



Pack

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Edward is very good at taking care of himself, in his rarely-humble opinion.

This is not a good thing.

Prologue

Nests were supposed to be made by omegas. They were supposed to be protected by alphas. That was how it worked. Omegas had instincts to make and maintain homes, while alphas had instincts to protect and lead them.

Edward was a beta. Betas were supposed to keep the peace. They didn't have as strong an urge to please and listen to alphas, nor to protect and comfort omegas. They were the glue that held both sides together.

But they tended to be rather... poor at taking care of themselves. They weren't supposed to need to. They had omegas to make their nests and keep them fed and teach them how to function within their pack. They had alphas to protect them and keep them safe and teach them to function in greater society.

Edward knew how to take care of himself fairly well. This was not a good thing.

His alpha father was what Edward needed protecting *from*, and his omega mother hadn't once bothered to make Edward a nest. He'd been making his own since his mother dubbed him too old to sleep in his parents' nest.

Betas didn't typically make nests. Edward thought he was pretty good at it. Sure, they tended to be a little lumpy and cold and came apart easily, but he was certain that was how most nests were — right?

Betas were not supposed to cook. Edward thought he was pretty good at it. Sure, most of what he made was either a little cold and soggy or far too black, but he was certain that most food that didn't come from restaurants was like that — right?

Betas were not supposed to fight. Edward thought he was pretty good at it. To be fair, modern society had decided that all designations could fight pretty well, if in different ways, and Edward was legitimately fairly tough considering his bad leg and generally scrawny-leaning build.

Betas were not supposed to take care of themselves. People were not supposed to be packless. Edward thought he was pretty good at living on his own. Sure, he tended to be rather sad and everything he did failed and he had somehow ended up a Supervillain, but surely that was the world's fault rather than his own — right?

Chapter 1: Bed Of Straw

The first time that Edward had seen the Scarecrow out of costume, his eyebrows had shot straight into his hairline and any plans to tease Jonathan over showing such trust went straight out the window. Edward had to breathe in deeply several times before he accepted that the scent wafting off the other was indeed his real one.

How could such a tall, terrifying, dangerous man be an *omega*? It just didn't make any sense to Edward. Until the first time he'd seen Jonathan in heat, and then everything suddenly had made a lot more sense.

Edward and Jonathan were sharing a hideout for the very first time, and things had been going pretty well until Edward walked into the living room one day only for Jonathan to snap at him to sit down and eat breakfast.

Because Jonathan had cooked. Jonathan had cooked a lot. And he wouldn't let Edward leave until Jonathan decided that he'd properly eaten.

The way he took Edward hostage was not by brandishing his scythe or threatening him with Fear Toxin or even via blackmail, like he normally might've done. No, instead his pupils got absolutely *huge* and he made a low whining keened in the back of his throat every single time Edward tried to move away from the table.

Edward's brain registered *omega* and *upset*, and he might've not been an alpha but betas were still wired to keep omegas somewhat content, so he was stuck there until Jonathan was satisfied that he was full.

It would take a while for Edward to realize that Jonathan didn't just happen to be an exceptionally good cook, but that *most* people could cook better than Edward himself could. All the same, the Scarecrow's food was heaven in his mouth, and he found himself not entirely minding the bizarre situation.

When Edward got back home that evening, the situation only grew stranger. Jonathan pulled him into a hug practically the moment he'd stepped through the door, immediately tipping Edward off that something was very, very wrong — while they had hugged a few times in the past, Edward was always been the one to initiate it and Jonathan mostly put up with it only because they were both *extremely* touch-starved.

Jonathan squeezed him *tight* and started to outright whine that Edward had been gone for too long. Apparently Jonathan-in-heat wasn't okay with being left alone, unlike regular Jonathan, who usually preferred it.

Edward was fairly certain that Jonathan was going to pump him full of enough fear gas to drive him completely insane once his heat was over. But right then, Jonathan looked near tears and was making whining noises that sounded far too vulnerable for the normally caustic man and *damn* it, he was Edward's friend and he was in need.

So Edward just... stayed home for a week. He put up with Jonathan's overfeeding him and demands for cuddles and fussing over everything from Edward's wardrobe to his sleep schedule.

Edward made many discoveries during that week. One was that omegas could get a little crazy if they spent enough heats with only crows for company, and Edward silently vowed that his friend wasn't ever going to go through such an ordeal ever again if he could help it.

