



HARLEQUIN®

INTRIGUE®

USA TODAY Bestselling Author

B.J.
DANIELS

WHITEHORSE
MONTANA

Winchester Ranch
RELOADED

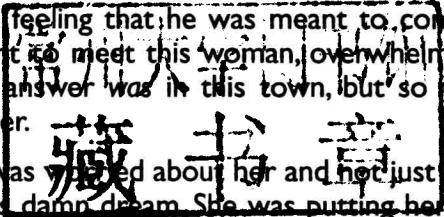
BOOTS AND
BULLETS

“Are you sure you want to know the truth?”

He feared Kate Landon didn't have any idea what she was getting into. Worse, how dangerous it might get.

“I've always wanted to know the truth.”

That feeling that he was meant to come here, meant to meet this woman, overwhelmed him. The answer was in this town, but so was the danger.

He was ed about her and not just because of his damn dream. She was putting her faith in him.

And he feared that if he kissed her, it wouldn't stop there.

He couldn't make Kate Landon any promises, and she was the kind of girl who deserved promises from a man.

USA TODAY Bestselling Author

**B.J.
DANIELS**

BOOTS AND BULLETS



HARLEQUIN®

TORONTO • NEW YORK • LONDON
AMSTERDAM • PARIS • SYDNEY • HAMBURG
STOCKHOLM • ATHENS • TOKYO • MILAN • MADRID
PRAGUE • WARSAW • BUDAPEST • AUCKLAND

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

This book is dedicated to the Malta Quilt Club and all the other wonderful and amazingly talented women who are teaching me to have fun with fabric. Quilting keeps me sane when words fail me. Thanks, ladies!



Recycling programs
for this product may
not exist in your area.

ISBN-13: 978-0-373-69501-0

BOOTS AND BULLETS

Copyright © 2010 by Barbara Heinlein

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher, Harlequin Enterprises Limited, 225 Duncan Mill Road, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada M3B 3K9.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

This edition published by arrangement with Harlequin Books S.A.

For questions and comments about the quality of this book please contact us at Customer_eCare@Harlequin.ca.

® and TM are trademarks of the publisher. Trademarks indicated with ® are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the Canadian Trade Marks Office and in other countries.

www.eHarlequin.com

Printed in U.S.A.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

B.J. Daniels wrote her first book after a career as an award-winning newspaper journalist and author of thirty-seven published short stories. That first book, *Odd Man Out*, received a four-and-a-half-star review from *RT Book Reviews* and went on to be nominated for Best Intrigue for that year. Since then she has won numerous awards, including a career achievement award for romantic suspense and many nominations and awards for best book.

Daniels lives in Montana with her husband, Parker, and two springer spaniels, Spot and Jem. To contact her, write to B.J. Daniels, P.O. Box 1173, Malta, MT 59538 or e-mail her at bjdaniels@mtintouch.net. Check out her Web site at www.bjdaniels.com.

Books by B.J. Daniels

HARLEQUIN INTRIGUE

- 996—SECRET OF DEADMAN'S COULEE†
- 1002—THE NEW DEPUTY IN TOWN†
- 1024—THE MYSTERY MAN OF WHITEHORSE†
- 1030—CLASSIFIED CHRISTMAS†
- 1053—MATCHMAKING WITH A MISSION†
- 1059—SECOND CHANCE COWBOY†
- 1083—MONTANA ROYALTY†
- 1125—SHOTGUN BRIDE*
- 1131—HUNTING DOWN THE HORSEMAN*
- 1137—BIG SKY DYNASTY*
- 1155—SMOKIN' SIX-SHOOTER*
- 1161—ONE HOT FORTY-FIVE*
- 1198—GUN-SHY BRIDE**
- 1204—HITCHED!**
- 1210—TWELVE-GAUGE GUARDIAN**
- 1234—BOOTS AND BULLETS††

†Whitehorse, Montana

*Whitehorse, Montana: The Corbetts

**Whitehorse, Montana: Winchester Ranch

††Whitehorse, Montana: Winchester Ranch Reloaded

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Cyrus Winchester—The cowboy private investigator woke from a three-month coma with a story about a murdered woman he'd seen in the hospital nursery who needed his help. Was it possible it had only been a bad dream?

