

A Biker's Tale

BoneDog

2007-07-07

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A Biker's Tale



This is a tale of intrigue, mystery, and romance in a few out of the way places of the world, namely The Southwest United States. Any semblance to real persons is 'mostly' accidental. Enjoy!

1 Out of Gas



rundown-looking farmhouse, and the deer carcasses hanging from the unpainted porch. They had looked at him as he went by, but hadn't even turned their heads, just the eyes had followed him. That was what had made him speed up as he went on down the road, the dead look in their eyes.



where something had rustled in the heavy underbrush most of the late night. He had never

As he coasted down the slight grade, he thought, "I knew I should have gassed up at that last station." He hadn't though because he could tell when he went by there was a redneck bar next door, and the guys standing outside the station would have loved to screw with a biker that looked as scruffy as he did. So he had just kept going, thinking he had enough to carry him through.

"Oh well," he thought, "it could always be much worse," as he remembered that next place just up the road from the station. It had looked just downright scary, what with the dirty unshaven layabouts next to the old

He was glad he was at least twenty miles past them, even if it was starting to get dark, now that the sun had vanished behind the hills to his right. At least he was getting a bit farther South, where the nights were slightly warmer now. He hated the cold, and wanted to get as far away from that type of weather as he could.

Up ahead he could see what looked like a place he could get off the road. Hopefully, enough off to not be seen from the potholed asphalt he had been traveling for the last sixty miles. He could only hope for a quiet night this time, not like the last stopover,

seen anything, there, so figured it was just some small forest creature.

As he rolled off the highway at the turnout, it began to look even more promising than his first glance had indicated. Then he noticed the slight trail off to the right that seemed to wind a bit farther back into the woods. Hey, perhaps he could roll the scooter down that enough to feel safe as well as completely out of sight from passers-by, at least from the ones that seemed to hate bikers for no reason but just for being a biker. Seemed to be a lot more of those types of folks these days than in the past few years. He kind of thought it was just a sign of the harder times these days than fools just deciding to be mean from lack of work, or boredom.



Around the first turn in the faint path, he noticed a second trail even fainter than the first. “Even better,” he thought, and decided to take that one. The better hidden he could get, the more restful sleep he would enjoy. The second trail rose up the hill a bit, requiring pushing the springer evolution a task, but he thought the extra effort worthwhile, as he noticed he would be slightly above the highway yet still able to see traffic coming from either direction, and somewhat screened by a thick line of bushy shrubs. “Perfect place,” he thought as he maneuvered the hardtail facing back the way he had come. Now he could take the time to pour the extra gallon of gas he always carried into the tank, then relax a bit, knowing he could leave pretty quickly if he had to. Somewhere he could hear a trickle of water. Time to explore...

2 The Pool



He did a quick check around to ensure he, or his custom-built sled couldn't be seen from any direction, before he went in search of the water he thought he had heard earlier. As he slipped into the thick brush, his thoughts went back to the start of the trip. How excited he had been at the thought of getting way off the beaten paths and super slabs he usually traveled on, and getting to enjoying some of the lesser-known roads he knew were in the area, but had never had the opportunity to take. "Never enough time...," he thought, as he tripped over a root. That's what it always seemed like on previous trips he had taken. Now things were different, as his wife had passed on a few years back, and he seemed to now have too much free time. "Darn," he muttered, as he got up. He sure did miss her, the love of his life, and the driving force behind their many happy years together. Sometimes it was almost too much to bear, as he turned to point out the beauty all around, only to realize there was no one there. But he did remember the happy times they had and the love they drowned in every day with

each other. Those times he would never forget.

It seemed to brighten ahead as the brush thinned a bit, and the sound of water again became momentarily louder as he advanced. Ahead, he could see a glint off a small pool that seemed to catch the almost-gone dusky light. “The Good Lord must be watching over me today,” he thought, “even though I did run out of gas, and my spare fuel is gone too. He has good reasons for everything, I know.” He added to the litany of thoughts that unconsciously ran through his head most of the time, “...behold He comes, riding on the clouds, shining like the sun, at the trumpet’s call. So lift your voice, it’s the year of Jubilee, out of Zion’s hill, salvation comes...” The trickling sound of water became louder as he pushed through the last screen of brush into a tiny clearing nestled into the small copse that snuggled into a even cozier overhang from the small cliff that rose above the pool. He noticed the tiny waterfall from the small dark cleft in the rock face as it fell the five feet into the pool. That was the sound he had heard earlier, he now knew. The clear pool looked like it was safe to drink. Slipping the canteen off his shoulder from where he had placed it after removing it from his worn dark leather saddlebags draped over the rear fender of the scooter, he dipped it into the cool, clear liquid.



“I wonder where that goes,” he mused, as he noticed a trail on the far side of the rocky pool that snaked between the cliff’s overhang and the pool edge. He capped the canteen and rose to his feet, slinging the strap over his shoulder once again. Stepping around the edge of the pool, he started down the trail to the left, his curiosity aroused. After walking for less than a minute, he noticed the trail seemed to be making a circle, and ahead a glimpse of chrome left of the main trail convinced him he had actually walked in a large loop and was in fact right back at the faint

trail to his scooter. “Now I know where that main trail leads,” he mused. Feeling better knowing the lay of the land, he knew he could remain out of sight unless someone took the fainter trail. He thought that not too likely as it wasn’t very enticing, and was rougher than the main trail. For his liking, it was perfect, and he preferred out of the way places over more traveled spots. To ensure no one would even notice his campsite, he dragged a few branches across the entrance. Looking at his handiwork, he confirmed it was completely hidden, and was unlikely to be spotted unless a local came by. He thought that possibility remote, as the turnout seemed small and unassuming, and between more likely stopping spots with better vistas. “No one will likely want to stop here, especially if they have somewhere to go,” he thought.

Rummaging through the faded, dirty leather saddlebags, he pulled out what would be his supper for the evening, fried chicken. He liked chicken as it kept pretty good, and even though the saddlebags got hot while he was riding, it seemed to keep for at least a day or two, in a Ziploc bag and wrapped in a thick towel. That’s all he required. If he wanted something

different, he could always stop at a roadside restaurant for a change of diet.

It was now full dark, and as he wrapped his thick Pendleton blanket around him against the coming chill, he felt like the day had been pretty good. He had made a decent distance for the day, even with running out of gas and having to push the bike a bit. Good thing it had run out almost at the top of that last hill, or he might have missed this great campsite. “Thank you, Lord.” He always made it a habit to give thanks to the Lord for watching over him, and giving him the many great years he had enjoyed with his wife. But he stilled his heart as he started to miss her presence yet again.

The clear call of Gamble’s Quail was lifting to his mind as he knew there was no one else in the vicinity at the time, and he could get a good night’s rest. He was always pleased to see them, especially for the funny little feather standing from the top of their heads. The starry heavens were bright and clearly visible as he drifted off to sleep, so he knew rain was unlikely, at least for this night.

