

BACK in the SALDLE



Praise for Back in the Saddle

"Back in the Saddle is an uplifting and heartwarming story about two wounded people using the power of faith to find the courage to change. A dramatic ranch setting, rich characterization, and a beautiful love story make this a book to savor. This is a strong beginning for what promises to be an exciting trilogy. Ruth Logan Herne is my new favorite author!"

—KAREN WHITE, New York Times best-selling author

"Heart and hope combine in Ruth Logan Herne's sweet tale of old wounds and ties that bind. Where faith and forgiveness are present, old scars can be healed and new love can bloom. Sometimes, you really can go home again."

—LISA WINGATE, national best-selling author of *The Story Keeper* and *The Sea Keeper's Daughters*

"Not your average cowboy story, *Back in the Saddle* is the action-packed tale of an emotionally wounded prodigal (from Wall Street, no less!), his family's dysfunctional ranching dynasty, and a unique heroine with a heartbreaking secret and an adorable son. Cowboys and kids, trouble and tragedy, Ruth Logan Herne delivers a tender romance wrapped in a wise, heart-touching blanket of redemption and grace. Highly recommended!"

—LINDA GOODNIGHT, best-selling, award-winning author of *The Memory House* and *The Rain Sparrow*

"From the first pages, readers will be drawn into the community of Gray's Glen, the amazing cast of characters, and the lives of the hero and heroine. Angelina and Colt fill the pages of this book with a romance that will have readers wanting to know their past, their future, and the story that intertwines their lives. With *Back in the Saddle*, Ruth Logan Herne takes us on a journey that we will want to continue!"

—Brenda Minton, author of the Martin's Crossing series

"Wrapped up in Ruth Logan Herne's heart-touching style, *Back in the Saddle* delivers an engaging, romantic tale of a spunky heroine with secrets to keep and a sigh-worthy cowboy hero finding his way back home."

—GLYNNA KAYE, award-winning author of the Hearts of Hunter Ridge series

"As always, Ruth Logan Herne shoots straight to the heart with *Back in the Saddle* . . . the heart of the story and the reader. This is one cowboy love story you'll want to enjoy to the very last page."

—Debra Clopton, author of Kissed by a Cowboy

BACK in the SADDLE

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BACK in the SADDLE

A Novel

RUTH LOGAN HERNE



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This book is dedicated to my wonderful literary agent, Natasha Kern, for her constant faith, hope, and love in so many things . . . including me!

And to my son Luke, a financial wizard and a constant source of love and encouragement! Luke, your quiet humor is a marvelous blessing.

So are you. I love you.

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he sharp metallic click meant one thing.

Someone had a gun pointed in Colt Stafford's general direction.

He sucked a breath and realized two other things. First, these might be the last two thoughts he'd ever have—and that would be a downright shame, wouldn't it?

Second?

It was clear he'd been away from the Double S too long when he couldn't tell what kind of gun it was by the sound of the mechanism. Was it his father's Ithaca Deerslayer or the vintage Remington short barrel?

He put his hands high, figuring this was about as good a welcome as he could expect after being gone nearly nine years. "I'm unarmed and this is my home. Kind of. Who in the name of all that's good and holy in the West has me at gunpoint?"

An explosive stream of Spanish brought him two more thoughts. The person speaking wasn't his sick father—the man he'd come home to help. It was a woman, and not too tall gauging from the direction of the Hispanic tongue-lashing being laid down.

He turned his head slightly.

Backlit from the foyer light, her features were hard to make out.

Her silhouetted frame said she was petite and most assuredly feminine.

The gun, however, wasn't.

"I'm Colt Stafford, Sam's son, and I told Dad I was coming home to help. Whoever you are, let me turn around, and you can see who I am."

She paused, then issued a command. "Darse la vuelta."

Which he would have gladly obeyed if he'd taken Spanish in high school and understood her request. But he hadn't. He'd taken Latin because he thought it sounded cool to say he'd taken Latin. That was only one of many stupid moves he'd made over the years. "I have no idea what that means."

Would his confession earn him a bullet? And where was his father? Why hadn't Sam Stafford stormed down the massive rustic front staircase and welcomed his prodigal son with a nice beef barbecue after all this time? Didn't anyone around here read the Bible anymore?

Dude, your mother was the churchgoing member of the family. Dad? Not so much. The whole prodigal's great return thing might be lost on him.

