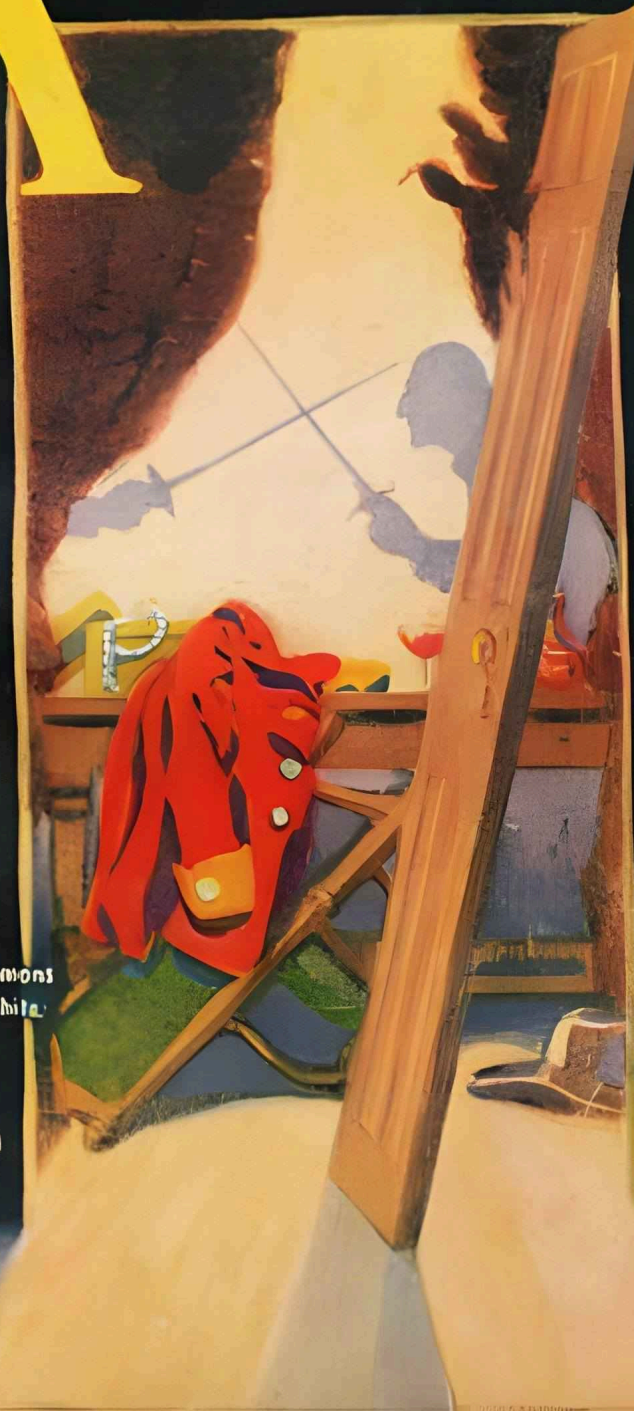
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK
WHEN LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST ***



WHEN LOVE’S LABOR’S LOST

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of “Sparing the Family Tree,” “The Wisdom of the Ouija,” etc.

“This is the land of the free and the home of the brave, the same of which makes your argument worthless. Everybody except ‘Testament’ Tilton was strong for the idea, and Testament, bein’ a preacher, don’t count.”

“Well,” says I, “it ain’t none of my business, but I don’t like it. I’ve got a right to an opinion, ain’t I? Just because a committee of danged fools agrees on anything it don’t mean that it’s all right and perfectly proper, does it? And besides all that, where in —— are you going to get a lion?”

“From the circus which is to be at Granite on the last day of August, Ike. We aims to purchase one from them.”

“Cost you a lot of money, Magpie, and I don’t

know of anybody in Piperock who is going to pay good money for a ordinary lion."

"Not ordinary lion, Ike—African."

Magpie Simpkins unhooks his spurs from the top of the table and rolls a smoke.

"The community is going to foot the bill," he explained. "We're goin' to sell chances on the lion. We sells the chances for enough to buy the lion and promote the entertainment. Five dollars per chance."

"I wouldn't pay five dollars for no lion."

"If you could win the lion, Ike? If your number wins you gets the lion free gratis and also a share of the receipts, which means two dollars per ticket."

"Is it the bull that Zeb Whittaker calls Calamity?"

"Uh-huh. Some animal, Ike."

"Some. But what is there about Labor Day which falls for a fight between a bull and a lion?"

"Just a novelty, Ike. You've got to hand it to us for handing Piperock something new and novel in entertainments. When me and Judge Steele, 'Wick' Smith, 'Buck' Masterson and 'Jay Bird' Whittaker gets together we sure surprizes ourselves with the things we can think of to do."

"You can't surprize me," says I. "I've suffered too many times from your brilliant ideas, Magpie. I don't *sabe* this Labor Day thing, but I reckon it has to be. Still it ain't going to be nothing in my existence, 'cause I won't be here. Nobody can point at me and say, 'Ask him—he was there.'"

"Say yuh won't?" Magpie looks sad-like at me and smooths his mustache.

"Said I wouldn't. Labor Day may be a hyiu

holiday, Magpie, but it ain't no sufficient reason for me to be a stepping-stone for a lion and bull fight. I ain't lost no lions and as far as the bull is concerned —there's a great plenty always. I sure am all packed up and ready for shipment the day before."

"I'm sorry for yuh, Ike."

"Go ahead and be sorry. I hope you enjoy the fight. I hope it is a howling success, but somebody will have to write and tell me about it, that's a cinch. Curse me if you will, but——"

"Curse yuh, Ike?"

Magpie's voice shows about two quarts of tears.

