

FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY



KIM COX

~ ~ ~

SPECIAL OFFER

Click [HERE](#) to Get A FREE eBook

COPYRIGHT

--

FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY

Copyright © 2019 Kim Cox

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission from the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Name, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. No part of this publication can be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission of the author in writing.

Kindle ASIN: B07PT6CTNB

Cover Art © 2023 KC Designs & Publishing

DEDICATION

--

To my brother, David Hooks Jr., who died way too young in a tragic accident.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

--

Thank you to my critique buddies Sher, Pamela, and Neva for all your help.

Thank you to Nicola Aquino at www.spitandpolishediting.com for always being there to proofread my books, and for finding things I missed. Good luck with your new business.

And a special thank you to my editor, David Imrie at www.noveledit.net, who helped shape this book into a much better story with his amazing advice and guidance. He surpassed all my expectations.

Table of Contents

--

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE & ROMANTIC MYSTERY NOVELS

LANA MALLOY PARANORMAL MYSTERY SERIES

BOOKS BY KIM COX

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prologue

--

The low fuel warning dinged from the dash. I checked the gas gauge, then my watch and, sure enough, it was getting pretty late. I hoped Meryl's remained open: I couldn't remember their hours.

Why did I stay out this late? I knew the reason, but I didn't want to think about it. I hated my life, but it would all soon change. A new start awaited me. Any day now the check would arrive in the mail, I'd have all the money I could ever want and no one to boss me around or tell me how to spend it. That would be the day I celebrated my freedom.

The newly opened Gas and Go convenience store emerged ahead and, thankfully, it was one of those twenty-four-hour businesses. It wasn't Meryl's, where I usually stopped when I was up this way, but I didn't care. I would get gas and head home, so much nicer without always hell to pay from my *better* half. What a joke!

As I pumped gas, I noticed Daniel's silver Toyota Camry parked near the front door. What's he doing here? Could it get any better? I paid for the gas, remembering to use cash rather than my card, and backed my truck under the trees' dark cover, where I waited and watched for his return.

Should I do it tonight? What about her alibi? But could I pass up an opportunity like this one? Could I? Should I check with Leta first? Debating the pros and cons, my mind wandered to our last lunch date, after we'd worked up a sweat. I chuckled.

When Daniel loaded himself into his car, I made up my mind. Now or never. A few seconds after he left, I pulled onto the highway behind him.

* * *

Roadside gravel pelted against the Camry's undercarriage. Daniel jumped and struggled to pull the rear tire back onto the blacktop without losing control. The car corrected, and he drove nervously up the treacherous mountain incline. Shaking, he mopped the sweat from his brow. *That was a close one.*

He struck the steering wheel with the palm of his hand; how could he have been so stupid? Almost home, but not quite. He rubbed his eyes before taking a long, deep breath, calming his nerves. At least he wasn't a mile down the road, where it lacked a shoulder and a guard rail, and there was nothing to stop him from plunging into the ravine below. Almost certain death—even if the trees managed to stop him, he'd likely die from the crash.

He turned on the air conditioner and aimed the cold air directly at his face. It would help keep his eyes open a little longer, he hoped. Not much further and he'd be in his

warm bed, curled up next to his loving wife. He would make it. He could stay awake that long.

As he topped the hill, bright lights appeared from behind and glared into his eyes from the rearview mirror. "Dammit!" He reached up to tilt the mirror toward the ceiling, but whoever it was dimmed their lights, so he left it. He relaxed a bit.

Relief short lived; the vehicle rapidly closed the space between them and drew so close Daniel was able to see the shadowy outline of a large, dark colored truck and the glint of a Ford emblem. "Okay buddy, come on by if you're in such a big hurry. Pass me already." Daniel slowed slightly and hugged the line to the side of the road. The truck stayed right behind him though, its lights illuminating the interior of his car. "Well screw you then!" He planted his foot heavy to the gas pedal.

As he accelerated, their distance increased, but the other driver responded. The gap he'd gained diminished and, incredibly, the Ford kept coming. "Son of a bitch!" *Who the hell is this guy? What does he want?*

The motor behind him roared as the truck slammed into the Camry's rear end. He swerved right, then left, just managing to hold the car on the road.

Adrenaline pumped through his veins, his body suspending any need it had for sleep. He floored the gas again, but the Ford's speed increased, and he barely stayed beyond its reach. The dangerous, winding descent dropped away before him. He could feel his hair brushing against the fabric of the car's roof - static electricity caused it to stand on end. The truck collided with his fender, not as hard as the last time, but again and again. He needed to get away from this maniac, or it would be the end for one, if not both.

Something in the Camry cracked.

The Ford moved side to side as it closed in again. It smacked into the Toyota's left corner panel, making it snake wildly. Daniel struggled for control as his tires screeched against the asphalt. He yanked the wheel left and then straightened as the car threatened to spin the other way. The tailpipe scraped the pavement, and sparks licked the right side of the car.

The truck finally backed off. Daniel let out a deep breath and became aware of his shaking hands. His battered car handled awkwardly, and he was driving far too fast for this stretch of descent, but still, this counted as a respite. He prayed to God he'd make it home.

Then, in the rearview mirror, he saw the truck coming after him again, and all hope evaporated. He could do nothing to stop the lunatic on a mission. His only hope, he and the Camry would handle the next assault.

Chapter One

--

Alan Pearce woke with a jolt, a persistent ringing in his ears. The sound continued until it dawned on him, the noise wasn't part of his dream; it was the shrilling phone.

Pushing the hair from his face, he glanced at the glowing red numerals on the bedside clock: 3:15 A.M. "Damn!" *Who could that be? Whoever it is better have a good reason for . . .*

As the racket persisted, he realized he would either have to answer it or get more and more irritated by it. Either way, he could forget about going back to sleep.

Wondering which of his many clients had a problem, he rolled over and reached for the receiver while rubbing the sleep from his eyes with his free hand. "Look, whatever it is, can't it wait until morning?" One of the drawbacks to his job was that some of his clients didn't seem to care what time they called.

A man's squeaky voice answered him. "This is Bears Hollow –"

"What? Who is this?" Alan swung his legs over the side of the bed and combed his fingers through the shaggy blonde locks that had, once again, fallen across his eyes.

"This is Officer Randy Johnston, sir, from Bears Hollow Police Department. I'm sorry to wake you, but there's been an accident on secondary road 1008. Leta Carson asked me to call you."

That's the road leading to Daniel's house. Leta had him call. So, she must be okay, which left Daniel . . . A cold dread started in the pit of his stomach, and he raised himself out of his warm bed to pace the cool hardwood floor, the phone cord trailing after him. "Man, what are you saying?"

