

## Soliloquy

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1395031) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1395031>.

Rating:	<a href="#">General Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">DCU</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Jason Todd</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake</a> , <a href="#">Dick Grayson</a> , <a href="#">Barbara Gordon</a> , <a href="#">Stephanie Brown</a> , <a href="#">Cassandra Cain</a> , <a href="#">Damian Wayne</a> , <a href="#">Alfred Pennyworth</a> , <a href="#">Bruce Wayne</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">fluff week</a> , <a href="#">Hamlet - Freeform</a>
Stats:	Published: 2014-03-31 Words: 4799

## Soliloquy

by [somehowunbroken](#)

### Summary

Jason's doing it for the cash, or so he tells himself. [Written for the Fluff Week challenge on tumblr.]

### Notes

Written for Fluff Week! The prompt was: "Jason gets the lead role in Hamlet at a community theater to pay the bills. When Tim shows up to watch, he's surprised. When the rest of the batkids show, he calls Tim a sellout. But when Bruce shows up? He's floored."

Here's the thing: he's doing it for the cash. Or, okay, that's what he tells himself.

Jason likes Shakespeare, likes the language and the feel and the dirty jokes that most of today's audiences don't get. He likes the way it stirs up emotion in its performers, and the way that it'll never fail to draw a crowd – even if they're not sure of what's going on, people love to gather and watch a performance. Thanks to public school, everyone's got a basic understanding of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

And, well, *Hamlet*.

It's not something you find often near Crime Alley, people bringing in new tragedy that wasn't born there, but maybe that's why the theatre chooses *Hamlet* - it's something that people can enjoy in all its sadness without being driven to grief over it. Jason likes the idea of that, likes giving people something that their community has invested in that can maybe also bring Shakespeare to people who'd never be able to see it in the fancy theatres in the Central District. He tries out mostly

on a whim, but the director stops him halfway through his audition and tells him the lead is his if he wants it, and, well, there's no way Jason can turn down a paying part in a play that maybe resonates with him a little.

He's really glad that he's not technically a part of Bruce's patrol schedule; rehearsals run long, and if he had to be out there at nine sharp every night like most of his fellow ass-kickers, he'd be in major trouble. As it is, he has to prioritize which parts of his patrol route need to be visited and which he can let slide. It's a dangerous thing to do in Crime Alley, but he figures it's worth it. Somewhere, the math on it works out, and he doesn't want to examine where it is, lest he find that it doesn't actually balance.

It gets to the point a week before opening night where he realizes that something is going to have to give. He needs more time in his nights than he has, and rehearsals are getting longer, not shorter. There's something going on in the East End that needs a lot more attention than he can give it, and he can't back out of the play at this point. There are no understudies in Gotham community theatre.

He pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. There's really only one thing he can do at this point, so he grabs his phone and sends a text before he can talk himself out of it. His phone rings a minute later, and he takes a deep breath before he answers it. "Yeah."

"Jason," Tim says. "What's going on?"

So. long story short, he has to explain things to little red in exchange for him covering whatever's going down in the East End. To his credit, Tim just hums when Jason admits he's in a play, and asks how long Jason will need him to cover for. Jason's glad that he doesn't have to get into the specifics, his motivations and his thought processes, because they're things he's already failing at not examining. He doesn't need to spew feelings all over... anyone, but especially not *family*.

It takes a load off of his to-do list and therefore off of his mind, so the last week of rehearsals is only as crazy as hell week ever is. He doesn't get shot, he doesn't get punched anywhere that'll show, and the only stabbing that happens is the scripted kind. In short, it's the absolute best he could've hoped for.

Which is why he's so nervous on opening night, really.

He spends the time between costuming and makeup peering out into the theatre as the seats fill. He's glad to see a bunch of his neighbors in the seats; he'd encouraged them to come see the play, and it's nice to know that they decided to. The back left corner fills up with a bunch of kids involved in a local gang, and Jason tenses for a little while, until he remembers catching one of the punks a few days ago and giving him a ticket to the performance instead of a beatdown. Apparently the kid is taking "get a different hobby" more literally than Jason thought he would.

