

# ~ Midnight Muses: Little Lightening Landen ~

by Red Hope

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## **Disclaimers**

Copyright: I own some of these characters and others are real but long gone.

Subtext: Oh yes.

Violence: Yes, there's finally some gun-slinging.

**Summary:** The Texas Rangers continue the frantic chase for the Sam Bass Gang and tail them to Mesquite, Texas. They discover that the gang is robbing a nearby freight train so they race after the train. However, the rangers are taken completely surprise by the outlaw gang and Ranger Raleigh Baylor is left to hopelessly fight them alone.

Feedback: [redhope@redhope.net](mailto:redhope@redhope.net)

Webpage: <http://www.redhope.net>

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## **Chapter 1**

It was April 10, 1878 and already three major train robberies had occurred, and the Texas Rangers were failing to capture the Sam Bass Gang. The captain, Junius Peak, was hoping to apprehend the gang today as they were just outside of Mesquite, Texas where there were unconfirmed reports that the Sam Bass Gang planned to strike again.

The rangers were all mounted on their steeds and were galloping into Mesquite, which was south-west of Paris. The town was also just on the outskirts of Dallas. Captain Peak was leading the group into town and he merely slowed his horse to a canter but aimed for the train station that wasn't far.

The rangers came to a quick stop when they were just outside of the red-roofed train station, and the captain ordered everybody to stay mounted. He raced into the station to find somebody in ticket sales. He quickly received news that the most recent locomotive from the Pacific Railroad Company had already left. His earlier tension mounted but he hurried back out of the station and ordered his rangers to begin pursuit for the locomotive.

The Texas Rangers rode their horses hard and followed the railroad due to the west. They knew they'd come upon the train soon considering it'd only left the station fifteen minutes ago. When they crossed a short stone bridge, they went around a bend then the distinct huffing sound of a train echoed back. The captain just saw the outline of the freight train's caboose. He noticed the caboose had no cupola on top but instead it was a bay window caboose, which didn't bolster well.

Ranger Baylor was directly behind the captain. She pushed her hat back on her head to make sure it wouldn't fly off. She narrowed her eyes and focused on the caboose when

something caught her attention. "Captain," she hollered, "we found 'em!"

Captain Peak also now recognized the outline of two people standing up on top of the caboose's roof. He inhaled then loudly ordered, "Get yew guns ready, boys!" After his orders there were the synchronized motions of the rangers removing their revolvers and cocked them.

The five rangers urged their horses faster to catch up to the caboose.

Ranger Baylor carefully watched the movements of the two outlaws on the roof. She noticed they were most likely talking as they had their heads turned to each other. Then one of the outlaws took leave and carefully descended the ladder then disappeared into the caboose. Her eyes widened in fear when the outlaw left on the roof lifted a rifle and targeted them.

"Look ou-" The captain's last word was drowned out by the loud shot.

Ranger Killian painfully cried out when a bullet lodged into his right shoulder. He tried to grab his saddlehorn but missed and fell off his horse; his head smacked into a wood beam of the rail and knocked him out. His horse went several more paces then stopped.

"Shit," the captain hissed.

Ranger Herold lifted his gun and tried to take a bouncy aim at the dark outlaw. His shot rang out but he missed.

The outlaw returned fire and just missed Ranger Herold.

The rangers lifted their revolvers and chaos broke lose when they all started shooting together at the outlaw on the roof.

The outlaw instantly dropped onto his stomach yet continued to aim the rifle at the approaching rangers.

Ranger Baylor and the captain glanced back in horror to see that the outlaw was slowly picking each of the rangers off one by one. Ranger Baylor growled, but she was out of bullets. She used an old skill of hers that she'd taught her and her horse so that she could reload her gun while riding.

Captain Peak covered Raleigh and carefully tried to take aim at the outlaw. His sight lined up perfect with the outlaw's hat covered head. His finger pulled back on the trigger then there was a loud shot. He hissed in pain when a bullet scraped his right side. His shot went wild from his movements because of his wound.

Raleigh had her chamber reloaded finally and it was just her and the captain now. "June, are yew alright?"

The captain hotly ordered, "Just get 'im, I'll cover yew back."

Raleigh agreed and squeezed Classic Touch's sides harder; she was relieved to feel her

mare speed up.

Captain Peak had one bullet left so he stretched out his arm. He could feel that the outlaw was aiming for him.

Ranger Baylor raised her gun up at the outlaw that was lying on his stomach. She lined her sights with her right eye only open but she lowered her gun when the outlaw's face came into focus. Her hesitation was costly as the outlaw took a shot at the captain.

Captain Junius Peak fell off his horse and rolled down a small embankment but didn't move any further.

The outlaw slowly stood up, legs spread, and aimed the rifle at the last ranger that was only several hundred yards from the caboose.

Raleigh Baylor's heart was wild and her hands slick with sweat at recognizing Landen Morrison as the outlaw. She steeled her emotions and raised her .45 revolver at the cowgirl.

Landen Morrison's face was stoic. Her Winchester's buttstock was against her right shoulder and her sights lined up on the last ranger. She quickly moved her sights lower to the horse's chest and muttered, "Sorry, Classic." Her finger came back on the trigger.

Raleigh lowered her revolver when she saw what was just ahead of the train. She didn't know if she could watch this happen.

