

CHAPTER SIX

Bikers in Paris

Because *Le Central* was on the Champs Élysée it attracted an eclectic mixture of customers, from tiny Japanese tourists with rattling cameras and floppy hats, to bearded, tattooed bikers in leathers and chains. We had no dress code and no specific client profile – anyone that wanted to come in, could.

Originally from California, Jay spoke with a hoarse, grating American drawl that was instantly recognisable. He had long black hair tied back into a pony-tail, a thick moustache, a goatee beard and heavily tattooed arms. Weighty skull and cross-bone rings adorned almost every finger and his thick leather jacket seemed permanently attached to his torso. Jay was a real character and, despite his deceptive and unfriendly appearance he was a really nice guy who I immediately got on well with. Most Friday and Saturday nights Jay would park his Harley Low Rider outside the entrance to the club and pop in for a few drinks. Sometimes he stayed all night and other times he would just pop in briefly on his way to some party. Jay knew I was into security and bodyguarding but most of our conversation was about bikes – specifically Harleys – and girls.

One Friday night, shortly after the club had opened, Jay parked his bike as usual outside the front door and popped up to my office which was directly above the front entrance. As he stomped up the stairs I knew it was him as I had heard the thump, thump, thump of the beautiful sounding one thousand three hundred and forty cc engine. Apparently Harley-Davidson once tried to patent the sound of its engines. My dream is to someday own a Harley as I have always adored the look, the feel and the exhilarating sound the bike makes.

‘Hey, wanna come out for a drink?’ Jay asked in his distinctive gravel drawl.

‘Where?’ I asked.

‘Got a friend over. Want you to meet him. Just for an hour or two,’ he replied.

The club had just opened and I knew it would be at least a couple of hours before it would get busy. We always opened at ten pm but nobody ever came in much before midnight. The busiest time was from between two-thirty and five and we generally closed at around six in the morning. I would then take the metro home – just as everyone was going to work.

‘Why not?’ I said rising from behind my desk and grabbing the spare crash-helmet I kept on a shelf nearby.

As I left I handed the club’s keys to my assistant manager who was more than capable of running the club in my absence.

I must have looked very strange in my suit and tie behind a leather-clad long haired tattooed biker on his Harley. We drove on the pavement the few hundred yards to the top of the Champs Élysée, then joined the route around the Arc de Triomphe and back down the other side of the Champs. We crossed the busy Place de Concorde and parked directly outside the Hotel Crillion, one of the most exclusive and expensive hotels in Paris.

‘You’re kidding, right?’ I asked jumping off the back.

‘Nope,’ Jay replied turning off the engine.

With Jay striding confidently in front, I followed meekly behind wondering what an earth we were doing. We walked straight passed the horrified doorman who wasn’t sure whether to stop us or call for the police and crossed the plush columned foyer into a swish looking cocktail bar. Standing at the bar with his back towards us I noticed another biker dressed in black leathers. Hanging on each arm, giggling and flirting mischievously, were a couple of gorgeous looking women dressed in expensive looking slinky cocktail dresses. As we approached one of the girls turned to us, smiled, waved and called out: ‘Hi Jay.’ She looked incredible; as though she had just stepped out from a Hollywood movie set and I wondered what an earth she was doing hanging on the arm of a scruffy looking biker. As she smiled and waved the biker turned and greeted Jay with a, ‘Hi bro’ and a hug. Being the manager of a popular nightclub in the centre of Paris I had met many people and somehow felt as though I recognised him – but I couldn’t

think where. Jay introduced me: 'Rob, this is Marty (name not to be disclosed),' as I nodded and shook his hand I realised he was a famous Hollywood actor.

'Hey man, have a drink,' he nodded to the hovering bartender and circled the drinks with his forefinger indicating another round. I wasn't asked what I wanted but a few seconds later a bottle of Jack Daniels, a bucket full of ice and five fresh whiskey glasses, placed under delicate, frilly coasters, appeared on the bar (it seemed the girls were going to drink whiskey as well). Flicking the stupid looking coasters off the bar in the direction of the bartender, who bent down and picked them up from the floor, Marty filled his glass almost to the brim and toasted Harley Davidson – the best fucking bikes in the world. Jay agreed, the girls giggled and I stood silently not really knowing what to say.

