



# Protected by the Park Ranger (Frost Cove: Alaska's Rugged Heroes #2)

**Author:** *Tiffany Wild*

**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** Graham Hammond has his hands full raising his eight-year-old daughter and keeping Alaska's wilderness safe. The last thing he needs is another nanny who'll leave them both heartbroken. But when Naomi Reed arrives at his cabin door, all his protective walls crumble. With her wild curls and haunted eyes, she awakens something primal in him—a need to claim and protect.

Naomi is desperate for a fresh start, and Alaska seems like the perfect place to hide. She never expected to find a gruff ranger and his adorable daughter stealing her heart. As she settles into their cozy cabin life, Naomi dares to dream of a future filled with love and safety.

But when her violent ex-husband tracks her down, Naomi must choose: run to protect the family she's grown to love, or stay and fight for the happiness she never thought she deserved.

With danger closing in and passion igniting between them, Graham will do whatever it takes to keep Naomi safe. Because some things are worth protecting—and Naomi is his to defend.

A steamy, emotional romance featuring a strong but tender-hearted ranger, a brave heroine finding her strength, and the healing power of family. This short, sweet instalove story proves that true protection comes from the heart, and that sometimes the safest place to land is in the arms of someone who sees your worth.

**Content Warning:** Contains references to past domestic abuse, steamy scenes, and a brooding ranger who'll stop at nothing to protect what's his.

**Total Pages (Source):** 1

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 1:01 am*

Graham

“Daddy, this is stupid.” Lucy’s voice carries that particular whine that only an eight-year-old can perfect, the one that sets my teeth on edge even as I try to maintain my ranger-calm. “We don’t need another nanny. I can take care of myself.”

I pause my methodical inspection of the guest room—Naomi’s room now, I remind myself—to look at my daughter. She’s sprawled dramatically across the freshly made bed, her dark ponytail hanging off the edge as she stares at the ceiling with all the worldly disdain a second-grader can muster. The sight tugs at my heart, familiar pain mixing with amusement.

“Really?” I arch an eyebrow at her. “So you’ll cook your own meals? Drive yourself to school? Handle your own laundry?”

Lucy rolls onto her stomach, propping her chin on her hands. “I can make sandwiches. And cereal. And the bus takes me to school.” Her lower lip juts out. “Plus, Ms. Joanie from the diner said I could stay with her whenever you have ranger stuff.”

Christ. I sigh, fighting a headache. Joanie means well, but the woman’s got to stop filling my kid’s head with alternatives to our carefully laid plans. “Lucy Hammond, we’ve been over this. You need someone here when I’m on patrol. The station’s too isolated for you to be alone.”

“But—”

“No buts.” I smooth a wrinkle from the quilt, more to keep my hands busy than from any genuine need. Everything in here is pristine—I’ve checked three times already this morning. “Miss Reed will be here soon, and I expect you to be polite.”

Lucy flops onto her back again with a dramatic sigh that would put soap opera stars to shame. “That’s what you said about Miss Amber. And Ms. Williams. And they both left.”

The accusation in her voice stings, probably because there’s truth in it. Two nannies in three months isn’t exactly a stellar track record. But between Lucy’s creative approach to rule-following and my irregular hours, finding the right fit hasn’t been easy.

“I hardly call your last stunt ‘being polite’,” I say carefully, noting how Lucy’s fingers clench in the quilt. She might act tough, but each departure had hit her hard even if she claimed to not like her previous nannies. “Miss Reed seems different.”

“You always say that too.”

Before I can respond, my phone buzzes with a text: Had to stop and ask for directions, but I’m about 15 minutes away. Can’t wait to meet Lucy.

“She’ll be here in a few minutes. Do me a favor and go brush your teeth.”

Lucy groans and pulls a pillow over her face. I resist the urge to do the same. Fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes until I hand partial custody of my daughter over to a stranger. Again.

The phone interview had gone well. Naomi Reed’s references checked out, as did the background check I ran on her. She has experience with difficult cases—though I hadn’t exactly advertised Lucy as one—and seems to understand the unique challenges of our situation.

Unlike our previous nannies who lived locally, Naomi would be living with us. The arrangement came about when she first responded to the ad—she was willing to relocate to Alaska from Florida but needed a place to stay. A live-in position meant someone would always be here for Lucy, even if the pay wasn't great on a ranger's salary. And Naomi had seemed almost relieved at the prospect of having a place to call home. My gut churns as I do one final sweep of the room.

The guest space is small but comfortable, tucked into the back corner of our cabin with its own bathroom. The window overlooks the forest, and on clear days like today, you can see the mountain peaks capped in snow. I've added some homey touches—fresh flowers, clean towels, a selection of books on the nightstand. But it still feels impersonal, like a hotel room waiting for its temporary occupant.

