

A middle-aged biker hooks up with a young man who wants to learn the ways of the road. Little does the experienced biker know that he will end up teaching the kid's sister a move or two as well.

Preacher: Thou Shall Not Lie

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# **Preacher: Thou Shall Not Lie**

Book two in a series by **Victor Shurtz**



### ***Acknowledgments***

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A lone black Harley-Davidson roared down Highway 50 going east. Rider and bike had only stopped once in Eureka, for gas. They would stop again in Ely before starting across the Utah desert toward Fillmore. Fillmore, Utah was the destination for the day.

The closer bike and rider got to the desert, the more the landscape became the same. Rabbit brush, sage, and a few tufts of annual grasses were the only indigenous flora to be seen from the road. Jackrabbits, an occasional coyote, and lizards were the only occupants. The monotony of the landscape gave Preacher time to think. The entire purpose of this extended road trip was to give him time to think.

Preacher was a middle-aged man who had lost a child to cancer. His wife, at the time, had blamed the deadly disease on his family. His father had succumbed to the illness. The divorce and ensuing bankruptcy had left him all but destitute. When he walked out of the courtroom after all was said and done, he had one dollar in his pocket. As a random act of defiance, he bought himself a ticket in the California Super Lotto. It netted him twenty-four million dollars.

He called a fellow biker who happened to be a lawyer, and the two of them invested most of the money in interest bearing accounts. The remainder of the money was deposited into an account Preacher could draw from when the need required him to. Once the money was put away and working, Preacher decided it was time for a ride. He had to decide what to do with the rest of his life. Parties were fun, but that kind of fun gets old after awhile. Preacher needed to do something, accomplish something. Life on the road would give him plenty of time to think—to get inside his mind and find the things that really matter.

Preacher had three obligations to uphold in the next three months. One was to his sister, one was to a Brother in Denver, and one was to the Get Acquainted Run at Zion National Park. Tonight he would stay with a cousin in Fillmore.

Preacher had started this road trip a week earlier. About fifty miles east of Fallon, he had gotten a flat tire. The service station that he had limped into was owned by an older man named Hank. Hank had helped Preacher and bought him dinner. Preacher stayed on when an emergency took Hank and his grandson to a hospital in Reno. He had stayed until this morning. Now, he was back on the road, going east, deep in thought.



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Preacher's father had left him a couple of acres in Shasta County, California. He homesteaded it when the divorce got ugly. He moved a small trailer onto the land. That was the only tie he had—that and to a few road Brothers around the western states. Preacher knew that when he made up his mind to accomplish something, he would. He just didn't know how, where, what, or with whom this something now involved. This road trip had a purpose. Preacher felt an obligation to himself to find that purpose.

Once Preacher crossed the Nevada/Utah state line, he decided it was time for a rest. He had been on the road six hours or so, with only two stops for gas. He had purchased a sandwich and a bottle of water at the last stop in Ely. He pulled over in a wide spot and listened to his old girl cool off as he ate the sandwich. Looking at the sun, Preacher knew it was a little past noon. He rolled a doobie out of his saddlebags and contemplated the few hours he had left of traveling. His butt was numb. He hoped Beth, his cousin, and Alan, her husband, had a good bed, a hot shower, and a good meal waiting.

\* \* \* \* \*

Beth was standing at the kitchen window when she heard the sound. She raised her head and smiled as the roar of a Harley coming up the road, only to slow down on compression, rang in her ears.

"Preacher's here," she said as she looked out the window.

"I hear him," Allan, her husband, said as he started out the back door of their snug little country home.

Beth and Allan lived in a cozy little rambling brick country home with a split rail fence surrounding a small patch of mowed lawn. The driveway circled around the end of the house to join a double garage. Allan had opened the big door to allow Preacher entrance.

Preacher was holding a fist in the air as he came into view. Allan saluted him in the same manner. As Preacher rounded the corner of the house, he did a small burnout on his way up to the garage door. Preacher came to a halt in front of Allan. He shifted into neutral and put his foot down. He shut his old girl down and took off his helmet.

"Preacher," Allan said, "it's about time you showed up. Beth's been looking for you for a week."

Preacher crawled off his bike. "Allan, my Brother," he said as he embraced Allan.

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"It's been awhile," Allan said as he returned the hug.

Preacher was a tall man, standing over six foot tall, with broad shoulders and the narrow waist of a rider. Allan, on the other hand, was also six foot tall but had a thickening of the waist that came with marriage and a lot of good home cooking.

"I got sidetracked fifty miles out of Fallon," Preacher said.

"Was she purty?" Allan asked with a smile.

Preacher smiled, remembering Maggie, the owner of the diner where he had taken his meals. "Yes, she was," he said.

