



Building with the Mountain Man (Heroes of Apple Falls #1)

Author: Lyssa J Cole

Category: Romance

Description: One night changed their lives. And gave them forever to build a life together.

With the new construction company in town, a lot of hot, sexy mountain men now frequented my familys garden center. There was one I just couldnt resist. He was older, handsome, rugged, and always flirting with me.

When our two worlds collided in a heated moment of passion and desire, something unexpected happened. A baby. But I was keeping my pregnancy a secret.

Yet when I started to show, it was no longer under wraps. The mountain man wanted me and our baby.

And he wasnt taking no for an answer.

Total Pages (Source): 7

CHAPTER ONE

Journey

“There. Perfect.” I admired my new display of potted succulents, a new line my family’s store began carrying. The stupid cheap cardboard display case they send with the plants always sucked, but this one was a lot sturdier, and I had faith it would hold.

Satisfied with my handiwork, I cleaned up the packaging and as I was about to finish, a boom! echoed loudly through the air followed by the shrill shatter of pots.

“Uh, oh.” A soft voice cried before letting out a loud scream. I turned to find my display case destroyed, pots in several pieces, along with succulent plants all over the floor. A young child stood there very upset, his face red with tears.

Even though I was fuming inside, I swallowed my annoyance and plastered on a smile. “It’s okay, accidents happen.”

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry, Miss. Please, let us help clean up. I’ll pay for the plants too.” A young mother, her face frantic and her hair a mess, picked up her screaming child and looked at me with pleading eyes.

“No, it’s okay. Don’t worry about it.” I forced my smile to stay in place, as she scampered away, her children still screaming.

“Wow, you really know how to scare kids, huh, sis?” Lucian teased as he walked

over and saw the mess.

“More like kids destroy all your hard work without so much as a sorry.” I muttered.

“Bad day, sis? Don’t worry, I’ll help you.” Lucian grabbed the closet trash can and pulled it over.

“Whoa, what happened here?” Carina’s eyes widened as she took in the situation.

“A morning’s hard work wasted. Little kid knocked over my display. I really thought this display case would be sturdier, but nope. It’s cheap, like the rest of them. I think it’s time Mom and Dad look for some new suppliers.”

“Ha! You know that won’t happen.” Lucian said. “What does Dad always say- if it’s not broke?—”

“Don’t fix it.” I finished for him. “But guess what? This shit is broken.”

Both Lucian and Carina laughed and helped me clean up.

Afterwards, I headed to the back in search of a stand and more succulents.

Starting over sucked but at least it would keep me busy longer.

I’d rather be involved in some sort of task than helping customers.

Not that I minded helping, as most of the locals were pleasant enough.

I just didn’t always feel like peopling. Today was one of those days.

“I’ve noticed more guys coming in from the new construction crew in town.” Carina

said from behind me, and I nearly jumped two feet.

“Jeez! A warning would be nice.”

“Why are you so jumpy today?”

“Maybe my whole display crashed to the ground in front of me?”

“I think it’s someone not getting laid.” My sister snickered and I wanted to throw something at her head.

“Okay, miss, I’m so in love and get laid all the time. Besides, how do you know what I’m doing in my free time?”

“True. There was that one time?—”

I held my hand up, so she’d shut it. “Let’s leave the past in the past, okay, sis? Now move it along. I’ve got things to do.”

“It wouldn’t hurt for you to check out some eye candy. You never know who might wander in.” She blew me a kiss and disappeared from the back room.

I sighed and went back to my task. I didn’t need to look at any eye candy. If I wanted meaningless sex, I’d find someone from a few towns away, with no chances of running into them here. In a small town, everyone knew everyone, and it wasn’t easy to keep anything on the down low.

The only shelf I liked was the largest one in the back, but I didn’t mind. It would work perfectly for what I needed. With heavy pants and even heavier pushing, I dragged the multiple shelf display case to the set-up spot.

“Need some help with that?” A deep, burly voice washed over me, sending a tidal wave of something I hadn’t felt in a really long time, nor did I want to.

“No, I’m okay, thanks.” I said without making eye contact. That voice must’ve come from some type of sexy man and if I looked, I might not be able to stop myself.

“You sure? You look like you could use some help.” He chuckled, the sound more like a growl, and my curiosity got the better of me.

I dared to sneak a glance and holy shit was this man smoking hot.

