



Nightwing #19
Batkid

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Little Boy Lost

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"Grayson!"

"Yes, sir?"

Sloan came in scowling.

"There you are," he said grumpily. "All that time off has made you lazy. The trashcans are overflowing. Empty them, then cancel my lunch meeting with James today."

"Cancel?" Dick asked.

The lawyer glared at him. "Yes, cancel. You do know what that means, don't you?"

"Of course, but-"

"No 'buts', just do it!" The lawyer ordered as he headed into his inner office. He shut the heavy door with an air of finality.

Dick heaved a sigh and turned to the trashcan. It was only half full, but he emptied it anyway. He called James-and received a frustrated complaint that this was the third time Sloan had canceled the meeting. After he hung up the phone, he scribbled James' return message onto a Post-It note.

The teen glanced at Sloan's closed office door, then headed over to the potted plant that secreted one of his recorders. He removed the device,

then replaced it with a fresh one. He wondered how many more times he would have to perform this chore before the case would be solved. After he slipped the old recorder into his pocket, Dick completed the rest of his work smoothly, while he eavesdropped on his boss to see if Sloan would drop any interesting leads to the case.

As the two men left the office at the end of the day, Dick conveniently forgot his jacket, and had to run back for it. While there, he swapped the filled recorder on the lawyer's phone with an empty one.

Once home, he checked his messages. There were six-four from Tiffany. She was anxious to get to work finding her brother, though she didn't sound as though she had any clues as to Jake's whereabouts. He wished he had something to tell her, or some clue to follow up on.

Chugging a Coke, he played the recorder from the plant. It had caught every conversation that had taken place in the front office since he had gone to Yellowstone. Dick was glad it was voice-activated; it hadn't saved hours of dead air when the office was silent. Luckily, his trip to Yellowstone had been on a weekend-the device hadn't run out of room.

The recorder revealed nothing even remotely interesting for the first half-hour. Then...

"Only 50 grams this time, eh? You're short on some."

Sloan sounded more irritated than concerned. He seemed to have gotten over his earlier fright. Guess *I should pay him another visit*, Dick smiled.

"That's all they gave me-"

He instantly recognized the young, nervous voice and felt his pulse race this could be the clue to what had happened to Jake!

Sloan's snide voice cut in. "Well next time, you'd better be sure they give you more, Jake. Ya got it?"

"Tell 'em yourself, 'cause as far as I'm concerned, there won't be a next

time."

Silence. Dick held his breath.

Apparently, Sloan hadn't been expecting this, either. Slowly, menacingly, he said, "What did you say?"

Jake's voice was stronger now, more sure. "I said, there won't be a next time. I'm not doing this again."

Again, silence. Sloan broke it with, "You say you won't deliver any more goods for us?"

"That's right. I'm done. This whole deal might be alright for you, but it just doesn't work for me. Besides, my sis is already suspicious... She's been asking questions."

"Gumshoe Tiffany, hey?"

Dick barely breathed. If Sloan knew that Tiffany was Jake's sister, he could find a way to use that against them.

Jake must have figured that out, too, because he hurried to change the subject.

"Yeah, well, I had another visitor come. Nightwing. Right in the middle of the night."

For a minute, the recorder was silent, and then the lawyer broke in shakily. "Nightwing, eh? He seems to have a... certain interest in our business. Some of our clients have been complaining about his interference."

Sloan seemed to be talking to himself more than to Jake. To his credit, Jake had the common sense not to question any more-Sloan might not have liked the nosiness.

Instead, the boy said, "Look. You're not going to change my mind. I only did this delivery 'cause I'd promised you already that I would. I'm done. See ya."

Dick heard a door close. He let his breath out slowly.

That kid is either incredibly brave, he thought, or impossibly stupid. Surely he didn't plan to go up against the gang and expect them to just let him waltz out.

The tape played on, but no more interesting tidbits were revealed. Dick started on the recorder from the phone, listening as the lawyer discussed rather shady-sounding business deals with someone on the other line. At last, it reached the part that interested Dick.

He heard Sloan dial a number. "I hear your little delivery boy is skipping out on ya, eh, Marty?" The lawyer said in a mocking tone.

"He told ya that, did he?"

"Yeah. Said the job 'wasn't for him."

Marty chuckled nastily. "Don't worry about it, Sloan. Just you focus on your part, eh? I'll take care of my problems myself tonight."

Click.

Dick frowned. *I guess Nightwing has something for Tiffany, after all.*

It helped that Tiffany had mentioned to Dick that she'd told Nightwing about most of the stuff going on. That made it easier for him to investigate.

That evening, Nightwing crawled into Tiffany's apartment through Jake's bedroom window. He purposely made a little noise to alert his colleague to his presence.

"Have you had anything?" Tiffany asked the vigilante eagerly.

