A Night on the Set

by clgfanfic

Summary

Still more outlaws and actors.

Notes

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The location for the shoot, Northern Utah, was hot and dusty. Lights and reflectors made the temperatures nearly unbearable, but the studio and network (in their infinite wisdom), had decided that the local (Universal studios back lot) scenery had been worked to death.

Thus, several weeks earlier, a construction crew had been sent ahead into the desert. The crew refurbished a tumbled-down old homestead and barn, added a few building flats, hitching posts and water troughs and a western set was born. The location now looked like a small town, each flat aged to match the original building.

"Cut! That's a take!" the director hollered. "Pete, Ben I don't need you until tomorrow morning. Early. We have to get that dawn scene shot while we have the light."

The short, pudgy man turned, scanning the cast and extras before picking his victims. "Earl. Dennis. Bill. We're ready for scene 16-A. Let's go."

He pointed to several of the extras. "You, you and you, follow Earl." He rotated on his heel. "Get those horses over here!" he yelled at one of the wranglers.
Pete and Ben sidestepped the men scampering to their blocked positions, and jogged several steps to get out of the way of the horses. Once they cleared the chaos they slowed, walking tiredly back to their trailers, stopping occasionally to talk to the curious who had driven out to watch the filming, or local extras who hung around the location, hoping to get in a shot.

"I hate location shoots," Ben grumbled after he and his costar watched the three young ladies hurry off, clutching their autographs excitedly.

"Me, too," Pete agreed, digging a cigarette from his shirt pocket. He lit it and inhaled.

"When are you going to realize that those things'll kill you?" Ben griped, fanning the smoke away.

"Bitch, bitch, bitch," came the playful reply. "Another few days and this turkey'll be in the can. D'ya think you can put up with me for that long?"

"I suppose so, but it won't be easy." He grinned, taking the sting out of the teasing. "I'm for a hot shower, a cold beer, and getting out of these," Ben continued, slapping at his dusty costume.

"Best idea you've had all day. What time do you have?"

Ben started to look at his wrist watch, but caught himself, realizing that he'd taken it off that morning when he'd donned the old west costume.

"I don't have a watch, smartass, but you do." He nodded at Pete's chest.

Pete drew the antique pocket watch from his vest pocket. It had been a gift from his sister after he'd finished filming the pilot for the series and it had sold.

Opening the cover, he said, "Almost five, why?"

Ben rolled his eyes, but smiled. "I'll meet you over at the catering tent for dinner in an hour. I want to go over some of the script changes we got this morning after I take that shower."

"Sounds good to me. See you in an hour."

The two men parted company, each heading for his own tin can that served as home for the duration of the filming.

Pete entered the trailer, and pulled the door closed behind him. Removing his dusty, smelly costume, he laid it out for wardrobe to collect, then checked his pistol. Several months earlier the safety man hadn't cleared the blank rounds from the pistol's chambers, and only sheer luck had kept a serious accident from happening. Pete got into the habit of checking the weapon, and the "safety man" lost his job.

That done, he stepped into the shower, allowing the hot water to flow over his body, washing away the dust and fatigue. When he finally felt clean and relaxed, he dressed and stepped out and dried off. Dressing next in a T-shirt and slightly frayed cut-off jeans shorts, he looked more like a beach bum than one of Hollywood's up and coming young stars.

Dropping into the padded chair, Pete idly skimmed the next day's shooting schedule. Definitely an early call, he groaned inwardly. Five o'clock in the morning should be illegal. Realizing that he'd agreed to meet his co-star at six, and that he was late, Pete hurriedly gathered up the current shooting script and the new revisions and headed for the noisy catering tent.
Grabbing a paper plate, he helped himself to the food that sat in various tubs of chipped ice and warming trays. At least they ate well out here. Balancing a cup of hot coffee, plate and script, he made his way over to the picnic table where Ben waited.

"You're late," he announced as Pete sat down.

"You noticed."

The two men ate in companionable silence, idly listening to the conversations at the next table, and reading over the script revisions. Pete looked up when a man still dressed in western passed by, heading for the food. He looked familiar.

Pete watched him fill his plate and fetch some coffee from the urn. "Geoff?" he called, when the man turned to find a place to sit. "Over here."

The younger man looked a little confused as he studied Pete, and ignored the come-hither, finding himself a spot at a table near the back of the tent where he had a clear view of the entrance. "Geoff" ate his meal, eyes roaming warily around the crowded pavilion.

"Wonder what's got into him," Pete commented.