The cowgirl just caught the hesitation from the ranger then the whooshing sound in her ears registered. She yelled and suddenly fell flat onto her stomach just as the tunnel's ceiling flew over her head. Her entire world went dark except for the low red glow coming from the platform of the caboose. She carefully rolled onto her back with her repeating rifle pressed vertically against her body. She stared up at the quickly moving tunnel ceiling, but she focused on the constant beats of the horse just behind the caboose.

Landen pressed the cold steel barrel against her lips. She sent a prayer that her next shot would be true. She made out the light developing at the end of the tunnel so she prepared herself. Just when she came out of the tunnel, she flipped onto her booted feet and spun around with her rifle moving up so fast. After a second she lowered her Winchester and her eyes narrowed at the horse that was riderless and now coming to stop just a few yards away from the tunnel's exit. "Shit," she hissed.

The cowgirl lifted her rifle back up but carefully edged to the end of the caboose's roof. She had a good inkling where Ranger Baylor may have gone to while they were in the tunnel. She kept her rifle's barrel low and her index finger steady against the rifle's trigger. When she edged closer to the end of the roof she was completely taken by surprise.

Raleigh Baylor gave out a piercing cry and leapt up from the ladder just underneath the outlaw; her hat was lost in the process. She knocked the rifle from Landen's grasp

and it went airborne then hit the caboose's platform far below. Raleigh landed on her feet on the roof, yet she raced forward after the shocked outlaw. Once close enough she gave a spinning kick and sent the outlaw flying across the roof.

The air was knocked out of Landen when her back slammed onto the roof. Her black hat was blown off and that seemed to piss her off after already losing her rifle.

Ranger Baylor went for her revolver that she'd holstered in the tunnel. She already saw the cowgirl moving.

Landen jumped to her feet and her hands almost seemed gone.

Raleigh lifted her gun with her arm stretching out towards her lover.

Landen already had her arms drawn out with her shining Peacemakers.

Raleigh and Landen simultaneously clicked back hammers and their angry stares remained locked.

The heavily breathing ranger stared down the barrels of the cowgirl's Colts then her eyes lifted back to the cowgirl. "I know who yew are now."

Landen swallowed but her features remained still. "Just get off this train and go back tuh Paris."

The ranger hotly spoke, "Yew know I ain't gonna do that."

The cowgirl ignored her blond hair that was blowing around her face. Her cold stare remained on the ranger but she was also watching the ranger's trigger finger. "Don't be dumber than dirt... just get off."

Ranger Baylor ignored the demand. "Yew lied to me!"

"I didn't lie to ya," the cowgirl angrily yelled back.

"Yew hid thuh truth... its thuh same damn thing," the ranger snapped, "Yew played me!"

Landen bared her teeth at the ranger as her temper notched up. "Ya don't know anything about me or my life."

"What's there ta know? Yew an outlaw," the disgusted ranger spat.

Landen saw the pain upon reading deeper into the ranger's cold eyes. Her memories washed over her, and she broke her concentration by briefly closing her eyes.

Raleigh took her opening by kicking one gun from the outlaw's hand. She then rushed Landen and used her freehand to grab Landen's left wrist.

The cowgirl snarled when her left arm was lifted straight up into the air. She tried to break free from the powerful grasp, but she couldn't. Her other Colt was several feet

away and teetered the edge of the caboose's roof.

Raleigh still had her revolver, and she hastily pressed the muzzle under the smaller woman's chin. "Let go of the gun."

Landen's jaw was tight and her green eyes harbored a fire. Her chest heaved, but she knew she couldn't do much against this stronger woman, at least not in this position. She let the revolver loose in her grasp and held it by the trigger guard.

Ranger Baylor took the gun from her lover then she unexpectedly slammed the side of Landen's head with the Colt's handle.

Landen sunk into a moaning pile on the roof of the caboose.

The ranger glanced about the curved roof and decided on a quick action. She grabbed Landen by her shirt's collar and dragged her down to the smoke stack in the center of the roof. She reached behind to get her thin yet strong rope.

Landen Morrison gained consciousness slowly but snapped out of it when her pounding head reminded her of what'd happened. She quickly observed she was still on the caboose's roof, which meant she probably hadn't been out very long. She shook her head then tried to stand up but her caught hands stopped her instantly. "Goddamn it," she snarled when her aching wrists and shoulders told her the problem.

The cowgirl's hands were tied behind her back and then to further the issue her hands were closely lashed to the smoke stack. She moved her hands the wrong way, and she hissed at the heated steel. "Shit... shit," she growled then her head snapped up when there were gunshots from inside the caboose.

Landen's mind raced at what to do. She decided there was only one way to escape so she adjusted her hands perfectly. She then pushed back until her fingers wrapped around the smoke stack. She barred her teeth but hissed painfully while she tried to rip the smoke stack's top off. She cried out as her hands started to burn against the heat, yet she fought even harder.

The cone top snapped off and Landen was instantly free from it when she stood up. She now had to deal with getting her hands untied. After a quick glance at her waist she saw that her bowie knife was indeed gone. She growled but decided it was best to hurry.

Landen laid flat on her back on the roof then easily maneuvered her tied wrists under her body until she had her lashed hands in front of her body now. She jumped to her feet then hurried to the back of the caboose, she glanced over the ladder, and spotted her Winchester with complete relief.

The cowgirl made her way down the ladder until she was on the short platform. She picked up her rifle by the barrel but she stayed ducked down. She crept closer to the open door of the caboose then brought her head around the edge of the doorframe. She spotted Raleigh Baylor with her gun pointed at the seated members of the Sam Bass Gang. Landen's features darkened when she saw that Raleigh held one of her Colts and the other Colt was in Raleigh's holster.

