



My Protective Mountain Man (Summer in the Pines #13)

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Category: Romance

Description: Sierra thinks shes headed to the mountain to save her career. But once shes up there, a growly, reclusive mountain man saves her heart.

The Mountain Men of the Pines are tough.

And Everest certainly fits the mold.

Hes not going to let anyone in.

Not even the sweet, innocent girl who falls into his arms.

Hes not expecting Sierra to crack his hard exterior.

Hes not expecting her to melt his heart.

But what he doesnt know is shes got a secret

But since when has that ever stopped love?

Summer in the Pines is a collection of steamy summer romances, where the mountain air is cool, and the nights are scorching. These rugged men can handle the wild—but love is the one thing theyll never see coming!

Total Pages (Source): 11

CHAPTER

ONE

SIERRA

This trip was supposed to be an hour... tops. Get in, close the deal, get back to the office—I'm now completely and terrifyingly lost in the mountains. And I'm sweating through my blouse before I've even turned off the engine of my car.

The Pines Forest in summer is a furnace. No breeze, no clouds, just heat radiating off the dirt road and the heavy scent of pine needles baking in the sun. I kill the engine and glance down at my phone again.

Still nothing. No bars. No GPS. Tall evergreens stretch high above me, their thick canopies knitting together like nature's own cathedral ceiling, trapping me in an inferno. It smells like sap and soil and something ancient—clean, untamed.

But I'm not here for the trees or the silence or even the fresh mountain air that fills my lungs with every breath. I'm here for Everest. A little for Martin. And mostly for me and my unwavering desire to finalize the deal on this resort.

If we can pull it off, it'll be the biggest thing this town's ever seen—chalets, high-speed lifts, luxury spas.

It's the kind of thing that can make a developer's career.

And mine is on the line. I've put in two years —weekends, birthdays, relationships—all sacrificed so I could be indispensable .

So I could earn Martin's trust. So I could finally get a seat at the table instead of pouring the coffee.

And now I'm here. In these woods. On my project.

I pick my briefcase up off of the passenger seat and look over the surveyor's notes, my hands shaking slightly—I've got to make this work. Because if it doesn't, I don't want to explain it to him.

I work for the biggest developer in the state. Everyone wants to be him—or work for him. I used to be like that too. When I first got hired, I thought Martin was brilliant. Charismatic. Ruthless, but in that alpha male way that made people listen when he walked in a room.

Now I just think he's disgusting.

I hear his voice in my head at every turn. He laughs at his clients dumb jokes, but there's an edge to it—like he's already imagining what he'll say to me when no one else is listening. When it's just us. When he can make his crude and unwanted comments.

He'll touch me. He always does—an arm around my waist, a palm pressed to my lower back, a hand on my thigh when we're seated too close together on purpose. It's always subtle. Always deniable.

I don't let him because I want to. I let him because I can't afford not to.

Because rent is expensive, my savings are gone, and if I don't make it through this, I

have nothing to show for the years I've given him.

He could blackball me with a single phone call.

He's done it before. To women who were stronger than me. Louder. Braver.

And even if I walked away now... what then ? I've built too much. I've come too far. I need the payout from this project. My cut will be enough to finally break away—to start my own firm. Autonomy . Freedom. And most importantly no more roaming hands.

So I breathe in the clean mountain air and pretend I'm just admiring the forest. Pretend the sunlight is warming my skin and not the burn of humiliation that creeps up my neck every time I have to smile through one of his jokes or nod when he “accidentally” brushes against me.

I am stronger than this. And smarter than him.

I just have to make it to the other side. Through the trees. Through this trip. Through Martin . And then I'm free.

I mutter a curse under my breath. The address I got for Everest Smith is useless—there's no signal out here, and even when there was , the pin on the map kept shifting every time I zoomed in.

Typical. The guy owns the most strategically placed ten-acre plot of land on the entire mountain, and somehow he's managed to stay completely off the grid.

No phone. No email. Just a damn P.O Box.

I squint through the windshield and think I see it—just beyond the tree line,

something square and brown and possibly house-shaped.

Worth a shot.

I open the door of the car, and a wave of heat smacks me in the face like an oven blast. Immediately, my flats sink into soft dirt, and a pebble wedges itself between my heel and the shoe lining. Perfect. I brush off my slacks and start toward the silhouette in the woods.

By the time I reach the structure, I realize it's not a house. It's... a shed? No, more like the remains of one. Collapsed roof, rusted tin siding, no sign of life or even a path leading to or from it. I stop and put my hands on my hips, blinking hard against the sting of sweat in my eyes. Shit .

I turn around to head back toward the car—but the trees all look the same. There's no dirt road in sight. No break in the canopy. Just trees. And more trees. Green, endless, disorienting.

“Okay. No big deal,” I say out loud, my voice a little thinner than I'd like.

I pick a direction and start walking.

Twenty minutes later, I'm still walking. And panicking. My shirt is soaked, and my mouth is dry like cotton. I didn't bring water. Or sunscreen. Or a damn hat. Who gets lost in the forest trying to buy land from a reclusive stranger and forgets water ?

Me, apparently.

I stop under a tree that offers the illusion of shade and sit on a thick root, slipping my shoes off with a groan. My feet are swollen, red, dusty. I lean my head back against the bark and close my eyes for a moment—just a moment—because I'm dizzy now,

and the heat is pressing in from every side.

The irony isn't lost on me. I'm out here trying to build a luxury ski resort, and I can't even survive the forest for half a day in summer. If this resort ever gets built, the first thing we're installing is a pool for the summer. And some street signs.

I stand, brush myself off, and keep walking. And if I don't find Everest Smith or my car before nightfall, I'll be sleeping out here too.

Every step feels like I'm dragging boulders instead of feet.

My blouse is plastered to my skin, my bra soaked through.

Sweat drips from my forehead into my eyes, stinging like fire.

I can barely see straight. Everything is bright and too loud—cicadas screaming in the trees, the pounding of my own pulse in my ears.

I'm so far past thirsty it doesn't even feel like thirst anymore—just a deep, hollow ache in my ribs, like my body is folding in on itself. My mouth is dry and coated with dust, my tongue thick like it doesn't belong to me. My thoughts are sludgy. Slow. Everything feels too slow.

But then—Something.

Just beyond the next line of trees. A sliver of wood.

Angled roof. Pale against the dark greens and browns of the forest. I blink hard, afraid it's another mirage.

I've already chased too many shapes through the trees—rocks that looked like cabins,

shadows that looked like chimneys.

But this one stays steady. It grows as I move forward.

A house. A real house.

I don't feel my feet anymore. Don't feel anything, really. Just momentum and hope laced with desperation. I push through branches and stumble over roots until I hit the clearing.

And there it is. Weathered wood, deep porch, green tin roof. It's not fancy—more bunker than bungalow—but it's real. A door. A porch swing. Windows. I could cry just looking at it.

I drag myself up the steps, one hand clinging to the railing to keep from collapsing. Each stair is a mountain. My vision tunnels in and out—black at the edges, white fuzz in the middle. My knees buckle once, then again, and I drop to them hard on the porch. My palms scrape on splintered wood.

I don't care. I'm here. I made it .

I lift my hand to knock but I don't think my fingers work. They're numb and useless, like dead leaves. I manage to stand up and slump against the doorframe instead, resting my burning cheek against the wood.

My body caves. I melt sideways onto the porch with a choked sound that might be a sob, might be a laugh. Who knows anymore. Everything is too bright. The world spins in wide, slow circles.

“Please,” I whisper, or maybe I just think it. “Please let someone be home...”

And then it's all too much. The heat. The exhaustion. I let go.

The last thing I hear is the creak of the porch swing swaying. Or maybe it's the door opening.

God, I hope it's the door.

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CHAPTER

TWO

EVEREST

The knock at the door doesn't make sense. It was actually more of a thud than a knock.

No one knocks out here. People don't come up the mountain unless they're lost, crazy, or looking for trouble—and I've got no patience for any of the three.

I'm elbow-deep in grease from fixing the generator when I hear it.

Just one hard knock, then silence. I freeze, wrench in one hand, sweat dripping down my temple.

Could be a tree branch in the wind. Could be a black bear nosing around. Could be?—

Another knock. Softer this time.

I wipe my hands on an old towel and head for the front of the cabin, heart beating a little faster. It's the middle of the damn day in the middle of the damn forest. No one should be here.

When I swing open the door, I don't expect to see a woman .

She's beautiful— staggeringly so—even though she looks like hell. Her hair's stuck to her face with sweat, her cheeks flushed a dangerous red, her blouse clinging to her like she just walked through a storm. Her eyes meet mine for only a second, wide and glassy.

Then she collapses straight into my arms.

“Whoa—shit!” I catch her instinctively, my wrench clattering to the floor. Her full weight slumps against me. She's deadweight, her body burning hot like a furnace. “Hey. Hey—can you hear me?”

Nothing. Just a soft moan against my chest and the terrifying heaviness of someone who's not all there .

I scoop her up and bring her inside, kicking the door shut behind me. My heart's hammering. I lay her gently down on the cool wood floor and crouch next to her, brushing the hair from her face.

She's not just overheated—she's cooked . Skin flushed, lips dry and cracked, pulse fluttering way too fast under my fingers.

“Goddamn it,” I mutter, launching to my feet. “Okay. Okay, Everest, think.”

I grab the old landline and punch in the number for emergency services. Of course, the dispatcher reminds me what I already know— thirty minutes at best with the road conditions and the heat.

She might not have thirty minutes.

“Just get someone here,” I bark and hang up.

I'm already moving. I grab the cooler from the kitchen, yank out the beer, and dump the ice into a bowl. Towels. Water. Fan.

Back in the living room, I kneel beside her and soak a towel, pressing it gently to her forehead, then the sides of her neck. Her skin hisses under the contact like it's grateful.

"Come on," I say under my breath, wiping her arms, her collarbone, the inside of her elbows. "Don't check out on me now."

She stirs slightly, lips parting in a dry whisper I can't make out.

"I've got you," I say, more to steady myself than anything else.

I press the cold towel to the side of her neck and feel her shiver beneath my fingertips.

