



**Nightwing #32**  
Batkid

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## **More Than Useless**

Written by Batkid

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Edited by Ellen Fleischer

*I feel like  
I would like  
to be somewhere else, doing something that matters  
and I lay here  
or I sit here  
my mind walks away and my thoughts are together.*

*Whats the purpose  
it feels worthless  
so I'm haunted by the lost of my value  
I can't find it  
not in the least bit  
and I'm just scared, so scared that I'll fail you.*

*And sometimes I think that I'm not any good at all.  
And sometimes I wonder why  
I'm even here at all.  
But then you assure me  
I'm a little more than useless,  
when I think that I can't do this,  
you promise me that I'll get through this  
and do something right,  
do something right for once.*

"More Than Useless" lyrics by Matthew Thiessen. Recorded by Relient K  
on *Mmhmm* (Gotee Music/ Redcoats are Coming Publishing (BMI) )

Batman's heel landed squarely on the thug's nose as he swung towards the ground. A sickening crunch accompanied the other man's screams. Batman didn't even glance down as the man sank to his knees, clutching his bleeding nose.

"Shoulda thought of that before you went around shooting people," he muttered darkly, striding around the thug and into the dim pawn shop.

He knelt down beside the victim, searching for a pulse.

"Shoot," he muttered, feeling the man's wrist. Nothing. He placed his index finger on the man's neck, under his jaw. The sensor pads on his fingertips picked up nothing.

His mouth set in a grim line, he replaced his glove and quickly crossed the room to where a woman lay. He ignored the faint sirens in the distance as he brushed her hair off her neck and felt for a pulse. This time, he was rewarded with a faint movement under her skin. He drew a miniature first-aid kit out of his gear belt, extracted some gauze, and began pressing it to her chest. *Shoot!* It looked like the bullet had punctured a lung.

"Leave him," Batman ordered. The person who had entered silently behind him stopped a few feet from the other victim.

Needing no further explanation, he nodded and, although he knew there was no way Batman could see him, stood behind the Dark Knight.

The sirens outside grew louder. Robin gave a slight when a sudden growl emanated from Batman's chest.

"What?" Robin asked.

Batman tipped the woman's head back. Robin was on her other side in an instant, mentally counting the number of times Batman pressed on her upper chest. The younger vigilante grabbed a mask from his pouch. When he had counted to thirty, he leaned over automatically, pressing

his mouth to the mask. For a few seconds, the only sound in the room was his breathing.

One. Two.

Resting back on his knees, he watched as Batman again leaned over her, one hand clasped over the other as he shoved downwards on her chest. He began counting in his head again.

As the sirens grew steadily louder the two crimefighters continued, switching roles almost imperceptibly. Robin flexed his cramped hands as Batman breathed more air into the woman's lungs. The EMTs walked in as Batman pulled back. He stood up immediately.

"The robber stole three guns," he reported in a clipped voice. "When I got here he had already shot both victims and was escaping with the guns."

The cop nodded, jotting down an illegible note. He turned to his partner as Batman and Robin melted into the darkness.

Tim threw the remote to the floor and stood up abruptly. Dick Grayson and Alfred Pennyworth watched as the teen left the room, and listened as he thumped up the stairs and slammed his door.

Dick stared at the batteries that spilled out of the remote and rolled across the floor. Alfred glanced at the television, then turned and walked into the kitchen. He came back a minute later carrying the regular evening tray, as well as a roll of duct tape. He set the tray down on the television table, next to Dick.

"That was the case you handled last night, I presume?" He asked as he cut a piece of duct tape. He pushed the batteries back in, and placed the tape over the spot where the panel to hold them in had once been.

Dick sighed and reached for the coffee the butler offered. "Thanks," he said, gulping the hot beverage down. "Yes. The two victims the reporter mentioned... well, she confirmed that the blonde is dead." He glanced

up at Alfred. "She's the one he had to do CPR on for fifteen minutes. I think he's feeling guilty."

"And you, sir?" Alfred asked.

Dick's mouth twisted. "Not for losing her during CPR. There was nothing else we could do, except slow the blood flow." He reached for Tim's hot cocoa—Tim wasn't going to drink it.

