

**Word of a Liar**

By Sally Beauchamp

Chapter 5 part 2

"She's right, Rambo. Ole Squinch must have been trying to give you a shave with that bowie knife. Doesn't look serious. Dee should be able to patch it up."

"Did you kill that man?" Ellen's eyes searched Mason's.

She made him ashamed. He looked down. "No, I didn't kill him."

"He probably broke his nose though and my guess is Squinch is going to be seeing his dentist real soon." Mad Dog smirked, flipping his gun strap over his shoulder.

"Come on, put your arms around us and we'll help you walk back to the tent. Where are your shoes?"

"I don't know." Ellen looked down at her bare feet. "But don't ask your girlfriend if she can lend me a pair. She hates me."

Mason nodded. He knew Desi's nature all too well. They moved slowly down the path, the long night had taken its toll.

"When I get back to the camp site, I'm planting my ass in front of that fire with a bottle of Jack and not moving until we have to go back on security." Mad Dog sighed.

Movement in the long grass stopped them short. From a nearby tree, a barn owl hooted, followed by the rustle of feathers as it flew after its prey. A tall figure stomped towards them. Spider blocked their path.

"You trigger happy son-of-a-bitch!"

Spider moved in on Mason. His face so close Mason could see the sweat in his sideburns. Spider's eyes snapped. "What the hell did you think you were doing? First, you invite that Jack character without permission, then you haul her ass back here, and now, you fire shot-off that f\*\*king rifle! Do you have any idea what you could have started?"

Spider's enraged voice hit Mason like a snort of cocaine.

"I know what would have started if I didn't! What did you want me to do? Stand there and let Squinch run that blade right through Apostle? Every county and state cop would be here throwing us all in the slammer!"

Mason didn't budge. The muscles in Spider's jaw twitched; his Adam's apple moved up and down. Hit me you son-of-a-bitch, but this time I'm fighting back, Mason thought fuming.

Mad Dog broke them apart. "Hey, take it easy. We're all brothers, remember?" Spider backed up.

"I've got to get back down there and see if I can sort this mess out. The presidents of the other clubs are in an uproar. They agreed to no weapons except for security, but I doubt they figured on some gun slinger shooting off a fucking M16." Spider shook his head, noticing Ellen. "What the hell happened to her?" Spider looked at the two men simultaneously.

"I think Rambo scared the shit out of her." Mad Dog winked.

"F\*\*kin' biker lunatic!" Spider grumbled as he turned and stormed down the path.

The three continued in silence to the tent. Ellen kept her head down, watching her bare feet moving one in front of the other. Her body trembled with cold. Her legs were so wobbly she knew if the men let go, she would fall to the ground in a heap and have to stay there for the rest of the night.

When they arrived at Dee's tent, a couple men were sitting by the fire smoking. Ellen didn't recognize them, but they wore the Sons of Thunder vest. Dee stood by the grill, cooking what smelled like hamburger. Mason and Mad Dog helped Ellen into a lawn chair. She collapsed like a tattered rag doll.

"I'll get you a blanket." Mason smiled.

Ellen watched him go to the pickup truck. Mason shut the truck door, the blanket hanging across his arm. He moved in Ellen's direction but halted. Ellen turned. Desi, came through the crowd, her arms swinging at her sides. She looked deadly. She marched over to Mason, drew up her hand, and struck him hard across his face.

"Don't you ever scare me like that again!" she ranted.

Mason caught Desi's wrist. The same angry expression Ellen witnessed at the car paralyzed the campers. His chest seethed. His eyes narrowed. Ellen was sure he was going to strike back.

"Yes ma'am." He pronounced each syllable in a controlled and frightening voice then he issued a warning, looking into Desi's eyes. "Desi. Never hit me again!"

He shook her wrist loose then walked over to Ellen.

"Stand up!" he snapped.

Blood oozed from the side of Mason's cheek. Ellen didn't dare mention it. He wrapped the blanket around her shoulders. The strings of Christmas lights adorning the campsite and the light from the fire lit up Mason's face. His eyes were the cold blue of a winter's sky. She looked over his shoulder, fully expecting Desi to come flying at them, but she was gone. Pulling the blanket close, Ellen sat down hoping Mason would sit beside her, but he turned away.

Mad Dog, kneeling by the fire, watched.

"What you lookin' at?" Mason growled.

"Nothing." Mad Dog laughed and then threw a log on the fire. "Just your ole lady kickin' your ass."

Blue flames hissed.

"Leave him alone, Mad Dog. He's had enough for tonight." Dee Dee walked over to Mason and inspected his cheek. Ellen wanted to hug her. Mason didn't deserve Desi's wrath. He tried to keep those men from killing each other.

"I need a drink. Where the hell is that whiskey Muck Eye gave us?" Mason brushed Dee Dee off and began searching the campsite.

"They're over there." Dee pointed to a case of whiskey bottles near the entrance to one of the tents. "Take a load off, Rambo."

"Yeah, have a seat, Rambo." One of the men sitting by the fire, lit a joint and offered it to him. "You need to relax. You look like you're strung tighter than a guitar string. Don't let the bitch get to you, man."

"I'll get something for that cut. Sit there by Rat and have a smoke." Dee Dee ordered then walked to the truck.

Mason obeyed and slumped down in the chair next to Rat and took a drag.

Mad Dog threw a few more pieces of wood on the fire then walked over to the case of whiskey. Removing two bottles, he handed one to Mason then sat down next to Ellen.

"Have a good long swig of this. It'll take the edge off of things." Mad Dog said as he passed Ellen the whiskey bottle.

Ellen looked into his face. Handsome as Mason, his classic look--short dark hair, square jaw, round black eyes and a wide warm smile--contradicted his burly arms and menacing tattoos.

"I've never drunk liquor straight out of the bottle before." Ellen wrinkled her nose, not sure she could do it. "But after tonight...."

Ellen took a big drink, coughed then took another long swig. The warm whiskey slid smoothly down her throat, heating her body. She handed the bottle back to Mad Dog. Ellen looked across the fire at Dee playing nurse. Dee Dee swabbed Mason's cheek with an alcohol pad and he winced. Ellen pictured herself in Dee's place, touching Mason's face, looking into his eyes, her fingers brushing back all that long luscious hair to kiss away his pain. The alcohol must be kicking in. If I don't stop this, Desi's going to be coming after me next.

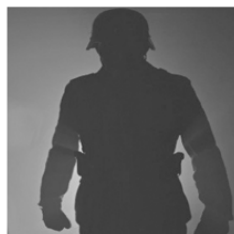
Ellen sighed, bringing her knees up to her chest and covering her feet with the blanket.

She watched the flames encircle the charred pieces of wood and thought of her late husband Paul. She knew he was watching her. If she could, she'd tell him not to worry. She was no longer afraid. She smiled, closing her eyes and feeling Paul's presence in the heat emanating from the fire. His strength was all around her. Tomorrow she would talk to JD. They would be okay.

"That's a nice little gash, Rambo. I hope this liquid Band Aid stuff works, because I think you should have a stitch or two," said Dee.

Mason didn't reply. His eyes were on Ellen. The color was coming back into her face and her dark eyes reflected the campfire. Even though her hair was a total mess, and her mascara had run down her cheeks, Mason thought she looked beautiful. Not the same kind of beautiful as Desi, but beautiful nonetheless. He watched Mad Dog move in and for some reason it irritated him. It shouldn't, he rationalized. Mad Dog was a good guy and had been alone for a long time. He should be happy for his friend instead of being jealous.

**Part 3 of Chapter 5 next issue.**



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