



# Take Me, Tex (The Mountain Code #3)

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** He lives by the code. But when she breaks down on his mountain, all bets are off.

I'm a survivalist. A mountain man. A loner by choice.

My world is quiet—just me, my dog Whiskey, and the woods.

But when a curvy, sunshiney librarians bookmobile breaks down on the edge of my land, the mountain code kicks in.

Help her. Protect her. Keep her safe.

Trouble is... once I get her under my roof, I don't want her to leave.

She says she can't stay. But I'm about to show her just how persuasive a mountain man can be.

Take Me, Tex is a short steamy, grumpy/protector, mountain man, OTT instalove romance featuring a reclusive mountain man and a curvy heroine he cant resist. No cliffhangers. No cheating. Just one possessive hero, one defiant heroine, and one very happy ending.

**Total Pages (Source):** 7

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Tex

There's nothing like the sound of silence out here.

Not the pretend silence you get in town, with its background hum of power lines and traffic and a neighbor's dog barking at shadows.

I'm talking real, deep, unshakable quiet .

The kind that settles over you like a weighted blanket and presses all the noise out of your bones.

The kind where you can hear your own heartbeat echoing in your ears, where the whisper of wind through pine needles sounds like a conversation between old friends.

A fact that still blows my mind. Who knew that social media would be the key to funding my hermit lifestyle?

I'm just wrapping up when Whiskey's ears perk up, the soft triangle points swiveling like satellite dishes.

"What is it, girl?" I mutter, watching the way her nose twitches as she scents the air. She doesn't bark or growl. She just lifts her head and stares down the ridge with that uncanny sense she's got, her amber eyes fixed on something my human ears can't catch yet. "What do you hear?"

I listen hard, and after a few moments, I hear it, too. There's a low whine in the

distance. Not an animal. Not the wind. An engine.

Who'd be driving this far up the mountain?

I straighten, my joints protesting after sitting cross-legged for the past hour, and tuck the tripod under my arm.

The metal is warm from the sun, and I can smell the faint metallic tang of the camera equipment mixed with my own sweat and the lingering woodsmoke from the campfire.

My gear bag settles heavy against my shoulder blade as I sling it over one shoulder.

I don't get many visitors up here. That road past my place? It doesn't even have an official name, and doesn't lead to much except my cabin and a whole lot of wilderness beyond.

Which means whoever's driving this way is either lost... or in trouble.

By the time I reach the trailhead that crosses my driveway, the sound has grown louder—a grinding, mechanical wheeze that makes me wince.

I spot the source through the trees: a chunky old bookmobile rumbling up the incline like it's begging for mercy.

The engine coughs and sputters, sending up puffs of steam that smell like burning coolant and desperation.

It makes it twenty more feet before a loud CLUNK rattles through the trees like a gunshot, followed by the unmistakable hiss of a dying engine. The acrid smell of overheated metal drifts toward me on the breeze.

The van shudders, lurches, and comes to a stop.

A woman climbs out, and the door slams with a hollow, defeated sound that echoes off the mountainside.

She's not the librarian who usually drives the mountain route, delivering books to the old-timers and recluses who can't make it to town. Maybe old Ada finally retired.

This woman doesn't look a day over twenty-five, and she's got more curves than a mountain road, each one highlighted by her faded jeans and sunny yellow t-shirt.

Her hair is twisted up into a messy bun that's barely holding on, wispy strands escaping to frame her face.

She's got ink smudged on her left cheek, blue-black like a fountain pen explosion, and she clutches a clipboard to her chest like it's a shield.

The summer breeze carries her scent to me: something clean and floral, like lavender soap, mixed with the papery smell of old books and a hint of vanilla that makes my mouth water.

Whiskey trots ahead, her tail wagging in that easy, confident way she has with people she approves of. The woman takes a startled step back—her sneakers scraping against the gravel—then catches herself and smiles. The expression transforms her entire face, making her eyes crinkle at the corners.

"Oh thank God," she says, her voice carrying a slight tremor that could be relief or nerves. "Are you real, or am I hallucinating from the stress?"

"Real," I say, stepping into view. The afternoon sun warms my shoulders through my flannel shirt, but I can feel the coolness that always comes with mountain evenings

starting to creep into the air. "Name's Tex. This is Whiskey."

"Tex?" Her brows lift, and I catch a glimpse of intelligence in her dark eyes, sharp and curious. "Short for Texas?"

"Short for 'the guy who can probably get your sorry van off the mountain before nightfall.'"

She laughs, and it's a sound like water over stones, bright and clear and natural. "I'm Nora. Nora Bell. And I think my radiator just gave up on life."

"Friday night," I say, glancing at the sky.

The sun sits low now, painting the treetops in shades of amber and gold that make the whole mountain look like it's been dipped in honey.

The air is starting to cool, carrying the promise of a chilly night.

"You're not getting a tow truck up here 'til Monday.

