

Legal disclaimer: This story is entirely a work of fiction. All characters, settings and incidents portrayed are the work of the author's imagination and that of any commissioner/trader where present. Any resemblance to actual persons, whether living or dead, or real locations or events is purely coincidental. Any views or opinions expressed in this work are those of the characters only, not of the author or anyone they belong to.

Sins of the Father

Written by Blue Kitty Tales on commission for SaltirePhoenix.

12/05/19

Thursday April 16th 2020, 12:18 Eastern Daylight Time. Having disposed of her arch enemy and returned home at long last, Amelia is now after information about her long lost friend. Unfortunately, this soon proves to be the least of her problems.

Even after finally making Johnny suffer for what he'd done to her friend, she was desperate. Whatever other heinous acts he'd committed, whatever contacts he had either in this country or Scotland, she had to find Freya no matter what the cost. But that information was proving elusive. And she had already spent the time she'd been awake since returning home searching online for her.

Her mother wasn't home. And her younger brother Theo didn't seem entirely sure where she was. Amelia was well aware that she had a job that took her to many different places, but did not know if it was the same one she had before she'd left so many years ago. Theo had gone downtown, having started to run low on food, leaving her alone with her thoughts and her mission.

Glad though she was to finally know what part of the world she was in now, she cursed herself for not getting the name of the business Freya ran from that life form. She had almost mentally called him a man, but she couldn't bring herself to. As far as she was concerned, he wasn't a man – he was nothing. She viewed Freya to be worth more than he ever had been in life. And her name and the country of her origin was as good a start as any. At least now she knew she hadn't lost her forever. And after much searching, she had been able to finally pinpoint the name of her business.

"Maxwell Investigative Services." she read aloud to herself when she pulled up the webpage of one of Scotland's police forces. *"Working in partnership with the police for a safer Scotland."* That has to be it. This has her name on it." She rifled through the linked pages and found a link to her Flutter account. While neither her photograph or her real name were present, she could tell simply by the style of speech in her posts that this was undoubtedly the correct one.

Now, she needed only a home address, on the off chance trying to find her at work was to be a fruitless endeavour. While she was doubtful she would find that online, she'd already got so close. *Just you wait now, Freya.* she thought. *So many years I've wanted to see you again. And now I can. I've missed you so much.* But then she looked at the name of the business again. *For fuck's sake, Freya.* she thought, sighing to herself. *When you include your own surname in the name of your business with a cunt like Johnny around, of course he was going to find you.* Then, she heard the sound of the front door swinging open.

"Is that you, Theo?" she said kindly as she folded the laptop monitor down and went through to the living room. What she saw stopped her in her tracks.

"Theo!" she cried. "What the hell happened to you? And don't try and tell me you're fucking fine, because clearly, somebody's attacked you." He was struggling to walk and he had a light yellow liquid splattered all over his clothes, which she worked out from its odour to be the milkshake he loved. Bruises covered his cheeks and arms and his right eye was swollen shut, whilst the two books he'd bought had both been burnt to a crisp. Mercifully, his horn was still intact. She had never seen her brother like this before.

"Don't make a big deal out of this, Amelia. Please." he pleaded. But Amelia was not going to stand for this.

"Surely you know what kind of things I've done when I've been outside of a house and home." she snapped. "You remember the phone calls we've had. I said I'm here to make sure you're protected, did I not?"

"I do, Amelia, but this isn't –"

"For heaven's sake, how many times have I got to say it?" she exclaimed. She drove her fist into the wall, making him wince. She hoped this would get the point across in a way her words could not. "I want to know who's done this to you."

"Our horns are touching," he said meekly, looking terrified out of his wits. She sighed to herself and abruptly backed away, realising all too late what she'd done.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Come on. Let's get you patched up, alright? Have you still got a first aid kit?"

"Oh, just in there." He pointed towards the mahogany unit next to the fireplace. Amelia rummaged through the drawers until she found the small green box. "Y-you scared me just now. When you get like that, I...I stiffen up."

