



Nightwing #15
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Nightwing

#5: Hopelessly Devoted to You

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*Hello, I'm just a fool who's willing to sit
Around and wait for you
But baby can't you see, there's nothin'
Else for me to do
I'm hopelessly devoted to you.*

- John Farrar, "Hopelessly Devoted to You"

With a frown, Dick pressed the 'Rewind' button on the recorder. When it stopped, he pressed 'Play' and listened carefully to the recording again.

Where have I heard that voice before? He wondered.

He listened as Sloan chattered nervously with his visitor. Obviously the lawyer had been uncomfortable with leaving his employee drugged on his office couch. Another person, definitely younger than Sloan, and probably just as nervous, responded.

He forced himself to stand up, but the aftereffects of the sedative he'd been given nearly made him fall back on his couch. Dick made his way to the refrigerator, pulling out a carton of orange juice. As he chugged a glassful, he struggled to clear his fogged mind. He knew who the mystery person on the tape was, but he couldn't *remember* it.

Even after his forced sleep, the teen was exhausted. Collapsing on the couch again, he fell into a deep sleep.

"Ready, my love?"

"Of course."

Stepping lightly, two dark figures stole across the rooftop, leaping onto a neighboring one.

"You know what to do?" A soft voice asked. In the distance, sirens wailed, and somewhere nearby, a dog barked.

"Yes, Natalia." Beside his girlfriend, Anton Knight stood unwaveringly. The bright lights of New York surrounded his black muscular form.

"Good." Natalia was equally confident. Her dark hair fluttered in the light breeze as she pushed back the hood of her cloak to reveal her pale face. She smiled, watching in satisfaction as Anton, also known as the Night-Thief, disappeared into the shadows. She waited, enjoying the feel of the night winds as they played over her skin. Moments later, her cohort returned, burdened by two plastic shopping bags stenciled with the cheerful legend: Thank You for Shopping with Us!

Night-Thief removed his mask, smirking. He held up one of the bags. "And have a nice day."

Nocturna returned the smile. She surveyed the contents of the bag while Night-Thief patiently held it open for her. Bright orange containers were visible in the dim light.

"You've done well, Night-Thief."

"It was all for you, my darling."

Refreshed, Dick opened his eyes with a yawn. He lay awake for a few

minutes, enjoying the quiet. As he scrambled some eggs, he thought again about Sloan's visitor. Whoever it was, the contact was young, nervous, and probably new to the whole drug biz.

He ate his breakfast hungrily, and then decided to get some training in... It was the weekend, which meant... no Sloan!

Dick completed a perfect back flip and rolled into a defensive karate stance. Lashing out with one leg, he used the momentum of his foot's impact to execute another backwards flip, bringing his hand down in a hard chop as he did. As he landed, he flipped forwards easily, regaining his upright position.

Wiping his brow, he steadied his breathing. He'd just completed a few of the easier exercises, following an intense two-hour training session. The triple back flip into the shoulder throw still needed a little work, though.

For now, though, it was good enough. Patrol awaited.

"You again."

Anton shook his head in disgust. Standing before him yet again was that dumb teenager who thought he was the Karate Kid. All the Night-Thief wanted was to supply his love with everything she could wish for... and Nightwing thought to deny him that pleasure.

The young vigilante sprang to the right, dodging a low kick from the annoyed Anton. He delivered a swift karate kick of his own, followed by a series of three quick left-right-left punches. Nightwing rolled to evade the flurry of kicks and punches from Night-Thief, then leaped and caught the villain in the chest, sending him reeling.

Nocturna stood off to the side, watching the two men fight. A little smile played on her lips. Nightwing wondered, as he had the last time he'd

encountered this Disastrous Duo, how she could remain so cool and calm while her lover was fighting.

He ducked as Anton threw a punch aimed at his head, then reached out to grab the Night-Thief's arm. Anton jerked back, sweeping his leg out in a low, powerful arc as he did. Nightwing hit the roof, rolling again as Anton kicked out at him.

It's time to end this, the teen decided.

