

Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before

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Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before

by [FabulaRasa](#)

Summary

Hal and Bruce negotiate coming out to friends, to family, and to themselves.

"So to what do we owe the honor, GL?"

Hal managed not to startle, and by startle he meant choke on his own tongue, because Jesus Christ, the kid had scared the shit out of him. Most other places, you could reasonably count on some quality alone time if you were perched on a narrow cornice some forty stories above a dark cityscape, but not Gotham. Hell no. Here, you better wrap your head around the idea that within the first four minutes you were going to get nudged off your cornice by at least one Bat, if not more, so it wasn't like he was that surprised. He was just a little surprised it was this Bat, in particular.

"Well technically," he said smoothly, "this whole city is my beat, on account of being in charge of this sector of the galaxy and all. But also, I was in the neighborhood."

"Cool," Jason said, and he vaulted over the low wall to join Hal. He raised his mask, and made himself comfortable, sitting down and pulling out what was apparently his dinner from the paper bag he was carrying. He sat as easily as if he'd been on his sofa at home, and not balanced on a semi-porous ledge of concrete hundreds of feet above a certain and gruesome death.

"Want some?" he said, and he extended an egg roll.

"I ate."

"Suit yourself. But Duc Pho's eggrolls are the shit, man." He was talking through a mouthful of shredded cabbage. "Seriously, you oughta try."

Hal sighed and lowered himself, carefully. Jason was swinging his legs. If he had grappling wire somewhere, Hal couldn't see it. If Jason fell, would he be fast enough to catch him? But that was stupid — everyone in that family carried wire, and they could all eat a peanut butter sandwich and

an ice cream cone while balancing on a high wire across a lava-filled canyon, probably while texting for more take-out.

"All right, fine, hit me," Hal sighed, reaching for an eggroll.

"So you tracking someone in particular?" Jason said, over top of the box of dumplings he was now opening. The kid could really put it away.

"Yeah, some weapons dealer who knows better than to show her face in my sector. She's supposed to be in exile several systems away, on account of making some half a dozen people very spectacularly dead. I'll bag her up and get her out of here, no muss no fuss."

"Yeah, Lanterns are masters of discretion." Jason was examining a dumpling thoughtfully. "No one's likely to notice a sudden explosion of green light, or anything like that. You realize B's gonna have your ass, if you're in his city without giving him the heads-up."

"Why, you planning on ratting me out?"

He laughed. "Sure thing. You know me and Bruce, we're tight. I'll mention it over our movie night tomorrow." He finished off his dumpling and turned to examining Hal. "So just me personally, I think it'd be a good thing if you started making Gotham a little bit more your business," he said.

"And why is that?"

"A, because it is sure to drive Bruce up the fucking wall, and I am always down for more of that. And B, because you're not bad company."

"Oh," Hal said, a little surprised. "Thanks, I guess?"

"And you know what I do with decent company is, I take it to dinner. I swear I can do better than Asian take-out on a rooftop."

Hal blinked. "You. . . want to take me to dinner?"

"For starters. You interested?"

He was afraid he might have misheard. "Oh," he said again. "Ah. . . as in, dinner?"

"Yeah, as in dinner," Jason said. He looked definitely amused, grinning at Hal's confusion. "It's this thing I like to do with people I find ridiculously fucking hot — feed them some good food, maybe liquor them up a little, and then if all goes well, I make my smooth move. It's this unique little ritual I dreamed up called a date. What do you think?"

"You're asking me out," Hal said. His lips felt a little numb.

"Look, I'm not trying to be hurtful, but was your last official experience of this some time in middle school? Because you seem a little slow on the uptake here."

"Right," Hal said. He was recovering now, but only just. "Yeah, that's. . . I think I'd better pass on that one."

"Oh yeah?" Jason was wiping his mouth. "How come?"

"Well," he tried. "I. . . the thing is, I'm. . . seeing someone."

"That so? Well, I'm a discreet guy. What happens in Gotham stays in Gotham. If you'd rather it be

less of a date and more of a sex thing, I'd be good with that too. I'm betting you know exactly what to do with that killer body you got yourself there." Jason was flicking his eyes over Hal in a way that made him decidedly uneasy.

"Ah, no, that. . . that would not. . . I'm gonna have to swipe left on that."

"That's cool, no worries. This someone you're seeing — it's a serious thing, then?"

"Yes," he managed. "It is. So I think I'll have to pass on dinner, and the. . . other thing, but the offer is. . . ah. . ." He searched for the adjective.

"I have to tell you," Jason said, rummaging for a napkin. "I did not peg you for being this awkward. I'm not wrong about the gay thing, am I?"

"No," Hal said.

"Cool, I'd hate to think I was that off. All right, time to hit the mean streets," he said, and he balled up his napkin and stuffed his trash back in the bag. He rose and brushed off his pants, ignoring the gust of wind that would have knocked a normal person to a bone-shattering death. He was giving Hal one last assessing glance.

