

Dawn's Knight

Deleted scene (unedited)

Ice

The paperwork took less time than Ice expected. Boss had arrived, ready to ensure he didn't embarrass HIS in his purchase.

Frank slid the final document across the desk and pointed to the signature line. "Last one."

Ice scanned the page out of habit, reading every line before uncapping the pen.

Frank chuckled. "You're one of those."

"I like knowing what I'm signing."

"Nothing wrong with that."

Ice added his signature and slid the paperwork back.

Frank glanced at it before nodding in satisfaction. "Congratulations."

Ice frowned. "For what?"

Frank smiled. "You just bought your first Harley."

The words landed in his chest with a weight he hadn't expected—a strange, electric thrill that buzzed in his bones. For a split second, Ice forgot about the paperwork and the assignment. This was real. His first Harley.

It was a motorcycle. A machine, yes—steel bones and rubber sinew, all muscle and attitude, its bodywork gleaming with enough chrome to catch sunlight and scatter it in a hundred directions.

So why did it feel like he'd just accepted an invitation into a secret club—one with its own language, rituals, and rules—he hadn't even known existed until forty-eight hours ago?

Frank disappeared through a side door. "I'll bring her around."

Ice watched him leave, then turned to Boss with a half-smirk. "You realize this is the strangest assignment I've ever had."

Boss leaned against the counter. "Really?"

"I've parachuted into foreign countries."

Boss nodded. "I remember."

"I've posed as an accountant."

"You complained about that one."

"Because spreadsheets shouldn't require a security clearance."

Boss laughed. "I still have the picture."

Ice groaned. "If that ever makes it into the Christmas slideshow, I'm quitting."

"Too late."

"I hate all of you."

"No, you don't."

A smile tugged at the corner of Ice's mouth. "No," he admitted. "I don't."

The overhead door rolled upward with a heavy, mechanical rumble that vibrated through the soles of Ice's boots. Morning sunlight poured in, painting stripes across the polished concrete floor and sending long shadows crawling toward the showroom windows. The July heat pressed in with a humid embrace, thick with the scents of fresh asphalt, distant saltwater drifting from the harbor, and just a whisper of exhaust from an idling bike outside.

Frank eased the black Road King through the wide opening, the motorcycle's glossy paint glistening beneath the unforgiving Maryland sky. Sunlight slid along the polished chrome, bouncing from the handlebars to the pipes, turning the whole machine into a moving sculpture. The engine's low growl echoed off the walls, rich and confident.

Even parked, the Road King looked confident. Purposeful. The black paint mirrored the sky with the sheen of polished obsidian while chrome traced razor-sharp lines along the engine and exhaust.

Frank shut off the engine and rested the bike on its kickstand. "There she is."

Ice stepped closer.

The Road King somehow looked different outside the showroom. More real. Less like a display piece. More like something waiting to be used.

Frank handed him a small leather pouch.

Inside rested two keys attached to a simple black Harley-Davidson key fob.

Ice rolled the keys across his palm.

"They always feel heavier than people expect," Frank said.

"They're just keys."

Frank smiled knowingly. "They unlock more than a motorcycle."

Boss chuckled softly. "He told me the same thing."

"And?"

Boss looked at the Road King. "Turns out he wasn't wrong."

Ice wasn't sure he believed either of them. Not yet.

Frank motioned him closer. "All right."

He rested one hand on the handlebars. "Crash course."

Ice slipped the keys into his pocket. "I'm listening."

Frank pointed toward the right handlebar. "Kill switch. The ignition. Key goes here." He demonstrated, then continued around the motorcycle. "Fuel gauge. Saddlebags. Fork lock." He crouched beside the bike. "Kickstand."

Ice nodded, mentally cataloging each item. Nothing complicated. Just unfamiliar.

Frank swung one leg over the seat with practiced ease.

"The clutch is where new riders usually get frustrated." He eased the lever inward. "There's a sweet spot. The friction zone. When you find it..." He smiled. "...the motorcycle starts talking to you."

Ice looked at Boss. "Does everyone turn motorcycles into living creatures?"

Boss folded his arms. "Only the smart ones."

Frank laughed. "You'll understand."

"I'm beginning to think that's everyone's favorite phrase."

"It is." Frank stepped off the motorcycle. "I could spend three hours explaining everything. But I'd rather spend thirty minutes letting you feel it."

Ice nodded.

Boss pushed away from the counter. "I'll take it from here."

