

Shepherds For Science

by W.C. Tuttle



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Author of "Local Option in Loco Land," "Evidently Not," etc.

Me and Dirty Shirt Jones prods our three burros across the border of Yaller Rock County, points north through the country where God dumped the leavings after He made the Bad Lands, and has visions of the old home town.

Me and Dirty has abandoned the idea of finding gold where she ain't, and right now we're herding our sore-footed jassacks towards the flesh-pots of Piperock town.

We're cutting around the side of a hill, when all to once we discerns the figure of a man setting on a rock ahead of us.

He looks a heap like he was figuring out the why and whatfor of all things. He humps there in the sun, a long, lean, pathetic-looking figure, despondency showing even in the curves of his cartridge-belt. I feels sorry for him long before our lead burro halts before him and lets us arrive.

The figure raises its head, peers at that gray burro, and when we stop he gets to his feet, turns to us and snaps:

“Hold up your hands! Both of you!”

Me and Dirty jerks our hands above our heads, and this fretful-looking hombre with the good-by forever mustache and weary eyes squints at us and says—

“You both solemnly swear to uphold the law vested in you as deputy sheriffs of Yaller Rock County, so help you Gawd?”

Me and Dirty nods and puts down our hands.

“Now,” says Magpie Simpkins, sheriff of Yaller Rock County, “I feel a danged sight better.”

We nods again, sets down beside him, and rolls smokes. After while Magpie scratches his nose and pinches out the light of his cigaret.

“What you doing here—hunting snakes?” asks Dirty.

Magpie shakes his head and digs into the dirt with his heels.

“Of course it ain’t none of our business,” says I, “but I would like to know why you inoculates us with sheriffitis without warning.”

“Sheep,” says he, soft-like. “Just sheep, Ike.”

“Which there never was nor never will be,” states Dirty. “You mean just plain sheep, don’t you, Magpie?”

“That is as may be, Dirty.”

Magpie fingers his mustache, and nods.

“Well,” says I, “me and Dirty hankers for home, so I reckon we might as well drift along, Magpie.”

“No,” says he, sad-like. “You ain’t going no place, Ike. You’re arrived. Do you reckon I deputized you for fun?”

“Sheep,” pronounces Dirty, “don’t mean nothing at all to me. I sure am contemptuous of all things pertaining to wool.”

“Me, I votes against anything that blats,” says I.

“I don’t love ‘em!” snaps Magpie. “Don’t see me packing no sheep-dip to alleviate their sufferings, do you?”

We don’t seem to, so we all sets there, humped over in the sun. After while Magpie clears his throat.

“‘Alphabetical’ Allen and ‘Scenery’ Sims own three thousand woollies,” says he. “Scenery was a silent pardner, being as he’s a cow-man, which hates sheep. Alphy gets Scenery to unhook a thousand dollars to buy some fancy stock. *Sabe?* Well, Alphy bought ‘em—red, white and blue ones, in stacks, the same of which ain’t productive none to speak about.

“Scenery chides Alphy to the extent that Alphy gets disgruntled and wishes to separate the herd, fifty-fifty, without considering the thousand he lost over the green cloth. Alphy contends that him and Scenery has agreed to suffer gains and losses together, and furthermore that he lost a lot of his own money at the same sitting, the same of which makes them feller sufferers.

“Such a open declaration causes some smoke and a little noise in Piperock, but neither of them gets shot up enough for us to declare a holiday. Scenery plasters a attachment on the herd, and then Alphy limps to Judge Steele’s wickiup and prays for a receiver.

“Being as I’m the sheriff I has to serve said attachment, and also being as I’m a danged fool I’m appointed as the receiver. The county didn’t elect me to herd sheep, gents. Over on the other side of that hill is the sheep. Somewhere over there is the tent. All very simple.”

Magpie fusses with his mustache for a moment and then gets to his feet. He slaps our lead burro with his hat, and hitches up his belt.

“Come on, mules! Hump yourselves!”

“Where to, feller?” asks Dirty. “Them is our burros, Magpie.”

“You won’t need ’em,” says he, weary-like, “so I’ll take ’em home for you. All I ask is this: Take care of the sheep.”

“Sheep?” I yells.

