

KID KIRBY

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His name was Reeves Kirby and he was eighteen that summer. He was small of stature and unlikely to grow bigger. Moreover, he had a mild temperament, blond hair, bland blue eyes, and a downy upper lip—truly an unlikely candidate for the fast-draw artist the public later made him out to be.

He came up to the ranch at Almy to help his dad, Tull Kirby. Reeves meant to go back to Tooele in the fall and marry his high school sweetheart, Mary Beth McAllister. She was the pharmacist's daughter. Reeves planned to go to pharmacy school over in Pocatello. He for sure wasn't going to be a rancher.

His dad's ranch at Almy was down the Bear River five miles from Evanston, Wyoming. Tooele was in Utah. The distance between the two towns was about eighty-five miles. Culturally, it could have been a thousand. Reeves didn't figure on stumbling into a gunfight that summer with the notorious killer, gambler, and bawdy-house proprietor Thomas Galt. Reeves didn't own a revolver; he didn't know how to load one. All he knew was that you had to pull the trigger.

The ranch at Almy was called the Elkhorn. Long ago somebody had nailed an elk antler to the barn. There were cattle to tend at the Elkhorn, also fields of alfalfa to irrigate and harvest. For maybe a week after he arrived, Reeves found the work tolerable. But when a rancher from upriver showed up wanting to hire him to some break some horses, he was ready to listen.

This fellow's name was Homer Blanchard and he had a contract to provide twenty-five well-broken horses to the US Cavalry stationed at Fort Duchesne by the middle of September. He had some prime

mustangs, and he needed someone who was extra good at breaking horses to take them. “I need them mustangs broke pronto,” he said, “and I need ’em broke right, and your granddad says you can do it.”

He had just been out to visit Reeves’s grandfather, Riel Kirby, who raised horses at the Narrows of the Bear River. “A horse has pitched your granddad onto a fence and he’s too stove up to take on my project,” Homer said, looking Reeves over as if he were inspecting him for blemishes. “He says his Ute helper ain’t up to the task, but he says you can handle it. Says you are extra good at breaking horses. Says you are a genius at it.”

Reeves scuffed the toe of his shoe in the dirt. It had been a while since he’d tried his hand at sweet-talking a bronco into letting him on its back without a lot of fire and fustian—ever since his grandfather had sold his ranch at Tooele. “I could give it a try, I guess, if my folks will let me,” he said.

“Let me fix it up with your dad and mom,” Homer said. “You come stay in the bunkhouse for a week and I’ll pay you triple. You gentle a couple of broncs and I’ll have my buckeroos finish them off. And no hard feelings if it don’t work.”

Tull was okay with this proposition, having found out that a neighboring rancher had some big sons willing to work for a lot less than Reeves would be making with Homer. Predictably, his mother, Eula, said an emphatic no, and it took several days for Reeves to overcome her objections by persuading her that, rather than allowing Homer’s cowboys to corrupt his morals, he would impress them by his resolute adherence to Mormon standards, thereby opening their hearts to becoming members of the Church. Moreover, he solemnly promised to ride home on Saturday evening in plenty of time to get a good night’s sleep and prepare for driving to sacrament meeting with his folks.

Reeves did as he had promised at the end of the first week, telling his mother with considerable pride that Homer was satisfied with his work and wanted to hire him for gentling the entire herd of twenty-five

horses. Reeves hoped she'd let him accept. It seemed like breaking horses was a gift Heavenly Father had given him and he ought to exercise it, especially since the pay was so generous and he'd have enough money to go forward with his plans to ask Mary Beth to marry him and to apply for pharmacy school at Idaho State University in Pocatello. Eula prayed about it that night and it came to her that, yes, Reeves should take advantage of Mr. Blanchard's offer and acquire the means to escape not only from the polluting influences of Wyoming but also from a rancher's hardscrabble way of life. As for Mary Beth, Eula would welcome her as a daughter if the Lord saw fit to make her Reeves's wife.

What Reeves didn't tell his mother at the end of his first week—largely because he hadn't taken it fully into account just yet—was that while his bunkmates, Homer's three buckeroos, Andy, Jack, and Morley, were respectful of his Mormon scruples, they had already influenced him more than he had influenced them. He was curious about their indifference to sin. They didn't seem to recognize there was such a thing. Profanity and bawdy stories, punctuated by raucous laughter, were as innocent with them as breathing.

For his part, Reeves was keenly aware of sin. From his own perspective, he was a soul who paid close attention to the costs of sin without being able to check his spendthrift ways in accruing those costs. His bad side got the upper hand all too often and he'd stroke his stack in the privy or some other private place. The solitary vice, as people called it, was a nasty business, and he knew if he didn't stop doing it he'd be called to account for it. In the meantime, if he were to suddenly die by accident or disease, his soul would certainly not ascend to the celestial kingdom. The best a fellow of such a flawed character as his could expect on the ladder of glory would be a middling position in the terrestrial kingdom. But at least—so he reasoned—sins of his sort wouldn't consign him to the telestial kingdom, the dreary abode of murderers, thieves, and whoremongers, which was where the three buckeroos were likely to spend eternity.

For a couple of weeks more, Reeves got home around sundown as expected on Saturday evening. A week later, however, he didn't. It happened to be the last Saturday of the month—the day when Homer paid his hands their wages and they customarily rode into Evanston to blow a portion of them. Gathered with Andy, Jack, and Morley in Homer's office, Reeves asked if he could accompany them into Evanston. The road he followed toward home was the same the three buckeroos would follow on their night in town, branching off at the outskirts of Evanston.

Homer looked at Reeves with astonishment. "So you're going to take up with booze and wild women!"

"I'm already part way home when I'm in Evanston," Reeves said. "I was thinking I'd just look around a little and then get on home."

"Well, I ain't in charge of nobody's morals," Homer said, "but I don't want your folks to pull you off my bronc-breaking project. So by damn, you other fellers make sure he gets on his way home at a good early hour."

"You bet," Morley said. "We'll do that."

As the small cavalcade jogged toward town, Reeves learned that the buckeroos planned on visiting a dance hall called the Buckingham, which featured a bar, a vaudeville theater, and a brothel, owned by a madam known as Flossie Kabane, whose bouncer was a Texas gunman named Tom Galt.

"Thing you need to know," Andy said to Reeves, "is when Tom Galt knocks on your door, you've got to leave your lady pronto. Also, if the police raid the place, the drill is we skedaddle quick out the window and drop down into the alley in the back, which runs right back up to the livery barn where our horses are tied up."

"I don't believe Reeves will want to go upstairs to the ladies," Morley intervened. "Mormons don't do that kind of thing."

"Is that so, Reeves?" Jack said. "Not even before you get married?"

Reeves, flustered, started to say something, but his voice died in a squeak.

"That's just the way Mormons are," Morley said.

“Eighteen and he ain’t ever shugged nobody!” Andy marveled.

When the road split, one branch heading into Evanston, the other branch heading toward Almy and the Elkhorn ranch, Reeves’s good side told him to just head on home, but his bad side wouldn’t let him disappoint his sturdy comrades, who were pleased with the prospect of showing him the vices of a western railroad town. They each quaffed a shot of whiskey at the bar while Reeves waited; then they went into the restaurant and had salmon and oysters that had been shipped in ice from San Francisco. Their waitress was a pretty, blue-eyed girl of maybe fifteen. A white apron was tied around her waist. Her blond hair was coiled into a tight bun, atop which a tiny tiara of starched white cloth perched. Her glances did strange things to Reeves, making him straighten his posture and assume what he hoped was a nonchalant look.