"Mr. Carson was in an accident, and Leta, I mean Mrs. Carson, was so upset that –"

"Hold on a minute. Where's Daniel?" Unbelievable! Daniel had only left him a few hours ago, at eight, to go home. When the officer didn't answer right away, he continued. "I mean what hospital? Is he okay?"

"Sir . . . ah . . . Mr. Carson didn't survive. It appears he was killed instantly."

The ensuing silence was deafening, lingering like a bad taste. Alan knew the caller expected a response, but the words remained trapped in his throat.

"Mr. Pearce? Are you there?"

Numbness permeated his body, as from a shot of Novocain. The phone slipped from Alan's hand and clattered to the floor. The officer's words echoed over and over in his head. *Didn't survive? Killed instantly?*

For a moment, he stared at the receiver lying by his feet, and he wanted to stomp it into oblivion. But he needed to know more. How had the accident happened? It had to be a mistake; Daniel had an impeccable driving record.

Someone must be playing a cruel joke.

How had his existence been snuffed out so completely?

He picked up the phone to speak, but his throat constricted. Barely audible even to himself, he asked, "You say Leta is upset?" Knowing Daniel's wife, what to wear to his funeral would upset her more than losing her husband. "Where is she?"

"She's at her house. My ma is stayin' there tonight lookin' after her. The doc gave her a sedative."

He started to wonder if this was just a bad dream; why on earth would the officer's mother stay with her? Then he remembered the little town where he'd visited Daniel. Bears Hollow, the type of town where neighbors help neighbors in times of need.

"Why didn't Leta call me when this happened?" Even as he asked the question, he knew the answer. She would play the grieving widow to the hilt. Maybe that wasn't being fair to her, but from everything Daniel had told him this weekend, how could he believe anything else?

"I can't rightly answer that for sure, Mr. Pearce. But she was over-wrought, as you might well imagine. So, she asked me if I minded calling you for her, and I said I would. So, well, here we are."

"Thank you, Mr., ah . . . officer. How'd . . ." Alan gulped more air. "How'd the accident happen?"

"I wish I could answer your questions, but I'm just callin' because I promised Leta . . . I mean Mrs. Carson, that I would. It's an ongoing investigation you see. The Chief and the Highway Patrol haven't finished their inspection of the scene. Would you like someone to call you later?"

"I'm leaving immediately, and I should be in Bears Hollow around daybreak. At the latest, seven o'clock. I'll want answers. Should I ask for you?"

"No, sir. My shift ended a couple of hours ago and there ain't much I'll be able to tell you anyway. I'm not the one who found the accident. And I'm not the investigating officer."

"Who should I ask for then?"

"Chief Jessie Kendall."

"Just tell him, or better yet, leave him a note, saying I'll be there first thing this morning. Goodbye, Officer."

"But sir —"

Alan slammed the phone into its cradle before he realized the officer was still speaking. He didn't have time to waste. Whatever it was, he'd find out when he arrived in Bears Hollow. He pulled on worn jeans and stumbled towards the kitchen.

He removed a box of instant coffee from the cupboard, dropped it and spilled the bags all over the floor. Hands shaking, he hastily retrieved them. He deposited one into his favorite mug, filled it with water, and placed it in the microwave. Punching in two minutes, he waited, the carousel turning in rhythm with his thoughts.

The mug was a Dale Earnhardt souvenir and watching the great man's face revolve around in front of him reminded Alan of the final lap crash in the Daytona 500 where his

life had ended. Suddenly everything became too present. He'd purchased tickets for the two of them for the upcoming Charlotte race, but now . . . Unable to endure the thought of never seeing Daniel again, his elbows hit the green-tiled counter with a bang, and Alan's head dropped into his trembling hands. He squeezed his temples, warding off the pain.

Memories of Daniel ran through his thoughts. The high school where they shared some of their classes, and where they'd played baseball, basketball, and football. Daniel had been a quarterback, and he'd played wide receiver. They'd made good teammates.

There had been many double dates with the young women of the week. Neither of them had settled down or been the least bit romantically serious until after college. Daniel met Leta during the California trip, their last Spring break from college. She'd been an aspiring actress slash waitress, but they didn't get together seriously until Daniel went back after graduation. Alan hadn't gone with him the second time. Instead, he'd gone to New York to visit his mom and her newest meal ticket.

He suspected where he'd gotten his attitude toward women came from his gold-digging mother. He had never been able to truly trust any of the women he'd dated thus far, and so his relationships, like the one with Alexandra that had ended recently, never lasted all that long.

The microwave timer beeped, signaling the coffee was ready. Setting the steaming mug beside the sink, he turned on the faucet and splashed cold water onto his face.

As much as he wanted the coffee, the smell of it now made his stomach queasy, and he poured it down the drain.

Alan returned to the bedroom and pulled out clothes, throwing them all over his bed. *No, it can't be Daniel. It has to be a mistake.* Maybe he'd get there and find out it wasn't his friend after all. An hour later, after showering and packing enough clothes to last a week, he set off to find answers to the multitude of questions spinning through his mind.

First stop, the realty company he and Daniel co-owned. He checked messages and left Lois, his secretary, a note with instructions for the week, saying there was an emergency and he'd call her later with details. No reason to wake her and get into it over the phone at this hour. Then, he stuffed the contracts he needed to read into his briefcase and hurried out of the office.

They had hung the green-and-gold sign over the doorway in a state of jubilation. Carson and Pearce Realty had been started with Daniel's cash inheritance, and Alan had bought his shares in monthly installments. They worked well together; one's strengths balancing the other's weaknesses.

A year after Daniel married Leta, the couple moved to Bears Hollow, North Carolina, where he opened a land development company, bringing Alan in as co-owner again.

Alan remembered the discussion like it was yesterday. 'You don't have to make me a partner. Anyway, I still don't understand why you had to move?'

"You remember the great times we used to have vacationing there; it's the perfect place to raise kids," Daniel had told him. He'd wanted children so much, but Leta – the mere thought of her right now made him physically sick.

He slid behind the steering wheel of his black Camaro and headed toward Brookshire Freeway to join I-77. Although highway 74 would take him straight from Charlotte to Bears Hollow, he always made better time traveling the Interstate. Keeping his mind on his driving proved impossible as thoughts of Daniel clouded his subconscious. Tires hitting rock shards on the side of the road jostled him out of his reverie. He screeched his car to a stop, thankful he wasn't on the Interstate yet. He pulled over until he could regain control of his shaking hands, get his heartbeat down to a manageable rate.

