



# Hitchhiker Mountain Man

## (Hot Mountain Nights #3)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** SLATE

My trucks dead, and the last thing I need is a city girl with sunshine in her eyes stopping to help.

Jordyn. Shes trouble, plain and simple, messing with my peace. But when she offers a ride, Im stuck. Crammed in her fancy car, shes too close, and that spark in her gaze? Its a damn distraction a long-haul trucker like me cant afford but cant ignore.

JORDYN

This mountain trip was supposed to be my breath of fresh air, not a rescue mission for a ridiculously grumpy, undeniably hot trucker.

Slate. Hes rough around the edges, the kind of man who makes you want to get your hands dirty. His grunts should be a turn-off, but after the carefully curated world I left behind, his bluntness is surprisingly refreshing... and scorching hot.

**Total Pages (Source):** 10

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

one

Jordyn

My phone buzzes for the fifth time in twenty minutes. Mom, again. I toss it onto the passenger seat without looking. Whatever crisis she's having about my "impulsive life choices" can wait until I'm ready to deal with it—which might be never.

The Range Rover's navigation system keeps trying to reroute me to the main highway, clearly confused by my deliberate choice to take the scenic route.

I ignore its persistent chiming, just like I'm ignoring my family.

The mountain road curves ahead, revealing patches of aspen trees turning brilliant gold against the evergreens.

I crack my window and breathe in air that doesn't smell like designer perfume or my father's imported cigars.

Freedom. Finally.

Three weeks ago, I broke things off with Bradley Wells after two years of dating.

He checked every box on my parents' "perfect match" list: heir to Wells Investment Group, Ivy League education, country club membership, and a family pedigree that matched our own.

The look on my mother's face when I told her—part horror, part fury—was almost worth the social suicide. Almost.

"You'll regret this, Jordyn," she'd said, lips barely moving as she maintained her perfect smile for the benefit of anyone watching. "He was perfect."

Perfect for the daughter they wanted. Perfect for Jordyn Montgomery, future VP of Montgomery Luxury Real Estate, wife of Bradley Wells, mother to 2.5 perfectly dressed children who would attend the right schools and make the right connections.

But I'm twenty-five, and I'm suffocating.

So here I am, driving into the Colorado mountains to a cabin I rented on an app with my own credit card—possibly the first truly independent decision I've made since choosing my college major.

Even that had been guided by subtle pressure.

"Marketing is so versatile, darling. Perfect for when you join the family business. "

My phone buzzes again. This time it's a text from Bradley.

Your parents are worried. Just call them, J. You're being impulsive again.

Translation: Be reasonable, Jordyn. Come back to the path we've all agreed is best for you.

I switch the phone to silent and toss it into my purse.

The GPS informs me I'm thirty minutes from my destination, but my growling stomach and the fuel gauge hovering near a quarter tank suggest a stop might be wise.

When I spot the weathered wooden sign for "Rocky Mountain Rest Stop" ahead, I signal (a habit my father drilled into me even when no one's around to see) and turn in.

The parking lot is half-filled with massive semis, their chrome gleaming in the afternoon sun.

My vehicle looks almost comically out of place next to these beasts—like a pampered poodle among wolves.

I feel a little thrill at the thought. This is exactly what I wanted: something real, unscripted, unprogrammed by my family's expectations.

I check my reflection in the visor mirror—a habit I'm trying to break—and realize I'm still wearing the pearl earrings Mom gave me for my twenty-first birthday.

I remove them, dropping them into the console.

My honey-blond hair is falling out of its perfect blow-out after hours of driving with the windows occasionally open. Good. Let it be messy.

The truck stop is nothing like the carefully curated rustic-chic mountain cafés in Whistler where my family vacations.

This place has actual rust. The neon "OPEN" sign buzzes and flickers.

A bell jingles as I push open the door, and the scent of coffee, grease, and something indefinably authentic hits me. I love it immediately.

Inside, a handful of people occupy the vinyl booths—mostly men in work clothes, a couple of tired-looking families. No one pays me any attention, which is refreshing

after a lifetime of being Jordyn Montgomery, daughter of Richard and Eleanor.

I head to the counter, eyes drawn to the display case of pies with hand-written labels. "Homemade," the sign boasts. Not artisanal, not craft, not small-batch. Just homemade. I'm oddly charmed.

"Coffee, please," I tell the middle-aged waitress whose name tag reads 'Darlene'. "And what pie would you recommend?"

"Apple's fresh this morning," she says, already pouring coffee into a mug that's seen better days. I notice the chipped edge and find myself appreciating its imperfection.

"Perfect."

As I wait for my pie, I become aware of the guy beside me at the counter. Not next to me—there are two empty stools between us—but close enough that he enters my peripheral vision like a storm front.

He's big. That's my first impression. Tall, broad-shouldered, with the solid build of someone who uses his body for actual work, not just carefully programmed personal training sessions.

His flannel shirt has the sleeves rolled up, revealing forearms corded with muscle and dusted with dark hair and faded tattoos.

A worn baseball cap shadows his face, but I can see enough to note the stubbled jaw, the straight nose, the set of his mouth as he scowls into his coffee cup like it's personally offended him.

Something about him makes me straighten my back. He's probably over forty, definitely not the kind of man my mother would approve of me noticing. Which

makes me notice him more.

"Beautiful country up here," I say, aiming for casual conversation but hearing the too-polished edge in my voice—the one I use at charity galas and business mixers.

He doesn't look up, just grunts something that might be agreement. Or indigestion.

Darlene slides a generous slice of pie in front of me, the scent of cinnamon and apples rising with the steam. "Enjoy, honey."

"Thank you." I take a bite and can't help the small sound of appreciation that escapes. It's actually homemade, not pretending to be.

The man beside me shifts, and I catch him giving me a sidelong glance. His eyes are blue. Not the carefully cultivated blue of Bradley's tailored shirts, but something deeper and wilder, like mountain lakes I've seen in travel magazines.

Something in my chest flutters.

"First time in the mountains?" I joke, trying again despite his obvious lack of interest.

This time he actually looks at me, a full assessment that makes me feel stripped bare in a way that Bradley's gaze never did in two years of dating. I resist the urge to check if my hair is out of place.

"Not looking for company, princess," he says, voice a low rumble that seems to vibrate through the counter between us. He tosses a few bills down, nods to Darlene, and slides off his stool.

I watch him walk out, like a predator passing through territory too small to interest him. The bell jingles with a finality that echoes in the now-quiet diner.

I should be offended. Princess ? But instead, I find myself fighting a smile as I turn back to my pie. There was something refreshing about his dismissal—no pretense, no social niceties, no carefully calibrated response designed to make the right impression or maintain the right connection.

Just honest disinterest. Or maybe not completely disinterested, given that look.

Through the window, I watch him climb into an enormous black semi with silver detailing. The truck gleams despite the dirt of the road, clearly well-maintained. As he pulls out of the lot, I catch the name painted on the door: "Eleanor."

Eleanor. Like my mother. The coincidence makes me laugh.

Outside, the mountains are turning purple with approaching dusk.

My cabin waits somewhere among them, the first step in my undefined journey toward becoming someone other than the Jordyn Montgomery everyone expects me to be.

And for some reason, I can't help thinking about blue eyes and a gruff voice calling me "princess. "

I finish my pie, leave a tip that makes Darlene's eyebrows rise, and head back to my SUV. As I pull back onto the winding road, I realize I'm smiling. Really smiling, not the camera-ready version I've perfected over years of family photos and society events.

Maybe this impulse trip wasn't such a bad idea after all. Maybe up here, among strangers who don't know my name or care about my family connections, I'll finally figure out who I am when no one's watching.

And if I happen to run into a certain grumpy trucker again... well, that might make things interesting.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

two

Slate

Smoke. That's never good.

I pull Eleanor, my rig, onto the gravel shoulder, her eighteen wheels crunching over loose stone as the engine makes that whining noise I've been ignoring for the last hundred miles.

Stupid. Should've gotten it checked in Edmonton, but the schedule was tight and the load pays extra for early delivery.

"Come on, old girl," I mutter, cutting the engine.

The sudden silence of the mountain road presses in, broken only by the ticking of cooling metal and the distant rumble of thunder.

Storm's coming. The dark clouds have been building over the western peaks for the last hour, and the wind's picking up, carrying the scent of rain.

I grab my jacket and step down from the cab, boots hitting dirt with a familiar thud. Even in June the air bites colder up here than it did in the valley. Good. Clear head, clear thinking. Need both now.

