

Confidence Lost (Part 1)

a Batman/White Collar crossover fanfiction

by C. R. Scott

Prologue

Gotham City... Seven years ago...

"Really, Grandfather? Ninja?" The distaste in Robin's voice was so thick you could cut it with a knife. "I'm insulted." If the ten-year old boy said anything more over the radio, Batman didn't hear it. As soon as the last assassin had been put down, he'd taken a running leap off the rooftop and was flying through the cityscape as fast as was humanly possible. He wasn't worried about his partner. The man behind the mask knew all too well that the boy could look after himself. No, Batman was worried about another young man; someone who was quite possibly in well over his head.

He was right to be worried.

On the other side of the business district, Red Robin may have won the deadly serious, real life chess game between himself and Ra's Al Ghul, but he had no time to savor his victory. He was currently locked in sword-to-staff combat with the practically immortal man, and in this contest of physical prowess, there was no contest. Red Robin was losing, and losing badly. As he leaned against the glass window of the high rise building they were fighting in, the young man took a quick mental stock of his situation.

"Fractured cheekbone... Dislocated shoulder... Mid-grade concussion... Gash across my abdomen that would be more serious if it weren't for the Kevlar lining that took the brunt of the attack..."

He swallowed hard as he struggled to stay upright, forcing a smug grin onto his lips, trying to buy himself a little more time. Just another minute or two and Batman was sure to be there. His eldest brother would always be there for him.

"Even if you kill me now," Red Robin said with as much confidence as he had the

strength to exude. "I've made sure you've lost, Ra's. I saved the people he loved. I saved everything he worked so hard to build. No compromises."

Ra's glared at his young opponent with all the venom of an angry cobra. "Well done, Detective," he finally spat out, the rare praise sounding like a vile curse on his lips. "Although, technically speaking, you have not saved everyone he loved." The corners of his mouth pulled into a grim sneer.

Before he could come back with any sort of retort, Red Robin felt a sudden sharp pain his neck. A blinding panic rose up as he felt his body going numb, but his mind remained acutely aware. He tried lunge for Ra's, but the old man just casually stepped out of the way, letting his defeated opponent fall limply to the floor. Ra's loomed over Red Robin with confidence.

"Timothy, Timothy, Timothy," he chided as he sheathed his sword. "You may have saved his other loved ones, but you, more than most, know how deeply it wounds your father whenever he loses one of his sons."

Less than a minute later, a bat-like form shattered the window that Red Robin had been leaning against earlier.

"Robin!" Batman shouted, looking around the room and expecting an attack from every shadow it possessed. However, no assault came. His instincts told him no one was there, but that knowledge was no comfort. "Robin? Robin, where are you?" He quickly took in the appearance of the room. All signs pointed to the fact that a violent duel involving bladed weapons had just taken place here. There was so much blood on the floor. Too much blood, and Batman had a sinking suspicion that it all belonged to just one person.

He quickly noticed a distinct trail leading to a pitch black corner of the otherwise barren room. Dread roiled in the pit of his stomach as he rushed into the shadows, silent prayers flooding his thoughts. Time seemed to freeze when his eyes adjusted to the darkness and he clearly saw what the shadows had been hiding. Above a stack of explosives set to go off in less than twenty seconds, Red Robin's cape, cowl, and bandoliers were impaled to the wall with Ra's Al Ghul's blood-stained scimitar.

Gritting his teeth against the emotions that threatened to overwhelm him, Batman hesitated just long enough to grab the sword and uniform. Then he escaped the doomed building scant seconds before it imploded within itself.

Author Notes: *After re-watching last season's finale of White Collar, and after seeing all the Catlad!Tim images and stories out there of him as a thief alongside Catwoman on Tumblr, I ended up with an idea for crossing these two fandoms together. This story essentially re-writes the ending of Red Robin #12 and takes place right after the end of season 1 of White Collar.*

This is an experimental story. I have no clear direction for it at this point in time. It's one of those pieces where I'm letting the characters do what they want to do and we'll see where they end up.

To those of you brave enough to enjoy the ride on this unconventional crossover, thank you for reading.

Chapter 1

New York City... Seven years later...

"Count me out."

Peter Burke looked at Neal Caffery incredulously. "Are you serious?" Briefly Peter wondered if the man sitting in front of him hadn't been replaced by a body snatcher.

"You're honestly telling me you're not the least bit interested in being part of an assignment involving the private art collection of one of the wealthiest, most powerful billionaires in the world?"

Neal was silent for as he gave off the general impression that he was deep in thought. "Yeah, I'm not the least bit interested," he quipped nonchalantly.

A quick glance around the office confirmed Peter's suspicions that the rest of his team was as baffled as he was by Neal's abnormal disinterest in a case that was seemingly right up his alley. "May I ask why the uncharacteristic lack of enthusiasm? This is usually the kind of case that has you chomping at the bit, and has me worrying about all the extra paperwork I'll have to file just to keep you out of prison afterwards."

