

REDEEMING THE
ROUGHNECKS

BIG G RANCH - BOOK 4



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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.

CHAPTER 1



RACHEL

*R*achel Linton wiped an imaginary speck of dust off the skirt of her dress and sighed. What was she doing here, on this train, headed to an uncivilized place called Oklahoma? Her entire family had lost their minds. It had all started with her older sister, Sarah. She loved her sister, but honestly, who goes out west to marry a man she has never met? Mail order bride, indeed! Sarah could have had her pick of the wealthiest men in the east, but no, she didn't want them. She had gotten on a train bound for nowhere, or so Oklahoma seemed to Rachel. She'd married the man she went there for, too. He was a rancher, of all things. Of course, Sarah would never have let her parents think she'd made the biggest mistake of her life. Her letters were always full of praise for her man, love of the place they owned, and talk of the friends she'd made there. Maybe it was true, but to Rachel, she could not imagine such a life making anyone happy. Sarah was different, though. She liked things simple. That was the difference between the two sisters. And

when the love of Sarah's life was killed in some sort of accident, one would have thought the girl would have been smart enough to take the next train east, to go home. But no, not Sarah. What did she do? Got herself hitched to another man out there. At least this one was from the east and was a proper businessman.

And that's when their parents had made the horrifying decision to sell everything and move out there to be near Sarah and any grandchildren that might come along, taking Rachel with them. She'd been given no choice, really. Her father had laid down the law. Her life was ruined. She'd be damned if she'd succumb to the charms of one of those western heathens. She was not her sister. So, her plan was to cause so much trouble and aggravation that her parents would quickly send her back home to live with her aunt. She would go back to attending social events and would eventually marry one of the many men who wanted to court her, like any normal, civilized girl would do. Of course, she would have her fun first. No need to rush anything. Marriage could wait.

Rachel loved the social scene, the teas, the balls, dancing until midnight with every available young man and a few who weren't. All that was gone now, thanks to big sister, Sarah.

She would have been agreeable to an extended holiday with her sister and her new family, but to live in that godforsaken place? What were her parents thinking? Who sells everything to pull up stakes and move across the country like that?

Well, she would soon be on a train bound right back to Pennsylvania. She would make sure of that.

To her mother, she said, "How many more days must we be subjected to this train?"

They were sitting in the private car that was theirs for the trip. It had two bedrooms and a small sitting room. Her mother was doing embroidery work, some sort of gift for Sarah, and Rachel was pretending to read.

Mrs. Linton looked up and smiled. "Now, dear, you know it

will be several more days before we reach Sarah and Conrad. We must make the best of it and fill our time as best we can."

Just then, Rachel's father entered the car with two cups of tea. "I thought you girls might be ready for some refreshment," he said as he set the cups down on the table.

"Did you enjoy your cigar and brandy with the men?" his wife asked.

"Yes, indeed. There are a few men on the train who are very interesting to chat with. The smoking car was full."

"That's nice, dear. Rachel is getting restless. Do you know when we will stop again so she can stretch her legs?"

Mr. Linton sighed. "In a few hours. Surely, you can amuse yourself until then." He looked at his younger, difficult daughter.

"Well, if you would allow me to leave this car, I might."

"You know it is much safer for you to remain here unless your mother or I are with you. We have discussed this many times."

"Sarah made the trip alone," Rachel argued.

"Sarah is not you, my sweet daughter," he replied with a chuckle.

Rachel rolled her eyes and went back to her book. Yes, it was true. Sarah and she were two completely different girls.

For the next few hours, she tried to concentrate on the words on the pages of the book. Finally, it was time for a break, and she couldn't wait to get out of the train. They would dine in a real restaurant at least, before re-boarding the train.

When she stepped off and saw the general store/restaurant looming within walking distance, her face fell. Far from what she was used to in the east, she resigned herself to taking her evening meal in the countrified establishment.

"Come, dear, let's look around the store while your father gets a table for us," her mother said as she stepped up beside her.

"How can you be so cheery about this? Do you not realize

that father is moving us to some godforsaken place? Just look at this place. I am sure Oklahoma is even worse than this place."

"Oh, Rachel, where is your sense of adventure? I am sure it will be fine. Your sister certainly has acclimated well."

"I am not my sister. I wish you would all recognize that fact!" she said a little too loudly. Several people turned to stare in their direction.

"Shh, Rachel, you are drawing attention," her mother said.