"You sure?" he said.

"I'm positive."

"Okay, not trying to be pushy. You change your mind, you know where to find me."

"Right," Hal said, but Jason had disappeared as quickly as he had appeared, and the only possible solution was that he must have just dead-dropped off the corner ledge, and holy shit. He stared out at the dark skyline, trying to figure out if that had just happened or if he had imagined it.

"So I'm pretty sure your son just hit on me," Hal said.

He was leaning against the tower of blinking hard drives and watching Bruce, who was intent in the blue wash of the monitors, scowling in concentration. Hal finished off his coffee, and Alfred slipped from the shadows to refill his mug. "Thanks," Hal said. If Bruce noticed when his own cup was refilled, he didn't indicate it by glance or grunt.

"Did you hear what I just said?"

"I heard you. Which son?"

"Jason, who else?"

"Why would Jason hit you?"

"Hit *on* me, not hit me, you moron. Hit on me. You know — made a pass, macked on, got fresh. That kind of hit."

Bruce snorted, and reached for his coffee cup. "At times I'm not sure which is larger — your ego, or your ability to exaggerate."

"Pretty sure neither are as big as Jason's libido. And what do you mean, my *ego*. Yeah, you got it, I just go around thinking random people are proposing sex to me all the time, on account of I am a massively delusional narcissist."

"Your words, not mine."

"Suck my cock. And your boy needs a muzzle on his."

Bruce was quietly chuckling, his eyes still studying the monitor. It was a spread of Gotham and surrounding areas, with insets of the whole east coast, and there were glowing blue hot spots. The spots were apparently unconnected, but Hal suspected the connection was there; they just didn't have enough intel yet to see it. "There," he said, pointing. "Unrecorded sighting. The ring picked her up about 10:30 tonight, lower east side. Never got a visual, but she was there all right. Somewhere around Juniper and 6th, maybe?"

Bruce added it in, with only a mildly raised brow. "You were going to alert me when your ring sensed activity," he said. "That was the agreement."

"I got a little distracted, what with the whole 'hey there how ya doin wanna get naked' conversation I was having with your boy. That tends to throw you off your game."

Bruce was back to laughing a little bit, into his coffee. Hal fought the urge to snatch the mug out of his hand and beat him with it. "Well, I'm glad this is so fucking hilarious for you."

"It is, a little bit."

"Do you have any idea how uncomfortable that conversation was?"

That didn't seem to quell Bruce's amusement. "Well, you managed to emerge in one piece. How did you put him off? Did you arrange to meet him later tonight? A passionate tryst on a deserted rooftop, perhaps?"

"You're an ass. And I didn't put him off, I told him the truth."

Both Bruce's brows were raised now. "Excuse me?"

"Well not the *whole* truth, obviously, just that I was already seeing someone."

Bruce grunted and returned to his coffee. "Although," Hal said thoughtfully.

"Rethinking your evening plans?"

"Although," Hal repeated, more firmly. "I don't think it would be the worst idea to maybe just be honest with Jason. Or hell, with the rest of your family. I mean. . . come on. What's the worst that can happen?"

Bruce's snort this time was eloquent. "It would mean avoiding future awkward situations," Hal pointed out. "For me, anyway. And the truth is, I mean, aren't you getting a little tired of. . ." He trailed off, because he wasn't exactly sure how he wanted to end that sentence anyway.

Bruce was entering some data, and was probably not even listening. "Maybe not everyone," Hal amended. "But your family? Come on. Or at least Jason."

"All right," Bruce said, with a few more clicks of the keyboard.

"Wait. . . all right? Really?"

"Really."

"So you're fine with it."

"I'm fine with it. But I think you should be the one to do it."

"So. . . really? You're okay if I tell Jason that you're the one I've been seeing. That you and I are. . . together."

"Tell him whatever you'd like."

"Okay then," Hal said, and he didn't bother to restrain the grin, because Bruce was mainly looking at the screen anyway, and probably only saw him in reflection.

"All right," he said. It was going to be a whole new world, if they were out to Bruce's family, but it was a world they could deal with — and frankly, one Hal had been pretty sure he wouldn't see in this lifetime. Bruce's casual acceptance of the idea felt like a kind of victory, like crossing a boundary into some new place. Strange that it felt like a weight off his chest, a weight he hadn't even been aware he was carrying for the better part of a year now.

"Thank you," Hal said, because Bruce was watching him, and smiling a little. "Thank you for being okay with this."

"Absolutely I'm okay with it," Bruce said. He was drinking the last of his coffee, and still smiling. "Especially because there's not a chance in hell he will believe it. So feel free to tell him whatever you want."

Bruce was still quietly chuckling to himself as he turned back to his screen.

