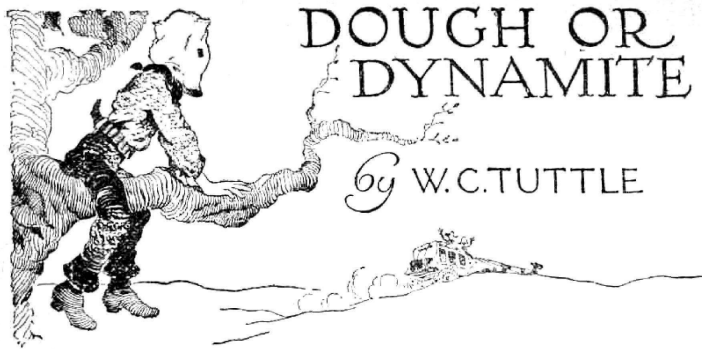


**DOUGH OR
DYNAMITE**



DOUGH OR DYNAMITE

Me and “Muley” Bowles and “Chuck” Warner are putting a saddle on a colt in the Cross J corral, when “Telescope” Tolliver enters the precincts of said ranch, and we gets our first glimpse of Archibald Ames.

Archibald occupies a seat on the buckboard with Telescope, and they soon comes over and climbs on top of the corral fence. Archibald’s name fits him—in a way. The length of his first name indicates his girth and his last name his height. He’s one of them persons who you’d never invite to set down, ’cause he don’t seem to require no such posture.

It takes him quite a long time to negotiate the top-pole of the corral, and when he does get up there he has to balance—his feet won’t reach the next pole. He’s wearing them dinky little pants, with the seat of a shoplifter and the knees of Lord

Fauntleroy. His calves perspire in shiny leggings, and for a hat he wears a libel on the name of Stetson.

Muley gives him a passing glance, yanks up another notch on the cinch, and grunts—

“What’ll we do with it?”

“Love it to death or render it out,” grunts Chuck. “Looks to me like one of them playthings for kids that yuh can’t tip over and make it stay down. Let’s give this colt a chance to breathe, while we peers a little closer at this attraction.”

We ambles over and looks up at the critter’s soles.

“Mister Ames,” orates Telescope, “I’m obliged to make yuh used to Muley Bowles. He’s the sylph-like critter in woolly chaps. That one with the sad, horse-faced features is Chuck Warner, the anti-George Washington of Yaller Rock County, and the other person down there is Henry Peck. They’re all harmless.

“Bunch, this is Mister Archibald Ames, who is to be with us for a spell.”

“I’m pleased to meet yuh,” smiles Archie.

“You ought to be,” agrees Muley. “It ain’t often that we shows this much interest in a stranger. What seems to bring yuh hither?”

“I brung him,” states Telescope. “Mister Ames is looking for local color. Sabe?”

“What’s he done, and is he wanted by Federal, State or county?” asks Chuck, serious-like, wiggling his ears.

Chuck can wiggle his ears just like a mule.

“Done what?” grunts Telescope. “Chuck, you boob, don’t yuh know what local color is?”

“I’ll bite,” grins Chuck. “Go ahead and spring it, Telescope.”

Telescope clears his throat, rolls a cigaret and glares at Chuck, who glares right back, and wiggles his ears.

“Look at them ears!” applauds Archibald. “I’d love to get a close-up of them.”

“Mister,” reproves Chuck, “it ain’t seemly that a stranger should set on top of a corral and make remarks about the physical failings of a native son. Keep on at the pace you’ve started, and that spell that Telescope spoke about can be spelled in four letters: g-o-n-e. Sabe?”

“You got a lot to say about it, now ain’t yuh?” reproves Telescope. “You ain’t nothing around here but a forty-dollar puncher. You got a lot of chance to tell visitors where to head in. Come on, Mister Ames, and we’ll go up and see the man what owns this ranch, and ain’t no more sense than to pay forty dollars to a runt like that.”

They climbs down and goes up to the ranch-house.

“Haw! Haw! Haw!” whoops Muley, shaking every ounce of his two hundred and forty pounds of bone and lard. “Haw! Haw!

