



Nightwing #21
Batkid

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Kiss in the Night

Night-Thief groaned quietly as he felt himself returning to consciousness. Dizzy and disoriented, he lay there for a moment. He could hear voices somewhere near him, and recognized one as Nocturna's. She didn't seem to be worried or in trouble... it sounded as though she was talking to someone. He tried to place the other person's voice, and failed. He became aware of blood trickling slowly from his mouth and nose, and of cold concrete against his cheek. He tried to open his eyes. One was swollen shut, but he was able to open the other one a slit. He could just see through his shattered goggles.

He could see silky black fabric blowing in the gentle wind, and a flash of a white leg. Night-Thief knew instantly that it was Nocturna, but her companion was a mystery. She seemed friendly with him...

Just as he was about to sit up so that he could see Nocturna's friend's face, as opposed to the black spandex-covered leg, which was all he could see presently, he heard a mocking chuckle. Nocturna raised her voice angrily, and Night-Thief, ignoring his throbbing head, sprang up. Ripping off his mask, he stared at Nocturna's companion.

Recognition dawned as Night-Thief found himself looking at a smirking Nightwing. He forced his rage down, and turned to his first priority-Nocturna.

"Natalia, don't worry. He hasn't hurt me badly... I'm fine!"

But Nocturna only gave him a dark glare.

Night-Thief gave Nightwing a look of utter hatred, and turned back to Nocturna. She was angrily marching away. He followed after her, glaring over his

shoulder a few times at Nightwing. Her behavior puzzled him.

What had he done?

Nightwing stretched out and relaxed in the plush movie theater seat. He smiled at Kory, who was engrossed with the film they were watching. The crime rate had dropped amazingly in the short time it'd been since he'd broken up the drug ring. True, he and the cops were still rounding up gang members, but the majority of the gang was behind bars. *Finally*, he could relax and enjoy a normal date with Kory... no more hot-and-sour squid and no more eavesdropping on crooked lawyers.

Night-Thief arose and paced. He paused to stare bleakly at the white ceiling, walls, and door. His cell was decently sized, but it seemed impossibly tiny to its prisoner. A moment later, he resumed his pacing—there was nothing else to do. Nothing else but reflect upon upsetting dreams and memories.

Nights were the worst part of the day for him. He had to stay *inside* his windowless cell, unable to enjoy the nighttime. The staff at the Eastern New York Correctional Facility weren't cruel, but none of them were particularly inclined to babysit him while he sat on the rooftop, staring at the stars.

Also, at night, he had dreams. Nightmares, really. Sure, he'd long outgrown monsters-under-the-bed (had he ever feared those?), and had never been scared of the nighttime sounds. No, the monsters in his nightmares were scarier than those could ever be, because they were *real*. The monsters in his nightmares could actually affect him.

Doubt. That was the monster Night-Thief feared most. And fear, because it came with the doubt.

At night, he remembered the night he and Nocturna had fought Nightwing, and had walked away. He'd been knocked out during the fight only to find Nocturna *talking* with Nightwing. It hadn't bothered

him much then-he'd been too enraged at Nightwing for saying whatever had upset Nocturna so much. He'd been confused by her abruptness with him, sure, but he had never *doubted* her.

Now that he was away from her and had a chance to think, he was remembering. Everything.

She was talking... friendly! With Nightwing.

Anton frowned.

She snapped at me-me! Told me to 'Just shut up!'

He ran a hand through his blond hair, sat on the bed and put his head in his hands. He had put up with being arrested. He could have put up with the humiliation of defeat. But he could *not* deal with the *doubt*.

Kory giggled. "Tell me another one, Dick."

Dick laughed. "That's the last joke I know. It's your turn."

Smiling happily, the couple walked slowly. They had left the movie theater an hour before, but had only gone three and a half blocks. They were in no hurry. Dick had bought cappuccinos, and as they strolled, they sipped the hot creamy liquid. Finding an empty bench, the two sat down. Dick smiled at Kory's joke, enjoying being with her.

What could be more perfect?

"Get! Away! From! ME!!!" Anton screamed at anyone who came near. All he could think about was finding Nocturna. If he could just find her, he thought, everything would be fine.

For the thousandth time, he inspected the walls and doors.

There had to be some way out of here!

Nightwing sat on a rooftop, enjoying the night air. He was out on patrol and had just knocked out a mugger. Using his grappling hook, he swung gracefully down to a lower rooftop, scanning the streets for problems. As he landed on a lower rooftop, a shout broke the silence. He wheeled around, looking for the source of the noise. He didn't have to look far.

