

Chapter 2

Adley pulled down the gravel road she just had put in and parked her truck. She unlocked the small shed that one of the metal building builders put up. While it was just big enough to hold the side-by-side that she affectionately – or not – called ‘the buggy,’ her tools and some gas for the buggy and saws, it kept people from the temptation of making off with her stuff.

Not that they couldn't break in if they really wanted to, but usually when you made it more hassle than it was worth to steal something, the kids generally left stuff alone. She had to make some changes to her original plan because the remoteness of the area made it easier for those looking for a free paycheck to do just that – at someone else's expense. The shed seemed to be dissuading any thieves that might be around, but then again, being about 300 yards into the woods, it was hard to see from the road.

She'd started clearing along the property line. When she first found the property, she met the surveyor who was marking JB's property and asked the surveyor if he would survey her property when he was done with Jbs. Because one of the lines was already done, she saved a few hundred bucks.

As she drove down the trail she already cleared, she noticed that someone started clearing a trail along the other side of the boundary. It wasn't very wide – they just cut saplings that were in the way. She'd seen the trucks parked along the road as she pulled into her property, but didn't notice JB's truck out there. *Wonder what they're up to over there?* Well, she was fixin' to find out – she could see them through the trees.

Since it looked like she was heading their way, the guys turned around and drove the few hundred yards they had cleared out along the property line. Aiden looked at Colin and said, "Hmm... wonder if they got someone to log that parcel?"

Davis laughed and said, “We were jes’ talkin’ ‘bout that when you finally showed up. What took you so long anyway? We liked to git this whole boundary line trail cut out before you got here.”

Aiden cut a sideways glance at Davis and said to Colin, “What’d you give ‘im this mornin’? He’s runnin’ that mouth a little more than normal.”

Colin snickered and said, “Might have somethin’ to do with the prospect of gittin’ another big job out this way. Or maybe that he caught a glimpse of a pretty little thing through the trees.”

“Yah, right,” Davis growled.

Adley felt a prickle on the back of her neck as she watched the three guys drive up in a side-by-side. She held her breath and reached for the 45 caliber pistol on her belt. Though she didn't pull it, it gave her comfort to feel the cold metal and soft wood of the grip under her palm.

Normally, a prickle on the back of her neck meant that there was danger around. But these guys

didn't look dangerous. *In fact, they looked right scrumptious. That one with the brown hair has the deepest blue eyes.*

As Davis climbed out and turned, he was captivated by a pair of green eyes with silver flecks that were on their way back up from below his belt. As he stood there, Adley's eyes started at his brown, wavy hair and roamed over the deep, blue eyes, the chiseled chest she just knew was under the shirt, the slight beer belly – and a sexy one at that, and down to the shiny Stihl belt buckle that rode just above his trim hips and muscular thighs.

When Aiden jumped over the side of the side-by-side's bed, Adley jerked her eyes up. Aiden nudged Davis as he mumbled, "You can close your mouth any time now."

"Damn," Davis mumbled under his breath.

He finally stepped forward and stuck his hand out. It took Adley a few seconds before she realized the one with the deep blue eyes and Wranglers that absolutely hugged his trim hips and rounded ass had reached out to shake her hand.

"Davis Bailey."

"Adley Greer."

"And this is my logging supervisor Colin Quinn and my partner Aiden Jackson," Davis said as he pointed to the two other men. "Did you just buy that parcel?"

Adley finally caught her breath enough to answer Davis. "Yep. Did you guys buy this piece off JB or are y'uns just loggin' it for 'im?"

Davis sucked in his breath when he heard the southern accent slide past her lips. *And right fine-lookin' lips, too. I wonder if her lips are as soft as they look? That shirt just hugs her breasts. They're about the right size, too... big enough to fit in my hand but not big enough to suffocate me. She's got some hip on 'er too. Trim enough, but enough to give 'er that sexy hourglass look. And those lips. Lawd have mercy.*

Davis felt the pressure build behind the fly of his Wranglers. *Whoa boy, you better quit that right now. You ain't lookin' for no woman, nor do you need a woman. And what would she think if she notices that? What is this anyway? That's never happened before – at least not since I was a teenager jes' learnin' what that was all about. Damn.*

Davis tore his eyes from Adley's lips and looked right into a pair of green eyes with silver flecks. "Nah, we're just loggin' for 'im. You fixin'ta log yer place?"

