

Meat Loaf

HANG COOL TEDDY BEAR

CHAPTER TWO



She was beautiful. Her hair swept down across her forehead in an auburn wave just above her dark, alluring eyes. Her face was sculpted. Her shirt was a petite cotton number with a collar and it fit her like a glove. Patrick couldn't name its color but he thought it was a pastel, one of those boutique varieties with a name like "lilac."

Most striking was her gorgeous smile. Not exaggerated, just a mouthful of lips and teeth that formed the most genuine and welcoming smile Patrick had ever seen.

Patrick suddenly realized that they were making love. He ran his calloused hands under her shirt and down onto her firm naked buttocks, comfortably cupping them. Everything about her was invigorating. She looked up and flashed Patrick another warm smile. His heart swelled and even skipped a beat.

Patrick opened his eyes. He was still in the desert, still bleeding out.

Who was that woman? He didn't know her. Who the hell was she? Where did she go? It felt like he had been dreaming; maybe he did know her. But if that was the case, he's made a mess of that as well because she was gone. And he didn't even get her name.

He slumped lower, face sunk into the dirt.

Patrick rode his motorcycle down the flat stretch of asphalt ribbon known as Highway 7. Jenny was on the back, holding on to him with the perfect amount of snugness. Suddenly Patrick knew her name, knew everything about her. Of course he did, because they were best friends. Or at least it felt that way.

His bike had a loud roar. Maybe not louder than anyone else's but such that he couldn't hear a word Jenny said. Sitting behind him, arms wrapped around his waist, her voice was little more than a whisper. But Patrick didn't mind. He felt warm. And not because of the layers of capilene and leather insulating him from the chilly winter air. He knew something about physics and it didn't make sense that Jenny's 105-pound body could transfer so much heat into his two hundred pounds. But there it was.

As they crossed Moss River Bridge he accelerated and she pressed up harder against him. Patrick hadn't told Jenny yet about his plans to go to Hollywood but knew that when he did, she'd leap at the chance to join him. He couldn't explain why he hadn't mentioned it yet and it dawned on him that he better do so soon else risk her pissing her off.

"I'm going to California," he proclaimed. "I want you to go with me."
"What?" she fought to hear him over the motor. "Never mind," he shook his head. Satisfied, she pulled tighter against his hips with hers. Patrick smiled, content, and opened up the throttle again.

Suddenly Patrick was shivering. Seagulls cried out and he looked up to see them flying over a choppy, grey sea. He and Jenny were walking now, arm in arm onto a busy pier. Wall-to-wall people shuffled their way across the creaky wooden planks, pausing to engage vendors and sample arcade games. It must've been the Fourth of July. It didn't make sense, the weather being so unkind at that time of year, but how else could he explain the American flags everywhere and the fireworks going off. Roman candles, firecrackers, sparklers; a potpourri of spectacle. The din didn't bother Patrick. He followed Jenny as they pushed their way through the throngs.

Patrick noted that there was no patriotic music playing and that seemed odd to him. There should've been a brass band in the background the entire time, but he only now realized its absence.

Jenny spotted a cotton candy stand and made a beeline for the pink wisps that danced out of the spinning machine. "You want one?" she asked. "My treat." Patrick shook his head no. Jenny took his hand and gently guided him over to a snow-cone booth. "I know you like these." As usual she was right. Patrick ordered a large and pointed at the cherry syrup.

The vendor filled the cone with shaved ice then let flow the syrup. He kept pouring and pouring, though, as if he didn't have an off switch. Patrick gave him a look but he just kept it coming until there was more syrup than ice.

Patrick looked at the syrup overflowing and he really didn't want it anymore. "That's okay," Jenny said, and led him away.

The filthy elevator door opened and Patrick stepped into a dark corridor. The frayed carpet looked like it belonged in someone's grandmother's house. It reeked of stale cigarettes and cheap air freshener. Faded wallpaper was peeling from floor to ceiling, exposing the decaying yellow plaster behind.

Patrick walked past one scratched up door after another until he found number 305. He banged a couple times with his fist, but the music playing inside eclipsed it. He rapped again, so hard that his knuckles bled. Muffled voices emanated from behind the door.

A deadbolt turned and the door opened revealing a beast of a man sporting a bald head, blue jeans, and a torso full of tattoos. "Where's Jenny?" Patrick demanded. "What's it to you?" the big man replied.

"Look, just let me talk to her..." Patrick tried to push through into the apartment. Baldy-man wasn't accommodating, blocking the door with his foot.

Patrick swung first but it was a stupid move. His punch barely fazed the guy, provoking him to hit back with a combination that immediately dropped Patrick to the ground. For good measure he gave Patrick a couple of kicks in the solar plexus with his work boots.

Patrick groaned, a sharp pain in his stomach, and his vision quickly blurred. He thought he saw a pair of women's legs as they kneeled down beside him. But everything faded to black.