
STONE CLIFF SERIES

CATHRYN FOX

Cathryn Fox

CRASHING DOWN

“**Y**ou reek of sex.”

Noah Ryan grinned at his buddy Jared, a guy he'd gotten to know over the last couple of years while living and working at Stone Cliff Resort in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Taking his friend's ribbing in stride, Noah scrubbed his hands through his disheveled hair, and sank down onto the driftwood next to him, setting his motorcycle helmet at his feet. He let his glance surf over the crowd gathered around the nightly, beachside bonfire. He zeroed in on a cute blonde with big tits and gave Jared a wry smirk. “Not yet I don't.”

Jared reached into the cooler, pulled out a cold brew, and handed it to Noah. “Yeah, well that's a matter of opinion.”

“Fuck you.” Noah laughed and twisted off the cap, the taste of weed and smoke scratching his dry throat like coarse sandpaper. “How the hell can I reek of sex when I just crawled out of bed, *alone*?”

Jared shrugged. "Well your bed smells like sex, then."

Okay, so that was probably true. His bed likely did smell like sex. Sometimes a hard, mindless fuck chased away the chills that had taken up residency inside him since the accident a little over three years ago. Then again, sometimes it didn't. Sometimes the demons managed to tunnel their way past the wall he'd built despite a warm body lying next to him.

Noah took a long pull from the bottle, and washed the grit from his throat. Too bad the alcohol did little to drown the pain that blackened his soul. Then again, did he really deserve for it to?

He worked to push all dark thoughts aside, and tried to keep things light. He nudged his friend with his elbow. "Ah, come on, Jared. Don't be jealous 'cause I'm getting all the play and you're not."

Jared waved to Ryan and Bobbie, a couple of locals who had just rolled in, before he flicked his beer cap at Noah. "Yeah, well, fuck you. I get all the play I need, or I would be if you weren't always hovering around." Two well-built, dark-haired hotties moved in front of them, smiling flirtatiously at Noah. "Christ, Noah, what the hell is it about you?" He clucked his tongue and added, "You're like nectar to the honey bee, my man."

Laughing, Noah took another swig from the bottle as the cute blonde he'd been eying glanced his way. He caught the mischief in her gaze and pegged her as a local, a rich townie who'd just returned home from university. He knew her type all too well. She'd spend her days lounging on the water with her friends and her nights here at the beach, otherwise known as the Cave, where many of the resort staff and locals alike gathered for a little action. Not that he was judging her.

He wasn't. After all, unlike him she was getting an education and going places.

With exhaustion pulling at him, Noah stretched his arms over his head and stifled a yawn. He hadn't planned on hanging out with Jared tonight, but since he couldn't take staring at his ceiling for one more minute, he'd decided if he couldn't sleep, he might as well get laid. The little townie gave him a look that said, *come get some* and his cock twitched, but before he made his move on the blonde, he shifted closer to his friend. He pulled an envelope from his back pocket and slipped it to him, wanting to do this exchange off resort and away from their manager, Donald Brake's, watchful eye.

"Noah..." Jared looked down at the envelope and shook his head. "Shit." He stole a quick glance around before he shoved the bills into his pocket. "But you were saving...you can't afford—"

"And you can't afford not to." He looked pointedly at the swelling beneath Jared's bruised eye. Even though he claimed the injury had happened when he fell off the raft during yesterday's rough, white-water ride down Canyon Run, Noah knew better. Noah pitched his voice low, his words for Jared's ears only. "You keep fucking with these guys and you'll lose more than just your job. You know that, right?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know," Jared said gravely, dark eyes cast downward in worry as he rubbed his temples with his thumbs. "Christ, I had a straight flush. I never thought I could lose." He fisted his short-cropped hair and gave a tug. "I mean come on, what are the fucking odds that the other guy beat me with a royal flush?"

"A trillion to one," Noah said. He didn't need to do the mental math that came so easily to him as he finished off his

beer and reached for another, handing one to Jared as well. Even though Jared was as big a fuck up as he was, the guy was a damn hard worker, and in a few short years had climbed his way up from bellboy to concierge. That job was his life, and Noah wasn't about to stand around and see it get taken from him.

It was Jared's job to get to know the guests and see that their needs were being met. What he wasn't supposed to do was socialize with those guests, or get himself invited to the after-hours poker game that the resort's management turned a blind eye to. The high-rolling businessmen, who came to town for the annual weeklong event, weren't the kind of guys who took kindly to getting stiffed. You owed them money, you paid your debt. One way or another.

Noah's glance shot to the blonde. Then again, who was he too lecture about rules, considering he was about to break one himself? Even when off duty, the staff wasn't supposed to do anything to bring negative attention to the resort, which meant that picking up a local for a quick fuck on the rocks was pretty much all kinds of wrong.

