

IRON CROWS MC

BOOK 1



Captive
Couple

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CAPTIVE COUPLE

By

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**For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,
but by love serve one another. ~ Galatians 5:13**

CHAPTER 1

A loud, vibrating roar interrupted my reverie as my new wife and I got into our Suburban. I had just married the only woman I had ever loved, Kristy Donaldson – now Kristy Butcher.

Motorcycles swarmed from behind on the street, closing in and stopping all around.

I looked, perplexed, feeling a spike of panic. *What's this?*

Kristy, in her white wedding dress, began looking worried. We had traveled out to Keystone, just over the county line to get married at the first marriage chapel we found. Our city didn't offer the type of quick services we wanted. Not fast enough. I looked at her with a fast glance; we fit each other as oddballs fit together. Loving each other because no one else could or did, we survived together and had for three years.

But the growling roar around us drew our attention away from each other. It demanded our attention.

Men in black jeans and vests were running. A van had stopped two car spaces ahead of us and three bikers were lifting out a long rug, suspiciously thick, as if containing a body.

Kristy reached over and grabbed my arm. Her voice was frail, echoing the panic I felt. "Jim, get us out of here!"

Heart beginning to thump loud in my chest, I shifted the lever into reverse and hit the gas. All of my nerves were on end. I turned the wheel over and the front of our Suburban swung out wide. There was a solid crunch and rocking of the Chevy as we struck something.

Kristy screamed, "Jim!"

I didn't know where to look to see her warning. My door was yanked open by a frantic-faced biker as burly as I was, if not more. I had put on a few pounds. At six foot, I weighed in at two hundred and forty-one pounds. Yeah, I needed to drop some.

Things were happening too fast. I reached for my gun – a Beretta 9mm Nano – and whipped it towards the face of the biker in my door. I heard Kristy's door open and her scream.

The biker was lean, mean, full of muscle and speed. His hair was buzzed down but showed flecks of gray throughout. His hand grabbed my

gun hand and pulled, hard. I heard a gunshot just before my finger pulled on the trigger and my own gun went off. But buzzed biker had control.

I cursed fate for the situation as the Suburban started to roll backwards. It was still in reverse and biker-guy had a death grip on my arm. Another biker joined him, latching onto my arm and slapping away my gun. I was dragged out of our SUV. The Suburban bumped up against something and stopped.

I twisted, trying to get to my feet. A boot to my gut lifted me a foot off the ground. But it also served to infuse me with adrenaline. *My life is in danger! Kristy!* I rolled away and got to my feet. Buzzed biker was launching a fist at my face. I reacted as I had been trained in karate school several years before: I blocked and launched my own attack. A quick punch to the face of the man sent him back staggering.

I heard Kristy crying out and glanced to where she was. Her struggling form, still in her white wedding dress, was held by two bikers. Her face showed a look of terror. That was the last thing I remember seeing. Something hard, solid, and metal hit the back of my head. Darkness covered my vision like a heavy, black blanket. I felt nothing then of my normal awareness. No aches, no pains, no irritations – only peace. Dimly, I felt my body hit the pavement.

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Pain pulsed down my neck from my head. Now I knew what a splitting headache felt like. I wanted to rub my head but my wrists were bound out to my sides. So were my feet. Those two things were the first sensations that made any sense. Then I had the stunning conclusion form in my aching head that I was alive. *Oh joy of painful joys.* I tried to move my head, but the room swirled around me. I groaned.

I'm in a room? Blinding light kept my eyes closed. *Light?* Some sense of rational thought intruded. *Where is Kristy?*

A voice grated down over me as something blocked out the light. "Ready to talk, fed?"

I groaned again to let whoever it was know that my head really hurt. I jerked on the bindings and felt the burn against my wrists. I tried to lift my legs and realized the sudden sensation of my feet fastened into place; they weren't going anywhere. *That's right, I'm tied down.* I had a burst of panic at not being able to move and struggled feebly, despite my strength.

Another voice said, "Fat boy's trying to get away."
I'm not fat! I'm... I'm...big. Where is Kristy? Where am I? I groaned, trying to form the words.

I heard, "Stick him and be done with it."

The growly voice said, "In due time."

My life floated precariously on growly-voice's whim.

I whimpered, wondering where we had gone wrong. *I just wanted to get married.* I heard something near, sort of. A feminine noise that sounded like my girlfriend of three years. No – my new wife. I lifted my head, trying to blink away the blinding brightness. I made a noise not even I could make out.

Buzz-cut biker was standing there, arms folded. Other than the light, he was the first thing I saw that made any sense. He was scowling at someone else. "Watch him while I go question his partner."

I heard a grunt, but nothing else. My eyes swam as cloudiness swept across my vision and senses.

A sound, familiar and forlorn, fought through my fugue. I lifted my head at the sound of my Kristy making a mewling noise. I heard a question, maybe from buzz-biker. I heard her whimper. More questions.

I opened my mouth, fighting the dryness that was suddenly there. "Kristy?" I croaked.

An enormous man with shoulders like boulders and arms like logs leaned over me. "Shut up."

I heard ripping and a sudden whimpering that I knew was Kristy. I opened my mouth, forcing the word out. "Kristy?"

I heard more ripping and her sudden frantic call: "Jimmy!"

I struggled against the bindings only to be greeted with big guy's chuckle.

My wife was panting, I could barely hear it. Her dress had been ripped. She groaned suddenly and said with a fountain full of frustration, "No!" Then all went quiet.

I gasped, "Kristy?"

Big guy leaned over me again. His huge hand grabbed my cheeks and squeezed. "Shut up, fed. Your partner's getting what she deserves."

I managed to mumble, "What?"

Big guy laughed. I focused on him for a brief second. My vision seemed clear enough to make out details. He wore a black denim vest with patches

on its front. One of them read: "Gripper."

Then I heard my wife - my Kristy. Her plaintive wail was filled with regret. I also heard the audible panting of someone else, followed by a long sigh. "She's fucking tight."

A couple of chuckles greeted that. Someone said, "Fuck her good, brother."

I heard more panting, quickening, followed by the introduction of whimpering that I knew to be my new bride. I raised my head. "Kristy? Kristy!"

Something impacted the side of my face, hard. My head flopped.

I heard grunts from a man and whimpers from my wife. His voice, after a sigh, said, "This is some fucking tight pussy."

There was some cheering.

I strained against my bonds, wanting to break free like some crazed super-hero and destroy them all with my obvious superior strength. But my bindings prevented me. I shifted my focus, trying to reach for my gun. But it had been slapped out of my hand back in our Suburban, and I was still bound anyway. I growled in frustration.

The pain of hearing what sounded like my bride being raped seethed deep within me with outrage and offense.

CHAPTER 2

I lifted my head. "Water..." My bindings chafed beyond pain. They were a constant reminder of a situation far beyond my control. I wondered where my gun was. I felt slightly cold, but could tell there was heat nearby.

A worn female face leaned over me and lifted my head. A cold steel cup was pressed to my lips. I took it, eagerly. Her voice was dry and weary. "It's about time you drank something." She was good-looking for an old bag, face filled with wrinkles and worry.

I sipped the cool water, savoring the soft silvery feel against my tongue and the back of my throat. I coughed after swallowing, but pursed my lips for more. All of my limbs ached. I groaned, still sipping more water. I realized I needed to go to the bathroom and groaned louder.

The woman's wizened face was over me. "You awake enough to move around?"

I made another garbled groan in response.

She looked away. "Twenty! He's ready."

A biker came into my view as I tried to focus. His black denim vest had a patch near his left breast that said: "Twenty." He sneered down at me. "Time to use the toilet?"

I nodded, for lack of any meaningful response. I felt completely helpless, and at the same time, urgent with needed relief.

My bindings were undone.

I briefly considered fight and flight: I was strong. I was beefcake. But the necessity of needing to pee overwhelmed me with tension and an inability to move right. Sitting up was a monumental task of effort not to wet myself. That's when I realized there was something around my neck, weighing me down with depression. I was wearing a collar with a heavy chain attached. I instinctively grabbed at my throat and found the collar, pulling at it.

Hands gripped me roughly and moved me. My feet hit the floor, totally numb and not wanting to work. *Where are my shoes?* It is amazing what silly things enter your mind when you lack control. I was having a seriously bad time trying to get my mental bearings.

I was pushed towards a bathroom door. I noticed the room, then: a featureless room with one window that showed a steel-grated cover. My mind instantly registered there would be no escape through the room's only window. I was guided into a small bathroom with a shower. The chain weighed heavily on my neck and I was constantly bent sideways, trying to compensate for the weight.

All I had ever wanted in life was to be someone - to be successful. In my Kenpo classes, I had yearned for inclusion. I had been taught to fight, but not how to fit in. I had struggled through school, outcast by the sports guys and shunned by the nerds. Girls had looked me up and down and shaken their heads.

It was only on a call from a bookkeeping agency that I had met Kristy. Her computer had fried due to the CPU fan dying and I had responded to fix it. Of course, it was unfixable, but they didn't know that when they had called. Kristy's look had spoken of a yearning that matched my own. Both of us felt it: an instant desire to be together, near, and sharing our fate as loners. That had been three years ago in forming that fateful relationship.

I sat on the ice-cold toilet seat, not trusting my legs to stand, and let out an insistent and demanding stream of water.

My mind cleared. *Where is my girlfriend? I mean, my wife? Where is Kristy?* As my mind continued to sharpen, I noted the man watching me without looking at my eyes. He was smaller than me, crazy-eyed, and suspicious-looking. The woman behind him had her arms folded, looking bored. She was wearing a denim vest with labels on it that I couldn't see at this distance. I looked at Twenty. He was in black denim and vest, just like the others I had seen.

Due to the position of "Twenty" over his left breast, I resolved to understand that particular spot as a nametag. My mind filed that away with little difficulty. I gasped, "Where is Kristy?"

I was almost done peeing.

Twenty glanced over his shoulder at the door. "In the other room. You ready to talk, fed?"

I used tissue to wipe off the end of my dick. "Yes."

He didn't appear impressed. But his voice rose. "Dealer!"

Cold washed down my back at the name as the realization hit me. I was in the midst of a drug gang. What else could dealer mean? This biker gang dealt drugs. I began to get a very sick feeling in my gut. My sense of

impending death increased. My life meant nothing to drug dealers and neither did Kristy's.

The buzzed-haired biker came in, rubbing his jaw and stifling a yawn. "He's alert?"

Twenty grunted.

Dealer regarded me with very critical eyes. "You don't look like a federal agent. Not FBI. Are you CIA? DEA?"

I was rising, feeling much relieved. But his question added a whole new set of suck to my appraisal. "What?"

Dealer, with his nametag affirming his moniker, stepped up close as if not fearing my size. "What agency are you with?"

I started to deny. "I don't know what—"

The fist to my gut stopped me real fast.

"Tell me."

I tried to draw in air from the unexpected punch. I groaned.

Dealer sneered, "Maybe I can get the story from your partner. You don't mind if I fuck her for it, do you? Of course not. You only care if I kill her." His evil smile moved away as he twisted around and left the room.

I wanted to say something, anything, as Dealer left the room. The woman was shaking her head. Twenty had a grin on his face that bespoke amusement.

I heard Dealer call, "Viking, come here."

A moment later, there was an audible grunt.

Dealer said, "Your turn."

Viking's low chuckle filled my ears as my mind suddenly went numb and buzzy.

I gasped out, "Wait..."

Twenty grabbed the chain near my neck and yanked hard. I fell to the floor. The chain was that heavy. I briefly looked along its length to where it was fastened. There was no way I was going to superman that sucker out of its fastening. Heavy bolts secured the plate and I immediately knew I would need tools. Heavy tools.

The wizened old woman in the room with me laughed. At the same time I heard Kristy gasp and cry out.

Whoever Viking was, he became vocal. "You're right, tight as a virgin." His gasps and grunts grew louder and were joined by feminine gasps that I knew to be Kristy's.

I raged, pulling against my collar and chain, "I'll kill you all!"

A fist met my face - very fast and sure. The next I knew, I was on my back looking at the ceiling. Twenty was over me. His voice was like grated concrete. "Fuck you." It sounded like he enjoyed saying it. He moved away and settled against the wall, crossing his arms.

