



# At the Crossroads

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**T**HE DUST ROSE UP IN A HAZE AGAINST THE TWILIGHT AS vintage '47 Harley-Davidson Knucklehead rumbled into the parking lot of Delilah's. Lance Cosain added his bike to the sea of chrome and steel overflowing the gravel lot into the surrounding fields. A kick of his heel set the stand and a twist of his wrist killed the engine. He ran his hands down his thighs, working kinks out of muscles tight from too many hours on the road, and turned a hooded gaze toward the roadhouse. A thread of anticipation ran through his gut.

Lance swung himself out of the saddle. He drew off his headgear and set it on the tail of the bike. Swirls of white paint hugged the back of the glossy black helmet. Celtic knotwork surrounded ancient symbols representing his name. He ran a finger along each bold line, felt their power. As he traced them, energy crackled like static from the helmet to his hand. The runes flared, and then faded, leaving the gleaming surface an unbroken black. A gift from Suzanne, his faerie queen, the protective spell spread and settled over him like a second set of well-worn leathers, but stronger than Tri-Armor. It felt like she had just wrapped her arms around him and settled in to stay. He wished.

He headed for the entrance, his leathers faintly creaking and the power subdued. Pulling open the door, he stood a moment in the entranceway. Murmurs of "Wind Walker" traveled around the room as they recognized him. He acknowledged the nods and smiles as those filling the crowded space greeted him, their ride cap-

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tain. Some of the bikers held up bottles, inviting him among them; the mamas had a different invitation in their eyes. He made his way around the bar in search of Suzanne, acclimating himself to the ever-present smoke, savoring the comfortable musk, built up over decades, of butter-soft leather laced with the rich essence of whiskey and beer.

Lance searched the shadowy corners of the place but did not find the slender platinum blonde with mischief bubbling in her silvery blue eyes. The room was large and open, with tables set up in the center and booths down both sides. The bar faced the door, stretching the full length of the mirrored wall. The lights were dim and the music loud. Most of the faces were familiar, but none of them was his Suzanne. A slight chill of premonition ran through him, but he shrugged it off. She'd be here soon.

And when the last rider arrived, they'd all get on their bikes and join the Steel Horse Stampede for the sixty-five mile run down to Lynchburg, complete with police escort and a rescue-vehicle entourage. They'd ride in all their glory, with colors, hair, and spirits flying, alone or pillion, passing exit ramp after exit ramp full of idling cars as the stateys forced the cagers to wait until the procession went by, like royalty. And Lance, riding in the Front Door position, would lead the way, with his lieutenant and best friend, Gavin, riding the most trusted position of Sweep.

He could feel the wind flow over him already. He could feel the rumble of the road beneath his wheels and hear it echo endlessly at his back. And, God help him . . . again, he could feel the ghost of Suzanne's slender arms twined around him. Hear echoes of her wild laughter by his ear, mingled with the roar of hundreds of cycles strung out behind.

"Sue," he growled in a tight, hungry whisper.

His eyes searched the crowd again, predatory and sharp.

"Hey, man, it's been a while."

Lance turned abruptly to see a tall, lean man with shoulder-length, golden-blond hair and bright green eyes that glowed with power deep within. He nodded, giving his best friend a comfortable grin. Gavin was Suzanne's brother. If he was here, she had to be around somewhere. Lance went back to scanning the place.

"She's not here," Gavin continued, as if reading his mind.

Lance's brow drew down low, and the grin took on a menacing feel. He shoved away from Gavin and headed toward the bar. Gavin followed.

"Suzanne's not here, but she should be. She called two hours ago to say she caught some static outside of Dalton, and I was to let you know she's on her way."

She was coming! Delayed only by a run-in with the police. He closed his eyes and breathed, deep and slow. Then the rest of what Gavin had said broke through.

"Two hours ago? Dalton's not even an hour away. Was she havin' trouble with the Shovelhead?"

"The bike was runnin' fine."

Lance didn't know what to think. Suzanne was one of the best bikers he knew;