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American

Magazine



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Is It Hard To Be Honest In Your Town?

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The American Magazine

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MERLE CROWELL, *Editor*
JAMES C. DERIEUX, *Managing Editor*

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Hettie drew back with the last of failing strength. The quivering of her body ceased as if paralysis had set in. Cold, numb, awful suspense held her upright, waiting, as if for death itself

"Nevada"

A romance of the West

By Zane Grey

ILLUSTRATED BY STOCKTON MULFORD

Synopsis of the Three Preceding Instalments.

BEN IDE and his sister, Hettie, had sold their fertile ranch in California, on the shores of Tule Lake, and journeyed overland to the newer country of Arizona, taking with them their mother; Ina, Ben's wife, and their little boy; Ina's brother, Marvie Blaine—and a long train of men, wagons, and horses. There were three reasons for this move: Their mother's health, Ben's longing for a return to pioneer living, and the hope in his heart and in Hettie's that in a frontier country they might find the man they both loved.

Six years before he had come to them, a stranger, known to them only as "Nevada." For two years he had helped Ben in his wild-horse hunting; he had shared in the capture of the great stallion California Red; he had fallen in love with Hettie. And then he had recognized in Less Setter a scoundrel he had known in years past, and had seen through Setter's schemes to ruin the Ide family. He met Setter and his two accomplices in the road, killed them all in open fight, and escaped, with no word of farewell to Ben and Hettie.

By his deed he saved the ranch for them, and made possible Ben's reconciliation with his father and his marriage to Ina Blaine. This, Ben and Hettie knew. What they did not know was that their "Nevada" was the notorious gunman Jim Lacy, and that he had learned from them for the first time the beauty of friendship and the glory of love. They had made a new man of him—and yet to save them he had had to renounce his new self and become again Jim Lacy.

Jim went back to Lineville, where he had known Setter, resolved never to let Hettie know who he was, but to live up to her ideal of him. And again fate intervened. He had arranged to go to Arizona with Cash Burridge—who had determined to turn from cattle "rustling" to honest cattle raising and had bought a ranch there—and then once more Jim Lacy was called upon to kill his man and become a fugitive from the law. He came into the "Gold Mine" (Lineville's gambling hell) one night, to find a girl dying on the floor, where Link Cawthorne in a drunken rage had thrown her. Jim Lacy did the only thing his code allowed. And for four years no one knew his whereabouts.

Meanwhile, Ben Ide and Hettie had bought a ranch and cattle in Arizona from a man named Cash Burridge, only to find from Tom Day, a neighbor, that Burridge had cheated in the count of cattle; that he had passed on liens on the stock; and that the whole country was so infested with rustlers that not even Judge Franklidge, the boss rancher of the country, knew who were the honest ranchmen and who the thieves.

However, Ben stuck to his guns, built his ranch-houses, and hired a man named Dillon as foreman. When Ben Ide's cattle and his own began almost at once to be the chief targets for the rustlers, Judge Franklidge called Day and a trusted cowboy, "Texas Jack," into consultation. Texas Jack volunteered to go single-handed into the Mongollons, to pose as a rustler, in order to get information to break up their gangs. And when Franklidge and Day remonstrated, he confessed to them that he was the notorious Jim Lacy. So, once more, to save those he loved, Nevada made his sacrifice. He shaved off the beard that had disguised him, bought a new outfit, and rode into town—Jim Lacy once more!

He heard much gossip in the saloons, and learned that old Elam Hatt and his son Cedar were under suspicion. Then, on the street he ran into Rose, the only daughter of old Elam. He gained her confidence, found that she feared Cedar Hatt and Clan Dillon—and loved Marvie Blaine. Jim promised to help her. That night he saw her at a dance with Marvie—and he saw Hettie Ide! Hettie was lovelier than ever, and from a dark corner Jim heard Clan Dillon make love to her. Hettie repulsed his advances with scorn, and when Dillon tried to hold her by force she broke away from him and ran. Whereupon Jim stepped out of the shadow, knocked Dillon down, and got away before a crowd gathered.

IT WAS eleven o'clock when Jim Lacy entered the Ace High Saloon, at that period one of the noted gambling-hells of the Southwest. He bolted into the barroom, like a man who was pursued. He was, indeed, though not by any visible thing.

"Cowboy, what you runnin' from?" queried a tall man. He happened to be standing nearest to the door, his back to the bar. A brass shield, with letters printed upon it, stood out prominently on his vest.

Jim espied that, almost in the instant that he recognized this individual.

"Howdy, Macklin," he said, nonchalantly. "I was just runnin' from a sheriff."

"Wal, you run right into another,"

growled Macklin, surprised and annoyed. "Who air you?"

"I'm foreman of the Coffee Pot Outfit," drawled Jim.

"What's your handle, smarty? It jest happens there ain't any Coffee Pot Outfit at this particular time. . . . I've a notion to clap you into the jug. You kinda look pale 'round the gills. What have you been up to, an' who air you?"

"None of your business," returned Jim, with an abrupt change of tone and manner. "But if you hang around, I reckon somebody'll tell you."

"Hyar, you come right along with—"

"Lookout, Mack!" interrupted someone behind Jim. A glass went crashing on the floor, and the rasp of heavy boots followed. Then a man strode in front of the sheriff,

facing Jim. "Excuse me, stranger, but I believe I know you. If I'm wrong say so."

"Howdy, Cash," returned Jim, extending his hand.

Cash Burridge looked a full ten years older than when Jim had last seen him. Drink and hard life and evil passions had broken the man.

"Jumpin' steers!" he ejaculated, grasping Jim's hand in both his. "If it ain't you!" "Shore is, Cash. Just got in, an' lookin' for trouble."

"No! *Who?*" queried Burridge, with a sudden check to his almost boisterous welcome. He had bent forward and lowered his voice.

"Wal, nobody in particular, Cash. I just feel mean."

"I'm a son-of-a-gun! It's you—changed a lot. Most in disposition—if it's true. You're lookin' for trouble!"

HERE the sheriff interposed by placing an ungentle hand on Burridge's shoulder and turning him somewhat.

"Friend of yours, hey? Thet's no guarantee to keep him out of jail."

"Thunder!" exploded Burridge. "I'm tryin' to keep you out of the boneyard. My lord! If I told you who this man is you'd sweat blood!"

Macklin's jaw dropped and he swayed back against the bar, dominated by Burridge's fierce sincerity. Then Burridge drew Jim aside.

"It's you—really you, Jim?" he whispered huskily.

"Shore, Cash. Cain't you see?"

"But we heard you were dead."

"That was terrible exaggerated, Cash."

