

One Smart Cowboy

By

Misty Malone

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Chapter One

Cheyenne sat on her old bed, looking around her old room. She still couldn't believe she was back here, in this same room she never cared for, in the same house she cared for even less, on the same ranch she never liked at all. When she'd moved away four years ago to go to college in Paris she'd said good riddance to her room, and the house, and especially the ranch.

The ranch in Wyoming had been in her father's family since his great-grandfather settled on a portion of it as a homesteader. The ranch had grown over the generations, as neighboring lands were bought and added to the original ranch, but nothing had ever been sold off. His family had been big on ranching, and her father followed in their footsteps. Her brother, Clay, felt the same way and would be taking it over some day. Her father loved the ranch, and tried relentlessly during her last couple years in high school to find something she liked about it, as well, but to no avail. Cheyenne was convinced she just wasn't meant to live on a ranch.

Her mother had been the same way. In fact, Cheyenne was pretty sure the ranch is what had eventually come between her mother and father. In any event, as soon as she and Clay, who was two years her senior, were both out of high school, her parents divorced. Her mother left to live in Paris with her sister, and Cheyenne had quickly accepted the offer to accompany her. She didn't really care much for her Aunt Mary, but since she spent most of her time away at college, it wasn't a problem, except during summer break.

During the summer she tried to stay to herself and ignore her aunt as much as possible. Aunt Mary was too much of a diva, and very self-centered. It bothered Cheyenne that her own mother was becoming more and more like her, but she didn't really see it as her problem. Her mother had met a man and was spending most of her time with him, so Cheyenne didn't see much of her anyway. She gladly kept Cheyenne in spending money, thinking that was just as good as spending time with her daughter.

With money in her pocket, Cheyenne spent more and more time with her friends and less and less time at home, which was fine with her. She was barely passing her college classes, but since no one paid enough attention to realize it, that wasn't a problem to Cheyenne, either.

However, everything changed suddenly when she graduated. Her mother immediately got married and announced she and her new husband were going to take his yacht traveling around the world. She looked at her daughter and said, "Now that you've graduated you're free to do whatever you want, dear."

Cheyenne was shocked. “But what will I do?”

Her Aunt Mary said, “Well, I would assume you’d get a job. Now that your mother’s moving out, I’m selling my house and moving to Venice. My late husband had a rather small vacation home there that I always loved. It’s just the perfect size for me. I’m tired of taking care of such a large home, and for just me, I don’t need nearly this much house. It’s just a headache to maintain.”

“When are you leaving?”

“I’m signing the papers to sell this house tomorrow, and then I’ll have thirty days to move.”

“But what about me?” Cheyenne was appalled. Her mother and aunt were both looking out only for themselves. Where did that leave her?

Her mother looked at her as if seeing her for the first time. “Well, dear, maybe you can get a job and find your own place.”

Cheyenne looked at her mother in disbelief. “Not in thirty days, I can’t!”

“Well, then maybe you should speak with your father, dear. I’m sure he’d welcome you back to Wyoming.”

“But you know I don’t like the ranch!”

“Well, dear, you have a degree now. Maybe you can go see him, and stay long enough to get a job and find a more suitable place.”

With that, she and her husband left, leaving Cheyenne with her Aunt Mary, who didn’t hide her feelings. “Why don’t you make yourself useful for once and help me pack.”

Cheyenne had fled to her room and called her father. Now here she was, two weeks later, in her old bedroom. Thinking back through the whole scenario, she realized just how selfish and self-centered her mom was. She admitted to herself that she’d always known it, she had just ignored it so she could move to Paris and away from this awful ranch. But now that selfishness was hard to ignore. Her mother had deserted her, plain and simple, in favor of her new husband.

What was worse, she had no idea what kind of job she could find. Her father had indeed welcomed her home, but she sure didn’t want this to be a permanent move. The ranch was still full of stinky cows and smelly horses and big, strong, sweaty cowboys that Dad called his ranch hands. Somehow, the only thing that looked any different to her was a couple of the cowboys who appeared to be bigger and better looking than the ones who used to work on the ranch. She’d have to check them out over the next few days, but other than them, nothing seemed too interesting. It was good to see her dad and brother, Clay, again, but she couldn’t say she’d missed anything else.