Landen noted that the conductor and two express messengers were out cold on the bench.

"Toss 'em," the Texas Ranger coldly ordered.

The four gang members each slowly started to throw their guns to the floor after Sam Bass nodded his head.

The cowgirl knew she needed to act quickly before the train staff woke up or Raleigh spotted her. She was thankful that Raleigh's back was to her. She silently walked forward, closer to the ranger's back, and she prepared her rifle's buttstock.

"What yew plan ta do?" Sam Bass remarked, "Yew ain't gonna be able ta take all four of us back to town."

Raleigh raised an eyebrow at the challenge. "When one of these fine rail workers wakes up then he can go up ta thuh engineer." She smirked and pointed her left gun directly at the leader. "'Til then enjoy thuh ride, boys."

Landen silently approached the ranger. She glimpsed at her comrades; she knew they were waiting for her move. She slowly straightened up while pulling her rifle's barrel back over her shoulder. The board under her feet creaked in reaction.

Raleigh hastily acted when she heard the noise clearly made by somebody.

Landen yelled and her thrust was fast.

Raleigh had been turning her head and body, which caused her to take the buttstock solidly into her right temple. She fell to the floor and lost her left gun from her hand.

The gang members jumped to their feet and scrabbled for their guns.

Landen remained poised over the ranger, her rifle lifted again, and her cold eyes centered on the groaning ranger.

Raleigh tried to blink away her fuzzy vision but it was useless. She twisted her head to the right and gazed up at the cowgirl above her. "Landen?" she hoarsely whispered.

"One turn deserves another," the cowgirl sarcastically remarked, who instantly slammed her buttstock against the ranger's forehead again.

Ranger Baylor slumped against the floor, her forehead started to turn red from blood.

Frank Jackson eyed the unconscious ranger. "Nice goin', Landen."

The cowgirl held out her bound wrists. "Com'on get me outta this."

A gang member obliged and yanked his hunting knife from his waist sheath. He came over and carefully cut the tight rope free from Landen.

The female outlaw was grateful. "Thanks, Sammy."

Sam Pipes grinned and sheathed his knife. "No problem." He then turned with his hands going to his hips. "What we gonna do with her?" He tapped the unconscious ranger's side with his pointed boot.

Sam Bass was busy collecting money from a floor safe that he'd been working on earlier. He stopped but remained hunched over, and he ordered, "Tie her up."

Landen Morrison bent down, and she ripped her Colt Peacemaker from the ranger's holster. She placed it in her holster then she picked up her other revolver from the ranger's limp hand. She then finally spotted her bowie knife that was clipped to the ranger's side. "Damn," she muttered however took back her weapon.

"Let's hurry up," Sam Bass commanded. "They're liable ta come lookin' for us anytime soon."

Landen was still knelt beside the ranger. She then saw Sam Pipes kneeling on the other side.

"Turn her over."

Landen agreed and rolled the larger woman over onto her stomach. She then saw Sam Pipes's rope he'd been carrying with him. She and Sam quickly worked to get the ranger tied up by her hands and ankles. Now the fun of getting off the train with the loot and a tall ranger would begin for the gang.

## **Chapter 2**

Ranger Baylor's head was slumped forward and her back pressed against a dark, damp rock wall. She slowly regained awareness, yet she didn't move or make a sound. She kept her head down and did a mental inspection of her body. Her head ached, a bloody taste in her mouth, and her shoulders were quite sore. Next she focused on the sounds around her.

"There should have been more," a man barked.

"Shut up, Jim. Yew weren't even there."

"Settle down," Sam Bass soothed.

Another man then remarked, "Christ we're lucky ta be here if it weren't for Landen." There was a pause and some movement. "That stupid ranger almost got us."

"Not so stupid if she almost had us," Landen calmly mentioned.

"Yew got a point, Landen," Sam Bass agreed. "We need ta be more careful next time." He listened to the campfire crackle around him and his men, but he further mentioned, "Next time we ain't leavin' Landen alone up on thuh roof."

Landen tapped her rifle's barrel then revealed, "I told Seaborn tuh go inside. I reckoned I could have handled the rangers alone."

There was some movement then Sam Bass's voice filled the air again. "I know yew reputation proceeds yew but we ain't gonna make that mistake again." His steps echoed loudly then faded out.

There was a long silence other than some chewing and a tap of metal against metal.

"What we gonna do with her anyway?" It was Jim's voice again.

"I ain't sure what the boss has in mind."

Raleigh kept listening; she now heard somebody standing up and they moved closer to her. She tensed, but kept her breathing regular. Suddenly she felt the presence knelt beside her and a large hand yanked her head back, however her eyes were still closed.

"She might be abnormal," Jim breathed out, who was holding the ranger's head back by her bangs. "But she's got some good... qualities."

Raleigh understood the underlying meaning and her eyes flew open in a rage. "I got a lot more than yew can handle." She gave a cry and suddenly rammed her lashed boots in between the man's open legs.

Jim cried out and fell to his side near the ranger. He clutched his valuables and gasped.

The rest of the gang jumped to their feet and most of them pulled guns and aimed at the ranger.

Raleigh didn't move any further and stared coldly at the outlaws that undoubtedly wanted her blood, among other things. "Come on, boys I got more of that for yawl."