"Dropped from the sky! Jim Lacy, just down from heaven, huh? Well, I'm darned! . . . An' I never was so glad to see a man in my life! Where you been, Jim, since you left Lineville? Lord, I'll never forget that night you shot Link Cawthorne's eye out!"

"Wal, Cash, never mind where I've been."

"Sure, that doesn't matter, only I always had my idea, an' I was curious. I had a hunch you went to New Mexico, an' got mixed up in that Lincoln County War. Some of those hombres got out of that fight alive. I know one of them did. Close pard of Billy the Kid."

"Who?" queried Jim.

"I'm not givin' any man away, Jim. Sure wouldn't have said as much as that to anyone else. When'd you drift in?"

"To-day."

"You'll be recognized here."

"Who's goin' to recognize me, Cash?"

"You remember Ace Black? He's the gambler we knowed at the Gold Mine back in Lineville."

"Shore, I remember Black."

"He's up-stairs playin' faro. Reckon Black will know you; but he'd never give you away. Hardy Rue, though. He will. He never cottoned to you. Always had a hunch you killed Less Setter. Rue has dogged me all these years. An' I'm layin' it to him that I'm down on my luck now."

"Wal! What come of your ranchin' deal heah, Cash?"

"JIM, you had me figured. I couldn't stand prosperity," returned Burr ridge heavily. "But I swear I went straight till I got in need of money. I'd made poor deals. I could steal cattle an' make money, but not by tradin' or ranchin'. I began to borrow. Then I had a chance to sell out to Ben Ide, a Californian. I did him dirt, an' I've lived to be sorry. There's a man, Jim! . . . Well, when I was flush again, I began to drink an' buck the tiger."

"An' now you're aboot broke. Who got all that money, Cash?"

"Hello, Marvie. Come and walk with me," she said brightly. "Aw, I want to die," replied Marvie

"Aw, everybody. Brennan some; but then I don't begrudge it to him. Hardy Rue beat me out of most of it. I fell in love with a Spanish girl here. She an' Rue double-crossed me. Got my pile!"

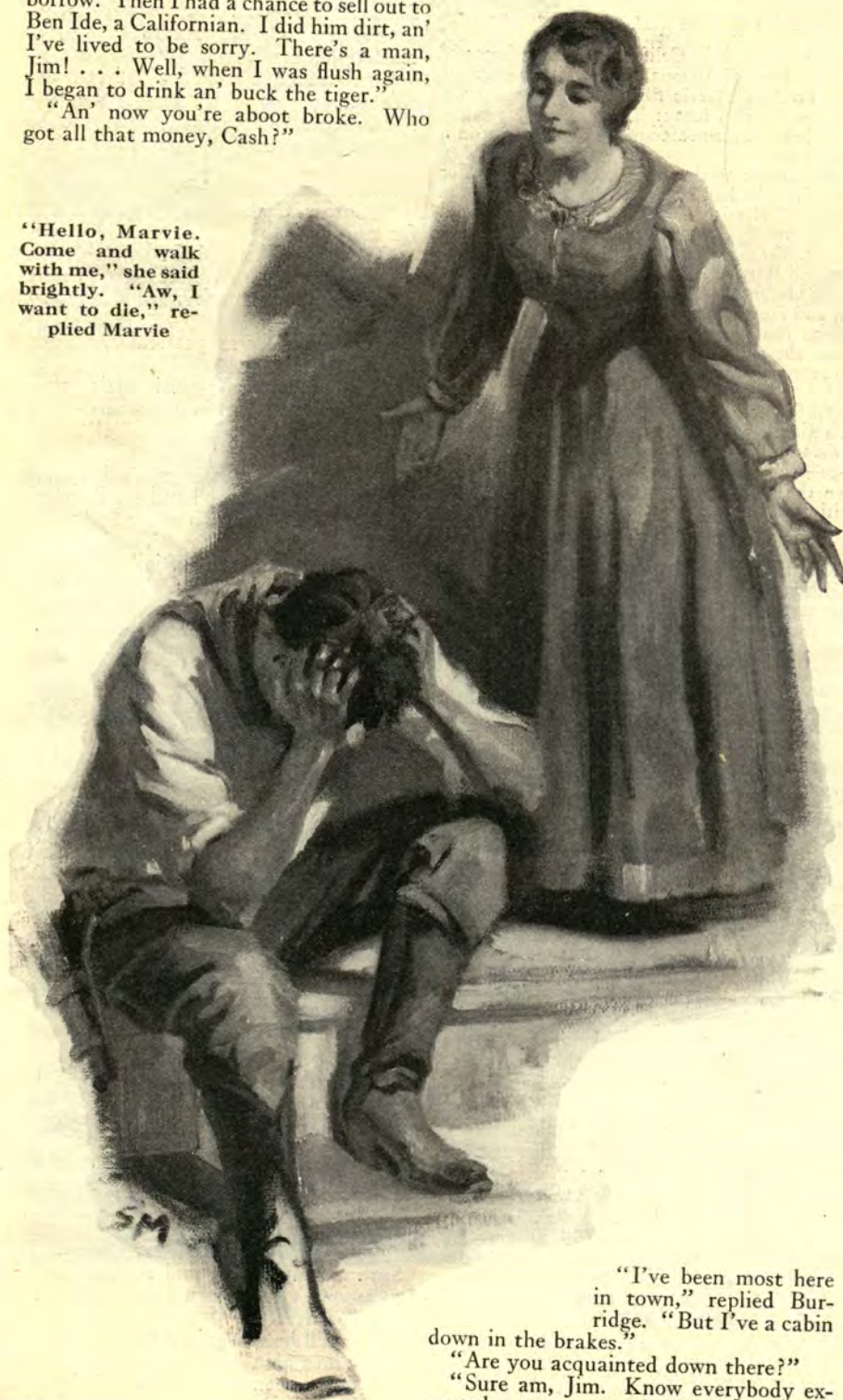
"Wal, why didn't you kill him?"

"I couldn't try an even break with Rue. An' I never had a chance to shoot him in the back."

"Is Rue heah now?" asked Jim.

"Reckon he's with that black-eyed hussy. It's a little early for him to drop in. Lord, it'll tickle me to have him see you with me. Rue was afraid of you, Jim. An' you need to watch him!"

"Where do you hang out, Cash?"



"I've been most here in town," replied Burr ridge. "But I've a cabin down in the brakes."

"Are you acquainted down there?"

"Sure am, Jim. Know everybody except the newcomers. An' I'm givin' you a hunch there's some hard customers driftin'

in. It's a rough country, an' big as all out-doors. I've sure learned to love Arizona."

