

LISTEN HERE, COWBOY



MISTY MALONE

BLUSHING BOOKS

©2018 by Blushing Books® and Misty Malone
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.

Published by Blushing Books®,
a subsidiary of
ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901
The trademark Blushing Books®
is registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Misty Malone
Listen Here, Cowboy

EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-804-9
Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book is intended for adults only. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual spanking activity or the spanking of minors.

CHAPTER 1



OUTSIDE OF MOUNT IDA, ARKANSAS, 1899

Bryce Billings pulled on the reins, bringing his large gelding, Midnight, to a stop. He sat tall in his saddle and nudged his old worn Stetson back a bit so he could get a good look at his herd of horses grazing in his pasture. As he looked from animal to animal, he was satisfied, even proud, of what he saw. He'd made the decision to start breeding, raising, and breaking horses a little over two years ago, and was very happy with his progress thus far.

He saw a need for more horses in his area, and knew he was capable of breeding and raising horses. He also knew he had land he wasn't using for his farming operation. Farms in this area were generally small enough for a single family. If a family had sons big enough to help with the farming operations, they used all their available land, but without sons to help, they usually had bigger pastures than necessary, as a way of making use of all their land.

Bryce's farm was a little different. He had more land than most farmers, because he was willing to take the land that went partway

up the mountainside. Although he knew it wouldn't be usable for growing crops, it would be suitable for pasturing cattle or horses. When he saw the shortage of horses and how difficult it was to find a good horse for a fair price, that land instantly came to mind. He loved horses and working with them, and knew with a good breeding program, within a couple years he would be able to help fill that shortage.

The only thing stopping him was time. He had to do what he needed to survive and make a living. In this area that involved raising corn and hay to feed your horses and a few cattle, including a milk cow to provide milk for drinking, cheese and butter. It also involved raising sorghum, as it wasn't at all unusual in this area for a meal to consist of biscuits and sorghum. A farmer also needed to raise a crop to sell for cash, which was usually cotton. A few chickens were also nice to have, as they provided eggs and occasional meat.

As with most farmers around there, most of the meat for his table came from hunting and fishing. Wild game was plentiful enough, and there were also a couple smaller branches of the Ouachita River running through his property which contained a good supply of fish. The only problem was finding the time to go hunting or fishing. Being single, that meant he also had to take care of the house and do the cooking and laundry duties. It took a lot of time to raise the crops and harvest them, milk the cow or cows, and care for the other cattle, horses and chickens. Even if he did have the land to raise horses, he lacked the time.

Or he did, until a couple years ago, when he met Wendel Jackson. Remembering back to that day brought a little smile to his face. He'd gone into Mount Ida to pick up some supplies he'd been needing. While he was at Ben Morgan's general store a young man came in and gave Ben some coins. "She said to thank you and to put this on her account, Mr. Morgan."

"Thank you, Wendel, and I keep telling you, you can call me

Ben. Everyone else in town does.” The young man nodded with a smile.

“I’ll put that on your account. You’ve got a few deliveries on there now, so when you need something, come on in.”

“Thank you, Mr. Morgan. I’ll be in soon, and I appreciate the opportunity you’ve given me.” The young man turned and left.

Bryce looked around to be sure no one else was in the store before approaching Ben. “I don’t believe I’ve seen him around here before, but he seems like a good young man.”

“He is new here, he does in fact seem like a good young man, and I worry about him.” Bryce cocked his head, obviously interested. “He and his parents were part of a wagon train going through. Unfortunately, a couple people contracted this influenza that’s going around, and it spread throughout the wagon train. His parents both got it, and they both died; one on a Monday, and the other the next day. The wagon train wouldn’t allow him to travel on with them. He’s only fifteen, and they didn’t think he’d be able to keep up with everything he’d need to do to continue on, or what he’d do once they reached their destination. But above all, they were afraid he would be getting the influenza as well, and would pass it on to others.”

“So they made him leave, on his own, while grieving?”

“They helped him bury his parents, then let him drive their family’s wagon behind the wagon train. They made him stay far enough back that he wouldn’t spread the disease to anyone, but they brought the train over close to Mount Ida. The mayor has allowed the young man to camp out at the edge of town. He’s been sleeping in the wagon and making a campfire to cook.”

