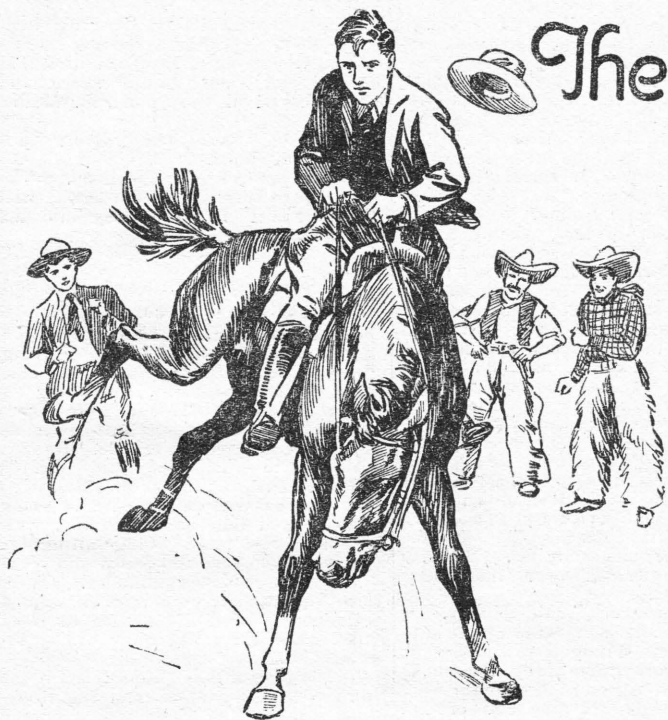


SENSATIONS ON THE RANCH! As a rule nobody takes any notice of Baldy Bubbin, a notorious chatterbox. But they sit up and take notice when Baldy circulates a startling rumour about a stranger who rides into Windy River, seeking work!



The New Chum at Windy River!

A Stirring Long Complete Story dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, in the Wild West.

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. In Direst Peril!

"HALT!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy was riding at a trot on the Mosquito trail, heading for the Windy River Ranch. He was thinking chiefly of supper, having spent a long afternoon in the saddle. Certainly he was not thinking of a "hold-up."

But it was a hold-up that was destined to happen before supper.

A shadowy figure loomed up from a belt of larches by the trail, and Jimmy caught the glimmer of a revolver.

He reined in Blazer at once.

A dark face, with scintillating black eyes, peered at him in the gloom. And Jimmy's heart sank a little as he recognised Red Henri, the half-breed.

"So it is you!" said the half-breed, with a savage grin.

"Little me!" answered Jimmy.

"You know me?"

"I know you, you horse-thief!" retorted Jimmy Silver. "And I warn you that if the cowpunchers get hold of you you're as likely as not to be lynched on the nearest tree!"

"Light down from that horse."

Jimmy Silver set his teeth. A week ago he had encountered Red Henri, the half-breed, in the foothills in possession of a stolen horse. Evidently the horse-thief had not forgotten him.

But Jimmy Silver did not intend to lose Blazer if he could help it.

He dismounted at the half-breed's order. His riding-whip was in his hand, and he watched for a chance to use it as a weapon.

The half-breed came a little nearer, his black eyes gleaming at the Rookwood junior.

It was evidently only the fear of consequences that kept him from pulling the trigger.

"Put up your hands!" he snapped savagely.

"You're not stealing my horse, you scoundrel!" said Jimmy Silver, between his teeth.

"Hands up, or—"

Jimmy Silver's hands swept up, and the riding-whip crashed against the revolver, knocking it high. There was a sharp report as the weapon exploded, but the bullet flew a yard over the Rookwood junior's head.

The next instant Jimmy Silver was springing at the startled half-breed, and his fist crashed in the dusky face.

Red Henri staggered back.

Jimmy was upon him at once. He knew that if the ruffian had a chance to use the revolver he would use it now ruthlessly. The riding-whip crashed on Red Henri's arm, and the revolver went to the ground.

A fierce exclamation rang out from the half-breed, and he grasped at Jimmy Silver.

His muscular hand closed on the Rookwood junior, and Jimmy struggled for his life.

"Help!" he shouted.

The trail was a lonely one, and night was falling. But there was always a chance that some cowpuncher of the Windy River outfit might be within hearing.

"Help!"

Jimmy had no time to shout again. In the fierce grasp of the horse-thief he was borne to the ground.

He went down into the grass, resisting fiercely, with the half-breed over him.

Two savage hands gripped his throat, and the half-breed's eyes glared down from above.

"Now!" panted Red Henri.

With his left hand he pinned the junior down, and with his right he groped in his belt for a knife.

Clatter, clatter!

It was the sound of hoof-beats on the hard trail in the direction of Mosquito, from which Jimmy had come.

Clatter!

The half-breed started and listened. For a second his grasp on Jimmy Silver's throat relaxed.

"Help!" yelled Jimmy.

The grasp closed on his throat again. Red Henri dragged at the knife in his belt.

From the shadowy trail a horseman dashed up, with a clatter of galloping hoofs. He drew his horse in so suddenly that it came almost upon its haunches, and leaped to the ground. The knife of the half-breed was flashing in the air, when the newcomer seized the ruffian and dragged him back.

The blow descended, but the weapon struck only the earth.