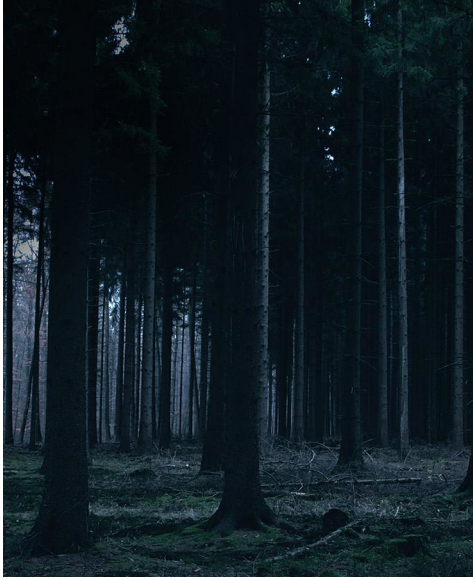
3 Sleep Interrupted



The squeal of brakes startled him awake sometime in the middle of the night. As he cautiously raised from his blanket, he could dimly see headlights through the screening brush of what appeared to be a dilapidated pickup truck pulling off at the turnout which led to his campsite. "Aw, crap," he thought, "there goes my nice quiet night." He hoped the brush he had piled around the scooter was enough to hide the glint of chrome. As he listened, he heard the sound of a door opening and shutting. Dimly he could hear footsteps approaching. As he grabbed his pistol, he realized the steps were getting fainter as their owner went the main trail toward the pool and waterfall. Then he heard voices and the noise of another set of feet, walking a bit faster. They had apparently missed his campsite but there was only about fifty feet separating

his camp from the pool. He hoped the thick screening of brush would be enough to prevent them from discovering his little camp. He could hear the faint tinkle of the waterfall, but little else. He realized he should have been able to hear their voices as the other trail wasn't that lengthy and they seemed not to care about making noise. But he could hear nothing. Could they be attempting to sneak up on him, perhaps having seen him leave the road earlier? He hadn't seen anyone, though, and he had looked around as he steered off.

Quietly he slipped the safety off the Glock 26 as he pushed the covering blanket back, glad it was a dark color and wool, as it made no noise. As he slowly rose into a crouch, he noticed how cool the night had become. He slid behind a nearby oak tree and peered down the path occasionally looking around through the surrounding trees. As he waited, he again noticed how quiet the night had gotten. Bird noises had completely ceased as had the insects vigorous chirping. Only the faint tinkle of the waterfall could be heard through the oppressive quiet as he strained to see in all directions at once. It seemed as if a thick blanket was smothering all sounds. He remembered the branches he had pulled across his side trail would rustle loudly if someone attempted to cross over or move them, so knew he would have some warning if they came from that direction. He saw nothing and heard nothing as he waited for some indication of what was happening, but all remained quiet. After what seemed like half the night, he again realized he could hear the quiet night noises that were normal and that he had noted earlier in the evening. But where were the two people he had heard pass up the trail? Against his better judgment, he decided to investigate. Knowing it was probably stupid, he slowly crept down to where the two trails merged. As he stepped around the untouched branches blocking his side trail, he carefully looked around from the parked truck to the main trail the two people had taken into the forest. Nothing, and no voices! Again, cursing himself for idiocy, he crept slowly and carefully up the trail. As it curved toward the pool, he carefully listened for voices or steps, but again heard and saw nothing. He slowed even more as he saw the glint of water ahead, knowing he had to be close to them, somewhere. Where could they be? Were they creeping through the trees in back of his camp, expecting him to still be there? Something was wrong, but he couldn't put his finger on what it might be. As he finally reached the pool, he realized what had been bothering his subconscious. There were no tracks around the pool edges, or in the trail in the damp earth. Had he passed them somewhere, and not noticed? Quickly he turned around, cringing, but there was nothing! Then, in the near distance, he heard the truck start up and drive off down the highway. Quickly he traced his path back down the trail, but after tripping over every root on the way, he reached the turnout only to see distant tail lights fading into the dark back the way he himself had come the previous day. How had he missed them? Where had they been hiding? Had they been watching him and laughing the whole time? Chills ran up his spine as he realized something strange had happened, but he was not sure just what. He made his thoughtful way back to his secluded campsite, but didn't sleep a wink the rest of the night.



As the night slowly gave way to downy morning light, more and more of the surrounding trees came into view. Everything looked just like it had when he went to bed, but now he looked on everything with suspicion. “Thank you, Lord, for bringing me safely through the night, despite my stupidity,” he prayed silently, as he arose and packed his camp. But he was still curious what had really happened last night. He had to know! After closing the floppy worn saddlebags, he again stepped softly down the trail to the main path. In the new light or what looked to be a fine start of a clear day, he could now easily see two sets of boot tracks in the soft loam of the trail. Following them back up the trail, he noticed both were going in the same direction, but it took a few seconds to realize there were none returning! What was going on here? He stopped, thinking he had missed the returning set, but nothing else could be seen, and both sets going into the woods were clear and sharply defined. He continued, carefully noting each track closely and carefully as he again neared the pool for the third time. Suddenly, the tracks veered off to the left directly toward the cliff, but stopped at the edge of the cliff. There were no more tracks, coming or going! “Nobody walks into solid rock,” he exclaimed to himself. He checked the cliff carefully, but there were nothing to indicate anyone had gone into a cave or fissure in the rock. It was solid the whole length! The short hairs on the back of his neck raised as he realized he was out of his depth here. “Time to get out of here,” he stated with feeling, “now, before anything else happens!” He retraced his steps back to the turnout, but all he saw was some tire tracks and, “What fortune is this?,” he exclaimed, seeing the 2 gallon gas can where the truck had parked. “Guess they forgot it, or were up to no good, and missed it in the dark!” He shook the can which seemed to be full and carried it back to his hidden camp.

4 On The Road Again



The satisfying roar of the straight pipes blasted back the quiet as he hit the starter button of the flyrite-framed bobber. He slowly let out the clutch as the 3-inch belt drive started the usual satisfying “whurzz” around the pulleys. He ran over the branch at the trails’ junction, not even bothering to move them in his need to be out of there and on, away from the strange happenings of the night before. He just wanted to be gone! The grumbling of the 80-inch evolution engine was music to his ears as the strange campsite disappeared in his rear view.

“Whew!,” He was glad to be on the road again. It looked like the start of another beautiful day as he blasted down the scenic two-lane road winding between the low hills. In a few miles, the happenings started to fade in the pleasure of the ride and the continuously unrolling vistas ahead. Another beautiful day of riding seemed to be the order of the day!

He had traveled about fifteen miles when he noticed an old pickup truck parked on the opposite side of the road. He thought nothing of it, but in the back of his mind seemed to be a niggling that the truck was vaguely familiar. No one seemed to be around so he didn’t slow, but kept his speed steady at about the usual sixty miles per hour. As he topped the next hill, he glanced into his rear view mirror, but it was only after the next hill he realized he hadn’t seen the truck, and it should have been easy to see!

“I’m going crazy,” he thought, “must have been the heat waves, that I didn’t see it.” Again, he thought nothing more about it as he putted on down the road.

Ahead he saw a small town and hoped they had a station where he could top of both his tank and emergency bottle too. “Ah ha, I’m in luck,” he thought, as he rolled to a stop in front of the single pump at the small convenience store, next to the only house on that side of the road. Except for another house and a garage with an attached toy store on the opposite side of the highway, that seemed to be it. “Small town, really small town! I hope they have gas...”



After kicking the stand out, and parking the scoot, he entered the store. As he walked up to the single short counter, behind which sat an attractive middle-aged lady, he noticed the shelves were almost bare. "Must not have much business," he thought, as he asked to fill up his scoot and laid a ten on the counter. The lady smiled and asked where he was going as she reached over and pressed the pump control. "Just traveling around, seeing the country," he replied. "Didn't see

which way you came in, but you might be a bit careful where you stop if you are going north," she said.

"Why is that?" he asked, as he turned toward the door.

"Well, there have been some strange goings on lately, up that'away the last several years," she said, "people disappearing and such things. And the folks seem a tad strange for my tastes, hm?"

