A place to stand and love

by Teland

Summary

"Sometimes the end of the world isn't so bad."

Notes

Disclaimers: No one and nothing here is mine.

Spoilers/Timeline: Vague and occasionally AU-ized references to older -- sometimes much older -- storylines. Takes place (mostly) some months after the earthquake -- but *not* in NML.

Author's Note: Ever since I got my Earth-2 Robin action figure some years back, I've been
musing on -- something like -- this story. If you have a Dick who stays Robin *forever*? There are going to be some changes to the rest of the universe. Mildred stepped in with tips on how to surgically remove a goodly portion of the angst and came up with some of the better jokes. I? Sincerely hope you'll come along for the ride.

Acknowledgments: To Mildred, Pixie, Melissa, ShadowValkyrie, Britt, and my splendiferous Jack for audiencing, encouragement, suggestions, and a *great* deal of crack.
Gotham has the gayest fucking vigilantes in the whole damned world. Jason should know -- he's one of them.

It was bad enough when Dick took over for the late and *seriously* fucking lamented big, bad Bat but refused to put on his pointy little ears -- like Gotham needed a full-grown *man* in a Robin suit? -- and it's just gotten worse over the years.

Boosting the tires off that painfully bright, daffodil-yellow Robin-car wasn't the smartest thing he'd ever done for a buck, but it got him a ride to his new home and a uniform of his own once Dick finished proving that there was no way in fucking hell Jason could take him.

It's just that his cape is --

Well, it's fucking feathered is what it is, and somehow Dick had talked him into going by the name *Starling*.

For five damned *years*, already.

*That* was bad enough, but now --

Fucking now and for the last *two* years --

"Jason."

"*What*?"

Tim licks his lips. It's no fucking fair, at all, that he'd managed -- with Alfred's help -- to come up with lip gloss that doesn't smear off when he does that.

Just -- no fair. Just like it's no fair that there's absolutely nothing wrong with the staff-work and tumbling Tim's been showing him for the last twenty minutes even though there are suddenly fucking *heels* on his fetish-wear red boots.

Fucking *Clark's* boots are more subtle.

*Wonder Woman's* boots are more fucking subtle --

"I note that you're not saying anything."

"Do you, Tink? Do you really?"

Tim looks at him from under his long -- mascara-ed -- lashes. He doesn't actually have to say, aloud, that Jason was the one who started calling him Tinkerbell three years ago -- while Tim was still in *training*.

That Jason doing it on the *street* had killed every chance they *had* of the criminal class -- or the cops, or the motherfucking *press* -- calling Tim Cardinal, even though that's his *official* code name.

That --

Jason sighs and covers his face with his hands. At least Tim's uniform is still mostly red.
At least---

Jason has no idea how Dick had talked Tim out of the sparkly purple jumpsuit thing he'd come home with one day, and he really should ask. It would *help* to know how to convince Tim to do sane things. It --

"Jason... you know I *can* work in them."

"Argh."

"In fact, *you're* the one who *taught* me to work in them."

"Brargh."

"In fact, you're the one who removed all of my sneakers from my closet and *replaced* them with heels --"

"You were still in *training* then! And it was only for a *weekend*!" But moving his hands was a mistake, because Tim is that much closer. That --

Jason can smell cologne that may or may not be designed for women rather than men, the apparently *perfect* cruelty-free makeup Clark has the AI synthesize for Tim, the sweat from his little workout --

Jason doesn't groan.

Tim touches his tongue to his upper lip. "I'll be your best friend...?"

Tackling Tim is easier with him in the heels. That has to be something the kid keeps in mind, right?

Somehow?

Knowing Tim, *all* he'll keep in mind is the fact that Jason makes him leave the damned heels *on* after he tears off everything else --

"Oh, *Jay* -- "

Right.

*
He is fear.

When they'd come to the conclusion that Luthor was the driving force behind the anomalies which folded space enough to bring creatures --

People. He will remember that many of them were *people* --

Bruce distinctly remembers a moment of *relief* when Clark had brought him that filing cabinet full of papers with Luthor's signature on them. The man was dangerous, of course, but he would never risk his chances to gain power over the earth.

He would never truly go as far as it *seemed* like he'd gone this time. Cities were burning, hospitals were overcrowded, and every hero was strained to the breaking point, but there had to be an answer.

There was *always* an answer with Luthor -- Clark had proved that countless times -- and *this* time, he would have Bruce to help him.

It didn't matter that Bruce had barely spent more time as an operative than Clark himself had. It didn't matter that Bruce had only his martial arts abilities and wits to help him through to Luthor's inner sanctum.

All that mattered was the answer. All --

("Answer? You're joking, aren't you? You *aren't*?")

And Luthor had laughed. At first it was clear that he was laughing at *him*, and it had brought Bruce back to Exeter in a *blink*, turning him into the naive and *helpless* boy --

("Did you think *that* would help?")

Bouncing Luthor off a wall and into a messy pile of unconscious guards *had* helped certain parts of him --

Bruce can still hear Luthor's laughter, even though he hadn't laughed any *more* before telling them both that there was no answer, no way to secure the earth -- their plane of *existence* -- against the *chain* of reactions he'd started --

It had all been just another plot to *inconvenience* Superman -- not even kill him. It had gone wrong nearly immediately, with 'pockets' forming all over the world from which nothing returned and beings appeared which hadn't even been known to the Green Lantern Corps.

Luthor had been working to reverse the process and had only barely managed to escape a three-block-long pocket that had swallowed most of his main laboratory complex --

There is no answer.

There --

There is no *hope*, not truly, and Bruce has spent the past thirty-six hours wakeful due to caffeine pills and encroaching, *unmanning* horror --

But he fights at Clark's side -- he will never try to distance himself from the man again, he will never take for *granted* --
He fights and he tries to think of something, *anything* that hasn't been tried --

The earth is losing mass and the tides are wrong, day and *night* are wrong --

He's so *frightened* --

No, he *is* fear. He needs no excuse and no support from anyone save his allies --

Gotham is *drowning* when Clark flies them back there without so much as a word, and there are creatures, huge creatures --

People. There are *people*, almost certainly confused and frightened, and he must not kill, he does not *kill* --

One of them knocks Clark through what remains of Wayne Tower.

Bruce bares his teeth and pulls out his second-to-last explosive batarang.

He is fear. He is the night --

He fights.

*
Nightly Rituals

Suiting up for the night is its own little ritual.

One: Mock Dick for looking *infinitely* fucking more like the circus boy he *isn't* anymore than like the hardcore vigilante he totally *is*.

Two: Accept mockery for having a cape Liberace would've creamed his rhinestone-studded jock for.

Three: Watch Tim like a fucking *hawk*, because -- guaranteed -- there is some damned fucked-up thing he's going to do.

Right now, he's *just* pulling on the shiny new boots, but --

Well, no, right now Dick is gripping Tim's shoulders and giving him a Look. Jason knows that Look. Jason used to *get* that Look all the fucking time when *he* was the baby in the house and -- yeah.

It's a pretty damned effective Look, as these things go.

Tim licks his lips -- tonight he's wearing the *lipstick* that matches his uniform, as opposed to his day-to-day gloss, and Jason hates so much that he knows the difference.

So much.

"Jason saw me working out in them --"

"Before or after he came on them, little brother."

Augh -- "Fucking A, Big Bird, you're not supposed to use the Cave cameras to *watch us screw*!"

Dick shows his teeth. "I didn't *have* to, little wing," he says, and never looks away from Tim. "Spill."

"Um... before. He said --"

"Jay, did you say anything remotely positive about the boots?"

Jason bites his lip. "Uh..."

Dick shakes himself like a dog. "Strike that question from the record. Did you say anything remotely positive about the boots which *didn't* in some way involve your dick?"

Jason blows out a breath. "That's a big ol' no, Dickie."

"Thank you," Dick says and turns back to Tim with his eyebrows up.

Tim raises his own -- lightly plucked -- eyebrow.

Dick narrows his eyes.

Tim sucks his teeth and stands hipshot, and -- Jason has to own this -- that stance works a lot better with heels. And he also has to own the fact that Tim could see at least *some* of that on his face, because, yeah, he's getting the slow-and-flirty wink that had, at last count, made at least three dozen
skels recoil in horror.

Jason pulls on his stern face.

Tim *huffs* --

"*Cardinal*," Dick says, and Tim pulls himself up straight and generally looks like he's stalwart, true, and everything the *Bat* would've wanted him to be.

In the old days, Dick and Jason *both* had done what they could to make Tim *stop* doing that, but Jason has to admit that it works --

"Take those off, and retrieve your old boots from wherever you've hidden them."

"Yes, Robin."

Dick smiles then, and it's the crooked one which always makes him look like he's *maybe* three nanoseconds from hugging the fucking *shit* outta you -- but not when he's suited up.

Tim jogs for the locker room that had mostly been buried in rubble after the 'quake -- not even Clark had been able to rescue all of it, which sucks, because somewhere in there are some *awesomely* comfortable old shirts and shorts with Jason's name on 'em -- and he does it in the heels.

Jason watches him work and sighs. "How the *fuck* does he get gayer every *day*?"

Dick gives him the Look.

"Aw, c'mon, you know I'm *right*, Big Bird."

"You..." Dick laughs quietly and pinches the bridge of his nose, and that's --

Well, that's the thing. It's a *Bruce* look on Dick's face right now, a twist of his fucking beautiful features which means that he's totally thinking of the dead man. It's maybe even a *Batman* look, and that's bad because it means he's gonna be at least a little down. It's just that it's also *good*, because...

Well, Jason's been here for five damned years, and he knows a lot more about Bruce Wayne than any fucking civilian, but --

Not enough.

Jason steps close and cups *Dick's* shoulders. He's only an inch taller than Jason now, and he says Jason *will* get up over six feet -- Jason shakes his head. "It's so fucking weird to be almost eye-to-eye with you, man."

Dick smiles at him wryly. "I don't suppose I could convince you to *stop* growing? No...?"

Jason snorts and smacks the side of Dick's head --

And immediately winds up spun and halfway into a full-nelson, because Dick is just that fucking *fast* --

Jason slams himself back in an attempt to *flip* Dick --

Dick's not fucking *there*, and he's taking Jason's arm *with* him --
Spin and Dick dodges his punch, his strike, his really *good* punch --

Sweep and Jason's *down*, but only until he can roll, fling himself back up and into a kick -- and out of it before Dick can fucking *catch* him --

And now Dick's advancing on him, predatory smile all *over* his features -- his fucking *cheekbones* are fucking predatory --

Jason moves into a ready stance and gives Dick the come-on -- "Though that *doesn't* mean you shouldn't tell me what you were thinking, Big Bird."

"Bruce wouldn't know what to *do* with you two," he says, and *then* attacks --

Jason uses the armor in his gauntlets to block what *feels* like about nine hundred punches, but was really only a dozen. "Eh, the way you talk about him -- he probably would've just beaten us until we *behaved*. Which is something you should think about trying with Tim," and Jason drops and tries his own sweep --

Kicks up when Dick leaps --

Fucking *barrel*-rolls when Dick comes down stomping -- "Stop being so *mean* --"

"But --" And Dick kicks for his back --

Jason gets *up* --

"You *want* me to be mean to Tim."

"I totally don't, Dickie. I mean, it would just turn me on more."

Dick snorts and comes at him with his nut-twisting kicks --

Jason blocks, dodges, *moves* -- fuck, yeah. He catches Dick’s ankle with one hand, *claps* the other on to make it secure --

And *barely* manages to make his toss worthwhile before Dick contorts himself up into, like, the Cartilaginous Wonder --

"Seriously, Dickie, you gotta *help* me with Tim. You can be mean if you're ready, willing, and able to suck off the consequences --"

Dick snorts again, rolls up --

The kick would've taken Jason's *head* off -- "But don't be mean like that. You know he hates the facial bruises --"

"God, you *two* --"

"What about us?" And Tim wades in, dodging and weaving to stay as much in Dick's blind spot as possible --

Dick laughs, high and bright and *happy* --

*Yes* --

"And this is how it is? Starling wears me out; Tinkerbell comes in for the kill?"
"Prepare to be fairy-dusted," Tim *intones* --

And then Dick is spinning, striking, moving --

He's just that fucking *fast*, and *one* day Tim will be that fast, too, but *Jason* won't --

And Tim isn't --

And it takes about two minutes for Dick to have Jason on his back and Tim on his stomach. Nice of him to arrange them side-by-side, like. Jason rolls Tim over onto his back and rubs his nose.

Tim wrinkles it like a ten-year-old and seems to be making a serious attempt to *blow* Jason's hand away --

And Dick drops to kneel between Tim's legs and tap on the pockets of his belt. "What else are you packing tonight, little brother, hmm?"

"I --" Tim blows again. "Not really --" Tim blows *again* --

And Dick laughs softly. "Tim. What are you doing?"

"I'm *tickling* Jason's palm so he'll *move* it."

"You're totally not."

Dick strokes Tim's chest through the armor. "You really aren't, no."

"He -- his palms *are* ticklish. I've *tested* this."

"With your fingers and tongue, bro. Not so much with the blowing."

Tim sighs and wriggles enough to get an arm free, then uses that hand to move *Jason's* hand. And then he pulls out his compact.

Which is red, and has a little fairy on it.

Jason rolls back onto his back.

Dick looks like he wants to take a picture.

Tim fixes his lipstick. "It really was only the heels tonight, Dick. I had a lot of homework to do today."

"Are you sure there won't be any surprises which would make me need to bench you for a day or five?"

Tim winces.

*Jason* winces -- Dick will *totally* bench a fucker for being a fucker --

And Tim pulls a knife from *somewhere*. The hilt isn't sized right for his hand, but he still holds it just as well as he should, considering all the training in knife-fighting Dick had given them that they weren't ever supposed to *use* --

*Jason* is allowed a belt-knife as of a year ago -- it had taken *that* long to get Dick to trust him with one that worked for more than just cutting through zip-strips and stuff like that --
And Dick takes the knife, getting that distant look again -- and shaking it off. "What's this for, Tink?"

"Well... mainly my own paranoia," Tim says, and sits up on his elbows. "It's been six months since the 'quake and Gotham is as rebuilt as it's ever likely to get. The metahumans are all gone... and the gangs *still* haven't settled down. I think I might *need* it, Dick."

Dick frowns and *that* is another Bruce-look --

"I... take it that Bruce wouldn't have approved?" And of course Tim would know. He may not have been here as long as Jason has, but... yeah.

A rueful smile makes Dick look about Tim's age, like he *needs* the hug --

Fuck it. Jason sits up and wraps an arm around Dick's shoulders. *Tim* sits up and places a gauntleted palm right on Dick's 'R.' "It's okay, Dick. I don't have to carry it --"

"Well, no, bro, you're right that it's fucking crazy out there --"

"There is just... no point whatsoever in trying to get you to stop cursing, is there, little wing?"

Jason snorts and shakes Dick's shoulders a little bit. "I'll totally do it if you let Tink run with his *good* ideas."

"You really won't," Tim says, and gives him the pissy look.

Jason grins. "Yeah, probably not," he says, and turns back to Dick. "Seriously, Big Bird. You've been doing this for almost thirteen years. We *trust* you, and we trust you for a *reason*. We all know you gotta trust yourself more often -- fuck --"

There's no such thing as being prepared for Dick's hugs. They're fucking *muscular* things, full-*bodied* things --

He and Tim are on their *backs* again, and the noises Tim is making mean either that he can't breathe or that his blush is smudging -- hunh.

"Bro, did you start wearing blush so that we'd never be sure when you were *actually* blushing?"

"Yes and no," he grits -- yeah, he can't breathe.

"Dickie..."

"I never thought I'd have brothers," he says, and his voice is thick and low. Aww...

Jason hugs right back and he knows Tim is doing the same --

"I can't -- I can't let anything *happen* to you --"

"We -- ah. We get that. Really," Tim says, and that sound means that he's patting Dick through the armor --

"One of the things I have to avoid is letting one of you *kill* someone. It can happen so *fast*..."

Like it had for the Joker right *after* that lucky-horrible shot with the poisoned bullet --

They all know exactly how that went down.
They all know what Dick dreams about when he's screaming -- and when he's smiling so darkly that even with his eyes closed Jason and Tim know it's *not* time to get close. Some nightmares you can't be saved from.

Jason squeezes as hard as he *can* --

"I -- I'll leave my knife home. All of them, I mean --"

Dick stiffens -- and then he snorts hard enough to *move* all three of them, knocking him and Tim back down to the floor and kind of glare-smiling at both of them.

"Hey, man, *I* didn't send him to the Army-Navy surplus."

"I'll have you know I bought them from a *cutler* --"

Dick presses two fingers to Tim's mouth, which --

Yeah, Tim's got that 'I'm paying attention with my cock' look on his face that Dick's so good at not noticing even a *little* bit --

("Um... Jay..."

"Yeah, bro?"

"Does Dick ever... ah. Did *you* ever... um. *With* Dick?"

"In my dreams about six hundred times. And that was just last *month*. Don't worry about being subtle around him, Tink -- he's so not gonna catch a clue."

"But --"

"You *want* him to, I know..."

But that had just been the *first* talk they'd had about it -- back before Jason realized just how Tim *really* felt about him --

Back before he knew what those looks meant.

Right now, Tim is fighting every instinct he *has*, because there's no way in hell he's not thinking about sucking those fingers in deep --

Jason *likes* having company for thoughts like that --

"It's okay, little brother," Dick says, breathy and quiet and warm and hot at the same fucking time --

And yeah, Tim shivers.

Dick responds to *that* by using his free hand to stroke Tim's hair -- currently un-spiked, because Tim likes to save the best for last -- back from his face, careful of the blush just fucking *instinctively* --

Tim's jock is gonna make him start hating life *imminently*, so Jason sits up on his elbows and jerks his head to get Dick's attention. "Sanction to carry?"

Dick smiles gently. "Sanction to carry. But if you go overboard, Tim --"
Tim moves Dick's hand from his lips. "I'm benched. And I spend that time having horrible nightmares."

"That's about the size of it, little brother. C'mon, let's get your hair right. That crime's not going to fight itself."

"Not that that wouldn't be fucking *entertaining*." Dick stands up and pulls Tim with him. "*Which* pimp is beating himself with a lead pipe in your imagination, Jay?"

Jason sighs happily and stands, jumping a few times to get the feel of *his* new boots -- sometimes he thinks his feet are gonna grow until he needs fucking clown shoes. "I got a whole chorus-line thing going on, Big Bird. Don't cramp my style."

"Oh, I'd *never* dream of it. You've got the strolls tonight, little wing. I'm taking little brother through my territory tonight."

Jason raises his eyebrows behind the mask. "Testing him with the knives?"

"Mm-hmm. And the fairy dust. And the magic wand --"

"I still *call* it a *bo*, Dick," Tim says, and his hair is already halfway aerodynamic -- "Yes, but you don't *think* of it that way, Tink, and that's just one of the reasons why I love you," and Dick *swoops* in and plants a kiss on Tim's forehead.

So much for saving the kid from his own cock. Maybe next time.

*
You thought I'd make you choose?

Bruce doesn't know how he made it back to the manor.

He doesn't know when he'd made the decision to *try* to get back here.

He doesn't know --

He'd watched most of the Justice Society -- and several hundred of the civilians they were protecting from the latest round of... beings -- be swallowed into one of those pockets, and then he had run, carrying what he thought was a baby to what he'd hoped would be safety, because the pocket had expanded.

So had the other four pockets he passed before... he doesn't know.

He'd woken in what was left of the kitchen, terrified by the silence of the child in his arms, by the creeping quiet of the manor, by *everything* --

The child had turned out to be a particularly realistic grimy doll.

He'd still had trouble putting it down.

He doesn't know where Alfred is.

He --

He's very tired, and there are muscle strains in both of his legs. His right ulna is cracked.

He doesn't know --

He doesn't know what day it is, and he can't be sure how long this day has lasted.

The sunset was... uneven. He remembers that.

Right now, he's standing in the surprisingly -- horribly -- perfect study.

The clock is open, but only by a crack. Only --

Bruce swallows and walks down the stairs --

Clark --

Clark had told him about an emergency in North Carolina, a pocket larger than the rest --

He doesn't know when that was.

He hasn't heard from Clark --

The pocket which is taking the space where the supercomputer used to be doesn't seem to be growing, at all, but --

A click, and Bruce is moving, flinging his tattered cape out to make it a target, rolling to his feet --

He has no batarangs left, but there is a bolo --
Most everything he's fought has been too large and strong for the bolos to do any good, but if an assailant is using a gun --

The man drops, cursing --

Cursing *familiarly* --

"Harvey --"

"*F*uck*. You *lied* to me," he says, and he looks to be considering shooting at his own *ankles* --

Bruce takes the gun and crouches to take Harvey's hands, always so long-fingered, always so deft --

Harvey is *snarling* at him, but --

"Harvey, I didn't know -- how did you come to *be* here --"

"I *drove*, you asshole! I was planning -- planning to get you and Al out of here -- ah, *fuck*," he says, and covers his face with his hands. "What's happening. What -- there are -- there are *voices* --"

Bruce pulls Harvey close because he needs to, because he's alive, because --

"*Bruce*. Take that fucking -- *costume* --"

"It. It's my uniform --"

"Has it done you any fucking good? You're a *mess*. I'm a mess. I don't. What day is it? Who *are* you?"

"Harvey... you must... you must stay calm --"

"Now? When my best friend in the world has been a lying sack of shit and the fucking *world* is ending and I don't know -- oh, God, they said all of Worth is gone. The whole -- whole damned *town* --" And Harvey is clawing at his face --

Harvey and Gilda *lived* in Worth --

Where do the pockets *lead*?

No, he -- he can't think of that. He tears Harvey's hands away from himself, crushing them between them --

"*Bruce* --"

"I'm here, Harvey. I -- have you. Did you see Alfred --"

"Yeah. Falling into that fucking -- *hole* --"

Bruce grunts but he doesn't fall, he doesn't waver, he doesn't *break* --

"*Cry*, you asshole!"

"I -- can't. I have to. There's work to be done --"

"Out *there*! You came *home*, Bruce. You -- ah, big guy, why didn't you *tell* me?"
Bruce swallows and shakes his head, meets Harvey's beautiful dark eyes --

So warm, even now --

"There. There had to be... secrets. Somehow --"

Harvey laughs, breathless and derisive at once. "Let me go."

"Harvey --"

"Let me *go* --"

"Harvey. Please. I need --"

"Me? Or that Halloween costume? I -- was that it? You thought I'd make you choose?"

"You love the law --"

"I just tried to fucking *shoot* you -- you. Oh. Oh, no. Oh, God, I've gotta -- where the fuck *am* I?"

Harvey... "You're in my home. My other home --"

"Surrounded by... creepy fucking *trophies* --"

"Yes --"

Harvey twists and yanks against Bruce's hold until Bruce can either let go or *hurt* him --

He lets go and Harvey stands, paces, pushes his hands through his thick, wild hair one after the other after the other --

"Batman."

"Not. Not now. I don't think..." Bruce shakes his head and stands, as well. "I think I'm... very tired now."

"I think I don't know how long I fucking *slept*..."

Bruce swallows again and pushes back the cowl --

"There you are. Look at you. I thought you had black eyes for a minute, but you're just that fucking *wiped*," Harvey says, shaking his head and cupping Bruce's face. "Big guy. I wanted to tell you. I wanted... you're the only one I *can* tell --"

"You're having nightmares again. They're... hurting you."

Harvey stares at him.

Bruce winces. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to use... that voice."

"But you knew -- as soon as you saw me?"

"There are times... sometimes the nightmares have made you cruel --"

"My -- my police-issue forty-five. In *this* house. This --" Harvey makes a strangled noise and beats at his forehead with the heel of his hand --
'"Don't *do* that, Harv --"

"Have to. Gotta. Two ways of doing things and I picked the wrong fucking --" Harvey cries out and points behind Bruce, and for a moment --

For a terrible moment Bruce wonders if it's a *trick*, but the air is changing, the quality of it --

The *pressure* --

Instinct to gather Harvey to him, to run --

Their legs tangle together, but Bruce will not fall, will not waver --

Black --

There's no air, there's nothing to breathe, there --

Oh, Alfred --

He's falling, and the only way --

Harvey is gasping, but maybe there's an end to the fall, a way --

Bruce pinches Harvey's nose shut and presses his mouth against Harvey's own, exhaling and willing Harvey's lungs to fill, for the fall to *end* --

The darkness is everything --

The darkness has always *been* everything --

He must breathe, he must help Harvey, beautiful Harvey --

Air, and it's normal, cool, faintly dry --

They're still falling --

The world is light, familiar --

And that's all he knows before he lands badly on his broken arm and the crack makes him --

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Skylark is a hottie made entirely of hottie. She's right between Jay and Tim in height and fucking *stacked*. Her tits aren't any bigger than Babs', but you can just tell that they *jiggle* more. Her ass probably does, too.

It sure as hell does when he's spanking it in his fantasies, anyway.

Skylark's *name* is Stephanie Jean Brown, but Dickie says he's not supposed to use it until she opens up to *them* -- as opposed to meeting up with them for a little cooperative ass-kicking from time to time.

Like *this* time, when Jason's kick spins the latest fuckhead of a pimp *right* into her left cross -- which is just as sweet as candy, because teeth crunch before the guy hits the ground and starts snoring.

He lets her kick the guy onto his side so he doesn't drown in his own blood or anything, and takes a bow for the girls the pimp had been terrorizing.

He hands out a few cards, Skylark divvies up the pimp's roll. He gets his hair ruffled and his cape petted, Skylark gets some tips on how to condition her perfectly fucking pretty blonde hair. *He* doesn't get it, but he doesn't have to.

She grins at him when they're all done and they fly.

The next stroll has no pimp for them -- semi-mysteriously, considering the fact that the *last* time Jason was here he was hearing about what an asshole the pimp *was* --

Heh. Was *might* just be the operative term, considering the *smugly* secretive smiles on some of the faces and the *nervously* secretive smiles on others.

This? Is no skin off his nose.

Jason throws up his hands and tells them to get the word out if the bitch-ass punk comes back *koff* from the grave *wheeze*, and this time Skylark hands out the cards. She really rocks her homemade purple and blue uniform. There's military armor for her back and chest under her top, a nice sturdy belt with nice, full pockets, big-ass boots with steel in the toe *and* the heel -- and hell fucking yes, she *does* have the legs to pull those off --

He's pretty sure Dickie's dying to tell her that actual larks don't tend to be purple, but *he* knows that she'll point out that Dick hasn't *met* all the larks in the world, yet. So.

They do the town. Stroll after stroll after stroll -- with breaks in between for muggers and dealers --

Skylark hates dealers the way Jason hates *pimps*, and Jason just bets there's a fucking story or two *there* considering what they'd seen of *Mrs.* Brown when they were doing a background check on Skylark --

That's not for them today.

Dick and Skylark had hooked up to take down her punk-ass *father* a few months back and Jason had been all set to get a little more estrogen down in the Cave -- Babs doesn't *visit* enough -- but Skylark had never taken her mask off for Dick -- or for him or Tim -- and that had been that.
Still --

Jason knocks a couple of dealers' heads together while Skylark does some nut-blasting on the guys who are down --

Good deal, but --

He whistles three short notes and jerks his thumb up, and Skylark damned well knows that means they're gonna talk at the nearest r-point. She may not be one of them *yet*, but that doesn't mean they can't teach her stuff. Dick gave the order *to* teach her stuff, but he really didn't have to. Jason *likes* it when chicks can and do beat the shit outta people, and *Tim* likes it when he can sneakily increase the number of criminals with broken hands and dislocated kneecaps.

Skylark *mostly* doesn't do that stuff --

("What, like I'm gonna steal Tink's moves or some shit?")

-- but she fucking well *can*, and that's... good enough.

Jason leads her to r-point fifty-seven B -- which has a three hundred degree view of a *lot* of the docks, and is nearly mathematically centered between *four* different strolls, because sailors are sailors.

Heh.

Once she's up, Jason steps about *halfway* into a shadow and pulls out an energy bar. *Skylark* pulls a *sandwich* from one of her pockets. Jason can smell roast beef, onions, mayo, horseradish --

"Jesus, you're fucking awesome."

Skylark smirks at him and takes a *big* bite. Right. There's more than one way he's not getting any tonight. Jason sighs and eats his vaguely berry-meets-sawdust stick of health, and it's not even remotely a surprise that Skylark's done with her sandwich first.

She sighs, belches, pats her belly through the armor, sighs *again* -- "So what did you wanna talk about, Starling?" Her voice is carefully light -- too careful.

Jason holds a hand up and fucking well chews *faster* --

A snicker. "You should dip those things in chocolate or something."

Hunh. Jason swallows -- "I can see it, yeah. But I dunno if chocolate would actually *stick* to this crap. Here, taste --"

She wrinkles her nose *and* glares at him.

"Okay, okay, these aren't even the ones with seaweed in 'em --"

"*Eugh*!"

"Heh. I have *seen* you drink those shakes from McBurger's --"

"That's -- that's special *chocolate* seaweed --"

Jason flips his lenses up just to give her a nice Look --
And she plants her fists on her hips and sticks her tongue out at him. Which --

"Heh. Sometimes Owl does that."

"Oh -- seriously?"

Jason tucks the last of the bar away and dusts off his gauntlets. "Uh, huh. She totally knows how to have fun."

"Every time *I've* worked with her, it's always been 'No,' and 'Don't do that,' and 'Damn it, Skylark!' and --"

"I get you, I get you," Jason says, and pushes with both hands. "She's totally worried about you because she knows how tough it is on girl vigilantes when they're just starting out."

"I've been doing this for almost a year -- oh." She snorts. "Yeah, okay, I'm the new kid, I can deal," and she punches his shoulder lightly. "What *did* you want to talk to me about? I didn't screw up or anything, did I?" Careful, careful, careful.

"Nah, you're good. You could be getting more out of your kicks, but then, so could I, you know?"

She gives him that kind of *old* smile she has. The one which Jason has learned comes with the territory for pretty much *any* halfway normal kid with fucked-up parents. He has it, ninety percent of the pros have it, *Tim* has it, *Dick* has it even though his *circus* parents were apparently pretty fucking great --

"I'm not trying to give you a line here, Skylark. I want you *in*."

She frowns. "What..." And her face moves kind of oddly -- she's totally blinking behind the mask.

"Seriously, babe --"

"I'm not your *babe* --"

"Okay! Not my babe, got it. Come home with me, anyway, hunh? You need better armor for your legs and the kind of training we just can't *give* on the street."

"And -- you're not telling me to go *home*?"

*Jason* blinks -- and knows she can see it. "Uh? No? Why the fuck would I do that?"

She flips her own lenses up, and she's awkward with it -- it's not something she does all that often, and --

"Hey, blue eyes. I was totally thinking brown because of how dark your blonde is --"

"I dye it so I look more serious and -- *Starling*! What, was all this some kinda fucking audition?"

"No? I mean -- not a question. Robin's had us waiting for you to come out --"

"You already *know* who I am!"

"Well, yeah, but we were totally trying to be polite," Jason says, and *then* realizes how stupid it sounds --

Skylark's looking at him like he's a *nutbar* --
"Okay, look, I'm blaming Robin for this, okay? He's kinda fucking crazy old-fashioned."

She's still giving him the stink-eye.

"Can we please skip to the part where you come home with me and get new toys? Seriously, Tink's had this *fantastic* mask all ready for you for weeks --"

"What's wrong with my *mask*?"

"Nothing! But the new one is all feathered-looking around the edges, has lenses for night-vision and infrared, and it's totally a better match for that purple you like --"

"Ooh -- it's eggplant."

"The -- that's what that purple is called?"

"Aubergine in England and France and stuff, but that's -- I don't know. Wussy."

Jason snickers. "And 'eggplant' isn't?"

"Not if you *don't* want a kick to the sac," she says, and crosses her arms under her unbelievable tits --- right.

"So you're comin' home with me tonight?"

"I -- Starling --"

"Jason. Or Jay," he says, and offers his hand.

Her eyes are wide, her mouth is open --

"Jesus, you're hot --"

And she giggles for him and takes his hand, squeezing hard and shaking it. "Steph, you pig. Not that you didn't know that --"

"Still nice to hear you say it," Jason says, twisting the hold until he can clasp her forearm.

"Oh -- got it," she says, and actually blushes a little, and maybe he's kinda fucking *trained*, because he reaches out to stroke her cheek --

He *stops* himself --

And she shivers and presses her cheek against his fingertips. "You -- like this?"

"Uh. Yeah," he says, and strokes a little -- gentle because of his gauntlets -- "I just -- got kinda used to doing this back when Tink was still just Tim."

"So the two of you *are* screwing?"

How had she not *seen* them --

Except that Tim has never really been big on getting crazy on the street unless it's a *high* rooftop and it's the *end* of the night -- after Steph has gone home to her mother.

Jason shakes it off a little. "Yeah, actually. Sorry, it's weird to think of you not already knowing that."
This time, her smile is small and kinda *cute*. Just --

"Just so you know? Tink and I are *not* monogamous. I'm just, you know, putting that out there. For no reason at all. Definitely not because I jerk off thinking about you --"

Steph snorts and hauls him in for a *hard* kiss. Their mouths don't get too far open and there's no *tongue* --

Jason still has to go with that being a *good* sign.

"So who else is *he* screwing?"

"Heh. You know Young Justice?"

"Yeah?"

"So does he. Well, the guys, anyway."

"Oh -- fuck! Are you saying Superboy's gay?"

Fucking Superboy --

("You *do* realize that the two of you only dislike each other because you're so much *alike*, don't you?"

"*Yes*. There only *needs* to be one of me --"

"My rectum disagrees. Strenuously.")

"Hey, what did I say?"

Jason smiles ruefully. "Superboy and I are a little too much the same kind. I look at him and see the kid I used to be when I was young and fucking *ignorant* --"

"As opposed to young and slightly -- *slightly* -- less ignorant?"

"Heh, and now you sound like Tink. All right, look -- I don't have anything real against the guy. He always steps up and does his job and he has Tink's back when I don't. It's on me that I think he's too damned young, and not on anyone else. And? He fucks everything on two legs, so if you want a piece? He probably won't put up much of a fight."

She gives him a narrow look. "You think T-Tim can do better."

"Fuck yeah, I do," Jason says, and winks. "I also think he can do better than me."

She hums and tosses her ponytail. "But I can't?"

"I don't know, not-my-babe. Can you?"

Another snort and she gives him a casual -- but *hard* -- push.

"I can't fucking wait to put you on the weights."

"Not the gymnastics equipment?"

"Eh, that's Robin's -- Dick's --- thing --"
"His name is *Dick*?"

Jason mimes turning down the volume. "Older and wiser vigilantes than *us* have tried and *failed* to talk him out of that. He's pretty serious most of the time, but he knows more dick jokes than *anyone*.

"And Owl puts up with that?"

Well...

She snorts again. "And *that's* a no. There are these *constant* flamewars on the superhero boards about whether or not Owl and Robin are hooking up, and there's even this old, blurry picture which may or may *not* be them kissing back when Owl was -- wait, *was* she Batgirl?"

"Totally, yeah. Apparently, Dick was seriously surprised when she changed her name and look, but..." Jason shakes his head. "Everyone knew that Gotham would go to hell without *someone* for all the surviving heroes to, you know, rally around, but the way *Dick* tells it? He wasn't even remotely sure it should be him -- even after he traveled the world getting even more hardcore than he already was. Owl changed her name and *style* to get him to cope the way everyone *else* needed him to."

Steph nods thoughtfully, chewing on her lip a little.

Jason lets her do her thinking and pulls out the end of the energy bar again. It doesn't smell any better.

It doesn't look any better.

It sure as *fuck* doesn't taste any better, but he damned well eats it, promising himself thirds of whatever amazing thing Alfred will be cooking for them next.

Maybe fourths if Tim gives him that look where it's all about him trying and failing to *conceive* of any way Jason can be more of a pig. Jason smiles to himself for that --

"What's that for?"

"Thinking about Tink being a prissy bitch -- 'cause he totally is if you hadn't picked that up."

"I *watched* him fucking *destroy* some guy who spat on his boots. He didn't even let me *help*.

Here's hoping the guy had committed some *actual* crime... no, Tim's not ever that bad.

*He* is if someone gives Tink a hard time where he can hear them --

Neither of them are supposed to be like that, but sometimes you have to do the necessary. Even when it isn't. Jason shakes it off --

"That looked -- less good. Wait, am I supposed to be making you talk to me --"

"Yes. Yes, you totally are," Jason says, and winds a lock of her hair around his fingers before tugging a little. "We all work solo at least sometimes, but I'm not as good at it as Robin and Tink. I get too wrapped up in my own shit, you know?"

Steph's nod is a little troubled -- *she* shakes it off. "Tell me."

"Just thinking... well, Robin was *Batman's* Robin for almost six whole years. His whole damned
adolescence, practically, you know?"

"It... gets to him? Like he feels guilty?"

"Fuck, yeah. Especially when he looks at me and Tink and sees people Batman maybe wouldn't have liked so much. Or wouldn't have approved of even if he did like us. There was a little of that tonight."

Steph frowns. "But you and Tink are so good. You guys never fuck up."

"Eh, you haven't seen us when we're tired -- or too tired not to be pissed right the fuck off. But yeah, we're good enough -- and Robin never lets us think for even a minute that we aren't -- but Robin also remembers being the subordinate partner to a man who worked most of the wild circus boy out of him and left someone professional and fucking hard. Well, when he's not making dick jokes and making fun of me and Tink and hugging us like our lives depend on it -- uh. It's complicated?"

Another thoughtful nod. "Okay, let's hit it. We can totally make five more strolls before you bring me back to your place and we totally don't screw over the pommel horse."

Jason blinks... a lot. "Uh?"

Steph gives him a sly smile, tilting her head back and licking her lips --

"Hell, yes," Jason says, moving in slow and cupping her waist with one hand and her face -- carefully -- with the other. His hands are big enough that the texturing on his gauntlets can really fuck with her hair --

He's constantly ripping his own hair out --

And he's totally not thinking about hair even a little once they start kissing, 'cause Steph's mouth tastes like peppery meat, and she's doing this thing where she teases Jason's tongue into her mouth and then pushes it out again and then coaxes it in again --

Jason laughs into the kiss and tries to dodge her tongue a little bit, get a little bob and weave action going --

She hums and presses close, and Jason can't feel her body's heat even a little, but he can feel the promise of it, and that's good enough for the street. He pulls back and licks a stripe over her lips --

Goes over it from the other direction --

And Steph giggles for him, pushing him back and looking him up and down. "Not bad," she says, and starts to back her way to the edge of the roof, but --

That alarm. A buzz rather than a chime or anything -- "Steph, wait."

"What is it?"

"Somebody is fucking with the Cave. I've gotta jet --"

"Wait, what? Your base?"

"Yeah," Jason says, and tries to swallow his fucking heart back down to where it belongs -- "I'll call you, but it's not safe for me to take you back there --"
"You need *backup*, asshole!"

Fuck -- Jason pulls the palmtop Tink had beaten him into learning how to use and checks their twenties --

Jason is the closest, followed by Tink, and Tink still rides one of the *smaller* bikes --

"Fuck it, yeah, you okay with riding -- uh. Pillion?"

Steph snorts and jumps off the roof -- "I'm not your *bitch*, either."

"That's *Tink*," Jason says, and follows. "Sometimes, anyway."

Steph hits the ground well -- no flashy little tumbles this time -- and takes off at a run for their bikes. Jason follows, wondering if it's *safe* enough that Steph's own bike won't get jacked --

Fuck it, he'll buy her a new one. She'll *need* a new one.

He catches up to her and they go. It *hurts* to ignore the dealer they'd missed before --

Steph kicks out *while* running --

Okay, he can do that, too. He makes it a good one -- lots of spin to keep his momentum up -- and the guy is taking a nap. Maybe some junkie will steal his stash and knife him before they get back. Stranger things have happened.

They make it to Jason's bike in under five minutes, but Steph's panting a little when she puts on Jason's spare helmet.

"You okay?"

She gives him the thumbs-up and fastens the thing --

"Starling, what's the word?" And Dick *sounds* breathless, which means that he was sprinting for his *own* bike --

"I'm pulling out now -- and bringing Skylark with me."

Dicks hisses -- "That's not safe --"

"She's one of us now, BB. If it's bad enough that she *can't* help, I'm pulling *both* of us out at speed. Could you raise Al?"

"No. But I can't tell if that's because he's hurt or because he's not wearing his *comm*," Dick says, and there were so many curses in there --

So many fights where *both* Alfred and Dick lost --

"How far out are you?"

Dick's palmtop should be showing his tracer just as well as Jason's own is, but -- yeah, he has to ask. "Twenty. Fifteen if I don't trip over any more crime --"

"Make it ten, little wing. *Twelve* if you run into a parade of toddlers and little old ladies."

"Uh. Fuck?"
"We're *not* losing our base. Robin out."

Jason fucking well pours it on, taking the bike up to one-twenty and wishing he trusted any of the gods around enough to pray. The bike is the best -- the tires are only a month old, the engine got a full exam a week and a half ago, and it's as responsive as one of his own *limbs* -- but the *roads* aren't --

He doesn't *know* how well the bike will respond with a passenger this *heavy* on it. Steph's five-seven and at *least* one-forty-five -- easily twenty pounds on Tim --

Shit, shit --

No, he's not thinking. He's *driving*, and he's making himself just as small and aerodynamic as he can, and it's after midnight. The roads are *mostly* empty, and he's going fast enough to blow through the red lights --

Another --

*Another*, and Steph makes a *yeeping* noise through the helmet radio when Jason noses them between a semi and a child-molester van --

They're good --

Over the bridge --

That's one pissed-off cop who isn't gonna catch them *tonight* --

Fuck, what if the *signal* goes up? No, not that, either, because *Dick* will go back for that --

Out of the city, and he fucking *owns* these back roads. Sometimes he wonders what'll happen when the *other* rich fucks living in Bristol finally get up the nerve to *complain* about the engine noise coming from the vicinity of Wayne Manor --

"Where the fuck are we *going*? This is *country* club land!"

"You're totally right, Lark, and I *promise* I'll explain everything once I'm sure we're not about to die in puddles of our own piss."

She snorts for that, and it feels good, feels *great* --

Yeah, he'll focus on the happy. He'll just --

Fuck, Ra's al Ghul could be waiting with fifty machine-gun-toting Ubus. Strange could be waiting with whatever whackjobs he managed to attract. Who else?

Who *else*?

Maybe Dent finally figured out what it meant that Batman disappeared at right around the same time that his ex-best-friend died mysteriously --

Okay, no, he's making himself fucking *queasy* and he's still at least a minute out -- "Lark, say something happy. Right now."

"*What*?"

"*Something*! I'm goin' nuts over here --"
"Uh. Uh. Uh -- your uniform makes your ass look *fantastic*.

Hunh. "Seriously?"

"Oh, yeah. The cape is always blocking it, but when it isn't? I'm totally thinking of grabbing your cheeks and squeezing hard."

"Really digging your nails in?"

"*Fuck*, yeah," Steph says, and squeezes Jason's abdomen.

"Fuckin' A. I could go with that."

"Like Tink *isn't* all over you."

"See, Tink always gets distracted by my cock --"

"It's a very nice penis," Tim says, *right* there on-channel, and maybe Jason just needs to own the fact that he gets distracted on the radios.

"*Thank* you, bro. How far out?"

"Hn. Fifteen minutes, still. Armed robber shot out one of my tires --"

"*Shit* --"

"The good news is that the sealant works as well as it should, and that my batarang work from a spinning, ditching bike is excellent."

Jason snorts *with* Steph, and --

He's here. Two hundred yards from the hologram and slowing --

Slowing --

Stopping while he can still fucking *see* --

"I'm going in. You might hear me coming *out* --"


Jason parks and pulls out a batarang --

Jason thinks about it and pulls out three shuriken.

Steph takes out her sweet little nightstick.

Jason gestures for 'go in rolling,' Steph nods -- "Nothing fancy until I give you the high sign," Jason whispers and tries to *drill* it into her --

"I'm following your lead. *You* know the territory," she says, and drills her own look into him.

Good enough, and his ass is too fantastic for them to get killed. He's just gonna -- go with that.

He goes in, tucking and rolling and bracing himself for bullets, beam weapons, zombies --

Except for how *not*, because that -- *that* -- is Bruce motherfucking *Wayne* sending a batarang
at his head --

"*Down*, Lark --"

"Got it!"

And he's rolling more, moving -- there --

He sends out two shuriken --

The -- thing that looks like Wayne --

Right down to the Batsuit which looks like the *old* ones Dick had shown him, the *first* ones --

The *thing* blocks once, twice --

The third shuriken gets caught in his gauntlet --

It looks fucking *chewed* already --

And the thing grunts and grips his arm exactly like Jason had *hurt* him, which --

No, immobilize him first, ask questions later --

"*Fuck*," Lark says, and tosses one of the batarangs Tink gave her *past* Bruce --

At *Two*-Face -- who's somehow a *one*-face -- who's wobbling on his feet due to taking a batarang to the head, but holding a gun steady --

Jason whips out another batarang and lets fly, taking out the gun, but there are all *kinds* of fucking guns in here -- "Lark, protocol J --"

"Got it," she says, and sounds calm and steady, ready for anything -- especially for getting out of the way and after the obviously weaker opponent --

Except that Jason's no longer sure which one that *is*, because the thing is still clutching his arm --

Fucking shaking like he's *sick* --

Two-Face grunts and hits the deck -- "*Bruce*! *Run*!"

What. The --

The *thing* grunts and just fucking *opens* his stance --

And then he's *moving*. He's --

Motherfuck, he's as fast as *Dick*, and he's --

Protecting Two-Face. Protecting -- but --

And he *can't* think about that right now, because he has to defend his damned fucking *life* --

Go for the wounded places, the places where the suit has been chewed or burnt or sheared off --

Block and move --
Move *again*, because that punch would've crunched his fucking cheekbone --

Block the strike that would've paralyzed his arm and spin into a strike of his own --

He connects to the arm and feels the bone *move* -- yeah, it's broken, but the thing doesn't even grunt for it this time, doesn't *pause* --

Jason drops, sweeps --

Gets stomped in the fucking *gut*, but he keeps his air, rolls --

Movement --

And the thing knocks Steph's nightstick away --

He's gotta teach her to go *low* with those hits --

If he gets *out* of this -- no, Steph is scrambling away, rolling fast just like she should --

The thing's attention is split --

And Jason can damned well kick for the thing's knees --

He misses and hits a thigh that's fucking corded -- but *that* time the thing grunts, staggers --

And Steph comes in low enough to jab the thing in the *crotch* with her nightstick --

And Jason *hammers* the top of his spine through the neck armor --

"*No* --"

That was *Dent* again, what the *shit* --

No, no, he's coping, he's definitely coping, because the thing just dropped to its knees --

And Steph's uppercut turns the lights out. Maybe.

Maybe --

He waves Steph back -- no. "Lark. Four hundred yards northeast is a cabinet. Third drawer down. Blue label. Bring four."

"Four hundred, three, blue, four?"

Jason nods and gestures go --

And then he kicks the thing onto his face and reaches for the belt --

Fuck, no, he can't be sure all the traps are in the same places, which means he can't tie the thing's hands anywhere *near* his waist --

Knock him out, drag him to the uneven bars, strip him as much as possible while *avoiding* the belt, because they damned well have Tink for that stuff -- he's good. He's good.

And Steph's already running back with the tranq darts. "I brought six just in case!"

"Good deal. Start Dent with two to the --" Nice, she'd managed to zip-strip his ankles, too. "Calves.
"Just jab 'em right in there."

"Who *are* you people?"

Steph kicks him in the chest. "Punks who fake amnesia piss me *off*," she says, and gets him but good. He's weaving before she makes it the five paces to Jason's position, and Jason stops her *right* there. "You think that guy is getting up after *that*?"

"That *guy* -- fuck. That *thing* looks just like fucking *Batman*, Lark. Watch my back."

He can tell she's blinking rapidly behind the mask, but she holds the two syringes he doesn't take like the weapons they are and spins the nightstick over the fingers of her other hand.

Maybe she should get a staff, too? Would that work with tits like hers?

How the fuck is Dick gonna react to *this* --

No, no, focus, just focus, because the thing hasn't moved from the uncomfortable position Jason left him in, but *he* wouldn't, either.

So he creeps, and he watches, and he creeps some more, and he swallows back bile that someone could know this much about them --

What if there are more of them?

What if he'd sent Steph into -- no, no, if there were more, they would've recognized how vulnerable Steph was two minutes ago and used that to take out Jason's only back-up. Right?

"Lark --"

"Say something happy?"

"*Fuck*, yes," Jason says, and tries to find a spot on the thing's body where he wouldn't be vulnerable to hands, feet, knees, elbows --

"I totally wanna watch you fucking the *life* out of Tink one day."

"That counts as happy. That totally counts --"

He tackles the thing and jabs for his exposed bicep, using every last pound of his weight to hopefully hold down --

The guy who used to be able to bench him and Dick *combined* --

Nothing.

A lot of nothing.

More nothing --

"Gimme another dart," and Jason reaches back --

Steph claps it in his palm just like she'd stepped out of the safe-zone --

He jabs the thing again and calls it good, standing up and dusting himself off a little. "Don't *do* that, by the way --"
"You are *not* getting on my ass for moving to back your play when you're acting like this guy's the fucking Terminator on PCP."

"He -- okay, look, what if I'd needed you to throw your bolo?"

She scowls and crosses her arms under her tits.

"Don't gimme that, Lark. Which of us has been doing this longer?"

"You're seriously gonna trot that out every time you disagree with me for the rest of my life, aren't you?"

"To be fair," Tim says, "the rest of your life might not be that long."

"Yeep -- *gruesome*, much?"

"Often. I take it the threat is neutralized?"

"Yes --"

"*Maybe*," Jason says and glares at Steph for a moment before sucking it up and dealing with the fact --

With a lot of damned facts at once.

He's not even touching the theories. "We're going over the Cave with a fine-toothed comb once Big Bird gets back here, Tink. Take a look at what we got," he says, and lifts the thing's head by the hair --

Tim steps back and shakes his head once --

"And *this* fucker," Steph says, and Jason can tell when Tim notices One-Face by the way his hands twist into strike-formations he didn't learn from him *or* Dick.

He's ready for Shiva-work.

"Stand down and help us get the *thing* to the uneven bars --I'm not even gonna *try* to touch his belt."

"That's the old uniform. The -- there aren't any traps --"

"We don't *know* that, Tink. I -- shit, we don't know who the fuck it *is*."

Tim opens his mouth, shakes his head, and shuts it again. "You're right. We'll have to wait for Robin or... A?"

God, they didn't check on *him* -- but. "We can't risk bringing A into this. We don't know if these two checked what's above us or not --"

"Uh... maybe?" Steph looks back and forth between them. "There's a whole lot of dirt over by the big-ass computers. And a big hole in the... wait, *is* it a ceiling if you're in a Cave?"

"Hole --"

"What --"
Jason gestures at Tink to ask first while he gets a hold on the thing's legs --

"Ah... show me?"

"Stay *close*, you two."

"*Yes*, sir, Starling, sir --"

"Christ, Lark --"

"He really is -- ah. Skylark, words cannot express how *much* Starling is freaking out right now. I mean, if he feels anything like the way I do, his scrotum is trying to enter his abdominal cavity again and his penis is a full inch shorter than it should be."

"There's nothing wrong with my *cock*!"

"Note the quaver in his voice --"

"I -- fuck you both sideways."

But Steph's laugh is a little wondering... "Okay, I get it, he's scared something else fucked-up is gonna happen and he doesn't want to be responsible for me getting hurt --"

"I *said* that --"

"Really *not*, Starling. And... uh. Maybe I'm not so used to people worrying about me...?" And that was... really soft. Conciliatory, like.

Jason bites his lip and turns to look at her. "Apology accepted if you accept mine?"

"Done," she says, and tugs on her ponytail a little. Her lenses are down, but he *thinks* he knows what expression is in her eyes, anyway.

Maybe.

Jason keeps dragging the thing --

And it *has* to be a thing, because no one is that perfect. No one could even --

*That* day, Dick had sucked in a shaky breath, stroked his abdomen up and down and up again, stared up at the ceiling --

("He had... this one scar. Well, he had a whole *lot* of scars, but this one... this one was on his scalp, just peeking out a little on his forehead. I always noticed it because it had a little teardrop shape, like a shiny silver drop of sweat that never went away. He wore concealer over it every time we went out -- or just styled his hair to fall over it -- because he was just... incredibly paranoid about facial scars. About everything, really...")

And Jason had just... scooted in next to him. They were in the big bed, in the room Dick had shared with Bruce -- as opposed to the museum to Dick's childhood down the hall --

Dick sighed --

("The first time we made love...")

Dick swallowed and balled his hands into *fists* --
"Hey, you don't have to tell me --"

"I do. I do. And -- wait, do you not want to know? I know it's a lot to put on you --"

"No, I. I kinda. I wanna know everything."

And Jason remembers blushing his fucking *head* off, but he also remembers loving the hug Dick had given him, hating his constant fucking *hard-on* --

("I said... God, at some point when I really would've said *anything*, and I already know you know what *that's* like, little wing..."

"Heh, yeah. What'd you say?"

"I said -- something like -- "I want to know about your *scars*, Bruce!" And you should absolutely imagine me sounding like scary porn, because my voice isn't that deep now, but *then*..."

'How young *were* you?' is one of a handful of questions Jason's never been able to bring himself to ask. The way Dick says 'we've been hooking up for *years*, little wing' when he's talking about Clark is bad *enough*. This --

'This' was something different. Something --

("That was the first scar he told me about -- maybe because he saw me staring, maybe because he was working his way from the top down. He got it from a little old lady who'd been running numbers with her mah jong crowd down in Chinatown. This was in the days *before* the cape and cowl, and those women must've thought he was just another criminal... heh. She hit him with what he said was an absolutely *beautiful* vase, he bled into his eyes, they beat him with everything handy until he ran *away*.

"No way!"

"He *did* eventually put them away. Eventually."

And yeah, that scar is *right* fucking there, and it *does* have a teardrop shape, and it *does* look like he's sweating --

Though that could be the smell. Now that he's not kicking Jason's ass all over the Cave... yeah, no way this guy's had a shower in the past three days.

What the hell was he *doing* before he got here?

Who *is* he?

And why does Dent have a whole *face*?

God, where the fuck is *Dick*? *Did* the signal pop off?

No, focus, get him --

Fuck, no, the uneven bars are too *fragile* if this is --

He *can't* be. Dick had beaten the *shit* out of Ra's for even *trying* to take Bruce's body to a Pit, and then he'd damned well *burned* it --

("Raven took my emotions from me... and then I poured on the lighter fluid and lit the entire book of
matches.

And how fucking *fucked* --

But the bars are still too fragile. Jason drags the thing to the pommel horse, checks to make sure the pommel horse is screwed down into the stone *well*, and then he zip-strips the thing's wrists to the pommels themselves, arranging the thing so that his arms will be straight.

And then he uses two more zip-strips each.

And then he worries about the swelling from the obviously broken ulna.

And then he gets one of the wrap-around ice-packs and slaps it on.

And *then* he takes a deep breath --

"Master Jason --"

"*Gah*! Alfred! I. Are you *okay*?" And once Jason is on the floor again, he turns to see Alfred looking fucking *grey* as he stares at... the thing.

"So young..." Alfred shudders --

"It's not -- we don't know that it's -- I mean, it can't be --"

"Of course not. It's only..." Alfred shudders again. "I can't allow myself to be seen."

"Uh... no. But you can... I mean, there are questions you can write out for us to ask... him?"

"Master Dick should --" Alfred cuts himself off and studies the thing *hard* for a long moment, finally reaching out and actually peeling back the gauntlet that *isn't* shredded -- "No scar..."

"Uh... he's supposed to have one there?"

"A four and a quarter inch knife scar acquired while he searched for Master Dick's parents' murderer. If he is... if he is who he seems to be somehow... he's too young."

"Like... twenty-eight instead of twenty-nine?"

Alfred's mouth firms into a hard line. "I will prepare questions for you to ask," he says, and squeezes Jason's shoulder through the armor. "You must be strong for Master Dick."

"Oh, yeah, absolutely --"

And Alfred is one of the *very* few people who can shut Jason up with a look when he feels like it. Just --

Jesus. Jason bites the inside of his cheek and nods.

Alfred heads back toward the stairs.

Jason takes one last look at...

He heads over to check out the hole.

*
Rather more revealing.

The darkness consumes. This is not a surprise in and of itself. In truth, he always knew that this would be the truth of his existence, the ultimate and only true end.

This is -- this *must* be -- the expression of everything which has always lived within him. This --

"Are you sure that's gonna hold, Big Blue?"

"Honesty, Starling, you could at least choose a nickname for me that hasn't been used by Lex Luthor's *tabloids*." Clark. That --

In the darkness with him?

He's not alone? Why can't he *see* --

He opens his eyes and spends a moment berating himself for being foolish -- he's in the *Cave*, and that means all is --

The man crouched in front of him is utterly unfamiliar. The uniform he's wearing is more garish somehow than even Alan Scott's -- despite the lack of purple to go with the red, gold, and green -- and his expression is hard and utterly closed.

He is...

He seems to be young enough -- Bruce's age or perhaps somewhat younger -- and there's no way to be sure how many scars he has under his clothes, and so Bruce has no reason to assume there'll be many.

He is staring --

And Bruce remembers that this cave is not *the* Cave, that the differences far outweigh the similarities. He'd allowed himself to be beaten by two teenagers, allowed --

No --

"Where --" His voice is a furred croak. Bruce clears his throat and tries again, fixing his expression into the glare that, in his experience, had gotten the best results from even the criminals *most* entrenched in their terrible lifestyles. For a moment it even seems to work -- the young man shivers impressively --

But then the man gets up and walks away without a word, without --

He has to find *Harvey*. The people who'd taken over this Cave --

But where *is* he? Are these people working against the terrible *folding*? Bruce frowns. If this is the Cave -- and even the scents are the same, and the few looks he'd gotten at the amazingly advanced computer monitors had shown a city recognizably Gotham --

No, that's not -- possible.

Is it? Could it be?
A part of him had known he was restrained -- and restrained *well* -- before he'd fully regained consciousness, but, in some ways, it's only fully sinking in now.

There are at least two zip-strips wrapped around each of his wrists, and there are bolts driven into the mats -- and the rock below them -- to which his ankles are tied.

His boots and belt have been removed, as has his chest armor. He'd never gotten the cowl back over his head after falling through the pocket --

Alfred's gone. Alfred --

But could he have come here?

"Robin..." And that was Clark's voice again, unmistakably and unfailingly gentle --

"Don't," says a man with a somewhat rough tenor voice. The roughness speaks either of emotion or a habit of indulging in some sort of smoke --

"Hey, Big Bird, it's okay. We're *all* here, and we're all gonna deal with this." Another man's voice, or perhaps it's the voice of the large and well-muscled teenager who had gotten past Bruce's guard so easily with the help of his partner --

"Does he really -- I mean. No one can look *exactly* like --"

"Lark, it's -- every picture I've seen, every scrap of training footage --"

"It's not him," says the man with the roughened voice. "*He* coughed out his last breath on my cheek. *He* was dug up by Ra's al Ghul. And *he* was burned to ash by *me*."

"We gotta question him --"

"Yes. We do. Superman, please do the honors. I'm going to see what the hell is going on with this Dent-clone."

Clone? What could they possibly be --

But then Clark is in front of him, and he looks whole, rested, and uninjured. His hair is somewhat more casually-styled than what Bruce is accustomed to, but his uniform is correct, and his posture as he hovers a foot off the floor couldn't be *more* correct --

But his expression could not be more dark. Is he somehow in league with these people?

Had he been co-opted? Is there a way Bruce could bring him back? No ally could be more *useful* - -

"Clark," Bruce whispers, "where are the others?"

Clark frowns in annoyed confusion -- "Who is Clark?"

It's just that -- "That's the expression I taught you to cultivate. I'm glad to see you've finally perfected it."

Clark jerks in the air and narrows his eyes. "You claim to know me but not -- who are these others you're speaking of?"

"Alan. Jay --"
"How *old* are you?"

*Bruce* frowns -- but they're in a strange and desperately *unlikely* situation. Of course he must be tested.

It's... a sort of enough that Clark is keeping his voice low, as well.

He nods. "I'm twenty-seven. I'll be twenty-eight on December twelfth --"

"What is *today's* date?"

"I --" Bruce blinks once -- "I can't be sure. It was the tenth of July when you came to me with what you'd learned about the spatial anomalies --"

"Anomalies --" Clark shakes his head once and frowns. "You're saying that we were fighting side by side."

"We went to Luthor together, Clark. We... he had no answers for us, no way to reverse the effects of the spatial *folding* he had caused. After that, we began to move to various 'hot spots,' doing what we could to save civilians from the... aliens which had been brought through due to Luthor's meddling."

Clark frowns more deeply. "And you are... twenty-seven."

Bruce raises an eyebrow. "I wasn't aware that was a problem. Please, Clark, tell me what's become of Harvey. I believe he has some sort of --" Problem, but he can't break Harvey's confidence. "He needs assistance badly --"

"He's your friend."

"Of course he is. You know that from all of your *surveillance*, Clark --"

"When I was *surveilling*... Batman, he did not call me by that name."

That... is worth a laugh, for all that he knows that it wasn't a very good one. "I know. I was a fool. You came to me and offered trust, friendship, *companionship*... it took me far too long to realize that it would cost nothing to take it."

Clark -- swallows.

"My friend, I didn't -- there was no time for me to -- the anomalies --" Bruce shakes his head. "I was a fool, and there is no excuse. Please, tell me of Harvey."

Clark closes his eyes for a moment, and when he opens them they're *hard* still... but the hardness is more brittle. "Dent is resting on the gurney. He responded to the sedative far more deeply than you did."

"Sedative -- I was *drugged*?"

"Are you truly surprised? You invaded the home and base of several deeply territorial vigilantes. Whoever you are, your mode of dress would suggest that you know something of --"

"*Clark*. You know who I *am* --"

"What's your middle name."
"I don't have one --"

"When did you learn to drive."

"I taught myself when I was thirteen --"

"How did that end."

"I crashed my father's Jaguar -- *Clark* --"

Clark shudders. "What. What were you doing when -- when you were found."

He hadn't *broken* anything in particular -- other than the car, but he was bleeding from several cuts, bruised all over, and his right ankle and left wrist were hideously swollen. And all he could think of was the look on Alfred's face. All --

He was going to be so disappointed, and maybe this would be the final straw, the thing which would make Alfred leave him, go back to England and find a whole family, a *good* family --

"How. How do you know --"

"Answer. The question --"

"I was weeping. And attempting to piece the front headlights back together. At some point, it occurred to me that my blood was a better adhesive than -- "

"What. Which hospital were you brought to?"

"I wasn't. Alfred cared for my cuts and bruises himself, and explained to me that he would never leave me if he could possibly help it, but that I had to follow... follow the rules which were meant to keep me safe and whole --"

"*Enough*," Clark says, flying up and back --

"Alfred. He told you these things. Is *he* all right?"

Clark blows out a breath -- "He's fine. He -- Bruce --" Clark shakes his head. "This is not... this is not your place."

"No, of course not. I never had these... garish *trophies*. The computer is something I'd very much like *to* have, but the one in *my* Cave is buried in some pocket of an anomaly. You, though -- you came to find me?"

"What? I -- no, Bruce, I -- this is *my* universe, and I --" Clark licks his lips. "The Alfred who gave me these questions to ask is *also* from this universe."

"But -- where *is*... your Bruce?"

Clark laughs softly. "Oh... he was never mine. And he's been dead these past six years, thanks to the Joker."

That -- "The *clown*?"

Clark floats back down and crouches in front of Bruce the way the strange man had, searching him --

This close, Bruce can see the lines at the corners of Clark's eyes --
The lines which simply weren't *there* -- and trying to reach out is just an excellent reminder that he's been tied. And that he has a broken *arm* -- "I have to -- Clark, how old are *you*?"

Clark smiles softly. "I'm thirty-seven. You also helped me learn how to... well," he says, and relaxes his face into --

There are no lines. "You don't *age*?"

"A discovery I made not long after you first *did* begin calling me Clark."

"Then -- the anomalies --"

"They didn't happen here, Bruce. Nothing like that ever happened on anything like that scale..." Clark shakes his head again. "Let me take you back to the Fortress and bathe you. And -- you need to be healed."

"Clark, you -- tell me who these people --"

"He's that young, Superman?"

And the strange man is back. He moves admirably well, though his hair is a little too long to be practical as a vigilante -- especially if his uniform has no cowl --

The girl's hair had been much, much longer than that --

Longer than *Dinah's* --

"I'm afraid so, Robin. But -- he answered --"

The man waves a hand. "I was monitoring. Alfred told me about the Jag when I confessed to him about how I hated... Bruce's rules."

"I... had rules for you?"

"*You* didn't. You --" The man covers his face with one hand and clenches the other into a fist. "Ah -- God. I. You don't know me."

"No, I don't, but if you were a part of the Mission --"

"When you were that -- when *he* was that age he thought he didn't *need* a partner," the man says, and drops his hands to his sides. "Right?"

"I thought a great many foolish things a week ago, but... you were very young to be my partner. Weren't you? Your Bruce would've been close to forty."

The man's hands are shaking. It --

"Or. Perhaps you could tell me your name? Your code-name --"

"I'm -- Robin. My Bruce took me in when I was thirteen and he was twenty-nine. He'd watched... he'd watched my parents die --"

"*No* --"

"He couldn't do anything but track down their killer... and teach me how to help make sure that didn't happen to any other children."
Bruce feels -- queasy. Lost. *Confused* -- "So -- so young?"

"He told me -- after he'd finally confessed to being more than just a brain-dead socialite with an occasionally functioning conscience -- that he saw himself in my eyes. And that he'd seen a lot more than that. He said -- you're not him."

"No, Robin. I... the two of you were close."

Robin's smile is humorless and dark --

And Clark immediately moves to take him in his arms. Clark is always *gentle* --

And he's murmuring something Bruce can't quite hear, something which makes Robin stiffen and shudder --

And pull back. "He comes *back* here, Superman. We -- we have to find a way to get him home."

If anything remains -- no, he must not think that way. He's been offered the chance to recover and recharge, and that he must take --

What would make him --

Of course he can understand needing to do everything in his power for a boy who had suffered what *he* had suffered, but to then turn around and take that boy onto the *street*? To expose him to thieves and murderers and *worse*? It's not --

Clark is holding Robin's hands up between them -- no. Clark is *kissing* Robin's hands, and that --

The urge to blush is powerful, but between the sedative he'd been given and his own control, he manages to contain it well enough that neither of them look at him strangely when they turn.

The move Robin makes to pull his belt-knife is smooth and practiced, at least as fast as Bruce himself can manage at his best, and Bruce doesn't manage to catch himself before he nods in approval --

And Robin smiles, sharp and quick. "At ease. My *father* taught me how to do that," he says, and slices through the zip-strips on Bruce's ankles and wrists --

And Clark is there to catch and cradle the broken arm before it can fall and make Bruce show something --

Something he doesn't want to show.

"How are you going to treat that arm, Superman?"

"Ah, the nanites at my disposal are the only possible choice at this point. It appears to have been broken and then broken more *thoroughly*." Clark turns to him with his eyebrows raised.

"I landed on it when I... fell through to this place. Clark, will you be bringing Harvey with you?"

Clark looks troubled --

And Robin looks almost *angry*. "Clark didn't tell you what he's just about due for."

Bruce frowns. "I don't understand."

"You said he needs 'assistance.' Does that or does that *not* mean that you know that he's in the
process of flying off the rails?"

Pointing a gun at him.

Yelling and pleading.

Nightmares and lost *time* --

But Bruce is strong enough not to turn away. "He needs... rest. And someone to speak with. I take it your Harvey had problems, as well?"

"'My' Harvey. Right. In *this* universe, Harvey Dent beat me to a bloody pulp and left me to die... and did the same to many, many other people. Some years later, he murdered Starling's father -- as he'd done to many, many other people's mothers, fathers, siblings, and children --"

"No, he wouldn't --"

"But you have a few doubts about that right now, don't you, Bruce?" And the humorless and cold smile is back in Robin's voice. "I happen to have video of the time he took Jim Gordon hostage after shooting his way through Gotham Central with a mad bomber as an accomplice... but you think he just needs a little time on the couch."

Bruce works himself to his feet --

Bruce *braces* himself on the pommel horse to keep from falling over --

"It's all right, Bruce. I won't let you fall," Clark says, and it means so much --

It's *always* meant so much, and he hadn't let himself -- no, he must focus. "Harvey hasn't done any of those things in my universe. Here, he only tried to protect me from -- Starling?"

Robin nods once. "And Skylark. She's the reason your jock is uncomfortable as hell right now."

"I can't fault her ability to use the weaknesses of her opponents, but she's a *teenager* --"

"So was I. So were all the partners of the heroes my Bruce *inspired* to take partners -- and she has a lot more training than some of them did," Robin says, taking a step closer -- and becoming honestly angry.

Because... he is insulting what Robin sees as the Mission. To have inspired someone to carry the Mission long after his death --

The other Bruce had to have been at least somewhat remarkable, for all that his judgment was questionable -- no, he will set that aside for now. He studies Robin until he can be sure of where his eyes are focused behind his simple domino, and then he meets the man's gaze as best as he can. "I have no resources of my own in this... universe, but I am pleading with you to do what you can for Harvey. He has been a tireless and valuable warrior in the war we all fight --"

Robin raises a hand to stop him --

"*Please* --"

"You -- he always -- loved him. *Believed* in him --" Robin growls and turns to his left --

Two hundred yards away, Starling, Skylark, and a *child* in a bright red uniform are bending over something --
Harvey --

"Will they -- do they know not to *hurt* him?"

"He's as safe as he can be right here," Robin says, and turns back to face him. "They won't hurt him unless he attacks, and that won't happen while he's strapped down on the gurney."

Bruce winces. "He needs to be able to move and exercise --"

"There are... hospitals --"

"None of which are very *good*, Robin --"

"*Christ*, Clark -- *Superman* --"

"I'm *sorry*, Dick, but -- how *many* times have we discussed helping those hospitals modernize and hire trained, competent staff?"

Robin -- Dick? He won't use that name until he is allowed, assuming that happens. Robin bends his head and pinches the hawkish bridge of his nose. He is clearly troubled -- and Bruce must admit that he has reason to be so -- but he also must know that the Mission includes no room for the railroading of innocents.

After a long moment, Robin takes a breath -- "Do you have a suggestion."

Clark licks his lips and looks at *him* for a moment, but Bruce has never --

He doesn't *know* --

"Perhaps... we could consult with Dr. Thompkins?"

Robin winces for that. "Perhaps *you* could, but she hasn't spoken to me since Cardinal hit the streets."

"Cardinal is the... slight... young man?"

Robin laughs, panting out tension *sharply*. "*Cardinal* also goes by Tinkerbell... and is two years older than I was when *I* hit the streets at your -- at my Bruce's side."

But -- "Surely you weren't so --"

"Small? I was smaller -- though I had a better grasp of the acrobatics than you -- than he did. Cardinal came to us as a black belt in judo and a brown belt in karate."

So *small* -- but he is not here to question. He must somehow put aside his -- prejudices? "I would like to meet them," Bruce says, and hopes he sounds polite enough, *good* enough --

Robin raises his eyebrows behind his domino. "Meet them and maybe *test* them?"

Bruce *wants* to protest that -- but he shakes his head and closes his eyes for a moment. "You knew him well, of course. He was... a friend as well as a partner?"

Robin's expression hardens once more --

He turns and walks away --
Bruce winces. "Perhaps I shouldn't try to... I'm honestly unsure of what I was trying to do, other than attempting not to give offense."

Clark cups Bruce's shoulder and squeezes it. "You and Robin changed each other's lives, Bruce."

"I -- he put him in that terribly dangerous uniform --"

Clark clears his throat.

"What is it?"

"The original Robin suit was... ah. Rather more revealing."

Bruce frowns. "I don't think any vigilante's uniform should ever be able to be described as *revealing*, Clark."

"But -- you're familiar, by now, with your Dinah's uniform and the reasoning behind it?"

"I never *agreed* --"

Clark hums and smiles wryly at him. "Once, when I'd asked you about Dick's uniform for the seventh time -- trying to be polite, of course -- you muttered something bad-natured about the... ah... force of his personality?"

Bruce frowns more deeply. "Are you saying that I allowed a thirteen-year-old boy to choose how he would present himself to the criminal class?"

Clark rubs at his upper lip. "You did armor it."

"How much of it was capable of *being* armored?"

"If you'd just turn to your right and --"

"*Clark*. Those aren't even -- was he supposed to be some sort of *exotic dancer*?"

"Actually, those... trunks were immensely challenging to remove."

"How would you --" Oh. This time, he can do nothing about his blush save to turn aside --

And Clark's fingers are smooth and strong on Bruce's cheek. "Once, I thought I saw something like this on your face..."

"Clark."

Clark shivers and pulls back. "Of course. You have my apologies, Bruce. Are you ready to come with me?"

In truth, what he's most ready to do is sleep in a bed for at least eight hours... but he knows that Clark will arrange for that in one way or another. Bruce nods --

Red occludes his vision --

His arm is somehow splinted --

They fly.

*
"I'm so not dealing with the fact that he used to be hot," Steph says, and she's got that scrunched-up face which means that she's *actually* saying "eugh." She's just using words to do it.

"Actually, there was a great deal of talk about his attractiveness back when he was the District Attorney. If the papers weren't commenting on his age, they were writing incredibly salacious things about Dent and various attractive and famous Gotham women. It was... well, it was more than a little disturbing to read after he'd been Two-Face for several years," Tim says, and that's totally another way to say "eugh."

"But *this* guy hasn't even --" Steph frowns harder. "He had the coin."

"He sure as fuck did, Lark -- and *that's* what's gonna be on my mind. No matter how good and not-crazy he is right now --"

"That -- Bruce was spooked enough about him to beg us to get him help," Dick says, just fucking appearing out of nowhere. But --

"It's really -- him?"

And Dick gets that look like he's about to beat the living shit out of the first criminal he sees -- even if it's a jaywalker --


Dick blows out a breath and looks at each of them in turn before glaring down at Dent for a long moment. "He's Bruce Wayne from a universe where time, for whatever reason, moved much more slowly. He's twenty-seven years old, has never had a partner, and has only been the Batman for a little more than a year."

Well... fuck.

Dick smiles grimly. "He's also from a universe where Luthor -- somehow -- set off a series of reactions that caused *severe* space-time anomalies to pop off all over the place. One popped off in the Cave... and that's why he's here."

"And Harvey Dent was in the Cave, too," Tim says, and frowns down at the man. "He knows the most dangerous secret in the world other than Superman's."

"For now," Dick says, and never looks away from Dent. "There are ways to un-ring the bell, as it were. Especially if the psyche in question is already as fractured as we know *this* one is."

Steph frowns. "Wait, we're supposed to fuck this guy up worse than he already is?"

Tim rests a hand on her thin little gauntlet. "Sometimes, it's the only way. We've traumatized Ivy, played transference games with Harley, sicced Strange on his own judgment centers --"

"I get it, but -- shit, guys, it's not like he's done anything wrong, *yet*, right?"

She has a point, but -- "He was waving that gun around like he was gonna use it, Lark --"

"Yeah, but it was real damned clear that he was gonna do that to protect *Bruce*, yeah?"
"There's... hypnosis? We could bring him upstairs to one of the guest bedrooms --"

"Way to make me queasy, little brother. Are you *serious*?"

Tim gets that *dogged* expression. "It would be reasonable. We could make him believe that *Bruce* had saved him, rather than Batman. A blow to the head makes all sorts of things believable."

Dick's expression twists a little, and he turns back to Dent -- who *had* been sleeping like a drugged baby, but now has a little frown on his face just like part of him is aware that he's being braced by four incredibly violent people.

"Tink's idea could work, Big Bird --"

"There's another option," Dick says, and curls his fingers around the gurney's railing, squeezing *hard* --

"Uh. The way you look right now is making me think I'm gonna hate it, Big Bird. Just so you know."

Dick's laugh isn't much, but it's there -- "The League. Specifically, J'onn and Zatanna."

Steph rears back a little. "You're gonna *magic* the knowledge out of his head?"

"Technically, I'm going to have J'onn chase down every pathway in his mind that leads to that knowledge, bind them, and *then* have Zatanna magic them out of his head."

"Is that... ah. Allowed?"

Dick reaches across the bed and ruffles Tim's hair, breaking most of the spikes in one shot. Normally, Tim would be bobbing and weaving a little for that treatment, but right now he's just standing there looking *shocked*. Which --

"It's... uh. The answer to that is 'sort of,' Tink. The League *only* does it when secret identities get compromised."

Steph *steps* back this time. "You've been part of this, Starling?"

"Personally? No. Robin and I convinced everyone not to do it when it was Tink."

And now Tim's looking *green*, and that --

He would, too. "Big Bird... it hasn't been done to any civilians. I mean, that's part of what *kept* them from jumping on our asses when it was Tink."

"*Dent* isn't going to be one of us."

"Wait, guys, just -- fucking *wait*," Steph says, and she doesn't look green so much as horrified. "You've *got* a fucking mind-reader-and-then-some on speed-dial. Why not just have the guy *fix* Dent?"

"Skylark --"

"Don't fucking *Skylark* me, Robin! What even *happens* to the people who get mindwiped? I'm not a fucking genius, but there's no fucking way that's an exact science!"
Which is *why* they didn't have to fight too hard to keep Tink out of the chair or star chamber or whatever the fuck they used --

But Dick is still looking hard. Just -- Jason is supposed to have his back right now -- and *always* -- but Steph has a point.

"It's not... uh. What if he *can* be fixed before he does anything fucked-up, Big Bird? I mean, if it doesn't work --"

"If it doesn't *work*, he could sell Bruce's secret to the highest bidder, and then -- if they're still *here* -- the spotlight gets turned on the people who live in Bruce's *home*, little wing. Unless you wanted to put a tail on him 24/7?"

"Well... ah. We *are* going to be monitoring him the entire time he's here -- we'll even have Super help with that -- and... I think it's worth a try," Tim says, and if his eyes *aren't* a little hollow behind the mask --

"You're all... for this. You..." Dick shakes his head and glares down at Dent again --

Dent's eyes are open, and he looks confused and freaked right the hell out.

As far as Jason's concerned, it's a *good* look on the fucker -- but this isn't *their* Dent. He's not even --

Fucking hell. "What *case* were you working on when your world went to shit, asshole?"

Dent shakes his head and tugs weakly at the restraints before his arms and legs fall back down to the gurney. "Who the fuck are you people? Where's *Bruce*?"

Movement --

And that really was Dick's arm shooting out to *choke* Dent --

'*Robin* --"

"Answer. Starling's. Question," Dick says, and that's the Robin voice that doesn't get trotted out too often. It's hard and cold and more than a little wrong for everything Dick is supposed to be --

Used to be?

"Shit. I was working the Maroni case, and none of you people are getting a word outta me about it," he says, pulling on hard like it's a suit instead of who *he* is --

And Dick blinks. "You... you think we're working for Maroni?"

"You can say what you want -- anyone who'd beat up and drug Batman is no fucking friend of mine."

Dick yanks his hand back and starts to walk away --

He comes back and grabs the back of Jason's neck and starts to drag him along. "I'm comin', Big Bird, one sec," and Jason turns to Steph and Tim. "Don't do *anything*. If he wants to talk, let him, but we're *not* letting him go."

Steph frowns at him -- but Tim gives him the 'noted' nod which means...
Well, shit, he *might* do something insane, but he'll *try* not to.

Dick drags him back over by the supercomputer -- and under the new stone ceiling Clark had *melted* for them --

"Are you sure we gotta stand here?"

"It's not going to fall."

"That's what *you* say --"

"Jason. Clark can see *microscopic* cracks forming."

"Not while he's not *here*, man --"

"Focus," Dick says, quiet and -- not cold. This is Dick talking, and not even a little bit of Robin.

Jason nods. "I'm here, Big Bird."

Dick smiles ruefully. "You always make me think I should have a code-name like Raptor or Harrier or, hell, Nightwing or Flamebird."

"Who?"

"A couple of Kryptonian vigilantes who may or may not have been real. The stories about them are almost certainly exaggerated at least a little, but..." Dick sighs. "I thought about changing my code-name after I came back from my tour around the world. I thought about... I don't know. Getting *hard*. Being more like *Bruce*."

"And then you realized he would've hated that like a flaming bird on his sac?"

Dick snorts. "Got it in one. I didn't manage to stay... to stay the Robin I was for him. Sometimes I regret that."

"Meaning you *really* regret it a *lot* of the time."

"Maybe. I admit... some things. Not everything,‘ and this time when Dick smiles, his eyes crinkle up and the corners of his mouth get deep and *serious* with the happy, and there is no one on this planet hotter than Dick-never-Richard John Grayson.

No one.

And so maybe Jason steps a little closer --

"Ah, God, yes, what am I thinking --" And then Dick wraps most of his body around Jason's own somehow --

Even though Jason has twenty-five pounds on the guy --

"I love you, and I need you to be my brain for a minute, Jaybird."

"Hey, you don't actually call me that --"

"Babs does. And you always get this look on your face like your cock is *beating* at your jock to get free when she does."
*Jason* snorts. "Look, man, you've got a *lot* of damned ways to make me look like that -- *oof* --"

Yeah, tighter hug.

*Better* hug, because Jason can feel his ribs creaking the *right* way --

And Dick pushes back and looks into Jason's eyes just like they've been mask to mask a million fucking times and know each other. "Be my brain."

"I'm not the one who makes the *plans* around here --"

"Jay... I'm compromised."

Jason frowns and flips his lenses up. "The fuck does that mean?"

"I can't look at Dent without wanting to beat him to death for every -- every *goddamned* thing he did that broke Bruce's heart..." Dick shakes his head. "I've told you that he never gave up on the guy."

"Yeah, but... seriously?"

"Every new murder was a *fresh* wound on him, Jay. He did everything he could to save Dent -- even funneled money into Arkham and twisted arms behind the scenes so that they'd hire the best shrinks in the country... Dent killed two of them and crippled the third for life."

"*Fuck*. I mean -- fuck, it's *not* a surprise, but --"

"But,' yes. So Bruce stopped getting other people involved in his attempts to save the guy --"

"Wait, wait, isn't all this *after* he beat the shit out of you?"

"*While* murdering someone else, yes. I -- I'm compromised, little wing. All I want to do is accidentally drop him in gen-pop at Blackgate during the yard hour -- no, that's a lie. I want to drop him there and watch his last few minutes of existence. Even though the Dent who did all of those fucked-up things -- " Dick sighs and rests his forehead against Jason's own --

"It's okay --"

"It's *not*. You're the one who should be -- Christ, Jay, why *aren't* you ready to hang this guy out to dry?"

Jason thinks of the two neat little bullet holes in the anything *but* neat remains of his useless fucking asshole of a father -- and then he lets the smile that wants to be on his face out. It's small and sickly and weak and a whole lot of other bad shit, but --

"Oh, Jay, *tell* me --"

"You told me once that one of the things you were dead sure about was that Bruce would've thrown this whole life over if he could get his parents back."

"I -- yeah. It was one of the things that frightened me about him, about our life together --"

"Because *you* wouldn't have given up a thing. Heh. I'm with you, Dickie. All the way."

"Oh... Jay. You can't actually -- I mean, it's not like I haven't beaten Tony Zucco to a pulp in my
dreams a million times --"

"And I've done the same damned thing to Dent. He still managed to do me a solid, Big Bird."

"Oh -- no, Jay, don't --"

"You're asking *me* about this stuff, right? No one else."

"Yes, but --"

"*But* -- you've set us all up so fuckin' *sweet*, Dick..." Jason shakes his head and gives Dick a hug of his own. "Think about it. We get to make ourselves hardcore and it's never really *work*, because you're right there finding *some* damned way of making *push-ups* fun. We get to go out every night and beat the shit out of criminals, and *that's* fun, because you taught us that it was pretty much *always* fun. We get to wear ridiculous clothes while we *do* it, and make our own fucking vigilante *brand* -- because you did it first. And, to top it *all* off, we never have to worry about killing anyone accidentally *or* on purpose, because you've damned well been there first, *too*. You make it look easy, Big Bird -- but more to the point? You make it look like the best fucking life any kid can have."

"It *is* -- most of the time --"

"Yeah. So how am I gonna *completely* lose my shit about this Dent when a) *he* didn't shoot my piss-stain of an old man, and b) the Dent who *did* it gave me Christmas and birthdays twenty-four-seven while he was at it?"

"What if I didn't *find* you, Jay?"

"Eh. You were all over Crime Alley in those days, Big Bird. Sooner or later? I would've gone for those fucking all-weather radials with the gay-ass rims which were still worth a fortune."

Dick gasps a laugh and beats his head against Jason's shoulder twice. "Okay. Fine. *You* don't want to kill him a lot for existing -- that's *why* I need your brain. Tell me what we need to *do* here, Jay."

Jason blows out a breath. "Fix him. *Somehow*. Sit on him -- maybe hook him up with one of those house arrest ankle bracelets -- *while* we fix him, *and*? Find a way to send his ass home."

Dick's smile curdles, and that's fucking *confusing* -- until it isn't. "You... you're thinking of keeping this Bruce."

"He won't -- he's *not* --" Dick pushes off and growls, shoving a hand into his hair and pacing away a few steps -- "Fucking hell."

"No, uh. I get it? I think?" Jason makes a little pushing motion --

Dick waves him off. "One thing at a time. Explain to Dent that we know about his mental problems and will be *helping* him -- I'll call in the League."

Are you sure -- no, Dick doesn't need him to ask that question. "Sure thing, Big Bird. Uh... when *is* Clark coming back with Bruce?"

Dick smiles but doesn't turn to face him. "Got some questions for the big man, little wing...?"

"Fucking *yes*. Starting with 'how the fuck do I use my size to beat Dick stupid.'"
"That* gets him a snicker -- "He'll just tell you to push me down a flight of stairs first. A long one. While I'm tied up. And drunk."

"Aw, suck my sac."

Dick blows him a kiss.

Jason gives him the double-bird with his eyebrows up.

"*Clark*... will probably be *right* back just as soon as he talks Bruce into letting the AI experiment on him in ways we're technically not supposed to know about because they *can't* be used on all of humanity, bathes him lovingly, and possibly does other things lovingly," Dick says, and smiles wryly. "Clark? Never got a taste."

"Seriously? Never?" Did Bruce just not *like* adults -- no, no, don't go there --

Dick sighs. "Never. I'm reasonably sure -- no. Bruce was terrified of intimacy. I just tripped him into it by being a boy with a tragedy and too much *lunacy* to sit home and grieve my way through it. I..." Dick shakes his head and points Jason at the gurney before heading for the supercomputer.

Right. He can do this.

When he gets close --

"Jesus, you *kids*. Why the hell are you asking me about *law* school?"

Tim smiles ruefully. "It seemed like a safe topic? Ah, I believe Starling has something more substantive to speak to you about."

"Starling. Starlings are little winged *thugs* --"

"They sure are, Dent, and I am, too," Jason says, moving up to the side of the gurney and considering and rejecting cracking his knuckles. He leans in, instead. "What year is it?"

"What? It's nineteen-eighty-seven --"

"Not quite. See, when that big pocket or whatever swallowed you and Bruce, it didn't just knock you into a new universe, it knocked you into the *future*.

Dent -- laughs. "Okay, kid, that's original, I'll give you that."

Right, fine. Jason sighs and gestures Steph and Tim to flank before opening Dent's restraints --

"What's this about?"

"Take a look around, tough guy. See how much is different from the Cave you left."

*Now* Dent's eyes show a little shadow of fear -- but he gets up and looks around, lingering on the big-ass penny, the bigger-ass dinosaur, that giant fucking cannon they took off Freeze that one time, that dried-up Audrey III they took off Ivy and sealed up so it wouldn't contaminate everything and --

Christ, what if someone shoots out the glass on it? Are those spores still alive?

No, focus, focus, because Dent's mouth is a hard line and he's *starting* to clench his fists -- "I don't buy it."
"No, you don't *wanna* buy it. That's something different. But, well, you don't have to believe me -- whether or not you do won't change a goddamned thing about what's gonna happen with your ass -- so just sit back and listen," Jason says, and points to the gurney.

Dent glares at him hard -- and takes him in enough to know that he doesn't stand a chance in a fair fight.

And that Jason doesn't *fight* fair when he doesn't have to.

Dent sits and raises his eyebrows.

"That's fine for now. Here's the deal -- when the Bruce who lived in *this* universe turned twenty-nine, he took in a kid whose parents had been murdered in front of him --"

"Fuck --"

"Yeah. That kid is the guy who wants to choke you, because, among other things, the Dent from *this* universe killed a whole bunch of people. Excuse me -- he flipped a *coin*, and if it came up 'bad' heads? *Then* he'd kill them. To date, *our* Dent has been directly responsible for over eighty murders and *indirectly* responsible for hundreds more --"

"What -- what the fuck do you mean 'to *date*'? Why isn't he on death row?"

"Ah, Dent -- you don't even know how many times I've asked that question. But the courts rule him legally insane *every* time and put him in Arkham, and he damned well finds ways to get out. *We* have some cameras in his cell now. We checked on him earlier. He's sitting up against the wall drooling because the *latest* shrink says it's schizoaffective disorder and anti-psychotics will make him all better."

And that... is a haunted look. A *real* scared look --

"Yeah, you're hearing me now, aren't you?"

Dent swallows. "This -- this business that it's the future --"

"It is," Tim says. "You were still the D.A. when I was born, but, by the time I... became aware of Gotham's vigilantes, you were calling yourself Two-Face and making life difficult for them."

"Two--" Dent frowns hard, reaching for something under his shirt. It doesn't matter that they'd frisked him thoroughly before tying him up -- they *all* tense up for it --

And Dent pulls out a funky little yin-yang pendant on a chain.

"Didn't know D.A.'s were allowed to go around pimping," Jason says, and crosses his arms over his chest -- no, he's gotta stay loose just in *case* --

"Bruce... gave this to me. When we were sixteen," Dent says, and it sounds like he's reminiscing and it sounds like he wants to run somewhere dark and *cry*.

Jason takes a closer look -- the black side is scarred right the hell up. "You did that."

"I don't... remember. But yeah," and Dent swallows hard and closes his fist around the pendant. "What -- I killed him here, didn't I? I killed my... my friend..." Dent starts to hunch *in* on himself --

What the -- no, it's -- it's logical *enough* for him to come to that conclusion, but --
"You never managed it. You *tried* more than just about anyone else --"

"I didn't know. I didn't know he was Batman until I went to go *get* him when all those fucking anomalies were popping off. The clock was open and there was no one there but Alfred, and I couldn't get him to come with me, couldn't keep him safe --" Another swallow. "I waited for Bruce to come back so I could talk, just so I could *talk*, but there was a gun in my hand --

"I'd brought the gun for all the *monsters* out there. These -- huge fucking things breathing fire and knocking down skyscrapers like dominoes --" He's rocking back and forth now --

Tim and Steph both have their hands on batarangs and that's good, that's *right* --

"What happened with the gun? What -- tell us what happened, Harvey," and Jason thinks he might choke on that fucking name, but --

"I... I'd passed out for a while. Right on -- right on the gurney, actually," and Harvey's laugh is sick and fucking *old* --

"Go on."

"When I woke up, all I could think about was the lies. Your momma ran off with a salesman, Harvey. I'm gonna quit drinking tomorrow, Harvey. I signed those papers you needed and mailed them right off, Harvey. Nothing will ever take me away from you, Harvey. I'll always love you, Harvey... all the lies and all the liars and Bruce had been one of them all along, hadn't he? He didn't tell me what he was doing when he traveled the world and he let me -- let me make a fool outta myself all those nights on Central..." Dent frowns --

Dent balls his hands into fists and then relaxes them --

"But that's not true. He never made me a fool. Never -- he was always the smartest outta all of us. Always --" Dent bites his lip. "I shouldn't have pointed that gun at him. Not my best friend. My only friend 'til Gilda came along. He was -- I know he thought he was doin' the right thing, keeping things above board, keeping *me* clean like I always told him I had to be --" And Dent covers his face with his hands.

He doesn't sob and his breathing doesn't get any worse... but.

And Tim and Steph are looking at Jason fucking *expectantly*, like it matters that *now* the guy knows it was wrong to *aim a deadly weapon* at a guy who kept a fucking *secret* --

Fucking right. "We're gonna help you, Dent."

"I'll help *myself*!"

"No fucking way -- you *don't* get a choice unless an anomaly pops off and yanks you through it before we *can* get you help."

Dent snarls at him -- "You want to take my *memories*!"

"Are you sure you still want the ones of your old man fucking with you? I mean, I know how *nice* it can be to get rid of that kind of pressure -- since the you from this universe killed *my* father."

"*No* -- oh -- oh, fuck, no --"

"And you -- Jesus. Bruce bent over *backwards* to get your ass help, and he did it as Batman *and*
as Bruce Wayne. He did it even though you almost beat his *partner* to death!"

That makes Dent *flinch*, but -- shit, that's not a fucking victory. That --

He's supposed to do *better* than this. Dick *needs* him -- and he can cope. He *will* cope. "We're gonna try this *without* taking your memories. One of our allies can step *into* your mind and he has, in the past, *taught* people how to fight off their bad memories. Hell, he's *helped* them fight the memories off. And if *that* doesn't work? We've got a sorceress on call."

"Sorceress -- is this -- did the Justice Society get new members or something?" And he's back to sounding confused and interested --

Jason hates that it *does* feel like an improvement -- but it does. "Yeah, the JSA has new members. But these guys are on the Justice *League*. Bruce helped form it a few years before Joker offed him."

"The *Joker* did it?"

"He's a lot more dangerous than he looks, Dent, so remember that for when you *do* get back to your universe --"

"He looks like a circus freak --"

"Funny how that works," Dick says, coming out of *nowhere* again --

Jason manages not to jump *too* much --

"*Do* you want to see what you end up looking like here? You should keep in mind that the wounds are self-inflicted. The *original* wounds are from a Maroni capo throwing acid in your face at the trial, but one of the things Bruce tried to help bring you back from where you'd gotten to was funneling money to some cut-out of a charity to get you plastic surgery. It worked for just long enough to give Bruce and Gilda hope... and then you let them down. Again."

Dent squeezes his eyes shut -- but only for a moment. "I -- I want to see the whole file on the... me from this universe. I'm not gonna fight you people -- I know you'd fucking love any excuse to destroy me, and I can't even blame you for that. I just wanna know. And maybe... maybe be forewarned."

Movement -- it's Steph, crossing her arms under her tits and frowning. This *isn't* sitting completely right with her, and, fuck, *he* can't blame *her*. It's playing judge, jury, and *shrink* instead of executioner, and maybe that doesn't make anything any better. They'll talk. They just --

They'll talk.

Dick nods. "I'll show you."

"Thank you. I..." Dent smiles ruefully. "You took care of Bruce? Watched his back?"

"Not enough," Dick says, and walks away *again* --

Jason gestures Tim to follow Dick. "I need to put you back --"

"In the cuffs, yeah, I hear you. Any chance of you letting me go take a piss before I have to do it in one of those damned hospital containers?"

Jason blinks. "You were hospitalized?"
Dent smiles a little wider and lifts up his button-down, turning to show off an obvious bullet scar that
--

"You totally don't have a spleen anymore, do you?"

"Nope. Most death threats are just hot air, but the Flannery brothers’ mother was the real deal. Put a
thirty-two right through me for putting her asshole sons away," Dent says, and sounds just as proud
of it as Jason is of his own better scars. That's bad enough. What's worse --

"That -- that didn't happen here. Mama Flannery just tried and failed to gut you like a fish."

Dent shrugs -- but his eyes are saying that he's thinking about it. That maybe what happened here
doesn't *have* to happen to him, that maybe he's saner than he thinks he is --

So Jason pulls the coin out of his pocket and holds it up to the light, spinning it over his knuckles so
it’ll *catch* the light --

Dent shudders. "I heard you, kid. Loud and clear."

Jason nods and puts the coin away, and then gestures Steph to help him flank while he leads Dent to
the bathroom.

*
The Fortress provides a bathroom which manages to look luxurious, utterly sterile, and completely unlike anything which should exist there. Bruce had only been in his Clark's Fortress once, but the AI's personality -- and pride -- were memorably alien.

*This* bathroom is made to a human standard, and, as such, Bruce can't help feeling suspicious. Although it's possible that it's simply... hmm.

"Clark."

Clark appears outside the broad, deep tub immediately. "Did you require assistance?"

"Is that... hope in your voice?"

"Ah... well. Probably," Clark says, and reaches out to not *quite* touch the odd -- yet firm and comfortable -- 'cast' on Bruce's arm. It will be there for another hour, at which point the nanites will have almost certainly completed their work. And --

That's not the point, right now. "Clark, were you watching me bathe?"

"No, actually. I was inputting some data about you into the AI's memory, and arguing with it about what was to be done with you. I've thus far talked it out of imprisoning you in an education module."

Yes, that does sound like the AI. "Thank you. I suppose... the AI is monitoring me?"

"Oh, quite closely."

Bruce nods thoughtfully and lathers the soap once more. The cast allows impressive freedom of movement in his hand and fingers and --

He's not sure he's ever had the sensation of feeling watched by a computer before.

Perhaps it's a question of sentience --

"Bruce...?"

Bruce blinks once. "I'm sorry; I was woolgathering."

"I would love to hear your thoughts," Clark says, and the sincerity is palpable, warm --

Bruce turns to face Clark more fully --

And Clark looks Bruce over slowly enough that Bruce can't miss it, can't mistake it for anything *else* --

"The Clark from my universe was never so... direct."

"Had the two of you ever made love?"

Bruce doesn't blush -- "No."

"Perhaps... perhaps he will change tacks with you before it's too late," Clark says, moving closer without touching -- "I smell desire on you, Bruce. I would know it."
*Desire* -- "I -- I have no objection to your desires, Clark --"

"Just to me?"

Seduction. He'd prepared himself for such things when he was starting out as the Batman. A certain amount of attraction from erstwhile victims was to be expected, and certainly there were always 'groupies.' Absenting himself at speed from the scenes of the crimes he'd stopped was an excellent way to handle both groups of people --

He hadn't counted on the attraction of allies. Of people who fought the same war he did --

At first, he didn't think of it as *being* the same war. Clark was too bright -- and Superman was even brighter. Superman lives and works in a daylight world, and that world knows his face and wears his colors.

Clark --

Clark sighs. "I'm sorry, Bruce. I'm being... hmm. You always did call me precipitous."

Bruce walks into the hot water -- how is it *heated* down here? -- to cover his flush as best he can. The water is *enough* of an excuse --

He's only somewhat hard --

*Clark* --

"I've... offended --"

"No. No, Clark," Bruce says, and forces himself to meet the man's eyes -- he is a man, and so is Bruce, and the world, he has learned, is full of such things --

It's not so *strange* --

"I'm sorry. I'm having... rather a lot of difficulty focusing on any one thing."

Clark narrows his eyes slightly -- but it's the truth.

A piece of the truth. *Only* a piece, and doesn't Clark deserve much more? Doesn't he -- "You and your Bruce..."

"Yes, Bruce?"

"He... must have cared for you a great deal," Bruce tries, and soaps himself for a third time. How long *had* he been wearing the suit?

Clark smiles wryly. "He found ways to express that -- at very odd, rare, and random times."

Bruce winces. "He... he was almost certainly afraid."

Clark blinks once. "Afraid?"

Bruce smiles and closes his eyes for a moment, continuing to scrub off the grime of the work, the most *extreme* version of the work --

"Please, tell me?"
"Yes. He... I have always been sure that the war I fought would be solitary. I never imagined allies, and I certainly never imagined anything like a family."

"There's a difference between a failure of imagination and fear, Bruce --"

"Of course. But one can very easily lead to the other. Have you never found yourself in a situation which proved that what you had come to understand about the world was a lie? A foolish one, even."

"Well... one particular memory comes to mind for that," Clark says, and raises an eyebrow. The light in his eyes is bright, so bright --

And the edges of his irises are faintly purple. Bruce controls his breathing as well as he can. "Please, tell me."

"The first thing I noticed was the sound of male screams -- several different men, all obviously frightened. *Some* of them were also deeply pained, and so I flew as quickly as I could -- and nearly caused the death of a man who had been tossed bodily *through* a plate glass window."

Oh.

"Hmm. I see our first meeting was the same in your universe as it was in this one. You were nothing I'd ever seen, Bruce. You were actively *terrifying*."

Bruce smiles helplessly. "I forced myself to focus on the rush of violence, the joys of it -- something I almost never allowed myself to do. It was necessary in order to keep my fear from growing too great."

"Fear of *me*, Bruce?"

"Yes," and Bruce lets his smile become much sharper. "At the time, all I knew of you was what had been printed in breathless prose in the Metropolis tabloids and dailies. You'd allowed Lois Lane to dub you Superman --"

"To be fair, Bruce, there aren't very many things I *wouldn't* allow her to do to me. In fact, I can't think of any."

Bruce hums. "A truly beautiful woman."

"And a wonderful wife," Clark says, and holds up his left hand to show the ring which hadn't been there before. "Superman isn't allowed to wear it -- even among friends -- but... we have this time."

Bruce can do nothing to hold back his smile. "Did your Bruce live long enough to see that?"

"Ah... I'm afraid not. I allowed fear and habit to hold me back from her for far too long. And then there was the Doomsday business -- I was beaten so badly that I had to *hibernate* --"

"An ability my Clark hasn't seen fit to share," Bruce says, and raises his eyebrow.

"Chances are, he doesn't know he *has* it. Though... if your Clark ever seems to die, make sure you leave him exposed to sunlight. He'll come back much faster."

His Clark... how will he find the man? What can be done?

What *is* being done on the earth he'd left?
Bruce frowns and scrubs at himself faster. He has to --

"Bruce...?"

"When I fell into this universe, the earth I was born on was in the process of being *consumed*, Clark. I have to find a way --"

"The most brilliant minds in the world -- who aren't actively evil -- are focused on this problem."

"I have to help --"

"Forgive me, Bruce, but how *much* theoretical physics do you know?"

Well -- but. "A properly-focused mind can learn anything," Bruce says, and steps out of the shower --

And into a perfectly white bath sheet held by Clark.

"Hm."

"Yes, Bruce?"

"Did you intend to dry me?"

"I -- intent is such a slippery thing. Much like you right now --"

"Clark."

And he's expecting a smile -- or even a laugh -- for his prudish tone, but what he gets is a shiver --

"Clark?"

"You used that tone with me so *often* -- he did, I mean." Clark shakes his head and smiles ruefully. "When I *did* eventually discover that my Bruce was only three years older than me, I was shocked -- and determined to do a better job of standing up for myself against him."

"Did it work?"

"Oh... no. Not even a little bit," Clark says, and there's the smile, though it's more rueful than anything else as he pats Bruce with the bath sheet. "Excuse me --"

And Bruce is dry everywhere and faintly... not chafed. Sensitized. And Clark has the bath sheet pressed to his face. "Clark..."

"You say my name so many ways --" Clark shakes his head. "I'm used to such things being parceled out over weeks. Months. *Years* --"

"He was a fool --"

"Not. Not all the time. Please, come with me."

"Lead the way."

Clark does, and, as ever, there's something decidedly strange about following a man in tights, boots, and a cape around if all one is doing is walking not especially fast indoors.

In a *home*, even, and --
Perhaps it's Alfred's influence? The man had threatened to start taking season-long vacations the one time Bruce had worn the uniform in the manor proper, and, in truth, Bruce couldn't blame him for that.

Clark leads him to a room which seems more like a curious museum than anything else. There are uniforms that Bruce doesn't recognize, uniforms designed for both male and female forms --

"A museum to the fallen, Clark?"

Clark smiles again. "Each hero has his or her own memorial closer to where they'd lived and worked, of course, but... the nature of my powers is such that I am capable of visiting with nearly anyone I choose... and I always choose to know heroes," and Clark pauses by a flat case with --

"Dinah. She -- her uniform was always so --"

"Her uniform was her self-expression, Bruce. And it wasn't the work which took her from us."

Bruce frowns and strokes the air in front of the case, noting the old-fashioned seamed stockings she honestly tried to keep intact, the boning in the corset which had done nothing good for her lung capacity --"How, Clark?"

"Cancer," Clark says, and presses a button which opens the case --

And the air is immediately scented with her 'perfume' -- the many scents which had made up her flower shop. Another tell to her identity --

No. All he's doing is coming up with things to think which won't let him grieve properly.

Bruce breathes deep and remembers long nights with coffee thermoses and the hot dogs she never allowed her *daughter* to eat --

"Clark, who took care of her daughter?"

Clark hums. "According to the JSA? Dinah the younger, herself. She's Black Canary II, now -- she joined the Justice League when she was seventeen."

"So many *teenagers*. How -- how was this *allowed*?"

Clark closes the case and rubs at his upper lip with his finger, which --

"You're about to say something you find awkwardly amusing."

Clark looks at him from under his lashes, and his eyes have a *dark* heat --

"Clark --"

He blinks it away, leaving blamelessly blue eyes --

"No, not that. I've never wanted to see..." Bruce shakes his head. "It's one of the reasons why I feared you, Clark -- or, rather, the idea of you."

"Because of the relative ease with which I can deceive."

"It's never easy for you --"

"Oh... Bruce. I am not so *good* as all that --"
"Clark."

Clark moves from around the case and cups Bruce's shoulders in his broad, unscarred hands -- "I would seduce you, beloved friend. Needful companion."

Bruce breathes deeply --

Breathes in a riot of flowers and Clark, himself -- and the scent is not so different at this distance. So much ozone --

A part of Bruce only wants to know *where* he'd been flying so recently -- "Clark, I fear the unknown as much as any man, and you've represented that. Your powers, your admitted alien nature, the ease with which you mimicked humanity -- there was no way to know *when* your ship landed here -- everything. You did everything in your power to *make* yourself known to me."

"Did I do so good a job at that in your world, Bruce? You held yourself so much *apart* in those early years --"

"And I remembered everything you said, everything you did, every move you *made* --"

"Bruce..." Clark licks his lips and searches Bruce, takes his own deep breaths and strokes down over Bruce's shoulders --

No, Clark's hands are on Bruce's still-naked chest, and the more-sensitive skin there wants Bruce to know that Clark's hands are much warmer than they should be, much more *smooth* than they should be --

Clark leans in and Bruce prepares himself, holds himself steady, holds himself *clear* --

He must be *strong*, and he knows what that means --

He knows -- he should be doing *something*. He should be objecting --

And the press of Clark's lips against his own is -- different. His lips are more hard than those of the women he's kissed for the sake of his cover, than the women who have kissed *him* for the sake of whatever agenda they meant to push --

The *press* -- and Clark exhales. His breath smells like nothing Bruce can name, beyond being sure that there's something fruit-like about it --

The *press*, and it gets harder, *more*, and Bruce realizes that Clark's mouth isn't as soft as *any* human's must be, and he means to say Clark's name, but instead he makes a rough, low *noise* --

"*Please*," Clark says, and at first it makes no sense, but --

Of course he would want to be kissed back. Of course --

And he doesn't *have* to. Curiosity is a terrible reason to make love. Adrenaline -- or the aftermath of a great deal of it -- is even worse. This is *not* the Clark who took his hand on the roof of the Daily Planet building and pulled him close to keep a photographer from getting anything but the blurriest possible shot of the Batman --

This isn't the Clark who was honestly *aggrieved* when Bruce chose to follow him rather than simply asking his name -- or.

Everything *else* was the same about that meeting --
Bruce pulls back --

Clark groans and moves his hands back to Bruce's shoulders. He *clutches* Bruce's shoulders and pants as if he'd run -- as if he'd flown all the way around the world dozens of times --

"I'm sorry --"

"No, Bruce. I -- I meant to show you --"

"It's only that I wanted to know --"

"I have... one of your *suits*. Your business suits, I mean --"

"Did you -- did you want me -- your Bruce to ask your name?"

Clark frowns in confusion -- and then blinks. "That night. Yes, Bruce. I've wanted every *moment* of your curiosity. I've needed you and dreamed of you. I've mourned you and *hated* Dick for following your wishes and making sure you could never be resurrected by Ra's al Ghul..." Clark smiles again, and it's small, shaky... "I'll tell you anything, I'll tell you *everything*. You need only ask."

You loved me --

You love me still --

"You -- you're *married*, Clark --"

"Is that your only objection?"

He's having a difficult time *remembering* his objections, but -- "It... was one of them. It *is* one of them --"

"I would happily fly you to my Metropolis home. I would..." Clark laughs. "Lois would join us with joy in her heart... as she has joined me with others."

The images --

The *assault* of images --

"She doesn't always join me with my other lovers, but for some... certainly, the two of us have shared Dick many times --" And Clark stops himself for some reason --

No, Bruce was reaching up for Clark's hands, which Clark is using to massage Bruce's shoulders and the sides of his throat. Bruce shakes his head and grips Clark's wrists --

"I don't -- want to let you go. I let you go so many times --"

"And you can... smell my desire for you."

"I can *taste* it, Bruce. I..." Clark looks down between them and laughs breathlessly. "I can see it, as well. Tell me your objections. Tell me *all* of your objections, because I swear to you, Bruce, that I've spent the years since your death hating *both* of us for allowing those objections to stand --"

"Kiss me again. I."
"Bruce?"

"*Please*," Bruce says, and he doesn't squeeze his eyes shut. He doesn't even close them, and that allows him to watch Clark *almost* close his own eyes, to watch the red glow rise and flare behind his eyelids as he presses --

As he opens Bruce's mouth with his own --

Robin. Clark had shared him with Lois --

That strange and hurting man --

That *beautiful* man, so lithe and quick --

So devoted and *sure* --

Bruce grunts and pulls back --

"*Please*, Bruce --"

"Tell me. Tell me that I didn't begin a sexual relationship with Dick."

Clark pants and it's abruptly hard to look at Clark's eyes -- no, he's blinking many times rapidly. He's seen that. He's *shocked* the man, and that means --

Bruce exhales in relief and leans in to kiss Clark, to taste his mouth, learn the surfaces of his teeth, the *hardness* of his tongue --

Clark whispers something too rapidly for Bruce to be sure what *language* it's in and fills Bruce's mouth with his tongue, *strokes* Bruce's mouth --

The heat of him seems to intensify, seems to make the space they share into something hot and not quite humid *enough* --

Clark groans and cups the back of Bruce's head with one hand and Bruce's left hip with the other --

And then they're in the air and Clark is pulling Bruce close, holding him up --

The thrill is making Bruce's heart pound --

So *many* things are making his heart pound, and no, this is not something he has to do, and perhaps it's not the best idea -- but the soundless sound of him *weaseling*, playing semantics games even within his own mind tells Bruce all he'd needed to know. He'd thought he'd lost Clark forever, and this isn't --

But the memories are the same, the heat is the same as he's always dreamed, always *feared* --

Clark whimper and pulls back --

"Clark, what is it --"

"I'm sorry," he says, and puts Bruce down near to Dinah's case, before settling himself a full three paces away. And --

"Have I done something wrong?"
"No, I did. I allowed you to believe --" Clark shakes his head. "Bruce, you and Dick were lovers for years. Night after night, day after day -- including the morning of the day you were murdered."

And this time, the images ---

They don't seem so strange. Dick is a beautiful man, but he *is* a man, and --

And he was not when they began making love, because -- "Please. How old was Dick... when your Bruce died." He *can't* ask the other --

And Clark nods as if he'd heard -- of course he had. "He had just turned nineteen earlier in the week. He still... he finds birthdays difficult. Even with Starling and Cardinal."

'Tinkerbell.' Had he seen makeup on the boy's face?

Had Dick learned to abuse --

"Oh, Bruce... I won't say everyone in the community approved, but no one --"

"*Stopped* me? How, Clark? How --"

"No one could ever be around you and Dick without seeing how you loved, how you *needed*," and Clark is pleading with him to understand *this* --

Clark has made love to Dick so many *times* -- and how old was Dick then? How did it *start*?

"Bruce --"

"It... I hurt the men and women who abuse children *badly*, Clark! I've always allowed myself a greater degree of violence --"

"Shall I show you pictures of the two of you together? Video? Dick was never *happier* than when he was with you. Than when he was *touching* you, in whatever small way being in public allowed. When it was only the three of us, he would leap onto your lap -- or mine -- and kiss you soundly --"

"No --"

"In the days when you refused his love, he would come to me with tears in his eyes he couldn't bear to shed --"

"I -- I vowed to never hurt a *child*!"

Clark reaches out with one hand and smiles ruefully. "Let me show you --"

"There's nothing you *can* --"

"Do you fight because of your beliefs? Or because you can understand the part of yourself which could love that way all too well?"

The boys he studied muay Thai with in and around Bangkok.

The boys all over Brazil who'd taught him all he could learn about capoeira and laughed so *musically* at his stiffness --

The boys -- he'd never *touched*, but --
And the girls? The way Dinah's daughter would look at him, always from behind the leg of one of the JSA members -- usually Ted Grant. She had been there to watch Ted teach him how to throw the most devastating punches possible, and afterwards she had sat on Ted's lap and drank iced tea, heedless of the sweat and stink of them both --

Pleased by it?

"Oh, Bruce, I never meant to make you feel this way --"

"No. No. I know," Bruce says, and stares down at his own hands. They are clean and bare of makeup and moisturizer. There are no gauntlets. He is... some variety of himself.

Who he always *should've* been with Clark --

Only Clark?

And heat announces Clark's proximity better than his other senses, his other --

Had he wallowed in Dick's beauty? Had he tasted and touched the way he's wanted to do with Clark nearly since meeting him?

Had he made Dick cry out?

Clark pulls Bruce close, and that makes Bruce aware of how stiff he is. How -- that's dangerous.

Bruce deliberately relaxes himself --

"I wish I could believe that was natural."

Bruce grunts in lieu of coming up with anything reasonable to *say* --

"I was jealous of your love, Bruce."

"Because -- because you desired me."

"And Dick, *always* Dick, but... not that. I believed for many years that I'd never have a relationship as pure and perfect as the one you shared with Dick --"

"You -- that's a *misuse* of that word --"

Clark pulls back enough to stare into Bruce's eyes. "You held each other's hearts with every moment you were together and every moment you were apart. You watched over each other's dreams, and held each other when you had to weep. You opened your heart to Dick's other lovers. You respected each other's wishes. You listened to each other's lessons and concerns... you were *not* each other's worlds, and you were never more open with me and the rest of the League than you were after you'd spent time in Dick's arms."

Bruce frowns. "All of that -- nearly all of that could come with simple *partnership* --"

"Is partnership ever simple?"

"Clark, you -- you have to *see* --"

"No, Bruce, I don't. I only have to love you, and believe in you, and desire you, and need you. And to admire the man who helped teach me what love should be until I was finally brave and wise enough to seek it for myself."
Bruce tries to push away --

"*Please*, Bruce --"

"You -- you've written a *fairy* tale around that -- *relationship* --"

"It even has the -- once obligatory -- gruesome ending," Clark says, and sighs. "If any of us ever believed Dick was in danger, that he was being *damaged* by your love --"

"You weren't there in their *bedroom*, Clark!"

Clark tilts his head to the side and raises an eyebrow, and that --

Bruce rears back. "You watched."

"And listened when I wasn't near enough *to* watch. I..." Clark shakes his head. "I'm ignorant of neither the law nor the truth of intergenerational relationships of that sort in this day and age. At first, I *had* to be sure that Dick *truly* wanted you, and then I had to know that he wasn't being hurt, and then... I simply had to know, and to know myself for someone who would happily make love with either or both of you."

"And you don't find your conclusions self-serving, Clark?"

"I am not perfect -- I save that sort of thing for that Superman creature."

Bruce laughs -- it's more of a cough than anything else.

"Yes, Bruce?"

"The other heroes... did they take partners of their own? *Young* partners."

Clark nods. "Diana -- or had you met her? She's Hippolyta's daughter."

"The woman of clay... no, though I heard that she had joined the battle to save as many lives as possible."

"She's a wonderful woman -- and another who desired you in vain. Her -- occasional -- partner was Donna, who was Wonder Girl and is now Troia. Green Arrow -- Oliver Queen -- took in a young orphan raised on a Navajo reservation and made him his ward and partner not long after Robin's debut on the streets. His name is Roy Harper, and he went by Speedy before he became Arsenal in the wake of your death. The Flash --"

"Jay *Garrick* took in a teenager?"

"Ah... no. Jay is mostly retired now, and passed his mantle to Barry Allen -- a forensic scientist -- who in turn passed it to the nephew of his wife. Both of them have metahuman abilities..." Clark sighs. "Barry passed away not long ago, becoming a part of something... well, none of it is well understood. Wally West -- the nephew -- took his place on the League. Aquaman -- Arthur Curry -- took in an Atlantean orphan --"

"Atlantean?"

"Ah... to make a long story short: Atlantis exists, as do merpeople. They use a mixture and science and magic... anyway. Garth has various water-themed powers and is also something of a sorcerer, which is something I found uncomfortable in one so young, but... well. He's always been a very responsible young man, which makes his current code-name of 'Tempest' rather odd to me. He has a
lovely new uniform, though. There are other young men and women in Dick's generation -- and younger, of course -- but those were the five who created the Teen Titans. They lived and worked together, eased the pressures of our lifestyle for each other... well. They're all great heroes, and the world would be much the poorer -- and perhaps decidedly nonexistent -- without them."

"I have no doubt that they perform admirably --"

"No...? Perhaps you simply doubt their ability to make decisions about their own lives?"

It occurs to Bruce that this conversation would be more comfortable were he wearing his uniform and also not being *held* --

And then Bruce remembers how many times he'd hid behind the thing when Clark was only trying --

"I made many of my own decisions when I was... very young."

"A teenager, Bruce...?"

"You *know* I was younger, Clark --"

Clark squeezes Bruce. "I do, I'm sorry. It's only... I've had many years to come to terms with *all* of my feelings about young heroes. The conversations -- and many were heated -- we had about them are all some variety of... ancient history? Not one of us hasn't defended the younger heroes' right to *be* heroes. Not one of us has made it to the ages we *have* without the help of those heroes -- and this has been the case repeatedly for those heroes who had the younger ones as partners. We were stunned when Dick couldn't save you, considering how many of us he had personally rescued."

Bruce closes his eyes. "It must have been terrible for him."

"I believe, very strongly, that it was terrible for you, too, in those last moments. Forced to disappoint your love, to leave him alone..." Clark shakes his head. "You'd planned for your death, of course -- there was even a Batsuit in Dick's size. It's just that there were far more Robin suits, including the first generation of the one he wears today. The first generation of the one he wears today. The will, the trusts, the orders to Lucius Fox to treat Dick as he'd treated you... none of that compared to the faith which must have lived within you -- that you would always be the Batman to his Robin."

Bruce frowns and tries to imagine --

"It's difficult, I know. He was *very* young when the two of you first made love together, and you've had your whole life to turn you away from such desires --"

"I never... I've never spoken to anyone other than Harvey about my sexuality, and even with him... I never admitted my attraction *to* him, or to any other man in anything but the vaguest of terms. I've made a study *of* sexuality -- but more to understand the many strange things I saw or heard or made *use* of while acting as the Batman than to understand *myself*. Clark... I am ignorant," Bruce says, and doesn't try to hide his blush.

Clark reaches out to touch his cheek, and once again doesn't quite do it -- until Bruce leans forward. "It's only -- your heat, so human..." Clark swallows. "Bruce, are you saying you're a virgin?"

"Yes."

"I -- do you think you and Dick gave your virginities to each other?"

Bruce smiles. "I don't know. I can't know."
"Yes, of course, but..." Clark blinks. "I honestly don't know if Dick *would* tell me that --" Clark shakes his head again. "Will you learn with me?"

And Bruce knows his mouth is open --

"Oh -- say yes. Please, say yes. You must know I would never hurt you, or --"

Bruce kisses Clark, feeling heedless, reckless --

Bruce kisses Clark, and the *flood* of feeling --

Everything he'd felt before is back again, and this --

Clark is an *adult*, fully-grown, powerful, independent, *married* --

Bruce groans and lets his mind fill with the few memories he has of Lois Lane and her fox-faced beauty, her long legs and the whisper of silk --

He lets himself picture Clark's broad, golden hand on her thigh, the sight of that hand slipping under Lois' skirt --

*Clark* groans, and Bruce realizes that he'd just been thrusting his tongue into Clark's mouth repeatedly, that he'd gripped Clark's head to hold him *still* --

Bruce pulls back --

"*No*," Clark says, and *licks* Bruce's mouth, his cheek, his *throat* -- "Let me, please *let* me --"

"Clark --"

"Just -- it only has to be *once* --"

"No, please, Clark, don't say that --"

Clark *pants* and cups Bruce's face, kissing Bruce *hard* --

Bruce grunts and finds himself tugging at Clark's thin uniform, at --

Clark's cape falls before Bruce realizes he was trying to undo the thing --

Clark's kiss is a brutal thing, a *sharp* thing -- and then Clark pulls *back*.

"*Clark* --"

"I'm sorry. I'm -- your *mouth*, Bruce --"

"Would you have me fellate you?"

Clark makes a *hurt* noise, deep and animal --

And then the two of them are on a flat, soft surface which feels nothing like a bed, but probably is. Bruce is on his back and Clark is beside him -- no, he's hovering above and *slightly* to the side --

"Let me *taste* you, Bruce --"

"Naked. Please, Clark --"
Clark moans and Bruce can see the Superman uniform fluttering to the floor in his peripheral vision, but mostly he can see *Clark*. The vast, golden expanse of him, muscle and flesh over bone more sturdy than titanium --

The Man of Steel.

Bruce closes his eyes and gives himself *over* to stroking Clark's chest and back, Clark's shoulders and throat, Clark's abdomen --

"Are. Are you learning me, Bruce?"

"Making... memories. Clark, I need you --"

"I *feel* you --"

Bruce growls and flips them --

Clark *allows* it -- "*Anything*, Bruce --"

And he must kiss Clark again, must *taste* until he's convinced that he *does* taste citrus and strange minerals, fruit and salt and sweetness --

Bruce sucks Clark's tongue into his mouth and does his best to *massage* Clark's chest --

Clark *softens* himself --

"*No*," Bruce slurs, and Clark cups Bruce's face again, hardens again, *coaxes* Bruce's tongue back into his mouth --

Yes.

Bruce *takes* Clark's mouth the way he thinks he wants to be taken, the way --

Oh, but he hasn't yet touched Clark's *penis*. Bruce groans and pulls back, kissing Clark's throat --

Clark *gasps* when Bruce reaches his pulse point, and --

He can't hurt Clark. He can't --

Bruce bites down hard -- and Clark *clutches* Bruce's shoulders and holds on tight, holds him --

"Bruce, *yes*, *yes* --"

Bruce licks him there and thinks of Harvey's throat, of the flavors which *must* be left behind through the oxidation of silver --

Harvey has worn that necklace for eleven *years* --

And if Harvey had ever wanted this from him --

If he'd ever *asked* --

But Bruce is groaning *again*, because Clark has begun to sweat, and the taste --

The slick-hot *feel* --

Bruce licks Clark's throat thoroughly, taking Clark's whispers and moans for his own --
They're becoming more difficult to parse, more *senseless*, by the moment --

More.

Bruce bites the other side of Clark's throat in what he hopes feels like a promise and moves down. There's more sweat between Clark's pectorals --

Clark cups the back of Bruce's head and *pants* --

"I've wanted this," Bruce says, and can't drag his gaze away from Clark's chest --

"It's yours."

"Clark..."

"Touch -- oh, please, your wonderful fingers --"

Bruce *pinches* Clark's nipples, tugs a little -- "Like this."

Clark blows out a breath --

And suddenly Bruce is straddling Clark's hips. His fingers are still on Clark's nipples, but -- Bruce meets Clark's gaze and raises an eyebrow.

"I've wanted *this*, Bruce --"

"It's yours," Bruce says, twisting and tugging, pinching and *pulling* --

Clark groans and arches up, tossing his head -- no, Clark is floating, head tilted back --

"Clark, *stay* with me --"

And Clark slams back down to the bed with a hurt sound -- "I'm *here*, Bruce --"

"Yes. Yes, you --" Bruce shakes his head. He hadn't truly meant to *command*, but now that he has --

Now that he has, he can deny neither of them. Bruce goes back to stroking Clark restlessly --

*Firmly* --

And he lets his gaze fall on Clark's groin, on the thick and curling hairs there, on the *vastly* erect penis, less dark with blood than his own, less curved and more *slick* -- it seems as though Clark has been leaking pre-ejaculate for hours, considering the volume --

And he's already cupping Clark's penis, already *gripping* --

"Oh, *Bruce* --"

"I've wanted -- you wear no *armor* here --"

"No. No, I --" Clark groans and arches up again, lifts both of them --

"Clark..."

"Do -- oh, please do anything you *wish* -- " 
"I have no -- no *skill*, but I wish --"

"*Please* --"

Bruce grunts and nods, stroking Clark with much the same motions he's used on himself when his needs grew too great, when he couldn't stop himself, when he thought of *touch* --

How warm it might be, how *shattering* --

And he's not surprised to find himself moving again, leaning in, breathing deep --

"My friend -- oh, my beautiful *friend* --"

"Tell me... tell me I found ways to let you *in*, Clark --"

"*Yes* -- oh, please, your breath is so *cool* --"

Bruce blows on the tip of Clark's penis, and it twitches so powerfully that Bruce's hand jerks --

"I'm *sorry* --"

"*No*, Clark --"

"I need you, I would have your touch, always, I would live in your -- your --"

The taste is distinct, impossible to imagine as something else --

Or perhaps it's simply that his imagination is failing. For all that Bruce had imagined Clark's penis into his mouth dozens of times, he'd never taken the fantasy very far. To taste, to feel, to *have* --

To be *filled* as he takes more of Clark inside his mouth --

As he feels his lips stretch, his jaw complain --

"*Bruce* --"

Bruce hums --

"*Ah* -- oh, yes, oh -- I wanted this -- I wanted to *do* this --"

Bruce hums and *nods* --

And Clark is definitely saying something, but it's much too fast to translate -- assuming it's even in any language Bruce knows.

Bruce grips Clark more firmly and tries to suck -- surprised and not that it's so challenging to do with this much of Clark in his mouth. On the one hand, it's one of the first motor skills a human develops. On the other hand, making love must always be challenging in some way, mustn't it?

There surely has to be a *price* to pay for pleasure like this, for the *ache* of this which is located nowhere near to his jaw, the ache which is making *him* twitch and thicken, rise *more* --

Clark pushes a hand into Bruce's hair, strokes Bruce's scalp and tugs so *gently* --

So much *control*, even though Clark is spasming with every suckle, arching and dropping whenever Bruce strokes him a certain way --
"*Bruce* --!

Perhaps he would not be himself if a part of him didn't wish for Clark to have *less* control, for *Clark* to be as inexperienced and ignorant as Bruce is, himself --

Could the other Bruce have kept himself apart from Clark for so long *because* of his virginity? Shame? Fear? No, there's no question -- fear had to have been *some* part of it -- but Clark --

Clark would *brook* no shame, no --

Oh, Clark is stroking the back of Bruce's neck, cupping and squeezing, pressing and *testing* --

"Please...?"

Bruce nods and hums --

And Clark *grips* the back of Bruce's neck, holding tightly and firmly even without guiding --

Bruce has perused pornography. He can guess what's desired, but he isn't sure if he *can*. He certainly isn't ready to release the base of Clark's penis, but -- he has to try. He pulls back enough that only the thick, rounded head is in his mouth --

Clark groans and speeds through more speech --

Bruce lowers his head --

Bruce goes down and then back up again --

"*Yes* -- oh, yes, *Bruce* --"

He can do this, and, more importantly, it's *desired*. It --

Had something in Dick's body language told the other Bruce that this was desired?

Had his scent been as young as his body?

The man is lithe *now*. Then, he must've been as slight as Cardinal. As *small*, smooth and sleek - -

No. No, not --

Bruce forces his head lower to chase his thoughts away, works his head faster and uses the slickness of Clark's pre-ejaculate to ease the way --

And the image of himself bent over or on his hands and knees *for* Clark isn't new, but it's enough to make him cough for the feel of his own penis twitching, his body trembling --

"Oh, Bruce, you mustn't --"

Bruce suppresses the cough as ruthlessly as he can and hums --

Clark cries out --

And there are other things Bruce can do. Other --

It would be worse than pointless to hold Clark's hip, but he can slip two fingers behind his scrotum --
So slick and hot --

He can *press* --

And Clark cries out rhythmically, shudders and tosses his head --

Spasms *powerfully* --

And then Clark is ejaculating with a series of *sharp* cries, semen splashing the back of Bruce's throat and forcing him away from the urge -- the *need* -- to wallow in just this --

He will not *cough* again, and he'll suck as hard as he can --

"Bruce, I *love* you --"

Bruce squeezes his eyes shut and tries to convince his heart not to seize, not to *ache* --

He must stay in this *position* --

Except that Clark is pulling Bruce away. Could he be too sensitive? Bruce kneels up and licks his lips, feeling their slight numbness and tasting Clark, *feeling* --

And then Clark is kissing him deeply, *wetly*. He seems to almost be searching for the taste of himself in Bruce's mouth --

Searching for the purpose of *obliterating* it -- and Bruce cups Clark's shoulders and pushes him back --

"Oh -- please, Bruce --"

"No, you --" Bruce shakes his head. "I want to keep the taste of you for somewhat longer."

Clark stares at Bruce, lips parted and eyes wide, irises rimmed in red --

Bruce reaches out --

Clark closes his eyes -- no, Clark offers his eyelids, and they seem as though they're as thin as any human's, but they aren't *soft* --

Bruce sighs and leans in to kiss them, to feel the heat of Clark's *power*. It leads inevitably to kissing Clark all over his face, to kissing his lips over and over --

"Bruce, let me -- oh, I don't know what I *want* --"

"I want everything --"

"Then --" Clark exhales shakily and kisses Bruce once more before pulling back. "I have -- there's a certain lubricant which relaxes my internal muscles for a time so that I don't have to concentrate enough to *control* those muscles."

Bruce swallows and thinks --

And then there is no thought, no --

"Give it to me, Clark. Let me --"

"*Yes*, Bruce, it's there --"
And the bowl growing up through the bed has a faintly golden liquid in it --

Bruce reaches for it --

Remembers that he's *supposed* to question, to test, to -- at the very least -- *pause* --

"Oh, Bruce, I've tested it extensively. It works very badly for certain species, and many metahumans can't use it, at all, but --"

"Did you... I... with Dick?"

"And with Cardinal, Roy --" Clark shakes his head. "Many others. I've never wanted to *hurt* someone with my penis, Bruce --"

"No, of course not --" But what if it was desired? He had enjoyed the ache of having Clark in his mouth. Surely having Clark *take* his mouth would be even more pleasurable, more intense --

"Bruce...?"

"I'm... musing on sexualized pain," Bruce says, and slicks his fingers with the lubricant, noting that it's warmer than the air -- though not as warm as Clark --

Clark tilts Bruce's head up so they can face each other -- "Anything, Bruce. At any time. I -- there is nothing I would not give, though I would ask that you not ask me to injure you permanently."

Bruce swallows and pants -- "Clark..."

"Every -- I do not make that promise to everyone, or lightly. I would give you all that I am. I would have you *take* all that I am."

"I want you. I want you inside me, Clark --"

"Now?"

Bruce grunts and *tries* to think, to be more than just his erect and aching *penis* --

Clark sighs and licks his lips, stroking Bruce's wrists, squeezing them. "If it helps... I've longed to have you inside me far more often than the other way around."

That -- Bruce narrows his eyes --

And Clark laughs. "I promise to show you how such a dream could come to pass. Now?"

"What -- I need to give you what you *want*, Clark --"

And then Clark is flat on his back with his legs spread wide. A part of Bruce is only noting Clark's flexibility and wondering how it could be improved -- and that part of him will clearly try anything to keep Bruce away from pleasure --

(Your path will be a lonely one --)

No, not that, not *now* --

"Bruce..."

