

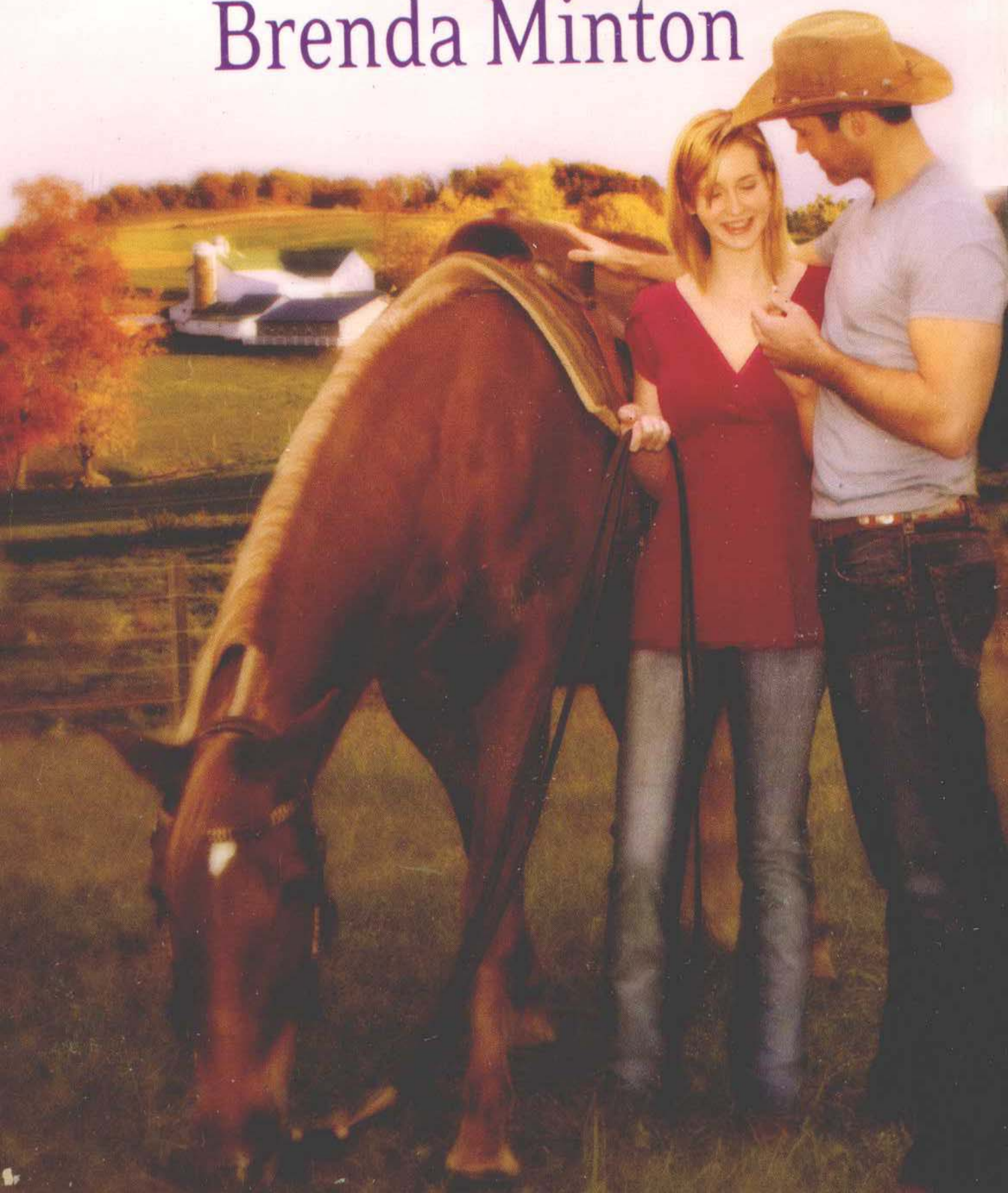
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Love of a Cowboy®

The Cowboy's Sweetheart

Brenda Minton



Dear Reader,

Welcome back to Dawson, Oklahoma. Andie Forester's story really started with Alyson's story (*THE COWBOY'S COURTSHIP*). It was there that we met the twin sisters and got to know Andie a little bit.

I was excited by the story that unfolded for a heroine who quickly became one of my favorites. I felt like I knew Andie. But as her story unfolded, I realized it wasn't going to be as easy to write as I had assumed.