"Well, I'm going south so I guess I missed whatever is going on," he replied, not wanting to mention the previous night's bizarre activities and events. "She'll think I'm crazy," he thought.

After filling both his tanks, and retrieving his change, he said goodbye on his way out the door, thinking the lady was looking at him a bit wall-eyed for some reason, but not wanting to ask. He just wanted to be on his way!



As he threw his leg over the trusty sled, he happened to glance into his rear view mirror. Parked not 100 yards up the road at the garage was an old pickup truck that seemed familiar. With a shock, he realized it was the same truck he had seen parked up the road miles back, and the same truck he had seen at his campsite the previous night? He sat astride the bike a while, thinking nothing, just sitting, digesting what was going down, but nothing came to mind. Then he noticed the clerk from the store had come to the door and was watching him. "This is getting strange, and downright scary," he

thought, but wasn't quite sure what to do! "I need to make tracks, and fast!" he decided, as he started the big twin and pulled onto the highway. As he glanced back over his shoulder, he noticed the truck pull out onto the road behind him. "Let's see if he can keep up," he laughed as he rolled through the gears of his TrikShift 6-speed tranny. After he shifted into third

gear, really pouring on the coals, he realized the truck was only about 50 yards back. “This is getting out of hand!” he grunted as he hit fourth gear and cranked open the dual-cabled throttle. Going to fifth gear, he noticed the truck seemed to be a bit farther back. “Now that’s the way it should be!” he exclaimed. As he shifted into overdrive, thinking it was time to get serious about moving out, he noticed two things: the truck was really far back now, and he was doing almost 130 miles an hour. And the throttle was only half open!

The road straightened out ahead, so he rolled the crank all the way open, and the big pistons roared like an uncaged beast as the 80 cubic inches pushed the hardtail, and the strident roar of the drag pipes blasted the quiet with ear-shattering volume. After a few miles, he again glanced into the mirrors, but the highway was empty as far as he could see, and the scenery was only a blur to the sides. He backed it down to a steady 80 miles per hour, which was his favorite cruising speed, and kept it there for the next few hours.

As the next town came into view, he started looking for a filling station and a place for lunch. He kept a careful eye out behind, but saw nothing. After filling up the scoot, he went next door to a nice clean-looking cafe for lunch. He was still a little nervous, and continually glanced out the window of the restaurant, but saw nothing out of the ordinary, and the other patrons seemed normal and at ease, and the waitress friendly. He briefly considered asking the waitress about the country he had just been through, but changed his mind, and quietly finished his meal.

5 Stopover



In the following days, the incidents slowly faded from his mind as the endless highways rolled under his tires, and things moved on as he continued his trek. The scooter was running like a top and mileage was exceptionally good. Even the bugs seemed to not be as bothersome or thick even in this late summer.

The seat felt softer than ever, especially for a hard tail scooter. Life was going great, and the feeling had persisted for weeks now.

One morning, during those rare times when he stayed in a motel to get a comfortable night's rest and shower, he stopped at the attached restaurant for breakfast. Ham and eggs with pancakes and hot coffee seemed just the thing to start off the day. And there wasn't a cloud in the sky as yet. It looked like a perfect day. Only half noticing the TV in the corner of the cafe, he motioned to the waitress for a refill of the coffee. It was pretty good coffee, after all. The waitress was filling his cup when she gasped. Startled, he looked up, thinking she has spilled the coffee or something. But she was staring at him in the strangest way.

"What's wrong?" he asked in surprise.

"Why, you look just like the biker on the television!", she exclaimed.

"What? What do you mean?" he asked.

"The story that was just on about the State Police finding the body of the motorcyclist over in northern Arizona. They said they think he had been dead about two or three weeks, in a pool of water off a isolated stretch of highway up near Haunted Mesa. They think the water had prevented the body from decomposing completely, so they were able to take a pretty good picture of the body, and it looked just like you!" she said.

"Well, obviously it wasn't me, because I'm right here," he exclaimed.

"That's true," she replied, "but the resemblance is uncanny!"

"I suppose everyone must have a look-alike," he replied uneasily, "so that must have been the case with me." Inside, however, he was freaking out! "What had she seen," he was thinking.

"I have to see that newscast somehow!"



He went back to the motel room and immediately turned on the television to the local channel, hoping the news would repeat. Sure enough, after about a half-hour the newscaster started repeating the stories again. Waiting with mixed feelings, he sat nervously on the edge of the tattered bed to see if that particular story would repeat. As the anchor started the story he only half listened, having heard the story word for word from the waitress. Too soon they flashed up a picture of the body, asking for anyone who could identify the body. But he only half-heard, because seeing the picture had erased all thought from his mind. It was him! Even the same chaps and clothing he had been wearing that strange night on that isolated stretch of highway where he had run out of gas and camped near the pool. The television even showed the same pool. The only things different were they made no mention of finding a motorcycle or discovering a second trail, only the main trail to the pool.

He began to feel lightheaded from the strain. The room became fuzzy and darker, somehow. "Am I actually passing out?" he thought in confusion. His last thought seemed anti-climatic, "How funny!"

6 Return



Slowly the room brightened as the sun rose over the eastern ridges. It was several minutes before he began to wonder what had happened the previous night. As his thoughts sped up it seemed like a bad dream. But then he remembered the newscast the day earlier he had seen with his own eyes. No, that part seemed real enough, as he had watched it twice more later that night. Be he still was unsure what it all meant. As he became more aware, his resolve to find some answers

became stronger. But just where to start?

The black rattle-can-painted v-twin scooter made the morning quiet flee as he fired it up. The straight pipes echoed between the close-packed motel rooms as he warmed the 80 cubic inch Evo before pulling out on the the access road that led to the freeway. He had made up his mind the best place to start was where it had all seemed to begin, at the turnout back on that lonely road on the northern part of Arizona.

As he headed down I-10 West, his thoughts went back to the events of that strange night. It took some effort to bring his thoughts to the here and now as traffic was heavy on the interstate, mostly big rigs and RVs. But he was used to the flow as he maneuvered around the slower traffic and up to the 80 mph he liked to cruise, as the Evolution engine seemed to be particularly smooth at that speed in sixth gear. But he had learned hard lessons in the past about keeping his thoughts focused on surrounding vehicles. That last time had been close. He had been traveling way too long that particular day, and wasn't fully aware as the Chevy Suburban tried to take him out as it cut into his lane. Only the Lord had saved him that time, he was sure. Certainly his riding ability hadn't. It was like something had taken the handlebars and maneuvered for him, before he was even aware of the Bowtie full of vacationing kids. College kids, he remembered later, after he was on the side of the road, sweating the close call. He remembered he had said a prayer of thanks to the merciful Lord Jesus that time too. It had gotten easier with time to thank the Lord for the many times He had saved him, some he probably wasn't even aware of to this day.

Off and on, he noticed signs pointing the way to upcoming attractions at exits, but he wasn't really interested in them, only in a particular one, and that was still at least a day's ride away. As he traveled closer to that particular two-lane highway, his apprehension grew stronger. He didn't know what to expect, or even why he had decided to return to the scene he knew so

well, and had been on the TV two nights ago. But he had made up his mind, and had no intention of changing it now!



Stuck in traffic, still several miles from the Highway 17 exit, he watched the temperature gauge climb as the air-cooled engine labored in the heavy mid-day Phoenix traffic. He hated the times he had to travel through the over-congested city. The mid-fall heat didn't help the situation any either. He had managed to avoid Phoenix in his way down from the north the last time as he had taken Highway 198 through the Tonto National Forest, and had avoided the metroplex completely.

