

# Life at the Ranch

By

Misty Malone

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# Chapter 1

Bo Hamilton took the steps two at a time as he made his way to the large front porch and knocked on the door. He looked around while he waited. The ranch certainly was impressive. The home was impressive, and the entire spread was well maintained. He understood it was a large ranch. He'd grown up on his family's ranch, which was nice, but not as big or intimidating as this one. He reminded himself that ranch work was ranch work no matter where it was or how large the ranch was, and he was certainly qualified to be a ranch hand. Truth be told, he felt he was qualified to be more than a ranch hand, but he was willing to start as a hand.

The front door rattled, which brought his wandering mind back to the present, and he watched as the door opened. A man much younger than he expected to see appeared. "Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Mr. Wyatt Granger," Bo replied.

"I'm Wyatt. And you are?"

"Bo Hamilton. My neighbor, Clyde Dawson, said you might be looking for a ranch hand."

"Bo, come in." Wyatt opened the door and reached his hand out. Bo shook it as he stepped inside. "I've been hoping you'd stop by. Come on into my office."

He led the way into a nicely furnished office and motioned to the two wingback chairs in front of his massive mahogany desk. Once both men were seated, Wyatt asked, "Would you like some coffee, iced tea, lemonade?"

"I just stopped for some iced tea before I got here, but thank you anyway."

"Tell me about yourself, Bo. Clyde told me you've recently graduated from college. According to him you stepped in and ran his place for close to a year when he got hurt. That tells me a lot about you in itself, but I'd like to hear more."

"I just finished school, where I concentrated on animal husbandry, and some new, rather innovative ways of improving the soil through managed intensive grazing. I planned on trying to hire on as a ranch hand somewhere when Clyde got hurt. I went over to do what I could to help him, and when he asked if I'd run it for him until he was able to again, I agreed. It was good experience for me. He was there, and we talked a lot." Bo chuckled. "He pretty much talked me through it. Now I'm back to where I was when he got hurt; out looking for a job again."

"He said you grew up on the place next to his."

"That's right."

"But you didn't want to go back there to work after school?"

"No, sir. That's my dad's ranch, and my older brother is the foreman. The two of them do well together. I worked there from the time I was barely big enough, right up through the summers while I was in college. But that ranch does well with one owner and one foreman. I love my dad and my brother, and I'd like to keep it that way."

Wyatt smiled at the grin on Bo's face. "I hear you, and I respect that."

Bo became more serious. "I would like some day to be a foreman, and eventually be able to buy a ranch of my own. Six years of college has taught me a couple things, though. It's not always good to jump in with both feet. The water might be over your head. Sometimes it's better to wade into deep water gradually."

Wyatt nodded his head. "I've got a few questions, if you don't mind?"

"Not at all."

"You said six years of college?"

"Yes, sir. After four years of taking the classes I was interested in, relating to ranching and the animals, I got my bachelor's. Dad strongly suggested I take some business classes so I could make sense of the legal and financial papers I'd run across if I do have a ranch to run some day. It seemed like good advice, so I got a master's in business administration. Those classes weren't nearly as fun, but I have to admit, Dad knew what he was talking about. I would have had no idea how to make heads or tails of the financial reports, or how to even start long-term planning, which I now know is pretty essential."

Wyatt nodded his head again. "I couldn't agree more." He looked at Bo carefully for a few moments. "Let me be honest with you here. Clyde said you took over his ranch and ran it impeccably. He was very impressed."

Bo blushed a little. "Clyde is a good rancher and a very nice man. I take that as a compliment."

"What did you think of running his ranch; how do you feel it went?"

Bo was surprised by the question, but answered honestly. "I think it went well. Like I said, Clyde was there, and I talked things over with him first to be sure he was on board with everything, and listened to what he had to say about it. After we discussed things we agreed on how we wanted to proceed, and I followed through."

"Like I said, I want to be honest with you. I definitely have a job for you here at The Winding Waters."

"Thank you."

"But the job I'd like to hire you for isn't as a ranch hand. I need a foreman." Wyatt watched as Bo swallowed hard and took a deep breath. "I've talked to Clyde about it, and he thinks you can do it. After talking to you, I agree. You look stunned, and I understand that. What do you think?"

"I am stunned. I have some questions, some reservations."

"Ask anything you want. What are your reservations? Maybe we can clear them up first."

