

Title: Always Know, Ever Learn

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Summary: Chibs is making plans for the future of Diosa. Lyla reminds him being king doesn't mean he can decide everyone's fate.

Always Know, Ever Learn By Scribblesinink

"Place looks good," Nero observed. Chibs was showing him around Diosa. It was two weeks after the brawl with the pimp from Oakland had wrecked the premises for the second time in six months, and Nero was back in Charming with Wendy, who'd returned to finalize the sale of Teller-Morrow to Samcro. Chibs had seized the opportunity to ask for a face-to-face with Diosa's former owner.

"Aye, thanks." Chibs huffed a laugh and waved Nero towards the bar, where Tig was already working on a beer. "Shoulda seen it two weeks ago."

Once Jarry had released him and his brothers from lock-up, Chibs had called Rat to bring the van out and ferry everyone—Sons and girls—back to Diosa. Jarry later told him she'd dumped the Oakland crew at the town line, with a warning she never wanted to see them in her quadrant again. Knowing Jarry, Chibs reckoned it'd be a good long while before those boys dared to venture back into Sanwa.

Rat had jumped to it and soon Chibs had been picking a trail through the damage left by the bust up, taking stock. Glass crunched underfoot and the whole place reeked of spilled booze. Had to be a small fortune soaked into the carpet. Cursing under his breath, he'd mentally tallied the cost of putting things right and the loss of income until everything was fixed. Where the hell would they get the money from to restore the place? This legit business stuff was too fuckin' hard.

"I'm sorry," a small voice had interrupted his crabby calculations.

Chibs swiveled toward Winsome, surprised she hadn't hightailed it out of there at the first opportunity, along with the rest of the girls. He wasn't confident any

of 'em would be back; Veronica, the unwitting cause of the trouble, had elected to return to Oakland with her old pimp. "Ain't yer fault, lass."

Winsome hugged herself, looking unhappy and uncertain at the same time. "No, it is. I talked you into giving Veronica a chance and—."

"You didn't *talk* me into anything," he snapped. Winsome flinched at his harsh tone, as if she expected to get hit. Jesus, of all the things.... He sucked in a lungful of the booze fumes, releasing the breath slowly through his nostrils, and struggled to get a grip on his temper. Moderating his voice, he added, "Couldn't know the bastard'd come get her. You got nothing to apologize for."

Winsome had shrugged but, thankfully, not argued further.

The Sons had spent the two weeks after that sweeping up rubble, replacing and painting dented drywall, and laying new carpet. It had cost them a pretty penny, too, but Diosa Norte Escorts & Massages was finally about to reopen. A couple of the girls who'd agreed to stay on after all were about, with Lyla and Winsome directing them to fluff pillows, smooth sheets, and straighten wall hangings.

Seeing Chibs and Nero join Tig at the bar, Lyla made her way behind it. The men settled themselves comfortably on the stools while she placed glasses in front of them and poured a measure of scotch into each. Chibs nodded his thanks at her, and she smiled.

"I hear cousin Alvarez wasn't too happy." Nero picked up his glass.

Chibs suppressed a groan. Alvarez had shown up mid-morning the day after the brawl, lieutenants in tow, to remind Chibs in clipped tones that shit happening at Diosa Norte also affected business at Sur. "Fact, that's what I wanted to talk to ye about," he admitted.

Nero swiveled toward him, eyebrows quirked. "Alvarez?"

"Nope. Running Diosa."

Nero froze, his glass halfway to his mouth. "Whoa, 'mano, you know I ain't comin' back." He set the glass down without drinking. "I got a good thing goin' in Norco and—."

"I know, I know." Chibs held up both hands, palms out, forestalling further protests. "Ain't what I'm askin'."

"We're struggling here, brother." Nero pivoted on his stool at Tig's words, facing him. "Chinese thing got people spooked."

"Winsome's been trying to hold it together." Chibs tag-teamed with his VP. "And she's a smart lass, but she ain't got experience."

"The girl from Oakland?" Nero's brow furrowed. "Greensleeves' girl?"

"Aye. Girls've been givin' her trouble for that, but she's got a good head on her."