"Yeah." Nightwing played the recorders one right after the other-he'd paused each of them at the crucial points. After playing them, he looked up at Tiffany.

Her face, which had gone pale while the recorders were playing, now showed anger and determination.

"Do you know where their New York base is, or their meeting spot or whatever?"

"No, not for this particular gang. But it won't be hard to find out." Tiffany said nothing for a moment, only nodded. Then, "Tell me if you find anything, and I mean *anything* about Jake."

"Of course." He smiled suddenly. "Should I go out the way I came?"

Laughing softly, Tiffany led him to the front door. "Bye," she called as she closed the door behind him.

For Nightwing, the next three days went by incredibly slowly. Of all the people he talked to, of all the tips he received, not one of them shed any light on where Marty's gang could be found.

Then, on day four...

"Marty? He got a last name?"

Nightwing frowned. "Not one that I know. But have you heard of him?"

The man Nightwing was questioning frowned thoughtfully. He'd made it his business to know everything about everyone that happened into his bar. The man Nightwing described sounded familiar. Leaning back against the wall, the barkeep said, "I don't know. I do know someone who might know, though. What say I talk to him and tell ya what he thinks in a coupla days?"

Nodding his agreement, Nightwing turned to leave the dimly lit bar.

Alone, his contact pulled the cigarette he'd been puffing nonchalantly from his mouth. A long sigh escaped him and he rubbed his eyes wearily. This wasn't the first time Nightwing had questioned him, nor,

probably, would it be the last.

A couple more times like that, and...

He didn't bother to finish the thought, only turned to grab his coat and head out the door into the street. Maybe, if he was lucky, his friend would know something, and Nightwing's interrogations wouldn't get any worse. *Maybe.*

With a dry smile, the bartender handed a cool, sparkling beverage to the teen vigilante in front of him.

Nightwing lifted an eyebrow at the glass.

"Sorry it's not anything stronger-but unless you wanna show me your ID, it's ginger ale for you." The bartender smirked.

Seeing the vigilante hesitate, the other man sighed. "Fine." He said. He whisked the glass away and took two empty ones down from the overhead rack. He held them up. Before Nightwing's eyes, he rinsed the glasses and dried them. "See?" He demanded. "Clean."

He picked up the glasses, then set them back down. "Right. You can't see the tap from here. One sec." He bent down. Dick heard the bar fridge open and shut. The bartender straightened, a sealed can of ginger ale in his hand and plunked it onto the bar. "See? New." There was a hiss as he lifted the tab and opened the drink. He divided the can's contents between the two glasses. "Eenie meenie minee moe..." he chose one of the drinks and took a sip. "Ahhhh." He smirked. "See? No poison. No liquid E. No rohypnol. Hell, there's not even any caffeine. Happy?"

Shaking his head ruefully, Nightwing grabbed the glass and downed the drink, nodding his thanks.

Nightwing's contact watched. With a frown, he said, "Sorry, buddy. I've tried everyone who might know anything. Most of them had no clue about Marty, and one of them was too high on Coke to do me any good." He hardly had time to note his companion's bemused expression before

it was replaced by worry.

Nightwing sighed dejectedly. "I know, Bill. Thanks." Frowning, the teen racked his brain, trying to think of where else to fish for information.

The two were quiet for a few moments, each man lost in his own thoughts. Eventually, Bill said hesitatingly, "y'know, there's one other person who *might* know something about the guy you're looking for."

Nightwing looked up sharply, wondering at Bill's reluctant manner.

The barkeep seemed to be debating something with himself. "I can take you to her. But ya gotta promise that you won't bother her again."

Nightwing gave the bartender a sad smile. "Bill, you know I can't promise that. But if it won't hurt anything-or anyone-then of course I won't."

Nodding slowly, Bill walked over and switched off the neon. He headed out into the dark streets. A light rain was falling. Nightwing followed.

Nightwing quickly hid his surprise as Bill introduced him to an elderly woman. Even so, Bill noticed.

As he introduced the masked teen to the woman, he bit his lip, wondering for the thousandth time if he'd made the right decision.

As he assessed the situation, he noticed with relief that, despite some tension, everything seemed to be going smoothly.

Shrugging off his concern, he met his mother's curious, bewildered expression with a serious one. "Ma, I was just wondering..."

He watched Nightwing for any change of expression when she replied.

"Well, now isn't that funny? Just a couple of days ago Jake stopped by to tell me that he'd quit the gang. Isn't that nice, Bill? You know I've been praying for him, but I hadn't seen him much lately, except for a couple of days ago. The last time I'd talked to him he looked awful, and I just

know he'd been on some kind of drug." The woman-introduced as Betty-looked ready to keep talking, but Nightwing interrupted her before she could continue.

"Who's Jake?"

