



**Nightwing #20**  
Batkid

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**Nightwing: Be My Escape**  
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*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-not with the gun pressed to it. He didn't see any sign that the boy was alive-*

*Marty apparently relished the hero's anguish. "This is the big bad hero that scared ya, Sloan?"*

*Sloan. Nightwing had almost forgotten the man who had come in with Marty.*

Lifting his eyes up to the attorney, he glared daggers at him. The lawyer appeared to be far less at ease than Marty was, from the way he glanced down uneasily at the vigilante.

"What're you gonna do, Marty?"

Marty glared at Sloan. "Now *that's* a kinda stupid question," he said.

Sloan paled, but glowered back. "If you're gonna kill him, hurry up and do it, then."

Nightwing's mouth tipped. "So eager for my blood? Why don't you do it yourself, Sloan?"

The lawyer paled even more, and Nightwing wondered whether he was going to faint.

Marty raised an eyebrow, obviously thinking the same thing.

"I will do it gladly."

The voice came from behind Nightwing, and although he couldn't see the speaker, he recognized the arrogant voice.

"Finally worked up the courage to come back after you ran away, you coward?" Nightwing taunted the newcomer.

A bellow of rage was his response-and a blow to his temple that send him sprawling across the floor to land on top of Jake.

Nightwing smirked, holding back a grimace at the pain.

"Where's your girlfriend, Anton?" He started to sit up as he asked-but froze as the barrel of Marty's gun again appeared in front of his nose.

A sultry feminine voice replied.

"Right here... have you missed me?" A soft hand touched his shoulder.

"Nah... been kinda enjoying the peace and quiet, actually." It was a weak jab, but the best he could do while sitting half on top of Jake's still form...

He knew that he'd enraged Nocturna, but she concealed it well. Night-Thief, eager to get revenge on Nightwing, swung a fist at the teen. Raising an arm, Nightwing blocked it, half expecting the gun to go off in his face.

It didn't, though Night-Thief did manage a powerful kick to Nightwing's ribs.

The teen bit his lip, then grinned bitterly. "Did it take this many of you to take down the kid, too?"

In Nightwing's limited range of sight, Night-Thief looked ready to pounce, but Nocturna placed a pale hand on his arm, calming him enough to stop.

"He's simply trying to anger you, Anton." She gave Nightwing a dismissive glance, then looked back at the black-clad man beside her. "Let him have his fun while he can." She smiled. "After all, he doesn't have too much longer to live."

Nightwing raised an eyebrow. "So you're just going to kill me, and that's it? You think you'll actually be able to go on, business as usual?"

Marty chuckled, still pointing the gun at Nightwing, its cold barrel pressed between the teen's eyes. "That's about it, kid."

Shaking his head, the teen said, "Man, you guys are dumb. You think I'd actually come here without a backup plan?"

Sloan, who had been jumpy ever since he'd arrived, looked nervous. "Who'd ya tell, kid?"

Nightwing gave a short, disbelieving laugh. "As if I'd let *you* know."

This time, Nocturna didn't hold Night-Thief back as the villain lashed out with an agonizing kick to Nightwing's jaw. Still kneeling, Nightwing slurred, "You seriously don't think you can beat it out of me?"

Marty held up a hand, and Night-Thief stopped in mid-punch. The gang leader gestured to Nocturna, who calmly glided over to the pile of weapons Nightwing had confiscated from the men he'd fought earlier. Unhesitatingly, she picked up a revolver, and walked over to where Jake lay. Without a flicker of emotion, she knelt down beside him and calmly pressed the barrel of her gun against Jake's temple.

Nightwing gave a bitter laugh. "You can't do anything more to him-he's dead!"

Nocturna smiled and raised an eyebrow. "Do you really want to take that chance? If I shoot him, and it turns out that he was still alive, could you live with it?"

The teen noticed that Marty, confident of the hold Nocturna had over Nightwing, had lowered his gun hand. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Night-Thief, gloating.

"Probably not." He replied honestly.

Nocturna's smile grew wider. "Of course you couldn't. So tell me who you else knows you're here, or watch as the boy dies."

Nightwing hesitated, thinking of Bill and Betty. Giving their names was unthinkable. "The Teen Titans, for one."

Sloan looked nervous, Marty and most of the others, thoughtful.

Night-Thief, on the other hand, appeared enraged-as usual.

"You stupid-" He stopped as Nocturna held up a white hand.

"It's all right, Anton." She gazed calmly at Nightwing.

"Tell us the truth. Three... two... one..." Her finger pressed down on the trigger.

