

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.

"Fraternizing with the Enemy"

A Gunslinger Girl Original Story by Kiskaloo

"Your mission will take place in Bologna, but we need you to be a couple, so we're still deciding on how to proceed," Ferro noted.

"Just make Kara his mistress," Alessandro noted. "Matteo Amati is a womanizer so he'll understand. Heck, he'll likely compliment you on your exotic tastes."

"Why aren't you handling this? You've already made contact with him," Michele growled, staring daggers at Alessandro.

Kara raised her hand.

"Yes?" Ferro acknowledged.

"Would it work if I was his girlfriend? To explain my staying with Michele at his apartment in Milan, I tell people I'm an exchange student at university who is dating him."

"The University of Bologna is the oldest in Europe so it draws from all over the world...that could work," Ferro admitted. "It would make a far more believable cover than a married couple in this situation and since you two already use it, it should be easier to maintain."

The drive from Rome to Bologna on the A1 was just under 400 kilometers and with Kara behind the wheel of the F430 they completed it in just under two and a half hours, arriving in the late afternoon. They checked into their hotel, showered and changed for dinner. Kara added a blonde streak down the hair that fell over her left shoulder and Michele added contact lenses that changed his eye color from blue to brown. He also liberally streaked his hair with grey and had grown a partial beard, as well.

The ristorante they were meeting Amati at was past the Piazza Maggiore and the basilica of San Domenico, about a half a kilometer

away from the hotel, so they decided to walk since the evening was nice.

They arrived and were shown to a table. Michele recognized Amati from the picture shown at the briefing.

"Signore Amati?" Michele asked.

"Signore Marchetti, I presume?" Amati said.

"Please, call me Donatello. This is my girlfriend, Michiko."

"A pleasure," Amati said, eyeing Kara. "My friends call me Matteo and I hope we can be friends, Donatello."

"As do I, Matteo," Michele said.

A waitress came by and distributed menus. Michele looked over the wine list and chose a local red from the higher end of the price and quality scale. Matteo made some recommendations, which they concurred with.

"I want to thank you for travelling all the way up here to meet," Michele said. "I'm a little uncomfortable being close to Rome with all the...troubles...as of late."

"I can understand, Donatello. The government has scored some impressive successes as of late in Lombardy. Anyway, Niccolo Baggio vouched for you. He said he's worked with you in the past on...transporting...pieces of art you...acquired...for your collection."

"Yes, Niccolo has been very helpful. He approached me about providing the start-up funding for your business proposition."

"Yes. We'd like to set-up our shop in Barletta. It has a nice harbor so the boats coming across from Durrës will be able to dock. There is also a highway connecting to the A14 which can get them to here in Bologna and then on to the trains to Munich."

"What kind of personnel support will you need?" Michele asked.

"A dozen, tops," Matteo said. "The less people involved the less risk – and the less number of people to split the money with," he added with a wink. "We're happy to provide the staff, unless you have some

people you wish to add?"

"No," Michele answered. "As you noted, the less people who know the better. I trust Niccolo and he felt it was best if this was handled by your associates."

Matteo smiled and nodded. "As for infrastructure, a fishing trawler would attract the least attention. We can modify the holds with false fronts so if we're stopped and boarded, the Guardia costiera will just find ice and fish. Depending on the loads, probably two or three Iveco vans. We'll handle all the paperwork before they arrive. All we will need to do is snap their pictures and add them to the documents. So we won't need any housing."

Their dinner arrived and they started eating.

"So, Michiko. What do you do?" Matteo asked.

"I am student at University," Kara replied.

"A foreign exchange student," Matteo said to Michele. "How'd you hook up with her?"

"I saw her at an espresso house one day. A Japanese girl is an uncommon site in Italy. I knew the language so when she looked up at me, I fired off a few phrases in *nihongo*."

"I was surprise to see someone speak to me in Japanese," Kara said. She was intentionally speaking in stilted "dictionary Italian" and trying to add a Japanese accent.

"So you hit it off right away?"

"It took a date or two, but we found we enjoyed each other's company and she moved in with me. She is beautiful, after all," Michele remarked.

"And he's rich," Kara added.

Matteo burst into hearty laughter. "Being neither, I can only imagine it must be nice," he said.

"It is indeed," Michele said, squeezing Kara's hand.

"He also very good in bed," Kara added, earning a grin from Matteo.

Fortunately, Michele had just swallowed his wine, otherwise he'd have spit it out in a fine spray. However, he successfully kept from making a scene.

