

Quick summary of what's happened so far in this story: Sheriff Meyer has a relative, Irving Spencer who is a deputy who is coming to work for him. Owen is on the run after being accused of murder (it was self-defense). When Owen gets to Omaha, the sheriff sees him and assumes he's Irving. Since Wanted posters are all over the place, Owen plays along. He's hoping to slip out of town as soon as possible, but he's about to be surprised because Irving had agreed to marry Jenny Larson.

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Owen studied his reflection in the mirror. The dark blue pants, crisp white shirt, and dark blue vest were nice, but he wondered why Ernie felt the need to give him a suit when a pair of denims and shirt would have done just fine.

Ernie patted him on the shoulder. "You look dapper, Mr. Spencer. Why, I hardly believe you're the same man who came into my store!"

"I can't believe it either." Owen touched his chest. Yes, it was him alright, but he'd never worn a suit in his entire life. It just didn't *look* like him.

"Here's your suit jacket."

"Wow. This must be expensive." He touched the fabric before he slipped it on.

"Don't worry about it. The sheriff's paying."

"What?" Owen stopped fastening the buttons and shook his head. "No. I can't let him do that."

"Why not? He's your kin...and your boss."

"But...I don't really know him." At least that much was true.

"Naturally. But it's your special day and he wants it to that way."

A special day? All Irving Spencer had to do was show up in town and it was 'special'? Owen shook his head. Irving must be an important man.

"Alright. I have your measurements down, so I'll get started on your other clothes. I'll have them delivered to your new residence by tomorrow afternoon."

"My new residence? You mean the sheriff's house?"

Ernie threw back his head and laughed. "Oh, Irving. Meyer didn't tell me you had a sense of humor."

Owen watched, bewildered, as the man went into the backroom. He took that as his cue to leave. He quickly dug out a coin that he figured would cover the cost of the suit and threw it on the counter by the cash register. Then he retrieved Irving's hat from the trash can and put it on his head. So it didn't match. Who cared? He just had to get out of town before the sheriff realized the truth.

Just as he opened the door, the sheriff stood right in front of him, and he jerked back. He tumbled and fell back against the shirt display which came crashing on top of him as he landed on the floor.

"What's going on?" Ernie yelled as he came running from the backroom.

The sheriff laughed. "Looks like I scared poor Irving. I was ready to come in when he opened the door." He turned to Owen and stretched his hand out to him. "I guess the groom is anxious to get to see his bride."

Owen's jaw dropped. What?

The sheriff leaned forward and practically picked Owen up and set him on his feet. He sighed. "You can't wear that hat anymore. It doesn't fit you right. Here." He grabbed another hat from the wall, took off the one he was wearing, and plopped the new one on his head. "Much better."

"I'll get the shirts," Ernie told Owen. "Go on ahead."

“Yep. We don’t want to keep that bride of yours waiting. She’s real anxious to see you,” the sheriff said. “Ernie, send me the bill.”

“Will do.”

The sheriff wrapped his arm around Owen’s shoulders, forcing Owen out of the store.

“Irving’s getting married?” Owen asked dumbly.

“You know, you’re a breath of fresh air, son. I can’t tell you how nice it is to finally have a deputy who has a sense of humor.”

A breath of fresh air? A sense of humor? Owen gulped the lump in his throat as he struggled to keep up with the older man’s fast pace on the boardwalk. He caught sight of the train station and wondered if he could create a diversion so he could slip into the station?

“I tell you, you had us mighty worried,” Meyer continued. “Especially Jenny. She’s been fretting something awful. I can’t tell you how much it means to us that you’re doing this.”

“This? You mean the...” Oh goodness. Dare he actually say it? “Wedding?”

“What else?”

He glanced at the train as it pulled into the station. Oh, this was bad. Really bad. He had to get out of here! He couldn’t marry someone else’s woman. He licked his dry lips and cleared his throat. “You know, I...I need to...to...” To do what? *Think, Owen. Think!*

“Now, now. Did you think I’d forget?”

Owen couldn’t answer. He was breathing too fast. Was he hyperventilating? He did feel dizzy, almost like he was going to pass out. He tried to get a gulp of air but coughed instead.

“Here it is.” The man handed him something. “I kept it safe for you, just as you requested.”

He stared at the wedding band in the palm of his hand. Shaking his head, he said, “You...you don’t understand.”

“Got cold feet, huh? Well, all men get that. Even the tough ones.”

“No. I-” He almost tripped on a step as the sheriff led him down the boardwalk so they could cross the dusty street.

“Watch your step, son. You don’t want to get this nice suit dirty.”

Owen gave a frantic look at the train station. This wasn’t good. This *wasn’t* good!

“The courthouse is right up ahead.”

Owen dug his heels into the dirt but the sheriff lifted him by the shoulders and dragged him along, making him stumble a couple of steps before he found his footing and walked with him.

“What a joyous day this will be! Now Jenny can rest assured that her little boy will be safe.”

“Little boy? She has a child?”

“Don’t act so surprised. That’s why you two are getting married.”

“It is?”

They stopped in front of the imposing building and the older man set his hands on Owen’s shoulders. “Now, I know you’ve never been a family man before, but you’re about to become one. I feel responsible for you, what with you being so young and all, but I know your ma raised you right. You’ll do right by Jenny and Jeremy. They need you.”

“Uh...no, I don’t think-”

“Oh, here she comes. She’s the one in the pretty white dress. She even sewed it herself.”

Owen grabbed the sheriff’s vest. “You don’t understand. I can’t marry her!” It was bad enough he stole Irving’s clothes and money. He didn’t need to add this to his list of sins.

Meyer chuckled and shook his head. “The jokes just never stop with you, do they? Look behind you.”

He reluctantly obeyed and straightened as soon as he saw her. Whoa! She was...She was...He rubbed his eyes and looked again, just in case his mind was playing tricks on him. But they weren’t. She was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen. He blinked several times. She was still

there...and looking very appealing.

She had light blond hair that fell softly past her shoulders, a white hat with a red flower on it, a white dress that hung nicely along her curves, and a red floral bouquet in her hand. She smiled at him as she approached him. Two women followed behind her and a boy stood to her left.

“Hello, Irving,” she said.

“Who?” Owen asked.

Meyer waved his hand at her. “Oh, don’t mind him. This one is a hoot.”

“A real kidder, huh?” the blond woman standing on her right said. “Well, I’m Jenny’s sister, Sally. And this is our sister-in-law, Mary.”

Owen couldn’t take his eyes off of Jenny. He tried to...but he couldn’t.

“I really appreciate this, Irving.” Jenny glanced down at her son and smiled. “We both do.”

Owen knew he should tell them all the truth. This was the time to do so. He took one last look at the train station and then turned his attention to Jenny. Was there really a contest? She was much more attractive. And Irving wasn’t here. And everyone expected Jenny to get married today. And Jenny looked very happy about it. He looked down at the boy. “How old are you?”

“Four,” Jeremy answered.

“You been taking good care of your ma?” he asked.

The boy puffed up his chest and nodded. “Yes, sir.”

The group chuckled.

Well, the boy seemed like a good kid. Owen returned his gaze to Jenny who appeared hopeful. Who was he to let them all down? A big smile crossed his face. “Let’s get married!”