

The months flew by and December came and with it Christmas. During all this time Louise had welcomed the changes taking place in her body. As her middle grew bigger and all of her body swelled, her doubts about her maternity gradually disappeared. After everything that had happened, Lou hadn't completely believed that she was actually going to have a baby. Doctor Webb, who had decided to stay in Rock Creek, had assured her and Kid that everything was going as it should in her pregnancy and there was nothing to worry about. As she had foreseen, Kid was driving her crazy, fussing over her like never before as if she were made of china and could break at any moment. At the slightest thing he made her go to the doctor's and even though Louise wasn't happy with his incessant fret, she couldn't really blame him for feeling like that. So despite her protests, she ended up doing as he liked. Yet, she wasn't sure whether Doctor Webb was so patient and Louise feared that one of these days the kind physician would throw them out of his little office after stoically bearing their constant visits and unimportant questions. Truth to be told, she was as ignorant about babies and pregnancies as Kid was and at any discomfort or change from what she had already experienced, she got as worried, but she had more sense than to add on her husband's already troubles and never voiced her fears. However, she knew she didn't need to have fretted so much as everything had been as smooth as silk.

In her last visit to the physician, he had told her that the baby might be making its appearance in a couple of weeks' time but as she was a first-time mother, the odds were that it could take a bit longer. The news had filled her with joy but also with great dread. However much she wanted to have her child between her arms, she couldn't help but fear the moment of labor. Everybody lately joked about it, telling her terrible stories without realizing that she would be going through that in the very near future. At least she felt somehow reassured knowing that Doctor Webb would be helping her through that trying time. Despite her abhorrence to doctors, this man had managed to inspire her trust. He was so different from that horrible man who had passed himself off as Doctor Logan. It had been months since Kid and she had gone to Fort Laramie where the so-called Browne and Mrs. Logan had been tried. The young couple had made a statement telling the court what had taken place in Rock Creek all those months ago. It hadn't been easy for either of them to relive the whole thing before a room full of strangers. Having to see the man responsible for their problems and the termination of their first baby had been especially difficult for the couple. The so-called Browne had seemed impassive to the fact that a likely death sentence hung over his head and had flashed his smile at Lou repeatedly in a cruel and mocking way. Mrs. Logan, though, had looked pale and haggard, begging the court for mercy over and over again. However, her pleading words had proved useless as the pair had been found guilty and sentenced to death. Lou couldn't say that she was sorry about the outcome of the trial. The couple deserved that fate since they had played with people's lives and fates in a ruthless way.

It had been snowing all night long and the property was today surrounded by a crisp white blanket. Louise looked through the window for the umpteenth time, feeling terribly tired and bored of being trapped between her four walls. There was nothing much she could really do. A few days before all her friends had arrived to spend Christmas with the family and stay for the birth of the couple's child. Kid had finally built an extension to the house, adding a few extra rooms, so they could now take in their friends comfortably. Louise really felt happy to have them around, but since Emma had arrived, the red-headed lady and Rachel hadn't allowed her to move one finger, which added to Kid's insistence that she stayed confined in the house for her own good. Louise thought wryly that these few weeks till the birth of the baby were going to be the longest in her life.

Gazing through the window once again, Louise exclaimed, "I can't see the boys anywhere in the yard. I'll check on where they are." Before Rachel or Emma could say anything against it, she crossed the length of her lounge as quickly as her state allowed her and grabbing her coat

from the peg by the door, Louise slid outside, happy not to be intercepted by her self-appointed guardians. Naturally she did know where their children were; she had been watching them play with the snow in the yard but just a few minutes ago they had followed Kid, Jimmy, Cody and Buck to the stables, but Lou just needed this excuse to break from the prison her house had become lately. Once outside Lou felt invigorated to be able to breathe the fresh air and feel the cold in her face. With slow steps she began crossing the yard where the snow reached her ankles and little by little she managed to get to the stables. From the door which was slightly ajar she could see the four adults and her two children. Kid was showing his friends the hoof of one of the new horses. Lou knew that he was worried about this beautiful black stallion, which had lately been limping. Jack seemed really interested in what the four men were discussing about the animal while Tommy was obviously bored and his attention was somewhere else. From her position Lou couldn't hear what the men were talking about, so she moved a bit closer. On doing so, Tommy spotted her straightaway, "Hello, mama!" he exclaimed happily as he ran to her for a big hug.

