



Rescued by the Lumberjack (Moonshine Ridge Lumberjacks #1)

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Category: Romance

Description: Six years ago, I showed up in this sleepy mountain town to work for the local logging crew.

Now that Ive got some years behind me, Im ready to make Moonshine Ridge my permanent home, Ive got the job, the house, and the desire to build a future here; all I need is the woman wholl build it with me.

I never thought Id find her clinging to the side of a cliff.

When I look into Phoenixs sky blue eyes, all I see is the future Im looking for.

I may have rescued Phoenix from a fall that could have ended in tragedy, but when her feet are back on solid ground, will she be the one who rescues my heart?

Total Pages (Source): 9

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter One

Phoenix

I'll head back after lunch, I decide. This spot is perfect for a picnic.

Slipping the little knapsack off my shoulders, I take a minute to stretch and admire the small clearing in the dense forest I've been hiking through.

There aren't many trails that cut through the Weeping Wilderness, which is such a shame, because the densely forested section of the mountain with the tragic backstory to its name is one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen.

When I first moved up to the tiny mountain community of Moonshine Ridge just a few months ago, I was blown away by the rugged, mountain scenery-- not to mention the rugged mountain men.

One of the first things I did was head straight across the street to Ash and Hyacinth McAllister's sporting goods store to pick up some hiking gear and a map of all the trails that run through the wilderness surrounding my new mountain home.

I'm determined to hike every one of them.

Of course, running the bakery on my own doesn't give me much opportunity to get outside for more than a few hours, so my new hobby is confined to day hikes.

I'm pushing my luck today, but it's still early and the sun won't set for a few more

hours.

Plenty of time to enjoy my pb&j and sliced apple and still get out of the woods before dusk.

I don't mind hiking the last mile of the main trail back to my car in the dark, I have my headlamp and the trail outside the woods is exposed and well worn.

Settling on a large, flat rock with my sandwich and my thoughts, I look around at the lush forest surrounding me.

Moonshine Ridge also came with about a thousand local legends and the townspeople have been happy to tell me all of them-- particularly Mable Hart, who runs the local history museum and loves to gossip, and Alice McAllister, who runs the small general store and loves to gossip about how much Mable loves to gossip.

Those two old ladies and their friends are notorious around town, and, from what I've gathered from the gossip about the town gossips-- they're pretty wrapped up in the area's local folklore themselves.

I've been here for three months now and I haven't seen a single Sasquatch, I haven't heard any wailing women crying from the river's edge, I haven't picked up any ghostly hitchhikers, and all the clocks in my rented cottage keep right on ticking past three oh nine a.m. every night.

But then, I've never been superstitious.

Which is why I keep hiking the old trail that used to be a wagon road through the high mountain pass that ran to the settlement of Paradise Point and the larger town of Waterford Plains in the valley on the other side of these mountains.

Even though the road was abandoned a hundred and fifty years ago and relocated to the other side of the river.

Even though the reason the road was abandoned and the trail was left to be reclaimed by nature, was because several unmarried women went missing along the old road as they traveled between the settlements.

Even though locals are still telling stories about what happened to those women-- and why it was only unmarried ones that went missing-- around campfires to this day.

And even though our own local cryptozoologist, Finch Diaz, keeps losing game cameras from the area, as if someone--or some thing , as the locals like to say in an ominous tone-- is intentionally removing them to prevent anyone from catching sight of what really lives in these woods.

Several tiny blue butterflies flutter around a cluster of wildflowers that have found a rare patch of sunlight to bloom in. A cool breeze rustles pine boughs all around me, birds sing in the distance and squirrels chatter in the trees overhead.

I tuck the little container my sandwich was in back into the small day pack I carry, take a long drink from my bottle of electrolyte-infused water, and get back on my feet.

It's so peaceful here, it's hard to imagine that some silly folklore still manages to keep people from enjoying these woods.

More for me, I decide, shrugging my pack back on and breathing in the scent of the forgotten forest one last time before heading back to the car.

The mountains around Moonshine Ridge are forested in pretty much every direction, including the center of town, but no other trail I've explored yet smells as good as the

Weeping Wilderness.

Maybe because it's so remote, or maybe because it gets so little traffic, but there's a primordial, untouched quality here that adds a deeper layer to the usual pine and petrichor fragrances of the forest.

I'm almost to the edge of the woods, where the trees thin out before suddenly stopping and the old road meets up with the well-maintained, modern trail that skirts the forest in favor of an exposed ridge-line.

Something about the air changes, the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and the woods around me go silent.

I get an eerie feeling of being watched, and when I turn to look into the shadows of the forest behind me I see something move quickly, disappearing in to the thick trees, but not fast enough to keep me from taking off running at a speed I didn't know I was capable of.

Adam

" Pretty much this section, here."

The fire management inspector points at a cluster of dying cedars that look like they've been putting up a good fight for the last few years, but it's clear they're going to lose it.

The big boss, Clinton Murdock, who owns the logging outfit I've been working for for the last six years now, nods solemnly and waves me over to tag each tree individually.

For a guy who owns a logging company, the old man doesn't much like cutting down

trees.

Which is the reason I'll keep working for him as long as he'll have me.

I mark the trunk of each tree with the company's trademark, just a 3CM that I've got down to a quick flourish of the spray paint gun after all these years, and follow the two older men deeper into the dark patch of woods we're working in today.

Nervously looking back over my shoulder to gauge how much daylight we have left before the sun drops behind Benson Peak in the west and plunges the Weeping Wilderness into early darkness.

I'm not much for folklore and I've never been known to scare easily, but this dense patch of remote forest gives me the willies.

I've been a resident of the small mountain town of Moonshine Ridge long enough to have heard all the stories the folks on this mountain are still telling after a century and a half since the old mining camp became a town, and I've been around for all the new stories that keep coming out of these ancient peaks.

Including the tales of women going missing while traveling the old road that once cut through this forest, and the more recent discovery of an undocumented wolf pack that might explain those disappearances.

"This one," Oz slaps a meaty hand against the trunk of another tree, the gold wedding band on his third finger glinting in the last of the sunlight that reaches beyond the tree line.

Clinton waves me forward with the spray paint again, himself glancing back toward the sun like I'm not the only one keeping track of daylight.

This forest stretches farther than we'll be able to manage in one season, covering the mountain pass between here and Paradise Point and running north for a couple hundred miles, based on the satellite images I've seen.

The old wagon road is the only trail that goes through the place and that doesn't get enough traffic to keep it intact.

Jake and Levi'll be up here this summer, running a couple of crews to cut the trees we're marking now. The area's too remote to get heavy equipment in, so the crews are gonna be camped up here for weeks, doing the work by hand.

After the Placer Canyon fire a few years back, fire management HQ finally gave in and gave Oz Lancaster the thumbs up to bring the Murdock brothers in to thin the deadfall out of the area, hoping to avoid another fire like the one that left Placer Canyon and most of the east slope of Benson Peak nothing but a charred scar running through the local mountains.

The few times I've driven up here with Oz, I see the way his hands tighten on the wheel as we pass the old forestry road up to the Benson fire lookout. The fire took the whole area out and I guess Oz and his wife, Meadow were the ones stationed at the tower the night the evac call came in.

That's the same fire that damn near killed Chief Diaz just a week later.

I get why the old man gets a little jumpy about the thought of losing more old growth forest to fire. Outside of the fact that he's our wilderness fire management inspector--it's kinda his job to keep these mountains from burning down.

"Think that's plenty for the day," Clinton says, nodding toward the fading sunlight filtering through the canopy.