"Getting back to the subject at hand," Michele said, recovering his composure. "What kind of start-up capital do you think you will need?"

"We're thinking €500.000. That will get us a boat, dock space, two vans, and equipment to create the documentation plus cover salaries and payoffs to officials. Your cut would be €500 a head for the first 1500 and then €250 a head after. You should recover your principal in under six months and then have a nice little income after that..."

After concluding their business and dinner, Michele and Kara walked back towards their hotel. They passed the entrance of the Galleria Cavour and entered, walking along the high-end shops under amazing sculptures of colored lights before heading back to their hotel.

"I'm sorry, Michele. I know your feelings about Lamborghinis, but those are just beautiful cars," Kara said as she stopped in front of a large window. Inside on stands sat a Lamborghini Murciélago Roadster and a Gallardo Spyder. The Lamborghini factory was located north of the city in Sant'Agata Bolognese and they had a "satellite showroom" with their two top models on display for people to look at.

"I have to admit that Audi has really reigned in some of the excesses of Lamborghini design philosophy. Compared to a Diablo or a Countach these cars are downright sensible," Michele said. "Especially the Gallardo."

"You still bought the F430, though," Kara noted.

"Lamborghini was far enough along with the Murciélago when Audi bought them that the Germans just made it more reliable. It still has that sense of extroversion that made a Lamborghini a Lamborghini. With the Gallardo, they oversaw the entire design process. So mechanically, it is a great car. But there was too much German in it and it just wasn't the drivers cars that the Ferrari is. The steering is heavier, the engine, while larger, isn't as responsive and the suspension is a bit too soft. "

"Yeah, yeah. But it is still a gorgeous machine," Kara said. "And that convertible even more so."

"We might as well take a closer look," Michele said and they stepped inside.

The Sales Manager was an expert observer and it took him only a moment to identify Kara's black Versace leather dress and Yves Saint Laurent patent leather boots as well as Michele's Armani suit. He therefore approached them as serious customers and not people just admiring the cars.

"Good evening, signore and signorina," he greeted. Based on her age, he guessed that Kara was a girlfriend and not a wife so he used "Miss" instead of "Madame".

"Good evening," Michele replied as he and Kara walked over to the Gallardo Spyder. The pearlescent paint was a deep shade of red and the interior was a mix of black and tan leather along with red carbon fiber in place of plastic.

"Striking, isn't it?" the Sales Manager said. "Osvaldo Turco," he introduced, putting out his hand.

"Michele Pagani," Michele replied as he took the offered hand. "This is my girlfriend Kara."

"It is striking," Kara replied.

"These cars represent some of the options available via our '*Ad Personam*' personalization program. It offers customers the ability to uniquely style their Lamborghini to fit their personal tastes," Osvaldo informed them. He opened the door and invited Kara to take a seat behind the wheel.

"This interior is magnificent," Kara said, running her hand across the fine grained leather dash. "And the carbon fiber work is exceptional. I normally don't like it, but it looks pretty when colored."

"The leatherwork was sourced by designers at Gianni Versace Couture and is the same used in their high-end dresses. The black matches nicely with your Versace, if I might be so bold. The carbon-fiber is specially colored to highlight the Rosso Leto paint," Osvaldo noted.

"Is it for sale?" Michele asked.

"Yes, sir. This car with the customizations fitted is €200.000."

Kara whistled, but Michele merely reached for his cellphone.

"I'll take it," he said. "Just let me know where to wire the money to."

"Of course, Signore Pagani. If you will excuse me for a moment, I will prepare the paperwork," Osvaldo said.

"What are you doing?" Kara asked after Osvaldo had left.

"You like it, don't you?"

"Absolutely, but you said it wasn't as good a car as the F430 and you own one of those."

"That was the Gallardo coupe. It was better than the 360, but not the F430. But this...this is something different. The Italians must have snuck in at night and added back some of the magic the coupe lost. I drove it a month back and trust me, driving this on a spring twilight with the top down and the V10 engine thundering at high-RPM will make you happy."

"Michele, I'd be happy driving a rusted-out Fiat 127 as long as you were in the passenger seat. You don't need to drop a quarter-million to see me smile."

"Kara, we're fortunate that we share a lot of interests in common, including cars. I think it's one of the reasons we've gelled so well as a *fratello*. If you hated this car and I loved it, I wouldn't buy it. And even though you love it, if I hated it, I wouldn't buy it."

"Do my ears deceive me? Is Michele Pagani admitting he loves a Lamborghini? You better hope the Ferrari Owner's Club doesn't find out. They might tar and feather you," Kara said with a chuckle.

