



THE MAN BEHIND THE BAT, THE WOMAN WITHIN THE CAT  
THE LIFE BETWEEN THE PANELS, THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MASKS

#18

# Cat = Sales

*Something Blue*



by Chris Dee



**CAT-TALES**

**SOMETHING BLUE**



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By  
Chris Dee

Edited by  
David L.

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BATMAN, CATWOMAN, GOTHAM CITY, ET AL  
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# SOMETHING BLUE

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The website Tim Drake was reading was one of the stupidest exhibits of paranoia, conspiracy theories, and urban legends on, he was certain, the entire internet. But it had the best photo available of the patch of desert known as Glow Ground 51.

Beneath the image of ordinary-looking wasteland that took on a greenish tint after sundown, were two vitriolic essays arguing that the land was the crash-site of alien spacecraft hidden by the government at Area 51 or else an Indian burial ground desecrated by nuclear testing in the late '50s.

Tim stared at the photos. It was neither. It was Clark Kent's Bachelor Party.

Tim didn't know all the details. No one did, except those present, and (if they remembered) they weren't talking. But even in Young Justice one heard things: Hal Jordan was Green Lantern then ... Jagermeister ... a cocktail waitress called Lola ... the Golden Gate Bridge ... Oliver Queen... the Space Needle... Tequila... and prominent members of the Justice League told they were no longer welcome in three West Coast cities for anything less than a nine-alarm fire.

"The truth is out there!" the website proclaimed. Tim would dearly love to know what it was, now more than ever.

He was 17. He was a high school junior. What did he know about planning a bachelor party? Dick said it didn't matter. He didn't need a party; he didn't want a party. He just wanted Tim to be his best man. Fine. Good. Great.

Except it wasn't fine. First thing Wally asked was when the bachelor party would be. Eel O'Brien asked where. J'onn asked if it'd be costume or civvies. And Kyle asked if there'd be a stripper!

This was so unfair.

Black Canary perched on the South Tower of Gotham General Hospital. This was the spot Oracle recommended—and sure enough, it was ideally situated to observe the emergency ramp, the heliport and, most importantly, the walkway between the main entrance and the Kensington Street parking garage. However Poloff tried to leave, she would see him, and she would tail him.

The only snag was that he wouldn't be leaving until visiting hours ended, and that meant quite a wait. Sitting there. Nothing to do except... get it over with.

She opened her stakeout satchel. From the sleeve where she liked to keep a thermos of coffee, she took a rolled up copy of BRIDAL SHOWERS FOR DUMMIES.

This sucked.

So far, if asked to rank activities worse than a root canal, Tim would have to place planning a bachelor party right between the SATs and hiding in the dumpster outside Joker's HA-HAcienda while those mongrel hyenas snarled over his head.

Bruce said it was costumed personas with more powers than maturity that led to "the greening of Seattle," and it'd be a cold day in hell before he'd okay a party in his city for anything but civilian identities. That was the sort of thing Bruce often said about metas, but the vein on his neck didn't always throb when he said it.

Alfred said the manor was off-limits. The wedding ceremony was almost upon them and he was far too busy - besides the memory of "the Frenchman" was all too vivid. Whatever that meant.

Dick said: "No pressure, Bro. Nobody's expecting 'little Timmy' to match Clark's party, 'the bacchanalia by which all future debauches will be measured.'"

Wally said he could buy the liquor, as Tim was underage.

The third attendant, Steve, Dick's college roommate said: "I've only been to one other bachelor party. Was in Pittsburgh. We went to a comedy club. Had a pitcher. Jokes about airline food. And shopping malls. And Bette Middler."

Tim's father said Uncle Derek threw his bachelor party in New Orleans, in the French Quarter, during Mardi Gras.

Clark hung up on him.

Having followed Poloff from his brother's hospital room into a money-laundering front, Black Canary called in the relevant information to her contact in the FBI. It grated that she wasn't allowed to pump the weasel for information, or even let herself be seen. But it was important this next phase be left to an official agency. There'd be plenty of action, her contact assured her, once they followed the money.

On an impulse, Canary swung uptown and landed on Selina Kyle's terrace. At least, she hoped this was her terrace. Peeking in to the apartment, she didn't see any cat stuff. Although there was a cat (hostile looking little critter, too), that was hardly conclusive. Plenty of people had cats.

She wanted to call Oracle and confirm the address, but knew that would stir up a dozen questions about the reason for her visit.