The boss is a man of few words. When Clint does speak, he does it in a deep voice that carries like he's yelling, even when he's not. Has a way of making you listen.

"We can be done for the day." Oz agrees with a smile and a pat against another tree trunk-- this one's just getting an affectionate love pat, I won't be marking that one to take out.

We're careful about what we cut, dead, dying, and carefully selected trees that are choking the forest's ability to thrive.

Birch McAllister even added some specialized equipment down as his mill to process the smaller trunks so we can keep operations local.

Working for the Murdock brothers is a far cry from the big logging outfit I started off with when I was just a kid. The one that operated out of pure greed and didn't give a fuck about the land it was scarring or the communities it was driving into poverty.

It's good to work for a company I can respect, and I like the way the people of Moonshine Ridge stand by each other.

It's the reason I bought the house in town, the reason I plan on staying here till I die, and the reason the glint of light off Oz Lancaster's wedding band catches my eye-- Moonshine Ridge is where I'm going to raise my family and grow old beside the woman I love.

As soon as I find her.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter Two

Phoenix

There's part of my brain that's screaming something about not running, but I can't help myself. Adrenaline is pumping through my veins and my body is determined to make use of it, even if I do know better.

Behind me, I'm sure I hear it chasing me but I'm not looking back to find out.

Sprinting for the tree line at record speed, I break out of the forest and back onto the main trail. The sun is still hanging above the mountains, so I know I have enough time to get back to the trailhead parking lot before dark.

I also know I can't keep up this pace.

This body isn't made for running. That's what you get when you make a living baking muffins in a coffee shop that makes the best huckleberry chai lattes you never knew you needed in your life.

As much as I love exploring the hiking trails around my new home town, I gave up any notions of losing my curves a long time ago.

The adrenaline is wearing off and my all-out run has slowed to a determined jog. It feels safer out here on the ridge line trail where the sun is shining and I can see for miles around me.

I don't hear anything behind me.

In fact, I don't hear anything but the wind in the canyon below and the sound of my own heart beating hard enough that I'm worried it might explode.

My feet slow, and I finally dare a look back.

I'm breathing hard, and my muscles are burning from the run, but I made good distance.

Turning around on the narrow trail that runs high above the river below, I keep pulling deep breaths into my aching lungs and scan the edge of the forest I just ran from.

Nothing.

Thank God.

Still, there's a creepy feeling that has me reluctant to turn my back on the woods just yet.

So I walk backwards, keeping my eyes glued on the wall of trees where the forest springs up suddenly near the main trail, while my feet make slow progress in the opposite direction, and my brain scrambles to explain what I saw.

What I think I saw.

The woods have always felt peaceful to me. I've never even seen a bear in there. Let alone a... Nah. it's just me thinking too much about folklore and the recent claims of wolf sightings out here.

One trick of the shadows in the dense forest and my imagination took the opportunity to get carried away.

My breathing is almost back to normal, my heart rate is down to a quick pitter-pat, and I'm feeling silly for panicking.

Relaxing muscles that were still poised to run, I start to spin on my heel mid-backwards-step, ready to finish the hike back to the car in the forward direction.

My foot slips to one side and before I can catch myself, the ground under me goes with it, taking me off the trail and down the cliff beside the trail.

When I open my eyes, the sun is just touching the top of Benson Peak. Shadows have engulfed the river canyon below me, and are creeping up the side of the cliff to the narrow ledge that stopped me from sliding all the way down to the river that's still several hundred feet below me.

On further inspection, it's not a ledge, exactly, but rather, a large boulder jutting out of the cliff wall.

Disoriented, I look around. I look up and see that I'm not really that far from the top where the trail runs. Maybe eight or ten feet.

The cliff is steep, but not vertical. I should be able to climb back up-- as long as nothing's broken.

I stop worrying about my escape plan for a minute to do a quick self-diagnostic. Feet work, knees bend, I can move all my fingers.

My hands are scraped up badly, as well as the exposed skin on my arms and elbows. There's a long tear along one side of my pants and my right knee is oozing blood

around small bits of sand and gravel embedded in the wound.

My right shoulder hurts, but I can move my arm fine. My head hurts and there's a buzzing in my ears. When I touch the spot that's most sore, my fingers come away covered in blood.

But I'm not equipped to survive a night outdoors in the mountains. Cell signal is iffy in town, it's non-existent up here.

The sun wasn't so low when I slipped. I must have been unconscious for a little bit.

Finagling myself around on the rock, I turn toward the cliff above me and start trying to climb up the loose dirt, but after only making it a few feet before sliding back each time, I've all but given up hope.

I just need to rest for a few minutes and then I'll try again, I think, as I fold myself into a near fetal position on top of my granite cradle and give in to feeling sorry for myself.

About now, I wish I'd sprung the money for one of the GPS locator beacons that Ash suggested when I was buying my hiking gear, but I didn't think I'd need it for just day hiking on established trails.

My rock has fallen into the growing shadows, I'm feeling chilled and realizing I left my fleece jacket in the car.

Tears spill down my cheeks and I wipe at them with the back of my hand as I look up and watch the shadow of the western peaks slowly inch its way to the top of the cliff above me.

If I can't get up this embankment, I'm in for a miserable-- and dangerous-- night.

Then I hear it; someone-- or something-- moving on the trail above me.

At first, every muscle in my body goes still, images of what sent me into this situation flooding my brain, but then I hear the deep, masculine voice carried on the cooling air, softly singing a song I haven't heard in ages.

Adam

"Y eah, go ahead," I assure my bosses. "Just going to mark this location on the map and make some notes for the crew. I'll be right behind you."

Oz is always in a hurry to get back to his family, and Clinton's eager to get back to whatever it is the boss has waiting for him at home; microwavable dinners and ball games on tv, I reckon.

Nobody knows much about Clinton's personal life and the old man seems content with keeping it that way.

The two men make me assure them one more time that I won't be far behind them, before they finally take off hiking back to the trucks.

The area we've been tagging doesn't have any trails running through it and I need to get the coordinates entered on the map so the crews know where to set up camp when they get out here.

Ever since Oz's sister-in-law, Finch Diaz, started recording evidence that there really is a wolf pack up here, the rules have been pretty strict that no one's supposed to be out here alone.

Believe me, I'm not looking to be far behind the two men who finally head out ahead of me.

But once I'm done making notes for the guys who will be out here after me and step onto the main trail that runs back to the parking area, the sun has dipped lower than I'd anticipated and there's no trace of the two older men on the trail ahead of me.

Guess I took longer than I thought.

Like I said, I don't particularly scare easy. I'm not worried about the mile or so hike back to the main road on my own. Not even realizing I'll likely be finishing it up well after sunset.

But the way the forest springs up out of nowhere, creating a wall of towering pines to one side of me as the trail takes its sweet time running alongside them before it'll break away and follow the ridgeline downhill and back to the road where my truck is parked at the trailhead, might have my steps falling faster than my usual pace.

By the time the main trail finally leaves the weeping wilderness behind me, I might also be well into the second verse of Miley Cyrus's The Climb.

What? It's a mountain song! I've got two younger sisters; it was kinda hard to avoid their Hannah Montana years.

Besides, the guys left me in the dust, there's no one out here to call me out on knowing the song, let alone singing it out loud, but a couple of chipmunks scurrying across the trail in front of me.

"Hello?"

My pace slows and I stop singing, listening for what sounded like a woman's voice on the cooling breeze.

Bigfoot and mysterious wolf packs aren't the only stories these woods are known

for-- it's said that some of those woman that went missing in the eighteen hundreds continue to lurk in the tree line.

