

*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.*

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## **"What is Love?"**

A Gunslinger Girl Original Story by Kiskaloo

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"Entrez!" Kara called out in French from where she was sitting in her bed in response to the knock on the door.

"Алло?" Though she didn't speak it, Kara identified it as Russian.

"Hello, Petra," she said without looking up from her book.

"Ilaria is not here?" Petrushka asked.

"She's at the firing range if you're looking for her," Kara replied.

"No, I wished to speak with you. Is that okay?"

"Of course," Kara said, marking and then closing the book she had been studying. She motioned for Petrushka to pull over one of the armchairs to the edge of her bed.

"Do you love Michele?" Petrushka asked.

"Why do you ask?" Kara replied, taken aback by the question.

"Angelica and Henrietta said that when they awoke, they loved their handlers immediately. From the moment they first laid eyes on them, they felt love and affection towards them. It was not the case with me. I felt loyalty towards Sandro and compelled to obey his and the Agency's commands. But not love, at least at first."

"They're of a different generation than us. Perhaps our programming is different," Kara suggested.

"I now love Sandro. He is someone I cherish. But I did not originally feel like this when I first woke up. As we spent time together and formed a relationship, these feelings grew until they became love. I want to know if I am alone amongst the new girls who feels this way."

"Yes, I do love Michele," Kara admitted. "And like you, it was not something I felt, or at least understood that I felt, until very recently."

"You've kissed him, haven't you?" Petrushka asked.

"Did the medical staff tell you that?" Kara said. She knew they were not bound by any confidentiality agreements, but she had expected them to be a bit more discreet with the information she provided when under examination.

Petrushka shook her head. "I can tell. I saw you... 'smiling dumbly'... with Michele earlier this afternoon."

"I've never understood why she uses that term," Kara noted of their blonde sister Series 2 cyborg. "How does one exactly 'smile dumbly'? Ilaria accused me of the same when I returned from Christmas vacation."

"So you have kissed your handler?" Petrushka pressed.

"Yes. In Sydney as the New Year started. If there was such a thing as a Fairy Godfather, Michele would be mine. I just wanted to show him how much I appreciate him. I believe what I feel for him can only be love."

Petrushka nodded in understanding. "Since our love is natural, it is real. I wonder if the other girls, the first series, also experience real love since their love was imposed on them by the Agency."

"It's real to Henrietta," Kara stated. "It might have been imposed in the beginning, but her love is no less real and natural than ours. Perhaps even more so. And while she might deny it, when we went to Paris and Berlin, Triela seemed much happier when Hillshire was present than when he wasn't."

Petrushka's face took on a thoughtful look, and a smile much like a wolf likely gives a lamb just before it strikes crossed her face.

Kara's cellphone suddenly rang. She checked the Caller ID and answered.

"Moshi moshi," she said. "Yes, Michele... One moment..." She reached for a pen and pad of paper. "Okay... hai... hai... hai... I have a set of keys for both... hai... Ja ne!"

"Michele wants me to head to the grocery store to pick up some items. If you're free, we can talk on the way or we can resume when we get back."

"Ah yes, I heard you have your license now. Lucky. I'll come," Petrushka said. Kara moved off her bed and went to her wardrobe where she pulled out a pair of knee-length white leather boots.

Petrushka looked in the closet and saw that the other five pairs were knee-length, as well.

"Pagani, you must stop hiding your legs by wearing such tall boots. You need to go with something mid-thigh like these," she opinioned, pointing to her own black boots.

"My legs get cold," Kara retorted.

"So do mine, but we girls need to put up with a bit of discomfort if we're to look our best for our handlers," Petrushka opinioned. She was wearing a sweater jacket over a tank-top and jean shorts. Considering the weather outside was hovering just above freezing, Kara figured it wasn't just Petrushka's legs that were cold.

Petrushka unzipped her boots and handed them to Kara. "Try them on," she ordered. Kara decided to humor her and pulled them on and zipped them up. Their feet were very similar in size so they fit her well enough. Petrushka then hiked Kara's sweater dress even farther up her thighs.

