



# Heavy Duty Attitude

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## 1 RSVP

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‘I liked your book,’ he said, as we shook hands across the table.

‘Well thanks,’ I answered guardedly, as I slid onto the bench seat opposite him and sat down. It was around three months since it had come out and so just coming up to about a year since his election.

‘You mean the one that just about stopped short of saying that you killed him,’ I asked, ‘or that you at least had him killed?’

‘Yes,’ he nodded with a smile on his wolfish face, ‘I particularly liked that part.’

Obviously given the history and who he was, I had been very wary when I had taken his call last week at the paper asking me to meet up with him.

No, wary was the wrong thing to say. Scared shitless would be more like it.

So I had my work cut out to persuade myself that it would be safe to go, but eventually and possibly foolishly, I had managed to convince my inner coward.

That he wanted us to get together somewhere in public was some reassurance.

He would also have to assume that I would probably take some elementary safety measures. I would tell someone who I was meeting and where so they could call the cops if I didn't get back in a reasonable time.

I might even, if I wanted to, have arranged for someone to come along to keep a watchful eye on me and raise the alarm if it looked as though things were getting ugly.

Even so, it had taken me quite a while to screw my nerves up to actually come. After all, fear of legal consequences wasn't something that ranked very highly in his world. And the trouble with the all elementary safety precautions I could take was that they still wouldn't mean I was safe.

I knew, absolutely and without question, that these were people who wouldn't think twice about killing me, whatever the situation, if that's what they had decided they wanted to do. It might only take a moment to take me out, and a moment might be too quick for anyone to intervene, while afterwards they would have all the time in the world to persuade witnesses that they might not actually remember what had happened.

So I knew I was taking a risk, perhaps even sticking my life on the line. But in the end I had decided I would go. The urge to know was too strong, and we'd agreed to meet at a motorway services, so it was about as public a place as I was going to get. Although, as I was on my way I suddenly regretted my choice as I realised that Heathrow might have been even better. The knowledge that armed police would be

expected to be on patrol in the terminals might have given me even more comfort.

It was a summer Saturday afternoon, the road was busy with holiday traffic, and the car park was full as I pulled in and parked up. Families were milling around open cars feeding kids ice creams, and camped out eating sandwiches and slurping cokes at the wooden trestle tables on the grass beside the main block, to the background noise of traffic roaring by. Welcome to staycationland I thought, as I headed inside, the automatic doors swishing open in front of me as two large women in low cut tops that clashed with their orange-glow skin came out past me sucking at straws from Styrofoam cups, brown paper burger and chips bags grasped in their other hands.

I walked through to the eating in area, my eyes adjusting quickly to the relative dimness of the cool interior from the bright glare of outside. As the doors hissed shut for a moment behind me, the noise of traffic faded away to be overtaken by the noise of people echoing against the concrete cave as children ran about and a murmuring susurrus of the noise of people talking and eating competed with the piped musak and clattering cutlery.

Well, here goes, I thought, steeling my nerves.

He was easy to spot.

The restaurant area was crowded as I walked in, the noise level reaching a pitch and all the tables filled, except for across by the window on the far side where a series of booths lined the wall.

The bikers were where you would expect to find them, looking out into the room, backs to the wall, always watching, always wary.

He was sat in the middle of the row, a coffee in front of him at the otherwise empty table. The neighbouring booths on either side of him were each also occupied by a single full patched Brethren with a drink in front of them, and despite the jam packed tables elsewhere, obviously no one had asked them to move, or had even decided that they wanted to sit in the adjoining booths.

He had seen me as I arrived and gave me a quick nod of acknowledgement as I walked across to him, while I could feel eyes following me across the room as people realised I was approaching his table. Was this what it was like I wondered? For them I mean. To always be on show, to always be the centre of surreptitious attention wherever you went?

He had gestured for me to sit opposite him and I did.

We paused while he asked me what I wanted and one of the guys went off to get it, joining the queue to pay like any other law abiding citizen. He wasn't in much of a rush and I guess he was safe enough that no one was going to nick his table while he was gone.

