



Nightwing #22
Batkid

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Nightwing: To Catch A Night Thief

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He crept silently. His heart beat quickly, and he worked on controlling his breathing as he made his way through the tall, stately trees.

A moment later he reached a door, and, glancing around surreptitiously, produced a well-used lock pick. A few seconds later he had the door open, and he slipped through it, closing it behind him.

Once inside he paused to carefully survey the room. He hoped that the house's occupant would be in bed, as he ran up the stairs. The deep carpet muffled his footsteps. Once upstairs, he peeked through the doors.

One of the bedrooms had men's clothing strewn about, and the blankets on the bed were half on the floor. A half-filled suitcase lay open on a chair.

I'm too late.

"You were right. He was there." Dick rubbed his eyes, exhausted.

"It's all right. You'll find him." Kory paused. "Was there anything to indicate where he escaped to?"

Dick frowned. "No," he said, loudly so that Kory could hear him over the speakerphone. He wiped another mug out and set it in the drainer. "No brochures, no telephone numbers, nothing. I searched the whole house."

"Hmmm," was all Kory said. Dick stuck a bowl into the dishwasher and slammed the door closed.

"The bad thing is I found a few safes that had been opened. They were totally cleaned out. So I have no idea how much money he has now. Depending on how much he could get at the house, he could be in Gotham, or he could have skipped the country! I just don't know."

He grabbed the phone, walked into the living room and slumped on the couch. Punching the 'Talk' button, he put the phone up to his ear.

"Though I doubt," he continued, "that he would leave without Nocturna. Granted, they could be meeting somewhere, but I think that he would have grabbed some of her clothes, at least. I mean, the only things that were out were guys' stuff."

The two talked for a while more before Dick hung up, anxious to catch a few hours of sleep before his patrol. As he climbed into bed, he couldn't stop thinking about where Anton could be.

As he pulled into a parking space, the driver worked to calm himself. Eyeing the building he was next to furtively, he grabbed a hat from the seat next to him. Stepping out of the car, he walked briskly to the building, tugging the hat over his hair as he did.

Inside, he looked around. People milled about, but no one looked at him.

He let out a sigh of relief, then walked on, heading for a rack of clothes. He'd come to the supermart, hoping to buy something to further disguise himself.

Anton browsed the mens' clothing aisle, then headed for hair dye. He found a deep brown and looked at the back of it.

He frowned. He'd never dyed his hair before, and the directions on the back were confusing... Did he need to buy any bleach or anything else to go with the dye? Not wanting to run the risk of getting recognized, he hesitated to ask a store employee.

After a moment of indecision, he tossed the dye in his cart. Picking up a

few other items, he went to the front of the store. He kept his head down as the cashier rang up his groceries, looking studiously at the gum selection.

Two minutes later, the cashier was done. Anton started to carelessly toss a bill at the woman, then hesitated. Glancing at the little screen in front of him, he counted out the amount and handed it to the woman. Then he walked away.

As he put the stuff in his car, he wondered how much longer he'd have to count his pennies. Before he'd been arrested, he had always just written a huge check, or counted out a large sum of cash without a second thought.

Before Nightwing had interfered.

Anton pushed the cart away from his vehicle and hopped in his car. He drove up to the motel he was staying in, and headed straight for his room. Pulling the hair dye out of the plastic shopping bag, he looked at it apprehensively and walked over to the bathroom sink...

An hour later he surveyed himself in the mirror, marveling at the change.

It doesn't look too bad, he thought with satisfaction. The cops'll never find me. Won't even suspect me until Nightwing's dead. Then everyone will know that I, Night-Thief, am Nocturna's champion, not that teenage Casanova Nightwing.

Nightwing drummed his fingers. Suspecting that Night-Thief might have had to turn back to crime to obtain basic necessities, he'd been going down his usual list of streetside contacts. He'd asked the last one on his list last night...

"You're here again?"

Nightwing grinned. "Got any more ginger ale?"

Bill laughed. Remembering the last time he'd served this particular customer a drink, he skipped the glass this time, and simply handed the teen an unopened can.

Still smiling, Nightwing glanced at the top of the lid-just to make sure nothing was on it-then opened the can. He took a swig, and put the can down on the counter.

"You don't happen to know where-"

Bill put up a hand. "If you're gonna ask about a white woman and an expert martial artist, you're wastin' your time. I don't have any idea where they are, and for safety reasons, really don't want to know."

Nightwing raised an eyebrow. "You know nothing whatsoever? C'mon, Bill! I find that kinda hard to believe."

Bill shook his head emphatically. "Except for that stunt Nocturna pulled a couple of nights ago, I haven't heard of 'em lately, other than the hype about your breaking her out."

The vigilante groaned. "Don't tell me you really believe all that."

Bill smirked. "Every word." Then, "Seriously? I don't. And anyone with any sense wouldn't believe it either."

Nightwing gave Bill a half smile. "I hope not."

Nightwing sighed. Even his best contacts were in the dark about where Nocturna and Night-Thief were hiding.