"Turn around."

That he understood. The thick accent disappeared with the deliberate shift to English, leaving only a hint of Latina. He turned slowly, respecting the size of the weapon and the temerity of the woman holding it.

"Turn on that light behind you. Please."

Please? Did she just add "please" to her direct order, as if she might

believe him? He'd hold back on the humor of the situation because either the Remington or the Ithaca would make short work of him at this range, and his pricey wardrobe was about the only accessible tangible he had left after years of hard work and financial ladder climbing. Bullets rarely hit seams, and fixing a hole in the middle of his lapel would be impossible, even for the best Manhattan tailors.

He hit the switch but kept his focus on the woman. When soft light flooded the area, his heart hit pause.

Untraditional beauty.

He wasn't sure what he expected. Maybe some aged *abuela* working to earn money for her family. Streams of Central American immigrants came north to work the vast fruit orchards of Washington. Some stayed, sending money back home to help those still south of the border. His smattering of Spanish came from working alongside some of those laborers as a kid.

But the woman facing him was nobody's grandmother. Angular planes lent a hint of Native American attributes to her exquisite face, perfectly sculpted brows deepened the angles, and eyes the color of dense, dark smoke appraised him.

And in that gaze? She found him lacking.

So what else was new?

In Stafford-speak, you toed the line and lived for the ranch. Sam Stafford was an all-or-nothing guy, and Colt had broken the rules. Now it was time to eat crow, humble pie, and anything else they served prodigals these days since the fatted calf refused to make an appearance. "I'm Colt." He gestured toward the picture on the far wall. "I'm on the right, next to Nick and behind Trey."

"I'm not blind." She stared hard at him and slowly lowered the gun. "You have been away many years and have no use for your father. This I know well."

"Good." A quick chill climbed his back. "That saves us the customary exchange of pleasantries. And you are?"

"Angelina Morales." She said the name with unusual crispness. "I am your father's housekeeper and cook." Her tone softened, but her expression stayed tough. "I help keep things running smooth. And"—she sighed, and her posture said she didn't like admitting this next part—"I am sorry I pointed a gun at you. It's late and I heard a strange noise."

"I tried calling. No one answered."

She flushed. "I was away this evening. The men were off, and your father is having tests in the hospital. I stopped to see him, then ran errands in town."

"Hospital? How bad is he?" Colt moved closer and relieved her of the gun. He unloaded the Ithaca bent barrel, his father's favorite, then set it back above the fireplace, old-style. "He told me he's been losing strength, but my father isn't exactly an old man." He studied Angelina's face. "Is he going to be okay?"

"He's not okay. You know he is a private man and will want to tell you things himself." She motioned toward the stairs of the classic western home, her expression serious. "I haven't dusted your room in two weeks or washed the blankets in a long time. I apologize for this, and I will take care of it in the morning, but for now it will have to do."

"I spent a lot of years riding herd. Sometimes I fell into that bed

dog-tired and plenty dirty. A little dust and unwashed blankets are nothing."

Doubt and disparagement filled her eyes as she scanned his designer suit. "Dog-tired is still fine. Sleeping dirty in a clean bed is not."

Bossy. Antagonistic. Well, he wouldn't be in the house enough to have her tough-girl attitude bother him. And if he wanted to fall asleep dirty at the end of a long day riding herd or freeze-branding beef, he'd do it.

He started for the stairs, realized he was reacting more like a fiveyear-old than a thirty-five-year-old, and turned. "Thank you, Angelina. For not shooting me and for your good care for my father."

Disbelief claimed her features at his lame attempt to man up, and in that one look he knew Angelina Morales wasn't easily impressed by anything, which was probably why she was able to put up with his father.

Like you're the easygoing one of the family? Yeah. Right, cowboy.

Reality hit home as he climbed the stairs with the small carry-on bag he'd brought into the house. He would bring in the meager balance of his possessions tomorrow. For tonight, this was enough.

He'd come back west tired, disillusioned, and filled with self-doubt, but at least he had a place to come back to. A lot of his Wall Street associates were out on the street after this latest market correction and Ponzi-style fiasco. He should be counting his blessings, even though he had an option most guys in New York wouldn't understand. The chance to mount up and man up.

God's timing is eternal and perfect.

