



## Sweet Laurel Falls (Hope's Crossing Book 3)

By *RaeAnne Thayne*

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Now they are all back, but Sage has her own secret, one that will test the fragile bonds of a reunited family. Thrown together by circumstances and dedicated to those they love, Maura and Jackson must learn to move forward and let go of the mistakes of their past for the bright future that awaits them and their friends in Hope's Crossing.

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## **Sweet Laurel Falls (Hope's Crossing Book 3) By RaeAnne Thayne Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #12975 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-10-01
- Released on: 2012-09-25
- Format: Kindle eBook

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Romance, vivid characters and a wonderful story; really who could ask for more?"

--Debbie Macomber, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author on Blackberry Summer

"If you're going to read only one book this season, make it Blackberry Summer. --Debbie Macomber, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author

### 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 six RITA Award nominations from Romance Writers of America and Career Achievement and Romance Pioneer awards from RT Book Reviews. She loves to hear from readers and can be reached through her website at [www.raeannethayne.com](http://www.raeannethayne.com).

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Forget Christmas vacation. This year, Maura McKnight-Parker wanted a vacation *from* Christmas. Wouldn't it be wonderful if she could just crawl into a warm cave somewhere and sleep through the holidays?

With a sigh, Maura took a final look around at the cozy nook where she had arranged several of the plump sofas and chairs normally scattered throughout her bookstore-slash-coffeehouse. Everything appeared ready for the Books and Bites book club Christmas party and gift exchange tonight.

Nibbles? Check. M&M's, spiced nuts and popcorn mix waited in holiday-printed bowls, and she had even dragged out her Christmas china and coffee mugs for said nibbles.

Decorations? Check. Not much to do there, since the halls of Dog-Eared Books & Brew had already been decked the week before Thanksgiving with artificial Christmas trees adorned in elegant blues and whites and silver. Snowflakes and gleaming ornaments in the same color scheme dangled from the ceiling, lightly dancing in the currents of air whenever anybody opened the front door.

Gifts? Yes. She had set up a little tabletop tree with handmade blown-glass ornaments for each of the book club members that she had commissioned from an artist with a gallery in town.

In addition to that pretty bit of swag, she had spent the past few days scouring shelves and boxes in her office and had filled gift bags for all the book club members, brimming with coffee and tea samples and some of the promotional bookmarks, notepads and other tchotchkes authors and their publicists were always sending to the store.

Despite a deep-seated wish that she could just hole up in her house for Christmas like a fox in a cozy den, she had worked tirelessly for days to make this party a success. If she were a scam artist, she would have called this baiting her trap. She had to convince her dearest friends and family members that she was indeed trying to move forward with her life after the hell of the past year. To accomplish that, she needed to put on a

convincing show for them.

Maybe then, everybody would back off and give her a little space to find her own way.

"What do you think?" she asked April Herrera, who was taking a load of Books & Brew coffee mugs out of the small dishwasher behind the counter.

The assistant manager for the coffeehouse side of her business gazed at the setup with an enchanted look in her eyes that seemed at odds with her henna-colored hair, pencil-thin eyebrows and various diamond studs.

The silk long-underwear shirt she wore underneath her barista shirt and apron hid the various tattoos Maura knew adorned her arms.

Judging only by appearances, April ought to be wild and cynical. Instead, she was just about the sweetest person Maura knew. More important, she was smart and hardworking and intuitive about her customers.

"It looks super in here. Just perfect. You guys are going to have *such* a great time."

Maura tended to have a soft spot for rebellious girls, probably because she'd been one in another lifetime.

"Are you sure you can't stay?"

"I really wish I could. Your book club meetings are always a hoot. Your mom cracks me up every time she comes in, and it's hilarious to watch Ruth and Claire together. Do they *ever* agree on a book?"

"Rarely," she answered. Or anything else, for that matter. Ruth Tatum worked in the bookstore, and she and her daughter had what could best be described as a complicated relationship. "You should really stay. You know everyone would love to have you again. Your comments on the last book were really insightful."

"I can't. Sorry. I've really got to take off as soon as Josh gets here. This is my very first time night-skiing with the team."

"How's that going?" she asked.

"Excellent." The young woman's face lit up. "I think they're ready to put me on the schedule on a regular basis."

April was training for the ski patrol and also taking classes in hope of eventually becoming a paramedic. Maura didn't know how she juggled work and class and her two-year-old son, especially on her own. Maybe that was another reason she had taken April under her wing—she could certainly relate to being a young single mother just trying to survive.

"That's terrific. If you need me to make any adjustments to your work schedule here, just say the word. I'm flexible. And I'm happy to babysit Trek whenever you need."

"Thanks, Maur."

"Maybe you can come to the book club meeting in January, if it fits around all the plates you have spinning."

