



Cherished by the Fearless Mountain Man (Lumberjacks of Timber Peak Valley #5)

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Category: Romance

Description: The cute home nurse is here to heal my wounds, but she ends up stealing my heart.

Brock

A chainsaw accident at the lumber yard lands me in the hospital with a nasty laceration that requires daily wound care, but I refuse. The last thing I need is some busybody nurse poking around my cabin every day.

But when infection becomes a real risk, I grudgingly agree. I'm expecting some old, nosy nurse who'll lecture me about safety.

Instead, I get Willa.

She's fierce, cute, and has zero patience for my growling. Every morning she marches into my mountain cabin like she owns the place, tending to my wound with hands so gentle they make me forget how to breathe.

I should hate having her here.

So why do I find myself counting the hours until she walks through my door again?

This was all supposed to be temporary. But one look into those gorgeous eyes and I know I'm never letting her go.

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Brock

The massive pine log sits in front of me like a challenge.

It's about twenty feet long, thick as a barrel, and knotted in all the wrong places.

It's the kind of timber that separates the experienced lumberjacks from the rookies.

One wrong move and the chainsaw will kick back hard enough to break bones.

I don't have anything to worry about, though.

I'm not being cocky, but I've been cutting timber for fifteen years.

I know what I'm doing. This log doesn't scare me one bit.

The saw roars to life, and I grin. This is what life's all about. Me, the guys, and a powerful chainsaw to wrangle these logs into submission.

My brother Archer is working on the smaller logs twenty feet away, Silas is spraying sawdust off the equipment with the air compressor, and Crew and Jace are stacking finished lumber by the loading dock. Just another Tuesday morning at the yard.

I line up my cut and check the angle twice. The knot in the wood is going to make this tricky, but I've handled worse. I press the blade into the bark, feeling the saw bite deep into the wood. It all goes smoothly, but then the chainsaw kicks back harder than I expect.

The blade tears through my jeans and into my thigh like it's cutting through butter. White-hot pain explodes up my leg, and I can't stop the roar that rips from my throat. It's part rage, part agony, but all primal. The saw flies from my hands and dies when it hits the ground.

"Fuck!" I scream.

I stare down at my thigh and the growing pool of blood soaking through the shredded denim. The pain is immediate and brutal, like someone's holding a blowtorch to my leg.

"Fucking hell," I cry out again.

"Brock!" Crew's voice cuts through the lumber yard from across the stack of logs. "You good over there?"

"No," I call back, doing my best to press my hand against the gash, but it's no use. Blood keeps seeping between my fingers. "Fuck."

Within seconds, the guys are rushing over to me. Archer reaches me first, his face going white when he sees the damage.

"Jesus Christ, Brock." My brother drops to his knees beside me, his usual smart-ass grin nowhere to be found. "How deep is it?"

I lift my hand to check. The cut runs from mid-thigh down toward my knee, maybe six inches long. Deep enough that I can see things I don't want to see. Shit. I need to look away before I throw up.

"Deep." I grab a clean rag from my pocket and press it against the wound. The contact sends another wave of fire through my leg, and I bite back another curse.

“Hurts like hell.”

Crew, Silas, and Jace all appear at my side.

“Ambulance?” Crew asks, already pulling out his phone to dial 911.

“No. Archer can drive me. That’ll be way faster than waiting for an ambulance to get here.”

“You sure, man?” Silas frowns at the blood now dripping steadily onto the ground.
“That cut looks pretty bad.”

“I’m sure.”

I struggle to get up, flashes of hot pain coursing through me as I try to find my balance. Archer throws his arm around me, helping me up. My leg holds, but I barely do. I let out another primal curse. I might lose consciousness soon if I keep bleeding like this.

The walk to the parking area feels like walking through hell. Each step sends shockwaves of pain up my leg, and by the time Archer helps me into the passenger seat, I’m gritting my teeth so hard my jaw aches. The rag is soaked through, and I’m starting to feel lightheaded from blood loss.

“Don’t you dare bleed all over my upholstery,” Archer jokes as he fires up the engine. “I just got the interior detailed.”

“I’ll try to keep it contained,” I mutter, pressing harder against the wound.

“Good. Because if you ruin my seats, I’m making you pay for the cleanup.” He throws the truck into reverse, gravel spraying as we peel out of the lot. “And you

know how expensive blood is to get out of leather.”

Despite everything, I almost smile. Leave it to Archer to crack jokes while I’m bleeding all over his truck.

The drive to the local clinic goes by in a daze. Archer could’ve driven me to a big hospital, but that would’ve taken ages. I’m grateful he chose to head to Timber Peak Grace Clinic instead, even though it’s rather small.

My brother helps me out of his truck after sloppily parking the car in front of the emergency room. The glass doors slide open, and Archer practically drags me inside. My jeans are soaked with blood, and I’m close to collapsing.

“Help!” Archer calls out. “Logging injury. Deep cut to the leg.”

The nurse at the front desk jumps to her feet, her eyes widening for a second before her training kicks in.

“Exam room three!” she barks, grabbing a pair of gloves. “Doc Willis! We’ve got a bleeder!”

Two staff members rush to meet us, one of them wheeling over a gurney.

“I can walk,” I mutter, teeth clenched, but the next step nearly buckles my knee.

“Nope, you’re done walking,” the nurse says firmly. “Sit. Now.”

I drop onto the gurney with a grunt, gripping the sides as they wheel me down a hall that smells like antiseptic and pine cleaner. A tall, graying doctor meets us outside the exam room, snapping on gloves.

“I’m Doctor Willis. Tell me what happened,” he says.

“Chainsaw kicked back,” I grit out.

“That’ll do it.”

The doctor and nurses work fast. They cut my jeans away, clean the wound, and flush it with something that feels like fire. I swear loud enough to shake the windows, but neither the doctor nor the nurses flinches.