Opening the hood releases a plume of steam that tells me everything I need to know. Cracked radiator hose, from the look of it. Could be worse. Could be better, too,

especially given the complete lack of cell service up here and the fact that the storm is about to break.

Fifteen years of hauling loads across the country, and I still end up on the side of the road now and then.

Part of the job. Usually don't mind the solitude, the problem-solving.

It's why I chose trucking—independence, quiet, wide-open spaces where no one expects small talk or asks about your feelings.

But tonight, I'm running behind, and there's a tight window for this delivery. Contracts matter. Reputation matters. Both are hard to build and easy to lose in this business.

I dig through my toolbox, assessing options. The hose needs replacing, not patching. I can rig something temporary, but I'll need parts. The nearest town's a good thirty miles ahead. Not walking distance before this storm hits.

As I'm calculating my limited options, headlights flash in the distance.

Probably another tourist heading to one of those luxury cabins that have been sprouting up like weeds in these mountains.

I turn back to Eleanor's engine. Not my type of people, those cabin renters with their spotless SUVs and designer outdoor gear that's never seen real use.

The first fat raindrops hit the hood with audible taps as the vehicle slows. Great. A good Samaritan in a brewing storm. Just what I need—some city slicker asking if I need help like I'm some helpless case who doesn't know a radiator from a toaster.

I hear the crunch of tires on gravel, the soft purr of a luxury engine idling. Don't turn around. Maybe they'll get the hint and keep moving.

"Car trouble?"

That voice. Something about it tugs at my memory, making me straighten from my hunched position over the engine. I turn, scowl already in place, and find myself looking at the woman from the diner. The princess with the perfectly styled hair and expensive clothes who tried making small talk.

She's standing beside her Range Rover, raindrops beginning to darken spots on her cashmere sweater, looking like she stepped out of a magazine spread titled "Mountain Chic" even with wisps of hair now blowing across her face in the rising wind.

Everything about her screams money and privilege, from her clothes to her impractical boots that probably cost more than my monthly rent.

"I'm fine," I say, turning back to the engine. Not a total lie. I am fine. The truck isn't.

A crack of thunder echoes through the mountains, closer now. The rain starts coming down harder.

"You don't look fine," she says, moving closer. "Your truck is smoking, and there's a storm about to hit. Do you have cell service? Mine cut out miles ago."

"No," I admit grudgingly. "Coverage is shit up here."

She glances at the darkening sky, then back at me. "My rental cabin is only about ten minutes this way," she hesitates, then adds, "You could wait out the storm there. Maybe call for help once it passes."

The offer hangs between us as another rumble of thunder sounds, closer still. I hate being in anyone's debt. Hate the idea of being stuck in some fancy rental cabin even more. But the sky is opening up now, rain is coming down in sheets, and I'm running out of options.

"You always invite strange men to your cabin?" I ask, trying to discourage her.

She smiles, and something strange happens in my chest. "Only the grumpy ones who call me 'princess.'"

So she remembers our brief exchange at the diner. Interesting.

"I'm Jordyn," she adds, extending a hand like we're at some cocktail party instead of standing in an intensifying downpour.

I hesitate, then take it, her skin soft against my calloused palm. "Slate."

I wipe my hands on a rag and secure Eleanor's hood as the rain soaks through my jacket. Pride tells me to refuse her help. The cold rain and approaching night say otherwise.

"Fine," I agree. "Just until I can make some calls."

"Great! Your chariot awaits." She gestures to her vehicle with a theatrical flourish that should be annoying but somehow isn't.

I lock up Eleanor, grabbing my bag and securing the cab even though there's nothing worth stealing except some beef jerky and a few paperbacks. Force of habit. A man's truck is his home on the road.

As I approach her shiny SUV, I'm acutely aware of the grease under my fingernails,

the three-day stubble on my jaw, the fact that I probably smell like diesel and sweat. She doesn't seem to notice or care as she slides into the driver's seat, rainwater dampening her hair into darker gold.

Getting into her vehicle requires folding myself nearly in half. I'm too big even for an SUV. The leather seat is pristine and smells new. Everything gleams with that particular shine that comes from having more money than you know what to do with.

"Seatbelt," she reminds me as she starts the engine.

I grunt, pulling the belt tight across my chest. The space is too small, too confined. I'm used to sitting above the road in Eleanor's cab, not riding low to the ground like this.

"So," she says as we turn around and head back the way she came, windshield wipers working overtime against the downpour, "what are you hauling?"

I glance sideways at her, surprised by the question. Most people ask where I'm going or where I've been, not what I'm carrying.

"Lumber. Heading to a construction site in Darkmore Mountain."

She nods like this actually interests her. "You must see a lot of the country."

"That's the job."

"Is that why you do it? To see places?"

I shift in the too-small seat, uncomfortable with her questions and the way her perfume is filling the confined space.

It's subtle, not overpowering like some women wear, but it's making it hard to maintain my usual mental distance.

A drop of rain slides down her neck, disappearing beneath her collar.

I shouldn't notice these things. Shouldn't be attracted to her at all.

She's exactly the type I avoid—high-maintenance, complicated, from a world that has nothing to do with mine.

"I do it for the solitude," I say, hoping she'll take the hint.

Instead of being offended, she laughs. It's a genuine sound, not the practiced tinkle you'd expect from some city girl like her.

"Message received," she says, still smiling. "I'll stop with the third degree."

We drive in silence for a few minutes, rain drumming on the roof, the trees on either side of the road bending in the wind.

Lightning flashes, briefly illuminating her profile.

She's beautiful in that polished, perfect way that usually leaves me cold.

So why am I noticing the curve of her cheek and the way her hands grip the steering wheel?

Must be the situation. The close quarters. The unexpected rescue.

"The cabin's just up ahead," she says, pointing to a side road nearly hidden by trees.

"It's supposed to be rustic."

I find myself almost smiling at that. Almost. Girl like her probably doesn't even know the true meaning of "rustic".

She turns onto a narrow dirt road that's quickly becoming mud in the downpour. The SUV handles it well until we reach a particularly steep section where the tires spin, seeking traction.

"Hang on," she says, biting her lip in concentration as she navigates the increasingly treacherous path.

We make it around one more bend, and the cabin comes into view. It's bigger than I expected—probably three bedrooms at least—with a covered porch and large windows. Rustic luxury, not actual rustic. Should've known.

The SUV slides slightly as she pulls up to the cabin, coming to a stop just under the edge of the porch roof. The rain is coming down in sheets now, the wind howling through the trees.

"Home sweet temporary home," she says, cutting the engine. "Let's make a run for it."

Even with the short dash from car to porch, we're both soaked by the time we reach the door. She fumbles with the key, hands slippery with rain, and I resist the urge to take it from her and do it myself.

Finally, the door swings open, and we stumble into the dim interior. She flips a switch, and warm light fills what appears to be a great room with vaulted ceilings, expensive-looking furniture, and a stone fireplace big enough to stand in.

"Come on in," she says, pushing wet hair from her face. Her sweater clings to her curves, and water drips from her eyelashes.

I look away, irritated by my own awareness of her.

"Phone's over there," she adds, pointing to an old-fashioned landline on a side table.

"I'm going to get towels and see if I can get a fire started."

As she disappears down a hallway, I stand dripping on the polished hardwood, feeling out of place in my wet, work-stained clothes. The cabin is all exposed beams and carefully curated wilderness chic—the kind of place that costs more per night than I make in a week—not rustic at all.

I should call Travis at Mitchell's Auto, see if he can send someone with the part I need once the storm passes. Then maybe someone from the local diner can give me a ride back to Eleanor. I pass through this area to Darkmore all the time, so I know most of the locals by face if not name.

The sooner I can get out of here—away from this too-perfect cabin and the too-attractive tenant—the better.

But as I move toward the phone, I catch sight of Jordyn returning with armfuls of fluffy white towels, a determined look on her face as she kneels by the fireplace and begins arranging kindling. Something about the scene—her focused expression—makes me pause.

This is going to be more complicated than I thought. And that's the most irritating thing of all.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

three

Jordyn

I didn't expect to end up sharing my escape cabin with a grumpy stranger, but as I towel my hair dry, I can't help thinking this storm might be the most exciting thing to happen to me in months.

"Here," I say, offering Slate the largest, fluffiest towel I could find. "You're dripping all over the floor."

