
THE CAMPING COWGIRL

Western Camping, Book One

MISTY MALONE



Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

©2019
All rights reserved.

No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The trademark Blushing Books is pending in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Misty Malone
The Camping Cowgirl

EBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-170-5

v1

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Marci Andrews cringed when her phone rang, just as her Netflix movie was getting to the exciting part. She grabbed the phone and glanced at it, thinking she'd call them back after the movie was over, but sighed when she saw who it was. She loved her sister, Penny, but she'd spent the last day and a half ignoring her calls, trying to find a respectable way out of spending the upcoming weekend with her and her husband, Mark, without hurting their feelings. Unfortunately, she'd come up with nothing. Time to face the music.

“Hi, Penny. I was just about to call you; I saw I missed a call from you earlier today. What's up?”

“You're still going with us tomorrow night, aren't you?”

“Penny, I don't know. I don't really —”

“Come on, Marci. You've been putting us off for almost two years now, and you finally agreed to go. Please don't back out now. What are you afraid of; that you might actually have some fun?”

“Okay, okay, I'll go. I'm just not into camping.”

“How do you know? You admitted you've never been camping.”

“For a reason. There's nothing about it that sounds fun. I like sleeping in my nice, comfy bed, with a bathroom off the bedroom if I need to make a midnight run, and a modern, convenient place to take a long, hot shower in the morning. I can set the coffeemaker before I go to bed and wake up to fresh coffee.”

“But you don't have a campfire at home, and everything tastes better cooked over a campfire,” Penny argued. “Even coffee.”

“We'll see.”

“There's a bathroom in the camper that will be just as close to your bed as your bathroom at home.”

“And the long, hot shower?”

“There's a nice bath house at the campground. And before you ask, yes, they have electrical outlets there so you can dry and curl your hair after your long, hot shower.”

“That's good to know.” She sighed rather dramatically. “Okay. I told you I'd go, and I will. It's just one weekend, and it's not like I have to stay in a tent. I can handle it that long, I'm sure.”

“You'll be safe and comfortable in the camper. Our bedroom's at the front, and the back of it's a bunk room, with two bunks. You can use whichever bed you want, and there's a door you can close off between it and the rest of the camper. I was serious, the bathroom's at your end of the trailer, so if you have to get up during the night, the bathroom's right there. You don't have to go outside to the bath house.”

“Again, that sounds good. I'm not sure I could handle having to go outside at night, in the dark, worrying about running into a bear, to go to the bathroom. So when do we leave tomorrow?”

“Mark and I should both be home and ready to go by five o'clock. Why don't you come over to our house any time after that and we'll leave? Since the camper's at the park all season, all we have to take with us is some food and clothes, and I have

The Camping Cowgirl

them all ready to go. As soon as we get there Mark can get the campfire going so we can fix dinner.”

“I have a meeting tomorrow afternoon, so it may be closer to 5:30 before I can be there, but I'll be over as soon as I can, if that's okay?”

“Sure. We'll have the pickup packed and ready for you. See you then, Marci, and please try to cheer up. I really wish you'd try to keep an open mind about this, because I really don't think you're going to hate it as much as you think.”

“Maybe you're right,” Marci said with a sigh. “I'll try to give it a fair chance. I'm just not sure I'm meant to be a camper.”

“Maybe not, but you won't know until you try. See you tomorrow.”

Marci put her phone back on the coffee table and stared at the movie she was no longer interested in. She knew her sister was trying to help, but she didn't need any help. Why couldn't her sister see that? She sat back and did a little self-reflection – honestly this time – and answered her own question.

She and Penny had grown up in the sleepy little town where they now lived, Penbrook, Pennsylvania, with their parents. Penny was only a year older than her, so they'd grown up very close. Graduating a year apart, they went off to college in different directions, feeling a need to prove their independence to themselves and the world. After successfully doing that, having obtained their degrees and jobs, living on their own for a couple of years, they both found jobs in Penbrook and moved back home, sharing an apartment, when their mother was diagnosed with cancer.

For a little over a year their mother was holding her own fighting the disease, when their father was killed by a drunk driver on his way home from work one day. Their mother lost her will to fight, and died three months later. Since that time, six years ago, the two girls had taken care of each other.

A couple of years after their parents passed, the company

Marci worked for offered her a promotion, but it would involve a move to Texas for a couple of years. The two of them talked about it in depth before she accepted it. Penny hated to see her turn down a promotion, and practically insisted she take it. Marci wasn't so sure she wanted to be that far away from the only family she had left, but in the end agreed it was a good opportunity.

