



Nightwing #40
Batkid

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Nightwing: Formula for Fear

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When he awoke hours later, it was to screams. He jerked his head up quickly and glanced around, unsure of his surroundings. He saw men loitering around him, some shifting their weight, bored. Three were playing cards, while casting covert glances at a door.

A door. The door.

The memories came back in a rush. Another scream from beyond the door reminded him that Robin was in there. He quickly began working to free his hands, but soon realized that, numb as they were, there was no way he'd get loose without help.

"Noooooo!" he heard Robin scream from behind that door. It was only four yards from him, but it might as well have been four hundred miles. He struggled again, straining against the knots.

"Nooooooooo!" That scream was much clearer this time. He glanced up to see William standing in front of the door. He'd opened it. Batman knew what was coming.

"It's your turn."

They hustled him through the door and into the room. Batman glanced around for Robin. He couldn't see him in the near-total darkness, but he could hear him at the opposite end of the room.

"Stop looking around," William said mildly. "This room is not so

different from other houses of the period. It really doesn't warrant that much interest." He cocked an eyebrow at Batman. "My counterpart, here, informs me that you've been affected by his fear formula before. I confess that I'm quite interested to see how you react this time. He's assured me that the results will be fascinating, as he's made some modification to the serum since you were last exposed."

Batman glared first at him, and then at the spindly rag-clad man standing before him. He looked for a light switch, for anything to illuminate the other end of the long room.

Scarecrow was clearly not interested in idle talk. He had a syringe and was eager to use it. Shoved roughly into still another chair, Batman's tied wrists slid neatly over the back of the seat. He struggled as another rope was laced across his chest, restricting movement of his torso. Scarecrow came forward, eyes gleaming crazily in the dim light. Without preamble, he jabbed the needle into one of Batman's veins. Batman's head jerked back as far as the man restraining it would allow as the needle penetrated his flesh.

"Now," Scarecrow breathed, inches away from Batman's face, "you think this day has been bad?" The edges of Batman's vision began to blur, dark forms and shapes began to take form. "Get ready, Bats, because it's about to get a whole. Lot. Worse."

Blinking, Batman tried to resist the drug already coursing through his veins as he tried to keep his grip on reality. Reality blurred, however, as his perceptions shifted. He squeezed his eyes shut, then opened them and looked around. He was no longer in the room with Scarecrow.

"Welcome to your nightmare," a voice whispered.

Dick gazed across the table miserably as his wife adjusted her hair in the mirror by the door. Only moments ago, her agent had called and told her to get over there *right now* if she wanted a chance at yet another modeling session. Dick was used to her being away frequently. He rarely saw her. Check that. He rarely saw her in person. She was the natural choice for every clothing company and commercial producer's project. He saw

her face plastered on almost every billboard in town.

"But, I have to go to the office... " he began miserably. "What am I supposed to do now?" A few feet away, a baby whined, and he cast about frantically for a teething ring.

"I do not know, Richard. We certainly can't afford a babysitter," she sneered. "It's not as if they really need you, anyway; there's nothing you do there, that Lucius couldn't handle in his sleep." She walked out the door without as much as a backward glance.

His head bowed, Dick rubbed his eyes. Kory was right. He signed a paper here, scribbled his signature there... he was just a face, a name. There was a loud rapping at the door, and he moved to answer it, almost tripping on the child playing on the floor. He opened the door, and his tired eyes widened.

"Tim, what're you doing here?"

Tim looked out of place on his doorstep, dressed as he was in a suit and tie. Dick absently rubbed his chin. He could have, at least, shaved today, he reprimanded himself.

"I just thought I'd stop in and tell you the news," he said with a grin. Somehow, he looked both embarrassed and happy at the same time.

"Oh, yeah?"

"I just landed a huge deal," Tim responded.

Dick stared at him a moment, his expression unreadable. Tim's face flushed as his embarrassment grew, though it clearly didn't interfere with his joy.

"That's great," Dick muttered mechanically. "Just great."

Tim said nothing. No "I thought you'd be excited", no "Way to go, Drake!" He just shut up and waited. His patience soon wore thin, though—Dick saw him glance over his shoulder a few times at his running vehicle.