But my senses were focused on the other room nearby. Viking, whoever he was, was grunting away. My bride made sounds of response. I didn't think they were faked. It surely sounded like she was being fucked. I had hoped they might be faking me out, but I didn't think they were. The hurt burned in my chest, bracing me for immediate action. I struggled to my feet and faced Twenty. "I'll kill you!"

His grin was instantaneous and relieved. He pushed off the wall from where he had been leaning and approached me. "Want a piece of me?"

I growled, ready for combat. I took the basic defensive karate stand: one foot forward, same arm up and ready to block, other arm lower and ready to counter attacks to the groin.

Twenty's eyes scanned me up and down. Then he was moving, fast and low.

I blocked a low attack at my groin with a downward thrust of my left forearm. At the same time, I launched a punch with my right at his face.

Surprised, he was deflected in his attack and took my fist into his face with a satisfying impact. He staggered backwards.

I stood upright, showing him my height. It never failed to impress others.

He wasn't impressed.

What the fuck? I frowned at him in curiosity as he came at me – fearless – with intent in his eyes. Before I could block his punch, his fist connected with my jaw and gut. The air rushed out of me in a rush and I went down onto one knee. I looked up just as his fist came down onto my chin.

CHAPTER 3

I don't really know how many days passed. With zero relation to time, I might have guessed a week. Maybe it was only a day. Maybe only two days. I don't know. I became used to the routine. I was allowed freedom, as it were with my neck collared, to use the toilet and shower. But my clothes had been taken away from me and I existed chained, naked.

Sometimes, during those times, I heard what amounted to sounding like men having sex with my bride. I wasn't convinced it was real. They seemed to be suspicious of me for some reason. I also found that laying on the table where they had bound me that I was responding to what I was hearing. *Are they really having sex with Kristy?* My memory of her pussy was comforting and at the same time conflicting. Were they really fucking her? Anger rose in me, but also my ardor. My penis responded, firming and rising as I listened to obvious sounds of sex.

I anxiously called out during times of darkness. "Kristy?"

I never got an answer.

It was during one time of panting and gasping I thought was meant to break me down with thoughts of her being raped that someone said to me, "Looks like you're excited."

I was panting, my dick hard and standing up. *Where is my wife?*

A face leaned over me, though I was no longer tied down except for the collar and chain at my neck. It was Twenty.

He whispered to me, "Your partner likes it." He didn't seem to expect anything, but his following words were pregnant with meaning. "She's spilling all. Your story better match hers, fat-boy."

I reached up to grab his throat; I wanted to strangle him.

His fist hit the side of my jaw and sent blackness spreading over my senses.

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I showered. I considered the soap and shampoo as weapons. Neither played out in my mind as feasible. I had brief thoughts of pumping the shampoo bottle into the eyes of all who opposed me, but somehow, even my fantasy couldn't conjure the image of me succeeding.

As my mind cleared more, I guessed I had only been captive for three days.

My first meal was brought to me – a bowl of soup. The woman, name-tagged "Grannie," told me I better eat it. That Dealer would be expecting answers.

I said, "I don't know anything."

Something in her eyes told me she might believe me, but she turned away and left the room.

I sipped the soup and wondered if it was my last meal.

Dealer came in, followed by a squinting bearded man whose name patch said "Sonar."

I looked over their other patches while the two simply stared at me sitting on the table. Dealer had a patch that said "President" and "1%" among others. Sonar had patches that said "VP" and "1%" with others. I said, "So you're the leaders."

Dealer's face didn't change. "You knew that."

"Well, I mean, I see from your vests; I've watched Sons of Anarchy."

Dealer and Sonar met eyes at the same time and then looked back to me. The president said, "You don't know shit if that's where you get your briefing material. What outfit are you with?"

"I'm not with any outfit. I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know why I'm here." My voice had risen, trying to impress them.

They shared a look again. Then Dealer turned to Sonar. "Find anything in their vehicle?"

Sonar's headshake was minute. He said nothing.

I saw the president take a deep breath and let it out slowly. I knew it was now or never. "We don't have anything to do with drugs or anything. Let us go and we won't tell anyone."

Dealer's head turned slowly with a look of distaste. "We'll see if your story matches your partner's."

I launched at him, moving before I could rationalize away my only chance. I latched onto his vest and yanked. "Leave her the fuck alone you piece of worthless shit! I'll fucking kill you!"

I might have caught him with a punch once when he had been pulling me out of my Suburban, but he was fast now, that's for sure. His fist caught me in the gut and doubled me over. He said, "Twenty, get in here and tie him down."

I was yanked around by the chain and tied down by Twenty and Gripper.

Twenty leaned over me and said, "You ever lay a hand on Dealer like that again and you'll lose that hand. Understand?" His eyes told me he meant it.

Sounds at the door had me lifting my head.

Dealer was hauling Kristy in. She was naked, but clean and unbruised.

She saw me and her eyes went panicked. "Jim!"

I panted with panic. "Kristy, are you okay?"

She nodded, tears in her eyes.

"Did they...?"

By the look in her eyes, I could tell they had. My wife had been raped.

Dealer growled, "Stuff his underwear in his mouth."

Gripper and Twenty did exactly that. I was gagged, mouth open and full of cotton.

Dealer was looking at Kristy and pointed to the wall. She backed up slowly and stood there, shivering.

I struggled against the bonds.

The president stripped off his clothes. He had a crow tattoo on his left arm and something small at the top of his back – a fleur-de-lis with wings. He wore a small cross around his neck. His cock – though I tried not to look at it, hung long and full. I groaned angrily.

Dealer picked up my small wife and pinned her against the wall. She held onto him, legs around his waist and hands clamped around his shoulders. She looked at me with wide eyes, watching me and staring.

I stared back, tense and quivering. I was hoping this was a show – some tease or threat that wasn't really going to be carried out.

Kristy drew in a sharp intake of breath, her eyes still on mine. Dealer's butt clenched and rose. My wife's mouth dropped open, then closed. I watched his butt move, clenching. Slowly, Kristy's eyes glazed over and her lids sank shut. She began letting out little pants of air.

I felt myself stir. *I can't get excited over this. It's all fake. Or maybe that's why I'm getting hard. Maybe it's the fake that's a tease.*

Kristy moaned, her fingers digging into Dealer's shoulders.

My dick filled and lifted. *Fuck, that sounds real.*

The man gave four good upward pushes then cupped her butt and turned her away from the wall. My bride's head lay on his shoulder, eyes closed.

He turned to face me, his eyes filled with anger. Through gritted teeth he said, "Worthless? Your wife likes this. A lot."

I saw in horror the base of his thick shaft. I saw my wife's pussy open and stretched around it. I saw the shaft rising and falling as he slid it in and out of her. I heard her moans. My cock bulged insanely and I groaned.

Dealer was speaking to her. "Do you like this, girl?"

Kristy panted.

"Do you?" He pulled out, his cock slick with her juices. "Answer me."

My wife's voice was a whisper. "Yes."

"Louder."

She glanced furtively at me, with guilt in her eyes. "Yes."

"Beg me."

"What?"

Dealer was looking at me. "Beg me to put it back in."

"I..."

"Do it. Do it right in front of your husband."

"I... Please. Please put it back in..."

"You want me to fuck you?"

"Yes, please..."

Dealer's eyes glinted dangerously at me. He stuffed his cock back up into my wife's pussy. He called out, "Tequila!"

What the fuck does he need a drink for? I wanted to tear him limb from limb. But my cock told me something else.

A woman popped her head in, taking in the scene without so much as a blink.

Dealer motioned with his head. "Give fat-boy a hand."

She was chunky, with black-dyed hair and heavy mascara. She immediately obeyed, coming over to me and gripping my dick. She began pumping my shaft as if it was an ordinary thing – like wiping a glass.

I groaned, lifting my hips.

Dealer whispered to Kristy. "You like riding on my cock, little girl?"

I watched my wife's hips begin to hump back at him. She said, "Yes, yes." She groaned after saying it and began trembling, her breathing coming faster. I realized my Kristy was beginning to orgasm.

Dealer was smiling at me. He moved his hips faster, his dick driving up into her.

Tequila looked back and forth between him and my dick, keeping pace with his movements.

Kristy came, her body shaking so hard it was unmistakable.

I wanted to rage, but my cock wanted more. The woman's hand on me was just right. My hips began moving and I huffed through the underwear in my mouth. I hated myself for being turned on, but loved every stroke on my cock.

Dealer pinned her back against the wall and drove harder and faster. Kristy's face rested against his skin, her mouth opening and closing. She didn't look at me anymore. He grunted, breath whistling through his teeth. His butt clenched up and his body began jerking. He was cumming in my bride.

I groaned louder, wanting to kill, but wanting to see.

He pulled out of my wife and blew out a long breath. He slowly lowered her. As he was, a stream of cum dripped out of her open pussy.

I lost it. I bit on the underwear hard, wanting to tear it all like a savage dog, but my cock had other ideas. Under the ministrations of a grinning woman named Tequila, my cock erupted. Long streams of cum shot up.

Dealer grinned and motioned to my wife to look. Kristy's eyes went big as she watched my humiliation: I had cum watching another man's cum drip out of her pussy. The president grabbed up his jeans. "I think your so-called husband likes it."

She looked back and forth between me and him. She whispered, "I've been telling the truth."

Tequila milked my cock a few more times, then wiped what had oozed onto her fingers on my chest. She left the room as if knowing she had been dismissed.

Sonar gave her a nod. Then he said to Gripper and Twenty, "Leave us."

The two men went out. I focused on the patches on the back of their vests. This was the Iron Crows motorcycle gang. I had never heard of them.

The vice-president watched Dealer get dressed.

Kristy took a faltering step and then another. Then she ran to me. She yanked the underwear out of my mouth and said, "I'm sorry."

I panted, not knowing what to say. I had been angry, but also very turned on watching her get fucked. "It's all right."

Dealer and Sonar were sharing looks and frowns. Finally the president said, "Shit."

Sonar nodded.

"What the fuck are we going to do with them?"

Kristy jerked and turned, "Please don't kill us."

Dealer sighed heavily and covered his face.

I said, "We don't want to get mixed up with a motorcycle gang. Just let us—"

Sonar actually said something. "We're a club, not a gang." He sounded angry.

I snapped my mouth shut.

CHAPTER 4

I stayed silent.

Dealer nodded. "That's the first smart thing you've done since you got into this. Maybe there's a spark of brains in there somewhere."

He shared a look with Sonar.

The VP turned and called, "Twenty."

"Yeah." He had been waiting outside the door.

I wasn't sure what was going on and my heart began to race in anticipation. *Is this the last day of my life?*

Dealer said, "Untie him. Chain, too."

Twenty, a smart looking man with his crazed eyes, immediately obeyed. One of his patches read "Sergeant at Arms."

The president approached close.

For the first time since I had been captive, I felt real fear. This man held my life in his hands.

Something in his eyes, though, told another story. He said, "Why were you at that chapel?"

I looked at him like it was a trick question. "Getting married."

"Why that one?"

"It was the first one we saw..."

He lowered his face into his hands and scrubbed. "Fuck..."

Sonar remained quiet.

Dealer straightened, placing hands on hips. "You picked the wrong chapel, the wrong wedding suit, with the wrong vehicle."

"What does my—"

"A black Suburban? It's got government written all over it."

"So you are criminals." I had an ounce of courage, knowing I was going to die anyway.

Sonar snorted.

Dealer, however, looked serious. "You don't know shit."

"You're mixed up in drugs, aren't you? This is a drug operation—"

"What the fuck gave you that idea? Sons of Anarchy?"

"Well, that too, but your nametag—"

Dealer laughed. It was an honest laugh from the belly and he leaned back, growling out a guffaw that almost made me want to laugh with him. He shook his head and pointed to his patch. "Dealer because I'm a good card dealer. Learned in Vegas some years ago—"

"Oh, I see—"

Sonar scowled. "Don't interrupt the president. Ever."

I said quickly, "Sorry."

Dealer scrutinized me with piercing and knowing eyes that looked like they had seen a lot. "That's the second smart move on your part."

Kristy was hugging my arm. Her grip tightened.

