

The three **Laws of Motion** were compiled by Isaac Newton in 1687. He used them to explain and investigate the motion of many physical objects and systems. Together, they describe the relationship between a body and the forces acting upon it, and its motion in response to said forces.

~oOo~

13.

But if they stay away and leave me at my leisure,
I lie there in displeasure,
With lifeless books I soon grow bored,
Till mournfully I think of the battles fierce and strong then,
And furtively for Elsa and Greta I do long then,
For them and all their Vandal horde.

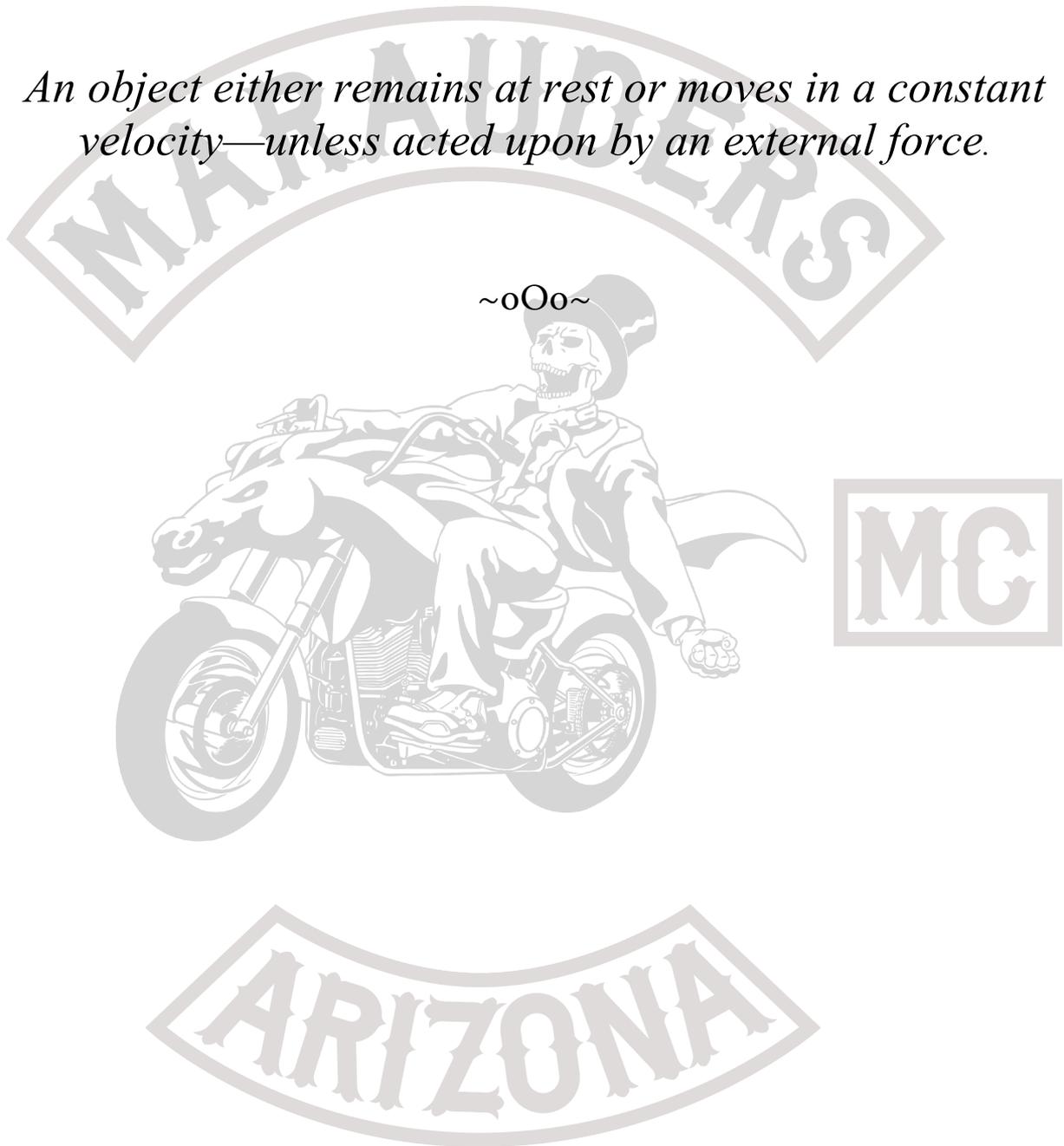
“Marauders” - Gustaf Fröding

ARIZONA

~oOo~

First Law of Motion:

An object either remains at rest or moves in a constant velocity—unless acted upon by an external force.



