

As days passed by, things gradually went back to normal. Kid and Lou had finally sorted out all the documents that legally bonded the boys to the couple. The young man suspected that they wouldn't hear from Robert Martin again, but he didn't want to take any unnecessary risks. Besides, this was something that they had always intended to do from the very first moment they had decided to take in the two brothers, but back then the man from the orphanage had persuaded the couple to wait, a decision that had almost cost them to lose Jack. Not that having all those documents sorted out meant that they could have been able to prevent Robert Martin from taking Jack, but at least now the boys were their legal children. Might that man turn up again, the law would be on their side. It felt so good to know that they were a family for real and to the eyes of the world. A paper wouldn't change what they felt for the boys but after the situation they had, the documents gave them some relative peace of mind.

The trip to the orphanage had taken them four days in all. It had really been very pleasant to spend that time, the four of them together, especially for Jack. He hadn't really talked about what had happened with his father out there, but by his unwillingness to even mention Robert Martin, Kid suspected that it hadn't been a very agreeable experience for the child at all. Fortunately, Jack was gradually coming out of his shell after breaking down at dinner the day they had come back. This brief trip had really been good for him and he was back to his talkative and cheerful character again. Most of the time he still called the couple by their given names; it was only occasionally that he used more familiar terms but, all in all, something had really changed. He didn't have the unwillingness on his part to admit that Kid and Lou were his family now and he didn't even protest when somebody from the orphanage had referred to the couple as his parents.

It really had been an enjoyable treat for the family and the couple of nights spent in the open had evoked many fond memories in Kid. It had been so long since he had been able to have some of this with Lou. If he thought hard, he imagined that they hadn't done something similar since their Express days. They used to love when they were sent on a run together and if they had to stay overnight in the open, there was nothing more especial than to cuddle together before a good fire. In moments like these he had felt like the happiest man alive and nothing more really mattered but the woman in his arms. Sometimes Kid wished he could go back to those innocent, though dangerous, days; he and Lou had been so naïve and inexperienced when they had started this man-woman stuff. It was no wonder they had made so many mistakes back then, but still thinking about that time brought a smile to his lips. He just loved the way she used to shyly look at him with those big eyes of hers over her spectacles, without anybody else noticing it. That one look made his heart race wildly as he had never experienced before. She had really been an adorable little thing back then and it was no wonder he had fallen in love with her since the very beginning. She could have hair shorter than a boy, be covered in dust and mud, wear unbecoming male slack clothes, but to his eyes Lou was as lovely and beautiful as if she were dressed like a princess. Their love had begun tenderly and far too innocent and now that years had gone by, Kid realized that those unsure feelings had given way to the love they shared today. Despite the problems they had to face and the passing time, Lou's look still made him feel like the young boy who used to ride for the Express. He just couldn't believe how much they had gone through in just this past year, but despite everything, he couldn't complain about anything. They really had a good life, a beautiful home and two lovely children. They couldn't ask for anything else.

After those few days away, the couple had to catch up with work around the ranch. Their plans of having a relaxed summer work-wise were called off to their dismay due to the economic loss they had suffered from Robert Martin's incident. Kid was happy to part from that money at that high price if that meant that the man wouldn't disturb them any more. Fortunately, not everything was lost. Mr. Jones, the man who had bought all those horses, would make payment for the other lot of horses at the end of the summer if his intentions remained unchanged. Kid knew that even so, that money would barely be enough to make them go through the winter

without problems and moreover, he just couldn't stake his family's welfare on this one card. He really needed to keep the business going and hopefully they would be able to attract new possible buyers, which would mean they could have a winter without concerns. If, on the contrary, they weren't that lucky, Kid knew that he'd have to find a second job which would help them keep going without financial difficulties. Lou had also mentioned that she could go back to her old job at the hotel for a few hours a day. The couple had recently run into Mr. Faber, her former boss, and aware of Louise's recovery, the man had hinted that he'd be glad to re-employ her if she wanted to. Kid had refused his suggestion, knowing that his wife had a lot on her hands as it was and he didn't want her to take on more responsibilities. Louise already worked around the ranch as much as she could apart from taking care of their home and the children. It was no wonder that she looked so exhausted at the end of the day. For the moment Kid would try to keep things as they'd been so far. Hopefully, with a bit of luck they'd be able to make it work.