"You and your women," Allan said.

"Well, he better give this woman a hug," Beth said as she walked into the sunshine from the garage. Preacher beamed at the sight of his cousin.

"Girl," he said, "get your ass over here, and rub them titties all over my chest."

Beth leaped into the air and wrapped her legs around his waist. She grabbed his hair and buried his head in her cleavage. "God, it's good to see you," she said as she kissed the top of his head before she slid down him to a standing position. "How long are you staying?" she asked.

"Only a couple of days. I have to meet George at Zion Park on Tuesday or Wednesday."

"Good," she said. "I wanted to have a barbecue this weekend." She looked up at Preacher with an elfish grin. "You still have a friend or two around here."

Preacher smiled. "Is she still single?" he asked.

"Yes," Beth said, "and she'll be happy to see you."

Allan grinned. "You and your women," he said as he turned toward the garage. He continued. "She's been dating the local Barney Fife off and on for awhile," he said as he opened the outside refrigerator and pulled out a beer.

Preacher looked at Allan. "Is that going to cause me any problems?" he asked.

"We'll know in a minute," Allan said as he looked out toward the road; "Barney just showed up."

Preacher turned to watch as the local cruiser came to a halt. The man who got out looked the way a small town cop should look: short and slim, with an attitude. He sauntered up the driveway. He stopped at Preacher's bike.

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“Well, well, I was hoping that I would never have to set eyes on you again, but here you are,” Barney said. He cocked his head. “Was that an exhibition of speed that I just heard?”

Preacher looked at Barney and smiled. “Where were you when I came into town? I expected an escort. After all, I *am* a celebrity in this town.”

Barney glared at Preacher. “The only thing you are is trouble.”

Preacher laughed. “I’m glad you missed me. Be sure and let Sheila know I’m in town. I’ll be needing a date for this weekend’s barbecue.”

Barney looked puzzled. “There isn’t a barbecue this weekend. It’s next weekend.”

Preacher winked at Barney. “When I see Sheila, she’ll be wanting to roast some meat.”

Barney flushed. “You leave my girl alone. She doesn’t need your kind.”

Beth walked up to Preacher’s side. She looked at Barney. “And what kind is that?” she asked.

Barney exploded. “Biker trash! You people are nothing but trouble.”

Allan spoke up. “I’ll remember you said that the next time you come into my store.”

“You do that, Mister Tuff Guy. And remember who the law is in this town,” Barney said.

Allan smiled. “How can we forget?”

Barney pointed a finger at Preacher. “You watch your P’s & Q’s while you’re in my town, Preacher. One slip up, and you’re in my lock-up. You hear me?”

“I’d forgotten what your voice sounded like. Now I’ll remember,” Preacher said as he started to unsnap and unzip his leathers. “See ya around, Barney,” he said.

“My name’s not Barney. It’s Jack!” Barney screamed.

Preacher smiled. “I’d forgotten your name too. Now I’ll remember, I think. Be sure and tell Sheila I said ‘Hi.’”

Barney turned to leave. “I’ll get you, you son-of-a-bitch. One of these days, Preacher, I’ll get you.”

Preacher stood up. “Have a good day, Barney.”

The three of them burst into laughter.

\* \* \* \* \*

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The morning came with clear blue skies and no wind. Preacher had showered and now stood in the kitchen, drinking a cup of coffee and gazing out the window. Allan had gone to work but was expected home early in the afternoon. Allan owned the local hardware store and had a brisk business. Beth had gone shopping. She said she would return before noon.

The last time Preacher had stopped to visit Allan and Beth he had gotten into a fight outside Allan's store. He had caught the local thief trying to load more bags of fertilizer than he had paid for. Preacher had disciplined him then taken all the fertilizer and restacked it. When Barney showed up, Allan didn't press charges. The thief was Barney's cousin.

Before the day was over everybody in town had heard the story. Barney was afraid of his cousin. He had let him get away with petty theft and drunkenness in public more than once. When Preacher caught this cousin and disciplined him, Barney was furious. "I'm the law in this town," had been his statement. He even tried to arrest Preacher for assault, but the public outcry got Preacher off with no charges.

Sheila, however, had been another story. She worked at the local bar. Allan and Preacher had stopped after work, and she became infatuated with Preacher. They spent a few nights together. Hearing that she was dating the local cop gave Preacher some concern. He didn't like cops and didn't trust them at all. Small town cops were the worst. They thought they were invincible. They thought they were kings. Put any small town cop in downtown Oakland, CA, Preacher thought, and they wouldn't last the night.

Preacher smiled at the thought of Barney kissing Sheila after she had spent time with him. He wondered if Barney would like the taste. He chuckled.

