



**Nightwing #12**  
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*Nightwing #12: Thieves of the Night*

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*Breathing steadily, a dark figure crept along the rooftop, glancing over his shoulder warily. The silhouette stole cautiously onto the roof of the neighboring rooftop, landing lightly. Stepping carefully, he ran across the roof to a skylight. He gently lifted the glass pane, and waited to see whether an alarm would sound. Silence. Tying a rope, which was knotted at close intervals, the mysterious figure nimbly climbed down it. Swiftly crossing the room, he relieved the cabinets and safes of their store, climbed up the rope, and disappeared into the shadows.*

"Grayson!"

Dick sighed. "Yes sir?"

"I'm about ready to finish up. Did you get those memos sent out?"

"Yes."

"Good."

Dick filled the cooler with fresh water, and then threw the previous day's newspaper in the trash.

"Hey kid!"

Sighing, Dick replied. "Yes sir?"

The tall man walked in and critically surveyed the room that Dick had just cleaned.

"I guess that's good enough," he said, shaking his head.

Dick glanced around the room. It was as clean as it would ever be. The only things out of order were the lawyer's mammoth piles of papers. Dick didn't dare touch those, knowing that it was always the messiest people who had the most unique organizing systems.

"Well, it's getting late." Sloan yawned. "I'm ready to leave. You can finish cleaning up in the morning."

Dick rolled his eyes as the lawyer turned to get his coat. "Sounds good to me."

The two men walked out to the hallway, and Sloan punched the button to call the elevator. As they waited, Dick's thoughts went, as they had a thousand times, to his employer's mysterious phone call. He was convinced that the call was a little less than innocent. He was determined to find out what it meant. As he stepped on the elevator, he glanced at his watch.

Sloan noticed. "Got a date?" He grinned.

Dick forced a smile. "Nah. Just wanna get home and watch the big game tonight."

Sloan nodded. The two stepped off, arguing about which team would win the upcoming football game. Dick was surprised that the man knew anything about it; he just didn't seem the type who was into that kind of stuff.

And as much as Dick really would have liked to kick back and relax, watching television, he had something more important to do. He jumped on his 'cycle, heading towards his apartment.

Over his third cup of coffee, Dick hit the rewind button, this time playing the video frame-by-frame. Nothing new. He restarted the tape again. Still nothing.

Frustrated, Dick slapped the tower of his new computer. The DVD he'd been playing skipped, then froze.

He groaned, staring hard at the screen. During last night's patrol, Nightwing had encountered nothing he couldn't handle... a mugger in Central Park... two teenaged car thieves, both younger than himself... a neighborhood saboteur. But towards the end of his shift the dispatcher on the police channel he was monitoring had relayed a report of a robbery. It had occurred just minutes before, but by the time he'd reached the site, a thorough search had revealed nothing except security feeds from the store and its neighboring business.

He glared at the still-frozen screen. All he could make out of the pictures was a man in a black costume.

*A pharmacy robbed last night, and three banks and five drugstores before that... what's the connection?*

He checked his watch. 5:00 a.m. He hadn't slept in 24 hours, but couldn't sleep now... not with this new robbery- and his 12-page Criminal Psychology essay due the day after tomorrow. He hadn't even started it. He *had* to turn this one in-the last one had been late because he'd been trying to free hostages from a madman.

Maybe he'd feel better after a run. After locking the door, he set off at a brisk pace. Twice around the block... it worked wonders. Feeling refreshed, he grabbed a glass of orange juice and a bagel, and walked over to the monitor.

The mysterious thief seemed to carry no weapons. His skin-tight costume was completely black from head to toe.

*Hmm.* His M.O. was the same as whoever had robbed the other banks and drugstores, which further supported the hypothesis that whoever had robbed them was the same person.

He leaned back in his chair, thinking of the possibilities of the thief's identity. Most of the burglars with similar MOs that he knew operated in

the area were currently locked up or had left the country. So far, the robber had only targeted major banks and pharmacies. The biggest neighborhood drug stores had already been hit, and there was only one other large bank nearby. There had been one robbery per night so far... He stood up. No clue on this tape.

No time to analyze it any further, either. He had an early class to get to get to.

Dick's stomach rumbled. He'd eaten only a light snack, not wanting to fill up before what could possibly turn into a fight and/or chase. He smiled. But what he had eaten had been good... one of Alfred's cookies. The last time he'd been at the Manor, the old butler had given him a few dozen frozen chocolate-chip cookies, ready to heat up in the oven whenever he wanted one.