Some call for help to save them from whatever fate they fell victim to nearly two hundred years ago, some are said to lure men to their deaths for revenge.

"Is anyone there? I need help."

The voice is soft, feminine. The soft wind blows the words through the canyon, making it hard to tell which direction it came from. Whoever she is, she sounds tired.

My head turns back to the woods and a tingle runs up my spine.

It's probably just a trick of the wind and my imagination, I decide. Still, there's no point standing here waiting to be proven wrong.

This time, my feet move a little faster as they get back in motion under me.

"Wait! Help!"

The sound of gravel skittering under my boots temporarily drowns out the other mountain noises. That was louder. Definitely real, and coming from somewhere below me-- on the cliffside that only leads down the river far below this ridge.

"Keep talking, miss, I can't see you yet," I holler back to the disembodied voice as I slowly backtrack up the path I was just so eager to put behind me.

As I stretch to peer over the edge of the cliff, her voice floats back up to me, guiding me to a spot where the side of the mountain looks like part of the ground has recently been disturbed-- like a rock, or something heavy might have caused it to give way.

Not that I'd noticed when I passed it, or would have given it much thought if I had seen it. It's not unusual for cliff edges like this one to crumble. That's why the trail is built several feet back from the edge.

"I just need some help climbing back up, I can't get a firm grip on anything."

When I'm certain I'm directly above the voice, I lean over to see what her situation is-- and get a look at the woman I've been looking for all my life.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter Three

Phoenix

A man peers over the edge of the cliff above me and the sight of him catches me so unprepared that I lose my grip on the roots of the shrub I'd been hanging onto.

It means sliding back down the rocky slope and losing the six feet or so of ground I'd gained, but holy hell! He's gorgeous.

In that rugged way that seems to be par for the course for most of the men on the Ridge. Thick, dark hair flops over his forehead, temporarily hiding the furrows of concern etched there, as he lowers himself to the ground above me and scoots close to the edge to look down at me.

"How far can you climb up, sweetheart?"

Dark eyes crease at the corners in an expression that's both worried and kind.

"Sorry," I call up to him. "You startled me and I lost my grip. I can climb back up again, but I can't get farther than that bush."

His beard brushes the dirt as his head moves to look at the bush I'm gesturing at. The dust in the dark whiskers give it a gray tint, making him look older than I'm sure he really is.

My rescuer nods, mentally calculating what will be required to pull me up the few

feet that I can't manage on my own.

"Okay, don't start climbing yet," he tells me before moving back out from the cliff above me, out of my sight.

My heart does a little dying Pacman noise. Not because I think he's abandoning me, but because I wasn't done looking at him.

"I want you to wrap that cord around yourself, hear?

" A loop of olive drab parachute cord falls down to me, barely long enough to reach between me and the man above me.

"Loop it under your arms so if you slip, you don't fall any further down the cliff.

It's all right to rely on the cord, I've got you. "

It's thin, nylon parachute cord. It's not comfortable wrapped around me and I'm not confident that it can really support my weight if I were to slip but it's what we have.

I start climbing my way back up, carefully placing my feet into the little divots I managed to kick into the near vertical surface of the cliff on my previous attempts to climb out of here.

"That's it, you're doing great, baby."

The man's deep voice has a roughness to it that does something wonderful to my lower belly, but his words of encouragement as I climb up as far as I can go on my own are spoken softly.

The combination has me forgetting the ache in my muscles and becoming aware of a

different kind of ache forming in my body.

"Just a little more," he coos down at me, one long arm descending toward me. "You're doing such a good job, you can do it, baby. That's it."

The arm reaching down to me is thick with muscles that threaten to split the flannel shirt wrapped around them when his massive hand grasps my wrist and begins to haul me the rest of the way up.

"Good girl," are the first words I hear when I'm safely on horizontal earth again.

The earth isn't the only thing that's horizontal. My mountain man hero has pulled me over the edge in a way that has me landing against his broad chest, his strong arms immediately wrapping around me, as he rolls us away from the ledge.

Adrenaline sparks through me, as relief and triumph short circuit my senses; that's the only excuse I can think of for what would make my lips land so confidently against his.

Adam

My heart's beating a thousand miles a minute, scared to fucking death that the loose dirt of the cliffside might give way under the toe of her cute little hiking boot, or that my palm is too damn sweaty to keep a solid grip on her wrist when she can finally reach high enough for me to grab hold of her.

Adrenaline rushes my nervous system as that fear turns to victory as the curvy little goddess with the bright blue eyes and raven black pony tail clambers over the edge.

Her soft body collides with mine as I pull her onto level ground, my arms instantly encircle her, so damn relieved to have her safe that I don't even take advantage of the

opportunity to appreciate holding those beautiful curves against my body.

I roll us both away from the edge, but I can't let go of her yet. All I can do is hold her tight against me, feeling more possessive of the stranger than I've got a right to.

Loosening my grip on her just enough to give her a once over, I only have a few seconds to take in the hair that's come loose from what might have started off as a sleek pony tail, the rounded face with the lightest of freckles scattered across the bridge of her nose, the thick black lashes that contrast against bright blue eyes, all the pretty features behind the smudges of dirt tracked with tear stains, some nasty-looking scrapes, and bruises that are already dark enough to make me wonder how long she's been down there.

Her eyes find mine and then, before I can utter a word, she lays a set of pillowy lips against mine in a kiss that breaks my mind and lights my body on fire.

I'm on my back in the dirt, my knees bent up and my feet flat on the ground with the woman of my dreams sprawled out across my chest, her hands wrapped around my neck like she thinks she's gotta force me to kiss her.

I should be prying her off me. I should be checking her for dehydration, signs of snake bite, or broken bones. I should be asking her what her fucking name is.

Instead, I put my hands on the sides of her head and cradle her sweet face while I kiss her back like I own her.

Her lips soften against mine, her pressure letting up to let me take control. I can taste the metallic flavor of raw skin where she must have split her lower lip as I press my tongue into her mouth.

She meets me easily, sliding her tongue with mine as her hands move up the back of

my neck into my hair.

When she moans into our kiss, my dick decides that's the permission he's been waiting on, engorging completely and thickening behind my fly.

I don't remember where I am, or how I got here, or the fact that I don't even know this woman's name yet. I know she's mine and I know she's just as in this moment as I am.

When I roll to one side, however, the spell breaks.

"Ow! Fuck! Ow!"

My girl breaks her sweet lips away from mine with a jolt and a harsh cry of pain that quickly fills her pretty eyes with tears.

"Shit, sorry... fuck ," I throw apologies at her and mutter curses to myself. "Are you okay? What hurts? Is anything broken? Did you get bit by a snake? Do you need me to call for an airlift?"

I immediately put distance between our bodies, allowing the girl some room to sit up while I kneel in front of her to inspect her wounds.

Her shirt's torn over her right shoulder; same side as the scrape on her cheek.

Further investigation shows more torn clothing along the right side of her body-- a cut on her full hip, a nasty rip across her knee, a long section of fabric along the outside of her thick thigh that's not torn through, but looks beat up.

"I don't think anything's broken, no," she moves her arms and wiggles her fingers.

As she demonstrates her ability to properly flex and bend joints in all the right places,

she moves her feet apart, widening her knees to make room for me to take a closer look at the mean-looking gash on her shoulder.

She gazes up at me with so much trust in those blue eyes, and with her knees wide like they are, and the view of full tits stuffed into some sort of sport bra that has her cleavage pushed tight and running damn near up to her neck has my dumbass, caveman brain think about a dozen other things I'd like to be doing while I'm kneeling between those curvy thighs.