I swallowed hard, like I had drool or something, and my hand flew to my mouth in hopes I really wasn’t drooling.

He was tall, must be around six foot four if I were to take a guess, and the muscles bulging beneath his tight t-shirt were hard to miss.

I imagined what he might look like underneath, maybe a sexy six pack I’d like to run my teeth all over.

Tattoos covered his arms, full sleeves on both, with a few peeking out from the top of his t-shirt.

Dark brown hair matched his brown eyes, intense brown eyes I should say, with the way they were staring right through to my soul.

Clearing my throat, I pushed a piece of loose hair back into my bun and smoothed down my now wrinkly tank top and shorts, dusty from the back room.

“I should be asking if you need any help. Do you?” I looked everywhere but him, his handsome rugged looks causing alarm bells to ring and red flags to wave. Please say

no, please say no.

“Actually, would you mind showing me where the marble slats are?”

Dammit. I still couldn’t even look at him.

You got this, girl. Don’t let his looks get to you.

More like don’t drag him into the back room and have your way with him.

Not that I would ever do that. Not here, hell no. My father has cameras around, and my family is constantly appearing out of nowhere.

“We don’t have any in stock. But we are taking custom orders for them. You can make one at the customer service desk.”

“Perfect, thanks. Journey, is it?”

I froze. How does he know my name?!

Oh wait. My nametag. Duh.

“Yep, that’s me.”

“I’m Cullen. Nice to meet you. I’m sure we’ll be seeing a lot of each other.”

His words made me pause. Seeing a lot of each other? Why?

My heart kicked into overdrive as I finally made eye contact with him again. Big mistake.

Cullen winked, and that was it. There went my panties.

I watched his sexy ass sway in those tight cargo pants of his as he walked away, unable to resist. He turned around and I jumped, my back rigid. I pretended to busy myself with the display case, but I heard his laughter.

“Whoa. Who was that, sis?” Carina said from behind me, and I spun on my heel, jumping for a second time.

I clutched my pounding chest. “Can you please stop doing that? And I don’t know, just a customer.” I shrugged.

“Mmhmm, sure was hot.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say.” With a wave of my hand, I went to grab the succulents, hoping I never saw that sexy man again.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am

CHAPTER TWO

Cullen

After placing an order for the marble slats my boss wanted, I headed out to my truck. With a quick stop for lunch, I'd drive back over to the construction site and see what needed to be done.

I only started this job a couple of days ago, jumping on the opportunity as soon as it came. Before, I worked odd jobs here and there, but nothing steady ever appeared. Until Thane Stanton brought Stanton Construction to Apple Falls and employed a bunch of us guys to form an entire crew.

Now, the jobs were flowing, and I was busy. It gave me less time to work on my side hobby of building custom pieces of furniture, but I'd rather be busy making money than not.

Today was my first day visiting the Apple Falls Garden Center and something told me I'd be back a lot more. Not only because of work, but a certain beautiful woman I kept seeing in my mind.

Her green eyes so bright, her face covered in freckles, and the curves...my dick thickened just thinking about her sexy self.

But it was strange at the same time.

I haven't wanted a woman in a long time, haven't felt the need to date, or even have

sex. As my forties were rapidly approaching in the next year, I thought maybe the family thing just wasn't for me. I'm fine being alone, content even.

Yet this woman...

I nearly missed the turn to the construction site and swerved just in time to make it.

See? See how women already fuck up your life so quickly?

"How'd it go? Did you get the order in?" Thane asked as soon as I stepped out of my truck.

"Yep. Should be in by the end of the week."

"Great. I need your help with some of this framework. You good to jump in?"

"You got it boss." Framework was a walk in the park to me. Hell, I built my cabin from the bottom up, every beam, every slat, every window and door put in by me, while camping out in a trailer at night.

I grabbed my tool belt from my truck and slid it on. Hopefully the rest of the day passes without another thought of the gorgeous woman.

As the workdays went by in a flurry of nails and wood and framing, I came up with every excuse under the sun to stop by the garden center. We needed more nails? Sure, I'd go. More wood? The daily pick up? A new drill?

I came up with anything for a chance to see her. Ask her a question. Watch her like a damn puppy dog. I came in so much I was afraid they'd kick me out for being a weirdo.

And every time, I became more and more intrigued by the gorgeous green-eyed beauty. Smitten. Captivated. A complete and utter goner.

I hadn't felt this way about a woman in a long time, and I never wanted to. But something about her kept me coming back for more. Until I could no longer hold back.