"Why? I mean, I wasn't aware you were looking for a foreman. If you do need one, why are you not promoting one of the hands?"

"I know that's the normal protocol, but to be honest, I don't feel any of the hands right now are qualified. Let me explain my situation. You may not be interested after hearing this, but I owe it to you to be upfront and honest before you agree to take it on."

“That sounds ominous.”

“Maybe it is in a way. I inherited this ranch from my grandfather less than a year ago, and to be honest with you, I don't know nearly as much about ranching as you do. Unfortunately, I thought I did. I thought I knew enough to get by. It didn't take long for my foreman, Wade, and the ranch hands to see through my charade. Four of the hands quit within the first few months. Wade replaced them, but word was out by then and experienced hands were staying clear. He had to hire all greenhorns. He questioned my decisions many times, but I played the part of a young know-it-all, and we always did it my way. Last week he gave me his notice.”

Bo was quiet, listening carefully to what Wyatt was saying.

“His notice was the wakeup call I needed. I realize now that I've been running this ranch into the ground, and quickly. I took a few days off and left Wade in charge while I went home to do some thinking and talk to my dad.”

“Did talking to your dad help you feel better?”

“Dads can be pretty smart. Talking to him helped a great deal. I wouldn't say it made me feel better, but it made me see things for what they are. I'm not a rancher. I used to love going to visit my grandfather in the summers, and I'd stay with them for a month or so. I loved the ranch. But that doesn't mean I know anything about running one. Dad pointed that out to me. He asked me if I wanted to keep the ranch, and make a go of it. That was easy. I want that very badly. All he said after that was, 'Then I think you can figure out what you need to do.' He walked away and left me there, wondering. I spent the next couple days thinking, and he's right. Now I know what I need to do.”

“And that is?”

“Find someone that knows ranching, hire him as my foreman, and listen to him. Let him run it, and hopefully he'll let me learn from him. After talking to Clyde, and you today, I think that someone I need to hire is you.”

Bo shook his head. “I don't know about that, Mr. Granger.”

“Wyatt, please.”

“Thank you. I don't know about that, Wyatt. I know a lot about ranching, but not about running one. My only experience as a foreman was that short span, not quite a year, for Clyde. Maybe what you need, if you don't mind my suggesting it—”

“Go ahead.”

“Maybe you need to find an experienced foreman that can come in here and take over.”

“I've thought of that, and I even interviewed two of them the last couple days. I planned on hiring one of them, and hiring you as another hand to replace one of the last two that left and haven't been replaced yet. But after I interviewed them I didn't feel good about either of them. I think you're the man I want as my foreman.”

“Why?”

“Both of them were obviously qualified. They came highly recommended. But as I talked to them I didn't feel comfortable. They would have taken over my ranch and left me in the dust,

wondering what was happening. To be honest, I'm not sure my ego could handle that. I want someone that knows what they're doing, but will talk to me about it, and at least let me feel like I have some part in it. But it's more than that, Bo. Both of these men were older, experienced men, and they were of the old school. They've done things one way their whole life and that's the way they wanted to continue. I'm very interested in the new things you learned in school. I'd like to talk about them, see if we can try some of them.”

Bo was starting to nod his head as he listened to Wyatt. “I'm very eager to institute some of the new things I've learned, but we would basically be two rookies trying to figure this out together.”

Wyatt had a big grin on his face. “I know, and I'm all for it. What's more important, though, is I think Grandpa would be for it, as well. He was always open to trying new things. He used to tell me, ‘Go ahead and try it. You'll never know if it'll work if you don't.’ I want to take his advice.”

Bo took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “Wyatt, I appreciate the offer, but I don't know. I don't know how large this ranch is even, but it looks very impressive. You'd be taking a big gamble on me. I'm not sure if I feel comfortable with that.”

“I admit, it is a gamble, but it's a gamble I want to take. I just didn't have a good feeling about either of the experienced foremen. I do with you. I want to try some of the new techniques, and I think you're the man for this job. We may stumble along the first year or two, but I think we can figure it out, and three years from now we'll be an unstoppable team.”

Bo studied Wyatt, and thought about his proposal. “Well, you've definitely given me something to think about.”

“Good. If you're not ready to accept my offer yet, why don't you take some time to think about it? You've got a job here. I'm hoping you'll take the position of foreman, but the least I want you on board as a hand. Can I count on you for that much?”