"I am... berating myself for giving in to pleasure. I will not listen to myself, however," Bruce says,
and hopes the lie of that is true *enough* --

Clark sits up and kisses him, cupping the back of Bruce's head with one hand and guiding *Bruce's* hand between his legs with the other. Bruce can't stop himself from stroking and caressing Clark's scrotum -- so soft and hard at once --

Bruce squeezes Clark there and shouts at the corners of his mind, fights for more of *this* --

"Bruce -- oh, Bruce, *take* --"

"*Yes*," Bruce says, and shivers for the sound of need in his voice, for the obvious hunger, the loss of *control* --

Clark gasps -- "You desire so *much* --"

"*Yes* --"

"Push *in*, Bruce. Two -- *oh* --"

The *heat* --

The tightness and the heat, the sense -- but how will he be *able* to take Clark? How could anything --

But his body is telling him how wonderful it will feel inside Clark, how the heat and pressure will drive him to heights he has not ever *approached* --

Clark gasps again and Bruce realizes that he's *thrusting* already --

"Clark --"

"Don't -- don't *stop* --"

"You feel --"

"*Perfect*, oh, can you --" And Clark is on his knees, pressed close enough that the reach between his legs isn't difficult --

His scrotum is pressed to Bruce's *wrist*, and Bruce can feel his skin prickling with sweat --

Clark moans and darts in to lick Bruce's throat, the spaces behind Bruce's ears, his throat again --

"Clark --"

"I like --" Clark laughs breathlessly. "I love this. I've wanted -- oh, your fingers are so long, so *powerful* --"

"Your *body* --"

"Opening. Opening to you -- do you *feel*?"

There's slightly more room to move, and that -- "It works that quickly?"

"Yes. I -- faster in me than in -- humans --"

"Tell me -- tell me about --" No, he can't. He *can't* --
"Bruce...?"

Bruce shakes his head and thrusts faster, tries to bury himself in the sensations --

The scents and *flavors* when he licks Clark's throat --

When he *sucks* --

"*Oh* -- I -- Bruce, you -- what *is* it?"

"It isn't -- it's not important --"

"You *want* something of me --"

"Need you. Need -- I've always --" Bruce growls again and bites Clark's throat, holding on against the need to *ask* --

"*Bruce* --"

He pushes *deeper* --

"Ah -- oh -- my *fire*, I would give you -- I *will* give you everything, but you must *tell* me --"

No. No...

"Please don't *hide* from me, Bruce --"

Oh -- but --- and Bruce makes the mistake of looking into Clark's eyes --

The eyes which have *always* seen him, seen *all* of him, and how could that ever be a *mistake*?*

"It -- I wanted you to tell me of Dick --"

Clark gasps again and *clenches* around Bruce's fingers, and the fear for that is meaningless against the pleasure, the power --

"I *need* you --"

"Soon -- soon it will be *safe* for you --"

"Yes, yes, I see --"

"He told me you wouldn't take him. He told me that you *wanted* him, that he could feel it, but that you feared his pain and *blood* --"

"No -- oh -- Clark, no --"

"What you *want*, Bruce. *Take* it," and Clark is almost glaring at him, certainly trying to *will* him to imagine --

Sleek skin, perhaps --

Perhaps hardly scarred at all --

"Clark..." And Bruce knows he sounds helpless, but he needs so much, and Clark is taking his
fingers, working his *hips* back --

Clark is taking *him*, and Bruce sees, Bruce *knows* --

"He was so *small*, Bruce, and, though we had made love in other ways many times by then, I was
struck anew by his size, his innocence, his unstinting bravery -- and his *need*."  

Bruce groans --

Clark licks his lips and nods -- "Give me another finger, Bruce..."

And for a moment, Bruce wonders if Clark's story had simply *skipped* to that point, if this was
something the boy --

*DICK* --

But Bruce is aware *enough*, and pulls most of the way out to make room --

"Oh -- oh, *now*, Bruce --"

He pushes in --

Clark cries out and *bucks*, removing any chance for Bruce to enter him slowly -- "*Yes* -- oh, you're *in* me --"

"Not -- not *enough* --"

"You'll fill me," Clark promises as he leans in to kiss Bruce lightly three times, a dozen -- "You'll *take* me."

"Yes --"

"Dick told me stories of how you would take him with your tongue, your fingers -- he showed me
the chafing on his thighs from how you would take his thighs again and *again* --"

Bruce *grunts*, shakes his head --

"Don't *stop*, Bruce --"

"No, no, I -- I *can't* --"

"He was so beautiful. So *hungry*. He begged me to take him and so *prove* to Bruce that it could
be *done* --"

"I wanted -- I would want to *protect* --"

"Yes," Clark says, and his voice manages to be soothing despite the breathlessness, the need -- "You
never wanted to show him pain, abuse --"

"Never. I --"

"So *beautiful*, Bruce. The blue of his eyes swallowed by dark hunger --"

"They're. His eyes are blue?"

Clark pants. "Yes, so -- and you would try to capture them in your sketches, but you felt that you
never had --"
"I --" Bruce shakes his head and grips the back of Clark's neck with his free hand --

"Anything* --"

"More. *Please* --"

"I could not refuse him, Bruce. I... in truth, I had only been waiting for Bruce to take him first, for
them to give *that* to each other, as well."

Bruce groans and thrusts *faster*, harder --

"Oh -- *soon*# --"

"Clark* --"

"I could -- I couldn't stop myself from taking him with *my* tongue again, and his whimpers and
cries sounded like *betrayal* --"

"Wallow. I would need to *wallow* --"

"Yes, and *take*, always *take* --"

"I have to *give* --"

"You are. You *did*," Clark says, and kisses Bruce hard *while* riding Bruce's fingers. His moans
are words, his wordless *noises* are words, a language Bruce wants --

A language Bruce *must* learn --

And then Clark is on his back again, *away* from Bruce --

"Please* --"

"Now*, Bruce, don't *wait* --"

Bruce strokes himself with his slick hand and gasps, *pants* --

The warmth and pleasure of his own *hand* --

But Clark doesn't want him to wait. Clark needs him. Clark --

Bruce groans and shakes his head, guiding himself in --

Bruce *whimpers* for the heat --

"Oh, *yes*, Bruce --"

"Tell me -- *give* me --"

"I used *this* lubricant, and I --oh, Bruce, oh -- not so *slowly* --"

"I need -- I *need* ---"

Clark breathes deeply and nods, pants out his air and arches --

"Clark* --"
"I didn't make him wait. I -- I gave him two right away, and he was -- Bruce had left him so *tight* --

Bruce growls and *thrusts* --

Clark cries out and rips great *hunks* of material out of the bed --

The bed refills the holes immediately -- and the strangeness of that is enough to let him get his hands on Clark's hips, so strong, so *perfect* --

He must distract himself, he must --

Bruce grips Clark's penis and begins to stroke him fast and *hard* --

"Bruce -- *Bruce* --"

"I need -- I want you to have an *orgasm* --"

Clark laughs -- "I *will* --"

"While. While I'm taking --"

Clark groans and opens his eyes wide, showing red that has taken over the *entirety* of his iris --

"*Clark* --"

Clark pants and smiles brightly, happily and hungrily at once -- "He cried *out* --"

"*How* --"

"High, *sharp*. Almost -- almost a *scream*. And I promised -- I'd already promised not to *stop* --

"Did. Did he *hurt* --"

"*Yes*", Clark says, and it's almost a *hiss* -- "and then he ejaculated while screaming my *name*."

Bruce *needs*, and it feels like instinct or something deeper to push Clark's right leg up to his chest --

To grunt like an *animal* for the shift in angle --

To quiet himself *immediately* so as to better hear Clark's grunts, Clark's moans --

"Oh -- like *this*, Bruce?"

"I don't -- "

"Would you -- would you have me on my hands and knees --"

"Don't *move* --"

"You would not *notice* --"

"Don't *move*", Bruce says, and begins to thrust fast and hard, begins to *squeeze* Clark's penis --
Clark *shouts* and tosses his head -- stops and stares once more. "The hunger you feel --"

"*You* --"

"And Dick --"

"A -- a boy, he's not a boy, he --"

"Shall I tell you of Cardinal? When -- *nnh* -- when he is aroused enough he sounds nearly *feline* in his pleasure --"

Bruce growls and squeezes his eyes shut, shakes his head -- "*Please* --"

"Starling... Starling never truly seemed a boy, at all --"

"*Clark* --"

"Bruce, let *go*..."

And Bruce can't stop himself from *gripping* Clark's penis, the back of his raised thigh --

"Oh -- not --" Clark laughs again, gasps twice and arches -- "Oh, *love*. In the -- I took him *three* times with my penis. I took -- I took him until he lost consciousness, and then I woke him up to take him *again* -- "

Bruce flexes --

Clark clenches --

Bruce *shouts*, and now he can't stop himself from thrusting as quickly as he's stroking. Now he's on his own *edge* --

"*Bruce* -- oh, please, tell me you'll do this *again* --"

"The -- the right *way* --"

"*This*, oh -- oh, *this* --"

"I *need* --"

"My pleasure, my -- oh, you *have* it. You've had it with every touch, every long *enough* look --"

"Clark --"

"I've masturbated myself on your *roof*, Bruce --"

Bruce coughs, shocked enough by the laugh that he can't fully *express* it without jerking, losing his *rhythm* --

Clark shouts and wraps his powerful legs around Bruce's waist -- "I *must* --"

And Clark is pulling him in deeper, somehow, *holding* Bruce in and allowing only a rough, *brutal* grind which is making Bruce lose the ability to see, to breathe, to *think* --

"I -- I flew him home to Bruce with a *large* bottle of the lubricant. I *waited* --"
"Did -- did he --*Clark*, the *feel* of you --"

"You must -- you must not *leave* --"

"Not this place, this moment --"

"Not --" Clark groans and shakes his head. "Bruce didn't *wait*. He threw Dick to the mats, arranged Dick on his hands and knees, and slicked them both. Dick cried his joy, and then he -- oh, he -- cried more as Bruce brought him to two more orgasms before *spending* himself --"

"I want --"

"*Take*. I can't -- not -- much longer --"

"*Come*", Bruce says, and he feels like Harvey, like someone brave --

"*Bruce* --"

"*Do* it --"

And Clark twines his fingers with Bruce's own and guides him to a stroke that strips, that *pulls* --

"I want you in my *mouth* again --"

"*Anything* -- oh -- tell me..."

"What, Clark? Tell *me* --"

Clark gasps a laugh --

Cries out *high* --

And his penis is spasming so vigorously in their hands while he ejaculates that Bruce has to wonder if he'd been controlling it while it was in Bruce's mouth -- no, he had been. He's *careful*, always careful --

Far more careful than any Bruce could be when faced with beauty, acceptance --

Need which is only *human* --

And Bruce can do nothing but *rut* as he brings his slick and dripping hand to his face, as he paints his own mouth --

Clark grunts and clenches again --

Again --

And Bruce realizes that he's doing it rhythmically, that he's being --

All but *milked* --

And the only thing which stops Bruce's groan is running out of air. The only thing which *can* stop his hips --

He *won't* stop --

And it seems as though he's hearing himself roar from a great distance as he jerks and spasms his
way through his orgasm, as he spurts and spends --

Clark's eyes are still *glowing* --

Clark's mouth is open and he is -- he *must* be the hungriest man --

So much more than merely a *man* --

Bruce collapses on his hands --

Realizes that the cast had -- somehow -- removed *itself* --

He is in a world of wonders, and this man is -- not only one of them. He's several of them. *Many* of them -- Bruce laughs at himself and meets Clark's eyes --

And Clark is smiling at him, redness banked to a faint purple glow -- hm.

"Are you controlling your arousal?"

"Ah... yes, to a certain extent --"

"Don't. I want more of you."

"Oh --" Clark searches him, bites his lip, reaches out to stroke Bruce's cheek --

"And tell me... tell me what you needed me to *say*, Clark --"

"No. It's nothing you can give."

Bruce frowns. "Clark --"

"It -- you're going to return to your own universe once we find a way to make that happen, and so you cannot give me what I want," Clark says, and strokes Bruce's mouth.

And --"That's what you meant about wanting me not to leave?"

Clark smiles ruefully and nods.

"I --"

"It's all right, Bruce. I am a very, very greedy man."

"I... have my own greed," Bruce says, and feels weak, small, *selfish* --

"Teach me. Teach me how to stop you from thinking, beautiful friend."

Bruce breathes deeply -- "Kiss me again --"

"Always."

*
So maybe the Martian Manhunter gives him the willies a little. That -- well, that's gotta be normal.

Right now, he's walking around doing his giant-chitinous-insect-with-fucking-ridiculous-*claws* thing --

Well, all right, he's just *standing* there with five of those claws buried in Dent's *hair*, but that's worse. That's really fucking *worse*, because he doesn't even stand *still* like a human. Humans move, breathe, twitch, scratch --

Manhunter might as well be a *statue* --

*I am not a statue, Jason.*

*Fuck* --

*You are supposed to call me J'onn.*

Fuck, fuck, *fuck* --

And Manhunter -- *J'onn* -- is totally laughing his not-really-an-ass off, only without actually *moving* -- So I take it it's break time?

*Yes. I have made good progress, I believe. He is fully cognizant of the fact that the voices he hears and impulses he has are a reflection of what he'd seen of his father as filtered through his own far greater intellect.*

And *then* J'onn moves his hand and turns to face Jason. Dent is passed *right* the fuck out at the moment, so -- okay.

Are we gonna talk like one of us is a plain old human? Please?

This time, the laugh *starts* in Jason's mind and then migrates out into the real world as J'onn morphs into that humanoid form he likes so much --hunh.

Jason gestures J'onn over to where he's theoretically writing up some kind of damned *report* about why they're suddenly at plus-one Bruce and plus-two Dent -- like he *knows* anything, and he swears Dick makes him do this shit because he *hates* him.

At least Tim can *bullshit* his way through a report --

"Yes, Jason?"

"I gotta question you've probably answered a million times, but uh... humor me?"

J'onn puts one big, green, fingernail-less hand on the back of Jason's chair. "If I can."

"Okay. Okay. You can look like *anything* you want, just about. You've *got* a human identity... out there somewhere and we both know why I'm not being specific, yeah?"

"There is no reason to compromise security further."

"Exactly," Jason says, and spins his chair around to face J'onn, look him over, try to *see* -- no, he
still doesn't get it. "*That* form. Why?"

J'onn raises exactly one-half of his brow-ridge. It's not like there's any *hair* there, and -- yeah.

"Seriously. Supes says you told him and Bruce that it was all about making yourself look, like, *harmless*, but -- it doesn't work. It really, *really* doesn't work."

J'onn smiles -- and smiles wider somehow in Jason's *head* --

It feels like it should make him *sneeze* or something --

And then it's milder or quieter or whatever the fuck, because Jason feels normal again --

And J'onn nods. "I did not wish for your species -- and the protectors of your species -- to know the full range of my shape-shifting abilities. Similarly, I have kept the full extent of my mental abilities a secret from all but a select few -- and those people with whom that few wished to share. I am unnerving."

"Well -- yeah, but -- that form isn't *less* unnerving if you know what I'm saying. You look like big gay alien wrestler, and that's coming from someone dressed up like a big gay *bird*, so -- yeah."

The laugh is aloud again -- but it also isn't. This time, J'onn doesn't make him want to sneeze, so that's all right, then. "Your species... humans often wish to believe they know everything about the things which frighten them *without* first knowing everything," and this time he raises his entire brow ridge, which...

"Okay, I'm hearing you. It's not like I *haven't* beaten the shit out of all kinds of people who *thought* they knew everything there was to know about the world without really *trying*, but..." Jason shakes his head. "You've been around for a *while*, J'onn. You were on-planet back when the Justice Society was young the *first* time --"

"Not quite that long --"

"Close *enough*. You're a founding member of the League, now. If you wanna rock the big green insect thing, I think you oughtta do it."

"Do you prefer it, Jason?"

Well... heh. Jason forms an image of himself as a four-year-old holding a canister of green Play-Batter and making a mushy version of the gay-alien-wrestler look.

J'onn hums.

"I mean, sure, the insectile look is fucking creepy, but it also *suits* you. It makes you look like exactly as much of a badass as you are."

J'onn tilts his head to the side. "I cannot speak aloud very well in that form."

Jason frowns. "Wait, I thought you guys couldn't read each other's minds all that well?"

"We could not. We communicated, mostly, in clicks, whistles, rattles, moans, and hums."

"So... maybe you could kick ass at a language like !Xhosa?"

Another laugh. "I do have a better vocabulary in that language than I do in most."
Jason nods thoughtfully. "Okay, I can go with that." And -- "Hey, how long can you hang out tonight? I'm benched to keep an eye on Dent, but we're totally not expecting you to do a marathon session on the guy."

"The inside of his mind is a dark and terrible tangle, though it's a predictable one given the studies I've made of violent human criminals. And I am not yet needed elsewhere, if you would like for me to stay."

Jason grins and points to Dick's chair.

"Most human chairs are not designed for the comfort of Martians in their traditional chosen form, I should say."

"Heh, I hear you, I -- wait. You go poking around in the minds of violent criminals?"

J'onn turns the chair so that they're facing each other and offers an entirely human-style smile. It's rueful as all *hell*, and maybe --

"Uh. Was that an emotion you just didn't have in your society?"

"Much of Mars was uninhabitable -- even for the hardiest species -- by the time I was born, and what was left was quite crowded. There was little room for those who would behave apologetically only after already committing a crime of some sort."

And that absolutely is another way to describe 'ruefulness.' Jason nods and grabs one of the nectarines Alfred had gotten especially for him, since Dick has the dumbass idea that peaches are better and Tim never met a piece of fruit he didn't like better carbonated and filtered with high fructose corn syrup. *Vegetables* he'll eat all day, but -- hunh. "Do you eat human food?"

"I would have starved if I did not, Jason."

"Yeah, no, I know, but as far as I know you could be getting most of your nutrients from pine tree bark --"

"Delicious, but terrible for my... blood pressure."

"Uh?"

"An approximation of the condition in question."

"Right, got it. Nectarine?"

"No, thank you. I prefer peaches."

"Aw, man, not you, too! They're just fuzzy little bitterness machines."

"Machines."

"With... uh... cogs?" Jason snorts and pushes a hand back through his hair. "Don't mind me, J'onn. I'm still trying to wrap my head around you going digging in the brains of psychos and fuckwads by *choice*."

"Even though the things I've learned have already been helpful with Harvey Dent?"

"Even *then*. That can't be good for you."
J'onn shifts just his upper body to the insect form and covers Jason's hand with his own -- Consider the people I surround myself with. There is little hardship in burying myself in the troubled and evil when I have people such as you to return to.

Aww -- okay, now I feel guilty for how much time I spend thinking about fucking.

J'onn pats Jason's hand. It is quite remarkable.

Jason snorts and flips J'onn off --

Then he *thinks* about it --

Does J'onn have a *cloaca* of some kind?

The laugh shivers Jason's entire brain and makes him grit his teeth a little --

"So I guess you heard *that*," Jason says, and smiles -- heh -- ruefully.

J'onn morphs back to the Jolly Green Alien form and raises his brow ridge. "While I would be happy to answer your questions about Martian physiology, I am not sure those are the questions you would most like to have answered."

And that... yeah. Jason spins his chair back and forth a little, savors his nectarine *maybe* a bit ostentatiously --

Tim has *also* been known to consume fruit juice if it's dripped -- or poured -- directly on Jason's skin somewhere. It's just that he makes them do it in the damned *shower*, and that's not actually good for Jason's digestion.

As opposed to Jason's other things -- fuck.

"Yes, you are doing it again."

Jason snorts and beats at his forehead a little -- there. "Okay, how 'bout a blanket apology for the past five years and the next ten or so?"

"Were you planning to castrate yourself at age twenty-seven?"

"Uh. No? I'm just -- well -- *Dick* isn't this much of a horndog still, you know?"

"He was not so... focused when he was your age."

Jason -- well, he knows he's making sad-face, but --

J'onn pats him again, and smiles in Jason's head *obnoxiously*.

Jason thinks about flipping him off again --

Jason thinks about whether or not he has a *cloaca* again --

"I --"

"Don't *tell* me! Never, ever tell me," Jason says, and tries a nice, manful glare.

He wonders how Steph likes those. He could find out easily -- it's not like she *wouldn't* just throw a punch if she hated it. And then he can work on her form a little --
Maybe *work* on her *form* --

J'onn clears his throat.

"Aw -- fuck. You don't even have to *do* that!"

"While air is heavily filtered before it enters my lungs, certain particulates can and do still lodge in those filters from time to time, making it immensely difficult to respirate."

... all right, that's just fucking *interesting* --

"Here," J'onn says, making himself translucent until Jason can see -- something --

J'onn lowers his *head* --

And that damned well looks like a fleshy filter. Or maybe some of those things whales have for filtering out krill and stuff.

*It is not entirely dissimilar,* and J'onn makes himself solid again. "Do you wish to distract yourself from something in particular?"

*Yes*. "Uh... you can't tell?"

"I am not reaching within you to know your thoughts. I am 'picking up' only what you are broadcasting."

Jason opens his mouth -- closes it again.

Tries to broadcast an image of himself doing calculus --

He *likes* calculus --

Mrs. Piazza is always wearing those pinstriped pants that make her ass look fucking *huge* --

J'onn chuckles --

And Jason admits it. "I'm totally avoiding thinking about the potential mass murderer snoozing over there," he says, and finishes off his nectarine before grabbing a wipe for his hands. "I keep going back and forth between wanting to *help* Dick choke him out and wanting to just -- I don't know. Help him. *Fix* him enough that we can send him home or wherever without worrying about the people there who probably don't deserve fucking Two-Face."

"Does anyone deserve Two-Face?"

"*Yes*. Hugo Strange. I've had *fantastic* fantasies about making them take turns fucking each other's brains up before shooting each other full of holes."

J'onn nods slowly, gaze going distant as he listens or reaches or whatever the fuck -- "I am studying Dent's dreams."

"Uh... yeah?"

"He has rather more memories of his mother than he thinks he does," J'onn says, and that --

"That doesn't sound... good."
"His conscious mind believes that she died when he was quite young. His... subconscious believes that his father murdered her. Beneath and beyond that is the truth: she packed a small suitcase, stole the few dollars from his father's wallet, and ran -- leaving Harvey there."

"*Fuck*. He *saw* that?"

"He seems to have watched her walking out the door from the shadows near his own bedroom door. He distinctly remembers her not looking back. One of the questions which has plagued him is the incomplete memory of whether or not her facial bruises had healed enough for it to be 'okay' that she had left the apartment without her 'special' sunglasses."

Jason winces and turns to look at Dent. Just -- he can't fucking *help* looking. What kind of mother --

No, he knows exactly what kind of mother would do that -- one who'd been beaten hard enough *often* enough that she started thinking more like a whipped dog than a woman. One who had exactly *one* light at the end of the tunnel --

And men like Dent's old man never let a chance to threaten death go by. Maybe --

Maybe he'd promised to kill her if she took their son? Maybe he'd promised to kill their *son* if she took him away. Maybe --

Jason squeezes his eyes shut because Dent's still out and it's safe enough to *do* that -- he still opens them after only a few seconds and turns back to J'onn. "Are you gonna give him that memory back?"

"I believe he will regain it on his own. I have..." J'onn steeples his blunted fingers and raises his brow ridge. "May I show you? Not the substance of Dent's memories, but... a representation."

"Uh -- sure?"

And then Jason just *is* in the middle of a huge forest. Like, exactly the middle, because there's no path behind him, no anything.

The clearing he's in is fucking claustrophobia-causing, because the thick and thorny branches are reaching in to grab him from all sides, waving and twisting like something *Ivy* would throw at him --

No, wait, there's a path in front of him. He hadn't noticed because it's even darker than the forest, but it's clear. It's --

It's *not* safe, but the thorns are ripping him to fucking pieces, and he doesn't wanna die. This is gonna kill him, and he doesn't wanna *die*. He walks down the path --

He walks into the black and it's cool, almost silky somehow. It gets wider as he goes, and he can breathe, he can think, he can *do*. All he has to do is stay on the path --

(He's losing his friends.)

The path is his only choice --

(He's losing his wife.)

It's *easier* now, and if he just keeps going he can get it all back, somehow, come back with a flame-thrower and a machete -- no, a chainsaw --
No, a fucking *tank*, yeah, that's right, blow it all outta the water once and for all. All those fucks -- they're all liars and crooks, all out for the main chance --

Even Bruce and Gilda --

He has to get *away* from them, do his own thing, maybe finally make a little fuckin' *money* --

But what's that sound over there? Like -- like sawing and chopping --

No, like a huge fucking light-switch being turned on --

And he can see the woods on either side of the path again, see that they're just trees, see that there *are* spaces around them, ways to get through --

And the path is still black. It --

Jason gasps and shudders. "Holy -- I was *him*!"

"Not... entirely."

"Uh. Okay? Please don't do that again?"

J'onn nods. "All right."

Jason laughs a little breathlessly and shakes himself like a dog. "Okay, so what you're saying is that he only saw one way away from everything fucking him up?"

"Not quite. It was more a matter of him having been blinded by his dread of his worst memories. He thought he was seeing clearly, that it was obvious to anyone that he was... beset by enemies? I believe that is the proper phrase."

Jason frowns a little. "I think I'm hearing you. It basically felt like anyone who asked him what was wrong was really... uh... poking him with sharp sticks."

"It does... feel very similar to what I have read of 'sports' such as bear-baiting."

"Eugh -- okay, so I sound like Skylark." Jason snorts. "Fuck *me*, I don't wanna sympathize with him."

"Even though he has not committed any crimes?"

"He pulled a fucking gun on Bruce -- shit, J'onn, it's just that I can *understand* that kind of thinking. One minute you're yourself and you've got friends and you like the world and most of the people in it, the next minute you're starving to death and fighting for your life -- and more -- every fucking night and it seems like the people who ask if you need any help just wanna... I don't know, shove you in a little box and forget you."

J'onn blinks slowly. "Are you speaking of the child welfare system?"

"Uh. Kinda? My life on the street, too," Jason says, standing up just to stretch his legs a little --

And maybe to pace --

And maybe to throw himself into a kata, because he's *not* suited up in any way save for wearing his mask and he's damned well in the Cave and he's damned well going to *move*. 
Dent.

Harvey fucking --

And a whole lot of people had grown up the way he had *without* murdering a fuck-ton of people, so --

So maybe most of those people had grown up to do other fucked-up things -- or just to *be* other fucked-up things to their own families. At least Two-Face had never targeted Gilda. That's --

That's fucking weak for a mitigating fucking circumstance.

That's --

"Jason. You need not sympathize with him."

"Heh. Is that what I'm trying to do, J'onn?" Jason steps out of the kata and smiles at him, thinks about what he would look like with hair --

And then J'onn grows hair. Specifically, John *Jones'* hair.

"You look like a backwards *carrot*. And yes, there are totally yellow carrots --"

And then J'onn *is* a yellow carrot -- just with arms and legs.

Jason snorts. "I think I had this nightmare when I was four, man."

The carrot grows a face right about where J'onn's should be -- "Have I successfully distracted you?"

Jason licks his lips and raises his eyebrows. "I'm definitely not thinking of either sex or Dent, so -- oh, damn."

Just --

He *had* to say that out loud, didn't he? Now he's thinking of sucking face with *Two*-Face, and hey, maybe they could talk shit about *each other's* childhoods --

And there's a clawed hand on top of his head. J'onn's got a little less than a foot on him, and it's exactly like having his head palmed like a basketball. By a great, big not-insect.

"Uh?"

"I could remove those thoughts from your mind. They are not as fully-formed as they could be."

Which -- okay, that would be *nice*, but -- "Doesn't that mean that they'll hit me just as hard when I have those thoughts again?"

"Yes."

"Then no, thanks," Jason says and reaches up to grip the surprisingly slim wrist --

Because all the not-really-bone is on the *outside*, right --

Jason steps back and moves his grip to J'onn's hand --

"You may ask for this at any time, Jason. I do not wish my friends to suffer."
Jason grins. "Thanks. You make me wish I could offer you something."

"You have offered me companionship. More, you have offered me the pleasure of your surface thoughts."

"Heh, well, not like I'm any good at hiding those."

"On the contrary; whenever you are on the Watchtower, your thoughts are often... streamlined. You do not broadcast there, save when you are willing a member of the League to think more rapidly."

Jason blinks. "Seriously?"

"Yes," J'onn says, and softens his hand until it feels -- no, it doesn't feel human, at all. It feels warm though, and malleable enough to shape itself *around* Jason's hand. "I enjoy coming here. Your entire family is far more relaxed here, more... open and welcoming."

"Yeah, well, Robin wouldn't have it any other way, you know?"

"And you have no influence of your own?"

"If I had any *influence*, I'd be out there with Robin, Tink, and Lark breaking heads -- except that I don't actually wanna fight for fighting's sake. I know what you mean, J'onn, I just... isn't it the same with the other vigis?"

"To a certain extent. There is more of a difference with your family, however. You generally have far more emotional armor to set aside, and so being here is... striking. Stimulating."

Jason turns and looks at the big, portrait-sized photo of Batman and Robin from back in the day. Dick is grinning like someone just explained to him that every day from now on would be all ice cream, ass sex, and beating up criminals. *Bruce* looks exactly like he's holding his face still against anything *like* a smile, and that the effort is the best pain he's ever felt. There's a single red rose that gets replaced every few days and a box full of Kory's memory-sticks.

If you're Tamaranian, inhaling the fumes from those things makes you remember just about anything you want to. Jason always winds up thinking about Dick hooking *up* with Kory whenever he burns one, while Tim had told him that he just meditates a little.

He hasn't asked what Dick remembers when he's kneeling at the little shrine. Some things really *are* private -- or maybe it's just that they should be. He doesn't know. What he *does* know...

"Tink and I always try to be at least a little professional around other people. It's not that Dick beats us if we don't or anything, but we figure... he has enough voices in his head questioning him about whether he's doing things the right -- read: *Bruce* -- way."

J'onn nods and kind of *grows* up Jason's arm a little until Jason's encased in green to the elbow --

"Uh?"

"Is this all right? I wished a greater degree of contact."

*Why*? No, no, go with it --

"I find your company pleasing, Jason."

"Are you... uh... not that I think you... uh." Sex?
Would you like to try it?

Jason licks his lips and pictures --

*Tries* to picture --

If J'onnn does it one way, it would be like hooking up with a cartoon character --

J'onnn laughs in Jason's mind --

*Or*, the other way -- how? Just -- *how*?

And then there are images of Clark holding what certainly looks like a penis-like thing jutting out from the insect's... groin... maybe. J'onnn is pumping his hips and *gripping* Clark's head with his clawed fingers --

And then Clark is jerking like he's been electrocuted by someone with some idea of how much juice it takes to *make* Clark jerk. He's coming hard and -- yeah, Jason's going to stick with hard. Those tights and trunks had to be a *dead* fucking loss, and --

Yeah, he's being hit on. By an alien who's somehow *more* alien than either Kory or Clark, despite the fact that both of *them* are way more freaky than J'onnn could ever be.

Or...

Jason raises his eyebrows at J'onnn.

*How would you define 'freaky?'

Oh -- Jesus, don't make me think of answers to that question.

The... J'onnn-ness creeping up Jason's arm making it feel warm and loved *ripples* --

"Uh --"

"I believed that you took pleasure from your thoughts about Superman and Starfire," J'onnn says, and it's totally a question *inside*, like maybe --

Maybe J'onnn would like it better if Jason answered silently --

*Yes.*

And that would be... sex?

*If you wish it to be.*

That's kinda... uh... Jason imagines himself limp-wristed --

J'onnn sends him an image of Tink looking *dangerous*, only it's *really* Cardinal. Jason's not sure what the difference is --

*It is, in my opinion, simply the difference in how I see him through my eyes versus how you see him through yours,* and there's Tink kicking the *shit* out of a bunch of *unfriendly* aliens the last time the League had called for help from *them*.

No wisecracks, no flirty little smiles -- hell, hardly any expression at *all* --
I believe he saves such things for when he is with you or Dick.

When he has backup. Yeah, that makes sense. And --

Jason looks up into J'onn's eyes. Tell me a little more about what you like? How you roll? What it is about *me*, maybe?

You find my desire confusing?

Desire. That. That's just putting it *right* out there, isn't it.

J'onn smiles in his mind, and it's exactly like being in the warmth of his pod, surrounded by friends and loved-ones as the solar flares make every one of the modern conveniences -- and the vast majority of the things they use to do their jobs -- into useless blocks of synthstone --

Whoa, wait --

Was that too much?

Jason blinks up at J'onn and *thinks* about asking him what the *fuck*, but -- he knows. He -- We feel like family, yeah?

You are a family, and yet you always welcome strangers -- once we prove ourselves.

You're totally not a stranger --

But I am... strange. Are you aware that you are reaching for me?

What? His arms are still -- oh. But -- what am I reaching *with*?

It seems to be your own thoughts of family. Of... home. You have desired a woman to be part of your home?

Well -- yeah. Homes *need* women. Not, like, cooking and cleaning and shit -- unless they're into it -- but --- being there. All female-like.

There is... a desire for softness?

And then Jason's thinking -- and almost certainly *beaming* -- about a memory --

The heat being off in their building -- for once *not* because they didn't pay -- and his mother waking him up and bringing him to her big bed, covering them with sheets and blankets and sweatshirts and coats and *curtains* --

And then she'd climbed in, and by then it was a relief, because her skin was cold but *Jason* was sweating --

*She sang to you.*

*So* badly. So -- Jesus, she couldn't carry a tune in a *suitcase*. And I was old enough to *know* why the songs didn't sound right, so I was kinda squirming and trying not to wince too hard --

And the next thing I knew it was morning and the heat was coming back on *right* before I had to go out in the cold to get to school -- uh. I'm totally not thinking helpful thoughts here, am I?

You are thinking of warmth and family. You are offering me your loved ones. May I? And he's lifting
that clawed hand --

The one that *hadn't* stopped being a hand and started being a damned *sleeve* --

And -- well, why the fuck not?

J'onn fills Jason with *gratitude*, with hope and pleasure and something that smells a lot like need --

Not that Jason can smell anything but that wet-rock and carnival midway downwind-from-the-cotton-candy-machine thing that J'on usually puts out --

And then that hand is in his hair, *gently* scratching his scalp --

His scalp feels warm and *tingly* --

*I scratched you enough to help our connection; I will leave none of myself behind*, and that's so damned *reassuring* --

He can go with that. He's relaxed. He's happy --

No, he's *excited*, because Ma'ena has summoned him to her tonight. She has not yet come wholly into her time of fullness, and so still has days before she *must* choose a --

'Husband' is close enough.

No, what --

'Mate' is a word used for animals -- for your people and my own.

Okay, okay, *show* me --

And there she is, waiting for J'on on the --

Stoop --

*Yes. In a way.*

Except that this stoop *stoops*, and brings Ma'ena down and down to the pedway, and she's gloriously nude, swollen enough at the throat and abdomen that she's split her exoskeleton to expose her deep green flesh. Her scent is --

Hot sand and --

*I go to the deserts often.*

*Musk* and --

She is ripe. She is *ready*, and that must mean --

He is chosen, he --

She read his terrible poetry and enjoyed his adequate sculpture?

She read the dry petition his aunt had helped him with?

But she is speaking! She is saying... something. Had she called him by mistake? Perhaps he shouldn't stand so --
She shifts, rising up and up on a coil of her tail, folding back her exoskeleton until she is a scaled creature, vast and sleek and *hot* --

And J'onn shifts with her, coiling himself --

Aching and thickening, longing --

His hands are clumsy and needful --

His throat is vibrating with the song he has longed to *sing*, the only song there is, because Ma'ena is wise and fair in her rulings over the criminals and advocates alike, Ma'ena has the longest fingers he’s ever seen, Ma'ena's eyes burn like precious red stones --

Rubies?

*Deeper*, and J'onn is up to Jason's shoulder, pulsing and *gripping* --

And deeper is right, because Ma'ena is slamming against him and coiling around like maybe she'll crush the *life* out of him, and he remembers that this form used to only be used for *combat* --

*Mine*, and she is not waiting for the formal call and response, for the *introduction* of mind to mind --

*Mine*, and she shows him herself in several pulsing *knots* as she scented the small gifts in his sculpture, as she *gnawed* on the bit of scale he'd left almost as an afterthought --

*Mine*, and she slams him to the ground, piercing herself on the spines J'onn may have grown in self-defense as much as in arousal --

*Ma'ena.*

Oh, Jesus fucking -- she's so *hot* --

*Strong* --

Just like -- just like I like 'em --

She's grinding him into the dust, cracking the surface of the pedway in dozens of places --

The fines will be high --

*MINE*, and she is everything, everything. He had *teased* her with himself, held himself apart when all her other suitors came to her *directly* --

He had been too formal, too *absent*, and now he must *pay*, he will pay anything, everything --

Beautiful Ma'ena, writhing and clutching him, heating him until he must gasp and shout meaningless images into her mind --

*MORE*, and he throws everything he is into her, he makes himself --

He is no one but Ma'ena's, and there will be children --

*NOT TODAY*.

Jason gasps a laugh --
Jason *groans* as the memory fades, as he remembers that he's *not* a Martian with a half-shattered exoskeleton and... pedway rash?

*Because I had courted her in the old style, she felt compelled to *claim* me in the old style -- though technically she should have waited for an audience of our relatives and friends to gather and perhaps fight her for me.*

That's -- uh.

*The old style was... very, very old. While there were no laws against it, no one in our society had used it without irony for many centuries.*

Why did *you*?

*I was -- and am -- a history 'geek.'*

Jason snorts and reaches out --

He *means* to reach out and clap J'onn on the shoulder, but both of his arms are sleeved-up now, held and *massaged* --

And *that's* when it occurs to Jason that there's nothing touching his cock but his boxer briefs, and that that could -- and probably *should* -- change.

A lot.

Right now.

J'onn sighs and it's like a wind blowing from everywhere at once -- especially *right* up Jason's cut-off sweatpants --

*Fuck* --

And J'onn *locks* Jason's shoulders in place and *grows* over him, on him --

Into him?

*Yes,* and suddenly it feels like his scalp is *higher* than it was a second ago, like there's something hot and *sweet* slipping around all the little connections and --

*Down* his shorts and in around his *cock* --

So *hot* --

And Ma'ena is dragging him off a case --

And Ma'ena is calling a recess to 'discuss' a *different* case in chambers --

And Ma'ena is singing their daughter to sleep while painting a detailed fantasy of J'onn inviting home his partner, his immediate supervisor, *her* immediate supervisor, and the man who had recently robbed several museums in order for them to *service* her --

Holy --

And he and Ma'ena are shopping for groceries, and J'onn is trying to concentrate on paying the vendor while Ma'ena -- hand hidden by their satchels -- is growing *into* him, penetrating him in a
dozen places at once, stroking and *scratching* him --

Jesus Jesus fucking --

She's like *me* --

Yesss...

And the hiss is coiling around his brain, his *mind* --

J'onn is jerking him off and *pumping* Jason's sac --

And Jason throws out an image from the dream he'd had about going down on Diana for about three hours, tongue so far up her box that he can feel her *clench* --

And an image of Dick beating him to the mats and then fucking him *through* them --

Little wing...

Yes please *please* --

But no, the memories, real *memories* --

Here he is swallowing Tim's little cock, still little because he was still *twelve*, but he was damned well training with them, and his parents were still alive and somewhere *else*, and there had been Superman sheets on his big, rich-boy bed, and he'd tried to put a pillow over his own face --

He'd tried to bite his *fist* --

He'd *begged* Jason to let him be quiet, but Jason had needed his noise *just* like he'd needed that cock in his mouth, needed to show it a damned good *time*, make him need it, need him --

And then he was teaching him how to walk in heels and he'd just *kept* falling to his knees --

And the sixth time that happened --

("Fuck my *mouth*, Jay.")

And maybe that's when Tink was born, because after that was the lip gloss -- and the lip gloss on his *cock*.

And the lipstick -- and the lipstick-marks that were perfect around his nipples and *fucked* all over his cock --

And the hip-sway --

The hip-sway that had killed every last fucking *scruple*, because he'd bent Tim over his own computer desk --

He'd ripped Tim's good-boy clothes off --

He'd tongued and fingered that pretty little hole at the same time, doing it until his jaw was complaining and Tim was *shaking* --

Doing it until he'd had to yank on Tim's sac three different *times* --

*You made him... beg.*
And he's right there listening to it and he's right here *sending* it. Every cracked cry, every hitching sob, every *wail* as he'd waited and waited and *tried* to tell himself he could do something else --

And the *silence* when Jason started pushing in, like maybe Tim didn't want to jinx it, like maybe he was *hurting* --

*aching.*

*Please* --

*you... you needed him. You'd denied yourself and him as well* --

*please, I tried, he -- so *young** --

*And you were not?*

Jason laughs and isn't surprised at all that it's not out loud -- I'm not denying anything anymore --

*No... And J'onn is smiling and rippling around him and in him -- Open your eyes.*

Jason does, and J'onn looks like a rose branch. Just -- spines *everywhere*, and a part -- a very dumb part, but still a part -- is horny enough to wonder what it would *feel* like to hug the man --

*Fatal*, and there's another smile, another squeeze and *stroke* --

Yeah -- fuck, how 'bout some nice tentacles?

And that sound *was* out loud, but only because there's something slim and sleek and *hot* sliding up inside his *cock* --

*J'onn* --

*No pain?*

No -- no? Oh -- oh, *please* -- and now he couldn't talk even if he *wanted* to, because there's a tentacle down his throat --

Another one *seeking* at his ass --

In me -- in me -- *in* --

Jason feels his eyes roll back in his head --

Feels his *knees* buckle --

Feels himself getting *lifted*, because J'onn *isn't* as strong as Clark, but that doesn't fucking *say* much --

He throws J'onn his favorite fantasy of Dick, where it's just the two of them on the big bed he'd shared with Bruce, and Tim's on the chair *telling* Dick how to give it to him, because Tim had gotten some *first* --

Tim knows what Jason needs and what Dick can give --

Tim's his baby brother and *loves* him --

And then all the tentacles stiffen at *once* --
J'onn?

J'onn's moan takes over Jason's body and most of his mind, J'onn is flooding him with feelings of heat and slick warmth, muscle power and hunger --

And Jason realizes that J'onn was feeding him himself, and that --

Fuck, he wants to be fucked so bad --

The tentacles soften --

No --

Only. Enough to be safe. Feel*, and J'onn sounds enough like himself that Jason realizes that he'd just come* --

And then J'onn is fucking taking* him, jerking him off from the inside and fucking* Jason's throat and ass, one-two-three, one-two-three --

One-one-one-two-three-three --

And he can't keep track of it, can't do anything but moan and beg for more. He'd never fantasized* about J'onn, but this is why* he isn't the smart one. Just --

Holy fucking hell*, like Dick would say if Roy convinced him to have a beer first --

More and he feels like Ma'ena, feels like he could take everything and everyone* so long as he had J'onn to take him home afterward and do him right* --

*Jason* --

Loved you, she loved you --

*Ma'ena* --

Think about her, show --

And Ma'ena is teaching him the women's ways, the tricks well-educated women will use on the men who bore them, like building pockets within themselves which lead nowhere for the spikes --

Ma'ena is making him promise to never* bore her while he fills all eight of her wombs --

Ma'ena is teaching him the latest musical styles and laughing, always laughing --

Ma'ena is systematically destroying his ability to be anything but her own, now and forever, and he is frightened, but never resentful. He is uplifted*, and when he comes home early that day they shift so much that they rack up massive bills and must live with a tarp for a roof for months --

Here she is at --

Carnivàle, it's Carnivàle --

Something like.

She wears the fur of a hundred jerr, more covered than ever and more sexually perfect* --

*Ripe* again, and this time she intended a child --
They'd disrupted the *parade*, encouraging an orgy in the Plaza of the Makers --

He penetrates women, men, neuters --

Her cries lead him from man to man, broken and leaking --

*Bleeding* --

He finds her waiting for him at the center of the Plaza --

He falls on her --

*This is how I took her... almost*, J'onn says, and the tentacles stiffen up enough to make Jason think of fucking *Clark* --

But Clark had never done him like this. Never --

Jason can't even *tell* how hard it is. It's so much, it's all *over* him, and he's being fucking *drilled* --

It feels like his *hair* is being jerked off --

*It is."

Jason *tries* laughing, but it comes out shouted, *screamed* --

He's screaming in his *mind* --

*Forgive me. I'd forgotten your prostate gland."

Jason nods --

Jason *thinks* he's nodding --

Jason focuses on screaming and writhing, because that's all he's got *left*. J'onn's so *hard*, so -- so fucking all *through* him --

Never like this. Never --

He remembers that he's not even screaming *aloud* and bites down --

And J'onn does him harder, takes him up --

*Jason..."

Ohn --

*Now*.

Fuck, fuck, *fuck* -- of course J'onn knows orders fucking work, of course he'd picked that up --

*Fuck* --

The tentacles are so --

Thick --
White-out and Jason's got nothing. No brain, no eyes, no fucking *soul* --

It's all burning away, all --

Spattering all over the mats --

Slicking up J'onn's tentacles --

More and *more* --

J'onn could do this all *day* --

*Yes. With you.*

Jason grunts -- and that was out loud. That -- okay, so he's coming back to himself a little. He's twitching and *swaying*, but J'onn's got him and he probably won't fuck Jason to death today. *Maybe next Thursday.*

Jason snorts and it fucking *stings* -- because J'onn had *used* his throat --

*And your sinuses to a certain extent.*

Jason sneezes on cue.

*Health.*

You always this cheerful after doing your impression of an entire porno cast?

J'onn sets Jason down on his feet so they're facing each other again. He's smiling and back in the humanoid form, eyes glowing orange enough to give that Impulse kid a -- heh -- run for his money. The sleeves flow back and off of Jason --

Jason focuses on remaining *upright*, because --

*You have my apologies. Dent is regaining consciousness.*

So -- but it's not soon, at all, because he'd just gotten laid by the Martian Asshunter.

*Jason.*

Heh. And -- "Heh. You wouldn't even have to change your uniform, much," Jason says, and punches J'onn's shoulder lightly. "Maybe just, you know, grow a package."

J'onn hums -- and grows what looks a lot like *Clark's* package after a long sweaty fight with Maxima or one of his other fuck-me enemies.

"See, and now that's not even *intimidating* --"

The package is moving.

Like -- writhing.

Behind the little shorts.

"Uh. Maybe don't show that to Dent," Jason says, keeping his voice low.
"Are you sure...?"

Jason snorts and punches J'onn's shoulder again. "Get back to work, Green Machine. I've got another few pages of report to fake."

"If you wait, I'll have more you can add to it."

"I already have to add what you told me *before*," Jason says, and waves him off. "Some of us are damned fucking inefficient."

"You have... many other fine qualities, Starling."

Meaning Dent's awake for serious?

Yes.

"Right." Jason heads over to the gurney. "What do you need?"

"I don't suppose you got a bottle of gin in those sweatpants?"

"Alcohol will only make our task harder, Mr. Dent," J'onn says as he phases up out of the stone at Jason's side.

"*Jesus*, that's creepy --" Dent shakes himself like a dog. "Okay. How 'bout some water and a couple of aspirin?"

"Headache or other soreness?"

"I'm stiff, not sore. I -- hey, maybe you'll let me jog to the bathroom next time?"

Jason frowns and checks the restraints reflexively -- "Depends on what Manhunter tells me when he's done with you. I'll be back with your aspirin in a minute."

Once J'onn and Dent are settled in for their session, Jason grabs another nectarine and heads back to the computers. He's *going* to get this report done.

And maybe put some backbrain time into figuring out who *else* had gotten the tentacle treatment from J'onn that he was that cool with it.

But he's not gonna beam porn theories at the guy for the rest of the night or anything like that. He's got at *least* ten minutes before his cock starts talking smack again.

*
He's wearing a suit with a somewhat broader tie than the ones he'd grown accustomed to, but, other than that, there are few differences. Once the cufflinks are in place and his hair is combed to fall -- rakishly, of course -- over the small scar at his hairline, Bruce feels prepared for one thing only:

A trip into Wayne Enterprises.

Of course, everyone there believes him dead, and that's more than a little problematic --

No, that thought was incorrect. The man who belonged at WE --and in this suit, which is almost certainly five years out of date -- is dead. In *his* universe, much of Wayne tower had fallen over onto the Schiff building, and he can only hope that the upper floors had been evacuated by then.

The bomb shelters in the basement can hold hundreds, thanks to his grandfather's paranoia about 'Reds.' There -- there would surely be *some* survivors --

"Bruce...?"

Bruce frowns and stares at his hands. Cufflinks at his wrists, but -- "I need moisturizer to complete the look."

Clark steps around in front of him and places a small jar in his hands. His eyes are amused, and his expression is wry. "A lack of lotion caused you to begin gritting your teeth while staring hollow-eyed at the wall?"

"Hmm. While that's entirely plausible... no."

Clark smiles and begins rubbing the moisturizer into Bruce's skin. "Tell me?"

"That... is a remarkably decadent sensation."

"You've never had --" Clark shakes his head. "Of course you haven't. I don't suppose I could talk you into a rubdown?"

Bruce smiles --

"Oh -- that expression makes me very happy," Clark says --

Bruce feels a tugging sensation -- Clark is plucking at Bruce's jacket. "Clark."

Clark breathes deep. "Your scent suggests that we haven't yet... ah... exhausted the possibilities?"

"And if I'm needed tonight...?"

"Oh -- of course you'd think of patrolling. I --" Clark laughs and covers his face with his hand.

Bruce frowns. "If I'm not going to be any help with figuring out how to get Harvey and me back to the other universe --"

Clark kisses him, soft and brief. "Amazingly enough, there are uniforms in your size in the Cave. None of the materials have degraded in the cool and mostly dry air of the Cave, and -- you have tricks and traps to learn."
"I added traps to my uniform?"

"All sorts of people did everything in their power to unmask you, Bruce," and Clark cups Bruce's face. His expression is rueful, aged, *distant* --

Has he -- no, ask. "I've upset you?"

"Only by speaking the truth."

"I could... quiet myself?"

Clark smiles more widely and searches him. "You care about my feelings."

"I always have -- since meeting you, I mean. I... I did my best not to show that to my Clark. I assume your Bruce did the same."

"Assiduously. Perfectly. I... he let me in to a certain extent once he took Dick in -- I've always thought he did that in part *because* Superman was so important to Dick -- and he wasn't always cold to me after that by a long road. It's only... well."

"I held you at a distance."

"An arm-clasp, a hand on my shoulder, a level look -- my friend, I am not yet ready to let you go."

"Then don't. You're already flying me back to the Cave --"

"You're asking me to stay with you?"

Bruce feels the blush rising and fights it as best he can --

Clark strokes Bruce's cheek -- freshly depilated with *lasers* --

And then Bruce remembers. He -- "I'm sorry, the Cave is not my home, anymore. It's wrong of me to assume."

Clark breathes deep again, this time parting his lips. "Robin will want you to stay close. He... would also want you supervised."

Bruce steps closer to Clark. "I could do anything without supervision, Clark," he says, trying on some of Brucie's innate flirtatiousness --

And it makes Clark look scandalized for a moment, thrilled for another -- "I will stay with you for as long as --" Clark stops and very obviously *listens* -- and then frowns and wraps Bruce in his cape.

"What --"

"Mudslides. The rainy season is much too early this year in certain parts of southern Asia --"

"The never-ending battle -- but what's this in my *ear*?"

"A Justice League communicator -- oh, dear. I'll be back as soon as I *can*," Clark says, and then Bruce's feet are on the ground, the cape is gone -- and so is Clark.

Bruce looks around -- and is immediately struck by the sight of an obvious non-human digging sharp claws into Starling's *scalp*. Starling doesn't seem to be bleeding or distressed -- if anything, his expression is quietly thoughtful -- and it says something that Clark hadn't even paused for the tableau
It is a strange thing to see myself a stranger in your eyes, Batman.

A voice in his *mind* -- !

I do not wish to break Starling’s concentration by speaking aloud at this time. I am sharing with him news about Dent.

The creature -- the man -- the *alien*?

I am a Martian.

There's no *life* on Mars --

I was kept in stasis for many thousands of years before being brought to this planet, Batman. I am the last of my species.

The idea of that --

Of course, it's too fantastic to be believed, but -- so are many, many other things. Starting -- but not ending -- with the photograph he now knows is part of a shrine to his partnership with a thirteen-year-old boy who had become a man in his care --

His *dubious* care --

I can see that Clark has already discussed the matter with you, but you still hold doubts about your partnership with Robin?

He must come to terms with the fact that he is sharing space with a *telepath* --

Please.

Bruce turns to look at the alien directly once more -- and finds carnelian eyes focused on his own. We are... allies?

Yes. I helped to convince you to join the League.

Bruce resists the urge to pull out the communicator Clark had given him -- it's small, but it's weighted with *something* --

Circuitry would be much lighter than this, assuming it could be made to be that small --

Computing is advancing rapidly among your people. I believe you would be surprised by the things this computer, as an example, can do.

I had the best. Surely, it can't -- no, I must remember that many things are possible. I suppose I should be grateful -- in some small way -- that my and Harvey’s appearance here was surprising to the rest of you.

We all remain... people, and the alien is smiling -- I am J'onnn J'onnnz. I have been dubbed 'the Martian Manhunter,' and you most often referred to me as Manhunter.

Bruce nods. Manhunter... that sounds like a formal title.

It was. I was something between a police officer and what you would think of as a bounty hunter.
Later, when the White Martians began their genocidal war, I used the skills I had learned to become what most in this nation would call a 'guerilla', often fighting at the side of men, women, and neuters I would have previously helped to imprison.

May I ask what became of your people?

Manhunter -- *J'onn* smiles wryly. War brings plague. For our war, the plague was devastating. Every man, woman, neuter, and child in the cities was infected. Those of us in the deserts lasted longer, and I was chosen to be put into stasis after we finally defeated the White Martians --in case they ever came back. When I was... put to sleep, there were people who believed the plague could be defeated with just a little more work. They were incorrect.

I'm sorry. There's nothing I can say --

*J'onn raises the hand he isn't using to... interface with Starling. The Batman from this universe, and I, once spoke of loss extensively. I know that there is much you understand. Unless you did not lose your parents?*

*BANG* *BANG* -- Bruce grimaces --
*I am sorry --*

It's all right, and Bruce raises his own hands --

And Starling is stirring, shaking out his thick hair -- "Fuck *me*, that's some scary-ass shit," he says, and turns to the computer to type.

Had no one ever tried to correct his language?
*I believe Starling would have a great deal to say to someone who tried, and J'onn is smiling again. He is your friend. And lover, now --*

"Okay, wait, are you sure Dent's not awake? My back is crawling something --" Starling spins around to face Bruce -- "Fierce. Uh. Hi?"

"Hello," Bruce says, taking a step closer and wondering if he should try for more --

"Uh -- when did you get back?"

"Approximately ten minutes ago. I believe... Clark meant to stay, but there was an emergency somewhere in south Asia."

Starling nods and bites his lip. He's wearing faded and heavily damaged workout clothing save for his mask, and he is --

There's something about him. He is --

Well, he's J'onn's lover, and that's remarkable --

*Thank you, J'onn says, and the deadpan sarcasm is *also* remarkable --*

Bruce is not used to digging himself into social holes -- *graves* -- without first opening his *mouth* --
Do you think that is why the Bruce from this universe spoke so little?

"I can't know, but I wouldn't be surprised," Bruce says --

Starling blinks and looks back and forth between him and J'onn -- "What am I missing?"

"I am sorry," J'onn says to Starling. "Batman and I began a conversation while I was still giving you the gist of my session with Dent. I didn't wish to have your concentration interrupted, and so I began the conversation silently."

"Heh." Starling jerks his chin at him. "You kinda had to get used to the telepathy *fast*, yeah?"

His language is --

*Perfectly comprehensible, and perfectly himself.*

Bruce draws himself back -- I'm sorry.

"Hey, what is it?" Starling stands and moves in front of J'onn --

Moves to *protect* J'onn --

Bruce raises his hands once more. "J'onn was defending you from... the run of my thoughts."

Starling frowns. "You were talking shit about me in your head?"

"Ah... I wasn't expecting your language to be what it is."

Jason snorts and grins -- and the rest of his dental work is so obviously perfect that his one crooked tooth almost seems to be an artistic choice. "Big Bird said you used to give him fucking fits when he cursed. He still almost never does, so... point to the power of your personality?"

"I... suppose?"

"Heh. He *also* said that if you ever met me and Tink that you'd have no fucking clue what to do with us, so... uh. I was kinda prepared?" Starling turns to look up and back at J'onn. "I appreciate you lookin' out for me, Green Machine, but you can just poke him until he says whatever it is out loud. And then *I* can talk to him about it."

J'onn inclines his head. "I will remember that."

"Good deal," Starling says, and moves his head oddly --

No, he would be looking at J'onn from under his lashes if --

Starling touches his mask and the lenses flip up. The angle is all wrong for Bruce to be sure of the color of the boy's eyes, but --

He'd like to know.

*Perhaps you will ask him,* J'onn says, and cups Starling's faintly-stubbled cheeks. "I will return tomorrow evening, Starling. If there are any difficulties, please summon me sooner. I will be staying in Gotham."

"Seriously? Why don't you just stay here, man? It's not like we *don't* have room. Room on top of room, even."
"Thank you for the offer. However, I wish for my... alter ego to walk the Gotham streets again. I have not done so in over fifteen years."

Starling shakes himself like a dog. "Wow. Fuck, yeah, I keep forgetting you used to live here. Why *did* you move?"

J'onn looks at *him* -- "Gotham gained a different protector... and I was not yet ready to make my presence known."

Starling laughs and turns back to smile at him. "You hear that? You bring down property values and shit. You gotta watch that while you're here."

Oh. He's joking with him --

**Attempting to. Help him.**

Bruce smiles and inclines his head. "I will endeavor to never play loud music at night or park the cars on the lawn."

"And hookers. You totally gotta chill with the hookers at all hours, man."

Bruce raises an eyebrow. "Perhaps I'll only summon them during business hours from now on."

"Well, that would mean it's time for *me* to get my ass out," Starling says, and *winks* at him --

His eyes are a beautiful Mediterranean blue -- and Bruce is very confused. "I... I'm not sure..."

"You should, perhaps, be more gentle with your houseguests, Starling."

"Aw, look at him. He can take it," and Starling grins at him again. "I'll explain in a minute," and he turns back to J'onn. "*Where* are you gonna be staying?"

"I am not sure. I will call when I know."

Starling's grin slips a little --

But J'onn moves his hands to Starling's shoulders and smiles warmly. "I am not always lonely when I am alone, Starling."

"Heh, okay, I hear you. Not like I haven't been up in your head *all* night. Just, you know, remember that I'm here, yeah?"

"Yes," J'onn says, and cups Starling's head once more --

Starling gasps -- and then smiles slowly and somehow *wetly* -- "Right back at you, Green Machine," and he steps back --

J'onn nods at him -- and then flies up and up --

*Through* the ceiling --

"He does that all the time, don't worry."

Bruce blinks and looks at Starling once more. "I suppose my wonder was obvious."

"And your 'I'm about to freak out any second now' face is pretty cute."
"Heh. Seriously, you do this thing where you totally look fucking *dismayed*.

"I might have *been* dismayed, Starling."

"Nah, no way. You're the motherfucking Batman. When you're actually dismayed? You probably
just look kinda grimly constipated."

Bruce... coughs. "Ah... Leslie did mention that once."

Starling smiles and shakes his head, moving closer until there's only a pace between them. He's
approximately five-feet-ten-inches tall, and he is at least one hundred and eighty pounds, given all his
muscle. He's broad and could become broader. He will almost certainly be taller than he is now, but
Bruce would have to do detailed measurements to be sure *how* tall --

And Bruce is standing here *examining* the boy -- "I'm sorry. I --"

"Wanted to see if you could see what made me fit for the street, maybe?"

"I... I also wanted to know you more and better than I do."

"You could always ask me questions...?" And Starling is looking up at Bruce through his lashes. The
mask casts strange shadows over his eyes, giving them an ominousness -- "Is that too much for you
right now?"

"What? No -- I." Bruce smiles ruefully. "I honestly believed that I would never share this space with
anyone, that if another hero came to join me here it would be merely temporary --"

"And it definitely wouldn't be a foul-mouthed kid who used to hook?"

"You -- are you all right?"

Starling snickers. "Yeah, I am, big guy --"

"Oh. Harvey calls me that, sometimes."

Starling winces. "Jesus, uh -- I kinda have to take it back, then. I... uh. Anyway. I'll just call you
Bruce, and you can keep calling me Starling -- unless you'd prefer I'd call you Batman?"

"Less than two days ago, I believed that I would never see anyone again who *could* know me as
Bruce," and Bruce offers another smile and his hand. "Please, call me what you like, assuming that
the people who surround us can be allowed to know my name."

Starling cocks his head to the side. "I *could* just call you B. Everybody who's *not* anybody
would assume I was abbreviating Batman."

"As you like. Would you... Harvey is asleep?"

"Yeah. Apparently the invasive therapy is pretty exhausting. Why don't you come over to the
computers with me and read over my shoulder -- I gotta finish the report."

"If --" No, he wouldn't be able to wait even if Starling *wasn't* sure. He closes his eyes for a
moment. "Yes, thank you."

Starling nods and leads them over --
And Bruce learns that Harvey has been hearing a terrible voice giving running commentary -- violent, insulting, and decidedly sociopathic commentary -- on all aspects of his life at all times. He learns that there have been blackouts during which Harvey went out to brutalize criminals on his own.

It doesn't seem to be true Multiple Personality Disorder -- now known as Dissociative Identity Disorder -- as there are many times when the different aspects of Harvey's fractured mind work together, and there is no 'child' alter which is protected by the others. Harvey has been spending his days attempting to ignore the darker parts of his psyche, and his nights being driven by them.

Harvey had begun believing that he was two people in one body, and that it would only be right to allow the other 'person' time to be ascendant. He had also begun thinking of ways to change himself *physically* to better reflect his dual nature, and, while these thoughts and beliefs had not reached his conscious mind, they had already begun digging deep roots into the soil of his *overall* consciousness.

The worst thing by far, however, is the discovery that all of this could've been stopped *years* ago if anyone had ever managed to draw him out about the terrible influence his father had been.

Bruce had barely even *tried*, and he'd known even as a teenager that there was abuse. He'd allowed Harvey to refuse his overtures time and again, and then he'd simply stopped making them --

"Hey, are you okay over there?" And Starling puts a large and well-worked hand on Bruce's shoulder.

"I. I've been a bad friend."

"Hunh? Oh, shit, because you didn't jump down his throat way back when? Seriously, B, how would that have gone?"

"Badly, but --"

"But nothing. *You* aren't a shrink, and you sure as fuck weren't one back when you gave Dent that necklace."

Bruce blinks -- "He showed you...?"

Starling's smile is troubled. "Yeah, he did. And he made it pretty clear that you two had a little... thing going. Yeah?"

Bruce draws back --

"Okay, no, you *don't* have to tell me --"

"It's only... I tried to never touch him... that way."

"Uh. Did that work?"

Bruce smiles ruefully and looks at his hands. "I never molested him, but I know that he knew I desired him greatly. I was never able to keep the truth from my eyes."

Starling bites his lip and nods thoughtfully. "I'm -- trying real damned hard to separate the Dent *I* know from the one *you* know. I mean -- I know your guy still wants to team up with Batman and Gordon to put the bad guys away, and he sure as fuck tried to protect you from us last night, but..."
"Your... Dent has done too much. I understand --" Bruce laughs at himself and knows it sounds terrible, but -- "No, I don't understand. I don't know if I'd understand even if you showed me your doubtlessly comprehensive files --"

"Heh, well. We showed them to *Dent*, already."

Bruce winces. "I... he took that hard."

"It got him to sign up for the hardcore emergency therapy real quick, which, well... that *helps*. If we could've done this with *our* Dent, a whole lot of dead people might still be walking around right now, and several demolished sections of the city would still be whole -- and Robin wouldn't be breaking his heart over all the times Dent broke *your* heart. Well, our Bruce's. You know what I'm saying."

"I do. I... he was my first friend, Starling. My only friend for a very long time. I could have made other friends -- certainly the Clark from my universe tried very hard to make that happen -- but Harvey never made me try, at all. He sought me out, and spoke to me, and did his level best to pull me out of my sulks and glooms -- and his best was very good. He carved me gifts with his own hands, introduced me to foods and music from other ethnic traditions, played childish games with me, shared his *life* with me..." Bruce shakes his head. "I don't know why I'm saying all this. I'm fully aware that I can never ask you to see him the way I do."

"Are you, though? I mean, I could read between the lines when Robin said his Bruce never gave up on him. Robin was his *subordinate* partner, and if Batman said jump, Robin asked how high *while actually jumping*. So if Batman didn't give up on Dent, then Robin sure as fuck wasn't allowed to."

Bruce frowns and winces. "I've gone back to thinking that it was wrong for your Bruce to choose a partner that young --"

Starling snorts. "Are you serious? Like *anyone* is old enough for that kinda bullshit? Anyone *ever*?"

Starling... has a point. Bruce nods to acknowledge it.

"So... yeah. So long as you understand that *all* of us are a little fucking incapable of being all sunshine and flowers about Harvey fucking Dent... we'll be fine."

"All right. May I ask why you're not patrolling tonight? Did you have... homework?"

Starling waves a hand. "All of our teachers have networked laptops, because the school system out here is that sweet. Tink hacked the network back in August and gets a little update every time one of our teachers submits anything new for the lesson plan. We're all way ahead on our schoolwork. Every now and again, the motivated types -- or the disorganized types -- spring a surprise on us, but we're solid. Nah, I'm here because Big Bird hates me," he says, and grins.

"Hates... you?"

"Uh, huh. *I* get stuck with the crazy guy, the report-writing, the freaky alien, *and* you."

Bruce winces again. "I'd be more than willing to watch Harvey --"

"Hey, no, I'm just playing -- and also? *You* don't know what Dent's capable of when he slips his traces."
Of course. Bruce nods again --

And Starling gives him a *playful* shove.

"Yes?"

Starling cocks his head to the side. "I'm trying to see Batman. The guy who twisted Robin up so bad. The guy Robin will always be in love with."

Twisted -- "I... Clark was of the opinion that your Bruce's relationship with Robin was positive."

"Heh. Sure he was. And *Robin* is, too. Me... I'm just a little leery of that kind of relationship -- and you know why."

"I tended to... ease my own limits when it came to people who abused children."

"And you had no idea that you could be one of them?"

Bruce breathes deeply and forces himself to meet Jason's eyes. "I ignored those thoughts and feelings and never allowed myself to be alone with attractive teenagers -- if I could help it. To be... fair, I never brought those thoughts and feelings very close to the surface of my mind."

Another thoughtful nod. "I never asked Robin how young he was when the two of you started screwing. I know he started up with Clark not much later than that, and that the two of them have been fuckbuddies for -- quote -- 'many, many years.'"

"That was... the gist of what Clark told me."

"Did he give you numbers?"

"No."

"Guys like that are a little allergic to numbers, in my experience," Jason says, and pushes a hand back through his thick and unruly hair. "Well, some of the them are. The rest either flat-out don't care or get *off* on those numbers. Which kind are you?"

"I don't -- I've never --"

"You're saying you're not gonna hit that when you go back to your world and Robin falls into your lap? No, wait -- when he *jumps* into your lap, wraps his arms and legs around you, and *begs* you to hit it?"

Bruce frowns and stares at his hands --

Bruce feels himself *blushing* --

He doesn't -- he *wouldn't*, but --

"Heh, okay, maybe not a fair question. You gotta understand, B -- Robin is my *brother*, and everything that hurts him? Hurts me. So I look at how every relationship he's had since you've been dead has either been with Clark, or casual as all hell, or just dead in the fucking water, and I think maybe you had a hand in that. Grief's one thing, but..." Starling shakes his head. "And no, it's not like I'm some kinda innocent bystander here. I've been in love with Robin practically from the jump, but I know he's never gonna give me what he gave you, and that makes me jealous."

Bruce reaches out -- and lets his hand hover over Starling's on the console.
Starling raises his eyebrows behind his domino. "Whatcha gonna do with that?"

"I... honestly have no idea," Bruce says, and starts to pull back --

Starling catches Bruce's hand and twines the fingers with his own. "Tell me something, B."

His hand is warm and very strong -- Bruce shakes it off internally. "Yes."

"That's it? No 'if I can' or anything like that?"

"I would like... I would like to live connected to others. I would like to die knowing that I had *been* connected to others... even if those others lived in a universe parallel to my own."

Starling blows out a breath. "You really thought it was the end for you."

"Many times in the last several days. You saw how damaged and exhausted I was."

Starling bites his lip again and nods. "Yeah, okay. If *I* could take you down... I mean, I'm pretty sure Robin's hardcore enough to take anyone down after twelve years of this, but I've only got five under my belt."

"How... how old are you?"

Starling's smile is sharp and wry. "Seventeen. Legal just about everywhere for just about everything, B. Well, except sodomy. In the south."

Bruce closes his eyes and forces himself to take that in. To -- Starling had been a *child* prostitute, subject to violence and abuse from nearly *everyone* -- of course Robin would want to provide a better life for him, and perhaps he'd been large for his age, or --

No, Bruce doesn't know what would make Robin choose to train a twelve-year-old for the life of a vigilante. Perhaps his Bruce had had an answer to that very question when Robin asked.

Perhaps Robin hadn't felt the need to ask the question, at all --

"You know, you could actually let some of those thoughts *out*, B."

Bruce opens his eyes and smiles helplessly. "I continue to be confused about what could make someone like me -- someone who *was* me for all intents and purposes -- choose to train a child."

"But you can see making *love* to a child?"

"Far... far more easily now that Clark has spoken to me about it... though still not actually *easily*. I would hope... that I would recognize youth and innocence and be able to resist the need to --"

"Mark it up a little? Take it for yourself?"

"I -- I don't know. I've never --"

"You gotta think about it, B. You just -- you seriously need to, because if you don't? It's gonna rear up and *bite* you, and then you'll be stuck with a kid on your cock and no idea how he -- or she? -- got there."

Vulgar... and vivid. Bruce breathes deeply. "All right. I will take your advice --"

"Start now. What do you see when you look at me?"
"I -- I mostly see your mask and then find myself wondering --"

"Yeah, none of that. Or -- I don't know. *Maybe* that. We'll see. You said *mostly* -- what else?"

"I -- your eyes are beautiful."

"And?"

"Your hair is thick and... quite lustrous."

Starling blinks. "*Lustrous*?"

"I -- could use a different word --"

"No, fuck that, what *else*?"

"Your limbs are strong and well-shaped. I thought about measuring you to see how tall you might grow --"

"Robin says six-one or two. What else?"

"Your mouth -- I --" But -- "I don't know when I noticed your mouth."

"Bingo," Starling says, and mimes shooting a gun at him. "*What* did you notice about my mouth? Gimme everything."

He doesn't want to. He shouldn't. The boy is *seventeen*. He's too young. It's not right --

"*Bruce*."

"Your mouth is..." Bruce swallows. "The whole of you -- you're very beautiful --"

"And?"

"Your mouth is -- it looks soft. Broad and... your lips are quite sensuous, and I wonder how they'd feel against my own. I wonder if I could crush them a little, if you would enjoy that. I wonder how it would feel to bite your lower lip, and then the upper. I -- I don't know where this is coming from --"

"You. It's coming from you. The *real* you who's thought a lot about boys --"

"And. And some... girls."

"Heh. Equal opportunity perv. See, you've obviously got a leash on it -- and that's good -- but that leash is fucking fraying, because I didn't have to push that hard at all to get you to think about fucking a teenager."

"I -- only kissing --"

"And biting, and crushing, and maybe some licking?"

Bruce bites back a *grunt* --

"Now, maybe that's not fair, either. I'm pretty. I *know* I'm pretty -- and guys like you have been telling me all about it in one way or another since I was *eleven*."

"That's -- obscene --"
"It sure is, B. And here's the deal -- if you're one kind of perv? Hearing that number bent your cock back a little. A different kind of perv would get twice as hard. Which are you?"

"I. I don't --"

"You don't *know*? You want I should *check*?"

Bruce stands and steps back, clenching his hands into fists --

"*That* wasn't fair, either, maybe? The thought of me shoving a hand down your pants --"

"Please. Starling --"

Starling stands up and stalks close -- close enough that Bruce has to choose between stepping back and holding his ground for a decidedly losing battle --

And Starling cups Bruce's jaw, pressing hard just beyond the pressure points and tilting Bruce's head down enough that they can meet each other's eyes.

"I'm here, Starling."

"Yeah, you are. But are you here to fuck us up? Throw a wrench in the whole family, maybe?"

Bruce shakes his head and frowns. "I would never interfere with you or your loved ones --"

"Not on purpose, no. What about by *accident*?"

Bruce frowns and reaches up slowly to cup Jason's wrist. They tighten their grips almost simultaneously --

And Starling frowns and shakes his head. "Your grip strength... is absolutely more hardcore than mine. Heh. *Right*.," and he steps back, letting go of Bruce's jaw --

Bruce makes himself release the boy's wrist --

"Hesitation for that, B? How *much* am I turning you on?"

"I'm not -- I shouldn't be aroused."

"Maybe, maybe not. *Definitely* not what I asked," Starling says, and crosses his arms over his impressive chest.

He has the body of a fully-developed adult, and surely that should mean something, say something *decent* about him --

Anything at *all*? --

Bruce feels himself grimace again and steps back. "I find you to be very beautiful. The touch of your hands is somewhat maddening. I feel sorrow for what has been done to you over the years, and I find myself wondering if there's more I could have been doing for Gotham's prostitutes --"

"Sex workers."

"All right --"

"And there absolutely *is* more. You just needed Robin to point it out to you. Just like Robin
needed *me* to point out the rest."

"You -- if you would tell me --"

"You'll take it home and start right away?"

"Yes," Bruce promises, and catches himself trying to will Starling to believe it.

Starling, for his part, looks troubled, and seems to have more he wants to say. Needs to say?

"I... anything you'd like to tell me would be welcome, Starling." Including your *name* --

"I -- am one dumb vigilante," Starling says, and then turns around and walks the short distance back to the computers before sitting down and typing in... something.

Bruce honestly isn't sure what he should do with himself, and in the days when that had been the case more often than not, he'd had Harvey to help him forward, to teach him the right things to say and the right questions to *ask*.

What would Harvey do right now? But --

Harvey would never be in a situation like this one. Harvey has never been a *deviant* in any way, shape, or form. Harvey would turn aside from Bruce forever if he knew Bruce harbored these feelings, and even if Bruce never acted on them, he'd be right to do so.

People like him are a stain on the world, and while Bruce has always tried to do far more good than harm, this universe has given him proof that he would lose his control.

That he would lose his control less than a handful of years from now --

Sooner?

Bruce clenches his hands into fists and tries to think, to *plan*. There have been inroads made into chemical castration, but he would perhaps lose some of his power and grow breasts he would have to learn how to work around.

There are other kinds of castration --

"Holy fucking *Christ*, you suck all the air out of a room," Starling says, spinning his chair around and glaring at him. "C'mere and read this, okay?"

"Is it the... sex worker protocol?"

"Yeah, and some other stuff..." Starling trails off and stares at him, looking him over thoroughly, suspiciously --

"What is it, Starling?"

"What is it with *you*? You... you're putting out some freaky fucking vibes."

Bruce blinks. "Do you have... supernatural abilities?"

"What? Yeah, actually. Just... kind of a good nose for it. Nothing serious. I can see ghosts and shit like that."

"Ghosts are *real*?"
Starling rolls his eyes. "Get *over* here."

"Yes, of course," Bruce says, and moves to join Starling at the console again.

He reads over the protocol quickly and carefully, noting that it calls for making the sex workers their allies and permanent informants by making sure they have access to food and basic care, that they aren't being abused by either police or pimps, and that they're funneled useful information about things such as incoming Vice raids as soon as it comes in. The rest is research and speculation about how to best handle the various sorts of pimps.

There were some who could be used as informants -- and rewarded for same -- but, in general, these tended to *not* be the pimps with the most information. *Those* pimps were almost always the ones who had earned the worst beatings -- scarring, and even *maiming* -- if only to keep the sex workers they managed loyal. It's a rough sort of justice, but Bruce can see the logic in it.

Certainly, Bruce had gotten absolutely nowhere with trussing up pimps to be arrested -- the worst of them could always count on their terrified 'employees' to testify on their behalf, as not doing so was no guarantee that the pimp in question *wouldn't* be acquitted and back on the street within days.

All too many sex workers had disappeared on his watch, and there was no excuse for that. Knowing that their profession had a long and honorable tradition and thus trying to treat them respectfully had done nothing to *protect* them -- or advance his cause.

Bruce reads the protocol over twice more until he has it committed to memory, and then he turns to Starling and nods.

"You sure you got all that?"

"I... there are tricks I've used to train my memory --"

Starling waves a hand. "Robin always said your memory was frightening," and Starling smiles ruefully. "About all I'm good with, memory-wise, is languages and numbers."

"Both useful. And... I imagine you've learned a great deal about the city's geography by now?"

"Eh, there's no percentage in trying to memorize more than the street-layout. Gotham changes all the damned time -- and that's not even counting the 'quake that ripped through here six months ago."

He was *aware* that Gotham rested on a fault line, but -- Bruce shakes head. "There's a very small percentage of earthquake-proof buildings in Gotham. I tried... I have some designs for renovations for the older neighborhoods --"

"Robin found those not long after he got back from his year of training himself up. He got some of them implemented by playing the public figure -- which helped a lot when it came time for him to convince the Feds not to fucking *disown* Gotham."

"I... I don't think I understand?"

"The damage was so bad... you don't even know. *All* the bridges collapsed. Half of downtown dropped a whole story underground. Arkham split open like a dropped egg. Homeland Cemetery -- let's just say it was fucking gruesome. We had a fucking cholera outbreak -- and that was *after* Robin rounded up the League and the JSA and everybody else to come in and help us rebuild. And all the while? Lex fucking Luthor was bribing government types to try to get Gotham declared a No Man's Land. For a while, Robin was *living* in D.C. to keep them from getting too crazy. He finally hooked up with Green Lantern -- the *first* Green Lantern --"
"Alan Scott?"

"Heh, okay, good, you know him. Scott did this freaky thing with his ring that basically made Robin invincible -- and functionally invisible -- for a while. Long enough for him to dig up some dirt on Luthor so that he would stop trying to fuck with the whole damned city. And then it turns out that he was after WE -- using vulnerabilities that had come up when Robin stopped trying to run all the day-to-day stuff -- anyway, it was a mess," Starling says, and pushes a hand back through his hair again. "Part of me still finds it weird to sleep in a warm, soft bed at night, go to school during the day, and shower whenever the mood hits me. Of course, I first had to get used to that when I was twelve."

Bruce nods slowly and -- reaches to cover one of Jason's hands with his own.

"Again with the comforting thing. Robin said that our Bruce always had to be eased into things like that."

"Your Bruce had more years to grow stunted and lonely. Starling... I believe there's a way to make sure I never hurt a child."

Starling snorts and grins at him. "Sure there is. You'll just whip it out for me while I whip out my belt knife -- holy fucking shit, you're serious."

"It --"

"Why are you serious? What's wrong with you?"

Bruce raises an eyebrow. "I believe you helped me to detail just that."

"Augh! Look, I -- fucking Christ. *You cannot cut your balls off.* Okay? You just can't."

"Have there been improvements in chemical castration? I'm worried about losing stamina and strength --"

"And growing tits, yeah, sure, okay -- okay, listen to me for a minute, okay? So I can stop saying okay?"

Bruce frowns and nods --

And Jason smacks the side of Bruce's head. Bruce could've stopped it, but it seems to have made Jason feel much better. "All right. I'm cool. I'm breathing and everything. You can't castrate yourself."

"But --"

"Look, I don't even think Clark should castrate himself, and there's nothing he won't fuck so long as it's either pubescent or convincing about being pubescent. I mean, his little black book is the Oxford English Dictionary, okay? Shit, I said it again, but -- okay?"

"I... wasn't aware that Clark was so promiscuous --"

"And maybe now you're wondering if he gave you space-herpes? You should -- but also no, because he totally flies into the sun periodically to power up, and if that doesn't sterilize him, nothing will."

"That's... ah. Improbable?"
"But *true*," and Starling cups Bruce's shoulders. "Look, I gave you a lot of shit, and I even stand by all of it. You *can't* go around with your fingers in your ears saying 'la la la' about all your hard-ons for kids. You *have* to acknowledge it, and examine it, and figure out where *all* of your limits are so you don't surprise yourself and hurt someone while you're at it," and he *squeezes* Bruce's shoulders. "Clark is a fucking dog of a *pervert*, but he damned well owns it, and he never crosses his own lines -- and he never hurts anyone unless they beg *real* nice for it."

"Have you... have you and Clark made love?"

"Eh, I would say that we've fucked a few times. He's damned good at tripping me into bed when the mood strikes him. I'm just that *easy* -- and he's just that good. I like him just fine --"

"But you hold yourself back from him because of his... perversions?"

Starling leans back and scratches his stubble thoughtfully. "Do I...? I don't know. I *do* like him, and he's been an *incredible* support for this family and everything..." He frowns and stares at Bruce. "What do you want? Seriously."

"I would like... to make friends here."

"Friends like you and Clark are friends?"

"I've had... I've always thought that there could be many different types of friend."

"See, I *wanna* be suspicious of you --"

"It would certainly be security-conscious."

"No, no, it's not *you* we don't trust. It's -- it's all about what you'd let slip to Dent at this point."

Bruce raises an eyebrow and smiles as gently as he can. "I am capable of keeping secrets, Starling."

"Sure you are. Just like you're capable of not molesting the guy you're more than a little in love with --"

"He -- Harvey's my *friend* --"

"He's a lot more than that, B. You gotta own that, too."

"I don't think it's -- he's been my only friend since we were *fourteen*, Starling. Of course my feelings for him are intense --"

"What do you get out of denying you're in love with him? Seriously. It's not the seventies anymore -- you *know* there's nothing wrong with you being queer as fuck for someone who's never done you wrong."

"I... must admit that I've had difficulty growing accustomed to the idea that homosexuality wasn't a mental disorder."

"Like you don't have *enough* mental disorders to make up for that?" Starling kicks Bruce's shin. "Seriously, this is the queerest bunch of vigis you're ever gonna see. Cope *quickly*..

"Did you... did you have people to speak with about your sexuality when you were younger?"

Starling cocks his head to the side. "Before or after I started hooking?"
"Either," Bruce says, and knows he sounds eager, but --

"Robin gave me the big talk. He started out with charts and books and educational movies, but eventually he'd just pull me aside every time something occurred to him. By then I was *really* hoping to talk him into my pants... but yeah, he helped. He's always been incredibly supportive. He did the same for -- well, no, he *tried* to do the same for Tink, but Tink had had the internet --"

"Is that something like ARPANET?"

Starling blinks at him. "Uh... sort of? Tink talked me through this... ARPANET is kind of like the trilobite to the internet's chimp. You can find out anything with it -- especially if it's about sex."

"It's... an educational resource available to the average student?"

"It's a porn-filled *cesspool* available to anyone who can walk into a public library in time to get an hour on the public systems. I'm not big on computers, but I know Tink games with people all over the world. Owl does, too."

"Long-distance *games*? On a military network?"

"Nah, nah, the military has its own private networks. Well, mostly private. I know Tink and Owl like checking up on the Feds when they can."

Bruce shakes his head and files the latest wonder away. "Would you tell me more about Owl?"

"Heh. The former Batgirl. She's a few years older than Robin... which means she's totally older than you now. Uh. Damn?" Starling shakes his head. "You didn't pick her up or anything -- she decided that she wanted to be a vigilante in your mold, made herself a uniform, taught herself to fly between buildings, and hit the streets. Black Canary -- the second Black Canary --helped train her in ass-kicking. Hacking's been her hobby pretty much forever, and she's been spending more time with that lately -- funneling info to Tink about who we should be targeting."

That sounds extremely practical. *Useful*. "She's a partner to you all."

"We're *all* partners to each other. We've all got strengths and weaknesses and we find ways to work around them -- or with them. You were seriously thinking you'd work alone your whole life?"

"I imagined... heroes from other cities occasionally visiting, or me needing to travel to their cities for cases. It's how I first met Clark."

"Clark's not anyone's partner. Not really --"

"It's true," Clark says from a crouch at Bruce's *feet* -- "Though I've tried to be a friend."

Starling kicks Clark's chest lightly. "You do all right. Here to kidnap Bruce for another little while?"

"Oh -- I should stay here and try to be present when Harvey wakes up --"

"Of course," Clark says, and kisses Bruce's hand. "If you don't mind my company, Starling...?"

"Heh. Mi casa et cetera. *Please* convince B not to castrate himself."

Clark's jaw drops and -- that's really something of a splutter -- "*Bruce* --"

"In my defense --"
"This should be good," Starling says, crossing his legs and folding his hands on his obviously well-muscled abdomen --

Even through his t-shirt, the definition is visible --

Of course the t-shirt is quite worn --

Bruce looks up --

And Starling is giving him a look which is a blend of amusement, disbelief, an oddly good-natured scorn --

"It -- it's far more than your physical beauty --"

"Yeah, 'cause my personality's been just sparkling tonight," Starling says, standing and stretching a little. "I think I'm gonna hit the sack. You and Bruce'll be okay down here, yeah?"

Clark murmurs assent and turns to Bruce, but the frustration --

The sense of something left incomplete --

"Okay, wow, Bruce, you're seriously --" Starling shakes himself like a dog. "What are you thinking now? Because I'm betting it's fucking ridiculous and huge."

Bruce -- blushes.

Starling stares at him with a dumbfounded expression on his face --

"It's only... I feel there's more we can say to each other. Ah. There's more that I want to say to you, I mean."

Starling continues to stare at him.

Harvey would shake him at this point -- almost certainly a gentle sort of chivvying, but -- "I'm not sure... what those things are."

Starling raises his eyebrows behind his mask and laughs somewhat breathlessly.

"I... recognize that I'm being ridiculous --"

"And huge, even," Starling says, and smiles at him sharply, beautiful eyes in shadow -- "Do you wanna talk to me? Or do you wanna do other things to me?"

Bruce stands and closes his hands into fists. "Both. And... other things. I'm not sure what those other things -- no. I would like to train with you. To teach you and to learn from you. Our body types complement each other. There are things I could give you --" And Bruce is cut off by the way Starling is closing the distance between them, the way Starling pushes a hand into Bruce's hair --

The way he leans in and breathes against Bruce's mouth -- "In case you haven't figured it out? I've been hitting on you all night, B. I just had to see how you would roll, you know? I don't know enough, yet, though. Give it time," he says, and the kiss is soft --

The kiss starts softly, but gradually gains more and more force --

And that's when Bruce realizes that he's pressing closer, trying to take more, trying --
He moans against Starling's mouth, desperate to keep himself from trying to pry it open -- but then Starling *does* open his mouth, and Bruce licks his way in, licks Starling's lips and teeth and tries to urge Starling's tongue into his mouth --

Starling grunts and *bites* Bruce's tongue, pulls back and bites Bruce's lip, Bruce's chin, Bruce's *jaw* --

"Starling--"

"Jason," Starling whispers, then licks the place on Bruce's lip where he'd bitten. "My name is Jason. I'll tell you when you can use it."

Bruce moans again and cups *Jason's* face --

But he knocks Bruce's hands away and backs up. "School tomorrow, B," Jason says, and waggles his eyebrows behind his mask. "Also, J'onn says Dent's cleared for sleeping with the family, but I'm thinking that we're all gonna want *some* time without our masks. Best scenario? There are extra gurneys in the storage area by the lockers," and Jason points in that direction, and then to the pile of blankets and pillows near Harvey's gurney. "Set yourselves up right, hunh? We'll work out the rest of the arrangements tomorrow."

Bruce...licks his lips. He can't quite stop himself. "Thank you."

Jason's lips part for a moment -- and then he grins and shakes his head. "Yeah, I think I see you now," and he turns to Clark. "Try to avoid doing at least some of the things I wouldn't, hunh?"

"Ah... no promises?"

Jason snorts and shakes his head before jogging for the stairs --

And Clark presses himself to Bruce's back and kisses Bruce's ear.

Bruce shivers --

"Are you wondering what his bedroom smells like?"

Bruce feels himself *twitch* -- "I am now."

"He's so powerfully *male*, don't you think?"

That -- "I'm not sure what you mean. Neither of us have vaginas, Clark."

"Yes, yes, but... hmm. He has a sort of uniquely American maleness. Perhaps I mean masculinity. You and I both have a bit of androgyny when held against cultural standards."

Bruce thinks of Harvey --

Of the *wonder* of Harvey. His bluff, hearty good nature, his enjoyment of sports, his *rough* physicality...

He's tender with Gilda -- Bruce has *seen* that, though not as much as he's wanted to -- but with others...

Even female colleagues are far more likely to receive a clap on the shoulder from Harvey than, say, a gentle touch to the backs of their hands. Part of that is the desire he has to be seen as above all temptations, no matter how simple and relatively innocent, but...
("Ah, women. Women are...well, they're *supposed* to be a confusing mystery and twist you up inside a little. That's kind of the point of them, no matter what else a given women is or does, big guy.")

*Bruce* has never found the average male to be *any* less strange and confusing than the average female, but he has to admit that he's had some degree of trepidation about making love to a woman. Far, far more than he's had about men --

"Bruce...?"

"I'm sorry. I was... in the process of starting a round of self-doubt and recrimination."

"Oh, Bruce, he's *seventeen* --"

"No, not about --" Bruce shakes his head and gives himself permission to press his body back against Clark's --

"Oh -- wonderful," Clark says, and kisses Bruce's cheek. "What *were* you berating yourself about?"

Berating -- well, yes. "I'm not sure I'm ever going to be able to take a wife."

"Take -- hm. Perhaps if you made it sound less like a dose of terrible medicine?"

Bruce laughs softly. "Clark, I... he's so free."

"Starling? I'm not sure if I'd describe him as free so much as *wise*. He is a product of his time and of his life... and he has transcended both of those things."

"I long to prove myself to him. I -- and of course I'm speaking about this to you instead of simply enjoying your company. I am sorry, Clark --"

"No, no, no. I want all your thoughts and dreams and desires. Especially the ones about me, of course, but also the ones about other people. I have longed to know you, beautiful friend," Clark says, and strokes Bruce's chest and abdomen through the shirt. "You wish to touch him."

"I believe. I believe I wish to taste him."

Clark sighs and presses closer, still, burying Bruce in heat, making Bruce's skin prickle with new sweat. "His flavors are... very strong."

Bruce breathes through his mouth. "Are they."

"Oh... yes. He often chooses very unhealthy foods."

"Alfred. Alfred wouldn't like that --"

"He told me that he'd compromised with Alfred. So long as he eats everything Alfred gives him, Alfred turns away from his... additions."

"I would like to... watch him eat."

"I would like to watch him fellate you," Clark says, and kisses the back of Bruce's neck over and over --

Bruce groans --
"I want to take you..."

"Clark --"

"I want to --" Clark growls and strokes down to Bruce's hips. "I've been replaying my memories of you since I had to leave. I can't -- I need more."

"Touch -- I want your touch --"

"Where?"

"*Clark* --"

"Oh -- yes, Bruce, *demand*," and Clark *cups* Bruce through his pants, squeezes -- "You're so beautiful..."

"Why -- why must I desire so *many* people?"

Clark laughs and flies them --

Sheets fly --

And there are two twin mattresses side-by-side on the stone. They're at least fifty yards away from Harvey --

"I meant to stay closer to him --"

"I will move us. *Later*," Clark says, holding Bruce's lapels and giving him an openly, *hopefully* questioning look.

"I -- yes --"

And then Bruce is naked --

"Clark, you --"

*Clark* is naked and on his knees. He's *nuzzling* Bruce's penis, breathing hot --

So *hot* --

Bruce moans as quietly as he can --

"Oh, no, Bruce, truly your friend sleeps *deeply*."  
Bruce swallows. "I wouldn't want him to wake to *this*, Clark --"

"Do I shame you, my companion?"

That -- Bruce laughs. "No. No, you don't. But it seems a basic *courtesy* --"

Clark kisses the head of Bruce's thickening penis --

Bruce gasps --

"Perhaps you're right. If I gag you, *I* will still be able to hear every nuance of your cries."

Bruce narrows his eyes and licks his lips -- "Do it --"
"Oh, *love*," and suddenly Bruce is on his stomach with what seems to be a goodly fraction of a pillowcase in his mouth. The detergent scent is quite mild, though not the same as his Alfred had used --

And he remains capable of thinking about the detergent for only about five seconds, because Clark *spreads* him --

Clark moans -- "*Bruce*..."

Bruce tugs the pillowcase out enough that he *can* talk -- quietly. "Clark -- that's disconcerting --"

"So many people in your position have said, but I can't help... ah... appreciating the view?"

Bruce laughs helplessly. "At least I can be sure that I'm not especially dirty there, given the equipment at the Fortress --"

Clark sighs *sadly* -- "All too true. Still, I believe I can find *some* ways to make you sweat for me," and he spreads Bruce *wider* --

"Oh -- the flesh feels very sensitive --"

"And so it is. I've watched you hold Robin just this way, Bruce. I've watched you *stare*.

Bruce swallows. "He... he's beautiful --"

"Oh, yes. And he would *squirm* for you, giggle nervously, ask you if you were sure you wanted to examine him *there*..."

"I... I must have wanted to know everything about him. I must have... wanted him to be mine."

"He was. Even when he made love to others. Even *while* he made love to others."

"I -- he's -- doesn't still -- *hnh* --"

A kiss. *Just* a kiss, but the location of it --

The --

He could *feel* his own puckered flesh, imagine how it felt to *Clark* --

"I -- *Clark* --"

"Analingus," Clark says, and *licks* him, "has a long and noble history, Bruce," and the smile in Clark's voice is *unmistakable* --

Bruce laughs again, tries to -- no, there's nothing he needs to try, nothing in particular he needs to do -- "I've thought about this act."

"I'm not surprised... but feel free to elaborate," Clark says, and kisses him again, again --

Bruce *pants* -- "Harvey. No -- no one else --"

"Not even me...?" A lick --

A *strong* lick, and Clark's tongue *is* strong, thick and powerful --

Dipping *in* --
Bruce grunts -- "I -- recently those thoughts have become far more inclusive --"

Clark laughs wonderfully, *happily* -- "Oh, Bruce, I never guessed you could be like this with *me* --"

"I never thought --" Bruce shakes his head and pushes up onto his hands and knees. "Please, like this," he says, and安排s the pillowcase a little more forgivingly. To his own ears, he sounds hopelessly slurred and quiet --

But Clark's senses are the best. Clark --

Clark has always been so much *more* --

"Oh, love -- " Clark kisses a hard line up along Bruce's cleft, then down again --

"Please, I -- I can't be sure what I want --"

"Then let me choose for both of us," Clark says, and begins to lick *wetly*.

Bruce narrows his eyes against the sensation, but it doesn't take long before he's panting constantly -- not *quite* blowing like some sorely-used horse, but --

It's hard to even *imagine* catching his breath with Clark doing this. The pleasure is too intense, too *serious*.

He --

Oh, he's pushing back against Clark's *face*, and that means he'd gotten up on his hands and knees at least in part to be *able* to do that. His body has gotten hopelessly ahead of his mind --

This pleasure --

"Clark, *please* --"

And Clark moans *against* Bruce's anus, panting himself and kissing --

Kissing *deeply*, and Bruce feels his eyes widening, but he can't actually *focus* on anything. He isn't even sure what *color* these sheets are, which is a shame, because he's going to stain them badly in just a few minutes. Just --

And Bruce groans and shoves the pillowcase deeper, because Clark is *thrusting* with his tongue. Is this what he'd meant by taking? It *is* being taken, tasted and known and laid *bare*.

Bruce wants to know if Clark had felt like this when Bruce was buried in him --

Either of the times --

Wouldn't the other way have to be more intense? He *wants* --

"Please, your *penis* -- *hnh* --"

Bites on his buttocks, his thighs --

His *back* --

"Clark -- *Clark* --"
"My love, you must be *patient* --"

"As. As you have been?"

"Never -- I'd never make you wait so *long*," and Clark wraps his arms around Bruce's chest and kisses the back of Bruce's neck -- no. He makes *love* to the flesh there, pressing close yet seemingly weighing nothing --

He's hovering. He -- "Clark, your *weight* --"

"More. You would have more?"

"*Cover* me --"

Clark groans and gives Bruce what must be at least *most* of his weight. It's no true strain to hold him up, but it *feels* better to lower himself flat to the bed again, to spread his legs and stretch his arms over his head --

Clark groans again --

Shifts --

Clark slips his penis into Bruce's cleft and begins to thrust, stroking his way along Bruce's arms until he can pin Bruce's wrists --

Bruce grunts and feels himself begin to sweat in earnest, feels himself slipping into what must be a sexualized *panic* response. He can't move, his breathing is somewhat impeded, and a very large man is thrusting against him hard, so *hard* --

But. He's not panicked, truly. He's excited. He feels almost *wild* -- certainly uncontrolled and only barely tethered to what he'd thought would be his *life* --

"Bruce -- oh, *Bruce* --"

Bruce nods as best he can and tries to work his hips for Clark --

"No, not yet. Stillness, beautiful friend, beloved companion --" Clark moans and tightens his grip on Bruce's wrists --

Thrusts faster and *harder* --

"Yes -- *yes* --"

"Clark, that's *intimidating* --"

Clark gasps something like a fraction of a laugh -- "You. Should I show you how you were taking *me*?"

Bruce feels himself blush --

"Oh -- oh, say *yes* to me --"

"*Yes*, Clark --"

And Clark's growl is strange, low and familiar -- "Like *this*," Clark says in *Bruce's* voice --
"Clark --"

"Feel*, my companion," and that was his own voice, but the motion of his hips --

The *slam* of his body against Bruce's own --

"You took me -- *claimed* me --"

"I -- I don't *own* you --"

"You always *have*," Clark says, and his voice is breaking, a higher tenor than his usual as he

thrusts and grinds and *grips* with his hands -- "I *need* you --"

"I -- should I be yours?"

Clark *shouts* -- but even that is relatively quiet, relatively *safe* as he spends himself in Bruce's
cleft, as he spatters Bruce's lower back with hot *slickness* --

Clark whimpers -- and then his weight is gone --

"Clark --"

"Need. I *need*," and Bruce is being licked clean at speed, being *worshipped* with that tongue, those grasping, clutching *hands*.

Bruce spreads his legs --

Clark grunts and takes Bruce's scrotum into his mouth, sucking hard --

Bruce gasps and tries to push up on his hands and knees --

He's down again, and he can't even --

Clark had moved too quickly for Bruce to *notice*, and his body feels that that's worth another

blush, a squirm, a *vision* of his father shrinking away from him in disgust --

Wouldn't he have to? Never mind the homosexuality -- he's rutting in a *cave* near to his innocently

resting *friend* --

Clark releases him and *growls* --

"Clark --"

"Let *go* --"

"I -- it's only that we're practically in *public* --"

"Your friend is still sleeping deeply, and Robin and Cardinal aren't due to return for at least another

*hour* --"

Bruce squeezes his eyes shut for a *moment* --

"You *desire* me --"

"Immensely*. I -- there's nothing I wouldn't at least *try* with you," Bruce says, and starts to turn over --
He's on his back and Clark is over him, still erect -- erect again? -- and staring down at him, searching him -- "Would you tell me... what hurt you?"

"I -- an image of my father. His -- disgust."

Clark looks stricken, and he cups Bruce's face -- "Everything you've told me about him, everything you've told Robin and that he shared with me... you painted a picture of a broad-minded man. He protected the weak and the downtrodden as much as he could --"

"I -- I know I'm not sick --"

"But you're not sure that your father would've known that?" Clark smiles gently. "Would he wouldn't he have continued to learn with you? The way that Dr. Thompkins has?"

"I --" But what is the real problem? What is he keeping from --

(This will be a place of struggle!) -- himself. Of course. A part of him had wondered if he'd left that voice in the other universe, if what had been left had been only the whispers and grating squawks of memory...

Bruce laughs quietly and tugs the perfectly comfortable pillowcase free the rest of the way -- And Clark winces -- "Will you tell me?"

Bruce closes his eyes -- no, not that. Not when Clark is touching Bruce's cheek so gently... Bruce looks up and meets Clark's eyes. "Did you ever watch your Bruce arguing with nothing? Perhaps with his empty uniforms?"

For a moment Clark's eyes are shuttered and blank -- and then they're not. "But, of course, you would know. Oh, Bruce, does it drive you?"

"It's only... I believe it thinks I'm having too much... fun."

Clark blinks at him and seems to be weighing any number of responses. Of course, he thought of all those responses in less time than it took for Bruce to notice the blink, but --

"I know. It's too much -- it's always been too much to ask anyone else to accept," Bruce says, and sits up --

Clark shoves Bruce back down, pressing hard on Bruce's sternum. "What must I do?"

"I -- I don't think there is anything, Clark --"

"No. I will not accept that. This -- this is your home. You must be able to let go here, Bruce."

"Was I not abandoned enough in the Fortress?"

"That isn't --" Clark shakes his head. "Here, Bruce. Here, where you have worked and sweated and bled for the Mission. Our Mission, and the Mission of your entire family --"

"They aren't mine --"

"Perhaps they should be."

"What?"
"Perhaps..." Clark strokes Bruce's face, cups Bruce's cheek -- "I must -- I need you to be comfortable here. A part of me recognizes that that's a great *deal* to ask, but... if I were to see you happy --"

"I'm happy with you --"

"And must it always be such a serious affair, Bruce? I -- no, not that, either. Do you have any idea how long it took for me to convince Jason to kiss me? You're already *making* them your own, and it won't be long -- I have to believe it won't be long --"

"I. Clark, I can't stay --"

"I *know*, I --" Clark leans in and kisses Bruce's forehead twice. "Make this your home for as long as you're with us, beloved friend. Be with us. *All* of us."

Could it be so easy?

(Nothing of any worth is *easy*.)

But was that the Bat or his *mother*?

Bruce laughs helplessly and covers his face with one hand.

"Oh -- *tell* me --"

Bruce moves his hand. "You come to me with lotus, my friend."

"I will *kick* you into *space* --"

Bruce gasps his own laugh -- "Noted, Clark. Kiss me again?"

"Do you mean that?"

"I am *quite* confident in your ability to make me think about absolutely nothing of any consequence."

"I'm *not* --"

"Clark. Believe in yourself," Bruce says, and offers one of Brucie's most obnoxious smiles.

"The Bruce from *this* universe once drove Robin to pick up a *two*-by-four and attempt to hit Bruce with it for that voice."

"Then it did its job --"

Clark rests two fingers against Bruce lips. "There are games we could play, beloved friend."

Games? Bruce raises an eyebrow --

Clark laughs and *strokes* Bruce's lips. "No one so innocent should be so skilled at playing the louche."

Bruce grips Clark's wrist and tugs it away from his face. "The ability served me well."

"And left you lonely... but that's neither here nor there. There are *games*, Bruce."

"Tell me."
"You've never made love as Brucie."

Bruce blinks. "That -- I believe that *would* be obscene."

"I've watched women throw themselves at you while you wore that guise. I've watched men catch their breath at the thickness of your wrists as you shot your cuffs, the breadth of your chest, your dazzlingly *dim* smile --"

"I'd never realized those parties were that *entertaining*."

Clark laughs, and it's one of his older ones. A *dangerous* one -- "And you slip into that persona like it's an old pair of slippers when you're uncomfortable enough. Or uncomfortable in just the right way?"

"Clark, would you *want* Brucie?"

"I've fantasized about taking you-- *fucking* you -- until you weren't *able* to call on that creature anymore."

Bruce grunts -- and shakes his head. "I'm reasonably sure that shouldn't arouse me more. Were you cursing for emphasis, or --"

"I was making a point. I have personae of my own, Bruce."

"Clark Kent would, I believe, give my penis a terrible sprain were he to fall on it."

Clark laughs again, and it's sunnier this time, but -- "Other than him. Other than Superman."

But who...? "Then I don't understand --"

Movement, but it's confusing, difficult --

His wrists are -- tied.

He's on his back with his legs spread as far as they'll comfortably *go*. *Precisely* as far --

And he doesn't see Clark. "I --"

"*Quiet*,” and the voice comes from one of his many blind spots. Somewhere beyond where his wrists were placed.

Hm. "I'm afraid I -- *ah* --"

And at first it's only the shocking *crack* of flesh on flesh -- but then Bruce feels his penis almost --

It almost seems as though it wishes it could *scream*. The pain is bright, staggering --

It's impossible to be sure that he isn't truly injured, and so he keeps peeking at it, trying to see it from every angle without moving too much --

Clark hadn't *said* he couldn't move, but it seems --

For a game like this...

He *has* done all the reading which *could* be done, from scholarly papers to the meanest, cheapest erotica available at 'adult' stores -- "I'm sorry, Clark." He *thinks* he can hear Clark's
breathing catch --

And then there's a stream of what could only *be* Kryptonian --

"I don't -- *hnh* --"

This time, the shock of the slap fades quickly, leaving only pain which makes him want to *arch* --

He does, and that breathy sound comes again --


Bruce blinks. Kal-El is some sort of sexual dominant?

He's supposed to be *Brucie* for that?

It certainly seems like an *original* way to go about making love, but -- no, Clark had spoken of driving Bruce to extremis, making him reach a point where he *could* only be honest --

And the desire to -- somehow -- resurrect this world's Bruce in order to *shake* him until he communicated honestly with Clark is, if not beneath him, then rather suspect. He'd had to watch his world be badly endangered if not -- no.

Not that.

Leave it at the fact that he has neither room nor right to judge --

And this is anything but a sacrifice. Bruce smiles -- stops and imagines the taste of champagne, and how it becomes something of rust and tang if one drinks enough of it while, say, pawing at and kissing a socialite who has been slipping out to smoke various drugs and flirt with other men all night.

*Then* he smiles. "Your name's Cal, you said?"

A flood of *pleased* Kryptonian...

"You know, they named a school after him. Cal Teck or something. I'm almost *positive* he did something important --"

He can't *see* Clark -- no. He can't see *Kal*, but he can feel him. Touches to his shoulders, his chest, his hips, his abdomen --

A *lingering* touch on his abdomen --

"Gosh, it sure is *windy* out here, Cally. Maybe we should -- whoa there. Hiya, tiger," and Bruce waggles his eyebrows at Kal, who is currently crouching between Bruce's thighs. "Lookin' good! You work out?"

Kal's teeth -- seemingly all of them -- are showing. Kal's hair is an attractive nest, blown this way and that by the wind of his passage.

Kal's eyes are... burning.

Seemingly *literally* -- but he has a role to play. "Say there, Cally, have you been hitting the ganja? Man to man, your eyes are pretty red."
Kal *licks* his teeth -- and begins stroking Bruce very --

Very *firmly* -- "Oh, oh -- is this -- did you go to boarding school, too?"

*Sibilant* Kryptonian --

"Mm, I -- not that there's anything wrong with -- ooh, your hands are as smooth as a *woman's*. Not that there's anything wrong with -- that --"

Kal licks a stripe between Bruce's pectorals, catches hair between his teeth and tugs --

"Oh, hey, when did *I* get naked?"

Kal *chuckles* -- and begins to stroke faster. Concentration is --

Very difficult, but -- "You know -- you know people will *talk* about this, Cally, ha, ha, ha. You know what it's like..."

Kal *squeezes* --

Bruce grunts -- "Oh, look at *me*. You're turning me -- turning me into an *animal* --"

Kal flips Bruce onto his knees *just* slowly enough that Bruce can *parse* the motions --

And Brucie would surely be a little intimidated right now? He's -- "I've *heard* of this kind of thing, Cally --"

More Kryptonian, rough and *hungry* --

"You -- say, you're not *French*, are you?"

*That* laugh sounds far more like Clark than anything else, and Bruce lets a little of his own smile out --

And Clark spanks him. That --

That *has* to be too loud --

More to the point, he can feel his penis bobbing, his scrotum *swinging*. That's -- there's no possible *dignity* --

Brucie is *allergic* to dignity. "Ooh, *Cally*, you're a *beast* --"

And that laugh is -- somehow -- *in* Kryptonian, but he's still being spanked, being *moved* with each --

No, he's lifting his rear for the contact, for the simple, *moderately* painful rhythm --

Bruce lets himself pant through his blush, hang his head -- "Should I be calling you *Daddy*, rough-and-tough?"

Kal stops and *cups* Bruce's buttock. "Would you like to...?"

Somehow, hearing English after that --

That simple *question* --
But, of course, it could never *be* a simple question --

And Kal's Kryptonian manages to feel soothing and frightening at once -- or perhaps it's just because he's *shuddering*, *wanting* to soften --

He isn't softening. He -- still has a role -- "I'm not some kind of *pervert*, Cally. *You're* not, either, right -- *hnh* --"

*Bite* to the back of his neck, hard and firm and *hot* --

"K-Cally --" And Bruce groans for the feel of Kal scraping his teeth down the hollow of his spine, pausing to *kiss* the base of his spine --

"Even if you beg, I will not stop."

Bruce closes his eyes -- "What -- what's *that* supposed to mean, Cally? Don't be *mean* to me, now --" And Bruce grunts again for the feel of being *forced* down onto his elbows --

His rear is -- exposed this way. *More* exposed, somehow, and having felt Clark watching him -- *studying* him -- earlier is no preparation for *this* examination --

He's spread and *open* --

He's *clenching* --

"Oh... aha ha, *Cally*, you're starting to really give me the *heebie jeebies* --" And then Bruce is sighing out all of his air for the feel of Kal stroking his anus with slick fingers.

It *must* be the lubricant which he'd used on Clark, himself, and a part of him is relieved, which means a part of him had been honestly frightened. Is that too far? Far enough?

Bruce frowns and tries to turn --

And finds himself staring down at the mattress between his forearms. His wrists are still tied together --

Somehow he'd *forgotten* that -- no, the role. "*Cally*, I was just trying to *see* you..."

*Sharp* Kryptonian -- an order.

"You know I don't *speak* that babble -- oh, say, are you from one of those countries with all the blondes? I *love* blondes -- *mn* *mn* *--* That -- it has to be more than one finger --

Kal *twists* -- yes, it's two, and even masturbating --

He hadn't *done* that to himself, always leaving it aside as something too involved, too *time* - consuming -- "*Cally*..."

Thrust after --

He feels so *slick* inside -- Bruce shakes his head. "We will *never* live this down, Cally -- *ah* -- oh, what was *that* --"

"The proof that you need just this," Kal says, and the smile in his voice is hard and *promising* --

"*Need*? I don't need *anything*, Cally --" And the rest of that is a *shout*, because Kal is rubbing
at Bruce's prostate gland, pressing and *dragging* his fingers against it --

The pillowcase is back in his mouth --

The Kryptonian sounds *thick*, somehow, as insinuating as those fingers -- no, they had *breached* him, are taking him with no --

No *subtlety* --

Brucie wouldn't understand subtlety -- "Unh -- oh. Oh, *Cally*, that's *marvy* --" *More* shouting, more, but none of that sounds any *more* ridiculous with the pillowcase in --

Kal is *vibrating* his fingers --

"Cally, *Cally*, this is -- just -- just *silly* --" But he's *screaming*, because Kal is stroking his penis again, taking him that way, *too* --

He's -- he's *close* --

Clark wants to be --

Kal *will* be inside him, and Bruce thinks it would probably be better for *him* if he were still aroused --

Though who knows what Kal would find to *make* him aroused again? Who knows what Clark would *allow* Kal --

"*Please*, Cally, you -- you're going to make me *pop* -- *ahn* --"

Three -- three *fingers*, and it shocks the imminent orgasm away despite the pain being entirely manageable --

Kal is -- oh.

Kal is using his fingers as something of a *ring*, denying him orgasm, but not pleasure --

Bruce has never wanted to own sex toys as much as he does right *now*. Of course, he would've had to carry them in his *belt* -- and laughing like Brucie instead of himself takes effort, but -- "You're such a *meanie*, Cally. Go on, tell me what's next. Give me a *hint*.

The Kryptonian is staccato this time, sharp and *promising* once more, but it seems to involve a *list* --

"Aww, I don't even *know* Swedish, Cally..."

"You take this well. Perhaps I should give you more of myself."

"*Please* -- I -- I mean. What does *that* mean?"

Kal sighs and begins vibrating his fingers again, making Bruce flex and croon, clench and gasp and --

He *sounds* obscene, but even that's not enough to make him soften in Clark's grip, to make him --

There must be a sort of freedom in being ringed like this. He need not control himself in any way save the ones which will allow him to continue playing this *role* --
"You -- your hands don't feel --"

"Like a woman's...?"

"Haaa, oh, Cally, *you* know how smooth they -- they are --"

"You're sweating."

"That's what *happens* when I get a workout, Cally --"

"I can smell your lust. Your *hunger*."

"Oh, *gosh*, did I forget my *shower* again? I must smell like a monkey in a *zoo* --"

"Shall I keep you, dim one? Feed you my semen when you thirst? Let you suckle like a babe?"

Bruce squirms *helplessly*, aware that he's still partially tied, but that -- he could close his legs --

Kal spreads him again easily -- Bruce hadn't even felt his *hands* move --

"*Answer*."

"That -- I'm not a *child*, Cally --"

"You're an innocent to this... but your instincts are *mostly* correct," Kal says, and begins to thrust *while* vibrating, making Bruce aware of how full he is, how *stretched* --

"*Kal* --"

"Not. Yet," and Kal squeezes Bruce's penis and scrotum *painfully* tightly --

"Cally, don't be so *mean* to me. You know -- I -- I'll give you what you *want* --"

"Your abasement?"

"I don't even *have* a basement, Cally, but -- hey, we could *build* one -- *nnh* --"

Faster thrusts, *harder* thrusts, and Bruce gives himself permission to just cry out into his gag for a while, just *feel* --

If he can take this --

If he can *have* this --

"Beautiful creature. So *flushed* for me..." And Kal slips back into Kryptonian for what sounds like a *count* for each thrust --

"*Cally* --"

"*Speak*.

"I don't -- I don't know what to *say* anymore, pal. I *know* it's a little... little *swishy*, but I think I'd *really* like you to put that fat rod of yours where the sun simply *never* shines..."

"*Rod* --" Kal coughs --

Clark *chokes* --
And suddenly Bruce's cheek is against the mattress and it feels like Kal is removing most of his arm from Bruce's rectum. It's just his fingers, and --

It's in preparation for more --

"Oh, Cally, please --"

"Beg. Beg to be taken --"

"I -- you don't think I should really do that, do you? I mean, the press is always --"

Wet spank, and thinking about the lubricant, the slickness --

And then the spanks begin landing on his scrotum, and Brucie would never --

Could never --

"Oh! Oh, I'll do anything you want, Cally, I -- what do you need? That basement thing?"

"Beg. To be taken."

This blush is fitting, suited -- "Please, Cally, put it -- put in in me --"

"And...?"

"Take me, Cally, please. I -- I suppose that would make me your boy, but I honestly thought I left that behind me at Exeter. You know, with all -- all of those poofs -- ah -- ow, Cally, I need those --"

"I need them more," Kal says, and spanks Bruce's scrotum steadily, making Bruce blush more, sweat more --

He's gritting his teeth and trying not to lose all of himself --

He's hurting and needy --

Surely -- surely Kal must --

"Please, Kal, no more --"

"Ah -- perfect," and Kal --

Clark is sliding in, pushing in inch by inch --

He can recognize intellectually that the girth is less than Clark's fingers, but the length --

The incredible heat --

"Bruce, speak --"

"I need you, Clark, please, please take me --"

"Oh, yes --" And Clark slips in the rest of the way --

The slap of his scrotum against Bruce's own makes Bruce want to jump, flinch, cry out --

"Oh, your pain, your beautiful -- Bruce, tell me you still desire --"
"*Yes*, Clark, you -- or Kal, show me everything, *everything* -- *oh* --" And the hand locked around the back of Bruce's neck *isn't* as hot as Clark's penis, but it feels that way *emotionally*. Everything feels --

He's as sensitized as he was after firewalking in the Kalahari --

He's stretched open and *full* for the first time, and everything else --

No, none of it is meaningless, because Clark had brought him to this point with a game they could both play, a moment they could *share* --

"*Please take* me --"

And Clark tightens his grip on Bruce's neck and begins to move, one long thrust after another. Bruce tries to breathe, but he can only pant, *salivate* as if his body wants to find still *other* ways to take Clark --

Every way, *please* --

"Bruce -- oh, Bruce --"

"*Here*. I -- I *need* you --"

"*Yes*, you feel -- you must *feel*," Clark says, moving his hands until they're both on Bruce's hips --

Until he's free and *twitching* -- "*Clark* --"

"You'll come for me *soon*.

Bruce nods like he's lost even more of his intellect than Brucie could play through --

Bruce *laughs* --

Bruce groans for the way laughing changes things, from the way his body moves to the way Clark is *clinging* to him --

"Please, *yes*, Bruce --"

"Don't -- please don't *stop* --"

"I want *more* --"

"You can *have* it --"

"I *must* --" Clark groans and lifts Bruce into a kneeling position, thrusting *up* at the same time --

The sound Bruce makes hurts his *throat* --

"Ah -- a moment --" And Clark moves the pillowcase and covers Bruce's mouth with his hand, instead.

Bruce can taste his own sweat and pre-ejaculate --

Bruce feels his eyes rolling up -- no, he must stay *conscious* for this, feel every moment, *taste* --

And Clark is lifting and moving Bruce into the thrusts with his other hand, clutching hard enough to
*Here*," Clark says, and shifts the angle of his thrusts --

Bruce cries out --

Bruce can't *focus*, anymore -- but he can grip Clark's wrists and hold them just where they are, beg with his grip for more, please *more* --

Where had the zip-strip gone?

When *had* it gone?

"*Bruce* --"

How could he give this up? How could he walk away from anything --

No, those thoughts aren't *correct*, and they don't belong in this moment, this --

"I *need* you, Bruce. I have loved, I have dreamed, I -- oh, Bruce, so *human* --"

Bruce nods and wishes he could speak -- but he knows he has no words as eloquent as those. He has grunts and cries and shudders, licks and *bites* for the palm covering his mouth --

"I would never deny your *sounds* --"

Better, it's *better*, and so Bruce tightens his grip on Clark's wrists --

"No, I need --" Clark growls and twists free, moving his hand from Bruce's hip to Bruce's penis -- 

"*Together*:

Yes, always -- no, just for this moment, this pleasure --

And Clark is stroking him fast and perfectly --

It's his *own* rhythm, for those times when he's wanted both to be efficient and to imagine himself lost to the touch of Harvey, of the frightening and beautiful alien --

He calls Clark's name and is muffled. He thrusts into Clark's fist and is taken *harder* --

The rhythms are *different*. He can't -- he can't catch *either* of them, but Clark can catch him, take him --

"Do it *now*, beloved friend. Do it so that I may do the *same* --"

Bruce gasps and twitches, groans and *flexes* --

"Oh, Bruce, *come* --"

Yes -- *yes* -- and throwing his head back *means* more when he can rest it on Clark's shoulder, clutch at Clark's wrists, his powerful forearms --

He's shaking all *over* --

Clark cries out into Bruce's *ear*, and the need in his voice --

The *anguished* pleasure --
Bruce loses himself in a *blank* heartbeat, comes back to find himself jerking and spasming as he spends himself --

As he spurts into the air --

As Clark groans almost *mournfully* --

And the feel of Clark's *hot* semen is enough to make Bruce spurt again and again, try to cling, push himself back and *cling* --

Clark bites Bruce's shoulder *hard* and spills still more inside him --

Bruce slumps because his body will allow nothing else --

And, after a moment, Clark wraps his arms around Bruce's chest and they stay that way, kneeling and bent under the force of their *pleasure* --

But.

Clark laughs softly.

Oh. "Did I tense?"

"Minutely, but yes. What is it, my friend?"

Bruce reaches back to cup the back of Clark's head --

"Oh, you're so wonderfully *big*."

Bruce hums. "Clark."

"It's *lonely* being 'the size of a motherfucking barn,' as Jason is wont to say."

Bruce *laughs* -- "His *language* --"

"Robin tried to change it. He's a determined young man, but Jason has a will of iron when it comes to some things. Tell me what's wrong?"

"Nothing. Or..."

"Or?"

"Was that truly what you wanted?"

"Is that so strange...?" And Clark leans in enough to let Bruce *feel* the breadth of his smile on his shoulder.

"Clark."

Clark sighs. "I've missed you *scolding* me, as well, beloved friend."

"Hm. I'll keep that in mind."

Clark shivers against him -- "Please do. And... you taught me much about how one can play certain roles until they *become* personae, until they become so real that no one can be sure they *aren't*. I needed that, considering the fact that I chose to spend as much time as possible around a world-class investigative reporter."
Bruce nods and considers that. "When *did* Lois learn your identity?"

"She told me that she went back and forth on the matter. Clark Kent was convincing enough most of
the time, but, in the end, there were a few too many coincidences."

"Not that Superman occasionally looked at her like Clark Kent and vice versa?"

Clark smiles against Bruce's shoulder again. "Kal was looking out of my eyes far more often than
anyone else."

Oh... "Did that..." No, he shouldn't. Bruce shakes his head.

"Please, ask."

"I'd rather not accustom myself to asking egregiously personal questions --"

"Of the people who make love with you?"

Well, that's... a point. "Hm."

Clark kisses Bruce's shoulder, his throat, the back of his neck -- "Please."

"I... wondered if Kal excited her."

Clark *licks* the back of Bruce's neck --

Bruce shivers --

"Yes, though I must be careful. When she's not in the mood for Kal, she is *decidedly* not in the
mood for Kal."

Bruce strokes Clark's arms, his hands... "Ultimately unsurprising."

"Did *you* guess that Lois would find a man like him desirable?"

"I... have only met her twice. Once as the Batman, once as Brucie. Neither of those personae moved
her to be especially open."

"And that wasn't what I asked. Tiger."

Bruce smiles helplessly, squeezing Clark's wrists precisely as hard as he can -- "The idea had... occurred."

"Because... no, I have no idea. *Why* did the idea occur to you that *quickly*?"

Clark... isn't softening. His stamina approaches the god-like when compared to *human* males, but -
- "Are you... unsatisfied?"

"What? No, I'm --" Clark sighs and kisses Bruce's throat again. "There have been times -- many,
many times -- when I've thought myself made up of nothing but *greed*, Bruce. While it's true that
there are few things I enjoy more than making love, I've yet to... ah... reach an end-point?"

Bruce blinks. "Not... you have many lovers."

"Oh, yes, and Diana is one of them. There are times when we make love for hours in the most
vigorous ways available to us. But... well. Perhaps it would've been possible when I was younger
and less powerful."

"That seems terribly sad --"

"Oh, yes, Bruce, it's a *tragedy* that I am, for all intents and purposes, *always* ready to make love to the people I care about. Or to do it a second time."

"Or a third. Or -- yes, I see," Bruce says, and smiles. "I withdraw my sympathy, but not my desire for you to live happily --"

"How did you *know*?"

Ah... yes. Bruce hums. "It was in the way she challenged me as the Batman. There was never any particular way around her challenges without resorting to force and... the more blunt forms of dominance."

"Yes, but how did you know she would *approve* of that?"

"I didn't, truly. But there was something in her eyes which... suggested that it wouldn't necessarily be a terrible idea to try."

"You were a *virgin*."

"Exceedingly so. Though I'd had access to a great deal of information about human sexuality. Access you may not have given yourself immediately...?"

Clark sighs. "The bumpkin in me is blushing *most* profusely, in case you were curious. I didn't think I *needed* to know what I hadn't picked up via... ah... trial and error?"

Bruce raises an eyebrow --

"All right, yes, I *did* do a great deal of research after moving to Metropolis, but I never really thought to *apply* that knowledge to my friends and loved ones."

"And you never listened to Lois' dates...?"

"That would've been... ah... prying?"

Bruce coughs a laugh --

"Yes, yes. Let's just say that you're not the *only* one with foolish and damaging rules of behavior."

"Noted," Bruce says, and moves to kneel up --

Kryptonian. *Teasing* Kryptonian, punctuated by Clark's *firm* grip on Bruce's hips.

"Hmm."

More Kryptonian, whispered into his *ear*--

"Clark."

A sigh, followed by still more Kryptonian -- "-- and, furthermore, you *can't* blame me for trying."

"You were wonderful --"

"And you were -- " Another sigh. "*Consider* staying here, with us. Consider all that you could
teach us, and all that we could teach *you* --"

"Clark -- please."

Clark moans softly, kisses Bruce's shoulder, and lifts Bruce off at a speed --

Bruce can feel the *aftermath* of the move -- mostly in terms of the semen spilling out of him -- but he couldn't feel the actual move, at all. He -- Bruce turns to face Clark, cups his beautiful face --

Clark turns to kiss Bruce's palm repeatedly before turning back. "I understand, Bruce, but I cannot entirely help myself."

"I am flattered and --"

"No, no, don't say that --" Clark shakes his head and laughs again. "I never want to *flatter* you, my friend."

Bruce nods once. "I'm sorry."

"You were trying to be polite to me. You -- I would much prefer your honesty, no matter how much it hurt."

"I never want to *hurt* you --"

"But you will, and you must. Start now. Tell me that you don't love me, that I'm not the *one*."

Bruce shakes his head. "I. I don't think I can do that."

Clark's lips part. "Oh... beautiful companion, I would keep you *near* --"

"I know --"

"But it's not enough."

Bruce frowns. "I must. I must *try*, Clark."

Clark sighs and nods. "Yes. You are yourself, and... yes. Lie with me? For sleep, I mean."

"I... thought I would dress again and wait for the others to return --"

"I've already sent them a message saying that you will be sleeping near to your friend and that I would be keeping watch."

Bruce nods -- pauses. "What *of* Lois?"

"Ah -- while she enjoys a certain amount of snuggling, that enjoyment dips precipitously when she is asleep and I am most assuredly not."

That -- "You don't sleep, at all, anymore."

Clark spreads his hands --

And then they and the beds are much closer to Harvey's gurney. Harvey is no longer tied, and is sleeping on his side. There are frown lines bitten deep into his forehead, but he looks far better than he had before.

Bruce reaches out to stroke his face --
"Bruce? C'mon, big guy, wake up, it's just a nightmare..."

"When J'onn has done this for others, there has always been a period of adjustment. The individual in question must grow accustomed to... ah. Well, the way he described it made it sound a bit like lucid dreaming," Clark whispers.

"He isn't having a nightmare?"

"I believe what he's experiencing is closer to having walked *in* on one of his nightmares."

There is no reason to wake him. There -- "When you covered my mouth..."

"He had moved closer to waking. He never actually did," Clark says, and tugs Bruce toward the beds. "Tomorrow, I imagine, you'll be able to speak with him."

Bruce breathes deeply and nods -- stops. "If J'onn has this power --"

"Ah -- you must understand, Bruce. Your friend had not yet sunk *in* to his difficulties. Most of him was still... on the right track?"

And most of the emotionally troubled criminals Bruce has met have already lost touch with the people they were before they sunk so low. Bruce nods. "I understand. He *has* done this before?"

Clark smiles ruefully. "Three other times. Twice on my behalf, once on Diana's. All of the individuals in question were younger than your friend, however."

Bruce frowns --

"If J'onn wasn't hopeful, your friend would still be *restrained*, Bruce."

Bruce closes his eyes and feels exhaustion and ruefulness settle *weights* on him -- "I'm being ridiculous."

"You're worried about your good friend... something I have been assiduous about giving you as little time as possible to do."

Bruce opens his eyes and raises an eyebrow.

Clark shrugs lightly. "Only Superman's motives are entirely pure at all times, Bruce."

"Noted," Bruce says, and lies down on the perfectly comfortable bed. It's positioned well within Harvey's sight lines --

And Harvey would be worried if *he* weren't rested. Bruce closes his eyes --

And sighs helplessly when Clark presses his body to Bruce's own and rests his head on Bruce's bicep. The warmth is staggering enough that Bruce is grateful to only be covered in a sheet --

Bruce breathes deeply and lets himself sink. Perhaps he won't have the nightmares tonight --

Perhaps he'll have them quietly.

*
You're a fucking *terrible* Dad, Big Bird.

Jason's dreaming of the mythical spar against Dick which leads to anything but crushing defeat --
And it's not Dick. It's -- Bruce.

And he's smiling -- showing even white teeth -- and gesturing a come-on --

He's using every halfway decent move Jason *has* --

He's showing Jason how it's *done*, and even knowing that he's dreaming -- the mats go to just beyond where the cars and bikes are parked. They *don't* lead into a blank fog --

And the world doesn't skip and restart every time Jason fucks up --

And Bruce *probably* doesn't toss his hair like Dick does when he feels like being an *ass* --

Even knowing it's a dream, Jason can't stop trying to catalog what he's learning, can't stop trying to make himself try to *remember* --

Movement --

And there's Tim and Tink and Cardinal all at once, sashaying in with his staff-slash-magic-wand, dancing in, *moving* all quick and sleek and right --

And that's *definitely* Tink sucking Bruce off, because Tim likes to do it a little slower than that and Cardinal maybe files his *teeth* --

Kiss --

The kiss *doesn't* taste like cock, which means he's waking up the right way. He reaches --

And Tim's skinny little hips are right there, already naked and sleek for Jason's hands. Jason squeezes *hard* --

And Tim hums a moan into his mouth, wriggling and pressing closer --

Until Jason *has* to flip them and pin his baby brother and the scariest twink in the known universe. It takes approximately *no* time for him to be kissing a smile --

And that means he's warming up everywhere he isn't *heating* up. Jason bites Tim's lips, sits up and *yanks* Tim's body further up the bed, and then starts working on renewing the bruises on his throat.

"Oh -- mm -- Jay, we should -- ah. No, I forgot," Tim says, laughing that breathless little thing that means Jason hasn't *earned* the giggle yet.

Jason grins and kisses his way up to Tim's ear --

No, he nuzzles Tim's cheek, looking for the scent of blush and finding cold cream, instead --

"You cleaned up *that* good down there?"
"I was -- um. Hoping that Bruce would wake up."

How big *is* Bruce's cock? He hadn't really pressed close enough to get a good feel -- wait a minute. Jason opens his eyes and wipes away the sleep-dust. "You're hot for him already?"

Tim blinks at him like he's a nutjob. "He's *Batman*.

"He's a fucking perv is what he is --"

"We *knew* that --"

Jason leans in and kisses Tim's cute little nose. "I kissed him."

"He's not -- *is* he your type?"

"Fuck if I know, bro," and Jason yawns fucking *hugely*. "Jesus, I'm always fucking *sleepier* on my nights off. C'mere, get on top of me again," and Jason rolls off onto his back.

Tim straddles him agreeably, but he's frowning.

"What is it?"

"We can't *all* want him. I mean, obviously we can, but --"

"It gets kinda fucked up if we do, yeah, I'm hearing you. And Big Bird's already thinking of keeping him --"

"I picked that up. Though he didn't even *shower* in the Cave."

Jason nods, thinks about it -- "He probably needs a little more time to run away from the guy who totally is the love of his life but also isn't."

Tim nods thoughtfully, doing a little data entry and input retrieval with his huge, terrifying brain -- and then he gives Jason a Tink smile.

"I'm about as braced as I'm gonna get. Hit me."

Tink pouts at him. "Is the magic gone *already*?"

"You *are* the magic, you freak. What do you wanna destroy my brain with today?"

Tink narrows his eyes, pouts a little more --

Jason has *learned* to not even try to predict --

And Tink has his hard little hands on his nipples. "Rings...?"

Jason groans and beats his head against the pillow -- wait. "What about your skin, baby?"

"You *like* my scars --"

"All of 'em, yeah, but --"

"The scars wouldn't *show*, Jay --"

"*But* the piercer might screw up. You don't know. It's not like these guys go through years of school and then stand and deliver in front of some board --"
"I was *planning* to do it myself," Tink says, and he's got that bitchy little twist to his mouth --

Jason sits up on his elbows and raises his eyebrows. "You totally already decided."

Bitchy look --

*More* bitchy look --

Flirty look. "You could watch...?"

And there goes Jason's cock. "Yeah, hunh? You wanna bleed for me a little?"

And Jason was expecting the twitch, but he gets a twitch *and* a hot little grind that may as well be
designed to make his sac tighten and his cock want a *taste*.

"C'mere --"

"I want -- tell me more about Bruce."

Jason blinks. "You're totally gonna try to hit that, aren't you."

Bitchy look *right* back... but Tim -- *not* Tink -- sighs and starts rubbing and massaging Jason's
chest. "It's just -- a part of me has been fantasizing about him since I was *three*, Jay."

Okay, but -- "I thought that was *Dick*."*

"It was! Mostly," Tim says, and smiles ruefully. "He was -- is -- the Dark *Knight*.

"And you wanted to be his squire...?"

"Well. I think I mainly -- there was definitely a fantasy about smelling his armor."

Jason stares at Tim.

Tim narrows his eyes.

"Okay, yeah, I *do* like it when you're sniffing me. I just -- how *old* were you?"

"Ah... ten. Maybe -- no, I was ten."

"But you said you didn't spank it until you were *eleven* --"

"There were any number of fantasies which made a lot more sense... then."

Jason stares at Tim -- oh, wait, he has no room to judge whatsoever. "Uh. So I hooked up with J'onn."

Tim *looks* ten when his eyes are wide like that --

"It was -- pretty fucking fantastic, actually. He said -- uh. He *sent* that I reminded him of his wife."