CHAPTER ONE

Are You Daniel Padilla?

~oOo~

It was a librarian who had made Wrench love books, and she'd done it by giving him books with the perfect first sentence.

He'd been at the library because he didn't want to go 'home' to whatever foster family he was living with at the time. He didn't even remember which family it was, but they'd been assholes, so he'd been hiding out at the library. The librarian, her name was Mary, had sat down next to him after he'd been at the library for seven days straight without even looking at a book.

"I normally give book at least one sentence before I discard them, but you don't even open them."

"One sentence?" he'd asked. "You saying that if you show me a book and I don't like the first sentence, you'll leave me alone?"

Wrench was thirteen or fourteen at the time, and he had yet to read a book. He didn't care about books; he hadn't while his mother was alive and he had a real home and sort of a family, so why should he care when things were as shit as they were at the time? Mary wasn't the first woman who'd tried to get to know him, get close, and make him tell her his problems. He didn't want that; he just wanted to be left alone.

"Yes," she'd answered his question.

"And if I don't like it?"

"Then I'll leave you alone the rest of the day, as long as you give me a new chance tomorrow."

He'd figured he'd tell her he wasn't interested, and she'd leave him alone the rest of the day. Then he could just keep doing that every day. It didn't seem like a lot of work, so he'd given her the go-

ahead. She'd handed him *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow, and he'd finished it six days later. Back then he wasn't a fast reader. The next book she gave him was *The Catcher in the Rye*. He'd been a bit bummed out, since he figured that a book his stupid teachers had been trying to get him to read for years had to be shit. They'd given it to him, but it wasn't until that day in the library that he'd even bothered to open the book and read the first sentence. It had taken him three days to finish it. Around the fourth book she gave him, he wasn't that bothered about the first sentence in the book anymore. He'd known that it would be good no matter what.

But ever since that first book he read from cover to cover, he always took extra notice of the first sentence in a book. *Little Brother* was still one of his favorites. So was *Leviathan* by Paul Auster, *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, and *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky—his all-time favorite book. It wasn't until years later he realized that Mary had tricked him to reading a lot of the big classics, carefully mixed with some modern classics and 'cool' books. But by then he wasn't all that bothered with what kind of book he was reading, and it wasn't as if anyone but Mary knew he was reading them anyway. To Wrench, reading and what people liked to read, was a private matter. What books you liked or disliked said a lot about you, and Wrench generally didn't want people to know much about him, so Mary was the only one he'd ever discussed books with.

He'd left that foster family two months after he'd met Mary the first time, but he'd kept going to that library even if he happened to live on the other side of town. In the middle of the chaos of foster families and the social service's fuck-ups, Mary and her books had been the only constant in his life. He'd read every single book she gave him, and after a year or two he'd finished the once he didn't like, too. Mostly because he wanted to know why she liked them.

She'd been the only person he'd talked to, and was the only person who'd he'd ever told everything—every nasty detail. She'd never asked any questions, she'd never made any assumptions, but she'd been able to read between the lines of what he said.

When he was around seventeen, Mary had told him she'd

discovered a lump in her chest. She lasted for six months, the last two of them at a hospice, and he'd been to visit her almost every day. She'd smiled at him when he came, and introduced him to the nurses and the family as her 'Little Gentleman Bastard.'

That was another book she'd given him. *The Lies of Locke Lamora*. It had a decent first sentence, but the title was perfection, according to Wench. What or who is 'Locke Lamora'? It sounded good—cool even—and the name of the series was even better: *The Gentleman Bastard Sequence*. He'd loved that, and he so wanted to be something that could be considered a gentleman bastard.

He'd read to her whenever they were alone in her room, and the last book he read to her was *Wuthering Heights*, one of her favorites. Wrench had thought it was a book about assholes being assholes to each other, an opinion that hadn't changed even when he'd tried to reread it as an adult. He was still glad it was one of the last books she'd heard.