Maybe later, if the part's not in stock. "

Her eyes widen, and I can't help but notice how beautiful they are. Dark brown with flecks of gold that catch the light. "This can't be happening."

I tip my head toward the horizon, where the first stars are already thinking about making an appearance. "You got cell service?"

She pulls out her phone, and I watch her face shift from hope to confusion to mild panic as she holds it up, angling it toward the sky like she's trying to catch invisible signals. The device's screen glows pale blue against her palm. "That would be a no."

"Thought so." I shift my stance, boots crunching on the gravel. "My old truck wouldn't survive if I tried to tow you the hour back to town. And even if it could, no one would be able to look at it until next week—and they'd charge you a fortune."

She sighs. "Then what am I supposed to do?"

"I can tow you back to my place and look at it myself. I'm a decent mechanic. I'll call the auto-parts store in the morning for whatever parts I need, and I'll fix it for free."

She hesitates, and I can practically see the wheels turning behind her eyes. Her teeth worry her lower lip, and she glances from me to Whiskey to the darkening sky.

I don't blame her. Stranger in the woods. Big guy with a big dog. If I were her, I'd think twice too.

"Why would you do that?"

I shrug. "It's a good thing y'all do, bringing books and movies up to the mountain people."

She looks at my face— really looks, like she's reading something written there in the lines around my eyes and the set of my shoulders. Her eyes drift to Whiskey wagging her tail beside me, tongue lolling out in her friendly doggy grin.

And then she gives a tight nod, her shoulders squaring with decision.

"All right," she says, her voice steadier now. "But if you turn out to be a serial killer, I'm warning you... I will haunt you forever."

The dry humor in her tone makes me chuckle, a sound that rumbles up from my chest. "Fair enough."

I head for my truck, already mentally cataloging what I'll need to get her van secured for the night and wondering why the thought of this woman spending the weekend on my mountain doesn't bother me nearly as much as it should.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Nora

I was supposed to be back in town an hour ago.

One last stop on my first official solo book route—a triumphant circuit through the mountain communities with my carefully organized inventory of paperbacks and audiobooks—then a long drive home with my reward cinnamon roll from Murphy's Bakery and a smug sense of accomplishment.

But no. Instead, my bookmobile is being towed up a gravel road that seems to climb straight into the clouds, by a man built like a survivalist lumberjack and his very good dog.

The man—Tex—drives a beat-up Chevy that somehow still manages to look powerful and dependable.

The truck's interior smells like worn leather and pine air freshener, with an undertone of motor oil and something masculine that I can't quite place but that makes my pulse quicken.

The dog is seated between us, a sweet, scruffy mutt named Whiskey who licks my arm to demand pets.

How'd I get myself into this mess?

The truck rocks gently as we climb, and I try not to have a meltdown.



Or a crush.

Which would be easier if Tex wasn't a walking fantasy in faded jeans that hug his thighs just right, and a thermal shirt the color of charcoal with sleeves shoved up over his forearms. Those forearms are a work of art, corded with muscle and dusted with dark hair, his hands strong on the steering wheel.

His jaw is shadowed with a dark beard that looks like it would scratch in all the best ways, and when he glances at me in the rearview mirror, his eyes are the color of storm clouds.

Ugh. Nora. Get a grip.

The truck's engine hums steadily as we climb, and through the open windows, I can smell the mountain evening coming alive—pine sap and cool earth, the green scent of moss and ferns, and somewhere in the distance, the faint smokiness of a campfire.

When we finally pull up to his cabin, I blink in surprise.

It's... cozy.

Not in the Pinterest way, with distressed wood signs and mason jar lighting.

There are no fairy lights or artfully arranged throw pillows or color-coded bookshelves.

But it's clean and solid, built from honey-colored logs that glow in the fading light.

Smoke curls from a stone chimney, carrying the rich scent of burning oak.

There's a heavy wooden porch swing that creaks softly in the evening breeze, and the

whole place is surrounded by the kind of deep, comfortable quiet that makes you want to whisper.

I can hear water running somewhere nearby, probably a creek, and the soft rustle of leaves in the wind.

Tex hops out, his boots hitting the gravel with a solid thunk, and unhooks the chain from my van. "We'll leave it here for now," he says, his voice carrying easily in the still air. "I'll check it out in the morning before the auto-parts store opens."

"Thank you. I'm just going to get my bag," I say, walking toward the bookmobile. I reach inside to grab my massive tote from the pile of library supplies. The canvas feels rough under my palms, and I'm grateful for my librarian habit of overpacking. I don't have spare clothes, unfortunately, but there's deodorant, toothpaste, and a travel-sized toothbrush tucked into a side pocket.

Be prepared for anything, Miss Ada warned me when I took the job.

Though I doubt she could have predicted I'd be stranded with a man who looks like he stepped off the cover of a romance novel.