At the boy's words Kid lifted his eyes to the door and saw his wife standing there and cuddling Tommy. Dropping the horse's hoof heavily, he turned towards her with a serious expression. "What are you doing here, Lou?" he asked with a grave voice.

"Just breathing some fresh air," she replied cockily, not flinching a bit at the seriousness in his countenance. Their three friends exchanged bemused looks, knowing what was coming inevitably.

"Hello, Lou. Nice to see you up and about," Jimmy quipped, which gained him a glare from his sandy-haired friend. That stopped him from making further comments and he decided to hold his tongue; he didn't want to get in the middle of the couple once more. Straightaway Kid turned his attention to his wife again.

"Lou," he started, slowly walking the few steps separating them, "it's all snowed and frozen out there. You could well have slipped over coming over here and then what?"

"It would have been a heck of a job to put you back on your feet," Cody added with a snicker, making another of his now usual jokes about Lou's overgrown size.

"Shut up, Cody!" both husband and wife ordered in chorus.

"I was careful!" Lou stated loudly, replying to Kid's words.

"Lou..." he tried again, but this time his brown-haired wife didn't let him.

"I wanted to have this baby so much, but now I'm not sure if I'd be willing to go through it if I'd known it would be like this!" she barked angrily. "You know I'm taking it easy, but your stupid imposing rules of inactivity are just unbearable. Next time you come to me, looking for some cuddling, you'll have to find it somewhere else because I'm not going through this anymore."

"Kid, my friend, she's already threatening you with no more dancing and she hasn't gone through labor yet," Buck remarked teasingly, which made the two other men guffaw raucously.

Louise didn't pay them any attention and simply continued her harangue, now in a gravelly tone. "Today's Christmas Eve and I feel so miserable," she muttered, as her eyes filled with tears.

Her words spurred Kid into action and he drew her into his arms instantly despite her unwillingness and protests. "I'm so sorry, Lou," he whispered softly, "I just want the best for you."

"I know," she hiccupped, "but there are still a few weeks to go, and I'm so darn bored."

Kid tilted her head towards his by putting his index finger under her chin. "I know what," he said, flashing his smile at her. "What about if I hitch up the buckboard and we go for a drive together?" Louise nodded faintly with a shy smile. "What do you say, boys?" Kid asked the two children who were at their side, looking at the exchange between the two adults with a mixture of curiosity and confusion.

"Yes!!!" the two brothers shouted in chorus as they clapped their hands happily with brought a smile to the five adults' faces.

Half an hour later the family was admiring the beautiful white landscape in the surroundings of Rock Creek. Kid drove the wagon slowly, making sure that the carriage didn't roll over unstable terrain, which was something easier said than done as he couldn't really see much with all the snow around. He had to smile as he could see how happy Louise appeared, looking at everything with bright and excited eyes as if it were the first time she saw these parts. Kid had to admit that his concerns for Lou had got the best of him, but he just couldn't help worrying about her, even more now that she was in the last weeks of her pregnancy. It hadn't gone unnoticed to him how she continually rubbed her back during the drive, but Kid decided not to say anything, considering how peaceful and delighted she looked. He didn't want to spoil the moment, sparking her anger once more. Lately she had been complaining of backaches and being uncomfortable, and Kid supposed that they were normal symptoms as she was now so heavy with the baby due in a couple of weeks.

"This is so beautiful!" Louise exclaimed, bringing Kid back from his reverie.

"It really is," Kid agreed and turning his head to the children, who were warmly covered by thick blankets, he asked, "You all right back there, boys?"

"Yes, sir," Jack replied and in that brief distraction the wagon rolled on a big stone in the path, which caused a loud thump in the carriage and the wheel to creak.

"Damn!" Kid blurted out as he stopped the horse. "You all right?" he asked, turning to Lou. Louise simply nodded, trying to hide her amusement at her husband's apparently clumsy driving skills. Kid jumped off the wagon and checking the wheel, he exclaimed angrily, "This is just perfect!!! The axle is broken!"

