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HUNGRY GHOSTS MC

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A Loose Id "Sneak Peek"

IN HARM'S WAY

Chapter One

The highway can be a lonely place. Reflection can cling to a body like rain along a long stretch of road. Sometimes, no shelter can be found. Harm hit the throttle hard and the bike surged. The beast lunged, taking him with it. The raw power traveling up from the machine hit his body hard only to ebb out in a wave almost as sweet as a climax. Almost. In this moment, he was one with the machine and the pavement rushing past. Some people did lines of powder, he did lines of asphalt. Out here no one could stop him. It was as close to free as Harm could get.

Harm loved early morning rides. The bugs weren't too bad considering how wet it had been as of late. A couple corpses lay splattered and decorating his goggles. It was unusual to have this much rain in August, the wheat in the passing fields leaning heavy with its kiss. He'd been riding for the past couple of days. Each year when August approached, the need to get home for harvest took over.

Oma Tam. The last visit with his grandmother had been nothing short of confusing with enough displeasure expressed on her side to make it uncomfortable. How such a tiny woman could put him on edge was remarkable, but Oma had that ability. She was tough and Harm respected that. The woman had survived war and married someone right out of her culture. She'd come to this country from the ruins of her own, wanting to rebuild a life. She'd insisted he call her and Grandpa by the Dutch words for grandma and grandpa, not the Vietnamese. His grandparents had endured much over their years and Harm thought the world of them. Too bad he'd been such a failure in his own life.

Family had its place and Harm didn't expect his grandmother to understand him or the life he'd chosen anytime soon. How many people had he listened to over the years complaining of strained family relations? Add a blended cultural background into

the equation and you'd have his family. His background was an unusual blend of Dutch and Asian, his grandmother being from Vietnam. He chuckled, thinking of all the pictures cluttered up and collecting dust on his parents' fireplace mantle. How many times had he witnessed company silently trying to figure it out.

"Was Harm adopted?" one bold neighbor had ventured to ask one Christmas.

"No, he just looks that way." Recalling his mother's words left him grinning from ear to ear.

"And it's good. I look like I should!" he yelled out to a lone cow standing next to the wire fence along the highway. He was a strange mix, nothing to be argued there. People would stare at him trying to put it together—who wouldn't take a second look? His features spoke clearly of the blending of his ancestry. He'd got his height from the Dutch side, standing over six feet three, and definitely his larger build, but his features...The Asian in his background filtered through in the shape of his nose and eyes. His closely buzzed blond hair was in complete contrast to his darker skin tone. What messed people up were his eyes—such a vivid blue color. How had a waitress at a tiny cafe once described him?

"Well honey, I think you're one exotic bird," she'd cooed, pouring him a coffee. *"I'll bet your bed don't get cold none."* She'd winked at him, pushing some of her overly bleached hair back into place. True enough, he didn't have any problems attracting women or trouble.

"Just holding on to love," he whispered out to the slowly emerging day.

This August was different from any other he'd had in a long time. His father's phone call had put a wrench into his plans. The eternal nomad, Harm always rode the summer until harvest. It was only then he went home to help bring in the crops. During this past spring, his oma had moved in with his parents. Like a plant stripped of its nutrients and sunlight, she'd begun to wither away since Opa had passed. Opa had been her sun and she the flower. His parents feared she might not be too long for this world.

The strain had been evident in his father's voice. *"Come home, Harm. Your oma Tam has asked to speak with you. She says it's very important."*

Harm would have dropped everything to ride across the country and move a couch for her.

"I'm coming home. I'll be there in two days," Harm had promised, ending the call with a heavy feeling in his heart. It was Thursday and he'd be home by Saturday. When he handed in his resignation at the shop, they'd begged him to stay on.

"Take a leave and see your family. Take all the time you need, Harm, just come back and work here. There aren't too many guys out there with your skill set," Reg Hampton had pleaded, but Harm had already made up his mind. He would have left anyway. He'd been working there for nearly three months and he'd already disrupted his usual routine of riding in the summer months. That familiar feeling of needing to pick up and go had taken over.

It wasn't like he was leaving a family behind. Harm fit the description of the typical lone wolf. He moved around the country, treating it as his own personal chessboard. Each move he made was patient and calculated to keep adding to his score. Being able to pick up work was his gift. Harm's skill sets allowed him to obtain work and live in an area until he'd had his fill. His father Alex would laugh at him with every phone call announcing his latest location.

"Harm, if I didn't know better, I'd swear you see this country as some kind of buffet. You go along tasting, then you're onto the next thing. When are you going to settle?" Alex would tease, but Harm sensed how serious his father was underneath the ribbing.

"I don't know if I can." He'd been completely honest with his answer. A restlessness burned deep inside his soul, the very thing that had kept him from staying with Ellie.

