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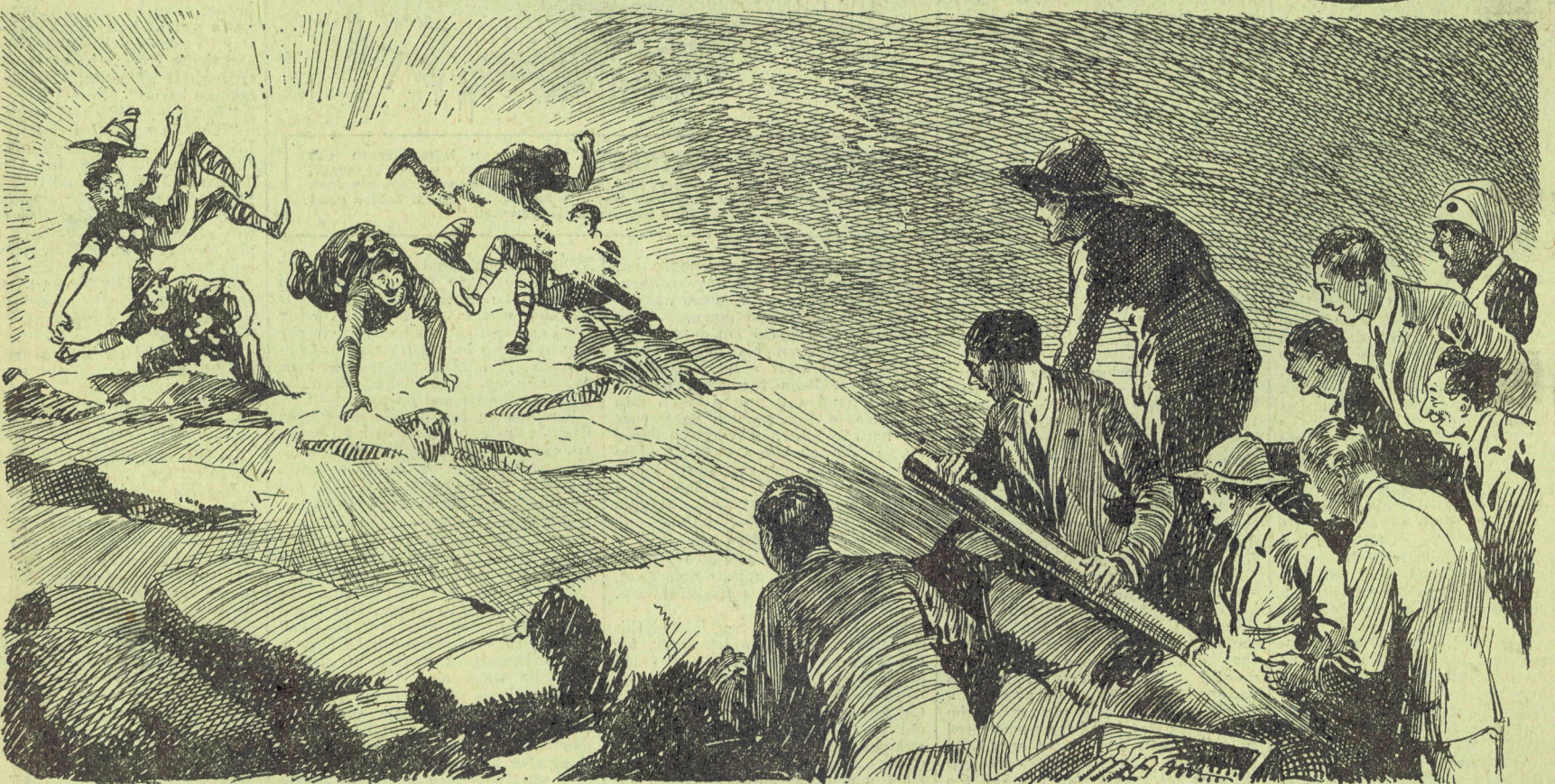
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(See Page 325 of this Issue.)



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Run Down on the Prairie!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

Larry Lagden finds himself up against it
when Sergeant Kerr arrives at the Windy
River Ranch!

The 1st Chapter.

Monty Smith is Wanted!

"Jimmy!" Hudson Smedley leaned over the rail of the ranch-house veranda, and called to Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy, who was chatting with Lovell and Raby and Newcome by the corral fence, came over towards the ranch-house at once.

"Yes?"

"Is Monty Smith about?"

"In the corral," answered Jimmy. "Bring him here, will you? Tell him that Sergeant Kerr has come over from Kicking Mule to see him."

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy.

The rancher went back into the house, and Jimmy Silver hurried to the corral. He heard the voice of Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch, as he went in at the corral gate.

"You gol-darned tenderfoot! You don't know how to handle a hoss! I guess it's time you larned!"

Jimmy Silver frowned a little. He was very friendly with Monty Smith, the tenderfoot of Windy River. At the present moment it was evident that Monty was in trouble with the foreman.

Pete Peters was looking angry when Jimmy arrived on the scene. The man who was known at Windy River as Monty Smith looked sullen.

"I say—" began Jimmy.

Pete Peters went on without heeding him.

"You was a gol-darned tenderfoot when you lighted down hyer, Monty Smith, but I reckoned you was larning to make yourself useful. Now you seem to be a bigger jay than ever, and lazy into the bargain. I tell you we don't want any dead-heads on this hyer ranch. You'll have to be spry if you don't want to be fired."

"I say—" repeated Jimmy.

"Don't you butt in, Jimmy!" growled the ranch foreman. "I'm talking to this galoot. The best thing you can do, Monty Smith, is to leg it down to Calgary, and ask for a salesman's job in a store. That's about your mark, I guess."

"Mr. Smedley wants Monty Smith!" interjected Jimmy Silver. "Take him away!" snapped Pete Peters. "Take him away, and bury him if you like. He ain't any earthly good hyer!"

And Pete Peters turned an angry back upon the tenderfoot and Jimmy Silver. Jimmy touched Monty on the arm.

"Come on, old chap!" he said. "You're wanted, Monty!"

"What is it?"

"Sergeant Kerr's come over from Kicking Mule to see you!"

The tenderfoot started.

"He wants to see me?"

"Yes; nothing to worry about," said Jimmy. "He wants to ask you about that cousin of yours—Larry Lagden, of course. He's bound to question you, as it's known that you've seen the man since he got away into Alberta. Lagden's far away enough by this time, I fancy."

Monty Smith nodded without replying. He walked out of the corral with Jimmy, who left him at the ranch-house, and returned to his chums.

"The sergeant will jump when he sees him," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a grin. "He fits the description of Lagden, the bank-robber, to a hair! Blessed if I should like to have a cousin like that knocking about!"

"It's rotten for Monty!" said Raby. "The sooner they lay Lagden by the heels, the better it will be for him."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"It's rotten!" he agreed. "I fancy it's getting on poor old Monty's nerves. He hardly seems the same man since the other night when he saw Lagden. I hear that there's been trouble in the bunk-house."

"He's losing his jolly good temper," said Newcome. "He snapped at me this morning. You remember he had a kick from a horse last week, and a tremendous bruise on his leg. I asked him how it was going on, and he snapped. I sha'n't ask him again in a hurry."

Jimmy Silver frowned thoughtfully. For the last two or three days he hardly knew his old friend Monty Smith, so changed were his ways. Monty Smith, tenderfoot as he was, had been a favourite on the Windy River Ranch, owing to his good temper and good nature—two qualities which seemed to have quite deserted him of late. The man who had always been ready to "swap yarns" with the cowpunchers had become reserved, silent, almost morose. Even Jimmy, with whom he had been very friendly, he seemed to want to keep at arm's length.