“Muscle damage, but you missed the artery,” he says, inspecting the gash. “You’ll live, though your ego might not.”

After twenty-some stitches, a fresh bandage, and a tetanus shot, I’m sitting upright with my leg propped on a foam block. I feel wrung out and more than ready to go home.

“Now, this is the kind of wound that needs daily attention,” Doctor Willis says. “We’ll send a home nurse to check it each morning and change the dressing.”

I shake my head immediately. “No. I’m good.”

“You’re not good,” the nurse says, arms crossed. “You’re stubborn and lucky, and if you screw this up, we’ll be sawing your leg off next week. But of course, if that’s what you want, then sure, refuse the home nurse.”

Archer raises an eyebrow. “Come on, man. Think of it as a hot nurse showing up to take care of you.”

I shoot him a glare. “What about you and Callie? Siblings are supposed to help each other out.”

Archer shrugs. “We would if we could, but we don’t know what the hell we’re doing. This isn’t like pulling a splinter or slapping on a band-aid. You need someone who knows how to keep that thing clean so it doesn’t get infected.”

The nurse nods, clearly pleased with my brother’s reasoning. “Exactly. You need someone who studied and trained for situations like these.”

I sigh. The last thing I want is some old, nosy nurse walking around my cabin like I’m one bad day away from a retirement home.

Fussing over me, telling me to elevate my leg, drink more water, maybe lecture me about the state of my fridge, which I know isn’t good, but I’m a grown man.

I can take care of myself. Then again, I’m not stupid.

This thing could turn bad fast if I mess around and don’t get the appropriate care. I don’t want to lose my leg.

I grit my teeth. “Fine. Send the damn nurse to my house.”

The doctor nods approvingly as he scribbles something on the chart. “We’ll schedule you for two weeks, but depending on how the wound heals, we can extend it.”

“Great,” I mutter. “Can’t wait.”

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Willa

“Take it easy, Mrs. Reed,” I call out as I latch the front gate of my patient’s house. “No more rearranging the furniture, all right?”

The older woman waves me off with a roll of the eyes. “Oh, please. I’ve been moving furniture longer than you’ve been alive.”

“Still, let’s give your sprained wrist the rest it needs, okay?”

She smiles and shrugs before heading back inside. I laugh. Mrs. Reed is a stubborn lady, that’s for sure. She’s super friendly, though. It's hard to be stern with her.

I sling my nursing backpack over my shoulder and head to my little hatchback parked on the street in front of her house.

This is only my second week on the job, but I’m loving every minute of it.

Being a home nurse has been my dream since nursing school.

At first, I pictured myself in a big hospital, like the one from Grey’s Anatomy , until I realized that real hospitals aren’t anything like the shows.

What I wanted was to serve a small town and be part of a tight-knit community.

Timber Peak Valley is exactly that. Working regular hours also beats the irregular shifts nurses have to work at the hospital.

So yeah, when the job of a home nurse became available in this small town, I was elated.

But to be honest, now that I'm here, it's all suddenly super real. It makes me nervous to know that I'm responsible for a slew of patients without someone supervising my every move. Yet a strange excitement curls in my chest. I've worked hard for this. I can handle it. I want this.

I glance at the next patient on my list. It's a guy named Brock, who had a chainsaw accident that resulted in a deep leg laceration.

Lives alone. Grumpy, stubborn, and apparently allergic to help.

Doesn't matter, though. Grumpy or not, the guy needs me, and it takes more than some annoyed facial expressions to scare me off.

I pull out the directions his family scribbled down when Brock was at the clinic and squint.

The first part sounds easy, but then I get confused.

Turn left at the big pine tree with the yellow ribbons, then go past the broken fence.

If you hit the pile of firewood shaped like a bear, you've gone too far.

Seriously? I blink, then read it again, wondering if it's a joke or a riddle. Either way, this is what I've got to work with. I'd better get going.

I throw the papers on the passenger seat and start the engine.

"All right. Big pine tree, yellow ribbon, questionable bear-shaped firewood. I've got

this,” I tell myself.

After all, getting to meet all kinds of interesting people and visit places I’d never have come across myself is also part of the charm of working as a home nurse.

When I spot yellow ribbons fluttering in the wind on a pine tree branch, I’m happy and relieved. By now, my GPS has abandoned me, but I’m sure I’ll find Brock’s house without it.

I pass the broken fence next, proud of my navigational skills, until I come across the bear-shaped firewood.

I turn the car around, which is hard to do on a narrow mountain road, and drive back at a snail’s pace.

To my right, I spot a tiny dirt road that I missed before.

A wooden mailbox clues me in that it leads to a house. Bingo.

A rustic cabin comes into view, and I park my car.

When I get out, I’m amazed by how quiet it is up here.

The trees sway in the wind, and birds chirp from all directions.

The scent of pinecones fills me with a blissful feeling.

It must be amazing to live here. Not that there’s anything wrong with my apartment in Timber Peak Valley town center.

I’ve got views of the mountains, but this is something entirely different.

It's peaceful. Out here, you're immersed in nature, not watching it from afar.

I grab my backpack containing my medical kit and head up the wooden porch. I rap my knuckles against the door.

"Hello, it's Willa," I announce.

"It's open," a deep voice replies.

I try the doorknob and sure enough, it's unlocked. I wipe my feet on the welcome mat and step inside.

"I'm in here."

I follow the voice into the living room and almost drop my bag when I see the face that belongs to the deep timbre.

Brock is on the couch, his leg propped up on some pillows.

He looks grumpy but hot as hell. Jesus Christ. His flannel shirt is half unbuttoned, clinging to a chest that looks like it was carved out of granite.

His beard is thick, his jaw sharp enough to cut glass.

