

Cockblocked

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by [FabulaRasa](#)

Summary

Bruce and Hal are just trying to get it on like any two normal people trying for a casual hook-up. It isn't their fault that life (and Barry, and Dick) keeps getting in the way. Humor with a side of serious, angst with a side of fluff, salmon with a side of risotto.

This is Bruce/Hal, with a substantial side of Jay/Dick. Mentions of Clark/Diana and Oliver/Dinah.

"So there was this one kid—Alex Pendleton, I cannot believe I remember his name, but it was Alex Pendleton, all right. Two forms above us at St. Paul's."

Bruce's sigh in response was more of a groan, and he rubbed at his forehead with a wince. "Oliver," he said.

"Shut up, I'm telling a story. So Alex had this thing where he would fight you, right? I mean, to the extent that we knew anything about fighting. But Alex wasn't bad—he was varsity wrestling and captain of the fencing team, so you know, he had it going on."

"Oh, the *fencing team*," Hal said. "Well then."

"Surely it merits a mention that Oliver was captain of the squash team," Bruce said, and Clark and Barry spluttered a laugh at that one.

"So *anyway*," Oliver said, riding over them. "Alex had this thing going where he would fight you, for money. Every week, behind the boathouses, Alex and a group of guys would meet up, and you'd pay your money and he would fight you. You win, you get double your stake. You lose, Alex and his uber-cool buddies would laugh their asses off at you, and you'd be out your hundred."

"Boathouses?" Barry said in some mystification, and "A *hundred*?" said Hal. "These were high

school kids, right? High school kids, dropping c-notes?"

"High school kids at one of the country's most expensive boarding schools," Dinah supplied. She was idly stirring her drink. "Spending money was not so much an issue for them."

"Anyway, my point is, every week Bruce would put his money down. Every goddamn week, he would go down to the boathouses and put down his hundred and strip off his jacket and go at it with Alex Pendleton."

"Now when you say, *go at it*. . ." Hal was squinting at the ceiling.

"Bruce defeated him soundly, of course," Diana said.

"Oh hell no," Oliver said, and the wince on Bruce's face deepened. "Jesus Christ, are you kidding me? Bruce got the shit beaten out of him, every goddamn week. Every week I would say, Bruce, what the hell are you doing, and every week Bruce would march down there to get his skinny fourteen-year-old ass handed to him. I'm telling you, it was a bloodbath."

"Oliver, for the love of—"

"No no hang on, I'm telling this story. And so I say Bruce, what the hell are you doing? And he says, I'm learning how to fight him. And I say, are you fucking kidding me? You're not learning anything, you're picking your teeth off the ground, and one of these days Alex is going to do you some serious damage. And so then one day—"

"Bruce turned the tables on him. He had finally discovered the weakness in this Alex's fighting style, and mastered him," Diana concluded, triumphantly.

"N-no," Oliver said. "Bruce pretty much just kept getting the shit beaten out of him. But one day he just stopped. He didn't go down to the boathouse anymore, didn't mention it again. And I asked him about it, said Bruce, what's up, did you finally just give up? And Bruce says no, I didn't give up, I had to stop because—" Here Oliver's laugh overtook him, and it all got too much for him. He bent over and gave himself to the wheezing. Bruce tossed his napkin on the table in disgust.

"For God's sake," he muttered.

"He told Alex Pendleton he had leukemia," Oliver choked out, with tears in his eyes. "Said he was going to Boston every other week for chemo. So Alex felt so bad, he donated like two grand of his winnings to Bruce's cancer fund."

Hal was grinning. "You devious little shit," he said. "I didn't know you had it in you."

"I don't understand," Diana said.

"I didn't have leukemia," Bruce explained.

"No shit," Oliver said.

"It was just that Alfred found out. That was—that was actually why I had to stop." Oliver roared with laughter at that, banging his hand on the table in his exuberance, and Clark laughed louder than any of them. Hal had stretched his long legs out and tipped his head back against his chair, shaking with a quiet laugh.

"But you avenged yourself later," Diana said. "When you had mastered combat, you challenged this Alex Pendleton and demonstrated your superior skills. I'll wager he learned a lesson he did not

soon forget."

"Not exactly," Bruce said.

"Well, you should find him today. Surely he cannot be hard to locate."

"Hard to *locate*?" Oliver grinned. "Penny's chief financial at Chase Manhattan, the only thing hard to locate about him is his waistline. I'm pretty sure getting challenged by Batman would make his internal organs melt out his asshole in a dripping puddle."

"Nice," Dinah said. "Bruce, no more wine for Oliver, it's doing terrible things for his language."

"I always thought alcohol improved Oliver's vocabulary. His metaphors are far more vivid when he's several bottles of Pinot to the south."

"Hey, speaking of," Barry said, reaching for an empty bottle on the table. The evening's carnage was spread across the vast dining table like the remains of a well-fought battle: empty wine bottles arranged like sentinels, disemboweled dim sum, gnawed steak bones. It had all the earmarks of the impromptu dinner party it was, but then, no one had expected the day's off-world rescue mission to end in such a blazing streak of glory, with a peace treaty between warring worlds negotiated and a brighter future for at least one corner of the galaxy. It was Oliver who had demanded they celebrate, and insisted Wayne Manor was the place for it, Bruce's protests to the contrary—and now, of course, he was stretched at the head of the table like he owned the place, talking louder than any of them, and Dinah was doing nothing to control him but smiling that indulgent smile and absently playing with the hand trailing over the side of his chair.

"Can't help but notice this bottle's empty," Barry said, wagging the empty bottle in Bruce's direction. Hal was looking at him with concern.

"You don't think you ought to go easy there?"

"What? Nah, I'm fine, my metabolism moves way too fast for it to have any effect on me," he said, with a distinctly lopsided grin. "Hey Bruce, see can you find any more of that Mossy Toe?"

Bruce snatched the bottle from him. "It's a 2003 Masseto, and there isn't any more of it. I'm going to go see if I can find you some Franzia before my cellars are completely demolished."

"Princess," Hal said with a lazy grin, and Bruce ignored him. Ignored Clark and Diana, too, who had started to make out right there at the table—or at least, what he would call making out. Had they been in public they could have received a police citation; were Alfred in town they would have received at least a stern look. Of course, were Alfred in town they wouldn't have had to resort to delivery dim sum and leftovers.

He made his way down the hall to the wine cellar stairs, trying to restrain the roll of his eyes. If Alfred were here, getting everyone out of his house wouldn't be a problem; one frosty glance from Alfred could have people hastily gathering their coats. The problem with this crowd was, they were utterly unintimidated by his glares. Immunity born of over-exposure, probably. He sighed and pushed back the door to the cellars.

Hal tried to talk to Dinah for a while, but Clark and Diana were in between them, and that was becoming distracting, to say the least. And then Ollie kept shifting closer to Dinah, and his hands kept wandering, and from Dinah's small smile it was clear she was really only listening to about a quarter of what Hal was saying, anyway. And Barry next to him had found a finger of scotch in an abandoned bottle and was drizzling it on his noodle rolls like some demented sundae.

