



Nightwing #11
Batkid

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Nightwing

Issue #11: "Lawyers and Other Slimy Things" (Part 1)

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He stopped flailing. He knew he was going to die. His black belts and forensic know-how could do nothing to prevent him from crushing on the pavement far below. After all, what could he do against gravity?

Nothing.

Nothing but air.

Free fall.

Nightwing was going to die. He accepted that, but he was sorry that it had to happen so soon after his reconciliation with Bruce. The gravitational force resulting from falling off a 22-story building was incredible; fighting against it, he struggled to grip the grappling hook that was strapped to his hip.

The one that shattered on the sidewalk below.

With only a few yards to go until he hit the sidewalk, he closed his eyes. He heard a scream that he thought must have been his, just as something plowed into him. Opening his eyes, he saw below him the building he'd just fallen from. Had he... died? At once, he became aware of his own frantically pounding heart, and of an iron grip around his waist. Looking up, the first thing he noticed was red hair-yards of billowing red hair.

Okay, so it's not Superman.

The next thing he noticed were huge green eyes that betrayed their owner's worry and rage.

"Are you all right?" His Titans teammate, Starfire asked him.

At first, he couldn't answer. Everything had happened so fast... "Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay."

The warrior princess nodded. She narrowed her eyes. "They nearly killed you."

Dick thought back to what had happened before he'd begun plummeting to the hard ground below. Illegal pharmaceutical sales were at an all-time high in New York, and heroin, meth, cocaine, and a host of other drugs were on the streets. NYPD was stretched thin trying to arrest dealers, confiscate drugs, and shut down meth labs, so, at the moment, many of Nightwing's vigilante activities involved taking down gangs. The gang he'd just fought was one of the worst in the city. He'd tracked them to a tall abandoned building. The empty office tower the perfect hideout for the gang members. He'd been holding his own during the fight, and had chased several up to the roof. Once there, he'd realized that he'd walked straight into a trap. Fifteen more thugs were waiting for him. Matched against two thugs obviously used to street fighting, he'd been tripped, and before he even hit the ground, he been 'helped' down-farther than he'd thought he'd go. Tossed off the low ledge, he had been hurtling towards the ground at an alarming rate, and had held no hope for his survival.

Now, though, it was time for justice.

"Kory, if you'll just put me down on the roof, I'll-" He was cut off as Starfire flew quickly toward the roof. She dropped him lightly onto it, and he assumed a fighting stance. What he saw was nothing like he'd expected.

Most of the crooks, at least those of them who weren't unconscious, were cowering in a group, dangerously close to the edge. Dick saw what had frightened them, and frowned.

"Batman? What are you doing here?" His partner's face was pale beneath the cowl, and his lips formed a tight line. Dick was concerned for his mentor, but knew better than to ask what was wrong in front of Starfire.

Batman was quiet a moment before handing him a piece of paper.

"Here-" He stopped, his voice catching a little. "Here," he repeated, more strongly. "This message was left for you." Then he turned and disappeared into the shadows.

Dick glanced at the paper in his hand before stuffing it inside his pouch. He looked up and saw Starfire looking after Batman thoughtfully. He wondered what she was thinking before she broke the silence, saying, "Nightwing? Ro-" She glanced at the cowering criminals. "Speedy," she corrected, "asked me to inform you that a few of the Titans files were missing."

That got his attention. "Which ones?"

The corner of her mouth turned up wryly. "The ones he was reviewing on the Titans computer. He also said to make sure that you realized that it wasn't his fault, and that 'the stupid thing has a mind of its own'."

Dick laughed. "Give me a list of which ones are missing, and I'll pull them from my computer to bring to the next meeting." Starfire complied as he copied the list onto a paper, which he stored with Bruce's message.

"Thanks, Kory." He started to put his hand to his hip before remembering that the tool he needed was shattered on the ground far below.

"Uh, and one more thing... " She waited expectantly. "After I round up these crooks... . would you give me a lift?"

Dick eased his motorcycle to a stop in front of a towering skyscraper. Swinging one leg over, he hopped off, put some change in the parking meter, and walked into the building. Standing in the elevator as other passengers stepped on, he contemplated the task he was about to undertake. It was definitely going to be a difficult one. Somehow, he had to convince Bruce's lawyer, Rachel Green, to have enough faith in him to let him work as a P.I. under her supervision.

When he'd first set the appointment, she had been furious with Bruce, suspecting that he was trying to use his status to get his ward a job. Dick was determined to show her that he could get the job on his own,

without his guardian's interference. The message Bruce had brought him, two days ago, had told him that Rachel had moved the appointment up two weeks-to today, only two days after he'd gotten the note. Since Dick's phone was down temporarily, Bruce had had to deliver it personally-there was no time to use snail mail. He'd had to postpone his date with Kory in order to be here.