After a couple of full glasses my head was spinning, my tie was off and my jacket thrown messily in a corner. I have never been that much of a big drinker and I certainly wasn't used to too much Jack Daniels.

'It's fucking empty!' Marty called to the barman and, as if by magic, another bottled instantly appeared. I could tell this was going to be one hell of a night. At the rate Marty and Jay were downing Jack Daniels I knew I would never be able to keep up, but I was having a good time nevertheless – it wasn't often you could sit with a top Hollywood star drinking Jack Daniels in a bar of one of the most expensive hotels in Paris. It seemed Marty wasn't anything like the roles he had played in some of his movies, he talked about boxing and bikes, drinking and fights and seemed as though he didn't want anything to do with the movie industry. 'Hollywood was bollocks' was all he said about that side of his life the entire evening.

'Hey man, you coming with us?' Jay asked me.

'Where're you going?' I replied believing we were spending the evening propping up the hotel's bar.

'Over to Sammy's.'

'Sure,' I replied as if I knew exactly who Sammy was.

Although my assistant was running *Le Central*, I hadn't actually told him how long I would be. I knew I had a club to manage and that I should really

return, but I was enjoying myself too much and anyway, I would probably never have the chance to drink socially with a top celebrity again. 'Fuck the club' I thought, 'tonight it can run itself.'

Jay's big Harley was parked out the front but I knew it certainly was not big enough for all five of us. 'How are we all getting there?' I asked.

Marty, who by that time seemed fairly drunk, waved a set of keys in front of my nose. 'We are going to fucking fly,' he slurred as he finished off the half glass of whisky and slammed the glass onto the bar. He turned to his gorgeous companions, kissed them both on the cheek and said 'sorry girls, this isn't really for you.' He then kissed them hard on the lips, got up from the bar and said, 'see you around.'

What a lucky bastard, I thought.

'Meet you out front,' he said to Jay and me.

As the three of us left I turned to see two very sullen looking girls sitting at the bar staring sadly at us. Sammy's had better be worth it, I thought.

Staggering towards the lift leading to the private parking area and still holding the keys in the air, Marty said, half to himself and half to us, 'See you out front.'

As we left the lobby of the hotel the doorman politely said to us in English 'Good night gentlemen,' while probably thinking to himself what low-life trash.

I climbed onto the back of the bike. Jay revved and revved the engine loudly, enjoying the fact that he was almost certainly waking up all the Crillion's wealthy, pretentious guests. A few minutes later Marty emerged from around the corner on another fat loud Harley and, without stopping, blasted his horn as he sped past us. Jay slammed the Harley into first and followed. I held onto the rails for dear life as we sped off through the streets of Paris and, as the wind battered me, I realised I had left my jacket and tie back at the hotel.

We hastily left the city centre and made our way into the suburbs and then into what looked like a run-down industrial park. At the far end of a row of empty ramshackle looking warehouse units I could see neon and movement. As we slowed slightly, three bikers screaming at the tops of their voices, whizzed

passed us heading in the same direction. As we got nearer the lights grew brighter and the music louder. We pulled up outside Sammy's, a scruffy looking biker's bar, and parked alongside a neat row of other Harleys. Rock music blared above the sound of the engines and I wondered what the fuck was I doing?

The bar was packed. It reminded me of the movies – except everyone was speaking French and this was for real. At one end a band was playing an old Lynard Skynard number and the room was heaving with smoke and leather and tattoos and long greasy hair. As if reading my mind, Jay put his arm around my shoulders and grinned a stupid drunken grin. 'Hey man, everyone's cool, you'll be fine.' He said. I didn't feel fine. Amongst the leathers and denim, the jeans, boots, studs and skulls I looked a real twat wearing a plain white shirt, black trousers and black dress shoes.

Even worse – I was English!