Marina hauls him away from the curtain to get his nose powdered, and by the time she's finished, it's too late for him to peek out again. It's probably just as well; he doesn't need to psych himself out. He takes his place in the wings, watches as Act I plays out in front of him, and takes a deep breath when the scene changes. It's go time.

He doesn't flub his lines or trip, and he manages not to whack anyone with his sword. He's doing pretty well, actually, and Jason almost forgets that there's an audience out there. It's partially being swept up in the performance and partially the overbright stage lights, but he's thankful for it when intermission rolls around, because suddenly he can hear the audience applauding and moving around on the other side of the curtain, and the nerves return.

"You're doing great," the director tells him, beaming and handing him a bottle of water. "They're

eating it up, Jay. This is fantastic."

"Thanks, Marcus," Jason says. He manages to keep himself from dumping the water all over his head, but only because Marina will probably kill him if he needs a wardrobe change at this point. "I'm having a good time, y'know? I'm glad we're doing this here."

"Yeah," Marcus says. He sighs and glances out the window. He's a product of the same streets Jason is from; he's got two kids and an aging mother to take care of, and Gotham isn't any better to her people of color than she is to the white folks they put on the "help the poor" brochures. Marcus is doing this for his kids, a way to give the community something so it might be a better place to raise children in, and Jason can't blame him for wanting to try. Everyone's got their reasons for being here and doing this, and Marcus is a good guy with enough hope for change that Jason thinks he just might be able to achieve it.

"We'll have to do something lighthearted next," Jason says, and Marcus glances away from the window and smiles. "Maybe something a little more modern. Something with more humor."

"This place could use some laughs," Marcus agrees. "We'll brainstorm when our run draws to a close, how's that?"

"It's a date," Jason says, draining his water bottle. "I'm going to get my makeup freshened up. See you in a few, yeah?"

"You bet," Marcus says as Jason walks off.

Marina is pretty pleased with how his makeup is holding up, so Jason actually has a few minutes to breathe before he needs to get ready for the third act. He finds himself back at the curtain, peeking out into the crowd again. The kids from the gang are already back in their seats, poring over the program and jabbing at different parts. Jason smiles, mentally scheduling a time to drop into the gang's territory and talk about the play with the kids. It'll do everyone some good.

Jason's eyes sweep over the rest of the crowd, taking in faces he knows and people he doesn't. He recognizes more than he thought he would, which is great. There's a small knot of people in the back of the theatre, murmuring to each other and clearly trying to look at something or someone without making it obvious. Jason squints in that direction, but as far as he can tell, they're all looking at some skinny guy with his back to Jason. He's short and lean, with dark, messy, hair, and it takes Jason a minute to realize where he knows that head from.

"Goddamnit, Drake," he hisses, butterflies back in his stomach. "What the hell-"

"Jason, get in position," Marina snaps from behind him. "Marcus is freaking out that you ran off or something. Don't kill the director on opening night, okay? It's bad luck."

"Right," he mutters, turning around and taking a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "Right. Let's do this thing."

Jason does his best to throw himself into the second half of the performance, but it's harder now that he knows Tim is out there somewhere. He's less surprised than he could be; he had told Tim about it, after all, and it's not like Tim to pass up an opportunity for... whatever it is he's doing. Hopefully not recording all of this on his phone to show Dick later.

He's not sure how he feels when the last scene rolls around; he squares off with Javier, who's playing Laertes, and they fence to the death pretty well. Jason delivers his last lines and slumps over convincingly, and then it's a few minutes of staying as still as he can manage while the play

wraps up. The curtain drops and Jason blinks against the hardwood for a minute before standing up and giving a whoop of satisfaction.