Wibble looked much as I remembered him from the few times we had met. The guys' lids were all with the bikers' Harleys parked up outside the entrance and were being guarded as always by a striker serving his time. Wibble was wearing his summer riding gear, a padded check work shirt which was now open to reveal the black and red hooped T-shirt underneath, with part of The Brethren logo showing just above the left breast. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, and over the top of the shirt was his black leather biker's vest which I knew would have his colours on the back.

He looked a bit older that when I'd met him before but then it was what, four or five years ago now? His sharp featured face was a bit more lined than I remembered, his shoulder length mass of wild hair and short cavalier style beard was showing

grey amongst the black, but he still looked wiry, whip-hard and very, very dangerous.

But then when you looked at the front of his cut, when you took in the grinning ¶¶ style skull and crossbones tottenkopf flash on his left breast that was his Bonesmen tab, and the simple red and black embroidered *Freemen* and *President* flashes ranked above it; then that would have told you he was a Menace, in every sense of the word, and needed to be treated as such, whatever he looked like.

Despite what people assume, few of the bikers actually wear any Nazi insignia these days, not because of any objection to it of course, much the reverse in fact as many of them often admire the triumph of the will image of the Nazis. An aura of disciplined ranks, marching as a body and a strength through joy reliance on violence has an atavistic and strong gut appeal. But in practice any of the clubs which has a presence in Germany has dropped anything with a swastika from its flash as their German charters simply can't wear it without going straight to jail. The Brethren's bonesman patch with its ¶¶ style skull and crossbones was unusual in that in its red dyed variation, so far, they had managed to get away with it.

There was a plain diamond shaped black and red patch on the opposite side of his cut. It was a new tab, one I'd not seen before, for obvious reasons.

It simply read *In memory, Damage. RIP* and underneath, *LLH&R*.

So why the hell I went and blurted out what I said next, I'll never work out. Did I have some kind of death wish?

'Well,' I said, 'now I'm here, do you mind if I ask you a question?'

'Naw, feel free mate,' he said, lounging back, 'What do you want to know?'

‘Alright then,’ I said in an in for a penny, in for a pound moment of madness, ‘can I ask, did you kill him?’

His smile seemed to stay fixed, but he leaned forward, resting his heavily tattooed arms on the table and bringing his face closer to mine as though he was going to say something in confidence and I couldn’t help but tense, wondering with a sudden mix of what – terror or regret? – if I’d just blown it with the first remark out of my mouth?

‘Of course,’ he answered steadily, the smile still on his face but nowhere near to touching his eyes which were boring into mine, ‘but just because you can ask anything you like, doesn’t mean that I have to answer, does it?’

‘No,’ I quickly surrendered.

‘Well I didn’t really expect an answer to that one anyway, but I’ve got to try,’ I said making an effort to recover the situation.

He left me on the hook for a moment or two, his expression not changing a bit, as though he was silently and deliberately calculating whether to have a problem with what I had said, or not. But, he was also saying in his silence, he didn’t need to calculate what he would do if he decided to take it that way. We both knew what he would do, crowd and CCTV or no crowd and no CCTV.

Then he let me go.

‘I suppose so,’ he agreed, leaning back again and looking a little more relaxed after that demonstration of his power.

‘How are his wife and kid? Are they OK?’ I asked, partly to change the subject a bit, and partly out of genuine interest, ‘It’s been a while since I saw them.’

‘Shaz and Lucy? Oh they’re fine, they’re being looked after.’

‘Good,’ I said and meant it. I had liked Sharon; Damage’s petite and pretty wife was a talented artist, and Lucy had seemed a great kid.

‘So,’ I said, a bit more nervously but relieved that he still seemed to want to talk to me, ‘can I try asking you another question?’

‘Sure,’ he said, the smile wider now, ‘Christ, you really are a nosy bugger aren’t you? Beats me how Damage put up with you for so long.’

‘Sorry,’ I shrugged, ‘it’s just the job, that’s what I do for a living, quiz people.’

‘And then you write it all down?’

‘Well, some of it anyway,’ I said, a bit more defensively than I had intended. ‘You always have to leave some stuff out as a journalist, and of course you can’t reveal your sources.’

‘Yeah, I get that and that’s good,’ he said looking up and back over my shoulder, ‘Ah here we are.’

‘There you go,’ said the full patch man-mountain of a Brethren as he arrived back at our table to serve me with a skinny latte and a couple of sugars. Not something that I had ever really expected to happen.

