

MATTIE 1 of 3 (PRE-READ)

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Mattie strides along, looking at facades. She stops, looking at the signage on a barnlike building:

Col. G. Stonehill. Licensed Auctioneer. Cotton Factor.

INSIDE

Mattie steps to the doorway of an office set in a corner of the stable.

Mattie

How much are you paying for cotton?

Stonehill looks up from his desk. He eyes the girl up and down.

Stonehill

Nine and a half for low middling and ten for ordinary.

Mattie

We got most of ours out early and sold it to Woodson Brothers in Little Rock for eleven cents.

Stonehill

Then I suggest you take the balance of it to the Woodson Brothers.

Mattie

We took the balance to Woodson. We got ten and a half.

Stonehill

Why did you come here to tell me this?

Mattie

I thought we might shop around up here next year but I guess we are doing all right in Little Rock. I am Mattie Ross, daughter of Frank Ross.

Stonehill sets his pen down and leans back.

Stonehill

A tragic thing. May I say your father impressed me with his manly qualities. He was a close trader but he acted the gentleman.

START

MATTIE 2 of 3 (PRE-READ)

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Mattie

I propose to sell those ponies back to you that my father bought.

Stonehill

That, I fear, is out of the question. I will see that they are shipped to you at my earliest convenience.

Mattie

We don't want the ponies now. We don't need them.

Stonehill

Well that hardly concerns me. Your father bought those five ponies and paid for them and there is an end of it. I have the bill of sale.

Beat.

Mattie

And I want three hundred dollars for Papa's saddle horse that was stolen from your stable.

Stonehill

You will have to take that up with the man who stole the horse.

Mattie

Tom Chaney stole the horse while it was in your care. You are responsible.

Stonehill chuckles.

Stonehill

I admire your sand but I believe you will find that I am not liable for such claims.

Mattie

You were custodian. If you were a bank and were robbed you could not simply tell the depositors to go hang.

Stonehill

I do not entertain hypotheticals, the world as it is is vexing enough. Secondly, your valuation of the horse is high by about two hundred dollars. How old are you?

Mattie

If anything my price is low. Judy is a fine racing mare. She has won purses of twenty-five dollars; I have seen her jump an eight-rail fence with a heavy rider. I am fourteen.

Stonehill

Hmm. Well, that's all very interesting. The ponies are yours, take them. Your father's horse was stolen by a murderous criminal. I had provided reasonable protection for the creature as per our implicit agreement. My watchman had his teeth knocked out and can take only soup. We must each bear his own misfortunes.

Mattie

I will take it to law.

Stonehill

You have no case.

Mattie

Lawyer J. Noble Daggett of Dardanelle, Arkansas may think otherwise—as might a jury, petitioned by a widow and three small children.

END

Stonehill

Where is your mother?

Mattie

She is at home in Yell County looking after my sister Victoria and my brother Little Frank.

Stonehill

I cannot make an agreement with a minor child. You are not accountable.

Mattie

Lawyer Dagget will back up any decision I make, you may rest easy on that score. You can confirm any agreement by telegraph.

Stonehill stares.

Stonehill

I will pay two hundred dollars to your father's estate when I have in my hand a letter from your lawyer absolving me of