"I think you have an eating disorder," Hal said, and Barry nodded.

"Oh definitely," he said, tucking into his scotch roll.

So after a while he got up and went to find Bruce, to see if he could poke at him some, because that was always fun. He found him still down in the wine cellar, buried in the corner behind some of the tall racks, frowning at bottles thoughtfully. "Hey," Hal said, and Bruce grunted in answer. Hal ran a finger over a dusty bottle, and wondered how much it cost. If you added up all the wine in this room, would it be worth more than the house itself, or less? He leaned against a rack and watched Bruce weighing his various bottles, and considered.

"So I know why you fought Alex Pendleton," he said.

"Do tell."

"So he would touch you," Hal said. "It was the only way you could get his hands all over you, right? Two years older than you, captain of the badminton club or whatever. Probably a blond, I bet you like 'em blond. Some sort of Aryan god, right?"

Bruce was ignoring him, which was no good. "Hey," Hal said. "Takes one to know one. I used to pull that kind of shit too."

And he leaned forward, putting his hands on either side of Bruce, trapping him at the rack. "I could help you reach something on the top shelf," he said, lowering his voice and moving his hips just fractionally closer to Bruce's backside. "If you wanted some help reaching things, that is."

"You probably imagine you are being subtle."

"Nah, subtle's going nowhere with you, I'm not an idiot." And tentatively, because Bruce hadn't ripped his arm off yet but it remained a possibility, he placed a hand on Bruce's waist. He felt the immediate stiffening.

"Get your hand off me," Bruce said, in a voice that meant business, and Hal did. Stayed where he was, though. Bruce turned to face him. The next thing Hal knew his spine had slammed into the opposite rack with an audible *crack* that was either the oak timbers or one of his ribs.

"Hey," Hal gasped, "hang on, I was only—" The grip in his hair was painful, yanking his neck back. *It was just a motherfucking pass, calm down*, he opened his mouth to say, but then Bruce's lips were on his.

It wasn't the sort of punishing, bruising kiss he had expected. It wasn't rough at all. It was. . . gentle. Bruce's tongue pushed his mouth open. Hal eased his defensive stance and found he was in Bruce's arms. Bruce was not just a good kisser; he was a fucking amazing kisser. Not one of those scorched-earth, let-me-hose-down-the-inside-of-your-mouth-with-a-pressure-washer kind of kissers. It was shockingly gentle, and nine thousand kinds of arousing, and before Hal knew it his arms were coming around Bruce, and his casual pass was turning into a quietly intense mutual grope session, here in the wine racks.

Bruce had inched closer as they were kissing, and Hal got a hand on his back and moved it lower, pushing him in even closer. "Jesus," Hal gasped, in the too-quiet room. He tasted so goddamn good. Bruce made a small noise in his throat. *Okay, so that's not just me*, he thought.

He was getting hard, right here in Bruce Wayne's fancy-ass basement, and what was more he could feel that Bruce was getting hard too. Could *feel* it. He tried a small rub of his cock against Bruce's, just a tiny motion, and he heard Bruce make that same small noise. "Air," Hal panted, and Bruce

lifted off, but then that was too far away, he needed Bruce's mouth back *now*.

They were necking like fucking teenagers, and it was the taste—Bruce's mouth had an actual taste to it. There didn't seem to be a plan here other than press as hard as they could to one another, and right now that sounded like an excellent plan to him, that sounded like genius. "Christ," he moaned, and Bruce's mouth did kiss him hard at that. He wanted his fingers in that hair, but he also wanted them in that ass, and maybe if he moved one hand up and one hand down—

"Hal?" said Barry's voice from the top of the stairs, and they froze. *Fuck*, Hal mouthed.

"Y-yeah," Hal called. "Just helping Bruce with something. Be right up."

Bruce arched a brow at him, and his thumb started doing this thing with Hal's collarbone; not so much stroking as pressing a button that only his fingers even knew was there, apparently. "Okay," Barry said. "I'll come help too. There's nothing to do upstairs. I think Ollie and Dinah went to have sex someplace. What are you guys doing?"

"Just taking these bottles upstairs," Bruce said, and he handed off two random bottles to Barry, moving quickly enough—Hal noticed—that the bulge in his pants was obscured. He needn't have bothered; Barry was clearly blasted out of his ever-living skull, and how that had happened Hal had no idea.

Barry's condition didn't stop round two of dinner, though this part of dinner was almost entirely liquid, and Ollie's stories just got louder and progressively less funny. Every now and again Hal would meet Bruce's eyes, which were quiet and mainly resting on him, and his skin would itch to touch him again. After a while Bruce pushed his glass away. "I think we need some dessert," he said. "Hal, come help me find something in the kitchen."

They made it to the pantry, which Bruce closed behind them, and then their arms were around each other again. Hal was torn between wanting to remark on how fucking good this felt—*does it feel this good for you? what exactly is going on here?*—and plunging his tongue deeper down Bruce's throat, because they were long past done with gentle or exploratory. It was clear the plan was to get off right here in this pantry, and Hal worked a hand to Bruce's zip, wondering if he would feel that same stiffening of muscle, or get his hand knocked away, but no.

Hal gripped Bruce's jaw in his hand and angled that gorgeous face just the way he wanted it, and Bruce let him, Bruce was letting him do anything. If he could just get both their cocks out they could rub each other off right here, probably in like five seconds flat, at this rate. If he could—

"Hey Bruce?" Barry was banging on the pantry door.

Oh my fucking God, Hal mouthed, and this time Bruce bent his forehead to Hal's and rested it there. He was getting control, trying to get himself under control. Hal stroked his back. "Yes," Bruce said.

"Are you finding something to eat in there?"

"Trying to," Bruce replied, and Hal started laughing, a silent shake in Bruce's arms, which tightened on him. "Tell you what," Bruce called. "Go look in the fridge and see if you can find some ice cream. I'll look for toppings in here."

"Okay, awesome!" He could hear Barry's abnormally heavy tread clumping over to the refrigerator, which was bizarre, because usually you could never even hear Barry move. It was like someone had fed moonshine to a gazelle, and it was crashing around Bruce's kitchen.

"I need to go help him," Hal murmured, and Bruce sighed, nodding. He was trying to tuck himself back together, with limited success, though they hadn't really even arrived at naked. At this point Hal was so hard he was pretty sure walking would be difficult, but then again, Barry was unlikely to notice.

He found Barry with his face in the freezer, spooning up what appeared to be Rocky Road with a spatula. "Hey there," he said, a blissed-out expression on his face.

"Barry," Hal sighed. "Bar. What is happening to you, man? You can't get drunk, not with speed-force metabolism."

"I know," Barry said. There was a bit of marshmallow on the end of his spatula. "But I figured it out. I think I—" The marshmallow began to fall off, and Barry attempted to lick it with his mouth, but missed. "I think it was that cold medicine I took before we went off-world. I think it messed with me somehow. Or maybe it was all that ishka-whoosit-whatsit they fed us on Lyangar."

"You. . . *what*? You didn't actually *drink* that stuff!"

"Were we not supposed to?" He looked so mournful that Hal felt bad for yelling at him. A drunk gazelle, but one with adorable puppy-dog eyes, and he looked so confused.

