

Wind in the Wires

Janet Chester Bly

A Trails of Reba Cahill Novel

Book 1

A distressed cowgirl seeks to find her runaway mother.

A grieving old man wants justice for his family.

They take a journey together and expose dark secrets that forever bind them together.

This contemporary western mystery is a road adventure with a touch of romance.

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Dedication:

For my forever Cowboy Honey

He went through the dry, wild desert,
waving his wild tail, and walking by his wild lone.

But he never told anybody.

Rudyard Kipling

Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.

Hosea 2:14 NIV

Chapter One

May 1991, Road's End, Idaho

She must find the runaway heifer. And get to Maidie's funeral on time.

Reba Mae Cahill urged her black quarter horse to trudge through the budding spring green, muddy terrain. Recent rains and snowmelt gummed the pine-dotted, wild flower sprayed high mountain prairie. Puddles and small ponds, tall grass and shadows made search tedious. Johnny Poe stalled.

"Come on, boy, Don said he saw her near here. Got to find that cow before Champ Runcie does. And return home quick."

They rode the moss-covered wood post and barbed wire fence line as she checked the steel stays. A strong whoosh of wind made a ringing sound in the barbed wires. She scanned the long length of Runcie Ranch fencing. Her glance caught at a break in the fence next to stacked tires filled with large rocks supposed to hold the fence in place. Certainly enough space for a moon-eyed, red bovine stray to escape. She peered closer and spied a cut at all five lines, now splayed on the ground. Why would anyone do that?

She slid down from Johnny Poe, pulled on leather gloves from her saddle bag, and eased the wire out of the way. A long strand was missing.

A quick image of a testy Champ flashed before her. Not the first time, she wished the Runcie and Cahill Ranches didn't butt against each other, with so many borders in common. Especially when one side determined not to be too neighborly. "Women, especially Cahill women, don't have what it takes to manage a ranch like theirs on their own."

Reba backed the horse up to get him prepped to ease through the opening in the wires. He balked, as she knew he would. She flicked the reins. His ears flayed back. He reared and pawed the air. Reba hit the muddy pasture ground hard on her rear. Pain shot through as she scrambled to her feet and reached for the saddle. She glided on the old leather before he could bolt and cooed at him. "Come on, Johnny Poe, it's going to be alright. Please try. A step at a time."

She imagined what must loom in his mind. Memories of his mother dying, gashed and twisted from withers to poll in a barbed wire fence. Found as a colt by her side. His fear had a firm basis. She patted his neck. "We've got to cross over. We can do this. We *have* to do this. And now."

Johnny Poe snorted and dropped his head as if he'd surrendered to her command, but she knew better. Reba nudged him to a spot a few feet from the fence. "It's okay. Don't be afraid. That wire's not going to hurt you. I'll take care of you."

The horse breathed out, flaring his nostrils, and turned to her like he understood. "Go. Face your fear." He ambled forward. "Good boy."

They crossed a dirt roadway that passed through both pine forest and prairie wheat fields. She heard moos and spied the Cahill Ranch heifer stuck halfway down a Runcie Ranch incline. As they closed in, Reba noticed her breathing heavy, head down. Like she was in hard labor.

In May? Surely you wouldn't do this to me.

Not the time of year when Cahill bovine delivered their calves. In October and February, Reba and her grandmother spent most of their days in the stable nursery. Out here she had no disinfectant. No Vaseline. No cozy shed. Only a weedy, scratchy mud hole for a stable. Another reason she couldn't do this ranch by herself.

I can't oversee it all. A first-time, two-year-old mama. An out-of-season pregnancy. The worst kind of birth.

Just like mine?

White circles framed the cow's bulging eyes and dark pools reflected fear and pain. A coyote howled from the draw, heightening the cow's quick, frantic pants as she attempted to raise up. Pain more than fear slit her dark, round eyes. The sound of water rushing over rocks sent Reba's gaze beyond the heifer to Broken Arrow Creek. If the crazed expectant mother charged for that water, she'd drown her newborn the moment it delivered. Poison ivy and a crisscross of debris and brush booby-trapped the slope and creek bank.

How much worse can this situation get? Reba glanced at her watch. "I've got to contact Grandma. I'm not going to get to the funeral on time."