His hair is a tousled mess like he just rolled out of bed.

Or wrestled a bear and won. I'm not even joking.

Brock looks like he could win a fight like that.

And those eyes? Deep, dark, and currently narrowed at me like I'm a Girl Scout

trying to sell him cookies.

“Are you the nurse?” he grunts, like the word personally insults him.

I blink, trying to remember how to speak. “Uh... yep. That’s me. Willa, the nurse.”

Great. Day two of week two on the job, and I’ve already turned into a cliché. Flustered by a hot, grumpy mountain man who looks like he hasn’t smiled since last century.

But I’m a professional. I’ve got this.

“How are you feeling?” I ask as I approach him.

I do my best not to stare at his muscled arms and legs, but it’s like it’s stronger than me. He’s wearing shorts, probably because pants would irritate his wound, and his muscled legs are doing things to me I’ve never felt before. Not with a patient anyway.

I’ve seen my fair share of body parts during my training as a nurse. It’s all clinical. Functional. Not hot or ugly . Not something to gawk at.

But Brock’s body? Yeah... It’s not like other people’s. His body looks so good that it makes me wonder what it’d be like to run my hands over it.

And I need to stop thinking like that. Immediately.

I clear my throat, still waiting for his reply, but all I get is a shrug.

“Mind if I take a look?” I ask.

Another shrug. Another grunt.

I sit on the edge of the couch, angling myself so I can get to his leg. He shifts slightly, giving me enough room, and I do my best not to notice how close my knee is to his thigh.

Focus, Willa. This is wound care. Not mountain man appreciation hour.

I set my nursing bag on the floor beside me and pull out a fresh pair of gloves, gauze, saline, and tape.

“All right, let’s take a look,” I say, more to myself than to him.

Brock doesn’t respond. He watches me with that unreadable look in his eyes, like he’s sizing me up. It feels oddly intimate to be watched by him like this, but for some reason, I don’t mind.

I gently peel back the existing dressing. It’s not terrible, but it’s ready to be changed. The wound is deep and fresh. The stitches are clean, but the edges are still red and angry, as expected. This isn’t the kind of wound that heals in a day.

“How’s the pain?” I ask as I carefully clean around the area with saline.

He shrugs again. “Fine.”

Of course. A man like him gets his leg sliced open by a chainsaw and calls it fine.

“Well, it looks like it’s healing okay,” I say. “But you’re not out of the woods. You’re still at risk for infection, and you’re not supposed to be putting weight on it, remember?”

“I remember,” he mutters, sounding gruff.

“I’m going to apply a new dressing. This might sting a little,” I warn.

But he doesn’t even flinch. Wow. He’s surely living up to his mountain man image. I guess it’s only normal. A man who yields chainsaws for a living is probably tough as nails.

As I press the clean gauze into place and tape it down, I smile. Tending a wound and helping someone heal is what I love about my job. Even if my patient is a stubborn, broody lumberjack who doesn’t like it that he needs help from someone.

“There,” I say once I’m done. “Good as new. Well, close enough.”

He glances down at the bandages, then looks back at me. “Thanks. You from around here? I’m asking because I haven’t seen you in town, and trust me, I’d remember.”

My heart skips a beat at his words. Is he flirting with me or stating the facts?

“I moved here last month. This is my second week as a home nurse. Still learning. One grumpy patient at a time,” I say with a wink.

He grunts, but his mouth twitches. It’s not a smile, but it’s close.

“You always this grumpy?” I ask to lighten the mood.

He arches an eyebrow, and for a second, I’m worried I’ve crossed a line.

But then he speaks. “No. I’m usually the one teasing and joking around. But this leg wound’s got me going crazy. I hate being cooped up in here. I feel useless. Going out of my damn mind.”

“Didn’t your accident happen yesterday?” I ask.

He shrugs. "I never sit around and do nothing for a day. Not even when I'm hurt. I usually limp around if I have to. But I can't with this," he says, gesturing to his leg.

I put my supplies away and smile at him. "I can help you with food or fetch you a drink if you want? I have a few minutes before I need to head to my next patient."

He shakes his head. "I'm fine. But thanks."

"You sure? I make a good cup of coffee."

His eyes show hesitation, but then he shakes his head again. "I'm all set."

I get up, ready to head out. I grab my bag and tell him goodbye, but before opening the door, I turn and give him a stern look.

"Don't try to do anything by yourself, okay, Brock?"

It's not good for your wound. And when it doesn't heal properly, you won't be looking at weeks of recovery, but months. Got it?"

He gives me a salute, and I finally see a smile on his lips. "Got it, Nurse Willa."

I grin. "See you tomorrow, Brock."

I head back to my car with a spring in my step. God, that smile... It should be illegal. It makes my heart do things it has no business doing when it comes to a patient. I shouldn't get carried away like this. I'm a home nurse. A professional.

Truth is, nothing about today felt professional. Not the way my heart raced every time our eyes met, or how I lingered longer than necessary when checking his bandages. And definitely not the way my stomach flipped when he said "Nurse Willa."

I try to block any thoughts of him and grab my papers with the details of my next patient, even though I'm already dreaming about seeing Brock again.

Tomorrow can't come soon enough.

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Brock

The front door opens, and the familiar voices of my brother and sister echo through the house.

“Brock?” Callie calls out. “We brought coffee and those disgusting protein bars you like.”

“In the living room,” I answer, my voice rough and hoarse from a lack of sleep.

Archer appears first, filling the doorway with his broad shoulders, followed by Callie, who’s carrying a cardboard tray of coffee cups. They both stop short when they see me.

“Jesus, you look like hell,” Archer says, confirming how I feel.

“Thanks, I guess.” I try to sit up straighter and wince as the movement pulls at my stitches.

Callie sets the tray of coffee cups on the side table next to the couch and gives me a once-over, scrunching her nose. “When’s the last time you showered? Or changed clothes?”