"Wal, Cash, when you was rich an' high-handed I didn't have much use for you," said Jim, with a smile. "But now you're broke an' down on your luck, I reckon I'll chip in with you."

"Jim Lacy! You always was a queer one," returned Burr ridge feelingly. "Reckon I know you've got somethin' up your sleeve; an' whatever it is, I'm sure with you!"

"All right, Cash. Suppose you tote me 'round to look 'em over."

HETTIE IDE had attended the dance at Winthrop as a guest of Alice Franklidge, an unmarried girl of nineteen, daughter of the judge's second wife. They left the dance before midnight, to be driven out to the Franklidge house by Alice's escort. The night was cold and clear, with myriads of blinking stars overhead. Hettie removed her hat to let the cool wind blow her hair.

"Did you enjoy your first dance in Arizona?" asked the young rancher.

"Yes, indeed I did, Mr. Van Horn—in spite of a—rather unpleasant incident," replied Hettie.

"Sure, we're awful glad. Sorry, too, somethin' annoyed you. But, honest, the dances now are Sunday-school affairs to what they once was. Isn't that so, Alice?"

"It is. I used to be afraid to go," replied the girl. "Fights were common. One for each dance! They're really nice now. Dad and some of the town men have seen to that. . . . Hettie, it mortifies me that you were annoyed by Clan Dillon. I know it was he. You danced with him—then came back to us all flushed and nervous."

"Yes, it was Mr. Dillon. He—he insulted me."

"I'm not surprised," returned Alice thoughtfully. "Dillon is a handsome, fascinating man. Very agreeable, winning. But I always thought him a little common and bold."

"Who was the pretty girl Marvie paid so much attention to?" asked Hettie.

"I didn't notice her. But I saw he was having a grand time."

"He had her with him just before we left," went on Hettie. "She hung back as Marvie came up to me. I think she was afraid to meet us. I thought her very pretty. Big dark eyes. Red lips. Curly brown hair."

"That was Rose Hatt," replied Van Horn.

"Rose Hatt? She couldn't belong to that notorious Hatt family we hear about?" asked Alice.

"There's only one family of Hatts, Alice, an' Rose is the only girl," said the young rancher. "I'd seen her before. Charley Moss danced with her. Pretty kid. An' she seemed modest an' quiet. Young Blaine sure acted smitten with her."

"Hettie, love affairs in Arizona go like fire in the dry desert grass," said Alice, with a little laugh. "You want to watch out, doesn't she, Frank?"

"Sure won't do her any good to watch out," returned Van Horn gayly. "One of our Arizona lads is goin' to get her."

Soon they arrived at the Franklidge home, which stood on a bench of high ground among stately pine trees. The girls went in to find Judge Franklidge beside an open fireplace. He greeted Hettie warmly.

"Did you meet your brother?" he asked, as he placed a chair for Hettie.

"No. Did he come in, after all?"

"Yes. He was here for an hour," replied the judge. "Came in to talk over a cattle deal. I advised him not to buy more stock just now."

"Was Ina with Ben?" asked Hettie.

"Sure was, and she looked powerful handsome. I wanted them to stay here overnight. But Ben said he'd rather go to the hotel, so he could be in town early. Left word if he didn't see you at the dance that you were to meet him to-morrow at noon sharp. At Brydon's."

"Goodness! I'm glad we got away from the dance before Ben arrived," exclaimed Hettie, with a rather unmirthful laugh.

"Well now, you don't say?" queried the judge, lowering his head to gaze at her over his glasses.

"I'M AFRAID it's going to be embarrassing for me when I see Ben. I'll have to tell him that I—I have discharged Dillon."

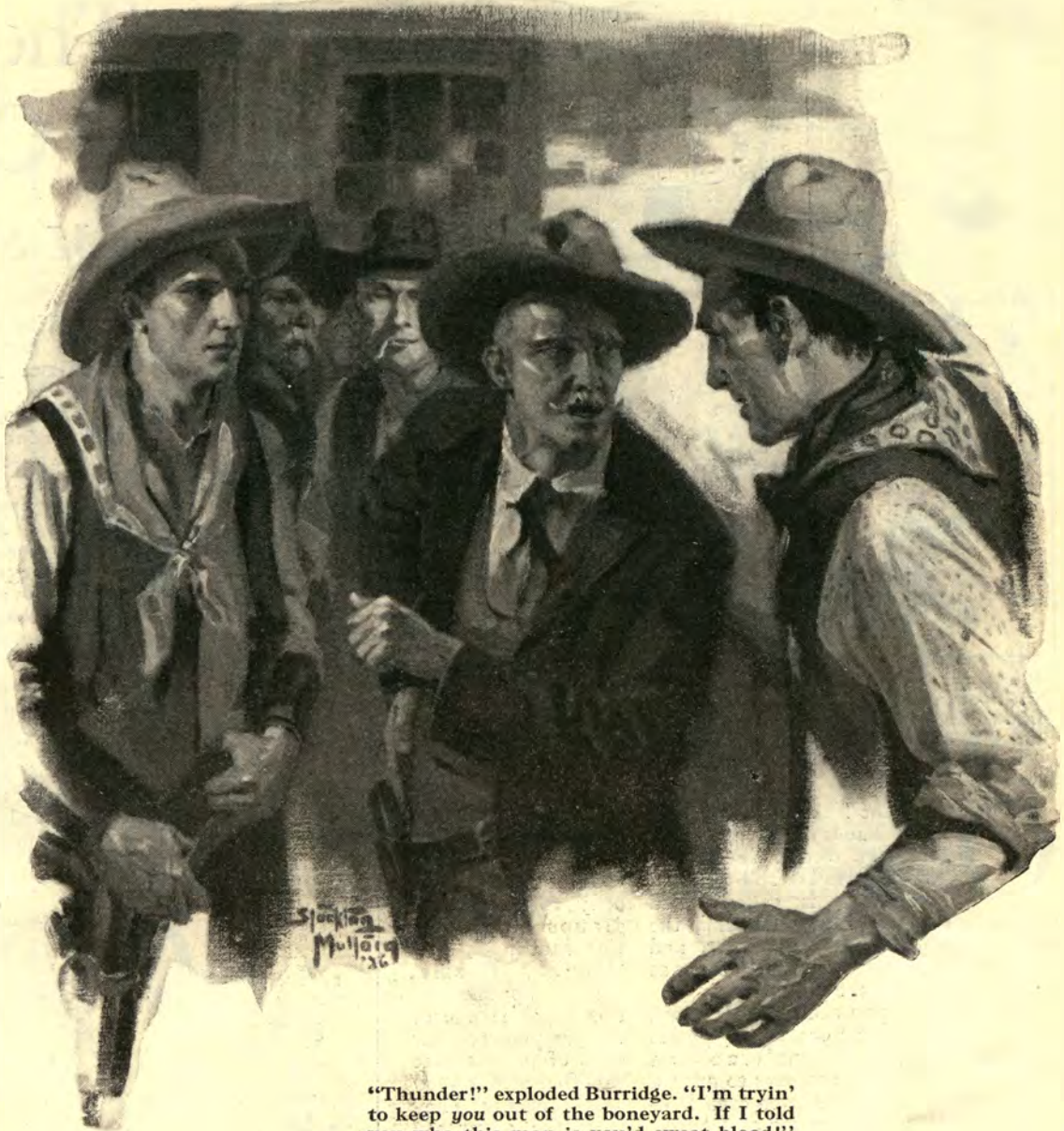
"Dillon! Clan Dillon? Did you fire him?" asked the judge, sitting up abruptly. "What for, lass?"