When Beth returned from the store, she found Preacher washing his bike. The tattoos on his arms and shoulders rippled as he worked.

Preacher's bike was a '71 FLH that he modified to his weight and to the length of his legs. The frame was stretched one inch with six-inch over tubes on a twenty-one inch front tire. The triangle was completed with sixteen-inch ape hangers that were adorned with eight-inch leather tassels hanging down from the grips. She was painted a deep metallic purple black. When in the sun, she had a luminous glow that

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looked like a dark rainbow. Five hundred pounds of black paint, chrome, and steel. He called her his “old girl.”

“So, how are you and your old girl getting along today?” Beth asked as she wandered over to the pair.

Preacher looked up and smiled. “After I wipe her down, I think she’ll forgive me for yesterday.”

“You’ve given her harder days than yesterday,” Beth said matter-of-factly.

“That, I have,” Preacher responded as he continued wiping his old girl down.

“So...what’s on your agenda today?” she asked.

“I thought I’d cruise the town and stop by the store. Maybe Allan could use some help.”

Beth smiled. “Don’t help him the same way you did the last time. Barney will lock you up for sure. He’s still embarrassed over that little fiasco with you and his cousin.”

“He should be,” Preacher replied.

“I saw Sheila today,” Beth commented.

“What are you doing in a bar before noon? Slumming?” he asked.

“Sheila doesn’t work in the bar any longer. She’s a checker at the market,” Beth said.

Preacher looked up. “I don’t know if I want to see her or not. People who hang out with cops make me nervous.”

“Whatever makes you happy,” Beth said. “I invited her anyway. You don’t have to start up where you two left off unless you want to, but she was excited to hear you were back in town.”

“Thanks, I think,” Preacher said as he finished wiping with a flourish.

The town had not changed much in the year Preacher had been gone. Some waved at him; others turned their heads in disgust. After a loop through town, Preacher backed his bike up to the curb in front of Allan’s store.

The hardware store stocked almost everything. Plumbing was to the left as you walked in the front door. Electrical supplies lit up the right front, with everything from axe handles and hammers to wheelbarrows and carpentry supplies filling in behind. The back area to the left housed the gardening supplies, with a door leading out to the green room where Allan stored the fertilizers and vegetable plants when in season. The back was filled with paint and supplies.

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“Preacher—just the man I want to see,” Allan said as Preacher strolled through the front door. “Would you help this gentleman load some sacks of concrete? I need to mix some paint.”

“Sure,” Preacher said. “How many?”

“Six,” Allan said. “Do you remember where they’re at?”

“Yup.”

Allan looked at the customer. “Mr. Crawford, if you’ll follow this gentleman, he’ll help you load your concrete.”

Preacher looked over at Allan. “I didn’t come here to work,” he said. Allan laughed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday came filled with excitement. Beth was having a party. Beth had Preacher mowing lawns and trimming hedges. Preacher and Beth hadn’t had a lot of time to talk, but he knew she would open up the conversation before long. The whole family knew about the divorce and ensuing bankruptcy. Few knew about the money. Beth was not one of the privileged.

So far, Preacher had spent most of his time helping Allan at the store. Spring was an active time in any country. Everybody was fertilizing, planting, and mowing. Gardens would flourish because of the products Allan sold out of his hardware store. In the evenings, Preacher worked on Allan’s full dresser. Most of the town folks, and some of the farmers, knew Preacher from prior visits. Those who didn’t were reminded with the story of Barney’s cousin. They all knew that story, especially Barney.

Preacher shut off the mower and looked up to see Beth coming out the back door with a large frosted glass of iced tea.

“You’re an angel,” he said as he rolled the cold glass over his forehead.

Beth sat down on the back steps. “Preacher, when are you going home? After the run?”

“No,” he said, “I think I’ll make a summer out of it.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Cause I can,” he said.

“How?” she asked. “You’ve lost everything except a few acres your dad left you. How can you afford it?”

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“Beth, my finances are of no concern to you or Allan. Trust me when I tell you that everything is okay. I’ll stop in Hurricane for some business, go on to the Zion run, then I think I’ll go over to Denver. I have Brothers there. I’ll get by.”

She looked up at him. “I worry about you. You need a home, a dog, and a good woman. Running all over the western United States isn’t going to solve any of your problems. After all that’s happened, I don’t blame you for being mad, but you should divert some of your anger into rebuilding, not running.”

Preacher smiled at his cousin. “I’m not running; I’m planning.”

Beth smiled. “What are you planning?” she asked.

“I’m planning on how to get out of here without getting involved with Sheila.”