Red Henri turned like a tiger on his new assailant.

Jimmy Silver sat up, panting.

The two men were struggling fiercely, and Jimmy scrambled to his feet to go to the aid of his rescuer.

There was a sharp cry from the newcomer; the half-breed had used his knife. Jimmy sprang breathlessly to his aid, and his fist crashed on the side of Red Henri's head.

The half-breed rolled over, the knife flying from his hand. Jimmy Silver caught it up.

"Now, you scoundrel—"

Red Henri leaped away.

Jimmy made a rush at him; but the half-breed leaped back, and, turning, fled into the shadows of the larches. For a moment or two his fleeing footsteps could be heard, and then Red Henri had vanished into the dusk of the wide prairie.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Nothing Doing!

JIMMY SILVER turned quickly to his rescuer.

In the dusk he made out a young man, apparently only a few years older than himself—a sturdy,

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handsome fellow, dressed in riding-clothes.

"You're hurt!" panted Jimmy.

"Only a scratch, I think!" answered the rescuer cheerily. "I'd caught his wrist, and the knife gashed along my arm. He meant business, though, the brute!"

"Let's see it," said Jimmy.

There was blood running from under the stranger's sleeve. He drew back the sleeve coolly.

"Only a cut," he said. "I can bind it up with my handkerchief."

"Let me bind it," said Jimmy Silver. "I've been a Scout in the Old Country, and I know how to bandage."

And Jimmy proceeded to bind up the cut. The young man looked at him curiously.

"You're from the Old Country?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" answered Jimmy. "I'm staying at present with my cousin—Hudson Smedley—at the Windy River Ranch. My name's Jimmy Silver."

"Mine's Smith. Montague Smith—Monty, for short."

There was a momentary hesitation in the stranger's manner as he gave his name. Jimmy Silver did not note it then, but he remembered it afterwards.

"Jolly glad to meet you, Mr. Smith," said Jimmy, with a smile. "I dare say you know you've saved my life?"

"Yes; I fancy that brute meant murder," said Smith. "Who and what was he?"

"A horse-thief—a half-breed. I've met him before," said Jimmy. "I'm sorry he's got away. Jolly lucky for me that you came along the trail just when you did!"

"Lucky for me, too, perhaps."

"How's that?"

"You've mentioned that you're staying at the Windy River Ranch. I'm going there, and I'm not at all sure of the way. I'm a stranger in this section."

"You know Hudson Smedley?"

"Not at all. I'm going to the ranch to look for work."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy in surprise.

Monty Smith smiled.

"You don't think there's any chance for me?" he asked.

"You don't look much like a cow-puncher," said Jimmy Silver. "Have you worked on a ranch before?"

"Never!"

"Anyhow, Mr. Smedley will put you up at the ranch for to-night," said Jimmy. "He'll be jolly glad to see you, after what you've done for me."

"But he's not looking for new hands?"

"Well, you see, the round-up's over," explained Jimmy. "There was plenty to do when the busy season was on, but now—"

"I see! Not much chance for a newcomer, especially one who doesn't know the ranch business?"

"I—I'm afraid not. But it won't do any harm to ask, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's get on. You're pretty late on the trail for a man looking for work."

"I've missed the trail about six times since leaving Mosquito."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"I suppose I'd better not mention that when I'm asking the boss of the ranch for a job?" said the young man, laughing.

"Better not," said Jimmy, laughing too. "Anyhow, you won't miss the trail again. I know it like a book. This way."

Jimmy Silver jumped on Blazer, and

Monty Smith remounted his horse. They rode on together by the trail over the darkening prairie.

"Fresh from the Old Country?"

Jimmy Silver asked.

"Oh, no! I've been in Canada for years."

"Not in the West?"

"In a town," answered Monty Smith; "not on the ranches."

"You're not a remittance-man?" asked Jimmy Silver, rather anxiously.

He was well aware of the ranchers' opinion of remittance-men.

"No; never had the luck. I've been working for my daily bread; now I'm looking for a change."

"I—I see," said Jimmy.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy Silver did not see. It was unusual, at least, for a townman to "fire" himself from his job, and look for work on the ranches at the end of the summer. Even if the young man had been "fired" by his employers, and had no choice about seeking a new job, it was odd enough for him to come up into the North-West to look for one.

But that was not Jimmy's business, and he certainly wished his new acquaintance the best of luck, and had privately resolved to put in a word for him, if he could, with Hudson Smedley. The young man evidently knew very little about the ranches, but he certainly had saved Jimmy Silver's life.

A light gleamed over the dusky prairie at last.

"That's the ranch," said Jimmy.

The two horsemen rode up to the ranch-house at Windy River. Some of the outfit were grouped by the bunkhouse, and Ecie Peters, the foreman of the ranch, took his pipe out of his mouth and called to Jimmy.

"Hallo, Jimmy! You're late back."

"Come jolly near being later," answered Jimmy. "I was held up on the trail—that horse-thief, Red Henri."

"By gum! Who's the stranger?"

All the Windy River men were eyeing Monty Smith in the light from the bunkhouse.

"Chap looking for a job on the ranch," said Jimmy.

"Take him away and bury him," said Pete Peters.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess, stranger, this hyer isn't the time to look for jobs," said Skitter Dick. "It's arter the round-up."