The cold amber eyes assessing her from inside were joined by a second pair—a human pair—green, and not nearly as nasty looking. The woman opened the sliding terrace doors and ushered her in.

"Catwoman?" Canary asked.

"Selina," the woman laughed, "home and out of costume, it's Selina."

"You don't have a lot of cat stuff around the place, do you?" Canary observed.

"You'd be surprised how often I hear that," Selina replied. "This about the shower, I take it?"

"Yeah," Canary paused, then spoke awkwardly, "I figured, since we're hosting it together, we should at least meet, compare notes..."

"You don't have any ideas either?" Selina guessed.

"None," she admitted with a laugh. "I bought this book."

"I visited a website."



"I don't see 'scented candles' and 'bath soap' being a big hit as party favors, do you?"

"I don't see Barbara wearing a hat made from bows and wrapping paper either."

"This is going to be tricky."

"Meow."

"I'd just like to know how I'm supposed to avoid the mistakes of Clark's party if I can't find out what they were," Tim muttered, as ZOGGER dug a hook into his arm and flung him against the wall. *Ah, but that is logic*, came the counter thought, *and logic does not apply when that vein on Bruce's neck throbs*.

He'd made a stupid move:

"You said I should hone my detective skills by picking a mystery, investigating and solving it," he had told Bruce.

"I never said any such thing," his mentor answered before sentencing him to a lifetime of ZOGGER.

Clark's bachelor party was becoming an obsession, and Tim's theories about it were growing as ludicrous as those on the website where he'd seen "Glow Ground 51."

Wildcat threw him out just for asking about it.

And Clark hung up on him again.

"I keep bigger secrets than this!" Tim had insisted. "I even know where B keeps that kryptonite ring 'just in case.'"

*...:What you don't know, kid:... the voice on the phone responded, ...:is what it's like to be married. When you know that, you'll understand why there's no power on earth, including that ring, that would impel me to tell you what happened -cough- that night...:*

And that's when Smallville's noblest son, the man who defined 'superhero,' hung up on Tim for a second time.

"Okay, here's the deal," a gloved hand switched off Zogger while the gravely voice spoke, "You can use the penthouse at the Wayne Building. Civilian identities only. Eight to midnight. Fifteen guests max. Understood?"

Tim looked up and the gloved hand helped him to his feet. It was a miracle. Like a Christmas miracle—except for bachelor parties.



“ESOLC TNOD! ESOLC TNOD!” a frantic voice called, while a Disney Store shopping bag wedged itself between the closing elevator doors.

Lois Lane raised an eyebrow as the doors parted and a panting Zatanna stepped inside, smiled apologetically, then pressed the button for Barbara Gordon’s floor.

“Flight was late,” she explained, “Magic Convention in Vegas—forgot the shower—stopped to get this on the way in from the airport—Cabbie was a pig.” She sighed dramatically. “Hi, Lois. How you doin’?”

Lois just smiled, waiting for Zatanna to notice they were still looking into the lobby.

“I mean, I’m in showbiz, right, I don’t mind if a guy notices my legs, but to talk about them on his radio right in front of me—”

“Um, Zatanna,”

“-and, okay, it was nice of him to wait while I ran in and got this, but it’s Gotham. If he didn’t want to wait, I could’ve got another cab easy enough, right?”

“Zatanna, the doors.”

“Oh, don’t mind me. Just feeling bad I guess, ‘cause I forgot and had to get a gift at the last minute like this. Think she’ll be getting a lot of dishes ‘n stuff?”

“I doubt it. I got her lingerie. Zatanna, you froze the doors magically. You want to unfreeze ‘em, or should we take the stairs?”

“Oh, sorry,” she apologized. “WON ESOLC SROOD”

They were the last to arrive. Dinah took Lois’s elegantly wrapped giftbox and Zatanna’s Disney Store Bag to a side table while Selina offered “tea or champagne.”

“This is very nice,” Lois observed of the large sprays of flowers on each end of the gift table. Then she saw another floral display next to the tea—and another near the champagne, and still another by the food, “It’s all very, um, pink and white.”

Selina and Dinah exchanged a brief ‘you go’ exchange, then Barbara cut in.

“They each bought decorations,” she explained, while everybody who heard the story before perked up, waiting for their cue, “So did I,” Barbara continued, “And so did Alfred. And Dick sent flowers.”

“Awww,” came the collective gush.

“Finest tush in the super-community,” Dinah remarked to Zatanna.

“I heard that,” Barbara chimed, ushering the new arrivals into the center of the party while the hostesses retreated to a quiet corner to continue their conversation about a mutual acquaintance now known as “The Cadaver”...

