And If I Recover

by Mikimoo

Summary

Officer Dick Grayson is captured by a criminal group that makes it's living from torture and extortion. Half the family are forced to watch as events unfold, while the rest frantically try to track down the culprits.

Notes

Warnings: Torture, humiliation and angst! There are also non-con elements and threats of mutilation and sexual violence - I will warn on individual chapters so if you would rather avoid those, you can.
Jan Bednarczyk was becoming more and more convinced this was a bad idea. It wasn’t just the illegal thing, they were way past that - it was the way his cousin Mathew’s friend had looked at him, like he was a bug, less than a bug; a dead bug in his soup. Then there was the gun they had given him. Jan had held Mattie’s gun before; that had been so cool. Now, it was fucking terrifying to feel the cold weight in his pants. And his was only a taser.

He was beginning to suspect his mom’s mistrust of Mattie was kind of justified.

“You ready, Jan?” Mattie asked, his voice a little high in his excitement. Something that was not reassuring, he was really into this, wasn’t afraid of his freaky, well organized, snap happy friends.

Too tense to speak Jan just nodded, his face hidden under his cap. Why the hell did he think this was a good idea? Revenge was one thing, but this was going to lose his mom her second son as well as her first. The thought made him feel ill.

Mattie jimmied the window open, and Jan distantly noted that it was a bit too easy for all those locks. As he followed over the sill he couldn’t help noticing the faint scrapes on the frame. Almost like it had been forced open before.

Inside the apartment was dark, and Mattie tripped over a pile of something on the floor, biting off a cuss. They both stopped and listened. The TV was on, but there was no other sound. As his eyes adjusted, Jan picked his way across piles of discarded clothes and sheets of paper stacked haphazardly all over the floor - for a cop, this guy was one hell of a slob.

They crept down the hall, as quiet as two jittery young men could be. The ten feet to the living room felt like a hundred miles. The room was dark except for the TV, and a figure was slumped on the couch, snoring gently.

“See?” Mattie smirked at him. “Out for the count, as promised.”

Jan was relieved that the cop was already unconscious, as they had been told he would be, but there was still something off about the scene.

His teachers said he was a smart kid, very observant – so he narrowed his eyes and observed. The cop was there, the remains of drugged food still on the table in front of him. A few empty beer cans around his feet – he was wearing heavy-duty boots that had mud clinging to them, some of it was on the table where he had clearly put his feet at some point. And next to the mud, there was a cigarette stubbed out on the table. Who did that? If you were a smoker, you would have an ashtray, and if it was a one off deal, you would use the plate or a beer bottle, surely? The guy was messy, but there were no obvious signs of destruction.

“Mattie?”

“Mat,” Mattie said, in irritation.

“This isn’t right,”

“No the time to change your mind, kiddo.”

“I’m not a kid! I’m just saying something about this set up is wrong!”

“I know what I’m doing!” Mattie said. And his word was final.
Jan had been right though. Mattie’s friend, Anderson, had been livid when presented with their prisoner. It was the wrong guy.

Anderson had snapped some photos of the unconscious man, then given them a tongue lashing and some syringes of a drug to subdue their target. He followed that up with a look that said, *do it right or you’re on the chopping block instead of him.*

So here they were again, breaking into the same apartment for the second time that evening. Except this time there would be no drugs to knock the guy out fist. Jan was only shitting himself slightly at that part.

They hid in the bedroom, figuring the guy would probably head in there first to change. The wait was excruciating and his breath sounded as loud as a freight train to his own ears.

Finally the door opened. The cop came into the apartment and then stopped, his body still. Somehow he knew something was off. It was creepy and Jan’s heart started to race. The cop sniffed the air, and Jan realized he could probably smell the last of the lingering cigarette smoke. Instead of drawing his gun, like cops did in the movies, he slid forward on silent feet and stuck his head into the living room. Then he seemed to catch sight of the cigarette butts and beer cans and his face took on an irritated expression. He briefly examined one of the stubs and then tossed it back onto the table.

“Jason?” he yelled, looking pissed off. “You still here, you ass?” He glanced around as if expecting the guy to spring out at him. Jan wondered what their relationship was; he certainly didn’t seem too pleased at the intrusion.

“If you’re planning some payback over the McGowen thing, then screw you! That was my case!” He listened for an answer and then cast a final suspicious eye around the room. “And if you’re still here,” he growled quietly, “then I’m going to beat your ass into the floor. Break in, eat my food, steal my beer then whine I screw up you operations. Bastard. And you damn well better not have pissed in my dress shoes again or no mercy!”

He moved to the bathroom cautiously, apparently still expecting ‘Jason’ to leap out of the darkened rooms. Then, shrugging, he set about clearing up the mess.

Mattie shifted beside Jan in impatience. He was going to go for it, and that was a really bad idea. Jan shook his head frantically trying to stop the inevitable, but Mattie drew his gun and sprang into action. He bolted down the hall towards the cop who was just heading to the kitchen with the half eaten plate of food and discarded takeout boxes.

One moment the cop was standing there blinking in surprise and the next he was across the table with an arm round Mattie’s neck. His gun fell uselessly to the floor as Mattie scrabbled in the cops grip while he tried to keep his footing and avoid being choked.

Jan panicked, but it was a strangely practical panic, almost like he was operating outside of himself. He leapt into the room, brandishing his taser in what he hoped was a threatening manner.

“Stop!” he yelled, “you’ll regret it if you do that!”

“Seems like your buddy here is the one doing the regretting.” The cop nodded towards Mattie, who he had in a tight hold that looked very uncomfortable. “Why don’t you put your gun down?” he sounded remarkably reasonable for someone being attacked in his own home.
Jan held up the taser, pointing it towards the ceiling. He was taking a huge, huge risk, counting on the possibility there was some level of care between this guy and the one they had taken to Anderson earlier. “Check his phone,” he said, nodding towards Mattie. “If we don’t call in, your friend is dead.”

The cop blinked at him for a moment then slowly reached into Mattie’s pocket –effortlessly resisting his attempts to break free from the lighter hold. Whilst he was examining the pictures, Jan slid his own phone out his pocket and flipped it on

“Our friend is on the other line right now,” he said, and he wished he didn’t feel so sick, because this would probably be really cool if he wasn’t one hairs breadth from up-chucking all over his target. He swallowed it down, forced the words out calmly. “And if you don’t let go of my cousin and do what we say, your friend will get a bullet in the head.”

Slowly the cop released Mattie, who looked very relieved, relieved and angry. “Get him!” He snarled, and Jan shot the cop right in the chest with his taser. He was honestly shocked he didn’t miss. The cop went down and Mattie pulled one of the syringes out of his pocket and shoved the needle into the cop’s shoulder.

“Sleep tight, pig,” he said, seemingly pleased.

Jan felt a little sick.
Chapter 2

Commissioner Jim Gordon liked his job most days, loved it on others. But there were some times when it was deeply unpleasant. Especially when it crossed the line into personal. And anything involving Bruce Wayne and his odd family of misfits was always personal.

He really hated to be the bringer of bad news to his friends, but he would rather it be him than a stranger – for all sorts of reasons. So he straightened his shoulders and braced himself for the coming storm.

Alfred Pennyworth opened the door, and by the subtle shift in expression, it was obvious he knew the news was bad. Jim and his entourage of hostage negotiators, Techs, FBI guys and cops were ushered into the house and stood awkwardly while Pennyworth fetched his master.

It didn’t take long, and the Bruce that stalked into the room was not the affable, slightly ditsy Bruce Wayne most of the police officers accompanying Jim knew- this Bruce was sharp, focused and fiercely intense. He stopped less than a foot away, radiating a controlled tension that made the hair of Jim’s arms stand up. The rookie FBI agent standing beside him took a step back, but Jim didn’t.

“Who?” Bruce said, blunt and tense.

“Dick.”

“What happened?”

Jim held up a hand in a vaguely placating gesture, “He’s alive. He was taken from his apartment an hour or so ago.”

“And you know this how?”

“His kidnappers contacted us directly, and asked us to contact you.”

“Not normal behavior for kidnappers.”

Jim motioned for Bruce to sit, unsurprisingly he didn’t. “It’s going to be a long night, Bruce.”

“Who took him?”

“They identified themselves as The Shroud. They’ve been on the news here and there, mostly on the west coast. But they began here on the east. In Bludhaven, most likely.”

“I’ve heard of them,” Bruce’s voice was grim.

Jim cleared his throat. “They cross state lines, which has made tracking them difficult,” he paused and cast a quick eye around the room. Only the rookie - Emily Brent, and Agent Moore were within earshot – and Moore already knew what he had to say. “There was also some foot dragging when it came to get the investigation started– possibly because the first victims were high risk and ‘unmissed’.”

“Someone missed them,” Bruce growled.

“Many someones, I suspect. Dick felt the real reason the investigation took so long to get off the ground was more to do with the people running the show.”
Bruce turned his piercing gaze on the two FBI agents and then pulled Jim aside. Moore looked like he was about to object, but even his arrogance wilted a little under Wayne’s stare. “You think there is some police or government involvement? Or that someone is paying to keep the cops off their backs?”

Jim nodded. “I gather that Dick believed that. He was told to stop investigating, but I know through Barbara that he was continuing to look into it on his own.”

“And you think that was why he was targeted?”

“In part,” Jim paused, unsure of how to continue with any kind of tact. “But it also seems to be partly aimed at you and your fortune.”

“They want a ransom? I thought they were more interested in making money off these so called torture actions?”

“They are, but this isn’t the first time they have earned a bit on the side by kidnapping children of the rich and famous.”

“And that would be why the FBI bothered to get involved, I take it?”

“Indeed.” Jim was glad he and Bruce were on the same page when it came to their frustrations with the agency. “In the previous case—something that was not made public—the victim was the daughter of a wealthy oil baron. He was instructed by her captors to watch the auction and match all the bids. The auction itself took place the same way as the rest—people bid on the various things inflicted on the victim–previously the highest bidder got the kill, but they seem to have it rigged—the girl’s father had to top the final bid to insure her release.

“And did they? Did the girl live?”

“What was left of her. Physically she might recover, eventually. But that sort of intense torture leaves strains on both the body and the mind.”

“Offer them double what they got for the girl, triple if necessary. Mr. Fox can free up the necessary funds.”

“I’m sorry Bruce, but making money seems to be only part of what they get from this. It is not just an attack on Dick, it’s an attack on you. The man running this show wants you to watch, he wants to watch you suffer, as you watch your son suffer in turn.”

Bruce grunted. He probably wasn’t surprised.

“And if I refuse? If I send you all packing and hire someone to rescue him myself?”

“Then you are taking a huge risk that they won’t just kill him outright. Take away their power and they might just punish you for it. If you want my advice, Bruce? I would perhaps make some calls, ‘hire’ your outside help, and then work with us, do as they say and try to insure his release if your… private detectives don’t find him in time.”

Plausible deniability was a pain sometimes, but it did mean that he and Bruce had a something of a coded language for discussions like these.

Agent Moore chose that moment to muscle in to the Conversation. “If I may say, Mr. Wayne, The FBI has a damn sight better chance at finding these freaks than some trumped up PI. In this case I would suggest you forget the outside help, let us do our jobs and use the next fifteen minutes calling your finance guys to free up the cash. Your son has to be worth more than money, surely.”
Bruce’s, attention shifted onto Moore, something that made the man’s eyes narrow and his ears redden. He was obviously not prepared to be hit by the full force of Bruce’s real, crisis driven personality.

“Quite so, agent Poor,” Bruce said after an excruciatingly long unblinking stare.

“Agent Moore,” Moore corrected, somewhere between flustered and indignant.

“Indeed.” Bruce broke eye contact for a moment, his gaze shifting towards the right. Jim turned, and saw Bruce’s adopted daughter standing by the bookcase, as still and silent as a statue. He hadn’t even registered she had been in the room, and he wasn’t the only one - he saw agent Brent jump as she suddenly noticed her too. There was a moment of what seemed to be silent communication between Bruce and the girl, before she moved gracefully towards the door, nodding politely to the police as she slipped out.

Jim had a real soft spot for that young woman and her friendship with his daughter, but the quiet, purposeful stealth in the way she moved sometimes made his hair stand up – just the way Bruce often did. Clearly a perfect addition to the family.

“Where were we?” Bruce said. All business now. “We should set up in here, get your systems up and running. I will make those calls, and get Lucius to organize some funds. And I’m sending the kids to stay elsewhere tonight, they don’t need to see this.”

“You heard the man,” Jim said to the room at large. “Let’s get moving.”
Anderson kicked the cop in the ribs a few times, but he didn’t stir. “Wakey, wakey, Grayson,” he said, landing a savage kick to the guy’s thigh. He still didn’t move; Jan hoped he wasn’t dead.

“Strip him down,” Anderson ordered, and it took a moment for Jan to realize he was talking to him and Mattie. He had never stripped a person before and it was surprisingly difficult.

Under his bulky jacket the cop didn’t look half as large as he had with Mattie in a headlock and Jan was slightly embarrassed at how shit scared he had been in the apartment. They peeled off his shoes and socks, and took off his shirt– the guy had some serious scars, more than you would expect from a couple of years on the force.

“Must have been in an accident,” Mattie decided after they had spent a moment contemplating the guy’s beat-up torso.

“Yeah,” Jan agreed doubtfully. Some of the scars looked like bullet wounds, but he supposed that was par for the course for cops. Probably.

Anderson had his camera again and he spread Grayson out on the floor like some sort of artwork before snapping off some pictures. More than Jan thought was necessary, really.

“Right, Keegan, Stukas, you set up for filming. Let’s send these pretty portraits off to Wayne and get this show on the road. Mat and what’s-your-face, put Grayson in with the other one for now – make sure you bind him, he’s some sort of wanna be martial arts expert or something.”

They tied Grayson’s arms and pulled him to the pen where the other guy was being held. The big guy still scared him a bit, even beat to hell with one arm clearly broken, the expression on his face promised murder. Mattie pointed his gun at the guy while Jan dragged Grayson inside and slammed the cage door shut. The big guy didn’t say anything, didn’t even move, he just followed them with his eyes.

Mat drew him off to the side, full of jittery excitement. “They’re going to hook up the connection to Wayne. I want to see his smug rich face when we show him the pictures. You stay here and watch these two, ok, Jan?”

“Don’t leave me alone!” Jan whispered urgently.

“Don’t be such a baby, you’re sixteen, that’s plenty old enough to deal with this, or you going to run home to mommy?”

If it was an option, Jan thought he might just do that, but it wasn’t. Instead he took the gun his cousin gave him. A real one this time, heavy and cold in his hand. He was man enough to admit he was scared, hell, he was bricking it. So he stayed in the shadows and prayed the two men in the cage would behave and he didn’t have to shoot anyone.

The big guy shifted, wincing. One arm hung limp and slightly bent at an angle that made Jan’s stomach roll. Anderson had really worked him over. But injuries non-withstanding the guy shuffled a little closer to his friend.

“Hey Dick-face,” he grunted at his unconscious companion. “Wake up, asshole!” He reached out his uninjured arm and poked Grayson in the back of his head.

“Wasat?”
“Wake the hell up!” The guy said. “Friends of yours?”

Grayson rolled over. He looked a bit muzzy, but was recovering much quicker than expected. “Wa' the hell is going on?”

“You tell me! I came over to give you the beating you deserve for the McGowen thing, but you took for fucking ever to get home so I made myself something to eat. And the next thing I know I wake up with some psycho wailing on me with a tire iron. What is it that makes people want to beat me half to death with metal things? A little variety wouldn’t go amiss.”

“Must be your winning personality,” Grayson grunted and rolled his eyes, then looked like he regretted it.

“You broke into my apartment, I warned you not to do that again, Jason – call me and we can hang out, or fight or whatever.”

Jason snorted

“I don’t like it when you take my stuff, eat my food or piss on my clothes– it’s really not that funny.” Grayson continued.

Jason was grinning, an expression made creepy by the blood smeared across his lips and chin. Jan couldn’t help feeling they should be acting more worried about the current situation and not why Jason had broken in to his friend’s house.

“You knew I would come after you for that shit – I figured that’s why you did it,” Jason was saying, “you had to know I wouldn’t stand for it, shit, two weeks of planning and you strolled in and fucked my whole operation, you bastard.” He grunted in apparent pain. “Then I got my arm broke and my legs cracked to hell. When I can move without agonizing pain I’m going to kill you, slowly.”

“Like to see you try,” Grayson muttered and Jan was shocked to see he was out of his bindings.

Quickly Jan grabbed his gun and stepped into the light. “Don’t even think about it!” he yelled. He hoped it was loud enough for Mattie and Anderson to hear. “You move and I shoot you, no matter how quick you are you won’t be able to get out the pen before I get one or both of you.”

“Awesome, a 9th grader with a gun,” Jason said - he sounded mildly irritated.

“How old are you kid?” Grayson asked, squinting at him. “You barely look old enough to drive.”

Jan bristled, “I’m old enough to shoot you in the face if you don’t shut up!”

Jason sniggered, then winced when Grayson elbowed him in the ribs.

“Look, kid,” Grayson smiled up at him. “Why are doing this? You can get into a lot of trouble – I can help you if you let us go.”

“You’re part of the problem, pig.”

“Oh, looks like your illustrious career in the police force is coming back to bite you on the ass.”

“Not helping, Jay.”

“It’s the fact it bit me on the ass too, that’s really pissing me off,” Jason grumbled.

Grayson ignored him and looked at Jan with a frighteningly earnest expression. “I’m not kidding, whatever is going on here is serious – do you know how much time you’ll do for helping to
“kidnap a cop?”

“Only if we get caught,” Jan said, with more confidence than he felt. He got the impression Grayson saw right through him.

“You will. And even if by some chance you don’t? Do you think these people will let you live if they doubt for one moment that you aren’t with them one hundred percent? I can tell you’re not sure, I can see you have some doubts.”

He didn’t say sacred, and Jan appreciated that, even as it pissed him off.

“Whatever money they’ve offered you isn’t worth you spending your life in jail – or losing it completely!”

“It’s not about money! Or at least not only that.”

“Even more reason to help us, then we can help you. I have a lot of contacts, I can make sure you’re protected, I can help you figure things out.”

God, he was actually pretty convincing and Jan had to dig up images of his brother’s face last time he saw him, bruised and betrayed. “Yeah, right. Like the cops did for my brother? He’s in jail for shit he didn’t even do!”

Grayson shuffled forward still giving him the big, honest eyes. “Is that why you’re looking for quick cash? To help him? That’s really admirable, but there are better ways to deal with it. I know the cops here aren’t all honest-”

Jason snorted and Grayson gave him another elbow to the ribs

“- They might not be honest, but I am. And if your brother is in trouble, I’ll help him.”

“I don’t believe you.” But he wanted to, he really, really did.

But he just couldn’t.

Anderson came striding into the room, followed by three other men. “Looks like sleeping beauty is awake!” he said.

Grayson gave him a long look and then rolled his eyes heavenward. “I do not believe this,” he muttered.

“You had me thrown off the force, you little rich boy upstart!”

“Because you were a rapist and a thief! Not exactly a fine police candidate!”

“It was a sweet deal before you blew the whistle. You know what we do to snitches?”

“Abduct them and their moron friends and lock them in a cage?” Grayson asked.

“Hey!” Jason said.

“You haven’t changed much, Grayson, still got a smart mouth on you. Tonight, we’re going to be making some movies – and you, my boy are going to be the star. You’ll like that, being center of attention. And we're going to use your boyfriend here to keep you cooperating nicely. ”
“Hey!” Jason said again, “I am way out of his league!”