"Theo, you must surely understand that I'm on your side," she said as she removed his shirt and started to clean and bandage up his wounds, aware that he kept passing it from hand to hand as though afraid someone might wrench it away from him.

"You know I hate worrying you," he said. "You're very dear to me."

"And I think the same of you. That's why I send you and Mom all that money."

"Alright. You've got me backed into the corner," he said. He finally dropped his bag. The instant it hit the carpet, an empty milkshake bottle rolled out of it. She read the label to herself. *He loves that too much to want to pour it all over himself.* "I never made it to the supermarket. They were waiting for me at the bus stop I normally take to go there."

"Who?" demanded Amelia as she moved on to his eye.

"That guy who's the son of the former Sheriff Marsh was there," he answered.

"Former?"

"He retired last year. It was in the local newspaper."

"Well, shit," Amelia grunted as she applied disinfectant to his swollen socket, while he tried his best to hold still while groaning in pain. "Sorry. It'll be done shortly."

"I know. Thanks."

"Don't mention it. We're family."

"He had a couple of his friends with him too. They set upon me and one of them set my new books alight. They pushed me over, calling me a tranny, a fag, all that kind of thing. They've been coming after me for a while after they saw me in one of the clubs. But this time, one of them started beating on me. He smashed a vodka bottle over my head." He gestured to his eye and Amelia abruptly stopped cleaning.

"They did *what*?"

"Please, don't be mad," said Theo fearfully, cowering from her. "They said...they said they know who I am. Who you are too."

"Which one glassed you?"

"It was...a bloodhound. I think his name's Bruce." *I should have known. That's Sheriff Marsh's little bastard of a son.* thought Amelia odiously. *I hoped I'd never have to see either of them again.*

"Theo, please don't worry," she said soothingly, stroking him around the shoulders with her free hand while drawing out a fresh bandage with the other. "I'm not angry with you. My problem is these creatures who think they can do this to you. That Sheriff Marsh's boy will regret bumping heads with us."

"I couldn't even fight back," he answered while she covered his eye with a cotton pad and wrapped a bandage around his head. "They threatened to get me in trouble if I dared to. They've had my number for months."

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"I don't want to fight, Amelia. I thought...maybe they'd just leave me. I...I'm not as good as you are at self defence. And I know you've got history with his dad."

"You're safe here, alright?" said Amelia. "You have nothing to be afraid of when you're with me." She pulled her brother into a cuddle, taking care to avoid gracing his injuries.

"But what are you gonna do now?"

"We might both say you're in touch with your feminine side, but if that's all their problem is with you, then that's just pathetic. They've got to learn that if they mess with you, they mess with me too. I don't take shit from creatures. I fucking give it. Especially to dogshit groups of creatures who don't know their asses from the bar they probably drank dry yesterday. Probably why they're either not at work today or can't get any jobs between them." This drew a smile out of Theo.

"I like how you describe things, sis." he said. "They...they seem like the kind of creatures to do that."

"And worse. I'll replace your stuff for you as well. And before you tell me, it doesn't matter how much it cost. And don't you worry about the food, Theo. I'll get it once I'm done."

"Once you're done? What does that mean, I ask you?"

"Do you know where they are now?"

"If I know them as well as I think I do," he answered, "then they'll either be at the bowling alley or at the bar. I don't know what you've got in mind, but I just don't want the next time to be even worse."

"It won't be. I'll make sure it isn't. Have you got a receipt for that stuff?"

"It's in the bag. Please, Amelia. I'm sorry I brought it up. Maybe we could just bribe them to stay away." Amelia looked at him as though he'd viciously insulted their mother.

