



Ultimate Gotham Girls Annual #1
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I. Resolution

The strains of Auld Lang Syne still floated in the Gotham City air, long after the first daylight of the new year. It was dark again, the lingering Christmas lights keeping the evening cheery. It was the first of January, and high time to finish the last Christmas leftovers. Jim Gordon's apartment was bright and full for this one evening, when he hosted colleagues, friends and family for his annual dinner. The leftovers had vanished – much thanks to Harvey Bullock – and as the hours grew later, the guests trickled away. Only those who Jim still counted family remained when the party was over.

Renee Montoya and Barbara Gordon shared a giddy, girlish grin when Jim bid a good night to Detective Sarah Essen with a peck on the cheek. The bashful smile on her father's face sent Barbara into a fit of giggles when he came back into the room.

"What? I don't have something in my teeth, do I?" Jim drew a finger through his moustache.

"No, Dad, you're just really cute." Barbara swirled her glass of champagne and took another sip with a long sigh. "She's good for you."

"Now don't go getting your hopes up, little lady," Jim chuckled, taking a seat again in his big plush armchair. "Ms. Essen and I are taking things slow." He paused. "You do think so, then? You like her?"

Renee reached across the couch to ruffle her friend's hair, both girls gone giggly from finishing up the holiday drinks. "Babs just needs a new mommy, that's all."

Barbara laughed and batted Renee's hand away. "Dad, she's great. Now

keep being cute.”

With a long drink from his cup of coffee, Jim sighed almost in relief. “’Tis the season.” He raised the mug in a salute to the two girls. “Have to admit, it’s nice to have someone for the holidays...NOT that you girls haven’t been magnificent company to an old man over the years,” he added.

“We know what you meant, Jim,” Renee smiled drowsily, although some of her thoughts were wandering into unfamiliar territory. Jim and Sarah had been seated next to each other the entire night, sharing small jokes as Jim urged her to taste all the treats he had made available. They were a cute couple, Barbara was right.

Barbara chimed in again. “Someday my prince will come,” she chuckled. “Till then I’m good.” Her eyes glittered in Renee’s direction, but Barbara didn’t say any more.

Jim yawned widely, and stood up again. “Goodness me, I think it’s that time. You girls help yourselves to whatever you want.” He crossed toward the couch with a kiss for his daughter’s cheek, and the salute that he and Renee had made their sign of friendship. “Happy new year to all, and to all a good night.” He left for his bedroom then, leaving Renee and Barbara to each other’s company.

“Another year down,” Renee sighed. “Been a hard one, hasn’t it?”

“You think you had it hard?” Barbara raised an eyebrow. “You weren’t the one trying to train every metahuman teenager on the planet.”

“You’re not training them,” Renee shot back. “You’re financing. Big difference.”

Barbara chuckled. “Okay, so the Titans and Outsiders, no. But I’ve still got plenty to do. Even with Steph spending time at the Titans, she’s running around Gotham, and our new Robin seems like a handful. And speaking of them,” she added, with what Renee could tell was feigned spontaneity- she had been waiting to ask all night – “I’ve got a proposition for you. You’re trained up, you’ve gotten used to this. How’d you like to take over Spoiler’s training?”

Renee blinked. "What, me? Steph? I mean...wouldn't she. rather have you and Dinah?"

"She might rather, but let's face it, you've got the least on your plate," Barbara shrugged. "And you're ready for it. We both know you are, you're turning into a better Batgirl than I ever was."

"I couldn't replace you," Renee laughed a little, but thought a lot. "I...I don't know. Maybe. Can I think about it? I'm just so used to only being responsible for myself."

"Yeah, of course you can. The offer's standing, it's not going anywhere any time soon." There was a very long pause before Barbara leaned nearer to inspect Renee's face. "Well?"

"What?"

"You still haven't told me about your mystery girl!" Barbara grinned. "The one you stayed the night with that time. What's happening? What's going on?"

Renee pursed her lips and looked away, sinking back farther on the couch. "Nothing."

"Oh come on!"

"No, Babs, really. Nothing's happening. I haven't seen her since," Renee said, quiet and short.

That was the truth, and Renee didn't know how to feel about it. On the one hand, the reasonable hand, it was for the best. It had been a monumental risk, a lapse in judgment to have allowed herself the night she spent with Poison Ivy. Even if the other woman had changed, or was changing, or would eventually change, she had still been a villain for years. And more importantly than that, Renee knew now that there was a connection between the two of them that would take a long time to get rid of. Now that they had been together once, they had reason to seek each other out. Now there was no way to guarantee that Ivy wouldn't go back into her life. No way to know that her identity wasn't in jeopardy

again.