There are back slaps and congratulations and hugs all around. Marcus looks like he's had Christmas come in the middle of May, and Jason's thrilled for him; he's honestly kind of excited about working things out with Marcus to extend the community theatre program. He hangs around backstage for a while with the cast and crew, rehashing some parts and complimenting others. It's great, feeling like he's part of the community, and he's kind of sad that he has to leave to get a shortened patrol in.

"I'll catch you guys tomorrow," he says, waving as he walks out.

Jason was honestly kind of expecting Tim to ambush him as he exited the theatre, but there's no sign of him as Jason walks back to his apartment. Jason shrugs and whistles tunelessly as he goes. If he wants to pretend it never happened, well, that's his weird prerogative.

He's suited up and swinging through his patrol twenty minutes later. He makes it an hour and a half before he picks up on the tail, and another fifteen minutes before he trips Red Robin with a jumpline as he lands behind Jason on a roof.

"Thanks," Tim groans, still facedown in the grit. "I can spit gravel. My night is now complete."

"Come to critique my performance?" Jason asks, crossing his arms over his chest. Suddenly he's kind of nervous, because there's no way Tim hasn't seen *Hamlet* before, no way he hasn't had the experience of actual actors in authentic costumes with fancy accents. Jason's proud of what he's doing, and he doesn't need Tim to approve of it, but he's not really prepared to hear shit about it, either.

Tim rolls over before clambering to his feet. "I enjoyed it," he says. "I thought your delivery of the monologue at the end of Act Two was fantastic, and I haven't seen someone put that much life into the 'to be or not to be' monologue since... well, ever, probably."

"Life," Jason snorts. "Great choice of descriptors for that particular scene."

Tim shrugs, but there's a definite smile on his face. "Anyway, I just wanted to let you know... you know. Great job, and all that."

Great. Now Jason's feeling self-conscious. "Thanks."

"Yeah," Tim says. There's a pause before he jerks his thumb over his shoulder. "I'm gonna just-"

"Crime, yeah," Jason says, heading in the opposite direction. "Let's go stop some."

They split up, and Jason puts the meeting out of his mind in his quest to bring a little more peace to Crime Alley. It's a decent patrol, not too eventful but not boring, and Jason gets back to his place in time to crash for a full six hours before he gets up and heads to the theatre.

He's much less nervous for the second performance. He doesn't feel the need to scan each member of the audience like he had last night, which is a good thing, because if he'd seen Dick and Babs in the front row before the show started, he probably would have... he's not sure. Thrown up, maybe. Having Tim there was one thing, but Dick and Babs are entirely another that he's not sure how to deal with.

He gets through the first half without screwing up yet again, knock on wood, and during intermission he goes for his cell. Tim answers on the second ring, but Jason doesn't let him get a

word in. "You told! Sellout! Why would you do that?"

"Breathe," Tim snaps, and there's enough command in his voice for Jason to gulp a breath down, damn it. "I didn't tell anyone anything, but I also flatly refused to tell anyone anything. You know Dick and mysteries."

"Damn it," Jason whines. "He and Babs are here."

Tim hums. "I talked him into leaving Damian home. You're welcome."

Jason feels fresh sweat break out. "Do not. No. No demon brats allowed in this theatre."

"I'll let him know you've put salt at all the doors and windows," Tim promises. He's laughing a little, the bastard. "I'm sure you're doing fine, Jason. Break a leg in the second half, okay?"

"I'll break your leg," Jason mutters, hanging up to the sound of Tim laughing outright.

Marina frowns when he comes in for his touch-up, but she's pretty much a wizard, so Jason's makeup and hair are fixed well within the time frame for the intermission. Jason takes his place for the second half and strides out when the curtain rises, doing his best to pretend that he knows nobody in the audience.

He doesn't get the chance to escape gracefully this time; Marcus snags his elbow a few minutes after the final curtain drops, grinning. "You've got some fans who want to see you," he says, jerking his chin at the door in the pit. "You're bringing in the crowds, Jay. Go meet your adoring public."