"No, it's. . . it's fine. You'll be fine. But we should maybe get you home."

"Okay," Barry said, as sweetly compliant as he had been all evening. He was still hugging the tub of Rocky Road. "You think Bruce will mind if I take this?"

"Nope, I am one-hundred-percent sure that is not what Bruce will mind. Come on, I got you." He maneuvered Barry to the doorway, which was only a little difficult because he got the idea he needed to go through it sideways, and then would not relinquish the five gallon bucket of ice cream.

"Hey," Barry said, in a loud whisper. "I think Clark and Diana are having sex."

"Yeah, you said that before."

"Did you know they were dating?"

"Um, yeah, and so did you, two hours ago. They've been dating for a while now."

"*Really?!?*" Barry's stage whisper was kind of hilarious, and his breath was alternately sweet from the Rocky Road, and cloyingly alcoholic. "You don't think that's kind of weird?"

"Everyone thinks that's kind of weird, but it works for them. Come on, let's get you home. You're gonna need to sleep this off, big guy. We need to—hang on, we don't have a car, we didn't actually drive here, did we. Okay, um, think you can fly with me?"

"I think I'm gonna be sick," Barry said, staring meditatively into the distance.

"So that's a no then. Okay, we'll borrow a car from Bruce. Just try not to puke in the back seat, all right? Because that's probably more than you can afford to pay. Though I don't know, your salary's pretty—oh Jesus," he said, because the Rocky Road had long since turned squishy, and Barry was pushing it at him for him to hold. It squelched out onto his jacket.

Together he and Bruce got Barry into one of Bruce's cars in the garage, though by the time they made it down to the garage, Barry had pretty much lost the ability to move in a straight line under

his own steam. He was also surprisingly heavy, which Hal wouldn't have figured, but maybe the speed force added extra density to his muscles, or something. Or maybe Hal was just exhausted.

He slammed the car door and clicked the lock shut. Barry slid lengthwise on the seat. "Well, this has been interesting," Hal said.

"That it has," Bruce said.

"I'm—really sorry," Hal tried.

"Don't be." Bruce slid his arms around Hal's waist, and just like that, every switch in his body lit back up. "I don't suppose," he murmured, "there's any chance of you sneaking back here once you get him in bed, is there?"

"Probably not. Who the hell knows what's going on with him, but it's not going to be a good idea to leave him alone."

"Mm."

"Please, can we just—" and Hal's lips nudged at Bruce's, and they were kissing right there in the garage. His boner had never really gone away, of course, and it was starting to ache, it wanted Bruce so much. "Just a little more," Hal whispered, and Bruce's hands were in his hair, Bruce's thigh was in between his. Was it possible they could just get off right here?

Nope, right on cue, there was Barry, pounding on the window of the car. "Jesus fucking Christ," Hal groaned through clenched teeth. "Okay, looks like another date with my right hand tonight. Awesome."

But Bruce wasn't releasing him. Bruce's mouth was sliding next to his ear. "I'll be thinking about that image," he said, and his warm breath curled down Hal's spine and into his aching balls.

"You do that," Hal whispered. "And while you're at it, think about this. When you beat off tonight, that's my hand on your cock. Think about that one."

The mouth at his ear gusted air in a small groan. "And that's my mouth on yours," he whispered back.

"Oh fuck," Hal moaned, because his cock gave a small sympathetic leap at the sound of that, at the fist-in-the-gut image of Bruce's luscious mouth sucking him, of coming in that unbelievable mouth. The noise in Bruce's throat was like a low vibration.

Barry's feet were now drumming on the window of the car. One of his shoes was missing. Hal shut his eyes and took a deep breath, ripping himself away from Bruce and the hot tight embrace of those arms. He wrenched open the driver's side door and got in, slamming it behind him. Bruce was standing there watching, his hands in his pockets.

"In the morning," Hal said to the backseat. "Remind me to kill you."

"Okay," Barry said cheerfully, as the car edged out the wide bay of the garage. "Hey, you wanna stop for pizza?"

Barry's head rested on the slick table, his eyes closed. Oliver set his coffee cup down, and Barry's eyes flew open. "Ow," he said.

"That bad, huh?"

"You have. . . no idea." Barry's voice was a strangled choke of sound. Ollie slapped him on the back, oblivious to Barry's startled gasp of pain.

"Don't you worry," he said, "I've got a hangover remedy that will do the trick for you."

"No," Barry said emphatically, his eyes wide. "No, you stay away from me. You're the one who told me to drink that wretched stuff on Lyangar in the first place."

"What? Don't be ridiculous. That doesn't sound like something I would do."

"Yes it does," Dinah observed. She was already on her second cup of coffee, and she looked serene as ever. "You've got to stop listening to the voice of your inner thirteen-year-old sadist," she said.

"Speaking of sadism," Clark said, scrubbing at his hair on a yawn. "A Saturday morning League meeting, really? The day after a successful mission? Wonder whose idea that was."

"I'm sure you know whose," Bruce said, the door swooshing shut behind him. "My apologies, but there was some sub-space transmission in the night I thought you all should take a look at, as well as—"

"Can you please speak more softly," Barry pleaded. "Is he always this loud?"

"Yep," Hal said, propping his feet on the table. "That's not your hangover, he's always that loud and growly." He caught Bruce's eye, but the lenses in the cowl were up, and there was only a flat blank stare meeting his. Most of the time in League meetings Bruce had his lenses down, and Hal wondered if this was on his account—or maybe because even Bruce had had a little too much last night.

Hal had gotten Barry back to his apartment and safely into his own bed. He was well and truly passed out by then and snoring softly, and Hal had stood over him a few minutes, wondering if it would be a bad thing if he were to beat his friend to death with a tire iron, and what his chances with a jury would be. *Exhibit A*, he could say, and hold up a giant blown-up picture of Bruce. Maybe with the cowl pushed back and his eyes extra-smoldery. *Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, this is what I could have been tapping on the night in question.* The Cockblock Murder, the papers could call it.

He had debated going home, but in truth he hadn't wanted to leave Barry, with who-the-hell-knew-what going on in his system. So he had collapsed on Barry's surprisingly comfortable sofa and tried to ignore the low steady ache of his cock. *And that's my mouth on yours*, Bruce had said. "Fuck it," Hal had whispered, unzipping and getting a grip on himself. It wasn't like Barry was going to move for the next eighteen hours anyway.

His orgasm had been fast and hard and painfully sharp. He had tried to keep his panting gasps quiet, but he knew he had made some noise there at the end. He lay there semi-destroyed in the wake of his too-fast pleasure, the backs of his eyes stinging with it. He thought about Bruce right at that exact moment, and wondered if he had already jacked off. He thought about texting: considered it, rejected it, considered it again. Finally he wiped his hand and reached for his phone.

I just came so hard there's cum on my neck, he wrote. *My hair too, I think.*

The answer was instantaneous.

If I were there I would lick it off.

Hal grinned into the dark. *Have you always been this filthy, and I just didn't know it?*

Absolutely, was the answer.

