



## Blackberry Summer

*RaeAnne Thayne*

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## **Blackberry Summer** RaeAnne Thayne

Claire Bradford needed a wake-up call.

What she *didn't* need was a tragic car accident. As a single mom and the owner of a successful bead shop, Claire leads a predictable life in Hope's Crossing, Colorado. So what if she has no time for romance? At least, that's what she tells herself, especially when her best friend's sexy younger brother comes back to town as the new chief of police.

But when the accident forces Claire to slow down and lean on others—especially Riley McKnight— she realizes, for the first time, that things need to change. And not just in her own life. The accident—and the string of robberies committed by teenagers that led up to it— is a wake-up call to the people of Hope's Crossing. The sense of community and togetherness had been lost during those tough years. But with a mysterious "Angel of Hope" working to inspire the town, Riley and Claire will find themselves opening up to love and other possibilities by the end of an extraordinary summer....

## **Blackberry Summer Details**

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## From Reader Review Blackberry Summer for online ebook

### Carla says

If this book is any indication, this is going to be the best series I've read in a long time. I can't wait to start on the second book, Woodrose Mountain! :)

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### Jacob Proffitt says

Bitter, *bitter* disappointment! It's a good thing I've read other books by RaeAnne Thayne because this would *not* have been a good introduction. Both protagonists are weak in ways that would be disastrous in tandem.

Riley is the worst because his emotional weakness is persistent, obviously unhealthy, and clichéd, to boot. It's not just that he is traumatized by his father leaving their family and he fears he'd only do the same. That's bad, but it plays even worse when coupled with his acceptance of culpability for outcomes he couldn't have foreseen and for actions that were not only responsible, but should have exactly countered his feelings of guilt in the first place. Both add up to someone who pretty much hates himself and is willing to buy into the worst version of his own motivations and actions. I find this very unattractive and an automatic dismissal of the macho righteous cop thing he had going on.

But Claire isn't much better with her emotional need to please everyone around her and give in to anybody who threatens to be upset. This is particularly bad in relation to Ruth, her mother, who abuses Claire's emotional weakness time and again. It's even worse in her relationship with her ex and his bimbo. I get not making trouble because of the kids' relationship with their father. I don't get allowing yourself to be walked on just because they'd feel bad if she didn't.

The story was okay, if both predictable and tinged with cliché. Thayne doesn't idealize Hope's Crossing and that worked out well enough. I suspect I'd have been more engaged with it if Riley wasn't so busy hanging himself in effigy to spare the townsfolk the trouble. I could have taken the events a lot better if they had played to Riley's strength, is what I'm saying. Since it exploited his weakness, it was a lot less engaging.

Fortunately, the book ended on a high. I thought Riley had buried himself too deeply to recover, but he pulled off a grand gesture that was too perfect to dismiss. I wanted him to be strong, so when he finally showed both the strength to change and the courage to commit absolutely, I found myself closing the book with at least contentment that I hadn't wasted my time. So yeah, a solid two-and-a-half stars rounded to a three on the strength of the ending. Barely.

**A note about Steamy/Chaste:** This is another of those rare books that qualify for neither—enhancing my meh for it, actually. There aren't any real steamy scenes, but there's a make-out scene that goes beyond what I can honestly call "chaste".

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### Terri Wino says

3-1/2 stars for this one. I discovered this author when I read a holiday story, Christmas in Snowflake Canyon, not realizing it was part of a series. I really enjoyed that book so I decided to read the series from the beginning.

This is the first book in the Hope's Crossing series and while I didn't find it quite as good as Christmas in Snowflake Canyon, I still liked it a lot.

A nice love story without a bunch of sex throughout the book. Down to earth, realistic characters who are both afraid to admit their feelings for their own mixed-up reasons.

Interesting cast of supporting characters as well, and I look forward to learning more about them as I make my way through the series.

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### **Susan says**

Fantastic book. I love small town stories and this is one of the best. All the characters are very realistic with hopes and dreams and problems that any one of us could experience. When tragedy strikes the town it's the way they deal with it that will make or break the ones living it.

