

Title: Black Bird Calling

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Summary: Jarry needs help solving a case. For reasons of their own, Samcro offer their assistance. When things go wrong and Tig disappears, Jarry fears she may have unleashed a force far worse than the original crime.

Black Bird Calling **By Scribblesinink**

Chibs woke up in an empty bed, the sheets next to him cool to the touch. He yawned as he sat up, and then grimaced: the room reeked of sex and pot. Locating his jeans on the floor, he tugged them on and went in search of Jarry.

A light burned in her living room, where she was sitting cross-legged on the floor, dressed in a hastily thrown on T-shirt—his—and panties, her legs bare. Pages filled with text and schematics were spread around her, along with crime scene photos.

"Hey." He scratched his chest and picked up one of the photos. "What's this, then?" It showed an old man with a bullet hole in his chest, the red bloom of blood around it staining his button-down shirt. Horrified understanding was caught in rigor mortis on the victim's face. Whoever this fella was, he'd known he was gonna die.

"Couldn't sleep." Jarry put down the report she'd been reading.

"And you think looking at these will help?" Chibs dropped the photo back on top of the others. Most were of the dead man from various angles but some featured a woman with gray hair and a lined face. Same age bracket as the man. She'd died wearing a flowered blouse.

Jarry huffed a rueful laugh. "Put like that, guess not." She gathered the reports and photos together in a manila jacket before climbing to her feet. "Those carjackers I told you about? Few days ago, they killed this old couple from Colorado. Took their Beamer."

Chibs shook a cigarette from the pack on the table. "Read about it, yeah." He didn't know any more than what she'd just told him, though; dead civilians held little interest for Samcro.

"Their daughter says they were on a trip of a lifetime, wanting to see the Golden Gate bridge." Jarry tapped the edge of the folder against the palm of her hand. "Assholes left them to rot in a ditch."

"And you got nothing?"

"Not a single shred of evidence I can work with." Jarry threw the file on the coffee table. "We got no fuckin' clue who this crew is, or where they operate from. It's like chasing goddamn ghosts!"

"Want me to put out some feelers?" Chibs lit his smoke and tossed the lighter down on top of the file. "Shake a few trees? See if we can dig up bit o' dirt?"

Jarry gave him a cautious look. "Why would you do that?"

"Hey, I'm a criminal—," he released the smoke through his nostrils, "—don't mean I got no heart." He aimed with the cigarette at the file. "That shit ain't right."

"Uh-huh." The earlier skepticism remained in Jarry's voice.

"A'right, fuck you." Unexpectedly feeling hurt, Chibs swung on his heel, heading back to the bedroom to get his boots and cut.

"Filip, I'm sorry." Jarry hurried after him and placed a palm on his bare back. She hardly ever called him by his first name. "I'm—." She broke off. "Yes, I'd very much appreciate it if the MC could help." She kissed his shoulder blade, her hands slipping around his waist and dipping into his jeans. "Please."

Chibs sighed and turned in her arms. He was a sucker for this girl. "I'll talk to the guys."

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Next church, Chibs brought the issue to the table. He'd be damned if he was gonna repeat Jackie's mistakes and try to fix everything behind the club's back.

Hap was far from happy with the plan. "We doin' cop work now?"

Chibs stroked his chin. Happy's reaction wasn't unexpected. His SAA was having a difficult time adapting to a legit life. He thrived on the mayhem and bloodshed that, to him, weren't just necessary evils, the way they were to Chibs,

or even Tig.

"This shit's happening on our turf, bro," Tig reminded him. "And people are startin' to look at us real funny."

"So?" Happy grunted. "They always do. Don't give a fuck."

Chibs sighed. They didn't necessarily need Charming's wholehearted approval, but the club couldn't survive on just legit business if the town viewed Samcro with distrust and hostility.

"What if it was your mom got killed."

Rat asked the question softly, to a collective intake of breath of the men gathered around the table. Snarling, Happy leaped out of his seat, his eyes flashing. Rat shrank back into his chair. "You fuckin' leave my mother out of this, shithead."

Rat lowered his gaze. Smart kid; he'd have ended up in the ring with Hap beating the crap outta him if he hadn't. But Rat's question had taken the wind out of Happy's sails and he fell back in his seat, rubbing a hand over the snake inked on his skull. "Shit."

"Used to be," Chibs took the opportunity to add his weight to the opening Rat had given him, "people in this town came to us if they got jammed up."

"That's right, guys." Except for Happy and Chibs, Tig was the only one who'd been around long enough to remember that.

"And hey, look on the bright side, brother." Quinn spoke from across the table. "Might get to whack a car thief or two." He cracked his knuckles, while laughter rose, the tension in the chapel easing, and Chibs grinned.

"Gotta be careful, though, bro," he warned. He'd promised Jarry they wouldn't go full-on vigilante and that he'd bring anything they dug up to her to deal with. "So, let's vote it. All in favor of finding these carjacking arseholes?" A chorus of "Yays" was his due, with even Happy inclining his head and giving an unwilling "Yeah," and Chibs brought the gavel down.

o0o

A week after she'd accepted Chibs' offer of help, Jarry was no closer to arresting the carjackers. The lack of leads was gradually driving her out of her mind. Two more luxury sedans had been stolen and their owners dumped at the side of the road—thankfully without any further bloodshed—and she was hard-up for anything to help find the ones responsible.

Scoops was closed by the time she pulled up in her squad car, though the lights were still on and leather-clad men were milling around inside. Brooke was still there too, cleaning the counter and restocking the candy jars. Slamming her car door, Jarry walked up and rapped her knuckles on the glass. Brooke looked up at the noise and one of the Sons—the skinny one: Ratboy—came trotting up and opened the door.

"Chibs around?" she asked, not seeing him among the small group loitering at the tables.