It began when Barbara had parted yet another boxful of Victoria’s Secret tissue paper to find yet another item of intimate apparel—with the difference that, unlike the previous boxes of powder blue teddies, sapphire blue nightgowns, and midnight blue penoirs, this garment was an intense purple.

Everyone looked to Selina, who laughed and sputtered, “Not from me.” Then, as Cassie meekly admitted it was her gift, Selina whispered to Dinah, “Like I’d really want Dick thinking about me on the wedding night—sheesh, after all I did to squelch that Nightwing story last year.”

It was a joke—but it was enough to remind Dinah what she had in common with Selina.

“Those reporters at the Post should be buried to their necks at low tide,” she seethed.

Selina's instinct was to laugh again, but she saw Dinah was in no mood to laugh it off.

"Rotten break, about Ra's," she said sympathetically.

"Megalomaniacal slimebucket," Dinah pronounced.

"Hairdo," Selina offered.

"Sicko freak," Dinah added.

Selina looked around then whispered, "Flyweight"

Dinah giggled, then held her fingers together between them, about a half-inch apart.

"Small...feet," she confided.

Selina's eyes bulged. Her comment was an assessment of Ra's as a global threat—Dinah clearly had another yardstick in mind.

Wordlessly, Selina picked up a champagne bottle, and she and Dinah retreated to a corner with their glasses.

By the time Barbara was opening Zatanna's box of Disney Store glasses, Selina and Dinah were comparing notes:

"He claims to know all these famous dead people," Selina was saying, "Did you get that too?"

Dinah nodded.

"Are you kidding, he wanted to *impress* me. I heard'em all."

"He told me he knew Wagner."

Dinah nodded more vigorously, then broke into a fair impersonation of Ra's voice and manner: "We were sitting in a café and I said 'Richard, it won't do. You can't cover this material in a single opera, it must be longer. Three, no four full operas. Don't worry about the length, a few hours each. And the Valkyries need a theme song!'"

Selina laughed merrily so Dinah continued: "'What's that Fair One, not much of a music lover? Theatre then. Shaw, Wilde, I knew them all. Why it was I who told Christopher Marlowe that Helen was 'a face that launched a thousand ships.'"

"He knew Helen of Troy too," Selina gasped in pretend shock.

"All the great beauties," Dinah pishawed, still in character, "Helen, Cleopatra, it was I who told Shakespeare about Cleopatra—though she was a shrew. Taking over the world is man's work. But where was I, oh yes, the great beauties—Helen, Cleopatra, Catherine the Great, knew them all. All!" Then she resumed her own voice, "I surpassed them all of course."

"Of course," Selina toasted, and they clinked glasses. "You do that really well, by the way, I know people who would just die to see that impersonation." She sighed, "Too bad really."

Dinah sighed too, and they moved to rejoin the party as the doorbell rang.

The party froze with a collective "Who could that be—not another centerpiece?"

It was Barbara herself who finally answered the door.

"Diana! You made it after all. How... wonderful."

"No stripper?" Kyle Rayner looked incredulous. "Isn't that the whole point of getting together on a guy's last night of freedom? Look at one last pair-HEEY!"

This last was in response to a smack in the head delivered at subatomic speed.

"Last party," Wally West said levelly, "I missed the good stuff - stuck in the men's room of the Foggy Bottom Bar & Grille 'cause a wiseass Green Lantern moved the party—actually moved the *ENTIRE BAR* except for the men's room to another location. This will not occur again."

Oliver Queen walked over from the bar with a glass in one hand and a bottle in the other. "Good man, West, you remembered." And he gestured with the bottle. "A man's drink."

"Tequilla," Wally mouthed to Kyle, and Kyle slid his Zema behind a tablelamp.

There had been some debate whether Oliver should be invited, not because he was dead, body brought back from the underworld without a soul and possibly inhabited by an evil spirit, but because he was the chief agitator in the matter of Clark, the waitress Lola who learned he was the groom-to-be, and Hal the hotshot who objected to any man other than him getting special attention from the girl, especially milquetoast Kansas, even if she did have an "L" name.

"So this is Bruce Wayne's famous playboy pad," Kyle asked, leaving Ollie's vicinity for safer territory near Dick and Tim. "Does he have any of those cool gadgets, like in the movies," he asked flipping each light switch in turn, "with a mirror ball and funky lights and a bed that comes out of the wall."

"Ah, no," Dick answered, wondering—not for the first time—why Kyle seemed magnetically drawn to whatever idea would most likely result in Bruce killing him.