Hal watched him work a bit more, and felt the weight settle back on his chest — quite a bit heavier this time. "Right," he said softly. He studied the floor for a few minutes, and silence reigned in the cave again.

A data point must have caught Bruce's interest, because he set the coffee cup hastily down and returned to entering calculations again. And it was, objectively speaking, fascinating. It had been Bruce's idea to examine the Anthrallian's appearances for detectable pattern, and to run them through every algorithm he could think of to predict where the next one would be. It was a solid idea, and the math of it was pleasing to Hal, and ordinarily he was as interested in the project as Bruce.

But after a few more minutes, he slipped out the cave's back entrance. He left in silence, knowing it would be some time before Bruce even noticed his absence, and by then, Hal planned to be far away.

"Take a look at this one," Bruce said, spinning in his chair. The cave was empty. He frowned. It wasn't that late — not much past two. It wasn't like Hal to just slip away. The man usually made a habit of announcing his entrances and his exits, because that was what you did when you were Hal Jordan.

He made an irritated noise and went back to his coffee. He heard Alfred return with a fresh pot, and set it down just behind him. "A good night's sleep would not come amiss," Alfred observed, but it was an observation, nothing more, and pitched quietly enough Bruce could ignore it.

"Some of us take work seriously," Bruce murmured. He squinted at the next array of pulsating dots on the screen. They were beginning to weave a bit, and he reached for the new pot of coffee.

"You are referring to the Green Lantern's absence," Alfred said.

"Mm." Bruce adjusted the calibrations, and reset the algorithms. He contemplated a remark about Hal's work ethic, but Alfred would just reprove his lack of courtesy.

"Such an interesting project," Alfred said, watching the screen. "It's sure to yield results, sooner or later."

"Sooner would be nice."

"Yes. However, I can't help but notice that you do a remarkable job of tracking the movements of an unknown person quite some distance away from you, and a poor job of tracking movements that are, shall we say, rather closer."

Bruce swiveled and regarded him sharply. But Alfred had gone back to his coffee tray, reloaded his things, putting the empty pot and Hal's cup on the tray, and headed up the stairs. Bruce watched him go. He frowned and returned to his screen, but somehow nothing was going right. He didn't want to think it was because Hal had been nudging the math along. He tapped his finger on the keyboard, irritation growing. After a few minutes — and a glance at the stairs to make sure Alfred was not returning — he took Alfred's hint and opened up the cave's security feed.

He settled in to watch, and sipped at the fresh coffee. He fast forwarded through much of it — he was at the screen, Hal leaning against something, nothing changed for quite some time. And then at a certain point Hal just set his coffee cup down and walked out. His face was hard to see because of a rock shadow. But there he was, striding purposefully out, without so much as a courteous good-bye.

And then he rewound, and flipped the audio.

There were no rock shadows on Hal's face for this earlier part. Bruce could see the smile on the handsome, mobile face, and he could see the moment where the smile slowly faded away.

There's not a chance in hell he will believe it. Feel free to tell him whatever you want.

He could see the moment when Hal quietly set his cup down and stood there a few more minutes. His face was unreadable, blank. The asshole at the screen just kept typing, didn't even turn around.

Right, Hal said.

After a few more minutes Hal walked out.

He made himself replay the whole sequence this time, starting from their conversation about Jason. He watched intently. When it was over he rested his forehead lightly in his hand, and shut his eyes.

"Okay, sure," Hal called out, still laughing. "But not at three g's again, are you fucking kidding me?" And he tossed his flight bag at the man walking the other direction, who caught it one-handed. The man said something inaudible in return — normal peoples' voices did not carry like Hal Jordan's — and Hal threw back his head and laughed. The glare on the tarmac was so great that even with sunglasses on, he knew Hal couldn't see him, lurking as he was in the shadow of the hangar.

"Yeah yeah, great story, suck my cock some more why doncha," Hal called over his shoulder as he came inside the hangar. He started whistling something airy and aimless — no, it was the opening bars of *She's A Rainbow*. He was shedding more flight gear, tossing it into bins along the wall. Today's flights must have gone exceptionally well.

“A good day’s work, I take it?” Bruce said, and Hal whipped around, his ring hand half-upraised. Bruce cocked an eyebrow at it.

“Jesus,” Hal said. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Well, I thought I should fly out to California and let you know in person about a series of natural disasters that has overtaken the state. Apparently every cell tower in a three-hundred mile radius has been taken down. Solar windstorm, maybe. Possibly dinosaurs, it’s unclear.”

It was meant to get him at least an eyeroll, but what it got him was a level look. “Cell towers,” he said.

“Yes. It was. . . I just meant, you haven’t been returning my texts.”

“Amazingly, I got the joke,” he said. He was just standing there.

“You probably want to change,” Bruce said, glancing at the locker room.

“Yep.”

“I can wait here.”

“For. . .?”