I decided to remain quiet until I was addressed.

The president watched me, waiting, then appeared to nod slightly. "I suppose you're angry."

I bit my tongue.

"We fucked your wife. Three of us. Aren't you angry? I would be."

I gave a quick nod.

He cracked a smile. "At least you're honest." He looked down at my dick. "That's not the whole truth, though. And I'd hate to see little Kristy go."

I tensed, my hands forming into fists.

He noticed. "You want revenge? Want to teach us not to fuck your wife? Want to fight one of us?"

I growled but kept quiet.

"I should probably pay you that courtesy. She's a very sweet thing. Sweet, indeed. What say we clear a spot and I'll have one of the patches fight you. Just a clean fight. Let you hurt us back, huh?" There was a jovial twinkle in his eye.

I didn't know how to read that. But I could tell I was being offered a challenge. I felt I didn't have to take it, but to not accept would be to admit I was nothing. Always, I had been nothing. I had fallen between the cracks in school, having few friends. Always the loner. Always the last picked for a team. Always looked at as too tall, too slow, too not with anyone else. I didn't fit in with the druggies, the smokers, the jocks, the nerds... And neither had Kristy. Too small, too skinny, too smart, too quiet, too aloof.

No, neither of us had ever fit into anything. Dealer's words sparked a rage at myself within me. I was never good enough. I could never stand and say that I mattered. As tall as I was, I had lived with the stigma for years.

My chest heaved, ashamed – ashamed of getting aroused seeing my wife taken in front of me. Ashamed of not having a job. Ashamed that even having the bad luck to be taken captive by this club had revealed my faults. I rose to my full height, determined to say I mattered. "I'll fight anyone here."

There was a reassuring squeeze from my wife that instinctively caused me to wrap my arm around her.

Dealer appeared pleased. "Stiff guy wants a fight."

Twenty chuckled.

"Get dressed and come out. Tell Twenty when you're ready."

"Will we be free to go after that?"

His eyes locked to mine, sparkling with something unsaid. "Ask me after."

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I hugged Kristy fiercely. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes. They pulled my hair that first day, but after that they treated me gently."

"Even when..."

She nodded against me. "I'm sorry."

"You really wanted it, or did they make you say those things?"

She looked up into my eyes, searching.

"Tell me."

Her eyes shifted left and right, looking everywhere at nothing. Looking for escape. She trembled and said, "I don't know... At first I was scared. Dealer raped me. Then Viking. And Big Pizza. But Dealer came back and he was...so gentle." She trembled harder in my arms. "I felt as if he were protecting me, like I was something of his he could never mistreat." Her tears flowed down her cheeks. "I'm sorry."

"So you liked it," I choked out.

She nodded. "Not for the sex, I think. But because I felt included. I felt special. I felt wanted. Safe. Does that make any sense?"

More than you know. "I think it does."

"Can you forgive me?"

I stroked her hair. "You were raped—"

"Not after that first day, I wasn't."

I sighed. "They used you."

"At first, yes. But then it wasn't like that. Dealer only allowed Viking to be with me one more time. Then it was all Dealer."

I felt angry, hurt that my wife had liked him and he had tried to take her from me. But at the same time, my dick began hardening and she felt it.

She grabbed my cock gently, looking up at me hopefully. "I'm glad you liked it, too."

I didn't like it. Not one damned bit. But then, that wasn't true, was it? I panted, feeling my dick becoming erect again.

She whispered, "It was hot watching you cum as you watched me. It felt like freedom – like I didn't have a care in the world. I felt special, just like when that pastor married us a few days ago."

I felt her sincerity. "When we leave, will you miss him?"

"Dealer?" She looked hurt. "I felt so wanted..." Things went unsaid.

I finished dressing, wondering if I had already lost my wife. I felt ridiculous in my black suit pants and white shirt. It was the only thing wearable for my wedding. I couldn't afford a tux. I looked at my jacket as I left the room; it was over the back of a chair outside the door. No wonder they thought I was government. *Black suit, black sunglasses, black Suburban. Fuck, what a mess. And I thought I was just looking cool.*

There was a grizzled old biker standing next to Twenty. His tag said "Gunner." A long, thin cigar hung unlit out of his mouth, though it had been lit at some time before. His eyes were glassy and squinted. Another patch said, "Chaplain."

Twenty grunted. "You ready?"

Gunner said, "Give the boy a minute with me, will you?"

Twenty said nothing, just gave the old man a look and then walked off. We were in some kind of a large building, old, with two corridors that went off left and right. But we were centered in a large room with couches and chairs. A pool table near the left wall had two biker women leaning against it.

I figured this must have been a hotel of some sort at one point. The hallways contained doors set close together.

Gunner said, "Heard there was a big mistake milkshake. Quite a mess."

I grunted sourly.

He said, " 'Blessed men pass through valleys of weeping.' You know that verse?"

I said, "Huh?"

"It's in Psalms. I take it you're not a Bible-reader?"

"No, I have one, but—"

"All of life's Wisdom is found there, son. You might try getting use out of it some time."

"Oh..." I felt uncomfortable at admitting I hadn't read it.

"Men who believe enter places of weeping. Happens to everyone. But blessed men pass through – to the other side. Remember that." He pulled the cigar from his mouth and squinted at me. He also had a patch that said "1%."

I pointed. "What is that? 1%?"

He smiled. "An award that's pretty fucking rare. It's earned by those who show extreme commitment to biking and the brotherhood."

I was confused. "Brotherhood? Like in Sons of Anarchy?"

The cigar went back in the mouth and a gnarled finger stabbed at me gently. "Best advice you can get about that is to forget everything about what you see on TV. A motorcycle club is nothing like that shitty show. For the most part. But yes, everyone wearing the patch is a brother or a sister —"

"You have a woman wearing a patch? I thought—"

"Don't interrupt your elders, boy. Especially those among the brothers. Yes, we have a lady patched; she earned it. Any of us in here would drop anything to come to the aid of one of ours in need. We're that tight. Tighter than you can know."

Kristy squeezed my arm and trembled. "I've never felt that, except with Jim."

Gunner's face cracked into a smile that showed a range of pearl-colored teeth. "The old ladies had good things to say about you."

She perked up. "They did?"

I wanted to steer her away from a precipice I feared. "Are you guys into drugs?"

Gunner's smile died and his look turned hard. "Fuck no we aint, I swear to that by God Almighty. We fight the attempts. We face the gangs coming out of the city looking for new territory. That was why we took down that preacher at the marriage chapel. He was a front – an advance scout feeling for buyers."

I gaped. "Are you serious?"

"Serious as a fucking shot to the head. That's how we handled him. Dumped a gang body in there with him. Made it look like a drug quarrel."

I made a face. "And the cops didn't see through that?"

Gunner laughed a deep wheeze like a sixty year old Chrysler trying to start. "You don't know much about Keystone, do you?"

I shrugged. "Not really..."

"Much of the population is God-fearing people. So are the sheriff and his deputy. You beginning to catch my drift? They look the other way and we keep the shit out of the area."

I bent my head towards him, trying to understand. "You fight against drugs?"

"And gangs. And sometimes the CIA."

I laughed. "You're shitting me."

His look was serious, but there was light in the old man's eyes. "The fuck I am."

"The CIA?"

He gave a quick nod. "They've tried once to set up an operation here."

"What did you do?"

He flashed teeth. "That's club's business. Not for outsiders."

I jerked at the word "outsiders." It left a deep sting inside that made me blush.

He frowned. "Don't go all butt-hurt, boy. Club business is club business. The way it is. Now, you gonna fight? Or are ya gonna slink outta here like a scared little chicken?"

"I'm not scared."

He grunted. "Good for you; we respect that. Though no one woulda cat-called you for declining."

"Who do I fight?"

"Whoever you want."

"Is this to the death?"

He wheezed laughter again. "Naw, just a bit of fun and we recognize you have a beef."

Dealer came up to me from behind. He stood at my side, his eyes swiveled to me. "You ready?"

I nodded. "Do I get to fight you?"

"No, it wouldn't be fair."

I stood taller. "I can fight."

"I'm not doubting it. What I mean is, I'd let you win. We did you wrong and we aren't that way. I'm responsible for what we did, so I can't give you an honest fight."

I felt somewhat humbled by his admission. For having been captive for three days, I was being treated like a real human being. Someone who had as much value as anyone else. Suddenly, I was at a loss. "I don't know who to fight."

"Your wife tells me you learned karate. You also fix computers."

"Make them, usually."

He nodded. "Why don't you try our bouncer?"

"Your bouncer?"

"If you do good against him, I might offer you a job."

A wave of something I'd never felt before washed through me. "Are you serious?"

He chuckled. "Unless you can't stand the thought of working for us."

I felt a weight on my shoulders, but not one of worry or pressure. I felt the weight of responsibility in a way that made me want to give my best. "I'll fight your bouncer."

Dealer just stood there, looking at me for a minute. I thought I might have answered wrong. I noticed Sonar come around from his other side, slowly, a curious look to his watchful face. His lips worked behind his black beard, chewing on a thought. Finally, Dealer said, "Clear a space! Call out for a pitfight!"

The biker women in the room cheered and hooted. The few bikers in the room laughed happily.

I didn't know what the hell I was getting myself into. Serious hurt? Pain? I didn't know. Even more curious, my Kristy seemed to approve. She gave my arm a squeeze and launched a kiss to my cheek.

Two of the women hurried off, calling out "Pitfight!"

Sonar was tapping on his phone. "Word sent."

Chairs and tables were moved. At what looked like a hotel counter that had been turned into a bar, beer mugs were filled and set out.

Dealer talked to someone out of earshot and the other biker straightened. It was Gripper. He looked surprised and looked at me, then nodded.

I wasn't sure what to expect as he approached. I said, "You the bouncer?"

The biker grunted. He was the one with arms like logs and a chest that put even mine to shame. But his was muscle; mine was mostly flab now. Still, I knew how to move. He said to me, "Karate, huh?"

"Kenpo."

"What's that?"

I almost snorted, but kept it back. "Chinese Kenpo Karate. Not much different from other forms of karate."

"Ever fought in a bar brawl before?"

I swallowed. "No..."

He winked. "It's a different world. Don't worry; I won't break anything on you."

I laughed nervously, trying to sound nonchalant. "That's good to hear..."

He shook his head and moved away.

Kristy had walked over to Grannie at the bar and they were talking with heads close. The older woman's eyes darted about, scanning the room as they talked.

Not sure what to do except wait, I did some minor stretching exercises, but I felt like a fool.

CHAPTER 5

Bikers straggled into the room in pairs and singles. Biker women appeared out of nowhere. Phones were out; they were going to vid this. Some were smoking and I was caught off-guard. Smoking laws prohibited smoking indoors at a place of business, but I was guessing this room wasn't open for business. Those who grabbed glass mugs of beer did so without paying. Two of the bikers started braying the stupid "One Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall" song.

Dealer was leaned casually against the pool table. Sonar was near the door, watching everything, his black beard and long black ponytail swaying slightly as he moved his head.

Somebody approached me, beer mug in hand. He was a hefty guy, smiling, and sporting a long beard. His name patch said "Big Pizza." He thrust his chin at me. "Hope you forgive me for hitting you in the head the other day."

I remembered the metallic thunk to the back of my head that had produced a splitting headache. "That was you?"

His eyes danced with an upward thrust of his chin. "Yeah, you knocked over Dealer's ride and then punched him. It seemed like the thing to do."

I ignored everyone else for a moment. "You guys really fight gangs to keep them out?"

His eyes went from dancing to sharp in an instant. "I don't know if I can say much about that. Maybe you should ask an officer."

"Chaplain said so."

His face relaxed. "Ah, so... Well, yes, we fight against gangs. It's not like we go out at eight in the morning and fist-fight gang-bangers until five every day. We keep a watch, then move when we see definite signs. Most days are just ordinary days."

"So what do you do all day?"

"Me?"

"Any of you?"

"Well, I work in the casino behind the cage."

I nodded.

He said, "Others work at our two bars, a couple at the pawn shop and a few at the strip joint."

"There's a strip joint here? I didn't know."

"Yeah, it's clean, though. Just dancing. No full stripping. Only down to topless."