"Doesn't look bad enough for stitches," I tell her after I've forced my brain out of the most inappropriately timed gutter-dive of my life and taken a serious look at her injuries. "Let's get you home so I can wash those out and dress 'em up properly."

Notice I skipped the introductions and didn't mention letting her drive out of here on her own?

Yeah. So did I.

I'm in deep already and now that the adrenaline rush is over, I need to make sure that kiss wasn't a fluke.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter Four

Phoenix

My rescuer kneels in the dirt and gravel and scowls as he gently lifts away the torn edges of my clothing to inspect the scrapes and bruises underneath.

His hands are so big and warm, covered in rough calluses that catch in the nylon hiking clothes I'm wearing and leave trails of tiny tingles where they graze my unharmed skin.

His dark eyes are kind, despite the scowling, and tiny creases have begun to settle into the corners, making me wonder if he's older than he looks.

Dark hair lays in a scattered pattern on his head, damp with sweat along the top of his forehead and mussed from my fingers and no doubt from crawling on the ground to save me.

My eyes can't manage to stay off his lips though. Full and firm behind the dark beard, and even though the whole side of me feels like I get hit by a sledge hammer and I know he's right when he says we need to get the scrapes washed and bandaged, all I really want is to kiss him again.

"Leave it," Adam commands when we reach the bottom of the trail and he sees me start limping toward my car. "You ride with me. We'll come back later for it."

Somewhere between the kiss, his assessment of my wounds, and the remaining half

mile or so back to the parking area, we finally got around to introducing ourselves.

Adam's been filling me in on his work as a lumberjack with the Murdock brothers' logging company. The reason he was up here today when I needed him.

I've been explaining how I love hiking through the old forest and slipped off the side of the cliff when I was hiking out earlier. I haven't mentioned the fact that I was running full speed down the trail or why.

"It's not a problem, Adam, I can drive myself out."

Adam's dark brows draw together over his eyes, his jaw squared under the beard as he sets his expression into a stern order.

"You're limping. I'll drive you."

He actually carried me the last hundred yards down the trail. My joints are stiffening up from where I took most of the impact along my right side. When he saw me limping, he growled and hoisted me into his arms without giving me a chance to protest.

I'm not a light package. I know that and ordinarily it doesn't bother me much. Then again, I've never needed to be carried off a mountain before.

The fact that Adam did it without breaking a sweat or making a single comment about my curvy frame only has the desire to kiss him again growing deeper. To kiss him again-- and maybe more.

"Let me help you." Adam opens the passenger door of a capable-looking work truck, tucking my small pack behind the seat before lifting me gently off my feet to help me up into the cab.

"You need anything from your car before we leave it for the night, sweetie?"

His fingers lay lightly over my hurt knee, careful to avoid the raw skin. His touch does funny things to me, and heat blooms between my thighs.

"No," I answer. "There's nothing in there I need."

"Let's get you home and cleaned up."

He keeps saying "home" like we live in the same place and I realize I haven't corrected him not once.

I'm kinda hoping he means his home, I want to see how this rugged mountain man lives.

And I want to find out if that kiss was just the relief of being saved, or if this attraction to Adam is as real as I feel it might be.

Adam

Conversation started off awkward as hell.

Phoenix had been down on that narrow rock ledge for over an hour before I came by and thoughts of what could have happened to her if she'd slipped off the edge anywhere else or if I hadn't come by when I did tormented me as we made our way back to my truck.

She told me about how she likes going into that creepy, abandoned forest because it feels peaceful and told me how she'd slipped on some loose rocks while she was standing too close to the edge of the cliff-- but there was a tremble in her voice when she was talking that has me thinking she wasn't telling the whole story.

My brain's all twisted into knots; wanting to taste her sweet lips again, bed her down after I get those scrapes cleaned out, claim those sweet curves and ease the tension I can feel she's holding in her sore muscles.

But I also want to scold her for going out alone with no way to contact help if she needs it.

I want to lecture her about that old forest and remind her that folktales get started for a reason and if they manage to live as long as the stories about the Weeping Wilderness have, then there might just be a reason for that too.

I want to wrap her up in bubble wrap and never let her out of my sight so I can I make sure she's safe all the time.

The jumble of emotions running through me is new to me and it's got my tongue tied in more knots than my gut, making all my attempts at talking to the pretty young thing riding shotgun in my truck come out as not much more than grunts and growls.

"You okay with me taking you to my place so I can get those cuts cleaned and dressed properly?"

Look at me, managing to string a whole sentence together.

Next to me, Phoenix slides those blue eyes my way and gives me a ghost of smile with a nod of her head.

"Yeah, I'd like that," she tells me sweetly.

She makes me feel some damn confusing things, for sure, and every one of them tells me she's something I need to hang on to.

"I can make you some dinner after? Or I can order up something from the Brick and Porter if you don't mind me running by town to pick it up."

"Let me cook for you," she tells me, smiling over at me, "it seems like the least I can do to thank you for saving me today."

"You need to rest. I'll do the cooking." I return her smile, adding a wink, and a quick brush of my thumb along her jaw.

"Guess I'll have to find another way to say thanks, then."

I don't think she meant the innuendo I hear in her words, but that doesn't keep a hundred images of ways I'd like her to thank me from crashing into my brain.

With a groan that I hope I keep to myself, I pass through the small town of Moonshine Ridge that's become my home, ignoring the little office where our resident doctor hangs her shingle, the daycare center that our local sheriff deputy's wife runs, and turn onto the small road that branches off the main highway through town just before passing the two eateries in town.

Current and Ginger Jone's brewpub passes on my side of the road, looking busy with the outside tables full of hungry locals and tourists enjoying Ginger's craft beers alongside her husband's brick oven pizzas.

In the side mirror, I catch a glimpse of Cedar McAllister's tavern disappearing behind us and think about how much I'd like to walk into either of those places with Phoenix tucked under my arm.

I oughta take her over to the doc's and have her give my girl a look, but it's late in the day and Doc's probably already home up on the river with her family anyway.

Phoenix is scraped the hell up, but nothing's broken and none of her cuts are deep enough to need stitches; I can swing her by Doc Jone's office tomorrow.

Truth is, I don't want anyone else looking after Phoenix. I want to be the one taking care of her, making sure she's safe and comfortable.

This girl's got me feeling more than just protective over her, she's got my body all keyed up and my brain thinking of her as mine already.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter Five

Phoenix

A dam lives in one of the old neighborhoods in town, a block of houses that were renovated to modern places from the bones of cabins originally built in the early nineteen hundreds.

Some contracting company came in and did it years before I'd ever heard of Moonshine Ridge.

So the house I walk into doesn't fit the weathered, board and batten siding on the outside at all.

Inside is all tape and textured walls with double paned glass windows and a kitchen that I can instantly see myself spending hours in, baking breads and pies to keep my man's belly full while he works hard up in the mountains all day with his chainsaws and axes.

So he'd have something good to eat while he's gone, and then I'd make sure he had a reason to look forward to hurrying home afterward too.

Sliding my eyes off the modern appliances and wide counter spaces of his kitchen, I brave an appreciative look at the man who saved me today.

Now that the adrenaline has ebbed and I know I'm safe, my nerves are buzzing from some other kind of anxiety.

Something delicious and exciting that ramps up every time I look at Adam's imposing figure, or get close enough to him to smell his specific scent of pine sawdust, one of those manly deodorant brands with its vague spiciness, dust, and sweat that carries a unique quality that has had my body waking up to new ideas the whole ride down the mountain with him.

The kiss we shared when he hauled me onto to level ground keeps replaying in my brain too, and I'm wondering if I can get another one. One that ends differently, now that we're safe and know each other better.