"Bribery?" she spat. "Fuck bribery! I'll show you how seriously I take my family! I'll be back here in half an hour." And before he could stop her, she scooped up his bag and its miserable contents before she stalked out, but not without taking a crowbar and a duffel bag from the cupboard under the stairs. If humility wasn't part of these creatures' vocabularies, then vengeance soon would be. *Nobody attacks my brother and gets away with it!* she thought furiously as she kicked her motorbike into life and rode off as fast as she possibly could. *They'll never look at rhinos the same way again after I'm done with them.*

*

Amelia wasn't just going to get even. She wanted to do even more than that. She thought of trying the market in the town centre for clothing, but...no, she had to find these creatures before they could give her the slip. She turned over her plan in her mind. Immobilising them wasn't the easiest thing anyone had ever done, but she hoped that however many of them there were, she could pull it off.

She knew which bar was the most likely one her brother's attackers would hang out in, but if she was going to find them, she couldn't dawdle. She slowed down, looking either side of her. Some of the properties had washing lines out, while another few had clothes horses positioned on wooden porches or concrete pathways. She could only see what looked like plain, run of the mill clothing, until, much to her surprise, she noticed an array of rather frilly looking garments hung up outside a house on a corner. What's more, neither its owner or any of their neighbours were anywhere to be found. *Alright! Jackpot!* she thought.

She pulled over, leaving her motorbike running whilst she crept up to the house, making sure to keep herself low so that the owner, if they were present, would not spot her. On closer inspection, these looked as perfect as could be. Leggings, arm warmers, bras, trousers that were stereotypically feminine looking, all in various tones of pinks, whites, reds...it was like she'd found the most wondrous treasures. There was no way she was going to pass this up. *Good thing I brought a duffel bag. They'll wish they'd never met Theo.*

She finally pulled herself upright and started to snag the clothing from the line, cramming each one into the bag. This felt like such a thrill, even if she wasn't to be the one donning it. Her heart was racing the more she grabbed, while her mouth started to go dry. Her revenge was going to be as sweet as could be. But soon her train of thought was soon interrupted by the sound of a shrill voice. One of the neighbours had appeared, and he looked less than impressed.

"Hey you!" the grey rabbit snapped. Looking at him, this was not the creature who had lived here the last time she had been in the town, lifting a small weight from her shoulders. "What do you think you're doing?"

“What does it look like?”

“Fucking perv! Put those back! You wait until Mrs Butler gets back home!”

“Look, don’t try and be tough with me, pal!” Not wanting to waste any more time, she slung the duffel bag over her shoulders and took off as fast as she could, gunning the motorbike before the rabbit had any chance to catch her.

*

She arrived at the *Grayson’s Tavern* soon after and she was relieved that none of the city’s police officers tried to stop her in her journey. In fact, none of the ones she saw appeared to recognise her despite her helmet’s visor being transparent, nor did the duffel bag catch their eye. *Has it really been that long since the last time I came home?* she thought. *Well, that doesn’t matter. They’re gonna know who the fuck I am soon enough, aren’t they?* She felt around the sides of Theo’s bag for the crowbar, allowing herself a smirk when her claws hit its curved end. She turned off the bike’s engine and headed for the bar.

Its exterior looked as seedy as she had remembered it to be from the last time she’d come many years ago. In several places, it was daubed with graffiti, while several empty beer bottles, one of which had been smashed, lay loose outside. Its car park was no better, with an overflowing rubbish skip against the wall, more shards of broken glass in its middle, along with numerous tyre marks, a painted outline resembling the shape of a canine body and a bloodstain where the head had been drawn. None of this was a dissuasion to her, for she had been in far more dangerous environments before and survived her fair share of serious injuries. *If I have to get blood on my claws, then so be it.*

She removed her helmet and pushed the door open. And right away, she picked out the Sheriff’s son. Even after all this time, she hadn’t forgotten what species he was. Sitting at the bar chatting with two creatures either side of him was Bruce, a brown and black bloodhound, with a short and stubby tail poking between a pair of blue jeans and a black tank top. To his right were two creatures she was certain were the other two men who had attacked her brother. One was a human with a shaved head and a green sports jacket, while the other was a grey and white wolf who she saw happily howling in response to something the bloodhound said.

