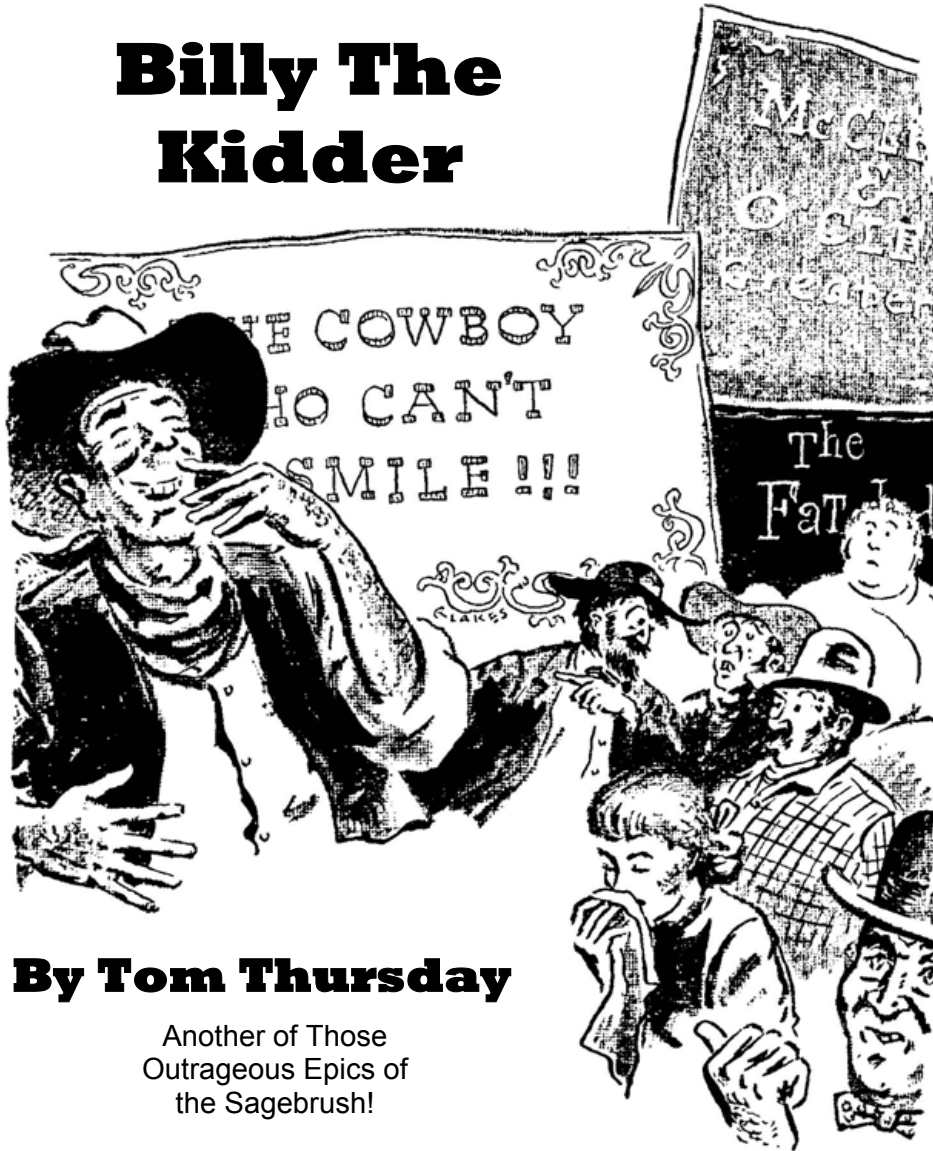


# Billy The Kidder



**By Tom Thursday**

Another of Those  
Outrageous Epics of  
the Sagebrush!

**G**ATHER 'round the chuck-wagon, pardners, while I unwind a tale that has absolutely no connection with the life of Billy the Kid. The hombre I have in mind was not even a niece.

Well, while on the subject of pulverized cacti, the McClunk and O'Clenn Greater Wild West Shows hauled up its mud-battling wagons in Sudden Hell, Arizona, when we meet one William Kidd, the smarty of the first part. This Kidd coot is something out of this world and, to be extra frank, if ever McClunk or O'Clenn meet him again he will be out of this world forever.

I'm personally managing the sideshow with the ten-wagon outfit and, besides the strange, odd and

curious people from all parts of the world meaning New York and New Jersey—I work a little pitch of my own. This fairly honest larceny is known as the shell game and, to prove that some of the cowbims did not care for same, I can show a few assorted bullet holes in my Stetson. However, can I help it if they ain't got a sound sense of humor?