"I'll pay you back," Jared said.

The blonde gave Noah a once over and a satisfied grin. "You just keep yourself out of trouble."

Jared followed the direction of Noah's gaze, and when he glimpsed the girl Noah had his sights set on, he shook his head. "You're one to talk. That girl has trouble written all over her."

"Good," Noah said, smirking.

"She's got a boyfriend, Noah," Jared warned. "And he's a big bastard."

“I think you’re mistaken.” Ignoring Jared’s warning, Noah stood and shoved one hand into his pocket, pulling his worn and faded jeans lower on his hips, a not so subtle invitation that brought the blonde’s attention right where he wanted it. “I think she’s looking for a little play.”

Jared gave him a look that suggested he was either crazy, or had a death wish, or possibly both. Maybe he was right.

“Yeah? What makes you say that?” Jared asked.

“She wouldn’t be wearing a shirt that showed off her tits if she didn’t want me to look.”

While Jared cursed under his breath, Noah moved through the throng of people. Seconds before he reached blondie, some douche bag stepped in front of him to block his path. Noah nudged him with his shoulder, shoving him out of the way. With single-minded determination he moved past him, but when the guy said, “Is there a problem here, pal?” it stopped Noah dead in his tracks.

He turned and sized up the steroid-induced mouth breather and shrugged. “Listen dude,” Noah began. “As far as I can tell the only problem here is that you’re standing between me,” he paused to poke his finger in the direction of the girl watching him with big, curious eyes, “and her.”

The guy grabbed Noah’s arm, his nostrils flaring as he yanked Noah closer. Even at six feet, Noah had to lift his chin to meet the guy’s eyes. The ogre gripped him tighter, his sausage fingers digging into Noah’s biceps.

Like a wire stretched tight, Noah snapped. “Get the fuck off me.” His skin came alive as he jerked his arm free. Christ, he didn’t like to be touched. Touching made him feel...well, it made him *feel*.

Old, blood-soaked memories clawed their way to the surface, and visions of his best friend clutching his arm like it was his lifeline swamped him. But Noah hadn't been Jonny's lifeline. Oh no, not at all. Noah was a fuck up, and the sole reason Jonny was dead.

"...Noah."

He heard Jared saying something, pleading with him, but the words were lost in the foggy haze clouding his mind, riding circles around his brain on the pain that came with remembering.

"Maybe you should listen to your boyfriend," the ogre said.

Noah laughed in his face. "Maybe you should suck my dick."

The mouth breather fisted his hands and drew his arm back. Heart racing, Noah stood there, his body braced as he prepared for the pain. Welcomed it.

Deserved it.

Like a hard fuck, sometimes a good punch in the face sent the demons scurrying. For a little while, anyway.

The hit came sure and swift, and Noah's teeth clashed as he flew backwards toward the water. The damp sandy shore padded his fall, but the cold waves crashing over his body snapped his groggy senses back to life faster than a broken condom. He jumped to his feet and spit a mouth full of blood onto the sand as the primate came at him again, his knuckles practically dragging on the ground.

"Stop it, Alex," a shrill voice cried out, and Noah's heart sank as the girl he'd been stalking halted the fight. Jesus, he'd wanted that next blow. Craved it. Noah wiped his mouth with

the back of his hand as blondie pounded her fists into Alex's chest.

Fuck if Jared hadn't been right. Blondie did have a boyfriend, and the big bastard's name was Alex.

Alex grabbed the girl's hands, and pinned them to her sides. She squirmed and fought against him, the back of her shirt lifting to show a tramp stamp that Noah was certain her good folks knew nothing about. Damned if she wasn't just the girl he needed tonight.

"Stay out of this, Dara," the ape named Alex warned.

Noah took a threatening step toward Alex. "Take your fucking hands off her."

"Noah," Jared warned again as the crowd gathered around them. The bonfire burned bright, the fiery embers sparking like angry fireflies in the dark night sky, casting a flickering spotlight on the scene playing out before them. "You start this shit again, and Donald won't give you any more chances," he bit out harshly, but Noah was too far gone, too far down the road filled with blood and bad memories to walk away.

"I didn't start it." He swiped his tongue over his swollen lip and jutted his chin toward Alex. "He did. I'm just going to finish it." Noah stood there, sizing up his opponent once again, waiting for him to make another move.

Alex looked at Noah, then at his girlfriend, who continued to struggle against his grip. Suspicion moved into his beady eyes as they locked on hers. "What are you protecting this guy for? Do you know him or something?" he asked, his voice slurring slightly.