Well, she’d have to give some serious thought to what to do. She did have her degree, but it was pretty worthless. Going to college in Paris, it was pretty easy to get a degree in English, so that’s what

she did. About the only thing she could do with that over here, though, was teach, and that was low on her list of careers she might consider. Plus, she'd have to go back and get her teaching certificate before she could even do that.

She sighed as she thought of her dire situation. Well, there was nothing she could do about it now, so she unpacked and settled in a bit. Looking around, she decided she'd have to ask her dad if it was all right if she redid her room. She wasn't in high school anymore, and she hadn't cared for it much when she was. Her mother had redone her room, and their tastes weren't exactly the same.

Having decided that would help, she went downstairs to see what the cook was making for dinner and when they would eat. The food on the plane was terrible, and she was starving.

Dinner at the Williams' table that night, or supper, as she was told it was referred to on a ranch, included Cheyenne, her brother Clay, and her father, Sam, along with their ranch foreman, Ty Tomlinson. She was surprised to find out that he usually ate meals with the family, as they often spoke of the ranch and things that needed done. When she and her mother lived on the ranch, meals were family only. This was different, but glancing over at him, she couldn't really say it upset her.

Her first impression of Ty was quite favorable. He was a large man, an inch or two taller even than her brother, who at an inch over six feet always seemed to be the tallest man around. Ty was obviously very muscular and in great shape, but most ranch hands were. Ranching was apparently hard work, judging by how tired and sweaty her dad and brother always seemed to be in the evening. Why anyone would want to do something that required that much hard physical labor, not to mention the awful smells, was beyond her. But some men seemed to go for this sort of thing.

Ty didn't strike her quite the same as most ranch hands, though. He was quite the gentleman, extremely mannerly, and had obviously showered before coming in to eat. He had a very pleasant aftershave on, not that awful cattle smell most cowboys seemed to carry with them. He had dark blond hair with lots of curl, which combined with his deep blue eyes and chiseled face, made for one sexy looking cowboy. She found herself thinking if they'd met anywhere else and he was anything other than a cowboy she'd be doing whatever it took to get his attention. But he was a cowboy, and that was all it took to extinguish those flames before they ever got started.

During dinner, or rather, supper, Sam pulled her into the conversation. "So, Cheyenne, any idea what kind of job you're going to be looking for?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Not really."

Clay tried drawing her in, as well. "What kind of job were you thinking of when you majored in

English; teaching of some kind?”

“Oh, hell, no.”

To her surprise, three male heads jerked up, looking at her. Her father shook his head. “Cheyenne, watch your language. You know we don’t talk like that here.”

Cheyenne had forgotten how funny he was about language. He didn’t allow any swearing at all, even though in her opinion a few small words here and there seemed more like an emphasis of what she was saying rather than swearing. She’d have to remember that while she was here. Noting all three men were still watching her, she quietly said, “Sorry.” They immediately all went back to eating. What was that all about?

Clay acted as if nothing had happened. “If you weren’t planning on teaching, what were you planning to do with a degree in English?”

“I don’t know.”

Again, all three heads looked up at her. She looked from one to the next, confused. “What? Do I have something on my face?” She swiped at her mouth with her napkin.

Ty studied her a few moments before returning to his *supper*. Sam persisted with the questioning. “Honey, are you saying you majored in English without having any plans for the future, and what kind of job you may want?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Yeah, I guess so.”

Clay shook his head and frowned. “Then why did you major in English? That isn’t going to get you any kind of job.”

San turned to his son. “Now, son, she must have had some reason for majoring in English. Give her a chance to explain.” He turned back to face her again. “What made you choose that as a major?”

No one had ever questioned her on her major before. As a matter of fact, she didn’t think her mother or Aunt Mary either one even knew what she’d majored in. She suddenly felt rather foolish, even ashamed. “Being from here, a major in English was pretty easy.”

Once again, those three male heads were all looking at her. None looked impressed. Ty had the decency to get back to his meal, but Clay and Sam continued to look at her. Both were frowning. Clay looked appalled. “Sis, is that really the only reason you majored in English, because it was easy?”