“I’m in town for a series of very boring meetings,” Bruce said, quickly pivoting. “I’ve got the next twelve hours or so free, and I was hoping I could take you to dinner. Are you free?”

He looked like he was actually thinking about it, the asshole. “No,” he said.

“Big plans to crack open a couple of cold ones with Iceman and Maverick at the O Club?”

Another line that should have at least gotten him a smirk at the allusion, or a crack about beach volleyball. They hadn’t been screwing around that long when for some reason—what had they even been talking about?—Top Gun had come up. Maybe the movies that had affected them the most when they were young, something like that.

No wait wait wait, it’s gonna be something by Bergman, you’re about to say Bergman, aren’t you, I fucking know you are.

I was not, Bruce had said, but he had in fact been going to say Smiles of a Summer Night, and now he couldn’t.

Oh bullshit you totally were. Such a fucking liar. Okay you wanna know what did it for me, it was Top Gun.

Bruce had started laughing. Hal had been lying naked with his head resting on Bruce’s abdomen, and he had reached a long arm up and smacked Bruce on the head. *Shut up you know you love that movie, if you like to fuck guys then trust me you like that movie, do not even try to lie to me.*

I liked it a little.

Uh huh I know you did. That shit was the freakiest gay porn I ever saw. First gay porn I ever saw, actually. Over at my friend Max’s house for a sleepover, I guess we were eleven? Maybe ten? And Max’s mom had rented it for us, probably thought oh look this is wholesome, it’s about planes and shit. Everybody else got bored with it after like ten minutes but I was riveted, man. Fucking riveted.

Beach volleyball?

Not even that, just like the idea of it. Like, Ice was gay, obviously.

Obviously.

And the idea that he could be. . . like that, and still. . . you know, the baddest pilot that ever walked the face of the earth. . . let's just say it was a revelation, to ten-year-old me, because I knew there was something wrong with me, I just didn't really know the name of it. But I knew it was bad wrong enough that maybe I couldn't be a pilot. After that movie I knew the name of it, all right. And I knew I could still be a pilot.

He had lain there, feeling the weight of Hal's head on his abdomen, wanting to reach down and stroke that silken fall of hair. Of course Hal would have grown up thinking there was something wrong with him. He hadn't reached for him though. Why not? He couldn't remember. Everything had felt so new between them.

So you were into Ice, he had said instead, and Hal had grinned in the dark.

Fuck yeah I was, he said. *Don't tell me you liked that asshole twerp Maverick.*

I have kind of a thing for asshole twerps, Bruce had said, and Hal had laughed harder and rolled over and crawled up Bruce and kissed him so hard.

Hal was not laughing today. He was standing there just looking at Bruce, and the O Club joke got him not so much as a twitch of those lips. "Look, I need you to go, all right?" Hal said. "This is my work, and you just showed up here, and I am not out at work. So I need you to get gone."

"Oh," Bruce said.

"Go find those dinosaurs or something. Call me if you need back-up." He was heading through the doors into the locker room, and they were swinging shut behind him, and Hal was gone. He was gone. He had had just a few minutes to put this right, and he had done the opposite. Out beyond the hangar he could see a couple of men standing around, talking to someone he assumed was Carol. The glare hid him from their view. They were discussing something loudly – something about the afternoon's flights. One of them was gesturing back at the flight deck. Carol said something, and they all laughed.

Bruce glanced around again, then ducked into the locker room.

It was larger than he had thought, with several bays and a whole wall of showers, hidden from view behind the lockers. Bruce picked his careful way through the forest of lockers – when had Ferris Air ever supported this many pilots? evidence of more prosperous days, probably – to arrive at the showers.

The water was running in the far shower bay, with a crumpled flight suit on the floor beside it. There was more aimless humming coming from in the shower. Bruce stood there, considering. There was a bench beside the shower. Gingerly he lowered himself onto it. The bench was damp and smelled of mildew and God knew what else, and this was definitely the end of his suit. Just one more thing he had destroyed this week.

"Hal," he said. The whistling stopped.

"Please just listen," he said, his head leaning against the shower wall. "You have every reason not to, I know. But I wanted you to know that. . . to know that I had a conversation yesterday that you

might be interested in.”

Nothing from in the shower, but there was no moving around either. He took a breath and soldiered on. “I went to see Jason,” he said. “It was as awkward a conversation as you might imagine. Actually, he spent most of it laughing his ass off. Once I had persuaded him that I was in fact telling him the truth. About. . . us. I believe his exact words were, *has Hal suffered a recent head injury?* When I told him that no, ours was in fact a voluntary and consensual arrangement, his next words were *you are fucking delusional if you think you can hang on to Hal Jordan*. Which was actually a fair point, because I’m pretty sure. . . I’m pretty sure you have thought of all sorts of excellent reasons why you need to have other plans tonight.”

He licked his lips. Still nothing, from the shower. The whistling had long since stilled. It was a little hard, conversing with a shower curtain.