I glance down at the same t-shirt I’ve been wearing for the past two days. “I’m okay.”

“You don’t smell okay,” Archer says.

“Should we help you into the shower?” Callie asks.

Archer gives her a look. “Can’t we ask that home nurse to help him with that? I don’t want to wash my brother’s... well, you know.”

“Guys, stop. I’m not asking Willa to wash me. I’m fine.”

There’s no way in hell I’d let Willa help me get cleaned up. I can’t have her seeing me like this. Helpless, needing someone to scrub my back like I’m a ninety-seven-year-old man in a nursing home. No thanks.

“Willa?” Callie raises an eyebrow. “That’s her name?”

I grab one of the coffee cups, hoping they’ll drop the subject. “Yeah. Nurses have names, too, you know.”

“Pretty name,” Archer says with a stupid grin. “Is she pretty too?”

“She’s my nurse.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

Callie kicks his shin. “Leave him alone.”

But Archer’s like a dog with a bone when he gets an idea. “I’m just saying, maybe that’s why our brother suddenly cares about personal hygiene. When’s she coming by today?”

I check the clock on the wall. Nine-fifteen. Willa usually shows up around ten. “Soon.”

“Aha!” Archer points at me like he’s solved some great mystery. “You want to look good for her.”

“I want to not smell like a garbage truck when a medical professional is trying to do her job,” I lie.

“Right.” He’s still grinning. “Because you’re usually so concerned about your appearance.”

Callie stands up, hands on her hips, and shoots our brother a look that could melt steel. “Okay, enough, Asher. Stop the teasing.” She turns to me. “Brock, do you want help getting cleaned up or not?”

I hate this. Hate needing help with something as basic as taking a shower. But the thought of Willa walking in here and seeing me like this makes my stomach turn.

“Yeah,” I mutter. “I could use some help. Thanks.”

“Good. Now, Archer can find you some clean clothes while I help with the shower. That way, he doesn’t have to chance seeing your bare ass.”

Archer laughs as he heads over to my bedroom closet to pick out some clothes.

Callie helps me get off the couch. I wince every time I so much as move a muscle.

Fuck. I wish I could stay on the couch, but I need to get cleaned up.

Thankfully, Callie doesn’t make a big fuss.

She pulls a stool into the shower for me to sit on, turns on the faucet, and leaves me alone while I wash myself.

These bandages are supposed to be waterproof, so at least I don't have to worry about that.

Twenty minutes later, I'm back on the couch, smelling as fresh as the mountains do on a spring morning. Callie and Archer stock up my fridge with food, and leave right before Willa's supposed to arrive.

For the past few days, she's all I've been able to think about, which is weird, because I've never been obsessed with a woman before.

Maybe it's the result of being cooped up in my cabin all day.

Thinking of her keeps me busy. It doesn't have to mean anything.

At least, that's what I tell myself. Deep down, I know that's not it.

Truth is, every time Willa's near, my heart almost beats out of my chest. It's gotten so bad that I'm afraid I'm developing a cardiological problem on top of a nasty laceration.

At exactly ten o'clock, I hear her car pull up the gravel drive. My heart does that stupid racing thing again every time she arrives. I run a hand through my damp hair and try to look casual, like I haven't been waiting for her to show up.

"Hello, it's Willa," she calls through the door, same as always.

"Come in," I call back, and this time my voice doesn't sound like I gargled with gravel.

She steps inside, and I notice she's carrying a white bakery box along with her usual medical bag. She looks... Fuck, she looks beautiful. Her hair's pulled back in a

ponytail, and she's wearing scrubs that show off her soft curves in all the right ways.

"You look good today," she says, giving me an appraising look.

I grin. "I took a shower."

"That always helps," she says with a laugh. "I brought you cupcakes from that little bakery, Sweet Peak Retreat."

I stare at her. "You brought me cupcakes?"

She suddenly looks flustered. "Is that weird? I thought—"

"No," I say quickly. "It's not weird at all. It's nice. Thank you."

She beams at me, and I have to look away before I do something stupid like tell her how pretty she is when she smiles.

"We can have one after I check your leg," she says casually, like the word "we" doesn't do things to my insides.

Willa sits on the edge of the couch, closer than usual. Then again, maybe I'm imagining things. It's not like I have a ruler to know exactly how close she sits to me every day. I let out a small grunt. When the hell did I become the kind of guy who overthinks where a woman sits?

"How's the pain today?" she asks as she opens her medical bag.

"Better. Still hurts, but not like the first few days."

"Good. That's what we want to hear." She pulls on her gloves. "Any swelling?"

Increased redness?”

“Not that I’ve noticed.”

I can’t exactly tell her about the swelling that’s happening in... other parts of my body, can I?

She carefully peels back the bandage. Her fingers brush my skin, and I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from reacting in completely inappropriate ways.

“This looks good, Brock,” she says, leaning closer to examine the wound. “The stitches are holding well, and the redness is going down.”

She’s so close that I can count the freckles across her nose. And when she concentrates, she gets this little wrinkle between her eyebrows that I find ridiculously endearing, like now.

“You’re healing faster than I expected,” she continues, cleaning around the wound with gentle, practiced movements. “You must be taking my advice about staying off it. That’s good.”

“I’m trying.” I clear my throat. “Going crazy sitting here, but I’m trying.”

“I know it’s hard. What do you usually do when you’re not at the lumber yard? You could do more of that now that you’re unable to work.”

I shrug. “I usually work.”

She laughs. “Okay, what else? There must be something you like to do for fun.”

Yeah, you.

I swallow. “Fish. Hunt. Hike. Fix things around the cabin.” I pause. “I’m not good at sitting still.”

“I can tell.” She applies the new bandage with careful precision. “So, what got you into logging? You seem passionate about it.”

