



Ultimate Gotham Girls #20
Samantha Chapman and Don Walsh

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Ultimate Gotham Girls
#20: By Any Other Name, part 1
Story by Samantha Chapman and Don Walsh
Written by Samantha Chapman
Cover by Jamie Rimmer
Edited by Don Walsh

He was waiting, patiently. His cell was as dingy and dusty as any other, but devoid of any clutter. Some men insisted on keeping pictures of loved ones, or books, or papers. He owned nothing but the clothes he had been given. Some men made marks on the walls or their bodies, ticking off the days until they got out of prison. He counted like all the others, but needed no help remembering.

He had spent the past five years in quiet contemplation, just waiting. There was never any doubt that he would get out early. He knew how the system worked, and how to avoid bad behavior. All he had to do was wait, and plan.

He knew what he had to do now. It was only a matter of time before he'd be back outside. He knew where to get money, where to get supplies. He knew who he was looking for, who he needed to target. And he knew how to get noticed in a town like this.

A moth fluttered around the light bulb that hung in his cell, and Drury Walker let himself smile, sitting cross-legged with his back straight against the wall. *Wouldn't be long at all, now*, he thought. Just a few more days. He would get out and get back at them all...

Starting with Renee Montoya.

Five Years Ago

The firefight came crashing down around her ears, sudden and deafening even though she'd known it would come. It was so hard to see, so hard to tell what was going on, but Renee focused everything that she had to help her cause.

Just a moment ago the scene had been tense, the potential for gunfire hanging in the air as the cops burst in. Renee felt the weight of the badge on her chest as she and the two partners stared down the drug ring. She'd spent weeks doing the rookie work; tracking their moments from afar and reporting back to Drury Walker. Finally, after all the time she'd spent working with the police, from running for coffee all the way up to today, she was working the streets.

All Renee wanted right now was to get out of her first assignment alive.

She ducked under an upturned table, crouched next to Walker and tried not to let him see her fear. Even the gun in her hand never felt right to her it was too heavy, the responsibility so strong it made her fingers shake when she pulled the trigger. Renee's very breath was heavy in her throat, and she swallowed to clear it away. She blinked hard at her watery eyes so that she could see again, no matter who saw her crying. She couldn't help shouting when she felt a strong hand push her out of the way of a bullet that grazed the small hairs where her neck had been a moment ago.

"Hang in there, Rookie. We've got them," Walker muttered. The senior cop wasn't that old, but the lines in his face were deep from stress. He was taller, having to crouch down farther to fit behind the table, aiming around the edge rather than over the top and signaled to his partner across the room. Renee watched him through her clouded eyes, her heart pounding in her chest at the near miss—he'd shoved her down just in time, saving her life without even taking his eyes off of the action.

The criminals were across the room, but she could tell even from here that they were flagging. She didn't know how much time had gone by, Renee only kept firing into the fray, aiming the way she'd been taught, needing to take them out without killing anyone, and without being killed. She'd learned that lesson a thousand times, but tonight was the

first time she knew how difficult that truly was. Each shot sounded like every other, staccato blasts in a symphony of shouting and sirens. But finally the sound stopped, the last man fell, and the fight was over.

Renee pulled herself up on her shaking legs and walked right into the middle of the room, taking out her handcuffs. But her fingers fumbled and the metal clattered to the floor, drawing a small, knowing laugh from the two cops behind her.

"We've got it, Renee. You did well," Walker told her, his hand resting on her shoulder. "But I don't think you're in any shape for arresting."

"I can do it, sir. I just, I want to do it," Renee insisted, but she swallowed again and felt how dry her throat was.

Walker's partner, another cop who had been at the station as long as Renee could remember, chuckled again and gave her a smile. "Come on. This bastard's the best cop I've ever known, he can handle the scum himself. Let's get you a drink. Calm your nerves."

Walker himself was already walking among the injured gang members, looking through their various bags and pouches and shaking his head. Renee took a long breath and nodded. "I guess...We aren't supposed to leave a man alone," she said, a weak protest.

"You two go on." Walker's voice was curt and dry, but he lifted his head and gave her a tired smile. "It's not hard work. I'll catch up."

Renee finally relented, and had to admit that when she was back in the station with a shot in her coffee and a blanket around her, it made for a much better evening.

Now

The morning had long since broken, the bright sunlight reflected off windows and the honking and zooming of cars on the street below did nothing to wake Renee. She had seen the dawn that morning over the city streets, something she couldn't put a finger on making her sure that

something in that Gotham night needed her attention. She had finally returned home under Barbara's orders, and had been out cold from the moment her head hit the pillow.