He laid flat on his stomach, staking out the adjoining building- the last major bank in the neighborhood. He didn't dare check his watch, but guessed he'd been out here for three or four hours already.

There. On the next roof over. Was that movement? This close to his suspect, he didn't want to take a chance and grab his night vision goggles, so he couldn't be sure. A minute later, a muscular, black-clad man came into view, nimbly leaping across onto Dick's rooftop.

*Darn... how was I supposed to know that he'd come from the rooftop?*

Holding his breath as the man walked just three feet away from him, Nightwing waited until the man had passed him. Slowly counting to three, he leapt up, immediately assuming a defensive position.

*What the heck...*

The man was gone. Shadows played across the rooftop, providing what he knew were perfect places for the intruder to conceal himself. Of course... that was the answer: there had been no time for his to escape to any of the adjoining rooftops. Alert, Nightwing carefully looked around for possible hiding places. They were endless.

As he made a slow sweep of the area, he noticed another shadow joining his. Turning around apprehensively, Dick faced the man from the security tapes.

"Hello," the man greeted him amiably, crossing his arms as he shifted his weight casually.

*Hello?* Not the greeting many thieves caught trying to rob a place might have used, except maybe Catwoman. But then, she never did what anyone expected.

"Hi," Dick said shortly. Not yet sure who he was talking to... the last thing he wanted was to have a pleasant little chat. "So, is creeping around in the dead of the night a hobby, or what?" he asked sarcastically.

The man shifted slightly, nodding. "Actually, it is," he said pleasantly. "There's something so... wonderful, and even that word doesn't come close... about the night. The glittering stars, the feeling of being alone in a city of 18 million... "

Dick stared. This guy was definitely a nut.

"Look, buddy... all that's fine, but if you want to stargaze, stay on your own rooftop."

The man had been staring up at the sky, and now looked at Nightwing. "But I can't," he said sadly. "I need the money these buildings hoard for my love, whose passion for the night equals mine."

He was starting to sound like he'd stepped off the set of a bad romantic/horror flick.

"The bank has an opening for a new teller," he retorted. "Why not try for an honest living for a change?"

The man's mood changed. "You dare mock me?"

Dick grinned. "I know it's hard to believe," he said, easily blocking a sudden kick from his opponent, "but... yeah."

The man exploded into a flurry of kicks and karate chops. Dick spun into a kick, but the man blocked it, delivering a punch of his own. Pain exploded in Dick's head, and the other man took that opportunity to deliver a powerful blow to his chest. As he went down, Nightwing kicked his leg out, sweeping the man's feet out from under him. In less than a second, Dick was on his feet, jumping on top of the man. Pinned down, the man struggled against Dick's iron grip. Nightwing stared into the black goggles looking up at him from the ground. He grabbed the mask, yanking it off.

A young man stared up at him, his eyes filled with hate. His blond hair was askew, and there was a red mark below his eye that would quickly darken into a bruise.

Breathing heavily, Dick asked, "Who are you?"

There was a click, and he felt a hard, cold object pressed against the back of his head.

"He is the Night-Thief," a soft female voice answered.

"Okay... and you are...?" Dick asked calmly.

"I'm the Mistress of the Night," the woman replied dreamily. "I'm Nocturna."

"Nope... doesn't ring a bell," he responded. *Or... did it?* Now that he thought about it, didn't Bruce's files make mention of someone by that name? She'd had a partner, too. Not Night-Thief, though. Nightslayer? *Nightstalker?*

Beneath him, Night-Thief growled and struggled. Dick glanced down at him.

"Release him," Nocturna ordered.

Dick stood slowly, and the man glared at him as he stood up. "Ruining a perfect night," the thief grumbled.

He heard Nocturna soothe him. "Don't worry, my love... . Tomorrow night will be perfect."

"Can I turn around?" Dick interrupted.

His request met with silence, Nightwing wondered what their plan was. The gun was lowered from his head.

"Yes," came the soft reply.

Dick turned, and was shocked by what he saw. The dark-haired beauty that stood before him was dressed in a deep blue or black dress that deeply contrasted her ivory skin.

*She's as pale as the moon*, Dick thought.

But where Snow White portrayed innocence and sweetness, Nocturna looked beguiling. The dark, luminous eyes that stared out at him from a near-white face were calculating.