This time something was driving him to hurry, so he had taken the more direct route. Now as he was reaping his reward of hastiness, he thought again of the much more scenic route through Payson and Globe, and the cute little waitress at the cafe in Jakes Corner. He had enjoyed her sparkling conversation as he stared out the window at the beautiful Mazatzal Mountains to the west. Mount Ord to the southwest had been a particularly pretty sight. He had wanted to visit the Indian ruins off toward Gisela, but he had already passed the cutoff by almost ten miles before he remembered it, and he hated to backtrack!. But that's what he was doing now, backtracking, after a fashion, so was breaking one of his own rules.

7 Heading North again



The roar of air horns abruptly brought him back to the present from his musings as a pregnant roller skate of a subcompact cutting off a tractor-trailer rig just ahead of him caused the rig's driver to squeal his brakes.

"I better pay attention," he thought, as he switched lanes to avoid the mess. He laid on the throttle and left the battling cages behind in the dancing heat waves. He saw his exit just ahead and had to swerve abruptly over three lanes to make it, just missing the lady with the cellphone stuck to her ear who gave him a dirty look as she was distracted from applying makeup and eating french fries.

"And driving with a knee, I presume," he thought with a chuckle, "serves her right for not paying attention to the road."

Finally getting away from the heavier Phoenix traffic, after several miles on Highway 17, he was able to enjoy the scenic New River Mountains on the western edge of the Tonto National Forest.

“Now I’ve seen both sides,” he thought as he blasted up 17 toward Black Canyon City and Flagstaff, getting closer toward his final destination. He thought then of the small town of Cottonwood, the former site of the Smoke Out West motorcycle rally, put on by The Horse magazine in former years. He has always wanted to attend, but had never found the time. The road was only a bit ahead near Camp Verde, but he had weightier issues on his mind this time, to give it much thought.



“One of these days, I will make it to the Smokeout,” he thought, but couldn’t remember the name of the town where it was now being held.

“Must be getting senile,” he mused as he putted through Munds Park and Willard Springs. As he saw the sign for Flagstaff, he thought about getting something to eat, but didn’t seem to have much appetite today.

“But I need to eat something, and fill the tank too.” He pulled off at the first filling station he saw as he rolled into Flagstaff.

“I’m in luck,” he thought, “ a nice restaurant just next door, and bikes too!” After filling the scooter and checking his spare gas jug,, he wandered over to the restaurant for lunch, It didn’t look too crowded, and the servers seemed pretty attentive, as he was seated almost immediately. He waved to another table where several “Bikers for Christ” members, wearing their colorful patches on the backs of their vests, greeted him in turn. He ordered, then sat back enjoying the peaceful surroundings as he waited for his meal to be delivered.

“I used to wear the patch myself,” he mused, but he didn’t know any of these riders. As he finished his meal, he thought of the road toward his destination. “Still a long way to go. Hope it doesn’t rain.”

He felt a bit better after eating, and now, cruising down I-40 westbound toward Williams and

the Highway 64 exit, he thought he now had things a little more in perspective than when he had started this search for answers. As he blasted past Davenport Lake, though, he again began to worry if he knew what he thought he was going to accomplish by going back. As the sign for exit 165 flashed by, indicating the Highway 64 cutoff, he slowed down, now reluctant to continue. But he forced himself to take the exit,, and as he passed Kaibab Lake on his left, he felt his resolve again strengthen. Still, he seemed in a daze, as he barely noticed when he again passed through the little town where he had filled up the morning after that so strange night.



“Valle,” he noticed it was called, by the barely readable sign at the roadside. He had not noticed any name when he had been through the first time, a stark indication of just how badly he had been shaken up from those events of that fateful night. This time he did notice the Sheriff’s car parked in front of the single pump, and briefly considered stopping, but just knew it would be a terrific hassle trying to explain things of which he knew nothing. So he kept on north toward the road he had been on that night.

He started looking for the sign that should mark the small two-lane toward Willaha and the mysterious Tin House road. Finally he saw on the left the road of that night, and as he crept up on it a all of twenty miles per hour, he again questioned his sanity in doing this, and what was driving him to return. He should be somewhere in Texas by now, not revisiting these back roads in the hinterlands of northern Arizona. It was only after passing through Willaha, he

realized he had no recollection of the last twenty minutes of driving.

“Time for a break! I must be more tired than I thought,” he said aloud. Ahead he saw a small turnout on the left that looked like a likely place for a break. “I’ll take some rest here, before continuing,” he mused. As he pulled off the road, he only then realized this was the same turnout where he had spent that bizarre night. The small hairs on the back of his neck were singing like a harp!

He shut the engine off and silence settled like a thick fog over the surrounding trees. Dead silence reigned. He could hear nothing except a slight breeze among the trees.

“Well, I’m here, he thought, as he got off the bike and stood looking at the dim trail leading into the too-quiet forest. Everything seemed the same, except for a few more sets of tire tracks and a few crushed bushes to indicate visitors. A strange reluctance took hold of him as he looked into the gloomy semi-darkness under the trees. He stood completely still, just looking for what seemed like an hour, but could only have been a few minutes. With a dry laugh and a sigh, he started up the dim trail...

8 The Same But Different



His footsteps sounded oddly muffled as he stepped onto the path leading into the trees. He did notice the trail seemed a bit more pronounced than he remembered. Then he recalled the television program he had watched. “Must have been the police tramping around here,” he observed aloud. And he did notice a few faint scuff marks on the ground. As he reached the place where the second trail should have been, he saw not the least indication there had ever been a trail.

“This can’t be right,” he thought, as he desperately searched for his campsite in the thick brush, “I must have mistaken this turnoff for the other one where I stayed that night!”

Shaken, he continued up the main trail. As it began to curve to the right, his breathing became more ragged as he again recalled every landmark, except where his campsite should have been. “I know! I’ll cut through the brush when I get to the pool! That way I’ll get to my campsite for sure! I must have just forgotten where the second trail began!”



As the pool came into sight, he saw the evidence of the police activity in the trampled grass and muddy, torn-up pool edge. Everything else, though, looked exactly as he remembered it. Again, he noticed how beautiful the little cliff and waterfall looked, how relaxing and peaceful everything was. Hard to believe so many people had recently been in the area where a murder supposedly had taken place.

“Now why did I think that? The television

hadn't mentioned the possibility of murder, only they had found a dead body, that looked a bit like me," he mused, now disinclined to believe the TV story at all. But in his heart, he knew the story had shown a body, that looked way too much like him, to discount it completely at this late date. Otherwise, he knew, he wouldn't be here at all.



He started around the pool searching for the place he had originally come out of the brush after following the sound of the waterfall. The brush seemed oddly undisturbed, though, so he struck off at about the place that must lead to his former campsite that night. After struggling through the thick brush in the hot, still air, he caught a glimpse of the highway showing through the trees.

"Must have veered off a bit," he thought, as he broke through a final screen of scrubby brush and stepped onto the shoulder of the road. He looked both directions up and down the highway and noticed everything seemed completely familiar, and there was his scooter sitting in the turnout.

"Perhaps I just missed the second trail. I'll start where I know the second trail should be. Maybe my own screening of the trail with the branches that night worked too well, and even I didn't notice it!"

As he reached the turnout, he noticed a vehicle a few miles down the road topping a rise and coming in his direction, but other

than noting it looked like an old pickup truck, he paid it no mind. At the most likely looking place for the second trail, he struck into the brush, just knowing this had to be the right place. But after walking about the right distance, he saw nothing that resembled the trail or his campsite of that night.