His mother would have said that. She'd have been wrong, but

she'd have said it, and he would have believed her because Christine Stafford was honest and kind and exuded warmth like the golden rays of angled sunlight on a late-August afternoon.

He lost her thirty-one years ago. He was four years old, just starting preschool.

He remembered being scared, so scared that first day of school. The building, big and brown. All those windows. People everywhere. Kids running, playing, laughing. He wondered how he could get out of there, but his mother took his hand, led him to a quiet corner, and squatted low. "Trying new things is good for us, Colt. It makes us stronger, like eating spinach when we'd rather have candy."

"I don't like spinach."

"But you tried it and made me so proud." She'd leaned in and kissed his cheek. "And now it's time to try this."

He'd sighed and looked around, and she'd waited for him to make the decision. She'd put it in his hands. That was another thing to miss once she was gone. His father wasn't the make-your-own-decision type. Sam Stafford's motto was "my way or the highway," with the guts and grit that built a multimillion-dollar beef enterprise while others around him failed.

He'd looked up at his mother and whispered, "I'll try it, Mom. I promise."

She kissed his cheek, ruffled his hair, and slipped out.

He never saw her again. A semi carrying an unbalanced load spun out of control on the two-lane. The ensuing crash killed three people—including Christine Stafford.

He'd kept his promise. He'd tried school, and he did well. Over

the years he'd tried a lot of things and done well until a few weeks before when the market nosedived and abject failure found him. He'd have been all right if that was all that happened. The hedge funds he governed were designed to withstand market pressures, but when the stock market slide revealed a mammoth Ponzi scheme run by a major Wall Street investment firm—a firm he'd trusted with a massive amount of money—his investment in that fund crashed along with a lot of people's money. Good people, normal folks who trusted his expertise. He'd failed them. He'd failed himself.

And now he was back in the West, humbled by circumstance, not choice. The Manhattan DA had some of his assets in lockdown, some were in critically hit market funds, and some had disappeared in Tomkins's well-shielded pyramid structure.

God's timing, eternal and perfect?

What a joke.

But he'd made that promise to his mother, to try things as needed. Right now he could use a job, and his father needed hands on deck. Colt was a numbers guy, and the mathematics of the situation wasn't lost on him. In the end it all came down to simple equations. One plus one equaled two.

Unless the human factor messed things up. And in Gray's Glen, Washington?

That was entirely possible.

"Slick City Boy Comes Home." Angelina didn't find the imaginary headline amusing as she strode toward her first-floor suite beyond the state-of-the-art kitchen and washing facilities. The extended hallway gave her just enough distance to provide space and privacy to be her own person, even on Stafford land.

She walked into her room and closed the door, trying to sort old memories from current concerns.

You pulled a gun on Colt Stafford.

Holding Sam's son at gunpoint fell neatly into the realm of current concerns. What was she thinking?

Her heart hammered as she crossed the room. She listened to the messages on the house phone, and there it was. "This is Colt. I'm on my way from the airport. They switched my flight, so I'll be there tonight instead of in the morning."

Information that would have been helpful thirty minutes ago.

How could she have been so stupid?

Not stupid, her conscience argued. Your training kicked in, plain and simple. Launching into Spanish, though? That was a blast from the past, chica.

Her ability to deepen or lose her accent had worked in her favor on the Seattle police force but was not helpful now. Detective Mary Angela Castiglione could role-play at will, but here at the Double S, Angelina Morales should be unchanging—a simple housekeeper who liked to cook, clean, and sew tiny gowns for grieving parents.

What if Colt's father took offense at her actions? What if he fired her?

Sam loves you. He treats you like a daughter, and he knows the truth. He knows you; he knows your past. He understands. He'd never let you go.

The mental reassurance sounded nice, but then she'd never pulled a gun on one of Sam's sons before.

First time for everything. Being stubborn, Staffords, and male, they probably half expect it.

The truth of that almost made her smile. The cold, hard look on Colt Stafford's face erased the temptation.

She'd dealt with his kind before. Cool, calculating men in designer suits with a head for finance and a heart for gambling. Lust for money and power had taken too much from her already.

Never again.

She'd brought her mother and son inland and nailed her two familial objectives: safety and obscurity. Her mother was discontented but safe, and her precious son was protected. She'd found an incomplete peace in Gray's Glen, a small western town nestled in a broad valley of rolling fields. It was a respite from the dark crimes of city streets.