When she didn’t answer, Sam seemed to make an effort to calm down before speaking. “Did your mother know what you majored in and why?”

“Not that I know of.”

Sam looked up at the ceiling, obviously trying to control his temper. “Just as I thought. She didn’t have a clue what you got a degree in, did she?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Honey, I’m sorry. I should have never let you go over there with her. But now that you’re back here, you need to do some thinking.”

“About what?”

“You need to decide what you want to do with your life. If you need to go back to school and get another degree, we can talk about that. As long as you can convince me you’re serious about a certain career, I’ll pay for you to go back. But I’m not going to pay for you to go back to school just for fun, or to get out of working. Your mother may approve of that, but I don’t. I think it’s important that everyone pulls their weight; no one gets a free ride in life.”

“But Mom never worked.”

“She would have been happier if she would have,” he said half to himself. “But as it is, she ran the house and ordered the supplies we needed at the ranch.”

“She ran the house? We had a housekeeper and a cook.”

Sam sighed. This had always been a bone of contention between the two of them. “I know. But she still planned the meals and made sure everything got done in the house that needed done. And I gave her a list of things we needed on the ranch and she took care of ordering them, along with answering the phone and handling all the correspondence for me.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” Cheyenne said.

Sam looked at his plate as he thought that was probably because she did very, very little of it. But Cheyenne didn’t need to know that right now. He collected his thoughts, and looked back up at her. “Why don’t you take a couple days to think, and then we’ll talk. If you find a job you want to apply for, that’s fine. If you want to go back to school, we’ll discuss it. If you haven’t come up with anything, we’ll talk about it more, okay?”

“Okay,” she answered slowly. This wasn’t sounding good for her. She’d planned on coming home and just hanging out until she met a Prince Charming who would whisk her away to a city to live in his grand house. She’d actually envisioned herself running a house, but certainly not on a ranch. But apparently she was going to have to come up with some way of buying time until she met her prince.

She was pulled out of her thoughts and back to the present when Ty joined in the conversation. “So, Cheyenne, what are you interested in?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you have any hobbies, any interests, any field you think you may be interested in exploring a career in?”

“Not really. I like to shop or read by the pool.”

He smiled a bit as he offered a suggestion. "Maybe you can think by the pool instead of read."

"Yeah, maybe."

That put a picture in Ty's mind he wouldn't quickly forget, he was sure. Cheyenne was a beautiful woman, and the picture he had in his mind was worthy of a snapshot. He could picture her lying on a lounge chair by the pool in a sexy little bikini, taking in the sun. She was a rather small, petite little lady, close to a foot shorter than himself, but with wonderful curves everywhere there should be curves. She wasn't a stick figure so many ladies today seemed to strive for. She was a refreshing change. Her eyes were a gorgeous green, and with her reddish-blond hair Ty would be willing to bet she couldn't stay out in the sun long without burning that gorgeous light-complexioned, rather pale skin of hers, but he could sure picture her lying there for a bit, anyway.

Ty shook his head to get his wandering mind back to the present. Supper was over. She was the boss's daughter and his friend, Clay's sister. She was not a woman to even be considering like that. He reluctantly did what he knew he should. "Cheyenne, it was nice to meet you. Welcome back to the ranch." He grabbed his hat off the hook by the door and said good-night to everyone in general, and left.

Thinking about the pretty little lady later that evening he wondered what Cheyenne and Clay's mother looks like. He could definitely see the family resemblance, but there were obvious differences, as well. Sam was a big man, like Clay, but Cheyenne was a much smaller person. Both men were muscular, which comes with ranching, but she had a much more fragile appearance. Sam's hair was red, while Clay's was blond, so her reddish-blond hair wasn't surprising. But the one big difference he'd noticed wasn't in their looks, but their demeanor.

Sam and Clay were both friendly and outgoing, quick to smile. Cheyenne seemed more introverted, not nearly as quick to smile, and she seemed somehow sad. Maybe that was just the way she was. He was sure he'd get to know her better with time. If she was sad about something, maybe living on the ranch, with good fresh air and open spaces would help. He hoped so.