"We're all just here to have a good time, Alex."

“A good time?” He jerked his head toward Noah, his lips curling with disgust. “That’s the good time you want?” Silence hung heavy for a moment, then sweet tits shrugged, everything in what she didn’t say answering Alex’s question. “This shit ain’t worth it.” He shoved Dara away, pushed through the crowd and stormed down the beach.

He watched Alex disappear and then turned his attention to Dara. “You okay?”

Big eyes moved over his swollen lip as her two friends came up behind her. “Are you?” she asked.

Noah scrubbed his hand over his jaw. “Your boyfriend throws one hell of a punch.”

She took a sip from the cooler her friend handed her, looking at him over the rim of the bottle. She swallowed and licked her lips before saying, “Maybe he’s not my boyfriend anymore.”

“Is that right?” Noah asked, inching closer and invading her personal space. Damn she smelled good.

“Well, maybe not tonight, anyway.” She nibbled her bottom lip, a seductive move Noah figured she’d perfected in front of a mirror, and then slid her gaze over his body.

“You gotta be fucking kidding me.” The sound of Jared’s voice from behind him pulled Noah’s attention away from those luscious lips.

Noah cast him a quick glance and smirked. “What?”

“Like you even have to ask.” Shaking his head, Jared disappeared into the crowd, leaving Noah to do what he did best. Fuck everything up.

With the fight over, the crowd went back to partying, and Dara stepped in and closed the small space that remained between them. She went up on her tiptoes, those nice tits of hers pressing into his chest. Reaching up, she feathered her fingertip over his swollen lip. “Does it hurt?”

“Yeah. It hurts like a son of a bitch. But I guess that’s to be expected when I use my face to stop a punch.”

She puckered those pouty lips of hers and all Noah could think about was how that sexy mouth would feel around his cock.

“You think I should kiss it better?”

Noah grinned. Christ, she made this so easy. “I think that’s a good start.”

She handed her cooler back to her friends, and gave the cute brunette a knowing smile before she turned back to Noah. With a tip of her head, she gestured behind her. “Maybe we should...you know...go somewhere private.”

She didn’t need to ask him twice. Noah grabbed her hand and pulled her away from the crowd. Once they were out of sight, near the rocky cliff at the far end of the beach, he stepped into the water and splashed a palm full into his mouth. He sloshed it around to wash away the blood, and then spat it out.

Not wasting any time, he gripped Dara’s hips, his cock swelling inside his jeans as he pushed her up against the rock wall. He dipped his head, his lips so close to hers that he could taste the raspberry cooler on her breath. Goddamn she had a mouth made for sucking. He slipped one hand around the back of her neck, the floral scent of her hair filling his nostrils as his eyes latched on her hot mouth.

“So about that kiss,” he murmured.

Her tongue flicked out to moisten her bottom lip and ignoring the split on his lip, he crushed his mouth to hers. The pressure stung like a bitch, but he didn't care. He groaned as sensations overcame him, let them push back the memories that came far too close to the surface tonight. His tongue slipped inside to thrash with hers as his hands went to her tits. He palmed them and she moaned, wiggling against him. With his mouth watering for a taste of her nipples, he gripped the hem of her shirt and tugged.

He pulled it over her head and inched back to look at her lace bra. “Sweet,” he murmured and she smiled at him, the look on her face telling him she knew she was as sexy as hell and could have whoever she wanted. He was fine with that. She wanted a good time, and tonight he was the guy she'd chosen to provide it. It wasn't his fault she picked a no good loser like him. But some of the townies liked to go slumming during their summer break, and as long as he was getting a piece of ass, he was cool with it.

He reached behind her back, made quick work of the metal hook, and then tossed the bra onto the rocks along with her shirt. Pushing a knee between her legs, he widened them and bent to draw a hard nipple into his mouth.

Her hands raked through his hair and she whimpered. He ignored the pain in his jaw and sucked deep, needing to get lost in her. Her hands moved to his shirt, and she tugged at the material. He reached behind his neck and tugged it over his shoulders, adding it to the pile forming on the rocks. Once he was half naked, she raced those soft fingers over him.

“Nice tat,” she whispered, tracing the cross tombstone on his arm.

An uneasy tremble moved through him as she stroked him. He grabbed her hands, put them behind her and lightly brushed the tattoo at the small of her back. “I like yours, too.”

She made a move to reach for him again, but he pushed against her, caging her hands between her ass and the rock. “Keep them there,” he ordered.

She looked like she was going to protest, but when he released the button on her shorts, and shoved his hand inside, a low moan rose from her throat. His cock throbbed against her thigh and she sucked in a quick breath when he dipped inside her panties to finger her pussy. A whimpering sound bubbled up from her throat.