Frank nodded once. "I figured." He extended his hand again. "It was good meeting you, Nate."

"You too."

Frank held on for a moment. "One piece of advice."

Ice waited.

"Don't try to ride like you've been doing it for years."

"I won't."

“Good.” Frank smiled. “Ride like you started today.”

Boss nodded at Frank as he departed, then turned to Ice with a sly grin. “You nervous?”

Ice considered lying. Instead... “A little.”

Boss nodded as if that were exactly the answer he’d expected. “You should be.” His grin said he was enjoying every second of this.

Ice looked over. “That doesn’t inspire confidence.”

“It isn’t supposed to.” Boss rested a hand on the fuel tank. “This motorcycle weighs over eight hundred pounds.”

Ice stared. “It doesn’t look that heavy.”

“It is.” Boss smiled. “The good news?”

“There is good news?”

“The weight disappears once it’s moving.”

Ice swallowed hard, hoping Boss was right and that the laws of physics—and beginner’s luck—were on his side.

Because right now, all eight hundred pounds felt like they were daring him to screw up in front of everyone. No pressure.

Boss reached into his saddlebag and pulled out two compact communication units.

“Helmet.”

Ice retrieved the glossy black helmet from a dealership bag.

A few moments later, he clipped the chin strap into place.

Boss installed the communicator against the side of the helmet before doing the same to his own. He tapped his helmet. “You hear me?”

Ice’s earpiece crackled. “Lima Charlie.” *Loud and clear.*

“Good.”

Boss swung effortlessly onto his own motorcycle, the movement so fluid it looked instinctive.

Ice watched him for a second, heart pounding. Then he looked at the Road King—the beast he was about to try and tame. This was happening. No more practice. No more pretending.

He took a slow breath. Gripped the handlebars. And threw one leg over the seat.

The motorcycle settled beneath him with reassuring heft. Heavy. Solid. Balanced. The grips felt cool beneath his gloves, the leather seat firm without being stiff.

Boss's voice came through the headset. "Comfortable?"

Ice adjusted his grip. "I think so."

"Good." Boss started his engine. The familiar rumble echoed across the lot.

Ice looked down at the key in his hand. Mission or not... This was the moment everything changed.

He slipped the key into the ignition and turned it. The Road King responded with a deep, unmistakable rumble—a living pulse that vibrated through the frame, up his arms, and into the very center of his chest. The sound was thunder and promise, the vibration a jolt of adrenaline that made his heart race. He could feel the engine's idle, a steady throb beneath his thighs, alive and eager.

A grin broke across his face before he could stop it—part joy, part disbelief, all adrenaline.

Boss laughed through the headset. "There it is."

"What?"

"The first smile."

Ice looked down at the motorcycle beneath him.

For the first time since accepting the assignment, he wasn't thinking about Dawn, ATF, or undercover work.

His thoughts stretched out as the open road shimmered beyond the parking lot, sunlight dancing on the distant blacktop. He wondered where it might take him—how far he could go, how fast, and what kind of man he'd be when he finally rolled to a stop.

He had a feeling the answer wasn't on any map.

The empty parking lot behind Harbor Harley-Davidson stretched nearly the length of a football field, its faded asphalt broken only by a handful of painted parking lines and a row of weathered orange traffic cones stacked near the chain-link fence. Beyond them, pine trees swayed lazily in the warm July breeze while cicadas buzzed somewhere overhead.

It was quiet.

Far enough from the dealership that no one would wander back here by accident.

Boss rolled to a stop near the center of the lot and killed his engine.

Ice followed, bringing the Road King to an awkward stop several yards away. His boots hit the asphalt with a satisfying thud, but his heartbeat hadn't gotten the memo. It still pounded hard enough to drown out the cicadas.

Boss removed his helmet and hung it on the left handlebar. "Not bad."

"I haven't done anything yet."

"You got here without dropping eight hundred pounds of motorcycle."

"I was riding ten miles an hour."

Boss grinned. "Exactly."

Ice shut off the engine and climbed off carefully, suddenly hyperaware of every pound the Harley carried. The weight shifted. Instinct took over. His arms tightened. The motorcycle leaned just enough to convince him disaster was seconds away. Then it stopped. Balanced. Perfectly still.

Ice released the breath he'd been holding.

Boss pretended not to notice. "First lesson."

Ice looked up.

"The motorcycle wants to stay upright."

Ice raised an eyebrow. "It didn't feel that way."

