



Nightwing #37
Batkid

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Dance of Death

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"You ready?" Dick asked.

"Yep," Tim replied.

Dick stepped away from the doorframe he'd been leaning against. As Tim passed him, he reached out and straightened the young teen's tie.

"How are we on time?"

Dick glanced at his watch. "If Kory shows up in the next five minutes, we'll be fine."

The two had barely made it down the stairs when the bell rang and Alfred showed Kory in. Dick greeted her warmly. "All set?"

She nodded and the group headed out to the car Alfred had pulled up to the door.

Twenty minutes later, the group quietly hurried into a large theatre. They settled into plush red seats, not a moment too soon; the lights in the room dimmed and the performers gathered onstage. Even Tim, who had been circling his foot on the floor, bored, became interested as the show progressed. Towards the end of the performance, a lone ballerina danced out, her mood melancholy. After a moment, the male lead leapt in from the opposite side of the stage, and the music became suddenly joyous as the two leapt across the stage. The enraptured audience gasped as, mid-leap, the ballerina went limp and hit the stage floor. When she didn't get back up, her partner hurried to her. The last glimpse

Dick caught before the curtain abruptly lowered, was the man cradling the woman's head in his lap, yelling for help in a panic...

"Well," Alfred commented, smoothing the newspaper Dick had just laid down, "that play had a tragic ending." His brow creased as he speculated. "She certainly seemed fine moments before she collapsed."

Dick agreed. "But she'd spent hours on stage," he reminded the butler. "There's really no telling how long she was sick—she could have been hiding symptoms for the sake of the show. You're right, though, it did seem sudden..." He paused, remembering. "No telling what killed her they weren't able to determine the cause of death in the autopsy."

Alfred nodded as he cleared the lunch dishes. "It is a mystery, sir," he stated as he walked out. Dick checked the time before running out to his car. He listened to the news on the radio as he headed back to Wayne Enterprises. The most-discussed happening was, unsurprisingly, the Tuesday-night ballet.

"Several suspects are under investigation at the moment, including Andrei Ivanov, Vera's on-stage and real-life partner..."

The news report went on, but Dick's thoughts were elsewhere: Vera Ivanova must've had some hefty life insurance... A big-time ballerina like her? Andrei is probably set to pick up a big check soon...

He turned into his reserved parking space at Wayne Enterprises, looking, for a moment, at the 'Reserved' sign. The 'Grayson' part still looked new, having recently replaced the 'Wayne'. He shook his head and entered the building, his mind on the mystery. He just might take a look at the case.

"How do you feel about catching up on your dance moves, Tim?"

"What?" Tim asked around his mouthful of cereal. He swallowed. "Ohhh—you want to investigate that ballerina's death?" He frowned.

"If you want to," Dick said, watching Tim's face closely. "If you're uncomfortable with it, just say so. I mean," he hesitated, "you watched her die. If you—"

"I'm fine," Tim interrupted. "When do we start?"

"I can pick you up after school, if you like, and we can go over right after."

"How are we going to get in?" Tim wanted to know. "Security's gotta be tight."

Dick smiled. "I own half of the place. Furthermore, we have... connections."

Tim cocked his eyebrow at that, but when Dick didn't elaborate, he went back to his cereal. "So, what's our story?"

Dick's eyes opened wide. "Story?" he asked with feigned innocence. "No story, Tim. You *do* have an informative paper due next week on a subject of your choice, right?" He winked as Tim rolled his eyes.

"Ballet? You want me to do a paper on *ballet*?"

Dick shrugged. "When will you have time to do research for another paper if you're on the case?"

"I'll find the time," Tim defended himself. Then he noticed Dick's smirk and laughed. "You—!"

Dick gathered his dishes into a stack for Alfred and grabbed his coat. "Right after school, then?"

"Yep," Tim said, as the two walked out the door.

"Hi, ma'am, I don't know if you remember me. I'm—"

“Dick Grayson! Why, I haven’t seen you since—” The woman Dick was speaking to paused.

Dick nodded. “Since Bruce’s funeral, I know.” He paused for a moment before going on. “How’re things here? I know you had a little excitement—”

“Oh, my, we did,” the woman nodded. “In fact, we... Well, who’s this?”

Dick gestured to Tim. “This is Tim Drake... Tim, this is Ms. Kirkson. She choreographed the entire performance we saw last night.” Tim looked dutifully impressed.

