

Chapter 8

Kid walked slowly towards the railway station; his body feeling the weight of his weary soul. The two days he had spent in Denver had seemed like an eternity and finally he would be on his way home. Despite his insistence he hadn't been able to convince Lou to join him in the trip. She had flatly refused and knowing how stubborn she could be Kid wasn't surprised that he hadn't managed to change her mind. So with a heavy heart he had set off in this brief trip, which he was finding really disagreeable from the beginning. They had bid each other good-bye coldly as if they were strangers; he couldn't tell if she was glad to see him go or on the contrary, she dreaded him leaving her or whether she'd miss his company. Her countenance didn't let on anything, good or bad; she was impassive as if she didn't feel anything. Yet, she had prepared him some refreshments and sandwiches for the trip, an attitude that baffled him completely. Some days she didn't even say a single word to him, but every single day she saw to it that he had everything he needed. "Was it her way of saying that she still cared?" Kid wondered but he couldn't find the answer.

The trip to Denver had proved to be distasteful and hard. The empty seat by his side on the stagecoach and the train was a continuous reminder that Lou wasn't with him and the reason behind it. He regretted not using his beloved horse for this trip as it would have been easier, but Lou saying that he was squandering their money had hurt his pride. So he had been forced to use his tickets even though he felt very uncomfortable in a first class compartment all on his own. In his loneliness, thoughts invaded his mind, memories of the last weeks and with every inch of country passing by his eyes as he blankly looked though the window, his mood fell deeper and deeper. It seemed unreal the way things were going between him and Lou; the first few months after his return had been magical. How could something that special change so drastically? Kid knew that Lou was hurting worse than what he had first thought. She had never been very open about having children, but for a few hints. Kid had even thought that she didn't particularly warm to the idea of becoming a mother, but seemingly he had been completely wrong. Maybe Teaspoon was right and women took motherhood as seriously as that. Kid could understand that she was taking it hard because it hadn't been easy to come to terms with the reality for him either. However, he couldn't understand why she didn't let him help her and kept pushing him away. Lou was living with her pain all alone and he seemed to be running out of ideas to make her react and take her out of that dark cell where she had locked her very self. It left Kid shattered to think that he was losing his wife little by little. However, there was one truth; he'd fight for her with every ounce of strength he possessed even though that meant to fight her. He wouldn't let her vanish from his life easily.

The couple of days that Kid had spent in Denver hadn't been as he had originally envisioned them in his mind. He had wanted to share these moments with Lou and he was positive that this time away from Rock Creek would have

been the ideal opportunity to talk things through and leave their problems behind. Not even the initial objective of his visit to Denver had distracted his thoughts. On walking around the cattle market Kid realized that the effects of the long war were noticeable. He had been told that this annual event was one of the biggest in the territory, but even though Kid had never been to it before, he could tell that the long arm of the war was still playing havoc. Kid noticed that the horses lacked the quality he had expected. Months after the end of the war, there was still a shortage of good horseflesh since many had been requisitioned by both sides. Even here far from the conflict, those years of hardness were tangible. Many ranchers had put their businesses on hold while away in the war whereas for the ones staying the situation hadn't been easy either. Despite his present mood Kid had found the visit quite enlightening as he had been able to talk and interchange views with other horse ranchers. Now he had a clearer idea in which direction to lead his next steps. Teaspoon had promised him that he would put him in contact with the group of Indians the marshal used to get the horses for the Pony Express from. So Kid was hopeful that with those magnificent horses he would be able to have a flourishing business, which would eventually make a good life for him and Lou. Lou... Every single thought came back to her. He had missed her so much in the few days that he had been away. Even in her late bitter mood, Kid still longed for her presence and now he worried whether she'd be fine. He knew that she was safe at home, but after all that had happened he wondered how she would be doing all by herself. It was the first time since he had come back home that they had been apart and Kid wasn't taking it very well. So he was glad that this trip was over and soon he would be on his way home to Lou.