I didn't undertake this story, or the subject, lightly. I hope that you'll trust me when I say that I prayed about this and labored over the words and how to handle this very delicate subject. People make mistakes. Each of us has done something that we regret, but obviously we can't go back and undo what we've done. So we move forward, we seek God, and we find a way to move forward in grace and with faith.

That's exactly how Andie and Ryder handle their situation. I hope you'll fall in love with these two characters the way I've fallen for them. And come back soon for Wyatt's story.

Many blessings,

Brenda Martin

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *The Cowboy's Sweetheart* starts with the heroine, Andie Forester, thinking thoughts that are totally foreign to who she believes she is. A situation causes this change. Why do you think she had this change in thinking? What event would, or has caused you, to think differently about your life or situation?
2. Ryder Johnson is afraid to face Andie, but he is there for her because he knows she'll need him. He's also put off by her return to her faith. How difficult would this be for him, to be there and yet have all of these obstacles that would make him want to not be there? What does that say about who he is?
3. Andie's faith isn't really new, it's just a faith that she's returned to. Why would facing her mother be the last thing she wanted to do at that moment?
4. Andie and Ryder made a promise to keep boundaries between them. Would it have been better, and easier, for them to face life and their feelings honestly and take each situation as it came to them?
5. Andie and Ryder made a mistake/choice that resulted in consequences that are lifelong. How can we distinguish between consequences and discipline? Is there a big distinction?
6. The Bible says that the Lord disciplines those whom He loves. Andie had the idea that God was out to

punish her, or hurt her, for her actions. Is this wrong or right thinking?

7. Ryder proposed to Andie believing it was the “right thing to do.” Why would that proposal be the wrong thing to do? How could it be right?
8. When faced with the possibility of a miscarriage, Andie’s thoughts about the baby changed. How?
9. Losing her independence wasn’t easy for Andie. Her faith was tested, but Ryder found more strength. Is it normal, for faith to have highs and lows? How does it help us to have someone with stronger faith to encourage us during those times?
10. Ryder is determined to marry Andie, even though he’s struggling with the romance part of the equation. When does he finally get it right?
11. How does the idea of being a parent change Ryder?
12. When does Ryder really figure out that he loves Andie and has probably loved her for a long time? Do you think he always knew but was afraid of hurting her, or was it a moment when he fell in love with her?
13. Life changes. Andie and Ryder were living very single, individual lives. One moment, one choice changed all of that. They went from single, to having a baby, to possibly losing that baby, and then having

twins. How do changes in life change us? How does it change our faith?

14. People with faith have values that they live by, according to God's word. We try to be who God wants us to be, but sometimes we fail. We make choices with long lasting consequences. Andie and Ryder made a choice and that choice changed their lives. In the end they found happiness and faith, but was it easy to deal with the consequences of their actions?



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"Andie, we're going to figure this out. I don't know how, but we will."

She nodded. "We should go." Andie glanced away, but Ryder touched her cheek, forcing her to meet his gaze. She stared up at a smile that curved into something delicious.

That smile was her downfall. She should turn away. But his eyes were dark and tempting, like chocolate.

"We should definitely go," she whispered.

"I know, but there's one thing we need to do before we leave."

His lips touched hers in a gesture that was sweet and disarming. Then he paused and rested his forehead against hers.

"We shouldn't have gone there," Andie said.

"Andie, at least give me a chance to figure this all out before you give up on me."

"I've never given up on you. But I have to make the right decisions, now more than ever."

"And you think turning down my proposal was the right decision?"

"Yeah. It was sweet of you, but it was spur-of-the-moment and this is something that we should take time to think about."

Spur-of-the-moment was definitely a bad idea.

Books by Brenda Minton

Love Inspired

Trusting Him

His Little Cowgirl

A Cowboy's Heart

The Cowboy Next Door

Rekindled Hearts

Blessings of the Season

“The Christmas Letter”

Jenna's Cowboy Hero

The Cowboy's Courtship

The Cowboy's Sweetheart

BRENDA MINTON

started creating stories to entertain herself during hour-long rides on the school bus. In high school she wrote romance novels to entertain her friends. The dream grew and so did her aspirations to become an author. She started with notebooks, handwritten manuscripts and characters that refused to go away until their stories were told. Eventually she put away the pen and paper and got down to business with the computer. The journey took a few years, with some encouragement and rejection along the way—as well as a lot of stubbornness on her part. In 2006 her dream to write for the Steeple Hill Love Inspired line came true. Brenda lives in the rural Ozarks with her husband, three kids and an abundance of cats and dogs. She enjoys a chaotic life that she wouldn't trade for anything—except, on occasion, a beach house in Texas. You can stop by and visit at her Web site, www.brendaminton.net.