"I thought Keystone was filled with Christians?"

"It is." He shrugged. "A little tit never harmed anyone. Most of our regulars come from the city."

I grunted assent, not sure how else to respond. "So...no prostitution?"

He gave me a look. "Well..."

I waited.

"We have Angela...but we closed down this place years ago when we bought it out." He waved his hand around to indicate the place.

"This was a cat house?"

He nodded, smiling. "We didn't think it was good for the community."

"But you have a prostitute."

His smile evaporated a little and his eyes hardened. "You have to understand, Jimmy, that some women have no other options or hope. They do what they know. If we didn't keep her, where might she end up? Strung out on drugs? Murdered in some alley somewhere? We consider keeping her an act of charity."

I had very much noticed his change. "Sorry."

The smile returned and he clapped my shoulder. "Quite all right, son. Now you know. Kristy tells me you're looking for a job?"

I blew out a breath. "Have been for some time now. She's been supporting us with her bookkeeping work." I looked down at my feet, embarrassed. I wanted to talk about anything except my lack of work; it made me feel worthless. "So no chop shop, then?" I saw a black haired, scowling biker with silver in his hair edge close, obviously listening.

He laughed, shaking his head. "We're not a gang, Jimmy. We don't steal cars."

"You don't have to steal cars to operate a chop shop."

Big Pizza regarded me for a moment. "Cars don't just magically appear..."

I shook my head. "Think ahead a little. People are hurting for cash and the internet provides opportunities. You put an ad in the paper offering two hundred dollars for a car—"

Big Pizza shook his head. "Scrap, you're only getting fifty to a hundred. Prices are low."

I placated him with a hand motion. "Two hundred. Then you siphon the gas out. Free gas for your rides. You pull the serviceable parts out and sell them on Craig's List. A four-set of rims with tires can get you the cost of the purchase back right there. You take out what you can sell first and then you scrap it."

He raised his eyebrows at me. "Why aren't you doing it?"

"I don't own a garage or know how to chop a car. I know computers. But I know car parts sell – even ashtrays."

The black-haired biker had edged closer, his head tilted, listening. His name patch said "Ghost."

I glanced at him occasionally, but he seemed intent to listen, not butt in.

Big Pizza had seen him, too. He said to me, "Don't mind Ghost; he's our Treasurer. Might be listening for ideas."

"My wife's a bookkeeper—"

Big Pizza was shaking his head. "We're fine. We make a lot of money sitting on what we have. More is always nice, but not entirely necessary."

Kristy had come over, cradling a beer in two hands. I doubted she would be able to drink half of it. "Talking finances?"

Big Pizza smiled at her. "Hello, sweet thing. Yep, talking finances. He was trying to offer your services."

"I'm a good bookkeeper."

"I think Ghost does well."

The black-haired, scowling biker straightened and came close enough to be included. "I'm interested in the chop-shop idea. Sounds plausible."

Kristy was brash. "So you're the bookkeeper?"

"Treasurer."

"So you keep the ledgers and balance—"

His scowl deepened. "Ledgers?"

"Okay, so you use the computer?"

"No..."

Kristy cocked her hip and dropped her mouth open. "How do you keep track of debits and credits? How do you reconcile—"

Ghost straightened, stiff. "It's club business. We operate at a profit."

She snorted. "I bet you don't even use spreadsheets."

He blushed, but his scowl deepened. I put a warning hand on her shoulder.

Ghost stalked off, his scowl deep and creasing his face.

Kristy looked up at me. "What? I was just trying to help."

Big Pizza shook his head slowly. "You never question an officer about their duties. That's a matter for the meetings."

"I was just trying to help."

His face softened, but the hardness about his eyes remained. "It's a club matter. You can be forgiven for not knowing, being that you're a citizen."

"What if I have good input?"

He chuckled. "You talk through your man. In this case, he doesn't matter, either." He looked to me. "That's not an insult."

"I understand." I didn't. Sort of. I think he knew.

Big Pizza leaned forward, close. "The brotherhood comes before all. Even family. I'm not saying family doesn't matter, it's just club business stays in the club, period."

"All right."

Gunner, the Chaplain, came up and stood with us. He twirled his thin cigar in one hand. "Giving him advice?"

Big Pizza rumbled laughter. "I wouldn't make a good chaplain."

"The shit you wouldn't."

I said, "You don't sound much like a chaplain."

That Chrysler wheeze buffeted me. "Why, because I cuss?"

I nodded.

"Son, the prophets of God cursed and pulled beards. Do you think Jesus cares about your words, or your heart?"

Something clicked in me, inside. Deep inside. I turned to face him completely. "Your heart. Always your heart."

Gunner wheezed again. "Even you could be chaplain."

"I'm serious." I felt it. Something lacking everywhere inside me screamed the affirmation that it was all about the heart. Who was I? Where was I going? Did it matter if I wore sunglasses? Did it matter if I was overweight? None of it. But my heart mattered. My heart was who I was, who I presented to the outside world. If I was a husk, heartless, wearing sunglasses and a suit, I was nothing. I didn't want to be a nothing. I never wanted to be a nothing again. It burst in me, sending shivers down my

limbs. I wanted to scream, "I'm someone." But I knew my words didn't matter. What mattered centered in my heart.

Gunner had fallen quiet, looking at me. "Do you know Jesus, Jimmy?"

"He was crucified, yes, I know—"

"No, do you know Him?"

"What do you mean?"

He moved closer to me, looking sharply into my eyes. Close so no one else was included. "Is He in your heart?"

I didn't know what to say to this grizzled biker. "I...don't know."

His eyes sharpened further. "Then He isn't. If you want Him, you ask Him into your heart to be your savior. It's as simple as that and all your failures are washed away."

My failures. I stood face to face with this gray-haired biker, talking of all things about Jesus. *Fuck! I'm about to fight someone and we're talking religion?* But his eyes pinned me to the spot and made me think. Never included, never trusted, never brought along, never friended... My life was nothing without Kristy. In fact, it was nothing anyway. I was useless. I opened my mouth and held my breath. I didn't know how to articulate my essence. Instead, I deflected. "God wouldn't want me."

Gunner was still. Big Pizza was standing respectfully a few feet away. His gaze sharpened on me. Kristy was listening and grabbed onto my arm in a gesture of support. *I know you want me, my love.*

The chaplain slowly began to shake his head. Despite the loudness around us, his words were gravelly and quiet. "He wants everyone like you. Just like you. Every fuck-up the world has to offer."

I realized I was trembling. "But why?"

"God isn't looking for perfect people; he's looking for men and women who will trust Him."

I snapped. Welling inside me was a lifetime of being nothing to anyone, except for Kristy. I couldn't hold back tears, and shame filled me. Here I was, crying in front of a biker who had seen more than I'd probably ever see. I felt the wetness on my cheeks. I knew others would see it and it made me more ashamed. Trust. Who trusted me?

Gunner shook his head. "No need for that, though I understand it."

I couldn't stop. Excuses rose in my thoughts. "But the things I've done —"

"Are forgiven and forgotten. That's grace, Jimmy. Do you want it?"

It seemed like the most amazing gift I had ever heard. I choked back a sob, trying to be firm. "Yes."

He stabbed his cigar into my shirt. "Get down on your knees with me, son." He dropped to his knees and held out his arms.

The room had gone quiet. I swear I could hear each biker in the room breathing. Knowing I would look like a fool to reject him, I realized I didn't want to. I realized with a growing surety that I wanted to be down there accepting what he was going to say. I wanted to trust him. I wanted him to trust me. I wanted to trust God. I sank to my knees. Not a single person laughed.

I accepted Jesus in front of at least thirty bikers and their women in an old whore house.

CHAPTER 6

Beside me, Kristy accepted, too. The only noise when we got to our feet was a muted murmur of approval. But I saw smiles everywhere.

Gunner smacked my shoulder with his hand and gripped hard. "Come to me when you have questions."

Someone said loud enough for me to hear, "I swear that old silverback is an angel of God. Never seen anyone with his ability to turn a soul."

Gunner heard it. He walked away from me and passed the biker that said it. He muttered, "Fuck you, too, you shit."

Laughter erupted in the room and I felt an elation that drove my spirit to a place I had never felt. I had been worthless, but maybe no more.

Twenty came to me, checking his watch. "Half hour has passed. You ready?" His look to me brooked no argument.

I can't say I was in a mood to fight. I think I wanted to hug. But I nodded.

Twenty glanced at Gripper. He said tiredly, "Don't break his nose."

Laughter flew through the room again, followed by cheers.

He motioned Kristy to the side.

There was something there amongst all those bikers that said they were one. They were a unit. Family. I was an outsider, even if I felt better than I ever had. I felt no danger from the group, though I had been held captive. Though I had thought my life was nearing an end only hours before. No, there was something honorable just out of my reach. Something I needed.

Twenty looked to Dealer. Dealer nodded. Twenty, as Sergeant at Arms, nodded in return. He turned to both of us and held up his fist. He looked back and forth once. Then he dropped his fist, saying, "Fight!"

The former whore house echoed with cheers and yells of glory.

I brought up my hands into the standard guard position. Gripper just looked at me, shifting slightly to the side. I evaluated his stance. *Okay, he sort of knows a good position. He can launch quick strikes from his left or powerful ones from his right.* I lightly tried to bounce on my feet to keep agile. He was stock-still. He edged closer, his eyes on mine.

Seeing an opening in his eyes, I lunged forward and dropped into a spin. I shot my foot out and caught the rear of his. I heaved and felt his feet go

out from under him.

The bikers in the room roared.

Gripper was down on his back.

Feeling triumphant, I stood over him and offered him my hand.

He slapped it away with a scowl.

Okay, I guess the fight goes on until...?

Twenty answered my mental question. "If either taps out, the fight is over. Not until then."

Okay, I know that procedure. I let him get up and moved around him.

He made a face and came low right at me, arms wide in a sweep to capture. This was dangerous to me and I knew it immediately. I sidestepped and slapped the back of my hand against his head to push it away from me. He stumbled away, cursing.

But he straightened, his lips firm. He brought up his fists in almost a proper karate pose. He rolled his shoulders and advanced.

I moved in a circular motion, edging around him. *Shit, this guy is tenacious.* He came at me low again and I prepared to block.

Suddenly, he was up high and his fist connected with my mouth. I felt my lip split and blood pour over my tongue. I cried out, "Agh..."

He wasn't done, launching punch after punch. It was all I could do to block them as I retreated away from him. That was my mistake. Instead of attacking, I was busy blocking. Not only that, but I was blocking repeated punches to the face. I was not expecting the punch that came in low, different from all the others. The wind left me in a rush as his fist sank deep into my belly.

I went down to my knees.

The bikers in the room were roaring. Probably for their own, I was sure.

My head was jerked back by Gripper. His look was intent, crazed, and out of control. He lifted his fist, ready to strike. I knew it was coming; I jerked away, rolling to the side. I was away and rose to my feet. I panted, "I guess I'm a little stiff."

A couple of the bikers guffawed loudly and I knew I had chosen the wrong word: I had gotten stiff watching Kristy get fucked.

Gripper grinned, but it wasn't friendly. He advanced fast, launching punches I could barely block. I had to do something fast. I ducked and dove forward bringing my right elbow into his ribs. I heard a satisfying grunt from him and raised my elbow to strike down on his lowered head. His own

elbow to my gut sent me staggering back. The hoots and hollering in the old whore house echoed madly in my head.

I blew out a breath and waited for him to straighten.

He twisted his head as if to bring relief to a stiff neck. "Never wait for your opponent." He leapt forward, foot raised for a kick.

I crouched and prepared to deflect his foot for a perfect strike to his groin.

The foot never came. It went down and I realized my mistake an instant before I was struck: it had been a feint. I looked up as his fist impacted the side of my chin. I went spinning. Really, I felt as if I was still and the room spinning instead. I found myself on the floor. I heaved upwards, and then rolled over onto my back. I felt little control in my limbs.

Gripper cupped the back of my head and yanked upwards. His other fist was poised. He said through gritted teeth, "I'd tap out right now. If I were you..."

I was dead to rights. There was no energy left in me that seemed to reach my arms or legs. He could punch me endlessly and there was nothing I could do to stop it. I reached a hand over and tapped on the floor three times.