“That may not be so easy. She’s looking forward to seeing you. I think you’ll be needing more vitamins if she does ever get a hold of you.”

“That’s what worries me. She should be looking at somebody else. I’m not the settle down with a good job and raise a family type. I tried that once. I’ll not be going there again in the near future.”

Beth stood up. “I think she knows that. I think she just wants some memories.”

Preacher smiled. “I’ll give her some memories. I wonder if Barney will notice the taste when he kisses her.”

Beth turned toward the door. “Well, I hope she brushes her teeth before she comes over here this afternoon. That taste could be a two-way street.”

Preacher made a disgusting face.

Beth laughed, “Maybe that’s why Barney is so smitten. You know, deep throat.”

Preacher smiled knowingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

The afternoon barbecue was a huge success. Most of Allan’s employees attended along with a few friends. Some rode their bikes. Allan never professed to be a “biker;” he just liked to ride. Some of his friends, however, tried to impress Preacher. He was not impressed. Some knew the mechanical terms and applications, but when Preacher looked at their odometers, they all lacked the miles. A bike

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and the attire do not make you a biker. It's a lifestyle. It's a culture within a culture. Until these people understood this truth, they would remain wannabe's.

Sheila spent her afternoon trying to ride Preacher. "Come on, Preacher, take me for a ride," she complained. "We had a lot of fun last time. I'll make it worth your time," she offered.

"Sheila," Preacher said, "I don't think it's a good idea, you dating Barney and all."

"His name is Jack, Preacher."

Preacher looked down at her. "I know his name; I just don't trust cops or the people they hang out with."

Sheila was a short girl, standing only five foot, two inches or so, with a well-proportioned body. Light brown hair framed her china doll face. She stood looking up at Preacher after his last remark.

"Preacher, sometimes a girl just needs a man's company. Jack is single, and he has a good job. I could do a lot worse."

"Whatever you say," Preacher commented.

"Come on, Preacher, one little ride. That's all I want."

"Okay, one ride through town." Preacher paused to raise his hands to get the attention of the crowd. "Is there anyone else who wants to go for a ride through town?" he asked

"Yes" was the unanimous cheer from the crowd.

"Allan, do you have a spare helmet for Sheila?" he asked.

Allan looked over at Beth.

"I'll stay with the party. You go with Preacher. It'll do you good," Beth said.

"Okay, Preacher let's go," Allan said as he headed toward his garage.

"Don't be gone too long," Beth yelled to Preacher's back. He waved his hand to let her know that he had heard her.

"Where do you want to go?" Allan asked Preacher.

"Through town then up on Highway 15 for a few miles."

"Lead the way," Allan said as he strapped on his helmet.

Preacher and Allan led the group out of the yard and down Main Street. Barney picked the group up as they cleared town and started up the on-ramp. He was behind the crowd, so Preacher took the opportunity to roll back the throttle as he roared up onto the highway. Barney followed. Seventy-five was the speed limit, so Allan and



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Preacher didn't back off until the group was doing eighty. The newer bikes had evolution motors. They could outrun his old shovel, but Preacher and her old girl had shared a lot of miles together—sometimes good, sometimes not so good. His old girl understood his temper, and he understood her temperament. They made a good team. Some of the tag-a-longs would race up ahead of Allan and Preacher, only to slow, and fall back in line.

Preacher took the off-ramp about fifteen miles south of town, crossed under the overpass, and re-entered the highway going north.

The group broke up as they re-entered the freeway. Most of them raced back to town. Barney stayed right behind Preacher and Allan. They both turned up the road toward Allan's home. Preacher nodded to Allan. Allan smiled. Preacher turned his old girl loose.

Beth noticed the returning motorcycles and smiled when she heard Preacher's old girl roar up the road. Barney followed, lights flashing.

Preacher stayed astride his old girl as Barney strutted up to the big black bike. Sheila crawled off the back to meet him.

"Jack," she said in a stern voice, "what the hell do you think you are doing? Can't you just leave things alone?"

"This man is a public menace," he said. "That last little trick will cost him a ticket for exhibition and public endangerment." Barney pulled out his ticket book.

Sheila slapped the book out of his hands. "You'll do no such thing. Not if you ever want to see me again."

Barney glared at her. She glared back. "I mean it, Jack," she said. After a moment's pause, Barney pointed his finger at Preacher. "One of these days, Preacher, one of these days."

He spun around and stomped back to his car. Everybody except Sheila roared with laughter when he started his car and left. Sheila walked up to Preacher. "I'm sorry, Preacher. I didn't think he would do that," she said.

"Not a problem," he said as he dismounted. "Cops and bikers don't get along very well. We don't trust them, and they don't like us." Preacher smiled at her. "It's a mutual agreement."