“Tim! Of course,” the woman laughed. “Dick here has pretty much wrapped my job up in less than a sentence.” She paused to take a breath. “Is this a social visit, Dick? Don’t tell me you’re getting into ballet,” she winked.

“Um, no,” Dick laughed. “Actually, Tim has a research paper, and he thought he—”

“Would do it on ballet? Splendid! Like I said, Dick pretty much described my job in a sentence, but let’s see if I can’t make it seem more impressive... If you’ll come along with me, I’ll get Belinda, one of the company’s ballerinas, to show you a few moves to some music. Is this a general paper on ballet, or are you interested in a certain aspect?” she wondered as they left the room.

“Oh, Dick,” she called over her shoulder. “There’s some coffee in the lounge if you’d like. Just tell them that I sent y—” She laughed. “Of course, you don’t need to—you own half the place anyway...” She walked out of the room with Tim, pointing to a picture of a past performance hanging on the wall.

Dick let out a breath. *Poor Tim...* He headed into the lounge and glanced around, pleased to see several other people chatting.

“Hello, there!” one man greeted him.

“Hi,” Dick said amiably. “Ms. Kirkson is showing my friend around to

help him with his paper, and she said I could grab some coffee in here.”

The man waved his acquiescence, gesturing at the coffee. “Sure, go ahead.”

Across the room, a woman was watching. Dick glanced up from pouring creamer into his coffee and gave her a quick grin. She smiled. “So your friend is doing a paper?” she asked.

Dick nodded, sipping his coffee. “He’s doing one on dance—ballet, specifically. And what better place to get information on ballet is there than here?”

The woman nodded, but looked confused. “But how did you get past security? I’m sure you know that things have been crazy here for the past few days.”

Dick nodded grimly. “Understandable,” he answered without responding to the question. “Are you a dancer here?”

“Who, her?” a new voice asked. Dick did a half-turn to see the newcomer. A tall woman walked in.

“I’m in charge of costumes,” the first woman explained. She gestured to the newcomer. “This is—” She blushed. “Where are my manners? I haven’t even introduced myself yet. I’m Victoria, and this is Elizabeth.” She gestured to the man, saying, “this is Bill.” The other three waited politely for Dick to introduce himself, but when he didn’t, Victoria continued.

“Is your friend interested in the costumes the ballerinas wear?” she asked.

Dick was tempted to say that his friend would be very interested, but decided against it. Tim would have more than enough to put up with in a day with Ms. Kirkson. “Actually,” he grinned, “I’m not sure. His interest is more in the performance aspect than the tutus.”

Victoria laughed. “I understand,” she said.

"I was amazed when I read how many performers were in Tuesday night's show," Dick commented. "Do you keep track of all of their costumes?"

Victoria nodded.

"Wow," Dick marveled, shaking his head. "And Ms. Kirkson coordinates them all?"

"Yes," Bill responded. "It's amazing, isn't it?" He was watching Dick carefully now.

Dick mentally listed the people he'd met that day in his mind: *Ms. Kirkson, the choreographer... Victoria, the costume... mistress... Elizabeth and Bill, the...?*

"What do you do here, Elizabeth?" he asked pleasantly.

The woman reached into her bag and pulled out a pair of delicate-looking shoes. "I'm a dancer," she explained.

"And you?" Dick asked Bill.

The man shook his head. "I don't work here," he grunted, apparently distrusting the guest who asked so many questions.

Elizabeth's cheeks flushed a light pink in embarrassment. "He's my fiancé," she explained.

"Ready to go, Elizabeth?" Bill asked, abruptly slapping his mug down on the counter.

The woman nodded, her cheeks flushing an even deeper pink. "I'm sorry, Mr. ..."

"Dick," the teen supplied.

"That's it." Bill snapped his fingers. "You're Richard what's-his-face, Bruce Wayne's orphaned foster kid."

Dick's smile froze in place. "I'm Richard Grayson, yes," he replied. His face hard, he turned to Elizabeth and Victoria. "I'm sorry to have intruded on your time," he said, heading for the door. Victoria protested to his back, while Elizabeth rebuked her boyfriend. Dick pushed the door closed behind him. He wasn't going to get any more information from Bill, it seemed—his realization of Dick's identity had definitely been displeasing. Dick expected that Bill wouldn't allow his fiancée to volunteer any information, either. Still clutching his coffee cup, he headed down the hallway.

Three... two... one...

Victoria came through the door behind him, her expression a mixture of embarrassment, confusion and anger. "Mr. Grayson? I'm glad I caught you." She stopped in the doorway.

"Yes?" Dick asked stiffly.

