



Nightwing #33
Batkid

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Nightwing: Vengeance Served Cold

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“Shoot.” Batman muttered. According to the police band, there was a burglary in process on Third Street—clear on the other side of town from where he and Robin were.

“I can take care of this one, B, if you want to go handle the robbery,” Robin suggested. He knew that Batman wouldn’t let him go to the armed robbery alone, but he *might* let him go to the original case.

Batman considered briefly. “Make sure you take note of anything there.”

“Better than that. I’ll take pictures.”

“Not ‘better than’, R. All the pictures you could take would be useless unless you studied the scene.”

“Of course, I was going to,” Robin mumbled. “I just meant...”

“I know. Pictures would be great.”

They separated. Batman went back the way they had come. Robin twisted the throttle and his bike picked up speed to match his new energy and enthusiasm.

Robin pulled up. His bike and a lone police car were the only vehicles to be seen for several yards in any direction. This particular crime had taken place in one of the more upscale sections of Gotham. One of the

residents in the area had been murdered—or had committed suicide. The case interested Batman, as the victim happened to be one of the executive vice presidents of Wayne Enterprises. Robin knew that Batman had a few theories as to how the man had been killed. Dick had told Alfred about an issue at WE, about which several board members had argued passionately—and two men in particular.

All of this was just a theory, of course. Robin paused before he approached the house, willing himself to examine the evidence with an unbiased eye, rather than try to look for the details that would bolster Batman's theory. He needed to look at things objectively. After all, it worked for Batman and Holmes.

Robin saw the cop making notes in his notebook, still hunched in the car. Robin shivered—he was freezing!

The cop saw him and took another slurp of his coffee. Then he opened the door, staying in his seat. Robin felt a blast of warm air as the cop opened the door. He must have had the heater on.

"Come to check out the suicide?"

Robin nodded. "How do you know it's a suicide?"

The cop rolled his eyes. "Look, kid, I've seen more'n my share of suicides and homicides in my eleven years on the force and I think I can tell the difference."

"But how can you tell?" Robin persisted.

"'Cause there's a chair there," he said, as if speaking to a child.

"I'm going to check out the crime scene myself..." Robin's voice trailed off as he saw the cop's eyes narrow. All at once, he realized that the statement could be taken offensively—as though he thought that he could do a better job than the seasoned cop.

He swallowed his pride and said, "I'm new at this and I'm trying to learn all that I can."

The cop leaned back again, more relaxed. “Guess you can, if you want to, though when you get to be my age, kid, you won’t be so eager to see another dead guy.”

Robin was already headed toward the house. The cop shrugged, slammed the car door, and continued making his notes.

Robin pushed open the door and walked into the house. At the doorway to the main room he saw it. He tried not to retch, but quickly scanned the scene, while he tried to avoid looking at the dead man.

His eyes traveled over the room, taking note of the furnishings, the dying embers in the fireplace... the dead man... and a big spot directly beneath the body that was darker than the rest of the carpeting. He ignored the wet spot, carefully stepping around it as he attributed it to the man’s loss of muscle control when he’d died. He walked toward the fire, put a hand out, and felt the hot air still coming from the embers. Grabbing his camera, he took pictures of everything in the room, from the dark carpet to the dead man’s television—and the rolling chair a few feet from the man’s feet.

On a chair by the doorway, he saw a woman’s purse. He snapped a few photos of it and bent down to examine it closely. Elegantly monogrammed letters swirled across the front of the purse: LEB. He snapped a close-up, making sure to capture the alternately small-and-large monogrammed initials in the picture, then checked out the contents. Nothing besides the usual feminine articles and cash. No ID.

Still avoiding looking at the dead man’s face, he continued snapping pictures. He checked the rest of the house, but found nothing interesting. Finished, he gave the crime scene another once-over and left.

As he headed out the door into the freezing rain, his radio beeped.

“Robin.”

Robin slammed the house door behind him. “Yeah, I’m here. What’s up?”

"I've finished up at my end. Find anything?"

"Yeah, a chair by the dead guy. Looks like he *did* kill himself. There was a woman's purse, too. It has some initials on it—LEB."

"Hmm. I'll look into that. How much longer will you be?"

"I'm done," Robin said. "Just leaving."

"Good. I—" The police scanner in the Batmobile squawked. Robin could hear it more clearly as Batman turned the volume up. "I guess I'll meet you home later, then," Batman sighed.