Hal stared at the screen. He weighed any number of responses. *Abortive and fucked-up as it was, I had a really incredible time tonight*, he could say. *Thank you for letting me touch you?* No, that sounded disturbed. *I can't wait to touch you again?* Nope, it just kept getting creepier. *There isn't a square inch on your body I don't want to lick?* Creepier still. He could go with something non-sexual, like *Sleep well*, but that would make him sound like some angsty teenage boyfriend who couldn't hang up the phone.

Finally he had tossed the phone aside and let Bruce keep the last word. Besides, his head had been spinning from post-orgasm drowse. But now he was wondering if maybe Bruce had been expecting him to say something more—if maybe he should have. Who the hell could tell what Bruce was thinking at any given time.

"I'm not really sure what's reality and what's not at this point," Barry was saying with a pained expression. Diana had gotten up and poured him a cup of coffee, and was handing it to him with a sympathetic look. Hal wondered if Amazons could get intoxicated. "I mean—" he took a swallow of his coffee. "I think I was actually hallucinating at several points last night. For instance, it's probably not true that Bruce keeps a miniature pink horse in the fireplace of his dining room? With glitter and braids in its—fur, sort of?"

"That would be not true," Clark said.

"Hey, that's My Little Pony!" Oliver interjected. "No, I was watching Lian for Roy last week, and she and I watched My Little Pony. I think you may be describing Fluttershy."

"Please just place your balls in the receptacle on your way out the door," Hal said.

"So that means there probably wasn't a tiny flock of penguins in the downstairs bathroom sink?"

"Probably not," Clark affirmed.

"Okay, but I also hallucinated that I saw Bruce and Hal making out," Barry said, and at that the room erupted in laughter.

"Oh Jesus take the wheel," Oliver gasped, practically falling out of his chair, he was laughing so hard.

"No, seriously, I did! It was—very graphic," he finished lamely, largely because Oliver's braying laugh was riding over everything else. In the wake of all the laughter, Bruce turned and left the room, his cape snapping behind him, and Clark called after him.

"Bruce—Bruce, come on, we'll be serious now, I swear—"

"Oh, you know Bruce," Hal said. The room's amusement was settling down to one or two quiet chortles, and he was grinning too. "He's such a boring humorless asshole, you know? He probably doesn't think homophobia's as funny as we do."

The remaining smiles were erased, and the room was suddenly still. "No, really," Hal said, looking around at them. "I mean, that's the joke, right?"

"Hal," Dinah said.

"Shut up," he said. "Shut up. If Barry had seen Bruce making out with Diana, we all know that wouldn't have been a joke. See, if he had been making out with Diana, that would not actually be hilarious, that would just be kind of sexy—and then tragic, because Clark would kill him, but still, sexy while it lasted, way sexier than whatever freak show you two are currently running, sorry but it had to be said. So let's not kid ourselves that the joke is anything other than two guys getting it on. What could be fucking funnier, right? Because if you don't find just the bare *idea* of that fucking hilarious, then I don't know, you must be one of those weirdos who does *not* think that queers are inherently disgusting or messed-up or the butt of some lame fucking existential joke, and that my life is there for you to laugh at." He kicked back his chair and tried to control his breathing, tried to still himself. Five grave pairs of eyes watched him. The room had never been quieter.

"Fuck all of you," he said. "Fuck you," he said, looking straight at Oliver, "and you, and you, and you—okay, probably not you, Diana, you get a pass on this one, you're gay anyway, what the fuck are you doing? Just—whatever, just stay the hell away from me for a while, all right? Just leave me the hell alone, all of you."

The whoosh of the doors was a cool rush of welcome air on his burning face, but nothing stilled the pounding of rage in his chest. *I think you might have over-reacted a small bit there, my friend*, said the helpful voice that always showed up exactly five minutes AFTER he decided to burn his life down.

"Shut up," he said to it, through gritted teeth, and took the elevator down to the gym. He needed to go pound the shit out of something, and at this point it was either going to be a mirror or a punching bag, and a punching bag was a hell of lot easier on the fists.

He was configuring the Watchtower's short-range defensive shielding when he heard the doors slide open and then shut behind him. He didn't turn around. What he was doing wasn't that important, and actually didn't need to be done, but it had occurred to him when he was on Oa last that their system was not that different from the Tower's, and yet it ran at thirty-percent greater efficiency because of the rolling use of energy, which they couldn't duplicate here but could maybe approximate, with a couple of tweaks. It was the sort of thing you have in the back of your head as a good thing to fiddle with someday, not really a crucial task. Certainly not the sort of job that meant he couldn't lift his head from the control panel he was standing at. But he didn't turn around, nonetheless. It wasn't a mystery who it was.

He is honestly just going to stand there in silence, isn't he, Hal thought. He kept running the configuration, ignoring the black and brooding presence behind him.

"Does Lord Vader require something?" he finally asked.

"You're irritated," Bruce said.

"Nope, I'm great," he said. "Just tweaking our use of energy on the short-range."

"I see," he said. Hal still didn't turn around. For a minute he thought that would do the trick, that he would hear the quiet slide of the doors behind him. But of course taking a hint would require some sort of emotional intelligence, so that was a non-starter. Hal's fingers keyed in a steady drumbeat on the panel.

"You think I walked out because I was ashamed," Bruce said, in another voice entirely—one much quieter. Hal's fingers stopped.

"Weren't you," he said.

"I left to master my rage before it mastered me. My anger and I are long acquainted. I know when I need to walk out of a room."

Hal dropped his eyes. He did not want Bruce's explanation to be so reasonable. "I need to finish this," he said.

"I see," Bruce said again. "I take it an invitation to dinner tonight would not be welcome, then."

"I—" He bit his lip. "It. . . dinner is fine," he said. There was another silence, and then he heard Bruce's step, heading to the door.

"But," Hal said, and the steps paused. He turned around. "Look. I'm not doing anything in particular right now, I'm just messing around with this. And you don't look like you have anywhere in particular to be. So since this is really about us getting off, then I don't require a medium-rare Chateaubriand for that, you know? Let's just go back to my quarters and do what we want to do, and problem solved. That's the object here, right?"

Bruce looked steadily at him, a blue unblinking gaze. Hal had endured many uncomfortable stares from Bruce over the years, but he had never felt so weighed and sifted, so pierced clean through. For a minute he thought Bruce wasn't going to say anything at all.

"Dinner is at eight," he finally said, and walked out.

The door of Wayne Manor was ajar, when he pulled up at five past eight. He stood there looking at it for a minute, because it almost wouldn't compute. The front door of Batman's house, standing halfway open?

He pushed it all the way open and walked to the back of the house, where Bruce was standing in the kitchen, doing something odd with a small cardboard box. "Your door is open," he said.

"I know," Bruce said, licking something off his finger. "I was afraid I wouldn't hear the door. Alfred is still out of town."

"You—" Hal turned, looked back at the hallway, then back at Bruce. "Okay. But. . . your *door* is open. So much for the most secure fortress on the East Coast, I guess."

Bruce tossed the box in a nearby trash bin. "That it is, and you thought a deadbolt was the extent of my security system? Trust me, no one gets through those gates unless I want them to."