He leads me up the porch steps, the wood solid beneath my feet, and flips on a single light that casts everything in warm yellow. The cabin opens into one big room that smells like cedar and wood smoke and something cooking that makes my stomach rumble embarrassingly loud.

The kitchen is small but efficient, with open shelves displaying mismatched dishes and cast iron pans that look well-used and well-loved.

A stone fireplace dominates one wall, with a few glowing embers still winking in the grate.

There's a well-worn couch with a quilt tossed over the back—handmade, with small, careful stitches in blues and greens that remind me of the forest outside.

Whiskey trots to a dog bed in the corner—a thick, cushioned affair that's clearly been claimed as her personal kingdom—and flops down with a dramatic sigh that makes me smile.

"You hungry?" Tex asks, already moving toward the stove. "I've got venison chili and cornbread."

My stomach growls so loudly I wince. The scent of chili hits me now, rich and spicy, with hints of cumin and something smoky that makes my mouth water. "That's not fair. You can't just rescue me and offer chili."

His mouth twitches like it's thinking about a smile, and I catch a glimpse of something softer beneath that rugged exterior. "It's not gourmet, but it's hot."

'Hot' should be this guy's middle name...

I sit at the small wooden table—the surface worn smooth by years of use—while he ladles chili into mismatched bowls. He hands me a spoon, and our fingers brush for just a moment. His skin is warm and slightly rough, and I feel that brief contact all the way up my arm.

The chili is incredible. Rich and hearty, with tender chunks of meat that practically melt on my tongue.

The cornbread is golden and crumbly, with a hint of sweetness that balances the heat perfectly.

We eat in comfortable silence, the kind you don't expect with strangers, with only the

soft sounds of our spoons against ceramic and Whiskey's gentle snores.

When we're finished, I rinse the dishes in water that runs cold and clean from the tap, while he wipes down the table with methodical care.

The simple domesticity of it feels surprisingly intimate, like we're two people who've been sharing evening chores for years instead of strangers who met an hour ago.

He disappears into a back room and returns with a folded T-shirt and a toothbrush still in its wrapper. The shirt is soft cotton, worn to perfect comfort, and when I shake it out, I can smell the clean scent of laundry detergent.

"You can take the couch," he says, setting the items on the armrest. His voice is rougher now, like he's fighting some internal battle. "Bathroom's through there."

I glance at the shirt in my hands. It's enormous, with Tex & Whiskey's Survival Guide printed across the front in faded letters. The fabric is incredibly soft, worn thin in all the right places, and I run my fingers over the cotton like I'm memorizing its texture.

I open my mouth to thank him, but my curiosity gets the best of me. "What is Tex & Whiskey's Survival Guide?"

He shoves his hands in his pockets. Is that heat in his cheeks? "Um, I have a YouTube channel," he says.

"You cover wilderness skills and stuff?"

He nods. "Yep."

I catalogue the information for later. I'll definitely be looking up his channel the first

chance I get.

"Well, this is really kind of you," I say softly, meaning it more than I can express. "I promise I'm not usually this helpless."

"You're not helpless," he says, his voice carrying a conviction that makes something warm unfurl in my chest. "Your van broke down. That's all."

And with that, he nods once, a gesture that somehow manages to be both reassuring and final, and retreats to the back room, closing the door behind him with a soft click.

Leaving me standing in his living room with a racing heart, a soft shirt with his name on it, and the unsettling suspicion that I might sleep better on this mountain than I have in years.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Tex

Whiskey usually whines at the door just after dawn, her claws clicking against the hardwood as she paces, so I'm trained to wake up to let her out. This morning, I don't hear her, though.

I roll out of bed and pull on a flannel shirt that's soft from years of washing.

The fabric smells like cedar from the chest I keep it in, and the morning air is crisp for summer—that cool mountain breeze that seeps through the windows I always leave cracked open, carrying the scent of dew-damp pine and the distant promise of warming earth.

No reason to shut the world out when you've worked this hard to escape it.

I pad into the kitchen on bare feet, the floorboards cool and solid beneath my toes, and stop dead in my tracks.

Nora is curled up on the couch, fast asleep, with Whiskey wedged beside her like a furry space heater.

My T-shirt hangs off one bare shoulder, revealing the elegant curve of her collarbone and the soft hollow at the base of her throat.

Her legs are tucked under the quilt—that old blue and green one my grandmother made—and her hair is now a complete mess of dark waves that spread across the pillow like spilled ink.

She's beautiful.

Too beautiful.

The morning light streaming through the windows catches in her hair, picking out threads of gold and copper I didn't notice last night.

Her face is soft in sleep, lips slightly parted, and I can see the faint smudge of ink still on her cheek.

She looks younger like this, vulnerable in a way that makes something protective and possessive rise in my chest.

I look away before I do something stupid.

I busy myself with making coffee instead, the familiar ritual grounding me.

The beans are a dark roast I get from a shop in town, and the smell as they brew is rich and comforting.

