

EXCERPT ONE: PROLOGUE

GRACE V/OVER: This story has my mother's name on it, sure, but her tale is just about the same as every women who has ever travelled to another country for a fresh start, with hope in her heart for a better future – for herself and for her children.

The first meeting of Redmond Barry. 1868

BARRY Will the witness state her name for the record.

ELLEN Mrs Ellen Kelly.

BARRY And your relationship to the defendant.

ELLEN He's my brother-in-law, sir.

BARRY Your husband's brother.

ELLEN Ay, sir.

BARRY And your husband's deceased?

ELLEN Ay, that he is, sir.

BARRY Brought here a convict, is that right?

ELLEN Done his time, given his ticket of leave.

BARRY And died of dropsy after a stint back in Her Majesty's custody, I believe.

ELLEN . . . Ay . . . , sir.

BARRY For cattle theft.

ELLEN No, your honour, "unlawful possession of a hide."

BARRY I see, and Mrs Kelly, how long have you known the defendant, Mr James Kelly.

ELLEN Some ten years, sir.

BARRY And were you aware that Mr Kelly himself had only recently been released from a three year sentence for cattle theft.

ELLEN I was, your honour.

BARRY Your sisters have given evidence that on the night of the fire, Mr Kelly entered your bedroom requesting you “*sit with him and take in a spot of gin.*”

ELLEN Mmmm . . .Somethin’ like that, sir.

BARRY – but you refused and ordered him out of the dwelling.

ELLEN Ay, that I did.

BARRY And this um . . house or rather . . old pub, was the residence of your two sisters, was it not?

ELLEN Ay, sir.

BARRY And neither of your sister’s husband’s were in attendance that evening?

ELLEN No, sir, they were not.

BARRY Because they are both currently serving time in Pentridge Prison, I believe.

ELLEN That they are, sir.

BARRY For cattle theft? Is that right, Mrs Kelly?

ELLEN That was the charge, sir, ay.

BARRY And in your statement, you claim that around 1 or 2am you awoke to the dwelling on fire and you could see Mr James Kelly standing by a window, is that true?

ELLEN Ay, and that’s when I called for Mr O’Brien, whose Hotel is next door, to help us with the water so as to save the children. They was all asleep at the time and if it weren’t for Mr O’Brien’s help with the water, we’d never got all the children out.

BARRY There were 13 children in the dwelling that night, is that right?

ELLEN Ay, sir and as I said, they was all asleep so . . .

BARRY How many of the 13 children are yours, Mrs Kelly?

Beat.

ELLEN Seven, sir.

BARRY Seven?

ELLEN Ay, sir, (*proudly rattling the names off*) Annie, Edward, Margaret, James, Dan, Kate & little Gracie.

BARRY Hmmm . . And what was your relationship with the defendant?

ELLEN Well, he was my husband's brother . .

BARRY Yes, we've established that, but what was your particular relationship with the man? Was he . . . kind to you?

ELLEN Why, I have witnessed acts of kindness from him - when he weren't filled to the brim with drink. But in all honesty, sir, I've rarely seen the man sober.

BARRY The defendant claims in his statement that you struck him with a bottle of gin. And another witness, Mr O'Meara claims to have seen you chasing him out of the house, brandishing a weapon.

ELLEN A weapon?

BARRY *(reading)* "The prisoner was chased by Mrs Kelly with a stick."

ELLEN Well, which is it Jimmy, make up ya mind, lad, did I hit you over the head with a bottle of gin or did I chase you out the road strikin' ya with a makeshift shillelagh? Either way, the facts of the matter remain that you're a gawd awful drunk, James Kelly, and ya burnt down the house we was sleepin' in.

Freeze.

JIM That were our ma. Fearless to a fault. We'd moved to Greta for a fresh start but trouble . . . well, it seemed to follow our family like flies. And that would not be the last time she would stand before the right Honourable Redmond Barry.

GRACE I feel at this moment, it might be important to explain a bit about the cattle theivin' the family was being accused of earlier, cause it frames us in a pretty bad light, you understand. The truth is – ma's side of the family, the Quinn's were decent hard-working Irish Catholic bounty immigrants.

JIM Well, exceptin' for Uncle Jimmy.

GRACE Well, yes 'ceptin', Wild Uncle Jimmy, Mum's youngest brother. But to explain Uncle Jimmy, I think we need to go back to . . . alright. Let's do a little bit of Irish History 101.

EXCERPT TWO: MEETING RED

ELLEN *(pointing a rifle at the back of Red)* Stop right where ya are, or I'll blow a hole straight through ye.

