

ROCKY MOUNTAIN KID by Virginia Fox

EXCERPT

Paige Nilson stared down the biggest cinnamon bun she'd ever seen. It competed directly against the Rocky Mountain Diner's famous, freshly ground, steaming hot coffee. She looked back and forth between the two, taking stock, and sighed. *What came first? The chicken or the egg?*

Slightly overwhelmed, she stared at the dessert. There's no chicken here. Or eggs. Just a luscious cinnamon bun. So, I'm safe! She shook her head. *No. No. No. I can't do carbs and sugar without anything in my stomach.* She grabbed the coffee and took a big sip. Before she realized it, she promptly burned her tongue. *Great. Just great.* Her streak of bad luck seemed to continue splendidly. Tentatively, she nibbled on the thick sugar icing. She closed her eyes and groaned loudly. The sweetness made her taste buds stop hurting. Maybe the gods weren't totally out to get her, after all. A cinnamon bun had *never* tasted so good.

"That's one lucky pastry," an amused, deep voice boomed behind her.

Embarrassed, she turned and stared right into the broad chest and perfectly pressed fabric of a man's uniform. Her mouth watered. At first, and of course, she salivated because she'd taken too long between bites. Why else? A half-dozen other scenarios came to mind on the spot as she slowly lifted her gaze over his broad shoulders and stopped on a handsome, square-jawed face. He possessed the bluest eyes she'd ever seen, military short-cropped dark hair, and a smile that required a gun license. Maybe two.

"So, do you like what you see?" he flirted. He put his hand on his hip and leaned like he was modeling for Michelangelo. His gaze roamed all over her. Paige suddenly felt a kinship with her cinnamon bun . . . knew he was objectifying her the way she had objectified *it!* She always figured whenever she'd been eyeballed, it was mainly because of the way her strawberry blonde hair framed her heart-shaped face. She was sitting, so she knew there was no way he could really check out her body.

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s just that coffee here has mind-altering properties,” she said, raising her coffee like she was giving a toast. She caught the name stitched onto his lapel.

Ace O’Neil.

Ace stared at her coffee as if what she’d said wasn’t a joke. Had she really been talking about drugs in coffee? Did she imply he only looked good because she was medicated? Had she accidentally insulted him while trying to flirt?

Paige noticed his confusion. Based on his looks, he was probably used to women throwing themselves at him. She pictured him checking himself out in the mirror, thrilled with himself. Then she pictured herself behind him, sliding her hands around his full chest, reaching for his chin to turn his face to hers, their mouths opening in anticipation.