“Feel good, baby?” he asked.

“So good,” she said, bucking against his hand.

He pushed a finger inside her and his mind shut down when he felt her wetness. “Jesus, you’re drenched,” he growled. He pushed deep, and while she looked so fucking hot in her short shorts, with his hand inside her panties, he couldn’t get a good finger bang going with her still dressed.

Panting hard, and keeping a finger inside her, he said, “Take your shorts off.”

She pulled her hands out from behind her, pushed her shorts down and wiggled them to her feet. Her pussy tightened around his finger with her movements. With his free hand, Noah pulled them from her ankles and tossed them onto the pile.

Leaning up against the rocks, she spread her legs wide to give him better access, and the sweet scent of her hot pussy hit him like a double shot of rum. The world around him faded, dulled to a hush. He pushed his finger in and out of her, until she was so soaked and ready that all he could think about was ramming his dick into her.

Her hands went to his zipper. "Take yours off too," she said breathlessly. "I want to see your cock."

Noah groaned. Oh yeah, this girl really was all kinds of trouble.

He pulled his finger out of her pussy, tore off his pants, and threw them on top of her clothes. His cock jutted forward, so hard and ready his brain was nearly blank. Jesus, he loved it when his brain shut down. Her gaze dropped, and she made a whimpering sound as she reached for his dick. He nudged his hips forward, offering it to her. It was true he didn't like to be touched, but when a chick wanted to stroke his dick, he damn well made an exception.

"So big," she murmured.

"You like it big, baby?"

"Yeah." She licked her mouth, her hands grasping his cock harder.

Noah swallowed hard. "You want to suck it?"

She gave him a sexy grin that told him how much she liked sucking cock, how good she was at it, before she sank to her knees. The second her mouth wrapped around his crown, he gripped her head with one hand and braced the other on the rock wall behind her. Christ, her hot wet mouth felt so damn good.

“Fuck...”

She moaned around a mouthful of cock, and he rocked into her, hitting the back of her throat. She gagged a little, but continued to try to take him deeper.

“Nice,” he murmured, ramming into her.

She licked the long length of him, her tongue running circles around his crown before she plunged forward to take him back in again. She spent a long time working him in and out of her hot mouth, and when he groaned, she cupped his balls. They drew up tight against his body, and knowing he was close to coming in her mouth, he inched back, and hauled her against him, desperate to bury himself inside her.

He gripped her hips, and lifted her until she was sitting on the ledge, shoving his shirt underneath her ass. His fingers bit into her thighs as he widened them. Bending forward to better position himself between her spread legs, he swiped her cunt with his tongue, and she jutted her tits forward as she leaned back, her palms braced on the rock behind her.

Noah grabbed his pants, and pulled a condom from the pocket. He tore into it and rolled the rubber down the long length of cock.

Dara’s eyes widened in anticipation as he wrapped one arm around her slim waist for leverage, and positioned his cock at her entrance.

“You ready to fuck?” he asked.

Instead of answering she wiggled her hips, forcing him in an inch.

“Christ,” he groaned as her heat wrapped around him. He held her tighter, and in one quick thrust powered into her. She gasped and rubbed her hard nipples against his chest.

He pumped deep, fast, ramming so hard he was sure they were going to punch through the rock wall. She moved with him, and he inched back to look between their bodies as he pulled out, only to sink all the way back inside again. Jesus, she was hot...

He fucked her long and hard, until her body tightened and she made a whimpering sound. A second later her hot cream singed his cock. As her muscles squeezed his dick, she reached for him again, but he pinned her arms to her sides and pumped feverishly. He knew he was being rough, knew he was going to leave her bruised come morning, but there was nothing he could do to slow down. He needed to fuck. He needed to forget. Oh, God, he just needed...

His cock swelled to the point of no return, every nerve in his body alive and on fire. He drove all the way insider her, burying himself balls deep as he let go, splashing his seed into the condom. He threw his head back and growled, concentrating on the explosions rocketing through him. She squeezed him with her cunt, milking every last drop of his release.

Sweat trickled down his brow, and he swiped it away as he strived to catch his breath. Dara shifted and pulled away, his cock slipping out of her. He stood back, water splashing against his heels as he disposed of the rubber. Dara reached for her clothes and pulled them on quickly. Once she was dressed, she jumped from the ledge and grinned up at him.

“Thanks,” she said, licking her lips and smoothing down her long blonde hair as her skin glistened with perspiration. “That was fun.”

“Yeah,” he said, his voice rough, edgy as he reached behind her to grab his pants. She stepped around him, and he said, “I’ll guess I’ll see you around.” He tugged his jeans on and gave a casual roll of his shoulder.