As we entered I felt all eyes turn to us, or rather me. I could see bikers look and smile and laugh and obviously wonder what the fuck a geek like me was doing in a place like that. I wasn't easily intimidated but I felt a little overwhelmed and prayed we wouldn't be staying long and that nothing bad would happen. I really didn't fancy battling against scores of crazed froggy bikers baying for the blood of a geeky-looking Englishman.

'Hey,' Marty shouted in English to the pony-tailed tattooed barman above the din of the club. 'Bottle of JD.'

'Quoi?' Shouted the barman.

'Bottle of fucking Jack Daniels.' Marty shouted again, leaning over the bar pointing to the JD on the shelf behind.

'Je ne comprends pas,' the barman shrugged and walked off to serve a menacing, heavily bearded biker further down the bar. I was sure that the bartender understood but in France you must at least try to speak French as the French respond really badly to any other language, especially English and especially when it is being yelled at them.

'What the fuck is this?' Marty said exasperated, holding up his arms in despair.

'Hey man, keep cool. I'll get it,' Jay said and asked a second bartender a little further down the bar for a bottle of Jack Daniels in French. I looked along the bar and noticed the first bartender leaning over and whispering something into the biker's ear. He looked over at us and nodded. We had only been there a few minutes and I had a real uneasy feeling that things were going to turn nasty.

A bottle of Jack Daniels was placed on the bar and three glasses were placed in a row by its side.

'Cinq cents francs,' the bartender said. Marty took out a wad of French Francs and casually flicked five hundred onto the bar. The bartender silently gathered the notes, turned around and placed them into a drawer.

'Au Français, fous le camp!' (To the French, fuck off!) Marty said. I looked at him shocked. He could speak a bit of French after all.

Just at that moment the menacing, ugly looking, bearded biker from further down the bar suddenly appeared behind us and behind him stood three other equally menacing and just as ugly leather clad colleagues.

'Fous le camp!' Marty turned to them and said again, raising his glass.

I looked up at the biker and gulped. He was a bear of a man, about six foot four, probably three hundred pounds with a ragged beard, long black hair and really, really ugly. I always thought the French were generally an attractive race, but him and his pals must have been last in the 'looks' queue – there was definitely nothing left to hand out when it was their turn. Just like in the movies, some of the other bikers around us moved back, sensing something was going on and not really wanting anything to do with it. But this wasn't the movies, it was real and we were going to get slaughtered. Jay and I were getting nervous but Marty didn't seem to give a fuck. I knew from numerous newspapers and magazines that he fancied himself as a boxer and street fighter and it really seemed to me that, there and then, he wanted to have a go with the *entire* group of mean looking ugly French bikers that had suddenly surrounded us. He nodded to them as though affirming that he was ready, smiled to himself, finished off his whisky and again slammed the glass hard down onto the counter.

While the three other bikers stared threateningly at Jay and me, 'the bear' slowly wrapped an old bike chain around his huge tattooed fists and stared with his dead-pan hate filled eyes directly at Marty. They wanted blood and had obviously selected their targets. 'Fuck,' I thought as I looked around. Even if Marty was the hard man he thought he was, against this lot I knew we wouldn't have a chance, we were dead meat. I thought about trying to talk our way out of it, buying them a few drinks, backing down and apologising, but glancing over at Marty I could see he was having none of it – he was drunk and foolish and wanted a fight. I could see a 'I don't give a fuck' smirk on his face. Maybe he didn't give a fuck but I did, and I really didn't fancy battling my way out of this biker's den. It looked a mad-house and I didn't want any part of it.

But I was part of it.

I had two choices; I could walk off and leave Jay and Marty to their fate or take some action. I knew I couldn't walk off. I could never walk off, no matter how much the odds were stacked against me. I would prefer to die fighting than escape as a coward. As Marty slowly turned to face his towering opponent I realised I had to strike first, and as hard as possible. Otherwise, no doubt about it, we were going to get a severe beating and would be limping and stuttering for years. I took a step backwards, turned slightly to the side and landed the hardest angled snap kick I could possibly carry out directly into the side of Bear's knee. Above the din of the bar I could hear a dull crack as the biker's joint folded sideways. He screamed and crashed to the floor clutching his knee. The tendons had been violently torn from the bone – he definitely wouldn't be getting up in a hurry and he probably wouldn't be walking normally for many months.