Jimmy attributed it all to the worry that Larry Lagden's appearance in the Windy River section had caused him. It was not a light matter to be the cousin, and the double, of a bank-robber who was hunted by the Canadian police.

The visit of the sergeant from Kicking Mule meant more trouble for the tenderfoot, for undoubtedly Mr. Kerr would take the view that Monty Smith should have handed over Lagden to arrest.

Pete Peters came out of the corral while the chums of Rookwood were chatting, and paused. The ranch foreman was frowning.

"I guess that pal of yours will get fired if he don't mend his ways, Jimmy," said Pete. "I can tell you I'm fed-up with him!"

"Oh, go easy!" said Jimmy. "He's a bit worried now, you know, owing to that rotter Lagden."

"That's all very well," said the foreman. "But there's a limit. He seems to have forgotten all he's learned on the ranch, and he's getting thundering lazy!"

"Oh, he's not lazy!" said Lovell. "I guess you know better than I do—it's generally so!" snapped the foreman. "I tell you he's a shirker, and I came near to laying my quirt about him for the way he's handled a horse this morning. I ain't chicken-hearted myself; but no galoot is going to ill-use a beast on this ranch while I'm Mr. Smedley's foreman."

Jimmy flushed.

"I know that Monty Smith has never ill-used a horse!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Last week he was kicked by a horse, and he never touched the brute for it."

"Last week ain't this week," grunted Pete Peters. "I guess I found him in the corral hiding a horse in a way an Injun half-breed would be ashamed of, and I stopped him. Next time I catch him at it out he goes with my boot behind him to help him, and you can tell Mr. Montague de Courcy so."

And Pete Peters tramped on with knitted brows.

Lovell whistled.

"That's something new for Monty," he said. "I'd never have thought he would ill-treat an animal."

Jimmy Silver was uncomfortably silent. He knew that Pete Peters would not have spoken as he had done without good cause; and it was amazing and distressing to him to

learn that there was a streak of cruelty in the nature of the man he had made a friend of. Somehow Monty Smith seemed to have changed utterly since the night he had gone down to the Windy River to meet Larry Lagden, the bank-robber. In looks he was still the same, but in nature and ways different—strangely different. He did not seem the same man—and that the actual truth was that he was not the same man was an explanation that did not yet occur to Jimmy's



BALDY IN THE WARS!

"Hand out the stew, Baldy, and don't jaw so much," said Pike Potter. "I'm looking after his lordship," said Baldy loftily. "Oh—I say—ow—wow—whoop!" Pike Potter introduced a heavy cowhide boot into the discussion, and Baldy roared. "Now are you going to hand out the stew?" demanded the cowpuncher. "Ow! Yes! Ow! Sure!" gasped Baldy.

mind. He did not suspect, so far, at least, that on that dark night Monty Smith had vanished, and his cousin and double had taken his name and his place at the Windy River Ranch.

The 2nd Chapter.

His Lordship!

"Here's the man!" said Hudson Smedley.

Sergeant Kerr fixed his eyes on "Monty Smith" as the man entered the room in the ranch-house.

The bank-robber was breathing hard, though in looks he was cool and collected.

The trick he had played at Windy River had been a success. No one suspected that Monty Smith was a hidden prisoner, far from the ranch, or dreamed of suspecting that his place had been taken by Larry Lagden, the bank-robber of Prince Albert.

But the rascal was well aware that he had a sharper ordeal to pass through, under the eyes of a sergeant of the Canadian Mounted Police.

But he played out his game with a

cool head. He stood by the table, with his Stetson hat in his hand.

"You sent Jimmy for me, Mr. Smedley," he said.

"Yes. Sergeant Kerr has something to say to you."

The sergeant's eyes never left the man's face.

"Your name's Monty Smith?" he asked.

"Montague de Courcy," said the man, with a slight smile. "I use the name of Smith on the ranches."

"Yes, I've been told so," assented Mr. Kerr. "You're the cousin of Larry Lagden, who robbed the bank at Prince Albert and injured the watchman."

"Yes."

"I suppose you know that you're exactly like him to look at."

"I guess so. Your man, Corporal Cayley, arrested me for Lagden, as Mr. Smedley can tell you; and I should have been taken away to Prince Albert if the news had not come through that Lagden was taken. Since then he has got away again."

"And you've seen him?"

"Well, yes."

"I guess I want to know about it."

"I got a letter from Mosquito saying that he was here and wanted to see me. I met him, told him I would not help him, and left him. He lit out for the Rockies."

The sergeant nodded.

"You know you ought to have given information as soon as you knew he was around?"

"Perhaps so. But the man is my cousin, and—"

There was a short silence.

"You know this man well, Mr. Smedley?" the sergeant asked at last.

"Yes. He has been more than a month on the ranch," said Hudson Smedley.

"You can swear that he's Monty Smith and not Larry Lagden, the bank-robber?"

"Sure! He was here when Lagden was taken in Saskatchewan. Every man in the outfit can swear to him, if necessary."

"I guess that's square," said the sergeant. "I reckon it's rather awkward for you, Monty Smith, having a man who's your double and a bank-robber as well. The sooner you get safe back to the Old Country the less likely you'll be to get roped in by mistake again."

"I know. If what Lagden told me is confirmed I shall go home at once to claim my inheritance," said the adventurer. "From what you tell me, it seems to have been true."

"It's true enough, and I reckon I told the inquiry agent that I'd put you wise," said Sergeant Kerr. "As Lagden is still at large, and his picture and description published all over Alberta, I guess it won't be safe for you to travel without somebody who can swear to your identity till you get clear of Western Canada. If you like you can ride with me to Kicking Mule, when I go back, as Mr. Smedley answers for you to me. You'll do that, sir?"

"Certainly," said the rancher.

"I'll be glad, sergeant, and I thank you for your offer," said the adventurer, a glimmer of satisfaction in his eyes. "Might I ask when you are going back?"

"To-morrow."

"I'll be ready, if Mr. Smedley will let me leave so suddenly."

"That's all right," said the rancher, with a nod.

"Thank you, sir!"

The adventurer left the ranch-house, and Hudson Smedley looked rather curiously at the sergeant.

"You're staying on till to-morrow?" he asked.

"Sure, if I'm welcome."

The rancher smiled.

"You're welcome to stay till the spring, if you like. Do you figure it out, then, that you might pick up Lagden's tracks near the ranch?"

"I guess it's possible."

"Monty Smith says he's lit out for the Rockies. He's had time to get right into the mountain passes."

"Very likely," assented the sergeant. "But Monty Smith mayn't be quite a George Washington; and as his cousin came to him for help once, maybe he might come again. Anyhow, I'll hang on till to-morrow," said Sergeant Kerr.

"I'll tell Woo Sing to get your room ready."

When Jimmy Silver & Co. came in to dinner, they found the sergeant from Kicking Mule at the table, and learned that he was staying. After dinner Sergeant Kerr strolled about the ranch, talking a good deal with the cowpunchers he came across, and all the ranch learned the news that Monty Smith, the tenderfoot, was now Lord Erdingford, and a rich man at home. It was rather exciting news to the ranchmen, and some of them congratulated Monty on his good luck. Even Pete Peters told him that he was glad to hear it. As the foreman remarked, it wasn't every ranch in North-West Alberta that had a real live lord in the outfit.