Kate Landon—The owner of Second Hand Kate's was used to dealing with furnishings from the past. But it was her own past that haunted her until she met the P.I.

Roberta Warren—The hospital administrator swore there hadn't been a murder at her hospital while Cyrus had been in a coma there.

McCall Winchester—The sheriff didn't believe her cousin Cyrus's story had been more than a bad dream, either, until his questions stirred up a past some thought long forgotten.

Marie Dennison—She was dying, unaware of the storm that was brewing around something that had happened thirty years before on the night she gave birth.

Joanna McCormick—The ranch woman had every reason to hate the woman who'd tried to steal her husband.

Virginia Winchester—No one knew what had made her so bitter. But the truth was about to come out and she suspected her mother was at the heart of it.

Pepper Winchester—The matriarch had proven she was capable of almost anything. But even she couldn't be so heartless that she'd betray her own daughter, could she?

Candace Porter—Only two people in Whitehorse knew who she really was or what she was up to.

Katherine and Elizabeth Landon—They understood the bond between sisters right to the very end.

Chapter One

Cyrus Winchester opened his eyes and blinked in confusion. He appeared to be in a hospital room. From down the hall came the sound of a television advertisement for an end-of-season fall sale.

He told himself he must be dreaming. The last thing he remembered was heading to Montana to spend the Fourth of July with the grandmother he hadn't seen in twenty-seven years.

Glancing toward the window, he saw a gap in the drapes. His heart began to pound. The leaves were gone off the trees and several inches of fresh snow covered the ground.

A nurse entered the room, but she didn't look in his direction as she went over to the window and opened the curtains. He closed his eyes again, blinded by the brightness.

As he tried to make sense of this, Cyrus could hear her moving around the room. She came over to the bed, tucking and straightening, humming to herself a tune he didn't recognize. She smelled of citrus, a light, sweet scent that reminded him of summer and driving to Montana with the windows down on his pickup, the radio blaring.

With a start, he realized that wasn't the last thing he remembered!

His hand shot out, grabbing the nurse's wrist. She screamed, drawing back in surprise, eyes widening in shock. What was wrong with her?

He opened his mouth, his lips working, but nothing came out.

"Don't try to talk," she said and pushed the call button with her free hand. "The doctor will be glad to see that you're back with us, cowboy."

Back with us?

Cyrus tried again to speak, desperate to tell her what he remembered, but the only sound that came out was a *shh*.

The nurse gently removed her wrist from his grasp to pour him a glass of water. "Here, drink a little of this."

Gratefully he took the cup from her and raised his head enough to take a sip. He couldn't believe how weak he felt or how confused he was. But one thought remained clear and that was what he urgently needed to tell someone.

He took another swallow of water, feeling as if he hadn't had a drink in months.

"Sheriff." The word came out in a hoarse whisper. "Get. The. Sheriff. I saw it. The nurse. Murdered. In the hospital nursery."

Chapter Two

Cyrus tried to make sense of what his twin brother was telling him. "No, Cordell," he said when his brother finished. "I know what I saw last night."

His brother's earlier relief at seeing him awake had now turned to concern. "Cyrus, you've been in a coma for three months. You just woke up. You wouldn't have seen a murder unless it happened in the last twenty minutes."

"I'm telling you. I saw her. A nurse or a nurse's aide, I don't know, she was wearing a uniform and she was lying on the floor with a bloody scalpel next to her just inside the nursery door." He saw his brother frown. "What?"

"You're in a special rehabilitation center in Denver and have been for the last two months. There is no nursery here."

Cyrus lay back against the pillows, looking past his identical twin to the snow covering the landscape outside. "The hospital was a brick building. Old. The tiles on the floor were worn." Out of the corner of his eye, he caught his brother's surprised expression. "There is such a place, isn't there?"

"You just described the old hospital in Whitehorse,

Montana, but you haven't been there for months," Cordell said.

"But I was there, right?"

"Yes, for only one night. They were in the process of moving you to the new hospital the night you were..."

"You're eventually going to have to tell me what happened to me," Cyrus said.

