

**Word of a Liar****Chapter 3 part 2**

by Sally Beauchamp

Shortly, the men stopped in front of a circle of tents. Mason dropped his arm to his side, forsaking Ellen. Two men and two women watched a large fire blaze in the center of the campsite. A charcoal grill, puffing blue smoke, rested on the open tailgate of a red pickup truck. The smell of steak hung in the air. A tall blonde with a slender sensual figure sitting next to a long-legged man wearing a straw cowboy hat, looked up.

"Looks to me like your guest, Jack isn't as harmless as you thought." Mad Dog said to Mason.

"Rambo, where have you been?" The blonde sprang to her feet and started toward them, but stopped when she saw Ellen.

Mason greeted her, taking her hand as he drew near. "Desi, this is Ellen Abrams and Ellen this is Desi Harrington, my girlfriend." The word punched the air from Ellen's lungs. Dazed, she held out her hand but Desi ignored it, turning instead to Mason.

"Who is she Rambo?"

Ellen wished she had kept Mason's bandana so she could hide her embarrassment.

"I'll explain it all in a second." He looked at the man in the cowboy hat and continued. "This is Jack Nelson."

Jack took off his hat and stood, offering his hand. Neat and clean shaven, his blond hair highlighted and cut in short choppy layers, he looked like a model from GQ magazine. He wore a distressed Ralph Lauren polo shirt, pressed jeans, a gold watch, and diamond studs sparkled in his earlobes. The only thing Ellen could see linking him to this crowd was the sleeve of tattoos running down his arms. She shook his hand.

"This is Jack's friend, Muck Eye." Mason continued, "And this is Dee Dee Mullen. Spider's wife." Ellen sucked in a deep breath. Why would Mason take her here when this woman's husband wanted her gone? A petite woman with wild auburn hair that glared crimson and thick black eye-liner outlining her dark eyes, Dee Dee Mullen blew a ring of smoke towards Ellen and then reached for a can of beer, nesting in a cup holder. She tipped the can at Ellen. "Want a cold one?"

"No, thank you." Ellen swallowed. She needed to sit.

Mason took Desi into his arms. "Her car broke down on the highway and Mad Dog and I have been trying to help her. So what's been goin' on here?" He eyeballed Jack. The muscles in his neck constricted.

"I've been waiting to talk business with you. But your girlfriend has managed to keep me entertained. What's a beautiful babe like her doing with the likes of you?"

"She's likes the way I make her scream."

Jack laughed. His slick smooth voice gave Ellen the chills. She folded her arms across her chest, rubbing her triceps.

"I'm having a great time." Jack smiled, showing perfect white teeth. "Thanks again for inviting me and Muck Eye." He turned to the small man, who sat erect when acknowledged. His long boney fingers drew a cigarette to his lips.

"You got a pair of jeans or something you could let Ellen wear?" Mason asked Desi.

"You don't need to do that. I'm fine." Ellen looked away from the couple and pointed to a vacant chair. "Dee, may I sit here?"

"Suit yourself."

Ellen sat down, holding her hands out to the fire. Her back to the men and irritated by Mason's attachment to Desi, she half-way listened to their conversation. Her thoughts turned to JD. She imagined him safely tucked into bed oblivious to the danger his mother had put herself in. Jack's angry voice startled Ellen. She turned to see Muck Eye kicking at the dirt.

"How am I supposed to find the girls in this crowd?" He whined, tossing his cigarette butt into the fire.

Instantly the suave Jack Nelson Ellen had shaken hands with moments ago, erupted into a crazed sociopath. He lunged at the small man, toppling him into the row of lawn chairs. "I don't give a shit how you find them, just do it!" His eyes constricted and nostrils flared with manic fury. Ellen closed her eyes, but opened them when she heard Mad Dog.

He shoved Jack. "Settle down," he cautioned and then helped Muck Eye to his feet. "Better do as the boss man says." Mad Dog jerked his head to the side. Muck Eye brushed himself off, shot a disdainful look at Jack and then left. Mad Dog turned to Mason next. "Better keep your guest under control or you're going to regret this day for the rest of your life, brother."

