

*Well here we are after a year of reading this kick ass story in parts. I hope everyone is enjoying it. So, with 5 chapters down and a whole lot of Mason left, let's get started.*

## Chapter 6

Mason followed Wolfman down the field to a large army surplus tent pitched under the cover of a decaying maple tree. Its solitary location signified its importance. The lit interior projected human shadows upon the canvas walls. The murmur of male voices carried upon the still night like a slow moving river. Wolfman stopped.

"Wait here," he commanded as he pulled back the tent flap and then disappeared. The men inside quieted.

Mason paced. He didn't think Spider would allow the presidents to get rid of him. Hell, Spider couldn't stand half the guys himself, but Mason dreaded the likelihood of the bootline. He knew he couldn't appear to be nervous. The men would smell his fear a mile off--and if they did, things would go a lot worse. Right now, he could use a shot of whiskey. Wolfman reappeared.

"Go on in. They're ready for ya."

Mason nodded, inhaled deeply, than stepped inside.

In the corner of the tent a large cooler overflowed with ice and beer. Bottles and cans littered the grass floor. Tobacco and marijuana smoke hung in the stale air like smog over a polluted city. Sweat trickled down the back of Mason's neck. He stood erect, pulling his shoulders back and cocked his head. Spider sat at a rectangular folding table with eleven other long haired and bearded men. Arms folded across his chest, Spider's poker expression gave nothing away. The scene reminded Mason of a surreal battlefield where the generals had assembled, except these generals wore leather and denim and their medals were tattooed on their arms. One against twelve. No... thirteen, counting Wolfman standing guard, Mason deliberated. I'll never be able to fight them all. I'm a fucking dead man.

"You gentlemen wanted to see me?" Mason asked, keeping his voice steady.

The eyes of the bikers rode over him. A tense silence charged the air. A kerosene lamp, hanging in the middle of the tent, popped and hissed. Mason swallowed, hitching his thumb around his dual belt buckle that also served as a dagger. An older man stood. His long blond hair, streaked with gray, hung down around his weathered face. A straggly white goatee touched the collar of his black T-shirt. He moved towards Mason. His dark puffy eyes sized Mason up with a cold intense gaze. Mason waited. The man held a joint to his lips, took a hit, held the intoxicating smoke, than exhaled through his nose.

"I'm Joe Conley, the president of the Highway Men. You do know why we sent for you Rambo?" It was a rhetorical question. "You risked bringing a lot of heat down on us by shooting off that fire arm of yours. What if you would have killed someone? None of the clubs here want that kind of attention, especially from some wanna be outlaw biker--a fucking lame!"

Joe arched his brows, jabbing his index finger into Mason's shoulder. "You understand?"

Forcing himself to remain calm, Mason squeezed his belt buckle, looked down at Conley's finger, then up to his accusing bloodshot eyes. Mason could drop the mangy old son-of-a-bitch with no problem, but they all knew he wouldn't. They wanted to know how much shit he'd take before he had enough, then they'd cut him loose. He wasn't biting. He'd take his licks.

"I understand." Mason said, nodding. "I'll take whatever I got comin', but don't any of you mistake me for a lame."

A slow grin spread beneath Joe's gnarly goatee. Yellow stained teeth appeared. Several of the men began to chuckle. Spider stood up, a beer bottle in his hand. "I told you, Rambo ain't no pussy!"

Joe slapped Mason hard on the back. "Rambo, you're a righteous brother. Squinch is an asshole. I signed the agreement that only those assigned to security would have weapons and Squinch dishonored me." He took another hit off the joint. "Because Squinch belongs to us, we've decided his punishment will be up to the Highway Men. These presidents and the clubs they represent have no hard feelings toward you or your people. You're welcome to ride next to me anytime." Joe held out his hand.

Mason relaxed and shook it. The mood changed to one of camaraderie.

"I do apologize for the actions of that dumb ass. He rides with us but not for long. You have my word. I'd be honored if you'd join me for a drink." Mason smiled. "I'd love to."

Joe went to the table, picked up a mason jar and drank.

"Damn good shit." Joe said and clicked the back of his teeth with his tongue. Joe handed it to Mason who sniffed the clear liquid. It smelled like whiskey. He chugged it down. Burning his throat raw, the fiery liquid snaked down to his belly, torching his blood. He coughed.

Joe watched with a wryly smile. "Potent, ain't it?"

"Yeah, what the hell is it?" Mason could barely breathe and his stomach was on fire. "Moonshine."

"Really?" Mason shook his head. "Never had any before. You make it?" Joe ignored the question, taking the jar from Mason. "That's all, brother. You can go back to the party."

Mason turned to leave.

"One last thing...." Joe stopped him. "Would you have really greased ole Squinch?" Mason considered the question.

"Like a squeaky hinge," Mason replied and then stooped to clear the tent's entrance. \*\*\*

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.

Part 2 of Chapter 6 continued next issue



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