Her mind was not as peaceful as her body. She would remember only parts of her dream, brief flashes of faces and feelings that couldn't be pieced back together into their whole. Memories long forgotten churned up with wishes she wouldn't tell anyone she about in her unconscious mind and folded together into stories that only made sense while she slept.

Renee was finally jerked away from her sleep by the sharp ring of the telephone, invading her dream as a loud, clanging alarm, bringing her to wakefulness with a start and sharp breath. She rubbed her eyes, traces of poorly-washed make-up coming off onto her fingers. With a heavy sigh, Renee cleared her throat and picked the phone up. "Hello?"

"It's been a very long time, Ren!" The voice coming through the speaker was high and bright enough to make Renee hold the phone at arm's length, as she shook out her head and tried to wake up. "How's my favorite sister?"

"Morning, Lou." Renee rubbed her temple as her younger sister, Louisa, began her typical run of chatter.

"Morning? Renee, it's 2:30! I was waiting to call you, but if I woke you up it was about time!"

"I work nights, Lou," Renee sighed.

There was a reason that Renee always let her family contact her, instead of making the effort herself. Maria Montoya and her younger daughter still lived in Gotham together, only halfway across the city from Renee, but the three women only gathered when Renee knew it was necessary. She loved her family, as any daughter would, but it was the kind of love that grew fonder in absence.

"How come you're so vague, Renee? Momma worries when she doesn't know what you're up to."

"I'm working at Waynetech, I'm taking perfectly fine care of myself and you can tell Momma to quit worrying." There was a snap in Renee's voice, a frustrated repetition as she repeated her half-truth. She took the phone with her as she stepped to her mirror, gingerly tapping a deep bruise on her shoulder.

"I know what'll make her stop."

"Lou, we've been over this," Renee's tone was final, but it didn't stop her sister.

"Aren't you ever gonna get a boyfriend?"

"No." There was no use trying to explain any farther, and Renee knew it from years of experience. "Did you want something, Lou?"

"Geez, don't have to be so cold. I told you, Momma's worried. Call her sometime won't you?"

Renee sighed deeply again. "Sometime." She was saved by the low beeping of her call waiting. "Listen, I gotta go. Bye." It was mostly with relief that she jammed her hand on the button and answered the other call. "Hello?"

"What took you so long?" Barbara's voice was jokingly stern, and a welcome change. "I've got something for you to check out tonight."

"I'm listening." With another yawn, Renee checked the door to her apartment for her morning paper, and started preparing a cup of coffee.

"We've got a new mask, and I can't really tell what he's up to," Barbara started to explain. "Calling himself Killer Moth. He broke into the records room in city hall last night, should be somewhere on page 8." Renee quickly flipped her newspaper open, without a chance to look at any other headlines. "They don't know what he was looking for yet. Seems pretty standard weapons-wise. Costume's a hoot, he's gotta have money coming from somewhere."

Renee snorted when she found the picture, but found herself looking at it much more seriously on a second glance. The antennae were a hair too

long to not be comical, but the so-called Killer Moth manage to strike a nasty chord despite it. His cowl was tight around his head, obscuring any identity with a mask of segmented eyes. The rest of his costume was tight and padded, brown, gray and black (according to the photo's caption). He was carrying a gun, which told Renee all that she really needed to know about the new threat. She was flipping idly back through the paper's pages as she started to answer, "I'll make sure I check him—"

"Renee?" Barbara asked after a moment of silence. "Renee, what happened?"

"He's out," she answered quietly, looking into the printed eyes of another picture. "That bastard Walker...they let him out."

The tapping of Barbara's keyboard came through the phone, and the red-head took a sharp breath a moment later. "Aah...gotcha. But you don't think he's going to do anything now, do you?"

"I don't know what to think. Not like I was a good judge of his character before," Renee answered bitterly. "I'll give Moth a check tonight. I'll talk to you later."

"Yeah, you will." Barbara hung up the phone and left Renee to her morning paper, steaming mug, and old memories.

Five years ago

A knock sounded on Renee's office door, and she picked her head up from her paperwork. The smile grew on her face when Harvey Dent opened her door, and Renee gestured him eagerly inside. "Morning, Mr. D.A."

"Morning yourself," Harvey smiled, setting down a sheaf of papers and taking a seat on the edge of her desk. "Busy night for you, I heard."