A raucous cheer ripped through the room and I felt humiliated.

Gripper shifted a little, his fist shifting downward. I flinched. But his fist had opened; he was offering me his hand to get up. I panted, realizing the fight was over. I gave him my hand. He hauled me up, grinning in triumph. He howled to the crowd's cheers and raised my hand in his. I was dumbfounded. Instead of ignoring me, he held me up as if I was a victor. My arm in the air and blood in my mouth, I smiled weakly, knowing that as much as they were cheering him, they were also cheering me.

Gripper turned to me and slapped my face. But it was a friendly gesture. He said, "Good job, fat boy."

The cruel reality of my condition struck me. At the same time, I accepted his praise as real. I mumbled, "Thanks..."

He gave me a push, propelling me towards...Kristy. I gripped her in a hug as tight as she clung to me. She whispered, "You were wonderful. Are you hurt?"

Something swelled in me alongside that earlier spiritual swelling, and I felt at peace.

CHAPTER 7

I spent the night there in a proper whore's room with Kristy. We had a bed, a table and chairs, and a fully stocked bathroom. I showered in the morning after she did and came out to an empty room. This was our day to go: to be free.

I wandered out, looking around and hearing voices from various places along the halls. The club apparently used the old whore house for living quarters. I felt at once at home and also alien to a place where I shouldn't be. Aromas of bacon drifted to me and I followed my nose to the kitchen.

Kristy was there and waved brightly to me. Two bikers were in there eating and so were a good half a dozen women eating and sipping coffee.

Grannie said, "Good morning, slugger." She pointed to the coffee machine. "You want some eggs and bacon?"

I hadn't felt hungry until she mentioned it. My stomach growled so loud I thought the building would tumble around me. "Sure, please."

Grannie winked at me and moved to shift things around in pans.

I poured myself a coffee and sat next to my wife. The coffee cup captured my attention. It was simple, solid, and appeared indestructible. It was a thick porcelain thing buff in color that radiated strength. Just like these bikers.

Kristy put her hand on my forearm, but was talking to a lady named Dragon. I slowly discovered that she was something different from the other ladies. She was wearing a vest with labels and patches – just like the men.

Dragon was saying, "It's not hard, really. Sort of the same process any woman would find: you first make friends with the women. Then you prove yourself to the men. It takes twice as long."

I was lost. "Prove?" I butted in.

Dragon was not a pretty woman. She had features that would merely put her above just plain. She was tall with long, light brown hair in a ponytail. Her vest held several event patches, plus her name. She looked to me with hard eyes. "A woman prospect not only has to prove herself to the men, but first and foremost to the women."

I was ignorant. "Why?"

Her expression didn't change. Whatever sensitivity in the woman she might have had was probably burned out long ago. "The old ladies control more than you think. They get jealous, sometimes, and they can stop a club in its tracks over accepting a new woman into its ranks."

I didn't know what to say, so I tried sipping my coffee.

Dragon muttered, "Some women are threats. They can bring drama. But I've seen as much drama from men as women."

I shrugged, then nodded.

She added, "Drama queens are found in both genders."

I couldn't relate. I said, "You didn't see my epic fight yesterday?"

She bit into some bacon. "I was at work, but I got the text message."

Kristy was like a little girl talking to a friend. "Where do you work?"

"I'm a cashier at Dillard's Hardware."

I fought the urge to laugh. She certainly didn't look like any cashier I had ever seen. She wore her denim and had an odd, thin chain wrapped around her wrist. Very goth-like. But her eyes said she didn't accept bullshit, so I kept my mouth shut.

She leaned over towards me across Kristy. "Do you ride?"

I wanted so much at that moment to say I did. Ride my Suburban. Ride my mountain bike I hadn't touched in years. Ride my Big Wheel from when I was a little kid. Ride something; anything. I lowered my head. "Nah, I'm a bit out of shape for that."

She snorted. "That's an excuse."

The tall blonde biker named Viking swarmed close, carrying a plate. He clapped a hand down on my shoulder. "You should ride; there's nothing like it. Ride free with the wind in your hair..." He looked down at my bald pate. "Er, well..."

Dragon laughed. I found the sound uncharacteristic and I had just met her. But whatever her demeanor, she found the comment hilarious. Her teeth had an odd shape, but it was pleasant altogether.

Viking settled next to me. "Well, he could grow out his beard, anyway."

Kristy stroked my goatee. "I think it would look good on him."

I jerked my head back, suddenly self-conscious.

Grannie called out. "Your plate's ready, Jimmy."

I really hated that name. I was Jim, not Jimmy. And I wasn't young – not at thirty. But I rose and retrieved my plate with gratitude that left Grannie smiling. I learned through Kristy that Grannie was Gunner's wife

and her real name was Carla. Gunner's name was Tom Roth, though I had never heard that anywhere in the three days of my captivity.

I still wondered in the back of my mind if they were going to let us go. But my sense was that they were. I felt something of honor in the promise and I just didn't foresee any issue with us actually leaving.

Grannie's man came in, Gunner, the chaplain. He sat across from me with a plate and looked at me with a morning-after appraising eye. "How you feel?"

I rubbed my split lip. "Good, considering."

"No, I mean inside."

Ah, so this is spiritual. I grunted happily. "Like I'm floating." It was true.

He winked and said nothing. He ate the eggs on his plate.

Viking said, "You ever ridden?"

I didn't have to glance at Dragon to know she was watching. I said, "No."

"What a shame."

I briefly considered in my mind the efficacy of riding in the rain. "How do you ride in bad weather?"

Viking laughed heartily. "Very carefully."

I shook my head. "So you all ride out on your motorcycles on the ice in one mass of riders and it's all great?"

He laughed, lower. "No. Most of us have cars. We don't necessarily ride on ice. That would be stupid."

I nodded, feeling better that bikers at least had some sense in them. *They're all still here, aren't they? Riding can't be that hazardous.*

Viking flicked his fork. "Sometimes we ride in bad weather. Just to ride. Depends."

I offered, "To prove something?"

Viking's gaze turned purposely towards me. "Not to prove shit. We know we can. We do it because we can."

That sounded sensible and I nodded.

Gunner reached behind him and then placed his hand forward. My Beretta Nano was under his hand. "This is yours."

I was shocked. Here, in the middle of the clubhouse, I was being given a gun – my gun. I reached out and lifted it. I could tell it was still fully loaded

by its weight. "Thanks." I stuffed it into my empty belt holster. I did note that Gunner had a very sharp eye on me. I said, "You trust me?"

"Not really."

"Then why give me my gun back?"

Gunner fetched a cigar from his pocket and twirled it before sticking it in his mouth. His gravelly voice sounded rough. "Because it's yours. And I'm faster than you."

I smirked.

Before I could drop my smirk, a large hole was up in my face – the business end of a .45acp. The old man had moved so fast I couldn't have blinked before he had the gun on me.

I whispered, "Uhh..."

He slowly put the gun away, shifting it back into whatever holster he had at his belt. "Don't make me regret giving you back your piece."

I desperately didn't want to disappoint him. I held up my hands. "I'm easy."

Kristy butted in. "Do your women carry guns?"

Gunner snickered. "Uh...yep."

"I wish I could carry one."

The chaplain frowned. "Who says you can't? You committed a crime or something?"

My wife shook her head emphatically. "No."

"Then why don't you?"

Kristy shrugged, her voice small. "I never thought about it."

Gunner wheezed. "Well, now you have."

I looked around at the cold green walls around me. A throwback from two generations ago, the color reminded me of early kindergarten. Something nostalgic triggered in me and I felt the distinct feeling I was going to miss this simplicity. I wanted to leave an impression. I said to Gunner, "I want you to know, I appreciate what you said to me yesterday."

The old silverback actually blushed. He said, "Sheeeeit...."

"I'm serious. I feel a connection—"

"To God. Never lose it. I didn't do shit for you. You made the connection."

That made no sense. "But—"

"I don't need scalps on my belt. You just go forward and look to God. Pray always."

It sounded so practical that I couldn't argue. "I will."
He winked.

~ ~ ~

My time with the Iron Crows was at an end. I accepted the keys of my Suburban from a silent Sonar.

Dealer said, "We went through your things, but it's all there."

I said the first thing that came to mind, and probably the most inappropriate, considering, "Thank you."

He glanced at my wife and then back to me. He addressed me and only me. "Be safe." He indicated the door.

I walked out into freedom, tingles stinging my back with relief that I was actually free. Once in the Suburban, instinct took over. Key in the ignition, familiar sound of the engine, and the feel of the seat beneath me satisfied me that I was once again in control.

We pulled away from the old whore house without looking back. One street and we were on the main drag of Keystone. I wasn't on it for more than a block before lights in my rearview mirror caused me to look up. A white Durango with black and blue police markings was flashing at us. I pulled over with an exasperated sigh. *Things were going so good...*

CHAPTER 8

I lowered the driver's window as the officer approached. He was a black man wearing the hat of a drill instructor. He said in his deep baritone, "License and registration, please?" His nameplate said "Davies."

"Yes, sir." I handed them.

He appeared surprised at the respect. "Traveling...through?" He sounded as if he suspected different.

"I suppose..."

He was looking at my face. "Trouble recently?"

I knew he was looking at my split lip. I said, "Fell down some steps yesterday."

He chewed on nothing. "Uh huh."

"Was I speeding?" I knew I wasn't.

Kristy was looking anxiously at both of us.

The deputy said, "No. How did you receive that damage on your bumper? I saw you come in a few days ago and you didn't have it."

"I backed into a telephone pole. No damage to the pole." I was pretty sure that's what our Suburban had hit.

He chewed on something a little more, and then nodded. He handed back my license and registration, but kept a grip on them. "We keep a clean town here, Mister Butcher. Outsiders come and go, and we often don't mind them going."

I caught his drift immediately. "I like this town – and the way you keep it."

He released my ID. "You have a nice day, sir. Ma'am." He tipped his DI hat and walked back to his SUV.

Kristy blew out a breath.

I nodded. "He was feeling us out."

"Yep."

"He must have known the club took us hostage."

My wife, succinct as always: "Yep."

~ ~ ~

I was plagued by the drive back home. Racing towards familiarity provided no comfort. We were free and going home. Free and under our own control. Free, and yet oddly unsettled. I still treasured the floating feeling of my acceptance of God the previous night. How did my actions as a man conflict with God? Gunner, practical as a pistol, seemed to think that didn't matter. Was the old chaplain right? Now I had questions.

We were leaving behind something hidden filled with promise. But we were outsiders to them. Citizens they had called us. But they had still treated me with respect. The president even admitted he'd throw the fight to me if we fought because of how he felt about his mistake.

His display of responsibility tormented me in ways I couldn't grasp. Were they really so tight that Dealer would assume such responsibility? Had I demonstrated enough? Had they been impressed? Or disappointed? The conversations that morning played poison in my mind, bringing with it a fear. While conversing with me as adults, and even laughing, the fear developed over my past.

I had never been included in anything. I had never been trusted. Gunner had helped me trust the previous night on my knees. But this morning had admitted, gun in my face, that he didn't trust me. The move had stunned me in ways that were only now coming out.

Kristy said, "What are you thinking about?"

"My gun and Gunner. I can't believe he pulled on me."

"It was just to show you how fast he was. I knew he wasn't going to pull the trigger."

"But he said he didn't trust me."

She was quiet for a moment. "Why should he?"

That was the crux of my entire life. Why should anyone? And no one ever had, except for Kristy. It was a vacancy in my soul that dug deep and left maddening echoes. For a brief time, I had entered a world where people trusted each other. Relied on each other. I had tasted it and the experience made the empty echoes all the sharper.

I wanted to do what I always did: withdraw. I wanted to be alone and cocoon myself against the world. My hands gripped the steering wheel tighter. The famous words of Jesus floated up from somewhere in that mess inside. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." How in the world could that be helpful to me? Other than being nice... But I felt my brow draw down in concentration. Trust others like you would have them

trust you. Trust breeds trust? Inclusion breeds inclusion? Was the answer to my life something so simple?