Baldy, the cook, could have kicked himself when he heard the news. It was Baldy who had purloined the bank-robber's letter to Monty Smith; Baldy whose chatter had revealed that Monty had met the bank-robber one dark night near the ranch; but for Baldy Bubbins, no one at Windy River would have known that Larry Lagden had ever been in the Windy River section at all. If Baldy had only known that Monty Smith was a real live lord, Baldy would never have given him any offence—not if Baldy knew it!—not if he had held a hundred surreptitious meetings with bank-robbers who were wanted by the police. At dinner Baldy provided "Monty Smith" with a very special feed, and expressed a hope that his lordship liked it. There was a roar of laughter from the cowpunchers as Baldy brought out "his lordship."

"You fat fool!" said Skitter Dick. "Stow it! Monty Smith is Monty Smith so long as he hangs out on this hyer ranch, and don't you forget it."

"Don't you mind these hyer low cowpunchers, your lordship!" said Baldy. "They ain't got no manners."

(Continued overleaf.)

ANSWERS
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Run Down on the Prairie!

(Continued from previous page.)

"You fat idiot!" was his lordship's ungrateful response.

"Oh, I say, my lord!" ejaculated Baldy.

"Shut it, Baldy!" growled Pike Potter. "Hand out the stew and don't chew the rag."

"I'm looking after his lordship," said Baldy loftily. "Oh, I say—Ow—wow—whooop!"

Pike Potter introduced a heavy cowhide boot into the discussion, and Baldy roared.

"Now, are you going to hand out the stew to a common, low cow-puncher?" demanded Pike.

"Ow! Yes! Ow! Sure!" gasped Baldy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When dinner was over, and "his lordship" was smoking a cigarette by the corral fence, Baldy—regardless of the duty of washing up—rolled up to him with a confidential grin. He leaned on the fence beside the tenderfoot, and began to talk genially. Baldy was determined to get on a friendly footing with a real live lord in the short space of time that remained at his disposal.

"Don't your lordship take any notice of that low crowd," said Baldy. "They're a low lot, my lord. There ain't a decent man in the outfit, excepting me, your lordship. I say, don't move off when a galoot's talking to you."

The adventurer shifted along the fence. Baldy rolled after him.

"I say, my lord—"

"Leave me alone, you fat idiot!"

"Oh, my lord—"

The adventurer took Baldy by one fat ear, which was amply large enough to give him a good hold, and sat him down forcibly on the ground. Baldy roared as he landed there.

"Ya-roo-coop!"

His lordship walked away. Baldy sat and blinked after him, in breathless wrath. Jimmy Silver came up laughing to give the fat cook a hand up.

"Ow!" gasped Baldy. "I say, young Silver—ow!—I've a darn good mind to boot that ornery galoot! Wow! I don't go much on lords, anyhow. What's a pesky lord? If that galoot thinks I'm going to be civil to him because he's a lord, he's sure making a mistake. Ow!"

And Baldy, the cook, rolled back to the cookhouse, and devoted himself to washing up, instead of cultivating the acquaintance of the new Lord Erdingford.

The 3rd Chapter.

The Shadow of Death!

Red Henri, the half-breed, rose from the log upon which he had been seated, and stood in a listening attitude. A lantern burned in the cave under the bluff on the Windy River, casting a dim light. At the mouth of the cave thick bushes hid the opening, and through the bushes, here and there, the waters of the river lapped and murmured. It was a dark and dismal lair, where the half-breed lurked in hiding with his prisoner. On a ragged blanket Monty Smith, the tenderfoot of Windy River, lay stretched, his handsome face white and worn in the dim light. There was a stout rope fastened round his waist and secured to a stump. The confinement in the gloomy cave had told on Monty Smith, as well as the hard and scanty fare that Red Henri doled out to him. Already he seemed almost like the ghost of his former self.

Red Henri did not glance at him. He stood with his head bent, his keen ears on the alert.

There was a faint footfall in the gloom outside the cave. The thickets rustled, and Red Henri's revolver almost leaped into his hand.

"Oh, it is you!" he said, in a low voice, as the newcomer stepped into the cave.

Larry Lagden, the man who had taken Monty Smith's place at the Windy River Ranch, nodded.

"Yes. How is your prisoner?"

"Safe enough," said the half-breed. "Another week of this and he will be safer still. Look at him!"

Lagden glanced across at the hapless man stretched on the blanket. Monty Smith sat up, and his eyes blazed at the sight of the bank-robber.

"You scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "Have you come to set me at liberty?"

"Scarcely!" Lagden laughed. "You had better make up your mind to it, Monty. You will never see the outside of this cave again!"

"You cannot keep me here for ever."

"Fortunate for you if I could," said Lagden, with a gloomy look. "It is because I could not keep you here for ever that you must be put in a safer place."

Monty Smith's lips quivered as he caught the meaning of the adventurer.

"You dare not!" he muttered.

Lagden shrugged his shoulders and turned away from him. He sat down on the log and talked to the half-breed in a low voice. Monty Smith lay on the blanket again, silent, as the voice of his rascally cousin came in low tones to his ears.

"It's all clear now," Lagden was saying. "There is no suspicion at the ranch. I'm accepted there as Monty Smith. I've played the game for three days now, and not a soul is any the wiser. Even the boy Silver has no suspicion, and he knew Monty Smith better than any of the others. Sergeant Kerr came to-day—"

Red Henri gave a start.

"The Mounted Police? That is dangerous."

"He came to question me about Larry Lagden."

The half-breed grinned.

"He was completely satisfied," went on Lagden. "He told me that an inquiry agent has come to Kicking Mule to find Monty de Courcy, wanted in England as the heir of Lord Erdingford. I am to ride to Kicking Mule with the sergeant to-morrow as Monty Smith. I have all my cousin's papers. Everything he had at the ranch is in my hands. All is plain sailing now."

"It is a bold game," said the half-breed musingly. "But it is often the boldest game that is most successful. You will go back to England as Lord Erdingford?"

"Yes."

"And you will be rich?"

"Ten thousand a year."

"And you will not forget an old friend who has helped you to so much?" said the half-breed, with a cunning glitter in his eyes.

"You can depend on that, Red Henri," said the adventurer coolly. "It will always be in your power to give me away if I do not pay your price. Now to business. The sergeant leaves Windy River to-morrow and I ride with him. Until he is gone you will lie low here in the cave. You have plenty of food here, and you need not venture outside the bushes."

Red Henri nodded.

"Peste! I am not anxious to meet any of the Canadian Mounted Police," he said. "I shall be careful."

"But after that—" said Lagden.

"Well, after that?"

"When the coast is clear you can go. But your prisoner?"

"If he goes there is an end of your scheme," said the half-breed, with a grin. "The new Lord Erdingford

will be arrested as Larry Lagden, the bank-robber."

Lagden drew a deep breath.

"There is only one way to safety," he said. "Larry Lagden's body must be found. After I am safe out of Alberta a body, supposed to be mine, can be found floating in the Windy River. For the last time my cousin's resemblance to me will buy my safety. The Alberta police will be satisfied that it is Larry Lagden whom they have found. There will be letters and papers of mine in his pockets—plenty of proofs of identity, to back up the resemblance. Monty Smith will be buried under the name of Larry Lagden, and I shall be safe in England under the name of Lord Erdingford."

"It is easy enough."

"And you—" Lagden hesitated.

The half-breed shrugged his shoulders.

"He will not be my first," he answered. "Peste! It is nothing to me. To-morrow or the next day. You have only to give the order."

Lagden sat silent on the log, his face pale and lined. Villain as he

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was, he shrank instinctively from this last and worst crime of his career of wickedness.

The half-breed watched him with a mocking grin. A knife-thrust, the death of a defenceless man, counted for little with the savage Ishmael of the North-West, the outcast whose hand was against every man.

"It is the only way to safety," said Lagden at last.