Landen remained the only one sitting off to Raleigh's right. Her back was against the cavern wall yet her attention was fully on the ranger. In her lap horizontally sat her repeating rifle, and she was missing her cowboy hat. Her right hand rested on her rifle's buttstock while her left was on her black leather covered knee.

Jim Murphy finally got to his feet and snarled at the ranger. He harshly kicked her in the stomach.

The Texas Ranger clenched her teeth as she was knocked to the right side. She straightened up and stared defiantly at the gang member.

Jim pulled his gun from his side and cocked the hammer. He pressed the muzzle into the ranger's temple and bent over her. "I'm sure yew can be accommodating when yew worthless life is on thuh line."

The other men snickered and didn't notice Sam Bass returning because of the all the commotion.



"I say we have our fun with her," Jim Murphy remarked, and he pressed the muzzle harder against the ranger's head. "What yew say, ranger?"

Suddenly the small cowgirl jumped to her feet and took a side step as her rifle lifted. Her sights were set on Jim Murphy just as her hammer cocked. "Back off, Jim."

The other gang members lost their leering expressions and hesitated about how to act.

Jim Murphy sneered at the cowgirl's protective manners over the ranger. "What yew care, Landen? Just put tuh damn rifle down." He nodded at the other members off to his left shoulder. "Yew ain't that good to take all of us."

The cowgirl smirked and answered, "I'm ain't planning on it. Just you, Jim if ya don't move ya plug-ugly ass away from her." Her voice grew dangerous. "Or do y'all wanna find out why they call Little Lightening Landen." Her eyes flickered between Jim and the rest of the gang.

Jim Murphy lowered his gun and slowly straightened up.

Landen kept her sights on the offending man as she spoke to the leader. "Sam, I ain't signed up for this bullshit if ya mean tuh rape. I ain't gonna stand by and watch."

Sam Bass straightened out his vest and stepped through his men. "Yew are right, Landen. We're honorable men." He eyed the other members, who put their guns away. "Any suggestion on what we should do with her?"

Landen didn't answer until Jim Murphy put his revolver away. She lowered her rifle and replied, "We let her go." And before anybody could protest, she explained, "There ain't no reason tuh keep her and she's only gonna cause us trouble." She then amusingly grinned at Jim. "As Jim demonstrated for us."

Jim glanced over at Sam Bass and saw that he was seriously thinking it out. "Boss, we ain't gonna-

"Jim," Sam Bass warned. He folded his arms against his chest and he leaned his weight onto his right foot. "Tomorrow at first light, yew and Arkansas take her away from here."

Landen's rifle barrel slid down her hand until the buttstock connected to the ground. She liked that idea as it'd give her an opportunity to recover her hat hopefully.

Sam started to move away but stopped, glanced at the conscious ranger, and back at the cowgirl. "See that she doesn't recall her little ride." Then he was gone.

Jim Murphy glared at the cowgirl, however he received no reaction from her. He walked away and decided to leave the cave so he could get some air.

Landen watched the other members sit back around the fire and talked amongst themselves. She crept closer to the ranger and coolly instructed, "Ya owe me so don't cause no more trouble, ranger." Her lover's dark blue eyes were set on her but Landen

ignored it as she walked back to the fire. She reclaimed her spot and listened to the steady conversation.

The chatter was all about the hold up of the train and how everything had happened. At one point the conversation silenced when Sam Pipes urged the cowgirl to talk about what'd happened up on the caboose's roof.

Landen shrugged at Sam Pipe's demand as the men watched her. "I ain't no storyteller."

"Com'on, Landen," Thomas Spotswood demanded, "I wasn't even there ta see any of it."

Landen shrugged. "There weren't much to it."

"I saw some of it from inside thuh caboose," Sam Pipes supplied, "Landen picked off those rangers like they were Indians."

Another member, Arkansas Johnson, had a wondering gaze to the ranger and murmured, "Except for that one."

The conversation around the campfire kept going on late into the night.

The only southerner ignored them eventually by dropping her head against the cold cavern wall. She closed her eyes and tried to sleep for awhile as she knew dawn would come very soon. Later on the silence filled the cave and it helped her sleep a little deeper than earlier, yet she woke up when the sun's light filtered into the mouth of the cavern.

The cowgirl softly moaned and lifted her head, her neck was sore but she disregarded it. She gazed about the cavern and saw some of the men sleeping either against the wall like she'd done or in blankets on the ground. She spotted Arkansas so she got up and tapped him with her boot to wake him up.

Arkansas had a slight hangover from last night so he tried to shake it off while he got up.

Landen walked over to the Texas Ranger with her rifle at her side. She tilted her head when cold blue eyes opened up to her. "Good morning. Ready tuh ride?" She devilishly grinned.

Arkansas joined the cowgirl's side and he removed his gun. "Yew got her?"

"Sure." Landen handed her rifle to her comrade then she knelt down. She revealed her hunting knife and quickly cut the ropes from the ranger's ankles. She noted how the ranger's canvas pants were dirtied up from yesterday. She then stood up while sheathing her knife again. She retrieved her rifle and ordered, "Stand up."

Raleigh carefully climbed to her feet, and she was actually relieved since her legs had been stationary all night. She stretched the back muscles in her leg.

Arkansas waved his gun and ordered, "Out of thuh cave, ranger."

Landen pumped her rifle once by the handle. "Com'on." She stepped aside and let the ranger pass her.