Ratboy pulled the door wider and a few minutes later, Jarry was crammed in a booth with Chibs, Tig and Ratboy—or Rat: she quickly learned the nickname was usually abbreviated. The rest of the Sons had spread themselves across the nearby booths, hovering close enough to overhear. If she'd been anyone else, she would've feel threatened by the set-up.

"Please tell me you got something." She didn't care if she was sounding desperate; her back was against the wall. Patterson had asked her to head up the investigation partly because the first carjacking happened in her quadrant and partly due to her service record, and the eyes of the entire Sanwa justice system were on her. She couldn't afford to fail.

"Not particularly." Sprawled next to her, Chibs slung an arm over the bench behind her. "Nobody on the streets between Stockton and Oakland knows a thing. Believe me, we asked."

"Shit." Jarry pinched the bridge of her nose. Best she didn't question how Chibs could be so confident he'd been told the truth. "Like I said, I'm chasing ghosts." Destroying the GSP tracking systems that insurance companies insisted were built into expensive vehicles was the first thing any car thief worth his salt would do. Those systems were easy to locate, easy to disable. But even with the trackers out of action, she should have had something to follow. Yet no one had reported seeing another glimpse of any of the cars after they were stolen. Not the sheriffs, not highway patrol, nobody. "How can they vanish like that?"

Though it had been a rhetorical question, Ratboy supplied an answer. "Trucks."

"Shit." So much for hoping the operation she was dealing with wasn't as sophisticated as that. "How d'you know?"

"Talked to some guys in Stockton." Tig met Jarry's sharp look stare for stare. "Said that's how they'd do it: load the cars onto a truck, transport 'em out of state for chopping and resale."

"Shit," she said, for a third time. She didn't bother asking who they'd talked to. She could make a pretty good guess, and it didn't really matter, anyway. She

couldn't care less about the occasional Mexican chop shop activity in Stockton.

Letting her head fall back against Chibs' arm behind her, she closed her eyes, considering her options. She was so screwed. Even if she could get the alert out fast enough after the next incident, she didn't have the manpower to inspect every truck moving out of the county. No, she needed to narrow the scope and lure those bastards to her.

"Bait car." Blurting out the words, she sat up, her eyes flying open. They didn't have any prepared in Sanwa, but Patterson could easily release a suitable model from the impound. She could add a tracker, slap out-of-state tags on it and—. She sighed. She couldn't simply park it and pray it got stolen. The thieves were aiming for cars on the highway and the expense of having two officers do nothing but drive around all day in the hopes of drawing the carjackers to them would be staggering.

"Honey trap? Won't work." Tig was shaking his head.

"Why not?" Getting the go-ahead on the plan would be a hard sell, especially considering the cost, but the idea itself was sound: bait cars had proven effective in other states.

Chibs laughed softly. "Crew like the one you're looking for? They'd smell a trap a mile off. Recognize your guys in an instant."

Jarry didn't bother to hide her skepticism, and he shrugged.

"Something about coppers is a dead giveaway." Again, he grinned. "Sorry, lass." He didn't sound sorry at all.

Jarry let her shoulders slump forward. "Probably can't get the manpower approved, anyway."

"We could do it," Rat piped up. Jarry blinked at him, from the corner of her eye catching Chibs and Tig do the same. Rat held up his hands, wincing at the sudden scrutiny. "Uh, forget I said anything."

Chibs grunted something unintelligible and Jarry heaved a sigh. She hated this part of the job: waiting for the bad guys to make a mistake. It usually ended up with more people dead.

"It ain't a bad idea." Tig spoke slowly, his narrow-eyed gaze still on Ratboy, who squirmed in his seat.

"Seriously?" Jarry took in the wild hair of the men around her, the scruffy goatees, the leather cuts that were scratched and grimy from long wear on the

road. "You reckon you can convince those scumbags you're for real? And my officers can't?"

"No fuckin' way." Chibs snorted a laugh. Jarry wasn't sure if it was at the chances of Sons pulling off the deception, or the plan itself.

"Have a little faith, prez." Tig drew his lips back in a wicked grin. "You and me, Rat. Father and son." He grabbed Ratboy by the scruff of the neck and shook him until the younger man pulled loose.

"Jesus Christ." Chibs was shaking his head, his dimples showing in an unwilling smile. "Ye're fucked in the head, brother."

"Why on Earth would you do this? You're—." Jarry swallowed down the accusation the Sons were criminals themselves. Something like that was better left unsaid.

"Ain't like we got any other pressin' business." Tig didn't mention T-M, but Jarry knew the place was still practically dead, though she'd heard Chibs and Wendy were talking to Oswald about a possible deal. "It'll be fun, won't it, Ratty?"

"Uhm...." Rat looked sorry he'd ever opened his mouth. "Yeah. If you say so."

oOo

"You involved the MC?" Patterson pursed her lips. "Hope you know what you're doing, lieutenant. 'Cause what I need from you is a suspect I can try in a court of law and not—," her tone turned cold, "another pile of dead bodies in an unmarked grave."

Jarry folded her hands together on top of her knee. "Of course, I understand." She'd gone to talk to Patterson in person, believing it'd be easier to convince her of the merits of her unconventional plan if she could explain it to her face to face. From Patterson's reaction, she no longer was so sure she could pull it off. If she failed to get the DA's permission, she'd be back to square one, with no plan and no leads. "Samcro is—."

Patterson held up her hand to silence her mid-explanation, and she inclined her head, waiting for Patterson to make up her mind. "So, you need car, huh?" Patterson asked, after a minute of heavy silence.

"Uh, yes, ma'am. The type of car these scumbags go for isn't the sort of vehicle Samcro—."

