his thoughts and looked up to find Alfred was standing in the doorway that connected the foyer to the dining room. He was thrown for a loop by how much older Alfred looked and the red that ringed his eyes. His shoulders were drooped as if there was an incredible weight bearing down on him.

"Alf," Tim said, taking a step towards him, "is everything okay? Did something happen to your family-"

"Master Tim," Alfred said. The raw grief in his voice had Tim's mouth clicking shut. "I think you should come to the living room with me."

Tim felt a feeling of cold concern wash over him. Alfred was usually pretty firm about his demands that Jason and Tim go to school, his disapproval was always always potent when they skipped.

"Is Dick okay?" Belatedly, he remembered that he wasn't supposed to know Dick was off in space with the Teen Titans and added, "He hasn't been around in a while. Did something happen to him?"

"It's not Master Dick," Alfred assured. There was a moment where he seemed to debate between telling Tim what was going on now and forcing him into the living room before saying it. In the end, he settled on now. "It's Master Jason. Bruce found him last night but...he was too late."

"Too late?" Tim echoed. The cold concern was turning to ice. "Too late for what?"

"Master Jason had already passed away."

That one sentence managed to shatter Tim completely.

Distantly Tim heard Alfred call his name, but all he could think was that Jason was gone.

He wasn't going to be crawling into bed with Tim that night, waking him up as he threw his bag somewhere in the room. He wasn't going to be sitting in their bed with Tim the next morning, filling him in on the details of his trip to Ethiopia.

Tim had thought they had years and years to spend their mornings and nights together, but they didn't.

Tim was suddenly faced with a future without Jason by his side and he wasn't sure how he was going to handle that because he never wanted that.

The only future he'd ever thought of, the only future he ever wanted, was one where Jason was standing by his side.

Chapter End Notes

1) How are ya'll feeling? I was really excited to write this chapter but I'm not gonna lie, it was fucking rough emotionally.

2) So in the first section, Jason expresses some concerns about Batman's methods and I hope no one minds me attributing Jason's aggression to it? I think (IM NOT SURE) the
comics dismissed Jason's increasing aggression (not to say that he wasn't always aggressive bc he totally was) as a thing he did because he was the street kid, the rough Robin. I feel like Jason would have had a reason for why he was suddenly doing things that way. And considering what he does as Red Hood, how he operates and why, I thought my explanation was a pretty good reason?

3) Jason's death was absolutely not Tim's fault, but damn does Tim feel like it was. Going through this chapter, you'll have seen a lot of moments when Tim could have said something to Jason and didn't. Tim knows Jason and he knows pushing him would have made things worse, but that's not gonna stop him from wondering if maybe that was the wrong call. I mean, it's not because who knows Jason better then Tim at this point?

4) On the second section of this, I debated for a long whether or not to include Jason being snappy with people he didn't necessarily consider bad. In the end I decided to because as much as Jason's aggression is about him trying to figure out his moral code, it's also about him being frustrated and frustration is rarely contained to the subject of it.

5) TEAM JASON DIDN'T KILL GARZONASA BUT IF HE DID I WOULDN'T HAVE BLAMED HIM!!!!!

6) I wasn't sure if Jason should cry in section three or not, but ultimately I decided that Bruce accusing Jason of murder and not believing him when he told he didn't do it would be a breaking point for him.

7) I'm not sure if the Barbara/Jason team up was post or pre-Garzonasa, but considering the point was that Bruce thought Jason was capable of killing someone I put it pre-Garzonasa and the aftermath of that happening post-Garzonasa. Hopefully the timeline is pretty clear?

8) I mean Jason was right to an extent? It's not going to be Jason against the world, it's going to be Tim against the world.

9) I debated for a long time whether or not to have Jason's play take place before his death or not. In the end I did. I also have no idea how long a play usually takes? My school does two a year but their kinda shitty and no one takes it seriously? I assume a bigger production would take longer so Jason's basically been practicing all school year.

10) I'm so worried their relationship on section four drifted into unhealthy territory?

11) In canon, Jason runs away to find Sheila. In this, he's benched as Robin and Tim helps him find Sheila with a paper/electronic trail.

12) Tim probably should've had a period of denial after Alfred told him about Jason, but I feel like he would know Alfred wouldn't lie to him and that Jason dying isn't completely left field since he's Robin (even if Tim's never considered that and Jason wasn't in Ethiopia on Robin business).

13) This is actually one of the shorter chapters of the series thus far and yet also one of the most emotional. Hopefully it doesn't seem rushed?

14) Buckle in guys. It's gonna be rough for a little while.
It wasn't the sound of shattering glass that pulled Tim out of his room, between Alfred dropping plates or cups when he realized he had one too many and Bruce's new habit of smashing picture frames or vases when things got too much for him to handle that sound had become all too common in the manor now days, but the shouting voices that accompanied it.

He followed the voices through the halls, steps quiet and soft, until he was standing outside of the den.

He felt his heart stop for a moment when he saw the tense shoulders and hard angry lines of a muscular back and black hair curling at the nape of a tanned neck. It took only a second, though, for him to realize that the body was just a little too tall and the hair a little too short.

Dick, he realized with his heart aching in his chest. Dick, not Jason.

The two of them were facing each other. Bruce's face was set in stone, expressionless and closed off, while Dick's face was scrunched up in anger as tears fell down his cheeks. A vase laid in pieces behind Bruce, Dick obviously having thrown it at the wall behind him.

Dick was shouting, "You could've called me! You should've called me!"

"You weren't exactly in an area where I could contact you easily," Bruce said. His tone didn't give away any more than his face did. "And you need to keep your voice down. Tim is upstairs sleeping."

Tim felt something almost like laughter bubble in his chest. He hadn't slept in anything greater than thirty minute spurts since Jason had woken him up as he left for Ethiopia, his palm warm as he pushed Tim's hair back and his lips soft against his forehead. He didn't laugh though. He hadn't laughed since that same evening when the two of them went to Pizza Hut with the entirety of the play's cast to celebrate a successful show before returning home for Jason to pack.

"You could've at least left a message, Bruce!" Something in Dick broke. The anger left him all at once. His shoulders slumped, heavy with grief. "God, Bruce, you didn't even leave a message. I had to find out that Jason had-

"Please don't," the words ripped from Tim's mouth. He hadn't intended to interrupt their argument, but he wasn't sure he could handle it if Dick actually said that Jason was dead. Dick whipped around to face him and Bruce's gaze flicked to him. "Please don't finish that sentence."

Dick stared at Tim for a moment, his gaze pure shock, before his mouth dropped open. His voice was shattered as he said, "Tim, you look..."

Dick didn't finish his sentence and Tim didn't need him to. He knew how he looked. He had dark purple bruises under his eyes from not sleeping and his already small frame looked even smaller with one of Jason's tee-shirts hanging off his shoulders. He'd always been pale, but he was slowly losing what little color he'd had.

Dick turned so his eyes met Bruce's.

A look passed between them, a silent communication that Tim couldn't quite decipher, before Bruce
straightened up.

He broke the long stretch of silence, "Your room should be ready. Alfred made sure to keep it clean."

Tim knew that though Bruce was passed it off as Alfred's doing, it was Bruce who went in there every week just to make sure everything was still as Dick had left it so it would be ready for his oldest son if he should ever want to come home.

Tim had moved into a different wing of the manor because that room screamed Jason-and-Tim from every corner and Tim couldn't stay in that room knowing that eventually it'd be more Tim's than Jason's. He wondered if they would do the same thing to their room now that Tim wasn't in it, if Bruce and Alfred would go through the pains of keeping that room ready as though Jason was gone only because he was feuding with Bruce.

"Ok. I'll call Wally and have him bring me my stuff," Dick said. "Can someone show me where he is?"

"I'll show you," Bruce declared.

Dick gave a small nod. His gaze flickered over to Tim, "Are you coming with us, Tim?"

Tim felt a wave of nausea. He ducted his head down, burying his nose in the fabric of Jason's tee-shirt, and squeezed his eyes shut. The shirt still smelled like Jason, but closing his eyes no longer helped Tim with pretending Jason was still there.

"No," he choked out with a shake of his head. "I can't."

He heard the fall of footsteps before Dick was pressing in close and wrapping his arms around Tim. He tucked Tim's head under his chin and murmured, "It's going to be okay, Timmy. We'll get through this."

Tim didn't believe that, but he didn't tell Dick that.

Instead he just wrapped his arms around Dick and let himself cling to his older brother for a few minutes.

Over the months following Dick's arrival, Alfred and Dick began to heal.

Jason's death was still a raw aching wound for both of them, but they began adjusting to the fact that he wasn't going to be coming back. Alfred packed away the numerous Wonder Woman cups that Jason had collected and set them in the attic, stopped setting an extra plate next to Tim at the dinner table, and replaced all the picture frames Bruce had broken in the early weeks instead of leaving them down because seeing Jason's face hurt too much. Dick didn't look surprised when Tim walked into a room alone, stopped turning to face Tim with Jason's name on his tongue because he expected Jason to be by Tim's side, and stopped pausing during conversations with Tim in places where Jason would have made a comment.

The more they started too function, though, the more apparent it became that Tim wasn't. He was constantly tired, he couldn't sleep without Jason by his side, and he always put too much food on his plate, too used to Jason sneaking bits and pieces off of it. He didn't leave the house very much, not wanting to visit any of his and Jason's old haunts without Jason by his side, unless it was to go to his parents house while they were in town.
It was three months after Jason's death that Alfred drove Tim to his first therapy appointment, insisting that while none of them had healed after Jason's death Tim couldn't continue the way he was.

Tim went through three therapists those first three weeks. He walked out thirty minutes into a two hour introduction appointment with the first because she kept speaking to him like he was a child. He made through a whole appointment with the second one, but told Dick that he wasn't going back to her the second he was in the car with him. He wasn't going to listen to some woman tell him that what he had with Jason didn't matter because Tim was so young.

When he got back to the manor after the third, he came to a realization. They were doing this because they wanted Tim to go back to normal, but they didn't realize just how big a piece of Tim Jason was. There was a reason everyone who knew them thought of them as Tim-and-Jason instead of Tim and Jason. It wasn't just because they were a couple. They were pair and one was never going to be complete with the other. No amount of therapy or healthy grieving was going to piece Tim back together, but he didn't want his family to hurt even more then they already did.

So he started leaving the house more. He would set his camera strap around his neck and go for long meandering walks. Sometimes he researched a destination before hand and sometimes he left with no real direction other than to go in the opposite direction as anywhere Jason had taken him. At dinners, he started opened up again. He'd been giving short responses to questions, but now he told Alfred about school without prompting and asked Bruce about ideas he'd had for inventions he was thinking of. He still spent a good amount of time looking to his side in search of someone who wasn't there or staring at the ceiling in his bedroom when he should be sleeping, but he was working on it.

He was always going to be a little broken without Jason by his side, but Tim was learning how to live with that.

On what would have been Jason's sixteenth birthday, Tim snuck out of the manor with his camera in hand to take pictures of Batman for the first time since Jason had stopped going out as Robin. It was his way of honoring Jason and how they had met. Maybe Jason hadn't been out as Robin prior to his death, but it was undeniable that the job had meant an incredible amount to him.

It was that night that he realized they had a problem. Batman was more efficient than ever, but he was stone cold and brutal. He was taking all of his frustration and grief over Robin's death out on criminals, be it the petty drug dealers or Mr. Freeze.

Tim spent a few nights watching him and trying to figure out what the best course of action would be before deciding that Batman needed a Robin. Nightwing had started helping a bit, after Tim made some vague comments to Dick about Batman seeming overwhelmed, but ultimately Nightwing belonged to Blüdhaven now. It was Robin who helped Batman shoulder the burden of Gotham's people and helped him keep Bruce Wayne and Batman separate. Without Robin, Batman had no one to keep him from crumbling under it all.

Figuring out who should be the next Robin was a lot harder. Dick would try his best to help as Nightwing, but he wasn't going to want to go back to Robin. His relationship with Bruce was on the mend, but Dick was an adult and he learning to be his own man now. Jason would've taken it back in a heartbeat, no matter the state of his relationship with Bruce, but...Jason wasn't an option anymore. All of Bruce's previous Robins had been boys who he helped out of tough situations, but they were also his sons and none of them were ready to add someone to their family when they'd just lost Jason.

Tim toyed with the idea of taking up the mantle himself, but wavered on whether or not he could actually do it. He had admired Batman and Robin for years. There was something terrifying about
the idea of trying to step into those shoes. There was also the fact that asking to be trained to become Robin would require letting everyone know that he knew who Batman and Robin were.

The secret had been the reason he and Jason had met and Tim was loathe to part with it.

At the same time, however, Tim struggled with the idea of someone else being Robin when Robin had meant so much to Jason. At least if it was him in the costume, he wouldn't have to see someone take over something that was Jason's.

Tim didn't get much time to come a decision because Batman and Nightwing got captured by Two-Face and Tim took the Robin suit in order to save them.

After Batman and Nightwing had been saved, Bruce, Dick, and Tim sat at the strategy table in the batcave.

Alfred had been there when they arrived, but once all of them had changed out of their uniforms and been checked over for wounds he left with nothing more than a glance in Bruce's direction. It had been only a split second of eye contact, but Tim got the feeling a lot had been conveyed in that second.

It had sent a sharp ache through him. He knew Bruce and Alfred's relationship was different, but it made Tim miss Jason. He missed having someone who understood him so well, and who he understood so well in turn, that they didn't need to use words.

The three of them had been sitting in tense silence for a while when Bruce finally spoke.

"Did-" Bruce stopped, choking on the words. Tim braced himself for the question, already knowing what Bruce was going to ask. "Did Jason know that you knew?"

"Yeah," Tim said, pain lancing through him even though he'd been prepared to hear Jason's name. And because it still hurts too much to say his name out-loud, Tim said, "He did. It was how we met. He'd felt me hanging around and confronted me one day." That first meeting hurt so much to think about now. Not just because Jason was dead, but because every time Tim thought about it he thought about how Jason walking into things like that without Bruce watching his back was what got him killed.

Bruce's lips turned down in a frown. Tim wasn't sure what he was reacting to - the fact that Jason had known Tim knew their identities the whole time or if he was drawing the same parallels between Jason and Tim's first meeting and Jason's death.

Before Bruce could say anything, Dick spoke up, "Then you know that the suit is what got him killed. The Joker went after Jason because he knew what Robin means to Batman and you still want to take up the suit?"

"Yes," Tim answered without any hesitation. "Batman needs a Robin, but Robin meant everything to him. I won't let someone else take that." Then, because it needed to be said, he added, "Being Robin isn't what killed him. The Joker targeted him because he was Robin, but he wasn't in Ethiopia because he was Robin." Though Tim didn't say that Jason got killed searching for his family because he felt isolated from the one he already had, the way that Bruce flinched made it clear he knew what Tim was implying.

Tim felt bad about it since Bruce obviously already carried around a lot of guilt about Jason's death, but Tim wasn't going to let Dick place the blame on the Robin mantle when Robin had meant so much to Jason.
Dick shook his head. "Jason loved being Robin, but it didn't mean everything to him. You meant everything to him, Tim. Do you really think he'd want you in the suit after what happened to him?"

Tim straightened his shoulders. Even though he was responding to Dick, he locked his eyes on Bruce's. He pushed all of his conviction into this voice as he said, "Jason wouldn't have wanted anyone else to wear the suit, the same way you didn't when he first took it up, but Jason is dead. No one but me is carrying on his legacy."

There was another long pause before Bruce spoke again. His voice was a little deeper now, not quite Batman deep but closer to it than to his normal speaking voice. It was like he was struggling with whether to handle this issue as Batman, since it was the position as Robin in question, or as Bruce, since it was one of his sons asking for the suit. "If you were to take the suit on full time, there would be a lot of training before you were allowed out again. You did good today, but ultimately you got lucky. I won't risk your safety."

"Bruce-" Dick started. He'd been watching Tim, but now his head whipped in Bruce's direction. "Tim's already stolen the suit once and I have every bit of faith in his ability to do it again if he wanted," Bruce said. "I'd rather he be trained and with me than off on his own. Wouldn't you?"

Dick pursed his lips, pressing them into a thin white line, before giving a curt nod.

Tim knew it didn't really matter if Dick approved, Bruce would train him anyway, but it still felt good to know he had it.

Tim spent the next few months training under Alfred, Bruce, and Dick in turn.

Bruce would make Tim come at him until Tim's hands ached, teaching him how to pack the most damage into his punches despite his small frame. He pushed Tim's hips into the correct stances until Tim fell into them as naturally as he breathed. He locked Tim into holds until Tim learned where to press and how to twist to get out of them. He lunged and jabbed at Tim until he learned how to dodge and evade without hesitation.

Dick taught Tim how to do the acrobatics that Batman and Robin were so well known for. He walked Tim through what he could on the ground, putting his hands on Tim's lower back to direct him through a new flip and making sure Tim knew the limits of his flexibility. When they got to the point where Tim was allowed in the air, Dick would check all of the ropes and nets ten times and show Tim everything twice before allowing him on the equipment. Tim had to do everything thirty-forty-fifty times before he was allowed to even suggest doing it without the safety equipment. Tim never pushed the issue since he knew Dick was probably struggling with the idea of losing the only brother he had left the same way he'd lost his parents, but he knew Bruce sometimes gently reminded Dick that Tim would be safer falling in the cave than he would be out on the streets of Gotham.

Though Tim learned quickly, he knew he didn't have the same physical prowess that the previous two Robins did. He was never going to be as graceful in the air as Dick was, nor was he ever going to have the raw force and power that Jason had.

What he did excel at though were the mental tasks Alfred set in front of him. He'd give Tim the pieces from old cases and let Tim come to the correct conclusions himself. Sometimes, Alfred took vital pieces of the investigations out and waited until Tim figured out that he was missing something. Sometimes they set up replicas of crime scenes and Tim would have to make all of the observations that they would need when doing an investigation.
Sometimes he worried about it, the fact that he was more brains than brawn as the previous Robins had been, but Bruce assured him over and over again that it was what he was looking for.

Just as they were working out the details for the end of Tim's training, Tim's parents were kidnapped by Obeah Man on their way to the Caribbean. He put the suit on the second time to go save them, but by the time they got there it was too late.

His mother was dead and his father was in a coma.

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Tim was sitting at his desk, looking at a review page on his laptop, when he heard two sharp knocks. "Come in," he called out.

He twisted in his chair to see Dick push the door open.

He stepped inside, looking around the room as he shut the door behind him. "This is strange."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Tim said. He gave Dick a small, slightly bitter smile. It was weird to see a room that was designed solely by Tim after spending so much time in a room that Jason and Tim had created together. He pushed the pain in his chest aside as he asked, "What did you need?"

"Nothing much. I just wanted to see what you were up to."

"Nothing exciting," Tim confessed. "I kinda bailed out at school at the end of the school year since Jason had just... So I've been looking over stuff from last year to make sure I've got it all. It's a good idea too, because I'd honestly forgotten like half of this shit."

"That's understandable given the year you've been having." Dick sat down on the edge of Tim's bed. He folded his legs under him, bracing his hands on his knees. "I know the school year is about to kick off, but you know you don't have to throw yourself into all of this, right? We'd all understand if you needed to take some time to come to terms with what happened."

Tim ran his tongue along his lips. He'd been expecting this conversation, he'd seen the way Dick and Alfred and Bruce looked at him as though they thought he was about to break down every time he came down to the cave to help with something, but that didn't mean he had figured out the words to say what he wanted to say.

"I don't need any time," Tim said.

"Tim," Dick said, his voice low and concerned, "your mother just died and your father is in a coma. You don't need to-"

"I'm not pretending," Tim said, cutting Dick off mid-sentence. "I know your parents death was big for you, but it's not the same for me. You carry around your parents death because you were so young when it happened that your world revolved around them, but it's not the same for me. I'm going to miss them, but I'm not drowning in grief three weeks after okay? Maybe it would be different if I hadn't met Jason and made my home here, but I did and my parents haven't been my family for a really long time."

Dick was quiet for a minute before he said, "You're sure?"

"Positive," Tim said. He gave Dick another off-beat smile, this one leaning more towards sad then bitter. "I already lost the person who meant the most to me. Nothing is ever going to cripple me the way that did."
Even though the school year had just started, Tim's training to become Robin wasn't quite over. Bruce insisted that Tim go overseas to learn about himself and hone his fighting skills a bit more before he actually went out on patrols, so they used Bruce's new (official at least) guardianship of Tim to switch him to online schooling.

Tim was honestly a little bit relieved. He hadn't expected to be reminded of Jason so strongly since he was starting at the High School, Jason had always waited outside the middle school to pick Tim up, but clearly he'd been wrong about that. Everytime he turned a corner, he remembered something about Jason. He walked down the hallways near the schools art classrooms and remembered the way they'd raced up and down the corridors after one of Jason's play practices because Jason had been bursting with energy. He looked at the vending machine near the cafeteria and remembered buying himself snacks during breaks in play practices and how Jason had leaned against it while speaking to him. He couldn't even look at the doors that lead to the auditorium without remembering how Jason had looked after every performance of the play, his cheeks flushed with pride and a bright grin on his face.

So the idea of getting away from all of that had held a huge appeal.

The day Tim left for Europe, the whole family came to see him off at the airport. Dick had, literally, swept him off his feet and into a bear hug. When Tim leaned down to hug Barbara, she'd crushed him into her chest and gave him a firm command to have fun but also to be careful. Alfred's embrace was gentler, a firm squeeze and a pat on the back before Tim was released.

When they had all had their turn, Tim stood in front of Bruce. He was given a few hundred reminders before Bruce finally reached for him. Tim slipped his arms around Bruce and listened as Bruce whispered in his hear for him to be careful. There was a fierceness to his words that hadn't been in Barbara's. Tim was certain he was thinking about Jason going off to Ethiopia on his own and how he hadn't gotten there in time to save him.

There was another round of quick goodbyes before Tim turned and boarded the plan, prepared for his last few months of training before he became Robin officially.

That night as Tim was sleeping off the eight hour flight from New Jersey to Paris, Jason Todd took his first breath in six months while buried under six feet of dirt and trapped in a coffin.

Chapter End Notes

1) Sighs so I wrote this end note once, but accidentally deleted it when I was almost finished with the second section so some of my notes on the first two bits are gone. I tried my best to include what I remembered in that though.

2) I'm not sure I handle grief well at all in this chapter. I've always seen Tim as a logical character and his actions here are very much that rather then that as someone reacting emotionally to someone that's essentially a piece of them dying. I tried to balance that with him holding what he had of Jason - the room they shared, the places they went together, the fact that Tim knew about Robin - close, but idk. Are his actions completely out of character for you guys?

3) I dont want to spoil my own story, but I do want you guys to know where this story
is going since I know I've dropped stuff for not going in a direction I agreed with. So quick notes for future chapters - Tim becoming Red Robin earlier and under different circumstances, Damian arriving earlier and under different circumstance. Those are the only big things I think? But more may come. I've tried to keep canon MOSTLY the same with only small detail changes, but this chapter and the ones coming up are basically when I'm throwing everything to shit. Things are happening, or not happening, and it's because of the changes I made to the universe. Butterfly effect you know? Even things that seem unrelated get effected.

4) I spent a solid twelve hours hating the opening to the second section and I'm still not sure I like it, but I couldn't find another way to do it that I liked any better.

5) Tim actually became Robin at thirteen in the comics, but he's actually well past his fourteenth birthday when that happened in this story. As stated above, I've basically thrown two fingers up at the batman timeline.

