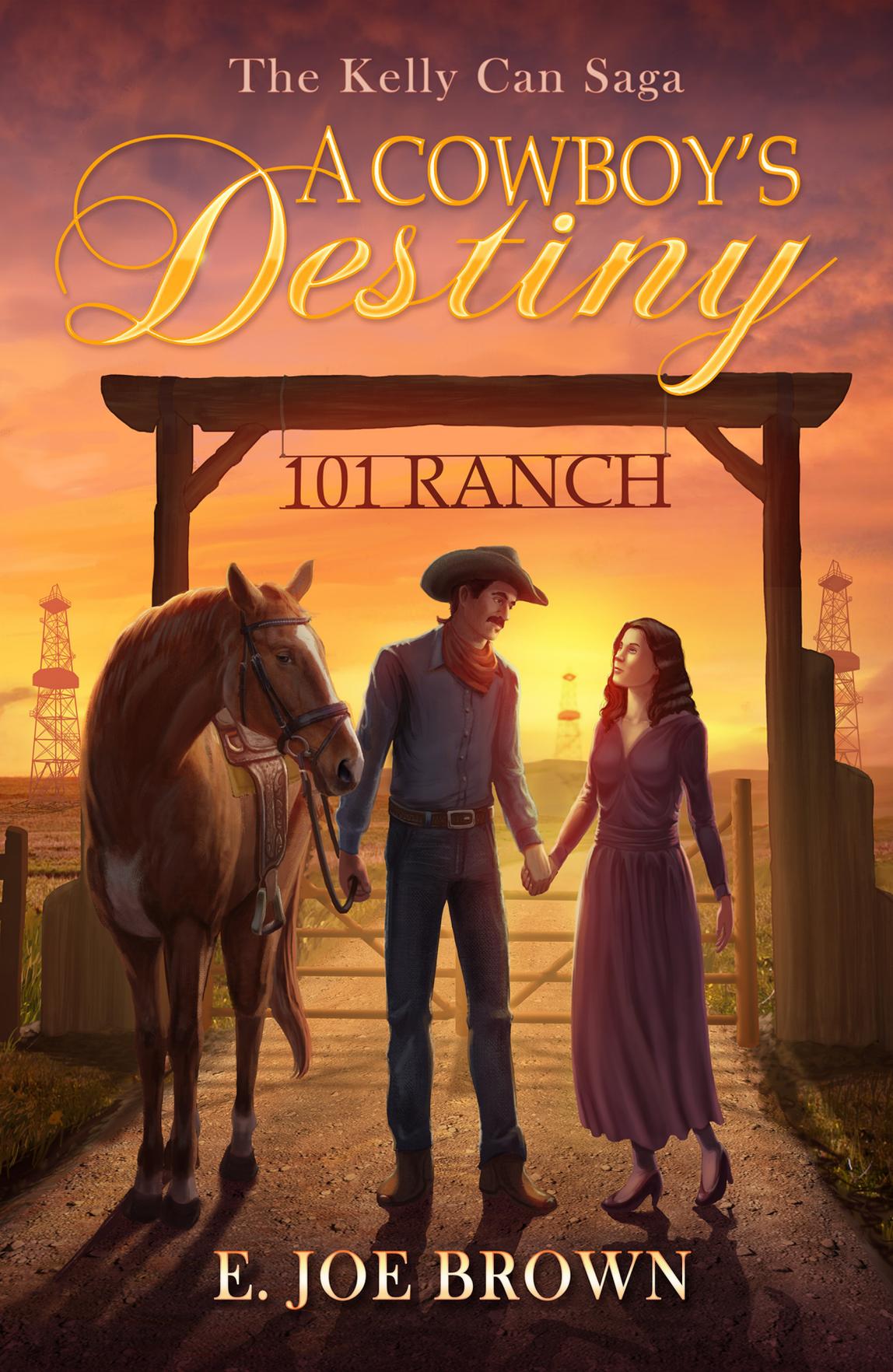


The Kelly Can Saga

A COWBOY'S
Destiny

101 RANCH

A man in a cowboy hat and a woman in a purple dress holding hands, standing next to a brown horse in front of a wooden archway labeled '101 RANCH' at sunset. The scene is set in a rural landscape with oil derricks in the background under a warm, golden sky.

