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REBECCA AND THE  
RANCHER

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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**R**ebecca Long checked her pot roast in the oven again. As she looked at the clock on her bright yellow kitchen wall, she sighed. If Roger didn't get home soon, their dinner would be ruined. Where could he be? He hadn't called to tell her he'd be late, which was very unusual. If her husband was anything, he was dependable.

"Mommy, I'm hungry," her daughter, Kaci, said as she ran into the kitchen.

"Get your brother and wash up. I'm going to go ahead and let you guys eat. Daddy's running late."

When Kaci ran off to find her older brother Matthew, Rebecca reached for the potholder once more and opened the oven door. Pushing her dark, shoulder length hair out of the way, she stood back, waiting for the steam from the hot oven to escape before taking their dinner out.

She had just filled the children's plates when the doorbell rang.

"Who on earth could that be right at dinnertime?" she asked aloud as she wiped her hands on a dishtowel and walked the distance from the dining room of her modern, midwestern home

to the front foyer. She opened the door, expecting to see one of the neighbors but, instead, found herself looking at the two police officers standing on her doorstep, in surprise.

“M-may I help you?” she asked.

“Mrs. Roger Long?” one of the officers asked solemnly.

“Yes, I’m Mrs. Long,” she replied hesitantly.

“May we come in, ma’am? We need to talk with you,” the officer continued. Both men proceeded to show her their identification.

“Of course, come on in. What is this concerning?” she asked as she stepped aside to allow them to enter her home.

“Are you here alone? Is there a neighbor or a relative you could ask to come over?” the other officer asked.

“My children are having their dinner. I could call my next-door neighbor, but I’d imagine she is feeding her family dinner right now.”

“Would you ask her to come over, please?” the officer asked kindly.

“You’re frightening me. Has something happened?”

“I’m afraid so, ma’am.”

With shaking hands, Rebecca picked up her cell and phoned her next-door neighbor and friend, Marci. “Marci, please, I know you’re probably in the middle of dinner, but could you come over here? The police are here, and they are saying I shouldn’t be alone. I’m not quite sure what’s happening.”

Within minutes, Marci and her husband, Charlie, were at the door.

Charlie looked at the officers and asked, “What’s going on?”

“Please, could we all sit down?”

Rebecca led the officers into the living room, and as they all took a seat, Marci held tightly to Rebecca’s hand. By now, both women were frightened.

The officer who’d been doing most of the talking spoke quietly. As he looked from Charlie to Marci to Rebecca, he said,

“There is no easy way to say this, ma’am. Your husband, Roger, was in an accident this afternoon. His car apparently went left of center and over an embankment. We don’t have all the details yet, but it is being investigated.”

“I need to go to him. Why have we wasted all this time? What hospital has he been taken to?” Rebecca screamed as she stood up.

The officer looked at Charlie and shook his head. Charlie immediately put his arms around Rebecca. “Sit down, hon, we need to listen to what he has to say.” He looked at Marci, who by now had figured out what was coming next.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Long. Your husband was killed instantly in the crash. No one else was injured; he managed not to collide with any other vehicles.”

“This can’t be happening. You’ve made a mistake; it wasn’t my Roger. It has to be a different Roger Long.” Rebecca was wide-eyed and shaking as she clutched onto Marci and Charlie for support.

“Are you positive?” Charlie asked the officer.

“His identification was in his wallet and in the vehicle. We’ll have his personal effects for Mrs. Long once the investigation is completed. I’m very sorry.”

After the officers left, Marci held Rebecca in her arms and spoke softly to her in an attempt to comfort her friend. Charlie made sure the children were fed then went next door to his own home to check on his children. He informed them of what had happened and began to make phone calls to some of the other neighbors. He also phoned Rebecca’s sister, Rhonda.

“Oh no, I’ll be right there. It’ll take me about thirty minutes to get everything together, but I’ll make arrangements to stay with her for the time being. Have the children been told?”

“Not unless she told them after I left the house. I’ll let her know you’re on your way.”

“I’ll be there just as soon as I can. Thank you for letting me know.”

Charlie gave instructions to his children and told them he’d be at Rebecca’s if they needed him. When he walked back in through the kitchen door, he saw Rebecca was on the couch, still in shock. Her petite frame was wrapped in an afghan, and she was staring into space, her green eyes glassy with tears.