"Don't fret, Kid, and help me down," Lou commanded, giggling simultaneously. He did as she told him to. The two boys had already jumped off the carriage without waiting for any indication and were playing together without any care. Once on firm ground Louise rested her back against the buckboard frame, trying to find some relief to the aches troubling her. Even though Kid had steered the vehicle carefully, the drive through unsteady terrain had made her back hurt more, but she didn't dare to complain after all her protests.

Noticing her husband's unhappy expression she said, "Kid, erase that long face. It's not such a big deal. Let's unhitch the horse; the boys can ride on it and we can walk to the ranch."

"You sure you're up to it, Lou?" he asked, frowning his brow.

"Course I am. The walk will do me good," Louise replied without any trace of doubt.

"All right," Kid muttered with a sour expression. He was cursing himself for his clumsiness and being the one to get his family in such a fix. He didn't share Lou's optimism. They were at about an hour's walk from the ranch and with all the snow and in Lou's condition it would take them much longer to reach home. On top of it all, it was freezing cold and Louise was obviously in discomfort. What a bright idea he had! Driving in the snow! Kid thought that it would be quicker if he just rode to the ranch and brought back another buckboard. Yet, he knew he just

couldn't leave his wife and children here in the cold.

"Come on, Kid!" Lou urged him and guessing where his thoughts were going, she added, "It will be all right!"

The Southerner didn't say anything as he walked to the front of the wagon and began unhitching the horse. Lou stood on the same spot, rubbing her back against the wooden frame of the wagon as a way to relieve her discomforts. Suddenly, her face contorted as a terrible pain coursed through her back, extending to her front.

"Are you all right?" Jack's voice resounded in the stillness of the place as he noticed Lou's pained expression. His question instantly drew Kid's attention away from the horse he was unhitching.

"Lou?" he called as he rounded the wagon and plodded towards her in a few strides.

"I'm fine," Lou stated in a weak voice. "It's just my back."

Kid eyed her narrowly, noticing her pale and tired countenance for the first time. "You sure, Lou?"

She was about to reply when another sharp pang of pain hit her and she let out a bitter cry while grabbing her swollen middle. "Oh God," Kid exclaimed, his face pale with fear. Framing her face with his two hands he asked even though he had a strong suspicion that he already knew the answer, "Lou, is it the baby? Is it?"

"I think so," Louise mumbled, her eyes filling with tears.

"Don't worry, don't worry; it's gonna be fine," Kid began, talking at a hectic pace, "It won't take me long to ride home and bring another wagon and..."

Lou cut him off in mid sentence as she exclaimed with a horrified expression, "No!!! You can't leave me here!!!"

"Honey, I'm not leaving you! We need a wagon to take you home and I can't repair this one."

"No!!!" she repeated sobbing as she threw herself against him and hugged him tightly.

"Lou," he talked softly to her as he caressed her hair, "I need to take you home and get the doctor."

Louise cried as another pain shot through her middle blindly. "I don't want to have the baby here!" she continued sobbing as she almost squeezed the air out of her husband, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"Shhh!" Kid soothed her as the pain subsided. It was then that he felt a tug on his sleeve and turning his eyes without letting go of Lou, he found Jack looking at him with a decided and proud stance.

"Daddy, let me ride home and bring help," the boy offered. "You stay here with ma."

Lou disengaged herself from his hold and moved to the back of the wagon, unaware to anything happening around her. Meanwhile, Kid was looking at Jack with a grave countenance as he heard his unsound suggestion. There was no way he was going to let him ride on his own all the way to the ranch. "No, Jack. That's out of the question."

"But why? I can ride well enough and I know the way," the boy insisted.

It was true that Jack had shown excellent riding skill and in these last months Kid and the boy had spent many afternoons in the saddle. Yet, Kid wasn't sure if that was a sound idea; Jack had just turned eight and the Southerner didn't know if his child was up to the job. He had never ridden on snow-covered terrain where the roads were so slippery. Moreover, Jack was used to the tame mare that Kid had selected for his riding practice and never before had the boy ridden any other horse.

"Please, daddy," Jack begged, noticing the hesitancy in the young man. He was sure he could do just fine and Lou really needed to be taken home hurriedly. The young boy swore to himself that he'd do everything possible not to let his new ma down.

Kid kept thoughtful for a moment, staring at Jack's proud stance. "All right," Kid finally agreed, praying that he was making the right decision. Lou'd kill him if something happened to their older child.