"I can come over there if you want," Robin offered.

Robin could hear the smile in Batman's voice as he said, "No, you need to get a good night's sleep so you can help Alfred set up for tomorrow."

Robin groaned, and Batman chuckled.

"I know, I know."

"Can I at least wear jeans? No holes, I promise..." His voice trailed off as Batman snickered.

"Nope. Alfred's got your suit, tie and shoes all laid out."

Robin decided he was perfectly justified in groaning again—and did.

Batman ran the last few steps up from the cave, then slowed as he walked through the study. He almost ran into Alfred as he rounded the corner.

Dick smiled. "Everything looks great," he said. "I thought you would do most of this tomorrow, though."

"I determined that there should be more than enough to do both tonight

and tomorrow," Alfred explained.

"Ah. Did Tim help?"

"Oh, yes," Alfred responded. "The young man fell asleep while vacuuming. He spilled a number of Dorito chips, then contrived to step on them," he explained. "He was moving the couch to vacuum under it and..." The butler shrugged, then smiled as he nodded at the other room.

Dick hid a smile at the sight of Tim kneeling on the floor, his head, arms, and torso across the couch. Dick switched off the still-running vacuum, and figured that Tim had only been asleep for a few minutes—otherwise, Alfred would have turned the vacuum off himself. He lifted Tim's legs onto the couch, being careful not to wake him. Then he grabbed the Doritos bag and went back into the kitchen.

"Will you be going to bed anytime soon, sir?" Alfred asked, readying himself to head for his own bedroom.

"Yep," Dick replied. "Just gotta put the Doritos away." He rubbed his stomach.

Alfred chuckled as he left the room. "Goodnight, then, Master Dick," he said as Dick devoured the chips.

"Night."

The next evening, Tim pulled uncomfortably at his collar. He frowned. As he was also wearing a tie, he couldn't unbutton even one little button. Gosh. How much starch did Alfred put on that collar, anyway? He glanced first at his watch, then at all of the guests below him. He scooted closer to the rail on the step he was sitting on and glanced over the room. The doorbell rang again. How many people were coming, anyway? Surely, Dick didn't know *everyone* here.

He sighed and glanced at his watch again. He was supposed to be sociable tonight... with all of these people he didn't know.

Tim stood up, set his shoulders resolutely, and went down the stairs.

“Oooh.” A few women cooed at him. He could just imagine what they were thinking... *‘How cute’*.

Great.

Dick grinned and nodded when he was expected to, leaned in conspiratorially to hear gossip he wasn't at all interested in and offered refills of drinks to his guests when appropriate. He wondered where Tim was. The clock across the room announced that it was already an hour into the party, and he hadn't seen the kid yet. Excusing himself as politely as possible from the two women that were talking to him, he glanced around. As he passed behind one mountain of a man, he heard several giggles and a feminine voice asking, “you look so young, Tom. Do you drive?”

Dick rolled his eyes when an all-too familiar voice replied, “Nah, they don't have driver's ed in prison.”

Dick walked around the huge man blocking his view and saw Tim talking to his audience, a sardonic expression on his face. Dick smiled at the women and laid his hand on Tim's shoulder. Tim smirked.

“Excuse me, ladies, I need ‘Tom’ to talk to someone.”

As soon as they'd taken a few steps, Tim asked, “Who?”

Dick gave him a look.

“Oh. You.” Tim paused. “How much did you hear?”

Dick rolled his eyes again. “I know you don't want to be here, but just behave for a couple of hours.” He grinned. “I survived how many of Bruce's parties growing up?”

Tim gave him a look that questioned Dick's sanity. Dick winked and walked away.

After the party, when the last guest had been pseudo-politely shown out the door, Tim breathed a sigh of relief. He gratefully loosened his tie, tossed it on the sofa, and unbuttoned the top three buttons of his shirt.

"Why'd you put us through that torture?" Tim grimaced.

Dick smiled. "I have to keep up appearances—"

Tim opened his mouth to speak.

"*And,*" Dick continued, "I was trying to kill two birds with one stone."

Tim lifted an eyebrow.

"Many of the people here are from Wayne Enterprises," Dick explained. "So many of them knew Rob—the man who was hanged. I was trying to see if anyone dropped a clue... Also, I talked with a few women whose initials I wasn't sure of. I met two women with the first and last initials 'LB.'"

"Did you look over my pictures, yet?"