Everyone ignored him. One of the guys Jan didn’t recognize stepped forward, his gun drawn. “Any funny business and I shoot lover-boy through the head,” he said. He had an almost hopeful look on his face and Jan suspected Jason had been the cause of his black eye and split lip. Anderson chucked Grayson some cuffs, and the cop closed them around his wrists before carefully being let out. He stood calmly and Jan couldn’t help be a little impressed by him. If their positions had been reversed he would have been shitting bricks.

“Bring the other one too. Grayson, behave or else.”

Grayson nodded, a resigned twist to his mouth. The angry guy ducked into the pen and hauled Jason out none too gently. He was having trouble getting his legs under him and Jan noticed that Grayson was looking a little concerned as Jason staggered and fell, cussing and muttering angrily.

“Drag him if he can’t walk,” Anderson said. “Shall we, Grayson?”

With a last look at his friend, who was still grumbling and trying to rise, Grayson turned and followed Anderson out of the room.
Of all the times to be benched, this was the worst. Stephanie Brown glared sullenly at her bandaged ankle. She would much rather be out on the streets than stuck in the cave watching hours of surveillance. But she had to do something to help.

Tim was busy setting up the live feed – something she was dreading, and judging by Tim’s tightlipped expression he was not looking forward to it either.

They had both skimmed the information they had on The Shroud – the results of their auctions were not pretty and seeing one of their own go through that stuff was going to be brutal. With that in mind, with not a single word spoken between them, they had agreed that Damian should be in the field and away from the horrors on the vid screen. Cassandra had been the most logical choice to accompany him and keep him distracted, while they investigated the details of Dick’s abduction.

She turned back to the screen – the endless boring feed of Dick’s empty apartment was briefly broken by the image of him staggering into the hallway in a pair of very short shorts and stumbling towards the coffee machine. She watched as Dick scratched absently at his bare abs and blinked at the dripping coffee. He looked rumpled and adorable, and it made her chest tight with worry.

The main com pinged and she paused the feed to look up at the third screen where Damian’s irritated face appeared, illuminated by the tiny camera in Cass’s mask. He had an angry set to his jaw, but Steph thought he looked worried. The same worry that was sitting in her gut like a cold, slick stone.

“We have arrived, “Cass said, and the scene shifted away from Damian as she looked across the street to Dick’s apartment. There were still cops crawling all over the place, which made things more difficult.

“Hang tight double B, once I’ve finished this last 24 hours of footage I will probably have a better idea of where you need to be looking for clues.”

“What kind of name is ‘double B’?” Damian snapped from off screen.

“You are as dumb as Grayson!” Damian was working himself up into a mini indignant rage – which was far better than seeing him anxious. Steph pursed her lips as she fast forwarded the footage of the apartment towards lunch time.

“Well, you love and adore Grayson, so I must be doing something right,” she said

“I do not! I tolerate him because father likes him for some reason.”

“Uh huh,” she went back to normal speed when the surveillance showed Dick returning to the apartment for lunch, another cop in tow, holding half a dozen takeout bags. Judging by the days leading up to the abduction it seemed to be common practice for him to come home between shifts, for food or for naps. This was the first time someone had come back with him though.

Dick shuffled through to the living room, chucking books and dirty pants off the sofa and making room for his friend, and then he scurried to the kitchen for bowls and chopsticks. They had an epic feast – more food than even Dick could eat, but he looked like he was going to give it a good go.
He and his cop buddy – partner maybe - chatted happily for a while, big smiles and wide gestures as they ate. The other guy was young and cute, with slicked back brown hair and a wide grin. Steph carefully selected a picture of his face and another of his badge number.

Defeated by the sheer amount of food they had a quick discussion – presumably about who got the leftover’s and Dick shrugged and started putting the lids back on the tubs.

Then partner-guy spilt his coke on Dick’s pants. It looked deliberate and alarms started going off in Steph’s head. Sure enough, as soon as Dick was out of the room, his cop buddy pulled a pouch of something out of his pocket and began sprinkling it onto the remaining food. Then he got up and packed it away in the fridge. Dick came back and they chatted some more, laughing and gossiping she assumed. She grit her teeth. That guy was going down.

“Double B?”

“Stop saying that, Brown!”

“Tut, tut, little D, no names in the field.”

“You have something?” Cass was always the voice of reason, well most of the time. Sometimes.

“Yeah I got something. The leftover takeout in the fridge was drugged. By some other cop – his partner maybe. Going to look him up now. Take a sample if you can.”

“Let me know what else you find and I shall bring back your sample.” Cass said. Heaven knew how she was going to sneak into an apartment full of cops and steal some old takeout, but Steph had absolute faith that she would find a way.

Steph pushed back from her unit and leaned over so she could see Tim, who was frantically typing into the main computer. He had set up the live feed – but all it was currently showing was a photo of Dick stripped to the waist and lying apparently unconscious on a dark mat of some sort.

“Tim, I got a suspect.”

Tim blinked at her, brain still apparently engaged in whatever he was doing with the computer. “Right, send it to Oracle. I’m still trying to trace this signal. Another pair of hands or three wouldn’t go amiss when this goes live. Any word from Jason?”

“Nope, not a peep. He may pretend to be a complete butt-head, but I would expect him to have at least touched base over something like this. I hope he’s ok.”

“He is a butt head, no pretending about it. But yeah, it’s odd that he hasn’t responded, even to be an ass about it.”

Steph grunted, she would worry about missing morons after the current crisis was over. She sent the images off to Babs – she was probably tearing through all this information anyway but she was knee deep in a big mess with her team, so any help was probably welcome.

She fast forwarded again, stopped when she saw the back window being jimmied. Jason’s large familiar figure slipped into the room and carefully disabled the alarms. He then sauntered though the apartment towards the kitchen. Steph could already see where this was going – nowhere good.

“Er, Tim?” I think I’ve discovered why Jason’s been out of the picture.”

“Why?” Tim sounded more resigned than curious.
“It looks like he broke into Dick’s apartment and helped himself to the drugged food.”

On the screen, Jason was happily dumping left over Chinese food on to his plate. Of all the badly timed break-ins.

“Seriously? God damn it. You think they have him?” Tim asked.

“Let me skip forward a bit and I can tell you – but I’m going to guess they do. He ate the food, not Dick and yet Dick got himself kidnapped? Could you kidnap Dick Grayson without some kind of leverage?”

“You think they used Jason to keep him in line?” Tim made a frustrated noise in the back of his throat. “Sounds all too plausible.”

“Yeah,” Steph sighed.

Tim came to stand beside her, his body was tense and she could smell the sweaty sent of fear beneath his expensive fancy-pants cologne.

They watched Jason smoke a cigarette, drink a beer and then fall asleep only half way through the mountain of chow mein on his plate.

Then the window was jimmied for a second time and two men entered the flat.

“What is this? Amateur hour?” Tim muttered as they watched the kids fall all over themselves trying to get Jason’s not inconsiderable bulk back out the window and onto the fire escape.

“Maybe so – but they still managed it.”

“If that idiot survives this, I am never going to let him forget it. Never.”

“Let’s try and ensure that he makes it long enough to endure your mockery. Although, I suggest you attempt your teasing from a distance, I suspect he will just punch you in the face if you try it close enough for him to reach you.”

“Yeah, they come back to us, and I might even welcome a bit of punching.”
Chapter 5

This was not how Jason had been planning to spend his Saturday night. He had intended to provoke Dick in to a fight, piss him off, get a level of revenge for the annihilation of all his hard work over the McGowan thing.

This wasn’t the kind of payback he had been after, and watching these assholes string Dick up from the ceiling, like some sort of pretty boy cat toy for sick fucks on the internet to play with, was pretty awful. It was actually frightening. He could have taken it - if it was him, he would be full of sass and rage, but watching someone he knew, someone he cared for on a weird twisted level, be shown off like a piece of meat ready for the eating – it was fucking terrifying. He felt so helpless.

He wasn’t sure at what point he had realized they didn’t have any control here, he had felt angry when they had beat him, angry but not afraid. When Dick had been brought in, he had been even more pissed off. But now his heart was pounding and he couldn’t even force out his usual bravado. He was frightened. He had seen what these people did to their victims and now he was going to have to watch it first-hand. He couldn’t do anything.

Dick seemed to have no such issue with bluster, and really they were both very alike in some ways – when outnumbered and out of other options, snark was the weapon of choice.

“Did ya have to take my shoes?” Dick called out to the huddled group of men who were tinkering with a computer by the cameras. “It’s cold in this tub!”

It was only then that Jason really registered that the slight tilting he could feel wasn’t just a concussion – they were on water. Not moving anywhere, just rocking gently.

He looked over at Dick, hanging from the ceiling, his hands were tightly cuffed above his head and his toes only just touched the floor but he flexed his muscles a few times, shaking his hair out of his eyes. He looked like he was playing out a badly acted porn movie, the moron.

“I know why you took my shirt,” he flexed again and this time he caught the chain above him and used his impressive upper body strength to lift himself up towards his cuffs, “cos I’m hot stuff,” he muttered, looking intently at the lock binding his hands.

“Get the fuck down, Grayson!” Anderson called. He stormed over to where Dick was still suspended and flicked out a telescopic baton. He smacked Dick in the legs and back and Dick uncurled from his awkward but impressive position and kicked at him, sending the baton flying and catching Anderson a glancing blow to the face.

“Fucker!” Anderson shouted, but he didn’t hit him again, even when he reclaimed his weapon. That was bad. Unreasonable anger was difficult to weather, but easy to manipulate. He was furious, but had the self-control to hold back long enough so the punishment would make him a profit.

“You’re making a mistake” Dick taunted him, but Jason could see his eyes were flicking to the other men in the room – if you couldn’t get the main guy, convince the muscle you had the better deal. A good tactic in this situation.

“Oh yeah?” Anderson said. “We going to get arrested? Cops here aren’t worth shit – and I should know.”

Jason eyed his own guard – he was still looking at Jason out of his swollen, reddened eye and
grinding his teeth. Jason grinned at him, his expression sharp. He decided to join the conversation

“Yeah but Grayson isn’t just some guy of the street, he isn’t even just some rich kid. He has connections.” he said.

“Connections? Like who, the Haven police don’t give a fuck, Gotham don’t either.”

“Yeah, but his old man is Bruce Wayne.”

“And what’s daddy going to do about it? Other than pay out the nose? Anderson sneered.

“His daddy, numbnuts, is Gotham’s darling, one of the richest men in the city.”

“I noticed, that was kind of the point.”

“What I’m trying to subtly point out is that Bruce Wayne funds a lot of things in Gotham city.”

“Like rock stars and orphanages,” one of the goons said.

Jason ignored him, focusing on Anderson “-Including the Batman,” he continued. “It’s the Batman that’s gonna be coming after you, not the cops.”

“I’m trembling in my boots.”

“You should be. There are some things, some families you just don’t fuck with in this city. The Bat will be coming for the lot of you.” He directed that at the other guys. Anderson was too far gone, this was personal for him.

“I’ll tell you what,” Dick cut in, “he’s right when he says Bruce will pay – but wouldn’t it be nice to have the money for more than a few days? That’s all it will take until the Bat gets you. Lots of capes in Gotham, if it’s not him, it will be one of the others. You better hope it is him and not the Red Hood. That guy doesn’t take prisoners.”

And you better believe the Red Hood was going to get these fuckers – he was memorizing every goddamn face in the room and none of them were getting away with this shit, even if Dick did manage to sweet talk his way out of this mess.

Dick wasn’t done. “You set me free – we’ll say it was a rescue. I will insure you get a reward, double if you let that lunk head go too.” He cut his eyes at Jason, who somehow resisted the urge to stick out his tongue.

“Nice try, Grayson, but I’ve got dirt on these guys and it’s not just the Bat they would have to watch out for. You’re not the only ones with friends in high places, Anderson said.

The goons were glancing at each other, assessing. Dick’s words had rattled some, enticed others. But they weren’t Gotham natives and the shadow of the Bat wasn’t real to them - the stick and the carrot in Anderson’s arsenal were much more potent than Dick’s vague promises and the threat of a mythical guy dressed like a flying rodent.

Satisfied that his men were stilling his court, Anderson stalked towards Jason’s cage. He turned to look at Dick, and then gazed assessing at Jason. “Here’s the deal; If Wayne pays up at the end, I will let Grayson live – a little damaged, but still breathing. Grayson behaves, and I will let you both go. Clear?” he asked, looking at first one, then the other of them.
“Crystal,” Dick said.

Jason opened his mouth but Anderson held up a finger before he could speak. “And you,” he leaned close to Jason’s cage “you don’t talk at all. We wanted heckling, we would have gone to a sub-par comedy night. You talk and the first thing I will do is burn your friend here, and if you continue to make noise throughout our performance I will have Keegan shoot out your knee cap. We will keep shooting off bits of you until we come to your dick, and when we’re done with that I will personally blow your fucking head off. Understand?”

“Yup,” Jason said – what else could he do?

“Right, let’s get this show on the road.” Anderson pulled on a mask that covered his whole head and tugged on some latex gloves. Safety first apparently.

“Yay,” Dick said, sounding more resigned than frightened.

The chain attached to Dick’s wrists was hauled up a little further so he was dangling completely off the floor.

“Let’s get you ready for your close up,” Anderson said, making a show of undoing Dick’s belt and sliding his slacks over his hips. He stepped back and let Dick’s pants drop to the floor, leaving him in his boxers… his superman boxers.

“Seriously?” Anderson said - he looked slightly scandalized.

Jason snorted out a laugh, no rules against that. And only Dick would get kidnapped and tortured while wearing novelty underpants. Superman underpants at that.

“Um,” Dick said, and if he hadn’t been suspended from the ceiling, Jason suspected he would be doing that ‘ah shucks’ shrug he did so well. As it was he didn’t even have the good grace to be embarrassed.

“Roll the cameras,” Anderson said, apparently giving up on Dick’s lack of dignity. He and another guy – who, until he learned otherwise, Jason decided to call Fucko, started to turn Dick’s hanging form one way and then another, making sure the camera got all angles. They swung him gently, and Jason could see Dick shifting slightly, adjusting to the extra strain on his muscles.

“Something special for tonight’s show,” Anderson said, putting on a deeper voice for the cameras, probably trying to disguise his voice a little. “Officer Richard Grayson, one of Bludhaven’s finest – and in this case that isn’t even an oxymoron. He is also the adopted son of Billionaire Bruce Wayne. Although some say their relationship is intimate on a very different level.

Jason saw Dick roll his eyes in exasperation at the comment – whenever Bruce fell out of favor with the press, they began speculating on his habit of collecting black haired orphaned boys. They conveniently forgot Cassandra’s place in the family and instead liked to publish pictures of a teenaged Dick and Bruce looking dapper together. And Jason had to admit, they did make a fine picture.

As he watched, flashing notifications started popping up on the screen. Sicko’s posting bids and offers. There was a lot of interest – both for Dick’s celebrity status, and for the fact he was a cop. They showed the camera his police badge and ID and the flurry of notifications increased.

Jason looked at the bastards in the room, twelve in total – some really into proceedings, some obviously just muscle. And then there was the teenager in the corner. He was obviously here with
the older guy – maybe Jason’s age, who frankly looked like he was enjoying himself way too much. The kid though, his black hair was plastered to his forehead with anxious sweat – whatever he had been expecting this wasn’t it– there was no way that boy was prepared for what was coming, he was going to be a soft Target – and maybe he wouldn’t have to go down with these freaks either.
“And allow me to make a special welcome to my guest of honor, Bruce Wayne!” The masked man on the screen said.

Jim saw Dick flinch ever so slightly as he hung still and calm from the ceiling. It must be really awful to know that your loved ones were going to be watching – some might draw comfort from not being alone, but he doubted Dick was one of those. Causing Bruce pain hurt him, and having Bruce witness his humiliation and degradation at the hands of these perverts was going to be crushing.

As they watched the masked man posture and taunt, Bruce’s face was lacking outward emotion. To most people he must look like a cold-fish, but to Jim he looked like a man watching his worst nightmare. If Bruce were not in a state of emotional turmoil, he would be acting more like his public persona than the smart, intense man that was viewing the feed now.

The first bid came in – it flashed up on their screen: hurt him slow, 200

They always stated low and cheep – it kept things going longer and built up the suspense.

The next line of text appeared on screen: Let me see some bruises 300

Then: legs and butt plz 500

The masked man pushed Dick and made him spin in a lazy half circle. He didn’t try to steady himself and just went with the movement - the kid looked calm, far too calm. Like he was ready for what was coming – he knew how this would play out as well as Jim did, he must be terrified, but he was hiding it well.

The guy was handed something from off camera and it took Jim a moment to register what it was – a police issue nightstick. Dick’s probably. A fact that clearly tickled the bidders’ fancy, and another flurry of notifications came in. The suggestions were pretty horrific.

Bruce reached out and switched off the two way audio, so The Shroud could no longer hear them. He also turned his face enough that it still looked like he was watching, but anyone watching them couldn’t read his lips.

“Jim?” he asked, his eyes intense and hard. “You’ve seen the feeds for previous auctions.” It was more of a statement than a question. Bruce was all business still, with barely any noticeable inflection in his voice. “Are the auction participants the same? Do you know what to expect?”

Jim had been dreading this question, but if it was – god forbid - one of his own kids on the block, then he would want to know. “There are a few regulars, some have particular interests, and others just seem to enjoy the pain.”

“What sort of interests?”

“Beating, cutting, they like to see blood. Or thrashing – that tends to make more of a spectacle.” Jim paused and rubbed an anxious hand over his moustache. “Then there are the ones who get off on the victims humiliation or fear. You might see things that encourage higher levels of panic, suffocation, for instance.”

“How permanent are the injuries? Broken bones? Amputations?”
“Both on a few occasions. Mutilations too.” Just thinking about what they might have to witness was making Jim’s palms sweat.

“Sexual?”

“What?” The question took him off guard, although it shouldn’t have.

“Is sexual assault a part of the MO?” Bruce was relentless, but completely calm, eyes still on the screen in front of them.

“Sometimes. With the nature of torture there is often a sexual element, whether it’s genital mutilation, sexualized humiliation or out-right assault. Rape is something that people fear, the threat alone can cause long term psychological impact.”

“I see.”

“Can you do this, Bruce?”

Bruce just looked at him, and the expression in his eyes sent a chill up Jim’s spine. “Can you?”

“I wish I didn’t have to witness any of this, but we will do whatever we can to rescue him.”

“Thank you.” Bruce said. There was still no inflection to his voice, but Jim could read the fear and determination in the tension on his face. Bruce leaned forward and turned the sound back on.

On the screen, the masked man swung the baton against the back of Dick’s thighs. He was wincing, but not struggling or calling out. It looked like he was trying to keep his body relaxed, but his whole frame was shuddering under the impacts.

Jim glanced at Bruce out of the corner of his eye, not sure how to phrase his question subtly enough. “You know Dick better than I,” he began awkwardly, “and he knows we’re watching, has he sent any sort of sign? Any sort of…message to you to indicate where he is, or the identity of his captors?”

“Not yet.”

“Does that seem odd to you?”

Bruce turned to look at him, face as impassive as ever. “He will wait for things to really start, so he can disguise any communications as cries of pain.”

Jim winced. Brutal and practical, of course.

Time passed strangely, each minute felt like an hour, but there were times when Jim was astonished at how much time had actually elapsed.