We arrive in Sudden Hell on a Saturday afternoon for a three-day date, courtesy of the marshal and the sheriff, or what have you in law and disorder. Sudden Hell is an authentic cow-and-bull town, with the bull being the most prominent. Saloons and dancehalls are scattered on both sides of the street, with six undertakers sandwiched in between them. The embalm-and-plant boys are

doing a very brisk business and everyone has his own private cemetery.

The name of the main stem is Bloody Boulevard and it didn't get the name from playing dominoes. The town had been founded by a bunch of cattle-conkers who later were dumbfounded to find ropes around their extra-long necks.

"Hey," says Side Mouth McGinty, the ballyhoo talker, "did yuh hear about the dumb wonder joinin' the show tuesday?"

"Nope," I say. "Who is he—Sitting Bull or Tecumseh?"

"He calls himself *The Cowboy Who Never Smiles*," explains McGinty. "The idear is to give a reward to any lady or gent who can make him smile, even one-tenth of an inch. I have seen his mush and I will admit that he is very sober and sad."

"You mean he's got liver trouble?"

"He's got something," says McGinty, and wanders down the midway.

Well, I am sitting in the lobby of the Hot Lead Hotel when I see a walking zombie enter with Elmer McClunk. This slightly animated what-is-it high-towers over McClunk like a giraffe's neck over sagebrush. His face or puss is a study in sapology. He has steady brown eyes and I notice he never blinks.

"This gent," says McClunk to me, "is Mr. William Kidd. Beginning tonight he will be the star feature of the sideshow."

"I am always glad to meet a great comedian," I say. "I take it that Mr. Kidd tells jokes; huh?"

"Mr. Kidd," sniffs McClunk, "knows all the jokes in the world but he never laughs at any of them. He has abnormal control of his facial muscles."

"That," says McGinty, "is absolutely what-the-so-ever nothing to brag about. Onct I had whoopin' cough and measles together at the same time and it gives me abnormal facial control in habit-formin' quantities."

**M**CGINTY'S statement makes Mr. Kidd look very bored, indeed. He arches a set of bushy eyebrows in the direction of McGinty and lets go with a polite hiccup.

"Now here," says McClunk, "is the lecture you will deliver on Mr. Kidd." He hands me six pages of corral dust which I am supposed to memorize and hurl at the innocent customers.

"What is this?" I inquire. "A condensation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or maybe *Ben Hur*?"

"That," drawls Mr. Kidd, "is a very short history of my remarkable life. You will kindly not miss a word when you lecture to the patrons who flock around my platform."

The gent is as modest as a peacock with ten extra tail-feathers on his rear end.

"This ape," whispers McGinty, "is a phony-wony. I thinketh he stinketh out loud."

That night the sideshow is jammed to the sidewalls with everybody but those nestling under headstones. William Kidd is the central attraction, which makes *Fanny the Fat Girl* and *Rembrandt the Tattoo Man* very jealous, to say the least.

"Whut," asks Rembrandt, "has that buzzard got that we ain't got?"

"I personally think," says McGinty, "that he's got more larceny in his heart and liver than a stagecoach highwayman."

I introduce Kidd to the popeyed-patrons and then proceed to read the six pages of literary dung word for word, as I have no desire to memorize the horseradish. I have reached the second paragraph on page one when Kidd steps forward and grabs the papers out of my hand.

"Outrageous!" he snorts. "This is not a funeral oration; this is a scientific exhibition of paramount interest to intelligent people." Then he faces the audience and coos, "Good friends, due to either lockjaw or just plain illiteracy, I shall have to explain my case personally. This man here is both absurd and impossible."

McGinty rolls sleeves up, clinches his fists, and is about to haul off and bust him in the beezee. I restrain him. "Let us be calm," I say. "Let the yap yoop his brains out."

Well, Kidd talks for more than an hour on his favorite topic, himself, and then announces that a reward of \$100 will be paid to anyone in the crowd who can make him laugh. After that announcement he strikes a pose like Ajax defying General Custer or maybe Wild Bill Hickok.

McGinty, in a red-faced rage, steps forward and remarks, "I will personally add ten buckaroos to the reward if anyone can make this flat-mugg grin!"

Kidd ignores McGinty's insulting words and continues to strike an attitude. Suddenly a little waddy in the rear of the crowd begins to clear his throat and tonsils of four bits worth of cut plug tobacco.