"Haven't had the chance." Dick held out an arm dramatically toward the Batcave entrance. "Lead the way."

Downstairs, Tim hooked his camera up to the Batcave supercomputer. A screen popped up immediately, and he clicked on an icon. A second later several pictures appeared. Double clicking, he enlarged them, filling the screen. Dick studied the pictures intently, noting the details.

"There's the woman's purse in the background," Tim pointed. "It has the initials on it."

"Anything inside it?"

“Not really, just the usual. No ID or anything like that, though.”

“Hmm.”

Tim was quiet as Dick continued to go through the pictures.

“Very good,” Dick said when he’d reached the last of the pictures. “Note anything else?”

Tim shook his head. “That’s about it. I checked out the other rooms just in case. Nothing looked like it had been searched or anything.”

Dick nodded. “You missed one thing.”

Tim stared at the picture, trying to see what Dick was talking about. Dick kept quiet, giving the boy time to try and figure it out. After a moment, Tim shook his head. “I don’t see it,” he admitted.

“Look at the close-up you took of the chair. There’s no dirt or footprints on the cushion,” Dick noted. He clicked the mouse a few times, bringing up a new picture. “And here... if you zoom in,” he instructed as he tapped the keys, “you can see Rob’s shoes clearly. Because of the nasty weather we’ve been having lately, the bottoms of his shoes are covered in mud. Remember all the mud you tracked in the other day?”

Tim nodded. “He should have left footprints all over the chair—or if the mud was dried, some still should have fallen off his shoes. ‘Specially if he kicked it a few feet away from him if he were struggling. He couldn’t have stood on the chair,” he finished, trying to hide a yawn even as he spoke.

“Go get some sleep,” the older vigilante said. “I’ll take patrol tonight. Tomorrow,” he told the teen, “we’ll check this out.”

Tim didn’t argue.

Dick was already at the office when Tim came home from school the next

morning. He was surprised—Dick normally went in late. Because of who he was, no one questioned it.

By the time he'd finished his homework Dick was walking in the door. "Find out anything?"

Dick frowned. "A dead end. You suffered through wearing the tie for nothing. The two women were both out of town the day Rob died."

"So they couldn't have killed him."

"No."

"The purse couldn't have been one of theirs, either."

Dick shook his head. "It still *could* be, though it's unlikely. They could have left it there at an earlier time." He glanced down at his pager. "Hold that thought." He grabbed his cell phone and dialed the number. "Hello?" His expression changed. "You do? Great. Thank you... Uh-huh, you too... Bye."

He hung up and grinned at Tim. "A woman at Wayne Enterprises found the list of employees names that I need."

"Anyone I know?" Tim asked.

"Nope," Dick replied. "Her name is Louise Edwards."

Tim winced. "Not one of the lovely ladies I had the pleasure of talking to last night?"

Dick shook his head mock-sadly. "'Fraid not."

Tim wiped his hand across his forehead. "Whew!"

Dick ran down the steps to the Batcave and found Robin already suited up and ready for patrol, lounging in the computer chair and staring at the screen. He didn't look away from it as Dick hurried to change into

his costume.

When Dick came back, he asked, "Have a brainstorm?"

"No," Tim admitted. "I'm willing one, though."

Dick smiled. "You do that. Ready to go?"

As Robin sped off ahead, Batman took his own advice and thought about the case. Maybe the man *had* hanged himself, but it didn't seem likely. After all, the only thing he could have stood on was the chair—and it was completely free of the mud that coated the bottoms of Robs' shoes. If there *had* been anything else to stand on, it had simply...

...Disappeared.

"Robin."

"Yeah?" Robin asked, catching the excitement in Batman's voice.

"Any idea what the dark stain on the carpet was?"

There was silence for a minute, then Robin said, "Um, well, when he died he lost muscle control... so... I, uh..."

"Besides that?"

Robin sounded surprised. "No, I don't."

Batman nodded to himself. "Were the police going to analyze it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then we're going to swing by there."

A while later they pulled in front of the house. There was police tape, which they ignored, and the dead man had long since been removed, for which Robin was thankful. Dick headed at once to where he thought the stain had been.

“Here?” He checked.

“A little closer to the fire... yeah, there.”

Robin watched as Batman nodded to himself and tried to get a sample from the rug that lay in front of the fireplace.

“Ready to go?” Batman asked.

“That’s all you wanted? The stuff’s dried by now...”

“I know. Let’s get back to the cave. I want to analyze it.”

