

An excerpt from:

“AMERICAN BIKER”

Tortus and the Hare

By: *Chuck Brost*

It was early morning on the sort of day that's common enough in the short hills during early fall; overcast and still. The air, sharp and cool hazed the tree line, and made the neighborhood appear small and faded like an old photograph that's lost most of its color. From the west came the unfocused sound of the rail yard.

Bull stood on the side walk in from of the Club house, pulling a long deliberate drag off of his cigarette, looking into the distance relishing the peace and quiet of the neighborhood.

Shaking off the listless resignation of the morning, he took a sip from the steaming styrofoam cup of coffee in his right hand, and gave a quick but gentle tug on the dog leash in his left. The massive pit bull that was attached to the other end of the leash sprang to life at full attention.

Bull had slept in the club house the night before. He wanted to be there at day break to finish preparations for the run that would ensue that day and most of the night. It was the Clubs annual last run for members of the entire state. Starting at a different chapters club house each year, the last run is mandatory for all members in good standing to attend. However, if they have a good, no, a really good excuse, they can get out of it with a STIFF fine.

Junior, this chapters only prospect, had just gone upstairs to get some sleep as Bull was heading out to take the dog for a walk. Junior had been up all night reassembling his motorcycle in time for the run.

Since the annual run is absolutely mandatory-no excused absences-for all prospects to attend. Tramp and Dummy thought it only fitting to test Junior's worth by completely disassembling his bike the night before, and though Junior was pretty pissed, he knew what this ritual meant, and smiled as he looked at the pile of parts in the middle of the shop beside the club house.

The club house sits on an average tree lined neighborhood street in the middle of the block. It's a two story red brick storefront building. The three 4' x 8' plate glass windows have long since been removed, and the openings bricked over. The glass door has also been replaced with a reinforced steel monstrosity with no window.

The club house was purchased about a decade ago, and within a year the club made an offer and acquired the west side property from its former owner, a taxi driver. A former resident of the Indian subcontinent who had recently arrived in the United States, well ahead of his English, was more than happy to sell when he saw

the shoe box full of cash.

It was almost comedic. Standing out in front of the house, he was presented with the shoe box. Bull held the box and lifted the lid just enough to reveal its contents. The man looked into the box, looked up at Bull, raised one finger and said, "One moment please", turned and went into the house and immediately emerged carrying a green army duffle-bag in one hand, and the deed to the property in the other. Without saying a word, he handed Bull the deed; retrieved a single key from his front pocket, handed it to Bull, and extended his hands, palms up, silently asking for the box. Bull placed the shoe box in his opened hands, and without even counting the cash, the man tucked the box under his arm, picked up his duffle bag, flashed a wide toothed grin, got into his taxi and has never been seen around there since.

The dilapidated structure has long since been leveled, the two properties fenced as one, and a five thousand square foot pole barn style metal building, that's used as a shop for the Club, has been erected. The remainder of the lot is basically for parking.

The club has been trying to purchase the property to the east of the club house, but this is another story. The old lady won't budge! Which, over the years, has led to a tolerable relationship, amicable at best. The woman, somewhere in her late sixties, has some emotional attachment to the house. And, even though she does not approve of the loud motorcycles, and the late night parties, and even thinks these boys look dangerous, she's never called the police, and actually feels safer in her own home knowing these men are nearby.

The woman is also caring for a young girl of nine or ten. No one on Bull's side of the fence knows the girls story, bit it is assumed to be the woman's granddaughter. When it came to the neighbor's, especially the old woman and girl, the club members did their best to mind their ow business, but it was the girls pet, that damned rabbit, that was causing a lot of trouble. It wasn't so much that the rabbit was doing anything wrong, it was Tortus, the clubs pit bull, who couldn't seem to control himself when he so much as caught wind of the little creatures cage.

Though he doesn't have a pedigree, Tortus is a full blooded American Staffordshire terrier, an American breed originally developed for dog fighting. Dago, the clubs president, know's his dog's, and Tortus is definitely a pit bull. They found him yelping and paddling around in the bottom of a sink hole out on Old Farm road. The dog might have fallen in by accident, but probably not.

The fella's named him Tortus because the thick muscular back and shoulders of the dog resembled a torus shell, and the fact that Dummy thought he was looking at a big turtle at the bottom of the sink hole, pretty much set destiny on the name of that dog.

Tortus is plenty smart, and very protective of the club members as well. If you raise your voice, and display any signs of aggression toward a patch holder while Tortus is around, you run the risk of breathing through an artificial trachea tube for the rest of your life.

The trouble started about a year ago when the girl received the rabbit as some sort of an Easter gift. Every morning since the creatures arrival, it's been a ritual of sorts: the old woman and the girl come out into the back yard, the woman hangs blankets on the clothes line and the little girl lets the bunny loose; Tortus goes CRAZY barking and carrying on. There is no stopping him until he is unchained and brought inside. Even then he stay's trained on the door.

One day Tortus got loose and was gone for hours. It wasn't until the old woman from next door came beating on the door of the club house that anyone knew where the dog had gone. Tramp opened the door to an irate woman who's only words were, "get that monster out of my yard! NOW!" Tramp, knowing how potentially dangerous the dog could be, and thinking about the little girl, quickly responded. As he made his way round the building in almost a full sprint, he was stopped dead in his tracks by the scene he was witnessing.

It was one of the weirdest things he had ever seen. The dog was just sitting there in front of the rabbits cage looking up at the mammal; turning his head back and forth in the little curious way that dogs do. He wasn't barking, or growling. Hell, he wasn't even away of Tramps approach. He was hypnotized it seemed. To this day, Tramp laughs at the memory and swears the dog has rabbit fever, and not the infectious disease Tularemia either. This fever is more associated with instinctual biological drives!

The day turned out to be a beauty. Seventy-Eight degrees and not a cloud in the sky. This was the biggest group of club member that had ever turned out for the last run. It was also the biggest group Junior had ever ridin with, and as he took his place in the middle of the pack, for the first time he experienced the formidable and irresistible power of forty pairs of Harley pipes trumpeting at him in unison. The moment was overwhelming, and Junior felt magnificent as the riders kicked into high gear together, unleashing a tidal wave blast of unbridled torque.

For the most part, the festivities had gone uneventful. No accidents. One fowled plug. And, NO COPS! These brothers knew the score when it came to the ins and outs of surviving a run and coming back feeling good. They had the run practically down to a science. Four and a half hours, straight shot, on Highway 63, and four and a half hours back up Interstate 12. With all the stops in between, it made for

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