The station in Denver was packed with people coming and going in a flurry of activity. The noise of the trains arriving and departing mingled with the voices of the dozens of people found in the place. A voice announcing the arrival of his train reached Kid's ears and he made his way through the crowd slowly, carrying his carpet bag, which contained just a few garments and items and which Louise had prepared for him before leaving. A couple of children came barging towards Kid and one of them knocked into him, snapping him from his deep thoughts. The children didn't even stop to apologize and Kid kept staring at their two retreating figures between laughs and games with a bemused expression on his face. He turned around to continue his way, without really paying attention to the people walking towards him in the opposite direction, and this time it was him who almost knocked over a gentleman. Kid was about to utter a clumsy apology, but when he looked up at the man, he stopped his flow of words and the only thing he was able to say was a name. "Jimmy!"

James Butler Hickock had a smirk on his face as he watched his old friend's surprised expression. "Seems to me you're still as clumsy as ever, Kid," he said with a bemused expression. Both friends joined in a friendly embrace. Their past discrepancies were forgotten and all that was left was the warm feeling of having re-met after so many years. It was Jimmy, who after the initial surprise, spoke first. "What are you doing in Denver, Kid?" His sandy-haired

friend proceeded to explain his visit to the cattle fair without getting into much detail. Kid knew through Cody's last letter that he and Jimmy were living their days in the city, but in his lately troubled mind he hadn't given any thought to the possibility of visiting them. Now Jimmy was explaining that he was coming back from visiting his sister Celinda and her family who were living in a little town not far away.

"So how's Cody doing?" Kid asked.

"He's the same big mouth or even worse. Need a respite from him from time to time or I'd end up killing him," Jimmy said with a smirk and Kid smiled broadly at his words. "Buck's around as well, so it's good I don't have to bear his presence on my own."

"Buck?" Kid asked surprised. They hadn't had any news from his Indian friend for years and he and Lou had been wondering how he was. It had been something that had worried and saddened Louise at the same time. The thought that their friend could be in terrible trouble scared her, but it broke her heart to think that he didn't try to contact them if he was perfectly fine.

Jimmy nodded and added, "Cody bumped into him and from time to time he gives a hand to Cody's regiment in his dealings with Indian tribes."

"Really?" Kid asked notably surprised. He knew what Buck's opinion about the army had been back then. He hadn't been very willing to help them in Indian matters and it was only because of Teaspoon that he had accepted to work with the army on a few occasions. Kid had to admit that his friend had been right in his reluctance as the results had been disastrous for the Indian people. So now it really astonished him that Buck would willingly be working with them.

"I guess he's had to accept that he was fighting a lost battle, so he's trying to do something to ease things. It's not an easy task to be in the middle of conflicting forces," Jimmy explained and after a pause he concluded, "These are really hard times for his people."

"These are hard times for everybody," Kid said ruefully.

Jimmy nodded somberly and as an idea struck him in that moment, he blurted out the question straightaway, "Why don't you come with me, Kid? They'll sure be glad to see you and you can take another train tomorrow."

Kid shook his head no and added with a heavy heart, "Sorry, Jimmy, but I really need to go home." As much as he wanted to see his friends, he couldn't delay his return home. Those days without seeing Louise had been plagued with worry and only when he set eyes on her, would he find some peace of mind.

Jimmy chuckled bemused and added, "Seems Lou's got you under her

foot, ain't she?" Kid didn't say anything but kept a serious countenance. He wasn't sure if he wanted to talk about Lou's problems with Jimmy. Not that he didn't trust his friend, but talking about it made the situation more real somehow. Sometimes he wanted to fool himself into thinking that things weren't so bad with Lou, but actually talking about it made him realize the bleak reality.

As Kid remained silent, Jimmy added, "I guess we'll have to pay you a visit then." He had thought of going back to Rock Creek for a while and seeing the friends he had left there. So far he hadn't found the courage after the way he had left. They had shared so much during their Pony Express days, but his latest days at the station had been dampened with tension, especially with Kid. Jimmy had left almost without saying good-bye to the people who had cared so much for him, like a thief in the night, and he had even believed that he would never set foot in his old home. After meeting his friend now Jimmy realized that Kid didn't hold a grudge against him and it gave him hope that things could rekindle.

Kid kept silent for a moment and after a few seconds he added ruefully, as he continued to look lost ahead of him, "That might cheer Lou up."