"Fresh towels in the bathroom for you," Adam tells me as he pokes his head around the frame of a doorway that I assume leads into the bathroom.

His eyes slip over me, head to toe and back up again, lingering on parts of me that respond to his heated gaze.

"I'll grab some spare clothes for you. Everything I've got is probably going to be way too big. "

I swear the man gulps, his throat working in a hard swallow under the long beard with those intense, dark eyes fixed on my hips.

Ordinarily, that much attention on my body would make me self-conscious, but something about the way this man looks at me has me feeling flushed and wondering what else he might enjoy looking at.

"When you're done, I want to take a good look at those wounds. We need to make sure they get treated so nothing gets infected."

His voice is a low, deep hum, when I go to slip past him at the doorway. One more time, he tenderly slides the pad of his thumb along my skin. This time in a soft sweep

up my cheekbone on the side that's not scraped, all the way to the little spot right in front of my ear.

The touch sends a thrill skipping all the way down my body.

My nipples hardened and I can feel wetness between my thighs.

I just stand there, transfixed under the weight of his stare.

His eyes are such a deep brown, and standing close to him like this, I can see his pupils are dilated so wide, it makes his eyes look that much darker.

He could kiss me again right now, and I'm hoping he does. It would be so easy for him to unfurl that large hand and wrap his fingers around the back of my head to pull me into him.

Time stops. His hand lingers. I feel myself leaning into his touch and I tip my head up to hopefully make it clear what I'm waiting for.

"I'm just gonna jump in the shower in the other room real quick." Adam snaps out of it before I do, dropping his hand away from my face and stepping back, half turned toward another door just down the hall. "I'll be waiting for you when you're done."

Nodding dumbly, me and all the butterflies in my stomach close ourselves into the guest bathroom, hoping that when he says "waiting" he means naked.

Adam

I shower fast; knocking off the sweat and the forest and the dirt of the day while giving serious thought to rubbing one out to thoughts of Phoenix's curvy little body naked and willing while she stares at me with that same adoring expression she was

giving me just a few minutes ago.

Like she wants me as bad as I want her.

Fuck. I shoulda fucking kissed her. Everything about the way she looked at me, the way she pressed into my touch, wasn't just permission, it was begging me to do it.

But we both needed to clean up and as much as I'd like to have put her here with me in the custom shower of my master bath so I could watch the water run over her smooth skin and make sure to clean every crease and curve of her form, I needed to give us both some space.

I was thinking that maybe if I wasn't up against her for two minutes, my thoughts might straighten themselves out and I'd start feeling normal again.

No such damn luck.

By the time I'm toweled off and dressed again, my balls still ache and I'm still sure that Phoenix is the woman I've been waiting on to help me fill this house with kids.

Grabbing the first aid kit from my bathroom cabinet, I adjust my dick, grateful for the support the boxer briefs give behind the loose sweat pants, and head out to the front room to wait on Phoenix.

She comes out of my guest bathroom scrubbed clean, with her black hair tousled and damp, hanging loose past her shoulders, looking like a sweet vision with one of my t-shirts tied in a knot at her waist, pulling tight enough to show off those heavy tits of hers that make my mouth water at the way they move with her steps now that they're freed from the tight bra she had on before.

I gave her a pair of my boxers to go with the shirt. A loose pair in a soft cotton

material with tiny pine trees and bears printed on the material that my mother gave me for Christmas a couple years back.

Mom is the last thing on my mind when I see the way Phoenix's round hips and ass fill out those shorts.

"Come over here and lemme take care of you." My voice comes out gruff on what sounds like an order but feels like a plea.

Phoenix lets me position her between my knees, turning her so I can start with her skinned knee. I apply antibiotic ointment and cover the scraped skin with a wide bandage before working my way up her shapely leg, doing my best not to touch her like I want but not doing the best job of it.

My fingers trace up her thigh to the swell of her hip where I know there's more scratches from where her hiking pants were torn.

Those scratches are covered by the boxers now, the soft flannel shorts too tight around her thigh to lift up over her hip, meaning I have to lower them from the waist band.

Hooking a finger into the elastic, I start slowly, giving Phoenix plenty of time to let me know if she's not comfortable with what I'm doing.

The shorts lower an inch, then two, and it's clear that she didn't put her panties back on under the shorts.

My dick surges with need. The silky smoothness of her skin against my rough fingertips, the idea that she's bare beneath the little boxers, the idea that her sweet little pussy is bare against my clothing. Fuck me, man, I might never wash these boxers again.

At this angle, Phoenix is standing between my open thighs while I sit on the edge of my sofa.

I'm about eye-level with her plush ass, and if I move her half a turn, I'd be able to press my nose directly into the little space where her thighs come together and inhale what I know is going to be the sweetest pussy in the world.

Eyes the color of a Caribbean sea stare down at me. Phoenix smiles shyly and her little hand joins mine to guide the shorts further over that full hip.

My fingers splay, moving south and inward, avoiding the angry bruises and the raw skin where she slid down the cliff, till my hand sneaks around her thigh to the space between her legs.

Phoenix moves a foot, widening her stance for me. She leans against my shoulder and lets out the cutest little gasp as my fingers reach her center and find her hot and dripping for me.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter Six

Phoenix

A dam's fingers move agonizingly slowly, when all I want is for him to take care of the ache that's settled into my core.

The lines in his face deepen with the unspoken question as he looks up at me and I'm so scared to just blurt out what I really want that all I can do is move my feet apart to give him space, hoping he'll take the lead here because honestly? I'm not sure what to do.

"Sweetie, your little pussy's soaking through these shorts."

Adam's fingers work between my legs with firmer movements, his other hand leaving the first aid kit abandoned on the couch cushion beside him to grip my other hip and turn me toward him

"Soaking is good though, right?" My hands brace his strong shoulders for balance as one broad fingertip slides into my seam.

The sensation is overwhelming, making my hips buck toward him involuntarily while I let out a whimper that doesn't sound like me at all.

Adam looks up at me again, his dark brows pulled together and those lines by his eyes creased with the curiosity in his expression.

"Fuck yeah," he says. "Soaking is fucking awesome. As long as your little cunt's soaking wet because of me."

That probably shouldn't sound hot, but the coarse words only make my growing need worsen. I move my hips, using his hand like I'm scratching an itch.

"Definitely you, Adam," I assure him.

I've touched myself before. I've felt arousal. I know that part of me gets slick but I've never felt like this before. This is next level.

I've never been able to get myself all the way there before. Nothing has ever felt like what I hear other women describe.

This, though. This is different.

Everything about Adam makes me understand , finally.

As soon as I speak, it's like something breaks loose in the big man. With the hand that's less busy, he pulls me to him, the borrowed boxers hitting the floor as Adam drives his face directly into the junction of my thighs.

He doesn't give me time to process what he's doing before he's pushed my legs wider and angled his head to get his mouth where his fingers had been.

My hands grip his shoulders, then the back of his neck, pulling him closer into me when his tongue licks between my folds.

It takes exactly no time at all before I find myself lowered onto my back on the soft rug in the center of Adam's living room floor. The first aid kit and the reason for it forgotten as my lumberjack rescuer crawls onto the floor with me and settles between

my open legs.

"Phoenix, baby, you taste so fucking sweet, girl." His words come to my ears muffled as he speaks them directly into my body.

Whatever he's doing down there, he's doing a damn good job. My thighs open wider, my hands locked in Adam's hair. His tongue spears into my hole and laps up my juices while he continues to mumble incoherent words into my skin.

One muscled arm snakes under my thigh and grips my ass, holding me locked against him like I might try to wiggle away.