6) I'm a little unsure about the conversation in the third section. It was actually written a few chapters ago, a moment that flitted through my head, but I feel like I didn't lead into it enough or that it doesn't actually fit. If you guys think it seems out of place, I might go back and redo it.

7) Again, please please note that this fic does not at all line up with Batman timeline. I /know/ it's superboy's death that brings Jason back and I'm FAIRLY (though not completely bc as I said, I timeline fic at least 97% using wikias bc comic timelines are confusing af) sure that happened after Tim had established himself as Robin. I am just choosing to ignore that? I don't even know if all of you will notice these timeline changes, so I might just be proving how bad a writer I am by mentioning it. I just wanted everyone who did to know what the deal was.

8) Technically Dick was the last person to train Tim, but I put Alfred's last in Tim's training "montage" because I wanted to go into what Tim was really great at.

9) Tim's last section is a lil short, but this chapter was getting a bit ridiculous in length (given the average for this story that is, I know some people write 10 or 20K chapters no problem) and I didn't want to write another 1K of Tim/Dick angst.

10) Struggled a lot with whether or not to actively address Tim's training with Lady Shiva, but decided to kinda skip over it.

11) Jason died in April and the last bit of this chapter takes place in September or October of the same year (it honestly depends on whether you include April in the six month timeline).

12) Kinda skipped over Barbara's paralysis - the only real mention of it is Tim leaning down to hug her in the last section - but that's because this is honestly the ~Tim and Jason show~ and I pm only show things as they relate directly to Jason and Tim. And Tim had a lot going on in this chapter that I prioritized.
The first breath *ached*, lungs expanding after being dormant and unused for so long. It was like raising from a pool after holding his breath for too long, only a hundred times more intense.

Even before he opened his eyes, an awareness of sorts settled in his bones. An understanding that something was wrong.

He had to move, had to go, had to get out of here.

He opened his eyes, two pinpricks of bright blue color, and saw nothing but blackness.

Letting the feeling in his gut dictate his actions, he lifted his hands and feet and slammed them against the top of the container he was in.

He could hear the outside hatches rattling.

Each hit made his body ache, but he couldn't remember what had happened to hurt him so badly.

He couldn't remember anything.

His feet slammed against the container one last time and he heard the latches snap.

It took several more pushes before it actually opened and when it did something rough and gritty fell over him.

He blinked up into the darkness. He lifted one hand to touch the bit of it that had fallen onto his cheek.

*Dirt*, he remembered as his fingers brushed against the sentiment. This was dirt.

The realization sent another spark of panic through him and renewed the feeling that he had to go quickly.

Something in him was screaming that dirt above him was wrong.

If he stayed down here too long, something would happen. Something...bad?

He pushed himself up. His feet squished in the dirt that had trickled into the container with him.

The motion rushed to his head but he didn't let the dizzy, disorienting feeling stop him.

He dug his fingers into the dirt above him and clawed at it. Dirt and rocks dug deep enough under his nails that they added pinpricks of pain to the soreness in his muscles and the never ending pounding in his head, but he ignored it all.

Gradually, the darkness gave way to a sliver of white light.

It took only a little while longer for him to knock down a chunk of dirt that had the whole ceiling above him coming down on him.
For a moment, he just stood there.

He was knee deep in dirt, something cold and wet was falling on him - rain he realized after a few seconds -, and the world was dark except for the silver moonlight and the stars dotting the sky.

Something about standing here felt significant, like there was something important about this moment but he couldn't quite grasp why.

Eventually, he started moving.

He set his forearms on the edge and pulled himself up out of the hole. There was a flash of wrongness as he did so, a hint in his brain that his arms shouldn't be this small and yet this strong, but it was pushed aside like so many other things had been that night.

When he was standing on level ground, he looked around. There wasn't much around him, just a few gray stones with words on them that were rising out of the ground.

There was one at the beginning of the hole he'd just pulled himself out of. He tried to read it, but couldn't piece the letters into words.

Though he couldn't make sense of what was on the stone, it sent a sharp shiver of discomfort down his spine.

He found the feeling so unsettling that he stumbled away from the hole, legs shaky and unsteady under him.

He didn't know where he was going, just that anywhere was better than here.

He didn't quite come to himself as he walked, his thoughts were still scrambled and unorganized, but the more time that passed the more he became more aware of himself.

He started noticing how, without any conscious thought, he would look to his side every feel moments as though he expected someone to be there. He started noticing how sometimes his fingers curled involuntarily, as if he expected something to be there for him to hold.

It started to feel like he was missing something important. Like it wasn't just his brain that was missing pieces, but like there was something - or someone - that was supposed to be with him physically and just wasn't.

No matter how hard he tried though, he couldn't remember what it was that was missing.

He couldn't remember anything expect for words that came to him gradually, without any of the emotion from associated memories.

He wasn't sure how long he walked before the pain in his body became too much.

He felt like it'd been a while, he was sure the sky was lighter now even though it wasn't bright, but he wasn't positive.

Regardless, his legs fell out from under him and he slid to the ground.

He didn't know how long he laid there before his eyes drifted shut and he let himself slip under.

There was a boy sitting in the alleyway.
He was small, his feet swinging above the ground as his heels kicked against the box he was sitting on. His were stringy and pale. His skin seemed to almost glow under the moonlight. His black hair was long, sweeping over his forehead and falling into his eyes. He was holding an expensive camera up, looking down at something on the attached screen. Occasionally, he shifted it to one hand so he could brush the strands away.

The boy didn't look like much, but there was a feeling of absolute certainty in your gut.

This was, without a doubt, the person who'd been watching you for the last few months.

You felt a flash of triumph, because you had found them all by yourself without any help from B, before the nerves kicked in.

You felt like this person - this tiny boy - was yours in someway. Boys from places like Crime Alley didn't have guardian angels, but if you had one it would have been this kid.

You didn't want to talk to this boy in person and have that relationship ruined. You didn't want this boy to see you as a replacement the way the guys at the tower did or to see you as inferior the way the kids at school did.

You didn't want to ruin this silent relationship between you, but at the same time you wanted to know why this kid was sticking around when so many others didn't give you so much as a second glance.

You swallowed thickly and tightened you grip on the smoothies in your hands.

Gathering all of your courage, you took an obnoxious sip of your drink before asking, "Do you want a smoothie?"

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You had both hands resting on the top of the golf club and your chin resting on them, leaning over as you waited for him to take his shot.

"What's taking you so long?" You asked.

"I'm calculating the trajectory and amount of force needed for a hole in one."

You gaped at his back for a moment before he turned, mirth in his eyes and a small smile on his lips.

A joke then.

"I totally thought you were being serious," you said, amusement and fondness knocking around in your chest. "You little nerd."

"I think you believing that says more about you than me."

"Does it?"

"Well," he said, turning back to the ball on the ground and getting ready to hit, "it certainly says something about how gullible you are."

"Hey, now," you said, teasing.

You leaned off your putter and tapped it against his ankle.

He didn't move away from the rubber hitting his ankle, just let out a quiet laugh and ducked his
You watched as he brought his arms back to take his swing, a smile on your lips and warmth spread through your chest.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

You were lying on the couch reading a copy of Emma when you felt a sudden weight drop on your legs.

You didn’t have to look to know who it was, but you did anyway. You set your book on your chest, words down and cover up, to peer at him as he settled.

Even though you were used to the way that your personal space now belonged to the both of you, it still sometimes caught you off guard how easily he touched you. It was like he didn’t see you as a threat even though he had seen you with bruises on your knuckles and blood on your lip.

In Crime Alley everyone was weary of everyone. In Gotham society, they looked at you as though you were going to swipe the wallet from their pockets or start dealing drugs behind the art gallery.

You weren’t used to people trusting you the way he did - easily and absolutely - and it made you want to do better.

You didn’t want him to ever regret that

You wanted to prove that you were worth all that he had given you.

When he was settled between your legs, his knees touching your shins and his textbook balanced on top of his knees, he glanced up and caught your gaze.

"Hi," he greeted, voice soft. His lips spread in a small smile. "How’s Mr. Knightly today?"

"Exasperated as usual." You asked, "What are you doing?"

"Science," he answered. "Which is also, believe it or not, exasperating as usual."

You hummed softly. "What a coincidence."

His smile spread wider, white teeth perking out from between pink lips as his amusement grew, "Isn’t it?"

With anyone else you would have felt a little awkward given that the conversation had reached a natural end, would have felt like you needed to say something to keep him interested, but with him it was easy to just smile and enjoy having him by your side.

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You were rummaging around the fridge, looking for something the two of you could eat, when you heard him call your name.

You looked at him over your shoulder, "Yeah, babybird?"

He was lying across the kitchen island. His hair was still damp from swimming, black locks curling around his ears, and he had his towel draped over his shoulders. One of his arms were folded and his mouth was pressed against it while the other stretched out in front of him, fingers uncurled and
palm open.

You stared at his palm.

If you didn't know him so well you might have missed the message behind it, but you did and you understood immediately.

This was an acknowledgement of what the two of you knew, but had never said aloud. This was acknowledging that you loved each other fiercely and there was never going to be anyone in your lives who mattered the way you mattered to each other.

You glanced up to meet his eyes.

They were filled with so much warmth and fondness and unrestrained love that your mouth ran dry.

You still weren't used to people thinking you were with worth that kind of emotion.

It meant a lot on its own, but seeing it in his eyes meant so much more and you wanted that - wanted him - forever.

A smile blossomed across your lips and you reached out to grasp his fingers. You have a firm squeeze, a confirmation that you understood what he was saying and were with him all the way, before letting his fingers.

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Your theater teacher clapped her hands together to dismiss the cast from the circle they were sitting in while they read through the script.

You spent a few minutes exchanging goodbyes and see you laters with the other members of the cast before you were able to break away from the group.

You made your way through the auditorium until you reached the row where he was sitting.

He had his legs folded under him with a bag of skittles tucked into the pit between them. His head was ducked down as he focused on the Nintendo DS in his hands. He rolled his bottom lip between his teeth as he searched for something on the screen.

You shuffled into the row in front of him, moving down until you were in the seat directly ahead of him. You put your knees onto the cushion and leaned over to see the screen as you asked, "What are you playing?"

He looked away from the screen and up at you instead. The thoughtful downturn to his lips faded away, replaced by a small smile.

"Ace Attorney," he answered. "Practice over?"

"Yeah. We can leave whenever you're ready."

"Gimme one second to save."

You gave a soft hum as you watched his screen. "Are you still on the third case? The one with the actor?"

"Yeah," he answered. When the game finished saving, he flipped to the home screen. "I'm on the last day of the trial though."
"Do you wanna finish it when we get home?"

He powered the system down before flipping it shut. There was an amused twist to his lips as he lifted his eyes to yours, "Don't you have homework to do?"

You scrunched your nose up in distaste.

Both of your backpacks were in the seat next to him, so you leaned over to grab the strap of yours and sling it over your shoulder before straightening up. "I'd rather play Ace Attorney than do math."

He hummed as he stood up.

The two of you made your way through the seats and over to the aisle that led up to the doors.

"I haven't finished my science report," he said. The two of you were walking up the aisle close enough that your shoulders were brushing. You reached down and twined your fingers with his. He squeezed your hand before relaxing into the grip. "I'll work on that while you work on math, then we can play Ace Attorney together. Deal?"

You really didn't want to do math, but you were spectacularly bad at saying no to him so you just nodded. "Fine, but this weekend I'm not doing any homework until Sunday night."

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You sat on the edge of your bed with him kneeling on the ground in front of you. A first aid kit sat open on the bed next to you.

Your face hurt and you could feel the blood from your wounds dripping down your cheek. The slow crawl of it made your face itch uncomfortably.

More prominent than the discomfort you felt due to the blood on your face was the exhaustion that seemed to wrap around you like a blanket.

You'd been so angry earlier when you'd heard those men cat calling those girls, but now that the two of you were alone in your room the adrenaline had faded and you were just tired.

Having him question your actions as he cleaned the cut in your lip hadn't made it any better.

It'd just added a touch of guilt to the pain.

You knew he wanted to know why you were acting the way you were, to pick apart your motivations until he understood this part of you as well as he understood every other part of you, but you didn't want to explain it to him.

You didn't want him to know how your anger burned near constantly, didn't want him to know how deep the darkness in you ran, didn't want him to figure out how bad you were for him and leave you alone.

"Chin down," he said instead of pushing you for an explanation. He tapped you on the chin. "We've got to get your face disinfected."

You grumbled a bit before complying.

It struck you, for far from the first time, how in love with this boy you were and how lucky you were to have him in your life.
Your vision was fuzzy and your whole body was wet and sticky with blood. Every jostle of your limbs hurt and your breathes were loud, wheezy things as you struggled to get air into your lungs. You want to stop moving, to just lay there on the cement and let yourself drift asleep.

It was the tic-tic-tic of the bomb behind you that stopped you from doing just that.

You had every bit of faith that Bruce would save you if he could, you didn't really enjoy getting beaten by a crowbar but hearing the Joker tell you how important you were to Bruce had been a bit of an eyeopener, but he couldn’t find you if you'd been burned to a crisp.

You had to get far enough out of the blast zone so Bruce could find you and take you back home, back the manor were Alfred would be waiting to patch you up, back to the manor were you could lay in bed and recover with T-

Your thoughts were wiped away by the sharp click of the device behind you.

You felt a flash of heat and then you felt nothing at all.

He woke up slowly, whole body feeling heavy and slow.

He kept his eyes shut for a long time. He could hear the sharp click-click of heels on time flooring, the quiet conversations about brain activity and questions about organ operation that the people flowing in and out of the room had, and a constant electric beeping.

Hospital, he realized after a while. He was in a hospital.

The moment he remembered that, he remembered someone telling him never to go to a hospital. Someone telling him that going to a hospital would get him caught and he should come home instead. They would figure out what he needed, they would patch him up themselves or find him a doctor they could trust if he absolutely needed one.

He couldn't remember where home was, but he remembered that he wasn't supposed to be here.

That was enough for him to pull himself out of bed once the noise died down.

He spent a few minutes fiddling with the wires stuck in him before he was able to slip out of the room and into the corridors to find the way out.

Since he couldn't remember where home was, he lived on the streets after leaving the hospital.

Sometimes he remembered things, a flash of blue eyes and a white toothed smile or words someone had said to him at some point, but for the most part he wandered without any real clue where he was going.

There were somethings he knew how to do even without his memories. He didn't remember how to fight, but when he stopped thinking and let his body do what it wanted he was good at it. It was a skill that kept him alive.

He couldn't remember the words to argue with someone, so whenever one of the other people on the street took issue with him he let his body speak for him.

Over the weeks, he became so used to protecting himself on instinct that when he felt someone
approach him where he was huddled next to a dumpster in the alley he was staying in, he tensed up automatically.

He had his knees folded up to his chest and his arms wrapped around them when a shadow fell over him. His fingers dug tighter into his legs, he didn't want to get caught off guard but a few days ago he'd punched one of the children who he helped when he found extra food in his haste, and he flicked his gaze upwards.

The woman in front of him was very clearly not from the area. Her skin is as a shade of ebony that he'd seen before, but it was smooth and unblemished. Her long dark hair was shiny and well taken care of. She wore jeans that were molded against her as though they'd been fitted just for her and the loose white shirt she wore was unblemished. She was looking down at him with green eyes filled with interest and something that he couldn't quite put his finger on.

She was beautiful and lovely, but she radiated a feeling of danger that he didn't feel from any of the men on the street.

He didn't remember her, but something about her was distinctively familiar.

"Hello, Jason," she said. Her English was thickly accented, but her voice was honey smooth and as deceptively lovely as her face was. She crouched down in front of him, long fingers reaching up to tuck a loose strand of hair behind her ears. "Do you remember me?"

He looked around quickly, mapping the ways out of his corner and away from her in case something happened, before shaking his head.

She hummed, the sound thoughtful and considering, before saying, "Well, I'm Talia Al Ghul and I knew you before you died."

Chapter End Notes

1) Heyo everyone! I'm sorry it's been so long. I rotate updates and my check please fic gave me some trouble so I couldn't move on to this! I also want to let you know that I'm mobile, so there might be a lot issues in this chapter caused by auto-correct/auto-finish

2) Understanding the chapter might require some knowledge of the events of Jason's resurrection so the low down for anyone who has forgotten - Jason walked for twelve miles after digging himself out and then collapsed into a coma. He was in that for a while before eventually wandering away from the hospital. After some time, Talia found him. In this story all of that takes place over a year and a half, while Tim is overseas with Lady Shiva.

3) So Jason dreams during his coma in this. That's medically inaccurate but he also just came back from the dead.

4) That's being said; I really like his coma dreams. Their mostly rewrites of scenes we initially saw in Tim's perspective or elaborations on things that were mentioned.

5) Jason is entirely too coherent for someone with brain trauma.

6) I kind of set this up so that Jason can remember a lot of words and think, but that the
trauma from the events of his death make it hard for him to remember his family with the exception of Tim who he doesn't have any ill feelings towards? Also he has a hard time verbalizing thoughts due to his brain injury.

7) I think its clear but "he" in the real time events of the chapter is Jason while "he" in the dreams is Tim.

8) Debated for a long time whether or not to include another scene between Jason's coma dream of their getting together and his death. Ultimately added two and I think it makes a nice bridge tbh. But maybe you guys think it was too much?

9) Dated this a bit. So you know this chapter takes place sometime after the north American release of Ace Attorney γ(╯▽╰)╭

10) I'm sad bc Jason talks a bit about how he feels like he's always angry and there's a darkness in him which is not how I feel? I just feel like Bruce and Barbara and his reservations about the Batman way would have made him feel that way

11) I feel like this chapter is very confusing and everyone will hate it. (´・_・`) 

12) Also wondering if it ended too abruptly?? But it's only an interlude? It's not meant to cover everything.

13) And finally, I apologize that it's not as long as usual!
There was a fire raging it's way through his head.

It felt like the burn of a needle stitching skin back together. It smelled like peroxide mixing with blood in a bathroom sink. It sounded like a sharp hiss as a wound stung and a hand smashing against a wall when crutches wobbled.

There was a understanding deep in his bones that this was pain for the sake of healing.

He felt the moment it all snapped together.

It was a sharp, unmistakable, contrast to the confusion from only moments before.

Suddenly he knew the shape of words in his mouth and the sounds that corresponded. He knew that there were sixty seconds in a minute and a hundred pennies in a US dollar. He knew the way peanut butter dried a mouth and the way it felt to lick jelly away from his lips. He knew the smell of freshly cut grass and the smell of gasoline at a gas station.

Jason remembered his life. He remembered the early days when he hid behind a door as Willis screamed at Catherine. He remembered afterwards, the parade of different men with different drugs that his mother led through the house. He remembered trying to steal Batman's tires and he remembered Bruce finding him when he snuck out of the group home and being offered a home at the mansion. He remembered being offered the chance to become Robin. He remembered Alfred and Dick and Barbara. He remembered -

Jason was so caught up in the wave of knowledge that had swept over him that he became aware of the hand on the back of his head only when the fingers twisted in his hair.

His head had been submerged in some kind of liquid, something not quite as fluid as water but not exactly slime either, but the hand in his hair yanked him out of it.

Jason came up gasping for air.

His nose was stinging and his lungs were burning with the need for oxygen, but he managed to sputter, "Tim."

"Not quite."

Jason was pulled up against a large body, a woman he guessed from the way the chest he was pressed against squished but a strong one since she was handling him easily, and held there by a forearm that pressed against his trachea. The hand in his hair belonged to the woman holding him and she used the grip to force his gaze over to the side.

Talia Al Ghul stood a few feet away with two bodyguards flanking her. Her lips were tilted in the corner, just the slightest bit of amusement in her expression.

"Hello, Jason," she greeted. "How do you feel?"
Even after dying, Jason had no sense of self preservation so he said, "I feel like you can go to hell."

She clicked her tongue. "Is that how you speak to someone who brought you back to life?"

"You didn't bring me back to life," Jason said. He wasn't sure what had brought him back, but he had a feeling it wasn't Talia. If she'd brought him back, he'd have come alive in the Pit she'd just thrown him in, not in his coffin. "I was already alive when you found me."

"You were breathing," Talia said. "I'm not sure if I would call what you've been doing living."

Jason clenched his jaw.

He didn't like this situation.

His body was nowhere near as strong as it'd been before his death. He was weak from months spend in a coffin and then living on the streets. He didn't know how long it'd been since Talia found him, the Pit had given him back what had been loss due to his injuries but it didn't clear the fuzziness from his time since being revived, but it hadn't been long and she hadn't exactly been doing anything to bulk him back up.

He couldn't fight Talia and her henchmen, but he didn't want to be trapped with her either.

"What do you want?" Jason asked.

Talia hummed before saying, "To help you. Bruce let both of us down and it's time he paid for it."

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Tim was standing outside the airport, his bags sat at his feet, when a gust of wind swept by and pushed through his hair.

Though he hadn't heard anything, he had the weirdest feeling that someone had called out for him.

As he reached up to tuck his hair behind his ears, not wanting to deal with it getting in his eyes, he cast a glance around for anyone who would be looking for him.

Before he could look too far, he heard a warm and familiar voice shout, "Tim!"

He barely had time to look in that direction before arms wrapped around his waist and lifted him up off the ground.

"Dick!" Tim squeaked. He put his hands on Dick's shoulders to steady himself. The voice carried by the wind forgotten as he focused on his big brother. "Put me down!"

"But I missed you, baby brother!" Dick said. Tim had put on a lot of muscle while abroad, but not enough for Dick to struggle with spinning the two of them around.

Tim let out a bark of laughter, digging his fingers into Dick's shoulders. "Yeah?"

"We all did," Duck said.

As Dick brought them to a stop, Tim caught sight of Bruce, Barbara, and Alfred over his shoulder.

Tim felt a rush of affection at seeing Barbara there, her wheelchair wedged between Alfred and Bruce.

He knew things had been rough between her and Dick since the breakup, so he appreciated her
coming with the family to pick him up.

"I missed you guys too," Tim said.

As much as he had needed to get away from Gotham and as much as he loved being overseas, they were his family and he'd missed them fiercely.

It made being Gotham bittersweet. On one hand, he was back with his family and he had trained enough to be comfortable in his position as Robin. On the other hand, Gotham reminded him of Jason at every turn.

"Alright, Dick, put your brother down," Bruce said. "I'm sure he wants to go home and sleep off the jet lag."

Dick complied, lowering Tim down so his feet connected with the sidewalk again before letting him go.

For a moment, Tim considered asking to go the cemetery. He'd told himself months ago that he would visit Jason once he got back to Gotham, but now that he was actually standing here the idea of standing in front of a tombstone with Jason's name on made him nauseous.

So instead, he nodded and added a sheepish, "And maybe a McDonalds? I didn't eat during the flight. As much as I missed Alfred's cooking, I don't think I'll stay up long enough for him to cook for me."

"It's quite alright, Master Timothy," Alfred said. "We can postpone your welcome home feast until tomorrow."

Tim gave him a small smile, a little too tired from the eight hour flight and the initial rush of excitement to manage much else.

Being back in Gotham settled a certain weight on his chest, he carried Jason with him no matter where he was but he hadn't feel the loss nearly as much when he was gone, but after everything with Lady Shiva he was just so relieved to be home.

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Tim had known that being Robin was intense, but now that he was back from training and settled into his role as Batman's companion he was gaining a whole new appreciation for the job.