"Because you fought it."

"I was trying not to drop it."

"Same thing." Boss walked around the Road King, resting one hand lightly on the seat. "Everybody's first instinct is to muscle the bike around."

"I assume that's wrong."

Boss smiled. "If muscle solved everything, gorillas would ride Harleys."

Ice barked a laugh, feeling the tension break. "I'll write that down—and maybe get it tattooed if I survive today."

"You should." Boss stepped back. "You're stronger than this motorcycle."

Ice looked at him skeptically. "It weighs over eight hundred pounds."

"It does."

"So your math isn't adding up."

"Because you're thinking about lifting it."

Boss tapped the fuel tank with two fingers. "You aren't lifting it." He gently rocked the motorcycle from side to side. "You're balancing it."

Ice watched the movement.

The Road King rolled effortlessly beneath Boss's hand. Almost graceful. "I make that look easier than it is."

"A little."

"That's because I've done it for twenty years."

Ice nodded slowly. "Fair."

Boss motioned toward him. "Your turn."

Ice wrapped both hands around the grips again.

"Stand beside it."

He did.

"Now walk."

"Without riding?"

Boss nodded. "Without riding."

Ice pushed the motorcycle forward. The Road King immediately drifted left. Whether it was the motorcycle or his own inexperience, he couldn't tell. He overcorrected, and now it wandered right, handlebars twitching beneath his grip. He gritted his teeth and focused, determined not to let an inanimate object win the first round.

Boss remained silent.

Ice tried again. Smaller correction. Better. The Road King rolled another twenty feet.

"Eyes up."

Ice glanced down at the front tire.

Boss shook his head. "Not there."

"I was checking where I was going."

"No." Boss pointed toward the opposite end of the lot.

"Look where you want to go."

Ice lifted his eyes. Almost immediately, the motorcycle straightened. He frowned.

"I didn't do anything."

"You did."

"What?"

“You stopped chasing the front wheel.”

Ice looked back at Boss. “That actually worked.”

“It always works.” He smiled. “The motorcycle goes where your eyes go.”

Ice made another pass. This time, he kept his gaze fixed on the far fence, resisting every urge to check the front tire. The Harley tracked in a nearly perfect line, gliding across the sun-warmed asphalt. “Huh.”

Boss folded his arms. “Huh?”

“I expected this to be harder.”

“It will be.”

Ice stopped beside him. “I was feeling good for a second.”

“You should.” Boss picked up his helmet. “But right now you’re pushing.” He tapped the starter on his own motorcycle. “Soon you’ll be riding.” The engine rumbled to life beneath him.

Ice slipped his helmet back on and fastened the strap beneath his chin.

Boss’s voice crackled through the communicator. “Ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

“Good answer.”

Ice thumbed the starter. The Road King answered with its now-familiar rumble. It still vibrated through his chest. Still made him grin.

Boss noticed. “I see that smile again.”

“It’s involuntary.”

“That’s how it starts.”

Ice rolled his eyes inside the helmet. “I’m beginning to think everyone at this dealership is in on some conspiracy.”

Boss laughed. “Not everyone.”

“Just you and Frank?”

“And every rider you’ve met today.”

Ice eased in the clutch. The lever felt less foreign than it had fifteen minutes ago.

Boss’s voice remained calm. “Click it into first.”

The transmission clunked. “Ease the clutch out.”

Ice did—too quickly. The motorcycle lurched forward like a startled horse, his heart leaping into his throat as he instinctively squeezed the lever again. Miraculously, the engine didn't stall. It just grumbled in protest and settled back to idle, as if giving him a second chance.

Boss nodded. "Better."

"I almost launched myself into Baltimore."

"No." Boss chuckled. "You almost scared yourself."

"I definitely scared myself."

"That's normal."

Ice tried again. This time he released the clutch more slowly. He felt it. Not heard. Not seen. Felt.

Somewhere beneath him, the motorcycle seemed to wake. The Road King crept forward under its own power. Walking speed. Nothing more.

Boss rode beside him, matching the pace effortlessly. "Don't add throttle yet."

"I'm not."

"I know."

"How?"

"I can hear it."

Ice looked ahead. The parking lot suddenly seemed much smaller than before. Every tiny handlebar movement felt amplified. Every bump in the pavement traveled through the suspension into his hands. His shoulders tightened again.

"Relax."

"I'm trying."

"No." Boss's voice carried the same patient confidence he'd used during firearms training years earlier. "Actually relax."