"Eventually," Adley said with a sideways glance at him. *Damn, is he checkin' me out? Well, hell, girl, you're checkin' him out.* "Right now, I'm just clearing the boundaries for a fence line so I can put some cattle up and run a couple of horses. At least, that's the plan. Might change my mind and build first, but I'll still need to fence it in.

All three men raised one eyebrow and Colin asked, "You fixin'ta do this on your own?"

They hadn't missed that she said 'I' and not 'we.' Adley's parents had retired to Florida and she was

an only child. She hadn't found anyone she wanted to give her independence up for, so it was just her. She swung her head over to Colin with her own raised eyebrow and said, "Wey-ell, ain't nobody else gonna do it fer me," and grinned at the men.

"That's a whole lot of work for one person," Aiden said.

Adley narrowed her eyes at him and then grinned. She briefly explained her plan to them and said that if she did decide to build, she'd be looking for some loggers. "If I like the job you do with JB's place, I just might have-ta git you to log my place. How long d'y'uns think yer gonna be logging JB's place?"

Aiden rubbed his jaw while he looked at Davis and said, "I reckon it'll take us at least three to four months – maybe longer, d'pendin' on the weather and how many hills we gotta climb up in here. We're just starting to look over the property now."

Adley twisted her ponytail around her finger while she thought about that for a minute. "Okay, then y'uns'll be here 'bout every day if it don't rain?"

Aiden nodded, so she said, "I'll hunt you down here in a few weeks if I like what I see over here, and I do mean yer work, not yer fine bodies." As Adley said that, her eyes moved back down to Davis' lips, then down to his chest.

All three men's faces got a red tone underneath their tans, though Davis' face didn't look quite as red since his skin tone was darker thanks to the time he spent on the knuckle boom in the log yard. The others spent more time under the trees since they cut and skid.

The pressure at the front of his jeans started to get uncomfortable. *Lord help me if she looks down. And what is wrong with me anyhow? Ain't never got hard jes' talkin' to a woman before. Repeatin' yerself now, ain't ya? Boy you gotta git yer head on straight, else yer gonna hurt or kill someone when yer not payin' attention.* Davis looked up to say something and notice that he wasn't the only one checking others out... Adley was most certainly checking him out.

Bet he's got some fine muscles under that shirt. Mmm. Mmm. That bit of hair that shows at the top of the openin' of that shirt. Looks like he's got a bit of a beer belly, too. Not too much, but jes' enough. Damn, that's sexy.

Davis noticed her eyes roaming down his body for the second time in the few minutes they were talking. About the time her eyes reached his belt, he turned slightly and said, "We oughta git back to it. We're checkin' the boundary lines."

Adley looked up and grinned, and said, "Okay. I know I'll be seein' ya around."

Colin and Aiden snickered and Davis' face got a little more color to it. He narrowed his eyes at them and said, "Let's go, boys. See ya, Adley."

Gonna git ribbed for that one, Davis thought. No way they didn't notice any of that – me checkin' her out and her checkin' me out.

Adley finally finished clearing out a trail along the boundary with JB's property. The further she went onto her property, the farther her driveway was from the boundaries because of the way the lines angled. She caught glimpses of the loggers in the distance as they were cutting up the side of a hollow. The first week they were there, they used a dozer to cut logging trails along the boundaries and through the property. They'd been cutting and skidding for about four weeks now, and the whole time, she'd only caught glimpses of them through the trees.

From what she could see, Davis ran the knuckle boom up in the log yard by the road, Colin supervised the cutters and helped skid. And Aiden hauled the logs to the mill. As fast as he got a load delivered, Davis and a buckler had bucked a few more loads, plus loaded the second truck.