“S-h-e-e-p,” he spells, counting the letters on the fingers of his left hand with the barrel of the gun in his right. “Just sheep, Ike. Keep—your—hands—off—that—gun!”

“Yea-a-a-a-h!” blats Dirty, excited-like. “Explain yourself, feller.”

“You—” Magpie points at Dirty— “are the receiver. *Sabe?* I hereby makes you deputy receiver of them sheep, and I honors Ike by making him deputy attacher. Ike always was attached to

sheep. May the Lord have a little mercy on your souls, and—don't lose any sheep. Come on, canaries."

Me and Dirty sets there like a pair of mummies and watches that forlorn-looking hombre herd our long-eared rolling-stock across the hills. Dirty jerks a rock at a sand-lizard, and yanks his hat down over his ears. We glares at each other for a moment.

"Shepherd!" hisses Dirty. "You sheep-attacher!"

"Ditto!" I hisses back at him. "You sheep-receptacle!"

If there ever was an age when jackrabbits spoke with tin-whistle voices Scenery Sims was a throwback to that period. Him and Alphabetical Allen are two things, the same of which the dictionary designates as inanimate objects. If you can imagine a pair of ciphers with the rims rubbed out—you've got my opinion of them two *hombres* to a gnat's eyebrow.

"I'm going to kill Magpie Simpkins some day," says Dirty, mean-like.

"Uh-huh," says I. "That sounds like you, Dirty. You're always going to kill somebody the day after. You think too slow." We sets there a while longer, and then Dirty yawns.

“Might as well find ’em, I reckon. You attach ’em and I’ll do the receiving, Ike.” We pokes over the ridge, and after going about a mile we hears the voices of lamblets, and then we sees the teepee, which we decipheres to be the sheep-camp. In her callow youth she might have been a tent, but the wear and tear of sheeping existence has put her in the sere and yaller leaf, with a touch of color, where somebody’s red-flannel shirt has patched up a hole in one side.

“Well,” says Dirty, “she ain’t much, but it’s home, Ike.”

“It is ever so humble,” I agrees, and we slid down to it.

As we walks up to the front the flap opens, and out comes the head of an inhuman being. This face is so classified, ’cause no human being could have so much hair on its face and still breathe—not without gills.

“Holee henhawks!” gasps Dirty. “Who have we here?”

“Aye am de ship-hoorder,” comes from a hole in the hair.

“Bale of hay from Sweden!” gasps Dirty, and the hair opens again.

“Aye am de ship-hoorder.”

“What a dugout for dandruff!” says I.

“Yah! Who are you fallers?”

“Your successors,” says I. “You can tie up your war-sack and pilgrim.”

“Haw?” He seems to think it over, and shakes his head.

“Aye tank Aye stay. Das iss my yob. Aye am de ship-hoorder.”

“You don’t need to classify yourself,” grins Dirty. “Nature tagged you. Us two are going to dry-nurse this bunch of animated socks and underwear, so you might as well kiss ’em a fond fare-thee-well.”

The hairy one shakes his head, and peers at us out of a pair of little eyes.

“He say to me, ‘O-o-o-laf, I gif you twanty dollar month.’ He say dat an’ Aye stay for one month. Fifteen day Aye stay today.”

“This has been a long day for you, Olaf,” agrees Dirty. “Ike, do you get that jargon?”

“Sure. Alphabetical or Scenery promised him twenty a month, and today makes fifteen days he has reigned.”

“No rain,” says Olaf. “Dry as ——! Aye stay.”

He ducked back under the tent, and a second later he sticks his head out again, and beside that bunch of hair is the muzzle of a rifle.

“Aye tank Aye stay,” he announces, and ducks inside again.

“Defied by a barber-boycotter,” grunts Dirty. “Are we bluffed, Ike?”

“Not from my point of view,” says I. “You take one side and I’ll take the other.” There was four guy-ropes on each side, and it just took four kicks per each to make that tent unsupporting, and the poor old thing comes down upon Olaf. Then me and Dirty assumes reclining positions, while Olaf wastes a few cartridges, wild-like.

Then he emerges from a hole in the wreck, in time to be mounted by Dirty Shirt, who rode that shepherd to the queen’s taste. Olaf pitched considerable, but gave it up, and seemed receptive to civilized argument.