The masked man had moved on to a slim cane that had long since broken skin. Blood was trickling down Dick’s back, darkening the jolly blue of his ridiculous shorts. He was touching more too, running hands over Dick’s hip and curling his fingers around his throat. The touches were provocative, but didn’t seem to be completely sexual in nature, more a showcasing of the power he had. It certainly wasn’t Dick’s physique that was turning this creep on.

“Not long now,” Bruce commented, watching intently as Dick sent a glance at something off camera, and then seemed to grit his teeth and force himself to relax again.
It was when the man on the screen poured something from a jar into his hands and then rubbed it into the wounds on Dick’s back that the boy finally cried out and thrashed in his bonds – the instinctive desire to escape from the pain overriding his attempts to remain calm. And yet, shockingly, or not, knowing this family, Bruce was on the money as usual.

While flailing and jerking, and letting out angry pained yells - Dick mouthed words. Jim couldn’t follow them at first, Dick would say something and Bruce would write it down in some sort of short hand. He was honestly confused about how Bruce was picking up on the words – until he recognized one – in French. He wasn’t just speaking in English but using multiple languages that both he and Bruce knew in order to avoid detection.

Jim also realized that Bruce jotting down information in some unrecognizable code was not just to do with ease of writing, or to analyze the exact words at a later time, but to disguise the fact it was happening at all – even to the people in the room. It was no surprise that Bruce mistrusted the FBI or any law enforcement but Jim himself – that was just the kind of man he was. But he suspected it was more than that. If there was a leak, or worse, direct involvement from within the system – it was possible it came from high up. And until they knew otherwise, everyone was suspect.

On the screen the masked man drew back, leaving Dick panting and scowling.

“Now,” the man said, his voice rich with excitement, “shall we move on to something a bit more daring?”

The beeps indicating the suggestions and bids grew to a frantic pitch. People were investing in this, they were loving it. Jim just hoped that meant things would progress slowly enough to mean no permanent damage was done before they found the kid.

Bruce leant close to him and spoke low, once again keeping anyone watching from reading his lips. “He says he is on a boat, on water, maybe moving. Fifteen men or less. Other hostages are present. The leader is ex police – Budhaven, badge number 1587.”

Jim nodded and pushed back from the desk. There were a good few officers on the force he trusted completely; he would relay the information to them. As he punched in Montoya’s number, he noticed that Bruce was sending a text – in the same strange code he had used before. It seemed Jim’s officers wouldn’t be the only ones acting on this new information. The thought gave him a brief surge of hope.
This was the worst thing that Jan had ever been witness too. He hadn’t even imagined anything this horrible. Sure, he’d had revenge fantasies after his brothers unfair arrest, after seeing his beat-up face when he visited him in jail. But that had been video-game violence. He had seen himself shooting the cops who had hurt his family, smiling, cool and righteous as their heads exploded in a gleeful messy splatter.

It hadn’t been real. Their pain hadn’t been real.

*This was* real.

The smell of blood was heavy in the air and they had only just gotten started.

The way Grayson had shouted and twisted around in his chains when Anderson rubbed that stuff into the long cuts on his back, *that* was real. And the way both his own and Grayson’s eyes kept slipping towards the horrible looking torture devices stacked off camera, *that* was real too.

And the expression on the other guy – Jason’s – face; anger, fear, determination and bloody murder. It was the most brutal reality he had ever experienced in his sixteen years of life. And strangely, the right-now-realness of it was also making it feel like some sort of nightmare.

But he knew it *wasn’t* one.

“And breathe, kid,” someone said. Jan turned to see Jason looking at him with his cool, pale eyes.

“They see you freaking out and you’re next week’s star attraction,” he continued quietly.

Jan shifted his gaze quickly to Jason’s guard, but the man was distracted, watching as the other guys used pulleys and levers to lower Grayson to the ground without untying him. The guard looked excited. So did Mattie, he looked riveted to what was happening, like he was getting off on it. Jan couldn’t deal with the implications of that right now, so he turned back to Jason.

He was sat with his back to a slim pillar, his arms bound and pulled behind him. It must have been very painful considering his broken arm, but the only sign he showed of it was the tightness in his jaw and an occasional wince when he shifted position. It was only when he was watching what was happening to Grayson that emotion bled through.

Jan seriously hoped that if he survived this, Jason never caught up with him. If they let him go, he was coming back for revenge, Jan just knew it.

“I’m ok. I’m ok.” Jan said, more to himself than Jason, but the man snorted at him anyway.

“Sure you are. You look like you’re having the time of your life.”

“Shut up!”

“How did you even end up in this mess?”

Jan slid to the floor, keeping well out of reach of the big man. How *did* he get into this crap? “My cousin asked me to help him out – the guy he was supposed to bring along got arrested. He said it was a chance to earn some quick cash.”
“And get some payback for what the ‘Haven cops did to your brother?”

“Yeah. I wanted them to pay.” It sounded ridiculous now, like a fantasy that should never have seen the light of day.

Jason nodded and looked over to where his friend was being strapped to some sort of wooden plank. “I can tell you two things for sure, kid. One, that moron over there is probably the only honest cop in the whole of Bludhaven, and one of the most disgustingly decent people out there. Not that he isn’t a complete asshole, mind you, because he is. And not that I won’t deny I ever sung his praises, because I will.” He shifted and winced slightly as he watched the men prepare for their next torture scene.

“And number two?” Jan asked after a moment.

“Yeah. Number two is that if you don’t help me help him? You’re not going to see tomorrow.”

“Big threat from a guy who’s tied up and can’t walk under his own power!”

“I’m not the threat, dumbass. I’m your only goddamn chance. These people run a tight ship – if you’ll excuse the pun. And you are not the young, professional, sociopathic thug they were expecting. You’re a walking, talking liability and they are either going to off you and chuck your corpse into the ocean. Or more likely, they are going to put you on the bidding block, torture and mutilate you and then let some perv have his wicked way, before chucking what’s left into the harbor. Either way we’re looking at your dead body, face down in the water.”

Jan didn’t want to believe him, but at the same time he knew he was right.

“What can I do?” he whispered harshly. “I can’t do anything to help – and you can’t even walk!”

“What’s your name, kid?” Jason asked, not unkindly.

“Jan,” he didn’t see the point in hiding it. He was probably going to die anyway. The thought made him dizzy.

“Well, Jan, you help me get free, find something I can pick these cuffs with – see if you can find a weapon – anything that will help, and I’ll do my damndest to keep you alive.”

Jan was momentarily frozen in indecision. Even if Jason was free and armed there was no way he would be able to get the three of them out alive – but if Jan didn’t do something then at best he would have to stay and watch this to the end, and at worst, he might end up experiencing it first hand. The very idea made the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

Then the decision was taken away from him. There was a sudden commotion from where the guys were setting up for the next scene. It looked like someone had dropped a camera and something had smashed. Anderson was yelling.

“Jan!” Mattie called from where he was helping restrain one of Grayson’s limbs. “Jan, come help clear up this mess!”

“Go,” Jason said quietly, looking down so Mattie and the others couldn’t see his lips moving. “See if there’s anything useful in the mess. Broken glass, sharp metal. Don’t get caught, better to leave it than to be seen pocketing it.”

He was right, and for the first time Jan actually felt he could trust the guy – a little bit at least. He pulled himself awkwardly to his feet and headed over to the horror show.
He knelt and began scooping up the shattered glass and busted camera. He found he was almost eye level with Grayson and couldn’t help giving him a wide-eyed look. Jan had no idea what they were going to do to him next but whatever it was, he was sure it was going to be awful. He knew that just from Grayson’s grim expression. Then the cop tilted his lip up a little, in an almost a rueful smile, and blinked slowly.

Jan might have been losing it completely, but that blink spoke to him. It said, *it’s ok. I forgive you, do what you have to.*

Nonsense, but it gave him the strength to present a blank face rather than panicking or crying like a baby. He tucked the small bits of glass into his pocket and stood. No one was looking at him. They were too busy using the pulleys to winch Grayson at an angle. He was laying flat to a wide board of wood, tilted with his feet higher than his head. One of the men had another hand held camera and was shooting the whole thing - the restraints, the expression on Grayson’s face, the blood that was dribbling in thin rivulets from the weeping lacerations on Grayson’s back.

Jan swallowed bile, he averted his eyes from Grayson’s steady expression and found himself caught in Jason’s stormy gaze. He nodded, very slightly when he met Jan’s eyes, and Jan realized that as absurd as it was, both he and Grayson were trying to make him feel better, give him strength. It didn’t make sense.

They put a white piece of cloth over Grayson’s face, it looked like a shroud. He would deal with the irony of that later. He was suddenly terrified for the man he had brought here to die. He grabbed Mattie’s arm. “Are they going to shoot him?” he asked.

“Why would they cover his face for that? Dumbass.”

Confused and with his heart beating twice as fast as could possibly be normal, he made his way back over to his spot by Jason.

One of the other guys, Keegan, started carrying over watering cans. The sight was so weird and out of place Jan looked at Grayson again, incredulously. What the hell was going on? He noticed that although Grayson’s body was relaxed, his jaw was tense under the cloth.

“What are they doing?” he asked. Jason seemed to know a hell of a lot more than he did about this situation.

Jason shook his head. “They’re going to pour water over his face. It simulates drowning.”

“Why?” Surely there were more effective methods of hurting someone?

“You ever been underwater a bit to long? Had that sudden panicky urge to breath? Fact is it doesn’t matter how much of a badass you are and how ready for death you are. When your body is faced with the prospect of dying, it fights for life. Your body is flooded with adrenaline and you panic and struggle.”

Jason paused, he looked rather glassy eyed for a moment, and Jan suspected in some form or another he was talking from personal experience.

Jason shook himself slightly and his eyes cleared. “The fear that such a desperate fight for life instills in you is…insidious. It invades your life and creeps though your dreams. In some ways, for someone like Dickie up there, or me, its harder to deal with than physical pain.”

“Dickie?”

“I’m trying to impart deep and meaningful information on the psychological impact of torture to
you, but you get stuck on his stupid name?”

“Sorry,” Jan said, not sure why he felt such relief at Jason’s small smirk.

“It is a dumb name, I grant you.”

Jan rubbed his sweaty palms on his dark jeans. “What if he drowns? Like, for real?”

“The way they have him positioned means that water is going to flow into his mouth nose and
sinuses, but it won’t reach his lungs. He won’t drown. But it will feel like he is.”

As they watched, camera guy focused carefully as the first stream of water was poured over
Grayson’s face. He took a deep breath almost immediately, but his body was visibly tense, as
more water cascaded onto the cloth.

After a couple of long minutes, Grayson began to struggle. Pulling against his binding and
attempting to move his head to the side. Seconds later he was thrashing in earnest, and although he
was still weirdly quiet, he was obviously gasping for breath and freaking out, straining and trying
unsuccessfully to twist out of his bindings. It was horrible to see the loss of control – he had been
so stoic and fearless, this change was terrifying.

Jason had averted his eyes and was staring fixedly at his own boots, his jaw so tense it was
probability hurting. Jan could relate.

Keegan stopped the flow of water and took the cloth off Grayson’s face. The guy with the camera
got a close up of him as he struggled to breath, coughing up water and hanging limp in his bonds.
Anderson pulled on the ropes and Grayson swung up slightly, causing the water to stream from
his mouth and nose as he gagged and spluttered. He retched a few times, and the men laughed.

“Not so pretty now, huh?” Anderson said, his smirk a cruel twist on his lips. “Bet daddy dearest
liked seeing you choke, do you think he would like to see you beg?”

Having regained his breath, Grayson didn’t bother to answer, except to raise a contemptuous
eyebrow.

Jan didn’t think he could feel any worse, but the reminder that Grayson’s father was watching this
sent shocks of new horror through him. What if it was his family watching? His mother seeing
him break down and struggle for breath?

For one long, silver-gray moment he thought he was going to faint.

“Shall we go again?” Anderson asked, breaking Jan out from his sudden fear. “If you beg, I’ll go
easy on you.”

Grayson said nothing, didn’t even acknowledge him. Anderson didn’t seem surprised.

This time, he picked up the jug himself and smiled down at Grayson before putting the cloth back
over his face. “Bottoms up!” he said, with a disturbing level of enthusiasm. And the water started
flowing again.

Jan looked at Jason’s boots too, his own jaw tight. “Tell me how I can help,” he said quietly.

“Anything is better than this.”

Jason raised his eyes and nodded slowly. In the background they could hear Grayson start to gasp
and struggle again.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Warning: non-consensual touching and mild sexualized violence

As the sight of a pint sized Robin did not tend to strike fear into the hearts of men, (unless they had actually met him, of course) they had felt Cassandra would be the logical choice to interrogate Dick’s temporary partner and piece of human garbage, Henry Ramirez. Also, as Tim so delicately pointed out, there was a lingering concern that Damian’s anger and frustrated worry over Dick might lead his interrogation techniques into permanent injury territory or an unfortunate case of dead police officer.

Apart from the initial abduction of Ramirez, Cass had not needed any violence to get results. She had bound her prisoner to a chair in one of Jason’s dimly lit, dilapidated bolt-holes, and then she had loomed at him. Slinking around the edge of the light, like a hunting cat.

As Steph watched on the camera feed she could see Ramirez was trying hard to remain calm, but his eyes tracked Black Bat’s lazy circle around him.

“I’m a cop,” he tired first. “If you hurt me, you’ll be up shit creak without a fucking paddle!”

Black Bat ignored him, her stride even and soft. A bead of sweat slowly slid down the side of Ramirez’s face.

“I’ve got connections! Important people will miss me!”

Cassandra paused and she tilted her head towards him. “Important people miss Dick Grayson,” she said coolly.

Ramirez flinched.

“Tell me, before I make you regret waking up still breathing this morning,” Cass said, her body still and poised like a predator.

“I don’t know where he is!” Ramirez said.

Steph felt he was telling the truth – he was just an underling of some sort. Cass clearly agreed and switched tack. “Who do you work for?” she asked. “Who are the Shroud?”
“I only did it because they made me, I have nothing against Grayson, he’s a nice guy!”

Ramirez was babbling, he looked like he might cry. Steph hoped he did. On the main computer screen Dick was being waterboarded; he was panicking and struggling. She couldn’t bear to watch.

Not torture, her ass.

“Tell me everything,” Black Bat said, in a voice like cold steel.

Ramirez did.

Steph patched a call though to Babs. It took a long time for her to answer, and when she did, it was obvious she was fielding another rather frantic call or three from her team; lots of yelling and some colorful swearing in a feminine voice.

Barbara herself looked stressed, dark circles under her eyes and coffee stains on the sleeve of the ugly green and purple sweater she was wearing. Steph recognized it as one Dick had given her two Christmases ago. He thought it was pretty, Steph and most other sane people thought it was a hideous eyesore and should probably be burnt as an appeasement to the angry gods of fashion.

“News?” Babs grunted, typing rapidly.

“Some. Ramirez was approached by that ex-cop, Anderson, directly. Apparently they were on the same shift a lot and were drinking buddies back in the day. Anyway he has nothing much to do with the Shroud – mostly he’s just dirty. Did some naughty things and now the other corrupt cops own him. He does what they say or he goes down. Usual ‘Haven politics.’”

“Left! I said head left!” Babs growled, still typing. “Damn fool.”

It took a moment for Steph to realize she was talking to someone else, and a further few moments to shake of the guilty and slightly terrified feeling that tone gave her when Babs was actually directing it at her.

“Sorry, we’re having a bit of a crisis,” Babs said, almost rueful. “Bad timing.”

“Yeah,” Steph sighed. Wasn’t it always in their lives? “Got anything for me? And I’ll leave you to it – although I will obviously keep you informed of any changes and stuff.”

“There is defiantly a connection between this Anderson guy and some of the other agencies. FBI especially.” Babs said, all business. “He communicated with someone in Gotham, who logged in from the FBI head quarters. It was from a private device, so it wouldn’t hold up in court – but that’s the location.”

“B suspected as much, but it still sucks.”

“Yeah, and I expect the person or persons involved will be knee deep in this case, mudding the waters if they can. First port of call should be the agents’ upstairs with Bruce. And then perhaps their superiors.”

“You got it. We’re going to get him back.” Steph made her voice sound confident, despite her doubt. She believed that they would get him back – these were people she trusted in completely. It was how much damage he would receive before they came to his rescue that really worried her.
Babs flashed her a tired smile, “I know, I have faith in us. And him. I'm still sorting through emails and phone records, anything that gets a hit will come straight to you.” Then her attention turned back to the other screen, where tinny noises of shouting and gunfire could be heard. “Damnit, I said go left!” Her fingers flew across the keys almost faster than Steph could process. “Sometimes leading these people is like herding cats. Drunk, cantankerous cats.” She muttered, probably to herself.

Steph signed off with a small smile.

And speaking of cantankerous cats, there was a beep from her computer and Damian’s angry little face appeared on the screen. He was glaring into his camera phone with considerable menace. Behind him was a jumble of papers and debris, like a small brightly colored tornado had blown through the room.

“I hope your going to clear that mess up,” she said, raising an eyebrow. “We are supposed to be discreet with the breaking and entering thing. When the cops get around to investigating this creep the evidence needs to be solid and untouched.”

“I know that!” Damian snarled. “But I have found something.”

“Lets hear it then, little D.”

“Anderson knows it was Grayson that had him booted off the police force. He hates him.”

That made the knot of tension in Steph’s belly swell impossibly large. A personal grudge in this situation was not good news.

“He has been studying his movements,” Damian continued, waving a small red note pad at the camera. “By hand! Who does that?”

“Focus, Robin.”

“He also has some shipping lists and notes about docks. I haven’t finished going through it, but it seems suspicious to me.”

“Yeah, me too. Photograph it and send it to me.”

Damian nodded and then looked slightly shifty, like he couldn’t find the words he wanted to say, or get them out of his mouth.

Steph took pity on him. “He’s holding up well, Robin. We’re going to get there in time.” She kept her voice free of sympathy or emotion. Damian wouldn’t respond well to it, he needed to pretend he was okay. Steph was awesome at pretending to be okay, at pretending to be all sorts of things she wasn’t. She could relate to the need to keep those feelings and doubts at arms length.

“I shall clear up and come back to the cave,” he said, after an awkward moment or two.

“Actually, I have another task for you first.” Hopefully it was keep him away from things for the next hour or so. “I need you to investigate FBI agents Brent and Moore. I’m sending you details now.”

“I shall send you these documents in return.”

“Thanks, Robin. Black Bat will be on hand for back up if you need it.”
“I won’t,” Damian growled. “Robin out.”

Steph sighed and pushed back from the desk, leaning back to stretch out her sore spine. She never was able to maintain good posture at the computer and the tension was making her bones ache.

Tim was still hunched over the main computer, apparently digging though the massive amount of coded data streaming across the screen. Between them was the laptop with the live feed. Her gaze was reluctantly drawn back to the screen as the masked bastard who had been waterbording Dick started to speak again.

“Looking a little out of breath, Grayson!” he laughed. Dick just looked at him, once again calm and impassive. The other masked goons soon had Dick hanging from his original position, bare toes just touching the floor and arms stretched painfully above his head.

“Lets move on to something a little more vivid, shall we?” The guy asked. “Something to titillate.” He drew a large wicked looking hunting knife, turning it this way and that for the camera.

Steph must have made some sort of distressed noise, because before she could blink Tim was beside her and staring fixedly at the laptop screen. One of his hands was resting on the table the other was clenched at his side, his knuckles white.