It was exhausting to be out all night patrolling and then wake up at seven in the morning for a day of classes. Some days, the aches from a battle made it so hard to fall asleep that he closed his eyes for only an hour or two before going to take a Trigonometry or Anatomy test.

He didn't know how Jason had done it and still managed to be energetic enough to drag Tim out around town so they could spend time together.

He tried not to linger on that too long, though. Thinking about how much Jason loved him, thinking about what he had lost, wasn't good for his mental or emotional health. He'd already broke down once because he'd lost Jason and he didn't think he had the strength not to do so again if he dwelled on it.

It was a struggle to balance being Robin with being Tim Drake, but once he figured it out he excelled.

His first major issue with the job came during one of the first times Bruce left him in Gotham alone.
The Joker was out of Arkham and the city was self-destructing and Tim had to take care of it himself.

He knew he could have called Dick and Nightwing would be in Gotham as quickly as possible, but he wanted to prove that he could do this. He just wasn't sure whether he was trying to prove something to himself or to Bruce and Dick.

Tim managed to keep it together throughout the encounter, but when he went back to manor it was harder to keep his composure.

Feeling shaky and needing something that he couldn't have, he slipped through the manor and into his old room for the first time in the almost two years since he'd moved out of it.

The room was the same, but it was also had a certain quality to it that made it obvious no one lived in it.

Jason and Tim's books lined the shelf, organized haphazardly and in a way that only they understood, since Tim hadn't had the heart to separate them, but there weren't any of their clothes on the floor or hanging off the furniture. Their ridiculously large desk still sat in the corner with Jason's laptop on it, but it wasn't covered in marked up homework assignments and stacks of library books and undeveloped canisters of film. The TV still sat on the dresser and the stereo on the floor next to it, but there wasn't a stack of DVDs they wanted to watch on dresser or a mess of CDs on the floor just begging to be stepped on.

There were still six mismatched pillows on the bed, Jason had been too interested in having a Wonder Woman pillowcase to even attempt to match the ridiculous patterns on Tim's, and the bedspread was still an ugly, brightly stripped thing; but it was pristine and unrumpled in a way that it never was before.

Tim didn't let the strangeness of the room bother him.

He crawled into the bed, knees sinking into the mattress, and collapsed against Jason's pillows. They didn't smell like him anymore, but Tim buried his face again them anyway.

When he closed his eyes, the Jokers taunts about having killed the last Robin echoed in his head.

As much as Jason's death hurt, being here reminded Tim that Jason's life hadn't just been hurt. It reminded Tim that while he hadn't been there to stop the Joker then, he'd been here to help Jason through everything that had preceded it and that...that had to be enough.

Because Tim could handle a lot, but the idea that he could've changed Jason's fate was something that he couldn't let himself believe.

That was something he wouldn't be able to come back from.

Jason was lying on the cot in his cell, his legs stretched out in front of him and his hands clasped behind his head.

Cell was a bit if a strong word, in all honestly. To call the room a cell implied a purpose. With four completely white walls and nothing but the cot for furniture, it looked more like they had just thrown him into the first room they'd found.

Jason honestly would have preferred a cell. Those were familiar. He'd spent hours in the make shift ones in malls when he'd been young and first learning to steal. He'd spent hours in full blown torture cells when he was Robin. Cells were easily dealt with.
Little, unused rooms that people forgot existed though? That was significantly more worrying.

Especially to Jason, whose biggest fear was being forgotten and replaced.

It was only training and an understanding of what he was dealing with that kept his panic hidden.

He heard the door open. When he looked over, he saw Talia stepping inside.

"I don't know why you're here," Jason said, turning his head to stare at the wall again. "I already told you I'm not helping you and I haven't changed my mind about that."

"I know." Talia walked across the room, her steps a sharp sound in the silence, and settled down on the edge of the cot. Out of the corner of her eye, Jason noticed that she had something in her hands. "I thought that since you clearly care for your family so much, you might want to see what they were up to."

She turned and set the item in her hands on his thigh.

Pictures, he realized. Pictures of his family.

He knew there was more to this, but he had died two years ago and he hadn't seen his family since.

He grabbed them, flipping through the stack and drinking in the sights.

Barbara was in between the stacks of books at the library - in a wheelchair - with her arm outstretched as she reached for something. Alfred was walking down the street with a bag of freshly baked bread in his arms. Dick was standing in a movie theater with K'oriander, their fingers interlocked and nauseously sweet smiles on their faces. Bruce was holding the door to Wayne Enterprises open for a young lady, smiling at her even though he was on his phone.

The next picture was Tim walking out of Gotham Academy.

Jason had been flipping through the pictures quickly, hungry for the people he loved, but this one he stopped to look at. He drank in the sight of Tim, even if it was only a picture.

He'd grown a little taller and filled in a bit, but he was still a little on the small side for a fifteen year old boy. His hair was around the same length it'd been two years ago, just long enough to be brushing against the back of neck and curling around his ears.

Tim was family and anyone who'd been watching Bruce would know that Jason and Tim were close, so Jason wasn't exactly surprised to see him there.

Jason forced himself to move on.

In all, there were around forty or fifty pictures.

Some of them were individual shots like the first ones, but some of them were shots of them with each other as well. Dick and Bruce were having lunch together. Tim and Barbara were walking down the street, Tim gesturing wildly in the air as he spoke and Barbara looking as amused as she did interested. Dick and Tim had accompanied Alfred to the store and Alfred was plucking a box of cookies out of Dick's hands.

There were a few shots of them with superheros who knew their identities, Bruce having lunch with Clark in Metropolis and Dick standing outside a nightclub with Wally West, but they were all in civil clothes.
It wasn't until the last few shots in the stack that Jason saw them in costume. There were a few of Dick as Nightwing and Bruce as Batman, but for the most part everything looked as Jason expected.

It was the very last photo that had Jason freezing.

Because this photo wasn't Batman with Nightwing, it was Batman with Robin.

A Robin whose costume was unfamiliar, but who Jason had spent too much time with for a simple domino mask to keep him from recognizing.

"Tim Drake started his training to be Robin about three months after you died," Talia said. Jason's eyes were glued to the photo, but he could hear the false pity in her voice. "It must hurt to be replaced by someone who you brought into the family."

Jason knew what she was aiming for with the way she threw out the word replacement, but it barely grazed him.

If this was anyone else, he may have been hurt, but Tim wasn't a replacement for him and he never had been. Tim was a piece of Jason, had carved out a place in Jason's life that was meant solely for him, and the two of them had rarely left each others sides, but they were each separate people and they couldn't step into the space the other left. They were too different for that.

When he didn't say anything, she continued, "I heard he had his first encounter with the Joker recently. He was all alone when he did it too. I'm sure Bruce is proud of him, taking on a man like that all by himself after what happened to you."

Jason's fingers tightened around the photo as a rush of anger pulsed through him.

Talia caught onto his anger, but clearly didn't understand the source of it because she said, "I can help you get revenge on the Joker for killing you, Jason. I can help you get strong enough that Bruce will know you're better than that. I can help you make him pay for replacing you."

Jason didn't hesitate to nod.

He didn't agree to helping Talia take out Bruce, because no matter how she phrased it that we ultimately what was happening here, because he was jealous of Tim, but because he was pissed at Bruce.

The fact that Bruce would put Tim in the suit when the Joker was still alive, would risk the person who meant the most to Jason dying in the exact same way Jason had, was unforgivable.

"I'll do it," Jason said. He looked up at Talia. When their eyes met, he repeated, "I'll do it."

Ra was apparently onto the fact that Talia and thrown Jason into the Pit, so Jason was off the very next day.

Talia sent him around the world for training, setting him up with contacts of hers.

He went to Japan and stayed with a woman named Himari. She was a tiny thing with hair as dark as night. She was also an absolutely brutal physical trainer. He spent his days getting back into shape, working off half a year of death and a year and a half of living on the street, and his nights being stuffed full of food in her tiny apartment. He gained weight quickly with the way she fed him so insistently, making rice and sausages and pancakes while she complained about difficult patients she'd had before him, and grew almost a foot in a month. Himari chalked it up to good nutrition,
Jason thought it is probably just his body realising it had two years to make up.

He went to Jamaica and lived near the beach with a man named Demetrius who wore nothing but board shorts and rarely had a shirt on and his wife, Serene, who wore so many bright colors that Jason's eyes hurt when he looked at her. Jason spent his days working with them in a tiny Hut on the beach where they sold handmade jewelry and other souvenirs to tourist. At night, Demetrius taught him how to use his words to convince a man to do anything he wanted and Serene taught him all the ways that delicate fingers could snap a bone or incapacitate someone.

He went to Australia and stayed with a man named Lachlan in a house where tumbleweeds were the only thing for miles. Lachlan swore every six words, but had a horde of animals that he treated better than most people treated their children. When Jason was stupid enough to get himself attacked by a kangaroo and had his collarbone smashed, Lachlan spent his whole recovery bitching about Jason frightening the animal. When he wasn't swearing or feeding the fifteen animals sharing the house with them, Lachlan made Jason fire a gun until his finger wouldn't move any longer and he'd stared down a scope so long that his vision felt permanently narrowed. By the time he left Australia, Jason could unload ten different types of guns without making more then one hole in a target.

He went to France and stayed in an apartment above a nightclub with Julien and Chloe, who were roommates and half siblings. Julien was in his late thirties while Chloe was only just starting her twenties. Chloe had ebony hair and chocolate eyes while Julien's hair was the color of the sun and his eyes the color of the sea. The only sign of their relation was their matching olive skin tone. They taught Jason how to use his body as a tool, how to get a man or a woman in his bed without a word and how to seem so non threatening that they'd spill their secrets before the sunrose again. Jason had sex for the first time with Chloe and for the second time with Julien. He threw up afterwards. It was the only time he considered running back to Gotham, to be by Tim's side again because everything else felt so wrong. In the end he didn't and the next time he fucked someone, a woman whose husband had hired them to get proof of her cheating, he thought about nothing but the job.

There were others too, men and women with just as many quirks that taught him to use a sword and make bombs and hack. They weren't all good people, but they all made their mark on Jason.

Sometimes, Talia showed up to check on him. The first few times were all business, a quick check on Jason's progress, but then she showed up to a meeting with a grumpy ten year old whose face was all Bruce in tow and their meetings thawed to something more friendly.

No matter how bad their relationship was, Bruce was his father and that made Damian family. As his mother, Talia was family too.

Damian was a spoiled, overly entitled little shit, but he sassed with the best of them and somehow managed to look threatening when cuddling a cat so Jason liked him. He spent a lot of time rolling his eyes and teasing Damian, which reminded him so fiercely of how Dick treated him that sometimes it hurt.

Damian didn't always come with Talia, usually too busy with his own training, but when he did, there was usually a lot less talk about Jason's current life and a lot more talk about Bruce and the family. Damian tried to pretend he didn't care, but everytime Jason told a story about them he would perk right up.

Jason's contributions to those conversations were for Damian, but Talia's were always for Jason. They were information on what his family was doing.

He listened to anything she said, but especially when she said anything about Tim. He wasn't sure if he thought his interest in Tim was still about jealousy, but he wasn't about to correct her and risk not
hearing what he wanted to.

He heard, through her, how Tim's mother had died and his father had only just woken up from a coma. He heard about Tim's friendship with Spoiler and about how Tim worked with Dick when Bruce gave Dick the Batman mantle. He heard when a virus hit Gotham and Tim managed to help save the city even as he was dying, he'd only heard about that after the whole thing or else he'd have been in Gotham before anyone could stop him. He heard about it when Tim joined the Teen Titans and when he started Young Justice.

He could have gotten jealous at how easily Tim slipped into the superhero community when Jason had lived in Dick's shadow the whole time, but instead he just felt relief.

Jason's rage at Bruce burned hotter the more stories he heard about Tim's time as Robin and he knew the path laid out in front of him meant losing his family forever.

He was dooming himself to a life without Tim, but he felt like making Bruce pay for putting Tim in danger took precedence.

It was easier to do when he knew there were people at Tim's side who cared about him and would make him happy.

Chapter End Notes

1) Still mobile! Computer is scheduled to be here (and fixed) on the 25th though. Hopefully this will be ur sat mobile chapter.

2) I changed the chapter titles and I 100% recommend glancing at them bc I'm so proud of them? There's a very obvious Lilo&Stitch reference, a Barns Courtney Song, and a Book of Life reference.

3) Was aiming for poetic in the first section, feel like I hit "wtf are you talking about" instead.

4) I feel like we need to address right now that I don't think Jason Todd was ever insane? The Lazarus Pit makes you crazy when it brings you back to life - but Jason wasn't brought back by the Lazarus Pit, just healed by it. I think calling Jason insane and throwing him in Arkham was Bruce being a giant Ham and assuming the worse of Jason instead of acknowledging that Jason, you know, had gone through a lot of trauma and had maybe changed and gained a more cynical view of the world. To each their own though?

5) This chapter contains a lot of just general messing around with Jason and Talia's experiences together so you know. If you noticed that now you know that I'm aware it's incorrect. Welcome to the #aulyfe.

6) a lot of you have said you like seeing the experiences of both characters, but now that their separated I'm curious - do you prefer the Jason or Tim scenes? Tim scenes definitely have more meat to them, so I know it'd be easier to connect with them then Jason's vague ones but I also know some of you really enjoy seeing Jason's struggles.
7) I feel like Jason's decision to help Talia was too abrupt, but I think Jason would make rash decisions based on his loyalty to Tim. He forgave Bruce in his final moments of life, but this changes things because this is /Tim/.

8) I definitely changed up Jason and Talia's relationship but I enjoyed writing it a lot.

9) writing Talia here was /so fucking hard/. She's way too transparent in her goals, but I'm not a very manipulative person so I didn't know how to fix it??

10) Writing the paragraph about Jason in France made me feel icky but I can't imagine him not getting seduction training and that would be significant to him.

11) this is your reminder that this is on a stretched timeline. Jason is around nineteen in current canon and Damian is about nine years younger then him, making him around ten, but they've already reached those ages on this story and current comic canon is not even close to this point in the story.

12) Jason doesn't make a whole lot of sense in the last section does he? But I think Jason's emotions get the best of him and that's what's happening. He wants Tim back of course, but his anger at Bruce for - Jason assumes - putting Tim in danger is ruling him.
Train A is going sixty miles per hour and Train B is going thirty miles per an hour. When do their paths converge?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Walking into the tiny Belgian cafe, Jason took a moment to let his eyes scan over the crowd as he searched for the person he was looking for. It didn't take very long, their ebony skin and dark hair standing out in a crowd of mostly pale Europeans.

"Hey shrimp," Jason greeted as he approached the table Damian and Talia were seated at. He leaned down when he got there and placed folded arms on top of Damian's head.

Talia was sitting across from Damian, sipping a cup of coffee, with an unmarked folder in front of her. She was watching Jason over the rim of her coffee cup.

"Get off me, Todd," Damian hissed. He reached up, smacking his hands against Jason's biceps.

Jason found it kind of sweet and a little adorable since he knew Damian could fuck him up if he really wanted to.

"Nah, I think I'll stay right here," Jason dismissed. "Carry on my entire meeting with your mom while leaning on you."

Damian tilted his head back, fixing Jason with a glare that would have had most people fearing for their lives.

As it was, Jason knew him well enough to know the look portrayed little more than annoyance and was a little too amused by Damian trying to intimate him when Jason's forearm was taking up a good portion of forehead.

"Chill out, Agent 47," Jason said. He pulled his arms off Damian, delivering a light smack to the back of his head.

"My name isn't-" Damian began.

Talia cut him off, voice eerily serene, "Damian, why don't you go up to the counter and order yourself another sweet?"

Jason raised an eyebrow. Talia had never had any qualms about speaking about Jason's exploits in front of Damian, so her sending him away so obviously caught his attention.

Damian was obviously confused about it as well because he started, "But mother-"

"Hey," Jason interrupted before Damian could get further with that. He didn't think Talia would hit Damian, but there would be consequences to questioning her. He pulled his wallet out of pocket and dangled it in front of Damian. "I'll pay. Get a big slice of that chocolate cake and we can split it."

Damian pursed his lips as if he was going to argue, but ultimately the consequences for not following Talia's orders were much greater than questioning them and Damian didn't want to be punished to that extent.

"I don't want the chocolate one," Damian said as he grabbed Jason's wallet from his fingers. Jason
moved out of the way as he scooted his chair back to get up. "I'm getting the raspberry layer instead."

"Sure," Jason agreed, flopping into the seat next to Damian's vacated one. "Just make sure you get a slice big enough for us both."

Talia was quiet as Damian made his way to the counter and settled in the line, displeasure and impatience painting his face.

"I think it's time for you to go back to the states," Talia said.

Jason was turned towards Damian, watching to make sure he didn't try taking the knees off the people ahead of him in line, so he glanced at Talia out of the corner of his eye. "For training?"

"No," Talia said. She took another sip of her drink before placing her palm on the folder in front of her. She slid it across the table. "These are all the major players in Gotham's underworld."

Jason's tongue darted out, wetting his lips.

He understood why Talia had Damian walk away. Damian was already curious about his father and Gotham, mostly because Jason had told so many stories over the past two years, and knowing Jason was going back could be enough for Damian to make an attempt at trying to satiate that curiosity.

"This is the last thing I'm giving you," Talia said, her voice firm. "I've given you the tools and connections you need to carry out your plan, but I won't stay on a sinking ship."

Jason was going to take down the Joker and Batman in one shot and there was a high probability he was going down with them. He didn't mind dying a second time as long as he took down the two people he perceived as the biggest threat to Tim - the man who put him in the suit and the clown who'd already proven he could kill a bird.

"I know," Jason said. He glanced back over at Damian. He'd already come to terms with everything he would miss in Dick's life, but he hadn't quite reached that point with Damian. He was going to miss teasing his little brother and wondering which of his parents he'd grow up to be like. "Thanks for bringing Dami with you."

"He asked," Talia dismissed with a shrug of her shoulder. "I didn't see a point in denying him this one last visit."

Jason hummed, tapping his fingers against the tabletop. "Well, still. Thanks."

Jason rented a tiny apartment in one of Gotham's slums, the sort of area bad enough that the cops knew better than to answer calls about gunshots but not bad enough for Batman to ever think about visiting, and spent a few weeks there before he made any major moves.

He made friends with the girl who worked the cash register at the corner store even though she was far too young to be selling cigarettes, alcohol, or lottery tickets. She babysat for everyone in a ten mile radius and when he went to buy a pack of Marlboros she would tell him stories about all the crazy illegal things she saw in her customers apartments.

He hopped out of his window at night to lean against the fire escape and made friends with the prostitutes who worked the street in front of his building. He had shouted conversations with them about their favorite late night TV shows and played his stereo loud enough that they could hear the music filtering down to them from his place. When he was down on the streets with them, usually
smoking, they'd tell him all of the things their clients whispered to them when they were tangled in
the sheets.

When he went to the grocery store he'd buy extra family sized boxes of cereal or granola bars, things
which didn't expire quickly and could safely be eaten pass the expiration date, and gave them to the
kids who lived on the streets around his place. They were suspicious of him at first, Jason was a
street kid as much as they were and he understood the fear most of them carried of large muscular
men, but slowly they came to trust him. He stood with them while they ate their first few handfuls,
making sure none of the older people on the street tried stealing the food them, and slowly they
started opening up. They shared stories about the things they saw, the good and the bad.

Weeks passed without any sign of Batman or Robin.

Even though that was what he wanted, Jason couldn't help the disappointment he felt every night that
passed without any sign of the heroes.

Eventually Jason was settled enough and had enough ears on the streets, ears he trusted because they
were people who were real and good and understandable, to make his move.

The night he decided to do it, he grabbed the helmet he'd created from the box and took it out onto
his balcony with him. He sat on the lounge out there, listening to the rumble of Gotham below him
and looking up at the skyline above him as if seeing Batman or Robin or even Nightwing would
somehow change his mind.

Jason didn't know if it would have because he didn't see any of them that night either.

Eventually he went back into the apartment. He put the helmet on the coffee table while he unpacked
the rest of the costume and slipped into it. When he was done, he picked the helmet off the coffee
table and put it on.

Jason Todd had made his bed and now it was time for the Red Hood to lie in it.

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Tim was lounging in Titan Tower, sprawled out on the couch with his back against the arm, with a
book when he felt a body flop down onto his shins.

"Connor!" Tim exclaimed, jerking a bit at the pain. It wasn't that bad compared to other things he
felt, but it'd been unexpected and it felt like the sort of reaction normal teenagers had to their friends
jumping on them like assholes. "What the hell?"

"I missed you," Connor said. Tim felt Connor shifting around. Connor laid stomach down on top of
Tim, lining their bodies up despite the difference on their sizes, and wiggled until he managed to
duck his head under Tim's book. He popped up on the other side of it, blocking the pages from Tim's
view. "Everyone else is sitting outside having fun and you're in here reading a book."

"I like reading books," Tim said, looking down at Connor with an amused smile. He'd gotten used to
Connor's utter lack of personal space and it didn't bother him to have his best friend close. After what
happened to Jason, he liked keeping the people who mattered to him close. If they were close to him,
he stood a chance at saving them.

"But if you'd been outside you could have spent time with me," Connor said, pouting as he peered
up at Tim.

"Yes, but now you're inside and I'm spending time with you anyway," Tim declared. He lifted his
arm so he could close his book without hitting Connor in the bed. He snapped it shut then tossed it
down onto the floor next to them. "So, I think your point is invalid

"Okay, but consider this," Connor's voice was dripping in suggestion as he added, "Stephanie is outside."

Tim raised an eyebrow, "Yeah....?"

"So, she's totally into you," Connor said, poking his fingers into Tim's side. "It's not going to go anywhere if you don't do about it."

"It's not going to go anywhere anyway," Tim said.

He felt a strange mixture of amusement and pain. He couldn't imagine anyone looking at his relationship with Stephanie and thinking it was romantic, but there had been a time when he'd been so close to Jason that someone thinking he was with anyone else would have been impossible.

"Why not?" Connor asked. "You're hot, she's hot, you spend all your time together."

"We don't spend all of our time together. I know what it's like to spend all of my time with someone, what it's like to spend all of my time with someone that I love, and what Stephanie and I do is not that. What Stephanie and I do will never be that because I already had that and I know I'm never getting that back because he's dead and he's never coming back," Tim interrupted. He knew he was rambling and his tone was harsh, but he hated the way he was feeling.

Connor was staring at Tim, eyes wide and shocked.

Tim had the abrupt realization that he'd just talked about Jason's death to a stranger, to anyone, for the first time.

Feeling overwhelmed and emotional, Tim tried to joke, "And you know, Stephanie's a girl so even if she was into me - and she's not - I wouldn't be into her."

"Nope, nope, nope," Connor said, shaking his head. He pushed himself up onto his hands and knees, then moved down to sit cross legged on Tim's shins. "We are not brushing this off. We are talking about this."

Tim froze for a moment.

Then he opened his mouth and for the first time in his life he told someone about Jason.

He told Connor about Robin cornering him in an alleyway and about Jason picking him up from school the first time. He told Connor how Jason had taken one look at the Drake's empty house and decided Tim needed to come home with him. He told Connor about holding hands for the first time at a dirty duck pond and forehead kisses after auditions for A Midsummer Night's Dream. He told Connor about all of it crashing around his head and floundering to pick it back up again.

He told Connor about realizing that he was going to be missing a piece of himself for the rest of his life and knowing that he was never going to love someone that way again.

He told Connor all of it.