"What's going on, Kid?" Lou asked weakly, from the back of the wagon. The conversation between her husband and the boy had escaped her grasp as her mind was in turmoil.

"He's bringing help," Kid simply said and on hearing her husband, Lou opened her eyes widely as if he had gone crazy all of a sudden. "It will be fine. He's a clever boy," he added, sounding as if he was still trying to convince himself that his decision was a sound one. Lou opted not to say anything else, knowing that they were in the middle of a situation and they needed to do something.

Kid finished unhitching the horse and placed the boy on top of it. He realized that it would be the first time Jack would be riding without a saddle, but hopefully it wouldn't be much of a problem. "Just press your knees against the horse tightly and it will be fine," he instructed.

"Yes, sir," Jack replied without a hint of doubt or apprehension.

"Be careful, all right?"

"I will, daddy," he said as he spurred the horse into a trot and disappeared into the forest and towards the ranch.

"You think he will be all right?" Lou called as she lay in the back of the wagon. She couldn't really come to make herself comfortable but at least she needn't be standing while help arrived. Tommy had moved to her side and was holding her hand in a sweet gesture, not really understanding what was wrong with his mama. He didn't utter a single word and there was no doubt that he was really scared.

"I hope so," Kid replied to her question, rearranging the blankets around her. It was just useless to try and light a fire; everything was damp and wet and no kindling would set alight. He silently prayed that Jack would find his way home safely and help would come quickly. "Otherwise," he continued, "I'll have to deliver my own child myself and believe me, that's something I'm not particularly fond of trying."

Lou had to smile at his comment, momentarily in the middle of a respite from the contractions. She was cursing herself for her stupid protests. She should now be at home, had she accepted Kid's arrangement. But no, she had to be her usual stubborn self. This baby wasn't supposed to be born for a couple more weeks, but it was true that the doctor had told her that the actual birth might take place a bit earlier than it was due. It had to happen to her and in the middle of nowhere. She wanted to slap herself senseless for her foolishness. All these thoughts,





At her words the three men looked visibly embarrassed and without daring to meet the lady's sharp gaze Kid muttered, "Uh... yeah... of course. Come on, let's see what Tommy is up to."

Buck and Jimmy followed their friend and as soon as the boy laid eyes on him, he threw himself to his arms. Logically he was scared as he could hear Lou's shouts now and then. Kid tried to distract his attention but the task was easier said than done as his mind was with his wife as well. After a few minutes Rachel ran to them. "Kid, let's take your wife home and we'd better do it quickly," she said in an urgent tone.

The Southerner nodded and Jimmy approached his friend who had the boy in his arms. "Hey, Tommy, wouldn't you like to ride with your Uncle Jimmy? You'll see how fun it will be!"

The four-year-old turned his yes to Kid as if asking for his permission or protection. "Come on, buddy. Jimmy's a quick rider and you'll get home and out of this cold really fast."

Tommy hesitated briefly but then he stretched his arms towards the long-haired man and let him carry him towards his horse. Meanwhile, Kid rushed to help his wife onto the wagon his friends had brought and in no time they were driving towards the ranch. Buck drove the carriage with Rachel by his side while Kid sat at the back holding his wife against his chest. The drive seemed to take forever and even though Buck tried to steer the horse carefully, the roads were slippery and bumpy as the snow was turning into brown slush. Finally, the ranch came into view, which brought a sense of relief to the four on the wagon, and when they stopped opposite the house, Kid wasted no time and quickly carried Lou upstairs to their room. Emma and Rachel had followed him and helped him to place Louise on the bed comfortably.

"Where's Doctor Webb?" Lou asked weakly as she hadn't seen the good physician anywhere.

"Cody came back, saying that he's off at the Hendersons'. Their young child had a fall but he won't be long," Emma replied.

"What?" Kid exclaimed, clearly annoyed at this piece of information. He had promised Lou out there that he'd take her home and to the doctor come hell or high water and now the physician was busy???

"Kid, he'll come, but in the meantime your wife is in good hands," Rachel hurried to reassure the young man, who seemed to be about to explode.