Standing, as he was on the wrong end of the gun, he searched for a way to take control of the situation. While angering them might be dangerous, it could also make the two careless enough to make mistakes.

"So," he said casually, "what happened to *you*? Didja fall in a tank of acid like the Joker?"

Nocturna's eyes flashed, but she said nothing.

Night-Thief, however...

"How *dare* you say such a thing! Natalia is *nothing* at *all* like that lunatic!"

Dick raised an eyebrow at the thief's outburst. Okay, so Natty was a sore point with Night-Thief, was she? Well, he could play on that.

Again, Nocturna calmed her companion, gently stroking his arm with one hand, the other expertly gripping the revolver. Which, unfortunately, was still pointed towards Dick's head.

*Hmm... . Natalia... not much to go on, but I'll take what I can get. Besides, if I can just keep them distracted long enough, maybe they'll forget about Night-Thief's mask... a hair sample would be nice for a DNA test.*

Okay... it was time to wrap this up. Dick didn't want to fall asleep in class again, or be yawning the whole time he was at Mr. Sloan's office... not that he didn't anyway.

"Look, its past my bedtime, kids... so how're we gonna do this?"

Nocturna slowly walked towards him, keeping the gun trained on his head. "Maybe I should just blow you away," she said almost gently.

Nightwing wasn't very worried about the gun... he could dodge it with ease. He was fishing for information.

As soon as Nocturna was within his reach, he ducked. A bullet flew harmlessly past his head as he grabbed her wrist and twisted her arm. The gun clattered to the rooftop, and Nightwing kicked it over the edge.

*Sure hope no one was down there.*

Nocturna cried out in pain, and Nightwing released her as he whirled to face a furious Night-Thief. They were evenly matched for several minutes, the only slight edge Nightwing might have had over his opponent was Night-Thief's own anger. Sooner or later, the young vigilante hoped, it would cause him to get careless. As Night-Thief backpedaled to dodge a high kick from Nightwing, Dick stole a quick glance at Nocturna.

The woman was serene and staring rapturously at the night sky. Obviously, she had confidence in Night-Thief's abilities.

Dick's mask kept the sweat from pouring into his eyes, but Night-Thief was starting to feel the effects of an exposed face. He turned back to Night-Thief and grinned. Dick frowned. Maybe that wasn't such a good thing. There was less chance of their forgetting to retrieve it.

Spinning into a kick, he sent Night-Thief sprawling. Dick ran across the roof quickly and grabbed the mask, slipping it into the pouch on his utility belt. He turned around just in time to see Night-thief and Nocturna dashing across the roof. He gave chase and watched in amazement as Nocturna cleared the gap between the roof they were on and the one seven feet away. That such a delicate-looking thing was capable of jumping so great a distance... Shaking his head, he leaped after them, and realized too late what Night-Thief was going to do.

The villain stopped when Nightwing jumped over the gap, and whirled into a kick aimed at a still-airborne Dick. Twisting his body so that he minimize the blow's impact, he fell over the edge, slamming into the wall of the alley on his way down. He threw his arm up wildly, managed to grab the edge, and hung for a few tense seconds, half-expecting Nocturna or Night-Thief to loosen his grip on the wall. Finally, Dick pulled himself up and over the wall, and ran to the other end of the roof.

On the street below, two dark figures ran through the shadows towards a car parked beneath a bridge. Frustrated, he watched as the two slid into the vehicle and drove off. He sighed as he climbed down into the alley. Crouching down, he examined the ground where the thieves' car had been parked. Faint tire tracks were visible, and he wished that he had his plaster kit to make an imprint of them. Ah, well. At least he had Night-Thief's mask. He'd try to find a hair sample in it when he got home. Plus... there was Nocturna's revolver. He walked over to where it lay in a mud puddle. When he got home, he'd test it for fingerprints.

Back at his apartment that night, he knelt by the coffee table, studying the mask. With a pair of tweezers, he probed the cloth. Ten minutes later, he had what he was looking for—a short golden hair. He immediately started tests on it.

Hours later, the teen stared tiredly at the computer screen, looking for articles, school records, something, *anything*, on Anton Knight, the owner of the black mask. Scrolling down, he found recent newspaper accounts of Anton's father's murder.

'Charles Knight, NYC's millionaire, was shot to death yesterday evening.

He was apparently murdered by rival gang members- Knight's own illegal drug sales were not discovered until his after his death. Surviving him are his son, Anton Knight, and his adopted daughter, Natalia.'