Bo couldn't stop the smile spreading across his face. “You've got my curiosity piqued now. Yes, I think I'd enjoy working here. Why don't you give me a day to consider the foreman's job? May I ask you a few questions before I go and give it some thought?”

“Absolutely. Ask anything you want.”

“I've got some questions about the ranch; how big it is, what you're doing here now, what you want to do in the future, how many men are working here, and I guess I need to know what our roles would be as ranch owner and ranch foreman.”

“All good questions. Let me answer the last one first. As far as our roles, I've learned my lesson. I don't know enough about ranching to try and run any part of it. I plan on leaving the decisions up to you. I'll admit I like the idea of us talking about our plans so I know what's going on and can give you my opinions as to the direction I'd like to see it going in, but I'm serious about leaving the decisions up to you. You know ranching; I don't.”

“I know ranching, yes, but I have very little experience as a foreman. That's what worries me.”

“I think we'll be okay. Wade agreed to stay on a month so I can find a replacement and he can train him. There's three and a half weeks of that month left yet. That'll give you time with him, and I think you'll pick up on most of what he's doing and how. As for the rest, if you make a mistake here and there, I think we can work through them. Now, let me answer your other questions.”

Bo listened carefully for the next hour while he and Wyatt talked about the ranch in its current state, along with Wyatt's vision for the future. He asked a few questions, which Wyatt answered completely. The more they talked, the more comfortable Bo felt with Wyatt. By the time he left, he'd pretty much decided to give it a try, but felt he needed to give it some additional thought to be sure he wasn't overlooking anything.

Wyatt invited him for lunch the next day, which would allow him to meet Wade and ask any additional questions he might have. Bo accepted, telling him he'd try to have an answer for him then.

He went back to the motel he'd booked for the night and got some paper and a pen. It always helped him to write things down, good and bad, about decisions. Once it was in black and white, it always seemed easier for him to see which made more sense.

After doing that, he went to get some supper. Later that evening he went over his notes one more time, and called Clyde and talked to him. After that he called his dad and had a long talk with him. When he went to bed that evening he felt good about the decision he'd made. He fell asleep smiling, wondering what it was going to be like being the foreman of a large ranch.

The next day, Bo had lunch with Wyatt and Wade. He was rather surprised when Wyatt urged Wade to answer any questions Bo had, and to answer them honestly. As they were nearing the end of lunch Wyatt stood. “I have a phone call I need to make, and I'm going to the office in the barn to make it. I want you two to have some privacy to talk. When I get back we'll have our dessert, and I'll ask if you've reached a decision.” He left before either man could say a word.

Bo looked at Wade and decided to take advantage of the opportunity. “My understanding is Wyatt tried taking a more active part in running the ranch than he probably should have, but now sees that it was a problem. Am I right about that?”

“That pretty much sums it up, yes,” Wade answered.

“So I guess the one question I have to ask you is why are you leaving, if Wyatt wants to change now? Do you think he's not very sincere about changing, or is it something else?”

“It's actually a few things. I talked to him before, but he wasn't willing to change, so I started looking around. I found this job opening, and to be honest, it's my dream job. It's closer to my family, which is good since my parents are getting older now. But it's also a different kind of ranch. They have some cattle, but their specialty is horses. They breed them, raise them, train them and board them. That's what I really enjoy, the horses.”

“Okay, that makes sense then,” Bo said.

“Besides, that, Wyatt didn't really come to this understanding until after I'd already told them I'd take the job. I think giving him my notice is what made him open his eyes and see

what's going on. I really don't think he got it, even as all the ranch hands kept quitting.”

“Do you really think he does now?”

“I do,” Wade confirmed. “Wyatt means what he says. That's the one thing I liked about working for him. You know where you stand with him, and if he tells you something, you can take it to the bank. He never listened to what I said or took my suggestions, but he never told me he would, either. Now he is, and I believe him. I think he wants to learn ranching now.”

“That's kind of backwards,” Bo said with a smile. “Most people learn ranching before they own one.”

“And it would have been much better for him if he'd done it in that order, too,” Wade agreed with a chuckle. “But I think he sees what's happening to his ranch now, and he genuinely wants to save it.”

Bo nodded. “That's good to know. Thanks for your honesty.”

“No problem.” He paused, considering his words a moment. “For what it's worth, I think you should take the offer.”

“Why?”