"His wife liked fucking underaged boys and aliens?"

Jason snorts and bounces Tim a little -- just enough for his cock to start getting interestingly
uncomfortable. "Probably, yeah. Basically, I could *not* stop thinking of fucking -- this was before
Bruce got back from the Fortress -- "
"*Did* he and Clark have sex?"

"Oh, no doubt. Wait, wasn't Clark still there?"

"He *was*, but he was also wearing his uniform. You know how innocent he can look in his uniform."

"Bruce was naked?"

"I couldn't see what he might have been wearing under the sheet --"

"They totally boned again. Also -- also, Clark is never innocent."

"I *know* that. But he loved the Bruce from this universe... I don't know."

"You thought maybe he would wait?"

Tim scratches Jason's pecs and nods, looking a little troubled.

"I think -- I think maybe he wasn't capable of waiting. This Bruce *was* the same as the guy he fell hard for back when he was younger than *Dick*, you know?"

"*Dick* isn't --"

"He totally is --"

"He hasn't even said more than ten sentences to him. And he keeps running *away*.

Jason looks at Tim.

Tim glares at him.

Jason looks a little harder --

Tim growls -- "All right, fine, that *is* how he tends to try and fail to seduce people he wants now."

"Exactly --"

"I can't decide whether I'm happy he actually speaks to *us* or not."

Jason snorts and reaches up to break a few of Tim's hair spikes. "You're happy."

Tim sighs. "I am, yes. *Why* did you kiss Bruce?"

"Because he's huge and hot and *interesting* about being a perv? I dunno."

"That's *Clark*. You made Clark wait for two *years*.

"He told you that?"

"He made it sound like an epic love story for the ages," Tim says, and traces little circles around Jason's nipples.

"He's good at that, yeah. I don't know. This guy -- once I made him admit that he was totally hot for underaged ass --"

"Not just underaged boy-ass?"
"There was totally some little girl *somewhere* who tripped his trigger, yeah," Jason says, and thinks about it -- "Shit, I don't know. Have *you* ever asked Dickie how old he was when they started hooking up?"

"I..." Tim smiles ruefully. "It was definitely before he was tall enough to drive the cars, going by what he's said in various little... anecdotes."

"So -- definitely not fifteen yet. Maybe not even fourteen --" Jason bangs his head against the pillow a few times. "Yeah. He -- okay, I made him admit that he was kinked that way, and apparently Clark had spent some time talking him down off the ledge for that --"

"Clark is... does he just not *believe* in the concept of 'underaged'?

"He totally doesn't. Or -- you never hear about people being fucked-up because of Clark, as opposed to all the other heroes in his generation. Shit, I don't know. His definition of 'underaged' is a lot fucking narrower than mine -- or the *law's*. Maybe he can *smell* the tweens who are up for some Superfucking. I don't know."

Tim files *that* away --

Gives Jason an odd little look --

"What is it?"

"I have another question for when you're done answering my sixteen other questions," Tim says, and lies down on top of Jason, snuggling up close and humming a little under his breath --

"Oh, hey, I love that --"

"I know. So do I... sometimes."

Jason wraps his arms around Tim and holds on tight. "You'll tell me when you need me to be less up on your jock, yeah?"

"*Jay* --"

"I'm *serious*. You've got your own thing --"

"I have Young *Justice*, and -- that's only a weekend thing. They're not -- none of them are *you*," Tim says, and he's totally glaring.

Jason raises his eyebrows. "Then it's okay when I say that I never wanna let you go?"

The glare kinda melts off Tim's face --

"I don't know what I'll do when --"

"*Jay*!"

"Okay, okay, I hear you. Uh. Where was I?"

"Clark had convinced Bruce that it was okay that the version of him who'd lived in this universe was having sex with a teenaged Dick."

"Can I make you translate for me all the time?"
"No," Tim says, and bites Jason's collarbone.

"Heh, noted. Anyway, I put him on the right track -- you *can't* just gloss over shit like that --"

Tim grunts noncommittally.

"Hey --"

"I'm *listening*," Tim says, and bites him *again*.

"Okay, fine," and Jason blows out a breath. "So there I am, talking some sense into him. And then I went back to my report --"

"Dick snorted twice while he was reading it."

"Damn, no hat trick?"

"You probably would've had one if Dick hadn't been obsessing about Bruce. He muttered something about Bruce usually being a *light* sleeper before he stripped off and jogged up the stairs."

Jason frowns. "No goodnight for you?"

"He gave me the manly-yet-loving shoulder-clasp and an entirely unreadable look."

"Unreadable for *you*?"

Tim wriggles a little bit --

"C'mon, give."

"He... he was looking at me a little like he used to. That 'someone is going to stop me from training this boy, because I'm doing it wrong' look."

Jason sighs. "Yeah, I know that look."

"I know you do, but... it wasn't *quite* like that. There was... well, he looked -- and I hate using this word this way -- haunted."

"His childhood's coming back to *bite* him, baby bro."

"You think... you really think he was damaged by his relationship with Bruce."

"You *don't*?"

Another wriggle --

"Do I need to let you move?"

"No! I mean -- no. It's just..." Tim gnaws on him a little, but it's not in that Tink way, or even in that Tim-wants-a-piece way. It's in that *other* way he has -- the one Jason's not sure he's *supposed* to understand. The one that's all about how young Tim *wasn't* when Jason caught him snapping his little pictures -- except for how he was even younger.

Jason strokes the back of Tim's head and holds him a little tighter. Just -- keeps him a little, because maybe it *wasn't* their job to give Tim a childhood, but maybe they should've tried harder to do it, anyway --
"I'm okay."

Really? "I know."

"I'm *okay*. I just -- Bruce was the love of Dick's *life*.

"His *first* love --"

"Sometimes -- sometimes the two are the same *thing*," Tim says, pushing up and glaring a little --

And the way that always makes Jason trip a little, *seize* a little -- "I love you."

Tim blinks rapidly and reaches to scrub at Jason's stubble with his hand. "You didn't -- even if I'm really -- really a *mess* when I'm older? It could never be your fault."

Aw -- Jesus. What -- no. Jason swallows and nods, because there's nothing he can really say to that. Tim had never wanted him to feel even a little bit guilty for wanting him, needing him --

And, most of the time, he doesn't.

"Tell me..." Tim licks his lips. "How did you get from 'you're an evil pervert' to making out with him?"

"Well, I never really thought he was an *evil* perv. I mean, Clark wouldn't have gone for him so hard if he was --"

"*Jay* --"

"Okay, okay. Uh. Right. So I was working on the report again, and I could *feel* him, you know?"

"Staring at you?"

"Nah, that's a different feeling. It was more like -- he was taking up all the space in the damned Cave with what *he* was thinking, and a part of me was thinking 'shit, I bet it was like this all the fucking *time* back in the day,' and I even think that part is *right*, but it still wasn't like *that*. I mean, my skin was crawling."

"Like it does when you're around Crane?"

Fucking *Crane*. He'd hit Jason with a potion that made him afraid of *himself*, and the fear was so bad he'd gotten *angry* -- and nearly killed the guy before Dick had shot him up with the antidote and he could *think*. And now --

Now he can't be around the guy without feeling that scrawny neck between his hands and --

"No, not like that. More like..." Jason licks his lips and pulls Tim back down on top of him. Tim sprawls just as sweet as you'd like -- "God, I love you."

"You -- always, Jay. *Always*.

And maybe, just maybe, one day you'll be able to use those three little words -- or, hell, just *think* them -- without getting caught up in what giant fuck-ups your parents were. But -- "Anyway, it was more like *I* could feel what Dick feels every time he wonders if he's as good at training us up as Bruce would've been. That kind of -- *everything*-in-the-Cave-is-watching-me thing."

"That sounds rather... hm. I believe I'm rather glad to be the youngest."
"Eh, you'll feel it one day. Whenever one of us brings in the *next* bird-to-be."

"I don't feel like that with *Steph* --"

"How was she tonight?"

Tim sighs a little *dreamily* -- "Brutal. Relentless. *Mean*. She definitely made up for you being benched."

"Meaning she *did* use that nightstick of hers on you in some smelly little alley?"

"Jay, that's *unsanitary*. She deflowered me on a *rooftop*."

Jason snorts and smacks the back of Tim's head. "You don't *have* any flowers, you little prick."

"On the contrary -- I still have my *woman*-flowers. My heterosexual virginity is firmly intact."

Jason lifts Tim's head by the hair and *looks* at him.

"... and it's likely to remain so, given that even watching Steph kick a mugger's teeth out --"

"How many?"

"Two and a half."

"*Sweet*, go on."

"Yes, well," Tim says, and arranges himself a little better -- i.e., with his cock nudging Jason's own -- "Even then, I still wasn't even a little bit... arrested."

Jason sighs. "We can't all be equal-opportunity sluts, bro. Hey, what happens when you think about *me* doin' her?"

Tim gets a thoughtful look --

Tim *blinks* --

Tim licks his *lips* -- "Would you... maybe be excessively dirty about it?"

"Heh. If she was into it."

Tim licks his lips *again*. "Yes, that's a definite... maybe. I think she does want you."

"Yeah, I think so, too. We kissed --"

"*When*?"

"Right before Bruce and Dent showed up in the Cave. I -- heh. I meant to mention --"

Tim bites his *nipple* --

"Yow -- unh. Wait, are we having sex tonight or not?"

Tim *hum* around his nipple -- and wags his head back and forth before pulling back. "One, I don't know. Two, I never make *you* wait to hear about what -- or who -- I've been doing --"

"We've been *busy* --"
Tim narrows his eyes at him.
"I'm *sorry*!"

Tim narrows his eyes even *more* -- and then he hums his way into a snicker. "I'm not actually mad."

"No? Good!"

"I'm -- um. I've thought about what it would be like to be -- your girl."

"Like -- "

"Yes."

"With the --" Jason gestures --

"Yes."

Okay, okay, he's breathing --

He's thinking --

He's thinking *and* breathing, because that's a Tink look on Tim's face, and that's just fucking *dangerous* -- "Okay, one big problem with that... plan?"

Tink doesn't give him even a *whisper* of a hint.

Right. "See, if you were my girl? You couldn't be my *boy*."

"I could be *both*."

"Like -- more than you already are? And you know I love you in drag --"

"And if..." Tink licks his teeth. "And if it wasn't drag...?"

Jason -- stares. He just --

Tink snickers his way into a Timmish little hum. "Okay, that's -- that's for a time when I *haven't* woken you out of a sound sleep --"

"I'm awake!"

"Jay... stop thinking about it. I've just... well, file it under 'Tink is going to be doing some more experimentation' for now? Maybe?"

Jason *knows* he looks fucking wary --

And Tim leans in and kisses him deeply, licking at seemingly *all* of Jason's teeth, sucking Jason's tongue, humming and sucking on Jason's lips --

Jason cups the back of Tim's head and fucks his mouth a little. Nothing serious -- just enough to get *one* twitch of Tim's cock before Tim pulls back.

"I'm really -- finish telling me about Bruce? I mean -- what specifically changed your *mind* about him?"
Jason nods and breathes and -- licks his lips. "Well -- okay, there he was, sucking all the air out. I asked him to tell me what he was thinking, he's like -- 'I've found a way to keep from hurting a child,' I joked about how maybe I could castrate him... and he just looked at me."

Tim chokes and stares at him.

"Yeah, *exactly*. I think if I told him that I wouldn't believe he did it unless he let me chop 'em off myself, he would've just led me over to the medical equipment and dropped trou."

"Jay, that's -- what did you *say* to him?"

"Fuck if I know, baby, I was just talking shit about how he couldn't walk around thinking he *wasn't* a giant perv, getting him to admit that he wanted *my* ass --"

"You don't even *look* like a teenager, Jay!"

Jason shrugs. "He's got some serious guilt issues? Whatever, we both know how you *look* doesn't have shit to do with *shit*, yeah?"

Tim blushes and nods --

And Jason strokes his cheeks a little. "So, yeah, I had to talk him down a little, get him to *cope* with himself and how he could be a perv *and* a hero, but that he should watch himself, and by then... by then I could tell that he *really* wanted me."

"Oh... I. What -- what did that look like?"

"His eyes got all deep and wide, he kept taking really deep breaths, he kept clenching his hands into fists like maybe he was telling them *not* to just grab me and *take* -- that kinda thing."

Tim *grunts* -- "Um. I. Wow."

"'Wow'?"

"*Batman* *wants* you, Jay!"

"Eh, he's no Robin."

Tim's snort is just a *little* scandalized, and fuck if Jason doesn't need that. A little proof that *he's* still capable of being the one who's just that fucking *out* there --

Tink is tough *competition* -- "*Anyway* -- he's a good kisser. A little hesitant at first, but fucking *hungry* when you get him going."

Tim kneels up and frowns thoughtfully, eyes going distant because he's burning up his little motherboard... yeah.

Jason shifts to get more comfortable and folds his hands behind his neck. He can be patient. More to the point, he can be patient with the *light* on, because Tim has a *nasty* fucking bruise over his lower ribs on the left side.

Jason marks it out with his fingers -- it's gonna be bad. "Anybody take care of this for you?"

"What? Oh, no, it was under armor and I got it when I was soloing."

Jason frowns. "You should've told Dickie about it --"
"It's just a *bruise* --"

"He would've rubbed it a little for you --"

"He was -- you didn't see his eyes. I really don't think he would've dealt all that well with me being injured."

Jason winces, nods, and starts working the flesh a little, trying to keep at least a *little* blood from pooling. Tim stiffens up a little for the pain, but relaxes well enough pretty much immediately. Good boy.

When Jason's done, he leans in and kisses it a little, because he *has* to, damn it, and never mind how fucking --

"I -- I love you."

What.

"Oh -- God, that sounded terrible, didn't it? I mean -- the timing --" And Tim's pushing him *away* - -

"Hey, no," Jason says, sitting up and cupping Tim's face. "I just -- I wasn't expecting that --"

"I know, and. You were just taking care of me --"

"I had to --"

"You always -- you *always* take care of me, and I love that, and I feel guilty for loving it --"

"No, don't --"

"Because I'm not supposed to *need* like that --"

"Yes, you *are* --"

"And -- I guess. I guess I just need you to know that it's always you," Tim says, smiling ruefully and rubbing the backs of Jason's hands. "You're the one I'd do anything for, *be* anyone for --"

Just *you* --"

"Because I know, in the end, the only me you want is um. Me. Okay?"

Sometimes --

Sometimes Tim really breaks his fucking *heart*, and the only thing to do with that is tackle him like Dick would, pin him and fucking *mush* him --

"*Jay* --"

"Shut up and take it, baby."

"You're *heavier* than Dick --"

"Uh, huh. You need the extra compression."

Tim starts hitting him, but since he hasn't broken out the nerve-strikes, yet, Jason figures he's got another few minutes.
He damned well takes them, and starts kissing Tim's forehead a little --

Okay, that was a nerve-strike which could've paralyzed his arm if it had been aimed right. Jason kisses Tim one more time and rolls off.

"You're *not* going to do that every time I say -- it."

"Not every time."

"Okay --"

"Probably," Jason says, and grins at him. "I have to make *sure* you know what you mean to me, bro. I never had anyone like you, and --"

"You -- don't have to keep -- ah."

"Bein' sappy? Gushy? *Mushy*?"

Tim makes a face.

Jason snickers. "You, my bitchy baby boy --"

"That makes me sound like your *son*, Jay! Your son who's a *toddler* --"

"I don't think I'd call a three-year-old bitchy, but since we're talkin' about you... heh. I bet you made your nannies cry if their nail polish wasn't right."

"Some of my nannies were perfectly lovely people. I never -- I never."

More sharing? Really? Jason rolls onto his side and rubs Tim's chest a little. "Okay, I hear you. But I'm also... hearing you, you know?"

Tim makes a face again --

It turns *into* a frown --

"I suppose it would be better if I just spit out what was bothering me," he says, and generally sounds like Jason had suggested he put leeches on his cock or something. So --

"Yeah, baby bro. Just rip off the scab and get it over with."

Tim sighs. "It's just -- it's not really bothering me --"

"Is it not bothering you, or are you just convinced that it *shouldn't* be bothering you?"

Tim opens his mouth --

"Not the same thing. We've been *over* that."

Tim turns a bitchy look on him that's doing its best to wither the nuts off every last one of Jason's male ancestors -- and then he sighs again. "I'm worried about us. The way we'll be. With Bruce here."

Jason blows out a breath. "So am I."

"You are? No, wait, that doesn't make me feel more hopeful."
Jason laughs softly and pulls Tim close again. "He could really fuck us up, and all he has to do is be himself --"

"He wouldn't," *Dick* says from the damned doorway --

"*Jesus*, Big Bird --"

"Sorry, sorry. I was lurking, and I *know* I'm not supposed to do that, but -- it happens?"

Tim sits up. "If you need to talk --"

Dick laughs. "See, that's funny. When Jay wants *you* to talk, you give him Tink's evil-minded aunt. But for me? You've always been Little Mister Open. Why's that?"

"Ah -- hm."

And that's the 'hm,' of 'nobody is going to like this answer,' so Jason pokes Tim just above his bruise --

"Ow! Um. You're needier, Dick."

Dick looks at Tim.

Tim winces.

Jason tries very fucking hard -- he totally deserves points for this -- not to laugh.

Dick looks at *him* --

Jason snickers.

Dick hums. "You realize that you're both getting wheatgrass shakes out of this, don't you? And Tim, yours is going to have raw egg."

"Aw, *damn* it --"

"Dick! Salmonella!"

"Not if I wash the shell *very* well, which is something I learned from Dario Gatali, so it *must* be true," Dick says, breathing on his fingernails and pretending to buff them on his chest. All he's actually wearing is a pair of boxer-briefs, which means --

He doesn't know. Jason hasn't figured out the rules for pajamas versus pajama bottoms versus t-shirt and shorts versus -- and so on. He's damned sure there *are* rules, though, and he *will* learn them one day.

For now...

"You're a fucking *terrible* Dad, Big Bird," and Jason's expecting a choke, a splutter, maybe some obscene gesturing --

But Dick only sighs. "So was Bruce."

Oh -- shit.

Tim's eyes are *good* and wide --
"We're listening," Jason says, and sits up, dragging Tim with him. "In fact, get over here."

Dick frowns. "I -- should be letting you both sleep."

"Yeah, but you know we're *not*, because now we know you're fucked-up enough to lurk against the rules."

Tim nods to back his play and points at the spot at the head of the bed where Dick could make a nice equilateral triangle --

And Dick laughs a little sadly. "That's part of it, you know. Parents aren't supposed to take *over* their kids' lives. There has to be a certain point --" Dick shakes his head. "Even *I* know that Dad's mood swings aren't supposed to be the be-all and end-all of a kid's existence."

"But Bruce's were," Tim says, and frowns a little -- "Dick, please come here."

Dick raises an eyebrow at Tim.

Tim pulls on Tink and *flourishes* a point at the head of the bed --

And this time Dick's laugh is better. "I love you so much. *Both* of you -- okay, I'm coming," Dick says, and actually *walks* to the bed instead of flipping or tumbling --

"Hey, how tired are *you*, Big Bird?"

"Oh -- God, don't ask," Dick says, and sits down tailor-style before leaning over to ruffle Tim's damp hair. "Or -- you can ask, but you probably both already know."

Jason nods and bites his lip --

"Dick... we need you to tell us... I mean. I don't know how much you overheard --"

"All of it."

Jason's stomach tries to relocate a little. Dick hadn't been upset about Jason hooking up with *Kory* -- but Kory wasn't Bruce. He bites his lip a little harder -- no, he's gonna man up. "Uh... how upset are you about me making out with Bruce?"

Dick laughs again *and* smiles. "The most handsome man in the world? The bravest and the strongest and the absolute, perfectest *best*?"

Jason winces --

"No, no, it's okay, little wing. I *promise*. I always thought..." Dick rubs at his long, perfect fucking thighs with his hands and Jason doesn't try to pin him and lick or anything like that --

Because he totally has a sense of timing and a limit on the number of times he can deal with being rejected for really good and intelligent reasons that make him want to beat his head against the wall --

He's fine. "What did you think?"

"Well, I had Bruce, of course. I just also had Clark, and Roy, and eventually Kory, and all the other Titans..."

And he *does* mean all, because once Jason brought random bribes with him up to the Tower and got a Dick-sex story from every last *one* of them --
And he'd used the one Vic told him to get Tim so high he came twice *before* Jason shoved it in --

"You... ah." Tim licks his lips. "You thought Bruce should... have other people, too?"

Dick grins at Tim. "I thought he should be *having* people right and left. Even when I was thirteen, I could tell that Clark wanted him, and Diana wanted him -- and this was back when she got a little queasy when people talked about heterosexual sex in front of her. Hell, I saw *Ollie* give Bruce a look or two, and Ollie *hated* him back then *and had never actually seen his whole face*."

"He does... uh. He does have an *effect*," Jason says, and pushes a hand back through his hair. "Seriously, Big Bird, how are we gonna do this?"

Dick leans back against the headboard and just stares up at the ceiling for a little while, periodically swallowing.

*Jason* knows that that means a part of Dick is crying a whole fucking lot somewhere they just can't *see* --

Tim reaches out and cups Dick's ankle -- he knows, too, and -- they can do better than this.

Jason moves up to Dick's left side and lets Tim take the right, and then they push and move him a little so they can give him the tag-team hug --

"Oh -- God. Okay, at least I taught you guys how to do *this* right --"

"*Dick*. You taught us how to do *many* things right, or we'd be *messily dead*;" Tim says, and he's not really being Tink, but there's that little snap to what he's saying, anyway.

"Seriously, Big Bird. You *have* to stop --"

"Worrying about the two of you? Really?" And Dick gives them both that *arch* look --

"*Dick* --"

"You *know* that's not it, Dickie --"

Dick holds up a hand, and then gives them *actual* serious looks. "I know. I do know what you're saying, and -- I know this is going to be damned hard for you both to believe -- most of the time I even agree with you. I can't *look* at either of you without seeing how incredible you both are, and how great you'd be for *any* team, and, most of the time, I can even put myself in that picture. *I* trained you both. *I* helped you learn the things you needed to know. I'm not -- I'm not actually *constantly* chewing my fingers off convinced that Bruce is going to -- to come back and reject me for doing a terrible job. Okay?"

"I... you do that a *lot*, though, Dick," and Tim's petting Dick's chest and not even looking like he'd rather be petting something a lot further down.

"What he said. You can't actually *hide* that from us."

Dick sighs. "No, I can't. I -- it's actually part of the bargain I made with myself, guys. I promised myself that you'd always be able to tell what I was thinking and why I was making you do the things I made you do -- since that was one of the few things that drove me straight up a *wall* with Bruce. He never -- I think..." Dick frowns.

"You can tell us, Big Bird. You *should* tell us."
"I think it's possible that he was a little -- superstitious. That if he thought too much about what he was doing with me, he'd go a little nuts," Dick laughs. "More nuts."

If he thought about *everything* he was doing with you...?

Tim presses a little closer. "Was he... did he seem... afraid?"

"Never. Just -- never. God, we had almost six years together, and I don't think I saw him widen his *eyes* more than a handful of times. And, you know, even then I knew that was part of the image, something he had *worked* on specifically to *make* himself seem more than human and infallible and *correct* and all the other things a man dressed up like a flying rat really shouldn't be *able* to be... but it was also just him."

"Well... ah. I think, after a point, that anyone can become the stories they tell about themselves if they're not careful. Or... even if they are," Tim says, and smiles ruefully.

Dick smiles fondly. "Yeah, you'd know all about that, wouldn't you, Tinkerbell?"

Tim tosses his hair -- impressive since he doesn't actually stop cuddling Dick. "I -- um. I really did appreciate you trying to keep Jason from calling me that... back then."

"You *did*?"

Tim blushes. "I knew you were trying to protect me, Dick. It felt... warm."

Dick gets a look on his face that Jason recognizes from the *inside* -- and then Tim just kind of *is* on Dick's lap and getting the life hugged out of him. "I love you so *much*, little brother --"

Tim gurgles. He's getting a little brick undertone to his cheeks -- Dick must've caught him just after he exhaled.

Jason pats Tim's back. "You're good, bro. Dick... uh. Are you ever weirded that we *are* your brothers and not your... uh..."

"I think I'd *remember* fathering a child when I was *seven*, little wing."

"I know, I *know*, but still. You weren't *looking* for brothers."

Tim gurgles again --

"I wasn't looking for *you*, Jay, but -- God, I don't know. I just knew that I *had* to get you off the street, and that you'd actually made me *laugh* in *Crime Alley*, when every other time I'd been there I was either watching Bruce mourn for his parents or mourning Bruce's parents *for* him, and --"

Tim flails a little --

Dick eases his grip *just* enough to let Tim gasp -- and then squeezes him *harder*.

"*Ngh* --"

"Just take it, bro," Jason says, and turns back to Dick. "I know you looked at me and saw *potential* or some shit --"

"You *poet*. I saw -- God. You were so *brave*, Jay. So -- you didn't even *blink* when I dangled you off that rooftop --"
"I was focusing on not shitting my only pair of *pants* --"

Dick snickers. "You were incredible, and I thought -- I need a partner. I need someone who can keep me from losing my mind and killing someone *else*. I need -- him. And then *I* was so busy figuring out how to convince you that it was all a *great idea*, that I didn't *have* to think about anything else."

Tim finally slumps --

"*There* you are, little brother," and Dick manhandles him into a position where he can kiss him all over his face --

Tim whimpers --

Jason keeps his snickers *internal* --

"Mmmmmmwah!"

Okay, no, he couldn't keep that snicker in -- and now Tim is giving him a dirty look.

Jason grins and opens his arms, making a come-on gesture with his fingers --

Tim nerve-strikes Jason's fucking *thigh*, and now he can't feel the thing or tell if he's tipping the fuck *over* --

Dick drops Tim and knocks Jason onto his back, and, eventually, they wind up lying down with their heads at the foot of the bed. Tim's got the middle this time, though. Jason rolls over carefully, wincing for the pins and needles, and snuggles up to his best-worst baby bro in the *world* -- who scowls at him until Jason waggles his eyebrows.

And then he just *tries* to scowl --

And Dick cuddles up to Tim's other side. "He never tried to get in the way of my other relationships, guys."

Okay, back to that. "Not even a little?"

Dick sighs and gets a little distant -- but only for a moment. "There were a few times when I could tell that he was at least a *little* jealous. That fist-clenching thing, and also some tightness in his jaw like he was *fighting* himself about saying something..." Dick shakes his head. "He never did, and he was always right there after I came back from a weekend with the Titans or a sleepover with Clark, giving me this little *look* like maybe he knew exactly what I was doing the whole time and was amused and *happy* for me..." Dick rubs Tim's abdomen restlessly -- "That's *why* I wanted him to have more lovers. He was so *good*, and there were good people who *deserved* him. Am I making any sense?"

"Um." Tim covers Dick's hand on his abdomen until he *stops* rubbing --

"Oh, hell, sorry, little brother. I know I shouldn't really -- ah. I'm not actually that oblivious, guys. I know you both think you want me --"

"Oh, don't *even*, Big Bird. We're *exactly* old enough to know what we want --"

"No, of course you are, and -- I never thought it was wrong for you and Tim to get involved, Jay --"

"But you think it's wrong for us to get involved with *you*? Dick, that makes no *sense*," Tim
says, and tries to sit up --

Dick shoves him back down --

"Oh, *God* --"

Dick *wincses* --

"Wait a sec, both of you, okay?" Jason looks back and forth between them. "Dick, are you saying that being with Bruce *did* fuck you up?"

"*No*, because I'm never -- going to admit that?" Dick laughs and moves the hand from Tim's abdomen to cover his face.

Tim frowns up at Jason --

Jason winces and shrugs --

"I always -- I always *feel* you two," Dick says, and keeps his face covered. "Sometimes I think I'd know if something bad happened to one or both of you; sometimes I think the feeling means I should just be -- all over you all the time. That I shouldn't *give* you time to be alone with each other, that I should just -- *keep* you both, twenty-four-seven, until you both felt me the way I feel you. The way I felt Bruce."

Tim blinks a lot.

Jason opens his mouth -- "Uh?"

Dick snickers. "Yeah, that about covers it, little wing. I'm not -- I know what it *feels* like to be the younger partner, or -- maybe I mean that I know what it *should* feel like. Roy wanted Ollie. Garth wanted Arthur. Wally was *straight*, but he still would've done *anything* for Barry -- and was dying a little because Barry didn't *want* anything. But *I* had Bruce, and Donna had Diana, and we were the ones who were happy pretty much all the time. We didn't get addicted to anything nasty, we didn't hook up with weird undersea sorcerers, we didn't pick up gambling habits -- none of that. And for a long, long time -- let's just say 'until the day I caught Jay staring at my dick in the shower and then met his eyes for a long, long moment we *both* wanted to have go somewhere' --"

"Fucking *A*, Dick --"

"Wait, Jay. Okay?"

Jason frowns -- but Tim squeezes his hand. He'll deal.

Dick sighs and starts rubbing his temples without uncovering his face. "For a long time, I thought that meant that everything was fine and dandy. I wasn't like those *victims*, after all, and of course, when I grew up -- heh. I never thought about what I'd do when I grew up. I didn't think of myself *as* an adult until *long* after Bruce had died -- and I was right not to. I..." Dick swallows with a click --

"It -- it's okay, Dick," Tim says, and rubs Dick's thigh a little cautiously. "We're here and -- ah. All right, I don't think I *can* understand, but I don't think less of you --"

"And neither do I," Jason says, and his voice is fucking *rough*, but -- he can deal. "It's okay. Just, you know --"
"'Let it out,' Jay?" Dick's smile is *old* on his face. "I used what you told me, little wing. Your experiences on the street, I mean."

"Uh -- used *how*?"

"Jerking off enough to hate myself, rearranging things in my head until it looked right enough, thinking about what it would've been like to be your *john* --"

"*Jesus* fucking -- uh. Okay?"

"Never --" Dick winces. "I would never hurt you. Not either of you. And Clark is really, *really* good at helping people blow off steam. And that machine you've both used to help you break the nightmare cycle -- I've used it countless times to get dreams of you, and Tim --"

Tim makes a strangled noise --

And Dick moves like a striking *snake*, grabbing Tim's hand and bringing it up to his mouth --

"Oh -- Dick --"

And Dick kisses Tim's fingertips *once* before letting them go. "That's how I get through. That's what I do. I let Clark fuck me blind, I dream things -- a *life* -- with both of you that -- God, it can't happen."

"Dick -- there's *nothing* stopping us from boning. *All* of us --"

"*I'm* stopping us, little wing," Dick says, sitting up and smiling down at both of them. "Because I've known for a long time that I don't want either of you the *right* way --"

"*Dick*! Just because you're not Bruce doesn't mean you're *bad*," Tim says, kneeling up and moving to cup Dick's shoulders --

Dick catches Tim's wrists and squeezes --

"Oh -- God. I really wish --"

"Oh, Tink, little brother --" Dick groans and squeezes *harder* --

Tim gasps a little bit --

'I'm not saying 'never,' guys, all right? I -- I couldn't actually do that if I tried, and I can't even *try*. I want -- I want so much, and maybe if I'd learned something different when I was younger -- ah, God, I can't blame *Bruce* for this --"

"You totally can, Big Bird. He never stopped you from making him the planet you were orbiting, you know?"

"He *tried* --"

"Not hard enough --"

"I *loved* him --"

"And you always will. But --" Jason licks his lips and shakes his head. "He taught you that it was *okay* to be completely obsessed with him to the point where you were never really fully a part of the team you helped *found*. The team you *led* --"
Dick grunts and his teeth click together. He lets go of Tim's wrists, grinds the heels of his hands into his eyes -- and then he lets out a shuddery breath. "He came first. Always. Even -- even when I wasn't here. And -- that's what I want with both of you," he says, and drops his hands.

"You --" Tim frowns. "You can't have -- that. But everything else --"

Dick taps Tim's nose. "Is not enough. And this whole thing... well, obviously it didn't *start* with -- that other Bruce showing up, but it's not helping. Or rather -- it's incredibly helpful at getting me to face a few salient facts. Like what it means that Clark honestly doesn't understand why I don't make love to both of you."

"We don't *either* --"

"Jay. Don't lie."

Jason winces -- and raises his hands. "All right, fine, but look, Dick, do you really think you *can* work this out alone? Clark's never had a partner or *been* a partner. You could at least be talking to *Roy* about this stuff, you know? He fucking *misses* you."

Dick winces. "I could never... I could never be who he wanted me to be. I could never be who *Bruce* wanted me to be, and I *definitely* can't be who you --"

"Big Bird, it'll be the fucking *life of man* over here, but I *will* punch you in the fucking jaw."

Dick coughs -- "The life -- what?"

Tim smiles like Tink in a social club full of people who don't have broken hands *yet* -- "Nasty, brutish, and short."

Dick snorts, claps a hand over his mouth -- and his eyes are dancing a little. It looks more hectic than happy, but Jason will fucking take it.

"*None* of us are fucking perfect at being who other people want. Tink would fucking love it if I let him get away with never talking about the shit in his life. *I* would love it if *Tim* would *trust* me --"

"I *do*, Jay --"

Jason pulls him in close and kisses his temple hard. "Not as much as you could, bro, and we both know that."

Tim bites his lip and nods.

"This -- this is never gonna end, Dick. Tim is the one I'll do anything for and follow *anywhere*, but we're still not perfect, and we never will be --"

"And that's *okay*. Or. Um. Better than," Tim says, and pets Jason's forearms like he can't decide whether he wants Jason to squeeze him harder or let him go.

Jason goes for harder -- and yeah, Tim junior is rising for the party. The *question* is --

Not a question, at all, because Dick is cupping himself and *squeezing* while he stares at Tim's cock --

Fucking *fuck* --
Tim moans and *reaches* --
And Dick fucking *motors* off the bed and back to the door, raising his hands --
Exposing a bulge that just keeps getting bigger as they *watch* --
Jason licks his lips --
Dick *pants* --
"Big brother..." And Tim's voice is high and sweet and *wanting*, and nobody can fucking stand against that. Jason's *already* grabbing for him --
But Dick has his fists clenched and his eyes squeezed shut -- "*Clark* --"
"It's only that I'm not sure I *should*, Dick," Clark says, and doesn't quite *touch* him --
"*Please*, Clark --"
"I --" Clark turns to look at them, and he looks worried and hungry --
He's looking at *Jason* --
"It's only... Jason, perhaps I should try to be... convincing?"
Dick laughs and gasps -- "Clark, *work* with me, here!"
"Your brothers desire you greatly, Dick. Perhaps... perhaps even more now than they did before?"
"*Yes*," Tim says, but --
Jason is holding Tim back. He doesn't even --
He doesn't *recognize* that reflex --
"Jay...? Let me go --"
Dick laughs again, and it's ugly and low -- "You know what I've been saying, don't you, little wing? You know I'm -- poison right now."
"Not -- not all the fucking *time*, Big Bird --"
Clark *grips* Dick's shoulder. "*Dick* --"
"Not all the time, Jay. No, I -- I promise," Dick says, and his eyes are solemn and heavy even though he has to be *aching* right now --
Right. Jason pulls Tim back against him, and -- wonder of fucking wonders -- Tim doesn't struggle.
Clark frowns and sighs, pulling Dick into his arms --
Dick turns and *buries* his face against Clark's shoulder --
"Oh, love, beautiful love..."
And Jason can see Dick shudder *hard* before Clark hides him with his cape --
"Big Bird -- I'm thinking of you, okay? And... yeah. Part of me wants you more."

Dick makes a low, quiet sound that Jason can't classify --

And then his door is closed and there's no sign of Clark and Dick other than something he thinks he can smell. That *hard* thing that's arousal plus guilt --

Plus fucking *shame* --

Dick should never be *ashamed* --

And Tim's wriggling free and staring at Jason. *Not* glaring, so that's something, but --

"How mad are you?"

Tim frowns. "You... were trying to protect me?"

"I think. I think he would've hurt you tonight, bro. Whether or not you wanted it."

"I *always* want it. And -- he's *smaller* than you --"

"That's not the kinda hurt I'm talking about. Well -- it's not the only kinda hurt."

Tim frowns *harder* --

"I know you don't get it, baby, but -- maybe trust me on this one?"

"That... it's when he was talking about wanting to be your john. That's what upset you?"

Jason winces. "That's one of the things, yeah. See, Dick's always known how fucked-up it is to be on the street. Hell, I think he knew at least a little about it when he was still in the circus, you know? For him to be thinking like that..." Jason shakes his head. "A part of him isn't thinking of us as his brothers."

"A *part* of him is thinking of us as his *lovers* --"

"No question there. At all. But there are whole *other* parts which don't think of us as *either* of those things. And -- I know you already know that."

That gets him the *pouty* frown that always makes him wanna chuck Tim's *chin* or something -- no, no, so not the time for it, no.

"Seriously, Tim --"

"I -- I know," he says, and crosses his arms over his chest. "We still have to help him."

"Absolutely. Just, you know, maybe with our clothes *on* for a while --"

"Oh -- *Jay*. You *know* it'll hurt him if we start acting like we're uncomfortable around him."

I *am* uncomfortable -- or. No. Jason sighs and lets himself fall back to the bed. "You're right."

"I *know* I am."

"Maybe -- maybe we should lock him up in a room with Bruce."

"It's not the *right* Bruce --"
"No, I know, but that's the thing -- *this* is a Bruce who *hasn't* gotten his cock wet with an underaged hero. Maybe he can still *think* straight --"

"*You're* the one who made out with him. You *know* he can't think straight --"

"*Argh*. Okay, okay. I'm thinking -- no, wait, *you* think," Jason says, leg-locking Tim and throwing him down next to him.

Tim bounces into snuggle position and starts gnawing on Jason's pec --

Jason cups the back of Tim's head and just -- enjoys for a minute. They *needed* Tim, and that was just --

Dick didn't even put up a *fight*, and now, yeah, Jason's wondering if it's at least partly because Dick wanted a piece, but that doesn't even really matter. Because --

("You're saying he knows the secret."

"Fuck, yeah, I am."

"You're saying he knows the secret and a lot *more* than that because he's a hacker."

"Dickie, he had your family tree, and you and I both know that that's only on two computers in the *world*, and that one of those computers is Vic's fucking *head*."

"You're saying he already knows --"

"Karate and judo, yeah. He's a little stiff, but -- fuck, Dick, what are *you* saying here?"

"Bring him home. *Right* now.")

And the look in his eyes had been *all* about the fact that a *part* of Dick thought Jason had fucked up by not bringing him home *before* asking --

They needed him, and now they have him, and it was just their fucked-up luck that Dick and Jason had been dealing with Two-Face while Tim recovered from his training in his parents' house on the night the Drakes had gone to *that* party. The one with the high-society tweakers with more firepower than brains --

They needed him, and they have him, and that's how it's going to stay. In a way, Two-Face has a piece of all of them, though Jason's not sure Tim's ever thought about it that way. All he knows for *sure* is that Tim's never blamed *them* -- and that a part of *Tim* was grateful for the chance to move into the manor -- and half into Jason's bedroom.

Jason kisses the top of Tim's head and promises always, promises forever, promises to make Tim get a less-stinky brand of post-patrol conditioner and never fucking mind the fact that Clark likes this one --

*Clark* is doing whatever the fuck it is that makes Dick *look* like he's coping with all the hot underaged vigilante ass in his house --

Their house.

And, suddenly, it seems *wrong* that Jason can't hear it, that --

Fuck, they *should* be sharing this, right?
"Jay?"

And yes, he *was* already sitting up in preparation for going to open the door, and maybe also Dick’s door, and maybe doing a little -- just a little -- more than that -- right. Jason snorts and pushes a hand back through his hair. "So maybe I'm a little... yeah."

"He needs us."

"He really does."

"Robin -- Robin needs a *flock* -- okay, no, that sounded... um."

"Pretty fucking gay, actually," Jason says, and ruffles Tim's hair until it's sticking out in all directions.

Tim gives him the meanest look he *has* --

Jason grins obnoxiously -- and catches the knuckle-y punch that was aimed *right* for his nipple.

"That's for *supervillainesses*.

"Well. You *were* being bitchy."

Jason coughs and squeezes Tim's fist in his hand. "Point to Team Drake."

"As it should be," Tim says, taking his fists back and kneeling up to straddle Jason's thighs --

"Oh, yeah?"

"I lubricated my rectum in the Cave."

"You -- Bruce was *sleeping* down there --"

"I was hoping he'd wake up, as I've said," Tim says, and gives Jason the eyebrow.

"Yeah, okay, but you gotta realize that I'm now thinking about *him* slicking you up."

"Not Clark? He *was* down there, too."

Jason sighs and gets a nice double-handful of Tim's ass. "I've *seen* that already. You were practically *meowing*."

"I was *not* --"

"Yeah, no, it was more of a yowl once he got that third finger in there."

Tim blushes -- no, that's a flush.

Jason licks his teeth. "Maybe that's what you want tonight? See how *much* of my hand I can get up there?"

"Oh -- fuck. Um. Maybe? It's just -- I'm also thinking about Dick."

*Right* --"Wait, yeah, you were supposed to come up with something --"

"He needs us, and he needs us to be at least mostly okay with the fact that he has a dark, burning passion for both of us --"

Jason snorts --
Tim smiles, slick and sly. "Maybe we *should* make fun of him."

Jason lets go of Tim for long enough to find -- there. Tim had dropped the lube near the center of the bed to get warm enough from their bodies. It's possible Dick was *sitting* on it. He slicks *himself* up, grabs Tim's skinny little perfect hips --

"Oh, Jay --"

"I think it might be dangerous to do that to him, baby."

"Yes, but it could be the *good* kind of dangerous --"

"It could also be the *wheatgrass* kind of dangerous."

Tim looks pained, and that --

He can't have that. "C'mon, tell me what you want Dick to be doing *right* now."

Tim grunts and stares into his eyes --

Jason does his *damnedest* to look encouraging --

"I want. I was thinking about him just... fucking me hard. Hard enough that I yell *every* time --"

"Where are his hands?"

"Ah. Um. One of them is on the back of my neck. He's holding me down."

"And the other one?"

Tim licks his lips and -- *that's* a blush.

Jason sucks in a breath and then pants it right back out. "Tell me, baby," he says, and squeezes Tim's hips *hard* --

"He. He's -- gripping your hair. Holding your head still. Making you watch."

Well... fuck. "You want that?"

"I want *everything* -- ah. I mean --"

"You mean you want everything. Don't backtrack. Me, I'm thinkin'... I'm thinkin' he could fuck me right *into* you."

Tim groans. "Oh, would you --"

"I've wanted him to fuck me pretty much from day one, baby," and Jason lifts Tim just enough -- "Get me in you. *Now*."

"Fuck -- oh, fuck, Jay --"

"The longer you make me wait? The longer I make *you* wait for Dickie."

"*Ohn* --"

And Tim reaches right down, gets a *mean* grip on Jason's cock --
Tugs against Jason's hold on his hips --

*Pulls* against Jason's hold on his hips until Jason eases up enough to *let* him position himself the way he wants to --

"*Now* --"

"*Fuck* me," and Tim takes him deep, so fucking --

Somehow he always forgets how *hot* Tim is inside, his own personal fucking *furnace* --

And so Jason takes a minute to just enjoy it, just feel Tim clenching and spasming around him as he tries *not* to scream and yell and *beg* --

And then Jason opens his eyes and raises an eyebrow. "You fuck Impulse yet?"

"Ah -- no. He doesn't *stretch*. Or -- the stretch doesn't *last* -- "

"You gonna do him anyway?"

Another blush --

Tim licks his *lips* --

"Heh. Yeah, you are. Maybe you'll even get Superboy to hold him wide open with his *power* --"

"I've had. That fantasy --"

"Twenty-seven times?"

"*Yesterday* --"

Jason snickers and groans, bounces Tim a little --

"Oh -- oh -- oh --"

"Yeah, baby. You're so sweet for me..."

"*Always* --"

"I wanna see you sucking Big Bird off, baby. I -- nnh. Wanna see you really go to *town* on his cock --"

"It's so -- he has a *foreskin* --"

"But he's used to treating his cock mean. He told me that he still jerks off the way he did when he was living in his parents' trailer -- fast and hard and faster than *that*. You don't have to -- have to be too gentle."

"Nnh -- I -- Jay, I need --"

"What do you need?"

That frown-line is deep on his forehead, his eyes are squeezed shut --

Jason reaches down between them and *squeezes* Tim's sac --
Tim shouts, eyes flying open -- "*Jay*!"

"*Tell* me."

"Make me -- make me scream --"

"You want Dickie to hear you? *Again*?"

"*Yes* --"

"You want him to know -- what he's not *having* --"

"God, *please* --"

Jason pants and stops bouncing him -- "You little fuckin' bitch. Grab my shoulders and hang on --
don't move your hands for *anything*., Get me?"

"Oh, *yes*, Jay, yes --"

"Do it --"

And those hands are *right* there, just *barely* not pinching pressure points --

"*Good* boy," Jason says, grabbing those hips again --

Lifting Tim while he pulls out --

"*Please* -- *ahn*!"

Fuck, this rhythm shouldn't be so *easy* --

Shouldn't --

He feels so *good*, so slick and right, so hot and fucking *tight*, because, no, he *hadn't* fucking
stretched himself. Tim had *just* slicked himself up and hoped that the big, bad Bat would catch him
at it, maybe ask a few questions, maybe --

Fucking *rumble* at him and *touch* --

And now Jason's grunting for it, because this rhythm is easy *because* it takes him right over, makes
him fucking --

Fucking *brutal* --

And Tim is yelling for him, tossing his head like it's just that good --

It *is* just that good. It --

"*Always*, Tim --"

Tim whimpers and lowers his head, *tries* to focus on him --

"You're perfect, make me feel so -- be *ready* --"

Another cry and Tim is *gripping* Jason's shoulders, digging his short little nails in and nodding,
panting --
Clenching hard enough to make Jason fucking *bark* as he shoves in as deep as he can, pulls Tim down and *grinds* them together, and it would suit the *Mission* for Tim to grow, but then he wouldn't be this *incredible* --

"God, baby, I *need* you --"

"Here -- I'm *here* --"

"*Drop*," Jason says, and they've done this enough times that there's hardly any awkwardness at all getting Tim on his back --

Getting his legs up around Jason's *chest* --

"Tell me you *want* it --"

"I want it, fuck me, *take* me --"

"Nuh-uh. *Bruce* will do the taking," and Jason starts the fuck right up again, cupping Tim's shoulders from the back and holding him *still* for the fuck, the right fuck, the best fuck except for all those *other* fucks --

"*Jay* --"

"What's that, baby? *Harder*?"

Tim yells and tosses his head, which is the kind of yes Jason *maybe* shouldn't listen to --

No, fuck that, Tim wants Dick to *hear* him --

Hear those yells turn to screams, louder and louder --

And a part of Jason wants to just close his eyes and *feel* this, fucking *wallow* in it and the way his cock feels almost *tenderized* by those clenches --

But Tim had told him once that it was *better* when he could see Jason staring down at him --

("Like you *own* me.")

And that had led to *just* this --

"Who do you belong to, bitch?"

"*Hnh* -- I -- oh --"

"*Say* it!"

"*You*, Jay, oh -- *please* --"

"*Milk* my cock while I'm fucking you," and Jason works to make his expression as mean as fucking possible --

Tim screams and does it, and it's gotta be *killing* him -- this is the kind of fuck where they'll maybe need to take a day or two *off* -- but --

God, so good --

So --
"So *sweet*. Yeah, you -- *nnh* --- just a little longer, baby --"

"More -- *more* --"

*Fuck* -- "Oh, *yeah*?"

And Tim focuses for a *hot* second, and his eyes are full of everything. Heat and hunger and shyness and *meanness* and --

Tim and Tink and Cardinal -- just the way he likes it. So Jason works in a twist of the hips, just enough that he's *glancing* off Tim's prostate a little from the side --

Tim claws at Jason's *sides* --

No, he's gotta do it the other way, gotta -- 'Losing control, baby --''

"Oh -- *yes* --"

He lines himself up again, kneels up and *shoves* Tim's knees back to his chest -- and now every thrust is *punishing* that little prostate --

Now Tim's screams are fucking *breathless* --

"You tell -- you tell Dick to put it to you *this* way, baby --"

"*His* way -- want -- I *want* --"

"*Fuck*, that's -- God, I hear you, I *hear* you, just give it to me, gimme everything --"

And Tim *immediately* starts trying to buck for him, *move* for him --

In this position he can only *rock*, but that's fucking good enough --

So good --

Tight and --

*Hard* clench, and it makes his eyes fly open --

Makes him realize they were *closed*. Can't do that, can't ever --

Jason uses everything he has *left* to glare down at Tim --

And Tim comes with a whimper that turns into a *wail*, spattering them both hot and sweet --

And Jason's *vision* is going for those clenches, whiting out, fuzzing out --

He can't *stop* --

"*Jay* --"

"Hnh -- *yours* --"

The clench gets *harder* --

And that's all he can do, all he can fucking *be*, because it feels like he's *forcing* himself into that tight little hole, feels like *he's* the one taking what doesn't fucking *belong* to him --
"Oh, fucking -- *Tim* --"

And he *loves* it when he can yell Tim's name just before he comes, because it means --

Something --

He's jerking-spilling-*yelling* --

Sweet fucking *Christ*, that's so *good* --

And holding on to Tim's lean little thighs is a great way to keep from falling on the kid. Heh.

But.

Jason opens his eyes just in time to catch that look of wonder and sweetness and *young* happiness Tim gets *every* time Jason yells his name out like that --

Blush.

Jason unfolds Tim a little without pulling out and *carefully* lowers himself down. He still slips out enough to make them both grunt, but it's good.

It's perfect.

It's --

Okay, they're laying *sideways* on the bed and Tim's head is actually dangling over the *edge* --

Jason snorts and bites Tim's neck. "Fucking *relax*. Were you holding your neck like that the whole time?"

"Well... yes?"

Jason bites Tim's neck *harder* -- and gets a clench that makes them both grunt *again*.

And Tim lets his head drop -- "This is going to get uncomfortable extremely quickly."

"Next time *tell* me to yank you further onto the bed."

"I didn't really have that many *words*, Jay --"

"Yeah, yeah. Puss."

Tim nerve-strikes Jason's damned *shoulder*.

"Okay, I *was* gonna drink half your shake for you while Dickie wasn't looking, but now you get it *all*.*"

"*Fuck*.*"

Jason snickers and licks the underside of Tim's chin. "Eh, maybe you'll grow. You never know."

Tim sighs and wriggles --

And Jason hauls them both up, uses his lingering hardness to push in again --

"*Oh* --"
And *then* gets them situated more or less the right way on the bed. "Sleep like *this*, baby."

In answer, Tim reaches back to turn off the lamp and then wraps his arm around Jason's chest.

Good deal.

*
Was he... very like Cardinal?

When Bruce wakes -- his body tells him that it's at least *near* dawn, and he's inclined to let that guide him for now -- Harvey's gurney is empty and Bruce is somewhat... scaly.

He'd always known unprotected sex would be messy, but the realities are --

Showers. There are showers here as there were in *his* universe, and, at this time of day, there will almost certainly be no teenagers in them. The part of him which speaks with Clark's voice is murmuring something teasing about 'the perfect crime,' but Bruce need not listen.

Why *had* he designed the showers to be comfortable for four people at a time? What had he been thinking? He has a vague memory of thinking about aiming multiple streams of water at himself, but he'd never actually *done* that --

And he's not getting any less disreputable just lying here.

He stands up, wraps the sheet around him just in case, and heads toward the showers --

And hears Harvey humming what seems to be a very *old* song. Perhaps something from the 'swing' era?

Bruce drops his sheet and walks into the steamy heat --

"Whoa -- oh, thank God it's just you, big guy. The *last* thing I needed to see this morning was naked teenager ass," Harvey says, and he's smiling easily, warmly --

"How... how do you feel?"

"I --" Harvey shakes his head and points to the shower head next to his own.

"Of course," Bruce says, and walks over --

"Careful, it comes out ridiculously cold at first -- and you already know that. Heh. God, big guy, I should've known you'd be able to keep a secret like no one else."

He sounds so clear, so --

No, not happy, but *calm* -- and Bruce realizes that he hasn't heard *that* in Harvey's voice in a long, long time. Of course, he'd always been so *busy* --

Bruce shivers once for the blast of cold, breathing deeply with his head down --

"Hey, are *you* okay?" And Harvey's hand is on his shoulder, strong and warm and clean of everything --

Bruce looks up and smiles. "You sound wonderful, Harv. It's occurring to me how much that wasn't the case in the past year."

Harvey winces and squeezes Bruce's shoulder before letting his hand drop. "You're not wrong. I was really a *mess*. Bruce. I still am, actually -- but now I can see it from the outside, a little," and Harvey smiles ruefully. "That J'onn guy doesn't mess around."

Bruce nods slowly -- hm. "Would you have used a curse there instead of 'mess' if you were talking to
someone other than me?"

Harvey blinks, coughs -- "Ah -- probably? You told me about how your Dad hated cursing when we were *kids*, big guy. I remember *some* things."

"You remember much," Bruce says, considering while he lathers his hands. "I'm not sure I want to be responsible for censoring you, Harv."

"It's not censoring. It's just being polite -- I don't have to curse all the time, and I know it makes you happy when I don't -- hey, how the hell do you get those mooks out on the street to listen to you, anyway? Most of them only *know* curses."

Bruce frowns -- "Violence, mostly. Sometimes it takes a great deal to *make* them listen."

Harvey blows out a breath and starts washing his hair with the shampoo on the shelf placed at *Bruce's* hand-level --

Just as the soap dish is higher than it is in most other showers. Clearly, he hadn't been thinking of teenagers *then*. Or, if he had, those thoughts had been buried very deeply, indeed. And --

Harvey. "Harv... I'm so sorry I didn't notice."

"You *did* notice, big guy. You asked me if I was all right every time you saw me -- usually two or three times."

"Still --"

"Still *nada*," and Harvey turns to face Bruce with his hands in his soapy hair. "I blew you off *every* time, and that's on me. God, how I *ever* thought I could deal with this crap by myself --"

"You *won't* be alone," Bruce says, trying and mostly failing to keep the Batman out of his voice --

And Harvey grins at him and winks. "No, I *won't*, because just as soon as I track down Gilda, I'm taking myself to a damned shrink for a good, long while."

Bruce blinks and pauses in soaping himself. "You're not planning to return to our universe?"

"Big guy, think -- how much of our universe is even still *there*? Wherever there is. Uh." Harvey shakes himself like a dog. "Half of me wishes I'd taken more physics classes. The rest of me thinks that'd just make my head hurt *more* now."

"I... I have to try to go back."

"And if you get sucked into a pocket that sends you to an even *more* screwed-up universe? No, Bruce, the *smart* thing is for us to track down our friends and loved ones and settle someplace *quiet*."

"And if there's no such thing?"

Harvey frowns. "There is."

"Harv --"

"There -- heh. There's always *this* world, you know? From what those kids have been saying, they could probably use *both* of us, you know?" And Harvey is being honest -- Bruce can *feel* that -- but there's also a shadow *behind* those words... and Bruce knows what it is.
"I... haven't yet looked at their files on the you from this universe --"

"You should," Harvey says, sharp and *hard*. "You gotta know what I can do if it all goes to hell, Bruce."

"But you feel better --"

"Heh. Better enough to *know* better, you mean. 'cause I can see all the little -- and huge -- fuck-ups my brain was throwing at me, which means I can see them *coming*, but if they all hit me at once? Like maybe if something pissed me off just that much?" Harvey shakes his head. "I have *no* problem with the idea of finding my Gilda and bringing her here where she'd have a bunch of vigilantes fucking invested in keeping an eye on my behavior."

"You sound like you're volunteering to be *imprisoned*, Harv."

Harvey raises his eyebrows. "Do I? Maybe, I guess. To me... to me, it just feels like being practical. J'onn *showed* me things in my head. Ugly, horrible, *crazy* things, and I could tell that they were all *my* things. I could feel where they fit in my head and where they *hid* in there, and right about now? I wanna stay *real* damned close to people who can tell when I'm about to lose it. Maybe I won't feel the same in a few weeks or months, but for now? Freedom's overrated."

Bruce frowns again --

"Big guy --"

"I've always... I've always needed you to be free, if only so I could see what you did with it, Harv."

And Harvey gets a very *soft* look on his face --

He pushes his soapy hair back from his forehead and walks close, cupping both of Bruce's shoulders --

"Maybe... maybe you haven't been free for a real long time, Bruce?"

Bruce nods, and realizes he's just standing here with soapy hands -- "I should --"

"Wait -- wait a sec, okay?"

Bruce nods again, and wishes he could smell Harvey over the scents of water and soap and shampoo --

There's water dripping from his jaw, the lobes of his ears --

Bruce has never bitten him there, of course, but a part of him is insistent that it knows how that would *feel* --

"Jesus, all your *scars* -- this is why you wouldn't go to the beach with me and Gilda last month?"

"I -- I was working a case --"

"They call you -- they say you're a detective like no one else, and that just tells me that I should've known it was you, because no one else puts things *together* like you do, even when we were in *school* --"

"No, Harv, you were always the brilliant one, so passionate about knowledge --"
Harvey cuts Bruce off by squeezing his shoulders hard. "*You* didn't need passion to get by, big guy. You had -- God, everything else. And you still do," and Harvey grins at him, sunny and warm - - "What the hell was I talking about?"

Probably not making love -- "I'm not entirely sure, Harv."

"Ah, big guy -- you know what it is? When we were kids, you were all wrapped up in your grief -- no freedom there. A little older than that and you were traveling the world learning how to make your body do all those crazy *things* -- yeah?"

Bruce nods --

"Yeah. So maybe six months after you get back from -- what was the last place you visited?"

"Brazil."

"Yeah, okay, and I bet you didn't even look up from your studies to check out the hot salsa dancers - - uh, anyway. Suddenly there's a damned *Bat*-man flying all over Gotham, lurking on the roof of Central and making poor Jim about ten years older *overnight* --"

"I always. I wanted to make things easier for him. For both of you."

Harvey frowns mildly and searches Bruce -- and then blinks and smiles. "I didn't know you liked redheads, too, big guy."

Oh -- Bruce blushes --

Harvey sighs and reaches up to rub at Bruce's cheek a little -- "I guess I know why you didn't just go with a Zorro-mask?"

"I've gotten better -- to some extent. I rarely blush for strangers, anymore."

A nod -- "You... you never stopped wanting me, did you?"

"Harv --"

"Please. Tell me."

Bruce closes his eyes for a moment -- and when he opens them again, he can smile. "Considering what I've been told about how the Bruce from this universe conducted himself with young men... at present, I feel rather better for having spent half my life mooning over you."

Harvey laughs *and* frowns -- "Okay, that's fair, but -- uh. What does that mean?"

"Robin was Bruce's lover."

"He's... twenty-three?"

"Twenty-five. His Bruce was murdered six years ago... after they had been lovers for six years."

Harvey's jaw drops and he steps back, making Bruce instantly regret having said anything -- "Are you *serious*?"

Bruce smiles ruefully. "I'm afraid so."

"*Jesus*. Just -- do you *go* for kids that young?"
Children, yes -- Bruce shakes his head. "I never thought so --"

"That's past tense. Why is that past tense?"

"Superman has been... focused about making me face things about myself, Harvey --"

"*[Harv]*, you call me *[Harv]* --"

"I -- if you're sure --"

"Are you telling me that you're *going* to go after kids like some kinda *predator*?"

"*[No]* --"

"But you wanna go back to our universe and... find Robin? This kid who's -- what? Sixteen years younger than you with *no* experience, *no* huge muscles or detection ability or --"

"Actually, Mr. Dent, what Robin had to offer was more than any of that combined," and that's -- Cardinal. He's dressed in a school uniform save for the mask over his eyes. The ensemble makes him look both older and younger than he had in just his Cardinal uniform, as if the mask conveys some sort of -- faintly corrupt -- maturity while the school uniform removes doubt --

Bruce doesn't know --

"*[Jesus]*, kid. You ever hear of privacy?"

Cardinal looks Harvey over and smiles sharply. "Not in these showers."

"I -- point. And I know this is your place and *not* mine, but --"

"*[But]* you're about to lay into Bruce for, essentially..." Cardinal sighs and shakes his head. "I never knew our Bruce, but I know precisely how much he meant to Robin. You can quibble all you'd like about the moral rectitude of the two of them entering into a romantic and sexual relationship, but please keep in mind that Robin is my *guardian*, and so you are, as Starling would say, talking shit about my *parents*.

Harvey rears back and shakes his head. "That -- kid --"

"Cardinal, please."

Harvey closes his eyes and blows out a breath. "Okay. Cardinal. I -- wait, how *long* have you been running around on the streets like this?"

"I was twelve when I started training and thirteen when I took the Oath and was given my sanction. I'm fifteen now."

Oath -- but could it be the same? He feels as though he's staring *daggers* at Cardinal, but all the boy does is smile at him with a sort of gentle *acceptance* --

And Harvey's hand is on Bruce's chest, pushing him back to the wall --

"Harv?"

"He's too *young*, big guy!"

Bruce frowns. "I wasn't -- it's only that I have questions for him --"
"I'll answer all of them I can, Bruce," Cardinal says, and this time his smile is -- openly flirtatious.

Oh --

Harvey growls. "*Bruce*. You were looking at him the way you look at *me* sometimes."

Bruce winces. "I understand. I will never offer injury or hurt --"

"Robin said you wouldn't," and Cardinal's smile has neither dimmed nor dulled --

"Look, Cardinal, you may think that it's okay for you to get involved with an older guy -- and there's definitely nothing wrong with you getting involved with a guy period --"

"Oh, I'm *very* glad you think so, Mr. Dent," and Cardinal leans against the doorway, face pulling oddly -- no, he's raising an eyebrow behind his mask. "I... Mr. Dent."

"I'm listening, Cardinal."

Cardinal touches his tongue to his upper lip for a long moment --

Long enough for Bruce to wonder about the *quality* of his noticing it, about the motives and murk *behind* that noticing --

And then Cardinal sighs. "I'm not going to try to say that you know nothing about the nature of intergenerational relationships and the myriad ways they can affect the participants -- that would be ridiculous -- but you have to understand that Starling, Skylark, I, and all of the other teenaged vigilantes have made a choice to put our lives on the line for the greater good. For *justice*. Neither you nor anyone else will stop us -- *can* stop us -- from making other sorts of choices, entirely. And we will *profoundly* resent any efforts on your part to *try*.

Harvey's fingers curl in against Bruce's chest --

Bruce *covers* Harvey's hand --

Harvey shivers and steps back, shaking his head and turning away. "I need to finish showering. I -- fuck. I don't know anything right now," he says, and much of the calm is gone from his voice despite the fact that he's not shouting or even straining.

Cardinal's nostrils flare and he reaches for his -- perfectly innocent -- belt --

No. Bruce moves to cup Harvey's shoulders, to rub at the tension, to try to *will* Harvey to feel confidence in himself, in his own *sanity* --

"I'm okay, big guy --"

"You're not."

"Heh. I -- did you see it on me before or *after* Cardinal over there got ready to *destroy* me?"

"At... it was almost simultaneous. Harv, tell me what's wrong?"

"This -- I. I was going with the idea that maybe this universe could be --" Harvey shakes his head again. "I don't know. They're *kids*. They're -- Christ, how old's the *girl*?"

"Skylark is sixteen, and you should probably think twice before you say anything remotely sexist or
patronizing, as I'm not above editing this footage down just for her."

"Footage -- the *shower* is bugged?"

Bruce fights back a blush badly. "Sometimes I grow paranoid about whether or not there have been intruders in the Cave."

Harvey looks at him as if he's *mad* --

Bruce smiles ruefully. "It seemed the better choice."

"Than *what*?"

"Staying up for several days in a row lurking near every entrance I could find."

*That* makes Harvey seem *pained* -- but he also doesn't seem to be getting lost in the terrible labyrinths of his mind, anymore.

Bruce nods internally and squeezes Harvey's shoulders. "I promise to always try to be the man you want me to be, Harv."

A different pained look --

And when Harvey pulls Bruce close --

It's too much not to think about his body, so strong and sleek in the water. His skin is scarred here and there, but nothing like Bruce's own. He has almost no chest hair, but what abdominal hair he has is thick, as dark as Bruce's own. His penis is soft, *vulnerable* against Bruce's own --

"You've always been the best, big guy. I thought -- God, I don't know what I thought when you started going around acting like an idiot --" Harvey pulls back and searches him. "Was it that you couldn't trust me? That some part of you knew that I was falling apart?"

"No, I -- I never meant to tell *anyone*, Harv. I always thought that it was something I had to do alone. The Batman was allowed allies from time to time, but I couldn't -- I couldn't let myself become *distracted*.

"You -- *distracted*? And *I'm* the crazy one?"

"Hn. We never said Bruce wasn't crazy, *too*," Cardinal says --

Bruce had *forgotten* him for a moment --

What does he think when he sees Bruce holding Harvey like this? What assumptions does he make? How would it feel if *all* of them were entirely correct --

"-- saying that Robin *helped* him or something?"

No, he must pay attention. He swings Harvey around enough that they can both see Cardinal --

"*Jesus*, big guy --"

"I'm sorry. I must know."

Harvey looks more *resigned* than troubled --
Had he seen this in Bruce before? Had he *suspected*?

"Go ahead, Cardinal, tell us what happened," Harvey says, and Bruce knows he'd phrased it that way *for* Bruce --

Bruce grips Harvey tighter, tries to be *comforting*, at least --

And Harvey's smile for him is small, but there. Bruce takes a deep breath and turns to find Cardinal examining them both with a sort of *quiet* intensity --

And Bruce is abruptly sure that *that* expression is the most common one on Cardinal's face, that his *default* social position is that of the one who studies -- no, Bruce doesn't know him, yet. He can't make assumptions like that. He --

He will ask.

Cardinal sighs and nods once. "The older heroes, to a man -- and woman -- found Bruce's personality perfectly horrible. Some few appreciated his efficacy and professionalism, but no one really *wanted* to work with him other than Superman, and even Superman has admitted to wanting to throw Bruce into orbit more than once."

"What? He's *Bruce*. You can't not like *Bruce*."

Oh... Harvey... "I... believe Cardinal was referring to the role I played as the Batman, Harv."

Harvey frowns. "Sure, you were a little creepy and annoying when we all met up at Central, but you weren't an *asshole*."

Cardinal smiles again, and Bruce wonders what it looks like when his smiles offer no threat.

He's such a *sharp*-featured boy, so lean and spare --

"To you and Jim Gordon? Probably not. That would certainly make sense given what Robin knows of that era. To everyone else... well, Bruce?"

"The Batman has an image to maintain."

"Mm-*hm*," and Cardinal licks his teeth, shifting enough that the left side of his jacket falls behind his body, exposing... his shirt. Just his shirt. "Suffice it to say, that image was of an arrogant, broody, rude, brusque, judgmental -- I could go on, but I'm sure you get the point...?"

"And you're saying Robin changed all that."

"Not overnight, to be sure. Most of the people who were around then agree that it probably took at least a quarter of the length of Robin's training before Batman became someone occasionally worth speaking to," Cardinal says, and turns to him. "Someone occasionally like himself."

Bruce frowns. "Was that wise? Perhaps if he'd been more professional --"

"The bullet that killed our Bruce..." Cardinal shakes his head. "It was a graze on his right arm -- a wound much like the ones our Bruce had accustomed himself to ignoring until the battle in question was done, and that's just what he did. The Joker had worked with poisons twice before, but there had to be injections, repeated doses... he was no master chemist. There was no reason to expect the bullet to have been coated in poison -- much less with one that virulent. Our Bruce captured the Joker with Robin's help... and almost immediately collapsed. The paralysis didn't start affecting him until
enough of the poison had reached his brain --"

"And, once it began, it worked very quickly, indeed," Robin says, and cups Cardinal's shoulders. "You were supposed to sleep for another hour, little brother."

Cardinal winces. "I --"

"Wanted to brace the confused and *very* naked men in the shower? I caught that," and he turns Cardinal around to face him. "Your shake is waiting for you in the kitchen, and I *know* you'll want to drink it before it gets much warmer, yes...?"

Cardinal makes a distinctly *nauseated* sound --

And Robin's smile is bright with cruel joy -- and open love and affection for... his little brother.

"Robin --"

"Ah-ah-ah, begging's for your *other* brother," Robin says, and gives Cardinal a playful -- but firm -- shove.

Cardinal departs at a jog --

Robin has his lenses down, and so, when he stops smiling, he looks more blank and ominous than anything else.

Harvey steps away from Bruce and raises his hands --

"You -- think I'm threatening you. And that's actually a perfectly reasonable thought for you to have," and Robin rubs his temple. "God. I'm sorry, Dent. You've never done anything to me or mine, and it was wrong for me to treat you as though you had. Truce?" And Robin is raising *both* of his eyebrows behind the mask --

Harvey raises his own and lifts his chin -- and then nods. "Truce. Look, lemme just get this shampoo out of my hair before it shellacs itself there and you can talk to Bruce as much as you want, okay?"

"I appreciate that," and Robin smiles slightly and shrugs off his robe, revealing a body *crisscrossed* with scars.

Most of them by far are on his legs and arms -- thanks presumably to that *nothing* of a uniform he used to wear -- but there are many more on his chest --

Robin laughs. "You can check out the ones on my back when you wash it for me, Bruce."

Bruce blinks -- "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stare."

"I always wanted your eyes on me, boss."

"Okay! I'm done," Harvey says --

"Harv --"

Harvey smiles at him, amused and *bright*. "It's okay. *I'm* okay. I'm... gonna lift some weights or something, all right?"

Bruce holds back an apologetic frown and nods.
Harvey claps Bruce's shoulder and walks out, gesturing Robin to the spray he's leaving behind.

"Thank you," Robin says, and takes it, immediately wetting his hair and then flipping it back out of his face. It's not quite shoulder-length --

"You've never made love with him."

He knows, of course, that Robin means Harvey -- "No, I haven't."

Robin nods and begins soaping himself with care. He moves neither quickly nor slowly --

"Did you... sleep well?"

Robin's smile is as sharp as one of Cardinal's. "Are you offering small talk to distract yourself or are you honestly interested?"

That... "I can honestly say that there's nothing I don't want to know about your family."

"Especially Starling...?"

Bruce needs to actually *clean* himself -- he works on doing so. "I'm not sure... Robin, I'm at a loss. There's so much I didn't know about myself. About my... potential."

Robin nods. "When you touched me, at first, it was always abundantly clear that you wanted me *badly*... and that you didn't *want* to want me."

"You were -- so young."

Another smile. "So were you. You told me -- on our first anniversary as partners -- that you'd been a virgin. I've never told that to anyone else. A part of me was actually *embarrassed* for you."

"I imagine I didn't perform especially --"

"No, you were wonderful. *Every* time. You made me feel wanted, needed, loved... you made me think that if something terrible happened and we were the last two people on earth... that it would still be all right," and Robin's smile is gentler this time. "I was *surprised* that you were a virgin -- even though there was no one I could think of who *could* have made love with you. I suppose I thought you'd found someone briefly during your travels."

"But -- to be embarrassed --"

Robin laughs and sluices off. "Oh, Bruce. You were pushing *thirty* when we made love the first time. I was pushing fourteen -- and had already started thinking about taking up various people on their various offers. I would have, too -- if you hadn't finally walked into my bedroom one night and closed the door behind you," and Robin's expression is distant --

Lost to the past? Bruce crouches to wash his legs and feet and waits --

"You were so... you're missing a few of the scars I memorized back then, but the rest of them are in all the right places. I can't look at you without wanting you, Bruce."

"I'd like. Please let me know you," Bruce says, looking up --

"I also can't look at you without... mourning isn't a good enough word for it. Part of me has been screaming and crying nonstop for the past six years."
"I don't think I would ever have left you --"

"Me?"

"Someone. I can't imagine making love to anyone without first being in love with them, Robin. Perhaps it is embarrassing, but Harvey never wanted me that way --"

"He did."

Bruce blinks and focuses -- he *tries* to focus on where he believes Robin's eyes are -- "What do you mean?"

"He -- by which I mean Two-Face on enough anti-psychotics and mood stabilizers to choke an emotionally-disturbed *horse* -- told Cardinal all about it. How Bruce Wayne was his only true friend, how he used to beat himself up for pretending not to need him, how he hated himself for never kissing him... and so on," Robin says, and grabs one of the bottles of shampoo. "Cardinal wrote a heavily-edited report of that particular visit to Arkham in order to protect my feelings, but I made him tell me everything, anyway."

What --

Could his Harvey be the same?

*Why* would he keep himself apart --

"My guess? Being in love with Gilda Baines Dent and the concept of monogamy. Before that... well, how many openly gay politicians do *you* know?"

Bruce winces. "I hadn't meant to say that aloud --"

"I know," Robin says, and gives him another gentle smile. "You love him like no one else."

"I don't measure love as some... there is no competition in my mind or heart, Robin."

Robin narrows his eyes and cocks his head to the side, studying Bruce in much the same way Cardinal had done. Bruce stands and offers as much of himself as he can, from the arousal he feels for the memory of Harvey's body against his own, to the curiosity Cardinal had engendered in him, to this moment -- with a man close to his own age and infinitely beyond him in terms of life experience -- and vigilante experience, as well.

"I -- I would learn from you."

Robin shivers and reaches up to touch Bruce's face, stroking against the grain of the stubble -- "I believe you. I believed you then, too. You just never *stopped* loving Dent, and so never stopped needing to try and make it better for him. You would've done the same for me..." Robin smiles ruefully. "I'm not a kid anymore. I'm not quite sure *how* that happened, but... I can recognize *you* when I see you. And you were never capable of falling out of love."

Bruce swallows and nods, reaching up to cup Robin's hand against his face --

Robin sighs and pulls back, turning -- "Let me feel your hands on me again, Bruce."

"I --"

"Please," Robin says, quiet and calm -- but still pleading.
"Yes," Bruce says, lathering his hands and using what he's learned of massage --

Robin *gasps* -- but he doesn't stop Bruce. He just walks forward and braces himself against the tile. He --

"Robin..."

"Don't stop. Don't -- just keep going."

Bruce nods and can't -- this --

This *desire* for him --

They don't know each other -- no. Robin knows him, understands him, loves --

Bruce massages more firmly, seeking out points of tension and working them away. He moves on something like instinct, because the sensei who had taught him much of what he knows of aikido had also been fanatical about the importance of easing the body after hard work -- and about developing healthy friendships between himself and his students. Bruce had been terrible at both when he began, but the sensei had only pushed him more, demanded more *of* him --

And Bruce doesn't know what the man would've thought of this. This -- there is no friendship in this touch -- not once he pulls Robin back into the spray to sluice away the soap and reveal muscle, deep olive skin, scars --

Bruce strokes and tries to learn Robin with his hands, tries to understand -- but. "You're beautiful."

Robin laughs. "Even like this...?"

"I -- I don't know how you looked as a boy --"

"Oh... rounder-cheeked. Skinnier. Just a *little* bendier. Puppy fat on my face and ass --"

Bruce's swallow is much too loud --

"Oh, Bruce... I forgive you for everything. You know that, right?"

"Robin..."

"Dick. I'm *Dick* --"

*Permission* -- but. "You -- not... Richard?"

Robin's laugh is musical and bright. It echoes off the walls and seems to *urge* Bruce, to make him *need* more --

"Please --"

"Never Richard or Ricky or anything like that. Just Dick -- though I let *some* people call me Dickie."

"I -- truly?"

*Dick* smiles back over his lean-muscled shoulder. His lenses are up, revealing eyes that flash like blades -- no, the blue is too soft for that.
Bruce touches Dick's cheek. "I will call you anything you wish to be called --"

"Just my name, Bruce. Just -- oh."

And for a moment Bruce is confused... but then he realizes that he's cupping Dick's hips. He swallows again. "Is this all right?"

"What -- what do you want from me, Bruce? Tell me everything --"

"I want to *know* you. I want you to help me understand --"

"Yourself? Or me? Or the family?"

"All of you, everything --"

"Are you attracted to Cardinal?"

"I -- he's very. Very small --"

Dick smiles again, moving his left hand from the wall to cover Bruce's own on his hip. "Starling --"

"He. He told me his name."

Dick gasps -- "Oh... dirty little wing. I guess you *do* already know how to kiss the sense out of a guy. Fine. *Jason* loves how small Cardinal is."

Oh... "They're lovers?"

"For almost three years now. Jason *found*/ Cardinal, and only hesitated long enough to *ask* me before bringing him home to us. Where he belongs --" Dick shakes his head and licks his lips. "He likes to pick Cardinal up and move him where he wants him. *Everywhere* he wants him."

"Cardinal... he seems very happy. Very *secure*, I mean --"

"He is -- most of the time. He -- Jason *helped* him. Just like you helped me, boss," and Dick lets his head hang.

"You -- I would like to kiss you here. The back of your neck --"

"*Mm* -- fuck. Do it --"

Bruce leans in and presses his lips there. The hair is soft and wet, sleek -- he doesn't shave here, or perhaps he hasn't had his hair trimmed for a very long time --

This life can make one so *busy* --

"Bruce..."

His name was almost *swallowed* -- and Bruce realizes that he's kissing Dick there over and over, *licking* against the grain of Dick's hair -- "I'd like. To make love to your scrotum. I... please tell me what I may have with you."

Dick laughs again, more breathless this time. "With me? There's nothing you can't have with me."

"Oh -- Dick..."

"Squeeze me. My hips. Let me feel -- *mm*. Oh, Bruce, I -- Jesus, your mouth on my throat -- no,
don't stop --"

Bruce kisses the side of Dick's throat wetly, indulging himself in the *thrill* of flesh, of tension --

Where Dick is hard to the touch, he is holding himself that way. He's human, and so is his strength. It's *possible* for Bruce to bite too hard, to bruise and abrade --

Dick moans and throws his head back, tensing more -- and relaxing all over when Bruce pulls his body against his own. That --

No, he won't ask *yet*. He sucks Dick's throat and strokes his terrifyingly scarred body, always holding him as close as possible --

"*Please*.

Bruce bites down --

Dick cries out and *shoves* his buttocks back against Bruce's thighs, and that --

"Tell me, Dick. Tell me what you want --"

"Touch me, hold me, *talk* to me --"

"Will you --"

"*Yes* --"

And Bruce doesn't -- it's *necessary* to spin Dick back against the wall, to tilt his head up and study his eyes --

He looks *drugged* --

"Who *are* you, Dick?"

"The boy -- oh, God --" He gasps and then there's another of those musical laughs. They aren't quite feminine, but they're *very* far from masculine --

"Please tell me --"

"I'm the man who *used* to be the boy who would've done anything for you at *any* time, no matter who else it hurt --"

"No, I would never --"

Dick presses two fingers to Bruce's mouth. "No, you wouldn't. And that just made me *determined* to be perfect for you, to be *right* --"

Bruce kisses Dick, and he can't make himself close his eyes for it --

Dick keeps his eyes open, too, and they're looking deep within his own, seeking and, perhaps, *finding*, because *eventually* he closes his eyes and presses close --

His lean, sleek body --

The staggering and *startling* interruptions of his scars --

Bruce strokes Dick's sides and back --
No, he cups the back of Dick's head and pulls him more deeply into the kiss --

Dick groans and claws Bruce's back, and Bruce has to buck, grunt like an animal and shove Dick back against the tile --

Kiss, yes, but there are other places to kiss, other ways to appreciate, worship, ask --

Bruce breaks the kiss. "Tell me. Tell me what you always wanted your Bruce to do --"

"He gave me everything --"

"I want --"

"He didn't." Dick moans and shakes his head, squeezes his eyes shut and reaches to stroke Bruce's stubble again --

"Did I hurt you --"

"God, no, just -- " He opens his eyes again and pants, licks his lips -- "He never let me suck him enough. There -- there is no enough for that."

Bruce pants. "I wanted -- I thought it would be something --"

"That you could do for me...?" Dick's smile is wet and sly, bright -- "Trust me when I say it is... though I think it's possible that Tink loves this even more than I do," and Dick pushes Bruce back --

"Please --"

"Let me," and Dick's eyes are serious, hard with pleading --

"Yes," Bruce says, and it's the only answer he can give, the only possible way to acknowledge --

Dick drops to his knees gracefully, easily despite the scars showing on his knees and lower thighs --

Perhaps the injuries were minor. Perhaps --

Perhaps he'll be able to do nothing save breathe roughly for this, to pant like a bellows for the feel of Dick's hand around the base of his penis --

"Oh, Bruce..."

"Yes. I --"

"Did Clark do this for you, yet?"

"No. I didn't think to ask --"

"Understandable, you being you, " Dick says, and kisses along Bruce's shaft. "What surprises me -- God, I wish I did this while you still had Clark's come all over you --"

Bruce grunts again and feels himself twitch --

"Oh. Ooh. Was that a happy thought...?" Dick looks up at him and raises his eyebrows behind the mask --

"I imagine... I imagine you and Clark are beautiful together."
Dick pants twice --

Dick kisses the head of Bruce's penis *wetly* --

"I don't know if you would've found last night beautiful or not, Bruce..."

"You -- you made love with Clark last night?"

"He saved me from myself -- again. He's promised to always do just that, that -- that it's no hardship - -" Dick groans quietly and *licks* the head of Bruce's penis, lingering at the meatus. "You taste the same. So much the *same* --"

"I don't. I don't think I know what you mean --"

"I want my brothers, Bruce. I want their hands on me, I want *them* on their hands and knees. I want to take them, hurt them, *touch* them -- " Dick *sucks* --

"Dick --"

Dick closes his eyes and sucks *harder*, forcing Bruce to grab at the tiled wall, hold himself *up* --

Is this what he'd made Clark feel?

This --

There is such *power* for the one who fellates --

Is that what the Bruce from this universe wanted to deny to Dick?

How could he deny *anything* -- "Please, Dick --"

Dick pulls off and pants more, licks his lips -- they're already swollen.

"You're so beautiful..."

"Heh. The first time you told me that you were *teasing* me, Bruce."

"I -- " Bruce tries to shake off the haze of arousal. "I'm sorry, I don't know what I was thinking --"

"Easy, easy," Dick says, and pats Bruce's hips. "That was one of the things I taught you -- how to make teasing work between friends."

"Teasing... I've never thought it could be..." Bruce shakes his head. "I've joked with Clark, but to say something deliberately hurtful --"

"It was all *right*. I laughed, too -- *after* you finally let me take off the dress, the heels, the stockings, the falsies, the *gaff*, the *makeup*..."

"I -- I disguised you as a *woman*?"

Another of those musical laughs -- "A *beautiful* woman, boss," and Dick licks him, sucks kisses along the vein -- "You let me change the subject. *That's* not good."

"Surely you don't expect me to judge you for desiring them? You *know* them --"

"And they're wonderful, so perfect and wonderful -- *mm* --" And Dick takes half of him in a gulp, making Bruce's flesh feel too tight, his mind too *hot*, somehow --
"*Dick* --"

Dick *nods* and sucks in pulses, rhythmic and *firm* --

So -- "You'll unmake me --"

Dick slurs *no* and scrapes with his *teeth* --

Bruce groans and cups the back of Dick's head with one hand --

Dick pulls *back* --

"*Please*, Dick --"

"I used Clark last night, the way I've done -- too many times since taking Jason in. I used him, and I *made* him use me, and I don't deserve his friendship --" 

And then Clark is *there*, chewing on what appears to be a muffin and wagging his finger at Dick --

Who splutters and hides his face against Bruce's thigh. That --

"I'm afraid I'm deeply confused," Bruce says, and strokes Dick's hair as gently as he can --

Dick is laughing breathlessly, and that seems like an improvement, but the simple fact of the matter is that Bruce is absolutely sure that he's incapable of speaking with any degree of intellect at the moment. He decides to focus on looking hopeful at both of them --

"*You* -- oh, excuse me," Clark says in a rather muffled voice before swallowing hugely and sighing. "Dick, you didn't *use* me."

Dick strokes Bruce's thighs. "Yes, I did --"

"You were imagining your brothers performing acts I would dearly love to see them perform --"

"*Clark* --"

"And you were making love to *me*, as you always do," and Clark moves close, heedless of the spray as he crouches down beside Dick -- "Oh, my, that's truly --" Clark *kisses* the head of Bruce's penis --

Bruce grunts for the heat --

Dick snorts and tugs Bruce's penis closer to his own mouth. "Wait your *turn*, Clark."

"Yes, I will, of course, but it was right *there* -- and you've begun to feel guilty for far too many things."

"I can't *live* like you, Clark --"

"And no one is asking you to do so --"

"Guilt's the only thing that keeps me from doing *terrible things* --"

"Loving things, beautiful things -- you don't know how much your brothers love and need you. You won't *let* yourself know."

"And I'm making you talk about them *again* instead of -- ow --"
Bruce loosens his grip on Dick's hair. "I'm sorry, Dick, but it seemed the thing to do. And I believe Clark began discussing your brothers first."

Dick frowns -- but it's not a scowl. It's a troubled thing, a *hurt* thing --

"Oh, Dick..." Clark clasps Dick's shoulder and squeezes, undoubtedly filling Dick with warmth and security. "There is nothing I wouldn't give if it would make you happy."

"And you, Clark? What makes *you* happy?"

"To see your family complete, at long last... though of course it could be *more* complete," Clark says, and squeezes again. "There are other things -- such as the completion coming in the form of a Bruce who enjoys my company --"

"I've always enjoyed your company, Clark. I -- I can't imagine that changing."

"Oh, beloved friend... yes, I see, you *pretended* --"

"And I will never do that again, unless it's some deception I must enact for the sake of the Mission."

Clark sighs and smiles at him -- and turns back to Dick. "I know I must have seemed reluctant last night, but truly it was only because your brothers seemed so *willing* --"

"Jason was holding -- Cardinal back --"

"He needed more time, it's true... but you didn't hear the conversation he and Cardinal had after we left. They will not turn away from you now -- and the only time *I* will turn away from you is when I believe you can be better served by another. Assuming I'm feeling altruistic at the time, of course,"

and Clark smiles quite sharply --

Dick shivers and reaches up to cover Clark's hand on his shoulder with his free one. "I'll think about what you've said."

"Good --"

"And I do. I do make love to you every time --"

Clark kisses Dick firmly, twining his fingers with Bruce's own in Dick's hair and making Bruce pull again --

*Harder* this time --

And Dick begins to moan. It's low and quiet at first, but rapidly becomes higher, louder --

Dick is *shaking* --

Dick breaks the kiss and swallows Bruce *whole*, making Bruce stagger on his feet --

And then he simply *does* have his back against the tile. Clark had found a way to lift and move them both --

Dick gives Clark the thumbs-up --

Clark steps out of the spray and *blurs* -- no, he's dried himself. He's still there *watching* as Bruce struggles not to pull Dick's hair *out* --
"Isn't he wonderful, Bruce?"

Dick groans in his *chest* --

"I -- yes. I've never felt --"

"I knew he'd want to be your first for this. I knew..." Clark sighs and leans against the place where the stone of the Cave meets the tile. "You should tell him what to do."

It makes his penis *twitch*, but -- "Clark, I have no *idea* what he should do --"

"Use your *imagination*, Bruce," and Clark points toward Dick --

Dick is looking up at him with wide eyes, *wanting* eyes --

"Oh, lovely..." Bruce reaches down and strokes the edges of Dick's mask, his flushed cheeks -- "So... you're *tight* around me -- *ah* --"

Swallows, those must be --

It's just that they're constant now, painfully and wonderfully *rhythmic* -- "I don't want to -- no, I was about... to lie. I would like to thrust --"

Dick nods rapidly, strokes Bruce's hips and buttocks --

*Claws* them the way he'd done to his back --

"*Dick* --"

"*Mm* --"

"I meant -- more warning --"

Dick shakes his head and digs *in* with his short fingernails --

"I find that -- very arousing --"

Dick opens his eyes for long enough to *wink* --

And Bruce blushes. Of course he'd known that. He knows everything that arouses Bruce, every possible *trigger*, and perhaps it's simply proof of Bruce's basic inability to accept beauty and wonders when they're offered that a part of him is only wishing he could *surprise*. To, perhaps, make Dick's eyes widen once more --

They're so beautiful, and he had *surrounded* himself with beauty, from the blunt rawness of Jason to the sharpened stiletto and gamesmanship of Cardinal --

Dick's brothers. His beautiful brothers who he desires --

As much as Bruce does? He's had far longer to come to know them and their quirks, their --

Dick *shudders* --

And Bruce realizes that he'd lost himself *again*, that he'd began a *harsh* rhythm of one thrust after another --

He's *taking* Dick's mouth, and he'd barely even -- no. No. Bruce tugs on Dick's hair and pulls out
at the same time --

"Bruce, *please* --"

"I need. I need more of you," Bruce says, and hopes the apology in his voice comes through the roughness, the animal *bluntness* --

Dick stares up at him and pants --

His beautiful mouth is so --

Bruce drops to his own knees and cups Dick's face, strokes the strong cheekbones with his thumbs, pets Dick's ears --

"Bruce..."

"May I --"

"*Yes* -- *mmph* --"

The kiss is much too hard, at first -- barely more than a mash of lips and a *clash* of teeth -- but Bruce can soften it, can make love to Dick's beautiful and generous mouth --

Oh, Dick is coaxing Bruce's tongue into his mouth, leaning back -- no, lying down. Bruce covers Dick and thrusts with his tongue --

Dick wriggles down and lines them *up*, and the touch of Dick's penis --

He's so hard and *warm*, so human --

Bruce moans into Dick's mouth and tries a *thrust* --

And Dick wraps his legs around Bruce's *chest*, grips Bruce and holds *on* --

"Dick --"

"More. *Fuck* against me --"

Bruce bucks and -- it doesn't stop. He can feel himself twitching for the pleasure of this touch, this --

It's so basic, so --

It's nearly the first sexual fantasy he *had* -- the sense-memory of Harvey's hugs and the painstaking efforts of his imagination to remove their clothes before the hug happened. And they would touch like this --

Rub and *move* like this --

Dick whimpers and chases everyone away but himself. Bruce must --

"What -- what should I do --"

"Feel -- God, *Bruce*," and Dick is wriggling more beneath him, *writhing* with pleasure as he drags his body against Bruce's own --

He almost doesn't seem to *care* if his penis receives direct stimulation from Bruce's own, but --
It feels right to hold Dick down by his shoulders --

"Oh..."

That was *Clark*. Bruce had *forgotten*, but when he turns to face him -- Clark's hand is warm and firm as he turns Bruce back to Dick --

"I am well, beautiful friend. Here," Clark says, and cups Bruce's scrotum --

Bruce grunts and -- no, he won't squeeze his eyes shut. He'll watch Dick as *he* squeezes his eyes shut, as he gasps and moans so *high* --

It must've been higher then, but Bruce is grateful to have *this*. If Dick was nineteen when the Bruce from this universe had been murdered, then that Bruce may not have had the opportunity to see Dick's full growth. He certainly hadn't seen or touched *all* of these scars --

No, he needs more. He squeezes Dick's shoulders hard --

Dick's eyes fly open --

"*Yes*," Bruce says, and he can't even recognize his voice, but it makes Dick cry out and *strain* -- not struggle.

Bruce uses more of his strength to pin Dick, thrusts and *grinds* and imagines something deeper. Something tight and hot --

"I *want* you, Dick --"

Dick cries out -- and uses his powerful legs to flip them. Bruce allows it -- his only options would involve *hurting* Dick --

And it feels good to be beneath this beautiful man who knows so much about him, to be --

Oh, Clark is holding his scrotum *again*, squeezing it firmly over and over --

"Nnh -- *Bruce* --"

"Yes. Yes, Dick --"

"Clark has you?" It's *barely* a question, but --

"Yes, he -- his hand is so very warm --"

"*Hot*. He's --" Dick whimpers and wraps his hand around both of their penises --

"*Dick* --"

"Oh -- *please*, boss, just *hump* --"

Bruce groans and follows orders, sitting up on one elbow in order to see it more clearly, to watch his pre-ejaculate slick Dick's scarred and graceful hand, to see Dick's foreskin sliding back and forth --

Dick moans and shakes his head, tightening his grip until every thrust feels like he's *forcing* himself against Dick, forcing --

"*Dick*, I -- you're so -- tell me what to *do* --"
"Don't *stop*. And -- God, I promise, I won't look away, I won't run away --"

"Stay. You'll --"

"*Please*, Bruce," and Dick's eyes are wide again, but they're wild, needy and *full* --

"Dick..." He can't make the same promise, the promise Dick *and* Clark want --

Dick sobs and begins *stroking* them both, and the feel of it --

The calluses which are so much *like* his own, but held differently, positioned for a smaller, more *deft* hand --

Bruce groans and thrusts harder, faster --

But Dick sobs *again* and Bruce must --

Bruce sits up the rest of the way and grips Dick's shoulders, holds them and tries to soothe, to give --

"I can't -- I can't forget this --"

"I *know* that, Bruce, I -- *oh* --"

And Bruce notices the loss of Clark's hand on his scrotum just as his vision fills with the sight of Clark wrapped around Dick and holding on -- all without jostling his moving arm --

"Clark, I'm *okay* -- *mmph* --"

The kiss is obviously a deep one, loving and sure and promising --

Everything Bruce can't *be* --

But he doesn't have to just *use*. He twines his fingers with Dick's own and *helps* the stroke, not changing the rhythm because it's perfect --

Perfect for him.

Dick *knows* --

"*Please*," Bruce says, and isn't sure what he's asking for until Dick turns away from Clark and lunges in to kiss *him* even as he's making the stroke harder, more *implacable* --

Bruce moans Dick's name into his mouth and reaches with his other hand for Clark --

Clark catches his hand and breathes hot on the palm, licks between his fingers, bites the pad of his thumb and the heel of his palm --

All while Dick demands the *thrust* of Bruce's tongue, the *taking* --

He wants to be taken, as well, wants to be moved as far beyond his own responsibilities as possible - -

(You must not *waver*!)

Bruce's groan must not sound strange -- nothing stops, and for that he's more grateful than he has words to express. He pulls Clark's hand to Dick's thick hair and they muss and tangle it together.

He thrusts until there's nothing he wants more *than* more, until the images fall all over each other,
leaving him to pant and groan and *grunt* into Dick's slick and willing mouth --

"I'm sorry --"

"No, no --"

"I won't -- if there's a next time --"

But Dick kisses him too firmly for Bruce to say anything else --

And Bruce understands that more than he wants to. This, then, and the rapid loss of ability to stay anything like on rhythm --

He's *rutting* now --

Dick is *smiling* against his mouth, and Bruce must lick, must give *many* kisses --

Dick gasps --

Dick cries out and ejaculates, slicking them both and making both him and Clark groan more --

"Oh, *God* -- *ohn* -- " Dick throws his head back --

And Bruce darts in to bite that vulnerable *throat*, feeling both bestial and *correct* when Dick cries out again and spills once more.

A flurry of arms and motion --

And Bruce is on his back, unprepared and *thrilled* -- "*Dick* --"

"I'll teach you," he says, *beaming* -- "But you have a promise to keep," and he scoots back and bends down --

"Oh -- oh, *Dick* --"

"Mm-hmm --"

Bruce pushes both hands into Dick's hair and tries to keep himself from closing his eyes --

Dick is tasting *both* of them right now, and "I want -- I want *this* --"

Dick gazes up at him with a *mischievous* look in his eyes --

"*Please* --"

"*Mmm*," but Dick narrows his eyes -- and begins to work his head on Bruce's penis, taking *himself* --

"Oh. Oh, I *see*," Bruce says, and holds Dick's head still as carefully as he can --

Thrusts --

And Dick nods almost frantically. He had denied. He would want --

When *Clark* had thrust into his mouth --

"I -- I'm sorry I was *selfish*," Bruce says, and begins to thrust in the fast, *rough* rhythm Dick had
Clark sighs and smiles at both of them, hand moving on his penis in an unknowable *blur* --

Dick is moaning in rhythm -- no. His moan is continuous, and is being choked *off* by Bruce's thrusts. It's the single most frightening and *arousing* thing --

"*Dick*.

Another nod and a *dazed* look, and Bruce knows that this is Dick's pleasure, this -- this giving and *taking* --

He tries to say Dick's name again --

He tries to force himself to at least -- no, he can't slow, he *won't* --

Not even when the press of Dick's long, *hard* fingers behind Bruce's scrotum makes him yell and *yank* Dick's hair --

Such *pleasure* --

"I'll *have* this," Bruce growls --

Dick *whimpers* --

Clark moans --

And Bruce sits up again and *holds* Dick's face against him, grinding in once --

Twice --

He can't count, but he can groan and spend himself, body sensitized enough that the spray feels like *needles* -- no, a watery caress --

Dick's mouth --

Dick's *throat* --

He's gasping before long, struggling --

Dick *isn't* struggling. He's swallowing over and over again with no *complaint*. He --

"I -- I have no more to *give* --"

"I have my doubts about that, my companion," and Clark's smile is both obnoxious and warm.

Bruce -- it isn't in his power to scowl --

And Dick shakes his head. Oh --

"I'm sorry," Bruce says, tugging Dick away from himself --

Dick whoops in a breath and immediately laughs it out. He's beaming again, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand --

"I should have -- I don't know what I was thinking --"
Dick covers Bruce's mouth with his sticky hand, and Bruce can't stop himself from making a noise --

And licking --

Dick's smile is intensely predatory for a long moment -- "I forgot to mention that I *always* enjoyed it when you lost control... and I'd forgotten *entirely* how much you used to apologize when you did."

Bruce raises an eyebrow --

Dick moves his hand --

"I *stopped* apologizing?"

The predatory smile is back. "The last time you did was the Friday before the weekend I got crazy with Arsenal -- and Arsenal's *arsenal* of bondage and domination toys."

Bruce blinks --

Considers --

"Yes, I think I see. Hm. You enjoyed that?"

"Oh, *goodness*, yes," Dick says, standing and offering his hand --

Bruce uses it to stand --

"I enjoyed it, but I'm also not really built for it. *You*, now... you started tying me up after that. And there were spankings, cock rings, a paddle we never actually used... a few other little things."

That -- "How --"

"Boss. Don't ask me how old I was. It won't change anything for you to know."

"I'm..." Bruce smiles ruefully. "You must've guessed, by now, that I'm rather conflicted by the prospect of meeting the Dick from my universe."

Dick smiles, too, and strokes Bruce's stubble. "Wanna field this one, Clark?"

"Oh, if I may...?"

Dick laughs softly. "Please do, Uncle Clarkie."

"Really, Dick, I'd like to keep some measure of dignity around *this* Bruce."

"Not a chance," Dick says, and moves in to press his body against Bruce's own --

Oh, a *hug* -- Bruce wraps his arms around Dick and holds on, promising --

He wishes he could promise everything. He wishes --

It's *frightening*, but this is so warm, so safe and -- not simple. *Not* safe. Their Bruce had *died*, and --

And he never would've been *able* to prepare for a neurosuppressant like that. There's only so much armor he can wear and still be mobile enough for the *work* --
Dick sighs and pats Bruce's back -- it's the same thing Harvey does when he's about to pull away --

"Please. Please stay for a moment?"

Dick leans just his head back for a moment. "It feels like I'm hugging a *wall*, Bruce, and while I've been known to do just that when Arsenal talks me into the consumption of alcoholic beverages --"

"It's only -- I'm worried," Bruce temporizes, and hopes his stroke for Dick's hair and back is distracting *enough* --

Dick frowns. "It's not just you freaking out about meeting a thirteen-year-old me and maybe -- as the inimitable Starling might say -- bouncing him on your cock, is it?"

*Puppy* fat --

"I believe it is *now*, Dick," Clark says, and moves close enough to rest his hands on both of their shoulders.

His hand smells a great deal like his *semen* -- "I missed your orgasm," Bruce blurts --

"Then I'll just have to be assiduous about making sure you miss as few of them as possible," Clark says, *winking* --

"Please, both of you, *one* of you -- tell me what *good* can come of me taking a young boy from his life --"

"He --*I* had had my life destroyed when you took me in, boss. And no, I won't tell you how."

Bruce frowns. "But -- if I can prevent it --"

Dick smiles gently and shakes his head. "That... I've always known that was the difference between us, boss. If you had a chance to get the life you had as an eight-year-old back, you'd throw everything -- all of this -- away. Me? I could never do that. It's all meant too much."

Bruce shakes his head and tries to --

There's nothing he can *say* to that --

What had Dick lost? Had it been his parents? Would he honestly let them be killed or -- no, he couldn't. No one could -- no. No one so loving and kind and *caring* could -- "You won't tell me."

"No, Bruce. I'm sorry."

"Surely -- surely there was a time when you *would've* wished someone to keep your life from being destroyed?"

Dick cocks his head to the side and narrows his eyes. "Right after, yes. And for the weeks before I discovered that the absentminded and just plain *absent* billionaire who took me in was really the Batman. After that... an hour or two. The time it took me to think 'I could be his partner.' Come to think of it... that was probably no more than twenty minutes. I'd *thought* about becoming a vigilante before, Bruce, so... About five weeks *total* -- versus the last nearly thirteen years of my life. There's never any competition in your mind and heart, Bruce, and I *can't* say the same for the most part... but I can for this."

"I must -- I'd have to try to *help* --"
"Don't you see, Bruce? You *did* help. You gave me a life where I could save people each and every night, and help make the city better for the good, law-abiding citizens -- and for some of the good, *non*-law-abiding citizens, too. On top of that? I got to go to the best schools, eat the best food, learn everything I *ever* wanted to know about healing wounds and illnesses and enforcing the law. On top of *that* -- you always asked me my opinions about things the Wayne Foundation could do to help still *more* people. On top of *that* -- everyone else. Clark, here, and my Titans, and the Justice Society, and the Justice *League* -- the best people in the world are on my speed-dial, all of whom are ready to sacrifice themselves to work for the greater good at *my* say-so, because *you* trained me and everyone knew that Batman was the best. How could I give that up? How could I even think of doing that?"

"But -- your *family* --"

"Is right here. For the next ten minutes, anyway. It's almost time for Jason and Cardinal to go to school, and I have to make sure Cardinal hasn't convinced Jason to let him wear glitter in his hair or something. Again," Dick says, and rubs Bruce's cheek one more time. "I..." Dick smiles softly. "Sometimes the end of the world isn't so bad. That wasn't *always* my philosophy, and it took a beating when our Bruce died... but *it* didn't die. It bounced right back the night I found Jason boosting the tires off the Robinmobile. Try... I guess I'd like you to try to look at it from my perspective, Bruce."

Bruce nods, feeling his thoughts *roil*--

Dick sighs. "Well talk about it more later, if you'd like."

"Thank you," Bruce says, and knows his voice sounds rough in the *wrong* ways--

But Dick only looks at him for a long moment before turning to retrieve his robe and leave.

Bruce stares at the exit to the shower--

"Bruce... he is happy far more often than he isn't."

Bruce nods again. That -- he could tell that, he thinks.

Clark cups Bruce's shoulders and guides him more fully into the spray--

"Hm. This is the longest shower of my life, Clark."

"Truly? I spent a rather exceedingly long time taking cold or lukewarm showers when I was a teenager."

Bruce smiles helplessly. "You were concerned about your parents' hot water bills...?"

"Bruce, some of those showers lasted well over two *hours*."

Bruce laughs. "I... I'm thinking of one particular shower. It was after Alfred had explained masturbation to me --"

"You had to have it *explained*?"

"I was a slow child in many ways, Clark --"

Clark coughs and -- soaps Bruce at speed. *Thoroughly*.

Bruce blinks and considers and rejects checking to see if Clark had truly soaped his cleft as well as it
seems like he did -- he sluices off.

"The shower?"

"Yes. I..." Bruce turns to look at Clark. "I stayed in the shower until I had five orgasms, but that only took forty minutes."

"Oh, my. Perhaps... ah. Perhaps it was *because* you'd needed it explained...?"

Bruce hums and turns in the spray. "That was always my assumption, yes."

"Oh, you missed a spot --"

"Clark."

"Ah... yes?"

Bruce smiles and opens his stance before raising his arms.

Clark sighs. "You do realize that you're only encouraging me."

"The thought had occurred," Bruce says, and inclines his head. He's clean, dry, out of the shower, and in a robe within the time it takes to blink twice. And really --

"I'm surprised that you didn't take the time to dress me in workout clothes --"

He's dressed in workout clothes.

Hm.

"Forgive me," Clark says, and smiles with exceeding insouciance. "I had to find where those were kept."

"I... believe I'm not going to dare you, anymore."

"Oh... if you're sure."

Bruce laughs somewhat helplessly. "Clark... thank you."

*This* smile manages to be both brighter and softer -- and then Clark looks up. "Ah, Dick is driving the boys to school today. Would you like to see them off?"

"I believe I'd rather not test my libido at the moment -- or my ability not to interrogate them about their lives."

Clark strokes Bruce's face. "They love the lives they have now, Bruce -- far, far more than they enjoyed the lives they had before they lost their parents."

Bruce blinks. "All of them?"

"I'm afraid so. Don't ask them for their surnames. Don't make them choose between this life and a morality which would sink them deep into worlds of abuse and neglect."

Bruce winces. "Even -- even Dick?"

Clark shakes his head. "Dick lived in a world outside of the world, and there was much he never
learned -- much less understood -- before he came to know you. Of course, there was much *you* never learned before then..." Clark spreads his hands. "I cannot -- and will not -- answer questions like that."

"You agree with him about 'the end of the world.'"

Clark cocks his head to the side and raises his eyebrows --

Which is an excellent trigger for forcing Bruce to consider what he knows about Clark's history. About Kal-El.

Bruce squeezes his eyes shut and inclines his head. "Your point is made."

"I have my doubts that it's been made for good and all... but then, I don't think you would be yourself if it could be so easily," Clark says, and cups Bruce's shoulder.

Bruce covers Clark's hand with his own. "I believe I need to speak with Alfred."

"I think that would be wise."

"I -- I've left Harvey alone --"

"I'll go upstairs and tell Alfred you wish to speak with him when he has a spare moment. That will give you some time...?"

And what if Alfred doesn't wish to speak to *him*? What if it's too much to ask?

Alfred *hasn't* come to speak to him, and --

And Bruce has never wished to *impinge* on Alfred's time if it was something which could possibly be helped. This Alfred may not have *watched* his Bruce die, but he had grieved. He --

Alfred is *correct* about his emotions -- *always* -- but that does not mean that they aren't *present*. What if this situation is too *much* --

"Bruce...?"

Bruce smiles ruefully. "I don't particularly wish to... make things difficult for him --"

"Oh -- Bruce. Do you need him?"

"Yes --"

"How would *you* feel if you knew Alfred needed you but wasn't seeking you out?"

"I'm not --"

Clark... looks at him. Quite powerfully.

"I suppose you believe I'm being somewhat ridiculous --"

"*Yes*."

"Hm. When *are* you going to go back to Metropolis?"

"Bruce --"
"I will speak to him. I -- I will... lean on his wisdom."

Clark smiles at him *brightly*, as if Bruce had agreed to something much more --

Bruce doesn't know.

And Clark strokes Bruce's face lightly. "I was back and forth to Metropolis all night. Right now, Lois is having her second cup of coffee. She'll be ready to speak with me midway through her third."

Bruce laughs. "You use your powers well, my friend."

Clark inclines his head. "I do try. Ah..."

Bruce leans in and kisses Clark softly and, he hopes, with *enough* promise --

Clark moans and sucks Bruce's lower lip hard before pulling back. "Thank you," he says *solemnly* --

Bruce raises an eyebrow.

"Everything you do like that is a first, beloved friend. And quite possibly a *last*.""

"That's true with any --"

Clark's fingers are on Bruce's mouth. "More so with you, in my heart."

Bruce closes his eyes briefly and nods.

Clark strokes Bruce's mouth -- and flies.

Bruce takes a deep breath and listens for the clank of the weights -- but of course it's muted. Harvey has been working out in gymnasium environments since he was a boy. When they'd met at age fourteen, Harvey had been taller than most of the other boys, more muscular *and* more graceful --

Of course he'd had the awkwardness of adolescence to contend with, but it had never seemed as severe in Harvey as it had been in other boys -- or in himself, for that matter. His overlarge hands were never clumsy, and he never tripped over his own feet.

Perhaps it had been the fact that he'd done various physical jobs 'off the books' from the time he was twelve -- and inclined to lie about his age in order to have at least a few extra dollars --

"Big guy? You okay?"

Bruce blinks and focuses -- he'd allowed himself to keep walking while he woolgathered, and now he's holding the barbell Harvey was working with instead of setting it down or giving it *back*. He winces and sets it down. "I'm sorry. I was thinking about your past."

Harvey winces. "Uh -- maybe we can have as little of that as possible? Maybe?"

Oh -- "I didn't mean -- I was thinking about how graceful you were. Even as a teenager."

Harvey... looks at him.

Bruce laughs quietly. "You have to admit that you were far less likely to make a fool of yourself in P.E. than the rest of us were."
"Ah, that's nothing, Bruce," and Harvey lies back down and starts lifting again, smoothly and easily. "I just spent as much time as I could running around and playing games on the street, is all."

"Yes, along with your studies and *working*.

"Heh. When you don't wanna go home, you find all kinds of things to do."

Bruce winces again. "I'm sorry --"

"It's okay, it's okay. I know you didn't mean to go there, and *I'll* be going there in a big way once J'onn shows up to play with my brain."

"You're very brave --"

"No, big guy. I'm just less scared of J'onn than of what I can do if I don't get this taken care of. You - - why don't we talk about you, a little, hunh?"

Bruce strokes the bar, forcing himself to avoid Harvey's clenched fingers -- "I... Robin has an interesting -- and terrifying -- philosophy of life."

"Well, let's see, he dresses up in red, yellow, and green clothes which are *super* tight and goes out to fight crime every night. Oh, yeah, and he's been doing this since he was thirteen. *And* he's your ex. Your future ex. Your -- you know what I'm talking about."

Bruce hums. "I think so. You believe that I shouldn't be surprised that his way of thinking is different than my own."

"Uh, huh. But you -- you went for him," Harvey says, and frowns a little.

"Harv...?"

"I -- don't mind me, big guy. I just -- I got used to you balling socialites, only now I know -- wait, *were* you?"

"Never."

"Not *one* of them?"

"I... no," Bruce says, and fights back a blush. "I convinced many of them that we... had, though."

Harvey's frown is deeper. "Convinced *how*?"

"Hypnosis, mostly. Mild to moderate doses of sedatives and drugs which interfere with memory formation --"

"*Jesus*, Bruce --"

"I tested -- I would find ways to test my 'dates' for allergies beforehand. If one of them proved to have a sensitivity, I would 'forget' our date, or simply ignore her in favor of a woman I could safely drug --"

"Just to protect -- no, I know there's no 'just' about that," Harvey says, shaking his head and sitting up on the bench. "C'mere and sit next to me?"

Bruce nods and does so. There's not really enough room for both of them, but Bruce can't say he minds. Harvey's skin is warm and sleek with fresh sweat, and the loose workout clothes he's wearing
do nothing to hide his scent --

"So... so. You weren't really doing anything with all those women."

"The kissing... the kissing and public groping were bad enough, Harv."

Harvey frowns again and nods, clenching his hands together and staring at the floor -- "So what you're saying is that you're definitely gay? Just gay, I mean."

"I don't... believe so."

Harvey turns to look at him. "Meaning there *has* been a girl somewhere?"

Dinah on Ted's *lap* -- "Not. Not the way you mean, Harv. But I've felt attraction to them."

"Well -- okay, then. You can still find a nice woman and settle down --"

"Harv... I don't think I want to. The feelings I have for men are much stronger --"

"And the ones you have for *boys* are much stronger than that?"

Bruce shakes his head. "No --"

"Well -- thank Christ for that. You really freaked me out with the way you were looking at Cardinal."

"It's only --"

"You had questions for him, I know. And..." Harvey unclenches his hands and reaches over to take one of Bruce's hands in his own.

"Oh, Harv --"

"Yeah. Yeah, we almost never did this, but, you know, secret hole in the ground and everything --"

Bruce squeezes Harvey's hand --

"Ah, big guy, I really love you, you know?"

"I. I love you, too --"

"In maybe different ways? Heh. Maybe the same ways," Harvey says, and turns to look at him. His warm, deep brown eyes aren't wide, but they're *full* -- "You know -- you gotta know I've always wanted you. Right?"

*No*, but -- that's not true. Even beyond what Dick had told him, even -- "Sometimes when you've looked at me... I've thought, perhaps, that it would be all right if I reached out."

"Aw, Bruce -- fuck. It would've been. Except that sooner or later -- probably sooner -- I would've pushed you away again."

Yes, that. "I always knew that you would never let me be with you the way I wanted --"

"Bruce --"

"Robin told me about... about something the Harvey they know said about regret."
Harvey swallows audibly. "I bet. I bet I can guess what that's about. Considering."

Bruce nods and squeezes Harvey's hand again. "I always knew you had your reasons."

"But you didn't agree with 'em."

Bruce frowns and shakes his head. "You wanted what you have now. The DA's office, a loving wife, a *future* --"

"I wanted *you* -- but, yeah, it's not like I could ever give up on anything I have, and it's not like I could see mooching off you to get along. I'm good at *one* thing, and that's the law --"

"Harv --"

"No, no, I'm not having this fight with you. I don't know why I even --"

"It doesn't have to be a fight, Harv. You -- I would never pressure you," Bruce says, and tries to be convincing, calm --

"Meaning you maybe gave up on me a long time ago, big guy?"

"I -- I've never --"

"Fuck, was that *ever* not a fair question," and Harvey laughs softly and squeezes Bruce's hand.
"It's just that -- maybe I'm wondering if you would've been throwing yourself at kids if you'd. If you'd had -- someone like me."

Bruce swallows. "Harv... what are you saying?"

"That I -- that I maybe warped you? Or -- you're *you*, big guy. You were too smart to believe that I didn't want you, and you -- what did you even *think*? That it was wrong?"

"Yes --"

"It's not. It's -- it's only wrong for stupid people. *Ignorant* people --"

"I know that now --"

"Do you?" Harvey searches him a little wildly. "You know you could go out and get yourself a man? Someone good and smart and -- uh. Okay with the whole vigilante thing and also *your own age*?"

Bruce smiles ruefully. "Someone... I believe I would also need this hypothetical man to accept polyamory."

Harvey blinks. "Seriously? You -- wait, you hooked up with Robin and who *else*?"

"Superman."

"Well -- okay, he's an adult. Also an *alien*, but there's a damned Martian playing with my mind, so fine --"

"I -- I kissed Starling."

Harvey winces. "He's -- the big one. The tough guy."
"He's... much more than that."

"Of course you think so. Of course you do. You wouldn't have made out with him -- Jesus, big guy, you ever think maybe you were *repressed*?"

"Yes, Harv. More and more."

"So -- so go with that. People who were repressed can make some -- some pretty crazy decisions. You've gotta *relax* a little, figure out who you are, make the best of it. The *best*, not the -- the easiest or something."

Bruce frowns. "That makes good, objective sense --" "*But*?"

Bruce smiles ruefully. "I've never been attracted to so many people before, Harv. It's... heady."

Harvey frowns again and nods. "Maybe... maybe you're a little drunk on it?"

"Intoxication... yes, that sounds correct."

Harvey releases Bruce's hand and cups Bruce's shoulder, instead. He squeezes hard --

"I'm listening, Harv."

"They're all... right here. Living in *your* house. Having *sex* in your house -- like no one has since your parents were still alive. That -- it's gotta be tripping your triggers, some, yeah?"

Bruce nods. "And... they're all attracted to me. Or claim to be."

"Cardinal didn't even --" Harvey blows out a breath. "Okay, yeah, he did. He absolutely did. Jesus."

Harvey scrubs at his face with his hand. "Hey, is it safe to go upstairs, yet? Robin at least should have some shaving cream and a razor or two."

"Oh, there's a more traditional washroom -- hm. There *was* a more traditional washroom down here, but it may have been affected by the earthquake. I'll --"

"The what now?"

"Apparently, Gotham was hit by a terrible earthquake recently. Robin called in all of the heroes to help with relief and repairs."

"I didn't even know we could *have* earthquakes out here. I -- hell. The death toll had to be *awful*."

"Yes," Bruce says, and covers Harvey's hand on his shoulder with his own. "Let's look for a place where we can shave."

"*Good* idea. Not like I wanna look like Tokey the Bear when all those physicist guys find a way to send us where we need to go."

"Home --"

"Wherever *Gilda* is first. I gotta find her. I -- heh. Not that I haven't thought about going to see this universe's Gilda. Seeing if maybe -- I don't know. It's stupid."
"I don't think it is --"

"It is, big guy, it is," Harvey says, and stands, offering his hand.

Bruce takes it and stands --

"All the vigilantes should be built like you --"

"I'm rather glad they *aren't* --"

Harvey coughs and pulls Bruce in for a hug. "I -- it's stupid because -- okay, look, everybody here is all over you, and that's gotta be making you think positive, but you *still* don't know everything the me from this universe *did*. I -- he broke her heart. He had to have done it. Time after *time*..."

Harvey shudders --

Bruce holds him more tightly. "You're not him --"

"I *look* like him. Enough like him to make your pal Robin try to strangle me when I first woke up --"

"Oh -- *no* --"

"He apologized, big guy, relax. And I can't blame him one little bit," Harvey says, patting Bruce's back and pulling away. "Shave?"

"Yes, of course. I think I saw something that might be the remains of a washroom --"

And then Alfred clears his throat. He's several yards away, but he had still managed to get down the stairs silently --

He is himself. "Good morning, Alfred."

"And to you, Master Bruce. Master Harvey," Alfred says, and inclines his head. "If you would both follow me upstairs, I have prepared a collection of toiletries I believe you will find to your liking."

"Oh, God, Al, you know how to make a guy smile," Harvey says, and does just that. "I'm not *allowed* to grow a beard."

"Indeed, sir? While many young men are incapable of developing the gravitas necessary to be truly suited to a beard, I have always felt that you had no such weaknesses."

Harvey laughs. "Ah, I only have gravitas when I'm in front of a judge, Al. The rest of the time I'm just a guy. You know that."

Alfred blinks rapidly before turning to Bruce, and it's the *only* sign that he's having any difficulty with the situation, but -- both he and Harvey see it.

"Say, you okay? I know -- this has gotta be incredibly hard for you."

Bruce nods. "Please, Alfred. If there's anything I can do --"

Alfred reaches out and pats Bruce's forearm with his gloved hand before folding his hands together again. "I am quite well, Master Harvey, and I will be sure to let you know, Master Bruce. Please, follow me," and he turns and walks toward the stairs.

Harvey looks a question at him, but all Bruce can do is shake his head. Alfred was never a father to
him -- he had been quite clear that he could never be that, and Bruce remembers feeling a strange and *hollow* gratitude for that -- but, at the same time, what *do* you call someone who cooked your food, cleaned your messes, cared for your injuries, taught you how best to comport yourself in any given situation, told you stories, learned your hurts... and everything else?

*Everything* else.

Bruce shakes his head again -- internally this time -- and focuses on following Alfred without tripping himself on the backs of Alfred's shoes. He can see that Harvey is still troubled, but they've all given him far too many reasons to *be* troubled.

If anything, this place should be made an island of calm for him while he works through his emotional difficulties. They should *all* be helping him --

And a part of Bruce would very much like to know when and why the rest had begun thinking of Bruce's and Dick's families as a single entity. Bruce winces internally --

Harvey rests a hand on Bruce's lower back. Bruce can almost hear his "keep it steady, big guy," and he can't help but think of all the times Harvey had told him just that. Times when Bruce had grown blackly angry at how unfairly Harvey had been treated by the professors and other adults at Exeter, or when he had grown distinctly anxious and wary about going to one of the dances, or when he'd simply become lost in his thoughts about something Harvey -- and the rest of the world -- found perfectly normal. Things like naming conventions for American cars, or the way most members of so many different ethnicities didn't automatically try to get to know people from other ethnicities or races, or anything else.

Bruce was *very* slow as a child, and a teenager, and, apparently, even as an adult. He has no difficulty seeing how he would've learned from someone like Dick, and he's already learned from Clark and Jason, as well. He'd *known* as a teenager that he needed people who were more worldly to *help* him. Why had he forgotten?

What possible help could he be to Gotham if he hides himself from the people who know her best? Who are *capable* of knowing her best?

Alfred leads them up to the second floor -- and pauses. And clears his throat without turning to face them.

"Al...?"

"Master Harvey, your bedroom is here to the right, and you will find the toiletries in the bathroom along with several... older suits which should fit you well. I'm afraid the suit you were wearing when you came to us is in need of extensive repairs -- if, indeed, it is salvageable at all."

"Al, you're a miracle worker," Harvey says, and moves to clap Alfred on the shoulder lightly before turning to face him. "Are you *sure* you're okay, though?"

Alfred's smile is gentle, but shows all the years between the last time they'd seen him in their own universe and the now of *this* universe. Fifteen years, and some of those years must have been very long, indeed.

"Please, Alfred. I know I've made your life very difficult over the years, but if there's anything I -- *we* -- can do to ease this time for you, you must let us know."

Alfred hums and closes his eyes for a brief moment. When he opens them again, his expression is shrewd -- and focused on Bruce himself. "You and I must talk, Master Bruce, but I confess that I am
not sure where to begin."

"We'll find a way together, Alfred."

Alfred blinks rapidly again -- and then gestures to the suite which had -- as far as Bruce knows -- last been used by a cousin who'd died in a boating accident when Bruce was only four --

"I'm goin', Al. Uh. Say --"

"There are some few breakfast items waiting for you in the small dining room when you are ready for them, Master Harvey."

Harvey's grin is bright and rueful. "Thanks, Al. I mean it."

"You are quite welcome, sir," Alfred says, and they watch him walk into the suite together.

Once he's out of earshot, Bruce turns back to Alfred. "I imagine Dick has taken the master suite?"

"In truth, Master Bruce, it had been his to share with you for many years."

Bruce swallows and nods. "How. Would you tell me how it happened? From your perspective, I mean."

Alfred gives him a very long and level look. "Are you saying that you do not know for yourself, Master Bruce?"

"I..." Bruce shakes his head. "Was he... very like Cardinal?"

Alfred blinks again, *starts* to shake his head, and then gestures Bruce to follow.

Bruce does so, and they pass the bedroom suite which had been -- apparently -- favored by Bruce's grand-aunt Germaine, the sitting room which hadn't been used in Bruce's lifetime, the long window seat Bruce had sat in to read more times than he could count --

Times when he could've joined his mother in the library but *hadn't* --

The last suite in the hall also hadn't been used in Bruce's lifetime, but it's bright and only smells *very* faintly of dust. The linens are fresh, the windows are thrown open on as clear and fresh a day as Gotham and its environs ever get --

Bruce nods his approval, Alfred inclines his head, and then Alfred gestures him toward the bathroom.

The shaving materials aren't the same --

"Master Dick chooses to use your razor, cup, and brushes."

Bruce nods and tests the edge of the new-to-him razor reflexively, nodding his approval and preparing the cream on something like autopilot. "I would like to know as much about that time as possible."

"Do you truly intend to do things differently, Master Bruce?"

Bruce frowns. "I'd like to believe that I could have... more and better self-control."

Alfred nods. "This is something anyone would desire, I believe..." Alfred takes a deep breath and
meets Bruce's eyes. "You told me that you had never felt for anyone what you felt for Master Dick. You told me that you were, at all times, both moved and something very like stunned. You told me that you feared yourself with him --"

"Yes. Yes, I must have --"

Alfred holds up a hand. "You told me that when you held yourself apart from him, he felt the distance and grew hurt. In truth, you did not have to tell me that, at all. I believe -- I must believe -- that there was a time when the young sir's feelings for you could have been defined as being nothing but, or at most little more than, an adolescent crush, which could then be set aside with the care and good sense of the adults around him. I believe this despite the fact that I observed no such moment."

Bruce stops stirring the cream -- no, the texture will be all wrong if he does that, and Alfred hates it when his shave isn't perfect. He -- he stirs. "Is there more, Alfred?"

Another gentle smile. "Master Jason would say -- in his own painfully obscene way -- that there is always 'more,' and that the nature of the world we live in precludes an end."

("The end of the world isn't so bad.")

But what is happening in his own world?

What --

Had all the pockets grown together in some way?

What of all the *people*?

Of *Dick*, eleven years old and still living in the only world he's known --

He doesn't know what that world is, but he *must* find a way to save it for Dick --

Against his wishes.

Against his own...?

"Master Bruce...?"

"When... will the people working on the problem of my presence here know to call even when Dick isn't available?"

"Master Dick has made himself into an individual who is always, for better of worse, available."

"But -- he's taking his brothers to school --"

"And he's wearing the waterproof, shock-proof, pressure-proof, *et cetera*-proof communicator which can and does connect him to *every* vigilante on the planet, in one way or another."

Bruce frowns. "That can't possibly be -- when does he *rest*, Alfred?"

Alfred hums. "Master Clark has been known to... insert himself into the lives of those people who would call on Master Dick when he is sleeping."

"When does *Clark* rest?"

Alfred raises an eyebrow --
And Bruce blinks and nods. "He did tell me that, though he didn't explain it. I believe a part of me seized on the omission as proof that it could forget the entirely unpalatable discovery."

Alfred rests his hand on Bruce's forearm and squeezes gently --

Bruce has stirred the cream enough. He applies it evenly and carefully, grateful to not have to subject himself to the Fortress' shaving *lasers*. For all that he'd been smoother than he'd been since his teen years, it had all been slightly traumatic. And --

"Please. Please tell me more of Dick."

"When you did acquiesce to the desires you and Master Dick shared, I told myself that it was a matter of the lives you led, and that the two of you could not possibly fall so far into each other..."

Alfred frowns and shakes his head. "That was not the truth."

"Alfred...?"

"I spun a fantasy of the young sir growing out of his more... difficult feelings for you. I encouraged you to encourage him to spend as much time as possible with the young heroes your allies had gathered to themselves, and you made sure that they had a place of their own to gather and rest where all of their needs would be fulfilled without their ever having to call on their guardians."

"Did I...find that difficult?"

"I did not ask, Master Bruce."

Bruce frowns and pauses to flick foam and hair from the blade. "Alfred... please."

"I saw jealousy in your eyes many times... but you worked diligently to protect Master Dick from the consequences of it."

Bruce nods. "That's what Dick implied. I..."

"You were afraid that he was exaggerating the truth?"

"It's nearly textbook for the victims of some abusers to paint their victimization as love --"

Alfred holds up a hand again. "Master Bruce, I must ask you. Are you questioning me now so that you may learn how to protect a child, or are you doing so in order to better punish yourself for the failures of another man?"

Bruce swallows. "You do see it as a failure."

And Alfred seems to pause all over, rearing back *slightly* --

He knows --

"I see," Alfred says. "The third option -- you seek absolution for crimes you have committed in your heart, if not yet in the flesh."

Bruce shaves himself carefully and quickly. It wouldn't do to -- to --

"Master Bruce... we have never discussed these... predilections."

"Perhaps. Perhaps we should. Or... there's so much I could never speak of to a psychiatrist --"
Alfred raises his hand once more.

Bruce shuts his mouth, breathes, and continues to shave. And waits.

He can see Alfred staring at the floor in the mirror, and he can see Alfred's *jaw* work. This is hurting Alfred so *badly*, and surely the other Bruce must have known that, that it *would* --

How could he have been so *selfish*?

"Master Bruce. I guided you away from your 'hands-on' involvement in the Wayne Foundation when you decided that more money and time should be spent on children's charities. Did you never wonder why?"

It had been when he was twenty-one. He'd been resting at home for six months, since he knew he had to wait at least eight to get time with the muay Thai sensei who had come most highly recommended. He had spent his days training his mind and reteaching his body the lessons he'd learned in the past three years -- and he'd had a great deal of free time.

Not enough of it to keep from feeling grateful when Alfred had encouraged him to leave the business of the charity to those who were more experienced, though, and --

"Are you saying... you feared I would... take up with one of the charity's recipients?" And when he looks at Alfred, his eyes are hard. Bruce puts the razor down. Just -- for a moment. He can't keep his hands from shaking. "Alfred. How -- how did you *know*?"

Alfred looks him over for a long moment -- and then nods once. "I had to be certain, Master Bruce."

"Of -- oh. You thought that I already knew this about myself? That I was lying for sympathy, or to have an excuse? Alfred, I know that there *is* no excuse. I only..." Bruce shakes his head and stares at his hands until they still, and then for a moment longer before he finishes shaving. "I would like to know that you could still respect me --"

"Yes, Master Bruce," Alfred says, and steps closer, resting his bare hand on Bruce's biceps for a moment. "If you had asked me that question before I realized what you were -- what you *could* be, given precisely the wrong sorts of opportunities --"

"What I became when I took Dick in --"

"No. You." Alfred swallows and shudders once. "I can only speak as the man I am. I can only speak as the man who tried to raise you in the absence of the people you truly needed. I can only speak as the man who loves you as... as a son --"

"Oh -- Alfred --"

"*Wait*," Alfred says, and his eyes are hard again, sharp and -- not icy. There's far too much *feeling* for that.

Bruce nods dumbly and waits.

After a moment, Alfred nods. "I have neither authority nor objectivity, and so it is perhaps meaningless that I say you have never hurt a child, and never will... but it is all I have to say just the same."

Bruce blinks. "Alfred...?"
Alfred pats Bruce's arm once more and then slips the glove back on. "I will never -- *can* never --
give my blessing to your... your *affairs*, Master Bruce, but I will not and cannot condemn them,
either. Do you understand?"

"I do. And I believe I am more frightened of myself than I was before."

Alfred smiles sharply and raises an eyebrow. "I believe that is the best we can hope for. For all that I
wish you only happiness, I have seen the good which has come from your fears, Master Bruce, and
that is where I rest my own fears -- as well as my hopes. Do you understand?"

Bruce stands straight. "Yes, Alfred. I will never offer hurt."

"Be sure to use the lotion I've provided after you have finished your shave. It is of a better grade than
what you became used to... in your own universe," Alfred says, and blinks again.

"I will, Alfred. I... will you accept my apology for all the difficulties I've given you over the years?"

Alfred's smile is gentle again. "I have always felt that it was the prerogative of a parent to deny such
things out of hand." And Alfred turns and walks away, pausing in the bedroom -- "I will expect you
for breakfast in no more than ten minutes."

"I -- yes, Alfred."

Alfred allows Bruce to hear him walk to the hallway before moving back into his usually silent gait.

Bruce finishes his shave and applies the lotion. It does indeed feel even more refreshing than usual.
The mommy-box.

The alarm on Jason's incredibly special and complicated 'watch' goes off just as he's walking out of English class on his way to pick up Tim -- before he 'accidentally' provokes any *more* fights over how goddamned queer he is --

And really --

*Really* -- Jason can't blame him. They go to school with the richest, most motherfucking *entitled* assholes in the state. When Jason was Tim's age, he was still flat-out daring fuckers to fuck with him.

Tim's more subtle about things, but the fights still happen. Mainly because *some* of these guys are smart enough to understand when Tim whips out the fifty-cent words to insult them, and -- yeah. Jason can't *blame* him, but Tim made the decision to live *way* the fuck out loud, and, yeah, that just has a little too much in common with a certain local vigilante who's *also* black-haired and fucking *diminutive*.

So. No fights allowed.

Still, if *his* alarm is going off -- and yes, he *is* heading to the designated exit for this time of day, right at the northeast corner of the campus -- then so is Tim's. Considering where his last class is located, he should already be out the door, and maybe -- just maybe -- he hasn't convinced any of his admirers to *follow* him out the door because they're just *that* passionate for his company.

You'd think at least some of these guys would *learn*, but then you'd *stop* thinking that, because - -

("Minor injuries only... means that they come back for *more*, Jay. Over and *over* again.")

Because Tim is Tim. And *not* Tink for these little sessions, because *Tink* likes to *maim* bigots, and maybe cripple their hands a little. *Tim* likes to fight like an extremely mean girl who's maybe not as committed to ass-kicking as she could be.

No breaks, a minimum of sprains. No scars, not too much bleeding.

No reports to the school authorities, because that would endanger the fuckheads' theoretical payback --

("I *do* think first, Jay.")

A whole fucking lot of blows to the sac and *seriously* sexual teasing --

("I like to think of it as doing my part to help these poor, brainwashed young men along their way to their happy futures as fulfilled, productive gay men.

"You *like* to give them nightmares about waking up on their hands and knees with big, fat cocks up their asses.")

Which is probably why he's thinking more about Tink shoving a gauntleted hand down his pants than about the alarm --

That's never even *fun* as opposed to fucking painful --

He's still fucking thinking about it. Jason sighs and pushes through the door, doing a quick scan for
preppies curled up on the ground gripping their nuts -- none today. Okay, then.