The former con artist sighed and leaned back in his chair before he started ticking off his reasons on his fingers. "One, anything of value attached to Wayne Enterprises has top of the line WayneTech security covering it. It's practically impenetrable for normal, run-of-the-mill criminal elements. You'd have a better chance of breaking into Fort Knox with one hand tied behind your back. Two, if someone is targeting the Wayne collection they're going to be coming in hot and heavy. There will be big guns, perhaps a meta or two, and maybe even a small army if they have the budget for it. The organized crime rackets from Gotham City aren't especially known for their subtlety. A few federal agents flashing their badges won't be intimidating anybody."

"And three?"

Neal looked pointedly at Peter. "And three, Bruce Wayne funds Batman Incorporated. Have you forgotten about that little detail? It was only earth-shattering news a few years ago. With the value of this collection, there's a pretty good chance that Mr. Wayne's called in a favor from the cape and cowl set to look after his investments."

Neal leaned back in his seat, crossed his arms across his chest, and shook his head.

"Frankly... I don't even see why the FBI is even bothering with this. Isn't this an example of that whole wasteful spending thing the government is supposed to be cracking down on?"

Peter pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. "Regardless of your *professional opinion*, Neal, the FBI is on the case. There are several pieces in the collection that are being actively targeted by criminals on our watch list and Bruce Wayne himself has personally requested that we have one of our best operatives test his security for weaknesses."

"So send in your best operative."

"I'm looking at him."

From the expression on Neal's face, one would have thought that Peter had just asked him to have a root canal without anesthesia. Finally, the younger man capitulated.

"Alright, alright, I'll do it. However, I want it on the record that I'm doing this under protest."

"Duly noted. Now get out of here. You've got a week to figure out how to steal something priceless out from under Bruce Wayne's nose."

Normally a quip like that would've rewarded Peter with one of Neal's cheeky, confident, kid-in-a-candy-store grins. Not today, though. Neal looked practically grim as he put his hat onto his head and stormed out of his office. Special Agents Diana Barrigan and Clinton Jones watched him as he left, then turned their attentions to Peter.

"Are you sure this is a good idea, Peter?" Jones asked with undisguised concern. "Clearly Neal is still out of sorts after Kate's death. I've never seen him like this."

"I understand your concern, Jones," Diana said. "But this assignment will be good for him. If he's left to brood with nothing else to occupy his mind, he'll just start focusing on finding on Kate's murderer, and you know what'll happen then. We don't need him running off half-cocked and looking for revenge."

"You've both got your points," Peter said somberly. "Neal is clearly not being himself, so it might affect his work with us, but to just force him to take time off to grieve Kate's death gives him too much time on his own to get himself into trouble. I personally requested this specific assignment for Neal because it is something he can work on that's well within his comfort zone, but it's still a controlled environment where we can keep our eyes on him."

Peter rose up from his seat, pulled out a set of folders from his desk drawer, and handed one each to the two agents before him. "In the mean time, you two know your tasks regarding the investigation into Kate's death. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go meet a Mr. Grayson about the security surrounding the display of Bruce Wayne's art collection."

Author Notes: *Welcome to Chapter 1. Whereas the Prologue (set seven years in the past) rewrote the ending of Red Robin #12, this chapter starts off where the end of Season 1 of White Collar left off. So essentially this is a rewrite of Season 2.*

Chapter 2

New York City... One hour later...

When Peter showed up at the uptown gallery where the new art exhibit from Bruce Wayne's private collection was going to be shown, he had to pause in appreciation at what he saw. Perhaps Neal had a point earlier, if the amount of private security he could see crawling around the building was any indication. From the sidewalk, he counted no less than six different cameras covering just the main entrance, the alleys on either side of the building, and the street that passed in front of it going in both directions. There were a pair of obvious security guards in crisp black suits standing at the main entrance, but Peter's trained eye spotted at least two more guards in plain clothes patrolling around the general area.

"I'm sorry, sir," one of the posted guards said as he automatically blocked Peter's path into the building. "But this gallery is currently closed to the public."

"I'm not the public," Peter said as he flashed his badge. "I'm Special Agent Peter Burke from the FBI. I've got an appointment with Mr. Richard Grayson."

The guard took a close look at the badge. "One moment, please." He turned his head and pulled his collar up to his lips. It was only then that Peter noticed that what he thought was just a small round pin was actually some sort of communication device. It seemed to work in conjunction with the earpiece the guard was wearing. "Mr. Grayson? We have a Special Agent Peter Burke from the FBI at the front entrance to see you." There was a pause as he got his instructions. Then he turned back to Peter. "Mr. Grayson is expecting you. He'll meet you in the foyer. Please step inside."

Inside, the security was no less impressive. The foyer had cameras covering every conceivable angle, and the ornate, elegant display cases being set up had more high tech

hardware filling their hollow marble bases than Peter would've imagined possible in such small spaces.

"Do you like what you see, Agent Burke?"

Peter turned his head to see a dark haired man casually sauntering down a spiral staircase towards him. "Richard Grayson, I presume?"

He was rewarded with a charming grin and an open hand as soon as they were within reach of each other. "You presume correctly."