Raleigh felt the two outlaws behind her while she slowly exited the cavern into the new day.

"What's that she's got?" Arkansas questioned, and he pointed his gun at the slip of paper that protruded from the ranger's back pocket. "Stop," he commanded then carefully stepped closer to the ranger. He extracted the paper and unfolded it.

Raleigh twisted her head sidelong and watched from the corner of her eye. She wanted more than anything to act as the outlaw fooled with her Authority paper.

Arkansas shook his head and held out the unfolded paper at Landen. "Can yew read, Landen?"

The cowgirl glanced at the familiar paper and furrowed her eyebrows. "No, I can't." She brushed the other outlaw's hand away to get the paper away from her. "Can ya read?"

Arkansas grunted then laughed. "Hell naw." He debated what to do with the paper.

"Whatever it is," Landen commented, "it's something official. It's got all those signatures and uh seal." She shrugged. "Just give it back tuh her, Arkansas."

The outlaw agreed so he folded up the paper. He slipped it back in her pocket then instructed, "Move, ranger."

Raleigh didn't move but she was suddenly shoved by Arkansas.

Arkansas became aggravated and growled, "Move, I tell yew."

The Texas Ranger stumbled for a step, but started to turn so she could face the outlaws. Just as she turned around she was surprised to find Landen's Colt muzzle in her face.

"I reckon we'll have tuh do this the hard way," the cowgirl hotly whispered.

Raleigh's eyes slotted at those dangerous words.

Arkansas took his cue and rushed forward; he slugged the ranger and knocked her out cold.

Landen stared down at the unconscious ranger at her feet.

"She's stupid," the male outlaw spat.

Landen put her Peacemaker away then leaned her rifle's barrel against her shoulder. "Let's get her on my horse." Together, she and Arkansas were able to get the ranger on

the mare then they tied her down so she wouldn't try for an escape.

Arkansas straightened up and muffled a groan because of his aching back. He was a fairly large, burly guy and bending under the horse hadn't helped him much.

Landen was knelt beside her mare's side. "Go get the supplies... I'll finish up."

Arkansas straightened out his back but asked, "Yew think we need much?"

"I reckon so since it'll be uh long walk to the railroad."

Arkansas said nothing else and decided to take care of collecting some supplies. He also needed to saddle up his horse before they could go.

Landen reached under her horse's belly and finished tying the rope down that was lashed around Raleigh's ankles. She then climbed to her feet and took a step back. She inspected how the slumped ranger was lashed down into the saddle and Raleigh's tied hands were lashed to the saddlehorn. She decided that the ranger wouldn't be able to wiggle out of it.

The cowgirl then glanced at the cavern mouth and knew it'd be a few minutes before Arkansas returned. She quickly stepped up to her saddlebags and rummaged through them until she found what she needed.

Arkansas returned after about fifteen minutes. He saw the cowgirl was tucking something into her saddlebags. He didn't mention it and instead towed his horse over to her. "We ready?"

"I reckon so," the southerner agreed. "Let's go." She grabbed Stargazer's reins and started the trip through the barren plains.

The outlaws walked in relative silence and it wasn't until hours later after they left the hideout that the ranger awoke slowly.

Ranger Baylor lifted her head after she muffled her moan. She took in her new predicament and easily recognized the horse she rode now. She checked her situation and was quite impressed at the tying job these outlaws had performed.

Landen heard her mare huff in complete irritation. She turned her head sidelong and mentioned, "Stop squeezing her sides... ya'll piss her off then she'll buck ya."

Raleigh relaxed her legs against the mare's sides now that she'd been figured out. She doubted Stargazer would follow her orders but it was worth a try.

Arkansas peered up at the tall ranger on the Morgan horse. He hadn't realized she was awake, and he was surprised that Landen Morrison knew it. "So what's yew name, ranger?"

The cold ranger set her sights on the outlaw. "What's it matter to yew?"

Arkansas grew smug and tipped his hat back at the feisty woman on the mare. "It ain't

everyday I met uh female ranger." He slowed his pace until he was walking beside Stargazer. "How 'bout it, ranger?"

Raleigh turned her head away and her gaze pierced through Landen's back. "Yew mean Miss Morrison ain't told yew?"

Arkansas's face darkened and switched to the cowgirl. "What's she talkin' about, Triple L?"

Landen kept her back to the pair and continued to guide her horse. "Ranger Raleigh Baylor and I have a short history," she casually mentioned, "we met in Paris."

Arkansas grew very suspicious at this news.

"A very brief history," the ranger snapped.

Landen made no comment back.

Arkansas smirked because he pieced it together somewhat, and he laughed for a minute. "Landen, yew are somethin' ain't yew?"

The cowgirl flashed a smirk to her comrade. "Ranger Baylor is having uh fit 'cause I've bested her." She lifted her sparkling eyes to her lover. "Haven't I, Ranger Baylor?"

The ranger didn't fall for the game. She instead turned it around and brought out a dire topic. "I read yew killed yew aunt and uncle." She instantly saw the uplift of the cowgirl's shoulders.

Landen quickly stopped and turned to the ranger astride the mare. "Shut up," she coldly snapped, "ya know nothin' about what happened."

Arkansas intently watched and listened to the women.

The ranger was smug, and she huskily tormented, "I'm sure yew got an excuse for that too."

The southerner decided it was better to ignore the ranger or else it would get out of hand. She turned her back on the ranger and continued the trek.