Reba slid off her horse, dropped his reins to the ground, and reached into the saddlebag. She grabbed a walkie-talkie, pulled up the antenna, and pushed the talk button. "Grandma? Reba here. Got some trouble. Over and out." She released the button and stuck the portable radio closer to her ear to detect the hiss of static or her grandmother's voice. She heard neither. She shook the handheld device and tried again. No connection. She slapped it back into the bag and tried hard not to blurt out the words she was thinking.

She scowled at both the frenzied heifer and her skittish horse. She tied a rope to Johnny Poe's saddle horn and worked her way with care through the weeds and mud down to the cow. Times like this, she missed Grandma Pearl something fierce. The past year, she wasn't strong enough to do much of the physical work, what with her knees or hip buckling whenever she overdid. But she could provide advice and a calming influence. They worked the ranch well together. In fact, they had done very well, just the two of them, since they lost Grandpa Cahill.

"The Dynamic Duettes," half-brother Michael called them.

Reba heard her grandmother brag, "My granddaughter can wrangle cows and break horses as good or better than I can."

And Reba loved the freedom and fulfillment of hardy outdoor work. But Reba began to realize the last few months that Cahill Ranch may be too much for one woman to work mostly alone. They needed a full-time ranch hand. Or a rancher husband. Someone who would understand the connection to family land and to this lifestyle.

When Michael Cahill showed up three years before right after Grandpa Cahill's funeral, claiming to be Reba's younger half-brother, she'd hoped he might take on some ranch duties. But he was more interested in blondes, painting, and drums. He wanted to be an artist. Or a drummer for a rock band.

"Ranching is lonely work. Cows don't have souls. You can see it in their eyes," he told her.

Kneeling in the pungent weeds, Reba stroked the heifer's head and down the magenta coat. She slowly reached inside. One tiny hoof was hung up. The mama's tight muscles fought against her intrusion.

Like last spring.

A calf died before Reba could pull it. She had to cut out the stillborn animal, piece by bloody piece.

Please, God, not again.

Clouds covered the sun, graying the landscape, and a breeze kicked up. Reba had sweaty palms and shivered at the same time, as the cow pushed. Reba grabbed the

calf's feet, and tugged as hard as she could. The heifer let out a bellow like a long, low train whistle. They both gave a heave and the dazed calf fell into the muck. A black Angus calf born to a white-faced red mama. The unexpected timing made sense. The heifer had been courted by a Runcie Ranch bull. There would be words over this. On both sides.

She heard a rattle up on the road and an engine idle. She jerked around, half-expecting stern Champ Runcie to stand on top, bawling out accusations about the broken fence and trespass. She waited a moment, a hitch in her stomach, trying to think of what to say. Soon a male figure appeared.

Reba shook with relief. "Don! I'm so glad to see you."

"Have you called your grandma?"

"I tried to. No luck."

"Hold on. I'll be right back. There's better reception down the road apiece. I know she'll be frantic to know where you are."

"Thank you so much."

He turned and she heard the pickup drive away.

Widower Don Runcie, Champ's son, who telephoned to warn her of the errant heifer on their property. Her heart warmed at his concern, giving her a chance to rescue the cow before Champ discovered it. They proved as much as anything his feelings for her. Perhaps their two recent dates had softened him a bit on her side of the Runcie-Cahill feud. However, she wondered what Champ thought of them as a twosome.

Her grandmother didn't mince her disapproval. "He's old enough to be your father," Pearl chided.

"We went to a movie and danced some at the Grange Hall. That's all." *And he's a rancher.*

"Almost every dance. Everyone in town is talking."

"Is that what you're worried about?"

Grandma pursed her lips tight like she was afraid to say too much. "You can do better than that," she concluded.

Not likely in Road's End, population 400. She'd certainly looked the field of possible contenders over many times from her cowgirl perch. Those rare few bachelors near her age were either divorced and in custody fights or not the ranch work type. Like the McKane brothers who recently moved from California. Jace and Norden bought and ran The Outfitters Shop as a kind of hobby, best she could tell. Jace made his money in software programs and wanted to play at wilderness living. Not her type at all.

"I want a guy to help run our ranch," Reba confided to Pearl and her best friend, Ginny George. Dependable. Faithful. Not with his career focus and dreams elsewhere. "He cannot be the type to abandon me." *Or our children.* "He will be fully committed to me, wholly sold out to the rancher lifestyle. Just like Grandpa Cahill." Didn't Don fit that description? A plus on her private Dating Don List.