“What’s he living on?”

“Whatever his family had in their wagon. He’s been asking around, looking for a job, but there just aren’t any. I was closing up for a bit one day to deliver groceries to Mrs. Hansen, and he volunteered to make the delivery for me so I wouldn’t have to close. I

thanked him and offered to pay him a little for it, but he said he didn't need to be paid for helping an elderly lady get her groceries. I told him I was putting a little coin on account for him, and he thanked me. He's made a few more deliveries for me since then. I've gotten good comments about him, and a few people have said they wish they could afford to hire him to help them, but as you know, people don't have extra money around here to pay wages for someone."

"He's going to need a better place to stay. That wagon's not much protection for him."

"That's true. It gets him up off the ground when it's wet or cold, but a tarp is the only thing over him, and you're right, that's not much protection."

"Well, I hope he finds something soon." Ben nodded his agreement, and the two men loaded up Bryce's supplies. He couldn't get the young man off of his mind, though, and by the time he reached his farm, he'd made his mind up. The next morning he headed back to Mount Ida.

The young man was in front of his wagon, washing a plate and fork and skillet in a little bowl of water. Bryce went toward him with his hand held out. "Good morning. I don't believe we've met yet. I'm Bryce Billings."

"Nice to meet you, sir. I'm Wendel Jackson." Bryce was impressed with the firm hand shake. They talked a few minutes, during which Wendel told Bryce how he came to be camped out at the edge of town in a covered wagon, looking for some kind of work. Bryce was a little surprised, but impressed as he listened to the young man's story. Most young men at that age, having been dealt the hand he'd been dealt, would have been at least a little angry, but Wendel didn't seem to be. He was obviously upset at losing his parents, but didn't seem to be bitter or angry with the wagon train for basically dumping him off at the nearest town. In fact, he mentioned one time that he was grateful they'd helped him bury his folks and then saw him safely to the edge of town.

After giving Wendel his condolences, they talked a bit more.

Once Bryce was convinced Wendel was a decent young man, he got down to the reason for his visit. "What kind of work are you looking to find, Wendel?"

"Anything," he answered quickly. He looked Bryce in the eyes and explained. "I'll be honest with you. I grew up back east, outside of Atlanta, so this area is all new to me. I don't have much experience at anything. All I've really done, other than going to school, is help my dad some. He ran a local telegraph office and I used to go there after school and make deliveries for him, giving people their telegraphs that came for them. I know that's not much experience at any kind of job, but on the other hand, I don't know of any kind of job I'd turn down. If someone's willing to teach me, I'm willing to learn how to do about anything. I can't promise I'll be able to do it proficiently, at least at first, but I can promise to try my best."

Bryce smiled and nodded his head. "Well, I don't see how anyone can ask for more than that. Have you been around horses much?"

"A little, but not a lot. We had a couple carriage horses and I helped take care of them. When I was smaller my dad used to let me go to our neighbor's house to play with their son, and his father and older brother taught me how to ride. I loved it, and the two of us used to ride their horses whenever we had a chance. They moved away a couple years ago, though, and since then it's just been our family's carriage horses." He looked over at the two big work horses tied under the tree. "We traded our horses for these two for the wagon train."

"You can ride a horse, though?" Bryce asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you like horses?"

"Sure. I used to love riding."

"I have an offer for you, Wendel, but I want you to take some time and think about it. I'll readily admit it's not a very good offer, but it's about all I can do right now." Wendel cocked his head to listen, obviously curious. "This area has a shortage of horses. I've

got a farm outside of town, and I know how to breed and raise them, and even how to break them and train them, but that takes time. I've got to keep the farm going to make a living, and I can't do that and start raising horses."

"That's where I come in?" Wendel asked hopefully.

"It is," Bryce confirmed, "but listen carefully to this part. I don't have a lot of money. In fact, I can't really offer to pay you steady wages at first, but I've got a decent house and plenty of food. I can assure you a warm place to stay with a roof over your head, and three meals a day. I'll be able to give you a little here and there, when I sell the crops or a steer, but until we get the horse business going, money will probably be scarce. I will promise you a better job, with fair wages then."