Alfred nodded, understanding in his eyes. "You feel that you did not arrive in time. That you should been quicker."

Dick said nothing—he didn't need to. Alfred caught up the duct tape, gathered up the tray, and he headed for the kitchen. Dick could hear his faint murmur as he left the room.

"So like Bruce..."

Three days later, after an uneventful patrol, Dick opened Tim's bedroom door.

"We've got a call," he said. "Let's go."

Dick waited as Tim slid his note card into the chemistry book he'd been reading to mark his place. As soon as he stood up Dick turned and headed downstairs to the cave. He had the Batmobile quietly purring when Robin raced in and hopped on his 'cycle. As he touched the throttle, its sound nearly drowned out the Batmobile's.

Dick swung the Batmobile out and glanced in his mirrors.

Tim waved. Then he swerved a bit, forcing him to quickly slap his other hand down on the handlebar.

"Radio check," Dick spoke clearly into his mike.

"I hear you," Tim answered.

"Then hear this. Don't—*do not*—try that again. Not for a long, long, time."

"Bu—"

"'But' nothing," Dick said. "Look, you need more time on it before you try anything."

Tim paused a second. "Wanna switch?"

Dick knew the teen was itching to get behind the Batmobile's wheel. The question was asked only half-jokingly.

"Nice try." Dick hesitated, then smiled, though he knew Tim couldn't see it. "Maybe take it for a spin later tonight?"

Tim's whoop of delight filled the speakers in Batman's cowl.

"You mean it?!" He yelled excitedly.

"Sure, why not?"

"Sweet!"

They were quiet for a few minutes—Dick thinking about the mission ahead, and Tim imagining driving the Batmobile. Eventually Tim's mind came back to the present.

"Where're we headed?"

Dick gave Tim the address as he turned the Batmobile. He flashed his high beams off as he drove past a Volvo, then switched them back on a second later as Tim asked what they had to do.

"There's a robbery," Batman replied. "The crook didn't know that Officer Bullock was only a block away, and when he got there so quickly the crook panicked. Took some hostages."

"What store?" Tim asked, serious now. No more Batmobile daydreams.

“Not a store,” Dick replied sourly. His foot pressed a little more firmly on the accelerator. “An apartment, actually. Best I can figure is, the crook went in to rob the place and was surprised to see the owner there. Then, either his family was already inside, or they walked in during the situation.”

“How many hostages are we talking?” Tim asked.

“On the police band, I heard that there are five in the family. Those numbers aren’t confirmed, though.”

“Right.”

A few moments later they stopped near the apartment. Robin swung off his bike as Batman stepped out of the car.

“Go around to the back and wait for my orders.”

“Kay,” Robin replied, already heading in that direction.

Batman walked up to the apartment, crossing the police barrier. Officer Bullock saw him. Batman quickly held one finger to his own lips. Bullock got the signal and crossed over to him quietly before talking.

“There are six inside, including the crook,” he informed him, pointing to the door. “He hasn’t made any demands, nothing. No way he was prepared for this.”

“He might be trying to formulate a plan,” Batman replied. “We won’t give him that much time.” He strode towards the front of the building, shooting a grapnel line at the top rail of the fire escape. Once at the top, he swung over the rail.

“See if there’s a window you can sneak in through, R,” he directed into the mike. “If not, don’t worry about, and stay where you are.”

He waited a second. "Got it," Robin reported, his voice barely a whisper. "I can hear them in the front room."

"Good. Wait till I get in."

Batman quickly smashed open a window. The sound of shattering glass seemed incredibly loud. He heard a scream from inside and ducked through.

Slowly, he walked forward, feeling the tiny pieces of broken glass beneath his feet shift and snap.

He saw a shadow headed toward him from the other room, raised a batarang...

...And lowered his arm when he heard a feminine shriek.

A girl he estimated to be about eight or nine years old stood in the doorway, arms thrown over her head.

"Shh," Batman called. He didn't move closer yet—after all, the kid had just seen him ready to toss a razor-sharp piece of metal at her.

"Batman?" She walked forward quickly, too terrified to realize that her bare feet padded over the broken glass.