She rolled her eyes and walked away to look at a rack of ready-made dresses. Who would actually buy a dress off the rack in a general store, anyway? Disgusted, she wondered just how low her sister had fallen since moving out west. At least now, she was married to a businessman. Hopefully, that had restored some class to the rancher's wife Sarah had once been. She was sure Johnny was handsome and all, but a rancher, really?

"Come, our table is ready," Mr. Linton said as he approached his wife and daughter, oblivious to the latest outburst from his youngest.

"Thank goodness!" her mother exclaimed as she took Rachel's arm and pulled her along.

Mr. Linton gave her a funny look, not understanding his wife's impatience, and led them to the table. Then he explained that they would have a guest at their table. "Mr. Thomas, a young man I met on the train, was going to dine alone, so I invited him to join us."

Of course, he did, Rachel thought. Finally, a normal dinner at a real table and we have to entertain some guy he met on the train.

Her dad led them to the table where a dark-haired man stood when he saw them approaching. He wasn't bad looking, she supposed. Tall, young, with a mustache and goatee, he looked like he could be from the east, but he was not dressed as such. What was his story?

They all sat down, and the waitress took their drink order and left them menus to look over.

"It will be nice to have a good meal. Not that the food on the train isn't good, but there is something to be said for sitting at a proper table," Mr. Thomas commented as he perused the choices before him.

"I agree," Mr. Linton said. "It's also good to be able to stretch our legs. The next time we stop, we'll be able to sleep in a real bed as well. We will spend the night in a hotel. I'm sorry, I didn't make the introductions. Joshua Thomas, this is my wife, Rosella, and my daughter, Rachel."

"It's so nice to meet you," Mrs. Linton said.

"I'm happy to make your acquaintance as well," the young man replied. He turned to Rachel then. "Miss Linton." He nodded.

"Tell me, Mr. Thomas, where are you from?" Rachel asked.

He chuckled. "I grew up outside of Philadelphia. However, for the last few years I've been in Oklahoma."

"Why on earth?" she asked, to the horror of her parents.

"Rachel!" her father admonished.

"It's quite all right, sir. It isn't like I haven't heard it before from my own family." He laughed and then looked back at Rachel. "To answer your question, though, Miss Linton, I went out west for a change of scenery. I felt stifled working in my father's business. I wanted to explore the world before I settle down to that kind of life. So, I went out west and I've been working on a ranch for the past few years. I am returning from a visit home because of the death of my grandfather."

"And yet you are going back out west," she commented.

Again, he chuckled. "Yes, much to the chagrin of my family, I must say. I found that I like the town I have been living in, and the people. It's more to my liking and I most likely will settle there. When I return, I am to start working for a new oil company. The brother-in-law of one of my employers on the ranch started it, and he needs help."

"That's interesting," Mr. Linton said. "Our older daughter's

new husband owns an oil company. His brothers-in-law own the Big G Ranch. Have you heard of it?"

Joshua's eyes grew large. "Heard of it? I worked for the Garrison brothers on the Big G. The oil company I am now going to be working for is Conrad Appleby's. Is he by chance your son-in-law?"

"What a small world," Mrs. Linton said. "Conrad is indeed our son-in-law. We are moving to Oklahoma to be near our daughter, Sarah, and her husband, Conrad."

"Is that right? That's amazing. I had no idea," Joshua said. "So, it looks like we'll be seeing each other on a more permanent basis. Let me be the first to welcome you."

"Why, thank you, Joshua. That is very sweet," Rosella said in response.

"Yes, this is good news indeed. I'm sure you'll make a fine employee for Conrad's company," Mr. Linton said.

Rachel was silent, so Joshua looked over at her and offered, "Miss Linton, I would be happy to show you around when you are settled in your new home."

"Thank you. We shall see," was her non-committal answer.

Her parents gave each other the look they always shared when they were exasperated with their younger daughter. Mr. Thomas, however, took the brush off in stride.

"Very well," he said.

Their meal arrived then, which Rachel was glad of. Imagine, this arrogant man thinking he could make an advance on her. Why on God's green earth would she want a man who had given up the life of an eastern businessman to settle in that no man's land? The nerve of him to even think she would.

Soon, it was time to get back onboard the train. Rachel purchased some peppermint sticks to snack on and immediately went back to her family's private car so she wouldn't have to tell Mr. Thomas no if he asked her to sit with him. The farther away she could be from that man, the better. And the sad thing about

it was if she had met him when he lived in Philadelphia, she would have definitely been drawn to his good looks and suave voice. As it was, he was about as deranged as her dear sweet sister. What was it about Oklahoma that drew well-bred easterners to decide to stay there? Well, she would not be one of them. The first chance she got, she would be right back on this awful train, bound for her aunt's house in Philadelphia. She would make sure of that.