"Just need a little help, man." That was Tig again, gesturing with the beer bottle before taking another swig. "Couple months, maybe a few weeks."

"Get this place back on its feet for real." Chibs shook out a cigarette and offered the pack to Nero, who waved him off. "Teach Winsome some tricks. With the right mentor, she'll pick it up quick enough."

Nero let out a laugh, flapping a hand between Tig and Chibs. "I'm feeling a little ganged-up on here, guys."

"Sorry." Chibs wasn't sorry at all. "You're the best man for the job." He jabbed a thumb at his own chest. "I know how to run guns, I know how to be an outlaw. Hell, I even know how to run a garage. This?" He waved at their surroundings. "This was yours and Jax's gig. I got no idea where to start."

There, he'd put all his cards on the table. He didn't appreciate having to lay himself open to someone outside the club like this, but he trusted Nero as much as he trusted any man, and he needed him. If Nero said no, and they couldn't find someone else to manage Diosa, Chibs wasn't sure they'd be able to hang on to it.

"A few weeks, huh?" Nero had picked up his glass and was twirling the liquid around. "Till Winsome can run it on her own?"

"Aye."

Before Nero could answer, Lyla loudly cleared her throat. All three men at the bar switched their focus to her. "Got something you wanna say, darlin'?" Chibs asked. Wasn't like her to get involved in club business.

She looked him straight in the eye. "Did you talk to Winsome about this?"

"It's come up, yeh." Winsome herself had confessed to Chibs she was in over her head.

Lyla picked at a coaster, her eyes briefly darting toward Winsome— punching sofa cushions into shape at the far side of the room—as if afraid the girl would overhear them.

"C'mon, doll, out with it." Tig wasn't long on patience.

Lyla drew in a breath. "She's told me she was thinking about going back to school." The words tumbled out. "Get her GED. She's got some money saved and—."

A snort from Tig cut Lyla off mid-sentence. "She *what?*"

Lyla pulled herself up to her not-very-impressive height, a cute wrinkle appearing between her brows. "You think she's been hooking for fun? Trust me, it's not that great."

"Venus says it's—."

"She's different." Lyla didn't give Tig a chance to finish. To everyone's surprise, Tig had taken no issue with the way his old lady made her living. Big difference from Opie, who'd one time taken on a roomful of Chinese when they'd been slobbering all over Lyla. "Venus has a—a calling, almost."

Lyla should know; the last months, she'd been working closely with Tig's old lady on a specialized line of movies that made Chibs' skin crawl to think about, but which were being gobbled up by the distributors like candy.

"And sure," Lyla went on, "some women enjoy it. For the rest of us, it's a job. Sucks, but it pays the bills." She tossed the shredded coaster onto the counter. "Anyway, this is about Winsome, and what she wants to do with her life. So all I'm saying is, you guys better talk to her if you're making plans involving her." She walked off with quick, determined steps, not giving them the opportunity to say anything else.

"Wow." Tig slammed down his empty bottle with more force than necessary and drummed his fingers on the bar, a rapid tattoo that was a sure sign of his agitation. Used to be, no old lady would've dared to speak to a Son in such a tone. Especially not in front of outsiders. Except maybe for Gemma. And even she had always known how and when to pick her battles.

"What the 'ell just happened?" Chibs asked nobody in particular, not bothering to keep the amusement from his voice. He leaned over the bar for the bottle, grabbed a glass for Tig and poured a fresh round. Meek little Lyla, whoda thought?

He was struck with an abrupt revelation as to why Red Woody was such a roaring success for Samcro. And, annoying as it was, deep down he had to admit Lyla had a point. Winsome was an employee, not an old lady, and she didn't owe the club anything. Being king must be going to his head if he was starting to expect everyone would fall unquestioningly into line with whatever

plans he made. He—of all people—should know better.

Grabbing his glass, he turned on his stool to see Lyla talking quietly but urgently to Winsome. From the nervous glances the younger woman was casting in his direction, Lyla was giving her a heads-up about what she'd just said.

Catching Winsome's eye, Chibs nodded to her. "Come here for a minute, lass."

