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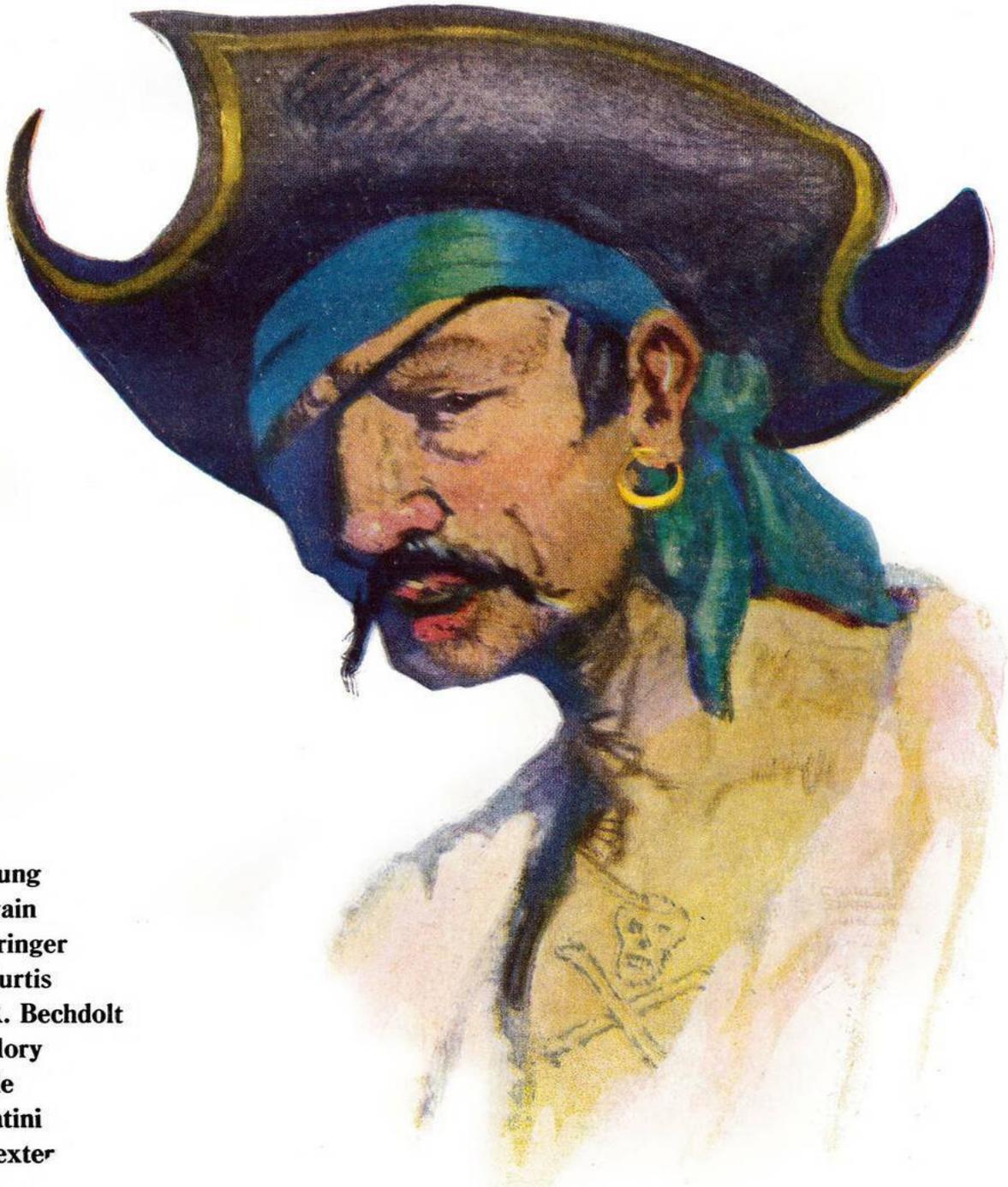
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CREEPIN' TINTYPES ***



Author of "Tippecanoe and Cougars Two," "Between Pike's Peak and a Pickle."

Creepin' Tintypes

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Tippecanoe and Tigers, Two," "Between Pike's Peak and a Pickle," etc.

There ain't no question but what me and "Dirty Shirt" Jones would like to go back to Piperock. Sort of a call of the wild, I reckon, and at that there ain't many places wilder than Piperock.

Me and Dirty started in to help "Scenery" Sims, the sheriff, put "Tombstone" Todd in jail. It was

dark and Scenery didn't have no handcuffs, so me and Dirty helped him handle his prisoner. Me and Dirty have peered upon the wine when it was red and neither of us cared much for Scenery with his squeaky little voice; so when Piperock awoke the next morning they had to dynamite the jail to get their sheriff out of his own cell. No, I don't know where Tombstone went.

Thereupon Piperock riseth in a body and follers me and Dirty plumb to the border. Maybe they wanted to congratulate us, but we're very, very modest. Me and Dirty ain't bad. We was just joking with Scenery.