Another thing he learned was that nests were apparently not just some blankets shoved into a corner. While in heat, Jonathan downright insisted on being the one to make Edward's nest along with his own. It was the first time someone else had made a nest for Edward.

The nests Jonathan made were large and spread out, with barriers of pillows around them and few if any lumps. Edward had thought that nests like that were just a thing in books and movies, but no, apparently that's how most nests were supposed to be made.

That first night, Edward marveled at how warm and *comfortable* he was. The nest smelled faintly of Jonathan and *safe* and *home* and a lot of other things that nests were apparently supposed to smell like.

Edward almost felt like he had a pack. He knew it was a silly idea, but he let himself pretend for a week that he wasn't some abandoned beta that had to survive alone in the world.

The week ended eventually, though, and Edward resigned himself to the embarrassed fury Jonathan was sure to reign down on him.

Instead, Jonathan stared silently at him for a few moments, and then given him a hug. For just a second, Edward thought that maybe his friend's heat was running a little long, but no — Jonathan was stiff and his arms were just barely wrapped around

Edward and he was looking away as if he could pretend he wasn't expressing affection if he couldn't see it. Just like he always did when he let Edward hug him.

A routine of sorts developed between them after that, though for most of each month they pretended it didn't exist. Jonathan eventually was able to keep a relatively good hold of himself during heats, after he went through a few without being alone, but he was still overly clingy and fussy during them. Edward was happy to stay with Jonathan during the week or so he really needed him, mostly because he cared for his friend, but partly so he could keep pretending that he had a pack.

Edward had *never* really had a pack. His birth bond with his parents had fizzled out pretty quickly, and his father hadn't ever bothered to reclaim him. He and Jonathan weren't really pack, only alphas could form pack bonds and neither of them had an alpha, but Edward still liked to pretend. Not that he ever told Jonathan that, of course.

Jonathan wasn't interested in a real pack. His pseudo bonds with his crows, Edward, and one overly-peppy psychologist lady he apparently had a friendship with were good enough for him. A real pack would require an alpha, and Jonathan refused to be tied down to the whims of some brute. Edward, whose main examples of alphas consisted of his father and Batman, found the stance perfectly understandable.

Then along came a silly little man by the name of Jervis Tetch, and their entire world went topsy-turvy.

Chapter 2: A Place To Hang Your Hat

I want to clarify right now that my version of Jervis is NOT a rapist nor an attempted rapist. The backstory I use for him most of the time goes like this:

He had a crush on a (ADULT) woman named Alice. Alice started dating someone else. Jervis grew jealous and managed to delude himself into thinking that minor issues about Alice's boyfriend meant he was abusive, and thus kidnapped and brainwashed her 'to save her'. Batman snaps him out of this delusion and Jervis has a bit of a heel realization, and actually cooperates with Arkham therapists when it comes to his issues with women, but this still kicks off his supervillain career.

Still bad. Still something I don't condone. But while in-universe rumors may exist, my version of Jervis NEVER would've escalated to rape or killing Alice. I like my villains goofy and potentially redeemable and mostly decent at heart, and I will rewrite them however I please to obtain that goal.

Thank you for coming to my TED Talk. Now back to your regularly scheduled Batfic:

Impossibly, Jervis's designation was even more shocking than Jonathan's. Jervis was entirely unassuming if wearing anything less attention-grabbing than a giant tophat and a brightly patterned longcoat. He was kind and polite, and he stammered terribly when nervous. He was obsessive in many ways, but especially over romance, and often talked about all the ways he'd care for a mate.

He was also, inexplicably, an alpha.

Edward began questioning his knowledge of biology and society in general after meeting Jervis. He had been wrong about how food was cooked and about how nests were made, loathed as he was to admit that even to himself, so maybe he had completely misunderstood designations as well. It was possible, though if true he decided that he would have to legitimately question his status as a genius.

Luckily, Edward's self-proclaimed title as the smartest man alive remained safe, as he would soon learn. Funnily enough, this would be another thing that Edward discovered through Jonathan's heats.

It had all started when Jonathan failed to come to Edward's place a few days before he expected his heat to begin. Edward had shrugged it off; despite their routine and Edward's compulsive need for order, their lives were too dangerous and unpredictable to always stick strictly to schedules.

Then it was halfway through the week and Edward hadn't gotten so much as a text from Jonathan, and now he was really starting to worry. Jonathan hated spending his heats alone, normally he would've told Edward where to find him by now.