Sheila looked into Preacher's gray eyes. "Maybe I should go. You'll be leaving soon, and I'll be staying here. It's been fun, Preacher. Thanks for the ride." She turned and was gone before anybody knew she had left, except Allan.

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“Well, Brother,” he said, “there goes another one of your women. I don’t know how you do it.” He shook his head.

Preacher put his hand on Allan’s shoulder. “It’s the bike,” he said.

“Yeah, right,” Allan said. They both laughed.

The evening was a little cool when Preacher ambled out to his bike. It was almost an evening ritual for him to wipe his old girl down and put her to bed. He started with the seat and moved fluidly up the gas tank to the triple trees and handlebars. Next, he went down the front end, fender, and wheel. From that point, he moved across the right side to the rear fender and wheel. He inspected almost every nut and bolt. He crossed over the fender and up the left side, paying special attention to his chain and primary case. No leaks. He twisted up a doobie and sat on an old truck seat Allan had placed against the back wall.

Allan wandered through the outside door and found Preacher kicked back on the bench, smoking. “I thought I might find you out here. May I join you?” he asked.

Preacher patted the seat. “Have a seat,” he said as he handed Allan his joint.

“Thanks,” Allan replied. “When are you leaving?” he asked.

Preacher leaned back. “I’m thinking I’ll be leaving Tuesday morning. I need to stop in Hurricane and take care of an obligation, then hook up with George. I would like to be in Zion’s south campground Wednesday afternoon.”

“Where from there?” Allan asked.

“Denver, unless something comes up.”

Allan leaned back against the seat. “Preacher, why are you doing this?”

“What do you mean, why am I doing this?” Preacher asked.

Allan looked over at Preacher and said, “We all know what you’ve been through. Why aren’t you home starting over?”

“Allan, I don’t have a home, and I don’t know if it’s worth it to start over. Maybe I’ll just stay on the road. Hell, I don’t even know if I want to start over,” Preacher said.

“Preacher, you’re one of the best home builders I’ve ever met. Every home you’ve ever built you’ve made money on. Why not build your home? Nobody could take it from you now. Build your home, fence your property, and start over. Maybe not get married; God knows you’ve never had a problem with women.”

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Preacher looked over at Allan and smiled. "Did Beth put you up to this little chat, or is it the pot talking?"

"We discussed it. We both feel the same way. We just want you to be happy."

"Being on the road makes me happy. I'm just built that way," Preacher responded.

Allan sat up. "I don't mean to preach to the Preacher, but maybe you should reconsider your options. Sooner or later that road's gonna kill you. You need to retire from the road. Go home and build your house. I'm not saying give up your way of life. Go on all the local runs. All I'm saying is don't let the bad things that have happened to you destroy you." Allan paused. "We'll love ya no matter what you do, and that *is* the pot talking."

Preacher was smiling when Allan looked over at him. "What are you grinning at?" Allan asked.

"You," Preacher responded. "That's more preachin' than the reverend at the local church does. Maybe you should change occupations."

Allan smiled. "Fuck you, Preacher, and please pass the joint."

After Allan left to go back in the house, Preacher sat on the seat silently. Two people had told him to go home and start over. Two people who cared. Neither one of them knew that he was worth millions. Neither one of them cared about that. They were talking from their heart, not his checkbook.

Well, he thought to himself, that's why you're on this excursion: trying to figure out what to do with the rest of your life. Take all the input you can get then analyze it. Then, make a decision. Things have a habit of working out the way they're supposed to, if you're true to your heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday morning came with the brilliance of a clear blue sky and an unobstructed sun. Beth had fed Preacher and Allan breakfast and had folded Preacher's clothes. He was packing when Beth strolled out the back door.

"Short day today?" she asked as she came to a halt at Preacher's side. "Only a hundred plus miles, and you'll be in Hurricane."

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Preacher stood up from strapping down his load. “That’s about the way I see it. I’ll meet George in Hurricane and stay the night, then it’s on to Zion.”

Beth thought for a moment. “It’s only thirty miles to Zion from Hurricane,” she said. Preacher started to snap and zip his leathers together. “Is Critter going to the park with you and George?” she asked.

“I don’t know. He may have to get back to Vegas. He’s welcome, if he wants to. George likes him.

“Well, cousin, travel safe,” she said. “Call if you ever need me, and we’ll see you when we see you.” She stood on her tippy-toes to kiss his cheek.

“See ya when I see ya,” he said as he straddled his old girl. He hadn’t even hit the starter button when Barney pulled up. Preacher looked over at Beth. “My escort?”

Beth smiled. “Be safe.”