It's a good sign—her body's responding. Her skin is still burning up, but the chill makes her lips twitch slightly, and her lashes flutter against her cheeks like she's fighting her way back to me.

Back to consciousness. I soak another towel in the bowl of ice water and lay it across her chest, just below the curve of her collarbone, careful, respectful.

God, she's beautiful.

Even like this—half-conscious, flushed with heat and dust smudged across her cheek—she's the most stunning woman I've seen in... I don't know how long. Years, maybe. Her lips are full and parted, her throat arched so delicately, like something carved, her skin golden with sunlight and heat.

I shift the towel lower and try not to look too long.

Focus, Everest.

You're helping her. That's all this is.

But when my fingers brush against the damp edge of her blouse as I tuck another compress beneath the fabric, I feel a jolt. Like a live wire snapping loose in my chest. I haven't touched a woman in years. Not since I left town. Not since I chose solitude over chaos, silence over disappointment.

I didn't realize how starved I've become.

Not just for touch—but for connection . For the scent of someone else's skin in my space. For softness. For warmth that isn't coming from the sun or a fireplace. For her—whoever she is. Some stranger who walked through hell and found her way to my porch. Like fate is telling me she belongs here.

I should be praying for the ambulance to get here. I should be checking her vitals again. I should want her to leave as soon as she's well enough—because that's the whole point of this life I've built out here. No visitors. No distractions. No vulnerability.

And yet...

I catch myself patting her down with towels just so that I can brush my fingers against her smooth skin. I feel my eyes jolting back and forth, trying their best not to look at the hard buds hidden by her shirt just underneath her bra. It's so wrong, but looking at her feels so right.

I run a towel along the inside of her wrist, watching the way her fingers twitch. Her

skin is soft despite the dirt. There's a faint scar on the back of her hand—like maybe she works with them, builds things, fights for something. I wonder who she is. What brought her to my house.

I tell myself it's curiosity. Maybe even concern.

But the way my eyes drift to her parted lips tells me otherwise. I exhale sharply and lean back, scrubbing a hand down my face. Get it together.

You're here to help her , I tell myself over and over. Still, I glance at her again. Her chest rises and falls in slow, steadier rhythm now. Her mouth moves slightly, like she's dreaming. I'm ashamed at how gorgeous I find this complete stranger who has fallen into my arms.

CHAPTER

THREE

SIERRA

I wake to the soft feel of water dripping.

The water is cool—blessedly cool—and the air smells... masculine? I blink slowly, my lashes sticking together. Everything is hazy at first—shadows and light, warmth and chill. Then I feel it: a large hand on my back, firm but gentle, guiding me.

“Easy,” a deep voice says, smooth and low. “Don’t try to sit up too fast.”

I do anyway.

A sharp wave of dizziness hits me, but it fades as I register the room—log walls, rough-hewn furniture, the creak of old floorboards beneath us. A cabin. Not the kind you rent with wifi and heated floors. The kind someone actually lives in. And then my eyes focus on him . Whoa.

He’s crouched beside me, helping me lay back onto a couch that smells like wood.

His arms— Jesus , his arms—are the first thing I really see.

They’re massive. Tanned and veined and straining against the sleeves of a torn, faded T-shirt that probably fit ten years ago.

His forearms flex as he steadies me, and I try not to stare at the way his biceps practically bulge through the cotton.

My gaze drifts up—because how could it not? It meets eyes so blue I swear the air leaves my lungs again. Bright and piercing, like glacial water. Framed by thick brows and a beard that’s scruffy, golden-brown, and way too sexy for someone who clearly lives off the grid.

“You alright?” he asks again, his voice like gravel warmed in the sun. “You fainted on my porch.”

I open my mouth. Nothing comes out.

His eyes search mine with real concern. “Can you talk?”

Talk? That’s apparently a lot to ask when your brain is short-circuiting from the fact that a Paul Bunyan fantasy just saved your life. And he’s crouched in front of you like some woodland god.

I blink and force air into my lungs. “I—I’m okay,” I finally manage, though my voice sounds embarrassingly weak and breathy.

His shoulders visibly relax. He nods, his eyes scanning my face like he’s checking for any cracks.

“Good. That’s good,” he says. “You’ve got heat exhaustion. I’ve been cooling you down. EMTs are on their way, but it’s a hell of a drive out here.”

I nod, though I’m not really listening.

Because he’s still touching me —his hand at the small of my back, warm and

steady—and every neuron in my body is firing like fireworks.

The whole thing feels surreal. I'm supposed to be working, making deals, negotiating land.

Not... melting into the touch of some blue-eyed stranger in a cabin in the middle of nowhere.

My chest tightens and I'm suddenly hyper-aware of everything—how close he is, how soft his touch is, how incredibly safe I feel in his arms. And how absolutely not safe this feels in my chest. This fluttering, this heat that has nothing to do with the sun.

I glance up at him again, trying to gather myself. "I... don't even know your name," I say softly.

His lips quirk just slightly, a smirk tugging at one corner. "Everest."

Of course it is. Rugged, wild, impossible to scale.

He hands me a glass of water, and I drink it like it's liquid gold, barely pausing to breathe.

It's lukewarm and metallic from the tap, but I swear it's the best thing I've ever tasted.

He watches me with those glacial blue eyes, one hand resting on the arm of the couch like he's trying not to hover.

Then he leans back slightly, arms crossing over that broad chest of his, and says, "So... what are you doing up here, anyway?"

I choke slightly on the last sip and wipe my mouth with the back of my hand. My brain scrambles. Right. The project. The reason I risked heatstroke and getting eaten by a bear.

“I’m, um... looking for someone,” I say casually, letting the glass rest on my thigh.

His brow lifts just a little. “Only one up this far is me.”

Bingo. I glance at him from beneath my lashes. “Is that right?”

He nods once. “Haven’t seen another soul in days.”

There’s something calm and assured about the way he says it.

Like he doesn’t just live on this mountain—he owns it.

Not in a legal-deeds-and-boundaries way.

In a this-place-is-part-of-me kind of way.

He’s got that rough, grounded thing going on.

Bearded, quiet, weather-worn. Alpha energy without the cockiness.

He lifts an eyebrow. “And you? Who are you?”

“Sierra.”

He nods like he likes it. “You’re also named after mountains?”

“Guess it’s fitting,” I say, flashing a small smile.

It's crazy how easy this feels, especially after weeks— months —of working under a man who makes my skin crawl, of backdoor deals and fake smiles and being overlooked or over-touched.

But this? Sitting on a worn couch in a dusty cabin, flirting with a man whose arms could crush granite and whose eyes feel like ice water on a burn?

This is the first easy thing I've done in this job.

And I'm not stupid. I'm not just here because he's hot and heroic. I'm here to get him to sign over his land. To make the deal. To finish the damn resort and get what I deserve.

But if flirting gets me closer to yes, then fine.

Let him think I'm just some lost girl with soft eyes and a sweet voice. But something about me doesn't want to play the game. I just want to spend time with him. I can't explain it, but it just feels like something is right by being here.

"You live up here all by yourself?" I ask, tilting my head slightly, letting my fingers graze the rim of the glass. "That must get... lonely."

He watches me carefully, like he's trying to figure me out. Good luck, Mr. Mountain. I've spent years learning how to wear a mask.

His voice is low, rough. "It's peaceful."

God. That voice. That mouth. That beard.

"You sure you're alright?" he asks, voice low, steady. "I can drive you into town. Clinic's about forty minutes out, but they'll check your vitals, get you hydrated,

maybe give you an IV.”

Part of me wants to say yes. The smart part. The part that still thinks in terms of liability and strategy and getting back to cell service before someone from the office starts calling.

But another part of me—the part that’s sitting in this quiet, wood-smelling cabin with a man who just caught me in his arms and cooled me down like he gave a damn —doesn’t want to go anywhere.

His beard is a little uneven. His brow is furrowed, concerned. He cares . No one in my professional life ever looks at me like this.

“I think...” I pause, then put a hand lightly to my stomach. “I might just have low blood sugar. Maybe I need to eat something.”

His expression eases, just a touch. “That it?”

“I think so,” I say, nodding, managing a soft smile. “I didn’t really eat today. Or drink. Or... plan ahead at all.”

“Alright,” he says, standing slowly. “No problem. I’ll make you something.”

He turns and walks into the kitchen like it’s the most natural thing in the world.

I watch him move—broad shoulders shifting beneath the thin cotton of his shirt, his jeans worn and faded, hanging low on narrow hips. He moves like someone who works with his hands, who builds things from nothing. And now he’s about to cook for me?

I sink back into the couch, a little stunned by the warmth spreading in my chest.

No man has ever cooked for me before. Not a boyfriend. Not a date. Not even a guy who wanted something. It's always been me picking up takeout, making something quick between deadlines, or just skipping meals entirely to prove I can keep up with the boys.

But now this mountain man is pulling out a skillet and a mixing bowl like it's nothing. He opens the fridge—an old one, humming loudly—and starts pulling out eggs, milk, bacon. He hums under his breath. The sound of it—low and a little rough—fills the room like it belongs here. Like I belong here.

God, this is dangerous.

CHAPTER

FOUR

EVEREST

I've got the bacon sizzling, the pancakes are golden, and the cabin smells like butter and maple syrup. I haven't cooked for anyone but myself in... hell, I don't even know how long. Years. But it feels natural, moving around the kitchen with her in the other room. Knowing she's here. Safe.

She's called off the paramedics and I've never been so happy to hear that help is not on the way. If she feels even a tenth of nerves I feel right now, then I may just have a shot.

When I carry the plates to the table, she's laying on the couch, color finally coming back to her face. She looks soft and sleepy, her hair a little messy, eyes heavy but bright. And damn if she doesn't smile when I set down the plate like I just gave her the world.

"This smells amazing," she says.

I shrug, suddenly feeling a little self-conscious. "It's just bacon and pancakes."

"Yeah, but you made it for me," she says, her voice warm, almost teasing.

I clear my throat and gesture to the table. "You hungry enough to sit up?"

She nods and gets to her feet slowly, holding onto the arm of the couch for balance. I hover without meaning to, just in case she sways again. But she doesn't. She walks to the table and sits across from me, curling her legs under the chair.