Batman nodded. He noticed filled shopping bags in the doorway, and several pairs of shoes. He guessed that the family had walked in on the middle of the robbery.

The girl hung back. "He sent me."

"Who?"

She frowned, unsure. "The bad guy."

"The bad guy in the living room?"

She nodded.

“Why did he send you?” He tried to keep his voice calm—there was no point in scaring her again.

“He said to tell you to back off. And that he has the rest in there.” She frowned again. “He has a little gun.”

“The rest of your family?” He asked.

She nodded. “Dad, Mom, Bobby, Mark and Michaela.”

“How old are your brothers and sister?” He needed to move fast.

“Bobby’s 12, Mark is 10 and Michaela’s a baby.”

“O.K. Good job... what is your name?”

“Rebecca.”

“O.K good job, Rebecca.” He unlocked and opened the front door, reaching for her hand. “See the police down there, Rebecca? Go to them.” He waited until she started down the stairs before he went into the living room.

As he turned the corner he could see the family, all in a corner, and the robber standing a few feet away. His ‘little gun’, a revolver, was pointed towards them, shaking. A novice.

“Batman!” The two young boys shouted, their faces and voices showing a mix of fear and delight. One of them—the younger one, Mark—turned to the robber.

“Haha, you’re gonna lo-oose! Batman’s here!”

His parents looked less thrilled. In fact, they looked even more scared, if that was possible.

“Stay back!” the robber yelled, his face glistening with sweat. “I’ve got a gun!”

Batman's mouth twitched. "I can see that."

The robber hesitated, unsure. The gun turned a little as he moved to face Batman.

"You really don't want to do this," Batman warned, his voice low. "Tell me, do you read the newspapers? Surely you've seen articles on what I do to criminals who carry... guns"

Evidently the man *did* read newspapers; he was sweating more profusely. His gun wavered a little more. It was now pointed a couple of feet from the kid at the end—Mark.

"You saw what happened to the guys who attacked the charity ball? You really think you stand a chance?" Batman's hand, still against his leg, twitched almost imperceptibly. Behind the gunman he could see Robin slip out of the bedroom, a finger pressed to his lips to stop the boys from blowing his cover. Carefully he grabbed the baby from her mother's arms and crept out of the room, keeping close to the wall.

"Remember that big jewelry store robbery last week?" He grinned. "Those crooks are gonna be *sore* for awhile."

Robin had returned and was quietly motioning the mother through the door. As soon as she was through, he half-dragged Mark away from the exciting scene in front of him.

"I would have gone easier on those two, had they not shot the store owner." His grin disappeared suddenly. There were now only two people left for Robin to evacuate—Bobby and his father.

"But murderers..." He stopped as the gunman whirled around, his gun up. Batman plowed into him as the gun went off, pulling his fist back and socking it into the crook's jaw. The man screamed, but his crazed shooting didn't stop as he fired blindly in all directions. Batman rolled to the side, grabbed the gun, and twisted it out of the man's grip. As the gunman lunged at him, he brought his foot up, straight under the man's jaw. As the man collapsed, Batman turned to check the damage.

Robin was kneeling down on the ground, rolling someone over. Bobby.

Batman muttered something under his breath as he knelt down next to the unconscious boy. "Robin, get him out of here," he ordered, jerking his head at the boy's father. He picked up the boy and ran down the stairs to where medics were waiting, passing the police on their way up. They grabbed the kid from him and put him on a stretcher. Batman turned to find Robin standing a few feet behind him. He jerked his head towards the Batmobile. Robin followed glumly.

Batman slid into the Batmobile as Robin hopped on his bike. As they sped away, Batman glanced at the clock. It was time to start regular patrols, but they hadn't had dinner, yet. He didn't want Robin going all night without something to eat.

"Hungry?" he asked over the radio.

No response.

"Robin..."

"No. I'm not hungry."

Batman frowned. "This thing won't fit through the drive-thru, but if you want, we can..."

"No, thanks."

Dick paused. "Well, *I'm* hungry." He slowed the Batmobile to a stop in front of a fast-food restaurant. "Be back in a sec."