A couple days later Cheyenne looked out the window and saw several of the cowboys that worked for them out in some kind of arena, playing with some horses. It looked like they were having a rodeo, letting them buck and kick, while they were trying to stay on. Maybe they were having a contest or something, to see who can stay on the longest. Several were getting thrown off, and she chuckled, watching them land on their butt. She always thought cowboys must be pretty stupid to be a cowboy in the first place, but having a contest like this just proved it.

She walked outside so she could watch them better. If nothing else, this was at least entertaining.

She noticed several of the cowboys looking over at her. Some of them even waved. A couple looked like they were trying to flirt with her. As if! But hey, what the heck. This could be fun. She gave them a sweet smile and waved back. Ty was one of them out in the pen, and he gave her a look that was anything but flirting, but he didn't say anything. That seemed odd. He'd seemed friendly enough every evening at dinner. Or supper. She smiled and waved at a couple more, then got bored and went back in the house to read.

At supper that evening her father started the conversation. "So, Cheyenne, what did you do today?"

"Oh, nothing much." Seeing the look on her father's face, she added a little more. "Mostly just did some more thinking."

Ty normally didn't say much when they were talking about her, but he surprised her this evening. "You didn't look like you were doing much thinking this afternoon when you were out watching us break horses." She noticed the frown on his face and was about to ask him if he had a problem with her watching, but her father was talking again, so she turned to him.

"Have you come up with anything yet?"

"No. I just don't know what I want to do."

Clay tried to help, as well. "Sis, I heard there's going to be a big job fair in town next week. Maybe you should go check it out. You might find a job that sparks your interest. You could apply for it right then."

She looked at him like he was crazy. "You mean go to a public place where lots of people who can't find a job gather to say, look at me, I'm a pathetic loser?"

Sam looked up at her with a frown. "Cheyenne, are you saying you're too good to go to a job fair?"

"Well, yeah."

"Cheyenne!"

"What? Dad, we're not poor and destitute."

"We would be if your brother and I weren't out there working hard every day."

She looked away and rolled her eyes. She knew Clay and Ty saw her do it, but luckily, they didn't say anything. Her father cleared his throat. "Cheyenne, you and I will discuss this after supper, in my office." Cheyenne rolled her eyes again, and Clay gave her a serious frown.

Luckily, her father changed the subject and they finished their meal without further talk of her or a job.

After supper Clay came to her rescue. “Dad, can I talk to you a minute?”

Cheyenne took this opportunity and quickly slipped off to her room, anxious to get away.

Sam stopped and looked at his son. “Before I talk to your sister?”

“Yes. Actually, it’s about that talk you’re going to have with her.”

“I’m not going to do anything but talk to your sister, son. You don’t have to worry.”

“Actually, that makes me worry more, Dad.”

“What do you mean?”

“Dad, she has no intention of getting a job.”

“Did she tell you that?”

“She didn’t have to.” Clay sighed. “Dad, she hasn’t been doing any thinking about her future. She majored in English because it was the easiest thing for her to major in. The other day a paper fell out of her pocket as she was going outside. I picked it up to see if it was anything important, and it was her grades in college. Dad, she barely passed her classes, barely got her degree.”

“Are you sure? She always got good grades in school.”

“Because you made her do her work. Mom never cared. So when she went to Paris, no one cared if she got good grades or not. She took the easiest classes and did just what she had to.”

Sam gave his son a warning look. “Clay, I don’t like what you’re saying here. I didn’t raise you two to be lazy.”

“I know, and she wasn’t lazy when she was living here. But she’s changed, Dad.”

“How?”

“She’s become a little princess. She flirts with the hands, but won’t go out with any of them, or even talk to them. And you heard what she said about going to a job fair.”

“Yes, I did. What’s gotten into her?”

“Dad, think back. She used to start acting like this in high school, all high and mighty, better than everyone else, until you’d have a discussion with her. Remember?”

Thinking back, her father frowned. “Her mother was starting to have an influence on her. It used to take a good session over my knee to get her calmed back down for a while again.”

“I know.” Clay hesitated a few moments before continuing. “Dad, I love Mom and all, but I have to say that I think she was a bad influence on Cheyenne the last several years. I don’t mean to be disrespectful to you or try to tell you what you should do by any means, but Cheyenne and I had a pretty good talk the day after she got back, and I think you need to know about it.”