"The only way!" assented Red Henri.

"And—and you—"

"Rely on me."

Lagden rose to his feet, and shook himself as if to shake away haunting and troubling thoughts.

"It is settled," he said. "You will not see me again in Alberta, Red Henri. But afterwards—"

"Afterwards you will see me," said the half-breed significantly. "The rich Lord Erdingford will not lose sight of the old pard who helped him to his title and his fortune."

Lagden gave a last glance at the bound man stretched on the blanket, and shivered a little. Then he moved to the mouth of the cave under the high bluffs.

"Take care," said Red Henri. "The water is high. Shall I ferry you in the canoe?"

"No—no! Good-night!"

"Bon soir, mon ami!"

Lagden pushed through the bushes and left the cave. Outside, the stars gleamed in the clear sky of Alberta, reflected on the swollen surface of the Windy River.

It was necessary to wade through the shallows for a dozen yards to reach the point where the bank could be gained. Lagden splashed along with the water to his knees.

He reached the bank and climbed it, and strode away in the direction of the Windy River Ranch.

His face was thoughtful and gloomy.

He was quite resolved; there was no repentance in his hard heart. But, in spite of his efforts to banish it from his mind, his contemplated crime haunted and tormented him.

He turned into the path at last that led to the ranch from the river, and tramped along under the trees. The ranch buildings were in sight when a shadowy figure loomed up in his way.

Lagden caught his breath and halted.

"Hallo!"

It was the voice of the Canadian sergeant from Kicking Mule.

"Oh, you, sergeant!" exclaimed Lagden.

"Yes. Is that Monty Smith?" asked Sergeant Kerr, peering at him in the shadows.

"Yes. You're out of your bunk late, sergeant."

"I guess I was going to say the same to you."

"I couldn't sleep," said Lagden, in as easy a manner as he could assume. "It isn't every day that a man down on his luck comes into a title and a fortune. I'm a bit excited about it."

"I guess that's natural enough," assented the sergeant. "So you were taking a walk to think it over?"

"Well, yes."

"You've met nobody?"

Lagden set his teeth for a moment.

"No. The outfit have turned in before this."

Sergeant Kerr walked back to the ranch with the adventurer. Lagden parted with him at the door of the bunkhouse, and the sergeant went on to the ranch-house.

The adventurer looked after him with a glitter in his eyes. He knew, as well as if he had been told, that the Canadian sergeant had been watching him—that he had missed him and looked for him. Lagden's lips curled in a sneering smile. The sergeant suspected that he, as Monty Smith, was still in communication with Lagden, the fleeing bank-robber. For that reason the sergeant was keeping a wary eye upon the tenderfoot of Windy River.

"Fool!" muttered Lagden. "He does not believe a word I have told him! He thinks that I know where Lagden is!" He chuckled involuntarily. "But—but if he had followed me to the cave—"

The adventurer shivered at the thought.

His good fortune and the darkness had saved him from that danger. But his heart was beating fast as he went into the bunkhouse and turned in.

But he slept soundly enough. It was his last night at Windy River. On the morrow he would be far away—and safe—on his way to claim the fortune of the man who was left to die. But the unscrupulous impostor would not have slept so soundly had he dreamed of what was to happen on the morrow.

The 4th Chapter.

Under Arrest!

Jimmy Silver came out of the ranch-house in the keen autumn morning, and looked round for Monty Smith.

Monty was to leave that day, in company with the Canadian sergeant, and Jimmy was rather surprised to realise that he was not very sorry to part with his friend.

Somehow, since that dark night when Monty Smith had met Larry Lagden by the Windy River, Jimmy's feelings had changed towards the tenderfoot. How and why it was, he hardly knew; but there it was!

Monty Smith did not seem to be the same man that he had been so chummy with.

He was, of course, the same man—so far as Jimmy knew! But he seemed utterly different.

Jimmy was glad enough to hear of his good fortune, and he was a little ashamed of his indifference towards him. It was not like Jimmy Silver to be fickle, but he felt that he had been fickle in this instance—for certainly he was feeling rather relief than anything else to know that Monty Smith was going.

He could not help it. But he determined to be as cordial as he could to Monty Smith until the hour of departure came. He caught sight of the tenderfoot at the corral, rubbing down a horse. The horse jibbed, and Lagden gave it a savage cut with a quirt, at which the animal squealed.

Jimmy knitted his brows.

This was another example of the change in his friend. Monty Smith had never been cruel, but in the last few days he had revealed a vein of brutality that Jimmy had never suspected. The startled horse reared and backed away, and Lagden dragged savagely at the halter, and brought down the quirt again on the flanks.

Jimmy ran up.

"Monty, what are you up to?"

"Mind your own business!"

"What? Let that horse alone!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, as Lagden raised the whip again.

Lagden gave him a savage look; but he recollected himself and lowered the whip.

Jimmy Silver stood for a moment or two, and then walked away without another word. His intention of being very cordial to Monty Smith that day was abandoned now.

"Morning, young 'un!"

Sergeant Kerr nodded cheerily to Jimmy Silver and joined him in his walk. Jimmy understood that the sergeant had been a witness of the little scene with Monty, and he felt very uncomfortable.

"Big stroke of luck for that young man," remarked the sergeant, with a nod towards Lagden, who was rubbing down the horse at a distance. "Eh? Oh, yes!" said Jimmy. "All the outfit are quite excited at finding a jolly old nobleman at Windy River—especially Baldy."

"He's a friend of yours?"

"Oh, yes!"

The sergeant's keen eyes dwelt on Jimmy's face with a penetrating look that puzzled the Rookwood junior a little.

"I hear from Mr. Smedley that this man Monty Smith was no end of a friend of yours," he said.

"Well, he chipped in to help me the day he came to Windy River," said Jimmy. "There was a horse-thief—Red Henri—going for me with a knife, and Monty stopped him."

"So you became friends?"

"That's it."

"You like him—what?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Noticed any change in him lately?"

Jimmy started.

"Well, yes," he said. "He—he doesn't seem quite the same since—"

"Since the night he met Larry Lagden?"

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Are you a wizard, Mr. Kerr?"

"Not quite!" said the sergeant, laughing. "But is it so? I want to know, you know."

"Yes, it's so," said Jimmy. "I'm blessed if I know how you can guess, but there's been a queer change in him ever since that night. Of course, he's worried a lot by that rotter coming to this section, and the matter getting to be the talk of the ranch through Baldy stealing his letter and reading it."

"Yep, I guess that would worry him some," said Sergeant Kerr.

"He looks just the same, but he seems different somehow, is that it?"

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"That's it," said Jimmy. "A good many of the cowpunchers have noticed it, I guess," remarked the sergeant. "You see, I've been looking around, and talking some. He ain't so popular as he was."

"I—I'm afraid so," assented Jimmy reluctantly. "He don't have a light hand with a hoss," said the sergeant. "You chipped in just now on that account. I should say that he was rather a brute in dealing with animals."

Jimmy coloured. He would gladly have spoken up in defence of the tenderfoot of Windy River; but he could not deny what the sergeant himself had witnessed.

"He never was cruel," said Jimmy at last. "I put it all down to the worry on his mind from that fellow Lagden."

"I've heard the boys say he was very tender with animals," remarked Sergeant Kerr. "Is it so?"

"It's so," said Jimmy eagerly. "There never was a fellow kinder to animals than Monty Smith. It beats me, the change that's come over him."

"I guess it's queer," assented the sergeant. "I hear that he was kicked by a hoss last week, and he never touched the animal afterwards, though most of the cowpunchers would have laid it on."