"You don't have a doorbell?"

"In a manner of speaking I do. I have motion sensor pads underneath the paving by the front door. Or I should say, I usually do. They seem to not be working, and while I'm sure I could fix them, that's an hour or so of time I don't have to spare right now, so the answer to your question is no, I don't have a doorbell."

He had finished decanting whatever was in the box onto a plate, and was reaching for another box. He slid a menu Hal's direction. "Here you go," he said. "Pick whatever you want to eat."

It was the menu from Antoine's, and Hal's eyebrows rose at the prices, though he said nothing. "Still no Alfred, huh?"

"Sadly no. It's the last week of summer, and Alfred decided to take Tim and Damian up to the lake for a few days. Periodically he decides we need to be a normal family, and then we are forced to do excruciating things like go camping, or visit a park. Fortunately he left me out of it this time."

Hal weighed the merits of escargots en croute versus remoulade de canard. "Tim and Damian off in the woods?" he said. "Is that wise?"

"No body parts have been shipped back to the house yet, so I will consider that a win. Have you decided what you want?"

Hal considered. Somewhere in the last twenty-four hours—in between closet grope sessions and dirty texts, and somewhere between "hey I wonder what Bruce would do if I put my hand right here" and "man I really need to feel Bruce's hands on me *this instant*"—somewhere in that very confusing zone of time and space, this had become a date, and he was unsure how he felt about that. Or rather, he was very sure how he felt about that, and that was unnerving. Bruce's eyes were watching him, and once again Hal had that feeling they were reading everything he was thinking. "I don't know," he said. "The salmon, I guess? How long will it take to get here?"

"Not long. It's in the fridge."

"Wait—what's in the fridge?"

"Your salmon."

"From Antoine's? You ordered already? Then why the hell were you handing me a menu?"

"So you could pick what you wanted, obviously. It's all in the fridge."

Hal looked at the menu, looked at Bruce, then back at the menu. "Wait," he said. "Wait. Did you. . . are you telling me you ordered the entire menu? From fucking *Antoine's*?"

Bruce had frozen while opening another box, and suddenly it struck Hal just what all those little boxes were, and what exactly it was Bruce was doing, and everything in him wanted to bust out laughing—and would have, were it not for the look on Bruce's face. He looked so. . . confused, was the word. As though aware he had done something wrong, but unsure what, exactly, that might be. "I wasn't sure what you would want," he said.

Hal let himself laugh then, just softly. "Put down the box," he said, and Bruce did. "Now come here," he said, and Bruce did that too. "Now kiss me," he said, more quietly, and Bruce complied.

He had thought Bruce was an amazing kisser last night, when they had been frantically groping in closets. But Bruce with all the time in the world in front of him—that was another order of thing altogether.

There was a hand on his face, and another that was somehow on his ass. He was being kissed, no question about it; Bruce was definitely the one kissing him, and he was letting it happen. His cock was beginning to stir at it, at the electric brush of Bruce's body against his, and he angled his hips fractionally further away, but Bruce was having none of it. Bruce was slowly pinning him against the kitchen counter.

"House to ourselves, hm?" Hal said.

"That's the idea," Bruce whispered back, before taking Hal's mouth back in his. Whatever Bruce was doing to him, it was tilting the floor decidedly to the left. He had to hold onto Bruce's waist just to keep from tipping over.

"You are literally making me dizzy," he gasped.

"Good." Bruce's mouth was on his neck now, and a definite thrum had settled in his balls. It was like his body was right back where it had been last night—hungry and desperate to come, desperate to grind against the impossibly firm body pressing against him.

"So—nnh—I was thinking—if the food is mostly in the fridge. . ."

"An excellent thought."

"Tell me your bedroom isn't five football fields away from here."

"There's a downstairs one that—"

They froze at a cheerful aimless whistle, coming from the direction of the front door. "Hey Bruce?" called the voice, a voice Hal recognized. "You back there?"

"Oh. My. Fucking. *God*," Hal whispered. Bruce had shut his eyes.

With difficulty they detached, just as Dick's step rounded the corner into the kitchens. "Hey, there you are," he said. "You know the front door's open? Oh hey, Hal, what's up."

"Dick," Hal said, with emphasis.

"Bruce, if you're not too busy there's a case I need to talk to you about, that drug shipment I've been tracking. I've actually got Jason to agree to work with me some on—oh hey, is that Antoine's?"

It was actually impressive, Dick's ability to plow ahead, completely oblivious to the two murderous gazes aimed at him. He had grabbed a fork from the counter and was tucking into one of the boxes. Hal could see a bit of glazed onion hanging from the side of his mouth.

"Dick," Bruce said. It was a voice a normal person would have recognized as controlled evisceration, but it clearly meant nothing to Dick, who had probably been raised on it. "Dick. We were just about to have dinner."

"Awesome. I'd love to get Hal's input on this too. I mean, I'm not going to rule out some sort of extraterrestrial contact for this particular gang we're dealing with, you know? It's possible Hal might recognize their M.O. Actually, analyzing a sample of what they're peddling with the Lantern ring might be a good idea. Hey, got any more of this in the fridge?"

Bruce was leaning against the counter, his eyes shut while Dick rooted in the fridge. His knuckles were white. Hal slid a quick hand over top of his. *It's okay*, he tried to say with his eyes, but Bruce was obviously approaching aneurysm. "Dick," he said again. "May I speak to you alone."

Hal shook his head. "It's fine," he whispered. He brushed his hand against the back of Bruce's. "So tell me about this case you're working on," he said more loudly, to Dick's back buried in the refrigerator. "It's a drug case, you said?"

"Yeah, and even tapping into Jason's network, I'm still not coming up with the main source for some of what we're seeing. I'm getting pretty worried about our lack of leads, and in point of—oh man, is that salmon? Antoine's salmon is the best. Did you just get tired of trying to forage for yourself while Alfred was gone?"

"Something like that," Bruce muttered. "Hal, will you excuse us for a moment?"

Hal watched him pull Dick out of the fridge with a firm hand on his back and propel him out of the room. "Um, okay," Hal said. "I'll just. . . stand here awkwardly then," he sighed, and tugged one of the boxes on the counter his direction, rooting around in a drawer for a fork. Bruce had a hand on the scruff of Dick's neck like he was a recalcitrant puppy, and they disappeared around the corner into some room off the kitchen. Half the rooms in this place he had no idea what they were even for. There was probably even a conservatory, whatever the hell that was.

He plucked through some spinach risotto and tried to ignore the slow insistent thrum in his groin.

"What's wrong?" Dick was still chewing his salmon—which wow, it had been years since he had eaten at Antoine's, but it was still fabulous—and trying to figure out what the hell had gotten into Bruce, who appeared to be having some sort of respiratory difficulty.

"Dick," he said, and stopped. He had his hands on his hips and was looking at the floor. "Dick," he said again.

"Yeah? Are you feeling okay?"

"Yes," Bruce said. "Dick, I am having dinner."

"Yes," Dick said slowly. Bruce was looking at him now, and he was clearly trying to communicate something to him, but it was not going well. "Dinner," Dick said, to help him out, thinking maybe he had lost his train of thought.