Faking a few punches, he waited until Anton attempted another blow before he dropped, swinging his leg up as he did. His booted foot connected with Night-Thief's chin. The crook reeled back, hitting the roof motionless. Nightwing leaned over him. Night-Thief's midnight-black goggles were covered with huge cracks from the fight, and through a hole in the plastic lenses, Nightwing could see that the man truly was unconscious.

Dick winced in sympathy. Bruce had made him wear steel-toed boots for years.

Nightwing turned to face Nocturna, expecting her to have fled or pulled a gun on him. To his complete surprise, she stood exactly where she had been during the fight, grinning at him.

"You were amazing," she crooned sweetly.

Nightwing raised an eyebrow.

"Oookaaaaay. Thanks... well, Natty, you'll have to return those drugs. Too many can be bad for you, ya know."

The woman shrugged, her dark eyes bright as she talked to him. "Take them. I don't care for the drugs... I prefer the furs, the jewels... "

Nightwing didn't move towards the bags she indicated. "For someone who doesn't care for them, you guys sure have been helping yourselves to the local pharmacies' supplies."

She gave him a crooked smile. "Night-Thief likes to steal the drugs...

they bring in quite a bit of cash, you know." She shrugged. "I let him indulge his preference. Personally, I prefer gems, but 'to each his own', right?"

"I assume you have a good market for them."

"Oh, of course. Face it, Nightwing... you're in NYC. There are plenty of willing buyers. Gotham, New York... so long as there are drugs, there will be buyers. Capes try to save the world, but they'll never really get rid of the crime... it'll always be here."

Nightwing looked down at her before he glanced back at Night-Thief. The man was still out cold... Anton was passionate, impatient, and in love with Nocturna. The teen wondered if the man would try to hurt Natalia if he regained consciousness and found his love *talking* to Nightwing.

He looked back at Nocturna. She gazed back with huge, luminous eyes. "Yes, Night-Thief is quite good at martial arts... but you're better. You're young... in your teens, I'd say... and surely you're in need of cash. Together, imagine how wonderful we'd be... why, not only are you a skilled fighter, but you're also an awesome detective. Just look how quickly you discovered Night-Thief and I... and Anton thought he was being so clever, too, and that no one would find him out." Her lips twisted into a wry smile. "I *know* you'd last longer in a fight than the mere ten minutes that Anton could stand against you."

Dick frowned. "Anton's biggest problem is his rage. That or his undying devotion to you. He's hopeless... he thinks you really love him. All you care about is the cash-excuse me, jewels and furs-that he brings in for you. And you should know by now that I won't turn to crime and harm those who I'm now protecting. The people, the government... it's my duty to protect them." He grinned. "Speech over. Now, it's *your* duty to collect your boyfriend, get off this rooftop, and never come back again."

Nocturna's expression changed to rage. She pressed her lips together tightly as she stalked over to Anton, who was just beginning to stir. "You'll regret this, Nightwing!"

Night-Thief started. He had yanked his mask off, looking angrily at the

ruined goggles. Now, his head shot up, and he glanced in concern at Natalia before he turned to glare at Nightwing. "Natalia, don't worry. He hasn't hurt me badly... I'm fine!" The blonde man said earnestly.

Nightwing chuckled. Nocturna wheeled around to face Anton, taking in his ruined mask, swollen chin, and black eyes.

"Just shut up."

She continued across the roof, with Anton trailing behind her and periodically throwing glares over his shoulder at Nightwing. Dick thought that Night-Thief was angrier at the teen's upsetting Natalia than he was at the injuries the vigilante had given him. Shaking his head as the two stalked off, Dick scooped up the drug-filled bags. He sighed. It was going to be a long night. This bag held the loot of the other pharmacy, two stores, and a bank that the villains had raided earlier that night... and he had to sort and return it all.

Stumbling wearily through his doorway, Dick fell into his desk chair, swiveling it to reach the 'Play' button on his answering machine. He listened absently to the messages as he toyed with his recorder. When he reached the end of his messages, he bounced the recorder in his hand and headed to the kitchen. He reached into the freezer, pulled out a plastic bag of frozen cookies that Alfred had supplied, and popped a few into the oven. When they were done, he poured a glass of milk, and sat down on the couch. Shoving Sloan's papers off the coffee table onto the floor, he set his plate and cup down. He pressed 'Play' on the recorder, and leaned back as he absently bit into a cookie. Fast-forwarding through his and Sloan's conversations, he stopped at the part immediately before the mystery person came in. He closed his eyes, and focused on the voice. It was so frustratingly familiar. Five minutes into the recorded conversation, his eyes sprang open.