Following their meal, Reeves’s comrades took him into the vaudeville show. There was a dog that jumped through hoops with incredible speed and another that could pedal a tricycle. There was a magician from Albany, New York, who locked a lady in a cabinet and sawed her in two and then waved his wand and opened the cabinet and, lo and behold, he had put her back together without any harm. There was a minstrel with black paint on his face who sang “Old Black Joe” very soulfully, which set the audience to weeping.

The grand finale was dancing ladies who came onto the stage with flouncing skirts and high-kicking legs—each upward flounce revealing above their black, be-gartered stockings an expanse of white, sensuous flesh. It was those glimpses of white, sensuous flesh that caused Reeves to envy his comrades when they disappeared up the stairway that led to the brothel. Moments later, his moral compass swung back to true north, and he was ashamed of himself.

He stationed himself on a bench in the passageway between the theater and the restaurant to await his comrades. By and by, the cute little waitress who had served them at dinner came from the restaurant and chalked the following day’s menu onto a blackboard. That task

accomplished, she stood a moment, arms akimbo, gazing at Reeves. A strand of blond hair, loosened from the bun on top of her head, hung over an ear. He confirmed his earlier judgment as to her age—fifteen at most, maybe younger. Once again he felt compelled to appear manly. He straightened his slumping back and nonchalantly crossed one leg over the other.

Stepping close to the bench, the girl said, “Where are your friends?”

Reeves nodded toward the entrance to the brothel stairway.

“You’re too young to go with them, I guess.”

“I’m eighteen,” he said.

“You don’t look eighteen.”

“I know it,” he said. “I’m eighteen even if I don’t look it. Reason I didn’t go with them is I’m a Mormon. I’m not supposed to do that kind of thing.”

“I know some Mormons who do,” she said.

He flushed.

“But I’m glad you don’t,” she quickly added. “Me, I’m an Episcopalian. We aren’t supposed to do that kind of thing either.”

Eyes averted, Reeves picked at a thread on a cuff.

“I don’t go to church, of course,” she said. “Anybody who works for the Buckingham can’t go to communion.”

That wasn’t a big loss as far as Reeves could see. The Episcopal communion didn’t count for anything anyway.

“What’s your name?” she said.

“Reeves Kirby.”

“Reeves Kirby,” she repeated, appearing to savor the sound.

The flicker of intimacy in her voice disturbed Reeves. He planted both feet on the floor.

“I’m Jennie O’Brien,” she said. “I’m sixteen. I’m like you. People don’t believe I’m that old. But I am.”

Reeves gave a doubtful glance.

“I *am!*” she insisted.

He nodded acquiescently.

She tilted her head toward the brothel stairway. "Flossie wants me to work up there."

"Why don't you quit?" Reeves said. "Why don't you go home to your folks?"

"I can't. They're in Fresno. We had a farm in Nebraska. Uncle Dean told Daddy to come on out to Fresno. But we ran out of money by the time we got to Evanston. Daddy had to borrow from Flossie and Tom to go on. They made him put me up for collateral. My folks said they'd come back for me. But they won't. There are too many mouths to feed."

Reeves's eyes widened.

"I've got to go," she said. "Flossie will scold me if she catches me loafing out here."

She put a hand on the door handle. Suddenly she blurted, "You probably think I'm tarnished."

"Tarnished?"

"I'm *not*." She glanced back toward the brothel stairway. "If I worked up there, I'd have a room to myself. I could buy nice clothes. But I can't. I *won't*."

Reeves stared at his feet. A stitched pattern decorated the toe of his boots.

"I guess somebody like you wouldn't ever come calling on a girl like me even if I'm not tarnished," she said.

Just then the three buckeroos burst from the brothel stairway. "Reeves, little buddy," Morley hooted, "it's time to get you started on your way home."

Reaching the Elkhorn ranch a little after dawn, Reeves told his worried parents a lie about his horse throwing a shoe, requiring him to turn back to get the animal reshod, and when that task was accomplished, Homer's wife asked him to help her finish pressing whey from a tub of cheese curds that threatened to spoil before morning.

As expected, Reeves drove into Almy with his parents for sacrament meeting. He considered not partaking of the sacrament but, unwilling to rouse his mother's suspicions, he took the morsel of bread and sipped from the tiny cup when they were offered.

Thoughts, worries, stray emotions of all sorts swam frantically round and round inside him like minnows trapped in a tub. He had stepped down a few rungs on the ladder to glory—no question of that. He hoped he would still qualify for the terrestrial kingdom in case one of the Broncos stumbled and fell on him.

Moreover, he couldn't stop thinking about Jennie O'Brien. She said her parents had sold her. It seemed incredible, yet he believed her. She claimed she wasn't tarnished. He believed that too. In a sense, that just made matters worse. She was too forward, too bold. She supposed a fellow like him would never keep company with a girl like her, even if she wasn't tarnished. Well, that was a fact, and he resented her for making him feel guilty about it just now. For one thing, a Mormon boy couldn't keep company with an Episcopalian girl. For another, it wasn't a girl's place to invite a boy to pay court to her. And on top of all that, he had a sweetheart back in Tooele.

By the time sacrament meeting ended, Reeves had got back around to feeling sorry for Jennie O'Brien. He granted she was a virtuous girl who had reason to feel desperate. She needed a rescue, but he wasn't the fellow to provide it.

Things went along as expected for a couple of weeks, and then on a Monday morning Tull asked Reeves to take a day off from working for Homer in order to convey supplies to his grandfather at the Narrows ranch. He'd have to transport the supplies by packhorse because of a washed-out bank in the ford across the river. Tull normally would have taken them, but he was pressed to clear several fields of newly mown hay before an extended irrigation turn came round. Accordingly, Reeves saddled his gelding, cinched a pack frame on a mare, and with Tull's help loaded the frame with beans, flour, dried apples, and coffee.

Reeves had no difficulty following the trail, although the horses had a tough scramble up the bank at the washed-out ford. Approaching the ranch house, Reeves shouted, "Grandpa, it's me! Reeves!" Hearing no reply, he repeated the shout.

He dismounted and tethered the horses to the hitching rail. As he climbed the porch steps, he shouted again. He knocked, then pushed open the door and peered inside. There were unwashed dishes on the table and a frying pan with a burned pancake on the stove. He shouted again. He closed the front door and walked around the corner of the house. He paused at the barn and looked in. The loft on either side of the bay was full of grass hay.

"Grandpa!" Reeves shouted into the bay.

He heard a faint voice calling from behind the barn. About twenty yards past the barn, he saw his grandfather, sitting on the ground with his back to a wagon wheel. His shirt was drenched with blood and he held a crumpled felt hat, equally bloody, against his chest. A pool of gleaming blood gathered on the ground beside him. There was another pool of blood—considerably darker—maybe four yards away.

"I am dying, boy," his grandfather said. "I have been shot from the back."

Reeves knelt beside him, his breath sucked down to nothing. His head swung with the unreality of what was going on. It wasn't possible someone he knew would get shot in the back. It wasn't possible someone he knew would bleed to death in his own barnyard.