Managing the ranch house had been the ideal solution to myriad problems, but she may have ruined everything by grabbing that gun.

Anyone who takes offense at a woman defending herself isn't worth the bother, her conscience chided. The gun is above the fire-place for a reason. This isn't Country Décor 101. It's the Old West, a century removed, but still a place where it's not only okay to own a gun, it's downright smart to know how to use it.

She'd known how to use a gun long before she moved here. Anyone brought up by Isabo and Martín Castiglione understood the basics of self-defense. Raised in a poverty-stricken village in Ecuador, her parents had come to America and acquired citizenship before she

was born. They'd given her the right to be an American, and her policeman father's exemplary service record set the bar high. How proud he'd been at her academy graduation. Eyes moist, he'd hugged her and praised God for a second generation Castiglione cop.

And then he'd been killed because she'd rattled too many racketeer cages as a detective. Her choice to follow in his footsteps became her father's shroud, and she had the rest of her life to deal with that.

She sighed, eyes closed. Father Almighty, Creator blessed, hear the plea of your daughter. Forgive my stubbornness, my pridefulness. Guide me in the paths of righteousness and humility.

Guilt stabbed.

She tried to staunch it, but to no avail. If she'd been righteous, she wouldn't be a mother.

If Ethan had been honest, you'd be a wife as well as a mother.

Angelina shook her head. She refused to make excuses for herself. Yes, it was more acceptable to be an unmarried woman bearing a child these days, but she'd promised to do things the right way. Then she broke that word by believing a tall, good-looking Ivy League financial investor. For a short while, she thought the rich blue blood meant to marry her. Cinderella to the max.

Wrong. Ethan Harding intended no such thing, which made her somewhat stupid for a smart girl. His selfish goals for their relationship had never included a happily-ever-after, and he didn't care that a small child bearing his DNA came into being.

Angelina did care. She'd refused Ethan's proposed payoff. She didn't need anyone else in order to raise her son God's way. And when Noah Martín Castiglione was born, he gripped her finger and

didn't let go. It had been that way ever since. A tiny boy, wise beyond his years, trusting her to do what was right.

With so much more to lose if things went awry, she'd do whatever it took to protect those she loved. Living a secretive life had become imperative after they buried her beloved father. She hoped, no *prayed*, that she hadn't just lost her tucked-in-the-hills job.



The scent of grilled steak and fried eggs woke Colt bright and early.

His belly growled a welcome. His gut clenched in anticipation. His mouth watered, imagining the taste as he scrambled into blue jeans and a designer sweater—not exactly everyday ranch-hand attire.

Would racing to the kitchen look too desperate?

Yes.

Plates clattered and silverware clanged as someone set the table. He made himself stroll when he longed to run. He hadn't had more than a nibble of real food in two days. He was way beyond hungry, heading straight toward famished. He rounded the corner from the front stairs into the kitchen and came face to face with Irwin Hobbs, a longtime Double S cowboy.

"Colt. Good to see you! Welcome home!" Hobbs grabbed hold of his upper arm. The old boy's iron grip said he'd stayed in shape as the years rolled on. He squeezed lightly but kept any opinions about Colt's lack of muscle to himself. "It's good you're back. We've got over a thousand calves due in the next few weeks, and you're sorely needed." Hobbs waved a hand toward the long kitchen table where a

couple of men Colt had never met sat drinking coffee, waiting for breakfast to be served. "Colt Stafford, this is Dylan McGee and Brock Stiles, a couple of local yahoos who hired on last year. These days we don't take on any but our own locals," Hobbs added. "Too many people usin' this, that, and the other thing to mess up their brains. Your father don't take kindly to the way drugs are comin' to the Northwest."

Brock stuck out a bronzed hand. "Nice to meet you, Colt."

"You too." He shook Brock's hand, then leaned across the table to repeat the gesture. "Dylan."

"Did you really work on Wall Street?" The young cowboy seemed amazed, almost star-struck.

Hobbs fought a grin.

Colt grasped the younger man's hand in a quick shake. "For nine years."

"Wearing a suit?" The kid uttered the phrase as if wearing a suit was either the worst punishment ever or a crowning glory.

"Every day."