As they shook hands, the federal agent in Peter couldn't help but make several observations about the man in front of him. Richard Grayson was a tall man in his mid-thirties with an athletic build. He had black hair, blue eyes, and had a very polished, clean cut appearance. At first glance, he looked every bit the wealthy man of privilege that most would assume upon seeing the eldest adopted son of Bruce Wayne. However, there were a few traits that Peter found slightly out of character. For one, when he shook Grayson's hand he was a little curious to find it was not the well-manicured, soft-skinned grip he was used to shaking whenever he first met men with more money than they knew what to do with. The skin of Grayson's hand was thick and callused and his nails were cut to a short, practical length. Peter was certain he caught a glimpse of faint scar lines as well. These were the hands of a man who worked for hard for a living, even though he didn't give the obvious public appearance of it.

There was also the matter of Grayson's tone of voice and general body language towards him. Most of the wealthy men he dealt with in the past tended to look down upon him, seeing as how he was several rungs down the social ladder from them. Of course they never said so outright, but he could read it in their body language and tone

of voice. Peter didn't get that vibe at all from the man in front of him as they spoke. If he was observing everything correctly, then Richard Grayson was respectfully treating him as someone akin to an equal and not someone beneath him. Peter decided that it was a nice change of pace.

"I must say, Mr. Grayson," Peter started as he glanced around the foyer. "I am impressed by what I've seen so far. A colleague of mind had said that this event would be more locked down than Fort Knox. I thought he was just exaggerating, but now I'm starting to see his point."

Grayson chuckled. "Well, while this level of security may seem like overkill, it's fairly standard procedure for anything involving Wayne Enterprises. Better safe than sorry." He then motioned for Peter to follow him out of the foyer and into the main gallery.

Inside the main gallery, though it was still incomplete, Peter could see that the collection being showcased was an impressive one. He couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt for not bringing Neal with him today. Peter was certain that having the chance to bask in a collection of rare and exquisite art like this would have lifted Neal's spirit considerably. Still, he eased his conscious by reminding himself that Neal would be trying to break into this place in a few days time.

"So what do you think, Agent Burke? Do you think the agent you've got testing our security is up to the task?"

"Honestly? As good as our guy is I don't think he's got a snowball's chance in hell of getting anything out of this building." Then Peter smirked. "However, he has surprised me in the past, so I can't count him completely out yet." Suddenly, an idea

popped into his head. "I do have a favor to ask you regarding him, though."

"And that is?"

"After this test is concluded, is it possible to get him an invite to the gallery's opening night event?"

Grayson shook his head with an apologetic expression. "I'm sorry, but the official opening night gala is restricted to a very specific guest list. However, I could get him an invite to the following event, which will be open to the press and social elite of New York."

Peter nodded. "I'm sure that'll work out just fine."

As they crossed the gallery, a flurry of activity and a familiar voice drew Peter's immediate attention.

"No, no, no... These drapes will not work at all. The color is all wrong and the pattern screams 19th century dusty old museum. Go find me some swatches of something in a neutral color, but with a modern design. And hurry. We've got just two weeks before the opening."

Peter's eyes lit up. "Elle?"

The dark-haired woman at the center of the whirlwind of activity turned in surprise. "Peter!" A big smile brightened her face as she immediately closed the distance between the two of them and placed a kiss on his cheek. "What are you doing here, hun?"

Realization dawned on Grayson's face as he put two and two together. "Ah... *Burke* Premiere Events. Am I safe to assume that our lovely event coordinator is your

wife?"

Peter nodded before turning back to his wife. "So this is the huge secret high profile event you've been working on for the better part of this month?"

Elizabeth nodded. "I really wanted to tell you, but I had to sign an iron-clad confidentiality agreement. I'm pretty sure the fine print on the contract said that my soul would be forfeit if I spilled the beans before opening night. So what are you doing here?"

"Oh, Wayne Enterprises has requested that the FBI arrange a test of the gallery's security before the big event. I'm in charge of coordinating it."

Some kind of realization dawned on her face, and she looked to Grayson with barely contained excitement. "Mr. Grayson! Since my husband knows what I'm working on now, and since he's going to be involved with the gallery security, can I please show him the *special* collection?"

"*Special* collection?"

Grayson nodded. "I was just about to head that way with him. Why don't you come with us. You can update me on what you've been working on with Mr. Pennyworth along the way.

As the three of them made their way to another stairwell, Peter studied the rest of the gallery and the security protecting it along the way while his wife and Grayson talked about details regarding the two opening night galas. When they finally arrived at the top floor, they came to a stop at a huge vault-like door. Peter's curiosity was piqued.

"So what's behind door number one?"

Author Notes: *Welcome to Chapter 2. Enter Dick Grayson and Elizabeth Burke. Personally, next to Tim Drake and Neal Caffery, these two are my second favorite characters in their respective fandoms.*

Chapter 3

New York City... Seven days later...

"Neal, if by some miracle you manage to pull this stunt off, my hat will be eternally off to you," Mozzie said as he lounged on the comfortable sofa in Neal's studio apartment with a glass of wine in one hand.

"Really Moz?" Neal said with a raised eyebrow as he stood before a mirror, trying to decide which tie to wear. "Even knowing this is an FBI sanctioned assignment?"

Mozzie took a thoughtful sip from his glass. "The fact that you, a mere mortal, are attempting to outmaneuver the goliath that is the latest and greatest in WayneTech security is enough to make even me overlook the blemish that is the suits' involvement."

