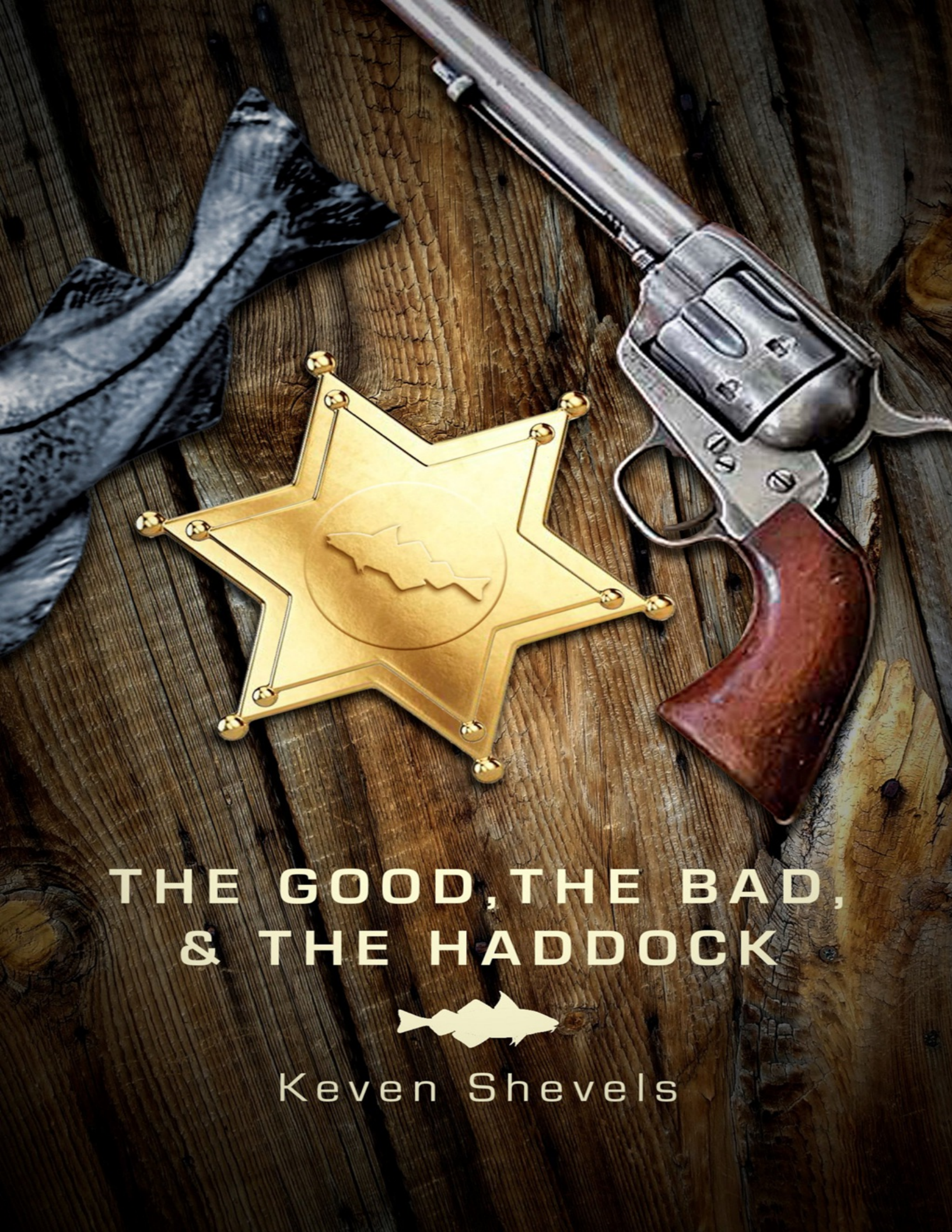