"I had reason enough, though I'm afraid Ben may not see it that way. He swears by Dillon. Well, Mr. Dillon has made it rather hard for me out at the ranch. He waylays me whenever I go outdoors. At first he didn't do me the honor to offer marriage. But finally he got that far along, and despite my refusal he kept at it. I did not know he was to be at the dance to-night, or I wouldn't have gone. But I danced with him, and walked with him, on the terrace. . . . And—well, to make it short, he insulted me."

"You don't mean he dared to lay a hand on you?" demanded the old rancher.

"Both hands, and arms too," laughed Hettie, though she blushed as she admitted it. "In fact, he was a ruffian. I imagine Dillon has had his way with certain kinds of women. I think he expected me to squeal, or beg—then flop into his arms. But I'm strong, and I broke away from him. And then I discharged him."

"You did right, lass; but how is Ben going to take that?" queried Franklidge



"Thunder!" exploded Burrage. "I'm tryin' to keep you out of the boneyard. If I told you who this man is you'd sweat blood!"

seriously. "He thinks a heap of this Dillon. Only to-night he was bragging about Dillon's recovery of a bunch of cattle that'd just been rustled off into the brakes. . . . Still, come to squint at the offense, Ben can't overlook it."

"You don't know my brother very well yet," returned Hettie, shaking her head.

"If he had seen Dillon insult me he'd have horsewhipped him. But Ben scouts my statements. He's tired of hearing about these lovelorn cowboys who annoy me. He thinks I'm—well, a little too sensitive. I declare I don't know how he will take this Dillon affair."

"I'll tell you, lass," replied the judge. "He'll not uphold you. Dillon will get to him first and soften his offense. And Ben will keep him on."

"That would be dreadful," said Hettie. "I'll actually be afraid of Dillon."

"Well, the only solution to your problem, Hettie Ide, is to fall in love with some fine Arizona lad," declared Judge Franklidge, with both kindly conviction and teasing good humor.

"Well," returned Hettie, "I'd take your advice, Judge Franklidge—if it weren't for an insurmountable obstacle.

. . . I can't fall in love with a fine Arizona lad, because I'm already in love with a fine—Nevada lad!"

As the beloved name sounded on her lips, Hettie felt the swift blood rise to tighten and heat her face.

The judge laughed heartily, but Alice, intuitively grasping the import beneath Hettie's rather flippant speech, crossed over to her and put an arm around her.

"Dad is as bad as Ben, dear. Come, it's late. Let's go to bed," she said.

"WELL, Hettie," added the judge, in the same mirthful vein, "if I were forty years younger I'd contest this mysterious Nevadan's rights. Where is the confounded lucky jackass?"

Hettie looked back from the doorway, through which Alice was leading her. "I do not know," she replied sadly.

When the door closed she heard the judge burst out: "Did you hear that, Van? It explains a lot. . . . Well, dog-gone me for a thick-headed fool! And I'll gamble Ben Ide is the same!"

One of the Franklidge stable hands drove Hettie into town the next morning, so that she had (Continued on page 206)



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"Nevada"

(Continued from page 61)

time for thinking how best to approach Ben. It had not occurred to her, until Judge Franklidge made the suggestion, that he might get a warped version of the affair from Dillon. She decided to wait and see if Dillon had already talked to him.

Hettie had some shopping to do, and after that had been accomplished she passed on down the street, presently to encounter Ben.

"Ina is at the dressmaker's," he said, after greeting her. "Reckon it's a good time for you to go to the bank with me."

"Bank! What for?" she queried, as they turned back up the street.

"I'm having a certified check made out for your interest in the ranch."

"Ben!" she cried, in amazed reproach.

"Yes, 'Ben,'" he returned, a little testily. "Hettie, I can't have you doing things without my knowledge. Besides, to be honest with you, I don't want to see you lose that money. And I'm pretty certain I'll lose all I put in cattle."

"Ben, something has happened since I saw you," said Hettie quickly.

"Reckon it has," returned Ben, dropping his head so she could not meet his eyes. "California Red is gone!"

"Gone? Oh, no, Ben," she cried. "Stolen?"

"We don't know. He disappeared from the pasture. Raidy swears Red was stolen, that he couldn't jump the fence. I know he could jump over the moon if he took a notion. Dillon agrees with me that Red just got away."

"But you don't know?"

"That's the rub, Hettie. We don't. And there isn't a man in my outfit who could track Red. Sure disgusted me. I tried to track him myself. Had to give up. . . . Reckon there never was but one horse hunter who *could* have done it."

"Ben, you'll get Red back," said Hettie, earnestly.

"You're game, Hettie," he returned, squeezing her arm. "With you and Ina and the kid I can beat this rotten deal. Reckon it'll help some if you consent to withdraw from it."

"I'll consent to anything that will relieve or help you."

THEY reached the bank, where presently Hettie received a certified check for her share in the transaction, and she immediately deposited it to her account. Then he drew her to a seat and said in a low voice, "Dillon just told me you'd discharged him."

"Yes?" queried Hettie, lifting her chin, while the tingle and heat of battle ran along her nerves.

"Hettie, I had to countermand your order," he went on gravely. "Now, we won't argue about it. Dillon is the best man available. I can't get along without him. He knows it too. I had some trouble conciliatin' him."

"Oh, indeed," retorted, Hettie, biting her lips. "May I ask what Mr. Dillon told you?"

"Not much. He was sore; but he laughed, at that. Said he loved you, an' had been coixin' you to look upon him

favorably. Then last night—at the dance—he asked you to marry him. Said you weren't very encouragin'. Then he tried to kiss you, an' you made a fuss, an' took it upon yourself to fire him."

