



Loving
THE

MOUNTAIN MAN

BACHELORS OF BLACKBEAR BLUFF

LILAH HART

LOVING THE MOUNTAIN MAN

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Bachelors of Blackbear Bluff, Book 3

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Epilogue

A gorgeous blonde in a skimpy two-piece bathing suit was climbing out of the Blackbear Bluff Inn swimming pool. And I was here for it.

I played it cool, continuing my walk toward the inn's front entrance. But out of the corner of my eye, I was watching.

And she was watching me.

I saw her stop, towel held in front of that curvalicious body, and stare at me as I crossed the small parking lot. The entire area between Scoreboard Bar and Grill and the inn was about as big as the half acre of land my cabin set on. Yet somehow, they'd managed to squeeze in a swimming pool and parking lot.

"It's closed," she called out.

Those two words stopped my footsteps. What was closed? The inn? Impossible. The front office was open twenty-four hours a day, year-round.

"The person working there had to step away," she said. "There's a sign. Thought I'd save you some steps."

Then, as if to dismiss me, she shrugged and turned her back to me. She tossed her towel aside, took three steps, and dove into the pool.

At that point, a normal person would leave. They'd just hop into their vehicle and move on with their life. But my vehicle was a motorcycle, and it was parked all the way over in the bar parking lot. My plan had just been to pop over here

to run this errand for Scoreboard's bartender. I hadn't planned on getting waylaid by a soaking-wet beauty.

Or getting laid at all.

"That's okay," I said to nobody in particular.

With all the splashing, she wouldn't have been able to hear me even if her head was above water. I looked around, confirmed nobody was watching, and started toward the wrought iron fencing that surrounded the pool. I'd just wait here patiently until she finished these laps, and then I'd leave this envelope with her.

Maybe she sensed I was watching her. Suddenly, after the fourth lap, she came to a stop at my end of the pool. She crossed her arms in front of her on the concrete and lifted her body upward just a little, staring at me. That was when I got a better look at her.

She was even more beautiful from this distance. Her nose and cheeks were red, making me wonder if she'd gotten a little too much sun. But it was those big, bright green eyes that really caught my attention. They were accentuated by a pair of plump, cherry-red lips.

She chewed on the bottom one as she seemed to study me. "It's locked." She nodded toward the front entrance to the inn before shifting her gaze back to me. "I tried to open it. The sign says he'll be back at two. I can't check in, so I thought I'd go for a swim."

"So, you broke into the hotel pool."

I didn't bother to stop the sly grin that spread over my face. But her expression hardened, and I could tell she was taking the comment way too seriously.

"I have to do something to kill the time until he returns." She gestured toward the parking lot. "Besides, it's a hot day. My plan was to go swimming as soon as I checked in."

I lifted my hands in mock surrender. "Hey, you don't have to defend yourself to me. I'm all for breaking rules. In fact, if I had a pair of swim trunks with me, I'd probably jump in with you. Did you just happen to have your swimsuit on?"

It was probably none of my business, but I couldn't help asking. The image of her changing out of her swimsuit in her car in this parking lot flashed through my mind. My cock immediately stirred to life. What I wouldn't give to have been crossing the parking lot around the time she removed her top. Or maybe she took it all off, then changed into the bathing suit. In that case, I would have loved to have passed by just as she got everything off and was shimmying that pink bathing suit bottom over her knees and up those luscious thighs.

"I wore it, along with my cover-up to drive here." She gestured toward the chair. "I drove all the way from Roanoke this morning. My goal was to check in and head straight to the pool. I even brought my own beach towel."

She'd driven all the way here in this two-piece bathing suit with a cover-up. That meant she hadn't worn a bra. For some reason, that imagery fascinated me almost as much as her changing in the parking lot. I pictured myself sitting in the passenger seat, sliding my hand inside her bathing suit bottom as she drove, trying to keep her focus on the road. Or maybe she'd be the passenger, free to do nothing but enjoy the feel of my fingers sliding into her warm, slick pussy.

"Zoey Murdock," she said.

Placing both hands, palms down on the concrete ledge of the pool, she lifted herself out. She twisted around to a seated position, then pulled her feet out before standing. Somehow, she managed to make the whole thing look graceful while I stood there, gaping like a horny teenager.

Zoey Murdock. That must be her name. The polite thing to do now was to give her my name—preferably before she turned and saw me gawking at her.

"Jared Knox," I said.

I deliberately scanned the parking lot beyond the pool as I answered, but out of the corner of my eye, I watched her stroll over to grab her towel. Everything about her appealed to me—her body, the way she moved, the way she talked. This was the woman I'd been looking for all my life.

The thought slammed into me, and I squirmed a little. Where had that come from? I hadn't been looking for a woman for anything more than a quick bang. Lifelong commitments were for wusses.

"I work on the logging crew here in Blackbear Bluff," I said, mostly to shove these whacko thoughts out of my head.

But there was plenty of distraction right in front of me. Drops of water cascaded from her hair and down her arm as she wrapped the towel around her torso. The move effectively covered those plump pale breasts that were threatening to spill over the generous triangles of her bathing suit. It was an image that would be embedded in my mind for at least a few weeks, if not months.

"I read the article about this town," Zoey said. "Bunch of men and no women. It must be tough."

At the end of that statement, she turned and looked at me, tucking one end of the towel into the other end. In the process, her thumb grazed the top of her breast, a move that made me all too aware of the pressure building against the zipper of my jeans.

"Boone isn't all that far away," I said. "There's a bar not too far past the city line."