My arms instinctively raised in a defensive posture as I fully expected to be leapt on and torn to pieces by each and every one of the crazy looking froggy bikers. I was shitting myself as I waited to get pulverised into nothingness. But they just gazed silently down at Bear curled up on the floor clutching his knee groaning. Suddenly, surreally, they patted me on the back. 'Très bon,' (very good) 'incroyable,' (amazing) 'excellent!' they cried. I couldn't believe it. A couple of bikers helped Bear from the floor and carried him hobbling towards the exit.

We stood there completely stunned, ready for a really good hiding and for a moment or two we were fearfully wondering whether this was some kind of a trick and that any minute we would get a bottle over the back of our heads or rammed into our face.

‘Une autre bouteille de Jack Daniels,’ one of the bikers barked over to the barman. The grumpy bartender – who had at first refused us – placed a fresh full bottle next to the half full bottle we had been drinking from just a few minutes earlier.

‘Santé,’ (good health) he bellowed and smiled.

For the following couple of hours Marty, Jay and I got exceedingly drunk with the best – the only – group of French bikers I have ever met. They took the piss out of my clothes and I tactfully decided *against* taking the piss out of their smelly unwashed leathers.

At about five-thirty in the morning, leaving Marty with the Bikers, Jay – who could hardly walk let alone ride a motorbike – gave me a lift on a very unstable Harley back to the nightclub. But I was far too pissed to notice. I stumbled into the club just as it was closing and spent the rest of that evening and most of the following day sprawled over the desk in my office fast asleep.

A couple of days later Jay popped by the club again. It was mid afternoon and I was at the office doing some paperwork. I enjoyed going to the club in the afternoon as, after I had completed my work and got everything ready for that evening’s business, I would either sit with a coffee somewhere on the Champs Élysée and watch the good-looking and elegant French parade by, or make my way to the Seine where I had found a great little café-boat that sat moored on the embankment overlooking the spectacular Notre Dame Cathedral. It was a calm and beautiful spot and I could quietly sit there for hours sipping cappuccino and reading a book.

Jay said that Marty was in Paris for a few more days and that evening they were going to an ‘underground’ bare-knuckle fight the gypsies were holding at a secret venue on the outskirts of the city. Following my startling performance a few nights previously Marty asked if I wanted to come along. I thought it was a

great idea. Marty was certainly a real character and a great laugh and had a personality and approach to life I really liked. He didn't give a fuck what people thought of him. Actually he didn't give a fuck about much in general – all he wanted was a good time, an extreme time and fuck the consequences. Even though I certainly wanted to spend another drunken evening with him before he went back to LA, I was a bit suspicious. Perhaps he had plans to fight or worse, have me fight! Jay laughed and said what a fucking idiot I was and that we would definitely be *only* spectators. Some friends of friends of friends had got passes, which apparently wasn't easy as these bare-knuckle underground fights were illegal and the gypsy community was suspicious of everyone outside their unique closed circle. After I was re-assured for a second and third time that I would definitely not be fighting – I knew my limits and gypsy bare-knuckle fights were definitely, one hundred percent way, way, above my limit – I agreed to go.

Early that evening, Jay came back into Paris and picked me up from outside my apartment. Because Jay lived on the outskirts of Paris and I didn't have a car it was difficult for me to get over to his place. Jay lived on a tiny houseboat, moored at the bottom of a friend's garden in the middle of no-where. I had been there only once, a couple of months previously, when I was invited to meet Jay's girlfriend. On that occasion Jay met me at the nearest train station; we then drove about three kilometres into the countryside. At a pair of majestic iron gates which had been left open, we turned into a long gravel driveway leading to the front of the building. According to Jay, his friend was a top music producer and his house was in fact a mansion. Slowly and quietly (as quietly as was possible on a Harley) we drove around the house and down a small brick path towards the embankment at the end of the garden where Jay's small houseboat was moored.