The masked asshat was circling Dick now, the tip of his blade occasionally making fleeting touches against skin. The camera guy was following closely, making sure he got every knick and scratch, as well as lingering on Dick’s face, looking for a wince or any show of fear. The masked man stopped at Dick’s back and ran the knife gently down his spine. Dick twitched as it passed over the sluggishly bleeding welts from his earlier thrashing.

Steph found she was acutely aware of Tim beside her, of the way his breathing sounded; he was angry and frightened – not like when he was fighting, not like when he was in danger of dying, this was a different type of fear. The feeling of helplessness was crushing. Steph found herself torn between the comfort having a friend with her during this horrible time, and the need to be alone so she could scream and cry and rage. She suspected Tim felt the same, in his smart, practical way.

The man turned the knife around so the blade no longer pointed towards Dick’s skin, and slid it past the hem of Dick’s superman boxers and between his buttocks. Dick flinched slightly as the man used the bladed edge to cut the shorts off him.

Then he slid the flat of the blade over the swell of Dick’s bare ass and around his hip, the camera man faithfully following the action. The bids were going crazy as the man on screen used the blade to lift up Dick’s flaccid cock.

Steph felt sick. She knew it was going to go this way, it was how most of these auctions went – whether the victim was raped or not, the torture was always sexually violating in some way. It made something in her gut twist viciously.

She didn’t want to look, but she was almost scared not to.

“Hmmm,” the man said, still using the knife to manipulate Dick’s genitals “I had heard you were a ladies man.” He turned and smirked at something off camera. “Although it seems you’re pretty equal opportunities.”

“Jason?” Steph wondered aloud. It was clear the guy was also putting on a show for someone in the room and Jay was the logical conclusion – especially if he thought they were friends – or even
lovers. The man was clearly a sexual sadist and really got off on causing emotional pain as well as physical.

If this guy was Anderson, then Steph was really, really glad he was no longer on the force. Although she would be much happier if he was in a locked room with no access to people. Or dead. Steph was a Bat; she would not kill, even with this sort of provocation. But if he happened to die in a tragic accident, perhaps involving some sort of traumatic amputation of his penis, or his head, then she would not exactly mourn.

“Jason,” Tim agreed, obviously having come to a similar conclusion. “Although Dick is way out of his league.”

The joke fell flat, but Steph gave a half hearted smile regardless, because joking in times of horrible stress was something Dick did, it was something that Tim had learned from him.

She tore her gaze from the thin line of blood running down the length of Dick’s penis and looked at his face. His body was relaxed – but he also looked pissed. Bodily autonomy was important to him – and he was fiercely protective of it in others as well as himself. That was one of the ways that Steph secretly felt he and Jason were very similar. Although very, very different in some moral areas (like murder) they had the same general values and the same desire to help those who had the worst lot in society. They both helped run and police a ‘Bad Trick List’ for prostitutes in the ‘Heaven and in Gotham, although they both pretended they had nothing to do with each other. They both spent time working with runaways and the homeless. There was a compulsive need to help people in them – in all of the family really, herself included. But for those two in particular, and for Cass too, there was something raw and driven about it.

Shit, all the worry over Dick and she had almost forgotten about Jason, about what he must be going through. And about the very real danger he was in. She was sure he was still alive, or Dick would have freed himself and beaten these punks to a pulp by now.

She hoped he was okay.

Another similarity between Jason and Dick was stubbornness and tenacity. And they were both resilient as hell. She was suddenly sure they were going to make it. Battered and maybe a little damaged – but not broken. Dick was one of those people who was emotionally fragile on one hand and full of emotional strength on the other. You knocked him down and he got right back up and into your face.

And Jason had kicked death in the ass, so this was nothing. Probably.

Tim was staring at the screen as though torn between laying down and crying and forsaking his Bat-Vows and arming himself with a couple of grenades and a Kalashnikov or two and murdering the whole fucking lot of them. And if anyone could do it, it would be Tim (not that he would, but he could, if he wanted)

“Out of his league you say?” Steph mused, as she looked at Dick’s angry face, and saw fight and strength. “Not so sure about that, Jason’s pretty hot.”

Tim looked at her with an expression of vague horror and she mentally high fived herself for distracting him from the horrible tableau in front of them. “And he’s Dick’s match in all shades of stubborn and bull-headedness.”

Tim made a complicated series of grossed out expressions that made her smile. He was such a dork. But then he seemed to sober and the humor slid off his face, leaving behind something almost childish in its needy anxiety.
“Do you think we’ll get him in time? Do you think he’ll be alright if we do?”

“Just look at him, Tim. Does that look like a man whose going to go down easy? He’s going to make it.” She sounded convincing because she knew it was true. He would.

He had too.

And she knew, that he knew, that if he died? While Bruce was sitting by and having to watch? It would destroy him. And Dick would rather pluck out his own eyes and eat them, than do that to B.

He was going to live because he fucking had to, in order to protect the people he loved.

That was Dick Grayson’s greatest strength. Arguably it was his greatest weakness too – but if you had to have a fatal flaw, it was one you could damn well own with pride.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Warning: Nasty stuff and non-con situations. [I am going to the Special Hell.]

Jason’s fingers were bleeding. The bit of broken glass Jan had shakily passed him was not quite long or slim enough to pick the lock on the cuffs. He had instructed the kid to find him something else but he wasn’t holding out much hope. In retrospect, he may have laid it on a bit thick when it came to telling Jan what his future would probably hold. Although it was the truth, the little punk was almost scared out of his wits. And damn it, now Jason felt responsible for him. Not that he wasn’t going to give him a good kicking once they got out of this mess, because he was.

But first, he had to get free.

If Jan failed to find something useful, then his only other option was to attempt to dislocate his thumbs and slip the cuffs off. He remembered Dick showing him how to do it for the first time - the grin on his face as he pushed the joint out without even a wince. Jason had nearly hurled. His utter disgust at dislocations had not changed at all since then – but he was more than capable of doing it himself. The problem he was faced with now was how tricky it was to do with only one arm, and the jarring wrongness of the pain when he shifted the break was making him dizzy and bile was rising into his throat. But he was going to have to try. The alternative was just sitting and watching, and that was completely unacceptable.

It had been hours. Dick was obviously in pain and starting to tire, the strain on his muscles and minor blood loss was sapping his energy. Jason had assessed the amount of mess and the still bleeding wounds and thought it was still within acceptable parameters – but it was still a massive drain. The longer it went on, the less help Dick would be when they escaped. And Jason was starting to seriously worry about their chances – as once again he failed to twist his bound hands into a position where he could dislocate his thumb.

Anderson gestured for the men to switch off the recording. “Time for an intermission, I think,” he said, lifting his mask and smirking at Dick. “How you holding up? There’s still a long way to go before sweet release.”

“I’m just peachy,” Dick said. His voice was slightly rusty, like his mouth was dry. He must be thirsty as fuck. But he wouldn’t ask for a drink, just like Jason wouldn’t, if their positions were reversed. A pair of stubborn asses.

As they were off camera Jason decided to take a risk. “Hey, no backchat intended, but could we get some water? All this torture crap makes a man feel parched.”

“Forget the rules already?” Fucko sneered, while Anderson turned his smirk on him.

“Nah,” Jason said. “I stayed quiet all through that shit, didn’t I? But now the cameras are off, I thought it was the best time to ask. Dick-face over there will need a bit of something to keep his strength up.” He shrugged his shoulder, wincing as it jarred his other arm. “That’s what you want isn’t it? A nice long fight? Blood loss and stress can take it out of you.”

Anderson snorted. “Keegan, give Grayson a drink. None for you though…what was your name
“Jason.” No point in hiding it, as Jan already knew and a threatening look in his direction from one of these goons would probably have him spilling his guts.

“Jason. Suits you.”

“Thanks?”

“So tell me, Jason, when you fuck Grayson, does he squeal like a pig?”

“You mean like a swine or like a cop?” Sometimes Jason just couldn’t help himself. It was a character flaw, but fuck it. “When he gets real excited, he reads me my rights.”

“Jason!” Dick sounded somewhere between peeved and amused and Jason gave him a lopsided grin.

“Or,” Anderson mused, his gaze flicking between them, “does he like to give it to you? Seems like fucking some scruffy piece of rough would be the sort of power trip he would enjoy.”

“Who you calling a bit of rough? I’m all educated and everything, and I clean up real nice.”

Anderson crouched in front of him, so they were eye to eye. Jason briefly considered kicking him in the head, but reluctantly discarded the idea as he was sure the repercussions for Dick would be unpleasant.

“You don’t like it when I touch him, do you?”

“I don’t like it when you breathe.”

“Does the possessiveness go both ways I wonder?” Anderson watched Jason’s face carefully as he gently touched the brake in his arm. Then he turned to watch Dick, who was very deliberately looking away. Anderson pushed down and Jason struggled to control his expression as he felt the bone shift under his skin. He vaguely considered just puking on Anderson, but his pride made him hold back. It was fucking painful and disgusting. He must have made some small noise though, because Dick swung round and all but snarled at Anderson.

“We had a deal! You leave him be and I’ll behave for your sick show – you break it and things won’t be so easy, I can promise you that,” Dick said. His muscles were flexing as he tested his chains, Jason knew he probably already had a plan of how he would get free if the opportunity arose. He was sort of secretly impressed that Dick still had the strength to look so in control.

Anderson actually seemed like he was considering his options, cash vs. his own lust to hurt people. And Jason spared a quick prayer for rescue, as embarrassing and infuriating as it would be to be rescued by Bruce, he really kind of wished the Bat would come crashing in to their little pain party and deliver some much needed justice to these freaks. But Bruce was watching on the vid screen, and rescue wouldn’t be coming from that quarter. Still, he knew with their precious Golden Boy in peril the rest of the family would be out trying to save him. He would happily take a rescue from any of them, hell even the cops would do.

Because there was no way in hell Anderson was letting either of them live.

And as he watched Anderson walk back towards Dick with a little twist of a smile and stroke a hand possessively across his stomach, Jason wished he had not gone along with the ridiculous insinuations that he and Dick were lovers, because Anderson was watching him as he touched Dick’s throat and shoulders, as he ran his gloved fingers over the welts on his back. His touches
were soft, almost gentle, but they were saying mine.

Dick appeared unresponsive and calm, but Jason could see his indignation and his anger, and under that - his fear. They both knew that it was only going to get worse from here and they both knew all too well the sorts of things that had happened to other victims. Jason mentally ran through the possibilities – he couldn’t help himself and he could feel his own fear bubbling just under the surface. Broken bones, rape, amputation, electric shock, castration, mutilation, brands, burns. The list went on and on.

Almost in answer to Jason’s frantic thoughts, Anderson pulled the mask back down and began to peruse the bids and suggestions on the screen. He smiled.

“We welcome back ladies and gentlemen,” he said into the camera. “As you can see, we are all refreshed and ready for round two!”

Jason sneered as Anderson gestured and swaggered like some sort of showman. He had really missed his calling in life.

“We’re going in for thermal at $50,000!”

That was a fuck lot of money just to burn someone. Maybe it was Dick’s star power, maybe it was his pretty face or the fact he was a cop. Either way, it was a hell of a lot of cash they were dealing with. And they weren’t even half way done. When they got free, Jason was going to make a point of hunting down these too-rich sickos and liberating their wealth by way of murder.

Anderson took a large cigar from one of his men, and lit it with a flourish. “Hope you like it hot, Grayson!”

Jason barely, barely, refrained from commenting at his tacky bullshit lines. From the look of Dick’s face he was doing the same.

When the embers touched flesh, Dick grunted and grit his teeth. Jason stared at his boots. He knew what that felt like, he knew what it smelt like; burnt flesh and agony. He could feel his chest tighten and his lungs burn with phantom smoke.

He tried to center himself, to pull himself back. He had to get out of the cuffs, if he didn’t, this would only get worse.

He focused, and was so close. He glanced up to check that no one was keeping an eye on him. Dick was sweating and panting, his pain really showing for the first time.

On the screen it read: Burn him good, on his balls, 50,500

Below that: Stick it in him, 50,800

Jason’s body was hot and cold and his skin was prickling. This was apparently not something he was prepared to cope with. Anderson took a long slow puff on his cigar, which must have the scent of burnt flesh on it, the sick fuck. He smiled slow and mean as he met Dick’s half lidded gaze. Neither was going to back down, but Anderson knew he had the upper hand.

Slowly, almost casually, he drew the cigar from between his lips and approached Dick. Dick didn’t fight and from this distance Jason couldn’t tell what was in his eyes, but Anderson’s expression hardened. He pulled Dick’s hanging form close to him, and ran the lit end of the cigar over his already burnt nipple, making him flinch. Then he dropped it down towards his genitals.

Dick’s chest heaved, and he turned his face away from Anderson as the burning embers touched
flesh. Dick caught Jason’s eyes again, and Jason averted his gaze, but not before he saw Anderson move his hand sharply backwards, behind Dick’s balls.

The noise Dick made wasn’t quite a scream or a plea or a groan, rather a mix of all three and Jason almost wished he was dead so he didn’t have to witness this.

The cameraman had gone down on one knee to get a better angle. Anderson had his body pressed close along Dick’s side as he relit the cigar and started again. What ever he did was apparently too much for Dick’s control and he cried out, kicking wildly. Jason suspected it was an involuntary movement – having your balls and ass burnt was a pain that Jason could only imagine. The kick hit the cameraman with a hearty thunk and he fell to the ground bleeding from the nose.

“Very stupid, Grayson,” Anderson said, but he sounded pleased, whether for the reaction or for the excuse to indulge in a little extra punishment Jason wasn’t sure. All he did know was he was going to suffer for that outburst and Dick was going to feel shit about it.

He wanted to remain stoic and uncaring as Anderson approached, but he found the part of him that was an obnoxious punk just couldn’t stay down when threatened and he found his lips pulled into a sunny, fake smile. “Problem?” he asked sweetly, as Anderson stepped over his fallen cameraman.

“For you, perhaps. Matthew, get him seen too.” He gestured at the guy bleeding on the floor. Then he turned to Jan, “You, kid, get the camera on the desk and film.”

Jan looked like he was going to piss himself, but he went and picked up the camera, focusing it on Jason. His hands were noticeably shaking.

“Keegan, show Grayson what happens when he doesn’t behave.”

Keegan smiled, all big and sincere, and picked up the iron bar that had battered Jason the first time round.

“Wait, I’m sorry!” Dick yelled, “It was an accident, just tie my legs – it won’t happen again I swear!”

The worst part was Jason had just got his fucking thumb free, but he didn’t know if he could get his legs under him. If he tried and failed he wouldn’t get another chance, if he bided his time and didn’t make the attempt then Keegan and his iron bar of doom might disable him further. Neither choice was good and he was shit out of time. He tried to stand by sliding his way up the pole behind him, hiding the fact his hands were unbound, but before he got even half a foot off the ground Keegan smashed the bar into his shin and he fell back down, just keeping enough presence of mind to keep his hands behind him. If his tibia hadn’t been fractured before, it sure as hell was now.

Then the bar came down on his broken arm and the world turned gray and white. He could hear Dick yelling, he sounded angry. But the white turned to black and sucked him under.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Warnings: The usual nasty things - non-con elements and threats, humiliation, torture.

Jim had watched Dick kick the cameraman in the head with a sudden burst of adrenaline – and then the screen had gone dark and the rush of anticipation had turned to blank dread. There were agonizing few minutes as they waited for the image to come back online. The computer was still showing the bids and suggestions – the viewers also seemed to have become agitated by the change in pace and had some inventive and horrifying ideas for punishment.

Finally the picture came back. Dick was still hanging from the ceiling, glaring at someone out of view.

“The new camera man is anxious,” Bruce muttered, staring intently at the screen.

“Why do you say that?” Jim asked, but even as he spoke, he noticed the same thing Bruce had - the camera was shaking slightly.

“Shorter than the last one too. Shorter than any of the men we’ve seen so far.”

“You think it could be a woman?” Jim said. he trusted Bruce’s eye when it came to detail, even more than he did his own.

“Could be, or a kid, or a small man. No need to jump to conclusions.”

Jim grunted. Typical Bruce. As far as Jim was concerned any possible chance at a lead was a good thing at this point. But he was right as usual.

As they watched, the camera swung around, away from Dick and towards the masked man. He was kneeling in front of another guy, bloodied and beaten, with his hands bound behind him.

Jim felt Bruce stiffen beside him as the camera angle revealed the man’s face. Despite the blood and the anger, Jim could see he was young, early twenties maybe. His face was pinched in pain, but his eyes were clear. He was familiar, although Jim couldn’t place him, but it was obvious Bruce knew him and it was equally obvious that this young man was the reason that Dick was being so compliant with his captors.

A second man, with a crude mask covering the top of his face, picked up a long metal pole and advanced. He was smiling through a split lip and bruised chin. Someone had obviously fought back pretty hard – and judging from the obvious pleasure on his face as he hefted his weapon, Jim was willing to put money on it being the young man on the floor. The first blow landed with a bone shattering crack and the kid grunted in pain.

Then the beating began in earnest and Dick started to yell and struggle. It only went on for a few minutes, but the tension in the room felt suddenly stifling.
Dick was held in place by the presence of a third guy, his gun trained on the hostage’s head. The camera shock even more violently. Bruce was right, whoever was in charge of filming either had a persistent tremor, or was scared out of their wits.

Then it was over. The bound man was left slumped and unconscious, but hopefully still breathing. The ring leader stepped back into the spotlight. “Sorry for the interruption, ladies and gents, as you can see some order needed to be maintained. And our young mister Grayson needed a few lessons in proper behavior.”

Dick spat at him, and the lines of the guy’s mask stretched as he smiled.

“Lets move towards the finale shall we? I for one, am quite looking forward to the final act.” In a well-choreographed move he was handed a black stick with coppery wire wound up the sides. With a sinking feeling Jim realized it was a modified electric baton. This was going to be unpleasant.

The bids were coming in thick and fast, most of them centering on the genitals and sexualized violence, but ever the showman, the guy in the mask went for something less dramatic to start

**Backs of the knees 65,000**

Dick cried out, kicking wildly – although this time the men surrounding him were expecting it and no one was hurt.

**Soles of the feet 66,000**

Jim had to look away. Bruce, as always, remained stoic and silent beside him, but Jim glanced at the other cops and agents in the room. Brent looked sick to her stomach, even though she was obviously trying to professional expression. Moore looked intent, although not overly bothered by the horrors on the screen. Instead he was spending much of the time watching Bruce – so intently that he didn’t even observe Jim watching him in turn. Jim was a man who, while following evidence and facts to the letter of the law (mostly), had also learned to rely on instinct. And his gut was telling him that he didn’t like or trust Moore one bit.

On the screen Dick was clearly suffering under the onslaught and the masked man stepped away to examine his own handiwork. Dick’s sweaty chest heaved as he tried to suck in enough air during the reprieve and Jim’s heart ached for him. He was clearly trying to keep a brave face but the façade was cracking slightly under the pain and stress.

His tormenter stepped forward again, running the baton across skin that jumped and twitched despite the electric current not being activated. Then he pulled Dick close like a lover, so his front was flush along Dick’s back. For the first time Jim saw a flash of real fear of the boy’s face, before it was quickly hidden by a fall of his damp, dark hair.

“This is what people really want to see, Grayson.” He pressed his lips against Dick’s neck in a parody of a kiss. “I can taste your fear. No need to be stoic anymore, just let it out.” He smiled as Dick visibly shuddered.