Suddenly he noticed again how quiet it had become. He also noticed he had reached the top of a slight rise. Remembering once more that night, he recalled this same slight rise exactly where he had parked his scoot. But now nothing was to be seen where he had parked, or where he had laid his bed, nothing but brush! Surely it couldn't have grown up that fast! Then he remembered the vehicle he had seen coming up the highway earlier. It should have passed by before now.

Again feeling a bit out of sync with events, he looked toward the highway through a thin screen of brush, but saw no vehicles anywhere. A bit concerned about his ride being in plain

sight to anyone passing by, he hurried back through the shrubbery to the turnout. There his scooter was, but parked right beside it was the same pickup truck he had seen coming up the road, and he was also sure, the same truck he had seen so many times that night he camped here and the one chasing him the following day! Now he would get some answers! He strode over to the truck, but could see there was no one inside.



“Hello,” he called, “Hello?” No answer, and, as he walked around the truck he saw no signs of anyone or any tracks, except his own. Now he began to wonder why he hadn’t heard the pickup pull up. It was slightly uphill from where he had seen it earlier, so they couldn’t have just coasted up. Perhaps it wasn’t the same truck from that other night as that one had made plenty of noise. Feeling slightly disconnected from reality, he slowly backed away toward his scooter with full intention of getting as far away from this strange area as he could!

Suddenly he had a strange feeling of someone standing behind him. Panicked, he whirled around, fully expecting some vile creature with a huge knife standing behind him ready to kill him in a most painful way, but to his surprise, there was no one! Carefully, he looked around at the surrounding trees and shrubbery, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. But he knew the driver of the truck had to be around somewhere!

Throwing his leg over the solo seat, he reached down and turned the ignition key to the ON position and pressed the starter button on the right handlebar. The v-twin engine roared to life and the rear tire threw gravel in a wide fan as he spun out onto the highway.

“Time to leave this strange country,” he thought, not for the first time, and as it turned out, not for the last time either! Just before going over the crest of the first hill to the south, he looked back. The truck was gone!

“Oh, Lord, help me!” he cried. He slowed and did a u-turn just over the crest. As he topped the hill again he pulled off the side of the road and looked to where the truck had been parked at the turnout. Absolutely no vehicles were to be seen.

“Where the crap could that truck have gone? It’s only been about 30 seconds or less, and there’s no way it could have gotten any distance, either way!” He could see several miles back, way past the turnout he had just left, and there was just nothing to be seen, nothing at all.

“This is just getting more and more strange,” he yelled aloud to the wind, “help me, Jesus!” he cried.



It was then he noticed a strange-looking haze or curtain that seemed to be hovering over the area near the turnout where the truck had been parked, and where he had just been. “That’s weird,” he said aloud. It seemed to be moving over the area from the west side where the turnout was located to the east. As it passed over the two-lane road, the highway seemed to waver and become somewhat indistinct, as if the road really wasn’t quite solid. “It must be heat waves,” he thought. Then he noticed the day wasn’t really that hot. At that point, the haze seemed to dissipate and the road became solid again. “Wow, that was really queer!” he said aloud. The day again seemed completely normal, and the prickly feeling that had been present since he had gotten here disappeared, and his heart, which he just now realized had been pounding, slowed to normal. The day seemed just like any number of past days, now. As he slowly pulled out onto the road again and did another u-turn to once again head south, he felt completely at ease. The past several hours now seemed like just some strange dream.

9 Time to Leave



Soon Valle came into sight ahead, and he determined to stop this time and have a little talk with the Sheriff. As the station came into view, he saw the police car was now gone. He parked the scooter to the side and walked through the screened door. The same attractive lady he had talked with on his last visit was still behind the counter, and greeted him with a slight smile as he came up.

“Good afternoon, sir. Can I help you?” she

asked.

“Well, I was hoping to talk with the Sheriff I saw earlier when I went by, but I see he has already left. I wonder if you would mind filling me in on the news since I was here several weeks ago” he said.

“Excuse me?” she said, “The Sheriff hasn’t been up this way for at least a month or more. This is quite a bit off his normal rounds, and unless we have some kind of trouble, he doesn’t come this way. And I can’t say we’ve ever met before, and I have a pretty good memory for faces!”

He blinked in confusion. “Why, I stopped in here for gas just a bit over three weeks ago,” he said, “and I only came back when I saw the television news report about the body they found at that turnout with the pond!”

“You must be confused,” she said. “If something like that had happened, why my gosh, that would be the most excitement we would have had since the flood way back in ’33 my grandfather told me about.”

He looked at her strangely. “You mean to tell me you’ve never seen me before? I certainly remember you! I don’t forget pretty ladies that easily! And there was no body found at that pond?”

“No, never saw you before, and as far as I know, there is no open water around here for 30 miles, just wells and windmills,” she emphatically stated as she looked at him with sympathy.

“I think the heat may have gotten to you...”

She reached into the cooler behind the counter and removed a bottle of water. As she placed it on the counter in front of him, she said, “Here, you better drink this. It must be pretty hot riding that Harley! On the house, this time. You need lots of water in this country. But I can see you are a stranger to these parts, and probably don’t realize how dry it can get!”

“Well, it’s not a Harley, even though it has an Evolution V-2 engine. It is a custom I built myself years ago,” he said, grasping onto the one thing that made any sense. “But that’s a bit off the subject,” he continued. “I was up here about three weeks ago, and camped for the night just up the road about ten miles at a turnout where there was a trail that led to a pool and waterfall. And just today, this morning, I stopped at the same turnout and saw the same pool! So I know it’s there!” he said, his voice rising.

“Sir, I don’t mean to doubt your story, or call you a liar, but there is no pool such as you described anywhere in these parts, and I’ve lived here all my life!” she said with conviction, her voice also rising a bit, “Perhaps you’d better leave!”

“I, I’m sorry, ma’am. I mean no disrespect or insult,” he quickly stated, “Please forgive my outburst! Perhaps I am confused after all,” he added. “I’ll just be on my way. Have a nice day!”

He went back out the door as the cashier just stared at him. As he threw his leg astride the scoot, he could see through the window where she was picking up the phone receiver mounted on the side wall behind the counter, so decided it was time to get completely out of the area, just in case she was calling the law.

“Time to get outta here and back to civilization, where folks are normal!” he thought. As he pulled out onto the road, he quickly decided to take the turnoff for Highway 180 instead of south on Highway 64 as he had come. Perhaps, if she was calling the law, she would think he had taken 64 as he had mentioned to her earlier. And that would give him a chance to check out the scenery of the Coconino National Forest, which 180 went through. He had heard somewhere that was a pretty road to ride. And it was more in the direction he now realized he wanted to go anyway, toward New Mexico.

As he pulled into the first gas station on the outskirts of Flagstaff, he made the decision to take Interstate 40 east and get completely out of the vicinity in as small amount of time as he possibly could. It was late afternoon as he took the on ramp of I-40 East, and the traffic was pretty light for a change. He cranked the throttle up to a comfortable speed of about seventy as he shifted into overdrive on the sweet little TrikShift tranny, and the 3-inch belt began to sing its normal tune.



“Life is good,” he thought, as the miles began to unroll under his wheels. “It’s time to get back into the normal rhythm of travel, and leave all these past several weeks behind as just a nasty dream!” In no time at all, it seemed, he was halfway to Winslow, and time to find another gas station. As late evening arrived, he pulled into a station with a motel next door off Copertown Road in West Winslow. He

decided that was enough traveling for one day, what with all the stress earlier. As he checked into the motel next door and wheeled the scoot into the room he had been given, he thought to himself what a strange and unusual time this past month had been.