Trying not to panic, Edward began to subtly ask around for the whereabouts of several people, only one of which was Jonathan. Almost no-one knew just how close they were, after all, and Edward thought it best to keep it that way. Eventually, he heard from Harley that Jonathan had been planning some sort of team-up with the Mad Hatter and was last seen near one of his hideouts.

Jonathan liked Jervis, Edward knew, even if he vehemently denied it. But Edward barely knew the man, and one of the few things he did know was that he'd kidnapped and brainwashed at least one omega in the past. Regular Jonathan would have no trouble defending himself, he was hardly weak, but Edward wasn't exactly sure if the same could be said about in-heat-Jonathan.

Edward was not an alpha. He was a beta. Betas weren't supposed to defend their packs, they were supposed to get their alphas if the pack needed protecting.

Edward was not an alpha, and he didn't have a pack. That didn't stop him from running off to challenge an actual alpha and save his friend.

Edward had always been good at taking care of himself, and he was certain that he could be good at protecting someone else.

...right?

Jervis opened the door barely two inches when Edward knocked, glaring up at him with more intensity than Edward had thought possible. It was entirely unlike his usual open, jovial greetings.

"What?" Jervis snapped at him, just barely not snarling. All hope Edward had of Jonathan still being able to fight him off while in heat dissipated.

Angry alpha, angry alpha, angry alpha, Edward's instincts chanted, shouting at him to stand down. But this was for Jonathan, and Edward had stood his ground with alphas in the past, he even fought the Batman himself on a regular basis. He had bested far more intimidating alphas with far less stakes many times before, he could handle someone like Tetch. He hoped.

"I'm looking for a mutual friend of ours," Edward said pleasantly with just the slightest undercurrent of danger in his tone, stressing the word friend pointedly. "Sticks and cloth for skin and bone, outstanding in his field; feathers are his friend and foe, fear his weapon and his shield."

Jervis actually growled at him then, sounding every bit the territorial alpha he'd never once managed to come off as before that moment. "He's indisposed at the moment."

Before Edward could reply to that, the door was yanked open, startling both of them.

"Edward!" Jonathan crooned from where he stood just behind Jervis, grinning brightly in a way he never did except for when he was deep in heat. "Jervis, it's alright, Ed's always welcome in my nest."

Jervis craned his head to peer up at Jonathan before looking at Edward again. He seemed significantly less hostile now, though still not quite his usual self. He huffed once, a warning sound, before stepping back from the doorway.

Edward thought that maybe entering the den of an angry alpha was a terrible, terrible idea. Jonathan apparently disagreed with him, grabbing his arm and tugging him inside before he could voice so much as a single protest. Inside, Edward saw that Jervis's many couches and plush chairs had been rearranged in a large circle, their cushions and throw pillows removed to create the single biggest nest Edward had ever seen in his life.

Edward honestly couldn't tell if it was a result of Jervis's obsessive tendencies or just what happened when Jonathan had access to more pillows and space while in heat. He decided not to ask.

Jonathan's and Jervis's scents mingled throughout the space. There was the familiar aroma of *safe home nest mine* that Jonathan always put into his nests, along with a new *protect safe mine mine mine mine* that Edward guessed must be from Jervis.

There was absolutely no smell of pain or fear or anything else that would be worrisome. Nothing to say that maybe Jonathan had fallen under Jervis's spell and wasn't actually there willingly. Edward relaxed a great deal once he realized that, letting Jonathan pull him into the nest and not resisting as he started fussing over the state of his clothes and hair. It was practically instinct for Edward by then to give in to the omega's demands for attention.

Edward remembered too late that someone else was actually present to witness their routine for once, and grew embarrassed. One wasn't supposed to be so comfortable and vulnerable outside of their pack, after all. He also remembered that he was in Jervis's den and he really shouldn't have entered the nest without the alpha's permission, even if it was technically Jonathan's nest and Jonathan was unbonded.

Edward tried to get out of the nest. Jervis was already mad at him for some reason, he didn't want to make it worse. But the moment he tried to rise, Jonathan started making a whining sound low in his throat. It wasn't his regular 'you will finish these eggs or else I am going to cry at you' whine, no, rather it was something Edward had only heard on TV.

It was the sound one made to summon an alpha when a packmate was doing something they shouldn't. Jonathan was tattling on him.

"Stay," Jervis ordered sharply, staring Edward down until he complied and settled back into the nest. Jonathan immediately wrapped himself around him and made a contented sound that he'd never dare let himself be caught making if half his brain wasn't shut off by heat. Jervis made a pleased little call at the happy omega, thought for a second and then made a similar call at Edward, and then wandered off to make tea for them all.