“At any rate,” he said. “I haven’t had that conversation with anyone else in the family, because I thought that perhaps. . . perhaps that was something you and I could do together, if you’d like. They are. . . conversations that ought to have happened sooner, I know.”

Somehow he wasn’t finding the right words. Why couldn’t he find the right words? Maybe if he could actually look at him. If Hal could see his face. Maybe he should just step into the shower, accept the final ruination of his suit. Maybe that would be some sort of romantic gesture. Though Hal might not find it all that romantic. *What the fuck are you doing?* Hal would say. And it wasn’t like he had other clothes here.

“Could you please just say something,” Bruce said. “There are. . . lots of conversations that ought to have happened sooner, I know that. Conversations between you and me, for one thing. Things I. . . ought to have said. If I could have another chance to—”

He shut his eyes again, put his head in his hands. Pathetic. He sounded sniveling, and yet somehow stiff at the same time. Yes, quite the case he was making for himself here. “I don’t know the words to say,” he said at last. “If there is something I can do or say to persuade you to give me another chance at this, please let me know what that is and I will do it.”

Sniveling, stiff, and now desperate on top of it. Yes, Hal must be just overcome with lust. How the man was restraining himself from ripping back the shower curtain and hurling himself at Bruce was a mystery. Bruce rubbed at his forehead. “The truth of it is, I fucked up, and that’s all. That’s the sum total of it. I did like I do. I can’t promise I won’t fuck up again. I can almost certainly promise I will. But that doesn’t change—that can’t change what I feel, which is—it doesn’t have anything to do with the substance of what is happening inside, and I think in some sense that’s true of both of us, and if you can just—”

He gave up. Just let his head rest on his hands. “Forget it,” he murmured. He should just pick himself up and quietly show himself out. Try to forget the last ten minutes of his life had ever happened. Or the last ten months.

Long sleepless nights, Hal lying draped across him. Hal’s low laugh in his ear. Hal’s kiss. The flick of Hal’s eyes at him, in a crowded room. No. No, he would not let go of those things, could not. And Hal’s petulant silence was ridiculous, it was petty and unwarranted and surely his mistakes had not been *that* egregious, surely there was at least room for a conversation. He stood up and paced, and he could see Hal’s shadow in the shower, standing there still and unmoving.

“The other night,” Bruce said loudly. “When I said there’s not a chance in hell he would believe it. I didn’t mean what you thought I meant. All right, yes, I suppose I did mean that you and I are not an idea that would leap first to anyone’s mind. A year ago you would have found it ridiculous too.

Is it so remarkable to point out that you and I are in many ways an incongruence of the universe? But what I also meant was that Jason in particular would find it unbelievable, because Jason would not believe that anyone would. . . feel those things for me. That you in particular would. That was what I meant. It was a comment on my relationship with Jason, not with you. It was. . .”

He rubbed at his forehead.

“It was a stupid thing to say, all right? Is it impossible that you would just talk to me about it, that you could at least turn off the damn shower and have a conversation with me? Because I would have thought that—could you please just—”

Now he was sounding whiny and self-justifying, which was a nice layer on top of sniveling desperation. “Is it your intention just never to talk to me again? Is that the plan here? I’ve been trying to talk to you for days, and instead of simply answering my calls you make me chase you down like—you evade and ignore and for all I knew you never intended to talk to me again, so what exactly was I supposed to do? And no, I wasn’t going to out you at work, for God’s sake, what did you honestly think I was going to do, or was my mere presence somehow offensive? Hal for God’s sake will you just *talk* to me.”

He had had enough of this sullen silence. He crossed back to the shower bay and he reached for the plastic curtain to rip it back and make Hal face him, at least force him to look him in the eyes, his hand had closed on it—

“The fuck are you doing?”

Bruce spun around. Hal was standing in the locker bay behind him, looking puzzled.

“You—” Bruce turned back to the shower – the shower Hal was emphatically not inside. He released the shower curtain like it was on fire. “I—”

He looked back at Hal, then at the shower again. Nearly thirty years of mapping every room he walked into for sightlines, exit lines, and vantage points and this was the afternoon he had decided to ignore all that training. It had to have been today. This exact room. Which of course had another door, off to his right, that opened to the outside. Which was where the person who was in the shower had come from, and Hal was just. . .

Just standing there, arms crossed, laughing. “Hey Roger,” he called through his laugh. “Sorry about that.”

“Oh hey man, no problem, don’t even worry about it,” said the voice from the shower. And then – ah yes, exquisite agony, that was what this afternoon needed, more humiliation, there it was – Roger stuck his head out of the shower, a crop of dark curls obscuring his eyes. He squinted up at Bruce.