It wasn't hard to find her, always near the garden area, watering or tending to plants and helping customers. I sauntered over to her, a grin stretching across my face. "Hey, how's your day going?"

"Oh, hey, Cullen. Back for more nails?" Journey smirked, a light playfulness in her tone. I wanted to toss her over my shoulder, spank her ass, and carry her to my bed.

"Yep. When you're building a house, you kind of need a lot."

"I can imagine. Do you need help finding them?" She teased, a warmth to her tone, one that had me ready to fall to my knees and give her the damn world.

"Nah, I think I can remember. But I do have one more question?"

"Shoot." Journey plucked a leaf off of a plant before spritzing it with water.

"Will you have dinner with me?"

Her body froze, noticeable by the way she stiffened, no longer spritzing the plant with water, but the ground. "What?" She choked out.

I held back my laugh. I couldn't help it with how adorable she was.

"You know, the meal most people have later in the day, will you have it with me?"

Journey stepped back and placed the spray bottle on the cart next to her, the one she wheeled around with all of her supplies.

She crossed her arms over her chest, and I tried to ignore her ample cleavage on full display.

“Listen, Cullen, you’re a nice guy and everything, but I work here, my family owns the place, and it’s not a good idea to mix business and pleasure.

Been there, done that.” Her voice softened on the last few words.

The thought of her being with someone else lit a fire somewhere deep inside me.

And not a good one, either. I needed to quit before I found myself too invested.

But my mouth said words my mind didn’t think.

“It’s just dinner. One time, that’s it. I promise to behave.

” Behave as in keep my hands to myself during dinner, but after that, all bets are off.

“What’s the point of one dinner? Why bother?”

Smart and sassy. I liked it. A woman with a backbone was my type of woman.

“Maybe to get to know each other?” I tried to throw her off, but she was as quick as the snap of a whip.

Journey smiled and placed her hands on the cart handle. “Have a good day, Cullen.”

She moved forward and I reached out, my hand landing on her arm in attempt to stop

her. “Wait, please let me take you out. As friends. No funny business.”

“So out of the blue, you ask me to dinner, and I’m supposed to think there’s no underlying intentions?”

“Is wanting to repay you for your kindness such a bad thing?”

“Most people would drop off a gift card or maybe a fruit basket.”

“I’m not most people. It’ll be fun, trust me.

” I sounded pathetic, like a guy begging for some attention.

But that’s what she did to me. Morphed me into a puddle of goo on the floor with no trace of a coherent thought.

As much as I told myself to stop, let it go, nothing good could come of this, I didn’t back down.

“Fine. But only one dinner. That’s it. And just dinner. Nothing after.” Journey said and if I wasn’t mistaken, the corner of her mouth turned up into a sexy grin, a molten look overtaking her eyes.

This was going to be fun.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am

CHAPTER THREE

Journey

I checked my reflection in the bathroom mirror for the hundredth time, and with one last swipe of lipstick, I headed out the door. Cullen exchanged phone numbers with me earlier and informed me through text he wanted to pick me up.

My apartment was in the finished basement of my parent's cabin, complete with a small kitchenette, a bathroom with a shower stall, a living room with a dining room table set off to the side, and one bedroom.

The little apartment had come with the cabin when my parents bought it, a year into being married.

Haven't moved since, raising my siblings and I there.

The apartment in the basement had been rented out before but my parents didn't want to deal with the hassle of being a landlord on top of running the garden center.

So, it sat untouched until they offered it to me.

I waited on the driveway, Cullen already a few minutes late. I hated waiting, had little patience, and ended up pacing the length of the driveway a few times before he finally pulled in.

Cullen put the truck in park and hopped out.

He looked more handsome now that he'd cleaned up.

A tight short sleeve button down shirt fit him perfectly, showing off his inked forearms I wanted to lick.

A fresh haircut, his beard trimmed, and the best smelling cologne to ever hit my nose, had me rethinking everything about tonight.

You're going to sleep with this man and you're going to love it.

I busied myself with fixing my dress though nothing was wrong with it when I felt him stand beside me, his heat radiating off him like the sun on hot pavement. His cologne was stronger now and I nearly jumped into his arms right then and there.

Damn girl, reel it in.

It's been way too long since I got laid.

"Wow, nice place you've got."

"It's actually my parents' place. I live in the basement apartment."