It wasn't exactly crawling in eligible women, but if a man really needed a fun night with a willing woman, there usually was at least one or two hanging around. In fact, I was pretty sure some of them came around just to see if a mountain man showed up.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

She started toward me then, and I gripped the top of the fence with my free hand. If she expected to have a conversation, moving to stand within a few feet of me wasn't a wise idea. My fingers were itching to explore the globes of flesh poking out above that tightly wrapped towel.

"It means it's a place to find women," I said in answer to her question, mostly because I had to speak to avoid staring at

her cleavage like a creeper. “If a man gets really hard up, you know...”

“You’re saying the women there aren’t attractive?” she asked.

I’d walked right into that one. “No, I’m saying driving all the way to Boone for...” I stopped myself before saying “pussy” and softened it up. Even *I* could be a gentleman sometimes, when the situation called for it. “If one of my logging crew teammates is looking for a date, that’s where they go.”

I expertly took myself out of that equation. Like I hadn’t traveled to Boone myself more than a few times. I’d lived in Blackbear Bluff since the military recruiter sent me here two years ago, and every few months, I needed a release. There wasn’t a single woman in sight, so a man had to do what a man had to do.

She tilted her head, eyeing me. “So, you’ve never done that?”

She was studying me. If she looked hard enough, she’d see the broken man I was. I didn’t want her to see that.

“You hungry?” I asked.

I held my breath, hoping for a change in conversation. She’d have every right to press for an answer to her question. I saw it as a good sign when her gaze shot toward Scoreboard.

“Starving,” she said. “I was planning to grab something once I checked in. I guess I didn’t plan very well. I was in such a rush to get here, I skipped breakfast and lunch. Do you think the guy who works the front desk is over there? Maybe he’d let you grab my keys for me so I can change.”

Change. She planned to take off this bathing suit. I was cool with it coming off, but not so cool with her replacing it with full-coverage clothing.

“Bryan’s not in there,” I said. “I just came from there. I was grabbing a quick bite before heading home after running my morning errands.”

Why was I giving her all those details? She didn't need to know them.

"I'd love to grab lunch, but I don't think they'd appreciate me traipsing through there in my bathing suit," Zoey said, tugging at the tucked-in section of the towel. "Especially with my dripping wet hair."

"Oh, they'll appreciate it, alright."

Had I said that out loud? Apparently so. Her head snapped up, and she stared at me through wide eyes. I rushed to correct that.

"If you want to be gawked at by a bunch of guys, go right ahead." I gestured toward the restaurant. "They'd be happy to see you, believe me."

The way she continued to stare at me had me worried she might head over to the restaurant. Her gaze drifted over my T-shirt-covered chest as she bit her lip and shifted her weight from one leg to the other.

I didn't want her to walk into Scoreboard, though. The scattering of locals on a Saturday afternoon would get an eyeful. She'd be lucky if she left without a date for tonight. If anyone was going to have her as his date, I wanted it to be me.

"What do you want?" I asked. "You name it, it's yours."

Again, she blinked at me, studying me. I didn't mean for every word that came out of my mouth to sound like some sort of offer of sex. But if she took me up on any of those accidental offers, I'd jump on it. In fact, if being a gentleman would have her panting beneath me by the end of the night, I'd drive hours to get her the meal she wanted.

"A big, juicy burger," she said. "With cheese. And bacon. And french fries."

She licked her lips as though anticipating the taste of all the food she'd just mentioned. I licked my lips in anticipation of how her pussy would feel, wrapped around my cock.

Clearing my throat to shove those thoughts aside, I said, "You've got it. I'll be right back."

“Oh,” she called out. “And a sweet tea, if they have it.”

They had it, alright. And I was going to deliver every bit of it to her, poolside. Then I’d do whatever else I needed to do to make her want me as much as I wanted her.

This had to be a dream. Everything couldn't be working out this perfectly.

I sat poolside, my legs dangling in the chilly water as I watched a guy with a gorgeous smile and well-defined pecs breeze through the gate. He held a large bag and a foam cup with a straw sticking out of it. Not only was this guy jaw-droppingly gorgeous, but he was bringing me my fantasy lunch. It didn't get better than this.

"I wasn't sure if you'd want condiments, so I got you a little bit of everything," he said.

He'd somehow managed to open the gate with both hands full, using just the index finger of the hand holding the bag. The guy was good with his hands. That was important.

"Thank you," I said.

I swung my legs around and pushed myself to my feet. I'd yet to master a way to do this gracefully. I just hoped this guy was so hard up for a woman, he'd go for someone imperfect like me.

"I'll set you up over here," he said, gesturing toward the row of lounge chairs. They were arranged in sets of two, with a table between. He carried the bag of food over and set it on the table. "I handed the paperwork back to Bo."

"Bo?" Had I missed something? "Who's that?"

He turned just in time to see me approaching. I was so glad I'd slipped my cover-up on over my bathing suit while he was

gone. I could only hide my imperfect body under that towel for so long.

Now that he was facing me, I felt it again. That jolt of electricity that went from the top of my head all the way to my tippy toes. Immediately, I had to shove aside thoughts of continuing toward him until I was pressed up against him, his arms around me, his hands on my back, moving up and untying the string that held my bathing suit top in place...

“The guy who runs the bar and grill,” Jared said.

Oh, yeah, right. Bo was the person who’d sent him in this direction with a manila envelope in the first place.

“Bo’s dad owns Scoreboard,” Jared continued. “Bo’s the one behind the bar most of the time.”