“Hey, looky,” he wips. “Didcher evah head of the cowpoke who made Sitting Bull stand up? Haw haw haw!”

“Continue,” says Kidd. “Although the story starts off very sadly.”

“Thet’s all they is to the story!” yelps the little lad. “Yuh must be dead!”

“Amen!” says McGinty.

“You ain’t got no sense of humor,” yelps another waddy. “An’ tuh hell with yuh!”

A cowpoke at the left whinnies, “Lemme tell that scarecrow a whopper. Now, lissen!”

The overstuffed cowbim switches his cut-plug between his two remaining front teeth, then asks, “Did you evah heah the story of what made Wild Bill Hickok wild?”

“I’m afraid I never did,” said Kidd. “What made Wild Bill Hickok wild?”

“Wimmen, yuh dope; wimmen!” hooted the overstuffed bim. The crowd thought it was very funny. You should have seen the shapes of their heads.

Well, three more hombres tell stories that even Joe Miller refused to put in his joke book, and then we passed to the next platform.

“Know what I think?” asks McGinty. “I think that corpse has neuritis of the face muscles. Even if he wanted to laugh, he couldn’t. Besides, I wouldn’t be surprised if he turned out to be the fella who held up the stagecoaches around here.”

**A**T THE END of the week no one has won the reward for making Kidd giggle and Elmer McClunk is very happy. He raises the reward to \$200 and when we play Heavenbound, Arizona, our next stop, Kidd is the chief attraction. His puss is still sober and he keeps to himself and does not mix with anyone.

Then on the last night at Heavenbound, Brother McClunk tells us that business is so bad that he will have to reduce all salaries by fifty percent.

“You really ought to be happy that you eat during such hard times,” moans McClunk.

“Yup,” echoes Roscoe O’Clemm, “you sure should.” O’Clemm is just a sap that McClunk lets into the show for a cash consideration. If he gets anything out of it except maybe pneumonia and a headache he will be very lucky.

“If yuh call that food what you feed us in the cook tent,” snorts McGinty, “I’ll take arsenic. D’yer mean you have to pay for them defunct

mules you serve as tenderloin steaks?”

“I do not desire to hear any criticism of my cuisine,” says McClunk. He walks down the midway, arm in arm with the other burglar.

Our next stop is at Coffin Corners, New Mexico. This hamlet is so tough that even the sparrows sing bass. It is the headquarters of the Zizzen Boys, a fine set of highwaymen and mail coach bandits. They not only run all the saloons in town, but run gambling games so crooked they could hide behind pretzels. If a guy makes as much as two passes with a pair of dice on one of their crap tables, the stickman switches in a pair of phonies and the player sevens out.

When the Zizzen Boys and their pals hear about William Kidd, *The Cowboy Who Never Smiles*, they decide to do something about it. In fact, they make side bets with all the solvent citizens that they will make Kidd giggle or blow him to assorted bits. McGinty gets wind of the plot and tells me.

“Them gents are tough,” says McGinty. “Why should we get moidered for a bum like Elmer McClunk?”

“I better tip Kidd,” I says. “After all, the lad ain’t done nothing to us.”

I stop Kidd before he enters the sideshow that night and warn him about the Zizzen Boys.

“They are as tough as the Battle of Bull Run,” I says. “Better watch out.”

“Thanks, fella,” he says. “I appreciate your warning.” Then he looks at me quizzically for a moment and his eyes smile, even if his face didn’t.

“Pal,” he says, “I understand that McClunk has reduced salaries.”

“Yours, too?” I say.

“Mine, too,” he says. “By half. My contract called for \$50 per week for a 26-week season. He cut me to \$25. We should do something about it.”

“Let’s,” I say. “Any good notions?”

“Keep your sombrero on. I have an idea.” Then he comes near my right ear and whispers, “You and McGinty got any spare silver?”

“I can let you have a couple of buckaroos,” I say.

“On the contrary,” he says, “I’d be happy to loan you some.”

“Thanks,” I say. “I am beginning to wonder why me and McGinty think you are a stinker.”

“Never,” he says, “judge a man you don’t know. Hate is waste.”

**I'**M JUST about to mount Kidd's platform that night when the Zizzen Boys, followed by a flock of extra-special flatheads, enter the tent. They enter with a whoop and a woop, firing their guns in the air. When they get through, the roof looks like a coffee-strainer. Then Kink Zizzen struts up to the platform and yips, "Fellah, I aim to make yuh laugh out loud. If yuh don't, ah feel sorry fuh yuh!"

