

## The Grulla Paint

Jesse McBride rode over the golden grass in silence, at one with his horse, the reins loose in his hand. The brim of his cowboy hat covered his large dark brown eyes, shading them from the rosy rays of the sun as it greeted the world.

On reaching the top of a butte, he reined his horse in and scanned the vista before him. His keen eyes took in every inch. He was looking for something, watching for something. Then he saw it: the wild herd. His gloved hand made its way to the lariat hanging from his saddle and slowly began working it free. When it was loose and resting on his thigh, he nudged his horse and they quietly made their way downward.

As they got closer, adrenaline began to pump in Jesse's veins. His eyes ran over each of the horses before resting on one particular animal. Their leader. A grulla paint stallion. The two stared at each other for a split second before the stallion turned sharply and began to run.

"Heya!" Jesse kicked his horse into a gallop and began the long awaited chase, shaking out his lariat as he did so. They galloped across the wide expanse, the only two under the pink tinged sky. The blood pounded in Jesse's head as he focused on the prize before him. The prize that was steadily getting closer.

The gray gelding under him never broke into a sweat, his long legs eating the ground with massive strides. Jesse choked back a whoop as he expertly swung the rope and tossed it. The stallion screamed as the rope slipped over his neck, the shrill sound shattering against the craggy rocks close by. Jesse swiftly wrapped the rope around his saddle horn and leaned back. The gray dug in his heels, wrenching the stallion around to face them.

The stallion reared, enraged. He fought against the restraining rope. Slowly, inch by inch, Jesse dismounted. He lightly took hold of the rope and carefully began making his way toward the fighting horse. The stallion's eyes rolled as he shrieked threats at the offending man who dared contain him.

Jesse stared the horse in the eye as he made his way up the rope. His body spoke dominance, the lithe muscular frame saying volumes. He wasn't afraid. He was the leader now. The stallion reared, his front hooves flaying. Jesse paused momentarily, never letting down his dominant pose. The horse stood on four feet, his head bobbing, tossing his thick black forelock back and forth .

"You're going to need me to get that rope off," Jesse said, low and persuasive, "You want your freedom back; you're going to have to depend on me." The stallion snorted then became perfectly still, his nostrils flaring.

The dry summer grass crackled under Jesse's boots as he walked gradually to the

horse. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he got closer. Within an arm's length, he reached out to touch the horse. The stallion quivered, his breath came in laborious gasps as Jesse's hand rested lightly on his neck. Then he went wild, neighing shrilly and jumping sideways. "Whoa, boy. Whoa," Jesse followed him, his hand never leaving the damp neck. The stallion snorted, his whole body quivering once before becoming motionless. Jesse ran his hands lightly over the slate covered hide, his eyes drinking in the horse as he did. Even under the dust and burs, the stallion was a magnificent animal. His smoky colored hide, broken here and there by white patches, was stretched taut over hard muscle; solidly built and made to turn on a dime.

"You're quite the horse," Jesse murmured. His eyes then dropped to the rope and he carefully began working it loose. In the blink of an eye, he had it over the stallion's ears. He jumped back as the stallion bolted forward and galloped away, soon disappearing in the distance. Jesse bowed his head, turned and started for his horse, coiling his rope as he did so.

The sound of a horse's snort made him look up to see his dad watching him from atop his tall bay, a slightly bemused expression on his rugged face. Jesse lowered his eyes back to the rope and finished coiling it before tying it to his saddle and mounting. His dad watched him as he settled into the saddle then asked calmly, "What was that about?"

Jesse shrugged, "To prove that I could."

"Hmm," his dad said noncommittally as he straightened and turned his horse around, "we got chores to do."

"Be right there," Jesse watched his dad lope off before he looked back toward where the stallion had disappeared. A slow smile crossed his face and he turned his horse, satisfied.