

When bike weeks hits in Daytona, it hits with a vengeance. It is the ultimate repirasal against conforming to the norm for days and weeks and months on end; for business suits and afternoon meetings; for bi-weekly paychecks and two-week vacation; for the six o'clock alarm and the five o'clock news; for gray cubicle partitions and dull fluorescent lights; for TPS reports and office politics; for ratcheting up and clamping down; for red lines and brown noses; for micromanagement and macroeconomics, for streamlining and synergy and outsourcing and sacrifices; for all that, for one week in March, bike week is a creeping, crawling, chrome-plated rebel roar. A blur of bikes, boobs, bootee, beer, biker boots, tattoos, leather, fishnet stockings, piercings, rings, skulls, neon, bandanas, baseball caps, bikinis, vomit, sweat, exhaust, but most of all--money. Money stuffed in the cleavage of the bartenders, money gilded onto the polished chrome of the Hogs idling down Main Street, money sprayed onto the thousand dollar paint jobs, money clad in leather, money chopped, money flung, money wasted, and money won.

Ox peeled his hang nail, winced, and sucked the blood from the nail bed. Stupid. When Jaw was angry, her jaw locked up and the veins in her neck stood out like steel cables. He sucked the edge of his finger and tasted blood, grease, gasoline and rust. Shit. In high school, Ox had been the star quarterback and could have dated any girl he wanted, but the soft, bouncy cheerleaders scared him. He was afraid he might crush them like pillows. He liked Jaw because she was all hard edges and angles. Her real name was Marjory, which had evolved to Jor and then to Jaw. Ox knocked Jaw up on Prom night. He did the right thing. No one thought it would last. After Tom was born, Ox dropped out of high school and started fixing motorbikes. Soon he had enough saved to open a small shop, which they called "Hosed" for the situation they found themselves in. He had modeled it on Smokey Yunick's "Best Damned Garage in Town". Smokey bailed in 1987, but Ox and Jaw had stayed and tried to ride it out. Stuck in the rundown, white trash neighborhood the locals called Holy Hell, it was a mess of meth-heads, drunks, tweakers and drop outs.

Jaw was sitting hunched at the desk staring intently at the computer screen. "Gad, I hate these things!" she spat and smacked the side of the machine. The office was Jaw's lair. It was a clutter of files, papers, phone books, and part boxes that had all taken up residence over the years, and which Jaw had no intention of evicting. Some joked that beneath the piles the bones of customers who had not paid their bills were hidden. The cork board along the back wall was tacked with photos of the bikes Ox had built over the years. Loved as children. Ox picked up stack of papers off a chair and dropped them to the floor.

"What's up?" He sat with his hands between his knees. Too big for the chair.

"Like ya don't know . . ." She scowled without looking at him.

"Money?" He wiped his hands on a dirty rag he'd taken from his pocket.

"Do ya got to use such dirty words?"

"How much?" He pushed the rag back into his pocket and dropped his head into his hands.

"How much ya got?" She was chewing gum loudly, smacking it—a habit she knew he hated. He thought she might have a pack of gum in the desk just to drive him nuts.

"For today? To keep the lights on?" She blew a flat bubble, and clicked away at the keyboard.

"Have you called Tom?"

"I ain't gonna call Tom. It's humiliating. I won't do it." She wound the gum around her finger and put it back in her mouth.

Ox pushed himself up. He was a big man, wearing a belly, but otherwise strong. "Invite him to stop by . . ."

"I told you, I ain't asking him."

Ox rubbed the back of his neck and chewed on his hang nail. "I've got work to do, tell Tom to stop by."

* * *

A bead of sweat rolled into Ox's eye. He wiped it with the back of his hand. He was trying to break the clutch plate free on a Honda SL125 by rocking it back and forth when Tom rode in. Tom was a big man, and the Harley CVO Limited heaved a sigh when he swung his weight off. He was fully decked in clean leathers and squeaked when he walked. Tom was a waxer as far as Ox was concerned, but he always waxed the best bikes out there. He and Jaw had sacrificed everything to put Tom through law school, but they had never asked for anything back.

"Are you okay?" Tom looked concerned.

"Yeah, yeah, fine." Ox squirmed and shuffled and tried to think of something to say "Have you seen anything as hosed as this?" He turned to the Honda.

"What year?" Tom sensed that whatever his father was going to ask him was going to have to come from Jaw.