"Didn't I put you in jail already?"

A shrug. Then, "I've got friends."

Nightwing rubbed his neck. "So've I. But you really don't wanna meet 'em. Batman can get *pretty* nasty when the people he puts in jail escape. When he puts someone in jail, he expects 'em to *stay* there." He cocked an eyebrow. "So do I."

"I've got to talk to you."

Both eyebrows shot up now. "Talk?" Nightwing echoed. "Not... fight it out? Running outta tactics? No plan to... kill me, or beat me up this time? Just... talk?"

"*Listen* to me."

Nightwing paused, suspicious. "All right, Natty. But come over into the light a little." His mouth twisted up wryly. "You'll have to excuse me for not trusting you."

Nocturna inclined her head gracefully. "Of course," she said, and led the way over to a patch of roof that was lighted better-And then she grabbed his arm.

Nightwing shook her off. Before he could say a word, she said loudly, "I *knew* you'd free me from that awful jail, Nightwing!" Grabbing his head with both hands, she started to pull him down towards her to kiss him.

Just before her lips met his, Nightwing recovered from his shock. He jerked back and freed himself, but not before a series of lights went off

from the roof across the street. Spinning around, he saw dim figures on the roof... people holding cameras, people scribbling in notebooks. He whirled around back to Nocturna.

But she was gone.

Smack!

Dick winced. Kory packed a powerful punch.

"Kory, listen-"

"NO!"

Dick rubbed his eyes wearily. At least *that* last slap hadn't been aimed at him. That one had whacked a newspaper with an incriminating picture of him and Nocturna on the cover into a monitor. Kory's hand had caught part of the screen, too... with devastating effects for the glass.

The *first* slap, however...

Gingerly touching his slightly swollen jaw, Dick tried again. This time, though, he stayed well out of Kory's reach in case she got worked up again. "Look. I honestly had no idea about what Nocturna had planned last night. None at all. None." He scowled at the pile of that morning's newspapers that Kory had brought in. "The reporters sure didn't waste any time on *that* story." He looked back at his girlfriend. "But now that you actually looked at more than the pictures-" Kory stopped pacing and looked away from him guiltily. "Now that you read the *words*," Nightwing continued, "you see what she had planned." He shook his head. "It was so simple... but I fell for it anyway."

Koriand'r forgot her anger and came over to him. "There's no way you could have known her plan. The reporters said that they'd gotten an 'anonymous tip' that Nightwing would bust Nocturna out of jail last night. She had everything mapped out perfectly. I'll even bet that she hired the mugger to be on the street just below the two of you. She would have shouted for you even if you hadn't gone up to that roof first,

in order to make you go up there." She gave him a weak smile. "She had you either way."

Dick groaned. "I know. Don't remind me."

Kory laughed softly. "Well, the only thing to do now is to go and get her."

Dick walked into the next room and came back a moment later with his suit in hand. "You can bet I will."

Anton blinked in the sunlight. His friend grinned at him, then left.

Free.

Anton closed his eyes.

I'm free.

After all this time, one of his friends had finally gotten him out. Posing as a guard, his friend had supposedly taken Anton out for exercise... and just kept walking.

Anton gave a short laugh. He couldn't believe that it had been so simple. Opening his eyes, he reminded himself that he was still standing right in front of the correctional facility, and hurried down the road. He knew that the alarm announcing his escape would sound soon.

He glanced down, and realized how conspicuous he was in his jail clothing. He hurried down the road, anxious to find some other clothing options. Going around to the back of a thrift shop, he found bags of clothing left at the drop-off door. Rummaging through it only took a moment, and when he was done, he had a decent-looking set of clothing. He found a spot to change and did so, gladly stuffing his despised neon-orange outfit into a Dumpster.

"What to do first?" He muttered.

Of course, he'd have to free Nocturna. That was number one on his list. Somewhere along the way he'd have to punish Nightwing. A bullet seemed too quick, too merciful for that enemy. Later, when he had more time, he'd indulge himself in imagining ways to slowly, painfully kill Nightwing.

Shaking his head, Anton pulled the baseball cap he'd found in the thrift store donation bag further down over his eyes. He found a pay phone, then realized that he didn't have any money on him. Frowning, he leaned back in the booth. With his lavish lifestyle, he certainly wasn't used to being so poor that he couldn't afford a pay phone.

"Excuse me?"

Anton glanced up.

"Are you going to use that, or may I?" The elderly man in front of Anton smiled ruefully. "I never remember to charge my cell phone."