None of the patrons, not even a pair who were sharing a game at the snooker table in the centre, appeared to recognise her. But the instant she deciphered their conversation, she realised her assumption about them was correct. Her fists clenched and it took all of her self control not to growl in rage.

“...the way we got away from that, it’s like he had a target on his head!” guffawed Bruce as he took a swig from his beer tankard. In front of him, Amelia noticed that the barman looked embarrassed to be there, staring at the trio with silent consternation. “He’ll learn we haven’t forgotten his sister. This’ll send a clear message to her that they don’t belong in this neighbourhood. It ain’t for their kind.” This instantly caught her attention. *This is definitely the right guy.* she thought.

“Yeah!” agreed the human, his voice low and gravelly. “I knew it from the way he was dressed. You know what that milkshake will look like when it dries. He’ll enjoy that!” This set the other two men off laughing.

“Hey Joe, you had your cameraphone, right?” exclaimed the wolf.

“Yeah Billy, I did,” replied the human, “but the battery’s dead.”

“You idiot!” snapped Bruce, shoving him and causing him to spill some of his drink. “We could have used that to make more of a point than we did already. As soon as his sister sees him, she’ll cry like a pussy too. But my dad still knows his moves.” That was all she needed to hear. With no empty bottles at hand, she’d need to rely on her own fists. But before she could approach them, the bloodhound suddenly stopped his flow of conversation.

“Where is the guy now?” asked Billy. “I thought he was –”

“Shut up.” he said sharply. “Something smells different in here all of a sudden.”

“Well, I can’t smell anything.” said Joe.

“Of course you can’t, Joe.” said Billy. “You humans haven’t got noses as good as me and Bruce do. I smell something too and it’s not your beer.”

"That's 'cause you're both canines, Einstein. Don't bust an artery." On hearing this, Amelia stepped forward, both of her fists tightly clenched.

"Well, look who it is!" crowed Bruce. "How're you doing, Amelia? You'll never guess who we met on the way here but your cissy brother of all creatures!" Without waiting for either of his peers to add their own verdicts, she pulled the crowbar out of the bag and struck him on the side of the head so hard, he tumbled off the stool and crashed to the wooden floor.

"What'd you do that for?" cried Billy.

"Thought you'd use your horn like a good rhino!" jeered Joe, downing the rest of his beer in one gulp.

"Well don't just sit there getting pissed! Help me up!" Bruce snapped, the wide gash on his head bleeding into his left eye. When he looked up at her, there was not a trace of courage to be seen in his expression. Instead, all she saw was revulsion. "You...you're the fag's brother, aren't you?" This angered her so much, she bent down and whacked him with the crowbar again, this time on his left elbow. There came a loud crack and he screamed in agony, nursing his injured arm.

"You want to tell me why the fucking hell you think you can just treat my brother like something on the bottom of your paws?" snarled Amelia. "What did he ever do to any of you?"

"Hey, lay off him!" cried Billy. "This whole thing was my idea! I'm the one you want." Amelia instantly saw through his ruse when fear zipped across his features the instant she met eyes with him. *For a wolf, this guy is absolutely pathetic.* she thought sourly.

"I don't believe you." she snarled, before she whacked his muzzle with her horn. A crack echoed across the building as his jaws dislocated, blood starting to drip from his muzzle. "You know why? Theo told me what you did. Bruce is the only one of you three who would be stupid enough to do it. I know who his father is. And you two are just Bruce's lackeys. Want to get on his fucking asswipe father's good side, do you?"

"Ugh," cried Billy, "whatdju do 'at for? You jus broge my jaw!"

"I didn't realise you two had more ivory than sense." sneered Bruce. Her boot moved over to his crotch and she began to apply her weight onto it, causing him to whimper in pain. Behind her, the human tried to reach for her neck. But she saw him coming. She caught his forearms, before she hurled him over her head into the wolf, sending both of them and Bruce's drink tumbling over.

