

**Word of a Liar- Chapter 6 Part 2**

by Sally Beauchamp

Mason returned to Dee's tent. Desi was there. Ellen sat next to Mad Dog, roasting a marshmallow, laughing at something he had said, no longer looking afraid.

"So what happened?" Mad Dog asked as Mason approached.

All eyes were on Mason.

"I had a drink with the president of the Highway Men and shook his hand. He invited me to ride with him any time." Mason smiled, sitting down next to Desi. He put his hand on her thigh. "You feeling better?"

"Yeah," she sighed. "I'm sorry I hit you. I didn't know Squinch cut you."

Desi traced her fingers lightly down the wound. "I was really scared, Rambo. I thought he was going to stab you."

Mason kissed her, smoothing back a strand of blonde hair, her green eyes stoking his desire. Resting her head on his shoulder, she watched the fire. Mason looked over at Ellen. "How are you feeling?"

"Me?" Ellen's eyes widened. "I'm feeling great. I'm happy... giddy... and everything is happening in slow motion. I'm glad you're still in the gang. If you had been kicked out, would you have had to leave immediately, or would you have been allowed to stay? And what about me? You're the one who found me, would I have had go, too?" Ellen blew a puff of air from her mouth and began to laugh. "I could never stay on that motorcycle all the way back to Milwaukee. You'd have to bungee cord me to that bike for sure."

Still laughing, Ellen looked up at the sky.

"What's with her?" Mason asked Mad Dog.

"Our little teacher friend has never smoked weed, so I gave her a lesson in Pot Smoking 101. She's a fast learner."

Mad Dog patted Ellen's knee. They both laughed. He held up the nearly empty bottle of Jack Daniels. "Our buddy Jack may have helped matters out some, too."

Mason shook his head. The mellow effect of the moonshine turned sour. It was all he could do to stay seated and not jump across the fire pit and punch the shit out of Mad Dog. He should have been more responsible and not given Ellen pot and all that alcohol. Drunk, she was no longer capable of defending herself in this kind of crowd. She was now more vulnerable than she would have been if she had stayed at the road.

Dee came from the direction of the tents. "Well, what happened, Rambo?" she asked but didn't let him answer as she rushed on. "If they voted to kick you out, I swear to God, I'll never let that old man of mine live it down. I know things like this aren't a woman's business, but I helped him start this damn club and-"

Mason got up and went to her, placing his hands on her small shoulders.

"Easy, Dee Dee. I'm still in."

Mason looked down into her dark fierce eyes. She blinked, then unexpectedly hugged his waist. Taken off guard, Mason hugged her back. During his time as a Sons of Thunder member, he had come to truly respect this woman. Dee Dee's small frame belied her inner strength. As unexpectedly as she embraced him, she let go.

"What the hell is going on here?" Spider called from the shadows. Swaying, he took a drink from the bottle in his hand.

"I just ran into your friend Jack. Some of the brothers asked him to be an impartial judge at the wet T-shirt contest. I hope he behaves himself." Spider said, shaking the bottle at Mason.

"You don't need to worry, I put one of the prospects on his tail for the rest of the night." Mason assured Spider.

Ellen scrambled to her feet "I'm making s'mores, Mr. President, sir. Would you like one?"

Mad Dog grabbed her wrist, pulling her back down into the chair.

"What?" Ellen grumbled. "I'm just being polite. After all, the old curmudgeon didn't kick Mason out and he let me stay here, so the least I can do is fix him a s'more."

Ellen popped two marshmallows on a stick. Holding them over the flames, she turned to Spider. "Mr. President, how do you like your marshmallows? Burned crisp or a delicate golden brown?"

Taking a seat by Dee Dee, Spider watched Ellen curiously.

"What the hell did she call me?" Spider asked.

Dee Dee shook her head. "I don't know. Ask her?"

"What the fuck did you call me, woman?" Spider leaned forward, his hands resting on his knees.

"Curmudgeon," Ellen replied, never taking her eyes from the browning marshmallows.

"What the hell does that mean?" Spider stood up, hands on hips.

Mason volunteered. "I believe it means someone who is a... killjoy, disagreeable, or a wet blanket."

Mason grinned, waiting for Spider's reaction.

Ellen looked across the fire at Mason. The marshmallows sizzled. She pointed the burning clumps at him. "Mason Hackett, you're a very smart boy."

One of the marshmallows fell into the flames. "I give you an A plus."

Ellen laughed, then noticing the dire condition of the surviving marshmallow, jerked the stick back. The luscious prize dropped into the fire and burst into a glorious flame. Ellen sighed.

"Looks like I'll have to cook you a couple more, Mr. President. Mad Dog, hand me two more, and I'll have another drink of whiskey."

Spider slowly sat down. His eyes narrowed then a wide grin appeared under his handlebar mustache. "Mad Dog, what have you done to her?"

"I'm innocent of any wrong doing. She's a consenting adult. You are over twenty-one aren't you Ellen?" Mad Dog asked as handed her the whiskey.

"Hell, yes," Ellen answered with too much enthusiasm, taking a drink.

"See?" Mad Dog said, his eyebrows raised in innocence.

Ellen swung around to give Mad Dog back the whiskey and nearly took out his eye with the stick. He grabbed it. "You'd better let me have that."

"But I really want a s'more." Ellen slumped down in the chair. Mason couldn't help but smile. She looked like a spoiled child, sulking because Daddy had taken away her toy. About to offer his services, Mad Dog beat him to it.

"Allow me," Mad Dog said as he speared two marshmallows and then held them over the coals.

"I don't like them burnt." Ellen pouted.

"I won't burn them. I've got three kids. I think I know how to roast a marshmallow by now, Mrs. Abrams."

"That reminds me." Ellen's sullenness disappeared. "You both promised I could use the phone to call JD tomorrow at nine o'clock." Ellen sobered a little, looking at Spider. "My son will go crazy if I don't call him on time. He has autism."

Dee spoke up. "Of course you can call your son. I'll take you up to Granddad's myself. You certainly have your hands full, don't you Ellen? A single mom and a son with autism."

"How about a single dad with three kids to raise?" Mad Dog mumbled.

Dee Dee eyed the two of them. She took a drag off her cigarette. "Mad Dog, Ellen lost her husband in a car accident."

"I'm sorry, Ellen. How long has your husband been gone?"

"It was seven years on June twenty-fourth." Ellen gazed into the flames, her thoughts turning inward.

Mason shifted, rested his elbows on his knees, and studied the two. Ellen looked up at him. Firelight flickered in her somber dark eyes.

Mad Dog carefully peeled the marshmallows from the stick with the edge of a graham cracker, but it broke in half and the precious treat fell in the dirt. "Shit!"

Ellen looked down, staring at the melted concoction as if it were a small dead animal.

Continued next month

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