As if.

I'm moving my hips, pressing my feet into his back, doing everything I can to chase the feeling that's building inside me.

This isn't arousal, it's not mere want, whatever Adam has unlocked in me is pure, raw, need.

I don't know what it is I'm after, but I know if he stops what he's doing right now I will die.

The thick pad of his thumb finds someplace special and begins a firm motion while his mouth continues to work dark magic against the rest of me.

I'm so close to the summit of whatever is happening to me already, and then he presses a finger to my opening, slipping it inside and easing in deep.

I'll never know how far the digit got; my vision goes black and fills with exploding lights-- if my eyes are even still open that is.

My entire body shakes in an all-over muscle spasm like a thousand rockets all shooting into my core and exploding outward from the spot where Adam's thumb continues to play.

It seems to last forever, and it's also over too soon. My brain clears, the ceiling fan turning lazily overhead comes back into focus. My body relaxes, feeling wrung out and almost drugged.

Slowly, I become aware that Adam is still between my legs, propped on his elbows, staring up at me in awe.

"You're fucking incredible when you come, sweetheart."

Euphoria clouds my senses, making me feel fearless and giddy.

I manage to untangle my fingers from Adam's hair, freeing him to kiss his way up the swell of my belly, over the cotton t-shirt covering my breasts, landing eventually on my own lips for a salty-tangy kiss that I realize must be what I taste like.

"I had no idea it was going to feel like that," I admit in awe as I drop my head back to the floor.

Adam

Her wrecked little body and heavy breathing have me feeling like I did my job right, but her confession fills me with a possessive kind of pride; damn right she didn't know it could feel like that. And I'll make sure she forgets anyone but me making her feel anything near that good.

Then she drops a bomb on me that has my brain losing the ability to remember any civilized thought at all.

"Nobody ever did it for you like that before, eh?" I lay beside her, stroking the side of her face and kissing on her some more. So lost in the way she looks still panting from what I did to her that I can almost ignore the painful throbbing of my hard-on reminding me of its ultimate goal.

A deep blush steals into her pretty face, those thick black lashes seal shut and she smiles shyly as she admits that not only has no one done it for her like that-- no one else has even touched her.

"Except me," she opens her eyes and peers into mine. "I've tried a few times but I could never get there before."

"Are you saying that was the first orgasm you've ever had?"

I scrub my hand over my face and down my beard, completely at a loss for what she's saying.

Blue eyes watch me with a hint of amusement.

"The way you kissed me back on the trail..."

I mean sure, there's adrenaline and gratitude and all that but that kiss sure as hell didn't feel like it came from a beginner.

"Sorry," she says. "I guess I'm just a natural."

"Naturally made for me." I lean in and drag a deep kiss out of her, staking the same claim on her mouth that I'll be putting on the rest of her body just as soon as she assures me we're on the same page.

"Just me." My voice comes out dark, half growl and near feral. "I'm the only one

that's ever going to see you like that, the only one that's ever going to get you there. That's only for me, understand, Phoenix?"

The caveman part of my brain that I've been battling since I first saw her is winning now, with me climbing over her to grind my hard cock against her still bare pussy just to show her what she does to me.

Phoenix's pouty lips pop open in a surprised little "o" when she feels my stiff rod behind my sweatpants.

She oughta run. I'm acting crazy and we've barely known each other for a few hours. But I knew this girl was mine as soon as I saw her and I'm not going to lie to her and pretend otherwise just to play along with some socially acceptable courting ritual.

Instead of shoving me off of her, Phoenix surprises me again; reaching up to grab my hips as she rocks her needy little pussy against the length of me.

"That goes for you too, then." She demands my fidelity in a sultry voice, hoarse with desire obviously reawakening in her body. "You only get to come for me from now on, Adam."

Her claim is my undoing. My dick pulses and my balls tighten and I swear I'm so close to coming, it's all I can do to keep from either embarrassing myself or pulling my cock out and ramming it into her like a mad man; desperate to make sure I put my seed where it belongs.

"Fucking bet, sweetheart. This cock is yours. Just please tell me you want it filling up that virgin cunt of yours because I need to get inside you more than I've ever needed another goddamn thing in my life."

It comes out between gritted teeth and I'm not waiting for the answer I know I'm

about to get.

Scrambling up to my feet and tugging Phoenix along with me, I haul her into my arms and carry her to my bedroom-- there'll be plenty of opportunities to rut on the floor like wild animals in our future, right now, I'm going to make love to my woman like she deserves her first time to be.

Tossing Phoenix onto my king size bed, I straddle her lush body and tug my t-shirt over my head, sending it flying somewhere onto the floor before reaching to add hers with it.

Finally, I've got my woman naked completely and the sight's enough to take my breath away.

"Damn, baby, you look so fucking pretty I'm going to lose my mind."

"You look pretty too," she smirks, running her hands over my chest, tracing my abs and making the muscles jump under her touch.

I watch in awe as Phoenix pulls the sweats and briefs down my hips together, paying close attention to the reverent way she looks at my cock when she pulls me free of my clothes.

"That's big, Adam," she whispers, wrapping both hands around my shaft like she's measuring.

"It'll fit, sweetie. I promise." Blue eyes stare up at me, big as saucers. "And I'm going to make sure it feels good for you, too." I add, bending to kiss those full breasts I've been dreaming about. "Just like last time, remember?"

Maybe it's the promises, or the memory of her first orgasm, or feeling a man's mouth

on her nipples for the first time in her life, but Phoenix's arms wrap around my neck and her body relaxes. She arches her back to better feed me her breasts.

"I'm not on birth control, Adam. If you're serious about being mine forever-- I don't want you to wear anything. I want to feel you."

"Keep talking like that and you're gonna feel me for the next nine months."

Phoenix giggles, and lies back for me, eager for me to make good on my promises-- all of 'em.

I can't believe this sweet little thing has never been touched.

That ends here, because she's mine and I'm going to show her what she's been missing; claim her, breed her, keep her with me forever.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Chapter Seven

Phoenix

O f course I'm nervous. Adam's cock is very much proportionate to the rest of his massive body and I'm a virgin. I've heard that the first time can hurt, but I believe Adam when he says he'll make me feel good like last time.

He works his mouth over each of my breasts, sucking my nipples till they're hard and so sensitive that I almost think I could reach that summit again just from the way it feels when he blows across the moist peaks.

I love the way Adam looks at me, at all of me.

His eyes are dark and intense as they rake over every curve I put on display for him.

His hands take time to caress every place his eyes go too.

He's not picking and choosing the parts of me he likes, he's appreciating every part of me, making me feel safe and loved.

This time, when he dips his head between my legs, he slides a finger inside me first, watching his own hand as he works it in and out of me, making me squirm with the need for more.

When I beg for just that, he smiles and gives me a slight nod, adding a second finger to the first that stretches me from the inside in a way that feels both weird and

wonderful.

"That's it baby," he encourages, keeping up the maddening pace with those sinful fingers while I twist fistfuls of the pillowcase beside my head with hands that I don't know what else to do with.

"Let's find your g-spot, shall we?"

Whatever he does, he changes the angle of his strokes along my insides. I stop feeling the pinch and stretch of having two of Adam's thick fingers stuffed inside me and can only concentrate on how good this feels.

"That's it, Phoenix. I want you to come all over my hand this time while I get this tight little virgin pussy ready for my cock."

The thick beast jutting up from where his sweats and boxers are still pulled low jumps in anticipation and I watch, fascinated, as a bead of clear liquid seeps from the tip and slides down the underside of the mushroom head.