E. JOE BROWN

What others are saying about *A Cowboy's Destiny*:

"*A Cowboy's Destiny*, E. Joe Brown's debut novel doesn't just promise – it delivers – an absorbing family saga with drama and deep humanity, firmly rooted in the grand tradition of American Western literature. Saddle up and enjoy the ride!"

Robert D. Kidera, Tony Hillerman Award winning author of the Gabe McKenna Mysteries

"*A Cowboy's Destiny* is an easy-to-read account of the Nineteen-Teens American Frontier – a period too often overlooked by novelists. E. Joe Brown is a promising new voice of the American West."

Johnny D. Boggs, nine-time winner of Western Writers of America's Spur Award

"From Oklahoma to Kansas City a most impressive debut by a western singer with great performance credentials who is now showing that he knows his way with a pen as well as he does with a guitar. Anxiously awaiting the next volume(s) in the saga."

Ralph Estes, author of *My Own Story: The Autobiography of Billy the Kid*.

"*A Cowboy's Destiny* is a big, sprawling tale of a young man's journey from a difficult childhood with an alcoholic father to becoming a top hand on the legendary 101 Ranch in Oklahoma. Life and love present Charlie Kelly with almost insurmountable challenges but if anyone can overcome them, Kelly Can."

Jim Jones, western singer and author of the Tommy Stallings and Jared Delaney series.

"Charlie Kelly, a young man of compassion and wisdom, crosses the West following his dream to be top hand at the 101 Ranch. Along the way he faces challenges head on and embraces each new opportunity with relish. There's something for everyone – stampeding cattle, oil strikes, and...love. I'm eager to find

out what happens next!”

Bobbi Jean Bell, Co-Host The Writer’s Block Radio Show, LA Talk Radio

“In *A Cowboy’s Destiny*, author E. Joe Brown shows us an early 20th-century Southwest that still boils with bunkhouse brawls, saloon shootings and cattle rustling. And in Charlie Kelly, he gives us a character bold enough and tough enough to take it on and look for more.”

Ollie Reed Jr., Recipient of the Western Writers of America Stirrup and Branding Iron awards.

“Charlie’s adventures as he journeys to Oklahoma, fulfils his dream of being a top hand, and achieves more than he ever hoped to accomplish is an engrossing tale of life in the American west as it transitions to a modern society. Charlie’s intelligence, strength and integrity shine through the story as he learns who he is and what he can accomplish as he strives to make himself worthy of the woman he loves.”

Carol March, Author at Ellysian Press and Compass Rose Press

The Kelly Can Saga Book 1

A COWBOY'S
Destiny

By

E. Joe Brown



**Artemesia
Publishing**

Chapter One

July 1913

Sweat poured off Charlie Kelly's strapping six-foot frame as he performed his chores on the Cullum Ranch outside Loco in Stephens County, Oklahoma. Charlie was fourteen and he and his family had worked on the Cullum the last two years.

Charlie gazed across the blue stem grass pastures as he packed the tools he'd used to mend the barbwire fence near the corral, when he heard a pained scream coming from the direction of the barn. Charlie dropped the tools and ran a hundred yards to the barn.

He entered the big double doors to find his older brother thrashing on the ground. "Jess, what happened? Where are ya hurt?"

"Charlie... It's... my leg... aw shit... brother." Jess gathered himself, "It hurts somethin' terrible. Git someone... quick!"

Charlie knelt next to Jess and looked up as Bob Nash, the foreman, ran into the barn, "Charlie, what happened?"

"It's Jess... his leg. He's hurt bad."

Bob, knelt next to Jess and Charlie, "How'd you hurt yourself, Jess?"