'Come on, Mister Ames, and we go up to see the man'—haw, haw, haw! You will tell folks where to head in at, will yuh?"

Muley is a poet. There might 'a' been as good rhymers as him once upon a time, but they're all dead and departed. Muley is the he-buzzard of the flock right now. He hangs on to the side of the corral and wipes the tears out of his eyes.

"Gosh!" he snorts. "Telescope sure showed his breeding, Chuck. Yuh could tell he's been well raised. Sticks his chin up in the air, like a grouse with a goiter, and proclaims: 'Come on with me, Mister Ames.' Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Some day I'm going to reach up and hang my fist on his jaw," proclaims Chuck.

"You better catch him in bed or carry a ladder with yuh," says I. "You got ambition, Chuck, but your height ain't noways adequate."

A little later old man Whittaker, who owns the Cross J outfit, comes out with Archibald, and them two goes back to town in the buckboard. Telescope comes down to the bunk-house and sets down in our midst.

Chuck gives him a mean look, and goes on playing solitaire. Telescope admires himself in our cracked shaving-mirror.

"Better fix your features in your mind, Telescope, 'cause you're sure going to need a pattern after Chuck gets through with yuh," laughs Muley.

"That banty little ear-wiggler!" snorts Telescope. "I got a feeling that I ain't going to punch cows much longer."

“Dead men punch no cows,” states Chuck. “Your perceptions are getting clearer.”

“Where do yuh feel bad, Telescope?” I asks. “Tell papa where it hurts.”

“Aw ——!” Telescope turns from the mirror and glares at us. “I’m glad I’m going to get away from you half-wits.”

“Has the old man been kicking on yuh wasting so much time over at the Bowers ranch, holding hands with Miss Amy, or has that tumble-bug yuh had down to the corral been whispering sweet nothings in your ear?” asks Chuck.

“You leave Miss Bowers’ name out of it!” snaps Telescope. “Mister Ames is a moving-picture man, and I may cease punching the festive cow to play hero parts for him. Me and him have had quite some conversation regarding same, and he assures me that I’ve got the physique and features for a lead.”

“You got the physique and features for a funeral if yuh don’t quit wearing my red tie,” says I. “That’s right—throw it on the floor. If yuh wants to make a hit with folks, why don’t yuh buy some clothes of your own?”

“Tell us all about it, little one,” begs Muley, resting his fat chin on his hands, and squinting at Telescope.

“Sing us a song of a locoed man,
Who got stuck on your face and shape—
A form that was built by accident,
And the face of a Jungle ape.
Sing us a song of a keeper bold,

Who went sound asleep one day,
A keeper who's going to show up soon,
And lead little Archie away."

"I'll tell yuh nothing!" yelps Telescope. "You fellers are just plumb ignorant."

"Ain't it true?" nods Chuck. "I'd take a job, too, if I was begged."

"You!" snorts Telescope. "Haw, haw, haw! Mister Ames told me that if he wanted something for the public to laugh at he'd sure hire you. No, Chuckie. This is a moving picture—not a sideshow."

"Here's the idea," continues Telescope. "Mister Ames wants something real. He wants real punchers and——"

"Ninety-eight cents in Chicago," nods Chuck. "I seen in a mail-order catalog where yuh could get good ones for——"

"He wants a real hold-up," states Telescope. "He wants a stage held up, and he don't want no fake. Sabe? Somehow he's got the idea that I could do it artistic-like."

"Your experience will help yuh out," nods Chuck. "There was a hold-up over in Mexican Cañon once, and the feller——"

"Sufficient, Chuck!" snorts Muley, and Chuck winks at me.

"Well, of course it wasn't done by one man," murmurs Chuck. "One of the posse shot the horns off a animile and made a muley. Correct me if I appear to be wrong,"

“You stand corrected,” states Muley. “Desist from historical romance, or I’ll remember one Summer afternoon down in Cottonwood, when a certain man went into a bank, and ——”

“I accepts the correction,” admits Chuck, playing a red queen on a red king, and Telescope continues:

“You fellers keep this under your hats. Sabe? Along about Wednesday afternoon I’m going to hold up the stage from Piperock. Of course after it’s over I’ll return everything, and all the while this picture will be taken. He wants to advertise it as a real hold-up, and she will be all that.”