Anyway, I don't think Tombstone was guilty of rustling Seven A cows. He said he wasn't, and there wasn't no reason for him lying about it to me and Dirty, unless he was afraid we'd want part of the proceeds. This is why we're in a strange county, at a strange bar and talking with a stranger. He's a pe-culiar-looking *hombre*, sort of sad-eyed, as he peers through his glass of hard liquor.

"The West," says he, "is the bunk. There ain't none such."

"What for kind of a West does you require?" asks Dirty, like he was trying to sell the feller a necktie.

"Wild," says he. "Wild like the writers tell us about. The kind of a West that Buffalo Bill knew. I've hunted for it loud and long, but she ain't and that's an end to it. Have another drink?"

"Mister," says Dirty, "you came West but you never got there. Somehow you missed Piperock."

"Whither lieth said Piperock?"

"Lieth is a good word," nods Dirty. "In direction, she's south of here and as the crow flies she's a hundred miles."

"Is that real West?"

"Man, that's the West. All others is imitations and frauds."

"You brings me great cheer," says he. "Bartender, do your duty."

"You bring cheer to two of us, the same of which makes three cheers."

"I wouldst have you take me to this Piperock place."

"Yeah?" says Dirty. "Me and Ike Harper are not taking anybody within sheriff-shot of Piperock, although our hearts are homesick for the old village of vice. We wouldst go there, pardner, but circumstances are against us. We'll tell yuh some few things pertaining to that hamlet of horror, but that's as far as we'll go.

"The city limits of Piperock are the distance a sheriff can ride in two hours and then shoot with a .30-30; the same of which marks a spot several miles removed from the turmoil of town. Me and Ike are outside that distance and we stays out, eh, Ike?"

"You couldn't 'a' said more if yuh hired a hall," says I. "Why does yuh wish to see the West in its raw state, mister?"

"I am a realist," says he, dreamy-like. "I hate the artificial."

"Gawd bless and keep yuh," says Dirty. "You'll find it there, but yuh may never return back. The sheriff sells cemetery space."

He absorbs his liquor and seems a heap interested.

"Is there a bank there that might be robbed and does they have a stage that might have a reason for carrying bullion?"

"Now," says Dirty, "me and Ike appears shocked at your question, but at the same time we're a

heap interested. Let's go outside where there ain't no walls to have ears and speak of such things as banks and stages. Yuh never can tell who might overhear us and suspect us of philanthropy."

We goes across the street and sets down on the sidewalk.

"Now," says Dirty, "there is a bank and there is a stage. Me and Ike are broke, but up to the present our records are as clean as our six-guns."

"Would you know how to rob a bank or a stage?" he asks. "Do the job like it ought to be done?"

"We ain't got no references from bank nor stage-lines," says I.

"But," says Dirty, "we're honest. We'll split three ways, mister."

He thinks it over for a while, and then says—

"Well, I feel that I've struck what I've been looking for."

"That's what 'Mighty' Jones said when he fell off into Hellgate Cañon and dislodged a hunk of galena ore, fifty feet from the bottom," says Dirty.

"A feller never knows his luck till the wheel stops."

"You two are going with me," says he.

"Us two ain't goin' to do no such a thing," says I. "You don't know Piperock like we do."

"That's why you're going with me."

"You're a danged poor fortune-teller," observes Dirty. "Me and Ike would last about as long as a snowball in Yuma and you'd be alone. They'd put us in a nice little jail and then you'd get lost, strayed or stolen.

"No, sir. You write to all your folks, predictin' your demise, leave your watch and chain with the bartender, and then walk into town, unarmed and with your hands in the air."

"By golly, that's the town I've been looking for," says he. "Thanks."

"Mister, she's a great place for freaks," says Dirty. "You won't be in that place long until you'll join P. T. Barnum."

"Barnum?" says he. "Barnum is dead."

"Sure—I know it."

"Yes," says he, after a while. "You're going with me. I'll disguise you so nobody will know you, you understand? I must have you with me."

"Mister," says I, "are you just a —— tenderfoot who wants to be a bad man, or what's all your talk about banks and bullion?"

"I am a realist, as I said before. The West has never been depicted as I feel it really is and I an going to show them something new. I have a story, 'The Twilight Trail,' which has been partly done, but I want realism. I want the spirit of the old West in it. I want a stage hold-up, a bank robbery, with real people in it, in a Western town—real West. Now, do you understand?"

"Just like I do Chinese," says I. "You said a lot, but she don't somehow fit into my mind. You don't want much, I *sabe* that part of it, don't you, Dirty?"

"Yeah, he's plumb modest and meek, Ike. Are you a writer?"

"Moving-pictures, gents. I am Llewellyn Waldemar."

"Sounds like a breed of bird-dogs," says Dirty, "but his ears are too small."

"You don't need to insult me," he snaps.

“Now, wait,” begs Dirty. “Did you ever see a Llewellyn dog?”

“No, I never did.”

“Well, then don’t get insulted. They’re a —— nice-lookin’ animile. You say you’re a movin’-pitcher?”

“No, I take ’em.”