"That's true," said Jimmy, glad to have something to say for Monty Smith. "I saw it all, and he had a tremendous bruise on his leg. He was limping the rest of the day."

"So I've heard," said the sergeant genially. "When I heard that I reckoned that Monty Smith was as kind-hearted a guy as you'd find in Alberta or all the Western provinces. And yet, since then, Pete Peters has threatened to fire him, for ill-treating a hoss, and you had to chip in just now for the same reason. It's a pesky remarkable change in a galoot—what?"

Jimmy Silver was silent. "Well, his cowpunching days will soon be over," said Sergeant Kerr lightly. "He's going off with me today. I suppose you know?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. The big Canadian sergeant nodded to him, and strolled away. Jimmy Silver looked after him rather curiously.

Jimmy was no fool; and he was well aware that Mr. Kerr had some motive for asking so many questions about Monty Smith. He knew that the sergeant had talked with almost every man on the ranch, on the same subject. He suspected Monty—of what?

Of being in communication with the escaped bank-robber? It was likely enough, though Jimmy's own belief was that Larry Lagden was many a long mile from Windy River by this time.

Whatsoever the sergeant suspected undoubtedly he was learning every possible detail with regard to Monty Smith. But the actual form the sergeant's suspicions had taken, came as a startling surprise to Jimmy, when Mr. Kerr at last showed his hand.

It came suddenly and dramatically. Sergeant Kerr dined with Mr. Smedley and the Rookwood juniors, and, after dinner, he "guessed" that he would be getting ready to ride back to Kicking Mule. He guessed he would give Monty Smith the tip to saddle his horse.

"You ready to start?" he called out to Monty, who was lounging by the corral fence.

"I'm ready when you are, sergeant."

The adventurer's face brightened a little. He was keenly anxious to get away from Windy River, under the Canadian sergeant's escort, taking the first step thereby to establish himself as Montague de Courcy, heir of Lord Erdingford.

"I guess we'll get the hosses out, then," said Mr. Kerr.

He strode to the corral gate, and the adventurer followed him. Hudson Smedley and the Rookwood juniors came out of the ranch-house to say good-bye. Some of the outfit gathered round. At the corral gate Sergeant Kerr stopped.

What happened next passed like a flash.

The big Canadian's powerful grasp was laid upon the tenderfoot so suddenly that the impostor had no chance. He was whirled round and jammed with a crash against the gate, and before he knew what was happening there was a metallic click, and his wrists were fast in the handcuffs.

Sergeant Kerr stepped back, and regarded him with a satisfied smile. "I guess you're my prisoner!" he remarked.

The trapped rascal staggered against the gate, white and panting. He made one terrible effort to drag

his hands free, but the cold steel held good.

"What—what—" he stammered.

"Sergeant!" shouted Hudson Smedley. "What the thunder—"

"Mr. Kerr!" panted Jimmy Silver. "I guess that's the man I want, and I ain't giving him a chance to draw a gun," said the Canadian sergeant coolly. "Larry Lagden, you're my prisoner, on a charge of bank robbing at Prince Albert, in Saskatchewan, and on the charge of murder in Alberta."

"Of murder?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yep!"

"You're dreaming! What—who—"

"The murder of whom?" yelled Pete Peters in amazement.

"Of Monty Smith!"

And there was a roar of amazement from the Windy River cowpunchers.

The 5th Chapter. Unmasked!

"Monty Smith!"

"The man himself is Monty Smith!"

"Are you mad, sergeant?"

"Look hyer—"

The Windy River crowd gathered round the corral gate in amazement and excited expostulation. The sergeant stood like a rock, a revolver in his hand now, his face hard as bronze. The wretched impostor leaned heavily on the gate, panting for breath.

"Hold on," said Hudson Smedley quietly. "Let the sergeant speak. He must have some reason for supposing that Monty Smith is Larry Lagden, apart from the resemblance."

"I guess so," assented the sergeant. "Didn't I say I was going to put you wise? But the galoot knows now that the game is up, and he'll own up. Is that so, Lagden?"

The wretched man panted.

"I'm Monty Smith!" he exclaimed in a choking voice. "Mr. Smedley—all of you—I call on you to stand by a man! You all know me—you know I was taken for Lagden before; but if they get me away they'll make out that I'm Lagden, if they can't find the right man. Stand by me!"

"We're standing by you, old pard," said Skitter Dick. "I don't like the way you handle a hoss; but you're going to have a fair show."

"You bet!" said Spike Thompson.

"We'll all see to that, Monty," said Jimmy Silver.

"Keeping it up, Lagden?" said the sergeant. "Well, I guess I'll put you 'uns wise to this galoot. I reckon I suspected him as soon as I saw him yesterday. What did Lagden come out to this section for, to see Monty Smith? It wasn't for money—Monty Smith hadn't any money; and Lagden had the thousands he'd stolen from the bank at Prince Albert. He didn't want any help that Monty Smith could give him. What he wanted, I reckon, was to borrow Monty Smith's name, and hide at Windy River as the safest place."

I knew it for certain; I was finding out. I reckoned it was likely enough that Larry Lagden got Monty Smith to meet him in a lonely place, and knocked him on the head in the dark, and borrowed his clothes."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Hudson Smedley.

"Getting wise—what?" smiled the sergeant.

"That's all very well!" said the rancher. "But, after all, it's only supposition. If there's nothing stronger than that—"

"I guess there is. Last week Monty Smith was kicked by a hoss, and a tremendous bruise raised on his leg."

"We all know that."

"He never touched the brute for doing it, but since that night he met Lagden he's had to be slanged for ill-treating the horses. I guess a man don't change like that in a night. But I guess it's known in Larry Lagden's record that before he started as a bank-robber he was in trouble once at Prince Albert for ill-using a horse. He's a cruel brute, and his nature's given him away. But that ain't all. Monty Smith's got a big bruise on his leg. If this galoot has a big bruise in the same place I guess I shall be surprised."

"That's easily proved, one way or the other," said the rancher.

Lagden's pale face became as white as chalk.

"Show up, my man!" said the sergeant. "I guess you're spy enough to have got a bruise ready,

with the handcuffs on. You're going to stand your trial for the murder of Monty Smith, as well as for the robbery at Prince Albert."

Lagden panted for breath.

"You fool! I never killed him!"

"I guess the evidence is against you."

"He is living!" yelled Lagden.

The sergeant shrugged his broad shoulders.

"So you say! Anyhow, you're arrested on the murder charge."

Lagden struggled as the sergeant gripped his shoulder. His senses almost swam with terror now. Monty Smith still lived; but that very night Red Henri was to carry out the bank-robber's instructions, and put the rope round his confederate's neck.

"You fool!" yelled Lagden. "If you take me away now Monty Smith is doomed. He is a prisoner in the hands of a man who will kill him to-night—after you are gone from Windy River."

"Is that the truth?" gasped Hudson Smedley.

"I swear it!"

"I guess we'll put it to the test," said Sergeant Kerr. "If Monty Smith is still alive, and there's time to save him, I guess this galoot will be keen enough to keep the rope from his neck. Where is Monty Smith?"

"Hidden in a cave under the bluffs, down the river!" groaned Lagden.

There was no hope, no thought of further concealment. Only the rescue of Monty Smith could save him now. For if the body of his cousin was found, as he had planned, it would undoubtedly condemn him to the gallows.

"If that's true, I guess you've got a pard looking after him," said the sergeant.

"There's a man, a half-breed—Red Henri—"

"You'll give us the office how to find that cave, and you'll come and guide us," said Pete Peters. "And I reckon that if we don't find Monty Smith alive, you rascal, we'll hang you on a tree by the Windy River, and save the hangman the trouble."