“Sure. I’ll be around,” she said and then disappeared down the beach, dismissing him like he was nothing but a go nowhere loser, a go-to guy when a girl needed to scratch an itch.

What bothered him the most was that she was right.

Keeping her head high and back straight, Kathryn Lane lowered herself into the chair opposite her new boss at Stone Cliff Resort in the heart of Alberta's Rocky Mountains. She crossed her legs at the ankles, and poised her tablet on her lap, ready to dive into her new position as Marketing Assistant.

"Kathryn," her boss Shannon began, flashing her a warm, welcoming smile, but behind that smile Kathryn could easily tell she was a serious businesswoman, one who didn't tolerate anything but perfection. "I see personnel placed you in Wolf Lodge. Are you all settled in for the summer?"

Kathryn nodded, thinking about the small room that resembled her dorm at Sanford, Canada's prestigious, East Coast University where she had just finished her junior year. At least at the resort her room had a private shower and the staff quarters had a small, communal kitchen so she didn't have to eat mystery meat in the meal hall every day. And when she didn't feel like cooking for herself, she could use one of her

staff meal tickets to dine on low fat, healthy food at the buffet.

“Yes, thank you,” she responded, keeping an air of professionalism about her.

Shannon looked at her over her dark-rimmed glasses. “You know this week is all about settling in. You didn’t have to come in until Monday.”

“I wanted to get an early start.”

“Very well.” Shannon’s silver hair glistened in the sunlight shining in from her window as she pulled open a file with Kathryn’s name on it. She adjusted her glasses lower on her nose, and went quiet for a moment as she read. “So your internship is for the full four months?”

“Yes,” Kathryn answered. “It’s part of my scholarship requirement.”

Shannon slipped a paper from the file and her perfectly sculpted brows went up as she looked it over. “I’m impressed. It’s not every day we get a scholar like you interning for us. I expect great things.”

Kathryn smiled her usual smile, never hinting at what she’d had to give up in order to get where she was. No friends. No dates. No dreams. Her father would have none of that. No, his only daughter had to work, work, work, and stand above the rest.

“Thank you. I’m looking forward to getting started,” she said cheerily, even though inside she was tied up in knots. While she’d worked hard and was extremely grateful that she had won one of Canada’s largest university scholarships, the pressures that came with it could sometimes be overwhelming. Not only did she have

to maintain an exceptionally high average in all her classes, she had to perform well during her summer break internships, which challenged her in three disciplines: enterprise, public policy, and community development. Combining those pressures with a president and CEO father who was always breathing down her back, pushing her to do better than her best, so she could graduate at the top of her class and secure herself a corner office in his financial consulting firm, certainly made for challenging times.

Shannon handed her a pile of brochures, and a thick book on the resort that contained the mission statement and marketing plans. "You can look these over on the weekend," she said.

Kathryn nodded, and Shannon opened her mouth to say something else, but closed it again when a noise outside her office door drew her attention. Shannon looked over Kathryn's shoulders, a frown on her pretty face as she zeroed in on something or someone in the resort lobby. Curious, Kathryn angled her head to see what the commotion was all about.

She took in all the new staff who were milling about, getting themselves acquainted with the resort and settled in for the summer. She peered through the crowd, until she caught a glimpse of a guy standing outside the resort manager's door. Dressed in staff colors, his snug green t-shirt with the resort logo on it hugged his broad shoulders, and showcased a hard body. On his left arm, she caught a hint of a tattoo dipping below the short sleeve. Her gaze dropped to his low hanging swimming trunks, and the clipboard he clutched tightly in his hand. He seemed to be in deep discussions with Donald Brake, the manager with whom Kathryn had interviewed with to get the assistant's job.

Kathryn glanced at Shannon. "What's going on?"

Shannon sighed. "That's Noah. He teaches skiing in the winter and is a river guide for the white-water rafting tours at Canyon Run in the summer."

"He seems upset."

"It's nothing for you to worry about." When Kathryn nodded, accepting the answer without question, her boss leaned in like she was about to confide something personal. "You probably won't cross paths with him, Kathryn." Shannon paused to look over Kathryn's prim, knee length pencil skirt, and chic blazer. Feeling a bit uncomfortable under her scrutiny, Kathryn smoothed her hand over her hair, checking to make sure it was still secured tightly in her ponytail. Shannon's eyes moved back to hers and she smiled. "I'm sure you won't be running in the same circles during your time here."

"Oh, okay," Kathryn said, for lack of anything else.

