

[David Lance POV]

After having taken down Bane, and Kobra, the team and I returned to the base, where Batman was waiting for us. First, upon our arrival, he congratulated the team for the results we had provided, then after the congratulations were done, he turned to me, with a scolding look.

"The mission was to observe and report, not to engage the enemy." He said in a gruff tone that bordered growling, his eyes staring into mine. "While I understand the reasoning behind your actions, you endangered the team by not following the orders I gave you."

~Your approach to the situation was too passive,~ I replied, staring back at him, refusing to back down. ~If I had just followed your orders, Kobra and his associates would've succeeded in their mission.~

"They did, regardless of your intervention, didn't they?" Batman asked, taking a step forward, his eyes narrowing. "Sportsmaster escaped with a vial from the suitcase, as per your report. So, what did your disobedience accomplish?"

~I stopped Sportsmaster from getting away with the suitcase,~
I answered. ~And I captured Bane, who is now on his way to
Arkham Asylum.~

"Your actions, while calculated, put the entire team at risk, and
that is unacceptable," Batman said, his voice getting harder. "I
put you on this team to lead, but even a leader must know
when to obey. Hear me well, Black Bolt, I cannot, will not, have
team members who do not follow orders, no matter how noble
their intentions are. Do you understand?"

~I do,~ I nodded, taking one step forward. ~But as the leader of
this team, I must inform you that when I see it fit, I will
disobey your orders.~

"I see," Batman said, his eyes narrowing.

"Get off our back," Superboy said, staring at Batman. "We did
what we had to, deal with it."

"This is not with you Superboy," Batman said, his eyes never
leaving mine. "Do not interfere."

"Or what?" Superboy asked, taking a step forward.

~That's enough Superboy,~ I said before Superboy could say
anything else. ~While I understand your frustration, this is not
the time or place. As the leader, this is my burden to bear.~

Superboy glared at Batman but didn't say anything else, instead crossing his arms and turning away.

"I must apologize Batman, but I too stand behind Black Bolt's actions," Aqualad said, taking one step forward.

"He led the team efficiently and managed to outplay the enemy with his moves," Robin chimed in, also taking a step forward.

"He kept us safe," Miss Martian said, joining the others. "He was keeping track of us at all times. He even saved me from Sportsmaster's attack, by realizing he had noticed me, and alerting me of that before Sportsmaster could attack me."

"He got the job done," Raven said calmly.

Batman stared at us for a long moment before a smile crept up his face for the briefest of moments. "I see. In that case, good job, team. While I'm not pleased your leader disobeyed clear given orders, you all stood by him and his decisions, and that's commendable. You're dismissed."

~Do you have a few minutes so that I can give you my full report?~ I asked, looking at Batman.

"Follow me," Batman said, his eyes narrowing slightly.

I nodded and followed him as he turned and walked away into one of the Zeta tubes. The rest of the team watched us for a moment as we entered the tubes before dispersing to their own areas, each one wearing a different level of concern, save for Raven and Kid Flash.

A few moments later, inside the Batcave's debriefing room, we each took a seat, reviewing some files before Batman turned to me. "I apologize for not telling you about my little outburst. But I had to make it believable."

~I didn't believe it, and by proxy, Raven didn't either,~ I replied, looking around the room, taking in every little detail. The room is brightly lit, but it does little to chase away the darkness that seems to permeate every corner of the cave; maybe that was an intentional design. The table in front of me is cluttered with files and papers from various different cases. ~I know you well enough to know what actually pisses you off. Excuse my language. So, I knew you were doing that for another reason.~

"And what reason is that?" Batman asked, his eyebrow raised in curiosity.

~To test the team's loyalty to me,~ I answered plainly. ~You wanted to see if they would stand by me even if you didn't approve of my actions.~

Batman nodded in understanding before leaning back in his chair and steepling his fingers. "Yes, that was part of it. But I also wanted to see how you would react under pressure."

I cocked my head to the side in confusion. ~What do you mean?~

"You're the leader of this team and the only one qualified for this task at the moment. However, you're still new to the role," Batman explained. "I wanted to see how you would handle a difficult situation, and you did well. Granted, you saw through my test, but be that as it may, you still performed beyond my expectations."

~Word of advice don't test Richard like that,~ I replied, giving Batman a look. ~As smart and talented as he is, he's still a kid deep down, and you are his father, for better or for worse. Hidden tasks, tests, or purposes behind actions will only mess with his head and, in time, will push him away from you.~

"I will take your words into consideration," Batman said, his voice softening slightly.

~The Light was behind this,~ I said, changing the subject as I pointed to the suitcase, I had taken from Sportsmaster.

"Yes," Batman said with a nod, his face hardening as he looked at the suitcase. "I had my suspicions, but seeing as Kobra and Sportsmaster were there, it's all but confirmed."

~Based on what I could gather from Kobra's men as I tied them up, they were making some kind of bioweapon,~ I replied, taking a deep breath as I leaned forward. ~The suitcase is full of whatever they were trying to make. Sadly, I couldn't stop Sportsmaster from escaping with one of the vials... I honestly didn't even see him open the suitcase, but it seems he did at some point.~

Batman nodded; his face thoughtful as he considered my words. "Before we proceed, we need to analyze the contents within the suitcase."

~I assume the Batcave has something to complete such a task,~ I replied, glancing around the room.