"There's no mystery in helping a baby to be born. Believe me, Kid, I've already gone through the same more than once," Emma added as she took out a nightgown from one of the dresser drawers for Louise to slip in. The young man didn't look any more relieved as he stood in the middle of the bedroom, looking at his wife with a troubled expression. She was fighting another blinding pain and as Kid was about to plod towards her, he felt a hand touching his upper arm and stopping his intentions. As he turned his eyes to the side, he realized it was Rachel.

"Come on, Kid. Everything's gonna be fine. Now all you need to do is wait," she said as she tried to steer the young man out of the bedroom.

"I'm not leaving Lou!" he stated without any hesitation.

"That's awfully sweet, Kid," Emma said, "but all you will do is make your wife more nervous."

"But..." he tried to protest, but the two ladies didn't let him get a word in edgeways.

"Just save your strength for when this baby is born. You're gonna need it," Rachel quipped with a smile, but still Kid didn't budge.

"It's all right, Kid," Lou called from the bed. "Just stay with the boys and keep an eye on them. I'll be fine."

The Southerner hesitated briefly but finally he let Rachel steer him out of the bedroom. Slowly he made his way downstairs and to his lounge where his friends were gathered, waiting for the arrival of the newest family member. He didn't say anything as he dropped on the sofa, suspecting that he was up for an agonizing wait. Instantly Tommy perched on his lap and Jack sat down next to him, resting his head against his father's arm. Kid had to smile at the boys' ways and felt happy to have their comforting presence in this moment.

A couple of hours later the men were still waiting in the lounge. As Emma had rightly said, the doctor had arrived minutes after Kid had left his wife in the bedroom, which had filled the Southerner with great relief. However, as the minutes had turned into hours, Kid couldn't help but feel restless and troubled. Rachel and Emma had been down on a couple of occasions to fetch water and other things for the doctor, but they hadn't said much, only that labor was slow. The afternoon was turning into evening, and darkness was falling on the ranch and those inside the house. Being children, Jack and Tommy soon got tired of waiting idly and they had scurried to play with Emma's children.

"What on earth is taking so long?" Kid exclaimed as he rose to his feet and began pacing up and down the room.

"These things take time, son," Teaspoon said.

"They've been up there for hours now," Kid complained, the tension taking its toll on him.

"Our Sarah was born after ten hours of labor," Sam offered, being the only one to have the same first-hand experience the sandy-haired ex-rider was going through right now.

Kid's face drained of all color as he imagined Lou having to endure such a long tribulation. It had been almost unbearable to watch her in terrible pain without being able to do anything to soothe her while they had been out in the open. Just to think that she might be like that for hours longer was simply sickening.

Suddenly, a long wail coming from upstairs sounded in the stillness of the house, which was followed by cheers, hugs and congratulating words from the five men to Kid. However, the young Southerner couldn't come to share his friend's jovial mood yet and held his breath, waiting for Doctor Webb or any of the ladies to appear. He didn't have to wait long as quick steps were heard descending the stairs. As soon as Kid laid eyes on Rachel, he plodded towards her and before the blonde had reached the bottom of the staircase, he asked in a serious and nervous tone, "How's Lou, Rachel?"

The lady smiled at hearing the concern in his voice and said, "She's fine, they're both fine."

"Really?" Kid asked again, wanting to make sure that there was nothing wrong with his wife. After these months of relative peace, some irrational thoughts had been tormenting the young man and even though he hadn't voiced his fears to anybody, not even Lou, he was afraid that they were just enjoying a respite because something terrible was somewhere along the way. After a year full of unfortunate occurrences, it was no wonder that he was still apprehensive.

"She's perfectly well," Rachel repeated, uttering every word precisely as Kid let out his

held breath and smiled for the first time. However, he didn't make the least attempt to move as if he were frozen on the spot, so Rachel had to urge him, "Come on, go and see your wife. She's been asking after you."

His mouth twitched into a wider smile and without further ado, Kid scampered up the stairs, taking two steps at a time. When he reached his bedroom, he knocked on the door lightly before opening it to a crack and then craned his head inside. Lou was propped against the pillows, looking flushed but relaxed, and as soon as she caught sight of her husband, she grinned and gestured him with her finger to get inside. Kid began walking towards the bed with slow steps; Doctor Webb was washing his hands and Emma was carefully handing Lou the baby. Kid's eyes grew wide, trying to have a peek of his child, oblivious to Emma's and the doctor's congratulations. He stopped at the foot of the bed and Lou said, "Don't stay there, Kid. Come and meet your son."