I look at Kidd, and whisper, "Mebbe you better laugh and humor the bum."

"I have no intention of laughing," says Kidd. "What's more, I have no use for bullies. If he starts something, I'll finish something."

McGinty looks at the Zizzen mob, then offers his hand to Kidd.

"Pardner," says McGinty, "it was nice knowing you. What size tombstone do you wear?"

Kink Zizzen leans both elbows on the edge of the platform, aims some day-old cut-plug at Kidd's left boot, then holds up his hands for silence.

"Aw right, sober-pants," says Kink, "I aim to heah a great, big belly giggle at muh first joke. Lissen. Why does a rooster cross the road when they ain't no hen on the other side; hah?"

"Why the hell don't you ask somebody who raises chickens?" demands Kidd. At that, me and McGinty edge toward the sidewall canvas, for a quick duckout.

"Oh, so you ain't gonnah laugh; hah?" snarls Kink. "Wal, if you won't laugh, then you're gonnah dance!"

He begins sharp-shooting around Kidd's feet. The lead pings all around Kidd's legs but he don't move them an inch. His guts get under Kink's leather skin and he stops shooting, then begins to rub his chin reflectively.

"This heah hombre don't laugh and he don't dance," says Kink to his mob. "Yuh know what I think? I think he's just plain dead. Gluckity-gluckity-gluck!"

He goes over to the platform of *Fanny the Fat Girl*, followed by the other half-apes. Kidd gives him a snippy look and settles back to business.

Well, whatever Kidd may be he certainly ain't got no canary streak up the middle of his spine. The way he faced the Zizzen bums took gold-plated guts, especially when you consider that Kink Zizzen has his own private cemetery and the same is well-populated. Frankly, both me and McGinty begin to like the guy. After all, come to think of it, what has he done to us? Of course he may be the

best train robber in the West, for all we know, just sitting in the sideshow for a cover-up, so the marshals won't get hep to his game.

**N**EXT WEEK finds us in Lead Gulch, New Mexico. This is more tough territory, what with all kinds of miners, including sweet and sour doughs. Elmer McClunk wrings his dirty paws over the fact that business is lousy, which it certainly ain't, but all the same he gives our pay dough another cut, including that of all the sideshow attractions.

At the same time he is knifing our wages he raises the reward on Kidd to \$500 for anyone who can make him smile.

"Hey, look, boss," sniffs McGinty, "if business is so rotten, how come you can hand out \$500 reward?"

"For two reasons," says McClunk. "First, I know no one will make Kidd smile and, second, that \$500 is my personal money which I have been saving up for years. If there is anything else you would like to know, don't bother to ask me. Good evening."

The big blow-off comes at Gila Falls, our next play stand. I have just finished lecturing on Kidd, when a beautiful blonde in front of the platform claps her dainty hands, and says, "I would like to see if I can make him laugh. Can ladies try?"

Kidd, sober-puss, looks down and nods his head gravely.

"How do I know you will pay the \$500 reward if I succeed in making him smile?" she wants to know. Elmer McClunk happens to hear that aspersion against his character, which he ain't got, and clears his throat with a few unattractive ahems.

"Madame," he says, removing his hat in a sweeping bow, "my name is Elmer McClunk, general manager and partner in this attraction. As to your question whether or not the \$500 reward will be paid, I can assure you that I am an honorable man and this is an honorable show. Which means, madame, that if you are successful in making Mr. Kidd smile, the reward will be yours. Moreover, it shall be paid with pleasure."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" cooed the little lady. "Daddy just needs \$500 to pay off the mortgage on the ranch. Won't he be surprised if I win!"

McClunk gives her a sniffy glance and walks out of the tent.

"Now, sir," she says, looking up at Kidd, "I am

going to tell you a very funny story. Please give me all your kind attention.”

“Very well, young lady,” says Kidd. “I trust your story is funnier than the cacti dust I have been listening to.”

“This is the story about the little old burro who lost his mother.”

Kidd raised his eyebrows and then looked at the roof of the tent.

“Now this little old burro,” went on the blonde lady, “began to cry and was very much upset.”

“Young lady,” interrupted Kidd, “may I ask how a burro cries?”

“Oh, sir,” said the little lady, “have you never heard a poor little burro cry?”

“The pleasure never has been mine,” replied Kidd. “May I assume that they cry in English?”

“Sir,” she says, “I will be very happy to show you just how a poor little burro, who has lost his mother, cries. Now, please watch and listen carefully.”