“Wyatt's really impressed with you. He wants to try cutting edge things, and he thinks the two of you together can do that. He also respects the fact you didn't jump at the chance. That tells him you're responsible and not just out for the title or money. After meeting you and talking with you, I think you two would work well together. I wish you the best of luck.”

“And you'll train me while you're still here?”

“I will. I'll tell you what; you can even call me after I leave if you have a problem. If I can help you over the phone, I will.”

“Thanks.”

A couple minutes later, Wyatt came back in and sat down. As soon as they each had a piece of pie in front of them, he looked to Bo. “So, do I have a new foreman, or just a hand for now?”

“If you're willing to give me a chance, I'll do the best job I can as your foreman.”

“Excellent!” Wyatt reached over to shake Bo's hand. “Welcome aboard, son. When can you start?”

“It's only a couple hours home. Let me go grab my clothes and my horse. If you've got room for me in the bunkhouse, I could be back by eight or nine o'clock tonight.”

“I've got an extra room in the foreman's cabin,” Wade said. “You'll be living there, so that would make more sense. We can talk in the evenings, and maybe I can pass on a couple tips.”

“I appreciate it,” Bo said.

\* \* \*

Wade and Bo got along well, and Wyatt was true to his word. He was part of the conversations and gave opinions, but left the decisions up to Wade for the first week, and then Bo made the decisions. Wade had suggested Bo take over, but promised he'd be there to back

him up. By the time Wade left, the men were all comfortable with Bo. He'd proven himself and they respected him. They knew he not only was very knowledgeable about ranching, but wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty, working right alongside with them, whatever they were doing.

Wyatt and Bo had quickly established an easy working relationship, also. They knew which direction they wanted the ranch to move in and had a plan for getting there.

Things went well for the first couple months. Everyone was getting to know each other and what was expected of them. Bo was gaining confidence in his abilities as the foreman, and he and Wyatt were both very satisfied with things.

The first real problem was quite unexpected. Bo glanced out at the machine shed, where a couple of the guys were working on the hay baler. A pin sheered off the day before as they were finishing up, and they had to get it fixed. He was surprised to see both men standing at the door, staring toward the house. His eyes followed theirs to a young lady standing in the vicinity of the pool, but off to the side far enough that the men could see her. It was obvious to him she was well aware they were watching her, and she was putting on a bit of a show as she lathered on suntan lotion.

He walked over toward the men and was a little concerned when they didn't even see or hear him approach. He was directly behind them when he cleared his throat and watched them both jump. They quickly moved back into the machine shed and picked up some tools.

He turned to the side a bit to hide his chuckle. "Everything okay, fellas?"

"It's real okay, boss," Austin Shelton said with a grin. "Did you see her?"

"I did," Bo confirmed. "Who is she?"

"Don't know," Landon Walker, the other man, said, "but I sure wouldn't mind finding out."

"I believe right now you need to concentrate on getting the hay baler repaired."

"Okay, boss," Austin said.

Bo walked away, shaking his head. He glanced back over at the girl, who had gone closer to the pool, since her audience left.

Bo ate his meals with Wyatt. That evening he brought the subject up after they'd discussed the ranch business. He looked around first. "I thought we might have a guest for supper tonight."

Wyatt looked up at him. "Why did you think that?"

"I saw a young lady by the pool today. I thought maybe she was staying here."

"She is," Wyatt said. "She and the neighbor lady went into town late this afternoon. They're eating before they come home."

"Is she a relative of yours?"

"She's my niece, Alicia Adamson."

"Your niece? She doesn't look much younger than you."

"She isn't. Her mother, my sister, is the oldest in our family. I'm the youngest – quite a bit younger, like an afterthought."

“Ah. That explains how you're about the same age.”

“Yep. Anyway, her father is in the Army, and he's deployed. She and my sister are at each other's throats constantly, so she asked if she could come here for the summer. She says she wants to take the summer off, then she'll go find a job in the fall.”

“Take the summer off from what?”

“From loafing, as far as I can tell. She screwed around and partied her first two years of college. She passed just enough classes to stay in school. She finally got her bachelor's degree, and went back for her master's. I think it was just so she didn't have to get a job. Anyway, she has her master's now, but she says she needs some time off to decide what kind of job she wants to look for in the fall.”

“What are her degrees in?”

“I'm not really sure. She probably would have majored in tiddlywinks if they offered it.”

“You don't sound too impressed with her.”

“She's a nice lady. But she needs to grow up. It's time to stop partying and get a job.”