Sleep came easily that night as he realized how really tired he was from accumulated frustration and stress. No dreams disturbed his slumber, and the strange clicking noise that started at the stroke of midnight and seemed to permeate the very walls went unheard.

10 Explosive Beginnings



Daylight seemed long in coming the next morning, as awareness slowly arrived. As he got out of bed and looked out the window, he noticed it seemed darker than usual for this hour and time of year. After all, it was only late fall, and at 7am it should be brighter! He hoped it wasn't cloudy and building up to rain!

"I don't have to check out till noon anyway. Perhaps I'll just go back to bed for a little while," he thought. Sleep came quickly once again.

BOOM! BOOM! He startled awake as the incredibly loud noise rattled the walls of his room! "What the...," he blurted as he rolled off the hard motel bed, glancing at the clock out of habit. 8:12am. He should be gone! "What in the world could that be now?"

As he jerked the door open, the first thing he noticed was the smoke and flames coming from the vicinity of where the motel office had been. "My Lord, the propane tank has exploded," he exclaimed. "Why, if I hadn't gotten back into bed, I might have been in the office checking out right now! Thank you, Lord Jesus!"

He quickly threw his clothes on and hurried toward the office to see if there was anything he could do. As he heard the distant sound of fire trucks, other overnight guests began poking their heads out of their rooms, wondering what the ruckus was all about. But no one was going toward the former office except a lady three doors down from him. "Nice looking, and nice jeans," he observed as a passing afterthought, as he ran closer to the ruins. They arrived at about the same time in the parking spaces in front of the smoking ruins. He noticed there didn't seem to be a lot of flames, just smoke and dust.

"Do you know what happened?" the lady asked, excitement and fear reflected in her lovely green eyes.

"No, but I think the propane tank exploded," he said. "I noticed it last night to the side as I was checking in, but I don't see anything there now but that huge hole," he exclaimed.

By then the first fire truck was pulling into the parking lot, and firemen were unloading hoses. Several police cars arrived shortly behind the fire truck and the officers began asking folks to move back. After the police had asked folks staying at the motel what they had seen, which was mostly nothing, and completed their gathering of statements, he walked back across the parking lot toward his room, noticing that the lady stayed close beside him.

“My name’s Jake,” he mentioned as he noticed how really hot she was, and how her dark blond hair framed her face.

“Hi, I’m Cat,” she replied in return. “Really sad thing. I hope no one was in the office!” she continued.

“I might have been in there, if I had checked out this morning when I intended to!” he exclaimed. “I guess the Good Lord was watching out for me again!”

She looked at him sideways. “Do you really think so?” she replied.

“I know so!” he stated emphatically. “He’s saved me so many times in my life, I can’t even add them up! Some, I’m not even sure I was aware of at the time, and may never know some!” he said with conviction. “My faith sometime is not as strong as it should be, but when the evidence is right in front of my face, I have to believe! I have no other choice,” he exclaimed with feeling and emotion, “and that gives me peace in my mind and heart! The Lord Jesus is my unceasing protector and the Rock I depend on every day. Even though I many times forget, and neglect to thank Him enough, I know He never forgets me!”

“Amen,” she said with feeling, “I’m glad you think that way! There seems to be nothing we can do here. Looks like the authorities have everything under control. I’m hungry and haven’t had any breakfast yet. Would you like to escort me? I’m not sure I feel completely at ease with things this morning, and would feel better if I had someone with me. I know I am being a bit forward, what with just having met you and all, but I’m traveling alone and would feel more comfortable if you were with me. You don’t have to sit with me if you don’t want,” she stated.

“I would be delighted to escort you, and of course I don’t mind sitting with you! I’m sure any man would be happy to have such a beautiful lady accompany him to breakfast!” he emphatically stated.



“Thank you,” she stated simply. She grasped his arm as they started toward the restaurant across the street, “I was noticing some rather unsavory-looking characters last evening just before I went to bed, and was wondering just what do in the morning if they were still around. They seemed to be watching the motel! I only noticed because I couldn’t sleep right away and was just looking out at the stars through my window. I had the drapes open, but the lights off, so I don’t think they noticed me sitting in the darkness. Looks like

there were two of them and they were driving some old ratty-looking pickup truck. Looked like it must have been 50 years old! I wouldn’t have even noticed them at all, but they seemed to have some weird glow around them. Must have been a flashlight, but it just looked passing strange.”

“What were they doing?” he asked as they arrived at the front door of the cafe, his thoughts

racing at full gallop.

“Well, they weren’t really doing anything, just sitting there in the truck. I couldn’t see any faces, just a suggestion of their outlines. And that weird glow. It must have been my imagination!”

“ I don’t know... perhaps it wasn’t your imagination. Sometimes when we see things we don’t expect, we start second guessing ourselves, but sometimes what we see is just what it is. I really can’t say, because I myself have had some strange incidents recently,” he mentioned as they entered the quaint little restaurant and found a seat at a booth in an unoccupied corner. “And I don’t really know how to interpret them either. A few times I thought I was hallucinating, overheated from too much sun while riding, or just dehydrated, but now I’m not so sure. And I still don’t have a satisfactory explanation that makes much sense.”

“You ride a motorcycle?” Cat asked, as the waiter approached their table.

“Yes I...” he started.

“What would you folks like for breakfast this morning, or do you need some time to look at the menus?” the waiter asked.

“Well, we don’t have any menus yet,” Jake mentioned as the waiter set glasses of water on the table.

“Oh, I’m sorry, the menus are there in the holder at the back of the table. I’ll give you a few moments while you decide. Just call me over when you are ready. My name’s William,” the waiter said as he was walking away.

“Perhaps he thought we were locals,” Jake chuckled, “and knew that the menus were already here!” He reached for the menus and passed one to Cat, again noticing just how beautiful she really was. “I haven’t really been attracted to anyone since my wife died,” he observed in amazement to himself.

“The Rancher’s Breakfast looks pretty good,” she said, “and it comes with jalapenos! I love jalapenos!” She looked across the table at him, smiling, “ I want to thank you again for accompanying me this morning. I feel really comfortable with you, and that’s weird, because I hardly know you!” she added.

“Well, it could partly be the events of the morning, but, I have to say, I feel at ease with you myself,” he affirmed, “and I haven’t been known to be a social animal, ever, even before my wife died.”

“You were married?” she asked, a look of trepidation on her lovely face.

“Yes I was, but that was many years ago,” he answered, “and she died in an accident in El Paso, Texas. I still miss her sometimes, though, but I know she is with the Lord, so that gives me some solace.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she offered with genuine sympathy on her face. “It’s okay,” he said, “I’m mostly over it. It has been about five years now. That’s what started me on what I mostly do now, riding around, seeing the country. And,” he added, “I’ve seen many beautiful places I never knew existed! God’s creation is all around us; we just have to learn to see!”

“That’s beautiful!” she exclaimed, “I’ve never heard it put just that way before! I see the waiter is returning, so we should decide what we want.”

11 Breakfast With Cat



“Oh, yes, that’s the one,” she exclaimed.

“And you, sir?”

“You know what, I think I’ll have the same thing,” Jake said, “and lots of coffee for both of us.”

“Thank you, folks. I’ll have your orders out in a few minutes,” the waiter said as he turned toward the kitchen.

“How did you know I wanted coffee?” Cat asked.