But on the other hand, that connection ran both ways. Renee found herself thinking about that night over and over again, sometimes when she should have been focusing, sometimes when she was all alone with nothing to do. She couldn't get it out of her head, and she wasn't sure she wanted to.

The memory popped up again, the dark room and the beautiful, sultry woman, and Renee missed Barbara's comment. "Huh?"

"I said, go after her!" Barbara set down her drink before she spilled it in excitement. "Go get her back. I don't want to see you let a good thing go to waste, Renee, this could be great for you! You haven't had a girlfriend as long as I've known you."

Renee turned away again. "Babs, I told you, it's not gonna work out. They never work out. It doesn't matter."

"This time it could," Barbara insisted. "What's the worst thing that happens?"

"You don't want to know."

"I DO want to know, but you won't tell me anything," Barbara sighed. "You can't be alone forever."

That brought Renee's head back toward her friend. "Alone? Who says I'm alone. I've got you, don't I? And your dad. I've got my family...well, most of the time."

"You know what I meant. Renee..." Barbara sighed deeper and put a hand on her friend's shoulder. "This isn't the first time you've done this. Thrown away chances. You think you don't want them but how do you know? How do you know you haven't found someone you could fall in love with?"

Because they aren't you, whispered a voice deep in the back of Renee's mind, let into the foreground by the drink. She fought back the words. It had been a long time since Renee promised herself she was over her

friend. It would never happen, it simply wasn't meant to be. And day to day, Renee was fine with it. But those late nights brought back the longings of her youth, and for years she had judged every woman she met by the standards of the one she wanted to love. This one wasn't smart enough. That one was too uptight. The other couldn't make her laugh. None of them were Barbara.

And with a jolt down her spine, Renee realized that those thoughts had never once surfaced when she had been with Ivy.

"Trust me," she finally said, draining her glass. "You wouldn't like her anyway."

"I might surprise you," Barbara said, a tired smile on her face.

Renee sighed and laid her head back. "It wouldn't be the first surprise."

The snow was falling gently over Gotham City, more of a feeble dusting, a younger sibling trying to live up to the storm that they had gotten before. But it was enough snow to be watched late into the night, and that the women did.

The wilting decorations clung steadfastly to the walls and the rugs in the cottage. Even with a fake Christmas tree, there were shed pine needles stomped into the carpet, and copious amounts of tinsel and glitter from ornaments. The tree in the corner sagged with the weight of the baubles, and the wrapping paper was still spread joyously over the floor. On top of all of that, there were confetti and mostly-deflated balloons from New Year's Eve, adding more celebratory mess to the pile of clutter. Ivy had allowed it to go on through the holidays. But she handed Harley the broom on January 1.

Harley hummed to herself as she cleaned up, keeping the last Christmas carols lingering in her head. She didn't mind the cleaning up, when Ivy had so patiently allowed her to make the mess in the first place. Truth be told, it had been one of Harley's best Decembers ever. She had been happy, not worried. She and Ivy had exchanged gifts, and both girls teamed up to get a good warm kennel for Bonnie and Clyde, who took it

in turns to sleep on their soft dog beds and in Harley's. There had been eggnog and gingerbread, decorations and TV specials, everything that came to mind when Harley thought "Christmas". But something was still missing.

"You guys...." Harley started, perking the hyenas' heads up as she took down the tangled plastic wreathes. "I dunno what's wrong."

Clyde barked, and both of them looked on attentively at their mistress.

"Okay, so maybe I try to figure it out...oh god, I still gotta make a resolution!" Harley realized. "So maybe that'll help right?"

Another bark, this one Bonnie's.

"I mean, I guess it just feels...it was just us four this year... just me and Ivy the whole year," Harley started talking into the air, as she swept and organized and made the room livable again. "Didn't I used to have friends? Like, lots of them? And I babysat, all these kids and they loved me. There were just all these people, all around, all the time...an' ever since I left college..." Harley trailed off. Ever since she'd set out on her own, she had been very nearly alone. There had been the Joker, and she still bristled at the way that had turned out. She was happy living at Ivy's, happy having a true friend again. "But it's just not the same," she finally sighed.

Bonnie whined, licking at a leftover candy cane before Harley snapped it away.

