

A CO^WBOY C^HRISTMAS



A mom on the run. A special child and her “imaginary” friend. A cowboy. And God. Heart’s Haven is at it again...

Layne Mabrey is on the run.

Her ex-husband wants to have six-year-old Chloe institutionalized, but Layne will go to any lengths to keep her Down's Syndrome child.

Dex Beckett falls immediately in love with both Layne and Chloe, but Layne can't afford to get close to anyone—not even the shy, gentle cowboy next door. She and Chloe have to be ready to run...again.

Concerned that Chloe's sudden creation of an imaginary friend could be used to substantiate her father's claims, Layne is shocked when Dex offers an unbelievable opinion about the child's invisible visitor. But there's more to

Heart's Haven than meets the eye. Is it possible a Christmas miracle awaits Layne and Chloe on the Heart's Haven Angel Tree?

#6 - 2013 Preditors & Editors Readers' Poll

Reviews

I love when these two authors get together. It's like magic! And I must admit, they had me wrapped up in this story from the start. A cowboy, a little girl, and a downtrodden mama - sounds like a wonderful mix to me!

[Donna B. Snow, Author](#)

This is a cute romance between a woman trying to protect her charming little girl who has Down's Syndrome and the proverbial cowboy next door. Dex is one of the sweetest heroes I've read. Well worth the money!

[Amazon Review by Susan Mason](#)

Great book to read. This was the 1st time reading this author. She had me crying like a baby! I really enjoyed reading this short story and plan on sometimes in the future to read more of the (Hearts Haven) novels.

[Amazon Review by Regions](#)

Loved this book because it was a touching love story.... and because I have a child with Down syndrome :)

[Amazon Review by Sarah Delcid](#)

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book! The characters and story line were well written and touched the heart. When I finished reading it, I was left uplifted.

[Amazon Review by Jeanau](#)

EXCE^RPT

From this location bordering the Angelina National Forest, a breathtaking vista spread out before her. When she'd moved into the Heart's Haven complex eight months ago, Layne had vowed never to waste this view—hence the too-large porch swing. She hadn't regretted the purchase for an instant, despite the hole it had eaten in a budget every bit as small as her postage stamp lawn.

This time of morning, with dew sparkling like diamond dust on every blade of grass and fluttering leaf, she could almost believe the world was brand new. Bright, clean, and wonderfully pine-scented, its beauty eased the tension in her soul.

She had twenty minutes to enjoy before heading off to her receptionist job at Hilliard & Beckett Law Firm. Once there, she rarely found an opportunity to go outside and enjoy the fresh air. Thank God her desk sat next to a huge, third-floor window, which overlooked the quaint little town.

Never having been one to spend much time indoors, working behind a desk hadn't been Layne's first choice of occupation. But then, she hadn't been in a position to be picky when she arrived in Angel Falls, Texas back in February. Her lips curved upward as she recalled that first visit to Heart's Haven.

As it turned out, the spur-jangling cowboy's name was Dex Beckett, and the two of them moved in to adjacent cottages. Almost every day since, Dex had shown up in Layne's front yard and chatted with Chloe about horses. Layne had never met anyone who knew more about or loved the animals as much as Dex.

"He's a horse whisperer," Pia Peretti-Myers had told her. Pia's husband David—old Hart's nephew—pastored The Falls Tabernacle. The couple lived in one of the new, larger units in the complex and helped take care of Heart's Haven and its tenants. "But don't let Dex hear you call him that." Pia's hazel eyes twinkled. "He prefers the term 'natural horsemanship.' He shows people how to understand their horses—travels all over the country teaching groups how to train the animals not to be spooked over gunfire or cannon shot."

Layne couldn't imagine shy, quiet Dex travelling extensively or taking charge in a group of people—at least, not grown-up people. Apparently he did though, even in Hollywood, where he trained movie horses. From what she'd seen of him, Dex was mostly quiet around adults, but with Chloe he talked up a storm.

The therapeutic riding classes where he taught people with special needs how to ride were the handsome cowboy's passion. Layne had been fascinated to learn that he'd taught an Iraq war veteran without any legs. Once they got to know each other better, Dex told her that seeing the man's face as he'd galloped across the field would forever be one of the highlights of his life.

A twig snapped nearby. Layne jumped and raised her gaze to find the horse whisperer watching her from the other side of her gate as if conjured right out of her thoughts.

“Layne.” He nodded, and his gaze met hers, slid away, then returned to her face. The same shy smile she remembered from their first encounter brightened his expression and turned his eyes to liquid amber. “Pretty mornin’.”

She stood and dumped the dregs of her coffee into the flower bed. “It’s absolutely gorgeous out here. If I didn’t have to go to work, I’d be walking the Angelina Trail.”

“I know what you mean.” He cocked his head to one side in a gesture that was becoming familiar to Layne. “How’s the job goin’? Ol’ Tim treatin’ you all right?”

She smiled. Dex’s cousin Tim was the Beckett of Hilliard and Beckett, and it was thanks to her Heart’s Haven neighbor that she’d obtained the position.

A few days after their first meeting, when they’d both been moving into their cottages, Layne had told Dex that she needed to find a job right away. He’d narrowed those amazing eyes and studied her face long enough to make her squirm, then slowly withdrew a business card from his wallet. His delicious Texas drawl made her smile, despite a desperate need to keep her distance.

“My cousin Tim’s one of the partners at this law firm,” he said. “He’s lookin’ for a receptionist. The last girl quit yesterday mornin’ and headed off to California, sure and certain she’ll be the next big movie star.”

Layne reached for the card, but Dex kept a firm hold on it. “You’re gonna stick around, aren’t you? I’d hate to send ol’ Tim another fly-by-night.” A playful grin took any possible sting from his words.

She tugged the card from his fingers. “I promise not to fly away any time soon.”

Dex had turned away and heaved a huge box off the back of his pick-up. “Then I guess I’ll be seein’ you around, Layne Mabrey.”

Up in Maine, where she’d lived before, nobody ever got hired on the spot, but things proved different here in Smalltown, USA. She’d walked into Tim Beckett’s office armed with Dex’s name and walked out with a job.

Now, outside the apartment she and Chloe had occupied since February, she gave her neighbor a smile. “Tim couldn’t treat anyone badly, you know that.”

“Yeah, I reckon I do.” Dex took a step backward. “Well, I guess I ought’a get to work and let you do the same.”

“Probably a good idea.” Layne chuckled. “We don’t want to try your cousin’s patience. I’d be terribly disappointed to find that he’s capable of meanness, after all.”

Dex’s crooked grin made Layne’s tummy turn an unexpected somersault. She watched him move toward his own gate, wondering where that little belly flip had come from and exactly how she was going to put a stop to it.

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