Sam's eyebrows raised. "If you think it's that important, I do want to know about it. Go ahead, son."

"I asked her how she liked living in Paris, and it seemed to me she was pretty much on her own. She said Mom spent all her time with this guy she married. She even told me Mom didn't seem to care much about anyone but herself, and Aunt Mary was a real diva."

Her dad's eyebrows raised. "Maybe I need to have a serious talk with her."

"Dad, I think you need to have more than a talk with her. Talking never did anything when she was younger."

"But certainly you can't be suggesting I spank her now?"

"That's exactly what I'm suggesting, Dad."

"But she's twenty-three years old."

"And she's acting like a spoiled teenager again."

Sam thought a bit. "I'm going to talk to her. I'll let her know what I expect."

"And if it doesn't do any good?"

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

"Okay. I understand that she's older and hopefully she'll listen to you now. I'm concerned about the influence Mom has had on her these past few years, though, especially hearing her attitude and the things she said the other day when we talked, and today when I suggested the job fair. It seems to me she was starting to become a princess when she left, and she just expanded on that while she was gone. I think you needed to hear that before you have your talk with her. If your talk doesn't work, that gives you a little more to think about."

"Okay, I'll think about it. Hopefully my talk with her will solve the problem."

"I hope so, but don't bet on it."

Ten minutes later Sam had summoned his daughter back downstairs and to his office, and they were having a heart to heart talk. He told her he was disappointed in her if she felt she was better than other people who were out looking for work, while she was content to sit at home and let others support her. He explained that nothing in life was free, and tried to explain the pride you feel when you earn what you have, as opposed to having it handed to you.

After thinking a bit, she tried to smooth things over quickly and easily. "But, Dad, I'm not opposed to getting a job and earning some money. I just don't know what I want to do yet."

"And you haven't been giving it much thought, either, have you?"

"Of course I have."

"Have you really? Be honest, honey. Can you look me in the eyes and tell me you've been giving

this some real serious thought?”

She squared her shoulders and looked into her father’s eyes, but couldn’t do it. Her shoulders slumped and she made a quiet admission. “I guess not.”

“That’s what I thought. So to help you decide, I have an idea. Our cook is retiring to go live with her recently widowed sister. I know you can cook. In fact, you’re very good at it. So until you find a job or decide what you want to do and start pursuing it, you can cook for us.”

“Seriously? You want me to be a cook?”

Frowning, Sam said, “Yes, I do. If you don’t like cooking maybe it will be the incentive you need to come up with something else you’d rather do.”

“But, Dad—”

“Cheyenne, I don’t care for this attitude I’ve seen lately from you, and I’m warning you now it better stop. When you were in high school, you used to get all worked up like this and I’d have to take you over my knee to get you calmed back down. It worked then, and it’ll work again if you don’t change your attitude on your own.”

“Dad!”

“You heard me, Cheyenne.” He softened his tone a bit. “Honey, I love you. I always have, and I hope you know that. I was thrilled that you decided to come back home. But you’re acting like a princess who’s too good to lift a finger to help around here, and that’s going to change. I suggest you work with the cook this week to make sure you know where everything is and when the meals will need to be done so that next week when she’s gone, you’ll be ready to take over.”

He got up and left, leaving her speechless.

It took her several minutes to digest everything he’d said. She was going to have to cook meals for them, and that didn’t sit well with her. That would mean getting up early to have breakfast ready, which meant no more late nights.

He’d also threatened her with a spanking! She was furious. How dare he even threaten such a thing, at her age. Surely it was just a scare tactic, but he had no right to even threaten her with such a thing. The more she thought about that, the angrier she got.

She briefly thought of his comment that he was disappointed in her. When she was living here growing up he would occasionally tell her that, and it always bothered her. The only times he was disappointed in her was when she didn’t try her hardest, and she deserved to feel bad. But this time was different. If he didn’t like her attitude, that was tough. She didn’t particularly care for his right now, either, and she certainly didn’t like her mother’s attitude.

The more she thought about what he said, the more upset she became. She went to bed, but didn’t

sleep well. She had to come up with a plan to get off this ranch.