Jason makes a face. "Dark-haired guy a little shorter than I am, redheaded lady with glasses?" he guesses, and Marcus nods. "Great. Just... great."

Marcus' expression drops. "Are they trouble? I can call Andre, get him to throw them out."

"Worse than trouble," Jason says, rolling his eyes. "They're *family*."

It makes Marcus laugh and his expression lighten, so Jason bites the bullet and heads for the stage door. Babs is laughing at something when he cracks the door open, and Dick is smiling like he'd done something amazing. Their cutesy couple-ness does something complicated in his stomach that he makes a command decision to ignore as he pushes the door open and steps out. Babs sees him immediately, and her face lights as she reaches for him. "Jason!"

"Hey," he says, shoving his hands into his pockets before remembering, right, his costume doesn't have pockets. There's an awkward moment of silence while he figures out what to do with his arms before Dick snorts and walks over to hug him. That isn't any less awkward, but Jason can see Babs raise an eyebrow, so he hugs back.

"You were great," Dick says, pulling back to smile at him. "Really, really great. I didn't know you could act like that."

"Surprise," Jason says, waggling his fingers.

"You were a great Hamlet," Babs says, reaching out to him. He hugs her much more readily, and she smiles up at him with a twinkle in her eyes. "I knew all that tutoring would pay off someday."

"That was math," he protests, but he's smiling now, too. "Thanks for... coming, I guess. And not bringing mini brat."

"Tim wouldn't let us," Dick says, frowning.

Babs rolls her eyes. "You told Tim it was date night, and he decided that we didn't have to take our de facto kid on date night," she says, and Jason smiles harder. Sometimes family isn't the soul-crushing menace that he knows it can be.

"That said," Babs continues, turning back to him, "don't be surprised if Steph and Cassandra show up one of these nights. They'll get a kick out of it, and I'll make them promise to behave."

Jason rubs a hand through his hair. "Okay. Thanks for the warning."

"And I won't send Damian on his own," Dick promises.

"Comforting," Jason snorts. "But thanks."

The goodbyes after that are quick; they've got things to do tonight just like he does, so they part ways and head for their bases. Jason's night is no more eventful than his last night had been; he drops in on the gang kids who had attended his performance, and they're eager to engage with him when he asks about the play. He spends almost an hour talking themes and motivations before giving them some references for further reading. Some of them will make use of it and some of them were only in it for the swords, Jason knows, but if he can get any of these kids out of the gang life and invested in something else, he'll take it.

Gotham coughs up a few muggers for him to stop, but he's still back in his apartment by four. He sleeps pretty well, dreaming about Ophelia and Horatio wearing domino masks and fencing on the roof of the National Bank, and wakes up ready to face Team Batgirl in the audience.

He's less than thrilled to peer out into the audience and see Damian sitting between them, but Steph waves as soon as she sees Jason's face sticking out and pinches Damian when he scowls in Jason's direction, so Jason pastes a grin on and waves back. He does his best to act with his body as much as his voice, and when the girls haul Damian backstage after the performance, Cass smiles and compliments his swordfighting. He figures that's as glowing a review as he's likely to get from anyone. so he's happy enough about that. Damian mostly just scowls at the floor, which is just fine, and Steph asks him about the future of the theatre and what they're planning next. He tells her that they're not sure yet, and she winks at him.

"I might suck at acting, but I'm willing to try out," she says. "Or, hey, makeup! I'm good at makeup, if your crew needs another set of hands."

He's taken aback for a minute, but then he remembers that her story is only different from his by a few pages. He nods instead and promises to get her information when he has it, and they all hug it out before the girls drag Damian away. There are a few other people in the audience who approach him, and it's great to talk with community members, to give them the news that the theatre is planning to keep its doors open and run other shows in the future. It feels like the breath of life that Marcus was hoping it would be, and it gives Jason a little bit of hope, too.