Jim braced himself, this was going to be bad.

And he wasn’t disappointed, although he dearly wished he had been.

The guy shifted back a bit, keeping one arm in a loose loop over Dick’s stomach and pushed the baton up against the underside of Dick’s body – from ass to balls.
Then he switched on the current.

Dick cried out and convulsed, his movements jerky and frantic. The sadistic bastard didn’t let up though, he kept at it, until the copper wire must have been leaving burns upon burns and tears were running down Dick’s face.

Jim tore his eyes away but he couldn’t help himself from checking on how Bruce was holding up – he was rigid, his jaw tight and twitching and his fingers were white as they clutched his phone. It was his biggest show of emotion so far. To their right, Moore was also watching Bruce with a spark of something Jim, perhaps unkindly, thought looked a lot like satisfaction. Beyond him, Agent Brent was watching Moore in turn, also with something close to satisfaction on her face. Before he could puzzle it out further the masked man began to speak and Jim reluctantly turned his attention back to the screen.

“That’s not very sanitary. Are you a man or a squalling infant who can’t even control his basic functions?” The guy sneered. The sound of the other men laughing could be heard faintly in the back ground. From the look of him, it was clear Dick had lost control of his bladder at some point during the prolonged assault and was now hanging limp and gasping in his chains.

“Seeing as you seem to have no sense of decency, perhaps we can all join in.” Masked guy gestured to one of his thugs and the chains holding Dick’s wrists grew suddenly slack, he fell to his knees with a thump.

The masked man swaggered in front of him for a moment. “Look at me, Grayson, or your bitch will get another broken arm to match the first.”

Slowly, Dick lifted his head. He looked dazed and pained.

“Good boy.” Then the bastard pulled down his fly, took out his half hard penis and pointed it towards Dick’s face. It took a good few minutes for the flow of urine to start – probably because of his semi-aroused state, but the wait was almost as enraging as the act itself, and Jim felt indignant fury welling up in his chest at the humiliation and the deliberate dehumanization of it all.

Dick tried to turn his face away, but a cry of pain, presumably from the hostage stopped the action and instead he turned back to face his attacker, a flash of angry fire back in his eyes. He endured the mocking and jeering as another guy began to piss on him. He didn’t give them the satisfaction of flinching again.

When they were done, the masked man turned towards his audience. “Time is of the essence this evening, so lets bring in the final bids. As before, the winner can choose to go public or private with their final act - and anything goes. While you bid yourselves into a frenzy, we are going to take a short break to clean up the star attraction and prepare for the finale!”

The camera took a last lingering look at Dick before going blank.

“Your funds sorted, Wayne?” Moore asked. “This is going to be a high one.”

Bruce said nothing, still staring at the blank screen as though he could will it back on.

And of course, because Bruce was Bruce and even inanimate objects seemed to have a healthy respect for him, the dark screen flickered back to life, revealing the ringleader, clearly smirking under his mask.

“Evening, Wayne. Or can I call you Bruce? This chat is just between us - to discuss the terms of
our agreement. And I must insist that this will *remain* just between us – unless you want to see young Timothy on the block? Or the lovely Cassandra? Little Damian?”

Bruce actually growled at that, but he remained focused, intent on the man in front of them. “I agree to your terms,” Bruce ground out. “But I have a request of you in return.”

“A request, how civil. Request away, can’t promise I’ll grant it.”

“I want you to release your hostage alongside my son.”

“Why? Because he’s your son’s boyfriend? Very touching. I’ll consider it – at a price.”

“Name it.”

Jim couldn’t say he was surprised at Bruce trying to save the other boy – even if it hadn’t been clear that he knew him, he would expect nothing less from Bruce. The suggestion that he was Dick’s lover was a bit of a surprise, but it did offer an explanation as to why Bruce knew him. He had his doubts though, Barbara would have told him. And he was suddenly overcome with a desperate hope she had not found some way to watch what he had just witnessed, if she knew it was happening (which he was pretty sure she would) then she would find a way to help. He hoped, if she had seen it, then she never told Dick.

In the end, the price for Dick alone was astronomical. The bids had clearly gone through the roof. The additional price for the hostage made Jim’s eyes water and it wasn’t even his money.

“I want Dick safe before I do the transfer,” Bruce said.

“Money first.”

“How do I know you’ll keep your word?”

“You don’t,” the man shrugged, casual. He was enjoying this. “But if you don’t pay the money in the next five minutes, I will start chopping things off. I’ll start with his thumbs – just to show I mean business, and after that it will only get worse. Time is ticking, Mr. Wayne.”

“Do it,” Moore said, “he’s not kidding around.”

Despite his growing misgivings about the FBI agent, Jim was inclined to agree with him. There wasn’t much more they could do. They were out of time.

Bruce stared at the man with sudden intensity – a gaze that could strip paint at twenty feet. “If you renege on our deal, know that I will find you, and I will make you pay for what you have done. Don’t cross me.”

The guy actually faltered for a moment, Bruce was a very frightening man when he wanted to be. The FBI agents were spared the expression on his face but just his tone of voice made their eyes widen.

Jim was going to have to do a little damage control later – wax poetic on the protectiveness of fathers and how fear could bring forth great reserves of strength. Sometimes plausible deniability was really hard work to maintain.
Mind made up, Bruce didn’t flinch as he transferred the sum.

Jim watched Moore – there was an expression that he could only call hungry on the agent’s face as the little green light blinked to tell them the payment had gone through.

The man on screen smiled. “And that’s a wrap, guys.” He gestured at Dick, who was still on his knees, “It has been a pleasure doing business with you.”

“What’s the address?” Bruce asked.

“I’ll send you an email – later.”

“How much later?”

“I said I will release him and I will. What’s left of him after I’m done. You know who the highest bidder was? Me. I used to dream of this moment, and I’m afraid I just can’t pass it up. You can watch though, if you like.”

“You bastard!” Jim said, over taken with a fury that he could barely contain. “You lying bastard!”

Bruce leant forward in his chair. “You will regret this – you aren’t infallible, we’re a lot closer to finding you than you seem to think. Stand by your word and we can do a deal. The DA is a good friend of mine, I can pull strings for you. You hurt Dick any further and I can make sure you won’t see your next birthday.”

“Empty threats, Wayne. What are you going to do, hire a hitman? The cops are right there watching you.”

“I’m not talking about murder. The three victims from Texas? We’ll have you extradited. You’ll get the needle. With the evidence against you and the fact some of your victims have parents with influence – it will be a fast track case.”

It was useless. Jim could see how far gone the man was. He was too caught up in his own sick fantasies to even make a deal for his own life. Distantly Jim wondered if Bruce was bluffing, or if he really would have him tried in a death state. Did it count as killing if the government did it for you?

“You don’t scare me, Wayne. I hope you stay and watch, but in case you don’t, I’ll give you a run down. First, I’m going to beat the soles of his feet. Falanga it’s sometimes called, very painful, and often crippling. Then I might cut off some fingers or toes.” He smiled, lost in imagining. “Grayson ruined my life you know, so although I have no particular interest in fucking men, I’m going to make an exception for Dickie here. Maybe I’ll do him dry, I’m sure he’s loose enough after being plowed by his big boyfriend over here. But if not, I’m sure his police baton will ease the way.”

Jim blocked it out. The sick feeling in his stomach was a hard knot of horror. This was going to happen right in front of them, he was going to have to watch this sick fuck torture and murder the young man who had been the goofy, smart little kid who used to simultaneously make doe eyes at his daughter and get sticky fingers all over the police reports he had brought home for safe keeping. (And he had known the little sneak was reading them, but he could never catch him at it.)

He couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t stand it.

His phone vibrated in his hand, it startled him and carefully, without drawing attention, he glanced
A text from an unknown number.

It was an address, a disused dock, a few miles from Gotham, closer to Bludhaven. Whoever had sent it, had kindly sent directions – defiantly one of Bruce’s brood. He forwarded the message to his officers, but he doubted he needed too – they were thorough and his most trusted had probably already received a similar missive.

They had the bastard.

He turned to Bruce, only to find his eyes on his own phone, his breath suddenly coming faster. The look he sent the guy should have had any sane man running for the hills, but the fool was too busy gloating and taunting Dick.

Bruce muted the sound briefly. “We should go.”

“Go where?” Moore asked, suspiciously.

Jim ignored him, concentrating instead on the email he had just received. He scanned the multiple attachments briefly – and adrenaline began shooting through his veins. He stood and moved out of the view of the camera, gesturing for the FBI agent to follow him.

“What?” Moore asked, irritated, his eyes still on Bruce.

“Agent Moore, I’m arresting you on suspicion of conspiring to commit kidnap and extortion. Well deal with accessory to murder part later.”

Moore looked momentarily shocked before his hand went to his gun, but he paused, eyes wide as agent Brent placed her own weapon against his back.

“I’ll take it from here, Commissioner.” She said, coolly.

“You’ll do no such thing, Agent Brent!” Moore blustered at her, “I outrank you!”

“Actually you don’t.” She raised one pale eyebrow. “I work for Internal Affairs, and you’ve been under investigation for months, Agent Moore. Being undercover as your probie has been an eye opening experience, let me tell you.”

She cut her eyes at Jim. “And as happy as I am to arrest this dirtbag, you better have the paperwork to back it up, Commissioner – I’ve been working damn hard on this case.”

“I appreciate that, Agent Brent. And I do, my sources tend to be… meticulous.”

Behind them Bruce suddenly stood, ignoring the drama and heading for the door. Jim half-heartedly excused himself and left the FBI to sort themselves out. He caught up with Bruce in the hall.

“Bruce, wait! There’s nothing you can do – not in time. We have to rely on those closer to Dick’s location to bring him home.” He flicked his eyes down to his phone, still clutched in his hand. “Montoya is already on her way – I’m going to head in that direction to oversee things, but I won’t be there in time for the rescue.” God he hoped this meant there would be a rescue.

Bruce paused. “You expect me to just sit here?”

“No, but you would be better off heading straight for the hospital, he will need you there. Let us
do our jobs and go look after your son.”

There was a long moment where Bruce visibly struggled with himself - it was disconcerting to witness.

“And if they don’t rescue him in time?”

“They will, Bruce. And if they don’t, then we will make the people behind this pay. And I hate to say it, but you being in that room, might buy them some time. Try to get him to talk, even if its just gloating, anything to give Dick a few more minutes before things get really nasty.”

Finally Jim seemed to have pierced the rage and appealed to his innate practicality.

Bruce nodded, slowly. “If his injuries are not life threatening, have them bring him to Gotham Memorial. Have my doctors treat him.”

“Okay. Ready to go back in there?”

Bruce didn’t answer, just spun on his heel and stalked back into the room.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Warnings this Chapter: Non-con stuff and the usual nastiness.

Some part of Jason wished he was still blissfully unconscious – just so he didn’t have to watch Dick being humiliated, it was somehow worse than watching him in pain. Perhaps he was projecting his own feelings – both he and Dick could take pain, were trained to block it out. But Jason was pretty sure if he was forced to experience the things Dick just had, it would linger – creep into his life for years to come.

But maybe that was just him, maybe Dick wouldn’t give a fuck about having been molested and pissed on. Wouldn’t care that he had wet himself in front of his tormentors.

Maybe.

Jason was just so angry, because Dick was only here, and being compliant, letting these fucks do these god-awful things because of him. If Jason hadn’t been captured like a fool then Dick would have broken free early on and kicked seven shades of hell out of these pathetic losers. But instead he had been beaten and tortured to a point where he could barely remain on his knees and had to work to lift his head. And Jason was useless, unable to help at all. All of his assurances to Jan were fucking laughable now. And, from the terrified looks the kid kept shooting in Jason’s direction, he knew it too.

Almost reluctantly he took a moment to assess himself. His right arm was busted so bad some of the damage might be permanent (if he lived long enough to care about such things) his right leg was likewise pretty fucked, definitely fractured, maybe worse. His nose was broken, he had lost a few teeth, which was just awesome, and, judging from the way his head was swimming and the fact that he felt like he might puke if he tried to move, he was guessing he had one hell of a concussion.

Buy hey, at least his hands were free. For all the fucking good it was going to do them, what with him being crippled down his whole right side. Perhaps he could attempt some kind of crab walk, and when the bad guys fell over laughing at him, kick them in the head with his good leg.

All in all, it could be said he was having a pretty bad day, what with the pain and the fear and the guilt. What he really needed to top it off was a bit of Bruce related angst. Hearing him threaten Anderson, hearing him threaten to have him extradited to a state with the death penalty – that added a new layer of pain and feeling he could barely describe.

He must have made a distressed noise, because when his head had cleared enough to take note of his surroundings, both Dick and Jan were looking at him. Jan looked scared, and Dick was trying to look carefully neutral, but Jason could still sense the pity lurking under the surface, and it fucking cut him like a knife. Anger swiftly rose to overtake the hurt, which in turn helped to clear his head.

He took stock of the room. Fucko was being creepy and looking longingly between his iron pole and Jason’s good leg - so that was going to be a concern soon. They were also wildly outnumbered. He was fairly sure Jan was on their team, but his fear and inexperience was
probably only going to make him mildly helpful at best. Dick was alert, but looked like a strong breeze might knock him over, so Jason couldn’t judge how much use he was going to be when it came to the crunch. Conclusion, they were fucked.

Jason had always suspected Dick had some sort of guardian angel looking over him, that or he had the devil’s own luck, because he had survived shit that no one should. And for once Jason didn’t have a spark of jealousy or anger. He just felt relief. Because when the movement of the boat shifted under them and there was a distant clanging – he knew it was Dick’s luck helping them out in the form of a rescue. He wasn’t the only one to think that either – the surrounding men started to shift anxiously. God, he hoped it was a rescue because that was their only chance. He shut his eyes and prayed like a motherfucker. And it looked like someone was listening. A man opened the only door and hurried to Anderson, who looked annoyed he had to pause in his taunting. The guy spoke to him in a hushed whisper.

Anderson didn’t bother to keep his voice down. “I don’t care, I hired you people to deal with trouble, so deal.”

“We’re going to need reinforcements, what if they catch us?”

“They won’t,” Anderson sounded very sure of himself and Jason wondered if that was bravado or if he had some sort of plan that was going to bite them on the ass.

“Keegan, take charge on deck. This is my moment and its not being ruined. Take everyone and do what I hired you to do. Make sure we get free of any pursuit, kill anyone who gets in your way. In fact, you and your men get us clear? Consider your wage doubled.”

“Yes sir! You want me to leave one of the guys with you?” he glared at Jason, like he might suddenly grow some extra un-broken limbs and charge them. Jason attempted a sweet smile, but the motion made his face hurt so he gave up.

“No need, Grayson and his lovely Jason are hardly a threat.”

“What about Jan? Do you want him to come up with the rest of us?” asked Mathew.

“He can keep filming.”

Jan looked between his cousin and Anderson with fear etched on his face. The kid was rubbish at keeping his cool. “If the cops are coming why don’t we just run?” he asked.

Everyone ignored him.

In the best luck they’d had since Jason woke up with some bastard cracking his legs with metal pole, all the thugs except for Anderson left. Now it was team Grayson vs. Anderson, but the prick still had the upper hand, apart from the fact the two people in the room that might be able to fight him were incapacitated – he had a gun held loosely in one hand. Still, the situation had improved.

“Well, Grayson, shall we proceed? Kid, you better be filming.”

Jan picked up the camera and pointed it back towards the sick tableau in the center of the room. Anderson barely looked at him, intent on his prey.

“Just you and me Grayson. We might not have quite the amount of time I hoped for, but I’m going to make it count.”

Dick remained on his knees head down, his hands still bound above him. Anderson picked up
Fucko’s discarded iron pole and swung it against Dick’s bare ass, sending him flying forwards onto his face and cruelly twisting his arms behind him as he fell. He grunted, but otherwise stayed quiet.

“Pay attention Grayson!” Anderson shoved him back onto his knees, and crouched in front of him, sweeping his damp hair off his face almost gently. Dick blinked blood out of his eyes and met Anderson’s gaze.

“I’ll let you choose, if you like.” Anderson said, his voice a parody of warmth and comfort. “I can take the fingers from one hand, but that would make doing your job a little hard. Maybe I’ll beat your feet until walking always causes you pain.” he laughed, “Very Hans-Christian Anderson!”

Haha, this guy was a laugh a minute. Jason’s mind was racing – what if rescue didn’t get there in time? Was he just going to sit here and watch? He was going to have to try and do something, even if he failed.

Anderson was still listing the various things he would like to do, and watching Dick’s face carefully.

“I could fuck you with your police baton?” he offered. Dick visibly winced and swallowed. Anderson latched onto the obvious fear like a terrier to a rat. “Rape scares you doesn’t it? One of the ultimate ways one man can violate another.” Dick averted his eyes, Jason could actually see his body trembling. Anderson caressed his face, “I like the symbolism of it. You fucked me when you had me kicked off the force, and now I fuck you with your own weapon.”

“Please don’t,” Dick said, his eyes still downcast. Anderson smiled. “Or shall I just go for it? The idea has appeal – watching you beg on the end of my cock.”

Jason’s rage was so great he only realized he was attempting to haul his broken body across the room with his good arm when he vomited on himself. His concussion was having none of this moving crap. But he was trained by the Bat, and was not going to give up, no matter how pathetic the attempt was.

Anderson watched him try to move and laughed at him, then turned back to Dick, completely unconcerned. Behind him, Jan was wild eyed and clutching the camera like a lifeline. He needed to hit Anderson with it, that was the only option – but yelling hit him! Would kind of give the game away. Jan could be an Eastern European name, or Nordic, he wasn’t sure. Jason dizzily tried to recall how to actually speak. “Hit him!” he tried in Russian, he knew Russian, so it was a good start. Jan just stared at him blankly. Of course, it was possible he didn’t actually speak whatever his parents’ or grandparents’ mother tongue was – but Jason was going to keep trying, not like he had anything to lose.

“Hit him, hit him with the camera!” He tried in slightly garbled Polish. This time Jan’s eyes widened slightly. Bingo.

Jan looked between his camera and Anderson, he took half a step forward and Jason tensed, ready to make a last ditch attempt to help.

Anderson stood, he pushed Dick onto his back, and then he glanced at Jan, who had lowered the camera. “Kid, you better be filming this, or I’ll put a bullet in your knee. Then I’ll send your mama a movie of what else I do to you. Got it?”

Jan nodded jerkily and the moment was gone. He raised the camera and continued to film. Dick was sending fretful glances at the baton lying discarded to his right. Anderson smiled. “I hope daddy is still watching.” He picked up the baton, hefting it in the hand not holding the gun.
“You’re scared of this, Grayson. Too large for you? Big Bad Jason only have a little cock? Maybe this will do some real damage.” He was working himself up into a frenzy, and Dick’s palpable fear was acting like a drug on his already sick mind.

“Please don’t,” Dick asked again, his voice barely a whisper. “Just let us go, I’ll do anything.”

“Like what? There’s not much you can offer me that would change my mind.”

Dick sent him a small, frightened look from under his lashes. “I could suck you off instead? If you wanted?”

The expression on Anderson’s face was frightening, it was clear he had lost whatever sense he had at the beginning of this torture party. And while the idea of it obviously pleased him greatly, there was no chance he was going to go for that over the option that would bring the most fear and pain.

He spat on the baton and pushed at Dick’s legs, trying to part them.

Rage, horror and a feeling of complete powerlessness took over Jason’s mind and momentarily shorted out his brain.