He takes it with a grunt that I'm beginning to interpret as his version of "thank you." The towel looks comically small in his large hands. Everything about him is oversized compared to the carefully proportioned furniture of the rental cabin.

"You can sit down, you know," I tell him, gesturing to the sofa. "It's just water."

He looks skeptical but moves toward the couch, leaving a trail of wet footprints.

I try not to stare as he runs the towel over his dark hair, but it's difficult.

There's something magnetic about his movements—efficient, purposeful, nothing wasted.

Completely unlike the calculated gestures of men in my social circle, who seem to constantly pose for an invisible audience.

"Did you reach anyone on the phone?" I ask, tending to the growing fire.

"Straight to voicemail," he says. "Storm's probably knocked out some lines."

"Well, looks like you're stuck here until it passes. Are you hungry? I brought some groceries."

He hesitates. "I don't want to impose."

"It's pasta and jarred sauce, not a five-course meal," I say, rolling my eyes. "Besides, I'm cooking for myself anyway."

Without waiting for his response, I head to the kitchen. I can feel his eyes on me as I move around, pulling ingredients from shopping bags. For some reason, I want to prove to him that I'm not completely helpless.

I focus on filling a pot with water. "You can use the bathroom to change, y'know. Better than sitting in wet clothes."

He gives me a look but takes his bag to the bathroom. I quickly change into leggings and an oversized sweater in the second bedroom. My hair is a disaster without makeup, but somehow I can't bring myself to care. It's liberating after a lifetime of always being "presentable."

When I return, Slate is wearing a dry flannel shirt and jeans, looking less drenched but still uncomfortable. He hangs up the phone.

"Any luck?" I ask, checking the water.

"Got through to Mitchell's Auto, but they can't get a tow truck up here until the storm passes. Roads are already flooding."

"So you're definitely staying the night," I say, trying to keep my tone neutral despite the flutter in my stomach.

He rubs the back of his neck and sighs. "Looks that way."

"Well, I promise not to bite," I smile. "Though I can't promise the same for whatever wildlife might be outside."

This earns me the closest thing to a smile I've seen from him—just a slight softening around his eyes, but I count it as a victory.

The cabin feels smaller with him in it. His presence seems to fill the space, making me hyper-aware of where he is. When he moves to add another log to the fire, I track his progress, noting how his shirt stretches across his back.

I shouldn't find him attractive. He's nothing like the polished men my mother would approve of. Nothing like Bradley with his perfect teeth and manicured hands. Slate is all rough edges and scowls, with calloused palms and stubble on his jaw.

Yet every time he moves, my eyes follow him. Every time he speaks, that deep voice sends heat through my core.

"Need help?" he asks gruffly, nodding toward the boiling water.

"Sure. You can set the table if you want."

He moves with surprising grace, finding plates, glasses, and utensils without asking. I add pasta to the water and stir the sauce, trying to ignore how domestic this feels.

"So," I say, "how long have you been a trucker?"

"Fifteen years." He places plates on the small dining table by the window.

"Do you like it?"

He considers the question seriously. "Most days. Freedom of the open road. No boss looking over my shoulder. Different view every day." He pauses. "Some days it gets lonely."

This small admission feels like a gift. "I can imagine. All those miles with just your thoughts for company."

"Better than fake conversation." He gives me a pointed look that makes me laugh.

"Fair enough. But this doesn't count as fake conversation, does it? I'm genuinely curious."

Something shifts in his expression. "No, this isn't fake."

We sit across from each other, the storm providing background music to our meal. I'm suddenly conscious of my table manners, wondering why I care what this grumpy trucker thinks of how I twirl pasta.

"So what's your story?" he asks unexpectedly. "What brings a... woman like you up to a cabin alone?"

"A woman like me?" I raise an eyebrow. "What exactly does that mean?"

He doesn't back down. "Someone who clearly comes from money. Someone used to cities and comfort, not mountain roads and isolation."

"Maybe I wanted a change from all that. Maybe I'm tired of being 'someone like me.'"

His blue eyes study me, and I force myself not to squirm under his gaze. "Running from something?" he asks.

"Isn't everyone?" I counter, then sigh. "I broke up with my boyfriend a few weeks ago. Bradley. We'd been together for two years, and everyone expected us to get married. It was all very... appropriate."

"But?"

"But it felt like putting on clothes someone else picked out.

They fit, technically, but never quite right.

" I look down at my plate. "Everything in my life has been chosen for me—where I live, where I work, who I date.

I just wanted to make one decision for myself, even if it's just where to spend my vacation. "

His expression softens. "That's why you're so excited about a run-down truck stop and mediocre pie?"

I laugh. "Hey, that pie was delicious!"

"It was decent," he concedes, almost smiling.

"Anyway, yes. This is all gloriously different from my usual life, even with the storm and the unexpected house guest."

Something like understanding passes between us, and for a moment, the space between our worlds doesn't seem quite so vast.

A crack of thunder breaks the moment, and the lights flicker before steadying again.

"Should we be worried about that?" I ask.

"Cabin probably has a generator if the power goes out." He eyes the storm. "This looks like it might be settling in for the night."

"Well, there are worse places to be stranded," I say. "And worse company."

His eyes meet mine, sending heat racing through me. "That so?"

"You're not as grumpy as you pretend to be," I say boldly.

"And you're not as spoiled as I expected."

I grin. "Careful, that almost sounded like a compliment."

He shrugs, but there's warmth in his eyes that wasn't there before.

As I clean up after our meal, I'm achingly aware of him moving around, examining bookshelves, adding wood to the fire. The lights flicker again and then go out completely, leaving only the fireplace glow.

"Guess I was wrong about the generator," Slate's voice comes from near the fire.

"There should be candles somewhere," I say, carefully making my way from the kitchen. "The rental listing mentioned emergency supplies."

I misjudge the distance and bump right into his solid chest. His hands come up to steady me, gripping my upper arms. The contact sends a jolt through me.

"Careful," he murmurs, his voice deeper in the dimness. His hands are warm through my sweater—hands that work for a living, not just for show.

I should step back. I should thank him and move away. Instead, I stay perfectly still, looking up at his shadowed face in the firelight.

"Slate," I whisper.

His grip tightens slightly, and I hear his breath catch. For one electric moment, I think he might pull me closer.

Then he releases me, stepping back. "Let's find those candles."

The spell breaks, but something remains—a tension in the air between us that wasn't there before. As we search for emergency supplies, carefully maintaining distance, I can't help but wonder what would have happened if he hadn't let go.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

four

Slate

I stand by the fireplace, feeding another log to the flames, trying to focus on practical matters rather than the woman moving around the candle lit cabin.

The power's been out for twenty minutes. The Princess—Jordyn—has handled it better than I expected. No complaints about missing Netflix or charging her phone. Instead, she methodically found candles, matches, and even an old battery-powered radio that's now softly playing staticky country music.

"The rental listing mentioned extra blankets in the hall closet," she says. "We should probably grab them now while we can still see."

I nod, not trusting my voice. She looks different in the candlelight—softer, less polished. Her hair has dried in natural waves. The oversized sweater she's changed into keeps slipping off one shoulder, revealing the delicate curve where her neck meets her collarbone. I force my eyes away.

"I'll get them," I offer, needing distance between us.

The hallway is darker, only one candle offering meager light. I find the closet and pull out several thick blankets that smell of cedar and fabric softener. They're soft, expensive—like everything else in this place. Like her.

I've encountered her type before. Women who slum it with the working class when

they want a thrill, when they want to feel edgy before returning to their comfortable lives. I'm nobody's vacation experiment.

So why can't I stop noticing the sway of her hips? The delicate line of her profile against the firelight? The way her leggings hug curves that have no business occupying my thoughts?

She's twenty-five. Thirteen years younger than me. Practically from another planet in terms of lifestyle. Every logical part of my brain is sounding the alarm.

I carry the blankets back and find her sitting cross-legged on the floor near the fire, pouring something from a bottle into two lowball glasses.

"Found some whiskey," she says with a smile that creates a dimple in her right cheek. "Seemed appropriate for a storm."

"Didn't take you for a whiskey drinker."

She laughs, the sound honest and unguarded. "There's a lot you don't know about me, Slate."

I place the blankets on the couch, careful to keep my distance as I accept the glass she offers. The whiskey is good—of course it is.

"So," she says, taking a small sip and trying not to wince at the burn and failing adorably. "Tell me more about your life on the road."

