

Tony has been bringing in well written stories all semester long. His enthusiasm for writing carries over into each piece that he has brought in. I think the strongest part of his writing is his ability to continually supply the reader with minute details that give hints and foreshadow the eventual outcome of his stories.

*~Jeff Nieuwenhuis, Master Tutor*

## **Chapter 5: Yellow Jacket**

By Tony Charlier

The rumble of his motorcycle, Gladys, thundered through his body and strummed the strings of his heart as he tore down the highway. He rode like a beast on the hunt, grimacing against the wind behind his tightly closed lips; his thick, bushy, grizzled beard hiding his stony features. His face, or rather the face that was visible amidst the forest of hair, was a tan-red color and leathery, having been beaten incessantly by the weather and winds of countless empty miles on the road. His eyes were dark and beady; although they watered and squinted when the wind struck them they stood resilient. It was with these eyes the man had seen the world. It was with these eyes he had won road wars with passing vans of children. It was with these eyes he had seen the happy faces of his family. It was with these eyes he had seen them murdered.

He had begun voyage across the nation two years ago when, in a fit of rage and triumph he abandoned his former, humble north woods life of harvesting lumber to feed his family and instead set his sights on the horizon. He had hopped on his bike with a change of clothes and a collection of meals ready to eat. Now two years had gone by and his goal was to become the self-proclaimed King of All Roads. He had ventured from the Midwest to the East Coast, from Florida to California. He had ridden with ancient road warriors, raced trains, and sought death at the hands of the most violent of storms. But mostly he had ridden alone with no one to accompany him but Gladys, his only friend.

She was sleek and sexy. A low-rider with enormous handlebars, Gladys was an Amazon that had been born in the wrong century. When Gladys came into town with her red-flame coat all other vehicles parted to let her through. Gladys was tough, throughout two solid years of nothing but travel, Gladys had no shown a single sign of hesitation or abandonment. He was proud that she was his hog. She had been a wedding present from his late wife on the day of their marriage, the happiest day of his life. Gladys had brought him to every state in the union. From east to west they followed the same goals as their forefathers: Manifest Destiny, to journey all ends of the continent, to claim it as their own. The final state on their warpath was Washington, their final city Sapphire Rush. From there they could go no further west.

He smiled under his beard as he spotted the green road sign he'd been waiting for: SAPPHIRE RUSH: 8 MILES. He was almost there, in eight minutes he would finally be able to truthfully name himself the King of All Roads. He pulled over to the side of the road underneath the sign and dismounted. It was time for a little pre-celebration.

He reached into his jacket and grabbed a small flask of whiskey and a cigar from an inside pocket. His jacket had also been with him since the beginning, and it was as dear to him as Gladys was. The final relic of his life before the road, the jacket was his favorite color, plaid, bright yellow, and cross hatched with heavily-contrasting black. Its bronze buttons snapped open and shut with ease and it was missing the third button from the top. Inside had been stitched a solid black sweater with a silver zipper running beautifully down the middle. This jacket had also been a present from his wife for their last celebrated anniversary. It was heavily stained and weather worn by the snows of the north, the rains of the east, the swamp muck of the south and the sands of the west. It was also stained in places with blood and bleach. Some of the blood was his; the rest belonged to his family, from that horrible day when they died. The

bleach originated from his hack job attempts to remove the stains from the fabric. The jacket reeked, he hadn't washed it since his botched attempt two years ago, and it stank heavily of sweat and blood and dirt and smoke. He now wore the jacket to remind him that life was fragile, and nothing ever turns out as planned.

During his time on the road, the jacket had become his namesake. Yellow Jacket, he was known as, the warrior of the road. With this name, his reputation preceded him and the land trembled before Gladys's wheels as they thundered towards it. Yellow Jacket liked the name; it reminded him of an angry wasp. It sounded badass, like he was someone to fear, quite unlike the horrible truth.

He took off the cap of the flask and took a swig, then bit off the end of the cigar and spat it to the ground. He lit the cigar with a match struck against the metal of the signpost. As he took in the first breath of smoke, he heard a siren go off a short way down the road. He could feel his ears prickling upwards at the noise but aside from this felt no further alarm. He had seen plenty of police throughout his travels, and had even had to outrun a few. He grimly recalled a time he had fled into Canada for a month while the buzz died down surrounding the death of his family among other things. He took a drag of the cigar and let the smoke out slowly. He was at ease. He now had a knack for knowing when the police were after him and none of those feelings were raising flags so he knew he was safe. He glanced at his watch. Three o'clock pm on a cloudy Tuesday, the cops had probably just caught a speeder on their way home from work.