She's got a forkful of pancake in her mouth, eyes closed like she's tasting a memory. I watch her, a strange warmth growing in my chest, one I haven't felt in a long time. Not just attraction—something deeper. Something tethered to the soul.

She swallows and looks up at me with a smile that's soft around the edges. "These are amazing," she says. "Like... dangerous-level good. You could open a diner if the whole mountain-man thing doesn't work out."

I laugh under my breath, surprised by how good it feels to hear her tease me like that. "Glad you like them."

"They're kind of... comfort food for me," she adds after a pause, spinning her fork between her fingers.

"My mom used to make pancakes for me when I was a kid. Whenever I had a bad day or couldn't sleep, she'd sneak down to the kitchen and make a stack just like these.

Extra crispy on the edges. Drowned in syrup. "

I feel something tighten in my chest. That hits closer than she could know.

"My mom did the same thing," I say, quieter now. "Pancakes on Sunday mornings. Always with too much butter and too much syrup. She said that's how her mother made them. Kind of a... tradition, I guess."

Her eyes search mine, and I know she feels it too—that quiet echo of commonality,

deeper than coincidence.

“When I was little, my mom and I had a dream we used to talk about,” she continues.

“She used to say that if she ever won the lottery, she’d buy a little bed and breakfast for the two of us.

Somewhere quiet, in the mountains or by a lake.

We’d wake up early, make pancakes for the guests, drink coffee on the porch before the sun came up. That was her version of heaven.”

She smiles a little, but there’s sadness tugging at the corners of her mouth. Like she’s trying not to let it show how much that dream still means to her.

“I believed her,” she says. “Not about the lottery—but the rest of it. I thought we’d do it one day. We’d make it happen.” Her voice drops. “But then she got sick. And... everything changed. I went the practical route.” She laughs nervously.

“What about your family?” She changes the subject. “Does your mom live nearby?”

I shake my head. “She used to. We lived not far from here, actually—on the other side of the ridge, in a little green-roofed cabin.” I pause, clearing my throat. “She passed away when I was fifteen. Cancer.”

Sierra’s face shifts, her smile fading into something soft and solemn. “I’m so sorry,” she says. “Mine died when I was ten. Cancer, too. One day she was there and then... she wasn’t.”

It’s weird but the ache in her voice when she talks to me is so sharp, and so familiar.

We don't need to talk about the pain. She gets it.

I'm not a talker. I don't like to lay my feelings out on a platter for others to play with as they choose.

But with her, it feels like I don't even have to speak about my greatest pain in life...

she just gets it because she's been there too.

It's the emotional connection I've been craving for years in an odd sort of way.

I break the tension, "It's nice having someone here. You're welcome to stay as long as you need to recover."

She looks up at me, and that smile again—soft, almost shy—spreads across her face. It hits me in the chest like a hammer.

"Thank you, Everest," she says. "That's... really kind."

She slices into her pancake and says, "You ever get lonely or wish you had neighbors out here?"

"Sometimes," I admit. "But it's better than the alternative. People can be... messy."

"Yeah," she says, and her smile dims a little. "They really can."

She looks at me, curiosity flickering behind her eyes. "So..." she says gently, "how did you end up here? Living in this cabin, I mean."

I smile a little and lean back in the armchair, stretching my legs out. I glance around the room—these old wooden beams, the stone fireplace, the photos that line the

mantel. It's all so familiar, so mine, but it didn't start with me.

"It was a gift," I say. "My dad bought this place for my mom a long time ago."

She perks up, clearly surprised. "Really?"

I nod, my gaze drifting to the window. "They used to hike up here before the cabin was ever built. Just the two of them. Said it felt like their own private piece of the world. There's a small waterfall about a half mile behind the cabin—hidden unless you know where to look."

Sierra leans in slightly, listening, eyes wide with interest.

"My dad proposed to her there," I say, voice softening. "Said she was the only thing in his life that ever made sense, and he wanted to anchor that feeling to something real. So when they got married, he bought the land and built this cabin for her. A place where they could always come back to."

Sierra smiles, her eyes misty. "That's... beautiful."

"Yeah." I nod, slowly. "It is. It was. After she passed, my dad never came back. Said it was too painful without her. He offered to sell it. But I couldn't let him. So I took it over."

I pause, glancing at the stone hearth. "It's not much, I know.

It's old and creaky and too far from everything, but...

it feels like them. Like home. And I don't think I'll ever leave.

Hell the only person who even comes up here to visit me is my Aunt Caroline.

She's really the only family I have now. ”

She's quiet for a moment, her fingers tightening slightly around the mug.

“I get it,” she says finally, voice barely above a whisper. “Sometimes the places we hold on to are the only ways we know how to hold on to the people we've lost.”

Our eyes meet. I feel something shift in me—quiet, but powerful. A thread pulled tighter between us.

We continue talking. Well more like she's talking—something about the first time she ever saw snow, how she made a snow angel and ended up soaking wet and freezing but refused to go inside because it felt like magic.

I should be listening to her words. Instead, I'm watching her mouth.

Soft, full, moving gently with every syllable. Every now and then, she bites her lip when she's trying to remember a detail. It's like watching a storm roll in—quiet and electric and impossible to look away from.

And it hits me, sharp and deep— I can't let her leave.

I don't just mean I don't want her to—I mean I won't . I can't. Something inside me won't allow it. The thought of her walking out of this forest, out of my life—it makes my chest tighten with something primal. Possessive. Like a fuse has been lit inside me that I can't snuff out.

She laughs again, eyes crinkling as she tells me about her brother daring her to eat a snowball, and that's it. I'm gone.

Completely and utterly.

I lean forward, resting my arms on the table, close enough to reach out and touch her—though I don't. Not yet. Not until I'm sure she won't flinch. Not until I'm sure she wants it too. But my eyes are locked on her like she's already mine.

And in a way, she is .

Because something changed the moment she stepped onto my porch—collapsed into my arms like she belonged there. Fate sent her to me. I don't care what the world thinks about that. I don't need logic or timing or permission. I just know what I know.

I can't let her leave. Not tonight. Not ever.

CHAPTER

FIVE

SIERRA

It feels like I've been talking to Everest for hours at this point...

and like I could talk to him for hours more.

And somehow, these pancakes still taste delicious, no matter how slowly I eat them.

I drag the side of my fork through a puddle of syrup and take another bite, savoring the comfort wrapped up in the flavors.

It tastes like childhood. Like safety. Like something I haven't felt in a long time.

Everest sits across from me, quiet now. We've talked a lot already—and it's shocking how much I can have in common with this reclusive man. And now there's just this comfortable stillness between us. The kind of quiet that doesn't feel awkward. It feels... easy. Intimate almost.

And maybe that's what makes the guilt start to gnaw at the edges of my mind.

Because I know I should tell him. I should just say it—that I'm here on behalf of someone else. That I'm not some lost wanderer who stumbled into his life completely by accident. I mean, I am lost... but not exactly in the way he thinks.

I lower my fork and glance at him. He's sipping his coffee, the morning light making his scruff look a shade lighter, his blue eyes brighter.

God, he's beautiful. Rugged, real. Honest in a way I'm not sure I've ever been with anyone.

He doesn't wear masks, doesn't say things to impress.

And I—I'm sitting here pretending I'm someone I'm not.

I open my mouth. Ready to say it.

But something inside me stops.

Because if I tell him now, this moment shatters. The warmth in his eyes cools. The way he looks at me—like I'm something rare and worth keeping—fades. And I can't handle that. Not yet.

Not when I'm starting to fall for him.

So I stay quiet. I take another bite. Swallow the truth.

He breaks the silence with a small smirk, nudging his mug aside. "I gotta admit," he says, leaning back in his chair, "I'm surprised you even thought someone would be living up here."

I look up, startled. "What do you mean?"

He chuckles. "You're not exactly on the beaten path, Sierra. I mean, sure, the Pines draw a few folks every season—hikers, hunters, the occasional lost tourist. But people don't just knock on my door. Not unless they're selling something or

desperate.”

I nod slowly, heart racing. “Have... have there been others?”

He laughs, and it’s a rich, easy sound. “Once. Some slick city guy showed up a few years back. Told me he had this amazing offer for my land. Said I could sell the cabin and ‘start fresh’ somewhere nicer. Somewhere ‘less isolated.’” He raises a brow.

“I guess he didn’t like it when I introduced him to my shotgun. ”

My eyes go wide. “Seriously?”

“Dead serious. He saw the barrel and made a sound I don’t think I’ve ever heard come out of a grown man. Ran for the valley like the bears were after him. But I’m not some maniac... this was after I refused several times and he wouldn’t leave after hours.”

I burst out laughing, too loud, too fast—but it’s from relief as much as amusement. My laugh comes out a little shaky, and I try to hide it with my coffee.

Everest just grins, proud. “Nobody comes up here to push me around. Not anymore.”

I nod, still smiling, but there’s a chill under my skin now.

I’m trying to hide my guilt. My shame. This man has cared for me, cooked for me, hell—he saved me.

And all I’ve ever done is lie to him. If he knew the truth, he would kick me out...

or worse. And it’s a problem because if I know one thing for sure, the truth will always find a way of coming out.

I'm not sure whether or not I've revealed myself with my foolish laugh—and I can feel Everest watching me, curious. Suspicious, maybe. I need to redirect. Fast.

“Speaking of bears,” I blurt, grasping for the nearest thread. “I saw one on my way up here, actually.”

His brows lift, and the tension in the room softens. “No kidding?”

“Yeah,” I say, forcing a more natural tone. “Massive. Just off the trail near where I left my car. I got a picture. Do you want to see it?”

“Absolutely,” he says with a small grin. “You didn’t run, did you?”

“Nope. I stayed calm. Took a picture from the safety of the car,” I say, half-laughing as I get up from the table. “Just like a true National Geographic photographer.”

I cross to my purse, sitting innocently near the front door where I must have dropped when I fainted. As I bend down to grab it, I accidentally knock it over.

And that’s when everything unravels.

Business cards spill out—dozens of them—like they’ve been waiting for their moment. Little white rectangles, crisp and professional, fanning across the wood floor with damning clarity.