"I fell on my face," his grandfather rasped. "I played dead, tried not to breathe, blood draining out of me. Son-of-a-bitch who shot me gave me a kick. He said, 'You've had this coming for a long time, Riel Kirby.' I knew the voice—Tom Galt, no mistake about it."

Reeves remained in stunned silence, mouth agape.

"I let Lester go to a powwow on the reservation," his grandfather said. "Lucky thing he wasn't here. Galt would've shot him too. I had a chance to kill that son-of-a-bitch years ago. I should have done it. He

was running with a bunch of rustlers over in Grouse Creek. We lynched four of his compadres and let him go. Tell your daddy who it was, Reeves. Tell him it was Tom Galt who did me in.”

Reeves was trying hard not to sob, trying hard to suppress his surging panic, trying hard to comprehend each word and phrase as precisely as possible.

“I have been a wicked man, Reeves. I have visited whores. I have killed men that didn’t need killing. I have defied the promptings of the Holy Ghost many a time. I’m going to hell, Reeves. I’m headed for outer darkness.”

Soon his hands fell limp and the crumpled hat dropped into his lap, revealing a bloody crater of shredded flesh and bone where the bullet had emerged from his chest. Reeves looked into his face and saw what a dead man looked like. There was something emptied about a dead body. It seemed suddenly smaller.

Reeves stood and backed away. Giving in to panic, he turned and began to trot. He came to the tethered horses. He untied the gelding’s reins and prepared to mount. Then he realized it would be a desecration, a dishonor, to leave his grandfather’s body behind. Whatever was required, whatever postponement of panic and grief and self-recrimination might be necessary, he had to take the body with him.

He attached the gelding’s reins to the hitching rail, then untied the load from the pack frame and carried it into the house. He led the mare to the barn and exchanged the pack frame for a saddle. Dragging his grandfather into the barn on a tarp, he tied a loop of rope beneath his grandfather’s arms and hoisted him by means of a block and tackle dangling from a rafter. Having positioned the mare, he lowered his grandfather into the saddle, securing it by tying his hands to the saddle horn and his ankles to the fenders just above the stirrups.

Reeves led the mare from the barn, climbed onto his gelding, and urged the horses forward. At the ford, the mare stumbled and fell to her knees. With a strenuous lunge, she recovered and followed the gelding

from the ford. Looking back, Reeves saw that his grandfather's body dangled bizarrely out of kilter. There was nothing to do but proceed.

Reeves got to the Elkhorn ranch after nightfall. Tull came from the house with a lantern and stared at the grisly burden strapped to the packhorse. Over and over he muttered, "Merciful heavens! Merciful heavens!" Eula stood on the porch watching.

"He talked to me some before he died," Reeves said.

"You watched him die!"

"Yes, sir."

"Tough duty. Very tough duty."

"He was in the barnyard. He got shot from the back. He fell on his face and played dead. The man said, 'You've had this coming for a long time.' Grandpa said he knew the voice. He said it was Tom Galt."

"Tom Galt!"

"Yes, sir."

Eula left the porch, calling, "I'm coming down."

"Don't," Tull called back. "He isn't pretty."

"I intend to see him," she said.

The mare shifted nervously. Riel's body listed grotesquely to one side of the saddle, face downward. Eula took the lantern from Tull and raised it, illuminating Riel's drawn, grimacing face. The glazed eyes were open, and tiny stalactites of dried blood hung from his nostrils.

She stepped back, shuddering.

Tull saddled a fresh horse, took the lead rope in hand, and left for Evanston. Inside the house Reeves tasted little of his supper. At his mother's insistence, he recounted the event at the Narrows ranch, and when he had finished, he asked, "Will he be cast into outer darkness?"

"He lived a hellish life for as long as I knew him," Eula said, "but I doubt he ever knew enough about the Holy Ghost to be cast into outer darkness."

Reeves lay awake for a long time, rigid with anxiety. An hour or so after he fell asleep, he woke in a cold sweat and sat upright in bed,

shouting. He had dreamed of diving into a deep pool of blood. He had the shakes, no question of that. He couldn't help wondering whether he had denied the Holy Ghost without knowing he was doing it.

The next day Tull returned with the county sheriff, Orville Roberts, who asked Reeves to accompany them to the scene of the murder. Tull rode in lead, the sheriff just behind, and Reeves at the rear. Listening to the sheriff talk about local politics helped Reeves keep a grip on his emotions.

At the site of the murder, the sheriff paced off the distance between the pools of dried blood and the corral fence, recording it in a notebook he pulled from his shirt pocket. "That's where he fell when he was shot," the sheriff said, pointing to the first pool of blood. "Then he crawled over to the wagon to prop himself up. Lots of stamina, old Riel. Hard to kill."

Next they traced Galt's tracks to a trampled campsite in a grove of junipers about a half-mile from the ranch. "Looks like he staked Riel out for a couple of days," the sheriff said. "He wanted to kill him pretty bad." Reeves felt a rush of anger. Anger felt good. He saw he wasn't free just yet to quail and cower. He had to keep himself pulled together, had to do whatever was required to see Galt get his just desserts.

Early the next morning, Tull left on an overnight trip to Randolph, Utah, where his mother had made her more civilized domicile despite its considerable distance from the Kirby ranches. Tull hoped to persuade Hortense to return with him to the Elkhorn ranch, where she would occupy Reeves's bedroom. Reeves, for his part, agreed to sleep in a bunk in the tack room of the barn.

Soon after Tull left for Randolph, Reeves decided to ride upriver to the Blanchard ranch to let Homer know why he was taking a week off from bronco breaking. As he saddled his horse, his mother asked him to pass through Evanston on his return to buy maple sugar and baking powder at Rinsler's mercantile. "I have in mind some special desserts for your grandmother Kirby," she explained.

That's how it happened that on his return, Reeves tethered his horse at the livery barn in Evanston and crossed the street to the mercantile. He couldn't find the baking section right away. He entered an aisle featuring dry goods—denim jeans, jackets, bolts of brightly colored cloth. A girl stood at the end of this aisle, fingering some material. Approaching her, he saw it was Jennie O'Brien. She wore a drab skirt, and her hair was wound into an untidy bun upon her head.

Reeves halted, and they stood immobile and wordless before each other, as if their sudden encounter required a carefully considered response.

"You never came back," she said at last.

He took her statement as an accusation. "My grandfather has been killed," he blurted, as if his recent devastation justified the dereliction of a hitherto unrecognized duty toward her.

"What happened?"

"It wasn't an accident," Reeves said. "Someone shot him. I watched him die. Then I tied him on a horse and. . . ." His voice broke. He was wishing he hadn't told her.

"I'm sorry," she said, "really sorry." There were tears in her eyes.

She laid a hand on his arm. He looked at it. She had no right to touch him. He had no right to let her.

"I've had a bad turn too," she said. "I've caved in. I've said yes to Flossie. I'm going to start working upstairs." Her hand gripped his arm more tightly, and her eyes peered into his. "You probably think I shouldn't. But what else can I do? She'll turn me out onto the town. I've got nowhere else to go."

Her face remained impassive, but her grip on his arm became fierce; it was as if she were clinging to a branch to keep from falling into a river.

"It's too bad you are a Mormon," she said. "I would let you be the first one. For free."