Renee chuckled and shrugged. "Nah, what's busy? Nothing unusual."

"You stop that, young lady. Don't count yourself down, that was a good

first outing." Harvey's smile twitched, and he took his paperwork up again. "Unfortunately I'm not just here to congratulate you. I've got to ask a few things, okay?"

She nodded. "Go on ahead."

The questions took up a good half an hour, covering every detail of the drug bust the night before. Harvey asked her about the people she'd seen, how many they had been, their distinguishing features, what she had seen of the drugs and the money that had been confiscated. Renee answered to the best of her ability, although she knew as well as anyone that her memory might not have been up to par. Once Harvey started repeating his questions though, she knew that something more was going on than she knew. "Harvey, what's going on?"

"Nothing," he answered too quickly. "I just needed to check your side of the story."

"Against?"

Harvey bit his lip, then got up to close the door. "Walker's."

"What? Why?"

He let his breath out and sat back down. "If you're telling me the truth, then it doesn't match up. There's stuff missing. And if you're telling me the truth, the only one who was alone with the evidence was Walker."

"Harvey, what are you saying?" Renee almost stood in her sudden outrage. "Are you saying he stole it? You don't think maybe I'm forgetting stuff, maybe I'm just making it up, I could have died in there. That screws with your memory."

"I know. I can't accuse anyone of anything yet," Harvey held a hand up. "But Renee, this isn't the first time this has happened. I've been looking back in the records. Walker has a reputation on these drug runs. It never quite matches up. He never quite recovers as much as we expected the gangs to have. Did you wonder why you were put on something that dangerous for your first time out?" When Renee kept her sullen silence, he continued. "Last night was the first time in a long time we knew for a

fact we had an honest cop out there with him. So we could check your word against his."

"I don't believe it," Renee said quietly. "You weren't in there with him, Walker's a good guy. He saved my life, Harvey. I would've died in there if he hadn't been next to me."

"Fine then, don't believe it. But help me, Renee," Harvey urged her. "Clear his name, if you're so sure. I need someone I trust to check this out." He handed her a piece of paper, covered in numbers and addresses. "Walker's file. Get to know him better. Just get him to talk, I need to know the things he says to his friends. If you get through a week with a wire and he doesn't say a single incriminating thing, I'll trust him for the rest of my life."

Renee took the paper reluctantly, looking it over. "I don't like this. It's not right. It's not necessary either...but because it's you," she said finally, looking back at Harvey with a nod. "A week. To prove it to you."

Harvey gave her a relieved smile, and they both jumped when the door opened again, the knock coming a moment later. A bright red head poked around the door, and Renee's heart jumped. "You two busy?"

"Nah, come in." Renee smiled at Barbara Gordon, clearing another corner of her desk with a small blush, "Swear to God, one of these days I'm going to get a chair in here."

Barbara laughed and took her seat, and Harvey looked back at Renee, clearing his throat. "I'll just leave you two alone. I'll meet you at eight tonight," he nodded toward the paper still clutched in her hand, and left.

"Tonight? Damn, I was hoping you'd be free," Barbara sighed. "I'm magically not busy later, we should have done something."

Renee winced. "I'm sorry, it just came up. I haven't gotten to see you out of work in forever, though. Maybe we could do something tomorrow? There's always movies," she suggested, and mentally berated herself. Barbara had her legs crossed up on the desk, as comfortable as any best friend, and the skirt she wore was hiked up over her knees by the movement. Renee made herself look away before she drew attention to herself.

“Probably not. Shame. I wish I could stay longer, I was just hoping we could make plans,” Barbara explained. “I’m still waiting for Dad to be ready to take me to that lunch he invited me for.” She checked her watch with a flip of her red head.

“Soon though, as soon as we can okay? I can still call you later, maybe?”

Barbara smiled, and the sight lit the room. “Yeah, that’s still good. Don’t make me worry, alright?” She blew a playful, friendly kiss from her palm as she hopped back off of the desk and left the room with a wave.

Renee slumped back in her chair and sighed, letting her smile fade out as she looked over the papers. She had never in her life been one to shirk her duty, and she needed to do what she had promised Harvey. But at times like this, she wished she weren’t so noble.

