

Kid Gloves

By EG Mercer

All eyes were on The Kid as he strode into the packed saloon, his pearl-handled Colt revolvers holstered tightly around his waist.

He waited patiently before gently nudging his way in, avoiding rubbing shoulders with the crowd lining the bar.

“A ginger beer,” he said to the bartender, pausing before adding a final “please”.

“A *what?*” said the bartender, his ogre-like frame bulging under his oversized wardrobe.

“A ginger beer, please,” said The Kid, sliding a shiny twenty-five cent piece across the massive bar.

The Kid's request brought a round of jeers and stares from the regulars.

“And a straw,” he added. “A *clean* straw.”

Turning around he sidestepped through the mob to a small table in the far corner of the saloon. Pulling out a chair, he brushed it off and sat down, methodically wiping his hands together before slowly extracting each finger from the calfskin gloves.

Towering over his domain, the bartender glowered at the coin before pulling it into his big mitt. Grabbing a bottle of warm ginger beer from a wooden crate under the bar, he squeezed the coin

between the lumpy thumb and forefinger of his other large paw and snapped the cork from the dark brown bottle, launching it on a near-lethal trajectory across the saloon. Shoving a straw into the bottle he lumbered over to The Kid and set it down hard on the table, raising a small circular dent in the soft pine as the ginger beer spilled over the top, covering his viselike grip with the sticky liquid.

“Here’s your *ginger* beer,” he said, his deep voice curling past his bared teeth.

The Kid regarded the bottle before looking up at the furrow canyoning across the bartender’s brow. Reaching down, The Kid undid the three brass

buttons of his deerskin vest, revealing a Derringer pistol partially concealed in the ruffles of his cotton shirt. Slowly he extracted a white linen handkerchief, laying it neatly on the table beside his gloves. Reaching across and pulling the wash cloth off the bartender's belt he carefully released the bottle from the big man's grip then wiped down the table and bottle.

Methodically unfolding the handkerchief he wiped his hands and the bottle top, raised the straw to his lips and took a long sip.

“New in town?” asked the bartender.

“First time here,” said The Kid. “I have business with the bank.”

“Gotta name?”

“My friends call me Jerome, Jerome Manning. But most people call me The Kid. Kid Gloves to be precise.”

A smirk emerged across the bartender’s greasy complexion.

“Jerome? What the hell kinda name is Jerome?” he said as The Kid placed the small pistol and a large silver dollar on the table.

“The kind of name that demands respect,” said The Kid, quickly tossing the coin in the air and

squeezing off a shot that reverberated throughout the saloon as the coin landed back on the table, a hole perfectly centred in its face.

Before anyone could move The Kid was on his feet, aiming his Colt revolvers at the mob.

“This place is a mess,” said The Kid, directing one gun at a drunk slumped over a nearby table to emphasize his point. “This *whole town* is a mess.”

“Says who?” said one of the cowboys, two days stubble creeping up his leathery tobacco stained face, his chaps torn and ragged from weeks on the trail. Pulling his six-gun and aiming it at The Kid, he was unaware of the wide-eyed stares of the others

who now recognized the young gun-slinger with the taste for ginger beer.

“I wouldn’t say that if I were you,” his partner said under his breath, giving the other cowboy a wide berth.

The Kid regarded the wrangler with the unkempt greasy hair hanging down to his shoulders and imagined the pungent odor of the man’s sweat adding to the stink permeating the saloon.

“Says me,” said The Kid as he fired both handguns, knocking the gun out of the cowboy’s hand and sending his hat flying.

The smell of gunpowder bit into the rancid air as the man stumbled backwards, falling in a heap on a large card table, catapulting poker chips, cards and cold hard cash onto the floorboards.

“Great,” said The Kid, as the wrangler struggled to get up, knocking over several other tables and adding to the layer of detritus on the floor. “More mess.”

Finally stumbling to his feet, the wrangler’s heavy breathing could be heard throughout the large room, competing only with the synchronized reverberations of a timepiece above the bar that showed precisely three o’clock.

“It’s three o’clock, on a Monday no less,” said The Kid, “and you men are drinking and carrying on as if it was Friday night. How come you aren’t working?”

Silence prevailed until The Kid realized his guns were still drawn.

“How come you aren’t at work?” The Kid repeated, his voice rising as he holstered the Colts.

“We was finished early,” said a young cowboy. “Rode all weekend and just made town this morning. Brought in a thousand head.”

“You *were* finished early,” said The Kid.

“Yes, we was.”

“No, you *were*, not you *was*. Oh, forget it,” said The Kid, reluctant to engage in what he knew from experience would be a lost cause.

Leaving the ginger beer on the table, The Kid strode confidently out of the saloon, pausing on the walkway to peruse the rest of Main Street.

In the bank across the road, someone was about to place a “Closed” sign in the window.

Wiping his sleeves and pant legs The Kid stepped off the wooden walkway and headed across the street, opening the bank door just as the teller was about to push the latch shut.

“I’m sorry but we’re closing early,” she said, as The Kid brushed past, momentarily captivated by the fragrance of lavender perfume.