"I'll take it. Thank you, Mr. Billings."

"Whoa, slow down a bit here, Wendel. First off, please call me Bryce, especially if you decide to take me up on my offer. But stop and think about it a minute. At this point I can't offer you steady pay."

"I heard you say that, Mr. Billings. But I also heard you say I'll have a place to stay and food to eat. I have the food we had on the wagon, but it isn't a lot, and I wasn't sure what I was going to do when it's gone. The wagon master and one of his men hunted while they drove the train, and we ate a lot of fresh meat. Pa had a little bit of money saved, but not a lot. I know it wouldn't last long if I have to start buying food. I'm worried about my horses, too. I can't afford to buy feed for them, and they've got about all the grass around here eaten. I asked Ben if he knew anyone who might want to buy them, but he didn't know of anyone that had the money. If you could take me and my horses—"

"That's no problem, Wendel. They look like a couple of good work horses. If you don't mind if we use them, I'll gladly feed them. They could be very helpful on the farm. I'm thinking they can make things go a little quicker, which would give us time to work on the horse business."

“That would be real good. They're good horses, and I sure would like to see them fed and cared for better than I can do here.”

“We can do that. Do you mind if I ask, what made your parents decide to move out west? Do you have family out there?”

“No, I have no family. My mother was an only child, as am I. My dad had a brother, but he was killed in the war. He'd lost his parents several years ago. My mother was born in Ohio, but her parents were both killed by Indians. They hid my mother, who was just an infant at the time, when the Indians attacked. Local people went to check on them when they heard Indians had been causing trouble, but her parents were both dead. They heard the baby crying, and rescued her. One of the families took her in and raised her. They were older, though, and died shortly after she and my father were married.”

“How tragic. I'm glad she was married by then.”

“Yes. So no, we don't have family out west. The telegraph office my father worked at burned down, so he didn't have a job. They'd put an office in at the next little town over, and they weren't in a big hurry to rebuild this one. There weren't any other jobs around there for him, so he figured we had to move. He heard they needed telegraph operators out in California, so he spent most of the money he had saved to buy into the next wagon train going out there, and to get the wagon, horses and supplies we'd need.”

“So he was going out there hoping to find a job?”

“Yes. That's one of the reasons I'm grateful for your offer and would like to accept it. I don't have any family or anywhere else to go, and I'm not trained for any kind of work. I don't know much about farming, but it always sounded fascinating. I like horses, love to ride, and would appreciate any training you can give me. I'll work hard for you, and like I said, as long as I'll have a place to stay and food for me and the horses, I'll be grateful. It's more than I have now.”

Bryce smiled as he remembered that first meeting with Wendel. It may have been about two and a half years ago, but he remem-

bered it clearly. Wendel had impressed him then, and he'd certainly lived up to his promise to work hard. He'd learned a lot since he'd been there, not just about farming or horses. Although Bryce was a young man himself at the time, only 22 years old, he'd become like a big brother to Wendel. Bryce taught him farming, and more about caring for horses, but he also taught him how to hunt and fish, along with a few other skills men needed to survive in that area. He taught him what wild life to watch out for, and when they'd go out on the land he let Wendel search for tracks and tell him what kind of animal it was. Wendel was quick to learn, and the two of them had quickly become good friends.

Now as Bryce looked out over the herd of horses they finally had, he had a sense of pride. They'd worked together to breed and raise them, and they were finally to the place that they could sell a horse here and there to neighbors that needed them. Later today they were selling three to a livery a couple towns over. Like everyone else, they'd been having a hard time finding horses.

Bryce had special plans for the money from these horses. Although he and Wendel had become like brothers, the young man never felt totally comfortable living in Bryce's home. It wasn't a large home, but it had a bedroom separate from the kitchen and living area. It also had a loft, which is where they made a room for Wendel. He never called it his home, and Bryce knew he felt like a visitor. When the weather was nice more often than not he stayed in his wagon. That was okay with Bryce, as long as he was safe close to the house. He knew Wendel felt more at home there, as it was something that was his.