Raleigh could tell she'd well poked the small cowgirl's armor. She didn't know why the outlaw had killed her aunt and uncle as the wanted posters never gave explanations, however she knew it made Landen a murderer. Raleigh had every intention to run the cowgirl into the jail and put her before a judge by the time it was all over.

Landen brought Stargazer to a stop when she saw the railway tracks only a few yards away. She then scanned the local area and a faint grin caressed her lips. "Watch her, Arkansas." She gave him the horse's reins then she marched off with her rifle in her left hand.

Ranger Baylor watched the southern cowgirl collect her black Stetson that was upside

down, near the tracks. She glanced down at the other outlaw, who was watching her carefully.

Landen Morrison returned with her cowboy hat now on her head. Her ensemble was complete again, and she felt quite lively now. She tilted her head back until her eyes met the ranger's darker ones. "Ya ready tuh go home, Baylor?" She smirked then turned to Arkansas. "I'll untie her, Arkansas. Ya make sure she doesn't try nottin'." She tossed her rifle to the outlaw.

Arkansas caught it after he dropped Stargazer's reins. He pumped the Winchester once then took careful aim for the ranger's chest.

Landen knew that Raleigh wouldn't try anything since it was Arkansas that was taking aim. There was no questioning his intent unlike Landen, who busied to untie the ranger from the horse. Landen unlashed the ranger completely except for her hands that remained bound but free from the saddlehorn.

Raleigh fought every urge to strike the cowgirl that'd caught her so easily. She knew she'd have another chance later and when she was better prepared.

"Alright, Baylor dismount on this side," the cowgirl ordered.

Ranger Baylor didn't argue so she swung her left leg over but without her hands she slid off uncontrollably.

Landen's quick hands kept the taller woman from falling on her face. She steadied the ranger until she was on her feet then she stepped back twice and her nimble hand pulled out her right Peacemaker.

Arkansas stepped around the Morgan horse and kept the muzzle directed at the ranger.

Raleigh glanced between the well gunned outlaws but her eyes locked on the southerner.

"Now follow the tracks." Landen pointed at them behind the ranger, who stole a sideward glance at them. "Ya outta come up on the tunnel 'bout uh mile from here." She smirked and in her amusing voice she taunted, "If ya luck ain't run out then maybe yer horse is still waiting for ya."

Raleigh was heaving from her desire to attack the outlaws. She didn't move and held her cold staring contest with the cowgirl.

Landen cocked her gun. "Go on. Don't waste yer chance tuh live."

The Texas Ranger took a step back then reminded, "Yew know I'll come after yawl."

Arkansas laughed. "Yew won't find us, ranger."

The cowgirl grew annoyed at the ranger's lack of movement. Her fast revolver lowered and her gun rang out a shot.

Raleigh jumped back when the bullet just missed her feet.

"Move before my next bullet goes in yer heart," the southerner threatened, who lifted her Colt back up.

The Texas Ranger stepped back again but finally turned and walked in a diagonal towards the railway. She waited to see if she'd get shot in the back as she thought maybe that was the purpose of the outlaws bringing her here.

Arkansas mounted his mare first but kept an eye on the receding ranger.

Landen put her gun away then easily climbed up onto Stargazer and adjusted the reins into her hands.

"Here, Landen." The outlaw tossed the cowgirl's rifle back to her.

The southerner caught it and gave it a spin before she rammed it into the rifle case strapped to her mare's side.

Stargazer pranced in place once then huffed, her head shook and her mane went all over.

Arkansas kept watching the Texas Ranger. He leaned towards the cowgirl. "Yew think she'll be uh problem later?"

The cowgirl already knew the answer, yet she shrugged and mentioned, "I reckon we stirred her up pretty good."

"I don't know," the outlaw argued, "she's like a one-legged man at a butt-kicking contest."

Landen laughed and turned her head to her comrade. "You reckon so huh?" She smirked under her hat.

Arkansas mirrored the grin that Landen had on her face. "I think she's all hat and no cattle."

Landen glanced back at the receding outline of the tall ranger. "It don't matter what she is because she'll be dead next time she shows her face." She gave a click with her tongue to her white mare and turned her mare back in the direction from where they came.

Arkansas adjusted the reins in his hands then briefly watched the last of the ranger disappear. He tapped his horse's sides then followed after the famous Triple L.

Raleigh Baylor glanced back over her shoulder but she couldn't see the outlaws any longer. She turned away and kept following the railroad back towards the town. She couldn't imagine how far she'd have to travel to make it back, and she wondered if she could make it since she had no supplies.

She stopped and glared down at her still tied hands. She desperately tried to wiggle a

hand free but it was useless. She cried out between the painful strain and her anger that she couldn't free herself. She dropped her lashed hands and closed her eyes as she tried to calm her emotions. Raleigh just kept seeing flashes of Landen and that damn smug pride.

The ranger shoved it all away and continued to follow the tracks due east. She came around a bend then the tunnel was just ahead. She hastily scanned her surroundings but saw no signs of her horse. "Com'on, Classic." She stopped beside the tunnel and desperately looked around in hope. She then lifted her hands and managed her index finger and thumb between her lips then she gave a sharp whistle. Her head snapped to the right when her horse's familiar whine filled the air.

Classic Touch came trotting out of a high brush area and raced up to her master; her excitement showed.

"Thank, God," the Texas Ranger muttered. "Hey, girl." She tried to pet the horse but it was too hard with her lashed hands. She hastily went to her saddlebags and fished through them until she got her knife out.