Shannon went quiet for a moment and then advised, "You might want to pick your friends carefully here. Relationships between staff members aren't forbidden, but they are frowned upon because they can interfere with work. I'm certain you wouldn't want to do anything to interfere with your job or your scholarship, isn't that right?"

Kathryn nodded. Point taken.

Still, unable to help herself, she stole another glance at Noah. As if he felt his eyes on her, he turned his head toward her. When their glances collided, he gifted her with a smile, a smile so hot and disarming, it sucked the breath from Kathryn's lungs. *What the heck?* She exhaled slowing, trying to appear unaffected as she turned back to Shannon, who thankfully, was looking over her file once again.

“I guess we’ll get started then,” Shannon said. “Since you’ll be working on the brochures, the first thing I need you to do is familiarize yourself with the resort. You need to know all the ins and outs, and all the activities we offer.” Shannon gestured with her hand when someone came in the door behind Kathryn.

“Amy, come in. I was just about to call for you.”

Kathryn smiled at Amy as she came bouncing in, a big smile lighting up her pretty face.

“Hey there,” Amy said to Kathryn as she extended her arm. They exchanged a handshake as Shannon did the introductions.

“This is Amy’s third summer with us. She’s a psychology student, and she works registration and sometimes helps me out,” Shannon explained. “I asked her to show you around today, and I believe Amy lives at Wolf Lodge as well. Isn’t that right, Amy?”

“Sure is,” Amy said, her long, dark hair as bouncy and bubbly as her personality. “Are you ready?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” Kathryn said, turning off her tablet and putting it in her bag.

For the next few hours Amy showed her around, and even though her personality was very different from Kathryn’s, Kathryn couldn’t help but like her. Amy helped to familiarize her with all the facilities, including the spa, horse stables, dining room, biking trails, ski hills, and tennis courts. Once they were done, they took the shuttle to Deerfield, the closest town.

Amy talked nonstop during the tour and as they drove past a beach area that looked like it had had a fire recently, she gave

a grin. "That's the Cave. It's where we go to have a little off-resort fun." She nudged Kathryn. "If you know what I mean." She looked at Kathryn's business clothes and then at her own. "Tonight we'll get out of these work clothes and into something a little sexier."

Instead of telling her she didn't have clothes that were sexy, she just nodded and looked at the mountains in the distance. Amy pointed out the amenities, and when they drove down a side road, the brick buildings full of gorgeous graffiti, Kathryn's heart leapt, thrilled that Deerfield had an art district.

Kathryn pointed at the wall. "Who did that?"

Amy's eyes widened. "Gorgeous isn't it?"

"Yeah," Kathryn agreed, taking in the lines, shading and composition. "Whoever did that was very talented." She thought more about art, art history, and murals, her true love. A knot tightened in her throat. She swallowed it down, because she knew better than to let her thoughts travel that path. While her father collected numerous art pieces, a career in the arts, or switching to a fine arts degree certainly wasn't in the cards for his daughter.

Their last stop on the tour was the white-water rafting adventure at Canyon Run River. They arrived just in time to see one of the boats returning, the thrill-seekers inside laughing as they wrung water from their hair. They disembarked, and that's when she caught a glimpse of Noah at the back of the boat. He pulled off his helmet, and wiped the water from his face. Kathryn felt her mouth go dry.

"Looks like fun," Kathryn said, when in reality the whole idea of rushing down a river scared the hell out of her. She didn't take risks. Her every action was calculated and had a greater

purpose. Of course, that didn't mean she didn't want to. Except such behavior was frowned upon in her world.

"We can sign you up for a run if you like?" Amy said.

Her glance shot to Amy, then back to Noah. If he was part of the deal, then maybe she'd give it a shot. Okay, where the heck did that crazy thought come from?

"Have you ever done it?" Kathryn asked.

Amy licked her lips and gave her a wicked grin. "Not yet, but I sure do want to."

When she caught the way Amy was drooling over Noah, Kathryn said, "Uh, wait, are we still talking about rafting?"

Amy laughed. "Nope."

Kathryn turned her attention to Noah, her glance moving over his body, which looked mighty fine in that wetsuit. They both stood there in mute silence as they watched him secure the boat on shore. He unzipped the wetsuit, pulling it from his shoulders to expose a very tight, very hard body, one with a tombstone cross with a J in the center on his left arm.

Amy groaned. "God he's so hot."

"Yes, he certainly is," Kathryn murmured, but then instantly straightened her shoulders. "I mean, yes, but he's not my type."

Amy rolled her eyes. "Come on, Kathryn, he's every girl's type."

And that was exactly why mooning over him was a waste of time. A hot guy like him would never look twice at a book-worm virgin like her. Kathryn shrugged off the comment, but try as she might, she couldn't tear her gaze away from him. It

was like coming upon a bad car accident and being compelled to stop and view the wreckage.