I can hear the coffee maker gurgling, the sound mixing with the soft rush of wind through the trees outside and Whiskey's contented sighs from the couch.

Try not to imagine what she'd look like waking up in my bed instead of on my couch.

Don't go there, Tex.

When she finally stirs, making a soft sound that goes straight to my gut, I'm already halfway through making breakfast. Six eggs crackle in a cast iron pan that's older than I am, and bacon sizzles on the griddle.

She rubs sleep from her eyes with the back of her hand, her movements slow and graceful, and mumbles something that sounds like "mmm, books. "

Did she mean bacon?

Holy hell, even her sleepy mumbles are adorable.

She stumbles over to the kitchen area, her bare feet silent on the wood floor, and I try not to notice how my shirt falls to mid-thigh on her smaller frame, or how the morning light makes her skin glow like honey.

"Morning," she says, her voice husky with sleep. "I dreamed I was rescued by a rugged woodland king."

"Someone reads too many novels," I say, handing her a mug of coffee that's still steaming. Our fingers brush again as she takes it, and I feel that same electric jolt from last night.

Her eyes widen in mock horror. "Impossible."

I chuckle. "I took a look at your van, and it should be easy to fix, so long as the parts store has what I need. They open at eight, so I'll call then."

"Thanks again. Seriously." She cradles the mug with both hands like it's a precious thing and gives me a sleepy smile that hits me like a sucker punch to the gut.

Her eyes are still soft with sleep, but there's something else there...

a warmth that makes my chest tight. "When the van broke down, I thought I'd be spending the night in the middle of the woods.



I didn't expect a warm place to sleep, much less wake up to coffee and bacon. "

The bacon pops and hisses in the pan, and I flip it with more force than necessary. "Sit. Eat."

Whiskey thumps her tail approvingly from her spot on the couch, and I catch Nora smiling at the dog like they're sharing some private joke.

At eight sharp, I call the auto shop down in Cedar Hollow. The phone crackles with static, and I have to shout to be heard over the poor connection. It takes three different transfers and a lot of frustrated waiting, but I finally get a guy named Keith on the line.

He sounds exhausted, slightly annoyed, and like he's already had too much coffee.

"Fan relay switch?" he repeats, like I asked for something cursed or impossible to find. "Gonna have to order that in."

"How long?" I ask.

"Monday morning delivery, if we're lucky. Could be Tuesday."

I hang up and brace myself before turning to Nora, who's now feeding Whiskey a bite of bacon under the table like she's been living here forever. The sight of her, comfortable and natural in my space, does something dangerous to my equilibrium.

She looks up, and I can see in her eyes that she's already read my expression. "Bad news?"

"Part won't be in 'til Monday or Tuesday."

"Oh." Her smile falters for half a second, and I catch a glimpse of disappointment that she quickly covers. "Okay. That's... okay. I can just hike back to the ranger station and catch a ride from there."

I shake my head, the idea of her walking those dangerous mountain roads alone making something cold settle in my stomach. "Not happening."

Her eyebrows lift. "Why not?"

"I'm not sending you off alone with no backup." The thought of something happening to her—a twisted ankle, a wrong turn, worse—makes my jaw clench.

She frowns, and I can see her hackles rising slightly. "So what, I'm just stuck here?"

I bristle at her words.

"I'll take you back to town if you want." I force my voice to stay level and reasonable. "No one is holding you hostage."

"I didn't mean—"

"Or you can stay," I say, my voice sounding harsher than I intended.

The morning air stirs through the open windows, carrying the scent of warming earth and pine sap, and I watch her consider her options. There's a beat of silence where I can hear my own heartbeat, the distant call of a hawk, and the soft sound of her breathing.

Then she asks, "And what happens if I stay?"

The question hangs in the air between us like a challenge, and I don't answer right

away.

Instead, I let my eyes sweep over her, taking in the way the morning light catches in her hair, the soft curve of her shoulder where my shirt has slipped, and the way her hands are wrapped around that coffee mug like she's trying to warm herself from the inside out.

Her bare shoulder, her lips slightly parted like she's already imagining the answer.

What happens if she stays?

I touch the brim of my coffee mug to my lip, using it to hide the thoughts that threaten to slip out—thoughts about what I'd like to do with two more days, thoughts about the way she fits in my space like she belongs here, thoughts about the soft sounds she might make if I kissed her the way I've been wanting to since the moment I saw her.

"We spend the weekend together," I say finally.

But my tone says more . Says everything .

And I think she hears it, because her cheeks flush pink like sunrise, and she doesn't look away.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Nora

I should go.

Any sensible woman would accept the ride back to town, thank this man for his hospitality, and get as far away from this dangerous chemistry as possible. I should call my supervisor, explain the situation, arrange for someone else to cover my route on Monday.

But when Tex looks at me like that—all quiet intensity and unspoken promise, his gray eyes dark with something that makes my skin feel too tight—I don't want to be sensible.

I want to stay.