“I will,” he replied as he hit the starter button. His old girl roared to life then settled into the heartbeat rhythm of an old ‘74. “How far do you think he’ll follow me?” he asked.

“To the county line, I think. He wants to make sure you’re gone.”

“I may come back,” he said.

“You’d better,” she stated.

Preacher clicked down once and released the clutch.

Barney followed Preacher at sixty-five mph until the county line—Beth had been right. Barney finally signaled for an off-ramp.

Preacher rolled back the throttle and let his old girl have her head. He was going to enjoy the next couple of hours. The day was a beautiful one with the golden orb shining in a clear, deep blue sky. Today is a good day, he thought as he rolled south on I 15 toward Zion National Park.

\* \* \* \* \*

Critter relaxed astride his beast on his way from Las Vegas. He had insisted that he be the one to meet Preacher in Hurricane. The two of them had come up together through the Brotherhood. When they were young, there was no stopping them. Rain, wind, or shine would find them on the road. They had fought, eaten, and slept together. Critter

had pulled Preacher home, and Preacher had pulled Critter home more than once. This trip was a reunion.

Critter was a big man, standing six-foot four and weighing in at two hundred seventy pounds. His arms, shoulders, and back were covered with the same coarse curly hair that adorned his head and face. He dwarfed the new Harley he was riding.

He knew about Preacher's misfortune and also his fortune. He knew why Preacher was on this road trip. The community that they both lived within knew the Brothers of the road. The highway telegraph held few secrets. Like the line riders of the previous era, these riders knew of, or had heard of, most of the apostles who called the road home. Preacher was one of these apostles. Preacher didn't wear a patch, but he knew the code. On the road, everybody helps everybody. If you come upon a biker on the side of the road, you stop and offer assistance. That was the code. Critter calculated that it would only take another hour to get to the rendezvous.

When Preacher rolled up to the house he was looking for, he found it devoid of occupants. A note, attached to the front door, fluttered in the breeze. After shutting down his old girl, he wandered up to the note. It read, "Shall return." It was signed by the owner. Preacher smiled. He knew better than to just walk in. First, it was disrespectful; second, Darrell had a dog.

The house stood by itself in the middle of ten acres. The construction was stucco. It had been painted pale brown with a dark brown trim. The lawn was neatly mowed. The flower boxes were in bloom, lending a fragrance to the air.

Preacher moved his old girl into the shade of a small poplar tree. A swinging bench occupied a spot off to the side of the tree. Preacher rolled a doobie and sat in the swing to wait. He didn't have to wait long.

He heard them before he saw them. Two bikes, riding in tandem, turned the corner and accelerated up to the driveway. Critter and George had arrived. They passed through the gate and turned their old girls loose. Preacher stayed in the swing, smoking. Upon seeing his old friends, Preacher felt a peace come over him. These boys were old school. They didn't carry cell phones or credit cards. The four of them, including Darrell, had met and become Brothers twenty-some odd years ago. They came up the hard way. They had earned the respect of their fellow bikers.

*Preacher: Thou Shall Not Lie*

Preacher had noticed over the past couple of years that most RUBS (rich urban bikers) were politically correct. They were afraid of offending anybody. Old school says fuck 'em. If you don't like it, don't look. When in doubt, knock 'em out. These old boys didn't ask permission; they gave it. Preacher was the youngest of the four.

The reunion was a joyous affair. Darrell had returned, driving an old restored '64 Chevy truck. He had gone shopping. As the afternoon wore on, George brought out the barbecue. Darrell had brought home chicken, hot dogs, and hamburger. George opted for chicken and fired up the kettle cooker. The campground where the run was to culminate was only thirty miles from Darrell's house. He would be sleeping each night in his own bed. George decided that Darrell's couch would satisfy him for a sleeping place. Preacher and Critter would stay in the campground.

Darrell's mouse made potato salad with sweet pickle relish, and she had a jar of sun tea. The reunion continued into the night. Nobody mentioned Preacher's marital status, but all knew his financial status. They joked about the gifts he should give. New bikes were mentioned the most. Preacher suggested a Schwinn.

"Hell, we could be a club of four," Critter said.

George chimed in, "Critter, even I could beat you on a bicycle. You couldn't hang!"

Out came the bicycles that Darrell kept for his two nephews. Both bikes were twenty-one inch BMX bikes with high handlebars. Critter looked like a gorilla astride the small bike. George, on the other hand, looked like he had ridden them before.

Under the glow of the moon, the contest began. All four of the Brothers competed in the single elimination rivalry. Darrell's mouse joined in and won the final race.

Preacher was the first to roll out his ground cloth and sleeping bag. The barbecue still glowed as they all settled down for one last smoke.