RED *(putting his hands in the air and turning slowly around)* I'm here to see your pa. He 'round?

ELLEN No 'e's not. And if ye come any closer, I'll pump you full of lead.

RED Understood. Do you mind though if I wait for your pa, over on this log here?

ELLEN Suit yourself.

He moves and sits down as Ellen watches him.

RED I'm Red. Red Kelly.

ELLEN Grand.

RED So which one are you then?

ELLEN Ellen.

RED Don't recall your pa mentionin' an 'Ellen'.

ELLEN That'll be on account of bein' called 'Nellie', all me life,

RED Ah, little Nell, he calls ya.

ELLEN Oh ay, but that's a bit silly, now I'm older. Nellie's no name for a grown lass of 18.

RED So you don't like it, then?

ELLEN Not at all.

RED Noted.

ELLEN Do you like being called Red?

RED Been called worse.

Beat.

ELLEN You like horses, Red?

RED Sure.

ELLEN I love 'em, and I'm a bloody good rider– I can go a lot faster than me brothers even. Wild Jimmy can't even catch me when I get going.

RED Maybe you'll be a rancher when you grow up.

ELLEN Could do – if I had a mind to it.

RED Do you know what ya wanna be when you grow up?

FATHER (off) Red! I'm out back – come round.

RED May I remove meself from this log and visit your pa, now, Miss.

ELLEN puts the gun down.

RED Was nice to meet you - Ellen.

He moves to walk away.

ELLEN I do, actually.

RED What?

ELLEN Know what I'm gonna be when I grow up.

RED Yeah?

ELLEN Yeah. I'm gonna be Mrs Red Kelly, I am.

RED *(awkwardly)* Ha! Well, that's mighty flatterin' Ellen, but I dare say you could do far better than the likes of me.

ELLEN I dreamt of you. Last night. You were in my dream.

RED Was I now?

ELLEN Ay. I have the sight.

RED Oh do ya, now.

ELLEN Ay. I do, and you were in my dream last night, Red Kelly and now I know for certain what it all meant – you and me is gonna be married and I'm gonna be Mrs Red Kelly – nothing surer.

RED Your pa won't be likin' that talk -

ELLEN I am, though – and Pa won't have any wee say in the matter.

RED Do I have a say in the matter?

ELLEN Not really, Red, I don't think so, no.

EXCERPT THREE: THE COPPERS

CONST 1 How long are we to wait?

SARGE She'll be coming along any minute now.

CONST 1 I am feckin' freezin', sarge. Let's just come back in the morning.

SARGE Keep your shirt on, son.

CONST 1 You don't even know he's in there.

SARGE Son, you are standing out front of the most notorious house in all of Greta. If he's anywhere, he's in that house.

CONST 1 What if she won't let you in to look?

SARGE *(lifting his truncheon)* I'll ask proper polite like.

CONST 1 Ain't the woman carryin'?

SARGE Ain't the woman always be carryin'? Ain't she got 7 kids to the first fella, and now she's ripe and ready to drop her second with the next.

CONST 1 Place looks a pile of shite. How she keepin' that many kids inside that?

SARGE I guess the same way she brought them into the world – with sweat, grit and a prayer to Jesus.

CONST 1 I can't see how a widow with 7 kids can be as fearsome as you say.

SARGE Oh lad, she has a temper on her. Before they come here, she was in and out of trouble in Avenel for aggressive verbal battering.

CONST 1 Aggressive verbal battering? What, shouting out loud, like?

SARGE Ay, aggressively! Was fined one week for verbally assaulting her dead husband's sister and then three months later fined for using "abusive and threatening language" in the defence of the same woman. She's unpredictable. And don't trust the little ones neither. They may be small yet, but they've inherited their mother's tongue, that's certain. Magistrate Akehurst threatened little Annie with the reformatory if he heard another complaint about her.

CONST 1 Akehurst? Didn't he murder a fella in the Stockade?

SARGE Acquitted.

CONST 1 So they made him a magistrate?

SARGE Ay, they did.

CONST 1 What a piece of luck it is to be born English!

SARGE Ay. But it weren't she who burned her sister's pub down mind; that were the work of her dead husband's brother. The kids barely escaped with their lives.

CONST 1 The whole family sound perfectly delightful.

SARGE A bad bird, a bad egg.

CONST 1 A bad egg, a bad bird.

SARGE What?

CONST 1 A bad egg, a bad bird.

SARGE Are you touched, lad?

CONST 1 What?