

## Excerpt from Mountain Skye Prequel The Weather Girls

Six years ago

Snap! A twig broke, crunch! Skye heard a rustling noise in the nearby thicket of myrtle. Her heart leapt into her throat. What if it was a black bear? Skye Weathers crept away backward, keeping her attention riveted to the spot in case she needed to beat a hasty retreat. But instead of a black furry animal, she could just make out the olive-green uniform of a national park ranger. Once she saw the square cut of his jaw and his sharp chocolate-colored eyes, she knew he was a threat far worse than a bear. Ranger Luke Scraper in the flesh scared the hell out of her. The man still haunted her dreams and he was standing a mere foot away, his gaze cutting through her like a knife to the heart.

“A penny for your thoughts,” he said.

Recovering from her shock at seeing him, more handsome than she remembered, she stammered, “They’re not worth that much.”

“I doubt that.” He settled on a boulder across from her and held his hat in his hands, twirling it by the rim. “As I recall, you were smart enough to go up north and graduate from the University of Michigan, so your thoughts are worth a small fortune.”

“I didn’t know you were back,”—her gaze raked the length of him from head to toe—”let alone a ranger?”

“Obviously.” His face wore a sheepish grin.

She wasn’t sure why and didn’t really care. Did she?

“Are you surprised I’m a ranger?”

“No, not really,” she said. “You always were happy here surrounded by nature. I was the restless one who needed more, an education.”

“Is that really the reason for your hiatus?”

She didn’t like his tone or his reminder that she had made other choices, choices that didn’t involve him, choices that didn’t include being a couple. “I’m not interested in rehashing that discussion. I had a choice to make and I made it. You made your own choices as well. End of story.”

“And now?” he asked wryly.

“I’m just here to see Gram and sign some insurance papers. I’m heading back home, Michigan.” she said matter of factly.

“So, here we are. That gonna be a problem for you?” Her hands were balled into fists at her side. This encounter was costing her on levels she didn’t want to acknowledge.

“Given our history? Damn right it’s a problem.” Luke stood and replaced his hat on his head with rigid

precision.

Skye stood and brushed off the seat of her pants. She didn't want to fight with him. "You're still holding a grudge?"

"Yep." He lifted a brow. "You?"

"Hardly, I was the one who fled the scene when you proposed," Skye said.

"You sure as hell did."

"That was a long time ago," Skye said with a sigh. "It wasn't my intention to hurt—"

"But you did," he gritted out. "You're still the same runaway prima donna."

"Excuse me! I was just a kid who didn't know what to do. I've grown up." Skye's hands twisted and shook. She laced her fingers and took a deep breath, quelling her emotions. "Normally, I'd try to talk this out..."

"Yeah, well," he conceded, "that's something."

"But what about you, Luke?" she asked, raising her brow.

"What about me?" Luke shifted his feet awkwardly, eyes downcast.

"You disappeared, like a bullet out of a gun. Gone," she reminded him.

"You left me and my marriage proposal hanging out to dry. You bolted," Luke accused.

"I didn't know what to think. You have to own yours. What do you want from me? This relationship will work better if—"

"Whatever," he said.

She began again, changing what she was going to say and said instead, "We'll get farther in our relationship when you—"

"When I what?"

"Take that stick out of your ass."

He smirked, folding his arms in a relaxed stance. "Those are dirty words for such a pretty mouth. Why even bother playing nice? Knowing you, you'll hightail it out of here just as quickly as you turned up. Did you plan to even tell me you were back?"

He scrutinized her a moment and grunted with disgust. The look on her face must've told him that she hadn't.

"Just as I thought," he said curtly. "Are the rest of the Weather Girls here too?"

“ No, Sunny and Storme are blowing in the wind. FYI, I’m staying at Amazing Grace,” she said. “For now.”

“Yeah, today you are, tomorrow it could be Timbuktu.”

He left her as quickly as he’d found her. One minute he was there, the next he was melting into the forest. She walked back to the Lodge, in search of her sisters. Her whole body shivered from the ice cold tone of his voice. Damned stubborn man! She wasn’t thrilled to see him either. The earlier feelings that had her heart slamming in her chest were evaporating as fast as the mountain mist for which the Smokies were legendary.

### Present Day

Tennessee was on her mind for some reason. She hadn’t lived there in years. Part of Skye wished she had never left her Great Smoky Mountain home, but life in Gatlinburg, Tennessee was just too small for her dreams. It wasn’t that she didn’t love the hills. She did. The rushing streams that tripped over rocks held her as spellbound as the tourist that slowed traffic. The greens of the hardwoods and evergreens captivated her and filled her with peace just as they did for countless others. The thought of leaving a place where thousands flocked was hard for her to cope with.