"I wanted to apologize for what Bill said," she explained, twirling her hair nervously with one finger. "I'm sure you can understand that emotions are running high right now; we were all close to Vera..."

"Of course," Dick returned. *You just realized I own half this place,* he thought cynically.

"... This has been hard on all of us," the woman was still explaining. "Especially on Andrei, you can imagine."

"I was here for the show," Dick said bluntly. "I can guess how hard it must have been for him to have her die like that only a few feet from him. Where is he now?"

"Last I heard, he was taken in for questioning. He is probably at his house at the moment, unless they've detained him. I was so nervous yesterday after Tuesday's performance that I was simply no good here and so, I went home. I haven't heard anything," she finished.

"Ah," Dick said. "I'd like to offer my condolences," he adlibbed. "Do you happen to have his number?"

Victoria hesitated, obviously not wanting to offend the owner of the company.

Dick's expression softened. "Please? I'd like to speak with him. I don't intend to bother him," he added. *Only get a few answers.*

She grudgingly nodded. "Do you have something to write it on?" Dick held out a business card, and she scribbled a number on the back of it as though in a hurry to get the deed over and done. Dick smiled, satisfied.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said, nodding. "If you'll excuse me, I've got to find my friend..."

"Of course." She held out her hand. "I'll take that back for you."

Dick handed her his coffee cup with thanks. *Bill must still be in there, he thought. She doesn't want me to talk to him.* He hurried back to the room where he had left Tim. Thumbing through some magazines, he settled in to wait for his young friend to return. After fifteen minutes, he could hear Ms. Kirkson's voice at the door. He stood as she walked in.

"I think he's got everything he needs to know, Dick," she beamed at the teen. "This paper should get an A."

"I hope so," Dick responded. "Thank you for showing him around."

"Oh, it was no problem at all," Ms. Kirkson waved her hand. "None at all. I enjoy being able to show off all the intricacies of this place. No one quite appreciates how much work goes into a single performance, I think, until they are able to understand what it involves..."

Dick listened politely for several moments before cutting her off. "I hate to interrupt, Ms. Kirkland," he interjected smoothly. "I'm afraid Alfred is going to be waiting for us." He glanced at his watch. "He's probably been keeping dinner warm."

"Oh, right," Ms. Kirkland nodded understandingly. "I remember him. Okay, I'll let you go now. Tell Alfred I said 'hi', will you? I've got to finish up anyway before I can possibly leave for the day. Come back if you have any more questions, Tim."

Tim nodded quickly and promised to do so as he slowly edged back toward the door. Dick followed him, chuckling when Tim let out a huge breath.

"This is officially the first sentence I've been able to finish in the last forty-five minutes," Tim announced as the two dashed through the heavy rain to Dick's car.

"Did Ms. Kirkland give you a thorough explanation of the intricacies of ballet?" Dick asked as he pulled out of the parking lot. He switched on his windshield wipers.

Tim smirked. "Only the choreography part."

"I'll have to take you back tomorrow and let her explain about the rest," Dick deadpanned. Tim's mouth formed a perfect 'O' for a moment before he broke into laughter.

"You do that," he grinned. Sobering, he asked, "So what did you find out?"

"I met a costume keeper, a ballerina, *and* the ballerina's fiancée."

Tim glanced at Dick. "There's a story there, isn't there?" He asked, grinning. Dick briefly explained his conversation with Bill, Victoria and Elizabeth.

Tim could barely hold his curiosity in any longer. "This morning you said we had connections here," Tim began. "Obviously, that was Ms. Kirkson?" He waited for Dick's confirmation before continuing. "How do you know her? She seemed to know you and Alfred."

"A date," Dick muttered, barely swerving his small car out of the way of a large truck. He straightened the car and beeped his car horn quickly before glancing back at Tim's wide eyes. "What?"

"You and Ms. Kirkson..."

"What?" Dick exclaimed. "You think...? No. Heck, no. I mean, she's a

nice woman and all, but..." His face flushed and he grinned. "She's twenty years older than me, Tim. She and Bruce went on a couple of dates when he bought half of the company. It was nothing serious, more for publicity than anything, I think. It didn't last long," he finished.

Tim nodded and leaned back in his seat. "Did you hear anything about what might have killed Vera Ivanova?" he asked. His disappointment was obvious as Dick shook his head.

"No. I'll talk to Gordon tonight and find out if the autopsy revealed anything suspicious."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Get online and see if there's a map of the building," Dick instructed. "Did Ms. Kirkson show you around much of the building?"