The bitter gesture didn't go unnoticed by Jimmy and he hurried to ask, "Something wrong with Lou?"

Kid looked at Jimmy straight in the eyes and after a slight hesitation he finally said, "She's not fine, we're not fine."

In that moment the last call for Kid's train reached their ears and he had to stop the conversation with his old friend. "What's the problem?" Jimmy asked with a troubled countenance.

Kid fumbled for words but realized that there was no easy way to tell his problems. His train was about to depart and he really needed to be on his way to Lou. "Jimmy, I really need to go," he said walking towards the train, followed by his friend. He jumped on the train just as it began moving slowly off the station.

"Kid!" Jimmy called, straining his voice over the noise of the screeching wagons, "What's wrong?"

Kid looked at his friend's figure walking briskly next to the train as Kid stood just at the door. "You and the boys come home soon and everything'll be all right," was all he could say. He had to believe that, he wanted to believe that. The train began to speed up and Kid cast a last look at Jimmy's shadowy figure which became lost as the train moved farther and farther from Denver and closer to home and Lou.



The reception home after his trip to Denver was as cold as when he had left four days ago. Not that Kid had lured himself into believing that the brief span of time away would radically change the situation at home, but a little hope had lurked deep down. Everything was the same and Lou had the same bleak and detached demeanour as in the last month or so. At least being at home again made Kid feel somehow at ease because now he could keep an eye on her and make sure that she was looked after properly. In just these four brief days Kid could tell that she looked even thinner. He guessed that she hadn't bothered to cook much for herself; lately though it sounded paradoxical by the way things were between them, Lou only cared to have everything in perfect state just for him. She seemed not to worry about her anymore. She ate when he did, and even though her looks were as neat as before the incident, Kid had the sensation that she had given up on herself. Kid just prayed to all saints to find the inspiration to snap her from that bleak mood.

His hope that his bumping into Jimmy and the promise of the boys coming would cheer her up had crashed as Lou had been unmoved by his excitement. She had barely shrugged her shoulders and let out a derisive snort. "They won't come," she had simply stated and not many words had come out of her mouth in the following days. Her reaction had saddened and surprised Kid at the same time; he knew that she had long had the wish to know that their three fellow riders were safe and sound, especially Buck. However, Louise hadn't seemed to mind his good news at all. They hadn't talked more about the subject and her attitude had filled Kid with such a sense of frustration that he wanted to yell.

That day Kid was sitting outside Teaspoon's office aimlessly. There wasn't much activity going on and Kid had the sensation of being idling around. He could be using that time on his ranch instead of warming his seat in Teaspoon's office. Just a couple of days ago he had bought the new horses and he wished he could be working with them right now rather than spending his time sitting like he was at the moment. But for now his only purpose was to watch the people of Rock Creek going past and to relax in the few weak sunrays of the budding winter. There was another reason for him to be outside instead of in the office where it was cosy and warm. As much as he appreciated Teaspoon's company, Kid sometimes needed to break free. The old marshal was really concerned about him and Lou and the subject logically came up almost on a daily basis. However, today Kid didn't want to talk about it and he knew that in an uneventful morning they would end up bringing up his problems. Kid felt drained and he just needed some carefree space without thinking about his worries. That, though, was easier said than done because his mind was constantly occupied with thoughts about Lou.

Distracted as he was Kid didn't notice her presence till her hovering figure blocked the rays reflecting on his face. He looked up, initially annoyed at the person stealing the warmth over him, but when his eyes fell upon her smiling face, he stopped his protest straightaway.

“Hello, Kid. What a nice surprise!” she said.

He stood up clumsily and tipped his hat to the lady. “Glad to see you, Amanda.” It was Amanda Davis, one of the local girls. Kid remembered when they had moved from Sweetwater to Rock Creek, the young lady had clearly shown her interest in his friendship and, Kid suspected, in more than that. He had to admit that she was a real beauty and almost the whole male population in Rock Creek would give their right arm to be with her. Even though he and Lou hadn’t been together at the time, he couldn’t see himself with any other woman. Lou was the only girl who had occupied his mind and heart since he had learned the truth about her gender. Kid realized that luring himself into being with somebody else rather than Lou would be just a lie and it would hurt him, Lou and the other person in the long run. So he had never encouraged Amanda in any way. However, Lou had one of her well-known jealousy attacks. Obviously, she hadn’t been very open about it and had tried to hide it, but Kid knew her very well and he had read through her straightaway. Louise had never liked the lady now before him, and even after they got married, she got that stiff demure if they happened to bump into the girl.

