

**Word of A Liar**

By Sally Beauchamp

**Chapter Seven-Part 1**

Mason crept quietly into his tent, pulled off his boots, and laid down on his sleeping bag. The throbbing in his cheek, the tenderness in his abdomen and the soreness in his backside where Mad Dog had kicked him to the ground, made him restless. He crossed his arms behind his head and looked up at the small vent at the top of the tent. The cool night air touched his face. Strung out from the events of the night, he closed his eyes.

Desi sighed.

"What's up babe?" Mason didn't want to talk, but felt obligated.

She turned, resting her arm across his chest. Her green eyes searched his face in the darkness. "I don't know. What is up Rambo?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"You've been acting weird tonight."

"Me? How have I been acting weird?"

"Weird... like you'd rather be somewhere else. Ever since that woman showed up, you and Mad Dog have been tripping over each other to be near her. I got the vibe you didn't want me around." She propped herself up on her elbow, her delicate face resting in the palm of her hand. "So who is she?"

"I told you. Her car broke down. She's all alone and way out here. I suppose we feel responsible for her, that's all. If you were ever in the same situation, I would hope someone would look out for you. You're making a big deal out of nothing"

"Am I? I saw the way you were looking at her. When you brought her over to the fire, you had your arm around her. What was that? Being protective?" Desi's voice gained volume and emotion. "I might not be as educated as some f\*\*king school teacher, but I'm not stupid. You said you'd always be honest with me. Are you being honest now?"

"Honest about what? For Christ's sake, Desi, I just met the woman tonight. You've been ragging on me all day about us, and now you're going off on me about Ellen. I never made any promises to you. I've never been anything but honest."

"That's the point. You haven't made any promises, and we've been together for almost a year. Do you realize, Rambo, you've never once said to me, 'I love you'? Now I'm asking you, are you ever?"

Desi rose to her knees. Mason thought she looked even more beautiful angry with her lifted chin and eyes flashing.

He sat up and began to stroke her long tresses.

"This afternoon," Mason said, "you told me you weren't going to do this anymore. You said if you had to force me into saying something about us having a future together, it wouldn't be real. Well, I got news for you darlin'; I don't have a crystal ball; I can't see past today. So how in the hell am I supposed to tell you we'll always be together? Shit happens...people change!"

Desi closed her eyes. Her face contorted in pain.

"Rambo," she whispered. "You already have."

Desi's eyes opened and tears streamed down her face.

Mason reached up to brush them away, but Desi slapped his hand down. Her chest heaved. Mason swallowed. The pain in her eyes made him realize how much he had hurt her. He hadn't meant to. Mason thought Desi knew he never had any intentions of making a commitment, and getting angry over Ellen was ludicrous--she was a curiosity.

Desi wrung her hands. "I love you, Rambo. I don't understand why you don't feel the same."

"I care about you, Desi." He hated to be the cause of her suffering, but he couldn't lie.

"I want more than that." She bit her bottom lip. Mason took her hand. "I know you do, but why can't we keep things like they are? You make me happy. I make you happy. Why do we have to change things?"

Desi squeezed his hand. "You just said, 'things change, shit happens' and when it does Rambo, I want to know you'll be there."

Mason closed his eyes and shook his head. His words stung him. Desi slipped her hand from his, laid down, and covered herself with the sleeping bag, facing the canvas wall. The tent filled with silence. Mason exhaled, raking his fingers through his hair, than laid beside her and pulled her close.

"I'm leaving tomorrow." Desi's voice cracked. "I don't ever want to see you again, Rambo."

"Come on Desi, you don't mean that."

"Yes. Yes, I do."

Mason closed his eyes thinking how their ending came so subtly. No yelling and screaming. No fanfare of any kind. It just ended. He didn't feel sad-- more weary and worn out. He sat up and pulled on his boots. Crawling out of the tent, he heard Desi crying, but he could offer her no comfort. He zipped up the flaps. Walking over to the case of whiskey, he picked up a new bottle. Mason found a long stick and sat down by the fire. Drowsy flames burned beneath the red smoldering coals. Poking them, they flared back to life. Voices drifted up from the river, bordering the farm, but the campsites were dark and quiet. He opened the bottle and took a long drink. Not even its fire soothed him.

Mason grabbed a piece of firewood and threw it on the fire. Sparks flew. He hadn't realized his reaction to Ellen had been so obvious. The two women were so unlike each other. Ellen didn't appear to be a high maintenance woman like Desi. But then again, maybe that came from Desi being so damn beautiful. Desi craved attention all the time. If she didn't get enough, she made it known. Like she just had.

Mason pushed another lawn chair out in front of him, resting his boots on it. He looked up into the night sky. Already in the east the morning light was beginning to subdue the darkness. He had busted his butt to be in the Sons of Thunder so he could ride with brothers and have no responsibilities to hold him back. That's how he pictured his life. Now, the possible job offer from Jack put a whole new spin on things. Mason's life would become unpredictable and dangerous. The aspect of danger didn't bother him, it kept the mundane at bay, but it was another good reason not to be burdened with a family.

Ellen's laughter interrupted his thoughts. Mason turned his head toward the direction of Mad Dog's tent and listened. The rattle of a soft breeze slipping through tree branches was all he heard. One thing Desi was right about; if she wasn't here, Ellen would be sleeping in my tent.

Staring into the fire, Mason took another drink of whiskey. He should throw some more wood on, but he didn't have the energy to get up and get it.

"Shit!" Mason said to the empty circle of chairs, laying his head back on his shoulders. The ageless light of the stars blinked and crickets crooned to their mates, who hid in the darkness and tall grass. He longed for sleep.

**Continued next month**

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