"No, I would think not." Patterson's mouth twitched with the beginning of a smile. She reached for her phone. "Thank you, lieutenant. I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you, ma'am." Jarry fought to suppress her own grin as she got to her feet and saluted Patterson smartly. She wanted to promise Patterson that she wouldn't be sorry, but she didn't dare go that far. She was putting her career on the line enough as it was, relying on the Sons' boredom as being a good enough reason to help her. She wasn't entirely buying Chibs' concerned citizen act, either. Could she trust him or the rest of the MC not to fuck up their part, or fuck her over for a scheme of their own?

Trying to quell the rattlers in her stomach, she returned to her squad car. Time to tell Tig and Rat to get ready.

oOo

"What did I tell you?" Tig briefly took his eyes off the road as he snapped at Rat. Much as he liked the kid, being cooped up in a cage with the little shit for a second day was getting on his nerves.

Rat froze, fingers no longer drumming on his knee. "Uh, to not do that?"

"And?" Tig hit the blinker—like any good citizen—and steered onto the main road to start another circuit of Sanwa's highways. Fourth round today—or was it the fifth already? He was fast losing count.

"You'd cut off my fingers and jam 'em up my ass if I do." Rat was rubbing his palms on his knees, smoothing out the crease in his pants.

"So?" Tig demanded, fighting off a smirk.

"Sorry... Dad."

"Shut the fuck up." Tig gave Rat another narrow-eyed glare, satisfied to see the grin melt from the other man's face, and settled the car into a sedate fifty miles an hour. They both knew he'd never make good on the threat. Rat was a patched brother, after all, and after what had been done to Bobby, cutting off fingers would be a big no-no. But imagining inventive ways to torment Rat if he didn't behave had amused Tig for an hour or two at the start of their honeypot cruising.

Engaging the cruise control, Tig tugged at the stiff collar of his dress shirt and rolled his shoulders, hoping in vain the thin material would tear and give him room to breathe. Winsome had done a good job estimating his and Rat's sizes after Jarry had tasked her to buy them "suitable clothes" but she'd not taken into account the vests, so the shirts were tighter than Tig would've liked.

Up ahead, an unmarked box truck was parked in a turn-out. Tig scanned it as they drove by, keeping a wary eye on it in the rear mirror until a bend in the

road hid it from view. He wished something would happen. Wished those jackasses stealing cages would try and steal theirs. Before he went fuckin' crazy with the endless loops.

In the secret depths of his mind, he'd admitted he hadn't fully considered what he'd be getting into when he'd suggested he drive Jerry's bait car. He'd only thought that looking for car thieves had to be more exciting than hanging around at T-M waiting for non-existent customers, or trailing after Chibs each time someone at Diosa got their panties in a wad. But driving a cage without any purpose or direction other than circling Charming had proved boring as fuck. And wondering, every time a vehicle passed them, if *this* was when the borrowed sedan would get stolen out from under his and Rat's asses was kicking his paranoia into high gear.

"Can I put on some music?" Rat slouched in the passenger seat, planting a boot on the dash and leaving a scuff mark.

"No." Tig slapped at him. "And put your fuckin' foot down. You ain't at home."

The cage itself wasn't bad. It reacted smoothly to his touch and the leather of the steering wheel was soft as a baby's bottom under his hands. The A/C kept the humidity and heat out; too-tight shirts aside, they were comfortable. But the damned shirt.... And the pants.... Tig shuddered. The outfit was the worst of all the things he hadn't reckoned with.

Jerry had insisted on it. If they wanted to fool the carjackers into thinking they were easy pickings, he and Rat had to dress the part. And though his brothers had laughed their asses off at the pansy get-up she gotten for them, Chibs had backed her. Damned traitor.

And why was his shirt goddamn *purple*? He wasn't a fuckin' One-Niner gangbanger. What was wrong with blue? Or white? Winsome had said the label called it "soft iris", but everyone who wasn't a pussy would call it purple.

Tig again slid a finger under his collar, thankful he'd put his foot down about wearing a tie.

A sudden blast of music pounded from the speakers and Tig jumped, startled. "What the hell?"

Rat had used his distraction to attach his music player to the dock and turn up the volume. Tig snatched the small stick out and the music cut off. He eyed the thing, lip curled up. Damned gadget; at least with CDs you could use 'em as coasters if they were crap. Not that he had any use for coasters. He tossed the player into Rat's lap. "What did I tell you about that?"

Rat sighed heavily. "Driver picks the music."

"And?"

"Shotgun shuts his cake hole. Jesus, Tig—."

"Or?" A black van came speeding up behind, signaling it was going to overtake their sedan. Tig watched it quickly grow bigger in the rear mirror.

"Or you'll jam the player down my throat."

"That's right. Remember that."

In the other lane, the van had pulled level with Tig and Rat and slowed to match their speed. "Tig?" Rat sat up, his tone changing from sullen to alert in a single beat.

"I see it." Tig bared his teeth at the van in what he hoped resembled an innocuous smile. He couldn't see a fuckin' thing through its tinted windows.

The passenger window rolled down halfway, and a gloved hand poked out, gesturing in Tig's direction. The owner of the hand remained hidden in the shadows.

"What the fuck you want?" Tig muttered.

"I think they're telling us to pull over," Rat suggested nervously.

"No shit, Sherlock." Tig gave him an incredulous look. "People actually fall for this crap?"

Rat shrugged. "I guess."

"Alright, alright," Tig waved an acknowledgement at the van. No way would those assholes have gotten him to stop in normal circumstances—except it was all part of the plan. He eased up off the gas and steered them onto the shoulder, letting the sedan roll to a halt.

oOo

Tig woke slowly, a gradual drifting up from the murky depths of unconsciousness, until a world of pain slammed into him and he barely held in a moan. Keeping his eyes closed, he tried to remember what had happened that would have caused his head to hurt like a mother.

Those assholes had shot Rat!

A noise escaped him despite his attempt to keep quiet. They'd shot Rat and he'd gone down, lying motionless in the dirt next to the road. Then the bastards had pistol-whipped Tig, and his own world had gone black.