Tim nodded.

"That's great. I didn't get any further than the lounge. Can you remember everywhere you went?"

"I think so."

"Good. That'll make it easier if we decide to check out the building." Dick snapped his fingers. "Oh, I almost forgot... I got Andrei Ivanov's number. I checked for it while I was at work, but he was unlisted."

"So how did you get it?" Tim looked puzzled.

"Victoria. When you look up the map of the building, see if you can trace this number." Dick fished for his wallet in his jacket pocket with one hand, while steering with the other. He tossed the wallet to Tim, who pulled out the business card and returned the wallet.

"I'll look it up," he promised. "You're going to see Gordon, then?"

"As soon as it's dark," Dick confirmed.

"Gordon," a familiar voice rasped from somewhere in the shadows.

Gordon snuffed out his cigarette. "Penicillin."

"You're sure," Batman replied roughly. His voice was suddenly much closer.

"If my people were right doing the autopsy." Gordon shrugged and turned ninety degrees. Batman appeared from the darkness.

"She was allergic."

"Yes. Very allergic, it seems."

"Does Ivanov know?"

"Not yet," Gordon sighed. "Right now, he's my prime suspect."

"Why?" Batman's eyes narrowed.

"Isn't that obvious?" Gordon asked, eyebrow raised. "Mrs. Ivanova had a big life insurance policy. Andrei was with her backstage before she went out."

"Vera Ivanova was the star ballerina," Batman stated, his voice rough. "She was onstage for nearly every scene of the performance."

"Enjoy the show?" Gordon asked sardonically. Batman was silent, and Gordon sighed again, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Look, the way it looks right now, Andrei is my main suspect. He had to have known his wife was allergic to penicillin, and he could easily have slipped it into her protein shake or whatever it is that ballerinas drink during a show." He looked over to Batman. "You have a better suspect?"

"Not yet," Batman responded.

Gordon nodded. "If you find anything..." He turned around. Batman was gone, swallowed by the shadows.

Gordon shook his head, looking up at the night sky. "If *I* find anything..." he muttered.

"Robin," Batman said into his mike. He took a swig of water.

"Right here, B," the boy replied. "I've got that map for you. I couldn't find one on their web site, so I drew up a rough sketch."

"Good," Batman grunted. "And the phone number?"

"Got the address," Robin gave it over.

"Thanks," Batman said. "It's going to take awhile to get there—maybe twenty minutes. That address is on the outskirts of town."

"Kay," Robin responded. "Want me to help you?"

Batman was silent for a minute, thinking. "Alright, take your bike and meet me there," he decided. "No stops."

"Sure," Tim agreed easily. "I'll leave as soon as I suit up."

"And," a voice broke in, "as soon as he partakes of some light refreshment."

Robin protested as Batman chuckled inwardly.

"Whenever you're able, Robin." He turned onto a clearer road as he left the city and sped up a little.

Arriving at Andrei Ivanov's house twenty minutes later, he entered the house through a first story window, having seen a light on upstairs. Silently creeping up the stairs, he entered the bedroom.

"Andrei Ivanov."

A blond man was slouched in a chair across the room, under the light of

a lamp. He started at the harsh voice, and whatever had been on his lap tumbled to the floor. Seeing Batman's form in the doorway, he mumbled, "Batman?"

Batman walked in. "I'm here to ask you a few questions."

The man slumped back into his chair, looking miserable. "I know what you're here for," he said. "I'll tell you the same thing I told the cops: I didn't kill my wife." He looked up, and Batman could tell he hadn't shaved in a while. Or slept.

"Do you know what happened?" Batman inquired, his voice raspy. The man was already shaking his head despondently.

"No, I don't. She was fine, the performance was going perfectly." He still looked as though he couldn't believe it had happened. "And then she was gone."

"She didn't seem odd before?" Batman asked.

"A bit," Andrei replied. "She looked ill, but I figured she was exhausted from the performance. She tried to hide it, and Vera is—was—a great actress, but she couldn't hide anything from me," he finished with a small, pained smile. "That is, not for long, and then she—" He put his head in his hands and moaned. "What have I done?"

TO BE CONTINUED!

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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)

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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!

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

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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)

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Nightwing #14 (2009)

Nightwing: Something Wicked This Way Comes

Nightwing #39 (2009)

Nightwing: Living Nightmare

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Nightwing: Over a Barrel and Under the Gun.

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Nightwing: Formula for Fear.

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

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Nightwing: Live and Let Die.

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