"Definitely!" April started to add something else, but a customer at the coffee counter rang the little bell, and she gave Maura a "later" kind of wave and headed back to take the order.

Personally, Maura couldn't wait for January, to finally turn that page of her calendar to a new year. Maybe

once the holiday craziness was over, she could escape some of the pressure of trying to act as if everything was fine when she was frozen solid inside.

She grabbed one more bowl of spicy nuts and set it on a side table, then moved a bowl of plump, airy peppermints to another spot. Having dear friends and family members surrounding her in Hope's Crossing was both a blessing and a curse. She knew they loved her and worried for her. While she understood their concern and tried to be grateful, mostly she just found it exhausting and overwhelming.

Sometimes that ever-present concern made her feel as if she had been buried alive under an avalanche. It pressed down on her, heavy and suffocating, until all she wanted to do was scramble for an air pocket.

Even her little bungalow on Mountain Laurel Road wouldn't remain a haven for long. In a few days, her daughter Sage would be coming home from college for the holidays, bringing yet another pair of watchful eyes.

She could do it. A few more weeks of pretending, and then she could have the cold nights of January to herself.

After one last look around, she suddenly remembered she'd meant to grab a couple extra copies of this month's book club selection off the shelf, in case anybody forgot theirs and needed it for reference. She had several copies in the display near the front, she remembered, and hurried in that direction.

A light snow drifted past the front display window, the big, fluffy flakes reflecting the colorful Christmas lights on storefronts up and down Main Street. Hope's Crossing was a true winter wonderland and local businesses worked hard to make the town glow with an old-fashioned, enticing charm. Nearly every store had some kind of light display. Hers were LED icicles that appeared to be dripping.

The effort seemed to be working. Her store bustled with customers and, judging by the pedestrian and vehicle traffic on a normally slow Thursday night, the other businesses on Main Street were enjoying the same success.

An SUV snagged the last parking space in front of the cafe across the street and a few stores down from her. A man in a leather jacket and Levi's climbed out and snowflakes immediately landed on his wavy dark hair and the shoulders of his warm cocoa-colored coat. He looked sharp and put together.

Everyone would be arriving any second now and she should go put the finishing touches on the scene she had created, but for some reason she was drawn to the man she could still barely see.

Some indefinable aspect of him—the angle of his jaw or the way he moved—called to mind the image of her first love. Jackson Lange, sexy and dangerous, young, angry, ferociously smart.

She rarely thought about Jack anymore, except on the rare occasions when his unpleasant father came into the store. Why she would be wasting time wondering about him now when she had so much to do was a mystery.

The man walked around the other side of the vehicle to let someone out of the passenger side, a gesture she didn't see enough these days. She was curious to see his companion, but before she could catch a glimpse of the woman, the front door of the shop opened and Claire and Evie burst through, bringing the scent of snow and Christmas. Their mingled laughter chimed more sweetly than carols.

"I know," Claire said. "That's what I told him. But this is his first Christmas as a stepfather, and I swear, he's more excited than Owen or Macy. I've had to hide the present stash a half-dozen times, and he finds every

blasted spot."

"What do you expect, honey?" Evie untwisted her scarf, hand-knitted in a heathery wool that dangled with beads instead of fringe. "He's a trained detective. It's kind of what he does."

The two of them had probably walked over from the bead store Claire owned, just down the street a block. Evie rented an apartment upstairs from Claire. For now, anyway. Evie was dating Brodie Thorne, her friend Katherine's son, and Maura expected their relationship was progressing quickly.

Claire's soft, pretty features lit up when she saw her. "Maura, honey, the store looks fabulous. I keep meaning to tell you every day when I come in for coffee, but you're never standing still long enough."

"Your mom did a lot of the work. It was her idea to hang all the snowflakes and the ornaments. Isn't that brilliant?"

Ruth had been working at the bookstore for months, but Claire still seemed baffled by it. Maura couldn't blame her. No one was more surprised than Maura when Ruth's offer to help out temporarily during those dark days and weeks in the spring had turned into a permanent arrangement that had worked out beautifully for everyone concerned.

"Ruth is a great employee," she assured Claire again. "Hardworking and dependable, with these wonderful, unexpected flashes of ingenuity, like the snowflakes."

"And here she is now," Evie announced.

Sure enough, a moment later Ruth walked in, along with Maura's mother, Mary Ella, and Katherine Thorne. With them was Janie Hamilton, a fairly new addition to town and another lost lamb Katherine had taken under her wing, and right behind them was Charlotte Caine, who owned the candy store in town.

Maura took a deep breath and put on her game face, that forced smile that had become second nature since her world had changed forever eight months earlier. "Welcome, everyone. I'm so happy you can all come."

She stepped forward to hug and brush cheeks with everyone as they all began to shed coats and scarves and hats like penguins molting in the spring. Everyone seemed to have on holiday party clothes: shimmering blouses, festive patterned scarves, dangling earrings and beaded necklaces.