For the moment that was his only major concern. The latest problems with the boys' estranged father were fortunately already a distant memory and hopefully it would remain so. The entire incident had taught Jack a good lesson. He had admitted that he had acted wrong and his repentance was sincere and real. Nothing they could say would make the boy more aware of his wrongs. However, Kid knew that Lou had a long conversation with him; in the gentle way of hers she had talked and explained to him a few things that might be still bugging the boy. It was difficult to cope with certain events in life especially when one is too young to really understand. Louise tried to be as sincere as she could without hurting Jack's feelings or shocking him. She knew that the matter with the money still weighed heavily in his heart. Somehow he needed to do something to alleviate his acts and Lou had thought that it would do him good if he helped Kid with some minor chores around the ranch after school. It turned out that Jack was enjoying the task more than the couple had bargained for and every day Lou almost had to drag him away from the stables when it was time for him to do his homework. It was obvious that the boy had a liking for horses and he really didn't mind the chores he had to do as long as it meant spending time around the animals. Kid really liked having Jack with him every day and this time together was bringing the two of them closer. The boy was beginning to open up to him and tell him what had happened with his father and his feelings about it, which the young man was really proud of. He listened to his accounts and answered his questions as well as he could do. Kid tried his best not to voice his opinion about the man who had fathered Jack even though he didn't deserve that respect at all, but the Southerner knew that it was Jack who should form his own opinions about his father. He was a clever boy and after everything he had witnessed, he could really tell what his father was like without anybody else butting in. Kid had even started talking about his own father, something he had never been very comfortable with, but as Jack's curiosity had sparked since the day the young man had briefly mentioned his father being no good, he kept asking question after question, and Kid answered him as best as he could. It was clear that Jack felt there was a special bond between the blue-eyed man and himself, both having bad examples as fathers and surprisingly to Kid, talking about it wasn't as bad as he thought especially since it was doing the young boy good. Jack had finally admitted to himself that he had a new family who cared for him. Kid had plain evidence of that when one day, the boy had come to him and said in a very soft voice, almost embarrassed, "I wish you were my real father." There was no need for more words and Kid couldn't feel prouder than at that moment as he realized that he finally had a place in Jack's heart.

All these memories and thoughts were occupying the rancher's mind on this warm June morning while he was mucking out the stalls in his stables. Suddenly, a female voice calling his name and the sound of pattering feet snapped him out of his reverie. He smiled as he caught sight of his wife appearing through the door; her face flashed, a big smile on her lips and her eyes shining excitedly.

"Kid!" Lou called again as she came closer to her husband. The young man stopped the task at hand and resting his body against the rake he was holding, he looked at her quizzically without uttering a single word. Louise had a letter in her hold, which she was waving in the air.

"What's the matter, Lou?" he asked when she was standing opposite him.

"They're coming!" she simply said, smiling widely.

"Who?" Kid asked again, letting go of the rake and walking a few steps closer to her.

"Everybody!" she exclaimed excitedly, her brown eyes dancing merrily. "Buck, Cody, Jimmy and... even Emma and Sam. I just got a letter from her. Oh Kid, Ain't it great?"

"It is," he replied, flashing a knowing grin in her direction.

Louise frowned as she noticed that her husband didn't seem surprised at the news she had just told him. "You knew about this?" she asked, studying his expression carefully.

"Well ... I just wrote a few letters to some friends ..." he trailed off letting the meaning of his words sink in while he lifted an eyebrow teasingly.

To his surprise Lou didn't react the way he hoped he would. Instead she sighed and her gay expression of a few seconds ago changed into one of sharp disappointment. "They aren't coming of their own accord. You had to beg them to come," she let out, lowering her gaze to the ground at her feet.

