

This story uses characters and locations based on the Gunslinger Girl manga written by Yu Aida and published in monthly shōnen magazine Dengeki Daioh. The characters of Kara and Michele are original to myself.

"Christenings"

A Gunslinger Girl Original Story by Kiskaloo

"Now *this* is more like it!" Kara Michelle Pagani exclaimed as she powered the Ferrari F430 out of Turn 4 and accelerated toward Turn 5 of the Circuito di Fiorano, the private test track owned by Ferrari. She risked quick glances to the sides, trying to locate the 150m, 100m and 50m braking zones. The speedometer touched 170km/h as the car crossed the 100m sign and Kara stomped on the brake pedal. It took a moment for the ceramic-composite brakes to warm to operating temperature, but when they did they bit with the force of a brick wall and Kara was thrown forward into the four-point harness.

Her left hand quickly pulled back on the paddle shifter behind the steering wheel four times and she felt the sequential transmission drop down four gears in rapid succession, each gear change taking only 150 milliseconds - even with her augmented reflexes, she could not match such a shift time. She trail-braked into the sharp 180-degree Turn 6 and started to apply power just past the apex. The throttle was a bit jumpy so she depended on the traction control and electronic differential to help lay down the power to maximum effect. She had wanted to set the *manettino* rotary switch on the steering wheel to CST to disable the traction and stability controls, but Michele had overruled her and forced her to set it for the next-higher Race setting.

As soon as the back end snapped into place and straightened-out, she nailed the throttle, her right hand triggering up-shifts just before the engine hit its 8500rpm red-line to extract all 490 horses. Where the V12 in the 456 M roared like a lion, the 4.3l V8 in the F430 shrieked like a banshee as the car dashed to Turn 8, a 90-degree left-hander with another straight that led to the wavy Turns 9-12 complex, all of which she took as close to the limit as she dared. As she came out of Turn 12 onto the main straight, she hammered the throttle again willing the car past the 225km/h she'd hit at the end of the straight on her first lap.

In the passenger seat, her handler Michele Pagani crossed himself.

Earlier that morning...

"This is what goes for casual nowadays?" Michele asked, skeptically, as Kara came down the hall towards him.

The night before, Michele had informed her that they were taking a trip in the morning. When she went on a mission with her handler, she often wore a business suit and skirt, though she traded the standard high-heeled shoes for knee boots as, her cybernetic enhancements notwithstanding, it was damn hard to run in heels. One advantage of this uniform was, with some selective application of make-up, she could easily pass as 20 or 21 instead of her actual 17 which made her cover as his aide believable.

Instead of a uniform, Michele had told her to dress casually so she chose a variation of a Japanese *sērā-fuku* school uniform: a white blouse and loosely knotted burgundy tie with blue stripes, the blouse was tucked into a pleated plaid skirt that ended just above the knees and black leather boots that ended a bit below the knee. A black leather belt with two rows of steel grommets was looped around her waist as an accessory.

Kara's face fell. "You don't like it," she said.

"I didn't say that," Michele replied. "Though clearly I am not up on the latest school uniform fashions for young ladies."

"Petra helped me pick it out when all of us girls went shopping," Kara noted.

"Ah, that explains it right there," Michele deadpanned.

"I'll go change," Kara said dejectedly, turning to start back to her dorm room.

"Kara Michelle," Michele called out, stopping her.

"You look fine."

"Your face says you think otherwise," she noted.

"What I am thinking is the old Italian proverb that God's revenge on a father is a teenage daughter," he smiled. "It's going to be hard enough

for you to fight the PRF without also having to fight off all the young men who will be trying to get a date with you.”

Did cyborgs even date? he wondered.

“Now come on, we need to get to the airport.”

Kara gave him a smile and fell into step behind him.

An Agency car delivered them to Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino where they caught an Alitalia flight to Guglielmo Marconi Airport in Bologna. There they took a hired car down the A1 Autostrada to the municipality of Fiorano Modenese and continued on to just before the border with Maranello. When they passed from Bologna Province into Modena Province Kara assumed they were going to the Ferrari factory in Maranello. When they drove through Modena, she was sure they were going to the factory. But when they exited the A1 onto the Via Pietro Giardini she became confused. As soon as they crossed the Via Pedemontana she saw a race circuit to her right and realized they were going to the Fiorano circuit.