'At his high school graduation, we asked NYC millionaire's son, Anton Knight, what his plans are for his future. "I'm hoping to leave for the orient as soon as possible. I'll be learning to take over my father's business soon, and want to get as much fun in as I can before then," he joked.'

*That would explain his martial arts know-how.*

But what about Natalia? The fingerprint test had shown the gun to be hers. He looked through older articles' headlines. There was one that looked promising.

'GCO Employee caught in radioactive laser accident'

'Gotham City Observatory experienced an unfortunate mishap last evening. Natalia Knight, daughter of Charles Knight, millionaire, was working late when she got caught in a malfunctioning radioactive laser. Knocked unconscious, she was rushed to Gotham City Community Hospital. Doctors there say that while she appears physically unharmed, she remains in a coma. Charles Knight is threatening to sue GCO for failing to properly protect its employees. We asked GCO for their story, to which their spokeswoman replied, "No comment."

*Apparently Natty did suffer side effects, Dick thought. Loss of pigment.*

So Knight's kids were following in his footsteps, huh? And apparently, Anton and Natalia had a romantic relationship, as well.

He scrolled down further to an older article.

He frowned. If Natalia's skin was drained of pigment, she was most likely extremely sensitive to light, which would help explain why she seemed obsessed with the night.

Hmm. Treating her pigmentation would probably cost a fortune. What was it Night-Thief had said right before they fought? That he needed the money for his love? He felt a pang of sympathy. The two thieves

probably didn't know how else to support themselves and get treatment for Natalia.

Five minutes later, the sympathy disappeared as quickly as it had come. He'd hacked into Anton's records... the man had wasted all of his inheritance on luxuries for himself and Natalia. A ten thousand-dollar telescope? A *Porsche*?

The money the robberies provided seemed to go toward funding their whims as much as it did medical problems. They wanted to continue the life of luxury they'd grown accustomed to from Charles' illegal support.

Well, maybe Nightwing would have to pay them a visit. He copied down their address. The two lived outside the city in the house they'd inherited from Charles. Dick knew the place. It was pretty large, a small mansion, really, on 6.2 acres of land. They owned houses in other states, too; their main house, a mansion that could compete against Wayne Manor, was in Gotham, from which Charles had operated his drug sales.

He grabbed a voice recorder and put it in his suit's utility pouch. He suited up as Nightwing, though he put his street clothes on over it, and hopped on his 'cycle. On the way, he dictated his essay into the recorder, so that all he had to do was type it up when he got home. This was one essay that *would* make it to the professor. And on time, too.

Weaving through the traffic this early in the morning was nearly impossible. Swerving to avoid one of the endless taxicabs, his voice recorder fell off. He watched in horror and dismay as the cab he'd swerved ran over it. The driver shook his fist at him, yelling.

"Aw, c'mon! What the heck am I supposed to do *now*?"

He'd easily had nine pages' worth of work on it-now gone, destroyed by a road raging taxi driver.

He made it through the traffic somehow, out to a somewhat calmer street. Nearly to the Knight's house, it was the time to plan a course of action, not the time to worry over lost essays, he told himself.

Pulling up in front of the house, he stopped. Chances were that Anton

and Natalia were sleeping after last night's escapade. Heck, if he'd had his way, *he'd* be sleeping now.

He turned off his 'cycle, pushing it behind some large bushes. All of the windows of the house were dark, though he wasn't sure if it was because its inhabitants were sleeping or because of Nocturna's sensitivity to light.

*May as well get started*, he figured. He crept up to the window for a peek.

No one was in sight, so he carefully cracked the window open and crawled in. Shutting the window behind him in case someone saw it, he looked around.

Japanese furnishings decorated the room tastefully. Wall coverings hung, depicting lovely and strange images. On the mantle, dragon statuettes were shown in various poses, the foreign effect of the room even greater due to the dimness.

He walked silently through, marveling at the foreign ornaments.

He walked into another room. It was decorated similarly to the other one, with the exception of the wall hangings. This room's walls had frames displaying various currencies. He wondered whether they represented the countries Anton had visited.

He continued through the lavishly decorated chambers, being as quiet as possible. Climbing silently up the stairs, he was thankful for the thick carpeting that muffled his steps.

He opened a door. A bedroom. The dominant color here was red, with oranges and a little brown. He figured that it was a spare bedroom; it hardly looked lived in. Opening the closet, he examined it, but found nothing helpful. The dressers and jewelry boxes yielded no clues, either.