“My dad. He ran the business before us. Taught Archer and me everything we know. There’s something magical about working with your hands and creating something useful from raw timber.”

She tapes down the edges of the bandage and smiles. “I feel the same way about my job. There’s something extremely satisfying about helping people heal and seeing them get better.”

“Is that why you became a home nurse? The helping people part?”

She sits back, pulling off her gloves. “Partly. But mostly because I love the connection. In hospitals, you’re one of dozens of nurses. Patients become room numbers. This way, I get to know people. Like you.”

The way she says like you sends goosebumps all over my body.

“All done,” she says, but she doesn’t move away. “Now, about those cupcakes. I may have gone a little overboard. The lady at the bakery said she knew you, and she insisted I take extra.”

“You told her they were for me?”

“I told her I was the new home nurse and wanted to bring something nice to a patient who had a chainsaw accident. She did the math. Small towns, right? I think she was hoping I’d spill some gossip about how you’re recovering.”

“What did you tell her?”

“That patient confidentiality is a real thing, even in small towns.”

I nod, impressed. “Good answer.”

“So, coffee and cupcakes? I promise I make better coffee than whatever you’ve been drinking.”

I should say no. My siblings already brought me coffee. And I should stick to the professional relationship Willa and I have and not blur the lines. But the way she’s looking at me, hopeful I’ll say yes and a little shy at the same time, makes it impossible. She’s hard to resist, that’s for sure.

“Yeah,” I finally say. “I’d like that.”

She grins and gets up. “Excellent.”

As I watch her move around my kitchen like she belongs there, humming softly to herself, I realize I’m in deep trouble. Because this isn’t just attraction anymore. This is something else entirely.

And I have no idea what to do about it.

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Willa

It's been a week since Doctor Willis reduced Brock's visits to every other day, and I should be thrilled.

Really, I should. A patient healing ahead of schedule is exactly what every nurse wants to see.

It means I'm doing my job well, the treatment is working, and he's going to make a full recovery without complications.

So why do I feel disappointed every time I look at my schedule and see that gap where his name used to be?

The logical part of my brain knows this is normal.

Standard protocol. When a wound is healing well and showing no signs of infection, there's no reason for daily check-ins.

But the not-so-logical part of my brain misses our daily coffee talks.

Misses the way he's started to open up, telling me stories about his personal life, and getting less and less grumpy with every passing day.

I miss the way his whole face changes when I manage to make him smile.

God, I even know which flavor of cupcakes he prefers and always make sure to bring

one, just so I can see him smile.

I also know that's exactly the kind of thinking that could get me in trouble.

"Earth to Willa?" Mrs. Reed's voice cuts through my wandering thoughts. "Where were your thoughts just now? I bet with that Brock boy, right?"

My cheeks heat as I try to deny the truth. "Mrs. Reed, I was just—"

"Oh, don't you try to fool me, dear. I know love when I see it.

You've been talking my ear off about one patient in particular.

Brock." She gives me a knowing smile. "Speaking of which, I saw him yesterday at the hardware store. Walking around like nothing ever happened to him. Well, except for the limp and the tortured faces he made."

I frown. "He was at the hardware store? Walking around? Are you sure it wasn't his brother you saw? They look kind of alike."

"I know those boys, Willa. They're both attractive young men, sure, but I'm not blind or senile yet. I can tell them apart."

My stomach drops. If Mrs. Reed is right, and it was Brock, that's not good.

"When exactly did you see him, Mrs. Reed?"

"Yesterday afternoon. I was picking up some lightbulbs and there he was, carrying a bag of screws or some such thing."

Yesterday. Two days after I last saw him. The day after I told him his wound was

healing so well.

I wrap up things with Mrs. Reed right away.

Usually, I stay and talk after her blood sugar checks for her diabetes, but I need to head over to Brock's to check on him.

Don't I? Not because I miss him, but because I need to know if he's okay.

I mean... Mrs. Reed said he was limping and making tortured faces. That doesn't sound good.

I hastily tell her goodbye and get in my car. The drive to Brock's cabin feels longer than usual, even though I'm probably driving faster than I should on these winding mountain roads.

After what feels like an eternity, I pull up to his cabin and grab my medical bag, my stomach churning with a mixture of professional concern and personal dread.

"It's Willa," I call out as I knock and open the door.

"Come in," he calls back, but his voice sounds different. Strained.

I find him on the couch, and one look at him tells me everything I need to know. He looks guilty as hell, like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar, and he's sweating.

"I know we don't have an appointment today, but I needed to see how you were doing. Mrs. Reed told me you were at the hardware store yesterday."

His jaw tightens. "Did she now?"

“She did.” I sit down next to him, pulling on my gloves. “Want to tell me what you were doing there?”

“Just... picking up a few things.”

“Brock.” I give him my best stern nurse look. “What did you do?”

He finally meets my eyes. “I was feeling good. Really good. And I thought maybe I could start getting back to normal, you know? Just small stuff.”

“What kind of small stuff?”

“Fixing a loose board on the porch. Cleaning out the gutters. Restacking some firewood that was falling over.” He says it like he’s confessing to murder.

“Brock.” My voice comes out sharper than I intended. “You cleaned gutters? That requires climbing a ladder.”

“It was a short ladder.”

“There’s no such thing as a short ladder when you have a healing leg laceration. Come on, let me see the wound.”

He shifts uncomfortably as I carefully peel back the bandage, and what I see makes my heart sink. The wound that had been healing so beautifully two days ago now looks angry and inflamed. The edges are red and slightly pulled apart, and there’s more drainage than there should be.

“Is it bad?” He leans forward to look, and I can see the worry in his eyes now.

“It’s not good. Some of these stitches are under strain, and there’s increased

inflammation. See these red streaks? That means the infection is spreading.”

