

Anywhere with You (Made in Montana)

By Debbi Rawlins



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Getting in bed with the law

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Deputy Grace Hendrix is not in the mood to be sweet-talked by a sexy stranger. To become the next sheriff, she'll have to outsmart her resentful coworkers...and stay out of trouble. Unfortunately, "trouble" is over six feet of mouthwatering, hard-bodied gorgeousness. It's only a matter of time before this good cop indulges in a little bad-boy diversion...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Debbi has written over 50 books for Harlequin since 1994, in several different lines including: Harlequin American, Harlequin Intrigue, Love & Laughter, Duets and Harlequin Blaze. She lives in rural, beautiful Utah with far too many rescued cats and dogs. Although she hasn't lived there for years, she still misses her home state of Hawaii. She's currently working on a western Blaze series, one of her favorite genres.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Blackfoot Falls 26 miles.

Ben Wolf smiled when he saw the warped metal road sign up ahead. No one had bothered to replace it, and now, fifteen years later, it still bore his mark—the large dent made by his baseball bat the day before heChloe let out a laugh9;d left town. He'd been leaning out of his friend Buster's pickup going thirty-five miles per hour when he'd taken a swing, and nearly dislocated his shoulder.

He'd been so damn angry that day. At his mother for all the lies, at the father he could barely remember, at the McAllister brothers for being better than him. Sure, the family had accepted him as if he'd been one of their own—and not *only* their maid's son—but that still didn't make him a McAllister.

Ben pressed down on the accelerator as he passed the sign and steered the Porsche into the curve in the highway. He hadn't thought about that day in years. Hell, he'd dislocated both shoulders since then, busted his ribs more times than he could recall and broken his jaw twice. The difference now was he got paid damn well to risk the occasional visit to the ER.

The sky was blue and cloudless, the air pleasantly warm considering the April sun was headed for the Rockies, their peaks still packed with snow. Patches of the mountainside below the tree line were still bare. Another month and the spring leaves would take care of that.

Northwest Montana was beautiful country. No argument there. In a way, Ben had been lucky to grow up on the Sundance. The ranch spread right up to the foothills, where clear water flowed in streams carrying all the fish a kid could catch. How many times had he fallen asleep in a grassy meadow, lulled by the warmth of the sun and the smell of wild sage?

Ben rolled down his window and breathed in the crisp, clean air. He watched a hawk wheeling and soaring through the sky. He hadn't realized how much he'd missed the mountains. Working as a stunt man, he'd seen plenty of great spots all over the States, Canada and Mexico. Even Europe once for an indie film. But nothing could beat the scenery here.

Hollywood had hills. Some nice views. And the city had other charms. But after living there for so many years, the glitter and sparkle had started to dim.

Maybe if everything went okay with his mother, he'd stick around for a week. Claudia had warned him their mom had aged. His sister saw her a couple times a year. All Ben had managed since leaving were phone calls at Christmas and sometimes on her birthday.

Distracted by his thoughts, he didn't swerve in time to avoid a rut in the road. The two right tires hit the

packed dirt and sent dust flying everywhere. Ben cursed a blue streak for all the good it did. He'd gone an hour out of his way to have the Porsche washed and waxed in Great Falls. Just so it would be nice and shiny when he pulled into the Sundance.

Half the population of Blackfoot Falls would be there for Rachel McAllister's wedding, including a number of folks who thought Ben would never amount to anything. Let 'em see he'd done well for himself. Few things screamed success louder than a shiny red Porsche.

He peered at the road ahead, then glanced in the rear-view mirror. The dust hadn't settled. A brisk breeze sent the airborne dirt swirling across the highway and chasing behind him. He accelerated, hoping that once he drove past the clearing, the scrubby brush would block some of the wind.

Taking another look in the mirror, Ben saw a flashing red light through the dusty haze. A second later, he heard the distinct blare of a siren.

A cop? Way out here?

"You gotta be kidding," he muttered, tempted to floor the accelerator.

The white truck had to be county-issue. Too old to keep up with his Porsche. Hell, his sports car had to be the only one around for miles. They'd catch him sooner or later. With his luck, a deputy would cuff him at the wedding.

Right. A deputy.

Not highway patrol. This was a county road.

Ben smiled as he pulled off to the side. Chances were damn good he'd gone to school with whoever was driving that truck. Kids from Blackfoot Falls rarely left after graduating. They normally stayed to work on the family ranch or found local jobs.