"If you believe him, Ben, why, there's no need in my bothering you with my side of the story," rejoined Hettie.

"Reckon there's no call to think Dillon's a liar," went on Ben. "The truth is, Hettie, you're a little of a man-hater. Oh, I know—I remember, an' I sure don't blame you for bein' true—to—to him. But you're hard on all these poor devils who fall in love with you."

"Ben Ide, I am not a man-hater," protested Hettie.

"We won't argue the question," said Ben wearily. "You an' Ina always beat me. But please don't misunderstand. I don't want you to marry Dillon. He seems a fine fellow who'll make a big man in Arizona some day. Just the same I'd want to know him better before I'd let him have you."

"Thank you, Ben. I can forgive you now," murmured Hettie.

"I'D LIKE to ask you somethin'," went on Ben, with both concern and mirth in his look. "Did you strike Dillon last night—when he tried to kiss you?"

"Strike him? No, I certainly did not. I wouldn't soil my hands on— But why do you ask that?"

"Well, he had a beautiful black eye," replied Ben ponderingly. "He told me he had stumbled in the dark—in his room—an' hit a chair. Sure it could have happened. But it looked to me like a black eye that had come from a good swing an' a hard fist. I've been wonderin' if he lied to me."

"Well, I'm wondering who gave him just what he deserved," said Hettie, as she arose. "I've got more shopping to do. And time flies. You wanted me to meet you at twelve. How about Marvie?"

"He'll be there. Marvie hunted me up an' asked for money. I'd just given him some, before we left. The kid was all excited about some girl. Wanted to buy her candy an' presents. But, by George, I forgot I promised not to give him away. . . . So long, till twelve. I'll pick you up at Brydon's store."

"Well," said Hettie, "as to Marvie—I think he's in love. I saw the girl. Tell you more later."

It lacked five minutes to twelve when Hettie labored to the front of the dry-goods store, burdened with packages. She deposited her bundles on a window seat beside the door, and looked out for Ben. He had not arrived yet.

Suddenly a man, hatless and coatless, dashed by, yelling, "Keep off the street!"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Hettie, amused.

Several clerks came hurriedly to peek out.

"Looks like another street fight," said one of them excitedly.

Shouts and trampling of feet followed. Across the street pedestrians hurriedly ran into the first open doorway they

happened upon. The noise ceased. Then a man entered the door where Hettie stood, transfixed and thrilling.

"Hello, Matt, what's doin'?" queried the clerk.

"Darned if I know," replied the man. "I seen people run off the street, so I ducked in here. Just before, I heard Jim Lacy was in town."

"Who?" shouted his questioner.

"Jim Lacy. Don't know how true it is. But somebody's in town, you can gamble on that."

Faces appeared at all doors and windows. Some peeped down the street, then jerked back. How ridiculous it seemed to Hettie! Yet there she stood likewise, her heart throbbing, her whole being in a state of suspense.

A shot rang out, deep and ringing. Another followed, almost like an echo. Silence ensued, palpitating, stifling to Hettie. A single shout came from far down the street.

The man beside Hettie peeped out.

"By heaven!" he ejaculated, in husky accents.

The clerk, frightened as he was, had to look. He jerked in his head, with face pale and eyes starting, and began to jabber.

Hettie obeyed an irresistible instinct. She looked out. The street appeared empty. No, there was a man, lying face down, not fifty feet from the door. His arms were outstretched.

"It's Jim Lacy. I never saw him; but I know them who has," said the man beside Hettie.

"Oh, how dreadful! . . . the dead man—there in the road—Jim Lacy?" whispered Hettie.

"No. Jim Lacy is the one comin' up the street. . . . See his gun. It's smokin'."

THEN Hettie espied a man in rider's garb, gun in hand, stalking toward his victim. He passed him with only a downward glance. He sheathed the gun. He strode toward the sidewalk.

His walk! His shape! Had she been horrified out of her senses? Was she mad? What flashed so swiftly in memory? But this man—this Jim Lacy! He was coming. He would pass the door.

Hettie drew back with the last of failing strength. She reeled. Her mind had halted. The quivering of her body ceased as if paralysis had set in. Cold, numb, awful suspense held her upright, waiting, as if for death itself.

The man in rider's garb passed the doorway, erect, stone-faced, with eyes of lightning set ahead.

Nevada! Hettie's faculties leaped out of terror and stupefaction to recognize him. Nevada! Jim Lacy? . . . Nevada! She had a sense of sinking down. All went blank—then slipped into black oblivion.

Hettie recovered consciousness before she had strength enough to open her eyes. She was lying down, with someone supporting her head. Cold water had been dashed in her face. She felt it trickling down her neck.

"It's Miss Ide," said someone. "She fainted. . . . Fell right down! Hadn't we better call a doctor?"

Whereupon Hettie opened her eyes, to whisper weakly, "I'll be—all right."

She lay on the window seat with her head supported by the young clerk. Sev-

eral persons, one a woman, stood around sympathetically.

"There! She's come to."

A bewildering complexity and whirling of thought suddenly left Hettie with her mind clear.

"Is my brother here?" she asked, trying to sit up.

"No. Better set still a little, miss. You're awful white yet," said the woman kindly.

"But I'm not hurt," returned Hettie. "You're all very kind. . . . It was silly of me to—to keel over like that!"

While she talked there seemed to be an awful question hammering at her consciousness. When Ben and Marvie entered at that moment, she understood what that question was: Ben did not know what she knew. Her relief was so great that it overcame her, and when she tried to rise she only sank back again.

"Why, Hettie!" cried Ben, in sharp concern, as he sat down to grasp her. Then Marvie knelt on the seat at her other side. Hettie smiled wanly at them, and closed her eyes. She felt dizzy, and then feared to look at them.

"It's nothin' serious, Mr. Ide," spoke up the clerk hastily. "She just fainted. It was the shootin'."

"Whew, Hettie! You gave me a scare," said Ben. "But you're all right. I'm surprised at you. Anyone would think you'd never heard a gun back in California. . . . Come, brace up, Hettie!"

"Take me home," replied Hettie, opening her eyes again. "I—I want to get out of this town."

"Wal, I should smile. Me too," joined in Marvie, squeezing her hand. Hettie had never seen the lad look quite as he did then. She did not dare ask him if he had seen the participants of the street duel. She feared he had.

"Marvie, you fetch these bundles," said Ben, as he lifted Hettie to her feet. He had to support her, and almost lift her into the back seat of the buckboard. "There, you're all right. . . . Marvie, put the bundles under the seats. Then get in beside Hettie an' hang on to her."