Getting going again, Alan was soon on the Interstate and tuned the radio to his favorite country music station, trying to drown out the thoughts threatening to drive him slowly insane.

His mom had named him after her favorite singer, Alan Jackson, and now his voice came on, singing *If Tears Could Talk*. As if brooding about Daniel wasn't enough, the song reminded him of his ex and their recent breakup, so he clicked the scan button until it stopped on a good southern rock station.

Alan and Daniel had spent the previous weekend together. They'd left work a little early on Friday and stayed at one of their Lake Norman vacation rentals. The first night, they drank beer and talked on the back deck.

Daniel told him how Leta had kept him up night after night for the last few weeks, arguing about wanting to move back to California to restart her acting career. She'd landed one acting job her whole time in the business, two episodes playing "hot nurse" in a hospital soap. Even so, Alan had been scared Daniel might consider it until his friend assured him of the unlikelihood. His exact words, "Nice place to visit, but I'd never want to live there. And as for Leta, why would any husband want to watch his wife put herself through all that again?"

According to Daniel, he'd tried to placate her with an offer to take her on a romantic cruise or a vacation to the west coast, but she would have none of it.

Alan had asked him, "Are you seriously thinking of separating or divorcing her?"

He'd said, "I don't know yet. I don't want to. I'm hoping we can work things out, but as much as I love Leta and our mountain home, I couldn't take one more night in that house with her and her mouth. I had to get away. It's why I'm here with you this weekend."

Daniel loved the outdoors and the quiet life when not working. He'd come to hate Charlotte and its rapid growth, although because of it their wallets swelled. Another reason he'd moved to Bears Hollow – to get away from Charlotte's traffic and fast life.

Unlike Alan, Daniel had grown up in a stable family with two loving parents, and he'd never had to deal with a lot of arguing and drama. He hated it, but he wouldn't throw away his marriage without fighting to save it first.

Sunday night, Daniel had left for home to try and work things out.

Alan's depression deepened with every song the radio played. There was no logic to it, but each seemed to remind him of times he and Daniel had spent together – a football game with friends or watching the pros on television. With a twist of his wrist, he silenced the emotion-laden tunes and slammed his hands to the steering wheel. *How could Daniel suddenly be dead?* It wasn't possible. He refused to believe it.

The straight road offered nothing to distract him from his thoughts. The trees were ghosts in the headlights, and none of the colors that signaled autumn's arrival, and winter close behind, were visible. Fall, Daniel's favorite time of year. Before he'd left for home last night, Alan had promised to visit at the end of October, when the mountain's trees reddened to their full glory.

In Statesville, the large green sign for Interstate 40 West loomed ahead. As he exited, his mind flipped again to Leta and the last time he'd seen Daniel.

When she'd called last night, around midnight, and asked him if Daniel was planning to stay another night in Charlotte, he'd assured her he'd long since left for home and was probably just stuck in traffic. Why hadn't he sensed something was wrong then? *How stupid can you be, Alan Pearce?* He felt like kicking himself, but it wouldn't be enough punishment for being a total blockhead.

Daniel was never that late – and that route didn't get big delays: no more than an hour because of traffic, or an accident. Accident? The officer's voice echoed in his mind, 'There's been an accident.'

Alan pulled off I-40 an hour later and took the back roads leading him straight into Bears Hollow. The closer he came to his destination, the more the highway curved and climbed like a copperhead. Large rocks dotted the countryside, with distant hills growing larger.

Along the way, he passed towns so small they didn't even receive a place on a North Carolina map – some consisting of a general store and a post office, if they were lucky.

In the early morning light, the colors of fall became more pronounced at this higher elevation, sprinkling the leaves with yellow, orange, and red. When he saw a sign for Fairfield Resort, a grim anticipation surged through him. *Almost there.*

The sun peeped over the top of a tall mountain as he drove into the neighboring town of Lake Lure. Next, Chimney Rock, then Bears Hollow. The dark sky had gone and was now pink with a spray of blue mingled through it. A few more miles and he'd be at the police station.

As he passed through Lake Lure, his mind wandered again.

Recalling his last visit brought a slight smile to Alan's lips. He and Daniel had been like schoolboys on a treasure hunt while they searched for a house Leta would like. They'd laughed and teased each other unmercifully all day.

How long ago had that trip been? Had it really been a year already?

'The mountain air does that to you,' Daniel had claimed. 'It makes you feel young and alive. The sound of water splashing against the rocks in the creek relaxes the soul.'

Nature aside, other than the common, small-town police station, general store, library, and fire department, Bears Hollow's main enticement was what the natives called *the western town in the sky*—Bears Junction, a part of Chimney Rock town limits. Long since closed and awaiting a new owner to bring it back to life, it was set atop a secluded mountain, where tourist used to ride chairlifts to see reenactments of gunfights, cancan dancers in old-time saloons, and motels with antique furniture dating back to the early 1800s. Below the tourist attraction, a multitude of gift shops lined the streets.

The memory of the gift shops and their banality jarred with his reason for driving here today, and as he approached the station anger raged through Alan's body at the senselessness of his friend's death. "Why?" he yelled into the quietness, before pulling his Camaro into a space in front of a stone building. Wrapping his fingers around the steering wheel, he clutched it in a white-knuckled grip. Perspiration dotted his face, and his hairline became damp.

Now, he'd get some answers.

Chapter Two

--

Alan observed his surroundings before getting out of the car. The sign swinging in the breeze read: *Bears Hollow Police Station*. When he stepped onto the asphalt, the heat, uncharacteristic for an October early morning in the mountains, hit him in the face as if he'd opened a dryer mid-tumble. He fished in the backseat of the Camaro for a hand towel, removed his white baseball cap, and wiped the moisture from his face.

He marched up the steps of the small building, through glass doors, and straight for the chest-high, wooden counter. A young woman with fiery red hair sat behind a desk a few feet away, her fingers pounding on her keyboard.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said, resting his forearm across the counter.

She looked up from her paperwork and flashed a bright smile. Rising, she sauntered toward him. "The name's Maybelle. How can I help you today, sir?" she asked with a thick mountain drawl.

"Yes, I'm here to see . . ." He pulled the paper where he'd written the name from his pocket. "Chief Jessie Kendall."

"Chief Kendall's not in yet, I'm afraid. She'll be doing a quick patrol on her way in. Can I help you? I'm just brewing a pot of coffee . . . if you'd like something hot?"

Alan tugged his hair away from his eyes, tired from the lack of sleep and the drive and struggling to accept the idea that he was here because his best friend lay on a mortuary slab in this same building. Maybelle raised an eyebrow at him. *I don't have time for this*. He raised his voice a bit. "Look." He slapped the countertop with the palm of his hand. Maybelle jumped from the unexpected noise. "I told the officer who called me to make sure he let the Chief know I would be here at daybreak."