Tim frowned as he followed Batman out, confused. Why would Batman want a dried sample of *that*?

“You think he was on drugs or something that caused him to be suicidal?” he asked.

Batman shook his head. “I think it’s something else entirely.”

Tim flipped through the pictures he’d taken of the crime scene again while Dick tested his sample. It would be harder, now that he couldn’t get a fresh, wet sample, but Dick obviously had a plan. Dick finally came up to him while he was practicing his karate.

“Find anything?”

Dick nodded. “I know what the wet spot on the carpet was.” He paused. “It was just water.”

Tim’s face fell. “Oh.” He’d hoped it was a clue, not a jug that had spilled when a shopping bag had ripped open or something.

“It is the key to the mystery, though... at least, one of them. We still have to figure out who did it.”

“You mean someone DID hang him?”

Dick nodded. "He had traces of ether in his system, which shows he was knocked out for this. It was a... unique method."

Tim cocked an eyebrow. "Well?"

"You noticed there was no chair for the victim to stand on, besides the one we ruled out. That's because Rob was made to stand on something else. Think about it—what was he near when he was hanged?"

Tim tried to remember. "He was near the doorway... On a rug."

"Right. Now, if I remember right," Dick said, flipping through the pictures on the computer, "yes, here. The fire was dying. Why would a man who was going to hang himself light a fire? And don't you dare say, 'because he got cold feet'."

Tim shrugged. Now he knew how Watson must have felt when Sherlock was always at least three steps ahead of him. "I don't know, why?"

"He didn't. Or at least, he wasn't planning to die when he lit it. The dark stain, the water? What does fire do to water?"

Tim shrugged again. "The water vaporizes."

"Or..."

Tim's eyes widened as he caught on. "Or it melts it if it's ice! Someone knocked him out with the ether, then stood him on the ice block to hang!" He felt a sense of triumph at figuring it out, but couldn't feel too thrilled.

"Exactly," Dick agreed. "Now we've only got to find out 'whodunnit and why. I think the purse is the clue. When whoever Ms. L.E.B. is walked in, she probably set her purse on the chair, then went to murder Rob."

"I wonder if she works at Wayne Enterprises."

Dick shrugged. "I don't know. But..." he grinned. "We're having

another party and even more people this time—and anyone whose initials are even close to matching is invited. I'm supposed to be hosting one this week, anyway. If she comes here, we'll find her. I'm also going over a complete list of employee names, though of course with a corporation this big, it's taking awhile. Not to mention that some names have changed very recently—so recently that the records haven't been updated."

"Changed?"

"Like if a woman married or divorced and her last name changed," Dick explained. "Or... sometimes an employee with a foreign-sounding name will change it to something a little more Westernized. So that's slowing it down slightly. I've already knocked a couple off the list, though." He yawned. "Anyways, let's get some sleep. We've got a *long* day tomorrow."

Tim looked down as Dick pinned something to his tie. "What's that?"

"A tie pin," Dick said. "Your initials."

Tim glanced down again. "Um, Dick? I hate to tell you this, but you made a mistake."

Dick frowned. "What do you mean? Want it in silver or something?" he smiled.

"That would be nice, but no. You have my initials down as TDJ."

Dick grinned. "Oh. You read the smaller ones first, then the larger one in the middle. Tim Jackson Drake."

Tim blushed. "Oh."

Dick shook his head. "Don't worry 'bout it." He winked as he started to walk out. Stopping, he snapped his fingers like he'd just remembered something. "Tim. I wanted to tell you... you handled the Zandia mission well. Great, in fact, especially considering that you didn't exactly have

much warning... Donna was impressed."

Tim blushed again. "Thanks. It was... cool." He wondered vaguely what Dick would say... or do... to Speedy when he saw him next time.

Dick smirked. "See you downstairs."

Tim stood there for a few minutes, then sighed. He couldn't put it off any longer, he decided. Joining the party downstairs, he wandered around, recognizing only a couple of faces.

"Tim!" Dick called. He walked over with a blonde, who smiled. "This is Louise. Louise, Tim."

Tim stuck his hand out. "Nice to meet ya, Louise."

"It's nice to meet you, too, Tim. Dick's told me all about you..."

Hours later, after the party, Dick said, "Glad you were able to meet Louise. If I'm not here, she'll be a good contact for you at WE, if you need something. She's the one who got me the names of all the employees."

"About that... find anything?"