She thought she had that with Tim Runcie, Don's son, and her high school sweetheart. At least, she thought he was. What a perfect pairing. Everyone thought so. Except, as it turned out, her best friend Sue Anne Whitlow.

She took off her denim jacket, yanked it inside out and wiped herself and the wet clump of calf legs with the wool lining. She stuck a finger in and cleared the newborn's throat and mouth and shoved the baby bundle against the cow's nose. The mothering light flipped on. She mooed and rough-tongued her babe clean.

Reba tensed, mesmerized, as she often did at similar scenes. A hazy picture of her mom popped in her mind. Shaggy, long sable brown and streaked blond hair. Teasing smile. Circling a barrel on a buckskin horse at a rodeo. She'd seen a few photos in a scrapbook and had a framed one tucked face down in her bottom dresser drawer, but couldn't scrounge up live memories of her own. Abandoned at the Cahill Ranch at age three left her with the pain of an "I am not important...I am not of value" message.

She tried hard to avoid the questions that stole in. Did her mother know about Maidie's death? Will she show up at the funeral? Grandma Pearl revealed how Maidie and Hanna Jo became very close as her mother grew up. Even Reba spent a lot of time at Maidie's house and considered her like another grandma. Pearl told her stories of the times Hanna Jo tended to Maidie during some of her sick spells. As Reba did with her guitar playing.

"Your mother showed care-giving skills in her early teens," Grandma said. "I thought sure she'd become a nurse."

She sure hadn't cared enough to look after Reba. How could her mom run away from her family and duty? The thought erupted unbidden like a dark, unprotected wound.

And why would she come to the funeral today? She hadn't made an appearance at Grandpa Cahill's service, her own father's. She looked again at her watch. "I may not make it to Maidie's either. Where is Don? He arrived like the cavalry and disappeared like Custer."

Reba tried to direct the calf to its mother's udders. But it showed no interest in nursing. "Come on, little one. You've got to get some nourishment. Aren't you hungry after your ordeal?" She tried again and again without success.

The newborn quivered. Reba wrapped her jacket around it, the cleaner side against its skin. Then she stood and faced the mama cow. "Recovery time is over," she hollered. "You have a hill to climb."

The heifer groaned to her feet and took a few steps. Reba grabbed the end of the rope she'd tied onto Johnny Poe's saddle horn and looped it around the new mother's neck. When she jerked on it, Johnny Poe backed up and tugged it taut.

The sound of an engine pierced the mountain air. She peered at the front end of Don's pickup on the ridge above, tires splaying mud, too close to the horse.

"Watch out," Reba yelled.

Johnny Poe reared and raised so high the rope connected to the saddle horn yanked and twitched free. Reba lunged for the cow as she tumbled and scooted into the bulging river. "No!" she screamed, as she bound after her. "You can't drown. Help! Don, please help!" Panic stretched across her chest and froze somewhere in her lungs. "Help!" she rasped again, barely above a whisper. She had to save that mama cow.

She splashed into the creek, boots and all, and reached for the floating rope, the line to life. Everything in her rebelled against the possibility a creature who had just gone through the agony of birth to a sickly, needy babe would now drown without a chance to care for the little one. After a slippery plunge beneath the surface, Reba grabbed traction with her boots on the bottom. The heifer's head burst above water and she bellowed in distress.

Reba raced to the bank, keeping her eyes on the cow's current-drifting pace. She could hear the calf blurt a weak cry. She twisted to see him try to get on his feet. *That's good.*

After another dip, Reba managed to pull the free end of the rope out of the water and tugged as hard as she could. In a flash, strong arms encased her with warmth and comfort and pulled her and the rope to the bank. She didn't resist the protection and assistance offered. With Don at her side and some hefty repeated yanks, the mother lumbered toward them and collapsed a few yards away. Reba trembled both inward and outward in a confusion of emotions. Relief over the heifer. Not wanting to leave the cocoon of Don's arms.

"Thanks so very much." Reba dropped in a pant as her teeth chattered.

"Don't thank me too much. Your horse escaped."

"Why didn't you go after him?"

"He was okay and you weren't. Besides, I don't think that horse likes me much. I've never been able to get near him without the threat of a vicious kick. My dad too. And Tim. He's got a thing against Runcies, I guess."

Is that a sign? The former warm feelings of camaraderie, teamwork, and maybe something more turned to a chill. "Do you know where he's headed?"

"Toward Coyote Canyon, looked like to me."