"A boy?" he asked as he walked the few steps separating them while Emma and the doctor silently stepped out of the room, to give the couple some time for themselves. When Kid reached his wife's side, he sat down carefully next to her on the bed without taking his eyes off the bundle in her hands.

"Yes, another boy," Lou replied happily as she tilted her arms so that Kid could have a good look at their baby. "Sweetie, this big man is your daddy." Kid glanced at his son in awe, which made Lou smile as she had been overwhelmed by the same feelings when she had first laid eyes on the baby. "You want to hold him, Kid?"

"I... I dunno," he said in a nervous voice. "I don't want to hurt him."

"Don't be silly. You'll do just fine and you need to start learning," she replied, carefully placing the baby in her husband's arms while he looked as if he were handling dynamite. "Just make sure you hold his head firmly."

Kid smiled as the baby briefly opened his eyes to him and instantly closed them again, obviously comfortable in his father's arms. "He's so small and beautiful," he whispered, completely taken by the image before his eyes.

"He's perfect," Lou added, resting her head against her husband's arm.

"Yes, just like his ma," Kid remarked, which brought a contented smile to her lips and she planted a kiss on his upper arm.

The couple stayed in silence for a few minutes till Louise said, "Kid, we need to give him a name." They had been putting off the matter and the untimely birth of their child had caught them with some outstanding issues. Kid nodded in agreement and asked, "Do you have any ideas?"

"Well," Lou replied hesitantly, "I'd love to name him after his daddy."

"No, Lou...", he protested in a low voice, not wanting to wake the baby, who had fallen asleep in his arms. "Never. No way."

"But why not?" she asked, feeling hurt by his flat negative.

"That's something I wouldn't want for my own son."

Louise clearly didn't look very happy at his words and as she wasn't one to give in easily when something got stuck in her mind, she insisted, "Why don't you at least tell me? I think I deserve that much." At his obvious hesitation she added, "Kid, you know everything about me."

Don't you think it's high time I knew my husband's real name?"

The Southerner pressed his lips together, not comfortable with the conversation. Why all that fuss about his name? It was just a name but he knew that she was right. She deserved that small gesture from him, especially today that she had endured such a hard and long labor to give him a child. Breathing in deeply, Kid looked into her eyes and after a moment's hesitation he told her in a soft voice.

"You're kidding, ain't you?" Lou asked with a frown and noticing his earnest expression she knew that he was serious. "That's not even a name!!!" she exclaimed.

"Well, it's your dear husband's name," he stated with a bitter countenance.

Lou tried her hardest to hide her amusement but finally she burst out laughing, which made her whimper painfully as all her body was very sore. "Don't make me laugh."

"It was you who wanted to know," he reminded her, stoically bearing his wife's teasing.

"Why did your parents call you ... that? Was it after some relative?" she asked visibly curious.

"Not that I know," Kid simply said.

"Don't pull that long face on me, honey!" Lou exclaimed, planting a big kiss on his cheek. "I love you just the same ..."

"Don't you dare say it," Kid cut her off, foreseeing her intentions as he cast her a look which clearly implied that he wasn't fooling around.

"All right, all right. Don't get mad. You will always be my big, big Kid to me!"

In that very moment there was a knock and Rachel's face showed through the half-opened door. The couple turned their eyes to her as she asked, "Would it be all right if I let this troop in? It's getting incredibly difficult to hold them at bay any longer."

"Of course," Lou said as she took her son from Kid's arms.

As soon as Rachel flung the door wide open, two small figures dashed in like the wind. "Hey, boys, take it easy," Kid said as he rose to his feet and stopped his children before they barged against the bed with their uncontrollable energy. "You need to be careful. Lou's tired."

The two brothers nodded their heads as Kid took them by the hand and they approached the bed where Lou was waiting with a big smile. "How are my boys?" she asked and turning to Jack she exclaimed, "Jack, honey, a little bird has told me you rode like a real Pony Express rider!" The boy blushed at her compliment and then Louise turned her attention to his younger brother, who had fallen behind and clutched Kid's hand tightly. "Hey, Tommy-boy, what's wrong?" she asked as she noticed his sheepish expression looking warily at the baby in her arms. "Don't be shy and come closer, honey. Don't you want to see your new baby brother?"