"I see them New Yorkers in the mornin' sometimes when I dial up them news shows," Hobbs said. "Sittin' there in front of their glass windows, the people and weather goin' straight on by behind 'em." Hobbs shook his head. "Settin' inside, while life passes on. Can't get my head 'round that, no how."

"You'd rather be caught in a blizzard, old man?" Brock stared at Hobbs as if the older man might have a screw loose.

"Well, not exactly a blizzard, but a snowstorm?" He shrugged, unimpressed. "They ain't that bad. Just regular. Though I hear that

global warmin' stuff means we'll probably be tropical by the time Nick's girls are growed. We'll be raisin' flowers for them lay-ee things they hand out in Hawaii instead of fattenin' cattle."

"Old man, you might be pushing up flowers by then anyway, so it don't much matter."

Hobbs's grin showed the gap in his lower front teeth. "The good Lord will call me when it's my time, not a minute before."

"Sit," Angelina said, removing a sheet of biscuits from the oven.

"Shouldn't I go see Dad first? And where's Nick?"

"Right here," his younger brother said as he strode in through the back door, looking every inch the rugged cattle rancher he always wanted to be. At least someone's dreams came true in the whole convoluted reality-TV-style mess of three brothers with five different parents. "You ready to jump in?"

"You got work clothes for me?"

"They'll be loose." Nick cast an amused glance at the other two men. "You're not as bulked up as you used to be."

"I've been using my brain instead of my brawn," Colt replied. A part of him wanted to go toe-to-toe with Nick for five minutes just to get it out of their systems. He hadn't pounded on anyone since his last visit ended badly, but the enticing odor of lean grilled steak and farm-fresh eggs took precedence. For now.

"Brain instead of brawn." Nick jabbed Colt's right shoulder. "How far'd that get you?"

Colt paused. Began counting to ten. Made it to five before he lunged forward aiming a fist at his brother's laughing face.

Nick's quick block made it a glancing blow, but Colt pulled up

tight, ready to do whatever his little brother thought necessary to get this over with now.

A rolling pin smacked hard on the counter, inches from them.

They swung about, and Colt found himself staring into those same smoke-filled eyes he'd met the night before. It seemed Angelina was adept at finding weaponry in every room of the house, making her one of the most versatile women he'd met in a while. "One drop of stupid Stafford blood gets spilled in my clean kitchen, and I'll take the hide off both of you."

Nick straightened but looked somewhat reluctant to back off—which was kind of how they'd both been since Nick was born. "Sorry, Angelina. I—"

"You!" She waved the pin at Nick, and he stepped back, hands up. "You are upset by many things these days, here and at your home with the girls, but is this"—she stretched out the word as she pointed toward Colt—"the example a loving father sets? Picking fights with others? Or do you want your beautiful daughters to see a man who rises above, who goes the distance for his family? You are their only model of behavior now." She set the rolling pin down, and Colt was pretty sure he heard a collective sigh as the three men began to breathe easier. "I believe you should make it a good one. Seeing you fight with your brother will show your daughters more division. They've already seen enough of that, haven't they?"

Nick surrendered without an argument, a rare moment in Stafford-land. "You're right, Ange. Like usual."

"And you." She shifted her attention to Colt and indicated the platter on the table next to him. "Would you rather fight? Or eat?"

Colt pulled out the chair in front of the plate and sat in it.

"I thought as much." She reached over and poured Colt a steaming mug of fresh hot coffee, the kind he wished he could find in New York City. No one roasted and brewed coffee like they did in the Pacific Northwest.

"Thank you."

She paused, said nothing, then went back to the cooking area.

The guys exchanged quick looks. Despite their size and number, it was clear who ran things at the Double S—the inside things anyway. He hadn't expected this, but he'd steered clear of the Double S for a lot of years, leaving him with no idea how things had changed. Any good cowhand knows that keeping the cook happy keeps everyone happy.

Silence reigned as the men ate an astonishing amount of food for this time of the morning. Colt plowed through a strip steak, fried potatoes and onions, three eggs, and a hunk of Texas-style toast. He knew the rigors of calving would burn this away well before supper. On range days, the guys went out with a lunch in hand, knowing a hot supper would be waiting when they returned at night. A long day, a hard saddle, and tough, tugging work awaited him.

Since the coffee she set before him beat anything New York had to offer, maybe his trade-off would be okay.