Raleigh stepped away from her horse so she'd have some space. Her hands were so tightly bound that it was hard to maneuver the knife around carefully without cutting herself first. She decided to sit down on the edge of the railway, a couple of yards from the track, and she propped her legs up on the ground. She placed the knife's hilt between her knees and tried to lock it in place.

Very carefully the ranger started to cut through the rope, yet she grew impatient and frustrated at some points. Raleigh would end up dropping her head back, hissing, and letting the sharp pain calm after the blade just cut her hand or wrist. It took her a solid ten minutes to finally get the ropes cut all the way through, but she was left with her hands and wrists sliced up and bleeding.

Raleigh grabbed the bowie knife from her knees, and she yelled out in rage at what'd happened to her for the past twenty-four hours. She jumped to her feet and pulled her arm back then threw the knife at the nearest tree with her anger behind the throw.

The hunting knife drove into the tree's trunk then swayed side to side twice.

Raleigh collapsed to the ground as her anger deflated along with her energy. She dropped her face into her bloody hands and tried to hold back her hot tears that threatened her, but she couldn't stop them.

Classic Touch carefully approached her master after a minute. She hated the distraught sounds coming from her master so she stretched out her neck and nudged Raleigh with her nose.

The Texas Ranger brushed back her hair and lifted her head. She sadly smiled at her horse, who seemed to be her only protector right now.

The Tennessee Walker stepped closer then managed to grab up some of her master's dark mane. She pretended to munch on it.



"Classic," the croaked up ranger fussed, "Com'on."

The horse released the hair and peered back down at her master.

Raleigh sighed yet sadly smiled at her horse's attempts. She slowly got to her feet and softly asked, "I guess I shouldn't give up huh?"

Classic Touch danced on her feet, trotted off towards the tunnel, and came back with her same excitement.

The ranger swallowed as she prepared herself to return back to Mesquite with empty hands. She went to the tree, ripped her knife free, and went to her horse. She put it back in its home then climbed up onto her horse. "Let's go, girl."

### **Chapter 3**

Raleigh Baylor sunk lower into the very warm bath that was soothing her aching muscles and cleaned her wounds. She dropped her head back against the tub and let out a low moan of enjoyment. As her body relaxed, she thought about her long ride to Mesquite from where the outlaws dropped her off. She'd been racking her brain all day to figure out how far they'd taken her and where from but it was hopeless. She knew she wasn't meant to find their hideout and that everybody from law officer to bounty hunter had been trying for the past month.

Then Raleigh considered her brief moments around the gang. Her eyebrows furrowed together when she repeated Landen's conversation with Arkansas just outside the cave's mouth.

"What's that she's got?" Arkansas inquired who soon took Raleigh's Authority paper from her back pocket. "Can yew read, Landen?"

"No, I can't," the cowgirl answered. "Can ya read?"

"Hell naw," joked back Arkansas.

Raleigh returned to the present and her eyes flew open. "She told me she could read and write," she muttered to nobody. She suddenly sat up in the warm water more by using her feet to push her up more. She hung over the tub and her eyes searched out her canvas pants, which were haphazardly tossed on the bathroom floor when Raleigh first came in to bathe.

The ranger partially lifted her body over the top and stretched out her long arms. She snatched up her pants and sought out her Authority paper. She had a hunch and her now dried, cut-up hands produced the Authority paper, which she unfolded quite rapidly.

A small slip of paper fell from the folded up Authority paper and landed on top of a pant leg.

Raleigh couldn't believe it, and she snatched up the piece of paper. Her hands slightly shook, yet she opened the worn piece of paper to find a very precise handwriting style staring back at her. The small note read: You'll find Jim Murphy's father hiding out on West Davis Street in a small, yellow inn. He's wanted for robbing the U.S. Mail.

Raleigh sunk back in the tub with the note still in her left hand and above water. She reread the note that held no signature, but she presumed it was written by Landen. She admitted she'd never seen anything written by Landen or had proof that the lying outlaw could write so she didn't know whether to trust it. She also considered it could be a setup.

The ranger's left arm hung over the side of the tub with the now folded up note between her fingers. She dropped her head back against the tub as she debated what to do. She didn't like this at all but her squad of rangers didn't have much choice considering every time they tried to hunt down the Sam Bass Gang they would lose track of them.

Sam Bass use to be a teamster in his younger days. He knew the local terrain better than anybody else and it happened to pay off for him now. The rangers couldn't track the gang very far as they were less apt to the local lands. Now the gang not only had Sam Bass's quick intelligence but the Triple L's sharp shooting to protect their backside. It was a deadly combination that no ranger liked.

This recent escapade between the gang and rangers had left all the rangers wounded including Raleigh but it was the captain who mostly suffered. Landen's bullet had merely scraped the captain's side but when the captain landed in the ditch his wound became badly infected. Captain Peak would be replaced by Captain Lee Hall when he arrived in a few days but until then Raleigh was in charge of the rangers.

Raleigh lifted her left hand again and flicked the note open; she reread it one last time. She stared at the words and uttered, "What's yew game, Landen?"

The following day came all too soon for the rangers, who collected outside of the inn they'd taken resident in for now. All the rangers were injured, but they set aside their pains for their duty and congregated on the inn's porch for their next move.