And there just happens to be a big, green minivan parked on the street. *The* big, green minivan to be precise -- because sometimes Dick does terrible fucking things when Jason talks shit about the Robinmobile.

*Unforgivable* things.

Jason sighs and does the quick-and-casual walk to the thing, swings into the back -- and stops dead, because Dick is *right* there kissing the *life* out of Tim. Just --

Okay.

Okay --

Dick pulls back -- "Close the door, Jay," he says, and that's not fair, because right now he sounds like the kind of porn that's actually worth something --

Jason closes the door --

Tim *gasps* --

And Jason sees that Dick has a fucking *grip* on Tim's tackle. Tim's eyes are wide and *blown* --

Tim's seat is fully reclined --

And Dick is looking *him* over.

"Uh. Big Bird?"

"I think. I think I'm not really thinking *well* right now," and Dick's laugh is cracked and *fucked* --

"That's fair --"

"I need you. Both of you. *Right* now."

And there goes his cock. Just -- "Uh. Fuck?"

Dick licks his lips. "Do you want this, Jay?"

Jason hears himself make a sound like --

He doesn't even *know* what that sound is, except that it's *close* to the noise he'd made when Tink had to wear that Catholic schoolgirl's uniform. "Dick. Uh." Think. Think. Just -- fucking *think* -- oh, yeah. "In the *car*?"

"I'm okay with being in the car for this. I think -- I think I'd like to build many happy memories in this car," Tim says, licking his lips and kinda *pushing* into Dick's hand --

Dick *purr*rs. "Oh, little brother. I've got you. You know that, right?"

Tim whimpers and nods --

Jason folds himself into a seat and tries -- thinks --

Grabs his *own* tackle and thinks about big, messy news stories about *scandals* --
Okay. "Dickie, man, drive us off by the athletic fields, at least. They'll be deserted --"

"We *have* tinted windows, little wing --"

"And we -- we're totally gonna make the mommy-box rock on its shocks, Dick. C'mon, think with the big head."

"I'm insulted that *you* are -- but I can wait for a few minutes," Dick says, and *leers* at him --

Jesus -- "Uh. I'm in shock right now, k? Don't be insulted. *Drive*."

Dick licks his *lips* --

Tim moans --

And Dick yanks Tim's shirt out of his pants and shoves his tongue in Tim's belly-button --

"*Fuck* -- ohn -- Dick, *please* --"

Dick grabs Tim's hips and -- God, Jason can see the tendons and veins sticking out. He's holding on *tight* --

"Oh, Dick, I'll do *anything* --"

Dick growls and bites Tim's belly in about nineteen different places --

Tim whimpers and arches like he's *dying* for it --

And maybe Jason is fucking *pumping* himself through his stupid-ass uniform pants --

*Definitely* he is, because it looks like Dick is *devouring* Tim, eating him right up --

"C'mon. C'mon, Big Bird --"

Dick growls and bites the thin skin right over Tim's ribs --

Right over Tim's *bruise* --

Tim *shouts* --

And then Dick is bending and twisting and folding and spindling himself into the front seat and Jason can breathe.

And reach over to just kinda *rub* Tim a little, cool him down, heat him up, *feel* him up --

Tim is panting and moaning every few seconds, and -- yeah. He's *tenting* his pants.

"Why don't you open up, baby? Get a little breathing room --"

"No," Dick says, and drives. "That's mine right now."

Jason grunts. "Uh. What about --"

"You..." Dick gives that really *sunny* laugh that means everything's *okay* --

Jason *relaxes* --
"You've got another few minutes before you're my property, little wing --"

"*Jesus*, Dick --"

"Like you haven't had that fantasy," Dick says, and winks in the fucking *rearview* --

"Yes, okay, I've had that fantasy --"

"I -- I have definitely had that fantasy," Tim says, and starts stroking his own chest a little. He looks *dazed* --

And Jason would be, too. Just -- "Neither of us have had that fantasy involving the *minivan* --"

"Actually --"

"*Tim* --"

"All right, no, I haven't, but I'm having it right now and I think that counts," and Tim licks his lips and spreads his legs more --

Dick shows his *teeth* in the rearview --

"Dick --"

"Jay. If I took you guys to a place with a bed -- or even with better-quality carpeting -- both of you would be walking funny tonight."

Jason makes *that* sound again.

Tim's noise is more strangled --

"I'm not... uh... do I get to ask what made you change your mind?" And Jason knows his voice is a little too *cautious* for the moment, but --

Dick sighs. "I need you. I used Clark last night for -- for the last time --

And then Clark is in the passenger seat --

Dick snickers and *swerves* --

"Oh, do be careful, Dick," Clark says, and steadies the steering wheel.

"*Thank* you, Clark --"

"You're very welcome. Ah --"

"I didn't mean I'd stop making *love* with you," Dick says, snickering *more* --

"Oh, good! I did have to check," and Clark pats Dick's shoulder and turns around to smile at them.

Well, mostly he's smiling at their bulges, so Jason flexes his cock in a little hello twitch --

Clark licks his lips and *starts* to crawl into the back with them --

Dick growls and grabs Clark by the cape.

"Oh -- yes, I see," Clark says, and sits back down. "Perhaps you should tell them about the other
thing that went into your decision...?"

Dick shows his teeth in the rearview again and pulls into the shady little parking lot that butts up to the *tiny* patch of woods that makes the Eston brochures look so pretty. "Bruce wants *both* of you."

"*Ahn*!"

"Aw, Jesus, Big Bird, lemme touch him a *little* --"

"Mmm... no," Dick says, and crawls back to join them again. "Alfred made a *point* of telling me that I should watch you both closely for 'signs of difficulty related to Master Bruce.' So --"

"Wait, wait, *Alfred* told you Bruce wanted our asses?"

Dicks shows even *more* of his teeth as he opens Tim right up --

Tim arches to make it easier -- and probably because he *has* to --

"To be *exact*... Alfred essentially told me that Bruce would be *going* for your delightful little asses, and... heh. I saw you both *first*;" and Dick's eyes get that crazy light which usually means --

Crazy. It means crazy.

Jason checks himself to see if he cares --

Tim whimpers and *holds* himself arched because he can't fucking do anything else --

Yeah, he doesn't care. Mostly doesn't care. Wait. "Dick --"

Dick holds up a finger and sucks hard on the head of Tim's cock --

"*Dick*!"

Dick closes his eyes and *moans* -- and yeah, Jason can see it. He's tasting his little *brother*, and that's making him --

God, Jason *needs* --

Dick pulls back and pants. "Making love to Bruce -- he was better. He *is* better. So much more *generous* -- I can be that. I can *make* myself --"

"Don't --"

"*No*, Jay --"

"I just -- I was just gonna say don't *hurt* yourself, Dick..."

Dick licks his lips and then turns to face Jason --

He looks Jason *over* --

Jason's cock twitches like the idiot it is --

And Dick smiles. "I know you'll have my back, Jay --"

"Fuck, *always* --"
"I know... I know you won't let me fall," Dick says, shivering all over and then turning back to Tim. "One day, little brother, I'm going to fuck you until you *cry*.

*Tim's* cock twitches and fucking *leaks* for that --

"Oh... oh, yeah, little brother? That's what you want...?"

"I -- I want *you*, Dick -- I've always --"

Dick presses his fingers to Tim's mouth --

Tim whimpers again and twists until he can suck those fingers *in* --

Dick narrows his eyes --

Tim looks a *challenge* at him --

"Oh, Tim, you..." Dick licks his lips and starts *fucking* Tim's mouth with his fingers. "I'll give it to you. I'll make you -- you won't have to wait. *We* won't have to wait --"

"Oh -- *drat*," Clark says, and frowns vaguely north.

Dick smiles *gently* -- which looks fucking *odd* with the crazy-eye thing, but -- "Where's the problem, Clark?"

Clark sighs. "Nova Scotia. Really a terrible storm, and I --"

"Have to go. I know. I promise we'll tell you *everything*," Dick says, reaching back with his free hand --

Clark kisses Dick's fingertips, smiles at Jason, licks his *lips* at Tim --

And then he's gone.

"Alone at last," Dick says. "You won't be able to call for help..."

Jason snorts. "Dick, I think we're both *okay* with you taking it out on us a little."

Dick raises an eyebrow at him and fucks Tim's mouth faster. "Just a little...?"

Tim moans and starts pumping his little hips, starts *needing* at Dick --

"You. You can't make him wait too much longer --"

"Answer the question."

And there goes his cock *again* -- "Fuck. A *lot*, Big Bird. You can -- what are you even actually *into*?"

"Depends on the person. You know that. And even then..." Dick shakes his head and pulls his fingers out of Tim's mouth, then drags them around and around Tim's cock in a spiral.

Tim pants and clutches at the sides of the chair --

Jason licks his lips -- "Even then?"

"Sometimes... sometimes you build up fantasies about a person. What they'd like from you, what
they'd want to do *to* you, *for* you.... you know what I mean?"

Jason nods and *then* thinks -- yes, he knows. "But -- it's different if you wait too long?"

"And sometimes if you don't wait, at all --" Dick shakes his head and makes a cock ring for Tim with his fingers --

"Oh! *Dick* --"

"Shh," Dick says and kisses Tim all over his face. "I know you like it when your lovers get a little dirty."

"*Yes* -- I mean. I can shut up," and Tim's eyes are wide and *half*-dazed. He'd had a little time to get himself *together* --

"I've wanted you so *much*, little brother. I've listened to the noises you make for Jay, for Kon, for *Bart*..."

What -- but Tim planted bugs. Of course he did.

"Did. Did you watch?"

Dick smiles and nods. "Sometimes, anyway. Clark would helpfully tell me which time stamps to fast-forward to."

Tim groans and squeezes his eyes shut -- because Dick is pinching and *pulling* on his nipples, switching his free hand back and forth --

God, when -- "When. When I do that to him --"

"You have to fuck him. *Every* time. I know, little wing. I *think* I have a little more control than that."

"That's... good?"

Dick smiles *wetly* at him. "I know I'll have the control after I fuck your mouth... Jaybird."

"Aw -- *Jesus*," and Jason grabs his cock through his pants and squeezes *hard* --

Dick narrows his eyes. "You're that ready for me already?"

"Fucking -- you're *you*, you're not talking the bad crazy, and also you're molesting my baby *brother*. What the fuck do *you* think?"

"I think... I think we can do most of our talking later," Dick says, scooting back into the foot-well, punching the button that makes Tim sit up --

"*Ahn* --"

And Dick growls and takes Tim's cock right in --

Fuck, he's even lipping his own fingers -- and Tim's rigid and silent save for fucked little gasps, shaking all *over* --

"You're gonna come as soon as he lets go, aren't you, baby?"
"Nnh -- nnh --" Tim nods jerkily and grips Dick's hair --

Dick hums *loudly* --

Tim cries out and starts to *pump* --

"You do that... you do that to your Superboy...?"

Tim nods and *sobs*, and -- fuck. It's not like he *wants* to watch Tim with his incredibly annoying and *young* team, but if Dick watches it --

If Dick watches it to get *off* -- yeah, Jason's been missing something. He's not missing anything *now*, though. Dick is working his head on Tim's cock in *just* the right rhythm --

Tim is crying out and -- he yanks his right hand out of Dick's hair and starts to beating at the window with his *fist* --

Dick reaches up and *grips* Tim's wrist --

And Tim's rigid again, straining and tossing his head just like --

"Is he sucking you *hard*, baby?"

"*Nnh* -- Jay -- oh, it's so *good* --"

"Tell me --"

"*Hurts* --"

"*Fuck*, I want -- I don't fucking know what I want --"

"*Ngh*" And then Tim is gasping out some *fucked* laughter -- yeah, he knows exactly what Jason means.

And Jason *really* wants to get his pants off before his boxer-briefs get too fucking *slick*, but -- Dick's party right now, and he wants them to fucking *feel* it --

He's humming *rhythmically* now --

Tim is *writhing*, and the sounds he's making don't even sound completely *human* --

"C'mon. C'mon, Dick, get him *off* --"

"*Please* --"

Dick grunts and lets go of Tim's wrist to push his hand back up under his shirt again --

Tim cries out *loudly* --

"*Fuck*, Dick, *please*, I need you --"

Dick grunts again and takes his hand out of Tim's shirt so he can *choke* him --

"You fucking better not let Superboy do *that* --"

Tim *grins* -- and then his mouth falls open and his eyes go wide --
Dick moves his hand --

And Tim is fucking *yowling* the way he usually only does when he's getting fucked on his hands and *knees* -- Dick's letting him come.

Dick is *swallowing*, and even knowing that he would --

That he fucking *always* would, and Roy was *crystal* clear about that --

("He sucks it down like you're about to run *out*.")

Tim is *shuddering* --

And then he gasps and slumps as Dick pulls off and jerks the lever that makes the seat recline again.

Tim moans softly -- he's so not going anywhere right now. Just -- no. Dick, however, is looking at *him* --

And maybe that was definitely a fucking whimper coming out of him. "My turn?"

Dick licks his lips and nods --

"F*ck, get your cock *over* here. Or -- no, get in the back so I have *room* to go down on you the right way --"

"Are you giving orders, Jay...?"

"Uh? May-- no?"

Dick smiles that fucking *dangerous* smile -- the one that makes his smile-lines look like *weapons* --

"Okay, no, I was definitely not giving orders. Sir?"

"Get in the back."

"Yes, definitely --"

"Open your pants and take your dick out where I can see it, Jay..."

Jason moans and *follows* orders, because he can fucking *do* that --

And Dick's right next to him on the bench seat just that fast, *gripping* him in his hard, callused hand --

Jason grips the seat and tries to do more than pant. Just -- he's wanted that hand from the word *go*. The hand that didn't get soft even after hours in the gauntlets, even after a ton of moisturizer, even after fucking *marinating* in the massage oil he'd used to turn Jason into fucking *pudding* --

Hands that have been hard and fucking *tough* since Dick was a *kid*, because people fucking *work* in circuses --

"You like this, Jay...?"

"Yeah. *F*uck -- your *hand* --"

"I watched you grow this pretty dick, little wing..."
Jason moans and *arches* --

"*Down*.:"

"*Fuck* -- yeah, okay, I'm down, I'm down -- *mm* --"

Dick's kissing him like he's gotta make a fucking point, like --

Jesus, in the parking lot at their *school*, and this can't *possibly* be anything like a good idea --

But Dick's kissing him, and he's wanted that, he's *needed* that, because Dick's mouth is just a little smaller and *harder* than his own, because Dick doesn't kiss if he doesn't mean it -- he'd known that by *looking* at the guy --

("Oh, *yeah*, Jay, he can -- 'mano can make a guy forget his own *name* when he wants you --")

And Kory had sighed at him when he'd asked *her* --

("Sometimes, he would try to *distract* me with his kisses... and I must admit that he could come very close...")

And then her hair just *was* around his ankle and he was on the floor and, no, he *doesn't* know when the fighting turned to fucking, and he's okay with the fact that he never will --

Just like he doesn't know when Dick started stroking him off or when he'd starting *pumping* --

Fuck, he's gotta stay *down* --

But Dick isn't stopping, so maybe --

No, he'll stop, he'll hold still --

Dick pulls back and *licks* Jason's mouth. "Good boy. Ready for more?"

Jason opens his mouth -- and whimpers because Dick's grip strength is *almost* as good as Jason's own and he's fucking *using* it -- "Dick --"

"Shh, yes or no question."

"Uh -- yes? Yes. I mean --"

And then Dick throws himself back against the door, making the minivan rock that much more -- his jeans are already open. He --

God, he just fucking whips it *out*, and, yeah, Jason's seen it a million times before, and he's even seen it *hard* --

But not that hard. Not that slick and fucking *ready*, foreskin all pulled back --

"Dick..."

"C'mon, Jay. Gimme your mouth," Dick says, and his eyes are bright and hungry --

And his cock looks even hungrier, and Jason is nodding and leaning in, letting his own cock dangle and swing --

"Dick... ah. Would you mind terribly if I sucked Jay off while he was sucking you --"
"Yes, I *would* mind, little brother. Stay put," and Dick doesn't turn away from Jason for even a *second* -- "Faster, Jay -- *mm* --"

"Mmm," Jason says, because he can't actually manage anything else with his mouth full. The thing is, he can take Dick *easily* at this point, but he also really fucking can't.

He'd never known this taste, or this fucking *quality* of slick, or *that* sigh, or *that* hand pushing into his hair --

And it doesn't matter that the same was true with *every* first-time he ever had -- Dick is making him feel like a virgin with every slow, steady *push*, inch by inch until Dick's in his throat --

"Oh, Jay... you should know *exactly* how good you look like this..."

Out of his throat --

"You... mm. More," Dick says, *gripping* Jason's hair to keep him place --

He won't fucking *move* --

And the thrusts get faster, *smoother* somehow, and Jason can keep his fucking eyes open for this. He can't -- he has to *feel* this, just like Dick wants him to, *needs* him to.

Dick called them out of *school* for this -- and Jason's groaning in his chest, bracing himself on the seat-back and Dick's long, perfect *thigh* --

And it's gotta be okay if he strokes that a little, if he swallows as hard as he can and tries to *hold* his throat tight --

"Wanted this, Jay. Wanted *you*.

Jason tries to nod -- he can't. He -- not without *fighting* --

"Shh, just take it..."

Jason's cock twitches hard -- *fuck*. That's -- Roy at his meanest. Kal-not-Clark at his -- fucking *selfest* --

Bruce? Could it be?

Would it really be *fair* for Bruce to have all that fucking everything and *also* be a good top? Jason looks up as much as he can, looks a *question* --

Dick shows his teeth and shakes his head -- and starts thrusting *harder*.

And there's no way he can keep his eyes open for that, but maybe he can encourage -- heh. He reaches out and snaps his fingers for Tim, then points at Dick --

"*Oh* -- ah. I'm. Ah. Somewhat *focused*, Jay --"

"And so should *you* be, little wing," Dick says, and strokes Jason's cheek and ear with his free hand. "Maybe I'm not -- nn. Maybe you need a little more from me?"

Jason groans again and squeezes his eyes shut, straining to get closer somehow, get more, get that sac on his *chin* --
"Oh, but -- you're such a good boy when you really. Really buckle *down*.

Jason takes a *sip* of air -- and that's all he can get before Dick is fucking *doing* him --

Tim moans high and -- yeah, that *is* the sound of Tim stroking himself off -- he'd know that rhythm *anywhere* --

Dick is fucking *rolling* his hips up, practically *pouring* himself into Jason's mouth --

Oh, fuck, he can come in Jason's *mouth* --

And Jason strokes Dick's thigh faster --

Jason catches himself stroking Dick's thigh like it's his fucking *cock* --

And Dick's laugh is breathless and sweet. "I know what you need, Jay," Dick says, slowing to a stop --

Jason whimpers *loudly* --

Tim makes a strangled noise and starts jerking off *faster* --

And both of Dick's hands are in Jason's hair. He's --

Oh, fuck. Oh --

He's working Jason's head on his cock. He's *making* Jason --

He was doing that before, but it's *different* now. Dick is fucking controlling *him*, and that --

Is this what he'd fantasized when he thought about picking Jason up? Was this something from Clark's dream machine?

Jason's hands are fucking *shaking*, but this --

This is making him harder, needier --

He looks up -- and Dick's eyes are wild and *starving*. He looks like he's feeling everything, hearing and *tasting* everything --

His mouth is open and he's *panting* --

And when Jason tries to put everything he's feeling into his eyes, all of his pleading and the incredible fucking *ache* --

Dick winces and grunts at the same time, tightens his grip -- "*Jay* --"

Yeah, Dick, *please* --

"Jay, I -- God, I *need* you -- *hnh* --"

And Jason still can't nod, but he can maybe be a *little* soothing with the way he's stroking Dick's thigh --

"*Ohn* -- *Jay* --"

Anything you want, anything you fucking *need* -- only a part of Jason is glad he couldn't say that,
because it's not true. It -- well, he doesn't *know* if it's true, because what if Dick is still *crazy* about them? As opposed to being crazy about them in the good ways, the fun ways --

The grab-Jason-by-the-hair-and-*use* ways --

Fuck, maybe he *does* mean anything, because this is gonna fucking *work* him. It already *is*, but Jason knows there's more, that there's gonna be an *after*, and all he'll be able to do is nod and smile and try not to beg to be fucked like this every *day*. It's possible, right? He's still got something --

Something like a little *pride* --

Except that Dick's shouting now, and it feels like Jason's cock is twitching for every last one of them, twitching and *begging* --

"*Brother* --"

Tim grunts *loudly* --

Dick gasps laughter -- "Oh, Tink. Did I *say* you -- you could come again?"

Tim whimpers -- "I'm -- sorry. I will be sorry. You -- ah. Maybe let Jason breathe? Maybe?"

No, no way --

"He's checked for another -- forty-five -- *fuck* --"

And the next thing Jason knows he's on his back and Dick is everything he can see, everything he can *taste* --

Dick is fucking his throat like it's trying to get *away* --

The black is creeping around the edges of his vision and he's gotta push through, has to *take* --

"Jay -- oh, Jay, I love you so -- so *much* --"

He still can't nod and now Dick can't *see* him all that well --

"Gonna -- I'll make you *see* --"

Yes, *fuck*, yes -- but he can't keep himself from tightening up his mouth when the black creeps in a little more --

Dick shouts --

Dick growls and claws at Jason's *scalp* --

Okay, *not* letting up, and really, he should've known Dick would go for that --

"*Hnh* -- you -- *ready* --"

C'mon, c'mon while I'm still fucking *conscious* --

And Dick growls like something being torn out of the fucking air, growls like he's gonna fucking *eat* Jason after he's done fucking him --

Jason's scalp is gonna fucking *bruise* -- but Dick is shouting as he comes down Jason's throat, one
spasm after another, and *God*, he wants some of that on his tongue --

"Oh -- Dick, let him *taste* --"

*Dick* whimpers -- but he manages to pull out just enough that the last spurt hits Jason's tongue and the roof of his mouth --

And the taste is Dick, *pure* Dick, right down to the fact that it even tastes like he's been eating exactly as healthily as he has been --

And it would be a bad fucking time to snicker, considering the fact that he *just* managed to get in a breath and he needs about another ten before he'll be up to doing more than passing out before his cock gets any more love.

So. Breathing --

Lots of tasting, yeah, but *breathing* --

"Oh, little wing. You're gonna turn Bruce on so *much* with that."

"He's that... ah... rough?"

Dick snickers and does some panting of his own. "*If* you can push him that far, Tim. Takes some doing, though. Keep in mind that *this* Bruce apologized for fucking my mouth about *half* this roughly -- after I'd begged for just that," and Dick pulls out slowly and gives Jason a little *room* to breathe, but --

"That *had* to have gotten old back in the day, Big Bird. But I'm thinking that if Tink can't convince the guy to ream him out, we're all SOL."

Dick snickers *more* -- "This one, I think, is just a *tad* more trainable than mine was."

Jason sits up, careful to keep his clothes from rubbing on his cock too much. "You *made* this one yours."

Dick's smile is a little wry. "I believe *you* collected the first touch."

"Aw, c'mon. *Clark* did."

Dick shakes his head. "Clark isn't part of the *immediate* family."

"So all that fucking didn't really count? 'cause I'm wondering how Bruce's *ass* feels about that."

Dick gets a thoughtful look on his face.

Tim starts to get up to move back --

And Dick points him back to his seat. Just --

Tim squeaks and sits *down*, and that --

"Dick, man, *please* tell me I can at least jerk off for *that*."

Dick's grin is lazy and --

"Also -- I gotta make Roy tell me more *stories* about you, because that's *his* fucking
"Okay, see, if you were *really* Roy? You would've brought beers for us so we could look and smell *extra* disreputable when you sent us back to class."

*Dick* snorts, then leans over and pulls a bottle out from under Tim's seat.

"What the *shit* --"

"Ah-ah-ah, little wing -- I'll have you know that this is forty-year-old single malt scotch."

Tim kind of... squinches. "Dick... why did you bring us scotch?"

"Ah... we don't actually have any beer in the manor. I checked, and everything."

"So basically what you're saying, Big Bird, is that it seemed like a good idea for you to Roy us to death?"

"No, I'm saying it seemed like a *great* idea. And since we're three orgasms and one *delightfully* thick erection into this party -- I gotta say I'm right," Dick says, and smiles *brightly*. But --

"Dick, uh. Fuck, get me off so I can *think* clearly!"

Dick licks his lips. "Are you just going to try to reason with me afterwards, little wing...?"

"Uh... no?"

Dick touches his tongue to his upper lip and raises an eyebrow. "Promise...?"

Jason whimpers so bad -- there are whipped dogs who whimper with more dignity than he just did.

Dick strokes a line down the underside of Jason's cock with his *fingernail* --

"*Dick* --"

"Will you trust me, little wing?"

"Yes, always, I just -- I just need you to not. Uh. *Crazy*!"

Dick turns to smile at Tim. "He's always been a fighter, hasn't he?"

Tim blinks and turns away from Jason's cock. "Um? Yes! Yes. To whatever you just said."

That makes Dick snicker and reach out to stroke Tim's cheek, his chin, his mouth -- with his dirty hand.

Tim moans for it and leans in --

"What do you think, little brother?"

"I think -- penis. What?"
Dick strokes Tim's lower lip, back and forth and back -- "What do you think about me letting Jay reason us out of this?"

Tim winces --

Jason kicks Dick's shin lightly. "I am *just* soft enough to know that was totally unfair."

Dick winces -- and nods. "I can't -- I can't be myself. Not all of myself."

"*Jesus*, Dick --"

"You both *love* Roy, and he's -- heh. He taught me a *lot*, Jay. He *built* a part of me, so -- it's not like I'm lying to either of you. Not completely --"

"We need *you*, Dick," Tim says, getting up and coming back to wedge himself in Dick's damn footwell --

"Also, you couldn't have brought the limo for this?"

"Too conspicuous. Also -- also you make the cutest faces when I make you get in this minivan, Jay."

"Okay, so that was you thinking about *torturing* me --"

"Even more than I'm doing right now...?"

Jason frowns. "Dick, seriously, work with us here --"

"Yes, *please*. I know -- I know you don't want to hurt us --"

"I do, though."

Tim pants -- "Dick -- please don't get me hard again already."

Dick turns and narrows his *eyes* at Tim -- "Say. Say 'please' again."

"Ah -- please?"

"Not like that. Not --" Dick licks his lips again. "Little brother, you -- I'm trying to buy control here. I'm trying --" Dick smiles *painfully* and bangs his head against the window.

"You can --" Jason reaches out slowly and *carefully* --

And Dick grabs his wrist and squeezes hard --

"Fuck, that's such a fucking *turn-on* --"

"Then let me. Let me take care of you, Jay. Let me --" Dick takes a shaky breath and he's not *looking* at either of them.

Tim frowns at him helplessly --

Jason pinches his cock hard and *whines* for the pain -- yeah, he's going down --

And Dick is *studying* that reaction like he's filing it away for another fantasy he won't fucking *share* -- no.

No. "Dick. You're gonna be scared shitless about losing too much control with us until you prove
"You *can* deal --" 

"Or that I can't," Dick says, and his voice is -- too fucking old. Too --

"*Lean* on us, Dick. Let us --" Tim growls a little and gets that look like he's thinking seriously of nerve-striking Dick somewhere but knows he won't get away with it. Finally, he takes a deep breath and *glares* at Dick. "Is it that you don't trust us to stop you if you go too far?"

"You -- you both look up to me so *much* --"

"You're *you*, Big Bird. I -- okay, learning this side of you is fucking *new*, but we learn *fast*. And neither of us will put up with being abused -- in part because *you* taught us better than that."

Dick frowns and stares at his hands -- then laughs. "Bruce used to do this all the time. Probably when he was thinking thoughts like these..." The frown gets deeper for a moment, and then Dick nods and turns to Tim. "Suck him hard again, little brother. Stop *exactly* when I tell you... because I won't be able to put up with disobedience."

Tim catches his breath. "Oh -- Dick, are you really --"

Dick raises an eyebrow and his eyes --

It's like watching someone turn the heat up in an old-fashioned oven. It's like watching Kal -- no, not that. It's Dick, and right now it almost looks more like that *exhaustion*-fueled rage he gets sometimes at the end of the night than lust.

Almost.

Tim moans and *scrambles* out of the footwell, moving between them -- "You -- you should hold it for me. So I don't have to use my hands."

He sounds about two years younger and that's *scary*, but -- fuck, yeah. It's not like he can ever say no to Tim -- and he sure as fuck can't say no when Dick is watching like this. He's bringing his thumb up to his mouth *slowly*, the one which gets tooth-dents and fucking *calluses* during bad cases --

Jason bends his cock down to Tim --

And Tim takes just half of him. It's actually *confusing* for a moment, because Tim should be fucking *swallowing* him --

But then Jason remembers that Dick had told Tim to *suck*, and Tim is just better --

So much fucking better --

"Dick -- Dick, can I touch him?"

Dick shakes his head and *gnaws* on his thumb as he stares at the back of Tim's neck, at Jason's cock, at Jason's fucking *abs* --

Jason nods and pulls his button-down up over his nipples. "Can I touch myself?"

And Dick's cock twitches. Just --

He's getting hard again fucking *fast* -- "Please, Dick --"
"Call me. Call me 'big brother.'"

Tim sucks Jason fucking *hard*, but --

That -- was almost a question. But they're going with this. They -- "Big. Big brother. Please let me play with my nipples?"

Dick winces *hard* -- and then looks up to meet Jason's eyes. He's still chewing his thumb, but his other hand is *clawed* against the seat, and his eyes --

He's *searching* Jason's eyes, and Jason thinks he's maybe looking for resistance, the bad kind of teasing, contempt --"It's okay, big brother. You know I want you."

Dick nods slowly -- and equally slowly reaches down to cup Tim's head.

Tim jerks slowly and moans around him --

Jason pants and fucking arches --

"Jason. *Down*.

Jason drops and gasps for the fucking *jar* -- "S-sorry, big brother --"

Dick licks his lips. "It wasn't all Roy. You know that, don't you?"

Roy's never left bruises on Jason's *scalp*, so -- "Yeah. I know --"

Dick nods slowly and strokes down to the back of Tim's neck --

Tim whimpers and shudders --

"Are you hard for me, little brother...?"

Tim nods -- shakes his head -- raises his hand and waves it.

Jason snorts --

"Quiet, Jay."

"Shit -- yes, big brother. Sorry --"

Dick looks at him.

Jason shuts up.

Dick tightens his grip on Tim's neck. "Are you hard for both of us, Tim?"

Tim nods *slowly* -- and Jason gets that Dick's holding on tight enough to make nodding hard --

"Tim... scrape him with your teeth. Lightly."

Tim shivers and does it, working his head --

Fucking --

Jason swallows and tries to be quiet, tries --
He still winds up whimpering for it, but *Jesus* --

And Dick takes a deep, *slow* breath and meets Jason's eyes again. "You like that pain."

"Y-yeah. I do. A lot --" 

Dick nods and pushes his hand back into Tim's hair, gripping hard and pulling -- no, he's working Tim's head on Jason's cock, and that's --

Fuck -- "I -- I wanted this -- I mean. *Fuck*, I'll shut up --"

Dick smiles at him. "Maybe you need something in your mouth again?"

"Fuck, *always* -- wait, I meant to *nod* --" 

Dick laughs, and it actually sounds happy and a little easy, like maybe there's *room* for the Dick they love in the midst of all the crazy --

That would be nice --

"Jay... how's this: I let you talk all you want... and you let me watch -- and direct -- Bruce fucking you once or twice."

Jason winces and fucking *slumps* -- "Jesus -- Jesus, okay, yes, sure, anytime you want, I'm not gonna -- are you *sure* it's okay that I want him?"

"It's the most natural thing in the world," Dick says, and *yanks* Tim's head back --

Jason and Tim cry out at the same damned *time* --

"Good... good boys. Tim, get back in the seat."

"Yes -- big brother?"

Dick smiles, and it looks gentle and *fucked* at the same time --

Tim moans -- "Please. Please let me suck you, too --"

"You came without my permission, little brother."

Tim moans *again* -- "I'm sorry -- I'm so sorry, it's just --"

"You're young. Needy. Hungry..." Dick licks his lips. "I've changed my mind," he says, and *yanks* Tim over his lap --

"Oh *fuck* --"

"Oh, God. Oh -- fuck, Big Bird, are you sure?"

Dick pauses with his hand hovering over Tim's ass, face pulled into kind of a *rictus* --

"It's okay," Tim says, panting and wriggling *just* until Dick folds his arm up behind his back. It's not a hard stretch for Tim, and --

"You --" Jason swallows. "It's not that I think it's too extreme! I just -- uh. *Timing*. And -- *location* --"
"This *won't* take long," Dick says, and he looks up at Jason. His eyes are wild as *fuck*, but he's focusing, and he's *seeing* Jason --

Jason nods. "Okay. Uh. I'll wait my turn."

Dick narrows his eyes and *claws* Tim's ass. "Not something harder for you, Jay?"

"Your hands. Your hands were the hardest things I'd ever seen. Just -- you know. To put that out there."

Dick pants and growls -- stops. "You don't have to count off this time, little brother."

"Ohn -- okay?"

And Dick starts spanking Tim hard and *steadily* --

"Oh -- *oh* --"

"The first time Bruce did this to me... was after the first time *Clark* did this to me," Dick says, and his smile is nostalgic *and* crazy --

But that doesn't mean Jason doesn't wanna hear it. "Yeah? Like... uh. Did he do it like that?"

"Lighter. I was only *four*teen," and Dick laughs a little. "Of course, his hands were..." Dick shakes his head. "He did it before patrol, so his hands were as hard as they ever got. I was too horny to go out, too... needy. Tim. Are you ready for me to hurt you?"

Tim grunts and *slams* his hips against Dick's thigh --

"Don't come again, little brother..."

"Ohn -- I'm sorry, please -- please yank on my scrotum --"

Dick sighs. "You didn't have time to make love to him this morning, Jay...?"

Jason rubs at his own thighs. "God, I -- I *wanted* to, but. No. I slept late."

"Tim... don't let him sleep late anymore."

"No! I'm sorry, big brother, I won't, I *won't* -- *ahn* --" And then Tim is whimpering and writhing a little, meaning the yank was either *meaner* than what Jason gives him or that he's dying for it just that much even after *two* orgasms --

And Jason can't fucking blame him. He's *scratching* his own thighs now, and getting to the point where he's gonna *need* the first thing Dick does to hurt or he'll go off *immediately* -- say it. "Dick. I -- hurt me? You know -- uh. Some?"

Dick smiles. "Absolutely, little wing. Now, Tim... are you ready?"

"*Yes*, big brother --"

"Here," and Dick starts really *reddening* that ass up, going back and forth, getting his upper thighs -- definitely no shorts for gym this afternoon --

"Tell... please tell us more about Bruce doing you, big brother," and Jason licks his lips and almost hopes he's out of line by Dick's rules. Just -- *something* for him to sink his teeth into a little, or --
Tim's crying out *quietly* --

"I came... very close to calling him Daddy. I wanted to *be* his son, the son he loved enough to discipline, enough to *hurt*..." Dick licks his lips again. "He kept asking me if it hurt, if I liked it, if I wanted more... the answer was always yes, and, by the end, he was panting like he did after his *toughest* workouts and his sweat was dripping onto my back."

"What. What was his cock like?"

Dick smiles and lifts Tim's sac out from between his legs. "Close those thighs, little brother..."

Tim sobs and does it --

"It was hard as I'd ever seen it. Dripping. *Dark*," Dick says, and starts *patting* Tim's sac --

Tim jerks and makes a questioning sound --

"Shh, it's okay, little brother. I love you. I'll *always* love you," and as Dick speaks the pats get hard and harder --

"*You*, Dick, you, I've loved you *forever*," and Tim sounds like he's *crying* a little, not just sobbing --

Dick gasps and spanks Tim *hard* --

Tim *screams* -- and doesn't come.

And then Dick gathers Tim into his arms, holds Tim on his *lap* -- "I wish I was bigger for you, little brother," he says, and pulls Tim's head down onto his shoulder. "Breathe."

"Yes --- yes. I -- need. I can't --"

"Just breathe, Tim. You did so well for me, so... you gave me what I *wanted*." Tim's moan is a little questioning, a little *confused* --

Jason's never spanked him that hard, and he's guessing no one else has, either. It --

"You're all right, baby. You know it had to be this way," Jason says, using the rough voice that always seems to --

There. Tim relaxes just like that, pushing close to Dick and nuzzling --

Dick sighs and smiles so *brightly* -- "Never -- you know I'll never let you go, right? I *had* to let go of the Titans, but this, you -- both of you..."

Heh. "You're ours -- and we're yours, big brother."

Dick licks his lips and reaches down to squeeze Tim's ass *hard* --

"*Ohn* --!"

"Jason... Jason is going to suck you off for me, little brother. But not yet."

"Yes -- oh, yes -- "

"Go back to your seat and wait for me. *Don't* touch yourself. If you do, I won't let you come, at
Tim's eyes are wide and *blown* -- "Yes, big brother," he says, and moves just as quickly and gracefully as he always does when he's focused on a goal --

And Jason lets himself look at that pretty cock as Tim eases himself down. It's not too thick, but it's gotten a lot longer in the past couple of years -- to the point where he's had really *stupid* fantasies of getting Tim in his mouth and holding him there until he just grew right down his throat --

Which is close *enough* to what he'll be doing just as soon as Dick says --

"Spread your legs, Jay."

-- something. Definitely... something. "Uh... you mean facing front or --"

"Facing me," Dick says. "And get your pants and shorts off. One ankle will do... mm. Do you know how much I love your thighs, little wing?"

Jason *resists* the urge to stroke them for Dick and just -- yeah, he can get his pants and boxer briefs down over his stupid school shoe and throw his leg up on the back rest -- "Uh. Like this? And -- you're the one who made 'em this way, big brother."

Dick narrows his eyes and leans in to *rake* his nails down Jason's inner thighs --

Jason grunts and *barely* manages not to arch -- "Please --"

"I knew the first time I got you naked that you were going to be incredible. You... *no* one who lived like you were living deserved to have that much *muscle*..." Dick licks his lips again. "Bruce. Bruce is going to want to massage every possible muscle group until you're moaning and begging."

"Fuck, big brother, *you* do that --"

"Who do you think I learned it from...?" And Dick's smile is soft and *hot* -- and it doesn't change even a little when he pulls the bottle of slick from his pocket. Just --

It's not like there are all that *many* things Dick could do which needed Jason spread out like this, but it's still a shock, still enough to make his heart hammer in his fucking *throat*. "Please," he says, and it comes out strangled, *needy* --

"I was going to leave this home... but then I caught myself heading down to the Cave to bring a massive bottle of massage oil, instead," Dick says, and laughs at himself a little. "I *think* I can stick to just using my fingers --"

"You don't have to," Jason blurts and tries to spread *wider*. "God, I. I know you know how long it's been since I've had something other than fingers... or. Uh. Finger-y tentacle things?"

"Three months. And Roy used the Superlube."

Jason groans. He'd known because he'd *watched* -- "Yeah. Yeah. He likes -- you know what he likes --"

"He* likes fingers... but he likes giving the people what they want even more than that. And he knew you wanted it fast, hard, and repeatedly."

"Nothing..." Jason bites his lip to keep from *scooting* toward Dick -- "Nothing better than the
Superlube for that. Uh. Big brother --"

"It'll be fast and hard... but you'll need a little time to recover, I think. Tell me yes, anyway --"

"*Yes*, big brother --"

Dick sighs out most of his air. "Even though it'll hurt?"

"*Yes* --"

"You love me --"

"You're also fucking *hot*, Big Bird -- I mean -- I mean I'm shutting up, because you're slicking your whole damned *hand*.

Dick laughs. "Shh. Don't worry, little wing. I only play *that* game with Roy. Still -- I want everywhere I touch you to be *good* and slick."

"Okay? Uh. What -- what do you need me to --"

And Dick has his dry hand on Jason's shoulder and his slick hand right *there* --

" -- do? Please --"

"Beg for it," Dick says, searching Jason's eyes and then studying his mouth, and then going back to his eyes --

"Please, D-- big brother -- please fuck me, please *do* me, I've thought about it -- I wanted you to bend me over the *car* --"

"Jay."

"Uh. Yeah? Also -- also... oh, God, Dick, your *fingers* --"

"Right here, little wing, right where. Where you're *hottest*..."

Tim whimpers and shifts on his seat --

And Dick turns Jason back to face him. "Just me."

"Yeah, okay -- sorry, big brother --"

"You fantasized about me fucking you over the car you habitually make fun of."

"It's *yours*.

Dick opens his mouth and pants, searching Jason a little more -- "You want me. Somehow... somehow that just brings it all home," he says, and laughs softly. "Oh, Jaybird... scream."

"Wha -- oh, *fuck* -- *fuck* -- *Dick* --"

"Louder," and Dick twists his fingers, his *two* fingers, in so deep --

No fucking *prep* --

"*Jay*."
Jason whimpers and tries to fight through the shock, the pressure so heavy that it's not even *pain*, yet --

But then Dick twists again and Jason is yelling, reaching down to try to spread his ass wider --

Dick knocks Jason’s hands away and starts to *thrust* --

In and in and --

And the shock and pressure turns to a burn, something that smolders the way fires that are *about* to flare up do. Jason knows he's still yelling, that his mouth is open and his eyes are as wide as a *kid’s* --

It -- or maybe something else -- makes Dick wince and press *up* --

Jason cries out and -- fuck, he's gripping the little hook for suits and shit --

Okay, he just heard the thing crack. Maybe. Maybe if he just grabbed the seatback or something --

"Jay."

Jason gasps --

Whimpers --

"*Dick* --"

"You looked..." Dick bites his lip *hard* for a moment -- "You looked like you were losing focus again."

Jason shakes his head and tries --

If he can just stay *still* --

"Your fingers -- so fucking --" Jason grunts, clenches, and grunts *again* --

Dick pants. "Oh, little wing... work your hips."

Jason nods *frantically* and does just that, throwing his head back and letting himself picture --

Roy, because Dick is using his fingers like he's never fucking *doubted* that he knew how to do it right --

Clark, because those fingers go so fucking deep, fucking long-ass fingers --

*Dick*, *Robin*, because those fingers know they're fucking *welcome*, and Jason can't keep himself from twisting his hips in the opposite direction --

"Oh, Jay..."

Jason whimpers and nods, takes *more*, deeper somehow --

He *needs* Dick, needs --

"I'm right here, little wing. I -- I'm so sorry --"

"*No* --"
"I'm sorry I *waited* --"

"*Fuck*, big brother, okay, you can be sorry, you can totally -- please don't *stop* -- *nnh* --"

"You liked that. That little..." And then Dick does it again, that --

"You -- crooking and... rubbing?"

Dick's smile is a little dazed as he nods. "Tricky without superpowered fingers... but you're not too tight for me."

Jason shakes his head --

Jason *nods* --

"Please. Please --"

"I'm here. I'm here, and I -- " Dick closes his eyes for a long moment, but he doesn't stop --

Thank fucking *Christ*, he doesn't stop, because there's *enough* lube, but not for a fuck this hard, this *good* --

Jason's gonna fucking *feel* this --

"I want -- I want *that*," Tim says, and he sounds helpless, sounds so *good* --

"You -- heh. You can have *this*, little brother," Dick says, and wraps his free hand around the base of his cock --

Tim moans like he's *dying* --

"*Right* now, Tim --"

"*Yes*, big brother," and Tim wedges himself into the footwell again, twists enough that it has to be *killing* his back, but he's damned well not in Dick's *way* --

Those fingers --

God, those fucking *knuckles*, right --

Jason shouts for the feel of Dick's hand *spasming* --

"Sorry -- sorry, little wing --"

"No! It's good, it's --" Jason licks his lips and jerks his chin at the back of Tim's head. "He's doing you good?"

Dick pants and smiles. "You know exactly how good he is."

Jason bites *his* lip. "Yeah, I. The first time... the first time he did me I nearly punched a hole in his fucking headboard --"

Tim moans high and *slurps* --

Dick groans and *stops* fucking Jason with his fingers -- then growls and does it *harder* --

"Aw, *fuck*, big brother --"
"Tim has another sixty seconds of -- playtime. After that? I'm fucking you. Right here."

Jason's cock fucking *jerks*, spattering Jason's abs and the seat. Jason looks at his watch -- no way he can measure time in his head right *now* --

"Oh, Jay... you shouldn't... shouldn't rush your little brother..."

Tim makes some seriously *urgent* noises, fuck-me noises, listen-to-the-smart-person noises --

"Yeah. Uh. Uh? Fuck, Dick, I'm *ready* for you --"

"And you need me to... hurt you a little more?" And Dick doesn't quite sound *hopeful*, but...

"It's always. It's always harder on my back, big brother --"

Dick's sigh is *shaky* -- and then he grabs Tim by the hair and starts to *pump* --

Tim flails out to grab the seat, Dick's t-shirt --

Tim's pumping his hips at *nothing* --

And Jason hears himself moaning like he's fucking *dying*, but since it's happening because he's getting *opened* in the world's most corrupted minivan, he's totally allowed. Just like he's totally allowed to sit up and *whine* when Dick pulls out --

"*Down* --"

"*Fuck* --" But Jason follows orders --

And Dick *pulls* Tim off his cock --

And Tim looks dazed and ready for *any* fucking thing, but Dick points him back to his seat --

"Yes. I. Yes, big brother," Tim says in a *small* voice --

Dick growls. "No, you -- I *want* you."

Tim's eyes fly open wide. He *searches* Dick --

And Dick pulls a smile for Tim out of *nowhere*. Just -- he strokes Tim's face with his dry hand.

"This isn't over. You know that, right?"

"You -- you and Jay --"

"And then *you* and Jay. For me."

Tim grunts and *whimpers*. "I -- I want it to be for you --"

"And it will be. Not... not every time," Dick says, wincing and fucking *obviously* struggling --

"It's okay, big brother," Jason says, rubbing at the seat since he can't rub at Dick himself at the moment --

"Yes," and Tim's smile is a fuck of a lot better than either of theirs. "I'm okay. I just. I get a little... um. When I can't bring someone to orgasm."

Jesus, that's *right*. The *one* time it had happened with *them* was because Tim's live-in had
decided to actually *check* on him for once and Jason had had to *dive* under the bed. By the time she'd left it was time for Jason to patrol and he'd put himself in *that* headspace... and Tim had been fucked-up for the hours it took for Jason to come *back*.

Jason shakes his head. "Sorry, big brother, we should've told you."

Dick is panting and stroking Tim's face, really --

Really rubbing and touching and *making* Tim feel it --

Tim's leaning in and *nuzzling* --

"You'll make me come... a lot, little brother. I promise."

Tim nods and kisses Dick's thumb, his knuckles, his fingertips --

"It'll be... just for us sometimes." Dick frowns. "But I won't ever try to take you from Jay --"

"All of us, big brother," Tim says, and *licks* Dick's thumb --

And Dick looks at Jason --

Jason nods and opens his arms, smiling as best he can and *knowing* it's coming out crooked and fucking *starved* --

Dick nods right back and presses his fingertips against Tim's pretty swollen mouth. "Watch us for now, little brother."

Tim smiles *brilliantly* -- "Yes, big brother."

Dick smiles and gestures Tim back to his seat -- and then he just *is* over Jason and nuzzling Jason's face, biting Jason's *cheeks* --

"*Fuck* -- fuck, big brother --"

"Every day since the first time I saw you naked, little wing. Every day I've wanted this -- or something like it --"

Jason whimpers and arches --

Dick bites Jason's *ear* -- "Come for me *fast*.

"Yes, yeah, anything you say, let me --"

"Do you want to guide me in?"

Jason groans and *clenches* -- "Yeah -- wait, no, you -- maybe let Tim do it?"

Tim whimpers *loudly*, making Jason twitch and spasm --

"*Do* it, Tim --"

"*Yes*, big brother --"

And Jason can't feel those hard little hands, yet, but he knows they're there, knows it by the way Dick narrows his eyes --
By the blunt nudge of Dick's perfect *cock* --

"*Nnh* --" There. Right around his hole. Just a little stroke, but --

Dick shows his teeth. "Naughty little brother."

"Um. I'm sorry?"

Dick laughs and *shoves* in --

Jason screams and beats at the back window --

Dick groans and sounds like he's winning at *every* fucking thing -- "Little... little brother..."

Tim pants -- "Y-yes?"

"Do you want that?"

"*Yes* --"

"Then go sit down again. Hard enough that you. Really feel that spanking --"

Tim goes and Jason forces himself to stop crying out, stop *beating* --

Yeah, Tim squeaks for them, for Dick, for *them*, because Dick *knows* he and Tim belong to each other, that it's for always --

Dick leans in and bites Jason's *throat* --

"*Hnh* -- big brother --"

"Did that hurt enough?"

"I -- I -- it still *does* --"

Dick sighs and licks his lips, licks Jason's throat and jaw -- "You're so beautiful. You -- this won't be slow."

Jason nods a lot and clenches because he *can* --

Dick *growls* --

"Sorry --"

"Do -- do that *again* --"

Jason does, and the *bright* hurt goes all the way through him, makes him really *feel* that three months --

How long since he'd done it without the Superlube?

How long since he's had *this* burn, this crazy fucking --

So hot and Dick's making him *feel* tight --

So --
But he can do this again and again, he can yank up the burn and the pressure for himself, make himself really --

Really fucking *need* --

And Dick is groaning and starting to rock, starting to --

"Dick -- I mean big *brother* -- *hnh* --"

Fuck, that was his *ear* again --

"I'm sorry, I'm so fucking -- *please*, big brother, not *slow* --"

*Dick* whimpers, cuts himself off with a growl and a *gasp* -- "You're. Absolutely right --" And then those hard, *hard* hands are on Jason's shoulders --

No, one's on his shoulder and one is shoving Jason's knee back to his *chest* --

And Jason's yelling for it, feeling himself stretch, feeling Dick get fucking *deeper* --

"Oh, Jay, he's *in* you!"

Jason nods and tries to remember not to look at Tim, not to reach *out* --

"Does it -- how *much* does it hurt?"

Jason *pleads* up at Dick --

"Go ahead," he says, and his voice is low, fucking *heavy* --

Jason opens his mouth --

And all that comes out is a *yell*, because Dick's thrusting *hard*, thrusting *fast* --

Jason *starts* yelling in rhythm --

He can't keep it up. He --

These thrusts --

Jason can *tell* that Dick isn't really splitting him or anything, but that just means that there's the friction, the -- the fucking *flow* --

The burn and the *sweetness*, like nothing fucking else --

Nothing *ever* -- and this is what Dick wants him to have with *Bruce*. This -- he wants to make Bruce do it *his* way --

And Dick is smiling down at him like some kind of *monster*. His eyes are wild, his smile is *sharp*, and he's so flushed, dark under olive --

"Big -- big brother --"

"Go ahead," he says again, and he just keeps *fucking* him, just --

It's what Jason had *asked* for, and it's ratcheting him up, making his *sac* feel tight, making his skin feel --
God, he's fucking *sweating* for it, and now Dick's lips are parted, Dick's *searching* him --

"I like it, I *love* it --"

Dick blows out a breath. "You love me...?"

"*Yes* --"

"Tell -- tell Tim how much it hurts. Get him ready for me --"

"I *am* ready for you --"

Dick hisses and starts --

God, *faster* --

And Jason is grunting and *gripping* the seats, bucking for it because he has to --

"Oh, Jay, my little... my little wing --" And Dick squeezes his eyes shut and throws his head back, showing off that lean and beautiful throat, the way his pulse is going so *fast* --

And Jason has to reach up to touch, has to stroke --

Dick growls and *bites* Jason's fingers --

Jason grunts and bucks *hard* --

And Dick's eyes get wilder, *hotter*. He *shakes* Jason's fingers in his mouth before pulling back -- "*Tell* him."

"Feel it -- fuck, I can feel him in my fucking *toes*, baby --"

"Oh, *Jay*, is it --"

"So hot. So -- so *hard* --"

"Tell me you want it *harder*, Jay," and that was another *growl* --

"Harder! *Fuck* me --"

And then they really *are* rocking the minivan, making it obvious --

*More* obvious --

God, Jason *wishes* he didn't care, but the truth is that caring is making it *hotter*. Just -- *let* someone catch them at this, or *wonder* about this, or --

He doesn't know. He just knows that a part of him is looking forward to punching people who talk shit about how he and Tim are gonna look and *smell* when they get back to class --

Anything to pay for *this* --

And Dick is pushing Jason's knee up higher --

Dick is shoving his other hand in Jason's hair and *pulling* --

"*Anything* --"
"You're *mine*, aren't you?"

"Family -- fucking --"

Dick growls again and claws Jason's *face* --

"*Jesus* --"

"Maybe. Maybe you need a little --" And Dick's hand is wrapped around his cock and *squeezing* --

Jason throws his head back and *wails*. Just -- like a kid. Like *Tim* --

"Oh, Jay..."

But Dick wants this, needs it --

Dick *dreamed* of it, so it's okay that Jason's losing it like this, banging his head back and bucking off-rhythm, trying to get more for his cock, *deeper* for his ass --

"All -- all *through* me --"

"*Mine* -- and the family's too. Everyone -- *all* of you --"

"Oh -- *yes*, big brother," and that's *Tim*, and he's gotta be feeling this, too, imagining it from every reaming he *has* taken --

But there's nothing but *heat* now. The burn in his ass, the friction for his cock, the way he's just fucking *sweating*, tossing his head and begging --

"Please *what*, Jay?"

"Fuck -- big *brother* --"

"*Say* it --"

"Make -- make me *come* --"

Dick growls *loudly* -- and then he's fucking *stripping* Jason's cock, jerking and pulling and making Jason feel sensitive enough to wail again, cry out for it like it's the first time, the only time --

The *right* -- "Any -- anytime you *want* --"

"*Come*...""

Jason wails *again* --

"*Look* at me --"

Jason opens his eyes -- and Dick's hair is hanging in his face, Dick's lip is bleeding from a bite, Dick's teeth are *gritted* --

He's holding back. He's --

He needs Jason to come *first* -- and that's the best fucking reason in the world to let himself fall into this, to let himself lose focus and everything else until he's just a tortured cock and a *happy* ass, bucking harder, faster, *wilder* --
"Little wing. *Always*," and Dick starts rubbing his thumb on the head of Jason's cock in *fast* circles --

Just like the way Jason would do in the showers back when he was new and *knew* Dick didn't want him the way *he'd* wanted *Dick* --

Dick had *watched* --

And the look in Dick's eyes is a yes, an always, an I *love* you --

And that's all Jason's got. He feels himself jerking into an arch, twitching hard in Dick's grip --

He opens his mouth and *nothing* comes out --

He can't rock anymore, can't meet --

Oh, those fucking *thrusts*, so good, so --

And Jason manages to keep his eyes open for just long enough to see Dick point Jason's cock at himself -- but that's enough to drive him over into the white, the heat, the nothing --

The everything that *counts*, because he's losing it for family. The best, the *only* --

He's jerking and wailing --

Fucking *screaming* --

And falling back into everything that makes him who he is in time for Dick to start *reaming* him, one thrust after another that makes him whimper and nod and *reach* --

Dick catches Jason's hand in his own sticky one --

Dick shouts and stares --

Jason squeezes Dick's hand as hard as he can --

Dick's rhythm stutters *hard* -- "You. Both of you -- I *need* --"

"We're *here*," and Tim says it *with* him --

"*Mine* --" But not all of it gets out before Dick is shouting again, eyes wide and *lost* as he thrusts and comes and *thrusts*.

And the look in his eyes --

Jason knows he wasn't ready to come. That he'd wanted more from this, from *him* --

Jason grabs Dick's shoulders and *yanks* him down over him while he's still losing it --

God, so hot and *slick*, and even knowing that Clark is more of both isn't enough --

"It's *you*, Dick," Jason says when he can.

And Tim kneels on his seat so he can reach back and grip Dick's calf a little. "We love you. And -- um. Penis."

Dick laughs against Jason's neck, and that's ticklish enough that Jason has to squirm a little --
Dick turns the cuddle into a *pin* --

And then he turns it back into a cuddle, but it's a more aggressive one, knocking out about half of Jason's air.

"I love you, little wing. I love you -- you're so much of what I *need* from the world. You and Tim. If I ever make you think I don't love you, don't need you --"

"We'll let you know, big brother --"

Dick laughs. "Okay, go back to calling me by my name. That was... an interesting experiment."

Tim hums. "I think it was a bit more than an *experiment*... Dick."

Dick shivers and turns enough that he can fix Tim with a *look*. "Really, little brother...?"

Tim shifts a little -- and yeeps for the way the seat is making his ass feel, Jason bets. "Um. Um? I don't think it's unreasonable -- I mean, you've obviously had the fantasy of us calling you that --"

"And you shouldn't think we didn't get off on it, Big Bird. You *are* our big brother. You've taught us damned near everything we *know*.

"You made us. *Changed* us."

"You made us *fit*."

Tim grins. "And you also made us look *very* pretty."

Dick narrows his eyes -- and his cock twitches *in* Jason.

"Oh -- *damn*, Dick. Uh. Again?"

Dick narrows his eyes a little *more*, obviously *thinking* about it --

Jason eases his down leg up to rub it against Dick's hip --

Dick groans and shoves it down. "If we do that, you're not going back to school today."

"That's -- uh. Wait, what's my motivation here?"

"Jay. Where's the little boy who got up two hours early for his first day back to school -- after sleeping through half of his *birthday*?"

"You worked my *ass* off for my birthday, and -- heh. I didn't know school would be full of *dumbasses*, Big Bird."

Dick smiles and grinds his hips a little. "Rich dumbasses, at that."

Jason moans. "Uh -- Dick?"

"I'll pull out in a second. And then you'll get comfy and leak all over this towel while I drive us around and you both eat," Dick says, and pulls a towel from behind the seat.

"Wait, there's food for us?"

"Alfred packed a cooler. Presumably there's also a beverage of some sort..." Dick shakes his head and laughs. "Let's all agree not to think about how Alfred knew I was going to need to have a
'picnic' with you two."

"He's *Alfred*," Tim says, and wriggles in his seat a little more. "And -- um --"

Dick coughs a laugh. "Oh, God, I can't believe I forgot about your hard-on, little brother. Here," Dick says, pulling out slow and steadily --

Taking some of Jason *with* him --

Jason squirms and stuffs the towel under his ass. "C'mere, baby, get on my chest --"

"No, not that. I need to be able to see you both more," and that *was* Dick's reasonable voice, but there's another voice kind of *under* it --

"I -- I'm short enough still that I can stand without crouching too much," Tim says, and demonstrates- --

Dick nods slowly and licks his lips.

Yeah, that works. "Slow or fast, Big Bird?"

Dick pulls a wipe from the little baggie on the door -- and uses it to *work* his cock while he's wiping it.

Tim moans --

And Jason's mostly staring. Mostly -- well, he's also leaning in just enough that he can *stretch* his tongue to the dripping head of Tim's cock --

Dick *grunts* --

Jason makes a *show* of licking Tim while Tim grips the seatbacks and pumps toward Jason's face - -

"*Please*," Dick says --

"Anything, Dick, you know -- it's *anything*," Tim says, and starts pumping faster while Jason licks *slower* --

"You -- both of you. Not a show. I can't take -- a show."

Jason blinks -- and files that away for thinking about later --

"Oh -- it. Is it something you've wanted, Dick?"

Or now. They can talk about it now --

Dick shakes his head slowly and it looks *nothing* like no. All right --

Jason sucks the head *nice* and hard --

"*Ahn* -- *Jay* --"

"Get -- put your hands in his hair, Tim."

"Yes, big -- I mean, Dick, I mean --"
Dick's laugh is soft and *cracked* --

Jason can *hear* him jerking himself faster --

And he can *feel* Tim massaging his scalp, *looking* for the bruises and sore places and trying to ease them, work away the pooling blood a little --

Jason pulls back with a slurp. "Love you so much, baby..."

"Oh, *Jay*, please, please suck me, please do it hard --"

"You want it to hurt a little, baby?"

"*Yes*, oh --"

And it's the best thing in the world to get his mouth back on, get one hand on Tim's -- currently -- fuzzy little sac and the other on his hip --

Suck him *deep* --

Dick pants and works himself *faster* --

And then the minivan is rocking *again* --

"Oh -- this is a wonderful blend of scents," Clark says from Tim's seat --

Tim jumps and twitches --

Jason snorts and tries not to cough --

And Dick just reaches out with his free hand.

Clark catches it, kisses it, nuzzles it. "Did you want some assistance...?"

"Nn -- no. I want my brothers to see this about me, to -- hnh. They -- should know."

"Oh -- I agree wholeheartedly. Goodness, I do believe you've left *hand*-prints on Tim's rear."

Tim blushes and twitches *again* --

And Jason gives up waiting for him to grow a little more and swallows him down --

Tim shouts --

"Oh -- lovely. Dick, if you'll notice, Jason tends to flare his nostrils quite often when he's fellating Tim --"

"He. He has to smell him. Has to -- take every part --" Dick groans and squeezes himself *hard* --

Jason nods and starts *moving* Tim a little --

"Oh, Jay -- Jay, I'll come *fast* --"

"*Do* it, little brother," and Dick's voice is low and fucking *harsh* --

Tim cries out and starts fucking Jason's mouth, Jason's *throat* --
He's looking deep into Jason's eyes and his mouth is open for every cry, every --

He's telling Jason he *needs* him, and that's good, that's right, that's --

It's *not* everything, but it should be, and the only reason Jason isn't jerking *himself* off right now is that he *always* gives himself a little love when he sleeps too late to get it from Tim... and then he gives himself a little more between second period and third --

And he's totally never doing that again. Better to be rock hard in class than miss a chance for *this* - -

Tim *grips* his hair --

Clark moans softly -- "One must... must enjoy their strength, of course --"

Dick groans again and he's doing himself like *his* teachers could yank open the doors to the van at any moment --

"Perhaps... perhaps they should use their strength on *you*, Dick...?"

Dick gasps and bangs his head against the door --

"Oh, no, Dick, don't," and the minivan is way too fucking *small* for this, but Clark is somehow lounging on top of the folded-down seat and cushioning Dick's *head* --

Dick's laughing and *shouting* --

Tim is whimpering for every last *one* of Jason's sucks --

"Clark, Clark --"

"Yes, Dick?"

"Stick a finger up Tim's ass," Dick says, and his eyes are so narrow they might as well be *closed* --

And Tim is fucking his throat *wildly* --

"Do it *fast* --"

Clark moans --

Tim *screams* --

"Work him. Both of you *work* him --"

Jason grinds his face against Tim's groin --

Clark whisper-babbles something *way* too fast to catch -- <<*I am one who has been gifted-held, I am wealthy and warm -->>

*Fuck*, yes --

Tim screams again --

*Again* --

Dick grunts and comes on Jason's *thigh* --
His *shirt* --

"*Dick* --! Ahn -- ahh -- *ahn* --"

And Jason pulls back *just* in time to get all that come right on his tongue where it belongs, where he fucking *needs* it --

Tim slumps and Jason and Clark catch him together --

"Oh my *God*," Tim says, and Jason's just about to congratulate himself for a job well done -- when he hears Clark slurping.

Jason snickers *with* Dick --

Dick ruffles his hair. "Yeah, we should've seen that coming, little wing."

"Yeah, Clark's always gotta get a taste," and Jason leans back and starts making vague efforts toward figuring out how to de-semenify his clothes --

And then stops, because Dick is lifting the cooler over the seat and Jason's stomach is growling like crazy. Just --

"Fuck, yes, Big Bird. Whatcha got for me?"

"Soap for your dirty, dirty mouth...?"

Jason flips him off with both hands.

Dick *looks* at him --

Jason raises his eyebrows and aims his fuck-fingers at his own ass --

And Dick snickers again. "Okay, I see how you're gonna handle me. I like it."

Jason blows on his fuck-fingers and buffs them on his shirt.

Dick throws a thermos at him, which is more than enough reason to start his lunch with tea while Tim whimpers and meeps and generally makes all kinds of cute noises. Jason checks --

Yeah, he's getting hard *again*, and his eyes have rolled back in his head. Good deal, but --

"We gotta make sure he eats, Clark."

"Mm-hmm..."

Tim shudders all over -- but Clark's got a good grip on him. He'll be fine.

Lunch turns out to be a nice Mediterranean spread. Chicken and couscous with a bunch of seasonings Jason can't guess at, stuffed grape leaves, a salad with that feta cheese Tim's not allowed to eat unless they won't be sharing a room for at least four hours, because it fucking well makes him gassy and Tim's incapable of just letting it rip when he's around *anyone* he's screwing --

And he makes these little pained *faces* --

Jason eats most of the salad.

There's pomegranate-cherry juice to go with the tea, some baba ghannouj for Dick -- who has been
known to *hit* them if they try to eat his share --

Way better than cafeteria food, even if the cooks at Eston *do* get paid about three times as much as the average school cook. By the time Jason's mostly done, Tim is dozing in Clark's arms and Dick is getting that crazy look back --

Clark hands Tim to Dick *immediately* --

And Tim wraps his arms around Dick's neck and nuzzles close in the way that only happens when he's *that* fucked-out. It makes Jason's arms ache a little, but --

Dick's never felt that. Dick's never *had* that. Dick --

Right now, Dick has his face buried in Tim's hair, and he's holding Tim *tight* --

And everyone in this goddamned mommy-box knows that Dick needs this *bad*. So.

Jason eats a little more, pokes around -- nice. Weird sesame-candy-brittle *stuff*, and Jason doesn't know what it's sweetened with, but it's awesome. He breaks off some for Clark --

"Oh, thank you very much," Clark says, and hums while he chews.

"Yeah, figured you could use something to wash your mouth out, Big Blue."

Clark makes a *face* --

Jason snickers and grins. "It's just that you react so *hugely* to those nicknames."

"Hm. I suppose it is rather sad that I'm jealous of people you've named after characters on children's shows and *toys*, but I am," and then Clark gives him the *soulful* look.

"Aw, Jesus, Clark, I -- Snuffleupagus? Eh? Eh...?"

"You just don't *mean* it, Jay."

"Well -- you appear and disappear, that's one. And you... uh."

"There is no two, is there, Jason?"

"No. No, there is no two. But! Dick's nothing like Big Bird. Except for how he likes the color way too fucking much --"

"It's a completely different shade of yellow," Tim says, and he's definitely getting some of his Tink back --

"Thank you, Tim," Dick says, and kisses Tim's forehead softly and *hotly* --

Tim shivers --

Dick rocks him a little until Tim deliberately relaxes himself, and then Dick sighs and buries his face in Tim's hair again.

Jason thinks he can *feel* Tim willing himself not to grow too much, but -- they're *going* to get Dick in one of their beds, and they're going to keep him there for a good long while after patrol --

And, when he checks, Clark is still giving him the soulful look.
"Aw, Jesus, Clark --"

Clark winks at him and eats more sesame candy. "You give most of your nicknames within hours and days of meeting the people you give them to, you know."

"I -- Tim wasn't 'baby' until we screwed. That -- that took a whole two weeks --"

"The longest, most frustrating two weeks of my life."

"Hey, I got you off a *couple* of times --"

"By *kissing* me. And *dry-humping* me. And then you'd leave, and I'd be stuck with my toys and no idea whether I wanted to jump directly onto your penis or *garrote* you for being a *tease*."

Dick laughs. "What about me, little brother? Did you want to strangle me?"

"I -- ah. You didn't really -- a part of me is still running around yelling because you're attracted to me. I didn't believe -- you know that."

"Yeah, Big Bird. I knew that you didn't think we were hideous or anything, but I also *knew* that you would never go for us, no matter *what* we said or did."

Dick's smile is a sad one. "Alfred. Alfred taught me a lot about how to lie. He taught Bruce the same lessons -- " Dick shakes his head. "It's just that I took so much from both of you already --"

Tim pulls back --

"Don't. Please."

Tim's breath hitches -- and he snuggles right up again. "I was just -- I was going to say that you *gave* us far more things than you took from us."

"Heh. Maybe, baby bro. Or maybe he's thinking of how much sleep we don't get, and how we don't get to even *try* to make friends outside of the community, and how our nightmares are fucked-up beyond all human comprehension, and how none of us are probably going to go to college... that about right, Dickie?"

Dick kisses Tim's forehead again. "You could always see so clearly, Jay. You don't know how many times I got up in the middle of the night to check to make sure you hadn't run away... it's one of the reasons why I did everything I could to make sure you *could* have Tim, that you wouldn't second-guess yourself about your feelings for him. I could see from the start that you'd never leave him."

"Jesus, Dickie, I'm not a fucking *quitter* --"

"But you're also the vigilante I'd vote *most* likely to stop doing crazy things once you realized they were crazy."

"Well -- the wrong *kind* of crazy, sure --"

"I already knew I had -- some of -- the wrong kinds of crazy, little wing. And I didn't know that I could... keep a leash on it."

Jason winces and nods. "But you know *now*."

Dick's smile is better this time. "I do. I also know my *littlest* brother will put up with being treated like a kid *half* his age if his pervy older brother needs it."
"It really is -- ah. Pleasant? I wouldn't make you put up a *fight* --"

Jason clears his throat *loudly*.

Tim scowls at him. "You were trying to rock me to *sleep*!"

"I'm not even talking about *that* time, baby."

"Oh -- well. You were painting my toenails the wrong *color* --"

"Not that time, either."

"I -- hm. I suppose I'm just making your point for you at this point?" And Tim nuzzles Dick's collar bone very deliberately.

Dick strokes Tim's hair. "Mm-hm. Jay, give Clark a nickname."

"Uh. I -- I can't do it on *command* --"

Dick *looks* at him. "It's not like *peeing*, Jay."

"It -- uh.″ Jason turns back to Clark, who's giving him the Superman-is-very-interested-in-what-you-have-to-say-you-adorable-youngster look. "*Augh*!"

Clark bites his lip, and he's totally and completely laughing behind his eyes.

"You -- see, I *know* you use that look when you're hitting on people who are way too fucking young for you -- wait."

"Yes, Jason...?"

"I got a nickname for you. It's actually -- heh. I've been using it in my head for you for *years*. Pretty much from the word go, actually... Chester."

Dick chokes.

Tim *coughs* --

Clark raises his eyebrows. "You do realize that Zatanna owes me many favors, and that I can *always* spend one or two by having her make you find... oh, *anything* sexually attractive...?"

Jason licks his teeth and sits back, planting his elbows on the backrest. "Like you *aren't* thinking about having her make me think I'm ten or something."

Clark looks down just enough that the visible portions of his smile look demonic. He coughs, hums -- and when he looks up, his smile is bland, friendly, and completely innocent.

Jason snorts --

"Ten, you said."

"Yeah, I fucking said it, you perv --"

"Out of curiosity... was that when you began your own puberty...?"

Dick throws the thermos at Clark's head --
Clark catches it, has a long swallow of tea, and *blends* at Jason again.

"You realize I'm gonna call you that in front of people, right?"

"I suppose I'll just have to endeavor to live up to it," and Clark tilts his head enough that Jason can be *sure* that he's checking out Tim's ass.

Tim picks *right* then to wriggle -- no, he could totally feel Clark's eyes on him. Tink likes that kind of attention just fine.

Jason shakes his head. "Okay, Chester. How 'bout you grab me a clean shirt --"

And Clark shakes it out for him right there and hums. "When will you let Alfred take your measurements for new ones?"

"Hey, these totally still fit --"

"Not as well," Tim says, and starts rubbing Dick's chest before turning to look at him. "*I* like getting the impression that you're seconds away from bursting out of your clothes to stand, gloriously naked, above your stunned and brutalized enemies -- but."

Jason pictures that for a little while -- "Which enemies?"

"It varies. At present, it's the varsity football team."

"Are *they* naked?"

Tim wriggles a little more --

Yes, Clark is checking out his ass again. Jason kicks him lightly. "Seriously."

"Well... their clothes are torn. Strategically."

Jason makes a face --

"Whether or not you've fucked them is *ambiguous* in the fantasy. But they're definitely available for that."

"So you're saying that I've beat them to the ground *and* made them my harem?"

Tim gets a thoughtful look on his face, so Jason leaves him to it and puts on his new shirt, which --

Okay, it *is* tight in the shoulders and a little through the chest, but it's not like the buttons are straining or anything.

Much.

Jason puts his jacket back on --

"I think this fantasy may actually be too disturbing for me now," Tim says, and frowns.

Dick snickers. "I suppose that only happens *rarely*...?"

"Well -- *yes*. There are few things healthier than an active fantasy life --"

"Oh... I've always thought so," Clark says, and somehow he's *closer* --
"Clark," Dick says, and lowers his eyebrows at him a little. "You can't have him, yet."

"I wasn't truly -- well, yes, I suppose I was." And Clark sighs and goes back to his seat.

Tim turns enough to give Clark a *promising* look --
Clark *beams* --
And Tim turns back to him. "Their clothes are still torn, but now it's in a less overtly sexual way."

"That's cool. No harem?"

"I'm making a different fantasy for that. I'll let you know."

"You do that, bro," Jason says, and gets dressed the rest of the way. He's still gonna leak a little, but it won't be much. His boxer briefs can take it, and --

Yeah. There was a time when Tim almost never talked about his fantasies -- not the casual ones and *really* not the real ones -- but Jason and Clark had gotten him over that by enjoying every fantasy he *did* talk about. Tim's an *imaginative* little fucker, and that --

Well, it fucking *works*. Jason can act when he has to -- and Tim wanting it is *totally* a 'has to' -- and Clark can do all those voices and facial expressions. Dick...

Well, Dick is a *walking* fantasy for Tim, so it'll probably be a while before he comes up with any about him. Or maybe not. Either way, Jason *is* gonna hear about 'em, and that's just fine by him.

Better than.

Tim starts eating quickly and neatly once Dick lets him turn around and Jason checks his watch. Sixth period is a wash for both of them --

"I told the vice principal that I needed you both for two hours today," Dick says, and grins like a shark.

"Heh. I know you didn't tell him why, Big Bird, but did you give him anything *like* a reason?"

Dick grins wider and shakes his head.

So *they're* gonna have to come up with something. Jason sighs. He'll make Tim do it on their way back inside. It's not like he -- or possibly Tink -- *won't* come up with a way to make Jason pay for it.

And *that* makes Jason's cock twitch just a *little* -- but Jason has every intention of staying dressed until he's home, so he gives Clark the stand-down gesture and shakes his head ruefully at Dick -- who gives him a *promising* look.

Jesus, he'd already forgotten that was -- yeah. He can deal. And that's just what he'll do.

*
Is that what it takes, big guy?

Bruce had tried to stay near Harvey once J'onn had arrived, but Harvey had waved him off with a slow, tired smile on his face.

("Go on, big guy. You can't help with this, and I don't wanna put it on you, anyway.")

Which had hurt, for all that Bruce knew it wasn't meant to. But J'onn had been very gentle --

(He wishes to remain... unsullied in your eyes.

He could never be --

I believe he will begin to come to know this after today. Please, be patient.)

And so that's what Bruce has been doing for the last few hours. The exercise equipment in the Cave is all the same as what he'd acquired for himself in his universe, and that is deeply reassuring. For all that it would be reasonable for there to be new, futuristic exercise equipment for Dick's family to use, it's the kind of reasonable which would...

Not hurt. *Panic*. The idea that there would be conditioning exercises to do which he doesn't know about --

Bruce sighs and then forces himself to breathe normally through his routine on the pommel horse. A part of him had come to believe -- despite the *myriad* reasons why such a belief is inherently dangerous -- that he had *finished* his training, that he had reached a point where, while he *could* learn more, he didn't *have* to.

He doesn't need to spar with Dick to know that that was a foolish belief. He needs to spar with Dick in order to *learn*. He's not even sure that he's street-ready compared to Dick's family. For all that he's reasonably sure that Jason and Skylark wouldn't have been able to beat him had he not been so injured and exhausted --

Bruce sighs again internally. *Part* of his reasoning behind wanting to teach Jason is that he wants to prove that he *does* have something to teach. He's going to have to watch himself for pettiness and jealousy along with all the other things he has to watch for. Like how much he misses Clark and Dick already.

Clark's Mission never pauses, and, of course, he's married. Dick needs time with his brothers and to do the necessary things to keep WE and the Foundation running smoothly --

Jason is in school, as is Cardinal.

Bruce wants too much. This is the danger of allowing himself these freedoms. This *distraction* --

Bruce dismounts perfectly enough to satisfy himself in a small way and tries to convince himself that he'll be *capable* of turning away from the wonders and beauty of Dick's family --

Of Harvey --

Of *Clark* --

But perhaps he *should* focus on Harvey. There's no -- Harvey has control and is *monogamous*. It wouldn't matter how much Bruce mooned over him, because Harvey wouldn't allow anything to
happen. Certainly, *Alfred* had always approved of their friendship --

And Harvey is, in his way, as correct as Alfred. He *won't* allow anything --

He -- a part of Bruce even *believes* that. It's the part of him which has always wanted him to be a certain kind of 'realistic.'

Of course, Bruce *isn't* irresistible in any way -- but he's also not as awkward and uncomfortably bearish as that part of him would have the rest believe. Bruce knows he's attractive, and that he's capable of saying and doing things which make him even more attractive --

And Harvey has been both jealous and inclined to distract Bruce from his attraction to the younger heroes. Bruce never *wants* Harvey to throw himself on the *grenade* of Bruce's sexuality, but there's a possibility that he'd do it. That --

It's a sickeningly attractive and *warm* thought. It comes with images, scents not truly appreciated since they were in boarding school together and Bruce could smell Harvey in the moments and minutes after a self-induced orgasm --

Harvey.

Bruce works himself on the rings and gives himself room to indulge. A Harvey who wished to remind him of sexuality no educated person could consider wrong. A Harvey who allowed himself to wallow in the attraction he's felt. A Harvey who would lean in to kiss, to touch, to *hold* --

Bruce moans quietly and moves into an Iron Cross, holding himself in position and looking for signs of fatigue -- there are none. He still feels as *renewed* as he had after that ridiculously long shower, and that...

Of course he'd already known what sorts of things constant, ruthless repression could do to a person, mentally and physically --

He'd never realized he *was* -- that repressed. Well. Bruce smiles to himself and continues to work, feeling his body respond the way it always should --

He'd forgotten what it was like to be healthy and uninjured so *quickly*... the dangers of adaptability? Bruce promises himself time to consider the matter deeply --

And finds that he'd already promised a goodly fraction of his time to considering Dick and his brothers. And Clark. Bruce winces. He'll have to adjust those schedules at least a *little* --

"Are you hurting yourself?" The voice is female and openly accusatory --

"Skylark," Bruce says, and *then* looks down --

Skylark is eating what looks to be a truly unhealthy candy bar and staring at him -- "Well?"

Bruce does an inventory of himself -- "No, Skylark, I am not hurting myself."

Skylark licks her teeth --

Skylark digs between two teeth with her thumbnail --

"Stupid damned peanuts," she says, pulling a paper napkin from her jacket pocket -- other than the jacket, she's wearing what seem to be well-worn workout clothes as well as her mask -- and spitting out -- presumably -- the peanut pieces before taking another large bite of the bar. "Anyway," and her
mouth is mostly full when she says it, "why should I believe you're not hurting yourself? You *look* hurt."

The scent of chocolate, caramel, and, yes, peanuts wafts up to Bruce -- "Hm. I suppose you can see tension in my face?"

"Like someone fucking *blasted* your nuts."

Hm. "I assure you, Skylark, no one has aimed a beam weapon at my genitals today," and Bruce moves into the next position.

Skylark tilts her head to the side and studies him. "You're better now."

It's tempting to respond to that with a question, but... he knows what she means, he thinks. "I was thinking, earlier, that I felt renewed."

She takes another thoughtful bite. "Screwing'll do that. If you do it *right*, anyway," and she licks her teeth again. "Teach me something."

For a moment, it seems as though Bruce has found an escape hatch from his future of pederasty and worse -- teaching someone else would take away time from his own training, and that can't be allowed to happen. And he'll explain (some of) that --

Except that he's already down from the rings and leading Skylark to the mats. Which is terribly predictable --

Is it better that she's female? Could it be?

"Would you tell me how old you are?"

She gives him a very long look, and, even though the lenses on her mask are down, it's a *speaking* look. Though this may have something to do with the sneer her mouth is pulling itself into.

"It's only --" *Does* he have a rational and non-sexual reason for wanting to know? "I'm curious about how much more you will grow, as it will have some impact on what you can be most effectively taught right now."

She raises her eyebrows behind the mask. "Sixteen. Robin says I'll probably hit at least five-ten before I finish growing. I'm gunning for six feet," and she finishes her candy bar in one large swallow. Or -- it's possible that she chewed once or --

She burps --

Snorts --

"Excuse me."

"You're --"

"Which of 'em *did* you screw? Other than Clark, I mean."

"-- excused. I --" Bruce coughs, knowing it for a truly pathetic gambit before he even raises his hand to his face.

She plants her fists on her hips and raises her eyebrows quite high, and --
"When did you put your mask on?"

"I -- heh. When I got on the grounds. This bike and these clothes belong to a civilian, so... it's not like I could suit up this early. Answer the question."

"Robin. I -- Dick."

She tilts her chin up rather pugnaciously -- hm.

"How are you at taking blows to the face?"

"Good enough to *avoid* it -- most of the time, anyway. The rest... it's pretty hard to knock me out with just a punch," and Skylark studies Bruce's eyes. It's abundantly clear that she's looking for a surprise -- or 'surprise' -- hit, as she's holding her body *most* of the way into a ready position.

Bruce gestures stand-down, just to --

She moves smoothly into a straight, loose posture.

Bruce nods. "I'm -- going to examine you. I may touch you lightly while I'm doing so, but I don't mean to --"

"Molest me?"

"If I may ask... do you feel I was wrong to make love with Robin?"

Skylark snorts again. "Hell, yeah. If you were making love with *Robin*."

"I wasn't. It -- all of you seemed determined to hide your identities from Harvey."

"Your not-quite-as-psycho-as-he-could-be buddy." She juts her chin at him again. "What do you want from us?"

Us. She -- will she live here, as well? Can he ask?

To have a young *woman* in Wayne Manor --

To have a young woman like Skylark -- but he has to focus. "I wish to be a help in any way possible while I'm trapped here. And then -- I wish to return to my universe and try to salvage the situation there, or at least try to help those people who *can* be helped."

"You know, don't get me wrong? But I'm kinda thinking that you're either a *lying* asshole... or the kind of asshole who hits and quits. Which one do *you* think you are?"

Well, that's -- Bruce shakes his head. "Skylark, I mean no harm to you or your family --"

"So what? You just didn't *notice* that Robin's been grieving for the you who *belonged* here for years? That he's a walking, talking open wound with your name on it?"

"I --"

"Lark." And perhaps it's fitting that Dick continues to surprise him -- this time by walking up to them from -- perhaps -- the Cave entrance closest to the East lawn.

Skylark, for her part, jumps somewhat dramatically -- "*Gah*. *Robin* --"
Dick strokes a line down the bridge of her nose. "Don't worry; I'll be teaching you that soon enough. I'm betting you'll get it faster than Jay... hasn't. Heh."

"*Robin*, he's --"

Dick gestures stop. "Jay already came out. He came out *first*, as a matter of fact -- because Bruce here is charming when he puts his mind to it."

"He charmed the hell outta *you*.*"

Dick smiles broadly. "Effortlessly. Enough that I begged, cajoled, demanded... he's a good man, and I used every weakness I could think of."

Skylark frowns and stares -- glares -- at him.

Bruce raises his hands and nods to her. "I was, of course, entirely ready to be convinced. Clark, Dick, and Jason have already taught me much about the nature of my sexuality."

Dick coughs out something -- yes, it was 'Tinkerbell.' Hm.

"Is it all right that I'm afraid of the lessons he could teach me?"

*That* makes Skylark laugh -- a snicker, really -- and Bruce can't help but smile for it. She has a very infectious laugh, and there's nothing wrong with preferring it to her suspicion and contempt.

"Shall I be cowardly more often, Skylark?"

She hums and licks her teeth again. "I don't know. Is *that* how you roll?"

"Really *not*, Lark --"

Bruce rests a hand on Dick's shoulder. "When it comes to matters of the heart, Robin, I'm ruled by fear far more often than I'm not."

Dick frowns for that. "You were never -- with me. I see. I think I see?" Dick laughs quietly. "If you tell me that you were *afraid* of *Clark* --"

"I was. A part of me still is."

"Oh --"

But Bruce catches Dick's wrist before he can -- it seems as though he was only going to slap him. Hm. "Perhaps I should have let that land."

Dick... glitters at him. "Boss, boss, *boss*. Do you wanna play with me...?"

*Yes*. And again, and again after that --

Movement --

Bruce dodges Skylark's kick --

Dodges again --

Dick twists free and moves to flank, gesturing commands to Skylark that Bruce doesn't know -- ah, she moves into a more actively belligerent ready-position --
And they come at him nearly as one. It's clear that they haven't worked together extensively, but Skylark follows Dick's orders -- which keeps her in the spar far longer than she would otherwise have been. She's quick, strong, and flexible, but she leaves herself vulnerable whenever she consciously attempts to pick up speed.

It's something he hadn't learned how to avoid until he was nearly twenty-one, and only then because he'd acquired an aikido sensei who was willing to work with him -- and on him -- for hours into the night.

Dick, for his part, is obviously testing him. He's allowing Skylark her vulnerabilities in order to see what Bruce can and will choose to do -- hm.

He gives Skylark his right side and attacks Dick with all of his speed --

And Dick matches him well, blocking with arms and legs and continuing to direct Skylark's attacks on Bruce's back and sides --

Bruce leaps over what would've been a powerful sweep, goes for the quick -- and weak -- kick which often connects with even the fastest opponents --

It doesn't connect here, at all, because Dick is rolling, flipping up onto his hands --

Capoeira has never been Bruce's strong suit, but it's obvious that Dick has no such difficulties. Bruce considers --

He turns to take Skylark down with a sweep of his own, a kick which he's careful to only graze her ribs with --

"You're down, Lark," Robin says --

"*Fuck* --"

"Up, out of the way, *watch*."

"Done," she says, and uses her own impressive gymnastics ability to flip up onto her feet before she jogs fifteen feet away.

Bruce blocks the punch which was truly a feint, blocks the kick which wasn't, spins and leaps into the muay Thai which was something of a relief to learn, considering the fact that it allowed for more use of his generally greater strength --

Dick smiles sharply, hotly, and goes back to capoeira. The rhythms are unmistakable, even as they shift --

"I would like to see you dance, sometime," Bruce says, and uses his speed to throw a flurry --

Dick quick-steps back, spins into a kick which just misses Bruce's wrists -- "Haven't done that in a while."

"Was it something --" Bruce strikes for Dick's shoulder --

Blocked.

His chest --

Blocked.
He drops and strikes for Dick's shin -- contact, but not enough of it. Dick is staggering, not limping --

"Was it something you shared with your Bruce?"

Dick's smile is bright and wide. "It surprises me not at *all* that you share the same kinks," and his stumps are shaky and slow --

Bruce evades, considers --

No, the stagger isn't a true one. He's hoping to lure Bruce in. Bruce nods to himself and switches to karate, where his speed is the best for reasons he's never been able to define --

Dick sucks in a quick breath and meets him speed for speed --

Movement --

*Bolo*, and he's quick enough to keep it from going around both of his ankles, but it still catches his toe --

He controls his fall as much as he *can* --

Dick snorts. "Didn't I say you were down, Lark?"

"Hey, it's not like I *wouldn't* still have my belt, Rob."

"Very true," and Dick is pouncing before Bruce can free himself. A grapple, then, and a part of Bruce is only wondering how often *this* sort of thing led to other sorts of things entirely --

He *has* to move his leg that way to *free* it --

Dick gasps and tangles their legs together, using surprising and wonderful strength to make Bruce *fight* to avoid the leg-lock --

Dick is throwing strikes with his left hand and blocking Bruce's strikes with his right --

Enough. Bruce uses his greater strength to roll them --

Rears away from a head-butt and remembers to *reach* --

He needs both hands to catch Dick's wrists, and it's immediately clear that he won't be able to switch to one hand --

His legs are still tangled with Dick's own -- hm.

"We appear to have something of a standoff."

Dick sighs --

"Wait a minute, doesn't he have you *pinned*, Rob?"

"Sort of. Look at our legs, Lark."

She comes closer and strokes down Bruce's calf. "He's not using all of his strength, though."

Oh, that's a very good --

"Good observation," Dick says. "However, if he *does* use all of his strength, all he can do is roll
us around -- and that would give me the chance to break or twist free."

Skylark hums and strokes Bruce's forearm. "He's stronger than you... but not strong enough to hold your wrists with one hand."

"Exactly. It becomes a question of which of us has the better willpower and focus, Lark, and I know where I put my money for that one."

Another snort -- "Like you *couldn't* distract him with your fucking *dick*.

Dick purses his lips. "You've been spending too much time with -- Starling."

"So we *are* going with protocol?"

"Yes --"

"Rob, if I was spending too much time with Starling? I'd say 'cock.'"

Dick sighs again, though this time it's the parody of a long-suffering parent. "You see what I have to put up with, boss?"

"You could consider punishing your siblings for their language."

"Hey, I'm not -- I mean. I don't have any siblings."

Dick turns and smiles lazily at Skylark. "No...?"

Skylark blushed. "Anyway -- punishing wouldn't work. Robin kidnapped Starling, Starling brought Cardinal in and Cardinal can and will do whatever the fuck he wants *whenever* he wants, and I'm -- independent. Mostly."

"Exactly. Also, when did you get the whole story? I was planning to sit you down for it today since you had a half-day."

Skylark smiles brightly. "Cardinal and Starling have been texting me all day. By the way? Good job christening the minivan."

*Dick* blushes -- and then his smile turns dark and sharp... but only for a moment. He raises his eyebrows behind the mask at Bruce --

Bruce releases Dick's wrists --

Dick releases Bruce's legs --

They stand, and Dick looks him over thoughtfully.

"Yes, Robin?"

"You never broke out the muay Thai against me except when I was *really* taking advantage of my speed and flexibility."

"Your Bruce knew your strengths and weaknesses as well as he knew his own. I only knew that you were a seasoned operative in his prime... and thus that I had to treat you as one of my more dangerous opponents."

Dick -- it's more of a flush this time -- "Turn around, Lark."
"Why?"

"Good point," Dick says, and pushes up on his toes to kiss him. It's a cautious kiss at first, but all it takes to change it to something rough and *needful* is a hand on Dick's freshly-shaved cheek. Or --

Perhaps it's the way Bruce can't stop himself from seeking out stubble, roughness --

This cheek had been *downy* the first time the Bruce from this universe had touched it with intent, with need which could only be answered with *more* need --

Dick moans and throws his lean, powerful arms around Bruce's neck -- and Bruce realizes that he's cupping and stroking Dick's hip through his shorts. His body --

His body is perfection, art --

Bruce pulls back --

"*Bruce* --"

"I'd like. May I sketch you?"

Dick raises his eyebrows behind his mask and laughs breathlessly. "I *found* my Bruce's sketchbooks after he died. You -- you're a pervert, and of course I can't say no --"

"You *can* --"

"Not to you, boss. Never --" Dick shakes his head. "Kiss me again. One more time and then we have to train --"

"Of course --"

"Shh --"

Bruce kisses Dick the way Clark had kissed him, tilting their heads just so and making the kiss a creation of power and hunger --

Dick moans *loudly* into Bruce's mouth --

Bruce nods for that and *takes* Dick's mouth --

"Okay, yeah, I'm seeing the worth-it-ness. You guys just go ahead and enjoy yourselves while I languish *alone*. And so totally *unloved*. And, like, surrounded by gay men when I'm not even *close* to being a fag-hag --"

Bruce coughs --

Dick snickers and pulls back --

"That's... that's really a terrible term, Skylark."

She crosses her arms over her chest and raises her eyebrows at him in obvious challenge --

And Dick walks over and shakes a finger at her. "People who use that particular f-word around here have to give Tink mani-pedis."

Skylark's jaw drops -- she closes her mouth and juts her chin. "You're *not* serious."
"Oh, I really am, little sister. And they have to be up to *his* standards -- he *will* make you do it all over again if you miss a cuticle or smudge the clear polish."

And now she looks somewhat... stricken.

Dick nods and pats her cheek. "Consider that your first -- and last -- warning."

"But -- Starling makes fun of Tink's damned sexuality all the *time*!"

"He also pays for it -- all the time."

"It's totally not paying if he gets to come from it, Rob. Just -- you *know* it isn't."

"Starling has given Cardinal six pedicures and five manicures -- he managed to stop himself after 'fa,' barely -- and, frankly, we let Tink set the rules for the rest."

"But you're *all* queer!"

Dick smiles quite sharply again. "When we consulted the magic mirror, it was agreed that Tink was the... ah... fairest of us all. Ergo...?"

"He sets the rules," Skylark says, frowning and --

"Is that a pout, little sister...?"

"I'm not -- wait, is there some kinda rule against pouting?"

Dick's smile becomes much broader, and, actually, somewhat wetter --

"Oh, Jesus -- okay, okay, I'm not pouting. However, I can still call you a gaywad, because I have *heard* Starling use that term and not get punished even a little."

Dick's laugh is soft and warm as he cups Skylark's shoulder. "Gay -- and all variations of gay -- are acceptable. As is queer. 'Sissy' will make Tink do something horribly mean to you -- probably because his father was known to use that term from time to time --"

"Oh, ew, *seriously*? His parents were *bigots*?"

That reaction is -- surprising. Bruce isn't sure if it *should* be --

No, Dick is blinking and coughing a little, too --

"*What*? It's not like I'm fucking *ignorant*. I'm allowed to bitch about everybody getting hot vigilante-on-vigilante action but *me* without it being a whole queerbashing *thing*, damn it."

"Yes, you --" Dick coughs again. "Of course you are, and you're totally right, and I take back at least seventeen different assumptions about you and what I'd have to train you to say and do. Okay?"

Skylark puts her fists on her hips again --

She turns to glare at *him* --

Bruce raises his hands. "I knew very little of teenagers when I was one, Skylark. I feel comfortable saying that I know even less now."

"But you *were* making assumptions."
Bruce smiles ruefully. "Yes."

"God, you *guys*. Okay, first off? Tink is my *favorite*. He's hotter than the rest of you put together, and *part* of that is how fucking queer he is, and I *know* that's bass-fucking-ackwards, but there you go. I *know* I'm never getting any, but *that's* fine, because the last time I got some I also got fucking *pregnant*, and I'm so not doing that again. *Tink* was there for me in the delivery room. *Tink* is the only one who knows whether I had a boy or a girl. *Tink* is the best friend I've ever had, even though I didn't get to know his actual name until *yesterday*. So, you know, *make* your assumptions or whatever -- I'm always gonna have his back."

Dick squeezes Skylark's shoulders. "That's why he was off the grid that night -- God, I can't believe I didn't put two and two together --" Dick laughs again and pulls Skylark in for a hug which seems equal parts bruising and affectionate --

"*Gah* -- *Robin* --"

"Little sister -- yes, I said it again -- please feel free to tell me off whenever the mood strikes you --"

"I -- I *will* --"

"Also, please remind Tink that he doesn't have to have secret friends -- just in case there are any other magnificently-more-attractive-by-the-second vigilantes running around I don't know about --"

Skylark snorts again --

"*Also*... tell me how much he's talked to you about his parents...?" And Dick pulls back to look at her -- and into her.

Skylark frowns. "He -- uh. I know they were kinda really fucking *absent*. I know they didn't give him rules or, you know, *anything*. I know that... I know that he's still a little fucked-up about them."

Dick nods. "Starling knows more about it than any of us -- though I've spied on those conversations as much as I could stand to. They were terrible people and worse parents. Bigotry is the least of it. Get Tink to talk to you about it as much as *he* can stand, because it's gotta come out somehow. But just to prepare you?"

"I'm. I'm listening, Robin."

"I'm glad I never had a chance to save them, Lark. Because I might've hesitated."

Bruce doesn't rear back. He doesn't --

He watches Skylark for *her* reactions, and finds a thoughtful frown in place of anything like shock or dismay. She reacted more strongly to the idea of performing a *pedicure*, and --

Bruce can't --

"Robin."

Dick closes his eyes for a moment before smiling. "Yeah, boss. I know you couldn't let that stand. I - - heh. I *would* have tried to save them, you know. I just wouldn't have jumped to do it as quickly as I would've for any other civilian. You look at Tink -- at *Cardinal* -- and see a confident, secure, brilliant vigilante. Maybe he's a bit too young --"
"Clark. Clark explained the place of younger vigilantes. I'm -- coming to learn --"

"All right, but you see all the other stuff, right?"

Bruce frowns. He knows what's coming -- "Yes. You're saying that he was abused by his parents."

"*Only* emotionally, but -- heh. It was pretty relentless, Bruce. When they were *there*, I mean. He didn't measure up as the son his father wanted, or the child his mother wanted. When they weren't trying to pound a square peg into a round hole, they were berating him for not doing the pounding himself. And it took its toll. When Starling brought him home for the first time, he was so jittery and nervous and convinced of his own basic unworthiness that I didn't think I *could* use him. Now, *some* of that was the fact that I was one of his childhood idols, but not all. Not by a long road. And that was *after* Starling had begun his program of fixing Tink's self-esteem by main force."

Bruce nods. He's seen children like that. *Families* like that. Families that -- truly -- didn't deserve the term. Still -- "We do not have permission to judge those who don't commit crimes --"

"Don't we? Because we didn't *just* call DYFS for the physical abusers way back when. We always found *some* reason to try to get help for the kids in situations like Tink's. Or hadn't you begun doing that?"

"That -- I didn't leave the parents in harm's *way*, Robin. Who could say what they could become with support and counseling?"

Dick laughs sharply and shakes his head. "The -- Tink's parents had *every* opportunity, Bruce. They took *none* of them. You did notice what kind of accent and diction Tink has, right?"

"There are certain similarities to Starling's accent... but those are artificial. Yes, I see. But there are no more chances when someone is dead, Dick. You know that. There are no chances to help, to heal, to even *alleviate*. Cardinal will never know who his parents could have come to be if he'd stood up to them."

Dick smiles again and massages Skylark's shoulders with rough efficiency before turning to face Bruce more fully. "Cardinal will also never be kicked out of his home for being queer, for loving someone of a decidedly different social class, for being more interested in the health and welfare of strangers than in whatever Ivy League college they chose for him... Bruce. You have to understand - - I have video of his mother *sneering* at him for getting a bruise from a game of pick-up basketball. His father was cheerful about it... until he began asking questions about whether or not Tim enjoyed the company of the other boys too much. They were hateful people, and I have no guilt whatsoever about their deaths. And -- I'm sorry, Bruce, but you can't talk me *into* having any."

"Seriously, Spooky, don't even try. I didn't know *half* this stuff, but I already knew they were useless."

Bruce blinks and turns to Skylark. "'Spooky?'"

"Robin still has *all* your stuff. One? The cars are seriously overcompensating for something. Two? The uniforms are *painfully* overcompensating for something. Three? The *trophies* --"

Dick coughs. "The trophies were *mostly* mine. Bruce would only keep the interesting weaponry and stuff to study them."

"Well, okay then. Still Spooky. Or, you know, Spooookky," she says, and wiggles her fingers like the sort of monstrous creature which only comes out on Halloween.
Bruce nods and smiles cautiously. "Thank you."

She frowns at him. "For *what*?"

"The nickname," Bruce says, and raises an eyebrow. "Though I begin to wonder what Cardinal will call me."

"Oh -- Bruce," and Dick claps a hand on Bruce's shoulder. "Points for the deft change of subject, and yes, I *do* think it's best that we agree to disagree, but -- ah. You shouldn't wish Tink on yourself that way. He's just going to come up with something terrible, and we're all going to side with him on it because he needs the validation."

Bruce hums. "I'll take the warning in the spirit in which it was given. Skylark asked me to teach her something. Do you have any suggestions?"

Dick raises an eyebrow at Skylark --

"Oh, what, is learning from Spooky against the rules, too?"

Dick purses his lips -- and laughs. "No, because I'm being a jealous *ass*, little sister --"

"Are you just gonna beat that into me until I accept it?"

Dick *beams* -- "Yes. Also... also, you should be moving in with us."

"*My* mother is still alive --"

"And could use some time off. Away. All-expenses-paid cruise...?"

Skylark jabs for Dick's abdomen --

Dick lets the punch graze him. "All right, I see that that's a 'no,' but still -- you *are* part of the family."

"*Owl* never lived with you guys."

"*Owl* thinks teenaged boys smell funny."

"She's *right*! Except for Tink. Tink always smells good."

There had been a certain scent to him this morning. Not quite flowery, but more flowery than musky --

"*Tink* owns more cologne than *Bruce* did."

Skylark gives him a look which speaks -- eloquently -- of disgust.

"You... don't care for cologne?"

"I don't *care* for grown men who are more vain than brainwashed teenaged girls."

"Are there... many? Of those?"

"*Yes*!"

Dick strokes Skylark's hair. "*Most* of those were for the Mission, Lark. He *pretended* to be vain and shallow and all of those other things so that people wouldn't take one look at how huge he was
and how many injuries he had on a regular basis and come up with Batman."

"Oh." She bites her lip and nods once. "That's okay, then. *Some* cologne is okay. Just, you know, I start feeling *insecure* when a guy spends way more time on being beautiful than I do."

"Unless it's Tink," Dick says.

"Unless it's Tink, yeah," and she jerks her chin at him. "*Teach* me."

Bruce looks to Dick --

And Dick smiles, steps back, and gestures like a ringmaster at the expanse of the mats.

Bruce nods and steps back, as well. "Show me all of your kicks, please."

She nods once and spins into one which may as well have been designed to stave in ribs --

Another which will at least dislocate the average man's jaw --

A knee-kick which will make anyone not wearing an armored jock pay dearly --

A side-kick that's -- wobbly.

"Stop," Bruce says, and considers -- "Again, slowly."

She does so, and it's immediately clear --

"You've injured your left ankle."

"Uh. Yeah. I broke it when I was eleven. It doesn't hurt or anything --"

"You've learned to favor it."

"Hey, no, I always stick my dismounts and my balance is --"

"Wobbly -- for that kick," Bruce says, and "Again, and hold your right leg in the kick position."

"Oh -- man, okay," she says, and does just that.

Bruce crouches on her left side -- yes, this close he can see that she's turning her foot over slightly. Not enough to make him worry about the integrity of the ankle, but... "Flatten your foot."

"Crap. I get more support --"

"You surrender necessary balance. I --" He looks up to meet her eyes. "I assure you, this is the best way for you to do this kick effectively."

She bites her lip again and flattens her foot, wobbling more --

Bruce stands to steady her --

"Oh -- Jesus, I feel *weak* --"

"You've been unconsciously allowing your calf muscles to atrophy, but your youth and health will stand you in good stead when you begin strengthening it again --"

"Starting *right* now, little sister. Now I know why you don't show me your right-kicks too often,"
Dick says, and sounds like he's berating himself --

"Aw, Robin, no, it's just -- um. Yeah. I'll just -- what should I do?"

"Come with me," and Dick moves in quickly to cup her shoulder and guide her away.

He --

Bruce wasn't *finished* -- oh.

Had it truly been that easy? That --

*Could* it have seemed that natural to teach a thirteen-year-old boy? A *grieving* boy, one who had to be searching for both purpose and meaning in the absence of... his parents?

*Who* --

Perhaps Dick would've been even more eager and willing than Skylark.

That would've *moved* him, urged him forward with more lessons, more *plans* for lessons which could only be taught when that muscle group strengthened, or that bone lengthened.

Skylark has almost certainly achieved much of her growth already, and so can be taught nearly everything she has the physical strength for -- and it's clear that her strength could *become* tremendous, given the rounded and faintly heavy musculature of her arms and legs.

Right now, Dick is guiding her in basic conditioning, making her stand on her toes and then her heels in order to teach her how not to let her ankle bend to the side unless it's strictly necessary. It's one of the things he would've done, and he has no doubt that Dick knows the rest just as well.

Perhaps... perhaps he'll be allowed to spot her, or --

Movement, and Harvey is walking toward him. He's still wearing the suit Alfred had found for him --

Had the Bruce from this universe taken his Harvey's things from Gilda when she'd divorced him? They would've had to go somewhere --

And Harvey's smile is slipping -- almost certainly because he'd noticed Bruce's expression. Bruce raises his hands and tries a soothing gesture --

"*I'm* all right, big guy, but I'm a little worried about you."

"I was... thinking about the Harvey from this universe."

Harvey winces and nods. "Yeah, that'd do it. Did you finally check out the file while J'onn was fixing me up?"

"No, not yet --"

"Aw, Bruce --"

"I'll look; I promise," Bruce says, and takes Harvey's hand.

Harvey squeezes firmly. "You were teaching the girl? Larkin? Loon?"
"Skylark --"

"That's right. She at least looks legal in a *few* places."

"She's sixteen. And -- I wasn't thinking of making *love* to her, Harv."

"Uh, huh, I believe you. I really do. *Robin's* the one thinking of putting it to her."

"I --" Bruce pauses and considers. The touches, the looks, the... claiming. The *relentless* claiming which, while ostensibly filial in nature --

"Yeah, you see it now. He's kinda... well, no, you're the one who's spending time with him. What's he like?" And the shadows under Harvey's voice are deep, frightening things --

"Harv..."

"What? Oh -- fuck. Don't mind me, big guy. J'onn helped me build something like a wall with a funnel in it between me and all the fucked-up shit from my childhood. There's this -- steady, slow trickle of... anyway --"

"Harv, that's not --"

"And also? I'm jealous," Harvey says, and grins at him, slipping his hands into his pockets and rocking on his heels. "I've never gotten to see you with anyone I could imagine you *liking*." That's... entirely true. Bruce nods slowly. "I don't want you to be jealous --"

"Yeah, well, that kinda thing happens, big guy. Nothing you can do about it --"

"I'd like. I'd like to make love with you."

"I know that. I mean -- I knew that."

"But you want them to be, and at least part of that is that they *fit* down here. Masks and sweatpants. God fucking help us -- okay, no, not that. But they fit, and *you* fit, and -- maybe you thought there wouldn't be anyone who *did* fit?"

Perhaps it was his turn to look away. "I thought of you, Harv. I thought -- I thought of telling you."

"Yes. I -- I've never wanted to lie to you. About anything."

"Including..." Harvey frowns. "Did you want this life for *me*?"

"Including..." Harvey frowns. "Did you want this life for *me*?"
Harvey nods, but frowns more deeply. "Did you want it for *your* self? I mean -- some of the things we were talking about before --"

"I didn't want it, but I needed it."

"Needed it or *thought* you --"

"I needed it. I -- all the struggle, all the doubt, all the pain and fear and *hurt*... it all led to... to a kind of *culmination* the first time I went out into the night as the Batman. I felt as though I finally belonged."

Harvey looks troubled, but he nods -- and grips Bruce's shoulder. "I was grateful to the Batman for helping me and Jim clean up Gotham, make it right for people, but I always kinda pitied him, too. And -- and there was a moment when I hated you."

Bruce nods.

"You -- Jesus, I knew you forgave me for that --"

"Lies... I've always known that lies hurt a relationship --"

"We don't *have* -- heh. But we do, yeah?" Harvey smiles and pats Bruce's shoulder. "You were the only friend I had back when we were teenagers. It was you, and that handful of pretty girls I hooked up with who could actually carry their half of a conversation. And then there was Gilda, and I -- God, I need her so *badly* --"

"I know, Harv --"

"And it's so fucking wrong that I've wanted that for you and wanted nothing of the *kind*. You were all mine for a good long while. Even *after* you started pretending to be an idiot --"

"Yes. You always --"

"*You* always missed your cues, slipped your tether -- something like that. I could see your *eyes*, big guy, and I --" Harvey shakes his head and moves to stand in front of him, cupping both of his shoulders and squeezing hard. "I wanted you to keep lying to me, keep pretending you were this, this shallow fucking *waste*."

"Harv?"

"See, if you were lying -- only not doing a good job -- I could come see you whenever I had time, could spend time with you day or *night*, and no one would ever think the wrong thing."

"The right thing."

Harvey sighs. "Yeah, that, too. But *I* didn't have to think it, either. Christ, big guy, if you'd ever been this open with me when we shared a room --"

"Don't --" But Bruce has to stop himself, because -- he's never wanted to *deny* Harvey --

And Harvey is searching him again, licking his lips -- "It's too much?"

"I want. I want to make love with you," Bruce says, again, because it's the most honesty he has available to him --

Harvey nods slowly, never taking his gaze away --
"Oh. Harv --"

"He doesn't want us to have this, yeah?"

Bruce blinks. "What?"

"Robin, I mean. He -- I did terrible things to him. *Fucked*-up things, because -- I think, maybe, the Harvey from this universe knew you were Batman, too. I think he knew, and he took it out on your partner whenever he could. Whether or not he could see that Robin was *more* than just your partner. I don't -- I don't blame him for not being able to look at me. And I didn't blame him for *claiming* you this morning, either. And -- I don't know anything, Bruce. I don't know anything, at all."

Bruce swallows and reaches up to grip Harvey's hands, to hold them, pull them down, pull Harvey close --

"*Bruce* --"

"I've learned -- so much that I don't have any idea what to do with. I've learned that my sexuality is *frightening*, Harv. But it doesn't have to be that way --"

"So you're saying you're *not* gonna drill your way through this family? Even though they *want* you to?"

"They -- no. Skylark finds me contemptible in many ways --"

"But then there's Robin. And *Cardinal*. And -- the other guy. Starling. And you want *all* of them."

Bruce frowns. "Is it -- I've thought about... limiting myself. It should be no hardship to not make love to *teenagers* --"

"No, big guy, it *shouldn't*. But..." Harvey's smile is rueful, forgiving, *hurt* --

"Please, Harv --"

"Tell me what he's like. Tell me -- you know I can't even wrap my *mind* around you and *Superman*, but you and Robin? That's -- that's a whole different thing, yeah?" And Harvey squeezes Bruce's hands *hard* --

It's a request Bruce can't ignore. "Superman -- he would prefer to be known as simply a man --"

"Can *you* do that?"

Bruce smiles ruefully again. "No, I can't. Not for any appreciable length of time... but I believe Robin can, and so can the rest of his family. I don't believe he's 'Superman' to any of them. I -- he and Robin have had a long, loving relationship."

"Yeah? Since the Bruce from here died?"

"Before then. *Well* before --"

"So you're saying that everyone in this family is a freaky pervert?"

Bruce frowns --
"Strike that from the record. It's normal for *them*, and I'm guessing -- no huge dramas? No break-ups that end with everybody beating each other bloody on these handy-dandy mats?"

"I can't be sure, yet, but that's the impression I was given."

"You know... the uniforms *alone* are just --" Harvey shakes his head again and twists his hands free, walking a few steps away -- "Aw, I didn't mean to do that. I -- heh. Nobody *here* is gonna care that the 'golden boy' DA is a giant queer. They just wanna keep the psycho away from anything --" Harvey cuts himself off and rubs his temples.

"Harv?"

"Just... just thinking. My old man... he was always real fucking clear that I was never gonna amount to anything. Sometimes I wish he'd lived long enough to see me married and a bona fide law-and-order *star*, see the papers calling me *Apollo*..."

Bruce moves closer cautiously --

Harvey sighs out most of his air and *slumps* --

Bruce cups Harvey's shoulders from the back and -- he massages them more gently than Dick had massaged Skylark's shoulders --

"Of *course* you'd be good at that -- Jesus. If you ever wanna convince somebody to put out for you? Do this."

"I -- to be honest, Harv, I believe a part of me would welcome a return to the status quo of absolutely no one desiring me for who I am --"

"*Me*, Bruce. I've always -- God, even when you *were* a kid. You were so fucking *sweet*, and innocent, and *grateful* to me -- and all I was thinking about was pushing down your pants and sucking you right into my *throat* -- heh."

What -- oh. He'd tightened his grip. He -- "I'm sorry, Harv --"

"You -- I changed the subject. I was gonna... tell you something about my childhood."

"Anything. I've always -- I never knew how to broach the subject --"

"Because I shut you down every time you asked about the bruises, yeah?"

Bruce nods -- but Harvey is still facing away. "Yes. I -- I was ignorant, Harv. Shamefully so --"

"*You* -- you actually had *good* parents, big guy," and Harvey reaches up to cover one of Bruce's hands. "You had no reason to know --" Harvey cuts himself off, teeth clicking together --

"Harv?"

He spins around and *grips* Bruce's face. "Did they hurt you, Bruce?"

"What? My -- are you asking about my *parents*?"

Harvey's expression is hard, *dark* --

"Harv, no, they never abused me --"
"It might not have *felt* like abuse, Bruce. C'mon, work with me. You know what I'm talking about."

He *doesn't*. He won't --

He doesn't *want* to --

And just thinking about it is enough to darken and -- and *pervert*, because his mind is bringing up moments of pure happiness, like his father tickling Bruce's abdomen with his mustache, or teaching him all about anatomy so he could surprise his mother with all the strange and interesting words he learned, or --

Or *other* things, and it was never --

"Ah -- God, Bruce, I'm so sorry," and Harvey is hugging him, and that's always wonderful, but --

"No, Harv, he never -- they never *hurt* me --"

"Bruce --"

Bruce pulls back and grips Harvey's arms. "I'm *all right*. There was -- there was never anything *sexual*.

Harvey frowns, and his suspicion is deep, *palpable* -- "Was it educational?"

Bruce blinks. "What -- what do you mean?"

"Your Dad..." Harvey licks his lips and then frowns *thunderously*, staring down at the floor between them.

"Harv, I promise you, I'm all *right* --"

Harvey shudders and continues to glare at the floor for a long moment --

"Please, I -- I want to help *you* --"

"Just like you wanna teach these kids, yeah? Help them."

Bruce steps back and drops his hands. "I know. I know my feelings are inappropriate at *best*. I'd like -- I'll be actively *working* to focus my attentions on suitable adults --"

"Like me?" And Harvey looks up and smiles lightly, ruefully --

"You -- you could never be a *replacement* --"

"But a focus. Someone who could pull you away from all the --" Harvey takes a deep breath. "You know something, big guy?"

"What?"

"I wanna go outside. In the air. Is it -- what *is* it like out there now? I know it was sunny this morning --"

"We... could check?"

Harvey smiles. "Yeah. Why don't we? And we could go out some other exit so I don't see any faces
I don't need to see, yeah?"

Bruce nods. "I remember... there was a spot on the grounds you seemed to like --"

"Aw, yeah, that great little stone bench right by the -- birches? Is that what they were?"

"Yes. It's actually quite close to one of the Cave entrances --"

"Then let's hit it. Get a little sunshine, a little time away from the cold, dark hole in the ground -- and there's *nothing* even a little bit wrong with the fact that this place has started to feel more like your home than the *manor* --"

"Harv --"

"Please?" And there's more in his eyes than just a plea, but it's the plea which gets Bruce moving. As if there's anything he would deny --

A part of him *does* feel he should tell Dick where he's going, if only not to worry him --

But Dick looks up from where he's crouched next to Skylark -- who is leaping in place -- and when Bruce gestures 'outside,' Dick only nods.

Harvey smiles at him. "Be honest -- it weirds you out a little that he knows everything about your sign language."

"Yes, it does. He's also added to it over the years..." Bruce shakes his head. "If you had asked me a week ago why I developed the hand signals in the first place, I'm not sure what I would've said."

"But you used them with people like Superman before."

"Yes. But I developed them long before I had any thoughts of working with *anyone*, even on a strictly part-time basis. I developed them when I was still convinced that I would always be alone."

Harvey frowns -- but then shakes his head and laughs. "I think maybe *part* of you already knew that you'd find *some* partner. And I think it was the part of you which makes Robin rock-hard and ready for you."

"Hm."

"Hm?"

Bruce smiles and reaches up to push the turf-covered block out of the way, then leaps up and pulls himself out onto the grounds --

"Man, my suit's gonna hate this. Ah, well," and Harvey jumps and takes Bruce's hands. He manages to get up and out with only some scuffing on his shoes, but he dusts himself off, anyway -- "Ever hear of *ladders*, big guy?"

Bruce pulls on his most dim expression. "Is that something to do with young boys, Harv? I don't think I *should* be doing anything like that."

Harvey's jaw drops -- and then he snorts and punches Bruce's arm. "Okay, I'm not sure how I feel about the fact that you can *joke* about that already, but that's a lie, because I *always* want you smiling about something," he says, and turns in a slow circle -- "Hah. Stand of white birches at three o' clock. That's what they're called, right?"
"Some call them colonies, but that's not strictly correct --"

"Just walk with me, big guy."

"Yes."

"What was the 'hm' about, anyway?"

Bruce smiles and lets himself blush -- not that he has any choice in the matter.

"Oh, *really*."

"Harv =="

"'cause maybe you were thinking that I get rock-hard and ready for that part of you, too...?"

Oh, now he's blushing *harder* --

Harvey laughs, bright and moderately loud. It's more than the situation is worth --

"Harv?"

"Ah, Bruce, I was so scared I was *crying* in that Cave of yours. The *empty* Cave, that is. I thought I was gonna die without ever seeing *anyone* I cared about again. I thought -- that's part of why I was pointing that gun at you. Sometimes when people get scared --"

"There's nothing they can do but offer violence."

Harvey laughs again, more quietly this time. "Look at me, forgetting that we aren't kids. You don't need my little lessons, anymore."

"I..." Bruce shakes his head and walks into the birches. The bench gets far more shade than it used to... he'll just put Harvey on the side. He should have as much sun as he wants. Bruce dusts the seat off with his hands --

And when he looks up, Harvey's expression for him is deep and a little unreadable -- until he smiles and sits on the sun-warmed part of the bench. "Me Apollo, you... well, it's not like you could ever be Dionysos."

"I suppose I could murder a lion and wear its skin."

"Yeah, but you'd also have to get *hammered*, big guy," and Harvey throws his head back and breathes deep. "God, I forgot how easy it was to forget that we *aren't* in the damned countryside. I hope those kids actually run around and play out here a *little*."

"Me, too."

"*You* didn't."

Bruce smiles ruefully. "I'm a hypocrite, among other things."

"You're -- Bruce, listen to me carefully, all right?"

"Always, Harv --"

"No, more than always. *Better* than always, because this -- these superheroes are gonna find a way
to send us wherever we need to go, and you..." Harvey swallows and stares out at nothing. The tension in him is palpable, but Bruce doesn't think he would appreciate touch --

Would he? Bruce covers his hand. Just his hand --

"Oh, Bruce... I don't think we're going to the same places. I don't think there's anything left of where we come from. I don't think -- I think maybe I'm going and you're *not*." 

"Harv --"

"No, don't argue this with me, okay? Just -- I'm gonna say this once, and you're gonna listen."

"Yes, Harv --"

"Be happy, big guy. That -- that's the only real thing. The only important thing. Maybe I should be worried about these kids you wanna bone like there's no tomorrow, but those kids have all probably seen things that'd turn my hair white -- and that's not it, either. They're not *you*. That's it. I care about you -- God, the thought of losing you scares me so much --"

"Harv, no, you don't have to --"

"Easy, easy. We're not talking about that. We're talking about how you can't let yourself be alone anymore, and how you have to -- have to be *happy*. *Somehow*. Maybe with this family that's had a space for you forever, maybe with some guy or a girl who'll actually make a *blood* family with you --"

"I don't --"

"*Please*, Bruce," and Harvey *grips* Bruce's hand.

Bruce takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I'm listening."

"I --" Harvey laughs again and scrubs his free hand over his face. "I don't know what I'm saying. I don't know -- there's not any more. I just need, almost more than anything else, to know that you're gonna be happy *somewhere*. That you won't be *alone*, because, God, big guy -- I've known you weren't supposed to be alone since I was *fourteen*." 

"You're not, *either*, Harv --"

"No, I know, and it's not like I ever managed to get too many friends..." Harvey frowns and squeezes Bruce's hand. "Not like you. Never... never anyone." Harvey takes another deep breath and turns to face Bruce. He cups Bruce's cheek --

He *strokes* Bruce's cheek, and then the spot on Bruce's jaw where the stubble always grows fastest --

"I remember. I remember when this was just a little spot. Like a bruise."

Bruce nods, careful not to dislodge Harvey's hand --

"I wanted to kiss it then. To just -- rub my mouth against it until it got swollen and red..."

"Harv..."

"Superman... his stubble's gotta be kinda ridiculous, hunh?"
"He uses his heat vision and a mirror to burn out the follicles."

"... oh." Harvey laughs quietly, breathlessly -- and then he kisses Bruce's jaw, nuzzles it and kisses again, again --

Bruce breathes out shakily and reaches to cup the back of Harvey's head. If -- if they can have this --

"Bruce..."

"Yes. I -- yes, Harv --"

"I love you," Harvey says, and kisses Bruce's lips, sucking the upper and then the lower --

Sucking *hard* --

Bruce pulls back enough that he can make the kiss deep, as heavy as he feels --

Harvey groans and licks his way into Bruce's mouth, tilting his head just so and reaching to stroke Bruce's chest through the t-shirt. And --

Harvey's hands are larger than Dick's, but smaller than Clark's. Harvey's mouth is nearly as broad as Jason's --

Harvey groans again, and Bruce realizes that he's pushed Harvey's tongue out of his mouth, that he's taking *Harvey's* mouth, that he's being aggressive. Too aggressive? He starts to pull back again --

And Harvey bites Bruce's lower lip and *claws* down Bruce's chest and abdomen, making Bruce jerk and gasp --

"You like that, big guy?" And Harvey's so close, so --

They're breathing each other's breaths -- "Harv..."

"C'mon, tell me. I need to know --"

"I liked it. I want -- I want to feel your hands on my body. I've always --"

"I don't have those baseball calluses, anymore. Softball once a year against the forty-eighth precinct really doesn't cut it, you know?"

"You have --" Bruce kisses Harvey quick and hard -- "Your writing calluses --"

"Yeah. Yeah. Maybe I..." Harvey sighs and kisses him more gently, letting it linger as he pushes his hand under Bruce's t-shirt and begins to stroke, to pet and scratch --

Bruce pants and tries to focus on the kiss, on more than the feel --

Harvey is *using* his calluses, and it's what Bruce has wanted, so much of what he's *wanted* --

"Harv --"

"I hear you, God, I -- the sound of your *voice* --"

"You make me *hungry*, Harv --"

"*Fuck*, this -- uh. Yeah, fast. Fast is -- what we're gonna --" Harvey shakes his head and kisses Bruce again, kisses almost viciously hard as he pushes his hand into Bruce's shorts --
"*Harv* --"

"No, let me -- please let me --"

"Oh -- I won't say *no*. I've always wanted you to touch me --"

"I know, fuck, I know -- help me get this jock out of the way --"

Bruce stands and pushes it down with his shorts --

"Oh, look at you --"

"Harv --"

Harvey wraps his fist around the base of Bruce's penis and groans, *stares* -- "So hot for me, so hard -- how were you hiding this behind that damned *jock*?"

"Painfully. Harv --"

"I love you, and I need you -- I need you to remember that," he says, then mutters something low and incomprehensible in the moments before he takes Bruce's penis *in* --

"Oh -- oh, *Harv* --"

Harvey nods rapidly, cupping Bruce's scrotum with his other hand and sucking so --

So *hard* --

And there's a part of Bruce which only wants to know how many times Harvey has done this, with *whom* he's done this so he can look into their eyes and demand they show how much they appreciated, how much they *loved* --

Harvey should always be *loved* --

Bruce strokes Harvey's hair, losing himself to the thick wave of it, to the pleasure --

The heat and *force* of the pleasure Harvey's giving and taking --

"Harv -- Harv, this -- you don't *have* to --"

Harvey *growls* around him and it's all Bruce can do not to *thrust* --

Bruce pants -- "You -- I know you desire me. I know you love me. I can't -- I can't *stop* you. I need you so badly, I don't -- but you're a married man --"

Harvey pulls back --

Bruce groans and drops to his knees to keep himself from weaving and *swaying* for the loss -- "I'm all right --"

"Bruce -- I have to believe I can have this."

"Harv...?"

Harvey tilts Bruce's face up, and his eyes are wide and full. He's letting his own need show, and his own hunger -- and his guilt and worry.
"Harv, no, I'm sorry I've been so -- I shouldn't let myself be so *needy* --"

"Shut up -- don't. Don't. Just --"

"I'll leave you alone --"

"Don't even *think* --" Harvey shakes his head and growls. "It's not you who has to worry about this, big guy. It's not -- this is just for us, okay? We -- I'll confess this to Gilda while crawling over broken *glass*, but I need you too much not to *try* for this. Okay?"

"I don't want you *hurt* --"

"I know, Bruce. I know -- and I always knew you'd try to take care of me --" Harvey squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, but when he opens them, they're only determined.

"Oh, Harv. I wanted -- I thought of focusing my desires on you --"

"To keep yourself away from the kids. I know. I forgive you -- God, you've never done anything *wrong* --"

"I've lied to you --"

"Shut *up*," and Harvey's laugh is breathless, but entirely real. "Come back up here. We -- we'll take it a little easy at first, yeah?"

Bruce is nodding before he can think about it, moving to sit back on the bench --

"Get. Touch me?"

Bruce groans and strokes Harvey's chest, seeking and finding his nipple and pinching it through the shirt --

"Ah -- harder, do it --"

Bruce pinches *hard* --

Harvey winces, but -- it doesn't look like a pained wince, at all. It looks --

"Harv... Harv, do you like --"

"Want it. Want *you*. God, your big fucking -- everything," and Harvey laughs again, lifts his hips - - "I can't wait. I can't -- touch my dick?"

"I'd like --"

"Anything, Bruce. *Do* it --"

And Bruce kisses Harvey again, making it as aggressive as he can --

Harvey grunts and scrabbles for Bruce's hand, gripping it and pushing it down --

Oh, yes. Oh -- Bruce groans into Harvey's mouth and opens his pants one-handed, grateful for everything he's learned about dexterity when one's focus is elsewhere due to pain or... other things.

Bruce feels himself *wanting* to laugh, but it seems too likely to distract from this moment, this chance to have what he's *wanted* --
He loves, he *loves*, and Harvey's boxer shorts are easy to push aside --
Oh, the *heat* of him --
Harvey pulls back and cries out, just for the touch of Bruce's hand --
"Harv --"
"Do it, just do it, make me come --"
Bruce leans in to kiss again, squeezes and starts to stroke, but Harvey cries out and shakes his head --
"I can't. Just --" Harvey shakes his head again and leans back, jerks for Bruce's squeeze and reaches up to grip Bruce's shoulder -- "Oh -- I feel you --"
"Yes. Yes, you're -- so strong in my hand --"
"Always wanted to be strong for you --"
"You are, you *were* --"
"Not -- not as *much* -- oh, *fuck* me --"
Bruce grunts and squeezes again --
"*Bruce* --"
"That's what I want, Harv. That's -- I want you inside me --"
"*Hnh* -- *Jesus*, big guy --"
Bruce pants and pushes closer, turning enough that he can touch Harvey with both hands, so that he can *hold* Harvey's shoulder still, hold him in place --
"God, so -- you can -- can push me *around* --"
"Do you *want* that --"
"*Yes*. Thought about -- you just taking what you wanted --"
The grass isn’t as soft here as it is on other parts of the grounds --
Harvey *and* Alfred will berate him for the damage to Harvey's suit, but --
Like this, with Harvey below him and staring up with wide eyes --
Like this, rising above and opening Harvey's clothes, his shirt --
"I'm a child with you --"
"You -- oh, God, Bruce, do what you *want* --"
Bruce nods and leans in, licking Harvey's throat and pushing his abdomen against Harvey's penis --
"Oh, yeah, yeah, all that *hair* --"
Bruce *rubs* his abdomen against Harvey's penis, sucks and bites --
"Bruce, Bruce I'm gonna -- *please* --"

He wants *more*, but he knows Harvey is close. He's had no jock compressing him, forcing him to both pain and patience -- but. "Harv, tell me --"

"You can fuck *me*. I've wanted --"

"You -- you've never wanted --"

"No -- *yes*. Everything, Bruce, everything -- God, right *now* --"

They can't *have* everything right now, but --

Bruce bites Harvey's throat again --

"*Bruce* --"

Bruce moves down Harvey's body, pausing to suck and bite his nipples, the shallow dip between his pectoral muscles. Bruce had watched Harvey rub himself there countless times just before he masturbated, before Harvey knew he *needed* to masturbate --

"Oh -- God, *yeah*, take me, *do* me --"

Bruce groans and grabs Harvey's shoulders, shoves at them --

"Not -- not goin' anywhere --"

"*Harv* --"

Harvey moans again and shoves his hands in Bruce's hair, grips it and holds Bruce's head against his navel --

"Harv?"

"You -- I need you --"

"Let me take you in my mouth --"

Harvey *whines*, taking his hands out of Bruce's hair and gripping the grass, instead -- "Like -- felt like taking *advantage* --"

"No, Harv --"

"Never thought -- never let myself think too hard -- ah, fuck, sometimes it happened *anyway* --"

"*Everything*, Harv --"

Harvey whines again and *tears* the grass, and it's not a yes, but it's *also* not a no. Harvey -- Harvey is strong. He can *stop* Bruce if he needs to --

And Harvey's *scent* is strong in the late spring air, thick and gamy from his workout earlier --

Bruce is already *salivating*, and -- he doesn't have to wait. He licks the underside of Harvey's penis from root to tip --

"*Bruce* --"
He sucks at Harvey's circumcision scar and Harvey beats at the *ground* --

"I'm not -- I'm not very experienced --"

"*Please* --"

Bruce squeezes the base of Harvey's penis *firmly* and takes the rest of it in, shuddering for the taste, the *strength* of the taste, the simple, human --

Harvey *sobs* and arches, lost so quickly --

Fast, he'd said, and Bruce knows what would bring *him* to orgasm quickly. Bruce sucks hard and works his head up and down on the shaft, and that --

It's so --

He's using Harvey to take himself, he's filling himself with his friend, his beautiful *friend* --

And this, perhaps, is something close to what the Clark of this universe has felt about him, this love and need which spans *years* of being convinced that nothing of the kind can be had --

*Culmination* --

Bruce groans and takes himself faster, closing his eyes --

"Bruce -- oh, *Bruce* --" And Harvey is moving, shifting --

He has to look. When he does, he can see that Harvey is sitting up on his elbow and reaching with his other hand, *staring* wide-eyed and *dazed* --

"Can't -- can't believe --"

Bruce hums and tries to make Harvey understand that it's need, that it's profound, that it's *need* --

Harvey whimpers and lets himself fall back down, reaching to cup the back of Bruce's head with both hands and pulling his knees up, planting his *feet*. "Gonna -- can't hold still --"

Bruce nods and hums again --

"Ah -- God -- can you take -- no, I *need* --" And Harvey holds Bruce's head still, keeps him -- "Oh, just that -- just that --"

Bruce shakes his head and tries to urge Harvey to take more, *use* more --

"*Bruce*, I need you --"

Bruce growls, hums *again* --

Harvey gasps, sobs -- and starts to thrust, pushing into Bruce's hand, into Bruce's mouth --

Yes, Bruce wants to say, yes and yes, and if Harvey would let him move, he'd say it that way -- except that Harvey *quickly* loses his rhythm. He's thrusting randomly, jaggedly --

Three thrusts fast and two slow and long, slow and *reaching*, almost --

Bruce uncurls one finger so that Harvey can slip deeper, press against the back of Bruce's throat --
"*Huh* -- oh -- oh, yeah --" And now it's *fast* and ragged, rough and *dark* --

And Bruce knows how he could make it darker, make it *more*. He's read, he's studied, he's
*interviewed* -- and he's watched Clark and Dick. Bruce moves his hand and gulps --

Harvey *shouts* --

Grinds --

Bruce's throat feels tender, *shocked* -- no, that's his mind, his heart --

Harvey wants him, wants to *enter* him, *is* entering him --

Bruce doesn't have the *air* to groan and his penis is twitching against the thin grass, waiting and
hungry, *starved* --

But the rest of him isn't, and that only becomes more true when Harvey cries out and begins to
ejaculate, spilling down Bruce's throat --

And on his tongue -- the *taste* --

Back into his throat -- and Bruce grips Harvey's hips and forces him to stay deep within, holding him
there while Harvey twitches and spasms, shouts and arches --

Bruce holds him until Harvey slumps and begins to whimper, and then pulls off as slowly and
carefully as he can. His body is telling him to *climb* on Harvey, to hold him down again as he
takes his own pleasure --

He doesn't know what that would feel like --

His body wants him to find out --

Harvey groans -- and laughs, soft and tired.

"Harv." Oh -- he didn't mean that to come out so harshly --

Harvey sucks in a sharp breath and sits up immediately, blinking his eyes open and gripping Bruce's
shoulders --

Bruce *pushes* against Harvey's grip --

"Oh, big guy... I meant to get you off *first*, maybe... maybe walk *away* before you could return
the favor --"

"No."

"Bruce --"

"It would've. It would've been too painful without your pleasure."