“I spoke to Rhonda, and she’s making arrangements to come. She’ll be here in just a little while,” he told her.

“Thank you, Charlie. I don’t know what I’d do without you and Marci.”

“Have you told the kids?” he asked.

“Marci is getting them settled. I’ll tell them after my sister gets here. I just don’t know what I’ll say to them. How do you tell two small children their daddy is never coming home?”

“Somehow, you’ll find the words,” he replied quietly.

No one slept that night. Charlie returned home while Marci stayed with Rebecca and her family. It took both Rhonda and Marci to console Rebecca and her children during the long hours that followed.

Rebecca moved in a fog over the next several days. Family, friends, and neighbors stopped by with food and words of comfort. As they all came through the receiving line at the funeral parlor, she smiled and accepted their words of condolences. At the cemetery, after everyone else had gone, she placed a rose on Roger’s grave and whispered, “It wasn’t supposed to end like this, my love.” The salty taste of tears touched her lips as they fell.

How she made it through the funeral and the days that followed were a mystery as she felt she was living in a nightmare. The following week, she sent her babies back to school. They had to begin leading some semblance of a normal life, although Rebecca doubted her life would ever be normal again.

“What are your plans?” Rhonda asked gently over coffee one

morning. Rhonda was older than Rebecca by five years. The two sisters looked alike, both with dark hair and green eyes, although Rhonda's had recently begun to show some signs of slight graying. She was forty now and her children were in high school.

"I have no idea. I've been a stay-at-home mom since Matthew was born. I suppose I should think about getting back into accounting. It will give me something to do."

"When do you meet with the attorney about the business? Will you sell it or try to keep it going?"

"I have a meeting with him this afternoon. I wanted to wait until the children were back in school before dealing with all that. We're going to go over everything."

"Would you like for me to go with you?" Rhonda offered.

"You've done so much already, putting your life on hold for me. I'm sure you're ready to go home."

"You're my little sister. My family is old enough to fend for themselves for a few more days if you need me," Rhonda assured her.

"I love you, sis, and I'd like for you to go with me," Rebecca said softly as she looked down at her lap.

Sitting in the attorney's office later that day, Rebecca found herself in a state of shock once more as she listened to what the man was telling her.

"I had no idea. Roger never mentioned any of this to me. Are you certain this is the case?" she asked in a stunned tone.

"I'm sorry, Rebecca, but it's all true. The company was failing miserably. Roger has amassed a large amount of debt in an attempt to keep it going."

"What will I do? I assumed Roger would leave me in good shape financially."

"His life insurance policy will take care of the company debts and the funeral. Your automobile is paid for, and you'll have insurance money from the auto insurance for his totaled car. As for the house, I'm not sure whether you'll want to sell it and

move into something smaller or try to keep it going. Either way, I'm afraid you're going to have to go to work. You will be getting some government benefits for you and the children to live on, but it won't be enough to keep the house I'm afraid."

Rhonda patted her hand. "I'm so sorry. This is the last thing you needed to hear after everything you've been through the past few weeks. Let's go home, and we'll talk about it."

Rebecca looked at the attorney and said, "Thank you, Ralph. I can count on you to take care of everything, right?"

"Of course, I'll be in touch. Again, I'm very sorry for your loss. Roger was a good man."

On the ride back to her house, she fumed. Finally, she spoke. "How could he do this to us? He should have told me he was in trouble. I could have gone back to work, and maybe we could have gotten a handle on things."

"Evidently, he was trying to spare you. He didn't want you to think he was a failure. He'd built the business from scratch, and it did quite well for several years. I think he probably assumed he'd get things under control, and you'd never have to know."

"But we were supposed to be partners. He should have trusted me to help him."

"Rebecca, you lived a charmed life with Roger for many years. He loved you and obviously didn't want you to have to change your lifestyle because of his problems. Please don't be angry with him. It really serves no purpose now. He's gone, and he isn't coming back. You're going to have to make some very tough decisions and move on with your life. You have Matthew and Kaci to think about," Rhonda said in a compassionate yet stern tone.

"I know, but it's just all such a shock. How could I have been so blind? Was I so wrapped up in my own life I couldn't see he was in distress?"

As Rhonda pulled the car into the driveway, she turned and said, "Let's go inside and make some plans. You don't want the



kids to be upset so I'll make us a pot of coffee, and you'll have time to calm down before they get home."

