
CONFESSIONS OF A BAD BOY FIGHTER

CATHRYN FOX



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KATHERINE

“**W**hat the hell am I doing here?” I say, more to myself than to my best friend, who is squirming in her seat beside me.

As soon as the words leave my mouth, Sara turns to me and pins with a glare. “You know what you’re doing here,” she answers, and then glances around the packed room, eager anticipation dancing in her eyes.

While she’s super excited, the pungent scent of sweat and stale beer is turning my stomach, and if I don’t get out of here, I fear my dinner is going to make a second appearance. I groan and try to move away from the big guy beside me, his body spilling over into my seat as we all wait for the fighters to take center stage.

“Backyard brawling is not my thing,” I respond, and glare back at Sara even though I’m no longer the focus of her attention.

“It’s not backyard brawling, it’s underground fighting, and that’s exactly why you’re here. You need to get out more, experience life.” She turns to me. “Seriously, girl. You’re about to start your last year of college and if you don’t have some

much needed fun now before you graduate and follow your father into politics, you'll never get the chance to. This is the perfect opportunity to live it up before you bury your nose in the books again." She flops her hand out, turns her palm up and nonchalantly adds, "Plus, you need to get laid."

"Shh..." I warn, but it's too late. The guy beside me shifts closer, his ears perking up at the word *laid*. Obviously he'd been listening to our private conversation, and from the way his body is suddenly rubbing against mine, I'm guessing he's hoping to get lucky.

I nudge Sara, and gesture with my head. She leans over me and pokes the guy in the chest. "Back off, dude. You're not the guy she's going home with tonight."

Heat crawls into my face as the guy curses and inches away. He's three times Sara's size, yet one glare from her and he's cowering like a frightened animal.

"I'm not going home with anyone," I whisper through clenched teeth.

"Well, I know you're not going *home* with anyone, since you still live with your parents, but that doesn't mean you can't go to his place. Or better yet, move into my spare room like I've been asking you to, and do him there."

"I am not 'doing' anyone anywhere."

Sara's mouth drops open for a second. "Are you seriously telling me that you don't want Harding King in your bed tonight?"

Harding King.

God, I can't believe after all these years, I'm going to watch him fight. He was the bad boy from our high school, and I avoided him at all costs. It was unheard of for a straight-A student like me, the daughter of a public figure, to socialize with the tough guy from the wrong side of the tracks. But when our teacher paired us for an assignment, I had no choice but to work closely with him, and I swear to

God, even though he was all kinds of wrong for me, I wanted him in the worst way. I was never sure if he was teasing me or being a jerk when he insisted on calling me by my middle name. How he learned it, I'll never know. I never liked the old fashioned name Adeline, but cripes, it sounded so hot rolling off his tongue. A quiver moves through me and I pray to God Sara has missed it.

"So that's why you dragged me here? Because Harding is fighting and you think I'm going to go home with him?"

"What?" She grins. "Are you saying you didn't have a little thing for him back in high school?"

"I did *not* have a little thing for him."

I had a *big* thing for him. But I'm not about to admit that.

She angles her head, those all knowing eyes meeting mine. "Are you forgetting who you're talking to, Kat?"

No, I haven't, and I sometimes it irks me that I can't get anything by my best friend. I love her, I really do, but at times like these I wish she couldn't read me so well.

"Well that was a long time ago. It was just a stupid high school crush, with, I might add, a guy who was all wrong for me."

"But he's still hot, Kat."

"If you like him so much, why don't you go home with him?"

"Because he's for you."

She says this like she knows something I don't, and it worries me, because Sara is right about a lot of things, especially me getting laid. We might be completely different people, but we've been besties since childhood and now go to the same college. While I'm a bookworm who walks the straight and narrow, and considers pizza and a movie a big night out, Sara is wild, unpredictable, and not afraid of trying anything new. Then again, her father is not the mayor and her every move isn't under scrutiny.

“He’s not for me,” I say, but my voice lacks conviction. Even I know how lame I sound. “He’s not even my type,” I add for good measure.