"Curse yuh, friend Harper? No, old pardner, I won't curse yuh, but——"

"No!" I yelps at the top of my voice. "—— you, let up on that sob stuff! You dog-goned——"

"Me and you has been selected to secure the lion," says he soft-like. "I promised 'em, Ike, and Magpie Simpkins never breaks his promise. I told 'em that you would go with me and I ain't goin' to let you make me out a liar. What did you say, Ike?"

"I didn't say. I was just wonderin' how we were going to haul the lion down here, Magpie."

"That's easy. We'll get a wagon, I reckon. Jay Bird is going to advance the money."

"Why not pull off the raffle first?"

"Not until after the fight, Ike. It's the uncertainty that is going to make it interesting. *Sabe?*"

"Uh-huh. Like shaking dice to see whether you're going to get shot or hung. I don't know what in —— anybody would want of a lion if they got it for five dollars."

"Yuh can't get African lions every day in the week, Ike."

"Be a —— of a place to live if you could, but that don't answer my questions, Magpie."

"Well, for gosh sake don't start any agitation like that! Let the winner decide what he wants to do with it."

"In other words—keep your danged mouth shut and let the lucky man get scratched."

"Something to that effect," says Magpie.

Old Testament Tilton sure is anti-bullfight. He rises with indignation and scorches us with his wrath. He calls a meeting to protest against it. "Dirty Shirt" Jones was the only one in the audience and he slept all through the protest.

Testament comes to us and promises that we'll never climb the golden stairs nor twang a harp. He points out the error of our ways and denounces our past, present and future.

"Desecratin' Labor Day by chargin' two dollars to see a lion and a bull fight each other," says he, wailing-like.

"I've got a free seat for the clergymen," says Magpie. "A seat where you can see every move of the fight."

Testament seems to consider this for a while and then—

"Do you think they will put up a good fight, Magpie?"

"You can't lose nothin' by taking a chance."

"That's right, Magpie. Verily, I reckon I'll have to bow down to the popular clamor. Didn't think I'd go,

but when you're in Rome you've got to do as the Romans does, I reckon."

"Yes," says I. "And when you're in Piperock, do as the rest of the —— fools do."

"Piperock ain't so bad," says Testament. "She needs better society, that's all, Ike."

"Yes," says I, "that's all —— needs."

Calamity was one of them cross-grained animals born with a grudge against everything on earth. He's sort of a blue-black color and inside his hide is the spirit of a grizzly and the ambition of a quart of nitroglycerin. Nobody knows why Zeb Whittaker keeps such an animal.

Calamity is a son of the cow that jumped over the moon and what he can't jump he goes through. Zeb has one puncher who don't have nothing to do but pack a hammer and some nails and foller Calamity's blazed trail.

"Weinie" Lopp tried to ride him once—just once. Weinie pulled leather for a mile, after which the cinch busted. Then Weinie played matador until he found a tree. About ten hours later we found the bull still waiting for him.

"Yuma" Yates bulldogged Calamity once. Somehow the bull got his horn tangled in Yuma's raiment and started for Canada with him. "Slim" Hawkins roped Yuma, yanked him loose, and then had to drag him half a mile to keep Calamity from hooking him. Everybody except Yuma applauded Slim for his presence of mind.

Then cometh the question of where this heroic

contest is to be held. It's a cinch it can't be done in a house.

"She's got to be bull-strong and lion-proof," says Buck.

"I've got a idea," says Wick, "and she's a good idea. We'll set posts from the corner of my store to the corner of Buck's place, and another bunch from Rickey's corner to Pete's blacksmith shop. We'll set in high posts and board 'em to the top. We can fix seats on top of the store, saloon, blacksmith and barber shop. *Sabe?* There will be plenty of room in the enclosed street for the fight, and the spectators will be up out of harm's way."

"I rise to applaud our foresighted citizen," states the judge. "You've got a beautiful thought, Wicksie."

"I don't know about the beauty of it, but she's plausible," agrees Magpie.

I meets Dirty Shirt, who is watching the digging of the post-holes, and he's seeking information. I explains the idea.

"Labor Day?" he asks. "Contest between a lion and a bull?"

Just then Magpie and the judge comes along.

"Who you fellers going to favor in this exhibition?" asks the judge. "Does you place your increment upon the chances of the feline or does you see grand prospects for the domestic quadruped?"

"My money stays in my overalls," states Dirty. "In a case like this I may dig a hole and bury it."

"Me," says I, "I feel as sorry for the lion as I do for the bull."

"Well, that settles that end of it," says the judge,

happy-like.

"The question is what?" asks Dirty.

"We needs two neutral witnesses," explains Magpie. "This here will be some contest, you understand, and many pieces of silver will be wagered. Them what has bet their money will be prejudiced in one way or another, which makes them noways fit to judge upon the outcome. You and Dirty Shirt Jones are hereby honored with the distinction of being the referees of said contest and your decision will stand. *Sabe?*"

"Yes, even if the hills do fall," says the judge. "Judge without fear or favor and let nature take its course."

"And," says Magpie, "we also hereby appoints you both to go with me to Granite to purchase said lion."

Me and Dirty Shirt sets down on the sidewalk and looks at each other. After while Dirty says:

"What do I know about lions? Why ask me to help pick lions? I don't know a danged thing about lions."

"Neither do I," grins Magpie. "But I'm willin' to do my dangdest. This is for the community at large and in the sublime interests of Labor Day. Be public-spirited for once in your lives. This little task will be a labor of love. There won't be no remuneration nor pay. Just a labor of love, gents."

"Labor of love sounds poetical," nods Dirty.

"It will be appreciated."

"Yes," say I. "I hope they appreciate it, as the horse-thief said when the rope broke."