"'72."

"It'll be a goody if you can get it running."

"Yep, clutch is stuck," Ox began rocking the bike back and forth. Tom walked off to find Jaw.

He heard her yell it before he could hide. "You coward!" She was coming out of the office.

Tom stood by the door, distancing himself. "You couldn't do it, could ya?"

"Ah, Jaw. We can't go borrowing money from our kids. I'll find something."

Tom already had his wallet out. "Just tell me how much you need." Ox pushed it firmly away.

"We're not gonna take your money, son." Jaw's eyes flamed blue like a blow torch.

"Ya brought him all the way down here, now just ask!"

"It's okay, it's okay, Tom. I'm sorry. I shoulda never even got you involved in this. We're gonna figure this out. It's just a bad patch."

"You sure?" Tom looked hot and uncomfortable.

Ox nodded looking at the ground and licking his lips. "Yep, yep, we'll cover it. We will. Heck, Limp and I gonna be racing this season."

"You're what?" Jaw was livid. "We can't even pay our freaking bills and you're gonna play?"

"No, Jaw, it's not like that. We're gonna win the prize."

Limp shambled over from whatever corner he had been holed up in when he heard his name.

Born on 14 September 1945, he had one of the worst birthdays ever, just days after the Japanese signed the surrender papers, but also the first number to get pulled out of those big blue pills in the Vietnam draft jar. Before going, he had been a hot shot racer, raced at the Daytona 200. At the time he looked like Paul Newman, with hot steel blue eyes and a ready wink. He'd taken his share of girls in his day, but in Nam he'd taken shrapnel to the leg. Tore the muscle clean off his thigh. He was lucky it wasn't any higher, but the girls lost interest. He'd never been able to shake that bitter blue pill.

"You call me?"

"I was just telling Jaw how we gonna race and win the prize," Ox tried to wink at him, but he shouldn't have bothered. Limp had been working at Hosed long enough to know Ox's tricks and just jumped right in.

"Yep, just talking 'bout that."

"Which race, Limp?" Jaw confronted him.

"Daytona." Limp said defiantly.

"You?" Jaw laughed, "up against those kids, Joey and Cameron? You know it ain't the same three mile race you raced in 1937, Limp. You gotta have stamina for 200 miles."

"I raced with Barry Sheene in '75. I was there. I seen him go down."

“You know you wasn't there when Sheene went down,” Jaw said indignantly. “Those kids winning this thing now, they was probably born after your last erection . . .”

“Why you!” Limp's face burned and he raised his fist as if to strike her. “They'll be calling you broken Jaw, if you don't shut your mouth.”

“Why you gotta pick on a man's pride, Jaw?” Ox broke in. “There's no sense in getting Limp all upset. He didn't get us into this mess.”

“It's the damn government,” Limp spat. “They always had it against the little guy. Always changing things. We used to race on the beach. There weren't nothing wrong with that. Now it's all rules and regulations. Geez a man can't take a shit without the government poking its finger up his anus.” As Limp was getting heated, he noticed Tom. “Well, Prom!” he exclaimed, “Long time no see.”

Tom nodded and clasped his riding gloves passing them back and forth awkwardly, Limp has always scared him as a child, and even now as a man. A desperate silence hung in the air like humidity.

Finally, Tom broke down, “Well, I better get on back to the office. You let me know what I can do, alright.”

Ox nodded. “Sure thing, Tom. I'll be calling you.”

* * *

That afternoon Ox and Limp spoke in whispers over the bike they were working on. A plan was formulating. What they needed Limp suggested was a hot chick in a bikini to spin a sign out front and get some customers to come in. Limp suggested he and Ox sneak out later that night and go cruising for a chick to wear a bikini and spin a sign that said “Hosed” on it.

“It don't matter what she look like,” Limp said, “so long as she got a nice rack.”

“Yep, I guess you're right about that.” Ox nodded and wished titties were as real as they had been in the '70s and '80s. He didn't like the over inflated, plastic models they were churning out these days. He had never been able to shake the image of Helen Mirren in “Savage Messiah” as the ideal. He was just 16 when he saw that movie and it kinda stuck with him. Whenever he tried to discuss it with Limp, they never got beyond Pam Grier in “Coffy”.

“So long as she look good in a bikini, that's all that matters,” Limp said.