And then it rebooted.

He had to stop thinking with his lizard brain, all emotion and reaction. He had to stop projecting his own fear, and think like Dick would think. Dick had this freak profiled from the moment he realized who his was– he knew him from the force, he knew him from his criminal exploits. He knew what made him tick.

Dick didn’t want him to go easy, he wanted him to attempt to use that damn baton. All those little flickers of fear that had been riling Jason up, his strange surrender – all calculated. Or most anyway, Jason was pretty sure Dick was genuinely terrified, he knew he was.

But now he saw Dick’s actions for what they really were – something to manipulate Anderson into doing what he wanted - Jason was full of a new fear. Dick was not faking his exhaustion and weakness, he had been pushed to his limits over the past hours and there was some question about how much longer he could remain functional. Jason just really hoped Dick had the strength to follow through with whatever he had planned.

Unsurprisingly, Anderson took the bait, all of those fretful glances and whimpers just feeding his sick fantasies. “Open your legs, Grayson,” he said as he pushed at Dick’s knees, while still holding the baton in one hand and the gun in the other.

“No!”

“Do it, Grayson, or should I take it over to your pitiful boyfriend? Perhaps you would rather swap places with him?”

Dick whimpered pathetically, and even though he knew Dick was hamming it up, the sound still made Jason see red.

Dick reluctantly parted his legs and let Anderson shift him into position. He lifted one of Dick’s legs onto his shoulder almost absently, instead concentrating on how to hold the baton, the gun and keep Dick’s other leg open at the same time. Obviously he couldn’t do it, and with Dick’s face turned away from him in apparent dread, perhaps he thought he could relinquish his hold on the gun.
A very bad move on his part, and one that sent a thrill of anticipation up Jason’s spine.

As soon as Anderson’s hand was free of the gun, Dick’s other leg came up and his ankle’s crossed behind Anderson’s back. Then he tensed his whole body and twisted, lifting Anderson away from the gun and slammed him face first onto the floor. Anderson kicked and struggled, hitting at random with his baton. But Dick held fast.

That sick son of a bitch didn’t stand a fucking chance, and Jason wondered if it was too much to hope Dick had snapped the bastard’s neck.

Slowly Anderson’s struggles became weaker, his breath choked out between Dick’s strong thighs. Jason had the wildly inappropriate and giddy thought, what a way to go.

Anderson stilled and Dick kicked him away with the last of his strength, before going limp, his last reserves having been exhausted.

There was a shocked silence and time seemed to have stretched and warped in Jason’s mind. He felt a blinding moment of relief before he realized that Anderson was starting to twitch and moan. Dick hadn’t kept him choked out long enough and he was coming round. The feeling of euphoria turned to lead in his chest and he and Jan locked eyes for a moment before Jason snapped out of it.

“Get the gun!” he yelled, “Get the fucking gun!” Jan blinked at him stupidly, and then glanced at Anderson, already fumbling for the weapon. Dick was out for the count and Jason was still incapacitated and was too fucking far away.

Jan dove for it, snatching it from Anderson’s grasp by a mere whisper. Anderson lunged at him, desperately scrambling for the weapon, they staggered as they tussled, and Jason could feel his heart hammering in his chest.

The gun went off, whether by accident or deliberately, Jason wasn’t sure, but a sizable chunk of Anderson’s head exploded outward, splattering Dick’s prone form and splashing Jan’s pale face. There was another one of those shocked moments, this time the only sound in the room was Jason’s strained, erratic breathing.

Then Jan threw up on Anderson’s corpse.

That kind of jerked Jason out of his paralysis. “Jan?” he tried, “hey, kid!”

Jan was just staring at Anderson’s body. Vomit still staining his lips and chin.

“Jan! We aren’t out of the woods yet, kid. There are still a bunch of bad guys up there, who might come down and shoot us at any moment. So bring me the gun.”

Jan looked at him, wild eyed and scared.

“Now,” Jason put all the command in his voice he could muster.

It seemed to break the kid out of his horrified shock. He staggered to his feet and over to Jason, still holding the gun. Jason took it from him gratefully – having a weapon in his hand made him feel so much better. He checked out the best position to defend the room. He began dragging himself to the chosen spot.

“Go get Dick,” he told Jan, who looked stupefied. “Grayson, go get him and drag him here with us. Then get behind me.”

Jan did as he was told, unlocking Dick and bringing him over by pulling on his arms and dragging
him across the floor - getting who knows what into the wounds on his back. They would deal with that later. Jason was almost as relieved to get Dick into his hands as he was the gun, and he gathered him up, checking his pulse and feeling for any breaks in his torso. Half conscious, Dick held on to him weakly.

Jan settled behind him and held on too, pushing his face against Jason’s good shoulder.

Jason held on to the gun.

“You said that you were going to save us,” Jan said, his voice muffled.

Jason shrugged and winced at the pain that shot through his body. “Yeah, well I may have over estimated my role in things. But looks to be that it was kind of a joint effort between the three of us, and that’s good enough for me.”

“What if they come down here?”

“Then I’ll shoot them.”

“What if it’s the cops?”

Jason rolled his eyes, he hated high stress situations with civilians. “Then I won’t shoot them. I know what I’m doing, Jan.”

“Oh god I shot someone! I’m a murderer!”

Jason sighed. “A killer, yeah, but not a murderer. That was a justified kill. It was even self-defense. I would worry more about the part where you aided in the kidnapping of a police officer who is also the son of one of the most powerful men in Gotham, if I were you.”

“Oh god!”

“It’s ok, Jan,” Dick’s voice came weak and reedy from somewhere in the vicinity of Jason’s lap. “Will make sure the cops understand how you helped, and how you didn’t know what you were getting into, we’ll help you make a deal.”

“Going to wrap him in cotton wool and kiss his boo boos better too?” Jason asked, sarcastically.

“Oh, if I have to. Would have done it for you.”

“Liar.”

“Some people deserve a second chance, Jay.”

That sort of hurt somewhere in Jason’s chest, and he shifted uncomfortably “Yeah, well, you smell like a toilet,” he said. When in doubt, leave maturity by the door and head straight for the playground insults.

“You look like you got hit by a bus.”

“Smelling like you’ve been rolling around on the floor of a public restroom is way worse.”

“You realize you’re hugging me right?”

“Oh god, I shot him, oh God,” Jan interrupted them, determinedly continuing his freak-out.

Jason ignored him. “By the way, Dick-face, I’m going to kick your ass over the McGowen thing.
Just as soon as I can kick without falling over.”

“Bring it on, asshole. But later, I’m going to pass out now.”

“Right, have fun.”

Snark and banter was somehow comforting, it was just the way they rolled – their way of not flipping out and becoming a dribbling mess during moments of crazy stress. And to be fair, Dick really did smell pretty rank; blood and fear and piss, with a nice undercurrent of vomit. Although that might be Jan, or Jason himself, who had upchucked all down his own shirt more than once since his last beating. Awesome.

Now Dick was unconscious again though, pressed against Jason’s sore body, the fear and adrenaline started to rush up on him. The sounds of a fight could now be clearly heard above deck. Jason could feel Jan trembling against him, and however much of a moron the kid was, he was clearly not cut out for a life of crime. The whimpers he was making were cutting through Jason’s anger at the boy, and bringing out his protective side.

They had come this far, there was no way he was letting them go down now.

There were sounds on the stairs, and Jason took a few steadying breaths, checked his ammo and carefully lined his shot.

The door flew open and an armed thug burst through. Jason did take a fraction of a second to make sure it was one of the bad guys and not a cop, but as the man took a look at what was left of Anderson’s face and spun towards him, gun drawn, Jason shot him right between his eyes. Perfect left handed shot if he did say so himself.

Jan went limp against him, too overcome with fear to function. Without giving them time to regroup there was more clattering on the stairs and Fucko charged into the room. His eyes widened as he took in the bloody scene and Jason squeezed off a short. Or would have done, if the gun hadn’t jammed.

There was a horrified second of realization on his part, and a slow smile on Fucko’s, but before he could raise his weapon, Black Bat flew into the room feet first and kicked the bastard right in the head. She was the most beautiful thing Jason had ever seen. He had always been fond of Cass, felt a strange kinship with her. But now she was on his Christmas list for the next decade at least.

It took less than thirty seconds for her to have Fucko tied up and unconscious on the floor. Jason hoped he would have an opportunity to off the bastard before the cops arrived. At the very least he wanted to break a limb or four. Turnabout was fair play, after all.

“Are you a sight for sore eyes!” he said, trying and failing to wink. His face really hurt when he made any sort of expression.

“As are you. We were worried if we would find you in time.”

“We? Did you bring the cavalry? Or the police?”

“They are on their way, but it was quicker for me to come alone. An ambulance is also on its way.” She glanced at Jan curiously as she approached, the kid was slumped limply against Jason’s back. “This boy is a hostage?”

“It’s a long story. Make sure the cops keep him separate from the rest. Until Dick and I can give our statements.”
“You have my word.”

“You’re the best, Black Bat. Way cooler that old Bats himself,” Jason said, vaguely, aware he was babbling and not giving a shit. Cass was here to take charge, so he could just shut his eyes and take a little nap, just until the police arrived. He thought about telling Cass about his plan, but the slow slide into unconsciousness was too inviting.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The journey to the docks had been a dreadful one. Jim had no visual in the car, but they had set up the audio feed from the events on the boat. When the first shot was fired his heart dropped into his stomach. Then there was an agonizing wait for the people watching the video feed at Wayne Manor to relay what had actually happened. The fact Dick had choked out the masked man before the shot did little to appease him. Especially as it seemed the camera had been dropped before the gun went off and it was unclear who the casualty was, but it seemed someone had been shot. On the audio there had been yelling and the whisper of voices behind static. Then the sound of another gunshot.

Jim was glad he wasn’t driving, because he suspected he would have broken the land speed record in an effort to reach them.

Finally he got the call that one of the Bats was there, and that the situation was in hand – and the bad guys were the only fatalities. The relief made him lightheaded.

By the time they arrived, Jim felt he had aged by five years. Montoya and her unit were already processing the surviving gang members and there were cops scouring the surrounding area for any who had fled – they were going to get every single one of those bastards. The cops were angry, Dick was one of their own, even if he was from the ‘Haven.

Jim listened to the reports with half an ear, He couldn’t see Dick, and he felt he had to actually lay eyes on him to be certain he was safe.

Finally Montoya took pity on him and laid a warm hand on his shoulder. “Grayson and the hostages are round the back waiting on the ambulance. I’ve got things here, go check on them.”

Jim nodded gratefully and headed in the direction she had indicated. The ambulance had arrived, and the EMT’s were attempting to get the boys into the back of it. It seemed they were having a bit of trouble untangling them from one another. Although they both appeared unconscious Dick and the hostage were still clinging to one another. Behind them, another much younger boy had his fingers clenched in the first man’s shirt. His eyes were open, but wide and shocked. A kind, but frustrated looking EMT was gently attempting to coax him into letting go, she was not having much success.

“Just load them up together, quicker they get to hospital, the better,” Jim told her. Dick’s face was swollen and he looked pale and worn, but at the sound of Jim’s voice he stirred.

“Commissioner Gordon?” he asked, groggy and pained.

“I’m here Dick, these folks want to get you and your friend to hospital as quick as possible, you good with that?”

Dick didn’t answer, but his death grip on his friend lessened slightly and the EMT was able to pull him free and get him onto a stretcher. Jim wished he could go with them, but he was much more useful here. He had to pull himself together, it was hard, being so personally connected to the victim of such a dreadful crime – but the best he could do for them now was to make an airtight case against the criminal gang responsible.

But first, he needed to call Bruce.
“Well?” Bruce demanded as he picked up.

“Dick and the hostage are alive and on the way to Gotham memorial – they’re both seriously injured, but I’m hopeful they will make a full recovery.”

“Keep me informed of developments,” Bruce said, and hung up.

Jim snorted. All that brusque tetchiness was just covering up Bruce’s fear and relief. Having known the man for a very long time, he understood that despite appearances Bruce was a very emotional person; he felt deeply and fiercely – it was just expressing those feelings he had trouble with. Something that had at times impacted badly on his family, especially Dick whose own emotions often ran high. Jim hoped that Bruce would be there for him through his recovery, he suspected he was going to need all the support he could get.

“Commissioner!” Montoya called, breaking him out of his thoughts. “We have an ID on the ringleader; Peter Anderson, formerly of Bludhaven police.”

“Bastard,” Jim said, with feeling. He had suspected some of their own were involved, but to have it confirmed was infuriating.

“Quite so, Sir. He is also confirmed to be one of the two fatalities. Evidence from the scene suggests that the young guy taken to hospital with Grayson was the shooter, but we will have to wait on their statements and ballistics for confirmation.”

“And the second fatality?”

“We are thinking the hostage might have been the shooter on that one, as he was still in possession of the gun. It was definitely self-defense, and a damn good shot.”

“Who was first on the scene?”

“I was sir, but Black Bat had already done most of the hard work for us. She stayed to give a brief account of what took place and her findings. Then she took off.”

Jim nodded, technically they were supposed to at least pretend to arrest vigilantes, but really, what was the point? Not to mention the fact that on this, and in indeed most occasions he was enormously grateful to them, the Bat sanctioned ones anyway.

When Jim finally finished at the crime scene, he made his way to the hospital to check in on Dick. The nurse was initially reluctant to direct him to the private room Dick was currently occupying – Bruce’s orders no doubt. But eventually she relented, and anxiously led Jim to the correct ward. Dick was resting quietly with Bruce and Alfred by his side. Jim didn’t want to disturb them, but he felt he must.

“Bruce?” he asked quietly, stepping into the room.

Bruce tore his gaze away from his son’s battered face and turned to him, his expression carefully blank.

“How’s he doing?” Jim asked, determined to ignore the stony silence. Bruce was probably still feeling raw from the stress, fear, and the overload of emotion.

“He’s sedated. His wounds have been cleaned, there was very little internal damage, but the burns were quite extensive.”
Jim nodded, he was not looking forward to reading over the detailed reports of the injuries Dick had received. “Has he said anything?” he asked, keeping his voice professional. Bruce would probably appreciate keeping things about the investigation and not about the personal cost of what had happened.

“Only that you should offer the boy, Jan, a deal in exchange for his testimony. And that someone should look into a case involving the boy’s brother, Marek Bednarczyk who was arrested in Bludhaven last December.”

“I’ll look into it.”

“I’ve already contacted the DA to set things in motion. And if the boy does want to testify against the other perps, you might want to offer him and his family protection. Apparently one of the other men involved is a relative, which might cause problems if you don’t offer some assurances against reprisals.”

“Doing my job for me again, Bruce?”

Bruce gave him the slightest upward twitch of his lip “I wouldn’t dream of it, Jim.”

“I will make sure he’s looked after, I’m going to interview him as soon as an appropriate adult arrives and he is given the all clear from the doctor.”

“I was not aware he had sustained any injuries.”

“Shock, I’m told. Unsurprising given the past twenty four hours, I certainly would not have been able to cope had I been a witness at that age.” Jim paused and rubbed a hand over his mustache, it needed a trim, and he needed a wash, a shave and at least five hours sleep. “How about the other boy, the hostage? How’s he holding up?”

“He’s in surgery. The Doctor assures me he will make a full recovery, but as well as the broken bones, there were some internal injuries.”

“Do we have a name for him?” Jim asked, cautiously.

Bruce looked pensive for a moment, and then gave the tiniest shrug of a shoulder. “Jay.”

“I’ll have to interview him when he is able, but I will be as delicate as possible.”

Bruce gave him a rueful smile, “Do what you have to. And Jim?”

“Yeah?”

“Go get some sleep, things are steady for the moment.”

Jim yawned and shook his head, “take your own advice, Bruce. Get some rest.”

Bruce grunted in answer, and Jim took that as his cue to take his leave. A few hours sleep would probably be for the best, after all.

Jim was back at the hospital six hours later, his eyes still gritty and his head still a little heavy – but his mind was clearer. The relief he had felt earlier was still there, but now it was tempered by the desire to make sure everyone responsible when down for this. He was going to follow the corruption as high up the ladder as it went.
He checked in on Dick first, Bruce and Pennyworth were gone, but they had been replaced by two sleeping teenagers, slumped together on the uncomfortable looking chairs. Stephanie’s blond hair was stuck to Tim’s face in places, caught on the slight stubble on his cheeks. The fact the kid was obviously in need of a shave was somehow shocking, when did Tim grow from a boy into a young man? They both still looked so terribly young.

Dick was also sleeping, his bruised face relaxed and free of pain, Jim decided not to wake him, and instead opted to interview the other two survivors first.

‘Jay’ was also asleep, but unlike Dick he didn’t seem to be resting peacefully, his brows creased in apparent pain or distress.

Jim was somehow unsurprised to see Cassandra sitting by his bedside, she glanced at him as he entered and offered him a small smile. “I felt he shouldn’t wake alone,” she said.

Jim nodded. “Having people around can help a great deal. Does he have any family that you know of? Anyone I can call for him?”

She pondered, but shook her head. “I will stay until he wakes again. He will want an update on Dick’s condition.”

“I’m glad he has some friends around him,” Jim offered – he desperately wanted to ask about the connection between Jay and Dick, but he also suspected that might be treading into the kind of territory that should be avoided in order to maintain a level of plausible deniability, so he resisted.

Unlike the others, Jan was awake and ready to be discharged by the doctors, although he was not under arrest yet, it had seemed prudent to post a guard outside his door. The woman nodded to him as he approached. “We finally tracked down his family, his mother is with him now,” she said.

“Thank you officer Azeez.”

“Just to warn you, Sir, they haven’t been very forthcoming and have requested a lawyer.”

“I’m sure they have.” He really hoped this interview went smoothly, but he was more than prepared to play hardball if he had to.

Jan still looked pale and shocky, and far younger than his sixteen years. His mother sat beside him, holding his hand and scowling fiercely at her son, at Jim and the world in general.

“Are you the officer in charge of this operation?” she asked without preamble.

“I’m police commissioner James Gordon, and I took over the case when Mr. Grayson was kidnapped.”

“Is he going to be okay?” Jan asked quietly.

“Physically he is expected to make a full recovery. But that sort of traumatic event tends to leave deep scars.”
Jan shuddered. “And Jason? He tried really hard to protect me, even though it was my fault he was there-”

“Jan!” his mother snapped, “say nothing until the lawyer gets here!”

She followed that statement with a stream of rapid words in another language and Jan looked suitably chastised. Despite the harsh sound of her words, Jim noticed she was still holding Jan’s hand gently, and he figured, like Bruce, she was channeling her fear for her son into anger.

“Ms. Bednarczyk, I want to see the men responsible for this in jail. Officer Grayson has made it clear that he believes Jan was unaware of the true nature of what was going to happen, and that he was perhaps unduly influenced by other, older people in the group. Is that right?”

Jan glanced at him from under his lashes and shrugged. Jim got the impression it was more complicated than that.

“The DA is on her way, and it is possible, in light of your age and the fact the victim is advocating for you, that we may be able to make a deal. But you will need to give evidence against the other perpetrators.”

“I shot someone,” Jan blurted suddenly.

“Jan!” his mother gave him a little shake. She looked terrified.

“As I understand it,” Jim said carefully, “if you had not shot him, Anderson would have killed you, and then probably Dick and Jason too.”