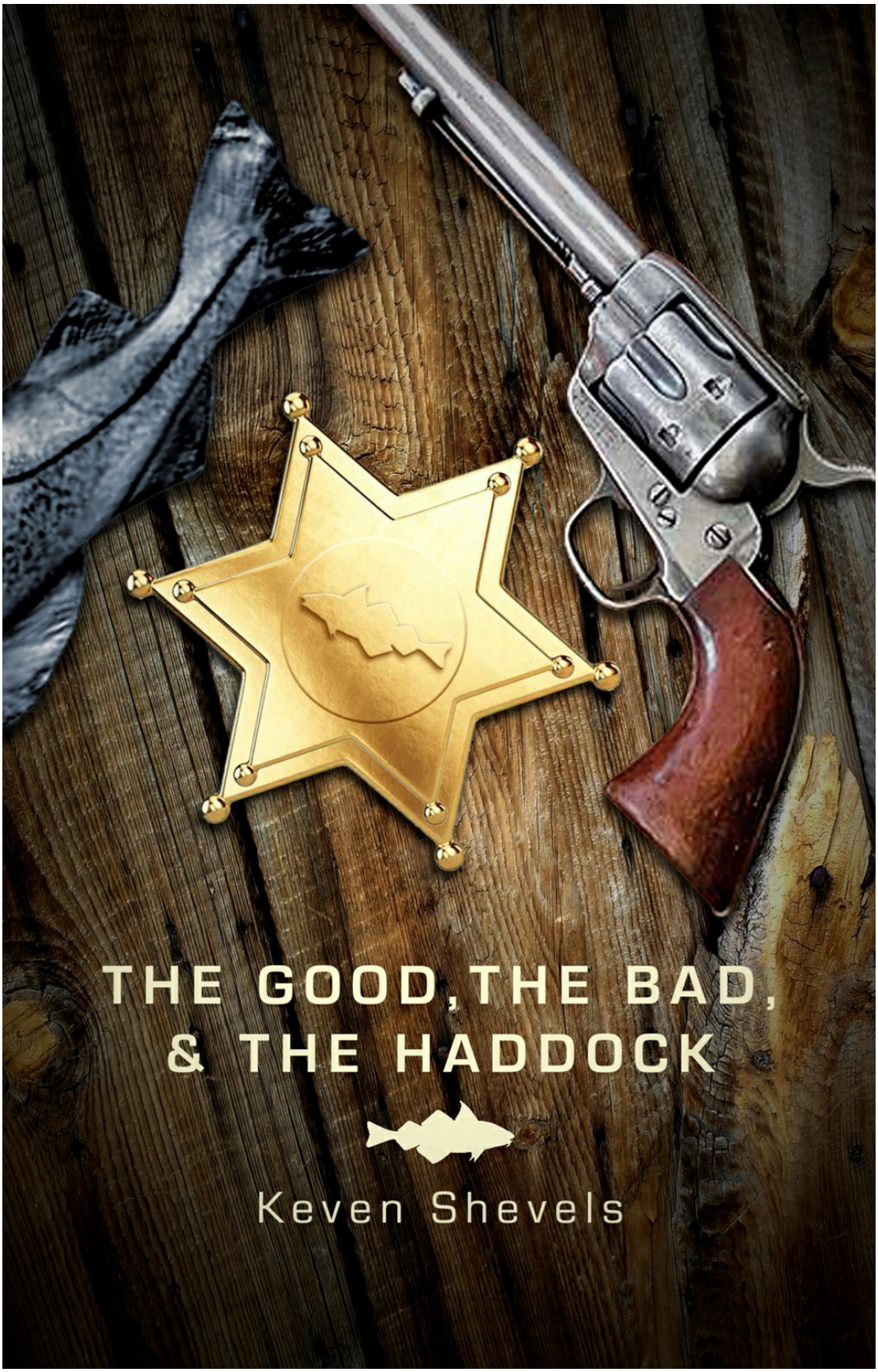

