

The Pastor's
Wife Wears
BIKER BOOTS!



Karla Akins

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Dedication

For the pastor's wife who dares to be herself as she serves others with her life. God has not forgotten you (Hebrews 6:10)!

Praise for The Pastor's Wife Wear's Biker Boots

Karla Akins is a master of humor! You'll definitely find yourself laughing out loud at every twist and turn (especially when you see a bit of yourself in the characters)! ~Cheryl Martin, author of *The Hawaiian Island Detective Club* series

"Put on your helmet and strap on your boots, because Akins' delightful novel *The Pastor's Wife Wears Biker Boots* delivers a quirky look at what happens when a small community's pastor's wife decides to take life by the proverbial handles. *Biker Boots* is a story about life and love, laced with a humorous charm that will ride with a reader for years to come." ~Jessica Nelson, author of *Love On The Range*

"I love a story that's not only interest-grabbing, but loaded with both sage wisdom and sparkling wit. Karla Akins delivers a perfect three-way combo in *Biker Boots*. This is charming, laugh-out-loud Christian fiction at its very finest." ~Camille Eide, author of *Savanna's Gift*, *A Romantic Christmas Novella*, White Rose Publishing

"Strap on your helmet, you're in for a DELIGHTFUL ride with *Biker Boots*. While you're at it, grab a box of tissues—for crying and for laughing out loud until you cry." ~Susan F. Craft, author of *The Chamomile*, an inspirational Revolutionary War romantic suspense and winner of the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance Okra Pick

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Most of all, I thank my savior, Jesus Christ, for His grace and mercy and inspiration that endures forever. He is more than wonderful

1

The women of Eel Falls First Independent Christian Community Church Ladies Fellowship are a strong-willed, opinionated bunch.

And I'm their fearless leader.

OK, fine.

I'm afraid of them.

"Ladies, ladies." I clapped my hands and spoke in my sweetest let's-get-moving voice. "We have events to discuss, and I need your attention."

Another smile and a rap on the table.

Invisible me.

And then?

Holy. Terror.

Women screamed, my mouth flew open, and Dorothea clasped her heart. Goliath and Timmy came barreling through the church basement door covered head-to-toe in mud, rejoicing in foul-smelling, slimy delight. All I could see were Timmy's white teeth and the rims of his eyes. Goliath barked and danced around Timmy like an organ grinder's monkey.

A really big one with bad breath.

I whispered a prayer for God to deliver me from the dog that so easily entangled Maude's new Vera Bradley handbag.

I slammed my eyes shut, but Goliath's bark snapped me back to reality. I threw my hands over my eyes and peeked through my fingers as the giant

mastiff braced himself to shake off the pond scum.

Dread gurgled from deep inside me until it erupted like Mt. Vesuvius. "Nooooo!"

Like a slow-motion horror film, Goliath shook every inch of his 213-pound extra-wrinkly-skinned self. When he finished, the ladies at the table's end were smothered in muck and drool.

"Pond!" Timmy smiled with pride and pointed out the door and down the street to the pond in front of our house. "Pond!"

"Help," I mouthed.

I looked at my good friends, Lily and Opal, and made a silent plea for rescue.

They both nodded and grabbed Timmy as I dashed toward Goliath who had Bernice pinned to the floor, licking her like a Popsicle. His head was twice the size of hers, and he ignored her screaming and the violent kicks of her size-ten feet. She swung at him with her handbag, and he responded as if it were a fabulous game of tag, woofing and slurping with fervent delight. If the cantankerous matriarch hadn't used an entire can of hairspray, he would have inhaled every curl atop her freshly-styled head.

Bernice might not have been able to see through glasses covered in muck, but she could scream. "Norman! Help! I'm being attacked by a mad dog!" And she bellowed something about the immediate return of Christ and the rapture of the dead.

Everyone else yelled at Bernice to shut up.

Finally, Lily caught Goliath and took Timmy and the monster dog home. I helped Bernice crawl out from underneath the table and tried to clean the sludge from her floral-patterned blouse. She spun in a circle and slapped my hand away.

"I never..." Bernice's eyes blazed with fury.

I fought hard to hold in my laughter. I'd never known her to be speechless.

Bernice wiped at her face with a small hankie, but it covered little territory. "I never, I never..." She attempted to pat her hair back into place. Her left eye peeked out from a circle of mud and a small piece of algae clung to her twitching eyebrow as she glared at me. "The pastor and board will hear about this. I never..."

I did my best to restore pastoral peace and harmony to the group by closing the meeting in prayer, but I don't think their hearts were in it.

All the ladies left except for me and Mrs. Huntington. Together we mopped up the mud, but I had a feeling we'd be discovering new spots to clean for months. After she left, I went outside to empty the mop bucket.