Sierra Mitchell

Senior Real Estate Assistant

ClearRock Development Group

My breath catches as I try to hide what feels like hundreds of photographs of my face on the most damning pieces of evidence he could ever hold against me.

The color drains from my face. For a split second, I'm frozen, heart thundering in my chest like it wants to rip through my ribcage.

I might have been caught. Then instinct kicks in and I drop to my knees, frantically shoving the cards back into my bag.

Too late.

Everest stands slowly behind me. I can feel the weight of his gaze pressing into my back.

"What's going on?" he asks, his voice low, not yet angry but not light either. "You okay?"

"Yeah—yes," I say quickly, too quickly. I zip up my purse like sealing a vault and stand up, trying to keep my face neutral. "I think I forgot my wallet. I just—uh—I should go check outside, see if maybe it fell when I first got here."

His eyes narrow, and I can see something mischievous in his face. God I hope he believes me. I think I scooped all of the little cards that could betray me back into my purse before he saw anything, but I'm not sure. I need a minute to myself to regroup just in case.

My hand's on the doorknob. I can feel the heat of Everest's eyes on my back, the tension in the room behind me thick like a storm about to break.

I try to remember how to breathe, but everything inside me is tangled.

I'm two seconds away from walking out onto that porch and pretending to look for a wallet that's definitely still in my purse—anything to avoid the questions I can see building in his eyes.

But before I can twist the knob, I hear his voice behind me—firm and low.

“You can't leave.”

I freeze.

The words hit me square in the spine. My fingers tighten around the handle, but I don't move. I can't. My heart leaps into my throat, caught between fear and something else—something hot and dizzying that I can't quite name.

Slowly, I turn toward him.

He's standing in the center of the room, one hand still resting on the back of the chair he pushed away when he stood. His eyes are steady, piercing. But there's no anger in them. No suspicion. Just... emotion. Raw, honest, and pouring out of him in quiet waves.

“I mean it,” he says, taking a step closer. “Don't go.”

I swallow hard. “Why?”

He hesitates, then exhales, as if he's finally decided to let go of something he's been holding inside.

“Because it's been a long damn time since I've felt this way about someone,” he says. “And I'd be a fool to let you walk out that door. You came into my life like lightning, Sierra. Out of nowhere. And I don't want to go back to the silence I had before you.”

My heart stutters.

“I don’t know what this is yet,” he continues, voice quieter now, “but I know it’s real. I know I don’t want it to end. You’re staying.”

The air between us shifts. The fear gripping my chest loosens.

My posture softens before I even realize it—I don’t have to fake anything.

He doesn’t know about the business cards, doesn’t suspect a thing.

Right now, he just wants me . Not for what I can give him or take from him—but because something in both of us has started to bloom, and he wants to see where it goes.

Relief crashes over me like a wave. Warm and dizzying and dangerously sweet.

I take a step closer. Then another. Until I’m right in front of him, and his hands are hovering just inches from my waist like he’s afraid he might scare me off if he touches me too soon.

“I wasn’t really planning to leave,” I whisper.

He lets out a breath, and his hands find my hips. Steady. Gentle. “Good.”

I lean in, resting my forehead against his chest, the steady beat of his heart grounding me.

The weight of his hands on my hips makes my breath catch. It’s not aggressive. It’s not rushed. It’s steady and sure—like he’s anchoring me there. Like he wants to make sure I don’t float away.

I don't want to float away. I want to stay right here.

My heart pounds so loudly I swear he must hear it.

The space between our faces shrinks, the air around us thickening with something unspoken but undeniable.

My lips part slightly, and I see it—that flicker in his eyes.

Like he's asking for permission, even now, even with the world slowing around us and gravity pulling us into each other like magnets too long kept apart.

And I give it. I lean in, just barely. That's all it takes. His lips meet mine, and the second they do, everything stops.

His mouth is warm and soft, but there's fire there, too—controlled, restrained, but desperate to be released.

I feel it in the way his grip tightens at my waist, pulling me closer.

I rise up on my toes to meet him, my hands sliding to his chest, fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt.

He's solid underneath. Warm. Real. And mine—at least in this moment.

The kiss deepens—slow and reverent, like he's trying to memorize me.

And I'm doing the same.

There's something so tender in it, wrapped up in the heat. It's not just want. It's more. It's like he's been waiting for this—for me—and now that he has me, he's never

letting go.

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He groans softly into my mouth, and the sound makes something inside me unravel. My fingers slide up to his neck, tangling in the scruff of his hair, pulling him even closer. I feel his heartbeat where our bodies touch, wild and steady, a perfect match to mine.

I didn't expect this. I didn't come here looking for a man like him. But now I can't imagine the woods, the wind, the quiet of this mountain— any of it —without him in it.

His hands roam up my back, rough and calloused, but so careful, like I'm something breakable. His body shields mine from everything outside, from the past and all the pressure I left behind.

It feels like falling. Like flying. Like everything at once.

When we finally part, it's only by an inch. His forehead rests gently against mine. I can feel his breath on my lips, the way his chest rises and falls against mine.

Neither of us says anything at first.

I close my eyes and whisper into the silence between us, "I don't even know what just happened."

He touches my cheek, his thumb brushing along my jaw. "Yeah, you do."

And he's right. I do. I'm hopelessly his.

Everest's eyes lock onto mine. "I want you, Sierra," He says, his voice a low growl. "I want to taste you, to feel you, to make you mine."

I swallow hard, and I swear I can hear his heart pounding in his chest. And a new reality hits me. I've spent so long focusing on school and work and getting ahead in life that I've never really made time for any semblance of a love life. I feel... inexperienced and inadequate.

"I-I've never... done this before," I admit looking down. I'm nervous. Scared. I don't want to disappoint him. I don't want him to dismiss me as an inexperienced, naive little girl. I'm a woman. And this woman wants to give herself to him.

His smile is almost predatory. "All the more reason for me to be gentle," he replies, his hand reaches out to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear. "But know this, Sierra. Once I have you, you'll be mine. Completely. I don't share."

I nod. Although I'm not truly sure what that means. I hesitate to clarify. I've spent so long trying to get ahead at work that I feel behind in my romantic life. All I know is that if he wants it, he can have it. "Okay," I whisper. "I'm yours."

He takes me in his arms, his lips capturing mine in a searing kiss. I moan softly, my hands reaching up to his neck. I deepen the kiss, my tongue exploring his mouth, tasting him.

He breaks away, trailing kisses down my neck, feeling his pulse flutter under my lips.

He unbuttons my blouse, his rough fingers brushing against my skin.

He unhooks my bra with ease. He's clearly much more experienced than me.

I relax slightly knowing that he will have no problems showing me how to please

him...

and myself. My bra flies across the room freeing my breasts, and he takes a nipple into his mouth, sucking and nibbling until I am arching against him, my breath coming in short gasps.

He leads me to the bedroom, where he slowly undresses the rest of me, his eyes roaming my naked body. He places a hand on my thigh where he can see my tremors of anticipation, I can't tell if I feel fear or desire. He undresses himself.

I can see his manhood. It's thick and long and pointing directly at me. It strikes me in that moment that I have no idea what to do with it.

"Everest," I whisper, my voice thick with lust.

He looks up at me, "Yes, Sierra?"

"I want you to... teach me. Show me how." I say, while I feel my cheeks flushing.

Everest smirks, "Come here."

I sit on the side of the bed and he places himself in front of me, his cock poised at my mouth.

Everest looks into my eyes, seeing the trust and fear and desire all mixed together.

He pushes through my lips slowly, feeling the inside of my warm cheeks, my lips stretching to accommodate his girth.

My nails grab the cheeks of his ass. I begin to move quickly back and forth.

As fast as I can. I think this is how it's done?

"Am I doing it right?" I ask, my voice muffled by his cock moving further down my throat.

He grins, his hips moving in a steady rhythm. "Go slow. It's not a race. Let me enjoy your mouth. Let me guide myself down your throat. I want to savor the pleasure of being with you, Sierra."

His hips begin moving slower, and more intentionally. His dick moves slowly in and out of my throat. I can feel him twitch in my mouth, his body tensing.

"Open up wider, Sierra," he commands. "I want to cum in your sweet little throat."

I begin sucking harder, more intentionally, and mimicking his motions. My tongue swirls around his shaft.

"That's it, Sierra," he groans. "Suck my cock like a good girl."

My mouth starts to move up and down, my hands gripping his length. I can feel his dick throbbing in my mouth. He grabs my head, his hips pushing, his cum exploding into my mouth. I swallow, my eyes watering, my cheeks flushed.

"You did perfect for your first time. And now, I want to see you cum. You've never cum for a man before, have you?"

I shake my head in the negative. I've never done any of this before. My eyes are wide open and the anticipation is nearly killing me.

He picks me up and lays me down on the bed, spreading my legs.

He slides two fingers into my wet heat, feeling my tightness, my virginity.

He groans, I can see in his eyes he's filled with lust and possession.

He positions his face between my legs, his tongue finding the most sensitive part of my center.

I moan, my hands grabbing the sheets. "Everest, that feels so good."

My insides grow warmer, slicker. I can feel my juices sliding out of my center. The more he licks, the more swollen I feel. I can feel my walls clenching on his fingers as intense pleasure builds inside of me.

He continues to lick and suck, his fingers slipping in and out of me. My moans grow louder, my body tensing as I approach my climax. Everest looks up at me, his eyes never leaving mine as I come undone.

"Oh, Everest," I cry out, my body convulsing. My thighs begin to tremble and my body seizes in the most incredible feeling I've ever had in my life. Like all the tension has exploded and left my body in a sweet, lingering rapture.

Everest smiles, his fingers still inside me. "You taste incredible."

He lays next to me and holds me in his arms. My breathing slowly returns to normal. But my heart is racing. Not because I'm scared. But because I know I won't be able to do what I came here to do. This isn't how it was supposed to go.

I'm supposed to talk to him about the land.

That's why I came here in the first place—my job, my future, everything I've worked for depends on this.

If I can close this deal, it's my ticket out.

My ticket to freedom. The chance to finally stop answering to men like my boss who treat me like I'm expendable.

But I haven't brought it up. I can't. And the longer I'm here, the harder it gets.