“Okay, but Jaw will have a fit if she finds out. This' got to be all you. You take Timmy along.” Timmy was Ox and Jaw's second son. Conceived after a wild night of cocaine and alcohol, Jaw hadn't realize she was pregnant and continued to snort coke well into the second trimester. It was the '80s and everyone was doing blow at the time, but she blamed herself for Timmy's lack of ambition. Where Tom took after Ox, Timmy looked like Jaw. He was stringy, wore his sun bleached hair long, and shambled rather than walked. He spent his days surfing, smoking pot, and hanging around the shop.

“Timmy? I ain't gonna take Timmy along, he's just a kid.”

“He's 26, Limp. 26! He ain't a kid no more.”

“It's just the way he acts. He's what I call a ne'er-do-well.”

“I know, I know. Okay, so don't take Timmy. I'll go with ya.”

Limp chuckled and nudged him, “You know you wanted to go all along, right?”

Ox laughed, “Yep, but don't tell Jaw. We're got to keep it from Jaw.”

“Don't worry 'bout Jaw.”

That night Ox and Limp started at the 800 block at Froggy's and then moved to the 700 block stopping at Dirty Harry's and the Full Moon. They was just wetting their whistles, filling up on liquid courage, and getting ready to engage. The truth is that neither Ox nor Limp, although each liked to think of himself as a ladie's man, had much experience with girls since graduating high school. Ox had only ever been with Jaw. He was an attractive man or had been an attractive in his youth. Handsome, tall,

cheerful, and vital, he had never really understood his own charm, but the years had dragged him down. His shoulders slumped, his jowls hung, and his belly bulged above his waistline. If a woman were to look into his face, she would find a chiseled nose, a sensuous mouth and dancing blue eyes, but most women saw the man slumping against the bar and did not give him a second glance. He was a man that life had kicked around. Women could tell these things instinctively and steered clear. Limp, on the other hand, maintained his vital spark. He had not trouble attracting the ladies, but once they got close enough to look into his eyes, they saw the madness, and quickly stepped away. He had spent his life around men and had never learned the delicacies of the female gender. It wasn't that he was too old to change, he was just too stubborn.

As the night wore on, they rolled down to the 600 block to the Dog House. It was here, fully equipped with beer goggles, that they remembered their task. The girls were everywhere. Hundreds of them. They sparkled and titillated like elusive mirages. Limp swayed over to a tall beauty and, clutching his beer with one hand, did his best to stand without falling and present their proposition. Ox watched Limp sway and stumble. He pulled out his phone and tried to focus on Timmy's number. As he fumbled, pandemonium broke out. People were swinging and lurching around. A chair flew overhead. Ox stuffed his phone in his pocket, found Limp, and dragged him out on the street.

"I grabbed her crotch!" Limp cackled.

"What?" A group of cachophonous drunks were singing and hooting at the moon. "Her crotch, I grabbed it."

"Good God, Limp. What the hell you do that for?"

"To be sure, you know. Lola." He winked and lurched into traffic. A car veered and honked. Ox grabbed his arm. "Come on, come on. Let's go. Let's get out of here." Ox wasn't exactly sober, but he could stand. He draped Limp's arm over his shoulder and carried him down the street. Suddenly, the girl ran out and grabbed Limp by the hair, pulled him to the ground, straddled him, and began to pound his head into the pavement. Ox tried to pull her off, but he was afraid to touch her. "Get 'er off me, get 'er off me." Limp was shouting. The girl stood up and pressed her red stiletto heel to his neck. "All I gotta do is step down and you're history, little man." Limp was clutching her heel with both hands and pushing up. Ox could hear the sirens wailing in the distance. "Ma'am, you gonna get us all thrown in the clinker, is that what you want?" Ox did some of his best negotiating under pressure. "Why not just come work for us? That's all we ever wanted to begin with. Just a gorgeous gal like yourself to come spin our sign."

The girl looked up. "You mean a respectable job?"

"Yeah, you know. You seen 'em. Sign spinning. It's marketing. Marketing," he pleaded. While the girl was distracted by Ox's offer, Limp pushed himself up and was crawling off down the street. Ox turned to follow, but the girl grabbed his arm, "I'll come by tomorrow."

"Yeah, yeah, come by."

* * *

The next morning, before the fuzz had cleared from his head he saw the girl swinging down the alley. "Holy Shit!" he gasped and rushed over to Limp. "How the hell did she find us? We've gotta get her outta here before Jaw sees her. What the fuck were we thinking?"