Claire is a divorced mother of two. She owns a bead store that is doing pretty well but will never make her rich. She lives in the same town as her ex and his new wife so that her kids can see their father on a regular basis. She is also the person who takes care of her mother, a woman who turned very needy after her husband's scandalous death. The investigation of a burglary at her store brings her back into contact with Riley McKnight, the younger brother of her best friend and the new chief of police. The bad boy teen has grown up to be a handsome and responsible man and too darn tempting for her peace of mind. When a car accident puts her in need of depending on other people, Riley is one of those who is there. I liked Claire's sense of independence but she also had trouble accepting help. After her father's death, Claire's mom fell apart leaving teenage Claire to take care of her younger brother, the house and her mother. Ever since then Claire has been taking care of everyone but ignoring her own needs. Seeing Riley again stirs feelings in her that have been quiet for a long time, but she's not too happy about having the hots for him. After the accident that injured her and another girl and killed Riley's niece, Claire has to give up some of the control of her life in order to accept the help she needs. She finds herself spending more time with Riley and is quite impressed with the man he has become. She has trouble believing him when he tells her about the crush he had on her when they were younger, but she can't deny the feelings that are growing now. I loved the way that she can separate the troubled boy he was from the man he is now and that she has no trouble standing up for him to other people. It was terrific to see his care for her give her the desire to look after her own needs for a change.

Riley had been a bit of a hell-raiser as a teen. He is the youngest of six kids and the only boy. He had a lot of anger to deal with when his father left the family and it came out in destructive ways. As soon as he graduated from high school he left home and ended up becoming an undercover cop in California. After years of doing that work he is feeling burned out when he is offered the job of police chief in his hometown. He takes it on a probationary basis, not sure if it will be a good fit. He begins to think he was right as so many in town don't seem to be able to forget his teenage mistakes. A bright spot in his return is seeing Claire again. He has never forgotten her and meeting again as adults shows him that the feelings are still there. As much as he'd like to pursue them, he feels that he's too damaged to be good for her, because of his cynicism from his former job and his fears that he'd be like his own father. But he also finds that he can't stay away from her. He's first on the scene after the car accidents and is desperate to make sure that she and her kids are safe. Finding out about the occupants of the other car, and the death of his niece, Riley feels like the whole mess is his fault. He spends a lot of time helping Claire and growing closer to her, but afraid to take it further. I liked the way that he owns up to his stupidity from when he was younger, and I got really frustrated with the townspeople who refused to see the man he had become. Even his own family seemed to be blind to who he was. He did have a couple instances of idiocy, especially the one where he was so cynical about the "Day of Hope" that Claire and her friends were planning. I'm glad he saw the errors of his ways. His oh-so-romantic actions at the auction were the perfect ending to the book.

One of the things I like best about small town stories is the complicated and interwoven relationships. As the first book in the series we learn at least a little about quite a few characters. Claire's ex isn't a bad man, but he's pretty oblivious to the pain he causes Claire with some of his actions even after their divorce. Claire's mother really irritated me. I hated the way she leaned on Claire for everything and still managed to put her down about so much. Her attitude about Riley really made me mad. She was slightly redeemed at the end, but I think she still has a ways to go. I loved the "Angel of Hope" and the way he/she has been doing things to help out various people. Those things and the way that small towns have of coming together in times of tragedy go a long way toward improving the atmosphere of the town.

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## Carrie says

2.5\*

While the writing isn't all bad, the author predominantly tells instead of shows. There are too many minor and major info dumps, and too many little schmaltzy anecdotes inserted in the middle of conversations. The book is riddled with cardboard characters, each one more stereotyped than the last. The small town atmosphere vacillates between heartwarming and mean-spirited.

Claire is way too "perfect." She thinks it's a major character flaw in herself that she can't be "true friends" with her ex-husband's much younger, bimbo wife. She lets her ex-husband, mother and others treat her like an incompetent child because she doesn't want to say anything "unkind" to them.