Kid placed a finger under her chin and tilting her head, he made her meet his eyes. "Come on, Lou," he said, "I didn't beg them, just invited them over." He paused and noticing an incredulous look passed over her gaze, he added, "Lou, I know how much you want to see them again, so I thought I'd give you a nice little surprise."

"Yeah, I guess," Lou muttered, still unconvinced by his words. It hurt her to think that Kid had to ask them to come to Rock Creek once again. In his past letters Cody had always promised to visit them, but had never complied although Lou and Rachel had insisted on it in their own letters. Not even when Kid had run into Jimmy in Denver a few months ago and repeated the invitation, had they bothered to come either. Lou hadn't seen them since the Express shut down and they went their different ways. In the last years she had seen Emma on a few occasions. The red-headed woman had visited and stayed with her in Rock Creek a couple of times and likewise Louise had gone to her and Sam's home when Emma had given birth to her baby daughter two years ago. The couple also had an older boy, who Emma had around the time when Kid and she got married.

"Come on, Lou!" Kid insisted, noticing her half-hearted response. "It will be like the good old times, uh? But this time I'm afraid it will be us who will have to feed Cody's stomach." Kid grinned at her jokingly and reluctantly she plastered a smile on her face. "It was high time we had a small celebration," he added after a while, "We didn't have any for our birthdays, our wedding anniversary or for the boys ..."

"And the one at Christmas was simply pathetic," Lou added bitterly, cutting him off in mid-sentence. She knew that she was to blame for those lacking occasions and even now, remembering those months brought about a sense of total bitterness that she couldn't help. For almost a year she had been impossible to deal with and there had been few or no reasons to be merry about.

Kid hated the direction the whole conversation was taking. Lou had been almost ecstatic when she had first shown up at the stables but all of a sudden she had turned all gloomy and miserable. Sometimes it scared him to think that something might happen and she would reverse her recovery. Kid cupped her face in his right hand and caressing her cheek with his thumb he said, "It wasn't that bad, but next year's will be better."



The following morning Louise was walking along Rock Creek's main street and like every day she had to put up with Jack's whining and protests about going to school. At a certain distance from her the boy slowly shuffled after Lou with an unhappy face. At some point Louise turned around and called for the umpteenth time that morning, "Come on, Jack. We don't have all day." Despite her urging words, the child didn't make the least attempt to hurry up and carried on in the same slow pace while he pouted exaggeratedly. When he finally reached Lou, she patiently looked at him, her hands resting on her hips and asked, "Honey, why are you like this every single morning? You know you have fun at school." Jack shrugged his shoulders and in that moment somebody clearing their throat near them drew Lou's attention and turning to her side, she found herself face to face with the marshal.

"Hey, Teaspoon," she greeted cheerfully, "How's it going?"

"Fairly good. The sun's shining, no problems in sight and on top of it all, bumping into a lovely face like yours just made my day." Louise chuckled at his words and turning to the seven-year-old boy Teaspoon asked, "Hi, Jack. How are you, son?"

"Not very well," he answered morosely. "My belly aches something terrible."

The marshal raised an eyebrow enquiringly in Lou's direction and she simply said, "He doesn't want to go to school like every day."

"Oh," the marshal let out with a bemused expression.

"It's not that!" Jack protested vehemently. "It really hurts, Lou!"

"Really? Then let's go to the doctor," Louise said, folding her arms over her chest. "Doctor Logan's surgery is just right at the end of the street." Jack looked at her with an unhappy face and she asked again, "Shall we, Jack?"

The seven-year-old simply shook his head forlornly while Teaspoon and Louise shared a bemused look. It was then that the boy caught sight of his friend heading for school with his mother just a few feet ahead of him. "Hey, Victor!" Jack called, all of a sudden forgetting about his bellyache completely. "Wait!" The other boy stopped his steady walking and noticing his friend, he waved at him while calling his mother's attention. Then Jack turned to Louise and asked, "Can I walk to school with Victor and his Ma, Lou?"

"All right," she agreed, nodding her permission.

Louise had barely uttered those words before the boy ran after his friend while the chestnut-haired lady stood looking at his fleeting figure, shaking her head in amusement. "Boys!" she muttered as both she and the marshal chuckled at Jack's sudden recovery.

