

## The Girl

A couple of days later, Jeff was making a run down Border Road along the Rio Grande and had stopped to relieve himself in the trees. On his way back to the Jeep, he stopped, took off his hat and drew the handkerchief he carried across his forehead to remove the sweat. He settled his hat back on his head as his eyes searched the riverbank on the Mexican side of the border for any sign of movement. He was about to climb back into the Jeep when he spotted a large crowd of people entering the water and swimming across. If he had been moving and sending up dust, the scout would have let him go on by before starting the people across. He knew where the camp was where they would be waiting for transportation, so he called it in and waited. After a short wait Penny called and said, "The Chief wants to make the raid. Meet Ike, Bill and Walter on I-44 and make the hit. You will be in charge. Over." Penny informed.

"10-4. Over." Jeff acknowledged.

Jeff turned the Jeep toward one of the access roads and rolled out to I-44. He pulled off the road about a mile

from their objective and waited for the guys. The weatherman said it was in the nineties again today and the humidity was heavy. Dark clouds were building overhead and he hoped it would bring rain and cooler temperatures.

A little over an hour later, a Bronco and a transport truck pulled off the road behind Jeff and he got out to meet them.

Ike was driving the truck and he jogged forward to where Bill and Walter were getting out of the Bronco. Jeff nodded at them. Ike was a middle-aged man with brown thinning hair and graying sideburns. His face was creased with worry lines and he had a scar on his right cheek. Bill was young, too young. He was the greenie of the group with barely over a year under his belt as an agent and only three months in the field. He had a nice face and a broad grin, adventure was in his hazel eyes. This brought some concern to Jeff, but he cast it away and turned to Walter.

"They came across about two hours ago and I don't think anyone has picked them up, yet." Jeff told them as Walter's light blue eyes surveyed the sky.

"Going to pour," he grumbled. "Let's get this done. Those camps can become pig sties in a hurry." Walter looked like he belonged behind a desk, not out here. He had a short business haircut with sandy curls on the top of his head.

"Okay," Jeff nodded. "Follow me." He climbed into the Jeep and pulled out into the sparse traffic. They drove for a while and then he pulled off the road again and the others did the same. Jeff took his shotgun and walked over to them. When they assembled, Jeff waved at them and they followed him into the woods. After about a fifteen-minute walk, they could hear people talking. The tone was light and joyful. Jeff tapped Walter on the chest and made a motion telling him to go to the far side of the camp. Then he sent Ike right and Bill left. He caught Bill by the sleeve and said softly, "Don't do anything unless I tell you to, no shooting." Bill nodded and went his way.

Jeff gave them about ten minutes to get into place and was about to blow the whistle when one of the Mexicans said loudly in Spanish, "Hey, who is that?"

Someone had been spotted, so he shouted in Spanish, "Border Agents! Don't anyone move!" Then he stepped out of the trees with his shotgun leveled at the camp. The others did the same. The camp erupted in frantic squeals, curses and shouts. Three men near Bill tried to make a break for it and he cut them down with his shotgun. Jeff groaned and felt sick inside. They were unarmed men. The rest of them threw their hands up in the air and begin to beg for them not to shoot.

Jeff was so furious with Bill that he lowered his gun and ran over to him. He was standing there looking wide-eyed at the three men lying on the ground and he was breathing hard. Jeff stripped the shotgun from his hands and yelled into his face. "I told you no shooting, damn you!" The disappointment showed clearly.

"But they were attacking me," Bill defended.

"With their bare hands?" Jeff shouted back, swinging his arm at the men.

Two were rolling around on the ground moaning in agony and the other was not moving.

"Get out of my sight," Jeff shoved him. "Go call a medic and get the truck."

Bill blinked at him and then jogged away. Jeff went to the man not moving and he had a whole in his chest. He was not dead, but he would be before help would arrive. The sad part about this is that Bill would just get a reprimand and office duty for a while and this poor Mexican man would get a burial. Then Jeff went to one of the others and he had a serious arm wound. He was bleeding and cursing.

"I'm sorry, mister," Jeff said in Spanish and the man gritted for him to go to hell. The third man was only peppered with some buckshot and it was not too bad.

