

**HUNTEROPERA  
STORY**

**BALTHAZARDRAGON  
ART**



**CAGING SONGBIRD**



## C A G I N G S O N G B I R D

Madripoor was balmy this time of year, a cloying cloud of smog and smoke coating the skyline. A person relying on the sun for some sense of time would have been lost here, lost and alone. The pollution in the sky caught fire sometimes. This was a city smothered in darkness and decorated by pollutants, a place where clean air was a luxury only the wealthy or the powerful could afford.

Paul Norbert Ebersol was both. The air filtration system from his techpac was barely visible to the naked eye, and that same technology let him keep perfect time. He knew he was early for his meeting and he knew that was a risk. In this city everything was – *too early and the locals might decide to attack a loitering someone, too late and no one sane would wait* – but he could keep himself safe. Hr'd been a supervillain and a superhero and now he was mostly just himself.

Still, the technology he wore offered as much enticement as protection, desperate people watching him with hungry eyes.

He hoped he wouldn't have to kill too many of them.



The man he was meeting was not nearly so endangered.

Jonathan Garrett, formerly of SHIELD, could send his consciousness from one specially prepared life model decoy to another. Paul recognized the technology – *he'd helped build it* – and knew there were a limited number of bodies that could be prepared without compromising the mind being moved. The limit had been one active, one waiting, when he'd developed it and he didn't think it had moved too far beyond that.

Further, Paul knew he could trap a mind like Garrett's in a body and keep it from going anywhere. He'd done it before and Garrett knew that, but Garrett had still agreed to meet him because of what he'd seen and then what he'd confirmed.

“You look good,” Paul said, taking the man's hand in his own. They began walking and the eyes

watching them moved on, looking for lonelier souls to target.

“Thank you,” Garret said, smiling. “The copy of me you left in the Raft still holding up?”

“No one is the wiser,” Paul nodded. They both knew he was the one checking those systems. “And that will remain so as long as you can tell me what I want to know.”

“And what is that?” Garrett asked, his grin growing.

“I want you to tell me where Melissa Gold is.”



The answer looked obvious.

Melissa Gold had been Screaming Mimi and then she had been Songbird, a criminal and then a hero. She was part of the Thunderbolts, then an Avenger, then the Thunderbolts again. She'd been a frontline soldier, a rescuer, a warden, a protector, a spy.

She had friends, more friends than Paul did, but there were few people that knew her so well. He'd been there when she'd lost her powers and he'd built the equipment that let her be a criminal, be a hero, be an icon. Se came to him for help when she needed it, when her tech failed or when she was in trouble.

He loved her, but knew her heart belong to another – Abner Jenkins, Paul's closest friend. He was happy for them, stood by them, supported them. He loved Abner and then Abner died and Paul and Melissa had gone to the funeral and she'd been beautiful.

“His memory is a blessing,” she murmured, tossing dirt into the grave.

They'd spoken a few times since, planned to get coffee together and catch up. They'd set a date, not a *date*, just a moment in time where they could check in with one another and mourn the loss of someone they both knew better than anyone else, someone who had been closer than blood to them both.

He'd spoken with Melissa when she came to meet him. He'd smiled, been polite, exchanged words, even hugged her. The tech-pac could drug him calm while keeping his mind sharp, and he didn't want to give the game away.

Paul did not want anyone to know that he knew that the Melissa he met was a life model decoy.



He watched her on television, in the field, as much as he could, trying to discover where the real Melissa was. He kept quiet, remembering what could be done to him if the wrong people found out – there was Pleasant Hill, the Raft, so many places that people like him could be sent to.

There were no answers to be found, not until Garrett had gotten in touch with him.

“You might not like it,” Garrett said. “But I can show you if you agree to meet.”

“Where?”

“Madripoor.”



“Where is she?” Paul asked.

“Somewhere in this city,” Garrett said, then paused. “I think.”

“You think?” Paul growled, the tech-pac beginning to expand.

“Settle down,” Garrett said, hailing a cab and holding the door open when one stopped. “Settle in.”

Paul stared at him for a long moment.

He'd come this far.

“The only way to get where we're going is from here, and it's tricky even when you know where you're going,” Garrett explained. “Security is tight, and you won't remember much of the place when you leave, if you remember it at all. I mention it 'cause of that whole Pleasant Hill fiasco – the madame wants you to know what you're getting into before we go.”