"No! I don't wanna move back. Why would you even say that, Bonnie?" She chided the hyena, and then scratched behind her ears. "I just wanna, you know...just wanna get out there. Do something. See people. Maybe..." Harley's face went as bright as the Christmas lights she was taking down. "Hey! That's it! The kids, babysitting!" Harley squealed and jumped up and down, before composing herself again. "I can still do that, right? Well, probably not here," she glanced around at the living room. "But I can find some place, and get some kids, an' maybe even make some real money, some legit money." She was off like a rocket, rattling out a list of necessary steps toward her goal. By the time the living room was spotless again, Harley had it all planned out.

She ran toward Bonnie and Clyde and threw her arms around both of them. "Thanks you two! You're so helpful!"

Meanwhile, up in the tiny crawlspace that served as an attic, Ivy leaned against a wall with a thousand thoughts in her head. She had initially escaped here in order to get out of the way, not sure what kind of a whirlwind Harley would make. It didn't matter how much mess she made in the process of cleaning, so long as the room was back to normal when Ivy came back downstairs.

Her long white fingers trailed down the spine of the book in her hand. This was supposed to be just a way to kill time. Not a trip down memory lane. But her senior yearbook lay open in Ivy's lap, and there was no way to avoid it.

Pamela Isley seemed so far away. She had been a different person back then, living a different life. Pamela Isley would have grown up, finished college, become a botanist, probably married. The pictures showed a girl flocked by admirers. Here she was at the homecoming dance, lifted on the arms of several clambering boys. Her arms were thrown up in the air happily as she balanced on their shoulders. They all looked so young.

Ivy turned the pages lazily. It hardly seemed like it should matter now. But as she flipped through her old pictures, the memories came in a rushing stampede. She had spent a lot of time thinking, recently. Batgirl had left the house a long while ago now, but something about her presence lingered. It had been harder, these last weeks, to think about the theft and petty crime that had been keeping Harley and Ivy afloat for the past year. They had what they needed to eat, and anything more than that brought on the questions. Would she ever come back, if Ivy slipped back into those ways?

She flipped to another picture. Someone had made a collage of pictures of Pamela with her flings and stuck it between the pages. There were jocks, there were actors, eggheads and musicians, even a few women sprinkled in between the boys. Back then there had been waiting lists for Pam's attention. But that was before. Before people realized that Pam was serious about being an environmentalist. Before Ivy was born. Before they all left her behind as a radical, and before Ivy had proven she

deserved to be taken as a threat.

Ivy never thought she would miss that old life. Those people weren't worth missing. But just maybe, there was something else about them that was.

For years now, Ivy had thought she was happy alone. She had her cottage, she had her plants. She didn't have to deal with people any more. And that was the way she liked it. For years, that was the way she had made her life. Cut off from other people, fending for herself. And then Harley had come along. Then she had had someone else to be responsible for. Even when Bonnie and Clyde had made themselves at home, it had felt like having more real company around, especially with the way Harley talked to them.

It wasn't until Batgirl shared the house that Ivy really began to feel the absence.

It wasn't until she had that sort of closeness with someone else that she started to miss it. When she had been the beauty queen in high school, the people hadn't been worth missing. She had fooled around and used countless people without hardly caring. Those people had never really known her. They were the ones who left her behind when her true passions had surfaced. But Batgirl knew her. Batgirl had never met Pamela Isely, never seen the woman she used to be. She only knew the activist, the woman who fought for what she wanted. And Batgirl stayed with her anyway.

Ivy put down the yearbook. *How long did you want to be alone, Ivy?* she asked herself. *Too late now. You keep thinking about her. You let her change you. Stop fooling yourself.*

With a nod, she twirled the book in her hands and put it back away in the dark corner of the attic. There was nothing else for it, now that she knew what she wanted. Poison Ivy was a woman who went after her opportunities, not one to shrink back and wait for a prince to come. She wanted more than a fling with the woman who'd had such an effect on her. For the first time she could remember, Ivy wanted a real relationship. And she was going to get one.

By the time she came down, Harley had the living room back the way it should have been. "All done?" Ivy asked her.

"You bet!" Harley grinned wide. "And I got such a great idea, Ivy, you just wait, this is gonna be the best year ever!"

Ivy smiled back, more subdued but happy nonetheless. "Great. Can't wait to see. I'll be back," she promised, and made her way outside. When she came back to the house from their post office box, Ivy blinked, seeing the living room even cleaner and more organized than it had been before the holidays. "Harl, you can stop now."