“He’s every girl’s type.” She shrugs. “Look, I’m not saying you have to marry him. Just fuck him.”

“Ohmigod,” I say and pinch her to shut her up. It doesn’t work. Nor did I think it would. I mean, this is Sara Knightly we’re talking about—a psychology student with plans to open her own psychotherapy practice. When she has something to say, nothing or no one will stop her from saying it.

“Harding King.” She clicks her tongue. “You know what they say about him, right?”

“No,” I lie. Of course I know what they say about him. Harding King—hard as a fucking king cobra—between his legs. I just can’t bring myself to vocalize it. Romanticize about it sure, but speak it, uh no.

She playfully wags her eyebrows. “They say—” she begins, but her voice falls off when cheers erupt in the crowd.

I turn to see what, or who, has caught everyone’s attention and when I glimpse Harding walking toward the ring, his swagger sexy and completely confident, my entire body vibrates. It actually vibrates. I’m sitting here, and my chair is practically shaking beneath my ass. My God, what the hell is going on with me?

My gaze races over his body, and as I take him all in, I don’t dare miss every tight muscle, every sexy groove, every contour of his body. Jeez, the guy was smoking hot back in high school, but he was a boy compared to the beautiful male specimen climbing into the ring, fisting his hands over his head as the crowd goes wild.

Awareness hits like a sucker punch, and a sound I have no control over crawls out of my throat. My fingers curl and uncurl around the arms of my chair as I take a breath and try to control myself. Sara nudges me. I turn to see her ‘told you

so' grin, and shake my head. Okay, yeah, so it's true and I wouldn't mind breaking my three-year dry spell with Harding. It's not that I've been celibate on purpose, waiting until the right guy came along to be my second. I've just been so busy with my job at the campus library, helping my father out at the office, and studying. Plus I still live at home. My parents insisted on it, and in the end it made sense financially. So how could I ever bring a guy home for sex? And staying out late always came with its own questions or worried texts from my mother regarding my whereabouts.

But all that aside, this is Harding King, who apparently has a huge king cobra between his legs. He can have his pick of any girl in the room. Most of whom are dressed in revealing clothes and holding up signs indicating they want to have his baby. No way would he pick boring Kat, who is in her buttoned up finest and less than flattering jeans.

I sink into my seat, my feet sticking to something gooey on the floor as I kick my legs out. Eww...I don't even want to know what I just stepped in.

"I need to get out of here," I mumble. Out of here and straight to my vibrator.

Sara links her arm through mine. "Nope, you're not going anywhere, my friend. Not without Mr. Cobra."

"What you fail to realize," I begin, "is that watching two guys beat each other up is not my idea of fun, and Harding would never be interested in me." I make a sound, a half laugh, half moan. "I was a blip on his radar in high school. He probably won't even recognize me."

"Listen, Kat, you're gorgeous and my guess is he's going to know exactly who you are."

"Why is hooking us up so important to you?"

"Because you need to get laid, and he's the guy who's going to do it."

I steal another glance at Harding as he strides around the

ring, his gaze racing over the cheering crowd and sending everyone into fits of hysteria. As he turns my way, my heart races, the entire world closing in on me until nothing exists but the guy who starred in my fantasies for years.

He goes perfectly still when our eyes meet, collide, hold for a moment too long. My breath leaves my lungs in a rush as heat zings through my body, hitting every erogenous zone along the way to the needy juncture between my legs. The sound of Sara squealing pulls me back, and I suck in a quick breath to refuel my lungs. A sexy, bad boy grin curls one side of his beautiful mouth and he points a finger at me. Jesus, he can't really be singling me out, can he? I turn, look over my shoulder—he must be gesturing to someone behind me—then my gaze jerks back to his. Is he really pointing to me? Does he even know who I am? My brow furrows and he nods, like he's answering my questions.

“Oh, my God, Kat.”

“What?”

“He's pointing at you.”

Panicked, I ask, “What does that even mean?”

