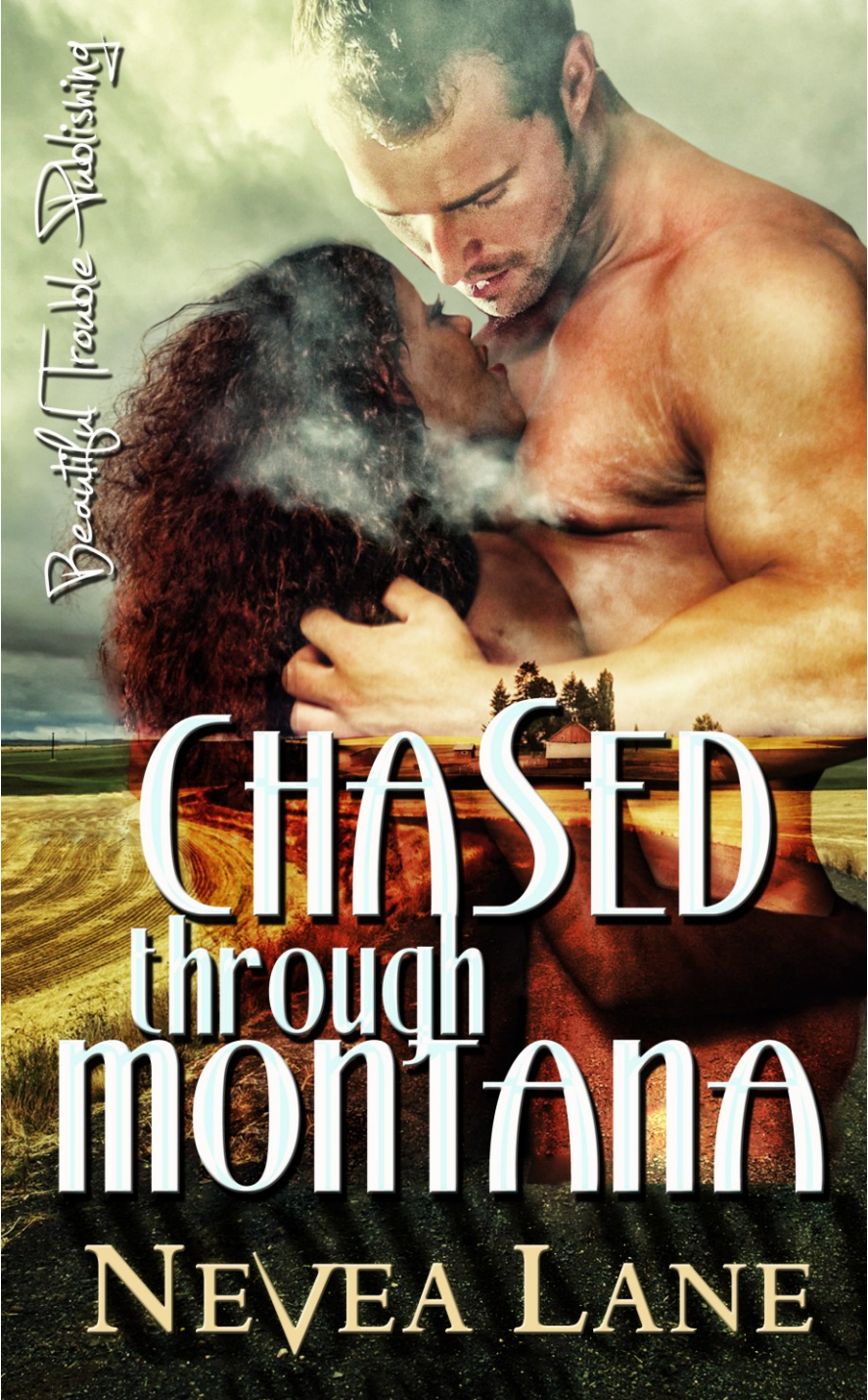


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The background of the cover features a romantic scene of a shirtless man and a woman with long, dark, curly hair about to kiss. The man is looking down at the woman, and his hand is gently holding her head. The background behind them is a soft-focus landscape of a Montana farm, showing a wooden fence, a small house, and trees under a cloudy sky. The overall color palette is warm, with golden and earthy tones.

CHASED through MONTANA

NEVEA LANE

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Chased through Montana

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To Momma G...It was you and your icebox
cookies that kept me going.

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This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

Chapter One

Are you fucking kidding me? I heard the captain speaking to me, but I didn't want to believe the captain was speaking to me. Staring at Captain Foss, I saw his mouth moving but didn't hear a sound. I'm sure it was the blood rushing to my ears, or shock; either way, I was deaf.

I watched as he sauntered his short, portly body from behind his oak desk and sat on the edge of it. He folded his arms in front of him, stretching the fabric of his tweed sports coat; I could tell he was enjoying this far too much. I knew the prick had a vendetta against me when I saw his crude caricature of me on his desk earlier this morning. His drawing was so bad, it could have been anything with huge tits, but he had so cleverly written "Layla Owens" under the drawing. *Pathetic asshole.*

"Well, it's mandatory after a shooting incident, but the lieutenant and I both feel you could use some extra time off. You haven't taken a vacation in a very long time. So we think this is best." His voice was thin and shrill, almost as if he was happy.

I spent twelve years of my life trying to make detective, and after one drug raid, I'm getting sent on extended administrative leave?

I shook out of my mental stupor and realized I had the wood chair in a death grip. I slowly uncurled my fingers from the ragged chair arm and counted to ten. Looking up, I met his gaze, hoping shock didn't register in my eyes.

"Captain Foss." My voice came out husky, and I took a moment to clear my throat. "Sir, in my defense, my track record is impeccable. I have never had to discharge my weapon before yesterday. I am a good cop, a better detective. Why this 'extended vacation'?" I said, air-quoting his words.

My blood was boiling. To keep from reflexively kicking the man in his shin, I crossed my legs. His beady brown eyes followed my movement, and I saw him lick his lips. *So that is what this is about? I know this fool of a man didn't expect me to give him favors?* Just because I was the only female detective in this community didn't mean I owed anyone any favors, especially not that fat-ass waste of space.