“Mama told me you were back,” Amanda said, flashing her radiant smile at him. “I’ve been away for the last few months and I’m really glad that our good men are finally back.”

“Thank you,” Kid replied, feeling a bit embarrassed at the lady’s words. She began talking endlessly and Kid found himself enjoying the conversation mainly made up of snippets of the town gossip. For once his head was free of all the problems which were now his everyday life, and guiltily Kid felt pleased to have the attention of such a lovely lady. He had to admit that she was as beautiful as ever; her blonde hair shone in the daylight like gold, her skin was as delicate as porcelain and her emerald eyes were lively and expressive.

Realizing that it was a bit too late the young lady exclaimed, “Oh Kid, I really should have been home by now.” She laughed at her own private joke and added lightly, “My wagon isn’t far. Would you...?”

“Sure,” Kid replied without the slightest hesitation and they walked together the few meters between the marshal’s office and the wagon in silence. When they reached her carriage, Amanda shook hands with him politely. “It’s been very nice to see you again, Kid,” she said without letting go of his hand.

“Me too,” he replied as he helped her onto the wagon. He handed her the reins of the horse and she added, “You should come home one day. I’m sure mother would love to have you over for dinner.”

Kid kept thoughtful for a moment, realizing that she hadn’t included Lou in her invitation; actually in all her babbling she hadn’t mentioned her once and he

had to admit guiltily that he hadn't either. "That would be lovely," he said hesitantly, "I'll talk to my wife and I'll let you know when we're free." He knew that they wouldn't go anywhere where Amanda Davis was concerned if Lou had any saying about it, especially with their last problems, but somehow he felt the need to pronounce her name to the lady. It didn't feel right to carry on as if she didn't exist.

Kid noticed that at the mention of Lou the young lady's expression changed slightly. "Oh," she let out with a stiff demure. "Louise." She paused for a moment and debating with herself whether to say her next words but finally she disregarded her doubts and blurted out in a low voice. "I heard about her handicap. I'm really sorry for you, Kid. You're a good man and it's not fair."

Kid stared at her, unable to believe what he was hearing. It seemed that their personal life was popular knowledge to every busybody in Rock Creek. He wondered how on earth the matter had become public gossip. Amanda's words were making him very angry not only because she was talking so freely about his personal life, but also because she was practically implying that their situation was Lou's doing. He couldn't utter a single word as hers had left him flabbergasted and he simply stared at her in disbelief.

"Mind you," the young lady continued without noticing the anger mounting in Kid's eyes, "it's hardly surprising considering her past; all that riding isn't healthy and for good reason it's not work for us women."

Kid couldn't control himself any more. With each word she pronounced he got more and more shocked. Was that what people were saying in Rock Creek? It angered him to think that people were implying that Lou had brought the situation upon herself. That was far from the truth and he prayed that those rumours wouldn't reach her ears. That would shatteringly add up to the already heavy weight in her soul. Kid glared at the woman before him and with a very cold voice he just muttered, "It's my wife you're talking about." He paused a moment and unable to stand the lady's presence any more, he said, "Good bye, Amanda."

Amanda noticed the change in Kid and instantly realized that she had made a mistake. She had talked without thinking and had let her true feelings come up to the surface. Truth to be told, Amanda hated the guts of Louise McCloud. She had never understood why a man like Kid had ignored all her clear hints. She was well aware that men were attracted to her, but Amanda had only wanted Kid since the first time her eyes had fallen upon the rider. She had gotten the surprise of her life when news of Kid's wedding had come to her knowledge, especially when she learned who he was marrying. It had hurt her pride to know that he had practically refused her over Louise McCloud, somebody who had led a rather dishonorable life in her own opinion, living wildly in the same room as a bunch of boys. The whole town of Rock Creek had been shocked when they learned that the puny Pony Express rider was actually a girl.