Me and Magpie and Dirty Shirt and “Whiskers” went to Granite. I don’t know how Whiskers happens to adopt us, but he does. “Mighty” Jones is Whiskers’ lord and master, but I reckon Whiskers is one of the noble souls who arise above such masters as Mighty.

Way back in the dim and distant past Whiskers’ ancestors were blooded dogs, I reckon, but they associated with the rank and file, the same of which makes poor Whiskers the mulligan of all mutts. He’s big and hairy of face and according to Mighty he don’t know “sic ’em.”

We left our broncs at the stable and wandered uptown, with poor old Whiskers getting between our legs every time a strange dog shows up. The circus is there all right. It ain’t a awful big circus, but Magpie argues that it’s reasonable to suppose that their lions are just as big as the lions in a big circus.

Me and Dirty infests “Hoot” Duncan’s saloon while Magpie acts important around the outskirts of the circus.

“What brings you here?” asks Hoot.

“Lion,” says Dirty.

“Some folks can’t tell the truth,” agrees Hoot.

“Lion,” says Dirty. “L-i-o-n.”

“To buy one,” says I. “Me and Dirty has been commissioned to buy a raging lion, Hoot. One of them African ones.”

Just then a feller steps up to us and asks us to have a drink. He’s one of them slick-looking jaspers, and I sort of loosens my gun.

“I own a lion,” says he.

“Funny how me and you gets together,” says

Dirty. “How’s your lion?”

“Very well. I own Pluto, the original man-eating terror of the Congo. He has killed seventeen keepers. Beautiful black mane and——”

“We ain’t in the rug business, so the state of his mane and tail don’t cut no figure,” says Dirty. “We just want a lion, thassall.”

“After the show is loading tonight,” says the feller, “I might fix it so you could drive right away with Pluto in his cage. I wouldn’t want anybody to know it, ’cause Pluto is the big attraction of the circus.”

“Don’t ruin the circus on our account,” says Dirty. “It ain’t so danged necessary that we has a attraction, mister. Just slip us a lion.”

“Say, who is buying this here lion?” asks Magpie’s voice, and he horns into our midst. “I’m the lion-buyer.”

“We was just dickerin’,” says Dirty, grieved-like. “This gent owns a lion.”

“How much can you pay?” asks the feller.

“I don’t want no second-hand lion,” states Magpie, and I can see that he’s had several jolts of nerve tonic.

“Pluto ain’t never been scratched.”

“The price-tag says?”

“I’d rather talk privately to you,” says the feller. “Let me and you take a little walk.”

“Let ’em go, Ike,” says Dirty, tearful-like. “If I can’t buy a lion I’ll buy little drink. Have little drink?”

It’s the little things in life that count. Dirty Shirt

has a peculiar way of knowing when he's got enough, and when he finds that he's up to capacity you couldn't get another drop into him even with one of them hypodermic squirt-guns.

Down in Piperock he always shoots at the little bell on top of the Mint Hall, and if he misses it three times in a row he quits drinking. Here he is in a strange place with no bell in sight and the feeling that he might be imbibing too much.

"C'mon, Ike," says he, tearful-like. "Let's go find shomethin' t' shoot at."

I couldn't 'a' hit the other side of the street with a shotgun, but I agreed that a target was necessary, and we started out with Whiskers tripping us up every time he hears a noise.

I don't know where we went, but after while I finds that me and Dirty are setting on a pile of canvas talking to a stranger. Dirty is crying like his heart was broke, and after while my ears get tuned proper-like and I hears some conversation.

"Lions don't amount to much," says the feller. "Lions ain't got no guts when it comes to fighting. You folks are going to be a lot disappointed. As I said before, you ought to have a tiger."

"Tha's a fact," sobs Dirty. "Nice li'l striped tagger. Wish we had one."

"Well, why not buy one?" asks the feller. "Sell you one for a hundred dollars cash."

"Zasso? Give you eight."

"Eight dollars? That would be robbery."

"Yuh might holler for the sheriff," says Dirty.

"Sell you one for a hundred dollars."

"Hunnerd dollars? Thanks. Wouldn't Piperock applaud us, Ike?"

"If I had a hundred dollars I wouldn't need applause," says I.

"Ain't you got nothing you could sell and get the hundred?"

"Mister," sobs Dirty, "I ain't got nothing left but my honor."

"Which makes you in debt up to your eyebrows," says I, and then I went to sleep.

I don't know how long I slept, but I know it was awful dark and raining hard when I woke up. My mouth feels raspy and in front of my eyes are black spots like the patent-medicine advertisements tell about. I finds a place where they sells glass-covered cheer, and then I hunts for Magpie and Dirty. They ain't in evidence, so I goes down to the stable, saddles my brown mare by the light of a lantern, and I'm just riding out, when "Foghorn" Foster steps into the door of the stable and says—

"Where yuh goin' with that animal?"

It's none of his business, and anyway I don't feel like arguing. I paid the bill when I left the horse there, so it ain't anybody's business where I'm going.

Foghorn acts excited and empties his gun at me as I went down the street. A couple of bullets hive up in the cantle of my saddle, but I just considers the source and keeps going.

It's about four miles to Wind River, and I sure fogged some in that rain. I figured that I'd catch Magpie and Dirty. I skidded down the bank of the

river and into the water, and just then a flash of lightning gives me a view of something out of the ordinary.

It's one of them fancy circus-wagons, and it's stranded in the middle of the river. I rides out to it, and just then comes to my ears, sad and low—

"Rocked in th' cra-a-a-dul of th' dee-e-e-p I lay me ——"

"Dirty!" I yells. "What yuh wailing about?"