As much as it hurt, it also felt like relief.

Tim was spending most of this time away from Gotham. He was usually in San Francisco with the Titans or off working with Young Justice.
Having someone in those places who knew about Jason ended up being a bigger relief than Tim had thought it would be.

When someone did something that reminded Tim so much of Jason that the wound felt fresh, Connor was there to bump his shoulder against Tim's. When Tim got that phantom feeling that came with Jason not being by his side, Connor would loop his arm through Tim's and distract him until he stopped searching the room for someone who wasn't there. When Tim came from a visit to Gotham shaky and off balance because he'd stared the Joker down again, Connor would pull him into his bedroom and the two of them would lie on the bed in a tangle until Tim got himself under control.

Connor knew exactly what Tim needed on his bad days and he did his best to make sure Tim got it. And on the days when Tim was steady and good, which was most days because despite the occasional lapses he really had healed a lot, Connor didn't treat him as if he was anymore fragile then the others on the team. He still played a little too hard, forgetting his strength when they were training or play wrestling, and trash talked badly when they played video games.

Tim thought that it would have been really easy to fall in love with Connor if he hadn't met Jason.

As it was Tim had met Jason when he was eleven years old and, even with all the pain it caused, he still considered that day the luckiest in his life.

He'd take loving Jason and getting hurt over never meeting him any day.

"You're getting in late, baby boy," Callie observed. The prostitute was leaning against Jason's building, small high waisted shorts showing off long tanned legs and the glitter blush on her cheekbones glinting in the streetlight.

"You're here late," Jason replied, instead of answering her thinly veiled question. "No takers tonight?"

"Already left and came back," she corrected. "Looking for another client if you're interested."

Jason had been approached before, some of the younger girls had even asked if he wanted to have some fun without paying for it, but his answer was the same everytime. "Nope."

He could handle sleeping with someone for a job, but he didn't really feel attraction towards anyone in his life. It'd always been Tim and it would be for as long as his heart was beating.

"Anyone give the girls any trouble?" Jason asked as he reached into his pocket for his cigarettes. Callie had been on the streets for along time and she did her best to look after the other girls, so Jason knew she'd know if something had happened.

"Mm. There was a guy hounding Sapphire earlier, but we took care of it."

Jason raised an eyebrow as he plucked a cigarette from the box. Callie was a good woman, but even she wouldn't help a girl if it meant making herself look violent enough that word could spread and hurt business.

She waved a hand in the air, dismissing his silent question, "Not like that. We just reminded him that this was Red Hood's territory and he'd roughed guys in this neighborhood up for not respecting us before."

"Ahhh..." Jason drawled as he lit the cigarette hanging from his lips.
He considered her words as he smoked.

Red Hood was becoming something of a legend around his neighborhood and it was exactly what he wanted. People didn't need to believe in him the way they had to believe in Batman because Red Hood was a real, tangible threat. He carried out the type of justice the people in the slums of Gotham could rely on. He made sure their abusive spouses felt their pain and stayed the fuck away, he made sure the drug dealers stayed in shady alleyways and far away from middle school bus stops, he took over the gangs in the immediate vicinity until gang violence was taking place further and further away because a larger area was united.

Sometimes Jason agreed with them. Sometimes he considered Red Hood to be the protector Gotham needed because Batman had been around for over a decade and just wasn't cutting it. Sometimes he remembered watching Garzonasa launch himself off a roof top to get away from Robin and didn't regret not being able to grab him before he fell.

Sometimes Jason heard the word hero and felt sick to his stomach. Sometimes he remembered Bruce's face when he heard Harley or Poison Ivy was causing trouble again and remembered how Bruce had looked increasingly exhausted each time. Sometimes he remembered that Batman was doing what he could to get the people that the cops couldn't touch off the streets.

Before he could dwell on it anymore, he took a final drag of his cigarette and threw it on the ground in front of him.

As he was stomping it out, he heard Callie say, "And, Firecracker?" He glanced at her, his blue eyes catching honey brown. "You've got a bit of blood on your sleeve."

He glanced down, finding a small patch of red on the cuff of his right sleeve. He'd changed into these clothes after he'd washed his hands, but the suit had been covered in blood and he'd shoved it into his backpack in a dirty alley. It was possible he'd rubbed against it.

Still, bloody clothes weren't exactly out of the ordinary in his neighborhood.

"It's not mine," Jason said.

"Yeah," Callie said. Her eyes filmed with a knowing gleam. "I didn't think it was."

"It's gonna be a pain to get out of my jacket regardless, so I'm going to get started on that," he said. He was careful not to look away from her too quickly as he headed towards the door. "You want me to toss down some chips? Or turn the stereo on?"

"No," Callie said. "You just clean that jacket and get some sleep."

He held one fist above his head, thumb up, as he used the other to pull the building door open. "I don't have any problems with that plan."

The thing was that as much as Red Hood helped Gotham's bad neighborhoods, his original purpose was to gain Batman's attention.

Helping prostitutes, rerouting drug dealers, and taking out gang leaders just wasn't going to cut it.

Batman didn't approve of killing, not even the killing of people who took a fist to their kids or the leaders of Gotham's biggest gangs, and someone taking care of those things would catch his attention but never to the extent that people like Clayface and Black Mask did.
If he was going to do what he planned to do, then he was going to need all of Batman's attention. He was going to need Batman to care enough about him to care enough about chasing him that he wouldn't drop the chase just because the Joker had escaped from Arkham again.

Red Hood existed so Jason Todd could take the Joker and Batman out at the same time, but to pull that off Red Hood was going to have to do something that made Jason Todd sick to his stomach and cracked all the carefully crafted boundaries between his personas.

Because the one way to take Batman's attention off the Joker was to make Batman think he was going to lose another Robin - to make Bruce Wayne think he was going to lose another son.

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Tim crept up the stairs to the roof of Titan tower, domino mask in place and bo staff in his hands.

He'd already called the other Titans back, some of them were in the city and some of them were away with family, but he wasn't going to let whoever had tripped the alarms wreak havoc on his territory while waiting for them.

Changing into the Robin costume had taken more time than he would have liked, but he knew Bruce would kill him if he got caught outside the tower without it. Especially if it was a villain that caught him.

He turned the knob with one hand before backing up.

He pushed the door to the roof open with the end of his staff, making sure it slammed onto one of the walls so no one could hide there.

He stayed on guard as he approached the door. He swiped at the other side of the wall. When the staff went straight to the wall, he took a few steps out onto the rooftop.

He'd barely made it out the door before he heard someone say, "That was pretty smart. The other Robin would have come charging out without checking either side of the door."

Tim pushed down the rush of pain at the mention of Jason. Instead he looked turned around in a swift motion, extending the staff out in front of him as protection, and looked up at the person who had spoken.

Crouched on top of the towers air conditioning unit was a man in a sleek red helmet. What looked like black Kevlar stretched across his chest with a blood red imitation of the Bat symbol and he wore black pants that molded to his body just as tightly. The look was completed with silver holsters on each hip and a light brown jacket. Leather, probably.

He was crouched with one elbow propped up on his knee and his fingers curled into a fist. He was resting his chin on his hand.

If Tim hadn't been so angry at the symbol across the man's chest, he might have noticed that the pose was one he'd seen a million times in a cocky teenager that'd been a lot smaller.

Instead he was too busy choking down his anger to notice that.

He fought to keep his voice level as he said, "What makes you think there's more than one Robin?"

"You're pretty slender. You don't have nearly as much muscle on you as the last one," the intruder pointed out. "You could be the same boy and just have loss weight, but your shorter too."
Tim didn't say anything to that. He didn't think about how odd it was that someone had noticed the physical differences between himself and Jason when some of the villains they faced on a regular basis hadn't even figured out there were multiple Robins instead of just one inconsistent fighter.

Instead he focused on the man's appearance and came to a different realization. "You're Red Hood."

He'd done some intel work on Red Hood, but he was hardly Tim or Bruce's top priority.

"Yeah." He lifted the hand he wasn't supporting himself on and tapped the top of his helmet. "Kind of a misnomer isn't it? Considering this isn't really a hood."

"And what is it you want with me?" Tim asked. If he'd been thinking, he might have considered the possibility of some kind of voice module in the helmet changing the man's voice. As it was, his brain was running a thousand miles a minute and that wasn't one of the things he was focused on. "I'm not exactly your usual victim."

"No. No, you aren't." There was a small pause after the words, Red Hood's chest rising and falling as he took a deep breathe. If Tim hadn't been wondering how far Connor and Cassie were, because one of the two had to be getting close, he might have noticed how odd it was for Red Hood to be thrown off balance by a comment like that. Instead, his entire focus wasn't directed back at the Hood until he shifted. He placed his palms on his thighs and pushed himself to his feet. "But I need you to deliver a message for me."

Tim shifted his hands down his staff, getting a better grip on it, and bent his knees. Not quite a battle stance, but one that made it easy to drop into one. "And what's the message?"

"You. You're the message."

Tim barely had time to react before Red Hood launched himself off the air conditioner. The ensuing scuffle involved a lot more close combat than Tim was prepared for. If he'd been thinking about anything other than staying alive, he might have considered how strange it was that Red Hood was pressing into his space with bare fists when he had two guns in their holsters.

But he was so focused on the swing of his staff and dodging each hit sent his way that he didn't notice how close Red Hood was until the man ducked under his arm instead of throwing another fist at his face.

Before he could turn to face him or move his arms to jab his staff backwards, there was a forearm against his trachea and a needle jammed into his neck. Whatever he'd been injected with hit him fast, slamming right through all the immunities Batman had made him work up and making his knees wobble.

"What?" Tim said, voice slow and slurring. His staff fell out of his hands and he leaned backwards into the man holding him. Instead of letting him fall to the ground, the man tightened his grip and kept Tim upright. "What'd you...What'd you put in..."

The words were heavy and hard to come up with.

"Shhhh," Red Hood murmured. The arm that had been pressed against Tim's neck was pulled away. A moment later, Tim felt a cool hand push his bangs from his forehead. "Just let the drugs do what they're supposed to. It'll be so much easier if you don't fight it, baby bird."

Even with the drugs in his system making it hard to think, the pet name broke through the fog.
This was one clue that was impossible for Tim to miss, no matter what else was going on, because only one person had ever called him baby bird.

Baby bird belonged to a boy who hated strawberry banana smoothies and refused to take Tim to the museum the first time they hung out. Baby bird belonged to a boy who stuck his feet in dirty duck pond and took naps with him on the couch after a hard weekend apart. Baby bird belonged to a boy with bruised knuckles and split lips that Tim treated when they couldn't trust anyone else. Baby boy belonged to a boy who had gone to Ethiopia to find his mother and come back in a body bag.

Baby bird belonged to Jason.

The realization flashed through Tim's head, but the syllables were too heavy for his tongue and he could feel himself drifting towards unconsciousness.

In the last few moments before he passed out, Tim let his eyes shut and thought *Don't let me forget this. Please don't take him away from me again.*

When the Titans finally arrived back at the Tower, after receiving a communication from Robin that they'd later realize had been sent almost an hour earlier, they found Robin lying on the rooftop seemingly unharmed but surrounded by a message that been spray painted onto the roof.

Red Hood Was Here.

Chapter End Notes

1) This is a mobile chapter again so beware auto-correct and auto finish fucking my words up
Tim woke up with the sound of a distorted voice and a dead man's words echoing through his head. His eyelids felt heavy and his mouth like it was stuffed full of cotton.

He'd been sedated then.

There was a gray haze over his thoughts that made it hard to drudge up the knowledge he wanted, but vaguely he recalled the fact that some sedatives could induce hallucinations. The thing was, though, that Tim had been doped up with drugs that induced hallucinations before and while he'd certainly had hallucinations of Jason when on them, he had never hallucinated Jason in such a context. He hallucinated blue eyes and soft black hair and a full toothed smile and his name spoken with nothing but happiness. He didn't hallucinate a red helmet and an almost electronic voice and a nickname spoken as if it'd barely been thought about.

And if it was a hallucination than it was a hallucination that had started a lot earlier than Tim had thought it did because the nickname had been whispered as the drugs were working their way through his system.

Considering all of that, considering how unlikely it was that Tim would concoct such an elaborate fantasy when he already had ones that would be much easier for his brain to piece together and how self aware he would have had to have been drugged only to hallucinate being drugged later, there was really only one conclusion Tim could come up with.

"Master Tim." Alfred's voice washed over him, breaking through Tim's thoughts before he could fully consider the conclusion he'd come to. He turned his head slightly to see Alfred standing next to his bed, fiddling with an IV bag that was connected to Tim's arm. "I'm happy to see you've woken up."

His tongue felt heavy as he slurred out, "Wh't h'ppened?"

"You were attacked while you were at Titan Tower," Alfred said. "We brought you back to the mansion for recovery."

"'Cover?"

"You didn't sustain any injuries that weren't simple bruises, but you were given a heavy sedative," Alfred declared. That made sense, Tim decided. If the person under the helmet was who he thought it was than they wouldn't want to hurt Tim. That was something that wouldn't be fathomable for that person. "We're flushing the drugs out of your system slowly. You should feel well soon."

"'Kay."

"When you do, Master Bruce wishes to speak to you about the attack," Alfred said.

He still felt groggy and was having a hard time grasping onto his thoughts, but Tim knew Bruce would ask what he remembered, would push for details on it, would want Tim to give him any information Red Hood had left about his purpose or identity.
Tim also knew he would lie through his teeth before he actually told Bruce anything.

If Jason was the Red Hood, then it was going to be Tim who figured out why.

It took two days for Tim to be back on his feet, most of the grogginess had passed on the first but Tim had felt unusually exhausted the second day and spent it in bed, but once he was he dragged himself out of bed and out to Jason's grave for the first time since his death.

Tim felt a flurry of conflicting emotions as he trekked through the cemetery to reach the plot where they had buried Jason. There was grief pounding through his chest, heavy and suffocating. Seeing Jason's name on a headstone was something that he'd never been able to fathom, it had a scary amount of finality to it, but Tim had to push through that in order to validate the hope that burned right under it. Because if Jason was the Red Hood, then he had to have found his way out of that coffin somehow and there would be some kind of evidence of it. And hidden between both emotions was a burning rage and almost overbearing sadness. He was angry at the possibility that Jason had been revived and he'd chosen to stay away from Tim. When he started thinking about that though, he started wondering why it was that Jason had stayed away and that was were the sadness started. It started with the idea that Jason could see who he was now and hated the changes in Tim so much that he couldn't stand him anymore or that he just simply didn't want Tim anymore.

He preferred the anger to the sadness.

Tim felt so much on the way there, but when he reached it everything was swept away in a wash of relief and exhaustion.

Because it was so painfully obvious that Jason's grave had been disturbed. The grass wasn't freshly grown, but there was a quality to it that made it clear it was too new to have been growing since they'd first buried Jason. Then there was the way there seemed to be a dip were Jason was supposed to be buried, like someone had lost a few inches of dirt when refilling the hole.

Tim didn't know if Dick simply plopped down when he visited on Jason's birthday and sat talking to a headstone that he assumed Jason was under for hours without really looking at his surroundings. He didn't know if Bruce was so overcome with grief when he came by on fathers day to visit the son that he'd lost that he didn't realize how different that son's grave looked. He didn't know if Barbara came by and spent so much of her brilliant brain thinking about how close she had come to being the bat buried in the ground that she didn't notice anything wrong with where the brother she'd lost was. He didn't know if Alfred was so focused on thinking about how to keep the grandchildren he had left, because no matter how many times he called them "Master" that was what they are, safe that he didn't notice the changes surrounding the one he'd already lost.

All he knew was that Red Hood had called him baby bird and someone had disturbed Jason's grave.

All he knew was that there was a possibility that instead of someone digging into Jason's grave, someone had dug themselves out of it.

All he knew was that he needed to dig deeper into this situation, needed to find out exactly who had filled Jason's grave in and what they had seen, and get to the bottom of this before the hope in his chest flared any brighter. He needed to figure out exactly what was going on before he found something out that would suck all of it out of him and send him spiraling back into the state he'd been in the last time he'd been confronted with losing Jason.

Because losing even a half formed idea of Jason would be like facing his death all over again and Tim couldn't do that a second time.
"What do you want?" Jason growled when he picked up his business phone, the line that only the Red Hood's informants had the number for.

Between the security he had on his actual phone and the security in the apartment, he wasn't really worried about taking business calls while inside his place. Answering the phone to take calls that usually involved some kind of nastiness while wearing nothing but ratty sweatpants and stirring pasta on the stove did come with a certain sense of whiplash though.

It was moments like this that had Jason thinking about the choices he'd made.

Because when he was a kid, because he might have been fifteen when he died but god he was still such a child, he'd never imagined this. When he thought about moving out of the manor, he'd thought about some medium sized apartment that he'd share with Tim not an apartment that was almost too small for just him. He'd thought about looking out the window and seeing a parade of college kids because of course they'd live close enough to a campus for Tim to do his nerdy school thing, not stepping out on a tiny balcony that he'd littered with cigarette buds and seeing working girls looking for their next client. He'd thought about Tim and him and having a place where they could be alone while still interacting regularly with their family.

"Someone's been snooping around in that graveyard you told me to watch," Jason's informant said.

Jason forced himself to stop thinking about everything he could've had and focus on the words being spoken in the now. He'd already let those dreams be carried away from him and all that mattered now were the plans he had lined up in front of him.

"Who?" Jason asked.

He moved the spoon in his hand around. Business or not, he didn't particularly feel like being the guy who'd set off the fire alarm because he'd burned some mac and cheese. The fire department wouldn't show up for a while, most of them would have been all too happy to see this neighborhood burn, and his piece of shit landlord would keep them all waiting outside just so he didn't need to worry about getting sued if someone got hurt. Not that anyone in the building had enough money to be suing him. But it was the principle of the thing.

"I'm not really sure yet," his informant answered. "They haven't exactly shown their face or anything. They've just been digging into the system, looking at employment records and overtime slips."

Jason hummed in thought. Some people would have dismissed it, assumed it was simply some kind of organization making sure the cemetery was following policy or something, but there was a feeling buried under his skin that told him something was off here. It was like there was something in his mind, some memory, that he knew would lead to this but he couldn't exactly pin down what it was.

He hadn't had any face to face interactions with the Batman or Nightwing what he could have slipped up during.

He briefly considered his confrontation with Tim, but he didn't think he'd done anything to give himself away than either. He actually thought he'd done a pretty good job of reigning in his desire to scream at Tim for getting into this situation and he considered it an accomplishment that he hadn't bundled Tim up in a hug and refused to let him leave his side.

He'd been a mess during the whole encounter and he was actually kind of surprised he'd made it out of there without falling apart.
"Alright," Jason said. "Keep an eye on them. Let me know if they do anything else."

Obviously confused, his informant echoed back, "Anything else?"

"Yeah," Jason declared. "If they started trying to get in contact with the employees or looking too closely at anything."

"...Alright," he said. After a moment, he asked, "Boss, can I ask why exactly your so interested in this place? Don't people usually stop being your problem once they end up in a graveyard?"

"It's where I was buried when I was dead," Jason said, because there was really no point in lying about this. There was a pregnant, disbelieving pause that followed the announcement. This was why Jason didn't see a point in lying about it. No one ever believed him anyway. "Just keep an eye on the place and let me know if something happens."

Without any further commentary, Jason reached up and grabbed his phone. He tapped his thumb against the end call button before tossing it before him. He heard a soft thump as it landed on the couch.

Unless something actually happened at the graveyard, specifically at his grave, he had other things to worry about.

Like draining his pasta.

All things considered, the graveyard wasn't exactly at the top of Jason's priority list. He kept his informants around because he wanted to know if the Joker decided to stage some kind of grand battle on the grave of the kid he'd killed, but otherwise he didn't really think anything was going to come from it. He didn't know who had filled his grave in, but considering his family didn't seem to have any idea that he wasn't in it he assumed it had been done pretty soon after he crawled out of it.

Or maybe his family just didn't visit him.

He didn't know.

Considering how things had been between him in the family before he died, the way things had been with everyone except Tim, he wasn't exactly eager to find out either.

So instead of dwelling on that, Jason focused on the next phase of his plan.

Now that he had enough power in his hands and Batman's attention, it was time to step up his game.

It was getting intel on what Batman was looking into and figuring out the problem before he could, admittedly sometimes he didn't quite manage it but he was only one person and he didn't have Tim's genius brain on his side okay?, and solving the case before he could so the trail would go cold with nothing but a whisper of Red Hood's name in the wind. It was seeing the Bat symbol in the sky and getting there before him so that when Batman arrived the criminals were already tied up or dead with a message that made it clear who had done the deed. It was facing Black Mask and leaving his lackeys alive so they could squeal to their bosses about who exactly it was messing with their shipments and eventually coming face to face with the man himself. It was being the one who left one of Batman's greatest foes for the police to find.

Batman could sneer at death all he wanted, but the Red Hood wasn't afraid to kill and his method was getting things done more effectively than Batman's was. And after what Red Hood had done to Robin, there was no way Batman wasn't watching him enough to realize that.
It had taken Tim a few more weeks than he would have liked, but on a sunny Wednesday afternoon he walked out of a coffee shop in Gotham feeling like his world had just been shattered because Jason was alive.

He'd tracked down one of the graveyards former employees, someone who had been paid for overtime even though their time card didn't show them working it. It had been a long shot and Tim was fully expecting to strike out, but the second he introduced himself as Tim Drake they were telling Tim that something had happened and agreeing to talk to him about it.

They told him how at the end of a shift one day, they'd noticed something off about one of the graves. They'd went to check it out and found Jason's grave dug up, his coffin busted open, and no body in sight. Typical protocol said to call the police so the family could be notified, but their bosses had told them to fill the grave back in and act like nothing had happened. No one wanted to be the one who had lost the body of Bruce Wayne's son.

Tim had had a loose grip on his coffee cup for most of the meeting, but it was then that his fingers tightened and anger pulsed through him. If someone had notified them, Tim would have found Jason much sooner. He wouldn't have lived years of his life, because Jason had only been dead for six months, without Jason.

He could have had him by his side this entire time.

Of course that brought back the trickle of worry about why exactly Jason hadn't come to them, but Tim had analyzed Jason's actions as the Red Hood over and over again and come to one conclusion.

No matter what Jason's reasons were, they weren't about not wanting Tim. If he'd stopped caring about Tim he wouldn't have been so careful not to injure him during their fight and he wouldn't have comforted him when the drugs were kicking in. It was strange that he hadn't come to Tim right away when he was resurrected, however he was resurrected, but his actions weren't the actions of someone who had stopped loving Tim.

And that was really all Tim needed to know in order to track Jason down.

Tim stared at the video footage in front of him.

He'd put a photo of Jason into the Bat computer, burying his program under everything else the system held so the others wouldn't think to look for it, and set it to search out anyone with the same facial structure. He wasn't sure it'd actually work, people's entire face didn't tend to change in five years but Jason had been dead so he wasn't sure if the rules still applied here, but in almost no time at all he got a message telling him he'd gotten in a hit.

He'd sent the footage to his laptop and settled in at his desk.

Now he was watching in wonder as Jason walked up to the convenience store counter, hands shoved into the pockets of form fitting jeans, and asked the girl behind the counter for a pack of cigarettes. He listened as Jason, his voice deeper than Tim remembered but still so distinctively Jason, asked the girl about her night and watched as he propped his elbows up on the counter to listen to her talk about the kid she'd been babysitting.

Knowing Jason was alive was one thing, seeing him alive and walking was another.