The one thing that had sounded good to her, besides the promotion itself, was moving to cowboy country. She had always been fascinated with pretty much anything western. Not many ladies in Pennsylvania wore western style clothing and cowgirl boots, but Marci did. Her fringed purse and cowgirl hat often finished her look. The possibility of seeing genuine cowboys on a daily basis was too much for her to turn down, so she'd accepted the promotion and moved to Texas.

She had enjoyed her two years in Texas, for the most part. She and Penny stayed close, talking almost daily, and taking turns flying back and forth for visits, not missing a main holiday together. The only part she didn't like was a cowboy she'd met named Cord Gentry. He wasn't a true cowboy, in that he didn't live or work on a ranch, but he was a Texas cowboy. He wore his Stetson on his head proudly and his cowboy boots were always polished. He had that cowboy swagger, and when he asked her out for dinner it didn't take her long to accept his invitation.

She'd enjoyed dinner that evening, along with the time they'd spent together over the next several months. In fact, everything went real well, until he'd asked her if she would consider taking out a car loan for him. He explained that he'd gotten a divorce a few years back, after catching his wife and her boss in bed together. He'd just wanted out of the marriage, but she was fighting him every tooth and nail, not agreeing to anything. Finally, he'd agreed to take on the majority of their debt just to get her to sign the papers so he could move on with his life. As a result, he'd had to file bankruptcy. Now he had a good job and

The Camping Cowgirl

making the payments on a new car wouldn't be a problem, but the bankruptcy had ruined his credit, making it impossible for him to get a loan. He assured her the car would be put in her name until he paid it off, as a means of security for her.

She gave it a lot of thought, but eventually agreed. The fact that he insisted it be put in her name made her feel more comfortable about it. She got the loan and bought the car, and he drove it home. Things went fine for the first few months, which helped her relax. But then he missed a payment. When she asked about it he looked surprised and said there had to be a mistake somewhere, but not to worry, he had his canceled check, and promised to take care of it.

But then she got another notice, stating it was now two months behind instead of one, and assessing more late fees. The same day she got that notice, she also got a credit card bill for a card she never used, but kept for emergencies. It now had a balance – a large balance. She went to her purse to get the card, but it was gone. She called the bank and talked to them.

They canceled her card, but explained that apparently someone had gone on the Internet, claiming to be her, and changed the phone number on the account. Therefore, when large charges suddenly began appearing on her account, they called this new number and left a message. A lady called back, claiming to be Marci Andrews, gave her Social Security number and birth date, and assured them the charges were legitimate.

Becoming worried, Marci had done some investigating, and while Cord was in the shower one day, she found her card in his wallet. What followed made her head spin. She confronted him, and when she did, he changed completely. He refused to return her car, but continued driving it, without making any more payments on it. He threatened her and her sister if she went to the police and filed charges against him. She got a notice from the insurance company, informing her that the insurance was about to be canceled for nonpayment. She called the insurance

company and explained the situation. Unfortunately, they told her that as owner of the vehicle, she could lose her license if her car was being driven without insurance.

She went to a police station and asked if that was true, explaining the situation. To her horror, she found out that was true. If he was in an accident with her car and didn't have insurance on it, not only would he have legal problems, but so would she. She would lose her license and could be held financially responsible for any damages done. She also found out he couldn't be charged with auto theft, since he'd been the one driving it from the start, initially with her consent.

She used her savings to bring the car loan current and insure the car. She talked to an attorney, but was shocked when she heard the process she would have to go through to get back the car that was legally hers, in her name.

She would have to withdraw her permission, in writing, and be able to prove he'd received that withdrawal. Since he more than likely would refuse any certified mail he'd have to sign for, that often meant filing a case in court. He would have to be served with the court papers, which was generally a long, difficult process, whereby he not only avoided certified mail, but also opening his door to any law enforcement officer trying to serve the papers.

Once the papers were actually served, he had the right to contest her withdrawal. It often got very expensive and took over a year, during which time she was still liable for providing insurance on the vehicle and making the payments. On top of that, if he thought he was going to lose the car and was upset about it, he could take a sledgehammer to it or damage it in some other way, then deny doing it. Without an accident report the insurance wouldn't pay for the damage. She would have a lot of money invested to get back a car that was demolished, but she still owed money on.

Unfortunately, she didn't have the money for a long, drawn

out court case. She asked the attorney about the credit card, but was told that to get the charges removed from her credit card she would have to tell the bank who made the charges, and they would talk to the police and have charges filed. If he denied it, it would be her word against his, since she was the only one who had seen her card in his wallet. His threat to hurt her or Penny was still fresh in her mind and she was too frightened to do that.

