



Woodrose Mountain (Hope's Crossing Book 2)

By RaeAnne Thayne

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Evie Blanchard was at the top of her field in the city of angels. But when an emotional year forces her to walk away from her job as a physical therapist, she moves from Los Angeles to Hope's Crossing seeking a quieter life. So the last thing she needs is to get involved with the handsome, arrogant Brodie Thorne and his injured daughter, Taryn.

A self-made man and single dad, Brodie will do anything to get Taryn the rehabilitation she needs...even if it means convincing Evie to move in with them. And despite her vow to keep an emotional distance, Evie can't help but be moved by Taryn's spirit, or Brodie's determination to win her help—and her heart. With laughter, courage and more than a little help from the kindhearted people of Hope's Crossing, Taryn may get the healing she deserves—and Evie and Brodie might just find a love they never knew could exist.

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Editorial Review

From the Author

Dear Readers,

Of all the people in Hope's Crossing who could use a little hope in their lives, Brodie Thorne and his daughter Taryn probably lead the list. Taryn was severely injured in the car accident that devastated the town several months ago and her outlook for full recovery looks bleak. But in the way of loving parents everywhere, her single father Brodie refuses to give up. He pursues whatever avenue necessary to provide his daughter the best possible life, even if it means enlisting the help of a woman he dislikes as much as he does Evie Blanchard. Evie doesn't want to be sucked into her previous career as a physical therapist again. She knows the devastating cost of allowing herself to care too much and she fears Brodie and Taryn will threaten the serenity she has worked so hard to find working at the bead store in Hope's Crossing. Together with the help of her patient dog - and other surprising sources -Evie is able to reach Taryn ... and Brodie as well. To me, this story is about healing hearts as well as bodies, about redemption and forgiveness and how with a little effort and faith, it is possible to heal the scars of the past in order to move forward to a brighter future.

All my best,

RaeAnne

About the Author

"New York Times" bestselling author RaeAnne Thayne finds inspiration in the beautiful northern Utah mountains where she lives with her family. Her books have won numerous honors, including four RITA Award nominations from Romance Writers of America and a Career Achievement Award from RT Book Reviews magazine. RaeAnne loves to hear from readers and can be reached through her website at www.raeannethayne.com.

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On a warm summer evening, the homes and buildings of Hope's Crossing nestled among the trees like brightly colored stones in a drawer—a brilliant lapis-lazuli roof here, a carnelian-painted garage here, the warm topaz of the old hospital bricks.

Evaline Blanchard rested a hip against a massive granite rock, taking a moment to catch her breath on a flat area of the Woodrose Mountain trail winding through the pines above the town she had adopted as her own.

From here, she could see the quaint old buildings, the colorful flower gardens in full bloom, Old Glory hanging everywhere. At nearly sunset on a Sunday, downtown was mostly quiet—though she could see a few cars parked in the lot of the historic Episcopalian church that had been the first brick structure in town, back when Hope's Crossing was a hustling, bustling mining town with a dozen saloons. Probably a Sunday-evening prayer service, she guessed.

Farther away, she could see more cars and a bustle of activity near Miners' Park and she suddenly remembered a bluegrass band was performing on the outdoor stage there for the weekly concert-in-the-park series.

Maybe she should have opted for an evening of music in the park instead of heading up into the mountains. She always enjoyed the concerts on a lovely summer night and the fun of sitting with her neighbors and friends, sharing good music and maybe a glass of wine and a boxed dinner from the cafe.

No, this was the better choice. As much as she enjoyed outdoor concerts, after three days of dealing with customers nearly nonstop at the outdoor art fair she had just attended in Grand Junction, she had been desperate for a little quiet.

Next to her, Jacques, her blond Labradoodle, stretched out on the dirt trail with a bored sort of air, tormenting a deerfly with the effrontery to buzz around his head.

"You don't have any patience when I have to stop to catch my breath, do you?"

He finally took pity on the fly—sort of—and swallowed it, then grinned at her as if he had conquered some advanced Jedi Master skill. Mission accomplished, he lumbered to his big paws and looked at her expectantly, obviously eager for more exercise.