"The —— doubletree busted!" he howls, "The team is gone and me and poor Rajah are stranded in the ragin' flood." And then he begins singing—

"Secure I rest upon th' wa-a-a-a-ve——"

"Shut up, you danged fool!" I yelps. "Who is Rajah?"

"Tagger. Roarin', ragin' tagger. Seventeen stripes and whiskers like a Rooshun."

"Is there a tiger in that wagon?"

"Signed, sealed and de-livered."

"Where's Magpie?"

"I ain't Magpie's keeper—I'm tagger's keeper. Come and have a little drink, Ike."

"How did you get the money to buy a tiger? Did you sell your honor?"

"Tha's a shubjec' for deliberation. I don' jus' know how it comes about. It was dark and the circus was over and this feller helped me on thish wagon and he took my money and I—— Well, the wheel hit a rock and the double-tree busted an—— Aw, let's have a little drink, Ike."

"Where did the team go?"

"Tha's a —— of a question. I'm no palmist."

Dirty sets there on top of that wagon, humped up in the rain, and every time the lightning flashes I can see him taking a drink. I rides back out there, climbs up with him, and turns my bronc loose. I don't know why I done that, but it ain't the first locoed thing I've ever done.

We has a few drinks together, and then I humps up there with him. Man, it's raining in sheets, and that same old Wind River is one stream what can rise and shine.

"Sto-o-o-orm-e-e-e th' night and th' waves ro-o-o-o-ll high," wails Dirty. "Swiftly th' ship—— Say, Ike, this danged thing's moving!"

Comes a longer flash of lightning and I notices that we've turned around and are pointed toward the Pacific Ocean.

"The anchor's busted!" yelps Dirty, and just then we hits a rock and almost upsets.

"Set still, you danged fool!" I yells.

"Cloud must 'a' busted!" yowls Dirty.

Man, I'd say it must have busted complete-like. Wind River ain't ordinarily a raging torrent, but this storm makes her rise plentiful. A couple of trees hooks up with us, and we have a regular parade.

"I wish I could get a message ashore," says Dirty. "Our bottle is almost empty. I'm so danged——"

But the wind blew the rest of it away.

It almost took me and Dirty with it. I feels a ripping crash under us and the danged craft whirls over sideways, and we climbs over and over that thing like one of them squirrel-cage riggings, and the

thing sort of busts apart.

After while she hits her stride again, and me and Dirty has time to get our breath.

"We lost our runnin'-gear," cracks Dirty. "Lost our —my ——!" Dirty crawls over my lap, and I turns my head. There on the end of our craft shines a pair of eyes. I reckon Rajah's full to the gills with alkali water and his soul is sore within him.

"Kittie, kittie, kittie, kittie," says Dirty squeaky-like. "Nice kittie."

"Stop it!" I yells. "Nice little ——! Don't let on that you see him."

"We've got to ketch him, ain't we?" wails Dirty. "He cost us a hundred dollars, Ike, and we've got to ketch him, ain't we?"

"——, don't let that worry yuh," says I. "He ain't going to be no trouble that-a-way. Tigers are easy to catch."

Just then the wind spins our boat around and we has a hard time hanging on. I shakes a lot of water out of my eyes and hears Dirty say—

"Now—now, don't be so —— tame!"

The boat give another whirl, and I grabs for Dirty —and I think I got Rajah by the tail. Man, there was something doing about that time.

"*Yar-r-oo-o-o-o-o-o!*" yowls Rajah, and just then we hits a reef, and everything goes into the flood. I reckon that danged striped cat turned a flip-flop and lit on top of me in the river.

I ain't no tiger-hunter. None of my folks as far back as I can hear about has ever lost any wild animals, but I has presence of mind enough to drown

the danged thing if possible.

First I'm under and then the cat is under. We sure played tag all over Wind River and it was some embrace, I'd tell a man. There is times when the danged thing don't struggle at all, and again it tries to show its authority a heap.

Then we skids out on a sand-bar and rolls high out of the water. I knowed I ain't much on fighting tigers on dry land and with bare hands and I tries to pull my gun, but finds that I ain't even got a belt left. The tiger lays plumb still, so I figures to sneak away as easy as possible. I'm crawling through the mud when I hears a voice speak, very low—

"I reckon the —— thing got a plenty or it thinks I'm dead."

"What —— thing?" I asks.

"Shut up!" hisses Dirty. "That tiger just left me. Keep still and maybe it will go away. I had it danged near drowned."

"All right," says I, weak-like. "I'll keep still about it, Dirty Shirt."

"I think we better go somewhere," says Dirty, after while. "My feet are all wet."

"Your feet? Is that all?"

"I said 'feet'," says he, peevish-like. "My feet are —oh——!"

I glances around, and there in the dark near where Dirty Shirt must be is a pair of bright and shining eyes.

"The —— fool don't know when he's got enough," wails Dirty. "Kittie, kittie, kittie! Nice little kittie!"

"*Wr-r-oof!*"

I hears a *thud*, and them lights go out.

"Don't monkey with me," states Dirty Shirt, hoarse-like. "Don't do it. I'd just as soon hit a tagger with a rock as a ——"

Them lights open up just about in the same spot, and the next second Dirty bumps me and we went down together. I didn't stay down—not me. Self-preservation is strong within me and my mind is fancy-free. I bounced right to my feet and I just ran.

It was so dark I couldn't see a danged thing, but I went somewhere. I reckon Dirty Shirt went somewhere too. I hit the road, and behind me I can hear the panting exhaust of that man-eatin' tiger. It didn't spur me to further efforts, 'cause a human being can only go just so fast anyway.