Because Everest... he isn't just some man standing in the way of a project. He's not an obstacle. He's a person. A good one. Rugged and rough around the edges, sure, but steady. Kind. The way his eyes linger on mine makes me feel weaker than I already am.

I don't want to pitch him. I don't want to be the person who turns him into a transaction. I won't be the woman who tries to get him to sell the family land that has such obvious sentimental value. I want to be someone he can trust.

And that terrifies me, because I haven't told him the full truth.

Not yet. But when he finds out, I know this will end badly.

And every hour I spend wrapped in his warmth, in the illusion that this— we —are untangled from what brought me here, that truth gets heavier.

It's pressing down on me now, right here in his bed, making it hard to breathe. I don't want this to end—ever.

But for now, I'll drift off to sleep in the strongest arms I'll probably ever know.

CHAPTER

SIX

EVEREST

The summer sun is beginning to rise and its warmth begins permeating my cabin. My arm is draped over her waist, our bodies tangled under the blanket on the bed, like we've always been this way. Last night was the beginning of something new in my life. I can already feel it.

Sierra's breathing is slow, steady. Her cheek is resting against my chest, her fingers curled lightly against my ribs. Every part of her is pressed into me, like she belongs there. Like she always has.

I've never felt more sure of anything in my life.

Not the land. Not the quiet. Not even the mountain I've called home.

But her ?

Yeah. She's the surest thing I've ever felt.

She stirs, just barely, her head shifting, breath catching slightly as she starts to wake. I brush my lips against her hair.

"Good morning," I murmur.

She hums sleepily and nuzzles in a little closer. My chest tightens. I want to freeze time. Hold onto this moment and never let it go.

I pull back just enough to slip out from under the blanket. She groans softly but doesn't protest. I smile and head into the kitchen to make her coffee. I don't think I've memorized anything that fast in my life.

As it brews, I glance toward the bed where she still lies, one hand now resting where my chest had been. Like she's still holding onto me.

I bring the mug to her carefully and kneel down beside her. Her eyes flutter open, soft and sleepy and so damn beautiful it physically hurts to look at her.

"Here," I whisper. "For you."

She takes the mug, fingers brushing mine, and smiles. "You didn't have to."

I grin. "I want to."

She takes a sip and hums quietly with pleasure. I swear it nearly undoes me.

I sit back on my heels and look at her, really look at her, and say, "I still can't believe you just ended up here. On my mountain. On my porch. Like the gods dropped you off as some kind of gift."

She blushes, eyes lowering. "I wasn't exactly in great shape when I got here."

"Doesn't matter," I say. "You were perfect the second I opened that door."

She looks up at me then, and something passes between us—heavy, warm, real. And I know I may have been alone a long time. But I was never meant to stay that way.

Not now. Not with her here.

I stand slowly and ease down beside her again, my arm wrapping around her shoulders, the mug of coffee warming her hands between us.

The silence is soft, not empty. I glance at her face, half-lit by the morning light, and realize I want to learn every part of her.

Her favorite songs. The way she takes her eggs.

What makes her cry. What makes her laugh until she can't breathe.

"I've been alone out here for a long time," I admit quietly.

"I figured," she replies, eyes still on her coffee. "It's peaceful. But lonely too."

"Yeah." I swallow, feeling something tighten in my throat. "But I think... maybe I was just waiting."

She turns her head, meets my eyes. "For what?"

I reach out and gently tuck a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "For you."

"Sierra," I say softly, trying not to startle her.

Her eyes flick to mine. A flash of something—uncertainty, maybe guilt? It vanishes before I can place it.

"Yeah?" she asks, voice light, too light.

"Tell me about yourself. I want to know everything about you. Do you work? What

do you do?” But she looks down and I can sense there’s something... off. I tilt my head. “What’s wrong?”

She shakes her head. “Nothing. I’m fine.”

I sit forward. “You’re not.”

She gives me a tired smile and looks away. “Really. It’s nothing.”

But I can’t let it go. I won’t.

I shift closer and gently cup her face in my hand. Her skin is warm against my palm, soft, but I can feel the faintest tremble.

“You can tell me anything,” I say, my voice low. “I don’t care what it’s about. Whatever it is—you don’t have to carry it alone.”

Her eyes glisten just slightly, and I see her throat work as she swallows hard. Her lips part, like she wants to speak but can’t find the words.

She closes her eyes, leans into my hand just the tiniest bit.

“I’m scared,” she whispers.

Of what? I want to ask.

But I don’t rush her. I wait.

She pulls away from my hand, just slightly, and I feel it like a cold wind straight to my chest.

“There’s something I have to tell you,” Sierra says, her voice barely above a whisper. “I don’t want to, but something about you just feels so real. And if I keep this secret any longer I don’t think I’ll be able to look you in the eye. And I want everything about this to be true... to be real. ”

I straighten up. My stomach knots. Her eyes won’t meet mine.

“I came up here because... my boss sent me,” she says. “He wanted me to see if you were interested in selling your land. Your ten acres. For a resort.”

Silence crashes over the room like a thunderclap.

I blink. My brain refuses to catch up. “What?”

She finally looks at me. There’s guilt there, pain too. But it doesn’t soothe the fire building in my gut.

“So this was a job?” I ask, my voice sharper than I mean it to be. “That’s why you showed up here?”

“It started that way,” she says quickly. “But it’s not why I stayed. I swear. I’ll tell my boss you’re not selling. I just couldn’t keep it a secret anymore... not when I’m feeling—like this about you. ”

I stand and take a step back. The room feels too small suddenly. The walls are closing in.

“Was last night just part of the pitch?” I ask again, bitterness creeping into my throat. “Butter me up before the ask?”

Her face crumples. “No! Everest, I didn’t?—”

“You knew who I was from the beginning,” I cut her off. “You let me think it was fate. That it was... real. ”

“It was real,” she pleads. “I didn’t plan any of this. I didn’t expect to?”

“To what? Sleep with the guy whose land you’re supposed to steal?”

She flinches like I slapped her. I immediately regret the words, but the damage is done.

She stands frozen for a moment. Then something in her shifts—like a wall going up, fast and final.

Tears brim in her eyes, but her voice is steady. “Maybe I should go.”

“Sierra—”

“No, it’s okay,” she says, standing fast and grabbing her bag. “You think I came here to manipulate you? That this was all some con? I should’ve known better than to think this could work. Than to believe you might actually—” Her voice cracks and she shakes her head.

“Do you even care about me?” I ask, hating how vulnerable I sound.

She stops. Turns.

“Of course I care about you,” she says. “That’s what makes this so damn hard.”

I see it in her eyes. The conflict. The pain. The truth.

And it only makes it worse.

Because part of me still wants to pull her into my arms. To believe her. To pretend the last five minutes never happened. But the rest of me—the part that’s been burned before—can’t stop screaming that I’m a fool.

She heads toward the door, and I feel like the floor is disappearing beneath me. Everything warm and good from the last twenty-four hours is being stripped away.

I take a step toward her but stop. My fists clench at my sides.

Because I don’t know what to say. Not yet. And if I say the wrong thing again, I’ll lose her for good.

She hesitates at the door. Just for a moment. Her hand on the knob. Like maybe she’s waiting for me to stop her.

But I don’t. And then she’s gone.

The door creaks open, and she steps out into the sun, her silhouette framed by the blinding light. And just like that, she’s out of reach.

The silence she leaves behind is deafening.

The pain stretches on after she leaves, echoing in every corner of the cabin.

She left yesterday but it feels like it’s been a year.

It’s not just quiet—it’s hollow. Empty in a way I didn’t know a place could feel.

I pace the floorboards like a caged animal.

I sit. I stand. I run a hand through my hair for what feels like the hundredth time.

My chest aches in this deep, unfamiliar way, like there's a pressure there I can't get rid of.

Like part of me walked out the door with her.

I replay everything she said. And everything I said back.

God, I was insensitive. I didn't mean to be, but I was. I let the fear and betrayal hit first and didn't stop to listen—to really listen. I told myself I was protecting what's mine, but all I did was push away something... someone... I was starting to need more than I'm ready to admit.

Then, something catches my eye.

A small white rectangle on the floor, just under the edge of the couch.

I bend down, my fingers brushing it as I pick it up.

Her business card.

Sierra Mitchell. Her beautiful face just above.

That sleek little logo of the development company printed in the corner like a brand.

But all I see is her. The way her lips quirk when she's trying not to smile.

The fire in her eyes when she argues. The warmth in her laugh when she lets herself relax.

I stare at the card. My thumb runs over the raised lettering again and again. It feels too light to carry the weight it suddenly has.

And just like that, the anger fades. All that's left is regret. I'm an idiot.

She told me the truth. It wasn't perfect—hell, it hurt like hell—but it was honest. She could've kept lying.

She could've spun some sweet little story and tried to charm me into signing over everything I've built here.

But she didn't. She chose to tell me the truth.

To risk everything she'd built with me in just a few days—for honesty.

She chose me. And I threw it in her face. God. I told her she used me. I made her feel cheap. Like none of this—none of us —was real.

I drop the card on the table and grip the edge like it might anchor me.

The air in the cabin is suffocating. Every piece of furniture reminds me of her. Her hands on the mug of coffee I made her. Her laughter echoing through the room. Her body curled up beside mine under a blanket on the bed.

I see her everywhere. And I hate myself for being the reason she's gone.

I need to see her again.

I need to fix this.

I grab my keys from the hook by the door with a renewed urgency. I don't think, I just move. The need to find her— to make this right —burns hotter than anything I've felt in years.

The engine rumbles to life, low and familiar, but even that comforting sound feels distant under the pounding in my chest. I back out of the gravel drive, tires spitting dust, and hit the road harder than I probably should.

I don't know exactly where she is, but I know where to start.

That office. That boss of hers. The one who sent her here. If she went anywhere, it's back there. Back to the job that sent her into my life.

But maybe I can pull her back out of it.

I grip the wheel tighter as the miles blur past. Trees rush by in green streaks. The sun is high now, burning through the windshield. My jaw is tight. My pulse is racing.

Because I've made up my mind. I'm not letting her go.