"Sir, I must mention that I have been a member of the Owings Mills Police Department for twelve years. Maryland is second nature to me. I don't think I need to take any more time than necessary. Miles Jacobs pulled his gun on me after I identified myself as a police officer. He pointed it at me and I shot, end-of-story." I tried not to sound insubordinate, but I was tired of living by the good ole boy handbook.

"That is true, Detective Owens. However, Mr. Jacobs has threatened to sue and also claims you used sexual favors and innuendoes that made him think you wanted a big bad drug dealer to date, or fuck." Again, Captain Foss' devious eyes slithered up and down my body in a way that made my skin crawl.

I watched intently as the captain pushed himself from his perch and circled me like the vulture I knew he was. I knew at that moment, I was dead—well, my career was anyway. When I felt his chubby paw on my shoulder, I knew I was done.

"You know, Layla, there are ways of making things like this go away." His hand slid farther down my shoulder, over my chest, and the tips of his fingers came to a rest on top of my breasts. *Fuck that*, my mind screamed. I popped out of the chair as if the seat burned my ass and whirled to face the captain.

"With all due respect, sir," I said through clinched teeth, "I will take the mandatory leave. I will see you in a month." I slipped past him and eased out into the hallway.

I shook my head and knew there was nothing I could do. I was up against an old system. Internal Affairs played golf with Captain Foss every Thursday and Sunday. The lieutenant was Foss' brother-in-law, and the judge was related in some way. I was no one but Layla Owens, daughter of a locked-up pimp and a

cracked-out prostitute. Cop or not, the word of Miles Jacobs, known drug dealer, was better than mine because he was born with a sausage between his legs.

I cleaned out my desk—not that I had many personal effects, just my favorite coffee mug—and left the station. I didn't know if I would be missed, but I didn't really give two figs or a flying squirrel. I was tired of being looked at like a piece of dirt, or a piece of ass.

I stopped at a diner, not wanting to cook in my dinky apartment, and ordered a plate of pancakes, my favorite comfort food.

As I flipped through a travel magazine left on the table, I wondered what I was going to do with myself. I had done nothing but be a cop, and I had no other skills besides whooping ass and running after criminals. I had plenty saved up because I never took a vacation and didn't have hobbies. Shit, I didn't even have a man I could go home and complain to about that shit stain I call a boss. It was just me and my mixed lab, Ranger.

My finger settled on an ad for Montana. *Stone Ridge Ranch and Hotel—Escape to Possibilities*. The picture appeared so serene, and I sighed. The mountains looked inviting, and there were plenty of land Ranger would love after being cooped up in an apartment most of his puppy life.

I paid my tab and left to pack. I am not a spur-of-the-moment girl, but this time I was done being cautious; I was visiting Montana.

Chapter Two

When I pulled up to the Stone Ridge Hotel, I could admit it was bigger than expected. It looked like the hotel had at least fifty rooms. The outside was lined wood and brick, painted a deep hunter green, and it just had a masculine appeal. There was definitely nothing frou-frou about this place, and I liked it. Smiling, I hurried to open the back of my Toyota sedan. Ranger was clawing at the window. I was sure he just wanted dinner. I hadn't fed him since my last push of driving four hours ago.

When I opened the door, Ranger hopped down, his black tail wagging happily. The lab took a sniff of the air, and I knew I was in trouble. I couldn't reach the leash quick enough, as Ranger took off running. I ran close behind him, but he turned a quick corner around a barn.

"Ranger!" I yelled, coming around the corner at full speed. I skidded to a halt, the tips of my running shoes turning green in the lush grass. Ranger, the damned traitor, was lapping the face of someone. The dog's tail was wagging like he'd just found his best friend. Then, the someone spoke.

"Okay, okay lil' buddy. Since I just fed my girls, I guess I can feed you too. Where's your papa?" The

man's melodious voice flicked a switch in my body. His tone was a deep and rich vibrato with a hint of a Southern drawl. Yes, his voice was like whisky, and I was already drunk. I bit my lower lip to get myself into check, or to stop the moan that rose to my throat. Five years of celibacy and this man had me wanting to throw my panties at him, and he was only talking to the dog. He could have a face only a mother could love, but his voice alone made me want to pant and drool. *Damn.*

I cleared my throat and walked over to the man as I watched him scratch Ranger behind his ears. His hair was a darker black than Ranger's coat. His back was broad, straining against the plain gray t-shirt he wore. His blue jeans looked well worn, and he was wearing them well. As I checked out his jean-clad bottom, I crossed my arms in front of me.

"Ranger has a mama, not a papa," I said slowly. The man didn't jump at all; he wasn't surprised by my voice, as if he expected me to be there. Then, he slowly rose from his hunched position. I think I now know what that little boy Jack must have felt when he was watching the beanstalk grow. Holy Mother was this man large and in charge. I thought he was broad? No, he was a barn. I could see just how muscled his thighs were. He made a proud, tall six-foot woman like me feel like a pocket toy. He had to be at least six foot

seven. My jaw dropped looking at his muscled body standing to its full height. I felt a moan bubbling in my throat. I was not about to start drooling over this man! I smacked my mouth shut and tried to pry my eyes from his chest to his face.

Big mistake. The cerulean glare pinned me to the spot. This man was dangerous. I don't know who he was, but my cop instinct was telling me to be careful. I had to get back in control. I wasn't in high school anymore; I was thirty-four, damn it, which meant no drooling over guys, barns...whatever the hell old blue eyes here was, I shouldn't be drooling!

He didn't have on a hat, or a Stetson like many of the men I'd seen passing by, but he touched his two fingers to his head and nodded just the same, and then he smiled. He had the nerve to have perfect white teeth against that tanned skin of his. *Please God, don't let him work here!*

He walked toward me with an extended hand, a sure smile on his face. Taking my hand in his much larger one, he gave it a firm shake.

"Well hello, Mama." His voice was more dangerous than the criminals I locked up back home. Whatever it was this man was made of, they needed to bottle it and sell it to us lesser mortals. The combination of his warm hands and even warmer voice had me weak in the knees.

