For Sale

The supple, gently pebbled leather on the seat broiled under the hot June sun. Frank ran his fingertips over it, then jerked them away abruptly.

"She's a beauty, huh?" he remarked. He smiled, wide and honest. The motorcycle, a Harley Davidson VRSCA V Rod 100th Anniversary, only three years old and two-tone sterling silver and black, gleamed sensually. The sunlight caught on the shimmer of the paint, as if winking.

"Yeah, man, it's really something..." The younger man standing at Frank's side nodded slowly, then looked away, as if uncomfortable. His gaze took in the lush and perfectly-kept lawn.

"You'll notice, too, Adam, she's only got about three thousand miles on her," Frank continued, drawing him back. "Cept for being a few years old, she's just like new. Rides real nice. Purrs like a kitten."

He watched Adam hide a laugh. He knew this kid, maybe thirty or maybe a little less, thought his little clichéd comments were cheesy. He could see Adam trying to figure out why he was selling something this nice for so cheap. Adam was the first person who had seen the For Sale sign and stopped to inquire. He wondered if Adam was thinking about sex, the way he'd done when he bought the bike, brand new, on a whim, the day after his sixty-third birthday. He had saved and penny-pinched all his life, owned his home and took great pride in watching his

daughter graduate from Penn State, debt-free. This, he felt, after twelve years of Catholic school and service in Vietnam and helping his beautiful wife raise an accomplished daughter, this was his due: something he could do for himself after sixty-three years and one day of being alive. It was bold and it made him feel like a young man again. He looked to Adam and wondered if he was married or had a girlfriend or maybe just someone he was seeing casually.

"Yeah..." Adam's voice trailed off. He looked torn. "My wife..."

Aha, Frank thought. "Bought her myself without Frannie's knowledge, few years before retirement. She rang a storm over my head like you wouldn't believe – didn't think a man of my years should be tearing up the highways on something so dangerous. But you know wives. They worry too much. Once you have kids the wife stops paying so much attention to you, leaves you alone for a bit, then the kids move out and suddenly you're back in the spotlight. God love her, but she's a nag." Frank knew he was rambling at this point, but he barely wanted to give the kid, Adam, a chance to weigh the options: buying sex on wheels and facing some wifely incredulity, versus walking away without buying. Frank's mission was clear. It had to go. He took in Adam's relative youth, his casual jeans and polo, the Ray-Ban sunglasses.

"You have any children?" Frank asked, then regretted it.

He watched Adam's face melt into one of those unmistakable smiles. "Laura's pregnant. First one. Due in September."

Damn. "Yeah, it's just, at this point, everything's baby baby baby...get the fun in before it's too late!" Frank wondered if his ridiculous logic was at all convincing.

"Could I -?" Adam motioned at the bike, making two fists, mimicking the ride.

"Oh, hell yeah. You, uh, have your motorcycle license?"

"Sure do. Been thinking about buying something this nice for a couple months now. I have an older bike, a Honda, had it since I was twenty-one, but I'd like an upgrade, definitely, now that I can afford it. This...this is an upgrade." Adam scratched his head then ran his hand through the mess of dark locks.

I remember when my hair was that color, Frank thought, smoothing down his own smoke-colored hair. Hell, kid could pass for my s – younger brother. He produced the keys from the pocket of his khaki shorts, and let them dangle in mid-air. Adam took them, with near-reverence, and an almost audible groan of anticipation.

"Thanks, man. Wah-hoo, right?" He swung his leg over the side, shifted his weight front and back, side to side, gripped the handlebars. He kick-started the bike and Frank gasped. The sight of another person enjoying the V-Rod was almost too much - the shock of envy that stabbed him was a complete surprise - but he pulled a helmet from a hook in the garage and handed it to Adam.

He plastered another smile on his face, a fake one, and yelled over the roar, "Take her around the neighborhood, there's plenty of road in this neighborhood. And watch out for the sharp curve on Jesse Drive!"

Frank watched the younger man take off like a rocket, past his abruptly parked Jetta, out the short, open driveway.