His deep brown eyes lit up with curiosity, no trace of judgement in them. "That's awesome. You're close with your family, am I right?"

I laughed, some of my nerves dissipating. "You could say that again. But I have my own entrance and lots of privacy. I like it."

"I would too." He held out his hand and my heart exploded. "C'mon, I'll help you into the truck." He nodded at my shoe choice, a wedged heel that went perfect with my black lacy dress.

Okay, so maybe I was a bit overdressed, especially for a dinner date I didn't want to go on, but here we are.

Stop lying to yourself.

When I placed my hand in his, it was even better than I could've imagined. Our touch ignited a type of spark I'd never felt before, a combustion waiting to happen.

Why? Why does he feel so special? So different?

Cullen walked me to the passenger side door of the truck and helped me in before climbing in the other side. "Ready for an adventure?"

"Sure. As long as we get some grub." I answered.

Cullen laughed and the sound filled me with warmth. I could get used to hanging around him.

No, no you couldn't.

"Of course. I couldn't let such a pretty lady starve." Cullen winked and I nearly orgasmed in his front seat.

Damn him for destroying another pair of my panties.

Dinner wasn't anything I expected.

The drinks and food flowed and so did the conversation. Instead of fighting against it, I leaned into it and ended up enjoying myself and his company.

On the ride home, he reached over and squeezed my hand. "Thank you, Journey.

Tonight was fun. More fun than I've had in a really long time."

His words squeezed my heart. "Me too." Over dinner, he told me he had no family around, having been a loner most of his life.

Then he got a phone call, saying a distant relative left him some land in Apple Falls.

He bought a trailer and lived on the land while learning the construction trade, until he was able to build his own cabin.

From scratch.

And he did it, all by himself, despite the occasional plumber and electrician.

Before I could stop myself, the words tumbled from my lips. "I'd love to see your cabin."

The air between us crackled, shifting with more intensity.

"Are you asking if I'll take you back to my place?" Cullen shot me a mischievous look.

"Yep! Go quick before the offer expires!" I giggled, the few drinks from dinner making me feel light and giddy. Daring. Adventurous.

And probably regretful in the morning.

But what was life without a few regrets?

Cullen chuckled, the sound more growl like. "Trust me, you don't want the offer to expire."

A shiver trickled down my spine, my skin covered in goosebumps.

When he pulled his truck into the driveway, a small log cabin appeared, a wraparound front porch complete with rocking chairs and a few hanging plants.

“I love it already.” I said and soon, we were inside, Cullen giving me the grand tour.

“It’s perfect. You’re so talented.” I said with such admiration of his handy work.

The back door led out to a patio with a large fenced in yard.

A large toolshed sat in the far back, almost the same size of the cabin.

“Is that a home away from home?” I asked with a nod towards the shed.

“Kind of. Bit of a man cave, bit of a work bench.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“I usually don’t share this, but for some reason I want to share everything with you. As a side hobby, I build furniture pieces.”

“What, really? That’s amazing, Cullen!” I looked around at a few gorgeous pieces he was using currently. “Did you make all these?”

“Yes.” He said sheepishly.

“They are beautiful! Please tell me you sell your pieces.”

Cullen shook his head. “Nah, no one would want to buy these. I just do it for myself. Store them in my shed. Though I’m beginning to run out of space.” He chuckled to

himself and scratched his beard. “But working more now will keep me busier, less time for side hobbies.”

I walked up to him and placed a hand on his muscular arm, my fingers tingling from the feel of his hot skin.

“Your work is beautiful. But I understand wanting to keep it for yourself. Maybe one day you’ll be ready to share with the world.

If not, that’s okay too. As long as you keep sharing with me. ” I grinned.

Before I knew what was happening, Cullen cupped the side of my face with his hand, tracing a thumb over my cheekbone.

And then he kissed me so hard, my entire world flipped upside down.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am

CHAPTER FOUR

Cullen

She tasted sweet, like a ripe strawberry picked at the peak of perfection, and I knew right then and there, I would never get enough.

Ever.

Journey was mine, whether or not she wanted to admit it. But after tonight, she might very well be admitting it to me and to herself.

My tongue slipped inside, and she tasted even better, like an addicting elixir.

A full-blown addict. That's what I was now.

To her. And her sweet fucking taste.

I walked us backwards to my bedroom, wanting her in my bed now , our mouths still attached. Our tongues swirled together, tasting, licking, and exploring and when her knees hit the back of the bed, I set her down gently, her body sinking into my comforter, her hair splayed out around her.

