

August Fire

By Kasey Riley

Fire...is such an insatiable ravenous beast. The arsonist felt his blood thundering through his veins as he watched the growth of the beast below him. In the distance, he could hear the sirens of the men who would destroy his beast. His smile reflected his sickness as he waited their arrival.

CHAPTER ONE

“Son of a bitch...don’t you dare do this to me now. Not here, damn it.” Stephanie Bascum ordered her vintage Mustang convertible as the car’s engine stuttered and died; steam rolled out from under the hood. She managed to guide the slowing car to the shoulder, well off the highway before it came to a sickening stop. Pulling out her cell phone to call her mom, she found no signal at this point between two bluffs on highway 50. “Awww crap!” Tears threatened, but she held them back. Viewing the surrounding high desert, taking in the landmarks and remembering how long she’d been driving; she figured Riverview, Colorado was another five or six miles ahead and Gunnison, Colorado about fifteen miles behind her current location.

She listened to the stillness of the high desert in mid-summer, as a few rogue tears slid down her cheeks. Grabbing a tissue, she turned on the radio for company, the soft country sounds of Blue Bayou wailed. She let the

music express her distress at this turn of events. Music flowed over her; she could blame the song for the tears. When the station broke for a commercial, she blew her nose; feeling better for the short bout of self-pity. Climbing out of the car, she marched around to the front and cautiously lifted the hot hood for the universal broken car signal. Billowing steam forced her to jump back. Thankfully, it wasn't smoke. With no motorists in sight, she had few hopes of rescue. Unless she climbed one of the surrounding hills, no tow truck would magically appear. She could either fix it or hike into town, a five-mile walk on a hot afternoon.

When Willie began "On the Road Again"... she sighed, "Yeah Willie, that's exactly where I am, on the side of the road." Jacking up the volume of the song, she took a bottle of water from the backseat cooler, sunscreen from the glove box, and then leaned with her butt against her car, looking out over the serene landscape. Far above, a lone vulture played in the thermals, gliding and circling, looking for a meal.

Drizzling sunscreen down her bare legs, she rubbed in the gooey cream, managing to avoid the straps of her new sandals. She continued to apply the white cream to her arms, the back of her neck and the ample skin exposed by her V-neck tank top. She finished with her shoulders and face. Summer sun was her nemesis in the clear air of the high desert plateau she called home. Only frequent applications of sunscreen kept her fair skin from blistering.

Without the wind whipping around her, she could feel every degree of the ninety-plus temperature of the hot August afternoon. Sighing again, she decided against using her drinking water to cool the engine. She might need it if she ended up hiking. Damn, her day had been going so well until this happened. Settling against the side of the car, her

back to the sun, she let her mind enjoy the solitude and sounds of the desert while she waited for the engine to cool.

She loved her Mustang, could never sell it, but its days of being her only car were numbered. It was like an unfaithful man...not reliable in any situation.

Hearing an approaching vehicle, she stepped out to flag down the motorist only to have a red Ford truck blow past her without slowing. Okay, so chivalry is dead. Walking back to the side of the car, she bent over at the waist and stuck her head under the hood. With the steam expelled, it had cooled enough to allow her to investigate the problem farther. Leaning into the engine, she lifted her left leg, extending herself farther across the motor, trying to see what caused the problem. Wishing she had her contacts, she squinted to see the hoses and wires.

Relaxing into the drive, the arsonist's thoughts spun on about making one good sale today. Something to prove he was in Montrose, working when the barn burned. He smiled and sped past a broken-down Mustang.

CHAPTER TWO

Fifty miles away and a half hour earlier:

Doyle Garrison pointed his Blue Silverado pickup west on Highway 50. “We should be there in another forty-five minutes or so.” He smiled over at Snatch, the golden lab mix he rescued from a dumpster on this journey to a new life. The young dog grinned back, his tongue lolling out of his mouth, before he laid himself down on the passenger seat. Doyle knew the dog didn’t understand, but it felt good to talk to someone, even if only to this skinny pup. Smiling, Doyle turned his attention back to driving.

“I’ll tell you one thing Snatch, you ever take my burger again...you and me will be having some loud words and you may end up walking home.” Laughing to himself as the dog eyed him without raising his head. Doyle recalled the speed of his hamburger disappearing down the throat of the animal before he realized it had been snatched.

A soft warm wetness slurped his right pinkie. Doyle looked into the seemingly understanding eyes of the animal. “Well, what would you have done if you caught your wife and best friend doing the nasty in your own bed? Probably ripped out his throat, right?”

Snatch licked the hand again and lay back down on the seat, never taking his eyes from his new best friend.

Doyle smiled before gently knuckling the dog’s soft head. “You smell so much better than yesterday, but I hope you don’t have fleas.” Hearing sirens, Doyle saw emergency vehicles driving on a frontage road and turning in at a dirt drive. Smoke billowed from a burning building... “Wow, boy. A fire. Let’s hope no one was hurt.” When he noted the property looked abandoned, he wondered how it started.

Driving up a long winding hill above a reservoir, a beat-up red Ford pickup blew past him. “*Damn fool. This is a hill and a curve,*” Doyle snarled to himself, “I guess the

double yellow line is for everyone except him.” Doyle hit his brakes, moving over to let the truck back in before the crest. The Ford never slowed, seeming to drive even faster around the curve. Doyle exhaled the breath he’d held while watching the stupid maneuver.

“Well, boy, the only good thing about that idiot is the fact that he’s going to be far enough ahead of us, we’ll be able to miss the wreck.” Doyle scratched the dog’s head and put his foot back on the accelerator.

Shrugging, he relaxed; the road curved to the left and a bridge crossed Morrow Point Reservoir. The color of the water reflected the bright blue of the wide-open sky. The surrounding landscape seemed to be either highlands or high desert. Soon another high bridge crossed over a canyon containing a large creek that emptied into the reservoir. Wow. Good thing he had a stable stomach and no fear of heights. As scenic as this highway was, he felt no sense of loss when he saw the road curve away from the water.

Topping a grade, he noticed a car at the bottom with its hood up. Automatically, his boot came off the gas pedal and he let the truck slow naturally before pulling behind the vintage Mustang. His eyes homed in on the long legs and well-rounded ass visible from under the hood. Admiring the view, he grinned like a kid discovering Santa. “Wow Snatch. Nice scenery around here, maybe she has a girl dog, too.”

When the truck door opened, Snatch jumped out over Doyle before he could get out. He watched first in amusement, and then in horror as the dog charged up and stuck his cold, wet nose between those shapely tanned thighs.

“*Snatch! No. Bad dog. Come!*” Doyle shouted, trying his best not to burst out laughing at this turn of events.

The woman jumped at the touch of the cold nose, hit her head on the underside of the hood, stepped backward only to lose her balance. Doyle leaped forward and managed to catch her before she hit the ground, but watched her ankle twist. Ouch...that was going to hurt.