Through gritted teeth, Jess said, "I was pitchin' hay bales down from the loft, and I... I lost my balance and fell. I landed funny on my leg—" He yelped and twisted as Bob touched the leg to assess the injury. The foreman leaned back on his heels and pulled off his hat, wiping sweat from his forehead.

Bob turned to Charlie, "Go find your father. I'll see to Jess."

Charlie nodded and ran out of the barn. His dad was supposed to have been working in the south pasture mending fences and Charlie hoped he was still there. He hoped today was not a day that his dad had decided to sneak some moonshine down by the creek. Charlie ran flat out to the pasture and was glad to see his dad was where he was supposed to be.

"Dad!" Charlie yelled. "Dad!"

His mom had always said that his dad, Joe, was the most handsome man in the entire county. He was tall, over six feet, and had a strong barrel chest that was good at setting fences or wrestling steers for branding. As Charlie ran and yelled his dad stood up, pulling off his hat and wiping his brow.

"What is it, Charlie?"

"Dad, come quick! It's Jess. He's hurt his leg bad."

His Dad said something Charlie couldn't hear and threw down his tools. In about five minutes, Charlie and his father ran into the barn, both out of breath.

Joe said, "Bob, how is he? Charlie said he's hurt his leg."

Jess hollered, "Dad, it hurts somethin' awful."

Bob said, "He has. He took a fall from the hayloft. We need to get him to a doctor. Let's get a wagon hitched and ready to go into Loco. Doc Patterson can fix him up."

Charlie jumped to help get the wagon ready. As they hitched the horses Charlie's mom, Elinor, arrived, having heard that Jess was hurt. News traveled fast, even on a ranch as big as the Cullum. They got the wagon ready in record time and they lifted Jess into the wagon as gently as they could, but he still let out a howl of pain. By now several other hands and the rest of Charlie's family, his sister Annabelle and his younger brother Dan, had arrived to watch. As they got ready to go Charlie's mom climbed into the wagon bed to hold Jess's hand, while his dad climbed up onto the bench seat with Bob.

Charlie and his brother and sister started to climb into the wagon but Elinor told them to get down. "I don't need one of you hurtin' your brother's leg more than it is. You can walk behind. It ain't like we'll be driving fast." She glared up at Bob and Joe.

"I'll do my best to make it as smooth as possible, ma'am," Bob

said as he flicked the reins.

* * *

By that evening the doctor had done what he could. As he and the entire Kelly family sat in his parlor, Doc Patterson said, "I've got the leg immobilized now, and I think the bones will heal. But Jess's Achilles tendon is damaged. It may not heal back to normal. He'll walk, but he could have a limp for the rest of his life."

Rocking back and forth, Joe said, "Are ya sure, Doc?"

"No, Joe. I'm not sure, but it could turn out that way." Doc Patterson rubbed a hand across his weary face. "That tendon's ruptured and may never be the same. I wish I knew more about those things. We covered it in school, but I'm a general doctor, and it would take a specialist to know more. I don't have any idea short of getting Jess to Oklahoma City where we could send him for that kind of help."

"Oklahoma City!" Joe exclaimed. "That's at least three days by wagon."

Elinor put a hand on Joe's knee and asked, "Any idea what a specialist might cost?"

Doc Patterson sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry Mrs. Kelly, I have no idea what that might cost. Or even if it will work."

"I can't take over a week off from the ranch on something that might not even work!" Joe said, his face turning red.

"I can help cover at the ranch, Dad," Charlie offered, hoping to ease his dad's worry.

"You can't do the work of two grown men, boy," his dad said. Charlie could tell it was the anger talking, but he couldn't help but feel the sting of the rebuke. His mom gave Charlie a small nod of appreciation for offering to help, and she brought Joe's hand up to her lips and gave it a kiss to try and calm him.

"If you don't want to take Jess to Oklahoma City, then let me keep him here for a couple of more days," Doc Patterson offered. "Maybe keeping him off the leg for a few days will help." He gave a hopeful shrug.

