



stacey weeks
In Too Deep

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Dedication

Dedicated to God my Father. May I always take seriously the responsibility that comes with proclaiming God's truth.

Thank you to my family for giving me the freedom to follow my passion to write.

Special thanks to Jane Hart for the idea that plugged a plot hole and to Jean Miller for the name Camp Moshe, which means to pull/draw out of the water.

Much thanks to fellow writer and friend Sandra Orchard, without your help and input, I would have given up long ago.

1

Kye Campton shrugged out of his dark suit coat and tossed it through the open window of his two-door sedan parked in front of Camp Moshe's offices. He had some time to kill before meeting with the camp's new swim instructor, Grace Stone. He folded up the cuffs of his suit pants, unbuttoned the top three buttons of his white dress shirt, and walked barefoot toward the sandy shoreline of Lake Moshe. The lapping coolness of the Georgian Bay washed over his toes, and he inhaled June's promise of heat.

A small boy paddled a blue canoe, and a smile tugged at his lips. If he had his way—and he usually did—this place would be crawling with kids canoeing, parasailing, horseback riding, and enjoying God's creation. The peaceful backdrop of the sun peaking over the swelling hilltops would draw families in need of rest. Which, according to his doctor, also happened to be what he needed. He was set to collide with burnout, and thirty-year-olds shouldn't get burnout.

"Look out!" A blur of red streaked past him, knocking him to his hands and knees. Water sprayed out around him.

"Hey!" He pushed up and shook off the wet.

The girl's sweater hit the sand as she sacrificed a quick glance back, her dark hair billowing out around her head. "Call 911!"

911? His eyes snapped to the horizon. Waves lapped against the side of a capsized canoe. The boy! A

crest of water washed over a small form and pushed it underneath the rolling surface. Kye fumbled for his phone and rushed knee-deep into the lake while punching in the numbers.

Pounding feet on the nearby dock dragged his gaze to the left. The woman had stripped down to a bathing suit and shouted indecipherable commands into the wind. The breeze snatched her words away. Before he could shout, move, or do anything, she dove into the lake.

An authoritative voice sounded from his phone. "911, how may I direct your call?"

"We need an ambulance at Camp Moshe." He glanced around, searching for the nearest lifeguard tower. "We are at the beach front by tower number two. A child is in trouble in the lake...Yes, someone has gone in after him. She's...she's..." he tracked her movements. Her toned arms cleanly sliced through the water with confident strokes and, despite swimming against the current, her pace never slowed. "She doesn't seem to be struggling. She's got the boy now. She's pulling him in." She exhibited impressive strength and competence as she turned the boy over, tucked him into the crook of her arm while supporting his head, and swam him in.

The operator wanted him to stay on the line. He punched the speaker option and slipped the phone into his shirt pocket. He waded deeper into the water meeting her at hip level. He wordlessly took the still child from her arms. She must be tired, although she didn't look it. He carried the boy to the beach and lay him down on the sand. Before he even had a chance to look him over, she nudged him out of the way.

"Is he breathing?" The operator's voice blasted

through his phone.

Kye snatched it out of his pocket. "I think so."

The woman checked the boy's airway and monitored his chest. Seemingly satisfied with what she saw, she rolled him onto his side and extended one arm out perpendicular to his body and pulled up one knee into his chest. The child spluttered and coughed.

"That's right." The woman rubbed his back in comforting, circular motions. "Cough it out."

Her velvety voice slowed Kye's panic and seemed to calm the child who only looked about eight years old. He seemed old enough to know better than to go out on the lake alone, but young enough to make reckless decisions.

She sat back on her heels, never shifting her eyes from the boy's face. Her damp hair hung down her back in tangled waves and clung to her tanned skin. Her strong physique, muscled but still feminine, hardly seemed winded; but then he noticed the slight heaving of her chest. Her sharp and silent intake of oxygen belied her facade of ease.

He turned off speakerphone and spoke directly into the mouthpiece. "I hear the sirens. The ambulance is almost here and the boy is coughing. He seems to be OK. Thank you." Kye disconnected.

He met the woman's eyes. If she hadn't been here... "Thank you."

Paramedics dropped down beside the boy, and she gave them a succinct summary of events while stepping back to give them the space they needed to work.

He waited for her attention. Nothing. She fixated on the child at first, and then her eyes closed and her lips moved. Was she praying? He cleared his throat.

Finally, she looked at him. In the brief second they made visual contact, fear, relief, and exhaustion flashed through her eyes.

"Thank you," he tried again.

"You're welcome."

He waited for her to say more, but she didn't. Instead, she shaded her eyes and studied Camp Moshe's boatshed. After a few seconds, she shifted her interest to the empty lifeguard tower and finally rested on the camp offices just up the gravel path where he had parked his car. Her eyes narrowed before they swung back to him and roamed up and down the length of his body. He got the feeling that both he and the camp had failed some sort of test.