"Much better," she said. "Now you will impress all the boys."

"I only want to impress Michele," Kara said and again, the wolfish grin spread across Petrushka's face.

"Well be sure to let him see you in that outfit and see what he says," Petrushka noted. She reached for Kara's pair of black patent leather boots and pulled them on.

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As Petrushka and Kara walked along the path towards the garage area, they saw Triela coming towards them, her shotgun slung over her shoulder in it's map case.

"Ciao!" Kara greeted.

"Ciao," Triela replied. "What are you two up to?"

"Just the usual deviltry," Kara replied with a smile. Triela raised an eyebrow.

"Seriously, Michele asked me to run into town and get some groceries for this weekend and Petrushka is tagging along."

"Do you have room for one more?" Triela asked. "I missed dinner and I'd like to get something other than a microwave meal."

"Sure," Kara replied. "We can take the 456."

"You buy a new pair of boots?" Triela asked.

"No, Petrushka forced me to try hers."

"Don't make it sound so melodramatic, Kara," Petrushka said. "It's really for your benefit. There are times when you are going to want people to notice you, either to gauge their reactions or to cause a distraction so your handler can sneak by or perform a function," she noted.

"Fair enough, but can we get going? My legs are freezing."

Kara and Petrushka removed the car cover off Michele's Ferrari 456, putting it in the trunk with Triela's shotgun, then piled in and drove off towards town.

"So how was it?" Petrushka asked as they drove towards the *commune*.

"How was what?" Kara and Triela asked together.

"Kissing Michele," Petrushka clarified.

"You kissed Michele?" Triela exclaimed from the back seat.

Kara pulled out her cell phone, flipping it open but not dialing. "Hi, Ferro? It's Kara. Can you note in the morning briefing that I kissed Michele at New Years in Sydney? Thanks." She snapped it shut and put it back in her purse.

"Seriously, you kissed Michele?" Triela asked again.

"Yes. The fireworks went off and everybody around us started hugging and kissing so when Michele leaned down, I had this sudden desire to kiss him."

"You Series 2 girls don't waste any time," Triela teased, causing Kara to scowl at her in response.

"What's the big deal?" Petrushka said. "We all love our handlers, but at least the feelings Kara and I have are natural ones and were not imposed on us by the Agency."

"My feelings for Hillshire are my own," Triela said, biting her tongue when she realized she might have said too much.

"Are they now?" Petrushka asked, that wolfish smile returning.

"Petrushka, let it alone," Kara said. "It's not something I'm comfortable with other people knowing."

"Claes told me you said you felt love for him when you were in Geneva. Why did you wait six months to finally act on it?" Triela asked. She was curious about how their relationship had developed as she was not certain of how her own feelings towards Hillshire had evolved as of late.

"At Christmas he said I was beautiful. It was the first time he'd ever told me that," Kara replied. "He compliments me on my outfits and he's praised me for my efforts on missions, but this was different. And how he spoke and related to me was different...special, even. He gave me this necklace. He's never given me any jewelry before. And then he gave me my license. I know he did it so I could be more useful on missions, but that made it even more important to me. In Sydney he called me his partner and his companion and we promised to stay at each other's side. For the first time I felt not like a girl, but like an adult. I couldn't kiss him as a girl, but I felt I could as an adult."

"I see," Triela replied, thoughtfully.

"If we love our handlers, is it not natural to show them affection? Especially if the handlers are themselves receptive?" Petrushka asked, confused

"Was Michele receptive?" Triela asked, curious.

"Triela!" Kara cried, embarrassed.

"Sorry," Triela said. "Anyway, Petrushka. Not all our handlers are as...receptive...as Alessandro."

"That is because you both dress like a бабушка," Petrushka replied, using the Russian word for 'grandmother'. "They say Claes is the prim one, yet she always dresses in tight sweaters and short skirts," she noted.

"I told you in Venice. I like the clothes Hillshire buys for me," Triela said.

"We're here," Kara reported and pulled into the parking lot of the Esselunga supermarket.

"We'll pick this up later," Petrushka noted as they exited the car.

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***The End***