"Hold on to your roll bars, girls," Zatanna was whispering, "we're gonna do a little offroading, and I want a seat in the back, cause I'd hate to get hit by a flying reporter."

The colloquy in Barbara's kitchen had assembled the moment Diana stepped into the powder room to "freshen." She didn't have a hair out of place, Dinah was quick to observe, but when you arrive at a party you said you couldn't attend because of an uprising in Argentina, which is then resolved and you can come but you're 2 hours late because you came straight from the Pampas, you are expected to go to the powder room and freshen.

"Can somebody explain this?" Selina asked, "I didn't bring my decoder ring."

"They don't like each other much," Dinah explained, "and there's gonna be fireworks."

Selina raised an eyebrow. "Look, I'm just the outsider here, but you guys are all on the same side, right. If everybody's treating me okay, why would there be any friction with—"

Barbara understood how to explain it succinctly: "That's kind of like saying you and 'the demonspawn' are 'on the same side.'"

"Oh!" recognition dawned. "You don't mean Superman and—"

"Of course not," Dinah cut her off, "that's just talk. Gossip. But like we were saying before: the talk, when it hits the newspapers, can get pretty—"

"At least you two contradicted those stories," Zatanna put in, "the thing with Diana is she's never once so much as..."

"Get Diana drunk," Barbara suggested, grabbing Selina's sleeve.

“Barbara, contrary to popular opinion around here, I don’t actually have any special powers to get heroes drunk.”

“Ah, guys,” Stephanie interrupted from the doorway, “of the two women you’re discussing, one has super-hearing and the other is a professional snoop. And they’re both out here. Come and help!”

“What I want to know,” Eel O’Brien grumbled, “is how that uptight, tightass, master of gloom rates the hottest piece to ever pour herself into spandex.”

“Meow,” Oliver’s demon mouthed the word with quiet menace. In life, he’d always admired the Catwoman’s curves, it was logical to assume the other more red-blooded heroes did as well...

Wally looked towards Bruce then around the room, “Check it out: Penthouse—Picassos.”

“Nah, they had a thing before she knew he was rich, didn’t they?” Kyle whispered, completely missing the undercurrent of envy and malice Oliver was subtly exuding. This wasn’t because he was any purer than the others. It was habit: Batman intimidated him, and he always kept Bruce or Batman in his peripheral vision if they were in the same room. Only superficially participating in the conversation with Oliver had kept him immune from its darker subtext.

“...Hitman used to say he’d crawl fifty miles over broken Pepsi bottles just to clean her bathtub with his tongue...”

Kyle’s eyes grew wide. “He can hear you!” he whispered through clenched teeth.

“Balls.” Ollie dismissed the idea as ridiculous.

“He’s looking this way,” Kyle insisted, still not moving lips or teeth, “and he’s rubbing his knuckles.”

“He can read lips,” Wally said, holding a glass to his mouth.

“And he’s coming over,” Eel announced.

“Don’t be such a *pussy*,” Ollie said distinctly, glaring up at Bruce on the final word. “We’re not allowed to *TALK* now? Bad enough you can’t come into ‘his’ city without sayso.”

“You can come to Gotham, Ollie,” Bruce said amiably, “any time you like. But call first so I don’t mistake you for something—*evil*.” The last word only was spoken in Batman’s foreboding growl. Then he placed a hand on Kyle’s shoulder and resumed Bruce’s fop manner: “Kyle, you haven’t met Dick’s roommate from Hudson U...”

He led Kyle to a small group at the far side of the room, then whispered something to Tim who immediately looked towards Ollie, Wally and Eel. A few minutes later Tim whispered to Clark, then joined the trio and said: “Ah guys, deal is you knock off the Catwoman talk this second or you’re in orbit ‘til they’re back from the honeymoon. ‘Kay?” The threat was delivered in tones of such sparkling innocence, an eavesdropper would have assumed it was a joke... even if they knew Tim knew Superman... right up until they saw Clark pause in the middle of his conversation, turn towards the trio, and nod.

"This was a mistake," Dick hissed at Tim, "Ollie AND Eel AND Kyle AND Bruce— You don't put these guys together unless a malignant intelligence is hurling huge meteors at heavily populated cities—and even then you *THINK ABOUT IT FIRST!*"

"It's *his place*, Dick," Tim insisted, "I couldn't tell him not to come."

Dick sighed, "Yeah, I guess. But Eel makes him crazy!"