"I guess I'll chase him later." Reba tried not to show her dismay. She focused on getting to the funeral. "Help me get these two out of here."

He handed her a canteen. "That I can do. Never been a downed cow I couldn't get up." He lifted his head. "Even up a hill."

She filled the canteen at the creek. "I'll carry the calf."

"No, you won't. Get up there and I'll bring him to you."

Reba stiffened at the command. He sounded and looked a lot like Champ in that moment. But when Reba started to protest, her alarm increased for the listless, puny babe splayed on the ground. She gently rubbed drops of water on its mouth as its head drooped.

Don draped the limpid calf across his shoulders and stumped up the incline while Reba followed. A raging war grew inside her. Should she have insisted on carrying the calf herself? Was Don going to claim ownership of the calf, on behalf of Runcie Ranch? She was reminded again how nice it would be to have a capable man on the ranch. She looked ahead and admired his muscular, confident stride.

Don would make someone a good rancher husband, as he already had once, with schoolteacher Marge Runcie. *Reba Runcie, that has a ring to it.* She imagined him at her side, plowing the fallow Cahill ground back into wheat fields. Buying more cattle at auctions.

Reba cradled the calf and watched from the top as Don below worked to nudge the downed one thousand pound immovable bovine to get up and go. If they had more time and materials available, they could manufacture a primitive sling to drag and hoist the heifer. "How inconsiderate of your mamma to go down at the bottom of a hill," she told the calf.

"Stop your muttering up there and give me some ideas," Don shouted.

So much for romantic fantasies. "Try to push her."

"She's too fat. What do you feed those cows of yours?"

Road's End pasture, same as you. "Then scare her."

Don stood straight and howled like a coyote. The heifer's eyes got wild, but she didn't move. He kept howling.

Reba didn't know whether to be impressed or amused. She craned around the calf to look at her watch. She began to pray for God and his angels to move that cow,

though she knew the heifer would get up when she was good and ready, and not before. "Try yanking her tail. Come on, we've got to go."

Don pinched her ear and pulled back hard on her tail three separate times. Just when they presumed this failed too, she heaved her hulk of a self off the ground as though it were no big deal and moseyed up the hill. Reba set the calf down in hopes he and the mama would connect. He bawled something pitiful and attempted a wobble on three legs. Reba scooped the critter into her arms again and swabbed its lips with water drops. Its eyes closed, legs hung limp, and ears drooped. "This calf is not well. He needs a warm tub bath."

It took both of them to corral the heifer through the barbed fence at the broken line. She and Don pulled back the spliced pieces as best they could.

"You do notice this has been cut," Reba remarked.

"Did you do it? Or your grandmother?"

"Of course not. That's ridiculous. Why did you say that?"

"Because Dad will ask me. This part of the fencing is closest to your ranch."

"But we have no possible motive." Reba felt the chill of accusation and the discomfort of confusion. *What is going on?*

As she headed into Cahill Ranch pasture, Reba tucked the calf on the front bench seat of Don's pickup and helped him repair the fence. They crawled into the truck with muddy boots, stained jeans, and torn shirts.

"If we go like we are, we'll be only a few minutes late." Reba tried to imagine her grandmother's reaction to her showing up at Maidie's service looking like something the pigs drug to the pen. They might be backwoods ranch folks, but Pearl Cahill insisted on looking cleaned up at social events.

"You look like a drowned fox. A red one, of course. A very cute one."

"Are you flirting with me?"

He grinned, his rugged face relaxed. "Just stating an obvious fact."

Reba scooted the jacket wrapped calf between them. "I had a clean rag in my saddle bag. Have you got anything like that in here?"

"Open the glove compartment."

She pulled out a large, folded piece of white cotton.

"An old t-shirt of Tim's. Do what you can. I'm sure he won't mind."

But I will. She smelled Lava soap and Tide detergent and something else not so clean, but pleasant. She didn't know how she could explain it was impossible to use Tim's shirt, to rub it against her skin. Tim Runcie, a classmate, her first and only real boyfriend. The guy who married her best girlfriend, Sue Anne Whitlow. And a reminder of at least one awkward part of dating Don.

The clouds cleared and a bright sunbeam sprayed through the scattered Douglas fir and ponderosa pines. "Thanks, but that's okay. Just get me home quick. This calf has to be fed."

The truck bumped over the three miles of unpaved road to the Cahill homestead as Reba held on tight to the calf and the truck door. They rolled past charred remnants of a cabin, struck by lightning and burned to the ground. A wooden water tower for an old logging camp at the end of a former railroad spur sagged and leaned so far as though a gentle push would topple it.