Her smile fell and she appeared flustered. "Sorry, sir, but as I said, Jessie isn't here just yet."

He placed his hands, palms up, on the counter. "Is there anyone else I can talk to about Daniel Carson's accident?"

Maybelle took a stern motherly tone. "Look, you'll need to speak to the Chief. I'm the only one here right now, and there's nothing I can tell you about the accident." Her smile turned sympathetic, but her voice remained serious. "You should calm down." Lowering her tone, she said, "In a town this size, patrolling ain't gonna take very long anyway. Can I get you a cup of coffee and a cookie while you wait?"

A picture of Maybelle, a man, and a carrot-haired little girl decorated the desktop behind her, along with a ham biscuit and a mug of coffee. The other desk, farther back, held a spider plant and the picture of a large Shepherd puppy.

Alan sighed heavily. "I apologize for my rudeness. Thank you for your kindness, Maybelle. I live down in Charlotte, and I guess I'm not used to people being friendly for

no reason. A cup of coffee and a cookie would be fine." Snapping at everyone he met wouldn't get him the information he needed. What was wrong with him? He didn't normally behave so crudely. In his line of business, he had to be able to finesse anyone with the skill of a politician, and he was good at what he did. Today, he could think of nothing but Daniel lying dead, and his burning need to understand why. He needed to get a grip.

"It's okay. Have a seat over yonder, and I'll get it for you."

After pointing out the waiting area, she rounded the counter and walked into another room.

Turning, he saw three wooden chairs and a table, the only furniture making up the small waiting area. 'Wanted' posters of sour-looking criminals hung on the walls, while neatly stacked magazines covered the table. He sat down and thumbed through them, finding one to pass the time.

Maybelle returned with a mug that said, "World's best Detective" and a cookie on a plate. "Can I get you anything else while you wait, Mr. aw . . ."

"Pearce, Alan Pearce. Please call me Alan. No. Thank you, ma'am." The chocolate chip cookie was still warm to the touch. She must've made them fresh this morning because as far as he knew, Bears Hollow didn't have a bakery nearby. He felt even worse for his sour behavior. "I'm sorry. My best friend, who was like a brother to me, died in an accident last night. I feel so frustrated right now."

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Mr. Pearce." Genuine sympathy shone in her eyes. "I'll let you know as soon as the Chief returns."

"Thank you." He finished the cookie and squirmed in the chair. The hard seat, apparently designed for someone a lot shorter than him, did little for his disposition as he flipped through the pages of a two-year-old issue of *Field and Stream*.

* * *

The squeak of leather soles on the tile floor drew his attention to an attractive brunette crossing the lobby. Although she could be no more than five feet, three inches, her strides were long and purposeful as she walked up to the counter.

"Good morning, Maybelle," she said. Unlike Maybelle, who wore an old-fashioned floral and lace dress, this woman wore a stylish tailored, navy-blue suit. Another secretary, he assumed. Did a police department this size need two?

Speaking in low tones, the two women retreated to the back of the building. When they finished, the brunette continued to a private office in the back where she sat behind the desk. Alan watched as she began writing on a legal pad, shaking her head.

For some reason, the small woman held his attention. Perhaps it was her natural beauty – the kind of clean, free-spirited attractiveness soap commercials took credit for creating. She seemed as refreshing and unspoiled as the mountains surrounding them.

But not even a pretty woman could distract him from thinking about his friend. Terrible thoughts intruded his mind, conjuring Daniel's lifeless, crumpled, and bleeding body hanging out of his crushed Camry. He shook his head to remove the image.

Getting up, he paced the floor, as if it would help pass the time. The more he strode, the shorter his patience became.

He marched back to the counter and rang the bell. Maybelle's head popped up, her eyes wide with surprise. With a sigh, she stood.

"It's been almost an hour. Can you radio Kendall if that's what it'll take to get him here? My friend's wife . . . widow, is alone in her house in God knows what state. I don't have all day to sit here and wait."

The brunette, watching through her office door, waved for Maybelle to remain where she was. "I'll take care of this." Her strides were more pronounced than before as her sensible shoes hit the linoleum. Chin-length dark hair bounced with each step. "Okay, sir. You can stop harassing Maybelle. I'm all yours for the next few minutes." A silky sprig fell across her brow, resting on the lashes of her right eye, and she brushed it behind her ear. She wasn't smiling, and he got the impression he'd annoyed her.

"I need to speak with the Chief, not his secretary."

"Here I am. All the morning's urgent business is finished. Now it's your turn. And I'm not a —"

"No. You don't understand. I'm waiting for —"

"You said you needed to talk to someone now."

"There must be some sort of mistake. I'm waiting to speak with the man in charge of the Carson accident out on road 1008. Chief Jessie Kendall was the name the officer gave me on the phone this morning."

"No mistake, that's me," she said.

Heat crept up his neck, splashing his cheeks with warmth. He adjusted his collar. "You're Jessie Kendall?"

"I am. What can I do for you?"

He stared down at the woman standing before him, clarity growing.

Jessie's hands rode high on her hips, and her sky-blue gaze raked over him from head to toe, making him feel like a specimen in a jar. "Can. I. Help. You?" she repeated.

He towered almost a foot above her. "I would like to know what happened. What caused Daniel's accident?"

"We don't know yet," she said with a slight shrug.

His temper flared again. "What do you mean, you don't know? It's been hours since the officer called me." Cops. Never any help when you need them but there to give you a ticket and bust your chops when you don't.

Squaring her shoulders, Jessie inclined her head and looked him directly in the eyes. "Look, mister. I got the call about that at four this morning, at which time it was still dark. I've just run dawn patrol to cover for the officer who's at the site, and this isn't the only

thing on my plate this morning. It's now eight, and by my reckoning, the crash site should have enough sunlight on it to see properly soon, so I'm heading there next. The night officer who found the car said in all likelihood Mr. Carson's death was an accident. We have a lot of those around here since so many people try their damndest not to slow down for the sharp curves."

The need to explain his annoyance overcame him. "I'm sorry. Daniel was my best friend, more like a brother, and I need to know why it happened. How it happened. It doesn't make any sense. He was a good driver, and I can't understand any of this." Alan knew he jabbered on like an idiot, but he didn't care.

"I'm sorry for your loss Mr....ah-

"Pearce. Alan Pearce," he said, shuffling his feet.

"I understand you're upset, and you don't know our procedures. The highway patrol has been called in to help with the investigation. They're at the accident site now and a night officer kept the site secure all night."