His face goes pale. “Spreading where?”

“Through your tissue. And if we don’t get this under control...” I don’t finish the sentence. I don’t need to scare him, even though he looks quite fearless for a man who just heard he’s got a nasty infection.

I take off a glove and press the back of my hand to his forehead. “You’re running a fever. How long have you been feeling warm?”

“Since this morning, I guess. Maybe last night,” he confesses.

“Why didn’t you call me?”

“I didn’t want to bother you.”

“Bother me? Brock, this is literally my job. This is exactly what you’re supposed to call me for.”

He runs a hand through his hair, looking miserable. “I hate being useless. I hate sitting around doing nothing while there’s work to be done. And I was feeling so much better.”

“It was kind of reckless.”

“I’m fine, Willa. Don’t worry about me,” he insists, but even as he says it, he makes one of those tortured faces Mrs. Reed told me about.

“No, you’re not. And I’m not comfortable leaving you alone tonight.” The words tumble out before I can second-guess them. “What if your fever spikes? What if you

aggravate the surgical site even further and don't realize it until it's too late?"

His eyes widen slightly. "Willa, you don't need to—"

"Yes, I do. Either I stay, or you go to the clinic and stay there for observation. Your choice."

For a moment, we stare at each other. He might be stuck on the couch, but everything about him speaks to the fearless mountain man he's rumored to be. Solid, unshakable. Stubborn.

"I have overnight supplies in my car," I continue, trying to sound clinical. "It's standard procedure for post-surgical patients who've overexerted themselves."

It's not entirely a lie. I do have supplies. Whether it's standard procedure to camp out in a patient's cabin is debatable.

"I don't need babysitting."

"I'm not here to babysit," I reply. "I'm here to make sure you don't end up unconscious on the floor."

Finally, he sighs. "There are spare blankets in the hallway closet."

"So you're okay with me staying?"

He shrugs and gives me a small smile. "I don't want to get in the way of standard procedure, Willa. The last thing I want is for you to get into trouble."

"Great, it's settled then." I get up to retrieve the bag with extra supplies from my car.

Part of me is ecstatic about staying, but I also feel a twinge of guilt. I just lied to him about this being standard procedure, and I hate being dishonest. As soon as I'm back inside, I'm telling him the truth. He could still send me away. He could opt to go to the clinic after all.

It'll be his choice, but at least it will be an honest one. Yeah, it's for the best. So why am I afraid of his answer?

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:16 am

Brock

I hear the front door shut, and the soft crunch of her footsteps on gravel fades before they circle back toward the cabin.

It only now hits me. She's staying. Willa will be here in my cabin tonight. After the sun goes down.

Shit. The stabbing pain in my leg is nothing compared to the dread of spending an entire evening and night with her.

Not because I don't want her company, but because I don't trust myself.

I'll have to keep myself from reaching out and caressing her hands.

From leaning in and kissing her goddamn sexy lips. Will have to—

My thoughts are interrupted by the door opening again. Willa steps inside, clutching a medical bag like she's prepping for a full-blown stakeout. She looks determined, but also guilty.

"I need to tell you something," she says, chin raised high.

I raise an eyebrow. "That bad, huh? You think I'm going to croak within the next hour?"

She doesn't laugh. Fuck. Am I seriously in worse shape than I thought?

“No, you’re not croaking on my watch, Brock. But...” She squares her shoulders. “It’s not standard procedure to stay overnight with patients. Not like this. I lied because I was worried something would go wrong if I didn’t stay. I knew you’d say no if I was honest.”

“Let me get this straight. You lied to stay and keep an eye on me?”

She blinks, looking scared. Shit. Does she think I’m going to reprimand her or something? I’d never do that to her.

“Willa, stay. Seriously.”

“Seriously?”

I nod. “You already went through the effort of bringing in that extra bag from the car. It would be a shame to waste that effort, right?” I joke. “So yeah, stay. I don’t mind.”

“You’re not mad?”

I suck in a sharp breath of air. “I could never be mad at you.”

“Thanks.”

“You don’t have other patients tonight?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “Just you.”

“All right then, Willa. Guess I’m all yours,” I say, unable to keep from smiling like an idiot.

We both look at each other for a couple of seconds, neither of us sure of what to say

or do next. I can see the cogs turn in Willa's head.

"I'm making us dinner," she says and heads to the kitchen without waiting for my reply.

Thirty minutes later, she's whipped up a pasta. It tastes amazing, and I clear my entire plate. But then, we don't know what to do. It all feels so domestic.

"You want to watch a movie or something? Or do I have to undergo additional medical exams before you clear me to turn on the TV?" I joke.

She laughs and rolls her eyes at me in amusement. "A movie sounds perfect."

"Any preferences?" I ask, handing her the remote after turning on the TV.

She sits next to me and scrolls through the offers on the streaming services I pay for. Mere minutes later, the opening credits of a movie roll by.

I don't know what the fuck we're watching or which actors star in it, though. All I can focus on is how close Willa is sitting to me. So close that I catch her floral scent. So close that I feel her body heat, warming me like a damn fire on a cold mountain night.

It could also be the fever that's warming me, of course.

Before I can second-guess myself, I slide my arm over her shoulders. She doesn't stiffen or swat my arm away. Instead, she snuggles closer, and it feels like she was made to fit right next to me. My breath hitches, but I keep my eyes on the screen, pretending I'm watching the damn movie.

She lets out a soft, contented sigh, and something inside me shifts.

Maybe it's the fever, maybe it's being this close to her, maybe it's hearing her sigh happily and wanting to hear more of it.

Whatever it is, I'm not about to fight it anymore.

I've wanted her since the day she walked in here.

Since we shared cupcakes from Sweet Peak Retreat.

Since I saw her gorgeous laugh light up her face the first time we met.