They agreed that was the best they could do, and they gave their good-byes to Jess before returning to the Cullum Ranch. The

family returned and took Jess home from Doc Patterson's in a few days, and by September, he, Charlie, and their siblings were back in school.

* * *

Charlie's mother, Elinor, was a slender, attractive woman of fifty, tall with silver-gray streaks in her hair. Charlie had always looked up to her and did everything he could to please her. In October, she became sick and had taken to her bed with a bad fever. Her mother, Sarah McDaniel, came over from Graham, Oklahoma, to take care of her and help with the chores and keep their house running. At that point, Jess's leg had healed but the Doc had been right, and he had a pronounced limp. Charlie had turned fifteen in the intervening three months.

One evening, as she prepared biscuits, Grandma McDaniel said, "Charlie, help me and your sister fix the meal for the family."

Charlie put down the schoolbook he'd been studying. "Grandma, why do I need to know about cookin'? I'm gonna be a top hand someday, not the cookie."

Grandma McDaniel gave a stern shake of her head. "You won't make a very good top hand if'n you don't know how to feed your men."

Annabelle laughed from where she was peeling potatoes. Grandma McDaniel gave her a stern look. "Just peel the skins, dear. We want to keep the potato."

"Yes, Grandma," Annabelle said, but Charlie could tell she was still happy that their Grandma was putting him to work as well.

"But I don't know nothin' about cookin'," Charlie said, wanting to get back to his studies. He didn't want to do them either, but they were better than learning to cook.

She smiled, "I can teach ya what to do, and it would mean a lot."

Charlie nodded. He put his book down and walked over to the kitchen table.

"Now I'm gonna show you how to make my special biscuits," she said, setting a bowl and a sack of flour next to him. "I learned how to make biscuits from a cowboy back after the War. And I'll

tell you about him as I tell you how to make 'em."

Charlie was eager to learn how to make the biscuits then. That was the start of a close relationship between Charlie and his Grandma McDaniel that would affect his life for years to come.

* * *

In the early spring of 1914, Charlie was helping Grandma McDaniel clean up in the kitchen when a banging and shouting came from the front screen door, "Charlie, come quick, your dad is in a big fight over at the bunkhouse."

Charlie rushed out and Dan and Jess trailed behind him.

Charlie looked back and said, "You two can stay home."

Dan said, "Nope, we're comin'."

Charlie didn't have time to argue with his brothers and ran to the bunkhouse. As Charlie entered the building, he could see the fight was over and his father was sitting on a hay bale, blood dripping from his nose and looking up at the foreman with a dazed expression.

Charlie heard Bob Nash say, "Joe, this is four times in the last two months you've fought with someone on the ranch. On top of that, me and Charlie have had to go to Ringling to get you outta jail for fightin' at some bar. As much as I hate it for your family, it's time for you to pack up and leave the Cullum. I need you gone by this time tomorrow."

Bob turned and headed toward the door. As he passed him, he put his hand on Charlie's shoulder, "Son, I'm sorry, but this has gone on too long. Come see me in the mornin'; I need to chat with you."

Charlie and his brothers shared a look and then took their father back to the house. They practically carried Joe in the door as Elinor said, "Joe, what have you done now?"

Charlie said, "Bob fired Dad. We have to leave here by tomorrow."

Joe shouted, "That son-of-a-bitch Skinner was cheatin' me."

Ellie shook her head and said, "You're so drunk; I don't see how you would know if someone cheated. Why can't you stay home with the family? Let those single cowboys lose their money

to each other.”

Grandma McDaniel said, “Ellie, he ain’t hearin’ ya. Don’t git yourself all worked up.”

Charlie nodded, “Mom, we’ll work things out. Bob wants me to see him in the mornin’; maybe I can change his mind.”

“I doubt it but see him first thing.”

* * *

At sunup the following day, Charlie found Bob Nash in the barn saddling his horse. “Mornin’, you said ya wanted to talk to me?” Charlie said as he walked up.