How long had he been out? Extending his senses, he took stock of his situation: he was lying on a cold metal surface and he could hear a car engine whining. So he was in the van. Smelled funky, too: of old food wrappers and gasoline. A hood had been pulled over his pounding head, cutting off his sight, and he tasted blood from where he'd bitten his tongue when they hit him. His hands were tied behind his back. Ankles, too. He gingerly tested his bonds, finding no give in them. Felt like those plastic straps the cops used. Shit, they'd trussed him up like a goddamn turkey for Thanksgiving.

But he was still alive and, as far as he could tell, whole. And his brothers wouldn't abandon him.

"He's awake."

Damn, him waking up evidently hadn't gone unnoticed. He'd hoped for more time to figure out his next move.

Five minutes later, by his count, the car took a turn, bumping over uneven ground and tossing him around like a sack of potatoes. He gritted his teeth as the hammering in his skull increased. They came to a stop, the engine shut down, doors slammed and, a few seconds after that, he heard the van's side door slide open. Next, the hood was yanked off his head. He blinked into the sudden glare of the setting sun, his kidnappers faceless silhouettes against a red sky.

"Hello, fellas," he sneered. A hard slap, the only response, made his ears ring. Someone yanked him upright by his collar, but the expensive dress shirt wasn't made to withstand such abuse. A button popped loose, rattling along the metal floor.

"What the hell?" A hard finger jabbed Tig in the chest but he barely felt it through the heavy kevlar protecting him. Someone else grabbed his shirt and tore it open. "Fuck. This asshole's wearing a vest!"

Tig sniggered. "You only notice that now?" Amateurs: in too much of a hurry to throw him into the van. *He* would've risked the handful of seconds it took for a quick pat-down so as to avoid surprises like the one he'd just given them. "Incompetent *and* ugly, ain't ya?" It earned him another smack.

Hands started pawing along the rest of his body, and Tig presumed they were searching for a wire. They found his burner phone, which they tossed into a

corner of the van after a cursory glance had confirmed it was a simple cell. "You a goddamn Fed?"

"Do I look like a Fed to you?" What were these assholes thinking? Tig spat out a mouthful of blood, not caring that it splattered onto the guy searching him.

"You fuckin'—."

"Cut it out," a second voice broke in. "We ain't got time for this. We'll take him to the house. We'll get our answers then."

The first man laughed harshly. "Buddy, you fucked with the wrong people." He yanked the hood down over Tig's head again and shoved him backwards. Tig fell awkwardly on his bound hands and he bit back a curse of pain.

"Likewise, asshole," he muttered. His words went unheeded as the van door was slammed shut. A minute later, they were moving again.

As time passed—Tig lost track after twenty minutes—despair crept up on him. Every minute and every mile was taking him further from Charming. Further from the rescue he'd been sure would happen as soon as Jarry and Chibs had figured out the scheme had worked and the sedan had been taken. And then the cavalry would show up, guided by the tracker.

Except the goddamn tracker was on the goddamn car. Not on Tig. And Tig was in a van. They wouldn't take him to the same place as the sedan, would they? Men like him didn't get that lucky.

Shit, the club would have no way to know where these pricks were going.

"Stupid asshole," he cursed out loud. All he'd had to do was let them take the car quietly. But no, dumb fuck that he was, he'd had to go shooting off at the mouth at the sight of a gun aimed at him and Rat. He couldn't even remember what he'd said. Something about them being pansy-ass cowards for killing helpless old people, which wouldn't have been so bad, except then he'd added a warning that they had no idea who was coming for them. When the gang's leader had demanded to know what he was talking about, Tig had laughed and spat in his face.

He choked out a bitter laugh. "Sorry, baby," he murmured, a quiet apology to Venus, who had loved him despite his faults. He was gonna be done for, soon as those fuckers understood that, no matter what they did to him, he wasn't gonna tell 'em anything.

o0o

Chibs' agitated brogue coming both out of her phone's speaker and from the hallway warned Jarry he was on his way an instant before the door to the radio room was slammed open. Stalking in behind him, Happy and Quinn wore equally furious expressions, though Jarry caught the fear underneath.

"Tell me you got them." Chibs was still snarling into his phone. His eyes blazed as his gaze swept the room and landed on her. "Those bastards took Tig."

"I heard you the first few times you said that." Jarry snapped her cell shut and put it away. "And yes, we got them. Why did Rat call you and not us?" Plan was to have the hidden radio tracker turned on remotely soon as the car got stolen, and then trace the vehicle to wherever the gang had set up shop. Thankfully, her surveillance guys had been on the ball and alerted her the moment the built-in GPS system went off line. A quick glance told Jarry the technician's gaze was glued to the dot on the screen in front of her that showed the position of the hidden tracker, the woman's attention perhaps a bit more focussed than the job required.

"Because they fuckin' took Tig!" Chibs shouted. "Are ye deaf or dimwitted?"

Jarry worked her jaw, fighting the urge to snap and tell him to mind his tone. She knew he was close to panicking, holding on to his self-control by a thread, and the pair with him likely weren't any cooler-headed. She needed to contain the situation, not make it worse by letting her own emotions rule her actions. She took a breath, holding it for several seconds before letting it out slowly.

"Ma'am?" One of her sheriffs poked his head into the room. His uniform was disheveled, shirt askew, indicating he'd tried to physically prevent the three Sons from entering. Jarry waved him off; he was lucky to be standing. "It's okay. And you—," she turned to Chibs, "need to calm down and tell me what you know." She carefully kept her tone reasonable.

He gulped in a deep breath. "Don't you fuckin' tell me—!"

Quinn laid a huge hand on Chibs' shoulder. "Easy, prez." His words were soft, meant for Chibs alone, and Jarry barely caught them over the hum of the computers and the radio static filling the small room. Thank God someone was using their brains.