It's raining awful hard, but I knowed when I went into the next ford, 'cause it knocked my feet out from under me and I turns dismal flip-flops until I lands high, but not dry, on the sand-bar. I manages to crawl up out of the flood and just then I hears very hoarse-like—

"Kittie, kittie, kittie, kittie! Nice kittie," and then a rock comes along and bounces off my vertebray.

"What do you think you are throwing rocks at?" I asks.

There is silence for a moment, and then Dirty says, complaining-like—

"Run in a circle, —— the luck!"

"Think you did?" I pants.

"Think ——! I know I did. No human bein' could keep ahead of me at the speed I went. Where's the

tagger, Ike?"

"Must 'a' been behind you," says I, "'cause it's a cinch he wasn't in front of me."

Just then we hears something splashing the water. It blows some water out of its throat, and then we hears it grunt as it comes out of the water.

"Lay still!" croaks Dirty. "Taggers won't hurt dead things."

"Likely not," says I. "But neither will anything else."

Me and Dirty are close together, so we lays down and don't move. We can hear the tiger sniffin' around us, and we almost has heart-disease when it shakes the water off itself. I got most of that water in my face. Then the tiger licked me right in the nose with its tongue. Man, I rose right up and took that tiger by the face.

I ain't no fighter, but I don't allow no danged convict cat to get familiar with me that-a-way. I'm mad. I clasped that cat to my bosom, looked it right in the face and then cast it back into the flood.

"My ——! What was that?" squeaks Dirty when he hears the splash.

"Whiskers!" I yelps.

"Whiskers? The faithful old thing. He—he came to find us."

"Yes," say I. "After somebody locked him in a cage and sold him to you. You —— fool!"

Me and Dirty crawled off the sand-bar and headed for Piperock down that muddy road, squashing along through the mud and rain.

After while I says:

"You sure done well, Dirty. You might at least 'a' got a tiger."

"Uh-huh, I might, Ike, but where'd we been? I can see the lights of Piperock. If we'd 'a' got a real tagger, we'd never lived to see them welcome lights, and—and today is the glorious Labor Day, Ike. If I'd got a tagger instead of Whiskers we'd never lived to see old Piperock celebrate Labor Day."

"—— Whiskers!" says I.

We plodded around the outskirts of the town and went to my cabin, where we chucked off our muddy clothes and went to bed.

It was afternoon when we woke up. I hears a few shots, so I shakes Dirty loose from a large snore and we gets dressed.

Piperock sure looks queer. There's a tall stockade built right across the street, and beyond that is all mystery to us. From the number of horses and vehicles I'd say that Yaller Rock County came to the party.

We meets "Hassayampa" Harris from Curlew, and Hassayampa is tearfully intoxicated. He hands us a quart and talks of the wrongs of mankind.

"I've spent sixty dollars in chances on that lion, two dollars to behold the performances, and I've lost all my tickets."

"Tell 'em about it," says Dirty, prying his teeth loose from the neck of the bottle. "Claim what's yours, Hassayampa."

"Yeah?" Hassayampa looks sad-like at the bottle. "Yeah? With 'Scenery' Sims at the one ladder, the

ladder where my ticket is good, and the rest of the seats all took? I explains to Scenery, but he's hard of hearing."

"Shoot him," advises Dirty. "Make him listen to reason."

"He's got a riot-gun, Dirty—one of them end-loaders, and she's got a handful of horse-shoe nails in each barrel. Dang the luck, I helped Pete Gonyer load it—before I started to mourn my loss. We heard that Paradise was contemplatin' free seats, and we took certain measures to change their minds."

"We'll get in all right," says I. "We're the referees."

"Referees? Say, ain't there something I can help yuh at?"

"Dirty," says I, "let loose of that bottle and tell the gent what he can do for us. Can we use him?"

"No question about it, Ike. C'mon, Hassayampa, and may the best man win."

We went all around behind them buildings, but there's only one ladder still in contact with the earth, so we starts up.

"You can't come up here!" squeaks Scenery, shoving that muzzle-loader over the edge into my face. "Git down, dang yuh!"

"We're the referees," says I. "Git that hen-hawk sprayer behind thee and let us officials up."

"No such thing has been said to me," says Scenery. "I'm here to see that nobody gets up free. Where's your tickets?"

"I lost mine," says Hassayampa.

"Go find it," grins Scenery, and the danged little

squeaky-voiced cross between a rusty hinge and a coyote kicked the ladder loose.

I don't know yet in just what order we hit the earth, but I know that me and Dirty Shirt got tangled in the ladder, one end of which was hooked over a saddle-horn on a bronc, which was tied to a wagon-wheel. There ain't no ties which binds a bronc in a case like that, and me and Dirty Shirt seemed to get a travois ride which we didn't ask for.

The bronc seems to skid into the back door of Rickey's barber-shop, busted the door open and also loses the saddle, the same of which lets us stop with nothing worse than the loss of memory and some skin.

I comes back to earth and hears a lot of cheering, and there is Hassayampa standing by the busted door, grinning like a fool.

Dirty Shirt is setting there making motions like he was swimming. I reckon he thinks he's still in Wind River with the tiger.

"What's the joke?" I asks, and Hassayampa points at the busted door.

"They locked all the back doors," says he. "But the bronc opened this'n. Let's go inside and watch the show through the front window."

We dragged Dirty Shirt inside, fastened the door and then went up to the front window. We can see the crowd on top of the Mint Hall and on Pete's blacksmith shop, and as far as we can see there's a solid line of humanity on top of the stockade.

Me and Hassayampa imbibes from his bottle while we congratulates each other on having such a

lovely view of the arena.

"Ringside sheats," says Hassayampa. "Right where we can shee——"

"Heh, heh, heh, heh," says Dirty, sort of jerky-like.