Nightwing's leg shot up, catching Marty's hand and sending his gun skittering across the concrete floor. Seeing Sloan reach into his jacket, the teen shot up and gave the lawyer a swift uppercut to the chin. As the attorney fell back, dazed, Nightwing turned to meet and block Night-Thief's kick. Feinting a kick of his own, Nightwing swung his fist, which narrowly missed his enemy's jaw as the man stepped back. By that time, Marty had another gun out, and was pointing it in Nightwing's direction. The vigilante dove to one side, plowing into Night-Thief. He heard the bang of the gun as Marty fired it and missed him. Now he was on top of Night-Thief, but with Marty and his gun behind him, Nightwing didn't have time for fancy moves-he grabbed Anton's head and shoved it

back on the hard concrete floor.

Nightwing rolled across the floor to avoid any bullets that Marty might send his way. All at once, he sprang up. With lightning speed a nightarang appeared in his hand and went flying towards the gunman. Marty had a split second to realize what had happened-but a split second was all the time the nightarang needed to catch the gang leader's forearm. Marty gave a bellow of rage and agony, clutching his arm to his chest, as the gun fell to the floor. Nightwing lunged toward the weapon as Marty quickly bent over to retrieve it. Grabbing the gun just as Marty's fingers touched it, Nightwing pointed it at the gang leader's nose.

"Give it up."

Still, pointing the weapon at Marty, Nightwing stepped back-out of his opponent's reach. He chanced a quick look at Nocturna.

She stood watching the fight, her gun hanging limply in her hand.

Nighwing grinned. "I guess I forgot to mention to ya that I emptied those jokers' guns, huh?"

Marty looked at him, furious, but powerless to do anything. He slowly raised his hands, as he looked around the warehouse for help.

Most of the gang had cleared out long before, and now only those who were brave or stupid enough to stay remained. They hid behind junk piles to avoid stray bullets. Nocturna's gun was useless-Marty'd found *that* out a little late when her gun had failed to kill his dumb delivery boy. With growing hopelessness, he looked over at Sloan.

The lawyer was standing over Jake, eyeing the boy with an odd mixture of anger, confusion, fear-and relief. Nightwing suspected that, much like Jake, Sloan hadn't been totally prepared for the gang, either-or what came with it.

That didn't mean that Nightwing felt any pity for him, though.

"*Get. Over. Here.*"

Visibly shaking, the lawyer threw his hands over his head and obeyed slowly. Nightwing waved Noctuna over. She tossed her revolver carelessly to the side, nonchalant as ever. With a quick glance at Night-Thief to make sure the villain was still unconscious, Nightwing turned to the few gang members who had stayed. With his free hand, he pointed at one.

"Call an ambulance, *now*." Nightwing's tone of voice left no room for debate. To his complete shock, the man grabbed a cell phone from his pocket and walked over to a quieter area of the warehouse.

Marty and company watched in utter disbelief. Nocturna turned to Nightwing, her eyes betraying rage and fear for the first time.

Nightwing glared at them.

"You had better hope for your sakes that Jake's still alive." He walked over to where the boy lay, all the while keeping his gun trained on the gang. Kneeling beside Jake, he placed his finger on the youth's wrist, feeling for a pulse.

With growing trepidation, he realized that he couldn't find one. Forcing himself to remain calm, he pressed his finger against Jake's neck. Nothing.

After a moment, he let out a breath and closed his eyes.

Opening them a minute later, he glared hard at the group of villains he had at gunpoint. "He's alive."

He heard a sigh, looked over at Sloan, and realized that the lawyer was relieved. He saw no such remorse on Nocturna or Marty's face, however.

The wail of approaching sirens sounded in the distance, gradually growing louder. Turning to the gang, he frowned.

"Darn. Looks like I have to turn you over to the cops now." His face darkened, and his voice dropped ominously. "Lucky for you."

The door of the warehouse burst open, and Nightwing looked up, expecting the police and medics. His jaw dropped.

"What-?!"

Tiffany and Bill ran up to Nightwing, Betty not far behind.

"Did you find-?" Tiffany looked around eagerly as she asked. She let out a piercing scream when she saw her brother. Betty and Bill looked over to where Jake was. Betty closed her eyes. Bill put an arm around her comfortingly and looked over at Nightwing.

Nightwing went over to where Tiffany was kneeling over Jake, sobbing as she mumbled unintelligibly. He placed a hand on her shoulder, saying "Tiff... Tiff, it's okay. Jake's alive! Shh... "

She looked up at him with a tear-streaked face and tortured eyes. "Are... " A sob escaped. "Are you sure?" She asked more strongly.

Nightwing nodded, and held his hand out. She took it and let him help her to stand.

"The police and ambulance are coming." Nightwing looked at Tiffany and her companions quizzically. "What are you guys doing here, anyway?"

Bill grinned. "Ma made me hail a taxi to drive over to the neighborhood where Jake had told her he lived. She asked around until she found his apartment. Then she told Tiffany and her mom that you had a strong lead."

Betty nodded briskly. "Then Tiffany insisted that we bring her here."