They pulled up to the buildings in the center of the track and exited the car, which drove off. When it did so, her spirits soared because she knew that many Ferrari customers took delivery of their new vehicles at Fiorano. Her mind immediately flashed to the 575 M Maranello she had been dropping hints about. Or perhaps he wanted another four-seater and was getting the new 612 Scaglietti? Both had monster V12s and the new F1-style semiautomatic gearbox and either would be a step-up from the 456 M GTA.

A Ferrari salesman in a tailored suit came out and greeted them.

“Mr. Pagani, welcome back,” he said as he put out his hand. “My name is Giancarlo. Your vehicle is ready. If you will follow me, please, we will head to the garage area.”

A golf cart pulled up and the three climbed aboard. They drove around the largest building and up to a large white garage area. Out front was a vehicle Kara had never seen before. It was about the size of an F360, but the bodywork was quite different. She could see hints of the Ferrari Enzo supercar in the rear end and the nose reminded her of Ferrari racecars of the '60s.

"Mister and Miss Pagani, I present to you the Ferrari F430," Giancarlo said, the pride evident in his voice. He took out a white handkerchief and used it to open the driver's side door.

"F430?" Kara asked as she admired the curves and lines.

"Yes, Miss Pagani. It is the replacement for the F360, though we will continue to produce the Challenge and Challenge Stradale for a time."

The exterior color was a deep metallic reddish purple officially called "Rubino Micalizzato" with an interior done in medium grey "Carta Da Zucchero" leather and carpet. Carbon fiber accents highlighted the center dash switch area and the HVAC outlets.

"I suppose you want to drive it," Michele noted to Kara.

"Is it okay?" she asked Giancarlo.

"Fiorano is a private track, Miss Pagani. The car is fully insured so if your father wishes to let you drive it, we will...overlook...that you do not have your *Patente B*."

"I want to at least take a few laps with it before you stuff it into a guardrail and I need to write a check for another," Michele said with false gruffness. Kara crossed her arms and scowled at him.

Michele slipped into the driver's seat and adjusted the seat and mirrors to his comfort. "I see it has two memory settings, so we can set your preferences as well," he noted to Kara as she settled into the passenger seat.

Present Time...

After four laps, Kara pulled the F430 into the pit lane and slowed to a stop in front of the garage area. She waited sixty seconds for everything to have a chance to settle and then she killed the ignition.

Giancarlo came forward and Kara rolled down the left window.

"Well done, Miss Pagani. The track record for this model is a 1:27 set by Signoir Schumacher. Your best time was a 1:31.40 and your father scored a 1.32.17. Do you both find the car acceptable?"

Kara nodded her head enthusiastically, Michele concurring with less aggressiveness.

"Then if you would please accompany me back to the main building, we will have lunch and complete the paperwork while your vehicle is prepared for final delivery."

After a sumptuous lunch and completion of the paperwork, the F430 was brought to the front of the building. Kara put her messenger bag behind the passenger seat while Michele settled into the driver's seat. They drove back to the A1 Autostrada and headed south towards Rome.

A bit over an hour later they were approaching Florence when Michele's phone rang. His F430 had a Bluetooth receiver integrated into the audio system that allowed him to take and receive calls on his cellular phone without needing to use the handset itself.

"Michele Pagani."

"Michele, it's Jean. Where are you?"

"On the A1 approaching Florence."

"Perfect. Exit at the city and meet us at the front entrance to the Palazzo Vecchio."

"What's up?"

"I don't want to discuss it over an open line. Call me when you're almost there." And the line went dead.

"Arrogant ass," Michele said. He pulled off the Autostrada and made his way to the Piazza della Signoria in the city center. They parked in a No Parking zone in front of the Uffizi Gallery, Michele placing a police parking placard on the dash. Kara grabbed her Ferrari F1 team messenger bag and followed Michele.

Out front was Jean, who motioned them to follow him inside and he led them into a conference room where they met Rico along with Alessandro and Petrushka. Michele noted that Petrushka was wearing a black tank-top with a plaid skirt far shorter than Kara's, black hosiery and tan felted leather boots.

"Sorry to pull you in on your birthday," Jean said, though his tone made it clear he wasn't. He then laid out four pictures of a man in his late twenties. "We've discovered that Lamberto Sanesi is holed up with some cohorts in a room in the Convivio apartment up the block at the intersection of Via Dante Alighieri and Via de' Cerchi."

"Sanesi? Isn't he the head of the PRF faction in Emilia-Romagna? What is he doing in Florence?" Alessandro asked.

