2458 Black Snake Gang  
  
  
The car had left the more prosperous part of the city and entered the poorer parts. The buildings were older and more ramshackle here, the streets were narrower, and the people were dressed in cheaper clothes. The terrain of the city was uneven, littered with hills and mountains — more so here than in the center.  
  
As a result, some of the sloping streets were covered in rushing water, with deep puddles collecting at the bottom. Driving through these puddles in Sunny's old car would have been a problem, but he knew the complicated labyrinth of streets like his own five fingers, avoiding the worst of it with ease.  
  
That fact had not escaped Effie. She looked around with interest, then asked:  
  
"Where are we going, anyway?"  
  
He shrugged.  
  
"Where else? We are going to the Black Snake lair."  
  
She seemed more amused than frightened by the prospect. Usually, a woman as attractive as her would have been wise to avoid entering a vicious gang's territory… but then again, this bombshell in particular seemed better suited to cracking skulls than most thugs were, so maybe they were the ones who had to be nervous.  
  
"Just like that? Wait, how do you even… ah, right. You worked in the Organized Crime Division before, right?"  
  
Sunny gave her a sideways glance.  
  
"Yes. Something like that."  
  
He lingered for a few moments, then sighed and said:  
  
"Gangs were all over the city not too long ago — even ten years ago, they controlled these parts of Mirage City entirely. A single day rarely passed without someone ending up dead, not to mention all the vile crap going on in the shadows. The cops were either on the payroll or too afraid to do anything, and those who did try tended to be disposed of swiftly."  
  
Sunny smiled crookedly, remembering his youth.  
  
"Times change, though. The political climate shifted, and being tough on crime became a rallying cry for the ruling party. So, the Police Department was cleansed… mind you, it wasn't cleansed of corruption. The corrupt bastards being paid by the criminals were just swapped out for corrupt bastards being paid by the politicians. Well, and a few capable people managed to get themselves into key positions in all the chaos."  
  
He fell silent for a while.  
  
"Captain Jet was one of them — although she wasn't a captain back then, just yet. Actually... I only ended up becoming a cop because of her. Then, somehow, we ended up being partners in the Organized Crime Division, with her spearheading the crackdown on the gangs. Those were… intense years, to say the least."  
  
Effie chuckled.  
  
"Captain Jet, huh? Wait, where is she now?"  
  
Sunny did not answer for a while, his knuckles turning white on the wheel.  
  
Eventually, he said in an even tone:  
  
"She's dead."  
  
That was one of the reasons for his sorry state.  
  
The main reason, really.  
  
...And here he was, side by side with a new partner.  
  
Sunny looked at the rookie detective somberly.  
  
'I'm not responsible for her.'  
  
Putting this woman in front of the cameras might be a great PR move for the Mirage PD… but it also painted a target on her back. She had to know it, but she was still here — so, it was her own decision.  
  
He had nothing to do with it.  
  
Turning back to the road, he said:  
  
"Well, anyway. Most of the gangs were demolished back then, and those that remain are merely shadows of their former selves. They know their place, doing a bit of dirty business that everyone takes part in, but pгetends that it's the most abhorrent thing in the world publicly. Others went clean and are now managing slimy, but perfectly legal, businesses. The Black Snakes, though…"  
  
He frowned.  
  
"The Black Snake is the only gang that is still somewhat of a real deal. So, when we get there…"  
  
Effie grinned.  
  
"Oh! Let's do the good cop, bad cop routine! I always wanted to! Can I be the bad cop? Please?"  
  
Sunny gave her a dubious look.  
  
Had she really graduated from the Academy at the top of her class?  
  
Well… he could easily imagine all the examiners being too distracted drooling at the sight of this particular cadet to give her objective marks…  
  
He pursed his lips and shrugged.  
  
"Sure. You can be the bad cop."  
  
The car came to a halt in front of a seedy building. It was not what one would imagine when thinking about a gang's headquarters, though — the lair of the Black Snakes was not a bar, a night club, or an illegal casino. Instead, it was an old, seemingly rundown boxing gym.  
  
Climbing out of the car, Sunny waded through the rain and approached the front door. There was a muscular man in a training suit hiding under the canopy there, smoking somberly.  
  
When he saw Sunny, the man's eyes widened a little. He stood there frozen for a moment, then silently threw away his cigarette and disappeared inside.  
  
Sunny picked up the cigarette, tossed it into the nearby trash bin, and followed. His rookie paгtner was on his heels, looking around curiously.  
  
'She's way too relaxed.'  
  
The woman was either too confident in herself or had a screw loose.  
  
Entering the boxing gym, they saw a scattering of rough-looking men. Some were busy abusing punching bags, some were playing cards at a plastic table, some were watching two muscular thugs having a spar in the ring.  
  
…Some were already moving behind Sunny and Effie, locking the door.  
  
He frowned slightly when he heard the sound of the bolt locking into place.  
  
One of the men at the table looked back, then smiled and rose from his seat. The guard was standing nearby, having already reported something to him.  
  
The man walked over to stand in front of Sunny and Effie. He stared at the former coldly, then shifted his gaze and leered at the latter.  
  
"Hey there, sweetie…"  
  
Effie smiled, too, then suddenly put on a furious expression and bellowed:  
  
"Listen up, assholes! We're from Mirage City PD. I am Detective Wow, and this is my partner, Detective Meh. We are going to ask you some questions, and if you bastards do not spill your guts… well, then, do not blame us for spilling them for you!"  
  
The crowd of thugs was completely surrounding them by then, glaring at the two cops with an unrestrained hostility.  
  
The man standing right in front of them remained silent for a few moments, then looked back at Sunny and raised an eyebrow.  
  
"Hey to you, too… rat. I must say, you have some nerve showing up here, rat. And you brought your girlfriend, too… what's up with her, anyway?"  
  
Sunny stared at him silently for a second or two, then shrugged.  
  
"She's playing the bad cop, you see."  
  
The man laughed.  
  
"Oh? Really? Wait, are you the good cop then, rat?"  
  
Sunny lingered a little, then slowly shook his head.  
  
"No…"  
  
With that, he calmly delivered a vicious punch to the thug's face, sending the man crashing to the ground with a torrent of blood spilling from his broken nose.  
  
Sunny looked at the surrounding thugs coldly.  
  
"...I'm the worse cop."