The two sisters pored over the household expenses for the rest of the afternoon. By the time the school bus pulled up in front of the house, Rebecca had an understanding of what she needed to do. She just had to figure out how she was going to do it.

That night, she sat down with the children and explained to them that things in their lives were going to change.

"What kind of changes, Mom?" Matthew asked. The little boy took after his father with fair hair and blue eyes. Right now, his eyes were opened wide as he waited for his mother to continue.

"For one, I'm going to get a job. I won't be at home all day as I've always been."

"Who will take care of us when we don't have school?" Kaci asked, her dark curls bouncing as she turned her head to look at her brother.

"We'll work that all out. I don't want the two of you to worry about anything. Mama will take care of it."

"Will we stay here?" Matthew asked.

Surprised at the question, Rebecca looked to her sister for support. Rhonda said, "Would you like to move to a different house, Matthew?"

"I don't know. I just thought if things are going to change, we might change houses too."

"Out of the mouth of babes," Rebecca said in a low voice. To her son, she added, "We might just do that. Now you two go on up and brush your teeth. I'll be up to tuck you in soon."

When the kids had gone upstairs, she looked at Rhonda. "I guess that went well. Those poor babies have been through so much. I hate to uproot them."

"I know, but I really don't see any way you can keep this house, even if you do manage to get a decent job."

“You’re right, of course. I’ll start looking for a job tomorrow. Once I get that taken care of, I’ll list the house.”

“I’m sorry, sis. I know none of this is easy for you. But I have faith in you. You’ll survive it and move forward, for Roger. No, on second thought, you’ll do it for yourself and your children.”

And so it began. The next chapter of her life, a life without her husband, lover, partner and father to her babies. She was now a single mom, solely responsible for their upbringing. Was she up to the task?

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During the next few weeks, Rebecca pulled herself together and began checking the classified ads. Nothing popped out at her, but she didn’t give up.

“I just don’t know, Marci. I didn’t think it would be this hard to find a job in my field. I guess I’ve been out of the loop too long,” she told her friend one morning while sharing coffee with her.

“Charlie says it’s tough right now, but I’m sure something will come along.” Marci was the same age as Rebecca and also a stay-at-home mom. Like Rebecca, she enjoyed volunteer work and was concerned her friend would have to return to the work force.

Weeks passed and spring was making itself known. Flowers were blooming, the trees were budding, and in the evenings, the neighborhood children could be heard outside enjoying a rousing game of baseball. Soon the kids would be out of school, and Rebecca was no closer to finding a job than she had been in the winter. Even though money was tight, so far she was surviving on the government benefits, what little Roger had managed to put into a retirement fund before he had branched out on his own, and some generous donations from family and friends.

Job interviews were few and far between and nothing had

come from any of them. The phone rang one afternoon just before the school bus was due to arrive.

“Hello,” she answered breathlessly.

“Hey, sis,” Rhonda answered.

“Hi, what’s going on with you?” Rebecca replied, disappointed it hadn’t been a prospective employer on the other end.

“I spoke with Aunt Helen. She was asking about you. I wanted to give you a heads up; she’ll be calling soon.”

“Well, okay. I’m always glad to hear from her, so why the need to give me a heads up?” Rebecca was confused. She and Rhonda had always been fond of their Aunt Helen and Uncle Ben. They owned a ranch in Texas and, having no children of their own, had always doted on their two nieces. Rebecca had been surprised when she hadn’t heard from them at the time of Roger’s death, but she had figured they were out of the country on one of their many excursions at the time.

“We were right about them being gone. They’ve been touring Europe since Christmas and had no idea about Roger’s accident. She was devastated when I told her and even more distraught she wasn’t here for you.”

“I understand, and it’ll be wonderful to hear from her.”

“I hope you’re not upset with me, but I sort of filled her in on your situation. She was heartbroken to hear what you’ve been facing.”

“Well, she would have found out sooner or later. Don’t give it a second thought. We’re family, and families take care of each other. That’s what you were doing, taking care of me.”

“I’ve got to run, but don’t be surprised if she offers to send money. You know Aunt Helen, generous to a fault.”

“Right now, I think my pride would have to take a backseat to my children’s needs. If she offers, I’ll humbly accept.”