Five minutes later Hudson Smedley and half a dozen cowpunchers were heading for the cave, with the sergeant and the bank-robber to search for Monty Smith.

The 6th Chapter. At Last!

Red Henri sat on a pile of skins in the cave under the bluff and yawned and rubbed his eyes. It was the afternoon, and the half-breed had been sleeping. A half-empty bottle lay beside him. He yawned and muttered a savage exclamation and rose unsteadily to his feet. He did not give a glance towards Monty Smith, lying, bound, on his blanket, silent and in despair.

Something had awakened the half-breed, and he approached the mouth of the cave and stood listening, his head bent, his eyes gleaming, like a wild beast roused in its lair.

There was a sound of splashing in the shallows, and of voices. Men were wading along by the bushes that covered the mouth of the cave.

Red Henri gripped his revolver and listened. He had little fear of the hidden cave being discovered by chance. But the sounds were coming closer, as if unseen comers were being guided to the spot.

A voice came clearly at last through the bushes.

"Is this the place?"

"Yes." It was Lagden's voice that answered, and Red Henri started and gripped his revolver convulsively. It was his employer and confederate who was guiding the party to the cave.

"Yes; the cave's behind those bushes. Look out for the half-breed."

"I guess we'll take care of the breed. Get on!"

There was a rustle in the bushes as they were dragged aside.

Red Henri backed away a few paces, his black eyes glinting with rage. Of what had happened at the ranch he knew nothing; but he knew that Larry Lagden had betrayed him into the hands of his enemies.

Many hands dragged the bushes aside, and in the opening of the cave, with the afternoon sun behind them, stood the figures of Sergeant Kerr, of Kicking Mule, and Larry Lagden, the bank-robber.

Behind them came Hudson Smedley and Jimmy Silver and half a dozen of the Windy River outfit, all with revolvers in their hands.

"Hyer's the place!" said the

(Continued overleaf.)



TO THE RESCUE! "Monty!" shouted Jimmy Silver. He ran forward and caught the prisoner by the arm. A white, worn, emaciated face was turned dazedly upon him. "Monty!" "You, Jimmy!" said Monty Smith huskily. "Little me, old man. You're saved," said Jimmy Silver softly.

Hudson Smedley strode forward. "Sergeant, what does this mean? I answer for it that this man is Monty Smith."

"I guess you've been taken in, Mr. Smedley."

The rancher looked impatient.

"Your men made this mistake before," he said. "Monty Smith was arrested by Corporal Cayley, on his resemblance to Larry Lagden. He's been at the ranch ever since, while Lagden was in prison at Prince Albert. Every man here can answer for him."

"I guess so," said Skitter Dick. "You're right off'n the trail, sergeant."

"It's a shame!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver indignantly. "We can all prove that he is Monty Smith!"

The sergeant stood grimly between the prisoner and the surging crowd of cowpunchers.

"Stand back—"

"Look hyer, sergeant—"

"That man's my prisoner!" said Sergeant Kerr grimly. "I guess I'm going to put you galoots wise. But keep back!"

"You ain't taking him away a prisoner," said Pike Potter. "I guess I don't like the man so much as I did; but we're standing by any Windy River man to see fair play."

"Sure!" said Pete Peters emphatically. "I guess I want to see him fired off the ranch; but he's going to have a fair show of cards. He's been taken once for that fire-eater Lagden, and once is enough."

There was a murmur of incredulity.

"If that fat galoot Baldy hadn't stolen the letter nobody would have known that Lagden had been near the place," went on the sergeant.

"I guess he would have been safe then, and could have played out the game to the end. I guess Baldy ought to be booted for stealing a man's letter; but, as it turns out, it's put me on the track of this fire-eater. As soon as I knew Larry Lagden had been here to see Monty Smith, I guess I turned over in my mind every possible reason he could have had—and there was only one that held water. I came along to Windy River yesterday to put it to the test. And I reckon I've learned from nearly every man on the ranch that Monty Smith has seemed different somehow since the night he met Larry Lagden by the river."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I reckon I've kept my eyes open," went on the sergeant. "A man who was always kind to animals suddenly becomes a cruel brute to a hoss. It ain't in reason. A man who was always open and chatty suddenly becomes reserved and sulky. No reason why Monty Smith should; but plenty of reason why Lagden should, if he had borrowed Monty Smith's name. He would be afraid of giving himself away with every word he spoke."

"By Jove!" murmured Lovell.

"But—" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Let me finish, kid. I don't say

but you never looked for this. You 'uns know which of his legs was kicked. Show it up!"

Lagden made a sudden spring.

Manacled as he was he drove his way through the circle of staring cowpunchers and attempted to flee.

But the attempt was hopeless. A dozen hands were upon him at once, and he was dragged back, struggling furiously, and almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

"By gum, I guess the sergeant's right!" said Pete Peters. "But that's soon proved."

While the adventurer struggled in the grasp of the cowpunchers Pete dragged the boot from his right foot and rolled back the trouser-leg.

There was no sign of a bruise on the limb when it was revealed.

"He ain't Monty Smith!" said the ranch foreman. "Monty's got a big black bruise there, and I guess it won't go for weeks to come!"

Hudson Smedley's face set grimly.

"The scoundrel!" he said. "It is Larry Lagden, after all! You villain, what have you done with your cousin?"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard. The man before him was Lagden, the bank-robber. Where was the genuine Monty Smith? Had he fallen that dark night by the Windy River, struck down by a murderous hand? Jimmy shuddered at the thought.

"Are you giving us the straight goods now, Larry Lagden?" asked the sergeant. "Anyhow, you're coming to Kicking Mule with me,

RUN DOWN ON THE PRAIRIE!

(Continued from previous page.)

sergeant. "And hyer— Hands up, you galoot!"

Crack!
Red Henri fired as the sergeant spoke. But it was not at the Canadian that he fired. His aim was at the white face of Larry Lagden, the man who had sold him to save his own skin.

There was a terrible cry from Lagden, and he pitched over on the damp earthen floor of the cave, his face covered with blood.

The next instant Hudson Smedley had fired at the half-breed, and Red Henri dropped before he could pull trigger again.

Monty Smith staggered up.
"Monty!" shouted Jimmy Silver.
He ran forward and caught the prisoner by the arm. A white, worn, emaciated face was turned dazedly upon him.

"Monty!"
"You, Jimmy!" said Monty Smith huskily.

"Little me, old man! You're saved!" said Jimmy Silver softly.
"Oh, if we'd only known! If we'd only guessed!"

He drew his knife and cut the prisoner loose. Monty Smith leaned heavily on the Rookwood junior's shoulder. The sudden reaction from the depths of black despair had dazed him.

Sergeant Kerr was leaning beside the groaning Lagden. Red Henri's hurried shot had scored across the bank-robber's face, and the blood was flowing freely.

"I guess that was a close thing," said the sergeant coolly. "But a miss is as good as a mile. You won't go under this time, Larry Lagden. You'll live to face your trial, and I guess you're lucky that it ain't a murder trial you've got to face."

Lagden only groaned in answer. Red Henri sat up dazedly, his hand to his head. The rancher's bullet had gone close enough to stun him. He was in the hands of the cowpunchers before his senses fully returned, and his hands were bound.

Heedless of the bank-robber and the half-breed, Jimmy Silver led the tenderfoot of Windy River from the cave.

Late that afternoon Sergeant Kerr left the Windy River Ranch with two prisoners in a wagon—Red Henri, the horse-thief, and Larry Lagden, the bank-robber. Neither was seriously hurt, though they groaned as the wagon jolted away over the prairie. Lagden's face was a mass of bandages, from which his eyes gleamed full of savage rage and despair. The long trail of the bank-robber was over, and he was going back to Saskatchewan to stand his trial, with long years in prison before him.