The younger con artist managed a weak smile as he straightened his tie. "Well at least one of us is looking forward to the slight chance that I might succeed." When Neal studied his reflection in the mirror, he sighed. Ever since Kate's death, he just didn't feel like himself. She was his whole world for so long, and now with her gone...

"Neal," Mozzie said with a concerned tone. "I know you haven't been feeling up to working with the feds since... y'know. But this kind of opportunity doesn't come along every day. If you're not gonna give it a hundred percent for yourself, then at least give it a hundred percent for me." He inclined his glass at his friend. "I really want to know if my new source is the real deal. Do you know how hard it is to locate a quality mole in Wayne Enterprises Tech Division?"

"They're as rare as blue roses, Moz," Neal remarked with chuckle. He gave himself one final glance over in the mirror. "I guess it's showtime. Wish me luck?"

Mozzie raised his glass. "If luck is what happens when preparation meets

opportunity, then you should have plenty of it today."

Neal looked at Mozzie curiously. "Seneca the Elder?" he asked, referring to the quote his friend had paraphrased.

Moz smirked. "The Younger."

Several hours later, by some insane amount of good fortune coupled with the fact that Mozzie's source had been genuine, Neal found himself feeling like a kid in a candy store as he leisurely browsed through the Wayne art collection. He was dressed in a *borrowed* uniform for the gallery's cleaning agency and was making his way through the building with a security card he'd subtly purloined from a guard who had been leaving the building at the end of his shift. The artwork on display was extremely rare, exquisite in quality, and obscenely expensive.

Neal was in heaven.

Well... a locked down heaven...

There was the rub.

Getting into the gallery really wasn't that hard, all things considered. He'd even managed to lift a few of the more portable pieces of the collection using a device Mozzie had gotten from his WayneTech source. The tiny remote was supposed to temporarily disable the security devices attached to the display cases, and he was extremely careful in choosing those displays that were in rare security camera blind spots. Considering the guards didn't come down on him like a ton of bricks when he swiped the first set of jewels, Neal figured his plans were working like a charm.

Now, though, the real challenge was getting out of the building without getting

caught. While he was planning the heist with Mozzie, the Plan A escape route was to head out through the service entrance he'd come in through. However, a quick look told him that he'd have to nix that plan. Neal's good luck was starting to run low as he spotted the guard he'd lifted the card from earlier talking to the one who'd taken his place. The man looked extremely upset and Neal overheard something about losing his job if he couldn't find his missing security card. So Plan A was officially out the window.

Plan B was a riskier, but still doable. It involved taking a private stairwell up to the roof and then taking a flying leap across the narrow alleyway to the rooftop of the other building. Mozzie had measured the distance himself, and assured Neal that he could clear it easily. It didn't matter if he was caught by the people who worked in the clothing shop that owned the building. All Peter tasked him to do was to get out of the gallery with the stolen pieces. Unfortunately, there was just one problem with this escape route...

...And that was a huge metal vault door.

"What the-?" Neal muttered under his breath as he lurked in one of the security camera blind spots on the second floor of the gallery. From the blueprints he'd memorized of the building, there was supposed to be an open parlor here, with the entrance to the stairwell on the opposite end of the room. Clearly the door had been added after the fact just for this occasion.

Now Neal had a conundrum. On one hand, there was Plan C. It involved making his way down into the basement of the gallery and escaping through a secret tunnel to the other adjacent store that had been a part of the building since the days of Prohibition, when the gallery used to be a speakeasy. The reason this escape route was

Plan C, though, was because the route to the tunnel involved the riskiest maneuver of sneaking right by the command center for the security team.

On the other hand, there was the shiny metal vault door staring right back at Neal Caffery, taunting him with its unexpected existence. Vault doors were meant to protect things that were extremely valuable. Neal wondered if his security hacking remote would work on the lock. He didn't think it actually would, so when it did and the locks were released on the door, the treasure hunter in him got huge spike of adrenaline. Without a moment of hesitation, he slipped into the room and closed the door behind him.

The vault was nearly pitch dark once the door was shut, cutting off the light from the hallway. It took a minute, but once his eyes adjusted to the dim security lighting that was available, Neal froze. Instead of art or jewels tucked away inside the cold spacious room, there were masks, capes, weapons, and other artifacts all associated with those special people the rest of the world called *superheroes*.

Neal silently walked between the rows of display cases, but instead of the excitement he'd felt earlier when he'd been lifting the jewels from the main gallery, the ex-con artist now felt nothing except for a growing sense of dread. Strangely enough, the emotion wasn't out of guilt or fear for being an accomplished criminal surrounded by the personal symbols of those who fought crime for a living. No... For some strange reason, when Neal Caffery walked through this room, he felt as if he were walking through a morgue. His skin was especially crawling as he came to a series of clear display cases which held an assortment of iconic, familiar costumes.

No... Not costumes...Uniforms...

Red...

Green...

Yellow...

Black...

Neal stopped in front of one case in particular and just stared at it, transfixed. It was an incomplete uniform. The only pieces within the display were a black cape and cowl and a set of bandoliers. They were badly beaten up, and no one had bothered to repair the damage before they were put into the case. He moved a little closer, his blue eyes squinting in the dim light. Where the bandoliers crossed was what looked like a round insignia. However, he couldn't tell what it symbolized. The disk had been damaged beyond recognition. It looked as if it had been stabbed by something.