"Fucker." grunted Joe. This drew a punch to the side of the head, causing his jaw to hit the hard floor. Panting heavily, she brandished the crowbar again, ready to whack the next one who dared to speak. Below her, Joe spat out two teeth and a mouthful of blood. But the bartender wasn't going to stand for this.

"Bloody hell, Amelia!" he snapped. She picked out his London accent, recognising the chameleon immediately. *Not this guy again.* she thought, her heart sinking. "This is killing me! What am I supposed to do when you're roughing up my customers? You've got some nerve coming in here after your last ban!"

"Come on, Ian." said Amelia derisively. "This is none of your business."

"You don't even have the decency to take it outside! You want me to get the police over here again?"

"Yeah, fat chance. Like that did any good last time. This is personal." She turned her attention back to the felled bloodhound and aimed the crowbar at him as though it was a sword.

"Look, honey, I get it. We won't bother your brother again, okay?" he said pitifully. For the first time he sounded fearful, but this just made her apply further weight to his manhood, making him cry out again. In front of her, Billy had his hands applied to his lower jaw as though scared it might fall off.

"They've had enough!" protested one of the other patrons. Amelia's only response was an ominous stare, before she turned back to Bruce again.

"Your choice, Brucie." she snarled. "You stay the fuck away from me and my brother, or the next time we meet, you'll be walking away as a eunuch."

"The guy's a wimp!"

“And you think that’s cause for you to attack him? I’ve taken you down once, and I could do it again. But I have an ace up my sleeve.” Joe tried to get up to his feet, only to be cowed by Amelia aiming the crowbar at him. Billy could only grunt in pain as he held his jaw, spitting up two mouthfuls of blood. With a loud moan and a hollow pop, he finally swung his jaw back into place, but did not move when he saw Amelia aiming the crowbar at him before grabbing Bruce by the scruff of his neck.

“You’ve already messed us up good.” snapped Joe, dribbling blood as he spat out a third tooth.

“Yeah, you’ve already made your point!” cried Billy. Before she realised it, Amelia heard herself mockingly laughing.

“You really haven’t got much fight in you for a wolf, have you?” she sneered. “I’ve seen braver fucking sheep. And they don’t even have sharp teeth like you do.”

“Ooh, ouch!” hooted one of the other patrons. Amelia’s expression turned into a furious snarl.

“Get up!” she demanded.

“What are you doing?”

“You’ll find out in just a minute. Get into the women’s bathroom before I really lose my temper!” Looking frightened for their lives, each of the three men got up and started to make their way towards the room, aware of the other patrons and the bartender watching as she brandished the crowbar and jabbed their backs with the end of her horn.

“Alright Amelia, now that is enough!” cried Ian.

“Hey, would you let them get away unharmed if they attacked *your* brother? No!” retorted Amelia. Suddenly, Billy tried to run away from her, but he wasn’t fast enough to avoid a whack from the crowbar, dislocating his jaw again. Ignoring his grunting in pain, she aimed it squarely at his muzzle as she fiercely pushed the trio through the door.

“The next one of you who tries to get away will get this in the eye.” she snapped. “That’s not as easy to deal with as a dislocated jaw, is it?”

“Fug gyou.”

*

By no means had this been a dull shift for the Inspector. The middle aged fox, adorned with blue and white fur and donning a matching suit, had only been outside of the police station for about thirty minutes when he’d received a report of a theft of clothing from outside of a residential dwelling. They’d belonged to someone he knew – a middle aged pig named Charlene Butler, who was away attending a dance competition. And the description her next door neighbour had given was a familiar one.

Glad though he was that he was finally doing something today other than paperwork, he hadn’t expected Amelia of all creatures to be back in town after so many years. But why would she steal clothing of all things? He didn’t know what she was planning, but the sooner he could bring her in for questioning, or at the very least find out why she’d done this, the better. He remembered the times they’d crossed paths before. While he didn’t like to get aggressive with her unless the situation called for it, he still was well aware of what his job entailed. He was not one to fall for flirting or bribery like some of his current and former colleagues were.