But that was about to change. Bryce had told Wendel that once their spring crops were in the ground, they were going to build a cabin for Wendel. The young man's eyes were big, and he slowly shook his head. "I can't ask you to do that, Bryce."

"You're not asking. You're almost eighteen, and I've seen the way you've been looking at the Williams girl at church on Sundays, and the way she looks back at you."

Wendel's face turned red, and he tried to change the subject. "Speaking of ladies, isn't it about time you found a wife?"

Bryce chuckled, recognizing his friend's attempt to change the subject. "I'm open to the idea. When the right lady comes riding into my life, trust me, I plan on claiming her. I just haven't met her yet. But now let's get back to you and the Williams girl. You're more than welcome to bring her by the house anytime you want, visiting, but if you two get serious you're going to need a home of your own. You've held up your end of our deal, and you've worked hard. Now it's time I hold up my end of it. We're going to build you a cabin. We can put it anywhere on my land you want, but I have a suggestion if you want to hear it?"

"Of course I do. You know I value your opinion."

"Thank you for that. I checked with the land office, and there's still land available adjoining my land to the east. My suggestion is we put your cabin at the edge of my land over there. Then once you turn eighteen, if you want to you can go claim the land next to it. I can deed the section of land the cabin's on over to you."

Wendel was quiet for several moments while he thought through Bryce's words. "Are you saying once I'm 18 I should go claim that land, because you won't need me anymore then, since the horses are doing good?"

Bryce's mouth dropped open at his words. "That's absolutely not what I'm saying, Wendel. I'm saying if you want to get that land, you can, while it's still available. There's nothing that says you have to do anything with it, other than show an intent to use it. We can put some horses or cattle on it, which will be sufficient to show it won't sit idle. I still need help here, and I hope you'll still work for me, but I want you to have options in the future. Down the road if you find a young lady you'd like to make your bride, either the Williams girl or someone else, you may want a farm of your own. I'll hate to lose you, but I'll understand and I'll feel a whole lot better knowing you have a place. Besides, I can't think of anyone I'd rather have for a neighbor," Bryce finished with a grin.

Wendel thought a few more moments, and Bryce watched as a smile spread slowly across his face. "I never thought of having a farm of my own," he said slowly. "I'm not at all ready for it yet, but you're right; I should probably look to the future. And if I ever get to the point where I do want to try a little farm of my own, it will be because you taught me how, so what better neighbor could I have than you?"

That talk had taken place yesterday, and the two of them had saddled up and headed to the eastern edge of Bryce's property to look for a suitable place to build a cabin.

Now Bryce was on his way back home from an errand in Mount Ida, anxious to talk to Wendel again. He'd delivered the three horses to the man that owned the livery, and stopped in to talk with a farmer on his way home. Joe Simons lived between his place and Mount Ida, and had knowledge and experience building log cabins, both for himself and neighbors. Bryce heard he was looking for a new carriage horse, so he went to see him. They agreed to trade a horse for Joe's help building a cabin for Wendel. He would be up to start in two days.

Bryce rode Midnight right up to the barn, hoping Wendel was still there doing chores. Sure enough, he came out to meet him. "Did you get the horses delivered okay?"

"Yep, no problem. Then I stopped in to talk to Joe Simons."

"Did you sell another horse?"

"Not exactly. I traded him a horse for his help building a cabin. He'll be in the day after tomorrow and we'll get started. In the meantime, we've got some work to do. I thought we had enough trees cut down and cleaned, but he thinks we'll need several more."

"Let's get busy then. I just finished mucking out the stalls, so let me harness up a couple work horses while you brush out Midnight."

Twenty minutes later they were at the woods on the government land adjoining Bryce's. The land was covered with trees, free for anyone who had a use for them. All the government asked in

return is to cut only what you'll use, and leave the land in good shape. They found a tree that was the size they were looking for and got their axes out.

Once they got the tree down they started chopping all the branches off in preparation for taking the bark off. "Wendel, I know you have a few things in your wagon, but I'm sure you'll be needing some furniture and a few additional things for your cabin."