Anxiety rippled through him, followed by confusion. Grief was giving way to something else. She lusted on him and he knew it. Furthermore,

he lusted on her. An animal inside him had come awake, had gone on the prowl, alert to a clandestine opportunity. His bad side had taken charge just now—a fact she must have sensed through some slight motion or inclination of his body that Reeves took no account of.

“We could cross the street,” she said, “and go around behind the livery barn. There’s a back door to a hayloft. Some of the ladies use it when they want to work on their own—when they don’t want Flossie taking her cut.”

She turned and walked from the store, Reeves close behind her. In a split second, he had made an irrevocable, cataclysmic, life-changing decision. Half an hour later, he emerged from behind the livery barn alone. He returned to the mercantile and bought the maple sugar and baking powder. Retracing his steps, he tucked the goods into his saddlebags. Mounting, he urged his horse into a trot. Passing the corner of the barn, he saw Jennie, looking forlorn. He noted a wisp of hay clinging to her tousled hair.

For a while, he felt numb and detached. Once again, things didn’t seem real. The world had taken on a different color. The midday sun blazed, yet its light seemed filtered as if by smoke from a prairie fire. After a while, his ideas coalesced, bringing him around to his desperate situation. He couldn’t understand what had come over him, couldn’t believe he had succumbed so easily. He recognized he had hitherto known next to nothing of sin, neither of its enticements nor of its consequences. Stroking his stack in the barn was penny-ante sin. In contrast, to pay for the dubious privilege of deflowering Jennie O’Brien, he had written an IOU pledging his salvation as a forfeit. How did a fellow repent of a sin like that? What currency would satisfy the debt?

Tull didn’t arrive back with Hortense until near noon of the next day. She descended from the buggy with her head held high. Her abundant grey hair was bunched about her head and her cheeks were deeply seamed. “Was it you then,” she said to Reeves, “who found my poor, beloved Riel shot in the back and dying?” She pulled Reeves to her bosom and wept.

After supper that evening, Tull and Hortense prepared a brief obituary of Riel for the Evanston newspaper. When Tull proposed one for the Tooele newspaper, she objected. "Riel was not dealt with justly in Tooele," she said. "I wash my hands of the people there. Knowing of Riel's service as a Union officer, stake authorities called him on a mission to halt rustling in the Grouse Creek country. But these self-same authorities turned on him for hanging the thieves—as if there were some other way of stopping cattle theft in a lawless region. And the disfavor of the authorities allowed the spirit of persecution against him to flourish in Tooele. Those we took to be our best friends turned against him, and we were forced to sell our ranch and our beautiful house and come to this godforsaken country."

The next day, Tull accompanied Reeves to the inquest in the Uinta County courthouse, which was overflowing with participants and curious onlookers. The inquest board, composed of the coroner and two upright citizens, occupied the elevated judge's bench. At another table, somewhat to the side, sat Reeves and Sheriff Roberts as witnesses. At a table immediately in front of the judge's bench sat Thomas Galt and an attorney, Galt having been subpoenaed on the basis of the sheriff's report. Tall and broad-shouldered, Galt was dressed in a handsome western suit. His expressionless face was accented by a thin, pencil-line mustache.

Pounding a gavel, the coroner called the meeting to order. "We are assembled here to inquire into the death of Riel Kirby, rancher, found within the precincts of this county by his grandson Reeves Kirby alive but dying from a gunshot wound on Monday, September 4, in the year of our Lord 1899."

The coroner first asked Reeves to testify. For a few moments, Reeves was paralyzed by stage-fright. Then, in a subdued voice he recounted the sequence of events from his arrival at the Narrows ranch to his departure scarcely an hour later. He ended by repeating the words his grandfather had attributed to Tom Galt. "The man who shot him said, 'You've had this coming for a long time, Riel Kirby.' Grandpa said he knew the voice."

Reeves paused for a moment. Eyes downcast, he continued, dropping his voice to little above a whisper. "He said it was Tom Galt."

The coroner next called on the sheriff, who ended his report by saying circumstantial evidence pointed toward Tom Galt as the perpetrator. Following that, the coroner called Tom Galt into the witness box. "We have subpoenaed you, Mr. Galt, to appear before this inquest because of the testimony of young Mr. Kirby. Are you able to provide evidence exonerating yourself in this matter?"

"Yes, sir."

Galt's attorney stepped forward at this point, asking permission to speak. The coroner nodded approval. "My client," the attorney said, "is employed as the chief security officer at the Buckingham, a resort offering the citizens of Evanston entertainment of the highest order. On the day of Riel Kirby's demise, Mr. Galt was on duty at this establishment and likewise during the preceding night, as his employer, Miss Flossie Kabane, and a number of other employees stand ready to testify. Miss Kabane, I will add, is among the spectators in this room and stands ready to so testify if the inquest board desires."

He turned and pointed to a woman sitting on the first row of spectator seats, only a few feet from Reeves. She wore a dress made of velveteen, having a high collar and long sleeves. Her lips and cheeks were rouged, her lashes were long and dark, and beneath those lashes, her eyes were restless and wary.

"Miss Kabane, you've heard what Mr. Geary has said regarding Mr. Galt's whereabouts on the day of Riel Kirby's assassination," the coroner said. "Are you able to verify that he was on duty at your establishment not only throughout that day but during the previous night as well?"

"Certainly," she said.

"Well, then, I don't see any need to prolong this hearing," the coroner said, turning to his two associates on the bench. These two nodded their agreement. "Sorry to go against your opinion, Orville," the coroner said to the sheriff, "but this board of inquiry finds that Riel Kirby died from

gunshot wounds inflicted by an unknown assailant. Thomas H. Galt, hitherto suspected as the assassin, is hereby declared cleared and exonerated. The board extends its condolences to the family of Riel Kirby.” And with that, the coroner struck the desk before him with a gavel and declared the inquest adjourned.

Outside, the courthouse was a busy scene—clusters of people talking, riders mounting, buggies pulling out of the hitching area onto the street. Reeves reached the Kirby buggy ahead of Tull. While he watched, Galt and Kabane got into a buggy, which Galt, who handled the reins, guided onto the street. Galt turned the buggy about and brought it to a halt within a few feet of Reeves. “You have run up a bill for entertainment provided by one of Miss Kabane’s employees, Jennie O’Brien. You owe Miss Kabane two hundred dollars for that session. That’s the going price on virgins. Miss Kabane is willing to extend your credit till next Friday. On that day she expects you to deposit two hundred dollars in gold coin with the cashier’s office in the Buckingham. If you don’t make it, what happened to Riel Kirby is going to happen to you.” He looked at Flossie Kabane and when she nodded, he added, “It appears Jennie has got balky on the idea of working upstairs with the ladies. If she don’t change her mind, we may be asking you to make up the deficit on that score too.”

Reeves’s stomach knotted. He looked at his hands. They shook violently. He had an impulse to climb from the buggy and run back into the courthouse. But of course he didn’t.

The next day, Saturday, a funeral was held for Riel in the Almy ward chapel, with burial in the Almy cemetery. At the viewing preceding the funeral, the Kirby family stood beside the coffin while members from the Almy ward filed by to pay their respects, most of them unknown to Reeves. Riel’s face struck Reeves as unnatural. It was peaceful enough, but shrunk and eerily pale.