Chibs blew out air, nostrils flaring, before he grimaced at her ruefully, which she took to mean an apology. It was all she was gonna get out of him at this point, so she nodded for him to go on. He drew in another shuddering breath. "Rat called," he said again, calmer this time, though he was visibly trembling with the effort of holding himself together. "Ten, fifteen minutes ago. Car got jacked. They shot him."

"Good God." Jarry's hand flew to her throat. So much for their flawless plan. "Is he—?"

"Vest took the bullet." Chibs quickly allayed her fears. "But he hit his head when he fell, knocked him out for a spell. When he woke up, both the car and Tig were gone."

"Any idea why they took Tig?" Kidnapping was a deviation from the gang's MO and the vests had been a preventive measure considered overkill by the guys. She thanked her lucky stars she'd stood her ground. The kevlar had done its job, but they might have lost Tig after all.

"No clue." Chibs rolled his shoulders. "Rat said Tig mighta said something to provoke 'em."

"Goddammit," Jarry swore. "Stupid fool."

"Aye."

"This them?" Happy was leaning over the shoulder of the unhappy-looking technician, pointing a finger at the dot on her screen.

"Yes. That's the tracker. So we got this under control." She turned back to Chibs and Quinn. "We'll get him back. Soon as we know where—."

"Tig could be dead by then," Chibs gritted out through clenched teeth.

Best not to remind him Tig could be dead already. "Chibs, we need to know where they're processing the cars." Patterson had been very clear about that: she wanted to take down the entire operation, not just the dumb schmucks doing the actual carjacking or the truck driver transporting the stolen vehicles. And for that, they had to follow the bait car to its destination.

"I don't give a goddamn fuck about your case." Chibs lost his hold on his temper again. "Jackie's not been in the ground three months. I'm not gonna lose another brother."

Jarry crossed her arms over her chest. This whole operation was going FUBAR. And if she couldn't reel in the Sons, it would get so much worse. She hadn't forgotten what kind of carnage Samcro on an avenging rampage could bring. "We don't even know if they're taking him to the same place as the car."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" Chibs stopped pacing and whirled toward her. His hands tightened into fists. "What can we do?" He forced his hands loose and rans his palms over his head. "Phone." He jabbed a finger at the bank of surveillance monitors. "Tig's phone. Can you track it?"

"Can we?" Jarry looked at the technician.

The woman gave a reluctant shake of the head. "Not unless it's got a tracker pre-installed."

A triple snort from the three Sons was Jarry's answer before she could even open her mouth to ask. She allowed a rueful smile to briefly tug at her lips. Of course. Guys like the Sons went through burner phones the way other people did clean underwear for a reason.

"Uh, the phone company could help," the tech offered up hesitantly. "They can triangulate through their towers, or use the GPS, if it's got that."

"Good idea." The phone company wouldn't release that data simply because Jarry asked nicely, however. "I'll talk to Patterson, get a warrant."

The hope on Chibs' face vanished soon as she mentioned the warrant. "Ain't got time for that. *Tig* ain't got the time."

Jarry threw up her hands. "Shit, Filip, what else do you want me to do?"

"Don't bother doin' anything." Chibs' jaw was clamped tight, a muscle twitching. "We'll handle it. Hap? Quinn?" He turned on his heel, expecting his guys to fall in.

Happy was fishing for his cellphone. "I'll call Colletti."

Jarry filed away the name for later as she followed them out of the surveillance room. "What are you gonna do?"

Chibs threw her a look across his shoulder as if the answer should be obvious. "Whatever we need to." Having a plan, no matter how rough, had obviously allowed him to get himself back under control, but Jarry wasn't sure she liked his current cold determination any better than the frustrated panic of a few minutes ago.

"You can't kill 'em." She quickened her pace to get in front of the three of them. "Listen, Scotty. You promised: no vigilantism in my quadrant." If she lost them on that now, Patterson would tighten the reins and not allow her to deal with Charming or the Sons her way. *Hope you know what you're doing, lieutenant.* The DA's warning echoed in her mind. "At least give me *Tig*'s number, let me try."

"You go get your guys, lieutenant, and I'll get mine." Chibs stopped and held her gaze. "I'm *not* losing *Tig*, Althea." He brushed past her, marching on, the thud of

the three pairs of biker boots echoing through the police station.

"Chibs!" she called after him. He ignored her. Crap. She planted her hands on her hips, watching the reapers on their backs file out the door. Best thing to do now was her job and get to those assholes soon as possible; she simply didn't have the manpower to keep an eye on the Sons and go after that damned truck at the same time. Though she could always toss Chibs' ass in jail, keep him out of the way....

She huffed out a laugh; he'd never forgive her if she did that. No, she'd have to let things play out and hope for the best.

She turned back to the surveillance room. She should get someone to check out that guy they'd mentioned, Colletti. And perhaps she could get a hold of Tig's number another way. Brooke at Scoops? No, the twitchy guy at T-M, Chucky: he'd have the number and he'd be easier to convince to give it up than Brooke. Then she could inform Patterson—not a conversation she was looking forward to—and ask for the warrant so she could try to locate Tig before Chibs found him.

And if she failed, if Chibs got to Tig before she did? She shivered. She could only pray he'd keep his head. If he didn't, her career being in shambles was gonna be the least of her problems.

oOo

Early the next morning, Jarry received the call she'd been both dreading and waiting for. "Comin' in," was all Chibs said, without so much as a hello. After he'd stormed out of the sheriff's station the night before, she'd tried calling him repeatedly, each time getting his voice mail. "Twenty minutes." He'd hung up before she could ask any questions.

She waited on the stoop, pacing in the soft light of the rising sun, sipping from a styrofoam cup of bitter coffee. Way it was making her heart thunder in her chest, she should've laid off the caffeine hours ago. But it had been a goddamn long night, and she was afraid it'd be a lot longer before it was over.