"I can make do for a while. Now that you're able to pay me a little wage, I'll be able to save that money, since you were kind enough to say I can still take my meals with you."

"Of course you can still eat with me. In fact, you've been having better luck than me hunting and fishing lately, and the biscuits you make are much better than mine. But most importantly, I've enjoyed having someone to talk with during meals."

Wendel smiled, but never took compliments easily. "The only reason I've been able to get more meat and fish for us is because I've had more opportunity. Since I've been here we've eaten a lot more meat you've provided than me." He grinned before adding, "But I will agree, I'd hate to have to eat alone. Thank you for still providing my meals."

"It's the least I can do. I'm hoping to be able to keep paying you that wage, but it's awfully low. It's not what you should be making, but it's a start. As our horse business grows, your wages will, as well. But about the things you'll need for your cabin, I have something for you." Bryce reached into his pocket and pulled out an envelope and handed it to Wendel.

"What's this?" He looked at Bryce, but when it became obvious he wasn't going to tell him, he opened the envelope, looked in, and his eyes opened wide, before he tried to give it back to his boss. "No, I can't take this, Bryce."

"Sure you can, Wendel. That's the money from the three horses we sold today. It isn't enough to buy everything you'll need for your cabin, but hopefully it will get the more important things. I could never have gotten my horse business going without your help, and

you've helped me nonstop, doing whatever I asked of you, for two and a half years for nothing but room and board. You're owed a lot more than that, my friend. Please take it and get a few things for your cabin."

Bryce was shocked as he watched Wendel's eyes tear up. "Bryce, if it means a lot to you I'll take the money, but I need to correct something you said. You said I've worked the last two and a half years for nothing but room and board. That's not true at all. I've gotten way more than that. When you so generously brought me here to live, I had nothing. I had no family, no job, no skills, no work experience, very little money, and nowhere to turn. You taught me how to farm, how to hunt and fish, how to raise horses, all while helping me grow into a man. My Pa always said the best way to learn is by example, and I don't know of any better example I could have had."

Bryce had never seen emotion like this from Wendel and knew immediately he was totally sincere. "I'm glad things worked out as they did, Wendel. I needed help, and I now also realize how much I needed a friend, companionship, and you filled that need for me." He chuckled a bit as he added, "Not to mention how badly I needed someone to show me how to make a biscuit you can actually eat."

Wendel smiled in appreciation, but had more to say while he was being serious. "I'm glad to hear I could help you a little, as well. Thank you. But I want you to understand how much I appreciate what all you've done for me. When I said you were such a good example for me, I wasn't just referring to how you've taught me farming and survival skills. I can see what a good man you are, and I see how much the people around you respect you. I want them to some day respect me the way they respect you. That's my goal, and you've given me the example to follow, so I know what I have to do to achieve that goal. I want you to know I'm grateful for that."

Bryce was very touched by Wendel's words and had to blink a few times now himself to keep the tears at bay. He held out his hand, and Wendel took it, but the handshake soon turned into a

hug; a hug both men seemed to need. Bryce managed to find his voice first and pulled back, going back to the handshake the embrace had originally started as. "Wendel, you're sure welcome for anything I've done for you, though I still feel you've done a lot more for me than I've done for you. Either way, I'm certainly glad things turned out the way they have."

"Me, too," Wendel said, stepping back. "Now, though, can I ask another favor of you?"

"Certainly, anytime," Bryce answered with a big smile.

"Will you help me spend this money? I'm not sure how to decide what I should get first for the cabin, or where to get it from."

"I can certainly do that," Bryce said, patting the younger man on the back. "We'll have some time to talk while we get a few more trees and drag them back to the house. Let me ask you a few questions. I know you have a chair in your wagon because I've seen you sitting on it outside. Do you have any other furniture? And how about any pots for cooking, not that you'll have to do any cooking for a while yet, or plates?"

The two men discussed what would be the best things to focus on to equip the cabin as they worked the rest of the day. When the work horses dragged the last of the trees back to the house, the men dragged themselves out to the barn to do chores before going inside to fix some supper and collapse into their beds, exhausted.