“I have back-up memory systems,” Paul growled.

“You'll disable them willingly, and you'll remember that,” Garrett smirked. “And I get it. I'm paranoid, too, it comes with the job, but I promise you that this is the best way to maintain secrecy and security. You'll remember it some of the time and you'll know how to pick out the signs to get there if you like what you see. If not, well, no harm, no foul. You'll remember nothing and you'll think fake Melissa is the real thing.”

“How?”

“Does it matter?”

“Professionally, yes.”

Garrett laughed, said nothing, stared out the window.

“Fine,” Paul growled. “Take me to her.”



They circled the city for a half-hour, Garrett paying the cab driver ahead of time. The directions he gave made little sense, but Garrett seemed to know where they were going.

They got to an intersection just as their pre-paid fare was about to expire.

“Bodyslide by two,” Garrett said.





Paul and Garrett were sitting on a couch, the cushions soft, pressed, clean, deep. The lights were set low, lush carpets and drapes all combining to set a mood. Beautiful people, barely dressed, helped them to their feet and offered them sparkling white wine and small appetizers, welcomed them, offered them anything.

“No, thank you,” Garrett said. “We're here to see Songbird.”

“Her next show is in a half hour,” a pretty lady Paul did not know whispered, looking up at him with pretty eyes. “I can take you there, keep you entertained if you like, or I can find someone more to your liking...?”

“You are very much to my liking,” Garrett said, wrapping a hand in her black silky hair and pulling her in, kissing her. She was utterly compliant, offering no resistance at all, and when Garrett pulled her away from his face he held her out to Paul like an offering. “You want a taste?”

“Where's Melissa?”

“Forgive my friend,” Garrett said, pulling the giggling woman back against him, molesting her as he nibbled on her ear. “He's single-minded. Why don't you lead the way...?”

“Cindy,” she said, hands at her sides as Garrett touched her however he pleased.

He let her go, spanked her ass. She turned and smiled at him, twisting her body to best expose her ass and her small chest, then flounced in front of them when he didn't spank her again.

“What is this place?” Paul asked.

“What does it look like?”

“A brothel.”

Garrett laughed, letting the floozy lead them both.



The hallways were vast, labyrinthine. Without Cindy to guide them, Paul thought they might have gotten quickly lost, but she navigated the length for them. Paul's tech-pac couldn't keep track of it and he wondered how anyone could make sense of this place.

“I try not to think about it,” Garrett said. “Seriously, just enjoy the ride.”

There were glass panels on the wall, spotlights showing beautiful dancing people in various states of undress, their hands raised and hips shaking, tight young bodies on display. Spotlights beamed at them, highlighting their curves, their muscles, the light doing nothing to hide the despair and shame in their eyes.

“So it is a brothel,” Paul muttered to himself.

“A very special brothel that specializes in a specific kind of product,” Garrett laughed, shoving Cindy against a wall. She turned to face him, let him pin her hands above her head as he used his knee to spread her legs apart. “Look at this. Super whore-oines.”

“All of these people were superheroines?”

“Some of them were superheroes, I think,” Garrett said, shoving his hand between Cindy's legs, pushing into her. The girl simpered, whimpered, bowing her head, acting like she was enjoying the

abuse. "Who were you? I mean, what was your idiot costume?"

"Silk," panted Cindy, her legs shaking.

"Never heard of you," Garrett said, letting her go. She landed on feet and staggered back against the wall, stumbling. She looked caught between hunger and fury, but she closed her eyes and bowed her head, let Garrett wrap his fist in her hair again. "I guess that's why you're working the floor, huh?"

She said nothing when he pulled her close and kissed her again, then shoved her in front of them.

"I think I'll keep you," Garrett said. "During the show, I mean."

"Where's Melissa?" Paul asked, feeling numb. Cindy was hugging herself, her ass swaying in front of them.

"This way." Her voice was shaking, her pace slower.

They followed.



Cindy took them to a large evening lounge with deep set leather chairs, fine brandy served by scantily clad women who would not meet his eyes, and dim blue lighting. Bright white lights shone down around a circular stage in the center of the lounge, the stage covered by thick red velvet curtains.

They were led to a table halfway between the backwall and the stage, offered places to sit.

"Can I get you anything?" Cindy asked.