“Look, I’m sorry this is how it all worked out,” he began, not looking very apologetic, “but when you turned down their offer three months ago... I mean, c’mon, what was I supposed to do? I couldn’t just let it go.”

“Of course you couldn’t,” a female voice spoke up. Dick glanced behind Tim and saw Donna, looking as beautiful as ever. She slid her hand over Tim’s shoulder reassuringly. “You didn’t do a thing wrong, honey, you just took their offer.”

Tim glanced at Dick, who cocked an eyebrow. He coughed, and then said, “Dick, I think you know Donna...”

Dick inclined his head slightly. “I didn’t know you two...”

“We’ve been going out about three months, right, Hon?” Donna smiled.

Dick returned her smile with a thin ghost of a grin. “Right after he secured the deal I rejected and came into cash,” he mused.

Donna’s face twisted, her exquisite features turning ugly.

Tim’s face was a cold mask. “It’s all right, Donna,” he told her, turning his back to Dick and walking his girlfriend back outside. “We’re going house-shopping uptown, how’s that sound? And I was saving this for your birthday next month, but I’ll ask you now: would you prefer a Porsche or a Corvette?”

Dick rolled his eyes at the display and closed the door. He frowned, fully aware that Tim and Donna would, in fact, probably be purchasing a Porsche *and* a Corvette. He would, because Dick had messed up a couple of months ago—messed up badly. Underestimated the company that had offered a partnership. Then what happened? Tim snatched up the deal and got rich, while Dick’s business was now in its death throes. He glanced at the baby who was still busily chewing on the teething ring, engrossed with *Barney*, and he leaned back in his well-worn recliner...

"I'm disappointed, Dick."

"What?"

Bruce appeared in front of him, the only person or object in the otherwise featureless white landscape. "Very disappointed. You drove my company into the ground. I didn't build it up to have you destroy it."

"I didn't... It wasn't my fault, I mean... It was a mistake."

"A big mistake.. You disappointed your wife, yourself... you disappointed me, Dick. And your parents..."

"My... parents?"

Bruce nodded, his hands still casually shoved in his pockets. "Yes, Dick. You've made a lot of unwise... frankly, you've made a lot of stupid decisions."

"I..."

"They're disappointed, Dick, to the core. Their only son turned out to be a failure."

"I... I don't believe it."

Bruce shrugged. "Don't take it from me." He casually stepped to the side. Behind him, a woman in a summer dress and a man in a suit stood, mournful expressions on their faces.

"Mom? D-d-ad?"

His father shook his head and waved a dismissive hand. "What can I say that Wayne hasn't told you already?"

"You mean, you agree with him?"

His father looked mildly surprised. His mother still looked mournful. "Of course." He pointed his finger accusingly at Dick's chest. "You failed us, Dick. Our only child, and you failed us."

Bruce stood beside them. "I took you in, I trusted you with my company, and you failed me, Dick. You failed..."

"Aaaugh!" Dick sat straight up in his chair and looked around. It was just a bad dream. The baby looked up and laughed. Dick sank miserably back into his chair. Even the baby was laughing at him. He flipped the channel, making the baby cry. Filling a plastic bowl with Cheerios, he put it in front of her. She promptly stopped crying and shoved her fist into the bowl. Dick turned his attention to the screen across the room. As soon as he sat, it flooded with static. He stood, crossed the room, slapped the offending television, and sat down again.

A perky reporter wearing too much eye makeup was speaking about a riot somewhere before the footage switched. The reporter, Becky... Something, grinned.

"And now we're joined by a special guest, Koriand'r. Thank you, Kory, for joining—"

Dick switched to another news station, where a less-perky reporter with even more eye makeup was discussing a hurricane that was building up at sea. He languidly watched until a breaking story dominated the screen.

"—just received word that Commissioner Gordon has been kidnapped." Dick leaned forward in his seat, and for the next fifteen minutes quietly absorbed the footage on the screen. Updates flew in, until a report came that Koriand'r had been abducted while driving south on—

Dick switched the television off. He glanced down at the baby. Picking up the phone, he called the number of the babysitter he'd frequently employed to watch his kid, back in the day when he'd had enough cash to afford a babysitter. Then he headed to his closet and dug through a chest until he found what he was looking for.