He'd cried more at her funeral than his own mom's.

~oOo~

As a grownup, Wrench had decided that being a bastard was at least half-way to being a gentleman bastard, and he was pretty okay with that. He wasn't sure he'd ever met a gentleman bastard, but figured Brick was as close as he'd ever get, and he was proud to be under his command. Even if it sometimes meant hours and hours on a bike and way too little sleep. It meant he'd been able to afford a house, albeit not a big one, but still: He owned a fucking house. No one would've ever thought that about him when he was fifteen and considered a hopeless case by everyone but Mary.

Wrench was insanely tired when he got off the bike underneath the carport. He was pleased with his house in general. Or bungalow. According to Mel, Brick's old lady, the house he was owned was a bungalow, but he really didn't give a shit either way. He'd gotten it just after patching into the Marauders, simply since he wanted a place of his own, and when Mel had heard that he was looking,

she'd suggested the small green (fern green, again according to Mel. Wrench just called it green). He'd taken in immediately. It was pretty fucking tiny. The bottom floor had a small kitchen, an equally small guestroom, and an adequate living room. The bathroom wasn't really adequate, but it had a shitter and a shower, so it worked. He did like his bedroom, though. It was an attic rebuilt to a bedroom that stretched the full length of the house. It got hot as fuck up there, but one of the first things he'd done was to install the best AC money could buy. He hadn't really done much with the room, but he had his books, computer and a bed with a metal frame he'd found at a yard sale. It wasn't more than a double, but then he never took any bitches home with him anyway. This was his place.

The studio apartment he'd had before probably would've been enough, and he still crashed at the clubhouse more often than not, but he liked to go home and decompress; a place that was all his, and it had turned into a house for just guys pretty fucking soon.

The main reason he liked it was that it had a nice front porch and a big back yard. As the only single in the club with a house, or what could at least pass as a house, most of the other singles liked to come over for beer and some barbecue. Even the locked down guys liked to come over for that very reason. There were no bitches or kids at his place, and their Old Ladies knew that, too. Not that he thought any of the club's Old Ladies were all that worried about the sweetbutts, but more that they knew that Wrench's place was a place where they just chilled the fuck out, had a beer, grilled some steaks, and possibly worked on their bikes simultaneously as the first two.

There wouldn't be any fucking barbecue that night, though. They'd gotten back from a run late the night before, and somehow, he, Sisco, and Bull had started drinking and ended up at the Booty Bank, the club's strip joint, where they picked up a few women and continued to party at the clubhouse once the BB closed. Wrench had still worked his full shift and had gone to Brick's for dinner afterwards, but now he just wanted to crawl under his cover and pass out for the coming twenty-four hours or so.

As he turned around the corner from the carport, he noticed

someone sitting on the front porch. Normally, that would've led him to pulling his gun, but he quickly realized it was a kid.

"Hey!" he said as he lit a smoke. "This isn't your house. Go home!"

The kid, a girl, didn't react much, but she raised her eyes from her shoes and looked at him.

"Are you Daniel Padilla?" she whispered.

"Do I know you?"

He fished his keys out of his pocket and took a closer look. He didn't recognize her at all, but then most of the kids he met were club kids, and this wasn't one of them. He rarely took much notice of the kids that were constantly playing outside on the street, unless he was about to hit them while driving.

"Are you Daniel Padilla?" she repeated.

If he had to guess, he'd say she was around six. She had long brown hair and blue eyes, and he was sure he'd never seen her before.

"Yeah. Again, do I know you?"

"Mommy told me to give you this."

She handed him an envelope, and he took it with a sigh. This better not be some stupid bitch he'd fucked trying to say the kid was his. Despite her blue eyes being very similar to his, he knew he suited up—always. He tore the envelope open with his teeth, still holding on to the keys and the smoke with his other hand, and pulled out the paper. After a quick look at the kid, who was back to staring at her shoes, he read the note.

This is your niece Blanca. Please look after her. I can't.