She felt drab in her suede jacket, tailored cream shirt and jeans, though she was wearing one of her favorite chunky wood-bead necklaces she had made at String Fever last year.

"What about Alex?" she asked. "Isn't she coming?"

"Angie's picking her up," her mother assured her. "They texted me a few minutes ago to tell me they're running late. As usual."

"Whew. That's a relief. She's supposed to be bringing dessert, those delicious pumpkin spice cupcakes she makes."

"The ones with the cinnamon buttermilk icing? Oh, yay!" Claire said. "I guess since I'm not trying to fit into a wedding dress anymore, I might be able to let myself have one."

Maura could probably afford to eat five or six, since all her clothes fit her loosely now. Amazing how little appetite she had these days. "Everybody grab coffee or tea or whatever you're drinking from the counter. I've

got us set up in the corner."

She ushered everyone over to the coffee counter in time to see April hang her apron on the hook. Josh Kimball had come in to replace her for the evening shift. He waved and grinned his charmer of a grin at her, and she managed to dredge up a small smile for his perpetual raccoon eyes, white in an otherwise bronzed face where his goggles blocked the sun while he was snowboarding.

"I'm off. I'll see you later," April said as she grabbed her coat.

"Thank you for everything. Good luck with the night patrol. See you tomorrow."

"You got it." April swung open the door just as a couple walked in—and suddenly all the air whooshed out of Maura's lungs.

It was the man she had seen a half hour earlier entering the cafe, the same impractical leather jacket, the same wavy dark hair, the same plaid scarf.

In the hanging track lights of her store, she could clearly see her mistake.

This man didn't simply bear a mild, passing resemblance to Jackson Lange.

He most definitely *was* Jackson Lange.

For one crazy second, her mind became a tangle of half-buried memories, the kind that came from being young and impulsive and passionately in love. The first time he held her hand in a darkened theater, shared confidences on a sun-warmed boulder high up the canyon, tangled bodies and mouths, the peace she found only with him—then the vast heartache and the sharp, gnawing fear after he left.

Someone was talking to her. Evie, she thought vaguely, but the words couldn't register past her dismayed shock.

Jack had vowed never to step foot in Hope's Crossing, with the fierce, unwavering determination only an eighteen-year-old young man could claim.

Yet here he was.

Yeah. Like she needed one more thing to make this Christmas really suck. This was definitely the cherry on top of the fruitcake—for Jackson Lange to come into her store with his undoubtedly lovely wife to have a cappuccino or maybe browse through one of the nonfiction sections. Travel, maybe, or her small but adequate architectural design shelf.

And in the middle of her book club meeting, for crying out loud.

She could just ignore him. If she ducked behind a bookcase, with luck, he wouldn't see her. He probably had no idea she owned Dog-Eared Books & Brew—why would he possibly know that? She could send one of the clerks over to escort him to the farthest corner away from the book club—or better yet, have Josh come with all his delightful snowboarder muscles and throw him out in the cold. She'd never heard of a bookstore having a bouncer, but there was always a first time.

Too late. He turned just at that moment and his blue-eyed gaze met hers. She saw definite recognition there. Oddly, he didn't seem at all surprised to see her, almost as if he had come looking for her. That was impossible, of course. In nearly twenty years, he hadn't made the smallest effort to find her. Not that it would

have taken much work on his part. She hadn't gone anywhere.

The years had been unfairly kind to him, she saw, had taken a teenage boy who had been brooding and angry and undeniably gorgeous to all the other teenage girls and turned him into a sexy, potent male, with intense blue eyes, a firm mouth and the resolute jaw-line that just might be the only thing he shared with his father.

"Are you all right?"

She managed to look away and saw her mother studying her with concern. "What?"

"You've gone pale, darling. And I asked you three times if you made these delicious truffles. What's the matter?"

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Michael Short:**

The guide untitled Sweet Laurel Falls (Hope's Crossing Book 3) is the book that recommended to you to see. You can see the quality of the publication content that will be shown to an individual. The language that writer use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The article writer was did a lot of research when write the book, therefore the information that they share for your requirements is absolutely accurate. You also will get the e-book of Sweet Laurel Falls (Hope's Crossing Book 3) from the publisher to make you a lot more enjoy free time.

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#### **Lori Gonzales:**

In this era which is the greater person or who has ability in doing something more are more important than other. Do you want to become one of it? It is just simple way to have that. What you need to do is just spending your time almost no but quite enough to enjoy a look at some books. Among the books in the top listing in your reading list is usually Sweet Laurel Falls (Hope's Crossing Book 3). This book that is qualified as The Hungry Hills can get you closer in turning into precious person. By looking up and review this reserve you can get many advantages.

#### **Paul Breen:**

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