"Should I speak to him or with the highway patrol?" he questioned, at a loss as to which way to turn next. "Where's Daniel's body now?"

"No. It won't be necessary. I'm going down there, and after, I'll be out to speak . . ." She cleared her throat. "Daniel has been taken to the morgue for now but will be at the funeral parlor later today. Where will you be later this morning?"

"I'll be at Leta's . . . I mean Mrs. Carson's."

"Very well. I will speak with you and Mrs. Carson later. Now, if you'll excuse me." She rounded him and headed for the door.

Alan slid his baseball cap off and touched the brim to his jeans. He wiped perspiration from his brow with the back of his hand. "I'd like to go with you," he said, closing the distance between them.

"I'm afraid I can't take a civilian to an accident site." A slight smile creased her lips, but her firm tone let him know she meant what she said.

Opening the glass door, Alan motioned her through with a sweep of his cap. "How long will you be?" he asked, knowing arguing was useless. Besides, he'd see her at the site in a few minutes.

They walked side by side through the parking lot. "An hour. Two at the most," she said before sliding behind the wheel of her dark blue sedan. She closed the door and turned the ignition key.

Alan watched Chief Jessie pull away from the curb, biding his time. Thanks to Officer Johnston, he knew the road where he'd find her; the same road where Daniel had lived. Not wanting the Chief to notice him tailing her, he waited until she rounded the next curve, out of sight.

He didn't trust small town cops. From what Daniel had said, they didn't have much if any crime around here, so what experience did they have? If he were being honest, he didn't trust law enforcement at all. He'd gotten into a scrape or two in his younger years,

and that had spiraled into one particular cop harassing him every time he saw him, just because he could – said he looked like he was up to no good.

No, he owed it to Daniel to keep an eye on them, or they'd probably file the crash away as an accident without a thorough investigation.

Enough time passed. Alan cruised right onto Highway 74, and then left onto Road 1008. Daniel lived five miles down this road, his house nestled in a valley. So, the wreck would've occurred somewhere between where he was now and Daniel's house.

* * *

As Jessie approached the scene of Carson's car crash, she noticed different shades of glass scattered in the road. Had his car collided with another vehicle before careening down the side of the mountain?

She searched for distinctive shaped pieces of each different shade of glass she could see, pulled a bag from her back pocket, and bagged them, keen to get samples before other cars driving along the road messed up the evidence. Then she walked to the edge of the cliff where the Camry had rolled over some saplings and brush before tumbling into the gorge below. Crouching to the ground, Jessie raked the earth, rubbed it between two fingers and brought it under her nose. It was damp and had a chemical smell. She scraped up more and filled another evidence bag.

The lab would be able to tell if the oil type matched Carson's car, or if it belonged to another vehicle.

Looking down into the gorge, she noticed a tall, dark-haired man searching the car and ground around it some thirty feet below the ridge. From where she stood, the crumpled car resembled a can put through a trash compactor. How awful for anyone to go through such a torturous death as the victim must have. It would've been merciful if he'd died on impact.

Jessie threw up her hand and yelled to Tom Kendall, a recent graduate of the Highway Patrol Academy, and her brother, "Tom!"

He ran up the slope to meet her halfway. Brother or not, Jessie had to admit he cut a dashing figure in his gray, patrol uniform. Neither the thick underbrush nor the steep, rocky terrain deterred him from reaching her in a matter of seconds.

He wrapped muscular arms around her and hugged her, placing a kiss on her cheek. Something caught her peripheral vision and she pulled away. Glancing up, she saw Alan Pearce sitting in a car with his window down on the road above. *What is he doing here?* Maybe if she ignored him, he'd move on.

She popped her brother's shoulder. "Tom, stop," she said. "I'm Chief Kendall right now, not your sister." They walked down together to stand a couple of yards from the car. "How's the investigation going?"

"I arrived about five minutes before you did, and I haven't been able to do much," he said, lifting his gaze from the wreckage to look over her shoulder. "Unfortunately, it seems we have a spectator."

She turned to see Alan slowly making his way down the hillside. "Damn!" Anger surged within her, causing a headache to throb in her temples. She massaged them, attempting to ease the pain.

He ignored the intruder and addressed his sister's obvious irritation. "Sorry, Sis. I couldn't help myself. I haven't seen you in weeks. Ma is furious with you, you know," Tom said, grinning.

"It's not you, it's the man coming toward us."

"Who? Him?" he asked, pointing to Alan whose long legs were making easy work of the slope. "Who is he?"

"He, dear brother, is proving to be a pain in my ass."

Chapter Three

--

"But who is he?" Tom glanced back to Alan, still making his way toward them.

"He's a close friend of Mr. Carson's, from Charlotte. I told him I would talk to him and Mrs. Carson when I finished investigating the accident. I also gave him strict instructions not to come here, but as you can see . . ." Jessie motioned toward Alan and sighed. "Here he is."

Pointedly ignoring his approach, Jessie continued to talk to her brother. "So, why is Ma mad at me?"

Tom took the clue and answered her. "Because you haven't been by the house in weeks."

From behind her, she heard Alan clear his throat. Twisting around, she glared at him, ready to tell him off until she saw the raw pain etched across his face. Then, feeling sympathy for his situation, she decided to give him a break—enough stress obviously plagued him already. "Tom, this here is ah . . . Alan Pearce. He's a friend of the deceased."

Jessie noticed him cringe while his facial muscles tightened at the mention of the word *deceased* and her heart softened. This nightmare would be a long haul for him.

"Mr. Pearce, this is Tom Kendall, my brother, and a highway patrolman," she added proudly, smiling at Tom.

"A family of cops, huh?" he asked. Jessie was stung by his brusque tone. She'd just decided she was going to like this man after all, but now she wasn't sure. Again. Law enforcement risked their lives daily to protect people like him.

After a moment's hesitation, the two men shook hands. "Sorry about your friend, Mr. Pearce. I moved back here two months ago, so I didn't know him personally. But I heard he was a fine man."

"Thanks. Please call me Alan."

Alan's unpredictable attitude, and a little common sense, had made Jessie change her mind about giving him a break. Though she felt bad for him, she couldn't overlook the fact he'd deliberately done what she told him not to do. Next, he'd want to be included in every aspect of the investigation. That couldn't—no, it wouldn't happen.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Pearce? I directed you to go to the Carson house, and we agreed I would speak with you there, later." Jessie's tone was professional rather than friendly.

He rubbed the back of his neck. "I had to see it for myself."

"I could arrest you for obstruction of justice."

"I won't touch anything."

