



COLORADO
COWBOYS

3

TO TAME A
COWBOY

JODY HEDLUND



TO TAME A
COWBOY



JODY HEDLUND



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2022 by Jody Hedlund

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hedlund, Jody, author.

Title: To tame a cowboy / Jody Hedlund.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House Publishers, a division of
Baker Publishing Group, [2022] | Series: Colorado cowboys ; [3]

Identifiers: LCCN 2021051764 | ISBN 9780764236419 (paper) | ISBN 9780764240102
(casebound) | ISBN 9781493437269 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3608.E333 T6 2022 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20211021

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021051764>

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Cover design by Kirk DouPonce, DogEared Design

Author is represented by Natasha Kern Literary Agency.

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger,
and plenteous in mercy.

Psalm 103:8



A decorative flourish with symmetrical, swirling lines and a central scroll-like element, framing the chapter title.

CHAPTER

1

FRONT RANGE, COLORADO TERRITORY
MAY 1867

Savannah Marshall's heart pulled taut like a rope in a tug-of-war.

In the darkness of predawn, she paused inside the front door, glancing behind her at the winding grand staircase. She ought to march right up to her room, climb back under her covers, and stay.

But her feet seemed to tangle with the plush entryway rug, preventing her from spinning around. She couldn't go through with the weddin'. She had to slip out, saddle up, and ride away today.

But could she really do this? Leave without saying any good-byes?

She gripped the door handle. She had to. If she didn't,

everyone would convince her to marry Chandler Saxton—just like they’d been doing for weeks already.

Pressing a hand to her chest, she tried to ease the battle inside. . . . She wasn’t saying no forever. Just not yet.

Hefting her bag over her shoulder, she took a steadying breath, opened the door, and stepped onto the wraparound veranda and into the frigid May air.

At her appearance, Mr. Pritchard rose from the rocking chair, taking a puff on his pipe. The amber glow illuminated the kindly veterinarian’s weatherworn face underneath the brim of his hat. “All set?”

Was she ready?

Pulling the door shut, she steeled herself against the need to retreat.

“Yes, sir.” A cold breeze blew across the Front Range from the northwest, from the Rockies still covered in snow at the highest elevations. Savannah tugged her canvas coat closer. Painted with linseed oil to make it wind and water resistant, the coat was lined with flannel for warmth. It wasn’t as heavy as her overcoat, which she wore on the coldest days, but it would hold her in good stead during the ride up into the high country. She’d already put on her calf-skin gloves and tucked her flyaway fair hair up into her hat—one that had once belonged to Hartley.

“You’re sure you want to tag along today?” Mr. Pritchard started down the veranda steps, his boots clomping. “I know you’re busy. What with getting ready for that fancy wedding of yours and all.”

The weddin’ was only three days away, and Momma was making a fuss over last-minute preparations. Actually Momma had been making a fuss ever since returning from

their winter home in St. Louis earlier in the month, bringing with her a weddin' gown, decorations, and a to-do list as long as a prairie fence.

Savannah hastened after Mr. Pritchard. "I could use a break from the planning." Yes, her going away was a break. That's what it was.

"Alright then." His feet crunched in the hoarfrost that coated the grass. "So long as you're sure."

Was she sure?

She glanced behind her at the dark windows of the mansion, where everyone was still asleep. Daddy had built the beautiful home for Momma in order to entice her to live on the Colorado ranch, which she still only did for half the year. With the long colonnade spanning the full length of the front façade, the Greek-Revival style was similar to the Georgia plantation home they'd lived in before the war. The inside was just as beautifully decorated as the outside. Momma had made sure of it.

Savannah's footsteps slowed. What would her parents do if she didn't marry Chandler and his money? They needed the wealth the marriage would bring, allowing Daddy to invest in railroads again. But what would she do with her life if she became Mrs. Chandler Saxton? Especially since Chandler had made it clear that he didn't want her doing menial labor as a southern gentleman's wife. He'd agreed with Momma that she'd need to focus on their home and children and that her days as a veterinarian would have to come to an end.

Would she have nothing better to do with her days than decorate her house?

She didn't want to end up unhappy, like Momma. Sure,

her elegant and sweet-natured mother tried to hide her discontentment. But it was easy to see and was one of the reasons why Daddy was so anxious to go east, to Atlanta and civilization, where Momma would have more friendships and socializing.

Savannah shifted her attention to the large horse barn and to Silas, who'd roused to saddle their mounts and now stood by the wide door, yawning noisily. He held a lone lantern that illuminated her black Morgan, Molasses, although she normally rode Sugar, her Appaloosa.

The problem with Sugar was that she was unique. With her silvery white coat and dark leopard-like spots, the horse was sure to stand out. When Daddy and Chandler started searching for her, one mention of the horse's description and they would be right on her trail.

Taking Molasses would give her more time. And she needed more time, didn't she? A few weeks or even a month to gain perspective. Maybe after that, she'd be able to make herself go through with the marriage.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," she whispered. "I know you'll be disappointed." Since coming west and helping manage the ranch, Chandler had become like a second son to him. After Daddy had experienced so much sadness with Hartley's death, she didn't want to cause him more grief in losing Chandler too.

Yet, *agreeing* to marry Chandler was different from actually *going through* with the deed. As the weddin' inched nearer, she'd felt more and more like a corralled wild mustang. She'd circled and circled, going first one way and then the other. . . . Now that she was facing a saddle and halter, she needed an escape. To be free so she could decide what she wanted for herself first.

“Thank you, Silas.” Mr. Pritchard took his mount’s reins from the middle-aged groomsman.