"What you want me to do?" Limp whispered, "She wants to kill me."

Ox pulled twenty dollars out of his pocket. "Here. Take this and get her out of here." He shoved Limp out the door.

On the roof Timmy and Oyay were smoking their first "J" of the day. Oyay was Ox's other worker who had scrambled onto one of the last boats departing Cuba on October 31, 1980 when he was just 16. Arriving in Miami on Halloween, had traumatized him for life. He fled Miami, stealing a motorcycle to do so, and got as far as Daytona. He had been with Ox since the day he showed up at

Hosed. He spoke not a word of English, and Ox liked it that way. They communicated with gestures and grunts. Oyay was as short as a child with tiny hands and pipe cleaner fingers that could bend in any directions and fit in very tight spaces. None of the family knew his real name they just called him Oyay. Timmy and Oyay has watched the girl come up the alley and now watched her leave on the back of Limp's FXS Low rider.

“She Limp's Bitch?” Oyay asked.

“Coyote Ugly,” Timmy replied, held his breath for a minute, then exhaled a heavy cloud of smoke. “Must of picked her up last night.”

“He pick up her?” Oyay chuckled. “I thought him Limp.”

They listened to the distinct sound of Limp's Harley roar off into the distance.

“Oh, Limp knows how to get laid when he's got to,” Timmy said. “Looks like he just couldn't get rid of this one.”

They were still sitting up on the roof staring at the ocean, or rather the two 25 story towers that exactly blocked the view of the ocean, when they heard the Harley returning. To their surprise the bitch was still on the back, but now she held a large sign tucked under one arm, and with the other hand she held a cowboy hat on her head. She was wearing a skimpy bikini emblazoned with the America flag and a pair of short, scuffed cowboy boots. They pulled up in front of the shop, she got off with the sign, then Limp pulled into the alley, and disappeared into the garage. It was then that Timmy and Oyay found their new fascination watching the bitch spin the sign. She was good. She had some of the strongest thighs Timmy had ever seen. And her skill with the sign was staggering. She could twirl it, toss it high in the air, and catch it between her nimble fingers with such grace it was mesmerizing. They edged closer until they were staring down at her. Suddenly she looked up.

“Hey, what the fuck you staring at?!”

They scrambled back off the roof like two small children caught pouring water off a balcony.

“What's got you two going,” Ox asked them as they burst into the garage.

“The bitch with the sign,” Timmy giggled.

“What? Limp!” Ox hissed and put his fingers to his lips and his eyes flashed in the direction of the office. “Jaw's in there!”

Whatever the bitch was doing it seemed to be working. Soon the garage was humming and the boys were busy assessing and diagnosing like young doctors over sick patients. After a few hours, Limp made his way out onto the street to take the bitch some water. He knew he was parched from the night before and she was out in the hot sun. It was the right thing to do and he would have done it for anyone--male or female. The fact that she was a bitch in a bikini may have prompted him to go sooner, but that was another point. Limp was still pretty bruised up from the night before, so he approached the bitch with caution. But he was not careful enough, he caught her mid-spin, just as he rounded the corner she swung the sign and clipped him across the face with it, and then punched him in the nose while trying to catch it.

“Hey, watch it!” She shouted at him. He staggered back, dropping the water, and clutching his nose. He went down hard against the building, blood spurting. The bitch ran down the alley screaming for help. Jaw came out of the office to see what the commotion was and found the bitch clutching the big sign that said “Hosed” on it, Limp was not far behind, blood spurting.

“Well, just what the hell is going on here? Give me that thing!” She snatched the sign from the bitch and tossed it into the office. Limp, Timmy, and Oyay scattered like cockroaches leaving Ox and the bitch to answer to the Jaw.

“We had an idea,” Ox began. “Limp and I. To bring in customers.” Jaw's neck still held the tensile strength of a steel cable. “It was working,” Ox said and dropped his shoulders.

“We don't need no bitch in a bikini to sell our business. Limp! Limp!” She pointed at the bitch

as if she were an object. Limp came round the corner with a grease rag pressed to his nose.

"I'm bleeding here."

"Oh, that ain't nothing Limp. Get this bitch outta here or your gonna be bleeding a whole lot more."

"Now Jaw, leave Limp out of this. He was just trying to help."