Harley looked up from the stool she'd dragged in front of the window, to wash the highest parts of the window. "Oh, okay!"

"Here," Ivy flicked her wrist and sent a letter flying toward Harley. "That's for you." She took a seat in her favorite armchair, sorting through the rest of the mail. A few minutes later, Ivy looked back over to see her friend staring at the note, her face pale. "What, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Huh?" Harley snapped her head up. "Oh, nothing. It's nothing. Just junk," she said, crumpling the paper in her hands. She couldn't tell whether Ivy believed her or not.

Hidden now, stuck in the creases and wrinkles, was the last thing that Harley had expected to read, and the last thing she wanted. "Happy New Year, punkin pie! My resolution this year? I'm going to get you back. -J."

II. Spoiler's Nutcracker Suite

The moonlight trickled in through the gaps in the curtains, filling Stephanie's bedroom with a cool, calm glow when she turned off her lamp. The snow coating the ground bounced the light all around outside,

making it brighter, and giving her plenty of light to see by as she crept into bed.

Steph turned toward her bookshelf with a bright smile as she lowered her head onto the pillow. The nutcracker doll looked back at her. His wide, toothy mouth was wired to stay shut until she needed it, so that he smiled gently instead of having his mouth hang open. Steph appreciated that. The traditional nutcrackers always seemed to want to bite into her head instead of a walnut, always looked like they were watching her. This one was friendly and calm, and probably vegetarian.

The nutcracker was an exquisite piece of work, and Steph knew just how long her father must have been saving up to get her something so nice for Christmas. Every tiny button and fringe on his red coat was perfectly in place, each small laugh line carved around his mouth, the eyes painted bright and lifelike, despite the extra blush painted onto his cheeks. Few of Steph's friends would have pegged her as a doll person, but the nutcracker was special. It was the love that her father tried so desperately to show, even when his finances were small. It was the memory of years past, when she learned to dance and whisked through their old house, making her mother smile. It was dream and fantasy and the wonder of the world, all bundled up in a frilly red coat and a tall black hat.

She yawned and let her eyes close with the nutcracker's smile on her face. The holidays were over, and school would be starting back up tomorrow. But there was one last night of fantasy to be had.

The trumpets announced her presence to the ballroom, stuffed full of dancing figures in blue and white. She stood at the top of the long staircase and looked them over. The snowflakes and flowers that twirled across the floor were better-dressed than Stephanie in her purple frilled nightgown, but no one was giving her any odd looks for it. She was the prince's special guest, after all. So it was with a jaunty, confident gait that Steph went down the stairs and into the fray. She skipped two steps at a time until she landed, and was swept up immediately in the dance.

A snowflake boy took her hand first, his teeth gleaming in a pearly smile.

His skin and hair were frosting-blue, the eyes glittering with the stairs from which he had fallen. "Welcome."

"Glad to be here," Steph grinned back at him, and let the snowflake take the lead.

The dance picked up, alternating quick, whirling movements with slower, more deliberate steps, and each change tossed Stephanie across the floor into a new partner's arms. The ballroom was every little girl's dream, decked out in Christmas decorations. Garlands streamed down from the arched ceiling, tinsel and mistletoe sprinkled as thick as snow. But what caught Stephanie's eye was the smiling figure at the other end of the dance floor, in the frilled red coat and the black hat.

"Hey, cutie!" Steph called over the music, winking at the Nutcracker come to life. "Save me a dance, will you?"

The Nutcracker smiled his rosy grin, and didn't notice the movement behind him that Steph saw. She tried to run through the dancers to reach him in time, but the crowd was too thick, and the rats too lithe. "Look out!" Steph yelled instead.

He turned around, and the Rat was on him almost instantly. More were coming from the curtains, from the sides of the room where they had been hiding, lying in wait. They were as tall as the people, or maybe the people were as small as rats, but either way they were dangerous. Steph could only watch as the Nutcracker prince tried to fight them away, drawing a thin sword from his belt. She had to stand on her tiptoes to look through the crowd, the gumdrops and snowflakes panicking and trying to run back out the door, the mob threatening to drag Steph along with them.

"Aw no, I'm not about to run away!" Steph got her footing on the marble dance floor and pushed herself up, somersaulting over the heads of the dancers and landing in front of them, grinning at the rats. "Y'know, where I come from, it's really rude, breaking up a party."