Two minutes later he was back, holding a couple of hamburgers. He tossed one to Robin.

"You're not going on patrol tonight unless you eat something," he said. He smiled. "C'mon, it's not the best food, but it really isn't—"

"Do you think that you could handle patrol by yourself tonight? I have a

chemistry test to study for.”

Batman raised an eyebrow behind the cowl. “I could really use your help.”

“Please?”

Batman’s eyes narrowed. “What happened back there wasn’t—”

“It *was* my fault. I would have come back to get them if I hadn’t taken so long getting the others out.”

“Robin. It wasn’t anybody’s fault. If it were—which it wasn’t—it’d be mine for not stalling him long enough.”

Robin was silent, brooding. “I’ve got to study.” He revved his bike. “See you later.”

Batman turned, frustrated, to the Batmobile as Robin sped toward the manor, his hamburger lying on the car’s hood, still wrapped. He saw a man sitting on the corner, watching. Batman walked over to the homeless man and tossed the burger to him. Then he stopped.

“What the heck,” he muttered, giving him the other one. Suddenly, Batman wasn’t hungry anymore.

Back at the manor early that morning, an exhausted Dick gratefully tumbled into bed, still fully clothed. He winced as he rolled onto his back, still slightly sore from his fight with Deadshot.

“Come in,” he mumbled as someone knocked at his bedroom door.

Alfred entered. “Good morning, Master Dick.”

Dick opened one eye long enough to peer at the bedside clock. Four-thirty.

“Care for a snack, or some tea? I have a kettle boiling.”

"No, thanks," Dick replied, eyes still closed.

"All right, then," Alfred said, closing the door. "I shall see you at lunch."

*Two days later*

Dick finished his exercise and glanced at the clock. Tim should have been home by now. Half an hour ago, actually.

"Alfred?" he called as he thumped up the stairs and walked into the kitchen. "Was Tim supposed to stay after school for something?"

"Not that I know of," Alfred replied, walking into the room. "At least, he hadn't said anything in that regard." He gestured at the school calendar, held with a paperclip to the monthly calendar on the wall. "There's nothing on the timetable."

"Huh. Well, I'm going to hit the shower. He should be back soon."

"Quite right. I'll call the school if he isn't home within the hour."

Twenty minutes later Dick went back downstairs, his freshly combed hair still damp from his shower. "Tim back yet?"

"No, he is not," Alfred replied. "Would you like me to call the school?"

"That's okay, I'll just drive over. Shouldn't be gone long."

Alfred nodded as he put a pan in the oven. "Good-bye, sir."

Dick pulled into the school parking lot, and cast about looking for a parking space. He slid his car into one, glanced at the light rain outside, and searched for the umbrella he kept in the car. Opening it, he walked to the main office. The school building was mostly empty, its students having left an hour before. One lone secretary sat at the desk, scribbling something on a form of some kind.

"Hello, ma'am."

She glanced up, and her eyes widened. "Oh! Hello, Mr. Grayson." Standing, she smiled and offered her hand.

He grinned. "Sorry if I startled you."

She waved her hand dismissively. "In my own world..." She stopped. "Was there something you needed?"

"Actually," Dick began, "I came by to check on Tim. I was a bit concerned when he didn't show up at the house..."

She looked confused. "Hold on..." She walked to a computer and typed something in, nodding when a new window, headed by a picture of a grinning group of kids, came up. The school's sports page.

"He's at practice. You probably heard the kids when you came across the parking lot."

Now it was Dick's turn to be confused. "Practice?"

She nodded, speaking a little more slowly. "Soccer practice."

Dick forced a smile as he slapped his hand to his forehead. "Of course! How could I forget he just signed up?"

"Just yesterday..." she reminded him.

He smiled ruefully. "If you don't mind, can you jog my memory once more? What time is practice over?"

She glanced at her watch, a little gold clock with a brown band. "Actually, they should be done in the next five minutes."

"Perfect. I think I'll just wait here, then. No need for the bus to drive all the way up the lane—we're the only people up that road."

She, like the rest of Gotham, knew exactly where he lived.

"That's fine," she smiled.

