

## **Slash**

A **Teen Titans** story

Written by Corey W. Smith

Robin sat at one of the computer terminals in the common room of Titans Tower, having intended to go online to look up information about... something. Something serious, probably, and possibly important. But now, he couldn't quite remember what it had been.

Because the current wallpaper image that greeted him as the monitor came flickering to life had brought his entire thought process to a screeching halt, and he'd spent the last several minutes staring at it in utter shock and disbelief. His mouth had been hanging open for so long that he felt his tongue beginning to dry out, but was simply too stunned by what he was seeing to close it.

Eventually, he became aware that someone else had entered the room, and they were doing... something, over in the kitchen area, humming contentedly. With some difficulty, he finally managed to tear his eyes away from the image on the screen, and turn his head toward the direction of his teammate.

"Um... Starfire?"

"Yes, Robin?" she happily chirped, looking up from the pot she was stirring.

Keeping his eyes locked on her, determined *not* to look back at the monitor for fear of further derailment, he slowly raised a hand to point toward it. "What... *is that?*"

"Ah! You have found my new computer drapery!" Forgetting whatever it was she'd been cooking, she came bouncing exuberantly over to him.

"Wallpaper," he corrected automatically, without thinking. "But, what, what... what *is it?*?"

"It is an image I found on the Web of the World, in a repository where artists express their appreciation for our exploits through visual interpretation," she replied, never one to shy away from belaboring the obvious.

"Yes, I... figured that part out on my own," he told her, trying to keep his tone as neutral as possible, while smiling so hard it hurt his teeth. "But, what... *is... it???*"

"I believe it is intended to depict you and Kid Flash, celebrating a victorious battle." She leaned over his shoulder to point at the screen, her long hair (among other things) swinging quite distractingly near his face as she did so. "Do you not find the vibrant colors, the dramatic lighting, and the exhaustively accurate reproduction of detail to be delightfully intricate? Truly, the artist who created it must be a *great* admirer of yours, to have spent as much time and effort as must surely have been required to create such art!"

"It's... impressive," Robin admitted grudgingly, not quite managing to keep himself from wincing as he looked back at it again. "At least, the work that went into it is. But, well..."

"You do not approve of it?" Starfire sounded genuinely surprised as she turned to look at him, seemingly oblivious to the concept of personal space.

"Of *course* not!!" he exclaimed, having decided it was more important to settle this matter than it was to protest the way she was practically draping herself across him.

"But, you agreed that the work is impressive."

“It’s not the *quality* of the art that bothers me, it’s the *picture*, itself, and what it’s depicting!”

“But... how can that be?” Sincerely puzzled, she looked back and forth from his face to the screen several times, as if trying to piece together a riddle. “The depiction of your likeness is exceedingly accurate.”

“It’s not the *likeness*, it’s – it’s – I, *I would never do that!!!*”

She frowned. “But, Robin... we have all engaged in such battles many times; nearly every week, in fact.”

His frustration mounting, he pointed at the small mountain of defeated villains in the picture’s background. “I don’t mean *that*... I mean *that!!!*” He moved his finger, drawing her attention to the two lavishly illustrated figures who dominated the image’s foreground. “What I’m – what *they’re* doing!!!”

Now she looked confused *and* worried, and something *else*, too; her lip began to tremble slightly as she spoke. “But... but, only yesterday, did *we* not—“

“**That’s different!!!**” he exploded, then fought to regain his composure as she pulled back, startled.

“*Why* is it different??” she demanded, reacting to his tone. “Because I am not human? Because I am not from Earth? Why?!”

“No, it’s nothing *like* that, it’s because you’re, you’re – *you!*” He knew he should add something more to that, but another idea appeared to have struck her, and she was looking back at the image again, her expression suddenly thoughtful.

“...Does he have the Bad Breath?”

“It’s – it’s – no – I... he... it...” At a loss for words, Robin slumped back in his chair, ready to give up.

Starfire turned back to him, looking apologetic, yet still confused.

“I... I am sorry, Robin... I am sorry to have upset you, but I still do not understand why. It would seem I have yet to fully comprehend all of the different meanings that are attached to such contacts on your world, unlike my own. I had thought that it was an expression of elated affection.”

“Well, yeah, but...” He *really* didn’t want to have to spell this out, and anyway, he wasn’t sure exactly where to start. “...Um... usually, those *specific* things are shared between two people who, well... that is... who want to...” He fidgeted.

She continued to watch him attentively, but gave no indication that she had any idea where he was headed with all this.

He groaned internally, desperate for some way to end this torture, and decided to go for broke. “Okay. Remember when we were stranded on that planet, with the space monster, and we talked about... um... friends who are girls and boys? Well, it, uh... sort of has to do with *that* kind of situation.”

“But... but, I have also seen such things shared between humans of the same gender,” she insisted, “I am sure of it!”

“Well, yeah, sure, *some* people do it that way, but I—“

“Oh, it is so confusing, I do not understand this at all!!!” She blew her breath out in a frustrated sigh, then reined herself back in a bit. “...But it does not matter. I have offended you, Robin, and I must seek your forgiveness, even though it was not my intention to do anything bad or hurtful.”

“Oh, no, *no*, that’s not what I...” Great, now *he* felt guilty. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he took a deep, calming breath and reached for her hand. “Star... let’s just forget about it, okay? I know you didn’t mean anything by it. There’s no harm done.”

“Truly?” She sighed again, still looking dejected. “I only wish I understood... it seems I still have so many things to learn. I simply thought it was a beautiful work of art. Raven thought so, as well.”

Robin froze. “Ra... *Raven* saw this?”

Starfire nodded, not noticing his reaction. “*She* did not seem to notice anything wrong with it, either, but perhaps that is because she is from Azarath... still,” her brow furrowed, “Cyborg showed no negative reaction, either.”

Robin felt his throat tightening. “Cyborg.”

“...*In fact*,” she continued, “He seemed *very* impressed, and *he* was the one who encouraged me to set it as the computer drapery! And, for that matter, Beast Boy *certainly* did n—err... Robin? Is it not more efficient to use your *hands* for typing, rather than your head...?”

**-Fin-**

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