"You've already trekked through evidence by walking down here." Jessie took hold of Tom's arm, pulling him to the side. Looking over her shoulder, she said, "Excuse us a moment, Mr. Pearce."

"But —"

"Stay put. I need to talk to Tom in private." He opened his mouth to object again, but she cut him off. "Please! Let me do my job."

They walked to the roped-off area, out of Alan's hearing. "I know you said you haven't been here long, but have you learned anything pertinent to the case?"

When she looked back to make sure Alan hadn't followed them, she felt sorry for him again. Dark green eyes stared off into space, with a pale face and tightly drawn lips. A white baseball cap set atop longish blonde hair touching the tips of his slumped shoulders. His gaze didn't move from the mangled remains of the car.

Why was he putting himself through this? Would seeing the wreckage up close make the truth any easier for him to accept?

"Jessie . . . Chief!"

"What? Sorry, Tom. What did you say?"

"It looks like a regular accident, but sometimes it's hard to say. After I parked my car, I noticed two different sets of tire marks on the road. One doesn't belong to Carson's Camry, but they could've been made at another time. Or another car was involved."

"Did you see the glass in the road further up the hill?"

"You have sharp eyes. Yes, it's why I'm wondering about a second car. Some of it doesn't match the Carson car either."

"I talked with Randy earlier this morning, and his first priority is to question some of the residents."

"Good. I guess we'd have heard by now if anyone'd seen the accident, but there can't have been much gone down this road between the crash and when it was called in. Maybe someone saw something useful."

Jessie pointed up the mountainside. "Did you see the tire iron on the side of the road and the tire on down a bit?"

He rubbed a hand through his dark curls. "I assumed someone left them after changing a flat. You think those could've belonged to the Carson car?"

"I don't know. We'll need to have it checked out." She moved closer to the wrecked car and squatted at the passenger side's rear wheel. "The tire's flat on this side."

"Could've been punctured during the crash."

Jessie stood, her glance tracing the path from the road to the car. "You're right. It could've, but tires are designed to take a hammering from the road, and they don't puncture easily in a crash. Also, where did the tire iron come from? I think someone clipped the rear of the driver's side, pushing the car and possibly Mr. Carson with it over the incline. Perhaps the force of the impact snapped the trunk open too. But then we have

something unusual; his body wasn't found in the car. According to the report I received this morning, they found it halfway between the road and here."

Tom scratched his head. "I assumed he was thrown when he hit the bottom, but are you saying you think he wasn't in the car when it went over?"

"I'll know more after the coroner's and forensics' reports. If there was another car involved, it might have pushed him over the incline, and if he wasn't wearing a belt, maybe he fell out as it rolled down to where it landed against the big oak tree. If he was changing his tire though . . . well, I'm saying we're looking at three possibilities." She held up her fingers. "One, an accident; two, a hit and run; or three, first-degree homicide." Jessie sighed, casting a glance at Alan. A lengthy investigation would be tough on everyone who cared for the victim. And on the police, who had to deal with them.

"I guess you're right. So, we'll need to know if anyone might have wanted Carson dead," Tom added.

"Well, since Alan is here, let's ask him."

Tom, then Jessie, turned and walked to where Alan squatted on the ground, his head downcast as he twisted a blade of grass between his fingers.

Without preamble, Jessie asked, "Mr. Pearce, do you know if Daniel had any enemies?"

He jumped to his feet. "Why? You don't think it was an accident, do you?"

Seeing his stunned expression, her voice softened. "We still don't know. We're trying to cover all our bases right now."

"He didn't have any enemies that I know of, but of course I live in Charlotte and he lived here."

"But Daniel did sometimes work in Charlotte, didn't he?"

"Yes. Occasionally. He usually came into the Charlotte office at least once a week, sometimes twice. He came in Friday and spent the weekend there with me."

"Well then, do you know of any enemies he had there?"

"No. Daniel was a likable guy. Everyone loved him. Look, you know these parts; could it have been someone here in Bears Hollow?"

Tom spoke up. "Don't get the wrong impression. This is still classified as an accident unless we find hard evidence to prove otherwise. Which we haven't. We want to cover all possibilities. It was raining last night, the roads were slick, and in all probability, your friend lost control of his car."

All three of them went silent, looking at the car, and Jessie took the chance to walk closer and circle the heap of twisted metal. The crushed roof made it obvious to her the car had rolled numerous times before finally slamming sideways into a massive, solid oak tree.

As she studied the vehicle, she saw all the windows were shattered, and the smashed top looked like a piece of aluminum ready to be recycled. She rounded to the other side

of the car, where, squashed against the tree, the driver's door crumpled inward to the point where the two front bucket seats were buckled together.

A chill ran through her body. Something didn't feel right. She'd seen a few accidents like this: a missed corner on a winding mountain road, the crumpled wreck of a car lying further down the hillside. Drunk locals, tourists used to the sanitized streets of the cities; it happened often enough. But a tingling sensation in her gut told her there was more to this one. The damage was always extensive, but this car somehow seemed broken in a subtly different way. As if it had had help.

Continuing to trudge around the wreckage, she inspected every detail, transcribing her thoughts into a small notebook.

Tom joined her. "Did you find something? They've already examined the car once."

"Just making my own notes . . . not that I don't trust them." Jessie smiled, patting her brother on the arm.

Alan, looking sickened by the mangled car but also apparently unable to take his eyes off it, had also come closer. "Jessie, I mean Chief Kendall, what do you really think?"

She masked her face with a slight smile, hoping to disguise the direction of her thoughts. "Too soon to tell." Jessie took Alan's arm and tried to lead him away from the car.

"You didn't answer me before, so I'll ask again. You don't think this was an accident, do you?" Did she imagine the tightening of his jaw and the guarded look in his eyes? Did he have something to hide?

"Did Daniel and his wife get along?"

"You don't think she could have done this, do you?" Alan gestured at the car, clearly emotional.

Perhaps not emotional enough to have put all the tricks realtors used to one side though. Well, intentionally avoiding her questions with his own wasn't going to work. She'd find a way to break through. "I'm in the process of ruling things out. The probability is still accidental death. However, let's pretend it wasn't. Say someone intentionally ran Daniel off the road last night. The number one suspect would be the one with the most to gain. Would that be you? You and Daniel were business partners, am I right?"

His face turned bright red, eyes bulging under his furrowed brow. "Are you asking me if I killed my best friend?"

"I'm asking for answers, not questions. But no, that wasn't what I asked. Since you've brought it up, though, did you?"

"No!" Alan balled his fingers into fists by his sides.