Thus, she spent the next year making payments on her credit card and a car she didn't have, kept insurance on that car, and paid all bills sent to her, as the owner of the car, from TxTag and EZPass.

Luck was with her roughly a year later, however. The policeman she'd talked to a year prior came to her door with news. Cord had been involved in an accident with her car. It had been someone else's fault, which was a relief to Marci. No one was hurt badly, but the car had been destroyed.

Cord tried to get the other driver's insurance to pay him for the car, claiming it was in fact his vehicle and he had driven it from the time it was purchased, but fortunately, canceled checks were able to prove who had paid for the car and the insurance. They concluded the vehicle was in fact titled in the legal owner's name and that owner had indeed paid for the insurance, as well. Therefore, they paid Marci for the car. She paid the loan off and had enough left to finish paying off her credit card.

When her employer gave her another promotion, which would move her back to Pennsylvania, she accepted quickly, anxious to get back home and leave Texas behind her. The ordeal was now over, but her faith in men was shattered.

Marci thought back on all of this while she was sitting on the couch thinking about Penny, and had to admit to herself she understood why Penny had been trying to get her out socializing again. While Penny had been patient with her when she first returned home, the Cord incident had been a couple of years ago now, and she supposed it was time for her to put it behind

her and get out again. As the cowboys in Texas would say, she needed to get back on the horse. She sighed, having finally admitted that to herself.

But that still didn't mean she was excited about this weekend. Getting out again was one thing, but going camping? Her idea of roughing it was staying at a Ramada Inn that had an in-house restaurant, but no room service. She chuckled as that thought entered her mind. Okay, so maybe it wasn't that bad, but camping had never even sounded fun to her. Penny and Mark loved it and had their camper parked at a campground for the season and spent most of their weekends at the lake. That was great for them, but she didn't share their enthusiasm for the great outdoors and all the little critters that included. Still, she told Penny she would keep an open mind, and she owed her that much. Most importantly, once she spent the weekend with them maybe they would stop asking.

With that thought in mind, she turned the television off and went to her bedroom to pack. She didn't have anything that screamed campground, so she opted for clothes that were comfortable. It didn't take long and she had her suitcase by the door, ready to go, before calling it a night.

MARCI ARRIVED at Penny and Mark's just after 5:30 the next evening, and wasn't at all surprised when they both came out of their house and met her at her car. "I'm so excited," Penny said, giving her sister a quick hug.

"Where's your suitcase?" Mark asked. "I'll put it in the truck and we can go."

"Why don't I just follow you guys in my car? Then I'll know how to get there."

"No chance," Mark said, finding her suitcase in her back seat. "If you have your car there you'll find some reason to

The Camping Cowgirl

leave.” He put her suitcase in the back of the truck and opened the pickup door for her. “No, we’ll go together. My wife has been looking forward to having you there for a whole weekend, and you’re not going to disappoint her by running off midway through.”

“But what if something —”

“If something happens and you do truly need to come back home, I’ll bring you home. I’m not an ogre. I just want you to give camping an honest try for a full weekend. You might just decide it’s not so bad.” He motioned with his hand for her to get in the back seat of the extended cab pickup, and chuckled a bit when she slumped her shoulders and sighed, but slid into the back seat. He closed the door, thinking she looked like she was going for a root canal rather than a weekend of fun.

Penny’s excitement was contagious, though, and by the time they got to the campground an hour later, Marci was in a much better mood. Mark busied himself unloading some wood from the back of the pickup and making a fire in their fire ring, while Penny proudly showed Marci their camper. After the tour they put Marci’s suitcase on the top bunk in the bunk room, put the food they brought in the refrigerator and cupboards, and started fixing dinner.

An hour later she had to admit that the simple hamburgers and home fries, or fried potatoes, as she was told they were called when cooked over a campfire, did somehow taste better. After washing up the dishes, the three of them went for a walk. Penny showed her where the bath house was in case she wanted to take a long, hot shower, while Mark showed her how to get to the lake, both the swimming area and the dock they liked to fish off of. Marci surprised them both when they passed a bicycle path and she showed interest. “Why didn’t you tell me there was a bike path? I could have brought my bike.”

“The next time you come camping with us you can bring it,” Penny said, bouncing up and down with excitement. “They have

some they rent here, though, so if you want to go bike riding, we can.” Mark was all smiles as he watched his wife and her sister planning a bike ride. Marci had been a very social person before she went to Texas, but since she'd come back she didn't seem to want to go anywhere or do anything. Penny had been trying to get her out more for the past couple of years, but hadn't had much luck.