I gave a nod and ripped my stare off that riveting smile. He wore a pair of sunglasses, which meant I couldn’t see his eyes. I wanted to see his eyes even more than I wanted to take a bite of that burger. My first bite of cheeseburger in three years. I wanted that bite, and I wanted it *bad*.

“I can leave you to it,” he said as I slid onto the lounge chair and reached for the cup.

The thought of him leaving panicked me a little. What if I couldn’t find him again after this? How did I even begin to look for him in the cabins spread out up and down these mountains?

“Stay,” I said. “Keep me company while I eat.”

Surprisingly, he did exactly that, obediently taking the lounge chair next to me. He kicked back, tennis shoes on the cheap plastic slats, as I took my first sip of sweet tea.

All other thoughts fled as I experienced the smooth, sugary liquid. “This is amazing,” I said, taking a break before going in for another long sip. “I’ve never had iced tea at a bar before, so I wasn’t sure...”

“It’s the only restaurant in town,” Jared said.

That was right. I’d noticed that when I was researching the place. Scoreboard wasn’t just the only restaurant, but the only

place to get food or beverages, unless you counted the tiny supermarket and the convenience store just a few miles from this pool. Luckily, the only hotel in town was next door to the only restaurant. Otherwise, I might starve during my long weekend in town.

“Bo makes that sweet tea himself,” Jared said. “Brews up a batch every morning. He also has a great team of cooks. They take their steaks and their burgers very seriously.”

Speaking of which, I had a bag full of junk food to eat. I felt a little self-conscious pigging out in front of this guy. Would he judge me for eating this way? Would he remind me how bad it was for my heart and my physical appearance like my ex always did?

That thought seemed to propel my hand forward. I grabbed the paper bag and opened it, peering inside at its contents. Heavenly scents wafted out to me, and I had to close my eyes and take it all in. This was on my post-breakup bucket list, along with all the other things I’d given up during my two-year-plus live-in relationship with a stuffy banker. If eating my bucket list burger in front of a hunky stranger scared that stranger off, he wasn’t someone I wanted to be with, anyway.

“I don’t know how you can eat that,” Jared said as he watched me dig into the bag and pull out the items. I set them on the lounge chair next to me.

“What do you mean?” I asked, not bothering to freeze my movements.

I plucked a french fry out of the bag and eyed it before sliding it into my mouth and taking my first delicious bite. This was amazing. I’d forgotten how good restaurant fries could be. The kind that had the extra crispy exterior covering the pillowy potato inside.

“Usually when I’m out in the heat, something cold and refreshing tastes better,” he said. “I’m impressed. Nothing like a woman who knows a good meal when she sees it.”

I couldn’t see his eyes. They were still covered by sunglasses. But I could feel his stare on me. From what I could

see of his expression, though, he wasn't judging me at all. He seemed genuinely impressed.

So I went for it. I picked up the burger, still wrapped in paper, and unwrapped it just enough to free a small section of the concoction inside. I stared at it hungrily for a long moment before sinking my teeth into it.

Flavors exploded in my mouth. That's what thirty-two months of grilled salmon and green vegetables would do to you. When you finally got real food, it was like discovering paradise.

"Mmmmm."

That groan involuntarily escaped as I closed my eyes and took in all the flavors. The bacon, mixed with cheese and ground beef... It was just the right amount of spice and juiciness. Unlike the dry, grainy veggie burgers my boyfriend had insisted were as good as the real thing.

"If you like that, you should try the steak," Jared said.

My eyes popped open. It wasn't that I'd forgotten he was sitting there. The burger just had all my other senses on overload, which was exactly why I'd closed my eyes. Looking at him might drive me to the first ever orgasm not brought on by my vibrator or my own touch.

"Sorry," I said. "I've been on a strict diet for a while."

The way his eyebrows shot over the top of his dark sunglasses frames told me he was surprised. "Diet?"

I shouldn't bring up the ex. That was the wrong thing to do when trying to win over a guy. But I wasn't trying to win this guy over permanently. Just one night with a stranger, and I could check that off my list.

"I was living with a health nut," I said. "He was obsessed with his body fat composition."

Body fat composition. Three words I'd spent twenty-two years of my life not knowing. But nearly three years with Charlie and I couldn't seem to shove them out of my mind.

“Sounds like a fun guy,” Jared commented. “This guy’s your roommate?”

“He’s my ex-boyfriend,” I said. “We met in college and moved in together senior year. I dumped him when he said I couldn’t travel to Vegas for my friend’s bachelorette party. And that’s why I’m here.”

There. It was all out in the open. May as well be honest with the guy. He needed to know up front what I was offering.

“You’re in Blackbear Bluff because your boyfriend won’t let you go to Vegas?” Jared asked.

“*Ex*-boyfriend,” I corrected. “I’m in Blackbear Bluff because it’s been a long time since I’ve done some things. Like eating a burger.” I held the burger up to demonstrate. “And having good sex with a man who knows his way around a woman’s body.”

Saying those words directly to him empowered me. I’d never felt so confident and in control. The eyebrows juttied up again, and I wished, more than anything, I could rip off the sunglasses. Okay, I’d rather rip off his clothes.

“I’ve never done that,” I said. “And that’s on my list after eating this burger. I heard this town was full of horny single guys.”

I took another bite of my burger, but somehow the flavors didn’t pop quite as much this time. Maybe because my attention was on the man in front of me.

Suddenly, he reached up to pull his sunglasses off his face. He did it slowly, though. Like a striptease. Like he knew I’d been dying to see what was behind those dark lenses. Dying to see what was beneath that T-shirt and pair of blue jeans too.

“Well, I brought you the burger,” he said. “I’d be happy to help you with whatever else is on your list.”