I felt a clamminess run down my back. *Have I suffered the lack of trust and inclusion from others because I myself did not trust and include others?* I looked over at Kristy. *But everything worked with her.* And the answer came within, quietly. *Because she was just like me with exactly the same problems.*

I opened my mouth but stalled. I looked back forward. We were nearing our off ramp. I pushed it out. "Before me, did you ever trust anyone?"

She gripped her arms together and shivered. "No."

I knew she hadn't made friends, just like me. Had she never tried being inclusive? "Did you ever try to make friends in school?"

She laughed bitterly. "No, why bother? No one was going to be friends with me."

I sat stunned, steering us off the freeway.

She said, "I actually felt as if I had friends there."

I knew what she meant. At the biker club.

She continued. "The ladies were so supportive. Even Big Pizza's wife..."

I knew what she meant there, too. Big Pizza had been one of the bikers to take her. "She didn't look jealous of you?"

"Not at all, she even hugged me." She lowered her head, her eyes distant in thought. "They offered us jobs."

"It's so far away."

She was quiet.

I had made an excuse and knew it. I wasn't working and she didn't like her bosses, but her income was all we had. Our Suburban had been bought off a used car lot. Our apartment held little. And I was driving us back to hopelessness. I wanted to stomp on the brakes. My foot even came off the gas pedal. I wanted to stop the world and get off. Thank you, no, this ride isn't for me. I fought a lump in my throat.

It took money to make money. I could open up a computer shop selling custom builds and doing repairs, but it took money to rent a place and equip it. I had built all of two computers over the past twelve months and that was nothing. Two hundred dollars each – a total of four hundred dollars in income for the year. That was my life. Shops were closing, there was no work for a free-agent repairman at any of them. Thing was, I wasn't really good at anything else.

The internet offered nothing, unless I wanted to go into the armed forces. The local papers had nothing except for phone solicitation. I was not a phone person. I gave brief thought at times of the Walmart Center, but I didn't want graveyard shifts that would take me away from my Kristy; she was all I had.

I sighed as we pulled into our apartment complex. "What did they offer you?"

"Ten bucks an hour to learn bartending, twelve an hour if I'm good enough for the casino bar."

I dropped my head onto the steering wheel painfully. "Are you kidding me?"

She looked at me with big eyes and shook her head.

I said incredulously. "You only get eight and a half—"

"Bookkeeping."

"Why don't they pay you more?"

"Same old story; more people are filing online nowadays. Less people working, less jobs, less taxes, more companies moving overseas..."

"Leaving the only jobs available being fast food burger-flippers for the welfare class."

Kristy said in a desultory tone, "Bingo, baby." She got out.

I opened the back and hauled out our two suitcases. They felt like weights of shame as we trudged up the stairs to our apartment.

She muttered, "This doesn't feel like home."

I felt it too. I looked around inside at our belongings. The familiarity of the couch and TV offered no comfort. The Navajo White apartment walls offered no character – not like the laughable green of the whore house kitchen. It was out before I could stop it. "What are we doing here?"

She came to me and hugged me. "Existing. You and me."

I dropped the suitcases and hugged her back. "I love you, Kristy."

She looked up into my eyes, searching. "Even after what happened? I'm not...dirty or something? Broken? Stained?"

"Shh..." I stroked her hair. "No, definitely not. Besides, only that first night was rape."

She said against my shoulder. "Even that doesn't feel like it anymore. I don't feel broken inside."

Memories of her closing her eyes as Dealer entered her immediately stirred me. I hardened, fast. I lifted her and moved to the bedroom.

She gasped in surprise. "Are you sure you want to..."

I was panting, tearing off my clothes. "Yes."

"Even after..."

"Yes. Especially so." My cock throbbed upward, hard after I released it. It felt fully hard and tight with strain. "Get your clothes off."

She did so, looking at me with excited eyes, but searching all the same.

I was impatient; I needed to be in her. To feel her pussy again. To know it was mine. I nudged her legs quickly and mounted her. I felt the warmth of her pussy and speared my shaft into her.

She groaned out and hung onto me.

I felt my stiffness slide easily into her velvety pussy, sinking deep. It felt the same. No little aliens in there attacked my dick. I trembled with need and began furiously hammering my cock into her. *Yes, mine!* Images of Dealer's cock stretching her open rampaged through my frenzy. I fucked my wife harder, deeper.

She cried out with pleasure as I made love to her harder than I ever had before. It was as if I could fuck away the others who had been in her. The harder and faster I went, the more she was mine – the less claim they could have.

She convulsed in orgasm after just a moment of intense pounding.

I huffed heavily above her, not sure where I had gotten the energy to keep up this kind of pace. I pulled out and flipped her over, drawing her up for doggy. Her ass was beautiful and so smooth. I thrust my cock back into her pussy and watched my shaft slide in and out. Did they see this, too? Did they do her from behind and enjoy such a wonderful sight? Did they feel as good with their dicks in her? I groaned as my own orgasm triggered like an explosion.

I hammered forward, driving us both down onto the bed. My wife cried out in stunned pleasure, her mouth open and gasping as I ferociously grunted and shot my seed into her. I squeezed, pushing and straining, making sure every last drop was deposited as deep as possible. I collapsed on her, gasping from the exertion.

She mumbled a giggle under me. "Wow..."

I let out a breathless chuckle. "Yeah, not sure what came over me. But that was great."

"Were you thinking about them?"

A spasm of aftershock sent another stream into her pussy. I cried out in surprise and humped my hips to make sure any more of it was fully milked out of my cock. I laughed. "Whew, yeah, I guess I was."

CHAPTER 9

Fear fucked everything over in my head that night and the next day. She would be going back to work tomorrow, back to her bookkeeping job as a married woman. And I would be here, alone, vainly searching the want ads online for a job that would never appear. Could I be a bouncer? Had I done well enough to impress Gripper? Dealer had said if I could impress him, he'd take me on as a bouncer. Had I impressed him enough?

Kristy had left a slip of paper on the kitchen counter. Dealer had written the club phone number on it. I looked at it and walked away, chewing over our situation. I came back to it and walked away, the paper drawing me inexorably from across the room, only to have my fears make an excuse. I was too fat, even if I had lost a few pounds being captive. My specialty was computers. My wife's work was here. We had a place. It was a long drive.

I stood over the paper and spread it with my fingers. "Iron Crows Motorcycle Club." The phone number tempted me.

I turned away and paced. Gunner had said pray. *How do I pray, Lord? What do I say? What do I ask for?* I didn't get the feeling God was some sky-Santa, so I didn't make a list of things I wanted. *I'm not sure if I'm praying right, but please help me make the right decision.* A lot of things flashed through my mind at that point. Not the least of which was the rape of my wife and how it had turned into something she wanted. God surely wouldn't want that, would He?

The fact that the gang – no, the club – did things on the very shady side of the law from time to time had me worried. They had never really said they did illegal things, only hinted at them. Had they killed the gangbanger they had pulled out of the van to throw in with the marriage pastor's body? They certainly must have killed the pastor. Was killing that way legal? I was sure it wasn't. But the bikers had said they had the law on their side. Was that kind of vigilante justice honorable?

I felt it was. But what about my gun? What about their guns? Hadn't Jesus said something about living by the gun and dying by the gun? I sat in my computer chair and went online. I searched up the term and also the verse. The overwhelming majority of the church sites said Jesus hated guns. But two sites had a completely different take.

I sat forward, reading intently. I found not so much instruction from the pastor as I did in the comments section. At both sites, two different posters had laid out a far different version.

Their take made a lot more sense. "Those who take up the sword shall die by the sword" was not something He taught as other beatitudes. It was delivered at the moment of his arrest. Surrounded by soldiers, they were doomed if they "took up the sword." This was contrasted by Jesus telling his disciples just before his death, "If you do not have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one." A sword was the latest military weapon of the time, replacing spears as a deadlier advancement.

I sat back, feeling the very rightness of the whole argument. That made me wonder if guns weren't evil to God, was vigilante justice evil to God? The very idea that justice would be evil made me laugh out loud in our apartment.

Kristy came out of the bedroom. "Something funny?"

I chuckled, nodding slowly. "Yeah, something very funny." I shook my head. "Never thought of things like this." I explained to her.

"Why are you looking up all that? I mean, I don't mind, but usually you're doing something else."

"I was, I was pacing." I got up and went over to the counter.

She came up beside me, seeing the slip of paper spread by my fingers.

I said, "What does God think? About guns? About shady things that club might do in the name of justice?"

"Maybe He doesn't." She looked up at me.

"Oh, I think He does. I think He does." I nodded, thinking to myself. *Of course He does.* "I don't think I've ever met Christians like these people."

"You think God approves of them doing things against the law?"

"Certain things maybe. But if I recall anything from hearing about Jesus, it's that He was always against the law. Or the law against Him."

She laughed. "Uh, yeah, you're right."

I fiddled with the paper, remembering my dilemma on the way home. Had I not trusted anyone first? Had I not been inclusive first? At any time? *What if I started right now?*

I snatched up the phone set in a trembling hand.

She gasped, "What are you doing?" But there was a hint of hope in her question.

I gripped the handset so hard I thought I might break the plastic. My breathing came shallow and fast. I wavered. *Stop it! What do I have to lose? Just dial and find out.* I took a very deep breath, but my vision swam as I tried to calm myself. I put my finger on the hang up button and held it to reset the dial tone. My breathing slowed a little and I let off the button. Then I dialed the number.

Three rings – the number of days we were captive.

"Clubhouse."

I rushed, "Dealer? This is Jim Butcher."

"Jimmy? No, this is Smiley, the club secretary. Give me a minute and I'll let him know you're calling."

"Okay." I waited on hold. I waited some more. I began to be worried that maybe my call wasn't welcome.

Kristy murmured, "Are you on hold or something?"

I shrugged and nodded.

She went around the counter and grabbed a cup for the water machine. I saw her hand shaking.

There was a click. "Hello?"

"Dealer?"

"Yeah, Jimmy?"

"Yes. I was wondering what kind of job I might get with you guys." I heard a squeak and a sigh.

"Well, much of what we do is covered by our members and their wives..."

I felt as if the world had fallen out from under me.

"But you did well enough against Gripper that he thought you could learn how to be a real bouncer."

My world stabilized. *Bouncer. What a career.* But I had nothing else. "I'd like to try."

"That's quite a drive."

"Yes, I think we would move. Kristy said she could learn bar for ten an hour?"

He chuckled. "Both of you, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You got a place out here already?"

"I'll find one." I said it without fear of failure.

"Get yourself a place here and present yourselves at the clubhouse. We'll slip you into a couple positions. No guarantees, though. If you don't work out..."

"We're good workers."

He didn't answer right away. "Sonar tells me he'll offer you to rent his trailer. He moved out of it and it's sitting empty."

I felt as if my chest were bursting. "That's fantastic. How much?"

A brief pause. "Five hundred a month. It includes electricity."

"We'll take it."

Dealer grunted. "Great. Call us and let us know when you expect to arrive."

"I will, thank you."

He clicked off without saying goodbye. I replaced the handset.

Kristy was staring at me with large eyes. "We're moving?"

I realized I hadn't even asked her. I swallowed. "I'm sorry. I should have asked—"

She shook her head. "No, that's okay. That's fine..." She looked around. "I would rather live up there, with them." I knew what she meant: she craved that inclusion.

I pulled out the phone book and flipped to U-Haul.

CHAPTER 10

We threw away a lot of junk. Not that we had a whole lot. But it's amazing how much plastic shit piles up around the house that serves absolutely no purpose and has no value. Is it worth packing a plastic vase that once held flowers? Especially when glass vases are more attractive?

I was ruthless. I threw away things I thought might eventually come in handy. If they weren't handy right now, why would I think they'd ever be handy? I only saved tools. Things from as small as trash bag ties to as big as sleeping bags went into the trash. We kept things necessary to live. Chapstick? Trash. Hair spray I no longer used? Trash.

We fit all into the smallest trailer offered by U-Haul. I didn't think we'd do it, but we did. I even threw away my cheap computer desk. I'd buy a better one, not as cheap, later. With the prospect of both of us working, the hold on potentially usable items diminished. We debated the couch, and even threw that old thing away. I'd sit on the floor; I didn't care.

