



Against the Wind (The Raines of Wind Canyon)

By Kat Martin

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Secrets don't stay buried long in cattle country. Sarah Allen, the beautiful girl who humiliated Jackson Raines in high school, is back in town. Not so long ago, she couldn't wait to leave Wind Canyon, Wyoming, in her dust. But, recently widowed, she has nowhere else to go and finds herself on Jackson's ranch. And despite everything, Jackson's finding himself reluctant to get rid of her.

Sarah brings her own kind of trouble, and he can't resist trouble. Enemies of her dead husband show up making threats, thinking she has something they're owed. They're not taking no for an answer, but what they will take is the one thing she has left—her daughter. Jackson's the only one who might be able to save little Holly and bring her home.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

After Sarah Allen's abusive, sadistic husband, Andrew, is murdered, his shady business partners want to "talk" to her about something of Andrew's she has. But Sarah has no idea what they mean. Fearful for herself and her little girl, Holly, Sarah changes her name and moves back to her old home in Wind Canyon, Wyoming, far away from her expensive L.A. mansion. A flat tire during a blizzard on the last leg of her trip reunites her with Jackson Raines, who was only a teenager when she rejected him for the monster she married. There's action, adventure, and lots of steamy sex as Jackson and Sarah search for Andrew's secret and why the men who are willing to kill her for it want it. This is the first book in Martin's Raines of Wind Canyon series, to be followed by *Against the Fire* and *Against the Law*. --Shelley Mosley

About the Author

Kat Martin is the New York Times bestselling author of more than fifty historical and contemporary romance novels. To date she has over 13 million copies of her books in print in seventeen countries, including Sweden, France, Russia, Spain, Japan, Argentina, Poland, and Greece. Kat and her husband, author Larry Jay Martin, live on their ranch outside Missoula, Montana, and spend winters at their beach house in California. Kat invites you to visit her website at www.KatMartin.com.

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"Mommy, why do we have to leave?" Sarah Allen's six-year-old daughter, Holly, looked up at her with big blue, tear-filled eyes. "I like it here. I don't want to go."

Anxious to be on her way, Sarah reached down and lifted the little blonde girl into her arms. "Don't cry, sweetie. I promise you're going to love it. The mountains are beautiful and there are these rivers and big green forests, and you can have a puppy if you want." At least Sarah hoped so.

Surely the owners of the cottage she had rented wouldn't mind. The house was, after all, on a very large ranch, at least twelve thousand acres.

Holly sniffed back tears and looked up with interest. "A puppy? Can I really?"

"As soon as we get settled, we'll drive into town and you can adopt one from the pound." Sarah glanced nervously toward the door. The car was packed, the rest of their personal possessions boxed and shipped. She was leaving Los Angeles and she prayed she was leaving her troubles, as well.

The sooner they left town, the safer she would feel.

She set Holly back on her feet, took a last glance around the expensive Santa Monica apartment she had occupied with her late husband, surveyed the plush white carpet and chic black lacquer furniture that was Andrew's taste, not hers. There was nothing homey, nothing the least bit geared toward a family. The condo was just for show—no substance beyond the surface beauty. Just like Andrew.

Sarah started for the door, but the phone rang before she could reach it. She considered just letting it ring, a hollow echo now that her things were gone, but she was afraid it might be important.

She lifted the receiver and pressed it against her ear.

"Hello."

"Sarah, this is Martin Kozak." His raspy smoker's voice grated over the line. "We need to talk."

A shiver went down her spine. Marty Kozak was one of Andrew's business associates. A few weeks ago, Marty had started calling, trying to set up a meeting. Sarah didn't want to talk to him or any of Andrew's other shady business acquaintances.

"What do you want, Marty? I told you I don't know anything about Andrew's affairs. He never talked to me about business. We never discussed it."

He didn't think I was smart enough, or savvy enough about finances, or he just plain didn't want to.

And Andrew never did anything he didn't want to do.

"Like I told you before," Marty said, "Andrew had something important I need. Did you find anything in his personal belongings? A list he might have been keeping? A computer disk, maybe, or a record book of some kind?"

"No. Before he died, we were barely speaking." That was an understatement. When they were together, Andrew did all the talking, mostly about himself. Sarah had been trying to leave him for years, but she had been afraid of what would happen if she did. "He didn't tell me anything, and he didn't give me anything."

"Maybe there was something in his personal effects."

"Not that I know of."

"I'd like to talk to you, Sarah."