Unlike the State Troopers, the Border Patrol used buckshot in their shotguns, instead of hard rounds, because they deal mostly with unarmed men. If the three men had not made their break right at the agent and if Bill had shot sooner they would have probably only received superficial wounds. Jeff tore a section of the seriously wounded man's shirt off at the tail and made a tourniquet for his arm.

Ike and Walter had begun the shake down and found one guy that was carrying a half-kilo of cocaine. He was handcuffed and laid face-down on the ground. One young Mexican girl was shouting at Walter in frantic perfect English that she was not Mexican. He ignored her and shoved her in with the others to be loaded in the truck. Many times, Mexicans try to convince the agents that they are Americans, which is not too convincing because Americans don't usually try slipping across the border with Mexicans.

Bill came back with the truck and he and Ike began loading the immigrants. Walter went to bring up the Bronco to transport the prisoners.

Among the immigrants was a man that Jeff recognized. He had been caught several times and sent back to across the border. Jeff walked up to him and shook his head. "You have no luck, my friend," he said in Spanish.

The man grinned at him and said, "Maybe next time."

"Why don't you give up?" Jeff returned.

"No future in that... but in California, there is future," he opened his hand to him.

Jeff just nodded and patted him on the shoulder. Jeff wondered if he would try to make it into America if he was Mexican and living in abject poverty in a country where there was no future. He finally decided he probably would, given his nature. Nearly everyone was loaded in the truck except for the young Mexican girl and four others. Then his attention was drawn to where Ike was trying to put the young girl into the truck and she was screaming that she

was an American and putting up a struggle. She was very agile and it was plain that Ike had his hands full with her. Jeff went over and said in Spanish, "What the hell is your problem? Get into the truck."

She totally ignored him and bit Ike on the hand. "I'm not Mexican," she spit at him viciously. Ike grabbed her by the upper arm and shook her hard.

"Do any of you know this girl?" Jeff asked those already in the truck in Spanish. Most of them stared at the girl, then one woman shook her head and the others did the same. Since she was speaking English with no noticeable accent, Jeff said to Ike, "I'll take care of this, get the others loaded."

He grabbed her wrist and dragged her around to the side of the truck. She was about five six, had on jeans that were too large for her and the shirt was definitely not becoming to her figure. She wore dingy white tennis shoes and her dark hair lay on her shoulders and hung down her back a ways. She was striking in appearance with a small nose and her soft cheeks flowed with tears that made trails in the dust on her face. That did not mean anything to Jeff. He was use to that, but there was fear in her intense hazel eyes. That caught his attention. Most Mexicans have dark eyes and no fear of being deported.

"Please," she begged with trembling lips, "You have to believe me... I'm not Mexican." She caught Jeff's shirt in a tight fist. "I'm an American. My passport was stolen and I could not get back across the border."

Jeff wanted to believe her and what she said was possible. "What is your name?"

"Angela Joy Weygandt" She did not hesitate and she gave a second name. She let go of his shirt and fingered his nameplate. "Oh p-please, Jeff, you have t-to believe me," she begged, her words unstable.

"Do you have any identification?" Jeff asked with a sigh.

"No, it was in my purse with my passport."

Bill came around the truck at that time and said, "All loaded, Jeff." His eyes went from Jeff to the girl and then back to Jeff. It was decision time. The girl had said enough to warrant further investigation, so he nodded.

He caught the girl by the upper arm and said, "Let's go."

But the girl balked, "No, Jeff, please! I can't go back to Mexico!" There was that fear again. What was she so afraid of? Most Mexicans that make a try to get into the US know there is a chance of getting caught and deported. They don't fear it because they are just dumped on the Mexican side of the border and wait for another try. This girl does not seem to have this knowledge and that, too, is peculiar. Jeff looked at her and said in Spanish, "Get in the truck. There is no need to be afraid."

She frowned at him, "I don't understand Spanish."

Walter said in Spanish, "She is just working you Jeff. Take her out in the bushes and satisfy her and then put her in the truck."

"Yeah," Bill said in Spanish with a broad grin, "or I will."

"I'm not Mexican!" she screamed at them.