“Hey, how are ya,” he said to Bruce, before turning to Hal. “Seriously man, it was a good speech, I think he’s sorry, you should prolly take him back. Who’s Jason, though? Because I feel like I can’t come to any sort of decision here without knowing exactly who all the—”

“All right all right that’s enough outa you, asshole,” Hal said, tossing a towel at Roger’s face. He caught it, the shower curtain flapping briefly open, and ducked back in the shower.

“Plus he’s pretty cute Hal, you’re for sure not gonna do better,” Roger called from behind the curtain.

“Yeah, I’m telling your wife you said that,” Hal said, laughing again. Bruce just stood there.

“Not out at work,” he said slowly.

“Yeah, kinda lied about that one. But I was pissed, so.”

Hal was still grinning, the sadistic asshole. “Come on,” he said, jerking his head at the side door. “Unless you and Rog want to try to work things out?”

“Shut up,” Bruce muttered, stalking out the door and into the blinding glare of a southern California afternoon. He blinked and squinted to find his vision after the cool darkness of the locker room. Hal sauntered out, still laughing. He leaned against the wall of the hangar, shaking his head.

“Ah man,” he was saying. “That was the most fun I’ve had all year. You were really gettin’ into it, I think Roger was close to caving there for a minute.”

“You prick,” Bruce said. “You could have stopped me.”

“I mean I was gonna, but then I kinda wanted to see how far you’d go. Plus I didn’t wanna mess with your rhythm there. But listen,” he said. “I wasn’t actually lying about tonight. I’m not free. I’m supposed to ship out tonight.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Wish I was. I’ve got like three hours.”

Bruce shut his eyes and tried to think of some of Hal’s more colorful expletives, something involving farm animals and sex toys and deep space explosions. “Hey,” Hal said, nudging at his foot. “It really was a good speech though.”

“It was terrible, don’t try to make me feel better.”

“Okay, yes it was terrible. You are a calamity of an individual, a methane-burning landfill of a human personality, and you’d sooner fuck yourself with an enriched-uranium dildo than express a normal human emotion, so what the hell I’m in love with you for I have no idea. Musta really screwed the pooch in a past life I guess.”

Bruce opened his mouth to protest, but then there had been that thing near the end there, so he let it become a smile instead. He reached for Hal then, and he caught the quick slide of Hal’s eyes to the left, toward the flight deck, so even though they were in a bit of an out of the way place here by the locker room door, Hal must not be all that out at work. Bruce brushed a kiss on his mouth, and caught a scrape of stubbled cheek.

“I can work with three hours,” he murmured.

“Oh can you now.”

“How long?”

“It’s. . . gonna be about a month. Maybe more. I’ll bring you back a tee shirt from the Theta quadrant.”

“Just bring yourself back.” His arms were encircling Hal now, and their kiss this time was a wary, gentle thing. Hal pulled back and studied him.

“You really talked to Jason, huh?”

“I really did.”

“I cannot even imagine how that went.”

“It was. . . strange. He did give me a message for you, though. He said if you change your mind, you know where to go for eggrolls. Do I want to know what that means?”

“You truly don’t. Really looking forward to Thanksgiving this year, though, that’s not gonna be awkward at all. Hey c’mon, let’s get outta here.” Hal was tugging at his hand, and Bruce let himself be led, and before they rounded the corner of the hangar, while they were still in this relatively obscure spot, he pulled Hal back to him and kissed him like he had meant to kiss him before – with all the words he hadn’t managed to say in the locker room, or in the cave, or for most of the past year. Kissed him like Hal Jordan deserved to be kissed. The rest of it, as Hal would say, was just bullshit, and they could figure it out.

Hal brushed a careful hand on the side of Bruce’s face. “Two hours fifty minutes,” he murmured. “Let’s go, pretty boy.”

And he headed out across the California glare to the parking lot, his long stride quickening, Bruce close behind him.

“I’m the limo,” Bruce said.

“Yeah thanks, we’ve met,” Hal called over his shoulder.

Hal leaned against the window and watched the beginning of dawn poke at the sky, and the lights of cars down below, where the world was still washed in darkness. Up here on the twenty-ninth floor, things looked a little brighter. Maybe that was why rich people were always so cheerful – they just had a better view. Of course there was also that whole “not going to die because of unpayable medical bills” thing, that was probably another reason rich people were so damn happy all the time.

He heard the shift on the bed behind him, and turned around to look at Bruce, sprawled across the bed.

They had gone back to Bruce’s hotel and fucked themselves into exhaustion – or rather, Bruce’s exhaustion. He had fallen asleep, more or less on top of Hal, and normally for Bruce falling asleep was something that happened between three and four in the morning, and even then it wasn’t easy. He must have pushed himself hard this week. So Hal had eased him onto the pillows and wrapped him in blankets, and when he had gotten the message that his report time was delayed, he had settled in to sleep beside him.

Bruce’s eyes were open and watching him. “You’re still here,” he murmured.