"He's a tenderfoot from the town," said Red Alf. "Look at them bags!"

And the cowpunchers laughed again.

"All serene—only their fun," whispered Jimmy Silver, as Monty Smith flushed red.

The young man nodded.

Baldy Bubbin came out of the cookhouse, his fat face ruddy. He grinned at the stranger.

"I guess I've seen you afore," said Baldy.

"I think not."

"I guess I have," persisted Baldy. "What's your name?"

"Smith."

"Waal, that ain't a gol-darned uncommon name," said the cook. "I guess I've struck heaps of Smiths in my time. Where was it I struck you, stranger? Been in Mosquito afore?"

"I've never been in this part of Alberta before," said the newcomer briefly.

"I guess that's so, or he wouldn't have come along in them bags," said Red Alf, with his grinning glance fixed on the young man's baggy riding-breeches—quite a new sight at Windy River.

"Waal, I've seen him," said Baldy.

"Know his face like a book. Pr'aps I've seen you in Kicking Mule, stranger?"

"I've never been in Kicking Mule."

"Or down in Red Deer?"

"I don't know Red Deer."

"Waal, I've seen you somewhere," said Baldy, "and I don't seem to remember that you was named Smith, neither."

And with that, Baldy, the cook, went back into the cookhouse, looking a trifle huffed. Apparently, he was assured that he had met Monty Smith before, and was annoyed at the young man's disclaimer.

"Come on," said Jimmy Silver. "I'll put up your horse."

And he led his new friend on. The horses were turned into the corral, and Jimmy Silver led the way into the ranch-house.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

What's in a Name!

HUDSON SMEDLEY gave the stranger a hearty greeting when Jimmy explained how matters stood. The taking on of new hands was a task for Pete Peters to attend to; but Hudson Smedley made the young man very welcome. He was not likely to fail in hospitality towards one who had saved his cousin's life. Woo Sing was ordered to get a room ready at once, and the rancher chatted with his unexpected guest while waiting for supper, and Lovell, and Raby, and Newcome made his acquaintance. Their verdict was that the young man seemed quite decent, and his service to their chum made them feel quite kindly towards him.

At the supper-table Monty Smith sat down with the rancher and the Rookwood juniors, and there was a cheery buzz of conversation. But Jimmy Silver could not help noticing that the newcomer talked very little about himself. That he had worked in a town, and that he had left his job for a change, was about all that he said on his own account; he did not mention the name of the town or the nature of his former work.

That was all his own business, of course; but such reticence was rather unusual. Indeed, it was not likely to do, if he expected to get a new post. A new employer would naturally want to know something about him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. bade the young man a cheery good-night after supper, and went to their rooms. Monty Smith was given the next room to Jimmy's, looking over the veranda. Jimmy, looking out into the night before turning in, caught sight of a face at the next window. Monty Smith was looking out, too!

He smiled and nodded as he caught Jimmy Silver's glance.

"Topping fine night!" he said.

"Yes, rather," assented Jimmy Silver. "How do you like it here?"

"Fine! Not much chance of catching on, though. I'm afraid," said Monty Smith. "It seems that this is a time on the ranches when hands are more likely to be sacked than taken on."

"Well, that's so," agreed Jimmy. "Mr. Smedley wouldn't turn off any of the outfit, but taking on fresh men is another matter, of course! Is it—?" He hesitated. "If you don't mind my asking, is it important for you to get fixed?"

"Well, a little. I'm not quite down to bedrock, but very nearly. I've got to find something."

"Wouldn't there be more chance in a town?"

"I'm fed up with towns."

"You should have tackled the ranches in the spring, or early in the summer," remarked Jimmy.

"Yes, I knew; but I hadn't any choice. I fancy I'll get on my way to-morrow, and try at the Sunset Ranch—that's the next in this direction, I believe."

"Yes," assented Jimmy. "But I hope something can be done here."

He bade the young man good-night, and went to bed. But for a long time Monty Smith stood at his window, looking out at the stars and the dusky prairie. He sighed when he turned away at last, and turned in.

The next morning Monty Smith breakfasted with the Fistical Four of Rookwood; Hudson Smedley was already out on his horse. After breakfast Arthur Edward Lovell was riding to Mosquito for letters, and Raby and Newcome went with him. Jimmy Silver would probably have gone with his chums, but he stayed on, as Smith was there. As the rancher was still absent, Jimmy walked round the place with the tenderfoot, pointing out things of interest to him. All things on a ranch were evidently new to the young man, and Jimmy concluded that if he had been in Canada for years, it must have been in an eastern province. But in Canada there is a sharp dividing line between town and country, and it was quite possible that Smith had spent years in a western town, like Calgary, without learning much of what lay beyond.

By the corral Jimmy and his companion came on Peters. The foreman of the ranch nodded to Jimmy and stared at Smith.

"Still lookin' for that job?" he asked.

"That's why I'm here."

"I guess there's nothing to it," said Pete. "Sorry, as you seem to have played up like a little man in helping Jimmy, here. You've got a cut on your fin, I hear."

"Only a scratch."

"I guess I'll give you a tip in looking for a job at the next shebang," said Pete, with a grin. "Don't go around in them bags, looking like a town dandy. Get yourself some cowboy clothes. See?"