"I am having dinner. . . with Hal."

"Yes," Dick said again.

"Hal. . .and I. . . are having dinner. . . together."

"I know. And look, I think that's great. I mean, I know that you and Hal have not always gotten along. I've seen you guys go nine rounds before, but truth is, I've always thought maybe that was because you were so alike. So I'm glad to see that, you know, the two of you are putting aside those differences. I think it's great."

"I see," Bruce said. He was pressing his fingers between his brows. "Well. I'm glad we've had this little talk."

"Me too," Dick said, with a slap of his arm. He took another bite of the salmon. "Hey, did they send any of that dill sauce with this?"

"In the kitchen," Bruce sighed. "Just. . . help yourself."

Several hours later, Dick pushed back the door of the seedy apartment, edging his way through the narrow doorway, laden with styrofoam boxes. "I come bearing gifts," he announced, but the apartment's dingy living room was deserted except for a lone dark head, which tipped back on the sofa and regarded him upside down.

"W'zat?"

"Food," Dick said, a croissant still between his teeth. "Bruce had extra, and it occurred to me it had probably been a day or fifteen since you ate an actual dinner. Want some?"

Jason was still frowning at him, but then, Jason always did that. He unbent slowly and came to sniff at the boxes like a suspicious Labrador. "Smells good," he said.

"It ought to, it's from Antoine's. Where are Kory and Roy?"

"Out," Jason said. That was about as much information as he ever offered on the whereabouts and activities of the Outlaws, at least to Dick. *Oh come on*, he had scoffed once, to Jason. *What the hell do you think I'm going to do, call the police?* Jason had just cocked a brow. *I think you ARE the police*, he had said. *And I don't forget it.*

Dick watched him attack the mussels in raspberry sauce, hiding a smile. Jason might live close to the bone, but being raised in Wayne Manor meant you never quite lost your taste for the finer things in life, or a certain comfort level with them. "So I've got some ideas about that next shipment we're tracking," he said, as Jason licked some raspberry sauce off his fingers. "Actually, Hal's ideas—I picked his brain a little about some of this."

"Oh yeah?" Jason dug in the bag for a napkin. "Where'd you run into Hal?"

"The Manor, actually. He was over there for dinner, so I laid out some of the broad outlines of this case, and he thinks it's a possibility we're looking at some alien provenance for some of this shit, anyway."

Jason had stopped licking mussel shells and was looking at Dick oddly. "Hal was at the Manor for dinner? Who else was there?"

"No one. Alfred's still got Tim and Damian hostage up at the lake. If they're not back by tomorrow I'll alert the local authorities, we'll begin dragging the lake for bodies. I figure as long as the park rangers know to look for a tiny demon child toting a blood-stained carving knife and muttering Arabic curses, area residents should be safe."

Jason had set down the mussels. "So. . ." He was frowning. "Lemme recap. You walk into the Manor tonight—uninvited, of course—and you find Bruce there, alone, with Hal, eating dinner, from Antoine's."

"Yeah."

"And you. . ." Jason was squinting at him. "What, exactly? Invite yourself to sit down and join them?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

Jason had put his whole face in his hands. His shoulders were shaking. "Oh my God," he said. "Oh my fuckity fucking fuck. I don't care if I live to be a hundred and nine, straight boys are never not gonna be comedy gold. Dick, you oblivious cauliflower, you crashed his *date*."

Dick stared at him in confusion. "His date," he said. "What the hell are you talking about. There wasn't anybody. . . Bruce wasn't. . . he didn't. . ."

He saw Bruce, hauling him into the next room, face practically contorted with the effort to put something into words. *I am having dinner. . . with Hal.*

"Oh my God," he said.

"There it is," Jason said.

"Oh my *God*."

"This is what I'm saying."

"Bruce and. . . but they don't. . . they weren't. . ."

"Evidently they do, and they probably are."

"Oh my God," Dick said again, and this time he bent double, head in his hands. "Oh *shit*." It was made worse by Jason's malicious laughter; clearly the asshole was enjoying this. "Shut up, just shut up," he moaned. "Fuck, Bruce is gonna kill me."

"Prolly," Jason said, opening another box. He had gone back to eating, though a wicked smile was still on his face. Nothing had ever pleased him so much as Dick's discomfiture, since he was twelve years old, the little shit.

"Not all that straight," Dick said in irritation.

"Who?"

"Me. You said *straight boys* like that was somehow me."

Jason had gotten up and was rooting around in the fridge for some milk. When he found it he drank from the carton. "That is you, Dickface," he said, wiping his mouth. "How much gay cred you think a couple of adolescent fumbles buys you? So you and Wally humped in your Calvins a couple of times until you got all sticky, that doesn't make you Grand Master of the Gotham Pride parade."

Dick stood in Jason's shithole of a kitchen with his arms crossed, like he hadn't just been knifed in the gut. It was fucking amazing, how Jason could do that; blithely drink his milk like nothing had happened. And maybe in his world it hadn't. He was drinking milk because he actually and truly did not remember. He was drinking milk because he had, in fact, been drunk off his ass when Dick had sucked him. Not ten years ago; not five years ago. Not last year. Last week. Jason's long soft laughter in the dark. *You realize I am too fucking drunk to remember any of this, right?* And Dick had smiled, showing his teeth, sliding down Jason's body.

Of all the things Jason was, a liar was not among them.

"What, did I rip the band-aid off your tragic backstory?" He was capping the milk and putting it back now, cocking a brow at Dick.

"Eat your food," Dick said. "Just. . . come on, we've got work to do."

But Jason was looking at him. "Dick," he said.

"What."

The kitchen was silent. Dick found the scuffed linoleum intensely interesting. "Dick, come on, don't be that way. You gonna sulk about Wally all night, or you wanna play video games?"

"I thought we were going to work on this case."

"That's what I meant. Video games is code for the case."

Dick didn't smile. "Tracking this shipment is serious business. You don't feel like being serious, then maybe working together is not such a good idea."

"I really pissed you off," Jason said. "I had no idea your balls were still in a knot over Wally. Seriously, Wally? Who the fuck falls in love with a ginger?"

Dick kept his eyes level on Jason's. "At this point I can't tell if you honestly don't remember, or are just trying to convince me you don't. Either way, why don't you go fuck yourself." He shoved off from the counter, but there was a hand gripping his arm, too hard.

"Remember," he breathed. "Remember what, remember—"

There it is, Dick thought, hearing it between one stuttered breath and the next. "Let go of my arm," he said.

"*Shit*," hissed Jason. It was a night of revelations. They were a pair, weren't they just.

"Let *go*. Of my *arm*," he repeated.

"Please," Jason said, and for some reason they were whispering. "I did remember, but I thought I hallucinated it, I didn't think it actually happened, I thought—"

"Forget it," Dick said. "Will you fucking let *go* of me."

"Kory and Roy won't be back for another three hours," he said. They were still whispering. Dick had whispered too, like Jason had sucked all the oxygen from the room like he always, always did.