“Yep, I need you to understand your father made it so bad that many of the men here won’t work with him. I know this causes a hardship on Ellie and you kids, but Joe left me no choice.” He shook his head in sympathy, though Charlie wasn’t feeling it right now.

“Charlie, you’ve become a top hand after your brother’s accident, and I’ll miss you. I’ve a good friend who’s the foreman down at the Four Sixes near Guthrie, Texas. I got a letter from him yesterday. He said there’s a big ranch called the Cornerstone near Fort Sumner, New Mexico hirin’ a lot of new people for the spring gather. You might go out there and see what happens. With a fresh start maybe Joe can do better out there.”

Charlie had to keep his anger at his dad in check as he said, “I understand, Mr. Nash. Thanks for all you’ve done for my family. What ya did when Jess got hurt was sure appreciated.”

“I wish it could have been more. I guess he’s gonna have that limp from now on, right?”

“It’s likely, but he’ll do okay. I’ll tell Dad about the Cornerstone.”

The family was in a sullen mood as they packed their wagon. They saddled their horses and after saying their goodbyes to Grandma McDaniel who returned to Graham, they were on the trail to New Mexico by noon. Charlie was angry as they rode off the Cullum Ranch for the last time. His dad had ruined what had been turning into a good thing for him here. Now they were going to have to start over on a new ranch in a new state. He’d have to prove himself that he could do the work, and he’d have to make

sure his dad stayed out of trouble.

Outside of Hollis, Oklahoma, they made camp. Joe said, "We've done good today. Let's have a meal and git some sleep. If the weather holds up, we'll git to the Cornerstone in a few days." Charlie and his siblings managed to hide their annoyance at their father. He was acting like this had been his decision all along.

Chapter Two

April 1914

As Charlie and his family crossed the plains of eastern New Mexico they felt the changes in elevation from western Oklahoma. Charlie turned to his dad and said, "The terrain sure is desert-like. I see this is short-grass country, with mostly blue grama and galleta on some of the gravelly slopes."

Joe said, "Yep, and there's some big bluestem in the heavier soils that seem to git some run-in water. I've seen some buffalo grass too."

Charlie nodded, "We may cross the old Goodnight-Loving trail before we git to Fort Sumner and the ranch. I look forward to experiencing that and seeing the same country the cowboys from fifty years ago saw."

Joe smiled, "We lived on the old Chisholm trail back on the Cullum, now we'll live on the Goodnight-Loving. Who'd a thought it?"

Charlie stood beside his father as the Cornerstone foreman, Fred Turpin, interviewed them. He now towered over his father by at least two inches and the foreman noticed it.

"You're a mighty big young man for fifteen. So, you a cowboy too?"

"Yes, sir," Charlie said with a nod.

"Fine, and Joe, you still cowboy some, but you said earlier you can do carpentry and leatherwork too, right?"

Joe said, "Yep." He pointed across the yard, "That's my other two boys there."

Dan, at thirteen, was already the size of many men, and Jess stood six feet tall himself.

Turpin said, "So, all of you want jobs?"

Joe said, "My boys go to school, but yes, we're available to work. I want full-time, year-round work, and the boys can work summers and when school is out. All three boys can do a man's work."

Turpin looked at Charlie and laughed, "I'm guessin' this one could do the work of three."

Charlie smiled and nodded.

"Kelly, you and your boys, are hired. We'll find work for ya, and I'm good with your sons stayin' in school. I got more schoolin' than most, and I know it has helped me." They shook hands and worked out the details, including a two-room dug-out house that the family could live in. It was small but would suffice for their needs.

Turpin put Joe to work in the tack room, mending saddles and bridles. Jess only needed to complete his last year of high school and in his spare time he was a handyman around the place, his bad leg didn't slow him down much. Dan worked the remuda, keeping the horses fed, watered, and groomed. Charlie was the only one who went out on the spring cattle gather and branding.