Anton shook his head, swallowed his pride, and said, "I was going to, but I must have left my wallet in the taxi. There goes my day, huh?"

The kindly man smiled sympathetically. "I can't help you get your wallet back, but I *can* offer you this." The older man held out three crisp ten-dollar bills. "That should get you a taxi ride back home, or wherever you need to go." Fishing around in his pocket, he came up with a fistful of coins. "And here's some change for that phone call." He paused. "Will the thirty be enough to get you home?"

Anton hadn't expected that amount of generosity. "Uh, yeah. Yeah, that'll work fine." He took the money, then paused, saying awkwardly, "Um... thanks, Mr... ."

The older man smiled and waved a hand dismissively. "It was my pleasure."

Anton glanced across the road and saw another phone booth there. Normally, he wouldn't have even thought about letting someone go ahead of him, but the older man didn't look like he was about to leave. He stepped out of the phone booth.

"Thanks," he said again, counting out the change he needed for his phone call.

The other man waved as he dialed a number. "Hello, sir. The store is fresh out of couscous. Knowing your opinion of the hotel's cuisine, I thought perhaps I might approach one of the local establishments, to purchase an order of *Escoveitche de Pescado* for supper tonight, Master Bruce? The chef is an old friend of mine, and you may rely on his expertise... "

Anton crossed the street to the other phone booth. After a few calls, he used the rest of the money the man had given him to catch a taxi. He had to stop when the meter demanded the amount he had in his pocket. He hitchhiked the rest of the way to his Gotham home. He stopped before he reached the grounds of his residence as the realization hit.

"Darn!"

He hadn't thought of the cops guarding the place. Of course the cops would check out that house first. After all, his New York one was in ashes.

Biting his lip, he wondered where to go. There were other manors not too far from his house... maybe he could find a spot to spend the night at one of them.

He walked a few miles down the road, then stepped off it and headed into the woods. His neighbors liked to hunt, and had built a deer stand a ways from their house.

Finding it, he climbed inside it, wrinkling his nose as he looked around.

And kids actually ask for a tree house?

He pushed some leaves and dirt out and lay down. He wanted to get as much sleep as he could. He had a lot of work to do later.

Dick growled. "She's not anywhere! And now Night-Thief's escaped, too!"

Kory soothed him. "Don't worry, Dick. We'll catch both of them."

Dick stood up and went to the kitchen. He poured two mugs of coffee, went back to the living room, and handed a steaming cup to Kory. He recklessly took a long gulp, and barely noticed when the beverage burned his tongue.

Kory sipped her coffee more carefully than Dick. "You're the detective, Dick. Where do you think they'd go?"

Dick shook his head. "Nocturna? I don't have a clue. She's as unpredictable as Catwoman." He scowled. "And Night-Thief would go wherever Nocturna went, so that's no help."

"Are you sure about that?" Kory asked.

Dick glanced at her. "What?"

Kory shrugged and drew her legs up beside her on the couch. "Well, realistically, when Nocturna and Night-Thief broke out of jail, they had no money, no cars, nothing. Even after the police had searched their houses, they'd still have nowhere to go, unless they have friends who took them in. If I were in their position, I'd break into one of my houses, spend a night or two there while I got together some things, and then leave." She sipped her coffee. "But I wouldn't be able to stay long, because of course that's the first place the cops would look." Her eyes sparkled as she looked up at him. "Or one of the first places Nightwing would look."

Dick smiled tightly. "I talked to the cops in Gotham. They say no one's been in the Knight house there. 'Course, the cops aren't exactly thrilled with me right now. Not after that stupid picture in the paper. Now they think that I busted Nocturna out of jail. Who knows? Maybe they just aren't saying anything to *me*." He was quiet for a moment, then continued. "I was there when Natalia and Anton's New York house burned

down. And if your theory's right, they would have had to borrow money to get to any of their other houses spread around the country."

"The cops have been wrong before."

"So've I. That's the problem. Everywhere I've looked for Nocturna for the past couple of days has been wrong." He yawned and looked at her.

She realized then exactly how tired he was. "Check out the Gotham house. Even if they're not there now, they probably stopped in to get clothes, cash, and other necessities."

"I will." His eyelids dropped a bit more.

"Soon."

"Mm-hmm." His body relaxed in his chair a bit more.

She tapped his shoulder. "Tonight."

He mumbled.

"Grayson!"

His eyes opened wide. "I'm up!" He looked around, eyes bleary. Stretching his arm toward the coffee table, he grabbed his cup, held it to his lips, and tipped it up.