He keeps his patrol light and crashes early; Marina had commented about the bags under his eyes, and though he's been getting decent sleep, it can't hurt to turn in a little early. Tim is still watching the East End, so Jason lets him know to call if he needs anything and sleeps. He wakes up rested nine hours later, and it's a great feeling. Maybe he should try sleeping more often.

There's nobody he recognizes when he peeks out into the crowd. Jason sighs, not sure if he's glad about that or not; he's out of family members save two, and Alfred wouldn't show up without Bruce. Jason's not sure he's quite ready for that particular confrontation, but Batman's got better

things to do than attend some random community theatre production when it's not related to crime, anyway.

The show goes off without a hitch, as do the next seven nights; Jason's getting antsy about patrol, because Tim keeps saying that things are covered unless something blows up, and Jason's just superstitious enough to knock on wood when Tim says it out loud. Things are never this quiet in Crime Alley for this long, so he can't help feeling like something big is brewing – until he flips out his window one night and sees Nightwing and Robin waving at him from the roof of the hotel across the street. Apparently his family is running interference, which is... nicer than Jason thought it would be.

Still, he's glad that the two weeks of the play are winding down. It'll be nice to get back to a regular patrol schedule, and to work with Marcus on the next project. He's been slacking on hours at the community center, too, and he knows they've been feeling his absence. Three more nights, then the cast party, and he can go back to patrolling his territory without worrying about messing up his face or his ribs or anything.

He gets to the theatre an hour before call; he wants to talk to Marcus about *Waiting for Godot* and some of Paula Vogel's works. They're going to try to work out a rotating schedule with different plays if they can find enough actors, and Jason's hoping he can talk some of the street kids into trying out.

"Jason!" Marcus says, waving as Jason enters. He's sitting at his desk, and there's someone that Jason can't quite see in the seat across from him. "Come in and meet our new financial backer."

Jason moves in, smile primed and ready, and freezes with his hand stuck halfway out.

Bruce smiles up at him. "Hello, Jason."

"Bruce," he manages. "Uh."

"The Wayne Foundation has money set aside for community enrichment," Bruce says before Jason can stutter anything else. "I've been talking to Mr. Walker about using some of the funds to help with some renovations and equipment upgrades for the theatre."

"We could paint the entranceway," Marcus says wistfully. "There'd be enough money to fix the sign out front."

"That's great," Jason says. He's trying not to show too much of an emotional reaction, mostly because he's not sure what form it would take. He's got even odds on hugging Bruce for helping and decking him for interfering. "How do we sign up?"

Marcus starts talking about a proposal and planning, and Jason nods through the rest of the meeting. Bruce promises to stick around for the performance, and Jason's stomach drops to the floor. Marcus just smiles and shakes Bruce's hand, and Jason forces himself to do the same.

The rehearsal notes are tough to get through; Jason is preoccupied by thoughts of Bruce watching the play, and Javier smacks him three times with his sword before Jason can get his head in the game. Marcus is frowning at him, but Jason shakes his head and focuses, and the rest of the warm-up goes well. It takes Marina longer than normal to do his makeup, and she keeps poking him and telling him to relax his face, so Jason takes a deep breath and makes the command decision to repress until the performance is over. He can manage that. Probably.

Once he's done with his costume and makeup, Jason frantically texts Tim. *why didnt you tell me he*

*was coming you are the worst brother friend person in the world*

*i think i'm also the best. can't be too many of those. and if i told you, you'd freak out.*

*right because springing it on me calms me down*

There's no reply to that, so Jason sighs and puts his phone back in his coat pocket. It's time to get in place anyway, so he shakes his head vigorously and gets into position.

The play is perfect. better than opening night, really; Jason delivers his lines with as much emotion as he can muster, and he nails the scenes with the ghost in ways that he really hadn't achieved in previous performances. The other actors rise to the occasion, and by the time Jason gasps out his final lines, he's completely wrung out and more satisfied than he's been in a really long time.