His death didn't appear to have stopped his growth any because Jason's body had clearly changed. Tim's exact measurements were thrown off by the camera's angle, but Jason appeared to have grown
taller than both Tim and Dick. Jason had always been stronger than them as well, bulky and muscular where Dick and Tim were both slender and lean, but now that strength was more obvious in the way his shoulders had widened and the actual muscle he'd put on.

Jason, it seemed, had grown up to resemble Bruce more strongly than either of his other sons. Tim thought there was a sort of sick irony in that given the way Jason and Bruce's relationship had been before Jason's death.

In addition to the natural changes of his body, there was a single streak of white in Jason's hair. Jason had obviously swiped it off to one side because it rested horizontally just above his eyebrow.

Tim wondered why he'd done it. One of the first things you learned when training as Robin was not to have any identifying marks. The white streak wasn't an identifying mark, so much as it was a giant neon sign pointing Jason out in a ground. He wondered if Jason had done it to rebel, his way of separating himself even further from Bruce or if there was some other reason behind it.

Tim was dragged out of his thoughts by the sound of knuckles tapping against his door.

Tim barely had time to turn the screen of his computer so it wasn't visible before his door was opening and Dick was poking his head in, "Hey, Timmy."

"Hey," Tim said. He had to resist the urge to glance at his computer and make sure Dick couldn't see it. He knew he probably could have told Dick what was going on, Dick had been off world when everything with Bruce had went down and Tim knew Jason hadn't held any resentment towards him about it, but a large part of him didn't want to. Jason had been his more than he'd been any of theirs and he wanted time with Jason before everyone else got him. "What are you doing here?"

"Bruce and I are having lunch," Dick said. "I was wondering if you wanted to tag along? We'll make it a father-son thing."

Tim thought about how it wasn't a father-son thing because they'd need Jason for that to be true.

"Sure," he said. He stood up, shutting the top of his laptop as he went. "Where are we going?"

He'd figure out what to do about Jason after lunch.

"What the fuck do you-" Jason hissed out as he pulled his door open, irritated at whoever had been pounding on his door for the past five minutes. Clearly whoever it was didn't understand that him not answering the door in the first five minutes meant that he didn't want to fucking talk to them.

His words cut off abruptly when he realized it was Tim standing outside his door.

Tim was standing in the hallway dressed in dark jeans that molded to his thighs and a men's peacoat that was way too expensive to be anywhere near Jason's building. He was holding two white styrofoam cups in his hands.

There was something so different about seeing Tim dressed like this, seeing Tim dressed like a normal teenager, and seeing him in the Robin costume.

"I was going to bring smoothies since they've always been our thing, but hot chocolate seemed like a better idea considering how cold it's gotten recently," Tim said after a moment, speaking when Jason didn't. His eyes flickered from Jason's face down to his bare hip, "But I'm starting to think I should've brought a first aid kit instead."
Jason followed Tim's gaze.

He'd been so shocked by Tim's appearance that he'd forgotten about the stab wound he'd gotten earlier that evening. His hand was holding a bandage there, but there was a pretty large blood spot forming.

"I've got one," Jason said, because he couldn't think of anything else to say. "I was about to stitch it up when some asshole started trying to knock my door down."

Tim's lips twitched up in a small smile. He requested, "Let me in? I'll stitch it for you."

Jason should have said no. Jason had already decided not to spend this life with Tim, had already decided that it was going to be too short to drag Tim into, and he should have sent Tim away.

But no matter what Jason had decided, it was impossible to tell Tim no when he was right there.

He wasn't strong enough to look at Tim, the person who he'd loved for two life times and who was still the most important person in his life, and send him away.

"Sure," he said. He stepped back, pulling the door open wider. "You've always been better at it than me anyway."

Chapter End Notes

1) Aye guys! Guess who's not mobile any more? This girl! I'm sure there will still be errors, but hopefully not nearly as many as before.

2) On that note though, I am also starting college!! Like the day I'm writing this particular bullet point (because I write bullet points as they become relevant) is the day before my first day of classes. So, updates MAY slow down a bit? It just depends. My class schedule isn't very heavy - two poli courses, elementary Russian, and a sociology course - but who knows. You've all been super patient with me about that kind of stuff, but I still wanted to give you a heads up.

3) Jason is very dumb in this chapter which I feel is not accurate? But also it seems like Jason - as Red Hood - tries to be cautious and ultimately gets fucked up by Roy and his antics? So I thought in the absence of Roy, Jason needed to fuck things up for himself. Also just generally, not every superhero has the same level of paranoia that Bruce does? And I think that even though he technically trained Jason, Jason wouldn't follow him in that? He'd just take care of anyone who figured out he was Red Hood.

4) There's a section after Jason's scene where we go from Jason's thoughts to Tim's thoughts and than it goes straight from a Tim scene to a Jason scene. I'd love your guys opinions on whether or not you liked that? Was it too much thought without any scene breaking or was it okay?

5) I feel like maybe Tim jumps to the conclusion that Jason's alive for someone who very much believes in facts and science? However, I feel like Jason is an area where Tim would /want/ to believe no matter how much he talks about not wanting to get his
hopes up?

6) I think a lot of you weren't expecting a reunion so quickly, so I'm curious as to whether you actually liked them reunited here or if you would have liked it to take longer?

7) Also I knocked this chapter out so quickly you should be proud of me. I wrote the first 3K in a day and finished it up the next morning.

8) The title of this chapter is from a Sanober Khan poem.

9) Fact: Jason IS taller than all of his brothers as well as heavier than Bruce. I've always found it interesting that Jason resembles him the most considering he has the most strained relationship. On the note of Jason Todd's appearance - I am also trash for the white strip tbh. I think it's good symbolism.

10) I think the next chapter will be pretty fluffy in order to just write Jason and Tim being together again? But than we'll get back on the plot. I'm thinking only three or four more chapters?
Tim took a look around as he stepped into Jason's apartment.

The walls were made of faded red brick with all sorts of cracks and scratches etched into the clay. There was a large window with a painted black frame on the far wall. It was slid open showing off the fact that there was no screen. Immediately outside the window was a landing for the rickety fire escape that wound around the entire building. There were a few pieces missing out of the railing in front of it. The placement of the missing pieces made it look like someone had kicked the bars out in order to sit down on the landing and hang their legs off the side.

The door Tim had come in led straight into a living room area, though Tim could see a small kitchen beyond it.

There were hints of the Jason that Tim had always known, all over the apartment. He was in the dark bookshelf shoved against the wall that contained everything from classics with worn spines to the shiny new covers of recently published young adult novels. He was in the Wonder Woman throw blanket that was folded up and thrown over the back of the lazy-boy. He was in the collection of movies scattered across the entertainment center.

There were other things in the apartment, however, which reminded him that he and Jason had been living separate lives for the last several years of their lives. There was a picture of Jason with a broken collar bone, looking a little more like the Jason from Tim's memories but still having picked up some of his muscle, with a wide grin on his face and a kangaroo in the background. Surrounding the picture was a delicate glass bead necklace and a matryoshka doll painted so intricately that Jason had to have picked it up while in Russia.

They were obvious trinkets from places Jason had been while they were separated because one of the first rules Bruce had taught Tim was that they never collected souvenirs. Souvenirs could be traced back to a country that Batman or Robin had visited. And though it was easy to say they'd visited as themselves, given how much money they had as children of Bruce Wayne, Bruce would rather there be absolutely no connection to their travels.

Tim's eyes fell on the dark brown couch in the center of the front room. There was a small coffee table in front of it, the wood was the same dark black as the window frame so Jason had clearly made some attempt at keeping the look consistent, with a first aid kit open on top of it.

Tim let his feet carry in towards it.

He set the mugs of hot chocolate he was carrying on the table with the first aid kit before shedding his jacket.

"Do you want me to sterilize the needle again?" Tim asked as he crouched down in front of the couch.

There was an already threaded needle sitting on a gauze pad. He focused on picking it up while Jason settled onto the couch, lying down with his head on the end furthest from Tim and his wounded side near Tim.

"No," Jason said. "I already did it."
Tim hummed. He rolled the end of the needle between his fingers, watching as the sun streaming in the window glinted off the silver. "Are you sure?"

"Positive," Jason declared.

"Alright then."

Scooting a bit closer to Jason, Tim reached out and set a hand on Jason's hip. Feeling Jason's skin against his own, warm and alive, sent a shiver down Tim's spine.

"You gonna be able to keep your hands still, Timbo?"

"Yes," Tim answered without hesitation.

He glanced up at Jason. He was watching Tim, his eyes a mixture of curiosity and contentment and something that seemed like fear. Even after so many years apart, it was easy for Tim to figure out exactly what Jason was thinking. He was curious about who Tim was now, knew that Tim had changed and seen things the same way Jason had, but content with the fact that Tim was at least here with him. He was scared, not of the needle or stitches because those were common given their nightly hobbies, but of losing Tim again.

Tim thought he had more of a reason to be afraid than Jason did, but he didn't tell him that.

Instead he asked, "Ready?"

He didn't give Jason time to nod, to anticipate the pain, before making the first stitch.

"Oh," Jason said, inhaling sharply. "You little shit."

Tim's lips twitched in the barest hint of a smile, but he didn't say anything.

He did the first three stitches in silence before he asked, "What happened, Jason?"

Jason was silent for a moment. Tim thought that perhaps Jason would brush him off, that Jason would pretend that Tim meant what happened with his hip instead of what had happened after his death, but after a moment Jason said, "It's not a happy story, Tim."

"I want to know anyway," Tim said. He focused on poking the needle through Jason's skin as he added, "Wouldn't you want to know if it were me?"

Jason was quiet for another moment before he said, "Alright. But if it's too much you have to tell me, Tim. You have to tell me so I can stop."

Tim gave a small nod. "Okay."

So Jason opened his mouth and told Tim exactly what he'd been doing for the past few years.

Jason didn't need too many stitches so by the time Tim wrapped those up, Jason had only just finished describing what his rising was like.

When he was finished, he settled in for the long haul. He stretched his legs out in the space between the coffee table and the couch, shuffled close enough that his right shoulder was brushing against Jason's leg, and put both of his hands on the ground behind him so he could lean back and watch Jason's face as he spoke.
Tim knew that everything Jason told him while they were sitting there was true. Tim and Jason had never lied to each other, hadn't even hidden things from each other unless they were surprises, and they weren't about to start now they they were reunited.

He knew that Jason wasn't lying when he said that he didn't know what had gotten his heart beating again, but that he was living because Talia Al Ghul had found him living on the streets and tossed him into the Lazarus Pit. He knew that Jason wasn't lying when he said that he hadn't been planning on working with Talia until he'd shown him a picture of Tim in the Robin costume and he'd gotten so angry at Bruce for letting Tim fill in a space that had gotten Jason killed that he couldn't see any other way. He knew that Jason wasn't lying when he told him about all the people he met when Talia had sent him away for training. He knew that Jason wasn't lying when he talked about everything he had learned from those mentors and all of the things he had done with those skills.

By the time Jason wrapped up, Tim felt like he got it.

Jason's actions had been driven by two things and they were two things which Tim had always known were a part of Jason.

The first was his unwavering loyalty. Jason had always been an incredibly loyal person and once his loyalty was there it was there for the long haul. His primary loyalties had always been to his family and Tim, but when he thought Bruce had betrayed that loyalty by putting Tim in danger his loyalty had shifted to Talia. Even if Jason didn't have all of the correct facts about how Tim had ended up in the suit, Tim could understand why he'd reacted the way he had. Jason and Tim had always been each others priorities and if Tim thought Bruce had done something to place Jason in unnecessary danger, then he likely would have reacted the same way.

The second motivation for Jason's actions were his already grey morals. Maybe Tim should have been more affected by the idea that Jason would kill because he thought someone had done something inexcusable, but he had always known Jason better than anyone else. When they were younger he'd never actually thought Jason would go that far, not with how much he looked up to Bruce, but he'd known how Jason had started feeling like what he was doing didn't mean anything when those people he was putting away just kept breaking out and how violent Jason had the capacity to be. So the fact that Jason had reached a point where he saw killing criminals as a form of Justice? Well, Tim wasn't really that surprised with that.

He honestly even agreed with it a bit.

"And eventually we end up here," Jason said, wrapping his story up.

A few hours had passed. Tim had appeared relatively early in the morning, Jason usually ended his patrol around five or six and Tim had arrived not too long after him, but now the sun was streaming in through the window and Jason could hear the people on the street going about their days.

"Okay," Tim said with a small nod.

Jason waited a moment. When Tim didn't start chiding him for his actions or flat up walk out, he prodded at him with a soft. "Well?"

It wasn't like he wanted Tim to leave, he wasn't sure what it would do to him to actually have Tim walk out on him, but he knew how his family would feel about what he was doing. He knew how Bruce would lump Jason in with the very person who had killed him and how disappointed Dick would be even though he wouldn't be able to turn against Jason the way Bruce did.
Tim had let a lot of Jason's behavior slide when they were kids, had always been more accepting of Jason's aggression and irritation than Bruce or Alfred who often seemed like they had no idea what to do with it, but Tim had also been the one who truly understood what Jason's limits were. He'd stood by Jason's side when he got into the faces of people who treated their waitress badly or yelled at boys who cat called the girls on the street, but he'd also been the one to reign Jason in when those arguments turned into fist fights.

He'd been understanding up until the point where Jason had taken it too far.

Jason didn't know if Tim would consider his current actions going too far.

Jason wasn't really sure what he was going to do if Tim did because thinking Tim would disapprove of something and actively having Tim's disapproval were two different things in his world.

"Well," Tim said, dragging the word out. He looked so casual lounging on the floor in Jason's apartment. At home. It reminded Jason fiercely of the years before his death, when every space they entered was Tim-and-Jason's instead of just Tim's or just Jason's. "I think you've jumped to a lot of false conclusions about how I ended up as Robin and that maybe you've gotten a few of your wires crossed, but ultimately I'm just happy your back."

Jason watched as Tim swallowed, adam's apple bobbing, before he shifted. He crossed his legs under him and reached one hand up to grab one of the palms Jason had resting on his stomach.

Even after all this time, Tim's palm in his was a welcome.

It wasn't quite the same now, both of their hands had scars and callouses that they hadn't when they were teenagers, but the weight of it was familiar.

Tim flipped his fingers between Jason's, locking their hands together. He met Jason's eyes as he repeated, "I'm so happy your back."

"Happy to be back," Jason answered.

It was ill advised considering the fact that they'd just stitched his side up, but he pushed himself out of his lounged position and slipped off the couch.

Keeping their hands locked, he settled on the floor in front of Tim and mirrored his position. Jason was significantly bigger than Tim so it was a bit of a squeeze and one of Tim's knees was jamming into Jason's thighs, but the discomfort was worth the closeness.

He set their joined hands in the space between their laps and bent forward so his forehead touched Tim's.

He heard the shaky exhale Tim let out at the contact, his hand squeezing Jason's tighter.

Jason's voice was rough as he whispered, "Happy to be back with you."

They stayed like that for a while, enjoying the peace of mind and the feeling of utter rightness that came with being pressed closely together, before Tim's stomach let out a loud rumble.

Tim's face had gone abruptly pink. He'd apologized sheepishly, but Jason just shook his head and laughed it off.

Climbing to his feet, he led Tim into the small kitchen.
He forced Tim to sit at the table he'd shoved into the middle of the kitchen before looking for something he could cook them to eat. He ended up pulling out the ingredients for grilled cheese, bacon, and ham sandwiches. When Tim cleared his voice, giving Jason a sharp look that he remembered all too well considering how many times a week Tim had reminded Jason to eat a bit healthier before, Jason plucked the box of strawberries out of the fridge and shoved them under the faucet for rinsing. It wasn't the most traditional pairing, but Tim didn't protest it.

As Jason cooked, Tim told him what he'd been up to while they were separated.

Tim started with how he'd ended up in the suit.

Jason listened attentively as he buttered slices of bread and slapped them into the frying pan, but in the end it didn't change his opinion on Bruce any. Bruce could have told Tim no. Bruce could have spent every night tracking Tim down just to make sure he wasn't off trying to be a vigilante on his own. Bruce had had options other than just giving in to Tim's request for the suit and Jason couldn't forgive him for not taking them.

Tim was alive and in front of him, but the possibility that he could've been killed at any point in the last few years remained.

Jason couldn't tell Tim to leave the lifestyle, wouldn't even consider taking Robin away from Tim when it had clearly given him more comfort and confidence, but he wasn't going to let it slide that Bruce had let him enter in the first place. Much less that Bruce had let Tim put that suit on when the Joker was still alive.

Jason had always been the story teller out of the two of them, far more inclined to the subtle dramatics of it than Tim was, so Tim didn't take up half the day talking about his life.

He did, however, take the entire cooking and eating process as well as a few minutes afterwards.

Jason didn't mind.

They couldn't rewind time and go back to a time when they were together for virtually every minute of their days,

Honestly? It probably wasn't even a good idea to go back to those days.

While they'd never known each other as kids, they had still been children when they met. When you were that wrapped up in each other as children it was acceptable.

But when you were two adults in a relationship being so wrapped up in each other that you were always by each others side and could happily go days - weeks - months without any companionship other than each other?

Well that wasn't exactly healthy.

That being said, they weren't exactly two adults in a relationship.

They had been together as teenagers and there had been a silent understanding back then that they would be with each other until they died.

But well...Jason had died and he wasn't sure if Tim still wanted him.

"And eventually we end up here," Tim said, echoing Jason's words from earlier.
Jason was quiet, staring at the collection of crumbs and strawberry stems on his plate as he thought about everything Tim had told him.

Tim asked, voice soft and cautionary. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah, 'course," Jason said, flicking his gaze up so he met Tim's eyes.

"Jay."

Tim's tone made it clear that he knew Jason was lying to him and that he didn't like the fact that Jason was hiding something from him.

There was something about it, something about the fact that Tim was still able to read Jason's mind so easily and knew exactly when Jason was keeping things from him, that had Jason saying, "I just don't know where here is, Tim. I wasn't - I wasn't lying when I said I was happy to see you, god you have no idea how happy I was when I opened that door to see you on the other side, but I have no idea where we are right now Tim. We were crazy about each others before, and I'm still crazy about you, but we were only supposed to be together until one of us died. And well...my heart stopped beating."

Tim was quiet for a moment.

Jason had never been more afraid of being rejected by Tim than he was in that moment.

"You," Tim said, speaking slowly, "are the biggest idiot on this planet."

Jason blinked a bit before saying, "I am?"

"Yes," Tim said, voice firm and without a single doubt. He stood up from his chair, leaning across the table so he could bring their faces close together and put his hands on either side of Jason's face. "Listen to me. The one reason death was the end of our relationship was because death is supposed to be permanent. That doesn't mean I stopped being in love with you. It just meant I was miserable and certain I was going to die alone because the only person I wanted to spend my life with died far too early, understand?"

Jason nodded as best he could with Tim holding his face like he was. "Yeah. I get it. I just-"

"Good," Tim interrupted before Jason could finished. "Did you stop loving me when you died?"

Jason shook his head. "Of course not, Tim. I just-"

"Good," Tim interrupted before Jason could finished. "Did you stop loving me when you died?"

Jason shook his head. "Of course not, Tim. I just-"

"Nope, stop. I don't want to hear it," Tim interrupted with a shake of his own head. "Now I'm going to tell where I think we are now and then your going to tell me if you agree, alright?" Jason gave another nod, but didn't say anything. "Okay. From what I can tell we are two people who are in love and who will continue loving each other for a very long time. We were torn apart by what I'm pretty sure was the greatest tragedy of both of our lives, but we've been lucky enough to get a second chance. And now that we're in a position to take hold of that second chance, your wasting time worrying about whether or not I still love you instead of kissing me."

Jason had been planning what to say the second Tim started speaking so he came out with, "Okay, I get that I was being stupid, but can you really blame me for being-" He cut off abruptly as his brain registered the end of Tim's sentence. Feeling a little dumbstruck, he echoed, "Kissing?"

"If you want," Tim said. There was a blush crawling across his cheeks, but his lips were tipped up with amusement and he gave a small shrug of his shoulders. "I'm not thirteen anymore, Jason. I think
seventeen is plenty old enough for a first kiss, don't you?" Jason's tongue darted across his lips, still feeling a little off balance as he tried to figure out how to respond. Tim's lips turned down a bit as he suggested, "Unless you don't want to kiss me? Because as much as I'd like it, you really don't have to unless-"

"I want to," Jason interrupted. "I definitely want to kiss you, babybird."

"Yeah?" Tim said, his lips turning up again. Jason gave a small nod as a smile settled across his face as well. "What are you waiting for then?"

Jason didn't need to be told twice. He lifted his hands so he could grab Tim's waist, feeling Tim's pulse under his fingertips, and leaned forward until their lips touched.

At first it was just a soft touch, their lips barely brushing, but then Tim's fingers curled on Jason's cheeks and he let out a small breath.

Jason took it as permission to go for it, pulling Tim in for their first real kiss.

Chapter End Notes

1) Hello everyone! How are you all? I'm so happy that most of you enjoyed Jason and Tim's reunion, even if you weren't expecting it. Hopefully you enjoy this chapter as well!

2) This chapter was supposed to be happy fluff with them fitting back into each others lives, but it ended up being all reunion. Hopefully you all enjoy that?

3) I'm not sure if you guys are going to like the second section....I wanted to have Tim react to Jason and I thought that this way worked best but I know some of you may not agree with that? Considering hit list though, I don't think killing is a huge issue with Tim tbh.

4) This chapters a bit different format wise because it takes place over one day rather then several? Hopefully it still flows okay.

5) Honestly, I just don't see my Tim and Jason being the kinds of people who would take more than a day to to the point they're at in the end of this chapter. The two of them are a pair and there's a sense of that even after so many years apart. They wouldn't dance around their issues. They've always been too comfortable with each other for that.

6) So my goal was too finish this fic before I went to class. I'm posting this around 10:50 and I have to leave at 11:20 so mission accomplished!!

7) Not actually a lot I need to say about this chapter since I think it speaks for itself a lot? Your either going to love how this went down or hate how it went down and I can't change how you feel about it.
"Come on," Tim whined. "Tell me where we're going."

"Nope," Jason said, popping the p hard as he shook his head. Amusement was written all over his face, etched into his wide smile and the twinkle in his eyes.

For the last few weeks they'd spent most of their time together just hanging around Jason's apartment. Neither of them had been particularly eager to let other people into their bubble while they were finding their footing with each other. So Tim had been a bit thrown when he'd barely had time to toss his backpack into the corner before Jason was tugging him right back out of the apartment.

Now, they were walking around one of Gotham's middle class neighborhoods. Jason had one arm thrown around Tim's shoulders, the leather of his jacket cold against Tim's neck but somehow still comforting, and Tim had tucked himself into Jason's space. The harsh winter wind bit at both of their cheeks and tossed their hair around, but Tim's chest was full of warmth and he couldn't stop himself from grinning.

This was all so pleasantly normal. Walking down the street with his boyfriend's arm around him and anticipation heavy in his gut, not for a fight but for a date.

He knew it wouldn't have been such a big deal for some of the other Teen Titans, that Stephanie would laugh at him for being so enchanted by such a normal thing, but Tim had lost Jason when he was thirteen. They'd never gotten to do stuff like this. They'd always been something more than friends, but calling Jason his boyfriend or calling their outings dates had never occurred to him. At thirteen and fifteen it hadn't occurred to put those labels on things. They had just been enjoying the fact that they were by each others sides and spending as much of their time together as possible with the knowledge that the rest of their lives were going to be spend this way.