"Let's see the tenderfoot on a hoss," said Rod Alf, lounging up. "Know how to sit on a hoss, tenderfoot?"

"He came here on a horse," said Jimmy Silver.

"Not much of a hoss," said Red Alf, with a nod towards the tenderfoot's steed in the corral. "How much did you give for that gee, stranger?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Gee-whiz! I guess you was done out of a hundred and fifty, then!"

"I'm not a judge of horses," said Monty Smith.

"No need to mention that," grinned Red Alf. "You ain't, sure! Put him on Blazer, and see him fall off, Jimmy!"

"Rats!" retorted Jimmy.

"I can ride, though," said Monty Smith. "I used to ride a good bit in the Old Country. I'll try Blazer, whatever Blazer is."

"You won't," said Jimmy, laughing. "He's a buck-jumper, and too much of a handful for a man that doesn't know him well."

"Here's a nice quiet critter," said Spike Thompson, entering into the joke on the stranger, and leading out a raw-boned horse with wicked eyes. "Like to try him, stranger, if I saddle him for you? You'll have to ride, you know, if you get a job on this hyer ranch."

"I'm ready!"

tenderfoot wheel it at last and ride it back to the corral. Monty Smith jumped down.

He was a little breathless, but cool. "I fancy I can ride that horse," he remarked.

"You ain't such a greenhorn as you look in them trousers," admitted Red Alf.

He drove the horse into the corral again. Baldy Bubbin was looking on from the doorway of the cookhouse, and he had stepped out to pick up the young man's hat. There was quite a curious expression on Baldy's fat face as he stood with the hat in his hand. When Alf took the horse away Baldy came over to the group.



ROPED IN! Whiz! The lasso descended over the shoulders of the straining horseman in front, and Skitter Dick drew in his horse. The tautening rope twanged loudly, and there was a gasping cry from Monty Smith, as he was plucked from the saddle, as if by a giant's hand. (See Chapter 6.)

"Look here——" began Jimmy.

"You ease off, young 'un," said Pete Peters. "Let the tenderfoot show us what he can do."

Spike saddled the big, raw-boned brown, who stood quiet under the experienced cowboy's hands. But it was a different matter when the tenderfoot mounted him.

The horse was a buck-jumper, and he began to buck at once. His fore-feet went high into the air, and the cowpunchers stood round grinning, to see the tenderfoot slip off over the lashing tail.

But Monty Smith sat tight.

Down came the forefeet with a crash like thunder, and up into the air went the horse's hind legs.

Still the tenderfoot sat tight.

"He can ride!" said Pete Peters, rather grudgingly.

The brown horse broke into a sudden rush, and Monty Smith still sat tight. His hat flew off, but his knees gripped the horse hard and his hand was firm on the rein. The cowpunchers watched the flight of the horse, and saw the

"Your hat, Mr. Smith!" he said, with a peculiar accent on the name.

Monty Smith took the hat, flushing a little.

"Thanks!" he said.

"I told you yesterday that I knowed you," said Baldy. "I seem to disremember your name, but it ain't Smith."

"Cheese it, Baldy!" said Jimmy Silver sharply.

"Leastways," said Baldy deliberately, "if your name's Smith, I reckon you lifted that hat from the owner, tenderfoot."

"What the thump are you driving at?" demanded Jimmy.

Baldy grinned.

"There's a name wrote in that hat," he said, "and I guess galoots don't write other men's names in their hats."

"What rot!" snapped Jimmy. "If there's a name written in the hat, it's this chap's name, of course!"

"I allow that's so."

"Smith, of course!" added Jimmy angrily.

"Tain't Smith!"

"Oh, rats!"

All eyes were turned curiously on the young man. Baldy's statement had made an impression.

"You've given your name here as Smith, stranger," said Pete Peters abruptly. "If you've got another name written in your hat, I guess we'd like to know what it means."

"I guess so," said Baldy emphatically. "On this hyer ranch, stranger, galoots don't sail under false colours."

Monty Smith's face was crimson. He had replaced the hat on his head, but Spike Thompson, with a sudden movement, jerked it off and held it up. Every eye read the name that was inscribed inside.

"M. de Courcy!"

"De Courcy!" exclaimed Pete Peters. "Great gophers! Where did you dig up a name like that, stranger? It's a pesky duke in disguise, boys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver looked anxiously at his new friend. He was quite sure, in his own mind, that Monty Smith was "square," but the incident was certainly a very curious one.

"I guess you ought to have bought a new hat along with a new name, tenderfoot," chuckled Skifter Dick.

"I suppose I can explain easily enough," said the young man, his face red. "My name is De Courcy, but I've been chipped about it so much since I came West that I've changed it to Smith."

"Waal, I guess a galoot with a name like that would be chipped," chuckled Pete Peters.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There ain't many galoots named De Courcy on the ranches, for a fact," remarked Spike Thompson. "Fust I've ever struck."

"Smith's an easier handle to get about with in the West, I allow," said the foreman. "But was that your only reason for changing it, stranger?"

"It's the only reason I have to give," said Monty Smith quietly.

"And a good enough one," said Jimmy Silver.

And he drew Monty Smith away from the spot. The cowpunchers were left chuckling—much entertained by the discovery that the tenderfoot bore the uncommon and aristocratic name of De Courcy.