“Come on, troublemaker.” I gently tug the pillow away from Lucy's face. “Time to get presentable.”

She scowls but slides off the bed. “Can I at least wear my ranger jacket?”

I smile. The miniature ranger jacket—complete with patches—was last year's Christmas gift, and it's rarely left her shoulders since. “Sure thing, Deputy.”

While Lucy heads to the bathroom, I go to the kitchen to start coffee. Our cabin isn't huge, but it's home. The main living area is open plan, with the kitchen flowing into a cozy sitting room dominated by a stone fireplace. My office—really just a desk crammed with paperwork and radio equipment—occupies one corner. The walls are lined with photographs: Lucy learning to fish, camping trips, wildlife shots I've taken over the years. And tucked away on my desk, a photo of Julie.

What would you think of all this? I wonder, not for the first time. Another nanny. Another stranger in our home.

The coffee maker gurgles to life just as tires crunch on gravel outside. Lucy appears

at my elbow, drowning in her beloved jacket, her expression set in what I privately call her “ranger face”—serious and assessing, a mirror of my own professional demeanor.

“Ready?” I ask.

She squares her tiny shoulders. “Ready.”

I open the front door just as a modest sedan pulls up. The woman who steps out isn’t what I expected. The phone interviews hadn’t prepared me for Naomi Reed in the flesh. She’s younger than I’d assumed, maybe late twenties, with a grace that makes even the simple act of retrieving her bags look elegant.

She turns toward us, and the morning sun catches in her riot of dark curls—wild and untamed as the Alaskan brush. My throat tightens. The woman moves like a willow in a summer storm, all effortless grace despite the battered duffel bag swinging from her hand. When she smiles, it hits me like a rifle shot to the chest—sweet enough to make my molars ache, but her whiskey-warm eyes hold a flicker of something feral underneath.

Dangerous. Delicious.

“Graham Hammond?” Her voice carries clearly across the yard. “I’m Naomi Reed.”

Fuck. I’m a professional, not some teenager struck dumb by a pretty face.

All evidence to the contrary. I’m nearly gaping at the sight of her.

She stands there expectantly while I try to find my voice, and I resist the urge to curse at myself. “Welcome to Glacier Point Station.” I step forward to shake her hand. She hesitates, and then takes it. Her palm slides against mine—smooth skin catching on my work-roughened grip. A spark jumps between us so sharp I half-expect to see

static. Her breath catches. Mine stops entirely. Those bottomless eyes widen, lips parting like she's about to say something forbidden. Lucy clears her throat. We spring apart like guilty teenagers.

"This is my daughter, Lucy." I sound like I swallowed gravel.

Lucy, bless her, manages a stiff nod that would make any junior ranger proud.

"I love your jacket," Naomi says, and there's genuine appreciation in her tone. "You must be your dad's best deputy."

A flicker of interest crosses Lucy's face before she remembers she's supposed to be standoffish. But I catch how her hand automatically strokes the patches on her sleeve, preening just a little.

"Let me show you inside." I lead the way, hyper aware of Naomi's presence behind me. The cabin suddenly feels smaller, more intimate. How am I going to survive in such a small space with a woman that beautiful? "Kitchen's through here. Help yourself to anything. Lucy has some dietary restrictions?—"

"No green beans," Lucy interjects. "They're evil."

Naomi's laugh is unexpected and rich. "Noted. Any other vegetable vendettas I should know about?"

"Cauliflower," Lucy says solemnly. "It looks like tiny brains."

Watching Lucy's walls crack ever so slightly feels like witnessing a minor miracle. I use the moment to study our new nanny more carefully.

Naomi moves with a kind of contained energy, taking in every detail of the space while maintaining that gentle smile. But there's something in the way she positions

herself—always aware of the exits, I realize—that triggers my professional instincts.

This woman is running from something. Or someone.

The thought sends an unexpected surge of protectiveness through me, fierce and instinctive. I've seen that hypervigilant look before in my line of work, usually in people who've learned the hard way to watch their backs. Background checks came back clean, but whatever ghosts Naomi Reed is carrying, they're her business unless they affect Lucy.

Still, I can't shake the urge to stand between her and whatever she's watching for.

"Your room's this way." I gesture down the hall, pushing aside my concerns for now.

As I walk her through the daily routine—Lucy's school schedule, emergency contacts, the quirks of our ancient washing machine—I can't help noticing how naturally Naomi fits into our space. She asks intelligent questions, makes notes on her phone, and somehow manages to keep Lucy engaged despite my daughter's determined attempt at indifference.

When I reach past her to demonstrate the washing machine's quirks—three spins to the left, two prayers to the plumbing gods, and maybe it won't eat your socks—her vanilla-and-rain scent wraps around me. She sways backward, the curve of her ass brushing my thigh. Neither of us acknowledges it, but I turn so she doesn't see my face turn red.

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