The morning air through the windows carries the scent of pine and possibility, and I can feel my pulse thrumming in my throat like a trapped bird.

"It's only two days," I say, pretending I'm still deciding when we both know I made up my mind the moment he said stay. "And you're sure I'm not a burden?"

He just raises one dark brow, and the gesture is so perfectly him—economical, confident, with just a hint of amusement—that I feel something flutter in my chest.

"Whiskey likes you."

I glance over at the dog, who is now dozing on the couch. "Ah, the ultimate seal of

approval."

"She doesn't like many people."

There's something in his voice; a note of sincerity that makes me look at him more carefully. His face is serious, and I realize he's not just being polite. This matters to him.

"Smart girl," I say softly.

Tex doesn't say anything, but there's a glint in his eyes that makes my heart skip like a stone across water.

We spend the morning outside, where the mountain air is crisp and clean, carrying the scent of warming earth and the distant sound of running water.

Tex wants to make sure I don't get bored, which is laughable, considering I'm a librarian with a backpack full of books and an endless capacity for entertaining myself.

But he insists on teaching me how to filter water using a sock, some charcoal, and a soda bottle, which is both ridiculous and fascinating.

His hands are sure and competent as he demonstrates, and I find myself watching the way his fingers move, the way he handles each component with practiced ease.

"The charcoal removes impurities," he explains, his voice taking on a different quality when he's teaching—more patient, more detailed. "And the sock acts as a preliminary filter for the larger particles."

He's surprisingly patient when I mess up the layering, just chuckling—a sound that

rumbles up from his chest and makes my toes curl in my sneakers—and saying, "Try again.

" His breath is warm against my cheek when he leans over to correct my grip, and I catch a hint of his scent—clean and masculine, with that underlying note of smoke and musk.

By the time the sun hits high noon, we've built a small fire pit together, our hands working in tandem to arrange the stones. The rocks are warm from the sun and rough against my palms, and when our fingers accidentally brush as we reach for the same stone, I feel that spark of electricity again.

We boil coffee over the fire just for fun, the flames crackling and sending up sparks that dance in the clear mountain air. The coffee tastes different this way—smokier, more complex, with an edge of wood and fire that makes even the simple act of drinking feel like an adventure.

My hands smell like smoke and pine sap, and my cheeks hurt from smiling. The sun is warm on my shoulders, and I can feel myself relaxing in a way I haven't in months. Maybe years.

And I'm completely, totally doomed.

Because this man? He's everything I didn't know I wanted.

Rough around the edges in all the right ways.

Steady as the mountain beneath my feet. Quiet in a way that feels intentional rather than uncomfortable.

Capable in a way that feels ancient and grounding, like he could handle anything the

world threw at him and still have energy left over to take care of me.

It's not just attraction, though God knows there's plenty of that. It's comfort. It's the feeling of being seen and valued and protected. It's belonging.

It's... terrifying.

Later that afternoon, clouds start to roll in, gray and heavy with the promise of rain. The air pressure drops, making my ears pop, and the breeze picks up, cooler now, brushing goosebumps up my arms and carrying the ozone scent of an approaching storm.

Tex opens the screen door, and I hear the hinges creak softly in the still air. He nods toward the cabin, his expression alert and watchful in the way of someone who reads weather like a book. "Come on. Looks like we're gettin' a shower."

I shower quickly in his small bathroom, washing off the day's accumulation of smoke and pine sap and sweat.

The water is hot, and the pressure is perfect, and I use his soap—something simple and clean that smells like him.

When I towel dry my hair, I catch my reflection in the mirror and barely recognize myself.

My cheeks are flushed, my eyes bright, and I look.

.. alive in a way I haven't in too long.

I change into the same oversized T-shirt from last night, the fabric soft and familiar against my skin, and a pair of clean shorts.

I step into the main room just as a low roll of thunder echoes in the distance, the sound vibrating through the floorboards and into my bones. The air feels electric, charged with possibility and the approaching storm.

Tex is at the stove, reheating the chili, his broad shoulders relaxed but alert. He's changed into a clean shirt, dark gray this time, and it clings to his frame in a way that makes my mouth go dry.

He turns when he hears me—and stops.

I freeze, suddenly very aware of my bare legs and the way his shirt hangs off my frame.

The fabric is soft and well-worn, and it falls to mid-thigh, leaving my legs exposed from the knees down.

I can feel the air conditioning raising goosebumps on my skin, and I'm acutely conscious of the way the cotton moves with each breath.

His eyes drag over me slowly. Deliberately. Starting at my feet and moving up with the kind of thorough attention that makes heat pool in my belly and my breath catch in my throat.

And then his gaze lands on mine, and the air between us crackles with electricity that has nothing to do with the storm outside.

"Um, hi." The words catch in my throat like they're tangled up with my suddenly racing pulse.

"Hungry?" he asks, his voice low and rough in a way that makes my knees weak.



I nod, not trusting my voice.