"Tell you what, Lou," Teaspoon said while they walked towards his small office. "Gets worse as they grow older or so I've heard." The marshal closed the glass door behind them after they had stepped into the building which housed the jail. "You can now imagine how much trouble that bunch of Pony Express boys were to this old dog." Louise laughed heartily at his remark as she dropped into a chair while the marshal perched himself on his desk. "You were the least bad, but then you weren't a boy though I didn't know that at the time." Louise kept looking at him, her eyes shining brightly in amusement and Teaspoon added after a while, "You and Kid are doin' really good with those two young'uns."

"Thank you," Louise muttered, embarrassed and pleased by the marshal's compliment. They stayed in silence for a few seconds, smiling contentedly and then Lou said, "By the way, I wanted to talk to you about that unruly bunch of boys."

“Did you?”

“Seems they finally decided to pay a visit to their forgotten friends,” she explained, still unhappy by their long absence. “In four days.”

“Good Lord, miracles do exist, uh?” Teaspoon exclaimed, clearly pleased with the news. He never came to admit it but his heart really longed to know what his boys were into these days. As he had rightly guessed, when the war broke out, the people he had come to consider his family had fallen apart. He could still call himself lucky as he still had Rachel, Lou and Kid around, but he couldn't help but wish that he could see the rest of his boys from time to time. They had their own lives, he knew that, but as he always said, family is family, and he was sure that the motto he used to repeat to those boys back then really meant something to all of them.

“Emma and Sam will be here as well,” Lou finished to fill him in and asked, “You going to be around for the occasion?”

“Wouldn't miss if for anything!” Teaspoon replied with a crooked smile. Louise smiled back with a placid expression. “I'd better go now. I have so much to do.” She quickly jumped to her feet and suddenly the room seemed to spin around her. Lou had to rest her hand on the chair she had just left to prevent her legs from staggering while she closed her eyes in a way to stop the overwhelming dizzy sensation. The marshal noticed her shaken state at once and rushed to her side, grabbing her by the elbow. “You all right, sweetheart?” he asked in a concerned voice.

Louise opened her eyes again to look into the old man's worried eyes. Fortunately, the spinning had ceased and breathing in deeply to steady herself she said, “I'm fine, Teaspoon. Just got a bit dizzy because of rising up so brusquely.”

The marshal peered at her with a puzzled frown. “You sure, Lou?” he insisted, not really convinced by her explanation, watching the pallor of her face. “You want me to walk with you to the doctor?”

“Of course not!” Lou exclaimed, breaking free of his hold. She had more than enough with her husband fussing over her just for anything and everything. She wasn't going to have Teaspoon acting all protector-like as well. Besides, she didn't want to see that Doctor Logan. “Nobody goes to the doctor for just a little thing like that!”

Teaspoon shook his head at her reaction. He knew that Louise had this irrational thing about doctors, which was really peculiar coming from such a level-headed person like her. “You just threatened Jack with taking him to Doctor Logan while you're not willing to go yourself. What would he think if he knew that his ma's also afraid of doctors?”

“I told you, I'm fine,” Lou replied a bit too harshly, tired of this conversation. “And I'm not afraid, but you're right, I have no desire to see that doctor. Gives me the creeps.”

Teaspoon had to chuckle at her outburst, not understanding her attitude about the local doctor. He was just a normal friendly fella as far as he knew. The marshal hadn't really had many occasions to talk to Doctor Logan and knew next to nothing about him. His predecessor, Doctor Bailey, used to come round to the marshal's office once in a while and share a few games of checkers with Teaspoon. Anyway, this new doctor was a married man and much younger than Doctor Bailey, so it was just natural that he saved his time for his wife or for younger friends. “So I guess you haven't seen our doctor for a long time?” Realizing too late what he had asked and knowing why she had last gone to see the physician, Teaspoon hurried to utter a clumsy apology, his amusement completely gone. “Uh... Lou, I'm so sorry, I didn't meant to bring that up.”