Harvey winces -- and nods. "Okay, yeah. You're right. This -- I guess this could never be easy -- I
can't live like you --"

"I know, Harv --"

"*Harv*."

Harvey grunts and reaches down to squeeze his own penis -- "No choices. Okay, I get you. I *hear* you, and I -- one good push deserves another?" And Harvey pushes on Bruce's shoulders --

It *hurts* to back away from Harvey, even just to lie down. It -- the pain of it is almost blinding, *tragic* -- "Harv --"

"I'm here. I'm right here. It's just that you're so big and *gorgeous*, big guy. I -- heh. I don't know where to *start*."

"You. It was always --" The words are trite, meaningless things. The words keep him away from this feeling, this knowledge that he may reach -- like so -- and touch Harvey's beautiful face, stroke his broad, Native cheekbones, the jut of his nose -- "Please," That word, at least, makes sense for this moment --

Harvey's eyes are so dark and *warm* --

"Please --"

"Ah, Bruce -- I. Just gotta --" And Harvey lowers himself down and kisses him, sucks hard on Bruce's lips until they feel even more swollen and raw, potentially as beautiful as Harvey's own --

Bruce cups Harvey's face and tries to urge Harvey to make it an even deeper kiss, a rougher, more dangerous one --

Harvey bites him, bites all over Bruce's mouth and jawline --

"*Harv* --"

"So big. So *fucking* big. I mean -- I'm not *small*," and Harvey laughs, breathless and much *higher* than usual. "Oh, Bruce --" Harvey kisses him again, shifts until he's lying on his side next to Bruce with his hand around Bruce's penis --

"Harv, *yes* --"

"I'm glad, Bruce. I'm so glad for this. You don't know --"

"I feel the *same* --"

"Ah -- fuck, maybe you do," and Harvey laughs again and starts to stroke, hard and fast -- "Won't last long --"

"No, no, I *won't* --"

"No, *I* won't, because I need -- you're gonna come in my mouth. You're gonna let me taste you --"

Bruce's body arches entirely on its own --

Bruce falls back down to the ground --

"Oh, fuck, don't *come* --"

"Now, Harv, it has to be -- *hnh* --"

"Oh -- God, I know that squeeze was too hard --"
"Good. Everything. I *need* you --"

"And I want -- wanna give you always --"

Bruce groans helplessly, aware that he's tossing his head but with no comprehension of how to *stop*. Harvey is moving, and a part of him panics atavistically. He can't leave *now* --

But Harvey is only settling himself down by Bruce's hip, only leaning in, *breathing* in --

"Do you like --"

"You smell so good. Even better than you did when we were roomies. I wanted -- sometimes I'd sniff your fucking *sheets* --"

Bruce groans again -- why didn't he think of doing that? He'd only sniffed Harvey's *pillow* --

And Harvey is nuzzling him, licking out to taste here and there --

Darting in to *nip* the head, and Bruce thinks that sound was more *animal* than anything else --

"I'm sorry. I'm not sorry. I'm -- no waiting," Harvey says, and takes him in three gulps. His eyes roll back in his head almost immediately and he's shaking, shaking as much as *Bruce* is shaking --

"Harv, your *mouth* --"

Harvey hums and nods, obviously trying to focus once more and *failing*. This -- he feels the same. He --

"It -- the *profoundity* --"

But when Harvey sucks, Bruce runs out of language. Of -- of things he can say aloud other than 'please' punctuated with *grunts*.

He tries to look at the sky, but the branches of the birches wind and twine together --

He wants to be held, encompassed --

He wants more of *this*, and it's the greatest effort he's ever felt not to simply lay back --

He sits up and strokes Harvey's thick, perfect hair, he cups Harvey's cheek --

Harvey is focusing again, studying him and looking for --

Bruce doesn't know. He feels *stupid* with pleasure, dim and shocked and lost to the heat and pleasure of Harvey's mouth, to the coil around his spine and the tightness -- "Harv..."

Harvey hums and nods and Bruce shudders, *pants* --

"My -- my scrotum -- *oh* --"

Harvey pulls off and *sucks* Bruce's scrotum, kisses and nibbles even as he strokes Bruce's penis *roughly*. It's almost enough to make him fall onto his back again, but he has to sit up more, has to *see* Harvey almost *presenting* Bruce's scrotum to himself, see his eyes closed and brow wrinkled in concentration --

"I want --" Bruce laughs again --
Jerks and moans for the ways the laugh moves his body --

"Oh, *Harvey* --"

"*Mine*, Bruce. Right now, just a little --"

"*Always* --"

"You'll *remember* me --"

"*Always*, Harv --"

"Remember -- it fucking hurts how much I love you --" And Harvey cuts himself off by swallowing Bruce again, and this time he works his head *and* gestures for thrusts --

There's no way Harvey *could* be as practiced as Dick, but -- it's what he wants.

And it's what Bruce's *body* wants, too. He doesn't thrust so much as he *allows* himself to thrust, and it almost seems a part of him is opening, relaxing everything including *control* --

He's managing not to thrust hard, but he's thrusting quickly, choking off Harvey's moan, Harvey's *pleasured* moan -- "*Harv* --"

Harvey nods and pushes his fingers back behind Bruce's scrotum, pushing into his cleft--

Every touch there is dangerous, dark and *needful*, and Bruce can't spread his legs properly because Harvey is in the *way*. He fans out his other leg and tries to find some way to urge that doesn't involve stopping -- or even slowing -- the thrusts which feel like the only thing which can save him from a lifetime of *pained* arousal.

The light scrape of Harvey's teeth makes him scream, makes him shudder his *relief*. Yes, pain for pain, need for --

For --

Harvey is stroking Bruce's *anus*. He's almost seeming to test it, to measure and study --

"*Please*, Harv --"

Harvey cuts Bruce off with a look -- he's so determined he looks almost *enraged* --

"In. Push *in* --"

Harvey squeezes his eyes shut and does it. It's only one finger, but it burns, it *aches* --

It highlights everywhere Bruce is still raw and swollen from Clark --

But then Harvey starts to thrust, and everything is heat, bright light, *heat* of the kind that makes Bruce sweat and toss, thrust *raggedly* into Harvey's mouth, his tight *throat* --

They are lover and loved, both. They are taking and *taken*. They --

Bruce never *knew* beyond the most shallow fantasies, the most *mindless* hungers. This is what he's *wanted*, and he'd denied that --

He'd *tried* to deny it for much too long. This may only happen once -- no. He won't think about
that, and he'll derail any conversations which would lead to that -- that *obscenity*. How could they be separated *now*? How could anything so fine, so heated and --

Perfect. That --

Harvey is *rubbing* his prostate --

Harvey -- his hand is so strong, so --

His eyes are almost steely in their focus, and all Bruce can do is make increasingly terrible sounds -- could bass *ever* sound anything but desperate and weak at *this* point?

Harvey is looking straight at him, eyes even darker than before, even more --

More *adamant*, stronger and more brutal than his unlubricated finger -- "More -- Harv, *more* --"

And Harvey urges a faster rhythm, a *steeper* one, somehow, because this time it feels as though he's being pulled up a great hill of his own arousal and hunger, that at the end there'd be exhaustion and perhaps things more --

More dangerous --

And metaphors fail him utterly when Harvey begins to suck in rhythm with his thrusts, when --

Bruce is grunting for every *push*, every *pulse* --

Bruce feels himself *spasm* in Harvey's mouth, and that --

Orgasm leaves him in an endless white -- no, it's punctuated with his own cries, with Harvey's strength and *ruthless* sucking and thrusting --

Bruce's cries turn to shouts, to *yells* when a scrape of teeth makes him flex and spurt what feels like a significant portion of his *spinal* fluid --

It shouldn't feel this good to lose everything, to give -- no, he's supposed to give, always to share with his beautiful friend, his only --

*Not* his only, but right now, perhaps, Harvey needs Bruce to belong to him. Bruce opens his eyes and waits patiently to focus. When he does, he sees that Harvey is holding him in his mouth and that, at some point, he'd allowed some of Bruce's semen to leak down to Bruce's groin.

Bruce shudders and can't stop himself from reaching down to swipe some onto his fingers--

Harvey pulls off and sucks Bruce's fingers into his mouth, shuddering and narrowing his eyes --

"Oh... Harv. Would you let me kiss you?"

Harvey nods and pulls back again, licking and nibbling at Bruce's fingers -- "Always wondered what the hell you *did* to get your hands to feel as hard as they did -- heh. I had these vague images of you yachting or something. Now I know you were working to keep them *soft*, you dog."

"Hm. Woof?"

Harvey bites down hard on Bruce's fingers and growls, shaking his head --

And Bruce can't help smiling. Just --
"Aw, big guy... yeah, that was good. *Incredible* -- but also just good."

"I always thought it could be with you."

"Heh. I'll do you one better -- I always knew it *would* be with you, and also -- I'm an idiot. Or -- I don't know. I had to be *careful* -- "

"Yes."

"I couldn't just -- if anyone ever found out -- hell, there were rumors about us here and there and we hadn't even *done* anything. If Gilda hadn't agreed to start campaigning and PDA-ing with me..."

Harvey sighs and pushes a hand back through his hair. "It's not fair. It's not right."

Bruce sits up and takes Harvey's hands in his own, massaging them gently -- "I am in your hands."

Harvey smiles ruefully. "Is that what it takes, big guy? A universe where one of us is dead and the other took a permanent trip to Cloud Cuckoo Land?"

Bruce reaches up to touch Harvey's cheek -- no, he leans in and kisses him, tasting himself even as Harvey must be tasting *him*self. It's a slow kiss, and an easy one -- almost as though it's the exact kiss Harvey wanted to take for himself. The thought makes Bruce shiver and move closer, close enough that he can get his hands on Harvey's rangy chest and stroke, massage --

Harvey sighs and cups Bruce's face, making the kiss briefly deeper before pulling back -- "You're the smart one --"

"Harv --"

"You figure out a way to make this work, hunh? I don't -- God, I never wanna give you up --"

"I love you --"

"Love me later, big guy. *Think* now," Harvey says, and his eyes are bright, the brown of them paler in a moment's sunlight --

"It's only... I'll never be able to say no to you, Harv. I'm not -- I don't think I can be *helpful*, even though I know it could ruin your career and your -- your marriage."

Harvey winces. "That -- that bad? I mean, I knew that --"

Bruce nods and strokes down to Harvey's waist. "I shouldn't ask you to have control for both of us. I know that --"

"You -- you've always needed people who could hold you, who could *take* your kind of love. You -- what the hell do you think you did when Robin was in danger?"

Bruce smiles ruefully again. "I imagine I hurt certain criminals very badly... but, in truth, I don't know. He's covered in scars, and some of them are quite terrible --"

"Like on his bare-ass arms and *legs*? I saw that damned uniform --"

"Apparently, Robin chose it for himself --"

"Don't let the kid *do* that in -- whichever universe you wind up in --"

"Harv, there's still hope for *our* universe --"
"Bruce. Great big chunks of everywhere wound up getting *swallowed* --"

"I have to believe --"

Harvey puts pressure on Bruce's face. "I have to be real. I might -- I might not ever get a chance to see my Gilda again. I might not make it *anywhere* when all the big scientists here send me away. I might --" Harvey blows out a breath. "It's all gonna be up in the air, one way or another, Bruce. It -- we have to take what we can, I think."

"Is that... is that what let you make love to me?"

Harvey smiles softly. "Yeah, a little. Mostly it was the jealousy and the fact that I finally know... well, not all of you. I don't think anyone in *any* world knows all of you, big guy. You -- you're big all over. Big-bodied, big-brained, big-hearted. You've got room for all this *stuff* -- including faith. I'm just a guy, Bruce. I don't have room for all that much, at all."

"Harv... Harv, what if I traveled *with* you?"

"Then I'd get to have you for just a little while longer. Or maybe a *long* while longer. I don't know. We *can't* know, Bruce," and Harvey strokes down to Bruce's shoulders again. "What I do know? Robin doesn't get to have you. *Starling* doesn't get to have you. *Cardinal and Skylark* don't get to have you --"

"I -- you think -- you don't approve --"

"It's not up to me to approve or disapprove. I -- hell, depending on how old Cardinal is, that might not even be statutory rape --"

"Harv --"

And Harvey cuts him off by *gripping* Bruce's jaw. "How many people have you let talk you into this so far, hunh? Superman, Robin... don't push me into telling you to fuck kids. Please."

Bruce rears back. "Harv, no --"

"We all -- everybody's gotta want you to be happy, and I -- I was your first real friend, yeah? The first stranger to really... really care about you?"

"Yes, Harv --"

"So you gotta listen to me, okay?"

"*Always* --"

"Yeah, like that. Just like that. You're good. You're so -- you've always *been* good, even though you've also always been a little fucked-up. I..." Harvey's smile is pained, and he loosens his grip on Bruce's jaw. "I don't know how deep it goes. I'm not a shrink *or* a damned Martian. Maybe... maybe you should get *him* to check you out, to find all the places in you which go for teenagers and... okay, so he said he couldn't just erase all the bad stuff, but fuck, Bruce, you know what I'm saying, don't you?"

"That I... should have more control?"

"Ah -- God. Maybe?" Harvey laughs again. "Look, I'm not gonna talk you into fucking kids even if it *is* making love to them --"
"Of course not --"

"It's just that I'm also not -- I'm not your conscience. I'm not *our* conscience. You say you can't say no to me? That's -- well, that's on both of us for the kind of relationship we built between us. It's just that I'm *not* your conscience*. It's not my job to talk you *out* of fucking kids, either --"

"I wouldn't --"

"Wouldn't you? Think about it, big guy. You've *always* let me call the shots. You didn't stop until you were the goddamned *Batman*, and even then you always asked me. Even if you *knew* your way was the best."

Bruce breathes deeply and closes his eyes --

"Yeah, you're hearing me. You -- I'm not giving you up, okay? I'm *always* gonna be your friend -- and you're always gonna be the first person I ever fell in love with --"

"You -- you, *too*, Harv," and Bruce knows his voice is pleading, but he can't stop --

"Aw -- fuck, big guy, I don't even know. I don't know a damned thing. I just -- make your own choices. Do what you *know* is right, and good, *and* what's gonna make you happy -- and the other person, too."

Bruce raises an eyebrow. "And when the other person is Cardinal?"

Harvey smiles wryly and sits back on his heels, raising his hands between them. "We're not kids anymore. We don't get to wrap our whole lives up together. Make a choice. Just remember -- just remember that I love you, okay?"

"It -- it feels as though you're saying goodbye --"

"Never, big guy. I'm just -- laying a few ground rules, okay?"

Bruce takes Harvey's hands in his own. "I will not make you direct my life. I will not ask that of you ever again."

"Ah -- *that* feels like goodbye, even though I asked for it --"

"Oh -- *no*, Harv --"

"Easy, easy, no, it's okay," and Harvey pushes his fingers between Bruce's own. "I know -- we both know what we're saying, yeah?"

Please don't leave -- Bruce beats the thought back and nods --

Harvey searches him *warily* --

"It's all right, Harv. I -- it's an old thought. I've always wanted to 'wrap my life up' with yours."

"Yeah? It's not -- something else?"

"I won't lie to you again," Bruce says, as solemnly and solidly as possible.

Harvey searches him again and then nods. "That's -- this is as good as it gets then, I think. The two of us, a sunny day, the taste of come -- heh. Okay, so I'm not much of a romantic. Gilda's always getting on me about that, even though the one time I brought her flowers she hit me with 'em."
"I -- hm. Maybe... maybe candy?"

"Yeah, that's always a winner with her. But it can't be chocolate all the time. She likes those fruity candies, too. The kind that taste like a chemical factory threw up on a lime."

"I. That's... pleasurable?"

Harvey laughs. "Not to *me*, big guy, but who am I to judge? I still eat hot dogs from street vendors and I'm a grown man."

"I've heard terrible things about those, Harv --"

"Oh, they're awful. Packed with organ meat and chemicals -- heh. They taste *fantastic*."

"They sure as fuck do," Jason says as he levers himself out of the hole -- "Aw, goddamnit, I did *not* need to see you people naked," and he braces himself with one hand and covers his eyes with the other. "Robin wants you, B. It's time for you to teach him absolutely every fucking thing he doesn't already know."

"Oh. I believe I'll enjoy that --"

"Yeah, yeah, I know, you're *big* into showing pretty guys how to work it for you -- aw, man, that has way too many images attached to it now -- fuck," and Jason drops down into the Cave again.

If Bruce concentrates, he can hear him walking away. However, judging by the large amount of scuffing -- yes, Jason is making sure they *can* hear him, whereas before... "Hm."

Harvey tugs his hands free and stands, beginning to gather his clothes. "'Hm'?"

"I believe Starling *chose* to approach us stealthily."

"You're not thinking that that's just how he works, big guy?"

Bruce stands and begins to dress, as well. "Robin suggested that stealth didn't come naturally to Starling, and he wasn't very... quiet last night."

"Yeah, okay, I'm thinking a guy like that maybe needs to be a little loud. Got a real mouth on him."

And when he uses it to kiss -- no. "Yes."

"Meaning you don't like it, or is it just that your brain's already running through crazy kung fu moves?"

Bruce shakes his head -- but. "Yes, I'm sorry. I've never been in the position of sensei, save for those few minutes with Skylark."

Harvey cocks his head to the side as he buttons his shirt. "You like it for itself. Not just for the pretty kids."

"The opportunity to share what I've learned..." Bruce shakes his head. "I know I'm being ridiculous - -"

"Only if every good teacher in the world's ridiculous. Heh -- not that we saw too many of those at Exeter. Trust me, though, they're out there."

Bruce nods and adjusts his jock. "You told me your eighth grade English teacher was instrumental in
helping you come to Exeter once."

"Heh, yeah. Ms. -- not Miss, not Mrs. -- McGrath was incredible. She not only gave us all the best books to read, she actually taught us all *how* to read."

"But --"

"Not the basics, big guy -- the *fundamentals*. How to look at a story from multiple angles, how to get in the author's head a little, how to pull multiple stories out of one big story... all that good stuff that *you* didn't *need* anyone to teach you."

"I -- I had my mother."

Harvey looks up and searches him -- "Yeah? Okay, then. You always said your Mom was big on reading to you and making sure you read on your own, too. I can see it."

Bruce pulls on his shorts and gives himself permission to watch Harvey's fingers as he deftly ties his tie, as he buckles his belt, as he pats his hair in place --

"-- not listening to anything right now, are you? Still shadow-teaching?"

Bruce blinks and -- realizes that he's already finished dressing. "Hm. I was mainly focused on your hands, Harv --"

"Horndog. *Such* a horndog," and Harvey is grinning at him happily, proudly --

"I *was* also listening. You were saying that you've kept in contact with her?"

"Heh. Because you're *you*, right, don't know how I forgot. Anyway -- yeah. First just thank-you letters, and then, you know, she would ask about what I was learning... she always made me feel guilty that I didn't take more Lit classes, but Sharpe turned me off *so* bad --"

"And you were far more interested in other things, Harv."

"Yeah, that's true," and Harvey shrugs on his jacket -- which does, in fact, have a few small grass stains. "Still, part of me always wanted to give her *you*. She could've turned you into the kind of professor they make sappy movies about."

"Hm. Assuming I didn't molest my more interesting students, Harv...?"

Harvey coughs and smacks the side of Bruce's head. "Stop that. Or -- hell, if it *works* for you to trip me with your own cock? Go with it."

That -- "That's a fascinating image."

"It's what you were *doing*, big guy. Of course, your sense of humor... well, anything that took that long to develop was pretty much *doomed* to be messed-up. Okay, you're going down the hole first, *then* you're helping me down so I don't break my damned leg. And we're going to find ourselves a ladder the next time the world's most terrifying teenagers give you a break."

"All right, Harv --"

"And --" Harvey grabs Bruce's t-shirt and pulls him close. "You're just gonna let me keep calling the shots? Even after all of that?"

Bruce -- blushes --
"Aw, Jesus, not --" Harvey kisses him, hard and quick and affectionate. And then he does it again --

Again --

He mutters something about one or both of them being crazy --

He kisses Bruce *again*, and bites Bruce's lip, and nuzzles Bruce's mouth and cheek -- ah, the place where the stubble grows quickest and most thickly, again. Harvey cups Bruce's other cheek and nuzzles there --

"I love you, big guy."

"A part of me will always belong to you --"

"Yeah, ditto. So many times I laid up in bed wondering what you were doing, where you *were* on that big world tour of yours. Maybe. Maybe you should stay somewhere I can always find you, hunh?"

"Gotham. I could never leave -- ow."

Harvey growls jokingly against Bruce's cheek. And then he laughs. "Sorry. Really. Uh. Right," he says, and kisses Bruce's cheek. "We'll see what happens when you *pick* a Gotham, yeah?"

And -- it's not the time to point out that he has every intention of returning to their own universe. That much is abundantly clear in Harvey's eyes. "All right, Harv."

Harvey points at the hole in the ground --

Bruce drops.

*
"One* of you has to be a little bit straight!"

"So what does he look like?" And Steph's giving him the laser-eye treatment -- which is bad enough -- but Tink is doing the thing where he's sitting on the console with his legs crossed at the knee and his hands folded on *top* of his knee --

"Tink, stop killing your sac. It's done *nothing* to you --"

Steph punches his fucking *funny* bone --

"*Jesus*, Lark --"

"Stop worrying about Tink and tell me what he *looks* like," she says, and she's actually moving into a *boxing* stance --

"Inquiring minds... ellipsis," Tink says, and smiles *wetly* -- because he's damned well wearing his sluttiest lip gloss. The one that had led to a family meeting with the goddamned vice principal where Dick talked a lot of shit about 'encouraging teenaged self-expression' which actually translated to 'I could sue you people into the Stone Age.'

*After* that meeting, Tim only wore *that* lip gloss to school on pep rally days, and they all called it a good compromise, and --

"You know something, Lark? If you hold your face like that for much longer, you're *guaranteeing* wrinkles."

"What the fuck do *you* know about it?"

Jason points at Tink.

Tink smiles sweetly and swings his legs a little. "Don't worry, Skylark. I give *excellent* facials."

Steph chokes and punches Tink's knee --

"*What*?"

"You *know* what, you damned perv!"

Great, now maybe he can just *ease* away a little. If he makes it all the way to the weights, then they'll *have* to leave him --

Movement --

Jason dodges right --

Too late. He hits the stone *hard*, because *one* of them had used the goddamned *heavy*-weighted bolo --

"Ooh, that was *mean*, Skylark."

"Effective, though," she says, and straddles Jason's waist --

"You know, *normally*? I'd be fine with this. *Great* with this, even --"
"Fuck you, Star, this *is* normal for you people."

"You people, Skylark? That's not very sensitive," Tink says, and that's the sound of him coming closer --

Closer --

Steph snickers and leans down to pin Jason's arms before he can get revenge. She can't *hold* him like this, but --

Tink crouches and lifts a lock of Jason's hair out of his face. "Were you going to do something mean to *me*, Starling?"

"*Yes*."

Tink gives out that long-suffering sigh he does so fucking well. "This is why we *have* to restrain you, Starling. You -- you have *terribly* wrongheaded ideas."

"Like trying to get away before you give us the *goods*," Steph says, and digs her knees in against Jason's sides --

"Hey, ow --"

"*Take* it, bitch. And tell us what he *looks* like."

"Jesus fucking -- *Tink* can tell you. *He* saw them naked in the shower --"

"But he'll use the icky *clinical* terms!"

Tink hums... and shakes himself loose until he's more Tim than Tink. "She's absolutely correct. I'll make them sound like diagrams in an anatomy textbook."

" Fuckin' A -- that's what they *should* sound like and Lark, if you smack me again, I will flip us, wrestle you down, and spank you."

"Assuming I don't help her wrestle you."

"Heh." Steph drums her fingers against Jason's wrists. "When's the last time *you've* had a spanking, Star?"

Jason tries and fails to blow hair out of his face --

"If you give us an honest answer, I'll keep your hair out of the way," Tim says, offering openly, *happily* --

And *Steph* is happy --

Why is he putting up a fight, exactly? Jason laughs a little and flips Steph *gently* so he can sit up, spread his legs, and plant Tim on his left thigh. He gestures to his right thigh for Steph's benefit --

She *blushes*, and that's fucking *hot* --

He's fucking *trained* --

"Do it, Skylark," Tim says, and smiles *gently* up at her -- "You haven't lived if you haven't ridden one of Starling's thighs at least a little."
"I --" Steph looks over to the spot on the mats where Dick and Bruce and fucking *Dent* are shooting the shit --

"C'mon, Lark. They'll be over there for a while, yeah?"

Steph bites her lip -- and then gives him one of her *adult* smiles. "You're not taking anything the wrong way?"

"Tell you what -- you don't like what I say or do? Find *creative* ways to let me -- and my junk -- know." And also tell me when I can get another *kiss* --

She sighs and drops to her knees, not quite riding his thigh, but not really holding herself apart, either. Good deal. And --

"You good?"

Another blush -- and she reaches to cup his shoulder with one hand. Tim snuggles up nice and close and puts his head on Jason's other shoulder --

"Fuck, I love this," and Jason cups their sides a little, checks on 'em one more time --

Steph's got the adult smile back. "Robin totally taught you to love the constant cuddling, didn't he?"

"Au contraire, ma soeur --"

"You can't use it if it doesn't rhyme," Tim says, and jabs Jason's pec a little --

"How is that a rule?"

"Because I *said* so."

Jason blows out a breath and turns to Steph. "Do I gotta take that?"

"Are you gonna talk like you have *no* education?"

"Yeah, maybe. Got a problem with that, Lark?"

She raises her eyebrows. "With you sounding like the guy who got me pregnant and then dumped me?"

Oh... damn. That.

Tim snorts. "I believe you just made his scrotum try to retract."

Steph smiles meanly and taps the tip of Jason's nose. "Good to know... but I don't actually have a problem with the way you talk, since you damned well shape up when you should."

"Hn. Not when he talks to the Commissioner."

"Hey, c'mon, Jim *expects* me to be a little punk."

"You're not *little*, Star," and she *flicks* his nose. "He's maybe thinking that Robin hasn't *trained* you right."

"I almost *never* curse more than three or four times in front of him --"

"Because Robin doesn't let you *talk* that much," Tim says, and shows his teeth --
"Aw -- *Star*!

"Did I mention how much I like that nickname? 'cause I really fucking do."

"I -- *good*, but --"

"*But*, it gives Tink more time to perform, Lark. And *everybody* loves that."

Tim hums and tosses his hair *almost* like Tink. It's a little faster and *brusquer* than he would do it. "Not every artist is appreciated in his own time."

Steph snorts. "Okay, okay. Fine. I will totally smack you if you act up when *I* show up on Central, though."

"Works for me, babe," and maybe it *is* pointless to wink at most people from behind a mask --

But he can *see* Steph seeing it. *Good* deal.

"*Anyway*," she says, and gives him a stern look. "Robin didn't teach you how to cuddle?"

"*Robin* taught me how to cuddle like a grabby *asshole*. My cuddle is always... uh... respectful!"

Tim snorts again --

And Steph stares at him with her eyebrows up.

"Hey, I totally give people room to object, room to get closer, the right to decide how *firm* a given hug should be --"

"You pick Tink up by the scruff of the neck and *carry* him places --"

"It's really only objectionable when we're in public."

Jason shakes Tim a little --

"Starling. *Never shake the baby*."

Jason snorts so fucking hard he *hurts* himself, and Steph makes a sound like what would happen if one crow flew head first into another crow's chest.

Tim, for his part, looks happy and smug, so Jason only smacks him *lightly*.

"If you don't wanna be carried, bro, then *stop making me do it*."

Steph giggles. "*How* does he make you do it?"

"Usually by talking shit -- in a *real* posh and educated way -- about the big, douchey rich boys standing *well within earshot*. Tink gets in more fights than *I* did."

"They're much less *serious*, though --"

"Baby? One day they're *all* coming after you, and then you either make like you're a lot more hardcore than the incredibly gay Grayson kid *should* be... or you get your ass beat *badly*.

And it's not like Tim doesn't *know* this, but he still puts on the pouty face --

Steph shoves him a little. "They're that bad? I would've thought they were all too busy doing lines
and date-raping the private school girls."

Tim coughs into his fist. "Well... there is a good amount of that --"

"It's mostly what he makes fun of them for. When he's not just finding ways to call them gay."

Steph shoves Tim a little *more* --

"Skylark --"

"You *know* you're totally making it worse for other gay kids who have to deal with those guys, right?"

"I --"

"*Seriously*. You're the gayest guy they know, and they all sound stupid enough to judge *other* gay people based on *you*.*"

Tim blinks... a lot. Which --

"Okay, so I never thought about that angle."

Steph laughs and shakes her head. "You never had to, Star. By the time you met those people, you could kick everyone's ass *once* and be done with it. Plus..." She eyes him a little shrewdly. "*Did* you hook up with anyone in school before Tink was right there?"

"Uh -- some of the chicks from the sister schools. You know, the ones who wanted the *dangerous* boy."

Steph nods once. "So there you go. You could probably come out to those guys and they'd still think of *you* as mostly okay. See, that's -- *you* kicked their asses, and they totally know you don't like queerbashing, but you don't *torture* them."

Tim winces. "Whereas I... live to torture them. Kind of... a lot. I do see what you're saying, Skylark - -"

"No, I know, it's fucked. You *should* torture them. I *like* thinking of them as being tortured even more than I like the image of Star picking you up and carrying you away from red-faced goons full of impotent rage --"

"Oh, the -- the impotent rage is extremely entertaining --"

Steph sighs. "Yeah, I *bet*. I -- anyway. You should just pick out the worst ones, kick their asses once, and have done with that. They'll think twice about picking on skinny little gay guys, and you won't have made anything worse. You know?"

Tim nods and smiles ruefully, reaching over to hold Steph's hand. "I'll listen to you."

Jason frowns at their hands a little. "Okay, wait, Robin wasn't just talking shit about you two having a little thing?"

Steph grins *meanly*. "Jealous...?"

And Jason has to snort for that a *little* -- but not all that much, because the shadow in Tim's eyes --

Well, it's there.
Jason cups Tim's face and kisses his forehead --

"Starling --"

"You're totally not ready to be completely married to me, Tink, and that's cool. Just, you know, remember that the whole *family* needs Skylark."

He can see her blushing out of the corner of his eye --

He can see *Tim* blushing -- "I -- yes, Starling."

"Hey, no, this isn't -- well, okay, it is a *little* official, but it's also not. *You* saw how happy Robin was when we came down here."

Tim looks up kind of shyly -- "Skylark... always makes me happy."

"Aw, you --" Steph shakes her head and smacks Tim's arm before pulling them all in for a three-way hug. She smells like sweat and feels *fantastic* --

Jason squeezes a little harder --

And Steph giggles some more. "Robin said we had to keep this stuff to a minimum when he's not here."

Dick *also* called her 'little sister,' which probably means... yeah. "Uh -- he totally wants a piece."

"What?" Steph pushes back and stares at him. "He *wants* to train me up. I mean, he even interrupted Bruce from doing it."

Tim blinks and bites his lip.

Jason raises his eyebrows --

"Oh, Jesus, *seriously*? Is that why he wants me to be part of the family or something? That's *fucked* --"

"Oh -- no, Skylark, it's just -- ah." Tim smiles ruefully. "It would be a lot more accurate to say that he already thinks of you as a part of the family, and so he wants to find every possible way to make you need to stay forever --"

"And ever. Definitely ever --"

"And ever, yes. And -- well. He can be somewhat shockingly possessive."

Steph narrows her eyes. "*No* one owns my ass."

Jason raises his hands and totally doesn't grope her tits. "No, totally not. I'm pretty sure Tink and I can keep Robin occupied for that end of things. Just, you know -- he's fucking great in the sack."

Tim coughs. "Or in the minivan. As the case may be."

"Are you guys *pimping* him?"

Jason raises his eyebrows again. "Is he still way over there where he can't hear us?"

Steph and Tim look --
"Ah, yes. They appear to be working on nerve strikes we don't know on one of the dummies."

"Dent's still over there, too, though he looks kinda nervous."

Tim hums. "Perhaps... out of place?"

Jason sighs and rubs Tim's and Steph's sides. "Two of Bruce's first three loves *right* there. And Dent made Robin fucking *suffer* --"

"The same could be said for *you*, Starling."

"Eh, it's like I told Robin -- a) *he* didn't do it, and b) he accidentally gave me *this* life."

Tim gives him a long look for that, mostly unreadable -- or it would be if Jason didn't *know* his baby brother. It's a look all about wondering where they draw the line, because there's the *Oath* they both took, and then there's the fact that Joker is scattered ashes -- Dick so wasn't risking anyone getting hold of him -- and that some of their enemies spend longer getting better than others.

Some of them never *do* get completely better, and that's totally okay.

This --

This is maybe the other side of things, because Harvey Dent over there is a bona fide good guy who's barely ever slipped -- only once, and not even for as long as Jason hated Dick for being better for him than the mother Jason had discovered a couple of years ago could've *possibly* been -- charity work and all.

He'd even hated Dick a little *more* when it came out that the charity -- and his biological mother -- were as crooked as any relative of his *should've* been --

He --

"I don't know, Tink."

Tim nods --

"Hey, wait, what?" Steph looks back and forth between them.

Tim looks at him --

"You tell her, Tink. You're better at explaining stuff like this."

"All right," he says, and rests his palm on Jason's pec. "It's -- we've made a tentative decision to accept Dent. He *isn't* Two-Face, and, judging by the reports J'onn left, he'll never *be* Two-Face --"

"No, you can't make a call like that one," Steph says, shaking her head. "You don't know. Maybe it won't be a flask full of acid to the face. Maybe it'll be somebody hurting his wife, or throwing acid in *her* face, or killing her --"

"J'onn seems to think that the 'release valve' he programmed into Dent's mind won't allow him to build up that much emotional pressure, Skylark."

Steph frowns and squeezes Tim's hand. "If I say something about 'once a crook, always a crook,' then you guys are just gonna try to be supportive about my fucking *father*, aren't you?"
Tim winces --

Jason squeezes her waist. "I can absolutely be fucking terrible at it."

Steph snorts. "At being *supportive*?"

"Oh, fuck, yeah. Tink, tell her about all the times I drove you into a little ball of a anxiety and neuroses back in the day."

Tim flips him off.

"You can see how totally embittered he is, Lark. I mean, he'll never be the same."

She bites her lip -- and then snorts again *anyway*, which --

Okay, maybe that *doesn't* mean that it's time to bounce her and Tim on his thighs, but his body is a little too fast for his brain --

She giggles.

She -- oh, yeah, that's so *sweet* --

Just as sweet in some ways as the way Tim latches on to Jason's t-shirt with his hands and *locks* his long, lean thighs around Jason's own thigh --

The way he shows his teeth again --

The way Steph *snorts* again and hits him --

Maybe he can turn this into all of them rolling around a little -- wait, no, gotta get to the mats for that --

Maybe he can *scoot* --

"*Star*! Where are you *going*?"

"Uh... not far?"

"Hn. Starling *never* likes to get exciting on the stone."

Steph blinks --

Slaps him --

"That's a no?"

"That's a *maybe*! A punch is a no. Tell me more about D-- Robin!"

"Well -- he can get obsessive," Jason says, and pushes back a lock of Steph's pretty blonde hair that had escaped her ponytail --

Steph tucks it better. "Obsessive *how*?"

"Ah... it turns out that he was obsessing about us... for a very long time."

"And kind of using Superman -- and Superman's dream-making machine -- to blow off steam."
"He has... he obviously has a number of fantasies --"

"And I'm thinking he's gonna want to try *all* of them before he's done --"

"And -- at least a part of him wants us all to belong to him --"

Steph growls. "If he tries something --"

Jason makes what he hopes is a soothing gesture. "He totally knows punch-means-no."

"Yes. I don't think he would ever... well, he knows he's not going to ever come between Starling and me, and I'm reasonably sure he knows he's not going to ever come between *you* and me... well. He knows how to blow off steam."

"Exactly," Jason says, "and here's the thing -- he's *good* at it. Like, we were all convinced until last fucking night that he was either oblivious, not attracted to us, or a mix of both."

Steph frowns. "You -- you didn't know even a little?" She turns to him -- "*You*, Star?"

Tim gives one of his little nothing laughs. "I'm allowed to be ignorant?"

She shoves Tim a little. "Fucking *yes*. You don't think anyone really wants you until they sit you on their dick."

Tim opens his mouth -- and closes it again before nodding to Jason.

"I didn't know, Lark. Not even a little. He will *never* put anything on you if he doesn't think he should, or even if you just don't want him to."

"Except for the 'little sister' thing."

Jason smiles ruefully. "Well... he *does* want you to be family. Clothes-wearing family, too --"

"He -- he said he wanted me to move *in*. I was going with the idea that he was mostly kidding --"

"He totally wasn't. Tink?"

"It was... ah. Somewhat unseemly how quickly he ingratiated himself with my parents so that I would have an excuse to spend as much time here as possible, even when they were alive."

"Exactly," Jason says. "You -- you said once that you thought your Mom knew what you were doing as Skylark?"

Steph smiles that adult smile again. "It's not 'think.' She knows. She -- she doesn't really know what to do with me, I don't think."

Jason rubs her waist again. "What does that mean?"

"She doesn't really -- she's clean now, and she's been going to a therapist who charges on a sliding scale to deal with at least a few of her issues, but there were a lot of damned years when she was more my quietly drug-addicted roommate than my *mother*, you know?"

Tim nods solemnly and squeezes her hand again.

And that's -- yeah. "My mom -- my *real* mom -- drank too much on top of hooking --"
"Are you *serious*?"

"Yeah, I come by this dictio *honest*, babe. Anyway. She never stopped trying to be my mom, but she failed a bunch of times, too. I hear you. Anyway... I just meant that maybe your mother can deal with the fact that you're here some of the time, you know?"

"Yes, Skylark. I... didn't you say there was a nurse's convention coming up?"

"Heh. I'm supposed to tell her I'm hanging out with *Dick Grayson*?"

"Well," and Tim smiles brightly. "You can always introduce me as your incredibly gay best friend...?"

Steph snorts again. "You *are*. I -- I can't just desert my mom, guys."

"No one's asking you to." Much. "It's just -- think of this place as your *other* home. That's what Robin wants, and that's what we want, *too*."

"I... ah." Tim squeezes her hand again. "I saw Alfred bringing fresh linens down from the attic. Linens that don't go with any of our duvets."

"Heh. *I* missed that, but maybe those linens had some purple-ish accents?"

"Actually, I'd say the accents were closer to eggplant, but -- yes."

Steph blinks. "I -- um. Wow. Okay, so this is moving kinda really *fast*, guys."

Jason smiles ruefully. "Big Bird's turnaround time can be kind of insane, yeah. You can *always* tell him to slow his ass down. Punch him while you say it, too. It won't hurt."

Tim gives him the prissy look. "Punching is not the solution to everything, Starling."

Heh. "*Punching* has made me the fine vigilante man I am *today*. Which means it's made your ass what *it* is today."

Tim raises an eyebrow. "You've had some help."

"So you *do* want me to be jealous...?"

No shadow at *all* this time, good --

"Heh. I always know you'll come home to where the good stuff's at, baby. Those metas and aliens will *never* do you the way I will."

The eyebrow goes up higher. "They will if I provide them footage to study --"

Steph slaps him --

"*Ow* --"

"Tink! Don't do that!"

Tim rubs his head. "I -- they've all expressed a desire to know how to improve their performances --"

Jason coughs and lets himself fall back on his elbows. "That's right, baby. *Spread* the trauma."

"*What*?"
"Nothin' at all, baby. Except for my newfound pity for Kuh-Superboy."

"I don't -- he knows perfectly well how I feel about him!"

"And that you like him *just* fine, and you definitely don't want him to be more like some other 'dude' --"

"He's never said anything about feeling insecure!"

"Lark, this is totally a good time to hit him again, by the way."

Which is how Steph and Tim wind up speed-blocking each other through a slap-fight.

Hey, it's *kind* of like training, especially since, like this, he can *see* all the little tricks he's taught her. Jason sits up and presses on *that* spot at the base of Tim's spine --

Tim grunts and closes his eyes for *just* long enough for Steph to backhand the hell out of him. That might actually bruise --

"Oh! Damn, I didn't mean to hit that hard!"

Tim stretches his jaw and glares at Jason.

"Your fault for not teaching her how to *spar*, Mr. I Have Secret Friends."

Tim sighs. "Point to Starling. Though I think we effectively changed the subject...?"

Steph sighs and rubs Tim's cheek. "Yeah, totally -- *wait*;," she says and punches Jason in the gut --

"Hnh -- yeah?"

"*Naked*!"

"Right now? *Hell*, yes," and Jason starts tugging on his shirt --

"Not *you*, asshole! *Them*," and she points to Dick, Bruce, and -- hell, where *is* Dent --

Jason looks around --

"He's studying the giant penny," Tim says, and gives him the you've-been-slacking look, which --

"Okay, baby bro. I *will* talk to Kuh-Superboy about your issues if you fuck with me *too* much."

Tim blanches for him --

"Uh, huh, I knew you were making him guess. Poor bastard. He's not even a *toddler* --"

"You don't *like* him --"

"I don't have to like him to want you not to turn him into a lovesick *supervillain*, *Tink*."

Tim firms his mouth into a hard little line. "I always make sure that he's happy. *I* was the one who talked Superman into spending more time with him and *looking* him in the *eye* --"

"And you're his *boyfriend*. His only boyfriend?"

"He has *many* lovers --"
Jason looks at Tim.

Tim glares at him.

Steph makes a fist and raises her eyebrows at Jason in question.

Jason shakes his head and keeps looking --

And Tim starts looking queasy. "I'm a bad boyfriend."

"Not to *me*, but, you know, I'm *fluent* in freakboy," Jason says, and pats his cheek. "Fix it, yeah."

"It would be easier if you liked him," Tim says quietly.

"My opinion doesn't --"

"It does. It -- it always will."

Jason frowns, opens his mouth, closes it again -- he turns to Steph. "Okay, I know you're about to kill my ass, so here: Bruce looks even fucking bigger when he's naked, and he's *covered* in hair. Just -- there's so much hair that when a scar cuts through it? It's *loud*. And there are a lot of scars. His *hands* look bigger when he's naked. His *feet* look bigger. His *shoulders* look bigger. And the cock on him -- look, I only saw it when it was soft, but it's huge. Huge like I'm thinking of stealing Robin's supply of Superlube --"

"You want him to *fuck* you?"

"Yes, yes, I do, and only part of that is because of how Big Bird said he would fucking *direct* him --"

"He'd probably direct you, too, Starling. Just -- that should be considered, as well," Tim says, and re-snuggles.

"Oh -- Jesus, yeah. I'm considering, all right. He just -- he has this *thing*, Lark. He's obviously smart, but he's also kind of an *idiot* in some ways. And you already know what that does to me from Tink."

Tim bites his nipple through the t-shirt, but it's friendly.

Steph bites her lip and nods. "Does he have the kind of skin where it's good that he looks that pale or what?"

"Huh? I -- I guess? Fuck, you know it's been like a year and a half since I've had anything like a tan, Lark."

She sighs. "Okay. And Dent?"

"Aw, man, can't I start blocking that out?"

"*You* said you were accepting him --"

"*Tink* said that --"

"But you meant it," Tim says, and pats Jason's abs.
Jason sighs. "Okay, fine. The quicker we take him in, the quicker Big Bird calms the fuck down, so -
- no more protocol. We don't say *Robin's* name, but we damned well use ours. Got it?"

"Got it," Steph says --

And Tim grins up at him. "Hi, Jay."

"Hi yourself, baby. Do I really have to tell Steph what Dent looks like naked?"

"Wait, what's Bruce's *bush* like?"

Jason coughs. "Girls care about that?"

"*This* girl does. I wanna know if I'm gonna have to wax or something to look normal around
here."

Because naked. As in, she's gonna *be*. As in -- Jason licks his lips --

"*Talk*!

"Uh. Tink waxes."

"I thought we weren't using code-names anymore?"

"We're *not*," Jason says, and *looks* at Tim. "It's just that Tim is totally Tink when he's making
his bush into a perfect triangle around his junk. He also shaves his sac sometimes," and he turns back
to Steph --

Who looks a little stricken. "Seriously?"

"*You* don't have to wax anything. I don't and *Robin* doesn't --"

"I would like to point out that Robin used to shave his legs twice a week," Tim says, and smiles
fucking *serenely* --

"How. How long ago?"

"He *stopped* when he changed uniforms. Well, a little before. When he was on his world tour.
*Anyway*, every girl I've talked to says waxing is of the fucking devil, and you're gonna have
*enough* pain in your life. Like, *daily* pain."

"Heh, okay, yeah. My calves still feel like jell-o from what Robin was having me do," and she looks
at Tim --

Who is, thankfully, smiling a lot more gently. "The women who wear more revealing uniforms tend
to shave. The women on my team... don't. At all."

Steph nods gratefully. "There are... a whole damned lot of reasons I stay covered up at school."

Including the ones which were all about hiding your pregnancy for as long as fucking *possible* --
and he can just leave that aside. "So, yeah. He's pretty neat-looking down below. He's -- well, he's
not cut, either, but he's still *neat*. But not Tink-neat."

"Okay. *Now* tell me about Dent."

"Well, for one thing," Tim says, "he's heading this way."
"Oh -- damn it --"

"One, he's pretty athletic-looking. There's some definition around his abs and arms. Two, he actually *looks* like he's got some Native blood in him, which means he's had some sun at some point. Or just that his bones are sticking out a little more. I don't know. He's got almost no body hair -- not even much of a bush. And I'd say he's got about seven inches," Jason says, and raises his eyebrows.

Steph gives him a kind of *quirked* look --

"No...?"

"Now I'm going to be *thinking* of that -- anyway," she says, standing up and dusting off her knees.

Tim gives Jason a goodbye-squeeze and then stands up, *too* --

And no, there's totally no excuse for Jason to stay down. Right. He gets up, he turns --

And Dent slows his walk down and raises his hands. "Anybody ever tell you guys how belligerent you look?"

"Comes with the territory," Steph says, and plants her fists on her hips --

The hips Jason forgot to feel *up* --

"How crazy *are* you?" And she's totally raising her eyebrows behind the mask -- wait.

"Lenses up, guys, we're doing this right," Jason says, putting up his own lenses and listening for the soft little clicks of Tim's and Steph's.

Dent blinks. "Uh... okay. I don't know what I can give you guys for that --"

"Treat us with the same respect you'd give anyone else and we'll call it even," Tim says. "Please answer Stephanie's question."

Dent blinks a little and nods slowly. "Stephanie. Okay. You -- all of you -- can call me Harvey. And... I'd say I'm still pretty crazy as these things go. I can feel how easy it would be for me to get the dangerous kind of angry..." Dent grits his teeth a little -- and then laughs. "That's just it, though. I can feel it -- and I can see it, hear it, smell it, and taste it, too. I don't think I'm ever gonna be able to just... fall apart. Not without being aware of every pathetic little second of the process. Also, J'onn's set up a steady trickle of some of my worst hidden -- and mostly hidden -- memories. It won't be long before I can't repress a damned thing."

Jason frowns. "Nothing? Ever?"

Dent raises his eyebrows. "That's not a good thing? You guys look so healthy I figured you talk everything out. Yes? No?"

Tim's smile is a little *twist* of a thing. "Certainly, we try to. It's the protocol. But... ah. In practice, it doesn't always work that way, Harvey. And I'm Tim."

Oh -- great. He *wasn't* about to use Dent's first name --

"Tim, thank you. You don't think -- all right, look, I'm obviously the last one who gets to have an opinion about this stuff --"

"You're not," Jason says, and -- fuck it. "Everybody knows that people who've had the J'onn
treatment aren't like the other psychos."

Dent frowns. "I thought he'd only done this a few times?"

"As serious as he's doing with you? Yeah, you're only the fourth. But he's done minor tweaks on people here and there just to get the job done. And I'm Jason."

"'The job.' I -- right," and Dent shakes himself like a dog. "You people are a whole new world for me. Forgive me for fucking up?"

Steph looks him up and down. "We'll think about it. Aren't you married?"

Dent smiles. "To the best and most beautiful woman in the world --"

"Why the hell were you screwing Bruce? Have you cheated on your wife before? Do you think it's 'okay' just because he's a guy?"

Dent *blinks* -- "Uh. Stephanie..."

Steph raises her eyebrows behind the mask -- "Wait, I hate this," she says, reaching out --

Tim slaps solvent on her palm --

And she spritzes it on and takes off her mask -- and *then* raises her eyebrows at him --

"Hey, do you guys only go for people with blue eyes or something?"

She narrows her eyes at him.

"Okay, not getting away with anything, that's fine," and Dent shoves his hands in his pockets and cocks his head to the side. "You gotta give me a minute to deal with *you* guys being sexually conservative about something --"

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean? Are you calling me a slut?"

Dent's eyes go wide and he takes a step back, taking his hands out of his pockets and making a pushing gesture. "I'm not, I'm not. I don't use that kind of -- uh. Anyway. It's just that you guys seemed really *open* about things. Like -- *hippie* open --"

"You take that back!"

Dent licks his lips. "You... don't like hippies, Stephanie?" He looks around for help --

Tim's smile is *razor* sharp. "She doesn't like the way they dress, the foods they eat, or the politics they espouse. In a lot of ways, Stephanie is a very traditional young woman."

"Fuck yeah, I am --"

Jason coughs --

Stephanie jabs him in the gut -- "You shut up!"

"I'm shut, I'm totally shut --"

"It's not like I'm some kind of bigot --"

"Except about hippies," Tim says, and turns that smile on her --
"Everyone* should hate -- okay, no, not that. It's just -- I think a lot of people who call themselves liberals don't actually fucking *think* about what they're talking about --"

"And you think most self-identified conservatives do, Stephanie...?" Dent's smile is back --

"I *know* they don't, but none of them live around *here*."

Dent wags his head back and forth. "That's fair. Think of it this way, though -- most of the people I went to school with who weren't *Bruce* were good, old-fashioned, blue-blooded conservatives with a *whole* lot to say about people who tanned as brown as I did over the summer. I think, in the end, *most* people wind up hating the people who did stupid things when they were just waking up to political awareness --"

"Hey, I've been politically aware for a *long* damned time," Steph says, and she's actually chesting up a little, which is the kind of thing Jason can watch all fucking *day* --

"I'm not saying you haven't been, Stephanie. Someone like you -- I bet you were politically aware at an age when I was still running around playing stickball and street hockey --"

"And you don't get to butter me up --"

"Easy, okay? I'm not about to get on your case for *anything*," Dent says, calm and easy and rueful --

Steph glares for a little while longer -- and then she blinks it off and steps back, raising her own hands. "Say what you have to say."

"Thank you. It's just this: one of the worst things I've seen good, smart, idealistic young people like you do is swallow the party line. *Whichever* party line it is. You get to thinking that most things a given party or political group or whatever is saying is good and smart and right, and then you start thinking that *everything* they say must be right -- or even that everything their opposite numbers say is wrong. You do *that* -- and one day you *will* trip over your own beliefs and fall flat on your face."

Steph frowns. "And?"

"*And* -- then you either wind up a cynical hack selling everything you are for more money and more influence and more *power* -- or you drop out of the game and can't help anyone anymore. And it *is* a game, Stephanie. It's a game where people's lives are at stake, but that doesn't make the players -- the big guns -- any more inclined to take it serious. I'm telling you -- the state capitals, and every other city, too, are *littered* with people who *used* to be young and passionate like you but got their hearts -- and asses -- handed to them one too many times. I... okay, I know I'm preaching here --"

"No," Tim says, "Keep going."

Dent raises his eyebrows again. "You sure about that?"

Tim shows his teeth. "Some of us are *deeply* invested in discovering why you were -- and are -- so important to... assorted Bruces."

Dent laughs for that. "Okay, that's fair, Tim. I -- are you *sure* he's not too old for you?"

"Are you sure you're not just jealous...?"
"Fuck no," Dent says, and grins. "In fact, I'm sure I *am* jealous, little guy. But you wanna know where I'm coming from --"

"You should also be sure to answer Steph's original question," and Tim crosses his arms over his chest. It *isn't* really belligerent or anything, but it makes Dent look back and forth between Steph and Tim --

And nod to himself. "Okay. One thing at a time. You always have to look at a problem -- or a *solution* -- from more than one angle. You always have to figure out what's going on in the other guy's head. You always have to stop and *check* to make sure that you agree with something because it's smart and makes sense to you -- not just because you like the guy -- or girl -- who's saying it. And -- I think that's about all I have for that --"

That makes a lot of damned sense --

"Wait," Steph says, and stares at him. "Did *you* run as an independent?"

"Heh. No. Not even for a few weeks at the beginning of my campaign, Stephanie. I sucked up to the party bosses so they wouldn't throw me under the bus, and when they *still* supported my opponent more than they supported me... well, I had Bruce. And I used the hell out of him. I might not have had to if I'd waited to run until I was older, but I had an agenda --"

"And Gotham needed you?" Jason raises his own eyebrows.

Dent grins again. "I think you people know a *lot* about that feeling, yeah?"

Jason can see Tim nodding thoughtfully out of the corner of his eye. He turns to Steph --

"You *work* as an independent," she says.

Dent nods. "I try, anyway. Once I build up a little more political capital of my own... *then* I can -- heh -- come out. And tell everyone who doesn't like it to kiss my ass."

Tim tilts his head to the side. "You think you can win the game."

"No. I think I can *survive* the game. I don't wanna be governor or even mayor. I have *just* the position I want, and I'm gonna keep it. You know -- that's one of the things that's making all this brain-fiddling tolerable. I can't fucking *believe* your Harvey let the D.A.'s office slip through his fingers after everything he had to do to get there. Of course, I can *absolutely* believe it, considering what J'onn's digging up, but -- you guys know what I mean, right?"

"We know," Jason says, frowning and trying -- well, right now he's trying to map *this* guy onto the Two-Face he knows and wishes Dick would find an excuse to finally kill.

It's not working.

It's not --

Hell, even when he turns to the fucking *side*, it's not working, because the eyes are different. The eyes are brown and warm and *clear*, just like this guy is someone anyone good could like.

Love, even.

He turns to check out Bruce and Dick --

Bruce is doing a kata slowly, hitting the marks and showing the kind of control --
Yeah, Dick has it, too, but it's different on a guy Bruce's size. Just like it's *completely* different when Dick gestures for Bruce to speed up and Bruce just fucking *explodes* into action --

Dent sighs. "If I'd known he could do that... I have no idea," he says, and sighs more. "Sometimes the Batman would kind of... tickle something in my brain. The way he'd stand, or hold his head. The way he'd come *just* this close and no closer. I didn't *know* I was fantasizing about Bruce in the back of my mind, but I was," and he turns back to Steph. "That's it, you know. I don't have some big justification sitting around in my head waiting for just the right vigilante to ask the question. I remember being fourteen and watching Bruce fall in love with me. I remember *panicking*, because *I* knew the gay thing would get my ass in trouble, even if I hadn't really thought it all through yet. I just also remember..." Dent shakes his head. "I remember feeling warm as hell, and... I guess a little like I belonged." He frowns and stares down at the floor -- he looks up again. "No. A *lot* like I belonged, because I'd never had a friend like Bruce and I knew I'd never have another one. I promised myself that I'd always take care of him as much as I could, and that I'd *protect* him from himself if I had to...

"Ah, there's a lot there. What it boils down to is that the thing that made me panic wasn't anything more than the fact that I realized I was falling for him, too. I didn't admit it to myself for a good long while, but I also didn't have to. It was *there*. You guys know how that goes. Ah -- don't you?"

Jason looks at Tim -- who's looking at Steph. *Steph's* looking at Bruce. Harvey's looking at *him*, and Jason is, abruptly, *very* happy that J'onn's not due to show up for another few hours. It's not that he doesn't want to know what everyone else is thinking -- it's that he doesn't want to know what *he's* thinking. Just --

Okay, then.

"Let's just say that we get it. For the most part. Kind of," Jason says, giving up and pushing a hand back through his hair.

Dent smiles wryly. "Okay, that's fair," and he turns back to Steph. "Is that a good enough answer?"

"You plan on telling your wife about it?"

"I could say something here about how she knows exactly how deep my feelings go for Bruce -- and that would even be true --"

"But you like not being thought of as a douche?"

Dent laughs, showing off some serious smile lines --

And Steph narrows her eyes a little in the way that means she's checking him out. Jesus --

And yeah, *Dent* can read people, because now he's looking surprised and raising his hands again -

Steph *blushes* -- "I wasn't --"

"No, I -- uh. Yeah. I know you weren't," Dent lies --

And Steph lets him get away with it.

Dent takes a deep breath and smiles ruefully. "Anyway -- I'm telling Gilda about all of this. Every last bit. If she tells me to shut the hell up, I will, but only after I let her know how much I've *needed* to talk to her about it. Bruce is my first love and best friend. Gilda is the love of my life..."
and my other best friend. That make sense?"

Steph nods and does that thing where she tries to hide a blush by looking pissy. It's obvious -- to him, anyway -- that she's *not* pissy, but --

Jason can deal. "Tink, show Steph how you beat your left-side weakness like the little bitch it was."

Tim and Steph snort together, and then Tim coughs. "Let's hit the stairs, Steph. It'll be easier for some of this."

"Sure," she says, and gives Jason a quick smile that's rueful, grateful, thrilled, horny --

Jason doesn't have to follow that ass, but he *does* have to look as it jogs away --

"You take care of them."

Jason blinks and turns back to Dent. "I try, yeah. Tink has gotten to take care of Steph more than I have, though, and Robin tries to take care of all of us."

Dent raises his eyebrows. "Tries? Not succeeds?"

"Look, if you're looking for me to say something bad about Robin --"

"Not at all. Not -- I'm jealous, yeah, but I'm old enough to know that you don't shit all over things for anyone you care about, and Bruce -- God, a part of me wants him to *stay* here, Jason."

"Uh. Seriously?"

Dent smiles ruefully. "You'll make him happy. You -- there's a *bunch* of you, so he'll never be alone..." He sighs. "Look, that's Bruce all over. Before his parents died, he had no friends, because all the other kids thought he was too weird because he took his damned anatomy doll with him everywhere he went. *After* his parents died, he had no friends because he couldn't figure out how to be happy anymore, or how to care about things other than the future. He told me -- he told me once that he wanted to make sure no other kid ever had to watch their parents die. And then we grew up and he started doing things for the charities in between traveling all over the world, and I thought that was it. That was how he planned to help people."

"And now you know that was only a part of it."

"Yeah, I -- yeah. I was so scared for him when I figured it out. I was scared for me, *too*, but there he'd been all along, running through the most dangerous parts of Gotham with a little body armor, a mask, and a damned boomerang." Dent frowns at the floor for a long moment, nods, and then looks up again. "He's never been any good at *people*, Jason. You -- you've seen it, haven't you?"

Well... "Heh. Smart and stupid at once."

"Exactly. *Exactly*. He needs people who'll take care of him, and I love Alfred, but he never could cut it. Alfred turned him into the most polite and *correct* guy in the world, but it's not like Alfred has all that many buddies, *either*." "He has Leslie and... us."

"And none of you are exactly *friends*, yeah?"

Jason smiles ruefully and crosses his arms over his chest. "You know we're not."
"Heh, I do at that," Dent says, and pushes his hands back in his pockets. "He needs people around him so that he *remembers* that he doesn't have to do everything by himself, that he's allowed to eat with people, and talk with them, and *play* with them. I -- *no one* has needed a playmate more than Bruce fucking Wayne, you know?"

Jason snorts and nods toward the stairs. "I could tell you a few stories about Tim -- not Tink."

Dent raises his eyebrows. "Yeah? He seems so... uh. Happy?"

"Yeah, he's happy all right. And he even used to get happy when he was *alone*. Which is good, because he didn't even have parents who liked him -- which is something I know you know about."

A wince. "Yeah, I -- damn. I hate to think of that happening -- ah, you know that already. But he didn't have -- okay, I can't exactly see him playing street hockey or anything --"

"He's actually a damned good point guard for basketball, but getting him to play is like pulling fucking teeth."

Dent snorts. "Yeah, that. I -- uh. He calms down a little, though, yeah? I saw you guys snuggling up."

Jason nods. "He... he needs to be a couple of different people. They're all *him*, but sometimes one of them is more him than the others are. It switches around."

"Is he... okay?"

"Heh. He's good. And I'm waiting patiently for him to get better than that. I -- It took me pretty much no time to want him, and then need him, and then love him. Even though he's two years younger and we met when I was *fourteen*."

Dent winces. "He... probably wasn't big for his age."

Jason snorts. "I thought I'd woken up and turned into one of the perverts who used to buy my ass before Robin brought me home."

"But you got over that."

"I... heh." Jason smiles ruefully. "Robin made me deal with my feelings for him sooner rather than later. Robin pointed out that I was *hurting* Tim by keeping him on the hook while I spent my time beating the shit out of myself. Robin had a whole separate *agenda*... but he was also right." Jason smiles up at Dent. "No regrets."

Dent winces. "He... probably wasn't big for his age."

Jason nods. "I thought I'd woken up and turned into one of the perverts who used to buy my ass before Robin brought me home."

"Some of them pick themselves, like Steph. She got a job, saved her money, and bought the materials for a pretty sweet uniform which she stitched up herself. We're *getting* her better materials, but hers is more than good enough for her to keep going out with us. Tink... okay, I don't think Tink *existed* as more than a joke *deep* in Tim's brain until I talked a little too much smack, but he's been running around rooftops since he was *nine years old*."

"*What*?"

"Yeah. He figured out Robin's identity, used that to lead him to *Bruce's* identity... and then stalked Bruce, Robin, and *me* with a camera and a notebook until I got lucky and caught him one night
"But his parents --"

"Were gone all the time anyway. They didn't *notice* how much time Tim was spending here until just before they were killed, and then they apologized to Robin for Tim being a 'nuisance.'"

"Shit."

"Yeah," Jason says, and pushes a hand back through his hair. "There are kids who *want* this life, Dent, and if they want it bad enough? Nothing will stop them."

"What happens when they're not cut out for it?"

"Then hopefully something happens to wise them up before it's too late. I -- in some ways? It's too late for this kind of thinking. The Justice Society started this whole thing *up*, and it maybe would've gone away after they retired, but then *Bruce* started it all *again*. And, hell, even the guys on the JSA who retired are back now -- older than dirt and twice as fucking *cranky* --"

"Hey, now, me and Bruce used to be pretty big fans of Green Lantern."

Jason snorts and shakes his head. "Yeah, and if you ever drop an f-bomb in front of him? He'll threaten to *spank* you."

Dent coughs. "I -- hunh. Are you sure that was a *threat*?"

Oh -- God, that -- Jason stares at Dent with what he thinks is probably a look of *betrayal* --

And Dent snickers at him, pushing with his hands a little. "Kidding, kidding. Hasn't he been married for most of a century?"

Jason blows out a breath. "Yeah, and let's just hope he stays that way. I mean, he doesn't *look* all that old, but he's *old*.*"

"You don't think you'll be that old someday...?"

Heh. Jason nods toward Bruce, who is currently fighting Dick back and back and *back*. He's taking hits, but... "He didn't make it to forty in this life. None of *us* have any powers."

Dent shudders. "I don't like thinking of that. I want -- the *good* part of me wants Bruce to marry a nice girl -- someone who likes big, thick books and chess -- and have a *stack* of kids who he'll teach to be as sweet and good and loving as he is... shit, I don't know. I'm still getting used to the fact that that's not gonna happen."

Well... fuck. Jason reaches out and claps Dent's shoulder because he pretty much has to --

And Dent smiles wryly at him and squeezes his hand. "You don't have to comfort me, Jason. I know... this is a mess. And I'm *starting* to know that it doesn't have to be. You people are on the edge every damned *night*. That makes the downtimes kinda serious, yeah?"

"You gotta take what you can *when* you can, because it might not be there tomorrow, yeah."

Dent nods and squeezes Jason's hand one more time before dropping his own. "The me from a week ago wants to tell you to get over yourself and calm the fuck down before you sprain something. That
guy didn't watch the suburb he lived in drop into a black fucking hole in the middle of existence on the nightly news, though, so... I'm not judging."

"Is that hard for you? Not judging, I mean."

"Heh. Judging people *does* get to be a way of life, now that you mention it, but I... there are a lot of things I'm not gonna forget, and even more things I *can't* forget, Jason. I don't know what's gonna happen to me when I start looking through the damned multiverse for Gilda. I don't even know if your scientists will figure out a way to send me after her. All of that, and I'm still dealing with the fact that I have the potential to be a damned mass murderer... nah. I'm just gonna try to live and let live over here, so long as I don't see anyone getting hurt."

Jason squeezes Dent's shoulder and drops his own hand. "You're all right."

Dent laughs, but gives him a pretty serious nod. "So are you -- but you already knew that."

"I know who I try to be. Robin made me better, then Tim made me better than that. I'm looking forward to Steph making me even better than that -- whether or not she ever thinks I'm as hot as she thinks *you* are."

"Whoa, hey, no --"

"Heh. You made her blush. I? Have nearly fucked up a stakeout with her because she let one rip that was so loud it woke up a bunch of pigeons we were sharing space with. Did she blush then? No. She *snickered*. For *ten minutes*."

Dent chokes. "I -- she's gonna kill you for telling that story."

Jason sighs. "Yeah. I mean, I probably shouldn't get off so much on hot women brutalizing me, but - - I do. I *really* do."

"Then I guess you're in the right line of work...?"

"No, no, it's no good when they're evil and crazy."

"Gotta be *good* and crazy...?"

Jason grins. "Damn right. It's -- uh. Camaraderie? You used to play sports, didn't you?"

"I didn't get off on the pitcher slapping my ass for making a good catch, Jason."

"Well, was he *hot*?"

"He was a brain-dead trust fund kid who liked making racist jokes, actually --"

"Well, there you fucking go. Jesus. It's no fun if the person beating on you is no good."

And Dent looks *exactly* like he's working his ass off not to crack up. Good deal.

"*Anyway* -- you gotta let women fucking own you a little."

"*Do* you have any -- heh. You call them 'civilians,' don't you?"

Jason rubs at his upper lip a little --

Realizes that it makes him look like fucking *Clark* -- he stops.
"Civilian girls stopped working for me even a little not long after I met Tim. And, yeah, maybe that was wrong, but also -- well, no, that's his secret to tell."

Dent raises his hands again. "I'm not asking. I'm just -- you have the other superheroines? Female heroes? What word *should* I use?"

"Heh. Depends on the woman. Seriously. And I don't really -- I have friends in the community because Robin wouldn't have it *any* other way, and some of them are closer friends than others."

"You saying you wouldn't have too many friends *without* Robin?"

Well... Jason frowns and thinks about it a little, scratching a mild itch on his right thigh. But he's doing more procrastinating than thinking --

"Hey, you don't have to answer me --"

"No, it's okay. I just -- heh." Jason shakes his head and grins at Dent. "I'm betting you know this one real fucking well: I didn't have a lot of friends growing up, mainly because people took one look at who my parents were and kept their kids away from me -- assuming the kids even wanted to do more than spit on me from a distance."

Dent winces. "Yeah, as a matter of fact... heh. Once you get past all *that* bullshit --"

"Assuming you *do* get past it --"

"And that's a big fucking assumption, but there ya go. Once you're past, it gets hard to figure out -- you don't even know *how* you'd go about making friends."

"*Exactly*. And that's when you hope you have someone like Robin in your life who will *totally* kick your ass up to NYC so you can spend the occasional weekend with the team in this community *most* likely to be able to make friends with a damned supervillain. As a matter of fact? They've *done* that. Kinda."


Oh -- right. Jason shakes himself like a dog. "There'll be one there, yeah. Mostly made up of the kid sidekicks of the older heroes -- the ones Bruce's age or a little younger."

"Wait, wait, you're saying -- uh. Okay, of course you're saying that, because I already knew how insanely fucking *influential* Bruce could be if he put his mind to it."

"You still wish he'd done that as a civilian, yeah?"

Dent sighs. "Yeah. But the law isn't for him, and he'd never be able to put up with the stupid fucking *bureaucracy* cops have to deal with, and it's even worse for the federal types -- don't mind me. I just don't have the kind of imagination you people do."

"Heh. We *do* think outside the box, now that you mention it," and Jason buffs his nails on his t-shirt.

"Uh, huh. Was Robin on that kiddie team?"

"He started it and led it -- even though his heart was here in Gotham."

Dent nods slowly. "And... they took you in?"
"I'm technically an auxiliary member, but they all know I'm never leaving Gotham for any length of time. When Tim's old enough -- or just feels like it -- he'll join them for real."

"He's not old enough now?"

"Eh, it's more like the team *he's* leading now isn't old enough. They've all got the kind of maturity issues that mostly missed Robin's Titans -- that's the name of the team, by the way -- and *that's* mostly due to the fact that none of them other than Tim are getting what they need from their mentors."

Dent winces. "And they're... metahumans? Powerful ones?"

"Scarily powerful in some ways. Tim's got 'em under control, though. Sometimes I don't like to think about *how* he controls them, but he does, and that's the important thing."

"All right, now I'm just wondering how many friends Stephanie has."

Jason shakes his head. "As far as I know? She has Tim and me. She'll have Robin, too, and he'll be kicking her up to New York soon enough. Robin *believes* in making sure we all have as many people as possible."

Dent nods again and turns to look --

Jason does the same, and Dick's doing a kata Jason hasn't seen before. Apparently, Dick hasn't, either, because he's doing it the kind of slowly which speaks of memorization rather than control.

Bruce is gesturing things like 'higher' and 'to the right' and other stuff --

And they're just as close as they *can* be while still being safe. Jason nods to himself --

"He's a good man," Dent says, and lets out about *half* a sigh.

"I believe you, you know. I could... there's something about him --"

"I meant -- I meant Robin."

"Oh -- yeah, he really is. He's the kind of man... I don't know if anyone else could've done something with me. By the time he found me, I was a fucking wreck, scared all the time and just as likely to slash a john's face as I was to suck him off... he took care of me. He *made* himself my family, and I could only resent it for about a week before I was sucking it up like chili dogs with extra onions."

"Ah, that's the good stuff right there. Gilda gives me the hatchet-face if she smells it on my breath, but she knows."

Jason grins. "You know -- I never thought of you as the kind of guy who could really love someone."

Dent turns to smile wryly at him. "The Harvey from this universe didn't give you much of a chance for that."

"Nah, just Tink. He told Tink *all* about loving Bruce, missing Bruce, *wanting* Bruce..."

"Jesus. Was he locked up at the time?"

"Tight as Arkham ever gets. Plus, he was *full* of psych drugs."
Dent frowns and shakes his head. "I don't --" He stops and blinks. "All right, no, apparently I *do* like psych drugs. The *hell*?"

"Heh. Do you *like* them, or are you just reserving judgment?"

Dent frowns a little harder, obviously searching himself a little -- "I'm... reserving judgment. Is this -- did J'onn do *that*?"

"*J'onn* knows that he might not always be able to be *around* if things go south for one of his -- heh -- patients. The fact is? Those things work for a whole lot of different people. They freak *me* out, but I'd like to think I could man up enough to pop a pill if I ever needed one."

"'Man up'... by popping a pill. Okay, Jason, I gotta say, that's a new one on me."

"'Man up'... by popping a pill. Okay, Jason, I gotta say, that's a new one on me."

"Eh, that's just 'cause you're a little fucking primitive, One-Face --"

Dent chokes and coughs --

"Heh. Had to be done."

"If you say so, tough guy. So I'm primitive, now?"

"Big guy, little guy, tough guy --"

"Oh, Jesus, did I really -- heh. I really did do that, didn't I?" And his smile is deep, warm, rueful --

Still -- "If you call Steph 'lady guy' or something, we're pretty much duty-bound to kick your ass."

"Nah, nah, you let the *lady* guy do the ass-kicking on her own. That's in the rules and everything."

"We *rewrote* those rules, One-Face --"

He snorts -- and then shakes his head. "Yeah, I bet you guys -- yeah, I did it again -- did a lot of rewriting over the years, hunh?"

"You're *not* saying that how you live will suddenly become normal."

"Nah, not like that, but -- fuck, Harvey, queer is in *fashion* in some places now. Not so much for politicians, but for other celebrities? And you -- I went back and read all about you after Robin told me that you were the guy who'd popped my father. They called you fucking *Apollo*. You could've gotten away with -- heh."

"'Murder?'"

"'Murder?'"

"I'll tell you something, man -- if you'd just stuck to the guy who'd thrown acid in your face, or maybe the people who sent death-threats to your *wife*... the *people* of the city would've stood by you."

"I'll tell *you* something, Jason -- I wouldn't have stood by *myself*. And -- hell, maybe that's what happened. There's a right way and a wrong way of doing things. There's also the *vigilante* way -- and Batman did a damned good job of making sure I saw it -- but there are still limits. Murder is murder. You have to be better than the bad guys, or you just wind up making Gotham that much
darker and dirtier." Harvey -- he's giving the fuck up here -- frowns a little again and looks at him. "Bruce knows that. Do you?"

Well, about that... heh. Jason nods toward Dick. "He killed the Joker after Joker killed Bruce."

"I -- shit."

"Yeah. That's a tough call, isn't it?"

"It shouldn't be --"

"Maybe not," Jason says, and jabs Harvey's chest lightly, "but should doesn't mean a damned thing, sometimes."

Harvey looks down at Jason's finger -- and then back up into Jason's eyes. "What about you? How many bodies are on you?"

"None. But then... I didn't need Robin to tell me that he brought me on, in part, to be a *check* on him. We all keep each other honest, Harvey -- as honest as we can manage. But we're not giving up on each other if some shit-stain winds up dead."

"People like me can't help you if the bodies start showing up, Jason --"

"Maybe not. But we can still help *you*... and that's why Bruce started this in the first place. I'm willing to bet my own damned money that Bruce didn't spend too much time thinking of making friends with the Commissioner -- or you, for that matter."

"He... he was pretty stiff, at first. Ah -- you gotta give me a little time here, Jason. This stuff goes against everything --"

"Everything you believe in? Or everything you wanna believe in?"

Harvey squeezes his eyes shut for a second, smiles sharply, and opens them again. He's exactly as pretty as all the idiot reporters used to say he was, and he's smart and funny and actually a good guy. A *great* guy, if Jason's being honest --

Jason sighs. "I can see why he went for you."

"You're not so bad yourself, tough guy. And -- call it everything I *need* to believe in. And I know you're hearing all of that, yeah?"

"You're building yourself on it. *Rebuilding* yourself."

"Got it in one. And I'm not doing it on some abstract theory, or even on some kind of universal morality. This is me -- the kid I was when I watched my old man beat a 'buddy' into a coma and get away with it scot-free, the teenager I was the first time I hit the asshole back, and the man I was when Bruce handed me my wedding rings and smiled into my eyes like nothing meant more to him than my happiness... and the way Gilda looked just the same. It's me, and that's what I'm gonna go with, so... maybe keep the other stuff quiet *enough*? I'm not gonna try to tell you people how to live -- I can't even wrap my *head* around what you do most of the time -- but I am gonna tell you what I can live *with* --" Harvey cuts himself off with a choked noise that *becomes* a laugh.

"What's up?"

"Me. *This*. Jesus, I was talking like I was gonna stick *around*. Jesus, you're too damned easy to
"Talk to, tough guy."

"Heh. Same goes for you, since it didn't sound even a little weird."

Harvey gives him a wondering look. "No?"

Jason smiles ruefully and shrugs. "Like we *don't* need someone like you in the D.A.'s office? In the years since you went clown-shit, we've had to help Gordon bust *two* of your successors."

"Jesus fucking -- I knew that office was still bad, but I thought I'd gotten *rid* of the worst ones --"

"One of them we trucked in from out of state, if that helps."

"Too many Gothams -- or. No, not that. All I wanna do right now is walk into those offices and start kicking ass and taking names. I haven't been back to work since those black holes started popping off, and I think it's killing me a little."

"Yeah, that'd fuck with me, too. Hardcore. I -- hunh. What if we fill Gordon in on you and have you working -- *quietly* -- with him while all the big-brain types work on the problem?"

Harvey blinks. "You're serious? I could do something other than be a useless lump who occasionally gets alien fingers stuck in his brain?"

"I can run it past Robin, at least. And there's totally nothing wrong with those alien fingers. Heh."

Harvey snorts for that and gives Jason a playful little shove... so Jason shoves back and dances his way into the boxing stance Dick had bribed Ted Grant into showing him --

He still doesn't know what Dick had bribed the guy *with* --

And Harvey gets in his own stance, and it's *exactly* as perfect as Jason's own. He waggles his eyebrows a little --

*Jason* snorts -- and tags out, testing a little --

Harvey dodges neatly and tags for him --

And then it's not just time, it's *fucking* time, so Jason quick-steps Harvey back onto the mats --

His balance is *fantastic* --

And, all right, so it *is* the rule to tape your knuckles whenever you're doing *anything* with your fists --

Jason still remembers those blood stains *high* on the heavy bag, higher than Dick could comfortably punch --

And they're not punching to *hit*, exactly, and Harvey's got a light in his eyes like he's fucking loving this --

And Jason is, too. Especially once he starts using some of his *real* speed, and Harvey pulls out the stops, too -- just like he *isn't* in a damned suit and tie --

That was a fucking *trip* Jason leaped over --

Harvey *winks* at him --
"Oh, yeah, One-Face?" So Jason is perfectly *justified* in pulling out just a little aikido, nothing *too* serious --

And that's fucking *judo* Harvey's showing him, and it's not practiced or anything, but --

"The *fuck*?"

"The city paid for a bunch of us to learn some unarmed self-defense after one of my ADAs took a bullet to the jaw from his own gun. Heh. You can handle it."

"Fuck yeah, I can," and so Jason works a few strikes in with his punches --

And Harvey's trying to lure Jason in just like he thinks he can *throw* him. And --

Why not take a look? Jason quick-steps in, throwing one of his nicest flurries -- just with the *force* turned way down -- bobbing and weaving --

Harvey comes for him with a flurry of his own, looking to distract, fighting for some of Jason's *serious* blocks --

The hard *slap* of Harvey's hand against his forearm --

The little rush that means Harvey's spinning away from another strike, jacket flying out behind him --

The *shift* in his eyes -- yeah, Jason's leaping over a sweep --

And Harvey uses the *height* of Jason's leap to throw a shoulder into Jason's fucking midsection --

"Oh, *nice*," Jason says, twisting *away* --

"*Thank* you, tough guy. Next time stay still so I can throw you *properly* --"

Jason snickers and does a little boxer's dance. "Too slow is too slow, One-Face --"

And *that* is the unmistakable sound of Dick snorting so hard --

"*Ow* --"

He hurts himself. Heh. Jason stands down and throws up a hand. "Can I help you with somethin', Big Bird?"

And Dick's eyes are just *blazing* at him for a moment --

*Jesus*, yeah, and it's gotta be fine that he's stalking up to the guy, following his damned *cock* --

It *is* fine, because Dick pushes a hand into Jason's hair --

Dick *holds* him there and looks him *over* --

Dick licks his lips and pulls Jason in, tilting his head just a little, just enough to make the kiss *perfectly* deep right away, deep and fucking *hard* --

But Jason can take it. He feels like he can take *anything*, and it doesn't matter that his ass is lying a little --

Maybe a lot --
It's lying the *hot* way, the *clenching* way that's making Jason groan into Dick's mouth and try to open wider, *take* more of that slick-sweet tongue pushing and *shoving* its way in --

Jesus fucking *Christ*, Big Bird --

And there's that other hand -- not just on his hip but just *under* the waistband of Jason's shorts, rubbing back and forth almost like he's *looking* for something --

Bruises, maybe?

Jason doesn't know, because Dick pulls back just enough for Jason to be able to get his own back, kiss-wise. So he gives Dick one of Tim's favorite kisses -- the kind that should maybe be in a bed while *one* person is leaking come and both of you are rank with sweat --

The kind of kiss that just says more, and *more*, because Jason can't *get* deep enough into Dick's mouth this way --

Dick groans --

Yanks Jason *back* -- "Fuck, Rob --"

And laughs. "Some little wing came out at least a little."

"What? Oh. Uh. Yeah, it was time, Robin --"

"You didn't give *my* name?"

Jason frowns. "Fuck, no. I figured if you decided not to, there'd still be some time for Bruce to shore up secrecy a little if Harvey does go crazy."

Dick turns to look at Bruce --

Who really is *right* there looking at Harvey's throat --

At Jason's thighs --

At Dick's hands --

At Harvey's *hair* --

And into Jason's eyes. "Yes," he says, and the *way* he says it --

Like he's answering every question that *matters* --

"*Jesus*, big guy --"

Bruce winces, blinks, and looks more like Batman than anyone else, eyes hard and a little cold, posture ruler-straight and *also* hard --

Dick flicks Bruce's arm with his fingers. "Not that, boss."

"I -- there is a need for professionalism --"

"Yes, yes there *is*, but not for you to go all *Bat* on us all," and Dick's expression shows off about three-quarters of his smile lines, because he's feeling rueful and a little nostalgic --

"You totally beat that out of him, didn't you?"
"It took the better part of two *years*, but I managed," Dick says, sighing and rubbing the spot he'd flicked. "He *is* phenomenally beautiful, isn't he?"

Bruce frowns. "I'm trying -- I'm trying to --"

"Do something stupid like *repress* everything you're feeling for all of us, maybe?"

"Hey, now, Robin, are you sure you should be *encouraging* him to go after teenagers?" And Harvey sounds *exactly* like he's making a last-ditch stand for sanity --

Which is probably why Dick's smile is as gentle as it is. It's not *very* gentle, but there's still --

A little softness.

A little *care* -- "You won Jason over."

Harvey smiles ruefully at him -- "I think so, yeah. I can be a good guy --"

"You *are* good, Harv --"

Harvey holds up a hand. "Right now and for as long as I can manage it, big guy. And I'll expect you -- whichever you I wind up with -- to jump on me feet-first if I ever slip up."

Bruce frowns a little for that, but he nods --

And Dick walks up to Harvey with his hand outstretched. "Harvey Dent. I'm Dick, and I promise to *help* Bruce stomp you if you ever fuck up."

Harvey grins ruefully. "Dick, hunh? You've heard all the jokes."

"And made up a few myself," Dick says, smiling back at Harvey. "I'm not going to make friends with you instantly, Dent. I've had too many years to hate you and everything you did to hurt Bruce. However, I respect Jason's opinions too much not to take notice of this -- all of this -- and you."

Harvey looks at him, smiles a little wider, then turns back to Dick. "And I respect Bruce's opinions too much not to think you're something special... Mr....?"

"Heh. I guess I did ask for that. Dick's fine. And we have to find something to do with you when you're not getting your J'onn treatments."

"Uh -- well..." Jason raises his hand.

"What is it, little wing?"

"Gordon could use the help putting together cases for those assholes in the D.A.'s office now."

"God, they don't even do *half* of their jobs --" Dick sucks in a breath and nods. "Yeah, we out you to Gordon. The question is whether or not we out Bruce, too."

"You think he's not gonna *notice* a huge, familiar guy in a Batsuit?"

Dick smiles wryly. "So you did figure out that I was sending him out tonight."

"Heh, you pretty much have to. Have a Batman, *use* a Batman."

"My thoughts exactly. Tink's leading him through his territory tonight. Because...?"
Test time, because, no, training *never* ends. "Because his is the territory which has changed the most, and because his style is the one most different from anything Bruce knows. Uh -- shouldn't we have them working together right now?"

"Mm-hmm. In fact..." Dick prods Bruce's arm.

"Should I find him now?"

"Absolutely, boss. Remember not to throw him around *too* much tonight -- it tends to make him try to put heels on his boots."

Jason snorts. "Big Bird, *air* makes him do that."

Dick frowns a little. "Is he...? Ah... no, I'll ask you later."

And the thing is, Jason *knows* what that conversation is going to be about, but he has no idea what his side of it will be. *He* has to talk to Tim about that *and* about this thing where Jason's opinion of Superboy is fucking things for him. It can't stand --

And that's Dick's hand on his shoulder, and Dick's eyebrow up. His *lenses* are up -- "Where'd you go?"

"A conversation I have to have with Tim. I -- don't know if it's a big deal or not."

Dick bites his lip and nods -- and then visibly pushes it aside. "Teach Steph some of your meaner punches, but don't wear her out -- I want her on short patrol tonight."

"Got it, Big Bird."

Dick smiles at him, leans in, and bites Jason's fucking *ear* --

"Uh. Does that have an order attached to it?"

"That *is* an order, little wing," Dick *breathes* against his ear -- "Go play."

Fucking -- right.

Jason leaves Dick standing with Harvey -- no, they're headed to the console. Gordon's been working third-shift for at least as long as Jason's been doing this, and he just *happens* to have a videophone in his house for calls like this one. That, at least, was all Dick's idea -- Jason remembers the trip they'd taken to Gordon's house to set it up for him in the part of the attic right above his bedroom, and how fucking *surreal* it was to break into a cop's house, into the house where Babs was *raised* --

He'd dealt, and Dick had dealt better, and that's pretty much that. They don't do the calls all that often, but the *option* is there, and that's the most important thing.

He watches Tim pull on Tink, and then he watches Tink pull on *Bruce* until they've got a nice big *expanse* of mats surrounding them. Dick, Jason knows, will be joining Bruce and Tink and acting like a mean-spirited criminal -- or possibly several -- to help teach them how to work together...

But Jason's pretty sure they're not going to need much help. Bruce may not have planned for Tink -- no one *does* -- but Bruce is Batman, and that means some part of him has been dying to work with them, train them, shape them --

*Touch* them --
Fuck. He's -- not gonna think about it.

Especially since Steph is paying more attention to her stance and gait on the steps than to *him*, and that means she doesn't know what he's thinking about. He gives her a nice whistle --

She flips him off and *then* turns to grin at him. "Whatcha got for me?"

"Heh. You really wanna know...?"

She looks him over with a *sweet* kind of hunger.

"Is this what working with Tim does to you?"

"Heh. Since you asked...?"

Jason raises his eyebrows. "Yeah?"

"Mostly it makes me wanna fall over and fucking *nap* --"

Jason snorts --

"But it's not like my pussy *doesn't* start making noises at me when he goes all focused and grim."

Oh, man... "Yeah, fuck. *I* don't get to see that guy too often, but I know for a fact that his *team* does."

Steph sighs. "That's -- God, if he wasn't so gay, I'd have to be *jealous*. There's no *way* the girls on his team aren't completely and totally hot for him."

"Heh. He almost looks manly when he does that or something?"

Steph plants her hands on her hips and raises her eyebrows. "He *looks* *heroic* when he does that. Manly is something people like me can do *without* sometimes, thank you very much."

"Okay, okay, my bad, you don't have to kill me."

She glares at him for a long moment, but it's pretty damned clear that she's doing it mainly because she *can* --

So Jason waggles his own eyebrows and does about one-twentieth of a strip tease, showing off his abs, his treasure trail, his belly button, just a hint of under-pec, and he doesn't even know if that's actually a *thing* --

But it makes Steph laugh at him -- a nice little giggle-snort that gets her to cover her mouth, too.

He switches his hips like Tink and gets a full-on snort --

"Oh, God! Don't do that!"

"C'mon, babe, you gotta let me... uh... express myself?"

"*One* of you has to be a little bit straight! It's -- a *rule*.

Jason raises his eyebrows at her and waggles them *once* --
And then dodges away from her pounce, spinning to catch her with a light kick --

That she blocks pretty damned perfectly, actually. "Nice one. Put more of your body into it and you can kill the other guy's balance."

"Oh -- *yeah*. Wait, show me again --"

"Back on the steps."

She goes, hesitating a little -- no, she's leading with her left to strengthen it. Good deal.

She pounces, Jason dodges and spins --

Jason *kicks* --

And she fucking well *kills* his shin. "Okay, yeah, I can't improve that."

"You didn't go *down*."

"I was braced for you, babe -- and I'm tougher than you are, right now."

She glares -- and stops. "Okay, show me how to take you down from there --"

"Harder strike for the shin, followed *immediately* by a shot to the knee. Here, kick up for a second," Jason says, and sketches a little arc around her kneecap --

"God, I *love* hitting people there --"

"I know, so sweet *every* time. The thing is, it's easier to do serious damage with your feet, but that doesn't mean you can't *stop* someone with a good strike," and Jason pulls back. "Up on the steps."

"Got it --"

"Lead *left* --"

"*Shit*, okay, fine, I'm listening," and she actually steps back and goes over her own steps again.

Jason nods in helpless approval, braces *loosely* --

And this time she *fakes* the pounce and comes in with some *beautiful* kicks Tim killed his nuts to teach her, so Jason lets her do it, watching for weakness, for strain --

Nada, but --

"How tired are you?"

"A little? Just in my left leg --"

"Then stop. We still need you out there tonight --"

"You do *not* --"

Jason looks at her.

"You're gonna have *Batman*!"

"Yeah, but he? Has spent less time on the street than *I* have, and he hasn't spent *any* time in
"Perfecting your knee strikes and then eating dinner with us."

"Fuck, I gotta call my mom --"

"No way Alfred won't be bringing a phone --"

"Okay, okay. Knee strikes. Back on the steps?"

Jason nods. It's the best thing they have for uneven terrain that *won't* tempt her to start favoring her left side again.

Jason moves back into position --

Steph pounces, *tucks* when she misses him, lands lightly enough to dodge easily when he kicks, manages the strike to his shin perfectly, but barely grazes his knee. Hunh.

"Is that because you were trying to keep from hurting me, or...?"

"Uh. I was trying to keep from hurting *me*, I think. I froze up a little," she says, and stares at her right hand, which is still folded into position for a strike. "Isn't it really easy to break your *fingers* this way?"

"Nah, you're in more danger of that with the shin -- wow, I can't believe we didn't teach you this already. *Tink* should've had you ready to batter my kneecap to *powder*."

"Well, he mainly focused on how to kick people there really meanly and how to also be mean with my nightstick."

"Okay, that's fair, but *still*. Look, even if you break a finger doing this? Which you won't? You'll just splint it so stiff that you can throw strikes *easier*.".

Steph blinks --

Looks thoughtful --

"Also? Tim would love to do your nails."

"He would not. He wants to make *you* do my nails," she says, and gets back up on the steps. "He says you're *good* at it."

"Oh, I'm *fabulous*, girlfriend --"

"Oh -- fuck *you*," she says, pouncing --

*Tumbling* over his kick --

Kicking out before she's down and only missing Jason's knee because she *pulled* the kick --

And no strike for his knee because Jason was diving back. "Okay, yeah, do *that*.".

She giggles. "Yeah?"

"Fuck, yeah. Now show me some punches."
"I thought you didn't *want* to wear me out?"

And there goes his... yeah.

She snorts at him again. "Fucking *finally*," she says, and throws her arms around his neck. "Kiss me, you jerk!"

"Are you sure? I mean, I can say something else *really* gay if that'll turn you on --"

"Jason. Peter. Todd."

"Aw, man, he told you my *middle* name?"

"He said I could get *his* middle name out of you --"

"Jackson. Seriously. His Dad was *that* much of a douche."

"*Eugh*!"

"Yeah, seriously. Uh -- wait, wasn't I about to --"

She kisses him, pushing up on her toes even though she's only a little bit shorter --

She licks his lips, his tongue, his teeth --

Jason *sucks* her tongue, and does it hard enough to sting a little --

"*Mm* --"

Jason hums and grabs her ponytail with one hand and one sweet, *sweet* hip with the other. He tugs and squeezes, squeezes *hard*, because Jesus, there's so much fucking *meat* --

He pulls back. "Okay, the next time we're out there together --"

"I wasn't *finished* --"

"Neither was I, but I *need* this, okay?"

She frown-glares at him -- "*What*?"

"Hip-check somebody. Just -- fucking send some skel flying with one of these, okay?" He squeezes again for emphasis.

"Jason. Are you fetishizing my child-bearing hips?"

Jason hears himself make a sound like a nauseous otter --

Steph smiles *meanly* -- and rubs her inner thigh against Jason's outer one. "Again?"

Jason kisses her hard, hoping for another noise and getting a stiffening followed by a sigh that loosens her up all over so well that it's a surprise that her hair-tie hasn't fallen out. He wraps the ponytail around his fist as far as it'll go and tugs, tilting her head back slowly enough that she could stop him at any time --

And there's her neck right there. Thicker than Tim's, but that's not saying much. Her pulse is beating nice and fast, nice and hard --
And maybe a little harder when he flicks his tongue there --

"F-*fuck* --"

"Can I suck?"

"No hickey --"

"*Done*," Jason says, because he knows exactly how easily she *doesn't* bruise. All the times she's been tossed around out there and has just gotten right back *up* --

But he's *careful* on top of good, so he starts with a suck rather than a bite. Right on that pulse. Right where she's a little salty but *already* slick with his spit. Marked a little --

And a part of him is right back in Tim's *old* bedroom, because --

("Would you. I. I mean..."

"It's okay, we can do whatever you want --"

"Oh -- God. If you keep saying things like that --"

"I *want* you --"

"Ohn -- *Jay* --"

"*Tell* me..."

"Ma-- Jerk off. On me? Please?")

And that had been good. *Weird* but good, like that time *all* he'd done with Roy was jerk off because they'd both been too drunk and exhausted to *move* --

("Ohhh, Jaybird. Can you fly that over here? No? Then send the beer. I need something to do with my other hand before it starts bitching me out for not taking it over *there*.")

So maybe he's grinning and making the suck a little messy, a little dirtier than it *has* to be, but Roy would fucking *cream* himself for a taste of Steph, and one day Steph's gonna plant at least *one* on Tim, and maybe --

God, if it was the *three* of them --

Okay, so growling makes her *hump*. It's just *one* hump -- it was more of a *slam* -- but --

"Fuck -- *Jay* --"

Jason growls more *purposefully* and bites down slow and hard, pushing just a little closer, close enough that she can feel his jock and maybe -- *maybe* -- get a few ideas --

She grabs his ass and digs her *nails* in, and now he's the one humping. He can keep himself from slamming -- the jock wouldn't be comfortable for *either* of them, but --

God, that actually *stings* --

"*Unh* -- nails -- fuck, I didn't mean to stop *kissing*," he says, and *shoves* his tongue in her mouth as she drags her nails back *down* over his cheeks --
She gurgles a little for him, pushes her hands under his t-shirt --

He strokes up to the side of her breast --

And her shove is a perfectly comprehensible message.

"Too much?"

"Uh, sort of --"

"Ah, Miss Stephanie. What a pleasure to find you have joined us once again. Perhaps you will choose to remain with us for a somewhat longer visit than your last," Alfred says from right the hell *there* --

Jason's sac is used to it, though -- it only creeps a little. *Steph* is looking kinda *green* --

"Um. Um. It's nice to see you. Too. Alfred."

But she's good. Now it's his turn to deal. "Yeah, it's really uh. Is that dinner?"

Alfred gives him the *evil* twinkle, and lifts the cover off the *massive* tray to reveal the *phone*... and also dinner, which is two roast ducks and a bunch of sides.

"And you're totally not letting me help with that, are you."

Alfred narrows his eyes -- and then hands Steph the phone. "You may, if you wish, gather the others for your repast."

Right. One day, Alfred's not going to be *able* to do this, and that'll break *everyone's* heart, and --

Alfred himself would point out that that day isn't today, so Jason damned well goes with it. Dick's already leading Harvey to the big table, so Jason catches Steph's eye and points in that direction. She gives him the thumbs-up, and Jason goes hunting for Bruce and Tim.

They aren't on the mats, or over by the trophies, or anywhere near the gymnastics equipment, or the *weights* --

Oh, damn.

Jason jogs over to the medical area --

"-- really have to let me apologize, Bruce --"

"I think not," Bruce says, and holds his arm out for Tim, who is swabbing an *impressive* slash with peroxide -- presumably after the standard alcohol and iodine washes.

"It's just -- oh. Hi, Jay," Tim says, rueful and quiet. He's doing that thing where he's trying to hold on to his good humor but also working his way into a *serious* funk --

"You tagged him a good one, baby...?"

"I -- "

"I suggested a spar," Bruce says, obviously trying to keep his voice low and soothing. "I believed it would give me a better sense of Tim's skills, and of how he chooses to use them."
"And maybe also you wanted to see it?"

Bruce turns back to Tim, searching his face and lingering on his down-turned eyes like maybe he's *willing* Tim to look up again -- "Yes."

Tim *jumps* a little -- probably because that voice has a way of wrapping a fist around your cock and *squeezing* --

Jason shakes his head and pets Tim's hair a little before gripping the back of his neck and doing his own squeezing.

Tim sighs out most of his air, fixes his posture, and examines the wound. It's oozing more than bleeding -- "No stitches?"

"Nah, he's good. Just bandage him."

"Yes, Jay," and Tim works on doing just that. He has Bruce's attention again -- in a *big* way.

"Bruce."

"Yes, Jason."

"I -- heh. You weren't expecting Tim to get a little subby like this?"

Bruce frowns. "No. Perhaps I should have...?"

"Maybe," Jason says, and squeezes the back of Tim's neck again. "Baby's complicated. Lots of... heh. Facets."

Bruce nods slowly. "Yes. I see your point. I -- Tim, I do not feel that you have anything to apologize for. You may not have slipped into this... mode of being because of what happened in our spar, but you seemed... happier before then. Please. I'd like to see that again, in whatever manner you choose."

Tim licks his lips and tilts his head back just enough that he can see Jason's eyes. There's a question in Tim's and --

"The answer's always yes for you, baby. You know that."

Tim pushes back against him and turns back to bandaging, and that's an answer, *too*, but --

"You had your knife when you were sparring."

"Yes, Jay."

"Maybe... a lot of knives?"

"Three."

"And you were expecting Bruce to dodge or take it away from you?"

"Yes, Jay."

Jason eyes Bruce a little --

And Bruce smiles wryly. "I honestly didn't expect him to use it, nor did I expect him to use it well. My instincts were to deflect, then to disarm. For a moment -- just long enough -- I forgot that I wasn't..."
wearing the Batman, or the Batman's armor."

Which... heh. Jason smiles back. "There are a lot more kids with knives in Gotham proper than there are in your Cave back home."

Bruce nods and glances at the hand Jason has on the back of Tim's neck -- and then it's much, much more than a glance. It --

"You want some of this?"

Bruce blinks once. "Yes. And there are many ways to interpret your question."

"So there are," Jason says, and maybe he can blame the day for making him into a walking, talking *hormone* --

Or maybe he can just reach past Tim to hold the gauze in place while Tim tapes it down. He can feel Bruce's heat through the gauze, and even though it means that he's feeling the heat of Bruce's *wound* --

Maybe *because* of that --

He's breathing a little harder.

And Tim's breathing a little harder.

And Bruce's eyes are narrowed in fucking *concentration* as he reaches for Tim's face with his other hand. He does it carefully and *slowly* --

But Tim still gasps for the feel of Bruce's fingertips on his cheek --

"Oh. So..." Bruce takes a deep breath and strokes Tim's cheekbones. "I must have known just this sensation when I was a boy, but I have no memory of anything this... beautiful."

Tim shudders, tenses --

Bruce pulls his hand back immediately. "I'm sorry --"

"*No*. You -- I --" Tim licks his lips and dips his head in *just* the way that means he's looking at Bruce from under his lashes. "You have nothing to apologize for," he says, and sounds *increasingly* like Tink throughout. And *that* --

Jason moves his hand to Tink's shoulder, instead --

Tink shoots him a *hot* look, a promising-as-*hell*-look --

"*Dinner*," Jason grits, and he wasn't expecting to get a coherent, non-fucking-related word out, at all, so he's pretty proud of himself.

"*Oh* -- ah." Tink licks his lips and finishes the bandaging perfectly. "We'll discuss this later, Bruce," he says, pushing up on his toes and pecking -- not kissing -- Bruce's cheek before jogging to the table.

Bruce looks... confused. A lot. He --

Jason doesn't *snicker*, but --
"Hm. I find I'm glad for your amusement, Jason. Even when it's at my own expense."

"Yeah, well. Uh. Nobody's ready for Tink the first time. Nobody's ready for *Tim* the first *fifteen* times. It's kind of a fact *and* the law around here."

The light in Bruce's eyes is bright and kind of *hard* -- but still warm. "As you say," and he stands and flexes his arm before nodding in approval. "Will you tell me what changed your mind about the protocol?"

"Easy answer," Jason says, and starts walking. "Dick needs things to be as calm as possible right now. All of this is driving him a little crazy, because his past, present, and *future* family is right here. *Plus* there's Harvey looking like pain and terror and *acting* like anything but -- there's gotta be some simple rules. Like the Cave being the safe space it's always *been*. We can't go around acting like we're in siege positions in our own damned home."

Bruce nods slowly. "And Harvey proved himself to you."

Jason snorts. "*That* fucking guy could prove himself to -- I don't know. Some kind of god who actually *cares* about virtue. He's maybe a little too old-fashioned... eh, I don't know. He's a good guy."

"Yes," and Bruce smiles, tiny and bright. "He brought light into my world with effortless generosity."

"You ever think maybe you were never supposed to be dark in the first place, B?"

"Yes. Very, very recently," Bruce says, and shows his *teeth* at Jason, which --

That's another promise right there.

Jason's not actually capable of thinking that's a bad thing.

*
I don't do especially well with -- ah. People who care about me.

The sight of all the food Alfred had prepared was intimidating and strange, but that was only because it took a moment for Bruce to fully catch up with the fact that there were *six* people eating, rather than one.

With that in mind, Alfred had once again managed to prepare enough food to *perfectly* satisfy their needs for a light pre-patrol -- and pre-terribly-invasive-therapy -- meal --

Though both Jason and Stephanie had looked for more before grinning ruefully at each other and standing to go stretch.

The rest of them had eaten far more slowly -- Alfred would call it 'decorously' -- before moving to their own duties. Harvey had expressed some measure of trepidation about using the computers to work on the case files Jim had sent, and Tim had immediately broken off his own stretches to go to help. Dick --

Dick learns with a rapidity which would inspire fear in someone entirely other than Bruce.

Dick's smiles are knowing and sharp, wide and bright, soft and open --

Right now, Dick's smile is expectant and possibly even impatient, and Bruce realizes that he has simply been taking *in* everyone here for at least two minutes.

Bruce moves to join Dick on the mats, and then simply to follow Dick. "You have my apologies. I never imagined this place so full."

"You told me once that *I* was enough to fill the Cave."

"I imagine --"

"I thought you were crazy then. Are you crazy now...?" Another bladed smile, something to wound -- but only with pleasure.

"If I say yes, will you let J'onn work on me?"

Dick wags his head back and forth -- "Maybe, yeah. This place has always needed a family. A *big* family."

That -- "Would you tell me of your family?"

Dick throws his head back and almost *shouts* laughter -- "You almost got me, Bruce. I had the first sentence all ready to *go* -- and that sentence would've told you all you needed to know in order to *save* the life I used to have." Dick waggles his finger at him.

"I -- I truly only wished to know if you had *siblings*, Dick --"

"Ooh, that's a *terrible* lie, boss," and Dick hisses between his teeth. "Just for that? I *won't* let Tim nibble on your dick when it's his turn."

Bruce grunts -- "It was. It was a lie. I still --"

"Those questions are off-limits."
"You've allowed both Harvey and me a large number of details about all of your lives --"

Dick hums. "So I might as well give up the goods...?"

All right, that sounds asinine, but -- "It -- *this* -- is my nature."

Dick's smile softens dramatically -- and he leans in to bite Bruce's lower lip. It's neither vicious nor teasing. Rather, it's an act of decidedly *violent* affection, and a part of Bruce only wishes to know from whom Dick had learned it.

He raises an eyebrow --

And Dick laughs at him. "Boss. Look at the life I have. The life I *built* with the help of all of these wonderful, beautiful, desired and desiring people. *Look* at it."

"I *have*, Dick."

Dick frowns and pulls back --

"Oh. Don't --"

"You haven't looked, Bruce. Not enough. But I promise that that will *change* before I let you go."

*Bruce* frowns. "I -- you wish to change me?"

Dick turns and walks on, raising one finger -- "One thing, boss. Just one."

"For the opportunity to have... this."

Dick sighs, but doesn't turn around until they reach the uniforms. "Oh, yes. Now let's get you into one of these without killing ourselves."

"The traps are *deadly*?"

An airy wave of the hand. "A figure of speech. Though the electrical charge will take you out of commission for most of a night and give you *such* a burn," Dick says, and there's something febrile under his voice. Something --

"You're not meeting my eyes."

Dick looks up away from the utility belt -- but his eyes are closed. "I've never wanted to lie to you, and I've *definitely* never wanted to *hide* anything from you --"

"Then *don't* --"

"*Bruce*," Dick says, and that's almost certainly his command voice -- "Ultimately, I would rather spend a -- guaranteed -- limited amount of time living in conflict with my own heart than risk another world -- another *Dick* -- not having all of this."

Bruce frowns again. "Dick, I can't decide whether I should find that horrifying or noble --"

"Then my work here is... heh. Well begun. Strip."

Bruce does so, and they spend the next ten minutes going over and over what the suit can and cannot do for him. After that, Dick painstakingly refills the pockets of the belt with everything which could have reasonably aged beyond its usefulness, and then leads Bruce through twelve different katas
from several different schools of martial arts.

After *that*, Dick flows through eighteen different stretches at a speed which only *seems* too fast for the stretches to be effective. When he suits up, he seems to almost become someone else entirely, someone whose smiles could never be anything but sharp, whose entire *humor* is something dangerous, only to be wielded by someone *trusted*.

There are parts of Bruce which don't want to trust Robin, at all, but those parts can be quieted with the simple fact that Robin had shown him nothing that would suggest he was unfit for the streets.

For the *Mission* --

Even though he's killed.

Even though he's dooming his family -- whoever they were -- to a fate --

Bruce doesn't know their fate. He knows what's right and what's wrong --

And he's known for a very long time that he would not always be able to count on the allies he found in this war sharing all of his beliefs.

(They should be more than simply *allies* --)

Robin looks at him through the blank eyeholes of the mask and there's something almost terrible about it. Bruce can barely see the beautiful, loving, and *hurt* man he'd made love with this morning, and that --

Of course they *should* be as professional as possible right now --

"Bruce...?"

Has his name ever been more of a relief?

Once, hearing 'Batman' had felt like that, as if Bruce was someone to wear only until the *right* time had been reached --

He sees, now, that that was a terrible lie, and a crime against himself. "Dick... it's only that I needed to see you --"

"And not Robin...?" Dick smiles softly again and comes close, touching Bruce's cheek with a gauntleted hand. "I'll tell you a secret, boss..."

"Yes. Please --"

"*Robin* wants to tell you everything. *Robin* could never go against your orders -- or even your *requests*. *Robin*... is a very good boy. Now and forever."

Bruce frowns. "And Dick is not?"

Dick shakes his head. "No. Not anymore. I'm sorry," he says, and steps back, gesturing --

And Cardinal is at Bruce's side, solemn and dark as blood -- no. His lenses are up, and there is 'Tink' in the flash of his grey-blue eyes. A promise --

"Start near Owl's territory, Cardinal, and report in on the hours."
"Aye-aye, cap'n."

Robin stares at Cardinal --

'Tinkerbell,' of all *things* --

Tim?

The boy is all of those things and none as he cocks his hip and purses his small, soft-looking lips --

No, that's the lipstick he's wearing, which is subtle enough -- when compared to his uniform -- that it almost blends with his complexion --

Which has been shifted -- enhanced? -- by some degree of *foundation* --

Robin laughs suddenly, hard and *intense* -- and then it becomes one of Dick's laughs, which are often musical and sweet. "All right, fine, you win. I'm *here*. What do you need?"

The boy looks down, and the small amount of skin that shows on the back of his neck is flushed pink.

Tim, then, and Tim *must* be the heart of him. If he wasn't, then he wouldn't be able to crack Dick's facade so easily and perfectly. Dick crouches in front of Tim -- "Tell me --"

"I -- ah. It was disconcerting not to see you," he says, and his voice is *small* --

"Oh... little brother. You shouldn't tempt me with --" Dick shakes his head --

And Tim looks up immediately, shrewd and quick -- he nods. "I promise you, Dick -- I'll always have issues you can hug out of me. Or other things."

Dick parts his lips and breathes deeply -- staring and searching --

He *pants* and Bruce feels himself thicken with want for this, *too*. *All* --

Dick growls and stands. "Go. Before I ruin your... mm. Finish."

Tim bites his own lip *carefully* -- "Yes... big brother."

Dick flashes his teeth --

And then Tim's hand is clutching his own, and Bruce is being tugged toward the cars and bikes.

Bruce can feel Dick's eyes on them as they go.

He --

Yes.

Tim leads them to the one simply *black* (as opposed to red, gold, or green) car which is in position to be driven out of the Cave --

And the air itself seems torn in the wake of Jason's and Stephanie's bikes as they peel out at speed. Stephanie's bike appears new -- and its colors complement her uniform where they don't simply match --

And a metallic tinkle and clink reminds him to look down at Tim, who is dangling a set of keys -- on
a keychain carved to look like the bat on Bruce's chest. It's not so strange -- already, in his universe, some entrepreneurs had begun selling merchandise with versions of the bat stamped or carved or painted on --

It seems surreal to have such a thing *here*, though. Bruce strokes the thing lightly and tries to imagine a life where --

Where all of this is true, and real, and as correct as a young boy's maquillage.

Bruce gestures Tim to the passenger side and opens the doors, slipping in --

"Fourth button, third row," Tim says.

Bruce pushes it -- and they're both restrained. "Hm."

"Yes...?"

"Did you not trust me to learn how to use the seatbelts?"

Tim smiles at him brightly and --

"Wait," Bruce says, and uses the thumb of the gauntlet to wipe the small smear of lipstick from Tim's left central incisor --

"Oh --" And Tim pulls a wipe from his pocket for Bruce's thumb. "Thank you. I usually check the mirror right before I go, but... ah. Well." He's blushing under his foundation.

He's terribly young and *strange* --

Not so strange that he can't be understood. Not so --

So young --

"Um. I should go over -- ah. Everything?"

"Would you tell me..." Bruce frowns at himself. "No, never mind --"

"No! Ah -- ask. Please?"

The boy --

Tim is very beautiful, even with his wide eyes mostly hidden, even with his face painted --

"Would you tell me what it looks like when I stare while wearing the cowl?"

Tim blinks at him. "Ah... hm."

"You weren't expecting that question."

Tim's expression quirks, making him seem far more womanly than he usually does.

Bruce doesn't have the faintest idea of how that particular calculus is being managed within his own mind. Still -- "It's all right. It wasn't an important question --"

"Ah -- no, actually, I believe it was. You're feeling... some degree of difficulty about where to draw the line between Bruce and Batman? Is 'Bruce Wayne' a part of that equation?"
The mathematics of identity. To share *that* with this boy... Bruce breathes deeply --

"Should I take that as a yes?"

"Yes."

Tim closes his mouth and hums, nodding to himself and seeking -- ah, something behind his own eyes.

Bruce waits, and familiarizes himself with the car's controls. Everything is labeled well enough. A dark droplet for the oil slick, a spiked star for caltrops, a cloud for smoke, an oddly sleek-looking computer for autopilot...

Yes, it's all quite clear, as it would have to be for emergencies. This universe's Bruce had no idea when he would have to relinquish the car's controls to his partner, and so he had made sure they wouldn't *have* to be memorized.

Bruce strokes the steering wheel lightly -- and a recessed button comes to hand. "Tim --"

"That's the button that automatically moves the driver's seat into the proper position for Dick to drive it."

Pressing it now -- or ever while he's driving -- would thus be the cause of near-immediate regret.

The seats are also made to be *ejected*, judging by the buttons on the console between driver's and passenger's sides --

Bruce has no doubt that every single one of these measures had either made their lives easier, or *would* have made their lives easier had they been available at the times in question --

"I -- I'm still thinking."

"You don't need to give me an answer immediately, or at all --"

"I know that. But -- I used to dream about talking with you," Tim says, in the quiet voice he's been using with him since the slash --

"You... are you... intimidated by me in some way?"

"Hnn. You're a foot taller and over a hundred pounds heavier than I am," and his voice is much less quiet.

Bruce hums. "You're fully aware that that's not what I meant when I asked the question."

"Well. Best to get that sort of thing out of the way."

"Is it?"

"I..." Tim sighs. "All right, I'm at something of a loss with you, to be honest."

"Please, tell me."

"We're not going to have *any* problems working together once we're out there, because we're both professionals."

"Yes."
"However... you're nothing like what I expected. Even after hearing Dick's stories of the warm, loving, kind, and intricately *perverse* man who had been his first lover and *partner* -- I wasn't prepared for you. You're... younger."

"Yes."

"You -- and you're actually holding yourself *back* a little right now because you think I'll say something hurtful. I hate that. I -- I never really want to say hurtful things, and sometimes it just happens anyway," Tim says, and frowns. "Jay has been immensely educational in terms of keeping that from happening randomly, but I still mess it up -- perhaps you're correct to be cautious."

"I would like for neither of us to be cautious," Bruce says, carefully and clearly as he can --

"Hnn. Ooh. That sounded like you were thinking something *filthy*."

Bruce blinks behind the cowl --

Tim sighs. "And then there's *that* issue. I -- look. When I'm attracted to someone as much as I'm attracted to you, I let them *know*. I touch them, I hit on them, I gaze deeply into their eyes and show my teeth *just* so, I make comments about the welcoming nature of my rectum -- er, that usually comes later --"

"Are you... at all attracted to women?"

"I. I'm sort of in love with Steph. I think. I mean, I can't actually imagine making love with her, but I'd like for it to happen someday just the same. Somehow. She's the only female person I've felt this way about."

Bruce nods. He could see that in the way they looked at each other. It's different from how Tim and Jason relate to one another, but the intensity is quite similar. "Thank you for telling me."

"You're welcome. And that's the other thing -- wait, no. I'm not done with the last thing," and Tim blows out an irritated breath. "I can't figure out how to -- I mean, I know how to be with Jason and Dick and all the others when I want to make love. I know how to *relate* to them, because they've *told* me how. And the others... well, I tell them how to relate to *me*. They're not -- quite -- family."

"Would you like me to tell you how to relate to me?"

Tim looks *pained* --

"Or -- we could speak about something else --"

"Oh -- God, that's the other thing. The other, other --" Tim growls and starts to reach for his hair -- he stops and lowers his hands to his lap. "You can't be afraid of me. Not -- not of *me*, Bruce!"

Bruce -- doesn't lick his lips. "If you're sure."

Tim snorts, reaches to cover the lower half of his face -- and then brings his hand back to his lap. "Don't *do* that when I'm trying to be beautiful!"

"I --"

The red car pulls out ahead of them, and the windows are tinted too darkly to be sure of anything, including whether or not Dick is wondering what they're doing. Of course, *their* windows are
Bruce shakes his head and turns back to Tim. "I've found you beautiful since the first time I was near enough to you to observe you clearly."

"I -- oh."

"I want you to be comfortable with me. I -- I'm very curious about you --"

"Yes, well, I'm *odd* --"

"Yes. And also obviously quite brilliant," Bruce says, and covers Tim's hand with his own. "Would you like to make love --"

"*Yes* --"

"We. Not now --"

"*No*, not now, but -- ah. Soon. Hopefully very soon, and I want -- I want you not to be afraid of me."

"I promise to try --"

"And I want you to -- to keep being interested in me --"

"Yes."

"And I'm not sure if I want you to be this agreeable."

Bruce licks his lips. He suspects *he'd* look deeply pained were Tim able to peek beneath the cowl. "All... ah. Hm."

Tim glares at him for a moment -- and then giggles, bright and young.

"You're lovely."

"And odd."

"Yes. I'd like to know you. To know your... facets."

"Ooh, I love a man who talks *jewelry*..."

"Do you?"

"No, not really. Well. I am thinking of piercing myself some few places, but *I'll* choose the actual jewelry... not that I couldn't be convinced..." Tim frowns and looks down at their hands. "$\text{Sometimes I think I became Tinkerbell to shut Jay up. Other times I think I did it because I knew it would make Jay as crazy for me as I was for him. *Other* times I think I did it because it's the real me -- especially because Tink lies so *much*. Still other times... I think I did it because it's easier to be Tink than to think about... about maybe being a woman,}^*  $\text{Tim says, and his voice is small again. His *self* is small again --}^*

"*Tim, there's nothing wrong with your feelings --}^*"
confused is what I think I'm saying."

Bruce nods. "I'm making it worse."

"*No* -- well. Yes, actually. I've had so many *fantasies* about you, and so many of them have the potential of coming true, but it's all so *different*. I mean, with Jay, I didn't have as much *time* to build up fantasies."

"And with Dick?"

"Dick -- Dick is a fantasy *walking*. I never managed to come up with *coherent* fantasies about him which didn't fall apart into a series of images and sense-memories at first... ah... stroke."

Bruce turns Tim's hand and rubs what he hopes is a soothing circle against his palm --

Tim moans and yanks his hand *away* --

"I'm sorry --"

"No, it's. Ah. That's one of the -- that's an *aspect* of one of the fantasies I've had about you. That touch."

Bruce touches his tongue to the backs of his teeth for the contact, the frustration -- but. He does not have to force Tim to be the only honest one. He can... he can be open, *too*. "Tell me," he says, and doesn't control the roughness of his tone --

"Oh, God. Um -- Bruce --"

"Tell me, Tim. Now."

Tim's flush is immediate, his lips part, and he rubs at his long, promising thighs.

"Tim."

"You -- we spar. And you throw me -- several times."

"Do you use your knives."

"No... not in this fantasy."

"All right. What happens then."

"You -- oh. You're making me want to lick my lips --"

"Don't," Bruce says, and tilts Tim's chin up to expose the small fraction of his neck which *can* be exposed.

"What -- *where* is this coming from --"

"You're teaching me how to relate to you. I am, on occasion, a fast learner."

Tim giggles for him again --

And Bruce smiles. "Tell me what happens next."

Tim moans --
Sits back and sits straight. "You pin me when you realize -- somehow -- that I've lost the ability to fight back effectively. I try to get up anyway. You praise my instincts --"

"Yes."

"Oh -- ah. Yes. You can. You can smell me --"

"I enjoy the colognes you've worn. Tell me which one you're wearing in the fantasy."

Tim moans again, but doesn't slip in terms of his posture. He --

Bruce strokes Tim's cheek with rough, gauntleted fingers, gently enough that he won't smear the makeup. He wants more. He wants --

The image of himself holding Tim down is hardly unbidden, but still uncomfortably arousing. He should end this conversation or at least change the subject --

Is it rude for a gentleman to do something like that to a young woman? If the woman wishes to discuss sexuality, then surely the gentleman must accommodate her --

He's not supposed to be *agreeable*, but surely there's room for -- ah. This, Bruce thinks, and grips the back of Tim's neck. The collar of Tim's uniform is stiffened with something that would keep him from being choked by all but the strongest and most determined enemies, but --

Tim still moans and sighs for the touch, pushing back against Bruce's hand. "I'm sorry --"

"Tell me."

"It. It's hard. I." Tim looks down at his lap, clenching his jaw, and for a moment it's difficult to credit. What could be so embarrassing about the scent he'd choose to --

Unless it wasn't a chosen scent, at all. "In the fantasy, it's your own scent I enjoy."

"*Yes*," Tim says, and clenches his jaw even more tightly, because --

"You're a woman in that fantasy."

Tim shudders once, all over -- and then breathes out much of his tension. "Batman --"

"No. Not in this moment."

"*Ohn* -- Bruce. I. Most of my fantasies about you... um. It's just. It's just that Jay has always been so *clear* about liking me male, and Dick lets his female lovers *go*, and -- um. Yes."

"I enjoy your maleness, and the ways in which you express it --"

"I. Oh. I see --"

"I believe I would vastly enjoy making love with you, were you a woman."

Tim gasps lightly. "You -- yes?"

Bruce squeezes the back of Tim's neck as hard as he can without -- he hopes -- causing *much* in the way of pain --
"Bruce -- oh, Bruce --"

"Perhaps you will... dress for me."

"Yes -- *yes* --"

"Perhaps you will allow me to take you out somewhere --"

"You *can't*. You -- too many people would *recognize* you --"

"Then Alfred will serve us in the manor. The two of us... perhaps in the solarium."

Tim gulps lightly -- "I -- yes --"

"Perhaps you'll wear... Chanel number twenty-two."

Tim frowns. "Your mother wore that scent."

Should he be surprised that Tim knows so much about him? He'd been focused in hero-worship, dedicated to the point of using his natural intellect to develop skills which would allow him to know more, and more than that --

"I mean -- of course I will --"

"It's my favorite scent, Tim. And I am not unaware of the things that says about me."

Tim purses his lips and studies Bruce from under his lashes --

"Ask."

"Do I... resemble your mother?"

Bruce raises an eyebrow -- there's no way for Tim to see it --

Tim blushes anyway. "I -- it's an honest question. To some extent. You were close enough to her that the resemblance between us might seem terribly shallow."

Bruce nods once and gives himself permission to stroke the outline of Tim's mask, the shell of his ear --

"Please -- please."

"Tell me."

"I think. Um. I might need to -- come. Before I can be useful --"

Bruce grunts and presses the button to release the restraints --

Tim lifts the center console out of the way -- "Please, Bruce --"

"I believe you could resemble my mother greatly with the right shades of makeup and style for your hair. She was... quite petite."

"I -- I can walk very well in heels --"

"I want you in silk," Bruce says, and reaches for Tim's belt -- pauses. "Remove the belt and lower your. Bare yourself for me."
Tim groans and does just that. It takes a full two minutes -- his hands are shaking badly -- but he manages. His penis rises straight and dark from the artificially and fascinatingly neat triangle of his pubic hair. His scrotum is lightly fuzzed with hair, and, perhaps, slightly small for his age. He --

Bruce turns in his seat and pushes Tim's tunic up and his briefs further down -- hm. It seemed as though the others wore oddly tight boxers. "Do you wish you were wearing women's panties?"

"Some. Sometimes."

"You pretend at other times."

A moan -- "Yes, Bruce --"

"You're beautiful."

"Thank you, Bruce --"

"I want. I want to take you --"

Tim arches up off the seat, seemingly trying to *reach* Bruce with his body -- "I -- I'm not... very tight --"

"No, you wouldn't be. It would, perhaps, be difficult to hurt you."

Tim whimpers and shakes his head. "Jay. Jay hurts me."

The images for that -- "Does he. Are you on your hands and knees," and Bruce strokes the underside of Tim's penis with his gauntleted finger --

Tim cries out, penis twitching *wildly* for a moment --

"You tempt me... reason is smoke," Bruce says, and curls his finger around the base of Tim's penis.

"Answer me."

"He likes it -- usually when he hurts me, we're up on our knees together. He thrusts up --"

"And pulls you down."

"Yes, Bruce."

Bruce nods and squeezes with his finger--

"*Ahn* --"

"I will take you that way... unless you have any notable objections."

"I want -- no. No, Bruce," Tim says, shaking his head and beginning to *slowly* pump his hips --

"What do you want."

"It's not -- important --"

"Would Jason allow that answer."

Tim whimpers and pants -- "N-no..."

"Then what do you want," and Bruce begins tugging lightly with his curled finger, squeezing on
alternate tugs --

"Oh -- *God*. That shouldn't even -- Clark said that you were a *virgin* --"

"You spoke to him...?"

"He -- ah. I took a small break from study hall to... catch up with him. Um."

"Did he touch you."

"I. I. It was too soon after Dick --"

"Did you want him to touch you."

Tim moans and tries to thrust in the opposite rhythm to Bruce's tugs.

"Was that a yes...?"

Tim tosses his head -- stops and glares at him, hot and *dark* -- "You -- when and where you remember that question marks are available --"

Bruce squeezes *hard* --

Tim cries out, eyes widening in the shadows of the mask -- "I. I did! I wanted him to fuck me right there in the bathroom --"

"I'm experimenting. These... I've imagined these touches from a lover."

"Oh -- of course -- I can't think of *Batman* having fantasies --"

"He dreams of justice," Bruce says, and wants to kiss, to lick Tim's sharp-boned cheeks --

"Right, of course, I'm sorry --"

"I dream of... flesh. Touch. Heat..." His ear. He can -- Bruce leans in and nuzzles Tim there. Dick had bitten Jason --

He can do the same, of course --

How is it an 'of course'? There's a temptation to laugh at himself, there's another to remove Tim from the car and drive into Gotham on his own, to bury his emotions and hungers in violence, justified violence --

The strongest temptation is to suck hard enough on the lobe of Tim's ear that it may, perhaps, *feel* like a bite, and he's allowed to, he's --

He'll never offer *hurt* unless it's desired --

These beautiful young ones --

Tim.

Bruce sucks, very hard --

Tim moans for him and shakes more, clutching at Bruce's arm -- "*Please* --"

Bruce pulls back --
"*Nnh* -- Bruce, oh, Bruce, I'm *close* --"

Bruce grunts and breathes, ignoring the pain from his jock, ignoring everything but this beautiful *boy* --

Girl?

"Tell me what you want. What... what you didn't say before."

Tim whimpers -- "Oh, please, hold me, my -- my penis --"

Bruce changes his grip immediately --

"Thank you, Bruce, I -- I want -- I've thought about being on my hands and knees for you --"

"Even though it wouldn't hurt as much...?"

"You're *bigger* than Jay, you -- Dick showed me on a sex toy site."

Bruce... doesn't cough. It wouldn't suit the mood. It --

There *must* be an etiquette for this, something beyond the ease of being greedy and demanding, rough and -- and *harsh* --

"Tim..."

"Yes. Oh -- yes, *please*?"

Perhaps *this* laugh can be suitable. "Shall I stroke you firmly?"

"Oh -- *God*. Do what you want, what -- *use* me --"

"No --"

"*Please* --"

"Not *yet*," Bruce says, and squeezes Tim's penis what *must* be too hard --

"Ah -- oh, *fuck* --" And then Tim is jerking, gasping and *flexing* in Bruce's hand --

Tim still manages to retrieve a wipe -- from *Bruce's* belt -- to catch his semen, and Bruce realizes that he's disappointed, that he'd wanted more of this, Tim's touch and taste --

For all that it would've been far too rough to stroke Tim with the gauntlet on, as opposed to merely holding and tugging --

"Bruce...? Oh -- oh, you want *more* --" And Tim makes a softly incoherent noise as he tugs Bruce's hand away from his penis and then moves to open Bruce's suit with deft, sure touches.

"How --"

"Dick showed me. I -- he saw me looking at them too many times, and he showed me everything, I --" Tim pants and eases the shorts and tights away, the armored jock -- "I think he must've known why I wanted to know."

"You wanted everything of me you could have."
"Yes*, Bruce," and Tim's touches are gentle through Bruce's briefs, careful and soft --

"Beautiful. I understand you, I believe."

Tim moans and searches him for a moment -- and then tugs Bruce's penis out through the slit and pants -- no. He's hyperventilating for some reason --

"Tim --"

He holds up one finger and smiles brightly, reassuringly -- and then he stops hyperventilating and *swallows* Bruce in three somehow *brutal* gulps --

"*Tim*, you --"

Tim hums loudly --

Bruce groans and reaches -- no. Tim's hair is too perfect, and the texturing would be an *annoying* sort of hurt on Tim's scalp, Bruce thinks. He cups the back of Tim's neck, instead, squeezing and trying to *will* Tim to stay open for him, to desire *thrusts* --

But Tim is looking up into Bruce's eyes, Tim is present, beautiful --

Bruce pushes the cowl back and tries to give Tim his own focus, his need and hunger -- "I *understand*."

Tim groans in his chest and sucks, *salivates* -- and Bruce realizes that Tim wants to know more, to *hear* more --

That this is, perhaps, a *constant* --

"Of course you should be this -- this *avid*," Bruce says, and squeezes the back of Tim's neck again. "So -- acquisitive, as well?"

Tim nods -- and then begins to work himself on Bruce's penis. So --

"You're so much *smaller* than Dick --"

It's an answer when Tim groans again and begins to swallow rhythmically -- *ruthlessly*. The compression of his throat feels almost dangerous, as if there would *have* to be the risk of terrible injury for *one* of them.

And Bruce knows that he's not gripping Tim's neck as much as he's stroking there, and his back --

He's too *covered* --

"I must. I must *feel* you --"

Tim pulls back enough that only the head is in his mouth, and suddenly the world is a *cold* place, cruel and unwelcoming --

Until Tim wraps his bare hands around Bruce's penis and begins to stroke the shaft even as he sucks, even --

He's giving Bruce his calluses, and, of course, more of his body, his --

Her -- ? But how to ask? Should he not have manipulated Tim's penis? He'd seemed to enjoy it --
"I want to give you *new* fantasies even as I enact your older ones --"

Tim hums several times. He almost seems to be speaking, and Bruce can't help but feel as though a *part* of him can understand. The soft and needy part of him, the *greedy*--

Oh -- "I *understand*," Bruce says again, taking off the gauntlet on his free hand with his teeth so he can touch Tim's hair, just--

He won't ruin the *style*--

"I wanted to be taken as well, Tim. I wanted -- *nnh*-- your mouth is a *wonder*--"

Tim hums interrogatively, *pointedly*--

Bruce laughs somewhat breathlessly. "Yes, your impatience, as *well*, Tim. So perfect--" Bruce licks his lips and grunts for the feel of Tim's hard sucks and harder *squeezes*. "Yes, you--I wanted to be taken by a lover, used utterly by someone who saw me and was *stricken* by the need for touch--however brutal. It would mean so much *more*..."

Tim whimpers and nods, and perhaps the way Tim begins to stroke Bruce faster is meant to be further affirmation, more--

It *is* more, but--"Tim... can you take me in your throat once more?"

Tim nods *vigorously*, squeezing Bruce's penis one more time before letting go and lowering himself down. Not--

It's *not* slow, but it isn't fast, either. It's measured, steady enough to remind Bruce of videos of ships pulling into dock, cars pulling in--

*In*--

Bruce strokes Tim's ear with his fingertips--it's not enough.

Bruce strokes the gorget of Tim's cape, the strip of flesh above it--it's not *enough*, and Tim is taking his mind, suckling as he *swallows*--

"Beautiful. You're beautiful--"

Tim looks up at him and gives even more, offering the pleasure in his eyes, the simple *happiness*--

"Yes. I want--I *will* have this from you--"

Tim pulls back seemingly *just* to moan. For him. For *this*--

And Bruce finds the catches of his cape. The mechanism is a simple one, but it's designed for much smaller hands to manipulate. He tries anyway--

And Tim groans and reaches up to do it himself, one-handed and so deft--

Of course the uniform is--he's *used* to it, but--

But Bruce still feels himself twitching in Tim's mouth, Tim's hot and *wonderful* mouth--

But the skin of the back of his neck is fuzzed with hair, as tender and interesting as his scrotum. Bruce massages roughly and Tim groans again, looks at him *pleadingly*--
But what is it? What could -- no. '*Swallow* me.'

Tim grunts and thrusts at nothing --

Bruce twitches *again* --

And Tim takes him whole, entire --

His eyes roll back in his head --

This is arousing him once more. This --

A part of Bruce is only noting the time -- but he can't think of this as a waste. Not when there's such pleasure, desire *shared* --

And he can stroke Tim's long, slim throat. He can mark the curve of it as Tim drives him higher, stokes the fires of Bruce's *lust* until everything he wants seems brutal and perfect at once. He *squeezes* the front of Tim's throat experimentally --

And Tim claws desperately, *fervently* at his hips, eyes gaining and losing focus, gaining it again as he *nods* --

"Oh -- but so dangerous --"

Another nod and a *plea* --

And the truth is that Tim isn't getting any air to *be* cut off in this way. The truth --

The truth is that Bruce is already thrusting when he squeezes, when he *lifts* Tim enough that he must take Bruce from another angle --

Tim scratches and claws at the chest armor -- but doesn't bare his teeth. This -- this must be correct. This -- use.

"Anyone -- anyone would desire you, and I -- I can't *deny* -- oh, *Tim* --"

He's working his head in rhythm with Bruce's thrusts, meeting him with power, strength --

Of course, this must not be an unfamiliar protocol, but to be made love to like this is still *profound*. He *is* being taken -- and perhaps used to soothe the ache of fantasy, and years of frustrated and *hopeless*-seeming desire.