"What's important is that you're conscious. The doctor said everything looks good and there is no reason you shouldn't have a full recovery. As for this other issue, we can sort it out later when—"

"A nurse was *murdered*," Cyrus swallowed, his mouth and throat still dry from lack of use.

"I'm sorry, but it had to have been a dream. You say you got up out of bed that night—"

"I buzzed for the nurse, but no one answered the call button, so I got up and walked out past the nurse's station," Cyrus said, seeing it as clearly as his brother standing before him. "The nurses' station was empty, but I remember looking at the clock. It was two minutes past midnight. I could hear someone down the hall talking in whispers in one of the rooms. I walked in that direction, but as I passed the nursery windows—"

"Cyrus, this is the first time since your accident that you've been conscious," Cordell said gently. "That night in the old Whitehorse hospital, you were hooked up to monitors and IVs. There is no way you got up and walked anywhere. I'm sorry. I know it seemed real to you, whatever you think you saw, but it had to have just been a bad dream."

"Then how do you explain the fact that I can remember exactly how the old tiles felt on my bare feet or the way the place smelled, or that I can describe the hospital to you if I was never awake to see it?"

Cordell shook his head. "I don't know."

"Then you can't be certain that I didn't see exactly what I said I did."

"All I know is that if you had gotten out of bed that night in the old hospital, the alarms on the monitors would have gone off."

"Maybe they did. There were no nurses around to hear them. I'm telling you the place was a morgue and there was no one at the nurses' station."

"Even if that was true, monitors were recording your vital signs. If you disconnected anything and walked down the hall there would be a report of it."

"Maybe there is. Have you seen the records?"

His brother sighed. "You were moved to the new hospital the next morning. Don't you think someone would have noticed you were no longer connected to the IV or monitors?"

"Maybe the nurses covered it up because they were down the hall killing a woman."

"Cyrus—"

"I know what I saw," he said with a shake of his head. What frustrated him even more than not getting anyone to believe him was that after all this time, any evidence of the crime would be gone.

"I'm glad you're the same old Cyrus, stubborn as ever," Cordell said with affection.

"Were there any other patients in the hospital the one night I spent there?" Cyrus asked as a thought occurred to him.

"One of the reasons the ambulance took you to the old hospital was because there was another patient who couldn't be moved, so the hospital was still staffed for the night."

Sure it was. "Another patient? Maybe that patient saw or heard something that would corroborate my story."

"That patient was in his eighties. He died that night."

Cyrus sighed and closed his eyes.

"Listen, the doctor said you shouldn't overdo."

"I want you to call the hospital up there and the sheriff," Cyrus said, opening his eyes. "I'm telling you I saw a murder." He gave his brother a detailed description of the female victim.

"Okay, I'll check into it if it will make you take it easy for a while."

Cyrus lay back against the pillows on the hospital bed, exhausted. How was that possible after sleeping for almost three months?

"Get some rest," Cordell said, clasping his hand. "I can't tell you how good it is to have you back."

"Yeah, same here." He was glad one of the first faces he'd seen after waking had been his twin's. But he couldn't help feeling helpless and frustrated.

He'd seen a murdered woman that night in the hospital and no one believed him. Not even his brother.

CYRUS WOKE to find his twin beside his bed. Through the open curtains he could see that it was dark outside. How long had he been asleep this time?

Cordell stirred and sat up, seeing that he'd awakened. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay." Had he expected Cyrus to wake up and recant his story about the murdered woman he'd seen? Surely his twin knew him better than that. "What did you find out?"

From Cordell's expression, he'd been hoping, at least.

"I called the hospital in Whitehorse and talked to the administrator. She assured me there was no murder at the old hospital the night you were a patient there."

"Someone moved the body."

"She also assured me that you never left your bed. There were two nurses on duty that night monitoring not only you, but also the elderly gentleman in a room down the hall. One nurse was just outside your room the whole time."

Cyrus knew that wasn't true, but Cordell didn't give him a chance to argue the point.

"I also called the Whitehorse sheriff's department and talked to our cousin McCall, who has since become the sheriff. There was no murder at the old hospital that night. Nor any missing nurse because both nurses who were on duty that night are accounted for. Nor was there a nurse's aide or orderly or anyone else working that night."

Then she must have just been dressed in a uniform for some reason, Cyrus thought.