Louise stared at him with a frown, not getting what he was apologizing for. When his words sank in, she finally understood what the marshal was going on about. "Oh Teaspoon, it's all right. Don't worry. Thank God I hadn't laid my eyes on that man, but that wasn't the last time I did" She kept thoughtful and the memory came back to her quickly. Strangely she hadn't happened to see the man at all in all this time but she perfectly remembered bumping into Doctor Logan many months ago after having a heated argument with Rachel about her then resolution to dissolve her marriage. Upset as she had been, Louise hadn't really been looking where she was going and had bumped against a body, which had turned out to be the doctor's. As the images replayed in her mind, she remembered something else, which brought a puzzled frown into her forehead. "Teaspoon?" she called hesitantly.

"Yes, Lou?"

"Uh... did you discover anything about that man who was found dead a few months ago?" she asked.

"You mean the one you told Kid you had seen?" Lou nodded her response and Teaspoon simply said, "No, nothing at all. Why?"

"I've just remembered where I saw him," she replied matter-of-factly.

"Where?"

"Well, just here in town, but that's not the important bit," Louise began, "but who I was with when I saw him." She explained the whole episode of coming across the doctor and how at some point he had stared at a man crossing the street, which had drawn Louise's attention. "He just kept looking at him as if he knew him, Teaspoon."

"You sure it was the same man, Lou?" the marshal asked. Doctor Logan had been the first one who had inspected the body and issued the death certificate. Not once had he shown signs of recognizing the man and in the certificate filled out in the doctor's handwriting the word "unknown" was written where the name of the deceased man should go.

"I'm sure," Lou stated without any hesitation. Many months had passed since then and she had to admit that she hadn't been in her best condition. She had no doubts on her mind that the dead man was the same person she had seen, but now she wasn't sure if what she had identified in Doctor Logan's eyes as recognition could well have been something else; maybe surprise to see the man in that peculiar attire or he might have been looking at something else. She had been sure of what she saw, but her doubts had started assaulting her. "Well, maybe Doctor Logan was just looking at him out of curiosity, I don't know." She had to chuckle at herself and added, "Kid says I have this insane thing against the doctor, which isn't very healthy. I guess he's somehow right." She paused for a moment and then added hurriedly, "I really need to go now, Teaspoon. See you." Quickly she gave the marshal a brief peck on his cheek and swirling around she was out of the office in a flash before the marshal had time to say anything further.

Teaspoon stood in the middle of his office deep in thought, pondering about the conversation he had had with Louise. The marshal had hardly noticed her slipping out of his office and hadn't even had the opportunity to ask her if she was feeling any better. Walking to the door and peering outside, he could make out Lou's brisk figure breezing along at the end of the street. "Seems she's good enough," Teaspoon said to himself, "but suddenly I'm not feelin' that good myself."

Closing the door to his small office and leaving 'Back in a sec' notice attached to it, he strolled towards the exact opposite direction that Lou had taken. When the place of his interest was before him, the marshal plodded towards it and let himself in decidedly. The room was

completely empty but for the young lady sitting on her own comfortably at the end of it. Teaspoon removed his hat and tipped his head to the woman politely. "Good morning, Mrs. Logan. How are you?"

The blonde lady rose to her feet and smiled placidly. "What brings you to my home so early in the morning, Marshal Hunter?"

"I'm in urgent need of your husband's services... something personal... you know," Teaspoon replied, rubbing his hand over his stomach repeatedly. "I have the worst case of heartburn ever."

"I'm afraid Charles is out. Mr. Cooper had a nasty fall on his farm this morning and he's just left for the place." She paused briefly and added, "But I guess I could help you some with that indigestion of yours."

"My lucky day then. Not every day has one the chance to fall into the tender hands of a beautiful lady... I mean ... metaphorically talkin'," Teaspoon said, pouring on all his usual charm. Maybe to find the woman on her own was a piece of good luck in itself, he thought pleasantly.

"Naturally," Mrs. Logan replied with a smile on her lips. She thought that the marshal was a rather peculiar character who was probably put in charge of the local law since many young capable men had been away in the war all those years. After all, Rock Creek was such a peaceful or rather boring town.