Today

Batgirl had been on the streets for hours, to little result. It wasn’t that she hadn’t been able to find traces of Killer Moth, far from it. It was that everywhere she went, she was a minute too late, a single step behind. She’d been told about the man in the moth suit by more civilians than she could count, all of whom had been struck with an unaccountable fear at the sight of the man. He had been walking the streets with single-minded precision, looking only straight ahead, paying no mind to anything else. At first people had taunted him, called insults or laughed. But when Moth deigned to look at them, the pure blankness in his stare drove them back.

She swung through the air on her lines, making better time that way, and needing it enough to brave the flight. Snatches of conversation kept running through her mind. Names she had half-forgotten, all named as targets. She had sent four names to Barbara in her first couple of hours on the street; Killer Moth was working fast, at whatever he was doing.

The reassuring voice came through the speaker into her ear. “You’re right. I checked them all, every one of them has some connection to the

GCPD. I've got one cop who retired in scandal just after you left, I've got a drug boss, four arrests over the last six years, and that third one used to be a judge. Hawkins is still on the force, but I've got a hell of a black mark on his record, just couldn't manage to prove anything."

"I've got such a feeling, Babs, but I just can't be sure. Can you just check one more thing for me?"

"Already have. Get some solid ground under you," Barbara advised her, and Renee swung up onto a rooftop. "Hawkins was questioned extensively on the Walker case. His Honor is the same one Walker was supposed to go up in front of, before they changed that on him. The other too as well, it's all getting connected. And stay on the ground, I've got one other thing."

"Go ahead. Please, make this night any better," Renee sighed.

"You're not far from home, are you?" As Barbara asked the question, Renee realized what she meant. "He's been in the same 20-block circle the whole night from your reports. Your place is right in the middle of it."

"He's coming for me," Renee concluded, and immediately swung back into the air. That sealed Killer Moth's identity in her mind, no matter what questions were still left unanswered. She turned toward home, although the night was only just beginning to wane. "I've got to get back."

"Are you sure? You don't want to come by here, stay the night instead?"

Barbara sounded worried, but Renee couldn't let her friend's concern stop her. She shook her head and kept on her path. "There's too much important stuff at my place. I am not going to leave that undefended. If Killer Moth is after Renee Montoya, I'm not going to let him find out he should be gunning for Batgirl too." She swallowed even as she said the words. "Dangerous enough I let that slip once."

The line was silent for a moment before Barbara replied. "Alright. But I'll be here all night. Be careful." She cut off the communication for the moment, leaving Renee to herself.

She took extra precautions before going to sleep, when the night waned away and the barest glimpses of dawn began to break through the black sky. She locked every lock on her front door, pushed heavy furniture in front of her windows, left vases and dishes and other things that would make loud crashes in every place that might be broken into. She needed to sleep, if she would be any use in the fight whenever it did come. But she didn't have to be caught unprepared. Her eyes finally closed fitfully, and Renee dropped into light, misty dreams, waking at every bump in the night.

Five years ago

Renee took a breath and adjusted the tight shirt around her chest, a long gold chain jangling with the movement. She had dressed in clothes she hadn't worn for years, and she had grown just far enough out of them to be perfect for the nightclub. The skirt still hid what it was supposed to but very little else, and her top only covered one shoulder. Her black hair fell to her shoulders, given more care than it was used to as she made herself look good for this job. Renee still didn't know how she felt about spying on Walker, or who to believe. But Harvey's hidden microphone was tucked under the single sleeve of her shirt, and the wires snaked down her back to clip at the small of her back. Like it or not, she was ready.

The bouncer took one look at Renee and let her through with a wink. This wasn't the kind of place where Renee had expected to find her superior, but Harvey had it on good authority that he would be there tonight. And sure enough, once she had gotten used to the pounding music and the dim light inside, Renee caught sight of him at a corner table. She knew the second that he saw her in return—Walker's eyes went wide and dipped toward Renee's legs and chest. His look made her swallow and steel herself; it wasn't honest, but she knew the quickest way to get into his good graces.

"Never expected to see you in a place like this," Walker greeted her when Renee stepped over to his table. Renee envied him for being a man; his loose button-down shirt and simple slacks would have been as fitting at any casual occasion as they were here, while she was stuck tugging up

her neckline.

"I could have said the same, Drury. But here we are." She smiled and sat down at the chair next to him, crossing one leg over the other. "Funny how these things work out."

Walker looked her over again, and leaned back in his chair with a drink in his hand, though his eyes always returned to her own with something like suspicion. "I suppose so. Still, I wish I'd had the pleasure of seeing you here sooner."

"Well, maybe it's not my favorite haunt," Renee admitted, giving him a small chuckle. "But if I knew you'd be here I would have come before."