"Water," Paul said.

"Two brandies," Garrett added. "Maybe a little charcuterie. And your mouth on my cock, cutie."

Cindy nodded, offering a smile that didn't look forced at all, and then scurried off.

"Will she actually come back and...?"

"Suck my cock? Yeah," Garrett grinned, spreading his arms on the backrest of their seat. "The product here is very well trained."

Cindy came back with the drinks and Garrett pushed one of the brandies towards Paul as Cindy slipped discreetly under the table. He leaned back, one hand vanishing from sight, eyes rolling.

"Are you okay?" Paul asked. Garrett just shushed him.

"Shhhh," he said, "the show is about to begin."



The drapes pooled down into the floor by some unseen mechanism, revealing slim golden bars, so thin as to be translucent, mostly visible by the bright white spotlights that assaulted the birdcage from every direction. A swing descended most of the way down the cage, hovering maybe seven feet from the bottom of the cage.

A bundle lay there, wrapped in blankets. Soft moans came from the blankets and they began to shuffle,

shudder, move, part. The moans were caught by microphones and harmonized, roiling through speakers all around the lounge. Every eye was focused on the cage, on the bundle, and what was emerging.

Paul recognized the white-pink hair of the girl he'd been looking for. She seemed dizzy, confused, leaning heavy on her arms. Had she been drugged? She looked like she'd been drugged and was just coming out of whatever haze she was in now. He could see her blink. She was in her costume. She whispered but the words were lost, her tone caught and turned into music. She looked around, bewildered.

A visible electric current ran down the cage from the bars to the floor to Melissa Gold.

She jumped up, her yelp caught, turned into music. The music was made louder, a heartbeat thrum of bass that gave birth to one wave after another, Melissa seeing them coming, trying to jump, trying to reach the bars, her every breathe or scream or cry caught and added to the music.

Paul thought about helping her but the pants he was in were framing his erection. It would hurt to move. He groped himself, staring at his friend, Melissa, a girl he had crushed on since she'd been Screaming Mimi. He dreamed about rescuing her. He moaned, gripping himself as she screamed.

Melissa ran for the bars, jumping as the current moved, timing herself so carefully to not be shocked. The bars looked so frail – he was an invalid without his tech-pac and he was certain he could have broken free of them – but the moment she touched them she shook and screamed, shocked, the bars to her cage always holding a charge. The cage spun slowly as she was trapped, her every muscle tensing under electric strain, spun around so everyone could see her twitch and shake, her small breasts and slender thighs and muscled shoulders shake, her eyes wide and mouth open, her scream made beautiful.

The current let her go and she crumbled, crying, and the music caught her sobs and turned them pretty, made her suffering lovely. She was given time to collect herself as her audience watched, panic giving way to certainty. She glared, drying her tears on her sleeve, staring into the dark where so many people were watching her, enjoying her.

When she stood up she looked fierce, strong. Her words and accusations were stolen by the tune, made another meaningless part of the show, but Paul wasn't sure if she knew that or not. Instead, she spread her arms and began to sing, pink wing melodies carrying her skyward, her eyes and throat rising.

He wondered what she was looking at.

And then he remembered: she had lost her powers. Mechanisms he and Abner had built let her use her powers again, but even a cursory glance let him see the mechanism had been changed and his tech-pac told him how – for every second she used her powers, it would shock her for ten.

She fell from the air, her wings curling in on herself, powers turned against her. She curled into a ball, then spread out, writhing, her weapon turned into a collar. She clutched at it, trying to pull it off, but there were pads in her suit that attacked specific muscle groups, a beating in time with the beat. She fought. Melissa fought. She pulled at the gold around her neck and on her shoulders, ripping it off, pulling her costume off, exposing herself to so many people that just wanted to watch her suffer.

Only when she was naked did the shocks stop. She curled into a ball, holding herself, head bowed and weeping, her cries caught up and made a part of the symphony that washed through the area. The cage began to spin, showing her utter defeat, her suffering, turning her pain into music.

And then the shocks started from the top of the cage once more.







Melissa was hurting now. She was in pain. She crawled in her cage, moving towards the center, underneath the hanging bar. The electric current would come and wash over her, knocked her to her belly, to her ass, forcing her to writhe and weep for the enjoyment of everyone around her and then it would stop and she would keep moving, keep crawling.