I looks down at him, sitting with his back against the door, and he's sort of jerking his shoulders and making funny noises with his lips.

"He'll be all right," says Hassayampa. "He's——"

Hassayampa's voice gets weak, and I turns my head.

Between us and the back door stands what I'd decipher to be Pluto!

Pluto don't seem a danged bit surprized at meeting us. He's one of them every-day sort of lions which is classed as King of Beasts. He yawns at us and sets there sort of dignified-like.

"Heh, heh, heh," says Dirty, like he had a fishbone in his throat.

"Well," says Hassayampa, offhanded-like, "there ain't nothin' much we can do, is there? The front door is locked."

"Why don't you shoot it?" I asks. "Where's your gun?"

"I know how it comes that the lion is in here," says Hassayampa, ignoring my question. "They locked him in here this morning. Notice that Rickey's stuff is all moved?"

"Reckon we ought to applaud your knowledge?" I asks. "The fact that you knows how the lion happens to be in here ain't going to temper the wind to the

shorn lamb none to speak about. I'd admire to see you kill it."

"Heh, heh, heh," says Dirty.

From outside comes the roar of the multitude and we hears the rumbling of a he-cow, evidently searching deep for sounds to tell how bad he is.

"They've got the bull in Pete's shop," states Hassayampa. "Got the front door fixed so they can lift the bar from above with a rope."

"*Yeow-o-o-o-oof!*" yawns Pluto.

Just then Dirty Shirt shakes his head a few times and gets to his feet. He stares at us and then at the lion. He rubs his eyes and looks around.

"I reckon we didn't get up that ladder, eh?" says he, foolish-like.

Just then comes a awful roar from the multitude, and I takes a chance on turning my back on the lion. I sees the door of Pete's shop open and out comes Calamity. That bull skids plumb into the middle of the street and then throws up its head to observe the assemblage. Calamity had got a flag fastened to his horns and it makes him a heap inconsolable.

Just then I hears a scraping noise in front of our lion's den, and I sees a rope yank a bar loose, and the front door swings open. Pluto licks his lips and takes a couple of steps toward us, peering at the open door. Then he sets down and yawns.

Dirty Shirt edges slow-like to the door, starts to step outside and then turns right around and steps inside again. We can hear the multitude yelling for the lion to come out and get licked. I reckon a lot of folks favor the bull.

Then Pluto seems to get a longing to go outside. He shakes himself and coughs like a locomotive and then he begins sneaking up on us.

"Gents," quavers Hassayampa, "the time is drawin' nigh when we've got to choose between bein' clawed by a lion or gored by a bull. What does you vote, Ike?"

"Democratic!" I yelps and went out of that door on the wing.

I know something about bulls, but lions are plumb unknown. I whirled around the corner of the door just in time to see Hassayampa fall flat in the doorway, and over his prostrate body goes Pluto, and hanging on to Pluto's tail, bouncing along on his high-heels, is Dirty Shirt.

Comes an awful yell from the audience, and above its call sounds Yuma Yates' voice:

"Leggo that lion! Leggo, daw-gone yuh! You can't handicap my bets."

Pluto skids to a stop in the middle of the arena, and Dirty stands there hanging on to the lion's tail and looking around foolish-like.

"*Yar-r-r-r-oo-o-o-o!*" yowls Pluto, the same of which put the fear deep into Calamity's heart, and that danged bull twists his tail over his back and comes right straight at me.

Man, I reverts to my ancestors right then and proceeds to climb up one of the porch posts. I did well—while the post lasted. Calamity must 'a' hit it head center, and unjointed it from the top and bottom at the same time.

I seems to get a zigzag view of the surroundings

and then I finds myself straddle of that onery blue bull with both arms wrapped around that porch post. We went some. Hassayampa went some too. Hassayampa was just in front of Calamity, while out in the middle of the arena is Dirty Shirt, trying his dangest to hang on to that lion's tail and keep it from doubling back on him.

I lost my porch post on the second lap of the arena, and about that time I'm of the opinion that the hump of a bull's shoulders ain't no fitting place for comfort. By this time I reckon everybody is enjoying the spectacle and I gets advice in large quantities.

We passed Hassayampa on the first lap and I'm wondering where he is, when the bull starts pitching and I slides down on his neck and gets him by the horns. I looks back once and I sees Hassayampa coming along behind, taking ten-foot steps and hanging on to the bull's tail.

Pluto seems to get the speed fever, and the first thing I know he's inching past me still towing Dirty Shirt, who is running wild-eyed and reckless. He glances up through the dust and yells—

"Come on you—snail!"

Some folks never seem to want to let well enough alone. I was all right—and so was Calamity. Maybe we both was a little mixed as to distance and direction, but that wasn't no reason for outside interference. Pluto was running on his own side of the track, and as long as he kept going Dirty Shirt was O. K.

I glanced up once and I seen Magpie standing on

the edge of Buck Masterson's saloon-front, whirling a rope, while behind him stands Buck, Judge Steele and Wick Smith. It appears that them last three constitutes the snubbing-post, being as there ain't hardly ever any snubbing-posts built on top of saloons.

They braces themselves behind that false front. Magpie sure can drop a nasty loop. It dropped over one of Calamity's horns and around my waist—and us going forty miles in no time. I'm betting that when we takes up the slack I ain't over seven inches around the waist, and it cinches me plumb tight to Calamity's horn. I turned my head and looked up and I seen four men and part of Buck's saloon-front yank high and handsome, and then me and Calamity turns a handspring.

I hears four distinct thumps before me and Calamity hits upside down, and then my candle seems to flicker. I know before I hit that I'm dead as ——. I know that my race is run and I finished about three-thirty. My past rose up before me, and looking backward, I ain't afraid to die. Sometimes it's a heap easier to die than to live, and I thought—

"They might have another celebration."