"Perfect," Dick said. "That should be plenty of time for me to suck you several more times. Anything else I can do for you while I'm down there? A pedicure, maybe?"

"Dick," Jason said, and how did this happen, how did they end up with Jason being the reasonable one, the cajoling one, the voice calling him back, the soft brush of knuckles against the side of his face. "Dick. Please don't let that be it. Please don't let some drunken fuck-up be my only chance. Don't tell me that was it."

He looked at Jason then, those too-intent eyes. Looked up slightly, because of course Jason had those extra two inches on him. In two moves, he could have Jason on his back. He was faster than Jason; had always been. "Please," Jason said again.

Dick opened his mouth to say something, and Jason misread it. Or maybe he didn't. He bent his head for a kiss, and Dick kissed him back. This was definitely new territory. Jason's lips were chapped. Salty from the mussels, sweet from the raspberry sauce, infinitely tender. What the hell were they doing? "Dick," Jason was murmuring. At first Dick thought he was saying something, but he wasn't—he was just saying his name, in between kisses.

There was zero part of this that was a good idea.

"Let me suck you," Jason whispered. "Let me get my mouth on you like you got your mouth on me. I'm gonna make you come so hard."

Scratch that. Zero would be a step up from this. The part of this that was a good idea was some negative integer significantly south of zero.

"Yeah, okay," Dick whispered back. "Just. . . kiss me some more." Jason was an awful kisser, objectively speaking. It should have been awful, anyway. Jason was chewing his lips off, and he knew for a fact that his own technique at the moment was less than spectacular; they both seemed to be worried the other was going to come to his senses any second now. History should have demonstrated how unlikely that was.

"We need to—think here," Dick panted.

"Nope, not thinking, thinking bad. Mouth good," Jason said, diving back in for Dick's.

"Okay but—"

"Unh unh."

"Bruce and Hal, really?"

Jason's mouth pulled off a fraction. It was smirking. "Pretty hot, when you think about it."

"No it is *not*."

"Liar." Jason was mouthing at his neck, and a firm hand slid down and cupped him, rubbing the heel of his hand along Dick's stiffening length, the fingers pushing at his balls. Dick bit back a groan. "It's hot and you know it. Think about it if you want. Think about it while I'm rubbing you. Think about what they're doing right now."

"Stop," Dick said in a strangled voice. Distressingly, Jason did. "No, I didn't mean—don't *stop* stop, you idiot. Just—"

"Kay," Jason murmured, and their mouths were back together now, and Jason's bulge was rubbing against his own. He wanted to be in a bed, in an actual bed with Jason, but he also wanted not to get lice or fleas or whatever was probably lurking in the sheets of this dive. Maybe he could get Jason to come back with him to his apartment, but who the hell was he kidding? They were barely going to make it out of the kitchen at this rate.

"Jason," Dick groaned, and Jason started devouring him like that was the sound he had been waiting for, like he had been waiting for it for years, like he had—

"Sup dudes!" Roy announced, as the front door banged back against the wall. He tossed a quiverful of arrows on the sofa and was across the room plundering the fridge almost before Jason and Dick had time to spring apart. Luckily Roy was not the most observant individual, but even so. Even so. Jason was braced on the window looking out intently on the fire escape. Dick was gripping the lip of counter by the sink. The pulse in his groin was painful.

"So things went down a lot smoother than we had thought they would, right? Hey Dick, how's things. Anyway, Kory should be back here in like half an hour, and then we can—no way, is that *food*?" Roy tugged a styrofoam box his direction and, eschewing cutlery, dove in with his fingers.

Dick was concentrating so hard on willing his boner down that he startled at the hand slapped on his shoulder—a hand that slid down his back in what might have been, if Roy were paying attention, a caress. "Karma's a bitch, Boy Wonder," Jason whispered in his ear. The quick caress ended in a squeeze of his ass, and the warm wry curl of Jason's voice was a promise of more, when Roy was out of their hair.

"Fuck I'm coming, oh Jesus Bruce—fuck I'm coming," Hal gasped.

"Yes," Bruce growled, and the fingers digging into his ass tightened.

"Are you—can you—*fuck*," he cried out, and the pleasure peaked, licked down his spine, shook his limbs, pulsed out his cock like heated lightning as the world went black and spangled. "Oh fuck," he managed, going boneless on top of Bruce.

Definitely one of the messier orgasms of his life, but he had been hard for going on twenty-four hours, dammit, and the human body was only equipped to handle so much. Besides, Bruce seemed to be right there with him, only a few clicks behind. He was making some noises that weren't anywhere close to speech, his fingers were about to gouge holes in Hal's ass, and his cock was so hot and slick Hal could feel its burning-wire heat against his belly.

Bruce groaned, open-mouthed, and there was even more heat and wetness against him. Bruce moaned a little on each pulse. Between their bodies, Hal worked his fingers up against Bruce's cock, and pressed on the cum-slicked head. Bruce made an inhuman noise and another thick string of cum spilled out. "Fuck," he whimpered, and pulled Hal's head down to his, kissing him hard.

He had never seen Bruce so undone, so vulnerable, so. . .

"You're shaking," Bruce murmured against his lips. In answer Hal rolled them and knitted their bodies closer together. He didn't care about the mess, didn't care about anything but pressing as close to Bruce as possible. What the fuck was even happening to them, to him. He kept kissing Bruce to make sure he didn't start saying impossible and embarrassing things, just in case his mouth was as out-of-control as the rest of his body.

In the end it was probably a good thing they had both been too cranked to make it beyond falling onto a bed half-clothed and rutting against each other like dogs in heat. This way, they managed to avoid any awkward conversation where Hal would have had to confess he was not nearly as experienced as maybe he had. . . implied. In fact, horizontal with a guy had already pushed well beyond the boundaries of his previous encounters, because he had never come with a guy when one or both of them hadn't been vertical, and/or in a bathroom stall.

But maybe Bruce knew that anyway. Hal always known that.

"We should shower," Bruce was whispering into his hair. So they did that, together—another first for Hal—and then dried off, and Bruce kept kissing him in between drying him, and Hal's lips still kept wanting to do treacherous things. Also, he had begun to realize that their previous activity had maybe been, as far as Bruce was concerned, more along the lines of a pre-game, and they were about to head into the bedroom for the actual show, and that was where he was going to have to look like an incompetent idiot, and Bruce would have to know that he—

"We can just lie down, if you want," Bruce was murmuring, and Hal's flush deepened, that Bruce could read his discomfiture so easily.

In the end, that was what they did—slid naked under Bruce's clean sheets, and settled into more quiet kissing and exploration. Nothing particularly wild or daring; more like teenage groping, and it was kind of nice. At some point he realized that Bruce was full-on hard again, and that he had been angling himself away from Hal, under the sheets, so that Hal wouldn't know it.

So Hal slid a hand to Bruce's crotch, and did some exploring of his own. Bruce's breathing got faster, and he rolled onto his back. Their hands had been all over each other in the shower, too, but this felt different. Less soap, for one thing. "Quite the refractory period you've got yourself there," Hal said, and Bruce's eyes flickered at him.