She was a hero, his Melissa, his Songbird.

Even with the cage spinning, even with her powers reduced, she was still fighting in the only way she could.

She pushed herself up to her knees, holding herself as another electric shock roared through her, gritting her teeth and shaking and crying but not falling. She held steady, waited for the shakes to stop. She stood up on her own two feet, still holding herself. Another electric shock and she braced for it, standing and shaking, crying out but still standing, still standing as it faded.

Her face when the shaking stopped – the quick hatred for her audience, the radiance of salvation offered by the bar. It was almost seven feet above the ground and even if she felt bigger she was a tiny thing, five-and-a-half feet if that.

But still she was looking at the bar hanging above her.

The current came for her and she jumped.



The bar was too high for her, but there was pleasure to be had to watching her stretch, spread her fingers, and fail. There was joy to be had in watching a little Songbird fall back the electrified earth, in watching her shake and listening to her cries, in watching the way she crumbled back down when the current passed her, in the slight move of her shoulders as she sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

Paul wondered when he'd started to masturbate, but a quick glance revealed that he wasn't the only one: several onlookers were pleasuring themselves as Melissa suffered, and most of those that weren't were being pleasured by someone else. Garrett winked at him, arms spread wide, and Paul could just see the top of Cindy's head bobbing up and down under the table. She seemed so much less than human, now. So much less than a person.

Just like his Songbird.

Melissa had pushed herself back up to her knees, was looking up at the bar again, bracing herself to be shocked again, to stand again, to try again.

How many time would she fail before failure set in, he wondered.

More importantly: would it be before or after he had a chance to cum?



The device he and Abner had made enhanced what powers she had left, but they weren't the source of her powers. This time, when she jumped, she sang and created a little pink disk underneath her feet. It broke even as she was leaping off of it to another one, and then a third.

She almost reached the bar, her fingers not quite closing around it.

It took Melissa another two times before she finally managed to grasp the bar with both hands and pull herself up, thighs across the bar, keeping her safe from the tide of electricity below her. Everyone could see it now, the tide unending, a constant electric hum threatening her from below, and then another voice – one Paul did not recognize, a resonant feminine threat – matched the music of Melissa's gasps and shallow breaths.

“Straddle the bar, Songbird.”

He saw the pain on her face. She closed her eyes, expression crumbling, leaning against the bars holding her up. She screamed when a current moved across the bar and she almost fell, only just managed to keep holding thanks to her weakened powers locking her in place.

Paul wondered what would happen if she fell. He could imagine it, the tumble, the crash, the writhing screams that would thoroughly dominate her until she finally fell unconscious, her broken mind trapped in a still twitching body. He wondered if that had happened in the past and, looking at the audience, he knew that it had.

They were waiting, everyone waiting to see what she would do.



She lifted one leg, carefully balancing, letting the central bar nestle inside her cleft. She closed her eyes, bit her lip, whimpered. The bar was vibrating. The bar was vibrating and the vibration was stronger, getting stronger, her legs quivering, her lips parting, her shallow panting caught in the music and wafting around the lounge.

They could see her cheeks flush, see her whole body shake and shiver, her head lolling on her shoulders, eyes rolling into the back of her head as strong muscles sagged, every whimper caught and drifting through the lounge, letting them all know how badly she wanted this.

And then

“please”

whatever device had been muffling her words was gone and they could all hear her beg, hear her moan, hear her plead with need, hear her promise anything if her captors would just let her cum. She was made to promise away her life, her soul, her body, her mind, everything she was, admit to wanting this, needing this. They had her sing about how she could be rented, how anyone could have her for a price, how they were going to let her cum and she would be back with another show soon and wouldn't everyone come back to watch her suffer again and again and

She screamed.



Her back arched, hair flying back. Pink sparkles and a halo surrounded her, painting her every curve and muscle as her mouth opened in a wide o, as her eyes opened and tears slithered down her cheeks.

She screamed.

She sank deeper on the bar bisecting her, white goo dribbling down her spread thighs, her tightening thighs, down her calves and toes and falling to the ground.

She screamed.

Again and again she screamed, whole body shaking, small breasts bouncing on her chest, shoulders going back, fingers losing their grip. The pink light vanished and only the white remained, a stark glow that painted her failure in perfect relief.