“Hm-m-m-m,” says Dirty. “I never seen any, but I’ve heard tell about ’em. Does them pitchers make yuh think they’re movin’?”

The feller looks at Dirty, like he was a new species of animal, and then wipes his eyes. He wipes his eyes several times and acts like he had a fish-bone in his throat, but he gets all right after while and says:

“Come on. I’m going to find a disguise for you to wear.”

“You’re a wonder if you can conceal me,” says Dirty, who is cock-eyed in one optic. “All them snake-hunters has to do is take one look at me and I’m due to chase buffalo in the happy hunting-ground.”

“Smoked glasses will fix you,” says he.

“Smoked glasses won’t help my bowlegs,” says I. “Magpie says he can roll me like a hoop.”

“I never thought I’d live to see the day when I’d have to look at Piperock through smoked glasses,” wails Dirty.

Well, he fixed us up; that’s a cinch. When he got through with us we looked like a couple of shepherds gone to seed. Down at one of them two-handed stores he purchased us both a outfit. He got us each a pair of smoked specs and some whiskers which makes us resemble a pair of owls.

“Your home town won’t recognize you now,” says he.

“No,” says Dirty, “but that won’t profit us much. Piperock may not penetrate our disguise, but that won’t stop ’em from pot-shooting a pair of freaks.”

“There’s one cinch,” says I. “They won’t never kill us in our own names.”

He takes us up to a hotel where all his stuff is and we sets down on the bed while he packs up.

“What kind of a sheriff have they got in Piperock?” he asks.

“He’s a wonder,” says Dirty, “and very fast with a gun.”

Then me and Dirty thinks about Scenery Sims. He’s about five feet two inches tall and his face is so danged thin that his mustache looks like a buffalo-robe hanging on a hatchet. I could rummage around in a sack and get a gun faster than Scenery could pull one out of his holster.

Waldemar got us a pair of valises to pack our own clothes in and then we drinks to our disguises and pilgrims to the depot.

“I know,” says Dirty, as we climb on the train, “I know —— well that we’re pilin’ up for grief for our side. We ain’t got no sense, Ike.”

“They’ll never know you,” says Waldemar.

“After we’re dead they will,” wails Dirty, “and I ain’t never deceived anybody yet. I can just hear ‘Old Testament’ Tilton sayin’, ‘Man is of few days and full of trouble, O, my brethren, and these two grabbed off more than they could chew,’ and then the Cross J quartet will sing, ‘Jee-e-roo-o-o-sa-

lem, Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-lem, lee-e-ft up your voice an' see-e-ng.”

“The Holy City,” says Waldemar. “A beautiful thing.”

“She’s only skin-deep with that bunch,” sighs Dirty. “I hope they just bury me and dispense with the sermon and songs.”

“We won’t hear none of it,” says I. “We’ll be layin’ there with our smoked glasses on and a cactus flower on our breast.”

“I think I’m goin’ to like Piperock,” says Waldemar.

“Your taste is all in your mouth, then,” says Dirty. “What are we supposed to be, in case anybody asks us?”

“You two?”

He thinks for quite a while, and then says:

“Tell you what—you two are scientists, looking for the remains of a—a dinosaur. Mister Jones will be Professor Doolittle and Mister Harper will be Professor Smythe. How’s that for names?”

“Lookin’ for a dinny-sor,” nods Dirty. “Might as well die for that as anything else, I reckon. Do we have to describe said—uh—thing? Is it a predatory animile, bird of prey or a crippled crawler?”

“The dinosaur,” says he, “died a million years ago.”

“Some fortune-teller likely told him what Piperock was goin’ to be like,” says Dirty.

We got off the train at Paradise, just in time to catch Art Miller’s stage to Piperock, and on that stage is “Magpie” Simpkins and Judge Steele. Magpie looks us over, careful-like and then shakes his head.

“There ain’t none,” says he.

“None what?” asks Dirty.

“E-clipse of the sun.”

“Professor Smythe and Professor Doolittle have ruined their eyes working on scientific data,” explains Waldemar.

“Why confine your post mortem to eyes?” asks Magpie. “Pears to me that they’ve ruined the rest of ’em, too. I suppose that one—” pointing at me—“got warped in the legs from studyin’ the shape of the earth. Can’t they talk United States?”

“They were born in this country,” says Waldemar.

“What part?” asks the judge.

“All of us, you —— fool!” I snaps.

“Think we were assembled?”

“Goin’ to Piperock?” asks Magpie.

“Yes,” says Waldemar. “Yes, we are bound for there.”

“On a mission?” asks the judge.

“Mostly for a rest,” says Waldemar.

“You likely will be,” admits Magpie, “and there’s plenty of room in the jail.”

We goes to Sam Holt’s hotel. Old Sam sizes us up kinda close-like, and then Waldemar says—

“Have you three rooms?”

“I have,” says old Sam, “and two of ’em I’ll keep.”

“What do you mean?” asks Waldemar.