HETTIE did not look to right or left, yet she saw and heard the excited people passing, talking, down the street. Ben drove rapidly. Soon the center of town lay behind. The streets were quiet. Hettie lost the cold dread of seeing a lithe, stone-faced man in rider's garb. Ben halted the horses before a house well back in a green yard, and as he leaped to the ground Ina appeared.

"Hello, you-all," she called merrily. But as she reached the buckboard she suddenly halted, aghast. "Why, Hettie! You look terrible. Are you ill? Oh, what has happened?"

"Nothin' to upset you, Ina," replied Ben. "Hettie had a scare. There was a shootin' fray down-town. An' she fainted. Climb up, an' we'll be off pronto. These ponies are sure rarin' to go."

As soon as Ina had climbed up she turned solicitously to Hettie and reached for her hand. "You poor dear! I never saw you look like this. Fainted! That's strange. You never fainted in your life. Did you see the fight?"

"No. I didn't see—the fight," replied Hettie, shutting her eyes tight. "But I

heard it. . . . Then I peeped out—to see a—dead man lying in the street."

"How dreadful! Did you see this fight, Ben?"

"No. I missed it."

"Did you know the fighters?"

"No. Someone told me Jim Lacy had come to town, lookin' for trouble. He gave a rustler named Hardy Rue choice of leavin' town or throwin' a gun. Rue chose to stick, an' it cost him his life. They met in the street. Even break, of course, as these Arizonians call a fair fight. But Rue was fallin' when his gun went off."

"Terrible," said his wife, shuddering. "But a rustler cannot be a very great loss to the community."

"Ina, I sure hope Mr. Jim Lacy sticks around for a while," replied Ben. "Tom Day told me Hardy Rue might be the leader of the rustlers who've been pinchin' me so hard. But Dillon scouted the idea."

DURING this conversation Hettie was glad to have the support of Marvie's arm and shoulder. She had not opened her eyes. But her ears rang with the words she heard.

"Ben, I reckon you an' sis might shut-up yourselves," declared Marvie, significantly, "or talk about somethin' else."

"Sure, sonny," agreed Ben. "It's no pleasant subject."

The spirited team drew the light buckboard at a rapid pace over the smooth, hard road. The breeze stirred by this pace was cool and pleasant to Hettie's throbbing brow. After a long rest she opened her eyes and sat up again. Already the dark line of cedars was in sight, and beyond them the uneven timbered ridges that ran up to the black, frowning Mongollons.

While her gaze strained out over the yellow and green prairie land, and the rolling ridges with their slopes of sage, and the miles of white grass where herds of cattle grazed, and on and on, and ever upward to the purple ranges, Hettie Ide was confronting herself with the staggering truth:

She had seen Nevada. She could not torture herself with a thought of doubt—that she might have been mistaken. Sight and heart and mind, her whole being had recognized him in one terrible instant. He was in Winthrop. He was Jim Lacy. Jim Lacy, whom range rumor had long made mysterious, famous, ruthless. Jim Lacy was Nevada. Back in those Forlorn River days, when she and Ben and Ina and Marvie had loved him as Nevada, even then he had been Jim Lacy.

Why was she stunned? Ever since Nevada had killed Setter, and ridden away never to be heard of again, Hettie had realized that he had borne a name he could not endure for her or Ben to know. That was not so astounding. Nevada might have been any one of the noted desperadoes of the West. The overwhelming thing was that Nevada was here in Arizona, alive, virile, stone-faced as she had never seen him but once; here in Winthrop, close to the home she and Ben had chosen almost solely in the hope that they might find him some day.

A sickening, helpless impotence assailed her. All the longing of years wasted! All the hope and prayer and faith wasted! Vain oblations! Nevada had been false to her, false to the best she had helped to

raise in him, false to the blessed conviction she had always entertained—that, whoever he was and whatever he had done, out of love for her and assurance of her faith, he would go on to disappear from the evil roads of the West and turn to an honest life. Hettie would have gambled her soul on that. And now the soul she would have staked grew sick with horror and revulsion. Nevada was a consort of rustlers, a bloodthirsty killer, a terrible creature of fire and stone, of hate and ice.

And yet how could she be faithless in hope, in trust? Had she not sworn, with her lips close to his, that she would die before she ever failed him? What if he had used his deadly gun again? He had killed once before, a worthless, wicked man, whose death had served a good purpose. Nevada had once saved her and Ben and Ina, all of them, from grief and misery. Who could tell what the killing of Hardy Rue might be to someone?

Over and over again this stream of consciousness eddied through Hettie's mind, like conflicting tides, now rushing, now receding, now full and devastating.

Through the waning afternoon—through sunset, twilight, dusk, on into the night—Hettie acquired deeper insight into the gulf which yawned beneath her.

The swift horses had swung into the home stretch, over the short-cut road that had been one of Ben's achievements. How the night wind moaned in the lofty pines! It seemed the moan of the world. The fragrance of sage filled the air. Down through the pale aisle of the forest moved shadows, unreal, grotesque—things as strange as shadows of the mind.

When at last they arrived at the ranch, Hettie crept exhausted to her room, and, falling upon her bed, she lay quiet, wanting to rest and think before she undressed. But she fell asleep.

WHEN she awakened the sun was shining gold in at her window, and the fresh, sweet, cool fragrance of the forest blew over her. Instead of being beautiful, they seemed dreadful to her. She dreaded wakefulness, the daylight, the many duties to be met, the imperative need of action, the facing of her family and of life. But she could not keep them back. And with the truth, there surged over her new realization of the catastrophe that had fallen.

Hettie sensed then that her greatest trial was yet to come, and a faint intimation of what it might be appalled her. It roused her to battle. Dragging her aching body off the bed, she undressed, bathed her hot face, brushed out her tangled hair, and put on her outdoor clothes.

Then she slipped out without awakening her mother in the adjoining room. What was it that she must do? Find him, save him, or perish! All that she faced in the golden morning light seemed to mingle in one subtle whisper: There was no deceit, no blindness, no vacillation in the nature that spoke to her.

Only the birds and the wild game, and the calves in the pasture, the roosters in the barnyard, the burros out on the range shared with Hettie those perfect, uplifting, clarifying moments of the sunrise.

Golden gleams of light crossed the brown boles of the stately pines; low down through the foliage shone patches of pink sky; to the north and west opened the vast slant

down to the desert, illimitable and magnificent in the shadowy soft dawn. Deer and antelope grazed with the cows in the pasture. Squirrels barked from the trees, hawks sent down their piercing cries, wild turkeys gobbled from over the ridge. Joy of life, radiance of creation, peace and solitude, wholesomeness and sweetness of nature, exquisite beauty of woodland and wasteland at the break of day, and a marvelous, inscrutable Divine Will pervaded that wilderness scene.

