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"You're having a hard time standing tonight, aren't you?" He smiled. Her lips trembled. He knew she was close to crying, so he tried to soothe her. "You know Ellen, I might look like Charles Manson's twin brother, but deep inside..." he brought a closed fist to his chest, "I'm just a big, hairy teddy bear."

Ellen's dark eyes narrowed, the corners of her mouth curling slightly. She breathed through her mouth and then rolled her front teeth over her lower lip. She looked like an image of a refugee... scared... vulnerable. "I shouldn't have come here. This was a mistake." Tears ran down her cheeks. She looked around as if she were trying to find an escape route.

Mason clutched her shoulders, "Ellen, we might be a bunch of crude bikers, but no one here is going to hurt you. You're safe with me, okay?"

Ellen rubbed the back of her neck. "I'm sorry, Mason. I'm just so out of my element. It's not only you; it's the move, the new job, being away from my home..."

"Shh..." He put his index finger to her lips. Their faces were so close, he smelled peppermint. "You're losing me again." He battled down the urge to kiss her.



"God damn it, Rambo, what the hell are you doing now?" Mad Dog, a tall man with the build of a linebacker stomped towards them. His dark short hair and his closely cropped beard framed black menacing eyes, seething with rage. "Wasn't one ass

kicking enough for you? You're supposed to be working security..." Suddenly his shark eyes fell upon Ellen. "...and who the hell is this?" He seized the front of Mason's vest.

"Easy you crazy bastard...just let me explain what happened, will you?" Mason glared back. He clenched his hands into fists, but they stayed at his side.

"Start explaining." Mad Dog let him go.

Mason rolled his shoulders back, turning to Ellen. "Ellen, this crazy S.O.B. is Mike O'Donnell aka Mad Dog." Ellen's horrified gaze traveled the length of Mad Dog, then back to Mason, who smiled. "This is Ellen Abrams," Mason looked directly at Mad Dog as he wrapped his arm around Ellen's shoulder, pulling her closer. "She's a damsel in distress, and we, my friend, are her knights in shining armor."

"Shit, Rambo!" Mad Dog stabbed the barrel of his shot gun into Mason's chest, "I ought to shoot you where you stand."

Chapter Two Next Month

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