“Them two,” pointing at me and Dirty, “can’t get no room from me. The last shepherd what stayed in my hotel left a lot of his mee-nag-i-ree behind.”

“Your danged old hotel didn’t need ’em,” says Dirty. “You ain’t changed blankets since the battle of Little Big Horn.”

“What do you know about me?” he asks. “Who in —— are you?”

“I’m Professor Doolittle,” says Dirty, “and I’m lookin’ for a dinny-sor.”

“You don’t look like you’d do much and I ain’t got none today,” says Sam, meanlike. “You —— shepherds are always loco about something.”

“Can we sleep in the barn?” I asks.

“No, yuh can’t! My horses are all pets.”

“Isn’t there any other hotel?” asks Waldemar.

“I can give yuh a place to sleep,” squeaks a voice behind us, and we turns to see Scenery Sims.

“Ah,” says Waldemar, “another landlord looking for business.”

“I ain’t no landlord—I’m the sheriff,” squeaks Scenery. “I’ve got a empty jail if yuh wants a place to sleep.”

Me and Dirty are sort of thinking it over when Magpie Simpkins shows up. He asks what the trouble is, and Sam Holt tells him.

“Scientists is always welcome to my shack,” says Magpie. “I’ve got room.”

“We don’t wish to deprive yuh,” says Dirty.

“There ain’t no depravity about it,” says Magpie. “I hankers to talk with learned men, being as this is such a ignorant neighborhood, and you’re just as welcome as the flowers in January. What seek ye here?”

“I’m lookin’ for a dinny-sor,” says Dirty.

“Never heard of him,” says Magpie. “There used to be a Dinny McCall workin’ for the Five Do outfit, down near Sulphur Flat.”

“This has been dead a million years,” explains Dirty.

“Oh,” says Magpie, fussing with his mustache. “Oh, yeah. That was before I came here. Wha killed him?”

“Wear and tear, I reckon,” says Dirty.

He takes me and Dirty down to his cabin, and makes us to home.

“I had a pardner once,” says Magpie, “but the —— fool went loco, and some law-abidin’ citizens chased him across the border.”

“Did he done wrong?” asks Dirty.

“If he ever done right he came back and corrected himself. Him and another cross between a bed-bug and a bee-sting went away together, and Piperock profiteth thereby. Make yourselves to home. You gents comes here at a opportune time, you know it? Tomorrow is the tenth anniversary of Piperock and we’re goin’ to celebrate.”

“Celebrate?” whispers Dirty, hoarse-like. “Celebrate what? Is the town married?”

“Anniversary,” explains Magpie, “means a year. Piperock is ten years old and she’s goin’ to celebrate her growth and civilization. This is her birthday.

“They will come from near and far, gents, and great will be the day and date. There will be bronco-bustin’, et cettery, and bull-doggin’ of steers. There will be ropin’ contests, et cettery and some shootin’. She’ll be worth your patience.”

Magpie goes out and me and Dirty sets there and looks at each other.

“My ——!” gasps Dirty. “I feel that everything is not well with my soul. Somebody is goin’ to see Dirty Shirt Jones behind these whiskers and specs and I’ll be forced to stand on nothin’ and look up a rope.”

“Be of good cheer,” says I, “for I will be with thee. They’ll have something except Piperock’s birthday to celebrate next year.”

“Do scientists drink hard liquor, Ike?”

“They has a throat and a tongue,” says I. And then we pilgrims uptown, and goes into Buck Masterson’s saloon, where we gets fortified against our fears of the near future. Waldemar is there, and Waldemar has surrounded himself with enough hooch to make him expand considerable. When we gets there he’s talkin’ politics with “Half Mile” Smith, and “Swan River,” and neither of them snake-hunters knows anything about politics, except who is sheriff.

He introduces us to them two misfits, and they gets agreeable.

“Mister Smythe,” says Swan River, looking me over, “your legs are twins to the legs of a —— fool I know, but from the waist up you look like a bum thrower. I’m pleased to meetcha.”

“He sure is built so he don’t have to go around nothin’,” agrees Half Mile.

“He’s a very brilliant man,” says Waldemar. “They both have degrees.”

“They look about zero to me,” says Buck Masterson.

“They know things which are concealed from ordinary men,” says Waldemar.

“Uh-huh,” says Half Mile. “I shouldn’t be surprized. Any horse-thief is in the same fix—if he’s got any sense.”

A little later on we corrals Waldemar and asks him what he thinks of the town.

“You sure led me to the right place,” says he. “I have dreamed of this kind of a place.”

“You ought to stick to dreams,” advises Dirty. “We’re wishin’ you’d hurry up and finish your business here, ’cause me and Ike hankers for the open places. *Sabe?* This city air stifles our lungs and makes our necks ache.”

“I’m framing it all up in my mind,” says he, “and in the morning we’ll set up the camera in the hotel window which will give me a full shot at the street, with the bank in the foreground, and then—can you two get horses?”

“I dunno,” says Dirty. “We have got ’em—at times.”