Baldy Bubbin rubbed his fat nose thoughtfully.

"I guess he's got me beat, all the same!" he remarked. "I reckon I know that galoot's face, and I reckon I know his name, though I disremember it—and it ain't either Smith or De Courcy! I calculate I've got my suspicions of that galoot. He's got too many names to please me!"

And Badly, the cook, went back to the cookhouse, shaking his bald head seriously.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

MONTY SMITH stayed on at the Windy River Ranch.

Hudson Smedley was a little perplexed to know what to do with him. He was not required on the ranch; the outfit was more than numerous enough for the period following the round-up. But he had saved Jimmy Silver's life, and he was keen for work, and the rancher was hospitable. There was no likelihood of the young man getting a job in North-West Alberta, and the rancher had a shrewd idea that he was near the end of his resources. And for some days his arm was likely to be useless from the gash of

the half-breed's knife. The wound had bled again after the exertion of riding the buck-jumper—a reckless proceeding in the circumstances—and it needed care. So Monty Smith was given leave to bunk down with the outfit, and to make himself as useful as he could till some better opening should turn up.

In a few days Monty Smith—or De Courcy—was quite well liked by the outfit.

He was a frank and good-natured fellow, always ready to do anybody a good turn, and he was made welcome in the bunkhouse.

On the subject of his name the outfit were satisfied. It was natural enough that a man named De Courcy should prefer to look for work in the democratic West under the less remarkable name of Smith.

Only Baldy, the cook, was not satisfied.

He persisted that he had seen the young man before somewhere when he was not called either Smith or De Courcy; and Monty persisted in disclaiming all knowledge of Baldy.

Baldy's opinion, therefore, was that the new man had a secret to keep, and he hinted darkly that Monty had had good reasons for "lighting" out to the West under an assumed name.

Jimmy Silver had accepted Monty Smith's explanation, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

All four of the Rookwood fellows liked the newcomer, and they were friendly with him.

And Smith, tenderfoot as he was, showed keenness and intelligence, and quickly picked up the ways of the ranch. After he had been a week at Windy River he spoke to Pete Peters.

"Am I worth my keep yet?" he asked. Pete eyed him.

"I guess you are," he replied.

"Good! If I'm not, I'm clearing," said Monty Smith. "I'm not taking advantage of Mr. Smedley's kindness because I helped his cousin. See?"

"I see," assented Pete. "Waal, young man, you're worth your keep, and that's about all."

"That's all I want," said Monty. So he stayed on.

It was a day or two later that Jimmy Silver had his first shock. He had heard some of Baldy's dark surmises, without paying any attention to them. But a little incident brought the matter very sharply into his mind.

Red Henri, the half-breed, had been seen again in the vicinity, and he had succeeded in annexing a horse from the Sunset Ranch. And there was news on the ranch that a couple of troopers of the Mounted Police were coming up from Kicking Mule to look for the horse-thief.

Jimmy Silver mentioned the matter to Monty Smith in the afternoon, as they rode back from the visit to Coyote Creek.

Monty made no answer for a full minute. Jimmy, glancing at him, saw a very strange expression on his face.

"I should have thought an outlying region like this was outside the beat of the Mounted Police," Monty Smith said at last.

"That's so," said Jimmy. "But they come when they're needed—and they're needed now, to run in that horse-thief."

"Likely to come to Windy River?"

"Sure to," said Jimmy. "I know one of them—Trooper Bright. Now that the rush of work is over, I dare say some of the outfit will help them in hunting for Red Henri. I shall get along if I can."

Monty Smith rode on in silence for some minutes.

"That's a rather lonely post down at Coyote Creek, where we've just been," he remarked at last.

"That's so," assented Jimmy.

"I'm not a regular member of the outfit, but I think I ought to take my turn there," said Monty.

Jimmy did not answer that.

"I think I'll ask Mr. Smedley to send me there for a week or so," the young man went on.

Still Jimmy was silent.

He liked Monty Smith, and Monty had saved his life. But he could not help seeing what the young man's words implied. He thought the matter over, and decided to speak out plainly.

"Look here, Smith—"

"Well?"

"You know Baldy has got all sorts of ideas in his fat head about you."

"I know! He's told me. Nothing underhand about Baldy Bubbin," said Monty Smith, laughing.

"Well, it's all rot, of course. I know you're square," said Jimmy. "But better not ask to be sent to Coyote Creek just at the time when the Mounted Police are coming to the ranch. It will really look as if you don't want to see them, or to let them see you. Excuse my putting it plain, won't you?"

Monty coloured a little.

"You think it would look like that?" he asked slowly.

"Well, yes."

"Then I won't ask."

"Good!"

The subject dropped with that, but the ride was finished in a rather uncomfortable silence.

Jimmy Silver had had a shock, and it worried him a little. He was rather anxious to see Monty Smith show up in the presence of the troopers when they arrived, which would prove that Baldy's wild surmises were groundless, and that Monty Smith had nothing to conceal.

The next day Troopers Bright and Dodson rode into Windy River Ranch.

Jimmy Silver found them eating a substantial lunch at the cookhouse when he came in from a morning's ride. Baldy, who was looking after their wants, gave Jimmy a wink.

"Where's the tenderfoot, Jimmy," he asked.