I can't help but lick my lips. I want to put him in my mouth, taste him like he's tasted me, find out how to make him feel as good as he made me feel.

"If you keep looking at my cock like that, we're gonna have to start all over, sweetheart."

My hands are on my own breasts now, my fingers teasing at my nipples. My knees are bent and I'm using the leverage my feet find against the mattress to meet each thrust of Adam's hand.

I'm almost there. Almost up to that same ledge he took me to earlier, the kind of ledge I'm desperate to go over.

Adam's breath is as ragged as mine. He must see how far gone I am because he slides his fingers in deeper still, adding his thumb to dance across my clit while he holds my knees wide so I'm helpless to do anything more than take what he's giving me.

My second orgasm starts with a languid sort of wave building and cresting deep in my core until it overtakes me entirely, shaking my body and making me cry out the only word my brain can remember; Adam's name.

He doesn't wait for me to recover. I fall back in the sheets spent and reeling, dumbly watching Adam strip out of his confining clothes before landing between my spaghetti noodle legs.

"That was good, baby, you did a great job. You felt so good coming on my fingers like that. Now I want you to do that on my dick while I make you mine."

I'm still nodding when he slams into me.

Adam

I 'm not exactly an expert at punching V-cards, so I hope I got Phoenix's tight little channel stretched out enough to take my cock without hurting her. Plus, I figured if I could make her come again, maybe it'd help her relax.

Must have worked, because I drive my dick home without resistance.

She's tight as fuck, even with the way I worked her with my fingers first. The way her walls part for my intrusion and seal around my shaft has me praying for mercy.

Just let me make her come one more time.

I need to make good on my promise that this would feel good every much as I need to

feel those internal muscles clenching down around my cock until I spill inside her womb and hopefully plant my seed there.

"How are you doing, baby?" I pull her tight, her tits sliding against my sweat-soaked body as I catch her lips with mine. "What you need? Tell me what you need so it'll feel good for you."

"I just need to come again, Adam."

Shit, she sounds about as wound up as I feel.

Her pale skin's blotchy with a fevered kind of flush, beads of sweat glisten in her hairline. My girl's got her hands behind my back, her short nails grappling at my lats like she can use 'em for handles.

Phoenix's needy little body is arching and bucking against mine, begging for another release while she grinds her clit up against the root of my cock.

One of my fists clenches in the pillow next to Phoenix's wild hair, my other hand has a grip on her hip that's going to leave marks, holding her body in place while I slam into her over and over, until I can't remember how to move again.

Phoenix goes off on my cock, squeezing me like a vice and milking me for the cum I'm all too ready to give her.

Both of us freeze against one another, temporarily locked in place by our mutual orgasms while I feel my balls empty themselves in a series of pumps until I can't hold my weight up any longer.

Even after I've collapsed, careful to keep my weight from crushing the precious girl beneath me and avoid the scrapes and bruises that I'm sure she'll remember again

soon enough, Phoenix's pussy continues to flutter in tiny spasms around my dick as it slowly softens inside her.

"Did I do it right?" I ask, softly brushing the damp locks of dark hair back from her face.

Phoenix laughs at me and reaches to mirror my move, pushing the hair out of my eyes.

"Did I?"

"Sweetheart, you do it any more right than that and you're gonna kill your old man before he gets a baby in you."

My woman giggles and gives me a kiss and I swear my dick is already trying to make a play for round two.

"How old is my old man?"

"Just hit my thirties last month," I tell her.

I know Phoenix is younger than me, I just haven't bothered to ask by how much. I'm guessing five, maybe six years. Definitely legal, for sure.

"I know you're younger than me," I tell her. "How bad is it?"

"You can buy me a drink in sixteen days."

Not even old enough to drink yet. I groan in mock pain, like the age gap's a deal breaker.

Phoenix slaps my shoulder.

"You said forever. No backsies."

Wrapping her in my arms, I agree. No backsies. I'm gonna love this woman for the rest of my life.

"Nine years," I murmur into her hair between kisses. "Seems like a good spread based on the couples in this town."

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

A few months later

Adam

Walking into Mountain Mocha, I'm struck by how much has changed since April Hart opened the place six years back.

Back then, I was just dumb kid in my early twenties with no clue what I wanted out of life. I was new to the logging team and new in Moonshine Ridge.

When April first came to town to open up her coffee shop, me and my buddies used to enjoy coming by in the mornings to flirt with the new girl.

That was before Raine Hart walked in here one day and stole her heart with one look.

Those two have been married for years now, working on their second baby, and it's hard to remember April ever being anything other than Raine's.

Since then, I've been in here a million times, of course. Mountain Mocha's the only coffee shop on the Ridge and the only place outside my own kitchen where the coffee doesn't taste like it was scraped off a bar-be-cue grill.

"Hey Adam!" April's bright demeanor hasn't changed much over the years. "You here for coffee or for something else?"

It's been three months since I rescued Phoenix from the side of the cliff and claimed her for myself. Now when I walk into the little coffee shop, everyone knows who I

am and what I'm looking for-- even when I order a latte to go with it.

"Figured she'd be done around now," I answer, shaking my head at the cup April holds up in a silent question about that coffee.

"She was just finishing up when I was in back a minute ago. You wanna go back and get her?"

Phoenix and I did keep our clothes on long enough to get to know each other a little better after that first day. Not that either of us learned anything that changed our minds about each other.

I bought her ring the next day.

Turns out, my curvy little sweetie likes to bake. In fact, she'd rented the commercial kitchen that Raine and April installed in the back of the cafe only a few weeks before I found her clinging to the side of a mountain.

This is my girl's dream, comin' in to work an hour before the first birds chirp so she can have the cases filled with baked goods by the time most of the town's people start filing in looking for their daily caffeine fix.

"Did I hear Adam?" Phoenix comes through the door from the back room, her apron already off and her purse in her arm, ready for our trip down to Slow River today.

When she sees me standing aside to let customers choose between cherry turnovers or strawberry tarts, she bolts for my arms, giving me a kiss that'd get us kicked out of most places around town.

But April just gives us a grin as she pulls both the tarts and the turnovers out of the case and boxes them up for the tourists to take with them up to the hot springs where

they say they have a campsite reserved.

"Drive safe," she tells us. "We expect pictures."

"I'll be back in a couple of days. There are fresh loaves in the freezer, directions on the board. If you need help-- don't call."

It's a damn good thing I meant every word of what I said when I told Phoenix I was putting babies in her belly right off because, as far as we can figure, we got pregnant that first day. Or maybe the day after.

We were so busy getting our happily ever after started off right, that Phoenix didn't realize she'd skipped a period till she'd skipped the next one.

A trip to Alice McAllister's general store for a home pregnancy test and a confirmation by Doc Jones a few days later and we're heading down to the Valley this afternoon to pick up a few things.

Maternity clothes, baby things, a marriage license. You know, the usual.

There's a lady down in the valley that runs an Airbnb on her goat farm, so we booked ourselves a private little cabin for a few nights as sort of a makeshift honeymoon.

I'll treat my wife to the real deal after the baby gets here, but for now, we decided it would be a fun way to start our life as Mr. and Mrs. Morris.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 3:08 am

Ten Years Later

Phoenix

It started snowing early this year, which means my husband's logging crew is packing up early for the season.

Adam's had to be in the field for the last few days helping with tear down and last minute logistics before he's finally home with me and the kids for the rest of the season.

I think the hardest adjustment I had to make when we got together was how much he's away from home during the good weather when the crews are active.

Even though, as one of the supervisors now, he gets to spend a lot more time with us even during the season. I always look forward to the first good snow of the year that brings him home until the following spring.