CHAPTER

SEVEN

SIERRA

The fluorescent lights buzz overhead as I step into the office, the air stale and cold in a way that seeps into my bones. The warmth of the cabin, the heat of Everest's arms around me, the way the morning light lit up his face—it all feels like a dream I woke up from too soon.

I can still feel the way my heart cracked when he looked at me like a stranger. Like I was just another player in some deal. I told him the truth. And maybe that's what stings the most. I was honest.

And it didn't matter.

"Sierra," a voice barks from across the room.

I don't need to look. I already know who it is. Martin. My boss. The man who holds my paycheck, my future, and—if I let him—my dignity in his hands.

He strides over, all stiff shoulders and forced smiles, his cologne wafting like a chemical warning. "Where the hell were you yesterday?"

"I was on the mountain," I say evenly. "Looking for Everest Smith."

His eyes narrow. “And?”

“I never found him.”

He snorts. “You just didn’t work hard enough. I always say if you want something bad enough, you’ll get it.”

I clench my jaw. I want to argue. To tell him I walked for hours in the blistering heat, passed out on a porch, and fell into something I didn’t see coming. But instead, I bite the inside of my cheek and nod.

“Right,” I say. “I’ll do better next deal.”

His lips curl, satisfied. “Good girl.”

I swallow the bile rising in my throat as he gestures for me to follow him. “Clients are here. Let’s make a good impression. Smile, Sierra.”

I force my shoulders back and step into the conference room. The walls are all glass and chrome, a sleek lie. The clients are already seated—two men in suits and a woman with a perfect blowout and a sharper smile.

I take the seat beside Martin, and just as the clients start making small talk, I feel it—his hand. Sliding around my waist like it belongs there.

I stiffen. But I don’t move. Instead, I plaster on a smile. The kind of smile that says I belong here. That I’m fine. That nothing inside me is breaking.

I glance at the reflection in the window across the table and barely recognize the woman looking back.

I sit at the long glass table, trying to focus on the words spilling from the clients' mouths—square footage projections, slope access, early investor interest. But it's all static in my ears.

Martin's hand doesn't move from my waist. I miss my mountain man.

I miss the way he touched me. The way I felt safe with him.

I am a fool to think you can spend 24 hours with a man and somehow form a real connection.

I've thought a thousand times that I shouldn't have told him who I truly am, but then what would the relationship be if I couldn't be me?

I relegate myself to the fact that he will always be the one that got away. I guess it wasn't meant to be after all...

I shift slightly in my chair, trying to make it seem casual, professional, but Martin just tightens his grip. I grit my teeth, trying to smile and trying to hide my disgust. It's like I'm some trophy he's placing on the table for everyone to see.

I nod politely at something the woman across from me says. And then I hear it. A voice. Low. Rough. Commanding . "Take your hand off her before I break it."

My heart stops. The room falls into a thick, stunned silence.

I turn. And there he is.

It's my mountain man and he's left his cabin. Standing just inside the glass doorway, the sun casting a halo around his broad frame like he's a god who has descended from the heavens to rescue me from this tortured hell. His jaw is set like stone, blue eyes

burning a hole through Martin.

No one moves. But Martin. His hand drops from my waist like it's been electrocuted.

“Who are you?” Martin says, voice high with forced bravado. I can see his hand waiving to the secretary to call for security.

Everest doesn't even blink. “I said take your hands off her. And I don't say things twice.”

I stand slowly, legs trembling, every eye in the room swinging to me.

“Sierra,” Everest says, his tone softer when he speaks to me, but still firm. “You okay?”

I nod, words caught somewhere between my heart and throat.

I should be terrified. Martin could ruin me. Fire me. Blackball me from every project in the state. And yet... I've never felt safer.

He came for me.

And he's standing in a boardroom full of sharks, unafraid, demanding that I be treated with the respect I never could articulate that I deserved.

I run to him, but Martin grabs my arm. “Everest!”

Martin recovers enough to laugh—too loud, too fake. He moves me behind him, placing himself between Everest and I. “Everest Smith! I'm so glad you could come down. We've been meaning to discuss a business proposition. If you could wait?—”

I can see the fury building in Everest's face. Martin has touched me again. Specifically going against his earlier commands.

"You're not to speak my name. You're not to address me.

Hell, you aren't even allowed to look at me.

" He says to Martin as he towers over him with his fists clenched.

"And as of now, you may no longer speak her name as well. This is your last warning. If I see you lay a hand on Sierra again, I will crush your fingers beyond recognition. You will be lucky if you can wipe your sorry ass with the stump I leave behind."

Everest points to me and beckons me to come to him. Martin wipes the look of confusion off his face and painfully attempts to recover. "She works for me."

"Not anymore," Everest says.

The clients look between us, clearly unsure of what's happening.

"Everest," I finally say, voice trembling, "what are you doing here?"

He looks at me, and his expression softens. "I came to take you home."

For a moment, the world spins. I can barely breathe.

Then he moves—quick, purposeful steps across the room like he belongs here more than any of these suits ever could. His presence commands the space, but all I see is the fire in his eyes as they lock on mine. Fire and something else.

Something I don't deserve, but desperately want.

Before I can even catch my breath, he's in front of me, his arms wrapping around me, pulling me into the strength of his body like I was made to fit there. I melt into him, instinct taking over, every inch of me drawn to his heat, his scent, the rhythm of his chest as it rises and falls.

He's holding me in his arms just like he did the first day we met. Saving me then, and saving me now. My heart is pounding so loud I swear the whole room can hear it.

He leans close, his breath warm against my ear. "I was a fool to let you walk out of my cabin," he murmurs, voice thick with regret. "But it's never going to happen again."

My breath catches, but before I can speak, his hands move—firm, reverent—cradling my face like I'm the most precious thing he's ever touched.

Then his mouth finds mine.

The kiss is not polite. Not hesitant. It's fierce. Hungry. A collision of pain and longing and... tender.

I gasp against him, and he deepens the kiss, like he's claiming me. And I want to be claimed.

Maybe I've always wanted that—someone to see past the mask, past the polished smiles and professional armor. Someone who sees the woman beneath it all and wants her anyway.

My fingers twist in his shirt, anchoring myself, holding tight to him like he's the only solid thing in a world that's been spinning too fast.

He finally breaks the kiss, just an inch between us, his forehead pressed against mine. His eyes search mine, and what I see there undoes me.

“You’re mine, Sierra,” he says, low and fierce, like a vow. “And I don’t care who’s watching.”

I tremble—not with fear, but with something like release. Like every wall I’ve built around myself has finally cracked and let the light in.

I don’t even glance at Martin. I don’t need to. I don’t care what the clients think. I don’t care about the job, the meeting, or the consequences.

Because this— he —is real. And for the first time, I’m choosing real over what’s expected.

Everest takes my hand, and I feel his fingers thread between mine. Strong. Steady. Unshakable.

“Let’s get out of here,” he says.

I nod, tears burning behind my eyes. Not sadness. Gratitude.

He leads me out of the boardroom, out of the building, and into the light of a future I hadn’t dared hope for.

And I don’t look back. Because Everest came for me. He came when I thought all hope was lost.

And this time, I’m not just walking away from the life I thought I wanted.

I’m running toward the one I know I want. The one I deserve.

CHAPTER

EIGHT

EVEREST

The woods are quiet, holding their breath, as if they know something is different now.

Something important. Sierra is beside me in the front seat, her fingers loosely tangled with mine.

The warmth of her skin against mine is the only proof I need that this is real. She's here. She chose to come back.

I glance over at her. The sunlight kisses her cheekbones, sets her hair aglow, and something inside me clenches with a kind of awe I can't describe. She's not just beautiful—she's luminous. There's peace in her expression, but also something that stirs me deeper. Strength. Softness. Resilience.

For a long moment, I don't say anything. I just breathe her in. The curve of her mouth. The way her chest rises and falls with slow, steady breaths. The slight furrow in her brow like she's thinking hard about something but doesn't want to say it yet.

Finally, she speaks.

"Are you mad at me?" she asks, her voice soft. "For lying?"

I glance over at her, taking in the way her face is half-turned toward the window, like she can't quite bear to meet my eyes.

"I guess you didn't really lie. You just should have told me who you were from the start.

I felt... used. Like everything we had was built on a false start.

It was more disappointing because so many people come up here and all they want is my land.

I thought I finally had someone who came up here for me. "

She nods slowly, eyes downcast, bracing for something worse. But I'm not done.

"But then I remembered something," I continue. "You never asked me to sell. Not once. You didn't even bring it up. You could've come here like all the others—pushy, polished, with some too-good-to-be-true offer—but you didn't."

She finally looks at me. There's hope in her eyes, but it's fragile.

"I didn't," she whispers. "I couldn't. Once I saw you, I didn't care about the project... I only cared about you."

"And that's how I knew," I say. "That the woman sitting across from me, telling me about her mom and how pancakes make her feel safe—that was the real you. That was the part I fell for."

Her lips part like she wants to say something, but I reach over and take her hand, threading my fingers through hers.

“I can’t be mad at you for having a job,” I add. “Hell, your job is what brought you to me in the first place. If things had gone how you planned, you wouldn’t still be here. You are more than your job.”

“I’m here because I want to be,” she says. “Not because of work. Not because of the resort. Because of you.”

That hits me like a warm shot of whiskey—burning, deep, but good.

I bring her hand to my lips and kiss her knuckles, slow and steady.

“Well,” I murmur, “then I guess we’re both exactly where we’re supposed to be.”

I reach over and slide my palm along her thigh, anchoring myself to her. “You belong to me now,” I say, my voice low, rough with truth. Not a demand. Not even a declaration. Just the simple, undeniable fact of it.

She turns her head to look at me, her eyes deep and clear and steady. “I wouldn’t have it any other way,” she whispers.

And I feel it then—this overwhelming wave of something fierce and tender all at once. It rocks me harder than anything I’ve ever known. All those years I thought I needed to be alone, to protect what was mine by shutting everyone out...

They mean nothing now. She’s changed everything.

I lean over the center console and kiss her, slow and deep. My hand slides up to cup the side of her neck, thumb brushing the edge of her jaw as her lips move with mine. She sighs into the kiss, melting like she was always meant to be here, always meant to fit into my life, my world, my arms.