Instead of cutting the tops off in the woods and leaving them, the crew skidded a whole tree up to one side of the log yard. Two of the crew topped it out, then skidded topped off log over to another part of the yard so the buckler could cut it to length. Every now and then, Davis would climb up on the mulcher and pulverize the tops into chips that they spread out on the log yard. It would keep the mud down when it rained. They'd eventually rot into the ground, making the area a fertile place to plant a yard or a garden.

When the logs started piling up, Davis grabbed the Stihl 362 and helped buck. Depending on the type of log and where it was going, the mills wanted 8-footers through 20-footers at even-numbered lengths. And, some mills wanted an extra 4 inches on each log, while others would accept an extra 3 inches. The bucklers marked the logs for different mills with chalk as they cut them to length.

When the bucked logs started getting in the way, Davis would climb on the knuckle boom and load the logs onto the long trailer. Adley had caught more than a few glimpses of snug-fitting Wranglers climbing up the ladder on the side of the knuckle boom.

She decided that they had a good operation going and would hire them to log her property. But first, she had to figure out where the areas she was going to clear cut for pasture would be. That would be a long hike.

Adley pulled her hiking boots on, strapped a machete and her 45 on her belt, and headed out. She already marked the site for the house and the horse stables. Once you got to the end of the road that she had put in – which only went about 300 yards into the woods – you had to go about a half mile along the top of a ridge.

There, the property widened out into the perfect house site that encompassed about 25 acres. Even though she couldn't see it through the trees, she knew that once the house site was cleared to the edge of flat area, she'd have one of the prettiest mountain views in the area.

When Adley faced north as if she was standing in front of the house, the right side of the house would be closer to the 500-foot cliff that had a pristine waterfall dropping off of it into a pool that was about 50 across. The water was only about 2 feet deep all the way across.

The water was so clear that you could see the small sandstone and limestone pebbles all across the bottom. The rear deck would face the falls at an angle so the house would also face the driveway as it wound its way around a few select trees she decided to leave near the house.

The pool's outlet ran into a creek that ran along the back of the house site before it fell down a series of waterfalls as it wound its way down to Valley Creek.

The left side of the house site had a drop-off, but it wasn't as steep as it was in the rear. Though the rear drop-off was too steep to put a road in on it, it would be fine for riding trails and even a trail for the buggy. The left side's grade was low enough that she could put a road in to reach the cattle barns – if there was a large enough flat area where it came up out of the hollow.

Adley started down the left side, chopping brush away with the machete as she walked. *So far, so good. A good bed of gravel, and I'll be able to take the truck through here. That way, I won't have to make another road in from the main road. The trucks won't have any problems bringing the cattle trailers through here. I wonder what Davis is doing...*

Hey! She yelled at herself – you're supposed to be working, not thinking about nicely rounded buns, muscles, and the muscular chest she knew was under his shirt. But... those brown curly hairs peeking out from where he left the top two snaps undone on his western shirt. Mmm. Mmm. I'd love to run my hands through that.

Adley shook her head at herself, wondering when she let herself get so distracted by a man. She sensed lots of trouble in the form of drama coming in the near months since she knew she wasn't going to be able to leave him alone. She'd noticed that he didn't wear a ring – and the way he was looking at her – he couldn't be married.

When she got to the top of the other side of the small hollow, the land looked relatively flat for quite a distance. She hiked along the edge of the hollow, cutting brambles and low brush out of the way with the machete. It took her all afternoon and early evening, but she cut a small trail all the way around the flat area. It was big enough for the three cattle barns, a bunkhouse and three separate pastures that she'd have the guys clear cut. The fencing would go into the woods, though, so the cows would have pasture and woods to roam and feed.

She headed back to her truck. Tomorrow, she'd mark any trees she wanted to save. As it was, she would be hard-pressed to make it back to the truck before the sun was just above the horizon. It got dark in the woods even before the sun had completely set because the tops of the trees blocked the light.

Bet them guys're gone by now. Seven o'clock. Didn't think it was that late. Wey-ell.. guess I should get this stuff put up and locked up, then head to town to get a bite to eat.