To his surprise, Homer Blanchard and his wife filed by. “I had dealings with him,” Homer said. “If he agreed to sell me horses, I didn’t need a contract. I knew he’d deliver.” As he passed on by, he said, “I’m

counting on you showing up Monday, Reeves. I'm needing you to get on with them broncs."

"Yes, sir, I'll be there," Reeves said.

But he wasn't sure he would be. He'd have \$100 coming when he finished breaking the broncs. That was good money for a ranch hand for half a summer's work—about a quarter of his father's former nine-month salary as a schoolteacher. But he wouldn't finish the job for a couple of weeks. Then there was the problem of borrowing another \$100, and, along with that, the problem of talking Jennie O'Brien into going to work as a whore. All of which gave him reason to consider skipping the county, disappearing down in Arizona or maybe up in Idaho.

The funeral wasn't long. Tull read a sketch of Riel's life, composed the evening before by Hortense. The sketch made him out to be a man without flaws. Following that, the bishop of the Almy ward preached a sermon on the Resurrection, in which he assured his listeners that at the dawn of that glorious event, the kin of the deceased, here assembled, would be reunited with him. Reeves could see the bishop didn't know much about Riel Kirby, who by his own account had been a wicked man, at best destined to pass eternity in the telestial kingdom—unlikely, therefore, to be greeting any of his righteous relatives at the moment of the Resurrection.

This thought reminded Reeves that at present he himself was unforgiven of a sin meriting consignment to that lower realm. Wouldn't it be the damndest thing if he got shot by Tom Galt and ended up in the telestial kingdom shortly after his grandfather? Could they talk to each other from time to time? Or would it be solitary confinement, worlds without end?

Come Monday, Reeves went back to work, unable to make up his mind about leaving the county. He skirted Evanston widely on his ride home the next Saturday night, hoping Tom Galt wouldn't anticipate his ruse. He accompanied his parents to church, knowing Galt's deadline had passed and therefore half expecting to be shot.

He finished working with the broncs on Thursday of the following week. That evening, Homer gave him a draft for \$120 drawn on the Stockmen's Bank in Evanston—\$20 more than Reeves expected. "For good, timely work," Homer explained. He went on then to advise Reeves to cash the draft at the bank it was drawn upon. An out-of-town bank, he explained, would likely discount it ten or fifteen percent.

Homer's draft put Reeves in a quandary. On the one hand, he didn't like taking a ten or fifteen percent discount on his summer wages. On the other hand, he was afraid—no, terrified—of running into Tom Galt in Evanston. Good sense dictated that he take the draft, ride home to the Elkhorn by an entirely different route, say goodbye to his parents, and continue riding on to some distant place before cashing his draft. Eventually, beset by greed, he failed to listen to good sense and stayed another night in the bunkhouse with the three buckeroos. By morning, he had worked out a plan for cashing the draft at the Stockmen's Bank before riding on down to the Elkhorn ranch. It wasn't an unlikely plan—except that, as Reeves learned later, Tom Galt had persuaded, through friendship and threat, a number of persons to inform him if Reeves Kirby should show up in town. These persons included an employee at the livery barn where Reeves tethered his horse a little before noon that fateful day.

Scarcely a half-hour later, in a stunning reversal of the usual dynamics of a confrontation between an armed and an unarmed opponent, Tom Galt lay dead in a growing pool of his own blood with an utterly dumbfounded Reeves Kirby standing nearby with a smoking revolver in his hand.

The action culminating in this, one of the most storied gunfights in Evanston's bloody history, devolved in a two-block area just west of the railway station, which stood at the head of Tenth Street. The Buckingham sat on this street as did—a couple of blocks down—the Stockmen's Bank. The livery barn, where Reeves tethered his horse, stood on the next street to the south. Reeves walked a roundabout

way, returning to Tenth Street well below the bank. After exchanging Homer's draft for greenbacks, he left the bank and retraced his steps. Approaching the livery barn, his limbs froze. Crossing the intersection ahead of him was Tom Galt, preoccupied with loading cartridges from his gun belt into the open cylinder of a revolver. Reeves wheeled about and retreated, hoping Galt would not look down the street and spot him, yet expecting at every moment to be shot in the back. Frantic, he returned to Tenth Street and headed toward the train station, supposing he might hide in some nook or corner there. However, as he crossed another intersection, he saw that Tom Galt had turned about and was scarcely thirty yards away.

Reeves broke into a run toward the station. As he approached the arcade sheltering the main entrance to the Buckingham, he remembered the advice from Andy on the night of his visit to the Buckingham. In case of a police raid, Andy had said, they were instructed to climb out a window into an alley leading to the livery barn—where, as Reeves now assumed, his horse, his means of escape, stood ready. Impulsively, Reeves swung into the arcade and shoved through the swinging doors. He ran down the hall and tried to open the door to the stairs leading to the brothel. It was locked. Looking back, he saw Galt coming through the entrance door. Reeves crossed the hall and pushed through the restaurant door. Waitresses were setting out napkins and silverware. One of them was Jennie O'Brien.

"Tom Galt is going to kill me," Reeves said hoarsely. "How do I get to the alley?"

"This way!" Jennie said, dumping silverware upon the floor with a clatter. She led him through a side door, down a dim, narrow hall, and into a dimly-lit room with a narrow bed on either side of the window. She shut the door and locked it, then went to the window, pulled a curtain aside, and raised the sash. "Climb out," she said, "and go left."

At that instant Galt began to pound on the door and shout, "Open up, by God, open up!" Jennie turned back to one of the beds and pulled

a hammerless revolver from beneath the mattress. She thrust it into Reeves's hand just as Galt kicked open the door and burst into the room. Two shots rang out and, as Galt tumbled to the floor, Reeves realized he had fired one of them. Galt emitted a sighing sound, twitched several times, and was still.

Reeves stared a moment at the hole in the wall where Galt's shot had struck. Then he stared at the hammerless revolver in his hand. He had never seen a revolver without an external hammer before. He threw it on a bed. He looked again at Galt on the floor. Blood flowed from a small round hole in his chest, drenching his handsome coat. Reeves was suddenly aghast. He had killed a man. The commandment said *Thou shalt not kill*. It didn't say *Thou shalt not kill except in self-defense*. He was at fault for not leaving town without trying to cash the draft. He was at fault for having gone into the hayloft with Jennie. He was at fault for signing on with Homer Blanchard in the first place.

Reeves sat on the bed beside the revolver. Jennie seated herself on the opposite bed, her face blank. What was she thinking, this girl whose father and mother and seven siblings had sold her, the Joseph of her family, into Egypt?

Reeves heard people in the hall. He heard a woman's voice. "Oh, my God, Tom's been shot!" Then a man shouted, "Clear out! He's just killed Tom!"

From outside the building came the clanging bells and the galloping hooves of horses drawing a police wagon. Shortly, someone entered the hall, and a man said, "That's Tom, there in the doorway. I think the kid who shot him is still in the room."

"I'll handle this," another man said. Reeves heard more steps in the hall. "Come out with your hands up!" the most recent voice said.

"All right," Reeves said, "I'm coming out."

He stepped into the hall, his hands high. "He came after me with a gun," he said. "I was trying to get away."

The cop locked handcuffs onto Reeves's wrists. A door opened and Flossie Kabane pushed into the hall.

"Where is he?" she cried hysterically. She threw herself onto the body. "Is he dead, is he dead? Say something, Tom, say something!"