Two man-sized rats, their black fur shaggy and knotted, stayed behind to attack her. They weren't expecting to have to fight a hero. Steph leapt through the air, her own kind of dance as she dispatched her enemies.

Her training served her well here – the rats didn't even have time to reach for the daggers that they carried by the time they realized they would need them. It took several hits from Stephanie's fists and feet before they understood that they weren't fighting the meek little girl they expected, and both rats fell to the ground dazed under the weight of one more punch.

"I'll take those, thanks," Steph reached down and plucked up a dagger in each hand, looking back up and ready to free the Prince.

The dance hall was empty in front of her. Torn bits of tinsel and spilled punch littered the floor, but apart from the ones she had beaten up, there wasn't a rat to be found.

"Damn!" Steph swore, stomping her foot, and whirling back on one of the rats as he tried to stand and scamper away. She gripped his fur at the front of his neck, where a collar would be if he were civilized enough to wear a shirt. "Tell me what they did to him, tell me where they took him!"

The rat's yellow, watery eyes stared up into Steph's furious brown, and his courage failed him. He told her.

The snow fell constantly over the Rat King's palace, but Steph wasn't cold. She was too energized by her quest, the rescue that needed to be made. But even that drive wasn't strong enough to keep her from stopping and staring at the sight. The palace was glittering in crystal and ice, blue and silver in the dank moonlight that coated the land. Not a brick was in place not carved from the freeze, or a bit of mortar not fashioned from salt. The snow fell so thick here that her every footstep filled up as soon as she made it. But soon enough, she found her way inside, through the secret servants' door that the rat in the ballroom had told her about.

It was warmer inside, but only just. Steph's slippered feet slapped against the slippery floor, and she held her balance as best she could. Within a few minutes, she had gotten the hang of walking through the

halls, and began to explore. The castle was winding and maze-like, but Spoiler had been through this sort of thing before. It was never too hard to make her way to the right path.

And with training from the old Batwoman and Black Canary, it wasn't too much challenge for Steph to sneak along. She kept near the walls, slunk through the narrow hallways and ducked into shadows, behind icy pillars whenever anyone walked by. For such a grand palace, the Rat King had few guards. It wasn't until she was well into the inner part of the castle, coming close to the throne room, that she happened upon one.

The rat leaned against the doorway, a pike unattended at his side, the visor of his helmet pulled down over his eyes. It was almost too easy. But Steph wasn't one to complain. She crept across the floor, kept her eyes out for more attentive guards, and saw none. While the hard-soled shoes she wore as Spoiler would have given her away on the hard floor, the simple bedroom slippers made no sound at all. She reached out when she got closer, snatched the Rat's pike right from under his nose, and brandished it under his chin.

The creature woke with a strangled snort. "Huh? Who- hey!" He tried to lunge forward, but Steph made sure he was aware of the weapon at his neck.

"Where's the Prince?" She demanded, sticking the sharp point closer to his fur, close enough to scratch his Adam's apple when he swallowed.

"Little girl, you better put that down, 'fore you hurt yourself," the Rat protested, but when his voice cracked it hurt his credibility.

"No, you better tell me what's behind that door, before I hurt you," Steph corrected him, with a wickedly sweet smile. She jabbed the pike into his side now, pricking a drop of blood from his dark fur. "So what's it?"

"This the King's private chambers...and I'm supposed ta guard it with my life," he quivered, his hairless tail reaching up to curl around his body.

Steph thought for a second, then brightened. "Kay, cool. You just run along, and I'll tell him I killed you, and you get outta here scot-free.

Good? Good." She didn't wait for him to agree.

The Rat paused and snarled, but cowered when she went to strike the weapon into his heart. "Okay! Okay fine, but I warn ya, girl! Nobody disturbs the King and lives to tell about it!"

"Oh cut the melodrama," Steph waved the pike in the direction she wanted him to go. "This is my dream."

A wind whipped around the throne room with no origin, simply to make it colder and stiffer inside. The Rat King paced his prisoner, grinning with all three heads. He was a sight to behold, standing nearly seven feet high, decked in black velvet robes with icicles of silver dripping from every seam. Three necks sprouted from his broad shoulders, an old-fashioned wrought-iron crown on each wicked, pointed head. His cape whirled behind him as he walked back and forth and back again, in front of the oversized birdcage that held the Nutcracker prince.