He let his fingers stroke gently up and down, and enjoyed watching Bruce let himself relax into it. He imagined he could see the moment when Bruce's body decided it was going to come, that there was only one way this ended. He scooted closer and started to move his mouth to Bruce's cock. There was a hand gripping his hair like iron, and it hurt.

"Don't," Bruce said.

Hal frowned at him. "Why not? Don't you like that?"

"I . . . do. Just. . . don't. Please."

Hal propped on an elbow and watched him. Watched Bruce watching him. He had thought he was just imagining it, that Bruce knew things about him he couldn't have—shouldn't have—known. "Can we. . . like before," Bruce said, so Hal climbed on top of him, and they started a slow easy grind. Not frantic like before, but even better. His climax this time was slow and wrenching and about a thousand times more powerful. They came almost together, and he was under Bruce this time, his head hanging off the edge of the bed, and the motions of Bruce's hips—it was like fucking, he knew Bruce wanted to fuck him and was holding back. He could feel Bruce's want in every shake of his muscles, but then they were both coming and maybe they were shaking from that.

This time he had to bite Bruce's shoulder to keep in all the wrong words that wanted to spill out. Afterward there wasn't any talk of showering. Their limbs were knotted together, their hands in each other's hair. They fell asleep like that, and when he woke up, Hal was confused—strange house, strange bed, person in the bed with him. The light was also confusing. He raised a bleary head.

"Whut timezit?" he husked, and Bruce fumbled for a watch on the bedside table without lifting his head. He handed it to Hal, because apparently his own eyes did not function before noon. He was burrowing back into his pillow like an angry mole.

Hal was starting to realize that he had never actually eaten dinner last night. For one thing, with all the blood pooling in his groin there wouldn't have been enough in his circulatory system to allow digestion; for another, he and Dick had been talking about the case, and he had forgotten about the salmon. But it was seven in the morning now, and he was starving.

"Hey," he whispered, nudging at Bruce, who groaned and flinched away. "Hey, Princess, I'm hungry."

"You know where the kitchen is," came a voice that sounded nothing like Bruce's—nothing like anything human, even, so raspy and thick-tongued was it.

"You're a real joy in the mornings, you know that," Hal said, but he hauled himself up. Somewhere were his pants. But then, the house was deserted, and he was just coming back to bed anyway, so clothes probably weren't all that necessary.

"Bring something back," rasped the voice from underneath a protective mountain of covers. Hal sighed.

"Sure, sure. Any coffee with that, your majesty?"

"Black."

Hal rolled his eyes. It was fortunate he remembered the way to the kitchen—on their way to Bruce's room last night they had been more than a little distracted. A couple of times he had thought they were just going to do it right there on the stairs, but Bruce had kept them moving more or less steadily. Hal didn't do much exploring on his way downstairs this morning, mainly because wandering Wayne Manor in his birthday suit would have felt weird—when you were walking around someone else's house naked, it was best to stay focused on the mission.

He studied the boxes in the fridge, and pulled a couple of them out. He could heat up some stuff in

the microwave, maybe put together a platter. But to do that he'd have to find a tray of some sort. Or a microwave, come to think of it. What the hell, did Alfred just warm everything in a cast-iron kettle over burning coals? He opened a promising-looking cabinet and stared at a confounding array of appliances.

"Bruce?"

He froze. He was, through the mercy of God, facing a cabinet. And the light in the kitchen was dim, and the open cabinet door had been hiding his head, but still, he was clearly not Bruce. "Ah," he said. "Um."

"Oh," Dick said. "Oh my God. Um."

Hal shut the cabinet door. "I was just—there was—"

"No no I'm sorry it's fine it's fine oh God I'm so sorry," Dick said in one breath, and he was looking so determinedly at Hal's face it would have been goddamn funny if it hadn't been the most humiliating moment of his entire life. "I really just came by to apologize about last night but I've just made that a thousand times worse so this never happened, all right?"

There was a dishtowel lying on the counter, and Hal grabbed at it. Nothing like closing the barn door after the horse had already streaked naked across the kitchen, but it made him feel a little better. Except now Dick had evidently lost the battle to keep his eyes on Hal's face, and was looking at the dishtowel.

"We can, um—we'll talk later," he managed, and he had vanished out the side door as quickly as he had come in, and Hal was still standing there frozen, clutching a dishtowel on his tackle like a goddamned idiot.

He grabbed two random boxes and beat a retreat back upstairs to Bruce's room, shutting the door behind him. Bruce raised a bleary head. "Coffee?"

"Sorry," Hal said. "Here. Food." He had managed to remember a fork, and he tossed that onto the bed too. Bruce pulled a box of risotto his direction and poked at it with the fork. He looked up at Hal.

"You all right?"

"Sure. Yeah. I'm. . . yeah."

"You look like you ran into Commissioner Gordon on the stairs."

"Heh," Hal said. "Funny story." Bruce's fork stopped moving.

"No," he said.

"See, the thing is," Hal tried.

"Tell me Alfred and the boys are not—"

"No no, nothing like that. It's, um—no it's not—I mean. . . you're more or less out to Dick, right?"

The fork slowly lowered. "Sweet Mother of God," he said. "Tell me you didn't."

"Yeah, Bruce, we launched into a long and involved discussion of your sexual preferences. I'm sure he didn't find that at all redundant since I was standing naked in your fucking kitchen wearing

a dishtowel."

Bruce recoiled from the towel wrapping his food. "*This* one?"

"Look, I'm sorry, all right, I didn't mean to, you know, but you said we had the house to ourselves and I thought I was just going downstairs for a second, so—"

"*This* towel?"

"Yes, forgive me, I got ball germs on your risotto, now you have cooties. Can we just—what do you want me to do, should I call Dick and make up some story, should I—"

"Oh relax," Bruce said sourly. "You're a grown man, act like it. Dick doesn't care, probably. He has issues of his own."

"Okay," Hal said. "You're calmer than I would have expected, considering I just outed you to your family."

Bruce flicked the dishtowel to the floor. "If Dick was unaware of my sexuality before, it's because he didn't want to be aware," he said. "People see what they want to see. If it's not an abomination, then it's a joke, or it's invisible. I'm not going to hide in my own home. Though maybe underwear next time wouldn't be a bad call, yes?"

Hal winced. "Sorry," he said again.

"I'm not complaining about the view," he said. "Just the lack of coffee." He stretched and set the risotto on the bedside table. "Come here."

Hal complied. It was August, but still chilly in the vast expanses of the Manor, and he was grateful for the warm covers and Bruce's even warmer body sliding next to his, wrapping around him. "I don't much care," Bruce murmured, "who comes through that door. I don't care if a congregation of nuns accompanied by the entire photojournalist corps of the Gotham Gazette comes through my front door. I am about goddamn done with interruptions, I think."

Right on cue, the phone beside the bed buzzed. *Dick*, read the ID that Hal could see even from this angle. Bruce reached for the phone, and Hal grimaced.

"So much for—" he began, but then the phone went sailing across the room and shattered in a million black and shiny shards against the oak paneling, hurled with all Batman's considerable aim and strength. Hal blinked at it.

"Now," Bruce said. "Where were we."

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