I settle on the floor across from her, the fire crackling between us. Safe. Safer than the couch where we might end up too close.

"Not much to tell. I drive. I deliver. I drive some more."

"There must be more to it than that," she persists. "Favorite routes? Crazy stories? Best diners in the country? I want to know."

Her eyes reflect the firelight, genuine curiosity shining there. Against my better judgment, I find myself answering.

"Route 50 across Nevada. They call it the Loneliest Road in America. Miles of nothing but open desert and mountains in the distance. No billboards, no strip malls, no noise. Just you and the road."

She leans forward slightly, completely engaged. "That sounds beautiful."

"It is. Most people would call it boring, but there's something about that emptiness..." I trail off, uncomfortable with revealing too much.

"No, I get it," she says softly. "Sometimes emptiness gives you room to breathe. Room to hear yourself think."

Something shifts between us—a moment of unexpected understanding.

"Best diner is closer to home. It's a place called Dot's in Red Deer," I continue, steering toward safer ground. "Woman who runs it has been cooking the same menu for forty years. Makes pie that would make you forget that truck stop slice."

She grins. "Fighting words."

The whiskey and fire are warming me from the inside out, loosening my guard despite my best efforts. The storm rattles the windows, but in here it's warm, almost intimate. Dangerous.

"Your turn," I say, redirecting attention away from myself. "What's it like in your

world?"

She considers this, taking another sip. "Controlled. Everything managed for maximum appearance. Even the most casual brunch requires the right outfit, the right conversation topics. It's exhausting."

"Sounds fake."

"It is. Completely." She sighs, and the sound holds genuine weariness. "That's why I'm here. I needed to remember what real feels like."

The simple honesty in her voice catches me off guard. I expected shallow, rehearsed answers about needing a social media detox. Not this raw admission.

"And is this real enough for you?" I gesture around at the cabin.

To my surprise, she laughs. "Touché. It's lux-rustic at best. But it's still closer to real than my normal life."

She stretches her legs out toward the fire. The movement causes her sweater to slide further off her shoulder, revealing more smooth skin. My cock strains against my jeans. My mouth goes dry, and I take a larger swallow of whiskey.

"What about you?" she asks. "Do you have someone waiting at home when you're on these long hauls?"

The question is casual, but I don't miss the careful way she watches for my response. I shouldn't care that she's interested. Shouldn't be pleased by the prospect.

"No," I say simply. "Trucking and relationships don't mix well. Learned that the hard way."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It's not a life many people would choose." I look directly at her. "Certainly not someone used to comfort and consistency."

She holds my gaze, not backing down. "Maybe some of us find too much consistency suffocating."

The radio crackles with static, then the announcer's voice breaks through with a weather update. The storm's expected to continue through the night, with flooded roads and downed trees reported throughout the county. Not getting out of here anytime soon.

Jordyn rises to turn up the volume, and I allow myself a momentary indulgence—taking in the graceful line of her back, the curve of her hip, the way her honey-blond hair falls past her shoulders. She's beautiful in a way that makes my chest ache.

When she turns back, she catches me looking. I don't glance away fast enough, and something flares in her eyes—awareness, interest, heat. The cabin suddenly feels one thousand degrees warmer.

"Sounds like we're stuck together until tomorrow at least," she says, voice a touch lower than before.

"Looks that way." My voice sounds rough even to my own ears.

She settles back down, closer to me than before. I can smell her shampoo—something expensive and subtle. Classy.

"We should probably try to get some sleep," I suggest, needing to break the tension

before I do something stupid. "Been a long day."

"Probably," she agrees, but makes no move to rise. Instead, she pulls one of the blankets from the couch and wraps it around her shoulders. "But I'm not really tired yet. Are you?"

I'm exhausted, actually. But sleep feels impossible with her sitting so close, firelight dancing across her features, her eyes holding questions I shouldn't answer.

"The guest room is all yours," she continues when I don't respond. "Unless you'd prefer the couch."

"Couch is fine." Closer to the exits. Farther from her bedroom. Safer.

She nods, but looks disappointed. "But before bed... More whiskey?"

I should say no. Should stick to water and clear thinking. "Sure."

She pours another finger into my glass, our fingers brushing. The brief contact sends electricity up my arm. She feels it too— I can tell by the quick intake of breath, the way her eyes dart to mine.

"I'm glad it was you," she says suddenly.

"What was me?"

"Broken down on the side of the road. I'm glad it was you I found and not someone else."

The sincerity in her voice dismantles another layer of my defenses. "You shouldn't pick up strange men on mountain roads. Could be dangerous."

A small smile plays at the corners of her mouth. "Are you dangerous, Slate?"

To her? Absolutely. But not in the way she's thinking.

"Just saying you should be more careful."

"I'm usually extremely careful. My whole life is careful." She leans forward slightly.

"Maybe I'm tired of careful."

The warning bells in my head are deafening now. She's young, beautiful, clearly interested, and probably rebounding from her breakup. I'm convenient—a working-class thrill before she returns to her real life. I need to shut this down.

The firelight catches the curve of her cheek, the fullness of her lower lip. I imagine what her lips would look like wrapped around my cock, watching her cheeks hollow as she takes all of me down her throat...

"You should get some rest," I say, my voice rougher than intended. "Been a long day."

Disappointment flickers across her face before she masks it with a smile. "You're probably right." She stands, gathering her glass and the bottle.

I nod, not trusting myself to speak as she moves away. The sway of her hips as she walks toward the kitchen to put away the whiskey is almost my undoing.

"Goodnight, Slate," she says softly, pausing at the hallway entrance. The way she looks at me over her shoulder, half in shadow, half in light, will be burned into my memory for a long time to come.

"Goodnight, Jordyn."

I close my eyes, trying to focus on the sound of the storm rather than the memory of her smile, her laugh, the curve of her shoulder in the firelight. Try and fail.

My cock is straining, aching for attention.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow I'll remember all the reasons this is a bad idea. Tonight, just for these quiet hours in the dark, I allow myself to wonder what it would be like if the circumstances were different—if I were different, if she were different.

I unzip my jeans and fist my cock, pulling with the right amount of pressure to help me relieve myself quickly. I hold my breath and keep an eye on the hall while I jerk off, simultaneously fantasizing about her and hoping she won't walk in.

I grunt low as I come hard, heat giving way to shame as I clean myself up.

It's a dangerous indulgence, but no more dangerous than the way my body responded when she sat close to me, no more dangerous than the thoughts that keep circling in my mind as sleep finally begins to claim me.

Dangerous, but seemingly inevitable, like the storm that brought us together in the first place.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

five

Jordyn

I wake to sunlight streaming through the windows and blessed silence. No rain pounding on the roof, no wind howling through the trees. Just stillness and the chirping of birds.

Rolling onto my side, I check my phone. Still no service, but it's just past seven—earlier than I'd normally be up on vacation, but my body is humming with awareness that I'm not alone in this cabin.

Slate. The memory of last night by the firelight sends a flush of warmth through me. The way his blue eyes had reflected the flames, how his voice had deepened when he talked about the open road, the electricity when our fingers brushed over the whiskey glass.

I brush my teeth and splash water on my face before padding down the hallway.

The living room is empty, blankets neatly folded on the couch where Slate slept. For a panicked moment, I wonder if he's gone—if he somehow managed to leave at first light. But then I hear movement on the porch and relief floods through me.

I slide open the glass door and step outside. The morning air is crisp after the storm, the surrounding forest glistening with raindrops. Slate stands at the railing, hands braced against the wood, staring out at the view.

"Morning," I say, pulling my cardigan tighter around me.

He turns, and something in his expression softens when he sees me. "Power's still out," he says. "But the roads should be clear enough for someone to get up here by afternoon."

"That's... good," I say, though part of me isn't sure I mean it. "Coffee's going to be a challenge without electricity."

"Already handled it," he gestures to a small camp stove with a metal pot. "Found it in a supply closet. Hope you don't mind."

"Mind? You're my hero right now." The words slip out before I can catch them, and I see his jaw tighten slightly.

He pours the steaming coffee into two mugs and hands me one. Our fingers brush in the exchange, and just like last night, the brief contact sends a ripple of awareness through me.

We sip in companionable silence, watching the mist rise from the valley below.

"I called Mitchell's again," Slate says after a while. "They're bringing the parts now."

"So you'll be able to fix your truck today?" I try to keep the disappointment from my voice.