"Finally," he grinned, the voice deep and rasping and as rat-like as one would expect. "Once you've been disposed of, the entire kingdom will belong to me, as it was always meant to!"

The Prince was silent, his wide jaws tied shut with a length of ribbon wound around his head. But he glared at the Rat, and tossed his head to and fro, looking for some hope in the frozen room.

Hope stuck a finger to her lips, and motioned for him to look away from her. The Prince's smile was hidden by the gag, and by the time the Rat King made his next pass, the Nutcracker made no sign that he had seen Stephanie hiding in the corner.

"You thought it wise not to war with me when we seceded," the Rat King went on with his gloating speech, "thought to leave me be...that we could be friends," he rasped out a laugh. "But let us unite the kingdom once again...under my rule!" He held up both his arms in a grand gesture, looking to the ceiling in his triumph.

So he didn't see Steph shooting toward him like a bullet on the floor,

sliding crouched and landing a kick straight in the back of his knee.

“Not if I have any say,” Steph grinned at the way the King yelped, and stood up straight with her fists in a fighting stance. The King only growled, and drew a saber from his side.

He swung the sword without any delay, and Steph leapt into the air to escape. It was hardly an even match, the unarmed girl still in her nightgown, against the powerful, three-headed rat. But Spoiler was a superhero. She was used to those odds.

“Come get me, big guy!” Steph bounded toward the King, dodging the swipes of his sword by jumping above them or sliding below. The ice floor made it easier than ever for her to move fast and smoothly. She practically skated out of the way of the King’s blows, sticking her tongue out as she slid away.

“Insolent girl!” The Rat King gnashed the air with all of his teeth. “You can run, but if you can’t hit me, you can’t win!”

Steph furrowed her brow and ran toward the Prince’s cage. “He’s right ya know... with that sword I’m not gonna get close enough to hit him.”

The Nutcracker smiled, and jerked his head. Hung outside the cage, just out of his reach, was his jacket, and his own long, curved sword.

Steph beamed. “You’re a genius!” She reached for the Prince’s sword now, brandishing it in the King’s direction. “Come on, en garde!”

The fight was on. The Rat King growled and snapped at her, far more practiced with his blade. But Steph was ready for it. She still slipped across the floor, still bounded through the air over the Rat’s head, and this time clashed her sword against his. They clanged and swiped and made sparks in the frosty air, matching each other strike for strike.

In the end it was his finery that brought the Rat King down. He was too well-able to block her strikes for Steph to hit him straight on, but she managed to kick the iron crown off of his center head with a jump, and

catch it in her own hands. "Hey baldy, over here!" she called, holding the crown up high.

"What! You impudent child, you dare!" The King reached to take the crown from his left head for the center, to cover the thin fur on what should have been his grandest head. But the left head protested, snapping at his own fingers. For a pivotal moment the King stood still, torn in different directions by the hideous majesty of his three-headed body.

Steph laughed as she threw the crown back to him. Both the King's hands were busy with catching the heavy thing, weighed down just long enough for Steph to skate around to his back. She pulled up the thick black velvet cape, throwing it over all his heads and wrapping him up tightly. With one mighty pull, Steph brought the Rat King crashing to the floor, and reached again for the Prince's sword. She gave one solid smack to the back of each head, until the squirming rat passed out and lay still, helpless, harmless, and defeated.

She stood up with a wide grin, and searched the room quickly. It was the work of only a few minutes to find the key, free the Nutcracker, and hand him back his coat and sword. The look he gave her was one of grateful adoration, and the Prince went down on one knee before her.

"Aw shucks, you would've done the same," Steph beamed despite her protest of modesty. When the Prince stood again, he put his jacket back on and bowed to her. He didn't speak, but when he held out his arm Steph knew to take it, and she stood on tip-toes to murmur in his ear, "Your place, then?"

A soft laugh came from the Nutcracker's lips, before Steph caught them in her own. She kissed him long and deep and let her arm fall around his hip, letting him lead her out of the palace.

When the alarm blared, the sunlight was already streaming into the room, ten times as bright thanks to the snow that covered the ground. The sound and the light teamed up to wake her up, despite Steph's

grumbled protests and the pillow she dragged up around her head. When she finally did get up, the nutcracker doll stared her in the face from the perch on her shelf where he had watched over her all night.

Steph smiled and picked him up, crossing the floor to her dresser to get ready for the day. “Dum, da-ba-da bum bum bam bum baaam..” she hummed, twirling the doll in her arms. She had to leave behind the nightgown and the music in exchange for a warm sweater and a pair of jeans, but she smiled at the memory that would stay with her all day long.