Standing there, under her piercing gaze, I undressed slowly, inch by inch, watching her squirm.

When I pulled down my boxers and my hard cock sprung free, her mouth formed a

small O shape before she dipped her tongue out to wet her lips. I groaned at the thought of her sexy mouth wrapping around the head of my dick. Fuck .

Journey sat up, her lips now lined up with my cock. “I. Need. To. Taste. You.” Her words were desperate, needy, and I placed a hand on the back of head, directing her closer.

“Taste away.” I growled as I stroked my cock, a few drops of precum leaking from the top.

She moved slowly and when her mouth finally connected, I cried out in pleasure.

She sucked me in deep like she was made to suck my cock, pulling my hard shaft down to the back of her throat and out again, her tongue dragging along behind and swirling on the top.

Over and over, she repeated those movements until I could no longer hold back.

Gripping both sides of her face, I fucked her mouth, and she took it like a champ, until my hot cum squirted down her throat and she drank in every last drop like she’d never been thirstier.

I lost myself in the moment, the atmosphere, the headiness of it all and out from the depths of my throat came an almost feral growl. I’d never come so hard in my fucking life.

“Holy shit.” I said through pants of breath.

Journey stripped off her dress and lacy bra, revealing two beautiful creamy mounds my hands instantly went to. “You look like you’re ready to eat me.” She grinned as she played with the thin string of her panties.

“I am.” I gently pushed her down onto the bed, slipped my hands under her ass and lifted her higher up towards the headboard. I climbed on top of her and positioned myself between her legs. “Spread that pussy for me, baby.”

Journey’s legs fell open, only a scrap of black lace fabric covering her and when she started to slip them off, I stopped her. “Leave them on.”

She nodded and instead played with her breasts, running her thumbs over her nipples.

The sight was so fucking hot, my dick was hard again already. Not to mention her perfect pink pussy mere inches from my face, my tongue dying for a taste.

I ran my finger up and down her wet slit, moving the scrap of fabric to the side for a better look and easier access. Fucking gorgeous.

My tongue dipped inside her sweet juices and latched onto her clit.

Licking, sucking, flicking, I attacked her clit until she was falling apart beneath me, her legs shaking and gripping the sides of my head.

I coaxed another orgasm out by fucking her with both my finger and tongue and when I slid my hard dick inside, it was a perfect fit.

Easily, I went balls deep and when she lifted her hips to match my thrusts, we fell into a rhythm.

“Fuck me harder!” Journey cried out, her nails digging into my back. I fucked her deep, our hips thrusting together, the sound of slapping skin over taking any other sound around us.

I rolled onto my back, taking her with me, so she was now on top and riding my dick.

The sight almost made me cum already, her beautiful body moving on top of mine as she ground down on my dick, her clit hitting the right spot on my pelvis.

After she came, I flipped her onto her stomach and slid inside from behind, slapping her ass cheeks as my balls slapped against her again and again.

Minutes later, we both fell apart together, and I pulled out just in time to squirt my hot seed all over her back.

After falling asleep in each other's arms, we woke up and did it all over again, before falling asleep once more.

When I woke up in the morning and stretched my arm to the other side of the bed, expecting to find a warm body, I found nothing but cold sheets. I rolled over and sat up and that's when I saw the note left on the pillow. Ty for a great night.

I tossed the note down. I couldn't process it right now, not with the way my head hurt. Thank God it was Saturday, and I didn't have to work. After a quick trip to the bathroom, I closed my bedroom shades to block out any light and went back to bed. I'd deal with everything later.

If only life was that easy.

I sent her a text. No response.

The weekend came and went and Monday morning, I stopped by the garden center, but she wasn't around. I tried again, each day, but she was either busy or helping others. A quick hi or wave was all she gave me.

Journey was officially avoiding me. It left me with a huge pit in my stomach. One that kept on growing bigger.

By the time the week ended, I'd seen little of her, and I was growing impatient. Why didn't she want me when all I could think about was her?

I refused to believe what we had was one sided. That night between us was special. Did she not see it the same way? Or was she avoiding me on purpose?

When I could no longer take it, I drove to the garden center and found her watering plants in the back, no one else around. Finally.

"Hey, Journey." I said as I walked over to her.

Her back noticeably stiffened and when she turned to look at me, her eyes reflected so much sadness.