"Darrell, where might I find a postcard and a mailbox?" Preacher asked.

Darrell and Mouse were sitting in the swing. Darrell answered, "Right before you enter the park, there's a small store on the right. It'll have everything you need."

Preacher pulled off his boots. "Good," he said. "I need to mail one to a friend."

V. Shurtz

Critter looked over at Preacher. "You mean to tell me you have friends?"

Preacher grinned. "Yup, and she's a good looker too." He told the group about the extended flat tire saga and the woman and child that he had helped in Nevada. "If any of you or your companions ever get over in that county, stop by. Tell them you're a friend of mine, and I can guarantee you a meal and a tank of gas."

George piped up. "How about the woman?"

Preacher smiled. "You could try, but I think it might be a waste of time. She's already had the best!"

George kept going. "How could she have had the best? She's never had me."

"George," Preacher said with a smile, "she'd throw rocks at you. She likes a bigger man."

Critter lay supine on his sleeping bag, with his hands behind his head. In a deep voice he said, "Then I guess I better go visit." They all laughed.

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Preacher awoke to the splendor of another gorgeous morning. Clear blue skies with a gentle southerly breeze. Trees were in bloom, and some were budding. Preacher made tea from out of his saddlebags and awoke Critter. Critter had kept him halfway awake most of the night, snoring.

"Get up," Preacher said as he toed Critter.

"Fuck you," came rumbling out of Critter's sleeping bag.

Darrell had a nice place. The lawns were mowed and trimmed, the fences were painted, and the livestock pens in the back were clean and in good repair. Darrell wasn't a big man; he was on the skinny side. From the looks of things, he stayed busy. When Preacher returned to the front yard, George and Critter were talking.

"Preacher, me and George are going back to Vegas today. We'll be back tomorrow night or Friday morning. Want to come along?" Critter asked.

"No, I think I'll hang around here. Maybe cruise the park; I don't know if I'll ever get back, so...I think I'll spend a day or two here."

Critter looked at Preacher for a moment. "Okay," he said; "enjoy yourself."

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“Are you leaving now?” Preacher asked.

George spoke up. “I think so; we’ll stop, fill up, and grab a burrito or something.”

“Okay,” Preacher said.

Critter started rolling up his sleeping bag and ground cloth. “I’ll leave this here. I have a bed in Vegas.”

Preacher nodded his head.

Darrell wandered out in Levi’s and slippers. “Where are you going?” he asked George.

“With Critter.”

Darrell looked puzzled. “Are you coming back?”

George smiled. “Yeah,” he said, “we’ll be back tomorrow or Friday morning.”

Darrell nodded his head. “Okay, see ya then.” He turned toward Preacher. “Preacher, I have to work today and tomorrow. Can you entertain yourself?”

Preacher saluted him with his cup. “Sure, I was going to cruise the park anyway.”

Darrell smiled. “Good,” he said as he went back into the house. Preacher set his cup on the swing and began rolling up his sleeping bag and ground cover cloth. Mouse came out as George and Critter were starting their bikes.

“You guys want breakfast? Darrell told me you were leaving; are you hungry?”

Critter looked over at her. “No, we’ll get something on the road. Home’s not that far.”

Mouse put her hands on her slim waist. “Okay, see ya when you get back. Preacher, are you hungry?” she asked.

“Sure, I’ll eat with you and Darrell,” he replied.

“Alright; give me a minute, and it’ll be ready,” she said as she disappeared back into the house.

Preacher finished rolling up his sleeping bag. He pulled the pack off the back of his old girl and headed toward Darrell’s house.

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Darrell had already gone to work when Preacher got out of the shower. He had finished the three S’s. He walked out on the porch and put his small bag of toiletries back in his pack. Mouse had been quiet



during breakfast. She served Darrell and Preacher then had stood by the sink while they ate. She was a slim girl, well proportioned, but nothing was large. She was almost petite. When she stepped out on the porch, Preacher looked up. She had a forced smile on her face. "Darrell said I was to take care of you today."

Preacher smiled at her. "What do you think he meant by that?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not sure. I know you share history, but..." She left the sentence open as she held her arms close and shrugged her shoulders again.

"What's your name?" Preacher asked.

"Mouse," she said as she dropped her eyes.

Okay, Preacher thought. She doesn't want me to know her name.

"Okay, Mouse, here's the deal. You don't know me, and I don't know you. You're Darrell's mouse, and you're supposed to do as you're told. So take care of me."

Preacher saw concern flash across her eyes.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked in a shaky voice.

"I want you to go change your clothes. Put on the things you wear when you go for a putt with Darrell. I think you and I are going sightseeing today. If you need to go anywhere or do anything, we'll do it. If not, just crawl on the back of that old girl and enjoy the day."

