and our sorrows, he carried

by TheResurrectionist

Summary

Five times Alfred carried Bruce Wayne (and one time Bruce returned the favor)

Notes

Thanks to Musicalgirl4474 for the quick beta.

1)

Bruce Wayne is a squalling infant, his cheeks too pink, his cries just a little too loud. He is a dark shock of hair, a pair of bright blue eyes. He is the most perfect thing Alfred has ever seen.

Martha, exhausted from the labor, soon falls asleep, her husband on the bed beside her. Thomas looks to him with a wry smile, fatigue pulling at his face. He'd coached his wife through every contraction, had been at her side with every push, his doctor's fingers working at the pained muscles, gripping his wife's hand tightly.

"Could you watch him for a moment?" Thomas asks, a jaw-cracking yawn torn from his mouth. Baby Bruce is handed to him, carefully cradled in hands larger than the baby's entire length. "I need to make sure Martha's...alright…"

Alfred's heart stops a little as Bruce is lowered into his hands, the new father closing his eyes and settling against the headboard. With a sigh, the Waynes are both fast asleep as dawn breaks.
outside, a long night of labor behind them.

"Aren't you a difficult one," he says to Bruce, matter-of-factly. He holds him up to the light, unsure of what to do with the life now in his hands.

The baby cries a little, shifting in his grip. His tiny hands ball into fists, waving in the air. Alfred holds him close, already awed by the child. It was too soon to be sure, but he could see Thomas' eyes in the boy, Martha's pale skin and high cheekbones a perfect complement. "Shh, shh, none of that."

Bruce quiets after a moment of rocking, his eyes going wide as Alfred hums under his breath.

"There you are," he says, after a few minutes. Bruce's eyes are beginning to close, a chubby hand rubbing at one cheek. Alfred smiles, despite himself. A butler shouldn't break decorum, but with his charges asleep, he allows himself this moment. "You're going to be an awful lot of trouble for your parents now, aren't you?"

The newest Wayne gums on Alfred's proffered thumb for a minute, then promptly falls asleep. He presses the baby closer, not imagining the warmth he feels in his chest.

"Hello, Master Wayne," he whispers into the child's hair.

2)

Bruce--

He's running before he can stop himself, loafers pounding on the cobblestones as he crosses the alley at break-neck speeds, decorum be damned.

And-Christ-the sight of Martha and Thomas on the ground nearly draws him up short, the blood coating the alleyway a more gruesome sight than all of Burma, of Laos or Cambodia. It's only after a moment of shock that he can even force his legs to move again, over to the darkened corner where a lieutenant is kneeling, a squad car flashing behind him.

Bruce has an oversized coat wrapped around his shoulders, eyes wide and glassy. There's blood splattered across his face, caked into his shoes and dress pants that Alfred had pressed just that afternoon. His shiny little gentleman's shoes, which the boy had been so proud of--ruined, sullied with the blood of his parents, with the grime of Gotham's worst.

"My God," he whispers, hurrying over. Bruce looks away from the lieutenant, the only reaction to Alfred's arrival the slight twitch of his lower lip. "Master Bruce--"

With a muffled cry, the boy throws himself into his arms. Alfred staggers back a little, feeling his throat burn. He wraps his arms tightly around Bruce, tugging him up into a hug.

The lieutenant is saying something, his words blurring into one another, until all Alfred can do is hold out a hand, and inform him that Master Wayne will answer his questions tomorrow, and absolutely not one second earlier.

He carries Bruce back to the Rolls he'd driven in his haste, bundles him into the backseat and buckles him up.

His eyes are dull, filled with the tail-end of horrors Alfred would do anything to obliterate from his memory.
"Home," he says firmly, getting into the driver's seat.

His hands shake on the wheel, trembling against the leather.

3)

His joy at seeing Bruce home is undiminished that day, and while Bruce is not his own child, he can't help but wonder how Martha and Thomas would have welcomed their son home from college. A party? A small, intimate dinner?

No, he thinks. Martha would have baked, burning the daylights out of whatever unfortunate dough she could convince Alfred to make. Thomas would have smelled the burning oven and run down in a hurry, only to find his wife laughing over a glass of chardonnay, a burned tray of cookies in the sink.

Then she would have offered him a glass, undoubtedly, and the two would wait for Bruce to hike up the steps, a knapsack in hand, ready to whisk him out to some new restaurant downtown. Thomas would pound him on the back and ask about his studies, the sports teams at Yale, and interrogate him about the newest fling. Martha would watch, beaming, interrupting only to ask Bruce if he's eating enough, and to sneak out a well-manicured hand to pinch his cheek every now and then.