"Can we talk?"

"There's nothing to talk about, Cullen."

I scratched the back of my head and watched her continue to water the plants, like she could ignore the entire situation in front of her.

"What we had that night was special. You can't deny that."

"It was nothing more than sex."

"Really? I don't believe you."

"Believe it. It's the truth." She looked me straight in the eye, but I didn't miss the wobble of her chin.

"Can we at least explore? Go on dates? No sex, necessary, if you want."

“No. Please go, Cullen. And don’t come back.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Journey

I hated saying those words, a festering pit of dread in my stomach. They were lies. All lies.

It wasn't just sex. It never was.

It was truly a special night. It always would be.

I wanted more of him. I always would.

I agreed with everything he said. I never disagreed.

But I couldn't do it. I couldn't let my heart get broken once again.

Even if it was the best sex of my life. Even if I'd never felt like this about a man before.

In the end, the pain was not worth it.

"That's not possible. My job sends me here all the time. I guess you'll just have to see me around, then."

"What don't you get, Cullen? It was a one-night stand."

A one-time thing. Okay?” Tears threatened to spill down my cheeks and I turned away quickly before he could see them.

I walked away, past other customers, past the concerning looks from my mother, and didn't stop.

Away from the store, the parking lot, this town, my life, everything. I just kept walking.

“Journey, wait!” Carina called and my shoulders sunk, my tears running down faster. I couldn't let her see me like this, she wouldn't understand. But her quick legs got the better of me. “What's wrong? Is it Lucien?”

Earlier today, Lucien called a family meeting and said he decided to pursue a career in construction, and he joined the new construction crew in town.

“I needed something different you know? Get out there and see the world.” Lucien told us.

I knew the time would come eventually but our parents couldn't handle it, Mom in tears and Dad asking a thousand different questions.

So, while I was sad about my brother's news, I didn't want Carina to know anything about Cullen. It was easier to pretend it was only Lucian's news upsetting me, than to tell her about the more pressing issue- my heart, cracked open, another dating disaster for the books.

“It'll be okay. You know he'll still be up our asses even if he no longer works here.” Carina pulled me in for a hug. “If there's anything you want to talk about, I'm here.”

“Thanks. But I think I need to go home and get some rest. Do you mind covering for

me? And can you let Mom and Dad know?”

“Sure, will do.”

Yet the entire ride home, I couldn't get the image of Cullen's face from my mind, the disappointment and sadness from my words, reflected all over his expression. I didn't mean to be so harsh sounding, so uncaring, and insensitive.

I hurt him. I hurt him badly.

But maybe now, we could both move on.

Two months later

I stared at the two pink lines until they blurred into two.

No, no, no.

It couldn't be. It wasn't possible.

I was on birth control; we used a condom...how?

I sat on the toilet seat with a thud as my body shook with nerves. It had to be a false positive. Those happened, right?

But your period is late...several weeks late.

I ignored the signs. The fatigue and the queasiness. The sore breasts and no sign of my period starting.

My breathing increased and my vision became hazy.

How would I tell my family? Oh, hey guys, I had a one-night stand and now I'm pregnant. Yay.

"Journey?" A soft tap at the bathroom door caused me to scramble to my feet. I tossed the test and box in the trash and covered it up with a few tissues. "Mom said you weren't feeling well, so I brought you some soup." Carina said.

"I'll be right out." I said, while gripping the counter and staring in the mirror. My face was pale, dark circles under my eyes, and a few new fresh breakout spots.

Well, at least I looked sick.

With a deep breath, I opened the door and smiled at Carina. "Hey, sis."

"Ouch. You don't look so good. Let me tuck you into bed."

"Thanks for the compliment." I said as I shuffled back over to my bed before climbing inside.

"Maybe it's the flu or something?" Carina said as she tucked the blankets in around me.

"Yeah, maybe." More like the baby flu. Ah!

"I'll put the soup in the fridge. Just heat some up when you're ready."

"Thanks." I mumbled and pulled the covers over my head.

"Oh, and by the way, Cullen came looking for you. Said he had an important message for you."

A chill ran through me at the sound of his name. “He did?”

“Yeah. I guess he went out of town for a job, that’s why he hasn’t been around much. But he told me to tell you he said hi. He’s really cute, sis. I think he likes you.” Carina wiggled her eyebrows, and I wanted to toss a pillow at her head.