"Somewhere about the ranch, I suppose," answered Jimmy carelessly.

"You figure it out he'll let the Mounted see him?"

"Of course!"

"Waal, I reckon not," said Baldy.

"Oh, rot!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

He went to the ranch-house for his dinner, and found Hudson Smedley there with the Rookwooders. Monty Smith was not at the table.

"Where's Smith?" asked Jimmy. "Not come in?"

"He's not coming in," answered Lovell.

Jimmy Silver started.

"How's that?" he asked quickly.

"He's gone to Mosquito."

"There's some stores coming up from Kicking Mule," said Hudson Smedley. "Smith offered to go over and see about them. He will be away a couple of days, Jimmy."

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

It was another shock for him. He simply could not help asking another question:

"Did Smith go before the troopers got here?"

"Oh, yes—some hours before."

"Are they staying long?" asked Jimmy.

"Only to-day. They're going after Red Henri's scalp at sun-up in the morning," answered the rancher.

"Smith won't see them, then?"

"No. He's not likely to be back till to-morrow afternoon."

Jimmy Silver said no more. There was a weight on his mind and on his heart. He liked Monty Smith, and Monty had held back the murderous hand of the horse-thief. But there was no longer the slightest doubt in Jimmy's mind that Monty Smith had reasons—good reasons—for not desiring to meet members of the police force of the North-West, and that he had deliberately avoided coming into contact with them.

What was it that he had to fear from the Mounted Police? For that he had something to fear was the only possible explanation.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Startling Discovery!

BALDY, the cook, came out of the cookhouse a few days later, with a grin on his fat face and a newspaper in his fat hand.

Baldy looked in high feather. "I knewed it!" said Baldy to the world in general.

Nobody gave any special attention to Baldy Bubbin's remark. The fat cook looked round him.

"I tell you galoots that I knewed it!" he exclaimed, raising his voice.

"Well, what did you know, fatty?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"About that man Smith!"

"Oh, give Smith a rest, old chap!" said Lovell. "We're rather tired of you on the subject of Smith!"

"Yes, rather!" remarked Raby.

"I guess I've got him placed!" said Baldy impressively. "Hyer, you, Pete Peters, listen to a galoot, will you?"

"Too busy," answered the foreman of Windy River, without turning his head.

"Why ain't you washing up?"

"Waal, if you want a bank-robber on this hyer ranch—" said Baldy Bubbin.

"What?"

"What's that, Baldy?"

Baldy, the cook, had succeeded in interesting his hearers at last. There were a dozen of the outfit about, and they all turned their attention upon the fat cook. Jimmy Silver came up, his face pale with anger.

"You fat dummy—" he began. Baldy waved a fat hand at him.

"Let up, young Jimmy! Don't I keep on telling you that I've found him out?"

"You fat fool!"

"Waal, what have you found out, anyhow?" demanded Pete Peters sharply.

"You're always chewing the rag, Baldy, and generally there's nothing in it!"

Baldy smiled.

"There's suh'in' in it this time!" he said emphatically. "Didn't I tell you 'uns that I'd seen that galoot before, and disremembered his name? Waal, I know now where I saw him!"

"Where?" asked Skitter Dick.

"In a newspaper."

"In a newspaper?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver blankly. "Have you gone off your rocker, Baldy, or have you been at the fire-water again?"

"This hyer newspaper," said the cook, holding it up. "It's got his picture in it!"

There was a buzz of interest now.

"It's an old paper," said the cook—"I guess a couple of months old. I'd used it to line the bread-box, and, cleaning out the box this hyer afternoon, I came across it. There was the face I remembered—fairly staring at me! That galoot's name ain't Smith any more than it's De Courcy! His name's Lagden!"

"Lagden!" said Jimmy.

"Lagden!" said Pete Peters. "I seem to remember having heard that name talked of somewhere."

"I guess you have!" said Baldy. "It was in the papers. Lagden is the man that robbed the bank at Prince Albert, in Saskatchewan, a couple of months ago, and lighted out with ten thousand dollars in his clothes, and left the watchman with a cracked head!"

"Phew!"

"And you mean to say that Monty Smith has any connection with that rogue?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily.

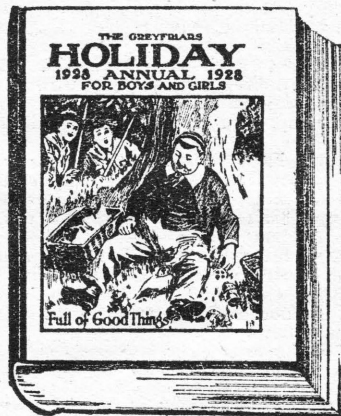
"I mean to say that he's the galoot hisself," said Baldy Bubbin coolly, "and here's his picture to prove it."

Baldy held up the paper, and all eyes were fixed on it.

Jimmy Silver became pale.

The picture in the paper was taken from a photograph, it was evident, and,

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though scarcely well printed, it gave a good rendering of a handsome face that the whole Windy River outfit knew well.

"That's Smith!" said Pete Peters, with a deep breath.

"Smith or his pesky twin!" said Skitter Dick.