He was so focused on trying to figure out what he was looking at that he almost didn't hear the sound of someone creeping up behind him.

Almost.

Neal felt the hairs stand up on the back of his neck, and turned around just in time to see a closed fist come flying towards his head.

Then everything went black with an explosion of pain.

Author Notes: Chapter 3 takes place a week after the events of Chapter 2. Mozzie enters the picture, and it is from following Neal's perspective that we finally see what was behind "door number 1" as Peter so eloquently put it. But who is it that put out Neal's lights at the end?

Chapter 4

New York City... Five minutes later...

Neal wondered how long it had been since someone had beaten him up while he was handcuffed to a chair in a small private room. As a new familiar fist connected with his jaw again, he figured it really hadn't been long enough.

"Well kid, props to whoever taught you how to throw a punch," Neal said in a cocky tone. "I think you knocked one of my fillings loose." Lifting his gaze, he smirked at dark haired teen glaring balefully at him, enjoying it immensely when the boy's eyes narrowed with growing anger.

"I'm asking you for the last time. How did you get into the vault?," he snarled.

"That was the last time?"

"Yes!"

"Good." Neal was impudently silent and relaxed in his chair as the teen's rage smoldered impatiently.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"How did you get into the vault?"

Neal tsked. "You just said you were done asking questions. Kids today. Their memories just aren't what they used to be. I blame the internet." *That* got him another blow to the head. "Ow... Ok... I think that one actually knocked the hamster off the wheel." He chuckled. For whatever reason, baiting this kid was really entertaining, even if it meant he'd be stumbling out of this place with a concussion and a few loose teeth. He spat out a bit of blood from the brand new cut on the inside of his mouth onto the

floor.

"Tell me what you're doing here!" The kid ordered. "And I want the truth!"

Neal laughed outright at that. "Y'know, I'd love to tell you the truth, but I don't think you'd believe me. You'd just hit me again."

"Try me."

"Alright." Neal took a measured breath and said in a perfect deadpan voice, "I was ordered by the FBI to break into this gallery for the purpose of stealing as many pieces from it as I could." He grinned, unable to resist jabbing at the angry kid one more time. "I'm your daddy's tax dollars at work."

He was steeling himself for the furious teen's drawn back fist when the door to the security room slammed open and a commanding angry voice cut through the air.

"Damian! What the hell do you think you're doing?"

The boy froze and turned to look at the newcomer. "Richard! I caught this thief in the—"

"I don't care! This is not Gitmo! We do not handcuff suspicious people and beat the tar out of them before calling the authorities!"

"Oh, I'm sure he's not handcuffed anymore, are you Neal?"

Neal grinned as he noticed the other man who'd come into the security room with the stranger. "Ah Peter. You know me so well." He raised a hand to wave in greeting, revealing that the cuffs that had been restraining him were completely undone and dangling harmlessly from his thumb. "How are you?"

"Just fine thanks. You seem to be in good spirits."

The con artist snickered. "The kid's got a nuclear temper, a practically non-existent fuse, and he baits easy."

"I noticed. Couldn't resist pushing his buttons?"

"They were red and flashing."

Peter rolled his eyes and offered Neal his hat. Meanwhile, on the other side of the room, Damian was getting a severe lecture at the hands of Richard Grayson.

"You mean he was telling the truth?" Damian exclaimed incredulously.

The older man nodded, his arms crossed over his chest as he glared at the teen. "Yes. Bruce personally requested that the FBI arrange a test of the security here. Obviously, it was a test that sorely needed. There's just one more week before the gallery opens, and we need security to be absolutely air tight." He sighed raked his fingers through his hair in frustration before he started to turn away from the boy and back to Peter and Neal. "I'm really, really sorry about that, Agent Burke. My younger brother can be impulsive to fault, and he's got a hair-trigger temper to boot. I wasn't expecting him to be here till tomorrow, so I hadn't told him about the test. I hope your partner's alright."

Neal answered for Peter. "Oh don't worry about it. This has been the most fun I've had in several months, although I think I really did lose a filling." He looked at Peter. "I do have dental coverage, right?"

If Dick Grayson was going to say anything more in apology, the words died as he got his first decent look at Neal Caffery since entering the room. He studied Neal

intensely before his blue eyes widened in surprise.

"Tim?"

"Hmm?" Neal and Peter both glanced behind them at the still open door to see if someone had just come in or passed by.

"Tim! Tim it's you!"

Suddenly Neal found himself pulled off balance. He was so stunned that for a moment he couldn't do anything but just stand there stock still while Dick hugged him.

"Ummm... Peter? What's going on?" he asked uncertainly.

Before Peter could say anything, Dick pulled back a little so that he could look Neal eye to eye. "It's me, Tim. It's Dick. Oh God, I can't believe it's really you! Where have you been—"

"I'm sorry," Neal said uncomfortably as he tried to worm himself out of the other man's grasp. "But my name is Neal. Neal Caffery, and we have never met before."