"I can't even have a little hint?" Tim requested.

Jason shook his head again. "I told you, babybird, it's a surprise. That means you don't get anything until we get there."

"Why not?" Tim said, aware that he was whining just a bit. Having been raised, primarily, by Gotham's greatest detective meant that Tim was horrible when it came to having things kept from him. He'd been trained to constantly examine the world around him and figure out the secrets that were being kept from him. "Even little kids get to shake their Christmas presents, you know?"

"We never got to shake our Christmas presents," Jason pointed out. "So why would I give you a hint now?"

A pout settled on Tim's lips.

Technically, Jason was right. Alfred would have scolded them for shaking their Christmas presents, but they had never shook their Christmas presents because there had been nothing to gain from it. Jason's presents were usually carefully wrapped first editions which wouldn't make a noise when shook and Tim's had been delicate things like camera equipment that couldn't be shook for fear of breaking.
But he really wanted to know where they were headed and if Jason wasn't going to tell Tim, then the least he could do was give him a hint so he could figure it out on his own.

"Besides," Jason continued, his fingers were resting against Tim's chest and he drummed them in place, "we're almost there."

"We are?" Tim said.

"Yup."

Tim had been focused on Jason, but now that he knew they were close to their destination he looked away from Jason in order to take in their surroundings.

At some point they'd stepped away from the businesses lining the street and entered a small park. There were small children bundled up in enough layers to make them look like marshmallows playing on the playground equipment while their parents watched them from the snow covered benches and other teenagers hurling insults as they whipped snowballs at each other. There were a few people with their dogs, a young woman had let her Alaskan Malamute off it's leash so it could bounce around in the snow drifts and a man was laughing as he was pulled his pug out of a particularly large pile of snow and cuddled the animal to his chest fondly, and a few more that were just strolling through with a steaming cup in their hand.

"We're here," Jason said, interrupting Tim's assessment of their surroundings. "Told you it wouldn't be much longer."

Pulling his attention back, Tim found that the two of them were standing in front of a silver cart with an icy blue umbrella over it and matching letters reading 'Sno-Cones!' on the front.

"Sno cones?" Tim questioned. He could feel a smile stretching across his lips. "We're getting sno cones in the middle of winter?"

"Yup," Jason said with a small nod. He was radiating absolute confidence and amusement in his choice, like it hadn't even occurred to him that they should get anything else. He pulled Tim along with him as he walked up to the cart, "I'm gonna get a strawberry-mango one. What about you?"

"Mmm..." Tim hummed as he thought about it, letting his eyes skim over the list of flavored that was attached to the bottom half of the cart. He was kind of impressed by how large it was considering how small the cart was. "I think I'm gonna try root beer and s'more."

"Sounds interesting. I'll share mine if you share yours."

"Yeah," Tim agreed without any hesitation. Sharing something with Jason, be it a sno-cone or his life, was something he never had to think about it. It was natural for the two of them to do things like that. "I'm down."

They start going out more often after that.

Nowhere near as frequently as when they were kids, but two or three times a week the two of them would spend their afternoons out.

Some days they would just stop at a coffee shop for drinks, Jason getting something with a ridiculous amount of chocolate and whipped cream while Tim ordered simple black coffees to dump cream in or hot chocolate, then spend their afternoons walking around Gotham aimlessly. They'd tell stories about the time they'd spent apart, Tim talking about his mornings in the manor and his school days
while Jason told him edited versions of what he'd been up to during that time, as they walked with their gloved hands intertwined while they held their coffees in the other. Some days a particularly childish urge would fill them and they'd spend their afternoon playing in the snow with the children who lived in Jason's building. They'd hurtle snowballs at each other from behind child-sized barriers or help the little kids place the heads on their snowmen or fall back into the snow to add their own snow angels to the collection in the front yard.

Some days Gotham's winter weather was so brutal that they spent their days out in warm, cozy venues.

They'd go to small diners where they could fill their stomachs with hot fries and apple pie. They didn't go to the same diners that they'd gone to as kids, but Jason made friends with the people at their new favorites as quickly as he had at the old ones. In what seemed like no time at all they had waitresses that referred to them by their names and insisted on giving them the biggest slices of pie so that Tim would fatten up. Sometimes they went to the movie theater. When they did they always left the arm rests between them folded up so that they could curl into each others sides. They'd hold Twizzlers and Nerd Ropes out for the other to bite off and dump Reese Pieces and M&M's into each others hands when requested.

As much as Tim enjoyed going out with Jason, there were some days when the two of them would spend their day in Jason's apartment.

Sometimes this meant Tim came over right after school and spread his textbooks out on the kitchen table so he could work. Jason would supply him with hot chocolate and encouraging kisses against his hair on those days, but otherwise he stayed in the living room to make his way through his latest novel so he wasn't distracting Tim. Sometimes it was Jason who had work to do, sitting at the table with a deep frown on his face he read through files or looked at things on his laptop, and Tim had learned to just plop down on the couch with his laptop to occupy himself on those days. Jason didn't like being reminded of Tim's presence when he was handling the criminals the Red Hood dealt it and while Tim didn't necessarily agree, he was Robin and he'd handled more than his far share of disgusting criminals, he wasn't going to push it.

Sometimes their days in the apartment were spent together. They'd curl up on Jason's couch, Jason wearing nothing but sweatpants and Tim in whatever borrowed clothes he'd snagged from Jason's drawer, and throw a blanket over them while they spent the day catching up on their favorite television shows. They steered away from TV shows that reminded them of their lives too much, preferring Netflix's Sense8 and Voltron over their series on fake superheros and watching Steven Universe or Suits over Criminal Minds and Law & Order. Sometimes Tim would lay down on the couch, putting his head in Jason's lap and claiming one of Jason's hands in order to play with his fingers, and demand that Jason read to him for a while. Jason never had a problem with going with the flow on those days. He'd pluck whatever book he had lying on the side table up and start it wherever he felt like, sometimes it was the beginning and sometimes it was the middle of the book.

No matter what they were doing, Tim was always filled with this feeling of incredible warmth and rightness.

He'd gotten so use to the hollow feeling that came from believing Jason was dead that he'd almost forgotten how amazing it felt when Jason was by his side.

Jason was quiet as he pushed his bedroom door open, careful not to make enough noise to disturb the figure curled up on his bed.

He'd been surprised when Callie stopped him on his way into the building after his patrol to tell him
that "his boy" had come by earlier and never came back out. He and Tim were spending a lot of time together, but Tim hadn't spent the night yet. Though, if Jason was being honest, that was less because they wanted to spend their nights apart and more because if Tim spent too many nights out than Bruce was going to get suspicious as to where exactly his youngest son was going.

Making sure to move as quietly and possible, Jason went about stripping off his clothes. He shoved all of his under armor into the bag that he carried his helmet and the most recognizable parts of his costume into before tossing the whole thing under one of the loose floorboards. He'd have to clean it all later, but at this precise moment he was feeling exhausted and concerned about the boy in his bed.

He replaced the armored uniform with a pair of ratty Superman pajama pants, leaving himself shirtless despite the fact that there was still a slight chill in the spring air coming in the window, before making his way over to the bed.

Jason wasn't terribly too surprised when Tim shifted the second his knee made contact with the mattress, remembering the days when he'd been Robin and Tim would always wake up when Jason left for patrol and again when he came back from it.

"J'sn?" Tim murmured, voice thick with sleep.

"Yeah," Jason said, keeping his voice pitched low. He didn't want to speak too loudly and rouse Tim anymore than he already had. "It's just me, babe."

Jason crawled up the bed and settled himself on Tim's left. Almost immediately, Tim rolled over so the two of them were chest to chest. He wrapped one of his legs around Jason's and buried his face in Jason's neck. After years of sleeping in the same bed as children, Jason was hardly thrown by Tim's clingy sleep tendencies so he just threw an arm around Tim and let it happen.

"Sorry about sleeping here. I know your worried about Bruce following me," Tim said, soft words brushing against the sensitive skin at Jason's neck and sent a shiver down his spine. As used to it as he was, now that they were older his body had quite a few different reactions to having Tim so close to him.

"It's fine, babybird," Jason answered. Using the hand of the arm he'd thrown around Tim, he played with the strands of hair at the nape of Tim's neck. "I want you here. I'm definitely not going to object you crawling into my bed, but are you sure your okay?"

"No, but knowing you're here is making it better." Jason felt Tim's arms tighten around him. "Don't leave me again, alright?"

Jason's heart broke a little in his chest.

Not for the first time, he wished he'd never gone to Ethiopia. He wished he hadn't been so upset with Bruce that he'd thought he needed to seek out a new family. He wished he would have let Tim convince him to stay, convince him to talk to Bruce. He wished he'd made any choice other than the one that had gotten him killed and left Tim feeling so alone.

He wished he'd been strong enough to turn Tim away when he'd shown up at his door with hot chocolate in his hands.

He wished he'd made different choices in this second life of his so that he wouldn't die a second time and leave Tim alone again.

But he hadn't and he had no illusions about how his final showdown with the Joker and Batman was going to go down.
"I won't," Jason said. He choked down the bile that rose to his throat whenever he lied to Tim. He pressed his lips against Tim's temple, repeating words that he knew weren't true. "I won't."

Knowing that he was going to be dying again sooner rather than later meant that Jason wanted to spend as much time with Tim as possible. He wanted to spend whatever time he had left, whatever time it took to get his plans finalized and everything in place, with Tim.

He knew it was selfish. He knew it was wrong of him to monopolize Tim's time and focus all of Tim's attention on him when he wasn't planning on sticking around. He knew he shouldn't let Tim get used to having him around again when he was going to be dying again, but as much as he didn't want to hurt he also couldn't deal with the idea of living his life without Tim by his side.

Jason hated himself for it, but he didn't make any attempt to fix it.

Instead he soaked up all the time with Tim he could.

Tim staying the night that first time seemed to open the floodgates for him to start spending more nights with Jason.

So on the weekends Tim would tell Bruce and Alfred he was staying with a friend, technically not a lie, or that he was going to San Francisco for the weekend, always a lie, and Jason would wake up with Tim wrapped around him like a koala on a tree. He always slept better on those nights than the nights when Tim was at the manor.

Days when Tim had stayed the night had a very different routine than days when Tim didn't.

Instead of sleeping until noon or later, Jason would pull himself out of bed early and make the two of them breakfast. Sometimes it was omelets made with bacon, mushrooms, and liberal amounts of cheese. Sometimes they were waffles with sugar powered sugar and every flavor of berry in his fridge. Sometimes it was chocolate chip pancakes that could be smothered in maple syrup and slathered in butter. Most days Tim was too out of it in the morning to do anything other than lean against Jason and shovel food into his mouth until he'd gone through two or three cups of coffee, but sometimes Tim woke up early enough to chide Jason for the health of his breakfasts. On those days, Jason turned on the small radio on the kitchen counter and distracted Tim with horrible renditions of One Direction or Selena Gomez or whatever else was playing on the radio that morning.

On the weekends, their afternoons had a slower rhythm to them. They weren't in any rush to finish work for the next day and it didn't feel like there was a clock ticking down to win Tim had to leave. Without that rushed feeling, they were free to just laze around the house in a way they usually didn't. Tim liked to sprawl himself on top of Jason and pull a blanket over both of them then lead Jason in meandering conversations. Usually they had heated debates about stupid questions - things like would you rathers or a million dollars but... - or discussed the things that'd they'd heard around town. On one afternoon like that, Tim had mentioned a concert he wanted to go to and Jason had made sure to snag them tickets. Sometimes Tim would start telling stories about his friends and Jason would fill him in on some of the more mundane things that had happened during his travels. On days when Jason was feeling particularly mellow, Tim would start talking about their family and what everyone had been up to that week.

With more time together, the weekend evenings became their time to go out on proper dates. Neither of them really had any objection to just spending their time in each others presence, but having the ability to go out and go things made them feel a little bit more like normal people their ages. Neither of them had any desire to give up the night time activities which set them apart from other teenagers, but it was nice to pretend sometimes.
So they go out before their patrols on the weekend. There wasn't a whole lot of consistency to either of them, they just went to whatever sounded interesting enough to capture their attention. They went to the bigger concert halls in order to see Fall Out Boy and Fifth Harmony and they went to small coffee shops to see Gotham's hottest talent. Sometimes they went to New York to see Next to Normal or The Tempest in the theatre district and sometimes they'd go see high school productions of Arsenic and Lace or The Addams Family. Sometimes Jason talked bouncers into letting them into the clubs downtown so they could spend the night dancing and laughing at drunk people and sometimes the two of them would drive out to the massive raves Tim heard about from his classmates.

For all that Jason was willing to wrap himself around Tim, to go back to spending so much time with Tim that they were considered a duo more than they were considered individual people, there were still things that Jason held back from. Lines that Jason wouldn't cross when he knew he would be staying in Tim's life.

Tim and Jason were situated on the couch. Tim was straddling Jason's lap with his shins against the cushions and they were taking full advantage of the fact that it put them at optimal lip-locking height.

Tim had been perfectly satisfied with their relationship without the make-outs, but he definitely thought they were a bonus to being together again now that they were teenagers.

"Jason," Tim murmured, the name falling from his lips in a punched out moan. Jason let out a soft sound that fell between a groan and moan, leaning forward to chase after Tim's lips. Tim leaned back, confident in the fact that Jason's hands on his lower back would keep him from falling completely, just enough to be out of reach. "Stop, stop."

Jason did, immediately. His hands were still on Tim's back, keeping him from falling, but he leaned backwards himself. There was worry in his eyes as he said, "Sorry. Too much, babybird?"

"Not enough," Tim corrected with a shake of his head. He'd had his fingers tangled up in Jason's hair, but now he let his fingertips trail along Jason's skin. He couldn't help the way his smile stretched a little wider at the feeling of Jason's biceps under his fingers, of the reminder of just how built his boyfriend was. He trailed them all the way to the hem of Jason's shirt. Playing with the edge, he said, "Want this off."

For a moment, one beautiful glorious moment, Tim thought Jason was going to do it.

Then Jason shook his head. He tapped Tim's thigh lightly, "Time for you to move, babe."

Not wanting to push it, Tim slid off Jason's lap and onto the cushion next to him.

Feeling confused and hurt, Tim couldn't help blurtling out, "Do you not want me?"

Jason turned to look at Tim, wide eyed shock and confusion in his eyes. "What?"

"Are you not attracted to me?" Tim asked, even though he knew he was being ridiculous. Nothing about the way Jason treated him when they were making out, or when they got close to going further, indicated that Jason didn't want to have sex with Tim. It just indicated that something was stopping him from it. He might have considered the idea that Jason didn't want Tim to see his scars, but Jason had never been shy about walking around the apartment shirtless when Tim was over so he doubted that was it. "Is that why you don't want to do anything but make out?"

"What?" Jason repeated. "Tim, have you seen yourself? You're pretty much every wet dream I've ever had."
"Then why?" Tim questioned. Under other circumstances he might have been flattered by Jason putting his attraction to Tim in such a positive way, but he couldn't help feeling even more hurt that Jason found him attracted and wanted him but still wouldn't do anything. "Everytime we get anywhere near going further, you pull back." Jason didn't answer right away, so Tim added, "It's not like it's a problem if you don't want to have sex, I still love you, but not knowing what's going on here is just hurting me."

A flash of guilt crossed Jason's face.

"Babybird," Jason said. He scooted close to Tim, pressing their thighs together even though Tim had moved enough that they weren't touching when Jason had told him he wanted to stop. "It's not that, okay? It's just-" Jason paused like he was trying to figure out how to explain what he wanted to say. After a moment he continued, "You said I was your first kiss right? So I'm pretty sure I'm going to be your first for this too. I want to make sure this is good for you okay? I want to make sure it's something you deserve. Not just a dirty couch in my shitty apartment."

"I like your shitty apartment," Tim grumbled, because it was true. Jason's apartment was starting to feel more and more like their apartment these days. It felt permanent and secure.

"So do I, but that doesn't mean it's the right place for this," Jason said. He reached out, brushing strands of Tim's hair away from his eyes. "My first time sucked, okay? I'm not saying it didn't feel good, because it did, but I felt like shit afterwards because all I wanted was to be by your side and being with them felt so wrong. I know it's already going to be different for you since it'll be me, but I just want to do it right, okay?"

Tim bit down on his lip. He got what Jason was saying. For all that virginity was a stupid man-made concept that didn't actually mean anything, the first time they had sex would mean something to the two of them.

"Alright," Tim said at last. He gave a small nod of agreement. "But I don't want to wait forever because you think I deserve some big grand thing okay? All I want is you."

Something flickered across Jason's face, guilt or pain, but it was gone before Tim could examine it too closely.

"Okay," Jason said. He moved his hand so he was cupping Tim's jaw and leaned in to press a quick peck against Tim's lips. "No grand gestures. Just whenever it feels right."

"Good." Tim shifted around so he was sitting with his legs out in front of him and his back against Jason's arm. "Now since you nixed making out, give me the remote. I wanna catch up on My Strange Addiction."

Chapter End Notes

1) Hello fam. I am so excited to write this chapter because it is all happy post-death boyfriends.

2) This weeks chapter title was brought to you by Boys Like Girls "Two Is Better Than One"

3) http://www.1-800-shaved-ice.com/flavor-list.html
4) Following that, what's your favorite sno cone combination? I'm a lemon-lime and blue raspberry bitch.

5) So notice how note one is all like "happy post-death boyfriends" but then section two of this got super depressing? That's because this was supposed to be happy but then Jason decided to be an angsty little bit in section two and it turned the WHOLE rest of the chapter into angst. Hopefully you enjoyed part one and the happiness in the interludes? The little snippets of them being happy even while Jasons being a fuckbucket.

6) The above being said, I do love the angst that comes with Tim being so happy and yet having no idea whats going on behind the scenes while Jason's having this super sad monologue.

7) I don't like the New Jersey Devils, but I really like hockey so they got a mention.

8) Jason and Tim's music tastes are wide and varied, because I honestly don't have the energy to be a music snob. Hence them going to both a Fall Out Boy concert because their awesome and a Fifth Harmony concert because their awesome.

9) For anyone who forgot this detail of this story - I absolutely stan Jason's love of all things drama. I think he'd definitely be a Shakespeare hoe most of all, because he's also a top notch slut for classic Literature, but also he's trash for Broadway.

10) I feel like it's taken me forever to get this chapter out?? and I sincerely apologize for that.
"That was fun," Tim remarked as he stepped outside. Jason followed behind him, eyes casting around automatically as they stepped onto the street. "I didn't expect it to be that entertaining."

Jason snorted, stepping up to Tim's side once he was sure there wasn't any immediate threat. Tim took a side step to get closer to him immediately, grabbing Jason's hand in his own and linking their fingers together. "What was it you were expecting then?"

The two of them had been at a slam poetry session held in a cafe in downtown Gotham. The inside of the building had been warm, both in temperature and atmosphere, but now that they'd stepped outside there was still a chill in the wind that bit at their cheeks and their breath came out of their mouths in gray wisps. Spring was approaching, but winter hadn't given up it's hold on Gotham quite yet.

Tim hummed softly in thought. "I'm not sure. I think I was expecting something a lot more...mellow maybe?"

"Mellow?" Jason repeated. He turned his head up, looking at the few stars that could penetrate Gotham's fog. "I guess I can understand where you got that, but it's all about emotion you know? It's hard to be mellow about things when you're talking about things that people feel. I can't listen to someone talk about their experiences with racism or rape or abuse without feeling something."

"Yeah," Tim said. There was a tone in his voice that made it clear he was thinking about one specific poem he'd heard over the night. Jason knew exactly which one it was too. There had been a girl who performed a poem about the recent death of her absentee mother. Tim's parents had died while Jason was with Talia, but he knew Tim was thinking about them while listening.

"It's why I like the breaks before performances," Jason said. "Going to get coffee and talking to the people around you gives you time to get a handle on those feelings. The break is therapeutic to the audience the same way the poetry is to the performer."

"Which one do you prefer?"

Jason looked over at Tim, "What do you mean?"

"Which do you find more therapeutic?" Tim clarified. He turned so he was looking at Jason as well, rather then looking at the sidewalk in front of them. "Listening to others or performing yourself?"

"Wouldn't know," Jason said. Writing had been a hobby of Jason's for years. Alfred had suggested it, way back when Jason had first moved in, as a way to handle his emotions without using his fists. He'd stopped doing it when he was with Talia, but he'd started back up again recently. He wasn't surprised Tim had noticed. "I've never actually performed."

"Why not?" Tim asked. "You've always liked performing."

Jason gave a dry laugh. "I think I'd be hard pressed to find an audience that would understand what I was talking about when I described death to them." He didn't think it'd be hard to find an audience that would understand when he talked about leaving someone he loved, but he wasn't particularly keen on thinking about that before he had too much less performing that.
"I don't know about that," Tim drawled. "I think you'd have a fairly decent sized audience if we populated it with superheros."

It shocked another laugh out of Jason, this time more amused then sarcastic. He let go of Tim's hand in order to sling his arm around his shoulder and tuck Tim against his side. Tim went without any protest and reached up with his other hand to grab the one Jason had resting near Tim's chest.

Jason joked, "Only if I can perform as the Red Hood."

Tim let out a sharp laugh, sounding every bit as amused and happy as Jason felt, "Can you imagine their faces?"

The fluctuating temperature meant that there was little routine to how they spent their afternoons together.

When it was nice outside, sunny and warm with the promise of spring, the two of them would go out. They were both the type of people that generally appreciated the indoors more than the outdoors, but Jason had learned to appreciate the warmth of the sun on his skin after digging his way out of a cold buried coffin. Sometimes they would go to a park and spend the afternoon reading under a tree as children ran around playing or they'd sit on one of the benches and spend the afternoon talking themselves hoarse. Sometimes they would grab lunch from a hot dog or sandwich stand. After they ate, they'd spend the afternoon walking around with their hands linked as they peered into store windows. When one of them saw something they liked in the window, the other would tug them into a store by their hand so they could look around.

When it was cold, Gotham clearly not having gotten the message that the year was moving on, they'd spend their days inside the apartment. Going out in the cold weather had been fine during the winter, but they were sick of the cold now and preferred to stay inside. On those afternoons they would pull the extra blankets and pillows out of the cabinets to build themselves a fort in the living room. They'd use the fire from Jason's gas stove to make s'mores and crawl under the blanket with flashlights to eat them while sharing sweet kisses. Sometimes they would feel the chill the second they woke up and make an immediate decision not to deal with it. They would spend those days in bed, cocooned in the blankets with their arms wrapped around each other and their legs tangled together. Those afternoons were spent whispering quietly about whatever popped into their sleep ridden brains. Sometimes they shared their dreams - Tim had a particularly hilarious one involving Dick in his old Nightwing costume and an eighties roller rink - and sometimes they asked each other stupid hypotheticals - Jason once asked if Tim would rather give up chocolate or change his last name to Hitler - that they were too sleepy to sort through.

No matter what the weather was, Jason was happy and being happy made him so incredibly sad because he knew it wouldn't last.

It never did.

"Master Timothy," Alfred said as Tim slid into the dining room. The table was already covered in side dishes and Alfred was standing next to Bruce's chair with a large cut of meat in front of him and a carving knife in his hand. He glanced away from what he was doing, fixing Tim with a disapproving look. "You've arrived just in time for dinner."

Dick let out a low whistle, "Cutting it close there, Timmy."