She looked up. "Who did it?"

"Him," the cop said.

"Reeves Kirby!" she exclaimed.

"He came after me with a gun in his hand," Reeves repeated.

"The question is what were you doing in this room in the first place?" the cop said and led him away. Flossie threw herself back on the body and resumed her wailing. No sound came from the room where Jennie still sat.

The driver of the police wagon whipped the horses into a near gallop and, with warning bell clanging, transported Reeves to the county building where city as well as county prisoners were jailed.

After Reeves's personal effects—a pocket knife, a handkerchief, his sheaf of greenbacks, a small medallion given to him by Mary Beth—were inventoried, he was conducted into a cell already containing three men, all of them vagabonds, judging from the tattered quality of their clothing.

"He just killed a man," the incarcerating officer—a desk sergeant—told these three, who murmured uneasily.

For a while, Reeves sat on a long bench beside his fellow inmates, wanting to believe the shooting hadn't actually happened. But it had happened, and he was presently in a very bad way. He was bound to be tried for murdering Tom Galt, and how was that going to shake out in front of a jury? What could he expect by way of help from Jennie O'Brien? It was all very confusing, all very ominous.

About eight that evening, the prisoners were offered a bowl of cabbage soup and a slice of bread for supper. Having no appetite, Reeves gave his serving to one of the vagabonds. A little later, a door opened and Sheriff Roberts sauntered into the cellblock. Gazing through the

bars, he said, "Well, Reeves, I never figured on this. I'm told you have killed Tom Galt."

"He came after me with a gun in his hand," Reeves said.

"I didn't know you had took up packing a gun," the sheriff said.

"It was Jennie O'Brien's gun. She's a waitress. I was in her room."

"She gave you the gun?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing in her room?"

Reeves was silent.

"Are you sure she's just a waitress?"

Reeves could see he was cornered. He looked at his fellow prisoners, who listened intently. "I'll tell you the whole story," he said to the sheriff. "But not here."

"All right," the sheriff said. "I'll get the desk sergeant to let me take you into my office."

Shortly the sergeant led Reeves into the sheriff's office. "I wouldn't trust this boy," he said. "He's a desperado. Meaner than he looks."

"Leave the worrying to me," the sheriff said. "I'll bring him back in a half-hour."

"He broke into a waitress's bedroom," the sergeant insisted. "Tom Galt caught him in the act."

"I expect there's more to this story than meets the eye," the sheriff said. "I want to hear what the boy has to say."

After the sergeant had left, the sheriff said, "Now then, set me straight on what happened. How come you were in that room? How come Jennie O'Brien handed you a gun?"

Reeves flushed. He'd almost rather cut off a hand than tell what he and Jennie had done in the hayloft of the livery barn. But it had to be told. Nothing else would make sense if it weren't. So he started by telling about riding into Evanston with Homer's buckeroos and meeting Jennie in the hall of the Buckingham opposite to the stairs leading

to the brothel. Then he progressed to the hard part of the story, their meeting in Rinsler's mercantile and their subsequent visit to the hayloft.

He didn't try to soften the sordid story any. He told how Jennie had given in to Flossie Kabane and decided to start working as a whore, and when she met him in the store she said if he wanted to, he could be the first to have her and he could have her for free. With that he gave in to his lust, plain and simple, which being a Mormon boy, he had no right to do. What was worse, it had got him on the bad side of Flossie and Tom Galt, who told him he had five days to deposit \$200 at the payroll office of the Buckingham for ruining Jennie for some railroad nabob who'd pay that much for the privilege of being the first to have her, and if he didn't deposit it, Tom Galt would do to Reeves what he'd done to his grandfather. Reeves wouldn't have that much money on hand even after Homer had paid him off. So he figured he would disappear somewhere. But he had foolishly decided to slip into Evanston to cash Homer's draft at the Stockmen's Bank, because out-of-town banks would have discounted it ten or fifteen percent. As bad luck would have it, he had run into Tom Galt, and being in a total, senseless panic and not being able to think of anything smarter, he dashed inside the Buckingham because he knew its back windows opened onto the alley that ran to the livery barn where his horse was tied. Jennie took him to her room but before he could crawl out a window, Tom kicked the door down and when he came through, he had a gun in his hand.

At the conclusion of their interview the sheriff said, "What counts now is can we get this gal to verify your story. If she will, you will likely be let out on bail till the matter is cleared up. You ain't the first boy to pull a girl's skirt up when he had no business doing it, and she ain't the first girl to let him." That cheered Reeves up momentarily. But once he was back in his cell, engulfed in darkness and shivering under a thin blanket on a top bunk, he couldn't keep his mind off the possibility that she would make him out to be the unwanted intruder in her room that the other employees of the Buckingham claimed he was. This, of

course, led his thoughts around to the rapidly growing list of sins set down against him in the Book of Judgment. It seemed as if sinning was the only thing he was really good at, which led him to wonder if there were descending degrees of ingloriousness a fellow could sink to in the celestial kingdom. Likely there were, and he had just achieved a new level of degradation and ignominy by getting himself stashed away in jail. As for repentance, it seemed likely he had long since passed the point of no return. There was truly nothing he could do to come clean of the burden of sin he had accumulated. It just kept getting bigger and bigger.

Toward noon the next day the desk sergeant brought Reeves out of the cell and returned his personal effects. It turned out that Jennie had backed Reeves's story and, there being no other eyewitness to contradict it, Reeves was free to go—with the understanding, the desk sergeant emphasized, that Reeves would show up at an inquest, which was scheduled for the following day. He also said the sheriff would like to see him in his office.

The sheriff, leaning back in his creaking desk chair, said, "I've been up all night. I went back to the Buckingham and had a little chat with Jennie O'Brien. Lucky for you, she tells the same story you're telling. That ain't all. She asked me to fetch her away so I took her home to my wife. Now what I want to emphasize is Flossie and her bunch may still try to make out you are in the wrong at the inquest. So, like it or not, you're going to have to tell the whole story you told me. Don't try to leave any of it out, or you'll get tripped up."

Reeves sighed and rubbed a hand across his forehead.

"My advice is you ought to just go home and come clean with your folks right now. Then you can relax in the witness box and tell the story like it happened."

Thanking the sheriff, Reeves headed for the livery barn. When the desk sergeant had first told Reeves he was free to leave, he couldn't believe it. It seemed too good to be true. Well, now he saw it actually

was too good to be true. He was out of jail but he wasn't out of trouble, not by a long sight.

How would he go about confessing to his folks? There wasn't a soft way to do it. "Dad, Mom, Grandma," he could hear himself saying, "I have to show up at an inquest tomorrow at eleven because I have had carnal knowledge of a girl in the hayloft of a livery barn up at Evanston and I have killed a man on account of it."

This was pretty much how he blurted it out upon his arrival at the Elkhorn, except that he named the man he had killed. His folks, all three of them, stared for a moment, obviously unable to digest what they had just been told.

"You shouldn't joke about things like that," his father said.

Eyes downcast, Reeves said, "It isn't a joke. I wish it was."

His father scratched the back of his head. His grandmother sat bolt upright in her chair, her face becoming even more pale and drawn than before. His mother burst out, "You have killed a man!"

"Yes, ma'am. He was coming after me with a gun."

"And fornicated with a gentile!"

"Yes, ma'am," Reeves said.