But now it made sense why I hadn’t seen him around much lately. Maybe it had nothing to do with me at all? How he wants to even say hi to me was beyond baffling. But maybe he really did just want to start over?

“You hooked up with him, didn’t you?” Carina pulled the covers away from my face and moved closer.

“Hey, don’t get too close! I might be contagious.”

Carina rolled her eyes. “I doubt it. Now answer the question.”

“No.” I lied. Where was this coming from?

“You’re a shitty liar, sis.” Carina laughed.

“It was nothing. A one-time thing.”

“I knew it!” Carina clapped, her voice loud.

“Shh. My head is pounding. Thanks for the soup. Now shoo.”

Carina laughed again. “I love how I’m always right. I want more details later when you’re feeling better!”

When she left, my mind raced a thousand miles a minute.

A pit in my stomach grew bigger with every passing second. A wave of nausea rolled through me at the thought of announcing my pregnancy. I looked down at my belly and sighed.

What do I do?

Within a week, I told Carina everything and we told Mom together. The men didn't need to know right now, but one thing was for certain.

I was keeping the baby.

"He loves you, you know." Carina said over lunch one day.

"What? What are you talking about?"

Carina narrowed her eyes. "You know who I mean. I've seen the way he looks at you. Maybe tell him about the pregnancy. You never know how he'll take the news."

"I don't know..."

"Whatever you want to do, I'm here for you. But I think he's a good guy who'd step up to the plate. And the love he has for you is undeniable." Carina squeezed my hand.

I'd never felt more confused in my life.

CHAPTER SIX

Cullen

When the opportunity to work outside of town presented itself, I harped on it. I needed to get out of Apple Falls and distance myself.

Once again, I ended up with a broken heart after opening up. No matter how hard I tried, Journey wanted nothing to do with me.

But now I was back in town and Journey was out sick. As the days passed, it seemed like she wasn't there more than she was. I worried she was battling something I didn't know about. But I kept in touch with her sister who assured me she was okay.

One afternoon a few months later, I finally caught a glimpse of her. She looked different, tired, and not like the glowing, confident woman I met before.

She turned to the side and that's when I noticed. A very distinguishable baby bump.

She's pregnant?

No way. How was she...I mean...when did she...

Is that why she was avoiding me?

I thought I'd be pissed but instead, I needed to know. I needed to know if that child was mine.

But I already knew, didn't I? I already knew without a doubt, that baby was mine.

And so was she.

It was about time I claimed my girl.

First, I went to Carina.

"I'm in love with your sister." I walked right up to where Carina stocked shelves with bags of potting soil.

She looked down at me from her step stool and laughed. "I know. And she loves you too. She's just being a dumbass about it."

My heart tripled in speed. "She does?" I said, my voice full of so much hope. I hated how I was ready to be heartbroken all over again, the risk of rejection high. But here I was, ready to bare my soul, fall to my knees, beg and plead, all for the chance to be with her.

Carina rolled her eyes and stepped down from the stool. "Both of you drive me crazy."

"I've tried. She constantly pushes me away. I took a job out of town because of how hurt I was. But I'm willing to feel that pain again for another chance with her. I love her so much it hurts."

Carina looked at me with tears in her eyes before glancing behind me and smiling.

I spun around and saw my beautiful girl, the first hint of a smile I hadn't seen in too long.

“You do?” Journey whispered, her own tears falling.

“Yes. I fell in love with you that first night with you. I’ve been in love with you ever since.

I don’t care how much you push me away, Journey.

” I stepped closer to her and took her hands in mine, her soft skin smooth against my rough calluses, my hands showing all my years of hard work. “I’ll never stop trying.”

“Oh, Cullen.” She cried as she collapsed into my arms, tears freely flowing, sobs coming up from her throat. “I love you so much, too. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I’ve been such an idiot.” She grabbed my face and kissed me through her tears, the wetness brushing against my cheeks.

Carina cheered and clapped from behind us and before I knew it, we had a whole audience of her family and various other customers in the store.

“Woot woot! It’s about time!” Carina called. She wrapped herself around a handsome man who stood next to her. That must be her husband, Hudson, who Journey mentioned before.

Love was flowing all around us, and the energy was infectious. But I wanted to take my girl and get away from all of this. We needed to talk. Alone.

“Can I take you to grab something to eat?” I asked her. She already looked so much better now that we cleared the air between us. But there was still a big elephant in the room. Would she tell me first or would I have to ask her?