"Let the man eat in peace. When he's ready, he'll come over," Ben commented. "Besides, here's the problem I'm having with these changes," he said, tapping a finger on the pink paper. "Curry wouldn't try and fight it out with a bad guy. He'd just fast draw on him and make him back down."

"Yeah," Pete said absently, still watching his brother.

"And the moon's made of green cheese."

"Uh-huh," Pete replied.

"Peter, are you listening to me? I don't want any more bruises tomorrow."

"What'd you say?"

"I said I don't want to break my ass tomorrow. And I don't think you do either."

"Well, let's see what we can do about this so we don't," he said, tapping the script.

The tent alternately emptied and filled around the two men, laughter occasionally breaking through their conversation, but they remained intent on the script changes.

"Geoff" ate his meal in silence, his eyes straying to the women, most of whom wore shorts.
Shameless, he thought to himself, but his eyes were drawn to the shapely limbs just the same.

A couple of wranglers dressed similarly to "Geoff" asked if they could share the table. With a nod, he agreed.

"You one of the locals?" one of the men asked.

"Yeah," came the taciturn reply.

"An extra?" the second asked.

"Huh… yeah. I hired on for a while."

"You any good with horses?"

"I've ridden some rank ones in my time, why?"

"One of the wranglers got kicked this morning by an ornery strawberry roan. Harry should've known better. So, we're short a hand. Pay's better than being an extra. $50 a day, plus room and board."

"Sounds like my kind of job. Where do I sign on?"

"You come see me, Joe Firecloud. After I eat, we'll go over to the corral and see what you can do. What's your name?"

"Bonney, William Bonney."

"No shit. Your folks actually hung you with that moniker? You any kin to ol' Billy the Kid?"

"Yeah… maybe," Bonney replied, his eyes narrowing.

"Well, Billy, ain't that something. This here's Hank Morrison, my second in command. He's also a stunt rider," Joe said to introduce his companion.

After finishing their meal, Joe and Hank stood, Billy following suit, following them over to where they deposited their paper dishes in a trash barrel.

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Pete noticed his brother talking to a couple of the wranglers, and watched them as they left the tent. Geoff didn't stop as they passed the table. Hurt, Pete frowned and turned his attention back to the pink sheets, scribbling a few notes in the margins and committing the lines to memory.

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The tent slowly emptied, people finding their own diversions around the encampment, until only Pete and Ben were left.
Ben finally stood, stretching. "I'm going for a walk before I turn in. It looks like the poker game isn't going off tonight."

Pete sipped at the last of his cold coffee, grimacing. "This tastes like old boots. Wonder if that's what the caterers' secret is."

Ben shook his head and shrugged. "I'll see you bright and early."

"Yeah."

Once outside Ben looked up at the stars, the Milky Way stretched like a veil thrown across the night sky. He drew in a deep breath. It was already cooling off, and the crisp air felt good. He started back for his trailer, passing by several tents arranged in small circles and scattered across the encampment. Fires burned cheerily at the center of the circles, and small groups of people sat around them. At one cluster someone played a guitar and voices sang along in slight disharmony.

Ben would have preferred some company, preferably of the feminine kind, but with a five o'clock call he knew that was out of the question. Hearing laughter and horse snorts, he veered over to the corral.

The young wrangler hopped lightly off one of the rankest horses in the remuda.

"Kid, you're hired," Firecloud said, slapping the man on the back. "That's one of the meanest beasts on this earth, but he's also one of our best stunt animals."

Ben winced at the sound of "Kid," watching as Firecloud passed a bottle of his homemade hootch over to the young man.

"Ben, c'mere. I want you to meet our newest wrangler. Ben Murphy, meet Billy Bonney," Firecloud said.

"Pleased to meet you, er, Mr. Murphy," Billy said warily. "You any kin to Lawrence Murphy down Lincoln way?"

"No, I don't think so," Ben replied, shaking hands with the younger man. Getting a good look at the man, he had to agree that he was a ringer for Pete's younger brother. No wonder Pete made the mistake. "I'd take it easy on Joe's firewater, it'll creep up on you when you least expect it."

"Here, take a swig, it's good stuff," Joe offered.

"No, thanks. I've gotta have a clear head in the morning."

"Poker game's gonna start up over in the big tent. Feel up to it? Or you afraid you'll lose that pretty shirt of yours?"

"You got the money to back up that mouth of yours, Joe?"

"Got mine right here," he said, patting his back pocket.

"Game's open to everyone, Billy. That is, if you can afford to lose," Hank added.

"I can even give you your first day's wages now," Joe told him.