Tim flashed Alfred a small, sheepish smile. "Sorry, Alfred. I lost track of time."
He'd been a bit behind on his homework, having been busy with his Robin duties when he wasn't with Jason, so he and Jason had gone to the library once Tim was out of class. Tim had gotten a lot of work done, but at the end his vision had been swimming with numbers and Jason had dragged him into one of the loungers in the library to cool off. Tucked into Jason's side and listening to him read the library's copy of Treasure Island allowed, he'd lost track of time and forgotten about the family's mandatory Friday dinner.

He was honestly surprised he'd made it in time.

As he walked to his seat, he let his eyes roam over the table.

Bruce was seated at the head of the table. He'd stripped the more formal parts of his work suit away, leaving him in white button up with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and a pair of slacks. His face had smoothed out in the way that it always did when he was more focused on his family than on his work at Wayne Industries or his work as Batman. The seat directly opposite Bruce had tableware set in front of it, but no one sitting there yet. Alfred would take his place there once everything had been set out. Most days Alfred didn't eat with them, which Tim thought was a little ridiculous, but Fridays were for family and Bruce had put his foot down about Alfred not joining them for them.

Dick was sitting to Bruce's left with Barbara sat next to him. Even with their break-up and Dick's relationship, they still sat together. Tim had a feeling that at the beginning it had been related to Jason's death, no one wanted to throw Tim's life further off balance when he was so obviously in pieces, but now it seemed like they were sitting together because they're friendship had mended and they genuinely enjoyed spending time together when Dick was in Gotham. Tim tried very carefully not to think about what that meant for Dick's relationship with Starfire. Barbara and Dick had always been a fact in his life, Tim had been there for most of their relationship and he knew just how well they worked together, and Tim had never really shaken the idea that they were an inevitability. That didn't mean he wanted Starfire to get hurt, though. He liked her, even if he didn't think she'd ever be his sister.

The seat immediately to Bruce's right was Tim's. It was where Jason had sat when Friday dinners had first started, back when Tim wasn't really considered family yet and Dick was just beginning to fix his relationship with Bruce, but when things had gotten rough between Bruce and Jason they'd switch seats. It put Tim closer to Bruce and Jason closer to Alfred which, at the time, had been best for everyone involved. Tim hadn't moved seats since then.

As he walked to his seat he reached out and let his fingers brush against the back of Jason's. He wondered what Jason would look like if he sat in that chair now. At fifteen Jason had been big, but at twenty Jason was **massive**. He'd fit in the chair, but Tim didn't know if it'd be exactly comfortable.

A small smile settled on his lips as he thought about it. He knew Jason wasn't ready to face their family again, but he liked the idea of Jason being here with them again. He liked imagining a day when they could sit side-by-side in the manor with the knee touching under the table and their shoulders bumping everytime Tim reached for a dish or Jason got too animated while telling a story. He liked imagining what it would be like to hear Jason rave about the latest books he'd read to Alfred or to hear him talking to Bruce about ways he thought Bruce could improve the Wayne's charities or to hear him exchanging teasing conversation with Dick. He liked imagining what it would be like to stand up after dinner, hugging everyone goodbye and kissing Barbara on the cheek, and link his fingers with Jason's so they could go to their apartment together.

"Tim...." Dick's voice, tone cautious and a little sad, drew Tim's attention away from the image in his head.

Looking around, he realized that everyone in the room was staring at him with expressions full of
sadness and pain. He remembered all at once that none of them knew Jason was alive and that to them him lingering over a seat where Jason had sat meant something entirely different.

Tim looked away from Dick, taking the last few steps to reach his chair. As he pulled it out, he mumbled another small, "Sorry."

There was a brief moment where the entire room seemed to stand still. Then Alfred reached out to continue cutting into the veal he'd cooked for dinner and Dick leaned forward to grab his glass. For a moment, the only noise in the room was the sound of Alfred's knife hitting the bottom of the plate and the ice cubes in Dick's glass clinking against each other.

"Tim," Bruce said, his voice cutting through the tense atmosphere. "How much longer are you planning on staying in Gotham?"

"I haven't decided yet," Tim said. He was a little surprised by the question. Bruce had never out right said it, but Tim knew he didn't like it when Tim spent extended amounts of time in San Francisco. A lot of them stemmed from Jason having been killed in Ethiopia, so far away that Bruce couldn't make it to him in time. "Why? Is something happening in San Francisco?"

"No," Bruce said with a small shake of his head. "You've just been here for a while. I thought it might good for you to head out and see your friends again."

Bruce was worried about him then. He thought Tim was feeling Jason's loss as acutely as he had back when it first happened and wanted to give Tim the opportunity to get away from the manor which had memories of Jason around every corner. He wanted Tim to be around people who he could find comfort in without constantly being reminded of times they'd all spent with Jason.

Tim was touched by how much Bruce cared, even if it wasn't necessary.

"I like being here," Tim said, honest. He added, "I know I have a duty to the Titans, but it's been a while since I was in Gotham for very long. I just want to spend some time with everyone that I've missed."

Tim hadn't exactly been out of contact with the Titans, the group chat they had was constantly going off and Stephanie lived in Gotham while Connor was more than willing to fly there for a few hours, but he and Jason had always had a habit of getting completely absorbed in each other. They'd always found it easy to focus completely on each other, to get so wrapped up in their world that they forgot others existed. While they weren't anywhere near as bad as they'd been prior to Jason's death, Tim knew he'd definitely been neglecting his friends since he'd reunited with Jason.

So even though he wasn't sure why, if they'd just started missing him more or if Dick and Bruce had mentioned something to them, he noticed when the Titans started contacting him more. Bart texted him while he was out for coffee with Jason and he ended up going back to the manor early for an all night Xbox marathon. On a day when Tim on his way to meet Jason so they go grocery shopping for the apartment, Stephanie showed up and dragged Tim out clothes shopping with her. When Tim was tossing his clothes into his backpack so he could go to Jason's for the night, Connor showed up outside his window and declared that it was tie for a best friends weekend.

Tim didn't mind spending time with his friends, but he wished they didn't show up out of no where and act as though he didn't have anything better to do then entertain them. He knew the situation could have been solved rather simply if he just told his friends that he was involved with someone, but he'd spilled his guts to Connor about his relationship with Connor and he knew the super boy would see through him in a heartbeat. Tim had made it clear to Connor that he wasn't interested in
anyone but Jason.

He could've tried talking to Jason about telling Connor the truth, but Tim didn't want Connor to know the truth.

He liked having Jason all too himself, it made him feel safer because it felt like Jason couldn't be torn from him the same way he'd been before if no one knew he was alive again, and he didn't want to give that up.

Holding two steaming bowls of ramen in his hands, real ramen like he'd been taught to make while he was in Japan rather than the packaged stuff, Jason turned away from the stove. Tim was sitting at the island, having been talking to Jason while he cooked, with his head tilted down as he typed something out on his phone.

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon. The two of them had spent the morning out, Tim tagging along as Jason ran the type of errands that came with being an adult with his own apartment, but they'd decided to go back to the apartment from lunch rather than going out.

"Hey," Jason said as he leaned over to set one of the bowls by Tim's arms, "food's done."

"Mmm." Leaning over Tim as he was, Jason could see Tim's eyes drift shut and the look of happiness that took over his face as he got a good whiff of the food. "It smells good."

"Tastes even better," Jason promised. He pressed his lips to Tim's cheek before stepping away. He set his own bowl next to Tim's and slipped onto the stool next to Tim. Immediately, Tim's ankle wrapped around his own. "I busted out the chopsticks I had in the drawer, but if you'd rather use a fork I can get one for you."

Tim shook his head, setting his phone off to the side as he reached for the chopsticks Jason had stuck in the bowl. "These are fine."

"Cool," Jason said with a small nod. He used his own chopsticks to stir up the contents of the bowl. He'd done his best to put it together in layers like he'd been taught, but that was more for aesthetic purposes then any kind of recipe necessity. "Who were you talking to?"

"Cassie," Tim answered. "There's some weird stuff going on in San Francisco and she was wondering if I was going to be back soon to help her take a look at stuff. I told her that I didn't mind coming back for a few days, but that I've got stuff stuff to do in Gotham so I can't stay long."

Jason felt abruptly sick to his stomach.

He'd been waiting for an opportunity to get Tim away from Gotham. He didn't want to confront the Joker and Batman when Tim was around, wasn't willing to risk Tim accidentally getting caught in the crossfire or having Tim feel like he could've saved Jason because they'd been in the same city, but now that the opportunity had presented itself he found it hard to force the right words out of his mouth.

"You should go," Jason said. He felt a wave of relief when the words came out casually instead of covered in all of his anxiety and pain.

Tim made a small sound of surprise. "Really? You think?"

"Yeah," Jason said with a small nod. Each word out of his mouth felt like someone was twisting a knife in his chest. He didn't want to leave Tim again, but he wanted to make sure Tim was safe. He
wanted to be sure the Joker would never hurt Tim the way he'd hurt Robin and he wanted to be sure that Bruce would realize how stupid he'd been for letting Tim in the suit to begin with. "You haven't seen them in a while right? Might be nice to spend some time with them."

"Haven't seen you in a while either," Tim pointed out.

"You see me every day," Jason said, faking casualty.

Tim glanced away from his food to fix Jason with a sharp look. Jason was careful to keep his expression open and casual for the few seconds Tim was looking at him. Tim could read Jason like a book and one false move would tip him off to the fact that Jason was planning something. "That's not what I meant."

"I know," Jason said. With Tim focused on his noodles again, Jason squeezed his eyes tightly shut for a moment. He wanted to stay in this space with Tim. He wanted to continue spending lazy weekends in his apartment. He didn't want to be separated from Tim again. After a beat had passed, Jason opened his eyes again and forced himself to say something that he knew Tim wouldn't forgive him for once he was dead. "But we've got the rest of our lives together, you know? You're only going to be a Titan for so long. You should enjoy it while you can."

It took about a week for Tim to get everything settled for his trip to San Francisco, packing and getting things arranged with his school, but once he was gone Jason forced himself to buckle down. He didn't know how long Tim would be staying in San Francisco and he wanted to make sure that he got everything finished before Tim came back. It wasn't so much that he was eager to die again, but he knew that the longer he put it off the more his resolve would waiver. If he spent much more time with Tim, he'd reach a point where staying with Tim was more important to him than what he had set out to do in the first place.

Jason liked the idea of staying with Tim, but there was a reason he had set his sights on Batman and the Joker. Tim would be fine without Jason, had managed to stay alive and healthy for the entirety of the time Jason was dead, but Batman and the Joker were two people that had already proven they could kill a Robin. Tim had friends and a family that would take care of him once Jason was gone, but no one else was willing to get rid of the threats in front of them so it fell to Jason.

The weeks following Tim's departure were a careful juggling act as he got things ready. Jason would turn the sound on Arkham's security footage down low when Tim called, half focused on whatever Tim was saying and half focused on the movements of the people on the camera. Jason was staking out the apartment of the security officer he was planning on impersonate when Tim texted to ask him what he was doing. He'd sent Tim a picture of the surrounding area and told him he was out checking out new apartments since his current one wasn't exactly made for two people. When he had Arkham's blueprints, complete with intricate details about the Joker's cell, spread out on his table when Tim asked if he wanted to Skype. He scribbled out the name of the facility and set his laptop up on the counter so Tim wouldn't be able to make out the exact details. They talked for what seemed like hours with Jason scribbling plans as Tim worked on his homework.

Tim had been in San Francisco for a month when Jason was ready to take out the Joker.

Chapter End Notes

1) Whoa! It took me a really long time to get around to this chapter and I am so so sorry
about that? I had a million ideas for a different pairing (some hockey RPF stuff) and I ended up writing those instead of this? Sorry about that!!

2) Things being added to the list of things messy, drama bitch Jason Todd likes: Slam Poetry

3) Would you rather give up chocolate or change your last name to Hitler?

4) Jason, once again, took an extremely sappy first section and made it depressing as hell in the last line.

5) Second section is kind of inspired by Gilmore Girls?

6) There's this place in Denver (where I got o school) called Izakaya Den and it's got some really awesome ramen? Also sushi. Holy shit their sushi.

7) Jason....is a misguided idiot.
"Hello?" Tim's voice flooded out of the speaker of Jason's phone, his voice thick with sleep and confusion.

"Hey, Timbo," Jason greeted. He was careful to keep his voice quiet. "Sorry, I woke you up. I thought it was pretty early over there still."

"I'm on patrol tonight," Tim said. "Was taking a nap before I had to go out all night."

Jason let out a soft laugh. "I don't think most people take naps at midnight."

"Most people aren't Teen Titans," Tim responded.

Jason heard the shuffle of sheets as Tim moved around and said, "Hey, hey, don't get up. Go back to sleep."

"It's fine," Tim said. His words were followed by a deep yawn and the quick pop of bones as Tim stretched out. "My alarm's supposed to go off soon anyway."

Jason had spent enough time in bed with Tim that he could imagine exactly what Tim would look like in that moment. He would be sitting up in his bed. His legs would be hanging off the side of the bed and the sheets would be draped over them, pooling around his waist. He didn't usually sleep with a shirt on, so Tim's slim shoulders would be highlighted by the moonlight that would be streaming in through the windows in his bedroom in Titan Towers. His hair would be a veritable bird's nest, mused from Tim rolling around in his bed.

Jason's heart ached as he thought about it. Tim was such a huge part of his life, such a huge part of him, that being apart was always rough. Some days were worse then others though. Today was one of the days when he wanted nothing more than to have Jason by his side where he could reach out and touch him, to have Tim close enough that he could wrap himself around him until they seemed more like one person than two.

"You sure?" Jason said, because he knew Tim well enough to know that 'soon' was probably more like 'thirty minutes or an hour'. "I don't have very long to talk, so it's not really a big deal if you want to go back to sleep."

"No, it's fine. I want to talk to you, even if it's only for a few minutes," Tim said. His voice dropped a little bit lower as he said, "I miss you, Jay."

"Miss you too, babybird," Jason said. The words came out a little more raw and truthful then he intended, but he didn't mind so much when it was Tim he was talking to. There were very few things he kept secret from Tim and most of them were going to resolve themselves that night. "But you're having fun in the golden state, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Tim said. "I'd forgotten how crazy the Titans can get, but I missed them. It's been nice to spend some time with my friends again, you know?"

Jason really didn't. He'd never really had any friends when he was Robin. The only person he'd gotten along with back then had been Donna, but even that was tainted by his constant fights with
"Yeah," Jason said, because Tim was perfectly aware that he'd been Jason's only friend back then so he would know Jason was just saying what he needed to continue the conversation.

"Connor and Stephanie have been bothering me to stay for a while, though," Tim said. "I love them and I love San Francisco, but I'd rather be in Gotham with you."

Sitting on a rooftop with a screen in his lap that showed him the movements of the security guards inside Arkham, Jason's throat felt tight. He closed his eyes for just a second, trying to decide what the best thing to say was. He was so sick of lying to Tim, but he was too close to let things go now and risk Tim being able to talk him out of it or make it back to Gotham in time to stop him.

"I like having you here," Jason said at last. He waited half a second, making sure the previous pause hadn't struck Tim had odd, before continuing. "But you don't have to hurry back on my account. Have fun with your friends. Go see the bridge or something."

"The bridge?" Tim said, laughter in his voice. "You think I've lived here as long as I have without seeing the Golden Gate Bridge?"

"You know what, you have a point. I was only at the Tower like a weekend every three months and I went to the bridge," Jason said. Taking the chance given to him, Jason asked, "What are the cool kids in San Francisco doing these days?"

"Well Cassie, Bart, and I go to this cat cafe once a week," Tim said. "We drink coffee and eat cakes and pet cats. It's pretty nice."

"Really?" Jason said.

As Tim started talking about the cafe, explaining how they had the bed strawberry shortcakes and how every time he went his favorite orange cat would come sit on his lap, Jason let himself lean back and get comfortable. He had a while before the guards were going to give him his chance to slip him.

He wanted to spend as much time as possible with Tim before he died again, because he didn't think he was going to get to live a third time.

Jason talked to Tim for about thirty minutes before they approached the time he'd been waiting for.

As he was saying goodbye, he told Tim he loved him. When Tim said it back, Jason wasn't sure if his heart was going to burst with how fond he was of Tim or if it was going to break with what he was about to do to this amazing boy. He knew how Jason dying again would effect Tim, but he also knew that Tim had a better support system this time. He wasn't isolated from their family, pulled so far into the problems between Jason and Bruce that Bruce and Alfred had become the enemy, but instead he was as close to them as he'd ever been. Alfred and Dick and Barbara would be there for Tim. He wasn't isolated from society, with Jason as the only friend he had. Tim had an entire team of friends who would help him through this.

This time when Jason died, he was going to be taking the Joker with him and Tim would be safe. This time when Jason died, he was going to be dying knowing that Bruce couldn't put anyone else that he loved in danger.

Jason packed his tablet into his bag and climbed to his feet.

He slung his bag over his shoulder, then reached for his helmet.
When he pulled it on, he pulled it on knowing that tonight was likely to be the last night of the Red Hood’s career.

Tim was just walking into the Tower after his patrol, having passed the baton onto Starfire after an hour and a half, when his phone went off in his pocket. Normally he would have ignored it, he’d taken one of the earliest watch shifts so he hadn't really slept that long yet, but his phone was programmed with two different sets of ringtones. One set was all personalized ring tones, silly songs for calls and stupid noises for texts, but the other was meant for the specific purpose of letting him know whatever his family needed was urgent and he had to answer right away.

Pulling his phone out, he flipped it open and answered, "Hello."

"Are you in Titan Tower?" Dick asked.

"Yes," Tim said, his spine straightening as he tuned in to the urgency. "I just got back in from patrol. Do you need me to get to Gotham?"

"No," Dick answered, the word firm. His voice was hard, full of steel and leaving no room for Tim to argue. "Stay in the Tower. Do not leave it."

"Why?" Tim questioned, because understanding Dick's urgency didn't mean he was going to put himself on lock down without knowing why. "What's going on?"

"The Red Hood broke The Joker out of Arkham," Dick said. Tim's heart stopped cold in his chest. "We don't know why he did it, but considering how he came after you before you have to be careful."

"No, I don't," Tim choked out. Words were hard when his heart felt like it was shattering and his brain was racing to put together all of the pieces he'd been missing. He turned over every odd interaction he'd had with Jason recently. Things were slowly clicking into place - Jason's strange insistence that Tim head to San Francisco even though they both found the idea of separating nauseating and the way Jason sometimes hesitated before promising anything that had to do with their future. "He won't hurt me."

Dick said, "We all know what your capable of. We know how strong you are, okay? But we don't know what he's capable of and he's already hurt you once so-"

"He didn't hurt me! He drugged me!" Tim said, the words coming out louder and more forceful then he intended. But Jason had spent the past few months lying to him and Tim was starting to understand why. Jason didn't lie to Tim unless Jason was trying to protect Tim. Jason didn't lie to Tim unless he thought Tim was going to try and stop him from doing something. "He wouldn't ever hurt me."

"What are you talking about?" Dick asked. He was sounding more irritated with each sentence. Tim got it, understood why Dick was getting so frustrated because he knew all Dick wanted to do was protect him. But all Tim wanted to do, all Tim had ever wanted to do, was protect Jason. "He's already hurt you!"

"Jason is the Red Hood!" Tim screamed. He heard Dick suck in a sharp breath. "Jason is the Red Hood and I know it might be hard for you to believe but it's true, okay? I know B is after him already, but you have to stop him before he hurts Jason."

"B would never-"
"He doesn't know!" Tim said. He was so wrapped up in his concern for Jason, in the conclusions he’d drawn about Jason's intention, that he couldn't think about why Dick was saying the things he was. He couldn't think about all of this was hitting Dick out of left field and making it hard for him to think clearly. "He doesn't know, Dick! And by the time he does know, it's going to be too late because Jason is going to kill the Joker and then he's going to make sure Bruce has no choice but to do the same to him."

Saying it out loud was the final straw for Tim.

His heart shattered in his chest because Jason was going to leave him again in some attempt to fix a wrong that Tim had already explained to him didn't matter.

"I can't lose him again," Tim said, his voice breaking as he spoke. "He thinks doing this is going to make me safer, but all it's going to do is break me."

Connor would have taken Tim back to Gotham, but there was too much going on in his head for Tim to conceal his emotions and if he saw the look on Tim's face he would ended up asking a million questions. Tim didn't have time to be explaining things to Connor. He didn't have to time tell Connor all the things he'd been keeping from him because the biggest thing Tim had been keeping a secret was Jason and if Tim didn't hurry that wouldn't matter because Jason wouldn't be around to keep secret.

So instead, he ran up the stairs to the roof where Starfire would be for her turn on watch.

The Titans had various ways of dealing with their turns on watch. Tim and Beast Boy both preferred patrolling, but Starfire and Superboy both preferred to watch the city from the rooftop. Their enhanced vision made it easy for them to see anything too different from normal going on and being on the open roof made it easier for them to take off to address a problem while sending a communication to the other Titans.

Tim busted onto the rooftop, panting because he hadn't really been thinking about pacing himself or controlling his breathing, and asked her to take him to Gotham in one big rush of breath.

Starfire looked at him for a minute, tilting her head curiously, but then she nodded and assented without asking him any questions.

It was what he'd been expecting from her. The two of them were friends, it was hard not to be friends when they lived and worked together, but their respective relationships with Dick had kept them from getting too close. Dick was Tim's older brother and Tim didn't have any desire to hang around when Starfire was telling stories about their dates. Tim hadn't even liked hearing stories about Dick and Barbara's relationship and they'd been far more closed off about it, in the way that they'd both been human and understood that some things just didn't need to be shared with the world.

That gap in their relationship, though, was what made it so easy for Starfire to agree to Tim's request without questioning. She could see his distress, but knew the two of them weren't close enough for her to question it.

A silence settled over them as they flew, Tim hanging onto Starfire's hands for dear life as they made their way through the skies. It was both comforting and nauseating.

It gave him time to think about how he was going to handle the situation once he got to Gotham, but it also gave him time to think about the situation in Gotham. It gave him time to think about everything that could go wrong before he got there, gave him time to think about what he could end
Nothing scared him as much as thinking that he would lose Jason a second time.

Jason's chest heaved with each breath he took. Cold sweat covered his body, the effect of all the running and jumping he'd done to lead Batman to this warehouse, and he could feel the blood seeping out of the wound on his side. The Batarang had taken a good chunk out of his side. It's gotten him well enough, good enough, that while Jason wasn't in immediate danger of bleeding out he knew he probably going to pass out from blood lost. Given the way his vision was blurring and the dizziness that crashed over him in waves, he knew that all the physical exertion he'd been doing had gotten him to a point where he only had a few more minutes before that ended up happening. Luckily, he was pretty sure that if they hadn't wrapped up by then he could hit the detonator before clamped in his sweaty palms before he hit the ground.

He was pretty sure it wasn't going to take that long though.

Another batarang had crashed into his mask with enough force to shatter the plastic it was made out of since Jason hadn't really been concerned with making sure he wore anything bullet proof when facing off against Batman. Jason had been lucky enough that none of the pieces had gotten him in the eye, but a piece had clipped his cheek bones. It'd split the skin there so a steady stream of blood flowed down Jason's face.

He'd thrown the helmet off once he had Batman where he wanted him.