"How could you? How could you?" Eula cried. "What did I ever do to deserve this?"

"You never did anything. I just got weak, I just got tempted."

With that, his mother stalked into her bedroom and shut the door.

On Monday morning Tull accompanied Reeves to Evanston in the buggy. Once again the inquest board was composed of the coroner and the same two upright citizens. At the witness table sat Reeves, Jennie, the city policeman who had arrested Reeves, and Sheriff Roberts. At the attorneys' table sat both the county and the city attorneys and Mr. Geary, the attorney for the Buckingham. In the audience, unknown to Reeves, sat a journalist from the East who happened to be passing through Evanston on a western tour. It was he who would create the myth of the fast-draw artist, Kid Kirby.

Pounding a gavel, the coroner called the meeting to order and declared that the board had been assembled to inquire into the death of Thomas H. Galt, security guard at the Buckingham pleasure resort. Mr. Galt had been shot through the heart at the entrance to the bedroom shared by two waitresses, one of whom was at the inquest in the capacity of witness to the shooting. Having examined the body of the deceased, the coroner went on to say, he had found Galt had expired from a bullet from a .38 special revolver, which penetrated his chest and perforated the left ventricle of his heart, resulting in near instant death. The Evanston police arrested Mr. Reeves Kirby on suspicion of illegally entering the bedroom of a waitress and shooting Mr. Galt, who in pursuit of his duty had accosted Mr. Kirby. Some hours later, the police released Mr. Kirby from custody on the basis of testimony of the waitress, Miss Jennie O'Brien, the only eyewitness to the actual shooting, Miss O'Brien's testimony having corroborated Mr. Kirby's claim that he shot Mr. Galt in self-defense. The stated purpose of the present inquest was not only to ascertain whether Miss O'Brien's testimony was accurate, but also, if her testimony was deemed accurate, to re-examine the alibi offered by Thomas Galt and Flossie Kabane at the inquest into the assassination of Riel Kirby.

"Shortly before I called this inquest to order," the coroner declared, "Mr. Geary, counsel and trustee for the Buckingham pleasure resort, informed me that Miss Kabane has withdrawn the assets of the resort from the Stockmen's Bank and, in the company of four of her female employees, has decamped from the city of Evanston for an unstated destination in Nevada, where she will presumably re-establish her entertainment enterprise. Mr. Geary informs me that Miss Kabane has left in his hands the sale of the Buckingham's remaining assets. It would therefore seem a useless endeavor to go further with this inquest, the testimony of both Reeves Kirby and Jennie O'Brien going uncontested. For reasons unknown, Mr. Galt assassinated Riel Kirby and attempted to assassinate his grandson, who defended himself by means of a weapon

handed him by Miss O'Brien. This homicide is therefore judged to be justifiable. This inquest is adjourned."

The sheriff and city cop stood and stepped away from the witness table. The sheriff had sat between Reeves and Jennie, who only now could turn and regard each other. Her eyes searched his.

She appeared ready to say something, but she didn't. Maybe she wanted him to thank her. He owed her a lot. He'd be dead if she hadn't handed him the pistol. He'd be in big legal trouble if she hadn't testified in his behalf before the authorities. However, she was the cause of his trouble in the first place, having offered to let him be the first to have her. He was a public shame now, his parents too. The bishop of the Almy ward would be calling him to account soon, and he'd likely be excommunicated. Moreover, he couldn't pretend to any future with Mary Beth McAllister, no matter what.

"Thank you for everything," he mumbled.

She seemed not to hear. "My blood hasn't come," she said, her cheeks flushing. There were tears in her eyes.

The sheriff's wife approached, a large, portly woman with a kind, motherly face. On the vertical, she outdid the sheriff by six inches—though sidewise the sheriff held his own, being plenty portly too. "It's settled, dear," the sheriff's wife said to Jennie. "You're to stay with us till your parents can be located."

Grasping Mrs. Roberts's outstretched hand, Jennie rose. She looked back as she walked away. Reeves saw disappointment on her face. What did she mean by "My blood hasn't come"?

Then it came to him with a rush of despair. She was pregnant.

On the ride back to the Elkhorn ranch, he told his father he was ruined. "Everybody knows what I've been up to," he said. "I'm thinking I ought to light out of this country. Maybe I ought to go find a job on a ranch in Idaho or Arizona."

"I hope you won't do that."

"I'm not respectable anymore," Reeves said. "Anybody that is halfway decent will look down on me. They'll cross the street so they won't have to meet me if they see me coming down the sidewalk."

"Why don't you take over the Narrows ranch?" Tull said. "It's out of the way. Nobody goes there unless they want to buy a horse. It would relieve me of a lot of worry if you were down there managing things. Lester will be back shortly and he can show you the ropes."

"I might do it," Reeves said.

That evening the ward clerk showed up at the Elkhorn to let Reeves know the bishop would like to have a chat with him before church on the following Sunday. Reeves said he'd be there. During the night he considered leaving the county again, but by morning he'd made up his mind to do one better on the bishop and ride over to his house in Almy and get the process of excommunication going immediately.

He found the bishop, a heavily bearded man, in his corral milking a cow.

The bishop said, "You have done some terrible things, Reeves—downright wicked things."

"Yes, sir, that's true."

"I hope you've learned your lesson."

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure."

"I have favored cutting you off the Church, but President Murdock has counseled otherwise." He was referring to his superior, the president of the Evanston stake. "President Murdoch wants you to groom yourself up for becoming an Elder shortly. He sets a priority on strengthening the Elders Quorum in the Almy ward."

Needless to say, Eula was vastly cheered up by Reeves's report. "An Elder!" she said. "Well, that does give me satisfaction."

Reeves didn't feel forgiven. In fact, he *knew* he wasn't forgiven. On top of all his other sins, he had managed to get a girl he didn't love

pregnant, and his intention was to disappear, vamoose, shuck out of the country. Sin *did* have a way of compounding itself.

However, in his bunk that night out in the tack room of the barn, he dreamed he saw his grandfather listing in the saddle during that long, grisly ride from the Narrows ranch on the day of his murder. Though he was dead, he could still talk. “What are you going to do to make it up to that girl?” he said to Reeves. He meant Jennie O’Brien. Reeves awoke in a fit of the shakes. He got out of bed and lit a candle. He sat on the side of the bed in his underwear, thinking about being married to Jennie.

He had no idea whether she would wake up mornings cheerful or foul, whether she’d have anything to talk about at the table, whether she’d want to keep house or make a garden or help out in the barnyard. Also, being an Episcopalian, she would likely take umbrage at a husband who, even if he couldn’t get squared up with God, figured God favored Mormons over all other kinds of believers. Also, his mother would object to his marrying an outsider for any reason whatsoever.

After a while, he blew out the candle and crawled into bed. He remembered then the night he had first talked with Jennie while he waited for the buckeroos to finish with their ladies. She had supposed aloud that somebody like him would never come calling on a girl like her, which implied a wish that he *would* come calling. What Jennie wanted, he could see, was for some decent-looking fellow to marry her, and as things had fallen out, Reeves happened to be the handiest candidate. He admitted he still lusted on Jennie, but lust wasn’t love, and it seemed like being married to her would just be one more sin piled on top of all the others he was guilty of. Nonetheless, there was nothing to do but ride into Evanston and call on her at the sheriff’s house.