From Jay's scruffy appearance and rebellious character I had expected his girlfriend to be just the same – another strong willed, not particularly attractive, slightly crazy biker's chic but as I got off the bike and took off my crash-helmet I looked up to see probably one of the most beautiful French girls I have ever seen in my life. She was so very different from her rough-neck scruffy

boyfriend, in fact she was completely the opposite; she wore immaculate, beautifully tailored fashionable clothes, she had a gorgeous figure, her face was delicate, her skin clear and beautiful, her hair short and slightly spiky and she spoke English with that wonderful, sensual, sexy French accent. In a lifetime working in pubs and clubs and travelling the world I have met many extremely beautiful women and, although at times breathtaking, genuine beauty didn't really affect me - I had found that, in most cases, beauty really was just skin deep. But when I met Jay's girlfriend I was mesmerised. Although I tried not to show it and acted as normally as I could, I just couldn't keep my eyes off her. She was stunning and for a few brief seconds I felt envious.

Given the fact that the houseboat only had a two-ringed stove, the meal she cooked us that evening was wonderful – we drank expensive red wine and never once mentioned bikes or bikers, drink or women.

As Jay impatiently honked on his horn outside my apartment; I rushed downstairs, slammed the door shut and jumped on the back of the bike. This time I had learnt my lesson and was wearing old, tatty jeans, black biking boots and an old brown leather jacket. Although slightly apprehensive as I had never been to such an event, I was really looking forward to it. It would be totally different to anything I had previously experienced and I might even pick-up a few bare-knuckle street-style fighting techniques.

Jay had arranged to meet Marty at the venue and had been given precise directions that afternoon when he called the hotel to confirm the time and place. We made our way to the correct village, about an hours' ride north of Paris, but at the village we then found ourselves completely lost. According to the directions Jay had scribbled down and kept in his jacket pocket, we were supposed to leave the village along a certain route, which we did, and then take a left at a t-junction, which we did, and then an immediate right. But there was no immediate right. The road was straight with no turn-offs for about two kilometres. We drove up and down the road a couple of times but there was definitely no turning, not even a path. We even took the right turning two kilometres up the road but that just led to an old farm house whose dogs barked nervously at the sound of the bike.

It was getting dark. We were told that, as soon as the sun set, the tournament would begin and we knew that once it was dark we would have absolutely no chance of ever finding the venue. Jay was extremely pissed off and got angrier and angrier as he swung the heavy bike around the small lanes looking for the right turning. I was holding on for dear life. I was pissed off too, both with Jay for getting the directions wrong and at not being able to get to the event. It would have been a great evening and almost certainly a once in a lifetime, totally unique experience. We eventually had no choice but to give up, turn around and make our way back to Paris. Jay dropped me off at my apartment and I nodded an unspoken, pissed-off farewell. For the first time since I moved to Paris I spent the rest of that evening alone in my apartment watching incomprehensibly boring French TV.

The next day Jay called. We were going to meet Marty one final time before his flight back to the US. I told Jay I would meet him at the hotel as I had to pop to *Le Central* first to check the previous evening's business. I caught the metro, spent an hour at the club and walked down the Champs Élysée to the hotel. I noticed Jay and Marty's bikes parked outside, between two top of the range Mercedes. I nodded and smiled to the doormen and walked across the foyer straight to the bar. I could see the leather-clad backs of Jay and Marty perched at their usual place at the bar, with their usual large glasses of Jack Daniels in their hands. I took the seat to the left of Jay who was seated to the left of Marty.

'How are you doing?' I asked as I sat down. Jay turned and greeted me. I then looked over and nodded at Marty and, as he gulped back a full glass of the gold colored liquid, immediately noticed his battered and bruised face. He had two black eyes, a deep-looking cut over his left eyebrow and a red, swollen lip.

'Fuck.' I exclaimed.

I wanted to ask what had happened but I knew that it would be a pretty pointless question – it was obvious what had happened. As expected Marty wasn't just a spectator at the previous evening's tournament after all and, from

the look of his face, had evidently been given a severe beating. He smiled showing a fresh gap in his white Hollywood teeth.