It was the face of Monty Smith. Under it was printed in large type:

**"LARRY LAGDEN.
THE CROOK WHO GOT AWAY
WITH 10,000 DOLLARS!
WANTED AT PRINCE ALBERT!"**

Baldy gave Jimmy Silver a lofty, reproving look.

"Don't that prove it?" he demanded.

"I guess it does!" said Pete Peters, knitting his brows. "The durned hypocrite, coming up here where there ain't many newspapers, and nobody to recognise him! No wonder he changed his name now and then!"

"Waal, I guess he couldn't travel as Larry Lagden!" chuckled Baldy. "He would have been roped in so quick it would have made his head swim! What

you got to say now, young Jimmy?" grinned the cook.

Jimmy Silver was silent. He had nothing to say.

His heart was sick within him. The whole outfit had been deceived by a cunning criminal, skulking into the North-West to hide from the police, with his stolen booty still about him. It was a sickening thought.

And yet—

"Hyer's the boss," said Skitter Dick. "Better tell Mr. Smedley, and he can decide what's to be done. The critter oughtn't to be allowed to vamoose the ranch now we know him!"

Hudson Smedley came up to the excited group.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

Baldy, the cook, almost bursting with importance, proceeded to explain. He showed the photograph in the paper as a proof of his explanation. All eyes watched the rancher's darkening face.

"I guess that's purty clear, boss!" said Pete Peters.

"It looks so!" said Hudson Smedley. "That's Smith's picture, I guess. The eyes seem a bit closer together than Smith's, but if it ain't his picture it's surprisingly like him. If he's the man, he's going to be handed over to the police!"

"Let him speak first!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver huskily. "There—there may be a mistake somehow!"

"I guess there ain't room for any mistake!" said Baldy.

"He saved my life!" muttered Jimmy, with an appealing look at the rancher.

Hudson Smedley nodded.

"The man won't be condemned unheard," he said. "I guessed he was square, and took him on trust. Fetch him here, some of you, and let him speak up for himself."

"Where is he?" asked Pete Peters, looking round. "He was at work in the corral half an hour ago."

"Seen Smith, Spike?" called out Lovell, as Spike Thompson came from the direction of the corral.

"Yep! He's just gone!"

"Gone!" yelled the cowpunchers.

"Gone!" said Hudson Smedley.

"Yep!" Spike stared at the excited crowd. He had heard nothing as yet. "He came running into the corral ten minutes ago, and collared his hoss. Never answered when I asked him what was up. He's lit out; I reckoned the boss had sent him somewhere in a hurry."

There was a roar.

"He's the man!"

"I guess that settles it."

"After him!" shouted Pete Peters.

"Which way did he go?"

"Saddle up and follow him!" exclaimed the rancher.

A dozen men rushed for their horses. Skitter Dick clambered to the roof of the bunkhouse and swept the sunlit prairie with his keen glance. His hand rose to point.

"He's making a bee-line west!" he shouted. "Lighting out for the foothills, I guess. After the galoot!"

He jumped down and ran for his horse.

In a minute or less an excited crowd of horsemen went tearing over the prairie on the track of the fleeing man. At their head rode Hudson Smedley, with knitted brows.

Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the ground.

"Well, who'd have thought it?" said Lovell, with a whistle. "The chap's fairly taken us in, Jimmy."

"Blessed if I'd have thought it!" said

THE POPULAR.—No. 457.

Newcome. "I fancied he was as straight as a string."

"Blessed if I can quite believe it now!" confessed Raby. "I—I'd have thought there was some mistake, only—only—"

He was silent. The sudden flight of the suspected bank-robber settled the matter for all minds. Evidently Monty Smith had heard Baldy's excited announcement of his discovery, and while the outfit were listening to Baldy, he had rushed for his horse and fled, without losing an instant.

"He'll never get away," said Lovell. "If he's taken, his own horse, he'll never win a race on that animal."

"He's taken his own horse," said Jimmy, speaking at last. "Whatever he is, he's not a horse-thief."

"Well, he's a thief, if he robbed the bank at Prince Albert," said Lovell. "I fancy he would take the best horse he could, with his liberty at stake."

"He took his own critter!" said Spike Thompson.

"I was sure of it," said Jimmy Silver quietly; "and—and I can't quite believe—I—I think there's some mistake—some—"

"You're an ass, old chap!" said Lovell.

Jimmy did not reply. He waited for the returning hoof-beats of the cowpunchers, his brain in a whirl. The proof was overwhelming, yet somewhere in his heart Jimmy found a vestige of faith in the man who had saved his life, and he hoped, almost unconsciously, that the cowboys would return without a prisoner.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Roped In!

MONTY SMITH cast a hunted look over his shoulder.

He had a good start; but he did not expect to escape from the Windy River Ranch unpursued.

Stetson hats bobbed on the prairie in the westerling sunlight, strung out behind the hard-riding fugitive. A dozen at least of the Windy River cowpunchers were in hot pursuit.

Monty Smith set his teeth and rode on.

He was not so well-mounted as many of his pursuers, and he knew it. But he had a start, and the foothills were not far away, and once in the rocky ravines and trackless canyons of the foothills, he could hope to elude the pursuers. With set teeth, he rode as if for his life.

Behind him, the cowpunchers came on, whooping.

"I guess we're having him," grinned Skitter Dick, as he spurred on his horse.