“Maybe a little risky for you two,” says he. “I’ll have two of ’em at the hitch-rack across the street. I won’t have you ride into town, because some one might spot you. I can fake the entrance. You fellows will dress in your range clothes, you understand? At the right time you will come around the corner of the saloon, swing on to your horses, dash across the street, where one of you will go inside, rob the bank and come out, get your horses and dash out of town. I hope the sheriff will get quick

action with the posse.”

“My ——!” gasps Dirty. “You’re all through with us, are yuh? You can’t use us any further, mister? What has we done to you that you should wish our demise?”

“You ain’t taking many chances,” says he. “You’ll take ’em so by surprize that they’ll forget everything.”

“Except to shoot,” says I. “Piperock never forgets their guns. No, sir, you’ve got to figure out something easier than that.”

“It’s a chance of a life-time,” says he, sad-like, and then he gets this idea—

“I’ll give you a hundred dollars apiece.”

“When?” asks Dirty.

“After the robbery.”

“Be a sport and make it a million apiece,” says Dirty. “We’ll never live to collect and a man don’t mind dying for a big stake.”

“You can keep what you get from the bank.”

“We ain’t goin’ to take no money,” says I. “We’re just goin’ in and come right out again. *Sabe?* Folks will think it’s a robbery.”

“I want this done right,” says he. “I want the real thing. Take it and then bring it back.”

“Well,” says Dirty, “if you feel thataway—how about yuh, Ike?”

“It makes me no never mind, Dirty. When they finds my remains with my dear hands folded around stolen money it won’t hurt my reputation none. I’m willing to do danged near anything, so as we get away where I can take off this beard. My own whiskers are growing circles inside ’em.”

“Is the hundred satisfactory?” asks Waldemar.

“In advance,” nods Dirty. “I’m goin’ to enjoy myself before the old feller with the hay-hook comes along and cuts me off at the pockets.”

Waldemar starts to argue, but we both stands pat and he gives us the money. A hundred dollars is a lot of money to a man who expects to die the next day. There ain’t no rainy days in his future. He don’t care a whoop what comes to pass. Some folks might prepare themselves by praying, but me and Dirty never have asked for anything we ain’t got the nerve to go and get for ourselves. We just throws dull care out of the window and gets cheerful.

Into our rosy existence cometh “Big Foot” Benson and “Hoodoo” Harris. Them two pelican proclaims it open season on anything that comes in bottles.

“You’re a danged queer-looking pair,” says Big Foot, “but it takes all kinds of folks to herd sheep. Klahowya.”

“Your whiskers ain’t orthodox,” says Hoodoo, peering at Dirty, “or has you reverted to the reptiles and sheds your skin in the hot days?”

“We’re scientists,” says Dirty, “and we’re lookin’ for a dinny-sor.”

“Oh, yeah,” says Hoodoo. “Well, you come to the right place, gents. The Lord knows you can find anything here, except a square deal. Why does you cover your eyes with gloomy glasses thataway? Does you hanker for the dark side of life?”

“Yuh never could find a dinny-sor with the naked eye,” says I, and they accepts the verdict.

That was one wild night for science. I reckon every puncher within fifty miles showed up for the celebration, being as there’s prizes offered, and me and Dirty, after absorbing considerable cheer, has a hard time sticking to plain science.

Dirty had a fight with Mighty Jones, when the two of ’em gets to discussing whether man came from monkey or not. Mighty debates that they are, and offers Dirty as a living proof. Two sheep-herders from over on Medicine Creek, cries on my neck and calls me “brother,” and I licked ’em both.

Yes, it sure was a regular evening and my throat was raw from trying to change my natural voice and talk like a scientist ought to talk. Dirty Shirt’s whiskers tried to crawl under his chin several times, but the crowd was too joyful to pay any attention to whiskers.

Somehow I can’t just remember what happened after midnight, except that Waldemar corrals me and tells me to pull off the stunt at ten o’clock. He explains the details, but I only hears half of it, ’cause Hoodoo is trying to tell me something about a mosquito that bit him when he was at the North Pole.

Dirty and Big Foot are trying to sing something about a wild Irish rose and Buck Masterson is standing on the bar, trying to nominate a Populist for president. We all voted for Buck’s candidate, I remember that much, and then me and Dirty starts home, amid much applause.

Across the street the Cross J quartet is singing—

“Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-a-a-lem, Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-a-a-lem, lee-e-e-ft up your voice and see-e-e-ng.”

And Judge Steele is orating about—

“—and in the glorious land of our forefathers, where the—the—sun never sets and the—the——”

“Ike,” says Dirty, “a man is of few days and full of trouble, but right now I’m a mockin’-bird, with spreadin’ pinions and a dazzlin’ top-knot. I may die tomorrow, but right now I’m a feathered songster, light of heart and sound of limb. O death, where is thy stinger?”

“The devil has it on the grindstone, Dirty,” says I, “and by ten o’clock tomorrow she’ll be sharper than a serpent’s tooth.”