The look he was giving her was pure fury, but rather than make her feel sorry for him, it made her want to push him further. "Did you and Daniel get along? How is the business? Were there any problems there?" She shot the questions to him, hoping to throw him off his guard.

"I already told you. Daniel and I were like brothers. Business is fine, and no, there weren't any problems." After fumbling in his pocket, Alan handed her his business card with his Charlotte office phone and cell number on it. "Call our secretary, Mrs. Lindsey, Lois Lindsey. You can check it all out." He shook his head as if in disgust.

"I'll do that," she said, taking the card. "Now, if you don't mind, I have work to do. We need to get back to our investigation. If I need to ask you about anything else, where did you say you'd be staying?"

"Daniel's."

"Oh, with Mrs. Carson? Okay then." Jessie smiled and turned her back, dismissing him. She and her brother walked back to the accident site before she looked to see if Alan had taken the hint.

She watched him stalk off up the ridge and slide into the seat of his Camaro.

Tom touched her arm. "Why did you antagonize him like that? You don't think he murdered his partner . . . his friend, do you?"

"No, not really. But you never know. Besides, he was trying to find out everything we know and wasn't giving one damned thing back. He doesn't need to know any more about this case until we know more about him. I have a feeling everything isn't as it seems where Mr. Pearce is concerned. He could be involved."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes. We know nothing about the man. Plus, he's staying with the victim's wife, and she's certainly someone we need to talk to before she gets any details of the case from him."

He rubbed his chin. "You could be right. I hear Mrs. Carson is a beauty. You know the model, movie star type with her bleached-blond hair and sexy body. Boobs out to here." He pushed his hands out from his chest.

Jessie glared at her brother. "I've heard that as well, although maybe I wasn't listening as hard as you. Anyway, I have too many questions about these people. Is it possible the best friend and the wife were having an affair, and Carson found out about it? It would be a good motive for murder, don't you think?"

"But he seems genuinely concerned and shocked over his friend's death."

"He does to me, too, but it could be an act. Now, let's finish with the car, so I can go speak with the victim's wife." Jessie squatted in front of the back bumper. "Look at this."

"What?" Tom crouched beside her.

"There's a different paint color here. Did you see this before?"

"No." Rubbing his fingers over it, he said, "It's scratched deep into the paint, too. It would take a pretty hard hit to cause so much damage."

"I thought you said someone had already examined the car."

"I was about to when you pulled up, but the officer who found it said he'd given it a thorough once over."

"Williams, the night officer," she read from her notes. "I should've known. He wouldn't know a vehicular homicide if it clipped him on the butt. Slack ass Williams, of all people. I should have his badge for such sloppy investigative work."

"Calm down. You found it. What's wrong?"

"I know you're new at this, Tom." She patted him on the arm. "Stick with me and I'll teach you a few things about investigating. What color was the car Alan Pearce left here in?"

Tom's eyes widened. "Black."

"Bingo! If we'd known about this sooner, we could've looked at his car for any front-end damage. If we found something, maybe hauled him in and interrogated him."

"You still can."

"I know, but I think I'll go by the Carson house and question both the wife and Pearce together first. I'll also check out Pearce's car for dents and scratches while I'm there." Pointing at the paint scratches, she said, "Scrape some off and have the lab test it."

While Tom put the scrapings into an evidence bag, Jessie got on her cell and called the wrecker to pick up the car and take it to the nearest police impound yard.

* * *

Alan drove around for a good thirty minutes, trying to calm himself before heading to Leta's house. The questions Jessie had asked him bothered him to no end. How could she think he had anything to do with his best friend's death? She'd been interrogating him about something as trivial as money when all he could think of was the best friend that he'd loved like a brother. Chief Jessie Kendall must be one cold lady.

As he grew calmer, though, Alan also questioned his own actions, admitting to himself he'd been a real jerk so far with the cops.

But wasn't it understandable he'd want to know the details of Daniel's death? He drummed a fist against the dash of his car, releasing some of his anguish. He wished he'd brought his punching bag. He felt like a bomb ready to explode, needed a good workout to clear some stress. But this one-horse town wouldn't have a sports center or anywhere else with exercise equipment, so he'd have to drive all the way to Asheville if he needed this release.

On the way to Daniel and Leta's . . . no, to just Leta's now, he stared at the dull markings in the road, his thoughts even more conflicted than they'd been. The lines began to hypnotize him. He shook his head and blinked, clearing the cobwebs. There wouldn't be any rest for this town until he had answers to the questions racing through his mind.

Maybe Leta would know something, but what if the responsibility somehow belonged with her? He knew Daniel would want him to comfort her. But could he? Could he trust her? He felt sorry for her, yet he blamed her. Even if Daniel's death was an accident, Leta had been mentally torturing him for weeks, keeping him awake night after

night arguing. She'd already failed at acting once, but somehow, she'd started to believe it would all be different if she tried again. And she couldn't be a star in North Carolina.

After another mile-long gravel road, and a short driveway that dipped into the Carson yard, he stopped, put the gearshift in park, and took a long, deep breath. Dear God, let him make it through this without saying anything hurtful to Leta.

Alan climbed the two short steps, leading to the redwood deck wrapping around the two-story slate-rock house. The sound of Leta's laughter made him pause before knocking on the door. Not believing that she could be lighthearted today, he wondered if he was at the right house. It'd been a year. He backed up and looked at the house and around the yard. *Yep, this is . . . was Daniel's house.*

What possible thing could a newly widowed woman find humorous? Why the tinkling laughter when her husband, his best friend, lay on a slab in the morgue?

Pacing to the back of the house, he gazed through the windows along the way, trying to discover the reason for her laughter. At first, the windows revealed no one, not Leta nor Mrs. Johnston, who he supposed was still with her. When he climbed the steps, a board creaked under the weight of his foot. Then he saw Leta in the kitchen, sipping from an ironstone mug, a man standing across from her.

Tears-streaked lines through her caked-on makeup. White patches replaced rosy blush, and mascara created smeared smudges under her eyes, giving her a raccoon-like appearance. In her hand, she clutched a wrinkled, white handkerchief, dabbing moisture from her big brown eyes.

Her face was a mess, but she knew enough to be able to fake that easily. Had he imagined the tinkling of her laughter? With a pounding heart, he balled his hand into a fist and banged on the kitchen door.