As the elevator stopped to let him off, his eyebrow lifted. He could hear a woman's raised voice from an office further down the hall. Striding towards the reception desk, he saw the receptionist, a woman only a couple of years older than he was, hanging up the phone. She glanced up at him, smiling.

"Yes?"

"Uh, yeah, I'm here to see Rachel Green."

She checked her book. Then, green eyes sparkling, she rose from her seat. "I'll show you to her office. I'm Tiffany, by the way."

They walked down the hall, the shouts getting louder the further they went. He glanced at his companion. She wore her long, black hair loose apart from a few small braids, and her friendly smile carried just a hint of mischief. She stopped outside the office the source of the noise. "Let me tell her assistant, Dave you're here."

Raising her hand, she knocked on the door.

No answer.

She rapped harder.

Still no answer.

Rolling her eyes, she gave Dick a brave salute, opened the door, and slipped in. A minute later, she came out.

"I told Dave. He'll let her know you're here. Go ahead into the waiting room," she added, shaking her head, as she hurried back to her desk.

Dick entered the waiting room. He could hear the conversation in the inner office perfectly from where he was. A man was just going into her office. Before he closed the door, Dick caught a peek inside. Rachel was at her desk, having a heated argument over the speakerphone with an unlucky caller. He pitied whoever was on the other end.

"Sloppy work, that's all it was! You didn't research your point, and therefore lost your case. That's the third time in a row. Do you know how that reflects on our reputation? Well, I'll tell you-" She stopped. Dick grinned. She must have finally noticed Dave.

"I've gotta go. But this next case should be an easy one, if you'd just do your homework. Lose many more because of slipshod work, and you're fired." He heard a beep, then there was nothing. She must have hung up on the caller.

"Good morning, Ms. Green," he heard the administrative assistant say politely. "Sorry I barged in like that. I knocked, but, ah, I guess you couldn't hear me over that call."

"Oh, yes." Dick could just imagine her rolling her eyes. "*That* call. Not only is he the worst lawyer on my staff, he's quickly becoming the worst I've ever seen. He's lost three cases in a row, and several before that. And many of the ones he loses are ones that should be a breeze for him to win. Not only that, but he picks and chooses over his cases, purposely taking the easy ones. Then what does he do but refer the ones he doesn't choose over to me!"

She calmed. "Which is why I'll have to be more careful when hiring staff. Speaking of which... did Wayne's kid show up yet?"

"Yes, I'll show him in."

A second later, Dave opened the door and gestured for Dick to go in. "Go ahead ... she's not in the best of moods, but good luck."

Dick hid a grin as walked into the office, thinking of the employees' reactions to her temper. Thick law books rested on high shelves, and Rae's degrees were arranged impressively on the walls.

The irate lawyer was leaning back in her chair, and bringing a steaming cup of coffee to her lips. By way of greeting, she said, "like I told you and Bruce before, I've got a long queue of people with impressive credentials and degrees who would kill for even the half hour appointment I was able to squeeze in for you, so this had better be good."

Dick smiled as the older woman tilted her head back, waiting to be impressed. Launching into his campaign, he explained why he was worth her time. He mentioned the few classes he was taking in college, and showed her letters from Captain James Gordon and from professors at his college classes. He watched, with some satisfaction as her eyebrows rose in surprise when she perused the Gotham City Police detective's letter, and that of one of the more influential professors. After she finished scanning them, she laid them on her desk. Crossing her arms, she leaned back in her chair, studying him contemplatively.

"Daddy Wayne has lots of money... so why does his kid think he needs to play private eye?"

Dick shrugged. "Bruce's money is Bruce's money. I'm not going to rely on his handouts."

"But why be a P.I.? With your connections, you could land an easy, well-paying desk job, with no problem."

"Like I said, I don't want to use Bruce's connections to land a job. I'm really grateful to him for helping me set up this appointment, but if you hire me" he hesitated, hoping that the words would come out right, "I want to know that I got the job because I have what it takes to make it on my own."

"You didn't answer the question... Why a P.I.? What makes you think that you can make it? Why do you think I should hire you? You think you have all the skills you need to do it?"

"Well... "

What am I supposed to tell her... that I was a Boy Scout?

"Ms. Green... I may not have all the degrees and all that others have, but

I'm quick on my feet and what I lack in experience I'll make up for in hard work. I know I can do it. As a P.I., I can help people out, and that's what I really want to do... C'mon... you've known me for... how long has it been since you helped Bruce get custody over me? Seven years, already? Just give me a try, and see how it works. If I don't do a good enough job, just tell me, and I'll be gone, no complaints."