"That's the plan." He glances at me, then back at the view. "Need to get back on the road. Cargo won't deliver itself."

"Right." I nod, staring into my coffee. "Well, you're welcome to shower and have breakfast before you go. I think there are some protein bars in my bag, since cooking

is out."

He looks like he might refuse, but then nods. "Thanks."

As we finish our coffee, I become acutely aware of how badly I want him to stay. It's ridiculous—we've known each other for less than twenty-four hours. But something about his presence feels right in a way nothing has in a long time.

When I return with the protein bars, Slate is examining a leak in the cabin's gutter, his practical nature apparently unable to ignore the problem.

"That's going to cause damage if it's not fixed," he says, pointing to where water has been misdirected against the wood.

"I'll mention it to the rental company." I hand him a protein bar.

"Could fix it now if there's a ladder around." He takes a bite, eyeing the gutter with the focus of someone who's used to solving practical problems.

"You don't have to do that," I say.

"Don't mind." He shrugs. "Better than sitting around waiting for Mitchell."

I watch him, struck by how different he is from any man I've known. Bradley would never have noticed the gutter, let alone offered to fix it. He would have called someone, or more likely, handed the problem to his assistant.

"There's a shed behind the cabin," I recall.

We make our way around the cabin, our shoulders occasionally brushing as we navigate the muddy path. Each accidental touch sends a jolt through me.

The shed is unlocked and surprisingly well-stocked. Slate finds a ladder, tools, and even some sealant.

Back at the front of the cabin, he positions the ladder, testing its stability before climbing up.

I hold it steady, looking up at him against my better judgment.

The position highlights the breadth of his shoulders, the way his faded jeans fit across his thighs, the flex of muscle as he steadies himself.

"Worse than I thought," he calls down, his fingers probing the damaged section. "Water's been getting behind it for a while."

I watch as he carefully removes debris—pine needles, twigs, and wet leaves—that have clogged the channel. His hands move with precise efficiency, each motion purposeful. He tests the brackets holding the gutter to the roof, finding one loose and another completely detached.

"Hand me those screws and the screwdriver?" he calls down.

I gather them and stretch up on tiptoes to pass them to him. Our fingers brush in the exchange, and this time, he pauses, looking down at me with an intensity that makes my breath catch.

"Thanks," he says, his voice rougher than before.

I watch him work, notice the impressive bulge in his pants and look away.

He works methodically, securing the loose bracket first, driving screws with powerful twists of his wrist. Sweat beads slightly on his forehead despite the cool morning air,

and he wipes it away with his forearm, leaving a smudge of dirt that somehow makes him even more attractive.

"Now the sealant," he murmurs.

I hand it up without being asked. He applies it generously to the seams where water had been leaking, his fingers smoothing the thick compound into every crack with careful attention.

For some reason watching him smear sealant with his two meaty fingers makes me squeeze my thighs together.

He tests his work by pouring water from his bottle along the gutter, watching as it flows properly down the spout instead of seeping behind.

"That should do it," he says with quiet satisfaction.

There's something incredibly attractive about his quiet competence, about knowing exactly what needs to be done and doing it without fanfare or need for praise. I've never seen anyone work like this—with such self-sufficient capability, taking pleasure in the simple act of fixing what's broken.

When he climbs back down, he's closer to me than strictly necessary, the ladder between us but not really a barrier.

"Should hold now," he says, but doesn't step back.

"Thank you." My voice comes out breathier than intended. "You didn't have to do that."

"Wanted to." His eyes search mine, and whatever he sees there makes his expression

shift subtly.

Time seems to slow, the morning air electric between us. I'm taking in everything about him—the stubble on his jaw that's a day heavier than when we met, the slight chapping of his lips from the mountain air, the scar near his right eyebrow I hadn't noticed before.

"Slate," I whisper, not sure what I'm asking for but knowing I need something only he can provide.

Slate lifts a hand, hesitating just before touching my face, as if giving me time to pull away. I don't. His palm cups my cheek, rough and warm against my skin. His thumb traces my cheekbone in a gesture so gentle it makes my heart ache.

"This is a bad idea," he murmurs, even as he leans closer.

"Probably," I agree, tilting my face up to his.

The first brush of his lips against mine is tentative, questioning. A test that we both know will change everything. His mouth is warmer than I expected, softer despite the slight roughness of his stubble against my skin.

I respond immediately, pressing closer, one hand coming up to grip his forearm. It's all the encouragement he needs. The hesitation vanishes as he deepens the kiss, his hand sliding from my cheek to cup the back of my neck, fingers weaving through my hair.

What begins as gentle exploration quickly transforms into something hungrier.

His other arm wraps around my waist, pulling me against him until I can feel the solid wall of his chest, the beating of his heart that matches my own accelerated

rhythm.

I feel his hard cock rest against my tummy, begging to be inside of me.

I've been kissed before—by boys in college, by Bradley countless times—but never like this. Never with this raw honesty, this unfiltered desire. Slate kisses like a man who has no agenda beyond the moment itself, no calculation, no performance. Just pure, undiluted need.

My arms wind around his neck, pulling him closer still. I guide us away from the ladder, until my back meets the cabin wall.

Slate makes a sound low in his throat—half groan, half growl—as he braces one hand against the wall beside my head.

The position surrounds me with his presence, his strength, but there's nothing frightening about it.

Despite his size, despite the intensity of his desire that I can feel in every point where our bodies touch, I know instinctively that I'm safe with him.

The kiss turns exploring, his tongue teasing mine, learning what makes my breath hitch, what draws the small, needy sounds from my throat that seem to drive him wild. My hands can't stay still, moving from his neck to his shoulders, feeling the play of muscles beneath his shirt.

When we finally break apart to breathe, his forehead rests against mine, our panting breaths mingling in the cool morning air. His blue eyes have darkened, pupils dilated with desire, and I'm sure mine look the same.

"Jordyn," he grunts. His thumb traces my lower lip, slightly swollen from his kisses.

The tender gesture contrasts with the barely restrained power I can feel in his body, still pressed against mine.

"We barely know each other," I whisper, though it doesn't feel true. In some ways, I feel like I know Slate better after one day than I knew Bradley after two years.

"I know," he says, his voice rough. "This is crazy."

"Completely crazy," I agree, even as I lift my face for another kiss.

A distant mechanical sound breaks through our haze—the unmistakable rumble of a vehicle approaching on the gravel road.

Slate pulls back, tension replacing desire in his posture. "That's probably Mitchell."

The spell breaks, reality intruding with unwelcome timing. I step away from the wall, suddenly aware of my tangled hair, my flushed cheeks, the fact that I'm still in my pajamas.

"You should get your truck fixed," I say, trying to sound normal despite the fact that my entire body is still humming with awareness of him.

He nods, though his eyes linger on my lips. "I should."

The moment stretches between us, loaded with unspoken questions.

The vehicle sounds are getting closer. Slate steps back, running a hand through his hair.

"I'll go meet them," he says, though he doesn't move immediately. Instead, he looks at me with an intensity that makes my breath catch again. "Jordyn—"

Whatever he was about to say is cut off by the sound of a truck horn. He sighs, a flash of frustration crossing his face before his usual controlled expression returns.

"We'll talk later," I say, wanting to reassure him, though I'm not sure of what.

He nods, then turns to head down the path toward the approaching vehicle. I watch him go, my fingers rising unconsciously to touch my lips, still warm from his.

One kiss. That's all it was.

I watch his tall figure disappear around the bend, knowing with absolute certainty that nothing will be the same after this.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

six

Slate

That kiss was a mistake.

I tell myself this as I follow Mitchell's son back to his truck. The parts for Eleanor are in the bed of his pickup—a new radiator hose, some coolant, basic tools I'll need for the repair.

But all I can think about is the softness of Jordyn's lips, the small sound she made when I pulled her against me, the way her body fit perfectly against mine.

A mistake. A complication I don't need.

"You need a hand with the install?" Mitchell's kid—Ryan—asks as we reach the end of the cabin's driveway.

"I got it," I reply. "Thanks for bringing the parts out."

He nods, helping me unload everything. "Storm did a number on the roads. Still clearing some downed trees on the main highway, but this stretch should be passable now."

Good. The sooner I can fix Eleanor, the sooner I can put distance between myself and this cabin. Between myself and Jordyn.

Ryan leaves, and I stand for a moment, tools and parts at my feet, staring down the road where my truck waits. I should head there immediately. Instead, I turn and walk back toward the cabin, telling myself it's just to let Jordyn know I'll be gone for a few hours.