Amanda didn't really mind that, but it angered her that Kid would rather be with somebody as plain as Louise, who had no difficulty in fooling people into thinking that she was a boy. When her mother had told her the latest gossip about the couple, she had beamed happily, thinking of Lou's predication as a kind of personal vengeance. "Serves them right," she had thought spitefully. In a small town like Rock Creek rumors spread like fire and Amanda's satisfaction had grown even bigger when somebody had told her that the couple were having marital issues. She had thought that maybe now it would be the perfect time to make her move. Hopefully, within time the married couple would walk their separate ways and she would be there for Kid. But now she realized that her words had been spoken in a rush and she might have ruined any future possibilities.

Amanda cleared her throat and fumbled to find an excuse but nothing seemed too plausible to her. She tried to smile in his direction, but Kid didn't reciprocate the gesture. "I didn't mean anything by that, Kid," she said awkwardly and pausing for a beat she added the only thing that came to her head. "So when will we be expecting to have you and Louise for dinner?" she asked in a futile attempt to mend her mistake.

"I don't think we'll have the time or patience to socialize and gossip any time soon," he said through clinched teeth. He wanted to launch all his anger at the lady but despite everything, he was a gentleman and had to bite his tongue. "Good day, Amanda," he hissed and turned on his heels and left the lady without even looking back once. Kid was so intent in his present state that he never noticed that two very angry eyes had intently been watching him and they sure weren't green.



As soon as Kid closed the front door of his house, he knew that something was out of place. Usually when he came home after his day in town, he was welcomed with the smells of Lou's cooking, but today the familiar aroma was missing and the house felt unusually cold. "Lou?" He called but there was no answer. He walked into the dining room and found nobody. The table wasn't laid out as usual and the fire wasn't going, which explained the coldness in the house. "She should have been home by now," he told himself as he stopped to light the fireplace. Once the task was finished, he continued his inspection of the house looking for Lou. He searched the kitchen, the lounge and even the back garden, and when it was clear that she was nowhere downstairs, he began making his way up the stairs. Kid walked along the corridor as he called her name repeatedly. Heading for the master bedroom Kid opened the door and he let out his contained breath as his eyes fell on her. Lou was sitting in her rocking chair, swinging back and forth in a continuous and monotonous movement and she looked at him in a way that Kid seemed completely confused about. She almost seemed to be angry and he wondered what was crossing her mind now.

With her arms folded and still with her coat on, Louise continued rocking back and forth without uttering a single word.

“Lou!” Kid finally said. “I’ve been calling you dozens of times, honey. What are you doing up here?” When she didn’t answer, he asked in a concerned voice, “Are you all right?”

Lou didn’t say a word, but kept looking at him with eyes full of fury and scorn. Realizing that she wasn’t going to speak, Kid crouched before her and resting a hand on her knee he asked again, “Are you all right, Lou?” Feeling his touch was enough to make her react and she jumped to her feet, pushing his hand off her roughly, which almost made Kid fall backwards. “Don’t touch me, you bastard!” she yelled.

Kid stood up slowly as if in a trance, and looked at Lou as if she were out of her mind. He didn’t know what had sparked this reaction in his wife. Even though their relationship had lately been cold, to say the least, she had never used that kind of language with him. “Lou!” was all he managed to say. Louise glared at him and pointing at him threateningly she barked, “I’m not gonna let you make a fool of me!!!”

“I don’t understand, Lou,” Kid muttered, watching her warily.

His innocent look fuelled her already hot anger and she spat scornfully, “I saw you with that ... that ...Amanda Davis!!!” The name of the woman almost got stuck in her throat, suffocating her. That afternoon when she decided to stretch her legs outside the hotel for a few moments after the long hours confined behind the counter, she couldn’t believe her own eyes. Her husband was in a very animated conversation with that hateful woman and Lou wanted to die in that precise moment. He was laughing and seemed to be having the time of his life. Lou had felt tears prick her eyes and she fought the urge to cry stubbornly. Old feelings of jealousy came back full force and in that moment she wanted to kill them both with her bare hands. Lou had never liked Amanda Davis; she was well aware that the lady had been more than interested in Kid all along and, even after they got married, the woman had shamelessly flirted with her husband and snubbed her. Lou had tried to disregard the feeling; she had always found it too humiliating to show jealousy before Kid. It made her feel more vulnerable and Kid never seemed to see anything in what she so clearly saw the signs of. Amanda Davis was the woman who embodied everything that Lou knew she could never be and her attitude towards her was exactly the way that Louise had always feared people would treat her. Seeing that woman and Kid laughing so carefree had almost made her physically sick. He had even walked her to the wagon as if they were a couple of regular loving birds. Was there something going on between them and she had been blind to it? She knew that she had been neglecting her husband of all physical and emotional contact. Maybe he was finding somewhere else what he didn’t have at home. Lou admitted that even though she had told him about finding another woman, she

