2456 Short Cop, Tall Cop  
  
When Sunny was informed that his new partner was a freshly pгomoted detective returning to work after an extended maternity leave — and one being pushed by the higher-ups for PR reasons, no less — he had imagined a comely woman who was well-suited to push the narrative of family values and nurturing care.  
  
A maternal figure to soften the harsh image of the unpopular Mirage PD.  
  
That woman standing in front of him, however…  
  
Was so thoroughly not what he had imagined that he was stunned for a brief moment.  
  
'H—huh?'  
  
First of all, she wasn't just standing there… she was positively towering above him, as well as above the rest of the policemen gathered on the muddy shore. One of her ancestors had to have married a troll, or maybe an ogrе — some kind of a mountain giant, for sure. Otherwise, he could not explain her staggering height.  
  
Despite her questionable ancestry, though, the woman did not look like a troll. Instead... she looked like a supermodel. In fact, she was absolutely stunning, with a captivating face and a figure so gorgeous that it bordered on being deadly.  
  
And as if that was not enough, her well-proportioned athletic body was perfectly sculpted, with lean muscles that put even Sunny to shame. The woman was wearing an unassuming athleisure outfit and a raincoat, but he could tell how terribly in shape she was.  
  
It was as if a goddess had stepped down from a painting.  
  
Sunny blinked a couple of times, slowly reevaluating her opinions of his rookie partner.  
  
'Looks great on a poster, huh?'  
  
He might have been a little wrong about the new captain.  
  
The man knew what he was talking about.  
  
Frowning deeply, Sunny raised a hand and beckoned the woman to lean down. She glanced at him with amusement, then obliged, hiding a paper bag she had been holding behind her back.  
  
"What?"  
  
When her face was close enough to hear whisper, Sunny said loudly:  
  
"Do I look like a civilian to you, moron?! I am investigating the body!"  
  
With that, he pulled out his badge from under the jacket and shoved it up under her nose.  
  
She easily dodged the badge and looked at it in confusion. Then, the gaze of her stunning hazel eyes shifted back to Sunny, full of disbelief.  
  
She seemed genuinely dumbfounded.  
  
"Wha… you? You're the Devil Detective? But you're… you're tiny!"  
  
Sunny closed his eyes for a second and took a deep breаth.  
  
Behind his bombshell partner, there was a choir of frightened gasps.  
  
"Oh no, oh no… we're all done for."  
  
"He's going to kill her now, isn't he? "  
  
"No! Not Detective Effie!"  
  
"Should we call another ambulance?"  
  
Sunny exhaled slowly through gritted teeth, then opened his eyes and looked at his supposed partner.  
  
"Yes, I am. And you… what's your name?"  
  
The woman seemed to have regained her composure. She straightened, saluted, and then gave him a brilliant smile.  
  
"It's Effie! I'll be in your care, then!"  
  
With that, she offered him her hand for a handshake.  
  
Sunny stared at the offered hand for a few moments, then turned away and concentrated on the corpse.  
  
"Shut the hell uр and don't get in my way, Effie. Stay where you are and observe silently."  
  
She lingered, then retracted her hand and sighed.  
  
"So grumpy…"  
  
Ignoring the woman, Sunny knelt near the corpse and studied its hideous, mutilated fаce. It had not been damaged too much by the water, but both of the dead man's eyes were missing…  
  
That was the Nihilist's signature.  
  
Each of the seven victims had been killed in a unique way, but all of them were missing their eyes. The sick bastard took them for an unknown reason.  
  
The prevailing theory was that he was collecting them as trophies.  
  
Sunny was studying the body intently, a little thankful that he did not have to hear retching noises behind him. He had fully expected the rookie detective to become violently sick at the sight of the Nihilist's latest victim, but the recently promoted mom detective seemed to be taking the hideous corpse in stride.  
  
No, actually…  
  
There were strange sounds coming from behind him, after all.  
  
Turning around in displeasure, Sunny opened his mouth to say something… and froze for the second time today.  
  
His unasked-for partner was standing where he had told her to stand. Her paper bag was open, and she was holding a half-finished sandwich in one hand, chewing with enthusiasm.  
  
Sunny stared at her in disbelief.  
  
"You're… eating?"  
  
His partner grinned sheepishly.  
  
"Oh… sorry! I have a swift metabolism. So I snack a lot."  
  
'What the hell is wrong with this woman?'  
  
Sunny stared at her for a while longer, then shook his head and turned back to the corpse.  
  
"Bon appétit, I guess."  
  
As he reached forward to move the dead man's head a little, the woman asked:  
  
"What are you looking for, anyway? The cause of death is obviously strangulation. Those bruises on his neck are from the killer's fingers. The guy seems quite athletic, so to strangle him this way… takes a lot of strength. The Nihilist usually works with blades, right? I don't think he ever used brute strength before. Can it be a copycat?"  
  
Sunny grimaced, then let out a long sigh.  
  
"Did I not say to be quiet?"  
  
He continued exploring it carefully.  
  
"...I am looking for anything I can find. And it's not a copycat. The eyes were removed with the same surgical precision, which is not something just anyone can do. Plus, we never disclosed this detail to the press. And that bastard does not work with blades. He works with whatever is at hand. His MO is constantly changing, almost as if he likes to be inventive."  
  
His partner whistled.  
  
"Are we sure that the Nihilist is a man, by the way? I thought there were no clues."  
  
Sunny remained silent for a while.  
  
"Not sure. But statistically, most serial killers are men. And… who said that there were no clues?"  
  
At that moment, he was holding one of the dead man's hands and checking under the sleeve.  
  
Suddenly, Sunny grew motionless.  
  
"Shit."  
  
His partner seemed to have finished her sandwich. Coming closer, she looked down over his shoulder and asked in a curious tone:  
  
"What is it?"  
  
There, on the dead man's pale skin…  
  
A little black snake was tattooed, coiling around his arm.  
  
Sunny winced.  
  
"It's a gang tattoo. This guy used to run with the Black Snakes."