Her gaze lingered over his split lip and then left his face to admire his abs. She suddenly wondered what it would be like to touch them.

“Time to head back,” Amy said with a sigh, pulling Kathryn’s thoughts back.

“Right,” she said, shaking her head to clear it. Good God, what was wrong with her? She wasn’t into guys like Noah. Heck, she wasn’t into guys at all. She could almost hear her father’s voice. *Boyfriends get in the way, relationships distract from your greater purpose.*

Even when it did come time for her to bring a member of the opposite sex home, it certainly wouldn’t be someone like Noah, a boy who had trouble written all over him—one her new boss had not so subtly warned her to stay away from. Then again, she’d probably never get the chance to bring a boy home. No, her father probably already had a boring accountant from his firm picked out for her.

A boring guy to go with her boring life.

For the rest of her boring life.

Perfect, just perfect.

Noah braced his hands above the doorjamb and looked at Jared as he pushed papers across his desk. “I guess I owe you a thank you.”

Jared met his glance and said, “You don’t owe me anything.”

“Yeah, well, Donald would have fired my sorry ass if it weren’t for you.”

He pointed to his eye. “And I would have been floating at the bottom of the river if it weren’t for you.”

Noah plunked himself down on the seat opposite Jared. “Okay, so enough of this pussy shit. Are you hitting the Cave tonight, or what?” He rubbed his hands. “It’s initiating night. Time to give the summer staff a nice warm welcome to Stone Cliff.”

Jared grimaced like he was reliving his own dunk in the lake. “You mean a cold welcome.”

“So you’re going then?”

“That depends.”

“On what?”

“Are you going to be there?”

“Yeah, why?”

Instead of answering, Jared said, “Come on, let’s go eat. I’m starved.”

Noah’s stomach growled, a reminder that he hadn’t eaten since rafting down Canyon Run earlier that afternoon. He smirked and said, “Yeah, I can see how you’ve worked up an appetite, pushing the pile of paper around, and all.”

Jared gestured toward the cut on the corner of Noah’s mouth, reminding him of his fight with the Neanderthal last night. “Yeah, well, we’re not all suicide junkies like you.”

They walked toward the kitchen, passing by Shannon’s office. Noah glanced in, catching a glimpse of the cute red-head he’d caught staring at him earlier that morning when he was

getting reamed by Donald, and again later today down at Canyon Run.

“Who’s the new girl?” he asked.

“Kathryn Lane,” Jared said, not bothering to look to see who Noah was talking about. That was the all-knowing, all-seeing Jared, always had his finger on the pulse of the resort. “Scholarship student. She’s here for a summer internship.”

An uneasy shiver moved through Noah as he gave her a once over. It wasn’t the way she kept her back rigid, or the way she had her strawberry hair pulled back in a tight ponytail that had him thinking back to three years ago. It was her focus. The way she seemed to tune the whole world out as she concentrated on her task, like it was the most important thing in the entire world. Noah had learned the hard way that it wasn’t.

“Forget it, Noah,” Jared said.

“Forget what?” Luke asked, as he caught up with the two of them on the way to the kitchen. Noah knew Jared considered Luke a friend, but Noah, well, he’d rather run his raft into a rock wall than hang out with the guy. As far as he was concerned, Luke was a bit of a douche, always walking around like he thought he was better than everyone else. So what if he was a super star tennis player, taken out by an injury during the world’s junior a few years back. Now, thanks to his family’s connections, he had a nice cushy job at the resort, giving lessons—on and off the court—to some of the hottest ass around. And to top that off, he took a three-month hiatus in the summer, hanging out with his family in Europe during the resort’s busiest months. What twenty-three-year-old needed a hiatus? From the second Noah stepped onto the resort, Luke had seemed to take an instant dislike to him.

He'd never come out and said it to his face, but there was no denying the tension between them.

Jared jerked his head toward Shannon's office as they passed. "Noah was checking out the new girl."

"Oh yeah? Well forget it, pal," Luke sneered and ran his hand over his gelled hair. "A girl like that would never fall for your bullshit."

"It's not my bullshit they fall for," Noah said, grabbing his cock.

"You're such a crude bastard," Luke said. "Regardless, you're not her type."

"And you are?"

A sour look moved over Luke's face as he let his glance rake over Noah's work clothes. Then he waved a hand over his own body. Christ, the guy looked like a fucking pussy in his designer brand polo shirt and golf shorts. Noah could understand having to wear shit like that on the court, but the guy was off duty.

"Come on, Noah, you can't be serious," Luke said. "She's out of your league."