"Bro! If I nixed everybody Bruce doesn't get along with, it'd be you, me, and Alfred sitting here. Hey, can you see Alfred with some 'Bambi' on his lap, trying to look disapproving!"

It was an amusing enough image, but it introduced a less-than-amusing subject.

"I don't see *me* with any Bambi on my lap."

Tim looked dejected. But Steve, the roommate, the outsider in the group, saw him slump as he walked away. He crooked a finger at him and said: "Don't worry, kid. I got a plan." If Tim noticed a distant glaze in Steve's eye, he would have attributed it to meeting too many new people after too much scotch and soda.

"Is it my imagination," Selina whispered "or has Diana been toasting for like 10 minutes?"

"Sit down, dear," Dinah answered, "she's just warming up."

Barbara now wore the traditional bride-hat of bows from the giftwrap stuck on a paper plate. The theory was that Diana respected ritual and the closer they stuck to prescribed shower activities, no matter how clichéd or inane, the more comfortable everyone would be.

Everyone apart from Lois, that is, who chose this particular moment to tell Cassie, who hadn't asked but was sitting beside her, about her interview with Oprah Winfrey.

"She has all these 'experts' on her show, but winds up doing all the talking herself," Lois declared pointedly, "I mean think about it, what's the point of having other people around if it's just going to be talk talk talk about *you* and what *you've* done and your precious advice to all the little people..."

Cassie nodded, not out of any strong sense of agreement but simply because she preferred nods to speech. That was true under any circumstances, but especially in a case such as this when someone else had the floor.

"I like to think of myself as Every Woman..." Diana continued, ignoring Lois's asides.

"She doesn't," Lois objected, "she likes to think of herself as, literally, gods'—with a small 'g' - gift to mankind."

"Of course," Diana still appeared to be oblivious to Lois's comments, but her toast changed tone slightly, "however much we might champion the cause of women's strength and independence, it is so important that we actually live up to those ideals. For who can consider themselves truly independent if they're forever in need of rescuing by a more able partner?"

"The thing I find most interesting about Oprah," Lois continued, undeterred, adding "in a tiara" under her breath, "is the way she'll give policy on things she has absolutely no experience of. Why it'd be like some professional virgin presuming to give advice

on marriage... But anyway, I shouldn't be monopolizing your attention, should I, dear? We were listening to—oh look, the toasts are *still* going on."

"Hey Barbara," Selina whispered, thinking back to her own confrontation with the demonspawn, "just out of curiosity, how big is your shower?"

"What was the name of that drama major you dated sophomore year?" Steve was asking Dick, "Megan?"

"Molly," Dick said with a twinkle, "Molly was drama, Megan was business administration with a minor in anthropology."

"And Cheryl," Steve rounded out the list, "was the music major with the Kermit the Frog backpack and the cello case she always laid on my bed."

"That's right, I forgot that."

Tim listened in awe: "Drama, business, anthropology and music. So the common theme here is...?"

"Red hair," Steve pronounced, as though answering the riddle of the sphinx.

"Of course," Tim smiled at Dick.

"Of course," Wally echoed.

"Oh brother," Dick rolled his eyes.

"I couldn't help noticing," Steve went on, raising his voice a little so the others at the party could all hear, "the lack of any ...traditional Stag Night entertainment..."

Tim blushed, as there were guttural murmurs of agreement even from the partygoers who had souls.

"...and knowing our guest of honor's preference for a certain hair color..." Steve went on, signaling to Kyle, who stood nearest the door, "I figured: Do I give a silver-plated chafing dish like everybody else? Or get my ol'buddy something he'll really enjoy..." He waved to Kyle, who opened the door to see a stunning woman, long red tresses cascading down her shoulders to... oh my... Kyle swallowed... great knockers... he inhaled sharply... great everything... and all of it... draped... in green...."

"So I told Donald Trump," Lois was now discussing her recent interviews with Stephanie, in just as audible a voice as before, "for a sharp businessman, you're awfully gullible. Anything that round can't be real!"

"What about one of those games," Zatanna suggested, swallowing her champagne at a gulp.

Selina and Dinah just looked at her. They had skipped that section of the books entirely.

"I don't know any shower games," Dinah hedged. "We figured, they were icebreakers, and everybody here..." she noted Lois glaring at Diana and Diana glaring at Lois, "...already knows each other."

"I know a good one," Stephanie offered enthusiastically, "The Penny Game! We sit in a circle, and everybody names something they've never done, and if anyone else in the group has done it, they put in a penny..."