How did a man get so lucky? I'd simply been dropping off some paperwork for Bo when I stumbled upon a blonde beauty. And now that beauty was seated next to me in a purple coverup over her bathing suit. It was sheer, though, so I could see the outline of those perfectly plump breasts.

Not only did she devour a juicy cheeseburger and moan in a way that made my cock stiffen, apparently, she wanted a man to devour *her*. And I wanted to be the one doing that devouring.

I sat up and shifted my legs so we were facing each other. She grabbed another french fry. I waited until she'd taken a bite to speak again.

"Let me get this straight." I set my sunglasses on the chair next to me and leveled a stare right at her face. "You're in Blackbear Bluff to eat cheeseburgers and have sex?"

Maybe too blunt. Not as blunt as I could have been, though. I didn't want there to be any misunderstandings.

"One time with a stranger," she said. "A man who can do what no other man has."

"What's that?" I asked.

She looked straight at me, swallowed the bite of french fry she'd just taken, and said, "Make me come."

I nearly choked, and I wasn't even eating anything. My dick was at full attention now. It was starting to get a little

uncomfortable. Starting? Hell, my cock had been straining against my zipper since the second I saw her.

But I had to ask. There were some things I just needed to clear up here.

“You’ve never had an orgasm?”

Zoey shook her head. “I have. Just self-induced.”

I swallowed around the lump in my throat. This was getting intense.

“Your boyfriend—”

“*Ex*-boyfriend,” she corrected. “He was into quickies.”

I didn’t know who this guy was, and aside from his eating habits, I knew nothing about him. But I absolutely wanted to punch him in the nuts.

“I can help you with that,” I said. “Just one problem, though.”

She reached for her tea, leaning forward and putting her face closer to mine than it had been so far. “What’s that?”

The words were spoken so casually, we may as well have been discussing the weather. I watched as she sipped and returned the drink to the table between us, then sat back and stared at me.

Our eyes met when I wore sunglasses, but I was pretty sure she hadn’t realized it. That made this our first true stare, and it went straight to my heart.

Yeah, this wasn’t someone I could fuck and forget. Maybe I should abort the mission now, before I had a taste of this mesmerizing woman.

“I don’t want to be limited to once,” I said without breaking the stare. “If it’s just one night, I’ll make it a night you’ll never forget.”

Her eyes darkened and her chest rose and fell dramatically, which told me my words had landed exactly as I’d hoped. My goal was exactly that—give her a night she’d never forget.

And maybe she wouldn't be able to walk away from here so easily.

"I have a room." Zoey nodded toward the inn. "As soon as I can check in, we could..."

She didn't finish that, which told me everything I needed to know about her. Including the fact that she was not a woman to bang midday in a generic hotel room. No, for this woman, I'd pull out all the stops. I'd show her exactly why she didn't want to leave this town after one night with me. I'd convince her to stick around...and see where this could go.

My hands were shaking as I pulled into the gravel driveway in front of the log cabin midway up the mountain. Not just my hands. It was tough to press the brake, my legs were trembling so hard.

The man with the smoldering brown eyes was waiting inside for me.

Sighing, I cut the engine and stared at the light streaming through the windows. How would this work? Would he be naked and waiting for me, or would he expect me to undress him? No, he was making me dinner, so there'd be some time before either of us got naked.

As soon as Jared opened the door, it was clear the red cocktail dress I'd worn had been the right choice. It was the very thing I'd worn in Vegas after I dumped my boyfriend for forbidding me to go. It had gotten me plenty of attention on our trip, despite how insecure my ex had made me over my curvy figure, so I was hoping it would go over well with my one-night-stand mountain man.

"Wow," he said. "You look amazing. You're just..." He shook his head. "Wow."

It wasn't just the words. It was the way his heated stare took me in. As his eyes roamed the length of me, his gaze was so intense, my body reacted like he was actually touching me. It was clear I'd picked the right mountain man.

He shook his head and took a deep breath. "Sorry, got a little distracted there. Come on in."

He stepped back, pulling the door with him and gesturing for me to enter. That was when the aroma inside hit me. I couldn't quite place it, but whatever it was, it made my mouth water.

"My mom's family's Italian," he said. "So those are the foods I cook best."

He closed the door behind me as I took in the surroundings. It was a typical bachelor pad, complete with a pool table where a dining room table should be and a gigantic TV above a fireplace in front of a couch and recliner.

"Italian sounds amazing," I said.

Smiling, I turned to face him. He reached out a hand, and for a second, I thought this was it. He wanted to go straight to bed. Maybe dinner was in the oven, giving us plenty of time for an appetizer. Or maybe we'd just let the food go cold. I wouldn't mind.

But his gaze lowered to my right hand, and I remembered I was holding my purse. I handed it over and tried to catch my breath as I watched him set it down on the end of the pool table and gesture for me to follow him.

I couldn't help but check out his backside as we walked. Like earlier today, he wore jeans, but these were darker, as well as a little baggier. Not so baggy that I couldn't stare at his ass as we entered the kitchen and pulled back a chair at a small round table.

Was he as nervous as I was now? Not possible. This guy had experience. This guy went to Boone and slept with random women he met in bars. That was what I'd gotten from our conversation, anyway. And for some reason, it made me hot, just thinking about a man like that wanting to go to bed with me. It was probably weird, but I deserved a few fantasies after the past couple of dull-as-dirt years.

"My plates aren't fine china or anything," Jared said with a laugh.

Once he had me seated, he headed over to the stove, giving me plenty of time to eye the place settings. The plates were

white with a faded blue pattern around the rim. The two forks didn't match. They had completely different handles. And they rested on top of what looked like two folded-over sheets of paper towels.