We had our first two babies early, we're pretty sure we got pregnant with Michael that first day we met.

Then our daughter came along just a couple of years later.

We spent the first years of our marriage so wrapped up in being a family that it's been like meeting Adam all over again now that the kids are older and getting interested in spending more time away from us.

Like this weekend, Michael is on an away game with his hockey team and Jayly is staying with friends, giving me a rare chance to have both the house and my husband to myself-- and I have plans to take full advantage of it.

Adam checked in about an hour ago that he was on his way home, so he should be walking through the door any minute.

Checking myself in the mirror, I give my hair a fluff and test buttoning and unbuttoning Adam's flannel shirt to see if it's better to leave it open or leave more to the imagination.

There is some seriously scandalous lingerie under my husband's giant flannel. He's used to me stealing his shirts to lounge in, especially when temperatures start dropping like they have this week, but this time, I don't have my usual leggings underneath.

Hopefully leaving my legs bare is all the hint he needs to get him to unwrap me like a package.

Not that my husband needs to be lured into our bedroom-- or my body. Adam's still as attracted to me as he was from the beginning. Our sex life isn't suffering at all.

Deciding on leaving the top few buttons undone for a little extra peek-a-boo of my cleavage, I turn in front of the full length mirror in our bedroom and jut out a hip.

Between a couple of kids and a thriving career as the owner of what remains the only bakery in town, my curves have only gotten curvier. But it's hard to feel self-conscious about it when the sexiest man I've ever met still can't keep his hands off me.

I hear the idle of a diesel work truck pulling into the driveway and a few minutes later I'm waiting at the door when it opens.

My husband walks in, already in his stocking feet and stripped of his cold weather jacket and hat after leaving them along with his boots in the mudroom out front.

I stand innocently just beyond the tiled flooring of the brief entry space and watch his eyes move around the room, taking in the crackling fire already burning in the fireplace, the pan of cinnamon rolls cooling on the counter, me waiting for him in what probably looks like nothing but one of his plaid shirts, unbuttoned almost to my navel and hanging to my knees, as he sets his keys and wallet on the space at the end of the counter where they tend to live.

His eyes land on me and stick there.

His gaze darkens and the corner of his mouth turns up under his thick whiskers.

"Kids gone?"

My mouth waters, watching Adam slowly unbuttoning his own shirt, his eyes traveling over my body as he does.

"For the whole weekend," I confirm with a nod as my eyes remain transfixed on my husband's slow strip tease.

His shirt comes off and then the long sleeved t-shirt he had under it, revealing a chest that's just as broad as it was the first time I saw it, and abs that have only gotten more defined over time.

I lick my lips, as his belt slides through the loops and hits the floor.

While my job keeps adding softness to my curves, Adam's keeps his body toned and strong.

He's just as jacked as he was when we met, with just a smattering of gray beginning

to invade his hair, including the soft beard I love feeling against my skin and the trail of fur running over his chest and into the waistband of his jeans.

Watching him pop the button of his jeans and lower the zipper has more than my mouth drooling. When he reaches down and pulls out that thick cock, stroking from root to tip, I have to press my thighs together. If I jam my hand into my panties like I'm aching to do, I'll spoil the surprise.

Adam's jeans hit the floor and he pulls his feet from both them and his socks, leaving him naked, hard, and staring at me hungrily.

"We should take advantage of that, don't you think, wife?"

"My thoughts exactly."

"For a woman who's thinking the same thing I am, you're still wearing a lot of clothes."

Adam stalks forward one step. I match him with a step back, my hands slowly unbuttoning the shirt to reveal the barely-there demi-bra.

My husband catches his first glimpse of it and stops, his eyes widening, his lips parting.

I found out early on that Adam has a thing for naughty underwear, especially when it's hidden under one of his shirts.

It's hard to find truly wicked stuff in my size, but then I found a boutique down in Slow River that specializes in plus size lingerie.

Now I have a drawer full of lacy, strappy things that guarantee my husband's imagination is always on me.

"Fuck, baby, what'd you find for me this time."

Adam's closed the distance between us, backing me into the center of the living room and making quick work of stripping me down to nothing but the scarlet red set that I had hidden under the flannel.

"You like?"

I preen under his hooded gaze, rolling my shoulders back and jutting out my breasts that are barely contained in a crisscross of satin straps, lace and mesh.

"I like what's underneath it."

Adam's fingers trace down the straps from my shoulders, sending chills over my exposed skin on their way.

He traces the edges of what can hardly be considered a bra, thumbing my very hard and very visible nipples through the material before fully palming both breasts and kneading them firmly as he takes my mouth with his and pulls me to the floor.

My husband unwraps me like a present, worshipping my flesh with his mouth and hands as he goes.

"You make me crazy, Phoenix," he mumbles into my skin between soft kisses. "All these years and I swear you keep getting sexier."

His large hands roam over my belly, his mouth kissing the marks left behind from carrying his children like he finds them just as sexy as the lingerie, then working his way between my legs.

"Still so fucking wet for me."

Adam growls into my soaking pussy through the thin panel of lace still barring his access.

Pushing the panties aside, he slides a rough finger into my slick channel as his mouth lands on my clit.

This won't be slow. I need him too badly, my orgasm already approaching.

Adam knows exactly what I need and he gives it to me without teasing. I come hard, riding his beard and his hand while my voice echoes off the ceiling beams.

When I open my eyes, my husband stares down at me with the expression I've come to know so well. Wonder, pride, hunger.

Adam loves watching me come undone, and he's still the only man who's ever seen it.

"Nuh uh." His voice is rough with need when he pulls me away from my journey south as I head for that monster jutting up between his legs.

I love wrapping my lips around his cock, taking him deep in my throat and making him lose his fucking mind over what I can do to him with my mouth, but he's got other plans for how we'll get him there this time.

"Ride me, sweetheart," he commands, rolling completely to his back and pulling my thighs across his hips. "I wanna look up at those pretty tits while you bounce on my cock."

"I was thinking of getting you behind me while I'm on all fours," I confess as I lower myself onto his erection. Who am I to argue with a man that wants me on top?

Adam's fingers squeeze into my hips, pulling me down on his length hard enough to make me gasp.

"We're gonna do that too," his voice is so harsh that his words almost sound threatening but if it's a threat, I guess we just unlocked a new kink for me because I swear my pussy leaks around his dick in anticipation. "You said we have all weekend, right?"

He looks up at me, his hands guiding me up and down his hardness as I find a rhythm that's likely to bring us both over the edge without much effort.

I manage to get the words "all weekend" out in gasps as I change my long up and down strokes to something different.

Adam's head drops against the floor, his finger grip tightening but no longer guiding my movements.

He pulls me tight to him and I moan on the sensation of how thoroughly he fills me as he bottoms out when there's no more of him left to push inside me.

I rock my hips, he bucks his. My clit rubs the root of his cock and stars fly through my vision.

Deep inside me, I feel Adam swell. I love the feel of his body pouring itself into mine but this time, I'm too far in my own pleasure, riding wave after wave of the spasms that rock my body while the man I love watches through the mist of his own climax before we collapse in a heap of sweaty kisses and I love yous.

It's been a while since we had the luxury of dozing off naked on the living room floor and we take advantage.

Later, we'll call down to the Brick & Porter and have Donner Hart deliver a pizza. Then we'll go for round two, right here in the living room again, with me bent over the sofa on my knees while my husband fucks me hard from behind like I told him I wanted.

We'll do damage to those cinnamon rolls around midnight, before we finally make our way into our own bed.

And maybe I'll get a round three before we finally give in to sleep so we can start over tomorrow.