Ice forced himself to exhale. His elbows loosened, his grip softened. Instantly, the Harley quit wandering—it rolled straight, balanced, suddenly easy. For the first time, he felt like he *belonged* in the saddle. "What just happened?"

"You stopped trying to control every inch."

"I thought that was the point."

Boss shook his head. "The point is to let the motorcycle do what it was built to do."

Ice rolled another thirty yards before squeezing the clutch and gently applying both brakes. The Harley came to a smooth, satisfying stop. No wobble, no panic—just the quiet triumph of a rookie who’d survived his first real ride.

He blinked. “I did that.”

Boss smiled. “You did.”

Ice looked down at the motorcycle. For the first time, he wasn’t thinking about how heavy it was. He was thinking about doing it again.

Boss glanced at him, then casually reached into his riding jacket pocket. He unlocked his phone with one gloved thumb and typed a quick message. He hit send, slipped the phone away, and looked up as if nothing had happened.

Ice raised his brows.

Boss shrugged. “Letting Sugar know I’d be late.” Then, he went back to business. “All right,” he said through the headset. “Let’s see if you can do it twice.”

Ice smiled.

“Now you’re just showing off.”

Boss’s grin widened. “I haven’t even started.”

The second run felt better. Not effortless. Not even smooth. But better.

Ice eased the clutch into the friction zone, let the Road King roll forward, and concentrated on everything Boss had said. Eyes up. Relax. Let the motorcycle do the work.

This time he made it nearly halfway across the lot before realizing he wasn’t obsessing over every twitch of the handlebars or every bump in the pavement. For a few glorious seconds, he was just moving—rider and machine, together.

The motorcycle simply...moved.

He slowed near the far end, made an awkward but controlled turn, and headed back.

Boss waited with both boots planted on the pavement.

“See?”

Ice stopped beside him. “I think it likes me.”

Boss nodded solemnly. “She’s deciding.”

Ice sighed. “There it is again.”

“What?”

““She.””

Boss looked genuinely confused. “Well, yeah.”

“It’s a motorcycle.”

“It is.”

“So why is it a she?”

Boss considered the question as though he’d never been asked. “I’ve owned trucks.”

“So have I.”

“I’ve owned boats.”

“I haven’t.”

“I’ve owned motorcycles.” Boss rested a hand on the Road King’s tank. “The truck gets you somewhere.” He patted the tank. “The motorcycle goes with you.”

Ice stared at him for a long moment. “That somehow makes sense.”

“It’ll make even more sense after your first long ride.”

Before Ice could answer, an SUV’s low growl echoed across the parking lot. A familiar black H1S Tahoe rounded the corner and rolled toward them.

Ice looked at Boss. “You invited somebody.”

Boss’s grin gave him away. “I figured you could use an audience.”

The Tahoe stopped a few yards away. Justin climbed out of the driver’s seat while Grits stepped from the passenger side, each carrying a cup of coffee.

Justin looked from Ice...to the Road King...then back again. “We leave you alone for one morning...and suddenly you’re buying motorcycles.”

Ice folded his arms. “I feel ambushed.”

“You are.”

Grits held up his coffee. “We came to observe.”

Justin nodded. “And to see whether Boss was exaggerating.”

Boss looked offended. “I never exaggerate.”

All three men looked at him.

Boss shrugged. “Much.”

Justin walked a slow circle around the Harley. “I’ve got to admit...” He nodded toward the Road King. “...that’s a good-looking bike.”

“I had help.”

“Boss has good taste.”

Boss gave a satisfied nod. "I do."

Grits stopped beside Ice. "So..." He glanced at the motorcycle.

"How many times have you dropped it?"

"I haven't."

Boss answered before Ice could say anything else. "He almost did."

Ice shot him a look. "I thought we agreed to leave that out."

"We never agreed."

Justin laughed. "That's the Boss I know."

Ice looked from one team leader to the other. "So this is why you're here."

Justin grinned. "Absolutely."

Grits took a sip of his coffee. "If it makes you feel any better, none of us knew anything the first time we picked up a rifle."

Justin nodded. "Or jumped out of an airplane."

Boss added, "Or worked undercover."

Ice looked at them. "So motorcycles are my equalizer."

"Pretty much," Justin said.

"For once," Grits added, "you're the rookie."

Ice couldn't argue with that.

Boss slapped the Road King's seat. "Enough socializing."

He pointed toward the open stretch of asphalt. "Ride."