A girl in front of us turns around and gives me a nasty look. “It means he wants you to come back stage after the fight.”

“It does?”

“Of course it does. Are you some kind of idiot?” Her eyes drop to take in my not-so-slutty clothes. “Maybe he thinks you're his grandmother or something.”

“Shut your face before I shut it for you,” Sara says. The girl turns to Sara, opens her mouth, then decides better. She pinches her lips tight and faces away from us. Good call.

“Ignore her,” Sara says. Then in a louder voice adds, “She's just jealous.”

As my mind whirls with this turn of events, the second fighter climbs into the ring and soon enough a series of

punches and the sound of bones cracking fills the club. My stomach turns again. How can anyone watch this? I put my hands over my eyes, but spread my fingers to peer through, unable to take my eyes off Harding. He's concentrating on the fight now, his attention no longer on me, but I can still feel the heat of his gaze caressing my body. It burns me up inside. I can't even imagine how my body would react if he actually touched me. I close my eyes and conjure up the naughty images.

I mull that over for a moment and as much as I do need to get laid, do want his hands on me, I know I can't. Nothing good—other than a few amazing orgasms—could come from getting mixed up with a dangerous guy like Harding. I have a political career to think about—one that is important to me for many reasons—and I can't do anything to jeopardize my reputation.

Harding moves with stealth and precision, a predator stalking its prey. Sara is shouting beside me, and cheering Harding on. All I can do is sit still, and count down the seconds until the round is over. These guys don't even use gloves, for God's sake. I can't imagine what a mess Harding's face is going to be when it's over. The guy he's fighting is huge, but before we came, Sara assured me Harding was going to win. I couldn't stand to see him hurt, really.

I peek through my fingers to see Harding land a series of punches. His opponent falls to the ground, and Harding takes that opportunity to jump on top of him and land a few more hits until the ref drags him off. Harding lifts his hands, and the crowd goes wild.

"Did he just win?" I ask a screaming Sara.

"Yeah, total KO. What a warrior!"

"KO?"

"Knock-out. Jesus, girl, you really do need to get out more."

My heart jumps into my throat. The fight is over, and that means I'm supposed to meet Harding, but I'm not going to. I grab my purse and I'm about to stand when Sara stops me.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Home."

"Like hell."

"Sara—"

"Look, it's easy. Harding is an experienced guy. He'll take you back to his room, give you some straight-up nasty sex, then you'll get in your car and go home. It's as simple as that, and you need this."

As simple as that?

That doesn't sound simple at all. It sounds cold and detached. Call me old fashioned, like my middle name Adeline, but what ever happened to the art of conversation over dinner, and a guy driving you home afterward? I guess it's just not a part of the world Harding lives in.

Okay, decision made. No way. No way am I going to meet him back stage, and jump into bed with him.

I don't think.

I can't fucking believe sweet Katherine Adeline Lewis is in the audience watching my fight. This is *not* her kind of thing. Her best friend however, she'd be all over an attraction like this. She was always was the wild one of the inseparable duo and sometimes I wonder how they ever became best friends. But if she's responsible for bringing my high school crush here, then I owe her.

It'd been a long-ass time since I've been back to Seattle. Adeline was the last person I expected to lay eyes on, even though I would have given my left nut just to see her in the distance. Yeah, she goes by Katherine, but when I saw her filling out a college application during our senior year of high school, I decided Adeline fit her better, and I liked having my own special name for a girl so special. I'm not sure what it is about her, why I'm so goddamn attracted to her, I only know I am. She's different from other girls, driven and ambitious, but there is an innocent sensuality about her that turns my cock to granite.

The second I saw her gaping at me as I scanned the audience, my heart nearly fucking stopped. Not a great

situation to find myself in when I needed all my strength and wits about me to beat the mean-ass motherfucker who boasted he was going to be the man to finally take me down. Seriously though, he did give me a good pounding and my fucking eye is swollen. I really need to give this shit up. One more fight, for the big money, and then I'll put this world behind me. Until then, it's status quo. Another fight, another woman, another city. Yeah, everything in my life is running together in one big blur, but I hope to clear my head and change direction after next week's fight in New York. I just have no idea what that direction will be.