had never been really serious. Everything in her mind was so confusing; she couldn't be with him like before but the notion of losing him made her experience a pain like she never had before. All she knew was that she wouldn't share him with anybody and least of all with Amanda Davis. If he wanted his freedom, she was ready to oblige, but she wouldn't let him play with two packs of cards at the same time.

Lou's words left Kid completely flabbergasted for a moment. It had been so long since he had seen his wife look so angry and in a way he liked to notice some kind of reaction in her. Although what she was talking about was completely false, the bottom line was that she still cared despite what had happened. "We were just talking," Kid simply said as he waited for more lashings on her part. He knew that in her present state it wouldn't be easy to appease her, but he couldn't let her think that he was entertaining any romantic notions with Amanda Davis or any other woman.

Louise didn't seem to have heard his words as she continued barging against him. "Did you take her with you to Denver occupying my place? Didn't the city have enough entertainment for you?" Lou asked question after question venomously. She knew that she could be really hurtful if she put her mind to it, and right now she wanted to make Kid hurt as much as possible.

"You know that's not true, Lou," Kid exclaimed mortified by her words. "There's nobody else in my life."

"I told you that you could get your freedom if you wanted to," Louise continued in the same loud tone, "but I won't let you make a cuckold of me!!!"

"There's nobody," he repeated, trying to keep calm but her words were beginning to anger him. She wasn't listening and whenever she mentioned the dreaded subject of a divorce between them, fear invaded his whole self and all calmness he could muster seemed to go.

"You owe me proper respect! Remember I am your wife!!!"

Her last words took the best of him and as soon as the thought entered his mind, he blurted it out sarcastically without thinking, "You should remember that as well."

Lou stared at him, silently for once, looking daggers in his direction. She walked the few steps between them in a cocky way and when she was barely inches apart from him she looked in his eyes purposely and letting out a derisive laugh she barked angrily, "So that's it? I don't satisfy your manly needs, Kid? I don't comply with my marital obligations to you?" He didn't say a word and kept looking at her with glacial eyes. "Answer me, Kid. Is that the problem? Do you miss dancing and romping about? Come on, Kid, tell me!!!" Her tone was demanding and almost hysterical, but Kid continued without saying a single

word. His silence unnerved her and she turned round from him while continuing her angered harangue. "Is that what you want? Poor Kid! His wife's really losing it and he feels neglected as a man." With every word she was getting more and more spiteful and Kid couldn't keep quiet any longer.

"Shut up!!!" he ordered.

She turned her angry eyes to him again and continued regardless of anything. "Why??? Isn't it the truth??? You want my body, don't you? Well, take it!!!" she barked every word and as she talked she walked to the bed and dropped her body on it heavily. "Come on, Kid, be a man and take me!!!" she called, her voice shaking from the anger and bitterness she was feeling.

Kid looked down at her, lying impassively on the bed; her body tense as if she was ready for a sacrifice. He was like in a senseless nightmare, unable to believe what the fight had turned into. He didn't recognize this woman any more. Where was his sweet Lou? What had happened to her? He stared at her for a few minutes, deaf to her words that still resounded in the room. His frustration made his anger resurface and he couldn't control himself any more as he growled, "Go to hell!!!" He regretted his words as soon as they were out of his mouth but now it was too late. Casting one last pitiful look at Lou he stormed out of the room slamming the door shut behind him. The sound reverberated in the now quiet room and when everything went silent again, Lou let out a bitter wail as her body curled up into a ball and silent sobs racked her body.