

Cowboy Dreams by Becky Freeman

Authors note: This is part of a larger story I'm working on. The back story is a girl got pregnant after high school and left home early to go to college never telling anyone. She lost the baby. She goes home 10 years later as part of a job assignment. When her work is complete, she returns to her life in LA only to return back home when tragedy strikes.

Bill and I build a perfect life together. I carefully plan trips home to Wyoming. Most of the time Mom and Dad come to visit us. It makes it easier to keep Tim from finding out about Emma. I'm not necessarily hiding Emma from him. I just didn't want to make Bill face the possibility of losing Emma as a daughter.

Two weeks after Emma turns 5, Bill is in a terrible car accident. He is hit head on by a drunk driver. He died on impact so people tell me I should be thankful that he didn't suffer. Funny, it doesn't make me feel better. Mom and Dad fly down to spend time with Emma and I.

I cry so much. Emma knows she will never see her Dad again, but she isn't old enough to understand everything. Mom asks if I would consider coming and staying with them for a while. It is summer so Mom says it would be the perfect time to take an extended vacation. I think about it and after a month of begging, I finally agree. I take a leave of absence from work and arrange for people to take care of the horses and the house.

We fly to Cheyenne and rent a car. Emma sleeps the two-hour drive to Mom and Dad's. We get to the ranch earlier than I planned. Emma doesn't wake up when we get there so I just carry her to bed. Mom gives me a hug and tells me to go lie down with Emma. I fall asleep and sleep forever. I haven't been sleeping well at home. Mom tells me I slept for almost 24 hours when I finally wake up.

"Why didn't you wake me sooner? I should have been up taking care of Emma." I say to Mom.

"Dad and I took care of her. She's been in here checking on you. She is concerned about you." Mom replies.

"I know. That's why I shouldn't have slept so long."

"No honey. She insisted that we let you sleep." My daughter is always the kind and considerate one. I love her so much. "Dad and I thought maybe you would like to take Emma for a ride. She packed you guys a picnic."

"Mom, that sounds great. I will go saddle up Snickers."

"No need honey, Tim saddled him and he's tied to the deck."

"Tim." Has he seen Emma? Will he know that she is really his daughter? Am I going to have to explain all of this at a time I just lost my husband? The man who loved me deeply and stood behind me through everything? It's just too much to try to process right now.

"He's working in the hay fields today honey. I don't think you will run into him."

"Thanks Mom." We take Emma out to the deck. I tuck our food in the saddle bags and hop on Snickers. Mom hands Emma up to me.

"Mom, I want my own horse to ride." Emma demands.

“Sweetheart, Grandma and Grandpa don’t have a horse that is tame enough for you to ride by yourself. You will just have to ride with me.”

This seems to satisfy her for now. She settles down in front of me. We take a long ride across the north pasture. Emma is so excited and says how beautiful she thinks it all is. We stop by a tree at the top of a hill to eat our lunch. I can tell Emma is having so much fun. I lean against the tree and watch her pick wildflowers. She chases a rabbit around for a while. The next thing I know she is crawling in my lap.

“Mommy, I am sorry you are so sad. Daddy is still with us. From here, I feel like if I just step up on my tiptoes I can reach him in heaven.” Emma says in her sweet little voice.

“Oh sweetie, thank you for the reminder. He loved you so much.” I say as my voice cracks.

“I know Mommy. He loved you too.”

“I was up here with your Dad once. I brought him to this very meadow.”

I watch as the clouds part and a sun beam shines down on us. Bill is with us and he is showing us now.

“See Mommy! He is shining down on us.” We just sit and watch the clouds together.

“I love you Emma. We better head for home.”

I climb back on Snickers and lean over to lift up Emma. When she is settled, we head for home. We take the ride back home nice and slow. The sun seems to be following us and I don’t want the moment to end.

I take Emma back to the house. Mom steps outside when she sees us ride up. “I was beginning to think you guys weren’t coming back. Did you have a good time princess?” Mom says to Emma.

“Yes I did. I brought you flowers.” She hands the flowers to Mom. “Daddy was also with us in the meadow. I think it made Mommy happier.”

Mom looks at me to see how I am handling that. I just nod my head. “Why don’t we go inside and put those in water while your Mom takes care of Snickers. You can tell me all about Daddy.”

I wait until they are inside before I turn Snickers towards the barrel racing arena. Snickers runs the barrels once. Then I just let him run circles around the arena. When I finally pull him up to stop, I just lean down and wrap my arms around his neck. I’m not sure how long I stay that way. But, finally I feel Snickers shift his weight underneath me. I hop off and walk him back to the barn.

I spend time brushing Snickers down really well. We had a long ride today. I wrap my arms around him once more and feel him nuzzling my neck. I lead him back in his stall and shut the gate. I just stand there and watch him eat his grain. How will I ever get out of this funk? Can my life go on without Bill? I can’t stay in LA. Bill will be everywhere I look. I can’t move home. Tim is too much a part of life here. I’m not saying I want to go back to him, I’m just saying there are too many memories.

As I turn to leave the barn, I run into Tim. I just look at him, not sure what to say. He just holds out his arms and I walk into them. I break down and cry. He holds me for a long time. Dad finds me in Tim’s arms crying.

“Jack, I’m not sure what to do for her?” Tim says.

“Neither am I Tim.” Dad takes me and leads me back to the house. “Emma is already in bed honey. Would you like a drink with me?”

“How big of a bottle do you have Dad?” He laughs, but I can tell he doesn’t really think it’s funny.

Bio

Becky is a mother of four and lives in a small Nebraska town. She has lived in Nebraska all of her life, only moving from the western side to the eastern side. She has a Bachelor’s Degree in Veterinary Science with a minor in Biology and a Master’s Degree in Educational Administration. Becky’s husband is a 20+ year member of the Nebraska Air National Guard and has been deployed multiple times over those years. When Becky isn’t busy with her children’s activities or at work, she enjoys writing, old cars, and spending time with family.