“Oh, Rebecca... I’ll see you soon,” Rhonda said in a sad tone as she ended the call.

Rebecca didn't have time to give her sister's call a second thought as Matthew and Kaci ran in the back door.

"Mommy, can we play outside before dinner? It's so warm today," Kaci asked as she ran to her mother for a hug.

"How about you sit down and have a snack first? I want to hear all about your day. Marci brought over some chocolate chip cookies she baked. We'll have those with a glass of milk, and then you can play with your friends for a while before supper."

Both of the children sat down at the kitchen table and devoured the cookies and milk while telling their mom about their school day.

"I don't have any homework. Teacher said it's a nice day, so she wasn't giving us any today," Matthew shared.

"I think your teacher must have spring fever," Rebecca said with a giggle.

"No, I don't think she's sick," the little boy replied in a puzzled tone.

"It's not a sickness; it just means she's glad to see spring."

"Oh," he replied as he stood up. "Can I go change my clothes and meet the guys now?"

"Yes, but be back in time for dinner. I'll make it a little later so you can stay out, but be in before dark and stay in the neighborhood."

"May I go over to play with Lisette?" Kaci asked.

Lisette was Marci's daughter, so Rebecca gave her the same instructions she had given to Matthew and sent her off to play.

After cleaning up from the after-school snack, she looked through the cupboards trying to decide on dinner. The menu in their household had changed drastically. Instead of roasts and steak several times a week, they now feasted on more economical meals. Of course, some of the new choices had become favorites of the children. They now adored simple fare such as macaroni and cheese, spaghetti, and some of the casseroles she'd been putting together. She decided on spaghetti and meatballs and

checked the freezer to see if there were leftover meatballs from the ones she'd made the week before. Glad to see there were enough left for tonight's meal, Rebecca decided to read the evening newspaper until time to start cooking.

She was in the process of circling prospective employment ads when she was interrupted by a shrill ring. She reached over and picked up her cell from the bar.

"Hello," she said cheerily, hoping it was someone calling her for an interview.

"Rebecca, it's Aunt Helen."

"Oh, hi there, how was your trip?" she replied with a question.

"Our trip was fine, but more importantly, dear, how are you? I was just sick when I heard from Rhonda last night about what had happened while we were away."

"It's been a long winter; that's for sure. I'm glad you and Uncle Ben had a good time. Who takes care of your ranch when you're away for long periods of time like that?"

"We have our ranch hands and our foreman, of course. Seth Warner, who owns the ranch next to ours, keeps an eye on things from time to time."

"It's good to hear your voice and to know you're back home safe and sound."

"Now, darling, we need to talk about you and the little ones. How are you, really?"

"We're getting by. Matthew and Kaci have adjusted, at least to a degree, to some of the changes I've made to our lifestyle. I'm still looking for work, which would help immensely."

"Uncle Ben and I have been discussing your situation and we may have a solution for you. Please hear me out."

Expecting her generous aunt to offer monetary assistance, Rebecca sighed. "Okay, tell me your solution."

"We have a beautiful little guest house on the ranch that's not being used. Why don't you pack up the kids and come out here

for the summer? It'll give you a break, and maybe when you return in the fall, things will look up for you."

"I don't think I can do that," she replied in a stunned voice.

"Actually, we were hoping you'd just put your house on the market and move out here with us permanently, get a fresh start, but I know how your mind works, so I'm suggesting a summer visit first."

"You don't know how tempting that sounds right now, but I'll have to really give this some thought, Aunt Helen. It's a big step, even for a summer visit."

"You used to love to spend summers here as a child," her aunt reminded her gently.

"Yes, I did. My kids have missed that experience. Give me some time to consider all the pros and cons. I promise I'll get back to you soon."

"Let us take care of you for a while. You can't be strong all the time."

"I love you, and please tell Uncle Ben thank you."

"I'll be waiting to hear from you. Have a good evening."

"You too. Bye now," Rebecca said as she hung up the phone. She sat silently for several minutes pondering the offer made by her aunt. It was a very tempting offer. Aunt Helen was her father's only sister. After the death of their own parents, she and Rhonda had kept in contact with her. They had precious childhood memories of happier times when the family had packed up the car and headed to Texas every summer to visit. What she wouldn't give to be able to do that again.

She glanced at the clock and jumped up. She was going to have to hurry to have dinner ready when the children came in from playing.