“You don’t? I’m sorry! Maybe I assumed you did. You just seemed like a coffee kind of lady,” he said with some trepidation.

“Well, yes I do, but how did you know? I’m not angry,” she added at his look, “actually I’m pleased that you were able to pick up on that!”

“Whew! For a second there I thought I had overstepped my bounds!” he exclaimed, still contrite.

“No, not at all. Put it out of your mind. In fact I’m really glad I had the courage to ask you to accompany me this morning. I haven’t felt this comfortable with a man since I ran from my last boyfriend in the middle of the night. He was an abusive so-and-so, even though he never touched me in anger. But I saw the signs early on and decided I didn’t want to wait until he went over that line. That’s been about eight years ago, and I haven’t looked back!”

“Sometimes people get into similar situations, and think they don’t have a way out, because of any number of circumstances, from financial to dependence issues, the list is endless. I’m

“Well, folks, have you decided what you would like? We have a great chef running the kitchen, and he really stirs up some tasty dishes. I’ve heard he is a transplant from some famous city restaurant, but I have no proof of it!” he exclaimed, “So, what’s your pleasure!”

“Go ahead, Cat, and order,” Jake offered.

“I’ll have the Rancher’s Meal. It sounds pretty good this morning,” Cat said.

“You mean the Rancher’s Breakfast?” William offered.

glad you were able to leave that situation before it turned worse!”

“So am I, now. But at the time I wondered if I was making the right decision. That was halfway across the country, back east. And, I’ve never regretted it, especially after seeing the beautiful country out here in the West. So, you never did answer my question.”

“What question?” he asked.

“Whether you ride a motorcycle,” she replied, “I didn’t see any in the parking lot at the motel.”

“Oh, that question. Yes I do, and you didn’t see it because it is in my room at the motel.”

“Your room!” she exclaimed, “whatever for?”

“Sometimes folks at loose ends, or just out to do some mischief, will see a motorcycle and just can’t seem to resist the temptation to mess with it, or worse, attempt to steal it. For some reason they don’t seem to think of it the same as an automobile, as transportation, but just some bike to joyride on, or a toy to play with. And then there are the others, the ones who just don’t like bikers for some unfathomable reason, and are looking for some rider to mess with. Those are the ones who are really dangerous, because they are usually criminal-minded anyway, and look at it as their duty to prove they are badder than the said biker.”

“That’s really sad,” Cat exclaimed, “but I know the type. I have run across a few people like that, out to prove they are tougher than the next person. They don’t seem to realize they are just lost souls looking for something they can respect. And in the process, they are heading down the wrong path, the path to destruction, because there is always someone out there that is tougher or badder, but when they discover that, it is usually too late!”

“Well said,” Jake acknowledged, “I think you understand very well. They won’t bother a group of motorcyclists, but one alone, well that’s an entirely different matter. Even then, they are usually cautious, because they don’t know if the person is a scout for a biker club, so that gives the prudent biker time to move on.”



After the waiter had delivered their breakfasts, and they were finished, they sat back to enjoy another cup of coffee before leaving. Both felt like they didn’t want the interlude to end. They both felt comfortable together.

12 A New Ride



“If I may ask, what do you do, normally?” Jake asked.

“Well,” she replied somewhat sheepishly, “it turns out my former boyfriend is the type of person who thinks if a woman is not with him, she shouldn’t be with anyone!”

“My goodness, that’s not good!” he returned.

“No, it’s not, so I have been moving from place to place. I don’t know how he seems to find me each time, but he does! Fortunately, I have discovered him in the area first, and pack up and leave. Unfortunately, that means I can’t seem to stay long enough anywhere to make a decent living. In fact just two days ago I sold my old car, and was going to stay at the motel for a while and look for work here, but now I don’t think that is viable, what with the explosion

and all.”

“That’s not a good situation at all,” he replied, “what do you do for work?”

“I was a computer programmer, and good at my job, but employers want a reliable worker, not one who might disappear suddenly. They want someone with a background, steady employment record, things like that.”

“Perhaps that’s why he has managed to track you down so often. He just goes where that type of work is done, or folks are hiring. Maybe you should try something different.”

“Actually, that’s what I have thought about doing, but what? I don’t know anyone, don’t have any real skills other than that, what can I do?”

“Maybe you need to get off the beaten path, go somewhere he wouldn’t think to look, somewhere away from the cities, let things cool down for a while. When was the last time he was close to you?”



“As far as I can tell, in Scottsdale. So I packed up and was heading farther west, then heard they were hiring programmers for a small company in Flagstaff, something about a government contract, but at the last minute, for no reason, just turned east and here I am in Winslow, with no job and no computer companies here. At least it’s off the regular route I would have taken.”

“Could he have heard the same hiring rumors?”

“Yes, that’s what decided me to just turn east. So he may already be in Flagstaff. I guess I am just too predictable.”

"And, I know this is really bad form since I invited you to breakfast, but, could you pay for mine? I didn't get as much for my car as I thought I would. No, I'm sorry, I can't ask that. Please just..."

"Stop! No need to go on. I would be really happy to pay for your breakfast. In fact, and this is also in really bad form, but I was thinking it would be nice to have some company for a while. So I was thinking of offering to have you ride with me, at least until you can get your feet under you, so to speak. But, I don't mean to offend, so if this is too forward, I apologize right now!"

"That's really nice, but, uh, I hardly know you. Although I feel really comfortable and safe with you! But, I don't know..."

"Don't take this the wrong way! I'm not talking intimate relations here. I am a Christian and don't believe in things like that outside of marriage. So I'm just talking giving you some help to keep you away from your stalker! And, you will see some beautiful country, outside the interstate system, where the real beauty can be found!"

"If you put it that way. Something like a roommate? On a motorcycle?"

"Yes, but if you decide this is something you want to try, we would have to go shopping for some things. For example, the jeans are fine, but you need some chaps, a leather jacket and gloves for protection, and a helmet if you wish to wear one."

"Um, I don't have enough money for those things. I only have about \$300 left..."

"Don't worry about it right now. I think we can swing that. Does this mean you want to give it a try?"

"If it will keep me away from that psycho, yes!"

"Okay, let's give a whirl! Waiter!"

13 The Sled Needs A Few Changes



After settling the check and tip for the waiter, they walked back outside, both keeping a weather eye out for an old pickup truck, but for slightly different reasons. Things looked normal, although the emergency vehicles were still at the motel, cleaning up. They walked back across the street at the first break in traffic, which had gotten heavier as the day advanced. “Do you have a lot of luggage?” Jake asked, as they returned to the motel and walked up to their rooms.

“Well, it’s kind of embarrassing, but I pretty much have the clothes on my back. I had to leave in somewhat of a hurry from Scottsdale and didn’t have time to grab much. Just a few personal items to get! Can you come with me? I don’t want to be alone right now.”

“Sure, that might be the safer thing to do.”

After securing her personal things, which consisted of a bag the size of a loaf of bread, they moved to Jake’s room.

“Wow, that’s a nice ride,” she exclaimed as they entered the room, “what is it?”

“It’s a flyrite-framed hardtail bobber, 80 cubic inch Evo engine, a 6-speed tranny, with mini-ape handlebars and a springer front end,” Jake said, warming to the subject.

“Uh, okay, what you said! But, where’s the seat?” she replied with a look of skepticism.

“Well, that’s one of the things I am going to have to change a bit, before we can ride double. However, I know of a shop right here in Winslow that can take of that, and a few other things too!”

“Okay,” she said, but he could hear the doubt in her voice, “Is that going to be expensive?”