“Still think you’ll stay?” asks Dirty.

“Val, Aye go pretty soon but Aye coom back now,” pants Olaf, pawing the alkali out of his whiskers. “Aye boost some-t’ing.”

“You talk like you had,” admits Dirty.

“Aye coom back—yah! Aye get de law.”

“Yeah?” says Dirty. “Look at us, shepherd. We’re the law. *Sabe?*”

He looks at us, and his whiskers seem a heap agitated.

“You—are—de—law?” he asks, deliberate-like.

“You are looking at it,” grins Dirty. “How does she look?”

“Val—” he hitches up his rope belt, and picks up his war-sack—
“val, Aye can say dis mooch: Yorge Hokansen hay say to me, O-
o-olaf, das country has too mooch bum law and no yustice!
Yorge iss smart—you bet.”

And me and Dirty stood there and watched the Hairy One fade out over the hills towards Silver Bend.

“I hope he forgets us before he loads up on alcohol,” says Dirty.
“I hate to chase even a shepherd off his job, but I reckon we’re sort of shepherds-in-law, Ike, and we ain’t to blame. Let’s inventory the grub.”

In the grub-box is one can of milk, one can of corn, a little coffee and a quart of raw alcohol.

Dirty nods over the assortment.

“That shepherd was good for fifteen days more, Ike, but the law sure is going to suffer internally. Let’s put up the tent.”

Olaf left too soon to enjoy the rain. She came down plentiful and awful, and demonstrated to us that red flannel ain't no ways water-proof. When the morning came we peers out into a wet world, and tries to dry out enough tobacco to make a smoke. Then cometh a interruption from without:

“Say, you lousy, slew-footed, blat-headed sheep-herder, come out here!”

“Somebody calling you, Dirty,” says I.

“Not me, Ike. Somebody has been getting your mail.”

“Coming out?” yells the voice again.

“You sap-headed snake-hunter!”

“Talks like a cow-man,” opines Dirty.

“Maybe he’s making us a visit.”

Dirty throws the tent-flap open, and we gets a view of a feller on a roan bronc.

“Say, you——” he begins, but he’s looking down the muzzle of Dirty’s gun, and his voice fails him.

“Speaking to me?” asks Dirty, soft-like.

“You better put down that gun,” says he. “It might save you a lot of trouble.”

“Yes,” says Dirty, “and if it went off and killed you, feller, it would likely save you a lot of trouble, if this is the way you’re in the habit of speaking to strangers. What seems to itch you?”

“Your sheep!” he yelps. “Half your danged woollies are over my line! You agreed to keep them stinking sheep this side of the Mesquite, and this morning I finds half of them across. “You get ‘em out of there pretty danged suddenlike or I’ll massacree the bunch. *Sabe?*”

“You don’t dare,” opines Dirty.

“The —— I don’t! Just about why?”

“Against the law. Them sheep are within the law, mister.”

“Yah? Well, let me tell you something, you lousy shepherd: I’ll get my punchers and we’ll show you! We’ll chase ‘em so far that——”

“Get off!” orders Dirty. “You’re up so high I can’t hear your voice.”

He had a gun, but I reckon he also had a weak heart, so he got off and gave me his gun. I reckon he’d ‘a’ given us his weak

heart, too, if we'd asked for it, 'cause Dirty has a nervous way of fingering a trigger.

"What in —— are you going to do now?" he asks.

"Hoard ships," grins Dirty. "I'm ship-hoorder."

"Oh!" says he. "You're the Swede herder that 'Alcohol' Adams spoke about."

"What did he say?"

"Said you didn't have brains enough to wad a shotgun with."

"What do you think?" I asks.

"Well—" he looks at Dirty's gun, serious-like—"well, not to mean any offense, but I'd say that Alcohol exaggerated a little, he meant a twenty-two."

Be it known that Alcohol Adams is so ornery that his own dog barks at him. He'd steal money from his own kids, and then lick thunder out of them for losing it. Mosquitoes, horse-flies and rattlesnakes turn him down like a white chip in a no-limit stud game, and his soul is so small and elusive that he has to drink straight alcohol in order to exhilarate it.