‘Hey man, you missed a great evening,’ Marty said, wincing a little in pain.

‘Looks like it,’ I said half-heartedly. I didn’t know Marty well, but in the brief few days I had spent with him I understood that he definitely walked the wild side of life. I should have known that the assurances he gave me of just being spectators at the gypsy gathering were completely unfounded. From my experiences and conversations with Marty over those past few days I understood that he could never resist the temptation of testing his fighting abilities. Looking at him sitting there bruised and bashed I was somewhat thankful that we didn’t find the venue after all. According to Marty, the tournament went well and was ‘so fucking cool.’ At the end of the evening, because he had been recognised as a celebrity Marty was offered a courtesy round in the ring with the bloodied champion. He jumped at the chance and was cheered on by the baying crowd. Apparently he had landed a couple of good punches before, ‘I was fucking taken out, man,’ he said. As I sat listening to him recount the story, blow by blow, I wondered what Jay and I would have done had we been there. Being foreigners and friends of Marty it would have been extremely difficult for us to have refused an offer of a round in the ring with the champion and therefore we too would have been sitting at the bar, wincing in pain, bloodied and badly beaten.

That evening, a very drunk Marty departed Paris first class on the red-eye back to New York and onward to California. His Harley was eventually picked up from outside the hotel by the hire company. A few weeks later I left Paris for the war-torn Balkans and never heard from him or Jay again, until about ten years later when I was in Moscow. I was with a British colleague; we had just finished a protection contract and decided to pop into Papa John’s pizza place for something to eat. We had a nice pizza meal and a couple of bottles of wine in the restaurant and decided to go to Papa’s nightclub downstairs in the basement for a couple of quick drinks before making our way back to the hotel. Papa’s was *the* place to go if you wanted to meet a gorgeous, sweet sixteen year old Russian girl. Although definitely far too young for me (no, really!) it was an unbelievable

place to leech at the young teenage girls as they seductively paraded around the dance floor teasing anyone and everyone who showed them the slightest interest. Unsurprisingly the place was always crowded, very hot and very wild and as foreigners we were immediately granted front-of-queue access and free admission. I suppose the owners knew that foreigners generally had a lot more money to spend than sixteen year old Russian students. Papa's was an excellent way to end a successful security operation and as we stood at the bar waiting to be served I was absolutely sure the girls dancing on the bar in their miniskirts were not wearing knickers.

Crowds were gathered round a stage area at one end of the cramped club. Good-natured screams and shouts could be heard above the din of the music – something was going on and my colleague and I tried to ease ourselves past the fit young bodies to see what was happening. Suddenly, speaking Russian in a harsh American accent, I heard a loud and very familiar grating voice over the microphone. I knew that voice. And then I saw a tattooed arm and, between the crowds, the instantly recognisable head of a long-haired biker bob up and down. It was Jay! I couldn't believe my eyes. What the fuck was Jay doing in Moscow and why was he standing on a stage in Papa's nightclub? As it was so busy I couldn't get anywhere near him so the very next day I called the club.

'Fucking hell man,' he said when I eventually managed to get through.

'What the fuck are you doing in Moscow?' I asked.

The very next day I made my eager way to Papa John's and met Jay again after many long years. He hadn't changed one bit, his hair was the same length and still tied into a pony-tail, his goatee seemed exactly the same, he still wore biker's leathers (probably the same ones) and apparently he still smoked huge amounts of cannabis.

He told me that shortly after I left for the Balkans he met a Russian girl on holiday in Paris. Three weeks later he packed his bags and left France for Moscow, and had been living there ever since. He was working as the entertainments manager at Papa John's nightclub five to six nights a week. It

seemed the tables had turned - I was meeting him at a night-club he was running. We reminisced about Paris, laughed at some of our escapades and spoke briefly about Marty. According to Jay; Marty had long since disappeared from the Hollywood scene into his own little world of alcohol and drugs. I wondered what had happened to Jay's stunningly beautiful French girlfriend, but I never asked.

Confessions of a Doorman

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Published by Diverse Publishing

ISBN 978 09548 14328