They got back to the camper as the sun was setting and it was beginning to get dark. Mark stoked the fire, bringing it back to life, while Penny got the marshmallows out. They started roasting marshmallows and making s'mores, which Marci admitted were very yummy.

Soon neighboring campers began stopping in to visit at the campfire. Mark or Penny introduced Marci to everyone that stopped in, and they all welcomed her. Some visited a few minutes and went on, but others sat down on the lawn chairs and logs Mark had set up around the fire ring and were soon laughing and roasting marshmallows. Marci was talking and laughing with Penny's neighbors, getting to know them as they made s'mores. Everyone seemed very friendly, and so laid back that she was totally relaxed and having a good time before she knew it.

She glanced up and saw Mark talking to a man she knew she hadn't met yet. She was sure she would have remembered him. Mark was just short of six feet tall, but this man topped him by a couple of inches. He looked very athletic, with broad shoulders that narrowed to a much smaller waist. She wondered what color his hair was. The main thing that caught her attention, though, was the reason she couldn't see his hair. Setting on top of his head, looking perfectly natural and like it truly belonged there, even in Pennsylvania, was a Stetson. Her eyes traveled down his muscular but lean body to his blue jeans complete with what she always thought of as a true cowboy belt buckle, and on down to his feet, where sure enough, there was

just as nice a pair of cowboy boots, clean and polished, but obviously not new.

Marci's reaction to this fine specimen of man she was looking at shocked her. She hadn't felt inner stirrings like this since before the debacle with Cord. Of course, since that was about the time she'd moved back to Pennsylvania, she hadn't seen many Stetsons or cowboy boots, either. Maybe she was now ready to move on with her life.

She leaned over closer to Penny. "Who's Mark talking to? Is he a neighboring camper, too?"

Penny followed her sister's eyes, and smiled. "That's Wyatt Masters, and yes, he has a camper here, just a couple of down from ours. I was hoping he'd be here this weekend so we could introduce you to him. He's really nice, and I thought you might like the Stetson," Penny said with a giggle.

"The Stetson's not the only thing that looks interesting," Marci said with a chuckle of her own. Just that quick, though, Cord flashed through her mind. "But he's still a man. I'm safer just looking."

"Marci, I really wish you'd give Wyatt a chance. He really is a nice man. More importantly, though, you need to allow yourself to live again. Not all men are like Cord. You need to trust me on this. You've been through a lot, I admit, but you handled it all, and now you deserve some happiness."

Marci thought a few moments before sighing. "Maybe. I guess it wouldn't hurt to get to know him. What can you tell me about him?"

MARK WAS TALKING TO WYATT, asking about his work, which Mark found fascinating. He was a computer programming consultant, which he was often able to do from home, but occasionally he had to visit a company to see the problem in person.

But he had another job, as well, which was the one Mark loved hearing about. He worked for a company that designed and manufactured equipment for outdoor activities. It included boating and kayaking, as well as bicycling, hiking, fishing and hunting, but centered mostly on camping and fishing.

When they had an idea for a new product, it was sent to engineering and then a protocol was made. Wyatt tried out the protocol for a period of time, and gave comments, both positive and negative, offering any suggestions he had for possible improvements that could be made before they began production, if they proceeded that far. Some ideas were thrown out or put on a back burner until changes could be designed into them.

Wyatt was describing a grill made to fit on the top of a pole for a removable table on a boat, when he stopped mid-sentence. "Who's the little cowgirl beside Penny?"

Mark knew whom he was asking about without turning to look. "You wouldn't be asking about my sister-in-law, Marci, would you?"

"Now that you said that I do notice the resemblance. Are those cowgirl boots for real? I like the whole outfit, but those cute little boots caught my eye. She looks comfortable in them. The little filly herself isn't a bit bad, either. All that's missing is the hat."

Mark had to laugh. "The hat's in our camper. If I understand what you're asking, yes, it's for real. According to Penny, Marci always liked the western look and wore it often herself. Apparently she's had cowboy boots since high school. She was transferred to Texas for work for a couple of years, and that kind of reinforced her appreciation of it. Is that what you meant by is it real?"

"Yep. She looks comfortable in it, so I assumed it's not a new outfit she's wearing for the first time."

"Oh, no, it's not new. She is definitely comfortable in it."

"So, is she married?"

The Camping Cowgirl

Mark grinned, thinking, not for the first time, that his friend and Marci could make a good pair. She didn't hide her thoughts or feelings much, either, just like Wyatt. "No, and she's not seeing anyone. Would you like me to introduce you to her?"