The air was warm and stars peeked through a dark, cloudless sky. I spilled the dingy water on the ground and took a deep breath.

And then I slumped to the grass and sobbed.

"Is this all there is to being a pastor's wife, God? One mess after another?" I stared down at the puddle I'd made as it swirled and reflected dancing stars at my feet.

Some people, when God speaks to them, hear harps, or bells, or angels singing.

The apostle Paul, Alexander the Great, and Joan of Arc saw a bright light.

But in the distant darkness of night? *I* heard a call.

The unmistakable rumble of the one thing on this earth—besides cheesecake—that makes my heart flutter and goose bumps crawl from the base of my

neck to the tips of my purple nail-polished toes.

I raised my head slowly and saw a vision.

Cobalt blue, mixed with shimmering chrome, reflected the moon's silver rays and sang in deep, rhythmic tones. I stood transfixed, completely mesmerized in the glimmer of metallic paint. The moon danced on chrome pipes that vibrated in sync with the steady cadence of the V-twin's deep symphonic timbre. My enchanted heart beat in fifth gear, and I released an audible sigh.

Caught up in rapturous wonder, my eyes followed Reba O'Malley as she maneuvered her Harley Davidson Road King around the corner and past the church. I waved as she passed, but she didn't see me. "Lord," I whispered as my eyes followed the bike's graceful rumba down the road, "are there Harleys in heaven?"

The only answer was the guttural rhythm of Reba's dream machine calling me to adventures I'd never known.

2

As God usually does when I'm at the end of my rope, He ties a knot for me to hang onto. This time, the knot's name was Reba.

I'd just finished adding oregano to my famous spaghetti sauce when the phone rang.

"You're going to have to come help me," Reba said in her matter-of-fact way. "Timmy's having a meltdown, and I can't get him past it."

"Oh no. What is it this time?"

"We're out of five-inch corner braces, and I can't convince him that more will be here tomorrow."

She popped her gum into the phone.

"I'll be right there."

I turned off the stove, jumped into the van with Timmy's weighted blanket, and sped the one mile to O'Malley's Hardware store.

When I pulled up to the curb and jumped out, Trace, Reba's husband, opened the door and let me in. I could hear Timmy screaming from the stock room.

Customers avoided my gaze and pretended not to hear.

"I'm sorry, Trace," I whispered, giving him what I hoped was a pained, apologetic look.

"It's OK, Kirstie. It's just going to take time." Trace's smooth, basso voice calmed my aching spirit. God bless him. Not a church-going man, but he had a heart of gold.

Before coming to Eel Falls, my husband's resume looked like Swiss cheese because of Timmy, whose outbursts and aggression embarrassed other congregations. Unfamiliar with autism, they blamed us for his unusual and disruptive behaviors.

I hurried to the stock room and found Timmy rocking in a corner on the floor between two shelves. Reba stood by talking to him softly, making sure he wouldn't hurt himself. She moved from the corner so I could sit beside him.

"Timmy, it's Mommy." I draped the weighted blanket over his shoulders. "Shhhh, it's Mommy. It's OK."

"No bay-sez, no bay-sez. Bay-sez all gone. No bay-sez."

"I know. I know." Fingers taut, I rubbed his arms up and down and down and up. "Braces will be here tomorrow. It's OK."

He banged his head on the wall.

"No banging, Timmy. Remember the rules."

He banged again. I sighed. My heart broke every time his did; and his broke a lot. Timmy needed sameness. Five-inch corner braces had their own spot in the store and now there were none.

I left his side and walked over to where Reba sat on a stool smoking a cigarette. Timmy calmed best when left alone once he passed the violent phase of what we called his "nuclear meltdowns."

"I'll leave the weighted blanket here from now on and get another one for home," I said. "That is—if you're still willing to work with him."

"Ain't been nothing ol' Reba hasn't conquered." Curls of smoke wafted in front of her piercing blue eyes. "Timmy's a pussycat. We'll get along just fine."

Why the heavy blanket?"

"It soothes him. The deep pressure is comforting."

Reba blew a puff of smoke out of the side of her mouth, away from me. "Just let me know if I'm doing something wrong."

"You're not doing anything wrong, Reba. It's not you." I looked down at Timmy and shook my head. The monstrous, ugly disease of autism was in the room staring me down, daring me to battle.

She took another deep draw on her cigarette. I worried that she smoked, but I didn't judge her for it. Reba smoked. I ate mashed potatoes, fried chicken, and fudge brownie sundaes every chance I got.

She exhaled with a big huff. "Autism bites."

I nodded. I hated the word. I felt myself tearing. She stood up to hug me.

"Don't." I threw up my hands to push her away. "I'll lose it if you comfort me. I don't know why I'm not more used to seeing him struggle by now. It makes me so mad. And when I'm mad I cry."