“Going south, as she drags out of Hell Gate Crossing,” orates Chuck.

“That’s the designated place,” grins Telescope. “You must ’a’ been studying the situation, Chuck.”

“Suppose somebody takes a shot at yuh?” I suggests. “Art Miller ain’t no suckling infant, and if there’s a shipment from the Golden Cross aboard there might be a guard.”

“Yuh never can tell about them shipments,” agrees Chuck. “I’ve tried several times to find out.”

“No wonder yuh know a good place,” laughs Telescope. “Never mind, there ain’t going to be no shooting. I’ll have ’em buffaloed. My shells will all be blanks. If I makes good in this I cinches a job with Archibald Ames, and it’s good-by to the Cross J. No more will Mister Tolliver ride the hills and smell of burnt hair and corrals. Poor, eh? I’ll be eating breakfast in bed while

Chuck Warner is out chopping holes in the ice so the doggies can drink.”

“A little more such talk and yuh won’t have to be a actor to get breakfast in bed,” states Chuck. “Keep it up, and you’ll have all your meals in bed. If you wants to hear me say what I think about you being a actor you got to come outside. I got too much respect for the bunk-house to express myself here.”

This day being Monday, we has to put up with that kind of conversation until Tuesday afternoon, when Chuck opines that he’s going up to Piperock. Chuck can’t stand prosperity, and Tuesday is payday. He’s a roulette fiend, and he runs into bad luck every time he bucks a wheel in Paradise, so he wearies his bronc with monthly trips to Piperock. Once he won eight dollars up there. It cost him forty but he never figured that side of the ledger.

Anyway we wishes him many happy returns of the day, and he lopes away. As he forks his bronc he grins at Telescope, and says:

“To be a good actor, yuh got to imagine you’re the party you’re imitating. Just think you’re ‘Slippery’ Silverton, Telescope. He’s a good pattern to go by. Sabe?”

Slippery sure ain’t no imitation. He’s had the Montana officers buffalooed for so long that they think he’s more than one man. The accumulated rewards for him look like the weekly clean-up at the U. S. mint.

Me and Muley wishes to see the proceedings, so we rides down to Paradise the next day with Telescope, and has converse with Archibald Ames. He squints at the sky and shakes his head.

“I doubt it,” says he. “Too cloudy. Yuh can’t get snappy stuff in atmosphere like this, and there can’t be no retake. We’ll let her go until tomorrow. I may set up after a while and get some character stuff. Lots of local color around here. Good characters, and the background is great. Know what I mean?”

“Perfectly,” says I. “Sheep-herders and so forth.”

Telescope opines that old man Bowers’ ranch is calling him, so a little later on he rides away, he and Muley horns into a poker game, and about an hour later Archibald Ames invades the place and leans against the bar. Mike Pelly leaves the table to serve him, but Archie ain’t dry. He asks a question—

“Can you tell me where I can get some raw beef?”

He turns to us, and we sees the most wonderful black eye yuh ever seen.

“Holy henhawks!” I snorts. “What yuh been doing?”

“I’ll tell yuh,” snorts “Doughgod” Smith, from the doorway. “He’s been exhibiting his danged ignorance. He opines to get a picture of a shepherd and he picked me!”

“Doughgod ain’t no shepherd,” I explains to Archie.

“This is a —— of a time to tell me!” wails Archie, and he goes across the street to a restaurant.

The next we sees of him he's taking a picture of a rackful of broncs and then he goes over and photygrafts a greaser kid and a dog.

Me and Muley donates as much as we can to Mike's game, and then quits. We wanders down to Art Miller's barn, and sets down in the sun. We haven't been there long, when we sees the stage drive up to the depot. They dumps some stuff off, and then drives down to the barn. Beside Art is old man Warner's son Chuck, and when he sees us he grins all over his homely face. Art sees us, and they both whoops.

