

skin

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by [emmram](#)

Summary

Set after 1.06: Jason Todd. The implications of the last twenty four hours finally come crashing down on Dick. He deals with it poorly.

Notes

Warnings: SPOILERS till 1.06. Self-harm, trauma, some body horror. Brief descriptions of consensual sexual encounters; nothing explicit. Dick's not in a great headspace.

skin

*Dick's pretty sure he's dying. His body **hurts** in too many ways to name, he shudders and strains at the apex of every breath, and—*

he can't—

he can't move his legs—

"Ssh, Master Richard. Just a pinch, and then you won't feel a thing."

He blinks rapidly and tries to focus on the blurry figure that's materialised next to him. But that only releases more tears, and he is ashamed and angry at the same time, because while Dick might only be a child, Robin can never be seen crying. "A-Alfred," he chokes. "What's wrong with me?" He coughs painfully; something tears at the back of his throat and he tastes metal.

*Alfred says something that's lost in the roaring in his ears, but he sounds profoundly, indefinably **sad**. Dick's breath stops stuttering and seizes altogether, freezing in his chest like a block of ice. Nothing seems to exist outside of this moment—there is no future beyond this pain. There is no future at all, because what is he if he can't run, and jump, and leap, and **fight**? If he can't be Robin? Every minute worth remembering in his life since he was six years old has begun with him coiled like a spring, ready to burst into flight into the night air, but this moment? He's splayed like roadkill, limp and broken, and it won't. **stop**—*

There's a sharp needle-point of pain at his bicep, startling him out of his own panicking mind, and seconds later, he tumbles into darkness.

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It takes a little over two hours for Dick to drive from Clay's house to the Chicago safehouse. Once he's there, Gar figures out how to get him inside and upstairs. Dick can tell he's itching to ask about Jason, but something in his eyes must've warned him otherwise, because he can barely meet Dick's gaze in the elevator.

Kory's lounging near the television; when she sees him, her eyes narrow, and she straightens. However, it's Rachel that speaks first. "Dick," she says, "you're hurt!"

For a long moment, Dick can't figure out what she's talking about. It's been a monumentally shitty day, but he's pretty sure he came out of it unscathed. Physically, at least. He follows her gaze to where it's transfixed on his arm, and spots the blood-spotted bandage wrapped around his forearm. Oh.

Oh. The tracker.

He hadn't bothered stitching it up that morning; he hadn't the time. He can imagine it now, gaping and leaking blood, fat and hard muscle peeking through. If he doesn't close it now, it's going to leave an ugly fucking scar; nothing like the perfect, unblemished skin the tracker left

behind while going in. Wayne Tech had been working on subdermal implants to deliver medicine for chronic illnesses a while back; it would've been so easy for Bruce to appropriate their designs for port of entry to get the tracker in without Dick noticing a thing—

“Dick? Dick!”

He blinks. Kory's shaking his shoulder, trying to get his attention. When did she get here?

“You're cold,” she tells him, shifting her grip to his hands. They're shaking, he notices. That's weird. “Go take a shower and change. I'll heat up some more of the frozen pasta from the pantry.” She tilts her head, and for a second she looks almost other-worldly, like a creature sizing up its prey. “Pasta's okay, right?”

He stares at her, and Kory sighs.

“Is he okay?” Rachel asks, her voice trembling on the last word. Just a little.

“I'm fine,” Dick says, the words scraping through his throat like he's not talked in a long while (*like he's been screaming*). “I'm just, uh, going to take care of this and clean up.” He waves his left arm at them. It's throbbing, but distantly, like it doesn't really belong to him anymore (*it doesn't belong to him at all*). “And pasta's fine.”

He can feel Kory's gaze on the back of his neck all the way to the bathroom.

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“You're beautiful,” Dawn tells him. Her hands and lips are everywhere, fingernails catching on his scars, her tongue soothing them in their wake. She climbs back up and kisses him fiercely, hair tumbling over his face. She smells of strawberry-scented shampoo and beneath that, the faint whiff of antiseptic. He grins, cards his hands through her hair, and flips them both—

--and Kory bites down on his nipple while reaching for his groin, and he arches above her with a choked-off groan. “Beautiful,” she whispers into his chest, guiding him inside her, and he's so close, so embarrassingly close—

*--when it's over, he collapses, relishing the slide of sweat-slicked skin against his, close, intimate, content to just **be**. “So beautiful,” Wally tells him lazily, squeezing his thigh.*

Dick needs to say something, but he never does.