The bitch approached Limp and he backed away, "I just want to take a look, that's all." She peeled the rag away from his nose. The blood had stopped and was beginning to dry in hard dark circles around his nostrils. "We need to wash that off, or it will be real tough." She led him over to the hand basin and soaked off the blood gently with a wet paper towel. His nose was swollen and his eyes were beginning to blacken. "You got me good, you did." He laughed.

"That was for last night." For the first time Limp looked at the girl. She was the kind of girl who had not given much credence to sunscreen. Her hair was frayed, her body ropey. She had a large devil tattooed on her left shoulder. "I was gonna get an angel on the right, but I ran out of money," her voice was cracked and smokey. "I've been real broke, so I hope you guys aren't going to fire me for this."

Limp suddenly felt protective of her. "Naw, naw, leave it to me. I'll fix this up."

Limp walked over to Ox and Jaw, "I'll pay her out of my own wages." Ox gave him an, "are you f-ing crazy" look. Limp looked away and said it again, "You can take it out of my wages. I don't need nothing. All I do is spend my money on booze anyway."

"Now, Limp. Don't go getting all soft-hearted," Jaw said. "She ain't nothing but a sleazy whore trying to put the make on you."

"I ain't doing it for her, Jaw." Limp sounded like he had a bad cold.

"You can't do it, Limp," Ox said. "I can't take your money." And so Limp loaded the bitch on the back of his bike and rode her back downtown to the Boot.

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He didn't come back that night. The next day he looked like hell. He had two shiners and a nose as bulbous as a squash.

"You stay with her?" Ox asked.

Limp nodded.

"Is it a thing?"

Limp shrugged. They didn't talk any more about it. Instead they talked about the upcoming race and how Limp would win it. You see a man never losses his virility. He may look the shell of what he once was, but his dreams and aspirations are always that of his youth. Limp had raced in the Daytona 200 so many times, any other man would know he couldn't win, but not Limp. Each time he entered, it was as if it were the first time. Young, passionate and full of vim in spirit, Limp was determined to win.

The Daytona 200 is a brutal 200 miles that requires dexterity, endurance, determination and one hell of a pit crew to get a rider through the fast and furious pit-stops. Ox and Limp knew they needed to train and train hard, so they launched into a training routine so heavy that Jaw began to believe they were serious. Limp stopped drinking and began jogging in the morning before he came into the shop, but he didn't stop there, in fact he never stopped. All day he did a series of squats, lifts, presses, curls, sit ups, stairs, lunges, and stretches. "It's all about ya core," he said to Oyay who held his feet in place while he crunched. "When the leg muscles get tired from hanging on the bike, ya got to rely on ya core."

One night as they were getting ready for bed, Jaw asked Ox, "Limp ain't serious about racing, is he?"

"I reckon he is."

“And your gonna support him?”

“What else can I do? He's doing it for us.”

“He's not doing it for us, Ox. He's doing it to recapture his youth.”

“Naw, Jaw, that's not it. He's serious. He wants to win it.”

“It's a pipe dream. I can't believe your going along with it.”

“What else am I gonna do? He's like family to us, Jaw.”

Jaw harrumphed and punched up the pillows. “He's like a child. He's worse than Timmy.”

“Well, I'm gonna help him. He's gonna win.” Ox punched the pillows down and heaved his big body against them. He picked up the remote and began clicking through the channels. “You better not say anything to him, Jaw. I don't want you dashing his dreams.”

“Dashing his dreams? Ha! That's a good one, Ox. Dashing his dreams. I ain't gonna dash nothing. He's perfectly capable of dashing his own dreams. Hell, he's been doing it his whole life. What's he done that ever been successful? Tell me one thing.”

“He came back from Nam alive and that's enough. Thousands didn't.” Ox had one arm crossed across his chest and held out the remote with the other, clicking continuously.

“Just give me that thing,” Jaw said and tried to snatch it from him. “You ain't never picked a show in your life.”

He dodged her. “No! I'm still looking. I'm picking!”

“Suit yourself, but you're just wasting time with that thing.”

“Why you always got to be so negative, Jaw?”

“I ain't negative, just realistic.”

“You always got to shred it all down.”

“What? Now I've ruined your life is that what you're telling me?”

“You know what I'm talking about, Jaw. The minute I got a dream, you got to tear it down.”