Then, what d’yer know? She takes out a small red hanky, holds it to her eyes and begins to boo-hoo all over the place. Her shoulders shake, her blonde head bobs up and down and she is having one helluva crying fit. Everybody is now looking at her and Kidd begins to blink in astonishment.

And then—blam—I hear a loud cackle from the platform and Brother Kidd is laughing his tonsils out.

“She wins!” yelps a little waddy in the rear. “Give the gal the \$500 reward. She wins!”

**S**OON THE whole tent takes up the chant and pretty soon I am escorting the little lady to the treasury wagon, where Elmer McClunk is sitting at his desk. He is very much surprised to see us and when he finds out the reason for the social call, he enjoys a complete set of apoplexy, with a side order of hysterics.

“I don’t believe it!” he finally rants. “Besides, I wasn’t there to see it!”

This stalling steams up the howling mob and some hombre lets go with a few practice shots into the wagon’s ceiling.

“Pay the little lady!” yips a tall ranger. “Pay her the cash or we’ll plant you like a beanpole!”

“Oh, sir,” says the little lady. “Please do not hurt the poor man. I am sure he will pay me the reward. Maybe he would like me to tell the joke, so he can see how funny it is, and why Mr. Kidd

laughed.”

Figuring it was his life or paying the reward—which was good figuring—McClunk goes to the little iron safe in back of the wagon and hauls out \$500.

“Very well, young miss,” he says, “let it never be said that Elmer McClunk welched on a just reward.”

“Oh, thank you, sir,” she says, and bows deeply to the waist. Then Elmer turns to me and sizzles, “Send that Kidd tramp in to me, at once!”

With McGinty by my side I rush back to the sideshow to get Kidd. The tent is practically empty, except for *Fanny the Fat Girl*. She is waving a small piece of paper as we come in and says, “Mr. Kidd says I should give this to you right away.”

I take the note and read, *You and McGinty meet me at Lost Mine right away. Why work for McClunk any longer? Hurry. Kidd.*

McGinty reads it and says, “What is this?”

“I don’t know,” I says, “but he is right. Why work for McClunk? He now owes us plenty in back salary. From now on we will be lucky if he feeds us one meal a day.”

“Sounds sensible,” admits McGinty. “There’s a stage leaving in five minutes. Hurry or we won’t be on it.”

Lost Mine is forty miles from Lead Gulch. Kidd is waiting at the stage stop when we get there. His face is as sober as ever.

“I’m glad you came,” he says. “Let’s all go across the street and have something to eat. I have a friend waiting for me at a table.”

The first thing I see when we enter the beanery is a prize-winning blonde. She gives us all a big hello and a beauteous smile.

“Gentlemen,” says *The Cowboy Who Never Smiles*, “I want you to meet Mrs. Kidder, the little lady who can cry like a burro who has lost its mother.”

“A nice hook-up!” says McGinty. “Yup; a very nice hook-up!”

**“I**T WAS,” said Kidd. “But in case you boys think I’m a crook, I must remind you that I just took what was coming to me in back pay. Included in the deal was an extra hundred dollars. I admit McClunk just owed me four hundred.”

“He owed us fifty a piece,” says McGinty.

“True,” says Kidd. “And here is the extra hundred, which I collected for you.”

While me and McGinty play the part of gaping apes, he passes us each fifty buckaroos.

“You know, or didn’t you,” he goes on, “that McClunk is famous for defrauding showfolks? Yes, indeed. So I thought a little of his own medicine might help his indigestion.”

“Well,” says McGinty, “what do we do next, start an almshouse?”

“I was thinking,” said Kidd, “that we might start our own little show. I’ve got a little money saved up, and we could buy a tent, the missus could sell tickets, and you lads could do the ballyhoo and lecturing. I’ll be the feature attraction and the reward will be no less than \$1000.”

“What, a thousand?” echoes McGinty. “Suppose someone makes you laugh?”

“My friend,” says Kidd, “let me tell you a secret of my success. The reason I don’t laugh is because, for the past year, I have had some kind of neuritis or maybe rheumatism of the facial muscles. It hurts me to smile. In fact, it hurts me to eat. Haven’t you noticed that I always eat soup?”

“Yeah,” says McGinty. “But how come you could laugh for Mrs. Kidd?”

“Believe me, boys,” says Kidd, with a very straight face, “it nearly killed me, it hurt so much.”

Hi look! Hi look! Hi look! Step right this way, folks. See *The Cowboy Who Never Smiles*. Win yourself \$1000 reward!

Try and get it!

THE END