Foot by foot, the pursuers gained on the hunted man. The rocks of the foothills were still distant, when he was within easy revolver-shot, and Red Alf loosed off his six-shooter. He did not aim at the fugitive, but sent a bullet over his head as a warning.

Monty Smith did not heed.

He rode right on, as if he had not even heard the warning shot.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three or four of the cowpunchers loosed off shots round the fugitive, and Monty Smith did not even turn his head.

"I guess he knows we ain't wanting to hit him," growled Pete Peters. "But we're roping him in, all the same, boyees."

Harder and harder rode the cow-

punchers, nearer and nearer they drew to the desperate, straining horseman ahead.

"Halt!" roared Hudson Smedley.

Monty Smith did not seem to hear.

"Leave him to me, boss!" chuckled Skitter Dick.

He held his lasso in hand, waiting till he was near enough to use the rope.

Foot by foot he gained on the fugitive, and suddenly his right arm shot up and the coiled rope whirled.

Whiz!

The loop descended over the straining horseman in front. Right over his head it dropped, over his shoulders, and down round him.

Skitter Dick drew in his horse.

The well-trained animal halted, planting his forefeet firmly for the shock.

The taunting rope twanged like a fiddle-string.

There was a gasping cry from Monty Smith as he was plucked from the saddle as if by a giant's hand.

Crash!

"I reckoned I had him!" remarked the Skitter complacently.

Monty Smith sprawled in the thick brown grass, dazed by the fall from his horse. He stared dizzily at the cowpunchers as they rode triumphantly up and surrounded him. His horse was dashing away, but was promptly roped in by Red Alf.

Monty Smith lay in the grass and panted. Hudson Smedley looked down on him grimly.

"Put him on his horse," he said. "I guess we'll keep him at the ranch till the troopers can come for him."

"Git up, you galoot," said Skitter Dick.

Rough hands dragged the captured man to his feet. He seemed too dazed to speak; but he realized that the game was up, that escape was impossible now.

He did not utter a word as the cowpunchers lifted him on to his horse and bound him there with a trail-rope.

Skitter Dick held the lasso to lead the prisoner back in triumph to the ranch.

With the cowpunchers whooping gleefully round him, Monty Smith rode back to Windy River.

"Here they come!" shouted Lovell suddenly; and Jimmy Silver, who had gone into the ranch-house, came hurriedly out.

"Have they got him?" he panted.

"Yes."

Jimmy compressed his lips.

The Windy River outfit rode up, with Monty Smith in their midst, bound to his horse.

He was unbound and lifted from the horse's back. Baldy Bubbin gave him a cheerful grin.

"I guess the game's up for you, Mr. Smith de Courcy!" he chuckled. "Didn't I tell you that I knewed you?"

The hapless man made no answer.

"Put him in the stores cabin," said Hudson Smedley. "And you, Alf, ride to Kicking Mule and warn the Mounted Police that we've got Lagden, the bank-robber, here."

"You bet, boss!" said Red Alf.

Then the prisoner spoke, as Alf rode away.

"You're making a mistake, Mr. Smedley! I am not Larry Lagden, the bank-robber of Prince Albert."

The rancher shrugged his shoulders.

"You're like him enough to be arrested for him, then," he said. "I'm bound to send for the police."

"I'm not the man."

"Why did you vamoose, then, you gold-darned critter?" demanded Pete Peters derisively.

Monty Smith's lip quivered.

"Mr. Smedley has stated the reason," he said. "I look so much like the bank-robber as to be arrested for him."

"And you ain't the man?" grinned the foreman of Windy River.

"No."

"I guess that yarn won't do. Anyhow, the Mounted will know whether you're the man or not."

"Put him in the stores cabin," said Hudson Smedley. "Monty Smith, or Lagden, or whatever your name may be, I'm bound to keep you a prisoner and hand you over to the Mounted Police."

If you're not the man, as you say, you've nothing to fear; there's good law in Canada for every man between the Atlantic and the Pacific. But I'm taking no chances with a man who came here under a false name and ran for it when he was found out."

"I guess not!" said Pete Peters.

Monty Smith bowed his head and did not speak again. The cowpunchers led him into the stores cabin. Jimmy Silver followed them, and caught Monty Smith by the sleeve. His eyes searched the handsome face of the captured man.

"You give your word that you're not Larry Lagden, the bank-robber?" muttered Jimmy.

The young man nodded.

"I—I'm sorry for this, Jimmy," he said. "I'd never have stopped at Windy River if—if— But my luck's been rotten. But I've not deceived you, my boy. I swear I have not!"

"I believe you," said Jimmy huskily.

"Now then, out of it, young Silver," said Pete Peters, and the Rookwood junior, with a pale and troubled face, left the cabin.

The door was closed and locked on Monty Smith.

That evening, Baldy, the cook, was in high feather. In the stores cabin, Monty Smith was under lock and key; and Red Alf, the cowboy, was riding hard for Kicking Mule to fetch the Mounted Police. And in all the Windy River crowd there was only one who believed in the innocence of the hapless prisoner—Jimmy Silver. And even Jimmy Silver's loyal belief was beset with dark doubts.

THE END.

(The mystery of Monty Smith is continued in next week's topping long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, entitled: "Defying The Mounted!" You must not miss it.)



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