"Why wasn't the boatshed locked? Camp Moshe always locks their boatshed until the lifeguards start work at the end of June. Where's Uncle Carl? Who'd he leave in charge of the beach?" She fired her questions one after the other.

Kye blinked. She knew too much about camp to be a cottager on vacation. The only person scheduled to be here right now, who'd dive into the lake without hesitation and ask these kinds of questions with such authority, was Grace Stone. This was not the way he had planned to meet his predecessor's niece.

Before he could respond, she whipped around and her wet hair slapped against her cheek. She started back toward the dock, scooping up her discarded sweater as she went, mumbling something that sounded like, "Never mind. I'll find out for myself what sort of clown is running this place."

Kye knew he should have let her walk away. But against his better judgment, he followed at a respectful distance, comparing her to the polished women he

usually rubbed shoulders with in the business world. She radiated simplicity, like the girl next door but all grown up. She'd probably choose jeans, flip-flops, and a beach BBQ over dining at a splashy, high-end restaurant. He'd bet she was nothing like his high maintenance ex-fiancé, Annette.

She gathered the rest of her discarded clothing and paused at the end of the dock, looking out over the water. The morning sun glowed, creating a tranquil, almost postcard-like, picture.

Kye waited. She had to come back this way at some point. She finally turned. If she was surprised to see him standing there, she hid it well. She walked toward him, appearing neither repentant for her earlier onslaught of questions nor embarrassed by them.

Kye blocked her path with an extended hand before she could brush past him. "Kye Campton. Interim Camp Director." He met her widened eyes and lifted one brow before wryly adding, "The clown in charge."

~*~

Grace blinked.

This guy was in charge of the beach? She flicked her eyes down his length again. Somehow he seemed better suited for office work.

She needed to find Uncle Carl. She couldn't imagine him hiring some bozo incapable of keeping the boatshed locked until the lifeguards arrived. There must be a reasonable explanation for placing a businessman in charge of the water. And what in the world did interim mean? Uncle Carl was the camp director.

She took another look at his soggy business slacks and untucked shirt as she accepted his offered hand. His thumb swiped across her knuckles as their gazes held.

Despite her critical perception of him seconds earlier, her insides swirled like the sandy lake bottom.

He held on a nanosecond longer than necessary, and his warm, firm, clasp was not the clammy, limp fish she expected from a displaced office man. An unexpected waft of coconut sunscreen further belied his business attire.

She straightened up. "I'm Grace Stone. Sorry for the clown comment. It wasn't kind or necessary."

He stared at her without saying a word, and she fought the urge to squirm. Shouldn't the director of a Christian camp be quicker to forgive? Besides, if he was in charge, he was responsible for that boatshed. She had seen from the parking lot that the drowning boy was in a camp boat. All the camp boats were blue and displayed the Camp Moshe logo. How did this guy miss it? She held his stare and lifted her chin. Once Uncle Carl heard about this oversight—and boy would he hear about it—this interim director could kiss his job good-bye.

Kye hitched his head toward the office. "We can meet in my office in about fifteen minutes. I'll need to speak with the paramedics before they leave, and I'll clean up anything they leave on the beach."

"Your office?" she parroted.

"Yes." He pointed to the office buildings as if she wouldn't know where they were.

"I know where the offices are."

"Good, then you won't be late." He flashed a quick grin that displayed one perfect dimple in his left cheek,

and she steeled her lurching heart. Even if he was a good guy, launching her water safety program required all her time and attention. She had no interest in diving into the shallow waters of a summer fling.

She nodded, and he trotted off toward the paramedics who were speaking with a distraught couple, presumably the boy's parents. She pulled her loose weave sweater over her head and tugged her jeans up over her hips, thankful she had worn her suit under her clothes. The lake water would soak through in minutes, but it was all she had. She had planned to swim after their meeting, not before.

What is going on, Lord? This wasn't how I planned my big comeback to Camp Moshe.

Fifteen minutes later, she stood in Kye's office, formerly Uncle Carl's office, twisting her fingers together and wishing she had dry clothes. Armed with new information gleaned from Judy, the director's administrative assistant, she felt somewhat up to speed. Judy spent the last five minutes alternating between dabbing her eyes over the financial mess sinking the camp and wiping them over Uncle Carl's early, unexpected retirement. She worked her way through an entire package of travel-sized tissues in their brief conversation.

Grace gathered enough information to get the gist. Some first-rate smarty-pants had managed to convince the board of directors that Camp Moshe needed a new, younger face. They bought out Uncle Carl and turned the place upside-down. If the scuttlebutt in the lobby could be believed, Camp Moshe was re-launching as an extreme sports camp—a concept that wasn't just crazy, but downright dangerous. She shuddered. She'd been in enough dangerous situations in her twenty-

nine years to last her a lifetime.