"Neal," Peter's voice had a suspicious edge to it. "You don't have an alias named Tim, do you?"

"I assure you, Peter, I don't—"

Dick looked stricken as he shook his head. "No. It's not an alias. Your name is Tim. Timothy Drake—"

"Dick," Damian interrupted his elder brother with what seemed like an uncharacteristic gentle tone. "It's not him. He may look a bit like Drake, but he isn't." The teenager turned a critical eye to Neal. "I think you'd better leave. Whatever report

you have to make on the gallery's security flaws can be delivered to my brother tomorrow."

Neal gingerly slipped out of Dick's grasp, a heavy feeling settling in his chest at the expression in the older man's face. It was an expression akin to one he'd been seeing a lot in the mirror ever since Kate's death. "I'm sorry, I'm not who you think I am."

Dick swallowed hard and tried to recompose himself. "The name Tim Drake really means nothing to you?"

Neal wished he could've said yes. The expression Dick wore was so downhearted. It seemed such a wrong expression for him to wear. "I'm sorry."

The older man sighed heavily. "I'm sorry too. I just... You look just like him, if he were..."

Peter touched Neal's arm. "C'mon Neal. We need to head back to the bureau." He then looked at Grayson. "I'll be back tomorrow with the security report and we'll go over the details of everything then. Have a good afternoon, Mr. Grayson." He inclined his head to Damian. "Mr. Wayne."

After the Neal and Peter had left the room, Dick sat down on one of the chairs and buried his face in his hands. Damian placed his own hand on his brother's back in a comforting gesture. "Are you alright?"

Dick shook his head. "I could've sworn it was him, Dami. In my dreams, when I see Tim older, as the age he'd be now if he were... here, he'd look just like that man."

"It's been seven years. We all searched for him, and no one looked harder for him than you. Not even father."

"I was the one who lost him."

"It wasn't your fault."

"Yes it was!" Dick's head jerked up and he gave Damian a pained look. Then his sighed, got to his feet, and started heading towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Out," Dick said simply. "Don't forget to lock up when you leave."

Damian didn't say another word. He just watched as his brother left as quickly as his feet could take him without breaking into a dead run. The seventeen year old teenager sighed.

The sudden loss of Tim Drake seven years ago had been hard on everyone in their network of family and friends. It had been especially devastating on Dick and his father, Bruce, who were each tortured in their own ways by the lack of knowledge about Drake's ultimate fate. Without a body, though, there was no way to confirm that the Red Robin was actually dead. Because of that, there was always a sliver hope that maybe, just maybe, he had survived his lone confrontation with Ra's Al Ghul and lived on even today. Damian never let himself believe in such fairy tales, though. He knew his grandfather's methods and he always figured the chances were better that Drake was dead and had been left to rot in some obscure corner of the world where no one would ever find him.

At least, that was the most merciful fate Damian could imagine happening to his least favorite brother, had he been captured by the League of Assassins.

Still, even though he was nearly completely certain that the man he'd caught in

the vault earlier was NOT Timothy Drake, Damian couldn't help suspiciously eyeing some of Neal Caffery's blood that had been spat out on the floor during the beating he'd given him.

Author Notes: Chapter 4 has now come and gone. Damian discovered the intruder in the vault and took prompt action to both subdue and interrogate him. Unfortunately for him, Neal is an adept evasive button pusher. Then finally we have the recognition mentioned in this story's preview that will ultimately shake up the worlds of everyone close to both Tim Drake and Neal Caffery. This is only the beginning. There is definitely more to come.

Chapter 5

New York City... late evening same day...

It was close to nine pm when Peter Burke finally dragged himself through the front door of the home he shared with his wife, Elizabeth. He was exhausted, and it showed clearly both in his posture and on his face. Of course his wife picked up on it almost immediately as she watched him pet the family dog, Satchmo.

"Looks like you had a long day," she observed as she dog-eared a page in the book she was reading before getting up from the sofa.

"You don't know the half of it," Peter said as he shrugged his jacket off and draped it over the back of the sofa. By then, Elizabeth had made her way around the large piece of furniture and wrapped her arms around her husband as soon as he was within reach. He held her close and sighed as he relaxed in her embrace.

"OK. What happened?" she asked after they separated, her eyes studying him with mild concern.

Peter made his way into the kitchen, placed his suitcase on an end table along the way, and started fishing around in the fridge for a beer. "Neal got handcuffed and beat up by a seventeen-year old this afternoon."

"Huh?"

"He has to see a dentist tomorrow to get some fillings replaced because of him." Peter popped the cap off his bottle and took a quick sip. "I'm pretty sure he's got a concussion too, but he refused to go see a doctor about it."

Elizabeth shook her head in confusion and disbelief. "Wait a minute. Back the truck up a little. What happened to Neal?"

So Peter explained to his wife what happened during the security test at the Wayne art gallery. He didn't know all the details surrounding how Neal got ambushed by Damian, the youngest son of Bruce Wayne. The guards at the gallery didn't even realize Neal was there until the kid half dragged the semi-unconscious ex-con-artist through the building and down into the security command center, where he ordered everyone out so he could be alone to interrogate Neal. The guards called Grayson, who in turn contacted Peter, and they both stormed into gallery to rescue him.