The next morning we sure slept peacefully, while Magpie goes uptown. He’s one of the leading fights, as usual. I reckon it’s about nine o’clock when me and Dirty gets something to eat. Dirty is a danged long ways from being a mocking-bird. We can’t eat. Maybe it’s from looking too much into the future, but I think it’s from looking too much into the bottom of a glass.

“If they sees us before we gets them broncs, Waldemar’s moving-pitcher is going to be a failure,” says I, as we puts on our own clothes, after soaking them beards loose.

“Waldemar?” says Dirty. “My gosh, Ike, you are getting temperamental, like a regular primmydonner. His pitcher a failure? What’s his danged pitcher beside my breath of life? If them or’nary saddle-slickers see us before we reach them broncs—Waldemar gets a regular necktie pitcher. They’ll hang us to that tree right near Sam Holt’s porch, Ike.”

“That’s too bad, Dirty. Where’ll we go if we get away with it?”

“There yuh are!” wails Dirty, flopping his arms. “No place to go.”

“Well, we’ve got to go, anyway; so it might as well be now.”

We went out of there and sneaked up on the town of Piperock, like it was a wild thing. Maybe that statement ain’t far wrong. We crawls in behind Buck’s place, and gets behind a pile of cord-wood. Me and Dirty has both got watches. Mine says ten minutes to ten, and Dirty’s says fifteen minutes after ten.

“Mine’s right,” says Dirty, positive-like. “That watch ain’t lost a second in two years. I can correct the sun with that watch, yuh betcha. We’re late!”

“Yuh can’t beat a Swiss movement,” says I, “and that’s the kind mine is. It is now ten minutes of ten.”

“You’re crazy, Ike. Lemme tell yuh something about this—huh—listen to your watch and see if she’s runnin’.”

“It ain’t,” says I, after listening. “I forgot to wind it last night.”

“Me, too,” says Dirty. “My ——, we’re in an awful fix.”

Comes a few yells and a few shots out on the street and then the clatter of six-shooter explosions.

“The celebration is on,” says I. “It was due to start at ten o’clock. Let’s take a chance. I hope to gosh them broncs are there for us.” I takes my life in one hand, a six-shooter in the other and leads the way. There’s more than two broncs at the rack, but there ain’t no time to figure out ownership, et cettery. There’s considerable humanity in sight.

“Take that gray one, Dirty,” says I, and then I happens to think that we ain’t figured out who is to go inside the bank.

“Wait a minute,” says I. “Do you go inside or do I, Dirty?”

“It makes no difference who goes in, Ike. We’ll be deader than —— in about three minutes anyway. You go in, will yuh?”

“A-a-a-board!” says I, and hops on to that mouse-colored bronc, which looks like it might go as far and fast.

Somehow I don’t no more than hook the right stirrup before I realizes that I’ve made a mistake. I hears Dirty sort of hiccup a curse, and I’m betting that he has the same thoughts. I don’t know about that mouse-colored bronc going fast and far, but I sure know it went high. Also, I soon realized that my saddle wasn’t cinched tight. Every time we went high and handsome I can feel the slack in that cinch and it makes me nervous.

“Git to —— out of the way!” I hears Dirty yelp, and into me comes that gray bronc, sunfishin’ like forked lightning and whistling like a scared buck. It’s about sixty feet across that street to the front of the bank. Know how long it took us to get there? I ain’t there yet, if you’re curious to know, and this happened a long time ago.

But Dirty got there. Yessir, he got there. At the edge of the sidewalk his cinch busted and he went right in through one of the front windows. He went in feet first, into the window with the sign painted on it, and he stopped with one leg through the cashier’s window and the other leg waving for help.

My bronc stopped bucking long enough for me to see all that and then we turns right around—me and that high-minded piece of deviltry—and we bucked straight for Buck Masterson’s saloon. There’s a big crowd there, and they sure give us room. Some danged fool must ’a’ tried to kill that bronc, but missed and one bullet burned my ear, and the other peeled my knuckles on my left hand. Yes, we went in. By that time the cinch is back in the bronc’s flanks, and I’m riding wild and free on

its rump, with the saddle going further back all the time.

I didn't dare to fall off, so I done my dangdest. I got a view of scared faces as we made a mulligar of a perfectly healthy poker game and then I went up and jammed my head through the bale of a hanging-lamp, and took it with us, hanging around my neck.

The back door was partly open and we took it away, hinges and all, and then we're out in the open again, with Piperock, et cettery, howling in our rear. I banged the bronc with my hat and swung him back toward the street, where I runs into Dirty, backing across the street, shooting every direction. I skids that bronc to a standstill, and yells—

“Get up behind me!”

Dirty stubs his heel and falls down and danged near shot me. Then he gets to his feet and runs up to me.

“Get on behind you?” he yells. “How in —— can I? You're as far back as you can get! I'll get on in front.”

Dirty got on. The first jump that bronc made landed him up on its neck, where he locks his legs around under its jaws and away we went, me way back on its rump and him almost on its head, while Piperock fired salutes and cheered in a loud voice.