THE GOOD, THE BAD,
& THE HADDOCK
Keven Shevels


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The Good, The Bad And The Haddock

By

Keven Shevels

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For Lyn

In a style that one reviewer has likened to 'Monty Python meets Terry Pratchett', the author continues his chronicles of the history of the Dogsbreath family with the exploits of the current Ivor Dogsbreath's great-great-great grandfather in the Old West.

He rode into town on the stage as a poor, penniless immigrant. Then they told him his job was to clean up the town. He thought they meant put out the rubbish. They meant a different sort of rubbish. When he rode out again he was still a poor, penniless immigrant … but behind him ten men and one hamster lay dead and the town would never be the same.

For animal lovers it was subsequently proved that the hamster had died of natural causes after a long and happy life.

Contains strong language and adult humour.

Some true, but little known facts about the Old West.

1. **It is estimated that up to 25% of cowboys were actually black while 30% were Mexican. Obviously this varied from state to state with the states bordering Mexico having a greater proportion of Mexican cowboys than those further north. So this 'John Wayne' image of the all-white American cowboy is just that, an image and not reality.**

2. **Homosexuality in the Old West was not unknown. It was not spoken about but it was generally accepted that what happened outside the light of the campfire on these long, lonely cattle drives stayed on the cattle drive. After all what could be more masculine than a checked shirt, a pair of high-heeled boots and a couple of rough, shaggy chaps.**

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1.
The Cowboy.

The kid watched the cowboy ride his horse up to the hitching pole. “Mister,” he said, “are you a cowboy?”

“Yep,” answered the cowboy in a deep voice.

“Do you want me to watch your horse for you mister? There’s a lot of twocking going on round here. I can polish its hooves as well and give the saddle a wax.”

“Yep,” said the cowboy as he dismounted the horse.

“You don’t say much do you mister.”

“That’s because ah fell into the horse trough kid.”

“Do you need a hand out mister?”

“Yep,” muttered the cowboy.

The kid leaned over and helped the four foot two inch cowboy out of the trough. “You’re not very tall for a cowboy are you mister,” he said as he placed the diminutive but soggy cowboy onto the sidewalk.

“Good things come in little packages kid,” said the cowboy as he shook the water off his left leg.

“And you’ve got a funny hat.”

“It’s called a bowler,” answered the cowboy.

“But it’s just a bowl,” exclaimed the kid.

“Yep,” replied the cowboy. “Everyone’s got to start somewhere,” and he shook the water off his right leg.

“What you doing here mister?”

“Ah’m looking for a man,” the cowboy answered.

“Oh, you want Miss Belle’s place then,” said the kid, “she deals with that sort of thing.”

“That’s not what ah meant,” the cowboy replied shaking his head and sending splatters of water over the sidewalk. “Ah’m after Rattlesnake Cyril, that low down varmint killed ma brother.”

“He does that sort of thing,” answered the kid. “You’ll find him in the saloon. But I’d be careful; he’s the fastest gun around here and a cold-blooded killer.”

“He’s not met me yet,” replied the small cowboy patting his shooting irons.

***

They buried the cowboy on Slipper Hill, it would have been called Boot Hill, but they did most of the burials at night. The young woman standing next to the grave shed a tear. “Did you know him well?” asked the Preacher.

“No, I’d never met him,” she answered.

“Then why shed a tear my child?”

“Because Rattlesnake Cyril killed my father and my brother and there was no-one there to mourn them. So I try and shed a tear for any of his victims that have nobody to stand over their grave.”

“That is highly commendable of you my child.”

“But does it work Preacher … because no-one’s killed the bastard yet.”

“Those who live by the sword …” started the Preacher.

“Kill those who don’t,” finished the young woman angrily.

“You can’t talk like that my child.”

“Why not Preacher? What law is there in this godforsaken territory?”

“There is God’s law my child.”

“But that doesn’t stop a bullet from a six gun.”

“I know your face,” said the Preacher trying to think deeply and also change the subject. “You’re from the Bar-B-Q ranch aren’t you?”

“What’s left of the Bar-B-Q ranch,” corrected the young woman. “I’m Darn Tooting’s daughter, Stephanie.” The Preacher nodded his head in reply. “I was back east when Badde Guy had his gunslingers gun down my father and brother,” the woman continued. “But he got a big surprise when I came back west to claim my inheritance. He didn’t count on that,” she spat out.

“I don’t think that he did,” commented the Preacher, “not the way he was bragging in the saloon about how he now controlled the Bar-B-Q.”

“What were you doing in the saloon Preacher?”