The next morning when Sam, Clay and Ty entered the dining room for breakfast, Sam looked all around the area.

“Looking for something?” Bella, the cook, asked.

“Has Cheyenne been down yet today?”

Bella looked at him oddly before shaking her head. “No. Were you expecting her to be down early? Should I check on her?”

“No, no, don’t bother, I’m sure she’s fine,” he assured her. “But she’s going to start cooking for us when you leave, so she’ll probably want to work with you this week to learn the ropes.”

Bella’s eyes grew as she looked at Sam. “She’s going to be cooking?” Ty had to hide a chuckle, saw a little grin on Clay’s face, and wasn’t surprised to see that Bella was shocked at the news, as well.

Sam assured her, “Yes, for a little while at least.” Seeing the shocked looks on everybody’s face, he said, “She’s actually a good cook.” As an afterthought he added, “When she wants to be.”

Clay caught his dad’s eyes. “Apparently she doesn’t want to be right now.”

Sam nodded. “Maybe I’ll have to talk to her again at lunch. I thought she understood what I said.”

At lunch Bella was again serving the food herself. Sam again came in and looked around. “Where’s Cheyenne? She’s not helping you?”

Bella stuttered and stammered a bit before shaking her head. “She said she had to go to town.”

Sam frowned and asked, “Did she say what for?”

“No. I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault, Bella,” Sam assured her. “I’ll talk to her at supper tonight.”

Clay looked at his dad before addressing Bella. “Did she say when she’d be home?”

She shook her head again. “No.”

Ty didn’t know what was going on, but he noticed the looks that went between Sam and Clay. Things could get interesting around here.

The group assembled that evening for supper, but again, no Cheyenne. Ty listened to the questions and Bella’s answers, very similar to those given at lunch, and noted the looks going back and forth between father and son. He still wasn’t sure what was going on, but he was sure the little prima donna was digging herself into some kind of hole.

After supper Ty left to go back to his foreman’s cabin, and Clay decided it was time for a discussion with his dad. “So where do you suppose she is?”

Sam sighed. “I have no idea.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“I’m going to talk to her again and see what’s going on, see what she has to say.”

“Dad, you know what I think you ought to do.”

“Yeah, I know. You made that clear. Let me talk to her and see what happens.”

While they were talking, someone knocked at the front door. “I’ll see who it is,” Clay said, as he headed in that direction.

Sam was still thinking about his daughter when Clay returned with his girlfriend, Lynelle. Sam stood to address her. “Lynelle, hello.”

“Hi, Mr. Williams.”

“Have you had supper? We just finished, but there’s plenty left. I’m sure we could scrounge up a plate for you.”

“No, I ate already, but thank you. You and Clay are both so sweet. He asked me the same thing.”

Sam smiled as he looked at his son. “Glad to hear he’s remembering his manners. Well, I’ll let you two visit a bit. I’ve got work to get to in my office.” He started to leave, but turned to his son. “Clay, if your sister comes in would you tell her I’d like to see her in my office, please?”

“Sure, Dad.”

Sam walked back to his office, thinking about his son and Lynelle. Clay certainly had dated enough girls in the past, but it was obvious to Sam that Lynelle was different. Clay seemed to be enamored with this girl, and Sam could see why. She was a pretty thing. Her long blonde hair and big blue eyes would get about any man’s attention. She was a bit on the thin side, but if she lived on the ranch, Sam was sure they could put a little meat on her bones. No, his son had found him a pretty little thing, all right.

The one thing that worried Sam about Lynelle, though, was her temper. It worried him because he knew Clay didn’t like it any more than he did. His son had talked to her about it, and the fact that when she lost her temper she seemed to lose control of her mouth, as well. The words that came out of that pretty little lady’s mouth when she was upset were shocking. Sam knew Clay was going to have to get those under control for them to have a future.

And Sam hoped they would have a future. He wanted both of his kids to meet that special person and settle down, hopefully on the ranch. Though he had to admit that was doubtful in Cheyenne’s case. She had never been a big fan of living on the ranch. Thinking back to Clay and Lynelle for a minute, though, those two could some day give Sam some nice looking blond-haired grandkids, if Clay could just calm her temper down. He wished his son luck.