"And I guess," remarked Pete Peters, "that that galoot will never be taken for Monty Smith again! I guess he will have a scar across his face that you could put a finger in. That gal-darned breed has spoiled his good looks for him!"

Monty Smith remained at Windy River, too exhausted by his imprisonment in the cave to accompany the sergeant to Kicking Mule. But in a few days Monty was himself again, and when he reappeared among the Windy River outfit they gave him a rousing welcome. Baldy, the cook, greeted him as "your lordship," and Monty chuckled.

For a week longer Monty Smith remained. Although his inheritance awaited him in the Old Country he was reluctant to leave his friends of the ranch, and especially Jimmy Silver. But one day the inquiry agent arrived from Kicking Mule, and then the tenderfoot could no longer delay. The whole outfit turned out to give him a send-off, and Jimmy Silver & Co. rode with him as far as Mosquito on his way.

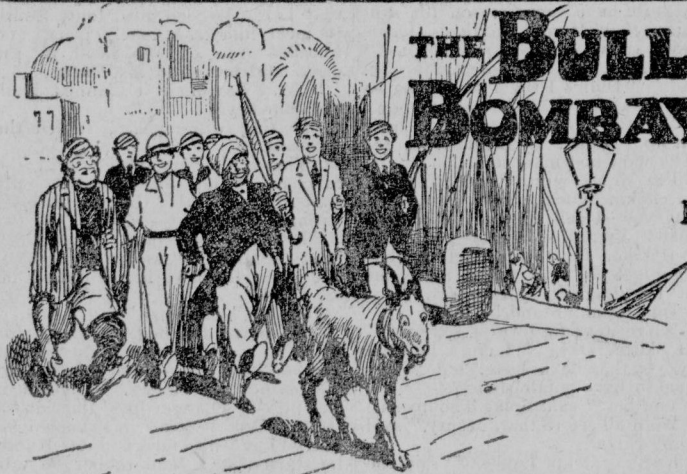
"You'll look me up when you come back to the Old Country," said Monty Smith as he shook hands with Jimmy Silver, and Jimmy promised that he would.

The railroad cars rolled eastward with Monty Smith—now Lord Erdingford. But it was only Baldy, the cook, who ever spoke of him as "his lordship." To the rest of the Windy River outfit he remained Monty Smith, the tenderfoot.

THE END.

(You will enjoy "Tricked by the Cowpunchers!"—next Monday's splendid story of Jimmy Silver & Co. out West. Don't miss it! Order your BOYS' FRIEND in advance!)

VOTED A GEM—THIS TALE OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE AT SEA!



THE BULLIES OF THE BOMBAY CASTLE!

BY
Duncan Storm.

Miguelete and his gang of bandits receive a great shock when they attempt to "hold-up" Dick Dorrington & Co.!

The 1st Chapter.

Arriving at the docks where Captain Handyman's famous school-ship, the Bombay Castle, is preparing for another sea voyage, Dick Dorrington & Co. make friends with Jerry Swainson, a youngster who is being sent on the cruise for the benefit of his health. To Dick Dorrington & Co.'s delight, Captain Handyman asks them to take Jerry in hand, and the youngster is installed in the Glory Hole, Dick Dorrington & Co.'s quarters on the ship. When the boys are gathered on the fo'c'sle that night, discussing the forthcoming trip, Chip Prodders points out the figure of a man lurking in the shadows of the wharf. Almost at the same moment a long, slender spear buries itself in the woodwork of the ship. The boys take the weapon to Captain Handyman, who discovers under the brass wire which binds the head to the shaft a gold ring. The ring, the captain informs the boys, belongs to Jerry's father, who was supposed to have lost his life at sea off the coast of Bismarck Archipelago. The captain decides to explore the island during the cruise, as he now has hopes that Joe Swainson is still alive. The next morning, just before the Bombay Castle is due to sail, a crowd of bullies come aboard, and, under the leadership of Tiger Basham, they do their utmost to get the better of Dick Dorrington & Co. After a visit to Bahia Blanca, a little fishing town off the coast of Portugal, the Bombay Castle makes for Teneriffe. Arriving at the anchorage of Santa Cruz, the boys are given leave to climb the peak of Teneriffe. With Mr. Lal Tata, Cecil, the orang-outang, and Horace, the goat, Dick Dorrington & Co. make the journey to Orotava, and arrive there well ahead of Basham & Co. They are warned to beware of Miguelete, a brigand, who lives in the mountains; but paying not the slightest heed to the caution, they commence the ascent of the peak. During a storm they lose Cecil and Horace among the rocks, and when they camp at night they make a huge fire in the hope that the orang-outang and the goat may see it, and be guided to their camp. Feeling suspicious of their guides, Dick Dorrington leaves his tent during the night to see whether they are still asleep in their shelter, and makes the alarming discovery that they are signalling to someone in the mountains.

The 2nd Chapter.

Preparing for Battle.

There was no doubt about it. Their guides were signalling to someone. Dick Dorrington, crouching in the shadows of the broom, looked up at that tiny little flicker of light which was plainly the light of an electric torch. He could not read the signals, but he caught the last letters, flashed in Morse code.
"—s—e—s," ran the message.
"Ingleses," muttered Dick. "That's Spanish for English." Then he thought for a moment. "What's that rooster signalling that English are here for? He's up to a bit of no good. It's ten to one that he's in touch with that chap Miguelete. Now, what's to be done?"
Dick's common-sense told him that the first thing their treacherous guides would do would be to return to camp. Then they would be as innocently surprised as anyone when Miguelete and his band of robbers turned up. Then there would be no evidence against the guides, who would probably be released by the

bandit to take messages, in the shape of ears and fingers, down to the town of Santa Cruz, if the ransom were not forthcoming.

"A pretty lot of lads!" muttered Dick. "I'll get back to my tent and watch them return to camp."

He crawled back through the tunnels in the thick cover of broom so quietly that he came right on a rabbit, which was so much taken aback at finding a British schoolboy crawling through its run that it did not move till Dick touched it. Then it scuttled away, and Dick crawled after it.

He got back into camp, and waited with his eye at the opening of his shelter tent. He saw the two guides come stealing quietly through the camp, passing by the smouldering fire. They made straight for their beds. Then Dick woke Arty Dove, who was snoring like a brass band.

"What is it?" asked Arty drowsily.
"Shut up! Don't talk too loud," whispered Dick. "There's dirty work at the cross-roads, Arty! Those guides of ours have been signalling up on the rocks. They stuffed up their beds with dummies, and crept out of camp. Now they have come back."

"I thought they were a pair of treacherous-looking birds!" said Arty. "Where's my boots?"
"What are we going to do about it?" asked Dick.

"Simple enough," said Arty. "First I get on my boots, then we proceed to the little cavern where the guides are pretending to sleep. Then we thump each guide heartily on the jaw. Then we bind them with cords. After that we put the camp in a state of defence, and await the attack of Miguelete and his gang."

"But, I say, Art, oughtn't we to wake Mr. Lal Tata?" asked Dick.
Arty lifted his finger. In an adjacent shelter tent Mr. Lal Tata was snoring.
"Old Tata is well away to bye-bye," said Arty, as he pulled on his enormous boots. "To-morrow morning he will tell us that he hasn't slept a wink all night. Crumbs! Isn't he the limit, that fat Hindu, snoring like a steam roundabout? I should think that there must have been a porpoise in the Tata family at some time. Thank goodness I don't snore!"

added Arty comfortably. "My boots are on now, Dick, and I'm ready for the fray. No, old son, we won't wake Lal from his little bye-bye. He's dreaming of home. And we don't want any of the other chaps to help us tackle these two herring-roed dagoes. Leave 'em to me!"