He sets down the spoon with deliberate care, the metal clanking softly against the ceramic bowl, and I can hear the rain starting to tap against the roof like a soft drumbeat. The sound is rhythmic and soothing, but it does nothing to ease the tension stretching between us like a wire pulled taut.

He closes the distance between us in three measured steps, and suddenly he's right there, close enough that I can smell his soap and feel the heat radiating from his skin. Close enough that I have to tilt my head back to meet his eyes.

"You sure you want to stay?" he asks, his voice barely above a whisper.

The question is loaded with meaning, and we both know he's not just talking about the weekend anymore. He's talking about this moment, this choice, this precipice we're balanced on.

I nod again, my pulse hammering so hard I'm sure he can hear it.

His fingers brush my cheek—rough and warm and careful, like he's handling something precious—and I feel that touch all the way down to my toes.

"I'm tryin' real hard to be a gentleman," he murmurs, his thumb tracing the line of my jaw.

I tilt my chin up, meeting his eyes with all the courage I can muster. "Don't."

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Tex

She says don't.

Don't be a gentleman.

Don't hold back.

Don't walk away when everything in me has been screaming to claim her since the moment I found her stranded on the side of this mountain with ink on her cheek and vulnerability in her eyes.

So, I don't.

I close the space between us in one step and cup her face in both hands, my palms rough against her soft skin, tilting her head up to meet mine.

Her breath catches—a soft, sharp sound that goes straight to my blood—and those perfect lips part just slightly, like an invitation I've been waiting for all my life.

That's all I need.

I kiss her like I've earned it.

Like she's mine.

Like the mountain sent her here for this exact moment, and I'm not fool enough to

question fate when it lands something this perfect in my lap.

She melts against me with a soft whimper that sends heat flashing through my bloodstream like lightning through a storm cloud. Her hands fist in the front of my shirt, the fabric bunching under her grip, and she yanks me closer like she can't bear even an inch of space between us.

I lift her right off the floor without breaking the kiss, her body light and warm in my arms, and she wraps her legs around my waist like it's the most natural thing in the world. She tastes so fucking sweet, and when she nips at my lower lip, I growl low in my throat.

She's perfect. Responsive. Made for me.

I carry her to the couch, my hands spanning her waist, lowering her onto the cushions as carefully as I can manage with blood roaring in my ears and need pulsing behind my zipper like a second heartbeat. The quilt is soft beneath her, and her hair spreads across the pillow.

Her thighs part instinctively, hips shifting in a way that makes my mouth go dry, and I fit between them like I was made to be there. Like every choice I've made, every path I've taken, has led me to this moment, this woman, this perfect fit.

"Nora," I growl against her neck, pressing kisses to the soft skin there, licking the salty sweat from her skin. Her pulse beats quick and strong against my lips, and I can feel the vibration of her soft moans in my chest. "You sure about this?"

"Yes." Her voice is breathless, desperate, and her hands are everywhere—my shoulders, my back, tangling in my hair. "Tex, please—don't stop."

Don't. It's quickly becoming my favorite word.

I slip my hands beneath that worn T-shirt— my T-shirt—and discover she's not wearing a bra.

The discovery hits me like a physical blow, and I have to close my eyes for a moment to steady myself.

Her skin is soft and warm, and when I run my thumbs over her nipples, she arches beneath me with a gasp that makes me want to do wicked things.

My mouth finds her breast, tongue circling one perfect peak while she writhes beneath me, her breath coming in short pants that sound like music. When she gasps my name like a prayer, I feel something primitive and possessive rise in my chest.

I want to take my time.

I also want to ruin her in the best possible way.

So, I do both.

I tease her until she's writhing under me, her body moving restlessly against mine, moaning and gasping and begging in words that get more fragmented with each pass of my tongue. My name on her lips turns to a whimper, then a curse, then a broken, needy cry that makes my blood sing.

I strip her slowly, worshiping every inch of skin I uncover with kisses and touches that make her shiver and arch. Her body is perfect, all soft curves and warm hollows, and I map every inch with my hands and mouth until she's trembling and desperate beneath me.

Then I strip myself, watching her eyes go wide when she sees me—like she didn't quite expect the full mountain man package—but she doesn't look away.

Instead, her gaze travels over me with an appreciation that makes my skin burn, and when she reaches for me, her touch is soft and sure and everything I've been craving without knowing it.

Her hand looks so tiny wrapped around my cock, and the sight nearly undoes me. Then she leans forward to take me in her mouth.

Oh. My. God. It feels too fucking good. I could let go... could come right now. But I force myself to take a deep breath before gently pushing her away.

She pouts, but only for a moment. And when I position myself at her entrance, she moans. "Tex..."

"Are you ready, sweetheart?"

She licks her lips. "Yes."

When I finally sink into her, I swear I lose my damn mind.

She's soft and warm and perfect, her body welcoming me like she was made for this, made for me.