Arriving in town, he asked the way to the sheriff’s house. He tied his horse to the picket fence surrounding the house, went through the gate, and knocked on the door. The sheriff’s wife answered.

“Mrs. Roberts,” Reeves said, “I’d like to come calling on Jennie O’Brien, if I may.”

She stared speechlessly for a long moment.

“I mean if it’s all right with her,” Reeves added.

Just then, Jennie crowded into the doorway beside the sheriff’s wife. “It’s you,” she said.

“Yes, it’s me.”

“I don’t feel at liberty to say yes or no in this matter,” the sheriff’s wife said. “You’ll have to ask Mr. Roberts’s permission. He’s at his office just now.”

An hour later, a lengthy deliberation was in progress in the Roberts’ parlor, the sheriff and his wife seated in easy chairs facing Reeves and Jennie and these two seated on opposite ends of a sofa. The sheriff and his wife both had round, cherubic faces, the sheriff’s sporting a bushy mustache. Their bulk loomed in the small parlor.

The sheriff seemed embarrassed. “Do I understand you have courtship in mind, Reeves?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Jennie, is this acceptable to you.”

“Oh, yes.”

The sheriff looked at his wife. “It might be a good idea—considering everything that has gone on, that is.”

“I’m not so sure,” Mrs. Roberts said. “To call a spade a spade, I’ll just say it: Jennie will regret tying in with the Mormons. They are a strange bunch.”

The sheriff coughed. “Well, yes—and another matter is are you ready to start making a living, Reeves?”

Reeves could see he needed to invent a livelihood in a hurry. He said he was going to take over the operation of the Narrows ranch. Drawing on things he’d heard his father say about it, he said he meant to expand the horse herd there by recovering a bunch of his grandfather’s branded horses running wild, and also by helping himself to some unbranded stock out on the public domain. He figured on shipping a carload down to the Ogden auction every spring and fall.

“The house down at that ranch ain’t no palace,” the sheriff said, turning to Jennie. “It’s more or less a shack—an outer room with a stove and table in it and a bedroom with a tiny closet. Water comes out of the river. Better count on cooking and washing the dishes, not just for you and Reeves, but for that Ute fellow too.”

“That’s all right,” Jennie said. “That’s what a woman’s supposed to do. That’s what I want to do.”

Nothing was said about Jennie’s pregnancy during this discussion. Moreover, as he rode back toward the Elkhorn, Reeves had no intention of saying anything about it to his folks. They’d find out about it soon enough. For the moment, all they needed to know was that he planned to marry Jennie. On that score, he knew he had to be assertive, knew he had to not sound like he was asking permission to marry her. But by the time he got to the Elkhorn, he had lost his valor and made no mention of Jennie. Furthermore, he was wishing he had acted on his notion of disappearing in Arizona or Idaho.

Nonetheless, he rode back to Evanston the next day as promised, leaving his folks puzzled as to his destination. Mrs. Roberts greeted him at the door and left the two of them, Reeves and Jennie, alone in the parlor, seated on opposite ends of the sofa. Jennie was silent and downcast, quite the opposite of her demeanor on the previous day. “I was mistaken,” she finally said. “You don’t have to marry me.”

He chewed on that for a while, uncertain of her meaning. Then it came to him. Her bleeding had started overnight. He was free. For a moment, his feelings surged. Then—as he viewed the tears rolling down her cheeks—his feelings dropped. He couldn’t walk out on her. He had to consider himself engaged. He told her so, and when Mrs. Roberts returned to the parlor, she found them seated closely together in the middle of the sofa. Just like that, by a transaction that had lasted no more than thirty seconds, Reeves Kirby and Jennie O’Brien were bound into a union destined to last for half a century.

Reeves announced his intention at the Elkhorn ranch that night. "This girl I did wrong with, Jennie O'Brien," he said, "her and me, we're going to get married. I want to bring her over tomorrow and have you meet her."

"You can't be serious!" his mother said.

"I am serious," he asserted.

"A gentile girl! My son marrying a gentile girl!" Eula said, bursting into tears.

"Is this definitely the direction the wind is blowing?" Tull said. "Is your mind truly made up?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Do you think she'll want to accompany you to the Narrows?"

"Yes, sir, she says she will."

Eula was weeping into a handkerchief.

"It's better he marry her, Eula," Tull said. "Just much better."

"I'd rather he was dead," she said.

"Well, he isn't, so we've just got to make the best of it."

"Please, dear," Hortense said, placing a hand on Eula's arm, "shouldn't we make her welcome?"

Eula stared morosely off into a corner of the room. "All right," she said in a weak, despondent voice, "bring her home to meet us."

A final obstacle to be overcome had to do with the construction of Jennie's wedding dress. When Reeves asked his mother to undertake the task—Mrs. Roberts having no skill in that business—she objected to the white, satiny material Jennie had chosen.

"It just won't do," Eula declared. "White stands for the purity of the bride."

What she said was true. Jennie had no claim on virginity. But after he had left the house and had a few minutes to think things over, Reeves decided to be firm. He went back into the house and said, "I'd like you to make it anyway. Jennie has her heart set on it."

Eula was startled. She looked at Hortense, who sat in an easy chair darning socks. "Should I do it?" Eula asked. Hortense put the darning into her lap and glanced back and forth between Reeves and his mother. "What would it hurt?" she said.

"All right," Eula said to Reeves, "bring her back so I can take her measurements."

At Eula's behest, Reeves asked the bishop of the Almy ward to perform the ceremony, which was conducted in the home of Sheriff and Mrs. Roberts. The bishop made no issue of the irregularity of this wedding. In attendance were not only the Kirbys and the sheriff and his wife but also Homer Blanchard, his wife, and the three buckeroos. The latter three were slicked up in their fanciest shirts and newest jeans. "Got to hand it to you, Reeves," Andy said admiringly at a private moment. "You had us plumb fooled. Never had no idea you was getting into Jennie O'Brien's britches."

Watching Jennie, luminous with joy, Reeves felt puzzled. He granted he might be mistaken, but it seemed he had come up a rung or two on the ladder toward glory.

Within days of their wedding, Reeves and Jennie made the Narrows ranch their domicile. Eventually, they became the parents of two daughters and three sons. When their first child reached the age of eight, her grandmother, Eula, persuaded her to be baptized a Mormon. As it happened, Jennie surprised her husband and in-laws by asking to be baptized too. By that time, Reeves was known as the provider of superior roping and cutting horses. With Tull's help, he enlarged and modernized the house at the Narrows ranch. It is to be noted that Tull's cattle enterprise at the Elkhorn prospered enough for Tull to build Eula a substantial two-story house—which included a bedroom and small parlor for Hortense.

Little remains to be narrated here other than Reeves's acquisition of the sobriquet of Kid Kirby. Although Reeves and Jennie at first lived in some isolation, they soon discovered that a small book written by the

eastern newspaper correspondent in attendance at the second inquest had placed Reeves at the center of a heroic legend. Titled *The Saga of Kid Kirby; or, The Wild West Lives among the Mormons!*, this book characterized Reeves as a fast-draw artist who had heroically avenged the assassination of his grandfather. With a surprising frequency throughout the remainder of their lives, Reeves and Jennie were annoyed by tourists and novelty seekers who made their way to the Narrows ranch to take a look at a Mormon Billy the Kid.