Dick frowned. "Not really, a couple of leads. Most of the women couldn't have done it—out of town, or working late, et cetera. There's only one or two that it could be." His stomach growled noisily and he grinned. "You hungry?"

Tim shook his head.

"I'll be back in a sec, then. Just gonna grab a sandwich." Dick headed up the stairs and into the kitchen. He was just applying liberal amounts of mayonnaise to two slices of bread, when Tim rushed into the room.

"I've got it!"

Dick dropped the butter knife back into the jar. "You know who murdered Rob?"

Tim nodded excitedly and held his tie pin out.

"Um... Tim?"

"Look at the letters! 'TDJ'! That's how I read the letters off on the purse, too—I read them as 'LEB', and I should have read them 'LBE'." Tim paused for a second, a weird expression on his face.

"Tim?" Dick asked again. "What's wrong?"

"Do you still have that list of employees?" Tim asked, visibly less excited.

"I copied it onto the computer, and there's a hard copy on my desk." Tim raced off to get it. Dick stared after him for a second, then finished slapping his sandwich together quickly.

He headed out of the kitchen, a sandwich in one hand and a glass of water in the other when Tim burst in around the corner and smacked into him. Dick saved the sandwich, but the glass of water shattered on the floor. Tim ignored it, pointing to a name on the list.

"Dick," he said, "there's only one person at Wayne Enterprises with the initials 'LBE'."

Dick stopped, staring at the name. "Louise Brenda Edwards," he breathed. "It all fits."

"Wow." Tim muttered.

"Let's just focus on bringing her in. I'll ask her to dinner tomorrow night. You'll have to come in as Robin and show her the picture. When the police get a search warrant they might be able to find the container for the ether she used to knock Rob out. Maybe even get her DNA off his skin? She did hang him, after all."

Tim nodded. "Let's do it."

"Dick, this chicken is delicious! Have you tried it yet?"

Dick shook his head and clamped his mouth shut automatically as her fork, loaded with chicken, came toward his face.

"Just try a bite," she encouraged.

He opened his mouth and tasted the chicken. "It *is* good," he agreed. He wondered how a woman who had just killed a man could act so guiltless. "I'll have to order it next time I come here. My personal favorite is the—" He stopped when he heard the surprised gasps and murmurs of other restaurant patrons. Robin was approaching them.

"Ms. Edwards," he said. He glanced at Dick. "Will you please excuse us for a second, sir?"

Dick's jaw dropped slightly. *That* wasn't part of the plan. Robin was having way too much fun with this.

"Um, sure, sure... Louise, you think you'll be alright?" He glanced at Robin, then grabbed his half-full glass of soda. "I'm going to see if I can get a refill."

A crowd had now gathered. Neither Robin nor Louise was paying any attention to him now, so he stopped to watch. Louise's face went pale as she saw the pictures of the dead man, and, the clincher—her purse.

"That's not mine," she said quickly.

"What's not?" Robin asked.

"The purse."

Robin looked surprised. "Did I ask about a purse?"

Louise was furious, now. The crowd had gathered closer, eager to see what was going on. She bolted, zigzagging through the maze of

onlookers. Dick stepped in front of her and she crashed into him. His glass shattered and the soda splattered all over him and the front of Louise's dress. Two times in two days.

"Louise?" he asked, doing his best to look shocked. "What happened? What did—oof!"

She knocked him out of the way as she ran, but was quickly apprehended at the door by two plainclothesmen. Two other officers joined them.

"You have the right to remain silent..."

"Case closed," Tim said into his mic, sounding satisfied. They had just left the restaurant and were on their way home.

Dick growled. "What was that all about, huh? 'Will you please excuse us for a second, sir?'"

Tim chuckled. "Aw, c'mon, I was just having a little fun."

Dick *harumphed* goodnaturedly.

"Why did she murder him?" Tim wondered a minute later.

Dick's mouth twisted. "Relationship gone wrong, from what I understand."

Tim sounded smug. "See what I saved you from? What if you had fallen in love with her?"

Dick rolled his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, in your dreams, kid—"

They were quiet for a few minutes, until Dick suddenly announced, "Race you to the cave!"

"No fair!" Tim yelled, revving his bike.

The race was on.

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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...

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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

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Nightwing: Psychotic Reaction (A Justice League vs. America tie-in)

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Nightwing: More Than Useless

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Nightwing: Something Wicked This Way Comes

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