Hettie absorbed it. She lifted up her head to the one black dome of the Mongollons. The misery of the night faded away like a nightmare. She had been a coward. She had failed to be grateful for the very thing that has been the beginning and end of her prayers. Could she be so slight and shallow a woman as to succumb to heartbreak? A terrible ordeal faced her, the outcome of which she could not divine. She could only endure, and fight whatever fate had in store.

"Oh, if I can cling to this blessed strength!" she cried. "To hold it fast when I'm distracted! To have it in hours of gloom!"

THAT day Hettie did not cross the picturesque log bridge that spanned the brook between her cabin and the beautiful rambling residence of her brother.

She did not see Ben all day. Late in the afternoon, when she went out to walk a little in the open air, she espied Marvie sitting on the porch, a most abject-looking lad.

"Hello, Marvie. Come and walk with me," she said brightly.

"Aw, I want to die," replied Marvie.

"Goodness gracious! Well, don't do that on my porch!"

She dragged him to his feet, and locking an arm with his led him off into the woods, until they were out of sight of anyone at the house. Then she bade him sit with her under an old pine where the fragrant brown-needle mat looked so inviting.

"Now, Marv, I'm through teasing," she said, with a gravity that suited his mood. "What's the trouble?"

"I had a run-in with Ben," replied the lad. "First one we ever had."

"You did? Well, I've had a thousand. When Ben gets sulky and cross a good run-in clears him up, as a thunderstorm does a sultry day. Where did Ben go today?"

"We finally rode off to a deserted homestead over here, five miles or so. Someone found tracks of California Red, and that news upset Ben. Then waited 'round hours for Dillon, who didn't come. Raidy, who's on the outs with Dillon, said some things that made Ben sorer. Well, dog-gone it, Ben pretty soon pitched into me."

"What for?" queried Hettie practically.

"Nothin'. Not a darn thing. 'Cept I moped along at a job he gave me. Fixin' fence. If there's any job I hate it's that. He swore at me. Then I told him to go to thunder—I'd quit and go home."

"What did Ben say?" asked Hettie.

"He said, 'Go ahead, you bull-headed, lop-eared little jackass.' So I rode off home. And I reckon I'll quit. I'm goin' to be a rustler."

"All right. You want to become a rustler," returned Hettie, accepting the statement. "What for?"

Marvie did not reply for a long while, during which his head sank lower.

"Hettie, I'm terrible—in love," he said at last, with an effort.

"Rose Hatt?"

"Yes. It couldn't be anybody else!"

"Does Rose love you?" asked Hettie softly, her hand going to Marvie's.

"I thought she did, at first," replied the boy, writhing. "She let me kiss her—kissed me back. But last night, when I asked her to meet me again, she said no. I got mad. But she stuck to it. When I accused her of flirtin', and me dead in earnest, she said, 'Marvie, I've a bad name. I belong to the Hatts. You've a lovely sister' (she'd seen you), 'and a proud family. I'm only a backwoods girl. It won't do. I'll not see you any more.' She ran away from me then, an' I couldn't find her. She'd hidden or left the dance. In the mornin' I tried again. No luck."

"Marvie, I admire Rose for that," said Hettie earnestly. "I think she's a square girl, even if she is a Hatt."

"Now, Hettie, don't you go talkin' like Dad or Mother," burst out Marvie.

"Oh, Marvie, I won't," declared Hettie, ashamed of the fact that she had been about to do so. By Marvie's warning she estimated his regard for her.

"I don't care a darn about myself—even when I do love her terrible," went on Marvie, passionately. "But what's to become of Rose?"

In the sincerity and inevitableness of youth he had hit upon the thing that mattered most.

"I understand, Marvie," said Hettie gravely. "You make me ashamed. Rose is not to blame for her family, for her surroundings, for—anything."

"Now you're talkin' like Hettie Ide," returned Marvie fervently. "And I'm givin' you a hunch. If Rose really loves me I'll stick to her. In spite of Dad or Ben or anyone!"

HETTIE dropped her head. Here was a problem. What should she say? Marvie's confidence in her suddenly meant more than ever before.

"What knocks me flat is—I'm afraid she doesn't love me," went on the lad. "I'm goin' to find out though, if I have to ride right under Cedar Hatt's nose. Last night I believed she didn't. 'This mornin' I thought she did. If not, if she was only a little hussy, why'd she say she wouldn't meet me any more?"

Hettie had no quick reply to his passionate query. Owing to her own stress of emotion the last twenty-four hours, she was far from being her old logical self. But she was fighting a conviction that Rose Hatt had shown nobility and sacrifice in her attitude toward Marvie's advances.

"Tell me, Hettie," begged Marvie, with soul-searching eyes that hurt her, "don't you think Rose cared really? Wasn't that good in her—givin' me up? Wasn't it because she—she liked me too well to go on with what she thought might disgrace me an' you an' Ben?"

"Marv, I can't be sure, but I think so."

"Thanks, Hettie," choked the lad, sitting up straight and facing ahead. A light crossed his somber, youthful face. "You hit me right here!" And he put his hand to his breast. "Sure, I couldn't tell anybody else but you. It's helped a lot."

"Marvie, how in the world did all this come about?" asked Hettie, in wondering sympathy.

"Like a story, Hettie. I met Rose over a month ago. Went huntin' on a Sunday. Rode a long way, then walked. I got after some turkeys. They were awful wild. I followed them a long ways, down into a big grassy canyon where a stream ran. Most beautiful place. Deer, elk, beaver all along. But I wanted one of those big old gobblers. So I kept on. And I run plump into a girl. She was cryin'. I spoke to her—sat down with her. After a while she began to talk. First she was sore an' hot at her brother, Cedar Hatt, who beat her. Showed me black and blue marks on her bare legs. I said somebody like Jim Lacy ought to come along and kill him. Funny, wasn't it, me sayin' that?"

"Well, we got real friendly. She said she'd meet me again, but farther away. That place was too near home. So she told me where a trail ran, and how I could find it. I never told her who I was that time. Forgot. Anyway, I kept the day she set and, sure enough, she came. . . . It was different that day. I reckon I fell in love then—not the first day. And she—but never mind. . . . I met her three times more. And last time, night before last at the dance. That's all."

"It's quite enough, isn't it, Marvie?"

"It sure is. I forgot to tell you. At the dance, when she said first she wouldn't meet me any more, I said I was goin' to our place Wednesday at the same time as before. I'm goin', too!"

