

BALDY WINS A FORTUNE!

Baldy, the cook of the Ranch, has an amazing stroke of luck, and as a result his head is completely turned!

The Rebel of the Windy River Ranch!



ANOTHER TOPPING EXTRA-LONG COMPLETE YARN OF JIMMY SILVER & CO.'S ADVENTURES OUT WEST.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Game in the Cookhouse!

"BALDY!"

No answer from the cookhouse.

"Baldy!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

"He's gone to sleep on the pots and pans!" said Raby. "Let's wake him up!"

"Baldy!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

An answer came at last.

"Don't worry! Git!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

The four Rookwood chums had walked down from the ranch-house at Windy River to Baldy's cookhouse.

Baldy was cook at the Windy River Ranch, and he was a good cook. Prompt to time, as a rule, Baldy turned up with excellent supplies for hungry cowpunchers when they came in from the range.

At this hour of the morning there should have been a steady stream of smoke from the chimney of the cookhouse. There should have been an appetizing odour floating round the lumber walls and the corrugated-iron roof.

But there wasn't! Something was wrong in the cookhouse that morning. Not a wisp of smoke came from the chimney; evidently the fire had gone out in the big stove. Not the faintest aroma of cooking hung around the building. When the cowboys came for dinner, it seemed likely that they would be turned empty away.

The door of the cookhouse was shut. There was no sound of clinking of pots and pans within—not even the jingle of washing crockery.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were surprised. They were calling in at the cookhouse for something substantial in the way of "grub" to take with them on a ride. Generally the fat, good-natured Baldy was only too happy to oblige. He would make up lavish lunches for the boys from the Old Country when

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they applied to him. But it did not look like lunch on this occasion.

Arthur Edward Lovell, growing impatient, hurled the door of the cookhouse wide open with a crash.

There was an angry growl from Baldy.

"Git!"

"Look here——"

"Vamoose!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not "vamoose." They wanted to know what was up, and they meant to know.

A surprising scene met their gaze in the cookhouse.

Baldy was not alone.

He was seated on a bench, straddlewise, facing another man who straddled the same bench. The space on the wooden bench between them was serving as a card-table. Baldy was playing poker.

His round, red face was keened with excitement. Even the round bald patch on the top of his bullet head seemed to glow with excitement.

The man he was playing with was a dark-skinned fellow, with rings on his fingers, who sported a dirty "biled" shirt and town boots, and had a panama hat on the back of his well-oiled head. He was a stranger to the Windy River Ranch. The juniors had noticed a horse hitched to the post outside, and they guessed that it belonged to the stranger. He did not look a very pleasant customer. Jimmy Silver & Co. had not yet learned all the manners and customs of the West; but they could guess the character of the man with the ringed fingers. He was a "sport"—one of those enterprising gentlemen who make a precarious living by their skill at card games.

Evidently the ringed gentleman had dropped in at the ranch for refreshment on his way, and inveigled the cook into a little game.

The hospitality of the Canadian West is almost unbounded; there was nothing unusual in a casual stranger calling in

for a meal, finding the ranch in sight at meal-time.

But this, certainly, was not the kind of guest that Mr. Hudson Smedley would have cared to welcome on his ranch.

The man did not glance at the juniors.

All his attention was bestowed on the cards he held in his hand, and, to judge by the expression on his face, he was not getting the better of the game.

There was plenty of money on the bench; the juniors noted bills in little heaps—tens, twenties, and hundreds.

They stared at the scene.

Baldy, the cook, was too busy to attend to them.

"Go you ten better!" he said.

"See you!" answered the stranger.

"And twenty——"

"See you through!"

"My only hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I say, Baldy, old bean——"

"Shurrup!"

"You've let the fire out!"

"Ring off!"

"What price dinner when the cowboys come in?" asked Newcome, with a grin.

"Git!"

"Look here, Baldy——"

"Will you give a galoot a rest?" roared Baldy wrathfully. "See you up to fifty, pard!"

"Fifty it is, I guess!" said the sport, following up Baldy's fifty-dollar note in the pool with one of his own.

"A hundred!" grunted Baldy.

"See you!"

Lovell gave a whistle. Where Baldy, the cook, was getting all this money from was a mystery. Certainly Mr. Hudson Smedley paid his hands well, but hundreds of dollars on a poker game was extremely surprising for a ranch cook. It looked as if Baldy was speculating with the savings of long years.

"Two hundred!" said Baldy, with growing excitement.

The sportsman grunted.

"Show up!" he said.

Baldy, with a triumphant grin, turned up his hand, and displayed four queens—"four of a kind," in poker parlance.

"Beat 'em!" he grinned.

Grunt from the sportsman.

He threw down three kings and two aces—a good hand enough, but not strong enough to beat Baldy's.

"I guess I rake in that leetle pool!" chuckled Baldy.

And he reached over to the stewpan that served as a pool and emptied it of its contents.

Baldy was having amazing luck. He threw the greasy cards together and shuffled them, grinning gleefully.