‘Thanks,’ I said automatically, ‘that’s great.’

‘Salright,’ he shrugged and slid back onto his bench in the booth behind Wibble.

‘So,’ I said ripping open the paper spills of sugar and tipping them into the tall glass, ‘if you don’t want me to ask you questions, what can I do for you?’

As I dipped the spoon into the drink and absentmindedly watched the white milk and dark coffee swirl together as I stirred, I heard what he wanted to talk about.



And much to my surprise, for obvious reasons in some ways, but equally as the most obvious topic in others, what he wanted to discuss was Damage. And I was interested to know why.

‘Like the man said, the evil a bloke does lives on after them, the good that guys do gets buried with them.’

Now it was my turn to smile.

‘What is this?’ I asked, ‘Friends, Brethren, citizens, you come not to praise Damage, but to bury him?’

‘Something like that,’ he agreed.

‘Well then,’ I continued, in a bit of a mock declamatory tone, ‘so let it be with Damage. The noble Wibble hath told you Caesar was ambitious.’

His eyes narrowed a bit as he looked at me.

‘Are you taking the piss?’ he demanded.

‘No, I said hurriedly, ‘I’m just thinking about your quote. I was trying to remember how the rest of it went.’

I was dredging it up now, from a year sitting there at school in Mr Majewski’s English class. How did it go now I asked myself? And then I remembered that it ran something like, *if Damage was ambitious, it was a grievous fault and Damage has paid for it grievously*. It just seemed appropriate really, but possibly not one for sharing with Wibble just at this moment and bearing in mind how our conversation had started.

‘Did you tell anyone you were coming here to meet me?’ he asked from out of left field.

I shrugged in acknowledgement. There didn’t seem to be a need to say anything else.

‘Sensible,’ he nodded, ‘to take precautions I mean.’

I knew straight away what he was referring to.

‘So did you like it?’ I asked. I had always wondered, and I had never heard anything from the club since it had come out. For months after publication I had half expected, half dreaded the bikers turning up at my door one day to wreak retribution. Knowing what they were undoubtedly capable of, in some ways the silence had been as unnerving.

‘Personally?’ he asked.

‘Well, yes I suppose so, but I really meant the club.’

‘Yes,’ he said after a moment’s consideration, ‘I guess I did.’

‘Even with what it was saying?’

I was conscious that the autobiography I had helped Damage to write hadn’t held back from discussing how some of The Brethren made their money and what sort of business they conducted to get it. And I was very conscious as I sat there in front of him, that Wibble had been talked about specifically. In fact, in some ways when I thought about it, Wibble had been the sole living member of The Brethren who could in any way be implicated in a crime from what Damage had told me. I had always wondered exactly why Damage had told me that when he had always been so careful about what aspects of business he had been prepared to discuss.

‘Yeah, even with that.’

I was curious now. I had never expected to have this opportunity to talk about it with someone like Wibble, who was after all, as high up in the club as you could go in this country. ‘Why?’ I asked.

His answer surprised me a bit. ‘It took us seriously I suppose,’ was his considered judgement.

‘It treated the club with respect and wasn’t full of the usual crap about biting the heads off chickens, or weird gangbang sex shit. At least it gave Damage a chance to talk straight about who we are and why.’

The way he had asked me to, I thought.

‘Oh don’t get me wrong,’ he said as he saw the expression on my face, ‘a whole lot of the guys were seriously pissed off at it, so don’t make that mistake. There were a load of them that just wanted to stomp you on principle for writing about us, but I squashed that.’

‘Well thanks for that,’ I said a bit weakly.

‘Mind you if we really hadn’t liked it, we wouldn’t need to be getting you here for a chat,’ he continued matter of factly, ‘so don’t make that mistake either.’

He pointed a finger at me and mimed shooting me in the head.

‘If you were going to be hit, we wouldn’t be meeting up like this, you’d just be dead mate. Bullet in the back of the head in a car park. Bomb under the car. There’s all sorts of ways.’

As well I knew from what Damage had told me.

‘Besides which, we live in a surveillance society you know,’ he carried on conversationally as if discussing how I might be murdered with me was the most natural thing in the world, and waved around him, ‘CCTV everywhere, and everyone you meet carrying a camera all the time.’