"After we turned Filippo Adani and put away Pirazzi, the PRF in Florence has been in disarray. The Agency believes Sanesi is trying to extend his authority south," Jean hypothesized. "Regardless, our orders are to try and apprehend him or terminate him if we can't. He's young and an idealist, which makes him ruthless. He won't hesitate to leave a trail of bodies – PRF and civilian – to get what he wants. We can't let that happen."

Jean turned to Kara.

"Did you bring your XM8 with you?" he asked. She shook her head and a look of annoyance passed across Jean's face.

"Hey, we were off-duty and off-campus. Be thankful we have our pistols with us," Michele growled at him.

"Very well. Rico, you will take the oversight with your SVD. Kara and Petra, you will proceed inside the Convivio with your pistols and Petra's Spectre M4. Michele, you will guard the front entrance and Alessandro the back. I will be on the roof of the building across the way with Rico."

Everyone nodded his or her understanding. They put in their earpieces and made sure they were all on the same radio channel and then headed out. Petra borrowed Kara's messenger bag to hide her M4.

"We don't know which room Sanesi is in. Kara and Petra, you will approach the office as two college students looking for an apartment ascertain their location. Report that back to us and we will proceed from there."

"Understood."

"Hai."

"Kara, remember your training," Michele admonished.

"Hai."

The two girls crossed the Piazza della Signoria and went down the street until they arrived at the Convivio apartment.

"Love your outfit, by the way," Petra complimented.

"I don't think Michele likes it," Kara replied.

"Weird. He dresses pretty sharp for an old man so I figured he'd appreciate it. I didn't know today was his birthday."

"Neither did I," Kara said, a bit sadly.

They both climbed up a short flight of steps and entered the front office.

"Ciao!" Petra said with a large smile. "My friend and I are transferring to the University and we're looking for an apartment."

"I'm sorry, but we don't have any available units at this time. Would you like to put your name down on our waiting list?"

Petra looked to Kara, who nodded and then walked towards the bookshelf, acting as if she was looking at the pictures of the units on the wall.

"That would be fine," Petra said as she came forward to stand before the desk.

"Excellent," the manager said. She stood up and headed for the shelf to grab a binder. As she reached for it, Kara came up from behind and struck her at the base of the neck, knocking her unconscious. The woman slumped into Kara's arms and she laid her down behind the desk while Petra rushed to close and lock the door and draw the blinds, hanging out a "We'll Be Back Sign" after advancing the time to an hour from the present.

Kara took a seat at the computer terminal and called up the tenant list.

"We should be so lucky that he rented it in his own name?" Petra asked as she looked over her shoulder.

Kara smiled and activated her radio.

"Go ahead," came Jean's voice.

"We've incapacitated the manager and are reviewing the tenant list," Kara reported. "I see no entries for a Lamberto Sanesi."

Jean provided names of known associates and the third one generated a hit.

"Found him," Kara noted. "First floor. Apartment 12. It faces the street."

"Acknowledged. Proceed and infiltrate."

Petra peeked out the window in the door and saw the entryway was empty. She and Kara stepped out, closing the door behind them.

They walked through the sitting room where a few people were enjoying a soccer game on the television. They were cheering raucously as ACF Fiorentina was up by a goal and they had the audio cranked. They went down the hall to #12. Kara pulled her silencer out and attached it to the end of her P2000SK, as Petra did the same for her M4. Both were using subsonic bullets to reduce the noise signature even more, which meant that penetrating power was going to be reduced substantially, requiring close-range shots to inflict maximum damage.

With Petra off to one side, Kara positioned herself in front of the door and knocked.

Inside the apartment's sitting room, Lamberto Sanesi looked up at the sound. He motioned to the guard near the door who looked out the spy hole.

"It's a girl in some kind of sailor outfit," came the reply and Lamberto's blood chilled. He'd heard the rumors about the Italian government sending child assassins after the PRF.

"How old is she?" he asked, reaching for the shotgun leaning on the wall nearby.

"At least high school age. 17, maybe? She's pretty hot."

Lamberto relaxed. She was too old to be from the government.

"Find out what she wants." The guard opened the door a crack and spoke with Kara for a moment.

"She says she's looking for her friend Giancarlo. She thought this was his apartment."

"No Giancarlo here. Send her on her way," Lamberto said and returned to his paper.