“Erm … umm, it was just what one of my congregation was telling me,” replied the Preacher rather quickly. He then looked at the young woman’s face. “Honest,” he added with his fingers crossed behind his back.

“Well maybe his bragging was right Preacher. Maybe I can’t hold out against his ambitions,” and the young woman looked quite downcast to the man of the cloth. Suddenly there seemed to be fire in her eyes. “But I’ll hold out as long as I can,” she snarled, “and I’ll make him pay for what he’s done to the Bar-B-Q and my family.” The woman held the Preacher’s eyes for a second and he saw a depth of anger in them that he had not expected. She then turned on her heels and went back down the hillside leaving the Preacher alone at the side of the grave.

2.
A Stranger Arrives.

The stage pulled up in front of the office of the Tombstone and Skunk Hole Overland Stagecoach Company in a flurry of dust and gravel. The stage agent stepped up to the coach while wiping the dust off his face and flicking some gravel off his jacket. “Decent trip?” he asked as he looked up at the driver.

“Shit, ah can’t wait till that goddamn railroad gits into this shithole of a town then ah’ll be the first in line to gits a job as an engine driver,” exclaimed Stacey Jones, the driver, rather loudly.

“That bad eh,” answered the agent. The stage agent was a middle-aged man with a paunch called Amos Bollock which was quite fortunate as the man was also called Amos Bollock and if the two had different names then it would have been very confusing. However, Bollock wasn’t his given name, his father’s name had been Bullock, but his mother had a lisp and the name just stuck.

“Nah,” shouted Shotgun Fred who was sat next to Stacey. “She just run out of chewing tobbacy and is meaner than a badger with piles. She’s been chewing cactus and tumbleweed for the last ten miles.”

In response Stacey Jones spat out of the side of her mouth, the brown liquid hitting the rump of the horse in front. “Whoa there,” she yelled as the horse jumped and promptly shit itself while she grasped the reins tightly to control it.

Turning to the coach the agent opened his mouth and shouted, “Skunk Hole, this is Skunk Hole. The end of the line. Everybody out.” The door of the stage didn’t open. The agent went up to it and peered in. “There’s no-one in the coach,” he exclaimed back up to the driver.

“Shit, ah knew there was something we furgot at that last waystation,” answered Stacey Jones before she spat again. This time the brown liquid hit the sidewalk next to where the agent was stood and smoke started to come off the wood.

He looked down at the smoking brown stain on the wood next to his boot. “That’s the fourth time this month you’ve left the passengers at a waystation,” he grumbled to the driver as he looked back up. “And you’ve only made four runs this month.”

“Accidents happen,” shrugged Shotgun Fred.

“Yeah,” agreed Stacey daring Amos Bollock to contradict them.

“Are we nearly there yet?” whimpered a small voice hiding amongst the baggage on the roof of the stage behind them.

For the first time the stage agent noticed the unkempt bundle that lay amongst the bags and

boxes on the top of the stage. “Who’s he?” he asked Stacey Jones and Shotgun Fred.

“A passenger,” replied Shotgun Fred with a laugh. “I think.”

“Is this where I get off?” whimpered the unkempt bundle.

“Ya ticket said that ya should have got off at the last town,” snarled Stacey Jones, “but ya were that shit scared we couldn’t prise yur hands off the roof rails. Not even with a crowbar.”

“Yeah,” snapped Shotgun Fred agreeing with Stacey Jones, “and believe me we tried.”

“Oh,” was the response from the top of the stage.

“Well you’ll have to get off now,” shouted up the stage agent, “because the stage ain’t going anywhere else.”

“Oh,” responded the unkempt bundle.

“Can ah shoot him?” pleaded Shotgun Fred. “Go on … please.”

“No,” answered the agent, “… there’d be too much paperwork.” He then saw the disappointed look on Shotgun Fred’s face. “But you can pepper his ass with buckshot.” Shotgun Fred smiled and picked up his shotgun, he then turned to face the roof of the stage. The unkempt bundle was gone. It was already halfway down the street and running like hell.

“Do ya think that worked?” grinned Stacey Jones and the three of them started to laugh.