He knew only that this neighbour, a rabbit named Declan Smythe, had seen her travelling east. But then, his radio crackled and the dispatcher’s voice boomed from it.

“Silent alarm received from the Grayson Tavern.” he said.

“This is Inspector Ronan Mendip. I’ll take that. I’m in the area.” answered the Inspector.

“Received.” He recognised the name in a heartbeat. A cubhood friend was the bartender and he had been one of his regulars for many years. He stroked the flask in his suit pocket, before feeling around his pocket for his baton and his pistol. He hoped he wouldn’t have to use them, but he knew that in this line of work, he never

could take too many precautions. He wasn't sure why, but he had a sneaking suspicion that the woman he was looking for was there.

He headed for the bar, parking his car next to a motorbike that looked inconspicuous. When he killed the engine, he drew out a small wad of banknotes. If his hunch was correct, he hoped this move would draw her to him. Or, if she was not here, perhaps one of the punters had spotted her.

"Alright," said Ronan as he strolled in counting his notes, "I've got a hundred bucks for the first bloke who can tell me something about a panty thief rhino girl named..." He trailed off when he set eyes on the scene before him. The punters were loudly chuckling at three men, a human, a wolf and a bloodhound, who were all dressed in identical feminine dress outfits. He recognised the leggings, short skirts, and most of all, the pink and white leather tops adorned with small gemstones.

On command, the dishevelled looking wolf removed the shirt, fully exposing his bare chest and drawing crowing and hooting from two human women at the back. Part of him couldn't believe his luck, while another was not at all sure how to react to this spectacle. It had been many years since he had seen something quite like this.

"Why do we have to do this, Amelia? This is so humiliating!" objected the wolf, who had blood around his lips and muzzle.

"Yeah, you heard what Billy said!" cried the human, blood all around his mouth and clearly missing several teeth. "You've proven your point already!"

"You know why," sneered the rhino. "Now dance! The audience is getting restless!" As though by command, the patrons cheered and raised their mugs and glasses the instant they started to sidestep uncomfortably, while the bartender looked to the detective in hope he would soon act. He saw that both the rhino and one of the patrons had their mobile phones out and were recording what was going on. And then he noticed who the bloodhound was. *That's Sheriff Marsh's son!* he thought. *Oh, what's he done to get himself into this? And with Amelia of all creatures?*

"Where the hell did you come from?" cried the wolf, throwing a pleading look his way before he let out a whimper. This drew a chuckle from the back of the bar.

"I was in the neighbourhood. And I received a report about the theft of clothing. And it looks like I've found both it and a certain old *friend* of Sheriff Marsh." She showed no reaction to this name at all. Instead, her attention remained with the bloodhound. "Glad to be back, Amelia?"

"You bet, *Officer*."

"That's Inspector to you, girly."

"You hear that, Brucie?" smirked the rhino. "Daddy isn't here to save you this time. Instead, you get one of his lackeys."

"You've already cracked my head open, taken all of our money and made Billy strip! This better not end up on the Internet!"

"Tough. That's exactly where this is going."

"Amelia Richardson," announced the Inspector, "I don't know what you think you're doing, but if you think this will somehow shorten your rap sheet, you are sorely mistaken. So far, there are two counts of theft and three of assault to chalk up."

"Give it whatever name you want. I call it retribution."

"Sheriff Marsh always talked to me about you, and I see he wasn't lying."

"Just arrest her!" cried the wolf. "We haven't done anything to her!"

"You want your jaw broken rather than just dislocated this time?" snapped Amelia, before she turned her attention back to the Inspector. "Before you do anything with me," she said, shoving the bloodhound towards him, "Bruce here has something he wants to say to you."