He could still hear the engine over a few grass mower-neighbors down the street. He pulled a lawn chair out of the garage and set it on the pavement where the bike had stood, then sank into it, drumming his fingers on the sky-blue plastic arm rests while he waited. Frank could hear Frannie through an open window on the side of the house; she was in the kitchen, making his favorite tonight, homemade ravioli from scratch and fresh-baked crusty Italian bread. He thought he had dozed off in the languid sunshine for a few moments; he saw himself on the bike, not Adam, felt the wind whipping the exposed part of his neck and his grasp on the handlebars. The thrill of the half-dream fantasy made him sick to his stomach, cut his guts in half.

When he opened his eyes to the familiar racket, Adam was pulling back into the driveway slowly, straddling the bike, his feet on the ground, bringing it to a steady stop.

"God, man, that was amazing. So much more power and substance...I'll take it.

Seriously, I will take this motorcycle. This is crazy, but I'm doing it." Adam had removed the helmet, hung it on the handlebar and was reaching for his checkbook. "Sign says five grand. Is that for real?"

"For real," Frank responded. He dug a pen out of his left pocket. "It's yours if you want it. For real. If you want, pay half now, it's yours, you can have it looked at, make sure everything's in order, and then pay the rest."

Adam held the checkbook up to the side of the house, scratching barely legible numbers and letters. "I trust you, man. Been working around engines and that for years with my brother. I'll have him check it out when I get it home, but as far as I can tell, this is the real deal. Laura can't be too upset with me, either," he remarked. "It's about ten thousand less than some of the

other bikes I looked at. Be straight with me, man - why're you selling it for so cheap?" Adam's head was cocked to the side, his eyes squinty.

Frank didn't quite know how to respond. "It's – it's for real, there's nothing wrong with it," he began, then stopped. "It...it was an impulse-buy and a mistake. Ehh...we were talking about getting new windows put in and...I haven't really been riding it all that much lately, so...I figured we could put the money towards the windows."

He could tell Adam barely bought this, but he was in a hurry now.

"Yeah...okay. So - " Adam started.

"I can drive it over tomorrow. Secure on the bed of my truck. Okay? Frannie can follow me. Talk to Laura about it, she's gotta love the price. Have your brother waiting there or whatever. She's a beauty, really." He took down Adam's address – just on the other side of town - and cell phone number, stuffed the check in his pocket, and then watched him back out in the Jetta, the disbelieving but joyful, exultant expression still pinned on his face.

Frank went inside. He smelled the sauce simmering and heard his wife softly singing along to Pavarotti, *Nessun Dorma* on the CD player, her soprano pure and clear.

"Sold the bike," he called to her. She stopped singing.

"Already?"

"Nice young kid. He'll enjoy it."

"Honey..."

Frank shrugged. He siddled up to Frannie at the kitchen counter, took a small white container off the window sill, and popped the child safety cap off, wincing. He gulped down three Aleve with a tall glass of water, and wished the ache in his hands would dull.

"Honey, call the doctor." Frannie watched him take the fourth, fifth, and sixth pain killers of the day.

"'M fine," he responded, shuffling out into the living room, still taking big sips of water.

The arthritis had become blindingly painful at the worst times, though sometimes manageable at the best.

He refused to see a doctor but finally settled on selling the bike when Frannie had remarked a week ago, nonchallant during *Jeopardy!*, "You never seem to ride that bike much anymore. Must be something like two years now. Hands hurting?"

He had stared at her, stunned; she had noticed, then, two years in a row he'd taken the bike out in late spring, lovingly dusted and polished it, admired its chrome, but hadn't ridden it. Frank put the bike up for sale the next day, on the side of the driveway, a little ways back, not out at the very end, where anyone could drive by and see it.

Giving up the bike – it was like selling away some of his favorite memories and never getting them back. He laid down on the sofa in the living room, setting the glass on a nearby table.

I'm getting old, he thought, not for the first time that day. Frank sat up and reached into his pocket, pulling out the check, his eyes focused on the dollar amount. *Could I get it back?*

He shut his eyes. A shot of pain. Frank massaged the one useless hand with the other.

The check fell to the floor, but it hurt too much to reach for it.