No wonder the voice sounded familiar.

No wonder the voice sounded nervous.

No wonder the voice sounded young.

Because it certainly was familiar... it certainly should be nervous... and it most certainly *was* young.

Too young.

Dick frowned, thinking of Sloan, Nocturna, Night-Thief, and the mysterious Marty. Cold, calculating criminals. They didn't care who they hurt, so long as they got their money. They didn't care how scared or young the users were.

They didn't care about Jacob.

Rubbing his eyes tiredly, Dick thought about the boy. How old had the kid said he was? Fourteen? Fifteen? And he'd already been taking and dealing them for *two years*?

Now what? Where was Jacob? Dick hadn't even gotten his last name... he didn't have a clue where this kid lived.

He supposed he *could* call Marty and casually ask about Jake. But he didn't want to call unless he absolutely had to. Besides, he wasn't sure whether Sloan already knew where Jacob lived. He'd be found out for sure if he inquired about someone whose whereabouts he supposedly knew.

Well, there *were* other ways of getting information...

Dick settled in for a good night's rest. He'd have to get up early if he were going to try his plan.

Arriving early at the office, Dick ran to the plant that concealed his recorder. He replaced the tape with a new one, just in case Sloan had snuck back during the night. He doubted that the lawyer would, but he still wanted to be on the safe side.

He placed his briefcase on the table, and opened it to reveal several jars, brushes, and cans. Choosing the black powder for contrast, he checked the hallway. Seeing no one, he covered the doorknob on the office door lightly with the powder. Several prints, many smudged, became visible. Taking pictures of the better ones, he began lifting them carefully, checking every few seconds to be sure that no one passing by in the hall would notice him. Removing the plastic from his rubber tape, he gently covered each of the good prints with the sticky side. Going into the office, he checked the other side of the doorknob, the table, the desk, and other pieces of furniture that Sloan's contact might have touched.

Getting through the workday was awful. Dick sat across from his employer, slurping his Pepsi as they ate Peking duck. The lawyer seemed nervous around Dick, though he was trying to hide it. As soon as he could, Sloan was out the door.

"See ya later, kid!"

Dick was not sorry to see him go, and as soon as he was sure the crooked lawyer wouldn't return, he jumped up. Opening the door that led to Sloan's office, he headed straight for the desk. He remembered hearing Sloan rummaging around in there right before the man had drugged him. Searching through the drawers, he found the sedative that Sloan had used on him, as well as some other bottles. Bringing his fingerprint kit into the room, he dusted the bottles, hoping that any that the mystery man might have brought would have clear prints.

Several good ones were visible. Snapping a few pictures of them, Dick quickly lifted them.

Returning to his apartment, the teen plugged his digital camera into his computer. When he brought up a file he'd created earlier, he found the pictures of prints he'd taken from the bags of morphine he'd confiscated from Jacob.

They were identical.

Leaning back in his chair, Dick was half happy, half sorry to see that the prints matched. Of all people, Jake had to be the delivery guy.

The poor kid, Dick thought sadly.

Two days later, Dick rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. He'd been working nearly nonstop trying to use Jacob's prints to get a last name, an address, anything.

Finally, he had it.

Staring at the address on his computer screen, the teen saw that Jacob lived only a short distance away from his apartment. Three in the morning, though, wasn't the best time for him to visit the boy.

On the other hand, it would be the perfect time for *Nightwing*...

The neighborhood was bad. Dim streetlamps cast their pathetic light onto dirty streets. Counting the building numbers until he reached 217, Nightwing looked around, checking for anyone who might be watching. Seeing no one but a dirty one-eared cat, he climbed in through a window in the apartment building.