I called the clubhouse on a Sunday evening. The phone rang several times and I was about to hang up when a female voice answered, sounding harried. "Clubhouse."

"Hey, this is Jim Butcher."

"Who?"

"I was there a couple weeks ago. Fought Gripper—"

"Oh, right."

"Is Dealer available?"

"No."

"Okay, would you let him know I'm in town tomorrow morning?"

She hesitated. "Sure... Writing it down. He'll get the message in the morning."

"Great, thanks."

She clicked off without saying goodbye.

I turned to Kristy. "We're set."

She was searching my eyes. "You're sure about this?"

"Definitely. I can't find shit here for work. I've been looking for a year and a half now?"

"You could have worked at McDonalds."

"No way."

"But you could have."

I sighed. It was the lowest of lows. Despite having nothing, I considered myself better than that. "I would have rather worked at Walmart. At least they have some amount of upward potential."

"And how far can you go as a bouncer?"

Touche. I firmed my lips. "Bar manager. Casino manager. Those kinds of positions I could take anywhere."

"Bar manager?"

"Okay, maybe casino manager. But still."

She hugged me. "I hope we're doing the right thing."

I felt it, too. We were making a monumental shift towards something unknown. Was it a cliff? Was it the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? I didn't know. Neither of us did. I muttered, "Working for a biker gang..."

She laughed. "Don't say that to them."

"I know, I know. Motorcycle club."

"Is there really a difference?"

"Shades of difference? But maybe these guys are better than a gang. They keep the gangs out." I had done searches on Iron Crows and turned up nothing. But my searching turned up a lot of interesting facts. They weren't just a riding club, they were an accepted three-patch motorcycle club. The dominant 1%ers here were the Outlaws. I didn't see such a huge group letting the Iron Crows get away with three patches on their backs without making a huge stink.

She said, "Maybe it's for a good cause."

I barked a laugh. "Any time you keep a gang out, it's for a good cause."

"Even if the methods are illegal?"

I was silent on that. What was a law? A decision passed by a group of men. What if the group of men was evil? Were all laws just? I knew that was not true. When a city could fine you for watering your lawn and then fine you for not watering and allowing your lawn to die, I knew the laws were not just.

"What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking about lawns." I knew she wouldn't connect it and would think that I was being flippantly irrelevant. Her pout didn't disappoint. I said, "I think we're making the right move."

Her pretty face brightened.

~ ~ ~

I stopped the Suburban and its mini U-Haul trailer with temporary hitch across from the utterly non-descript clubhouse in Keystone. Four Harley's were parked out front. The parking lot of the building off to the side had been turned into a gated enclosure with a high chain link fence.

I got out, eager for the start of a new life. I impatiently waited for my wife, then took her hand and crossed the street. Entering the unlit interior of the old warehouse, I at first thought the place was deserted. Then my eyes adjusted.

Two bikers were shooting pool – or had been. I recognized neither. A guy I had never seen before, who wasn't wearing a vest, was sitting on one of the couches talking to a very skinny, but pretty girl. At the bar was Grannie. Her face went from hard to soft and welcoming all in an instant. She said, "Well, lookie here." Her gray hair was free and wild; she had it clipped back the last I saw her.

I grinned.

She hooked a finger and beckoned. "I was told to watch out for ya." She picked up a phone and hit a button. "Sonar, they're here." She hung up.

I looked back at the two bikers playing pool. They still weren't; they were just watching us.

She said, "Sonar'll be right out."

Even as she was saying it, the black-bearded, ponytailed vice president came stalking out, looking like a human panther on the prowl. His eyes went everywhere: watching; searching. "So, you made it." He gave a quick nod.

"Trailer's out front."

"Let's go." He left out the front without waiting.

We followed him out and crossed the street while he mounted a motorcycle. I heard a high pitched whir followed by a cough and a rumble that settled lower and quietly. He pulled out and circled around, stopping near the front of our Suburban. He looked back, waiting.

We got in and I started. I nodded and he looked forward, pulling off smoothly – looking so much like a boat plowing easily through water. Head hunched forward a little, he led us through a few side streets until we were in what was probably considered not the best area of Keystone. A mix of yards and trailer parks took up about four blocks of town. He led us into one.

He stopped in front of a horrifically old looking trailer.

I glanced quickly at Kristy. She did not look very happy. But she said, "Maybe it's nice inside."

Fortunately, it was. Clean and tidy – in fact, spotless, if old. The only out of place item all alone in the empty trailer was a box of old newspapers and cardboard sitting next to a recently-added wood burning stove. However, no wood was in evidence.

Sonar had entered first and watched us - sharp, hawk eyes registering everything we did, said, or looked at.

Kristy wandered to the back and back up to the front. "Looks good."

Sonar's expression did not change – as if he had expected no less.

I said, "Do you need rent up front?"

His eyes flicked to me without the tiniest move of his head. "Nope. It'll come out of your pay."

At first I thought that was bullshit, but then I realized it was actually for the better. "Sounds good."

He gave a single dip of his chin in a nod and handed me the keys. "We'll make rent due on the first. Means you have an extra ten or eleven days right now free. I'll take it from your first payout, so you're going to have a very small first payment."

I shrugged. *Get it out of the way.* "All right."

Another quick nod and he turned to the door. "Gripper will want to see you. He's at the Triple Shot. I'll lead you there."

"Okay." I followed him out. I unhooked the trailer from the Suburban. I said to Kristy, "You want to stay here and watch this?"

"Yeah, okay. I can pull some of the lighter stuff in."

I gave her a peck on the lips and approached Sonar. I looked at his motorcycle. "Nice."

He glanced at it, seeming to relax a little. "It's a 2012 V-rod."

As if I knew what that meant. "Looks like a smooth ride."

His eyes turned to me, considering. "It is. You've ridden before?"

I knew honesty was paramount here. "No. Only a mountain bike."

He folded his arms against me, closing me off – I could see it in his body language. But he talked. "Not much different from a bicycle, really. Heavier, but the same balance and fundamentals. You're propelled instead of pedaling."

The sound of his ride had ignited a thrill in me. The deep rumble and the staccato burst when he twisted the throttle sounded primal. "I wish I could afford one."

His expression didn't change. "Even a poor man can afford a Harley."

I scoffed, "Aren't they like ten thousand dollars?"

"More, if they're new."

"I don't have that kind of cash."

"Who says you have to buy new? You can grab up an old working Harley for two grand. Even less."

I was stunned. "That's all?"

His words sounded like a challenge. "That's all."

"You're kidding."

His look went stone-faced instantly and he swung over to mount his bike. "Let's go to the bar and get you acquainted with Gripper." The conversation was over.

What had I done?

I got in the Suburban and waved to Kristy. She was standing, arms folded. She waved back with a hopeful look on her face. I turned the big SUV and followed Sonar out. His big back patches led me. The top patch reading "Iron Crows" and the bottom reading "Keystone." The center design was a black crow outlined everywhere in silver.

I pulled to a stop behind him a few blocks later. He gave the Harley a single staccato rev and killed the engine. He got off and approached my vehicle. He waited while I got out. "Dealer thinks you might make a good bouncer."

I didn't know if I should say anything, so I remained quiet.

He said, "Pay attention to everything he says and you might work out." He offered nothing else before he turned and led me across the street.

One of the Iron Crows was outside, leaning back, foot up against the wall, smoking. He flicked his cigarette in greeting to Sonar and eye-balled me. I didn't know him.

Inside was just a bar. Tables were scattered around a pool table in the center. The bar at the left was long and open. A mirrored wall held bottles of mostly harder alcohols. Different whiskeys, Scotches, and bourbons. I saw no fluffy yuppie bottles up there.

Immediately inside the door was a looming presence: Gripper. He was not wearing his vest.

Gripper smiled at me in recognition. "Fat boy!"
Wow, I really hated that name.

CHAPTER 11

Gripper talked ceaselessly. "Never show fear. Always take the conflict outside. Appear to agree. Ignore all personal insults. The front door is your zone of control; you must evaluate each patron as they enter." He went on for an hour.

I began to think bouncing wasn't busting heads, but negotiating peace for everyone else.

Gripper eyeballed me close. "Got all that?"

I swallowed, wondering how bad it could get. "I think so."

He punched my arm, hard. "Good. But I'll be with you for a while to make sure you do. It doesn't get bad very often. Very rarely, in fact. And often not from people you think. But you'll develop an eye for them and eventually spot them before they even take their first drink."

I stood near him, watching, for two hours.

He said, "Round about six, you can expect your first challenges. The later it gets the more likely."

I nodded, listening.

My first evening was uneventful.

~ ~ ~

I was awake in the morning, lying in bed in the trailer. Kristy lay against me, warm and soft.

She said, "We need another vehicle."

I grunted, dismissing the cost as too much at this point.

She sighed. "It's going to get colder. How am I supposed to walk to work?" She was at the Daily Dollar learning how to bartend.

I frowned. She had a point. I grunted again.

"One of us is going to have to hike in the snow when it finally snows."

I didn't want it to be her. "What if I got a bike?"

She lifted her head away from my shoulder. "You have one." She meant my mountain bike.

"No, I mean a Harley."

She laughed, but it was short. "You?"

"Why not?"

"It still wouldn't do well in the snow."

"It doesn't snow all that much here."

"Hmm."

"You don't think that's a good idea?"

"No, actually I think it would be fun. As long as you took me for rides."

I hugged her close, wanting to do everything with her. "Always."

She snuggled, happy. Then she said, "Aren't they expensive?"

"The new ones. But maybe I can get a used one. Supposedly some can be had for just a couple thousand dollars." We already had that in the bank.

"Hmm." She didn't sound negative, only thoughtful. "I think I like that. Would you take me for rides?"

I laughed and kissed her. "Of course."

I scheduled a riding course three days later.

~ ~ ~

My afternoons and evenings were taken up with learning to be a bouncer. While I had imagined constant fist-fights, Gripper told me it was best to avoid violence altogether. At the most; manhandle problems out the door. Some people you didn't want to let back in; some were good customers who maybe had too much to drink. You wanted those back and not with a busted face.

What I hadn't counted on was getting hit on by women. The fake red-head with a pretty face that slinked up to me made me feel awkward. Her touch to my thigh and her dancing eyes and puckered lips made me wonder what she saw in me. I was losing weight, but still had a gut. Her perfume was heady and made my head swim. My eyes latched onto hers and I can't say the attention wasn't welcome. It felt kind of nice to have a pretty lady pick me out on a Saturday night and approach. I felt my dick harden at her allure.

But tickling the back of my mind was the memory that she had come in just seconds before another guy.

Her hand rubbed my thigh and moved over to my crotch. My eyes ignored her, and focused on the bar to my left.

The man who had come in held a twenty in his hand, flashing it at the bartender. "Change for a twenty?"

The bartender this evening was Celia. She nodded and turned, opening the register.

The man palmed the twenty and rapidly flicked out something else.

I gently swept hands-with-hair aside and came up behind the man; he was now offering a ten. *Cute*. I laid a hand on his shoulder. "I think you might want to get change elsewhere."

Celia had turned with twenty dollars in small change. She scrutinized me, then looked at the man's offering. Alerted now, she made a dry face. She said, "Get out of here."

The man started babbling, "Hey, man, I just wanted change—"

I pushed him out the door and glanced at the red-haired woman. "You might as well go with him, right? Run interference for him at another bar." I stopped her with my hand on her boob. "A word of advice, skip the Triple Shot; it's a biker bar, like this one. Your man might get his ass beat."

She shrugged off my hand with a furious move and stormed out.

Truthfully, they were lucky. One of the club was sitting, displaying his colors, not ten feet away. At a nod, he would have come running to help me beat the pair for trying to scam the bar. I figured the least violent way was probably the best. Besides, a beating over ten bucks? Maybe deserved, but I'd rather it be something more serious.

Celia said, "Thanks."

I nodded. She was a small thing with wide hips and some well-worn wrinkles. She was a hang-around like I was. Not part of the club, but going along with them.

~ ~ ~

I spent some of the mornings at the clubhouse. Not all the time, but often enough. I met the club's only prospect, a clean-cut Mexican guy named Miguel. He had a bad-ass Harley and rode like he had stolen it. It was an XR1200X, a raw and aggressive ride. He was friendly and rushed to do things the other patches asked. They seemed to treat him harshly, but I could sense there wasn't anything mean about it.