I was here for a vacation, not to get caught up in sinful pleasures with whatever his name was. I tried pulling my hand from his grasp, but he just held tighter. I just stared at our hands entwined, his tan skin against my chocolate hue; it was definitely a huge turn-on. Damn, I had only been around this guy for two seconds, and I'd thought about sex for most of it. *I am in deep shit.*

"It's not Mama, it's Detective Layla Owens. Nice to meet you," I said, giving another tug and getting my hands returned to me. I had to put my hands back in my jean pockets or I was going to be rubbing his chest like he was a magic lamp and I was trying to get a genie to pop out. *Yeah, his pants' genie.* Ranger didn't seem to be ready to make a move as he stood by the man as if I were the stranger.

His inky eyebrows knit together as he folded his arm in front of his chest. His smile disappeared.

"Is one of our boys in trouble? I told Grant that a couple of these newbies would be a handful, but I don't think I've heard Sherriff Jim talk about a beautiful chocolate truffle working for him." His voice dipped to a whisper as he looked me up and down. This man knew how to play the game; every move he made seemed deliberate and attuned to my need. Or maybe it was my need that was attuned to his movement?

I shook my head and widened my stance, as if he were just another perp I was questioning. I held up my hand in order to stop whatever he was going to say next.

“I am not on duty; I am on vacation, from out east.” There came that smile again.

He walked closer still until he was looking down at me with those mysterious pools of blue.

“So then it’s Layla Owens, and we can drop the ‘detective’? Unless, of course, you would like to frisk me...” His voice trailed off, and he held up his arms. My fingers itched; I really wanted to touch the marble span of his chest.

“Since I can’t frisk you without reading you your rights, your name will do,” I said and looked down at Ranger. He was sitting back on his haunches, tongue hanging out and eyes darting from me to the man.

“Where are my manners? Chase Daniels. I’m the foreman at the ranch behind the hotel.” He nodded toward a long road leading through the valley of the mountain. “You staying for a while, darlin’?”

I watched his eyes; it looked like he was trying to dig something out of me. I wasn’t going there. I was on vacation, from work and from men, especially this man.

I clicked my tongue, and Ranger got up and stood obediently at my side.

“See you around, Mr. Chase Daniels.” I turned on my heel and headed to the lobby, Ranger happily prancing behind me. I had to check in and get away from that man.

When I reached the lobby, I noticed the hotel clerk looked as out of place as I did. She was almost as tall as me and sported a “city” haircut, the bob. She told me the bob was going to be the first thing to go once she got settled in here. Then the chatty clerk asked me how I managed to tame my natural curls into a ponytail.

“A lot of patience and a damn good brush. But I am on vacation, so from now on, no ponytails for me.” Having my thick coils flying in my face during a foot pursuit was not something I’d ever wanted to experience, but out here I was going to be free and wear my natural locks out of the ponytail.

She gave me my key just as I heard a deep voice reminiscent of a dangerous man named Chase.

“Sam! What are you doing?” The voice was coming from behind the counter. I cast a sidelong glance toward the door. How in the world did he move so fast? I was a cop, and there was no way in the world he could have made it to the counter without me knowing. The almond-toned woman had the audacity to blush.

“Nothing, Grant. I was just telling, err, Detective Owens here about my hair.” She stepped away from the counter. I looked back to the mountain of a man staring her down. His green eyes were like fire, and he didn’t even acknowledge my presence. He walked up to her, the anger obvious to me, and yet this woman was smiling. If I didn’t know any better, I would think she was glad she was getting the man pissed off.

“And?” He was nose to nose with her; I could tell she was looking him in his eyes with...interest? That couldn’t be right.

“And I helped her check in. And I gave her a key.” She smiled, her red lips parting to show pearly teeth. I might as well have been invisible. Whatever game those two were playing, I was just a bystander.

“Were you supposed to help her check in? Were you supposed to be working?” The man growled, and I saw her smile.

“No and no, but I’m bored. I need something to do.” The woman pouted, and that was my cue to leave, although I didn’t think those two would have noticed. Their eyes were solely on each other, and I felt like I must have vaporized. Shrugging my shoulders, I turned on my heel and plowed into a warm hard wall of flesh. In my surprise, I got a mouthful of a hypnotic scent. It was grassy and woody, but with a hint of spice. It reminded me of a home-cooked meal. I took a

step back, and I was staring into those damn eyes again. Damn.

“Excuse me, Mr. Daniels.” I took a step back and picked up my duffel. I needed to look at anything but him and those illegal jeans. I should arrest him for just wearing them. Before I could reel the thought back in, the image of him, naked, sweaty and handcuffed to my bed, flitted through my mind. I stumbled at the image. He must have thought the bag was heavy because he plucked it out of my hands as if there wasn’t a month worth of clothes shoved into it. *Baby, my stumbling had nothing to do with the weight of that bag.* I shook my head and held out my hand.

“Can I have my bag, Mr. Daniels?”

“The name is Chase,” he said, heaving the bag on his shoulder, smiling a wicked smile. “And around here, there is no need for a woman to be hauling this heavy stuff around. What’re you hiding in here, honey, a carcass?”

“No, but it is a month’s worth of clothes, Ranger’s toys, and stuff to keep me busy.” I laughed. I looked over my shoulder at the couple, who were now making out behind the counter. *Get a room!*

“I could find plenty of things to keep you busy, darlin’,” Chase said as he eyed me up and down with that damned arched eyebrow. Did he know how infuriating that was? “Come on,” he nodded in the

direction of the rooms, “I’ll show you where the rooms are. Those two aren’t coming up for a while.”

Throwing my duffel over his shoulder, he proceeded up the wood steps. What choice did I have? I followed.

I told him which room I had, and he stopped at the assigned door. I waited for him to drop the bag and turn heel, but he just stood, waiting and watching me. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I unlocked the door, and Chase hauled the bag inside. Ranger followed and went right to the fireplace in the room.

Chase stood in the middle of a very large room, and I still felt suffocated. I stepped away from the door and clasped my hands behind my back. I had to do something with them because I wanted to touch him so badly.

The silence was terrible, and just when I was about to say something juvenile, like *you can go now*, Chase took the wind out of my sails.

“Well, here you are, Ms. Layla, I’ll see you tomorrow.” He walked out of the room and left before I could utter a word. What made him think I wanted to see him tomorrow? *And what makes you think you don’t want to see him tomorrow?* my subconscious decided to add. Double damn.