"Well, thank goodness you're done!" said Jimmy Silver. "We've looked in for some lunch, Baldy."

"Ain't done!" said Baldy. "You got the sand to go on, Tennessee?"

"I guess!" answered Tennessee.

And Baldy dealt the cards.

"We'd better help ourselves," said Jimmy Silver.

"Do, and git!" said Baldy, the cook, without looking at them. "I guess I ain't quitting now and breaking my luck!"

"The cowpunchers will lynch you, Baldy, if they come in hungry and there isn't any grub!"

"Blow the cowpunchers!"

"You're an ass, Baldy, old man!"

"Oh, git!" said Baldy.

And he devoted himself to the cards, and became oblivious of the four juniors.

Jimmy Silver & Co. helped themselves from cold provisions, and left the cookhouse.

They mounted their horses, and trotted away on the prairie trail, leaving Baldy to continue his little game with Tennessee, the sport.

"The awful ass!" remarked Lovell. "That chap will clear him out, and we shall find him weeping and wailing when we get back!"

"Looked as if he were winning," said Jimmy Silver. "He had a big stack of bills on his side. It's dashed queer. That blighter he called Tennessee didn't look like a rich man. I suppose it's none of our business. Come on!"

And the Rookwooders rode away cheerily, and dismissed Baldy and his little game from their minds—though they were to be reminded very soon of that curious scene in the cookhouse at Windy River, which was to have very surprising results.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Baldy Astonishes the Natives!

PETE PETERS, the foreman of the ranch, jumped from his horse and strode up to the cookhouse.

Half a dozen of the Windy River cowpunchers had ridden in with the foreman, and the thoughts of the whole party were fixed seriously upon one subject—dinner. Five hours in the saddle in the keen air of the Alberta prairie made a man ready for his dinner when he rode in. Pete Peters and his comrades could almost have eaten Baldy himself just then.

"Look lively, Baldy!" roared the foreman into the doorway of the cookhouse.

"What?"

"Grub, man—grub!"

"Eh?"

Pete Peters stared at the cook.

It was quite a new Baldy who met his glance.

The cook was alone now. Tennessee, the sportsman, had taken his horse and ridden away, and the boundless prairie

had long swallowed him up. But the Baldy he had left behind was not the old Baldy.

Instead of being busy over a glowing stove, with pots and pans galore, Baldy, the cook, was seated on a bench, leaning back against the wall of the cookhouse smoking a cigar.

He smoked with enjoyment, smiling through the smoke rings, with fat satisfaction on his plump face.

He hardly heeded the entrance of even so important a personage as the foreman of the ranch.

Baldy was buried in a reverie, and it seemed to be a very pleasant reverie.

"Baldy!" shouted Peters.

"Eh—what?"

"Where's dinner?"

"Dinner?" repeated Baldy.

"Yep! Dinner!" roared the indignant foreman. "What's the matter with you?"

"Matter?" repeated Baldy vaguely. Evidently his thoughts were far away.

"Dinner!" shouted Skitter Dick, putting an indignant face in at the doorway of the cookhouse.

Baldy blinked at him.

"I guess there ain't no dinner," he said.

"No dinner!" gasped Skitter Dick.

"I ain't had time to think about it. Peg around and look for something."

said Baldy indifferently. "I guess a galoot about my size ain't no time for grubbing cowpunchers!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"He's mad!" said Red Alf, looking in. "Mad as a hatter! Or has he got hold of some fire-water?"

Baldy rose from the bench and waved a fat hand at the indignant cowpunchers with a lofty and dignified air.

"You git!" he said.

"What?"

"Don't you come worrying your betters, you galoots!" said Baldy. "I ain't no time for attending to you! Grub yourselves if you want grub! You can't expect me to do it!"

"What does Boss Smedley pay you for?" roared Pete Peters.

Baldy laughed—a scornful laugh.

"Boss Smedley! Blow Boss Smedley!" he said.

"Blow the boss?" repeated Spike Thompson blankly.

"Blow him—and blow you, too!" said the cook independently. "I ain't staying long on this here ranch, and you can lay to that! A man like me cooking for a gang of rowdy cowpunchers? No, sir!" And Baldy, the cook, drew himself up to his full height—which was not great, Baldy being a tall man sideways, as it were—and sniffed contemptuously.

"You certainly won't be long hyer if you don't cook!" said Pete Peters grimly. "You ought to have been in a lunatic asylum long ago, anyhow, if you come to that!"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Skitter Dick, in wonder.

"Blessed if I know! But I know he's going to hand out grub!" said Pete Peters. "Get a move on, Baldy, and sharp!"

Baldy did not get a move on.

He stood erect, as tall as he could make himself, with his arms akimbo, and looked loftily at the amazed cowpunchers.

"Get a move on yourself, Pete Peters!" he answered.

"Are you handing out grub?" roared the exasperated foreman.

"No, I ain't! Not by long chalks!"

"Bring in a trail-robe, Dick!"

"You bet!" said Skitter Dick.