Maybe he wasn't so angry at Edward after all.

Edward became a little worried that Jonathan wouldn't want to spend his heats with him anymore now that he had an alpha who wouldn't pressure him into a bond to stay with, but no, apparently Jonathan grew sad if Edward wasn't there when his heat hit.

Or at least that's what Jervis told him, right before he had several hypnotized goons carry him off to Jervis's hideout and an apologetic looking (though barely) Jonathan.

And thus a new routine was born.

Chapter 3: Delusions Of Loneliness

Staying at Jervis's place for one week every month wasn't nearly as annoying as Edward had expected it to be. The alpha and him eventually warmed up to each other, though it was mostly because Jonathan learned to weaponize sad omega sounds even when he wasn't in heat and used that to force them to get along.

Sitting in the comfiest nest ever, Edward would spend that week surrounded by okay tea and good food, having his fill of both intelligent conversation and cuddles. Jervis turned out to be as much of a cuddler as either of them despite being neither touch-starved nor having heats.

Edward found that it was even easier to pretend that he had a pack when it wasn't just him and Jonathan. Comforting omega scents mixed with protective alpha scents in the way that a pack scent was supposed to, and filled a void that Edward hadn't even realized was inside him.

Edward would lay down in the oversized nest with Jonathan next to him, and Jervis would make a few rounds to growl at whatever shadows he decided might be hiding bandersnatches that night, before he would lay down on the other side of Jonathan and the three of them would fall asleep.

For one week every month, Edward could almost pretend that he had a *home*.

But eventually, he'd always have to return to his own hideout. His cold hideout with his poorly cooked food and his lumpy nest, that only ever smelled of him and sometimes of whoever had been living there right before him. The closer he got to Jonathan and Jervis, the more the truth of his situation felt like a knife to the gut.

He had no pack. And he never would.

One day, Jonathan walked stiffly into Arkham's cafeteria and didn't quite meet anyone's eye. This wasn't precisely unusual behavior for the Scarecrow, who was rumored to only make eye contact when trying to intimidate someone. Edward knew that Jonathan actually just saw eye contact as a potential invitation for social interaction, which he loathed and so avoided whenever and however he could.

What was unusual was the faint blush coloring Jonathan's face. Edward was puzzled by it until Jonathan sat down at his table and was close enough to smell. His scent had noticeably changed in a way that could only mean one thing.

Edward nearly choked on his so-called potatoes that, knowing Arkham, were probably actually onions or soap or something. "You let yourself be claimed by a pack?" Edward asked, disbelieving. Growing concerned, he added, "You let yourself be claimed by a pack?"

"Yes, Edward, I let myself be claimed," Jonathan confirmed, rolling his eyes. He often complained about not wanting to be treated as something fragile and incapable of protecting himself, and normally Edward didn't treat him that way, but there were certain facts of biology that couldn't be denied and the potential for an unwilling claim on an omega was one of those.

"I thought you didn't want an alpha?" Edward asked after a few moments of silence, but it was more-or-less a rhetorical question. It only took a second of rubbing two braincells together to realize who had changed Jonathan's mind on that particular issue.

"I said I didn't want to be subject to the whims of some brute," Jonathan corrected. He smiled softly, head tilted so that only Edward could see it. "He's a lot of things, but he's not... like that."

"Hmm." Edward nodded, agreeing. Jervis was possessive and could handle himself well in a fight, but he was worlds away from the sorts of alphas that made certain omegas and betas decide they were better off alone. "Well, I'm happy for you. You deserve a nice pack."

Jonathan looked up at Edward, his gaze appraising. He opened his mouth to speak, but Edward cut him off.

"If either you or he asks, I will stab him with this fork," Edward said conversationally, twirling the utensil in question between his fingers.

"Just him?" Jonathan asked, amused, rather than trying to pursue the subject further.

Edward jutted his head in the direction of the food line, where Jervis was once again arguing with a staff member over the lack of tea, and smiled playfully. "Attack an omega right in front of his pack alpha? Tsk, you should know better than to think me stupid by now, Jonathan."

Edward had never been an idiot, he knew that Jonathan would convince Jervis to accept him as part of their pack in a heartbeat. Jonathan was clingy, and while it was in more subtle ways when out of heat, he still consistently tried to stay close to Edward. Being pack would give Jonathan a good excuse to keep his emotional support Supervillain as close as his emotional support crows.