About two-thirds of the way through his breakfast, he turned toward Nick. "Over a thousand calves, still? Aren't we a little late this year?"

Nick shrugged. "Last year's tough spring messed up some

timing. This year's crop started dropping yesterday. Meat calves. The seed calves for propagation are due later. It'll be like popcorn—the first few here and there, then the explosion of dozens a day, then back to a few here and there."

Colt understood bad timing real well. He met Nick's gaze. "About those clothes."

"I brought you a bag of 'em."

Angelina appeared at his side to refill his mug. She moved his empty plate to the counter, set a bag of clothes on the table, then bent to pour the coffee. Her proximity put him in instant sensory overload. Long dark hair, held back with a clip at the nape of her neck, tumbled over her shoulder. Sugar and spice wafted his way, a mix of cinnamon and vanilla—a scent that was pure woman and way nicer than the high-priced perfumes popular in Lower Manhattan. He reached out to take the freshened mug. "Thank you."

She paused. Turned slightly. She didn't speak, but the dip of her chin acknowledged his gratitude.

"There are extra coats and boots in the closet," Nick said. "Gloves, hats, whatever you need. We brought the herd down a notch last week, but if we get hit with this storm coming, we could be in trouble. We're talking a lot of rangeland to cover. I figured on hooking you up with Newsie."

Yesterday's News, *his* horse, still here, working and waiting. Would the big chestnut remember him? Not likely, but there was something earnestly right about pairing with his old friend again.

"Having the cows down a level is easier on your dad," Hobbs noted.

"Is someone going to fill me in on Dad, or do I have to play twenty questions?"

"He's sick." Hobbs offered up the info in a style Colt remembered like it was yesterday. "He got one of them hepatitis things last year that messed with his liver. He's weak but he's doing better. Some days. But then he went and got tossed around by a protective cow who weren't takin' none too kindly to your daddy's attention to her baby. A rookie mistake, so we knew somethin' weren't right from the get-go." He turned a no-nonsense look to the two younger cowboys on the far side of the table. "Never turn your back on an angry woman, boys. Words to live by."

"Whereas I would prefer 'Do unto others as you would have done unto you,'" remarked Angelina, but she slanted a look of amusement and affection toward Hobbs.

"Does he need a new liver?" Colt looked from Angelina to Nick to Hobbs.

"We don't know." Eyes down, Nick gripped his mug. "We don't know all that much right now."

"So you're not bein' left out, you're bein' included on the same lack of knowledge we're all sharin'," Hobbs said.

"Until they know if Dad's body will recover on its own, it's a waiting game." Strain tightened Nick's observation.

"I hate waitin'," Hobbs grumbled.

A chorus of agreement circled the table.

Angelina made a low sound, and Colt noticed all the men sat straighter, shoulders back, chins up. "Look at you sitting here, all fed and round and good, whining about waiting for a little information while hundreds of cows that have been carrying calves for nine months are about to deliver babies in the snow and wind. Bunch of whiners. Your mothers should take a switch to your behinds."

"When she's right, she's right." Hobbs stood. "I'll take the four-wheeler 'round the back way and meet you guys." He pointed to Colt. "Boy, you gonna hold that bag of clothes all day or get 'em on? Time's wastin'."

Colt took the bag upstairs, dumped the contents on the bed, and dressed as fast as he could. Nick was a touch broader and an inch taller, but not a big enough difference to matter. As he applied the layers, he caught sight of his Armani suit draped across the easy chair on the opposite side of the room. The irony of the situation caught him.

When he'd stormed off the Double S years ago, he was determined to never come back—at least not to work. And he'd kept that promise a long time.

Now he pulled on jeans and a dark green turtleneck and grabbed the Carharrt rancher coat he'd taken from the downstairs closet. He put it on and glanced in the mirror.

What he saw surprised him.

Looking back at him was Colt Stafford—the real Colt Stafford—a guy who played square, shot straight, and never messed anybody over, no matter how bad things got. He gave the reflection a long, slow look, then grabbed the hat and gloves from the bed. The guy in the mirror had a job to do and needed to get on with it. As he left the room, he glanced back.

The mirror showed nothing now but a messed-up bedroom, tousled and strewn. But he knew what he saw. He saw the man he'd been, before Manhattan got hold of him. And seeing that man made him realize it had been way too long since that guy had put in an appearance anywhere.



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