"Not love. Respect, say. It will hit 100 in under five seconds and top out over 300. And it's a bit more practical around town than the F430. It's a good bit shorter, the all-wheel drive helps traction on wet cobblestones and that slightly more compliant suspension on those cobblestones means I won't need artificial kidneys like yours. And I do agree with you that the styling and color are beautiful and the interior

on this car is magnificent. And since the HVAC, radio, and navigation system all come from an A8, they actually work. Besides, a good friend has been pestering me to sell him my 456M since I so seldom drive her now that we have the F430."

"Well I'm not going to talk you out of it if you want it as well," Kara said. "However, don't you think that being secret agents we should be driving something a bit more discreet than Ferraris and Lamborghinis?"

"This is Italy, Kara. Besides, you are a beautiful Japanese woman wearing designer clothing. The term 'discreet' is an oxymoron when applied to you," Michele said, causing Kara to blush and smile. "In fact, the more you stand out in a crowd, the better. People will remember you, but you will look so out of place that they will never connect you with the events transpiring around you. Child assassins are not new to Italy. The Mafia have used them for years. But they are all male. That is why the agency started with females. Nobody thinks of a little girl as a killer so our targets ignore them and so do the witnesses."

Michele filled out the necessary paperwork, wired the money over and arranged to have the car picked up tomorrow. They then headed back to their hotel.

"In the dealership you said we share a lot of common interests. But those are all ones you had programmed into me, aren't they?" Kara asked as they prepared for bed.

"Kara, what is the absolute magnitude of the star Aldebran in the constellation Taurus."

"I have no idea."

"How many transistors are in the PowerPC 7447B CPU in your PowerBook."

"Drawing a blank here, Michele."

"What is the maximum take-off weight of a Boeing 777-300ER at sea level in standard conditions."

"Uh...A lot? It's a big plane."

"Who won the 1986 Grand Prix of Mexico," Michele asked.

"Gerhard Berger," Kara replied, instantly.

"What was his time?"

"One hour, thirty-three minutes, eighteen point seven seconds." Again, her answer was almost immediate.

"Who had fast lap?"

"Nelson Piquet. One minute, nineteen point three-six-zero seconds on lap 64."

"What position did Piquet start from?"

"Second."

"And what was he driving?"

"A Williams-Honda FW11."

"Kara, your interests include astronomy, computers, airplanes and Formula One. Yet you could only answer the questions I asked for Formula One. That is because your interest in Formula One is one that I asked be added during your programming. Your interests in the other fields are your own, going back before you and I met and have developed subsequently to that time.

"You have, literally, an encyclopedic knowledge of Formula One from 1950 to 2004 because the medical team dumped the entire contents of the FIA Formula One statistics book for those years into your head. I wanted to be sure we had at least one...passion...we shared together to help us relate with each other in the beginning of our *fratello*. Your interest in cars is likely an offshoot of that, but I also think it's part of your personality and the relationship we have formed since becoming a *fratello*."

"When we first drove to your apartment in Milan in the 456, you looked so happy," Kara said. "There was a smile on your face as you clipped an apex on the Autostrada or accelerated hard to pass a slower vehicle. I wanted to share that joy so I studied Ferrari and Lamborghini and Maserati. When you enrolled me in carting, I began

to understand what you felt when you had raced them and what you feel now when you drive hard. Driving the 456, the F430 and especially the Veyron all helped me connect with you a little bit better on that level. Thank you for letting me."

Michele merely smiled, but Kara could read him well enough that her words resonated within his spirit.

They had been given a suite with a single double bed, which was the standard in many European hotels. While the same 200cm length as a king, the width was a full 60cm less which meant they'd be sleeping nearly next to each other. While both normally slept in t-shirts and underpants, for tonight they changed into pajamas, which Michele had made a point of packing for Kara lest she "forget".

"Since I tend to get warm at night, I'll sleep on top of the covers with just the duvet and you can sleep under them plus the duvet," Michele said.

Kara nodded and slipped under all the bedsheets while Michele laid down above them, covering himself with the duvet. Over the next few minutes, and with her heart beating a bit faster than normal, Kara surreptitiously moved closer to Michele until her back was against his.

"Kara," Michele said.

"Sorry," she said, and moved away. "It's kind of hard, though, considering the width of the bed."

"Just be sure to keep under the covers," Michele ordered.

"*Hai*," she replied, and moved back.

In moments she drifted off to sleep, a content smile on her face.

The End