As the string of cowboys brought the herd back to the holding pens from the gather, a tall, beautiful stallion off in the distance caught Charlie's eye. He pointed as he said, "Mr. Turpin, I'd like to go check out that horse up on the mesa."

"Sure, Charlie, we're about done. I can see the barn and ranch house from here; go ahead. That horse has been around for a year or two now. No one's got up close to him. Good luck, 'cause you'll need it."

Charlie rode around behind the hill and climbed to the mesa behind the cow pony. The horse was nervous, always shying away from Charlie and his mount, but it never bolted or ran too far away. It was almost like he was teasing Charlie, testing his resolve and patience. *This big, wonderful horse must be only two or three years old, and I love that sorrel color and those intelligent eyes.*

It took more than an hour, but Charlie eventually got a rope

on him. The horse reared on its hind legs and Charlie prepared to let it go if the horse tried to run. It wouldn't do to be dragged from his saddle. The horse dropped its front legs and shook its head, the long mane looking like a golden waterfall in the light.

He gave a gentle tug and tied the rope off onto his pommel, then slid down from the saddle. He walked slowly over to the horse, hand outstretched as Charlie talked to him, "Easy boy, we're gonna become friends for a lifetime."

The horse seemed comfortable and took to the rope easier than Charlie expected. He jerked his head a few times but didn't pull and strain against the rope. With a couple more tentative steps Charlie managed to reach out a gloved hand and rub the horse's muzzle. "That's a good horse. See, we're gonna be friends."

Charlie took him back to ranch headquarters. Turpin could see them coming and joined Charlie as he turned the big sorrel into the corral, "Charlie, that's a miracle. How'd you, do it?"

"I took my time and started talkin' to him as soon as I got in earshot. I suspect he'll not be happy when I try ridin' him, though."

It took most of the next day, to get a saddle on the stallion. And after several long hard days of Charlie's soft voice and the sorrel's wild bucking; Charlie broke him to ride. It was quite a show and the talk of the ranch for days. After the sorrel and Charlie came to their agreement, it was time to name him. Charlie picked Tony. When asked why he chose that name, Charlie said, "I've always liked that name. My favorite teacher in high school back in Oklahoma was Anthony Morelli. We became friendly, and now Tony will be my best friend."

* * *

Over the next few years, things for the Kelly family seemed to improve. Charlie's mom was doin' well in the hot, dry climate of eastern New Mexico, and the Charlie and his brothers and sister enjoyed school—Charlie was the top student in his class, even though he spent a lot of time daydreaming about working the ranch or riding the hills with Tony. Charlie's dad was also doin' better to Charlie's relief. He worked hard, stayed out of trouble, and had even managed to save money to put an extra room on

the small dug-out they lived in. He got along well with the folks at the ranch and had stayed away from alcohol. At least he did until March of 1917 when he discovered the Pecos Bar in Fort Sumner. It was a new saloon in town, and the cowboys from all around Baca County went there on weekends to play poker and get drunk.

After one Friday at the Pecos, Joe came home late, and he and Ellie got into a big argument that woke up the house. Annabelle and Dan looked at Charlie with worry and concern in their eyes. Charlie looked to Jess, but his older brother motioned for Charlie to do something. They all knew that only Charlie could get their dad to settle down. Charlie sighed and ended the argument by stepping between his mom and dad. "This needs to stop." He turned to look at Joe, whose eyes were already red-rimmed from drink. "Dad, we don't want another situation like we had at the Cullum, do we?"

Joe staggered a little as he said, "Of course not, but a fella can go blow off some steam, can't he?"

Ellie said, "You ain't no kid anymore, Joe. Ya gotta family that needs a father, and that's gotta come first."

"Alright, woman, you've had yer say, let's get some sleep." Joe headed toward the bed.

Charlie started to return to the room he shared with Dan and Jess when Ellie said, "Charlie, let's step outside a minute."

"Sure, Mom."