MR. LINTON WHISPERED to his wife, "You join Rachel in our car. I want to have a word with young Joshua, apologize to him for Rachel's behavior."

"All right, dear, but one of these days, we have to stop doing that and let her face the consequences of her own actions. Joshua seems like such a nice boy, though, so you go on."

He walked her to the door of their car, planted a kiss on her forehead and told her he would see her later. Then he found Joshua and invited him to join him for a cigar and brandy in the smoking car.

"Thank you, sir. I was just heading that way," the young man said.

Once they were comfortably seated, each with a glass of brandy and a cigar, Mr. Linton began, "I must apologize for my daughter. You have to understand that she is not happy about this move. If she'd had her way, she would have remained in Philadelphia with my sister. Part of the reason we are going west to join our other daughter is because we feel Rachel needs a change of scenery. She is a difficult girl, nothing like her older sister, Sarah."

Joshua smiled in understanding. "That does not surprise me. Most eastern girls would balk at the idea. I was not offended. Your older daughter, she likes Oklahoma?"

"Oh my, yes. She made the decision to become a mail order bride a few years ago. Of course, at first we were stunned, but she made it clear that she was not going to settle for any of the young men who had been trying to court her and that she wanted to live a different life. We finally agreed, and she has been in love with the area she settled in ever since she arrived there. Her first husband, a rancher, was killed in an accident. We wanted to come out then, but there was the house to sell, things to settle, and well, it just didn't happen. When she recently remarried, we decided not to put it off any longer. We sold our house and some of the furnishings with it. What we wished to keep will be sent out when we find a home. Luckily, she had some good friends who took her in and helped her during her mourning period. We had thought she might come home then, but she didn't."

"I believe I know who she is. The Garrisons are the ones who took her in. She's a pretty thing, very sweet from what I know of her."

"Yes, yes, it was Clayton and Clara Mae Garrison. Conrad Appleby is Mrs. Garrison's brother."

Joshua nodded and took a drink of his brandy. "Tell me about Rachel. You say she is difficult. Maybe she hasn't yet met the man who can tame her."

At that remark, Mr. Linton chuckled. "I don't know that there is a man alive who can tame that one. I certainly haven't been able to."

"The right man will."

Mr. Linton looked at Joshua through new eyes. "Well, let me just say that my younger daughter enjoys partying, flirting, leading men on, with no intention of settling down with any of them. We feared for her reputation, and thus, the move."

"Ah, I see. Well, living in Oklahoma will be a new experience for her. The folks there are right neighborly and friendly, but the men are looking to settle down if they haven't already. With her

pretty, fair hair and skin, she will have them all wishing to court her."

"Pardon my saying this, but they will not stick around long once her snobbish eastern ways make themselves known."

"All the more reason she needs the right man."

"Am I correct in believing that you think you might be that man?" Mr. Linton asked.

"You are, indeed, sir. I would ask your permission to court her, but I think the lady has made it quite clear she is not exactly excited by that thought."

"Give it some time, son. Let her get settled, get to know her ways, and then if you still feel the same way, we'll talk again. I agree that she needs a dominant man who can handle her the right way yet give her plenty of love and attention."

The two men, having reached an understanding, enjoyed the rest of their cigars and brandy before saying goodnight. Joshua returned to his car and Mr. Linton to his, with his wife and daughter.

When he stepped into the car, both women were in their bunks asleep. It was just as well, he thought as he readied himself for bed. He decided he would keep the conversation with young Joshua to himself for now.



THE NEXT DAY, Rachel remained in the car, taking her meals with her mother there. She didn't wish to run into Joshua Thomas again if she could help it. She spent her time reading and looking out the window, watching the scenery pass by as the train progressed down the tracks, taking her farther and farther away from the only home she had ever known.

Her father had been out of the car most of the day, probably visiting with the men he'd met on the train, playing cards or smoking and drinking. He was certainly enjoying the train ride.

But the man had worked in an office all his adult life. She was sure he was relieved to have the free time to indulge in such things.

Her mother was working on the gift for Sarah. So, Rachel was left to her own thoughts. She put down the book she had been reading, leaned her head back and closed her eyes.