"Dude," Javier says when the curtain falls on the wildly applauding crowd. "Did anyone else get the feeling that we just *killed it*?"

"We totally killed it," Marta says, sitting up and adjusting her dress. She's not built like your typical Gertrude, but she's doing a fantastic job at it, in Jason's humble opinion. "I mean, wow, guys."

Marcus comes running in, laughing so hard he can't speak. He wraps his arms around Marta and picks her up, spinning her through the air until she smacks him and he sets her down. He turns to Jason, still grinning. "That was incredible!"

"We did good," Jason says proudly, slinging his arm over Javier's shoulders. "I mean, we totally rocked, am I right?"

"Quite right," Jason hears from behind him. He spins so quickly that he accidentally smacks Javier in the arm, but he doesn't hear the complaint; he's too busy staring at the proudest smile he's ever seen on Alfred's face. "That was an inspiring performance, my boy."

"Thanks," Jason says, hear suddenly pounding in his chest. "I really... I couldn't have done it without everyone. Y'know?"

"I do," Alfred acknowledges. He turns and nods to the rest of the assembled cast. "It's been many years since I've seen such a fine performance of the Bard's work. I look forward to seeing what you do in the future."

"Uh," Javier says, glancing at Jason. "Thanks, Mr..."

"Pennyworth," Jason says. "My grandfather."

Alfred's smile makes Javier's questioning noise totally worth it. "Indeed. And, if I might steal you away for a moment, your... father... is waiting in the receiving room."

Jason swallows and nods, following Alfred out into the audience. He's going to have to explain a lot more than he was bargaining on to the rest of the cast and crew, but he's pretty sure that Alfred wouldn't be leading him to Bruce if Bruce was going to tell him he sucked.

"Jason," Bruce says when they enter the receiving room. Jason's got half a second to brace himself before he's being wrapped in a hug that he really, really didn't see coming.

"Uh," Jason says, vacillating between *hug back*, *moron* and *abort abort*. He ends up awkwardly patting Bruce's back. "Hey, B."



"That was excellent," Bruce says, pulling back and smiling. "Dick told me that you were good, but I have to admit, I wasn't expecting a performance of that caliber."

Jason raises an eyebrow. "I'm going to tell him you don't trust his taste."

Bruce laughs. "He won't be surprised. Really, though, it was impressive. I'm glad that this theatre came up on the list of organizations that the Foundation was thinking of backing."

"About that," Jason says. "Why here?"

Bruce sighs, and some of the cheer fades from his face. "It's not the same theatre," he says, looking away. "But it's not far away, either. It's been too long since this area had a place like this, so when news got to the Foundation that some people were working to bring theatre back to Crime Alley... well. Lucius forwarded me the information immediately."

"It had nothing to do with it being one of my projects?" Jason crosses his arms over his chest. "One that you approve of?"

"I know we're not much on coincidences in our family, but I can provide the paperwork that says it isn't more than that," Bruce says. "And, to be blunt, you and Marcus Walker have done a lot with very little here, but the money from the Foundation would get you a lot further."

Costumes. New makeup. They could fix the lighting, and the seats in the back that have seen better days. There are a lot of things that they could do with some money.

"Yeah," Jason says, letting his arms drop. "Yeah, we could."

"I'm glad to hear it," Bruce says. He steps forward like he's going to try another hug, but Jason is positive that he doesn't have the emotional fortitude to deal with another one of those, so he sticks his hand out instead. Bruce snorts but shakes it.

Jason leans in to clap Alfred in a half-hug. "Thanks for coming, Alfred."

"Of course, Master Jason," Alfred says with a smile. "Do send along your performance schedule, and I'll make sure we allow time to attend each production at least once."

"Will do," he promises. He smiles as they leave the theatre.

Well, he thinks, maybe *Hamlet* isn't always a complete tragedy.

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