"No I don't! Just give us back our money and let me get out of these clothes, will ya?"

"Brucie boy," she said in a mockingly endearing tone, as though she was a mother chastising a misbehaving cub, "why don't you tell the nice man what you and your two buddies did to my brother earlier today?" She held the crowbar level with the wolf and human's heads, looking angrily at them. Ronan cautiously stroked the handcuffs in his pocket.

"I don't think there's any way you can justify this level of brutality, Amelia," he said. "So this had better be very good."

"Oh, don't worry, Inspector. It is."

"I, uh..." stammered Bruce. But it was clear Amelia was losing her patience, for she pressed the crowbar against his neck.

"What's the matter? Losing our bottle, are we?" she snarled. "Or did you already lose it when you smashed it over Theo's head?" This stopped the punters dead in their tracks.

"Is that true?" asked a human man sitting in the corner.

"Tell them. Now!"

"We...we found him waiting at one of the bus stops," stammered Bruce.

"That's right," confirmed the human. "I got out my phone to try and record it, but...the battery was dead. I didn't get anything."

"Joe and Billy started insulting him," continued Bruce. The Inspector noticed the eye underneath the gash starting to twitch. *She's caused some real damage here.* he thought. "Asking him if he was gay, a tranny, that kind of thing. He never wanted to talk to us."

"Oh, I wonder why," said Amelia sarcastically.

"He always either blanked us or tried to run away. That's a wimp's way to deal with this." But this was not enough for the still angry rhino.

"He said you've been doing this to him for months."

"It was always just to try and get his attention," Bruce went on, shutting his eye while he wiped the blood from his wound. "We're not exactly keen on the fruity type. My dad always said that's not what a real man is. He didn't like running into them after the time he found two of them...together...in the park down the street."

"You what?" cried one of the patrons.

"What...you're saying *that's* why you attacked these men, Amelia?" cried Ian in surprise.

"He's not finished yet," answered Amelia. "Are you, Bruce?" She slapped her palm with the crowbar.

"When we saw him at the bus stop today, we'd shared a bottle of vodka. We...saw him with the girly books they've been advertising downtown."

"And he was dressed in pink and pale blue," added the human. "What do you think that looks like?"

"This sounds like a textbook homophobic attack to me, boys," said the Inspector succinctly.

"Bruce...he was the one who beat him," said the wolf. "The both of us just jeered at the guy."

"When he started to flee," said Bruce, "I...grabbed him by the throat and slammed him against the bus stop. And when he said to me...that he didn't think it mattered if I thought he was a real man...that's when I saw red. I got a couple of punches in, and...when he was down...I...hit him with the bottle."

"Joe," said Billy meekly, "he's the only one of us who smokes, and he set his books on fire while he was crying in pain. I did the thing with the milkshake while he was down. Thought it would be funny to make it look like he'd seen some action. I told him he fights like a girl. And that's when we left."

"You've clearly never met a girl like me before, have you?" sneered Amelia. *You took the words right out of my muzzle.* thought the Inspector.

"Guess not." answered Ronan for them. "My force will need to get Theo in for a statement."

"He's at home." answered Amelia. "But I'm not giving an address while the cameras are still running."

"Then we can discuss this at the station. Come on. All four of you are coming with me." Amelia scowled at him, but soon relented.

"Fine." she snapped. "Let's just get this over with. And maybe you'll do something with Curly, Larry and Moe here." She slipped the mobile phone into her jacket pocket as the Inspector handcuffed her to Joe, whilst his spare pair went around the other two men's wrists. Amelia followed the Inspector out, the three men limply trailing alongside her.

"Thank you." called Ian. "About time you four decided to shut up and get out. You're all barred."

"My force will be in touch for your security footage, Ian." When he got a look at the rhino, however, she didn't seem to be particularly bothered about her arrest. Rather, she looked snarky, perhaps even victorious.

"I can't wait until you get in touch with his father, Inspector." she smirked.

"Why?"