The feeling of being inside her is so intense it steals my breath, and I have to brace my hands on either side of her head and close my eyes to keep from losing control completely.

I thrust slow at first, savoring every inch, every breathy gasp she gives me, every flutter of her muscles around me.

The couch creaks softly beneath us, and outside the rain patters against the windows like nature's own percussion section.

But all I can focus on is her—the way she feels, the way she smells, the sounds of sweet pleasure on her lips.

But it doesn't stay slow. It can't.

She's grabbing at my back, her nails digging into my shoulders hard enough to leave marks, her cries getting louder and more desperate with every roll of my hips.

The sound of her voice, breathless and wanting, drives me higher until I'm moving faster, deeper, chasing something that feels bigger than both of us.

I brace a hand on the couch arm and tilt her hips just right—and that's it. She shatters.

I feel her break apart under me, her body clenching around me like she's trying to pull me deeper, and I hear her cry out my name as she pulses and trembles in my arms. The sight of her coming undone, the feel of her pleasure rippling through her body, pushes me over the edge with a growl and a promise I don't mean to say out loud.

"You're mine now."

The words hang in the air between us, rough and possessive and completely honest, and when she looks at me with those dark eyes still soft with pleasure, I know she heard every word.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Nora

I wake up warm.

That's the first thing I notice. Not just from the heavy quilt or the soft heat of Whiskey curled at my feet, her fur tickling my ankle, but from the furnace of a man wrapped around me—one strong arm slung across my waist like he's staking a claim, his chest pressed to my back, his breath slow and steady against the curve of my neck.

Tex.

Last night comes rushing back in a dizzy, delicious flood.

The way he looked at me like I was something sacred and wild all at once.

The way he touched me like he meant every second of it, like he was memorizing me with his hands.

The way I shattered in his arms—and the way he held me together after, whispering things against my skin that made me feel precious and wanted and completely his.

The way he fed me dinner and then carried me to his bed to make love to me again.

And again after that.

My whole body aches in the best way, a pleasant soreness that reminds me of every

touch, every kiss, every moment of connection that felt like coming home.

I try to shift gently, but his arm tightens instinctively, pulling me even closer against the solid warmth of his chest. I can feel his heartbeat against my back, steady and sure, and smell the lingering scent of woodsmoke and pine on his skin.

"You tryin' to sneak out on me already?" he murmurs, his voice all gravel and heat, rough with sleep and something deeper.

I smile into the pillow, the fabric soft against my cheek. "Didn't think you'd want to cuddle."

"I just spent half the night inside you," he says, pressing a kiss to the back of my shoulder that makes me shiver. His lips are warm and slightly rough, and I can feel the scratch of his beard against my skin. "You think I'm lettin' you go that easy?"

A happy sigh escapes me before I can stop it, the sound practically purring with contentment.

We stay like that for a long time—wrapped up in each other, letting the world drift by outside the windows. No deadlines. No schedules. No expectations. Just warmth and safety and the perfect weight of his arm around my waist.

The morning light filters through the curtains, painting everything in shades of gold and amber, and I can hear birds singing outside—a cheerful chorus that sounds like celebration

Eventually, I peel myself away from his warmth and wander into the kitchen, wearing his T-shirt again and nothing else. The floorboards are cool beneath my bare feet, and I can feel his eyes following me as I move around his space like I belong here.



I find a sticky note on the counter, written in bold, masculine handwriting that somehow manages to be both confident and careful.

Called the parts guy this morning. Still on for Monday. You're mine 'til then. --T

I should laugh. Roll my eyes. Say something sarcastic about his presumption.

Instead, I press the note to my chest like an idiot, feeling something warm and bright unfurl in my ribcage.

Whiskey trots over with a tail wag that nearly knocks over a chair, and I crouch down to scratch behind her ears. Her fur is soft and warm, and she leans into my touch with a contented sigh.

"I think your dad's a little intense," I whisper, but there's no complaint in my voice.

She licks my hand with her rough pink tongue and flops onto her back for belly rubs, completely shameless in her demand for attention.

I make coffee in his simple coffee maker, then take it out to the porch and settle into the swing. The chains creak softly as I curl up with my legs tucked under me, just watching the mist burn off the treetops like the mountain is slowly waking up.

The view is breathtaking—rolling hills covered in every shade of green imaginable, with morning light filtering through the trees and turning everything golden.

And I realize I don't want to go back.

Not just because of what happened between us last night, though my body still hums with the memory of his hands on my skin. Not just because of the mountain air or the dog who's already stolen my heart with her gentle eyes and boundless affection.

Because of Tex.

I think I've been alone for so long I forgot what it feels like to be wanted . Not for my efficiency, not for my credentials, not for the way I can make a library run like clockwork.

Just... me.

Messy hair and morning breath and all the complicated, imperfect pieces that make up who I am.

When he comes out a little later, hair damp from the shower and wearing a T-shirt that hugs his chest in a way that should be illegal, he pauses in the doorway. The morning light catches in his dark hair, and his eyes are the color of storm clouds, soft and intense all at once.