I climb from the ring, and make my way to the back room for the medic to bandage me. I scan the crowd, looking for Adeline, but she's nowhere to be found. My heart sinks. Shit, I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up. No doubt she's well aware of my reputation and a sweet thing like her would probably never accept an offer to meet me back stage. Then again, I never thought she'd show up to one of my fights, so I don't want to give up all hope that she won't take me up on my offer.

I walk down the hall, and the cheers become a distant hum as I make my way to my room. I step inside and my private medic, aka my best friend, Brayden Long, gives a low, slow whistle. "You look like shit, man."

"Why don't you tell me what you really think?" I say, and give him a grin. Brayden and I go way back, and after high school he trained to be a first responder. When I give this shit up, he'll go back to riding shotgun in an ambulance, but for now, we're a team, us against the world.

He tosses a towel over my shoulders to keep my body warm and grabs his bag. With a nod, he gestures to the table. "Sit."

I hop onto the examination table, and blood drips from

the cut under my eye. “Did you see Adeline and Sara in the crowd?”

“Who’s Adeline?” he asks as he pours some foul smelling shit onto a cloth.

“Katherine Lewis from high school.”

“Oh, right. I forgot you always called her Adeline. Why do you do that again?”

“I just do. Did you see them?”

“No.”

He dabs my eye and it stings like a bitch, but I don’t flinch. After all, this isn’t my first rodeo. “You remember them from high school though, don’t you?”

He cleans the blood from my cut, and checks out the rest of my body. “Yeah, is Sara still hot?”

“I’m sure you’ll think so. I invited them back stage.”

He steps back, his eyes darting to mine. “Are you fucking serious?”

“Yeah, why?”

“You haven’t brought a girl back stage in...fuck, I can’t even remember really.”

A few months, but I don’t say that. I think I’m getting played out. Either that or Hell is freezing over, because there is nothing I like more than a hard fuck after a hard fight.

“Just want to get caught up with some old friends.” I shrug. “Thought you might like that, too.”

He laughs and sees through my partial lie. While it’s true, I do want to get caught up, what I really want is to get my mouth on Adeline, to finally see if she tastes as sweet as she looks. Jesus Christ, I’ve imagined it for years, but back then, her parents hovered over her, preventing the good girl from having anything to do with the likes of me. Now, though, she’s all grown up, and her folks are nowhere to be found, which means I can finally make my move. Will she let me, or will the good girl come to her senses and run the other way?

“Caught up, huh? Is that what we’re calling it now?”

I arch a brow, but it hurts my swollen eye. “You got something to fucking say?”

My voice is threatening, but Bray doesn’t have to worry and he knows it. I’d give my life for him and vice versa. We grew up on the mean streets together, and even though we’re not blood, we’re brothers in every sense of the word.

He smirks and returning to professional mode, checks my eyes again. “Nope, nothing to say.”

“Stitches?” I ask.

“Not this time.” He hands me a cold pack and I put it over my eye, but set it on my lap when a gasping noise behind my friend reaches my ears.

My pulse leaps when I see Adeline standing there, her big blue eyes wide, her mouth agape as she takes in my bruised face. My cock jumps, eager to slide into that sweet open mouth of hers. Fuck, man, it’s insane how much I still want her.

“Are you...okay?” she asks tentatively as she wets her bottom lip. Jesus fuck, that’s sexy. Her friend turns her gaze from me to Bray.

“Hey Bray, long time,” she says as she curls her fingers in her long hair and Bray takes the bait.

Bray looks at me. “You good?”

What he’s really asking is if he can leave so he can get ‘caught up’ with Sara. “Yeah, I’m good, man.”

He leaves and Adeline takes a small step closer. The air around us is charged, and from the way her chest is rising and falling from her erratic breathing, I know she feels it too. I can feel her need, desire reaching out to me, but I’m not about to act on it. Not yet. Every instinct I possess warns me of that.