A bevy of twenty quails scurried across the road in front of them. They slowed and passed a guy on the roadside in pullover shirt, Bermuda shorts, and deck shoes changing a flat tire on a brand new '91 silver Volvo.

Don rolled down his window.

"Don't stop," Reba said. "We don't have time."

"It's not the Road's End way. You know that." He yelled out, "Need some help?"

The man turned around and Reba recognized Jace McKane, one of their newest citizens. In his thirties with blond boyish good looks, he looked nothing like his dark and ruddy younger brother, Norden. "Thanks, Mr. Runcie. I'm doing fine. I'm real used to this."

Mr. Runcie? Even Don's dad was called Champ by everyone.

They drove on, in sight of the Cahill driveway turnoff.

"I've seen him tinkering with his car before. Must be a lemon," Don said.

"I hear he's got plenty of money. Why doesn't he buy a new car?"

"Must be attached to that one."

As they turned right onto Stroud Ranch Road and another right onto the Cahill driveway, Reba leaned over the calf. "Oh, dear."

"What's the matter?"

Reba checked her charge for signs of revival. At her touch, a muscle moved and he slit open one eye. She dabbed him with water again. "I'm glad we're almost there."

They passed Grandpa Cahill's sprawling mutant Camperdown elm.

Reba caught sight of a red Jaguar parked behind the bunkhouse. *Who in the world does that belong to?*

Reba hugged the calf close as she slipped out of the cab. Tied to the front porch, Paunch and Aussie, Grandma Pearl's Blue Heelers, eyed them with disinterest. Scat the long-haired calico cat crouched nearby.

Don gestured at her. "I'm going to head home and clean up. If I miss the main service, I'll see you at the graveside later."

"Oh, wait. Here's your canteen."

"Keep it. I'll get it later." He grinned. "Good excuse to see you again." He backed down the driveway.

Pearl rushed over as she eased up the steps in front of the house. Salt-and-pepper hair pulled back in a twist, lips touched with soft pink, dressed in black denim western cut pantsuit and her Sunday best Nochona black leather boots, her eyes squinted in worry. "Reba, you okay?"

"Besides being covered with mud and cow blood, just fine."

Pearl checked the calf. "Get him on a bottle immediately."

"He wouldn't nurse."

"The funeral's running a bit late anyway. I'll do what I can. You get yourself decent." The calf's ears drooped when she picked him up.

Reba knew that look of her grandmother's, steely resignation. "You don't think he's going to make it, do you?"

"The good news is, the vet is here for the funeral. He'll get Dr. Whey's immediate attention." Pearl wheeled around and called out to the first person she saw. "Joe! Joe Bosch, go to the barn and get Olga Whey. Send her here to the house. Emergency calf care needed."

Joe Bosch, Runcie ranch hand, arrived for the service looking stiff and rigid with brown hair slicked down, dressed in navy blue suit, navy striped tie and matching kerchief-stuffed pocket. As he sprinted to the barn, Reba swallowed and tried to smile. "The heifer's safely in our pasture and... Johnny Poe ran away." Reba couldn't interpret

her grandmother's response beyond an expected frown. At least she had given her the full report.

She headed for her bedroom and stopped when she heard strains of Bette Midler singing "Wind Beneath My Wings" from the guest room. She stepped closer and wafts of a scent like musk and mulberry misted the hall.

The door from the bathroom at the hall's end opened wide and Pearl appeared. "I forgot to tell you that Ginny arrived from California..."

"My Ginny? Ginny George Nicoli?"

Pearl nodded.

The music stopped at "I can fly higher than an eagle" when she knocked. With a swish of shoulder-length, corkscrew dark curls and a sweep of black and purple faille, out popped the gal with skin like she'd rubbed it in walnut oil and buffed it to a gloss. She swept up Reba and swung her around. "Surprise! So good to see you, Reba Mae!"

"Watch out. I'll mess you all up."

"Don't worry. I brought lots of changes."

"I believe that, but I can't believe you're here." Reba felt as elated as when she'd given up finding elk on a season's last trip and stumbled onto a large herd. "You didn't mention a word about coming to Idaho at our last phone call." Reba thought hard. "Did you?"

"No, it was a last-minute decision. I decided to give myself some time off, the benefits of working for a family business. Good grief, girl, you look like sunburned spit."