Riley is a better character, although not unusual or unique. There's also some very real emotional angst in the book that centers around a car wreck. This is the best written part of the book. Unfortunately, the solution Claire comes up with to "help the town heal" was right out of a Micky Rooney/Judy Garland movie. "I know! Let's put on a *show!*"

This book has made-for-TV movie written all over it, complete with B-list actors. I truly enjoyed Thayne's book, *Dancing In The Moonlight* (Cowboys of Cold Creek, #2), and was happy to see this longer novel. Unfortunately, I think her writing style works best in the shorter form of the series romance, where info dumps and heartwarming rabbit trails have to be kept to a minimum.

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## Mandie Kok says

A mediocre romance novel, I think. I mean, nothing really happens here. The reader gets to peek at life in a small town, but there is no plot to speak of and the romance is dead in the water throughout the story. Although the imagery of the small town and the cosy homes offered a pleasant experience, there is very little here to entertain or intrigue.

Not really recommended, but it's not so bad that I'll say avoid it at all costs.

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## Sherry says

This book is everything I love about romance novels, and I don't say that lightly. It's been far too long since I picked up a book that made me want to keep reading instead of doing something else. I'm not happy that I

feel that way because since I was a kid, reading has been my favorite thing to do. I've been saddened lately that so many books have been a chore to get through. In fact, I've been searching for a book--any book--that might remind me why I used to love to read in the first place. I'm thrilled to say that BLACKBERRY SUMMER was that book.

Claire Bradford is struggling to make a new life for herself after her ex-husband left her for a younger woman. Since they share two children and live in the same small Colorado town, that's not easy to do. Riley McKnight is the town's former bad boy, and younger brother of Claire's best friend, who returns home to take the job of Chief of Police. As a kid, Riley had a crush on Claire, and he's surprised to discover that he's still attracted all these years later. It isn't long before Claire and her children are involved in a fatal car accident, for which Riley feels responsible.

Claire and Max are wonderful characters, the romance between them is believable and well-paced. The secondary characters and setting are richly drawn and add depth and richness to the story. But BLACKBERRY SUMMER isn't just the story of Claire's relationship with Max, it's also the story of a town struggling to move past a tragic accident and of a family struggling to redefine itself. It's a truly engaging story.

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### **Eric Bingham says**

My wife and I read this book for our book club, and I have to say that it was my first (and hopefully my last) Harlequin Romance. We both had the same opinion of this book. It was a somewhat dull storyline that drags on and on with occasional "steamy/sappy" paragraphs here and there. (These paragraphs really do come out of nowhere.) I was hoping that this book would be fairly clean since it was written by an Christian (LDS) author, but I was disappointed there also. (I know, I shouldn't expect a book that says Harlequin on the back to be "fairly" clean, but a guy can hope can't he?) There was quite a bit of language, and a few of the steamy scenes got a little too steamy. The "love" story involved really isn't a love story at all, but is much more of a "lust" story. All in all, it was quite a disappointment, and has scared me away from reading any such books in the future.

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### **Sarah says**

3.5 Stars

I very much enjoyed this book. RaeAnne Thayne creates wonderful characters and this was a great story and a great introduction into the town of Hope's Crossing.

This is a romance novel at its core but it does deal with some tough situations; and its done very well.

There is also a small mystery element of the story that I really enjoyed with trying to find out who the Angel of Hope is.

I am vary much looking forward to continuing with the series.

## Jennifer Estep says

Blackberry Summer by RaeAnne Thayne is the first book in her Hope's Crossing contemporary romance series.

Claire Bradford is happy running her bead shop in the small town of Hope's Crossing, Colorado. The divorced mother of two doesn't think that she has time for romance until she meets the new sheriff, Riley McKnight. Claire has known Riley for years since he's the younger brother of one of her best friends. Claire is used to taking care of everyone else, but when she's injured in a car accident that affects several families, Claire finds herself leaning more and more on Riley. For his part, Riley has had a crush on Claire for years, but he doesn't think that he's good enough for her. Claire has other ideas, though ...

I have to say that the cover drew me to this one. I think that's just a really lovely image. Plus, I'm always on the lookout for new contemporary romances to read, so I decided to give this one a try.

The book was different from what I expected. I thought it would be a light contemporary romance, but it was far more serious. Several local teens are also involved in the accident, which really devastates the whole town. Riley feels responsible for what happened, and he has a lot of guilt, wondering if he could have done something to prevent the accident.