We turned a corner and bucked around and around until we slammed up against the jail, where my cinch slid down around the bronc's hind legs and I got kicked in the belly with both hind feet. Then the bronc whirled sideways, and slammed Dirty against the corner of the building. He just lets loose and drops like a suit of clothes, while the bronc whistles again and hits for the open country.

I ain't got no ambition left, but I've got sense enough to throw the saddle and Dirty Shirt Jones inside the jail, and then fall in after him. I kicked the door shut, but Piperock cometh not. There ain't no sign of pursuit. Pretty soon Dirty's lips open and he begins singing:

“—le-e-e-ft up your voice and see-e-e-e-ng. Ho-o-o-o-o-sa-a-na-a——”

“Shut up!” I croaks. “You ain't dead—yet.”

He sets up and licks his lips while he feels of his head.

“What did yuh say?” he asks, weak-like.

“I said, you ain't dead.”

“Feller, there's a lot of things that you don't know. Where are we?”

“In the jail.”

“Thank the Lord! This is better than I expected. What are we charged with?”

“How much did yuh get in the bank?”

“There wasn't anybody there,” he wails. “I left one boot. It hung in the cashier's window and I didn't have time to get it loose. How did we get here?”

I told him all I knew about it, and he marvels exceedingly.

“We obtained money under false pretenses, Ike,” says he. “We agreed to rob a bank and there wasn't nobody to hold up.”

“He agreed to plant a couple of horses for us,” says I, “and he either has a danged poor idea of what a feller rides to a bank robbery or we picked the wrong steeds.”

“Prognostications don’t alleviate the crack in my head,” says Dirty. “Pears to me that my brain is runnin’ out.”

“Cast aside all fear,” says I. “You never could hit that hard. I’ve got a splintered wish-bone and my stummick has been turned wrong side out. What will we do next, Dirty?”

“Get away from here,” says Dirty, which shows that his brains ain’t leaking to no great extent.

“How?” I asks. “Looks to me like this quiet little jail is about the only safe place for me and you.”

“Well, why in —— don’t somebody come along and chide us?” complains Dirty, nervous-like. “It ain’t like Piperock to do things like this, Ike. Why don’t they kill us and have it over with?”

“Want to die, feller?” I asks. “Pinin’ away for death, are yuh?”

“No, I ain’t, Ike, but if I’ve got to die—hurrah for ——! Who’s afraid of fire?”

“Shall we sneak back to the shack and get our disguises, Dirty?”

“Not me! If I’m goin’ to die, good. I’ll die as Dirty Shirt Jones, not as a buzzard-headed bug-hunter who is lookin’ for somethin’ that crawled away and died a million years ago.”

“Well, what yuh goin’ to do, Dirty? Figure a little, can’t yuh?”

“Figgers be ——! I’m to camp right here until dark, or until some figger of vengeance cometh along and herds me hence. *Sabe?* Give yourself up, go out and get shot, choke yourself to death with your own fair hands—do what you think best, Ike, but old man Jones’ little fair-haired child is goin’ inside a nice cool cell and sleep off a headache.”

“I can’t do nothin’ but foller yuh,” says I, sad-like.

“Your attachment for me is sweet,” says he. “I’m all choked up with e-motion, and if I didn’t feel so bad I would cry.”

Sometimes I wonder who left that quart of hooch under that bunk. We moved the bunk over, so nobody could see us from the sheriff’s office, and there she stood, brave and bold. Me and Dirty surrounds it, inhales the odors of Araby, originated in Kentucky and fixed with equal parts of alkali water, copperas, chewing-tobacco and coal-oil, for the consumption of Piperock’s leading citizens.

Then we humps up on the bunk and wishes each other a great deal of pleasure in the future. I reckon we done a lot of wishin’. I dreamed of a whole danged string of wishes hanging on a line like laundry out to dry, and when I woke it was dark. Dirty Shirt sounds like a dry saw going through a greasewood butt. I’m about to wake him up, when I hears voices. I jabs my heel into Dirty’s shins, and he sets up like one of them mechanical toys.

“Yeah, and I hope yuh gets ninety-nine years and the balance of your life,” we hears Scenery Sims saying in his rusty voice. “I’m goin’ to put yuh in and then I’m goin’ up-town and tell all about it. Some of them snake-hunters think I’m no good as a sheriff, but I gets my man.”

“Some old lady must ’a’ got drunk and fell down and busted her leg,” says Dirty in a hoarse whisper. “Hear that woodchuck peep?”

The door of the cell is yanked open, and two men comes inside. Me and Dirty ain’t ready for to be locked in, so as they comes in we goes out. Scenery stands there in the dark, sort of stiff-like. Dirty Shirt lights a match and holds it up. I hears Scenery give a gasp and then the match went out. Then his gun falls on the floor.

I feels two men slip past us in the dark, but I don’t reckon that Scenery heard ’em. He moved over the table, knocked the lamp-chimney on the floor, and then managed to light the rest of the lamp. He squints at us, and then goes over to the cell, where he peers inside. Then he sets down in a chair and

stares at us. We don't say a word, but we're dang near bustin' inside. Pretty soon Scenery gets up, like a feller walking in his sleep, and goes inside and pulls the door shut after himself.