She couldn't blame him. He had been endlessly patient during three days of sitting in a booth. He deserved a good, hard run. Too bad her glutes and quads weren't in the mood to cooperate.

Finally she caught her breath and headed up again, keeping to a slow jog. Despite the muscle aches, more of her tension melted away with each step.

She used to love running on the beach back in California, with the sea-soaked air in her face and the thud of her jogging shoes on the packed sand and the sheer, unadulterated magnificence of the Pacific always in view.

No ocean in sight here. Only the towering pines and aspens, the understory of western thimbleberry and wild roses, and the occasional bright flash of a mountain bluebird darting through the bushes.

She was content with no sound of gulls overhead. She still loved the ocean, without question, and at times yearned to be alone on a beach somewhere while the surf pounded the shore, but somehow this place had become home.

Who would have expected that a born-and-bred California girl could find this sort of peace and belonging in a little tourist town nestled in the Rockies?

She inhaled a deep, sage-scented breath, more tension easing out of her shoulders with every passing moment. It had been a hectic three days. This was her fourth outdoor arts-and-crafts fair of the season and she had one more scheduled before September. Her crazy idea to set up a booth at summer fairs across Colorado to sell her own wares and those of the other clients of String Fever—the bead store in Hope's Crossing where she worked—had taken off beyond her wildest dreams.

She was especially pleased, since all of the beadery participants had agreed to donate a portion of their proceeds to the Layla Parker memorial scholarship fund.

Layla was the daughter of Evie's good friend Maura McKnight-Parker and she had been killed in April in a tragic accident that had ripped apart the peace of Hope's Crossing and shredded it into tiny pieces.

Outdoor art-and-crafts fairs were exciting and dynamic, full of color and sound and people. But it was also hard work, especially when she worked by herself. Setting up the awning, arranging the beadwork displays, dealing with customers, running credit cards. All of it posed challenges.

Over the weekend, she'd had to deal with two shoplifters and the inevitable paperwork that resulted. This Sunday-evening run was exactly what she needed.

Finally tired, her muscles comfortably burning, she took the fork in the trail that headed back to town, her cross-trainers stirring up little clouds of dirt with every step. She'd forgotten her water bottle in her haste to get up on the cool trail after the drive and suddenly all she could think about was a long, cold drink of water.

The return trip took her and Jacques down Sweet Laurel road, past some of the small, wood-framed older houses that had been built when the town was raw and new. She saw Caroline Bybee out watering her gorgeous flowers, her wiry gray braids covered by a big, floppy straw hat. Evie waved to her but didn't stop to talk.

The air smelled of a summer evening, of grilling meat from a barbecue somewhere, onions being cooked in one house she passed, fresh-mown grass at another, all with the undertone of pine and sage from the surrounding mountains.

By the time she turned at the top of steep Main Street and headed past the storefronts toward her little two-bedroom apartment above String Fever, she was hungry and tired and only wanted to put her feet up for a couple of hours with a good book and a cup of tea.

String Fever was housed in a two-story brick building that once had been the town's most notorious brothel, back in the days when this particular piece of Colorado was full of rowdy miners. She cut through an alley that opened onto the lovely little fenced garden behind the store, enjoying the sweet glow of the sunset on the weathered brick.

Jacques gave one sharp bark when she reached the gate into the garden, barely big enough for some flowers, a patch of grass and a table and four chairs where the String Fever employees took breaks or the kids of Claire Bradford—soon to be Claire McKnight—could hang out and do homework when their mother was working.

Evie really needed to think about moving into a bigger place where Jacques could have room to run. When she had moved into the apartment above the store, she'd never planned on having a dog, especially not a good-size one like Jacques. She had only intended to foster him for a few weeks as a favor to a friend who volunteered at the animal shelter, but Evie had fallen hard for the big, gentle dog with the incongruously charming poodle fur.

"Hold on, you crazy dog. You're probably as thirsty as I am. I can let you off your leash in a minute."