"Neal, Neal, Neal," Elizabeth said with a chuckle. "You just had to keep pushing those buttons." By this time, the loving couple had both reclaimed the sofa together.

Peter shrugged. "But you know, hun, as unusual as that was, that wasn't the oddest thing that happened over there."

"Really?"

"Well, this was the first time Richard Grayson had ever seen Neal, but as soon as he did, he mistook him for someone else. He was really adamant about it and even hugged Neal out of the blue."

"Who did Dick think Neal was? Had Neal met him before under one of his other aliases?"

Peter shook his head. "No. Neal swore up and down he'd never seen the man before in his life. But, I did find out who Grayson mistook him for." His expression grim, Peter reached over to the end table where his suitcase was, flipped it open, and pulled out a folder. He handed it to his wife.

"A missing person file?"

"A seven year old cold case," Peter explained. "I kicked myself for not recalling this sooner. It was huge news back then."

Elizabeth scanned the pages within the folder. Realization dawned in her eyes, and her own expression mirrored her husband's. "Oh, now I remember. The missing Wayne heir." She read over the details softly. "Name... Timothy Jackson Drake-Wayne... Age... Seventeen..."

"This boy's file reads like a Greek tragedy," Peter said. "First his mother murdered and his father paralyzed during a kidnapping overseas. Then his father was murdered in their own home a couple of years later and he was the one to find the body. Things started looking up when he was adopted by Bruce Wayne. For a while there he seemed to flourish. And then, one day, he just disappeared without a trace." He sighed and shook his head. "That kid had such a bright future ahead of him."

Elizabeth glanced up at her husband. "Were there any clues as to what happened to him?"

Peter shrugged. "Not that I can read from the file. I wasn't on this case back then. But I do remember that Bruce Wayne spared no expense trying to find him. That family was so desperate. They did everything they could. They blitzed the media, hired the best PIs while enlisting the FBI and I think even the CIA and Interpol for help. But no one could find anything. There was no ransom. No clues. No threats. All the leads the bureau followed led to dead ends. It was as if the kid had just fallen off the face of the earth."

"Oh," Elizabeth murmured sadly. She turned her attention back to the file, flipped a page, and gasped a little. "Oh!" She lifted up the photograph that had been placed in the folder, so she could see it with better light. "Is this a picture of him?"

Peter nodded. "You see it too, don't you?"

Elizabeth nodded, her voice awestruck when she spoke. "This kid... He really does look a lot like a younger version of Neal." She paused as she remembered something. "Wait... Didn't you say that the FBI doesn't have any history of Neal prior to his eighteenth birthday? Is it possible...?"

Her husband gave her a wan smile. "That's part of why I'm late. I called in a favor and had Neal's DNA compared with the sample of Timothy Wayne's we had on file."

"And?"

Peter shook his head.

Elizabeth gave her husband a compassionate look. "You were really hoping that the test would come back positive, weren't you?"

"I really was."

She leaned over and gave Peter a kiss on the cheek. "The DNA might not match, but the resemblance is still so uncanny. It's really kinda spooky."

"I know, which is why as soon as I get back to the office, I'm putting this back in the cold case files. We don't need Neal seeing this and getting any ideas."

Elizabeth gave Peter a scolding look. "Do you honestly think he'd stoop so low as to try to con Bruce Wayne into thinking he was his long lost son?"

Peter didn't respond to his wife out loud, but the expression he wore said enough for her. She closed the folder and slapped it against his chest before getting off the sofa and heading towards the stairs.

"I'm going to bed. I've got to be at the gallery early tomorrow. If you're hungry there's some chicken in the fridge."

Peter watched her ascend the stairs. Then as he drained the last of his beer, he flipped through the missing person file for the umpteenth time that evening, always coming to a stop at that photograph. Every fiber of his instincts was screaming at him that the teenager in the photograph was Neal.

However, unlike Neal, DNA didn't lie.

Author Notes: *With Chapter 5 we receive the revelation that while there is a scary uncanny resemblance between Tim Drake and Neal Caffery, the DNA the FBI has for the two just doesn't match up. Peter really, truly did want the test to come out positive.*

But then again... What kind of story would this be if happy endings came so easily?

Chapter 6

New York City... late evening same day...

It had been a long time since Dick Grayson patrolled the streets of New York City. It was close to midnight, and the red striped Nightwing had just helped the local fire department rescue several children from a burning apartment building. Their panic-stricken parents thanked the masked vigilante many times over as they crushed their children in their tight embrace. As he made his way back up to the rooftop of a nearby skyscraper, an annoyed voice caught his attention.

"You didn't have to go and do that alone," Damian said, glaring at his older brother from behind the mask he wore as Robin.

Nightwing tried to smile at his younger brother reassuringly. "You were already busy chasing down the arsonists who started the fire. Besides, it wasn't anything I couldn't handle."

Robin was not reassured, and his frown deepened to emphasize that point. "Don't give me that. You're still upset about what happened this afternoon with that thief-

"FBI agent."

"Tch! Whatever! Doesn't matter. What matters is that whenever you're upset about *him*, you go rushing into the night alone and start taking stupid risks in the field!"