Tim never expected him to *exist* where he could be made love with, just as Bruce never imagined being invited into the arms of a boy so knowledgeable and young, at once. So practical and yet so imaginative. So beautiful and so convinced that beauty could come only through *effort* --

And Bruce can't be gentle any longer. Not --

He will not *injure*, but his body gives him no choice: He grips the back of Tim's head and holds it still for his thrusts --

Tim claws at the chest armor once more --

Again --

Tim goes limp and *allows* --
Such *freedom* --

"Take -- take my *pleasure*, Tim --"

Tim shudders and begins to suck for every thrust, harder as Bruce pulls *out* --

And when Bruce tries to call Tim's name again, nothing comes out but a sighing *growl* --

Tim looks up again -- and it's obvious that his eyes widen even with the shadows of his mask and the strange position --

"No -- *fear* --"

And Tim is trying to nod -- he. Bruce can't *let* him nod. He needs Tim there, just *there* --

For one more --

Orgasm tears another growl from him, forces his fingers to *spasm* on the back of Tim's head --

He's breaking Tim's careful *spikes* --

He --

There is heat and *light*, and he's read of near-death experiences, wondered about the differences between zeitgeist and the suggestibility of the average --

So human --

And Tim is taking all of him, sucking and swallowing, squeezing Bruce's penis with his skillful *throat* --

No, he's pulling back, and Bruce thankfully has enough of his control back to *allow* it.

He grips the base of Bruce's penis again and strokes and squeezes almost brutally -- and Bruce *grunts* for the feel of ejaculating once more. It's something to narrow his eyes for, to --

But Tim is moaning in approval -- further arousal?

He's working his head on Bruce's penis once more even though he must be able to feel Bruce softening. The pressure is quickly growing *painful* --

"Tim..."

Tim's moan is mournful and staggeringly heartfelt. The power of this --

He has been given neither permission nor *hint* that hauling Tim up against his body would be welcome or even *tolerable*, but -- he must.

Tim tenses -- or is it his armor? He sighs and smiles. "You're a cuddler, too, Bruce...?"

"Your voice..."

"Hm? Oh, yes. Jason likes to call it 'froggy.' I like to think of it as a mark of a job well done."

Bruce hums. "I enjoy your confidence, Tim."

"But it's not deserved...?"
Bruce raises an eyebrow. "You know it is."

"I -- yes. Ah -- reflex," Tim says, and wriggles... testingly.

"Jason holds you. And so does Dick."

"And Steph, too, at times, but --"

"We have work to do. I know. Still."

Tim narrows his eyes again, purses his -- perfect -- lips -- Hm.

"Wait."

"Why *should* I, Daddy...?"

Bruce blinks -- a great deal. "Tim."

"Yes? No? A *little*...?"

He is being toyed with... expertly. However. "It wouldn't be terribly difficult to come up with a plausible read of your emotional profile which would include a certain desire for... parenting."

Tim shows his teeth. "That's the best part... Daddy."

"Tim. Were you to allow it, I would give you everything you even *seemed* to need --"

"Oh -- don't -- ah." Tim licks his lips and Bruce remembers --

"You left no lipstick on my penis."

"Ah... no? It's a really *sturdy* brand. We could use something else for other encounters --"

"That's much less important --"

"Than what you want to discuss right now. Namely me... failing to stand up for more -- you're *leaving*!"

Bruce blinks again -- stops. "I must --"

"Don't -- you can't make me want -- " Tim shakes his head and pushes back before sitting in the passenger seat once more.

"Tim --"

"Suit *up*, Batman. We're late."

Bruce winces -- and suits up. "I would like to apologize --"

"It's not you I'm angry with at the moment --"

"I believe that was a lie."

Tim smiles -- harshly -- at nothing at all.

"Please. I -- should I not have made love with you?"
"Should --" Tim isn't smiling anymore. "You -- I wanted that."

"But not my emotions?"

"That wouldn't -- I didn't want to use *you* --"

"And if I wanted to be used by you?"

Tim crosses his arms over his chest and frowns *darkly*.

"Please, Tim."

"Some of us -- some of us think *twice* about developing serious *attachments* to people who could leave the *universe* at any given moment."

"I... I've always told myself that I wouldn't make love with anyone I didn't care for, and want more from."

"You don't *know* me -- "

"I know that you have been wounded sorely by at least one loved one. I know that you use your identity confusion to create art both fleeting and permanent -- in terms of its effect. I know that you're brave but not fearless. I know that you're both young and wise. I know that you could teach me much, and that I could do the same for you. I know.... I know that I wish to know more."

Tim frowns and doesn't *look* at him --

"Did it take your brothers so long to come to care for you?"

"I -- they needed someone like me. They've told me --"

"Do you *truly* believe they only needed your body? Your skills?"

"Their -- opinions are very important to me, and I -- you shouldn't use them like this."

Bruce breathes deeply. "Am I hurting you now?"

Tim frowns again -- and then turns to look at him. "I don't do especially well with -- ah. People who care about me."

"You're wonderful with your family --"

"Yes. They -- they *stay*, and I might lose them one day, but statistically it's far more likely that I'll die before they do, and -- I can't help being... pulled toward someone who... wants me."

For a fleeting moment, Bruce imagines some vast and arcane portal leading into a mysterious darkness. He's standing in front of it, and Tim's hand is in his own --

Tim pulls them *through*, clear and excited and brave --

It could never happen, but... "I understand --"

"Not really," Tim says, and smiles ruefully. "You'd do nearly anything for the *Mission*, but the Mission comes before... family."

Bruce frowns. "I -- I've devoted my life -- and you took the same Oath --"
Tim's smile becomes darker, sharper -- "I took the Oath because it meant I would always be a part of the best family a boy like me could have. That Dick would be there, and Jason, and Barbara... well."

"Barbara is... Owl?"

"*Barbara* is Barbara Gordon, AKA James Gordon's adopted daughter."

"He doesn't -- oh."

Tim laughs quietly. "Yes. I... I'm not like you, Bruce."

He's like *Dick*, who would sacrifice his family --

His life and parents --

"I'm sorry," Tim says. "I -- just meant for us to have fun --"

"I did --"

"And that's a lie. I wanted *you*, this -- this interesting *man* who makes Dick crazy and Jay open --" Tim shakes his head. "You get what you pay for?"

"I -- should I regret what we've shared, Tim?"

"Shared. Because. Because we made love --"

"*Yes* --"

Tim blushes darkly enough that it shows through his foundation. He turns back to his lap --

"Please --"

"This -- this isn't the right *way* for you to not be agreeable, Bruce."

"Then you must teach me more --"

"You're -- leaving," Tim says, frowning and looking up once more, searching Bruce --

Bruce turns to face Tim more fully to make it easier, checking to make sure the cowl is back, though he isn't at all sure what he wants Tim to *see* --

Is he?

Tim firms his mouth into a hard line and shakes his head once. "I -- suggest that we table this for another time --"

"You don't believe that time will come."

"What I believe is irrelevant --"

"Not," Bruce says, and reaches over to cover Tim's hand with his own, "to me."

Tim closes his eyes -- and then puts his lenses down. "Patrol."

There's so much he'd like to say -- and he knows none of the right words for it. "All right," Bruce says, and pulls the cowl back down.
Maybe I don't *want* you safe, Star.

So this is absolutely the first time he's ever hovered under some chick's bedroom window in the motherfucking *suburbs* while said chick de-heart-attacks her mother by coming in whole and happy and sober and all that other good shit through the front door. It's just not *right* to ruin shingles with a grapple. He *knows* how much that shit costs.

Still, Steph is way better than 'some chick' and also she'd punched a guy so hard tonight that Jason almost hadn't been able to get his fist up fast enough to unload on the guy himself --

Yeah. That's just --

Yeah.

Lark doesn't really *have* territory of her own *officially*, but with Tink way the hell over near Owl country, they had a good chunk of the city to work with. And work *on*.

Steph is fucking *aggressive* -- all the *time*, but especially when she's horny. Working with her tonight had been like holding on to a Rottweiler with a fucking *grudge*.

*Every* dealer.

*Every* mugger.

And, yeah, those frat boys looking for trouble right at the *edge* of the 'hood, too.

She'd busted heads, kicked her way through guys' fertility, *punched* her way through people's damned *intellects* --

Jason had had to *literally* hold her back a few times so she'd leave him people to *interrogate*. And then --

Heh. He'd let her go.

*She'd* said that it was just because her pretty new gauntlets were a little *too* pretty -- but Jason got close enough to smell her a few times. Not *much* funk, but enough to get his nose open and *keep* his cock muttering at him all night long.

Which is maybe why he has five new teeth for his collection rather than his usual average of two. Heh.

Honestly, the only way the others had as much fun as *he'd* had tonight is if Owl had come out to play, and, judging by the way she was *directing* the others to various hot spots closer to the center of the city, she was probably playing at home with all of those computers.

She's -- she's different now than she used to be. She isn't as *into* the whole thing as the woman who'd been in all of Dick's stories. Dick said her smiles are quieter and more secretive than they used to be, too.

She still dances her way over rooftops. She still fucking *pounces* from on high, cape spreading over the whole sky and making the kind of shadows that make people piss themselves, but she has her hands deep in the political side of things, hacking into various systems and trying to help them -- and the cops -- find the dirt they need to take some of the worst crooks down.
More and more, that's what she's doing, to the point where sometimes whole weeks pass without her
being on the street, at all. Steph had been operating three whole *months* before she'd had her first
meet-up with Babs, and that --

Well, he's not sure if that's wrong or not.

The bad guys still get taken down, and justice still gets a little closer to actually working for all the
little people, but the idea of there just not *being* an Owl anymore -- even a distant and *absent*
Owl -- makes Jason more than a little fucking queasy --

But he can *hear* Steph stomping up the stairs through her half-open window, and there are things
he doesn't have to think about *right* now.

Things like --

Okay, he has no fucking clue anymore what those things were, because Steph was apparently
*stripping* while she walked, and she's curvy and creamy and down to a sturdy-looking bra, her
tights, and her boots. She looks like fucking *dessert* and --

She gestures *back* --

Jason rappels down away from the light of the window --

And that's her mother's tread. Jesus. Jesus --

"You don't know what you're *doing*, Stephanie!"

"I *know* that. That's why I'm *learning* from people who *do*.*"

*Shit* --

"You -- you're talking about *Robin*?"

"And Starling, and Cardinal, and -- uh. Never mind."

"Stephanie --"

"Never *mind*, I said! Look, you're already late for work --"

"I was waiting to *hear* from you --"

"I *told* you what I'd be doing, Mom! Don't -- don't use me as an *excuse*!"

Ouch. Just --

That wasn't even a little bit friendly, much less familial. Mrs. Brown isn't saying a *word*, but Jason
can feel that she's still there, maybe trying to pick her guts up off the *floor* --

"Oh -- Mom, I know you're not using anymore or anything -- I'm sorry," Steph says, but she still
sounds more annoyed than guilty.

"I see. I. Apology accepted."

"Mom --"

"No. No, Stephanie. Please, be honest with me for just a moment --"
"I'm only ever gonna lie to you if you start using again, so, you know, go with that --"

"Do you still think of me as your mother?"

Steph had called her a *roommate* --

And Steph's the one being quiet right now. Fucking *shit* --

Mrs. Brown gasps a little -- "I see," she says again, and this time her voice is thick and low --

"It's not -- it's not all the *time*, Mom --"

"You -- you might as well call me by my *name* --"

"I don't *do* that shit, Mom --"

"Watch your --"

"I'm sorry I cursed in front of you. I'm sorry, okay? I don't -- I don't want to disrespect you."

"And you don't consider running all over rooftops and *beating* on people after I've asked you not to disrespectful?"

"It's my life, Mom. It's what I want and it's something I'm *good* at. You have no idea how many criminals I helped stop tonight so that people like *us* can sleep better at night. So many guys who'll go to *jail* for at least a little while instead of home to torture their poor *families* --"

"I can't. I can't apologize enough for allowing your father to stay with us --"

"No. You can't. But I forgive you anyway, because you had your own problems. But just because I forgive you doesn't mean I *trust* you to know what's best for me."

Another gasp. Another -- Jesus, those are the kind of fucking hits you don't get *up* from. Just --

Jason doesn't lift himself up enough to look over the windowsill, but he wants to. He *wants* to stop the *bleeding* a little --

"I'm sorry, Mom, but -- it's the truth. I trust you to *want* the best for me, and to *try* to make things as good for me as you can. But this -- you told me once that being a nurse was the only thing you ever wanted to be because of how badly *your* mother died. Well -- this. This is the only thing *I* want -- maybe because of the way our family used to look or maybe not. But it's what I want, and I'm *going* to have it."

Another silence.

A long *fucking* silence --

God, doesn't Steph know that she can't -- do exactly what she's doing to stay with *them*, because they *needed* a Rottie --

A hottie-Rottie --

Okay, maybe fucking not, but still --

"Stephanie... I'm sorry I hurt you so badly --"
"I *know* that --"

"I -- it's a mother's prerogative to worry about her only child --"

"Like you'd worry less if there were more of me?"

"Stephanie, please," Mrs. Brown says, and her voice is still rough, but now it's quiet and low.

Steph takes a shaky breath. "Okay. You -- talk."

"Thank you. There's nothing you can do to make me stop worrying about you, Stephanie. If you call to tell me that you're going out with your -- your new friends, then all I can do is picture some man with a knife being too fast for you, or too strong --"

"I'm *really* strong --"

"You're not Superman! You're not even *Superboy*, Stephanie! I -- I'm not going to try to talk you out of this tonight. I can see you have your mind made up. But I need you to understand that I *will* worry. That I'll *always* worry, and always wish you -- *and* your friends -- would save this business for the *police* in this city."

"They can't handle everything --"

"And you *can*?"

"Not everything. Not *yet*. I'm in training, and training never ends. But they know I'm good enough to be out there for *short* patrols --"

"Anything can *happen* --"

"*Mom*.

Mrs. Brown sighs. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean -- please tell me you understand."

"I -- heh. You know when I worry, Mom?"

Fuck, Steph sounds *dangerous* --

"About... about me?"

"Yeah, about you."

"Tell me," Mrs. Brown says, and she sounds just as frightened as anyone *should* when Steph sounds like that --

"Every day."

"What? I don't --"

"Every day you go to work, every day you leave the *house*. But mostly work, because they never *realized* you were a damned junkie there. You were too clever for that, so now nobody *watches* you around the dispensary. Right?"

"Stephanie, I'm *done* with that --"

"Sure you are. I believe you *want* to be done with it, and that you *need* to be done with it. I
even believe that you *know* you need to be done with it, and that you'll try your hardest to *be* done with it. But I still worry, because one of the few *useful* things they've taught us in school is that a junkie is always a junkie. So I worry -- because I've seen you at your worst, and I never want to see that again."

"I never want to see your dead body --"

"Then maybe we're even, Mom. Because you were dead *inside* then."

Silence --

Fucking *heavy* silence --

And then Mrs. Brown sighs. "I was. You're right. I... I'll go now. I love you, Stephanie."

"I love you, too --"

"Do you have a condom for your friend hanging outside the window?"

*Fuck* --

"Heh. As a matter of fact? I have a box of them. Good catch."

"You never did need to have a lesson repeated more than once," Mrs. Brown says, and sighs again. "I'm going to work. I'll be home before you have to go to school --"

"Unless there's an emergency. Yeah, I know the drill."

"All right," and Jason listens to Mrs. Brown walk heavily out of Steph's bedroom and down the stairs --

And Steph opens her window all the way.

Jason climbs in and looks around, but it's not like there *would* be actual blood on the walls or guts on the floor --

"Hey," Steph says.

Jason turns around and finds her with her arms crossed under her breasts. She's staring out the window like maybe she expects someone else to come in -- "There are so many fucking hugs for you right here, babe --"

She snorts and waves him off. "Strip down to your underwear first. The first time I hugged Tim when he was in the armor was also the *last* time I did."

"Fine by me, but I was thinking you'd maybe want the clothes-on time first...?"

Steph looks at him, incredulous and wary at the same time --

Jason raises his hands. "Dead serious. Because that was... really fucking serious."

Steph smiles wryly down at the floor, pulls out her hair-tie, shakes her hair loose, and starts rubbing and scratching at where the sweat would've dried on her scalp.

It makes Jason itch a little, too --
"We were due, Jay. Totally due."

"Okay, I hear you, but --"

"Strip. Please? I need the cuddles kinda soon."

"Done," Jason says, and works off his cape, taking a moment to remember all the time it took to learn to take the thing's *weight*, to *use* it --

He hangs it on the back of Steph's door and gets rid of everything else until he's down to a sweaty t-shirt and boxer briefs which are doing a lot of talking about how *much* time Jason has spent thinking about sex tonight. Still, he *feels* good and cuddly when Steph walks right up to him and latches on, and that's the important thing.

He wraps his arms around her and holds her close, keeping her steady with one hand on her back while he pets her hair --

"Do you ever wash Tink's hair?"

"I did once. It led to *incredible* sex -- and Tim going right back into the bathroom to wash it the right way. Tim's beauty regimen is fucking hardcore."

Steph laughs quietly. "What the hell does he do when he gets a pimple?"

"Heh. I don't know and I don't wanna know, because when I see little red spots that look like they *could* be pimples, I also see Tim with that 'I will string you up by your own intestines if you *think* wrong' look in his eyes."

That gets him a snicker -- "Okay, I need to see that."

"From a distance, babe, trust me. He can get *bitchy*."

Steph sighs. "You like that, though."

"I -- heh. Yeah, I really do. You didn't see what he used to be like when he walked small all the time and constantly acted like he didn't have the *right* to his opinions."

"How did you go for him if he was like *that*?"

Jason hugs her a little tighter. "Little bits of him would show through if I talked *enough* shit, and -- I don't know. His eyes. You've seen his eyes now."

"Yeah, they're -- not really *pretty* like yours, but -- there's something."

"*Thank* you. There's totally -- there's *always* something going on behind his eyes, and you just have to *wait*, and maybe coax a little --"

"Or hit him. He talks when I hit him."

Jason sighs and leans in to kiss her temple. "I totally talk when you hit me, too, you know."

Steph snorts. "You *know* it's not the same."

"Yeah, I do. How'd you figure out that you wanted him?"

"The way he moved, all stealthy and ninja-like. I mean -- I could tell *instantly* that he wasn't
anything like *any* boy I'd ever seen. And then -- all the other stuff."

"Including the gay."

Steph smiles ruefully and strokes Jason's sides a little. "Maybe he's safe."

"I can be safe --"

"Maybe I don't *want* you safe, Star."

"Maybe I just twitched in my underwear."

"Maybe I just felt it," Steph says, grinning and stepping back -- and holding Jason's hands.

Jason squeezes Steph's hands. "Yeah?"

Steph grins a little wider and starts tugging him back toward the bed. Fuck, yeah --

"This is where I point out that the only mom you have to argue with before getting laid at *my* house is Alfred, and he has his arguments *silently*. With his *eyes*."

"How's that not bounce off *your* thick head?"

"Hey, I'm fucking sensitive --"

"Everywhere?"

"Heh. Try me and see, babe."

Steph snickers again and lets go of his hands to cup her tits through the sports bra. "Top to bottom or bottom to top?"

"Uh. What?"

"You heard me."

"I... get... a choice?"

She looks at him like he's crazy.

"Okay, look, keep in mind that the *last* woman I had sex with -- the only woman I've had sex with for over a fucking *year* -- is *Kory*. Starfire, I mean."

"The one with the --"

"Yeah."

"And she only wears --"

"*Yeah*."

"And she's -- she's *huge*, Jay!"

Jason smiles a little dreamily. "Fucking stacked, too. But also -- uh. Definitely a top. All the time."

Steph bites her lip and looks a little troubled --
"Oh, hey, no, you're the hottest woman I've seen in *forever* --"

She waves him off --

"Okay? What'd I do wrong?"

She bites her lip a little harder -- stops and shakes her head. "Are you a bottom with women all the time?"

"No! I mean -- no. I mean -- what's good here?"

She snorts at him -- and then snickers at him. "I'll stop you if you need to be stopped, yeah?"

"That's cool --"

"So --"

"Top to bottom. *Please* top to bottom. You have no *idea* how long I've been thinking about sucking your tits, babe."

She snorts and pulls off her bra in one movement, and the jiggle --

The fucking *wiggle* -- "Fuck, Jesus, those are sweet. I -- am not asking anymore because you'll hit me when I need to change the record. I'm good," Jason says, and gently clotheslines her midsection until she's on her back on her narrow little bed -- "Also? We *all* have king-sized beds. Tink's isn't even *used* --"

"Shut up and *suck* --"

"Okay, okay, I just gotta advertise a *little* here --"

She smacks him.

Jason grins. "See how easy that was?"

She balls her hand into a *mean*-looking fist --

And Jason latches on to the right nipple and starts getting it wet, nice and slick, nice and --

He *has* hands, and one of them is just going to have a little fun with the *left* tit, which is soft and full --

Gotta be at least a C-cup --

Dick probably *knows* already --

And maybe he's thinking about Dick doing this *with* him, sucking hard and sure and *harder* than that, staring into Steph's eyes, tasting that mix of --

Well, Jason *knows* women don't lactate unless a whole lot of pregnancy things -- or medication things -- happen first, but some women just *smell* milky, sweet and thick and fucking *drugging* --

And the little hums and moans Steph's putting out are so good, so --

Not good *enough*. So.
Jason meets her eyes and pulls off, blowing cold on her wet nipple --

She grunts and shoves her smacking hand into his hair. Her other hand's still balled into a fist, but Jason's thinking he's on the right *track*. He licks his way to her left tit and starts getting *that* nipple wet while he rubs and flicks at the right --

"Fuck -- *Jay* --"

"Mm-hmm.."

Another grunt --

She pants for him a couple of times --

Yeah, he can keep *this* up, because it won't be long until the smell of her sweat overpowers the milky scent, makes him need --

No, right now, and he pulls off and licks the crease under her breasts for salt, for *tang* --

"*Jesus*, Jay --"

"Just gettin' warmed up, babe," and he nibbles his way back to her nipple. The last chick he'd done *that* to -- some nameless girl on the yearbook staff -- had *bucked* for him. Steph pants again and *yanks* his hair -- "Tell me if you want it --"

"*Harder*, but --" She groans for his bite, shudders a little --

"*But?""

"Jay -- Jay --"

"Not too much?"

She nods frantically, and that just brings him back to Tim, to the first time he'd *pinched* Tim's tiny little nipples, the first time he'd really *pulled* them because he was thinking about shoving his hands down Tim's pants, shoving a finger -- or two, or *three* -- right up that tight little ass --

He bites again and she groans, digging her fingers in against the bruises on his scalp and making Jason twitch again --

Again when he presses hard against her great big fucking thigh --

"Ohn -- so --" She shakes her head and *yanks* him into a kiss, hot and wet and hard --

Jason makes it harder, fucking her mouth a little and rearing up over her enough that his shoulders block out the world a little --

*Tim* likes that, anyway --

And Steph wraps her legs around Jason's waist and *hauls* him against her, right where she's hottest through the tights --

Jason gets a hand back on her tit and starts squeezing and stroking, really giving her the *size* of his hand --

He's looked like he was growing into paws for a year and a *half* now, and *lots* of people like
that --

Steph groans into his mouth and shoves her free hand down the back of his boxer-briefs, grabs the meat of his ass and squeezes like she's been using a fucking *hand*-strengthener --

"Love that -- love that so fucking much, babe --"

"Ngh -- you've got such a pretty *ass* --"

"Wanna fuck it?"

Steph's eyes go *wide* for that --

Jason grins and licks his lips --

"Uh. Um."

"Back home? I've got a strap-on *just* for the women in my life."

"*Fuck*, Jay --"

Jason licks her mouth, moves enough to suck over her carotid *lightly* --

"Oh --"

"It's big, babe."

"*Fuck*. How big?"

"Seven inches --"

"Like. Like Harvey."

Jason blinks and pulls back a little. "Uh. Yeah, I guess, but --"

Steph snorts and pulls him back in. "I'm totally almost sorry," she says, and licks *his* mouth, bites his lips, kisses him hard and slow while she *talks* to him. It's gotta be talking, all those little hums and moans, little noises designed to heat him right the fuck *up* --

Jason sucks her tongue -- no. He goes *down* on her tongue, licking it up and down --

She shoves him back --

"No?"

"You *gotta* admit that he's hot."

"I do *not* --"

"He's hot."

"Steph --"

"He's *hot*, damn it!"

Jason frowns --
Steph scowls -- and covers her tits.

Jason whimpers. "Fine, fine, he's *hot*. *Jesus*, you're mean --"

"You *love* it!"

Jason sighs. "Yeah, I do. Uh. Do you wanna *hit* it with him? I mean, I don't think he goes for people our age."

Steph snorts again. "I guess that had to be true about *somebody*. Uh. You gotta go down on me, like, right now."

"*Done*," Jason says, scooting back to help her out of her boots, those socks -- "Oh, Jesus, even your feet are cute --"

"Don't be a fucking pervert!"

"Uh?"

She gives him the giggle-snort and wiggles her toes at him. "I'm *kidding*. Help me out of these things, 'cause I swear they know when I've eaten an extra cheeseburger and get *tighter*.

He's pretty sure clothes don't work that way, but he can shut the hell up -- but. "I fucking love checkin' out your ass out there --"

"I can *feel* it when you do -- fucking *horndog* --"

"Heh. I could *smell* you out there, babe."

Steph's eyes go wide again. "You -- my *sex* funk?"

Jason flares his nostrils and peels her tights down and down and down --

"Gah! *Fuck* --"

"I'm thinking *most* of the criminals missed it... but I didn't."

She blushes hard and *stares* at him -- "I am *never* going out without a shower again --"

Jason licks his lips. "Maybe I can convince you away from that...?"

"*Jay* --"

"Maybe if I promise to face-plant in your pussy *every* time you skip showering before patrol?"

Steph narrows her eyes -- hungrily, not meanly. "Maybe you're not worth it."

"Maybe --"

"Get the fuck down there *right* -- *now* -- oh, *fuck* --"

Not usually his *style* to suck on a clit first, but she was absolutely asking for it --

"Nuh -- *nnh* -- fuck *me*, that's good --"

Well, all right, then. He gives it to her about a fraction as hard as he gave it to Donna that time --
Kory doesn't actually *have* a clit, as opposed to a lot of interestingly muscular folds and something like a --

Well, it's not really a *tentacle* -- she can't do more than flex it in a few different --

Okay, it's a tentacle, and it doesn't *like* to be sucked, and it doesn't taste like *human* musk, and *human* salt, and *human* pre-come, because she's wet for him, fucking --

No, she'll stop him if she doesn't want --

He pushes two fingers into her box *slowly* --

"Unh -- *unh* --" She clenches and *spurts* --

Jason licks it right the hell *up* --

And then she shoves his head away.

"Okay, I'm stopping. That -- *was* that you coming?"

Steph shudders and pants. "Just -- mm. A little one. I always go off quick for my clit."

Jason nods. "Good deal. Uh... do I get more?"

Steph grins with her eyes closed and twists her nipples back and forth. "Who used the strap-on on you?"

"Donna -- Troia -- gave it to me as a birthday present --"

Steph snorts hard. "Oh *sh**. Had you been hooking up *before*?"

"Heh. Not even *once*. She wanted to wait until I grew a few inches."

Steph's eyes fly open and she stares at him -- "That's so fucking *dirty*."

"Uh, huh. She told me chicks on Themyscira try all *kinds* of things to get their fingers to grow faster."

"Their -- oh. Uh. Oh."

Jason waggles his eyebrows and flexes his fingers a little --

"Ooh -- uh. *What*?"

"You ever go for another girl?"

"What? No! I mean -- some girls *look* good, but they're all *dumbasses* in my school."

"What about Babs?"

"She treats me like a *kid*," she says, bending her knee back enough and kicking Jason's shoulder with it. "Have your Vigilantes Gone Wild fantasies *without* me."

Maybe she'll like Kory or Donna. Maybe -- mm. Jason sighs in what he hopes *sounds* like contrition --

Steph snickers. "Asshole."
Oh, yeah -- "Speaking of --"

"You really want that? Me to fuck you?"

"I want a *lot* of things, babe, but yeah, that's one of 'em."

Steph licks her lips. "And -- what if I used my fingers? I don't have any *lube* --"

"Medical grade in my belt. Works *just* fine --"

"Can you fuck me and not get off?"

"Uh -- maybe?"

"Let's do *that* -- and then I'll pack some fudge."

Jason *coughs* his way through a snort. "Okay, that's about -- uh. Eugh?"

She sticks her tongue out at him and wiggles it --

So he lifts her with one hand under her ass and gives her a *medium*-hard spank.

"*Fuck*, *Jay* --"

"Bad girl...?"

She narrows her eyes at him again, licking her teeth like she's thinking of doing a *lot* of mean things with them --

She pulls *both* knees back --

And then she reaches down and spreads her inner lips just like -- like fucking *anything* --

"Whatcha gonna do to me for it?"

Oh, yeah. "Fuck you so hard you scream my name, babe."

"That's it?"

Jason thrusts three times hard --

"*Mm* --"

Jason pulls out --

Steph *growls* --

"Heh. No. I'm gonna fuck you so hard you don't know whether to clench or beg me to stop."

Those eyes get *narrower* --

"And then? I'm gonna fuck you so hard you tear up a little. *Just* a little, though, babe -- I want you to see *every* fucking minute."

She grunts and sits up, pulling his cock out over the waistband of his boxer-briefs -- "No, wait, get your balls out, *too* --"

"You know it, babe," and Jason stands up on the bed and ditches everything he was still wearing
before getting back down and pinning Steph nice and easily. "You ready for me?"

"What if I'm not?"

"I *make* you ready."

Steph pants a little -- "Do it --"

And Jason kisses her again, making it wet enough that they're both getting messy, fucking her mouth slow and hard and *dirty*, nice and fucking *dirty* --

And then he bites his way down her throat, bites *hard* right on her pulse point --

She growls and pushes him *down* --

And then he cups her tits, sucking on one nipple and then the other and back again --

Again and she moans for him, arches --

He changes it up to nibbles and *hard* sucks --

"*Fuck* --"

He changes it up to something like how he'd imagined breastfeeding would be like, lots of tongue and *feeling* --

She makes a sound with a lot of o's and r's and n's, and so he keeps *that* up for a little while, makes it a little --

Okay, no, she'd actually *had* milk for at least a little while --

He's not thinking about that. He's not. He's *not* --

And then he *really* isn't, because she's pushing on his shoulders, making it necessary to lick his way down and down, stab her belly button for the salty little *kick* --

"*Jay*, *now* --"

And he gives her clit a little more -- no sucks this time, just some licks and kisses --

Okay, maybe a little suck, maybe just enough that she can feel him, feel how much he wants her to get all the fuck *over* him --

And then she's got a *fistful* of his hair, and she's digging her knuckles in even as she *bucks* against his face -- "*Fuck* me --"

He gets the message. He --

Yeah, he's good, he can stop anytime, she doesn't have to rip his entire scalp off -- "Condom --"

It hits him in the *head*, but he catches it before it falls off onto the floor. It takes him a second to remember how he *does* this, but the old habits come right back before he has to beat himself up for letting himself get too *high*. Just --

She smells like all the sex he could ever *need*, and even knowing that's not true isn't enough to keep him from breathing her in as much as he can, from opening wide to try to taste her on the *air*
even as he takes himself in hand --

She's spreading her lips for him again. She --

"So fucking *hot* --"

"Do it, Jay, *fuck* me --"

"Sound -- sound like Tim --"

And she laughs for that, grinning up at him and making her lips open and close while he watches --

"Fucking *fuck*, Steph --"

"*Now*.

And the only thing Jason can do is *grip* her hand to hold it still, *make* her keep holding herself open, slide in so --

So slick-hot-*sweet* --

So fucking --

She groans and starts clenching *immediately*, and he knows some women do that to get *accustomed* to the feel of a cock inside them, but it just feels like she's ready for him and won't take no for a fucking *answer*, that she's *devouring* him --

"Want -- want your fucking *mouth* --"

"*Next* time, you -- oh, *fuck*, Jay, you -- you're not *small* --"

"Was I supposed to be?"

"You were supposed to --" She shakes her head and *flexes* open, and it feels like she's pulling him even deeper, fucking *keeping* him --

"Tell me, c'mon --"

"*Fuck* me, hold me -- oh, *God*, Jay --"

And it's fucking *necessary* to kiss her, to shove her head down against the pillow as he grinds a little, gets an angle that'll let him hit her g-spot -- and *then* he starts rocking in, using the rhythm of the kiss, the rhythm of her moans --

She pushes him out of the kiss and cries out, loud as fucking anything --

And that means harder. That means stare right down into her eyes and *give* it to her, just like he promised -- "Steph. *Any* time --"

She whines and shoves her fingers in his mouth --

She *fucks* his mouth in the same rhythm *he's* using --

Jason bites down on her fingers and sucks the tips, *licks* the tips and speeds up a little --

"*Fuck* --"
He nods and *stares* at her the way Tim likes, the way he says makes him feel fucked all *over* --  
"Jay --"

He pulls away from her fingers. "You gonna scream that for me?"

Steph shakes her head a little, and Jason *knows* that doesn't mean no, but he still fucks her harder, really --

Really starts to *pound* a little --

"*Ohn* -- *Jay* --"

"*Nnh*, like that, do it *again* --"

"I -- *please* --"

"*Again*, I said --"

Steph *shouts*, and it's *almost* Jason's name -- but it's also almost a lot of things --

And he thinks he can forgive her when the random and *hard* clenches start up and he realizes that she's coming for him. Her eyes are wide and dazed, hazed over with *nothing* but sex, and she's crying out over and over --

Jason eases up --

And she rears up and *claws* his shoulders --

"Steph --"

"Don't you fucking *stop*," she says, glaring at him for a moment before she kisses him hard, sucking his breath right out of his body --

Fuck, *yeah*. He shoves her down and *holds* her that way, working his hips until it's perfect, just fucking right --

She clenches so hard Jason *barks* --

"*Now* --"

"Fucking do you *right*," Jason says, and starts up just a little slow, because he knows she's good, that *she* knows how to teach --

And she's bucking her hips faster and faster --

Jason *gives* it to her --

And then she's shouting for every thrust, shaking because she *can't* keep up with his fuck. It's too good for her, too much *not* to just lie there and take, *shake* and take, shudder all over --

"Love your fucking *tits* --"

"*Jay* -- oh -- oh, *please* --"

And it's not like he wants her quiet, but it just *feels* better to push his thumb into her mouth and fuck her that way, too, *screw* her that way until she's groaning and licking him like the best treat in
the world, like she needs him just like this --

Or maybe in a slightly different *shape*, because those clenches start up again, fast and fucking -- wait, he can --

Jason pulls his thumb out and licks it, tastes the sweetness in her spit, tastes her *warmth* somehow, and tries to --

God, he's so fucking hard, so --

"Need you, Steph, need -- you gotta come again --"

She nods frantically again and squeezes her eyes shut, arches and feels up Jason's arms and chest --

Opens her eyes and stares at him like -- like a *snack*. Not *even* a fucking meal --

"Fucking -- *Steph* --"

"*Harder* --"

Jason hears himself whine and does the only thing he can: He reaches back and *yanks* on his sac to give himself a little --

He screams and *slams* into her, moving them up the bed --

"Oh -- *fuck*, Jay --"

"I got it, I got you --"

"C'mon, c'mon, give it to me --"

"Fucking *always*," and once he can look at something other than the stars floating around his eyes, he stares into her own. Cornflower, that color is --

It's just a *little* blue around the black they're both falling into --

It's --

Her mouth is open and she looks so fucking --

Like she could be angry and anguished at the same time, horny and *lost*, desperate and *scared* -- but maybe that's him, because he doesn't know how he's going to *stop* fucking her, doesn't --

How the hell is he supposed to pull --

Out --

Oh, those fucking *clenches*, Jesus, so --

"*Steph* --"

She nods and whimpers --

Arches right up off the fucking *bed* --

Harder then. Harder and everything he can give her *but* his own come, because she's yelling and her eyes *are* wet and --
God, he *needs* a taste, so he reaches down to swipe up over her clit --

She screams and *locks* her thighs around him --

And shudders herself down to a stop while he licks away the milder-tasting juices that mean she's been coming *just* that much. He can deal. He can breathe. He can --

Well, she's not actually *letting* him thrust, and he can fucking well stop grinding --

She pulls her foot back and kicks his shoulder --

Jason whimpers --

"Pull *out*.*"

He does, and then he has to grab the wall with all the posters of superheroes with one hand and his sac with the other. Just -- too much. Not *enough*. Too *good* --

"Oh, Jay --" Steph sits up and rolls up onto her knees, pulling him close with one hand and knocking the hand he has on his sac away so she can get *her* other hand on it, so she can *massage* it --

"Steph --"

"Tell me what you *need*, Jay --"

"Something. Something *hard*.*," Jason says, and tries not to just bang his head against the wall *while* jerking off --

The poster of Kuh-Superboy just wouldn't *appreciate* that --

Steph's doing something with her hands and Jason's shoulders --

"Damn it, turn *over* --"

"You don't *have* to --"

"*Do* it, Jay. And -- next time just *come* in me if it's that bad --"

"Not -- not *bad* --"

"You know what I *mean*," Steph says, and pushes and hauls on him until Jason can get himself moving, get himself on his hands and knees --

"I think -- oh, fuck, Jay, your ass is *really* pretty."

Jason laughs -- but it comes out as just a *weird* moan --

*Steph* laughs. "This -- I'm pretty sure it'll work," she says, and at first Jason doesn't know what she's talking about, but then there are slick fingers in his crack --

It doesn't feel like the medical grade -- oh, *fuck*. "You -- your fucking *juices* --"

"Really -- really a *lot**, and -- " She giggles and rubs his hole. "Hard, yeah?"

"Please. Just -- I need it --"

"You -- God, Jay, I --" And the rest of that is muttered and as incomprehensible as the push of her
blunt, rough fingers *isn't*.  

She's going in with two right away, and that's just right, that's fucking *perfect*. Her nails are even shorter than Tink's, her fingers are almost as big as Dick's --  

Jason groans and punches the bed --  

Jason clenches and *whines* --  

"Jesus, *already*?"

"Raw. From -- from Dick --"  

Steph moans and starts feeling *around* in there and that's --  

"God -- *fuck*, Steph --"  

"No good?"  

"Don't -- just -- I'll *tell* you when something's bad --"  

"Then -- I mean, I remember this from health class," she says, twisting her fingers and fucking *bending* them --  

"*Steph* --"  

"Oh -- *fuck*, okay, yeah, we're doing this again --"

Steph moans and starts feeling *around* in there and that's --  

"God -- *fuck*, Steph --"  

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"*Steph* --"  

"Oh -- *fuck*, okay, yeah, we're doing this again --"

Jason laughs and it turns into another moan, into him *shaking* for it --  

"You ever do this with girls?"

Jason nods and tries to make words come out again -- "*Please* --"  

"Oh, Jay... okay, okay. You *said* hard," and she takes a deep breath and starts *giving* it to him, thrust after *thrust* --  

"Please," Jason says again, because he fucking *has* to --

"I've got you, Star, I won't -- I'll *make* you come," and she sounds a little young, but mostly she sounds *into* it, and that's all Jason can fucking ask for, that's proof that the world is a good *place* --  

Jason nods a little more and rocks into Steph's thrusts --  

"Oh -- *God*, I want that strap-on --"

"Come -- *home* --"

"I'll *visit*, you -- you just worry about getting off --"  

"No worries, I -- oh, *fuck*, Steph --" It's harder, it -- it's *not* deeper, but it still feels that way, like she's *reaching* inside him to make some *room* --  

"You want *Bruce* to do this to you..."

Jason nods and just -- he's fucking drooling for it --
Her fingers feel so *hard* --

"Yeah, he -- fucking *ream* me --"

"So I *shouldn't* go in with three? I should leave you a little... uh... ready?"

Jason groans and lets his head hang --

"C'mon, Jay, you gotta tell me --"

"Two. Just --"

"Okay, I -- but another *time* --"

"*Please* --"

"I want. I think I want Harvey to do this to me..."

Jason blinks and feels himself twitch *and* flinch a little --

Steph snorts -- "He *looks* like he'd appreciate something a little -- heh -- dirty."

"Uh. Please -- not --"

"*Okay*. Jesus," and Steph shifts behinds him, reaches between his legs with her free hand, strips off the condom and *grips* his cock. "You'd think you'd be a little more *liberal*.

Jason coughs -- and groans for the way everything jumps inside him, for the way he *has* to clench --

"Oh, that's fucking -- you get so *tight*, Jay --"

Jason nods and licks his lips, rocks back faster --

"Oh -- *yeah*," she says, and starts fucking him faster, *harder*. Making him open, making him really feel *everywhere* Dick rubbed him raw --

And then she starts *stroking* him, jerking him off with awkward motions that speak of just how long it's been since she's done this, but they get better, *smoother* --

Wait, is he the first guy she's been with since she gave *birth*?

Jason clenches and spasms, twitches and *jerks* --

"You'll share *that* thought, Star..."

"*Please* --"

"God, I -- you should get fucked all the *time* --"

"*Yes* --"

Steph growls and turns her short nails in against his cock, pushes *deeper* somehow --

She's gotta be bending her fingers *painfully* --

"Oh, Jay -- how long do I have?"
Jason opens his mouth --
Thinks about Steph *watching* somebody fuck him --
Dick-Bruce-Tim-Clark --
All of them --
Donna joining a fucking *train* --
And Steph seeing everything, *knowing* everything about him --
"*Sister* --"
Steph chokes and scratches his cock *hard* --
Jason *shouts* and beats the bed a little more --
"You fucking *perv* --"
"Just -- need you to *know* me --"
"I do -- I want -- I want that, too --"
"*Please*, Steph --"
"Yeah, okay, no teasing," she says, and starts working her fingers against his prostate over and over - -
Starts jerking him fast and *hard* --
"C'mon, Jay, think about a big, *fat* cock..."
Bruce --
His fucking strap-on --
"Think about -- yeah. He's riding you. He's all big and hairy and *huge* and you can smell him so much you can't smell *yourself* --"
"*Nnh* --"
"He's -- he's all *over* you, Jay --"
"God -- fuck --"
"He's so deep you can *taste* him --"
"I -- *need* --"
"You need to get *fucked*, and that's all you need. And I -- tell me not to give you another finger --"
Jason -- fuck, that was practically a *wail*, and the best he can say is that he *almost* cares. Steph is moaning for it --
Jason is clenching and *clenching* --
He can't find the *rhythm* anymore --

"Jay -- Jay..."

"Hnh -- *hnh* -- yeah?"

"Just when you think he's gonna fuck you across the room? You open your eyes and my pussy is *right* there in front of your face, all slick and juicy and puffed-up --"

Jason grunts, and --

Coming is wringing him out, making him blind with it, making him grunt and strain to spill and spill and fucking *spill* --

"Oh my *God*, that looks *brutal* --"

Jason gasps, tries to say something --

Spurts off *again* --

And whimpers like a *bitch* when Steph kinda *tickles* his prostate. "Nuh -- Steph --"

"Just checking, just checking. Uh. Wow."

Jason snorts and drops to his elbows so he can bang his *head* against the bed.

"You -- I always hate having something in my pussy right after I come, but... um. Do I have to move my hand right away?"

"No, fuck, *keep* it there," Jason says, banging his head a little more.

"You feel so *hot* in there."

"Heh. Burn you right up, babe --"

"And -- I'm totally afraid to look at my hand," she says, and snorts. "*You* know what's up there."

Jason snickers a little breathlessly. "If you'd gotten the slick from my belt, you could've *also* gotten one of my gloves."

"Like you could've waited that long! You were *clawing* Green Lantern!"

"Which one?"

"The *cute* one with the pretty mouth."

Jason snickers a little more. "That's Kyle. He's a good guy, and really sweet and polite and shit, but he's so repressed that I'm pretty sure he only gets off when he's painting."

"What, you think he's queer, too? Are *all* of you queer?"

"Wally definitely isn't. He's -- uh. Well, okay, he's hooked up with Dick a few times --"

"Wait, which one is Wally? What kind of parent names their child *Wally*?"

"Wally's Flash. And apparently he comes from really godawful fucking people. He was raised by his aunt, who was hooking up with the *last* Flash."
"The one who died."

Jason takes a deep breath and reaches up to wave a hand. "The way Dick explained it is that he left this plane of existence to go to one with a lot of damned speedsters. I don't know." His ass twinges kind of *loudly* --

Because Steph is flexing her fingers. Right. Yeah. That's --

He's almost sure he should tell her to *stop* --

That -- something --

"Oh! Fuck, sorry," she says, and stops. "My fingers were getting cramped."

Jason laughs a little. "Yeah, you better pull out before I beg you to go again *and* give me three. You need those fingers."

"It's not like you have a *Super* ass."

Jason grins obnoxiously back over his shoulder --

Steph snorts and spanks him with her other hand. "Like talking this much shit *won't* bring Superman --"

"Clark. You gotta call him Clark."

"Fine. Won't bring *Clark* to my bedroom window looking to bone *you* and not *me*.""

Jason checks the window -- "Yeah, no way he's not either saving the world or boning his wife right now. That was *asking* for it with him."

"*Seriously*?"

"He told me once -- wait, here," Jason says, reaching back to spread himself with one hand. "Go on and pull out."

"Slow or fast?"

"Uh -- medium?"

Steph snorts and spanks him again -- and pulls out at *medium* speed, so it only feels a little like she's taking Jason's guts with her, and also she doesn't scrape him raw-er than he already is.

When she's out, Jason sighs a little and kneels up, turning around to get a little cuddle --

But Steph *jumps* off the bed and jogs right for her bathroom.

"Uh. Can I cuddle you in there?"

"One *minute*," she says, and there's water running.

"You know, Tim was *just* like this the first time he fingered me."

"He has good *ideas*. And -- and stuff."

Jason snickers and checks out the wall. Kyle, yeah. Kuh-Superboy, looking like a doofus and probably thinking of *his* boy's ass. A nice one of Jay Garrick looking as friendly and *manly* as
ever -- impressive with that stupid caldero-hat --

Jason looks at his own cape --

Yeah, not making fun of anyone else's uniform. He sighs and checks out the wall again.

There's a good shot of Ray, showing off that fantastic fucking eight-pack, the *one* shot of Tim that isn't blurry or out-of-focus -- because Kuh-Superboy is holding him *still*, the asshole --

The asshole who's getting at least a little bit fucked over by Tim *because* Jason doesn't like him. Right.

Damn.

He's really gonna have to -- something. Tim *has* to understand that it's okay for him to like people Jason doesn't like, just like it's okay for Jason to *dislike* people *Tim* likes. They don't --

They're not --

Okay, they *are*, but still.

A nagging little voice is telling him that it would all go smoothly if he just sucked it up and got to *know* Kon-El a little bit, got to see what part of that *goofy* fucking personality made Tim hard --

Something.

Of course, *then* he'd have to *like* him, and maybe talk to him about non-Mission-related things --

And that *would* lead to *Impulse* in his life, and *that* kid is way too fucking pretty to be a two-year-old raised by a jumped-up computer game and no, no, *no*. Jason is *not* going to think about Tim's *other* sex life even a little bit, because he has to drive himself home tonight -- and not into some handy embankment.

So.

He focuses on checking out Steph's silhouette as she disinfects her hands. Curve and curve and *curve*. She's got the kind of body where she could either be one of those hyper-muscled triangular women who burn themselves like toast and coat themselves in oil, or just the *interesting* kind of fat, the kind where you *have* to take a second or third look --

*Wonder* a little about what all that soft is *like*...

Jason shakes it off. Right now, Steph's right in the middle of those two extremes. She *will* get more ripped training with them, but then there are those extra cheeseburgers. Not extra fries. Not extra sodas. Extra *cheeseburgers*. Jason licks his lips. "Hey, babe?"

"You're buying me a new nail brush."

"Done. After we cut school and hook up for lunch?"

"I don't *cut* --" She leans out of the bathroom and glares at him. "This is why you're only a *junior*, you know."

"Heh. I'm only a junior 'cause I missed about a year of school taking care of my mom when she was dying and selling my ass."
Steph closes her mouth and blinks at him.

Jason grins and waggles his eyebrows.

"So -- you're basically gonna be able to shut me up with that forever."

"Yeah, probably."

"Asshole."

"*Sore* asshole, to be exact."

Steph bites her lip -- and then she covers her mouth and makes some hooting noises. She covers her mouth with her *soapy* hand, though -- "Oh, *God* --"

And then she runs back into the bathroom. Heh. Jason checks out more of the pictures. There's Roy about two uniform changes ago. It's a candid shot of him *very* obviously hitting on a bystander after some huge Titans battle or another. He's even handing her a card, and -- yeah. "Babe?"

"*What*?"

"Roy -- that's Arsenal --"

"People name their children *Roy* still?"

"Hey, his bio-dad was a park ranger out west somewhere. It could've been a thing."

"Fine, what *about* Roy?"

"He's had sex with everyone. Just -- *everyone*. And he'll totally try for you, too."

"Wait, he's had you and Tim and Dick and Babs?"

"Babs was really high at the time, but yeah."

"Holy..."

Jason lays back and carefully wedges himself against the wall to leave enough space on the bed -- There's totally not enough space on the bed.

Jason sighs and straightens the sheet a little anyway -- wait, no. He sits up, ties off, and ditches the condom that was just *sitting* there on the bed, grabbing a wipe to deal with the mess. He's gotta be tired to have missed doing that. "Anyway -- not even Clark has pulled Babs."

"But he got Bruce, and Roy totally hasn't. Uh. Right?"

"Heh, no, you're right. They're tied up. *You* could settle the score."

Steph snorts and walks out of the bathroom, turning the light off behind her. Her hands look a little abused, and Jason can smell the soap while she's still most of the way across the room.

Definitely gloves from now on. "Do I get my cuddle now?"

Another snort -- and Steph pounces on him, making the mattress creak and complain and pressing Jason right down. "How's this?"
"Aggressive, *moderately* painful, lots of tits -- yeah, works for me."

Steph leans in and pecks him on the mouth. "I told Alfred I was sleeping over for a couple of nights starting tomorrow."

"Yeah? Seriously?"

"That's what started the fight with my mom. It's not like I could tell her *where* I was staying."

Jason winces. "Okay, true, but -- uh. That's the kind of issue Dick and Tim are more qualified to deal with than I am."

"Mm-hmm, I know. And I *will* be asking them. When are you heading out?"

"I wanna get in another hour or so of patrol --"

Steph sighs. "That means too damned soon."

"Oh, hey --"

"No, no way. We already interrupted the Mission *enough*. Just cuddle me *efficiently* now."

"You -- totally picked that up from Tim."

Steph grins. "Really yeah."

"Heh. That's cool. So long as you're *ready* for efficient cuddle."

"Oh, I'm ready all right --*yagh* --"

Flipping her over and pinning her against the wall is pretty easy as these things go, but he has to *work* to get a leg between hers, and also somehow avoid being bitten on the *face*.

It works *eventually* -- mostly because she squeezes him hard enough to make him let one rip, and that makes her giggle enough to lose control -- and then Jason rests his cheek against her temple and starts petting her a little.

"Gotcha."

"I --totally wasn't ready."

"Heh. Tim never is, either. He always bruises me up *most* at times like these."

"You love it."

"Always and forever, babe," Jason says, and turns to kiss her. "Heh. Sister-babe."

Steph digs her nails in over his kidney and seems to be trying to tear it out.

Jason decides to take a little nap.

*
'Subject is dangerously obsessed with the concept of parenthood, and with the concept of a healthy, "nuclear" family.'

The night was a busy one, with Tim leading him into Owl's territory over and over again as various areas turned into hotspots. Tim explained that Owl's territory has been the least-covered lately, and some of why that was so. Owl's own reports and directives -- spoken through a voice scrambler -- had explained the rest. There are parts of him which approve of a centralized core of information and direction for the family, of course, but there are still other parts which feel an odd mix of fear and embarrassment even now, when he is only remembering the thoughts he'd had hours before.

If Owl were to retire, then anyone could do the same. *He* could --

(Your path will be a lonely one.)

Yes. It must. It must -- *he* must do something to make it so, to save the Dick from his own universe --

To take away his opportunity to build a family of the brilliant and dedicated, the beautiful and *true* --

Bruce frowns at the road ahead. They are only two miles from the Cave and are traveling quickly. Tim is silent beside him, watchful from a space behind eyes which *could* be closed, but aren't.

He knows Tim tenses more purposefully when his eyes are closed, just as he knows Tim's scent when aroused, Tim's generosity and skill --

So *young* --

Bruce feels himself frowning more deeply --

"You could," Tim says, and crosses his legs at the knee, "consider talking about it."

"It's --" Nothing. No, it isn't. It can't be. Even if it were, Bruce would have to come up with something to keep Tim *talking*. "You've left me to my own devices all night --"

"Should I continue to do so?"

"Please -- no."

*Tim* frowns and flips his lenses up. "You were supposed to surrender."

"I... don't."

"I suppose that's in character, but so is -- according to Dick -- a certain degree of crippling discomfort when it comes to emotional conversations."

"That was true about the man I was before my universe began falling apart, but not anymore. I saw the end coming for all of us and could only think of every moment of connection I *missed*."'

"You... found yourself regretful."

"Yes."

Tim takes a deep breath and strokes the dashboard. His gauntlet makes a sound on it like denim
pulled over a plastic washboard, and it feels both soothing and enervating to hear. Still --

"Please tell me your thoughts, Tim."

"I -- heh." He turns to look at Bruce. "Tell me what you were thinking that made you frown."

"I was wondering whether Jason shared your and Dick's feelings on the nature and utility of regret."

"Well... that's what I was thinking about, too," Tim says, and smiles ruefully. "Jason does, yes. He's the one who decided that we should open ourselves to Harvey. I believe it isn't far off the mark to say that a part of him is grateful to *our* Harvey for killing his worse-than-useless father."

Bruce can't hold back the wince --

"I see. You haven't become accustomed to what the Harvey from this universe became."

"No. You -- you've seen him, and spoken with him... there is a part of me which only wonders how much the Harvey from this universe *hurts* that he could be driven to such acts over and over again."

Tim strokes a stain on his tights from the battle they'd had with members of a drug gang which doesn't exist in Bruce's time and universe. It had been difficult to let Tim separate from him, even knowing how well-trained he is, how skilled and sure --

He had done it just the same, and Tim had performed beautifully, with a physical brilliance which extolled his training by Dick and Jason --

And Tim is frowning *lightly*.

"Tim?"

"Any number of studies suggest -- some even shout -- that acts of terrible evil tend to become easier for people the more often they're repeated. You know that."

Bruce breathes deeply. "Yes. Still... do your notes and reports offer much about your Bruce's failings in terms of relating what he's learned about human psychology to friends and loved ones?"

Tim blinks. "Well -- yes, actually. Dick made note of the problem several times... with regards to Harvey."

"Were there... were there acts I could've prevented had I not been so blind?"

"That's..." Tim rubs at the stain vigorously for a moment. "That's not clear."

The answer is yes. Bruce nods. "That which drove me to become this... those internal... pushes, I suppose --"

"The Bat."

*Bruce* blinks and slows the car down. "There are notes about *that*?"

"Apparently, you told Dick all about it not long after you first began making love. You... I think you must have decided to share all of yourself with him."

Bruce tries to steady his breathing. "I... I've never been able to imagine..." He shakes his head.
"Oh -- Bruce..." Tim opens his restraints and flips up the center console, moving close enough --

"I can't feel your heat. I -- that was a non sequitur. I'm sorry."

"I'm not sure it *was* a non sequitur, and -- sometimes the heat has to be a promise for later," Tim says, and -- cuddles him from the side.

"Tim..."

"I wondered... the way Dick described it made it sound... terrible."

(You must not *waver*!)

Bruce licks his lips helplessly --

"You don't -- you don't have to talk about it."

(There is *one* path before you, and it will be a lonely one.)

"I've thought -- I've enjoyed the way Jay holds me when he wants to make me speak about something difficult --"

"I shouldn't -- take my hands from the wheel."

"No, no, I meant --" Tim pushes closer, mussing his hair solely to slip under Bruce's arm --

"Tim --"

"I was wrong to -- to freeze you out tonight."

"You -- I upset you --"

"Solely by being the man you were always supposed to be? Um. Anyway, we *don't* have to talk about it --"

"It came to me... before my parents were killed. I -- I'm not sure I ever would've said... that. To anyone. But you already know."

"Oh. I assumed -- I shouldn't have assumed --"

Bruce takes a shaky breath and tries to convince himself not to take one hand off the wheel --

The car handles beautifully and has no -- no *problems* --

He holds Tim against him. "When I've imagined -- tried to imagine -- speaking of the Bat, I've always glossed over the fact that it was in my dreams many months before I lost my parents. It seemed..." Bruce sighs and tightens his grip on the wheel with his other hand.

"You've always worried about your... about the integrity of your mental health."

"I..." Bruce laughs softly. "Since the first time my father explained to me what 'crazy' meant. What it *could* mean. And, of course, the other children..."

"Harvey was the only one who didn't treat you like you were hopelessly strange."

"Yes."
"It seemed... hm." Tim shifts beside him. "It must have seemed too much to bear. To have *him* lose his grip on sanity, I mean."

"I -- there are no excuses. Tonight I'll read your files. I'll know, and --"

"Surrender to the Bat's ideas of how you should comport yourself with people who care about you?"

Bruce frowns --

And Tim pulls back enough to show the sharpness of his smile. "You didn't die alone, Bruce. Can you imagine that? And it wasn't just at the end -- you had *years* with someone who knew your every secret and still loved you more than anything or anyone else."

"There -- he had other lovers --"

"He told me that neither the manor nor the Cave was his home. He told me that *you* were his home, and always would be."

Bruce gives up and pulls over to the side of the road.

"Here," Tim says, opening his cape and shaped chest-armor --

"Tim --"

"Let me. Let me -- I just -- it's not your *fault* that you're you, and that I'm me, and I need you to *know* that."

Bruce frowns and reaches out -- he still can't feel Tim's heat, but that's because of his own gauntlet, and --

Tim is pulling it off gently and firmly.

"I've always thought -- I mean, the sensation of sweaty skin -- "

"There's an intimacy to it like nothing else. Of course I *want* a shower, but -- I want this, too," Tim says, and raises Bruce's bare hand to his soft mouth.

"Tim..."

Tim breathes hot on Bruce's fingers, then kisses them. "Open your chest armor."

"Tim --"

Tim stops him with an eyebrow raise, and with the way the light in his eyes is both amused and somewhat hectic. *Fraught*.

"You're troubled."

"I need -- I need you to not be at all troubled because of *me* --"

"I hurt you --"

"You made me *want* you. That's -- that's very different," Tim says, and smiles ruefully. "Especially since you did it by being yourself. Open your chest armor."

"I -- should shower --"
"Bruce... I really, really like the way you smell."

Bruce narrows his eyes and grunts helplessly --

Tim blinks -- and shoves Bruce's arm aside to open the armor himself. He is as deft and quick at the task as he's been at everything else --

And the car seems to fill with the scent of his body. Armor and leather and sweat, aging and new --

"Oh, Bruce..." Tim shakes his head and tosses his armor in the back seat, then does the same with Bruce's. "Push your seat back."

Opened, he feels himself vulnerable to every -- no. He is not yet that, but this boy...

Girl?

Bruce pushes the seat back and reaches for Tim, who immediately pushes into his arms and straddles his lap. This close, Tim's scent is much more important than Bruce's own, and his heat makes Bruce shiver.

"Tim. Thank you for this."

Tim sighs. "You're welcome. I..." Tim cups Bruce's face, scraping his bare palms on Bruce's stubble. "You have a choice, you know."

(You must not *waver*!)

Bruce winces and shakes his head --

"The Mission exists across the multiverse, I think. The question is whether the Bat's need for you to live in loneliness and pain does, as well."

Bruce blinks and breathes. "It wants -- it's always wanted me to serve the Mission to the best of my abilities and beyond. If I could do that and still live... live with love --"

"You honestly believe it has your best interests at heart...?" Tim cocks his head to the side. "I've looked through all of our Bruce's old reports. I counted the number of times when Dick's input was what solved a case, or saved the lives of the potential victims, or saved *his* life --"

"Perhaps if your Bruce had used the time he spent training Dick to further improve himself --"

"Do you actually believe that?"

Bruce closes his eyes and breathes in -- Tim. He pulls him closer --

"I believe that's an answer --"

"No one who looked at Dick could believe him to be anything but a valuable ally, a *worthy* partner in every possible way --"

"Exactly. So the question becomes *why* the Bat needs you to be so alone."

"It's -- a delusion --"

"You don't believe that, either, and all of us have seen too much of the supernatural... well. There are such things as *jealous* beings. If you were some variety of mine --"
"I. I am."

Tim rears back and narrows his eyes at him.

Bruce smooths the frown-lines from Tim's forehead. "I will never forget you. I will always... desire."

Tim closes his eyes and mutters something incomprehensible before leaning in and kissing the corner of Bruce's mouth. He doesn't pull back very far before he says: "I have a terrible habit of trying to keep people to myself, to keep them from the larger world -- however that world is defined -- so as to keep them from learning how much more fun they could have with someone else."

Bruce frowns. "Tim --"

"I was so lonely, Bruce. I -- I think, sometimes, that it's like what happens with people who have starved. They always want to have full pantries. They -- *I* need to know that there'll always be someone for me, someone who loves me, who knows me *well* enough --" Tim cuts himself off and sighs. "It wouldn't be so strange for the Bat to want to keep you to itself."

"You. You find me so desirable?"

Tim pulls back, apparently solely to share his wry smile, which, truly...

"It's difficult to know ahead of time when I'm about to be ridiculous. I'll try harder to develop an early warning system."

"Mm, see that you do," Tim says, and strokes Bruce's chest through his t-shirt. "You'll hurt us when you go."

"I -- I know."

Tim nods once, firming his mouth into a line -- and then relaxing it again. His lipstick is no longer entirely perfect -- much of its gloss is gone -- but he still looks far better-assembled than Bruce feels.

"Tim. You -- this is a gift."

Tim cocks his head to the side again -- but then he nods. "I always feel that way when Jason does this. He's better at it than I am --"

"I have my doubts."

"He's wonderful, Bruce. You -- surely you've seen that by *now* --"

"I have," Bruce says, and makes what he suspects will be a futile effort to repair Tim's hairstyle. "I simply doubt that his touch could be 'better' than this, as opposed to an entirely different sort of transcendent."

"I --" Tim blushes deeply. "Bruce."

"For that you scold me? Tim, I've never *had* this."

"Well -- that's the point. The first one of us to do it would automatically seem --"

"No."

"*Bruce* --"
"Please," Bruce says, and cups the back of Tim's head. "Tell me how I may accept this with honor."

Tim opens his mouth and closes it again almost immediately, frowning somewhat incredulously.

"It was an honest request. I'm afraid... I'm afraid of *many* things, but few things frighten me more than... not doing the right thing. The *correct* thing --"

"There's nothing *correct* about loneliness --"

"Is there correctness in abandoning my universe? In -- what of the you *from* that universe? The Dick and Jason and Stephanie? While I believe I must try to save them from the things which brought them to this life --"

"You still wouldn't precisely *mind* having them be -- no, I was about to be snide. More snide, I suppose," and Tim cups Bruce's shoulders and leans in to breathe his breath again. "Dick told me once that he'd begun seeking out the man responsible for... the thing we're not talking about, *before* you took him in. I can't see his life changing dramatically without you in *that* respect."

"Tim --"

"I think you came here for a reason, Bruce. I think -- I'm terribly romantic-minded, but there *is* more than one thing worth believing in. We've been waiting for you --"

"You've -- mourned a dead man --"

"Bruce. Live for us *and* the Mission. It -- it doesn't have to be two separate things --"

"Do you truly -- no," Bruce says, and frowns. "I am not so desired as this. Not by you."

Tim smiles ruefully, once again looking far, far older than he is --

Than *Bruce* is --

"You can help me make my family happy. I want that -- I want that badly. And you want *me* --"

"You're beautiful, perfect and wise and warm --"

Tim kisses Bruce softly, nibbling a path along Bruce's lips, and then another one after that --

"Tim..."

"You can have me, Bruce. You can have everything you *want* -- well. Almost everything," Tim says, leaning back again and smiling. "Am I dressed to be the wicked temptress...? I *could* be easily -- certainly Dick picked a certain theme for *my* disguise closet..." Tim touches Bruce's swollen lower lip with one finger and shakes his head. "I'm sorry."

Bruce blinks. "I don't -- you needn't apologize --"

"I think you're wrong about that, Bruce. And I honestly hope you never get to know *how* wrong."

He would be in the Cave in his own universe, which is a blank and utilitarian place. He would be alone -- perhaps the Bat would even be silent.

He would realize that he has but little of Dick and his family. He --

A lock of hair? A photograph? The fading memory of fading scents?
He would be alone, and he would remember Tim's seduction and attempts at seduction as *wounds*, terrible and still *bleeding* --

How could he ever *take* that?

How will he -- accept --

He can't.

Bruce shakes his head and leans back --

And Tim nods once and moves from Bruce's lap. He --

He hadn't meant --

Bruce has to *make* him see -- what?

That he's desired? That he has shaken Bruce effortlessly -- no. The first Tim already knows. The second -- no one who could see Tim's eyes would say it was effortless.

"I want..." Bruce swallows and stares at his bare hands. He's in the car, so his hands shouldn't be bare, at all --

That's meaningless --

(You must not *waver*!)

Bruce squeezes his eyes shut --

And Tim takes Bruce's hand and places it on the ignition, gentle and firm, implacable --

"I want you, Tim."

Tim's hand shakes on Bruce's own, but only briefly before he pulls it away and turns to smile at him so *softly* -- "I know."

"Do you --"

"I don't -- I don't know how you can stay with us and still keep *your* definition of honor. I don't think. I don't think we need you enough for that."

The pain for that --

"Oh -- God. And Jason *wonders* why I always want him to do the talking," Tim says and pinches the bridge of his nose. "What I meant... is that you don't have to save us from -- anything. Or rather, you already *did* save us."

Bruce frowns. "I don't understand --"

"Dick was holding himself back from us. You -- broke his capacity to do that. Now, we're all together, and we'll be even *more* of a family with Steph there..." Tim bites his lower lip.

"I see. And... you'll have Clark."

"He's so -- he keeps us all warm. All the time. Even when Jason's yelling and cursing at him, he still knows that Clark will always be there --oh. God. I did it again, didn't I?"
Bruce smiles ruefully. "You must -- I would hate it were you to ever censor yourself around me."

Tim looks at him from under his lashes, an expression of a curiously shy menace in his eyes. "Dick said that you broke him of cursing with next to no effort on your part."

"I... my father was quite vehement in his dislike of rough language, and about the loss of respect he felt when a peer -- or a stranger -- cursed in front of him."

"Forgive me, Bruce, but you hardly live a life your parents would've approved of -- going by my own research and everything Dick has told me, I mean."

Bruce lets his smile grow wider. "What does that tell you?"

Tim opens his mouth -- and blushes. "You strive to do everything you can that would please them. This -- that's one of the ways your sense of honor works, yes, I see," Tim says and nods thoughtfully. "We can't compete with the dead."

"Tim, it's not a competition --"

"No? Are you saying that your love for your late parents isn't driving your need to save Dick before he can become yours? Not even a little bit?"

Perhaps he was due for a blush, for something else to share with this wonderful boy -- "I believe you know me better than I know myself, in at least some respects."

Tim smiles. "You were busy learning how to be the best Batman you could be, and teaching Dick to be the best Robin. I was studying you and Dick, and psychology, and all sorts of other things..."

"I'm not going to stop asking you to stay with us."

"He kissed you. He doesn't actually do that with people he doesn't want to make love with. He's entirely aware of what a cliché that is, and none of us actually argue the point with him, and -- " Tim moves Bruce's hand back to the ignition. "I'll be asleep in his bed by the time he gets home and you're done reading the files... but I'll also be waiting for you."

"What. What of Dick?"

Tim hums. "That's an excellent question which will absolutely guarantee that I'll have a powerful erection in my sleep. Let's go."

Bruce drives, and forces himself to only devote a fraction of his attention to the small and lovely -- hm. "Tim..."
"Yes?"

"Would you prefer it if I thought of you as female?"

Tim blinks. "You -- I wasn't aware that it was something -- but of course *you* could do that," he says, laughing and shaking his head. "I -- um. Think of me the way you think of me. The way that seems most correct to *you*.

"You... you are androgyne..."

"When I'm playing myself just right...?"

Bruce shakes his head and doesn't *turn* -- "Like that, I'm more confused than anything else."

Tim hums and reaches out to rest a hand against Bruce's ribs through the t-shirt. Bruce isn't injured there, but the contact is still soothing -- "You're tempting me to wear makeup to bed."

"Wouldn't that damage your skin...?"

"Badly, considering my adolescence and my combination skin. Still --"

"I would like to see you without your makeup. If you're amenable."

"I. I don't like me as much --"

"You must be comfortable --"

"I don't *think* -- oh. You were saying that you would take me however I felt most comfortable?"

Bruce nods and pulls slowly into the Cave.

"Um. Okay. Okay. I'll still just -- I'll be waiting for you. Tell Dick I'll do my report after I sleep? I need to run away from you right now."

"I've -- please tell me --"

"You didn't say anything wrong. Or do anything wrong. And that's the problem. Damn it," Tim says, and smiles shakily.

"Tim --"

"You just -- have to stop being perfect. You *need* me!"

"I want -- I. " What would be the *purpose* of a politic lie? "I never knew I could, but yes."

Tim nods -- not slowly -- and bites his lip again --

And then he growls and leans across the center console to kiss Bruce, hard and sharp --

His teeth are no smaller than they should be for his body, but --

Bruce cups the back of Tim's head and holds him still, making the kiss less sharp and more *deep* --

Tim moans and grips the *cowl* --

He shouldn't have pulled it back down --
Tim turns away and pants, and Bruce can't stop himself from pressing a soft kiss to Tim's downy cheek.

"Oh -- God, Bruce --"

"Tell me..."

"No," Tim says, pulling back and opening the passenger door. He takes his chest armor with him --
And he does, in fact, jog *briskly* toward the hampers and robes.

Bruce indulges himself by covering his face with his hands, but it *is* an indulgence -- he can smell Tim's cologne *and* the gel he uses for his hair. The mixture of scents is both natural and unnatural, and intoxicating --
Tim will be waiting for him.

Bruce gives Tim five more full minutes to strip and run up the stairs -- he's quite sure Tim will need far less than that -- and then he steps out of the car. He fills the gas tank and checks the tires for major problems. He checks the oil and radiator fluid.

And then he moves to strip himself, noting that Harvey is seated at the table with J'onn, and that he seems calm and relaxed. They both do -- though of course Bruce has no reference for J'onn's behavior or posture but what the man gives him.

Bruce nods to them, strips down to his t-shirt,-briefs, and jock, puts on a robe, and then moves to join them. He can't stop himself from squeezing Harvey's shoulder, even though it puts him in a position to *loom* --

Harvey smiles up at him wryly. "You started stripping in the car, big guy?"

Bruce blushes --

"Uh, huh. So tell me that it's okay that Cardinal -- *Tim* -- tore up out of here like he was being chased by the Furies."

Bruce shakes his head. "I believe... he realized that I needed him."

Harvey frowns. "And that's a problem? I mean, you need all of these guys. *And* the girl, too, judging by the way you were looking at her earlier."

J'onn clears his -- J'onn makes a sound as if he's clearing his throat and leans back to take in both of them.

"Yeah, J'onn?"

"I am reminded of how your memories suggest you felt when you realized Bruce needed *you*, Harvey."

"Ah -- Jesus. Uh. Yeah, there's that. Heh," and Harvey pats the table in front of the chair to his right. Bruce sits and smiles ruefully. "Were you tempted to run from me?"

"No!"

J'onn clears his throat again --
"Okay, so *why* do I get the inhuman lie detector treatment? I've been *cooperative* over here!"

J'onn's chuckle is easier to *feel* than hear, since it registers quite deeply. "Please, forgive me. We are all quite accustomed to Dick's family never allowing any of us to be deceitful."

"Even Tim?"

Harvey elbows him -- "Are you saying little guy's a liar?"

"He called himself that. I... I am not sure I would classify anything he said as a lie, for all that some of it wasn't true."

Harvey frowns at him. "Uh. What?"

Bruce smiles again. "We talked about much tonight, and some of it... some of our discussion concerned things which Tim himself isn't sure of, in terms of his own feelings and beliefs."

Harvey nods thoughtfully. "All right, I can see it," he says, and nods at J'onn. "So they call you guys out all the time?"

"They have little patience for the sorts of lies which would get in the way of the Mission, whether or not those lies are gentle ones, or small ones..." J'onn smiles more widely. "Dick explained to the League exactly how fleeting life could be. None of us could question his... expertise."

"And yet he lied -- to at least some extent -- about his own feelings for his brothers," Bruce says, and gives himself permission to cover Harvey's hand with his own --

Harvey smiles at him, quick and small and tired at once --

And J'onn inclines his head. "I was aware of his feelings for his brothers, and we even spoke about it once -- though much of the conversation was about how he had taken Clark into his confidence on the matter, and thus how he had, to his mind, neutralized the problem before it could truly become one."

Harvey shakes his head. "No offence, guy, but the whole lack of privacy thing has *got* to get a little stressful for your friends."

J'onn smiles again. "I am seen as the unnerving neutral party more often than not. I help to keep all of us as honest as possible... and I strive not to spend too much time with any one individual."

Harvey winces. "Okay, so now I feel guilty. Uh -- you know *I'm* not rushing you off, yeah?"

"Yes," J'onn says. "It is all right, I assure you. Many people in our community are, as Arsenal would say, 'allergic to privacy.' And all of them know that I will only look beyond the thoughts they broadcast when the Mission calls for it."

"Like it did for me. Heh, yeah, okay, I can see it. It's not like humans -- and otherwise -- aren't pretty good at picking up broadcast thoughts when they put their minds to it."

"You were always brilliant at that," Bruce says, and squeezes Harvey's hand. "It's a skill I only began to develop after you befriended me."

"Aw, big guy --"

"Harv. You explicitly *taught* me how to do it."
"Well -- okay, but that was for *girls*. Women, I mean. Or -- girls for you. Or -- Christ, I'm not getting used to that --"

"I would never ask you to --"

"I *know* that," Harvey says, and laughs a little. "And I wanted to run screaming when I realized you needed me, but that was *mostly* because I'd never much seen the *good* side of need by the time I was fourteen."

It's tempting to look to J'onn for confirmation of that --

"Ah, jeez. J'onn, help me out here."

"Harvey is telling the truth. He learned much about the darker side of humanity while still a child, and much of human psychology can be considered as a question of multiple facets of individual wholes."

"*That*, right there," Harvey says, jabbing his finger at the air. "Because, in the end, there's the need that exists between two friends -- two *real good friends* -- but it's not any bigger or more powerful than the need that exists between two real *bad* enemies -- or a guy and a bottle of cheap bourbon."

Bruce winces. "I can't believe that --"

"No, big guy? So that *wasn't* you funneling all kinds of money to drug-and-alcohol rehab centers just like someone who *knew* how badly the city -- heh -- needed it?"

"I must -- there are some things, some *emotions* which must be greater than their darker reflections --"

"They *feel* a lot better -- and cleaner -- but the dark ones are just as powerful, Bruce. I -- trust me?" And Harvey's smile is gentle and rueful --

*Beautiful* -- "I'll always trust you --"

"Yeah, about that," Harvey says, sighing and standing. "If you'll excuse me for just a bit, J'onn --"

"Please, do not worry about me," J'onn says, and raises a hand. "It was always my plan to spend some little while in quiet stasis before Jason returned."

"Stasis?"

"Aw, hey, I didn't mean to keep you away from your... uh. Stasis?"

J'onn hums, deep in his chest. "I assure you, Harvey. you were not bothering me in any way. I find you to be most fascinating, which is rare with people into whom I've delved so deeply."

Harvey colors. "Ah -- thanks. You're an interesting guy yourself."

J'onn inclines his head again before turning his glowing eyes on Bruce. "Martians only approached that state humans think of as sleep as children. As we aged, the nearest we could come was a kind of... half-step outside of this plane of existence. Like so," J'onn says, and... fades. Not entirely -- he's still visible -- but everything *behind* him is also visible beyond a translucent green wash. And his eyes are no longer glowing.

Harvey is staring.
Bruce wishes to learn more *immediately* -- but J'onn shows no signs of coming back.

"Well. I guess that was an answer, big guy," Harvey says, and claps Bruce on the shoulder.

Bruce frowns. "Superman doesn't sleep, either."

"No? Not -- well, okay, I guess that would explain why he's all over the world at all times of the day and night. Damn. Does *he* go into stasis?"

"He said that he is capable of it when gravely injured -- that he can appear dead to even deep analysis -- but he didn't mention that as an alternative to sleep."

Harvey sucks his teeth and shakes his head. "I gotta say, that's messed up pretty bad. Still, so long as it works for *them*... c'mon," he says, standing. "You gotta read my file."

Bruce swallows. "Yes. I will," and he stands and leads them to the console. Harvey pushes him into the largest chair and leans over him to bring up the file --

And the picture is terrible. The picture --

It's unmistakably Harvey's body -- in the photograph, he's wearing only two-tone briefs, and it's the body Bruce has sketched countless *times* --

Harvey tilts Bruce's head up, forcing him to look at the *face* --

"Harv --"

"Acid from a Maroni capo did that the first time. Then you paid to get me fixed up. Experimental skin grafts, the whole nine. Then I dipped my own head in acid again, because I didn't *feel* right unless I could show the world what the inside of my head looked like."

Bruce swallows and looks, and there are places where Harvey's face looks almost *melted*. The damage flows down over his left shoulder, onto the left pectoral --

"Apparently, I didn't have full use of that arm -- so it became the hand I most often put the gun in."

Bruce wants to shake his head, to *deny* --

And Harvey moves to enlarge mug shots. *Endless* mug shots, representing arrest after arrest. In some of the photographs, he's bruised and obviously beaten on top of being scarred --

"You -- I did that to you."

"Or Robin did, or Jim did..." Harvey sighs. "Notice how I'm rarely beat up *too* badly, big guy?"

"I could never -- I would never want to hurt you more than was absolutely necessary."

"Yeah. I'm thinking I knew that. Or he did. I'm also thinking he used it against you at least once or twice," and Harvey pulls up a text document. "Here's the psych profile you did on me after I broke out and killed sixteen different people before you could catch me again. *Sixteen*, Bruce."

"Harv --"

"Read it, will you?"

Bruce reaches up and catches Harvey's wrist --
"Hey, don't worry, I'm sitting right here. *I* plan to memorize that thing just in case I ever start to backslide."

Bruce squeezes his eyes shut --

"No, Bruce."

Bruce takes a breath, nods, opens his eyes, and reads.

With everything Dick's family has been telling him over the past few days, there is nothing in the report which is truly surprising. However, taken as a whole --

The knowledge he'd had about Harvey's father, the *abuse* he'd allowed to continue --

He'd never even invited -- "Harv."

"I'm listening, big guy."

"Did you. Did you ever wish I'd invited you to stay with me over the holidays?"

Harvey looks at him, and his smile is gentle and soft. "I used to fantasize about it a little, yeah. The fantasies always fell apart, though."

"Because I never did?"

"Because I knew -- in my *bones* -- that Alfred would hate having me around."

"Harv, no --"

"Easy, easy. I know he likes me *now*, and I even figured out that he liked me pretty good back then. But I --" Harvey shakes his head. "All I could think about was all the little rules and social graces I just didn't *know* until you taught them to me, and how it never occurred to you to teach me everything --"

"I *would* have -- but they aren't *important* --"

"I know that, too. Now. But I was a scared and messed-up kid back then, big guy. And I needed to be a little golden for you. I figured -- all it would take was Alfred pointing out *how* much of a peasant I really was --"

"*Harv* --"

"Bruce. Work with me, here. I was *messsed-up*. And we were both too damned young to figure out how to fix me."

Bruce frowns. "I wanted you with me. All -- all the time."

Harvey opens his mouth -- closes it again. "Bruce..."

"I wanted... I used to fantasize about you telling me what I had to do to keep you at my side forever."

Harvey sighs. "And maybe you would've crawled into my big ol' bed if I'd come over?"

"I -- at the time, I probably would've just loomed over you in the dark."

That gets him a snort and a light punch to the shoulder. "Yeah? What about *now*?"
Bruce smiles ruefully. "I'd touch your shoulder. Eventually."

Harvey snickers and changes the document to --

"Oh. A list of your crimes."

"Uh, hunh. With as much detail as *Dick* could stand -- because this document didn't *exist* in my file until he put it there."

Bruce winces --

"Go on, big guy. You can do this."

There are thefts, kidnappings, destruction of properties --

And there are murders. A seemingly endless list of *murders* -- but a part of Bruce's mind is counting them, even as he reads about the victims. *Many* of them were other criminals, but most were innocents -- including people who had tried to *help* Harvey --

He counts them, and he counts them, and when he gets to the end --

"Those were just the murders they were sure about," Bruce says, and looks to Harvey again. "Weren't they?"

Harvey nods, face set. "Do you see now, big guy?"

Bruce frowns. "I see *you* --"

Harvey points to the main monitor. "That's me, too. That's me missing a whole lot of luck and even more self-control. Tell me you can see it."

"Harv, what is it you want? For me to be suspicious of you? Wary of the man who taught me about friendship and *brotherhood*?"

"You can't tell me you weren't at least a little wary of your senseis, Bruce."

"I --" Bruce shakes his head and goes looking through the highly-intuitively-organized files --

And then he calls up the psych profile on himself he'd known would be there.

"What -- oh, Jesus. You did this to yourself?"

"I think... I think I must have had to, Harv," Bruce says, and turns to look the document over as Harvey reads himself. Once again, there are no true surprises, but this time it's more a matter of feeling the resonance of his most terrible and unflattering insights as absolute truth than a matter of remembering what he's been told --

"Aw, that's -- you're not *weak*, Bruce --"

"I can't -- I can't let go of you."

"You let go enough to let me get *married*. Hell, you let go enough to travel the world and start pretending -- " Harvey frowns and shakes his head.

"I wish. I wish I'd told you everything from the beginning --"
"*Without* strapping me down for some serious therapy?"

"Without -- if we could've shared the fractures in our minds --"

"The fractures would've still *been* there, big guy, and no, that doesn't mean you're weak. Unless I'm a complete fucking pussy."

"Harv --"

"Sorry, sorry, my language got away from me --"

"I won't -- I won't even try to stop you from using rough language anymore --"

"What? Suddenly I'm a hopeless case?"

Bruce blinks rapidly -- "No! It's only -- I can't imagine guiding Dick's family away from that sort of thing --"

"And you're already starting to think of them as *your* family. With *me*.*"

"Harv --"

Harvey looks at him from under his lashes, and it's a *dare* to contradict him.

Bruce -- can't. But he can take Harvey's hands in his own and squeeze them, try to warm them --

"The little guy -- Tim. You need him."

"I. I had a moment's fantasy earlier of taking him with me when I left."

"Uh." Harvey blinks and stares at him. "You know you... I mean, these guys *are* all a family."

"Yes. I know -- I wouldn't."

"But he saw that you needed -- what *are* you gonna do without him?"

Bruce smiles ruefully and brings Harvey's hands to his mouth, kissing the palms --

"Bruce --"

"The same thing I'll do without you, Harv: follow the Mission."

Harvey frowns, elegant brow wrinkling -- "Didn't he ask you to stay?"

"He... he tried to seduce me into it."

"It didn't work?"

"I must -- there is *duty*, Harv --"

"And *you* think that psych profile is -- some damned *prison* sentence, don't you?"

Bruce blinks. "Harv?"

Harvey twists his hands free and points at the monitor again. "You think you have to live up to that."

"No, I. It's who I am --"
"It's who you *were*. *Here*. Before you *died*. Just like the psych profile you did of me was right. It's not anymore. And -- look at you. 'Subject will never be comfortable discussing his emotional difficulties with others?' Are you saying that's still true?"

"I'm -- I'm hardly *comfortable* right now, Harv --"

"Yeah, but you're still *doing* it. With *me*. With *Superman*. With Dick and Jason and Tim. Hell, eventually you might even talk to a *girl* -- especially since there's one right here."

Bruce frowns more deeply. "It's true that I've planned to be as honest as possible, Harv, but I..."

Harvey looks at him very -- very *firmly* --

And Bruce realizes that he has no idea how to finish his sentence. "Hm."

Harvey laughs and claps Bruce's shoulder again. "Yeah, it takes a little time to get used to being a whole new person. The good part is that you have people who are ready, willing, and able to *help* you deal with it."

"I want to help *you*. I've always wanted to help you --"

"And you always did. Right from the beginning with you acting like I was just like everyone else, only *better*." Harvey shakes his head. "We couldn't be everything for each other, but I don't think that's so bad, big guy."

"For a long time, I believed that all I would ever truly need emotionally was your regard. Your -- your love for me."

Harvey nods. "I always knew I needed more than that... ah, big guy, it's like I always said -- you need *people*. All kinds of people."

Bruce smiles wryly. "And I pointed out that the people surrounding us weren't the worthiest sorts in the world."

"Heh. You can't do *that* anymore, now can you?"

"No, I can't. Dick's family... they're all so *dedicated*, Harv."

"Just like you like 'em."

"Yes, but also..." Bruce shakes *his* head. "I've come to believe that all of them faced tragedy before coming to this life, and nearly all of them have found ways to tell me that they wouldn't welcome those tragedies being prevented."

Harvey frowns. "And that surprises you? I mean, let's face it, big guy -- I would've loved to escape my old man back in the day, for at least a little while at a time, but I *can't* make myself want it to happen before I met you, because it all helped turn me *into* the guy you fell for. I don't know *all* the details, but you needed someone *just* like me -- meaning someone who needed a smart, gentle, *good* friend in turn. And *knew* it. Maybe I wouldn't have been so *aware* of how much I needed you if that old bastard hadn't smacked me around so much. Maybe I would've taken you for *granted*."

"You don't take *anything* for granted, Harv --"

"*Exactly*. And I already know how much that does it for you. These kids and Dick -- they don't
take anything for granted, either. And that *includes* all the hard times they must've had. Jesus, I can't even *imagine* what Tim would've had to go through with his parents, a kid like that."

"I don't believe he behaved that way always. He... intimated that he'd changed himself after meeting Jason."

"Yeah? I guess. Still, in my experience, that kind of gay goes right down to the bone. And even *liberal* parents screw that up most of the time. Hunh. I wonder if that's gotten any better here."

"He does wear lip gloss to school."

Harvey waves a hand. "That's rich-boy school. It isn't even *boarding* rich-boy school. The kind of money he's waving around at a place like *that*? I'm betting he could show up in a cute little pantsuit and heels so long as they matched the school colors."

Bruce blinks.

Harvey snorts at him. "You just had a happy thought."

"He -- he did say he was willing to... dress. For me."

"*That's* your kink?"

Well...

"Wait, no, do I *wanna* know?"

Bruce smiles. "I thought you looked very beautiful in your white tuxedo, Harv."

Harvey smacks the back of Bruce's head. "Back to the *important* stuff."

"As you say --"

"You can't lock yourself up in any prisons of -- of the *mind* or anything like that. You're a different person than you used to be. If that person was no good? I'd be all for you backsliding. But you're wonderful, big guy. And now you're just -- you're *showing* people how wonderful you are, and opening up like you were always supposed to -- ah, no, I can't do this."

"Harv?"

"You -- you say you can't let go of me?"

"Yes."

Harvey smiles ruefully. "*I* say I can't let go of the guy who rolled around on the grass with me."

Oh -- "You never *have* to --"

"I do, though. When I go find Gilda, and wind up in some universe where the you never told me the truth, the you never touched my shoulder in the dark..." Harvey sighs and leans back in his chair, staring up at the stalactites and blinking rapidly.

Bruce takes Harvey's nearer hand again and chafes it --

"Bruce."
"Yes."

"What am I gonna do with you, hunh? You're the only family I've ever *had*."

Bruce squeezes hard. "Gilda --"

"No, you're right, she's my family, too. Listens to all my bullshit, my hopes and dreams and fantasies -- just like you," Harvey says, and tilts his head back down to smile at Bruce sadly. "I guess I should be asking what I'll do *without* you."

Bruce -- reminds himself not to squeeze any harder. "She -- she might have been returned to our universe --"

"And if so, you'll be right there, and we can *really* show Gotham something. I..." Harvey sighs. "I want that. But I'm pretty damned sure we're not gonna get it."

So is he.

So --

But he *can't*. He has to hold on to something like hope --

(Despair will strike, but you will not succumb!)

Bruce blinks and sits back, considering --

"Bruce...?"

Bruce holds up a hand and -- of course the Bat could follow him here. He carries the thing within himself, and has since he was a boy. But *that* admonition. That *order*...

"Did you... hear? Something?"

Bruce touches his tongue to the backs of his teeth. "No. I don't think I did. I don't think I did, at all," and the smile hurts -- *badly* -- which is more than enough warning that it's a freakish thing on his face --

He doesn't truly need to see Harvey *recoil* --

"Uh. Big guy?"

"I've never... I've never been *sure* before, Harv. You --" Bruce shakes his head and turns back to the console, scrolling down the report on his psyche until he can select --

"'Subject is prone to delusions and the hearing of voices when agitated or otherwise emotionally distressed.' Hey, now, lots of people have crap in their heads, big guy --"

"Yes. Yes. And it almost always turns out to be a matter of the mind in question turning on itself using the weapons of memory and suffering."

"*That*, yes, and you -- you got a lot of bad memories --"

"I do, yes," Bruce says, and he still can't stop himself from smiling. "It's only... a part of me was convinced that the voice I heard was *real*."

"Oh. Really?"
Bruce nods. "It seemed to bring with it... stone and cold and dust. The merciless weight of perfect justice, perfect *purpose*..."

"Okay..."

Bruce laughs, breathless enough that it barely makes a sound. "Oh, Harv, it's been so long since I've been *sure* that the voice I heard wasn't real."

Harvey bites his lip and nods slowly, judiciously... "How -- what made you realize it wasn't real this time?"

"I was thinking about hope, about how it's important for me to hold on to it for our universe, and then the voice said something about I mustn't succumb to despair. It -- it is, perhaps, a *little* thing, but when I was eight, the Bat -- that's what I call it --"

"What? You -- wait, no, go on."

Bruce nods. "When I was eight, the Bat *fed* on my hurt and despair. It used it to hone me, and my resolve to never again let another child feel the way I did."

Harvey winces and rears back again. "Big guy, you -- it rode you like that?"

"Rode me... yes, I suppose that *is* a good way to put it. It was always superior, always sure and correct --"

"Not if it was *hurting* you, Bruce --"

"There are some kinds of pain which are -- oh." Bruce laughs again. "I was about to quote the thing. Or the incredibly *fertile* plains of my own mind. Or -- oh, Harv, the *idea* of it not being real, of it being something I could put *aside* --"

Harvey stands up and paces a short distance away -- but he comes back almost immediately, crouching by Bruce's chair and cupping Bruce's knees. "Do that. Do *that*. Because you don't need anything telling you to hurt yourself."

"Harv, it's all right --"

"It's *not*. I -- God, what do you think I've been *doing* with J'onn? I had so many guns pointed at myself -- some kind of internal freaking *firing* squad. And it made me *run*, Bruce. Run from the truth, run from *myself*. And you just saw what the me from this universe ran *to*." 

Bruce searches Harvey for a moment, reaches out to stroke his broad cheekbones, his faintly coppery skin --

"Bruce --" 

"Yes, Harv. I understand. I won't let it --" Bruce shakes his head. "I'll only listen to *reasonable* advice."

Harvey still looks troubled, and he strokes Bruce's thighs restlessly, firmly --

"It -- there's a weight which has been lifted --"

"I know that, big guy, I do. I just don't like the fact that I didn't *know* about that weight."

"I always knew that I had to keep it a secret, Harv. Even before it began to tell me that I had to spend
"*Jesus*, Bruce --"

"I think. I think it's wrong. About that. I mean -- I think that *I* was wrong. Or..." Bruce frowns and shakes his head. "It's difficult to talk about. I never imagined I would, and now I've brought it up *twice* tonight --"

"You talked about this with *Tim*?"

Bruce smiles ruefully. "He already knew, because the Bruce from this universe had told Dick about it when they began making love."

"You... I *wanna* say that that's not anything *like* an appropriate conversation for a kid, but -- fuck, you were younger than Dick was. You..." Harvey frowns again and stands, pulling Bruce up to join him. The hug is hard and warm, loving and *worried* --

"I'm all right, Harv --"

"*I'm* not, so just keep hugging."

"You never have to ask," Bruce says, and kisses Harvey's cheek as gently and chastely as he can --

And Harvey shivers, much as Tim had, but doesn't pull away. He strokes Bruce's sides through the robe -- and then he opens Bruce's robe and chafes and rubs at him through his t-shirt.

"I love you, Harv."

Harvey shivers again. "I know. I know. And that voice -- it tried to keep you away from me, yeah?"

"Yes."

"But you couldn't."

"No."

"See -- see, too many things make too much *sense* right now, and I --" Harvey cuts himself off and hugs Bruce tighter, rubs his relatively smooth cheek against Bruce's own --

"You -- your face will be irritated --"

"I need to *feel* you, because -- because of all the times that *fucking* voice kept you away. And I had my own voices keeping *me* away -- God, *Bruce*," Harvey says, pulling back enough to look Bruce in the eye. "You see what I mean about prisons, don't you? Look what we *did* to ourselves!"

"We made it here --"

"By *accident*. And I -- maybe this is too fucking superstitious for me to face with my *right* mind, but Bruce -- we gotta take advantage. We gotta do *right* by ourselves for once. Tell me you *understand*.

Right now, Tim is waiting for him in Jason's bed.

Dick has his own --
Dick's bed is the one he'd shared with *his* Bruce --

Stephanie is sleeping -- perhaps -- in a suburb on Gotham's opposite side -- but she wouldn't want --

Tim wants him to be part of a *family*.

Harvey --

Bruce swallows. "If -- if only some of the things said were delusions --"

"Then the rest are fucking *crazy*, big guy! You shut yourself up so tight, so fucking far *away* from the rest of us -- you don't know how many *times* I caught myself talking about the guy you used to be with Jim only to have you dump *punch* on him or something --"

Bruce winces, but -- "It's still -- if he knew the secret --"

"So you don't *tell* him the secret. It's not like he hasn't already guessed. Hell, he sounded me *out* for it months ago and I just didn't twig..." Harvey shakes his head and bites his lip. "You never say the word Batman to him and he never has to lock your ass up for being *psychotic* and also fucking *violent*.

"I do try to direct my more violent tendencies appropriately --"

Harvey laughs and smacks him again. "You. I get worried if I think too hard about punching some smarmy defense attorney in the face. *You* go out and dangle people off rooftops by the ankle. *After* breaking their noses --"

"Sometimes their teeth, too."

Harvey glares at him.

Bruce smiles cautiously --

And the glare seems to melt from Harvey's face. He's beautiful. He's always *been* beautiful --

"Harv..."

"The violence was in you all along, maybe?"

"I used to get into terrible fights with bullies when I was nine years old. Alfred told me that he would wall off every entrance to the Cave he could find if I didn't stop."

Harvey winces. "Okay, yeah, I guess I can see it. It's not like you've ever liked seeing people get picked on."

Bruce shakes his head.

"You -- God, I can't believe I'm remembering this *now*, but -- okay. You wanna know what made me the maddest I've ever been at you?"

"Tell me, Harv."

"*Lex*. *That* fucking guy -- and *no* one can tell me that he's not up to something in that damned tower of his --"

Bruce winces again --
"What? You're secretly his friend or something? Please say no. *Please* --"

"He's the one -- he caused the rifts in space-time in our universe."

"*What*? *Lex*?"

Bruce nods once. "It's not well known, but he's a supervillain. He was trying to pull a being to earth
who would be stronger than Superman. How he expected to control the individual or beast in
question, I don't know --"

"He took. He took Gilda," Harvey says, and his voice is low and dangerous --

Oh. "Harvey. You'll find her."

"He put Gilda -- and *millions* of other people --" Harvey steps back and covers his face with his
hands, breathing rapidly and harshly.

Bruce can't stop himself from looking in J'onn's direction --

At just the wrong time.

Harvey's smile is a twisted one. "A part of you just thought about me putting two bullets in Lex's
brain, yeah?"

"Harv --"

"Didn't you?"

"It. It wasn't a specific fear."

"But it *was* a fear, and I -- fuck if I didn't ask for just that," Harvey says, turning away --

"Harv, please --"

"No, I -- what did you do to him?"

"I beat him. Badly. I..." Bruce swallows and *admits* things to himself -- "Some of the injuries will
be... difficult to heal from."

Harvey nods, but doesn't turn back to face him. "Was he still the boy you saved from a beating by
some of the less *enlightened* members of the Exeter football team?"

Some of those boys had thought of Harvey as a friend -- if casually. But. "I haven't been able to see
that boy for many years, Harv."

Harvey raises his eyebrows, and --

"He had his father murdered not long after we graduated. Neither I nor Superman were ever able to
find conclusive proof --"

"Jesus. Jesus. The number of times I thought about just -- just hitting my old man *back* for more
than just to *stop* him from hitting me. And then maybe I'd do it a few times, and a few more
times..." Harvey laughs and it sounds pained, *dark* -- "I know you can't really... really *hear* things like that without... ah. Yeah. I'm sorry."

Bruce nods. He can't --
"And this -- yeah. This is what you mean about how Dick won't give you any clues to let you figure out how to save his parents. Or -- whatever he had before winding up with you, yeah?"

"I --"

"Subject is dangerously obsessed with the concept of parenthood, and with the concept of a healthy, "nuclear" family."

Bruce looks down at the floor --

And Harvey is right there, cupping Bruce's jaw and forcing him to face him again. "You can't look down on him for that. Maybe what he came from was ugly. Maybe you saving him would just mean... years of getting hurt. *Beaten* until he can escape when he's eighteen."

"That's -- he didn't imply that, even vaguely --"

"Okay." Harvey strokes Bruce's cheek with his thumb and smiles. "Maybe he had the *perfect* life, hunh? Maybe it was hearts and flowers, wine and song, the whole nine."

"Yes. Yes, you see --"

"I *see* -- that he thinks having you was even better than what he had. That you're the man of his dreams. That even having to watch you *die* wasn't enough to make him regret even a second of having you, and -- God, Bruce, I'd feel the *same*.

"Harv?"

"And you're actually asking that question instead of kissing me. *Jesus*, big guy, somebody needs to have a talk with the voices in *your* head," Harvey says, leaning in and kissing him firmly as his eyes track fast behind the lids.

Bruce cups Harvey's face and makes the kiss deeper, makes it more --

He *wants* it to be more, but he can't be sure what he wants it to be more *than* --

It doesn't matter, because Harvey's mouth is hot, wet, flavored with Alfred's coffee and something far sweeter --

Harvey hums and cups Bruce's hips, squeezing -- gently, not hard. Bruce doesn't press as close as he wants to -- and Harvey smiles into the kiss and backs off. "Who was it?"

"Harv?"

"Which of them were you thinking about? Wait, what did you even *do* with the little guy?"

Bruce blinks. "I was thinking about you. You weren't as... passionate as you could've been."

*Harvey* blinks -- and licks his lips, obviously studying something behind his own eyes. After a long moment, he nods once. "A part of me is still thinking about the hurt I'm gonna put on Lex fucking Luthor the next chance I get."

"Don't -- his bodyguards are *assassins*, Harv."

Another blink -- and then he narrows his eyes. "He doesn't *sleep* with them --"
"One of them is his lover."

"Big guy, help me out here. I *need* to get that guy's hairless little sac in a *vise* for this."

"If it helps, I did punch him there."

Harvey nods thoughtfully. "That does help, yeah. Break any teeth?"

"Three."

"His nose?"

"Carefully. It was hard not to drive the bone into his brain."

Harvey opens his mouth -- and closes it again almost immediately.

"That was... too much."

Harvey cocks his head to the side and smiles ruefully. "Maybe that voice gave you the kind of leash you needed?"

"Eventually, yes. I can't -- I can't let it go entirely. I would be afraid of myself if I did."

Harvey rests his hands on Bruce's chest, strokes up to Bruce's shoulders -- "I'm holding on to Gilda."

"You'll find her."

"Yeah. Yeah. And then -- after she beats the hell outta me for not being able to keep my hands off *you* --"

"Is she. Very jealous?"

Harvey blinks again. "She used to be, yeah. I'd made a rep for myself at Yale as a horndog. Lots of women coming up to me, making eyes or more... it took a while for the word to get out that I was serious about Gilda, and even then some of those girls didn't care. She'd get mad at me if I told them off and mad at me if I was gentle and mad at me if I ignored them... for a while, I didn't know *what* to do."

"What helped?"

Harvey smiles. "Time, mostly. She told me back before we got married that seeing me there every day made her stop feeling like she wasn't good enough for me. I got pissed because I'd told her a thousand times that she was the best, that there was *no* other woman I wanted the way I wanted her, and then she pointed out that there were a few life lessons I had to learn for *myself*, too."

Harvey strokes back down to Bruce's chest. "You wouldn't have to worry about that here, I don't think, big guy."

"The... they don't seem to be very jealous people, no. Though Tim told me -- perhaps warned me -- that he tended to try to keep people to himself."

"With the girl, yeah? Stephanie. I... so he maybe thinks of her as a... sister? What?"

"I believe he's in love with her. In... certain constrained ways."

Harvey coughs a laugh -- and then soberes himself quickly. "Ah, strike that moment of hilarity from the record, please."
Bruce nods.

And Harvey smiles at him. "You're a violent, teenager-screwing, crazy bastard."

"Yes."

"But somehow -- somehow you're still *you*. How's that work, hunh?"

Bruce raises an eyebrow. "Perhaps your desire for me to be the man you fell in love with is coloring your perceptions."

Harvey snorts and smacks him again. "Stop that. I get it. We *are* still gonna look at each other a little funny for a *while*, you know."

For a long while, Bruce hopes. And he smiles and nods. "I would learn about you -- and from you -- for the rest of my life."

Harvey shivers and laughs again. "Okay, whaddaya know, those little declarations of yours are getting easier to take."

"Yes?"

Harvey cups the back of Bruce's head and pulls him into a hard, brief kiss. "No matter where I am, you'll be with me, big guy."

Don't say goodbye *yet* -- "And you'll be with me."

Harvey frowns and searches him -- "Do I let that slide? 'cause I don't think I let that slide."

Bruce smiles ruefully. "One of the things the... voice explained to me was that the more honest I was with the people surrounding me, the more honest I would have to *remain* -- however unwillingly."

"Yeah, well, you're a *smart* guy. C'mon, what was that?"

Bruce steps back and takes Harvey's hands in his own again. "It's only... it seemed you were leaving already. Leaving -- me."

Harvey winces. "I -- should I stop talking about Gilda with you?"

"Oh -- no, never, please. I care about Gilda a great deal --"

"You -- uh. She thinks you're pretty useless, big guy. I know you did that on *purpose*, but --"

"It made it harder for you. I know, and I'm sorry. I can never regain the time I've squandered with you --"

"This -- it's like old times. Right down to how we're still figuring each other out, yeah?"

"I was never satisfied when I was far from the Cave, but I was always happy when you were near."

"And -- another one. Right in the heart, yet," and Harvey's smile is crooked and rueful and full. "Were *you* jealous of Gilda?"

"I've been jealous of everyone you've allowed to make love with you."

Harvey nods. "Yeah, okay, I can see it. Just so you know? Most of the time, it wasn't making love, at
all. Sometimes I think I *didn't* make love until Gilda. And now you."

"Oh, Harv..." Bruce smiles a bit helplessly. "That was a wonderful declaration."

Harvey blows on his fingernails and buffs them on his moderately rumpled shirt -- there's no sign of the jacket they'd stained. "I learned from the master. Tell me who you're screwing tonight."

"I -- what?"

Another *full* smile --

"Hm. Tim invited me... to Jason's bed."

Harvey coughs another laugh. "Does Jason *know* that?"

"I don't believe so."

"Are you gonna *go*?"

"I -- was hoping to discuss the matter with Jason when he came in. And perhaps with Dick, as well."

"And when you say 'discuss,' you really mean -- uh. Yeah. Wow. Right into the deep end?"

"A part of me..." Bruce shakes his head and smiles. "There is no part of me which is not convinced that I will miss this family badly once I leave."

"Heh, they're pretty unique. And good, too. They love each other. And they aren't letting *you* mess them up, which says a lot about how *well* they love each other."

"I would never --"

"I know that. And they know that, too, which may or may *not* be a part of how they're managing to work around you."

And Bruce has to nod and squeeze Harvey's hands for the warmth. It would've been all too easy for his advent to bring strife and pain, especially because they've all had so much tragedy --

He thinks.

In his mind, Tim is insinuating himself against Bruce's body --

Dick is kissing him --

And Jason is laughing at him, harsh and male and lovely. He'd worked with Stephanie tonight, and they'd broken off early. Jason had taken her home, and the fact that he's not back here, yet, suggests -

No, he won't make assumptions --

But he can't seem to stop himself from imagining Jason's large, *roughly* adolescent hands closing around Stephanie's impressive biceps, his teeth on her soft, plush lip --

Harvey knocks on Bruce's armored jock. "Hellooo the house...."

"Harv."

"Heh. Don't let anything or *anyone* keep you from having this family as much as they want you
to. Not even you."

"That -- "I wasn't -- I didn't intend to make you argue for -- for my perversions --"

"And you didn't, and I'm not. You can give them *platonic* hugs, too."

No, he can't --

What -- no. Not any of them? At any *time*?

"Oh, look at you trying to make yourself believe that that wasn't a huge lie. *Right*."

"Harv --"

"It's okay. Well -- I can't call it okay. I just also can't -- fuck. Leave it. Even though I started it. Please."

Bruce strokes Harvey's knuckles somewhat restlessly --

And Harvey smiles wryly down at their hands. "It's good that Dick was the first to get more than just a kiss. It -- for me, I mean," he says, and looks up again.

"I understand."

"I know you do, big guy --"

And Harvey stops to turn at the sound of a motorcycle engine pulling into the Cave and filling the space echoingly with its growl --

The bats screech as one --

And Jason doesn't pull off his helmet until the bike is at a complete stop in its parking space. Somehow, that's surprising. He's not sure why, though --

"Yeah, that's my cue to sleep. You have *discussions* to have."

"Harv. If I... if we could --"

"The two of us, big guy? *Just* the two of us and everything between us -- including the fact that a lot of me is still killing Lex over and over and over again?"

Bruce winces.

"That's not the only reason I'm saying no, but it's the only good one."

"Harv?"

"There's a *leetle* part of me which wants you to hurt a little for falling in love with someone other than me."

"Harv, no --"

Harvey takes his hands back -- and immediately covers Bruce's mouth. "Let me be a jackass tonight, big guy. I promise I'll miss you so much I'll be cured by the morning."

Bruce frowns --
And Harvey laughs at him, stepping back -- toward the stairs.

"Harv, I'm not --"

Harvey holds up a hand. "The morning, big guy. And maybe it'll be a nice, sunny day again."

"I don't want to let you go."

"I know. And that feels -- well, you'll learn exactly how that feels once the big brains figure all this out. Good night."

Bruce feels himself curling his hands into *fists* -- he stops. "Good night, Harv."

Harvey closes his eyes for a long moment, smiles *distantly* -- and then he turns and moves for the stairs at a jog. Bruce watches him go until the clock closes behind him -- and then he turns to look at Jason --

Who is sitting on the table close to J'onn, smiling and easy within himself. His feathered cape is spread over the whole of the table --

And Bruce finds that he wants to bury his nose against Jason's throat.

He goes to write the night's report, instead. There's no reason not to, and he wouldn't want Dick to be upset with Tim --

And it's an excellent excuse to wait.

*
"So you waited up for me, Green Machine?"

"Yes," J'onn says, and kind of *flares* those glowing eyes at him -- hunh.

"What does that mean? Your eyes, I mean?"

"It is a greeting, and a wish to look within you."

Jason raises his eyebrows. "Yeah? How many people actually know that?"

J'onn shows his freakishly-even white teeth -- "Very few."

"Heh. Got it," Jason says, spreading his hands and leaning in a little. "Take a look."

"Thank you," J'onn says, and stretches his arm out until it's long enough for him to palm Jason's head. "Would you like to experience what I do?"

"Sure --" And then Jason's grunting, because he can feel himself getting *stuck* a little --

And he's also feeling the sticking. He's entering a friend, being given a gift that no Martian could ask of another --

"Wait, what?"

We were closed to each other. While we could communicate with other species mentally, we could not do so with each other with any degree of clarity. And it was forbidden to try.

Well -- fuck. But Ma'ena --

Was not above contempt for laws she found worthless.

God, she was awesome.

Yes. You smell of Skylark.

Heh, well... and Jason pushes himself back into that funky little bedroom, the one that does and *doesn't* express who Steph is, because she's only a typical teenaged girl when she *wants* to be --

But a part of him is just -- fucking marveling at the *vista* of Steph's bedroom --

A space I have not known. A home I have not known.

... oh. Okay, then. Jason focuses his memory on Steph's Wall of Hotness --

I believe Kyle would find her... intimidating.

Yeah, so do I. Jason tries a little pan-and-scan action --

You are not here.

Tim's the *only* one who's ever gotten good pictures of me. This cape had to be good for something --
And then his vision is tugged -- not yanked -- over to the door, where his cape is hanging neatly --

heh.

Yeah, I do care about it. Dick *gave* it to me. Hell, Dick made the first one by hand --

And then Steph's bedroom is gone and he's looking -- at the Watchtower. Diana is crushing steel
balls the way she does whenever some man *somewhere* has pissed her off, Dinah is smiling at the
gorgeous fucking *ruin* of her knuckles --

And Dick is asking everyone where the hell to find thousands of starling feathers.

That's -- wow. Awesome.

J'onn hums, inside and out, and brings them back to Steph's bedroom, only now the lighting is a
little... off? Strange?

The light is from the knefa torches most commonly used to help consecrate a... union.

Uh. Like a marriage?

No, those torches are too common for that.

Okay. You know, it wasn't -- I mean, we didn't really --

The knefa torches are appropriate for every encounter you would define as 'making love.'

Seriously?

Ma'ena was exceedingly violent with me whenever I would take the time to light them.

So you're saying you did it every time.

Yes.

Jason snickers in his head and hears himself sigh through a smile --

Thank you.

For keeping the laugh in?

Wait.

He does -- and suddenly it feels like he's in a Jacuzzi or something, bubbling and warm and kind of
rolled along -- somewhere. What?

That is the sensation of your laughter.

Wow, okay. I'll hold it in more often, then.

Please, do not develop that habit for me. It would disappoint your family.

And *that* --

Jason throws up the image of a pre-Tink Tim, geeky and small and unsure -- and lit up all *over*
because he'd just made Jason laugh. So I'm saying that I hear you.

Yes. He made love to Bruce tonight.
Heh. I *thought* something was a little screwy about the way they just *sat* there in the car. Bruce didn't stand a *chance*.

No, he did not. Though I believe that Tim was... troubled when they returned tonight.

Oh -- Jesus, I'll kill him --

Wait, please.

And J'onn shows him fucking *Harvey* being concerned about it --

And Bruce using the n-word. Shit. You can't just go *needing* at Tim!

He is... sensitive?

*Nobody* needed him in his parents' house. It's fucking *crack* for him now. He's going to bend over *backwards* to give Bruce what he thinks Bruce needs, and Bruce is still talking about *leaving*. No, I'm back to needing to kill him.

It may be more... expedient to convince him to stay.

What, you like him or something?

Our friendship was one of distance and subtleties, but it was warm. His control over his own mind was nearly Martian-like at times, and the gifts he gave were always deeply and thoroughly considered beforehand. I have missed him.

This guy's not the same.

No. He is younger and somewhat... untutored. I was a surprise to him. I was never a surprise to the Bruce from this universe after the very first moment when he saw me in captivity.

Jason blinks a little -- I'd forgotten the Army jammed you up. How long did they have you, anyway?

Eight months.

Ever wanna go after some soldier-meat?

J'onn's smile doesn't have *white* teeth, at all. Not inside.

Got it. Look, I know I'm changing the subject --

You are jealous of Bruce.

What -- I -- yes. He can't -- he can't just *need*. Tim's *mine*. And that actually makes him happy, and it's not -- fuck. It's not like I don't want other people to make him happy --

Bruce is dangerous.

*Yes*. What happens if Tim decides Bruce needs him bad enough that he jumps through the portal or whatever *with* him?

Do you truly believe that he would leave you?

I -- you tell me.

And J'onn takes him at his word, phasing himself *into* Jason --
And this time it feels like -- turmoil, not chaos. The boy is ordered in his worries --

Since *when*?

And J’onn flips him an image of Dick beaming at him from the head of the dining room table just like Jason had done a cooler trick than finishing his -- second -- breakfast and belching loud enough to make the windows fucking rattle. Which --

Yeah, okay. Things *had* settled down fast as hell, because Dick always let Jason know how much *he* was needed --

Not *just* him, but *exactly* him --

No.

No?

You do not believe Tim would leave you.

Oh. Well. Good.

You believe he would *want* to leave you.

Aw, damn it, *seriously*? Now I'm gonna be all fucked-up around him and he'll *know* and fucking *worry* --

Here.

And now he's being *drowned* in every one of Tim's and Tink's and Cardinal's smiles for him, *buried* in those little touches that are all about letting Jason know that *Tim* wants to be touched by him --

Wait, but --

No.

And he's getting rolled *over* by that look in Tim's eyes. The I-love-you without the words, the *always*, the *forever* --

And he doesn't have to fight it, at all. He doesn't --

He can just live in those looks, because Tim is his and -- yeah.

Okay. I'm actually good.

Yes.

But -- *why* did that work? Reminding depressed people of good shit *never* works.

It does when there is a Martian around to... force the issue.

Jason snorts, inside and out --

It's apparently like being pleasantly *shaken* --

Yes. I care for you a great deal, Jason.
Jason smiles and sinks into *that* a little --

Maybe more than a little --

I wish for you to know me better already. I do not wish to flood you with myself at this time, however.

No? I'm good for it --

You need rest, and I need you to have more than that. May I come to you from time to time even when I am finished with Harvey?

Hey, sure. You could probably get me used to you enough that I could train while we... uh... communed?

Yes.

Do... do you have a cloaca?

Not all of the time.

Jason bites his lip -- that's fair.

Jason... were you to convince Bruce to stay --

I'd have to deal with him being *right* there, which -- I don't know. He's good. He's hot. He makes my brothers happy. I want him.

You do not want to want him.

It was all well and good earlier when I was drunk on my own hormones, but now I'm clearheaded enough to remember that this is the guy who offered to castrate himself. He's not *well*. And his brand of crazy feels more dangerous than other kinds.

He is thinking about you.

Shit, *really*?

He is... berating himself both for obsessing about the memory of your scent and for not remembering it more clearly.

Jesus fucking --

You enjoy his scent.

He's. He's a good-smelling guy -- wait, do *you* want him?

I have desired his control more than I have desired his body... but yes. I was able to observe him with Harvey earlier. His passions are violent and difficult for him to encompass, but never chaotic. He has depths of both gentleness and humor. He is, I have realized, much like you.

Uh.

J'onn's laugh is like getting rocked and hugged and *stroked* --

I like that --
I am glad.

I don't *go* for people all that much like me, J'onn.

J'onn hums -- and offers an image of Kuh-Superboy in flight --

Another of him using his so-called 'tactile telekinesis' to break Metallo into about a million different little pieces --

Another -- fuzzier -- image of him in some kind of tube, unconscious or asleep and naked --

Wait, *what*?  

He called out for release several times, but never powerfully enough -- or for long enough -- for me to find where this facility was located.

He was... trapped?

Imprisoned. Like me.

Shit, fuck -- you've talked to him about it?

I have made the attempt. He rebuffed me with juvenile humor.

Now *that's* the Kuh-Superboy he sorta-kinda knows and --

Fuck.

It's not fair to make me feel fucking *sympathetic* for the guy, J'onn.

On the contrary, you have already begun to wish to know him better, so that you can help Tim with his relationship with him.

... oh.

Yes.

Does he love Tim?

You know the answer to that question.

Jason wants to *scowl* for that -- which means that he already is where *J'onn* can see.

I assure you, it is a very attractive subset of emotions within you. However, I may be biased.

Hey, if you light any torches when I'm waiting to get tentacle-fucked, I *promise* to get fucking violent.

And there's Ma'ena in his head. At least, he hopes it is, because the huge, green, horned dragon-beast-*thing* is about to either kill him or make filthy love to his rapidly-breaking body.

The latter. Is she not beautiful?

Uh.

Another one of those rocking laughs. She tended to save that for special occasions.
Oh. Well. Yeah, you wouldn't wanna pull that out too --

KWEEEEEEEEEGH!!!!

Gah --

That is the sound she would make if I took too long to get home when she wanted me. The sound would carry for miles.

How did you not get in serious *trouble*? 

By then, my reputation as a Manhunter and hers as -- there is no better word than 'Justice' -- were made. We were... local celebrities, and allowed our quirks.

Okay, then. Kweegh, hunh?

You should endeavor to sound more rageful.

KWEEEEEEEEGH!

Hm.

No?

I do not believe you feel entitled enough to my presence, Jason.

Jason grins outside and snickers inside --

Gets rolled along on all those little bubbles --

I can barely act entitled with *Tim*, and he rewards me for it. Hint, hint --

Whoa --

Okay, so I can't actually see anything. And -- you're covering me. All over?

Yes.

Wait, you're under my *clothes* --

I phased through them.

That means. Uh.

Yes.

Jason grins and lounges as best he can with a couple hundred pounds of half-phased Martian *coating* him, laying back on -- coated -- elbows, and spreading his -- coated -- legs.

That was not necessary, Jason.

Nah, but it feels --

Better --

Oh, *fuck*, J'onn, you -- you're jerking me with your -- hunh.
Yes?

What part of your body *is* that corresponding to?

My cloaca.

Oh.

Kidding. I am, at present, concentrating my nerve endings around your penis. Everything you feel, every sense you imagine, is a fraction of what I feel.

Oh -- fuck. I'm *fucking* you?

And the light behind Jason's eyes goes smoky, flickery --

Fucking *torches* --

And J'onn's laugh is fucking *working* him, spreading him out and holding him and *loving* him, and all the ways he's just like Ma'ena and all the ways he's *wanted* someone like Ma'ena his whole fucking life --

And there's Steph right there, moving and fucking *doing*. Larger than life when she wants to be and twice as fucking *mean*.

J'onn *ripples* over his cock --

And Jason can't do anything but buck as much as J'onn is *letting* him, twist in that shroud of --

Another ripple and he can feel Steph *gripping* him with her pussy, smell that milkiness mixed with the *tang* of her pussy --

A gripping *stroke* and Ma'ena is winding her tail all around him, Ma'ena is crushing the *life* out of him -- but only because what he's doing feels so good, so right --

Ma'ena broke down the walls --

Sometimes *literally* --

But he was never alone, he can't ever be *alone* --

Jason.

Fuck fuck *fuck* --

Yes.

And J'onn forces Jason's mouth open and *pours* himself halfway down Jason's *throat* --

Jason feels his eyes go wide, but he can't see --

Can't think can't breathe --

Can't do anything but groan once J'onn starts *doing* him. There's no real *rhythm* for his cock, but there's one for his throat --

Jason wants to fucking *writhe*, but he can't, J'onn won't let go --
He has to fucking hold *on* to something --

And then there are smooth, rope-like things in his hands, wrapped around his *knuckles* --

Tentacles.

Oh, fuck, yes. Jason starts jerking *those* off --

And J'onn makes a sound that makes Jason's fucking *sternum* vibrate, makes the insides of Jason's ears thrum and want to *twitch* --

Fuck, so *good*, so he squeezes those tentacles hard, works them maybe like Ma'ena would've if J'onn made her wait for longer than ten minutes --

Fucking *KWEEGH* --

And then there's a hot, sleek *vise* around his cock, jerking it fast and -- not rough. Not --

*Sleek*, yeah, and he can go with that, he can --

Oh, God, those tentacles are growing up his arms *and* down his legs --

Spreading him wide --

J'onn's still moaning or vibrating or whatever the fuck --

*Jason*.

Yeah -- *yeah* --

JasonJasonJasonJasonJason --

*Do* it --

And then Jason realizes that that grunt was out loud --

That J'onn has freed his *head* for some reason, slipped out of his throat --

I miss... exhibitionism.

*Fuck* --

And then there's something slim and *wet* slipping up his ass where he needs it, right where he *needs* it --

Yes.

"*J'onn* --!"

And J'onn's hum rattles the table, the teeth in Jason's fucking *head* --

His eyes flare like fucking *lasers* --

And J'onn forms up around him, under him, *near* him --

Bruce can see *everything* --
I have always wanted to share my pleasure with him. Thank you.

Yeah. You. Uh --

Lasers, Jason...? J'onn *lifts* him and smiles with white teeth -- "Clark is an excellent lover."

Oh -- Jesus, fucking *images* --

All of them flickering through his *head* --

Clark on his knees --

J'onn in a dozen different forms -- *more* --

Clark *hugging* J'onn and all of his *spikes* --

Clark moaning and crying out -- in Martian --

Jason blushes and promises to learn, to know, to fucking *use*, but please --

Please please --

And then the tentacle up his ass starts *rubbing* his prostate --

The tentacle goes back down his *throat* -- and that's all he has. He's spasming, jerking in J'onn's grip and fucking *yelling* around that tentacle --

Trying to --

He's burning *up* and this is gonna kill him, or at least *kink* him --

One hopes.

Okay. Apparently, laughing *while* he's shooting off -- and getting tentacle-fucked -- makes his eyes cross and his ass clench and also he's yelling more.

*Fuck* --

"Jason."

Uh. Wait. "Uh?"

"May I kiss you as humans do?"

Jason opens his eyes and raises his eyebrows. He's actually in *close* to the same position he was in when J'onn swallowed him, so he just settles on his elbows again. "Is that gonna do anything for you?"

"You have many memories of kisses which you hold almost crystalline in your mind. I would like to find permanence within you."

Jason grins and sits up, wrapping his arms around that big, green, mostly-human-looking neck --

Except that suddenly he's looking at John *Jones*, and --

"Damn. I never realized how much that guy looks like you. Uh. Okay, that didn't make any sense --"
"Yes, it did," J'onn says, and *smiles* like he's human, showing off teeth that actually aren't as white as the Gay Green Wrestler's -- and Jason remembers that J'onn was actually moving through the world back when everyone expected private detectives to smoke, or at least look like they did.

"It's just -- uh. Help?"

"You think I'm being most honest when I wear the form I wore most often on Mars, and you have always preferred honesty."

"Yeah, *that*.. I just don't wanna give you the idea that I need you to look human or something. Or even *kinda* human -- yagh you're flexing your tentacle. In me. Uh. Okay, I get the point," Jason says, and licks his way across that thin-lipped mouth --

Nuzzles at the deep smile-lines to either *side* of that mouth --

And gives up and grips the sides of that so-carefully narrow-head before leaning in to make it a real kiss. John Jones' head *isn't* as narrow as J'onn-the-insect-guy's head, but there's that jut to the chin, the blond hair that protrudes over the forehead --

The long, lanky body pressed right up against his own --

Jason makes the kiss one of his better ones, wet and messy and as affectionate as he can manage, because, yeah, J'onn *is* a friend, and maybe John Jones can be, too, and --

Oh, Jesus, he's making himself taste like something different, something that's maybe *Different* --

And suddenly Jason's mind is filled with the image of J'onn kissing Ma'ena, licking Ma'ena, *biting* Ma'ena --

Oh -- I'm tasting *her*?  
Not quite... but close.

Jason hums and tries to make the kiss even deeper, and, after a little while, J'onn starts petting and stroking Jason's neck, the back of his head, his shoulders --

He pulls out slowly and gently --

And then he leans back in and nuzzles Jason's mouth very slowly and very, very seriously. "Thank you."

"Thank *you*," Jason says, and -- wait. "Where were your spikes?"

"I turned them on myself so as not to injure you."

"Uh. And that didn't injure *you* because... you moved all your organs around?"

"Yes," J'onn says, and turns to stare at --

Bruce. Oh, damn. Oh -- God. Right in front of the guy, and somehow that's a lot more meaningful now that his cock has gone back to nap a little. Not sleep. His cock hasn't been asleep in *years* --

And Bruce is blushing even as he types up something on the computer. He -- What's he broadcasting?

'White noise,' at the moment, and J'onn turns to face him. Before then, he imagined his hand on your

J'onn strokes Jason's cheek with his spindly human fingers, but Jason already knew he was blushing.

"I'll talk to him," Jason says, making a point of doing it *aloud* --

"I will continue to keep the rest of the League from swarming your home like... bees on the first flowers of spring."

Jason snorts. "Seriously? Wait, no, of course this would be --" Jason sighs. "Maybe we *should* let them visit. They all deserve a chance to say goodbye the right way."

J'onn narrows his eyes in a smile that feels more real once the eyes themselves turn black and orange again.

"Yeah, Green Machine?"

"Were you raised to be kind?"

"Kind? Uh. Well, I guess? I mean, my mom never wanted me to be an asshole. My *father* did, but he doesn't count. For *anything*," Jason says, and, yeah, he's *aware* he sounds a little fucking vehement, but --

J'onn strokes Jason's forehead --

And then *into* his forehead --


"Convinced you to focus on those parts of your mind which felt most calm and generally pleased. I did not take your emotions."

No, only Raven does that, really, and -- yeah. He got upset because thinking about Bruce in the front of his mind got him thinking about Harvey in the *back* of his mind -- yeah.

"Too much death, J'onn. You know all about that."

"Yes."

"I think..." Jason frowns a little and lays back on the table again. The amazing thing is that he's still fully-dressed. That has to stop *soon*, but it's fucking convenient as *hell* to have a Martianfriend who can fuck him brainless *and* keep him neat. And he's distracting himself, because --

Because.

"I'm mad at him, J'onn."

"Yes. Though it is not because you are jealous. I confess that I am curious."

Jason smiles ruefully. "Dick found me because he was purposefully going over routes that Bruce used to take through the city. Spending time in places Bruce spent time, you know?"

And J'onn gives him the image of Dick showing off video footage of Jason stealing the tires off the Robinmobile on the Watchtower.
"Oh, Jesus. *Seriously*?"

J'onn nods and kind of glows at him again.

Jason sighs and shakes his head. "Okay. Fine. Part of me spent the last part of my patrol dealing -- *badly* -- with the fact that *Bruce* could've been the one to pick me up. Like, breaking-a-few-too-many-teeth badly."

"You do not believe that you would have had a successful partnership with him."

"He's too -- *fuck*," and Jason sits up to look *at* Bruce, who's standing right the fuck there with an earnest look on his face, a *hopeful* look --

You could've *warned* me, J'onn.

He could hear you from the computers, as well.

Oh. "Uh. Bruce --"

"Please. Finish what you were saying."

Jason winces. "I really don't have to. I mean -- I was gonna talk to you anyway if you stayed up."

"Am I... I'm interrupting your time with J'onn. I'm afraid I became far too... interested when you spoke my name."

Jason winces a little *harder* -- "That's --"

"I wasn't -- I don't mean to offer approbation."

"No, I know, Bruce, just -- fuck. You're too crazy, okay? You've got issues on *top* of your issues, and, unlike *most* of this community, you apparently *don't* work yours out by punching people."

Bruce smiles ruefully. "Very true. But I believe I have found... other ways."

"With my *brothers*, yeah --"

"Does it bother you -- no, that was a foolish question," Bruce says, and his smile becomes slightly *harder* on his face. But it's not aimed at Jason. "Does it bother you so terribly that we won't be able to come to know each other."

Jason narrows his eyes.

Bruce flares his nostrils -- and steps back. Which --

Jason snorts and stands, moving into Bruce's space and jabbing at his chest a little. "That. Is that what you did to Tim?"

Bruce blinks for that --

And Jason sighs. "That backing-up thing. That -- backing-*away*-to-be-*polite* thing."

"I... I tried to give him what he wanted of me. To *be* what he wanted."

"Okay. That was a yes, no, *and* a maybe -- and I'll have to talk to Tim about it anyway. You -- God, Bruce, I could *see* me being your partner, and how you'd be careful and good and shit, and
be lying your *ass* off because you *wanted* my ass -- and wouldn't admit it."

Bruce frowns. "If... if I'd already been in a relationship with Dick --"

"You *wouldn't* have gone for me? Is that *seriously* what you're saying?"

Bruce shakes his head. "I'd like to believe that I would remain faithful... but of course neither of us has reason to believe --" He cuts himself off and turns to J'onn --

And when Jason looks, J'onn is basically transparent and floating up. "J'onn --"

I will return tomorrow, and it's pretty clear that he's speaking to both of them. But then he *focuses* on Jason -- May the time before we meet again be filled with pleasure and peace for you.

Uh. Back at you, and Jason nods mainly for Bruce's benefit and watches J'onn... disappear.

Jason frowns and crosses his arms over his chest. It's not that he can't understand why J'onn would want him to talk to Bruce, and even why he'd want Jason to talk to Bruce in *private* -- he *wants* Jason to work on him, and Jason can't actually blame him for that.

It's just that he was hoping for a little back-up. Mainly because --

"I'll leave you now."

Mainly because he trusts himself with this about half as far as he trusts Bruce. Fuck. "I -- like you," Jason says, and scowls at Bruce.

Bruce blinks and pauses about three paces away. "You do?"

"You made Dick happy right up until you tried to act like an actual hero. You made Tim care about you enough that he had to *run*. You -- I like you. And I fucking hate that."

"I'm... sorry?"

Jason snorts and uncrosses his arms, stripping off the gauntlets and pushing his hands back through his hair.

Bruce follows the movement avidly, narrowing his eyes a little --

"J'onn says you've been thinking about me."

Bruce *doesn't* blush this time -- "Yes."

Jason nods. "I've been thinking about you, too."

"You're beautiful."

"I know," Jason says, and smirks a little. "I see it every time I look in Tim's eyes. When he's feeling it, I mean."

"He feels... much."

Jason -- doesn't narrow his eyes again. "Did you hurt him?"

"I -- touched him while wearing my gauntlets. He seemed --"

"He loved it," Jason says, and waves a hand. "He came for you, yeah?"
Bruce swallows -- "Yes."

"And he... did he suck you?"

"Yes."

"You liked that."

Bruce closes his eyes, and *now* his face is getting a little pink. Flush, not blush, and the only question is how hard he can actually *get* behind his jock.

The one Dick had had made for *him* has enough room for a semi, but Bruce has got a lot more to deal with -- and he's staring at Bruce's crotch. Great. Jason looks up and raises his eyebrows mostly reflexively, because Bruce is staring at him hard. "Bruce --"

"He gave me great pleasure. I longed to touch him more thoroughly, but he only removed his cape. I long for him now."

"Why didn't you go get him?"

"There were -- the report --"

"Bruce."

"He told me he would be in your bed. I won't -- I couldn't assume."

That --

Apparently, a part of him thought Tim *wouldn't* be in his bed tonight. Jesus. He's really *that* jealous? *Really*? Jason frowns at himself --

"I. We can speak about anything you wish --"

"Don't take him with you."

Bruce blinks. "I wouldn't --"

"Dick wouldn't go, *I* wouldn't go, *Clark* wouldn't go -- but Tim has always needed to be needed. *Badly*.

Bruce shakes his head slowly. "I -- I couldn't take him from you --"

"You don't actually believe that," Jason says, and closes the space between them again --

"Jason --"

"Don't take him with you. He'll miss you when you go, but between me and Dick and Steph, we can *make* him feel better again. You won't be enough for him."

"Wouldn't that mean that you alone weren't enough for him, either?"

Jason rears back a little and takes a breath. "You've actually thought about it already. I wasn't just -- stabbing around in the fucking *dark* --"

"I'm sorry --"

"Don't be fucking *sorry* --"
"I won't. If he tries to come with me, I will stop him."

Jason narrows his eyes. "That's a promise."

Bruce firms up his jaw, stands straight -- he nods.

Jason turns away and just -- he can feel himself blushing *hard* --

"Jason...?"

"We were supposed to -- not get fucked-up over you. That was the *deal*."

"Should -- I don't want to absent myself from you. From this home all of you have made --"

"It's *your* home --"

"No. I could never have helped create a family like yours. The Bruce from this universe must have been --"

"Just like *you*. When he was your age, anyway," Jason says, shaking his head. "*We* might not have known you, but do you really think Clark would've gone for you so fast if you didn't feel right? *Dick*? He didn't just live with you, he lived *in* you --"

"That -- it frightens me badly."

Jason closes his eyes for a moment -- and when he opens them, Bruce's hand is hovering near his jaw. Jason raises his eyebrows --

Bruce drops his hand. "I'm not -- an institution. Nor am I an icon of any kind. I am -- barely -- a man, and I cannot imagine ever having the *confidence* to allow a boy like Dick must have been to believe otherwise --"

"You think you could've *stopped* him?"

Bruce blinks and frowns. "I...

"Yeah, think about that. Dick wasn't just some -- empty fucking *vessel* for you to fill up with the Mission and your cock. He was *himself*, and that means he was too fucking hardcore -- even at *thirteen* -- *not* to make his own decisions. It's just -- I've lived with the guy for five damned *years*, B. I know him down to the bone."