"But, I say, Art," said Dick, who was always prudent and careful, "supposing I've made a mistake and they weren't signalling to the brigands, after all. Supposing they were just out amusing themselves up on the rocks. They might have been chasing lizards or looking for butterflies."
"Then," said Arty, "they'll just take a punch on the jaw apiece which they don't expect. At any rate, they have been guilty of what the police call conduct likely to lead to a breach of the peace. It's best to be on the safe side. I'll just give Alfonso and Diego a precautionary tap on the boko, and, if there is a mistake, we'll slip 'em a dollar apiece in the morning, and tell 'em not to go fly-hunting at night with electric-torches when there are brigands about in the neighbourhood. Here are the cords to bind 'em with, Dick!"

"Shall I bring the blunderbuss?" asked Dick Dorrington. "Supposing they are armed?"

"You don't want any blunderbuss," said Arty. "That old cannon is what I call a highly dangerous weapon. If it went off you might be had up for murder. We don't want to blow these chaps' heads off," added Arty comfortably. "We just want to give 'em a nice little sleeping draught on the point of the jaw, all nice and quiet and gentlemanly. We shall want them for hostages."

Dick nodded, and the two boys left the tent and crawled to the little cavern where the two guides had returned to their blankets.

Arty and Dick slid in quickly and pinned the men in their blankets.

"Oh!" said one, lifting his head and attempting to grasp a knife. "What you want?"

Arty felt the knife whip out of the man's sash and tightened the blanket, pinioning his prisoner.

"Want to give you a kiss before you go to sleep, dearie," he mumbled amiably. "Take that!"

There was a punch and a snick, and the Spaniard's head dropped back as if he was shot. Dick was struggling with his man, who had drawn a pistol from under his blankets.

Biff!
Arty handed out a dose of soothing syrup from his left, and the second Spaniard lay still.

"Lash 'em up, Dick!" said Arty. "They'll come round in a minute."

The boys set to work swiftly and bound their hostages. They searched the men, and they found five pistols, four knives, and one dirty scrap of paper, pencilled with Spanish words.

The two guides had come round now. One glared up at them with savage madness in his eyes as he struggled with his bonds.

"What you hit us kiekeis in the jaw-bone for?" he demanded.

"Because you have been in correspondence with the enemy," replied Arty. "Because you've been signalling, and I want to know why you two lads are walking about with half Woolwich Arsenal stowed away under your belts. That's why we have given you both a tap on the boko. I fear you are two very treacherous fellows. Now, Dick," went on Arty, "let's have a look at this bit of paper. Turn on the glim of this gentleman's pocket-torch."

Dick flashed on the lamp. Arty knew enough Spanish to read the message.

"Bring the English by the old Guanche path," ran the note. "Get them to the Pico de las Vacas and signal when they are asleep.—MTE."

"Well," said Arty, "that's all plain. If 'Mte.' doesn't stand for Miguelete my name is not Arty. Rouse the camp now, Dick, boot and saddle. Tell 'em to get their boots on and stand to the blunderbuss. Then, when they are all ready, let them haul these two thugs out into the open. Meantime, I'll watch them till we can bind them to a tent-pole." The camp was soon roused. Mr. Lal Tata stopped his snoring performance, and woke up demanding what was wrong.

"We are going to be attacked by brigands, sir," said Dick briefly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lal Tata. "That, my dear Dick, is very annoying. Will you put ten bullets into my blunderbuss? Now, where are my socks? And I have put on my pants inside out!"

"Never mind about pulling them off again, sir," said Dick hurriedly. "You can fight just as well with your pants the wrong way round."

"That is perfectly true, Dick," said Mr. Lal Tata. "Where is Arty?"

"He is looking after the guides till we can bind them properly," reported Dick.

The boys were rapidly dressing now. Two shelter tents were taken down, and the guides were strapped to their poles.

"Now don't be peevish about it, lads," said Arty, as he tied a huge rock to a bit of rope and moored it to the leg of the leading guide. "We are going to build a fort, and we are going to put you in the fort, and you are going to be the hostages."

"Miguelete will cutta your t'roatas—all your t'roatas!" snarled Diego.

"That will be a bad thing for you," replied Arty cheerfully. "For the first Glory Hole throat that is cut you die! Yes, you die—hi-tiddley-hi-ti, tiddley-hi-ti—you die! Do you know that song, Diego?"

"No," replied the guide sulkily.

"That's a pity," said Arty. "It's a good song—makes you laugh! Now we shall have to trouble you. We are going to carry you out in the open, and we are going to build a fort round you."

"Miguelete will cutta alla your t'roatas!" repeated the guide.

"You wait till we have got ready for Miguelete!" said Arty. "You will see that our t'roatas are notta so easy to cutta. No, Alfonso Ilario, you knuts have made the mistake. You thought that you had put friend Miguelete on to a soft thing. You thought that all you had to do was to gobble up a preparatory establishment for young gentlemen; but you've got amongst the bhoys—the Glory Hole Gang of the Bombay Castle. We are the Bad Boys of Badville, and we don't give twopence for a gang of penny coloured bandits. You see!"

The unhappy guides were carried out into the open, away from the tents and the camp-fires. Here they were laid on a stony patch of ground where water was trickling through the stones. Then the boys set to work amongst the broom, and in a few minutes they had raised a square breastwork of the great flat stones, and the more valuable part of their luggage was piled on top of this wall. Then Arty drove the horses and mules up a narrow ravine, where they were lost to sight amongst the scrub, and returned to the fort.

He stepped out ranges of fifty and a hundred yards in the darkness, and marked these with boxes of wet phosphorous matches, which glowed sufficiently for the boys to see them.

"Now we are all serene!" said Arty, his preparations complete. "We have five pistols, one blunderbuss, any amount of rocks, and catapults and provisions and water. Let Miguelete come on. We can stand a siege. Put that box of fireworks handy, Dick, but don't lift the lid in case they get damp."

It was a good box of fireworks. It belonged to Skeleton, who was going to have a birthday, and the boys had persuaded him to bring them ashore, so that they could have, perhaps, a little celebration high up on the mountain.

"Now, silence all!" said Arty. "We'll gag these two gents with their socks. Otherwise they will give us away."

The socks of the guides were pulled off and stuffed in their mouths. Then in dead silence the boys listened for the enemy.

At Grips with Miguelete.

For ten minutes Dick Dorrington & Co. could hear nothing. Then down the slopes below they heard the rolling of dislodged stones.

"Here they come!" said Arty in a whisper. "Keep your heads down and your hearts up, boys!"

The boys waited, their hearts beating hard. Mr. Lal Tata had his trusty blunderbuss. Dick, Porkis, Algy, Jerry, and Chip were armed with the pistols which had been taken from the guides.

Their little sangar was well screened by the bushes of broom, and was built a good fifty yards away from their camp.

Soon they saw shadowy figures creeping against the smoulder of their camp-fires. Arty, whose eyesight was very good, counted eighteen of them.

The bandits were making for the camp, surrounding it silently and scientifically. There was a sharp whistle, a rush, and the old menacing bandit cry of "Boca a tierra!"—"Mouth to the earth!"—the old "Money or your life!" of the Spanish highwayman.

Then followed a yell of anger as Miguelete and his gang of miscreants found that the camp was empty. The boys crouched low behind their breastwork. Conkey Ickstein, treasurer of the Glory Hole Gang, felt his money tickling his feet in his boots. Conkey