The truth is more complicated.

She's on the porch when I round the corner, hair pulled back in a ponytail now, looking more natural than when I first saw her at the truck stop.

Something about seeing her like this makes my chest tighten in a way that has nothing to do with physical attraction and everything to do with something far more dangerous.

"Got the parts?" she asks, eyes carefully not meeting mine.

"Yeah. Heading to the truck now."

She nods, finally looking up. "Need a ride?"

"I can walk."

"Don't be ridiculous," she says with exasperation that somehow sounds affectionate. "I'll drive you."

I should refuse. But I find myself nodding, and minutes later we're in her SUV, the silence between us charged in a way it wasn't before.

"About what happened—" we both start simultaneously, then stop.

She laughs, the tension breaking slightly. "You go first."

I stare out the windshield. "That shouldn't have happened."

"Why not?" The directness of her question catches me off guard.

"Because you're—" I struggle for the right word.

"I'm what?" she challenges. "Too spoiled? Too privileged? Too much of a 'princess'?"

There's an edge to her voice, and I realize I've offended her.

"That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

The truck comes into view. Jordyn pulls over but keeps the engine running, turning to face me.

"You've got your life," I say finally. "I've got mine. They don't exactly overlap."

"We overlapped pretty well on that porch earlier," she counters, a flush rising to her cheeks.

Heat rises in me at the memory. "Physical attraction isn't enough to build anything on."

"Who said anything about building something?" There's hurt beneath her defensive tone. "Maybe I just wanted to kiss an attractive man without thinking too much."

She has a point. I'm the one making assumptions, creating complications that don't necessarily need to exist.

"Fair enough," I concede. "But I'm leaving as soon as I fix my truck. You're heading back to your life in a week. That's the reality."

She looks at me for a long moment, then nods. "You're right. I'm sorry if I made things weird."

"You didn't," I say, reaching for the door handle but pausing. "For what it's worth... it was a good kiss."

A smile tugs at her lips. "Just good?"

Despite myself, I feel an answering smile form. "Fishing for compliments, princess?"

"Maybe." The playfulness in her expression is a welcome return to easier territory.

I get out of the SUV, grabbing the parts from the back. To my surprise, she turns off the engine and follows me to the truck.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"Watching you work," she leans against a nearby tree. "Unless that's too distracting?"

It is distracting, but not in a way I'm willing to admit. "Suit yourself."

I pop Eleanor's hood and get to work, falling into the familiar rhythm of mechanical tasks. The work centers me, brings me back to practical reality.

But I'm acutely aware of Jordyn watching me, her presence like a physical touch even from several feet away.

"How did you learn to do all this?" she asks after a while.

"My old man," I reply, loosening a clamp. "He was a mechanic before he started driving. Taught me the basics when I was a kid, said a real truck driver knows how to fix his own rig."

"Smart man."

"He had his moments." The complicated relationship with my father isn't something I usually discuss. Yet I find myself adding, "He wasn't around much. The road was more important than home."

"Is that why you became a trucker? To understand him?"

The question is too perceptive, hitting closer to home than I'm comfortable with. I focus on tightening the new hose. "Maybe at first. Stayed because it suited me."

"The solitude," she says, remembering our conversation from the storm.

"Yeah."

We fall silent as I finish the installation. The work is done in less than an hour, which means there's nothing keeping me here anymore. I should be hitting the road immediately.

But when I close the hood and turn to face her, something in her expression makes leaving feel impossible.

"All fixed?" she asks.

"Good as new."

"So you're heading out." It's not quite a question.

I wipe my hands on a rag, wrestling with what I want versus what I should do. "That's the plan."

Jordyn nods, disappointment flashing across her face before she hides it behind a smile. "Well, it was nice meeting you, Slate. Safe travels."

She turns to head back to her SUV, and I watch her go, something urgent building in my chest. This is the moment—the clean break, the return to normalcy, the sensible choice.

"Jordyn."

She stops, looking back. "Yes?"

"It's getting late," I hear myself saying. "Probably not smart to start a long haul at this hour. Could call my client, let them know I'll be there first thing tomorrow instead."

Hope lights her eyes. "You could do that?"

"Already pushed the deadline," I admit. "One more night won't make much difference."

It's a rationalization. We both know it. But the smile that breaks across her face makes the potential fallout seem worth it.

"I was going to make dinner," she says. "Nothing fancy, but there's plenty for two."

One more night. Just a few more hours in her company before reality reclaims us both. It's a dangerous indulgence, but as I follow her back to the SUV, I can't bring myself to regret the decision.

Tomorrow I'll leave. Tomorrow I'll be sensible.

Tonight, I'm allowing myself this one deviation from the solitary path I've chosen.  
And the warmth in my chest as Jordyn smiles at me feels suspiciously like something  
I've been avoiding for years.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

seven

Jordyn

I pour wine for us both. Slate sits across the table, our empty plates between us. The pasta turned out well, and his appreciative look when he first tasted it made me strangely proud.

"Where did you learn to cook?" he asks, more relaxed than I've seen him.

"Cooking classes," I admit with a laugh. "My mother insisted. Said even if I never needed to cook for myself, I should know how to direct the staff properly."

He shakes his head with a half-smile. "Different worlds."

"Very different," I agree. "But I'm finding I prefer this one."

His eyes meet mine over his glass, and the intensity there makes my breath catch. We've been dancing around this all evening—the attraction since that morning kiss, his departure tomorrow, the question of what happens tonight.

"Should we move to the couch?" I suggest, pointing to the fireplace. "More comfortable than these chairs."

He nods and rises. For such a large man, he moves with surprising control.

I take our glasses while he brings the wine bottle, and we settle on the couch—close,

but not touching. The space between us feels charged.

"Tell me something real about yourself," I say. "Something you don't tell most people."

He considers this. "I write poetry. Sometimes. When I'm on long hauls and the road gets too quiet."

That wasn't what I expected. "Poetry?"

"Don't look so shocked," he says with a slight smile. "Even truckers can have hidden depths."

"I'm not shocked. I'm impressed." I move closer. "What kind of poetry?"

"The bad kind," he says with a chuckle. "Observations, mostly. Things I see on the road that most people miss."

"I'd love to read it sometime."

He studies me, as if checking if I'm sincere. Whatever he sees must convince him, because his expression softens.

"Your turn," he says. "Something real."

I take a deep breath. "I hate my job. Everyone thinks I'm so lucky to have this perfect position handed to me, but I feel suffocated by it." It feels both scary and freeing to say it. "I've never told anyone that before."

His hand finds mine, warm and reassuring. "What would you do instead? If you could do anything?"

"Photography," I answer immediately. "I've always loved capturing moments, finding beauty in unexpected places." I laugh softly. "Another useless rich girl hobby, right?"

"No," he says firmly. "Not if it's what makes you come alive."

His simple validation tightens my throat. Bradley never understood my photography—just tolerated it as a quirk at best, a distraction at worst.

"Thank you," I whisper.

Slate's thumb traces circles on my hand, sending sparks up my arm. I watch, fascinated by his hands—large, calloused from work, capable of fixing engines and writing poetry. His hands are so different from the manicured ones I'm used to.

"Jordyn," he says.

I look up, and the heat in his eyes steals my breath. We've been circling this moment since that kiss this morning, both of us knowing where this is heading but hesitant to cross the final line. Neither of us has touched the wine.

"I want you," I say simply, tired of dancing around the truth. "I have since I first saw you scowling at your coffee."

A sound escapes him, half laugh, half groan. "I was trying to be a gentleman."

"I don't need a gentleman right now."

That's all it takes. His hand releases mine only to cup the back of my neck, drawing me to him with a certainty that makes me shiver. This kiss is nothing like the one we shared this morning—that was exploration, testing; this is claiming, knowing.

His mouth is demanding against mine, tongue seeking entrance which I gladly grant. I melt against him, hands finding the solid wall of his chest, feeling the rapid beat of his heart beneath my palm. He's all hard muscle and heat, so different from what I'm used to.

"You've been driving me crazy all day," he murmurs against my lips, his stubble a delicious friction against my skin. "Walking around in those tight jeans, looking at me like you're doing now."

"How am I looking at you?" I ask breathlessly as his mouth trails down my neck.

"Like you want to be devoured."

"Maybe I do."