"Absolutely. Why didn't you tell me you have a pretty little cowgirl in your family you've been hiding?"

"To be honest, Wyatt, I've wanted to get you two together. There's something you need to know first, though. She was hurt badly by a real jerk while she was living in Texas, and it's taken her a long time to be able to get past it."

Wyatt broke in, his hands already in fists, anger on his face. "Did he hurt her physically?"

"No, not physically. He took advantage of her kind heart. It hurt her financially, but more importantly, she has a hard time trusting people now, especially men."

"It's a shame men can treat ladies that way, but I understand what you're saying."

"Yeah, he did quite a number on her. She's not totally over it yet, in fact, but I think she's just now finally starting to look forward again instead of living in the past. I'm only telling you this as a precaution. Go slow with her and be patient. She's a good little lady with a big heart, and I personally think you two would make a good pair, but you may have to treat her with kid gloves for a while."

"Like a skittish horse," he said, shaking his head in understanding. "Thanks for the heads up, Mark. I'll remember that."

"Thank you. She and Penny have always been close, but since their parents died they've been even closer, watching out for each other. If Marci's stressed and not happy, Penny's not happy."

"Which affects you," Wyatt said with a smile. "I get it. I'll be careful."

Mark nodded, confident he could trust Wyatt. He was a true gentleman, which was why he was willing to introduce the two of

them. Looking over at his wife and her sister, he waived to get their attention. There was a crowd around the ladies and the campfire, but much quieter where he and Wyatt were. "Hey, Marci, can you come over here a few minutes? I want to introduce you to one of our neighbors."

Marci and Penny both headed their way. Wyatt appreciated the smile on her face as she and Penny excused themselves from the people they'd been talking with and headed toward them. Marci was a very pretty little cowgirl, probably eight to ten inches shorter than himself, and with her cutoff shorts and boots she was absolutely adorable. As much as he wanted to see her with her hat on, it would almost be a shame to cover up her beautiful light brown hair that had shimmering highlights the evening sun was picking up so nicely.

The sisters made their way to the men, and once introductions had been made, Mark put his arm casually around Penny's shoulders. "Honey, I know you told me where the extra marshmallow sticks are, but I couldn't find them. Would you please come into the camper and show me where you put them? It looks like we may need them tonight."

Penny took a quick look at both Marci and Wyatt, and seeing no look of panic on either face, agreed. "Yeah, sure. We're getting quite a crowd this evening and I'm sure they'll be helpful. We better grab some more marshmallows and chocolate bars while we're at it. Will you two excuse us?"

"Sure," Wyatt answered for both of them, after checking Marci's reaction. "I'll take care of the new little filly while you're gone. It'll give us a chance to get to meet each other."

Mark and Penny were barely out of sight when Marci turned and smiled at Wyatt. "You do know you just played right into their hand, don't you? Mark knows exactly where the marshmallow sticks are. I was outside, but I heard him ask about them earlier this afternoon to be sure they were here and not at their house."

The Camping Cowgirl

Wyatt laughed out loud. "I didn't know it was that bad, but I assumed they were giving us some time together to get acquainted, while trying not to make it obvious. I willingly went along with it because frankly, I was fine with it giving me a chance to get to know you. It didn't look like you were opposed to the idea, or I wouldn't have allowed it."

"You wouldn't have allowed it?"

"Not if I thought it was making you uncomfortable."

She studied him a moment. "How would you have not allowed it?"

"I would have kept one of them out here with us by asking them a question, or told you it was nice to meet you, and excused myself, as well. I'd very much like to get to know you, but not if it will make you uncomfortable."

Marci was quiet a moment, before smiling up at him. "Thank you. I'm good with getting to know each other."

"Good. I haven't seen you here before, and I think I would have remembered you, especially if you were wearing those cutoff jeans and boots. Have you been camping with your sister and Mark before?"

"No, this is the first time," she said, blushing at his compliment. "Are you saying you like the shorts and boots, or just that you would have remembered them?"

"I would have remembered them because I like them. Not every lady that wears them looks at home in them, though, but you do."

"As do you."

He nodded slightly in acknowledgement. "So, I know you're Penny's sister, but not much else. What do you do?"

They spent the next fifteen minutes standing right there, talking, until several men started rearranging chairs and logs around the fire, allowing room for more logs to be brought in to sit on. Wyatt asked her to wait there a minute, helped get the additional logs into place, and went back to Marci, taking her hand to lead

her to one of them. They joined the rest of the group, including Penny and Mark, in the fun and laughter, but did a good deal of talking privately, as well. The evening began to wear down and people started leaving, but the two of them continued visiting as the crowd thinned out.