Which led to the situation he was in now - The Joker in a chair in front of him, bound and gagged but letting out manic muffled laughter, Jason behind him with the detonator for the explosives rigged around the building in his hands, and Batman - Bruce - standing across from the two of them with his expression stone-cold.

"Jason," Bruce said, his voice unwavering.

Jason thought about everything Tim had said about Bruce after his death, about how torn up Bruce had been, and part of him wanted to laugh. He was so focused on what Bruce had done to Tim, that he only thought about what Bruce had done to him when the night sky was pitch black and his room was silent except for their breathing. He did his best not to think about how he'd meant so little to Bruce that he'd put the most important person in Jason's life in the role that had killed Jason only months after Jason's death.

It was hard not to think about that now when Bruce was looking utterly unfazed by Jason's appearance.

"Heya B," Jason said, forcing himself to keep the words to stay steady and casual. He wasn't entirely sure which was harder - the effort it took not to pant or the effort it took not to let the words break. "I've got a bone to pick with you."

"You're the Red Hood."

"Talk about stating the obvious," Jason said. Straightening his shoulders, he gestured over at the Joker and said, "You know what else is obvious? That's he's still alive."

Bruce was quiet for a long moment before he said, deep voice rumbling, "We don't kill."
"You don't kill," Jason corrected. He thought about Garzonasa and how Bruce had been sure Jason had killed him no matter what Jason said. He let his lips curl wickedly and tilted his head as he said, "You already know I don't have the same issue."

"Is that why you brought me here?" Bruce asked. "To kill the Joker in front of me?"

"If I have to," Jason said with a shrug. "But mostly I brought you here to fix the things you did wrong."

"The things I did wrong?" Bruce questioned. His eyes flicked between Jason and the Joker.

"Not me," Jason growled. "Him! You left him alive after he killed me!"

"We don't kill," Bruce repeated.

All of the frustration and anger in Jason's gut boiled over and he found himself shouting, "But you should have! Because he killed me and then you put Tim in that suit! He fucking killed me and then you put the person I love in the role that got me killed and didn't make sure this fucking clown couldn't do the same to him!"

"Tim wanted the suit."

"You think I care about that?" Jason asked. "You think I give a single shit about the fact that Tim wanted the suit? I'm not happy that he has it, I really fucking don't like that he's putting himself in danger like that, but that's not my issue. I care that you found my body half charred and my skull bashed in and still put Tim in a situation where the exact same thing could happen to him."

"Tim's good at what he does," Bruce said. "He-"

"He's human!" Jason screeched. Bruce's eyes darted to his hand as though he was afraid Jason was going to slip and hit the detonator. "He's human! I know you have no concept of this because you think you're such a flawless example of humanity, but human's make mistakes! One mistake could kill Tim. One mistake against him-" another exaggerated gesture in the Joker's direction, "will kill Tim."

"I'm not going to let that happen."

"You already did," Jason hissed. He felt a twisted flare of pleasure when Bruce seemed to flinch back from that. "So you're going to fix this. You're going to get rid of this piece of shit or I will right." Jason raised his hand, showing the detonator off even though he knew Bruce was already aware of it. "So pick, B. Your son or The Joker."

"I won't kill him," Bruce said with a shake of his head. "His death won't change anything. Tim would still be in danger."

Jason bared his teeth, ready to snap at Bruce that of course Tim would still be in danger because Bruce had put him there but at least he wouldn't be in danger from someone who had already proven they could kill a Robin, but when he stepped forward he found himself stumbling. A sharp wave of dizziness crashed over him, his vision graying at the edges.

Jason realized all at once that in his anger he hadn't been paying attention to how much blood he lost.

"Fuck," Jason swore as he caught himself. He was weak and he could feel himself shaking.

"Jason?" Bruce questioned.
Jason heard the sound of Bruce's boots against the warehouse floor, his father stepping towards him, but his ears were ringing and his vision was growing steadily darker.

As his legs gave under him, he thought about how he had to end this. He'd wanted Bruce to do it, wanted Bruce to admit what he'd done wrong and finally give up this game of chase he'd been playing with the Joker for so long, but he knew Bruce wouldn't.

He'd always known Bruce wouldn't do it.

He'd always known he was going to die a second time because Bruce just wouldn't do it.

So, Jason used the last of his energy to push his thumb against the button on the detonator.

He heard a quick series of noises as he hit the concrete below him - something crashing open, the loud boom of the explosions going off, and a chorus of voices shouting his name. He heard Bruce, Dick, and -

"Tim."

Chapter End Notes

1) Hi everyone! I'm sorry this took so long to get out. I kept getting distracted by other things which pushed this back? Lots of hockey fics have been posted over the past few weeks.

2) How um...How's everyone feeling after this chapter? Do we still like me?

3) I am a bit worried this chapter went by a little too fast...but I didn't want to focus on the action which is what would have dragged this chapter out? I just wanted to focus on Jason and Tim and their relationship and how this event effects them. I don't know.

4) So I'm a little unsure if I messed up Kori's powers, but I don't think I did? I know she doesn't have flight in new-52 but I believe she did before then? I was UNSURE if she had superspeed flight like Superman/Superboy, but ultimately I decided I didn't care and gave it to her anyway bc I wanted Kori and Jason in the same space. Also a little unsure about her vision but google said she does have enhanced vision.

5) Google ALSO says that Starfire, Cyborg, Beast Boy, and Raven were all still apart of Teen Titans when Tim and his friends joined.

6) And I wasn't sure when the Starfire/Nightwing break up happened? But their together in this.

7) I think I've said this before, but I'm not actually a Teen Titan fan and yet it ends up in here a ton bc it's pretty important to Tim? And the placement of him for certain things.

8) The interludes in this chapter ended up pretty short...Hopefully that didn't ruin the flow or anything?

9) I feel like I rushed the confrontation between Bruce and Jason, but I also feel like that's what works best for the relationship I've built between them? It was also...kind of anti-climatic? but I had a certain way I wanted this to end so that was necessary.
10) So I'm thinking one more chapter after this. Then an epilogue? Probably, idk, we'll see how the next one goes.

11) Chapter title from Twenty One Pilot's "Stressed Out"
Tim was half asleep when he felt something shift underneath him. He made an unhappy sound, displeased with being woken up.

"Sorry, sorry. I was just trying to grab the water," Jason said, voice raw and scratchy.

His head was resting on his folded arms, so he burrowed further into them as he let out another groan. He couldn't get back to sleep if Jason kept talking.

"Sorry," Jason whispered. Tim felt it as Jason reached out, burying his fingers in Tim's hair and scratching at his scalp. "Go back to sleep. I didn't mean to wake you up."

There was a certain peace that came with Jason's voice and touch. Tim took a deep breath before letting it out all at once. He found it easy to settle back in afterwards. His entire body felt loose and warm as he let soaked in Jason's presence. He had almost drifted back to sleep when a memory burst through the sleepy fog.

He bolted upright, coming awake abruptly, and screeched, "Jason!"

"Hey Timbo," Jason said, his lips lifting in a small smile. He was paler than usual and there was a series of small stitches holding a wound on his cheek bone closed. His face didn't look that bad, but when Tim's eyes swept lower he saw the mess of bruises and smaller cuts that covered Jason's torso. There was a large bandage slapped against almost the entirety of Jason's hip where a visible chunk had been taken out of his side. That had been the worst wound. That had been the wound that had almost killed Jason a second time. "Sorry, I woke you up. I just wanted to grab the water from the table."

"No, it's- I'll grab it," Tim said. He leaned over grabbing the water glass that sat on the table next to Jason's bed and passing it over. He watched as Jason tilted it against his lips, gulping half the glass down in no time flat. "How are you feeling?"

Jason hummed for a second before saying, "Not fantastic, but it's not the worst I've ever had either."

"Good." Then Tim leaned forward and slapped his palm as hard as he could against the side of Jason's face that didn't have the bandage on it. Jason's head whipped with the force. When Tim's hand dropped away Jason lifted one of his, the one that Doctor Thompkins had stuck his IV in, and rested it over the spot where Tim had slapped him.

As he poked at the irritated skin, Jason let out a soft, "I guess I deserved that."

"You guess?" Tim said. His voice rocketed up as he repeated, "You guess?"

"Okay," Jason said, speaking slowly. "I know I deserved that."

"Damn straight you did," Tim said. "I explained everything to you! I told you that none of this was Bruce's fault! I understand that you can't just get over that, but I thought I was more important to you than that! I thought that staying with me would mean more to you than that."

"Of course staying with you means-"
"Then why would you do this?" Tim screeched, his voice filling with emotion.

"I just wanted you to be safe," Jason said. He was screaming as well now and making angry gestures with his hands as he spoke, "Poison Ivy and Black Mask aren't anything. The Joker has already killed one of us and I wasn't going to give him the opportunity to-"

"Except you did! You gave him the opportunity to kill you again," Tim answered. His eyes prickled with unshed tears as the anger in his gut gave way to a crushing sadness. "If you want me to be happy you wouldn't keep trying to leave me! Because you have no idea how hard it is to live thinking that you're dead. You have no idea how it is to live knowing that there's an entire piece of you that's never going to come back! You have no idea how hard it is to know that your going to spend the rest of your life surrounded by people who are in love with each other, but knowing you're never going to have that because the only person you love decided that it was better to die then stay with you."

"Tim, no," Jason said. He moved to reach forward, but let out a sharp hiss and fell back against the bed. His face had gone ghostly pale as he reached down, setting his hand over the large bandage on his hip.


"It's fine," Jason said, shaking his head. "I'm fine. But you-"

"I'm fine," Tim interrupted. "I'm angry and sad, but I'm fine because you're still here. As long as you continue to be here, I'm going to continue to be fine. Eventually I'll get over this and I'll be happy again. But you have to stay for that to happen, Jason." Tim reached out, setting one hand over the one Jason had resting on his bandage. He shifted their hands so he was holding Jason's hands in his and squeezed. "Stay, Jason. If you want me to happy, stay. If you want me to be safe, then stay and work with me. Just....Just stay, okay?"

Jason was quiet for a moment.

Tim's heart pounded in his chest.

There was a time when the idea of Jason leaving him was unthinkable, but Tim didn't have that same faith anymore.

He knew Jason loved him, knew Jason would always love him, but he didn't know that Jason wouldn't leave him in some misguided attempt to protect him from something Tim could handle himself.

"Okay," Jason said at last. He squeezed Tim's fingers as he gave a small nod, repeating, "Okay."

Doctor Thompkins came by to check on Jason later that day. Tim sat in the chair by his bed, his legs crossed under him and one of Jason's hands held in his own. The first thing she did on her first visit was to thump Jason over the head before she pulled him into a tight hug, telling him that he had been so stupid. Jason hesitated for a moment, but then he reached up to wrap his free arm around her and buried his face in her neck.

Doctor Thompkins had known Jason before Bruce, had been the one looking after Jason when he was on the streets and Catherine had been too high to care if his arm was snapped or his face bleeding after a fight, and she had never done anything but taken care of him. There was a trust there that made it easy for Jason to embrace her.
A while after Doctor Thompkins left, Alfred came inside with a food filled tray in his hand. There was a bowl of steaming soup along with a glass of Jason's favorite tea, organic peppermint bark, and a few small crack packages. There was also a small plate with one of Tim's favorite white bean and mozerella sandwiches and a glass of Tim's favorite soda. Comfort food, Tim figured. A tense silence settled over the room as Alfred set the tray down on the table by Jason's bed, fiddling with the items on the tray to make sure everything for Jason was within his reach and passing Tim his things.

Alfred didn't say anything until Jason said his name, eyes filling with tears and voice breaking.

Bruce was Jason's father, but that came with all of the heavy expectations and insecurities that any father-son relationship had. Jason had always chaffed under that, wanting so badly to please the only father he had ever known but never knowing if he'd succeeded because Bruce's affection could be confusing.

Alfred though...Alfred didn't come with the same expectations. Before Jason's death, Alfred had been cookies set on the counter after a rough day at school and someone sitting at the table to rant at about Treasure Island or Pride and Prejudice or Moby Dick and someone who Jason knew would always support him. There wasn't any of the pressure that came with his relationship with Bruce because Alfred made it clear everyday that all he wanted was for Jason to be happy.

Once Jason had spoken, Alfred looked up at him and told Jason that he had been incredibly stupid. When Jason had been appropriately chastised, affection had filled Alfred's voice and he'd made sure Jason knew exactly how much they loved him and how much they had missed him.

With the exception of Alfred and Doctor Thompkins, though, Jason and Tim spent the first few days of Jason's recovery alone. Sometimes Tim would crawl up into the bed with Jason and Jason would wrap himself around Tim while Tim read one of his favorite books aloud. Sometimes Tim would leave the room and come back with his DS or a coloring book or something else that they could do. Sometimes Tim would spread his text book out on Jason's thigh because he was already so far behind in school and doodle notes in the margins while having discussions with Jason about whatever sentence he'd caught that looked interesting.

Most of the time, though, Tim sat in the chair next to Jason's bed with one of Jason's hands in his and they'd spend hours talking. Some of their conversations were stupid arguments about mundane things - Jason continued to be mortally offended by Tim's taste in tea and Tim continued to scrunch his nose at Jason's love for Mean Girls - but sometimes Tim would coax Jason into a more serious discussion. They'd talk about Dick or Barbara or Bruce. They'd talk about all the things Jason had been keeping from Tim.

Having everything laid out in front of them hurt them both. Jason's shoulder were heavy with the weight of his emotions, of complicated feelings for people that he'd once loved without any thought, and Tim's heart felt ripped open by all the secrets Jason had. But it was also better.

Because while it had hurt to get there, this was also the way their relationship had always been. They shared their thoughts, secrets, and feelings.

They shared their lives with each other.

"Tim, hey," Jason said when Tim stepped into the room. Jason hadn't been recovering in his old bedroom, but rather in one of the sterile rooms in the batcave that they had specifically for purposes like this. "How do you feel about steak? Because I could really go for one right now."

Jason was dressed in a pair of light jeans that clung to his thighs with a black tee-shirt with a bright
red outline of a grinning wolf. His favorite black leather jacket had been thrown on over the shirt. His favorite black boots were laced up on his feet and a pair of sunglasses rested in his hair.

"Are you supposed to be up?" Tim asked.

"Yes. Doctor T came by while you were out," Jason said. Tim scrunched his nose unhappily. He’d been complaining to Jason all morning about having to go to the school. Gotham Academy’s online program insisted that students had to take tests at the school in order to ensure that they weren’t cheating so he’d had to go up over to take one of his tests. "She said I'm all good to be up and moving. I still have to take it easy, she doesn't want me doing my patrols yet, but I can go out and eat real food. I've just gotta make sure to go in for check ups."

"Really?"

"Timbo, please, would I lie about this?" Tim cocked his head, raising a judgmental eyebrow. Jason gave a small laugh, "Okay, so maybe I would lie about this but I'm not. Come on, Let's go out for lunch."

Tim pursed his lips for a moment before giving a small nod. A smile spread over his lips, "Alright then. Let's go get some steak."

"Yes!" Jason said, throwing a triumphant fist in the air. Stepping over to Tim, he wrapped one arm around Tim's shoulders and pressed a kiss against his temple. Tim let out a small laugh as he fit himself into Jason's side, wrapping an arm around Jason's side.

They spoke quietly as they made their way through the cave, moving through the winding corridor were the sterile rooms were and out into the main room, as they debated where they wanted to go for lunch. Jason was in favor of a genuine steak house while Tim was advocating for a small grill with the best turkey burger he’d ever had.

"But I'm not getting a turkey burger," Jason argued. "I'm going out to get a steak and if I want a good steak then-"

"Jason," someone interrupted. Their voice was deeper then he remembered and soft with shock, but Jason knew who it was even before he looked at them.

Dick was sitting on the stool at the computer wearing dark jeans and a light blue button up. His eyes were locked on Jason. Dick wore his heart on his sleeve and even after so much time apart Jason knew how to read him, so it wasn’t hard to pick out the emotions hidden there. A little bit of surprise and a hint of sadness, but mostly relief and hope. His mouth was open in a small o.

Jason's mouth ran dry, his throat closing around the words he'd been saying to Tim.

His heart clenched in his chest.

Jason didn't hate Dick.

Dick was his brother and it wasn't his fault that he hadn't been there when things had exploded.

Things between Jason and Bruce had soured so abruptly that even if they could've reached him, he wouldn't have been able to get back to Earth before they exploded. He couldn't have pulled out of the battle the Titans were fighting at the time to come fight the battle with Bruce and Jason.

That didn't make it any easier to talk to him.
It didn't make it any easier to find the words to talk to him when Jason had spent the last few years so far from his entire family. When he'd spent the last few years closing himself off to his family and rejecting everything they had taught him.

The fingers Tim had set on Jason's hip tightened.

The touch grounded Jason, reminded him of everything he'd told Tim in the days he'd spent in bed.

It reminded him of the nights when Jason was losing it and wanted nothing more then to go to out with Dick so they could order milkshakes until the sugar relaxed them. It reminded him how he'd confessed that he missed Dick. It reminded him of the nights when Jason's felt so lost that he wanted nothing more than to call his older brother to ask what the fuck he was supposed to do. It reminded him of days when all he wanted was one of Dick's fantastic hugs.

"Hey, Dick," Jason greeted. He lifted his lips in a small smile, knowing it was a little awkward but also knowing that Dick would appreciate him not forcing it. He took a deep breath before he took a leap of faith and asked, "We're gonna go to that steakhouse over on fourth for lunch. You wanna come?"

"Oh are we?" Tim asked. "I didn't know I'd agreed to that."

"Well, it's two against one," Jason said. "Right, Dick?"

There was a small pause before Dick nodded. His voice was cracked and filled with unshed tears, but completely undeniably happy, when he said, "Yeah, Timmy. It's Little Wing and I against you."

Lunch that day was awkward and stilted, but it was also just the beginning.

Part of Jason's recovery was physical therapy for his hip, so when they were both free Jason and Dick went to the park together. They'd make their way down the pathways that looped through the park's green fields with their shoulders bumping and coffee cups in their hand. Dick seemed to have an endless supply of funny videos to show Jason, everything from cats failing to jump over baby gates to toddlers falling on their faces when dogs on leashes pulled them to the ground, and Jason told Dick the funniest stories from his travels, like when Demetrius tried to teach him how to surf and he'd swallowed so much seawater that he ended up sick.

When Tim had gotten caught up in something, Jason and Dick would go out for lunch together. Sometimes they went to restaurants where they could tear chicken tenders apart with their fingers while they ordered fruity cocktails to get them tipsy. Sometimes they went to higher class places where they could get steak or bourbon chicken and spent their time shooting spitballs at each other. Sometimes they'd just go through a McDonald's drive-through and then they'd eat burgers while whichever of them drove put the pedal all the way to the floor so they could wind through the New Jersey streets at the fastest speeds possible.

Some days the two of them found wild silly things to do. They went to thrift stores, sifting through tee-shirts with ridiculous sayings and buying ridiculous knick-knacks for Jason's apartment. Every time Tim came over, he ended up rolling his eyes at the silly salt and pepper shakers Jason had picked up or the throw pillows with the three blind mice cross stitched on them. They went to play paint ball. They rolled under each others shots and laughed like children. They left bruised and exhausted, but smiling and laughing on their way home.

Slowly, Jason got his brother back.

It took a little longer, but eventually Barbara came to him as well. She showed up at his apartment
door way day, folding her arms across her chest. Seeing her, seeing someone else who had been hurt by the Joker as well, made Jason want to bundle Tim up somewhere that no one could touch him. It was a reminder that it wasn't just one child that Bruce had let get hurt by the Joker. Before Jason could dwell on the thought any longer, Barbara was rolling herself inside and Jason was forced to step aside to let her in or let her roll over his toes.

They sat at the table in the kitchen. Barbara having moved two chairs aside to wheel her chair up to it while Jason took the seat across from her. They sat there, just staring at each other for a while.

Then Barbara opened her mouth and the two of them spent the rest of the afternoon talking. At some point Jason got up, making them Zuppa Toscana for lunch and grabbing sodas from the fridge, but for the most part they just talked until their throats were raw. They talked about everything Jason had hesitated to tell Tim and everything he would never tell Dick.

It wasn't that he trusted Barbara more than them, he didn't trust anymore than he trusted Tim, but that Barbara was the person who understood this situation the most.

Robin and Batgirl had been children of Batman, but the Red Hood and Oracle were products of the Joker. They shared that connection, no matter how they felt about the rest of the family.

"Come on, Tim," Jason groaned. "I gotta go."

The two of them were lying on the couch in the manor. Jason's back was against the back of the couch while Tim pressed against him, tangled and wrapped around Jason's body, with his face buried in Jason's neck. Even though Jason was complaining about needing to leave, he wasn't actually making any attempt to untangle them. The TV in front of the couch was on, playing a marathon of some HGTV series that they didn't have too put to much effort into watching.

"Nooooo," Tim whined, shaking his head. "Stay a little longer."

"Can't," Jason murmured. He played with the short strands of hair on the back of Tim's neck. "Bruce is going to be home soon."

Jason had been spending time around the manor since healing, hanging around with Tim and talking to Alfred, but so far he'd been lucky enough not to bump into Bruce while there.

"He won't bother us," Tim said.

"Have you met Bruce? He's like....genetically incapable of minding his own business," Tim reached out and pinched Jason's side between his nails. Jason let out a sharp hiss, reaching down to slap Tim's hand on the wrist. "What the fuck, baby bird? I'm not wrong."

"No," Tim answered with a small shake of his head. "But you can't avoid Bruce forever."

"Why not?"

"Because," Tim said, raising his head up so he was looking Jason in the eye, "you promised to stay."

For a moment, Jason considered arguing. He was staying for Tim, but that didn't mean he had to be around Bruce. The more he thought about it though, the more he realized how ridiculous a plan that was. The last few weeks were proof that staying for Tim would mean being absorbed back into this family.

All of them had their issues with Bruce, but there was no denying that Bruce was the force that
brought them together and kept them tied. Being apart of the family meant having a relationship of some kind with Bruce, even one as strained as Jason's was.

"Okay," Jason said. "But not today. Neither Bruce or I want to have this conversation while you and I are cuddling on the couch. You and Alfred can set up some awkward family dinner shit."

"But you are staying?" Tim said. His voice was filled with such a soft insecurity that Jason felt like his heart had shattered in his chest.

"Yeah," Jason said, leaning forward to press his lips against Tim's. When he pulled away, he rested his forehead against Tim's. "I'm staying."

Chapter End Notes

1) Hi everyone! I hope you all enjoyed the final chapter of this fic as well as the fic in its entirety!

2) You know, I'm fully aware that this is perhaps not the ending everyone was expecting? But I think that what's important to Jason moving on, for Jason to stay like he promises Tim, is to reconcile with his family because Jason is a person that's filled with so much emotion that he /needs/ that support system.

3) So Barbara got a much shorter section than Dick because I feel like....Dick's section was more important? Their both siblings to Jason, but Barbara is a little different. Barbara has a family other than them, while Dick and Jason and Tim have each other and Bruce. If that makes sense?

4) Okay debated for a long time whether or not Bruce would actually be in this chapter? Ultimately decided not to include Bruce in this chapter.

5) Honestly though, I just really want to say thank you to everyone that's been reading this story and supporting me on it? It's been so much fun to write and discuss with everyone. You've all been amazing and I'm glad we were on this journey together! I hope everyone was satisfied with the ending even if it wasn't necessarily what you were expecting.

Works inspired by this one

[podfic] Baby, I'll Be Your Huckleberry by the_casual_cheesecake

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