"You. You didn't know he desired you --"

"Heh. No, I didn't. But that just proves that he'll never be half as predictable -- half as *easy* -- as anyone else. Face it -- he fucking *owned* you. Now I just need to figure out how Tim managed to do it to you, too. He's not *like* Dick."

"He is..." Bruce shakes his head. "He offered me his secrets. Some of them."

Jason squeezes his eyes shut *again* -- no. "He told you about the gender thing."

Bruce nods and searches him, looking for --

Jason knows what he's looking for. "He's hinted around it. And let me and Dick just *see* him loving being a woman for the Mission. And -- he let me change the subject."
"You... it makes you uncomfortable?"

"I don't want him cutting on himself, even if it does turn out to be --" Jason blows out a breath. "I'm not the right person to ask about it. It's his life --"

"You're his love. He spoke of you much --"

"I'm the one who *saved* him from his awful fucking *family* --"

"And so much more," Bruce says, and licks his lips. "He told me that he was speaking to me in part because he knew I would be leaving. Your wishes are important to him --"

"*Too* important. Just --" Fucking *Superboy* --

Bruce --

Dick? Jesus. Just --

He never gets jealous of *Clark*, but Clark is Clark, and would never try to *steal* one of them for more than a few hours or days at a time. He's got a wife and a *life*.

Superboy doesn't. *Bruce* doesn't. Dick -- has them, but not as much as he wants to --

And Jason thinks he could use J'onn to sort him out again, calm him down -- and thinking that is enough to do it, because Jason can *feel* the path in his mind J'onn built between 'pissy and jealous' and 'actually pretty mellow.' Hunh --

"Jason... I'm not sure Tim could ever think of your desires as inappropriate or grasping --"

Jason waves a hand. "I know. I know, actually. He -- it's another pretty scary thing."

Bruce nods and searches him a little. "You fear your capacity to offer hurt?"

Is that it? That --

He *wouldn't* hurt Tim. Not on purpose, anyway, and he's gotten pretty fucking good at avoiding it. It's just that he'd gotten good at it when everything was pretty solid and calm and clear. No real surprises other than the occasional dealer needing a harder beating than usual to stay down, or the kinds of people (and things) that occasionally stepped out of a Gotham fog.

It was the three of them -- plus Owl over there and Steph over *there*, and while none of it was routine, it was a little predictable, and --

It's not like he'd change much of anything about the past few days. Dick opening up, Steph joining them, J'onn treating him to some seriously *active* reminiscing about life on Mars, *Bruce fucking Wayne* right there to make everybody excited and happier, and, oh yeah, *Harvey*.

It --

Jesus. Jason snorts.

"Yes?"

"I'm pouting 'cause things are changing too fast for me, is all," Jason says, laughing quietly and pushing his hands back through his hair again. "*That's* why so much of me is ready for you to get your ass gone."
"So your life can return to normal. That's understandable, and -- I'm willing to keep myself apart -- "

"Quiet. You -- it's all based on false fucking principles, B," Jason says, and strokes that really dark patch of stubble on Bruce's jaw.

"It -- tell me."

"Nothing will be the same after you go. Not one goddamned fucking thing."

Bruce winces and starts to turn away --

And Jason turns him right back again. "Don't do that. You *want* to look at me, yeah?"

"All -- very often. I didn't mean -- I would never have wished to make your lives *difficult* --"

"We need you."

"No --"

"*Yes*. You -- you can't just come in here and give us a taste and then *go*. You can't --" Jason growls and reaches to shove a hand in Bruce's hair. It's just barely long enough for that to *work* --

The last pictures of Bruce had him with *short* hair --

But this Bruce is still young. Still a little --

A little soft, maybe.

Jason leans in and bites at that stubbled jaw, digging in with his teeth until -- no, he won't leave a mark, yet. He -- he doesn't know why, but he can't.

Yet.

And Bruce sighs and shakes for it, or maybe just for the fact that Jason's doing it, that --

"You like me this close, B?"

"Yes. I -- yes."

"You..." Jason licks the line of Bruce's jaw, nibbles around to his mouth --

And Bruce is panting a little. Just -- a little.

"You hungry, B?"

"Yes."

"Whatcha gonna do about -- it. Heh." Jason strokes down to the hands on his hips, and the grip is just as impossible and *hard* as it should be.

Even through his tights. But --

"Let go."

"Jason --"

"Call me Jay."
Bruce gasps and kisses Jason's cheek, his jaw, his cheek again --

"C'mon, say it --"

"*Jay*," and Bruce's voice is low, rough and *hard* --

"Take your jock off."

Bruce pants against Jason's temple, breathes deep, pants *more* --

"You're sniffing me?"

"Yes."

Jason licks his lips and pushes Bruce's robe off his shoulders before leaning in to breathe against his armpit --

"Jay --"

"I can -- fuck, you wear a lot more leather than I do, B."

Bruce grunts and cups the back of Jason's head, pulls him in --

"Don't crush me --"

"I'm sorry -- *Jay* --"

That for a bite to his chest, so Jason bites his way to Bruce's throat, lingering on his shoulder, on all that *muscle* -- "Take your jock off," he says again, and strokes down to pinch Bruce's nipple through his t-shirt --

Bruce groans and steps back, releasing the jock and letting it *fall* -- no, he crouches to pick it up.

"So you *do* remember Alfred's training."

"Everything. I -- everything, Jay."

Jason nods and walks *quickly* to the hampers. There's a fourth and a fifth one for Steph and Bruce -- yeah. Bruce drops his jock in his hamper and reaches for Jason, only pausing when his fingers were *about* to touch Jason's belt in just the wrong way. "I shoulda let you find out the hard way."

"Probably," Bruce says, and his eyes are wide and fucking *blown*. His lips are damp from being licked, bitten --

There's a bite mark on his *throat* --

And it'll be all his until it fades. It --

"Watch me," Jason says, and strips slowly and carefully enough that Bruce will be able to do it for him next time --

He's already thinking of fucking *next* time --

And he doesn't stop stripping until he's down to his boxer-briefs. They're going to go upstairs, and the robes are too damned *short* and -- he can deal. He can definitely deal, because all Bruce is doing is *looking* at him, taking in Jason's body in one hungry *glare* after another --
Jason does a little spin -- and immediately shivers, because the feel of that look on his *back* is just--

Too much.
The kind of too much he bends right over for when it's Clark. When--

Fuck, fuck--

"Bruce," he says, without turning around--

"Yes," and Bruce is right there, right behind him, not *touching*--

"Touch me -- *nnh* --"

"Your hips. You... are you sensitive there?"

"Yeah. To great big men with great big hands," Jason says, twisting a little in Bruce's grip just to see -- "Oh, yeah, that -- heh. Not letting me get anywhere, B?"

"I want you. Very badly," and Bruce starts *stroking* Jason's hips, leans in and kisses the back of Jason's neck--

"Wanna fuck me?"

"Yes -- no. I want to make love to you --"

"You *know* what I mean --"

"Take you. I want to take you. To..." Bruce sighs and shudders, and yeah, he really *is* close enough for Jason to feel that. And feel it all over when Bruce starts licking the back of his neck -- no.

That's not really licking. He's *tonguing* Jason's neck, feeling him up with something slick and muscular -- "You like the way I taste, B?"

"Intoxicating. You -- please," and that last word is slurred because Bruce is tonguing him again--

No, nibbling his way over Jason's shoulder --

Then back to Jason's throat--

"*Bite*.*" 

"Jay," Bruce says, and it's a statement, a speech, a fucking *order* to do exactly what he's doing: Moaning and shaking his way through a *vicious* bite over his jugular.

"*Bruce* --"

Bruce nods and it makes the flesh between his teeth *throb*, makes Jason need to grip himself through his shorts--

Bruce's hand is right there, not touching anything more exciting than *Jason's* hand -- but that could change.

*Will* change, because Bruce's grip on his other hip is still fucking *harsh*, because Bruce's teeth might make him bleed, because he needs it, fucking *needs* it --
Jason shoves his shorts down and makes Bruce clutch him --

Bruce grunts and stops biting, kisses Jason's throat and cheek and ear. "Tell me. Show me. Please."

"You. Just hold me. Maybe -- a *little* stroke --"

They gotta get *upstairs*, but Jason isn't actually moving or doing anything other than pushing into that big, *hard* fist --

Bruce is stroking so *gently* -- even though his breathing is rougher than Jason's is after a six mile run and a spar with *Dick*. He --

"You're getting off on this --"

"Beautiful. You -- I want to make you *happy*, Jay --"

Jason groans and tilts his head back onto Bruce's shoulder, tries to convince Bruce's other hand to wander on him a little --

"*Tell* me," Bruce says, and it's way more of a plea than an order, which means either that Tim didn't teach him right or that he's figured out that Jason wants something a little different --

Not *too* different, not --

Not so much he loses his damned *mind* --

But somehow he's reaching back to grope for Bruce's cock through his briefs --

"*Jay* --"

"So -- fucking *hard* --"

"You. You made love with J'onn --"

"*Right* there. You listened."

"I tried -- not to watch. J'onn muffled your sounds --"

"J'onn fucked my *throat* -- but you heard the end. All of it -- *nnh* -- so *tight* --"

And Bruce starts squeezing Jason's cock rhythmically, over and over --

"*Bruce* --"

"You must *tell* me. I need -- I need more of you --"

Jason twists free, turns, and drops to his knees --

"No --"

"'*No*?"

Bruce frowns and strokes Jason's forehead, his cheeks -- "Let -- I want to taste *you* --"

"You'll get your chance --" Except that it's a fucking *shock* that he got that last word out, because Bruce is just *on* him, pinning him on his back, holding his shoulders down as he kneels straddling Jason's waist. "B --"
"Jay. I could never -- I would never be able to deny myself around you. I -- but if you *asked* --"

"What do you *want*?"

"*Everything*," Bruce says, lifting Jason by the grip he has on his shoulders before pushing him back down again, looking him over -- "Let me taste you --" 

"Do it --"

And Bruce smiles so --

He looks so fucking happy, so --

"Your desire for me -- I've done nothing to earn it, but I *will* please you," and Bruce moves between Jason's legs and *tears* Jason's shorts away --

"*Fuck* --"

Bruce frowns at his torn fucking underwear -- "I didn't mean to do that. I -- your scent is a goad," and he brings the shorts to his face and inhales like Jason's a fine *wine* --

No, something better than that, more *satisfying* --

"Jay..."

"Yeah. Uh. I'm listening?"

And it shouldn't work on him to see Bruce's eyes glittering at him over his poor underwear --

But it does. Jason licks his lips and sits up on one elbow so he can grab himself with his other hand --

Bruce's frown gets *darker* --

"B..."

Bruce swallows and stares into his eyes. "He must have loved you instantly."

"Uh. Tim?"

"Yes. But also Dick," and Bruce sets Jason's shorts down gently -- he actually *pats* them -- before beginning to stroke Jason's thighs. "He must have seen... there is so much in your eyes, Jason."

"Yours aren't so empty, either --"

"You're in them. They could never be empty -- I want to ask you *why*."

"Why I'm doing this?"

Bruce nods and starts *massaging* Jason's thighs -- right where he's tensed up. Jesus.

He can't help but moan a little for it, and Bruce's eyes get that much *hotter*. "You -- I already said --"

"You don't only want me for your brothers, Jay. I am confident enough..." Bruce's smile is pained. "Tim's desires... have you found that he could subsume them for the sake of the family?"

"Yeah. I -- yeah. I try to beat that outta him, a little."
Bruce nods and moves back to massage Jason's calves -- where he's *also* tense --

"Bruce --"

"You -- he's involved with his team?"

Jason licks his lips and squeezes himself, not sure whether he wants his cock to shut up or get *louder* -- "Two. Two of them."

Bruce nods. "So Dick mentioned. Are you --"

"Yeah. I am. I'm working on that, because -- because he needs me to. Even though he hasn't said so yet."

Bruce's lips part a little and he searches Jason, stroking his way back up Jason's legs --

*Pausing* at his groin --

"*Bruce* --"

"I. I've never been so -- how can you be *sure* of what he needs?"

Jason suspects he's looking at Bruce like he's crazy, but one, he is, and two, he *is*. "You -- I promise I'll tell you if you come down here and kiss --"

The kiss doesn't happen. What *happens* is Jason getting pinned like it's nothing and Bruce *breathing his breath* and staring at him. "Please. Tell me."

"Uh. I *did* --"

"Not. Not *where*. Not *how*. I -- please, Jason --"

"*Jay* -- "

"Jay. You... Tim guided me, as did Dick. I am... I am not so experienced."

No, he isn't. But he's huge, and he's hard, and he's *on* Jason, and that --

Jason nods and sighs out a breath. "We can do this, yeah."

Bruce looks so *hopeful* --

"Fuck. Here it is -- I like it a little gentler than Tim does, except when I'm getting fucked. Even then -- even then, I don't wanna bleed for days or anything --"

Bruce nods *solemnly* --

"I. Uh." Jason licks his lips --

Bruce follows the motion fucking *avidly* --

"Oh, Jesus, are you sure I can't blow you?"

Bruce pants, frowns. "If -- if you wish --"

"Okay, I get it, *you* don't want it -- don't want me to shut up?"
"Please. I want your voice. Your. You cried out for J'onn."

Jason raises his eyebrows and gives himself a slow stroke, nice and easy, nice and --

Yeah, Bruce's hand is creeping towards Jason's cock. Whether or not *he* knows it --

He's so focused on Jason's *eyes* -- "He made me feel good, B," Jason says, and lets his voice be rough and fucking *obvious* --

Bruce narrows his eyes. "Don't --"

"*Don't*?"

"Don't -- seduce me. Only -- I desire you greatly. I'll do anything you wish --"

"Make me *feel* you," and, okay, maybe that was too vague --

But, then again, maybe it wasn't -- because Bruce is kissing him all over his face --

Bruce is driving him down to the *mats* with a kiss on the mouth --

Bruce is *moving* on him, squeezing Jason's wrists and making them feel a lot fucking smaller than they are --

Jason turns out of the kiss and blows out a breath --

"Jay --"

"*Naked* --"

Bruce groans -- but he moves at once, stripping himself from between Jason's legs and looking --

Big.

Really, *really* big. The kind of big that you can't ever picture *small*, and Jason doesn't actually know what he means by that -- except for how he does. No little kid Bruce could seem real after this -- no matter how much that little kid might've needed someone like Jason himself.

It's easy as hell to roll up onto his knees and take that cock in hand --

Feel Bruce's hands *clamp* onto his shoulders --

Jason tosses back his too-long hair and starts to jerk him a little. The jock had let him work up a semi, a few minutes without it got him bigger, and this -- "I'm gonna make you take what you want, B. You know it?"

"Jay..." He shakes his head, clenches his fists --

"Don't fight me on this. You *need* it --"

"I need --"

"And I do, too, B."

Bruce focuses on him *hard* --

And Jason smiles and puts a little tossing action in his stroke --
Bruce *grunts* --

"Dick gave me a taste. What it would be like to let a tougher -- *harder* -- guy just fucking take me over..."

"You -- Clark."


Bruce swallows for him, searches -- no, he's staring at Jason's throat. Just -- staring.

"It's not that I don't think you're all of those things, B -- I know you are."

Bruce looks up, and now he looks a little stunned on top of horny -- "Then -- please..."

"You've got a darker side in you. You..." Jason shakes his head and squeezes Bruce hard. "Think I taste like you yet?"

"Don't -- please don't stop talking."

"Not 'please don't stop jerking me off?"

Bruce smile is rueful and pained again. "No, I... I'd like to be known by you. Understood."

"Like Harvey does?"

"If --" Bruce shakes his head again. "No. You are not Harvey."

"Who am I?"

Bruce lifts a hand -- it's *shaking* -- to Jason's face. "A beautiful boy. A kind boy who lived an unkind life. A strong boy. A loving --" Bruce cuts himself off and shudders --

And *then* Jason realizes that he's fucking *stripping* Bruce's cock. He eases off a little -- "You -- God, Bruce. I want that other side of you. The one that doesn't know what it's doing, and just kind of fucking blunders and flails its way through -- only it's *you*, so it always looks graceful and --"

Jason licks his lips again. "You know what I want --"

"Let go of me."

Ooh -- oh. "Yeah?"

"Yes."

Jason raises both hands and his eyebrows --

Bruce cups Jason's face with both of *his* hands and kisses him gently and softly and -- fucking *thrillingly*, because they both know he's holding back, and because he's fucking well learned *how* to kiss in the last couple of days. He's --

Batman? Not here, not right *now*, but Dick taught him that Batman was *always* a man, that the Bat only came first for criminals, that the man was brilliant, caring, open, honest -- perfect.

And this kiss wants him to know it better than he does, this kiss wants him to moan *just* like this, shudder and push closer, fucking *get* more --
Because the kiss is getting harder, hotter --

And when Bruce bites Jason's lip *just* this side of too hard, Jason can't do anything but grunt like a fucking animal and let himself look like --

Someone who needed to be *flattened*, apparently, because Bruce drops him just as easily as Dick would, bites his *throat* --

"*B* --"

"Yes. You. I can still be led --"

"I'm leadin' you right now, B -- *do* me until I tell you to stop."

Bruce narrows his eyes and *growls* --

And Jason catches himself spreading his legs for it. Jesus, like Tim would --

Tim is a smart, smart kid --

Tim is *upstairs* -- but there's no way they're getting there yet. Just --

"Oh fuck -- not. You -- *bite* --"

And Bruce's teeth on his nipple are hard and sharp and perfect, just perfect -- and better when Jason can look up and see Bruce looking at *him*. He *is* still looking for direction, but he's also just doing what he wants --

Bruce *wants* him --

Jason pants a little and shoves his hands into Bruce's hair -- "C'mon, you want me to talk --"

Bruce *shows* the teeth holding Jason's nipple and *nods* --

"You gotta -- you gotta lead *me* -- oh, *Jesus* --"

Bruce sucks his way off Jason's nipple with a slurp, a cool *rush* of air -- "Tell me about Clark. More about Clark."

"Unh? You -- he's a fucking *pervert* -- no, don't look confused and stop. Do *not* look confused and stop --"

Bruce *blanks* his expression and *then* licks around Jason's other nipple --

"Oh my *God*, that's creepy! Look confused again --"

Bruce does it and *nibbles* Jason's nipple --

No, that gets harder and harder, too, that --

Bite after *bite* --

"Oh -- fuck, you're making me so hard --"

And Bruce squeezes his eyes shut and kisses his way down Jason's abdomen *roughly*. Each kiss feels like some kind of fucking *lip* punch --
He uses his *teeth* --

And then, before Jason can *breathe*, he's nuzzling Jason's cock and groaning, moaning and just rubbing his *face* --

His fucking stubble --

"*Jesus*, Bruce --"

"*Tell* me --"

"Uh. Uh. He's a pervert, and he knows it, and he knows *I* know it, and he -- he gets off on me *growing*, and that's -- I think he wanted to have me for himself -- *ohn* -- hot *mouth* --"

Bruce *hums* around the head of Jason's cock, watching for every fucking *reaction* --

"I think -- I keep him apart 'cause I want him, too, want what he can fucking *give* me --"

Bruce narrows his eyes and takes Jason in halfway --

Looks *thoughtful* --

And then swallows him just like a fucking *pro*.

"*Bruce*!"

He's trying to breathe. He's -- *hitching* --

And when he opens his eyes up wide again Jason can't see anything but how blown they are, how *gone* he is --

"Oh, Jesus, oh -- yeah, take me, then --"

Bruce grabs Jason's hips --

*Lifts* him --

"Bruce, *fuck*, you -- Clark does that --"

And his focus is back *just* like that. He --

He's staring *into* Jason while making Jason fuck his fucking *mouth* --

"No fucking *fair* --"

Bruce growls again in the second before he takes Jason deep again -- and Jason knows that he's still growling down deep, way the fuck down --

"I -- he does it -- he does it *faster* --"

Bruce shakes his head, and it may mean that he can't move Jason that fast, or it may mean that he *won't* move Jason that fast, but either way it's not happening.

Either way, Jason has to fucking take this, own it --

"M-more, B?"
A nod -- and then Bruce pulls off halfway and sucks in hard pulses, hard -- fucking --

"Bruce -- you -- *Tim* does me that way --"

Another fucking nod --

"Tim always -- he wants me to fuck his perfect little mouth -- *hnh* --"

Bruce's hands are so *hard* on Jason's hips -- wait.

"Touch my *ass*. Fucking *grip* it, and -- oh -- oh, yeah, spread me *wide* --"

Bruce groans --

And then the world is shifting and Jason's on his knees on the mats, on his fucking *face* -- "Bruce, Bruce, *upstairs*, fuck me *upstairs* --"

"Jay. I. Let me please you --"

"You *are* --"

"An orgasm. I... please. And then -- anything. Everything you want," and Bruce's voice is a rough growl, Bruce's body is fucking *heat* behind him. It's *not* like Clark, and he --

"Yeah. Yeah, you can get me off -- oh -- God, spreading me. Looking me over?"

"Beautiful..."

Jason snorts and wiggles his ass as much as Bruce *lets* him -- but then Bruce starts making hot, wet *love* to his hole just like --

"You -- Clark --"

"Mm-hmm..."

*Right*, because Clark always --

Dirty fucking alien --

Dirty fucking *man*, because Bruce isn't tongue-fucking him as much as he's -- making hot, wet love. There are nuzzles, and growls, and licks, and ---

"You -- you're makin' me *need* it, B --"

Another *growl* --

"Oh -- yeah. Yeah. I -- I won't come like this -- *hnh* --" And he hadn't *asked* for the hand on his cock, but he's fucking well *getting* it, and it's rough and sweet --

So good --

"Jesus -- *Jesus*, yeah, make me open, make me *ready* --"

Bruce pulls back and bites his fucking *cheeks* -- but then he's right back in there, and *now* he's tongue-fucking --

Pushing what feels --
It's gotta be as deep as he can *go* --

The rhythm is fucking *awkward* -- but then Jason realizes it's because *he's* trying to rock and grind at the same time, trying for more --

He always gets so *greedy* when his ass is on the -- heh -- menu --

"C'mon, c'mon, c'mon -- oh -- oh, yeah, that -- oh, so *gentle* --" And he doesn't know what he's talking about -- nothing about that hand could ever be gentle, nothing so *perfect* --

But suddenly he's *up* on his knees -- and Bruce's cock is between his cheeks.

"B...?"

"I thought. I thought this would be -- allowed," Bruce says, and he sounds strained and fucking *hot* --

No, that's how he *feels* -- "Yeah. Yeah, it's okay. Just don't push in --"

"I *won't* --"

"*Yet*," Jason says, because he has to make that fucking *clear* --

"Yes. Yes," Bruce says, and the kiss he plants on Jason's throat is as shaky as his hands, but then he *grips*, cock and hip --

He holds on and he strokes --

He holds on and he *thrusts*, dragging his cock over Jason's hole over and over --

"Jesus -- don't -- do *not* wear yourself out --"

A breathless laugh. "Jay. This -- this could never be too much --"

"Too much for *me* --"

Bruce sucks in a breath --

"No, don't you stop, don't you fucking stop --"

"You -- you feel --"

"I feel *you*, B -- you're so fucking *big* --"

Bruce grunts and *licks* Jason's ear -- "Do you like that --"

"Yes -- *yes*. I wish Dick was bigger than me --"

"He's taller --"

"For -- fucking *now*. He'll always be bigger than me in my head, though -- he -- he's so *good*, B --"

"Yes," Bruce says, and starts working the head of Jason's cock with his thumb --

Jason *whimpers* --
"He's beautiful, almost -- almost gamin, but not --"

"Strong -- fucking *tough* --"

"Skilled and graceful, fearless --"

"So -- so *open*, and he fucking *gives* --"

"He loves you, Jay..."

"I love him, I love him, he's always -- never fucking *leave* him -- *hnh* -- "

And the hand that was on his hip --

That *arm* is wrapped around his chest --

He can't *breathe* --

"Jay -- Jay, I won't *ask*..."

What? No, he knows. He just made it onto the list of people Bruce *needs*, and -- fuck --

It feels *good*, but *fuck* --

Which is maybe why he sounds so fucking *mournful* when Bruce starts rubbing his hole *raw* with his cock, starts jerking him fast and hard --

"I *need* you --"

"I *know*, you crazy fucking -- oh -- oh, yeah, don't stop, don't -- *fuck* --!"

And the last thing he knows before his brain fucking *flatlines* on how hard he's coming is that Bruce is licking and biting his throat like he can't decide whether to fuck him or *eat* him --

Bruce is squeezing him --

*Milking* him and Jason can't --

He sees a *flash* of the Cave and he fucking *can't* --

He's yelling his *head* off and he wants it, he's not done, he *wants* --

Jason slumps and pants and tries to *force* himself to move, to get the fuck *going* to where he can get *laid* --

Engine.

*Dick* --

Dick wants to --

Oh, *Jesus*, *please* let him want to direct Bruce *tonight*...

Jason arranges Bruce's hands and arms into a better cuddle for himself --

"I'm sorry --"
"No. No, that was -- that was fucking fantastic, B -- and I *know* you're not used to holding people after a fuck."

"Clark... he was... educational."

"Heh. Yeah, I'll just bet. Did you give me a hickey?"

Bruce kisses the tender spot on Jason's throat --

Jason shivers --

"I don't know how easily you bruise."

Jason sighs. "Not very. Neither does Dick *or* Steph. Tim, though -- Tim bruises like crazy. It's one of the reasons why we turned him into a distance fighter."

Bruce nods, dragging his cheek against Jason's own. "I would have done the same were he my partner. He is a natural with both the staff and his... powders."

"Heh. So he did whip out the fairy dust around you. Careful with that. He formulated those things to be *mean*.

Bruce sighs and begins to stroke Jason carefully, but firmly. "You enjoy his cruelty."

Jason stiffens --

"No, please," Bruce says, and squeezes Jason hard. "Please. I mean no disrespect."

"You just can't agree with the things he does? The things we *all* do?"

Bruce lets go and moves to kneel in front of Jason. "Please. It's only that I spent many years struggling to learn where it would be appropriate for *me* to draw the proverbial line, and far, far less time learning that that which was appropriate for me was not necessarily appropriate for others."

Jason feels his nostrils flaring -- right. He laughs. "Okay, sorry. I just -- I know you've been giving Dick fucking fits over wanting to save his thirteen-year-old self."

Bruce frowns and looks at the mats. "I have learned that I am... far, far more susceptible to beautiful young men than I ever imagined possible. I believe that I want to save his parents -- or whoever had care of him -- far less than I wish to save Dick from myself," and he looks up again with a plea in his eyes. "I want to believe that I have that power over myself, Jason."

Jason frowns and tries to just -- fucking *deal*. It's not like he can say Bruce is *wrong* for trying to stop himself from fucking a thirteen-year-old -- and the old footage of Dick from back in the day says he was a *young* thirteen in a lot of fucking ways -- no, he can't. "You gotta give him his life, B. *This* is his life. He's saved more lives and given more *joy* than he could in any other way. His family -- *all* of his families -- sprawl across fucking continents. He's -- he was born for this. And for loving you."

"You. You don't how *seductive* that point of view is --"

"So be seduced already. Look at it this way -- if you'd hurt him *badly*? We'd *all* know it by now. You changed him up some, but loving somebody always changes a person. Or were you the same person you'd been before, after you'd known Harvey for a year?"

Bruce frowns and reaches --
"Thank you. I. Harvey made me both more intelligent and more wise. Harvey opened a world to me I had never known. Harvey... didn't make love to me until twelve hours ago," Bruce says, and smiles wryly.

"His career --"

"Yeah, he *had* to think about that, but it's totally not a good reason, because, ultimately, it had nothing to do with how he felt about *you*, as opposed to how fucked-up the world is."

Bruce frowns *again* --

And Jason holds up his free hand. "Easy. I'm not saying I think there's something wrong with him for giving up love for the sake of becoming someone this city *needs*. I'm just saying that it didn't do either of you any good *emotionally*."

"And neither would he, because he's kind of a hero, too. Sometimes the world is so fucked-up that you *can't* get what you need. Sometimes it isn't, though," and Jason nods toward where Dick is standing in his mask and his boxer-briefs. "You can have us. All of us."

"Harvey. Harvey is leaving -- *must* leave --"

"Yeah, he needs his wife. I'm hearing that. And you -- he'll go wherever she is."

"Yes. I..." Bruce turns to *gaze* at Dick -- and then *slowly* wraps his arms around Jason and pulls him close.

Dick lets out a shuddering sigh before peeling off his mask. His eyes look wild and fucking *hot*, which means all that calm stillness is a lie.

"Big Bird... I need him tonight."

Dick nods slowly and licks his *teeth* --

"And you always look like you're about to rip someone's *throat* out when you do that."

"You love it," Dick says, and *flashes* a smile at him --

Big Bird. Big Brother. He's -- "You always make me *safe* -- uh. I can shut up."

"No, please," Bruce says, and starts stroking his back *soothingly* --

Dick narrows his eyes. "You're going to take my orders, Bruce."

Bruce grunts, cock twitching *hard* against Jason's abdomen -- "If you wish."

"I *do* wish -- in *part* because you do," and Dick moves up to join them, pushing a hand into Bruce's hair and tugging hard. "I was too young to give this to you back then. Too... greedy."
"Every touch would've been benediction --"

"And you can *say* that even though you're clutching my little wing. I should've known this about you, boss."

"Please, not that epithet. Not... at this time."

Dick shows his teeth. "Dad...?"

"Tim. Tim called me 'Daddy --'"

Jason coughs --

Dick smiles *wider* -- "You couldn't be our father. I know that. But you're not quite our brother, yet. Are you...?"

Bruce's breathing is rough again, *heavy* again, and the way he's stroking Jason isn't soothing, at all.

Double-team now. "You know we'll show you how, B. You know we'll *keep* you."

"Jay --"

"And never, ever leave," Dick says, narrowing his eyes enough that they crinkle at the edges.

"Never alone, B. Never -- never fucking *cold*," Jason says, and remembers saying something like the same thing to Tim all those months ago --

Saying it again and *again*, because Tim wasn't just mourning his parents -- he was mourning a childhood he'd never fucking *had*. And Bruce...

Is he so different? Could he be? What the hell were the Waynes even *like*? Jason files that away to find out later and leans in, breathing against Bruce's ear --

Bruce *clutches* him --

Dick *sighs* -- "You don't know how hard it was to let other people fuck you, little wing."

Jason grunts and blinks -- "Fuck, Dick, that's -- uh. Yeah?"

"Letting other people have what I wanted more than -- almost anything. Seeing you come home with a smile on your face and just a little swagger in your walk -- I knew you liked it hard."

"I do -- fuck, I *really* do --"

"Bruce is... big. You'll use Clark's lube."

Jason licks his lips -- and *then* thinks about it. Just -- "You don't want him to stretch me."

Dick smiles down at him like a *wolf* --

And Bruce turns to nuzzle Jason's cheek, *obviously* only doing it enough not to dislodge Dick's hand in his hair. "I -- to have this night --"

"More, Bruce."

"Yeah, B. *Every* night."
"All you have to do is stay with us," Dick says, standing straight and tugging Bruce's hair *sharply*.

Bruce stands -- and lifts Jason *with* him. Fucking --

"Ooh. I'd almost forgotten how strong..." Dick sighs and lets go, stepping back. "Lift him into your arms, Bruce."

Oh, Jesus --

Bruce looks at *him* --

Fucking feathered *cape* -- "You heard the man, B -- fuck --" Right up into his arms like a *bride*, and Jason doesn't know what he'd thought Bruce would do, but --

"Oh -- yes, like that," Dick says, and his voice is gentle and *pleased* --

"Big Bird, we *gotta* talk about your kinks --"

But Dick is right there, looking down at Jason --

Looking *into* Jason --

Jason swallows and tries not to -- something, because --

"I didn't carry you like this when I could have. Let me live vicariously through Bruce," and now his voice is more *soft* than gentle, a little *unsure*, and Jason can't --

He's nodding, because he *can* do that, and he has to give Dick everything he can --

Dick has to be *sure* --

And now Dick's breathing is a little rough, his eyes are right back to being *wild* -- because Jason is putting out for him. Giving it *up* --

And so part of Jason says "I love you" just to *see* --

But the rest of him knew he'd get a kiss just like this -- hard and bruising enough that his lips are gonna swell right up again, that he's gonna fall right into everything Dick *wants* --

And everything he wants, too. Dick pulls back and Jason licks his lips. "Tim invited B to my bedroom tonight, Dick."

Dick's lips part just a *little* -- "I love the way your bedroom smells, little wing..."

And it's *possible* that Dick *didn't* want Jason to picture him walking in there just to breathe heavy --

But not all that probable.

"Yeah, uh... you know you can come in anytime --"

Dick stops him with two fingers on his mouth. "Only when you invite me. I need -- I need that."

Jason's *about* to protest that -- but then he realizes that Dick means he needs the *rules*. Just --

Something to keep things *sane*. And that -- he can go with that. Jason nods and licks Dick's fingers a little, tasting sweat and gauntlet --
Dick narrows his eyes a little, breathes through his mouth -- "I'm taking Tim tonight."

Something in Jason *twists* a little --

And Dick smiles at him. "I'll give him back."

"You know -- I *do* know that, but we gotta -- B freaked him *out* by needing him too much tonight."

The smile fades a little -- but then Dick nods, solemn and serious. "I'll be careful. I think, sometimes, that so long as I have you I'll always be able to be careful," and Dick strokes Jason's cheek before pulling back.

"I -- you'll always --"

"Shh, little wing," and Dick nods to Bruce. "Upstairs. Jason's room is your grand-uncle William's."

"All right. I -- perhaps I should dress --"

"Not tonight, b-- Bruce. Heh. Alfred is Alfred. He's ready for this."

"Dick --"

"Go on, Bruce. I promise to be *right* behind you," and Dick actually waggles his eyebrows a little, which is probably the most reassuring thing he *could've* done -- Dick is still Dick.

Bruce hitches Jason in his arms gently and *carefully*, and Jason considers offering to get *down* --

But Bruce is already moving, and Dick has his kinks, and Dick's gone without for too fucking *long* --

If Jason had *known* --

God, just -- every fucking *night* before he found Tim, and then --

Well, then he'd probably have wanted to protect Tim at least a little -- so sensitive and *small* -- but he never would've kept Tim *away* from Dick --

Unless he got scary every once in a while --

Bruce tightens his grip on Jason -- "Are you all right?"

"What? Uh -- yeah, just getting a little lost in my head, B --"

"Were you thinking of me, little wing?"

Jason closes his eyes -- "Yeah. A little. What I would've done if I'd known you needed me like this. Stuff like that."

Dick's laugh is too *quiet* -- "You mean you wouldn't have run away from the lying kidfucker...?"

Jason winces. There's... that.

"It's better this way, Jay. You came to know the best parts of me, and to realize that I wanted you with me for much, much more than one reason."
"I -- well, I was thinking you would've waited to come after me. Until after I'd settled down some."

"Your trust was a drug, little wing. You..." Dick sighs and does something that makes Bruce stop on the stairs, then leans over and smiles down at him. "Don't think of it as wasted time. And don't ever think that you could've given me more -- or better -- than you already have."

"Dick --"

"Think about Bruce, little wing. Think about showing me everything -- because you will."

"Oh -- fuck. Uh." And now *all* of them are looking at Jason's cock, maybe hoping it'll twitch *again*, and -- "Uh. This could make me kinda shy, guys."

Dick snorts --

"I know... I believe I can understand the feeling," Bruce says, and smiles ruefully into Jason's eyes. He's so -- "Fuck, you're pretty -- uh. I mean --"

"You meant *that*, little wing," and Dick reaches to ruffle Jason's hair. "He's beautiful."

"Yeah. I -- pictures didn't really -- he." Jason shakes it off. "What I'm saying, B? Is that you're turning me on by *existing*?"

"I believe I can understand that feeling, as well," and he's kind of *burning* into Jason's eyes -- "Please."

"Yeah. We -- we were gonna -- uh."

"Anything you wish. And everything you wish."

"Dick. Dick calls the shots --"

Bruce breathes in and out *roughly*. Just --

Jason sits up a little and wraps his arms around Bruce's neck. "Whatever Dick says, goes."

"Unless I go too far, little wing."

And Jason doesn't *want* to put that fucking *limit* on -- but he nods, anyway. "Yeah."

"Bruce... kiss him *while* you're jogging up the stairs."

"Yes," Bruce says, and the kiss is that soft one again, that *careful* one that shows exactly how much Bruce was paying attention to how well Jason reacted to the *first* kiss like that.

Jason hums into it and presses closer, mentally counting steps and trying to figure out if he could do what Bruce is doing right now without killing himself --

His pace is so fucking *even* --

The kiss is -- perfect. It's so damned affectionate and hungry --

Jason sighs into it and pushes his hands into Bruce's hair --

Bruce clutches him a little tighter --
But Bruce just holds him with one arm and opens it with the other --

"Slow down to a *brisk* walk, Bruce."

Bruce nods and does it, guiding them inexorably towards the stairs leading up to the bedrooms, and it's only weird that he knows the way as well as they do because Jason's getting his brain kissed out of his head.

*Licked* out of his head, because Bruce is exactly as dirty as Clark is *sometimes* --

God, his own fucking -- *musk* is what Clark calls it, and probably Bruce would use the same fucking word --

Jason needs --

He *can't* twist enough to get his cock some contact, but he wants to, *needs* to --

Needs to be on his knees *yesterday* --

Bruce is fucking his *mouth* --

Jason groans and opens wide for it, begs for it with everything he has --

Bruce clutches him *tighter* -- and stops.

"That's right. Me first, I think -- *don't* stop kissing until I say so," Dick whispers, and slips past them into Jason's bedroom.

Jason sucks on Bruce's lips a little --

"Oh. Little *brother*..."

And that was Dick's *normal* voice --

So it isn't a surprise to hear Tim gasping himself awake. "Dick --"

"Look at you..."

"Ah. Ah. Um."

"These *aren't* from the disguise closet, little brother. You... mmm. Is this for Bruce...?"

Is *what* for --

But then Bruce *turns* them, so Jason opens his eyes -- "Oh fuck." Tim's sitting up in bed in a training bra and panties. Little. Little so-called boy-shorts *panties* --

"Did I say you could stop kissing, little wing....?"

"Uh. Maybe?"

Dick turns and *glitters* at him. "The answer is no... but -- somehow -- I'm feeling merciful. Bruce, put him down on the right side of the bed."

"Yes, Dick."
Tim moans and looks like he has no idea what to do with his *hands*, like maybe --

"Don't -- you don't have to cover a goddamn thing, baby --"

"*Really* not," Dick says, moving close enough to stroke the shoulder straps of the bra. "You're so beautiful, little brother... little sister?"

Tim blushes *hard*. "It -- I wasn't expecting you tonight. Um. I --"

"Am I making you uncomfortable, Tim? Do you. Do you need me to go --"

"No! I mean. Ah. I... I didn't think. I wasn't thinking clearly. And I --"

"Maybe... maybe you weren't ready for me to see you like this?"

Tim looks *pissed* -- at himself. "It's ridiculous. You've seen me in drag countless times. You've *put* me in drag countless times --"

"But this isn't really drag," Jason says, and reaches over to cup Tim's knee. "Yeah?"

The blush gets *heavier* -- and Dick comes over to kneel on the bed near Tim. He pushes Jason's hand aside *gently*, then cups Tim's face and kisses his forehead. "My beautiful little brother. You'll always be who I want -- no matter who you grow up to be."

"You -- you can't promise that -- *mmph* --"

And it looks like Dick is *drinking* from Tim's mouth, like he's maybe feeding a little and loving even *more* --

His hair falls over both their faces --

Tim reaches up to grip Dick's forearms, but not to make him let go. He's holding on for dear *life*, and -- yeah. Waking up to Dick was exciting enough when he *wasn't* bringing them his hard-ons. Like *this* --

Tim moans and shudders *hard* --

And Bruce sighs hungrily. He's still standing by the side of the bed, naked and hard and *waiting* --

"Dick, can I have Bruce on me a little?"

Dick holds up a finger, then pulls out of the kiss to lick Tim's cheeks and lips, *suck* those lips -- "I can promise anything I like -- and I'll keep it, too."

"I should -- the freedom you've given me should be *enough* --"

Dick smiles and shakes his head. "If you want to start wearing dresses to school? I'm behind you one hundred percent. If you want to put a skirt on your uniform? I'm behind you one hundred percent. I can't let you grow your hair out unless you wear a cowl, but everything else...." Dick smiles even wider. "Now. Was this for Bruce or for Jay?"

"Mostly... mostly for Jay. I was going to... talk to him. About -- ah. Anyway. Ideally, he would've brought Bruce with him so we wouldn't have to speak... much."

"We can talk anytime you *want*, bro --"
"Or we could not talk. Definitely -- I think that's a possibility worth examining at length -- oh. You. Dick..."

Jason looks -- and Dick is cupping Tim's... chest. Breast. Chest --

Tim arches for it and licks his lips --

He's *not* wearing gloss or lipstick, and somehow that's even *dirtier* -- wait. Jason looks down, and... that really isn't --

It is. "You're wearing a *gaff*, baby?"

Tim blushes again and strokes over his smooth crotch --

"No, it's okay, I mean -- uh --"

"It's *wonderful*," Dick says, and he's smiling like a *horny* wolf *and* like Clark with fresh boy in his nose. Clark and Steph are the only ones *missing* -- "Let me touch you, little brother."

"Oh -- you. You already --"

"Let me touch you *everywhere*."

Tim moans and leans in --

Dick smiles again and *squeezes* Tim's -- breast --

"*Oh* --"

And Bruce grunts *loudly*.

Dick licks his lips. "Jason, get on your belly -- *not* your hands and knees -- and spread nice and wide."

Oh, *yeah*. Jason follows orders, reaching up to grab the weirdly prison-like bars of his headboard and spreading a little wider so that he can brush Dick's thigh with his calf.

Tim cries out *high*, but when Jason turns he can't *see* --

"You'll tell Jason everything about what I'm doing to Tim. You -- you don't know how much I've wanted to *share* you, Bruce."

Bruce pants. "I. He must have feared losing your trust --"

"Or his own control. Or both, I suppose," Dick says, sighing. "Tell him."

"Jay..."

"Kneel between his *legs* and tell him, Bruce."

The bed dips kind of fucking *hugely* --

And Bruce is massaging his back just like that. Just like --

"You -- you're way too fucking good at finding where I'm *tense*, B --"

"I'd like to apologize, but it would be a lie," Bruce says, solemn *and* happy somewhere deep
inside --

"Tell him," Dick says --

"Jay... Dick is cupping Tim's groin and... working his hand."

"Oh. Fuck. Through the gaff --"

"Exactly, little wing. How do you like it, Tim?"

"I like -- I like -- ah --" And then Tim makes that little *growling* sound, all high and sweet and *dark* --

"Dick has moved his hands to Tim's buttocks --"

Jason snorts. "You're totally not gonna say 'ass,' are you?"

Bruce hums like he's *deeply* amused -- and strokes two fingers down Jason's spine. "Probably not."

"Oh... not-boss. Heh. You're relaxing, aren't you?"

Bruce pauses with his hands on Jason's waist, squeezing firmly -- "Should I not?"

"Oh, I didn't say *that*," Dick says, and that's *his* hand stroking Jason's hip. "I just thought we'd all have to try a little harder. You fought me so *hard*..."

"He." Bruce swallows. "He didn't know enough about loss and fear. He didn't understand enough about mortality -- his own and the world's."

Dick's hand stops moving on Jason's hip.

Bruce grunts. "I'm sorry. For interrupting."

*Dick* grunts -- "That... you're forgiven. Provisionally."

"Yes, Dick."

Tim whimpers --

Bruce massages away Jason's tension *again* -- "Dick is kissing Tim softly. His chin, his sharp cheekbones --"

"Love those so fucking much --"

"He's beautiful, Jay. Like you. Like Dick --"

"He's fucking *pretty*. And now -- God, in that little bra and panties --"

"For you, Jay. For --"

"For fucking *us* -- *nnh*. Oh, yeah, B, your hands are *good* on my ass --"

"I'm. I'm glad..."

Jason licks his lips. "Dick, tell baby to do this a *lot*, would you?"
"I -- I *will*," Tim says -- and then gasps --

"Jay. Dick is pinching Tim's nipples through the brassiere--"

"And loving *every* second of it," Dick says, and the smile in his voice is the crazy-older-brother one, the one that always seemed so *innocent* -- "Should I fuck you like a woman, little sister...?"

"*Hnh* --! I -- *Dick* --"

"Shh, answer me. Should I lay you down and take you face-to-face? Slow and hard and serious...?"

Tim growls again, and Jason can *feel* him needing to lunge a little --

The mattress bounces --

Tim gasps --

And Jason can *just* see the top of Tim's head. He's on his back --

Bruce sighs. "Dick has pinned Tim --"

Tim groans --

"Tim... Tim is shivering so..." Bruce strokes Jason's back and sides and ass --

Bruce *spreads* Jason's ass --

*Jason* groans --

"Keep talking, Bruce," Dick says. "You know what you have to do."

"Yes. I. May I kiss Jay's skin."

"Not yet. Not -- not quite yet."

"Yes, Dick," Bruce says, and lets go of Jason's ass. "Jay, Dick is stroking Tim's body almost restlessly, almost... it seems as though Dick is *teaching* himself Tim's body --"

"Oh, I *really* am. What you may have missed, little wing, is that little brother shaved his long, lean legs."

Jason grunts and thrusts against the bed --

Dick sighs a laugh. "He likes it, Tim. You're making him hard. Just like me."

Tim moans -- "You -- Bruce, too --"

"Bruce *always*, little brother. Little sister. Tell me which...?"

Tim *sobs* -- "I -- I *can't* --"

"Shh, shh, it's all right. Answer my other question, then."

"Anything, Dick! Anything you *want*!"

Yeah, that --
"That's just --"

("Oh, Jay, please, please, just do what you *want*! Let me *feel* --")

Jason has fucking *reflexes* for that, and maybe that's why he's humping the fucking bed. Just -- "*Fuck* --"

"Oh, good instincts, Bruce," Dick says, and strokes a line down Jason's side. "We *don't* want Jay to come too fast."

"No, I. I would like to be. Inside. When he has his orgasm," Bruce says, and his hands are fucking *steel* on Jason's hips. He's holding Jason still and holding him *up* --

"Uh. Please?"

"What are you begging for, little wing?"

"Something? Uh. I gotta get fucked, Big Bird -- oh Jesus --" Bruce is fucking *gripping* him now --

And Dick hums. "Does that hurt?"

"Yeah. I. A little --"

'*Don't* let go, Bruce."

"But --"

"I like it, B, I fucking love it -- feels like you can fucking twist my pelvis the wrong way --"

"He *probably* can," Dick says. "Make a date to watch him work out sometime, little wing."

"Yeah, sure, okay --"

"Tim..."

Tim jerks a little --

And Bruce's hands *shake* on Jason's hips. "Jay... Dick has just...ground against Tim's groin."

Jason moans. "That -- that little hip action -- fuck, I wanna *see* --"

"Not yet, little wing. But you'll see, and feel... *taste*... Tim. Will you be my little sister tonight?"

"I -- I --"

"Say yes to me. Please say yes to me, little -- heh. Tim. Please *trust* me."

Tim takes that *shuddery* breath -- the kind that either means he's choking on his own cock or that he's freaking a little -- and Jason reaches out for Dick.

Dick grips Jason's fingers. "Too much, little wing?"

"Uh. Tim...?"

"Yes. Yes, Jay."

"Dick needs you to talk now, okay, baby?"
"It's -- very hard. Difficult. Ah. I already know you'll take -- all of me. And Bruce doesn't -- I mean, he doesn't have a baseline for me to be... shaken. Or -- you know what I mean."

"I do, baby, but -- Dick loves you. Dick's never gonna... he's *thrilled* right now. You could hear that in his voice."

Tim moans, low and sweet -- "Yes. Yes. I just -- I don't --"

"All of you, Tim," Dick says, and his breathing is rougher now. *Louder*. "I need everything you can give me."

"Oh, but -- you love your little *brother* --"

"I'm so glad you understand that now. I'm so..." Dick laughs softly, breathlessly --

Bruce loosens his grip -- and tightens it right back up again. "Dick is nuzzling Tim's mouth, Jay. He is... his hair is hiding much. It -- I find it to be a tease, and I've begun to worry about my control."

"You can handle this, Bruce. You *will* be fucking my little wing. I..."

"Dick... has not moved away from Tim's soft mouth. He is licking it gently. Perhaps... perhaps urging him to open it with only his tongue --"

"*Oh* -- *mmm* --"

Bruce flexes his hands on Jason's hips again. "Dick is kissing Tim... very deeply now. He seems almost to be feeding on... such beautiful boys, so -- Dick is smiling, perhaps for my... distraction. He's nodding -- and Tim has pushed Dick's hair out of the way. Tim is... very kind..."

Jason licks his lips again. "He knows you need him."

"You. All of you, please. Please."

Dick hums -- and the hum stops being muffled, so Jason knows he's pulling back --

"Baby... do you *want* it?"

"Yes -- I'm *frightened* --"

Dick sighs. "I can smell it -- just a little. It probably shouldn't be turning me on more, little -- Tim. But it is. Let me have you."

Tim gasps -- "Dick --"

"You know how to make the fear go away, Tim."

"I do. I --"

"You know what *I*... need."

Tim's moan sounds like it *hurts*, and Jason feels himself blush, feels himself need to *hold* Tim, taste him, bite him, hold him down --

And then Bruce flexes his hands *again*, and everything in Jason flips right over to needing --

He's gotta wait his *turn* -- but. "Baby... give it up."
"Jay, I -- "

"I *promise* it's gonna be okay. Never alone. Never --"

"Oh -- oh, yes, and you won't -- even if Dick -- Dick, *kiss* me -- *mm*!"

Bruce moans so *quietly* -- "They are... straining against each other --"

Tim *grunts* --

"Dick has pulled the shoulder- straps of the training bra down over Tim's arms. He. The upper part of Tim's pectorals --"

"His *breasts*, B. He -- he's showing off his *breasts* --"

Bruce groans and flexes his hands over and over. "I want. I want to make love to him. To her. To -- all of Tim --"

Dick shoves Tim further up the bed -- and Jason can see that Tim's nodding, see --

"Dick is making love to Tim's throat. So -- long and pale. Slender --"

"*Anything*, Dick --"

Dick growls --

"Dick has bitten Tim... very firmly. Tim seems stunned, or. Perhaps *struck* by the force --"

"Biting me, he's -- *please*, Dick, I do want it, I do want to be your... your *girl* --"

Dick growls again --

"Dick is shuddering, Jay. I believe he is attempting to find... control."

"Oh -- I *really* am. I -- heh. Bruce, the lubricant is in the drawer beside you. The glowing bottle is for you. The plain plastic one is for me."

Bruce squeezes so hard Jason cries *out* --

"Oh, little wing. He's gonna blow your *mind*.

"Uh, huh, okay, *please* --"

"May I kiss him --"

"Lube first," Dick says, and --

"Dick is making love to Tim's throat again, nuzzling and mouthing..."

Jason can hear the drawer opening fucking *slowly* -- "B, c'mon --"

Faster, then, and Bruce sets the Superlube down by Jason's waist. It's warm enough through the bottle to make Jason shiver, a little --

Dick hums what sounds like a thank-you --

Tim moans, and the way the mattress is moving a *little* means that he's writhing slowly, a little
"carefully* --

"Dick is... biting a path across Tim's throat. I would like to do that to you, Jay. I would like... your musculature is so broad, so... thick and perfectly-formed --"

"I'm just -- big. You're fucking *huge* --"

"I want your taste, Jay. I want to make love to you for... for many hours --"

Tim cries out and *jerks* beside him --

"Dick is kissing Tim's... breasts. He's being... gentle. More gentle --"

"Dick -- oh, *Dick* -- *ahn* --"

"His nipples must be... very sensitive..."

Jason moans and tries to hump the bed again -- it's not happening. "They -- they are. I can't -- you can't even suck on 'em for too long --"

"I want. May I suckle yours again --"

Dick grunts and *slurps* -- "His back, Bruce. *Mark* him."

"*Fuck*, Big Bird --"

"Do you -- mm. Have objections?"

"Fuck, no, I'm just trying to stay a little fucking *sane* here --"

Tim -- giggles. "*Don't*, Jay!"

And what he'll do for that giggle --

*Everything* he'd do for it --

Jason closes his eyes and grips the sheets a little. "B -- do me."

*
It's difficult to let go of Jason's hips, which are only lean in comparison to the rest of his broad and growing body. He --

A part of him is imagining Clark in his own position -- in a position Clark *has* been in before --

Jason had said he thought Clark *enjoyed* his growth, and implied a depth of perversion --

*Pleasurable* perversion --

Jason shudders -- "B..."

He is not the only one who has been made to wait, and Dick's order was clear. Dick himself is lapping at the stiff peak of Tim's nipple while Tim shivers and cards through Dick's hair --

Bruce wants to *share* that, but -- not yet.

He relaxes his grip on Jason's hips and leans in to kiss the back of Jason's neck. Gooseflesh forms immediately -- he was expecting a bite.

Bruce has been *told* to --

But he can kiss for a moment longer, lick for the salt of Jason's flesh, Jason's *hunger* --

"Bruuucie."

Bruce shudders. "I apologize, Dick."

Dick laughs quietly and licks his lips. "You can be gentle *another* time. Now do what I say."

That was, almost certainly, the voice Dick uses to command others while he is wearing Robin. That much is clear by the way both Jason and Tim are moaning, arching and *striving*. It makes Bruce wonder whether or not the Batman could ever be welcome in this bed --

But those thoughts bring him no closer to submitting as he must in order to *please*. Bruce bites the back of Jason's neck carefully, slowly increasing the pressure --

"Oh -- oh, *yeah*, B..." And Jason shudders and flexes his hands in the sheets --

He tenses more and more as Bruce increases the pressure -- but then he relaxes all over and begins to pant.

"Hurts. You -- Fuck, *more* --"

Bruce nods and gives himself over to the expanse of flesh before him, to the permission he has been given --

For bites near his obliques, Jason stretches.

For bites over his deltoids, Jason claws at the sheets.

For bites near to his spine --

"Hnh -- oh, c'mon, c'mon --"
"What do you need, little wing?"

Bruce blinks -- he hasn't been monitoring what's going on beside him. He looks --

Tim is a sprawl of himself, but not loose-limbed. His navel is wet, and his half-exposed breasts are tense and reddened --

And Jason is beginning to sound winded and *hurt*. Bruce kneels up and strokes Jason's sides, massages around his new bruises --

"Oh -- fucking *God*, Big Bird. He -- I'm covered in *bites*.*"

"*Bruce's* bites."

"Yeah. Fuck -- I need more. You *know* I need more --"

"I do," Dick says, and his voice is almost a *purr* --

Tim whimpers and arches --

Dick splays a hand on Tim's chest and pushes him back *down* --

"Oh, God, *Dick* --"

"Shh, it's okay, Tim, I've got you," and Dick smiles down at Tim for a moment, fond and loving and *dark* --

Tim plants his feet and spreads his legs --

And that's enough -- *more* than -- to make Bruce need to lean over and bite Jason in more places, to --

"Fucking -- *Bruce* --"

Bruce grips Jason's hips to keep him from thrusting again --

And Dick is panting. "All -- all of you. I -- heh." Dick shakes himself all over. "Open him, Bruce. One finger until you have the lube spread around, and then *immediately* two --"

"Oh -- *fuck*, Big Bird --"

"And think about me *starting* with two, little wing --"

Jason whines and *fights* against the hold Bruce has on his hips --

"Oh, that... that's beautiful," Dick says, laughing again and turning back to Tim --

"You feel... free," Bruce says -- he needs to *know* --

"I *am* free, Bruce. I -- my perfect brothers are right here, and so are *you*. I never thought -- of course I never thought there'd be anything like this --" Dick sighs a laugh and scrubs at his eyes before the tears can fully form -- "Tim..."

Tim whimpers. "Yes. Yes, Dick."

"Are you ready for me to take your panties off?"
Tim gasps, apparently at least slightly *shocked* --

No, there *is* reason for that. Someone like Tim would've built many walls between himself and his desires, between his intellect and his fantasies, and, of course, between his pragmatism and his *dreams*.

Dick is tearing down every one --

"Please, Dick. Please let me -- a few more minutes?"

Dick pants. "And if I don't want to wait so long?"

Tim immediately pushes his thumbs beneath the waistband of his panties and lifts his hips --

And Dick nods and pushes Tim back down by the simple expedient --

"Jay..."

Jason shudders. "I'm. I'm listening, B --"

"Dick is holding Tim down with a hand on his groin."

"Oh -- *Jesus* -- is Tim --"

"Tim is shaking and staring -- I. His eyes are very wide and grey in this light."

"Love that, love -- c'mon, B, don't make me *wait* anymore --"

"No, I. I fear your heat."

"You -- *what*?"

"I fear... what I will do once I feel your heat --"

"Uh."

Dick laughs -- "Don't worry so much, Bruce. *I* know you're not gonna do anything but finger Jason until he's *begging* for your dick."

Bruce opens his mouth -- and can't stop himself from trying to taste the air. Everything --

All of these beautiful *boys* -- young men. They want him as their brother. They want to *keep* him, and no one has ever --

Harvey has always kept such feelings *apart*, has never allowed himself the sort of greed Dick's family raises to a virtue --

And Bruce wants to wallow.

Perhaps that's why his hands don't shake on the warm and glowing bottle. Perhaps that's why the need to question what this lubricant is *made* of can be brushed aside so easily, so perfectly as Bruce slicks his fingers with warmth --

"Oh -- fuck, B, my body knows that *scent* --"

"Mine, as well," Bruce says, spreading Jason --
Tim cries out, and when Bruce looks --

"Jay. Dick has lifted Tim's legs. He -- he has rested Tim's ankles on his right shoulder."

"Oh -- both. I -- he always gets so *crazy* when I hold both of his ankles --"

"I know," Dick says, and the purr is back in his voice --

Tim cries out again, and Dick is massaging Tim's anus through his panties. That --

Bruce sighs and touches Jason there --

"*Oh* -- fuck yeah, B, do it --"

*In*, then, just one finger --

But Jason moans as if it's much more than that, and this is something to remember. He will not --

He doesn't have to *hurt* Jason this way --

Bruce holds his finger inside Jason until the moan turns to pants and shifts --

And then he begins to work it all around, noting the feel of Jason -- he is less smooth inside than Clark had been, and Bruce isn't sure if that's a function of greater activity or --

"*Bruce*.

"Yes. Yes, Jay --"

"Fuck me, get me ready --"

"Easy, little wing. You have to let Bruce... ease the way."

Jason groans and grabs the headboard again, rubbing his sweat-damp face against the sheets. "I know that. I -- he's in me, Dick."

Dick sighs and begins to tug Tim's panties down. "He'll be in you even more than that."

Jason blushes and *grinds* his face against the pillow -- and clenches.

Bruce hears himself groan --

Jason clenches *again* --

"*Jay* --"

"You -- you can't make me *wait* like this, B --"

"*Don't* beg yet, little wing --"

Jason groans again -- "Dick, *please* --"

And Tim screams, sharp and high.

"What -- what --"

"Jay, you..." Bruce shakes his head and licks his lips. "Dick has entered Tim with his thumb. I don't
believe he lubricated his finger --"

"*Fuck* -- Dick, don't punish him when I fuck up --"

"Was that punishment, Tim?"

Tim pants and stares up at Dick. His eyes are still wide, and his cheeks are flushed pink. As pink as his areolae...

"Answer me, little sister."

Tim shivers and blushes more deeply -- "It. It's supposed to hurt a little."

Bruce twitches and hears himself *grunt* --

"Oh, *Jesus*, that's --"

"Perfect," Dick says, and breathes deeply, *harshly*. "Perfect little girl..."

Tim blushes for that -- but also looks at Dick from under his lashes. The passion there is banked, but only *loosely*. Bruce thinks --

Bruce thinks he should be able to hear Tim's heart pound.

"Baby --"

"It hurt when you fucked me the first time, Jay..."

"Yeah, I --"

"And again -- you *hurt* me --"

Jason groans and *grips* the bars of the headboard. "Tim --"

"It's like -- every time --" Tim shakes his head. "It means more. You *know* that."

Bruce shudders. Dick pants. Jason *groans* --

"I get it, baby. I -- I'm relaxing over here --"

"Help him do that, Bruce," Dick says, and starts working his thumb inside Tim --

Tim's noises are sharp and *rhythmic* --

Dick never looks *away* from him -- no. No. Dick never looks away from *her*, and there is no difficulty in understanding why.

And Jason groans again and *writhes*. "Fuck, I -- I *know* that sound --"

"Will." Bruce swallows --

"No hesitation, Bruce," and Dick sucks a kiss to Tim's right ankle -- and his gaze glitters and almost seems to *spark* with command.

"Yes, Dick," and Bruce turns back to Jason, unsurprised to find himself using his free hand to massage away tension. "I want to know if you'll make such noises for me."
Jason grunts. "Uh. Let's find out? A lot?"

Tim giggles his way through a *cry* --

And Bruce can already feel greater looseness. Greater *welcome*. He licks his lips -- and remembers Dick's command. Still, it *must* be better to pull out first --

"Oh, *Jesus*, Bruce, *please* --"

"No *begging* -- ooh, I see why. You know what you have to do, Bruce."

"*Yes*," Bruce says, rubbing his fingers together utterly unnecessarily and pushing in with two --

"*Unh* -- fuck, *yeah* --"

"Jay..." Bruce shakes his head and massages away tension in his lower back --

Presses on bite-marks --

And Jason is far too strong for Bruce to even consider trying to hold him still with one hand, but there is desire --

There is pleasure in watching him *grind* against the sheets --

"Oh, little wiing..."

"*Fuck* -- Dick, what -- I'm listening --"

"The more you grind? The longer I make you wait for Bruce's dick."

Jason grunts and stops grinding immediately, holding himself still and tense --

Shuddering for the feel of Bruce thrusting in --

Moaning for the feel of Bruce thrusting *deep* --

"*Dick*!" And Tim's voice is high and hungry enough that Bruce *must* look --

Oh... "Dick has removed his thumb from Tim's rectum and is lubricating his fingers while Tim stares almost fixedly."

"Fuck, sometimes I think you can *hypnotize* Tim that way --"

Tim snorts and glares at Jason, glittering and hot --

"I believe..." Bruce crooks his fingers testingly --

Jason groans --

Yes -- "I believe Tim will take revenge on you for that statement, Jason."

"God, I fucking hope so -- oh -- ohn -- Dick, can I have --"

"Faster...?"

"*Yes* --"
"Will you come?"

"Uh. I -- no? No."

Dick's laugh is as sweet and musical as, perhaps, Tim wishes her own could be -- and then he pushes *deep* with his first two fingers --

And Tim screams and *shakes*, attention pulled away from everything *but* what Dick is doing --

Her eldest brother --

Her *lover* --

Bruce swallows and forces himself to keep his thrusts steady, *even* --

"God, fuck, *tell* me --"

"She..." Bruce breathes. "She has thrown her head back --"

"Oh, *baby* --"

"Ahn! *Ahn*!"

"She is... lifting her legs from Dick's shoulders so that she can spread them wide. Wider. She is... offering herself --"

"She's giving me everything now. Aren't you, little sister?"

"Yes! *Oh*!"

Jason moans and grinds once --

 Stops himself --

Shudders what seems to be almost *painfully* hard -- "She's always *wanted* to, Dick --"

"I *listened* to those conversations, little wing --"

"*Fuck* --"

And Tim whimpers and stares --

And Dick smiles sharply once more and begins to rock his fingers, to *take* more than prepare -- "Every one of them, little sister. Every *moment* of them."

Another whimper --

"Clark would -- mm, yeah, clench for me again --"

Tim shivers and cries out --

"Good girl. *Beautiful* girl. Clark would *notify* me whenever the conversation took that kind of turn -- to make sure I *knew* to pay attention. Clark *tried* to give you both to me, tried so hard..."

"Have to -- have to fucking *thank* him," Jason says, and there's a pause as the brothers turn to the windows --
Bruce pauses, as well --

They turn to the door --

And then Dick laughs and starts thrusting --

"Nnh -- *please* --"

"*Whatever* you're doing, Clark? *Know* that you're appreciated," Dick says --

"*Seriously*, yes," and Jason clenches around Bruce's fingers --

"Don't make him wait anymore, Bruce. I need to hear him make... mm. A *lot* of noise."

"Oh, fuck --"

"As you say," and Bruce shifts until he can put pressure on the space between Jason's shoulder blades --

"Oh, God, I fucking *love* -- that -- oh -- oh, God, *Bruce* --"

"Yes," Bruce says, helpless to the sound of his name in Jason's voice, to the fact --

He's being *pleasing* --

Will he grow accustomed to this? Had Dick's Bruce? Is that *possible*? It seems as though it would be somewhat *miraculous* -- though less so than Jason, who is a feast for the senses. The scent of his sweat is strong enough for a fully-adult male, and the way his muscles work just beneath the skin --

The way he moans and shifts *shamelessly* as he tries to follow Dick's commands --

Bruce flares his nostrils in an attempt to get more of him, to have --

Oh, he's shouting --

*Shuddering* --

"*Please*! Please, I'll come!"

Bruce grunts and feels himself twitch, jerk, *need* -- "I want. I want that --"

Except that Dick's hand is *iron* on Bruce's wrist. "No, you don't."

Bruce shivers and stops thrusting -- oh, he was rubbing Jason's prostate. That -- the shiver is more of a shudder. He blows out a breath. "I'm sorry, Dick."

Dick hums -- and turns to *survey* his brothers.

Jason is panting and doing his best to writhe in *place*.

Tim is --

Oh, Dick is still thrusting with his other hand, but Tim is trying to swallow her noises --

Tim is gripping the bars of Jason's headboard and panting, high and --
So sweet --

She is --

"You're forgiven, Bruce. I didn't tell you *not* to do that. But... tell Jason about his baby."

Jason groans and cuts himself off --

*Starts* to reach toward Tim and stops himself --

Clenches and beats his face against the pillow -- and Bruce has to catch him by his hair, hold him --

"Oh, fuck *me* -- *nnh* --" And Jason's clench is vicious, sharp --

Jason moans and *shakes* --

And only Dick's hand on his wrist *could* keep him from thrusting more. "I *want* --"

"I know, Bruce. But trust me -- we'll *all* enjoy it more if you make Jason wait to come until your dick's in him."

Bruce licks his lips. "You are... gentle."

Dick laughs softly -- and does something with his other hand which makes Tim go rigid and drum her feet even as she bites her soft lip -- "Sometimes."

Bruce nods. "I will remember that," he says, and tugs Jason's hair --

"I'm listening!"

Bruce growls because he can't *help* himself --

"Oh -- God. *believe* me, I'm listening --"

"Tim is -- restraining her sounds."

"Oh -- God. Baby --"

"Can't -- you -- you always *lose* it faster when I'm loud --"

"Because it's fucking *hot*. And -- and you can't think about me right now."

Tim makes a questioning sound that turns into a sharp and *brief* cry --

Another --

*She* growls, and it's abortive and loud enough to make Dick *pant* --

"You gotta -- you're *Dick's* little girl tonight --"

"Oh -- fuck, *Jay*!"

Dick's hand trembles on Bruce's wrist -- but only for a moment before he firms his grip. He doesn't speak --

And Jason licks his lips. "It's what you said, baby. It's what you *want*."
"Oh -- God. Yes. Yes, I -- big brother..."

Dick's grip becomes *painful*. "I'm right here, little sister. What do you need?"

Tim pants and stares --

Bruce cards through Jason's hair. "Tim is... I can almost feel her shudders from here. It is, I believe, a difficult question."

Dick smiles. "A necessary one, though. Tell me, little sister. Give me that, too."

Tim moans -- croons. "I. I..."

"Her blush is deep, Jason. As lovely as every other part of her..." Bruce licks his lips. "I want to watch you making love with her. I want to learn more about cosmetics so that I could, perhaps, someday apply it for her --"

"'Someday,' Bruce...?" And Dick *strokes* Bruce's wrist with his index finger --

And Tim stares *into* him --

And Jason is still, and tense, and *waiting* --

They're *all* waiting -- and Bruce is blushing for so many reasons, so many --

The scent of this room, as if there could never be anything stronger than love and good, restful sleep.

The brothers reaching for him with all of themselves.

The man down the hall *willing* this for him.

The --

Clark, and everything --

Stephanie, and the *challenge* of her, the *chance* he'd never thought he could ever have --

Everything he's *wanted* to say, and feel, and *show* --

The *emptiness* in him where the Bat --

Where the *voice* had been, pushing him --

*Riding* him, as Harvey had said --

He had ridden himself. He had -- he'd *known* that, but here, in this moment where he's being watched and *waited* for --

*Hoped* for --

To never be alone again. To never shiver in his bed at dawn and *ache*. To always know he's *connected* to people who can --

Who can love him for precisely who he is -- and for everything he can become.

Bruce feels himself break out in fresh sweat, opens his mouth -- but only a croak comes out, desperate and broken, so --
"We're here," Dick says, and his voice is so *soft* --

"I need. I need a lot of things," Tim says, and her smile is rueful and quiet. "You're -- well, obviously you're not a thing, but -- oh..."

And for a moment Bruce doesn't know why she'd stopped -- but then he realizes that he's blushing --

Shaking --

"B... God. I can *feel* you. I -- can't you feel us?"

"Oh -- I want you to --"

"I *need* you to," and Dick strokes from Bruce's wrist over his forearm, up to his biceps --

His grip is so strong, his hand so *hard* --

"I feel," Bruce says, and shudders --

Needs --

"I feel you. I need -- I've been... so *empty* --"

Dick squeezes hard. "Never again."

Jason and Tim are silent, but the weight of their patience, their desire, their --

"I never thought. I never thought I could inspire... hope."

Dick grins at him.

Tim raises a *thoughtful* eyebrow --

"Well, that was kinda fucking *asstarded* of you, B. You're a *hero*. It's in the *regs*.")

Bruce coughs a laugh and smiles, feeling it painful on his face and in his chest, tight in his *throat* --

"Yes," he says, and it's another croak, and it comes with the sense of the world shifting --

His *self* shifting --

There is an emptiness within him that's *contracting*, faster and faster until it seems as though he should be trying to equalize the *air* pressure --

Tim's smile is much better.

Dick's smile is brilliant and triumphant at *once* --

"Heh. Admit it, B -- it's totally my ass," Jason says, and -- wiggles it.

Tim hums. "Don't steal my moves, Jay."

"It's an *homage*, baby --"

"It *is*... inspiring," Dick says, leaning close and kissing Bruce's cheek. "What do *you* need, hmm?"

"This. You." Bruce shakes his head. "All of you. Please. And -- perhaps if I could somehow
convince Stephanie --"
"To fuck you....?"

Bruce blushes again. "I was hoping... to make her laugh again. And -- repeatedly."

Dick's expression softens. "I'm pretty sure you'll be able to manage that -- mm. I'm still not calling you 'boss.'"

"Please -- no."

Dick breathes deep and closes his eyes. "'You have been everything to me, and more than I could ever imagine. You have been lover, and friend, and partner. You have been inspiration and teacher. You have been my companion on the path we walked together. You have been my brother of the spirit,' and Dick's voice is low, grating, *gritted* --

And the way Jason and Tim stiffen --

Bruce breathes deep and reaches to cover Dick's hand with his free one. "Those were his last words to you."

"His last words period," Dick says. "I tried to get him to stop, to wait, to hold on to his *strength*..."

He shakes his head. "I believe. I believe I would've told you that you were my strength."

Dick smiles at him, and there is a shine in his eyes which speaks of both old pain and love, so *much* -- "Brother."

Bruce stiffens and blinks. "Dick --"

"Brother," Jason says, and clenches *viciously* hard around his fingers -- "Oh, *yeah* --"

"Brother," Tim says, and puts his ankles back on Dick's shoulders -- his toenails are painted a pale coral. "I believe three is the magic number...?"

"You. All of you --"

"You *had* to see it coming, B."

"Did I?"

"My little wing never lies, Bruce. Mainly because he's *terrible* at it."

"Hey, I think that proves I have excellent fucking *character*, Big Bird --"

"Are you saying I *don't*?" And Tim's voice is, Bruce believes, closer to *Tink's*--

"Oh... Tim. Not yet. Please," Dick says, moving his hand from Bruce's biceps to her -- his? -- ankle.

Tim gasps -- "I'm sorry --"

Dick shakes his head. "If you need to change --"

"I *don't*!" And Tim sits up, bending herself in half to reach for Dick's face --

Dick sucks her fingertips for a moment --
"Oh -- Dick --"

"Tell me what you need."

Tim blushed deeply and turned *slightly* toward Jason before turning back. "You. I -- my big brother."

Dick smiled and *licks* her fingertips. "Be specific."

Tim moans --

Jason *shudders* --

And Bruce gives himself over to stroking the sweat-slick skin of Jason's back with his free hand, to feeling his *heat* --

"I'm good, B --"

"You're more -- you're beautiful -- I want you."

Another shudder -- and Jason spreads his arms until he's gripping bars that are further apart than the ones he had been gripping. And he spreads his legs as well. "I'm yours just as soon as Dick says so --"


She moans once more -- "You, I want you, I want to be yours. I want -- to sit on your lap again --"

Dick pants harshly -- "Yes."

Tim nods and *flushes*. "I want you to be... I want you to fuck me the way you fucked Jay --"

"I don't -- normally -- fuck women that way, little sister."

Tim grunts, penis twitching as she clutches at the sheets. "Oh -- oh."

"I do it harder," Dick says, licking his lips and smiling. "Dirtier, too."

"Hnh -- I --"

"Call it... call it the inevitable result of learning to love women with an Amazon and a Tamaranian."

Jason snickers --

And Tim nods slowly and *hungrily* --

And Bruce wants, badly, to ask about Owl, about Barbara *Gordon* -- and he will. He --

He knows that he *can*, nearly whenever he *wishes* --

"Brothers," he blurts, helplessly, and Jason and Tim jump slightly --

And Dick smiles more broadly. "Exactly, Bruce. Tell Jason about the beautiful girl currently learning what it *means* to be mine."

Jason grunts and *thrusts* against the bed -- once. "God -- fuck -- I'm sorry --"
"Shh," Dick says, and strokes from Tim's ankle to her buttock, squeezing and *lifting* --

Bruce swallows. "He is lifting her by the buttock. He... like so," Bruce says, and squeezes Jason's buttock roughly --

"Oh -- fuck, I wanted Dick to do that to me so *much* --"

Dick growls. "I had to grow up a little more, Jay. You know that now."

"Yeah. Yeah, I do," and Jason clenches once --

Twice --

And the third time he groans, shudders all over -- "Please more, B..."

Bruce squeezes *hard* --

'"*Nnh* --"

"Tim seems... almost drugged by the expression in Dick's eyes, and, perhaps, by the slow and steady rock of his fingers. She has begun repressing her sounds once more, and her control is... tempting. Maddening --"

"More the latter for *me* --"

'"*Hnh* -- I'm sorry! I didn't mean to that time --"

"Then why, little sister?"

"I don't -- I don't want to stop being able to hear *you*, Dick -- *ahn* -- oh -- *please*!"

"Hard, like this, little sister..."

"Oh, *God* --"

"And... I'll make it easy on you. Are you ready?"

"Yes, please!"

"You have to be *quiet*... but you *can't* be silent."

Her legs *shake* -- "Yes, big brother, *please* -- oh -- oh, *yes* --"

"And you're not allowed to come."

"She is nodding almost frantically, and I... Dick."

"Yes, brother?"

The ache -- "There is an ache, diffuse and sweet at once..."

Dick grins --

Bruce shakes his head. "Please, may I --"

"Give Jason *this* rhythm... but don't touch his prostate."
"Thank you --"

"Thank you thank you -- oh, *Jesus*, Dick, like *that*?"

"Mm-hmm. Tim..."

"Nnh -- please -- please make me do something *else*, big brother!"

Dick sighs. "You don't know how crazy you make me -- bend your *right* knee back to your chest -- oh, yes."

"Bruce -- *Bruce*, tell me how *Dick* looks!" And Jason sounds desperate, hungry --

He's tense and *straining* --

And Dick turns just enough -- to make it easy for Bruce.

"Jay... he looks wild inside, dark and *pridefully* hungry --"

"I know I'm gonna get what I want, Jaybird..."

"*Please* --"

"Yes, *please*!"

"Like *this*, Bruce," and Dick takes Tim harder, *faster* --

"Yes!"

"*Unh* -- oh, fuck, fuck, *fuck*!"

And Bruce feels himself flushing, feels --

He's hot all over, aching *less* diffusely --

It feels as though he has been erect for some improbably *crippling* length of time --

But he knows he will get what he desires, as well. He knows that he'll get so *much* from these brothers --

*His* brothers, so accepting, so welcoming --

And Bruce presses down between Jason's shoulder blades again --

And Jason shouts loudly, shouts out his *air* until he's gasping and shaking --

And Tim is crying out and *holding* her leg to her --

"Tim... Tim's left breast is fully exposed now. Her nipple seems to be erect to the point of pain --"

"*Fuck* -- I'll *come* --"

"*Stop*," Dick growls, and does just that --

And Jason whines --

And Tim *whimpers* --
And Dick shows his teeth without looking away from Tim. "Are you ready, Bruce?"

Bruce's penis spasms violently, and he feels as erect, as *slick* as he's ever been -- "*Yes*.

Dick laughs again -- "With me. On three, two, one --" And he pulls out slowly --

And Bruce does the same slightly faster to accommodate his longer fingers --

And Tim croons --

And Jason *yanks* on the headboard --

"Pull him up onto his knees... but keep his head *down*.

"Yes, Dick," and Bruce does just that, nostrils flaring at the waft of fresh scent from Jason's penis, his pre-ejaculate --

"*Fuck*, Dick --"

"Shh."

Jason is shuddering and rocking, urging with his body, as Bruce uses more of the lubricant on his penis, as he sighs for the warmth --

As he lets himself tense and strain *with* his brothers for the sound of Dick stroking himself, *slicking* himself for the beautiful girl there, just there --

Her *scrotum* is shaved --

And Jason grinds at the *air* --

He stops himself and shudders again --

"*Please* --"

"Oh, *please* --"

"Right now," Dick says, and his voice is breathy and low as he reaches out with his left hand --

Bruce takes it with his right and squeezes *hard* --

"God, *yes* -- but," and Dick laughs and twists free. "Spread yourself for Bruce, little wing."

"*Fuck* yeah --"

"Spread yourself for *me* -- oh, good girl. Now bend your other leg back -- mm." And Dick touches the head of his penis to Tim's anus --

"*Dick*!

Bruce *presses* the head of his penis to Jason --

"Don't move, Bruce. Don't --" And Dick groans as he pushes deep within Tim in one long *thrust* --

Tim whimpers and beats at the bed without changing the position of her legs --
"Jay. Jaybird... *nn*..."

"I'm. I'm listening, Dick --"

"*Take* him."

"Fuck, fuck --" And Jason *drives* himself back with a *harsh* cry --

Bruce is too *stunned* to make a noise -- no, he's gasping, clutching at air --

No, he clutches Jason's *hips* --

Jason's cry cuts off with a *grunt* --

He is shuddering in Bruce's hands. He is flushed and flexing, still *straining* --

"*Jay*.

"B -- B --"

"Does it hurt --"

And Jason's laugh is desperate and *sunny* -- and turns into another cry when he clenches --

When Bruce *flexes* --

"Oh -- oh, *look* at you, Bruce," and Dick's eyes are glittering again. "You're holding yourself so *still*.

Bruce swallows. "So. So are you."

"I really am, but... mm. Tim isn't."

"She's... clenching?"

"Over and over and -- mmm." He turns to her. "Are you trying to make me come faster, little sister...?"

She shakes her head, eyes wide and so *full* --

"Oh, I see," Dick says, and grips her scrotum *hard*. "You're trying to start the show early."

"Unh -- *please*!"

"God, fuck, what *she* said --"

Dick laughs. "Once I start... I won't stop."

"Please, big brother --"

"Once *Bruce* starts, I won't *let* him stop."

Jason moans and beats his head against the pillow -- no. Bruce catches him by the hair again --

"Oh, *Jesus* --"

Jason clenches and *shouts* again --
And it's everything within him, every *fragment* of control he has not to thrust, to move, to *take* -

And Bruce realizes that the shudder he's feeling is his *own* --

"Please, big brother, I *need* you!"

"Can you take it, little sister?"

"I can -- I *will*!"

"Will you cry for me...?"

Tim rears back. "Do the women you fuck *usually* cry?"

Dick laughs breathlessly -- "Not even a little... but none of them were my beautiful little sister. My perfect little girl. You waited so *long* for me..."

Tim groans. "I. I'm not sure --"

"I guess we'll just have to find out," Dick says, and grips the backs of Tim's knees. "*Now*, Bruce."

And there is fear for the way his hips *snap* to respond, for the way his body simply falls in --

Slides in --

*Shoves* --

"*Bruce*!"

"*Yes*, Jay --"

"Oh -- God, you don't feel like *Clark* --"

Dick gasps a laugh. "I -- *elaborate* on that, little wing," and then he begins --

Oh, so *hard* --

Tim's sounds are almost *strangled* --

"Bruuuuce..."

"Dick, I --"

"You know what to do."

Bruce swallows and wipes sweat from his temple --

Dick *yanks* Bruce's hand to his mouth and licks, groans --

Takes Tim *harder* --

And pushes Bruce's hand away again. "*Do* it, Bruce!"

And Jason's *scream* is what lets him know more *purely* that his body isn't under his control --

That his body wants everything *Dick* wants --
They're rocking the *bed*, banging the headboard against the wall --

Jason and Tim are so *loud* together, and most of Bruce's mind is with them, yelling and *begging* because this --

The slap of his scrotum against Jason's --

The *incredible* friction, so much more than what had been *possible* with Clark --

"Jaybird. *Talk*.

"Fuck, fuck -- you -- I *forgot* --"

"How -- how is it *different*," Bruce says, because he needs this, as well, needs it for himself *and* for Dick --

Needs it perhaps as much as he needs -- no. Nothing could ever be as blinding, as *staggering* as this motion, this welcoming heat --

Nothing save making love with everyone else he has come to know -- and know better -- these past few days. It -- there is a *smile* on his face, and he can do nothing about it save acknowledge the *lustful* wonder on Dick's face --

The blankly pleased *desperation* on Tim's -- no, that belongs to Dick right now, but --

Bruce knows, now, one of the ways to *put* that look on Tim's face.

Just as he knows how to make Jason grunt rhythmically and *claw* at the sheets --

How to --

Oh, he *sobs* --

And Dick *grunts* -- "*Do* it, Jay."

Jason cries out -- "Clark -- Clark doesn't --" Jason groans and shudders --

 Strikes out with his palm and *bangs* the headboard --

And Dick laughs breathlessly and hums. "Doesn't hurt you, maybe?"

"Not -- not like this -- so fucking *big* -- *unh* -- *unh* --" And Jason *fights* against Bruce's hold --

Tries to work his -- his *hips* --

"Oh -- *don't* let him go, Bruce --"

Bruce growls and tightens his grip. "*Thank* you, Dick," and perhaps it shouldn't be easier to hold to the rhythm Dick is setting now that he's forcibly *stilled* Jason --

Jason sobs again --

Strikes at the headboard hard enough --

No, that crack was Bruce's own knuckles. Jason is strong, demanding --
Needy for *this* --

Bruce looks --

And he knows with all of himself that Dick would be holding Tim still if he had the strength for it, knows that this is *why* -- or part of why -- he'd ordered her to bend her leg back --

Even so, she is rocking into his thrusts, panting and crying out, gazing with love and need, pain and *sweetness* --

Dick *growls* --

And his rhythm becomes brutal, vicious --

*Bruce* pants -- "Dick --"

"*Do* it, Bruce. *My* rhythm!"

And Jason screams --

And screams louder when Bruce *does* match Dick's rhythm --

And reaches back to grip Bruce's hip so tightly; his hand is so *warm* --

His palm is slick with sweat and his grip will bruise as much as Bruce's will, and there's so much Bruce wants to say, wants --

He wants to be able to *express* himself in this moment, to share the pleasure that has been shared with him, to *offer* more than his desperate --

Desperate *grunts* --

And Dick and Tim scream *together* --

Dick's rhythm *randomizes* --

Bruce pants and *stares* -- and knows that he's staring at one of the men who live at the heart of Dick, of *Robin*. There is strain and pleasure and hunger, there is *brutality* --

There is --

Something like the *old* definitions of ecstasy, something religious and *frightening* --

And Tim wails --

Arches and *jerks* --

"She -- she is ejaculating, Jay --"

"I *know* that sound -- oh, fuck, *fuck* --"

"Jay, I -- *Dick*, let me -- let me turn Jason *over*, *please* --"

Dick groans and squeezes his eyes shut -- he opens them again immediately and nods, wordless and *obviously* starved for every moment of Tim's pleasure --

Bruce watches her slump, watches her *moved* by Dick's thrusts --
And then he can only watch Jason, stroke his tensing, flexing back as *he* thrusts --

No, he has *permission*. "*Jay* --"

"I heard -- I know -- please just do it *fast* --"

"*Yes*", Bruce says, pulling out as *steadily* as he can --

Jason cries out and beats at the headboard more --

And then reaches back to grip it once Bruce flips him --

Wraps his powerful legs around Bruce's *chest* -- "*Do* me!"

And Bruce gasps for the *ease* of slipping back in, for the sense that this is something which can be done with no effort, no *force* --

But Dick growls and makes the gesture for 'harder' --

And Bruce realizes that he'll never be able to use it -- or see it -- without thinking of Jason's wild scream --

His own *bellow* --

And the *vise* of pleasure driving him on as if his moment of gentleness was a mistake, an illusion, a dream --

No, *this* is the dream, this pleasure and the ability to meet Jason's beautiful eyes, so wide and *brave* as Bruce thrusts --

Braces himself above --

And Jason is so large for his age, so strong and so beautiful --

Bruce *thrusts* --

And realizes that he *is* speaking, that he's offering -- brief snatches of adoration for Jason --

Jason is shaking his *head* --

"*Please*, Jay!"

And the clench makes them both cry out, makes Jason squeeze his eyes shut and roll his head back and forth on the pillow --

Grunt and reach for Bruce's shoulders --

*Beat* at Bruce's shoulders --

"Yes -- oh -- you're so very --"

And Dick shouts and throws his head back --

Tenses hard enough that it seems *dangerous* --

He's still everywhere save his *raggedly* pumping hips --
"Oh, *yes*, big brother!"

And the realization that Dick is ejaculating --

That he has *found* his pleasure --

He's thrusting *faster* --

"Nnh -- *nnh* -- *your* turn, B!"

"I don't -- I don't wish --"

"Heh. *No* choice," Jason says, and *clutches* Bruce's chest with his thighs --

"*Oh* --"

And digs his heels against the small of Bruce's back --

"*Please* --"

"*Fuck* me!"

There is --

There is a need to rebel against that, to slow -- he can do nothing of the kind, and *that* is an ache, that --

Dick has covered Tim and is kissing her, nibbling at her lips and apparently paying no attention --

Bruce drops and kisses Jason hard, slipping partway out and taking his mouth --

His beautiful *mouth* --

And he can't stop himself from grinding, and he can't stop himself from slurring his gratitude, his need --

Jason kisses him *back*, cupping Bruce's face and turning the taking into lovemaking, soft and so *loving* --

Bruce shudders --

Bruce grinds *harder* because he must, because it makes Jason grunt into his mouth --

Grip his hair --

"B. Come in me."

"J-Jay --"

"Do it. Fill me up."

Bruce groans and shudders, shifts --

He shoves his hands under Jason's shoulders and grips him *that* way --

"Oh, *yeah*, B, *here*," and Jason's rocks his hips, grinds *with* him --
Bruce can't *stop* shuddering --

And he doesn't want to. Jason needs to know precisely what he does to him, precisely what he makes Bruce *feel* --

He's looking into Bruce's *eyes* --

He's smiling and *wincing* at once --

And Bruce has to kiss him again, has to fight against the onrush of color and power and *heat* to make it a good kiss, a *pleasurable* --

He must always *please* --

"Now there's *something*..." And Dick laughs from next to Bruce, *close* to Bruce --

Bruce can't stop kissing, he mustn't --

"Oh, yeah. *This*," he says, pushing two slick fingers *deep* --

Bruce *bellows* again --

Jason snickers breathlessly and grinds *faster*, clutches --

He is --

He is held *between* --

"Oh... mm. I always pictured your scrotum a little hairier than this, Bruce," Tim says from Bruce's other *side* -- "But I can't say I pictured it any *bigger*." And she squeezes hard --

So --

Bruce's thrusts have no rhythm, at all --

Bruce's mind is --

He can't see anything but Jason's *smile* --

He can't --

"*Brothers* --!"

"*Fuck*... yeah --"

Darkness --

The darkness is as explosive, as all-encompassing --

He has never been so *warm* --

And he has never, ever screamed quite like this. There is a part of him which only wants to blush and demur, but it has no power over this pleasure, this incredible rough *push* --

*Brothers* --

The --
And there is a moment of nothing at all --
And then, abruptly, there is a moment where he's aware of himself as dead *weight*. That can't --
He pushes himself up on shaking arms --
His brothers are still --
And Jason is waggling his eyebrows and pointing at his powerfully erect penis.
Bruce licks his lips. "I want. I want to take you in my mouth."

"*I* got no objections to that. Big Bird?"

Dick *crooks* his fingers --
Bruce shouts and *spasms* --

"Mm... we'll revisit that. And no, I don't have any objections, since Bruce's performance was *nearly* perfect, and we all know how much he'd just *love* to improve, yes...?"

Jason snickers --
Tim hums --

And Bruce pants and licks his lips. "Please."

"Breathe," Dick says, but only waits for Bruce to gain a *modicum* of control before he begins pulling out. It's something to shiver for, to make promises to *himself* for --

And Jason is breathing deeply, too. Jason is *ready* for him --
But Bruce still needs to kiss him again, to suck his lips and examine his crooked tooth with his tongue --

Jason pushes him away -- "I don't have enough control for that, B."

That --
Tim hums again. "I think you just gave him a fantasy of kissing you until you came, Jay."

Jason opens his mouth --
His breathing *stutters* --

"Uh. Yeah, we can try that -- not now! Definitely not now."

Bruce stares at Jason's swollen lips. "If you're sure."

"Uh. Uh. Dick --"

Dick laughs softly. "It's a *school* day tomorrow, little wing."

Jason moans and bangs his head against the pillow. "Right. Right. Get out and *suck* me!"
Bruce nods and pulls out slowly and carefully, noting how smooth Jason's rectum *isn't* --

He will need time to *heal* from this, for all that his wince is mild. Bruce will remember that when next he wishes to lose himself this way --

As opposed to *this* way, with his lips pressed to Jason's thick and twitching penis --

His tongue --

Jason sits up, moans and shoves his hands in Bruce's hair, and Bruce is grateful for every wasteful, *dithery* moment that kept him from asking Alfred to cut it for him --

And more grateful for the rude and *needy* pulls --

"Jesus, Jesus, sorry, but --"

"Yes," Bruce says, and swallows Jason's penis, *holding* it there and noting the faint soreness doing this with Harvey had left behind. It's a counterpoint to the rest of the experience, to the sense of being both filled and *watched*. Perhaps --

Tim strokes Bruce's ear with her small, quick fingers. "Use your tongue more, Bruce."

Bruce shivers and obeys --

And Jason immediately begins to rock -- no, *thrust* -- "Oh -- oh, fuck, B, uh. I hope you weren't expecting. Uh. Uh. *Nn* --"

Bruce matches Jason's rhythm, which isn't fast enough to be challenging -- yet. He reaches for Jason's hips and strokes, studies -- yes. He presses lightly on the bruises he'd left --

"*Fuck* -- ohn --"

Dick sighs. "I really can't -- mm. Let me," he says, and moves behind Jason, cupping his pectoral muscles -- and twisting Jason's nipples --

"Oh, *yeah*, oh -- but -- I need --"

"Me, Jay...?" And Tim's voice -- no, her *manner* has become that of a much older and more experienced woman. There's a *vast* desire to *study* -- but not if it means the loss of Jason's penis.

"Uh. Uh. What do I *call* you, baby?"

For a moment the question is *confusing* --

But Dick laughs. "*Excellent* question, little wing. Are you gonna answer it, little sister?"

"Oh, Jesus, baby, that smile always makes me want your *teeth* on me somewhere --"

Bruce bares his own teeth --

"But that's good, too! Oh, yeah, *yeah* -- wait, no, I gotta *think* --"

Bruce covers his teeth once more --

And *grunts* for the feel of Tim clawing his back with her short nails --

"'Tinkerbelle...' ended in an 'e' originally."
"Uh. That's -- really?"

"Mm-hmm..."

"Fuck, Tink, just -- anything you want. Anything you *need* --"

"You, Jay. *Always*," Tim -- *Tinkerbelle* says with a laughing hum as she grips one of Jason's wrists and presses close. It --

It's too much not to stroke her shaved thigh --

And Tinkerbelle covers Bruce's hand and presses it there. "I have a fantasy, Jay."

"Y-yeah?"

"Oh, yes. You're bent over the pommel horse..."

"Oh -- Jesus, okay --"

"Your wrists are restrained..."

"Nuh --" Jason thrusts faster -- "Okay --"

"You're wearing... mm. A spreader bar."

Jason *bucks* --

Pants and moans and *stares* at Tinkerbelle -- "Please. Just -- I can't stop, I already --"

Dick twists his nipples in the other direction --

Jason cries *out* --

"I'm wearing a gaff, Jay. Nice... mm. Nice and *tight*:

Jason nods *mutely* --

"And I'm also wearing a great. Big. Strap-on."

Dick grunts --

Jason makes a high sound, animal and *lost* --

And Bruce can do nothing but grip her thigh and swallow Jason again, swallow him deep and *repeatedly* as he works his tongue --

As Jason sobs something which may or may *not* be "baby" and shudders --

*Yanks* Bruce's hair --

And now the thrusts are as brutal as his own had been, as wild and *sharp*. Bruce represses the urge to cough, *ignores* the urge to gag, and holds on, watching for every moment of pleasure in Jason's dazed, beautiful eyes --

And then watching the kiss he shares with Tinkerbelle -- no. He watches the kiss Tinkerbelle *bestows* on Jason, watches her smile and peck and nibble and *bite* as Jason shakes his head and begs, wordless and perfect.
After a minute, she pulls back --

Jason *lunges* for her --

And begins to ejaculate in the moment just *after* she shoves three fingers deep into his mouth and begins to thrust.

"Good boy," Dick says, and claws up over his nipples --

And Jason spasms in his throat -- and pulls back just enough to share his gamy, *strong* taste. It's impossible not to imagine Tim -- and Tinkerbelle, and Cardinal -- not having trained him to do just that.

It makes Bruce want to wallow even more than he already has and it makes him --

There is a happiness to this, this moment of sweat and semen and shudders and cries --

The intimacy of his hand on Tinkerbelle's thigh --

The lingering feel of Dick *inside* him --

All *through* him --

He is *happy*, and for once it doesn't seem as though he should apologize for it. The Bat --

The Bat is nothing he need *keep* with him -- not in this bed.

There are no tragedies he need prevent, here.

There is nothing save for this love, and all the ways it stretches beyond the bounds of this bed -- stretches to the Chisholm suburb and to Antarctica and to the bedroom just down the hall --

And what of the friends he'd made on the League? Of everyone *else*? 

Bruce pulls back when Jason pushes him and sits on his heels, giving himself a moment to just imagine, remember ghostly afterimages of a life *he'd* never lived.

It had been an *exemplary* life, and he will never forget that, but he will also strive not to make that Bruce's *mistakes*. He will open himself, and he will give, and he will live with love --

The kind of love which makes its own honor, as, perhaps, it must.

And when he looks up, his brothers are smiling at him expectantly. That --

Bruce smiles back, and moves close enough for touch.

Love.

*
"The memories will still be there."

"Uh. Isn't that one of those pillows old men have to put on their chairs when their asses go all haywire?"

Jason sighs and thinks about ignoring Steph so he can finish this report and also not *talk* about the state of his ass anymore than strictly necessary -- which is not at *all* --

And then he remembers that he's not an asshole, and also that Steph is Steph. He spins his chair -- gingerly -- and jerks his chin at her. "I think you can *maybe* guess what went on last night in my bedroom?"

Steph stops chewing on a candy bar Jason knows full well she'd had to smuggle in away from Alfred's freaking all-seeing eye --

"Hey, can I have -- "

"Fuck, no," she says -- mumbles -- and keeps chewing for a few seconds before swallows. "Was it *Bruce*?"

Jason grins. "Uh, huh. Following Big Bird's orders."

And Steph -- shifts a little where she's sitting on the console. And winces.

"Hey, no, he's fucking *fantastic* --"

"No, I figured, since you're even *sitting* like you wanna be freaking swaggering --"

"That's *mostly* the pain --"

She kicks him. "That's for being a liar, jerk."

Jason snickers. "Yeah, I deserve it. I got the fucking of my *life* last night. You gotta try it. You gotta try it *tonight*, because? He needs to get used to *good* women before his cock gets all hard for freaking Catwoman or Talia or somebody."

She makes a face --

"I *promise* --"

"No, it's not -- the other Bruce really went for *them*?"

"Not enough to get his cock wet, but -- pretty much, yeah. But back to your pussy --"

She snorts and smacks him -- "Oops," and she licks chocolate off her finger, then uses her wet finger to scrub Jason's face.

"You gonna let me get a taste?"

"Still no," she says, and *sucks* her finger, wiggling around a little bit and generally being fucking *evil*.

Jason sighs and turns to check on everyone else -- but then Steph winces again.
And *blushes*.

And Jason does, actually, have a *few* detective skills. Dormant and pathetic ones, but still -- "Heh. Was it Clark?"

She cuts him a sidelong look that's about half sex and half pissiness.

"Hey --"

"You coulda warned me that he's hung like freaking *Comet*.

Jason snorts hard --

Thinks about telling the stories *he* knows about Comet -- nah, he'll save those for some time when she's trying to be good and responsible and Jason's trying to break that into tiny little pieces. And anyway --

"It's not like he ever wears a fucking jock, babe --"

She waves a hand at him. "It's hard to *tell* by that. It's not like he's ever *completely* hard out there."

"Oh, he totally is, sometimes. Nobody ever *prints* those pictures, but I'm pretty fucking sure Jimmy Olsen has a spank file like *no* one else."

Her jaw drops, exposing half-chewed peanuts and a whole lot of chocolate.

"C'mon, at least *kiss* me --"

"Get your *own* candy, punk."

Jason blows out a breath and spins the chair back and forth --

And stops that immediately, because the pressure changes are just a little --

Steph snorts. "How are you even *patrolling* tonight?"

"I can *ignore* the pain when I'm doing *useful* shit."

"Like the reports *aren't* useful? I learned all kinds of shit this morning."

Jason blinks. "You cut?"

"I -- uh. Just the morning. I woke up late and came here for a while. Clark kinda. He didn't leave until, like *five*."

Heh. Heh heh. "Gonna tell me?"

She gives him another evil look. "Gonna beg me for candy again?"

"*Please*. I haven't had fake nougat in like six months --"

"Too fucking bad, rich boy."

"*Jesus*, Steph --"

"So he shows up," she says, and raises her eyebrows, gesturing three-sixty --
Jason takes a look --

Bruce is sparring with Tim -- they're going out together again tonight; J'onn is doing the finishing touches on Harvey; Dick is making the pommel horse his bitch in ways that makes Jason's cock wakey-wakey and Jason's ass --

Ow. "We're good, babe."

"Okay. He shows up, like, twenty damned *minutes* after you left. Just after I got out of the *shower*. He compliments me on the scent of my soap and conditioner, and just flat-out asks if he could brush my hair. I'm like, is that supposed to be foreplay or something?"

"And he just nodded and smiled at you, didn't he?"

Steph snickers. "Eggs-freaking-zactly."

"Wait, wait, lemme --" And Jason clears his throat, makes serious face --

And then makes mild-and-pervy face while folding his hands on his belly --

Steph snorts and kicks him again. "Freaking *yes*." 

Jason waggles his eyebrows. "So *after* he stopped you from kicking *him* --

"It was a punch, but yeah. And he totally had my favorite brush in his other hand when I looked up again. And then he looked *hopeful*."

"God, I'm fucking asking for it, but I love that look. It makes him look, like, twenty years younger but *still* dirty."

"*Yes*! So I sat down at my desk chair, and got the brushing of my young, tender life --"

"'Tender'?"

"Fuck you. I swear, by the time he was done, my scalp felt warm and buzzy and, like, happier than it had ever freaking *been*." 

"He totally massaged you there, too."

"I didn't feel -- oh." She snorts again. "He does that to you."

"Uh, hunh. While picking out the tangles in my hair like he's got OCD or some shit."

"You *could* just think of it as freaking TLC, jerkwad."

"Did *you*?"

"Hells, yeah," she says, and *inhales* the last bite of candy bar before handing him the wrapper and mumbling -- stickily --something.

Probably something about how he can lick it if he wants. Which -- it's not like he has *any* fucking pride. He licks.

After checking to make sure Alfred won't catch him at it.

They finish about the same time -- Steph spends some *serious* time licking her teeth and, like,
*concentrating* on getting every last molecule of candy bar down her throat -- and Jason carefully tucks the wrapper beneath some other trash --

"You are so fucking whipped."

"Babe, if it takes more than the few days you're staying here for Alfred to whip *your* ass? I'll buy you a *case* of those bars."

She narrows her eyes. "You *hate* spending money."

"You're goddamned right I do. Still."

Steph looks toward the stairs suspiciously --

Thinks about it *obviously* --

Licks her teeth again -- "What do you get if he *does* break me?"

Jason grins. "Threesome with you and Tim."

"You can have -- uh." She blushes and gives him a shy look that's just --

"You are *so* fucking hot."

"And *you* are so freaking *easy,*" she says, and kicks him *lightly*. "Done. If, you know, my lady parts don't make Tim freak."

And a part of Jason is *right* back in his bedroom after Bruce and Dick had left them alone to get sleep for school today, cuddled up close to his *sister* --

("You -- really don't mind.")

Tim's voice had been kind of -- right in the middle. Somewhere *between* the voice Jason got used to years ago and the voice he -- *she* -- uses when she's undercover as a woman most of the time. Jason had kissed her forehead.

("You're perfect the way -- *every* way -- you are."

"It doesn't *work* --"

"*You* work. For me -- and the rest of the family, too.")

And Tim had swallowed and shivered a little --

("I can do this."

"Fuck yeah, you can."

"I mean -- sometimes. Not all the time."

"Whenever --"

"I love you -- don't *crush* me.")

So Jason had just held on a *little* tighter, and kissed and kissed --

("I love you, too, baby. Always."

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"I mean--sometimes. Not all the time."

"Whenever--"

"I love you--don't *crush* me.")

So Jason had just held on a *little* tighter, and kissed and kissed--

("I love you, too, baby. Always."
"And -- Steph. She -- just being there. She helped."

"Does she... uh. Know?)"

She'd pressed a smile to Jason's shoulder.

("Soon.")

Now -- "How *much* was Tim texting you this morning?"

Steph gives him a wry look. "How much are we using Tim's name to avoid pronouns?"

"Heh. Okay, then. Sometimes it takes her a little time to, you know, *talk*.*"

"Uh, huh." And Steph pulls out three huge pieces of gum from her backpack -- "None of these are for you, by the way."

Jason snorts again. "Fucking *fine*.*"

She grins at him, warm and sweet and *happy*, and then starts chewing all three pieces. "Anyway, they're sugar-free. Too healthy for you."

"Fucking yeah, they are. Sugar is proof that the universe is a *good* place."

Steph looks thoughtful and a little distant for a while.

"What is it?"

"Just wondering... I mean, *are* there different things between this universe and Bruce's universe? Wouldn't there kind of have to be?"

"So far as *I've* heard so far, it's just that Harvey has a gunshot wound on his belly instead of a knife wound. No other differences have shown up."

"Isn't that... weird?"

Hunh. "Yeah, actually. Most of the time when the League or whoever deals with alternate universe stuff, the differences are *huge*. Like freaking *Deathwing* huge."

"Hunh?"

"Oh, the Titans ran into a universe where Dick was a psycho killer with a lot of damned cleavage," Jason says, and waves a hand.

"Uh. I thought it was the *women* who got cleavage-y when they went evil."

Jason shrugs. "Dick's got his own style? I got nothin'."

Steph nods. "Well, I guess we should be prepared if it turns out that Bruce is used to a world where ice gives good traction or the sky is green every other night or some shit?"

"Not a bad plan," Jason says, and punches her fist. "There's no way to know what questions to *ask*, but we can still be a little ready for the answers."

"Yep. So anyway."

Jason grins. "Yeah?"
"Apparently, I have 'a wonderful musk.'"

"Heh. You totally do -- wait, he was totally talking about your ass-musk, wasn't he."

She makes a face --

And then bites her lip and squirms a little. "I feel like I should kick *all* of you for not warning me about *that*, but... nuh."

"Uh, hunh."

"And..."

"Yeah?"

Steph sighs *dreamily*. "He'd totally gone down on me for, like, most of an *hour* first."

"That's allowed?"

Steph gives him a look designed to make his *sac* drop off, but --

"Seriously, babe, this is an *important question*.

"Yes, you can fucking well go down on me forever!"

"Nice --"

"Unless I say you totally can't."

"That's fair --"

"And -- I'll probably say that a lot," Steph says, and snorts. "I mean -- I'm betting you can't do most of the things Clark can do with his tongue."

"No, I can't, but I *promise* I'm --"

She waves him off. "*Anyway*. I -- had totally never been rimmed before," and her expression is kind of --

Tim would call it 'quirked.' Jason just thinks she looks like someone just tickled her pussy. "It's serious."

"*Yes*. Also -- also, I don't know if I *want* to like it that much --"

And then Clark is right there with a bouquet of pretty little purple flowers and a *big* smile --

"Jesus!"

"Only to some," Clark says, and nudges the flowers toward her.

"Um. I don't -- have a vase?"

And then Clark is holding the flowers in a vase. It's kind of plain -- it's just white -- but it's got a pretty shape to it. And he's smiling again. Hopefully.

Steph is just kind of staring --
"Hem. Perhaps I'll just --"

Breeze --

"-- put them in your room," Clark says, and dusts his hands off despite the fact that they look perfectly clean.

He probably washed them in a mountain stream somewhere. "Hey, Chester."

Clark pinches his cheeks. "And how are *you* today, you adorable little scamp?"

Jason stares.

Clark gives him a *mean* look -- and then turns back to Stephanie, who is still staring. She's got her mouth open now, though. Clark closes it for her. "Stephanie --"

"Uh. You should totally call me Steph. I mean. Now that you know more about my ass than I do."

Clark hums. "Oh -- thank you very much --"

"You're here to try to convince me there's nothing weird about rimming."

"Well... yes --"

"It's not gonna work."

"But --"

"It's not. Gonna. Work."

Clark frowns like a goddamned sad clown.

Jason moves to kick him --

And Clark catches him by the ankle and wags a fucking *finger* at him. "Now, now, son, don't make me have to put you in a corner."

"Uh."

Another mean look, and then he turns back to Steph --

"You're totally not helping your case."

"Ah -- hm --"

"I mean, you're not hurting it, either -- Jay *deserves* this shit -- but you're not helping."

Clark lifts Steph's hand gently and kisses her scarred-up knuckles --

"Ooh, I like that."

"I'm glad," he says, and kisses them back the other direction --

And forward --
He *sucks* on her middle knuckle --

And Steph gets that kind of heavy-lidded look that makes Jason want to see her without her mask at least once every day, whether or not *he's* the one getting that look.

Especially since watching Clark get that look boils down to watching Clark tent his poor jockeys a little --

A little more --

A *lot* more --

His cock twitches *hard* --

And Steph notices the movement out of the corner of her eye, looks down -- and her jaw drops again. "What the *fuck*, Clark, you just *got* here!"

Clark smiles. "You've always seemed like a young woman with little patience for... ah... wasted time?"

Steph snorts and blushes *hard*, taking her hand back and patting Clark's cock a little. "Not right *now*.

"If you're quite sure --"

"Hey, she was talking to *me* --"

"Jason," Clark says, planting his fists on his hips and shaking his head sadly. "Honestly, you *know* that sharing means caring."

Jason coughs a laugh -- "I'm totally gonna keep calling you a Chester."

"Is that so."

"Uh, hunh," and Jason swings his chair back and forth as obnoxiously as his ass will let him --

And Clark flares his nostrils just like he can *smell* that pain --

And his eyes flare *red* --

Heh. Jason sticks his thumb in his mouth, makes his eyes wide, and bats his lashes a little.

"Oh. I see," Clark says, and moves just a *little* closer --

"*Time*," Steph says, and signals it like a football ref trying to get the attention of a couple of linebackers with more steroids in their systems than, like, mucus.

Jason pops his thumb out.

Clark looks *innocent* --

And Steph looks at them both like they're fucking nuts, which -- they are. So.

"We'll be good, babe."

"*Will* you?" And she glares at Clark --
Who adjusts an invisible tie. "If you'd like? Of course, there are many ways to *be* good. Many... ah... many *acts* one can perform --"

"I didn't say I wouldn't *let* you rim me out again, you freak!"

"Oh... oh?"

"But it's still fucking *weird*!"

"It's truly --"

Steph makes a fist.

"Hmm. Yes, I believe I see your point," Clark says, and kisses her thumbnail. "I would be honored to introduce you to any number of weird things --"

"With your *dick*?"

They all look at it.

It twitches --

And *Clark* pats it like it's a pet or something before looking up with another smile. "While my penis hopes for rather more of your company than what it received last night --"

Steph snorts --

"-- it understands that it's only one part of me --"

"Wait, how many brains *do* you have?"

Clark blinks. "Truly, just... just the one --"

"Are you *sure*?"

"Yes...? Yes, I'm sure."

Steph nods thoughtfully. "Okay, just checking. Let me finish telling Jay what you did to me last night."

"Oh, do you want to make him jealous?" And that hopeful look is *right* back.

Steph grins. "I *want* to make sure he invites us to *all* the orgies."

Clark sighs happily. "Yes, that's a wonderful cause. If you'll both excuse me --" And he kisses Steph's cheek and *licks* Jason's still-slick thumb -- "I'll leave you to it."

"Uh, hunh."

"Bye, Chester." And Jason waggles his eyebrows --

And the world moves --

And then Jason hears himself *squawking*, because Clark had just *spanked* him --

And put him back on the little doughnut perfectly --
And disappeared. Right.

Jason snickers and shakes his head before turning back to Steph. "Was that actually slow enough for you to see him doing that?"

"He totally winked at me first," Steph says, and kicks her legs a little. "You loved it."

"Yes, I fucking loved it, but *still* --"

She kicks him. "Buy me an eggplant paddle."

Jason grunts. "Uh?"

She grins at him.

"Did I mention that I love you, yet? ’cause I really fucking do --"

"Slut. So *anyway*:"

"I'm listening!"

"I made the mistake of telling him that I'd only really fucked in a couple of positions before."

"Oh -- damn."

"Yep. I now own a copy of the Kama freaking *Sutra* -- which is staying in *this* house, thank you very much --"

Jason snickers --

"And also my thighs still feel like pudding, a little."

"Are *you* good for patrol?"

"Oh, yeah. He was totally petting me and rubbing me and *massaging* me *while* he was fucking me so hard my throat got sore."

"*Gotta* fucking love that. When are you gonna let him take you to the Fortress?"

"How do you know he -- never mind."

"Heh."

"I -- don't know? I mean, I think I kinda want company for that."

"I will *totally* go with you, babe. He's got toys there like you wouldn't fucking *believe*.

"Like... uh. No, I don't know," she says, and raises her dark blonde eyebrows.

"Well, start with the fact that the Fortress itself -- the walls, the floors, the ceilings, and everything else -- is alive."

Steph shivers. "Yeah, he said, but --"

"*But* -- anytime he wants? Clark can reach in and grab a handful of that stuff, shape it anyway he wants -- or have the Fortress shape it -- and that *part* will still be alive and fucking *mobile* when he's done."
"Oh... fuck."

"Uh, hunh," and Jason throws his legs up on the console --

His eyes cross --

He puts his legs back down.

And Steph snorts, and giggles, and then just points at him and cackles.

"Oh, yeah? How's your *pussy* doing?"

She blushes and bites her lip on a cough. "Uh. Happy I don't sit on it? Oh my *God*, the ride here was *ridiculous*, Jay."

"Heh. I'll fucking bet."

"Every bump. Every pothole. Every fucking *branch* in the *road* because you people live out in the fucking *woods* --"

"Was like getting fucked all over again?"

"God there was one point..."

"Tell me."

Steph grins and kicks her legs a little more. "Okay, so I'm on my side, right?"

"Uh, hunh. Naked?"

"*So* naked. I was happy, because when he had me on my hands and knees, my tits were just flopping all over the place --"

"*Unh* --"

"No, wait, that's not the good part!"

"But I really *like* your tits, babe --"

"And they like you, you freaking caveman, but *listen*," she says, and kicks his thigh.

"Okay, okay --"

"Okay, I'm on my side, and so my tits are finally not *moving* and I'm thinking I'll get a minute to figure out if they actually *hurt* from all that swinging."

"But no."

"Really freaking not, cause he pushes in just -- steady and *hot* and *not freaking slow* --"

"Jesus, I love that --"

"*Yes*. Even though it made me sound like a drunk guy trying to sing a *scale* or something --"

Jason does an impression of the *determinedly* homeless former opera singer who hangs out in the Pinktown subway stations --
And Steph cackles. "*Yes*. Only I'm pretty sure I sounded more like a sorority slut than a cow."

Jason snickers. "Gotcha. More?"

"Yeah, so I'm making all kinds of noise, and I'm trying to get a *grip* on my pillow so I can shove about half of it down my throat --"

"Oh, he *never* lets you do that --"

"And this is why you have to *warn* me!"

"Heh heh. Sorry?"

"Asshole. *Anyway*, the next thing I know, my leg is in the *air* and my cooch is all *cool* from how *wet* I was and how warm my room really *wasn't*, and I break out all over in goosebumps. And then?"

"Yeah?"

"He *breathes* on me. From, like, a *distance*. And it's *warm*."

"Oh -- damn."

"*Yes*. I thought he could only do that with *cold* air!"

Jason shrugs. "He's fucking *super*.

Steph sighs and kicks her legs more. "Yeah. *Really* yeah, because I broke out in even *more* goosebumps from how *good* it was, and I *forgot* I was trying to get the pillow, and he vibrates his finger on my *clit* -- is that good on the head of your dick?"

"It's *fantastic*.

Steph nods thoughtfully. "I *have* vibes."

"Like -- more than one?"

Steph waggles *her* eyebrows.

"Heh. *Nice*.

"I didn't *just* use my lawn-mowing money for armor and spandex."

"I hear you, I hear you. Did he get you off like that?"

"*Twice*. And then I passed *out*. And then he woke me up with his tongue back in my *ass*, and my pussy started *crying*, because it was like 'fuck yes!' but also like 'no no nooo!' You know?"

"Totally. He tried to convince you to take it up the ass?"

Steph sighs. "He came *real* close to *succeeding* with that, because I was all *quiery* at that point and just, you know, *soft*.

Jason licks his lips.

Steph grins at him. "You know you're not getting any until after we train, right?"
"I'm getting some? I mean -- whatever you say, babe."

"Well, you're not getting into the seriously *puffy* Promised Land --"

"Can I look at it? You know... look?"

She snorts. "Yes, you can freaking *look* at it. But if you touch it even a little, I e-mail pictures of your asshole to the Eston football team."

"Tink already did that last year."

"He -- *why*?"

"He totally put a timer on the site with all the pictures with a script that would -- eventually -- tell them how gay they were for looking."

Steph stares at him.

Jason shrugs.

"Was it *labeled*?"

"Heh heh. Communal showers, babe. I got some *interesting* fucking looks for a while."

"And you *didn't* kick Tink's ass?"

"Hey, it's important to *encourage* her hobbies, Steph."

"Are you her boyfriend or her *mom*?"

Jason grins and buffs his nails on his shirt. "I am her *incredibly* awesome big brother. And -- heh. I gotta say -- I was kinda flattered that he went with my ass instead of Dick's."

Steph splutters and kicks him *repeatedly* --

So maybe he gets up and wrestles her off the console --

And onto the mats --

And into a fucking *great* kiss --

He can still taste nougat --

And then Bruce is right there picking him up and *carrying* him -- by the neck and the waistband of his *shorts* -- back to the console.

"Jesus fucking *Christ*, B!"

"I'm terribly sorry," he says, and *arranges* Jason on the chair with the doughnut. "Dick was insistent."

Jason glares at him --

Looks *mournfully* over at Steph -- who's getting dragged by her ponytail over to the gymnastics equipment by Dick --

And then goes back to glaring at Bruce. "You don't have to take his orders *forever*!"
Bruce raises an eyebrow at him.

"Aw, *what*?"

"Were *you* planning to stop doing that anytime soon, Jay...?"

"Maybe!"

Bruce raises his eyebrow higher.

"C'mon, she had *nougat* in her mouth!"

Bruce blinks. "Have you suggested that Alfred prepare --"

"*Yes*. But he makes it all *good*." 

"And... that's not... correct?"

"*No*, it's not correct. It makes me feel *classy*, and that's not *right*."

"Hm." And Bruce raises his other eyebrow.

"Ah, fuck you," and Jason tags out --

Gets his wrist *caught* --

Held --

*Squeezed* --

"Unh. Okay, you got my attention."

Bruce smiles, and it looks happy more than it looks horny, and yeah, okay, he can work.

Jason sighs and twists his wrist free, then turns back to the console --

And Bruce is still standing right there.

Just --

Standing.

Jason snorts. "Okay, you're sucking out all the air again."

"I'm sorry --"

"*Ask*."

Bruce strokes the back of Jason's neck slightly --

And Jason flushes and squirms a little --

And *regrets* that when he hears himself make a yeping sound. Just --

"That was too light."

"Yeah, B. Sorry --"
"No, I'm --"

"*Ask*:

"Will. Will Stephanie stay?"

"For --" Jason turns back around. "You mean for more than just the next few days?"

Bruce nods and looks *into* him --

And Jason sighs. "I want her to. Tim and Alfred want her to. *Dick* wants her to. And I think... I think if her mom falls off the wagon again? She will. But while she's clean --"

"She will remain loyal. Yes, I see," Bruce says, and nods thoughtfully. "Dick told me much last night about her mother's... difficulties."

"Yeah, and Tim told *me* a lot about how you are about parents. Which -- heh. I'm kinda surprised you're pushing for Steph to live here."

"I'm not -- I would never pressure --"

"And also you're giving her space and time to come to *you*, which is a great fucking tactic with her."

Bruce nods. "I thought it would be --"

"You're still pushing."

Bruce closes his eyes for a moment -- but he smiles and opens them. "Is this, finally, what it will take to be admonished for greed?"

Jason grins. "Not even a little. *We all want her here*. But -- I respect her wanting to stick it out, even if the others don't. My mom was fucked-up in a lot of ways, but she damned well loved me when no one else in the *world* did, and she did the best she could. I don't think Mrs. Brown did the best *she* could -- by a long road -- but a lot of people could and would say the same thing about my mom. So." Jason shrugs.

Bruce inclines his head. "Thank you for your perspective."

"It helped?"

Bruce smiles and strokes Jason's cheek -- firmly. "Yes. I don't think I require a voice in my mind in order to... control myself."

"Heh. Not *too* much control, now --"

"No. Definitely not," Bruce says, and *moves* --

But the kiss is soft and only lands at the *corner* of his mouth.

Jason makes it better, nice and wet and a *little* hard --

Not hard enough to make him need to roll around on the mats with *Bruce* --

Bruce hums and pulls back. "Thank you again."
"Heh. You're welcome. What's next for you today?"

"Teaching and learning from Dick. And then, perhaps, time with Harvey at my side."

"He's -- I'm gonna miss him."

Bruce smiles ruefully and stands straight. "I have begun to study a great deal of theoretical physics. I will not -- I do not accept that his loss will be forever."

*Shit* -- "Hey --"

"Oh -- Jay. I only meant -- if there could be *visits* --"

"That's -- dangerous?"

"It will not be by the time I begin experimenting with it. I promise you," Bruce says, and it's a *vow* in his eyes, and -- yeah.

Jason offers his own rueful smile. "I -- I can go with that."

Bruce strokes his cheek again. "Beautiful. Beautiful *brother*. I will not disdain the gifts you have given me."

Jason shivers. "And when you talk like that..."

"Yes?"

"You kinda make me need to stick my cock in your mouth, B."

Bruce hums. "Because my mouth is too... classy?"

"*Exactly*. Gotta dirty you up a little bit, brother."

"Then I suppose I shall have to endeavor to be correct in my speech --"

"Now you're just faking it."

Bruce *laughs* --

And Jason has to grin for it. "Go make Dick even more ridiculously hardcore. And maybe save a little training up for *me* tonight."

Bruce inclines his head. "As you say." And he goes.

Jason checks --

Steph is on the uneven bars, Tim is working the heavy bag the way he almost never *does*, J'onn and Harvey are talking -- just talking -- at the conference table, and Dick is dancing fucking *belligerently* on the mats --

Yeah. He can work. He can *absolutely* work --

And that's what he does.

By the time he's done with the reports, he's thinking a little about food --

And a lot about the tall, lanky, pointy-chinned blond guy chilling in Dick's chair with his spindly
fingers folded together on his belly.

I'm thinking about you, as well.

Jason grins and tries to push it at J'onn a little --

And J'onn pushes the feel of being *hugged* -- all over -- right back at him. And then fills Jason's mind with an image of two little Martians sitting on a tiled-looking floor the color of bone --

That color was much less distressing on Mars.

Heh, I'll bet. And -- those are your kids?

Yes. Tiq, and the slightly taller kid is lit with some kind of inner light for a moment. It was impossible to get him to focus on his work, as opposed to on the various rough games he played in the wastes with other local children. Ma'ena said she was just like him at that age. And then the light glows from the other kid -- P'inn. She would sit still only for stories. Dark stories, gentle stories, funny stories... it did not matter. She taught herself to read at only three cycles, because, as she said, we did not have *enough* stories for her.

Aw, man, awesome --

And then Jason is looking at *himself*, and he's... saying something to the kids. No, he's telling a story, because his hands are moving --

Okay, he's telling a *violent* story, going by the *way* his hands are moving. That -- you think they would've liked me.

Very much. Though Tiq would have insisted on wrestling with you.

Hey, as long as he kept the spikes out of things, I could've gone for that.

Martians did not develop the spikes until they reached sexual maturity, Jason.

... oh. Uh. Sorry for the disturbing image?

J'onn hums and bubbles Jason along a little -- You are forgiven.

So... uh. I don't actually want to bring back bad memories --

I was deep in the wastes with my hunter squad when I received word that the plague had taken my family entirely. It was early enough in the course of the plague that there were people to hold the ceremonies for them, and ritually -- and hygienically -- burn the bodies. I took their ashes with me into the stasis coffin.

I -- damn. I'm --

It is all right, I assure you. While I did not have time to grieve for them before I went into stasis...

You've been out of stasis for a lot of years. Yeah, I hear you. Still.

I only wished to share. I promise you.

Aw, man, don't Bruce at me --

Another bubbly little laugh. You're thinking of him quite deeply.
Hmm. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that you are *feeling* about him. Many humans are capable of that sort of... splitting.

I try *not* to be.

There is not a single human vigilante who is not capable of it, Jason. Not the ones who survive.

Uh -- heh. Okay, then, I'll stop whining. And Jason makes the avatar-thingy of himself stand up -- Mind if I...?

Not at all.

Jason walks them away from the children, through a door which was absolutely designed for a species of really thin and really *tall* people --

And into the little apartment he'd shared with his mother. The smell of other people's cooking comes through the doors and the walls and the windows -- lots of stuff with garlic, onions, and recao, lots of *fried* stuff -- but the place is as clean as his mother could make it with Jason constantly messing things up again.

The boy he used to be is playing gin rummy with his mother, who is only a *little* too thin, and doesn't have any *visible* sores.

She's tired around the eyes, and her brown hair is pulled up into a bouncy little ponytail of the kind she'd never actually go out to *work* in --

The johns mostly go for long hair hanging *down* --

And there's a weight, an extra *presence* that doesn't make sense until Jason puts J'onn on the couch next to his mother, who immediately stops playing and asks excited questions and makes *Jason* excited and --

Yeah. J'onn would be right there, all calm and mellow and good --

And she would be able to *feel* that --

She'd be so happy that Jason had a *friend* --

Perhaps if I appeared somewhat younger.

Jason snickers and grows himself up until the boy on the rickety orange refugee-from-the-70s chair is him. Yeah, probably. Still. She loved the heroes. *Mostly* the women, but just -- everyone who did things. Did *good* things, you know?

Did you want to be a hero when you were a boy?

Doesn't every kid? At least a little?

Yes and no. Very few children who reach an age at which they can understand what vigilantism truly entails want that life for themselves.

Heh, okay, true. But it wasn't the blood and guts and nightmares that made me stop wanting it.

The J'onn on the couch flares his eyes a little --
Yeah, go ahead and look, and Jason makes his mother walk into the bedroom where she can rest a little and joins J'onn on the battered old couch.

A part of Jason is aware that they're really just sitting in two of the three -- soon to be five, maybe? -- chairs in front of the console, that the pricks he feels in his scalp here aren't as real as the ones out *there* --

Reality is fluid within the mind.

Yeah, that.

So Jason closes his eyes --

And closes his eyes --

And waits to see what J'onn will --

No.

No?

I will not fill your mind with memories of yourself as someone... soiled.

I -- heh. The memories will still be there.

Would your mother have wished you to think of yourself that way?

Of course not. And you know I mostly don't these days --

There is a pain within you that has not healed, Jason.

I know, I know. I just --

You keep it because you believe it helps to connect you to your past.

Well -- yeah --

You do not require it.

J'onn --

And then they just *are* in his mother's bedroom, and he's bringing her breakfast in bed on a cookie sheet --

And he's sponging her forehead when the fevers got too bad --

And he's crying as quietly as he can because even he can tell that she's not gonna make it, not gonna get *better* --

And he's in the park with her playing catch with a huge sparkly pink ball --

And he's hiding under the kitchen table because one of her pimps is yelling, yelling so much, and maybe if he got a weapon --

And he's rolling his eyes at his father's bullshit --

And she's teaching him blackjack --
War --

Old Maid --

A really *crappy* version of poker --

And he's warm in her arms --

And he's warm in her arms --

And he's *boiling* under the covers with her, because she was so afraid that he'd freeze with the heat off that she'd covered him with everything in the house that could be *used* as a cover, including the curtains, the psychedelic wall-hangings her friend Janine kept giving her, and every coat she'd ever *owned* --

J'onn --

You were never too soiled.

Seriously, J'onn --

You could never *be* too soiled.

Okay, I'm seeing how you and Bruce could get along --

Jason.

Oh -- Jesus, J'onn, is this you 'forcing the issue'?

No.

I -- good --

But I wish to do so. I wish to do so very badly.

Jason shivers inside and out. It's not -- it's not taking over my life or anything --

If you would allow it --

I want it. I want the pain.

You are more than your memories of hurt --

I *know* that. And you can feel that. Can't you?

Jason... I know, now, that there are times when you do not know that at all.

I. Oh.

Yes.

And -- he can see it. He can see himself watching Dick be perfect and knowing that it's not him, that it's only him because Dick was *lonely* and *unsure* --

He can see himself watching Tim and wondering when he'll realize how special he is --

How perfect *she* is --
How much she doesn't *need* him --

And there's Kuh-Superboy in his head, more dangerous than life and twice as fucking *goofy* --

And there's the knot of fear *behind* the images of the guy in his head --

The sense --

Not that he'll take Tim *away* from him, but that he'll be the one Tim will go to when it's time for her to leave him --

Because Superboy has never been anything but clean.

Well -- shit.

You hid this well.

I... don't have clue one what to say.

Let me --

No. Just -- not that, okay? And Jason pushes himself back out into the world and tugs on J'onn's wrist until those claws are out of his head and he can roll his head on his neck. "I gotta go talk to him, J'onn."

J'onn shifts to the big, green wrestler form. "You may find it easier to do so after --"

"I don't want it to be easier, though. Maybe -- maybe after? But I have to be real with the guy, and -- it has to be now."

J'onn inclines his head. "As you will. Please remember that I am available to you."

Jason grins, knowing it's crooked on his face, knowing that it's a lot fucking older than it maybe *should* be, knowing it *hurts* --

"Even your pain is beautiful to me, Jason."

"*Thank* you, *Bruce*. Seriously, watch that."

J'onn hums deep enough to kind of vibrate Jason's chest a little, and stands. "As soon as you stop responding to it... positively," and J'onn looks down --

And Jason's cock is just hard enough to show. Fucking right. Jason thinks about trying to will it back down --

And remembers that he's actually himself. He stands, too, and hugs J'onn hard. "I'll remember everything."

J'onn kisses Jason's forehead with his just-a-little-too-hard-and-a-*lot*-too-smooth lips. "Until we meet again," he says, and steps back --

And flies up and up until he phases through the ceiling.

Jason takes a deep breath and looks around --

Dick is looking at him just like he knows *exactly* how right Jason isn't right now.
Jason gestures 'later' and heads over to join Tim at the strike-dummies.

Tim looks up while Jason is still twenty feet away --

Frowns too *much* --

Jason jogs close. "It's okay --"

"It really isn't. The question is *why* --"

"J'onn asked me a question that had -- *has* -- kind of a fucked-up answer."

Tim frowns even harder and reaches up to rub Jason's chest a little in that way where he -- and Jason's almost *sure* that his being this fucked-up is bringing out the boy in Tim, and he doesn't want to *deal* with that, but he will *any*-fucking-way -- where he's really marking Jason out for *serious* examination. The kind with hot lights and rubber hoses.

He --

"Jay, what *is* it?"

"I... fuck, no, I'll just spit it out. I'm not jealous of Superboy --"

"I *know* that. You never *should* be --"

"Wait. Okay?"

Tim searches him and nods.

"I'm not *just* jealous of him. I'm not afraid of losing you --"

Tim opens his mouth --

Jason holds up a hand. "I *know* I'm gonna lose you one day, okay? I know it down *deep* --"

"*Jay*!"

"And it's not even -- *most* of me knows that it's bullshit. There's just a little knot in me -- this hard fucking *knot* -- that tells me I'm not good enough. Not for you, not for Dick, not for this *life*. It's --" Jason squeezes his eyes shut and shakes himself like a dog. "It's the part of me that went so hard for Bruce, because I knew *he* was a fuck-up, and could be just -- someone I wouldn't lose. I'm never afraid of losing *Clark*, either, you know?"

"Tell me to how to *fix* it!"

"You can't, baby --"

"*No*, Jay," and Tim is clawing at him a little, this close to *beating* on him, and Jason just --

He pulls Tim close and hugs him, holds him -- "I'm gonna fix it."

"What are you going to *do*?"

"I'm gonna take a good, hard look at myself, and the parts of me that are just -- no good --"

"*Damn* it, Jay --"
"The parts of me that *think* I'm no good -- God, I'll just -- the night I boosted Dick's tires?" And Jason pushes Tim back a little so he can meet his eyes. "This -- it's all coming back, you know? Or maybe I mean it's coming *up*, because I fucking well *hid* this shit."

Tim's nod is *troubled*, but -- "I'm listening."

"Okay, I -- here goes," Jason says, and smiles ruefully. "I'd spent the whole damned night -- almost - - thinking about using my knife on the next john who looked rich enough. Maybe just threatening him, maybe slicing him up but good. Whether or *not* he was an asshole. Just -- just for the money, you know? And I was thinking -- I wouldn't do it a *lot*. Whores that do that shit a lot always get *caught* sooner or later. But I was gonna do it *that* night, and I just -- Dick *saved* me from that life, but he also saved me from *myself*.

It's the *unnerving* stare, because it means that a good chunk of Tim is just thinking about keeping Jason in his sight-lines while he plans his *attack*. "Baby --"

"You think you're not good 'enough'."

"I -- yeah. But only *sometimes* --"

"Often enough for it to be --" Tim steps back and studies him harder. "You've kept it from me. You - - but not in the beginning. You kept me at a distance, then."

"I didn't want to *hurt* you --"

"Or get me dirty, Jay?" Tim raises an eyebrow and just -- glares at him.

"Tim --"

"It was when you could see I needed you that you stopped holding back. When you could see that, no matter what, the distance was hurting me more than anything you could do. Right?"

Jason opens his mouth --

"Wait. No. It was when you could see that the distance was hurting me more than anything you could do right *then*.

