

CHAPTER ONE

7:25 A.M. Thursday

“That guy is a frickin’ idiot.”

“Who’s an idiot?”

Brian Bane glanced at the girl sitting next to him before again splitting his attention between the twisting road in front of his Chevy Blazer and the tailgating Ford Explorer. On their right the roadway dropped over a thousand feet. As much as he liked excitement, this Internet-born adventure was not starting out as he’d imagined.

“The guy behind us,” he said, keeping a tight hold on the steering wheel. “He came up out of nowhere. Now he’s all over my ass. Like there’s any way for me to go faster up this grade.”

Misty—or Miss T as she was known on ChatPlace—twisted in her seat to look behind them. Her wild, blonde curls brushed her shoulders, and her miniskirt showed a teasing view of her inner thigh. “Shit,” she hissed through her teeth.

“What?” Brian said.

“He sent Vince.”

“Who sent Vince?”

“My dad.”

“Your dad?” Brian didn’t like the sound of that. “So, who’s Vince?”

“He’s a guy Dad knew in the Marines. He’s supposed to do computer security for my dad’s business, but he keeps acting like he’s my bodyguard. I can’t do a frickin’ thing without

him showing up.”

She flopped back against the seat, and crossed her arms over her chest. The fact that her old man had sent someone after her, and the way she was pouting, didn't bode well. For the first time since he'd picked Misty up in Skagway, Brian wasn't so certain she was the eighteen years she'd advertised.

“How old are you, Misty? Your real age, I mean.”

She glared at him, and then looked away. “Age is meaningless.”

Meaningless, my ass, he thought. *Damn, I'm so screwed*. He was about to take an under-aged girl into Canada. No wonder some steroid filled ex-Marine with an over attachment to the boss's daughter was after him. He'd be lucky if he wasn't arrested as an international felon.

“Do you think—?”

A thump to the back corner bumper sent the Blazer into a fishtail, and Brian gasped, clinging to the steering wheel as he fought to bring the car back under control. “Jeez, Misty, your dad's buddy just rammed us.”

“Then step on the gas,” Misty ordered, giving a quick glance behind them. “Outrun him.”

“In this thing?” The old Blazer was tired iron. The first part of the Klondike Highway, from Skagway to White Pass and the Canadian line, was a twisting, turning two-laner that rose from sea level to over three thousand feet. The steep incline was already taxing the engine. They'd be lucky to outrun a snowplow through this stretch.

Again the Explorer rammed into them, this time lurching them straight toward the guardrail as the road turned. Misty yelped and grabbed at the door. Brian swung the wheel. The sensation of the front right fender grating on metal vibrated through the steering column. When they came out of the turn, the Explorer was nearly nearly touching the Blazer's side.

“Your dad’s buddy is nuts! He’s going to kill us.”

“Just go faster!”

“I’m going as fast as I can.”

The powerful Explorer began squeezing them closer to the guardrail. Jaw clenched and muscles taut, Brian struggled to keep his SUV on the pavement. Adrenaline pumped through his body, a bitter taste rising to his throat.

And then his heart nearly stopped.

Just a few hundred feet ahead, the guardrail turned into a twisted, jagged strip of metal that hung limply to the ground. Open air replaced protection. One bump from the Explorer as they passed that broken section of guardrail, and they’d definitely be going over the edge, tumbling down the mountainside.

“That’s it, Babe.”

Brian pulled his foot from the gas and began to brake.

“What are you doing? Don’t slow down!”

“Forget it,” he said in disgust. Man, his friends had been right about this whole hooking up online thing. They’d tried to talk him out of it, but all Brian had been seeing was a summer traveling through Canada with a hot chick. Instead of lots of sex and partying, after this ex-Marine got through with him, he’d be lucky if all of his body parts were intact.

Brian brought the Blazer to a complete stop, his entire body shaking. The Explorer angled in front of him, preventing a forward escape. With a sigh, Brian shifted into park, and then turned toward Misty—the beautiful, sexy Miss T.

The beautiful, sexy, under-aged, Miss T, he mentally corrected. “Wouldn’t you know I’d hook up with jailbait.”

She glared at him. “So, it didn’t work out. Stop whining. Vince isn’t going to do anything to you.”

“Oh yeah?” Brian sure hoped that was true. “So, what was this, just a little joy ride for you?”

“What it was is none of your business.” Once again she looked away, out the side window.

Brian stared at her for a second, kicking himself for being such an idiot, then he stepped out of the car. As he looked toward the Explorer, he wondered if he should act angry—after all, Misty had duped him—or guilty, because he should have known she was under-age.

The other car door began to open, and Brian called out, “Listen, man, I had no idea she was—” He broke off as the man straightened and faced him. He almost laughed when he saw the bear mask . . .

Then he saw the gun.