“Let’s begin by clarifying it’s *someTHING* you’ve never done,” Zatanna giggled, “and not *someONE*.”

“First,” Selina confided to Barbara, “this shower idea is more fun than I thought.”

“And second?” Barbara asked, staring at Zatanna, then Lois, then Diana in stunned horror.

“Second is: Magic Gal is cut-off on the bubbly.”

“I hear ya.”

“I always assumed Black Canary was the party girl in your circle.”

“Everyone does, poor thing.”

Eel took in the buxom dancer before him with a gaze of pure lust: “Oh sure, it’s all fun and games ‘til someone puts an eye out.”

She smiled knowingly and leaned over him. Her scent was intoxicating...Flowery and fruity...he inhaled deeply... but musky, too... thick, heavy... like the jungle... green.

“Mile-High Club!” Zatanna chirped, while Diana and Lois watched each others’ fingertips like gunfighters at the OK Corral...

Roy, Vic, and Gar had retreated from the rest of the party. Dick was more than preoccupied being Bruce Wayne’s son, the groom, and the guest of honor. They collected a bottle of whiskey, found a card table, and played blackjack while discussing, alternately: “Are they real,” what really happened at Clark’s party, what was so cool about BattleBots, who they’d like to see appear in a JLA-swimsuit calendar, who would win in a cage-match between Huntress and Power Girl, and finally that bullshit editorial that said a hero changing his name or costume was official notice to the world that they’d “jumped the shark.”

“Felicity?” Roy sputtered, “they said it’s like Felicity cutting her hair—what kind of thing is that to say? It’s a TV-show! It’s hell-ooo,” he noticed his audience was no longer looking at him but looking past him. Turning in their direction he saw... bewitching beauty... “Hello,” he continued, “and whose little girl are you?”

At the conclusion of the ‘Penny Game,’ the ‘Safety Pin Game,’ three bottles of champagne, and several hands of five-card stud, Diana was the universal winner, and Selina and Dinah scrambled to find the door prize for which she would exchange her pennies, safety pins and poker chips.

“What the hell is this?” the Amazon Princess exclaimed.

Stephanie focused hard on the object, then answered decisively: “It’s soap—shaped like a blue pigeon.”

“Why?” Diana asked. Steph shrugged and Diana left.

The remaining guests looked at Selina and Dinah.

"It was either that or aromatherapy candles," Selina explained defensively.

"Serenity, Memories..." Dinah added, specifying the varieties.

"Valium," Lois suggested a more suitable fragrance.

Zatanna had another idea and giggled: "Ya sure you don't want a humming toy instead of soap?"

Barbara looked at Selina. "No special powers to get heroes drunk, huh?" she whispered.

"Um, Z'anna, maybe you missed this part," Dinah chimed in. "We didn't plan on having games. We had no prizes. We ransacked Barb's stuff to get the soap."

Zatanna's brow furrowed, then she said, "Nothing that goes 'whirr' in your old Batgirl stuff?"

There was a long, long pause.

"Okay, new rule," it was Selina who finally spoke, "We don't even *joke* about sex toys with bat emblems on them, not even hypothetical ones, not while I'm in the room. Everybody got that?"

Clark's super-senses detected the scent long before the temptress got around to him. He sat enraptured, watching her with Wally, while Oliver grumbled that the Bat's stay-out-of-my-city rules were interfering with his attempts to get Black Canary back....

Oliver trailed off as the beauty finished with Wally and approached him and Clark.

"Gentlemen," she announced her arrival in low come-hither tones that made their insides vibrate, "It's most unsociable to stay over here talking together when there's a lady present to be... entertained."

Oliver blinked a few times, looking up at her, then sank back in his chair.

"Do join us," he murmured.

"But there's nowhere for me to sit," she answered.

Clark stood from his chair, but Oliver offered his lap.

"What I don't understand," Selina asked, watching Dinah and Barbara drain the glasses while they cleaned up, "is why you're all not dead by now. You guys can't keep secrets worth shit."

"-hic- That's not true," Dinah objected. "I din't tell anybody 'bout Jason Blood and Shiva."

"Do you know," Selina ignored Dinah's outburst and spoke to Barbara, "how many versions of the Clark-Diana story I heard tonight? *Everybody* has one. Except for Lois of course, and *she* had to make sure I knew Zatanna only got your gift ten minutes before she got here. From the tourist Disney Store in Gotham Plaza, she specified, not the good one on Fifth Avenue."

"Lois is happiest when she's gathering and disseminating information," Barbara mused philosophically, "-hic- As am I. What do you think the guys are up to about now?"