Ellen shivered at the cold, deadly sound of Mad Dog's voice. Mason nodded, then glanced at Ellen. Without a word, he took Desi's hand and led her away. Jack slouched in the chair opposite Ellen. She looked down, afraid if she watched the fire their eyes might connect. Mad Dog came over to her. He squatted to eye level. "I'll be back." He put his hand on her cheek and then left her alone with Jack and Dee Dee. Mason's promise of safety banged around in her mind like a door left carelessly open on a windy fall day. She pulled the nylon hood of her jacket over her head.

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Standing at the entrance to their tent, Mason embraced Desi, nuzzling her neck. She smelled of smoke and exotic flowers. The warmth of her body made him wish

he didn't need to leave. "When you comin' back?" she whispered. "I thought you were done with security." She rubbed his fly with her palm. He moaned. Taking her by the shoulders, he held her away from him. "You be careful around Jack."

Her eyes questioned him. "But Rambo, Jack's offered me a modeling job for his company, Fortunate Son's Auto Dealership. He wants me to be the model on next year's calendar. He promised to put me in a TV commercial." Desi smiled, her excitement evident. "I might even get a new Porsche out of the deal."

He shook her shoulders. "I don't want you getting involved in any kind of business dealings with that guy. Understand? You saw how he went off on Muck Eye, the guy's crazy."

She pulled away. "But he's a friend of yours. Weren't you the one who invited him? According to Dee, Spider and Mad Dog roughed you up because you invited him without club permission. Why?" She tossed her head, moonlight shimmering on her bare shoulders.

"That's none of your business. Do as I say and stay away from the guy. And be nice to Ellen. She's scared half to death. I gotta go." He cradled her hand, bringing it to his mouth. "God damn, you're beautiful... later." He winked and left her by the tent.

When he returned to the fire he saw Mad Dog taping a gauze bandage on Ellen's ankle. Shit! He had forgotten about her burn. A sudden pang of jealousy quickened his pulse. "Come on Jack, let's go." He gripped his rifle. "You ready?" he asked Mad Dog.

Mad Dog patted the top of Ellen's thigh. "That ought to help." He smiled then retrieved his rifle from the flatbed. "Let's go, brother."

Ellen stood. "Where are we going now?"

"You're not going anywhere." Mason replied. "You're staying here with Dee Dee." Ellen's dark confused eyes reminded him of a scared child, waking from a nightmare.

"What do you mean?" Ellen stammered. "You promised to take care of me." Her eyes darted to Mad Dog. "You can't leave me. What if Spider comes and sees I'm still here?" Her bottom lip trembled. Her chest heaved.


Mason stepped closer. "It'll be okay." "No! No it won't be okay!" Panic punctuated her voice. "I never should have believed you." Mascara tears cut small trenches down her dirt smudged cheeks.

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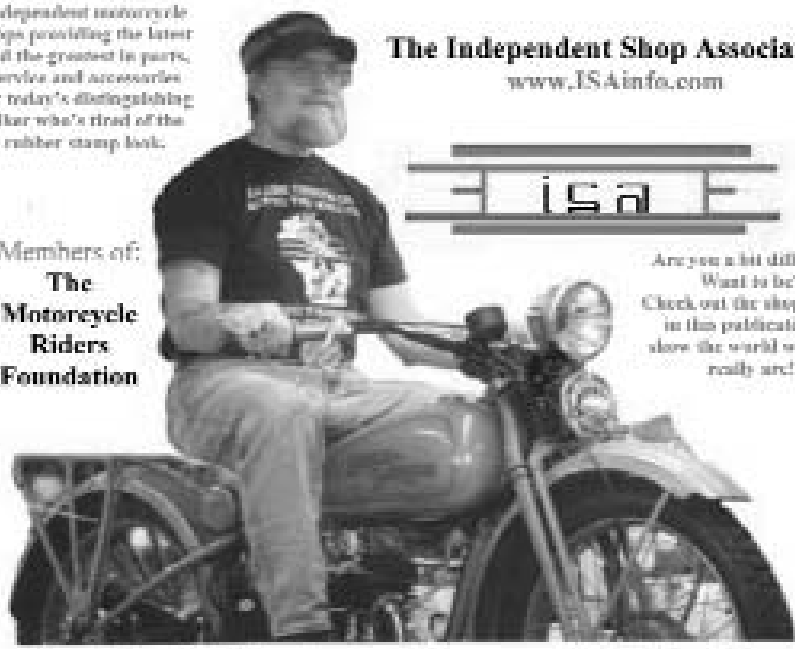
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