The Cowboy's Sweetheart

Brenda Minton



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THE COWBOY'S SWEETHEART

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Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne
of grace, that we may obtain mercy,
and find grace to help in time of need.

—*Hebrews 4:16*



Dedicated to the readers, for the wonderful
e-mails, letters and prayers.

To the editors at Steeple Hill, for the opportunity
to write the books that I love and for
encouragement along the way.

You're the best.

To my family, for all of the love and support
you've given me.

To God, for giving me the desires of my heart.

Chapter One



You have to cowboy up, Andie. Get back on, even if it hurts.

Andie Forester swiped a finger under her eyes and took in a deep breath. She hit the control on the steering wheel to turn down the radio, because it was the fault of Brooks & Dunn and that song of theirs that she was crying. "Cowgirls Don't Cry."

Whatever.

The song made her think of her dad pulling her to her feet after a horse had thrown her. She remembered her world when he was no longer in it. And the song reminded her how it felt to have a sister so perfect the world couldn't love her enough.

Andie even loved Alyson. How could she not? Alyson had come to Dawson and back into her life, soft smiles and sunshine after a twenty-five-year separation. Andie was home just in time to help her sister prepare for her wedding to Jason Bradshaw. A beautiful wedding, with the perfect flowers, the perfect dress.

At the moment Andie wanted to throw up because she was Andie Forester and she didn't think like that. She didn't think sunshine and lace. She thought leather

boots and saddles. She thought hard and tough. She was a tomboy. She knew how to hang with the crowd, with cowboys and stock contractors, and guys from Dawson, Oklahoma.

But her dad had been wrong. Brooks & Dunn were wrong. Sometimes cowgirls did cry. Sometimes, on a dusty road in Oklahoma when there wasn't anyone around to see, cowgirls sobbed like little girls in pig-tails.

Sometimes, when her best friend had hurt her in a way she had never thought he could, a cowgirl cried.

But she'd get it out of her system before she got to Dawson, and she'd be fine. Ryder Johnson wasn't going to get to her, not again.

That was another thing about Foresters. They learned from their mistakes. She shouldn't have made this mistake in the first place. That's what really got to her.

She downshifted as she drove through the tiny town of Dawson, all three businesses and twenty or so houses. The trailer hooked to her truck jerked a little and she glanced in the rearview mirror, smiling because even Dusty was glad to be home. The dusty gold of his nose was sticking out of the side window, his lips curled a little as he sniffed the familiar scents in the air.

Home was where people knew her. Yeah, they knew her secrets, they knew her most embarrassing moments, but people knowing her was good. The folks in Dawson had shaken their heads, sometimes laughed at her antics, but they'd always been there for her.

The end of September was a good time to return to Oklahoma. The weather would be cooling off and in a month or so, the leaves would change colors.

She would get back to normal. Home would do that for her.

Andie took in another deep breath, and this time she didn't feel the sting of tears. She was done crying. Her pep talk to herself had worked.

She slowed as she drove past the Mad Cow Café and pretended she wasn't looking for Ryder's truck. But she was. It was an old habit. She consoled herself with that thought. And with another one—his truck wasn't there. Hopefully he was still on the road. She didn't want to run into him, not yet.

They'd both been going in opposite directions as fast as they could, putting distance between them and their big mistake. He'd gone back to riding bulls or steer roping, whatever he was doing this year. She'd taken off for Wyoming and a rodeo event she hadn't wanted to miss. Even her trips home had been planned for the times she knew he'd be gone.

The last time Ryder had seen her, well, she'd done a lot of changing since then. She wasn't ready to talk to him about any of that.

At least Dawson hadn't changed. That was something Andie could count on. Her hometown would always be the safe place to land. Jenny Dawson, the town matriarch whose grandfather had started this little community, would always be in her front yard wearing a floral print housedress, digging in her flower gardens, a wide-brimmed hat shading her face from the Oklahoma sun. Omar Gregs would forever be in the corral outside his big barn, a shovel in hand, and that old dog of his sniffing at a rabbit trail.

And Granny Etta would always be at home, waiting.

She slowed as she drove past the Johnson ranch, past the drive that led to Ryder's house. Her best friend. Her heart clenched, the pain unfamiliar, sinking from her