He emerged in the living room of Jacob's apartment. Nightwing quietly walked around, wrinkling his nose. The room reeked of years of cigarettes. He wandered through the house, searching for Jacob's bedroom. He peeked through one door and found the kitchen; through another, a bathroom. Finally, he came to a door that was plastered with posters and signs warning Keep Out. Carefully, he opened the door and stuck his head in. Nightwing looked around. He saw a young boy stretched out on his bed, covered by an old Army camouflage blanket, sound asleep. *Star Wars* played on the 13-inch television that was sitting on the boy's dresser. Stepping over old Coke cans and Cheese-It boxes, Nightwing headed for that dresser. He guessed that he might get more answers by looking

around than by asking. Opening the top drawer, he felt around. The only light he had came from the streetlight outside and the television. Feeling nothing but clothing, he checked the next drawer. Underneath a pile of shirts, his fingers brushed a plastic bag. Excitedly, he pulled it out. Unable to see well in the dim light, the vigilante held the bag up close to Han Solo's face. The light from the screen showed a powder he suspected was morphine. Setting the bag on top of the TV, he reached in the drawer again, feeling around for more drugs. Finding a tube, he started to pull it free. Just then, he felt rather than heard someone behind him. Over the sound of the television's stormtrooper's blasters, he hadn't heard anyone come in. Whirling, he saw a young woman in the doorway behind him. In the darkness, he noticed a glint of metal, and realized that she held a gun.

"What are you doing here?"

Dick swallowed. "I was just... checking on something." He knew that voice too. But... what could *she* be doing here? He had to be wrong.

"Come here... slowly."

She backed up without taking her eyes or gun off him. Nightwing followed her out of the boy's room. The walk was right, too. Still... how could it be... ? Still keeping the gun trained on him, she reached over and closed the bedroom door. She led him quietly down the hall. Here, posters, photos, and a memory board covered the walls. A computer, obviously equipped with a DVD drive, played *Grease*, at a low volume. She pointed at the computer chair with her free hand, and he obligingly sat down. Walking over to the light switch, the woman turned on the lights.

"*Nightwing?*"

Darn...

"What are you doing here?" She looked confused. Then she noticed the pill bottle he was holding. "And what were you doing in my brother's room?"

"Jake's your brother?"

Tiffany's gun hand jerked slightly. "How did you know his name?"

Nightwing chuckled. The woman's eyes widened... it certainly wasn't what she expected someone held at gunpoint to do.

"We have too many questions flying around with no answers," Nightwing said. He leaned back in his chair, waving at the bed. "Why don't you take a seat? We can start with this: why did I find a bottle of drugs in Jake's room?"

Tiffany actually looked scared for a minute. Then, she glared at him. "I don't know. For all I know, you put them there yourself. I certainly didn't put them there, and neither did Jake... he's not into that junk."

Nightwing frowned in mock confusion. "He's not? I'm glad to hear it. I've been worried about him ever since I busted him for doing drugs a few days ago."

Tiffany paled. "You... caught him at it?" She frowned at him. "Never mind; that's ridiculous. You can't catch someone doing something they aren't doing, and Jacob *wasn't* doing drugs."

Feeling a pang of sympathy, Nightwing leaned forward in his seat. "Look... he was with a bunch of older guys... they probably talked him into it. He's just a kid."

"Listen, Nightwing: why should I believe you over my brother? He says he's clean, so I say he's clean."

"I'm telling you-"

The old Tiffany kicked in. "No, I'm telling *you*. If Jake says he's not doing drugs, then he ain't doing drugs, you got it? Now if you'll kindly leave... "

Nightwing didn't move. "I'm sorry I had to tell you about this... it must be awful. Try talking to him. You can get help... "

"I said GO."

Nightwing stood. "Sure. Just lemme grab something I left in his room." She followed him as he walked back to Jake's room, and watched as he grabbed the bag of morphine off the dresser. "Forgot to get the morphine I took from him."

He walked over to Jacob's window, opening it. "Don't forget what I said: talk to Jake." He dropped to the ground below. Seeing Tiffany walk over to the window, he waved at her. She slammed the window shut.

Back home, Dick tossed his costume on the coffee table, and then went to the kitchen. As he got a glass of water, he reflected on his search. Setting the bag of morphine on the counter, he opened it, and poured its contents down the sink. When he finished, he stashed his costume, and crawled into bed. He dreamed of his fight with Night-Thief, and of Nocturna... the two made an incredible team. Night-Thief was totally devoted to her. Dick had thought that they'd left NY for good... and they unexpectedly showed up again. He dreamed of his search at Jacob's house... of the young boy... of Tiffany... and of the little orange pill bottle he'd left on Tiffany's bed.