Kid gave the boy a gentle push and Tommy walked closer to Lou with the same shy expression. "Good, a boy!!!" Jack exclaimed happily and Louise tilted her body towards the two children so that they could see the newest member of their family. Tommy watched him without saying one word, feeling very shy as usual when meeting somebody new. "What do you say, Tommy-boy?" Kid asked using Lou's nickname for their son as he brushed his hand over the child's head.

Tommy didn't utter a single word but in bold movement for his shy and reserved nature, he dared to touch the baby's soft cheek with his index finger lightly. The little one must have felt the four-year-old's gesture and stirred and began whimpering. This reaction startled Tommy, who suddenly stepped back as if scalded, looking as if he was about to burst out crying. "It's all right, buddy," Kid hurried to say as he noticed the boy's bright eyes, "He's just a little thing and needs to get used to us."

Tommy nodded and still without saying a word he threw himself to Kid's arms and the young man held him against his chest while sharing a knowing look and a smile with his wife, who was rocking the baby and trying to get him back to sleep. It was then that another voice resounded in the bedroom. "Hey, Lou, are you gonna show us your little man or are you gonna hog him just for yourself?" Cody asked in a teasing tone. The five men and the two ladies had entered just after the two boys, but they had stayed aside, wanting to give the family some intimate time.

"Can't you hold your tongue for once, Cody?" Jimmy exclaimed, slapping his friend on the shoulder with the back of his hand.

Lou giggled at her friend's well-known banter and said, "I don't know if I want my baby to come under your influence, Cody. I saw you showing Jack one of your junk books and you know I don't approve of it."

"Good thinking, Lou," Buck quipped as everybody laughed at Cody's miffed expression.

"You poor ignorant thing," the blonde man added, adopting a proud and cocky stance. "Too bad if you want to deprive your children from the benefits of being with the most handsome, brave and intelligent of your friends. You don't know what you're missing."

"Oh... stop the speech, Cody, and come here," Lou exclaimed with an impatient gesture and all her friends approached to get a good look of the new addition to the family. "Ain't he the cutest little thing?" she said proudly.

"Yes, indeed he is," Teaspoon agreed, letting out a silent sigh. He was heartily glad to be witnessing the blissful occurrence for the young couple. They really deserved some happiness after all they had gone through in the past year. The addition of Jack and Tommy to their lives had been the beginning of a bright period which would be completed with the birth of this baby.

"And does the tiny tot have a name yet?" Sam asked.

Louise cast a sideways look at her husband and as he glanced at her with a strange expression, she said, "Actually he has. I wanted to name our child after the person who has supported me and been there for me no matter what... my husband."

"Lou...," Kid warned in a low voice, not believing that she still held to the same idea after he had told her no.

Louise didn't pay him any mind to his warning and continued regardless, "Ladies, gentlemen and children, let me introduce you to our son, Benjamin McCloud."

Kid let out his contained breath as to his utter relief she didn't pronounce the name he dreaded she would. "Is that your name, Kid?" Emma asked the question everybody was dying to ask.

"No," he simply said and everybody instantly turned their attention to Louise. She smiled as she explained, "Benjamin means 'the young one' in Spanish and... well... it's kinda similar to Kid, ain't it?"

"It's a fine name," Teaspoon agreed as everybody else nodded, confirming the marshal's words.

Kid stared at his wife mesmerized, feeling the luckiest man alive. He was already overwhelmed by all she had gone through to give him a child. The fact that she had come up with an idea to name their son after him was simply moving and filled him with pride for his strong and beautiful wife. Kid couldn't wish for anything else at this very moment, nothing at all. It was then that Jimmy slapped him on the back, snapping him out of his daydreaming as he said, "Some Christmas present you get this year, my friend."

Kid grinned pleasantly and added, not taking his eyes off his wife, "She's a present every day of the year." And it was true. Long forgotten were those days of coldness and emptiness and looking around, Kid silently prayed his thanks for all the blessings that he could count now. This was his family, his friends who were more than kin to him, his two children, who had made them believe in happiness and love again, that baby boy who was a real miracle and Lou. He couldn't wish for anything else right now; it would be the best Christmas ever and he knew he'd remember this day years on like the start of their new life.