Julia

He stared at the kid again, and she seemed to be afraid to look at him. She was his niece, and he wondered if she knew what the note said; he hoped she didn't. His idiot fucking sister had dropped a kid on his porch. *His* porch. As if he knew *shit* about kids. Not even mentioning he could've been on a run. Actually, when he thought about it, he hadn't been home for days, and he had no idea how long

she'd been sitting there waiting for him.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since around lunch. I think."

"What did your mom say?" he asked, trying not to explode and scare her even worse. She whispered something, but he couldn't tell what. "Speak up."

"She told me to wait for you here and give you the letter."

Letter was a bit much to call three of the shortest sentences he'd ever seen put together, but he didn't say that.

"Did she say when she was coming back?"

"No." She cleared her throat and for the first time lifted her chin to look directly at him. "Could I have some water, please?"

Lunch. She'd been there since lunch, in the blazing Arizona June sun. It was a wonder she hadn't passed out.

"Sure," he said and opened the door. "Come on."

He followed her inside, pointed towards the kitchen, and dropped his saddlebags next to the fridge. He opened it, took a bottle of water, and handed it to her. He stared at her as she was drinking and had no fucking idea what to do, simply since he didn't know shit about kids. With another sigh, he pulled the burner from his back pocket and dialed the first number he could think of.

"*What?*" Sisco growled when he picked up.

"Remember that I have a sister?"

"*Yeah. What about her?*"

"She dumped her kid on my porch today."

"*A kid? How old?*"

"How old are you?" he asked Blanca.

"I'm seven."

"She's seven." There was a silence at the other end, so he continued. "What should I do?"

"*Fucking retard,*" Sisco muttered. "*We have like seven members with kids in the club, and you call me.*"

He had to agree that it had been pretty retarded of him to call Sisco.

"I'll call Dawg."

"*Do that,*" Sisco said and hung up on him.

“Give me a second,” he said to Blanca while he dialed Dawg’s number.

“*This better be so fucking important!*” Dawg roared when he answered. “*We’re mid-fuck!*”

“My sister left her kid on my porch today,” he hurried to say.

“*Are you shitting me?*”

“No. Her name is Blanca, she’s seven years old, and I’m looking at her right now.”

“*I’m on my way.*” That was all Dawg said before he hung up.

Wrench sat down opposite the kid at the table and rested his head on his arms. Fucking Julia! Fuck her for so many reasons, and leaving a kid on his porch was really just the last in long line of reasons for her to deserve to be fucked violently with a trident.

“I’m sorry,” Blanca whispered, and he looked at her.

“It’s not your fault. I just don’t know shit about kids. I’m not really sure what to do.”

“Well,” she started and then cleared her throat. “I’m a little hungry.”

“Oh. Yeah. Of course you are.” He stood up and looked around. “I think I have pop tarts. Is that okay?”

She nodded.

“Strawberry or cherry?” he asked after checking what he had.

“Strawberry, please.”

Obviously she was very well mannered, which he had to admit surprised him, since she was his sister’s kid. He couldn’t imagine Julia being a very good mom, and given that her kid was in *his* kitchen, that was a pretty fair assessment.

He toasted her pop tarts in silence, and she didn’t say anything either. When she started to eat, he realized that she should probably have something but water to drink, and he poured her some milk he hoped hadn’t expired yet. She mumbled a, “Thank you,” but that was the only thing she said while eating. After having shoved the first two pop tarts into her mouth, he made her two more without asking.

Five minutes later, he heard a bike outside and went to open the door. Dawg was walking towards him, and behind him were April

and Mel, getting out of Brick's truck.

"I called them," Dawg explained with a nod towards the women. "Mel's good with kids, and I figured it might be good with a nurse. In case she's hurt, or something."

Wrench only nodded while concluding to himself that he'd obviously called the right person. He pointed over the shoulder inside the house.

"She's in the kitchen."

"Honestly, Wrench, you need to do something about this place," Mel said when she walked through the fairly empty living room and into the kitchen. "Especially if you're going to have a kid living here."

"I'm *not* going to have a kid living here," he mumbled, and he hoped it was true, but he had to admit to himself that it looked like he was, in fact, going to have a kid living there for a while. She just had to deal with the way his place looked like though.

Blanca stopped chewing when the two women and Dawg walked into the kitchen. She kept staring at Dawg with wide eyes, and Wrench realized he might look a bit scary with his tattoo-covered body.