After turning off the engine, he stared into the rear-view mirror and waited. The truck stopped several yards behind him. He couldn't make out the driver. Only that he was wearing a blue ball cap, which was odd. The sheriff and deputies had always worn Stetsons.

The truck door opened.

Ben turned his gaze to the larger reflection in his side mirror. The deputy was a woman. Medium height, slim, her tan uniform shirt tucked into snug-fitting jeans that showed off a small waist and curvy hips.

She closed the door and slowly approached him. Her hair was pulled back, the color somewhere between brown and auburn. Sunglasses covered half her face, but he didn't think he knew her. He would've recognized her walk. Few women carried off that easy sensual sway. In his experience, it worked only if a woman was unaware of it.

Now, the ticket book in her hand he recognized immediately. Man, he did not need another mark on his record. His insurance premium had shot through the roof with the last ticket. But all wasn't lost. Lucky for him, he had a way with women.

"Good afternoon," she said with a small nod. "License and registration, please."

He removed his sunglasses, hoping she'd do the same. "Deputy Hendrix," he said, glancing at the name tag fastened just above her left breast. Then he gave her a slow lazy smile. "Is there a problem?"

Her lips parted slightly. "Really?" One corner of her mouth quirked up. "You're going to pretend you weren't speeding?"

At the unexpected response, Ben's smile faltered. "Not by much."

Her brows rose over the dark lenses, and she smiled a little. Not necessarily in a good way. "License and registration."

Jesus. Here they were in the middle of nowhere and she was going to push the issue? Ben dug out his wallet and then rifled through his glove box. He was getting to be a pro at this, he thought wryly, and handed over everything.

"Thank you," she said, her politeness annoying as hell.

Trying to keep his cool, Ben watched her step back and study his license. A faint sprinkling of freckles across her nose made her look young, probably midtwenties. If she'd gone to school in Blackfoot Falls, she would've been quite a few grades behind him.

"I know you, don't I?" he said.

The deputy looked up. "I doubt it."

Blue. He'd bet that was the color of her eyes behind the dark glasses. "Blackfoot Falls High?" He tried out another smile. "Obviously, I was ahead of you."

She cocked her head to the side. "So you're from here and know better than to go racing around these curves. Deer could come out of the brush at any time."

Irritated, Ben snorted. "You giving me a ticket or a lecture?"

"Both, if necessary."

So much for laying on the charm. He knew for a fact she hadn't been following him because he would've seen her. That meant she'd been parked off to the side. "You didn't clock my speed."

"And you know this how?"

"A hundred bucks says you don't have radar in that piece of crap you're driving."

She f lipped open her ticket book. "You want to add gambling and harassment to the traffic violation? Be my guest."

"Come on...can't you just give me a warning? I'm only going to be here a few days." He noticed her slight hesitation, toying with her pen and angling her wrist to see her watch. Probably getting off shift soon. "I

swear I'll drive like a nun."

That almost got a smile out of her. She held up his license for another look. "Mr. Wolf, you weren't just speeding a few miles over— Do you even know how fast you were going?"

Deciding to plead the fifth, he kept his mouth shut.

"You're lucky I don't bump this up to reckless driving."

His sigh came out low and desperate. "Don't do that," he said. "Please."

It about killed him to get the word out. And she knew it. Which probably told her too much about his lousy driving record.

"Look," she said, her voice softening. "I'm not trying to jam you up---"

The sound of a rough engine in need of a tune-up made them turn. A truck cruised down the highway toward them. White. Probably another sheriff's department vehicle. Could be good news for Ben if he knew the driver. But something she'd said had distracted him. *Jam you up*? She wasn't from around here.

He watched her mouth tighten and her shoulders go back. Nice high breasts. He couldn't help noticing. Also, that Deputy Hendrix didn't look happy.

"I won't cite you for reckless driving," she said, clicking her pen and opening her ticket book. "Just speeding."

Shit. He'd thought he had her...

The truck slowed.

She kept her head bowed, ignoring the driver.

So did Ben. He was too busy watching her nibble her lower lip. She didn't seem nervous so much as irritated.

Finally, she glanced over her shoulder. Her hair was pulled into a tight braid, all but a few wisps fluttering in the breeze. "Need something?" she asked.

"Nope." It was a male voice.

Ben dragged his gaze away from her, but too late to see who was in the truck. All he caught was a glimpse of the driver's tan uniform shirt as he drove off. Hell, it might've been someone Ben knew, and he could've saved himself this headache.

Deputy Hendrix resumed filling out the ticket. "I'm writing this for only ten miles over. Consider it a gift."

"Right."