"Awful funny," says Muley. "Haw, haw!"

"Any time yuh don't think it was yuh got another think coming," whoops Chuck, hanging on to a front wheel. "Haw! Haw! Haw! Left the danged fool up a—haw, haw, haw—tree!"

Art leans against one of his wheelers, and the tears runs out of his eyes.

"Some—haw, haw, haw—picture!" gargles Art. "I ain't laughed so much in my whole life!"

Him and Chuck looks at each other, and busts out laughing again.

"What seems to be tickling yuh?" asks Muley. "Is it a secret?"

"Oh, glory!" gasps Chuck. "Listen, you fellers. That's going to be some picture. Telescope held up that stage, but nobody will ever see that picture. Haw! Haw! Haw! We drives out of the crossing, and he stops us, just like a regular bandit. Of course we know he's got blanks in his gun, but we elevates our hands

to make the play good, He's got a sack over his head, so yuh can't see his face, and I got a false mustache on so he won't know me. I made it myself.

"Well, we kicks the express box off, and sudden-like goes for our guns. He must 'a' been dreaming to let us get the drop thataway. We makes him throw his gun in the river. Haw! Haw! Haw!

"Then we makes him put the box back on the stage," whoops Art. "After he gets that done we makes him walk down to the river, and get a big rock. Then we marches him back and makes him put it on the empty boot. He made ten trips after boulders. Then we makes him dance a while, crawl all the way around the outfit on his hands and knees, and to finish up we made him climb up an old cottonwood snag, and he's there when we drives out of sight, with our thumbs at our noses at him. Haw! Haw!"

"Wait 'till I see Telescope," promises Chuck, weak-like.

"Haw!" says Muley. "He'd admire to hear it, Chuck. He was here until a while ago, and went over to Bowers'."

"Here? Telescope?" squeaks Chuck.

"Uh-huh," says I. "it was too cloudy, so we postponed taking that picture."

Art and Chuck looks foolish-like at each other and then at us.

"Well!" says Chuck "I don't sabe this."

“That’s the trouble with you, Chuck,” opines Muley. “Art don’t have much sabe either. I reckon you fellers had about ten thousand easy dollars crawling around your stage on its hands and knees, and just to show your contempt for it yuh rode away with your thumbs at your nose and your fingers wiggling at it.”

“Sus-slippy Silverton!” stutters Chuck. “That sure was Slippy! Ain’t we the dangdest fools on earth!”

“By a majority of two,” agrees Muley, “Telescope will be delighted.”

“My ——!” gasps Art. “Slippy Silverton! I think that box had a shipment from the Golden Cross. What a chance I took!”

“All the way from Piperock,” says I, but I don’t think Chuck got it—he was beyond words.

Me and Muley went up and had a drink, and Muley laughs so hard that he forgot to pay for it. We meets Art a little later on but there ain’t much fun joshing him about it.

“It’s on Chuck,” says he. “He explains the joke to me, and as she’s pulled off as per schedule I thinks it’s all right.”

“But it spoils things for Telescope,” says I. “You knowing about it spoils the hold-up. It might look like a fake. Sabe?”

“That’s right,” agrees Art. “Telescope is a friend of mine and—I got it! I’ll make out that I don’t feel good, and I’ll ask ‘Ricky’ Henderson to drive for me. He wants to come down anyway.”

“That’s fine,” says Muley. “Telescope will make it right with you, and we won’t tell him about today.”

That night we don’t have neither Telescope or Chuck with us. Telescope is just riding away as we come in, and we don’t have a chance to talk with him, and Chuck don’t come home, ’cause he’s too danged ashamed to face Telescope.

The next morning the old man sends me and Muley over to the Triangle to get some cows that Johnny Myers brought out of the Sleeping Crick Hills with some of his, and we misses the picture-taking. We travels as fast as we can, but the stage has gone past when we hits the main road on our way back. There ain’t nobody at the Hell Gate crossing, so we pilgrims on to the ranch.

About an hour later Telescope comes in, and a little later Chuck drifts home.

“There seems to be a Jonah on this job,” states Telescope.