The suit was old and dusty. At least moths didn't seem to like Kevlar. He stepped into the suit, missing the old feeling of... *rightness* he'd felt when

he'd first gone out as Nightwing. How many years had it been? He felt out of place in the suit and he almost changed clothes again, but he decided he had to go through with it. His 'cycle was long gone. Kory had taken the car, of course, so he hopped in the old Dodge minivan as soon as the babysitter arrived. He took a deep breath and pulled out of the driveway, hoping a cop wouldn't stop him as he sped down the road and through the four-way-stop intersection.

Didn't supervillains ever take a break?

The setup— both Kory *and* Gordon kidnapped—was obviously a trap. He knew it and he went anyway, listening to the news until he heard an all-too-familiar voice cackle over the radio about where he wanted Nightwing to meet him, yada yada yada. He'd heard it all before, a villain wanting a showdown with a hero. But this time, the hero just wasn't feeling very heroic. He pulled the minivan to a stop and pushed his way through the police lines, ignoring the stares from the cops around him. Whether they were staring at him because he was Nightwing and he was driving a minivan, or just because he'd come back, he wasn't sure. He strode past until he was halfway across a high bridge that overlooked a river. Several people were on the bridge: the Joker, grinning as usual, the Joker's henchmen, who were also cheerful, and the hostages, who were not so thrilled.

"Who's the boy?"

The Joker clapped his hands in delight. As he did, Nightwing's vision swirled to black. He felt a prick at his neck and swatted at it. His eyesight returned, and he was once again standing on the bridge, staring at three hostages, who were in turn staring at him. In fact, everyone was staring at him—the police, the hostages, the gunmen, and the Joker.

The Joker grinned so widely that Nightwing thought his face would split.

"You recognize these people, don't you, Hero Boy?"

"Who's the boy?" Nightwing asked again calmly, fully aware that he

was in Joker's trap and not caring much.

"You," came the simple answer. "You can save the *lovely* model, the commissioner, or yourself. Your choice." He looked thoughtful. "Back in the day, you would have tried to save all three, wouldn't you? Maybe you would have done it, too—if, of course, you had Batman, and Robin, and that Batgirl chick with you. But you won't today, and you know why? You're a—"

"Don't say it," Nightwing pleaded, his head bowed.

Three options. Three crazy, unbelievable choices.

"Well, who'll it be? The love of your life, the commish, or yourself?" The Joker's huge grin stretched wider, until it threatened to cover his whole face. He leaned forward in eager anticipation, loving every moment.

Dick blinked. Closed his eyes. Opened them.

They were still there, an indignant Kory, a nervous Babs... and a 9-year-old boy staring at him with wide, fear-filled eyes.

An impossible choice. Whichever way he chose, he still lost.

He didn't stop to ponder exactly *how* the Joker had found a 9-year-old version of himself, or what would happen if he, say, didn't save the young Dick Grayson. He just ran.

Everything seemed to move in slow motion as his instincts kicked in. He sprinted and leaped towards... Kory. He loved her, had shared so many precious memories with her, he owed it to her to protect her—

He glanced down at the woman he now held in his arms, let go abruptly and stumbled back. Wide green eyes stared up at him.

"Dick—"

He stared at her, her big eyes, her red hair... she looked almost as surprised as he was. There were two bangs, startling him. He turned around, saw the bodies and retched.

"I—" He couldn't speak. She wasn't supposed to be standing in front of him, breathing and very much alive. It was supposed to be Kory. He didn't realize he was on his knees, or that his eyes were squeezed shut, until he actually opened them and looked into her concerned eyes.

"I—" No. This was wrong. Why, oh why, had he picked Babs? It should have been Kory. But man, oh man, was he glad it wasn't Babs' body that was crumpled on the ground in a pile of blood... Babs put her arm around him, comforting him, and he sobbed. Maybe he hadn't failed. Commissioner Gordon, his Babs, was beside him, comforting him, living and breathing. But then, he remembered that he was sitting in the middle of the roadway, and that the Joker and his henchmen only a few feet away from him, standing in a pile of blood. Kory's blood. His blood. He'd failed.

And what did that make him?

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 #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 #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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