***

The unkempt bundle kept running. Skunk Hole wasn’t a very big town and so it didn’t take long for him to reach the edge of it where he stopped and stared out in front of him.

The unkempt bundle was called Ivor Dogsbreath and he was an immigrant … however it would be closer to the truth to say he was just ignorant. He’d left his home in Slagbottom in the north of England to make his way in America after hearing tales of streets paved with gold and fortunes to be made. He was easily influenced. And then when he arrived he’d found the slums of New York City … and they were much worse than the slums of Slagbottom. Resolving not to give up on his dream he’d then been foolish enough to listen to the tales of the gold strikes on the Pacific coast and he decided to move west and continue seeking his fortune. Unfortunately his sense of direction wasn’t that good and he ended up in Skunk Hole. Suffice to say that Ivor Dogsbreath had turned out to be a bitter disappointment to both America and the West.

Dogsbreath stood on the edge of town and stared out into the distance. There was nothing there … just miles and miles of open grassland. “What the fuck do I do now?” he muttered to himself as he looked at the empty plain. Unsurprisingly there was no answer.

He stood and stared then as time passed and he hadn’t moved the sun gradually passed round the sky and a tall shadow fell across him. It was only then that he realised that he was stood next to a large sign. Turning he looked at it. At the top the sign proudly proclaimed ‘Skunk Hole’. Dogsbreath thought for a second. “That ties in,” he said to himself. He often talked to

himself; it was the only way he could get an answer he liked. “That’s what the man at the coach shouted so that must be the name of this …” he looked back at the collection of buildings that lined the street, “… town,” and he almost said something else.

Looking again at the sign he saw that underneath the town’s name was printed the word, ‘Population’ and underneath that was the number 267 which was crossed out and the number 266 carelessly painted underneath. Next to the crossed out 267 a small piece of paper had been nailed. Out of curiosity Dogsbreath peered at it. Whoever had written it hadn’t been a master of the English language … but there again neither was Dogsbreath. By slowly running his finger along the words and saying them out loud he managed to understand the writing. ‘Amos McDoughnut shot by Rattlesnake Cyril,’ it read and next to it was a date which meant nothing to Dogsbreath. He was having enough trouble mastering letters and words let alone numbers.

The number 266 was itself crossed out and the number 265 painted underneath. Again, next to the crossed out 266 was a small piece pf paper nailed to the board. Still having nothing better to do, he read it. ‘Patrick Gilfeather shot by Andrew Morton’ and a date. Dogsbreath smiled to himself, he was getting the hang of this reading lark. He looked again at the number 265 which in turn was crossed out and the number 264 written underneath it. A small piece of paper next to the crossed out 265 proclaimed that, ‘Andrew Morton shot by Mrs Gilfeather’.

Dogsbreath blinked and then shivered as a thought ran through his head. Now he’d stopped trying to read the thought had plenty of room in which it could do its weekly exercise. This is a bloody dangerous town, he thought. He looked at the board again and the 264 had been crossed out and 266 painted underneath. He couldn’t believe his eyes; miraculously the population of the town had increased. He peered at the small piece of paper next to the crossed out 264. ‘Widow Twanky has given birth to twins’, the paper said. That seemed strange, he thought, a widow giving birth, they must have strange customs round here. As long as it’s not compulsory, he thought.

He thought again and shivered again, with the threats at the stage and now the notes on the sign, he was definitely getting the impression that this was a dangerous town to stay in. He looked out over the miles of grass in front of him, but what choice did he have. Who knew how far away the nearest town was or in what direction and besides that, how would he get there? Was walking an option? He’d arrived on the stage and he’d spent the last of his money on the ticket. Perhaps … and he patted his pockets. He smiled and put his hand in the pocket. He was better off than he thought. At least he had something … and his hand brought out a piece of lint. He shrugged; a piece of lint was more than he thought he had a moment ago. With a resigned look he turned to head back to the town.

At that moment a gust of wind blew suddenly across the open grass and a wave of pain hit him as something solid struck the back of his head. What the f …, he just had time to think before blackness enveloped him. He lay there face down in the grass and dirt next to the fallen sign that had felled him. Another gust of wind blew the lint away ….