He chatted with her for the next few minutes, waiting for the practice to be over. After a moment he could hear several loud voices as the soccer team came in, headed for the locker rooms. Glancing into the sea of soaked, joking boys, he saw Tim at the back of the crowd, talking to the coach. Tim nodded at something the coach said, then glanced in Dick's direction. He froze when their eyes met.

Dick gave him a little smile and leaned against the desk.

Tim got the message: when he came out, Dick would be waiting.

Fifteen minutes later the last of the team wandered out of the locker rooms, urged by the coach's yelling through the doorway. Tim and three other guys came out, and the coach locked the door.

Tim glanced once more at Dick and said something to one of the guys near him as they headed for the bus.

"Wait," Dick said. He glanced at one of Dick's friends. "Tell the driver that he doesn't need to head toward the manor, please. I'll take Tim home myself." Tim's friend, a freckled redhead, nodded.

"See ya, Tim," he called over his shoulder as he ran to catch the bus.

"Bye." Tim turned and watched as Dick thanked the secretary for her help. As they left the building, Tim was silent. From across the lot, Dick pressed the button on his key ring. It beeped perkily and unlocked the car doors. He slid into the driver's seat as Tim crawled into the passenger's side and threw his backpack and duffle bag into the rear seat.

"So, how was practice?" Dick asked cheerfully. "I know you just signed up yesterday, but you hopefully have some idea of how you're liking it?"

Tim opened his mouth, then snapped it shut. "You're not mad?" He

finally asked.

Dick shrugged. "It's your choice. I'm not going to force you to practice in the cave."

Tim's face flushed. "It's not that I don't want to, it's just that... I don't have the skill. Or luck."

"You're gaining the skill, and as for luck, you want a rabbit's foot? You can get them dyed in different colors... a red or yellow one to go with your costume, maybe."

Tim scowled. "Don't make fun of it. I'm not going to keep risking people's lives through my stupid mistakes. Maybe I'll just take a break from it. For awhile."

Dick shrugged again. "Again, that's your choice. I don't want you to quit for the wrong reasons, though. I mean, you're doing great in your training. Honestly? You're doing better than I expected... or wanted you to, in the beginning."

"I almost got that kid killed."

Dick rolled his eyes. "The gun wasn't in *your* hand."

"It might as well have been."

Dick frowned. "Not true. Think about it: if you hadn't evacuated the rest of the family, chances are, one or more of 'em would have been shot. Probably been killed, too—lucky that Bobby only got hit on his arm."

"What about that blonde in the pawn shop? *She* died."

"What about her? She wasn't breathing when we got there." Dick stopped. "Look. Don't think I don't know what you mean, I do. It kinda... comes with the job, I think. Bruce used to blame himself anytime he lost someone, heck, I've even seen Superman blame himself once or twice. You can't come into the job without seeing someone... die." He raised an eyebrow. "And you know what? You did one heck of a good job the other day when Beetle and I fought the Suicide Squad."

Tim rolled his eyes. "Like I did anything."

"Um, you *were* the one who pointed out that they were searching for me along my usual routes..."

Tim shrugged. "It wasn't that hard to figure out. Once I had isolated their locations by the satellite and mapped them all together, there was nothing to it."

Dick gave him a half smile. "Okay, well, for the record, it *was* a little helpful to know where they were so I didn't get an unexpected bullet to the brain. But you're right, it's no big deal..."

Tim laughed despite himself. "Yeah, not a big deal..." and ducked as Dick playfully punched him in the head.

They pulled into the driveway and ran up the steps to the door.

"We're home!" Dick called.

Alfred walked in, wiping his hands on a cloth. "Hello, Master Dick." He raised an eyebrow and smiled. "Did the bus..." He stopped. "Master Tim, what on earth—!"

"Oops." Tim looked at the mud he had tracked in, then saw Alfred stare at his clothes. Tim grinned sheepishly. "I was goalie."

Dick laughed as Alfred said, "go change and throw those clothes *right* into the washing machine. My goodness, those shoes! Were you *rolling* in the mud?"

Tim came back a few moments later, dressed in sweats. "Ready to practice?"

Dick grinned. "You bet."

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