To be continued!!!!

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Nightwing #10 (2006)

Nightwing: Black Friday Blues.

When terrorists take hostages at a busy superstore, it's up to Nightwing to save them. He dodges bullets and battles ruthless terrorists while racing the clock, coming face-to-face with a murderous madman who has no reservations when it comes to killing anyone in his way.

Nightwing #21 (2007)

Nightwing: Kiss in the Night.

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.

Nightwing #22 (2007)

Nightwing: To Catch A Night Thief

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...

Nightwing #11 (2007)

Nightwing: Lawyers and Other Slimy Things (Part 1).

Meth, crack, cocaine... they're on the street, and Dick, as Nightwing, is trying to make sure no one else gets hurt. In addition to that, he has to convince Rachel Green to let him become a P.I.... but runs into trouble with his supervisor. And what about the mysterious phone call his boss takes...?

Nightwing #13 (2007)

Nightwing: Ain't Never Had A Friend Like Me

Nightwing #16 (2007)

Nightwing: Beauty and the Mess.

Nightwing #17 (2007)

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

Nightwing #18 (2007)

Nightwing: Heart of a Champion.

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 to crack the case, but the team ends up with more than they bargained for! Can they solve the case before the crooks get away and before one character is written off—forever? Find out as the adventure continues in this exciting issue!

Nightwing #19 (2007)

Nightwing: Little Boy Lost.

Jake has disappeared and Nightwing's on his trail! But will he be too late?

Nightwing #20 (2007)

Nightwing: Be My Escape.

We pick this up right where Nightwing #19--left off-- with Nightwing in the gang's hideout! Dick is finally face-to-face with the mysterious Marty, and confronts him, Sloan, and the rest of the gang in this action-packed conclusion!

Nightwing #23 (2008)

Nightwing: Behind the Mask

A HUGE twist on Nightwing's case in this action-packed issue! Nightwing, Nocturna, and Night-Thief meet again--but with what consequences?

Nightwing #32 (2008)

Nightwing: More Than Useless

Robberies, shootings, and break-ins are all a part of daily Gotham life... Luckily, so are the crimefighters who stop them! That is... until now...

Nightwing #33 (2008)

Nightwing: Vengeance Served Cold.

When a Wayne Enterprises vice president is found dead - apparently by suicide - Batman becomes suspicious. He and Robin must piece the clues together to find out exactly how the man died - and who killed him.

Nightwing #14 (2009)

Nightwing: Something Wicked This Way Comes

Nightwing #37 (2009)

Nightwing: Dance of Death.

When a ballerina unexpectedly collapses during a performance, Batman and Robin dive into the investigation to find out who killed the dancer... and why.

Nightwing #39 (2009)

Nightwing: Living Nightmare

There's a villain loose in Gotham, and it's up to Batman and Robin to stop him. They may be in for more than they've bargained for, however, because the tables can be turned in the blink of an eye!

Nightwing #34 (2009)

Nightwing: A Scent of Danger.

A lead on a case takes the new Dynamic Duo to California... with horrifying consequences! Now the Boy Wonder is determined to make good--even if it means taking on Batman... and Alfred!

Nightwing #35 (2009)

Nightwing: Volatile Villainy.

Why is one of Nightwing's old enemies trying to draw him out? And can he be trusted?

Nightwing #36 (2009)

Nightwing: Over a Barrel and Under the Gun.

As the threat level rises, Nightwing races against the clock to find-- and stop-- whoever's out to get Sloan. Every second counts!

Nightwing #38 (2009)

Nightwing: Curtain Call.

Nightwing #40 (2009)

Nightwing: Formula for Fear.

Caught in the Scarecrow's trap, Batman comes face to face with his darkest terrors!

Nightwing #41 (2009)

Nightwing: Live and Let Die.

Nightwing #44 (2010)

Nightwing: Murder by Midnight.

With Bruce back where he belongs, Dick Grayson strikes out in a bold new direction! Brace yourselves for murder, mayhem, thrills and chills!



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