It's been amazing, but it's not enough. I want more.

I want it all.

I want her.

And the funny thing is, I'm not nervous. I'm fearless. Because if my instincts are right, I just know Willa wants this too.

I shift carefully, mindful of the stabbing pain in my leg, but every second I hesitate feels like wasted time.

I can't wait any longer. I turn toward her slowly, letting my hand slide from her shoulder to cup her jaw.

Her eyes grow wide as they meet mine, but she doesn't look offended or disgusted. She looks hopeful. Happy.

I arch an eyebrow as a question, and she gives me the tiniest of nods, a puff of air escaping her lips. She licks them, and I lose all constraints. I lean in, and our lips

meet with an intensity that steals the breath right out of me.

Her hand finds my chest, steadying herself against me. I shift again and wince with pain, but she doesn't pull away. Instead, she leans into me, her hands threading through my hair, her tongue pushing past my lips.

"Are you okay?" she asks as I wince again when a sharp stab cuts through my leg.

I nod. "More than okay, Willa."

She pulls back enough to study my face. "I should stop. You're still healing, and I'm supposed to be taking care of you, not—"

"Not what?" My hand cups her cheek, and I let my thumb trace the curve of her jaw.

"Not making me feel more alive than I have in months? I've wanted this since the day you walked into my cabin," I whisper.

"Wanted you since you started bossing me around about taking my medications and staying off my feet."

A soft laugh escapes her lips. "I don't boss you around."

"You absolutely do." I lean forward, ignoring the protest from my injured leg. "And I love every second of it."

"Well, sure, because you don't even listen to me. Climbing a ladder with that wound..." She shakes her head, but she's still smiling like crazy. "I want you, too, Brock. So much. You've all I've thought about since I first set foot in here. But I'm your nurse. There are boundaries."

“Boundaries,” I repeat, my lips brushing against hers. “What boundaries?”

She doesn’t answer. Instead, she closes the distance between us again, kissing me with the same hunger and need I’m feeling. When I shift and grunt softly from the pain, she breaks away with concern written across her face.

“We need to be more careful,” she murmurs, her hand still tangled in my hair. “I can’t have you reopening those sutures because of me.”

“Then you better follow the old adage about kiss and make better ,” I say with a grin that makes her laugh.

“That’s not how medicine works, Brock.”

“Are you sure? Because I’m feeling remarkably better already. You’re doing a fantastic job as my home nurse, Willa. Taking care of me in ways I didn’t even know I needed.”

Her cheeks flush. “You’re making it very hard to stay professional when all I want to do is—” She stops and bites her bottom lip.

“All you want to do is what?”

She looks up at me, her eyes dark with desire.

“When all I want to do is show you exactly how much I need you. But don’t report me to my superior, okay?”

I promise I’m a professional. You’re the only one who brings out this...

this passion and pure need in me. The only one I’m willing to cross a boundary for. ”

“Trust me, anything I’d put in a report about you would be X-rated, and I’m not about to give some administrator reasons to think about you the way I do.

I don’t want anyone else knowing how incredible you are, how you make me feel, or getting any ideas about what’s mine.

That report would give them reasons to notice you, and I’m selfish enough to want to keep you all to myself. ”

“I’m yours?”

I nod.

She grins at me. “Well, in that case, what are you going to do about it?”

Something primal flares in my chest at her words.

“What am I going to do about it?” I repeat, my voice dropping to a rough whisper. “I’m going to show you exactly what being mine means. First, I’m going to kiss every inch of you until you forget every other man who’s ever so much as looked at you.”

She shivers in my arms, her hands fisting my shirt. “And then?”

“Then I’m going to spread your legs wide open and take you until you’ll never doubt who you belong to.

” My lips trail down her neck, and I feel her tremble in my arms. “And tomorrow, when you go back out there to tend to other patients, you’re going to have my marks on your skin as a reminder that you’re mine, and mine only. ”

“That’s very presumptuous,” she whispers, but she doesn’t stop me from kissing her.

“Is it?” I pull back to look at her. “Tell me I’m wrong, Willa. Tell me you don’t want to be mine.”

“I can’t tell you that. Because I do want to be yours. Completely. And I want you to do exactly what you promised me.”

“What part? I made a lot of promises.”

“The part about you spreading my legs open.”

Her honesty breaks something loose in my chest, and I know there’s no going back from this moment. My hands slide down to the seam of her shirt, needing it to come off already.

“Willa,” I growl, my voice rough with want and the pain flaring in my leg.

“Shh,” she breathes. “Let me take care of you.”

She guides me back against the cushions, her movements careful but charged with barely restrained hunger. She puts a cushion under my injured thigh.

“Tell me if anything hurts, okay?”

I nod.

She strips herself bare for me, and I inhale sharply.

Not from leg pain this time, but from pure, primal need.

I let my eyes roam her curvy body, my dick growing rock-hard in seconds.

I quickly fumble with my clothes, but I need her help to remove my shorts.

I hate being this dependent, hate having to accept help, but with her, it's different now. It feels natural.

As she takes off my shorts, I watch her. Drink her in. Her tits are perfect, her hard nipples proudly standing up. I can't wait to close my mouth around them. My gaze travels lower, and fucking hell... Her pussy is glistening, which means she's as turned on as I am.

With my shorts off, she gently pulls down my underwear next. My dick springs free, and she lets out a small gasp. She tries to hide it, but nothing gets past me.

She tosses my boxer shorts aside and pauses, her gaze traveling over every inch of me like she's memorizing the view.

"Willa," I grit out. My hips twitch, needy and aching for her.

She straddles me slowly and carefully, her warmth settling over my thighs. The heat between her legs barely brushes where I want her most, and it makes my breath catch.