‘You know,’ he said turning away to gaze round the room at the crowded tables before coming back to stare at me, ‘I bet at least someone in here is filming us even now on the sly.’

‘You reckon?’ I asked.

He shrugged. ‘Yeah, sure. Here we are, three Brethren having a meet with a civilian. It’s quite a sight if you’re some drone

out with the wife and kiddies and just popped into the services for a burger and fries, and yet, look around you.'

I glanced around the room myself. Then I looked back at him. 'So?'

'So, did you see how everyone is so studiously not watching us,' he laughed quietly, 'and failing miserably?'

He was right of course. I had felt the duck and flick away of people's eyes, terrified to accidentally make contact, as soon as I had looked around from our table. Not surprisingly it would make sense that someone amongst the crowd had their mobile out, video running and pointed awkwardly, and they hoped discretely, in our direction to capture a wavering image of two men leant forwards together in a booth while his bodyguards watched the crowd either side. If it was me and I was a civilian, I'd have been filming it too, so I could show it to my mates.

'Is that why you guys have become so much more relaxed about photos?' I asked.

The time was, not so long ago, when no Brethren wanted to have their photograph taken at all and any request would be met with the brusque refusal *because we aren't poseurs*, if the asker was lucky. But these days The Brethren, in common with some of the other big six clubs had become open to pictures, and charters all around the world had their own websites with crew pictures emblazoned on them. As ever with a lot of these things the Angels had led the way with a book of photographs becoming a best seller and had even produced a calendar featuring members, each pictured with their bike and a tasty model just to keep the punters' interest levels up.

'Yeah, we just have to work with it these days.'

Which I guess meant having to take it into account when doing *business*. It was definitely time to change the subject I decided, but to my surprise, Wibble got there first.

‘Hey then, let me ask you a question.’

‘OK,’ I said, ‘what?’

He sort of hesitated, as if working out the best way to phrase what he wanted to say. ‘If I said I hadn’t,’ he started finally, ‘killed him, I mean. Well, would it make a difference? Would you really believe me?’

There was no hint of any emotion in the question at all. He had asked it completely flatly, as if it was a simple matter of fact query, the answer just to be filed away somewhere for information.

And I really didn’t know how to answer that one. Just how safe would an honest response be?

I had written a book about Damage. But only because Damage had been speaking to me in the months before he was killed, which I had always afterwards assumed was on the basis that he knew he was going to be hit.

Wibble was the only living member of The Brethren that Damage had in any way implicated in a crime in what he had told me, and after he had been murdered, Wibble had taken over his role as President of the Freemen, effectively the top spot in the UK Brethren.

You could never prove anything, it was all circumstantial, but there was quite a chain of events there.

And I couldn’t quite work out whether he was trying to tell me something or just being curious. Confused, I filled what could rapidly become an uncomfortable silence as he sat still and potentially deadly across the table from me, waiting for an answer, with a question of my own.

‘Well if you didn’t, who did?’

He nodded slowly at my response as he evaluated it. ‘Now that,’ he said at last, ‘is a very good question.’

‘And do you know the answer to it?’

‘Well,’ he said, effectively shutting the topic down again, ‘that’s another thing that you can ask, but I might not answer.’

‘But you know stuff don’t you?’ he asked changing tack.

‘Stuff? What do you mean?’ I replied. It wasn’t feeling exactly like a verbal fencing match, not yet at least, but it was starting to feel like a bit of a warm up to one, a wary arms length circling, sword tip to sword tip, with an on edge feeling that at any moment a sudden lunge could come.

‘Damage told you a lot didn’t he? A lot more than went into your book I mean? Not everything went in, did it?’

There didn’t seem to be any point in denying it so I shrugged. ‘Yes. I spent a hell of lot of time interviewing him, we covered a lot of ground, talked about a lot of things but when you come to do a book like that, there’s only so much you can put in. You have to edit, make decisions, leave bits out.’

‘Makes sense,’ he nodded, ‘did you tape all of it?’

‘Yes, it’s the easiest way. Much better than just relying on making notes if the interviewee’s up for it. That way you can make sure you’ve got everything.’