I smiled. This guy was unpracticed at luring women to his cabin for a night of dinner and sex. That was good news. I liked that he was experienced, but I didn't want to think that I was one of a long line of women he'd brought back here.

"I know you've been deprived of meat," Jared said as he returned from the kitchen.

My eyes widened, and I sucked in a breath. He was carrying a bowl, but were his words some sort of sexual overture?

As soon as he set the bowl on the table, though, I saw what he meant. He'd made some sort of pasta with marinara sauce, but it also had large chunky meatballs on top of it.

"Do you like wine?" He stepped back. "I stopped by the store and got red and white. I usually drink beer."

The only alcohol my ex would drink was red wine. He claimed there was something heart healthy in it. What I really wanted was some super sweet white wine. The kind that I drank with my dormmates in college.

"I'll take the white wine," I said.

Even if it wasn't sweet, it would be better than red. Besides, I needed a little liquid courage—just enough to lower my inhibitions. Just enough to make me forget that my ex liked to poke my stomach and call me "Flaborama."

"Be right back," Jared said, heading toward the fridge.

When he returned to the table, he held a bottle of riesling with a screw top. He didn't mention the lack of a cork, and I had to hold back a smile. Screw cap wine, beer, and spaghetti and meatballs. This guy couldn't be more opposite my ex. And I loved him for it.

Love. Ha! Not love, lust. The goal tonight was to keep my heart from getting involved. The best sex of my life. Nothing

more, nothing less.

And in the morning, I'd check out of the hotel and head back to Roanoke. Two items checked off my list. The rest, I could take care of on my own.

"I don't have wine glasses, either," he said.

His apologetic tone made me truly feel for him. He was trying to impress me.

"You're getting some tonight no matter what happens here," I said. "You don't have to work so hard."

He'd slid into his seat by then and reached for the bowl of noodles. But my words froze his movements. He stared at me, those eyebrows arched as they'd been at the pool earlier.

"I want to work this hard," he said. "You deserve the best. You deserve a guy who works hard to make you happy."

I felt that pressure in the back of my throat that meant tears wanted to form. No. There would be no crying tonight. Crying was horrible foreplay.

"Your ex sounds like a piece of work," Jared said.

I thought about that as I scooped noodles and sauce onto my plate. "Sometimes you're just wrong for each other, you know?"

Jared laughed. "Don't I."

I waited for him to elaborate. He didn't. That was for the best. Learning about his past meant getting personal. There was no getting personal tonight. Just raw, uninhibited—

"Bread?"

Jared picked up a basket and held it over to me. I stared at it, my mind clouded with thoughts of him shoving all this food aside and doing me right here on this table. At this rate, I might not even be able to get the food down.

"I'm not very good at it," I said as I grabbed a roll from the basket and set it on my plate. "Sex."

His movements froze again, the hand holding the basket hovering above his plate as he gaped at me. “What do you mean?”

I picked up my fork and cut into my meatball. I sliced it into smaller pieces that I could gracefully slide into my mouth.

“My ex was mostly a missionary position type,” I said as I twirled some noodles around my fork to combine with the bite of meatball. “He’s the only person I’ve ever been with, so I haven’t, you know, done too much.”

He stared at me a moment longer, then set the basket down, wiped his hands on the napkin resting on his lap, and picked up his fork. “I’m not the missionary position type.” He picked up a meatball and took a generous bite. “I mean, missionary position is fine, but it’s more pleasurable for the woman if she’s on top. Or taken from behind. There’s a certain position that hits the spot in a way nothing else can.

I was trying to eat, but as amazing as the spaghetti was, all I could think about was him entering me from behind, his hands on my breasts, his naked hips moving rhythmically as he pumped harder and harder, nearing orgasm—

“Plus, from behind, I can touch you,” Jared said, his attention seemingly focused on the spaghetti he was looping around his fork. “Your breasts, your clit. I can stimulate it at the same time I enter you. That alone can drive an orgasm stronger than anything a woman has ever experienced before.”

My fork slipped from my hands and dropped to the plate. I was the one who’d started this line of conversation, knowing we’d have to finish dinner before we could get to the really good stuff. The stuff I came here for.

“I have a microwave,” he said.

The statement was so out of place, it took me a second to orient myself. I watched him as he shoved a generous forkful of food into his mouth and waited for him to clarify.

Once he’d chewed and swallowed, he added, “We could heat this back up later. After...”

He didn't have to say another word. I set my fork and napkin next to my plate and pushed my chair back.

"Let's go," I said.

We didn't make it to the bedroom.

That had been my original plan. I'd take Zoey to the bedroom and lay her down gently on my bed. When she was comfortable, I'd feast on her body until she was breathless, writhing beneath me.

But I'd barely gotten two steps toward her when she put her hands on my shoulders and pulled me toward her. Our mouths met hungrily, tongues tangling as her hands roamed my arms, my hips, my buttocks. And then she was fumbling with my belt, and I had to reach down to stop her, pulling away.

"You first," I said.

I was still debating picking her up and carrying her to my bedroom when she looked around, grabbed my hand, and led me to the pool table. Then she spun around, and we were kissing again, hands feverishly roaming, unable to get enough of each other. I had to slow this down.

I took control, tugging the zipper of her dress downward and peeling it off her. It dropped to the floor, revealing a black lace bra and matching black panties. I sucked in a breath as I stepped back, letting my gaze freely roam. I was so distracted by my visual feast, I didn't notice she'd suddenly cast her gaze downward, her expression tight.