Kory laughed at his downcast expression when he realized the mug was empty. She handed him her cup and he gratefully finished it off while she looked up the Knights' Gotham address. By the time he'd chugged the coffee and taken the cups to the kitchen sink, she was holding his costume out for him.

"I'll do the dishes and let myself out."

Dick nodded his thanks, then went to his room to change clothes. By the time he was ready to go, Kory had already left.

He fired up his 'cycle.

It's gonna be another loong night.

When he woke up, Anton looked around blearily and wondered where he was. *What was he doing in the neighbor kids' tree house?* Then he remembered. He also remembered the task he had set out for himself.

Crawling out of the tree house, he went through the woods until he came to the border of his property. He went on, looking around warily as he watched for any cops.

Years of training in sneaking and stealth helped him now as he got closer and closer to his house. It was dark, and he couldn't tell... was that a policeman behind that tree? There, behind the statue... was that a cop?

He wiped his sweaty forehead as he came up to the trellis. Since it was night time, he couldn't see them, but he knew that roses grew directly in front of it. And directly above the trellis was his bedroom.

Hoping that he could get to the room before the cops saw him, he began climbing the trellis, biting back cries of pain as he stepped into a large rosebush. Finally he reached the top and managed to open the window.

Hours later, Anton paced in the lavishly decorated bedroom. He'd pulled out suitcases and stuffed them full of clothes. Hidden safes that the cops hadn't found had given him enough cash to last him comfortably for a while. He'd filled a few large boxes with snack food that wouldn't go bad anytime soon. He was sure he had enough Lays to last him a month. Out in the garage was a nice, inconspicuous car, with a full tank of gas. If it came to it, he was ready and willing to run from the cops-he *had* to find Nocturna. Everything was ready for him to go at a moment's notice.

Only problem was, he didn't know where to go *to*.

Why hasn't Nocturna called? Why hasn't she found me?

He wondered why she hadn't learned he'd escaped from jail and gone

looking for him. She should have heard by now.

She must be in hiding. She probably doesn't have access to the Internet. Or a T.V. Or radio. He tried to comfort himself.

Restlessly, he glanced at his watch, and realized that it was time for the news. Striding over to the couch, he plopped into it, turning on the battery-powered radio he'd taken from a shelf in his bedroom.

The newswoman's voice came through clearly an instant later.

"-And tonight from New York, we have Chuck Waters. Chuck is chief of security at the Eastern New York Correctional Facility. Chuck?"

"Right, Jessica. Earlier today Anton Knight, the notorious Night-Thief, escaped. This guy plagued New York until Nightwing finally caught him and his partner, Nocturna."

Jessie broke in. "But we now have evidence to suggest that Nightwing broke Nocturna out of jail."

"WHAT?!" Anton shrieked.

"That's right. Apparently the two worked together to help Natalia Knight, aka Nocturna, escape from prison. And this morning, Night-Thief escaped. But don't worry. We'll catch 'em. I have faith in the G.C.P.D." Chuck said importantly.

The news report went on to give Nocturna's and Night-Thief's descriptions and pictures, as well as puzzle over Nightwing's involvement with them.

Anton stood up and staggered to the bathroom, only to find that the water had been shut off. Grabbing the water bottle he'd been drinking from, he splashed cold water on his face over and over, in complete shock.

Nightwing.

What had been a preoccupation now became an obsession.

He had to make Nightwing pay.

How could Natalia have done this to me?

THAT must have been what the two were talking about that night Nightwing had knocked Night-Thief unconscious. They'd both gone behind Night-Thief's back...

He'd have to make Nocturna pay, too.

But how? He *needed* to have his revenge on Nightwing; he thirsted for his blood. He also needed to have his revenge on Nocturna. But he didn't want to kill her. Scare her, yes. Oh, yes, he'd scare her. Terrify her. Once she saw how terrible, how powerful he was, *then*, he was sure, she'd love him again. She'd forget all about teenage Karate Kids, and remember only Night-Thief.

First, he needed to find her. He had to figure out where she was hiding. He could keep an eye on her, but not let her know that he was watching her. Then, maybe, he could kill Nightwing and get to Nocturna before she discovered that he was on to her.

On to her, and to her betrayal.

Anton shook his head, shaking water onto his shirt. He grabbed the suitcases and money, and loaded up the car.

As he hopped in, he thought, *once she sees how powerful I am, she'll never dare betray me again. Never.*

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 #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 #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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