“Does she have a boyfriend?”

“Not that I know of. Why; are you interested?”

“No, but she's starting to cause a problem with the men.”

Wyatt sat up straighter. “How? I told her when she asked to stay here she was not to bother the men, and let them do their work. What's she doing?”

“Maybe it's nothing. Today instead of working a couple of the guys were staring at her in her bikini. I'm sure she knew they were looking, and she was giving them quite a show.”

Wyatt sighed. “I'll talk to her. Leading those men on isn't a good idea.”

“I agree completely. Thanks for talking to her. I'll talk to the men as well, and let them know she's family and off limits. There's a couple of the younger men out there that I haven't gotten to know well enough yet to be able to say I'd completely trust them around her. How about you?”

“I'm with you there. There's a couple I'd rather she not be around.”

After they finished their meal, Bo went out to the bunkhouse and gathered the men together to talk to them. He warned them she was Wyatt's family, here for a short stay, and they were to leave her alone. Wyatt talked to Alicia when she got home, explaining that he didn't know a couple of his men that well and they had work to do, and she was not to tease them or get their attention. She just laughed.

A few days later, Bo took the Gator filled with needed supplies out to where he'd sent a couple men out to ride the fence and make sure it was ready to turn some cattle into the pasture. They'd called, saying they had a major problem with the fence and needed a roll of barbed wire and a few tools. As he approached he saw both of them, Toby Campbell and Brooks McCoy, talking excitedly as they were obviously watching something in the valley on the other side of the knoll.

He anxiously looked over as he reached the knoll to see what had their attention, and was

shocked. It wasn't some form of wildlife as he'd expected. It was Alicia, stretched out on a large rock, presumably lying in the sun. Once again, he was sure she was aware the boys were watching. She stretched and moved in a very seductive way, and every now and then he saw her glancing their way. Oh, yeah, she knew they were watching. He cleared his throat. "I've got your supplies. When you get this fence fixed, bring the Gator back. Brooks, is it okay if I take your horse? I think I need to go have a talk with Wyatt's niece first."

"You can take the horse, boss," Brooks offered, "but what do you have to talk to her about? She isn't hurting anything."

"She could be hurting herself without knowing it. Do either of you see a gun anywhere over there?"

Toby laughed. "I wasn't exactly looking for a gun, if you know what I mean."

"I do know what you mean, Toby, and let me remind you, she's Wyatt's niece. Hands off. She's not staying that long."

"I know, I know. But looking's still free."

"Maybe during your off hours, but you're on the clock right now. Time to get this fence fixed. I'll see you two back at the barn." They grumbled a bit, but headed back to the Gator to start fixing the fence. Bo watched them each sneak another peak back over their shoulder before they started working.

He had to laugh as he mounted the horse Brooks had been riding. Brooks was about the only hand that had been hired on without his own horse. He said his horse had been stolen from the barn at the last place he worked, and he hadn't found one he'd wanted to buy yet. Bo had a feeling he was going to ask about buying this gelding. According to Wyatt, he'd picked him out when he was hired here and it was about the only one he rode. Bo had to give Brooks credit. He'd picked out one of the ranch's best, in his opinion.

Once he'd mounted, Bo turned the horse and headed toward Alicia. He was shocked when she looked over, saw the horse headed her way and quickly jumped on the four-wheeler she'd driven out there, and took off. "Hey, Alicia, come back here. I just want to talk to you!" She glanced back at him once quickly, but then sped away. Bo froze. For a minute he thought he knew her. She looked like someone he'd gone to school with when he was growing up. But no, it couldn't be her. She and her family moved out to the east coast their junior year in high school. And her name wasn't Alicia, either; it was Garnet. He had to smile when he thought of her name and how kids teased her in school. They called her 'darn it' instead of Garnet, and she hated it. Kids could be cruel.

Pulling himself back to the present, he told himself it couldn't be Garnet. He still needed to talk to her, but he wasn't about to give chase on a horse. It would be too dangerous. She was already going faster on that four-wheeler than she should be going, especially since she wasn't familiar with the area. He'd wait and talk to her at the house, or maybe to Wyatt. Someone needed to talk to her about driving like that, and they also had to tell her if she planned on roaming that far from the house she needed to have some protection. Wyoming had enough

predators that you had to be careful, and in country like the ranch, that was their territory.