She thought of all the parties back home, her friends, the young men who were always trying to get her attention. She doubted there would be such frivolous parties and teas where she was going. What did people do in Oklahoma, she wondered. She had never bothered to ask Sarah.

And now that Joshua would be working for her new brother-in-law, did that mean she would have to see him on a regular basis? She was still trying to process in her mind why on earth the man would wish to go back to Oklahoma once he had been back east and could have stayed there. He must be made of the same cloth as her sister, a bit touched in the head if you asked her.

How anyone, male or female, could choose the wild west over the excitement of the city was beyond her understanding. And Conrad was just as bad! She had been told that he had sold the family business, home, and everything else to join his sister and her family in Oklahoma. Just like her parents were forcing her to do! She still didn't understand why they couldn't have just gone for an extended visit. Why sell everything and relocate there, for goodness' sake?

Aunt Mary, her father's sister, had been more than willing to let her stay with her, but, no, her father had put his foot down on that. His sister had been widowed young, had no children, and was a bit of a social butterfly. Rachel and she would have gotten on famously, she was sure.

Well, soon, she would be with her beloved aunt again.

They were almost halfway to their destination now. In a few more days, they would be stopping for an overnight break, then

the next stop would be Oklahoma. Hopefully, the hotel in the town where they stopped for the night would be nice and there would be some decent shops for her to browse. When they finally got to Sarah, the plan was to find a house in town, near Sarah and Conrad. At least her parents weren't going to live on a ranch. For that, she could be grateful. She shuddered at the mere thought.

Finally, it was time to stop. She was anxious to see the town and get out of the train car. Her mother kept her close to her, of course, while their father got rooms for them at the hotel. Rachel couldn't wait to indulge in a proper bath before going to the shops and having dinner.

When she sank down into the warm water, she smiled. Now, this was more like it. The room she had been appointed would pass, she supposed. It was pleasant enough, with a handmade quilt on the bed, frilly curtains at the window, and a table and chair where she could sit with a cup of tea and look out over the bustling town.

Feeling refreshed after the bath and tea, she dressed and went next door to see if her mother was ready to do some shopping.

When she stepped into the hallway, Joshua was coming out of his room across the hall. Wonderful. She tried to ignore him, but he made that impossible.

"Going out to see what the town has to offer?" he asked.

"My mother and I are going shopping before dinner," she said as she knocked on her parents' door.

"Have a nice time," he said as he sauntered down the hall, whistling as he went.

"Ugh," she said as she waited for her mother.

"Ready, dear?" Rosella asked as she opened the door. "We haven't much time, so we should get going." She turned to tell her husband, "We will meet you in the dining room."

"I thought we would go to the dress shop first," Rachel said.

"Fine, Rachel, but we cannot purchase much. We don't have room on the train."

"Yes, Mother, I am aware of that. I just want to look. I don't know what sort of dresses I will be expected to wear out in the uncivilized world."

"You exaggerate so much, dear."

Once inside the shop, she began to look through rack after rack of dresses. Some were fancier than she had imagined they would be, others plainer. Her mother suggested they each buy one of the plainer ones for everyday wear.

She resigned herself to the fact that she probably wasn't going to be able to talk her mother into anything else and chose a pale rose-colored dress with simple ivory lace trim. It was pretty enough but certainly not something she would have been seen in back home.

When they returned to the hotel, her mother had the packages sent up to their rooms and they walked to the dining room where they found her father deep in conversation over coffee with, of all people, Joshua Thomas.

"Well, here are my girls now. Did you buy out the stores?" her father asked as both he and Joshua stood.

"We each bought one dress," her mother replied. "Your bank account is safe."

They sat down and the waitress brought menus and tea for the women.

"I took the liberty of telling her you ladies would have tea when you arrived," Joshua told them with a grin.

Rachel stopped mid-sip, her blue eyes blazing as she said, "And what made you think we would want you to take it upon yourself to do that?"

Her mother gasped, but when she glanced at her father expecting a reprimand for her rudeness, she saw that he was grinning too.

"I didn't, but I thought that after shopping, the two of you

would appreciate it," Joshua said calmly as he picked up the menu, ignoring her sigh of disgust. "Now, what looks good on the menu tonight?"

"I suppose you wish to order my food too?" Rachel spat at him, venom in her voice.

"I wasn't thinking that, but since you've said it, yes, I believe I will." He turned to her with a gaze as icy as hers, and then it wasn't. His green eyes darkened with something she couldn't define.