"You're beautiful," I said. "You know that, right?"

She looked up at me then and shook her head. "I'm soft."

She poked her midsection, and I wished more than anything she could see herself the way I did. I'd never get tired of staring at her soft curves, taking in her delicate features and that shy smile.

"I love everything about you." I stepped toward her, filled with rage at whatever—or whoever—it was that had made her feel bad about her body.

But I could show her how beautiful she was. If not through my words, then I could do it through my actions. Through the way I made love to her with my mouth. With my hands. With my entire body.

"So beautiful." I reached up and brushed my thumb over her bottom lip.

As her eyes met mine, I saw a gradual acceptance of my words, mixed with desire. She wanted me.

That was enough to push me to move this along. I lifted her onto the pool table, taking in the angle of her legs as they slanted slightly upward over the lip. I could work with that, but first, I needed those panties off.

She stared at me with wide eyes as I slid her panties down. My fingers skimmed her skin as the panties moved over her thighs, knees, calves, and ankles. I wanted her bra off too, but that could come later. Right now, I had to taste her. I had to show her what she'd been missing all these years.

She was wet for me. So wet. I moved between her thighs and opened her wider. The angle made it hard for me to slide my fingers inside, so I lifted her ass instead, bringing her toward my mouth. She cried out at the first touch of my tongue to the swollen bud. I moved slowly at first, then increased my pace, using the technique I'd perfected over the years. All of it had been practice for this very moment. For this woman who had been the one missing piece of my life.

When her hips began moving, I knew I was on the right track. The key was holding myself back. With each sigh and moan from the woman on the table, my cock stiffened a little

more as it prepared to plunge inside her and feel those warm slick folds tighten around it.

Finally, she cried out and arched her back, giving in to the orgasm. An orgasm I hoped was like nothing she'd ever experienced. If not, I would try all night. I'd keep trying until we were both spent.

As her cries subsided, I straightened and looked down at her. Now I'd urge her toward the bedroom. A woman like her deserved only the softest, most comfortable surface.

But she had another surprise in store for me.

"Fuck me from behind," she said, her voice hoarse, her eyes filled with raw desire. "Right here, right now."

All thoughts of leaving the room fled as she slid off the table and dropped to her knees, unbuckling my belt with trembling fingers.

I'd never taken a man in my mouth before. I'd seen it in movies—the kind I didn't let my ex know I watched when he wasn't around. I tried early on in our relationship, but he always said nice girls didn't do that.

Tonight, I had no interest in being a nice girl.

Jared's cock sprung out at me as soon as I lowered his briefs. I stared at it for what probably seemed like an awfully long time, but I'd never seen one so beautiful. It was thick and pink, with a drop of moisture on the tip. I raked my thumb over it, spreading the moisture and smiling to myself when it elicited a groan from the man standing in front of me.

I was running out of time. Any second now, he'd insist on being inside me, but I wasn't finished here yet. I wanted to explore.

He drew in a sharp breath when I wrapped my lips around him and drove forward, taking in as much as possible. He moaned as I pulled back slowly, teasing him.

I always thought blow jobs were strictly for the man's pleasure, but I was enjoying this far more than I ever would have imagined. Maybe because it was him. I'd never wanted to see someone happier than I did this man.

I plunged forward again, this time moving slowly and savoring the taste of him. I would have happily continued until he emptied his seed into my mouth, but he pulled back, sliding a hand under each of my arms and pulling me to my feet. He

paused to give me the longest, most passionate kiss of my life while somehow managing to remove my bra.

When he did finally pull back, there was an intensity in his eyes—a passion I'd never seen before, not even in the most romantic movies. Here I stood, completely naked in front of him, but I didn't feel the slightest bit self-conscious. He'd said I was beautiful, but now I felt it in his appraising stare as he ran his thumbs over my nipples. He made me feel cherished, loved...like a rare piece of artwork.

“Are you sure you want it here?” he asked, his voice husky. Heat and moisture pooled between my legs at the sound. “My bed's really comfortable.”

I shook my head. “Here. Now.”

And then I pulled away from him and turned around, bending over and propping my arms on the felt-covered pool table. Comfort didn't matter right now. In fact, the flat surface beneath my arms acted as a sharp contrast to the pleasure that rippled through my body when he slid his tip along my slick folds.

And then he was inside me, plunging deep as he put a hand on each side of my waist. There was a slight sting as I adjusted to his size, but it quickly turned to pleasure. I spread my legs wider and lowered my head, closing my eyes as he lifted my left leg higher and slid his hand over my stomach. And then he was rubbing my clit, moving in quick circles as he plunged deeper and deeper.

I gasped. “Oh yes. Right there. That's it.”

Was that my voice? It sounded so far away. All I knew was the combination of his bold strokes and his touch was sending me places I'd never been before.

My orgasm was so intense, it knocked the wind out of me. I cried out as his thrusts sped up, and then he was crying out too. His hands moved to grip my hips as he shuddered, finally stilling and pulling me closer.

I closed my eyes and collapsed on the pool table, face down, trying to catch my breath. Suddenly, I was embarrassed.

I had come to this town, thinking I could just have a one-night stand with a hot, single guy. Somewhere along the way, I'd developed feelings for Jared. It was absurd, but I even felt like I could stay here in his cozy cabin forever.

That wasn't an option.

But now what? He'd seen a side of me that I didn't even know existed. And now, I just wanted to curl up in a ball, I was so mortified.

I had to get out of here. I had to get out of here *now*.

"Wow," he said.