"Red," Dick said with a pained longing as the sharp vision of Poison Ivy filled his mind. Red Hair—what was it about red hair?

Ivy's enticing but displeased features contorted as she spoke.

"None of you are rich?"

Bruce Wayne's son, shouldn't all his friends be loaded? This lot of mouth-breathers were... *ordinary!* A reporter, an artist, a cop, a high school kid, a salesman—at that point she stopped asking...

"I used to be rich," Ollie grumbled through the haze of pheromones, anxious to please this bewitching siren.

"Used to be?" she asked flatly.

"Gone now," he admitted.

"Dot-coms?" Steve asked.

"No."

"Pork futures?"

"I don't like to talk about it."

"Day-trading?"

Ollie took Ivy's atomizer from her belt and spritzed his inquisitor. Steve's eyes glazed and he sank bank into dreamy contemplation of the green.

"We should've gotten a stripper," Dinah declared, passing the Hagen Daaz carton to Barbara.

"I don't want some himbo dressed as Zorro groining around my apartment in speedos," Barbara objected, passing the cookie dough tube to Selina.

"You'd rather have Diana and Lois squaring off?" Selina asked, staring at the cookie dough much as Diana had scrutinized the bathsoap and passing it on to Stephanie.

"They brought presents," Barbara pointed out.

"You'd rather have a Body-by-Victoria camisole than *Zorro*? Babs, you turned a corner somewhere, dear. That ring is cutting off circulation to your brain."

Barbara huffed, looked at the heap of blue lingerie piled on her couch, and reconsidered.

"You guys wanna go out? There is a club down by Pier 17. They have male dancers."

Selina looked at her appraisingly. Barbara was full of surprises.

"How do you know this?"

"They have a wheelchair ramp, and a ten o'clock show," she added.

"Barbara, how do you know this?"

"How do you think? They have a website!"

Dick's breathing became quicker and harsher... God, how he desired this woman, she was so beautiful, she was everything he had ever wanted... and her scent, burning into his lungs, was overpowering... fruity but tart... citrus... like... lemons, but with something else... something chemical...

His eyes cleared a little as a thought came into focus ...not lemons—Lemon Pledge. Poison Ivy! ...red... so beautiful and exciting... not natural red, henna maybe, not real like Barbara... Ivy... Poison Ivy... This wasn't real... Lemon Pledge... This wasn't real, this was a drug. Ivy—Poison—He shook his head clear.

Poison Ivy was standing before Bruce, fingering his hair like a plaything. "Looks like you're the only one here worth enslaving," she sighed.

Oh shit! Bruce looked totally out of it. He could be faking, but it didn't look it. Eyes empty, head back, staring up at Ivy...

Summoning all his resolve, Dick stood.

"No, he's not, Red. I'm his heir. I'll get it all."

Conjuring visions of Rhett Butler, he strode up to Ivy, grabbed her forcefully at the hips, and turned her into his arms. Before she could gasp, he kissed her, raising a hand to her hair, then raising the other to her throat. He moaned into her mouth, turning her face ever so slightly to better reach him... laid a finger on the nerve he was searching for, and pinched. He felt her tense for a quarter-second, then go limp.

He lowered her gently to the floor, let out a long huff, and looked around the room of passive, enthralled heroes.

"Next time," came the thought, "elope."

===== HEROINE CHAT =====

FeistyFan: Now DeepDude, seriously, you're telling me  
of all the women that run around in spandex  
you'd want to spend the night with Amethyst?????  
MarvMan: What are you, a perv! She looks like she's 12!!!  
BabeMagnet: YEAH! Figure of a VENUS PENCIL, dude

=====

Selina, Dinah, Barbara, Cassie and Stephanie, who were logged into the chatroom as "Underwire," huddled around Oracle's oversized monitor, trembling with laughter.

=====

DeepDude: You guys are so shallow. Look at her, you can  
see she's got so much more character than  
someone like Black Canary or Catwoman

=====

The women burst into peals of laughter. Selina pushed her breasts into her chest and pondered: "Why yes, I feel more complex now."

Dinah mimicked her: "Me too. I've got a good three, four more inches of character this way."

Stephanie asked to take over the keyboard to see what more ludicrous postulates she could lure out of "DeepDude" through private whispers...

She didn't get to find out, because the OraCom alert closed the chat window and threw up a feed from the police band.

"Barbara," Selina complained, "you said you were turning that OFF for the party."