Thank the Lord He brought her here to slow down the man hurling Camp Moshe toward disaster. Dangling danger in front of kids was like playing with fire. Children had no concept of their limitations, often overestimating their abilities. Sure, some of it was normal kid stuff, but sometimes things took a deadly, unexpected turn.

Don't go there.

She swiped her eyes and stuffed the memories deep. She couldn't go there. Not right now.

"So you're Grace Stone." From behind her, a dry, refreshed-looking Kye strode into the room, yanking her from her thoughts.

"The way you pulled that boy in," Kye's voice momentarily hitched and he swallowed hard. "You're everything your uncle said you were and more."

"Uncle Carl?" Funny that her uncle never mentioned Kye to her.

Kye moved behind his desk and gestured to the armchair on her left. "He said you were a firecracker and a first-rate lifeguard. I wish we could have met under calmer, less life-threatening circumstances, but seeing you in action, well, that was something else. You surpassed even your uncle's description. You're clearly qualified for the position."

"That wasn't an audition." She ignored his gesture to sit. She'd need to employ every trick in the book to maintain the upper hand.

"No," his expression sobered. "But I am thankful you were there." He adjusted his shirt cuff and sat down.

How did he clean up so fast? What did he have, a dozen suits exactly the same style, cut, and color

hanging in a storage locker somewhere? She pulled her sweater tighter, even more aware that her jeans and back were now wet through.

"Kye is an interesting name."

He looked surprised at her attempt at small talk. "It's short for Malachi. My mother is very," he paused as if searching for the right word, "fundamental. Your name made me chuckle too."

"Grace?"

"No, Stone. You know, since you're a swim instructor and stones sink?"

She fought the urge to roll her eyes.

He shuffled some papers on his desk and cleared his throat. "Please, sit."

"I'm good, thanks."

He stared for a moment and then shrugged. "Your choice."

"So where is Uncle Carl?" She folded her arms across her chest and pivoted her weight to her right leg. The wet denim stuck to her thigh in the most uncomfortable way. Judy had told her Uncle Carl had retired, but she didn't buy it. Not Uncle Carl. Not without telling her first.

Kye leaned back in his chair and pressed his fingertips together. It made her uncomfortable. "Somewhere in the Caribbean fishing, I believe."

What? She felt behind her for the chair and sank into the seat. She had made her plans with Uncle Carl and sold her program to him, but she hadn't signed anything. They planned to firm up the details today. How could he leave without telling her? And what did that mean for her program?

"So he's really gone?" She hated the catch in her voice. Uncle Carl was like a father to her and had been

since her dad died.

Kye's blue eyes visibly softened as if he had anticipated how she would take this news. "He left two days ago. If it's any consolation, things came together really fast and he tried to call you multiple times, but you were unavailable. He didn't want to email about something this big and thought it was better if I told you when you arrived."

"I had an issue with my cell phone. It was in for repairs."

"He left a forwarding number for you."

He didn't hand it to her. He placed it on the desk and slid it part way across the wooden surface, forcing her to meet him halfway. Likely some sort of smooth business trick learned in school. She gave the paper a cursory glance before closing her eyes. Uncle Carl had mentioned that things were changing at the camp. He said they were good changes, and that he'd fill her in when he could. How could he leave like this? And what was she going to do now? Her program had impressed Uncle Carl, and he booked her for the entire summer—but Uncle Carl wasn't here anymore. He had been replaced by some suit who likely didn't understand the importance of water safety for non-swimmers. He probably believed she was just a glorified lifeguard.

Lifeguards. Her eyes snapped opened. "Why was the boatshed unlocked before the lifeguards started? And why wasn't the boy wearing a life jacket?"

Kye shrugged, and his casualness rubbed her raw. "It looks like the kid broke the lock, and it's been my experience that when a kid takes something that doesn't belong to him for a joyride, he's not likely to steal the accompanying safety equipment."

“Does that happen much? Joy-riders? What will you do when they steal rock climbing equipment or paddle boards?” She curled her fingernails into the arms of her chair and willed her voice to remain steady.

He stiffened. Clearly, he didn’t expect her to know any camp details. She could almost see the cogs in his brain turning, trying to figure out how she had found out so fast. For once, she felt thankful for Judy’s loose tongue. As a thank you, she’d have to buy her one of those specialty coffees she liked so much.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your concern. But if you don’t like the direction I’m steering the camp, you’re not obligated to remain as a lifeguard. We don’t have a contract.” He was testing her. She was sure of it.