I immediately missed Jared's nearness as he slid out of me and stepped away. That was something else. My eyes popped open, then I squeezed them closed again. How did I face him? Especially without any clothes on.

Covering my chest with my arms, I straightened and looked around. My dress was on the floor, just a few steps away from the pool table. I knelt as gracefully as I could manage and scooped it up, then turned my back to him so I could squeeze it over my head.

"I really need to go," I said. "I mean, it was great and all, but I have to go."

I snatched up my purse, which was at the other end of the pool table. I didn't even glance in his direction. As I started toward the door, I half-expected him to stop me, but he didn't. Nothing happened. If I stopped to question that, I'd lose my nerve.

No, I was halfway to the door by now. I had to keep going.

"It was great meeting you," I called out. "Thanks for everything."

When the door slammed behind me, I should have felt better, but I felt worse. There was no other choice. I had to go. Because once his arousal wore off completely, Jared would realize I was not the desirable woman he thought. And that was when I'd really get my heart broken.

JARED

She was gone. If not for the bra and panties still on the floor, I might wonder if I'd just imagined her. How long until she realized she'd left them behind?

If it was anybody else, I would have been fine with her walking out that door. But it wasn't just the best sex of my life. It went way beyond that. Every minute I'd spent with her had been the best of my life. The connection we shared was rare.

I'd be damned if I was going to let her blow it. I snatched up her bra and panties, made sure the oven and stove were off, and headed straight out the door, almost forgetting my keys, I was so flustered.

Aside from my motorcycle, my driveway was empty, my date no doubt having made it halfway back to her hotel by now. Hopefully, she wouldn't grab her stuff and leave town, but if she tried, I could surely be at her hotel before she did.

Still, I was relieved when I pulled into the Blackbear Bluff Inn parking lot to see that same white sedan parked there. I'd glimpsed it both in this lot earlier and my driveway when I opened the door to her before dinner. She was still in town. It wasn't too late.

As I climbed off my bike, I stuffed her panties and bra in my back pocket. I was going to have to do some convincing to get the front desk clerk to give me her room number. Clutching lace underwear would just make me look like the stalker I kind of was.

I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw Bryan behind that desk. Bryan and I went way back. He was younger than me by a few years, but he was a good guy. He lived in an apartment connected to the lobby so he could be nearby in case a stranger stumbled into town and needed a room at two in the morning.

“Hey, man,” I said, doing my best to sound cool, calm, and collected. “You have a guest staying here. She left something at my place.”

I just hoped Bryan didn’t ask what. In a bigger town, the front desk clerk would no doubt protect the privacy of the guests, but Bryan knew me. If I said a woman left something at my place, that’s exactly what happened.

“The chick in two-twenty-three?” Bryan asked.

I was surprised at my immediate reaction to the word “chick.” Zoey wasn’t a conquest. She wasn’t even a quick lay. She was the type of woman you uprooted your entire life for. She was the woman I loved.

I loved her. Those three words pushed me forward.

“I can just run it up to her room,” I said, suddenly aware I had absolutely nothing in my hands. What if he asked what I was delivering? “I don’t want to interrupt whatever you’re doing.”

Bryan shrugged. “Whatever. You know where the elevator is.”

That was almost too easy. I shook my head as I took long, impatient steps toward the one rickety elevator that serviced the two floors of this building. Zoey deserved better protection than what she’d get in this building, but that was okay. If I had any say over it, she’d be under my protection for the rest of her life.

I stood in front of her door for several long seconds, listening for any signs of life on the other side of it. If she was packing, I couldn’t hear it, but I had no idea how thick or insulated these doors and walls were.

Finally, I took a deep breath, pulled the panties and bra out of my right back pocket, and held them in my left hand as I

knocked. My plan was to say three words when she opened that door. “You forgot these.” I’d use that as an excuse for showing up here, then ask if I could come in.

But what I didn’t plan for were the red cheeks and swollen, puffy eyelids that greeted me on the other side of that door. She was crying. Was she crying over me?

My mouth fell open, and I struggled for words. What had I done? Had I caused this? How did I fix it?

“Sorry,” I said, finally forcing out the only word that came to mind. Then I found another. “Why?”

What was happening here? None of it made any sense. Had it been the pool table? Maybe I’d been too rough. She seemed like she was enjoying it, and I’d done everything I could to make it the most memorable experience of her life. She’d said we could only have sex one time, though.

That didn’t explain why she’d be crying.

“You’re crying,” I said, stating the obvious. But I wasn’t sure what else to say. “Was it something I did?”

Zoey shook her head, then sighed as she stepped back, pulling the door open. “Come in.”

As I breezed past her, I remembered the underwear, still clutched in my left hand. I walked straight to the dresser and set them on the corner before turning to face her. She’d closed the door and was looking around, arms crossed over her chest in a way that seemed almost like she was embracing herself.

“It was supposed to be just one time. It seemed so easy in my head.” She looked everywhere but at me. “I came here to find a guy willing to have sex with any woman he saw. I’d leave in the morning with an item checked off my list.”

“You found the wrong man for that,” I said. “From the second I saw you, I knew this would be much more than sex.”

Now she looked at me, her eyes wide open. Tears had pooled there again, but they didn’t fall. They froze, just as the rest of her had done.

“I can’t explain it.” I shook my head. “I just knew when I saw you that you were the woman I’ve been looking for all my life.”

“You can’t...” She shook her head, then looked around the room like she was searching for the rest of the words. “I’m not perfect. I don’t look like a supermodel.”

“I don’t want a supermodel, and you *are* perfect. You’re beautiful and smart and you make me smile. I never believed in love at first sight until I saw you.”