Her face beamed. "Do you mean it?"

"Yup," Preacher said with a grin.

"Okay," she said as she whirled around and scampered back into the house.

Preacher knew what Darrell had offered him. He appreciated it, but this mouse didn't seem to know the old-school rules or else had become attached to his old friend. Either way, Preacher didn't feel right about taking advantage of her. Things like this could ruin a relationship. He didn't want that to happen. He would only take her along for the ride, not to be ridden.

Mouse returned a short time later. She was encased in black: black leather pants, black boots, black tank top, and she held a black leather jacket in one hand with a black helmet in the other. She was ready to go for a ride.

"Mouse, where's the nearest post office?"

"There's one right before the entrance to the park. Why?" she asked.

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Preacher looked at her.

“Sorry,” she said with lowered eyes.

“A promise made to a friend,” he replied.

“Okay,” she said softly.

Preacher smiled. This might be a better day than he had expected. Darrell had trained her well. A quiet woman is a good woman.

Preacher had toured Zion National Park several times in his lifetime. It never ceased to amaze him that the park could change from rock formations to timber in only a few miles. Situated at the border of Utah and Arizona, the park had a multitude of eco-systems—each one a marvel in and of itself. Mouse pointed out a few of her favorite vistas. Preacher stopped at all of them. He wanted her to be comfortable while he was a guest. By early afternoon, he had started back toward Darrell’s.

Preacher pulled up into the shade of the poplar tree. “Mouse, I’m going down to town and see if I can find something to eat. Tell Darrell that I’ll be back when I get here.”

Mouse stood on the front porch. “You could always eat here. Tell me what you like, and I’ll make it if I can.”

Preacher looked up at her. “If memory serves me correctly, Darrell likes simple food.”

She looked at him quizzically. “Yeah.”

Preacher grinned. “How about spaghetti?”

Mouse smiled. “I can cook the noodles, but we’ll have to use canned sauce. If that’s okay.

“You bet,” he replied. “I’ll be right back.”

Darrell rolled in around six o’clock. Preacher was washing his old girl when Darrell strolled over from the garage.

“How was your day?” he asked.

“Great; Mouse and I spent the day in the park. God, I had forgotten just how beautiful this country can be.”

Darrell shook his head. “Yeah, until next month. Then it just gets hot.”

Preacher laughed. “I can deal with the hot; it’s the snow that bothers me anymore. Every joint in my body hurts when it’s cold.

Darrell nodded his head. “We *are* getting older, Preacher. This old body doesn’t act like it did twenty years ago. I can still ride all day, but I need to take more breaks. I can’t go tank to tank anymore.”

Preacher stopped wiping his old girl off. “Darrell, I don’t know if I’ll be back next year for that very reason. I can’t see me giving up riding, but these long hauls are taking their toll. This might be my last road trip.

Darrell stood looking at Preacher for a long moment. “I didn’t think I would ever hear you say that. You take a road trip every year. Why give it up now?”

Preacher smiled. “Me and this old girl have a lot of miles behind us. Now we’re both getting tired. I’m starting to think that I might just stay in northern California from here on out. Maybe help the boys when I can but pretty much stay in Shasta County. Now that I have a dollar or two, I might be able to help some of the Brothers.

Darrell laughed. “Your dollar or two could buy enough ground to sponsor your own run every year.”

Preacher stared off into space for a moment. “Darrell, I think that’s the first time anybody has said anything that makes sense. I’m looking for something to do, something that makes my life worthwhile—to do something that’s good. I think you’ve given me something to think about.”

Darrell studied Preacher for a while. “Preacher, you’re a member of the UBNC, why not set up something for everybody. Isn’t that what UBNC stands for, United Bikers?”

Preacher shook his head and smiled. “Darrell, my friend, if that’s what I end up doing, I’ll build you, Critter, and George your own personal cabins. That way you will always have a place to stay, but you have to bring your own women. I won’t be sharing mine.”

“What!” Darrell said, indignantly, “after all I’ve done for you?”

“Sorry, Darrell, I’ll share everything else with you but not my old girl or my woman.” He paused. “Well, maybe, ‘cause it’s you, I’ll share the woman.”

They both laughed.

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Critter and George returned Friday around noon. Preacher had spent most of Thursday puttering around Darrell’s place. He had also taken some time to survey the camping arrangements in the south campground. The run was to culminate around an amphitheater. Preacher wanted to be nearby, but not so close that when the

A middle-aged biker hooks up with a young man who wants to learn the ways of the road. Little does the experienced biker know that he will end up teaching the kid's sister a move or two as well.

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