"Ellie is gone, Harm. When are you going to face facts – you let her get away." His father's deep sigh had carried right through the phone, enveloping Harm in its tone of finality.

How had he managed it? Ellie had been the love of his life. They'd gone on the road, sharing adventures together. Ellie, who didn't like too much change. Ellie who needed roots and stability. Ellie, who had shredded his heart when she'd made her decision about going back home and leaving him with a choice. Why hadn't he made the right choice? Why hadn't he married that woman? Was he afraid of love—or afraid of loving someone and then losing them? Once he'd hit the road again, a darkness had fallen into his life. A darkness he'd been happy Ellie wasn't around to see or get hurt from. He'd got himself into some nasty business and it had taken a good while to "disconnect" and fly solo again. The love he carried for Ellie had stayed. Harm remembered his opa's words from long ago. *"You can never take away the feeling an artist paints into a picture – it lives on the canvas forever."* Ellie had been the artist painting on his heart and the love remained—still.

The lone restaurant stood like a blemish on the landscape. Constructed of weathered wood, the box-shaped structure was without any of the usual frills a business might have—like paint for starters. The lone eatery was a shack at best, but these kinds of places often had really good food. Harm pulled in, maneuvering the bike over the rough gravel. The '48 Panhead garnered its fair share of attention and Harm always tried to leave it in full view by a window. Not that anyone tried to steal from him. His size usually left people moving out of the way. The couple of times he'd parked and had someone eyeball his machine, one long stare from him had shut it down. His machine was vintage and he'd used all his fabricating skills to customize it into the living piece of art it was. He pulled up to the sidewalk, spying available empty tables inside the large rectangular window. Only one other vehicle sat on the far side of the establishment. Perfect.

He removed his skullcap, running his fingers through his closely buzzed hair. Harm opened the door, then stepped inside. Not what he expected. Not at all. The outside belied what waited inside—a simple, but pleasant interior.

"Hey there. Just for one?" The southern drawl belonged to a mouth painted up with too bright lipstick. The poufy hair and heavy foundation helped to age the appearance of the waitress even more. Harm smiled, letting his energy ooze out at her. *Misty* was the name written on the tag pinned to her blouse.

"Unless you want to join me, *Misty*?" He winked, loving how cliché she was.

"Sugar, you follow me and I'll give you the best table in the house." She walked ahead of him, snatching a menu from the holder at the side of the front desk. *Misty* stopped at a table beside the window, the bike in clear view.

"I'll bet you'd like to keep an eye on your child?" She blinked slowly, the false eyelashes almost sticking together on the first pass. "Now, you just have a read and decide what you'd like and I'll come back with some coffee?" She left the last part a question. Harm nodded, and she went off. At least the table was clean. He enjoyed little places like this. Harm groaned when his phone beeped out. Now what?

The text was short: *Get home. Oma isn't doing well.*

Shit! At that moment, the waitress came up.

"Something wrong, honey?" *Misty* flipped over the cup, then poured coffee in. She gave him a smile, setting down a plate heaped with creamers.

"Family things," he answered vaguely.

The waitress stared, a surprised expression breaking out over her face. "Oh. You don't look the type for family. You look so—dangerous." She stepped back, taking out a little notepad for his order.

"I used to be. Not anymore. I'm a wanderer now." He cleared his throat. "Fries and could you bring a dish of mayonnaise to go with them?" he added.

"Mayonnaise?" She held her pen poised, ready to jot down the order.

"Yeah, it's a Dutch thing," he explained, hoping she'd let it go. Without another word, she went off to the kitchen.

At least his order would be quick. Fries were a fast deal. Too much past flooded into the present moment as he waited for his food. Harm stared out the window, trying to push her memory away as odd raindrops hit the glass. It was in these unguarded moments that Ellie's lovely face sat ghosted in silhouette over everything and everywhere.

"I can't stop loving you," he whispered.

"Who are you talking to honey?" The waitress placed his order down.

"A ghost. Just a ghost." He whispered.

"Enjoy." Her tone had changed. Why had he peeled open that layer and here in this joint? He dipped a fry in the mayonnaise, coating it thoroughly before bringing it to his mouth. The first bite and he knew he'd come to the right place. Only a hint of spice and the right amount of crisp on the outside. Divine. Many times he'd shared a basket of fries with Ellie. She'd liked the mayonnaise over using ketchup. He had no idea where she was. Almost two years had gone by now and when she'd moved out of Little Holland, they'd lost touch. Hell, he'd ridden off, his heart shattered from his own stupidity. Harm recalled how his oma Tam had stood on the front porch of his parents' house. Not a word had come from her lips as he'd secured the saddlebags. When he'd mounted the bike, ready to roll, she'd pointed to her heart, then to him, shaking her head. Harm had ridden off that day, knowing full well what his oma's unspoken message had been. He'd fucked up again. He'd let love slip through his fingers and she was letting him know. Harm had nodded at her, a gesture of respect for the tiny woman that held such a presence in his life. She wasn't a big hugs and kisses grandma. A look was all that was needed. She could convey much with her eyes.