Yellow Jacket took another swig and drag and the siren halted. No sooner than it did, rain began to pour steadily from the sky. Grumbling, Yellow Jacket put away his flask and raised his black and yellow hood above his head and turned his back to the wind and rain. He finished the cigar in three more drags and tossed the remains to the ground. Continuing to frown, Yellow Jacket climbed back on Gladys and rode back onto the road. He had been riding for about five minutes when he saw the cars in the distance.

They were stopped at the side of the opposite lane and standing outside the first was a police officer and what Yellow Jacket assumed to be the vehicle's two occupants. Two women, one tall and thin with black hair, the other short and round with brown hair.

Yellow Jacket slowed, wary of the actions of himself and the officer. He knew full well this occasion would not involve him yet he still slightly feared being caught. Yellow Jacket's fears were confirmed when suddenly without warning the officer flew back wards into the middle of the road.

Yellow Jacket slammed on his brakes immediately then looked on in shock as the cop stood to face an oncoming vehicle. To the biker's surprise, the officer stood his ground and threw his riot baton straight through the oncoming windshield where it exploded. Within seconds, the car was engulfed in flames.

Yellow Jacket panicked and attempted to swerve but Gladys refused to make so sharp a turn, as if she knew it would kill him. Instead, the bike slammed onto its side, tossing her rider off, sending Yellow Jacket sliding slowly across the pavement away from the remains of the dismantled vehicle. Yellow Jacket stopped skidding and feebly reached out to Gladys who was drawing nearer to the wreckage. Finally, Yellow Jacket could do nothing more than scream in pain and anguish as he watched Gladys gallantly smash headlong into the flames and explode with a triumphant roar into a thousand tiny pieces as her fuel tank came into contact with the fire.

Yellow Jacket brought himself to his knees, but could rise no further. He was badly scraped and bruised, his namesake torn; but the pain in his heart at the loss of his faithful companion and best friend was too much to bear. As he closed his eyes he saw only Gladys, her final roar echoed in his ears, but slowly, the images gave way to another woman. His wife, on the day she died, how she looked bathed in her own blood. The roar of Gladys became the pleading screams of his partner. He could see and hear them both

begging for their lives, for forgiveness. They had both betrayed him, and he had killed them both. *This isn't how it was supposed to be!* He thought. *We had a plan, a life, and a future, something to live for!* He opened his eyes out of fear of the past and found himself surrounded on all sides by flames. There was one other in the circle of flames with him. The officer that had started the ordeal was standing there calmly before him as if nothing odd were happening.

Yellow Jacket blinked away tears of rage and stood facing the officer. Before Yellow Jacket could say anything, the officer became engulfed in flames. His face bubbled and melted away and sloughed off in large chunks. But still the man stood still and calm. Soon the flames died down and in the officer's place was a charred skeleton of a man standing and staring at Yellow Jacket. The skeleton's jaw opened and shut as a high, cold voice issued forth from it.

"Do you wish to atone for all of your sins?" It asked, "For the murders of your wife and children, for the life that you fled from, the life you abandoned, the sins that have left stains upon your yellow jacket?"

Yellow Jacket was frozen in fear regardless of the scorching flames around him. Only one thought entered his head. *Yes, I do, more than ever.* The skeleton nodded and clasped his hands together. The surface of its bones began to bubble again and from the bones grew flesh out of the skull spouted hair and in the eye sockets, a pair of glowing red eyes formed. Before Yellow Jacket stood a different man than the one before, a thin, gaunt man, tall and greasy with a long black trench coat and great curtains of thin black hair. His eyes, though red were as cold as his high pitched voice and looking at him sent a chill down Yellow Jacket's normally brave spine.

"Who are you?" Yellow Jacket asked, he did not recognize his own voice due to the fear resonating through it.

"Call me Jasper." the man said "To atone you must obey all I say, only then will you be forgiven."

Yellow Jacket nodded, he could feel the ends of his beard beginning to be burned away. In response to his agreement, Jasper raised a finger and pointed at Yellow Jacket's chest. Flames flew from the fingertip and hit the king of roads squarely in the chest. Yellow Jacket felt warmth spread through his body and he was suddenly paralyzed. Yellow Jacket's arm moved involuntarily up and away from his body his hand clenched in a fist as if he were holding an invisible torch. Jasper smiled, his teeth were as dark as an ashtray. He leaned in close and spoke slowly so that Yellow Jacket could hear.

"Congratulations, you are now my puppet, fool. Here's what you have to do if you'd like to free yourself. There is a young girl outside these flames with black hair by the name of Amy Stone and I want you to kill her, no matter what it takes."

Yellow Jacket felt his mouth move and his vocal chords vibrate beyond his control. "Yes master" He heard himself say.

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