Ranger Baylor finally joined the men and informed them of the plans for today. She said they'd be taking it easy but what they were going to do was important to find the Sam Bass Gang. Her orders were for the rangers to sweep through Mesquite and find anybody that may be harboring or helping the gang. She split the group apart and she took one ranger with her while the other two went together.

Ranger Baylor and Ranger Herold worked together and took care of one end of West Main Street. They then started down West Davis Street and checked with each resident for information and whereabouts to flush out the gang. They received very little information or it wasn't quite reliable but Ranger Baylor figured it'd warn the residents not to harbor the outlaws.

Finally Ranger Herold came to the steps of a small, yellow inn. He noted that Raleigh wasn't coming up the steps. "What is it?"

Ranger Baylor hastily climbed the steps and quietly replied, "Be careful here, George." She stepped around him and entered the inn first.

George Herold checked his revolver at his side then followed after his temporary captain.

"Howdy," the innkeeper greeted. "Can I help yew?"

Ranger Baylor placed her hands on the counter and bent over it to use her height to her advantage. "Yew got any customers here?"

The innkeeper smiled coyly and leaned back to get some space from the imposing ranger. "Yes, ma'am. I only got two."

Ranger Baylor clipped, "Which rooms?"

The innkeeper cleared his throat then answered, "Same room... number three."

Raleigh arched an eyebrow at hearing the familiar room number. She signaled her comrade to follow her so she hurried up the steps to the upper floor. When she got to the top of the steps she turned back to the other ranger. "I want yew ta talk to 'em. I'll cover yew." She withdrew her revolver that she carried as a spare and didn't think she'd ever need.

Ranger Herold nodded then led the way down the hallway. He waited until his partner was on the opposite side of the door so that if the door opened nobody would see her. He knocked on the door.

"Hold on," a man called.

George put on a smile when the older man opened the door. "Howdy."

"Howdy," the man politely greeted. "Can I help yew?"

"I'm Ranger George Herold," the ranger informed, "and we're checking around town for some outlaws." He held out his hand for the pending introduction.

The man cleared his throat then took the ranger's hand. "The name's Henderson. What outlaws yew lookin' for?"

"Any of the members from the Sam Bass Gang." Ranger Herold paused and moved his hands to his hips. "Yew seen any of 'em?" It wasn't lost on him that Henderson omitted his last name.

"I can't say that I have," Henderson replied.

"The innkeeper mentioned there was somebody stayin' with yew," the ranger brought up.

Henderson shook his head then replied, "Naw it's just me."

Ranger Herold had a dubious expression. "Are yew sure?"

"I'm pretty sure," Henderson answered whose tone was irritated. He started to close the door while saying, "Excuse me."

George Herold's hand shot out and stopped the closing door. "Then yew won't mind me checkin' out yew room?"

"I actually do cuz...." Henderson's words dropped off when he found a gun muzzle near his face.

Ranger Baylor made herself known by stepping around the door. She kept her revolver in the man's face then quietly asked, "Yew don't mind us comin' in now do yew, Mr. Murphy?" She was pleased when the man's face blanched. She then pulled back the hammer and politely asked, "Now may we come in, Mr. Murphy?"

Henderson Murphy released the door and stepped back with his hands coming up.

"Watch him, George," Ranger Baylor coolly ordered.

Ranger Herold removed his gun and kept it aimed at the older man as he entered the small room.

Raleigh followed in next and her eyes went directly to the closed bathroom door. She smirked and neared the door with her revolver at the ready. "Com'on out, Jim before yew father get's a wound... or two."

The bathroom door slowly opened up and out came Jim Murphy, who was shirtless and shoeless but at least had his pants on for some decency.

The father glowered at his son's incompetence. "I told yew ta go out thuh window, yew idiot."

Raleigh chuckled at the father's words, and she took a step closer to the gang member. "Dumb as a box of rocks," the ranger mentioned who kept her revolver leveled with the man's face. "Yew miss me, Jim?"

Jim Murphy glared at the Texas Ranger. "Go ta Hell, yew bitch."

Raleigh didn't take kindly to the words. She slammed the large man against the wall near the doorframe of the bathroom. She shoved her muzzle into the man's neck and leaned her face closer into his. "Listen real good, Jim cuz I only say this once." She pressed the muzzle harder against the man's throat, which caused him to choke. "I hear yew father is wanted for robbin' thuh U.S. Mail so we got no problem runnin' him into thuh sheriff." She tilted her head and her eyes darkened in mischief. "Maybe though yew father can get outta jail sooner if yew agree ta help us."

Jim coughed between the choking but he rasped, "With what?"

Raleigh chuckled and with her free hand she patted the man's dirty cheek. "I know yew gotta be smarter than yew look. Com'on now."

The gang member growled some then hotly spoke again. "I ain't turnin' thuh gang in and yew can forget it."

Ranger Baylor slowly arched an eyebrow, and she gruffly asked "Is that yew final answer?" She waited a beat then her voice took on amusement. "I'm thinkin' yew and yew father will have a long time ta think about yew mistaken choice while in jail." Raleigh slyly grinned. "Yew gonna even miss out on thuh reward that's on Sam Bass's head. It's probably worth more than what he's gonna give yew."

Jim's dark eyes flickered over to his father, who was being watched by the other ranger. He swallowed then rasped, "What yew want me ta do?"

Ranger Baylor's smug expression grew darker, and she leaned in closer. Her sensual voice purred out, "Yew gonna betray yew own gang, Mr. Murphy." And that's when she knew she had her winning, wild joker in the Sam Bass War.

**The End**