Exiting the room, he wandered down the hallway, wondering where Nocturna and Night-Thief kept their stolen goods.

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. Surely Natalie and Anton would be getting up soon.

Voices drifted down the hallway, and he heard doors close. He silently crept closer. The two criminals were discussing last night's failed robbery, with Anton angrily complaining about Nightwing's interference. Dick smiled grimly as he eavesdropped.

Now, Anton was mentioning breakfast. He was going to make something this morning, instead of eating out, so that they could leave as soon as possible.

Wait. Leave? Dick listened carefully. Yes, they were planning to leave town, all right. All their baggage was loaded up in the car. He hoped that they'd say where they were planning to go to.

Dick ran noiselessly down the hallway as the voices came closer. He ducked into the bedroom he'd seen earlier, waiting until the two robbers passed by. Silently opening the door, he snuck over to the staircase, watching until they disappeared from view. Then, he walked down the stairs, following Natalia and Anton.

Soon, the smell of burnt eggs filled the air, and Nightwing decided to leave them to their breakfast while he explored the garage. He found the door leading to it, and walked in.

There was the car- a black Porsche, the same one he'd seen the records for. He pulled on his gloves- no sense in getting his fingerprints all over it for the police to find. Trying the car door, he found it locked. Fumbling in his pouch for his file, he picked the lock on the trunk, and opened it.

Several suitcases were packed, and he began to go through them. This one was must be Nocturna's, he decided, looking at the dark dresses. The next one was Anton's- complete with three black Night-Thief costumes.

Finally, he opened one up that contained little orange pill containers. He began reading the labels. Yes, these were the same medications as those that had been stolen from the drug stores. They probably planned on selling them for a pretty penny.

He looked up as Natalia's voice called out to Anton that someone was in the garage. Slapping a mask on, he glanced around, trying to figure out what had given him away. He tore off his shirt to reveal his suit. The

garage door was standing open, and Nocturna was visible a few feet down the hallway.

*"You!"*

Anton appeared around the corner, murder in his eyes. He ran towards Nightwing, and Natalia ran back towards the kitchen.

Dick shook his head. "You've got quite a stash here," he said casually. He bounced a hard plastic container filled with large white pills in his hand. He raised an eyebrow at the contents. "Ya know, I'd almost rather be sick than have to try to force these down."

Anton appeared to be trying to calm himself as he stood warily, a few feet from the unexpected intruder. "What do you want, Nightwing?"

Dick's eyebrows shot up. "To stop you, of course."

"And you really think you're going to be able to do that?" Anton asked.

The teen shrugged. "Of course."

Anton grinned coldly. "Well, let's just test that theory out, shall we?"

The two circled each other warily. Anton made the first move, feigning a kick as he lashed out with a devastating uppercut at Dick's chin.

Nightwing jumped back easily, and flipped onto the hood of the car. "Sweet wheels, by the way," he commented. "How much of Charlie's money went towards this?"

Anton glared as he grabbed a wrench and whipped it at Dick. The boy somersaulted to the floor, dodging the flying tool.

"C'mon, you can do better than that," he taunted. "I'm cutting a class to fight here with you, so at least make it worth my while."

Anton flipped forwards, rolling into a kick. Nightwing blocked it, delivering a kick of his own that sent Anton reeling backwards into the huge garage door. The villain quickly punched a button by the door, and

sunlight streamed in as the door continued to rise. A dark car was parked just outside, the window glass tinted black.

Night-Thief grinned as he ran through the doorway, and hopped in the car. Dick sprinted after him, just as the automatic locks clicked on. Nightwing pounded the glass angrily as he tried to peer inside. Nocturna, who had apparently driven the car outside, was now climbing into the backseat to allow Anton to take the wheel. It was hard to tell through the dark windows, but she seemed to be wearing a dark hood. She had probably worn it to protect her delicate pigment when she'd ventured out into the sunlight. As he watched, she threw the hood back and leaned forward to talk to Anton.

The driver lowered the window just enough to stick his hand out to wave as he sped down the drive.

His 'cycle at the end of the drive, Nightwing dashed back to the Porsche and opened the door. In just a few seconds, the hotwired vehicle was speeding down the lane after Anton and Natalia. When he reached the road, he looked around. There was no sign of them.

Figuring that they'd head toward town, he turned right, staying just at the legal limit. The last thing he needed was for Nightwing to be apprehended for speeding in a stolen vehicle. Just ahead, the dark Volvo he was chasing came into view.