“Not too bad,” he replied, “I know the owner; did him a favor back in another lifetime. But it will be a bit uncomfortable until we get there. I can fold a blanket as a temporary pad, though. You look like you are in pretty good shape, so it shouldn’t be too rough.”

He reloaded the saddlebags with his belongings and her bag, noticing he had plenty of room for the other things that would be required. “I hope I know what I am doing.” he thought, “Lord, give me guidance in this!” He backed the scoot out of the room and almost bumped into a portly man standing just outside.

“Sorry,” he exclaimed, “Didn’t see you standing there!”

“Is this your room?” the man asked.

“Yes it is,” he replied, his guard going up.

“I’m here to collect the rent. I’m the day manager, and although the office is gone, I still have to ensure everything is collected!”

“Well, I paid in advance. Here’s my receipt.” He showed the man the receipt after digging it out. “Was anyone in the office when it blew up?” he asked.

“No, the night manager left early, and I was late in coming in, so I missed the whole thing! Thank the makers too!”

“You mean thank God, don’t you?” Jake replied.

“Uh, yes, that what I meant,” the man replied, grinning lopsidedly at them. “What about her?” he motioned to Cat behind Jake.

“Is your room paid, Cat?” Jake asked.

“No it’s not. I was going to settle it this morning.”

“That is \$34 dollars, including tax,” the man interjected, a frown on his face replacing the grin.

Jake removed the required amount from the leather wallet chained to his belt and handed it to the clerk. “Have a nice day!” he offered to the clerk as the man walked away.

“I didn’t really intend you to do that,” Cat exclaimed, looking after the clerk.

“God provides for His people, in many ways, Cat.”

“Thank you,” she said, her eyes damp. “How is this going to work?”

“You mean the riding part or the other part?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s worry about the practical aspects for now. The other things, let the Lord give His guidance. Here’s the pad. I’ll put this here on the fender between the saddle bags where you can sit for now. Go ahead and climb on.”

“Umm,” she looked dubiously at the impromptu seat. “You might give me a hand here.”

Jake lifted her up and sat her on the pad and showed her how to get a good seat. “She’s pretty

light,” he thought as he noticed how petite she was. “You’ll have to put your legs around my waist for now until we get to the shop and have some foot pegs put on. I hope you don’t mind,” he said out loud.

“That’s pretty intimate,” she said.

“I know, but there’s nothing to do for it until we can mod the bike,” he replied. He sat on the scooter and directed her where to place her legs, out of the way of critical controls. “Have you ever ridden a motorcycle before?” he asked.

“Well, I did ride my older brother’s dirt bike once, but it was too tall for me. My feet barely reached the ground so I didn’t like it. This is not so high, though.”

“Good, then you know about leaning into turns and keeping your feet up, right?”, he asked.

“Yes, he taught me how to ride it some. As far as I know, it’s still back at the farm in Missouri where my parents live. I never told my last boyfriend where I was from, and now I’m glad I didn’t!”

“Yeah, that’s good. So you can contact them without worrying whether he could use them as a possible way to get to you. Smart thinking.”

“Yup, that’s no problem, about the only one though,” she replied.

“Well, we are about to change all that, now,” he exclaimed.

14 Old Friends



He turned on the ignition and pressed the starter button. The engine roared to life, startling a covey of quail into flight across the end of the parking lot and into the trees. Cat clenched her legs around his waist reflexively at the vibration, locking her ankles together in his lap.

“Wow, I didn’t expect that!” she exclaimed. “It feels kind of nice though, and secure,” she thought to herself as they started out of the parking lot.

After traveling down Highway 87 for a short time, they exited at the Clear Creek Road exit, heading east on Clear Creek Road. After a confusing number of turns in increasingly smaller streets, they finally turned into a somewhat nondescript lane hidden from the road by a rock wall and Ash trees. As the sound reverberated around the large enclosure revealed, several huge pit bulls ran out, barking furiously. A man strolled over slowly, a handgun held loosely in his hand.

“What do you want?” he inquired suspiciously, no hint of friendliness in his eyes.

“Hey, Larry, don’t you recognize me?” Jake called, shutting the bike off and lowering the kick stand. He climbed off and turned to help Cat off the back. “Ohh, that is sore!” she exclaimed, holding onto her shapely derriere with both hands.

Larry’s eyes widened in astonishment at both Jake and especially Cat. “Wow, girl, you’re hot! Jake is that you, in the flesh?” he exclaimed.

“Yep, that’s me. And this lovely lass is Cat. She’s my passenger and I’m her current protector from a past boyfriend turned stalker.”

“You always were a romantic, Jake, always rescuing damsels in distress and trying to save everyone, including broken down old bikers like me!” he laughed as he grabbed Jake in a bear hug, “Welcome, Cat and Jake, to my humble abode! These two fine noise makers are Candy and Putt,” he said, motioning to the two huge brindle dogs.

“I didn’t know you liked dogs, Larry,” Jake exclaimed.

“Well, after the problems we had back in the day that you dragged me out of, kicking and

screaming, I decided it might be nice to have some alarm system, even though none of those boys know where I landed. Plus they make fine buddies!”

“Are you doing alright?” Jake asked.

“Pretty good, actually. I have a good business repairing and modding scoots, where my talent really lies, not running drugs with the [Name Redacted]! Lots healthier too!” Larry replied.



“Glad to hear that, Larry. I put that life way behind me when I found Jesus and got married to Elva. And, to answer your unspoken question, I do still miss her once in a while.”

“I used to thank you for getting me out of that life, Jake, but now I thank Jesus for putting you in my path, and using you to get me out!”

“You don’t know how happy I am to hear you say that, Larry. I was just the vessel He used. I couldn’t have done anything on my own! God Bless you and it’s really great to see you!”

“You’re welcome in my home anytime, Jake. I know you are here for something, though, and I’ll bet it has something to do with your lovely passenger, eh Cat?”

“Hi, Larry, nice to meet you. I’m guilty as charged. Jake wants to do something with the scooter, here, but I don’t have a clue!” she laughed.

Larry looked at Jake and Cat, a question in his eyes.

“Well, it’s a bit of a tender issue,” Jake kidded, “namely Cat’s cute little butt needs relief from the tender vibrations of the bike. We had to ride over here with her sitting on that blanket, and that’s not much! It was kind of a seat of the pants decision, if you know what I mean.”

Larry laughed, "I know what you mean. So what do you want to do?"

"Well I thought about a regular pad on the rear fender, but that wouldn't be much improvement over the blanket," Jake said, "so perhaps a dual springer seat would be much more practical, or one with a piston. What do you think?"

Larry thought a bit, then brightened up, "I think I may have just the thing. An old dual piston-mounted seat big enough for two, from an old 70's FLH might answer the issue, if you don't mind being snuggled up closely together?"

Jake looked at Cat, a questioning look on his face.

"What does that mean?" Cat asked.

"Well, the seat is like the one on your scooter now, but longer enough for two to sit on, if they're friendly," Larry answered.

"Oh, I see," Cat answered, not correcting Larry that it wasn't her and Jake's scooter; that she was only a recent addition, really recent. "Well, I don't see that to be an issue," she said, keeping to herself the fact she had really enjoyed having her legs wrapped around Jake. "Do you, Jake?"

"No, that seems to be the best answer," Jake replied, keeping to himself the fact he had really enjoyed having Cat's legs wrapped around his waist.

"Great, then, I'll see if I can find that seat and see about some pegs too, you'll most likely want some of those, I'll bet," Larry said, "right after we get some cold iced tea!"



They entered the shop.