“Sorry ma’am,” he said, bowing slightly to the pretty young woman. “I didn’t mean to barge in like that but I have an appointment with the manager.”

“Well, you’ll have to come back tomorrow,” said the teller, nodding toward the door.

“I do apologize,” said The Kid, reaching for the woman’s hand and looking sorrowfully in her eyes.

“But I must see him today.”

“Oh very well,” she said, “follow me.”

The teller led The Kid to an office in back and knocked before showing him in.

“A *gentleman* to see you sir.”

The weasel-faced bank manager sat hunched at his desk, crushing his pencil into a stack of accounts. Sweat beaded down his forehead and neck, staining the dust encrusted collar of his white long-sleeve shirt.

The Kid’s entrance brought him to his feet as he quickly sized up the well-dressed cowboy as a potential new client.

“Welcome to Poverty, and to First Bank,” he said to The Kid, the words oozing out through his

yellowing teeth in a slow southern drawl, trying his best to make the town's name sound less disheartening by accentuating the "o" and barely enunciating the last syllable.

"The name's Silas, Silas Penney" he said, waiting for The Kid's response before extending a hand. "Interesting name for a banker, don't you think?" he snickered.

Ignoring the comment as well as the offered hand, The Kid slid past the bank manager and settled into the leather-seated armchair in front of his desk.

“I’m interested in making a deposit,” said The Kid, as the bank manager walked behind his desk.

“A *substantial* deposit,” he added.

“Well that’s what we’re here for,” said the banker.

The Kid raised a hand and continued.

“A substantial deposit, *if* you can meet my terms,” said The Kid, staring coldly into the bankers’ dour eyes.

“*Your* terms?” said Silas.

“Yes,” said the Kid. “I need some proof that our money will be safe in this town. Safe in *your* safe, to be exact. You see, me and my gang don’t just leave

our money anywhere, especially not with the name your “free banks” are getting around the state.”

“Your gang?” said the banker, sidling over to the window and surveying the empty street.

“Yes, my gang. They’re probably an hour or two behind me.”

“How *substantial* a deposit are we talking, Mister?”

“Manning,” said The Kid. “Jerome Manning. I’m talking several thousand dollars Silas. Ten thousand to be exact. But before my men hand over that amount of gold, I’ve got two thousand dollars of your own bank’s notes that I want to cash out as a

show of good faith on the bank's part. I'm sure you've heard the rumours that people don't think your notes are worth anything."

The banker sat down at his desk.

"Cash back?" he said as he scratched his balding head.

"That's right," said The Kid. "We deposited some of our gold at one of your other branches and we're prepared to deposit another ten thousand dollars' worth here. That's a lot of money. But before we do, I need proof that your notes are worth more than the paper they're written on."

“But I don’t know anything about the notes you got from the other branch. They could be just paper.”

“It’s all just paper,” said The Kid. “Filthy stuff really. Still, we’re willing to trust *your* bank with our hard earned gold in exchange for your demonstration of good faith. Two thousand dollars, that’s twenty percent up front, in case you were wondering.”

“I know how much it is,” said Silas.

“Well then, that’s a good thing,” said The Kid. “Cause in no time, you’ll have turned two thousand dollars into ten thousand, and made yourself five times richer than you are right now.” Silas could

see the logic of The Kid's argument but he also knew that many of the notes issued by the free banks that were popping up all over the country were not backed by state bonds, as required by law. Still, he was part of the free bank system and understood its frailties, but more importantly, didn't want The Kid to take his business to another town.

“When do you need the cash?” said Silas, taking a sheet of paper from his desk drawer.

“Right away,” said The Kid, pulling a gold-plated timepiece from his vest pocket. “My men have been instructed not to deposit our gold until you've cashed out our notes.”

“Very well,” said Silas, scratching the details on the paper and calling to the teller, who appeared instantly in his doorway as if on cue.

“Miss Tilley,” he said, waving her in and handing her the note. “Please process this for Mister Manning.”

“Certainly,” said the teller, eyeing the amount with some hesitation.

“This is what it’s come to,” said the banker, after the teller left to process the order. “Since the gold rush we haven’t been able to hire men tellers. With cattle increasing in price again, even the men too lazy to go after the gold are busy on the drives.”

“Yes, I met some of them earlier,” said The Kid, pulling on his gloves before extending a hand to the bank manager. “I’ll take the money to the hotel and be back with my men within the hour. Thank you for your cooperation.”

With that The Kid made his way to the teller’s window, signed for the cash and strolled out of the bank.

Silas Penney watched as The Kid walked across the street, unhitched a horse from the rail in front of the saloon and led it towards the hotel at the far end of town. Glancing in the opposite direction, the bank

manager's attention was drawn to a cloud of dust on the distant horizon.

Smiling to himself, he regarded his reflection in the window as Miss Tilley reappeared in his doorway.

“This will be remembered as the day the town's fortunes changed,” he said with a smile. “And Silas Penney will be remembered as the man who put Poverty on the road to recovery.”