Justin stepped back and crossed his arms. "We promise not to laugh."

Boss looked at him. "I don't."

Justin smiled. "I didn't promise I'd keep my promise."

Ice shook his head, pulling the clutch with exaggerated patience. "I work with children. Overgrown, loud, caffeine-addled children."

"No," Justin called after him.

"You work with professionals."

Ice smirked. "Professional children."

Even Boss laughed. Then he stepped back and folded his arms. "Ride."

Ice nodded once, pulled the clutch in, and eased the Road King into motion. This time, the Harley surged forward with a quiet confidence, the engine's low growl echoing across the empty lot. Each foot he covered felt less like a test and more like freedom.

Halfway across the lot, it hit him: he wasn't thinking about the clutch anymore, or worrying the bike might tip and dump him in front of everyone. He was just—riding, the wind sneaking under his collar, the world shrinking to the hum of the engine and the stretch of sunlit pavement ahead.

Boss

Justin watched him make the slow circuit around the parking lot. "He's loosening up."

Boss nodded. "I told you he would."

"He listens," Grits said.

"That's half the battle." Boss never took his eyes off Ice. "He doesn't let his ego get in the way."

Justin smiled. "That's the other half."

Ice reached the far end of the lot, turned carefully, and headed back.

The turn wasn't perfect, but it was smooth—almost easy. The awkward lurch was gone; in its place, the Harley swept around in a steady arc, tires gripping the asphalt with a promise of stability.

Grits nodded almost to himself. "He's got good instincts."

Boss smiled. "I know."

Ice

The engine's steady pulse thrummed through the handlebars as he completed another lap, each vibration a quiet celebration. The bike felt alive beneath him, as if it finally trusted him to lead.

This time, the Road King felt...lighter. Not because its weight had changed, but because Ice had stopped fighting it. For the first time, they moved together—man and machine, instincts syncing with the beat of the road.

He rolled to a halt in front of the three men—a clean stop, no wobble, no frantic scramble for balance. Just a moment of perfect stillness, the Harley purring beneath him, the sun warming his shoulders.

Justin gave a single approving nod. “Again.”

Ice grinned inside his helmet. No lecture. No congratulations. Just one word—simple, direct, and somehow more satisfying than a standing ovation.

He liked that.

He eased out of the clutch and let the Road King carry him across the parking lot again, each lap unwinding the last knots of doubt from his chest.

When he rolled to a stop beside the others, the silence felt loaded—like everyone was waiting to see if he’d punch the air or topple over. Even the birds seemed to hush, as if the moment mattered.

Boss studied him for a long moment before nodding once. “Good.”

Justin shot Grits a crooked grin. “He’s not going to get much better doing circles in a parking lot. Time to see if he survives street traffic.”

“Nope,” Grits agreed. “Time to let the real world have a crack at him.”

Ice shut off the engine and lifted his visor, shooting the group a mock glare. “That supposed to inspire confidence, or are you just trying to scare me?”

Justin smirked. “Depends.”

“On what?”

“Whether you survive the first stoplight.”

Boss snorted. “He’ll survive.”

Ice looked between the three men, eyebrows up. “That sounded a lot less reassuring than you probably intended. Next you’ll tell me the road’s full of circus animals and potholes the size of hot tubs.”

“It wasn’t intended to be reassuring,” Boss said. He swung a leg over his motorcycle and settled into the saddle. “Everything you’ve done so far has been controlled. Flat pavement. No traffic. No surprises.”

Ice nodded.

“Out there,” Boss continued, gesturing toward the road beyond the dealership, “you’ll meet all three.”

A sly grin tugged at the corner of Ice's mouth. "So...this is graduation? Or just a pop quiz—with moving obstacles, honking spectators, and absolutely no do-overs?"

Boss shook his head. "No." He thumbed the starter, the Harley's deep rumble filling the lot once more. "Orientation."

Justin laughed. "I suddenly don't envy you."

"You should," Boss replied. "Everybody remembers their first real ride." He looked at Ice. "You ready?"

Ice glanced down at the Road King, then toward the dealership entrance and finally the road beyond the fence.

An hour ago, the idea had tied his stomach in knots.

Now...

It felt less like standing at the edge of a cliff and more like stepping onto the stage at a sold-out show—heart pounding, anticipation tingling in his fingertips, the world holding its breath to see if he'd nail the performance or wipe out in spectacular fashion.

He lowered his visor. "As I'll ever be."