The guard said as much and started to close the door, turning away as he did so. Kara planted her left foot and braced herself with her left hand before using her right foot to smash the door in, catching the guard full on. He fell back and Kara let go with her left arm, falling forward on top of him while at the same time pulling her pistol out from behind her back. She smashed the butt into his face as Petra came in from behind. She leveled her M4 and fired a three-round burst into the chest of each of two people sitting on the couch. Kara rolled off the guard onto her back, put her pistol to his temple, and pulled the trigger, blowing the left side of his head out across the floor.

Lamberto had dived to the floor as soon as the door slammed open and was scrambling for the bedroom on all fours. Petra moved to track him, but an armed man exited the study to the left with a pistol in his hand and she fired a three-round burst at him, hitting him in the shoulder, driving him back inside. A fourth man appeared from the kitchen and took a shot at Petra, but missed. Kara swung her arm over her chest, took aim, and put two rounds into his head. She then drew up her legs and used her back and left arm to push herself into a kneeling position, Petra coming up beside her. They took a quick look around and saw that all four suspects were down and likely dead. Kara approached the study as Petra closed the front door. She saw the person Petra had wounded lying against a sofa bed, bleeding profusely. While it was clear Petra had inflicted mortal damage and he would exsanguinate in minutes, Kara still calmly put two rounds into his heart.

The only other rooms were the bathroom and the master bedroom, both located down a short connecting hallway from the sitting room where they were presently. Petra went first since she had the superior firepower, Kara right behind her. Petra wheeled her weapon into the bathroom while Kara continued to point hers down the hall. The bathroom had a glass-enclosed shower stall with an area beside it with both a toilet and bidet. A quick check showed nobody was inside, so they deduced that Lamberto had to be in the bedroom.

"Give yourself up, Lamberto," Petra called out. "We want you alive, so we won't shoot you if you surrender."

There was no response.

They reached the edge of the door. Petra was preparing to go in low when they heard a peculiar combination knock on the front door, which opened a moment later.

Two men in their mid-twenties walked in and suddenly stopped. They dropped the grocery bags in their arms and went for their weapons. Petra spun and sprayed them both with her M4, knocking them backward into a tangled heap. She then ran down the hall to ensure they were dead and to close and lock the door before replacing the magazine in her gun.

Kara was turning back to the bedroom when she heard the sound of crashing glass. She rushed inside to see someone climbing through the window. She took aim, but saw the muzzle flash of another gun come from the closet area to her left.

While Kara's body was artificial, her brain was not. The cybernetics just enhanced how fast her body responded to stimuli and commands. When objects come directly at a human, they tend to slow down temporally. This is even more so with her cybernetic eyes. Kara tracked the bullet as it flew by her as she dropped to the floor, returning four rounds of fire in a basic spread back into the closet. She saw that the other person was almost clear of the window, but was able to get one round off which hit him in the right thigh area. She turned back to the closet and saw that one of her four bullets had gone through the throat of the attacker and that he was not Lamberto, which meant he was the one who had gone out the window.

"Lamberto has escaped through the window," Kara called out over the radio net. "I believe I hit him."

"Take him out, Rico," Jean ordered.

"Yes," Rico replied and started to scan the street through his riflescope. She caught a brief glimpse of Lamberto rounding a corner. It was a bad angle, but orders were orders. Rico pulled the trigger.

The 7.62mm round left the rifle traveling at over 800m/s. The sound echoed off the stone walls in a loud crack, causing people everywhere to involuntarily jump. The bullet sped towards Lamberto's head, but the narrow buildings created strong wind gusts and the bullet yawed wide, missing Lamberto by millimeters and traveling on to pass through the shopping bag of a young woman, barely missing her arm. It traveled through a tightly wrapped blouse and exited the other side, burying itself in the gnarled trunk of a three hundred year old olive tree. The young woman never felt the passing of the bullet and when she got home, she wondered why there was a neat hole through her new blouse.

Rico tried to take another shot, but Lamberto had already moved out of sight. Everyone in the area assumed a car exhaust had backfired and went on his or her way.

"Lamberto is escaping towards the Piazza della Signoria," Jean said.

"I'm on him," Kara replied. She had already forced herself through the window and was heading down the Via de' Cerchi. She scanned the ground for blood, but didn't see anything. It was possible she had missed or his denim jeans were absorbing the blood.

"Clean-up team to the apartment, now," Jean ordered. "Alessandro, guard the apartment until they arrive. Petra, proceed to the Piazza and back-up Kara. Michele, link up with the support team and proceed to the Palazzo Vecchio. Rico, you're with me."