He was a little surprised Bruce could form words at this hour, actually. Usually nothing above the neck worked until about noon, and then only with heavy application of coffee. But he had been sleeping lightly, Hal knew. Dreams that had twitched and unsettled him all night long, and Hal had had to rest a hand on his back and soothe him down more than once.

“Yeah,” he said, sitting beside him, stroking his head absently. “Still here, baby. My assignment got delayed by a little.”

Bruce’s eyes were sharp now. “How long?”

Hal grinned. "By a week."

Bruce's smile was slow and rusty, and not all the muscles in his face were working correctly yet, but he got there. A vise-like hand closed on Hal and started dragging him over on top of Bruce. "Hey slow your roll there," Hal laughed. "Okay, you got me, but what are you gonna do with me now?"

"Gonna go back to sleep," he rasped, settling Hal next to him and wrapping him with long arms and legs. And from the way his breathing deepened, and his muscles eased, Hal thought maybe he really had gone back to sleep. Sometimes it was hard to tell; Bruce was this weirdly still sleeper, and he drifted between sleep and waking more than a normal person tended to. Hal lay there and stared out the window, watching the dawn streak the sky over the valley now.

"You're still awake," said Bruce in his ear.

"Mm. Just thinking."

"Don't."

Hal whuffed a laugh. "Why?"

"Because that's not going to go well for me."

Hal rolled over. Bruce's eyes were watching him. "What do you mean, baby?" he said.

"I mean that if you spend too much time thinking, sooner or later you're going to realize what a bad idea this is."

"What a bad idea we are, you mean," Hal murmured.

Bruce said nothing, just reached up and smoothed a wayward lock of Hal's hair. "All I was thinking was," Hal said, "was that you should get to pick someone now."

Bruce cocked a brow. That still didn't work right, so it was more of a grimace. "Pick someone for what?"

"I was thinking about the Jason thing, and how you told him about us. I was thinking, I should do that too."

"Explain to your son the reasons he should probably stop hitting on your boyfriend?"

"No idiot, tell somebody. Only I don't really know who to tell. I don't exactly have anybody in my life who would really give a shit."

"Roger seemed pretty invested."

"Roger has emotional problems. No, seriously, I've been thinking about this. It's not really fair, is all, on account of you having way more family than I do, or at least way more family you're close to."

"'Close' is probably—"

"Shut up, you're close. Not saying it's not stranger than your normal family, because it definitely is, but still. Way more than I've got. I guess the last time either one of my brothers knew anything about someone I was dating was. . . actually never, so never mind. I was gonna say high school, but no, it wasn't something we ever talked about. Actually, once I started fucking football players

it was definitely something we didn't talk about, so." He laughed, and Bruce's mouth gave a little twitch.

"Football players, hm."

"Oh yeah, I've for sure got a type. Broad shoulders and some height, pack some muscle on that frame, top it off with a tight ass, I'm there," he said.

"I'm both pleased and vaguely offended."

"That's the sweet spot. Some combination of those two tends to get me laid."

"What a disaster of a human being you are. And I choose Oliver."

Hal frowned. "Choose him for what?"

"That's what you meant, isn't it – that I should get to pick someone for you to tell? All right, I pick Oliver."

"Ahhh. . . . can I interest you in my Great-Aunt Lucinda?"

"Nothing doing. You're coming out to Oliver."

"I'll text him from the Theta Quadrant."

"Coward."

"Yeah, well, excuse me for having spent my entire life in the military, these are not conversations I'm exactly used to."

"Oh, and I am."

Hal propped on his elbow. There was a shaft of daylight streaking in the window now, just gilding the top of Bruce's hair. It gave him a light-filled aureole, making him even more beautiful than he usually was. Showed all the lines around his eyes, though, so that was some comfort.

"Yeah," he said slowly. "But. . . the idea of you being. . . like you are, was not exactly shocking news to Jason. There was only one bit of really surprising news there, is all I mean. And I haven't. . . let's just say, there are some conversations I haven't exactly had with Oliver."

"Being like I am?"

"Yeah, I coulda said that part better."

"It's like I have a hideous skin condition. Or a growth, maybe. Mild facial disfigurement."

"Shut up, I just meant, you know. We haven't ever—I mean, I don't know, what word do you want?"

Both Bruce's eyebrows lifted. "Are you asking me, or are you auditioning which word to use for Oliver?"

Hal thought for a minute. The light at the window crept higher, streaking Bruce with more light. He watched Bruce's pupils contract at a shaft of the light, and he had the weirdest desire to kiss his pupils – to kiss all the hidden, secret, inner parts of his body that he could never reach, all the mechanisms and involuntary muscles that made up this beautiful body stretched out next to him.

What the fuck was even wrong with him, he was lying here fantasizing about the contraction of Bruce's pupils.

"Both," Hal said. "I dunno. I forgot the question. Hey, can you stay the week in Cali?"