The woman studied Teaspoon's figure carefully for a few minutes. "I gather from the looks of you that you're a man with a healthy appetite," she said, noticing the marshal's protuberant stomach, which caused uncomfortable embarrassment in the old man. "You had a bit too much to eat last night?" she asked.

"Well, it's easy to overdo it when surrounded by family," the marshal lied. Last night he had stayed in his office like most days and had a simple frugal dinner. "I was over at the McClouds'. You see, they're like family to me and Louise's just a darlin' and pampers this old man somethin' terrible whenever I go to them. I gather you know her."

"Mrs. McCloud?" the lady asked stiffly. "Oh yes... I know her." It didn't go unnoticed to the marshal how Mrs. Logan's demure had changed as soon as he had mentioned Lou and he wondered why. "I think Charles has something for severe cases of heartburn in his surgery," she said in a stilted voice.

"Very well, Ma'am," Teaspoon replied as he followed the woman inside the room and when she turned round and saw him behind her, it was clear by her expression that she hadn't counted on the marshal following her. Teaspoon grinned at her and she responded to the gesture with a rigid smile. From a shelf behind her husband's desk, Mrs. Logan took a glass jar containing a white mixture and silently began transferring some of it into a small vial.

"If I don't remember wrong, you and your husband have been around us for almost a year now," Teaspoon began.

"Yeah, that's right," the woman muttered, not lifting her eyes from the jar in her hands.

"Where were you from again?" he asked in a casual manner.

"Uh...St Louis," she replied awkwardly, eyeing the marshal cautiously.

"That's right. I forgot. My age," he added with a wink but the woman kept a serious countenance. "I guess it must be hard to settle down in a small location like Rock Creek," the



He walked the few steps separating them and drew her into his arms. "I'm not laughing at you, silly," he said, kissing the tip of her nose tenderly, "just at your outburst."

"That woman wasted my precious time," she moaned as she disengaged herself from his hold. "And I have so much to do! I gotta clean all the windows, go for provisions, pick up Jack from school, fix dinner and still have time to exercise that couple of horses I promised you I would."

"Hold on there, honey," Kid exclaimed. "You're making me tired just from listening to you." Coming closer to her once again, he peered in her eyes directly. "Just do what you can, Lou. You don't need to work with the horses."

"But I want to!" she whined exaggeratedly. She was tired of being trapped in the house and really longed for working on their ranch.

"All right, all right," he said. "You stay here and do whatever you need or want to do. I'll take Tommy with me, go to Tompkins and pick up Jack for you. What about that?"

"That sounds pretty good," she replied, smiling for the first time and leaning over, she kissed her husband full on the mouth. "I love you," she called as he moved to leave.

"Don't try to do everything at once. Leave something for tomorrow."

"All right, but now get out of here," she said among giggles and stood dreamily looking at his retreating figure. Without even realizing it, a deep sigh escaped her lips, feeling a terrible need to cry, which she didn't want or dare to think why.

A few hours later Kid drove the buckboard back in his property, the two boys sitting at his side. He had delayed their return home a bit longer as he wanted to give Lou some time on her own before finding the house invaded by their two demanding children. After going around Teaspoon's office and not finding the marshal there, he had taken the children to Miss Prescott's new teahouse and bought them a nice piece of apple pie and a glass of milk each, which they had enjoyed thoroughly. Later they had gone visiting with Rachel for a while and when they had finally headed for home, Kid had taken a detour still trying to save some more minutes for Lou.

Kid jumped off the wagon and helped the boys off it afterwards. Blacky ran towards the brothers as soon as the dog set eyes on them, barking excitedly and the two boys began playing with him straightaway. Kid expected Louise to appear at the door at any moment as she always did when they had been in town, but seeing as she didn't, Kid plodded toward the house, bemusedly thinking that she must still be in the middle of her frantic activity and probably hadn't heard the wagon pull up outside. As he stepped into the house, it surprised him not to hear any sounds at all or perceive the smells of Lou's cooking wafting from the kitchen. Walking into the lounge, his mouth twitched into a smile as his eyes fell on Louise fast asleep on the couch, a bucket of water and a rag in front of her on the floor. Kid approached her and crouching before her sleeping figure, he caressed her cheek with the back of his hand tenderly. "Hey, Lou, sweetie. Wake up."