Back to square one...

An hour later Nightwing was carefully examining the kitchen. He had

no idea what Natalia and Anton had had in there before, but he hoped to gain a clue anyway.

Examining the cabinets, he found that there was virtually no non-perishable food within.

No coffee, no sugar, no peanut butter...

He opened more cabinets.

No napkins, no paper towels, no paper plates...

When he opened the fridge, he found a half-gallon of milk and a dozen eggs.

He must have bought just enough to last for the time he was here. Then he cleaned out all the stuff that wouldn't go bad anytime soon.

He straightened, closed the fridge door and tugged at his suit's sleeves absently.

I doubt he would have taken all that junk on a plane... he wouldn't have gone on the bus or train with it...

He left the house. There was nothing else for him there. Hopping on his 'cycle, Nightwing headed home.

The next morning, he straightened his jacket, then strode confidently into a car rental agency. Walking up to the clerk, he gave her his best smile.

She glanced up at him. "Yes? Can I help you?"

"I hope so. I'm Richard Grayson. I'm an investigator for Green and Loring. Have you...?"

"Can I see your I.D.?"

"Um, sure." He pulled his wallet out and handed her a business card. He

flashed his driver's license just long enough for her to see.

"Now, ma'am, have you rented any cars out to a blond man? He's kind of tall, muscular, has wavy blond hair-"

"My dream man." The woman said dryly, studying the card.

Dick paused, then smiled. "Have you, though? It's kind of important for a case I'm working on."

"I haven't. Whether any one else has..." She shrugged.

"Can I see your records from the last couple of days?"

The woman's eyes narrowed. "I can't do that without clearance."

"Ah." He hesitated, hoping she'd change her mind. "Well, thanks anyway."

"Uh-huh."

Dick tried different car rental agencies all over Gotham without success. After he'd struck out at the last place on his list, he stopped at a café for lunch.

Sipping his iced tea, he suddenly put it down on the table and groaned, drawing glances from other customers.

Stupid! Of course he couldn't rent a car... He doesn't have any ID! Not unless he thinks that no one would notice if he signed as Anton Knight.

Dick tossed a bill on the table.

And from what I've heard, he hasn't been in touch with any of his underworld 'friends' lately, so I doubt he's got forged I.D.

He started up his cycle and headed off down the road, glancing idly at the shops as he passed them.

Well, he'd want to disguise himself some way, unless he's a complete idiot, he thought.

Dick tried several barber shops and wig salons, but soon learned that it was hopeless. He tried the supermarket, although he knew that the chances of his finding a cashier in that huge store who remembered a blond man were slim.

The store manager was eager to help, though even less optimistic than Dick.

"Ask around, but... " the manager shrugged, "I doubt that anyone's going to remember him."

Dick *did* try. He thought he must have asked every employee in the store until he finally came to a teenaged cashier. Producing a photo he'd found after hacking into the Department of Corrections, he asked the girl about Anton.

"Oh! Yeah, I remember that guy. He was kinda moody, and kept staring at the candy while I was ringing up his groceries." She rolled her eyes.

Dick smiled encouragingly. "What kind of groceries?"

The girl fiddled with her bracelet. "Um, the regular stuff... you know... toothpaste, bread, shaving cream, a tooth brush... "

Dick wrote the list down in his book. "Was there anything that *wasn't* as regular? Camping equipment, maybe?"

The girl thought for a moment. "I don't know... " she began slowly. Dick's heart sank.

There goes another lead, he thought glumly.

"I know he bought hair dye, and some floss, and... "

"Hair dye?" Dick asked eagerly, his pencil stopping mid-letter.

"Yeah. It was brown. I remember because I was like, Omigosh, he wants to dye that? I mean, his hair was a totally awesome blond..." She giggled.

Dick smiled. "He didn't say where he was going, by any chance?"

The girl shook her head. "Nope. He didn't say a word. All he did was like take a bill from his wallet and start to hand it to me and leave. Then he changed his mind, I guess, because he turned back and counted out his change." She shrugged. "Sorry, but I don't remember anything else."

"You've been a great help," Dick said. "Thank you."

As he left the store, he thought, *Yes! Finally, a lead.*

Well, he sobered as he fired up his cycle, not much of a lead. But at least it's a clue.

He left the parking lot. "Let's see," he muttered to himself. "All my work this morning checking out the car rentals probably went down the tube. He still could have rented a car, but he most likely doesn't have any ID." As he swerved around a car, he thought, and without ID, he couldn't have hopped a plane. *I'll bet he's still in town somewhere waiting for Nocturna.*

He sighed. *Here we go again...*

Anton frowned as he paced in his motel room.

Where is she?

He'd asked around casually, but no one had heard anything new about Nocturna.

"So she's not in Gotham." He said aloud.

He hadn't thought that she would be. After all, she had been in New York when she'd...

Anton grimaced, unable to get the picture from the newspaper out of his head.

When she'd kissed Nightwing.

Still, a guy had to hope. He'd *hoped* that she'd come back to Gotham for him. But, he decided, he'd waited long enough.