After while I seems to sort of get a hazy idea of what is going on, and I finds myself still roped to Calamity, but Calamity ain't doing much. I'm setting on his neck, and it appears they've forgot to take off the rope.

Quite a lot of Piperock is gathered around and several of 'em are talking all at once. I gets my eyes

focused straight and I appears to behold a fat feller, wearing a real fancy vest and a gaudy watch-chain, and he's waving his fat hands a heap as he talks.

"I paid our good money just the same," says Magpie. "I acted in good faith."

"I don't care a hang what you done!" howls the fat man. "I own that circus. Just because you darn rubes ain't got no better sense than to buy a lion from some tin-horn gambler who never owned as much as a coyote-skin rug, you think everything is O. K.

"Somebody else got away with the parade-wagon, which didn't have anything in it, but we found the team. What I want now is my lion, or a hundred dollars. Where is my lion? Eh?"

"Ike," squeaks Scenery Sims, and he elbows his way up to me, "Ike, I've got to arrest you for stealing a horse."

"What horse?"

"Mine," says Foghorn Foster. "Brown mare with Circle Dot on her left shoulder. Dirty Shirt sold her to me for fifty dollars."

"I want my lion or a hundred dollars," says the fat man. "That lion was worth a thousand dollars," says the fat man.

"Not for fightin' purposes," says Magpie.

"You'll have to come to jail, Ike," says Scenery.

"Lion or a hundred dollars," says Fatty.

"Where is Dirty Shirt?" I asks.

"He's where the lion is, I reckon," says Buck. "The last I seen of them they was going in the window of the Mint Hall, and Dirty still had the lion by the

tail."

I feel a movement under me and I looks down at Calamity. He's opening and shutting his eyes, and them eyes are green as grass. Calamity dead? Say, that bull ain't even sick—he's mad.

"I'll take that hundred dollars or sue——"

Boof!

I seen Magpie reach out one foot, hook it behind Fatty's heels and lift hard. The circus feller upends and lands right in my arms. We sprawls all over that prostrate bull, and I reckon that is all Calamity needs to bring him to life.

Did he arise? He did. With me and Fatty on his neck and shoulders he got right up among that group of folks and started out to make things interesting. Calamity don't look around to sort of get his bearings like any self-respecting bull would.

He just bowed his back, plowed ahead, slipped one horn under Foghorn's belt and started going plentiful and strong. Scenery must 'a' handed Foghorn that shotgun when he makes the arrest, 'cause time Calamity swings his head them gawping muzzles seems to brush my eyebrows.

"Lemme go! Oh, lemme go!" howls the circus man.

"Go?" yells Foghorn, waving that shotgun. "What in —— do you think you're doing now?"

"Pow-w-w-w-w-der River-r-r-r-r-r!" howls the gang perched on the reserved seats, and then some misguided *hombres* begins to take shots at us.

Magpie has the right idea of stopping a bull. He hops in front of Calamity and tosses a blanket over

the bull's head. The idea was good, but Magpie slipped getting back, and Calamity knocked him halfway across the street.

"One baby down—one see-e-e-gar!" howls somebody, and just then Calamity quits running circles and points straight for the open door of the barber-shop.

I seen Foghorn try to dodge, but it ain't no use, and the thought, "He'll never prosecute you, Ike," flashes through my brain. Just then comes a crash. The door wasn't wide enough, so Calamity took part of the building out in widening it. In fact there were two crashes—going in and coming out.

When I got the shingle-nails, plaster and *Police Gazettes* out of my eyes, and the dandruff ad picture from around my neck, we're outside and going fast and free.

The fat circus man is still with us. I've got one arm hooked around his neck, and he's got my sleeve in his teeth. In one hand he's got a shaving-mug and in the other a door-knob.

Foghorn is on his stummick across the bull's neck, still hanging on to that shotgun, although his thoughts are not of mundane things. Of course I sees all these details in sort of a dazed way. I looks back towards Piperock, but the old town has faded away in a dim and distant past.

Then I turns to reason out our probable destination. As far as I can prognosticate we're headed for Canada, but between us and the realm of the Canuck is one gosh-awful deep washout, where alkali mud reigns supreme and sticky.

I tried to disengage myself from the fat man and the bull, but I'm asleep from my Adam's apple to my boots. I starts to think that this is a queer state of affairs, when I feels the front end of Calamity drop sudden-like, and then I says to me—

"Nothing but horseshoe luck will ever bring you back to your friends, Mister Harper."

And then I spread my pinions and flew. I never felt so free in my life. I hears two noises like *Hee-e-e-e-e! Hee-e-e-e-e!* going past me, and far below me comes two faint reports. I says to myself—

"Foghorn, you're a danged poor wing shot."

Then I tries to soar like a buzzard, but I reckon something was wrong with my soarer, so I turned over a few times just to show that it could be done, and then somebody seems to throw the whole country at me.

At the time I sort of wondered why I didn't bounce. I wondered why they didn't quit ringing the church bells and then I wondered who would inherit my brown mare, now that me and Foghorn are both dead. Then I begins to feel sort of cold and clammy, and I says to me:

"Your circulation is over, Ike. You're deader than ——."

Then I sat up and clawed the mud out of my eyes.

Above me is Calamity, sitting on his rump on that slippery bank, digging his hoofs into the mud and shaking his head like he objected to everything on earth.

On the other side of the washout is Foghorn

hanging by the slack of his clothes to a snag. He's just about as animated as an old suit of clothes, and as I'm looking at him there comes a slight tearing sound, and he drops flat on his face in the mud in the bottom.