At least they'd gotten the thugs and the location where they processed the stolen sedans. Soon as the bait car had stopped moving and its GPS coordinates had been translated into an industrial area outside of Carson City, she'd given the order to move in, not wanting to risk waiting, in case Tig was still with the car. With the assistance of the Carson City sheriffs, they'd arrested a handful of sullen mechanics and found two more of the stolen sedans—one partly stripped and the other being prepped with a set of new tags—as well as a cupboard full of records explaining where the gang had shipped the vehicles or car parts, for the Feds to investigate further. From a law enforcement viewpoint, the raid had been a roaring success.

They had, however, found neither hide nor hair of Tig. Nor of the black van Rat had said the carjackers were using to pull people over. Patterson had cursed when Jarry had told her what had happened and ordered her to "find him, fast." The peace in Sanwa was too delicate to withstand much bloodshed, whether the carjackers were outsiders or a local crew.

And Jarry had tried everything she could think of since then. But by the time she'd pried a location for Tig's phone out of the phone company and sent a team to a house in Galt, the place was empty, though overturned furniture and smears of blood signaled a struggle had taken place. Not as much blood as she would have expected; she took some comfort from that. But after Chibs delivered his brusque announcement that he was on his way in, she'd begun picturing execution-style murders, shallow graves in the desert, and Patterson demanding her head on a platter.

Her ears picked up the faraway rumble of approaching motorcycles. She crumpled the empty coffee cup and lobbed it in a trash can, preparing herself for whatever shit was coming for her.

Three bikes rolled around the corner and into the police station lot, followed by a black van with tinted windows. Chibs was leading the small convoy and Happy and Quinn were still with him, while the black Son was at the wheel of the van. She shielded her eyes against the low morning sun. Not a trace of Tig or Rat.

Chibs kicked down the stand on his bike and took off his helmet. He snuck her a glance, giving her no clue of what had gone down, as he walked over to the van, swung open the side door and hauled out a large garbage bag. Carrying it over to her, he dumped it at her feet. It took a second to settle, suggesting a collection of loose, heavy objects inside.

"What's this?" She toed the bag warily. "Heads? Body parts?" Christ, she hoped not. No way she'd explain that to Patterson.

"Nope." Chibs held onto the edges of his cut, his expression stern. "Shoes."

"What?" She blinked at him, not sure she'd heard right.

Chibs lost his composure and broke into a grin, his teeth white in a face coated with road dirt. "Picked up four of the bastards. Left 'em at Willow Creek Reservoir, end of the gravel road. Took their shoes."

Her jaw hit the floor. "They're... alive?"

"Aye." His grin widened, cheeks dimpling. "Bet they'll be grateful for a ride outta

the desert." He turned to walk back to his bike.

"Wait." Despite her caffeine intake, Jarry's sleep-deprived mind was having trouble catching up. She'd been so sure.... "You mean, you didn't kill them?"

"What part of *alive* don't ye understand, lass?" Chibs winked at her.

"Jesus." Jarry let out a laugh, finally daring to breathe. "And Tig?" She could guess the answer, but she had to ask.

Again, Chibs smiled. "Recuperating in the arms of the lovely Miss Venus." He reached his bike and slung a leg over the seat.

"Hey, Chibs?" He paused in strapping on his helmet. "Thank you."

He tossed her a mock salute. "I aim to protect and serve, sheriff."

Shaking her head to herself, Jarry watched T.O. jump onto the bike behind Happy and the four Sons roared off, leaving the van behind. She grabbed the bag—it was heavier than it looked—and lugged it inside, calling out orders for someone to take charge of the van and send an arrest team out to the reservoir, while making mental notes about just what to tell Patterson.

She'd been right that her day was far from over. But she'd been wrong about how bad it'd all turn out. Dumping the bag onto an unsuspecting deputy's desk, she let out a huff. Christ, she'd never been more glad to have been wrong.

oOo

Tig felt every one of his fifty-plus years as he limped up the stairs to Venus' second floor apartment. He was getting too old to have the crap beaten out of him on a regular basis.

The door opened as he reached the top step. "Oh, Alexander." Venus' voice betrayed her horror. "Poor angel."

"I'm fine, baby, I'm fine," he assured her, through a split lip with the blood long since dried on his chin. He shoulda cleaned up on the drive over with Montez, rather than scare the crap outta her by turning up looking like shit. Though, all in all, he'd gotten lucky. Those guys could've done with a few lessons from him or Hap on how to make someone talk. Dumb fucks, thinking smacking him around a bit would get them any results.

All the same, relief had washed over him when his ears had picked up the rumble of approaching Harleys, a sound lost on the bastards who'd grabbed him until it was too late. In the past, he'd never given a shit if he lived or died: his

life as an outlaw had been too dangerous to allow concerns about his personal safety make him hesitate. Now? Now he cared very much. And he had *not* wanted to die. Venus deserved better than being left to mourn over his sorry carcass.

Snorting through his nose at the memory, he slung an arm around Venus, letting her take some of his weight.

She went on fussing over him as she led him inside and to a chair, and examined his bruises with featherlight touches, clucking like a mother hen. "My poor darling."

He closed his eyes, leaning into her light touch as she combed his hair with her fingers. This was as close to heaven as an asshole like him could hope to get, in this life or the next, and he didn't want to lose it.

"And look at this fine shirt, all torn and stained."

Venus helped him out of the offending item. It was missing most of its buttons and crusty with dried blood, and Tig couldn't care less the damned thing was ruined. He barked a laugh, grimacing at the pain extracting himself from it caused his bruised ribs. "Christ, darlin', I swear sometimes you're more of a chick than the ones born with tits."

She smiled happily. "Thank you, Alexander. That's so very kind of you." She held the tatters of the shirt up to his face. "This color makes your eyes come out so prettily. I like it. It's a real shame, the way it's been treated."