‘And he didn’t mind?’

‘No, he was cool with it.’

‘I bet there’s some interesting stuff there.’

‘Could be,’ I said more warily now, unsure now as to where this was heading.

It was definitely time to change the subject, I thought.

‘So, getting back to my question, I said, ‘what can I do for you? I take it this isn’t just a social call or the start of a book club?’

‘You ride don’t you?’ he said unexpectedly, ‘Damage said you did.’

There was no getting out of that then, ‘Yes I do,’ I admitted cautiously.

I had ridden as a kid, in my early twenties I had even constructed the world’s worst chopper out of an old Z400 twin, a peanut tank and a pair of six-inch over fork extensions, rebuilding the engine in my bedroom, which had really done for the carpet. These days I still had an old Guzzi 850 sitting in the garage. It was more a toy now than the all consuming passion it had been, and one that in truth I admitted to myself, I hardly ever used, but I still had it and it was insured for the odd weekend blast when it was sunny and I felt like a breath of fresh air. Even though I was such a fair-weather biker these days, at least I understood something about riding that had given me some point of contact for talking to Damage.

‘Well then, come for a ride with us.’

I could hardly believe my ears.

‘You want me to come on a Brethren run?’ I squawked.

‘Yeah. You can tagalong at the back,’ he said dismissively, although of course that was where I would have to ride given what my status as a civilian would be on such an outing.

I was still trying to process the bizarre idea of The Brethren inviting a journalist along on one of their runs, and what’s more inviting me as someone who had written what I had about them.

‘But why do you want me?’

‘To see for yourself what we do, what we’re about.’

‘But why?’ I asked, in danger of starting to sound like a broken record.

‘PR.’

‘PR?’

‘Yeah,’ he shrugged, ‘we want to start to generate some good PR.’

It seemed from what he told me that The Brethren had decided that they wanted to polish their reputation. As a club they already did a lot of stuff for PR purposes; charity runs, bike shows and so on, but now he told me they were looking to move on from this. They wanted to open up a bit, become more public about who they were and what they did. They didn’t want to drop the mystique, and they didn’t want to be fucking poseurs, but they had decided that it was time to be less secretive than they had been in the past and it was time to actively put a positive spin on what the club was and what it did.

Given their reputation and history, it was going to be a pretty tall order, I thought.

‘We’ve got a run on this Saturday, a weekend bash,’ he concluded, giving me details of the time and the place they were meeting.

‘Be there,’ he said, in a serious, but not threatening, tone, ‘come out with us. See what we’re really about.’

I nodded to confirm that I would at least think about it.

‘There’s just a couple of things,’ he added, by way of an afterthought as he began to stand up.

‘What’s that?’ I asked.



‘Well first, when you come, remember you’re going to be riding with The Brethren. So don’t be a fucking wanker, don’t wear anything fluorescent.’

I looked up in surprise and he was grinning from ear to ear as though this was the funniest joke in the world.

‘And second?’

‘Pack a teddy. A fucking big one, you know, like the ones they have at the funfair? Put it on expenses.’

We shook hands. And with that and a ‘see yah then’ he was up, gathering his guys behind him with a nod and off out of the café with a hundred pairs of eyes once again surreptitiously following him, before not quite swivelling back to me as people leant over the tables in whispered conversations.

I sat back and sipped my previously untouched coffee.

Gradually a few more lines from back in my O-level days came to me.

*But Brutus says he was ambitious  
And Brutus is an honourable man.*

Perhaps it was just as well that we’d dropped that line of discussion before we’d got too far into it I decided. I doubted that Wibble would find the reference flattering.

Should I take him up on his offer I wondered? Would it be safe? Meeting him here in public was one thing. Riding off with him and the whole crew God knows where was something else. Talk about exposed, I thought.

But then as he said, I was exposed anywhere really if they wanted me badly enough.

And after all, I thought, as I swirled my coffee around in its mug.

*For Brutus is an honourable man  
So are they all, all honourable men –*

Honourable, I remembered Mr Majewski saying, now that was a double edged word.

I sat for a while after I had finished. I don't know why, other than that it seemed right to let them have a chance to ride off before I got up to go.

It was a while before anyone new came into the restaurant and sat down in one of the free booths either side of me.

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