From beside him raises a big gob of mud which gradually takes the form of a man. Two gobby hands come up and mop the mud off its face, and I beholds our circus man. Calamity stares down at us, waving his big head and making a mournful noise deep in his throat, which sounds like—

"I'm-m-m-m-m-m-m goin' ho-o-o-o-o-o-me."

"So am I," says I, and then I tries to stand up in that mud-hole!

"Er-r-r-r-row-w-w-w-w! Hu-u-u-u-u-h!"

I turns my head. Right up the bottom of that wash-out, squashing along in that mud comes Pluto, covered with the gooey stuff, and right behind him wabbles Dirty Shirt Jones, hanging on to Pluto's tail with one hand and a section of two-by-four in the other. Dirty has got his shirt and boots on yet, but he's depending on mud for the rest of his raiment.

Pluto stops and wails loud-like, but Dirty wallops him with the club and they come on.

I claws my way out of their line of march, but when Pluto sees me he refuses to go any further and sets down.

"Howdy, Dirty," says I. "Breakin' the thing to drive with a jerk-line?"

"Huh—huh—huh—" says he, staring at me.

He looks at the rest of the bunch, and then stares at Calamity.

“I’ve had a —— of a time—you know it?” he whispers. “Me ’n’ th’ lion. I’ve got the —— thing licked, y’betcha. I tol’ him I was goin’ to run him ragged fer jerkin’ me out of the back winder of the Mint Hall. Fell thirty feet.”

“Why didn’t you let loose of his tail?”

“I ain’t loco!” he wails. “Long as I’ve got hold of that end he can’t bite me, can he?”

“When he went out of the window,” says I, “why didn’t you let loose then?”

“My ——! A feller can’t think of everything, can he?” and just then Dirty seems to get a better view of the circus man. Dirty blinks the mud out of his eyes and then lets loose of Pluto’s tail and takes the club in both hands.

“Set where you are!” he snaps at the lion, and that King of Beasts seems to sort of shrink into the mud. Then Dirty comes sneaking ahead until he comes up to the circus man, where he stops and glares down at him.

“That man owns the circus,” says I.

“Yeah?” says Dirty. “He’s the son-of-a-gun who sold me the tagger.”

“I—I was fuf-foolin’,” says the feller. “I—I—it ain’t my circus. I don’t own the lion. I—I figured I could scare them into payin’——”

Dirty reaches down, yanks the feller to his feet and turns him around facing Foghorn, who is trying to understand with his ears full of mud.

“Give him a hundred dollars,” orders Dirty.

The circus feller digs a roll of bills out of his pockets and hands ’em to Dirty, who peels off a

hundred and hands it to Foghorn, who acts like he didn't understand.

"We're buying them horses back!" yells Dirty.

"I'm going back, too," says Foghorn, whose ears are so full of mud that he couldn't hear the crack of doom. He wades out of the mud, starts to climb the opposite bank, and gets almost to Calamity before he sees him. Then he whirls and starts running along that slippery bank.

Calamity needed some bait like that to take his mind off other things, and he gets right up, skids into a run and follers poor old Foghorn.

They're both running about twenty-five miles an hour, and getting ahead about two. The last we seen of 'em it was about an even bet. Then we sizes up our circus man.

"What was your official capacity with that circus?" asks Dirty.

"Shell game."

"How much money you got?"

"How much? None of your —— business!"

"That ain't much," admits Dirty. "But we're having a sale. Come on."

He leads the gambler around behind Pluto, and that black-maned terror of the Congo just shudders and sets there drooling. Then Dirty picks up the lion's tail and puts it in the gambler's hand. Then he peels off a few bills from the gambler's roll and puts 'em in his pocket.

"Witness a fair sale, Ike," says Dirty. "Going, going, gone! Sold! Mister, you've bought something."

"I don't want no lion!" wails the feller.

"Hang on to that tail!" snaps Dirty, and then he steps in and hits Pluto across the ribs with his scantling. Pluto yowls back at us and then starts on through that mud, searching deep inside his bosom for sounds to tell how much he misses his nice circus home while the mud-covered gambler oozes and squashes along behind him, hanging on to Pluto's tail.

"He can't hurt you if you don't let loose," yells Dirty, and we stands there and watches 'em travel up the mucky bottom of that washout—a dazed gambler and a disgusted lion, going no place and without a reason on earth.

"Pluto will likely kill him," says I.

"What with?" asks Dirty. "He ain't got no teeth nor claws left. He's a lion in name only, Ike, and I reckon the gambler is the more dangerous of the two."

Magpie was just limping up to the cabin door as we came around the corner. He looks us over solemn-like and then sets down on the steps.

"I ain't got the heart to chide yuh," says he. "Not after seeing what happened to yuh. Everybody got their money back except the fifty I paid for the lion."

"My gosh!" grunts Dirty. "I overcharged for Pluto."

And then he hands Magpie fifty dollars. Magpie looks at the money and puts it in his pocket without asking a question. Me and Dirty sets down with him, and the three of us sets for quite a while in silence.

After while Magpie scratches his ear and observes

—

"There will always be a question which is the best fighter—the lion or the bull, 'cause the way things broke it was impossible to tell which won."

"I know who lost," says Dirty, digging a hunk of mud out of his hair. "Piperock got something for nothing, didn't they? Maybe it wasn't much, gents, but it was something. Now, us three went plumb to Granite, suffered the pangs of—Magpie, didn't you say something about us bein' laborers of love? Didn't yuh? Ain't we the losers?"

"Love's labor loses," nods Magpie. "Don't it sound poetical?"

"Up to a certain point she was poetical," says Dirty. "But after she gets past that point she's what 'Muley' Bowles would designate as 'blank verse.'"

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