Nightwing had a few thoughts about *that*, but by this time, Tiffany was able to speak. "Nightwing, I called Ms. Green on the way here and told her about Sloan." She glanced over at the gang as she spoke. "I think she's coming here."

Nightwing almost dropped his gun. "She is?"

Tiffany nodded, then looked at him more closely. "Is that okay?"

Masking his shock, he nodded briskly. "Of course. Did you call Dick?"

Eyes widening, Tiffany exclaimed, "I didn't even think about it! As soon as we're at the hospital, and I know Jake's okay, I'll call him."

Nightwing nodded. "Sure." The sirens were suddenly right outside, and there was no time to say anything more before the police stormed in, surrounded the gang and handcuffed them. Two officers and a paramedic roused a groggy Night-Thief, while several others attended to Jake. Tiffany watched nervously as the paramedics checked Jake and loaded him onto a stretcher. Then they carried him out to the ambulance. Nightwing could hear the sirens fade away as the vehicle sped down the street toward the hospital.

He turned to where the police were arresting the gang, and received a nod from one of the officers. Returning it, he glanced back at Betty and Bill, who had been silent the whole time.

Betty looked up at him as he towered over her. "You should let me take a look at that," she said, reaching up to examine his bruised and swollen jaw.

He stepped back, wiping away the sweat and blood pouring into his eyes. Grinning was painful, but he still forced himself to as he said, "I'll be fine. Thanks, Betty." Looking at Bill, he said, "Good job, both of you, getting Tiffany." He started to say more, then stopped himself. Looking down at himself, he sighed. "I guess I'd better get cleaned up." He left them with a friendly wave.

Back at his apartment, Dick jumped in the shower and felt the blood and sweat wash away. Afterwards, he checked his face and ribs. While he thought that he might have had a few cracked ones, he was more worried about his face. He was expecting Tiffany to call at any minute, but if she came over instead... or even if she saw him at work tomorrow!

As if to mock him, the phone rang just then. Answering it, he told Tiffany that of course he'd come; he'd be there as soon as possible.

He grabbed some makeup he kept for such situations, and tried his best to conceal the bruises that covered his swollen face. "That's the best that I can do." He sighed and headed out the door.

When Dick got to Jake's hospital room, he saw Tiffany and her mom sitting on either side of Jake, who was lying asleep in bed. He couldn't get over how vulnerable the kid looked. Rachel sat in a corner, having a quiet conversation with Tiffany. Dick greeted Mrs. Weston and Rachel politely, then turned to Tiffany, who stood to welcome him.

"I came as soon as I could," he told her.

Smiling a real smile for the first time in days, she said excitedly, "the doctors say Jake should be fine. He's on sleep meds right now."

Frowning, she gently traced her finger along his jaw. "What happened to *you*?"

Dick shrugged. "I got into a fight at the bowling alley earlier." He grinned roguishly. "You should see the other guy."

Trying to suppress a laugh, and not quite succeeding, Tiffany said, "well, thanks for coming. I guess you haven't heard the whole story yet, huh?" The two sat down as she talked.

"Nope."

Over the next half-hour, Tiffany told Dick about Nightwing's heroic rescue of her brother. She told him about Sloan's being arrested.

Looking at Rachel, Dick asked her, "Have you seen Mr. Sloan yet?"

The attorney nodded. "I went to the warehouse as soon as Tiffany called me. They were just getting the gang loaded up when I got there. It took awhile."

"I heard the gang was huge," Dick agreed.

"They're still rounding up gang members." She gave Dick and Tiffany a sidelong look. "I hear a few of the members claimed that the gang has members all the way out to Yellowstone National Park."

They laughed. After a moment Rachel said, "Dick, after all that's happened... are you sure you still want to be a P.I.?"

Dick nodded. "Yes," he said firmly. "Now more than ever."

Rachel smiled. "Good. 'Cause I still need one."

"You mean... ?"

Smiling, Rachel said, "You can spend the rest of your attorney-supervised time under me-at least until another lawyer on my firm says he will take you." She looked at both Tiffany and Dick. "I'm sorry I didn't believe you before about Sloan," she said a little more quietly. "I found a tape on my desk. It was in an envelope with Nightwing's symbol on it." She smiled wryly. "He must have left it last night."

"What was it a tape of?" Tiffany asked curiously, leaning forward in her seat.

Rachel cocked an eyebrow. "It was a tape of Richie Sloan buying drugs from Jake." Tiffany blushed, and Rachel added hastily, "I don't hold that against you, Tiffany. Jake's decision was Jake's decision, and had nothing to do with you." She paused. "I should have believed you both when you first mentioned it. I'm sorry."

Tiff and Dick grinned. "S'okay," Dick said easily. "It was a pretty fantastic-sounding story, I know."

Tiffany agreed. "Who woulda thought that Sloan was guilty?"

Taking a sip of his Zesti, Dick smiled as he nodded. "Who woulda thought," he murmured softly.

**THE END!**

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