Chapter Three

I woke up at dawn; my internal clock was still off from the two-hour time difference. I couldn't help but dream about that man and those eyes again. There was something about Chase Daniels that made him stick in my head like a bad love song. That wouldn't do. I had been around enough men to know that none of them, especially ones who looked like him, talked like him and walked like him, were the settling-down type. I thought I was merely wound up from the drive, so I decided to work it out of my system. *Nothing like a run to refresh the brain*—or so I hoped. After taking a quick shower and tying a red bandana around Ranger's neck, I crept out of the hotel.

The sun was making its first appearance over the high mountain trails of Sapphire Mountain. It was a beautiful sight. That sunrise alone was well worth getting out of bed at dawn. I stretched a little and started to run. I didn't know where the trail led, but I was still packing my small snub-nose .38 in my shoulder holster, so no one was going to get the best of me without me getting off at least one shot. Vacation or no, I never went anywhere without extra protection. It was the cop in me.

Ranger zigzagged across the dirt trail as I jogged at a steady pace. Every time my foot hit the rock-covered trail, I kept seeing pictures of devilish blue eyes and a cocky grin. I ran faster, as if I could out-run the fact that Chase Daniels was male libido on steroids.

My lungs felt like they were going to explode, so I slowed down and came to a stop in front of a large flat rock. Swigging water out of my canteen and pouring some in my hand for Ranger, I stooped down to hydrate the panting mutt. I poured some of the cold water down the back of my tank top and hoped the shock would be the equivalent of a cold shower. It didn't work.

"Damn," I said out loud and kicked the rock. I didn't need this complication of a man! Sighing, I plopped down on the rock and watched Ranger play in the lush grass. The dog loved it out here, and I guessed I could too, if I could get a certain man out of my head.

I closed my eyes and just sat in the cool of the morning. I heard clomping, but I paid it no attention. I was on a horse ranch; there were bound to be horses roaming. I relaxed until I heard the steps come closer.

A dark shadow fell over my back. It felt like an eclipse. Putting my hand on the butt of my gun, I turned slowly toward the shadow. I quickly assessed that there were three bodies, all on horses. As I was

preparing to point my .38, I saw him. *Speak of the devil and in he walks.* I looked up to see Chase, black Stetson and his fine glory riding a black horse that had a leopard pattern on its hind quarter. Chase's blue eyes were bright and vibrant as he tipped his hat to me. I looked at the other riders with him; they had similar builds, but that was where the similarities ended. Chase was like a dark god compared to the golden boys next to him.

The other two riders looked almost identical. Both men were golden in color, a mix of brownish-blond hair, clefts in their square chins, and dimples. They looked like they could have been from Hollywood, the epitome of the Hollywood cowboy. Even the horses they were riding were the same deep brown, darker than my skin color but with black manes.

The only way I could tell I wasn't seeing double was the fact their eyes were different shades; one had gray eyes, so light in hue they were almost preternatural, and the other's eyes were amethyst. No man should have amethyst eyes.

I looked down to Ranger, afraid the city dog would freak out at the size of the huge horses in front of him, but Ranger stayed close to my side and didn't make a sound.

“Don’t shoot us, Ms. Layla,” Chase said, inching that beautiful horse closer. “The boys and I just thought you would care for a ride?”

I looked at Chase and then to the “boys.” Hell no! An unaccompanied woman riding with three strangers? Although they were three delicious-looking strangers, that was not a safe bet. My grip tightened on the handle of my gun.

Chase stopped inching his horse closer and looked over his shoulder.

“I told you she’s a fiery one. Will one of you please introduce yourself before she puts a bullet in all of us?” Chase ordered.

“Why us?” the amethyst-eyed one mumbled.

“Because she knows me already,” Chase threw back. “I don’t want you scaring her or not knowing what’s up, because if either one of you approach her, it ain’t her gun you need to worry about.”

The gray-eyed blond giant dismounted and started walking toward me. His movements were stealth like, almost as if he was trained not to make a sound. Even his heavy boots didn’t crunch on the path. Something about this one screamed military. Ranger, sensing my tension, crouched low to the ground. The horse Chase was on threw back his head and stamped in place.

Stopping two feet from me, the giant looked over his shoulder at Chase. Chase gave him a subtle nod.

What the hell? I hadn't expected the man to extend his hand. I looked down at his outstretched palm and gulped at the size of his hands—and he wasn't quite as tall as Chase.

“Bradford Thorn, and the one who looks like me is Brighton Thorn. We work for Chase.” His voice was mellow, measured, cultured almost. I raised an eyebrow but shook his hand. Bradford didn't have a trace of an accent like Chase. Something was strange about those two. After shaking my hand, Bradford walked back to his horse and mounted.

Chase's eyes never left mine.

“I'll see you at dinner, Thorns. I'm about to take Ms. Layla on a little ride.” He spoke quietly, but his jaw was set, and I could tell he wasn't going to take no for an answer. To be honest, I didn't want to say no. Well, at least my body didn't. I nodded yes.

Chase eased closer to me and held out his hand as I stood up on the rock. Slipping my hand in his, I felt a bolt of electricity shoot up my arm. Shocked, my eyes met his. His grip was strong, and his hand engulfed my fingers as he pulled me onto the back of the horse. I grabbed Chase's waist as tight as I could. I had never been on a horse before.

“Now, Miss Layla, Royal here isn’t scared of you, so don’t you be scared of him. He’s a gentle Appaloosa.” As if in agreement, the horse snorted and stomped his striped hoof. I relaxed a little but still didn’t let go of Chase’s waist.

Chase snapped his wrist gently, commanding the reins, and the horse stepped forward at a languid pace. Ranger followed at the side, stopping off occasionally to sniff another rock or two.

“So Ms. Layla, why our lovely state for a vacation?” Chase rumbled, his voice deep and husky.

I felt myself tense at the question. It must have made the horse tense too, because the black beast threw his head back and let out a pained sound. Chase patted the thick neck of the horse, calming him as we rode on.

“Now, if you don’t want to answer, say that. Don’t go getting all tense—Royal will know it. I merely meant you could’ve gone anywhere but Montana,” Chase said matter-of-factly. He didn’t pry; I liked that about him. After a moment of thinking, I decided there was no harm in telling Chase a little about myself.