“Ox, I ain't never torn down your dreams. Do you think I wanted to be work my life in this stinking shop? Sucking exhaust? Sitting on the phone all day begging for people to pay us? Do you think that's what my dream was?” Suddenly she was sobbing. Ox got quite terrified when Jaw wept. She did it so seldom, he never quite knew what to do. He knew how to deal with Jaw's hard edges, it was her soft parts that scared him. He went into a stunned silence and sat motionless as if that might make it stop. He even stopped clicking the remote. But the sobs turned into a wail, which grew louder until it sounded like a siren. He felt his shoulder hunch up around his neck.

“Jaw, it's gonna be okay.” He turned on his elbow and put his arm on her shoulder. “You know it is. It always it. We're gonna make it through this.”

“I'm tired, Ox,” Jaw wailed. “I'm just getting tired of the fight. It just don't seem like there's much worth fighting for anymore.” She sniffed.

“Now, you know that ain't true. Tom and Timmy turned out great. Didn't they? They're both something to be proud of.” He put his finger under her chin and pulled her face up. He tried to look into her eyes and smile, but her eyes were swollen and puffy. “We've got to keep going, Jaw. We got no choice.”

“But if we lose the shop, we lose the house, and then what? Then what, Ox?”

“I'm telling you, it ain't gonna happen. Limp's gonna win this thing and then we'll find a way out.”

“Is that are only hope? That Limp will win? Cuz if it is, then we ain't got much to go on. We're pretty much hosed.”

“Naw, Jaw. It'll work out. You'll see the bank will back off.” But deep inside Ox knew he was lying. It was only a matter of time before they took everything and there wasn't a damn thing he, or Jaw, or Limp, or Tom could do about it.

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The ride home Limp had offered to the bitch had grown into a steady ride. It was rare to see Limp cruising without the bitch on the back, and one day he told Ox he has asked her to hold his shade umbrella at the race, which meant she would be part of the pit crew. This was a big step for Limp who hadn't been riding tandem for a long time. Day after day, week after week, month after month, Limp trained his body. During the week they rode the loop. On the weekends, they took the girls and rode the Ponce Inlet, 55 miles; Round the Lake, 114 miles; and Sugar Loaf Mountain, 159 miles. They rode the track and they rode the rallies. Limp was a fit as he had ever been. Having the bitch in his life seemed to have infused him with new blood. He wanted to show her everything—all his possessions, his skills, his memories, his scars. He felt twenty years younger and twenty pounds lighter. So it was a cold wind that blew the process server down the alley that January day. Limp was working with Ox when he walked in, but by the time Ox realized who he was, it was too late to dodge him. He was served. Timmy and Oyay, who were sitting on their usual perch, saw the man walk down the alley, and they could have warned Ox, but they were staring out at the ocean and thinking of less important things.

Tom came over that morning and sat down with them in the office.

“We can try to delay this thing. I can file a motion, but I don't know how much time that will buy you. Maybe a year. Maybe two. Unless you want to try to fight it.”

“What would it take to fight it?”

“Hire a lawyer. It could cost you 10 grand, with no guarantees. Probably two grand deposit”

“We ain't got 10 grand to spend. Hell we ain't even got a deposit.”

“I could put it up for you.”

“Ain't it just delaying the inevitable? We're so far behind now, we ain't never gonna catch up.”

Tom bit his lip and shrugged. “It's up to you.”

Jaw scratched her eyebrow searching for an answer. Ox bit his hangnail. They both studied the floor.

“Can't you advise us, Tom? We don't know the letter of the law.”

“I'll file a motion. That'll slow it down some, so you can decide what to do.”

“How long? How long do you think we have?”

“It's hard to say. Could be a year, could be four.”

Ox stood up and shook his son's hand vigorously. It was a strangely formal thing to do under the circumstances, but the whole conversation was awkward. “You know we hate to drag you into this son.”

“I wish I could do more.” Tom said, took a copy of the papers, and left Ox and Jaw staring at the floor.

“Say Limp does win,” Jaw said finally, “Would that fix this thing?”

“He's got about as much chance as winning as we do of winning the Lotto. In fact, we could probably win the Lotto easier. Let's not say nothing to the others, okay?”

Jaw looked Ox in the eye. “They already know, Ox. They got to know.”

“Yeah, but let's not burden them with it, okay? Let's shoulder the burden between us.”