She pushed through the gate, then froze as Jacques instantly barked again at a figure sitting at one of the wrought-iron chairs. The shade of the umbrella obscured his features and her heart gave a well-conditioned little stutter at finding a strange man in her back garden.

Back in L.A., she probably would have already had one finger on the nozzle of her pepper spray and one on the last "1" in 9-1-1 on her cell phone, just in case.

Here in Hope's Crossing, when a strange man showed up just before dark, she was definitely still cautious but not panicky. Yet.

She peered through the beginnings of pearly twilight and suddenly recognized the man—and all her alarm bells started clanging even louder. She would much rather face a half dozen knife-wielding criminals out to do her harm than Brodie Thorne.

"Evening," he said and rose from the table, tall and lean and dark amid the spilling flowerpots set around the pocket garden.

Jacques strained against the leash, something he didn't normally do. As she wasn't expecting it and hadn't had time to wrap her fingers more tightly around it, the leash slipped through and Jacques used his newfound freedom to rush eagerly toward the strange man.

The distance was short and she'd barely formed the words of the *sit* command before the dog reached Brodie. Given her experience with the annoying man, she braced for him to push the dog away with some rude comment about how she couldn't keep her dog under any better control than her life, or something equally disdainful. Instead, he surprised her by scratching the dog between his Lab-shaped ears.

She didn't want him to be kind to dogs. It was a jarring note in an otherwise unpleasant personality.

Her relationship with Brodie had gotten off to a rocky start from the moment she'd started an email friendship with his mother nearly three years ago on a beading loop, a friendship that had finally led Evie to Hope's Crossing and String Fever, the store Katherine had opened several years ago and eventually sold to Claire Bradford.

His mother had become a dear friend. She had offered unending support and love to Evie during a very dark time and Evie adored her. She owed Katherine so much. Being polite to her abrasive son was a small enough thing, especially since Brodie had troubles of his own right now.

"Sorry. Have you been waiting long?" she asked after an awkward, jerky sort of pause.

"Ten minutes or so. I was about to leave you a note when I heard you coming down the alley."

She didn't feel at all prepared to talk to him, especially when she couldn't focus on anything but her thirst. "I'm sorry, but I didn't take my water bottle on my run and I desperately need a drink. Can you give me a minute?"

"Sure."

"Do you want to come up or wait for me down here?"

"I'll come up."

On second thought, she should have phrased that differently. *How about you wait here where it's safe and stay the heck out of my personal bubble.* Alas, too late to rescind the invitation now.

She led the way up her narrow staircase, aware with each step of the man following closely behind her. She wasn't used to men in this space, she suddenly realized. Yes, she had dated a few times since she'd come to

Hope's Crossing, but nothing serious and nobody she would consider inviting up to her personal sanctuary.

For the most part, her life was surrounded by women. She worked in a bead store, for heaven's sake, a location not usually overflowing with an overabundance of testosterone. If she wanted to date, she was going to have to put a little effort into it. Now that she almost thought she'd begun to finally achieve some level of serenity after the last rough two years, maybe it was time she did something about that.

If she *were* to start thinking seriously about entering that particular arena again, she could guarantee with absolute certainty that the words *Brodie Thorne* and *dating* would never appear in the same context in her head—even though he was gorgeous, if one went for the sexy, dark-haired, buttoned-down businessman.

Which she so didn't.

She pulled her house key out of the small zipper pocket on the inside waistband of her leggings and unlocked the door. As soon as it swung open, she winced. She had forgotten the mess she'd left behind when she headed up into the mountains immediately after her return to town—the jumble of boxes and bags and suitcases. She really ought to have left Brodie down in the garden with Jacques.

Brodie raised an eyebrow at the mess—or perhaps at her eclectic design tastes, with the mismatched furniture covered in mounds of pillows, the wispy curtains on the windows and the jeweled lampshades she'd created one winter night when she was bored. It was a far cry from her sleek little house in Topanga Canyon or her childhood home, a sprawling mansion in Santa Barbara, but she loved it.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christina Bain:

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