Jeff looked at her, "Angie, calm down! I'm just going to put you in the Bronco." She nodded and became docile.

"Ike, you're on the truck, get on down the road. We'll wait here for the ambulance. Bill, go bring up the Jeep." He tossed him the keys. "Walt, keep an eye on the prisoner."

He took the girl around and opened the door on the passenger side of the Bronco and she slid in.

After Bill brought up Jeff's Jeep, Jeff said to him, "Take Walt's Bronco, go up on I-44 and wait for the ambulance. Show them how to get here."

"All right," he said with way too much glee. Jeff did not like this man. He went over and took the girl out of

the Bronco and put her in his Jeep. Bill watched with a hint of disappointment.

"You going to stand there all day? Move it!" Jeff snapped at him.

After some time, Bill came back, followed by the ambulance. They treated the wounded men and loaded the dead one in the back. The one with the serious wound in his arm was cuffed and put in the ambulance seat in the back.

"Walt, go with the ambulance, Bill you take the prisoners on to the office in Walt's vehicle and I'll take the girl."

"Sure you will," Bill nodded.

"Shut your face," Jeff barked. "You better be saving your smart remarks for the Chief when he asks you about the man you killed."

Bill frowned at Jeff, turned abruptly and climbed into the Bronco, slinging dirt in the air as he peeled out. Right then, Jeff made up his mind that he would not go on another raid with that man. He was going to be in hot water as it was, explaining how he wasn't able to keep this raid under control. It was his responsibility and he would pay for that jackass's actions. He was not looking forward to facing the Chief himself.

The girl seemed to be deep in thought on the way back to the office. There was more to this girl than had come to the surface. He looked over at her. She was twisting the corner of the shirt in her hands nervously and there was a deep sadness on her rather pretty face. Jeff chided himself for feeling sorry for her. She was hiding something and he was probably being taken for a ride here. But if there was the slightest chance she was telling the truth then he owed it to her to investigate it further. Her story was plausible, knowing that theft runs rampant in Mexico.

"Is it okay if I call you Angie?" Jeff ventured after a while. She nodded and looked out the passenger window.

"Did you tell the Mexican authorities about your purse being stolen?" Jeff asked.

"I couldn't make them understand," she shifted her weight in the seat. There was usually someone that could translate. This did not make any sense, but it was possible.

"Where are you from, Angie?"

"College," she muttered. "Baylor University."

"You live in Waco, then?"

"I lived on campus." She sighed deeply and looked down the road. "Probably not any more."

"Why do you say that?"

"It was four months ago."

"You have been trying to get across the border for four months?" Jeff was amazed. She didn't offer any reply. They traveled a while longer, but she did not volunteer any information as he was hoping she would. Usually someone like this is anxious to tell their story.

"Where were you born?"

"Rocky Ford, Colorado."

"What were you doing in Mexico?"

"Spring break."

"Where did you cross the border at?"

"Laredo."

Angie was forthcoming in her answers and he was beginning to believe her, but he had to drag the information out of her. "You will have to answer these questions again when we get to the office and put them on paper." She just nodded. She did not seem to want to talk about what happened to her. Maybe she just wanted to forget it.

"You want to tell me what happened?"

"I told you, my purse was taken."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"That's all there is to say about it." She watched her hands give the shirttail another twist. "Will they send me back into Mexico?"

"Not if you're telling the truth, but we have to prove your identity and file a ton of papers. It can take weeks maybe even months to get you cleared."

"Great!" she sighed with a hint of disappointment

As they came into McAllen, there was a drive-in and it was way past lunchtime, so he pulled in. "Want a burger?"

"I don't have any money," she returned without looking up.

"I'm buying," Jeff offered. "What do you want to drink?"

"Sprite."

Jeff called in the order on the intercom system and they sat listening to the sixties music coming over the outside speaker.

"How old are you, Angie," Jeff broke the silence after a while.

"Twenty."

They received their food and began to eat. Jeff looked over at her and watched her. She ate her burger as though she was savoring each bite. She chewed it with deliberation as though it was a delicacy. She only ate about half of it and wrapped the other half back up in its little pouch.