"I'm sorry, Marty. I was just walking out the door. I've really got to go." By the time she hung up the phone, she was shaking. She had no idea what sort of trouble Andrew might have been in before he was killed, but she wasn't part of it and never had been.

Once you get out of town, she told herself, everything is going to be all right.

Things were bound to settle down. After her husband's murder, the police had questioned her extensively, but that had been months ago and they were certain his death was a result of his gambling debts or crooked business dealings. She figured Marty had waited for the police investigation to die down before he began to press her for whatever it was he wanted.

Sarah closed her eyes and dragged in a steady breath. The past would fade, she told herself, and in time, even Andrew's associates would leave her alone.

Grabbing Holly's hand and the big leather purse that carried everything from bandages to emergency

food—breakfast bars this morning—she took the private elevator down to the underground garage where her Mercedes, one of the few possessions Andrew had actually put in her name, was parked.

Everything else belonged solely to him and he managed to keep it that way with the prenuptial agreement she had signed. After he died, she was only mildly surprised to discover he owed more money than he had in his bank accounts and had mortgaged or sold all of the real estate he owned. He had even let his life insurance policy expire.

Sarah had been left with nothing. She had sold everything she could to raise enough money to move out of L.A., taken back her maiden name, changed Holly's name, and found a job over the internet in her home town of Wind Canyon, Wyoming. On a site for rental properties, she had happened upon a cottage on a ranch in the country not too far from town.

All she had to do was get there.

Still clutching Holly's hand, Sarah opened the rear car door, set her daughter in the booster seat and strapped her in, then rounded the vehicle and slid behind the wheel. It was a thousand-mile journey to Wyoming.

Sarah thought of Andrew, his extravagant lifestyle, his gambling and the crooked deals he made to keep the money rolling in. She thought of Marty Kozak and the rest of Andrew's so-called business associates.

She wouldn't feel safe until she got there.

Jackson Raines tightened his hold on the steering wheel of his white Ford extended-cab pickup. The temperature outside was two below, the wind howling, the heavy snow blowing sideways. A Wyoming blizzard was nothing to sneeze at, even one this late in spring. Keeping his eyes carefully fixed on the road, he was surprised to see a pair of taillights up ahead, barely visible through the blowing snow, twin dots of red flashing in hazard mode, the car pulled off on the side of the road.

Jackson started slowing way before he reached the vehicle. He didn't want to slide into the damned thing, and on a road as icy as this one, it wouldn't be hard to do.

There was rarely any traffic on the narrow two lanes that led nowhere except to a couple of ranches in the area. He couldn't help wondering who would be driving out here in this kind of weather. Hell, he wouldn't be here himself if he hadn't been in town when the storm blew in, several hours earlier than expected. He should have known. In mountains like these, the weatherman was never right.

He slowed even more, downshifted until the pickup was moving at a crawl, then pulled in behind the stranded auto. California license plates. Through the blinding wall of white, he recognized the car as a newer Mercedes. 500S gleamed in chrome on the left side of the trunk.

Jackson pulled on a pair of leather work gloves and climbed out of the pickup. He should have figured it would be some rich guy with more money than common sense.

Tugging his worn cowboy hat down over his forehead, he walked up to the car and rapped on the window. The driver flinched at the sound as if he'd been shot. He pressed the button and the window eased down, and Jackson frowned as he realized the driver was a woman. And in her lap, she was holding a little girl.

"Thank God you stopped," the woman said, her teeth chattering.

"What in blazes are you doing out here?"

"I thought we could get where we were going before the storm came in."

He could hardly argue with that since he had done the same thing.

"What's the problem?"

"Flat tire. My cell phone's out of range. I thought about trying to make it on the rim, but I was afraid I wouldn't get there and just ruin the wheel, then no one would be able to put on the spare."

He nodded. "You did the right thing."

"Can you help us?"

There was something familiar about the woman's voice. He leaned down, trying to get a better look at her, but she was wearing a fancy fur coat and she had the collar pulled up over her ears, hiding most of her face. "Open the trunk."

She pressed a button somewhere inside the car and the trunk popped open.

"Should I get out and help?" she asked.

His eyebrows went up. He hadn't expected her to be the type to put herself out, especially not in the middle of a snowstorm.

"Nothing much you can do." He looked at the little girl, blond hair and big blue eyes, and he could see she was frightened. "I'll do what I can. Roll the window back up before you freeze."