"I—I don't know," he squeaks in a whisper, staring at us through the bars. "I ain't felt good for a week—dang it! Seein' spots in front on my eyes. It sure is —— to see things thisaway. Must be my stummick."

Dirty stepped over, blowed out the light and we went outside.

"Where to?" I asks.

"Any civilized port," says Dirty.

"Somewhere, Ike, there must be a place where a feller can use up the rest of his misspent life without hidin' behind a stump every time a human bein' shows up."

"We've got to get transportation," says I. "Let's go boldly and take a horse per each from the tie-rack, and go hence rapidly."

There's a crowd in front of Sam Holt's place. Me and Dirty went right to the rack, picked a likely looking bronc per each and got aboard, minus saddles and with nothing on their hammer-heads but hackamores and hair.

Man, I thought that mouse-colored animile could do everything in the book, but this long-legged roan proved to me that my other mount was peckin' along in the kindergarten class.

High and mighty we went. We changed ends, sunfishin' and worm-fencin', but Ike Harper didn't pull leather—'cause there wasn't any; but he sure did anchor himself to that bronc's mane with both hands, got a toe-holt under each shoulder and rode regardless of sun, moon, or tide.

I gets a glimpse of Dirty Shirt Jones ahead of me, and I'd tell a man Dirty is high above the animile's back, the same of which ain't healthy to nervous systems nor stummicks.

Into that crowd we went, ——ity blip. I got a rope under my chin, the same of which cut off my wind. Somebody got one arm around my neck and seems to caress me, and then I'm out in the open, far from the maddening crowd. I manages to get a breath, shoves the encircling arm from around my neck and finds that there's two of us.

I'm all mixed up in a rope. Out of the dark comes another rider, just as my bronc gets hopped in this danged rope, and turns a handspring. This other horse goes over the top of us, and as far as I'm concerned the earth and sky have met.

Later on I removes the veil and comes back to material things. All is dark and dreary. I hears Dirty singing, soft and low—

"I sa-a-a-a-w the-e-e-e new Jee-e-e-ru-u-u-u-sa-a-a-lem——" and on every word he quavers like some one was shaking his soul.

"——!" says I. "I went further back than that, Dirty. I saw the old town."

"—le-e-e-e-e-ft up your voice and see-e-e-ng," wails Dirty.

"I ain't got none to lift!" I yells, and Dirty stops. Then he says—

"Ike, I—I feel that my days are numbered."

"Mine too—thirteen," says I, and just then we hears a faint voice saying:

"O-o-o-oh! O-o-o-oh!"

"Does your horse talk English, Ike?" whispers Dirty, and just then a dim figure reels up to us and

sets down. It's still got some rope around its neck. We peers at it, and then Dirty scratches a match. It's Waldemar, wearing a half-inch rope for a necktie. He was the man I picked up on my way through the crowd.

“Waldemar,” says Dirty, “we welcome you to our graveyard.”

He wheezes for a moment and then manages to croak:

“Take that money back! Take it back!”

“Back to the bank,” he wheezes, when we don't say anything. “They—they was hanging me, bub—because I—I told 'em it was just a picture stunt. Take the money back!”

“Way around 'em, Shep,” gasps Dirty. “We didn't get no money. Dang it, there wasn't anybody in the bank!”

“Don't say that,” wails Waldemar. “I seen you. I got a hundred feet of the best hold-up on earth, and they were going to hang me.”

“But we didn't rob the —— bank!” I yowls.

Waldemar is silent for a while and then he says, weary-like—

“Well, somebody did.”

“I dimly remember tellin' Big Foot and Hoodoo what we was goin' to do,” says Dirty, sad-like. “That must 'a' been them two that Scenery brought to jail.”

Me and Dirty gets to our feet. My feet don't line up good, but I'm too good to lay down and quit.

“We'll just walk,” says Dirty, sad-like; “just walk and walk until we finds the place which is farthest from Piperock, and then we'll beg, borrow or steal some broncs and keep on goin'.”

“How about me?” wails Waldemar.

We stops and looks at him, kinda wondering-like.

“I must go back and get my film and camera before I leave,” says he, apologetic-like. “Then where shall I go?”

“Do just as yuh please,” says Dirty, “but as far as me and Ike Harper are concerned, all things bein' equal, you can take your —— creepin' tintypes and go plumb to ——!”

We pilgrims away in the darkness, two sufferin' souls, holding hands that our feet may keep pointing ahead. We're in no shape to walk and Dirty says:

“Slow up, can't yuh? They're lookin' for Big Foot and Hoodoo, not us. Scenery likely thinks he's got snakes. Don't go so fast, yuh——”

“Sa-a-a-y!” yowls Waldemar, far away. “They made me tell who done it.”

We didn't answer him. Dirty said—

“My ——, ain't yuh got no speed a-tall, Ike?”

Transcriber's Note: This story appeared in the June 18, 1921 issue of *Adventure* magazine.

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