Alfred cooks, whipping up a fine meal he knows is Master Bruce's favorite. He bakes a cake for good measure, even though the only people on the illustrious grounds are himself, the maids, and the gardner. When the car arrives outside, he dusts off flour and washes his hands, making his way to the foyer.

"Alfred," Bruce says when he opens the door. He's grown, again, nearly an inch taller than him by now. He looks so much like Thomas in that moment, it makes his heart ache. His head bobs up. "Is that chicken I smell?"

Growing boy, Alfred thinks fondly, a perfectly composed expression on his face. "You'll have to wait an hour, I'm afraid; I just put it in the oven."

"Great," Bruce says, stepping into the foyer, his backpack in hand. He sets it down before Alfred can chide him, walking towards the stairs, "I'm going to go check out my room."

And Alfred smiles, when he's finally up the stairs, because no one can see him then. Martha would have smiled; she would have elbowed Thomas until the man did too, grumbling about being too soft on the boy, and the like. She'd know better, of course, and tell him so.

xXx

A few days later, on the eve of a night that didn't bear reminiscing, Alfred finds Bruce on the stairs, a bottle of brandy in one hand.

He puts a hand on his hip, even though it's nearly an hour past midnight, and there's little to be seen by the light of the foyer.

"Master Bruce."

"Alfred," Bruce says softly, a hint of wetness to his voice, like he'd been crying. "Sorry to, uh, bother you. I was just..."
He gestures with the bottle, and Alfred knows too well what he means. Knows how to drown sorrows in a bottle, and blur days into seconds. Knows how grief eats at one's soul from the inside, until all that's left is a shell.

Nevertheless, his own bad habits aside, the boy is barely nineteen. He harrumphs, raising an eyebrow in a gesture that's lost on his charge.

"That better not be my cooking brandy, Master Wayne."

"Afraid it is," Bruce says guiltily, bowing his head. He tries to stand, suddenly, reaching out a hand for the banister. He misses it, stumbling a little as his hands glance off the hardwood. "Shit--"

Alfred catches him easily, a little surprised by the sudden weight. Bruce had always been a rather skinny boy--Thomas had been too, if he recalled correctly. The Wayne men bulked up later in life, and it seemed that this one was no different.

He pushed Bruce to his feet gently, only for the boy to sag against him.

"Alfred," Bruce slurs into his shoulder, his legs folding beneath him. With a grunt, Alfred catches the boy again, hefting him into a poorly-executed fireman's hold.

"You're getting far too heavy, Master Wayne," he admonishes to Bruce's unconscious body as he stumbles towards the bedrooms on the lower level. "See if I give you a double serving of pie ever again."

He puts Bruce into his bed with none-too-little effort, laying him on his side. The bottle of brandy is thrown into the kitchen sink for later disposal, nearly empty. He'll have a hangover the next morning, undoubtedly, but the boy will live. He'd seen worse in the Service.

Alfred places a glass of water and some acetaminophen on the bedstand, tucking a wastepaper basket next to the bed. He pats Bruce's hair down fondly as he leaves, a familiar ache in his chest.

"Goodnight, Master Wayne," he says, and closes the door with a soft click.

4)

The Tumbler crashes through the cave, skidding on one wheel.

The brakes hiss like demented snakes as Bruce slows the ungodly vehicle to a stop, nearly taking out the West fortification. Alfred forces himself to remain still as the car opens, waiting for his master's eventual reappearance. Wouldn't want to appear worried, of course.

"Penguin," Bruce grunts as he climbs out of the Tumbler, a hand going to his cowl. With a muffled curse, he rips it off, throwing it to the floor. His cheeks are flushed, a fresh bruise forming across one cheekbone. "He's getting trickier. Six of his men were waiting for me when I got there."

Alfred steps forward, putting out a hand that his charge ignores.

"And you escaped unharmed, I assume?" He asks innocently, eyeing how Bruce is holding his side, leaning up against the Tumbler. He gets a glare in return.

"I'm fine," Bruce says a smidge too quickly, looking over Alfred's shoulder at the computer bay. "I just have to--fuck--"

Alfred's shoulder takes the brunt of his Master's weight as the taller man topples towards him,
biting off a groan. He throws Bruce's hand around his neck, half-stepping, half-dragging him to the table. With the armor and muscle from a near-decade of travel, it's near-impossible feat.

"I'm no expert," he says as Bruce hisses, slowly making their way to the table. "But I dare say, is that bone sticking out of your leg?"

The glare he gets is worth it.