“What yuh limping about, Telescope?” asks Chuck.

“Hurt my knee. Reckon it’s a good thing the stage didn’t come down today, ’cause I’d ’a’ been a cripple in that picture. Slipped on a rock.”

“Stage didn’t come down?” I asks, and Telescope shakes his head.

“Nope. Me and Mister Ames was there for two hours after the time, but she don’t show up.”

“Didn’t come down?” wonders Chuck, aloud. “Didn’t go to Paradise?”

“She sure didn’t. Hadn’t been there when I left.”

Chuck looks foolish-like, and gets busy reading an old magazine. I notices that he’s got it upside down, but his lips are moving, so I reckon it don’t matter. He’s restless, and don’t sleep well that night.

The next morning, right after breakfast, up rides Bill McFee, our unworthy sheriff; Ricky Henderson, Art Miller and Al McGuire, who manages the ground work of the Golden Cross. Telescope limps over to greet them, and they seems a heap interested in Telescope’s walk.

“What do yuh think, Ricky?” asks McFee.

“I’d hate to swear to it, Bill, but he limped.”

“I arrests yuh in the name of the law for robbing the Piperock stage yesterday, Telescope,” states Bill.

Telescope looks foolish-like at Bill, and then laughs.

“Yesterday, Bill? Why, it never——”

“The description covers yuh,” states Bill. “I got your pardner, who calls himself Archibald Ames, in jail. He’s already admitted the intent to rob it, but says if you robbed it he don’t know nothing about it. Said he was late meeting yuh, so he don’t know what yuh might ‘a’ done.”

“Whoever done it got seven thousand in that box,” states McGuire.

“Seven thousand!” wonders Telescope. “I thought the clean-up was brought down yesterday.”

“Some folks did,” grins McGuire. “We figured to double-cross some wise folks.”

I hears a deep breath, and Chuck sets down hard on the step. Old man Whittaker comes out, and they has to chew the whole thing over again.

“Well,” says the old man, “I don’t think that Telescope done it, but under the circumstances I reckon he’ll have to go to jail.”

“At least yuh can have breakfast in bed,” consoles Muley, and then he recites:

“A man in jail don’t have no cares;
The flight of time don’t bother him,
There ain’t no place for him to go,
The passing hours lightly skim.
The judge may say, ‘A year or two,
In places where they don’t need clocks,’
But you should care—when you get loose,
You’ve seven thousand in that box.”

“Muley, when I get loose I’m going to cut your rhymers square in two,” proclaims Telescope, and just then the old man leads Telescope’s bronc up, and he rides away with the posse.

We’re sad. Doggone, it sure is a sad sight to see our compatriot in the hands of the law. We smokes a while, and then I turns to Chuck—

“Where is that seven thousand, Chuck?” He looks, queer-like, at me for a moment, and shakes his head.

“Danged if I know, Hen.”

“You had it, didn’t yuh?”

“Nope. Listen; I held up that stage before it got to the ford. Sabe? I was going to chase Ricky away and drive it myself. Figured I’d have some fun with Telescope. Sabe? Well, I scared —— out of Ricky. He ain’t got no nerves anyway, and——”

“Wait!” yelps Muley. “Do you mean to set there and tell us that you scared Ricky so bad that he didn’t know your physique from Telescope’s? How about the limp?”

“Don’t rush me!” snaps Chuck. “Telescope was so cocky about that picture stuff that I figured to have some fun. Did yuh ever walk on stilts? Well, I did when I was a kid. I made me a pair that just filled my boots, and pulled a flour sack over my head. Limp?

“Of course I’d limp. I danged near fell on my face when I yelled for him to stop. I made him get out and walk back up the road, and told him if he stopped I’d perforate him. I took the box off the seat, which I figured was that shipment, and looks her over. On it in big letters she proclaims to be dynamite. I lays that box back on the seat, gets my stilt tangled in a wheel, and fell plumb off the grade.

“Well, the team ran away, that’s all I know. I figured that Ricky would stop ‘em—they wasn’t running fast.”

“What kind of a looking box?” asks Muley.

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