



## The Maverick & the Manhattanite (Montana Mavericks: Rust Creek Cowboys Book 3)

By Leanne Banks

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*USA TODAY* bestselling author Leanne Banks returns to Rust Creek Falls, the setting for the popular Montana Mavericks: Rust Creek Cowboys, where a cowboy is sure to find love—when he least expects it!

#### Rust Creek Ramblings

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But there's a rough road ahead for Rust Creek's sexy sheriff and his do-gooder girl. Can Big Sky and Big Apple make it past the first frost? Just how much will a city girl sacrifice for the strong arms of the law?

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

A New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author, Leanne Banks is surprised every time she realizes how many books she's written. Leanne loves new adventures; she has ridden an elephant, stood on an ostrich egg (no, it didn't break), gone parasailing and done indoor skydiving. Leanne loves writing romance because she believes in love's power and magic. She lives in Virginia with her family. Visit her website, [www.leannebanks.com](http://www.leannebanks.com).

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*My suitcase is packed and I'm ready for my assignment as a lead coordinator for Bootstraps, a charitable organization based in New York City. I'm getting ready to travel from my world to a totally different one. I'm trading subways, theater, high fashion and rush hour crowds for a small town in Montana that's been nearly destroyed by a flood. No more cushy apartment or paved sidewalks for me. I'll be facing mud—a lot of it. I expect I won't find a lot of Wall Street types in a town called Rust Creek. But there will be cowboys—and I've always been curious about cowboys....*

— Lissa Roarke

Lissa's roommate, Chelsea, swirled her glass of red wine as she picked up one of the boots from Lissa's suitcase. Chelsea eyed it with disgust. "I can't believe you're actually going to wear something with the label *John Deere*."

"Hey, these are great," Lissa said. "They're weather resistant and the lining is moisture wicking and breathable. They've got removable orthotics, a tempered-steel shank and a rubber outsole."

"But they're ugly," Chelsea said and dropped the boot back into Lissa's open suitcase. She took a deep sip of wine. "I know you're into your job and you want to help people, but are you sure this is a good idea? There must be plenty you can still do here."

"This is a huge opportunity for me. I'll be the lead coordinator. Besides, my rent will be covered and you'll get to rule our little roost," Lissa said, giving her roommate a hug.

"But I'll miss you," Chelsea admitted. "And I've worked so hard to improve your style quotient."

Chelsea worked for a women's fashion magazine and believed one of her missions in life was to help everyone dress with more style and flair. She glanced in Lissa's suitcase again and gave a disapproving sniff. "Couldn't you at least include a Givenchy or Hermes scarf? A Burberry sweater?"

Remember what I've told you. Just a few stand-out pieces can really make a difference."

Lissa smothered a chuckle. "Chelsea, I need to be ready to work. I need to give these people a strong impression that I'm there to help them if they're going to take me seriously. They haven't received enough national attention or help. No rock stars are holding concerts for them, and most of their town was practically wiped out, from what I've heard."

Chelsea sighed. "True, I suppose," she said and took another sip of wine. "You're such a good soul. I really will miss you."

"You won't have to share the bathroom," Lissa reminded her.

"Well, when you put it that way," Chelsea said. "Ciao. I'm putting a little prezzie in your suitcase for a time you may need it. Probably tomorrow night," she muttered under her breath. "No peeking."

"You don't need to give me any presents," Lissa said.

"Oh, I do. I have very little conscience, but I can't ignore true north on this one."

While Chelsea moved through the small apartment wearing a morose expression, Lissa double-checked her list and made last-minute preparations for her trip. She was halfnervous and totally excited. Her first assignment as lead coordinator.

She'd never be able to explain it to Chelsea, or her family of high achievers, for that matter, but Lissa had grown weary of life in the city and she was looking forward to being in a totally different environment. Her daily journal entries had grown stale and depressing. Her parents had always cautioned her not to put too much energy into her passion for writing. They thought she should focus on something more practical. Working for Bootstraps had offered her the unique opportunity to help people and also blog about her experiences on their website.

Although she knew her temporary stay in Montana would be challenging, she was looking forward to fresh air, big blue skies and wide-open spaces.

And cowboys. She wouldn't admit it to anyone else, but she'd had a fascination with cowboys for a long time. She wanted to know more about the real kind of cowboy, and apparently Montana was full of them. Lissa felt a twinge of guilt when she thought that Chelsea believed Lissa was being so self-sacrificing by going to Montana.