There were a few other hang-arounds, like myself and Kristy. Celia was one and her husband Ralph. Ralph was an attorney who was getting older and deciding he wanted to do something fun with his off-time. He had a big, expensive, brand new Harley: a CVO Limited that the patches in the club just shook their heads at. But Ralph didn't care.

I met and chatted with Donna, a motorcyclist who seemed to idolize Dragon – the club's only female full member. We all knew what she wanted.

She was prettier than Dragon and had a ways to go getting past Sonar's girlfriend, Smoke. Tequila, wife of Big Pizza, just watched Donna warily. Grannie didn't seem to give a shit.

There was also Chuck, a former biker who had surrendered his colors with another club in a different state and moved locally.

For some reason, the patches became edgy around him. I didn't ask and it wasn't explained.

~ ~ ~

We had more money than I had ever seen. Six weeks of work had us wondering what to do with it all. I felt like our lives had moved forward, not backward. Even if I was just a bouncer and my wife a bartender. She made more than me considering the tips. But that bothered me none.

I passed the riding course and secured my street license.

The biker's life seemed quiet. But more than that, very insular. Even as a hang-around, the patches talked to me. I felt included. I had a job. Maybe it would grow into more. I hoped it did.

It was the day before Kristy and I had the day off. The day before the big event. We were lounging in the clubhouse an hour before our shifts were to start, talking to Gunner. Or rather, Gunner was giving us advice and we were nodding, like usual. His cigar was lit this time and blowing smoke everywhere.

Gunner was saying, "You're doing well at bouncing, but there's something you should know; if a member from another club comes in, leave him alone and let the patches deal with it. It could be a meeting arrangement. Those things are handled by members. If it isn't, still leave him alone and let the members deal with it. You might be accepted as a hang-around by us, but another club's members won't give a shit. Touch him and you might end up getting beat for it and I daresay none of our members would stop them."

I was a little shocked at that and he saw it.

"Patches respect each other; they know nothing about you. Touching their colors in any way is a huge sign of disrespect. They earned those rags with blood and sweat; you didn't and touching them would be the biggest insult you can deliver."

I grunted. "All right; I got it."

Dealer came out and paused. He made a face.

For the life of me, I didn't know why he'd been distant. From welcoming to almost cold, I didn't know if I had done anything wrong.

Gunner seemed to sense something was on his mind and he got up. "Think I'll get a beer."

That's how closely they read each other.

Dealer dropped down into Gunner's place without a word to the chaplain. He said, low, "You have been an aggravating fucking distraction."

I froze, stunned. "Me?" *What did I do?*

He made an angry face. "No, not you, your wife. Fuck."

"What?"

Kristy looked confused.

The president shook his head. "Been walking around her now for almost two months, wondering if my dick would burst before my head or what."

Gunner returned with a beer, his cigar pinched in the same hand. He chuckled when he heard that.

Dealer scowled at him, but said to me, "I even considered using Angela, but it just ain't the same."

I stammered, "I'm s-sorry—"

He grunted. "No, don't be. But...I was wondering...."

Gunner snorted.

"Shut up."

The chaplain began wheezing.

Dealer rolled his eyes and asked me, "Would you consider loaning her out to me?"

I was perplexed. "Huh?"

"I'm asking if I can borrow her. She's your woman."

I looked at Gunner, knowing what Dealer was getting at. I opened my mouth, wanting to ask the things that had been on my mind, but feeling ashamed I had been so excited by it. I forced out the words. "Isn't that adultery?" I was looking at the chaplain.

Gunner grunted. "Not if you allow it. A wise rabbi once said that if you loan out your wife, it isn't adultery. If someone steals your wife, it is."

So the president is asking me if he can borrow her. I looked at Dealer. Then I looked at Kristy. I knew she liked him – had enjoyed it. Her look was directed at me, eyes searching mine with question. She was not shaking her head no.

Immediately, my dick stirred to life. I swallowed and faced Dealer. "If she wants to."

The president looked at the chaplain and Gunner gave an almost imperceptible nod. Then Dealer leaned towards me. "I'm about to burst...you, uh, want to come along? I couldn't say no."

Wordless, I just nodded. A huge surge of blood entered my dick and lengthened it in my pants. I was breathing erratically.

Dealer rose and smiled down at Kristy. "Come on, sweet thing. I absolutely cannot wait another second."

Gunner wheezed and walked over to the bar.

Kristy rose, her eyes on Dealer. My dick hardened further with her move.

I followed them along the right hall until we entered a larger group of rooms at the end. Through his office, we went into his private bedroom. It was packed full of mementos, including medals and ribbons from one of the service branches. I did not look too closely.

Dealer shut the door and began shedding his clothes at a frantic pace. "I thought I could hold out, or ignore it. But fuck, I just can't. I've been dying to get my dick back into you."

Kristy gasped as she was removing her clothes and whispered, "Really?"

"Fuck, you just don't know." He grabbed her and tossed her down on his bed. He pushed her thin thighs open and buried his face in her pussy.

There was a barstool and I sat on it.

My wife moaned out with relief as his tongue worked over her clit and pussy. She moved her hands over her boobs, teasing the nipples as he licked. But that didn't last long at all. I could see him quivering with anticipation.

He got up, jacking an already fully erect dick. He was longer than me and shaped straight with a nice-sized mushroom head. He crawled over my wife and pushed it into her without any other play.

Kristy's face screwed up in concentration as he pushed his cock into her pussy. She let out a long, low breath as his hips pushed into hers and his butt clenched to reach full penetration.

Dealer let out a long sigh. "Ahhh, fuck, yes. Perfect."

My wife gasped, jerking her hips under him.

They stayed like that for a moment and he settled on her fully, kissing her. My wife was buried under him, only her legs sticking out on either side of his thighs and her blonde hair splayed out on his pillow. She moaned as if she had also been wanting it.

His hips began moving. I saw nothing this time. He was in her, moving, his butt flexing as he fucked her. Her moans grew louder after he stopped kissing her. His panting started slow and grew fast. Her fingers lightly clutched at his shoulders and I could see the sparkle of her wedding ring against his skin.

With her mouth free, I could see her face now. Her eyes were closed. Her mouth was open, gasping as he pushed in and moaning when he was in deep and then pulling out. Her jaw widened when he was pushing, and closed when he was pulling.

I was fucking rock-hard in my pants. I had been shocked the first time, two months ago when he had fucked her in front of me. But not this time. I fucking loved it. I massaged at my pants as I watched him on my wife.

He didn't keep any kind of a steady pace. He was slowly accelerating his thrusts. They became faster and harder, building with his need. My wife bucked underneath him, her fingers making indentations in his shoulders. Within a few minutes, he was grunting savagely, mechanically tilting his hips to shove his cock into her as deep and hard as he could. She moved under him, pushed by his thrusts, and made the most airy noises of gasps and moans that I knew she was loving it. She never opened her eyes to look at me; I didn't think she was all there to even think about it. He was fucking her senseless.

She cried out, her legs quivering. She scratched at his back and her loud cries urged him on. She came underneath him almost coughing out her grunts of relief. Dealer fucked her deep and then leaned up, his butt clenched and his back arched. He growled and then began grunting, not moving – except to jerk his hips as he emptied his cum deep into my wife's pussy. He called out through gritted teeth, "Oh...fuck...yes..." He panted a little bit, then slowly relaxed. "Fantastic." His sigh sounded like a much-needed relief had been found. "Ah, you don't know how much I needed that."

I swallowed hard, wanting to finish myself and find that kind of relief.

He pulled out, leaving a trail of cum leaking from Kristy's gaping pussy. "I hope I can borrow her again here and there." He looked over at me, face

relaxed, open, and questioning. In this clubhouse he didn't ask; he directed. But he was asking me because she was my woman. I felt a deepening bond of respect there for the man that made me want to choke up. I said, "Sure, man. Any time."

He blew out a breath. "Thanks."

I think I was at a point where I would have forced her to, if she didn't want to. I would've held her down for him if she wasn't in the mind to give. But I could tell by the happy look on her face that it wasn't going to be a problem. It was a mutual agreement amongst all three of us.

CHAPTER 12

I drove with Kristy back to the city the next morning. Fresh after a night of bartending and bouncing, we had made love in the wee morning hours and slept until nine.

We had three bikes to look at today, and I hoped to come home with one. I hoped to be included in the upcoming ride the club had planned for charity. Or even just ride for the sake of riding around with one of the members.

We went to the dealership first, instead of the two private sales I had marked. As it turns out, it was the only stop we made. I was so impressed by how clean the motorcycle was, that I took the bike.

Being it was next to the new Harley dealership, I went and bought a helmet. I settled on the Fly Street 9MM Helmet. It looked too cool to pass up. I bought a half helmet for her.

Kristy's eyes were wide as she held the helmet purchase and the papers and keys were handed to me. We were in and out within forty-five minutes. Having heard it start and sat on it already, I knew what it felt like. However, as I inserted my key – my key – for the first time, I felt a sense of ownership. A thrill that made my movements slow; I wanted to savor starting my bike for the first time.

The starter didn't sound like the newer ones I'd heard. Those were like whirs. This was more like a flat zipper sound. The faltering rumble and coughing settled low and slowly began to purr. I felt the vibration all the way up my back to my neck and head. I put on the helmet and adjusted the strap. I couldn't help but grin like a kid.

Kristy must have felt the contagion and was smiling with me. She said, "I'll follow you." She planted a kiss on my cheek. "Be careful."

I waited for her to get in the Suburban before pulling away from in front of the used dealership. Maybe Ronnie Chapson was very happy to get rid of such an old bike, but I think I was happier to take it from him. As I moved towards the driveway, I felt the bike's weight and solid stability. I felt like I was on the smooth beginning of a rollercoaster ride. My heart thumped to the deep throb of the engine between my legs and made me want to laugh.

With what seemed like a smooth burst of speed, I was out on the street and accelerating. It wasn't unlike riding a mountain bike – air in the face. But it was so very much more. I obeyed the street laws and got onto the freeway to head back home. I accelerated up the ramp and onto the freeway, barely suppressing a yell of joy. I wanted to laugh. I wanted to cry. I felt free.

EPILOGUE

I pulled to a stop in front of the clubhouse and slowly walked the bike backwards until the wheel hit the curb. I thumbed the switch and pulled out my key. My key.

Kristy parked across the street and got out.

By the look on her face, I knew I'd have to be starting it up again soon and giving her a ride. I most definitely wanted to give that to her.

The door to the clubhouse opened and Big Pizza came out. "Hey, hey..." I grinned at him as I removed the helmet.

His eyes glanced over the bike. "You bought a Harley. Good job. Those sportsters are nice little bikes. What year?"

"2003."

He nodded. "Well kept. How much?"

"Twenty-nine hundred."

He chuckled. "Can't beat the price."

I looked behind him; he was the only one that had come out. But that felt about right. Usually someone who pulled up on an unfamiliar bike was checked out. I had no doubt Big Pizza would be in there relating my purchase as soon as he went back inside.

Kristy almost bounced on her feet. "Do I get a ride?" She was carrying her helmet.

I laughed. But I wasn't laughing at her. I was laughing for us – for the feeling she was about to experience. "Get on." I put the helmet back on and reinserted the key.

Big Pizza winked. "I'll hold a beer for ya." His face looked genuinely happy for me and it almost choked me up. I wanted to thank him for the sentiment, but it wasn't the thing to do. I gave him an appreciative nod. He knew what I meant; I could see it dancing in his eyes.

I thumbed the starter and my Harley coughed to life. Kristy shifted around behind me and gripped around my lower abdomen. Not much there to grip anymore, and I was still losing weight. I called back, "Ready?"

Her excited "Yes" had me smiling.

"Let's go for a ride." I gave a gentle twist and moved us out of the parking space. I felt her arms grip me tighter, suddenly trembling.

Behind me, her voice held no fear. She whooped with pleasure as we flew down the street. Free, together.

Thank you for reading Book 1 of the Iron Crows MC. The adventures of Jim and Kristy will continue soon, with no cliffhangers! I appreciate all reviews.