



## Ruby

by Lauraine Snelling

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*My dearest daughters,*

*I must beg your forgiveness for the long time between letters. I am sure you must have thought I passed on from this world, but life here in the west has been a myriad of experiences and not all of them good. I attempted gold mining with some small success and finally parlayed that into something that I can pass on to you, my two treasures. While I had hoped to be able to send for you before now, the sad news is that I am dying. We now have train service here to Medora so I have enclosed two tickets for the two of you to come here to claim your inheritance. God willing, if you come quickly, I will have a chance to see your sweet faces before I pass on into the next life where I know your mother is waiting for me, I hope with open arms. I know I have no right to ask this, but please come soon to Dove House in Little Missouri, which is near the military cantonment, directly across the river from Medora.*

*Your father, who has always loved you,  
Per Torvald.*

Ruby read the letter again, fighting the tears that blurred the spidery script. Why did he wait so long? *God, what am I going to do?* She closed her eyes, willing an answer to scream down from the ceiling or burst through the panes of the mullioned windows. She strained to hear, willing sound to ring in her ears.

Nothing. She could hear Bernie jabbering to Nanny as she bathed him. Water was running in the girls' bathroom. A giggle came from Alicia's room. Most likely Opal was helping them dress. But nothing sounded that could be construed as an answer to her plea.

She opened her eyes to see the two train tickets standing at attention in her hand. Had they been soldiers they would have saluted.

Ruby sucked in a breath that flew to her extremities and brought a warmth to her face that she knew to be a blush. *Lord, all I ask is that you get us there to see him before he dies.*

\* \* \*

The family gathered in the parlor in the morning to say goodbye. The girls were crying and that set Bernie to howling. Jason maintained the sober mien of his father, his eyes shimmering with tears he refused to shed.

Mr. Klaus hauled their trunk and boxes out to the carriage while everyone hugged Ruby or shook her hand. Mrs. Fleish handed her a sealed envelope, along with a wrapped box.

"One is your pay and the other something to remember us by." She dabbed at her nose with her handkerchief, at the same time patting Ruby's shoulder with her other hand. Cook handed her a basket and gave Opal a small box.

"For on the train. I hear food is terrible costly."

"We better be going, Miss Ruby." Klaus, hat in hand, stood in the doorway.

"Thank you all. We'll write and give you an address." Ruby put a hand on Opal's shoulder and nudged her toward the door before the tears she was fighting back burst forth.

"God bless," Mrs. Brandon, her hands on her daughter's shoulders, called one last time.

"Ja, God bless." Ruby let Mr. Klaus help her into the carriage to settle next to her sobbing sister.

"Hush now. All will be well." She said the words as much for herself as for Opal. Please God, all will be well.

Ruby fought the tears once more. How could they, who were so blessed to be with this family, possibly leave for such an uncertain future? But then again, how could they not?

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