Jan nodded shakily, and Jim had to resist giving him a reassuring smile – he didn’t know just how involved the boy was, and if he did have a bigger role than it first appeared, he was going to see justice done no matter what Dick thought. He hoped it wouldn’t come to that though.

“I’m going to have to take you in to custody, and process you properly, and then when the DA arrives at the station we can go over what’s going to happen next. Okay?”

The kid started to cry, still apparently overwhelmed. His mom patted his hand and gave Jim a nod. Jim really hated making kids cry, even if sometimes they deserved it.

Feeling vaguely depressed, Jim made his way back to Dick’s private suite of a hospital room – the benefit of being Bruce Wayne’s son. His mood lifted slightly when he saw that Dick was both awake and talking, and that Barbara was with him. Although Jim knew their relationship was no longer romantic in nature, they still seemed to be as close friends as they had been in their teens – and her presence always seemed to cheer Dick up. (And Jim couldn’t blame him for that, his daughter was the light of his life too.)

Opposite Barbara was the small, angry form of Damian Wayne, scowling at Dick like he wanted to set his hair on fire with nothing but the power of his displeasure. The poor boy must have been very worried over the last twenty four hours – but he was a real chip off the old block in the way he was dealing with that anxiety.

And speaking of the ‘old block’, Bruce was leaning against the far wall. He was impeccably dressed in an expensive suit, and somehow looked immaculate and centered, despite the likelihood he’d had even less sleep than Jim.

“How are you feeling, Dick?” Jim asked.
“I’ve felt better, felt a lot worse too, so I’m sure I will be up and about in no time.” Dick grinned, but it looked forced, and Jim couldn’t help but notice that he was avoiding looking at Bruce. That was one hell of a complicated emotional mine field they were going to have to cross and Jim suspected ignoring it like they usually did would do neither of them any favours.

“You up to answering a few questions?”

“Sure.” He flicked his eyes between Barbara and Damian, and some sort of fleeting silent communication seemed to take place.

“How about we go get some proper food for everyone?” Barbara asked Damian.

“No,” Damian said sharply, “you may go if you wish, but I am staying here.”

She gave him a flat look, but Jim could see the amusement in her gaze. “That wasn’t actually a request, short stuff.”

“It was phrased as a request,” Damian sniffed contemptuously, the kid had balls, Jim would give him that.

“That was me being polite and giving you the illusion of a choice. Let’s go, Damian.”

The boy looked first at Dick, then his father and then at Barbara’s uncompromising expression. He seemed to be weighing his options and his chance at success. “I get to choose what we purchase,” he said at last.

“Deal.”

She blew a kiss at Dick, who smiled, and then wheeled herself out after Damian, who seemed to have taken his new mission to heart and was steaming ahead with a destination clearly in mind. Jim suspected they were going to be subjected to some sort of food based revenge for his dismissal. Of all the difficult kids Bruce had helped raise over the years (Dick included) Damian was by far the most challenging, but he felt Bruce was up to the test.

Jim looked at Dick, who was staring at his blanket clad knees. Now came the awkward bit.

“Are you up to giving me your statement, Dick?”

Dick winced, and seemed to shrink into himself slightly, casting a quick, furtive glance at Bruce. Jim took pity on him, as Bruce obviously wasn’t going to take the hint. “The DA will be arriving soon, perhaps you could go and have a word when she gets here?” he leveled a stern look at Bruce, flicking his eyes between Dick and the door. Not very subtle, but Dick was too preoccupied with avoiding Bruce’s gaze to notice.

Bruce was a very bright man, and he picked up Jims meaning instantly, but he was also a very stubborn one, and he stood stiffly for a moment, as reluctant to leave Dick’s side as his youngest son had been. But then he nodded and stepped out of the room. Dick breathed an audible sigh of relief.

“You’re going to have to talk to him at some point,” Jim offered gently. “And you know he is going to get his hands on all the reports.”

“I know. I just need a little space to process. I’ll talk to him.”

“Don’t leave it to long, you know how he gets, he’ll be tearing the city apart if you let him stew.”
Dick gave him his first genuine smile since waking. “He’s lucky to have such a good friend, someone who can see through the bullshit and bluster.”

Jim felt himself flush slightly, high praise from Dick, who loved Bruce with an intensity that had always been slightly awe inspiring, even when they were throwing punches and yelling at one another.

Dick gave his account of the past two days in an almost dispassionate manner, but Jim could read the tension in his body as he spoke. He grew visibly upset when Jim told him it had been Ramirez who had planted the drugs in the left-over food, and he glossed over some of the details of the torture – although Jim had seen much of it on the video feed. When Jim asked about Jason, there was a tiny hesitation before Dick said he was a friend. Jim didn’t push it, despite how vague he was being.

It took a long time to cover everything, and Dick was looking distressed and drawn towards the end. As they finished, Barbara and Damian, as well as Cassandra and Tim trooped into the room, arguing and clutching boxes of take-out. And as Dick’s face brightened, Jim couldn’t help but think he was going to be ok. One way or another, he would have the help he needed to heal.

Chapter End Notes

Only 2 more Chapters to go!
Two weeks had passed in a blur of pain and confused guilt. And Jason had to admit he was a fucking mess.

Physically he was healing, his lower right leg was in a cast, but he was able to move under his own power – albeit in a pathetic shuffling sort of way. His arm was a mess and held together with pins, but the doctor had assured him with the proper care he would have at least most of his movement back. His head and facial injuries had mostly healed, although he was still missing two molars – something he was hoping to get fixed in the next week. He’d had worse, much worse.

It was inside his head that was the real problem.

He couldn’t sleep, and when he did, he was besieged by nightmares. Every time he woke, he thought he had just watched Dick die. Sometimes through torture, sometimes a gunshot. Sometimes it’s the Joker that kills him. Sometimes it’s Anderson, and sometimes he rapes him first.

Sometimes it’s Jason, not Dick, who is the victim.

Jason was an old hat at this shit, dissociative episodes and sense memory flashbacks. He had suffered from what he recognized as PTSD for years. But he had it under control, had worked long and hard to overcome it without help from anything but books and the odd skype with a specialist to give him some pointers. And yet here it was again, with a whole fresh bunch of crap to make his life miserable and difficult.

Maybe he should have stayed in the hospital. He had discharged himself the moment he could walk – the fussing from the family had been weird, but not wholly unpleasant. Cassandra had been a calming presence when he woke, if she was there, he was safe. She had updated him on all the developments and Dick’s condition practically and without too much emotion. She was kind, and he had slept easier with her by his side.

Bruce had only checked on him the one time that he could remember, but it had left a lasting feeling of something. He wasn’t sure quite what exactly, but it hadn’t made him angry, which was a nice change.

He had awoken with a feeling of vague comfort and a smell like home, so the large gloved hand resting gently on his forehead didn’t startle him. It barely even surprised him, and both he and Bruce had pretended that he was still asleep, as Bruce had gently petted his hair. Like back when Jason had been a boy, and not a damaged, angry man.

The rest of the family was one thing, but Dick was quite another. He couldn’t face seeing him, and so he had left. He wasn’t sure if Dick had even wanted to see him, but he hadn’t given him the chance, either way. Now he wondered if that had been a mistake. It was his feelings about what had happened to Dick, and his guilt at his own unwitting part in it that was driving him slowly insane.

He couldn’t stop thinking about it, couldn’t help worrying about the stupid moron. He didn’t want to see him damaged physically or emotionally. He didn’t want to know if the effects of what had
happened were still haunting him like they were haunting Jason. But he couldn’t stop thinking about it.

So now, two weeks later, he had turned to the bottle. Jason had never really been one to drown his sorrows or use substances to quiet the clamor in his mind. But he just didn’t have the emotional fortitude to actually deal with the extra stress – and the bottle of scotch had looked all friendly and inviting.

His mind felt fragmented and his stomach sick with guilt and an abstract fear. It was driving him crazy.

But Jason had always been a man of action. Got a problem? Deal with it, change the parameters and the circumstances, don’t hide from it, and don’t wallow in it.

So really there was only one thing he could do – go see Dick.

With some not so subtle questioning of Tim, Jason had ascertained that Dick had returned to his apartment rather than giving into the intense pressure to recuperate at the manor. Something Jason was very glad of, he didn’t think he could handle Bruce and Dick in one visit.

He was reassessing that an hour later, having taken a nip or two of whisky for Dutch courage, and caught a cab to Dick’s apartment block – predictably in the worst part of town. The problem was that Dick lived on the top floor, and the elevator was busted. Walking six flights of stairs with a broken leg was no fucking joke, and he was glad he had brought a hip flask to have a drink on the long climb.

When he finally reached Dick’s apartment he had to stop and catch his breath. Even with the whisky his leg was aching something fierce. He realized that although he had been to Dick’s place many times, he had never attempted to enter via the front door, never mind actually knocking to be let in.

It took Dick a few long moments to open the door and Jason wondered if he was still moving slow due to his injuries. The thought made horrible images to flash in front of his eyes and the phantom smell of burnt flesh assault him.

“Jason?”

He fought himself back from the brink and blinked a few times to clear his vision. Dick was looking at him in concern. Jason couldn’t help give him a quick once over. He was unshaven and dressed in ratty sweat-pants and an oversized sweater that had clearly once belonged to someone else.

“Hey,” Jason said stupidly.

“Are you ok? You’re all red.”

“Yeah, thanks, Dick. Your elevator is broken and so is my leg.”

Dick looked at his cast and made an unhappy face. “Sorry, I would have asked the super to fix it for you if I’d known you were coming over.”

Jason suddenly didn’t know what to say, and just stood there like a moron, staring at Dick’s face. There was a long moment before Dick seemed to shake himself out of his own awkward stupor.
“Come in and sit down,” he said, as he turned and shuffled back into the apartment. He was walking with a slight limp and an odd gait. Jason worried about which injury had caused it.

Dick’s living room looked as chaotic as Jason felt – it was a tip. Although there was nothing overtly gross like moldy food, almost all possible surfaces were covered in stuff; clothes, mugs of half-drunk coffee and papers. He had clearly been working rather than resting. Jason could relate.

Dick took an armful of crap off the couch and looked for a place to put it, failing to find a spot that was not already buried in debris he shrugged and dumped it on the floor behind the sofa. He gestured for Jason to sit, and he did so somewhat dubiously. The couch had seen better days.

“Do you want something to drink? Coffee? Something stronger?”

“What you got?” Jason asked, more alcohol might help take the edge off the hideous awkwardness. This had never been an issue between them before; tension, yeah, anger, bitterness and plenty of verbal sniping, but never this weirdly polite distance and discomfort.

“Beer, or maybe some bourbon?”

“Beer. I’m more of a scotch man, myself.”

Dick nodded and shuffled through to the kitchen for their drinks. Jason glanced around the room again and tried to gather his thoughts. The mess was not actually that unusual, Dick had a tendency to discard whatever he was doing and leave it where it lay when his attention was taken by something else, which resulted in a trail of mess that used to drive Alfred to very stoic despair. The scruffy stubble Dick was wearing was slightly more concerning as it was usually a sign he was feeling out of sorts when he neglected personal grooming. Dick’s beard grew like a thing possessed when left to its own devices. Jason had been extremely envious of it when he had been a kid and first experimenting with a patchy, fluffy mustache (years later he had hunted down and burnt the pictures that Dick had taken while Jason primped and posed like the little fool he’d been at that age.)

Dick came back in, handed him a beer and sat on the other end of the couch with somewhat more care than he would have done previously. In the huge sweater he looked small and more frail than he actually was. He worried at a loose thread on one of the too long sleeves and Jason couldn’t help wondering who the ugly thing had belonged to. Harper? Bruce? Knowing Dick it might even belong to Superman. Only Dick would wear one of the man-of-steels cast offs as a comfort blanket.

“What you smiling at, Jay?” Dick asked, giving him a lopsided smile in turn.

“Your shaggy face.”

Dick touched his chin and seemed surprised to find stubble there, he looked slightly sheepish. “I guess if forgot to shave the past day or so. I’ve been working on this case.” He waved at the stack of hand-written notes on the table.

“Shouldn’t you be resting?” Jason said, raising an eyebrow.

“Have you been?” Dick shot back.

“Touché.”

Dick shrugged again and went back to picking at the fraying sleeve of his shirt. “So what can I do for you, Jay? Come to deliver that ass kicking you promised over the McGowan thing?”
“Nah. I figured I would let you off on that one, considering, you know.” He gestured vaguely.

“Oh gee, thanks, Jay.”

Dick sounded sarcastic and bitchy and more like himself than he had since Jason arrived, it made him smile and relax a little.

“I just came to see how you were doing.”

Dick chewed his lip for a moment, considering. “I’m ok. Healing alright. Still caring for some of the burns.” He gave a small snort of a laugh. “It’s a good thing I’m flexible, talk about injuries in hard to reach places.”

Jason winced and took a fortifying pull on his beer. Although he generally preferred not to talk about his feelings, he wasn’t afraid to if it came down to it, and he was always honest. Dick was actually far more reticent and occasionally downright deceitful about the way he felt, preferring to put on a brave face and soldier on. Unless the emotion he was feeling was anger – in which case it spilled out all over the place. Anger was one place they could definitely meet in the middle, it was their usual way of sharing their feelings with one another, and often resulted in bloodshed.

“You’re smiling again, it’s creeping me out,” Dick said.

“I’m not sleeping so good, it’s making me dopey.”

Dick considered that for a moment, “I haven’t been sleeping too well either.”

“Nightmares?”

Dick didn’t answer and sipped at his beer.

“Tim said you haven’t been to see them at the manor,” Jason tried, he just needed to open up a good line of communication, but it was difficult to find something he was fully comfortable actually broaching.

“Tim is a tattle tale.”

“Yup. But I think he’s worried. You speak to Bruce?”

Dick shuddered. “No. It keeps me up at night thinking about it. About him watching.”

Jason stayed quiet, but he nodded his head to show he was listening.

“I don’t get it.” Dick looked forlorn. The faded bruises were yellow behind the black fuzz on his face.

“Don’t get what?”

Dick shrugged and tipped his head back, looking at the ceiling with distant eyes. “Doesn’t matter.”

Jason slammed his bear down on the table, making Dick jump and draw into himself defensively, like a startled cat. “It does matter, Dickie. I can’t stop thinking about it either. I came to see you because I needed to know if you were ok. And, if I’m honest, because you might understand how I’m feeling.”

Well, he hadn’t meant to be that straightforward, but it seemed to do the trick. Dick was looking at him with concern.
“What are you feeling?”

“You first, Dickie. What don’t you get?”

Dick looked at his bare toes and shifted uncomfortably. “I’ve had worse. I’ve been beat up worse, threatened worse. Even my fear for you and that stupid boy is nothing really new. Why is it fucking me up this bad?”

Jason shifted, uncomfortable. “Maybe the sexual aspect?”

“No, had that worse too.”

Jason had to take a moment to try to absorb that, realized he couldn’t and forced himself to push it aside. Dick was avoiding eye contact, and Jason let him, leaning his head back to rest on the back of the sofa. “I have a theory, if you wanna hear it? It’s not professional or anything, mind.”

“Something that came to you just now?”

“No. I’ve done some research, over the years.” He didn’t have to look at Dick to know he was giving him soulful sad-face. Sentimental fool. “I figure it’s sort of a cumulative effect. Like, any empathetic person faces enough trauma in their lives, fights enough battles, there has to be a point there mind just nopes right out of there.”

“You have such a way with words, Jay.”

“Shut up and listen.”

“Yes sir!” Jason could hear the slight smile in Dick’s voice as his spoke, although despite his words he didn’t shut up, “I’ve had times when I have been traumatized, times when things have been bad and I’ve lost loved ones. But generally I like what I do, I enjoy it.” He gave Jason a wry look that all but said; and so do you.

Jason ignored it. “Yeah, you’re an adrenaline junkie, and let’s be honest - you get off on righteous violence.” He expected Dick to protest, but he didn’t, so he continued, warming to his subject. “Thing is, the constant danger, the fighting and the fear of loss we all go though, that’s still a bunch of chemical reactions happening in your body. Your body doesn’t know you’re having the time of your life, it thinks you’re living in terror. And that combined with the actual trauma, the things we’ve suffered, the things we’ve seen and the people we’ve lost? There has to come a time you tip over the edge. And this was it for you.”

Dick was silent for a moment, and Jason gave him his space.

“What about you, Jay? When was your tipping point?”

“Mine happened a long-ass time ago. This is just a refresher – a repeat of my greatest hits, this time starring you.”

“I’m sorry, Jay”

“Stop fucking apologizing for getting fucked up! It wasn’t your fault. My fault more than yours.”

“Not your fault either,”

Jason took another long drink. Not enough booze in the world for this shit. “Got another beer?”
Dick rolled his eyes. “Fridge is that way, if you want to drink yourself unconscious.”

Sometimes Jason forgot what a sanctimonious prick Dick was. He had kind of missed it.

Jason woke with his face pushed into Dick’s side. He didn’t smell particularly fresh and he wasn’t especially comfortable, but somehow it seemed having Dick for a pillow had allowed Jason to sleep the night away. At least seven hours judging from the amount of light beaming through the window.

Dick was asleep too, his face relaxed and his mouth hanging slightly open. Even after Jason had extracted himself and hobbled to the kitchen for a glass of water and a Tylenol, Dick remained dead to the world, sleeping the sleep of the truly exhausted. Jason watched him for a bit, feeling his emotions slip and slide about in the pit of his stomach. He decided not to wake him before he left, and Dick only scrunched his nose and wrinkled his brow a little when Jason drew a picture of a penis on his forehead with a sharpie he found by the fridge - just to give them something to talk about to ease the awkwardness next time. He was pretty sure there was going to be a next time.

Two nights later Dick turned up at his door. Jason had almost been expecting him. Partly because he expected retaliation over the penis drawing, and partly because he himself hadn’t slept more than an hour at a time since he had left Dick’s apartment, and he had been wondering if Dick was dealing with something similar. He had been thinking about what sort of excuse he could make to go back and have another long peaceful sleep before he completely lost his marbles and started beating up on his furniture and drinking himself to death.

“Jay!” Dick greeted him with dark shadows under his eyes and a fake looking grin.

“Dick,” Jason held the door open for him to enter. Dick had shaved and hopefully showered. He was dressed casually in a t-shirt and jeans.

Unlike Dick’s catastrophe of a living space, Jason’s open plan apartment was neat and sparse, with only a few personal touches. He didn’t want to have to leave anything here he was attached to if he had to leave in a hurry – everything meaningful he owned was in storage, under the name Wayne Peters.

Dick sat on the sofa and offered Jason the large carrier bag he had been carrying. “I brought beer.”

Jason held up a hand. No way was he drinking anything Dick bought – apart from his poor taste in beer, there was a chance he had done something to it as revenge. “I’m on the scotch,” he said, watching Dick’s face for any sign of disappointment. Instead Dick shrugged good-naturedly and opened himself a bottle with his teeth. Jason shuddered.

“So what can I do for you, Dick-face?”

“I was at a loose end and thought I’d drop by to see how you were doing.”

It was a weak, but plausible excuse, and Jason didn’t call him on it. Instead he picked up a bunch of takeout menus and the TV remote and sat on the sofa beside him. “What you fancy for dinner then?” he asked, and Dick grinned and took the menus.

They couldn’t agree on what to eat. Or what to watch on TV, they squabbled and acted like a couple of kids. Ever the sore loser, Dick did an amusing (although Jason would never admit it) voice-over for the French movie Jason had wanted to watch, and Jason ‘accidentally’ ordered
coconut rice instead of plain, making Dick sulk and moan over his curry.