"There was also no missing person report on any woman in the area."

She must not have been from Whitehorse.

He saw his brother's expression and knew that Cordell would have thought of all of this and asked the sheriff to run a check in a broader area with the description Cyrus had supplied. He and Cordell were private investigators and identical twins. They could finish each other's sentences. Of course Cordell would have thought of all these things.

"Sheriff McCall Winchester assured me that no unexplained vehicles were found near the old hospital nor has anyone in the area gone missing."

Was it possible everyone was right and that he'd

only seen the murdered woman in a coma-induced nightmare?

Cyrus didn't believe that. But then again, he also couldn't believe he'd been in coma for three months.

WITHIN A FEW WEEKS, Cyrus was feeling more like his old self. He'd been working out, getting his strength back and was now restless. He hadn't been able to shake the images from the dream. In fact, they seemed stronger than they had the morning he'd awakened in the rehabilitation center.

He still had no memory, though, of what had happened to him in Whitehorse in the hours before the accident that put him in the coma.

Cordell had filled him in, finally. Apparently, he'd driven to Whitehorse in his pickup and stopped that night at the Whitehorse Hotel, an old four-story antique on the edge of town. He'd gone there, he remembered, to see his grandmother Pepper Winchester after receiving a letter from her lawyer giving him the impression that she might be dying.

Even now he couldn't remember why he'd wanted to go see the reclusive grandmother who'd kicked her family off the ranch twenty-seven years ago, never to be heard from again—until now.

In Whitehorse, he'd taken a room on the fourth floor of the hotel, intending to wait until his brother joined him the next morning before going out to the Winchester Ranch.

Apparently he had barely gotten into his room when he'd either heard something outside or happened to look out the window. What he'd seen, Cordell said, was a child molester breaking the only yard light in the hotel

parking lot and slashing the rear tire of a VW bug parked there.

Cyrus must have watched as the man went back to the dark-colored van, the engine running, and realized the man was waiting for the owner of the VW to come out.

He'd run downstairs in time to keep the young woman who owned the VW bug from being run down by the van and killed. While saving her, he'd been hit and suffered a blow to his head that had left him in a coma all these months.

"That's some story," Cyrus said after his brother finished.

It was like hearing a story about someone he didn't know. None of it brought back a single memory. But it did fit in with his dream, since he'd spent a night in the old hospital.

During the weeks he'd spent getting stronger, he hadn't brought up the so-called murder dream with Cordell because it upset him. Cyrus suspected he worried about his twin's mental health. During his last checkup, even the doctor had questioned Cyrus about headaches, strange dreams and hallucinations. Clearly Cordell had talked to the doctor about his brother's inability to let this go.

"I didn't think coma patients dreamed," Cyrus had said to the doctor.

"Actually, they retain non-cognitive function and normal sleep patterns. It's their higher brain functions they lose, other than key functions such as breathing and circulation. You were in a deep-level coma caused by trauma to the brain. I'm sure that explains what you thought you saw."

After his doctor's appointment, Cyrus stopped by

Winchester Investigations, unable to put it off any longer. With each passing day, he had more questions—and more suspicions. He knew there was only one way to put his mind at ease.

“Hey,” he said after tapping at his brother’s open office door.

Cordell looked up and from his expression, he’d been expecting this.

“I have to go back to Whitehorse and check out a few things myself.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“No, you need to stay here and do some work. We both can’t be goofing off. When I come back—”

“Yeah, I want to talk to you about that.”

“Is there a problem?”

“No, it’s just that, well, you’ve met Raine,” Cordell said.

Cyrus smiled. He’d been pleased when his brother had introduced him to the woman he’d been seeing for the last three months. Raine Chandler, he’d been surprised to hear, was the woman he’d saved up in Montana.

“So I brought you two together.” Cyrus had never believed in divine intervention. But as eerie as this was, he felt as if it had all happened for a reason. And that reason, he feared, was so he could be at the hospital that night and make sure justice was done.

But that surprise was nothing compared to realizing his brother had fallen head-over-heels in love with the woman. After Cordell’s horrible marriage and divorce, no one had expected him ever to consider marriage again—especially his twin.

But when he’d met Raine, he’d seen that she was