Yaller Rock got so disgusted with him that they sent him to the Legislature, where he collected all the loose money in sight,

and showed his appreciation of things by passing a few laws favoring sheep. He orated his views in Piperock, the same of which was contrary to our religion, and—let me admit that some poor shooting was done.

When he hit Paradise there was three hunks of lead in the cantle of his saddle, which proved we held too low or the range was too great. We held a mass meeting that night, and Magpie Simpkins chided us over our lack of ability.

We agreed to set aside six practise shots per day, against the time that Alcohol or any other lawmaker might appear in our midst. I hopes you hereby *sabes* something of Alcohol's nature.

"You can't run no blazer on me," says this feller. "I'm 'Sandy' Sorensen. What you going to do?"

"Borrow your bronc," says Dirty. "We'll ride that roan double, Ike."

"Won't ride double," says he.

"Maybe it never has," corrects Dirty, taking his foot out of the stirrup. "Come up, Ike."

Sandy sure diagnosed that bronc right. I'd trail my bet with his when he says it won't ride double—not meek-like. A bronc can't do its best with two hundred and ninety pounds on its

back, but I hope to gosh I never ride that bronc single-handed when it's riled.

Man, that animal done everything except fly, and at that the danged thing went high enough to convince the most skeptical that all it needed was a short pair of wings to make good in that respect. First it gives a correct imitation of a post-hole digger, and then it goes down that gully, changing ends like a whirligig. I've got my wish-bone hooked over Dirty's shoulder, and every hop I can feel my finger slipping higher and higher up that cantle.

Sandy rides a double-rig saddle, and when we hits the first turn of the gully I feels the rear cinch bust. From that on it's like riding a rocking-chair over sticks of dynamite.

The roan bucks along the edge of the washout, the bottom of which is about ten feet below us, and I just starts to yelp, "Don't get scared, Dirty; she won't buck down there," when we hit the bottom, and I bit my tongue over the first word.

My vertebræ comes together like a string of box-cars getting hit by a wild engine, and then we yanked out of there and went angling up the hill as fast as that bronc can run.

"Still alive?" I yelps.

“From my chin on up!” he yells. “Wonder what this fool wants to climb the hill for, Ike?”

“Can’t you stop her?” I asks.

“Bridle’s gone, Ike. Ha-a-a-ang on!”

We found out why the roan wanted to get a down-hill pull on us, ’cause as soon as we hit the grade the animal inagurates a new style of bucking. Was it effective? Oh, man, I’d rise to remark it was. I just hung on and prayed. I used up all the white man’s religion I ever heard about, and I’m just beginning to make medicine to the totem of the Alaskan Siwash when the cinch breaks.

I feels myself float into space, and then I goes out in a blaze of bright lights. After while Old Man Misery seems to come along and runs his fingers all over my carcass, and then I opens my eyes. I’m laying on my back with my feet up the side of a rock, and a short distance from me is Dirty, hanging by the back of his shirt to an old mesquite-s snag.

Standing there beside a pair of packed burros is the queerest-looking pair of pelicans I ever seen. They’re both wearing hard hats and black-rimmed specs, and what you might expect such persons to wear in the line of shirts, collars and neckties, but from the waist on down they’re clad in chaps and boots.

One of 'em is wearing a pair of Mexican spurs—the kind with rowels the size of a dollar and eighty-five cents. One of them has a belt draped around his waist, and in the holster is one of them single-shot twenty-two pistols. The other is packing a pump shotgun.

One of 'em removes his specs and polishes 'em, careful-like.

“Quite remarkable, my friend!” says he. “Quite remarkable. The—er—equine was no doubt desirous of removing its burden.”

“One would be led to accept such a theory,” nods the other. “We have observed the effect, my dear Middleton, but of course we know nothing of the cause. It really was quite remarkable.”

“Holee suffering scissorbills!” grunts Dirty, leaving half his shirt on the snag and staggering to his feet. He stares at them and at me.

“Ike, do you see the same thing I do?” he whispers.

“I hope so,” says I, lowering my feet. “I hope I do, Dirty, otherwise I’m a goner mentally. Is one of them apparitions wearing spurs?”

“Thank ——!” gasps Dirty. “We see the same little details, Ike.”

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