

EXCERPT: LEGACY OF RUBY'S RANCH - BOOK 3 OF RUBY'S RANCH SERIES

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Twilight whinnied when Rube rushed into the barn and clattered loudly through the gate. A dozen other Appaloosa mares poked curious snouts over their stall railings to get a peek at the commotion.

"How's my girl?" With her arms wrapped around the mare's broad neck, Rube let her tears flow. The reality of Papa's harsh words settled on her heart. She'd never have her own life. Duty was all there was.

The intuitive horse pressed against her mistress. Rube clung to her, soaking up the mare's unconditional love and loyalty, and considered saddling up and disappearing into the mountains.

Quiet footsteps fell behind them.

"Excuse me, miss. I don't mean to interrupt," a familiar voice said from outside the stall.

Rube whipped around, the motion loosening her tight bun so her long, auburn waves cascaded around her shoulders. "What the hell? What're you doing in here?" She quickly wiped the dampness from her eyes.

"Oh Lord, I'm so sorry. I thought you saw me when you ran by." The tall, young rancher from earlier stood, again with his hat in hand and apology written on his handsome face.

When he started to move closer, Twilight stepped between them, and bobbed her head in warning. No doubt sensing Rube's uneasiness.

"Well, I'll be damned. Got yourself a guardian angel, I see." He presented his hand for Twilight to sniff. "I promise, I mean no harm."

After a few gentle words, the saucy mare pushed her ear into his hand for a scratch.

"Wow, I'm impressed."

"She's beautiful. And probably pretty damn fast?" he said, admiring the mare's well-proportioned stature and her perfect muscle tone.

"Fastest on the ranch," she answered, twisting her long hair back into a bun.

His hands were on Twilight, but his attention was trained on Rube. His energy tingled against her skin wherever he gazed.

"You should leave it down," he said in a low, Southern drawl. The rasp in his voice was haunting.

When their eyes finally met, sensual sparks lit her consciousness. The heat of a blush warmed her face as she recalled his smell, his touch, the way she'd craved him in her

dream. Was she still asleep? Or was she being granted one final wish before duty took over her life.