I’d become a big wuss all of a sudden. I was never this guy. My time in the military had put me through a lot.

“I thought I was a broken man,” I said. “But once I saw you, I realized everything in my life had prepared me to be the man who can take care of you. The man you deserve.”

She was staring at me then, and I knew what I was saying was a lot. I didn’t expect her to tell me she loved me now. We’d known each other less than twenty-four hours. All I was asking was that she give me a chance to prove I was the man for her. To show her day after day what a healthy, loving relationship could really be.

“I feel it too,” she said. “There’s a connection I can’t explain. That’s why it upset me so much. I can’t even make a one-night stand happen without getting my heart involved.”

“This isn’t just any one-night stand,” I said. “There’s something here. Something we can’t walk away from. You feel that too.”

She nodded. “I feel that too. But I have to go back to Roanoke. That’s where my job is. I have an apartment full of belongings...”

“We’ll work it out.” I shook my head. “We’ll find a way.” I closed the distance between us and put a hand on each shoulder, looking down into her eyes. “Trust me.”

She nodded, smiling up at me. The tears fell from her eyes, and she wiped them away.

“Now, what do you say we make the most of this hotel room?” I asked.

She answered with her body, grabbing me and moving toward the bed. Our clothes were off and I was inside her before I even knew what had happened. And this time, I watched her come.

Yes, this was definitely the woman I’d waited my whole life to meet.

EPILOGUE

ZOEY

“**S**even ball, corner pocket.” Jared slammed the cue into the mentioned ball and straightened as he watched it sail exactly where he predicted.

He always beat me, but tonight I didn't mind. Tonight, I was hoping to talk him into revisiting our first time on the pool table.

Finally, it was my turn. “Four, left corner pocket.”

I leaned over as far as my pregnancy belly would allow and gave it my best shot. It got halfway across the table and stalled. No surprise.

“Ugh.” Stomping my foot, I stared down at the table, feeling Jared's appraising gaze on me.

The pregnancy hormones had me initiating sex more often than he did lately, and that was saying something. After six months as a married couple, we'd be adding to our family in a few months, and I couldn't wait. But I would miss being able to rip his clothes off and have him inside me almost every time he walked through that door.

“Moving this pool table to the bonus room was a good idea,” he said, looking around.

He'd created a man cave up here, complete with a beer fridge, big-screen TV, and comfortable seating area. He had some guys from the logging crew over pretty often, including his little brother Jude, who I was dying to fix up with my sister.

“It was your idea,” I reminded him. “I was fine with leaving it in the living room.”

“Well, this is far enough away from the kids’ bedrooms that we can play pool any time we want without the kids overhearing.”

This cabin had only three bedrooms. We planned two children, one for each of the two extra bedrooms. Those two bedrooms were far enough away from both the primary bedroom and the bonus room to give us privacy when we needed it.

“Besides, there are things we can do on this pool table,” he reminded me, moving closer, the pool cue clutched in his right hand. “And you aren’t very quiet in bed. I love to make you scream with pleasure.”

“The screaming might have to become more of a whimper once the baby’s here.” I slid my hand over my belly. “But there’s always the option of getting your brother to babysit.”

“My brother will be a great babysitter.” He stopped just two inches from me and leaned forward as though to capture my mouth in a kiss. But he stopped short. “Six ball, center pocket.”

He moved around the table, quickly clearing the way for what I knew would happen next. Then he came around and took my pool cue, sliding them both into the rack mounted on the wall nearby.

“You know what we haven’t tried yet?” he asked.

“What’s that?” I asked, already feeling a little breathless.

“This.” He lifted me onto the pool table and set me down on the felt. As he spoke, he lifted his shirt over his head, then reached for his belt and began removing the rest of his clothes. “I always thought I wasn’t a missionary-style type of guy until we found that angle.”

I smiled and shimmied my loose-fitting dress up over my head. I’d worn nothing underneath it, knowing well in advance where this game would lead.

“You didn’t tell me you were naked underneath that dress,” he said as he climbed up on the table.

He hesitated for a moment, probably to make sure it would hold up under both our weight. It didn’t even creak.

“I wanted to finish the pool game first.” I smiled teasingly up at him. “But really, it turned me on just knowing there’s nothing standing in your way.”

Holding himself up on one arm, he slid his fingers inside and smiled at what he found. “You’re definitely wet for me.”

He kissed me as he brought me to orgasm the first time, then parted my legs to slide inside me and work on a second one. By the time he finished, we were in each other’s arms, too weak to make it to the bedroom.

“Think we can sleep here all night?” he asked.

“I’d love it if we could just stay here forever, in this cabin, and never leave.”

He ran his hand over my baby bump. “Close enough. We get to raise our family in the best town around.”

“There’s that.” I sighed, lazily tracing my fingers over his forearm. “I’m so glad I read that article. I came here looking for a hot mountain man, and I definitely found one. I just had no idea he’d end up being my soulmate.”

“Glad it was me walking across that parking lot that day.”

I shook my head. “I would have found you anyway. I would have turned away any man I met until you walked in. There’s no one but you.”

He lifted his head and looked down at me, his eyes filled with love and a hint of renewed arousal. Yes, we’d definitely be going for one more time before we left this pool table.

Zoey’s sister Brooke comes to town to stop her wedding to Jared. But she gets more than she bargains for in his hot younger brother! *Trapping the Mountain Man* will be available October 27th. [Preorder it here.](#)

Don't miss Granger and Skylar's love story. Find out all about the newspaper article that started it all in *Finding the Mountain Man*, it's free to newsletter subscribers!