Still, it was nice watching Claire and Riley grow closer together, and Riley taking care of Claire, instead of her always thinking of other people (even her ex-husband and his new wife). I also thought their relationship developed at a slow, natural place, especially given the fact that Claire is pretty much housebound for a few weeks because of her injuries.

A few questions were left hanging at the end, like who the mysterious "Angel" of Hope's Crossing is that goes around anonymously helping people, as well as whether or not Riley will continue being the sheriff, but I imagine those will be resolved in the other books in the series. Also, the ending did feel a little rushed as Riley suddenly realizes that he wants to be with Claire, but it was nice seeing the town trying to come together and make a fresh start after the accident.

Overall, if you're looking for a sweeter, more serious romance, check this one out.

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## LORI CASWELL says

Set in Hope's Crossing, Colorado. Claire Bradford is the owner of a successful bead shop. She is a single mom with two kids living a predictable life. She has no time for romance. At least that is what she keeps telling herself. So why does her best friend's younger brother Riley seem so darn sexy and hot? He has returned to be the the new chief of police of this boring little town when he was some big shot on the police force in California. It just doesn't make sense.

A string of robberies leads to a tragic accident that forces Claire to accept help from her friends, even from Riley McKnight. The accident ends up affecting the whole town. Things get ugly when it is found teenagers are involved in the robberies and it starts to rip the town apart.

A mysterious "Angel of Hope" inspires a small group and then the whole town to plan an event to help bring

everyone back together. A bit of romance also starts to blossom making for a very interesting summer.

#### Dollycas's Thoughts

I was swept away by many things in this book. The friendships of the people who visit Claire's shop, the long term relationships of the people of Hope's Crossing, seeing someone you have known all your life differently after time has passed, and the effect the "Angel of Hope" has on this town.

If I was ever lucky enough to win the lottery or come into a great deal of money I would want to be just like the "Angel of Hope", helping people anonymously with things they need. The way the angel inspired the people of Hope's Crossing was really uplifting.

The characters in this story are so engaging and well developed. You want to be part of everything they are doing.

I haven't read Harlequin in quite awhile because they were started to feel the same story just with different names but that is definitely not the case with this story. This book is about so much more than the romance. Claire needs to break out of a life she has trapped herself in. Riley has so many reasons for coming home and for staying away as long as he did. Claire's mother has issues that need to be dealt with. Claire's ex-husband and his new younger, pregnant wife live right in town. Thayne interweaves and blends all their lives together wonderfully along with many other residents of the town of Hope's Crossing. I love the way she writes and her descriptions of people and places were a delight.

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#### Jacqueline says

I love how sometimes a book that you don't expect to like sneaks up on you and sucks you in. Blackberry Summer was like that for me. I expected it to be another story of a quaint small town such as seem to be flooding the market lately. And it was and it wasn't. There were definite sweet scenes and feel good actions but they were counter balanced by some really bad stuff. Nothing seemed contrived, as if the author had just included a scene to move the plot along. Neither were there scenes where you thought 'why the heck did the author meander there?'

This was the story of Claire a 36 year old divorced mother of two. Her best friend's younger brother has just moved back to town after 15 years away as an undercover cop in California. He is now the chief of police. Unbeknownst to Claire, Riley has had a crush on her since he was 12 and she was 15. They are meeting for the first time as equals. This is the story of their relationship which develops in the middle of a tragedy which affects much of the town. There were many secondary characters tidbits of whose stories were told as they touched the lives of Claire or Riley. POV stayed strictly with either Claire or Riley. I believe this must be the beginning of a series. I could see many threads that beckoned and things that seemed to have a story to tell. I particularly appreciated the way that the author left those for later. I didn't feel frustrated that all the stories weren't spelled out and finished. Rather I feel an excited sense of anticipation.

This was very well done writing. The dialog seemed real, how people really talk. Even secondary characters were clearly drawn so they were easy to keep straight in my mind. The writing flowed well and I didn't get knocked out of the story over poor sentence construction or TSTL moments etc.