"Your assumption would be correct," Batman replied as he stood up, leading the way out of the room, suitcase at hand, as I followed him to what I assumed was called the Batlab or something similar.

Within a moment or two, we arrived at a large room filled with all sorts of gadgets and machines that I couldn't even begin to understand, as most seemed custom-made. Besides that, there

were various monitors set up around the room, each one displaying different readouts or images.

In the center of the room was a large table with what appeared to be a microscope and some other tools of the same theme.

Batman walked over to the table, gesturing for me to join him. "This is the lab."

~How do you explain all of these tools to whoever makes them?~ I asked, making some conversation as I looked around the room, taking everything in.

"Most of these tools are my own design," Batman explained as he set the suitcase down on the table and began to open it. "As for how I get them here. Lots of money, connections, and planning."

~I see,~ I replied, nodding in understanding as I watched Batman pull out some vials from the suitcase and place them on what appeared to be a blood analyzer if one went by design alone.

"This should take a few moments or so," Batman said as he began to input some data into the machine.

Nodding, I crossed my arms and waited patiently as the machine began to do its work, my mind wandering as I tried to

see if I could remember anything that could unfold the mystery of these vials, anything from my canon memories.

Within a few minutes or so of Batman working, the machine beeped, catching my attention as I walked over to Batman.
~So, what does it say?~

"Inconclusive," Batman said as he read the data on the screen, "It contains Venom, but that's not all there is within this. The other part will take days, maybe more, to decipher without a sample of the other ingredient."

I paused, giving the readings a look, finding some of them very similar. ~Check my database; I think we already have a sample of the other ingredient.~

If I was correct, and I didn't want to be, the other ingredient was the Blockbuster vial. Some of the readings matched perfectly with the readings I had gotten from analyzing project Blockbuster in the arrow cave.

"Interesting," Batman said after a few moments, looking up at me. "The data you have about project Blockbuster fits perfectly with what we have."

~That's what I was afraid of,~ I sighed, running a hand through my hair. ~This pretty much confirms the Light's involvement; I mean, how else would have Kobra and Sportsmaster gotten their hands on the Blockbuster formula?~

"Agreed," Batman said, his face grim as he looked at the data on the screen. "Based on the data you collected from CADMUS, project Blockbuster is designed to increase the power of ordinary people through a combination of genetic research and some crystals who happened to have all their data redacted from every single file. When ingested, the serum is supposed to vastly increase the muscle mass of the user creating a thick hide underneath the skin, causing the original skin and facial features to slough off."

~Add Venom to that, and the result is Mammoth,~ I replied, my mind quickly putting two and two together as to why Mammoth looked how he looked.

"The Light is planning to create an army of super-soldiers," Batman said, his voice grim as he looked at me. "If they are able to mass produce this serum, the consequences will be dire."

I nodded. ~We need to stop them,~

"You might have to leave the team earlier than I would've wanted," Batman said as he looked at me, his eyes heavy.

~Wouldn't now be too soon?~ I replied, remembering our talk some time ago about using Deathstroke's and his liking to me to infiltrate the Light.

"I don't think we have a choice," Batman said as he looked at the data on the screen. "The sooner we can get our hands on more information about them, the better."

I nodded, taking a deep breath. ~And how do you plan we do this? I mean, there are a lot of factors at play. We need to make this as believable as possible, and not only that, we still have to create a valid reason as to why I won't use my powers when playing for the bad guys.~

"Martian Manhunter will help us with your talking situation," Batman said as he looked at me. "As for how to deal with your powers in order to create a valid reason for you not to use them, well, for that, I have a few ideas in mind."

~And what will be my motive for becoming a villain?~ I asked, taking a deep breath. ~Dinah and Oliver won't believe it if I just turn bad all of the sudden.~

Batman was silent for a few moments. "The Joker incident."

I froze at that. He actually wanted to use that event for this? I mean, it made sense, and it would work if we played it correctly, but it would scar Robin, and everyone involved by magnitudes we can't even comprehend.

"Mental deterioration is common to survivors of the Joker Venom," Batman said, his voice heavy. "If we play our cards right and expose you to the venom a second time, we can orchestrate your falling down."

I'm fucking glad Batman is not a villain.

~I see, and then when you realize I have gone 'bad', you will find a cure or permanent nullifier for my powers,~ I replied, connecting the dots of Batman's plan. ~I suppose that's where the device Martian Manhunter is having made for me enters the equation, right? With me trying to kill you all with a scream, only to find out I have no powers, and my voice is doing nothing. Except it won't be my voice, but the sound the device Martian Manhunter is giving me makes, right?~

Batman nodded. "More or less."

~Raven will know something is wrong,~ I sighed, looking at the floor. ~I won't be able to fool her. She will read my emotions and immediately grasp something is off about my villain act.~

"In that case, she can know, but the rest of the team and others can't," Batman said as he looked at me. "If we are going to do this, we need to make it convincing."

~I hate you,~ I sighed, giving him a short nod. ~But I understand why I need to do this.~

"I'm sorry, I really am. If I could have any other way, if there was any other path to take, I would not be asking this of you," Batman said, his voice sincere. "But you know as well as I do that, we are fighting a losing war right now."

I nodded, understanding his words all too well.

This mission wasn't optional; because as long as the Light existed, my sister, Raven, Oliver, and everyone else would be at risk, and if the only way to keep them safe from this risk was by sacrificing my own sanity and mental wellbeing, I would do it.

Without hesitation.

~I know.~