"Thanks, don't mind if I do," was Bonney's reply.

"How about I meet you all over at the tent in, say..." Joe checked his LED watch. "...half an
Ben agreed, returning to his trailer to get some change and bills for the game. Deciding that it was cooling off faster than he liked, he also changed, then walked over to Pete's trailer, and knocked, not waiting for an answer before he entered.

"Hey, Firecloud's got the poker game going. Figured you'd want a chance to win back some of the money you lost last night."

Pete set his guitar gently on the narrow couch. "He give you his 'pigeon' routine?"

"He called you his pigeon, if that's what you mean," Ben replied with a grin.

"Maybe a few hands, just to relax, but let's not make an all-nighter out of it. We've got an early call in the morning," Pete reminded him.

Ben waited while Pete changed into jeans and flannel shirt. "Hey, you know that kid you thought was your brother?"

"Yeah."

"His name's Bill Bonney. Firecloud hired him as a wrangler. And I thought Smith and Jones was corny. You sure your name isn't Bonney?" Ben asked with a laugh. "He sure is a ringer for your brother."

"No, my name isn't Bonney, and I'll bet his isn't either. Just some local trying to re-live the Old West."

"Like us?"

Pete glared at his blond costar, then led the way back to the catering pavilion. Nearing the tent, they could hear that the game was already in progress.

"Raise your ten and bump you twenty…"

"They started without us," Ben said.

Nearing the entrance of the tent, they could see Firecloud, Hank, Bonney, and two men still in costume.

"Oh, no, not again," Pete and Ben said in unison, ducking out of the lit entry.

"Pete, what do we do?" Ben asked in a whisper.

"I dunno, but we've gotta get Heyes and Curry out of there before those guys figure out they're not us."

"Pete, they are fictional characters, right?"

The dark-haired man took a deep breath and shook his head. "Ask me tomorrow."
"Pete, Ben, you two didn't have to get all dressed up to play a little poker," Firecloud said. "Unless you thought it was gonna bring you better luck."

"Huh…” Heyes said, a decidedly unsettled expression pinching his face. "We thought, uh, that we'd… give the game a little more… atmosphere."

Catching sight of Pete curling a finger at him just past the open flap of the tent, Heyes smiled and asked, "Would you deal me and Tha— Ben out this hand? We have to talk."

"Well, four handed isn't poker, Pete, or should I call you Heyes?" Joe replied.

"We'll be right back."

Firecloud shrugged. "I guess we could play a couple of hands without you two."

Curry and Heyes walked calmly out of the tent, and upon rounding the doorway, ran into Pete and Ben.

"Oh, no, not again," the Kid lamented.

"Just what we said," Ben informed him.

"This is beginning to be a habit, Heyes."

"You noticed, did you?"

"Why is this happening to us?" Curry asked no one in particular.

"Payback for all your crimes?" Ben suggested.

"That's funny, real funny," the Kid grumbled. "We ain't never done anything that bad."

"Every time we turn around we seem to be running into you two," Pete grumbled softly. "What's the deal? You're supposed to be two fictional characters Roy dreamed up, or Glen, or somebody."

"This isn't much of a Sunday social for us either," Heyes argued.

"Speak of the devil… Duck, here comes Roy," Ben said, herding the other three into the shadows. "What's he doing here?"

"He was visiting his brother in Tucson, remember?" Pete explained. "He said he'd drive up to see how we were doing."

"Oh, yeah."

They watched Huggins enter the catering tent, heard the hellos and the introductions as Roy and Billy met.

"Roy?" Heyes whispered.

"Roy Huggins," Pete filled in.

Heyes shook his head. "That's Al Gorman, one of the best con men who ever lived. Taught me part of everything I know."
Pete and Ben exchanged smiles. "Yeah, sounds like a producer," Murphy said with a grin.

"And I guess he did at that," Pete added. "Firecloud and Hank are in for a treat. Roy plays better poker than Heyes."

"But the problem is, what to do with these two yahoos," Ben reminded.

"Who you callin' a ya-hoo?" the Kid asked.

Ben ignored him. "Roy knows our doubles, and these two look too much like us to be them."

"Maybe we can use this to our advantage," Pete said, his dark eyes twinkling. "Heyes here thinks he's pretty good with cards—"

"What d'ya mean, 'pretty good'?" Heyes bristled.

"He's got you there, Heyes," Curry replied with a snort.

"Since when do you have room to argue about my skills with a poker deck? Who's been keeping us afloat all this time while we've been waitin' to hear from the governor?"