Lissa closed her eyes and brushed the unwelcome feeling aside. Her first duty was to help the community of Rust Creek Falls, and she was determined to make a difference. Cowboys were just the cherry on top of the assignment.

\* \* \*

In his office, Sheriff Gage Christensen took another sip of coffee as he prowled the small area and listened to Charlene Shelton, a volunteer senior deputy, give her weekly report on how the elderly in his jurisdiction were faring. As soon as he'd begun serving as sheriff, Gage had learned it was a lot easier to appoint a volunteer to check on folks than wait for calls. "I've made all my calls. Everyone is mostly fine. Teresa Gilbert may need a ride to the doctor next week, so we'll need a volunteer driver for that. The only one who didn't answer or call me back was Harry Jones, but you know he's a stubborn one. Always has been. Ever since his wife died last year, he's just gotten worse."

"I'll get Will to check on Harry," he said, speaking of his deputy. "He won't mind."

"I'm still worried about all the people still stuck in trailers since the flood," she clucked. "Winter is coming and I can't believe those cheap trailers will withstand our blizzards."

Gage felt his neck tighten with tension. He didn't disagree with Charlene, but it would take time to put the rural town back together after the flash flood they'd experienced. "We're all working on it, Charlene. In fact, we've got a charity-relief woman coming in from the East. She should arrive this afternoon."

"From the East?" Charlene echoed, clearly enjoying receiving this bit of news. Gage figured she would be burning up the phone wires as soon as they finished the call. "How is someone from the East going to know what to do here? Where's she from?"

Gage hesitated. "New York."

Silence followed. "Well, I suppose they have experience with flooding, but we don't have subways or high-rises."

"I know, but we're not in a position to turn down help. I've been tapping every connection I can find. Some people are responding. Others are already booked. We need to get as much done as possible since winter will hit early."

"Yes, we're in hard times. If only Hunter McGee was still with us," she said.

The mention of the former mayor's name stabbed him. There was never a day that passed that he didn't think about the mayor's death during the storm. Gage blamed himself. His parents had talked him into taking a quick trip to a rodeo out of town and Hunter had agreed to cover for Gage. The flood hit and Hunter had rushed out in response to a call. A tree had fallen on his car and he'd died of a heart attack.

"No one can replace Hunter," Gage said.

"That's true, but we're lucky we have you as sheriff, Gage. You've been working nonstop to help us," Charlene said.

"There's always more to do," he said.

"Well, I'll bring you a pie the next time I come into town. A single man needs a pie every now and then," she said.

Gage looked at the baked goods piled on a table next to the dispatcher's desk. "You don't have to do that, Charlene. We all appreciate the work you do with the calls you make each week."

"Oh, it's nothing," she said. "I can bake a pie in my sleep."

Gage swallowed a sigh. "Thanks for making those calls. Take care, now."

At that moment, he heard the sound of a husky, feminine laugh and wondered who it was. It was a sexy sound that distracted him.

Gage glanced outside his office and saw his twenty-one-year-old deputy, Will Baker, walk into the office with a slim redhead by his side. The woman was a head-snapper with her fiery hair, long legs and confident air.

"Hey, uh, Gage, this is Lissa Roarke, the relief worker you told me to pick up from the airport. She needs

someone to show her around town. I can do it."

Gage tore his gaze from the woman's eyes and bit back a smile. He wasn't at all surprised that Will was volunteering to show the pretty New Yorker around. He was practically drooling all over the woman. "That's okay. Vickie," he said, referring to this dispatcher, "needs to leave early, so I'd like you to fill in at the dispatcher desk for a couple hours."

Disappointment shadowed Will's face. "Oh, well, if you need me for anything, Lissa, give me a call. I wrote down my cell number for you. Call me anytime."

"Thank you, Will, and thank you for picking me up from the airport and taking me to the rooming house before bringing me here. You're a much better driver than most of the ones I deal with in the city."

Will stood a little taller. "We take our driving seriously out here."

Gage cleared his throat. "Will, thank you for picking up Miss Roarke. Vickie's waiting, okay." He moved toward the New Yorker and extended his hand. "I'm the sheriff, Gage Christensen. We appreciate your help."

"Please, call me Lissa," she said in a voice that held a hint of a sexy rasp. She returned his handshake. Her hand was small and soft. He had a hard time imagining her smooth, uncallused hand doing hard labor. Her long red hair fell in a mass of curls to her shoulders and he liked the fact that she didn't seem to care about taming it. Maybe she wasn't as high m...

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**James Sirois:**

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