"Marv, if what I know of girls holds true—if she really cares—she'll come. Rose is too young to stick to a hard decision like that, if her heart's involved."

"Hettie, you're a comfort," cried Marvie, gratefully, almost hugging her. "I'll hope she'll come. I'll believe it. Maybe that'll let me eat and sleep."

"You'll tell me everything?"

"You bet I will! Now I'll go and crawl to Ben!"

SEVERAL days passed. Hettie took to horseback riding again, venturing perhaps farther away from the ranch than Ben would have allowed, had he known. On Wednesday she rode with Marvie for five miles of his journey, back into the forest toward the brakes.

On the last stretch back home, where the trail was fairly level and open, she urged her horse to his best speed. That race satisfied, for the time being, a restlessness and need of violence. Her blood danced hot; wind and sun burned her cheeks; the tang of the woods acted like wine. Thus she rode down into the clearing, and on to the barn and corrals. And she ran pell-mell into Ben, Raidy, Dillon, and Tom Day, scattering them like quail.

Hettie reined her mount and, wheeling him, trotted back, and slid from the saddle.

"He's a—fine horse, Ben," she declared, patting the wet neck.

"Wal, he suits you, lass," said Tom Day admiringly, as he took her in from boots to sombrero.

"Miss Hettie, strikes me this hyar Arizona has got into your blood," added old Raidy, shaking his head dubiously. "Reckon I don't like it. Day says it ain't safe for you to ride out alone. So does Dillon."

"What do you say, Ben?"

"Not a darn thing. I quit long ago tryin' to run you," returned Ben.

Dillon leaned against the corral, in the background, without entering into the conversation. The discoloration around his eye had not wholly disappeared.

"Miss, can't you be happy ridin' on the ranch, without headin' off into the woods?" asked Raidy.

"Do you think I'd ride inside a fence? But seriously, what's the danger?"

"Wal, lass, mebbe there ain't any real danger," replied Day thoughtfully. "But we're sort of locoed these days. Reckon it's far-fetched to think hoss thieves an' rustlers might take a notion to steal you."

"Kidnap me for ransom?" queried Hettie incredulously.

"Wal, yes, an' for other reasons, too," rejoined the old cattleman significantly. "You don't 'pear to know it, but you're a mighty handsome girl."

"Thank you, Uncle Tom. That's a fine compliment. But it's not scaring me."

"HETTIE, look here," interposed Ben gravely, stepping to her with a piece of paper in his hand. "Read this."

Hettie took the coarse, dirty paper and read:

Ben Ide:

Sir—Fire your foreman Dillon or dig a grave for him. X

Without a word Hettie returned the slip to her brother.

"We found that nailed on the bunk-house door," he said angrily. "It's a threat. Dillon recovered another bunch of my cattle yesterday. Only a few head, but enough to make these rustlers sore. To-day we found where they'd been campin' in an old cabin, on my own land."

"See, Miss Hettie?" added Raidy. "That's why it ain't safe for you to ride out so far."

"I'll be careful hereafter," replied Hettie soberly, handing her horse over to Raidy.

She was proceeding up the lane, revolving in her mind that threatening note Ben had showed her, when he caught up with her and fell in to her step.

"Hettie, I don't like this situation I'm in," he said.

"Neither do I, Ben," retorted Hettie. "But nobody can tell you anything."

"Aw now, Hettie, that's not nice of you," said Ben reproachfully. "I told Ina about your affair with Dillon—your side of it, mind you. She pitched into me like sixty. I can't stand havin' both of you against me."

"We're not against you, Ben."

"Yes, you are," he said doggedly. "An' I'm gettin' sore at everybody. I'm goin' against your advice an' Ina's, even Tom Day's. I've offered a reward of one thousand dollars for the return of California Red. Posted notices along the trails. Tom didn't like that. Said someone would bring the horse back, then steal him again."

"What did Dillon say?"

"He approved me offerin' the reward. You know, Dillon said he could get Red back. An' he was away two days, after he returned from Winthrop. I don't know where he went. He's worked with most of these outfits along the Mongollons. He

knows them all, anyway, an' no doubt some of them are clanny with the horse an' cattle thieves. That's the worst of this country. You really don't know who is honest. Well, Dillon came back an' said he couldn't find out anythin' about Red. So I decided to offer a reward. An' Dillon himself took the notices out on the range."

"You'll get Red back," returned Hettie hopefully.

"I've got another idea," he went on. "I want to send for several well-known sheriffs an' put them on the track of these rustlers. Pat Garrett, of New Mexico. If I could get him, an' a couple from Phoenix, an' hire a gang of hard-shootin' cowboys, I'll bet they'd clean out the rustlers. But Tom Day yelled murder at the very idea. An' Dillon, he hit the roof. Swore they'd burn me out, instead of just rustlin' a few cattle. Few? By George, I'd like to know what Dillon would call a lot of cattle."

"Ben, you should listen to Tom Day, at least," replied Hettie. "He knows the country."

"I'm listenin', Hettie. But I want some action," he retorted. "If I don't get Red back inside of ten days there'll be murder to pay by somebody!"

MARVIE did not come back to the ranch till late. Hettie sat up waiting for him, trying to read, but mostly gazing into the wood fire. She heard his swift step on the porch, then a quick knock.

"Come in, Marvie," she called.

In he rushed, like the wind, but quietly, and he startled her with his pale face crossed by black smudges, and his piercing, radiant eyes. He carried a rifle and quirt and gloves in his hands; and altogether he was a striking figure. Hettie knew before he spoke what had happened.

"She was there!" he said.

"I knew that the instant you entered," replied Hettie, with a smile. There was a contagion in his spirit.

"Hettie, I'm sure the happiest an' miserablest man in the world!"

"Sit down, Marvie, and tell me all about it."

"Not a great deal to tell, but what there is of it is terrible," he returned, coming to the seat beside her. Then in a low voice, full of suppressed emotion, he went on:

"Rose was there. She'd been there for hours, waitin' 'n' cryin' fearin' I wouldn't come. She said her heart broke. She'd found out she loved me. I was the only one who'd ever cared for her—been good to her. She said she could give me up—to save me disgrace—but she'd have to kill herself. I swore I'd stick to her—marry her. I talked an' talked. An' then I told her I'd fetch you down the trail next Wednesday. She was terrible scared at that. But I told her you'd help us. An' finally she agreed. She's to ride down a trail we know, till we meet her. . . . That's all, Hettie. An' for heaven's sake—"

Marvie broke off huskily, his voice failing.

Hettie impulsively kissed him. "Marvie, I think you're pretty much of a man," she said. "I'll go! And I'll find some way to solve your problem."

(To be continued)