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE & ROMANTIC MYSTERY NOVELS

--

In *Suspicious Minds*, Natalie Southard is trying to keep her family business out of the hands of a known crime boss, Nick DeMarco. Ryan Donatelli is out to avenge the death of his sister, and he's not above using Natalie to do it. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Hardcover](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *For the Love of Money*, Alan can't accept his best friend's death as an accident. He knows the winding roads of Bear's Hollow like the back of his hand and is convinced foul play was involved. As Chief Jessie Kendall investigates, she finds herself drawn to Alan despite mounting evidence against him and the victim's widow. Will she be able to uncover the truth before it's too late? [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Hardcover](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *All This Time* (Book 1) in the *Style & Profile Series*, Jenny Morgan feels her best friend, Trevor Drake lacks ambition except when it comes to chasing women. He thinks she takes life too seriously and needs to learn to relax. Can they get it together while uncovering a common enemy who is determined to ruin their business and their life. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Hardcover](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *Before We Wed*, (Book 2) in the *Style & Profile Series*, Sara Martin and Jon Clayton are about to say their wedding vows when the police charge in and arrest Jon. Is Jon innocent? Are there more sinister people involved? Will Sara find the evidence she needs to clear him, or will she find out he's fooled them all? If someone else is framing Jon, who is it and what are their motives? [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Buy Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | Hardcover (coming soon)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

All Available Now!

And . . .

Coming Soon:

In *Crime and Justice*, (Book 3) of the *Style & Profile Series*, Lynsi, a skilled researcher and Managing Editor at Style & Profile Men's Magazine, desires to start a family with her partner, but she wonders if it will ever happen. Jaxon, a committed lawyer who prioritizes work over everything else, inadvertently puts their relationship at risk when they work together on a cold case to obtain a new trial for a convicted spouse, leading to a dangerous chain of events that may prove fatal.

In *Duty or Truth*, (Book 4) of the *Style & Profile Series*, Kara, a widowed mother of a teenage daughter, has always struggled with the loss of her husband, Jeremy, who was killed in action in Afghanistan. When her late husband's best friend and godfather to her daughter, Ian McCray, returns to Larch Rise as a detective with the local police department, old wounds are reopened.

LANA MALLOY PARANORMAL MYSTERY SERIES

--



In the *Lana Malloy Paranormal Mystery Series*, Lana Malloy is a psychic, private investigator who is on a mission to help the dearly departed even when they don't realize they need help.

In *Haunting Lana – The Beginning* (Short Story Prequel), Lana is only 10 years old and has her first encounter with a ghost. [Read More](#) | Buy Links: [Kindle](#) | [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *Haunted Hearts* (Book 1), Lana sets out to solve her first case – the twenty-year-old cold-case and double murder of her great aunt and her great aunt's fiancé. If she succeeds, they'll spend eternity together; if she can't, they'll be stuck as Haunted Hearts. With the help of the ghosts and a new love interest, she can find the murderer. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Audiobooks](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *Get Out or Die* (Book 2), the success of Lana's first case has spread throughout the local Charleston area and her business is booming. At one pro-bono job, Lana helps a widow

communicate with her late husband where she learns of a frightening new ability – an ability that could give the spirit the upper hand if she’s not careful. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Audiobooks](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *The Wedding Crasher* (Book 3), when Lana Malloy is about to marry Tony Calabria, she has a dream of her wedding that is troubling, and she wonders if she could call it off. With the help of her Great Aunt Lucy, she realizes the vision isn't about her own wedding but that of someone else who will be forced to marry or worse. During their honeymoon, Lana's visions become clearer and now Lana and Tony are faced with finding and rescuing Jada from a madman. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *Christmas Cruise* (Book 4), Lana boards a cruise ship haunted by dead women who were brutally murdered. While aboard the ship Lana has an experience that mentally injures her. Once she recovers, she’s more determined than ever to find the killer. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

In *Haunted by Her Past* (Book 5), Lana and Demi team up to support Jena. Abused and scared, Jena runs away only to be haunted by her abuser. He's worse dead than he was when he was alive. [Read More](#) | [Excerpt](#)

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

And Coming Soon

In *Grave Accusations* (Book 6), Tony's brother Derek is being haunted by a soldier he tried to save. His guilt eats him up and he refuses Lana's help.

Start This Series Today

LANA MALLOY BOX SETS:

Save money when purchasing by the set!

BOX SET #1 -HAUNTING LANA, HAUNTED HEARTS, GET OUT OR DIE

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Hardcover](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

BOX SET #2 - THE WEDDING CRASHER, CHRISTMAS CRUISE

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Hardcover](#)

Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

BOX SET #3 - HAUNTING LANA, HAUNTED HEARTS, GET OUT OR DIE, THE WEDDING CRASHER

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

BOX SET #4 - HAUNTING LANA, HAUNTED HEARTS, GET OUT OR DIE, THE WEDDING CRASHER, CHRISTMAS CRUISE

Amazon Links: [Kindle](#) | Other Links: [Book2Read](#) (Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc.)

BOOKS BY KIM COX

Lana Malloy Paranormal Mysteries Series (Novellas)

Haunting Lana: The Beginning (Book 0)

Get Out or Die (Book 2)

The Wedding Crasher (Book 3)

Christmas Cruise (Book 4)

Haunted by Her Past (Book 5)

Grave Accusations (Book 6) - *Coming Soon*

Romantic Suspense/Mystery Novels

Suspicious Minds

For the Love of Money

Style & Profile Series

All This Time (Book 1)

Before We Wed (Book 2)

Crime and Justice (Book 3) - *Coming Soon*

Duty or Truth (Book 4) - *Coming Soon*

Short Stories - Contemporary Romances

A Dream Come True

In His Arms

All For Love

Love Conquers All

Collections

Wandering Spirits I

Wandering Spirits II

Dream, Conquer, & Love

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

--

Kim Cox, writes fun, action-packed cozy paranormal mystery novellas, and spine-tingling romantic suspense novels with fast-paced suspense and tender, yet passionate love stories. Her characters are fresh, humorous, and gutsy.

She's best known for her Lana Malloy Paranormal Mystery series. Lana helps the haunted as well as the ghosts haunting them--an investigator for the unusual.

Kim lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains with her Chainsaw Artist husband and their fur babies. She has two sons and two grandsons. All boys . . . ahem, men.

Sign up for [Kim's Readers List](#) for exclusive information, new releases, contests, giveaways, and free books:

Visit her at the following sites:

Author's Website: <http://www.kimcoauthor.com>

Kim's Musings Blog: <https://kimwrtr.wordpress.com/>

Author's Central: <https://www.amazon.com/author/kimcox>

Books2Read: <https://books2read.com/ap/xM5GWx/Kim-Cox>

Social Media locations:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kimcoauthor>

Facebook - Kim's Readers Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/364627704351380>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/KimCoxAuthor>

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/kimcox>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/kimwrtr/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kimcoauthor/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kimwrtr>

Tiktok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@kimwrtr1>