"Sugar? Are you done?" Suddenly the waitress was standing next to the table, poised to remove the plate.

"Yeah. I think I am." Harm got up. He tossed a couple of tens on the table.

“Baby, it’s not that much. Wait, I’ll get you some change.” She scrambled toward the desk, but Harm kept going. It might be the only tip she’d get for a long time if this was a regular day at the cafe. Not a soul had stopped since he had.

He pulled out onto the highway, riding slowly. Within minutes, Harm found himself pulling off again to ride up a deserted side road. The rough dirt and rock lane came to an end at a grove of trees. It would provide the privacy he needed. Harm walked into the thick of the growth, and through, stopping only when he reached the edge of the tree line along an open field. No one and nothing for miles—only tall prairie grass and the sound of the wind. Harm fished around one of the inner pockets of his leather jacket, finally bringing out a scarf. It had been Ellie’s. He’d taken it the last time he’d been with her. Harm held the silky material up to his face, breathing in what little remained of the perfume she wore mixed with her scent. Whether the memory of her smell was just in his head or some had actually survived all that time on the scarf, it only took seconds for his body to react. Very carefully, he tucked it away again. He unzipped his jeans, freeing his erection. The sun was now making its way up, leaving brilliant splashes of gold and oranges in the sky. Harm used the tree to brace himself. Each stroke brought him closer to the release he needed. All he could think of was Ellie’s graceful curves and how silky her skin felt under his touch. He’d held her close, buried deep in her flesh, wanting to take her over the edge, to have her call out his name. Harm closed his eyes imagining Ellie’s—light brown with flecks of gold set off by her long dark lashes. He’d gripped her ass tight, stroking his cock into her long and slow, then devoured her breast until the pleasure took her right over the cliff and she was his—completely his. His cock jerked, followed by the splattering sounds of his cum hitting the leaves on the ground.

Chapter Two

The weather had turned. The past four hours he'd ridden directly into the sheet of rain, and droplets had migrated underneath the cuff of his leather jacket. Water could always find a way in and along his arms if the conditions were rough. Harm didn't care. He hit the throttle hard, taking her up a few notches. Rivulets of water ran along the road and he took extra care to pay attention. Going for a slide would be unpleasant enough without the delay it would cost.

He'd passed through Pipestone, heading for Little Holland and home. In the distance, Harm saw the shadowed outlines of the large silos towering up from the prairie landscape. The Boland family farm lay on the outskirts of the small town. Several generations of his family had farmed and made a life there. The tiny community couldn't boast big malls or fancy restaurants, but it had heart. Harm carried a deep feeling of connection to this quiet corner where he'd spent many summers playing hide-and-seek in the tall rows of corn. So many hours of his teenage years had been invested in the huge workshop out on their acreage, learning skills from his father and Opa.

Harm took several deep breaths, trying to still the apprehension running through his system. Ever since reading his father's last message, he'd felt as though he'd been shot up with a drug. His adrenaline flowed heavily and yet he was numb. When the long driveway came into view, Harm slowed his speed to turn in. Finally, he'd made it home.

* * * *

He didn't knock, but pushed through the back door into the mudroom, not bothering about his boots. He shrugged off the leather jacket, leaving it on one of the

hooks to dry out. When he went through the door into the kitchen, the house was quiet, far too quiet. He was soaked from the storm, but he didn't care.

"Dad?" he called out softly as he stalked through the kitchen, then into the living room. Harm looked up to see his father descending the staircase.

"She's gone, Harm. I'm sorry, son. She went quickly." Alex Boland made it to the last step before stopping. "She asked if you would observe her rituals."

Hearing his father's news was akin to a truck slamming into Harm's body. Oma was gone? Words refused to form and he found himself locked in the moment, speechless.

"Harm? Son?" His father made it to his side, taking hold of his arm. "Harm, sit down." He led him over to the sofa.

He let his head rest against the cushion, staring up at the ceiling. How could a person miss a death? Why hadn't he gone faster? Why the fuck did he stop to jerk off?

"Rituals?" Harm tried to engage. "You mean about honoring the dead?" His head couldn't and wouldn't wrap around anything. "I want to see her." He got up.

Alex indicated with his hand toward the second floor. "Upstairs. Mom is with her. It's going to be so different now they've both passed." Harm knew it was a real blow for his dad. Now both his parents were gone.

"Dad, I'm really sorry." Harm swallowed his emotions down. No way he'd break down. He'd already added to the mix by not getting home in time.

His father nodded. "You know Oma thought the world of you." Alex stepped aside for Harm to go up the stairs. Harm slowed his steps as he reached the room.

The door sat ajar. He knocked softly. "May I come in?"

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