“Yes, let me just grab my purse.” Journey kissed me before disappearing into the backroom.

I introduced myself to Hudson and Journey's parents while I waited, all the more growing anxious. No one has mentioned anything about the pregnancy and now I questioned myself if I was seeing things. Maybe I was. Maybe she gained a little weight, and I shouldn't say anything.

"Ready?" Journey appeared behind me, and I nodded, wrapping an arm around her shoulder.

"Always for you." After our goodbyes, we headed to my truck. "I would've told you sooner, but I was trying to give you the space I thought you wanted. I'm sorry, love."

"I treated you horribly, how could I ever expect you to come to me? I should've come to you. But I'm..." Her words trailed off as her throat became thick with emotion. "I'm...my emotions...shit, it's just a lot."

"You don't need to explain yourself. Things happen. Let's just start over. Hi, I'm Cullen. Nice to meet you." I held out my hand for a shake and Journey burst into laughter.

"I don't want a handshake. I want a kiss."

"Well, well, well, that's quite the proposition from a respectable young lady. Do you flirt with all the customers?"

Journey wrapped her arms around my neck. "Nope. Only the one whose baby I'm carrying."

It was as if I poured an ice bucket of water on top of my head. I took her face in my hands and searched her eyes, while she confirmed every one of my suspicions.

Journey was pregnant.

With my baby.

Our baby.

“Oh my, holy shit!” I cheered before lifting her off her feet and spinning her around, both of us laughing, more tears coming down her cheeks. “I love you.” I kissed her over and over.

“Could you tell?” Journey teased.

I laughed. “That’s a trick question.”

“You can see the bump though, right?” She lifted her shirt, and her cute round belly popped out.

I rubbed my hands all over it. “Our baby. Your bump is perfect. You’re perfect, baby.”

“I love you.”

“I love you so much. See how much love we have for each other? We created a baby the first night together.”

“You’re right. We did.”

“The first of many.” I grinned.

“Ha! Maybe if you carry one.” Journey teased and we kissed and kissed under the sunshine of Apple Falls, where I finally found my perfect person, just waiting to be found.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am

Journey

Six months later

On a cold, snowy morning, I delivered a healthy baby boy we named Lev, meaning heart. Because I truly believed our baby was conceived that night because of how much love grew between us.

In such a short time, I fell in love with my perfect man. My soulmate. My forever partner.

I pushed him away. I'm surprised he came back.

But he kept trying. And he never gave up.

"He's perfect." Cullen whispered before kissing my forehead. He moved a piece of hair from my face and kissed my cheek as we admired our son now cradled in my arms.

"I can't wait to teach him out to build things. Get him his first toolbox."

I chuckled and traced my finger along his sweet face. "Let's get him potty trained first, hmm?"

"He'll be in college before we know it." Cullen teased.

"Shh, no, don't rush it." I kissed Lev's head again for the millionth time, in complete

awe that this baby was mine. All mine. I did this. I grew him. Cullen and I created him.

“The only thing I want to rush is getting you pregnant again.” Cullen winked. “Fucking you while you’re pregnant is top tier.”

My cheeks flushed. “Well now you have to wait at least six weeks, mister.”

“Six weeks?” Cullen groaned. “That’s too long to not touch you.”

“Who said we can’t do other fun things?” I wiggled my eyebrows, and his eyes darkened as he kissed me hard, deep, passionate.

“That’s my girl.”

“Trust me, as soon as the six weeks are up, I’ll be climbing on top of you even faster.”

“Faster? Doubt it.”

“Just you wait.”

“Oh, I will baby. I’ll wait forever for you.”

Five months later, we were married under the summer sun in the backyard of our cabin. Cullen was planning on adding to it now that I moved in and our baby was here. We planned to fill it with lots of children and love.

He also built every piece of furniture for our son, from the crib to the changing table, to the dresser and nightstand, all of his love and hard work poured into his craftsmanship, and it showed in every piece he made.

A few months later, two familiar pink lines appeared on a pregnancy test once again. But this time, not only was I pregnant, but so was my sister. Carina was pregnant with her first baby after finally giving in and starting her family.

We were able to share our pregnancies together. And when we both gave birth to girls, we called them our twin flames.

So much love that could never be extinguished.

Love was the building block to our forever and every day, we made it stronger and stronger.

I loved Cullen with everything inside me.

And he showed me every day how much he loved me.

THE END