"I don't-"

"Madrid?" Robin reminded Nightwing curtly. "How about New Orleans? Hong Kong? Metropolis? Baghdad? Do you want me to go through the whole list, or only the ones where you nearly got yourself killed?"

What Nightwing really wanted to do was just tell Robin to drop it, that it wasn't

something he had to worry about because he was just a kid. However, it was near impossible to think of his former partner as "just a kid" anymore. He'd long since stopped being shorter than Dick when he turned fifteen. At seventeen now, he was the same height as him, with signs that he'd probably acquire another couple of inches before he finally stopped growing. Damian had gained his father's genes in height, though not his bulk in muscle. His mother's genes worked on that and gave him a leaner body than the original Batman. He sighed. "No. You don't have to go on," he told Robin. "Let's... Just patrol for a few more hours, then head back to the hotel."

"Good," Robin said as he started pulling out his grappling gun. "I can't wait till this gallery thing is done, and we can go back to Gotham. I'm so sick of this city."

Nightwing smirked a little. "You just want to get back to work on your flight suit at home."

Robin scowled. "Yes. Yes I do! The wings are almost done! I can't wait till I can go on a Titans mission and NOT have to rely on the metas to fly me back and forth."

"Awww... Don't you like getting picked up by Supergirl anymore?"

The unmasked portions of Robin's face started to redden. "Shut up, Nightwing." The grappling line flew out from the gun, and the younger vigilante quickly followed after it.

Bantering with Robin lifted Nightwing's spirits a little. When he lost Tim, he made it a point to stay as close to Damian as he could, to the point where he was overprotective to a fault. Dick vowed he wouldn't lose another brother. However, when his hyper-protective nature kept hindering Damian in the field, Bruce had to make the

judgment call to separate the two, under the excuse that it was time for him to partner with his youngest son, and for Dick to be Batman Inc.'s representative in the Justice League. When that happened, Dick decided to hang up his version of the cape and cowl once and for all, and returned to his Nightwing persona full time. However, as a tribute to his missing brother, he changed the stripes from blue to red. The intention was to return them to their original color once they finally brought Tim home.

They've been red ever since.

For the next couple of hours, it was a pretty standard night in New York City. A car jacking stopped here, a meth lab busted there. A few breaking and entering jobs were nipped in the bud in between. It was almost three am when the pair decided to take a break and split a small pizza on the roof of the Empire State Building.

"I was right, wasn't I?" Nightwing insisted with a smile after finishing the second to last slice of the pie.

Robin frowned and finally gave in. "Alright. I admit it. The pizza here is better than any I've had anywhere else. Are you happy now?"

"Quite."

"Good, cause the last piece is mine."

"Hey!"

Before Nightwing could go in and swipe that last piece back for himself, the communicators from both of them started to go off. It was Oracle, and even though they both flipped the com units on their masks on, Nightwing was the only one who could answer, since his was the only mouth not full of pepperoni and cheese.

"Evening beautiful. What's up?"

"I can't believe it! I just can't believe it!" Barbara Gordon's voice was thick with emotion as her words tumbled into the boys' ears. It sounded as if she'd been crying. "I ran the tests five times just to be sure I wasn't dreaming, but it's real! It's really real!"

Nightwing's brows furrowed with concern and confusion. Robin looked decidedly less confused, but concern and surprise were both there in his young face. The rest of his pizza was placed back in the box and promptly forgotten. "Babs?" the elder brother said. "What are you talking about? What tests?"

"The blood samples," she said between sniffles. "The ones Dami sent me this afternoon. I ran the DNA against my database and it's a match! It's a match! A hundred percent! Oh god... You found him. Oh my god! You really, truly found him!" Barbara was sobbing openly now.

Robin had paled, his face a picture of shock. Nightwing felt a dawning realization about who she might be talking about, and his own voice thickened with barely restrained emotion when he spoke once more. "Who? Who did we find, Babs?"

There was a long moment of sniffing before Barbara finally answered him. "Tim," she said softly. "You finally found Tim!"

If Babs said anything more, Dick didn't hear it. His mind was whirling as the events of the earlier afternoon replayed themselves in his head. He didn't even realize he'd been stumbling backwards until his back met a wall and he slid down it, his legs suddenly turned to jelly.

"It *was* him," he said, his hands trembling as he brought them up to his eyes;

hands that just a few hours ago had held his long lost brother. His voice shook just as bad, caught between laughter and sobbing as he tried unsuccessfully to scrub the tears away from his mask. "It *was* him! We found Tim! He's alive! Oh god, he's alive!"

For the first time in years, Dick Grayson felt lighter than air. A mercilessly crushing weight of guilt and grief finally lifted itself off of his shoulders. Eventually, the sobs faded it was only his joyous relieved laughter which filled the crisp New York night air.

DNA didn't lie, after all.

Author Notes: DNA doesn't lie?

And here ends Part 1 of Confidence Lost. These PDFs will at least six collected chapters each here on DeviantArt. However, the individual chapters will each be initially released on my FanFiction.net account and on my Tumblr blog. If you would like to stay up-to-date with the chapters as they're posted, then you can find them at <http://www.fanfiction.net/~crscott> or at <http://crscottfanfics.tumblr.com/>.