"He'll be *really* happy to see this is how his son turned out." she said sarcastically. "I'd put money on it."

*

Once Theo had showered and dressed, he slipped on a pair of blue jeans and a green shirt. Despite knowing what his sister was capable of, he had found himself wondering throughout her absence what she had planned to do. He was tense, even fearful that she had either got herself injured or done something drastic. He found himself wishing he'd never said anything to her now. How could he ever forgive himself if she got herself into more trouble with the law on account of him? He couldn't stand to even think about it.

He poured himself a glass of red wine, by now wishing he had never said anything to her at all. The only thing he wanted now was to forget about the events of that day and hope that the three men would never darken his life again. But before he could take a sip, there came the sound of a car pulling up. He looked outside the window. His heart tightened when he recognised the vehicle and the occupants.

"No," he said, "Amelia, you didn't have to do this on my account." *But she did.* added his mind. *And it's too late now.* Outside was a dark blue sedan that, while it appeared inconspicuous, he recognised to be an unmarked police car. He remained still as Inspector Mendip and Amelia climbed out.

"We have an agreement, Amelia." said Inspector Mendip gruffly. "Make any attempt to run from me and –"

"I didn't forget." cut in Amelia curtly. Theo opened the front door before either had reached it, and the rhinos' faces lit up on seeing each other again.

"Amelia," he asked softly, "what happened? Why is that Inspector with you?"

"Mr Richardson, my name is Inspector Mendip. I found Amelia here at the tavern. She had violently attacked three men who she claims attacked you." The fox looked over him. "And even without forensics, your injuries paint a very clear picture."

"Where are they now?"

"They're being held in custody on hate crime charges. Amelia has admitted to three counts of assault, but she wanted to make a proposition to you before we go any further."

"I won't bullshit you." answered Amelia. "We think you should come down to the station to give a statement."

"A statement?" he repeated, his voice catching in his throat.

"That's right, son." said the Inspector. "This is a serious crime these three men have committed against you. I'm not one for taking bribes, so I want to see that they don't do what they've done to you to another creature."

"I don't know. I don't want this to go any further than it already has done." It was only then that he saw the spots of blood on Amelia's clothing. "Amelia...whatever you've done to them, surely that's enough."

"If you're afraid of them coming after you again," said the Inspector, "my force will ensure this cannot happen."

"This is our neighbourhood, Theo." added Amelia. "And you're as welcome here as the rest of us." Theo remained still as he turned this over in his mind.

"I'm still not sure I want to do this." he answered timidly. "I know you say I let creatures walk all over me, but I don't want the next time to be even worse."

"We'll make sure it won't come to that." said the Inspector with a fond smile.

"Theo, you saw how disgusted I was when you told me what they'd done to you." Amelia pressed on, jabbing her horn towards him. "I didn't want them getting away with that, even if Bruce is a cop's son. So I kicked the crap out of them, got them dressed in feminine clothes and showed them up in front of the whole bar. And I'd do it all again in a heartbeat."

"What did you just say you did?" cried Theo.

"You're my brother, not some sort of punching bag. You'd do well to remember that." At that moment, the Inspector's mobile phone rang.

"Sir?" he answered, while Amelia rushed up to Theo and coiled him in her arms.

"You see how much I care about you, don't you?"

"Yeah, I do. You must think I've been a bother."

"Theo, being a bother is a lot better than being a corpse on the side of the road. Once we get this all done with, I'll replace those books and that milkshake for you just like I said I would."

"You're right." he said after a hesitant moment. "I still don't expect you to go this far for me though."

"I guess there's a lot more I haven't told you than I thought."

"Alright, that was my Chief." said the Inspector. "A witness has just come forward. He says he saw them attacking you from his place of work. Please, think about what this will entail. Your statement will carry a lot of weight." Theo met eyes with him, then Amelia, managing a smile. He knew exactly what this meant.

"Alright." he finally decided aloud. "I'll do it."

The End