Shooting Lyla a worried look, Winsome scurried over. Behind her, Lyla folded her arms, watching them warily. "You wanted to talk to me?" Winsome's gaze snapped toward Nero and Tig, before returning to Chibs.

"Lyla tell you what she told us?"

Winsome nodded.

"That true? You want out?"

She glanced away and then down, before offering him another shaky nod. "It's not that I'm not grateful, to you and Jax and him," she waved at Nero, "for giving me a chance. But... this isn't what I want."

"Shit," Chibs muttered. He took a drag from his cigarette. He'd hate to see her leave—she was a hard worker and had done as well by the club as she could. But he wasn't gonna hold her in a line of work she didn't wanna be in. That'd make him no better than that asshole that Jax had thrown through a window.

"I'm sorry," she muttered, still not looking at him.

"Nah, you gotta do what you gotta do."

A cautiously hopeful expression lit up her pretty face. With a dip of his head, he confirmed he'd meant what he said, and she broke into a relieved smile.

"Thanks." She skipped back to where Lyla was waiting.

Chibs returned to his drink, mulling over this latest turn of events and trying to fit the various pieces of the puzzle into new places. The other two men were also silent, each caught up in his own thoughts.

Nero broke the quiet first. "Didn't you say you was gonna need someone at T-M—uh, Redwood Autos & Bikes—," With a smile he corrected himself, using the garage's new name. "—beside Chucky? Someone who won't freak out your customers most of the time?"

"Aye." In his own way, Chucky was a godsend—if a weird one—but he'd frightened more than one housewife in the past into running out the gate. "You'

thinkin' Winsome?"

Watching the girls putter around, Nero rolled a shoulder. "You were gonna let her run this place, right? Doubt a garage can be any more difficult."

"Hm." Chibs contemplated the contents of his glass. Montez had said Winsome was good with the clients, and she was already familiar with Samcro. And the garage had shorter hours; she could maybe finish school part-time. Nero could be on to something.... Chibs made a mental note to talk to the girl later; he'd better not make any further decisions without consulting her, or he'd have Lyla on his arse again. He smiled for a moment.

The smile quickly faded, though, as he realized that didn't solve his current headache. "Still gotta find someone who can manage this place," he pointed out. He directed a hopeful look at Nero.

"Ha, no, 'mano, no way." Nero read his expression correctly and laughed. "Not me. I told you, I got a life in Norco."

"I'm out of ideas, ese." Chibs pursed his lips and let the air whistle out between them. "If you got any other suggestions, I'd like to hear 'em."

Nero hesitated, before holding out his glass for a refill. "Have you considered asking Venus?"

They hadn't. Chibs stared at Nero, observing Tig doing the same from the man's other side. Tig's eyes were narrowed, calculating. Catching his VP's gaze, Chibs silently asked for his opinion with a wiggle of his brows.

Tig scratched his neck. "She wouldn't wanna abandon her own dates," he warned, speaking slowly as if still collecting his thoughts.

"Wouldn't need to," Nero said. "She could work in house."

Tig grunted. "Would be a lot safer." A month ago, he'd stormed into the chapel at Scoops, ranting about how Venus had come home with a black eye and bruises on her arms and hips. She'd refused to tell him which lowlife had laid his hands on her, so Tig had been left to fume at anyone who had the bad luck to end up in his crosshairs. Rat had taken the brunt of his anger; everyone else had been smart enough to recognize the signs and make themselves scarce until Tig had worked through it.

Chibs could see the thoughts making their way through Tig's mind: if his old lady was running Diosa, she'd be protected, have vetted clients, always have a Son nearby to call for help.... Yeah, Tig was warming up to the idea.

"Hold up, fellas." Chibs snorted a laugh. "It all sounds good, but, eh, mebbe we wanta talk to Venus first?"

There was a second of stunned silence and then they all burst out laughing. Chibs poured them a new round and lifted his glass for a toast. "To the smart gals who keep us honest."

"Hear, hear." Tig and Nero clinked their glasses with him and with each other, before the three of them tossed back the scotch in a single gulp.

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