Barbara became all business, taking the keyboard back from Stephanie and centering her chair before the monitor.

"I did," she said puzzled, "At least, I turned all the filters up to screen out anything that wasn't practically in our back yard. This can't be. To be going off like this, it'd almost have to say—"

Barbara broke off and inhaled sharply. The others gathered around the scene and read the words that triggered the OraCom panel:

:: visiting Bludhaven Police Officer Richard Grayson... Wayne Building... ::

"Oh dear," Dinah murmured, amused, while Barbara and Selina alternately mouthed various words as they scrolled up the screen.

:: ...apprehended...Pamela Isley aka Poison Ivy... infiltrated a private party... as a stripper!... ::

Partners. Partners work together, understand each other, depend on one another. Bruce and Dick were not simply the groom and his father, they had been Batman and Robin! Bruce and Tim were still Batman and Robin. The men shared a bond borne of surviving unspeakable perils together, as a team.

The rehearsal dinner did not look like a deathtrap when they walked in. But then, neither had the abandoned warehouses, the clock towers, the greenhouses, the factories, or the comedy clubs.

The women were already waiting. They made smalltalk.

"How was the party?" Selina had asked casually. It didn't seem like a trap.

"Oh, it was fine," Bruce answered.

"Not too rowdy?" Barbara had asked.

"No, no," Dick answered.

"Strippers?" Stephanie had asked.

"Nothing like that, no," Tim insisted.

And then, just like the time they tripped the electric eye in Mr. Freeze's hideout, the room's temperature plummeted ninety degrees in four seconds.

"So Poison Ivy was caught at a *different* party?" Selina began.

"A different *bachelor* party," Barbara corrected.

"Right, a different bachelor party," Selina continued.

"In the Wayne Building," Stephanie added.

"Dressed as a stripper," Barbara finished.

The arrival of Steve and Aunt Kate stymied any more explicit conversation, and the group went in to dinner in the much the same spirit three lions, three Christians, and two indifferent spectators might have entered the Coliseum.

Unlike the Mad Hatter's Aunt Maud, Dick's Aunt Kate was an attractive, pleasant woman in her late 30s. Steve found her an attentive dinner companion, happy to hear his stories about being bewitched by one of the actual costumed rogues of Gotham City. So far from feeling a victim, Steve seemed to look on the episode as an adventure

and an exciting brush with fame. Besides which, his good friend Dick was the hero of the day! How cool was that? No Batman or Robin that foiled that crime, but Officer Dick Grayson...

"How exactly did that come to be, anyway," Barbara muttered through clenched teeth.

Dick's eyes flickered. He wasn't about to give details on how he'd actually subdued Poison Ivy, so, needing to give some answer, he explained briefly how he'd fought off her pheromones.

"And just how did you originally come to notice her pheromones smell like Lemon Pledge," Barbara asked testily.

"Or that she's not a natural redhead," Selina muttered disapprovingly under her breath. Only Bruce heard this and, for the first time, was grateful it wasn't he who first broke out of Ivy's spell. With the noble intention of watching his partner's back, Bruce leaned over to Selina and defended him:

"You remember adolescence," he whispered. "He was sixteen, he was a hormone machine, and he noticed *everything* about *all* of you."

It was, perhaps, not the wisest time to allude to Selina's Catwoman past, for lacking any claws, Selina stuck a fork in his thigh.

"Hey!" Bruce exclaimed.

"So Dick is observant," she whispered back, before falling back on their sign language: "You trained him to be, right? Then how'd she get to *you*?"

Bruce blinked. It was starting to sound like he was in as much trouble as Dick.

"What do you mean?" he signed.

Slowly, as one might speak to a moron, Selina spelled out her question: "How... did... Poison Ivy... who ...I do believe... you've seen before... a number of times... waltz into ...Wayne Penthouse... and get close enough... to spritz YOU... not Dick, not Tim, not Wally... YOU, Dark Knight bad ass crimefighter extraordinaire.... How did she ...get close enough... to ...spritz... YOU... ???... I'll tell you how ... 'cause you... were not looking... at... her... face!"

Yes. He was in as much trouble as Dick—if not more.

"You said there weren't going to be strippers," Stephanie looked daggers at Tim.

"I didn't get a stripper. I had a nice quiet evening planned, which it turned out was a mistake, cause everybody was bored stiff and mad at me 'til Ivy showed up and..."

"Tim."

Tim looked up—Bruce could deliver much deadlier looks than Steph.

"As best man, don't you have a toast to make?"

"Umm," Tim blanched.