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In a distant sort of way, Dick's glad that Adamson's still tied up in the main bathroom; it's too big, too exposed. Normally, he wouldn't mind so much, but tonight he's content with the smaller, more discreet version attached to the third bedroom. He strips and steps into the shower, leaning against the wall while the shower beats a steady pressure against his tense muscles. The soggy bandage around his arm peels half-off, hanging, and Dick removes it completely.

The incision is puffy at the edges and bleeding sluggishly. He thinks it's still salvageable; if Bruce's usual safehouses are anything to go by, every bathroom should have an overstuffed first aid kit. Dick probably doesn't even need the lidocaine; he's so used to a needle pulling thread through his skin that it barely registers anymore. He just hopes they have good quality suturing thread; his skin is weirdly sensitive to anything other than Ethilon—

He wonders if Jason has gone through this particular ritual yet. If he cried like Dick did the first time. Maybe not. The kid cares too much about appearing tough, and besides, he's distilled a truth about Robin that Dick never figured out in over a decade: Robin's a distraction to draw fire. A dummy. A body. It's not the whole truth, but it is *a* truth—so of *course* Batman would need to track him at all times. Jason understood this from the get-go, so he got to know; Dick didn't. It would've been so easy, so *convenient*, to insert that tracker in him when he was sleeping, or laid up with injury or illness, or even during *sparring*—

Dick's shaking again, but it's no longer distant. His stomach rolls with nausea.

Oh, god.

He had something *inside his body* for months, maybe *years*, and he *didn't even know*—

He falls to his knees and vomits the half-digested remains of the grilled cheese he'd eaten at Clay's before leaving. His shaking's only gotten worse, and he retches and retches again until nothing's coming up but stringy bile. He's kneeling in a disgusting sludge of vomit and shower water and the shower that's still beating down on him is hot enough to hurt, but all he can think of right now is: *there's more there's more there's more!*

Because that can't have been the only tracker, right? No, no, Batman is much too paranoid, and Robin is too valuable an asset (*too much of a liability*) to lose track of that easily. And Dick's made it *so easy*, so trusting and open with his *body*—

He stumbles out of the shower, and rummages through his overnight bag for his electronic scanner. He passes it over every inch of his body, but it doesn't detect anything. Dick can't relax, though, because that doesn't mean anything; Bruce could've easily built an upgraded tracker that his old scanner can't detect. After all, he has all of Wayne Tech at his disposal and Dick's got—Dick's got—

(*skin*)

He settles on cold, slick bathroom tile and drags the first aid box towards him. He pulls out a lancet, rips open the sterile packaging. He positions the blade over an old, long scar on his right thigh—remembers how it was torn open with a rusty crowbar by some random thug-of-the-week who got in a lucky hit. Remembers Bruce holding his hand while he writhed and whimpered and Alfred slowly, painstakingly stitched him back together.

It's as good a place as any to start.

Dick lowers the blade and makes the incision.

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The night Robin lets Zucco die, he returns to the Batcave teetering on the verge of shock. He knows Alfred tried to get him to change out of his damp costume and come into the manor, but all he's managed to get Dick to do is get his mask and gloves off and sit, shivering, on a stool, hands closed around a steaming mug of hot cocoa.

Robin waits while Dick quails.

Batman finally arrives and stands before him, a looming shadow. Dick opens his mouth, but no words come out. What can he possibly say after failing so spectacularly at everything he's supposed to stand for? After feeling that sharp frisson of near-joyous vengeance when Zucco died in a hail of gunfire, still reaching to Robin for help?

*"Dickie," Bruce says finally, voice raw and disappointed and so, so sad. He reaches out to hold Dick's shoulder, and something snaps inside of him at last, at long fucking **last**.*

The mug falls to the floor with a resounding crash as Dick flees.

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Blood's seeping slowly from the gaping cut on his thigh. There's no tracker there; Dick was quite thorough. Dick picks up the blade and moves to his other forearm. He'll need to cover all the places he's been touched; all the places where he stupidly provided easy *access*.

Before he can make the incision, however, a hand catches his, quickly, firmly. "Dick."

Kory.

"I have to keep looking," he tells her. It's really important, but he's feeling dizzy now, and she takes the lancet from him without much effort. The world wavers at the edges as she presses a towel firmly against the wound on his thigh and wraps another around his naked form.

He waits for her to say something (*so beautiful*), but all she does is settle next to him and pull him towards her. He leans in, closes his eyes, and shivers, and shivers.

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