Both of the main characters grew. Claire had to learn to let go of a bit of control and Riley had to face up to relationship fears which were a result of his father's desertion of the family when Riley was a young teenager. There were a couple of hot kissing scenes and some sweet kissing scenes but that was it, no love making.

The author avoided obvious choices like making the ex husband a total bad guy. Sure he left her for a younger woman, but he really seemed to love that woman. The new wife was a sweet girl and neither one of them treated the children badly. That was refreshing.

So ready to read more about Hope's Crossing. Keeping my fingers crossed that there will be more to come.

Although, in the end, I'm not sure what blackberries had to do with anything. :-)

I received this book free from Tell Harlequin for review.

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## **Karla says**

### **3.5 Stars! A lovely start to this series!**

After reading Christmas in Snowflake Canyon, a book that I absolutely adored, I had to go back and start at the beginning. I had no idea it was the 6th book in RaeAnne Thayne's Hope's Crossing series, and so many of the characters caught my attention, that I needed to read their stories too! I've read a few other books by this author and one thing she always manages to do is touch my heart, and it was no different here. I love the hometown, close-knit community feel and how they all pull together when tragedy strikes. It's similar in nature to Robyn Carr's Virgin River series, but this is virtually a clean romance with very little sexual intimacy. There is character chemistry, moments of passion and enough going on within the story itself, that I didn't miss it. Although there is a sweet HEA for Claire and Riley, the devastating events that affected so many carries over into the next book, Woodrose Mountain, and I look forward to seeing what fate has in store for some of the other characters.

It's not a complex read, the angst level is low and it's the perfect read for a relaxing afternoon!

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## **Kat ~ Forever Book Lover ♥ says**

You can find this entire review at Forever Book Lover.

I knew from the first few pages, that I was going to love this book. Immediately the characters and the town surround you with a warm welcome, like coming home.

I had the ARC for the next book in the series, Woodrose Mountain, and knowing it was the second book of the Hope Crossing series. I don't like to read a series out of sequence, and just by reading the blurb I knew in order for a more effective review I needed to read Blackberry Summer first.

And I am so glad I did, why did I wait so long!! I loved the friendships of these woman, standing strong and supportive even though each of them is dealing with their own sorrow and healing. They stand together and triumph through the devastating accident that is felt throughout Hope's Crossing.

The author created characters that came to live before your eyes, you can envision the town as her words

described each shop, each building, you were a part of it. Amazing job. It has been a bit since I read a book where I felt a part of it, like I strolling down the street or sitting with friends beading.

The protagonist in this story is Claire- the typical good girl, recently divorced, mother of two and owner of a beading business. Riley is Claire's best friends brother, younger by three years, he moves back to town as the Police Chief. He secretly had a boyhood crush on Claire and seeing her again, the emotions has blossomed to something more. It was a sweet romance, if you are expecting a lot of heat, you won't find it in this book.

I dare say this is my first book from this author, if I had to give you a comparison of her writing style, I would compare her to Sherryl Woods or Debbie Macomber. I look forward to reading Woodrose Mountain and spending some more time in Hope's Crossing.

I hope to see you come back and read my review on Woodrose Mountain.

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### **Rob says**

This was a Free book in exchange for an honest review...it was just an ok read for me, way too many secondary characters and what's going on in their lives, had a hard time following all of that, I did love Riley's humor, as well as the history between him & Claire, however the romance was lacking, not enough for my taste. It was extremely boring in parts, that just seemed to drag on...

What she didn't need was a tragic car accident. As a single mom and the owner of a successful bead shop, Claire leads a predictable life in Hope's Crossing, Colorado. So what if she has no time for romance? At least, that's what she tells herself, especially when her best friend's sexy younger brother comes back to town as the new chief of police.

But when the accident forces Claire to slow down and lean on others—especially Riley McKnight—she realizes, for the first time, that things need to change. And not just in her own life. The accident—and the string of robberies committed by teenagers that led up to it—is a wake-up call to the people of Hope's Crossing. The sense of community and togetherness had been lost during those tough years. But with a mysterious "Angel of Hope" working to inspire the town, Riley and Claire will find themselves opening up to love and other possibilities by the end of an extraordinary summer....

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