Tig blinked. "You shittin' me?"

Venus dropped the ruined shirt on the floor, shaking her head sadly. "I would not dare do such a thing, my sweet. Please, stay here a minute." She stepped away and headed into the bathroom. He heard water running and the soft clatter of bottles. She returned a few minutes later carrying an armful of first aid supplies.

"Why you got all that stuff around the house?"

"Ehhh." She fidgeted with the materials. "A girl like me should be prepared for any eventualities."

Tig snorted. "Ain't that a boy scouts thing?" He poked through the collection of cotton balls, bottles of antiseptic and boxes of butterfly bandages that she'd spread on the table. "Seriously. What's with all this? You rob a pharmacy or something?"

Venus pressed her lips together in a thin line and sighed. "Sometimes my dates, um, lose their cool during the, well, proceedings."

"Shit." Tig's head whipped up. "They hit you?" He was halfway out of the chair before he realized it.

Venus' hands on his shoulders pressed him down again. "Don't worry, my angel. Doesn't happen often, and I'm always careful."

Still upset for her sake, Tig allowed her to nudge him back into the chair. "You're with me now. Tell me if that happens again, and I'll take care of it."

"I know you will, angel." She smiled. "Let me take care of you today, and I'll have you back to your handsome self in no time."

She poured antiseptic onto a cotton ball and reached out to dab it on a cut near his left eye, but Tig stopped her with a hand on her wrist. "You meant what you said, about the shirt? That you like it? I mean, it's fuckin' *purple*."

She cupped his cheek with her free hand. "Purple is a beautiful color. It's rare and precious. The color of nobility and compassion, of gentle souls and free spirits."

As he let her voice and all her amazing words wash over him, Tig shivered. "Oh God, baby, the things that come out of your mouth...." He could listen to her talk all day.

"Dearest Alexander." She leaned toward him and kissed his forehead.

He inhaled her sweet scent, which always calmed the noise in his head. "I can get a new shirt." Brooke or Winsome would know where it had come from; they could buy him another one.

"You'd do that?" Venus pulled back, looking down at him. "For me?"

Tig nuzzled her cleavage. "For you, baby, anything." He'd do whatever was in his power to make her happy.

Including wearing fuckin' purple shirts for the rest of his life, if that's what it took.

oOo

Four days after they'd taken down Tig's kidnappers and left them shoeless at the Willow Creek Reservoir for Jarry to collect, Chibs had the club gather at Scoops for church. The high, happy voices of children drifted up from below, the

occasional burst of adult laughter mixed in. A good sound to hear, sitting in the president's chair and waiting for his brothers to take their seats. Once people had gotten over their fear of visiting an ice cream shop that had last made the news because a grenade had wrecked it, the home-made ice cream was proving too much of an enticement for them to stay away. Brooke was working long enough hours that Rat had started complaining.

"So, where we at?" Chibs gestured for Tig to start.

"We heard from the cops. The DA reckons she'll have those scumbags locked up for a very long time."

Tig's face still showed a collection of bruises running the gamut from purple to green to yellow. They clashed with the pale purple shirts he'd continued to wear for reasons Chibs couldn't fathom, even though, watching Winsome unwrap the shirt a week ago, Tig had groused, "Jesus, you got me a fuckin' *purple* shirt. You think I'm a nigger?" At which T.O. had cleared his throat loudly, and Tig had given him a blink. "Not you, bro. Talkin' about the ones in Oaktown." Last thing Chibs would have expected was for Tig to give Winsome a wad of cash, and tell her to buy him a half dozen more of those "fuckin' purple shirts". Maybe the pricks had hit him harder over the head than anyone had thought, and Tig's skull had finally cracked.

He shook off the thought. "Serves the bastards right." Patterson had already, through Jarry, expressed her reluctant gratitude for the MC's help—on the down low, of course; she could hardly be seen rubbing shoulders with a bunch of outlaw thugs.

"Still thinkin' we shoulda put a cap in those fuckers," Hap groused from Chibs' right.

"Well, we didn't." Chibs was gonna have to have a private chat with his SAA, and soon. Happy needed to figure out a way to be okay with Samcro's new direction, and if he couldn't—or didn't want to—they'd all be better off if he transferred to another charter more to his liking. Chibs would miss him something fierce, if it came to that—bloodlust aside, Hap was a damned good man to have around—but he couldn't risk the direction the club was taking for one patch.

"What else?" he asked, for the time being not wanting to spend further energy on Happy's discontent.

"Chucky and Oswald've been crunching numbers at T-M," Montez offered when nobody else spoke. "Chucky's pretty confident they can make it work."

"And repair business is slowly picking up, too," T.O. added. "Had a couple

people come in askin' for tune-ups and shit."

Chibs nodded, pleased. As he had hoped, their good deed had put the town in a friendlier mood toward Samcro. "I'll give Wendy another call, see how she feels about it." She'd likely agree, having already said she'd be okay with anything that was good for the boys.

"Lyla says she's sold another three titles to the distributor," Rat put in next. His words were greeted with catcalls and laughter.

"What?" Tig asked. "*Fat Asses In Your Face Seventeen?*" Another round of laughter went up.

"Nah." Rat smirked. "I think this is *Robohooker 8*."

Listening to the banter, Chibs smiled. Jax's course was proving a profitable one: Red Woody had done well from the beginning, Scoops was turning into another success, and all signs indicated T-M was gonna work out, too. Only issue left was—.

"Diosa," Quinn muttered, as if he could read Chibs' thoughts. A groan went around the table and Rat slouched down in his chair.

"Aye." Diosa was becoming a pain in the arse that Chibs didn't need. Every other day, one crisis or other was demanding his attention, from cat fights to the bar running out of booze to drunk patrons smashing furniture. Thankfully, they'd gained some credit with the sheriff's office, or the cops would've shut the place down already.