Her whole body seemed to collapse and she fell, boneless, off the bar and down to the stage below. The solid electrified floor had been replaced by cushions – *when had that happened?* – the blankets she had emerged from catching her. She lay among them, splayed, a stupid smile curling her lips, her eyes sightless and empty.

The birdcage spun so everyone could see her broken, defeated, waiting.

The curtains fell slowly, the lights in the lounge brightening only a little.

Paul was not sure when he had cum, but Cindy was happy to lick him clean.



It didn't cost much more than a single bank heist to get her alone.

Paul was led down a staircase, down to a circular room with thicker bars surrounding it. She was hugging her knees, back in a gossamer parody of her costume, recovering from her performance on a plush circular bed.

“We will kill you before we let her go,” the madame of the brothel informed him, touching a keypad. Even his tech-pac couldn't tell how it worked, not really. “Do not let her take you hostage.”

He nodded and she opened the door, let him inside, and left them alone.

“Melissa?” he said. His voice sounded distant, but she looked up, eyes widening.

“Paul?” she looked up, her eyes going wide. She jumped to her feet, jumped into his arms. “Paul, this place... we need to get out of here. Do you have plan? Can your tech get us out of this cage?”

“Yes.”

That's what he wanted to say. That's what he meant to say.

“Yes.”

That's what he wanted to tell her, that they were going to escape and free everyone.

“Yes.”

But she was half-naked, mostly naked, and he was so hard and she was here and pliant and desperate. She fought when he pushed her down, but her powers were gone and he still had his tech-pac. Mechanisms under his control pinned her, let him rip her clothing off. He was so hard it was painful, and her legs and lips were pulled open, waiting for him.

Melissa begged him not to. Pleaded with him. She cried and shook her head and tried to use her pitiful strength against his machines, tried to sing anything into existence to batter him away. He even let her try, standing over her, letting her use every last ounce of strength that she had left.

Songbird failed.

*She failed.*

And she was wet, pliant, her pleas changing in tone and intent.

She wanted him as much as he wanted her. She couldn't help herself.

*Finally.*

Finally he had his chance to see what Abner had enjoyed for so very long.



She was worth the wait.

She was tight, his little songbird. Tight body, tight muscles, tight tight *tight*. Her cheeks flushed and she sung as he pushed into her, a terrible sense of victory filling him. It felt like he was raping her song, raping her soul, twisting her into what he needed her to be, and she couldn't do anything but lie under him and writhe and excite him, making everything better... every twitch, every moan, the dying light in her eyes, it all composed a symphony that left him singing.

And after, when he sagged over her, her arms flailed to hold him, her legs pushing him deeper inside her. She was barely conscious, that same stupid smile on her face. Whatever they had done to her here had made her better than anyone he could have imagined.





“I need to speak with whomever is in charge,” Paul said, shoving Garrett to one side and standing over Cindy Moon. “Go. I’ll wait.”

“What the hell, man,” Garrett moaned. “I was enjoying her.”

“Go find someone else,” Paul seethed. “Don’t you have a thing for redheads? Your jackpot is down that way. There’s an actress or super model or something down that way.”

Garrett glared at him but left, holding himself in his hands. Paul didn’t watch him go; instead, he sat down and stared at the wall opposite and thought.

*Do I really want to do this?*

He thought about Screaming Mimi screaming at him, thought about Songbird in chains, thought about Melissa Gold underneath him, her cries of pleasure, the way she quivered and pushed onto him, letting him into her. He needed that in his life and he needed it more often.

When he looked up his section of the brothel was empty. He was alone.

Except

“You wanted to see me.”

She was standing over him, black voids where her eyes should be, her golden mask implacable. Her hands were open and resting at her sides and she was tall, taller than him, stronger than him. He knew her by reputation but they had never met. Paul had worked for Tony Stark and she had fucked Tony Stark, both figuratively and literally.

He recognized her voice from the show, the order Melissa had obeyed to straddle the bar that had inflicted the mind-blowing orgasm on her, that had broken her into a frail little nothing.

Paul nodded.

He could accept that she was in charge.

“I like what you’ve done here, but I have some ideas to make it better,” he said, swallowed, staring up at her. She was impossible to read, perfectly still, her presence a threat.

“You want a job.”

“I do,” he said. “And I only want two things as payment: money, a lot of money, and the chance to fuck Melissa whenever I want to...”

*The song will never end.*