Jackson pulled up the collar of his heavy down jacket and crunched through the snow toward the back of the Mercedes, silver, he saw, now mostly covered by at least an inch of fresh powder. He pulled the jack out of the trunk, walked around and stuck it under the frame. As he shoved the handle into the slot and started cranking, he thought about the woman.

He could only see enough of her to know she had thick, chestnut-brown hair about the color of her fancy mink coat and eyes as blue as her daughter's. Her skin was smooth and he thought she had a nice straight nose but he couldn't really be sure.

Still, there was something about her....

Jackson pulled off the flat tire, got the spare out from under the luggage in the trunk, eventually got it on and replaced the lug nuts. It was ball-freezing cold and he wanted to get back to the ranch before the storm got any worse. When he finished putting the jack away, he reloaded the luggage, closed the trunk and walked back to the window, which slid open with a soft electric hum.

The woman stuck out a slim hand encased in a brown kid glove holding a twenty-dollar bill. "Thank you so much. I really appreciate your help."

"Keep your money," he said, only slightly annoyed. Out here people helped each other because it was the

right thing to do. "It was only a flat tire."

"Are you sure? You must be freezing. I wish I could pay you more, but—"

"Consider it a favor. Where are you headed?"

"Just down the road." She checked the map that lay open on the console. "It's just a couple more miles."

It had to be one of the ranches up ahead. There wasn't much else out here. "I'll follow you to the turnoff."

She nodded and fired up the engine. The Mercedes didn't have four-wheel drive, but it was a good, heavy auto, and if she took her time, she could make it to where she was going. As if she were still on the freeway back in California, she put on her left turn signal and pulled cautiously onto the road.

Jackson felt the tug of a smile as she navigated the big car carefully down the lane. Again, he wondered who she was and what had brought her twenty miles from Wind Canyon, the nearest town.

Back in his pickup, he cranked the engine and followed them at a safe distance until her turn signal went on again and she made a very slow turn onto the private road leading to the Whittaker Ranch. He watched until he was sure she was close enough to the ranch to make it, then gave her a wave she probably couldn't see and drove on down the road toward home. It was only a couple miles farther. Olivia would have a pot of coffee on the stove and if he was lucky, stew and biscuits for supper.

Jackson pressed down on the gas pedal, eager to get in out of the weather.

Sarah rounded a corner and saw the sign for the Whittaker Ranch. Biting back a swear word she couldn't say in front of Holly, she cautiously stepped on the brake.

"What's the matter, Mommy?"

"I turned too soon. This is the Whittaker Ranch. We're looking for the Raintree Ranch."

"Do we have to turn around?" Holly gazed worriedly out the window into the storm.

"We'll turn around as soon as I can find a wide enough spot in the road." She wasn't taking any chances. The next time she ran into trouble, her old classmate, Jackson Raines, wouldn't be there to help her.

Sarah released a shaky breath that turned white inside the car, even with the heater running full blast. Though he looked older, more rugged than he had when he was a senior at Wind Canyon High, she had known him instantly. She had kept her head down, hoping Jackson wouldn't recognize her, and she didn't think he had.

She knew he'd left town after high school. According to her friend, Nancy Marcus, he had gone to the University of Wyoming on a boxing scholarship. Everyone in Wind Canyon had watched the Barcelona Olympics the year Jackson had competed in the light heavyweight division, and though he hadn't won, everyone in Wyoming had been proud of the effort he had made.

Sarah had never heard any more about him.

She certainly didn't know he had returned to Wind Canyon. Maybe he was working as a hand on one of the

local ranches. She remembered he had done that during the summers when he'd been in high school.

Driving carefully, she continued along the road and finally found a turnaround spot, her thoughts still on Jackson, the gangly teenager he had been and the lean, broad-shouldered, rugged-looking man he had become. With his high cheekbones, dark eyes and nearly black hair, he had been a good-looking boy. Now, at thirty-five—three years older than she—he was a man, with an air of confidence that made him even more attractive.

Focusing her attention on getting back to the main road, Sarah used the circular turnaround made for just that purpose. It was nice and wide and she was able to change direction without a problem, even with the building layer of snow.

She had taken Holly out of the backseat when the tire went flat so they could huddle together and stay warm. For the few miles left to their destination, the six-year-old was strapped into the passenger seat with the air bag turned off.

Sarah kept the car going slowly all the way to the entrance gate, then turned right, back onto the two-lane road. The next two miles felt like ten, with the car slipping on the ice beneath the snow and the wind making an eerie moaning sound.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mark Vandyke:

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