Savannah handed Silas a haversack, hoping he wouldn’t question why she had the extra luggage. Of course, she always wore her leather satchel strapped diagonally over her shoulder whenever she went on calls with Mr. Pritchard. She was as prepared as the veterinarian for any animal ailment.

“Please tie the bag onto my saddle.” She hitched her foot in the stirrup and hefted herself up.

The groomsman stared from her to the haversack and back.

She pretended to ignore him, making a show of situating herself in the saddle.

Silas lifted the bag hesitantly.

“Hurry on up, Silas. Mr. Pritchard and I need to be on our way.” She arranged her split skirt on either side over the trousers she wore underneath and prayed Silas wouldn’t voice the question that filled his warm brown face.

He set to work looping a rope around her bag and securing it to the saddle. After cinching the last knot, he stood aside and hooked his fingers through his suspenders. “Sure are takin’ a lot with you, Miss Savannah.”

In the process of releasing a pent-up breath, her lungs tightened again, especially when Mr. Pritchard looked at the haversack and raised a brow.

She waved a hand to brush off the concern. “It’s just a few extra things. Nothing to worry about.”

Silas pursed his lips, the sure sign he didn’t believe her.

She nudged Molasses forward. Though the ranch hands would be awake and readying for the day in the predawn hour, their cabins and the livestock barns were located across

the east pasture, well away from the main house. That meant she wouldn't have to worry about running into Chandler or any of the other cowboys. But the house servants would be rousing soon enough, and she wanted to be on her way before anyone else saw her bag and wondered what she was up to.

"The master know where you going?" Silas called after her.

"Of course he does." She could only pray her letter of explanation was enough. She'd left it in an envelope on the chest of drawers in her room. The servants would see it today when they went in to tidy and clean, but they'd leave it alone. When she didn't come back, then Daddy would start investigating and find the note calling off the engagement.

After he read it, his shoulders would droop and the lines in his handsome face would deepen with more sadness.

Her throat tightened, and she blinked back tears. She had to stay strong. Surely after a few days he'd realize she'd been right to leave, that marriage was too big a commitment to enter into without making sure she was ready for it.

She hoped he'd come to that conclusion. If only he wasn't struggling to make up for all the wealth he'd lost in the war . . . If only his and Momma's future security didn't depend on the union to Chandler . . .

Her horse trotted ahead of Mr. Pritchard down the lane leading away from the house. Darkness shrouded the landscape, but the starlight illuminated enough to see the rocky plains of the east rolling outward for miles and miles, all the way to Kansas and the Missouri River. Though the land wasn't arable enough for farming, it was perfect for ranching, as Daddy had discovered shortly after the gold rush.

As one of the presidents of the Central of Georgia Railway, he'd sold off his stock in the company and invested in land out west before the start of the war. Savannah suspected he'd done so to avoid the growing conflict, especially to keep Hartley away from combat. Little good it had done. Hartley lived through the war years, but an accidental kick in the head from a horse had caused trauma to his brain and killed him just as surely as a battle wound.

As she unhitched the gate and guided Molasses under the metal sign that spelled out the name of their ranch, the Double L, she allowed herself a final look at the place that had been home for the past seven years, the mansion set against the backdrop of the red-rock sandstone formations and the mountains in the distance.

"Love you, Momma," she whispered. "Love you, Daddy. I promise I'll make this up to both of you." The trouble was, she didn't know how.

"First stop, Smith Fork Ranch." Mr. Pritchard took a puff on his pipe and moseyed up next to her, the horses' hooves loud against the hard earth. "They've got a couple of calves with scours."

"And what about the Middletons? Their foal is having a hard time latching on." The Middletons lived close to Fountain near Ute Pass, and she needed to reach the wagon road before the teamsters left so she could ride along with them for safety. The road leading up Ute Pass was one of the main transport routes through the Pike's Peak region, winding through South Park and going all the way to Leadville.

Just last week Mr. Pritchard had mentioned the growth of ranches in the South Park area and that ranchers there wanted to hire a vet. He said he'd go himself if he were a

younger, sturdier man who could handle the harsher conditions of the high country.

Ever since Mr. Pritchard brought it up, Savannah had been able to think of little else. She might not have gone to college or earned a degree like Mr. Pritchard, but he claimed she was as good as any vet he'd ever known.

Of course, the news of the need for a veterinarian had come just when the weddin' pressures had been building to unbearable proportions. Then, yesterday, when she'd heard the teamsters were heading up into the mountains, she'd known this was her chance—maybe her last chance—to taste freedom before having to return to the paddock.

"If you want," she said, "I can ride over to the Middletons'. You know I'm good with foals. I'll have that sweet thing nursing before you get there."

"You have a gentle touch with all horses. Not just foals." Mr. Pritchard's voice contained a note of pride.

"I've learned everything I know from you."

"No, Savannah. The truth is, some men—and women—are born with a natural ability to relate to creatures. And you're one of them."

If only everyone felt the same way. Even though Daddy was more supportive of her tramping around with Mr. Pritchard than Momma had ever been, he still held to the traditional view that such work was best left to men. But he'd humored her and allowed her more freedom in that regard.

Savannah smiled. "So you'll let me ride ahead to the Middletons'?"

He chuckled at what he must have perceived as her eagerness. "I'll deliver you there and then head over to Smith Fork."

"Thank you, sir."

“Just don’t let your father know I left you unattended. If he finds out, he’ll never let you accompany me again.”

“I promise I won’t say anything if you don’t.” She swallowed the discomfort at knowing she was putting Mr. Pritchard into a difficult situation.

She had to push it aside. This once. And pray that eventually everyone would forgive her for what she had to do.