She sipped more coffee, staring at him.

He held her gaze. "Well... ?"

"Well," she sighed. "I told you before that I didn't want you to get the job simply due to Mr. Wayne's influence." He opened his mouth to protest. "And," she continued, ignoring him, "It seems it was an unnecessary concern."

Dick clamped his mouth shut. Then he grinned. "Thank-you, Ms. Green!"

"But." Rachel gave him a slight smile. "This is just a trial. Prove to me that you can handle the job, and you'll become our new resident P.I."

"Thanks," the teen said again. "When do I start?"

She laughed. "Well, at least you've got ambition." A mischievous gleam that he didn't quite trust came into her eyes, and the corner of her mouth turned up. "However, you won't be working under my supervision directly. You'll be working under-

"Mr. Sloan!" Dick balanced a huge Chinese takeout meal in his arms, glad that his dislocated shoulder had completely healed. "I've got your order."

"Come in, then," a voice invited from the other side of the office door. Dick carefully snaked his hand out from the cartons he was carrying and grasped the doorknob, wincing as some hot egg drop soup trickled down his arm. Turning the knob, he kicked the door open the rest of the way, depositing his load on the table inside. He righted some cartons that had fallen over when he'd set them down before shutting the door.

A dark-haired man, surprisingly thin for the massive amount of food he consumed, eyed Dick critically. His stare made the teen painfully aware of the food that had seeped from the cartons onto his shirt. Coloring slightly, he ducked into the restroom and dabbed at his shirt with a damp paper towel. When he returned to the office, he saw his supervisor, Richie Sloan, steadily working his way through the food Dick had delivered. Dick managed to scrounge a small plateful and sat down to eat.

"Did you drop off that letter?" Sloan asked between bites.

"Yes, Peters said that he'd fax it to you with his signature Monday," Dick said irritably. "Mr. Sloan," he said, "I applied to this firm because I want to be a P.I., but so far all I've been is your errand boy."

Sloan eyed him disapprovingly. "Eager to get to the fun stuff, are we? I need time to observe your talents and strengths before I set you on your own big case-and apparently, PATIENCE isn't one of them." Frowning, he said, "I think I've been generous in providing you with this opportunity to become a private investigator. I took some precious time out of my schedule to supervise you," he said, very nearly in a whine. "And what do I get? Thanks? No... I get complaints."

Dick gritted his teeth angrily. As soon as he'd met Sloan, he'd realized what Rachel's mischievous look was about. She had purposely assigned him to a lawyer who was annoying, obnoxious, and inconsiderate. He was the best weeding-out process he'd ever seen, he admitted to himself-he had to give that much to Green. The lawyer assigned him more chores-picking up lunches, making appointments, and, on one occasion, picking up his laundry from the laundromat-than real P.I. work. The teen hated it, but he didn't dare complain to Rachel. She might decide that he couldn't handle the job.

Tiffany had proven to be a great friend. She'd warned him that Ms. Green had no problem firing employees who complained... If she didn't think that they were up to the job, she replaced them, simple as that. So, he completed the lawyer's mundane tasks, hoping that soon he would finally be given a real assignment.

Resignedly, he sighed. "Sorry, Mr. Sloan. I guess I'm just eager to start

doing what I signed up to do: P.I. work."

The lawyer gave him a somewhat fake-looking smile. "Well, kid, I'll just chalk up your rudeness to your youth-after all, you're only a teenager. You couldn't be expected to understand the complicated process of assessing your abilities. Why, I've noticed that you have an exceptional memory-every time I've given you a food order to pick up, you've gotten everything perfect, right down to the packets of sweet-and-sour sauce."

Listening to a slightly different version of the same speech for the third time, Dick suppressed the urge to throttle the man.

Oh, yeah, remembering everything in his order is no biggie at all-he orders nearly everything on the menu!

"Again, I'm sorry for complaining, Mr. Sloan," he forced out.

The lawyer started in on the last container of rice-and with it, Dick's chances of receiving a full meal. "Well, he mumbled through his food. "That's okay. I understand youthful impatience, and it's refreshing to see so much ambition in a kid so young." He shoved the remaining bites into his mouth, leaning back contentedly as he chewed. Washing his huge meal down with a Coke, he smacked his lips.

"Mm, that was good." He stood. "Look, kid, I've gotta lot of work to catch up on-you clean up this mess," he waved his hand at the empty cartons. "Refill the water jug out in the hall." He started for his office, than turned back. "Oh, and kid," he said, as if it was an afterthought, "thanks."

