# Excerpt from Beyond Lace

# By Mia London

Charlie walked into Catwalk, a local bar, with her good friend, Lori. They were best friends since the fourth grade and loved to blow off the stress of the day at the local haunts. The crowd seemed like the usual Fort Collins group for a Friday night.

They scanned the room for an open table, and Charlie’s eyes landed on a man sipping a beer with his back to her. He had a familiar frame, but she couldn’t place it. Was he someone who worked at one of her clients’ companies?

“I don’t see any tables. Do you?” Not waiting for a response, Lori suggested, “Let’s go to the bar and wait for something to open up.”

Charlie nodded, then focused her attention back to the stranger. He sat at the far end of the bar and slanted her direction when he called out to the bartender.

She stumbled for a second.

*That looks like Blake.* The thought popped into her head with a suddenness of a bottle rocket. She stared. Her heart pounded in her chest, on the verge of exploding.

Lori asked her something, but she couldn’t even hear it. “Hey.”

She glanced at her friend. “What?”

“What do you want to drink?”

“Um. A beer.”

Her attention back on the man, she strained to get a clear view over the horde of people. It was very unlikely Blake. Her imagination was getting the best of her. She watched as he ordered another drink from Larry. His mannerisms seemed like Blake’s.

She turned straight ahead. The blood thundered in her ears.

“Oh shit,” she breathed.

“What is it?” Lori asked.

She faced her friend.

“You alright, sweetie?” Lori asked as she placed a hand on Charlie’s arm. “Your face is sheet-white.”

“Lori, the man at the other end of the bar, third stool.” She motioned with her head. “Doesn’t that look like Blake?”

Lori wrinkled her nose and peered in his direction. After several seconds, her eyes went wide. “Holy shit.”

“Exactly.”

Charlie couldn’t turn his way, but like a wreck on the side of the highway, she had to. She examined his features again. His profile still just as chiseled and defined and masculine. The scruff on his face made his jawline more pronounced. If it was possible, he gotten even more handsome.

As if reading her thoughts, Lori leaned in closer. “He looks even better than he did in college.”

His jawline appeared stronger, his hair darker, and his shoulders broader. When he smiled at something Larry said, she knew. It was him.

*Christ almighty. What is he doing here?*

His gaze traveled casually down the bar when it met hers. Her heart stopped, and her limbs froze. His mouth gaped. She couldn’t blink, couldn’t think, could hardly do anything but stare. He finally broke away and lifted his beer to drink.

“Here, sweetie,” Lori called from beside her and set her beer on the counter in front of her.

Charlie glanced at the bottle like she didn’t know what to do with it.

“You should go say hi,” Lori spoke in a soft tone.

Charlie glanced his way one last time. She brought the beer bottle to her lips and swallowed a significant mouthful. No sense avoiding him. That would be childish.

She wended her way to the other end of the bar to see him chatting with a guy ordering drinks. She hadn’t seen Blake in eight years. She didn’t know what she would say once she got to him. Her palms went slick.

The breath she took in did nothing to calm her wildly beating heart.

“Hi, Blake,” she said to his back.

In what felt like an eternity, he slowly spun around. “Charlie. What are you doing here?”

*What?* That was certainly not the greeting she’d been expecting. They may have had a tragic breakup, to put it lightly. But after eight years, shouldn’t their history be just that—history?