"Should get a patch to hang out during business hours," T.O. suggested. "Having rockers around makes people behave and shuts that shit down before it starts." T.O. would know; the Bastards had run plenty of pussy in Lodi.

"Nero never had any trouble," Rat mused out loud.

Tig huffed. "Latin pimp ain't comin' back, bro."

No, Nero had made that very clear: he was out of the escort business and happily playing farmer in Norco. But maybe he'd be willing to give them some pointers. If that didn't work, Chibs would have to talk to Alvarez and see if the Mayans wanted to buy Samcro's share before the whole place went to shite.

"Good idea," he told T.O. "Set up a schedule." Though he loathed taking manpower from the garage at this point, he'd rather try that than give the Mayans a foothold in Charming, after all the pints of blood the club had shed in the past to prevent that very thing from happening.

He looked around the table, taking in the faces of his brothers, the men Jax had left in his care. "Looks we're doin' a'right, lads." Heads bopped, including Hap's, though he only lowered it by a fraction. "Ain't been easy, and we ain't done yet. But we're makin' good on our promise to Jackie." He raised his eyes briefly to the pictures on the wall across from him, from the corner of his eye catching several of his brothers doing the same. "Thank you, boys. Couldn'ta done it without ye."

He'd never wanted the president's flash. But now that he wore it, he'd do his damndest to live up to it. He was glad to discover that, perhaps, he wasn't the total failure he'd feared he'd be.

He brought the gavel down. "Let's go get a drink."

oOo

Jarry toed the door to her apartment shut and loosened the tie of her dress uniform. Tossing her keys into the bowl near the door, she walked deeper into the apartment. It had been three damned long weeks, filled with paperwork and debriefs, since they'd taken down the carjackers.

"Aah, I love me a woman in uniform." Chibs popped out of the kitchen, carrying two open bottles of beer. He offered one to her while his gaze ran up and down her from top to bottom.

"Jesus, you scared the crap outta me." Jarry accepted the beer and took a long gulp. It had been a thirsty morning. "How'd you get in?" They might be having sex on a regular basis, but they hadn't reached the level of her giving him a key yet. Seemed he didn't need one.

He shrugged, not answering the question. "Your thing, it go a'right?"

"Yeah." Patterson had written her up for a commendation for the neat way she'd wrapped up the case. "Lots of press. DA loved it."

Chibs chuckled. "Aye. Bet she did."

"You break into my place just to ask me about my day?"

He grinned smugly, toasting her with his bottle.

Taking a fresh pull from her own beer, Jarry cocked her head. "So, uniforms turn you on, huh?"

"Aye." The corners of his mouth curved up further. "'Course, I like my women

better out of 'em." He winked. "Bed or squad car, don't care."

"Ri-ight." Jarry laughed. He was never gonna let her forget that, was he? Not that she cared; given the same circumstances, she'd do the exact same thing again. She took another drink from her bottle, before putting it on the table. Watching her walk toward him, he got rid of his own beer without looking where he was setting it down. Soon as she was within arm's reach, he grabbed her and yanked her closer, starting in on the buttons of her shirt with eager fingers. "Easy, Scotty," she warned as he struggled to get the little nubs through the holes and one of his rings caught. "You have any idea what a dress shirt costs these days?"

"Don't give a shite." He'd undone the buttons and was pushing her collar aside far enough to be able to nip at her throat.

"But I do." She tilted her head back, baring her throat further, her hands busy pushing the cut off of his shoulders. She dropped it to the floor and he grumbled under his breath, even as he backed her toward the bedroom, tugging her shirt from her pants and dragging it down her arms as they went.

Her hands shifted to his belt, undoing the buckle, popping the button of his jeans and yanking down the zipper. "Hey, Scotty?" Her fingers slipped inside his jeans, cupping his hard cock and squeezing lightly, and his "Yeh?" came out on a intake of air. "Thank you. For, you know."

He lifted his head from nuzzling her neck. "Helping you out and not killing those bastards?"

She stroked him, and his hips bucked into her. "Uh-huh." Today's ceremony would've been very different if he'd left her a heap of bodies instead of a bag of shoes.

"You already said that, luv." He palmed her breasts, teasing the nipples to hard nubs through the lace of her bra and it was her turn to let out an involuntary noise.

"I know. I also know that must've been difficult for you. For your guys." She removed her hand from his pants and helped him out of the leather jacket he insisted on wearing under the cut.

Some of the playfulness left him. "Aye. Used to be—." He gave a shake of his head, not finishing whatever he'd been going to say.

Jarry reckoned she could make a pretty good guess. "Hence, thank you."

"Didn't do it for you." Chibs was shoving at her uniform pants now, until they puddled around her ankles. She kicked them off, along with the loafers that

went with the uniform, thankful she wasn't wearing boots.

"Oh?" She allowed him to push her back until she flopped onto the bed, clad in nothing but her bra and panties. "Who'd you do it for, then?"

He crawled onto the bed after her. "Me." He braced over her on hands and knees, eyes hungrily zooming in on her chest. "If I wreck yer career," he lifted one hand and undid the front clasp of her bra, "they'd replace ye with some dunce." He lowered his head and sucked a nipple into his mouth and she arched her back, her hands fumbling for a moment as she worked his jeans down over his hips. "And I'd hate having to break in a new sheriff." The words were barely intelligible against her skin.

"Christ." She slapped at his shoulders, laughing. "You're such an asshole, you know that?"

He flashed her his dimples. "Aye. And ye like me for it."

She smiled, admitting the truth without words. She did like her Scottish asshole. Better than she'd expected to. Definitely more than she should.

She tugged on his hair—it was long enough to get a good grip—to direct his mouth lower. "So, uniform's gone. Get to work, Scotty."

Rumbling a laugh against her belly, Chibs did as he was told.

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