Her eyes fluttered for a moment and then she opened them slowly, getting a blurry image of her husband's smiling face before her. "Kid?" she called in a raspy voice.

"We're back, honey," he said softly.

"Back?" she repeated huskily, her mind not completely awake yet, but when his words sank in, she sat up suddenly while she exclaimed, "Oh my God! I've fallen asleep. I just sat down for a minute and I've fallen asleep!"

"It's not such a big deal, Lou, it's fine," Kid piped in.

"No, it's not!" she let out angrily. "I haven't done a single darn thing, not even dinner!"

"You mean you've been sleeping all this time?" he asked with a frown. Lou didn't answer his question and instead she jumped to her feet and in her hurry to go to the kitchen, she stumbled over the bucket she had previously filled with water to wash the windows, tipping it over and spilling the water all over the floor. "Oh God," Lou exclaimed horrified.

"It's all right," Kid tried to appease his seemingly agitated wife. "I'll see to this. You start dinner and I'll give you a hand once I have dried this floor."

Minutes later Kid slid into the kitchen, his eyes falling on Lou as she washed her hands in the sink. Hearing his steps she turned her head to him and both kept looking at each other without uttering a single word. It was Kid who broke the silence as he asked, "Lou, what's wrong?" Before she had time to protest he added, "And don't say it's nothing because I know better. I wake up every day with you, live with you, struggle with you, sleep with you, so I have a certain idea of what I'm talking about if I say there's something different in my wife. For one thing you never fall asleep in the middle of the day without an apparent reason."

Lou sighed wearily, knowing that she couldn't stall him any longer. Resting her body against the sink and her arms folded across her chest protectively she muttered hesitantly, "I... I'm not feeling well lately."

"I thought so," Kid simply said with a serious countenance.

"I must surely be coming down with something ... a cold or maybe the flu," she continued faintly.

"But you don't believe it's that," he stated without hesitation.

"I don't know, Kid!" Louise exclaimed. "I'm no doctor!"

Kid walked a few steps till he was face to face with her and holding her upper arms in his hands he said, "That's why we're gonna see Doctor Logan tomorrow without delay and don't start with your protests."

"I don't need to see any doctor, Kid."

"Lou..." he let out in warning.

"Maybe it's a temporary thing and it will blow over like ... like a headache," she said with a slight smile, looking intently in his eyes, trying to make him believe what she wanted to believe herself. "I promise I'll go to Doctor Logan if I still feel unwell in a few days, honestly." Kid wasn't really convinced of her arguments but he knew that nothing he could say would persuade her otherwise. "Now let's finish fixing dinner once and for all if we don't want the boys to starve tonight."

Louise turned away from him and continued getting everything ready for tonight's quick dinner. Kid came to her side and started shelling some peas from a bowl. They worked in silence when out of the blue Lou blurted out, "You know, I think my mother couldn't have been much older than I am now when she passed away." Kid slowly turned his head to stare at her crestfallen while she kept her attention focused on the carrots she was peeling while continuing to talk. "It's funny. I don't even know what exactly she died from. You see, nobody talks to an eight-year-old about those things. All I know is that she started getting these pains and

weakening away to nothing.”

“Wh...” Kid tried to speak, but had to clear his tightened throat before carrying on. “Why are you telling me all this, Lou?” he asked, staring at her wide-eyed.

This time Lou met his frightened eyes and smiling widely as if she didn't notice his demure she said, “No reason. Just miss her sometimes, that's all.” She leaned over and planting a quick kiss on his cheek she said cheerfully, “It's getting dark outside. I'll call the boys. Won't be long.” As she scurried out of the kitchen, Kid stood there on the same spot, frozen, feeling overwhelmed by fear, stronger and infinitely more frightened than he had ever felt before and sighing, his lips let out a few words, softly like in a prayer, “Oh God.”