His eyes narrowed more, and Renee made her gulp as small as possible. One of his hands reached toward her bare shoulder, brushing a few loose locks of hair away. "Would you, now?"

"Yeah...I mean, I've wanted to get to know you better...just never knew how to find you outside of work. Don't want the commissioner watching this sort of thing, do we?" she joked, leaning her neck toward Walker's fingers. Her heart pounded and her throat tightened with guilt at what she was doing, but he seemed to be taking the bait.

The fingers played over her skin, and then began to tighten, pinching at Renee's neck painfully as Walker drew her head closer to his. "I know what it is you don't want Gordon to see. And it ain't me."

She gasped and her teeth closed around her bottom lip, feeling Walker's grip getting tighter. "What do you—"

"You think we're all blind, do you? Or just we're not watching? I've seen how you look at the Commish's kid. You weren't really gonna go that moon-eyed about me, not any guy," Walker rasped into her ear. This close, she could hear the gravel in his voice, the hard edge that had always kept her from being too friendly before. His nails were digging into her skin now, his hand pulling her head down toward him, trapping her there as he demanded, "Why are you really here?"

"Alright...alright, let go!" Renee struggled, shoving on his chest for the

leverage to free her head, and rubbed at the marks on her neck. "Okay...listen, you're right... and I'm sorry for trying that," she told him, swallowing again and forcing her body to let go of its tension. "Har...the D.A. sent me in here. He thinks I'm his girl, he wants me to find something on you." Renee gave him that much truth, hoping he would fall into this trap more readily. "But I don't want to do that...bastard wouldn't even tell me what he was looking for, I've had it taking orders from him. Whatever it is you're doing, it's making a lot of people pretty comfortable. And I want in."

By this point their privacy was getting lost; the new song on the speakers was slower, with more pauses between the deafening beats, and a small group was forming at the tables around them. Two of the men were people Renee knew, other cops who she had often seen talking to Walker on their own. The others were unfamiliar, looking much too dangerous for comfort. Suddenly, Renee felt vulnerable, and alone. She waited for Walker's response with baited breath, begging him silently to tell her nothing was wrong, that he was honest, that she had nothing to be worried about.

Instead, Walker nodded to the men around her and gave an order. "Search."

There were hands all over her, laughter all around her as Walker's men pried at the hem of her skirt, pawed over her chest and slipped her sleeve down, snaked around the small of her back, and pulled out the battery pack for her microphone. "Dyke's wearing a wire!" a voice shouted, and Renee felt herself freezing.

Drury Walker took the microphone from his man and dangled it in front of Renee's face. "You lying little bitch." His voice was too calm, and that scared her more than anything. He lifted the mike to his lips now. "Is the best you have, Dent? I'm so sorry."

"Drury, please," Renee gulped over the lump in her throat as she fought against the hands that still grabbed her, many of them trying to get more bold now that she'd been found out, clawing all over her body. "Remember your badge!"

"What, this?" Walker actually smiled as he took his wallet out of a front

pocket, letting it fall open to reveal his police identification. "You're so earnest, aren't you? There's only one thing that this badge means to me. It means no one's going to cross me," he told her, then looked back at his fellows. "Have fun."

Renee gritted her teeth and began to kick and claw and struggle, surrounded on every side by leering men, every one of them corrupt without a doubt. Right now every second counted, and Harvey and the police were minutes away—she was alone in the viper's nest, and about to be stung.

Today

Renee wanted to sleep late again, but she could deal with her own exhaustion when Walker was off the streets. She knew it was him. It had to be him. So she dragged herself out of bed and fixed her coffee, so many questions running through her head.

How Walker had gotten himself out of jail, that was easy to come up with an answer. He always knew how to work the system, that was what he had wound up arrested for in the first place. He knew how to manipulate people, how to make himself appear trustworthy, or penitent, or whatever else he needed to get his way in the end. It was too easy for Renee to believe that he had gotten out on good behavior.

Why Walker was dressed as a giant moth was harder to explain. Renee exhaled slowly and sipped at her coffee, picking up her paper and looking over the headlines.

The coffee mug fell to the floor with a loud clatter when the door burst open, kicked in with a louder *bang*.

Renee was on her feet and ready to fight immediately as Killer Moth smashed his way into her home. She might have her answers even sooner than she wanted them.

To Be Continued...

If you enjoyed this story, you can find more alternate universe tales of your favorite DC heroes at DC3 Multiverse.

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