I reach for her, my hands palming her tits. She gasps when I run my thumbs over her nipples, and I do it again, just to hear it once more.

"You're killing me," I manage to say between gritted teeth.

It takes every ounce of restraint not to buck my hips and slide my dick inside her. I want to, but I'm letting her set the pace.

Willa leans down to kiss me, and the wetness from her pussy slides over my dick. Fuck. If I'd known this is what would happen after jamming a chainsaw into my leg, I would've done it way sooner.

"I want you, Brock," she whispers.

"Then take me," I say. "Do you have a condom?"

"I'm on the pill."

"Good, because I want to feel every part of you."

She shifts her position to guide my dick to her entrance. Her eyes lock on mine as she slowly sinks down until I'm buried to the hilt.

"Fuck," I groan.

She's tight, hot, and wet. She's perfect.

Willa moves slowly at first, getting used to the size of my dick.

But once she finds a rhythm, it's like all bets are off.

She tilts her hips back, then forward. She slams into me with such determination, with such lust in her eyes, that I lose all inhibitions.

I moan loudly, not caring about anything but Willa riding my dick.

She plants her hands on my chest for balance as she rides me, her hips rolling in a steady grind that has my teeth gritted and my eyes threatening to roll back. Every moan she lets out wrecks me. Every brush of her fingers across my skin lights me on

fire.

I slide one hand up her body, cupping her breast, brushing my thumb over her nipple until she gasps. Her head falls back, and the sight of her with messy hair, parted lips, riding me like I'm hers, burns itself into my memory.

"Willa," I growl again.

"I've got you," she whispers, breathless and wrecked. "I've got you, Brock."

And fuck, she does. In every way. Her words undo me. Not just my body, but my fucking heart, too. No one's ever said that to me and meant it. Not like she does. And I can't get enough.

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Willa

Every inch of him is solid, hot, and mine.

I ride his hard dick, barely able to take him, and he lets out a curse that lights me up inside. I revel in the fact that I'm the one who makes him moan and curse like this.

He watches me like he's starving. Like every movement I make is driving him even crazier.

His eyes roam over my body, pausing at my breasts and my hips before zooming in on the spot where our bodies slam together.

My cheeks heat under his gaze, but I don't stop.

I don't want to. Riding him like this makes me feel powerful and beautiful. Desired. Cherished.

Fucking sexy.

He reaches up, one big hand cradling my breast, his thumb brushing over my nipple until I gasp.

"You're going to ruin me," he mutters in a rough voice. "Right here on my damn couch."

"Good," I say, breathless. "Then we're even."

I lean forward, bracing myself on his chest, and our lips meet. This kiss is nothing like the first. It's filthy and desperate. His tongue slides against mine, and I moan into his mouth, riding him harder now, chasing that orgasm I know is close. Fuck, I can't wait for him to come inside me.

His hand finds my waist, steadying me so I don't jostle his leg, but I feel how badly he wants to move. Wants to take control. And if he wasn't hurt, I have no doubt he would've flipped us over by now and wrecked me against the couch.

The thought makes me clench even harder around him, and he groans against my lips.

"Jesus, Willa—"

"I know," I pant.

We move together, finding a rhythm that's less about being careful and more about pure need. Every thrust, every grind of my hips sends me spiraling closer to a mind-blowing orgasm.

"Come for me," he growls while he grips my ass. "I want to feel you come."

"Fuck. I'm... Brock!"

I cry out his name as I fly over the edge and shatter, clenching tight around him. Brock follows a second later with a hoarse shout as he empties his dick inside me.

I settle myself on the couch next to him, and he wraps his arms around me, holding me close.

"You okay?" I whisper against his neck. "Is your leg okay?"

He chuckles. “Willa, I’ve never felt better in my life.”

He kisses me, looking at me intensely. And God, that look... It melts me. It’s not just post-sex bliss. It’s like he’s seeing all of me and loving it.

“I love you, Willa,” he says, confirming what I knew his eyes were trying to tell me.

I smile. “I love you, too, Brock.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:16 am

Willa

One year later

I find Brock out back with his shirt off and sawdust clinging to his skin.

He stands over a half-built crib, one hand gripping the chisel, the other steadying the smooth pine frame.

My God, he looks gorgeous. I pinch my arm to make sure I'm not dreaming.

He's hot as hell and sweet as pie. And he's all mine.

He glances up when he hears me behind him, and that smile... Fuck, that smile still makes my knees weak.

"You're supposed to be resting," he says, eyeing my swollen belly with concern.

I arch a brow. "Says the man who tried to clean gutters with stitches in his leg."

He grins sheepishly. "Okay, fair."

I walk over, placing one hand on the edge of the crib and the other on my lower back because this kid is officially using my spine as a jungle gym. "This looks amazing."

"Thanks. But you need to be sitting down, Willa."

I snort. “Again, you were the worst patient ever when it came to resting. I think I’m handling the third trimester better than you handled your leg wound.”

He chuckles and pulls me into his arms. “Maybe. But I didn’t look half as gorgeous as you while limping around.”

My heart does that swoony thing it always does when I’m near him, even after an entire year of calling him mine. He kisses me with the same passion as our first kiss, and butterflies swarm in my stomach.

“You keep kissing me like this, and I’m going to forget I waddled out here to check on you. You’re tempting me to do something else instead,” I say with a laugh.

His grin turns wicked. “Then let’s get you back inside right away.”

“Are you sure you have time?”

He tosses the chisel down and scoops me gently into his arms with a low growl. “Hell, I have time. I have all night, Willa. You get me forever.”

I wrap my arms around his neck as he carries me toward our cabin like I weigh nothing. As the door swings shut behind us and Brock takes me into our bedroom, I smile. This is exactly where I’m meant to be, and I couldn’t be happier.

Read Silas ’ story next in *Marked by the Brooding Mountain Man* !