Kara stepped into the Piazza della Signoria. She'd grabbed a baseball cap off the nightstand and was hiding her gun behind it, hoping the black end of the suppression barrel would blend into her skirt where she pressed it between her legs. She had two rounds left in her magazine, but she did have a spare tucked into a hidden pocket inside the waistband of her skirt. The plaza was not terribly full, but there were still hundreds of people milling about. She looked for any who were limping and suddenly scanned one across the way.

"I believe Lamberto is heading for the Fountain of Neptune," she reported.

"If you have a shot, take it," Jean ordered. "Don't let him escape."

"I'm approaching the fountain from the opposite side," Petra noted. She had exchanged her M4 for her un-silenced Taurus PT92 pistol, which she had just inside her purse.

"We're behind the Palazzo Vecchio," Michele called. "Twenty seconds."

Kara dashed across the piazza, closing on Lamberto who was passing a small vendor cart. Her movement caught his eye and he turned and fired at her, causing the crowd to scatter in all directions like pigeons.

"Shots fired! Shots fired!" Petra screamed over the link.

Kara fell to her left, using that arm to stop her fall and prop her at about a 45-degree angle. Both of Lamberto's rounds missed, but people kept running in front of her as she took aim on Lamberto, preventing her from firing. Finally, she had a clear shot and fired both of her remaining rounds. The first one went wide, burying itself in the cart, but the second one caught him in the upper shoulder opposite his heart and spun him around, causing him to collapse onto the cart, which fell over.

Kara pushed herself up and jogged towards the upturned cart, releasing her empty magazine and replacing it with a full one. She cocked her weapon and slowly approached Lamberto, who was sprawled forward over the cart, his gun out of reach. She turned him over and placed two fingers to his carotid, detecting a strong pulse. His eyelids fluttered and he stared at her.

"I thought you were supposed to be kids?" he asked before his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he went unconscious.

A moment later a silver Fiat Ducato van screamed into the plaza and headed for where Kara was standing. The side door slid open and Michele appeared.

"Grab him!" he ordered, and Kara lifted the unconscious Lamberto like a dressed stag and threw him over her shoulder. She carried him inside and headed to the back while Michele shut the door and the

driver took off. As they rounded the corner, they saw a Fiat Punto hatchback from the 6th Carabinieri Battalion pull into the piazza followed by a BMW R85-T motorcycle.

"Looks like you shot him in the ass," Michele snorted.

"I hit him there and in the shoulder," Kara reported as she laid Lamberto out on a stretcher in the back of the van. The EMT present grunted his acknowledgement and pulled back the shirt to review the shoulder wound.

"Looks like you missed any arteries or veins, so I don't think he'll bleed out on us. Stand aside and let me work, please."

The van pulled into a garage two blocks down from the Piazza and Michele and Kara got out. A moment later, an Alfa Romeo 156 pulled in and Jean, Rico, Alessandro and Petrushka all exited.

"Status report," Jean barked.

"Lamberto will live," Michele reported. "The EMT is stabilizing him now."

"Excellent," Jean said. He turned to Kara, his expression showing barely constrained fury.

"Why did you hesitate?" he demanded.

"What?"

"In the Piazza."

"I didn't have a clear shot. There were people in the way."

"He could have ducked behind that cart or taken a hostage. Next time don't think about it, just do it."

"Yes, sir," she said.

"It's not her fault, Jean," Michele said. "I taught her to be sure before she shot."

"Well maybe you should re-consider what you've been teaching her."

"I saw that shot Rico tried to make from the roof. It damn near took down that woman," Michele replied in a cold voice. "Our job is to protect the public, not endanger them."

He stood up and placed his hand on Kara's shoulder, steering her for the exit.

Outside in the sun, they walked back to Michele's F430.

"Thank you for sticking up for me back there, Michele" Kara said.

"You did the right thing, Kara."

"Perhaps, but Jean is right. Lamberto might have taken a hostage. I only had two bullets left and with the silencer, I could not be sure of my accuracy. He might have been able to use her to get away."

"Better a guilty man remains free another day than an innocent one is injured or killed through our negligence. Don't forget that."

"I won't, Michele."

"Good. Now let's go home."

"Okay. Oh, Michele?"

"Yes?"

"Happy birthday," Kara said, reaching up on her toes to kiss him on the cheek.

"Thank you, Kara."

The End