"You okay?"

I nod, meaning it more than I've meant anything in a long time. "More than okay."

He crosses the porch in those long, easy strides, hooks a thumb under my chin, and tilts my face up to his. His skin is warm and slightly rough, and I can see the concern in his eyes, the careful way he's watching my expression.

"Nora..." His voice is thick with emotion, and he clears his throat. "I don't want this to end on Monday."

I shake my head slowly, holding his gaze. "I don't want this to ever end."

He leans in, brushing his lips over mine in a kiss that tastes like promise and possibility, then pulls back just enough to whisper:

"You stay alone... until the mountain sends you a woman."

I look at him, confused. "What?"

"It's just something people around here say. They call it 'The Mountain Code.' I never believed in it... but now I do. The mountain sent you to me."

My face stretches into a wide smile. "Well," I murmur, tugging him down for another kiss, "I hope it told you I'm staying."

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

Nora

One month later

I never thought I'd fall in love on the side of a mountain.

But now? I can't imagine my life anywhere else.

It's been four weeks since the bookmobile broke down and Tex invited me to stay the weekend. Four weeks of waking up in his arms, of learning the rhythms of mountain life, of falling asleep to the sound of wind through pine trees and Whiskey's contented sighs from her bed.

The van's fixed now, and the book route is back on schedule. I still deliver paperbacks and DVDs to the far corners of the county, winding through mountain roads to reach the library's most remote patrons.

The only difference now?

I always come home to Tex.

I love coming home to him. I can usually see him through the kitchen window, making dinner with the same careful attention he brings to everything else.

Whiskey always bounds off the porch to greet me, her tail wagging so hard her whole body wiggles, and I drop to my knees to accept her enthusiastic kisses.

Sometimes Tex rides with me, claiming that the roads are too rough or the boxes are too heavy for me to go alone.

He's added a Books in the Wild segment for his channel, where he ties survival skills to titles I bring on my route.

Last week, he made a firestarter using dryer lint and tied it to The Hunger Games , his deadpan delivery making me laugh so hard I nearly choked on my coffee.

Today, he stayed behind while I wrapped up a few quick deliveries to the immediate area. When I pull into the drive, gravel crunching under my tires, there's a note pinned to the cabin door in his bold handwriting.

Meet me and Whiskey on the back trail. --T

I follow the trail behind the cabin, winding through trees dappled in late-summer sunlight that filters through the leaves in shifting patterns of gold and green. The air is still warm but already starting to whisper of fall, carrying the scent of changing leaves and ripening berries.

After a few minutes, I spot him. Tex is waiting at the overlook where we sometimes come to watch the sunset, hands in his pockets, that lopsided smile tugging at his lips like he can't help himself.

He's wearing the blue flannel I love, the one that brings out his eyes, and his hair is slightly mussed like he's been running his hands through it.

"You brought me all the way out here just to look handsome and smoldery?" I tease, stepping up beside him and breathing in the familiar scent of home .

"Partially," he says, his voice carrying that note of carefully controlled excitement that I've learned to recognize. He looks around. "Where's my accomplice?"

Whiskey trots forward, tail wagging like mad, her head held high. There's something tied to her collar. A scrap of soft flannel that stands out against the worn leather.

I blink, my heart suddenly beating so hard I can hear it in my ears. "What's that?"

I stare at Tex, who's watching me with an expression that's equal parts nervous and certain.

A mischievous smile dances on his lips. "Hmmm?"

I smack him playfully. "Don't mess with me, Tex."

He chuckles before kneeling to pet Whiskey. He unties the scrap of flannel from her collar, and a velvet box falls into his hand.

My hands fly to my mouth. "Oh!"

He drops to one knee—just like that, in the middle of the woods, his flannel sleeves rolled up over those strong forearms, boots dusted with the earth of the mountain we both love, eyes shining with something fierce and tender and completely honest.

"You were sent to me," he says, his voice rough with conviction.

"No doubt in my mind. And I don't need fancy words to tell you how I feel, but I'll say this...

If you'll let me, I want to spend the rest of my life loving you.

Keeping you safe. Making you laugh. And reading every damn romance novel you toss at me, no matter how many shirtless cowboys are on the cover. "

I laugh through a choked sob, the sound bright and breathless in the mountain air.

"Tex..."

"Marry me, Nora."

The words hang in the air between us, simple and perfect and more than I could have ever dreamed for.

I throw my arms around him, nearly knocking us both over in my enthusiasm. "Yes," I whisper against his ear. "Yes, yes, yes, yes."

Whiskey barks once, like she's sealing the deal, and her tail wags so hard she nearly falls over.

And when Tex kisses me, with the whole mountain stretched out behind us and the promise of forever pressed between our hearts, I know one thing for sure:

I may have come here to deliver stories.

But the mountain gave me my own.