"These are friends of mine," he said, but had no idea how to continue.

Mel crouched down next to the chair. "My name is Melanie. And like your uncle said I'm a friend of his. What's your name?"

"Blanca Mann," she whispered and put what was left of her fourth pop tart on the table and rubbed her hands against her thighs. After a quick glance at Mel, she turned her eyes to Wrench again.

"And this is April," Melanie continued, this time without any notice from Blanca, who were still looking at Wrench. When he nodded, she finally turned towards April. "She's a nurse. And that scary looking guy, who's really nice, is Scott, but we call him Dawg. We're just here to make sure you're okay because your uncle doesn't know much about little girls. Okay?"

"Okay." Blanca's lower lip started to tremble.

"Do you have a spare bed in your guest room?" April said in a low voice behind him.

“Yeah. The bedroom to the left in the hallway.”

April walked up to Blanca. “How about you come with me and Melanie, and we’ll get you a bed, maybe talk a little if you want?”

For some reason Wrench didn’t understand, Blanca once again looked at him as if to ask if it was okay, and he nodded again.

“Do you have anything but pop-tarts?” Mel asked him.

“Beer.”

“Dawg, go and buy things for a proper breakfast,” she said.

He nodded and left, and all of a sudden Wrench was alone. He grabbed a beer and went out to sit on his back porch. He couldn’t fucking believe it. What the hell had possessed Julia to think it was a good idea to leave her kid with someone the girl had never even met?

Julia was six years older than him. She’d started with drugs before he even became a teenager. The last thing he’d heard, which was about nine years earlier, she was living on the streets in Dallas. They’d never been close, and once he got older he’d realized she probably had some serious psychological problems. Their dad had gone for the famous pack of cigarettes when Wrench was five, but their mom had done her best. She’d worked hard just to be able to put food on their table, so she was gone a lot. When Julia had started to go off track, she’d done what she could, but Wrench honestly didn’t think anything could reel Julia in when she had one of her episodes. Their mom had sure tried until she died, which happened just before Wrench turned thirteen.

The next day Julia was gone, and the social service had picked up Wrench. He’d spent the next five years in the system, and he hadn’t heard from Julia even once. She didn’t show up until he was around twenty, and the only reason she’d bothered was that she wanted money. The following years, she’d popped up now and then, until he made it really fucking clear that since she never gave a fuck about him, he didn’t give a fuck about her. He’d never given her money, because he’d realized he wasn’t helping her that way, and in all honestly, he had no fucking interest in helping her, either.

This, leaving her kid on his porch, was a new low, though. It was actually low on a level he’d never even heard of. Dropping off your

seven-year-old kid on the porch belonging to a man she didn't even know, and Julia didn't now shit about him either. He could be a fucking molester for all she knew. To top it off, the only explanation she'd managed to produce was a three-sentence note.

Dawg arrived and left the food in the kitchen. He sat down for about fifteen minutes, but was probably eager to go home and continue to fuck his old lady, so he left.

April came out about half an hour later and sat down next to him. She was Bear's, the vice president's, old lady. He didn't know her that well, since she wasn't much at the club, but she seemed nice.

"She's scared, probably dehydrated from sitting outside in the sun all day and has some bruises, but I'd say she's as fine as can be expected."

"Bruises?"

"Normal bruises from kids playing as far as I can tell." April studied him for a while. "Did you see this coming?"

"I didn't even know she had a kid. I haven't talked to her for years."

"What did she say?" April asked, and he took the letter from his pocket and gave it to April. She shook her head after reading the three sentences. "That's it?"

"That's it."

"Well," she sighed when she handed the letter back to him. "Blanca seems to like Mel, so she's staying here with her for the night."

"Maybe it's better if she's at Mel's house?" he tried.

"We suggested that, but she wants to stay here so her mom can find her."

Wrench laughed dryly. "Really?"

"Kids have a tendency to love their parents even when they don't deserve it."

He assumed she was right, "Thanks, April."

"No problem at all. Call me again if she seems to need it."

He nodded and watched April leave in Brick's truck. He wasn't sure if Brick would like that, but it wasn't his problem. His problem

was the seven-year-old girl in his guestroom and a sister he most likely wouldn't be able to find until she wanted to find.

