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No one is so utterly desolate, but some heart, though unknown,
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## CATTLE KINGDOM

By ALAN LE MAY



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 "I do love the hills," sheo shish stuff.He shook his head. "This isn't


| pooling long shadows under the lashes of her steady eyes. "I just thought of something." <br> "This-isn't it kind of funny?this is exactly the situation we were speaking of the other day." He was puzzled "Wh. <br> He was puzzled. "When was this?" <br> "In Inspiration.' <br> For a moment he didn't get it. Then it came back to him in a rush -the blast of sun upon the dusty street, the atmosphere of silent, waiting waiting hostility, the groups of spurred and booted men in doorways, watching without seeming to watch; and he had stood talking to Marian across the door of a car, not thinking about what was ahead. "' If you and I were set afoot,'" she quoted, "'some place far off in the mountains at night, with only He was resting perfectly still on one elbow, looking at the fire; but he could feel her eyes, so near his face, watching him under her lashes. And behind her eyes he supposed she was laughing at him. "I was right," she said. "You didn't know it then, but you can see it now. You see-it seems a good deal different, now that we're really here.' <br> "Does it?" he said without expression. He got up with a sort of stiff, slow leisure, for the little fire was burning low. He went beyond the fire, squatted on one heel beside it, and fed it pieces of stick. "You see, I know you, Billy. than I know myself." Her eyes wavered and drifted out toward the low young stars. "I can remember when I was afraid of you. If we had been out here then-two years ago-I would have wanted nothing so much as to get back among other people. looked at her. She had never seemed more lovely, more human, more elementally desirable than she looked now, a tired girl in cowcountry work clothes, slim and lazy, relaxed by the little fire as if she had never known any other resting place in her life. Her face was quiet, almost grave; but though her eyes looked drowsy there was a little gleam in them that did not come from the flame in front: a small provocative gad seen in her within, which he had eyes only two or three times in two or three days. <br> Their eyes met and held, his steady and masked within, hers seeming to laugh at him a little, half veiled by her lashes. <br> "I said," she reminded him, "that if we were-in a situation like this, there wouldn't be anything for me to worry about, nothing at all. And you said, if I thought that I was a fool. Well, you see-" she met his eyes again-"I win. <br> Still her eyes held, and he could not understand why hers did not drop. "th can't believe, hardly," he said, "that you have any idea what sort of thing you're talking about.", She smiled. "You think I don't? That's because western men are certainly the most conventional peo ple in the world." ple in the world.' brought her here of his own will nor set them afoot, nor wished to rest here with her. He would not even have been on her range, or within a day's ride of it, if her interests had not drawn him in and held him. She had made her de- cisions in regard to him long ago, and to change them he had spent his every resource without any ef- fect. And now, at the last-it amused her to torment him. It seemed to him that there was a capricious she-devil in that girlperhaps in all women, given opportunity. <br> saying again. $\square$ The masks behind his eyes hardly changed his eyes reddened, | seeming to smoke with an angry Are that came up behind. She herself had lighted that fire, long ago. It was a fire that had driven him relentlessly, making him rich; it could have made him work for her all her life-or it could break him again, and drive him up and down the world. Suddenly he did not know whether he loved or hated this girl. <br> "I'll give you the same answer I his words almost inaudible, even against the stillness of the might. "If you think that, you're a little fool.," <br> Still she met his eyes, so long, so steadily, so knowingly that he wondered for an instant what was hap- pening, was going to happen, there under the coyote moon. <br> Then he saw her face change, so that she was suddenly pale, and the unreadable light in her eyes went out, and she was like a little girl. Abruptly she pressed her face hard into her hands. <br> Held as the rocks as hard and them. "Now what?" <br> She answered in a muffled voice, fail every one..." She lifted her head and glanced about her, as if she were seeing this place for the first time. A black shape lay beside the empty dust of the stream, like a great black botle iverturned horse. Suddenly the girl turned sideways, and dropped her head in her arms upon the blanket. She began to cry, terribly, silently except for the choke of her breath. <br> He sat down against a rock and waited. The gaunt, dead rock-hills leaned over them sadly cold and silent, blackened by the twisted ghost shapes of the parched brush. And the coyote moon was pale and old, no longer golden, but greenish, like phosphorus rubbed on a dead and frozen face. Once she said fault, too-that I fail-your fault as much as my own." <br> His answer was perfectly honest. "I don't know what you mean." <br> CHAPTER XII <br> It was impossible for him to sit waiting for her weeping to stop, while her slim body shook conwhile her slim body shook con- vulsively with her effort to suppress it, and her breath jerked uncontrollably in her throat. Her tumbled hair made her seem a child; he had hair made her seem a soen small, so fragilely made. And he thought he had never in his life seen anything so pitifully in need of comforting. He swore under his breath and got to his feet. <br> For a few moments he stood over her, watching the movement of the firelight in her hair. He could hardly prevent himself from touching her; almost he stooped and picked her, up in his arms. But he was telling himself that that was the last thing she wanted. <br> He waiked out a little way into the dark, and stood listening to the night silence. He was still worrying about she distant muffled sound of concussion which he had heard. It seemed to him now that what he had heard was unquestionably the sound of a gun-perhaps a gun fired near the forgotten miner's shanty at the upper end of the gulch; but what he could not imagine was who could have fired it. He had assumed that it was Lon Magoon who had killed Marian's pony; but now he saw that something was wrong. Ired upon Marian Dunn and killed her horse he would not have gone to the cabin at the head of the try between himself and them. be prowling these hills. He thought of Coffee's theory that there had and was worse puzzled than before. (TO BE CONTINUED) |
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