His eyes darken at my words, and suddenly I'm being lifted into his lap, straddling his thighs. The show of strength sends a thrill through me—he handles my weight like it's nothing, arranging me exactly where he wants me.

What follows is a blur of sensation—his calloused hands exploring my body with reverent hunger, his mouth hot against my skin, my clothing somehow disappearing between frantic kisses. His body is a revelation, all hard planes and powerful muscle, built not from vanity but from years of honest work.

"My God," I breathe, running my hands over his broad chest. "You're incredible."

A faint flush colors his cheekbones at the praise, but his hands never stop their skilled exploration, drawing sounds from me I didn't know I could make. He's both tender and commanding, finding every sensitive spot with unerring precision.

When his fingers find my folds, where I'm already slick and ready for him.

"You're so wet for me," he says, voice filled with wonder as he strokes through my folds.

"Only for you," I whisper, the truth of it surprising me. I've never responded to anyone the way I'm responding to him.

His fingers work magic, finding a rhythm that has me clutching his shoulders, head falling back as pleasure builds. When he slides one thick finger inside me, I cry out, overwhelmed by the sensation.

"That's it," he encourages, adding a second finger, stretching me deliciously. "Let me hear you."

His thumb circles where I need him most while his fingers curl inside me, finding a spot that makes stars explode behind my eyelids. It's too much, too good.

"Slate, I'm going to—"

"Come for me, princess," he commands, and somehow the nickname that once annoyed me now pushes me over the edge.

I shatter around his fingers, crying out his name as waves of pleasure crash through me. He works me through it gently, murmuring praise against my neck, easing only when I collapse against his chest, trembling with aftershocks.

Instead of letting me recover, he stands, lifting me effortlessly.

My legs wrap around his waist as he carries me to the bedroom, the display of strength making desire pool anew between my thighs.

The weight of him above me as he lowers me to the bed feels like exactly what I've

been missing all my life.

Slate pulls down his jeans, revealing the long trail of dark hair that leads to his impressive cock. It's long and thick, and all I can think about is how much I want him inside of me.

The first push of him inside me draws a long moan from me. He's bigger than anyone I've been with before, stretching me in the most delicious way. He moves slowly at first, giving me time to adjust, his control evident in the tension of his arms on either side of my head.

"You feel incredible," he groans, fully seated within me now. "So tight, so perfect."

He begins a steady rhythm, each thrust sending sparks of pleasure through my body. He's powerful but controlled, passionate but attentive, reading my body's responses and adjusting to give me maximum pleasure.

When he hooks one of my legs over his arm, changing the angle to hit a spot that makes me cry out, I know I'm already close again. The coil of tension winds tighter with each thrust, his pace increasing as we both chase release.

"You're going to come again," he says, more statement than question. "I can feel you getting tighter."

"Yes," I gasp, hands clutching at his back, feeling the play of muscles as he moves above me.

His hand slides between us, finding where we're joined, his thumb circling in time with his thrusts. The dual sensation pushes me over the edge, pleasure exploding through me with an intensity that tears a scream from my throat.

My orgasm makes him lose control. His thrusts become harder, deeper, his rhythm faltering as his control finally breaks.

His powerful body tenses above me, muscles rigid, jaw clenched as he growls my name through gritted teeth.

The veins in his neck stand out, his face a beautiful mask of pleasure and strain.

He shudders violently, hips jerking against mine as he pours himself into me, each pulse accompanied by a deep, guttural sound that's the most primal, masculine thing I've ever heard.

We stay together for a few minutes, not waiting to withdraw. He's careful not to crush me with his weight, but keeps me close against his side when he eventually moves.

Rain begins to patter against the roof again, a gentle rhythm that seems to underscore the peace I feel in this moment. Tomorrow he leaves. Tomorrow I might never see him again. But tonight, in this cabin, with the storm returning outside, I've found something I didn't even know I was seeking.

"Stay," I whisper into the darkness, not sure if I mean for the night or for something more.

His arm tightens around me, pulling me closer against his chest. "I'm not going anywhere tonight," he promises, his heartbeat strong and steady beneath my ear.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

eight

Slate

Morning light filters through the cabin windows, falling across Jordyn's sleeping face. She's curled on her side, one hand tucked under her cheek, hair spilling across the pillow in golden waves. I've been awake for an hour, just watching her breathe.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

Two days ago, I was stuck in a storm with a spoiled city girl I'd written off as just another tourist passing through. Now I'm in her bed, memorizing the curve of her cheek, the flutter of her eyelashes, the small sigh she makes when she shifts in her sleep.

I should be halfway to to my next client by now.

The roads cleared yesterday, and my delivery's already late.

The client's gonna have my ass for the delay, but somehow I can't summon the urgency I normally would.

All I can think about is the woman beside me and how leaving this cabin feels like walking away from something I didn't know I was looking for.

Jordyn stirs, her eyes blinking open slowly. When she sees me watching her, a smile spreads across her face—unguarded, genuine, still heavy with sleep.

"Morning," she murmurs, stretching like a cat. The movement pulls the sheet down slightly, revealing the curve of her breast, and my cock responds immediately.

"Morning," I reply, my voice gruff with more than just sleep.

She leans forward, pressing her lips to mine in a soft, lingering kiss. "Coffee?"

Before I can answer, she shifts closer, her naked body pressed against mine under the sheets. The contact ignites something primal in me, and all thoughts of coffee evaporate.

My hand slides into her hair, pulling her mouth back to mine. The kiss deepens instantly, her soft moan vibrating against my lips. The sweetness of morning affection transforms into hunger within seconds.

"Thought you wanted coffee," I murmur against her throat as I trail kisses down the slender column.

"This is better than caffeine," she whispers, her hands already exploring my chest, my stomach, moving lower with clear intent.

When her fingers wrap around me, I groan against her skin. She's bold in her desire, confident in a way that drives me wild. Nothing tentative, nothing calculated—just honest want from this beautiful woman thirteen years my junior.

"Need you," I growl, rolling her beneath me.

Her legs part willingly, cradling me between them. She's already slick with desire, ready for me after just a few kisses. The realization sends a surge of masculine satisfaction through me—knowing this sophisticated woman wants me this badly, her young body responding so eagerly to my touch.

"Please," she breathes, arching up against me, the smooth skin of her firm thighs gripping my hips. "I need your cock."

I push into her in one smooth thrust, both of us groaning at the sensation. The fit is exquisite—tight, hot, welcoming. Like she was made perfectly for me.

"Fuck, Jordyn," I groan, struggling to maintain control as her tight heat envelops me. "You feel incredible around me."

"So do you," she gasps as I begin to move. "So deep. So full. I've never felt anything like this."

I set a rhythm that has her clinging to me, her body rising to meet each thrust. Her soft curves contrast perfectly with my harder frame, her youth and vitality evident in every responsive movement.

The sounds she makes—little gasps and moans that get louder as her pleasure builds—are the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. Each time I drive into her welcoming warmth, I'm reminded of how perfectly we fit together despite every difference between us.

Her hands roam my back, feeling the muscles flex as I move above her. There's wonder in her touch, appreciation that feeds my desire to please her, to make this good for her.

"Harder," she demands suddenly, her eyes dark with need. "I won't break. I want to feel all of you."

The request snaps something loose inside me—something primal that's been waiting to claim this beautiful young woman fully.

I hook one arm under her knee, changing the angle, driving deeper with each thrust. Her body yields perfectly, impossibly tight yet stretching to accommodate me.

Her eyes widen, a cry escaping her lips as I hit that sensitive spot inside her that makes her whole body tremble.

"Like that?" I ask, my voice rough with exertion and restraint, reveling in how her smooth, firm body takes everything I give her.

"Yes," she gasps, her inner muscles clenching around me with each thrust. "God, yes, just like that. No one's ever filled me like you do."

I maintain the pace, watching her face as pleasure builds. She's magnificent like this—hair wild across the pillow, cheeks flushed, lips parted in ecstasy. Nothing like the polished princess I first met, and all the more beautiful for it.

"So close," she whimpers, her inner muscles beginning to flutter around me. "Please, don't stop."

"Never," I promise, though I know it's a lie. Tomorrow I'll be gone, back on the road, and this will be just a memory. But right now, at this moment, she's mine, and I'm hers, and nothing else matters.

I slide a hand between us, finding where we're joined, where her slick flesh welcomes me so perfectly.

My rough thumb circles her clit, feeling how she swells under my touch.

The additional stimulation is all she needs.