He turned and headed back to the barn. Later that afternoon he went to the house, looking for Alicia, but Maria, Wyatt's cook and housekeeper, hadn't seen her. "She left on a four-wheeler and I haven't seen her since. I'm a little worried. I told her she shouldn't go far from the house, but she just laughed at me and told me she'd be fine."

"I'll talk to Wyatt and if we need to, we'll go look for her. She didn't say where she was headed, did she?"

"No. All she said is she wanted to see the ranch."

Bo could tell Maria was worried, and he tried to soothe her concern. "We'll find her. If she comes back, would you mind calling one of us?" Maria assured him she would, and Bo headed out to the barn. He got his horse, Midnight, and headed to the cornfield Wyatt was spraying fertilizer in.

Wyatt saw him coming and stopped at the end of a row and waited. "What's wrong, Bo?"

"Alicia. Maria's worried about her. She left on a four-wheeler this morning and hasn't been back. I saw her enticing the men working on the fence in the west pasture, and I was concerned. I've seen mountain lion tracks out there a couple times, and I didn't see any gun or any form of protection on her or her four-wheeler. I tried to go talk to her, but when she saw me coming she took off. I went back to the house later to talk to her, but Maria says she hasn't come back yet. Does she have a gun with her that I didn't see?"

Wyatt sighed and ran his hand through his hair. "Probably not. I doubt if she knows how to use one. I told her not to wander far from the house because it wasn't safe. I also told her to quit teasing the men."

"Do you suppose she has a phone on her?"

"We'll find out." Wyatt took out his phone and dialed. "She's not answering, if she does."

Bo shook his head. "What do you think? This one's your call. She's your niece. Should we get some of the guys together and go out looking for her, or assume she's okay?"

"I don't know. I'd sure welcome your opinion."

Bo grinned before answering. "I'm not sure you'll still welcome it after you hear it. When she saw me coming and sped off on the four-wheeler a little while ago, I called for her, saying I just wanted to talk to her. She didn't say anything, but leaned on the throttle a little harder. My thought then was someone needs to take that little lady in hand. She needs her bottom warmed."

Wyatt laughed out loud. "I've told both of her parents the same thing, numerous times."

"They won't allow anyone to lay a hand on their little girl?"

"Not that so much as they're afraid to do it. He's been deployed a few times and feels guilty about not being here for her all the time. When she was little he was sent overseas for four to six months out of the year, mostly training soldiers in other countries. That's when the guilt started. Then when the war started he was deployed for longer periods at a time, and it was about the time she really needed someone to tell her no. He wasn't about to say no during the precious times he had with her between deployments."

“And her mom?”

“She wants to be her friend, but what she needs is a mother. I've told her that, but she's afraid Alicia will want nothing to do with her if she acts like a mother instead of a friend.”

“I guess that leaves the task to her Uncle Wyatt,” Bo said with a grin.

“Or her uncle's foreman,” Wyatt countered. “If she gets upset with me and leaves here, it's hard telling what trouble she'll get herself into.”

“If she's around me and earns a trip over my knee, I don't have any problem with giving her what she's earned, as long as you don't think I'll have an irate army man wanting to tear me limb from limb.”

“Don't worry about her parents. I don't think either one of them would have any problem with it, as long as they don't have to be the ones doing it. If either of them does have an issue with it, I'll run interference for you. I'll tell them it was with my approval.”

“So do we go look for her, or give her a little time?”

“I'm tempted to say let's give her until supper time and see if she's back by then, but what if she's not? It'll be hard trying to find her once the sun goes down. I told her not to be wandering far from the house and I expect her to be there for supper unless she tells me ahead of time she's going somewhere else. If she was clear out there when you saw her, it's obvious she's not listening to what I told her, so supper time may not mean anything to her, either. I'm thinking we need to go find her. She could be hurt.”

“Or lost,” Bo added. “This is a big ranch. She may have gotten turned around out there.”

“That's quite possible, too,” Wyatt added with a worried look.

“Let me call all the men first and see if any of them have seen her. She seems to like their attention. Maybe she's out enticing someone else.” Wyatt nodded.

Ten minutes later Bo said, “Several saw her earlier, but no one's seen her lately. Apparently she's been all over the ranch, so I don't even know where to start looking. Let's call all the men in and talk to them and send them out in pairs looking for her.” Wyatt nodded his approval. Bo made the calls, telling them to meet at the barn ASAP so they could organize a search mission.