"Probably. But I bet I can get her to go out with me. In fact, I bet I can get her to do a lot of things with me."

"Oh really? Then I guess I'll take you up on that."

Wait! Shit, what had he just agreed to? He thought back to the pretty girl who looked like she was all work and no play. His gut tightened, because everything inside him told him that he should have kept his big mouth shut. Getting her to go out with him was a bad idea. Not because he wasn't up for the challenge, but because he saw way too much of himself in

her. Too much of the guy he used to be and never wanted to be again.

“Isn’t fucking around with staff forbidden?” Noah asked, hedging a direct answer.

“It’s frowned upon.” Luke made air quotes as they entered the kitchen area. “Not forbidden.”

With a shake of his head, Jared grabbed a tray and moved ahead of them, leaving them to hash out the details of the bet Noah knew better than to accept. Then again, he was the one who had put it out there. Jesus, he was such a fuck up.

“What’s good?” Jared asked the kitchen staff.

“Lasagna,” the head chef, Mario said in a very thick Italian accent. He looked past Jared’s shoulder and met Noah’s glance. “Nice and cheesy, just the way you like it, Noah.”

Working to keep things light, Noah stepped up to Mario and slapped him on the back. “You’re the man.” Reaching into his back pocket, Noah pulled out the two tickets a guest had given to him as a thank you for a fun time white water rafting. While he wasn’t allowed to accept cash tips, sometimes the guests rewarded him with things like vouchers and tickets.

“Take the wife out to the drive-in tonight.” He gave him a wink, and said, “Maybe you’ll get lucky and something really boring will be playing.”

Mario laughed. “You’re too good to me,” he said as he put an extra heaping of lasagna onto Noah’s plate.

Luke, who barely spared the cook a look, took his tray and made his way toward the back room, where staff ate separately from the guests.

“Well,” Luke continued as they all sat at the long table. “You want to bet on it or what?”

“What’s in it for you?” Noah asked, glancing out the window to see a squirrel run up a tree. Off in the distance he caught a glimpse of Amy, gesticulating with her hands like she always did as she showed another newbie around the resort. Noah caught the way Jared was watching her, his eyes glued on Amy’s ass.

Noah looked back at Luke in time to see a sly grin slide across his face. “Your motorcycle.”

“What the hell?” Noah’s head jerked back. “You want my bike?”

“Yes. Not the one you’re riding. I want that piece of crap you keep in the garage.”

“What the fuck do you want with that?” Noah swallowed the bile rising up in his throat at the mention of his broken down bike, or rather Jonny’s bike. Jonny had loved that vintage motorcycle more than anything in the world. He’d purchased it years ago with the intention of rebuilding it. But he hadn’t lived long enough to get it up and running. Noah had spent the last few years tinkering with it, wanting to see Jonny’s dream through for him. Unfortunately, the parts for this particular bike weren’t only expensive, they were hard as hell to come by. He’d recently found the gearbox he needed, and had put a bid in on it, but pulled out at the last minute to lend the money to Jared when he’d found out Jared was in trouble. He’d lost the part to another bidder, and had no idea if he’d ever find another, but it was worth it. No way could he just sit back and let Jared get the shit kicked out of him, or worse.

“It’s taking up too much room in the garage, and I’m afraid my Porsche is going to get dented with all those parts you have lying around.”

Noah shook his head, hardly able to believe what Luke was suggesting. “What’s in it for me?”

“I’ll help you restore your bike. Either way I win because it gets the damn thing out of the garage quicker.”

“I don’t want you touching my bike.”

Luke met his glance, and they stared at one another over their food. After a long moment, Luke pushed back in his chair, and said, “Okay, fine.” He pulled his car keys from his pocket and dangled them.

Noah shook his head as he stared at the keys to the Porsche. “Are you serious?”

“Jesus, Luke, what the hell are you doing?” Jared asked around a mouthful of lasagna.

Without taking his eyes off Noah, Luke smirked and said, “Don’t worry. I know what I’m doing.”

Shit, if Noah won Luke’s car, he could sell it and get the parts he needed to finish the bike.

Noah angled his head. “Are you sure about this?”

Luke dangled the keys again. “This is how sure I am. So what do you say? Do we have a bet or are you too chicken shit?”

“You’ll be gone all summer, how will you even know I got her?”

“I’ll know.”

“How?”

Luke arched a brow. “Because after one summer banging you, she’ll come out the other end just as fucked up.”

As he glared at Luke, he knew taking the bet was a shitty thing to do, but then again he was a prick, and pricks did shitty things.

He tossed a hunk of lasagna into his mouth and turned to Jared. “Tell me everything you know about her.”