“Lifeguard?” She shot to her full five-foot-six-inch frame and towered over the desk. “You have no idea what I do or what plans I made with Uncle Carl. I am not just a lifeguard. I’ve created a new program geared to help—”

“Non-swimmers survive in the water,” he interrupted, patting the air like he wanted her to calm down. “I know. It’s called Water Survival for Non-Swimmers. He did tell me. And you’ll have a chance to pitch your program to me. Today was supposed to be a get-to-know-you meeting.”

It wasn’t fair. He knew far more about her than she knew about him. A few well-placed phone calls should fix that.

He tapped his phone and opened an electronic day-planner. “How about two days from now? You could pitch your program to me then.” He looked up but didn’t stand to reach her level. It was like he couldn’t be bothered. Another boardroom trick?

She suddenly felt woozy, and the chair rushed up underneath her. She gratefully sank into it. Would Kye pull the plug? She swallowed her vinegary comeback and replaced it with honeyed words. "I'll be happy to pitch it to you in two days. Uncle Carl and I established a viable plan to recover this camp. This place means a lot to me, and I want to see it succeed." She needed it to succeed. This was her last year to qualify for the young entrepreneurs' grant. And if she wanted this provincial funding, she needed to run the program through a camp.

"Great." Kye shuffled some papers on his desk. "We are on the same page. Turning this place around is my job. It's the whole reason the board of directors turned to my firm for help and contracted me. I am good at my job."

He said it with confidence, but she heard the undertone of a challenge and gobbled the bait. "I'm sure once you hear my pitch, you'll agree with me and Uncle Carl and get on board with our program. Water programs are a safe bet for summer camps. Extreme sports, well, that's a little risky."

His face reddened at the words *safe bet*. "Carl is no longer here, and in case you didn't notice, they called me in to replace him because his 'viable ideas,'" he put air-quotes around the words, "were not attracting campers. Not for the last five years. Camp Moshe is on its last summer unless I can turn this boat around. We are done with safe bets. It's time to take a risk."

"Now you just wait—"

He held up his hand. "Before you get all crazy, Carl was offered a nice severance which he gladly accepted. I did not gun for his job. The board hired me after months of discussion with Carl. They agreed they

needed someone with my special skills to save this place. It's what I do."

"But Uncle Carl—"

"Is off on a well-deserved holiday and will be back in the fall to help transition in the new permanent camp director. But for now, you're stuck with me. Like it or not."

She snatched up Uncle Carl's new phone number. Nope, she didn't like it, not one little bit.

2

Kye broke from the trees and hit the beach. He slowed just long enough to kick off his shoes and finish his morning jog barefoot. He tried to concentrate on the worship track pulsating through his ear buds, but he couldn't stop thinking about the threatening note he found tacked to his cabin door. Did Grace write it? The idea that she might dislike him enough to threaten him twisted his gut.

He pushed the spirited woman out of his mind and upped his pace until the sand sprayed behind him. It didn't matter. She wouldn't be the first person to try and bully him out of a job. It came with the territory. It had never gone past empty threats in the past.

He veered into the water, and a shock of cold jolted him harder than his 5:00 a.m. coffee. A wave, courtesy of a passing motorboat, lapped over his ankles, shooting numbness up his legs. He angled himself to move higher toward the drier sand on the beach. He dodged pebbles and sticks and made a mental note to arrange for the town to start dragging the sand every morning.

He wrestled with an urge to stop and note that reminder into his phone. He had so many details crammed inside his head he was afraid he'd only remember this task tomorrow morning when the sticks and stones stabbed his feet again.

Before he could decide, his phone vibrated in his armband. He slowed to a brisk walk. Killing two birds

with one stone, he made his note and swiped his thumb down the phone's touch screen. Tamera Campton. His mother. He considered letting it go to voicemail—except, did she know about the note? He'd sheltered her from the disgruntled employees he'd dealt with in the past and didn't intend to start including her now. His reputation as a fixer made him popular with the board members and shareholders of struggling corporations but not so much with staff. When someone like him arrived, the following employee overhaul pushed some personalities to the edge.

"Hello?"

"Good morning Malachi. I held dinner until nine o'clock last night. Were you unwell?"

He'd bailed on dinner last night. This call must be his punishment. He drew a calming breath and stopped. It was too hard to keep up his vigorous pace and keep up with his scheming mother. "I'm fine, Mom. I told you I wouldn't be able to make dinner. Did you forget?" He should have left his phone at home and jogged without the tunes today.

"Sarah was so disappointed you cancelled. It's a shame. She's such a lovely girl." Her displeasure oozed through the connection.

"You never mentioned Sarah." He had suspected her ulterior motive for dinner included a woman. Ever since he had called off his engagement to Annette, his mother repeatedly expressed how she hated his transitory lifestyle that made dating difficult, marriage unlikely, and grandchildren non-existent. For a mother determined to keep him healthy and happy, she seemed oblivious to the effect her Cupid-inspired ploys had on his blood pressure.