She comes apart beneath me, her body arching off the bed, her inner muscles

clenching rhythmically around me in waves of pleasure, gripping me tighter and tighter.

My name becomes a broken cry on her lips as her release washes through her, her younger body responding with an intensity that makes me feel powerful, needed.

Her tight heat pulsing around me is too much to resist. I bury my face in her neck, hips driving forward one last time, burying myself to the hilt in her perfect warmth as release crashes through me.

I pour myself into her deepest core, the intensity staggering, like nothing I've experienced with any woman before her.

For a moment, the world narrows to just this—her soft, lush body wrapped around mine, the pulsing connection between us, the sense of rightness that defies all logic.

As I catch my breath, her hand comes up to trace my features—my brow, my cheekbone, the line of my jaw. There's something reverent in the touch, something that makes my chest tight with emotions I'm not ready to name.

"That was some wake-up call," she says with a smile that doesn't quite mask the vulnerability in her eyes.

"Better than coffee," I agree, kissing her forehead.

We lie there in comfortable silence, her fingers trailing patterns on my chest, mine stroking the curve of her hip. It's domestic in a way that should terrify me, but somehow doesn't.

My phone buzzes from the floor where my jeans lie discarded. Reality intruding. I ignore it, but a second buzz follows. Then a third.

"You should get that," Jordyn says softly. "Could be important."

Reluctantly, I disentangle myself from her and reach for the phone. Three messages from my client. The delivery is now critically late. The comfortable bubble we've created is about to burst.

I look back at Jordyn, still wrapped in the sheets, hair tousled from my hands, lips swollen from my kisses. Something twists in my chest at the sight. This wasn't supposed to happen. She wasn't supposed to matter.

"Bad news?" she asks, reading my expression.

"Client's pissed about the delay."

She nods, disappointment evident despite her attempt to hide it. "So you need to go."

It's not a question, but I answer anyway. "Yeah. I should get going."

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

The morning sun glints off Eleanor's polished chrome as Slate loads his duffel bag into the cab. I stand on the cabin porch, arms wrapped around myself despite the warmth of the day, watching him prepare to leave. Watching the routine of a man who's done this hundreds of times before.

But this time is different. I can see it in the tension of his shoulders, the way he keeps glancing back at the cabin. At me.

Two days. That's all it's been since I found him stranded on the side of the road, scowling at his truck in the rain. Three days that somehow feel like much longer.

"That's everything," he says, closing the passenger door and turning to face me.

I nod, not trusting my voice. What is there to say? "Have a nice life?" "Thanks for the memories?" Nothing seems adequate for what's passed between us.

"I should hit the road. Already behind schedule." He shifts his weight, keys jingling in his hand.

"Of course," I manage. "You have a schedule to keep."

He takes a step toward me, then stops, caught between coming and going. I've never seen him so uncertain.

"Jordyn—" he starts, then stops, running a hand through his hair. "This isn't how I expected this trip to go."

I laugh softly, the sound slightly strained. "Me neither. I came up here looking for solitude and self-discovery."

"Found trouble instead," he says, the corner of his mouth lifting in that almost-smile that makes my heart ache.

"The best kind of trouble." I take a step down from the porch, closing some of the distance between us. "I don't regret it, Slate. Not a single moment."

His blue eyes search mine, looking for something. Sincerity, maybe. Or just memorizing my face the way I'm memorizing his.

"I need to ask you something," he says finally. "And it's probably crazy."

My pulse quickens. "I like crazy. Ask me."

He takes a deep breath, glancing at his truck and then back to me. "How long is your vacation, again?"

"Two weeks," I answer, confused by the question. "Well, a week and a half now."

He nods, seemingly coming to a decision. "Come with me."

The words hang in the air between us, unexpected and thrilling.

"What?" I'm not sure I've heard him correctly.

"Come with me," he repeats, more firmly this time. "On the road. For your vacation. See what it's like, the life I lead."

My mind races, trying to process what he's suggesting. "You want me to just... get in

your truck and go?"

"Yes." Simple, direct. So like him.

"To deliver lumber?"

"That's the first stop." He takes another step closer. "After that, wherever the next haul takes us. Could be Saskatchewan, could be Texas. That's the point—freedom, open road, no itinerary."

The offer is so unexpected, so completely outside anything I would have imagined, that I can only stare at him. This isn't a casual invitation for dinner, or even a weekend away. This is stepping completely into his world, leaving mine behind.

"What about my car? My things?"

"Car can stay here. Cabin's paid up, right? Bring whatever you need. Eleanor has plenty of space."

"Eleanor," I echo with a small smile. "Your truck."

"My home," he corrects. "At least for now. Could be yours too, for a while."

The practical part of my brain is listing all the reasons this is insane. I barely know this man. I have responsibilities waiting for me back in the city. This isn't the sort of thing that people like Jordyn Montgomery do.

But there's another voice, louder and more insistent, reminding me why I came to this cabin in the first place. Freedom. Authenticity. A break from the script my life has always followed.

"This is crazy," I say, but I'm smiling.

"Completely," he agrees.

"My mother would have a stroke."

"Probably."

"I'd be living out of a suitcase, sleeping in a truck cab, showering at truck stops."

"It's not glamorous," he acknowledges. "But it's real."

That word—real—resonates through me. Isn't that exactly what I've been seeking?  
Something genuine, unfiltered by expectations or appearances?

"What about after?" I ask. "When my vacation is over?"

He shrugs, but there's vulnerability beneath the casual gesture. "We figure it out then. Could be this is just a short adventure, a story you tell at dinner parties back in your world. Or maybe..." He trails off, leaving the possibility unspoken.

"Maybe it's something more," I finish for him.

He nods, watching me carefully. "Only one way to find out."

I look back at the cabin—comfortable, predictable, safe.

Then at Eleanor, gleaming in the morning sun, promising adventure and uncertainty in equal measure.

Finally, at Slate, this man who crashed into my life and somehow, in just three days,

made me question everything I thought I knew about what I wanted.

"Give me fifteen minutes to pack," I say, the decision made almost before I realize I've made it.

His face breaks into a full smile, transforming his features. I've seen glimpses of it before, but never this complete, this unguarded. It takes my breath away.

"Fifteen minutes," he agrees. "I'll warm up the engine."

I race back into the cabin, heart pounding with excitement and nerves. What does one pack for an impromptu trucking adventure? I grab essentials first—toiletries, comfortable clothes, sturdy shoes. Then, on impulse, I add my camera. If ever there was a time to capture unexpected beauty, this is it.

Slate is leaning against Eleanor's massive grille when I emerge with my suitcase and backpack. The engine rumbles, a deep mechanical purr that somehow sounds inviting now rather than intimidating.

"Ready?" he asks, taking my suitcase.

"Not remotely," I admit with a laugh. "But yes."

He stows my bags in the storage compartment, then turns to me with an expression that's half amusement, half concern.

"Last chance to change your mind, princess. Once we hit the highway, you're committed."

I step closer, tilting my face up to his. "Stop giving me excuses to back out. I'm coming with you, Slate. Unless you're the one having second thoughts?"

"Not a single one." He bends to kiss me, a brief but fierce connection that feels like a promise.

"Not exactly the Ritz," Slate says, climbing into the driver's seat beside me. The space feels intimate without being cramped, our shoulders nearly touching.

"It's perfect," I say honestly. "It's you."

Something in my tone makes him look at me sharply, his blue eyes searching mine again. Whatever he sees there seems to satisfy him, because he nods once and turns his attention to the controls.

"Any regrets?" Slate asks, picking up on my mood shift as he puts Eleanor into gear.

I look out the window at the cabin growing smaller as we pull away, then at the man beside me—strong profile outlined against the morning light, hands confident on the wheel, the beginnings of a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

"Not a single one," I say, settling into the seat that will be mine for the miles ahead. I reach over and place my hand on Slate's thigh, a gesture of connection rather than demand. He covers it with his own, large and warm, without taking his eyes off the road.

"Ready for an adventure, princess?" he asks, the nickname now an endearment rather than a judgment.

I smile, watching the mountains give way to the open sky as Eleanor carries us forward into the unknown.

"With you? Absolutely."

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 1:11 pm*

Six Months Later...

The Halifax waterfront glitters with evening lights as I adjust my camera settings, trying to capture the perfect balance of fading sunset and emerging city glow. The salt-tinged air fills my lungs, so different from the mountain scents where Slate and I began our journey six months ago.