"Guys, this is no time for an argument," Pete interrupted. "I've got a plan."

"Oh-oh," Ben breathed.

Pete gave his costar a sour look. "Ben, you take Curry to your trailer and give him some of your clothes. I'll do the same with Heyes."

"And?" Murphy asked.

"We'll meet back here."

"And?" Curry asked, a little more forcefully.

Pete ignored the question as he checked his pocket watch. "Say in ten minutes?" He laid his hand on Heyes' shoulder, directing him off, then paused, turning back to the Kid and Ben. "And Kid, lose the hardware, it's not worn at night."

"Why do we have to change clothes in the first place?" Curry asked.

"Because," Heyes explained, "if we don't, we'll look too conspicuous to be them," he concluded, pointing at Pete and Ben.

"I don't want to be them."

"Just go along with it, Kid," Heyes prompted. "Who knows, it might even be fun – for once."

Curry shook his head, but started off with Ben, all four men keeping to the shadows as best they could. It would be far too difficult to explain if they were discovered, and they really didn't want to try.

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Ten minutes later the four men met behind the pavilion. Heyes and Curry were dressed in more contemporary clothing, Curry fidgeting slightly at the loss of the comfortable weight of his Colt.

"I told you I walk with a limp without it," he whispered to Ben.

"Just do the best you can," the actor replied with a sigh.

"Okay, here's the plan," Pete announced softly. "You two... go back in there," he said, pointing to the two outlaws and then the pavilion. "Play cards. And win back some of the money I lost, but watch out for Roy. He's good."

"And what are you two going to be doing in the meantime?" Heyes asked.

"Looking around, trying to find out why you're here."

Heyes and Curry exchanged skeptical glances, but neither of them had a better plan. With deep sighs the two ex-outlaws entered the pavilion, modern money in their pockets and Heyes sporting Pete's pocket watch for verisimilitude.

"It's about time you two showed up," Joe said. "I thought we'd scared you off. Glad to see you changed."

"Naw," the Kid said with an easy smile, "we don't scare that easily."

"Deal us in," Heyes said as the pair sat down.

The poker game went smoothly, the pot dividing pretty evenly between Heyes and Huggins. Bonney, Curry, Hank and Firecloud had each won a few small pots, so they were happy.

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After a through search of the entire encampment, Pete and Ben returned to the catering tent and sat in the darkness, watching Heyes slowly whittle down their executive producer's stake. After a while, Roy leaned back and called for a break, suggesting that they could all use a stretch, and that he wanted to go get a jacket from his car.

Hank and Firecloud agreed, and headed off to check on the horses. Billy declined to join them, walking over to the coffee urn and pouring himself a cup. Heyes and Curry stepped outside, quickly locating Pete and Ben.

"You're doing great," Pete said to Heyes, a wide smile plastered across his face. "Roy's never going to believe I cleaned him out."

"You didn't," Heyes reminded him.

"No, his own fictional creation did."

"Pete, we can't tell him that. He'll have us committed to a loony bin," Ben argued.

"Yeah," Pete admitted wistfully. "You're probably right."
"So," Curry interrupted, "why are we here?"

Ben shrugged. "We don't have a clue. We checked the entire encampment and couldn't find anything out of the ordinary."

"Great," the Kid growled. "We sat in there playin' with amateurs and you two can't find anything?"

"Fine, you think you can do better, Ben and I'll go back in there and you can look around," Pete suggested.

The Kid nodded. "That sounds like a better plan."

Heyes and Curry headed into the shadows, Pete and Ben watching. The actors turned back to the tent.

"Think they'll find anything?" Ben asked.

"Don't know."

A hand descended on the dark-haired man's shoulder, and Pete yelped, spinning around ready to deck whoever it was.

"Hey, what's the big idea ignoring me?"

Pete's eyes lit up when we realized it was his younger brother. Then his face pinched.

Geoff's eyes narrowed. "Wait a minute… I passed you back there," he pointed, his forehead wrinkling.

"Ignored you?" Pete asked. "What do you mean, ignored you? You've been here all night and not so much as a hello, drop dead, or anything."

"Pete, I've been driving all night to get here." Geoff glanced around. "Wherever the hell 'here' is. The map the studio gave me is worthless."

Pete's eyes widened slightly. "You've been driving all night?"

Geoff nodded.

"I told you," Ben cut in. "The kid's name is Bonney."

Geoff looked surprised. "How'd you hear about it already?"

"About what?" Ben asked.

"That's why I drove all the way out here. I got a part! A real part."