“I, well, I’m on administrative leave. I was involved in a drug raid and shot the suspect. The day I was placed on leave, I saw an ad in a magazine for this hotel, and it sounded nice. Plus, Sapphire Mountain

Range just sounded relaxing,” I said after a while. Chase was the only other person on this earth who knew why I was in Montana, but it did feel good getting it off my chest. Chase’s free hand found mine, and he enclosed my fingers in his.

“So, I can guess, the boys in blue back home thought you needed to take some time off, to think about whether you really want to be a detective.” His voice had a steel-lined edge to it, and he sounded upset.

“Yeah, something like that, how did you...?” The question I was going to utter hung in the air.

“Honey, after being born and raised in Texas, serving my time in the Marines, and settling down here, I have seen the system work or not work. I hate to say I’ve even been caught in the middle a few times,” Chase said as he led the horse down the trail. I grabbed on tight as Chase navigated through the pebbled dirt road and around the lush green of the valley. Horses grazed on the horizon, and I took in the fresh air.

“What do you mean, ‘caught in the middle’?” I asked, curious.

“Those guys you saw me with back there, they were a part of my recon unit in the Marines. There were four of us. The fourth was a woman like yourself.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Don’t’ get all prickly on me, darling. I just meant confident, independent, quick on the draw and perhaps quick on the temper too.” Chase chuckled.

“I’m sorry, please continue.” I felt like an ass.

“Anyway, this woman knew her stuff, but the boys and I couldn’t, wouldn’t let her come into the field. We would always send her on safe assignments. She was like a kid sister. Finally she got wise to our act, put in a transfer request and was gone, just like that.” Chase sounded a little sad at the fact.

“What happened to her?” I felt a little jealous even though I didn’t know the woman.

“Don’t know. That’s why the Thorns are here. Apparently she turned up in Billings after being off the radar for a while. They thought she would have contacted me, but she hasn’t.”

“Will you contact her?” I asked. That little green jealous elf was dancing on my shoulder; I could feel it laughing at me.

“Hell no, darling.” Chase snorted as if that idea was the silliest thing he’d ever been asked. “I’ll leave that hell cat to the Thorns. I’m retired, and I’ve got my own hide to worry about.”

The horse came to a stop, and I noticed we were outside a nice rambler home. It was hidden in the dips

of the valley and nestled into the rock of the mountains.

“Welcome home,” Chase said as he dismounted. I looked down into his eyes and accepted his hand as I slid off the high back of the horse. He led the horse to the side stable with me trailing behind.

“You have a nice-looking home, Chase. Am I keeping you from work?” I said as Chase brushed the coat of the strong horse.

“Nope. It’s still early yet. I usually go out for an early morning ride; imagine my surprise when I saw a morning flower picking on a defenseless rock.” I rolled my eyes. This man’s speech was smoother than honey and probably just as sticky. I was not about to get caught in that.

He finished brushing the horse and gave Ranger a huge steel dish of cold water from a pump. I quirked an eyebrow—a water pump?

Chase looked up at me and let out a rich laugh.

“There’s running water in the house. The pump is just quicker for filling buckets to clean my horse and my hog.” He grabbed my hand. “Come on, let’s get some breakfast.”

Chase led me into his home and I felt at peace. It was bigger than my apartment, that’s for damn sure, but it was definitely a man’s space. There weren’t any

photos or personal effects, just lamps, chairs, and a lot of blankets everywhere.

Watching Chase move around his kitchen was like watching a magician at work. He was pulling out pots and dicing, all the while keeping me in conversation. He asked me what made me want to be a cop, my favorite color and what size shoe I wore. I didn't even realize I was opening myself up to him until he laughed at my stories of being an only child forced to play cops and robbers by myself. As his laugh came out rich and melodious, I realized Chase was a man too easy to become attached to. All of his emotions flickered in his eyes. As he talked, I found myself drowning in them.

Before I knew it, we had consumed a late breakfast of eggs, toast, fresh fruit and bacon, with Chase giving Ranger a few pieces of bacon every now and again. The conversation hadn't died, no matter how much I wanted to pull back.

"Chase, that was so delicious. I usually just eat a muffin from a deli. I'm so full. Don't even think about getting me on the back of that horse again!" I stretched and pushed my windblown curls out of my face, looking around his place again. All of this talking over a big breakfast and domestic stuff just wasn't me. I was a cop, a detective; there was no reason to get all homey just because I was put on leave!

Chase got up and put the dishes in the sink. After a quick rinse, he was back, fixing me with that mesmerizing stare.

A slow smile broke out across his face, and he took me by the hand again and dragged me out to the garage. There was a black pickup and a Harley Davidson. He guided me into the passenger seat of the car and, calling Ranger, helped the mutt into the back of the pickup.

I shook my head at my dog's obedience to this man. As Chase slid into the driver's seat, he looked at me.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing; Ranger seems to like you."

"Good. Now if I can just get his mama to like me," Chase said, pulling out of the garage. I said nothing as Chase drove back to the hotel.

Chapter Four

I'd spent a whole week with Chase finding me in various spots. The more I tried to avoid him, the more the infuriating man seemed to show up. I didn't want to like him. We were from different worlds, and I was eventually going to leave. Apparently, that didn't deter him one bit.

Every morning I would take a different trail to run with Ranger, and every morning Chase would find me. He'd gather me up on his horse, and we'd have breakfast at his place. At lunch, Ranger would find Chase in the stables and line up with the other dogs to be fed. While the dogs ate and played, Chase would lean over the wood fence and talk to me, telling me about his day.

For dinner, Chase would be in the dining room of the hotel, waiting. He never said, *Let's have dinner*. Chase just showed up and did what he pleased, taking me by my arm and leading me into the dining room. Fool that I was, I let him do it every time. I should have put my foot down, especially when he ordered my food for me, but I was starting to like it. I knew I was losing some of the independence I'd once adored.

The second week, I needed to put some space between us. The "chance" meetings were beginning to

feel a lot like dates. I knew that was exactly what they were when I found myself looking forward to seeing even a glimpse of him during the day. That just wasn't me. Here I was, getting all expectant and short of breath when he was around—and he was always around. I hadn't thought once about shooting that perp or the life I had in Maryland.