The morning acted just the same as any other. She wolfed down her breakfast, kissed her father, and went off to school. But the day was crisp, and bright, and crinkling with the promise of the new year about to start.

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

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Ultimate Gotham Girls #11 (2008)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Clown College, Part 2 (of 3).

With the Joker's 'school' well underway and the clock ticking closer to 3pm, will Batgirl and Zatanna be able to prevent even more carnage? What about with some unexpected help? And how will Harley hold up when forced to choose between her man, and her only friend?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #10 (2008)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Clown College, Part 1 (of 3).

The Joker's been lurking in the background, and it's never good when he rears his head again! Harley's ideas and Joker's plans are coming together at long last, but is Harley really on-board with the joke? Ivy sure hopes not! And either way, the Clown Prince of Crime is going to have his hands full when Batgirl and Zatanna catch up to him!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #2 (2008)

Don't Say a Word, Part 1 (of 2)

Ultimate Gotham Girls #1 (2008)

Girls' (K)night Out.

Meet Harley Quinn. She is bound and determined to meet her number one hero, the object of her affection, Gotham City's premiere costumed champion...The Joker! To do it, she's teaming up with the seductive and deadly Poison Ivy...whether or not Pamela Isley likes the idea! Just what a neophyte Batgirl needs for on-the-job training!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #3 (2008)

Don't Say a Word, Part 2 (of 2).

The all-new, all-daring Batgirl is put to the test, tracking down a ruthless killer of children! But there's more to the mind of Mockingbird than meets eye, and Renee must walk the abyss of madness to figure it out!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #4 (2008)

The Joker Rules April Fools!

It's April Fools Day in Gotham and that can only mean one thing! The Clown Prince of Crime is giving the city a hearty greeting, and Batgirl must struggle, not only with a diabolical mastermind that gives even Batman pause, but whether or not to accept help from a shocking source!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #5 (2008)

Harvey and Ivy.

Harvey Dent has a curse: he's the acid-scarred mobster Two-Face! And he has a past: having pursued prison for Poison Ivy! Is there a connection between the two events? How does one lead to the other, and how do the lives of these two villains intersect? It's all in this issue of Gotham Girls, as signs point to dangerous storms brewing for our heroes...and other protagonists!

Last Sun of Krypton #1 (2008)

Last Sun of Krypton, Part 1 (of 3).

Travel with us now, into the past, to a time when a great and advanced race of people lived, loved, fought and struggled with the day-to-day and with the higher aspirations of all people. Come and witness Kal-El, with his family around him, as he discovers that for his generation...there seems no future to aspire to! What do you do in the face of the ultimate end?

Last Sun of Krypton #2 (2008)

last Sun of Krypton, Part 2 (of 3).

Even with the heavy news hanging over their heads, life must go on for Kal-El and his loved ones. But how can they go on with life as usual when the world is about to collapse? Isn't there anything that Kal can do to help save Krypton and its people?

Last Sun of Krypton #3 (2008)

Last Sun of Krypton, Part 3 (of 3).

"If Lyla had still been there to talk him out of it, Kal knew that he would never have even suggested this solution, let alone volunteered for it. He stood alone in the middle of a large, barren field, staring up at the monolith that was an energy plant, and he could feel the heat of the world gathering beneath his feet.

Two days had already gone by, two more days of heartache and fear, of disbelief and thick, destructive denial. Despite the official

pleas from the Board, and despite the few ready rockets off-world that had already left for the colonies, most of the population refused to budge from their homes on only the word of Jor-El. Kal's breathing was quick and nervous in the heated air. All of those people were depending on his bravery, his intellect...
...and on the nuclear bomb strapped to the hood of his small electric car. "

Ultimate Gotham Girls #6 (2008)

Reality Check.

Harley Quinn can't believe her good fortune! She's made friends with Ivy, won the love of her sweetheart, The Joker, and discovered her old mentor, Jonathan Crane is now in town. Could any woman's life be any better? She's on cloud nine, facing a future bright and exciting, despite The Joker's dislike of Crane's potential influence on the young woman. And then it happens...

Ultimate Gotham Girls #7 (2008)

Reunion.

Where does poor little Harley run with nowhere else to go? To Ivy's house, of course! How long can she hold up away from the Joker, and could he possibly be trying to get her back? Plus, the Ultimate secret origin of Poison Ivy!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #12 (2008)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Clown College, Part 3 (of 3).