Bruce sighed, rolled onto his back. He stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. "I could," he said. "I could also point out that you already took the time off at Ferris, so there's no reason you couldn't spend it somewhere else."

"Yeah, I did, but if I take this as vacation then I just have to make it up on the back end. Just your daily reminder of how the actual world works."

"Oh look, we've gone almost a whole twelve hours without my regular 'Actual World' reminder from Hal Jordan. I wasn't saying you had to, and yes, if you want, I can stay the week out here. But we've also never gone anywhere together. Well, let me rephrase – you and I have never gone anywhere together where people weren't trying to shoot at us and kill us."

"Huh," Hal said. "So you're saying, a vacation, but with less murder."

"That is the concept I'm floating."

"I dig it. One thing though, about where to go. I hate cold."

"Me too."

"You live in Gotham!"

"I wear thermal-insulated suits."

"The beach it is then."

"I burn."

"Mm, I want you too baby, c'mere."

"Idiot." Bruce shoved him away, and Hal laughed.

"Listen, you want somewhere shady and hot, we could always just stay in my apartment and turn off all the air conditioning, be a lot cheaper. Come on, let's go to a beach, it'll be fun. You can wear sunscreen – I'll even apply it for you. Don't you worry baby, I'll coat you real good," he said, sidling closer again. Bruce grimaced.

"Is that a line that worked on the football players?"

"I'm gonna tell you a little truth, every line works on football players."

Bruce laughed, his real laugh, and it always gave him a lift in the middle, every time he made Bruce laugh like that. Bruce was playing with his hand a little, studying it.

"Did you mean what you said," he said, and he was still watching Hal's hand, not his eyes.

"Probably," Hal said. "I mean most of what I say. But at this exact moment I have zero idea what the fuck you're talking about."

"At the hangar. You said. . ." Bruce frowned, staring at Hal's hand like he had seen something unexpected there.

“Ohhh,” Hal said. “That. Yeah, baby, I meant it. Truly and from the bottom of my heart, I mean it that you are a complete and total calamity of an individual. Satisfied?”

“Eternally.” Bruce pulled him closer, and Hal draped himself more or less across Bruce, letting his head rest on Bruce’s chest. A whole week to themselves. They had never had that. It would either be amazing, or a total fucking disaster, but that could also be said about the two of them, so. Hal propped his chin on Bruce’s chest, considering.

“You realize,” he mused, “that if I call Oliver and tell him I’m gay and dating Bruce, there is no way in hell he will actually believe me? He’s just gonna assume I lost the mother of all bets.”

Bruce’s laugh was long and low. “Oh I know,” he said.

“So you’re fine with me going through that.”

“I am. Consider it payback for making me declare my love to Roger.”

Hal grinned. “Oh man. Anytime I am at all depressed about anything, for the rest of my life all I’m gonna have to do is think about your face at that exact moment, and I’ll be good. That’ll do it for me all right. Oh man.” And he started laughing, thinking about it again.

“Such an asshole,” Bruce growled, but a heavy hand came to rest on his head, pushing it back down onto his chest.

His thumb started absently stroking along Hal’s hairline. Bruce always did this thing where he assumed Hal was going to go back to sleep after dawn, which was a nice idea but never going to happen. Too much military life in him for that. Bruce was clearly up for round three of sleep, however.

He would call Oliver in a little bit, see if they could hang out next week sometime, and then he could start thinking about how he wanted to phrase it. It wouldn’t have to be a big deal. Oliver wouldn’t let it be a big deal, he knew that. And Bruce had done the same for him, after all – had a conversation he would definitely have preferred not to have. Why would it feel weirder than someone like Roger knowing? Hal didn’t usually give a shit about that kind of thing, except when he did. But Roger only knew part of him, and Oliver knew all of him. Nowhere to hide with that one. Bruce’s choice had been a good one.

“Stop thinking,” Bruce murmured, pulling him in closer, and Hal smiled in the dawn-streaked gray of their room, letting Bruce stroke him back into half-sleep. They would figure it out.

Still. Ollie would for sure assume this was a massive troll — and really, was he wrong? This whole thing between them could be a troll the universe was putting over on him, the best one of all. Because Bruce had been right, about their incongruence. They were a joke, was the thing — an unbelievable, impossible, spectacular, stop-me-if-you’ve heard-this-one, for-sure-can’t-be-real joke, that he would ever have fallen so deep and so hard in love with Bruce, and that Bruce would have fallen for him too. The universe was telling a joke, was all, and they were the punchline, a punchline he would be laughing over for the rest of his life.

He raised up and crawled up Bruce a little to cradle his head. Bruce’s eyes flicked open and rested on his, and Hal saw everything he needed to in those sleepy, beautiful eyes, and kissed his eyelids shut.

“You’re still thinking,” Bruce whispered, and Hal grinned.

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