For my early-morning walk with Ranger, I purposely took a route Chase had told me to avoid. I needed to clear my head of Chase Daniels. I was pretty certain Chase wouldn't find me if I purposely did something he told me not to do. It wasn't as if he deserved blind obedience from me. *Ha! Who am I kidding? I like his domineering attitude because he doesn't flaunt it over me.* Ranger loped beside me, seeming to actually listen to me instead of bounding off and sniffing flowers.

"What am I going to do, huh, Ranger? I'm leaving in another few weeks; I shouldn't get all ga-ga over this guy, right? I mean sure, he listens to me, doesn't judge me, has the patience of a saint, the body of a Greek god, talks smoother than an Isley Brothers record and is easy on the eyes."

Ranger looked up at me as if to say, *Lady, you have got a huge problem.*

"Yeah, Ranger, I do have a problem. And I haven't even kissed him yet." That got my wheels

turning. Maybe if I kissed him, or maybe if I was the one to come on to him, he'd back off? Would it be easier to break it off with him if we did this on my terms? It couldn't hurt to figure it out. I whistled to Ranger and headed back to the hotel.

Just as I was about to hit the main trail, my foot slipped on a jagged rock and I stumbled into a running stream, landing on my bottom. I must have screamed, because as I was picking myself up out of the stream I heard hooves breaking towards me. I was trying to hold steady, but I must have twisted my ankle. As I bent to examine it, I felt two strong arms circle my waist, and before I could blink I was sitting on top of Royal. I looked down and saw Chase glaring at me, his eyes a dangerous hue.

"What do you think you were doing?" he barked.

"Walking," I said back, low and steady. I don't think I had ever seen him angry.

"Why were you hiking off trail? You could have been hurt, you could have been bit, you could have fallen..."

"I did fall," I mumbled.

Chase glared at me and took Royal's reins. Chase didn't climb on the horse; he merely led Royal back to his rambler. I didn't realize that in my musings and wanderings, I had walked close to Chase's house.

Damn, even when trying to avoid the man, I ended up near him.

Chase helped me down from the black horse as always, but this time he didn't set me on my feet. He gathered me into his arms, and carried me into his living room. Setting me down on his leather couch, Chase worked the wet sneaker off my foot. When he pulled down my wet sock, I could feel the heat from his fingertips touch my toes and snake up my veins, my legs, my thighs, and settle into the pit of my stomach. His touch was electric and soothing.

"Let's see if you sprained it," Chase said, his voice thick. I watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed, his dark hair flopping over his head as he bent it to examine my ankle. There was no denying it; he was feeling the effects of touching me too. All this time, I hadn't realized we'd kept touching to a minimum until this moment.

I swallowed too, shifting my bottom on the seat cushion. The wet running shorts made a weird sound, and Chase looked up at me. His eyes were dark, a shade of midnight, and his pink lips were parted. His fingers had stopped moving over my ankle and were still on my calf.

"Chase, I..." My voice trailed off. So much for being a seducer. One look from him and I was speechless.

“Layla, let’s get you out of these wet clothes.” Chase sounded more sure than I was. He picked me once more up and carried me into a huge bedroom. After he set me gently on the bed, I watched him move with a slow sense of purpose. He closed the bamboo shades, blocking out the afternoon sun. He walked through another door, and I heard the sound of running water. I smelled a faint scent of eucalyptus and watched as steam rolled from the doorway.

Chase appeared again, this time carrying a large peach-colored towel. He kneeled in front of me and swiftly took off my other shoe. I felt his fingertips at the top of my shorts, and he pulled them down in a quick motion. My hand went to pull my top off, but Chase quickly stilled my hand.

“Oh no you don’t. I’ve thought about this since the first time you were standing in my stable, lady. We are going to do this my way.” Chase pulled my t-shirt over my head and wrapped me in the towel. “I bought this color last week; I thought it would look great on your skin.” Chase gathered me into his arms and started toward the bathroom.

“And what made you think, Mr. Daniels, that you were going to see me in your towels?” I really thought it was sweet, but again, a part of me had to put up some sort of fight. Chase pinched my ass, and I jumped a little.

“The name is Chase—remember it, because you will be screaming it later.” Chase planted a kiss on my lips so fast and so hard it stole my breath. I didn’t even notice Chase sliding me down into an in-the-floor hot tub. Chase broke the kiss, his breathing ragged, and stepped back. Somehow he’d held on to the towel and slipped me in the perfectly hot scented water. I watched with hungry eyes as Chase quickly took off his jeans and shirt. His muscles rippled as he pulled the t-shirt over his head, and I let out a gasp. I thought he was muscled before, but I was shocked at just how ripped and toned he was. He smirked slightly and eased into the tub.

Before I could blink, Chase gathered a handful of my wild curls and pulled me close to him. He looked down into my eyes and I sensed there was a lot of restraint happening on his part—and I wanted to make him lose control.

“Now, I knew I was going to see you in my towels because I have been your shadow for damn near two weeks, woman.” I watched as he lowered his lips to mine and slowly kissed my top lip, my lower lip, my chin and my jaw line. I heard him moan and I tilted my head back, letting his soft lips roam down my neck.

His head came back up, and he looked me in the eyes as I felt his hands begin to roam over my body. He reached for something behind me, and I melted as

I felt his oil-slicked hands begin to massage my neck and arm. It took me a moment to realize Chase had maneuvered our bodies so that I was positioned on his lap. His hands roamed up and down my breasts, and I began to squirm.

“Slow down, Layla—we’ve got all the time in the world,” he whispered as he rubbed the hot oil across my nipples, his large hands engulfing my breasts as he kneaded them and plucked at the tightening tips.

His words soothed me, and I began to relax in his arms. His kisses were making me drunk. The scent of the almond oil, the relaxing smell of the eucalyptus had my eyes dropping, until his index finger traced the line of my stomach through my thatch of hair and right onto my button. It was pure electricity that shot through my body as his finger played with the swelling nub like he was trying to remember a tune.