We pull up to the cabin and I kiss her again, this time with more heat, more urgency, and she responds with the same fire. I taste everything she's offering—her surrender, her trust, her affection—and I give her mine in return.

When I pull back, her eyes are glazed and a little dazed. Her cheeks flushed. Her smile soft and real. I want to memorize every part of her in this moment—the sound of her breath, the way she's looking at me like I'm the one who hung the stars.

“Let's go inside,” I murmur.

She nods without hesitation.

We step out of the truck, the air still warm with the last light of day, the scent of pine and earth grounding me in the moment. I walk around to her side and take her hand again, needing the feel of her, needing to make sure she doesn't disappear.

Together, we walk up the wooden steps to the cabin, our footsteps slow, unhurried. There's no rush now. Just us.

As I open the door and lead her inside, something in my chest loosens. I've spent years building these walls—real and emotional—and now, for the first time, I want to tear them all down.

Because she's not just stepping into my house. She's moving into my life. And I'm never letting her walk back out.

We step inside and it's only seconds before I turn to face her, my heart full of love and my groin full of lust. "I've been thinking about this all day," I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

I step closer to her and my hands cup her face.

I lean in, my lips capture her in a deep kiss.

Our tongues dance, exploring each other's mouths.

Tasting her is electric. Our tongues clash in a fierce ensemble. I capture her lower lip between my teeth, biting gently before soothing the sting with my tongue.

Her hands pull at my shirt, her nails scraping against my skin. I groan, capturing her wrists in one hand and pinning them above her head.

"You're mine now, Sierra," I say, my voice rough.

Sierra's eyes flash. "Then take me, Everest. Make me yours."

I move my hands to roam her body, my fingers tracing the outline of her breasts through her shirt.

She moans into my mouth, her hands gripping my waist, pulling me closer.

I lift her shirt, my hands trailing over her skin.

My broad fingers move along her ribcage.

I unhook her bra and my fingers roll her nipples between my thumb and forefinger.

She gasps and her back arches her body into mine.

"You like that, don't you?" I whisper, my lips trailing down her neck.

She nods, her eyes close, and her breath coming in short gasps.

I take her nipple into my mouth, my tongue swirling around the hardened bud.

She moans again, her fingers wrap around my hair, gently pulling on the strands.

It takes everything I have not to throw her to the floor right then and there and destroy her perfectly tight cunt with deep, unbridled thrusts.

My hands slide down her body, unbuttoning her jeans. I push them down, my eyes lingering on her lacy panties. How did she know to wear these? They're driving me wild and she's lucky I don't rip them off.

I hook my fingers into her waistband, reluctantly pulling them down gently, revealing her wet slit. I kneel in front of her, my tongue licking her slit. She cries out, her hands gripping my hair tighter.

My tongue flicks out, licking her from bottom to top. She cries out, her hips pressing against my mouth. I find her clit, circling it with my tongue before sucking on it in my mouth.

Sierra's moans filled the room. "Fuck, Everest. You're so good at that."

I smile against her lips, my tongue continuing its assault. Sierra's body begins to tense

"I'm close, Everest. So close," she pants.

I looked up, my eyes meeting hers. "Cum for me, Sierra. I want to taste you when you do."

Her eyes roll back, her body convulses as she cums. I lap up her juices, my cock throbbing in anticipation.

I stand up, she looks at me. "I want you inside me," she says, her voice desperate. I smile, my fingers find her clit, rubbing it in slow circles. She squirms, her hips thrusting against my hand.

Her perfectly shaved center drips her sweet juices down my fingers and she's clearly ready to take me.

I lift her up, her legs wrap around my waist. I carry her to the bedroom, laying her down on the bed. I climb on top of her, my cock poised at her entrance. She looks into my eyes as I push inside her, and her tight pussy grips my throbbing cock. I moan, my hips pushing against her.

I'm the first man to conquer this peak and it turns me on knowing that I own her. That her pussy will be perfectly molded to me, and only me.

"You're so tight," I groan, my hips moving in slow thrusts. "You feel so good."

"You're so big," she whispers, her nails digging into my back.

I lose control and start pushing deeper, my hips slamming into hers.

I'm going to make Sierra feel every inch that she begs for.

She cries out, her body arching against mine.

I reach down, my fingers finding her clit, rubbing it in time with my thrusts.

I can feel her walls stretch with every push inside. I have her legs pinned open and I'm enjoying her sweet, wet center. It's almost more than I can bear. And if I didn't have my own ego to worry about, I would explode inside of her right here and now.

"Yes, yes, yes," she begs, her body tensing. Her pussy clenches around me, her orgasm ripping through her. I groan, my own orgasm following hers. My seed rips into her and I collapse on top of her.

I pull out, my cock covered in her juices.

"Fuck, you're beautiful when you cum," I say, my voice hoarse. This woman has worked me up and I don't know if I can ever calm myself down with her tight little ass around me.

She smiles, her chest heaving. I crawl up her body, my cock resting on her stomach.

She reaches down, her fingers wrapping around my cock, her hand moving in slow strokes.

"I want to taste you," She says, her eyes on my cock. I nod, my cock begins twitching in her hand. She sits up, her mouth capturing the head of my manhood. I groan and my hands grip her hair. I shouldn't be able to do this. I shouldn't be able to get hard right after exploding inside of her.

But my body is drawn to her in a way I have never felt with another woman.

For her, I feel like I could do anything.

She takes me deep in her mouth, her tongue swirling around my shaft. I feel feel the head of my cock pushing its way down her throat. I throw my head back, my body tensing as she continues to suck on me.

My body is shaking. "I'm gonna cum," I warn. She looks up at me. My cock pulses in her mouth. But she dutifully swallows every drop, her eyes never leaving mine.

I pull her up, my mouth capturing hers in a deep kiss. Our bodies pressed together, our breaths mingling. "That was amazing," I whisper, my fingers tracing the line of her jaw.

She lays in my arms and begins to close her eyes.

"Oh no, Sierra," I say. "This night has only just begun."

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:16 am

SIERRA—TWO MONTHS LATER

I smooth down the front of my dress for the hundredth time, pacing in front of the mirror.

The soft, silky fabric clings to my body just right, hugging every curve in a way that makes me feel a little bit braver than I actually am.

It's my favorite dress—deep red, low at the back, with a neckline that walks the line between elegant and dangerous.

I wore it because... well, because he said he had a surprise for me.

And because a part of me, the part that's too wrapped up in him to think clearly, is terrified he's about to ask me something I'm not ready for.

Like to marry him.

God, it's only two months. But Everest doesn't do things halfway. When he wants something, he goes after it. And when he looks at me, it's like he already knows I'm his.

Still, I can't stop my heart from beating out of my chest as I step out of the car and walk toward the restaurant. It's tucked into the side of the mountain, all warm lighting and rustic charm, like it was carved right out of the forest.

I see him before he sees me.

He's standing by the entrance, wearing a black button-up shirt that strains slightly at the chest and sleeves, his beard trimmed, eyes scanning the road. When they land on me, they widen just slightly—and then a slow, proud smile spreads across his face like sunlight breaking through clouds.

"There you are," he says, voice low and smooth.

I try to breathe. "Here I am."

"You're..." He steps forward, eyes sweeping over me with reverence. "Gorgeous."

I feel heat rise to my cheeks. When he looks at me I feel like a treasure.

He holds the door open and guides me inside with a hand resting lightly on the small of my back. Every inch of me is buzzing with nerves, excitement, curiosity. He's being so thoughtful, so gentle. It's almost disarming.

He pulls my chair out for me, and I lower myself into it, my hands resting in my lap to keep them from trembling.

Everest lifts the wine glass to his lips and flashes me a grin. "See? Told you I'm not completely feral. I even remembered to pull your chair out."

I laugh, a little more nervously than I mean to. "Look at you, evolving."

He winks. "It's all thanks to you. You've trained me well. Next thing you know, I'll be quoting poetry and folding napkins into swans."

I raise an eyebrow, amused. "I'll believe that when I see it."

He grins and leans in, his eyes locked on mine. "Stick around. You might be

surprised.”

There’s a playfulness in his voice that makes my chest warm. But beneath that, I can feel it—something more serious simmering just under the surface. Like this dinner, this night, means more than he’s letting on.

My smile falters slightly. The nerves come rushing back.

I fold my hands tightly in my lap, trying to keep them from trembling. “So…” I say carefully, my voice softer now, “what’s the surprise?”

He doesn’t answer right away. Instead, he reaches down beside his chair and lifts a large manila envelope onto the table.

My stomach twists.

It’s not what I expected. There’s no velvet box. No ring gleaming under the candlelight. And yet, somehow, the mystery of it makes my pulse race even faster.

He pushes the envelope toward me with both hands, his eyes dancing with excitement. “I’ve been working on this for days,” he says. “Go ahead. Open it.”

I stare at the envelope, trying to read something in his expression. He looks… proud. Hopeful. A little boyish in his eagerness, and that only makes it more endearing.

I reach for the flap, hands still trembling slightly.

What is this? I wonder. If it’s not a proposal, then why all the secrecy? Why the candlelit dinner and the nervous energy between us?

My fingers brush the seal. It feels thick—like there are multiple pages inside.

Documents? Letters?

I glance up at him again, and he's watching me like I'm about to open the universe.

My heart softens at the sight of him. Whatever this is, it matters to him. That alone is enough to push past the nerves.

I pull the flap open slowly, careful not to tear anything.

And inside, I see a stack of papers, neatly clipped together. The first page is a printed map of the mountain. His mountain.

My brows furrow, and I flip to the next page—a legal document. Deed information? Zoning changes?

“What is this?” I whisper, looking up at him.

I flip past the conservation documents, my fingers brushing across the next section in the envelope. Something thicker catches my eye—another set of pages, printed and stapled neatly. The title at the top reads "Transfer of Ownership." My heart stutters.

“Everest...” I glance up at him, suddenly breathless. “There's more?”

He leans forward, eyes sparkling with excitement, like he's been holding in this secret for far too long. “Yeah,” he says, nodding. “There's something I need to tell you.”

I stare down at the page, trying to make sense of it.