It sort of felt like they were friends.

And they both slept the night away, sharing the couch and lost to the world. In the morning Dick was gone, and all of Jason’s helmets had smiley faces drawn on them in permanent marker. Bastard.

Over the next few weeks they spent at least four out of seven nights together – they never mentioned it, or called ahead. And they always slept on the couch. Jason was aware they were heading towards codependent territory, but he really couldn’t make himself care.

Of course other matters were progressing too, as the police began to make their case and prepare for trial. The majority of the gang had opted to plead out for a lighter sentence, but a few of the higher ups were holding out while they threw money at lawyers and made vague threats towards the eye witnesses. Commissioner Gordon had been hunting Jason to take a statement, but had yet to catch up with him – although there had been a close shave when Jason had been at Dick’s place and Gordon had arrived to go over a few things. Jason had been forced to hide under the bed with what looked like the world’s largest collection of missing socks and an ancient, fossilized chocolate croissant. Gordon asked awkward questions and Dick lied through his teeth. Jason owed him for that one. Eventually he might have to talk to them, if it looked like his absence would impact the case. But he preferred to stay under the radar if he could.

He wasn’t sure at what point Dick’s toothbrush moved into his bathroom, and his apartment got steadily messier, but it was probably around the same time, haunted by the images of the mummified croissant and the possibility of more ancient discarded pastries, Jason had snapped and cleaned Dick’s whole apartment. It wasn’t as bad as he’d feared, but still way beyond his comfort level. And if his spare toothbrush had made its way into Dick’s (now clean) bathroom, then that was only fair.

Of course trauma wasn’t that easy to fix – they gained comfort from one another, but the nightmares didn’t stay gone for long. But there was something reassuring about waking from fear and pain to soft breathing and a warm body. Dick never pressed him about his dreams and Jason returned the favor, instead they offered a wordless, easy comfort, like gentling a small child or wild animal.

Jason’s fear and horror were lessening, reducing back to manageable levels, but Dick’s were not.

Jason had faced his demons; he had confronted Dick, comforted him and received comfort in turn.

Dick had not faced his.

In Jason’s opinion, Dick’s demon was Bruce. Or to be more exact, his shame over the things Bruce had seen, his feelings of failure, his feelings of abandonment and his anxiety over having abandoned Bruce in turn. Jason was kind of an expert in Bruce related angst. And although he knew he had some - for want of a better word - daddy issues, he had nothing on Dick. Dick’s feelings of self were so wrapped up in his relationship with Bruce, and his love was so vast and obsessive it was mildly frightening at times. Bruce was a fucking fool to let that kind of dedication slip away from him, but then Jason thought Dick was just as much of an idiot for devoting so much of himself to other people. Especially Bruce.
Jason often wondered if he was the only person with any reasonable intelligence in their family. Well, him and Alfred. And Tim, sometimes (Oracle was smarter than the lot of them put together, so she didn’t count.)

He had to make the two morons talk to one another, or Dick wouldn’t be able to move forward. He considered calling Alfred, but couldn’t face the possibility of seeing his hurt – Dick was avoiding him too. Instead he called Tim, no doubt Tim was full of angst and pain and woe over his big brother’s absence in his life, but Jason could deal with that. And the nasty bitter part of him that still harbored some resentment for the replacement might even enjoy it.

He called, and Tim answered with “Jason, everything ok?” And Jason damn well knew he hadn’t given the little shit his number.

“Hello? Is this the society for annoying creepy stalkers?”

“What do you want, Jason? I assume this isn’t a social call. Or are you so bored you’re having to engage in prank calls to entertain yourself?”

“Can you repeat that? I don’t speak moron.”

Tim gave a long suffering sigh, and Jason was surprised to realize he quite liked having a little brother to harass. But that wasn’t why he was calling (although he was already planning the call after this one, when everything was back to normal).

“Jason, can you please tell me what’s going on?”

“Yeah, alright,” Jason said easily, leaving a long and no doubt annoying pause. “It’s time Dick got his shit together and talked to Bruce.”

“Oh thank god, I thought he would never come round and put the rest of us out of our misery. You know how Bruce gets when he’s upset.”

“He hasn’t exactly come round to the idea – more like I think we need to force the issue.”

Tim was quiet for a moment and Jason thought for a moment he was going to get all holier than thou about it. Then, thankfully, that didn’t seem to be the case.

“Ok, what’s the plan?”

“That’s why I was calling, dipshit. Two heads are better than one and all that. And you have access to B.”

“Insulting me is not the best way to get my help, Jason.”

“Seems to be working thus far, don’t it?” Jason was pleased to hear a sound that might have been Tim’s teeth grinding together. Kid should stop that before he wore out his perfect pearly whites.

“Fine, pick a place – neutral ground, you get Dick there and I’ll bring Bruce.”

“My west side safe house? Respectable enough for Bruce Wayne to visit. This needs to be done sans masks.”

“Perfect. Tomorrow at eight.” Tim hung up.
Getting Dick there was easy enough, their current relationship was such there weren’t really any questions asked. Jason didn’t envy Tim his side – there were probably a great many questions asked, and their answers carefully analyzed and dissected.

Tim met him in his secondary safe house, one floor below the first. He was dressed casually for once, in a goofy t-shirt of some band Jason had never heard of. It was a nice change – most times when Jason saw Tim, he was either dressed for the night job, or his day job, working for Bruce. Jason felt kind of pissed on his behalf – the kid should have been preparing to go to college and learning how to get drunk and sleep through class, not working the daily grind for daddy.

Tim sat on the sofa and looked at Jason expectantly. Jason looked back, unsure of what he wanted.

“I assume you have surveillance of your other apartment?” Tim prompted, at last.

“Yeah, but I wasn’t planning on using it. Even if they flip out at one another they aren’t going to do any damage. Probably anyway.”

“Not the point, Jason. We should know what’s happening, so if there is some fallout, we can be ready to deal with it.”

Jason mulled that over for a moment. On one hand, Tim was right, it would be useful know what wounds might need a Band-Aid, metaphorically speaking. But on the other hand, it would be a breach of trust for Dick, even if he never found out.

There was also a part of Jason that didn’t want to hear things go well and didn’t want to watch them hug and be close. After some brief introspection, he was surprised to find he was happy to disregard his own feelings in the matter in order to do right by Dick. And doing right by Dick meant not invading his privacy.

“No,” he said, looming in front of Tim, who failed to look intimidated. “Dick’s been through enough non-consensual surveillance to last a life time. And it’s bad enough we tricked him into coming here in the first place. We give him his space.”

Tim looked like he was going to argue, but then reluctantly nodded his head. “Okay.”

“So, wanna play Xbox while we wait?”

“I’ll whip your ass, Jase.”

Jason ignored the nickname, and the warm feeling hearing it caused in his chest. “You don’t even know what games I got, squirt.”

“Doesn’t make a damn bit of difference.”

“Bring it on, boy wonderless.”

It was close to 1am when Jason got a text from Dick: Get your sorry butt here ASAP

Jason replied: on way, just tucking in a tuckered out babybat.
Tim had crashed an hour ago, teenage vigilantes needed their rest, after all. Jason covered his sprawled form with a blanket, and considered attempting a repeat of his forehead art. But he didn’t really have the heart for it, he was too anxious about what Dick was going to say.

He checked his messages: *Tell Tim he’s a dead man walking*

Jason winced, yeah they were both going to be in the doghouse for this one.

Jason gave it fifteen minutes, just to give the illusion of distance, before heading up to the top floor. Dick was sitting on the couch, knees pulled up to his chest defensively. This was going to suck.

“Hey, Dickie.”

“You had no right to do that, Jason.” Dick sounded tired, emotionally exhausted.

Jason perched on the edge of the sofa. “I know I didn’t, but it was a thing that needed to be done.”

“You don’t get to decide that!” Dick snapped.

There wasn’t really a good argument against that, and to be honest, despite Dick being absolutely right and completely justified in his anger, Jason wasn’t actually sorry, so he didn’t insult him with an apology, instead he cut right to the chase. “So how’d it go, did you clear the air?”

Dick let out an aggrieved sigh, his posture becoming slightly more relaxed. “You’re an ass, Jason Peter Todd.”

“Yup.”

Dick rubbed at his face and Jason noticed his eyes looked a little red. “Yeah, we ‘cleared the air’ as you put it. It was fucking horrible, and I just want to forget about it for tonight, okay?”

“Do you feel any better for it?”

“Looking to justify your actions?”

Jason shrugged and leaned back against the soft cushions on the sofa. “I’m just concerned about you, Dickie. I don’t like seeing you so messed up. You’re supposed to be the confident and annoying one, not all sad and twitchy.”

Dick snorted. “You just don’t know me very well, Jay.”

“I know you plenty well, Dickie, and I know you needed to talk it out with B before you could move forward.”

Dick gave him a long, sour look. “You ever take your own advice, Jay?”

“Never. My advice sucks.”

Dick laughed, a slightly wild sound. “Come here,” he said, pointing at the cushion beside him.

“Are you going to hit me?”

“Maybe. You deserve it.”
“Yeah, probably.” Jason slid across the couch and into Dick’s arms, which wrapped around his back like a vice. As hugs went it was kind of an aggressive one – Dick’s anger was very well conveyed in the creaking of Jason’s ribs as they were squeezed.

“We gonna stay here tonight?” Dick asked eventually, his voice muffled against Jason’s chest.

“Yeah, if you want to.”

Dick shoved away from him and stood, he seemed to shake his distress away from him and instead just looked determined. He grabbed Jason by one ear and tugged him off the couch. Jason cussed and stumbled, but Dick was relentless, and dragged him towards the bedroom.

Jason went with it – he really didn’t fancy being at the end of Dick’s fists tonight, a bit of ear torture was about all he could take. In the bedroom Dick finally released him, sent him a challenging look and said, “Don’t know about you, but I’m sleeping in a bed tonight.” And with that he pulled off his t-shirt, shucked his pants and flopped down on the bed.

Jason pointedly ignored the new shiny red scars and faded mottled bruising on Dick’s body, dwelling on it wouldn’t help him sleep. Instead he shrugged out of his own clothes and slid into the bed beside him. Dick shuffled up and slung an arm over Jason’s bare chest. The feel of skin on skin was strange, electric. Jason’s heart beat hard and he struggled to find some equilibrium. Eventually he decided it was probably best if he said something, anything to break the strange pulsing tension.

“Dickie?” he whispered.

Dick started snoring lightly.

Just him with the tension then, clearly. But he couldn’t help but grin in the dim light – there would definitely be time to explore their friendship further. For now he allowed Dick’s comforting presence calm his tingling nerves and lull him to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter to go!
Jan didn’t think he would ever get a proper night’s sleep again. His heart beat too fast in the dark, *thud, thud, thudding* against his chest like it was trying to break free. Even now, in the midmorning light, his body felt tight and twitchy, ready to explode.

His mom and he had been moved to Gotham, away from their old neighborhood and away from their family. He knew it was his fault that his mom was missing her sisters and brother, even though they were fighting. Mattie was going to jail for a long time on the basis of Jan’s testimony, and the family were divided as to who was at fault for what. It was breaking his mom’s heart.

His therapist was always trying to get him to talk about his guilt, but he couldn’t find the words. When he tried, he saw Anderson’s head explode, heard Grayson’s cries of pain and saw Jason spit blood and teeth onto the floor after being beaten.

Jan was paralyzed with fear and shame.

He hadn’t even been back to school, he couldn’t cope with socializing or crowds, instead his lessons were being sent to him via email. Some nights he couldn’t help wondering if he should just give up on everything.

“Janek!” his mom called from downstairs, she sounded anxious. Jan had found that since the incident he had become hyper aware of things like that. The way a voice sounded, the feel of tension in the room.

“Jan, get down here!”

Jan heaved himself reluctantly off his bed and went down stairs. He hadn’t heard the door go, but it must have, as Officer Grayson was sitting at his kitchen table, smiling as he accepted a cup of coffee from Jan’s mom.

“Hello, Jan. How are you holding up?” he asked, like Jan hadn’t last seen him naked and bleeding and covered in piss.

Jan froze in the doorway. Memories and fear washing through him, over him, *drowning* him.

“Jan?” his mom asked, worried.

“Come sit,” Grayson said, gesturing to the chair opposite him. “I only wanted to see how you’re doing, nothing else.” He smiled.

Jan sat. His limbs felt like they were made of wood. Grayson tactfully ignored his discomfort, instead smiling up at Jan’s mom.

“I understand your other son, Marek, has been released from jail and all charges dropped?”

“That’s right, he is thinking of taking the ‘Haven police to court for wrongful arrest. He said his
lawyer suggested it – the one Mr. Wayne sent.”

“That’s good. And he’s doing well?”

“Very well, he’s back at college, changed his major to law.”

Grayson beamed. “That’s the best way to get even when the system screws you over. Get in a position to make a difference.”

Jan couldn’t help but feel that was directed at him in some way. “Is that what you did?” he heard himself ask. He almost wanted to bite back the words.

Grayson pondered for a moment and sipped his coffee. “Yeah I guess it is. The ‘Haven police have a rep for being corrupt. And it’s a rep that’s well deserved. But I found there were some really great people on the force who wanted to make a difference. They just needed a little extra help to start making changes.”

“They still fucked Marek over.”

“Jan! Language!”

He had completely forgotten his mom was still in the room and he winced. But he didn’t feel like holding back his anger, it bubbled under the surface along with a toxic sludge of fear, shame and grief.

“Yeah, there is clearly still a lot of work to be done. Gotham used to have a similar problem, and now under Commissioner Gordon, it’s a pretty good force. There will always be bad people in the police, in any profession. We just have to make sure there are also people who want to do what’s right and fair fighting against them.”

Jan nodded. He thought Grayson’s optimism and belief in people after what he had just been through was fucking weird. But also strangely inspiring.

“I’m sorry for what happened,” Jan blurted. And he really meant it. “I’m sorry for my part in it.”

Grayson shrugged. “I know you are, and I appreciate the apology.”

“It was a stupid thing to do!” Jan’s mom cut in, scowling at him.

“Yes,” Grayson agreed, amicably, “it was a dumb reaction to a bad situation. I did some pretty stupid stuff as a kid too, maybe not quite that stupid, but close. I nearly got myself killed when I was angry and lashing out at an injustice the cops couldn’t touch.”

After the incident, Jan had googled Grayson. Had read about the murder of his parents and his being fostered by Mr Wayne. Jan had read everything he could about them, many of the articles were kind of snide and a bit rude. He had seen the rage behind child-Grayson’s blank little face in the early pictures, and seen it replaced with genuine happiness in the later ones. He had found some level of peace, Jan was sure of it.

“What happened?” he asked.

“A good man taught me a different way of looking at things. A way to channel my anger usefully.” Grayson looked wistful for a moment, then laughed quietly. “Not that it always stops me, or him, from being dumb as hell sometimes. That’s just human nature.”

“Is that why you’re here? To teach me a different way of looking at things?” Jan couldn’t stop the
sullen tone to his voice.

“I think you learned that lesson already,” Grayson said sharply. And Jan winced.

Grayson shrugged, his posture relaxing “I’m not sure there is just one reason I came. Getting over this has been hard for me. Harder than I thought it would be. And I think I needed to see you were safe and well.”

“Why? You should want me in jail! If I was in your position I would never have forgiven any of the people involved!”

“I do forgive you. You had no idea what was going to happen when you got involved.”

“But I did!” Jan shouted, all the guilt and rage bubbling up in him. “I knew they were going to kill you, I don’t deserve a free pass on this!”

“Jan, killing me was an abstract concept before they really got started. Your remorse during and after convinced me of that.”

“How can you be so forgiving, so nice after what happened?”

“I’m not always so forgiving, believe me. I sure as hell don’t forgive the rest of them, but they didn’t feel any remorse. Or at least, the regret they felt was for themselves having been caught.”

“I was just scared for myself too,” Jan insisted, not quite sure why he was so adamant in digging his own grave.

Grayson gave him a long look and then smirked. “I just had a sudden insight as to why people get so annoyed with me when I say stuff like that. Do you regret what happened to me?”

“Yes.” Because he truly did.

“Would you change it, if you could?”

“Yeah.”

“Even if you never had to witness it, no repercussions for you or your family?”

“Yes.”

That’s good enough for me, Jan. That and your promise to come talk to me, or another responsible adult if you ever get the urge to be a total moron like that again, ok?”

“I promise.”

Grayson finished his coffee and smiled at Jan’s mom again. “Thank you for your hospitality Ms. Bednarczyk.” He pronounced the name perfectly.

Jan’s mom nodded, she looked relived, and Jan wondered if she had doubted him before Grayson’s visit. The though sent further tumultuous emotion flying though him. His stomach rolled.

“Thank you for coming, Officer Grayson. Forgiveness is an important part of healing,” Jan’s mom said.

Grayson stood and reached for his beat-up denim jacket.
Jan’s mom was right, he couldn’t move on if he wasn’t forgiven, and it wasn’t just Grayson he had wronged. “Is Jason ok? “He blurted, suddenly terrified of the answer.

Grayson smiled, it was a sweet expression, like remembering a tender moment.

“He’s fine. Moaning and complaining about his leg and the fact he lost a few teeth. He’s been really good to me over the whole thing, helped me get my head straight.”

Jan nodded, he really wasn’t sure if they were just friends, or if the insinuations Anderson had made were true. He could maybe believe Grayson was queer, but he couldn’t imagine someone like Jason being that way. But then, what did he know?

He had googled Jason too, but without a last name it had been impossible to find anything. The only Jason he could find connected at all to Richard Grayson was another kid Wayne had taken in, but he was long dead, so it hadn’t seemed worth investigating further.

“Well you tell him I’m sorry too?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’ll tell him.”

After Grayson said his good byes, Jan dodged passed his mom and her questions and retreated back to his room. He couldn’t decide if he felt lighter for the experience or not. He suspected that he would be more certain of his feelings tomorrow when things had a chance to settle. Back on his bed, he caught movement out of the corner of his eye and glanced out the window. Jason was standing in the shadows opposite the house. Despite the cast on his leg he looked pretty intimidating, smoking a cigarette and glaring at the sidewalk beneath his feet.

Jan’s brief flash of fear that the big man was here to murder him was eased as he saw Grayson walk up to join him. Grayson plucked the cigarette from between Jason’s lips and stomped it out, making Jason’s scowl deepen. Grayson seemed unconcerned, beckoning Jason to follow him away from the house. Jan couldn’t hear what they were saying, but from the hand waving they seemed to be having a good natured argument.

Jason was a scary guy - imposing, built like a fighter, not to mention the fact he had withstood some serious damage and then shot someone in the head without flinching. Jan was in complete terrified awe of him. But the gentle way he touched Grayson’s waist as they walked and the warm smile Grayson sent him in turn was at odds with his memories of the man. Then Grayson snatched the carton of cigarettes from Jason’s grip and darted off with them, taunting and gleeful and Jason’s colorful cussing floated back to Jan’s window as he hobbled after him, hampered by his broken leg.

Not for the first time, Jan was very glad they had both lived.

He still felt adrift and tangled up from the things he’d seen and done, but being forgiven, and seeing Grayson recovering and happily tormenting his friend gave him a glimmer of peace. And for the first time since he woke up in the hospital he felt things might actually get better.

The End.

For now.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone for reading, and for those who have left such lovely comments, they have brightened up a tough year :)

Next up – chapter 14 of And Who By Fire!

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