Outside she said, "Son, thanks for steppin' up in there, but you're not the parent. Your dad's gotta straighten up and quit these trips to town."

"Mom, I know I'm not the parent, but I was afraid somethin' bad was about to happen."

She said, "He'll never hit me. He knows I'd never put up with that, and I don't think your dad would ever forgive himself. But I don't understand what's makin' him want to go into town."

"Well, I don't either, but I'm here for ya, Mom."

* * *

In May, Charlie and Dan were helping their mom get supplies

from Foster's Mercantile in Fort Sumner. As they loaded their wagon, Charlie spotted Marshal Sam Bernard riding down Main Street leading three horses tethered together with prisoners in the saddles. The prisoners had their hands tied behind their back, and their horses were linked together so the Marshal could easily guide them.

Charlie said, "Dan would ya look at that. I've never seen the like. The Marshal has three prisoners, and that rope there is tied such that he can control them by himself."

Dan said, "I'd like to have seen him in action as he got them tied up. I guess we'll never know how he made that happen."

Charlie and Dan speculated what the three men had done to get afoul of the Marshal until Ellie told them to stop lollygagging and finish loading the wagon. After the wagon was loaded, they took off toward home. About halfway, they met Joe headed to town.

Ellie tugged at her hair as she said, "Where ya goin', Joe?"

"I'm meetin' some fellas for a card game at the Pecos."

Charlie looked down as he rubbed his hands together, "Dad, is that a good idea?"

Joe stiffened in the saddle, "Who are you to question what I do?"

Ellie said, "Settle down, Joe. He's right, turn around and let's all go home."

"Naw, I'm playin' cards and havin' a beer. Don't wait up."

* * *

Charlie woke up early, as he usually did, and was heading outside to the outhouse when he spotted his mother sitting in the rocking chair in the front of the room that was a combination kitchen, dining area, and living space. She was slowly rocking with a quilt wrapped around her shoulders to keep out the morning chill. Charlie looked into his parent's room and saw that his father had not made it home that night.

Charlie held in the sour words he wanted to say about his dad. Instead, he walked over and knelt next to his mom. "Dad didn't make it home last night."

She shook her head and Charlie could see that she had been crying at some point.

“Mom, I’ll go into town and get Dad.”

Ellie shook her head as she wiped away a tear, “Thank you, son. It shouldn’t fall to you to see after your father. I know he’s not a happy man, but I don’t know how we fix it. Be careful.”

Charlie got Tony ready and headed into town at a quick pace. There was no need to push Tony as there were only two places his dad could be. He arrived and went straight to the Pecos Bar, the first place he’d look. The bartender stopped sweeping the floor when Charlie walked through the batwing doors, “Mornin’, I’m Charlie Kelly, have ya seen my father, Joe?”

“Yeah, Marshal Bernard has him locked up. He and an old coot got into it over a card game last night, and they both ended up in jail.”

“I see, well, thanks.” That was the second place Charlie would have looked.

The jail was about a block from the bar, and Charlie recognized his father’s horse tied up out front. He tried the door and found it unlocked. He stepped in and could see Joe asleep on a cot in one of the cells. There were three cells along the back wall, and the Marshal sat at a desk to the left of the front door.

Sam Bernard said, “Charlie, I guess you’re here for Joe. This is twice this month, isn’t it?”

“Yep, and no offense, but I’m tired of havin’ to come to see you and this place.”

“No offense taken, and I don’t blame you. Let’s wake your father. The old coot he tangled with is already gone. Too much beer mixed with hot tempers. I have Joe’s horse tied up out front. I expected you.” The Marshal woke Joe, and Charlie and his father headed home. Neither of them with much to say.

As the cottonwoods around their house came into view, Joe said, “Thanks, son. I’m sorry you had to do this again.”

Charlie looked directly into his father’s rheumy eyes, “Dad, you’ve gotta promise me that this is the last time.”

His father nodded, but Charlie wasn’t sure if it was a promise or the left-over shakes from last night’s drink.