She stopped and looked up, her eyes meeting his over the top of her sunglasses. Oh yeah, they were blue. As blue as the Montana sky. And brimming with annoyance at his sarcasm.

He smiled. "Thank you, Deputy."

She tore the ticket out of her book and handed it to him along with his license and registration.

She smiled back. "You have a real nice day, Mr. Wolf."

Grace Hendrix stood under the shade of a cottonwood tree, knowing she didn't belong. Not here at the Sundance ranch. Not at the wedding. And not in Blackfoot Falls. Yet here she was, trying to hold on to a smile while staring at all these strange, happy faces.

The bride, Rachel McAllister, had been kind to invite her, but Grace didn't really know Rachel. Or her three brothers. Or anyone else in the crowd of over four hundred people, all the women wearing dresses except, of course, Grace. If she still owned a dress, it was in storage along with most of her stuff. She'd packed in a hurry before leaving Arizona two weeks ago. Who knew what she'd crammed into the boxes?

Grace cast a quick glance at the two bars set up on either side of the huge white tent erected for the occasion. Her uncle Clarence was around somewhere, irritating someone, no doubt. Of that, Grace was quite certain. He was her mom's brother, the mayor of Blackfoot Falls, and the main reason Grace had moved to town, even though she didn't know him well. The last time she'd seen Clarence was at her mom's funeral. Grace had been ten. And while she appreciated his support, he was embarrassing her with his blatant campaigning to get her elected sheriff in November, so she'd given him the slip about an hour ago.

The shade inched away with the sun, and Grace inched along with it. The weather was perfect. Bright. Warm. People had scattered, gathering wherever they could find shade instead of confining themselves to the tent. This made escaping tricky. But everyone was busy laughing and talking, so it was possible she could dash to her car without being noticed.

She spotted Roy and cringed. He stood with his wife, and luckily was more interested in the bowls of munch-ies at the bar than anything else, including Grace. Fine by her. She wasn't interested in socializing with him or the other deputies, though she hadn't seen any of them at the wedding. They probably hadn't been invited. Which meant they'd have something else to hold against her. As if being an outsider and a woman weren't enough.

She could hardly blame them. The sheriff had resigned. Noah would be gone in ten days, and she wasn't the only deputy who wanted to take his place. In truth, the others had a right to view her as an interloper, regardless of the fact she was the best qualified. Just like she had a right to throw her hat into the ring.

Someone tested the mic, drawing everyone's attention to the stage. Perfect opportunity for Grace to zip to the parking area. She pulled her cell out of her pocket and checked the time. It was already six. Preparing to bolt, she glanced toward the large three-story family home to make sure she wasn't being observed.

"Well, look at that."

The voice startled her. Grace whirled around, ready to make an excuse, when she saw it was three of the bridesmaids talking to each other. They weren't even looking at her.

"Where? What?" The blonde in the royal-blue dress shaded her eyes, her gaze darting from the stable to the house.

"Right over there," Katy said, her steady focus almost predatory. Grace had briefly met the tall brunette. She and the other two bridesmaids were Rachel's sorority sisters, all of them wearing different styles and colors of dresses, which Grace thought was pretty cool. "He just got out of the red Porsche."

Red Porsche?

Grace's heart skittered from first to third in two seconds. Silly, since she'd guessed the speed demon was in town for the wedding.

"I still don't see him." The shorter blonde wearing emerald green—Grace thought her name might be Chloe—pushed up on tiptoes. "Where?"

"Tall, longish dark hair? He's gorgeous." The blonde in blue adjusted her neckline, tugging at it until her cleavage was just so. "I wonder who he is."

"I bet he's Hilda's son," Katy said. "Ben, I think."

"Hilda?"

"You know...the McAllisters' housekeeper. Rachel said he was driving from California." Katy slid an arch look at the woman still fussing with her dress. "By the way, Liz, I saw him first, so don't even think about it."

It took a moment for Grace to realize she'd joined the pack and was actually waiting for a glimpse of Ben Wolf. If he spotted her, she wondered how he'd react. She knew he hadn't expected her to ticket him. A hot guy like that probably got away with murder.

Admittedly, her intention had been to give him a warning. Stopping him had almost made her late for the reception. But once Roy had seen them, she'd had little choice but to write the ticket. The last thing she needed was to come off as a pushover for a good-looking guy.

"California, huh?" Chloe settled back on her heels and drained her margarita. "I wonder what he does."

"Stunt man," Katy murmured. "He grew up here, though."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lindsey Gant:

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