Jason blows out a breath. "I love you."

Tim nods once. "Love, when it's real and at least moderately healthy, means a desire to, among other things, protect the loved one from the worst of one's neuroses."

"Yes --"

"You've never let me do that, Jay. You pointed out -- quite rightly -- that it hurts *us* when I'm hurting and not sharing it with you."

Jason smiles ruefully. "Sometimes I'm not an idiot?"

Tim narrows his eyes --

"You're angry at me."

"*Yes*."
"I'm sorry."

"What are you going to *do* about it?"

"*Fix* it --"

"Wrong answer."

"I --" Jason blinks. "What? Oh -- oh, you're gonna make me... put all of this on you... and I totally get why. And understand why." Jason blows out a breath. "Okay. Okay, I can see it."

"Can you?"

"Yeah, I can --"

"Are you going to --" And then there's a different frown on Tim's face, something -- something that makes him look *down*.

"Hey, no, *you* haven't done anything wrong --"

"I've made you *work* to help me with my problems," Tim says, and his voice is thick. "And I just. I never realized how much it would hurt to be in the same position."

"Jesus, baby --"

Tim hugs him hard, clutches at him a little --

"I'm here, I'm here and I won't --"

"*Jay*," and Tim's voice is *accusing* --

And that's when Jason realizes that he's not hugging *back*. Jesus fucking --

Jason wraps his arms around Tim and forces himself to just push *past* everything until he can hold on, pull him closer, his *brother* -- "I love you, I love you so much, I *swear* --"

"I shouldn't. I shouldn't believe you *more* now," Tim says, and even his *laughter* is thick, heavy with *tears* --

But it's still pretty funny. "We -- uh. We might be a little fucked-up, baby."

Tim snorts and digs his nails in against Jason's back. "We -- *I'm* going to do better," he says, and pulls back. "I'll tell you everything, Jay. I *promise*," and he searches Jason a little --

A *lot* -- and Jason nods. "Everything, yeah. I know -- *most* of me knows we can take it --"

"I'll never leave you," Tim says, slow and serious and just -- *willing* Jason to believe --

And Tim's got willpower like no one fucking else.

Jason nods and leans in, nuzzling more than kissing, holding on more than gripping -- no. He *grips*, and Tim makes a soft sound and kisses him, pushes up on his toes and kisses him harder --

And Jason only breaks the kisses to tell Tim he loves him, wants him -- wait. "I want the girl, too. I'm not -- you don't have to change *anything* for me --"

"I need to make you feel *comfortable* --"
"Then just give me all of you, baby. I figured out last night that I was getting all fucked-up because things were changing so fast --"

"*Yes* --"

"But that's all done, okay?"

Tim pulls back with a frown --

"I promise, baby. I just -- I was blaming Bruce for everything going crazy around here --"

"That's *fair* --"

"He just gave us little pushes toward where we were heading *anyway*," Jason says, and smiles. "And you know it, because I know *you* aren't blaming him for anything anymore."

"I don't --"

"Want me to blame myself. I *know*, okay? I'm not a complete fuck-up --"

Tim strikes his *kidney* --

"Ow, *Jesus*, baby, *ow* --"

"You *deserved* that --"

"You *really* did, little wing," *Dick* says, and grabs Jason by the hair, yanking until they're looking at each other.

"Uh. Hi?"

"I caught -- some of that," and Dick is frowning. "Be my brain here. What do you need?"

"I --"

"*My* brain," and Dick is staring *into* him, and --

Yeah. No way to fuck around with that. No way *possible*. Jason licks his lips. "I need to talk more about my past. How it made me feel, not just what actually happened."

Dick nods. "I let you skate past that too much."

"Dick --"

"You made it easy, little wing," and Dick smiles wryly. "Always sharing just *enough* to make it seem like it was everything. Right?"

Jason -- blushes. "Uh. I really didn't --"

"Want me to think you were too fucked-up for this life? I get it," Dick says. "I really do. Still --" And Dick lets go of Jason's hair, steps *back* --

And that is absolutely Steph *jabbing* his other kidney. He'd know those knuckles *anywhere* at this point --

"Stop fucking up!"
Jason winces and tries to stretch his back a little, tries to -- no, fuck it, he's gonna hurt right now, and that's the way it works. He jerks his chin at Tim. "How much of what you were doing was designed to distract me?"

*Tink* smiles at him -- And then holds *her* body just a little differently, just enough to *imply* a little arch for her little breasts, a curve for her hip -- "Maybe... about thirty-two percent."

And Jason is now horny enough to be *confused* for a while -- way more than a fucking moment -- And then Steph snorts and *grinds* her knuckles in a little -- "Fuck, I'm listening!"

"You can be a jerk, but you can't be a *stupid* jerk, asshole," Steph says, and then moves around to Jason's side. Her ponytail is a little off-center, she's flushed from how *hard* she's been working out, and she smells like the kind of sweat that just *needs* to be licked off *slowly* -- And then Dick bites his *ear* -- "Little wing."

"Uh. Yeah?"

"We're not about to distract you with sex."

"*Damn* -- I mean --"

Dick laughs softly and pushes a hand between Jason's and Tim's bodies until he can scratch at Jason's abs through his shirt a little. "Don't think I'm not tempted... and you can *feel* how tempted Tim is."

"Yeah. Yeah --"

"And we can *all* smell how tempted *Steph* is --"

"Oh -- fuck *all* of you!"

Dick pulls away from Jason's ear to grin at Steph. "Promise...?"

Steph *blushes*, and that -- "Can I sniff you? Just, you know --"

"Oh -- for fuck's sake," and Steph knocks Dick's hand out of Jason's hair and replaces it with hers, yanking him in for a hard kiss with a lot of biting. She doesn't close her eyes, and so he doesn't *either* -- And he can see her glaring at him -- And glaring a little less -- And *softening* for him -- And -- yeah. Jason closes his eyes and makes it a *good* kiss, because he needs this, all of them --
wait. He kisses her a few more times, just a little *quiet* and affectionate --

She pulls back and grins at him *wryly*. "Bruce is upstairs with Harvey."

Jason blinks -- "Okay, so I'm obvious --"

"You want your family around you," Tim says, and scratches Jason's back a little. "I think that's a good sign."

Jason nods --

"Unless, of course, you *are* trying to get us all to hide from the issues with sex," Dick says, and strokes down to *grip* Jason through his jock. "Which we're not doing."

"Uh. Are you *sure*?"

Dick laughs again and kisses Jason's cheek before stepping back and gesturing 'box.'

They get into formation smooth and easy -- and Dick looks all of them over with a smile. "Bruce -- the one I grew up with -- wasn't *any* good at bringing out emotional conversations. He *would* share, and he was always right there when *I* wanted to share, but..." Dick shakes his head.

Steph frowns. "He didn't know how to start it up? The right questions to ask? What?"

"Got it one, little -- hmm," and Dick looks back and forth between Steph and Tim.

Tink smiles like a *pretty* shark. "What *are* you going to do with two little sisters, big brother...?"

Dick narrows his eyes and smiles like a *meaner* shark. "I have a few ideas, Tink. But, for now, Steph is little sister --"

"I still don't agree to that!"

Jason pats her fantastic fucking hip. "It's better to just take it, babe."

Dick gives him a *hot* smile -- and turns back to Tim before cupping her face. "You're my pretty little girl, Tink. You take it... mm. Just the way I want you to. Just the way I *need* you to. Don't you...?"

Tim's jaw drops a little and Tink is just *gone* --

And Dick smiles *slowly* and strokes Tim's lip. "You're all mine --"

"Sometimes! Ah... sometimes."

Dick inclines his head. "Sometimes works. Very, very well," Dick says, and pulls back again. "My Bruce --"

"Your *old* Bruce," Steph says, and crosses her arms over her chest. "You have a new Bruce now."

"Oh -- God. Let's -- I'm just going to go back to calling him 'the Bruce I grew up with,'" and Dick raises his eyebrows and looks them all over.

They nod for it --
And Dick nods, too. "He was -- he *tried*. And I could *feel* him trying -- God, with all of myself. Every *part* of me. And it was just the easiest -- and most *right* -- thing to do to go with him, work with him, and -- learn to do things his way."

Jason frowns. "You *did* pull us out of ourselves, though. You didn't --"

"I know I didn't become him, little wing, and I've actually reached a point where I'm okay with that. But..." Dick shakes his head and smiles ruefully. "My *parents* would've had all these little truths out of you -- *all* of you -- *years* ago."

"You didn't *know* me years ago --"

"They would've *found* you years ago, little sister. Because *they* would've been smart enough to check the gymnastics meets."

Steph blinks. "Uh. Is that what you *plan* to do?"

Dick gives another one of those *slow* smiles. "This is a big, big house. And there's no such thing as 'enough' operatives. *Not* for Gotham. And there are more kids on the street. And? There are a whole *lot* of kids on the superhero boards," Dick says, and strokes a finger down the side of Tim's throat.

Tim shivers and licks her lips. "I -- only object to the idea of having less of you."

Dick blinks and turns to Tim with a frown --

"Ah -- sorry --"

Jason stops her with a hand on her shoulder. "No, seriously, we *have* to air these objections out. Right, Big Bird?"

Dick nods slowly, still staring into Tim -- and then he laughs *hard*, smile lines digging deep. "All right, here's where I confess my own issues a little more: Part of me was hoping to use my little recruitment plan as a way to keep from falling on *you* guys -- all of you -- like a pack of wolves in one *admittedly* attractive body."

Steph sucks her teeth. "Please. Either you'll fall on the *new* kids or you'll wind up *ignoring* the new kids because you can't get off *our* jocks."

"Exactly, Big Bird. And either way? You'll feel guilty as *shit*.

"And -- going by what we've observed from you -- you'll get even more uncommunicative."

Dick smiles ruefully at them. "Just enough of us?"

"For *now*," Steph says. "I still have to get used to you people," and she nods towards *him*. "What are we doing about Jay's issues?"

"Hey, what about *yours*, babe?"

Steph makes a face -- and then smiles ruefully. "We're hugging mine out, starting tonight after patrol when everyone is invited to my huge freaking bed upstairs until I kick all of you out again. Rules subject to change at a moment's notice."

Tim hums and reaches over to hold Steph's hand. "It's a date."
Dick raises an eyebrow at him. "What about it, Jay?"

"I -- uh. I told J'onn I needed to talk to Superboy."

Tim blinks at him.

"Because -- because I've been really unfair --"

"You don't *talk* to him --"

"And that's wrong, baby," Jason says, and strokes his hair. "You really care about him -- you *love* him, at least a little --"

"I don't --"

"Baby, if you didn't? You wouldn't have *kept* boning him. Not after you knew I didn't like him."

Tim blushes *hard* --

And Jason breaks formation to pull Tim into another hug. "It's okay. I *swear* it's okay, because I'm the only fuck-up here, and I just -- he's yours, and you care about him, and *that* means I'm *real* fucking late to deal. *Especially* since I never had a *good* reason to dislike him," and Jason pulls back enough to meet Tim's eyes. "Okay?"

"You're not -- you don't have to supervise my *relationships*!"

"It's not about supervision. It's about being the guy *I* want to be, and part of *that* is all about dealing -- really fucking *dealing* -- with the fact that you love people *outside* the family --"

"And part of that is terrifying my boyfriend?"

Boyfriend. Boyfriend. Boy--

No, he's not going to fucking freak --

And he's not going to talk fucking *shit* --

And he *is* going to deal with the *rest* of what Tim actually said before Tim gets any *more* tense and worried. He leans in to kiss Tim's forehead. "I'm not gonna scare him. I'm not gonna threaten him. I'm not even gonna warn him about what happens if he *hurts* you, because we both know that he already knows that, yeah?"

Tim nods once, still *tense* --

"I'm just gonna apologize to him, and ask him if we can maybe talk to each other sometimes --"

"You -- want to be his *friend*?"

Jason smiles ruefully. "I wanna be his *family*, baby. Because that? Would make *most* of the bad shit just blow away."

Tim sucks in a sharp breath, blinks a few times, and then steps back. "Clark? Would you --"

And Clark is right there, smiling *warmly* at Jason and reaching out, which --

Jason got used to Clark listening to every-damned-thing years ago. He smiles ruefully, punches
Steph's fist, and jerks his chin at Dick. "I'll be back ASAP."

"Don't rush, little wing. Do *exactly* what you need to do," Dick says, and -- Jesus, that's the *proud* voice --

Jason gives up on everything resembling pride -- he *won't* need it where he's going -- and hugs Dick hard. "I'll do better, Big Bird --"

"I know you will," and Dick kisses his cheek again and then puts the squeeze on Jason's ribs.

Jason grunts just like he's supposed to --

"One thing everyone but you knows right now, Jay? Ray called an hour ago. They think they're making serious headway."

"Oh -- fuck --"

Dick claps his back and pulls back with a rueful smile. "It's *why* Bruce is upstairs with Harvey right this second."

"I gotta --"

"Do what you need to get yourself together," Dick says, hard and *even*. "Clark *will* bring you back if it all goes down suddenly."

Jason takes a deep breath and nods. "We're boloing Bruce if he rabbits, right?"

Dick reaches back -- and then he just *is* holding a tranq gun. The *mean* one they use on freaking *Croc*.

"But we'll bolo him, too," Steph says. "I need my turn."

Tim hums. "You really, really do."

"Nice. Back when I can," Jason says, and walks over to Clark. "I'm ready for my ride, Chester --"

And there's a lollipop in his mouth --

And he's wrapped in red --

And the lollipop is freaking *cherry* --

And -- he's totally in the Fortress, which is fucking *suspect* until he sees one of the learning pods Dick talked him into so he could learn Kryptonian faster. It's glowing *just* like there's someone *in* it, but --

"I thought --" Okay, that was more of a goddamned *mumble* because there's a *lollipop* in his *mouth* -- he takes it out. "I thought Superboy didn't *want* to learn Kryptonian."

Clark leers at him for just long enough to be worrying *and* interesting -- and then he hums and rubs at his upper lip. "He seems to have changed his mind. He told me..." Clark smiles *happily* -- "He told me that he could finally tell that I meant it when I named him 'gift.'"

"Aw, man, that's fantastic! Wait, maybe I shouldn't bother him --"

"The AI is bringing him to a more conscious state as we speak. It won't be --"
The pod cracks open and -- there he is, flying up to the skylight and stretching, yawning --

Jason has to admit that the new uniform works on him. It shows off how much he's grown -- now that he *is* growing -- and makes him look -- sleek.

Attractive.

A part of him is *picking* at the fact that he knows in his *bones* that Tim likes the new look just fine --

And that he'd probably kept *something* from the old uniform *anyway* --

Tim *always* keeps things like --

"What's up, Clark? The AI finally stopped yelling at me for thinking in English -- whoa!"

-- that. And, yeah, Jason really is standing here in *workout* clothes --

With no fucking *mask* -- because he's not gonna need one right now. Jason nods to Superboy. "I wanted to talk to you about something --"

"Is Tim okay?"

Jesus, Jesus --

he's dealing. "Tim's fine, man. Uh. Can we?"

Superboy stares at him *hard*, looking a lot less goofy and a lot more *thinky* than usual --

"It's all right, Kon-El," Clark says, and makes a soothing gesture. "Jason only wants --"

Jason holds up a hand. "I'll tell him. Heh. If he lets me," and Jason smiles ruefully at Superboy --

Who floats down to stand in front of him. He's made it to about five-eight to Jason's five-ten, and it looks like he'll eventually have at least *most* of Clark's size -- if not his jaw.

Not like that jaw could fit on just *anybody* --

And Jason's not gonna let his brain chase him away from this. "Mind if we keep this a little private?"

Kon looks at him like he's fucking crazy -- "Dude. We're in Clark's *home*.:"

"One of them only," Clark says, and floats over to stand close to Superboy. Close enough to put a hand on his shoulder and squeeze in a way that -- somehow -- manages to look only a *little* pervy.

Sometimes it's hard to remember that Clark can *do* that --

"Clark --"

"It's all right, Kon-El. It would be no hardship for me to go elsewhere --"

"And you'd still be able to *hear* --"

"And I need not listen. I..." Clark smiles ruefully. "It's been very difficult lately for me not to listen to you, but I'd like to begin proving that I'm capable of allowing you both the respect and love you deserve, *and* privacy."

Superboy blushes pretty hard for that, turning away --
And Clark lets Jason see him *start* to reach for Superboy's face before he stops and just squeezes his shoulder again. Verdict: Perved beyond belief, but actually willing to *control* himself. Which means...

Well, there was no fucking *doubt* that Clark cared about the kid. Even when Superboy freaked him out, he still made sure that he had what he *needed*. It's just that this is a kind of care Jason's not sure he's seen from Clark before. Somewhere in the middle -- or maybe *above* -- all of that baseline perviness, Clark actually wants to be something like a *father* to Superboy. And that --

Does and doesn't seem more fucked-up than the relationship Dick had had with the Bruce who was born in this universe. Jason doesn't know, but he can damned well put some thought into it.

And ask Clark about it the next time he's recovered from whatever Clark says or does to make Jason pay for 'Chester.' Jason bites back the smirk --

And *then* remembers that Superboy can damned well smell his amusement from this distance. Right about when Superboy gives him a narrow and *suspicious* look. Jesus.

Jason raises his hands. "Easy, man. I was just thinking about Clark punishing me for calling him Chester all the time."

Superboy blinks in confusion --

Gets a thoughtful look that's kinda fascinatingly *distant* --

And then he snorts *hard* before breaking into snickers that actually seem a little scandalized. Heh. Nice --

And Clark sighs. "I suppose it was too much to hope that you hadn't picked *that* slang up somewhere --"

"Dude, it was totally programmed in," Superboy says, and pokes at his own forehead with two fingers. The half-gloves make him think of Roy and Connor a little --

They've always looked *cool* -- and impractically douche-y for pretty much everyone *but* archers.

And he's *coping*, because Clark looks *horrified* --

"Hey, it's okay, Clark! The stuff they programmed in is *useful* sometimes."

Clark looks *pained* --

Superboy looks *worried* --

Jason clears his throat. "Hey, you never know when he's gonna need random old-school slang."

"Yeah, exactly! I gotta... uh... talk to people. About things!"

Jason blinks -- and carries on. "He totally does. And some of those people will *appreciate* the *classics*."

Clark raises an eyebrow at both of them.

"Seriously," Superboy says, and then gives that slow and helpful nod people give to toddlers to get them to go along with things.
Was that programmed in, too?

"I... *appreciate* what you're both saying, but you can't -- " Clark shakes his head and smiles ruefully. "I really can't help worrying about what you were *forced* to learn, Kon-El."

"Well -- but. It's nothing really *bad*, Clark. Just -- some of it is kinda weird. Uh. Now that I'm thinking about it more often."

Clark reaches out to touch Superboy's face again, and this time he actually lets his fingertips brush his cheek.

Superboy smiles cautiously, *hopefully* -- and then floats back far enough to give Clark a high-five. "You can leave me with -- uh. Starling. It won't take long, right, dude?"

Jason smiles ruefully. "I'm pretty sure it'll be brief, yeah."

Superboy bites his lip. "Okay, cool. See you later?"

"Of course," Clark says, and squeezes Superboy's hand before zooming off -- somewhere.

And -- Jason watches Superboy concentrate -- *obviously* concentrate -- for a long moment. "Can you still hear him?"

"A little. He's a couple dozen miles up -- okay, no, he just flew north *really* fast. No idea anymore," he says, and shrugs.

That -- "That was good, Superboy. You almost looked completely casual."

Superboy narrows his eyes. "Do you just wanna fuck with me? I already know you birds can lie as easy as you breathe. Some of us need practice with this stuff."

"Easy, easy, I'm not -- I didn't mean to break your balls, okay?" Jason pushes at the air a little. "I'm actually really fucking *bad* at lying, and Dick only puts me undercover if, like, *no* one else is available. And he damned well asks people on other teams *first*."

Superboy looks *confused* --

"I'm -- doing this wrong. Look, uh --" Jason shakes his head and closes the distance between them before offering his hand. "Hi. I'm Jason. I wanna start over with you."

"What does that mean?"

It means you remember *exactly* how much of an asshole I've been -- Jason drops his hand and nods. "It means that I *know* I've been an asshole to you and I'm trying to fix it."

Deep frown -- "Did Tim put you up to this?"

"No. And we both know he never would. Don't we? "No, and -- I'm not even doing it *for* him."

"Then who *are* you doing it for?"

"Myself," Jason says, and smiles ruefully. "I just -- I've started getting close to J'onn --"

Superboy *blushes* --

And Jason decides not to bring up the tube. Just -- not right now. "I -- anyway. He pointed out some
of the ways I'm kinda fucked up. And I can't -- I can't let that stand."

Superboy crosses his arms over his respectable chest. "And part of that is... what? Making *friends* with me?"

"If I can. If you're even remotely interested --"

"I don't get it, dude. You're not -- what does *you* being fucked-up have to do with *me*?"

"I've been... really fucking unfair to you --"

"Because you're *jealous*?"

"In a word? Fuck, yeah. Because you don't have a damned thing to be ashamed of about your life, and I really fucking do." Jason shoves his hands in his pockets and offers his own shrug. "Part of me is sure -- *dead* sure -- that one day Tim's gonna figure out I'm no good for him, or at all -- and waltz right on over to you. For good."

That gets another blush, and -- yeah.

"You've thought about it."

"No, I -- Tim *loves* you, dude. He's not gonna -- it's not like he's some kind of... I don't even know. But *you* should," Superboy says, and frowns at him just like --

Just like he'd said something which would hurt Tim. Which... "I'm working on it. I know -- I *did* already say this stuff *to* Tim."

"And he *didn't* kick your ass?"

'He.' Superboy doesn't know, yet --

And it's not *Jason's* place to say a fucking word, even though right now that feels like more of the bullshit he's been dumping on the poor kid's head --

"C'mon, *what*, Starling?"

"He kicked my ass a little, yeah. And I told him I'd do better -- starting with you."

Superboy frowns. "Just -- what did *you* do that was so bad?"

"Sold my ass for the better part of a year before Dick picked me up --"

"*Fuck* -- but. There's nothing *wrong* with that!"

"I knifed a few johns --"

"Uh. But -- *seriously*?"

Jason smiles ruefully again. "Just the ones that got violent, but I always gave more than I took if I could --"

"They -- they *deserve* it. I've *talked* to sex workers. I know this stuff!"

Jason raises his eyebrows.

Superboy blushes -- but stands his ground, unfolding his arms and jabbing at Jason's chest a little.
Without touching. "It's not -- you *can't* get on yourself for that. I've *seen* sex workers who do that to themselves and -- it's no *good*. They *hurt* themselves --"

"And other people, too, sometimes," Jason says, and smiles a little wider. "When Dick picked me up, I was thinking about going after the johns for real. Including the ones who *didn't* try to get rough with me."

"I -- oh."

"Yeah. And sometimes -- even now -- when I'm beating on the pimps and johns? I'm not doing it for anyone but the kid I used to be."

"But -- that's *fair*. I mean. Isn't it?"

"Is it?"

"I mean -- it's not like --" Superboy frowns again and looks away. "I'm not -- I'm kinda... mean. To mad scientist types."

The fucking *tube* --

"I figured -- that's allowed. I mean, it *should* be, right?" And now Superboy's looking *worried* at him --

"Shit, I didn't mean to fuck *you* up --"

"But -- I mean, Tim *told* me this stuff. He's bitchy as *hell* to bad parents, and he always said Dick was extra mean to, like, muggers and people running protection rackets, and -- and he didn't mention you," Superboy says, and blushes again.

"You don't --" Get it. Except -- except what, exactly, is he doing here? Jason steps back and holds up a hand, breathing himself down to a little half-assed meditation --

And finding a *new* path in his brain, something that leads straight from hating on himself a little to -- not. He doesn't *have* to take it -- there's *nothing* pulling him in that direction -- but there's a... suggestion.

Right there.

Jason swallows.

"Uh... Starling? I mean -- Jason..."

Jason *takes* it, because he can, because it's fucking allowed, because he's not --

He's not gonna make *another* kid all fucked in the head --

And he's right there in his head, right there looking into Tim's eyes and seeing love and hope and something like *adoration* --

And Dick's there feeling pride, and love, and *need* --

And Steph is tagging out to bruise him, not hurt him --

And Bruce is reaching for him like he's something --
Something so much *better* -- Babs.

Babs is there, too, somehow, even though he's *always* been too young for her, even though he always feels like a puppy who hasn't figured out how his paws work in her place, even though she's pulling away like escape velocity from the street is *easy* --

("I haven't seen my biological father for... God, I guess since I was ten or so? A few years before my *exceedingly* pathetic drunk of a mother --"

"*Seriously*?")

And Babs' smile had been slow and wet and *dark*... but still fond.

("Is it that I cover better, do you think? Skylark had the same reaction."

"I... I just... you don't *feel* like --"

"Your tribe, Jaybird...? There's something to be said for the fact that Jim Gordon really is *just* that good a man. There's also something to be said for a teenaged girl deciding, way back when, to be someone new."

"And you think I should do the same thing? That *Lark* should?"

"God, no. Skylark drives me up a wall and I can *feel* my father *itching* to shove a bar of lye soap down your throat sometimes, but I'd *miss* you. *Both* of you. You're exactly who you need to be, I promise.")

And he'd been -- his back was up. His *blood* was up --

("Jaybird. Think for a minute about how much I -- and the rest of the family -- enjoy your company *just* as you are --"

"You don't have to --"

"Blow smoke up your ass? Wouldn't dream of it. But... I think, right now, that instead of doing *anything* useful, you're thinking about how much *you* enjoy your company... and how much you don't."")

And -- he'd changed the subject. She'd *let* him change the subject --

Let him *leave* --

Was that really the *last* time he'd spoken to her for more than just the damned Mission?

Fucking --

Is it better or worse that she probably wasn't *surprised*? But --

The path is there, and it's his *family*, and --

"Uh. Should I call Clark back? You're kinda --"

"I'm good," Jason says, and -- doesn't pull on a fake smile. He damned well looks *up*, though. "I'm good. I'm just... there's a lot in my head right now."

Superboy nods like that makes sense --
Like he's a lot fucking more than the goofy *asshole* --

Who he probably never really was. Not -- not all the fucking time. Not all of him.

"Superboy --"

"I'm not -- I mean. You can call me Kon. Everyone does," he says, and blushes again.

Jason -- swallows. And nods. "Kon, then. And you --"

"Jason?"

Jason smiles and nods. "Or Jay --"

"Does. Does Tim call you that?"

Jason bites the inside of his lip a little -- no. "Yeah, mostly."

"He doesn't when he's just, you know, talking about you. I was... kinda curious," Superboy -- *Kon* says, and snorts. "He can be so *serious*."

"The Mission --"

"Hey, I know --"

"I -- know you do. Sorry, I just -- reflex."

And that wary look is back -- damn.

Jason winces. "I just --" He shakes his head. "I'm the one who doesn't adapt too well. I'm the one who was never *really* a part of *any* team. I have a way I know how to be with my family and then I have a way I know how to be with -- everyone else."

"But..."

"Yeah?"

Kon shakes his head. "I don't get it, dude. I mean, Clark and John and Kara and Natasha are great, but it would be *fucked* if I spent all my time in Metropolis and Smallville."

"I know what you're saying, and I try to get up to NYC fairly often, because I *love* the Titans, but --"

"You don't need them? What?"

"Not -- no. I just -- they've been there for me when I've needed them in a lot of ways, and they're great, but I get... pretty *much* all I need in Gotham."

Kon's nod looks a little *sad*.

"Hey --"

"No, I -- I mean. Not everyone can be into having a bunch of friends. Right?"

The smile on Jason's face feels crooked as hell, and the path in his head is cool and easy and full of something that *tastes* one whole fuck of a lot like acceptance. Like --
It feels like eyes on him, though. Blue eyes, green eyes, red eyes -- waiting for him to fucking cope.

"I think... I think I've spent a real long time convinced -- no. I *know* I've spent a real long time
convinced that there were things I just couldn't have, and that the things I had could be taken away...
anytime. Anytime, at all --"

"Tim's not a *thing*. And -- I don't like you talking about him like he isn't *loyal* --"

"Is that what you want from him? Loyalty?"

"*Yes* --"

"Because I'm thinking..." Jason rolls his head on his neck, which feels tight and fucking *painful* --

"*What* are you thinking?"

"That loyalty is something I'm scared of, Kon."

*Confused* frown --

And Jason smiles ruefully again. "Look at it this way -- someone can be loyal to someone even when
don't feel *anything* for them anymore --"

"*Jesus*, you've got problems!"

That -- Jason snorts. "Yeah. Yeah, I really do. And -- they're mine, and I'm not gonna lay them on
you --"

"But are you gonna *deal* with them? I mean, like -- you're *talking* like you will, but you just
keep trying to convince me of all this fucked-up shit."

Jason opens his mouth -- and closes it.

Kon looks at him like he's waiting for Jason to catch a fucking *clue*. And --

Fuck, why can't he? Why can't *he* live like he knows everything is basically okay and will *stay*
okay? That has a lot of answers -- *easy* answers, even, starting with G-for-Gotham -- but there are
even more answers that he doesn't really think about. He -- "How do you do it, Kon?"

"Do what?"

Jason jerks his chin at him. "Live like you do." Love -- "*Love* like you do. I don't know a whole
lot about you, but I know you've been *through* some fucked-up shit --"

"So maybe I should act like it?"

Jason shrugs. "You pointed out that I'm not actually making any forward progress. Dick taught me to
ask for *help* when that happened."

"You needed to be *taught*?"

Jason snickers. "Okay, that -- that right there, actually. You were imprisoned naked in a
motherfucking *tube*. You *had* to find a way out by yourself or you'd still be there getting fucked
over by Cadmus, and then you had to figure out how to *live* on your own because first Clark was
*dead* and then he was freaked right the fuck out by your *existence*. Why *aren't* you like me?"
And Kon just *glares* at him for a while --

And Jason remembers. "Aw -- fuck, no, I didn't mean to --"

"I made *friends*, asshole. People are *good*, and so is the *world*. If you need help, there's *someone* out there who'll give it. Sometimes you have to *look* for them, but that doesn't mean they're not freaking *there*. It's --" Kon shakes his head. "Okay, you had a really fucked-up childhood. I didn't know about the hooking, but Tim has given me little hints sometimes -- usually when he's trying to tell me to be more of a *pessimist* -- and, like, I *know*, all right? And I also know that Gotham is more fucked-up than, like, anywhere else in this *country*. But you can't tell me there was *no* one!"

I was alone.

I had a *squat* I had to *fight* for.

I lost my virginity to a guy who smelled like mustard and Old Spice who kept calling me *Billy* --

I was *alone* when she died, and the social workers just *let* me run the fuck away --

And stay away --

Just like my mother stayed away from everyone who tried to get her to drink a little less --

Apply for fucking *assistance* --

Anything but -- selling it.

And being alone except for the friends -- and 'friends' -- she drank and smoked with and *him*.

And --

Yeah. Jason takes a deep breath and looks Kon in the eye. "You're right."

Kon blinks. "Uh. Yeah?"

"No, you know you are. *Don't* act like you don't --"

"And don't give me orders, dude. You're not the boss of me."

Jason licks his teeth -- "Is Tim?"

Kon shrugs again, and his fake-casual is a lot more shaky than it was before --

"I'm -- taking that question back. It's none of my business --"

"Do you want to be my friend or *not*?"

Jason *sucks* in a breath -- "Sorry. I -- sorry. What should I do next here?"

"I --" Kon punches his shoulder lightly. "Ask me questions and don't freaking take them back until I *tell* you I don't want to talk about it."

"It -- felt like you were about to do just that."

"I -- oh."
Jason nods. "And -- it's okay --"

"He's totally the boss of me. I mean, I act like he isn't, and I give him a lot of shit when we're not, you know, fighting for our *lives*, but -- he's Cardinal. And he's a lot of other things, too," Kon says, and searches Jason a little.

"There's -- I wanna say that there are *some* things I wouldn't do for -- him, but it's not true."

*Kon* nods like Jason had just affirmed a basic fact of the universe, which --

It's something else he needed to know.

Jason smiles and punches Kon's arm.

"Heh." Kon flies up a few feet and mimes some boxing moves which are actually pretty damned tight.

Jason jerks his chin again. "Did Tim teach you that?"

"Hunh? No, it was all programmed in. They were really *exact* about how much force most humans can take, and when to decrease it, and when to increase it --"

"And how to throw the kind of punch that can lay a super-strong meta out without fucking your knuckles?"

"Uh, hunh. I always thought they must've had some meta in to help with that, though I guess they could've measured it from watching metas fight? I dunno," and Kon flies around a little. It's slow enough that it looks more like something he needs to do than something he wants to do.

Jason nods thoughtfully. "How much do you *want* to know about what went down when they were making you?"

"Uh... it kinda depends?" And Kon smiles ruefully and pushes a hand back through his hair. "I mean... sometimes I don't wanna think about it, at all, you know?"

Part of him wants to point out how *dangerous* that is --

But the rest of him has actually been *having* this conversation. "I get that."

"And it's not like -- I mean, Tim doesn't really let me blow shit off too much," Kon says, and that's a *shy* look --

"He's gonna be beating on me until I cope, yeah."

Kon nods and lands again. "So... what else do you wanna know about me?"

"What... what would you do if he left you?"

"Get him *back*, dude. Ask a *hard* one."

Jason coughs a laugh. "I... uh. I can't decide if I want to bring you back to Gotham or just run screaming."

"Uh. Neither? I vote neither."

Jason raises his eyebrows. "You don't wanna see him in his natural habitat more often?"
"Hey, I *have* visited. It's fucking *scary* there, and I'm not allowed to make it *less* scary."

"You were a lot of help after the 'quake --"

"Yeah, yeah. So was everyone else. I still don't *get* what makes people want to *stay* there."

"Some people have no choice --"

"No, I get that, and I get that *you* guys have to stay there for *them*, but -- fuck, dude, I got shot at by a guy who turned out to be an undead *flesh-eating* *mobster* with *tentacles* and all I was trying to do was help put a *school* back together. I'm not saying I won't come if Tim calls me, or, you know, if you guys ever need more help, but the rest of the time? That place is *all* yours."

"Heh. Got it. Anything you wanna know about me?"

"I... would you ever *leave* Gotham?"

"I... I'm needed --"

"But if you weren't?"

Jason shakes his head. "I don't think I can wrap my head around that."

Kon nods. "Okay, what if your *family* left?"

"They --"

"If they *would*," Kon says, and something in his eyes says this is an important question --

And Jason absolutely gets it, because yeah, it is. "Dick told me recently that one of the reasons he did everything he could to make it easy for me and Tim to be together is that he knew I'd never leave him -- with the subtext that he knew *Tim* would never leave the *family*.""C'mon --"

Jason holds up a hand. "I'm not avoiding the question, okay? I just -- I'd follow him if he still wanted me."

"And Dick?"

He *wouldn't* -- but, okay, he can go with this. "If I thought he needed me, yeah -- and if I could take Tim with me. And -- we're getting someone new --"

"Stephanie? I mean -- Skylark?"

Of course Tim told Kon about her. Before he and Dick knew her *name*, maybe. And -- he can deal. "Yep. She's pretty fantastic."

"And hot?"

"Fuck, yeah. She's got these hips --"

("Are you fetishizing my child-bearing hips?")

"-- anyway. She looks damned good on top of *being* damned good."

"Are you and her boning?"
Jason grins. "She's part of the family, Kon. You kinda gotta go there."

Kon snorts and punches him again. "*Tim* says that *only* Dick has ever gotten a taste of Owl."

Not a surprise that Kon doesn't know *her* name -- but. "She's got her own thing going on. And she's always liked 'em older." Or, you know, old *enough*.

"*She* was hot when she was Batgirl --"

"She still *is* hot. And a lot harder to catch on camera."

Another thoughtful nod. "But she hangs out with you guys and everything? Tim says he visits her all the time."

And he absolutely does. A *lot* fucking more than he does. "I kinda... I let my issues get in the way of me talking to her. Being with her."

Kon frowns. "Hey, you know, it's one thing if you kiss off the rest of the world, but she's one of *you*. Right?"

"I -- kinda want to kill those questions of yours."

"Oh --"

"No, wait, not *those* questions, okay? Just the ones where you're not sure about how *annoyingly* fucking smart you are."

Kon *blushes*. "Uh -- I'm not the smart one --"

"Heh. I'm *really* not the smart one --"

"You're *Starling*. You've been doing this *forever*.

"Not really. Not ---" Jason shakes his head. "The fact that I've been doing this twice as long as you've existed doesn't mean I've been doing it all *that* long. Time can... go really fast, sometimes," and that was a *weak* finish --

But Kon nods like it made sense anyway. "It doesn't feel like forever."

"Maybe it will when Dick can't kick my ass *easily*, but... I'm kinda thinking that it'll take more than time *or* skill to make me feel old. Or even like an adult."

"What would do it?"

"I -- loss, I think. It's part of what did it for Dick. And --" Tana Moon. "You know how that works, too, yeah?"

Kon stiffens right up and nods, taking a shaky breath -- but not turning away even when his eyes start looking a little damp.

Jason squeezes his arm instead of punching it -- and... hunh. He's hot like Clark is, but not *as* hot. The real difference, though, is that he feels almost entirely human. His muscle is hard, but it still feels like *muscle*, as opposed to fucking *stone*.

"What is it?"
"Nothing -- no, just. Your power is from your aura? *Just* your aura?"

"Hunh? No, I'm getting some of Clark's powers, too, now that I'm aging normally. Why?"

"I wasn't expecting you to feel like a human," Jason says, and moves his hands back into his pockets.

"*Oh*... Uh... heh. Here," Kon says, and gets a deep look of concentration on his face --

And he feels hard. And *cooler* -- "Your aura is up."

"Yep."

"Your aura was *down*?"

"Uh. Yeah? We're in the *Fortress*, dude. If something gets in here that wants to hurt me, the aura won't make much of a freaking *difference*. It's not like you're wearing your uniform or anything."

"No -- I'm due to go work out, actually. I was working on the reports when J'onn came over to talk to me --"

"Dude, he just hangs out in your *Cave*?"

"He's working on a project with us -- for us, really." Jason grins. "I'm hoping he comes around a lot more often, though."

"Are you boning *him*?"

"Uh, hunh," and Jason raises his eyebrows. "Got a problem with that?"

"*No*! I mean, if that's your kink --"

"It really fucking is --"

"Fine by me, dude. But -- I didn't know he was *that* close to you guys. Tim's never said anything about him."

"It's pretty new. But -- uh. Bruce was his friend back in the day. Did Tim tell you --"

"That you guys totally have a living, breathing *Batman* now? Yeah. Jesus, I'd think you'd all be focused on *him*, you know?"

Jason snorts. "We've been pretty focused. Enough to convince him to stick around."

"*Dude*."

"Yeah --"

"So does this mean you're all gonna be bats instead of birds now?"

"*Fuck*, no. Though if Tim wants to change his codename to Fruitbat or some shit, we're pretty much all duty bound to support him."

Kon snickers.

Jason grins. "Liked that, did ya?"

"Hell, yeah. When we're up against, like, kid metas, they get so *confused* by Cardinal."
"You don't ever call him Tink?"

"Eh, that's your thing. If I call him anything other than his name or Cardinal, I'm calling him Red. Hey, thanks for talking him out of that purple sparkly thing. It wasn't *nearly* as hot on him as his regular uniform."

Did Tim's inner woman pick that thing out?

The heels, maybe?

Jason frowns --

"Hey, what is it?"

"I -- something you said made me think of a question I need to ask Tim sooner rather than later."

"Bird stuff?"

Jason waves a hand. "Only in the sense that it's *family* stuff. I need --"

"To get back, I know. I got about a million more Kryptonian words to learn, anyway."

Jason snorts. "I know just about enough of that language to get Clark to fuck me harder, so --"

"Oh, dude, do *not* put that image in my *head*!"


"You are *not*. He's -- he's all -- he's *different* family --"

"I'm very happy to hear you say that," Clark says from right fucking there --

And he even sounds *sincere* --

"Though, truly, one shouldn't... ah... set such things in stone?"

*Mostly* sincere --

"Hunh?"

Clark sighs, smiles, and pats Kon's shoulder. "Nothing of any import," he says, and --

Kon shrugs and lets him get away with it. Because he can't read Clark as well as he can read Jason? Because he doesn't *want* to read Clark that well? Or maybe it's something to do with all those questions that didn't need to be there, at all, all those *moments* when Kon's confidence had failed.

There would've been more of those if Jason hadn't been so much off *his* game, and that's...

Something else to talk to Tim about before he even tries to go shoving his own nose in. For now, though --

Jason grins and offers his hand again --

And Kon grins and shakes it, then grips Jason's forearm with his eyebrows up.

Jason lets his own grin get wider and returns the gesture. "Thank you."
"Hey, you're welcome! And, you know, we can talk pretty much any time you want, okay? I mean, I know you've got the birds, and you'll want to talk more to them --"

Jason hauls Kon away from Clark and in for a hug, hard and serious and *solid*. Kon stiffens up for a second, but then he just *is* relaxed and hugging Jason back, patting and stroking a little. And when Jason moves to pull back --

Kon holds on for a minute. "*Are* you gonna be okay? I mean... I don't think we really *fixed* anything."

"I've got a lot to think about, Kon. More and *better* stuff thanks to you -- like the fact that Tim's got pretty good taste in boyfriends."

Kon *beams*, and, for the first time, Jason can see the Clark in him. All *through* him, really, and that --

That just means he's been real fucking slow about even more things than he'd already thought. He --

He pulls back the rest of the way and nods to Clark, who wraps him up tight and flies them up --

He'll do better.

*
Bruce watches Harvey pace the bedroom Alfred had set aside for Bruce, watches him move and notes restlessness, curiosity, tension --

But he doesn't have to stare. He sits down at the small desk --

"Don't do that."

Bruce blinks. "Don't... sit?"

Harvey's laugh is quiet, nervous --

Bruce thinks that, were he to rest his hand on Harvey's chest right now, he would feel his heart pounding. It's not a feeling he would ever disdain, but he's quite sure that the reasons for Harvey's purely *emotional* arousal are anything but arousing. "Harv..."

"I -- don't sit in that chair."

"You don't think I'd be in your way on the other chair?"

"Sit on the *bed*, big guy. Gimme -- gimme a reason to do the same thing."

"Harv, we need not make love --"

Harvey makes a soft, pained noise and covers his face, and Bruce -- must. He stands and closes the distance between them, pulling Harvey into his arms --

And Harvey hugs him back *almost* immediately, pushes his nose against the side of Bruce's throat and breathes harshly and terribly --

Bruce tightens his hold in a reflex he's not altogether *sure* about --

But Harvey begins to lengthen and even his breathing, and so it is a reflex that Bruce will do nothing to beat out of himself. He kisses Harvey's temple, and Harvey shivers and continues to relax himself with steady, practiced care --

"I'm scared."

"I am, as well."

"You -- you're not *going* anywhere, big guy!"

Bruce smiles ruefully, but doesn't pull back. "You are. There is... more than enough fear for that. And pain."

"Ah -- hell," and Harvey hugs him firmly. "We don't know anything, yet. We don't -- I'm not just gonna let them drop me in any old universe. It has to be -- there has to be at least a little *hope* that I'll be able to find Gilda..."

"I know, Harv. Dick has told the Atom and the others to search for universes with multiple biological signatures matching Gilda's."

"That -- well, that makes complete sense. In that way where it's science freaking *fiction*," Harvey

"says, pulling back enough to search Bruce's eyes a little. "This is working for you? It makes sense?"

"To a certain extent."

"Okay, so --"

"Specifically, to the extent where I'm absolutely positive that the understanding I have of what the physicists are doing is exceedingly shallow where not simply wrongheaded."

"I..." Harvey snorts and cups and squeezes Bruce's shoulders. "Bet you wish you went to college *now*."

Bruce laughs quietly. "The idea had occurred. Repeatedly."

"Not that they really prepared any of us for any kind of science education -- hey, how did your *Dad* manage to learn anything useful at Exeter?"

"The stories he told suggested a rather more passionate teaching staff than what we were... subjected to."

"Heh. You know, you never talked shit about the professors -- or any of the other adults -- when we were *there*. Not unless they were *actively* being assholes to the weaker kids -- or me."

"It was something I was rather explicitly trained against," Bruce says, cupping Harvey's waist with one hand and stroking his hair with the other. "Mother wasn't an especially patient woman with the people she felt were undeserving -- and did not demand that sort of thing from me -- but Father, Alfred, and Leslie were all quite clear about the respect due to adults from children and teenagers."

Harvey nods thoughtfully. "I can see it. And -- heh. You preferred spending time with your Mom."

"When I didn't prefer being alone with my Visible Man doll and Father's old medical texts."

An eyebrow raise --

"Harv...?"

"How much did you really *prefer* being alone, big guy?"

"I --"

Harvey covers Bruce's mouth with his fingers, and it's enough to make Bruce hunger to touch, to kiss --

Harvey shivers, perhaps for the look in Bruce's eyes --

"Harv..."

Harvey winces. "Just -- I need to know this. I need to know you as well as I can, big guy," he says, and moves his fingers.

"You're building memories."

A laugh -- "I used to think that was one of the saddest things about you, big guy. I used to -- it just seemed so *painful*."

"But not now?"
"Now..." Harvey smiles wryly and kisses Bruce, soft and brief --

("Everything you do like that is a first, beloved friend. And quite possibly a *last*."")

Bruce does his own shivering and makes the kiss warmer, deeper --

Harvey makes a low sound and begins stripping out of his suit with rapid, careless motions -- without breaking the kiss.

Bruce wants to help him, to slow him down --

Bruce wants to make this moment *last* --

But he knows that Harvey wants other moments. Bruce nods and toes out of his trainers, pushes down his shorts, jock, and the strangely sleek underwear that had appeared in his drawer this morning. He isn't sure what they're called, but he *will* know. Dick and Jason wear this sort of underwear all the time, and --

He'll have the chance to ask this, and many other questions. He --

He groans and cups Harvey's face as Harvey tears at the buttons of his shirt, pushes his tongue *deep* as those same buttons fall to the carpet --

Harvey pants and *bites* his lip --

"*Harv* --"

He pulls back. "I have to *know* you!"

Bruce swallows and nods. "I --" He takes off his shirt, sits on the bed to remove his socks --

And Harvey is right there beside him doing the same thing. He --

He wants to *watch* this, *take* this --

He must speak. "I wanted -- I believed I wanted to be alone, because, by the time I had been in kindergarten for a few days, I knew that I had no desire to spend time with children my age. I also knew that even the most patient and caring of adults grew tired with the company of children --"

"You didn't want to be a burden?"

"Precisely. Alone was... it seemed the better path --"

"It wasn't. Tell me --"

"I know that now," Bruce says, and cups Harvey's face, strokes his skin --

His stubble hasn't grown in, at all, from this morning, and won't until much later --

Will he still be here, then? Will -- "I'd like to shave you."

Harvey coughs a laugh. "You still use straight razors, don't you."

"They provide a far superior --"

"Can you keep your hands from shaking, big guy? When we're both damp and naked in a steamy bathroom and you can *see* me thinking about everything I could do to make you sweat --"
"*Harv* --"

"I *love* you," and that was more of a growl than language, more --

So much more, and Harvey is on him, moving him --

Bruce helps, holding and squeezing and *writhing* them further onto the bed, closer to where they can touch, and love --

"Ah, God --"

Bruce kisses him again, nuzzles his mouth and breathes in the scents of Alfred's coffee *and* Alfred's special soothing blend of teas -- he needs more, and so he licks Harvey's throat --

"Oh -- oh, yeah --"

He sucks there, bites and -- no, he will leave no marks. He mustn't --

Kissing here is enough, sucking *gentle* kisses, careful ones --

"God, Bruce, you're holding *back*!"

The accusation is *unmistakable*, the desire comprehensible to every part of him which has known love and needed so much *more* -- but. "You must. You must blame me for this," Bruce says, and doesn't wait before he bites Harvey over his jugular --

Harvey gasps --

Gasps again and *shakes* --

And cries out when Bruce pulls back, *clutches* him --

Bruce bites over his carotid and strokes Harvey's beautiful body, too lean still, but familiarly wonderful, *needful* --

Harvey cries out again, and Bruce needs --

Bruce pulls back and stares at him, fills his mind with the sight of Harvey's parted lips, his dazed eyes slowly finding focus again, the shine of fresh sweat on his forehead --

Bruce licks him there --

"*Bruce*. Tell me -- tell me something you haven't told me before --"

"I sniffed your pillow when I masturbated. I -- when you were at baseball practice --"

"Jesus -- fuck -- *more* --"

Bruce kisses Harvey again, licks --

Harvey turns out of the kiss and flips them only somewhat awkwardly. The self-defense courses taken by everyone in the D.A.'s office remotely healthy enough for them were, by necessity, quite good --

And Bruce will remember Harvey's hands on his shoulders --

And Harvey rising above him --
And the *darkness* of Harvey's flush --

"*Please*, Bruce!"

And for a moment he feels only stupid, awkward and *incorrect* --

"I need *everything*!"

And he will remember this, too. "This -- this desire --" Bruce swallows and reaches to cup Harvey's lean and relatively pale hips. "I have sketchbooks filled with images of your hands --"

"God -- more."

"I have more filled with -- suits you could wear. Suits I imagined you in --"

Another laugh -- "*Business* suits?"

"And -- uniforms."

Harvey bites his lip -- "Were they tight, big guy?"

"Most of them were... impractically so."

And this laugh is bright, faintly wild -- "Poured on?"

"I felt very embarrassed by the one in which your circumcision scar was visible through the material --"

An explosive *snort* -- and Harvey scratches down Bruce's pectorals, strokes *up* and to the sides --

Strokes over Bruce's ribs and licks his lips --

Dips his thumb in Bruce's navel --

"*Harv*..."

"I need more. I need -- every time I gave you that look we both knew meant I didn't want you to tell me the truth. Every time you blushed. Every -- God, and it doesn't all have to be about *me* --"

"You have to know how much I *need* you --"

"I do. I do. But I want to know it *better*," Harvey says, and *grips* Bruce's penis --

Bruce groans and shudders --

"Can you concentrate on talking while I touch you? I -- I *need* that --"

"Your *hand* --"

"Mine, big guy. Just mine right now -- God, did you really have sex with *all* of them?"

"Not -- not Stephanie --"

"No, she's been giving *me* those looks, but I don't think she'll last long with you around. Heh. Here's a hint -- talk *Republican* to her."
Bruce blinks and tries to -- to focus --

And Harvey snickers. "She's a *traditional* girl, big guy. You gotta be respectful."

"I try -- I try to always -- *mm* --" And Harvey's thumb in his mouth is thick, lightly callused where once it had been heavily so, strong and mobile as Harvey uses it to press down on Bruce's tongue --

"I'll tell you something, okay? I think she's a stunner. If she was just *two* years older -- and if I didn't have the best woman in the world waiting for me somewhere out in the freaking *multiverse* - - I'd go for her. She's passionate, smart, no-nonsense, *and* she's willing to learn new things about the world. She's not a traditional girl even a *little*, even though part of her wants to be, and she *knows* it. So you remember *that*. And you tell her someday that a *very* problematic part of me wanted to know what she tastes like. And then? You taste her *for* me."

Bruce lets his nostrils flare --

"Oh... big guy, I..." Harvey licks his lips again --

Pulls his thumb out of Bruce's mouth --

*Sucks* his thumb and wraps his other hand around both of them, holding and stroking --

Bruce groans and stares, wanting more than just flashes of Harvey's penis, more than the feel of it, so long and slender -- "Harv --"

"Yeah -- yeah. I wanted this bad, big guy, thought of it all -- all the freaking *time* --"

"*Tell* me --"

Harvey moans and shivers -- "Wanted -- wanted it on your bed, surrounded by your *scent* --"

"Oh --" And then he's grunting, because Harvey is squeezing rhythmically, eyes closed and searching -- "You -- *more* --"

"Wanted it *here*, but -- in your bedroom -- your old bedroom --"

"It's Tim's --"

"Does he even *use* it?"

He? Or she? Is *that* secret available to Harvey -- no, he must assume no, even though it hurts. "He -- he said no. I haven't seen --"

"You like his colognes --"

"*Yes* --"

"I like *yours*, big guy. You always -- *nn*. You always smelled so good, so *classy* --"

"I never -- I hardly ever *chose* --"

"Even when you were freaking *Brucie* -- oh, I gotta --" And Harvey begins to stroke, fast and *hard* --

"*Harv* --"
"God -- God, so much *time* --"

"*Look* at me!"

And Harvey cries out and does it, and for a moment it's only the two of them, only what they can see of each other, feel --

Harvey looks as wild as Bruce feels, as hungry, as *desperate* -- "I need -- we need *more* --"

"Anything, anything, big guy --"

"I want -- let me show you what I've learned --"

"Oh -- fuck, yeah, we can, we can absolutely -- God, your body --"

And it's too much not to flip them, cover Harvey, kiss him again and drive against him --

"*Fuck*, Bruce --"

"I've dreamed of joining you *with* Gilda --"

Harvey grunts and *bucks* --

"She's beautiful, so petite, but her hands --"

"Strong, so -- *rough* --"

Bruce moans and *grinds* against him -- "I've dreamed of you mouthing them, sucking --"

"I do, I *do* --"

"I've dreamed of her taking me with them while I took *you* --"

Harvey growls and shoves Bruce *back*, and for a moment Bruce wonders if he's gone too far --

But Harvey is only scrabbling at the bedside table. He --

"Harv, I don't know --"

"I* know,*" he says, and pulls out a bottle of lubricant of the same brand as what Dick used with Tim last night. It's quite full and --

Hm. "How did you --"

"Big guy, if they *don't* have slick in every single bedroom in this manor -- just in *case* -- I'd be *real* damned shocked."

Bruce hums and considers the many definitions of 'healthy teenaged sexuality' -- until Harvey snaps his fingers in front of Bruce's face. "I'm sorry --"

Harvey's smile is wry. "It was good for you last night."

Bruce takes a deep breath and nods. "I would... I would answer every question --"

"Tell me about Superman? And here," Harvey says, and twines their fingers together around the bottle.
"Oh, Harv --"

"Gimme your other hand --"

Bruce pins Harvey's free hand with his own, clutches his strong wrist --

"Oh, *yeah* --"

"He is... he has many fantasies."

"About you?"

Bruce smiles ruefully and thrusts --

"Oh -- *slow*.

"Yes, Harv --"

"Nnh -- but not too slow, oh, fuck, I love your *hair* --"

"Your body... such grace --"

"Tell me, tell me everything --"

"I believe he has fantasies about *everyone* he cares about even slightly --"

"Jesus --"

"I believe..." Bruce licks his lips. "Do you want --"

"In me, you gotta get in me --"

"I *will*, but --"

"Tell me more first, come on, tell me what you -- you love him, don't you?"

Bruce pants, flushes -- "Yes --"

"Since -- from the beginning? Like me?"

"More -- I was afraid of him, despite or perhaps." Bruce groans and thrusts faster --

"No, no --"

"Harv --"

"Not *yet* --"

Bruce shudders and slows himself down, forces himself -- "Your *heat* --"

"Superman -- Superman's hotter --"

"Not -- he's *inhuman* --"

"You *like* that --"

"I feared -- I feared so much. I lied to him, avoided him, insulted him, kept my -- my *distance* --"
"Jesus, big guy --"

"The Superman -- the Superman from our universe had so *little* of me --"

"*Stop*," Harvey growls, and it's the snap of his cross-examination voice, demanding and demanding of *attention*.

Bruce stills his hips and tries to calm his breathing -- "I'm listening --"

"Don't go feeling guilty. Don't -- don't go changing your *mind*, Bruce," and Harvey's voice is low, *stern* --

Bruce groans and darts in for a kiss, another --

Harvey turns his head --

"*Please* --"

"Don't change your --"

"I *won't*, Harv. I -- I *can't*," Bruce says, and the feeling of weakness --

The rush of shame --

They are nothing compared to the *wonder* in Harvey's eyes, the hope and pleasure -- "You want this for me --"

"Always -- so *much* --" And Harvey twists the hand not holding the lubricant free and cups Bruce's face, *pulls* him in for another kiss, so deep and *firm* --

Bruce moans into Harvey's mouth and begins to grind, to *push* until Harvey is panting grunts into his mouth --

Until they twitch nearly *together* --

Harvey *bites* him --

And Bruce bites back, thinking fleetingly of Jason's obliques --

Clark's throat --

No, Harvey is more sensitive there, capable of both pleasure *and* pain. Bruce pushes Harvey's head to the side and bites him there again --

Harvey *twitches* again, cries out --

Bruce bites *harder* --

Harvey pushes his hand into Bruce's hair, grips and *tugs* --

"More. I need. *Harv* --"

"Don't stop, don't freaking -- mark me *up* --"

Bruce groans and *sucks*, holding the flesh between lips and teeth --

Biting and sucking a *path* --
Moving *with* Harvey as they grind and slide together, as Harvey moans and mutters --

*Sweats* --

"I love you," Bruce slurs against the reddening flesh of Harvey's throat. "I *need* you --"

"Yours -- part of me --ah, *fuck* --"

And Bruce knows that these thrusts are too hard, that they're not what Harvey *wants* --

Even though they please him enough to make him toss his --

His beautiful head --

Bruce kisses his mouth again, *takes* his mouth in the rhythm of his hips --

Harvey shakes his head and for a moment Bruce can only try to kiss harder, deeper --

He *needs* --

"*Bruce*!"

Bruce growls and forces himself *back* -- "I'm sorry."

Harvey pants and stares at him --

Licks his lips --

And laughs, high and -- somewhat -- hysterical. "Just like that."

"Harv?"

"That's how easy it is to get you to lose a little control?"

"You -- you saw --"

"I took you by *surprise* then, big guy. Today. Today, you saw me coming, yeah?"

Bruce breathes and swallows, strokes the rising bruises on Harvey's throat --

Harvey moans. "You don't know how long I've wanted -- but you do now, don't you?"

"If I... if I had... pushed." He can't finish the thought --

And Harvey's wince is pained and lustful at once, *hungry* -- "Need you. C'mon, the slick is warm *enough* --"

"Harv."

Harvey pants -- "Tell me."

"It's -- anything. For you --"

"Then live. And be happy. And fuck the *hell* outta me."

Bruce laughs, desperate and pleased and -- "You've always *made* me happy --"
"Ah, big guy -- ditto. *Always* -- like... like the world was real with you in it, next to me, under me -- no."

"No?"

Harvey licks his lips and pushes Bruce until he moves down between Harvey's legs. "The world was always real -- too real, sometimes. You just -- you made it warm."

"And -- the light you gave --"

"I *love* you, Bruce -- *hnh* --"

Necessary to kiss Harvey's scrotum, to lick it -- no, to mark him there, too, to make Harvey's memories of these moments as powerful as possible, as *incontrovertible* --

"Bruce, *Bruce* --"

Bruce *hums* --

"*Please*, I gotta -- I gotta know how it feels to have you *inside* me --"

And Bruce knows it's not what Harvey means, but --

"*Jesus*, what -- oh -- *oh* -- *Bruce* --"

Bruce pulls back and tries to speak, to explain himself -- he can only groan, and plead with Harvey with his eyes --

Harvey's eyes are wide, shocked -- "Who *taught* you that?"

Bruce licks his lips and shivers for the taste of Harvey's musk, for the sense-memory of his anus -- "I -- I knew about it --"

"But --"

"Superman. He... quickly erased my objections to the act. We don't --" Bruce shakes his head. "Please."

Harvey nods and stares at him for a long moment -- but then turns over onto his hands and knees, *lifts* his posterior --

"*Thank* you --"

"Don't -- don't lemme *think*, big guy --"

"No --"

"Ah, Jesus, feel you -- feel you spreading me -- *uhn* --"

Bruce hums and nods, nuzzles and *kisses* --

The sweat here tastes so *different* --

And it seems as though Clark is with him, as though --

But could it be the Clark he had rejected?
Would it be terrible to hope that Harvey winds up in the same universe with *him*? And they could --

They could find something, common ground, hope --

Or Harvey could give himself time to know that world's Stephanie -- or. No. Gilda might not --

And he can't think of any of that once Harvey starts clawing at the *sheets* --

When he starts groaning, *shaking* --

He's being *pleasing* again, he is --

Bruce *grips* Harvey's buttocks and *delves*, *takes* --

"*Bruce*!"

Bruce groans and remembers the sounds Clark had made --

The way those sounds had *felt* with him here, touching him *here* --

Harvey shouts and tries to spread his legs wider, tries --

But would he have allowed this if he didn't believe their time was short? Could this have ever -- no.

No, he can't --

Bruce pulls back --

Harvey grunts -- "*Please*!"

Bruce kisses him again, kisses his cleft and his lower back --

"Fuck -- fuck, I *need* --"

"Tell him -- you must -- you must *tell* whatever Bruce you find --"

"Bruce --"

"Even if you never *touch* --"

"I don't wanna *tease* --"

"Show him he isn't wrong, show him -- if he's *anything* like me it would be *enough* for him to know --"

"That -- that *one* of you got me?"

Bruce pants and kisses his way up Harvey's spine --

"God, *Bruce* --"

"It will *fill* something, something so --" Bruce shakes his head -- "I *ache*.

Harvey stiffens -- and spreads his legs still -- still *wider* --

Bruce groans and kneels up, needing --
He *grips* himself and squeezes hard, telling himself not to stroke, telling himself to feel a *different* ache --

And Harvey is looking back at him from over his shoulder --

Harvey is panting as much as *he* is --

"I love you --"

"Harv --"

"I'll tell. I'll -- God, I'll tell all of them, I'll warn them about me and I'll be honest --"

"Please --"

"I'll be *brave*, Bruce, just -- just as brave as you --"

Bruce shudders and -- he's not at all sure what to do with the reflex that causes him to yank on his scrotum rather than stroke himself for Harvey --

Beautiful *Harvey* --

"Hey, what did --"

"I -- yanked --"

"On your *sac*?"

"I'm -- very close --"

Harvey moans -- "God, I want you in my *mouth* --"

"Then --"

"*No*, open me, slick me up, you don't -- *don't* do a good job --"

"*Harv*, I --" But the shape of the bottle in his hands is different --

The curtains are fluttering --

And the bottle is warm. "Hm."

"Bruce, *what* --"

"A gift from Superman. *This* lubricant will allow for... speed."

"Uh. What -- wait, he was *here*?"

Is he still? "He is... he *monitors* the family, Harv --"

"And you're family. And -- uh. And this new slick won't make me grow two heads or anything?"

Bruce pauses to see if Clark will come back --

He strokes the small, glowing bottle and subvocalizes his thanks --

"Big guy, you kinda need to not *hesitate* for questions like that --"
"Hmm. Jason suffered no ill effects last night. And Clark spoke of using it with Dick and Tim, another human operative named Arsenal --"

"What kind of -- okay, never mind, I *don't* care that much --"

"Harv, I want. I want to see your face."

Harvey pants and hangs his head -- jerks his head up again. "I'm not -- saying no --"

"But?"

"Just -- I've never *done* this, big guy. Uh. J'onn had a few *suggestions* when I couldn't stop thinking about it --"

"Oh. I."

Harvey laughs nervously and turns over onto his back. "But that slick maybe means I won't *have* to be on my hands and knees?"

Bruce licks his lips. "I didn't -- I don't know. Harv."

"Yeah. Yeah. Look how hard I am, big guy."

Bruce takes another moment to study the darkness of Harvey's eyes, the brown lost under *black* --

But then he looks down Harvey's body, studying the flush, the shine of sweat --

The nipples which seem hard enough to *hurt* --

And his penis. His --

"My *fantasy* --"

"Mine, kneelin' right there between my legs. Look how big you are. How *thick*,."

And for a moment Bruce can only feel *pride* in his body, a sense of himself as something desired -- but he *remembers*. "Harv --"

"Oh, God, Bruce, don't -- don't nut up on me now --"

"I'm sorry, but *never*?"

Harvey pants at him, stares -- "I want it. I *need* -- don't make me go without this, big guy, don't. Don't take it away from me."

Bruce grunts and *shakes* --

"You've done this. You -- Superman. And -- Tim?"

"Jason --"

"You won't *hurt* me. I know -- I know you'll be careful --"

"*Harv* --"

"God, I *need* the pain, big guy, need to feel -- I've wanted you in me for so *long*, used to -- oh, yeah, open that bottle right up, Bruce, open *me* up --"
"I -- I'll be careful --"

"And then you'll *stop* when I *tell* you to."

That -- Bruce smiles and slicks his fingers --

"That's good, that's real fucking --" Harvey spreads his legs and squeezes himself, strokes -- "That smile is *worrying* me --"

"I believe we agreed that I wouldn't let you call the shots..."

Harvey's mouth drops open --

Bruce laughs. "Perhaps... just this once?" And Bruce reaches to stroke Harvey's anus, to use the almost *excessively* slick lubricant to coat the *small* pucker --

He hadn't *thought* --

Harvey is *shaking* --

"Big guy. Big -- your *fingers*..."

"Yes, Harv --"

"They're right *there* --"

"Touching you --"

Harvey groans and squeezes his eyes shut --

Opens them and plants his feet -- "How long are you gonna tease me, Bruce?"

Bruce grunts --

"How long -- you gotta give it -- *fuck* --"

One finger, one finger only, and Harvey is already *panting*. Bruce remembers -- he will not *forget* -- Dick's instructions for taking Jason, and this --

It can't be the same, here, and he will remember *that*. Still, he can *move* his finger, he can touch and *coat* Harvey --

"Oh -- *oh* --"

"Harv..."

"Ah, God, big guy, it's already..." And Harvey shakes his head almost violently, licks his lips --

"Tell me, please tell me --"

Harvey closes his eyes and moans, arches --

"Oh, Harv..."

"I need you. I need you so *bad*, I -- *hnh* --"

The clench is too much to prepare for, too -- too *sweet* -- "Open --"
"I can't, I can't, it feels --"

"I need your *eyes* --"

Harvey groans and shudders, clenches again --

Again --

And *yells* when Bruce crooks his finger --

"*Please*, Harv --"

And Harvey opens his eyes wide -- but his focus is already absent, he -- he is *staring*, and Bruce knows he can see little but his own pleasure.

Bruce will remember Harvey's parted lips, and the way he wets them every few *seconds*.

He will remember the way Harvey pants and moans off-rhythm to Bruce's thrusts and crooks, as if he can't catch *up* to the pleasure.

He will remember the way Harvey begins to work his hips to demand faster *just* as Bruce considers slowing down to make the sensations *easier* --

"Oh, Harv..."

Harvey nods frantically and clenches --

Clenches again on *purpose* --

Sits up on his elbows and moans, wordless and high --

"You're beautiful. You're -- you were everything I *wanted* from the world --"

Harvey grunts and shakes his head --

"There was need, but I'd had years to live without what I needed. I'd -- oh, Harv, I'd forgotten *how* to want things, to want *anything* other than an end to the darkness I knew I must live in --"

"*Bruce* --"

"You gave me light, you gave me sweetness and laughter and *contact*, so much *warmth* --"

"Yours -- oh, Bruce, *please*!"

Bruce pants and breathes in the scent of sweat and musk, already overpowering the faint hints of cedar Alfred uses for long-term storage of clothes and linens --

Though it's possible that he's simply learned how to filter more effectively, more *beneficially* than he ever has before. Harvey.

Harvey who is *opening* for him after every clench, whose body is *begging* --

And it's something Bruce needs to hear *and* feel, something --

"Another, Harv --"

Harvey's nod is desperate --
The wave of his hair is *unruly* with sweat, and he lets his head fall back as Bruce pushes in with his index and middle finger -- no.

Bruce shifts closer and pushes the fingers of his free hand into Harvey's hair so he can hold him still, so he can continue staring into Harvey's eyes --

Studying his -- blush, not flush, not this time --

"It's all right --"

Harvey's laugh is explosive, and no more bright than his *drugged* smile -- "That. That so, big guy? You gonna soothe me into taking you -- *ohn* --"

Bruce eases the crook of his fingers. "I don't think I can manage that, Harv."

"Do. Do what you *want* --"

"I *am* --"

"Ah, God, thought about -- thought about you just takin' me *over*, makin' me your boy --"

Bruce grunts and thrusts faster --

And Harvey pants and blinks, stares -- "Bruce..."

"Do you *like* --"

Harvey nods against the pull on his hair, arches for more -- "So -- so much -- never thought this could feel *easy* --"

"It's -- the lubricant --"

"I don't *care*," Harvey says, laughing and gasping, *clenching* once more -- "Feel -- more --"

"Not -- not yet --"

"You're gonna make me come so *hard* --"

"I *want* that --"

"Gonna -- gonna make me scream for you, give it up --"

"Harv --"

"*Please*, Bruce!"

Bruce growls and crooks his fingers for Harvey's shout, doing it over and over until Harvey's penis is twitching constantly, spattering his abdomen with pre-ejaculate --

He looks so flushed, so *ready* --

"God -- *God* --"

"Harv --"

"Slow -- no, wait, *don't* slow down --"
Bruce cups Harvey's scrotum and squeezes --

"*Nnh* -- oh, Jesus, Bruce, *fuck*, c'mon, open me *up* more --"

"You -- you're loosening --"

"More, please *more* -- *unh* -- oh, fuck me --"

"Yes, Harv --"

"Please, please, please --" And he keeps saying it, keeps *chanting* it as he rocks into Bruce's thrusts, as he *tries* to toss his head --

"*Beautiful* --"

"Fantasy -- such -- *please*!" And Harvey's focus comes back for a sweet and *hungry* moment --

They stare into each other as Bruce *thrusts* --

They stare and they know desire, know *need*, and so Bruce can only nod as he pulls out --

As he pours lubricant directly on his penis while Harvey winces --

While Harvey tries to spread himself still *wider* --

"Comfort -- I need --"

"I need *you* -- oh, *fuck* --"

"I. I can *stop*," Bruce says, and knows that it's true only because he hasn't truly *begun* -- as opposed to merely pressing the head of his penis against Harvey's anus --

"Don't." Harvey swallows audibly and groans --

"Harv --"

"In me, you gotta --" Harvey shakes his head and reaches to tug Bruce's other hand out of his hair --

"Where -- I must touch you --"

"How. How'd you hold onto the tough guy?"

Bruce licks his lips -- "His hips --"

"You liked that?"

"Very. Very much."

Harvey *bites* his lip. "Never felt that. Big -- big hands --" Harvey moans and pushes Bruce's hand to his hip --

Bruce squeezes --

And Harvey makes a low, animal sound and squeezes his eyes shut, *struggles* --

"Harv --"
"Never -- it doesn't stop, big guy. It." And Harvey laughs and opens his eyes again, looking rueful and dazed --

"You --"

"*You*," Harvey says, and settles back on his elbows. "You're workin' me over, Bruce. You -- I thought I already *knew* how much I could need you --"

Bruce squeezes convulsively, Harvey's hip and his own penis --

They groan *together* --

"Harv, I need. I need *touch* --"

"Lemme touch you all over, lemme -- oh, God. Oh -- Bruce --"

"Tell me -- tell me to *stop* --"

"I *can't*, I can't -- oh, *please*," Harvey says, and reaches for him, stretches his long, graceful fingers --

Bruce knows Harvey doesn't *want* to lose Bruce's hand on his hip, and so the only option is to let go of himself, to --

It feels like it would lead, somehow, to his penis *rebell*ing*, forcing its way into Harvey much more quickly, much more roughly --

He's so smooth, so *hot* --

"*Bruce*!"

Bruce cries out and lets go of himself, twines his fingers with Harvey's --

Cries out again for the feel of himself twitching *as* he continues to push in --

So --

Harvey squeezes Bruce's hand *hard* --

Bruce squeezes Harvey's *hip* --

And they are together in their cries, in this -- this beautiful moment --

Harvey looks as wounded as Bruce feels, but only if it could be pleasurable, wonderful --

"I *love* you --"

"*You* --"

"C'mon, c'mon, do me, *do* me --"

"I'm almost --"

"I'm shaking -- I can't *move* --"

"Oh, *Harv* --"
"Please --"

"So -- let me --"

"*Please*!"

Bruce growls and speeds himself --

Harvey *shouts* --

And Bruce will remember how young Harvey looks in this moment --

And he will remember the way the ache only builds, only rises --

And he will remember Harvey's *shocked* look as he clenches --

As he stares into Bruce as if *Bruce* has answers, wisdom, knowledge beyond --

Beyond the basic facts of -- no. This is *fundamental*, foundational, something --

Something on which all other things can be *built*. He is *moving* for Harvey, for his first love, his friend --

"*Brother* --"

Harvey jerks and clenches --

Bruce groans and shudders as he thrusts, as --

He brings their clenched hands down to Harvey's other hip, he presses Harvey's hand there so he can hold, grip --

"Bruce -- oh, fuck, you *got* me --"

"*Yes*, Harv --"

"Don't -- I need you, I *need* you --"

"*Harv* --"

"We can be --*nnh* --"

"*Tell* me --"

Harvey shakes his head and squeezes his eyes shut once more, moves and obviously tries to move in *rhythm*, to stay with him, rise --

"Harv. *Harv* --"

Harvey shouts again and shudders as if he's *ill*, jerking to a stop --

Flexing *open* around Bruce just as if he was pulling out --

He can't *not* break rhythm, he must --

Bruce shoves deep and *growls* for Harvey's clench --
Harvey's increasingly *desperate* cries --
"Tell me *everything* --"
"*Happy*, Bruce! I'll do -- I'll do anything to know you're happy, stay *happy* --"
"*You* --"
"*Harder*!!"

And Bruce gasps and tries to keep his body from following orders, from doing --

But Harvey's eyes are open again, Harvey is pleading --

And Bruce nods and *lifts* Harvey's hips --
"*Fuck* --"
*Holds* them --
"Oh, God -- oh, *Bruce*!!"

And now his thrusts are forceful, *heavy* things. It's nothing like what he was giving to Jason, but it still seems as if it ought to be too much --

He can't stop. He can't --

Harvey cries out again and yanks his hand out from under Bruce's own, takes himself in hand --

Cries out *again* --

But he never looks away from Bruce's eyes, even when he starts to stroke. He *holds* Bruce, holds them both --

There is no --
"I can't *stop*," Bruce shouts, and wants to apologize for doing so in Harvey's face, wants the ability to move beyond his body's hungers --

*Needs* --
"*Harv* --!!"

But Harvey's expression speaks of pleasure so great it *surpasses* pain, speaks of -- of a kind of desperate trance --

No, he can still see, he can --

Bruce *feels* seen, feels --

Harvey is wincing and stroking himself so hard --

Faster than Bruce's thrusts --

But it doesn't have to be that way. It --

Bruce sucks in a breath and growls it out, tightens his grip on Harvey's hips so he can hold him
absolutely still --

Perfect for his thrusts --

Perfect for their groans and *yells* --

"Gonna -- gonna do it --"

"Harv --"

"Oh, Jesus, Jesus, just don't -- I *feel* you --"

"You are -- I feel --" Bruce growls again and shakes his head, pleads with his mind for the words to make this correct, make this as true for his mind as it is --

No, there is no falsehood in this. There could never *be* --

"*Harv*.

"Bruce -- Bruce --"

"*Come* for me --"

"*Fuck* --"

"I use -- you *taught* me the use of that word --"

"*Hnh* -- oh, Jesus, that's so *dirty* --"

And Bruce is shocked by the laugh that bursts out of him for that --

Bruce gasps and *shakes* --

Clutches and -- and *ruts* --

"Oh, yeah, yeah -- nn -- *Bruce*!

"*Yes*, Harv --" But he doesn't manage to get all of that out before Harvey is clenching and shuddering and grunting and *ejaculating* --

He spatters his chest and Bruce's --

Bruce lets go of Harvey's left hip so he can twine their hands together again, so he can squeeze and *pump* --

Harvey *sobs* something incoherent and continues to ejaculate --

His clenches are so --

"Need -- *need* --"

"What -- *tell* me, Harv --"

"Hands and knees, c'mon flip -- *unh* -- God, I wasn't *ready* for you to pull out --"

Bruce shudders -- "I'm sorry --"
"No, no --" Harvey shakes his head and strokes Bruce's mouth with his slick fingers, so warm and salt --

Bruce takes three of them into his mouth and sucks hard, licks and *grips* Harvey's wrist --

Reaches to stroke himself --

"*No*, Bruce!"

Bruce grunts around Harvey's fingers and whimpers, *pleads* with all of himself --

And Harvey pants and shudders -- "Can't -- can't catch my *breath* --"

Bruce nods and sucks again --

Harvey pulls his fingers *away* --

"*Please* --"

"*In* me. And -- God, you'll come in me, give me that, *show* me that -- oh, *yeah* --"

"You -- you like my *strength* --"

"Love it, love *you*," and Harvey clutches at the sheets and braces himself on his hands and knees --

And then loses seemingly every bit of tension he *has* when Bruce kisses the back of his neck --

A path down his spine --

He *moans* -- "You're too *hard* for this!"

"Not -- not to *love* --"

"Oh, God, Jesus, *Bruce* --"

"I won't -- I won't have *control* when I enter you again --"

"*Show* me!"

Bruce groans and licks *up* Harvey's spine -- but Harvey is growing tense again, needing without having --

"No," Bruce says, and pulls back --

"*Bruce* -- oh -- oh, one -- one *push* --"

"*Yes* --"

"One -- you're *in* me --"

"*Yes* --"

"*Again*," Harvey says, and he's laughing, happy --

"You --" Bruce begins to thrust because he must, because -- "*Your *joy* --"
Harvey clenches and *nods* --

"*Harv*!"

"Oh -- God, that's gonna *hurt* -- don't *stop* --"

"I *can't* --"

"*Good*," Harvey says, laughing again and rocking --

Rocking back *against* him --

"Can't -- can't believe I'm *taking* you --"

"*Harv* --"

"Can't believe you feel this *good*, big guy --"

"Always -- I've always *wanted* --"

"Mine, my *brother* --"

Bruce groans and clutches Harvey's hips once more, but he can keep himself from stilling them, from --

"No one *like* you, Bruce --"

"*You* --"

"Just -- just a guy --" And Harvey *croons* a moan and clenches again --

"*Hnh* --"

Again --

"Oh, *Harv*, *please*!"

"Please, yeah, please *yourself* --"

And it feels like the growl tears itself out of him, like he's nothing but a bestial *urge* --

"Jesus, *yes*, do it, *do* it --"

And that's when Bruce realizes that he *is* holding Harvey still, that he's shoving himself in --

Seemingly deeper with every --

Pulling out even just to thrust *again* is enough to make him cry out --

"Say it, say you *love* me --"

"Harv -- *love* --"

"I feel it, I could always *feel* it --"

"*Love* --"
"I could -- like a glow I could live in, something -- something so *clean* --"

Bruce hears himself sob and covers Harvey, flattens him to the bed the way Clark had done to him --

And he will remember *this* gasp --

And he will remember that -- that he doesn't know which of them --

They're both *shaking* --

"Never -- I'll never *forget*, Bruce!"

And Bruce does his best to edit away the sound of his own groans, helpless and needy things that they are --

They keep him from *Harvey* --

He tries --

He can't stop the *slam* of his hips --

He is *aware* that Harvey can't possibly be *breathing* deeply, and it seems as though there's a moment when he can ease it, pull back --

But then he's losing himself, losing --

Giving himself over to something --

Greater --

Something of light and heat and --

This groan, he will remember *this* groan, because Harvey sounds *triumphant* --

And Bruce feels himself *burnt* by it, feels --

There's nothing but *pleasure*, and he wants to be able to fight it, to get back to a place where he can know *Harvey's* experience of this --

The pleasure keeps rising --

He's shouting himself *hoarse* --

And he's falling back into himself with a feeling which makes Bruce want to write something of a treatise around the concept of the perfect brutality of loss.

"Oh, *Bruce*..."

But there is a pang --

And Bruce knows that the real brutality will only come later. Much later, *please* --

Harvey takes a *strained* breath --

Bruce pushes up onto his hands --

"Oh -- wasn't ready for *that*," Harvey says, and laughs. His cheek is flushed and his eyelashes are
slightly wet --

His smile is so -- "Hav..."

"Oh, what -- heh. I know what," and Harvey wags a finger at him. "No depression. Not now."

"I -- you can... control that?"

"Hell, no. Not all the time, anyway --"

"But... now?"

Harvey sighs and shivers. "You're inside me, big guy."

"Yes. Yes, I..." Bruce lowers himself enough to kiss the back of Harvey's neck --

Harvey shivers again. "You're inside me, and pretty soon we're gonna be taking up *slightly* more space in this huge freaking bed --"

"Not. Not too much --"

"No, *not* too much, because I've been assured by people who know that cuddle is *key* at times like this --"

"You're *happy*.

Harvey laughs ruefully. "And I should deal with the fact that that was an accusation?"

Oh. "No. No, I -- I'm sorry --"

"Shh, shh. I -- you ever think it's funny? The thing where Apollo was kind of grim a lot of the time, but Dionysos was the partier? Ah, well, he did have the wine... I don't know what I'm talking about --"

"Brother..."

Harvey sighs and smiles a quieter smile. "Be happy for me, big guy. Be happy *with* me."

"We. We had something --"

"*Have* something."

Bruce swallows and -- he rolls them onto their sides --

"Whoa -- hey --"

"Is this -- I'm sorry --"

"It's fine, big guy. Better than," Harvey says, and reaches back to pat Bruce's hip and stroke his thigh --

"Every. Every touch..." Bruce shakes his head and pushes his right arm beneath Harvey's head and clutches him with the left --

"Don't think about the end."

Bruce squeezes his eyes shut.
"Don't -- ah, big guy, I think I can *feel* that."

"You could -- you always *knew* me --"

"I always *needed* you. And -- and I'm thinking... there are a lot of things you can fix here."

"Harv?"

Harvey's laugh is quiet and a little cracked. "Ah, hell, maybe -- maybe I know what you mean when you say you want to give the Bruce in whatever universe I wind up in hope --"

"*Completion*."

Harvey swallows. "Yeah. Yeah. The Harvey in this world..."

Oh...

"He knows what real loss is. He knows -- he's gotta think there's nothing there for him but fucked-up ideas of revenge and -- and all that other crap. He's gotta -- are you hearing me?"

"You believe.... you believe he'll leap at the chance *for* a second chance."

"If he's anything *like* me -- and J'onn says he is and he would *know* -- God, Bruce, I have to -- no. *We* have to believe in hope, no matter what anyone else says. No matter what else *happens* -- oof."

"I'm sorry."

"I note that you're not loosening your grip, big guy," Harvey says, and the smile in his voice is so bright, so *beautiful* --

"The first time you hugged me, I had to leave the room."

"I -- heh. I remember. You didn't say a *word*. You -- no, tell me --"

"I went to the bathroom, locked myself in a stall, and wept as quietly as I could as I tried to understand everything I was feeling --"

"Oh, *Bruce* --"

"I waited. I waited until I had control over myself, and until I could be sure that my emotions around you would never *truly* be controlled, at all..." Bruce swallows. "You. You remember --"

"You came back and asked me for another hug. I thought -- I don't know what I thought."

"You... you looked into my eyes."

"Yeah. Yeah," Harvey says, and *squeezes* Bruce's thigh. "Everything was in them. Hunger, fear, lust, shame, grief... part of me wanted to run."

"I understand --"

"Most of me wanted to kiss you. Just -- kiss you until everything I felt was everything *you* felt. Somehow," and Harvey laughs. "That wasn't the first time."

"You. You held me so tightly --"
"Had to. Just -- had to. Did you. Did you know you wanted me then?"

Bruce kisses Harvey's shoulder. "I knew I wanted to feel your strong arms around me for hours. I knew I wanted to press my nose to your throat --"

Harvey takes a sharp breath. "But... not the rest?"

Bruce surprises himself with a smile. "I was a very *dim* adolescent, Harv."

"That --" Harvey snickers. "Loved that about you, too."

Bruce -- hums. "I must admit, I could never quite understand that."

"Ah, big guy, it made me feel *special*. And *useful*. And -- I don't think anyone ever really needed me before you did."

Bruce loosens his hold enough to stroke Harvey's chest. "The world is full of the ignorant."

"You got that right. And -- ah. Okay, maybe my mom needed me once upon a time? I don't know. I don't know. I still don't have too many *clear* memories of her."

"They'll come back --"

"They sure will. And I'll even be ready for 'em, thanks to J'onn. But you... you were like..." Harvey shakes his head. "I took a good hard look at myself when I was fourteen and I realized that it wasn't just a matter of it being *possible* for me to make you my drug, but that it had already *happened*. And I was angry for a *while* about that -- but mostly I was happy to be in that old bastard's apartment so I didn't have to show *you* that anger. Even when it got bad, big guy, even when I was *yelling* at myself about you... I still *needed* to get back to you."

Bruce takes a deep breath. "I. I wish --"

"That you could've ignored your own yelling voices better?"

"*Yes*.*"

"Ah, Bruce... no regrets."

"Harv, that's not *possible*.*"

"It is, though. I *promise* it is, because all you have to do -- all *I* had to do -- was think about how good this feels. Your dick in my ass, your scent in my nose, your voice in my *ear* and everything else. *Everything* else. Because it wouldn't have been the same without everything that came before. And you know that *now*, don't you?"

"'Sometimes the end of the world isn't so bad.'"

"*Exactly*. And that was... Jason? No, wait, there'd be about six curses in there if it was. Dick, right?"

Bruce laughs softly. "Yes. When he said it, I was horrified."

"You know better now."

Bruce closes his eyes and squeezes Harvey again. "Yes, I do."
"So you *are* gonna lay up here and be happy with me like a *good* ultraviolent vigilante?"

"Yes, Harv."

"Good man," Harvey says, in an impression of their late headmaster that truly --

Hm.

Harvey snickers. "I didn't think you *could* soften that fast, big guy."

"Perhaps..."

"Yeah?"

"Perhaps we could see what sorts of things cause the opposite reaction...?"

"Heh. I think I can manage that."

*
"Little wing, what's your twenty?"

Jason gets a gauntleted hand around Tink's throat so *he* -- he was pretty damned clear about that tonight -- doesn't get any ideas about moving, and pulls out of the kiss. "Uh. Half on top of Tink on the roof of the Klein building. What's up?"

Dick snorts. "Starling."

"Hey, we did *good* justice tonight and everything --"

"Can Tink talk?"

Tink -- licks his lips. He *doesn't* blow a kiss, though, so Jason keeps his hand right where it is.

"Not right now he can't."

"God, I love you guys --"

"Aww --"

"-- but it's time to head home."

Jason blinks. "Seriously?"

"The word came in two minutes ago. Prime is setting up a multiversal portal over by the blast areas while we speak."

"*Fuck*. Is B --"

"Riding home with Lark in the passenger seat... and he's already made his promises."

"I -- I know that."

Dick's laugh is soft and full of *old* hurt. "And I know *that*. Tear it up, little wing. I'll see you both in twenty-five."

"Got it," Jason says, and releases *Tim's* throat, because everything about him is a little quieter, a little younger -- "Starling out."

They run themselves off the roof and fly, fast and professional-like until they get to the alley with their bikes, at which point Tim grabs his helmet off his own bike and gets on behind Jason, since he's just not big enough for a truly *powerful* bike of his own. They ride --

They ride, and Jason tries to figure out how his world -- *their* world -- had changed so *fast*.

It's only been a few *days* --

But they all already knew how *fast* the world can change --

*But* -- God, it hadn't felt this huge after the damned '*quake*. He hadn't felt like a new person with a whole new *family* then, and --

And. He's not gonna freak himself out. He's not gonna lose it *now*, even if Bruce *does* decide to
break his promises --

He'd spent all *day* with Harvey --

"It would be --" And Tim cuts himself off with a cough. He --

"Hey, your throat okay?"

"Just... tight. I'm all right. And -- I was saying something."

"Tell me," Jason says, and does his best to swerve around a *crack* that spreads two-thirds of the way across Moench Avenue.

"It -- all right. I'm just going to -- ah."

"It's okay, baby --"

"It would be one thing if it was -- only me."

"There's no such *thing* as only --"

"*Wait*, Starling. I -- all right?"

Jason frowns and focuses. "I'm listening."

"He wouldn't just be leaving me. He'd be leaving Robin, and Lark, and Prime, and *you*. And that's not... possible."

That warm feeling --

That *hurt* --

And Jason can damned well suck it up, because he's *not* a jealous asshole. At least, he doesn't have to act like one. "He said. He totally thought about taking you with him. Uh -- back when --"

"Um!" And Tim stiffens against him, squeezes hard -- breathes. "When he still -- thought he'd go. I. Um. I don't know what to say to that."

Jason laughs painfully --

"I mean! I wouldn't go."

"Even if he needed you *real* bad, baby?"

"He needs *all* of us! And -- and I need *you*."

"You'll always have me," Jason says, and flashing lights in the distance say it's time to cut through the park. "Even if you --"

"I won't *leave* you!"

"I --"

"I will not leave," *Bruce* says over the channel.

Jason's pretty sure they're *all* jumping a little for that. He should be paying attention to whatever word's coming in from the *Cave* -- wait. "Wait."
"Yes, Starling?"

"How much is Lark threatening you right now?"

Bruce -- laughs. Quiet, but still. "I'm going to have an impressive bruise on my jaw... but that was from earlier, when I complimented her on her form after a brief battle with several drug dealers working for the West .44s."

Dick *snorts*. "Lark."

"He sounded *pervy* about it!"

Tim hums. "*Were* you feeling... aroused, Batman...?"

"All night --" And that was a grunt like he'd taken a *good* hit, but Bruce is armored even more than *he* is.

"Lark --"

"I got him in the armpit."

"*Nice* --"

"Well. He *let* me get him there."

And Bruce grunts again --

"Stop that!" And Lark sounds pissy and gorgeous and *happy* --

And Bruce hums again. "Terribly sorry. Though I wonder if I should be as... disagreeable with you as I am with... Cardinal."

*Tink* shifts in *that* way -- "Hnn."

"What does that mean -- *yeep* -- okay, he's uh. He's kinda got me," Steph says, and Jason thinks he can *hear* a blush --

And Dick's laugh sounds a lot happier than it had just a minute ago. "Autopilot on...?"

"Yes," Bruce says, only that *must* be the Batman-is-about-to-do-something-*mean* voice --

And Steph yeeps again --

And Bruce hums. "Perhaps... I'll keep this in mind," and if Bruce *isn't* showing his teeth, Jason will skip chili dogs for a *month* --

Especially if he can be the *meat* on that sandwich --

Especially if Steph growls like *that* -- but then she snorts. "Oh, fuck. Uh. Let go?"

"Are you --"

"I'm sure!"

"Of course," Bruce says, and he even sounds smooth and well-behaved again --

And Steph blows out a breath. "Um. I just... I just think B-- I think Batman should be thinking about
other things right now."

Oh -- that. And there's silence --

A whole *lot* of silence except for the growl of Jason's bike and distant sirens --

"Batman..."

"Yes, Robin."

"We're here."

More silence --

"We're *all* here, B."

"Hell, yeah, we are --"

"We... hnn." And Tink moves against him in *just* the right way to suggest a hair-toss. "You might say you're stuck with us, Daddy."

And Dick and Steph snort at just about the same time --

But Bruce just says "please. Always," and it sits there all heavy and real and -- yeah.

"Not goin' anywhere. This is our home."

"And *yours*, too, Spooky. Remember that and I won't have to beat your ass so much," Steph says, and Jason *knows* that grin is sunny --

"I... hm."

"*What*?"

"I have begun to wonder if, perhaps, it might not be more pleasurable to forget," Bruce says, joking around and *trying*, really *trying* --

He always did learn things... quickly.

Whoa --

My apologies. I am quite near to your current position.

Uh -- oh. Okay. *Where*?

Please continue to focus on your driving.

Shit -- Jason opens his eyes again --

He doesn't remember *closing* them --

But he'd only drifted a couple of inches to the left. He's good. He -- hey.

Yes, Jason?

Why don't you give me a suggestion or something that'll let me keep my eyes and ears a little open while we're doing this?
J'onn's smile feels a lot like having his shoulders rubbed by someone with big, strong hands --

For a *while* --

It's so *warm* --

A small distraction to hide what I was doing from you.

Uh.

The 'suggestion' required the opening of several pathways in your mind which had been closed. Specifically, you are now slightly more likely than you had been to devote only partial attention to a conversation with someone you care about.

Jason frowns. I don't wanna be an asshole, J'onn --

I assure you, the likelihood will only be noticeable at times when you feel... threatened.

Which -- okay, that's useful.

And something his brothers *and* Steph could do naturally --

And something he'd given up on when his mother had kicked his father out for the last time. Jason winces --

J'onn hugs him from the *inside* --

And Tim hugs him from the outside -- no way he didn't feel Jason tense.

"I'm okay, baby, just talking to Green Machine --"

And Dick laughs again. "Talking? Or 'talking'?"

Steph coughs. "I can't believe -- what's the protocol -- oh, fuck it. Hi, Martian Manhunter!"

Please offer my greetings and wishes for further communication to Skylark.

You got it. "He says hi right back, babe, and that he'd love to talk to you more."

"Well -- cool. Wait, he means *actual* talking right?"

J'onn smiles in his head --

And Ma'ena is swaying in the air like something which can't decide whether to be a cobra, a knife-fighter, or a severed *live wire*.

So maybe Jason is maybe thinking about Steph dancing like a *boxer* --

"*Star*!"

"Uh! No. I mean. We're not... talking about that?"

I believe that you could have been more convincing than that.

Considering how much his family is *laughing* at him --

God, even *Bruce* --
"Hey, I'm a teenaged boy!"

"And teenaged boys are freaking *hilarious*," Steph says, and giggles. "Back me up, Tink."

"Certainly I find them to be a near-endless source of entertainment," and he scratches at Jason's abs through the armor --

"Damned right. Now let's laugh at Batman for how entertaining *he* finds teenaged boys -- *yeeep* -- oh. You didn't actually goose me. Hunh."

Dick coughs. "He pseudo-goosed you, didn't he."

"He was off by like a *millimeter*!"

"I didn't want to assume," Bruce says, and the laugh is still in his voice --

Every moment of hearing such things is... And the rest isn't in words. It's watching Tiq wrestling with Ma'ena and with his friends --

It's watching P'inn's eyes widen and flare nearly amber with excitement --

Diana hugging Clark hard enough to make him cough out his air --

Barry blushing --

An older Bruce smiling wryly --

Gripping J'onn's forearm --

Thinking-sending-offering --

(Welcome.)

And that *was* Bruce's voice, but it was also Batman's. It was older, rougher, more *sure* --

And it was a memory.

He had just agreed to become an official member of the League, and had given us his identity.

And given you -- access.

Something deeper than that. More... profound.

Aw, man, you should be talking to *him*.

I did try. At present, he is holding a large amount of himself apart.

He's *laughing* -- shit. *Shit*. Is he gonna rabbit?

I do not think so, Jason, but I cannot be sure of such things without better access to his mind.

*Fuck* --

I *am*, however, sure that he never broke a promise.

The one *you* knew --
You need him now.

I -- what -- *no* --

Jason.

*Damn* it --

I recommend that you let him see that. All of you.

Are you telling --

Yes. And J'onn is definitely showing his teeth again. Heh.

How *much* is the rest of the League pressuring you to pressure *us*?

Most of that... attention is falling on Clark.

Jason nods thoughtfully, inside and out, and slows down just enough to make blowing through a knot of dealers *only* 'hideously painful and potentially maiming', as opposed to 'definitely fatal.'

Very good.

Hey, thanks. Jason checks on what he's hearing from *outside* his head --

Dick is telling Bruce and Steph a *barely* edited -- code names, nothing else changed -- version of the story about the *first* time the Titans were dosed with a drug that killed their inhibitions. *Jason* had first gotten the story from Gar, and he'd damned well brought it right back home to Tim --

Who is humming along with the story *while* clawing at Jason's abs through the armor.

Nice. Jason shifts enough to press against Tim a little --

Focuses enough to see that his driving is still perfect --

How long before I'm out of your range, Green Machine?

One and one half minutes, at that speed.

Meaning he's staying somewhere *near* the park, which is a little higher-rent than what he would've expected for 'John Jones.'

And J'onn's laugh kind of bubbles through him. Everyone on the League with a secret identity found themselves rather wealthier than they had ever expected to be after Bruce shared his identity. He told me, later, that it was one of the reasons why he had chosen to do so, since he had not previously found a way to enrich us which couldn't be traced.

Hunh. Isn't it possible to do that kind of thing behind a million cut-outs?

I believe Bruce could not help thinking about the acumen and determination of people like... Owl.

Heh. Okay, there's that.

And they're over the bridge and riding, riding --

And there's a touch, soft and warm, on the back of his neck.
I like that.

As do I, J'onn says, but his voice is quiet and hazy, like something remembered in a dream --

He's almost out of range. He -- come visit as soon as you can, yeah?

Ye--

Nothing.

Jason shivers a little and heads deeper into the suburbs, listening with half an ear to Dick making a life-threatening -- and *cock*-threatening -- poisoning sound like fun and games --

To Steph talking about driving nails through her nightstick just in *case* she has to deal with anything like that --

To Tim pointing out that she might *enjoy* herself too much to *use* it --

To Bruce humming every once in a while just like he *isn't* holding himself back. Just --

He can't. "B."

"Yes, Starling?"

And Jason can feel Dick staring at him from a few miles *that* way --

And he can feel Tim tensing up just a *little* --

"Manhunter said you're holding back."

*Silence* --

Until Dick sucks in a breath. "*Brother*.

And Bruce grunts. "I'm not -- I will have no secrets from you. Any of you."

Tim growls. "Then *talk*!"

"I am..." Bruce's laugh this time is as hurt as Dick's had been at first, but there's still a lot of humor in it. "I am trying very hard not to weep. Only. Only that."

Oh. Well -- fuck.

Another laugh. "Does it seem so strange? Have I been so stoic? So... no. I will not use the word 'strong' in this way. I have learned, in ways both terrible and transcendent, that I was wrong to ever use it that way. I... please. I ask only for time."

"You --"

"You can get a lot more than that, brother," Dick says, and his voice is rough. He's got his own tears --

And Bruce takes a shuddering breath. "Perhaps -- no. I will remember this when the time comes. For now... for now, I must fill myself with everything I am about to lose."

Jason bites his lip --
"I'm -- sorry," Tim says. "I should've --"

"No," Bruce says. "You have every reason to doubt me. I understand -- oh. Thank you, Skylark."

Jason blinks. "What are you doing, babe?"

"Um. Rubbing his -- armpit."

Dick's snort sounds *painful* --

"It's the only unarmored part I can *reach*!"

Bruce laughs again, and it sounds thick -- but also pleased. "I assure you that I am also doing my level best not to sweat."

And *that* leads into talk about meditation techniques, which is actually interesting to the parts of him which aren't keyed-up and fucking *needy* --

And Bruce pulls up behind him once they hit the back roads. Jason pours it on just to piss off the neighbors a little --

Just to get *home* --

And they're there, pulling into their respective parking spaces --

And Harvey steps out of the shadows with a rueful little smile, a scared little smile, a *happy* smile --

Fucking --

Jason steps off the bike and just -- takes his turn, walking up to Harvey and hauling him into a hug because he *can* --

"Hey -- well, all right, tough guy, *this* I can do," he says, and Jason can *hear* the surprise in his voice --

And he can hear all the everything else that's gotta be making Bruce a little slow right now. Still --

There has to be fucking *something* he can *say* --

"You okay?"

Jason laughs a little helplessly and pulls back. "I -- uh. Yeah? Let's go with 'yeah."

Harvey's smile *quirks* a little -- and then settles into something soft and warm. "I'm not forgetting you anytime soon, Jason. *Or* you," he says, and turns to Tim, who's standing there looking like he's recording Harvey with the cameras *always* humming behind his eyes.

Tim smiles ruefully -- and then not ruefully at *all* before he *presents* his hand. "See that you don't."

Harvey coughs and snorts -- but he recovers quick enough, and bends over and *pecks* the back of Tink's gauntlet.

Tink hums and kind of *rolls* his hips a little -- you can't call that a switch -- wait.
Jason takes a closer look --

*Thinks* about it --

Her hips. She's rolling *her* hips, and planting her hands on them --

And Harvey is looking a little terrified --

And Bruce is out of the car. So.

Jason lifts his little sister into his arms -- he's not sure, but he *thinks* only little *brothers* get the scruff-of-the-neck treatment --

"*Jay* --"

"Nuh-uh, baby. *This* way," Jason says, and starts carrying Tim toward the blast area... after giving Steph enough time to shake Harvey's hand -- just like she wouldn't rather be slapping his ass -- and join them.

"I don't know if I want you to carry *me* that way or not, Star."

Jason opens his mouth --

"*I* don't know if I want him to carry me this way!"

"You totally do, baby. You were *asking* for it," Jason says -- but the nerve-strike doesn't come. Hunh. Jason looks down --

And Tim and Steph are sharing a look that has a lot of... something in it. He's not sure what.

"Gonna share?"

"Oh -- it's only --"

Steph sighs and yanks on her ponytail. "I don't think I'm ready to see Harvey gone, guys."

"I -- that," Tim says, and smiles painfully before wrapping her arms around Jason's neck and kissing his cheek.

"I think we're allowed not to think about it --"

"We are *not*, Jay!"

"Yet*. I was gonna say *yet*," Jason says, and squeezes Tim a little harder. "I mean, we *have* to talk about it, but I think if we kinda save it up until we're talking to Bruce --"

"We can give him the chance -- and excuse -- to talk about him at length," Tim says, and nods. "I like that."

"He doesn't need an *excuse*, Tim!"

"I know that!"

"*You* don't need an excuse, either!"

And Jason waits --
Shares his *own* look with Steph --

 Watches Tim's expression get fucking *murderous* --

 "Oh, is this for me?" And Clark is right there, smiling with his arms out for Tim.

 Jason raises his eyebrows at Tim --

 "I like Clark better right now," she says, twisting free --

 And Clark is holding her before she can even drop, so Jason picks up Steph --

 ">*Jay*!"

 "Hey, you gotta see how you feel about this position," Jason says, and walks them a little closer to the big, staticky, square black portal-looking thing --

 "Gah, no, put me down!"

 "You don't like --"

 "It's making my *hair* stand up!"

 And Jason's hair is a little too thick for that, but he can still feel -- yeah.

 He puts Steph down again and she moves toward Tim and Clark. And --

 Jason takes another step closer to the machine --

 And it immediately starts humming --

 "Uh. Chester --"

 There's a pacifier in his mouth --

 And Clark cradles Tim in one arm and tugs Jason just a little further away from the machine. "It tends to respond to proximity with... ah..." And he nods toward the staticky part.

 Which is showing a Jason wearing a weird red domino and holding two fucking guns like he plans to use them --

 And then a Jason with fucking *strawberry-blond* hair making the uneven bars his bitch even though Jason is only *barely* good enough not to humiliate himself on those things --

 And a Jason making out with a Tim, which is fine -- great, even -- though he's not sure how he feels about the fact that the Tim is dressed like freaking *Batgirl* --

 And a Jason fucking the *life* out of *Talia* of all people --

 Jason makes a noise around his pacifier --

 Yanks it out --

 "Okay, make it stop. *Please* make it --"

 "Perhaps another two feet or so back? It stopped showing *me* alternate versions of myself when I was standing where you are now."
Jason *scrambles* back --

It's black again --

But not before Jason gets a good, long look at his seriously broken and *obviously* dead body on the motherfucking *ground* --

Steph slaps him --

"*Hey* --"

"Your dick is nowhere *near* as funny-looking as every other guy's."

Jason blinks -- that *does* make him feel better. "Hey, thanks."

"Uh, hunh," and she turns to stare at Clark. "Do we even wanna *know* what it showed *you*?"

Clark winces. "Given the fact that I find myself wishing that my memory wasn't quite so perfect... I'd have to say no, Stephanie."

Tim frowns. "I think... hm. If the machine is set to respond to whoever stands in front of it --"

"Ah -- not quite that. I spoke too simplistically," Clark says. "We will not be kidnapping this universe's Gilda Baines to stand in front of this machine and -- well. The machine -- and the machine's supply of nth metal -- responds to human and, apparently, human-*like* brains with that which the individual in question most wants to see. This is, as you know, what gives Carter his facility over his arms and armor --"

"Uh."

Clark smiles gently. "Yes, I know you did not wish to see your selves... well. I didn't want to see *my* selves that way, either. But I was... curious."

And so was he. Fuck. "You think Harvey's just gonna focus on Gilda and *wham*, she'll be there?"

"If that doesn't work, Ray had other ideas. Including something which would allow more control over what universe is shown -- and chosen."

"But we're not waiting for that?" And Dick melts out of the shadows just like freaking *that* --

Jason sighs and copes.

Clark inclines his head to Dick. "We may have to... but Ray's estimates about how quickly he could make that work were... less than optimistic."

Dick frowns and nods, and then turns to look at Steph and Tim. "Either of you feel like taking a look?"

"Uh... no."

Tim shakes his head and looks *green*, and if she's *not* thinking about worlds where her parents lived --

Or maybe worlds where the Jason grew up into the kind of asshole who *wouldn't* drag her home --

Jason shudders and jerks his head at Dick. "What about you?"
Dick smiles the *Robin* smile. "Call it something to pass the time," he says, and steps close.

And there's Dick when he was a kid, only his uniform has actual *pants*. It's a full bodysuit, and it looks *good* and armored, and Batman -- isn't. That's Bruce's jaw, and his shoulders, and his huge fucking *size*, but there's also a whole lot of black and red silk. And, for some reason, his hair is red. That -- is it fake?

"Do we count that as a good one or a bad one?"

Dick shakes his head and stares incredulously --

And then not-Batman gooses Dick so hard he nearly falls off the fucking *roof* --

And Dick snorts. "We're calling it good. How do I get it to change, Clark?"

"Hmm. It usually just *does* change. Perhaps you like what you see?"

"Oh, I do, I do, but..." And Dick closes his eyes and *obviously* concentrates --

Deathwing.

"Jesus, not *this* guy --"

"Who --" Dick opens his eyes and glares. "God, is it possible that he got more pathetic?"

"Eugh. Are there seriously little knives hanging from his nipple rings?"

Jason chokes. "I *missed* that --"

Dick makes a *sweeping* gesture --

And the image changes to one showing Dick apparently on stakeout. He's got *seriously* too-long hair and his ridiculously perfect body just *poured* into something black and indigo and --

Tim coughs. "I think we have to count this one as good, too."

Little -- little stripes on the fingers -- wait. "Dick, how the fuck did you *do* that?"

"Just a meditation trick, little wing. The motion tells me how to direct my thoughts," and Dick does it *again* -- "Ooh. I think I can go with this one, too."

Considering the fact that the Dick on-screen is fucking the *hell* out of Babs' *tits* --

Jason stares --

And stares some more --

"I... ah. Should we really be looking at this?" And Tim sounds *uncomfortable* --

Steph snorts. "She checks *us* out all the time."

"Yes, but, this might make her seek *revenge*, Steph."

Dick laughs. "*Good* point," and he lifts his arm --

"Aw, c'mon, Dickie, at least let us get to the money shot."
Clark sighs happily. "I believe it could be... ah... beneficial."

"Beneficial."

"Oh, yes. It would help us see... how..."

"Uh. See how the machine works!" And Jason's proud of himself for getting that out, really, considering -- "Oh, *yeah*."

"Hunh." Steph gets a little closer. "Somehow I could never see her putting *up* with getting a pearl necklace."

Dick smiles *secretively* -- and gestures.

And the Dick onscreen is crying so hard --

He's holding *Tim* in his arms, and Tim's wearing a ripped-up and somehow conservative-looking *Robin* suit --

And Tim looks --

Looks fucking --

"No," Dick says, and gestures again --

And the Dick onscreen is wearing the black-and-indigo suit again, but his hair is *incredibly* short -- and *Steph* is Batgirl and *right* there --

"Oh, my," Clark says, and *beams*. "Would you ever -- oh."

Dick and Steph are -- not sparring even a little. It's brutal and *fast* -- faster than he's *ever* seen Steph moving, and she's using a staff like Tim's --

And the Dick onscreen is trying to *maim* her, and it's *obvious* even though he's only using fucking *escrima* sticks --

Fuck, Steph just broke Dick's *nose* --

His cheekbone --

That nut-shot would *cripple* any-fucking-one else --

"Uh. Big Bird?"

"You're allowed to close your eyes, little wing. *I*, on the other hand, need to see *exactly* what Steph is capable of learning."

"Okay, but --"

Dick spits blood in Steph's eyes --

Jabs her breast and stomach with the escrima sticks *viciously* hard --

She staggers --

Dick hisses and steps *back* --
But the screen doesn't go black until Jason knows for sure that Dick had aimed a shot at her throat.

Jason squeezes his eyes shut fucking late -- no. He opens them again and checks on Steph, who's rubbing her throat just like she'd caught the end of that, too. Her eyes are wide and freaked --

And then she shudders, swallows, and yanks on a smile by main fucking force before jerking her chin at Dick. "I'm calling Superman if you ever even look like you're thinking of getting a practical haircut."

Dick just stares at her for a long moment, stares like he's trying to memorize her -- and then he pulls on his own smile. "'Practical,' little sister...? Is this where we talk about just how problematic that ponytail is?"

She blinks and reaches to tug on it -- "I cut my hair for no one, Dick."

His smile turns into a grin. "Then a cowl wouldn't be the worst idea --"

"Oh -- that bitch's hair was all over the place!"

Dick blinks. "You assumed... was it her fault?"

"You didn't?"

Dick's smile gets rueful again. "Not even a teeny bit, little sister. I -- okay, useful advice first: It's much harder for an attacker to get a useful -- and deadly -- grip on hair that's spread out across the backs of your shoulders than it is for one to get a grip on a nice, handy --" And his hand doesn't move too fast to see, but it moves way too fast for Steph to counter -- "Ponytail."

"Gah! Okay, okay. But I'm Skylark, not freaking Batgirl."

Dick waggles his eyebrows behind the mask -- not too many people can actually manage that -- and winds her ponytail around his fist slowly.

She crosses her arms under her tits --

Jason takes a good, long look -- and then checks on Tim, who is absolutely letting Clark cradle her a little. Clark is whispering things in Kryptonian that Jason can't quite catch, and Tim is whispering right back.

Distraction works just fine, as far as he's concerned, especially since Steph doesn't look pissy, yet.

Jason walks over -- giving the machine a wide fucking berth -- and cups her hips from the back.

She turns to give him a flirty look -- and it doesn't get any less flirty when Dick turns her back to face him.

"We can... mm. There's more than one kind of cowl, little sister."

Steph blinks just like she wasn't expecting Dick to have anything Mission-related to say --

And Dick laughs that soft and sweet laugh -- "We can talk about it later," he says, leaning in slow and careful and slow --

Steph shivers -- and moans when the kiss finally lands. Maybe for the way Dick's lips feel, maybe for the way he'd closed his eyes --
He doesn't know, but he *wants* to --

Almost as much as he wants to press closer, *squeeze* those meaty hips and rub his way-too- armored-at-the-moment crotch against her ass --

She reaches back and *claws* his ass --

"Jesus, I don't get *tired* of that --"

And Steph makes a noise that sounds a lot like 'I *know*,' but she keeps kissing Dick, keeps --

God, he doesn't *know* this Dick-kiss. It looks hot as hell, but it also looks a little *gentle*, a little -- no. He's learning her, seeing how far he can pull her *into* it.

He already knows *exactly* how far he can take *Jason* --

And Dick's a *fast* fucking learner, because all Steph has to do is make an *impatient* noise before Dick is hauling her closer --

Up onto her *toes* --

"*Mm*!"

And the kiss is a *lot* like the ones Jason hopes he dies before he ever forgets. Dick is fucking *taking* her mouth, opening her up with his tongue --

*Pulling* on her ponytail with one hand and cupping her breast with the other --

She *bucks* --

And Dick pulls back and sighs coffee against her mouth. "Little sister..."

"Uh. Uh. Fuck?"

Dick grins. "I certainly hope so," and he licks her mouth --

Steph *grunts* --

Jason *strokes* her hips --

"How *much* did you like it when Jay started fucking you *hard*?"

Steph blushes *hard* --

Dick sucks in a shaky breath. "Steph..."

"I -- uh. You --"

"You're staying here tonight."

"I -- yeah --"

"With us."

"That doesn't mean -- uh." She bites her lip and tugs herself away from Dick a little --

And Dick raises his eyebrows. "Are you sure?"
"No? Mostly no? Jesus, Dick, we still have to go back *out* after this!"

Dick looks thoughtful, so Jason checks --

Bruce has his gauntlets shoved through his belt and the cowl pushed back. He's cupping Harvey's face --

They've got their foreheads together and they're whispering --

Jason can see a shine on *both* their cheeks --

Fucking --

"Little wing?"

"Uh. How *much* did Bruce like to distract himself with work?"

Dick laughs a little breathlessly. "A lot. A lot, a lot," he says, and *hugs* Steph --

"*Oof* --"

"Mmm. Tell me we can do this often...?"

"Hugs are totally okay!"

"Good," and Dick kisses her cheek, her temple, and her cheek again before pulling back --

And when Jason turns back to Bruce and Harvey, they're walking towards them. They're holding hands and Harvey is smiling. Bruce doesn't *quite* look like he's marching toward his own execution --

No, it would be Harvey's execution, because there's no way Bruce would look that sad and *painfully* brave if it was just his own life on the line. He --

He needs them. And that's exactly what he's gonna get.

Jason jerks his chin. "Stay right around where I am, distance-wise," he says, and points to the machine. "It's *real* damned responsive."

Bruce blinks and actually looks a little interested. "Responsive how?"

Dick smiles ruefully. "We've just been looking at various... lives. Of ourselves. *You* need to focus on Gilda, Harvey, because I know for a fact that you don't want to see what happens to you in other universes."

"You got that right, Dick. I..." Harvey shakes his head and his smile turns a little rueful, too. "On the other hand, it can be like a... booster shot, maybe? I'm not wasting *any* time before I find the birds and bats in whichever reality I wind up in. Hopefully none of them shoot first and ask questions later, hey?" And he's grinning and that's great, but --

Fuck.

"Hey, what did I say?"

Tim pats Clark's chest twice and Clark sets him on her feet. "We've just been given some measure of proof that we could be... ah..."
"FUBAR," Jason says. "I think that's the best word for it."

Harvey nods thoughtfully. "So maybe I should sit back and watch a little?"

Dick takes a deep breath. "I don't *want* to think that way, but... yes." His laugh is short and sharp. "Especially if any of us look like we have practical haircuts."

Jason opens his mouth -- but the Jason with the guns had hair shorter than he's kept his since his *mom* was alive and could make him sit still for her scissors. "Yeah, that," he says. "You're gonna think about Gilda. Maybe about *two* Gildas?"

Harvey looks them all over like he's doing his own memorization --

*Strokes* Bruce's hand --

And grins. "So maybe I've already had that fantasy a couple-few-dozen times."

Steph snorts. "What if she's not *into* clone-fucking?"

"Hey, Stephanie, I'm a *prosecutor*. I'm *paid* to be convincing," he says, and winks at her.

She puts her fists on her hips and -- yeah. That's totally her glare for *him*, which means it's her glare for I'm totally thinking about screwing you."

And Harvey smiles at her *warmly*. "Hold on to your dreams, okay? *All* of 'em --" "I *plan* on it --"

"*And* maybe remember that there are a whole lot of ways to make a difference."

She blinks --

"No *poaching*," Dick says, and wags a finger at Harvey just like *he* isn't deadly fucking serious about that --

Harvey raises his hands. "Can't blame a guy for trying? Maybe? Ah, what can I say? I'm *primitive* -- but I'm working on it," he says, and turns to look at Bruce. "I'll remember everything, big guy. I promise."

Bruce stares *into* Harvey and nods --

And Harvey shivers and kisses him hard once, twice --

Again and again, and *that's* when Jason notices that the hickeys really are visible above the collar of his shirt, and that the stubble-burn is really fucking *obvious* --

Jesus, a part of his brain had just filtered all that out as *normal* --

Which is going to make dealing with *their* Harvey --

Two-Face. They have a *Two*-Face, not a One-Face, and he's gonna remember that --

He *has* to remember --

Bruce groans and kisses Harvey *hard*, shuddering and holding himself *rigid* everywhere but his face --
He has to remember for *Bruce's* sake. They all do, and that's that.

Harvey pushes his hands between them --

And Bruce steps back and pants. "I love you."

"Always, big guy. *Always*," Harvey says, wiping the back of his mouth and turning to walk close to the machine, which shows Bruce in some kind of crazy full-torso brace *still* kicking ass --

And a Bruce who looks about seventy going on one hundred and eleven... with a middle-aged Tim on his *lap* --

*Their* Bruce coughs --

Tim *hums* --

And Harvey laughs a little. "I -- think I gotta say I like this one, big guy. But..." He closes his eyes and focuses --

And the Gildas fly past too fast -- almost -- to really see.

There's one with a scarred face to match Two-Face's --

And one sculpting a life-sized statue of fucking *Lex Luthor* --

And one wearing all black splashing gasoline all over the Arkham grounds and weeping --

Setting *bombs* and weeping --

Harvey still has his *eyes* closed --

And Dick cups Harvey's shoulder. "Think of her when you were happiest, Harvey. When... maybe your wedding day?"

And there she is marrying Two-Face --

Smiling up at Harvey in the Oval fucking *Office* --

Laughing, in a studio.

With another, older-looking Gilda. Hunh.

"I think you can open your eyes now, One-Face," Jason says, and grins.

"What -- oh. Oh. There -- there's her little awl scar," Harvey says, walking closer to the machine and pointing at an almost-invisible dimple just beneath her right eye. Both of her eyes are looking a little shadowed and deep despite the laughter -- "I was worried *sick* -- and. Ah, those hands, those --" Harvey shudders and *hugs* himself --

Pants --

Dick swallows. "You're sure --"

"Couldn't be -- God, look how beautiful -- but she hasn't been getting enough *sleep* --" Harvey growls and drops his hands, curling them into fists. "How. How do I *do* this?"

Good question --
But Clark clears him throat. "You merely... ah. The portal is the screen you're looking through, Mr. Dent."

"Oh. Oh. I -- I need to *thank* you, Superman. Hell, *all* of you," and Harvey turns to look at them all, and he's crying a little --

Jason does his own swallowing. "It's cool, man. It's --"

"Ah... better, perhaps, if you take these with you," and Clark hands Harvey a stack of papers which look covered with diagrams.

Harvey blinks. "What... what are these?"

Onscreen, the two Gildas turn to look at a television which looks like it was dragged into the studio *real* damned recently. The sound from the television is weirdly garbled for some reason Jason can't guess at, but it's easy enough to read the text at the bottom of the screen: Doubles Everywhere! JLA Stumped!

Well, at least it's not a *CSA* --

"-- could think of it as insurance, Mr. Dent," Clark says, and pats Harvey's hand. "I have no idea whether you'll be able to find all the materials needed to build a machine like this one in that universe, but..."

Harvey sniffs hard. "It's -- thank you. Thank you."

Clark smiles, and it's a *real* one, wry and warm and soft. "Thank you for every moment of happiness you've given my companion. And for every such moment you *will* give in the future."

Harvey turns to Bruce one more time --

Bruce is *smiling* --

And Harvey squeezes his eyes shut and nods before turning around and *stalking* right through the 'screen' -- which obviously isn't a screen, at all, because it *bubbles* --

Flares fucking *alarmingly* --

And then they're looking at Harvey staggering into the studio --

At the older Gilda *recoiling* --

And the younger one jumping up and *running* into Harvey's arms, holding him and patting him and kissing him --

And he's spinning her around and around --

Kissing her all over her face --

The older Gilda is on her feet and watching *warily*, but isn't reaching for a weapon or anything, which is a *great* sign as far as Jason is concerned. He tries to guess the year by the television --

It doesn't work. The thing looks much too old for the technology being shown onscreen.

As for checking out the older Gilda... no, that doesn't work *either*, because she'd aged a decade overnight after there was no longer any way to get around the fact that Harvey was a psychotic killer.
He doesn't know. He --

He might not ever know. Just like he might not ever know what it cost Dick to be the one to step in range of the machine to make sure they could all keep *watching* --

And it's not a surprise that Bruce is the one who starts tugging him backwards.

"Bruce --"

"Please, brother. Not this," Bruce says, and his voice is gentle and low and heavy --

"Then what?" Tim says, and takes *one* step closer --

Steph smacks her. "How is that even a *question*?"

"*Ow* --"

"She's got a point, baby," Jason says, and he *and* Steph push and pull her over to where Dick is hugging Bruce. They get in on that action -- Tim tucks herself under Bruce's huge fucking *cape* -- and eventually Bruce starts to shudder and rock a little.

"Let it out --"

"We're here, Spooky --"

"We *love* you," Dick says, reaching up and back to snap his fingers --

"Ah... are you sure?"

Jason swallows and thinks of Kon -- "*Yes*, we're fucking sure. And so is Bruce."

Bruce sniffs --

Does it again --

"Yes," he says, and -- "Please."

And Clark is right there heating them all up a little.

He can smell Tim's product and Steph's sweat. He can smell coffee and body armor. He can smell *tears* --

But they're his own, so he just fucking copes.

*
The long haul.

Thirty-seven hours ago, Harvey had walked through a portal into another universe with the plans to build another such machine. While there are parts of him which know very well that Harvey will *try* to get such a thing built -- if only to let them *speak* once more -- the other parts are the ones which have been getting the most *voice* within his mind.

He cannot quite escape the feeling that he's alone and will *be* alone for the rest of his life --

Save when his new family are near to him.

To that end, he simply hasn't had *that* much time to brood --

The more pessimistically *terrible* parts of him all say that that isn't *enough* --

Sometimes they say it with the same voice they'd use to tell him to *train* --

He will not call that voice 'The Bat.'

He will not give it *any* name anymore.

Right now, however, he is alone in the Cave save for Tim, who is soaking a muscle strain in her thigh in the Jacuzzi Bruce would never have thought of installing on his own. There are always dangers in sparring, but he knows Tim is blackly angry with herself for this injury just the same, despite the others' attempts to talk her around to reason.

Bruce would feel precisely the same in her position, and that --

That is what will help him stop being alone in *this* moment. He will give Tim a thorough rubdown before joining Dick for a shared patrol.

First, however, he will finish familiarizing himself with the crimes of Pamela Isley, who has somehow become one of the family's most dangerous enemies -- and nearly entirely inhuman.

She had always been a genius with plant toxins, and she had certainly always been deeply and dangerously *troubled*...

Bruce gives himself another moment to stare at the -- shockingly crisp and realistic -- computer image of Isley. Her flesh is the color of kiwi fruit flesh, her finger- and toenails are nearly *woody*, and, in the photograph, the leaves which *grow from her flesh* are brown and curling with obvious illness.

How to reach someone like that?

How to *help* them?

Arkham has no better a success rate with helping the criminally insane in this time than it had had in his own -- no. *This* is his time, now. This...

Bruce closes his eyes for a long moment --

"You told me once that you were *deeply* attracted to her the first time you saw her."

Bruce blinks and looks around, but there is no sign of the voice's -- low, rich, and feminine -- provenance -- no, not that, either. There is a small -- fascinatingly small -- speaker set just there
among the monitors. Bruce reaches out to touch it --

"Careful, Bruce. It's fragile."

Bruce swallows. "I'm afraid you have me -- hm. Owl?"

One of the monitors to his right flares to life -- Bruce would've sworn it was powered down -- showing a beautiful and apparently *human* woman in her late twenties or early thirties. Her hair has more in common with flame than with Isley's distinctly tropical-seeming flowers; she has pale freckles on her cheeks; a broad, clear forehead; thin-lensed glasses -- and Jim Gordon's nose. And her smile is both sharp and warm.

"Is it proper to say that I'm pleased to meet you in a situation like this one?"

She purses her soft, unpainted lips. "Something tells me you're going to *loathe* learning what you need to know about computers."

Bruce smiles and raises an eyebrow. "I believe that will depend on the teacher."

A show of teeth. "Tim isn't the most patient... person in the world for such things."

"And you are?"

She laughs. "No. Not even a wee little bit," she says, and rests her faintly strong chin on her scarred fists. "So you're in for the long haul."

Last night, he had gone to sleep in Dick's arms, with Jason on his other side. This morning, he had woken sneezing, because Stephanie's thick hair had somehow migrated into his nose.

Perhaps when he had clutched her lush body to his own.

He wishes he *remembered* that --

"Hard question...?"

Bruce blinks away the memory. "Not at all. I will stay here for as long as I am desired. I... was attempting to piece together the events of last -- hm. I believe Alfred drugged me."

Another laugh. "You can't tell me you're not familiar with *that* protocol."

"Owl --"

"Call me Barbara."

Bruce smiles. "Thank you --"

"You're welcome. Do you know why I waited to speak to you directly?"

"I assumed you had no desire to."

Barbara snorts. "I... no."

Bruce leans back and crosses his legs. "Please, tell me."

And she... looks him over. And sighs. "Bruce... you really have turned over a new leaf, haven't you?"
"I hope so."

"And you... you're not going to lie to the family if it can possibly be avoided, and you're going to do your level best to open up and share and allow others to share with you."

"It's... it's what I've wanted. For far longer a time than I am yet comfortable admitting to --"

"Except to your first love?"

*Lost* love -- no. Even now, he can use the machine to show him Harvey's precise location. He is at once incalculably far away and close enough for touch, for all that *he* can't come back here until another machine is built --

And he will not avoid Barbara's questions. "I knew at fourteen that there was nothing I didn't wish to share with Harvey, for all that the idea of doing so was both embarrassing and confusing."

She tilts her head to the side. "You couldn't figure out how to do it."

It isn't a question, but Bruce inclines his head just the same. When he looks up again, her smile is rueful and somewhat pained. "Barbara...?"

"I... let's just say that *that* sort of thing isn't unfamiliar to me."

"Yes?"

"When I want to shut down conversation about my issues, I speak lovingly and pointedly about the beauties and charms inherent to privacy. Much to my chagrin -- having observed *you* for the past few days -- people have come to think that I actually *am* a private person. As opposed to a fearful, obsessive, misanthropic, geeky, and *lonely* person."

Bruce frowns. "Is there anything I might do --"

"Oh, Bruce..." She smiles again, and reaches out with her palm facing forward.

Bruce touches his own palm to the screen --

And she sighs again and drops her hand. "I was afraid to look at you. I was *deathly* afraid to smell you. I was *terrified* to get to know you again... knowing that you'd be leaving again. And knowing that I probably still wouldn't find a way to tell you how much I loved you once upon a time. After all, I never even managed to tell *Dick* that when it would've given him comfort. But... you're in for the long haul."

Bruce drops his own hand and nods. "I would like to come to know you."

"Tim showed you how to get to my home."

"Would you like --"

"Not... tonight. And I'm not even stalling, this time," she says, and gestures to someone off-screen --

And then a very small young woman in her mid-to-late teens walks within view of the camera. She is Asian -- quite possibly Korean, given her bone structure -- and has a faintly pear-shaped form which is obvious, given the tightness of her uniform. There is a gold bat symbol emblazoned across her chest, a gold belt with many deep-looking pockets, and gold bands across her knuckles, which Bruce can see have been subtly enhanced with something which would turn her punches devastating.
More devastating. She is in no ready-stance, but her walk and the calm *looseness* of her body suggests a facility with *several* schools of martial arts --

"Batwoman...?"

When the young woman smiles, she looks even younger. Or -- innocent, perhaps. There is a brightness to it, a flare of *force* --

Bruce smiles back helplessly --

And the young woman points to Barbara and then to the bat on her chest. "Bat*girl*.

"As you say --"

And then she points to her own cheek. "Cassandra."

Bruce inclines his head. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm --"

"Bruce. Do you talk all the time?"

Bruce blinks. "I... at... times?"

She frowns mildly and nods before turning back to Barbara, who smiles at her with fondness and something like a *vicious* pride --

"Route F tonight. Report in on the hours."

Cassandra nods once and pulls a cowl much like Bruce's own down over her face. It's somewhat more form-fitting than Bruce's, which doesn't bode well for the armoring, but then *all* of them have decided to go without head armor for reasons Bruce does not yet understand. When Cassandra has the cowl situated properly, she smiles at him again and runs easily and lightly to the window several feet behind Barbara before jumping out.

Barbara hums. "She came to me -- to *Owl* -- after the 'quake. She was dirty, malnourished, and exhausted, because she had been searching the entire city for signs of *you*.

"But... I don't understand."

"The man who raised, trained, and abused her is named David Cain. Familiar...?"

"No --"

"I didn't think so. I've uploaded every bit of information I could find about him to the server. Your other self battled him inconclusively twice which, considering the fact that the man earns his money killing very, very well-protected people, was enough to make Cain obsessed with you. According to Cassandra, Cain didn't believe you were dead. He told her about you with some *very* problematic picture-books, and, when Cassandra woke up one day and decided she didn't *want* to be an assassin, she decided to come looking for you. It took her years to get to this country... well, she can tell you all about it when she wants to. It'll be good practice for her, considering the fact that speaking -- or making any sorts of noise, at all -- was a beating offense with Cain."

Bruce narrows his eyes. "Where is he."

"I haven't the *faintest* clue... but Cassandra believes he just might be looking for her -- and you. Watch your back."
"Will you be doing the same?"

"*Oh*, yes. Though, really, with Cassandra living here the past few months, I've really never felt *safer*," she says, and smiles ruefully. "She wipes the *floor* with me *every* time we spar. I *think* you'll be able to fight her to a draw, and Dick, too, but I could very well be wrong about that. In any event, I've already told the rest of the family a little about her -- and thus about why I've been so... absent -- do be sure to share the rest."

Bruce nods. And -- "I have no doubt in your ability to judge the fitness of another operative, considering the wisdom you've shown in your direction of the rest of the family."

Her expression... quirks.

"Was that... something the other Bruce wouldn't have said?"

"I... it's not that he *never* offered compliments. It's just that it always made him look *extremely* worried."

Bruce laughs quietly. "As if something terrible would happen...?"

"Yes. And -- you've already seen more terrible things than that Bruce had."

Bruce looks down at his bare hands. The Atom had told Dick that there was a *scar* on the fabric of space-time --

A scar with no signs of *healing* -- though, thankfully, also no signs of *spreading*.

There are other universes. Other *realities*. And, while there is no way to be sure that every person he has loved have found themselves in safe -- or reasonably safe -- realities --

There is such a thing as hope. Bruce looks up and smiles. "I have become superstitious enough not to want to 'jinx' myself. Just the same... just the same, I am here, and alive, and loved. And I will appreciate every moment of that."

"Hnn. Who do you plan to 'appreciate' tonight...?"

Bruce raises an eyebrow.

"Inquiring minds want to *know*... boss."

Bruce coughs into his fist -- and *then* thinks about what Barbara has said about 'observing' him. And, presumably, the others. There are strange and wonderful miniature cameras in the masks. There *must* be at least one camera *here*.

But if cameras have become *that* advanced...

Bruce blinks and looks at Barbara. Tries... tries to *see* her --

"Yes...?"

"Are... how *many* cameras --"

"No," she says, and shows her teeth.

"I --"
"You're not ready for the answer to that question, boss. Just go with the idea that voyeurism has a long and noble tradition in this family --"

"Who *started* that tradition?"

She raises an eyebrow. Pointedly.

"I -- I *watched* Dick with... his friends? His team."

Barbara crosses her own legs and swings her chair back and forth. "You edited the footage *beautifully*. And hid it well, too. You were dead for three years before Dick found it."

Bruce... stares.

"Aww, there, there. Surveillance is love, too."

"I --"

"Come see me... tomorrow."

"Oh. All right --"

"Bring Dick with you," she says, and *licks* her teeth. That --

Bruce blushes somewhat helplessly --

And Barbara makes a soft sound which *becomes* a bladed hum. "I'll get you Robin's twenty once you're rolling. Until then... Owl out."

"I -- yes --"

But the monitor is blank -- and powered down once more.

Bruce takes a deep breath, centers himself, and turns back to the file on Isley. As he's going over it for the third and final time, he becomes aware of an uneven and *consciously* soft tread behind him. It --

He smiles and continues reading. "Tim. Should you still be in the Jacuzzi?"

"I think you'll find," Tim says, and spins Bruce's chair just so before climbing onto Bruce's lap, "that I should be right here."

Bruce hums and pulls Tim closer because he can -- and because he knows, with all of himself, that in this moment he *should*. Though -- "I do still wish to give you a rubdown --"

"Oh... you absolutely will," she says, and throws her arms around Bruce's neck. "Daddy."

Bruce raises an eyebrow --

Tim pulls her expression into a *pout* --

"I... call me what you wish --"

"And you'll *be* what I wish...?"

Bruce kisses her forehead. "Beautiful girl. I belong --"
"*Here*."

Bruce smiles and kisses her again. "Always."

end.

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