“You should put that ice back on your eye. It looks bad.”

Most girls think my bruised body and face is hot—the more broken I am, the more they want a piece of me—not Adeline. She's actually fucking concerned. My cock swells another inch, the unease dancing in her eyes like a sucker punch. Shit, it's been a long time since anyone cared about me. But this girl isn't just anyone. She's Mayor Lewis's daughter, and the nicest girl I know. Maybe I should walk away from this. The last thing I want to do is corrupt a girl like her.

I'm open my mouth to tell her this was a mistake, when she takes the icepack from me and gently presses it to my eye. Her other hand brushes my too long hair from my forehead, and she leans in. Her breath is hot on my face, and I feel it all the way to my cock.

I put my hand over hers and press the pack harder to my cut, showing her how to do it. She tenses as our hands touch. Shit, she's nervous, practically quivering in her shoes, and I hate that. "You okay, Addy?"

She swallows, and says, "I can't believe you recognized me."

"Why not? You're just as beautiful today as you were in high school. No, correction. You're even more beautiful."

She blushes and my dick jumps. I haven't seen a girl blush in...ever.

"I...Ah..."

"Want to grab a drink?" I ask. "Get caught up?"

Please say yes. If she doesn't, I might have to punch something.

She nods. "I guess I could use a Starbucks."

I laugh. "I do miss having one on every corner when on the road," I say. I've been pretty much overdosing on the espressos since being home. "But I was thinking maybe something with alcohol in it."

"Oh, ah, okay. Just let me text Sara. I drove and I need to make sure she has a way home."

“Don’t worry, Bray will see to it. He’s a good guy and will take care of her.”

She shoots off a text, reads the response, and puts her phone in her pocket.

I can’t seem to take my eyes off her sweet curves. She’s thin, but her body has filled out since our high school days. “So you still live in Seattle, I take it?”

“Yeah, going to state college. I’m in my last year. I’m taking political science, and going to go into politics like my father.” She wets her lips and continues. “I really want to. I want to make Seattle a better place for the people. It’s important to me.”

While she might have changed outwardly, inside she’s still nervous around me, rambling like she used to do when we were paired together. I drop the ice pack and jumps from the examination table. She takes a step back and I go still. “Are you afraid of me, Adeline?”

She gives a quick shake of her head, but I see through her lie. “Good.” I step up to her, brush my thumb over her bottom lip. “I’d never do anything to hurt you.”

“Okay,” she squeaks out, her lashes blinking rapidly.

I eye her. “You do know that, right? I’d never lay a hand on you. Unless, of course you wanted me to.”

She nods.

I pull my hand away and she visibly relaxes. “Where would you like to have that drink?”

I shrug off my towel and her gaze roams over my naked body. “You...you need to get dressed.”

“And I need a shower. Why don’t we go back to my hotel? I can shower and change there, then we can go out.”

When she hesitates, I say, “If it makes you more comfortable, I can get cleaned up and pick you up at your place when I’m done.”

“No,” she says quickly, too quickly. What? Does she not

want me crossing the tracks into her territory and embarrassing her, or is it something else?

I tug on a shirt and pull my sweats on over my shorts. “You want to drive with me?”

“I have my car.”

“I can take you back to get it later.”

She stares at her shoes for a moment, then says, “No, I’ll just follow you.”

I grin at her. “That way you can make a quick escape if you need to.”

She laughs, and the sound caresses my cock. Dammit, I need to make her laugh more often.

She puts her hand on her hip. “Am I going to need to make a quick escape, Harding?”

“Depends.”

She cocks her head. “On what?”

“Why did you come to the fight?”

“Sara dragged me.”

“Did you know I’d be fighting?” I ask.

“Yes.”

“Why did you accept my invitation to come back stage?”

“Because you asked me to.”

“The truth, Addy.”

She looks down, and I put my finger under her chin to lift it. Our gazes meet and hold. She sucks in a breath, lets it out slowly and says, “Because I wanted to.”