“Timmy's got to grow up anyway, and Oyay, well, he's gonna have to go on.”

“Yeah, but let's not . . .” his eyes pleaded. “Let's not . . .”

“Not what, Ox? Not tell 'em that we fucked it up?”

Ox smiled. “Yeah, let's not tell 'em we fucked it up, Jaw. Okay?”

“All right. I won't say nothing just yet, Ox, but we're gonna have to tell 'em.”

“I know. I know. But not just yet.”

Jaw took the papers and shoved them deep into her bottom office drawer. She knew no matter where she put them, she would never be able to escape them. But for the next two weeks they would be

banished to the bottom drawer.

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In the evenings, Limp and Ox did the Loop. The Loop was just 22 miles, but it offered some great open road and interesting turns. The sand, water, and roots growing up through the asphalt kept them on their toes and slowed them down enough to talk. "You're gonna need a superbike to win," Ox said one day.

"Ain't no way your getting me on one of those shriekers," Limp said.

"Well a Triumph then? To compete."

Limp shook his head. "I've always been a Harley man, I ain't switching now."

"Come on, Limp. You know you can't win on a Harley. When was the last time a Harley won?"

"Cal Rayborn won in '69"

"69! Cal Rayborn? You're going back to the dark ages, Limp."

"Nobody ain't racing Harley's no more."

"Yeah, because they know they can't win on 'em."

"No, that ain't it."

"Well, why then?"

"When was the last time a Triumph won?"

"You know Danny just won it, fool!"

"Exactly, but it hadn't won a race since 1967, had it?"

Ox had to admit that Limp had him there.

"It's time for the Harley to take back the beach." Limp said with finality.

When the Daytona's switch back to the superbike, Ox tried to convince Limp that no Harley, not even their well-intentioned VR1000, would ever stand a chance against the rice rockets. "Well I ain't getting on no Gixxer, so I'll build my own bike." Soon word was out that Ox and Limp were building a Harley for the Daytona and guys started to stop by to see the bike and offer their advice. Debates about chassis rigidity, positioning of the foot pegs and handlebars, optimal tire sizes, peak rev range and torque curve went on well into the night while Ox and Limp labored over the bike.

On March 13 they had to get up early because the practice started at 10 at the track, and they wanted to practice for the first qualifying event at 2:45 pm. The night before Limp called a pit crew meeting for a pep talk and pizza. Timmy, Oyay, Ox, Jaw, and some of Limp's buddies from the Nam Knights gathered in the garage and sat around on upturned five gallon buckets and folding chairs dangling pizza down their gullets.

Limp took center stage, "This is the way it's gonna work. There's two practice sessions and two qualifying sessions. The first practice and qualifying sessions will be tomorrow as you know, and the second practice and qualifying sessions will be on Friday. The fastest rider of either qualifying sessions will be on the pole. We've got to work to get me on that pole."

"Sometimes being on the pole ain't all it's cut out to be," Jaw spoke up. "Who ya gonna draft off? Ya don't want to be pulling the swarm around behind ya, do ya? Wouldn't it be better to start in the grid and not on the pole?"

Limp shot her a warning glance, and she shut up. "They gone a changed the course on us this year, and we'll be racing 69-lap race on the 2.91-mile short course. Now the pit ain't what it used to be, we got to practically putter in at 50 mph these days, but we got to make sure we're working at top speed and efficiency. We're gonna be competing with crews who can turn it around in 10 seconds or less. We got the new Dunlops now, and the short course will cut out the west banking, but we're still going be leaving a lot of rubber on the road, so you gotta be fast. I can ride her fast, but if you can't change her

fast. We gonna stretch our pit to lap 22. That will give us a better tire for the checkered flag. This damn race is on the Ides of March! But we ain't gonna let a little thing like that stop us, are we? And remember when the green flag drops”

The others chimed in, “. . . the bullshit stops!”

They threw the pizza boxes in the dumpster down the alley, slapped each other on the back, and after making plans for the morning, Limp loaded the bitch on the back and rumbled down the alley. Ox and Jaw shut up shop and drove home. They had been in bed for about an hour when the phone rang. It was the bitch. She sounded as if she were running, breathless. A drunk driver . . . on the wrong side . . . she was thrown off the bike . . . but Limp . . . Limp . . . Ox laid down the phone and looked at Jaw. His eyes were wide. He looked scared. Confused.