Betty smiled. "Jake's a young boy who got more trouble than he had bargained for when he joined the gang. But he stopped in here just a couple of days ago, and said, 'Ms. Betty, I just wanted ta letcha know that I quit.' Well, I knew what he was talking about; he didn't have to tell me that it was the gang. Anyways, we talked for a good ten, fifteen minutes about it before he left. Said he had to tell him mom about it." Betty's eyes shone. "Isn't that wonderful?"

Nightwing nodded politely. "Yes, ma'am, but did Jake ever tell you where the gang met?"

Betty's eyes clouded. "He said that he didn't want to burden me with that information."

Nightwing was disappointed. "Oh."

Glaring at him, Betty said, "That's what *he* said. I told him that if a 14-year-old boy can handle it, then I'm sure I can." She laughed.

"Then he did tell you?"

"I didn't say that either." But the old woman's eyes were twinkling.

Nightwing nodded grimly as she told him the location. "I'll check it out."

"You be careful, okay? Don't let that gang cause anybody else any more harm, y'hear?"

With a hurried goodbye, Nightwing left the apartment. A moment later, Bill came out, too.

"Bill, how does your mom know Jake?"

Bill smiled. "My mom knows a lotta people around here. You would be

surprised who shows up at her doorstep. I've seen the meanest of the mean pop up there, just to talk to her or see if she needs anything." He glanced at Nightwing. "Not that I'm not taking care of her."

Nightwing laughed. "I understand. She seems nice," he said politely.

Bill shifted his weight. "Well, I guess I'll see ya later."

Grinning, Nightwing said, "You can count on it."

Nightwing studied the abandoned warehouse, trying to determine the best way to get in. This was the building Betty had said the gang met in, and, he hoped that they would be there now.

Once he'd selected a window near the front of the building, he used his grappling hook to reach the roof. Smashing in the window, he burst into the warehouse. As he soared through the air, he performed a graceful flip, to land in a defensive position, ready to lash out at any who dared to go near him.

One man dared, then thought better of it.

Nightwing glared at the pitiful bunch, of which some were in a drugged stupor.

"Where's Jake?"

The one who's almost attacked Nightwing stared at the intruder stupidly. Three others scratched absently at red marks on their arms and stared off into space.

Or maybe not...

Giving the junkies his fiercest Bat-glare, the teen jogged in the direction the three men had been gazing, apprehensive.

Without warning, five men leapt out at him from behind some of the many junk piles.

Nightwing hadn't been caught totally unawares; he'd been expecting a fight. In fact, he welcomed one.

Fists flying, the five men attacked the vigilante. The ones he'd seen when he had first entered weren't totally innocent, either-he suspected that the Coke can that flew by his head was from one of them. Caught up in the fray, with more members of the gang pouring in, he couldn't be certain, though.

After ten minutes of hard fighting, Nightwing realized that he'd run out of opponents. He glanced around and saw that the gang had either fled or were out cold, surrounded by the crowbars, baseball bats, and guns strewn about. Nightwing glared at the still-conscious gang members, daring them with a look to go for the weapons.

No one did.

He was almost disappointed. The adrenaline rush that had helped him during the fight still remained, and he was almost itching for more.

Scooping the weapons into a heap, he peered around several junk piles, looking for one particular ex-gang member.

When he found him, he slowly let out the breath he hadn't known he'd been holding.

"Jake!"

He rushed over to the boy and scooped him up in his arms. Seeing a bloodstain on his own shoulder, Nightwing glanced down at it-and saw that the blood was coming from Jake.

Heart pounding, he gently lowered the boy to the floor, looking over the pale face and feeling frantically for a pulse.

"NO!"

He's dead... Oh my G-How am I gonna tell Tiffany?

Nightwing put his head in his hands as he tried to make sense of everything. He looked again at Jake before angrily turning back to the remaining gang members.

"Where's Marty?" His voice was low and threatening, tight with barely-suppressed grief and anger.

Two of the men looked at him stupidly, while another shrugged.

"I dunno."

Nightwing turned back to Jake's battered body.

"You'd better know if the next ten seconds, or-" He said to the men behind him. He stopped as a shadow fell over Jake's body, and he looked up.

Even though he had never seen one of the two men in front of him before, he automatically knew who it was.

"Marty."

The cold barrel of a revolver pressed between his eyes. Staring past it at the man holding it, he said, "You killed him."

Marty glanced at Jake. "Killed him? Nah. He's not dead-yet."

Nightwing let his eyes fall on Jake-he couldn't turn his head at all. He couldn't see any sign that the boy was alive.

Marty apparently relished the hero's anguish. He turned to his companion with a low chuckle. "This is the big bad hero that scared ya, Sloan?"

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 #15 (2007)

Nightwing: Hopelessly Devoted to You

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 #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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