Dick watched his supervisor saunter into his office, then turned to the mess on the table. Grabbing a trashcan, he swept the empty containers in, then took some paper towels and wiped down the table. After he re-filled the water jug, he headed for the fax machine to grab an incoming message for his supervisor. Heading for Sloan's office, he froze outside the door.

"Look, Roger," Sloan's voice sounded rougher than it had a few moments ago. "I'll have the dough-you'd just better have the goods. You know how hard it is for me to make time for this? You know how many cases I take in? A lot. And I-"A floorboard beneath Dick's foot creaked, warning

the lawyer that he had a visitor. "Look, I gotta go. My P.I.'s here."

Dick waited a second, then knocked on the door. "Mr. Sloan, a fax came for you."

"C'mon in, kid."

Entering the office, Dick's mind was whirling as he thought about what he'd just heard. He smiled, hoping that his face betrayed none of his thoughts.

"Ah, Dick, take a chair." The lawyer was leaning back in his seat, his feet propped on his desk.

Dick surveyed his options. Each of the two chairs across from Sloan had stacks of paper piled high, and one of them had an old cup of coffee spilled on it.

"Ah, thank you, but I'll stand.

The elder man shrugged. "Suit yourself."

The lawyer seemed nervous. Was he worried about how much Dick had heard of his somewhat incriminating phone conversation? For the next half hour, things seemed to point that way, as the lawyer seemed interested in doing nothing but making small talk with the boy... most of which seemed to revolve around what chores Dick had completed that afternoon.

He's worried, Dick thought. He wants to know how much I heard, so he's trying to figure out what I was doing before then. Worried that the lawyer would guess that he had heard the incriminating part of the conversation, the teen made up a couple of extra chores that he'd completed... sweeping the office and emptying the trash bin. It seemed to convince him. After that, the rest of the work day passed uneventfully.

Emerging from the movie theater, Dick asked his companion, "So, what'd you think?"

The girl's eyes sparkled. "It's so funny to think that people here on Earth really have no idea what Martians look like. They look so different in the movie than they do in real life."

Dick grinned. "Yeah, those guys in *Space Adventures 3: The Return of the Mutant Martians* didn't look anything like J'onn. But most people have never seen a Martian, so they have to imagine it."

Starfire nodded. Both she and Dick knew what Green Martians looked like (Dick had never seen a White Martian-and did not plan to). As they strolled down the sidewalk, she asked, "So, are you enjoying your new private investigator work?"

Dick winced inwardly, but replied, "It's okay, I guess." He wasn't ready to reveal to anyone just yet what the lawyer had said over the phone. He planned on getting more facts before accusing his supervisor of anything illegal.

Her luminous green eyes studied him. "What does Bruce think of it?"

"He's okay with it... now," he added, remembering the argument they'd had when he'd first told Bruce that he was leaving school to take a job.

As they crossed the street, a car trying to beat the light swerved in front of them. Dick instinctively pushed Kory out of the way and got in front of her. After the careless driver straightened his car, Dick turned to his date. She stared at him, amused.

"Thank you," she said, smiling.

He blushed. "Sorry, it's just instinct." He knew as well as she did that the car wouldn't have done that much harm had it hit her, and that she could very well have flown or leaped out of the way.

"Wonder where we should eat," Dick muttered aloud. He should have thought of that *before* he asked her out. So much for planning ahead.

She gazed at the different restaurants. A Chinese one caught her eye. "I've been wanting to try Chinese food," she hinted.

He looked at the restaurant she'd singled out. "Chinese?"

"Roy said it was good."

He sighed. "Sure. Why not," he said halfheartedly.

She looked at him quizzically. "You don't like it? If not, we could always-"

He laughed, cutting her off as they entered the restaurant. "Actually, I love Chinese food. I was just... thinking."

She raised an eyebrow. He sighed. It was obvious he wasn't going to get to eat until he told her... and besides, he wanted to see what she thought of chopsticks.

"It's just that I've been eating almost nothing but Chinese food for lunch every day since I started working with Mr. Sloan. It's always, 'Di-"

"-ck, glad to see you. Pick up my order for me, will ya?" Startled, the two teens turned to see the subject of their discussion walking towards them. He looked hurried.

"I've gotta make a phone call," Sloan said, heading into a phone booth. "Mine's the General Tao chicken, egg drop soup, and rice."

Starfire bit her lip, trying not to laugh, as Dick raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"I can't believe it! You'd think that this guy would have had enough already, but no, he has to come in for more! And with his appetite, how in the world does he... afford... " He looked to the booth where the lawyer was huddled over the phone, obviously trying to be as quiet as possible.