"I've been birthing a calf." Reba peered down the hall at the bathroom and closed door. "The red Jaguar. Is that yours?"

"Yep. I drove twenty hours straight."

"You must be beyond exhausted."

"I'll catch up later. I had to be here for Seth and Maidie. And you. And there were other reasons." She squeezed a sad face. "I still can't fathom she's gone. She and Seth have been like fixtures here, like the Hanging Tree, and Champ and your grandma. I can't imagine Road's End without her."

I'd like to see Road's End without Champ. "Yes, they are Road's End. Just like Grandpa was too." A sudden depression gripped Reba. Life and love so fleeting. And all will die.

But Ginny nudged her. "Now, hurry. We've got to get you to the barn on time."

"Too late. We're already fifteen minutes overdue."

"We've been given another fifteen minute extension, by order of Pearl Cahill, the head honcho around here."

"Unless Champ Runcie's on the premises."

"Oh, he is. He and your grandma were exchanging terse words when I arrived. Something to do with his part in the service."

Please, Champ, leave us alone for once. "Grandma suspects he's going to try political posturing at the funeral. She's been firm with him this service is about Maidie and nothing else."

"Like what would he do?"

"Oh, give a stump speech for his re-election as mayor, something like that." Anything to mix it up and mess it up for Pearl and Reba. But, why bother? He had no opponents. He was a shoo-in.

Dr. Olga Whey burst into the house in navy polyester and pumps, carrying a black medical bag, straight brunette hair flowing. Reba pointed her to the bathroom. "I don't think I'm going to get a bath or shower," she informed Ginny as Dr. Whey squeezed by.

"Go out in the backyard and I'll hose you down like we did as kids."

"Okay, but this time with my clothes on."

"And then they come off." She opened a closet door in the guest room. A half dozen of what she presumed as very expensive outfits hung there. Strewn across the bed were charcoal gray silky pajamas, a rose pink pantsuit, and teal green caftan.

"You know we don't wear the same size."

"But one of my scarves or jewelry will brighten up whatever little thing you put on."

"And you know I rarely wear jewelry."

Ginny sighed. "How did we ever become best buds?"

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Reba snickered as she peered into her bedroom mirror at the tangle of pine needles and cobwebs in her auburn hair. Bloody dung streaked her face. *No wonder you're still single at age twenty-five.*

After a quick backyard hose shower, she changed into a blousy, v-neck black pullover dress and black flats. She blow-dried her straight hair and shook it out.

Pearl Cahill stomped down the hall. "Olga's going to stay with the calf, bless her heart. She gave him electrolytes and Sulpha pills. All we can do is wait and pray. I'm going to the barn."

Reba peeked in on the calf sprawled in the footed tub. At least his eyes were open. "I'm sorry you have to miss the service. Thank you so much."

Dr. Whey shrugged. "It's what I do."

Reba knocked and scooted the guest room door open. Ginny had changed into a brown suede skirt with brown velvet blazer and brown heels with crisscross straps. "The hug stained my black. This will have to do." She looked Reba over and pulled button pearl earrings, single-strand pearl necklace and a black and cream scarf from her suitcase. "Simple and classy. You'll look great. And it's nothing garish, so don't fuss at me."

Reba smiled. "I wouldn't think of it. Put them on. Dress me up like a doll, just like you used to."

Ginny snapped the necklace and earrings on and draped the scarf straight without a tie.

Reba touched her ears and the pearls. "I'm so glad you're here."

Ginny admired her touches with a twirl around her. "You're good. Let's go!"

Reba picked up her guitar case as she and Ginny hiked the half-mile to the barn. "You going to sing?"

"Grandma insisted. I often sang for Maidie when she had one of her spells. Seemed to calm her down."

"Seth must feel so alone without Maidie, after all these years taking care of her. Such dedication for his special needs niece."

"Grandma and I will look in on him as often as we can. He's going to speak at the service and he's real nervous. I promised to provide him support."

"We still have the toys Seth carved for me and my brothers back when we lived in Road's End."

"Most everyone in town has something Seth made for them." They passed Seth Stroud's Ford Model T., pickups, SUVs, and motorcycles cluttered around the Cahill barn and pasture. Reba pushed into the barn and gasped at the size of the crowd.

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Coming Soon!

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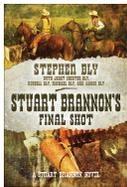
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