It's a deed—this one not for the mountain, but for a property downtown.

The address jumps out at me. I know it. It's right on the edge of the square, the old corner lot with the towering oaks and cracked stone gate.

I've passed it a hundred times. The abandoned mansion.

"I've seen this place," I murmur, fingertips grazing the page. "It's been empty forever."

Everest nods slowly, a knowing look in his eyes. "I've had my eye on it for years. The bones of it... they're beautiful. It's got history. Charm. But I never had a reason to live down there. That place was never meant for me."

I blink, the weight of what he's saying slowly sinking in. "Then why?—"

He reaches across the table and places his hand gently over mine, anchoring me to him. "Because it's meant for you."

My breath catches in my throat.

"I bought it for you," he continues. "So you could chase your dream. You told me you wanted a bed and breakfast, just like you always talked about with your mom. I listened. And I saw that house... and I saw you there. Welcoming people, running the place your way. Building something of your own."

Tears flood my eyes. I shake my head, overwhelmed. "You... you bought me a mansion?"

His thumb brushes across the back of my hand. "I bought you a means to live out your dream. You left your life for me. It was the least I could do."

I can't sit still another second. I push back my chair and rise to my feet, my pulse

rushing in my ears. He starts to stand too, but I'm already moving around the table. The emotion chokes in my throat as I reach him and throw my arms around his neck, pressing myself against him.

He holds me like he's been waiting to do it for days—no hesitation, no reserve. I bury my face in his chest, letting the tears fall freely.

No one has ever done something like this for me. No one has believed in me like this. Not just in what I could be to them , but in what I could become for myself . Well, not since my mom.

I pull back slightly to look into his face. His eyes are soft, warm, full of hope and certainty.

“This is everything,” I whisper, voice trembling. “You don't even know... I've never had someone do something like this for me.”

“You have someone now,” he says, brushing a strand of hair behind my ear. “And I'm never going anywhere.”

The restaurant seems to fade away around us. All I can see is him. All I can feel is the way his arms fit perfectly around me, the way his heartbeat anchors mine.

And in this moment, wrapped in his warmth, I know it with perfect clarity: he's the only man for me. Someone who sees me. Someone who believes in me. And he's mine, too.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 6:16 am

EVEREST—FIVE YEARS LATER

I wake up and my stomach growls for breakfast. The scent of fresh pine mingles with the faint aroma of cinnamon and coffee drifting from the kitchen.

It's early, but the house is already alive with the soft sounds of our twin boys stirring—Mikey and Ollie, just two years old now, their tiny voices blending with the rustling of sheets and the quiet shuffle of feet on hardwood floors.

I stand in the doorway, watching Sierra move with graceful ease through the rooms, a natural rhythm to her steps as she checks on the boys, smiles, and hums softly under her breath.

This place—our home—is no longer just a dream.

It's our perfect refuge. And the bed and breakfast is fully booked almost every weekend, a hot spot for weary travelers and a haven for those seeking peace.

And it's Sierra's warmth, her spirit, that guests remember most. Things are nearly perfect.

The boys are chasing each other now, their little legs stumbling over each other on the living room rug, laughter spilling from their mouths in joyous bursts.

Mikey's bright eyes catch mine, and he throws his arms out, a silent invitation for a chase.

I grin and scoop him up, feeling the weight of his small body against mine as Ollie follows closely behind, determined not to be left out.

Sierra catches my gaze across the room, a smile spreading slowly across her face, softening the tired lines that motherhood and hard work have etched gently on her skin.

Her hair is pulled back loosely, a few stray curls framing her glowing face.

She's more beautiful today than she ever has been.

I can see it in her eyes—that quiet satisfaction and fierce pride.

The woman who once chased a dream through dense pine forests has built something lasting and beautiful.

I walk over and wrap my arms around her waist, pulling her close so she can feel the steady thump of my heart.

She leans into me, her cheek resting against my chest, and the boys reach up, tugging at my pants and her dress, filling the room with the purest kind of chaos.

It's imperfect and loud and messy, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Sierra looks up at me, her voice soft but sure. "We did good, Everest."

I brush a stray curl from her face and smile, voice thick with emotion. "We did more than good. We built a life. A home. A future."

Her eyes glisten with unshed tears as she squeezes my hand. "Remember when I first got lost in those woods? I never imagined this. That I'd find you, a home, and a family."

I kiss the top of her head and think back to that moment—the day she stumbled to my doorstep, exhausted and parched, and I knew then that my solitary life was about to change forever.

The boys tumble toward us again, and I lift Mikey into my arms while Ollie clambers onto Sierra's hip.

We stand there, tangled together, the four of us caught in a moment of pure happiness.

And as I watch Sierra cradle our son, her smile radiant in the morning light, I know I'm the luckiest man alive.

Without a word, she closes the small gap between us.

Her lips meet mine with a fierceness that makes my breath hitch, a kiss full of yearning and promise and all the things we have said out loud a million times or more.

My hands cup her face, fingers threading through the loose strands of hair as I pull her closer.

The world narrows until there's nothing but the two of us, caught in this perfect, fleeting moment.

When she finally pulls away, her cheeks are flushed, and her eyes glisten with tears—happy ones, I think. She swallows hard, her voice barely a whisper. "Everest... I have something to tell you."

My heart jumps, a thousand thoughts rushing at once. "What is it?" I ask, voice low but steady, though inside, I'm spinning.

Just then there's a knock at the door. My Aunt Caroline is coming to take the boys for the weekend.

Sierra and Aunt Caroline have been talking more than usual lately, and I can't say that I'm disappointed about it.

They apparently planned a little slumber party for the boys at Aunt Caroline's and now I have my wife to myself for the night.

That hasn't happened in years and I fully intend on taking advantage of her in every way possible.

With big hugs and kisses, the boys jump in the car, drive away with my dearest aunt, and vanish into the skyline. Now... back to my wife.

"You said you had to tell me something before we were interrupted?" I ask.

She laughs, her perfect lips stretching across her mouth. Even something as simple as her smile still turns me on after all these years.

Her hand slides to rest on her belly, her touch light but full of meaning. "I'm pregnant," she says, her smile trembling with disbelief and joy.

For a moment, the world stops spinning. I blink, trying to wrap my mind around it, to hold onto this beautiful truth. Then a grin breaks across my face—wide, genuine, unstoppable. "You're... really pregnant?" I ask like I'm making sure I heard right.

She nods, tears spilling over as she laughs softly. "Yes. We're going to have a baby."

A swell of emotions crashes through me—joy, pride, excitement, and a fierce protectiveness I didn't know I had room for. I reach out, my hand covering hers on her belly, feeling the promise of new life beneath my palm.

“I’m so happy, Sierra,” I say, my voice thick with feeling. “I hope it’s a girl... so she can be just like her mother—strong, beautiful, and unstoppable.”

She looks up at me, eyes bright and full of love. “And if it’s a boy?” she teases.

“Well,” I grin, “then he’s got a couple brothers who he’s going to have to hold his own against.” I pull her close again, our foreheads touching as I smile.

We share a long, deep kiss—full of all the dreams we have for this new chapter. It’s a kiss that seals promises without words, a promise of love and strength and family.

As we pull apart, I whisper into her hair, “This is just the beginning. Our forever starts now.”

I slip my tongue back into her mouth, exploring, teasing. She moans softly, her hands gripping my shoulders.

I break the kiss, my lips moving down her neck, nipping gently at her earlobe. She gasps, her head falling back to give me better access. I continue my descent, my mouth finding the sensitive spot between her shoulder and neck. She shivers, her nails digging into my skin.

I move lower, my mouth capturing her nipple through the thin fabric of her dress. She arches against me, a low moan escaping her lips. I tease her other nipple with my hand, rolling it between my fingers.

"Everest," she whispers, her voice filled with need.

I look up at her, a wicked grin on my face. "Tell me what you want, Sierra."

"I want you to make my body tremble," she says, her voice barely above a whisper.

I smile, my hand sliding up her thigh. I find the hem of her dress, slowly inching it up. She lifts her hips, helping me, until the dress is bunched around her waist. I run my fingers along the edge of her panties, teasing her.

"Where, Sierra?" I ask, my voice low.

"Here," she says, her hand covering mine, guiding it to the wet heat between her legs.

I slip my fingers under the fabric, finding her slick folds. She moans, her head falling back against the couch. I begin to move my fingers, rubbing her clit in slow, circular motions.

"Do you like that, Sierra?" I ask, my voice a low rumble.

"Yes," she gasps, her hips moving with my fingers.

"Tell me how much." I say.

"So much that I want another finger... inside." She says as her eyes close.

I happily oblige, sticking two fingers deep inside of her warm, tight pussy.

I suck gently on her nipple, my fingers continuing their rhythm. She moans, her body trembling on the edge of release.

"Sierra," I say, "You know I like it when you're pregnant. You know it turns me on to see my seed swell your body. Your soft, supple breasts growing. Expanding."

"Yes. Yes. Deeper. Harder" She commands.

She whimpers, her body aching for release. I slip a third finger inside her, curling them against her g-spot. She cries out, her body convulsing around my finger. And

just as I curl into her I gently move my tongue along her slick folds. Just barely grazing her clit, teasing her, torturing her.

"You taste amazing, Sierra," I murmur, my fingers moving in and out of her.

My thumb finds her clit. I begin to move my fingers, my thumb rubbing her clit in time. She moans, her body seizing around my fingers.

"Everest," she gasps, her body begging to release.

"Cum for me, Sierra," I whisper, my fingers moving faster.

She cries out, her body convulsing as waves of pleasure wash over her. I hold her close as she rides out her orgasm, my fingers still moving slowly inside her.

"I needed that," she whispers, her body still trembling.

I smile, my fingers slipping out of her. "There's more where that came from," I say, my voice filled with intention.

I move up her body, my mouth capturing hers in a wet kiss. I pull away and look down at her.

"Sierra, you've made my life perfect." I say.

"Everest," she replies, "our life is perfect."

Everest adores Sierra and he wants Aunt Caroline to love her, too. Before marriage and kids, they take a road trip to meet her, but on the way there, their passions take over and and they have to take a slight detour. Get your STEAMY bonus scene [HERE](#) !