"Not the time for jokes, Alfred--"

"Of course not," Alfred smirks a little, tempering his worry with a little good humor at his charge's irritation.

With a quick heft, and some assistance from the infamous Bat, they manage to get Bruce across the metal table, leg outstretched.

Alfred grabs his glasses, peering at the man's lower leg. He sighs, poking gingerly at the ripped armor. "Looks like a compound fracture, I'm afraid."

Bruce mutters something that sounds suspiciously like a string of Cantonese curse words, closing his eyes. His head falls back onto the metal table with a thunk. "You think?"

"I'll have to set it myself," Alfred says smoothly, his tone not betraying the worry suddenly pouring through him. "Let me just fetch the anesthetic."

"Just do it already," Bruce says bitterly, but Alfred is far from fooled by the act. He grabs a syringe and fills it, jamming the needle into Bruce's thigh with little ceremony. The billionaire flinches. "Ouch!"

"Believe me," he tells his charge, setting the syringe aside. He cracks his knuckles. "This next one will hurt far worse."

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5)

The only guests at the Funeral of Bruce Thomas Wayne are Lucius Fox, Jim Gordon, John Blake, and himself. Just enough to carry an empty coffin between them--for a full one, they would have needed six.

He accepts the role of pallbearer again, nearly three decades after he'd done it for Thomas and Martha. This time, his shoulders are nowhere near as strong. He's withered, old age taking its toll on his body, as well as his heart. His hands shake against the gleaming metal, taking measured step after carefully measured step, digging his heels into the damp earth.

Bruce's empty coffin goes into the Wayne plot, next to those of his mother and father. Alfred watches as dirt covers the shiny black of the lid, thinking about everything and nothing at once, tears threatening at the back of his eyes. The coffin is soon obscured, the pair of gravediggers disappearing as soon as their job is complete.

Gordon reads from an older book, his soft voice carrying on the wind. It's a beautiful day around them, as if even Gotham itself couldn't bear another day of gloominess.

When the others leave, and Lucius touches his shoulder in farewell, the tears spill over.

"I'm so sorry," he tells Thomas and Martha, his voice shaking, trembling as badly as his hands do.
"I failed you. I failed you."

_I failed you_, he thinks, remembering the weight of Bruce in his hesitant grip, the very first day they'd met; the relief he'd felt as the child had dozed in his arms, the echoes of his cries ringing through Wayne Manor.

_I failed you._

+1)

"Alfred."

A hesitant touch startles him awake. He blinks, but his vision is blurry more often than not these days. There's a shadow above him, a hand outstretched.

"Alfred," Bruce says softly, a flash of white teeth in the dark. "It's me."

_A quick nod, in a cafe around the world, the flash of a familiar set of pearls around an elegant neck, a brief glimpse of blue eyes, of a young man alive and well--_

"Master Wayne," he croaks, his legs twitching, the urge to stand up and assist nearly second-nature, even after all of these years. A woman's voice asks something, and a hand presses him down into the chair. "I--"

"Rest," Bruce says, his voice a little older, but still the familiar baritone, still so familiar. He sees Thomas standing in front of him for a second, and shakes his head. "You're sick, Alfred. What were you thinking?"

"Nonsense," he says. His hands go to the arms of the chair, as if to push himself up. "I'll just--"

He freezes as his feet are lifted out from under him, scooped into Bruce's arms with hardly a grunt of effort. His charge carries him from the small sitting room, back into the bedroom like he knew this apartment by memory, even in the dark.

(Bruce probably did, but the thought didn't bother him much. He was too old now, he supposed, to worry about such things)

"Rest," Bruce whispered, setting him onto his bed gently. The covers were drawn over his legs, tucked in by another set of hands as Bruce removed his glasses, setting them on the bedside table. "Rest, Alfred."

"Master Wayne," he croaks, feeling his eyes begin to close. Bruce presses a hand to his forehead, his palm blessedly cool. With his remaining strength, he raises a crooked finger. "Don't you even...think...about touching my kitchen."

(It's a tiny kitchenette, just an oven and a pair of hobs, but Alfred was rather fond of his electric stovetop. Bruce had burned water as a child more times than he could count, until Alfred had banned him from the kitchen indefinitely, for fear of ruining more appliances)

"Never," Bruce says from above him, joined a moment later by a woman's laugh. He quiets soon after, voice becoming serious as Alfred's eyes close. "I wouldn't dare."

"Very...good, then."

And with that, he sleeps, content as a familiar weight settles by the end of the bed, sent into a
dreamless rest with the echoes of Bruce's soft chuckles, and the feeling of his charge's hand wrapped in his.

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