Reba grinned with a spark in her eyes. "When I'm mad, I cuss." She blew out a puff of smoke and flicked her cigarette into an ashtray sitting next to her by the stock room phone.

I laughed and wiped my eyes. I loved Reba. She was tough as nails, rough around the edges, and because of past hurts, didn't attend church. But she and Trace had always treated Timmy with respect. From the time we arrived in Eel Falls, Timmy had loved the hardware store. When he was younger, we visited every day. Sundays were difficult because the store was closed, and he didn't understand why he couldn't stop in. But Monday through Saturday he loved spinning the washers around the bolts and

screws and watching them wind up and down. He relished the smell of the leather tool belts and the feel of the cool heads of the hammers. The hardware store was Timmy's Disneyland, and when the O'Malleys offered to let Timmy work there in the afternoons, we were thrilled.

Reba, my best friend outside of the church, didn't have any expectations of me. I could be myself, and she'd never tell a soul my secrets. I never heard her gossip about anyone.

She lit up another cigarette. "You need to get that motorcycle you've been talkin' about and ride with Trace and me this summer."

"I'd love that, Reba. I saw you ride by the church the other night. It looked like heaven to me." I sighed and watched Timmy huddle deeper into his blanket.

Me ride? What would people think? What kind of rumors would Elder Norman and Bernice start? Could Aaron lose his job? If he lost his job, we'd be on the street because the church owned the parsonage. Besides, who would take care of everything and everybody when I was riding my bike? What would happen if I had an accident?

What would happen if I didn't do something for myself and lost my mind?

"You're only human," Reba lectured me. "You need a break. When's the last time you went anywhere by yourself without your kids or your husband?"

I shook my head. I couldn't remember one time in the past ten years.

"I can teach ya to ride," Reba said. "Ain't nothin' to it. And you need the break. A time out." She arched her fingers like quotation marks. "It'd give you something to do besides all that churchy stuff."

I nodded. I'd wanted a motorcycle ever since I was a little girl and my great-aunt put me on her Indian. I loved everything about them: the masculine smell of leather, the feel of the cold metal gas tank, and the rumble of the engine.

Was it time for me to pursue some dreams of my own?

My cell phone rang. Aaron. I listened to his frantic voice on the other end.

"OK," I sighed into the phone. "OK, I hear you. I'll bring something home. And Aaron—I'm sorry..."

I clicked my phone off and looked at Reba, trying to decide whether to laugh or cry. I could only imagine the face I made.

"What was that all about?" she asked.

"Oh nothing—just that..." I broke down in giggles. "Goliath ate tonight's supper off the stove."

"That dog's a monster."

"You have no idea." I turned to Timmy who had calmed himself down to small, puffy sobs. "Ready to go to the Fried Eel and get hamburgers for Daddy, Timmy?"

He looked up and smiled at me through tears. The Fried Eel was his favorite. "Fried Eel fwies? Timmy fwies?" He wiped his nose on his shirt.

"Yes, Timmy. We'll get you some fries."

"I'm gonna look into getting you enrolled in some riding classes, Kirstie," Reba said, putting out her cig.

I started to object.

Reba held up her hand and raised her left eyebrow parent style. "I don't want to hear it. Won't hurt a thing to find out about it. And in the meantime, let's go shopping for a bike. An adventure like that'd be fun and do you good. Now, what color you want?"

“What color bike?”

“Yup. Let’s get specific.”

“Reba, you know me. What color do you think I want?” I gave her my most mischievous grin. I was a girly girl.

Reba wasn’t. She rolled her eyes. “Oh no.” She shook her head. “I don’t know if I can be seen going down the road with you.”

We walked out of the back room and past Trace, who had been listening to the tail end of our conversation.

“Why?” he asked. “What color does she want?”

Reba groaned and waved me off with her hand.

“Bubble gum pink!” I said. “What else?”

3

“What do you do for fun?” My doctor was completely serious when she asked me last week during my yearly checkup. At that moment, I couldn't think of one thing that sounded fun. I felt like a piece of petrified wood.

Wash the dishes, dirty the dishes, wash them again.

Wash the clothes, dirty the clothes, wash them again.

Monotonous.

Except for the adventures I had with Timmy. He kept things more than interesting, but not in the kind of way that gave me butterflies. More like caterpillars crawling through my insides, making me nervous and scared until I wanted to escape out of my skin worrying what other people thought.

All I had was the day-to-day grueling routine of a rural pastor's wife. Predictable, reliable, and so much a part of the woodwork, my husband nearly choked on his buttered corn when I announced my plan the next night at supper.

The thought of owning my own motorcycle sent butterflies flitting through my stomach I hadn't felt since I was nine years old and jumped off the high dive for the first time at the city pool.

“I called motorcycle school today.”

Aaron coughed a second time and pointed to the