“Chase,” I panted, “Please!” Squirming on his lap, I didn’t know when I’d become so needy. But that was it—I just needed him. He’d started this fire; he was the only one that could put it out. My plea, however, didn’t make Chase go any faster; he continued at the same slow, agonizing pace, strumming my clit and rolling it between his index and forefinger like an evil genius of clitoral stimulation.

His strong arm came around my back, feeling like a vice, clamping me to his large body.

“That’s it, my Layla—I want to see you come. I want you to show me the flower that you are.” Chase’s whispered words of encouragement only made me burn more. His fingers increased their pace, and he was setting my whole body into a frenzy. It was when I felt him slide his middle finger into my tightening tunnel that I knew I was about to lose all control.

“Now, Layla. Come for your Chase.” His growled command was all I needed as his middle finger dove into the soft tissue at my core. The pleasure was so intense, I felt like I was falling as my orgasm took over.

I felt like Jell-o as Chase shifted his body and gathered me into his arms again. He wrapped me in the towel and carried me back to his large bed. I watched through heavy-lidded eyes as he dried me off from head to toe. When he was finished, Chase slid up the bed and over my body. His tongue began an ardent assault on my lips, his teeth nipping and pecking at my throat. I threaded my hands through his dark strands of wet hair.

The feather-light kisses Chase rained down my throat were nothing compared to the rousing thrill of his warm tongue lapping at my distended nipples as if he was meant to graze there. His long, winding licks around my breasts ignited the fire in me again. All I could do was writhe on the bed as Chase continued to assault my body with his tongue. He kissed down my

belly and farther still until I felt his lips on my moist pussy.

“Chase, I can’t take any more. I need you,” I cried, my voice nothing more than mere whispers.

“You can take more, sweet Layla,” he said, his warm breath tickling my slick skin, “and you already have me—you just have to look.” With that cryptic statement, he plunged his tongue in my pussy, licking and slurping as if he were a starved man.

I damn near careened off the bed. My hips bucked, and I was pulling at his hair and using my good foot to arch even higher off the bed. Chase wrapped those huge arms around my bucking hips and pulled me closer to his face. I wished I’d brought my gun—I might have to shoot him to get him to let go of my sensitive clit.

As if he could read the turn my thoughts had taken, Chase rose from my pussy and looked me in the eyes. He was licking his lips as if he’d just devoured his favorite meal, but the gleam in his eyes let me know that Chase was still hungry.

I watched him climb to his knees, working his hands up my calves, up my thighs and around my waist. He positioned himself between my legs and wrapped my long limbs around his waist, locking them at the ankle. He had already fitted himself with a condom, but I couldn’t even think to remember how or

when he did it, because the package between his legs yelled “hello.”

I could see the veins in the thick member pulsating as Chase rubbed its engorged head up and down my moist labia. My hips involuntarily bucked toward the heat of his flesh. I felt Chase slowly press the tip of the head into my opening, the stretching causing a slight burn. I tried to roll my hips to find a more comfortable position, but Chase had knowingly put me in an arched position. Any way I moved, I was going to get closer to him.

He lodged his head into my waiting core and held very still. I looked at him, trying to read his expression, but his eyes were fixated on where we were joined. My fists clawed at his navy silk sheets. I wished he would just move. His eyes snapped to mine, and for the first time since I’d met the infuriating man, I was scared.

Chase looked as though he had lost all control.

“Aw hell,” he moaned and surged forward without warning. I felt as though I was being torn in two. What was God thinking when he gifted this man with that thing he called a cock?

Chase didn’t move, and I was trying to breathe. I needed something to grab on to, and the only thing around was Chase. I bent toward him, letting Chase gather me up into his arms. He held me close and kept

us attached while he sat on the edge of the bed. My legs were still around his waist as he began to slowly rock my hips up and down on his rigid length. The burning was gone and replaced with a soothing motion against my walls. I had never felt so stretched or so full, ever.

Slowly Chase worked my hips, giving my pussy a lesson on his cock, lifting me up only to let me push my weight back down again. He took it slow at first, but as I grew more accustomed to his size, I wanted more. I needed more.

I wrapped my hands around his neck and held on. I was determined to make him lose that quiet control he always possessed. I began to rock my hips and grind into his pelvis. I said a silent thanks to God for those countless hours with a hula hoop as a kid.

I knew Chase was at his breaking point when his grip tightened like a vise around my waist. I knew I was driving him insane when he hissed in my ear. I knew Chase had snapped when he picked me up and pinned me down beneath him.

“That wasn’t very nice, sugar,” he said, his lips brushing against my ear. His breathing was just as ragged as mine, and beads of sweat were dripping off his forehead, making his hair curl at the ends.

“I wasn’t trying to be nice, cowboy,” I said as I rolled my hip again.

“You’re asking for it.” Chase growled and slammed his heated rod home to emphasize his point. My eyes rolled in the back of my head, but I wasn’t going to let him have the upper hand.

“I asked the first time when I said please; now I’m taking.” I grabbed on to his shoulders and pushed all my weight onto his cock.

“That’s it.” Chase grabbed my waist again and began pushing and pulling himself out of my highly wet but extremely packed pussy. The swishing sound of his thick member filling my insides became louder the harder and faster he worked. I was climbing that peak again, I could feel it building, and I couldn’t hold on for much longer.

“Oh God, Chase!” I screamed, my voice hoarse, holding on to him for life. I was going to die having an orgasm, and I couldn’t have been happier.

Chase, however, had other plans. His fingers started to stoke my swollen clit faster and faster. I couldn’t see straight; the light became a blur, and I felt myself giving in to the intense pleasure.

“That’s my flower; open up for me,” Chase soothed as his hard strokes contradicted the soft words. As if on cue, my pussy began to flutter around his pulsing cock. “That’s my Layla; come with me.” That was all I heard as my vision blanked and I felt like I was falling.

“Oh, God,” Chase whispered, and his body went tense. He held extremely still, with his length buried to the hilt in my sheath, riding out his orgasm. He slumped on top of me, rolling over until I was lying on his chest. His cock was still embedded inside me as if it had found a new place to park.

I struggled to regain my breath as I lay on his chest. His very fine sprinkling of black chest hair was whisper soft against my fingers. Chase’s breathing slowly returned to normal, and I felt my eyes start to drift closed. The last thing I remember was feeling Ranger’s cold nose nudge my leg. I was too tired to even move. I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter five

I awoke in the massive bed alone and sore. I untangled myself from the sheets and noticed that Chase had left out one of his t-shirts. I wondered if the man owned any other clothing besides t-shirts and jeans.