With time racing out, can our three heroines band together and stop the Joker's deadly finale? What's going to happen to Harley Quinn? You won't want to miss the stunning conclusion of *Gotham Girls Year One*-- with special appearance by the Batman himself!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #8 (2008)

Your Worst Nightmare, Part 1 (of 2).

Jonathan Crane is tired of waiting. He has stores of his prized possession, his finished 'fear gas', all over Gotham. With a push of a single button, he will trap everything that breathes in their own worst nightmare, and for once in his life, Crane will be the one unafraid.

What terrors lurk in the darkest parts of the minds of all our stars?
And how will any of them break free? If they even can...

Ultimate Gotham Girls #9 (2008)

Your Worst Nightmare, Part 2 (of 2).

Jonathan Crane --now the full-fledged Scarecrow-- has all of Gotham City under his power, including Batgirl! Can anyone fight their own most feared demons in time to stop Crane from completely taking over?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #13 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Overrun.

The One Man Army Corps have taken the Gotham streets, and they're doing their jobs on the villains-- but are they safe for our heroes? When Batgirl ticks one off on patrol, can she stop a super-strong robot all by herself, before it hurts anyone else in its attack on her?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #14 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Facades Part 1 (of 3).

After years of hiding, Harvey Dent has finally returned to Gotham City. But for his old friend Renee, is this a good thing, or bad? And when Poison Ivy is framed for murder, who's going to search out the truth, no matter how shocking it may be?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #15 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Facades, Part 2 (of 3)

The investigation is underway-- Renee Montoya, AKA Batgirl, hot on the tail of Harvey Dent, AKA Two-Face! But can Renee truly believe that her old friend is a killer? And what would she do if she discovered the proof? Meanwhile, how long can Harvey hold his two selves together, under the stress and the guilt of what he's done?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #16 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Facades, Part Three.

Batgirl's continued investigation of a double-murder frame job finally brings her to Harvey Dent, and forces her to confront what's happened to her old friend. How deep does Harvey's madness

extend? How has it affected him, through his entire life? And what will Two-Face do when he finds Batgirl prying into his secrets?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #17 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Facades, Part 4 (of 4)

The disturbing origin of Two-Face revealed to her, Batgirl now has to finally face off against her friend-turned-enemy. How badly can Renee stand to hurt Harvey? How badly will she have to, if Two-Face gets the upper hand? And what shocking revelation will finally end the battle? Find out in our stunning conclusion!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #18 (2009)

Gotham Girls: Jack of Hearts.

Jack Napier has had a crush on Harley Quinzel since they took Psychology together, and she has always ignored him. But when Harley robs Jack's magic shop, could fate be bringing them together? How can a man with such an eerily familiar face win the heart of the girl of his dreams, and is Harley's heart really free for her to give?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #19 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Now and Then.

Ultimate Gotham Girls #22 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Save Our Circus.

Haley's Circus is back in town, and ready to put on a killer show for Gotham City...at least, it was until a half-rate supervillain made a big-name mess by setting the animals loose! Join all our Gotham Girls, even including guest-stars, as they try to clean up in time for the show. And check back in with Harley Quinn, as she makes a couple new friends...

Ultimate Gotham Girls #24 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Face to Face, Part 2.

Two-Face is on the loose, with only Poison Ivy to keep an eye on him. Will Ivy slide back into her villainous ways, or will Two-Face force her to show her new colors? How will Harvey Dent be able to face up to his deepest fears, when he's just become free of them? And what on earth are Ivy and Batgirl doing working together?

All this and more in the thrilling conclusion to Gotham Girls year two!

Ultimate Gotham Girls #23 (2009)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Face to Face, Part One.

Harvey Dent has had enough. After months of treatment and no progress, he is desperate to get rid of the voice in his head, the other half of his mind that has always been there. And with the help of a touch of magic, Harvey can get his wish...but at what price? With Two-Face on the loose and no coin to contain him, how will Batgirl be able to keep Gotham City safe?

Ultimate Gotham Girls #25 (2010)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Beginning Again.

Ultimate Gotham Girls #26 (2010)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Scout's Honor.

Ultimate Gotham Girls #27 (2010)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: A Light in a Dark Wood.

Ultimate Gotham Girls #28 (2010)

Ultimate Gotham Girls: Rocket's Red Glare, Part 1.

Enter: Roxy Rocket!



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