His mind raced. The phone call... his expensive lifestyle... the man had Armani suits, a Porsche 911, and lived in a penthouse... how could he afford all of that, especially if he were losing as many cases as Rachel claimed? He'd been bragging to Dick about all the features his new Gulf

Stream would have... and Dick could remember gasping at the prices of even a modest Cessna when Bruce had been considering buying a plane. Maybe there was more to that phone call than he'd thought.

"Uh, Kory, go ahead and order what you want," he said distractedly. "Just get me whatever you order... I'll be back in a minute." He handed her some bills. "And don't forget to try out the fortune cookies."

He glanced around the restaurant. There wasn't much that he could hide behind to eavesdrop on his supervisor's conversation-and since he hadn't anticipated needing his Nightwing equipment on his date, he hadn't brought his shotgun mike. There was a wall hanging, a large potted plant, a couple of benches... and the restroom. Situated a couple of feet from the phone booths, it was perfect for him to listen in on the lawyer's conversation.

He glanced at Starfire. She was at table at the other end of the restaurant, looking perplexed as she perused the unfamiliar menu. He could just imagine her as she read (or tried to read) names like Peking duck, kung fu chicken, and General Tao chicken.

She'd be okay for a while. He headed as casually as he could manage to the restrooms, turning his head slightly so that the lawyer couldn't see his face as he passed. He entered the room, immediately cracking the door open enough to see the man's face. Back when he had been Robin, Bruce had trained him in lip reading-a skill that came in handy now.

"I'll have it... Already told him... have the coke... Miss Emma ready... regular... place."

As the lawyer hung up, Dick ducked back in the room. Counting to ten, he waited before opening the door. Stepping out, he saw the lawyer at the counter, grabbing his meal. Joining Starfire, he saw that her order hadn't arrived yet. She narrowed her eyes at him.

"What was that all about?"

He shrugged. "Just had to go."

She looked at him skeptically, then glanced toward the back of the

restaurant, where her order was being prepared. She was obviously nervous.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"Nothing. I just... " She appeared embarrassed. "I have no idea what I ordered."

He opened his mouth to reply just as a waitress came over to them, carrying a tray. She set the plates down on the table before hurrying on to another.

Dick stared at his. "Hope you like hot and sour squid," he said blandly. *Oh, the price to pay for justice...*

Kory looked at his face, then at her plate. "What is it?"

Dick smiled. "Don't ask. Just eat."

She watched him reach for his chopsticks. As he twirled his deftly, she tried to copy his hold on them.

Several long, messy minutes later, Dick suggested that she open her fortune cookies. She pushed her long hair back from her face as she reached for the cookie, opening it eagerly. She stared at the message, then handed it to Dick.

He took it from her, curious. "You will gain great strength," he read. He glanced up at her. Everything about his date suggested great power. She'd taken her coat off when they'd entered the restaurant, and the t-shirt she wore underneath it showed off her muscular arms. She had to be careful holding delicate things, because she often broke them unintentionally. She could easily have thrown the car that he had so gallantly saved her from earlier.

"Uh... . A little late, isn't it?" He laughed.

She slowly smiled, then chuckled. "At least this one is true."

She finished her meal, though she stabbed the food with the sticks instead of grasping them, and they left the restaurant.

At his apartment that night, he reflected on how his date with Kory had gone. He laughed to himself, remembering her expression when she'd seen the squid, but his thoughts kept returning to Sloan's phone call. He was half disappointed, half relieved that the call had turned out to be so innocent. But there was something about it that bothered him... He took a shower, planning to go to bed afterwards. Maybe the answer would come to him in the morning.

In bed that night, he lay awake, thinking about the phone call. The words he'd read on the lawyer's lips plagued his mind...

"I'll have it... Already told him... have the coke... Miss Emma ready... regular... place."

To be continued!!!

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Nightwing: Black Friday Blues.

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They're back! Night-Thief and Nocturna are back in action after breaking out of prison, with Nightwing hot on their trail. But Dick had better watch his back--Night-Thief has a score to settle with him.

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Nightwing is hot on Night Thief's trail... who is hot on Nocturna's trail... But finding a man who doesn't wish to be found is tricky when the usual wellsprings of information run dry...

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Nightwing: Ain't Never Had A Friend Like Me

Nightwing #15 (2007)

Nightwing: Hopelessly Devoted to You

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Nightwing: Beauty and the Mess.

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Nightwing: Psychotic Reaction (A Justice League vs. America tie-in)

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Just as Nightwing starts to close in on the drug gang, more problems arise. He and Tiffany will have to move fast if they're going

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Nightwing: Be My Escape.

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