Pete smiled. "That's great, what is it?"

"A movie, with John Wayne."

"No kidding?" Pete asked.

"Yeah, I'm going to be playing William Bonney. Billy the Kid."

"Billy the Kid?" Pete squeaked.
"Bill Bonney," Ben echoed.

"Yeah, isn't that great?"

"Yeah," "No," the pair replied in unison.

Geoff shook his head. "Well, I think it's great."

"Where is he?" Pete asked Ben.

"Who?" Geoff asked.

"Billy," Pete said, stepping closer to the tent and peering in.

"Billy who?"

"Never mind," Ben told the younger Deuel. "It's too complicated."

"Hey!"

The three men stepped into the pavilion and found Roy standing at the table, an angry expression on his face. He looked up. "You, where's all the money?"

"Money?" Geoff asked.

Firecloud and Hank stepped in to join them. "Billy?" the head wrangler said, confused. "I thought you said you were going to call it a night?"

"Huh, we can explain," Pete said.

"We can?" Ben asked.

"Where'd you see Billy?" Pete asked.

"Out at the corral," Hank said.

"We'll be right back," Pete said with a smile, then grabbed Ben and Geoff's shirt sleeves and dragged them out of the tent.

"What about the money?" Roy called.

"Money?" Joe asked. "Hey, we've been robbed!"

"I'll explain in a minute!" Pete called back, heading them toward the corral.

Heyes and Curry watched Billy scoop the poker money into his hat and head out of the tent, and trailed him to the corral. There he saddled the strawberry roan and shoved the money into one of the saddle bags.

"Where are you planning on going with that money?" Heyes asked as he and Curry stepped out of the darkness.
"Get outta my way," the young man snarled.

"Boy, you've a real attitude," Curry said, folding his arms over his chest.

"And it's not polite to steal from your poker buddies," Heyes added.

"Yeah? Well, the hell with you," Billy said, rolling up into the saddle.

"You're not going anywhere, not with that money," Pete said, stepping into the old barn, Ben and Geoff behind him.

"Pete?" Geoff said, his eyes widening as he saw Billy.

Billy reached behind him and tugged an old Colt free from his belt. "Don't get in my way," he threatened, kicking the roan's flanks. The gelding lurched forward, Heyes and Curry bolting to avoid being run down.

Pete and Ben stepped to one side, the dark-haired actor grabbing at the horse's reins as the gelding passed. He jerked the leather strap and the roan obeyed the stunt command, immediate falling to that side.

Pete and Ben jumped back, nearly knocking Geoff down. Heyes and Curry stepped in and grabbed Billy.

"Let me go!"

"Shut up," Curry growled.

Heyes reached down and picked up the saddle bag, finding them heavier than he'd anticipated. "There's more than just poker winnings in here," he said, handing it to Pete.

Pete checked the other side and found several stacks of bills. "Probably the cash for paying the extras," he guessed. "He must have stolen this before he came in for supper…" He trailed off, looking up at the younger man. "I'll give you balls, that's for sure."

Billy sneered. "Yeah, well, one day everybody's gonna know who Billy the Kid is."

Geoff eased around Pete to get a better look at his doppleganger. "Maybe you're right," he said.

Billy's eyes widened in surprise.

"But it's not going to be you. You're a spoiled little bastard, but I'm going to make you human."

"Come on, let's get this back to the tent before they come looking for us," Ben said, taking the saddlebags from Pete.

The three actors led the way out of the old barn, the three outlaws following. Billy jerked suddenly and bolted away.

"I've got him," Curry shouted, lunging after him.

"He's got a gun, Kid!" Heyes snapped, following his partner.

"It's fake!" Ben called.
The three actors stepped back into the barn. It was empty.

"Pete?" Geoff said. "Could you please explain to me what's going on?"

Pete slipped an arm over his brother's shoulders. "Geoff, I wish I could, but you're not going to believe it."

"Try me," he suggested as they walked back out into the cool night air.

"Well, it's like this—"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," a voice interrupted.

The three looked up, Pete and Ben's mouths dropping open. He was dressed in dapper western apparel, a bowler resting jauntily on his head.

"I was wondering, is there a hotel in this town?" the man asked.

"Huh, no," Geoff answered for his mute companions.

"Then I guess I'll just keep riding. Thank you." He clucked at his bay and rode off into the night.

"Wasn't that Roy Huggins?" Geoff asked.

Pete and Ben exchanged forlorn glances. "No, Geoff," Pete explained, "that was Al Gorman."

"Oh."


The End

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