But Edward had survived his entire life without a pack, he wasn't going to give in to the temptation to join the very first pack that might accept him. He wouldn't accept a pity invite to a pack. He would not let the universe win and admit that betas couldn't last on their own.

This development did mean some changes were in order, though.

Edward didn't know if Jonathan and Jervis were just pack or if they were mates. He did know that their relationship was certainly heading there if it wasn't already the latter. Jervis had a tendency to go from bubbly ball of sunshine to terrifying little warlord the moment another alpha would get too close to Jonathan, and for his part, Jonathan at most made a minorly disapproving noise if the other's actions went slightly too far.

Either way, eventually there would be the sorts of heats that Edward would rather not be present for. The kind that would lead to puppies if either of the two had been female.

Which was fine, really. Edward loved his friends very much, but he'd let himself fall too far into the fantasy of having a pack. He needed to be able to survive on his own, and he wasn't doing as good a job of that as he thought he had been.

Which was why he asked Jonathan to teach him how to cook. Jonathan's face when he learned that Edward had been eating burnt and soggy food most of his life *and* thought it was *normal* would've made Edward laugh if he wasn't so very embarrassed about it.

As he was not in heat, Jonathan snapped and raved at Edward the entire time he taught him. Apparently living by yourself while not knowing how to cook was a terrible, awful, no-good sin and Jonathan would not *hear* of such nonsense. Edward was therefore forced to live between Jonathan and Jervis's dens until he could successfully make scrambled eggs, spaghetti, and at least two kinds of soup.

Edward thought that maybe he could escape while Jervis was watching him, considering how distractible the man was. He was wrong.

"Stay for a cuppa, at least," Jervis insisted for the fourteenth time in a row. When Edward tried to refuse, he just made puppy-dog eyes at him until he acquiesced.

Between the most omega-y alpha he'd ever met and an actual omega with far too much knowledge of what made Edward tic, neither of which were reluctant to weaponize pathetic whines and promises of food, Edward soon had to accept another hard truth.

He had absolutely zero willpower. He had thought he had excellent willpower, because he often said no to guys like Batman. But guys like Batman didn't ask him to stop terrorizing the city with threats of Fear Toxin and offers of cookies while making terribly sad little pouts.

It wouldn't occur to Edward until much later that his own lack of willpower stemmed from the same source as Jonathan's insanity those first few heats or Jervis's uncharacteristic spikes of aggression.

No one was supposed to be packless. No one.

Epilogue

Edward eventually asked Jonathan to teach him how to nest, which was even more embarrassing than asking to learn how to cook was. This was how Jonathan learned that Edward had never really had a pack and his omega parent was even more negligent than Jonathan's own hated Granny had been (she was a terrible person, true, but she had been a fairly good omega).

The very next thing Edward knew, he'd been kidnapped and rather forcefully claimed into Jervis's pack. Jonathan's only defense was that Edward said they couldn't ask him to join. Edward would never stop complaining about this. He would also never do a single thing to try and leave the pack.

On Jonathan's insistence (and Jervis couldn't really bring himself to deny his mate anything), the pack grew to include Harley, which meant it also included Ivy. There was some fighting between the two alphas for a while, but Jervis calmed down when Ivy promised to leave his territory — and, more importantly, Jonathan — alone.

Even Joker was technically considered part of their pack, because where one clown was so too would the other be, even though he refused all proper pack bonds on the grounds that he wanted his 'Batsy' to claim him. That didn't stop him from spending every heat glomped on to at least one of them.

Edward was happy with his strange little group. It was more than he ever thought he would have, after all, and he couldn't even imagine wanting anything more.

Then along came an alpha (alphas) that was big and rough and technically everything that Edward hated in alphas, but he was also kind and caring and liked Edward's puzzles and was a living contradiction, and at some point Edward said *mine* and Twoface didn't even flip before saying it right back.

Despite their bond to him, Harvey and Harv very much did not want to join Edward's larger pack. But then Edward used what he'd learned from Jonathan and Jervis to pout and whimper at his alphas until they gave in. Turned out that weaponized puppy dog eyes were something that didn't depend on designation.

For most of Edward's life, he didn't have a pack. And then he had a rather large, chaotic, fight-prone pack. One that just kept growing and didn't look as if it would stop anytime soon.

Edward was very good at taking care of himself. But maybe now he could admit that it wasn't exactly a good thing.

Luckily, it seemed that he'd never have to be all that good at it ever again. His pack would make sure of that.

— end of "Pack" —