New York, here I come.

Dick walked into the motel and smiled at the clerk.

"Hello, I'm Richard Grayson. I'm an investigator for... ." He went through his well-rehearsed lines.

"Hmmm... ." The clerk mulled over Dick's questions, studying the Anton photo Dick had given him intently.

"He's got brown hair now, I think. He would have registered here recently... like since Night-Thief's jail break." Dick supplied.

"Actually... yes, we did have a man registered here that fits that description."

"You do?" Dick asked excitedly.

"*Did.*" The clerk emphasized.

"Oh." Dick said disappointedly. "Well, has his room been cleaned yet?"

The man shook his head. "No."

Dick was almost afraid to ask. "Can I search it?"

The clerk hesitated only for a moment. "All right."

They went down the hall, the clerk leading the way. He stopped in front

of a door and pulled a key ring from his pocket. He unlocked the door, pushed it open and stepped in. Dick followed on his heels.

"Here you go." The clerk said.

Dick wasted no time. "Thanks," he said, heading for the bathroom.

He quickly located the trashcan. And on top of all the trash...

"Yes!"

"You found something?" The clerk asked from the doorway.

"Maybe." Dick replied.

He took a plastic bag out of his pocket and grabbed a pencil, sticking it into the top of the opened dye box. Carefully, he dropped the box into a large Ziploc bag.

"There."

The clerk looked intently at the dye box in the bag. "This is important?"

"Yeah." Dick said, distracted. "Don't touch anything."

The clerk carefully kept his hands at his sides as he watched Dick make a systematic search of the room. Dick surveyed the glass on the mirror critically.

"Don't touch," he repeated as he left the room. Going over to his motorcycle, he found the fingerprinting kit he'd brought along, hoping that he'd get to use it.

"Hmm," he said, back in the bathroom. He chose a powder color and gently dusted the fingerprints on the mirror with a fine-haired paintbrush. He snapped a few pictures of the prints, put some tape over it and carefully lifted the prints. Walking around the bedroom, he followed the same procedure to lift other prints from other places, including the phone, dresser, and television. At last he straightened, satisfied. After thanking the clerk he left for his apartment, anxious to test the prints.

Anton walked in the doorway and set his bags down.

Another motel, he thought, surveying the room with distaste.

He walked over to the bed, pulling a phone book from a grocery bag. Before arriving at the motel, he'd stopped at a gas station, and relieved a pay phone of its directory when nobody was looking. He scanned the pages, looking for hotel listings. He had a few newspapers, too. He noted, with some satisfaction, that a few stores had been robbed of some articles of women's clothing and sundry other items.

Of course, none of the clothes had been long dark dresses-not only were those not normal every-day apparel, there was no way Nocturna would advertise her location by stealing a closetful of them. But they *had* been dark clothing, and they *had* been pants, skirts, and long-sleeved shirts.

Anton felt a small amount of comfort as he read about the robberies. Surely Nocturna and Nightwing had broken up, he reasoned, if Nocturna now had to steal clothing.

He turned back to the phone book. If Natalia were staying at a hotel, she'd have to be inside all day, because of her delicate pigmentation.

Where would she have gotten the money?

The answer came to him instantly. She would have stolen it, of course, the same way she would have stolen everything else.

Including Nightwing's heart.

He growled and tried to focus on the phone book, but couldn't. He tossed the book to the floor and got a drink from the bathroom sink. As he straightened, he studied his reflection, still not used to his different hair color.

Returning to the phone book and picking up a notebook and pen, he scribbled down the names and addresses of the hotels and motels in the

area. He was dismayed at the rather long list.

Oh, well, he sighed. Anything for Nocturna.

Dick swerved, shook his head, and opened his eyes wide, trying hard to stay awake and focus on the road. Not wanting to risk an accident, he dejectedly took the next exit and found a quiet hotel to spend the night at. He'd hoped to drive at least most of the way through to New York, but what with driving all day and the long nights he'd had lately...

He yawned loudly as he climbed into bed. He set the alarm on his cell phone to wake him up at 5:00 a.m. as he wanted to get to town early enough to search for Night-Thief in the morning. Also, he hoped to analyze the fingerprints he'd taken from the hotel room's bathroom mirror and the hair dye box he'd found. He had a pretty good idea of what the analysis would show, though.

Hopefully, Dick thought as he closed his eyes, he'd have better luck in New York than he'd had in Gotham.

To be continued!

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Nightwing #10 (2006)

Nightwing: Black Friday Blues.

When terrorists take hostages at a busy superstore, it's up to Nightwing to save them. He dodges bullets and battles ruthless terrorists while racing the clock, coming face-to-face with a murderous madman who has no reservations when it comes to killing anyone in his way.

Nightwing #21 (2007)

Nightwing: Kiss in the Night.

They're back! Night-Thief and Nocturna are back in action after breaking out of prison, with Nightwing hot on their trail. But Dick had better watch his back--Night-Thief has a score to settle with him.

Nightwing #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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