"Yeah!"

As he came up behind it, the Volvo lurched, going at least thirty over the legal limit. Dick's speedometer slowly crept up to match. They couldn't keep up this speed for long, he knew; they were almost in NYC. A few seconds later, he pulled up alongside the Volvo.

A dark silhouette was visible in the driver's seat. Dick inched forwards, hoping to get in front of the car. He pulled ahead just as a car came whizzing by from the opposite direction. Nightwing swerved right, pulling directly in front of Anton as the car passed them by inches. He fought to keep control as Anton bumped him from behind. The guy was a maniac to try something like that when they were both going so fast.

Another bump, harder this time, had Dick's concentration focused just on keeping the car on the asphalt. When another innocent driver nearly got run off the road by Anton's reckless driving, Nightwing moved over and let up on the gas slightly, letting the Volvo pull up alongside him. As it pulled ahead of him, Dick cut to the right sharply to avoid another stupid taxi cab.

They'd reached the city, and Dick was forced to slow down to avoid hitting pedestrians and other motorists. Anton slowed down, too, but pushed his way steadily through the crowd. He was forced to stop as he came into a traffic jam, and he and Nocturna fled the car, running down the street.

Anton was still wearing his street clothes, but Natalia wore another long, dark dress, an old-fashioned hooded cloak protecting her face from the sun, gloves protecting her pale hands. Unable to catch them by car, Nightwing opened the door and ran after them, ignoring the protesting motorists.

Dick ran across the road, narrowly missing being hit by a bright yellow cab. Here, on this street, traffic was moving somewhat. He could see Anton and Natalia flagging down a taxi. Even with Natalia's unusual clothing choices, this was New York, after all—anything and everything could and did happen. A driver wouldn't even blink if Superman flagged him down.

Anton and Natalia jumped into the cab and disappeared into the traffic.

Furious at himself for letting them get away, Nightwing walked back to where he'd left the car. Blinking lights were flashing half a block back; it was time to get out. He jumped in the car, barely restraining himself from responding to the vicious yells and insults the other drivers threw at him. Pulling out of the traffic, he drove back to the Knight's house.

Flames engulfed the house, stretching to the sky. He stood there, staring, aware that any clues that the house might have held were gone.

*Natalia must have set the fire before she ran,* he figured.

Then he laughed. He remembered the smell of burnt eggs, and realized

what had happened: Natalia and Anton had been in such a rush to fight Nightwing that they'd forgotten to turn off the stove!

Now doubly glad for his gloves, he decided to get what he could from the car. Unable to load the suitcase of meds onto his 'cycle, Dick simply dumped its contents into the bike's saddlebags. Another suitcase stashed money, which he squeezed in with the meds. With one last look at the house, he hopped on his cycle and drove away from the city, where sirens and lights were beginning to come closer.

"-Chance of rain at sixty per cent. Back to you, Amanda."

"Thank you, Dave. Employees of the stores and banks robbed recently were astounded when they arrived at work this morning to find the money and/or drugs that had been stolen sitting on the counters. Authorities refuse to comment, but do say that the thief who stole them is still at large. More on this strange case tonight at eleven. For now, I'm-"

Dick switched the TV off, yawning. Grabbing a Coke out of the fridge, he walked over to his blinking answering machine. He'd just gotten home from delivering the meds and money, and had experienced the usual troublemakers on his shift, as well. Sore and tired, he planned to check his messages and munch on Pop Tarts as he wrote his essay. He hoped that if he took it to the professor's office, the man might accept it late.

He hit the 'play' button and turned up the volume, walking into the kitchen. As he opened the box of Pop Tarts, he listened as a telemarketer tried to sell him insurance, Roy bragged about his cute date, and Mr. Sloan reminded him to fax some gobbledygook to James Wuther. As he stuck the pastry in the toaster, another message played.

"Hey, Dick, its Mark... uh, just wanted to tell you that Prof. Ruggins got a bad cold, and couldn't find anyone to cover for him on such short notice. So... anyway, don't worry about turning in that essay until he's better or finds a substitute... "

The classmate continued to ramble on, but Dick was too excited to listen. No essay! That meant... that meant that he could actually get some sleep!

Dick grinned as he put his tarts on a plate, biting into the sweet, sugary pastry that Alfred had all but banned at the Manor. Finishing his snack, he climbed into bed. Roy, faxes, and most of all, essays, could wait until he got some sleep.

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