Pulling the shirt over my head, I pulled my wild hair into a bunch and wondered what I could tie it with. I looked on Chase's tall dresser and found a bandana. I shrugged my shoulders and wrapped it around my curls into a knot.

My stomach let out a growl that would have been embarrassing if anyone else heard it. I guess Chase had worked up my appetite. I walked out of the bedroom and into the kitchen.

I stood in the doorway, looking at Chase move around the kitchen with nothing but his jeans on. I smiled at the way he wielded the spatula and continued whistling. Ranger was watching him as well, his tail wagging.

"Don't tell me you've been giving Ranger bacon again," I said, sauntering over and settling down on the barstool.

Chase looked over his shoulder at me and smiled. I think it was right then my heart took the

plunge. It was like a lightning shock to my system. I had just fallen head over heels in love with this man.

“No, not bacon. A few links of sausage, but not bacon. I hope you don’t mind pancakes for dinner? I enjoy them at night.” As if I could fall any harder, my heart went and did a happy dance at the thought of sharing pancakes for dinner with this man for a long time.

“No, I don’t mind at all. Actually, pancakes are my favorite comfort food.”

Chase walked over with two plates stacked with pancakes and sausage. He placed a plate in front of me and straddled his own barstool with his plate before him. I didn’t say anything for a while, just enjoyed the taste of the butter and syrup, but when I looked up, I noticed that Chase hadn’t each much more than a few bites.

“A penny for them,” I said softly, watching his reaction.

Chase’s eyes met mine, and I could tell he was troubled. He looked toward the bedroom and then back at me.

“What happened back there—it wasn’t easy for me. I can admit I’m a flirt, but I don’t get that close—not to anyone.”

I was shocked at his confession. I'd thought Chase Daniels was a smooth-talking playboy, not the vulnerable man I was seeing.

"I can see you don't believe it, Layla, but when I laid eyes on you I was determined to have you. It wasn't easy walking around with bacon in my pockets just so Ranger there would come seek me out." Chase gave a sheepish grin.

"That's why Ranger kept finding you?" I gasped. He nodded. "And the finding me on the trail every morning, and meeting me for dinner every night?"

"I figured I would grow on you sooner or later, maybe convince you you might want to try a change of pace?" He said it as a statement, but I could hear the question in the words. The question was, would I go back to Maryland in two weeks?

I picked up a piece of sausage link and chewed slowly. I'd never felt like I belonged anywhere. But from the moment I checked in here, I'd felt like I'd found something new, something that was called peace. Maybe that was what I was chasing back in Maryland—not just criminals, but peace.

"I don't know, Chase. I could use a change of pace, but I don't know what I'd do with myself. I've only ever been a police officer."

"You know, I thought the same thing when I was in the Marines, but sometimes, things happen to make

you change your mind.” Chase spoke slowly, looking me in my eyes.

“Why did you change your mind?” I asked, not sure I wanted to hear the answer.

“I changed it for the idea of family. I got shot. Lying in the hospital hooked up on tubes, I wondered if I would ever have an opportunity to try for a family. Because of my injury, I was granted an honorable discharge. I just never found someone to make me think about being a father or a husband till you rounded that barn door.”

I nodded, and we sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity. I knew I had fallen in love with the man, but I didn’t know if it was possible to fall in love this hard or this fast.

“I can see you need some time. I’m not asking for anything but time. I want you to fall in love with me as much as I’ve fallen in love with you.”

My head snapped up at Chase’s declaration. I couldn’t see any sign of bull in his eyes; they were dark, the hue a royal blue, and they were serious.

“You’re going to have to want something else, Chase,” I said, a smiling playing at my lips. His face looked crestfallen, but I forged on. “Because I am already in love with you.” I winked at him, and his smile could have lit the entire rambler. Again, my heart did a flip-flop at that smile.

“Wooooooo!” Chase jumped out of his chair, plucked me off the barstool and began swinging me around in the air. Ranger got in on the act and started barking and jumping up and down.

“Chase!” I yelled, laughing so hard my face hurt.

“Oh no, darling, don’t even think about telling me to put you down. I’ve hunted you down for two weeks, and I refuse to let you out of my grasp again.”

Chase proved his point by laying me down on the cold counter of the breakfast bar. His kiss on my lips took my breath away. Then his eyes got a mysterious light blue, and he arched that dark eyebrow at me.

“So, Miss Lady Cop, you wouldn’t happen to have a pair of handcuffs in that duffle of yours, now would ya?”

I sat on the bar and looked at Chase without a hint of laughter.

“If you take the Harley, we can make it to the hotel and back in no time, cowboy. I got more than one pair in that duffle bag, and I intend to use them all.” I winked and slid off the counter.

After racing to get dressed, I found myself on the back of Chase’s Harley, racing to get the rest of my things from the hotel. I finally belonged somewhere, with someone, and it felt damn good. I let the wind whip across my face and held on tight to the one man

who'd had the nerve to chase me. Chase had it right the second day when he said "welcome home." I was officially home.

****NL****

NEVEA LANE

Nevea Lane currently resides in the Midwest, where she lives the life of a hermit. Her life has taken her on many travels and adventures, including: the tops of the Swiss Alps, *le Metro* of Paris, the busy street of Adams Morgan in Washington, D.C., and the quiet mystery of the Silver Lake mountain ranges of the Treasure State (Montana). She has called herself a geographic mutt, and believes that your home is where your heart takes you for the moment. Right now, her heart has led her to the rolling plains of Minnesota, where she'll remain until her characters have decided to stop chatting, or the muse leaves to pester someone else. She has received many marriage proposals, but has not yet decided to make that leap. She is looking for more than just a spark, she is looking for a forest fire...until she finds it, let her entertain you.

You can reach her at:

nevealane@yahoo.com
pinklacebows@writing.com

Yahoo Group:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NeveaLaneWorkshop/>

Website:

<http://nevealane.wordpress.com/>

Lulu Storefront:

<http://stores.lulu.com/nevealane>