One hour later, the three of them sat at the table enjoying the spaghetti she'd prepared with her own special sauce and meatballs. There was also a green salad, bread sticks, and chocolate pudding for dessert.

“Now, you two run on up and get your baths while I clean up. Kaci, do you have homework?” she asked.

“No, I got it done on the bus.”

“Okay, good. Get your baths and get ready for bed, and I’ll come up soon to get you settled in.”

Anxious to get them into bed so she could think about her aunt’s offer at length, she hurriedly loaded the dishwasher and ran up the stairs.

After the children had said their nightly prayers and chatted with her for a few minutes, they were both sound asleep. Playing outside had made them tired and for that, she was grateful tonight.

She picked up her cell and dialed Rhonda’s number.

“Rhonda, Aunt Helen called. You’re not going to believe what she offered.”

“That much, huh?” her sister replied.

“No, not money. She invited the kids and me to come out for the summer.”

“Oh, you lucky dog, I wish I could go along.”

“Actually, she and Uncle Ben would like for us to move out there permanently, but she invited us for the summer to see how it goes.”

“You’re going, aren’t you?” Rhonda asked.

“I don’t know if I can. How can I leave for the whole summer? I need to find a job. I have bills to pay, and who will take care of the house?”

“Sell the house, go to Texas, and start a new life. I’ll come and visit.”

“Are you serious?” Rebecca asked.

“Honey, what is holding you here? You haven’t found work; you can’t afford the house much longer. There, you’ll have the support of Aunt Helen and Uncle Ben, and you can make a fresh start, maybe even find a decent job. She has that big ranch for the kids to explore. I’d say it’s a no brainer.”

“She said something about the guest house being empty and we could stay there.”

“See, no housing expenses. I really think you should consider it. I’ll hate to be away from you, but like I said, we can visit. You have to consider what’s best for you and the kids now.”

“You really think it’s a good idea?”

“What other options do you have right now?”

“True, but I’m going to have to think about it. I haven’t said anything to Matthew and Kaci yet.”

“Don’t, until you’re sure.”

“I’ll let you know what I decide. Thanks, sis, for putting things in perspective.”

“Love you, Rebecca; now get some sleep. We’ll talk soon.”

After the phone call to her sister, Rebecca got up and opened a bottle of wine. Her supply was quickly running out, but she still enjoyed an occasional glass from the stock she and Roger had bought when things had been good. On an impulse, she phoned Marci and asked if she’d like to come over and enjoy a glass with her. Marci readily accepted her invitation.

“It’s been a long day. I’d like nothing more than to relax with another adult for a while before bed. Charlie and the kids are already sound asleep.”

When the two friends were settled with their wine, Rebecca brought up the phone call from her aunt. She told her about the offer.

“Oh, Rebecca, I’d hate to see you go, but I don’t see how you can turn it down. It would help you financially. It would also be a way to start a new life for you and the kids. I know the memories here are killing you.”

“But it’s a really big step, selling this house and moving halfway across the country.”

“You’d be with family. Here, you have Rhonda in the next town, but you would have your aunt and uncle there. I’m sure they would absolutely love having Matthew and Kaci around.



You'd meet new people, possibly find a job. It's a win-win situation."

"You really think so?" Rebecca asked.

"I know it's hard to think about uprooting the kids and all, but talk to them about it. They may surprise you. They need a happy mom. You barely exist these days, hon; you go through the motions, put a smile on your face and get through each day, hoping for things to turn around. It may take a drastic change to make that happen."

"Roger would want me to move on, wouldn't he?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, I think he would. He wouldn't want you and the kids to suffer because of the way he left things."

"Speaking hypothetically, if it were you, would you do it?"

"In a heartbeat," Marci replied. "But it's not my decision to make; it's yours. Think about it, talk to Matthew and Kaci, and then call your aunt and let her know what you want to do. I'm sure she'll support you in whatever you choose."

"You and Rhonda have given me some food for thought. I *will* think about it, long and hard."

"I'm going to head home now. Thanks for the wine. Call me anytime you need to talk."

Rebecca stood up and hugged her friend before walking her to the door. "Thank you."

"We'll talk tomorrow. Get some rest."

After Marci had gone, she went upstairs and prepared for bed. Just before she fell asleep, she whispered, "Roger, give me a sign. Please tell me what you want me to do."