"Look hyer—" began Baldy, in alarm.

"You've asked for it, Baldy!" said

the foreman. "You're keeping us hungry! If you're mad, I'm sorry for you; but, mad or not, you ain't keeping this hyer outfit hungry? No, sir! Hand it over, Dick!"

Skitter Dick threw the rope to the foreman. Pete took a businesslike grip on it, and started for the cook.

Baldy backed away in alarm.

Apparently he had not expected drastic measures such as this. Something evidently had occurred to give Baldy, the cook, a bad attack of "swelled head." What it was, the cowpunchers did not know and did not care. Baldy at the best of times was what they called a "queer boob." Whatsoever was the matter with Baldy, one thing was certain—that the hungry cowpunchers wanted their dinner and that Baldy had to hand it out as in duty bound. And all faces looked on approvingly as Pete Peters took the mutinous cook by the collar with one huge hand, and in the other flourished the coiled trail-robe.

"Leggo!" yelled Baldy.

"Not this afternoon!" grinned Mr. Peters.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Go it!" Spike Thompson sang out. Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Baldy. "Lemme alone! Yooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Baldy's greasy trousers fairly rang as he hopped and jumped and skipped under the whacks from the coiled trail-robe.

He wriggled and he struggled; but he was as powerless as an infant in the muscular grasp of Pete Peters, who stood six feet three in his boots. Pete's left hand held him helpless, while the right laid on the trail-robe with terrible vim.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, let up! Let up!" howled Baldy, in anguish. "I'll git that dinner—I will sure! Let up, old man! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure?" demanded Pete Peters.

"Oh, for sure! Let up!"

"I guess I'll give you a chance! Get going!"

The big foreman released Baldy, who staggered to a bench and sat down. He jumped up again, however, as if that bench were red hot. After Mr. Peters' hefty application of the trail-robe, Baldy was feeling inclined for anything but sitting down.

"Hustle, you fat mugwump!" shouted Spike Thompson.

"Give him some more, Pete!"

"Let up!" yelled Baldy. "I'm getting a move on, ain't I? I guess I'll have that grub ready in two shakes of a beaver's tail! Let up!"

Baldy set to work with almost feverish energy.

The cowpunchers stood around urging him to greater efforts by incessant objurgations. Baldy's amazing and unaccountable outbreak was treated more or less as a joke, but the cowpunchers were serious on one subject—dinner. They chipped Baldy with a kind of rough good humour; but they kept him steadily to his appointed task, and at a sign of slacking there was always a heavy boot ready to jam on Baldy's greasy trousers.

The hapless Baldy had never worked so hard or so quickly in all his career as a ranch-cook.

It was not till all the wants of the numerous and hungry party were satisfied that Baldy was given a rest. By that time he was crimson, perspiring, and quite tired.

He fairly tottered to the door of the cookhouse, out into the keen, refreshing breeze from the Rocky Mountains.

"Now you can go and sleep it off, Baldy!" grinned Pete Peters. "But if supper ain't ready on time, you'd better wish you'd never been born!"

Baldy turned in the doorway. "You won't get any supper from me!" he gasped.

"What?"

"A pesky mob of rowdy cow-punchers!" sneered Baldy. "Man like me cooking for a mob like you!" Baldy sniffed contemptuously. "No, sir! None in mine! As for Boss Smedley! Bu'st Boss Smedley! Why, I could buy him up, ranch and all, lock, stock, and barrel! Yah!"

And with that scornful defiance, Baldy the cook turned and bolted suddenly, just escaping two or three dishes and pans that were hurled at him by the astonished Windy River outfit.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Baldy the Magnificent!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. rode in, in the golden sunset, ruddy-faced and cheery. They had forgotten all about Baldy, the cook, and his queer proceedings. But as they led their horses into the corral, his unimportant existence was recalled to their minds.

"Ten thousand dollars!"

That remark, in the cook's well-known voice, fell upon Jimmy Silver's ears as he entered the gate of the corral.

He glanced round.

Baldy, the cook, was seated inside the corral fence, his plump back against the railings. Perhaps he had chosen that quiet spot to meditate; or possibly he was keeping out of the way of the cow-punchers.

At all events, there he was—communing with himself. There was a fat and satisfied grin on the podgy face of Baldy, the cook. His fat legs were stretched out before him; and on his greasy trousers lay little heaps of bills of various denominations, which Baldy, apparently, had been counting.

"Hallo, Baldy!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

"Hallo!" said Baldy carelessly.

Jimmy led his horse in, and turned him into the corral, and his chums followed. Then he stooped to look at Baldy.

The sunset shone on his fat, red face, and the bald circle on the crown of his head. Baldy, the cook, did not look handsome; but he looked amazingly satisfied with himself and things generally.

"Made your fortune?" asked Lovell.

"Yep."

"You've got a thumping lot of money there, old bean," said Raby in wonder. "Been robbing a bank?"

"I guess I can play poker, some," said Baldy, with pride.

"You haven't won all that money at poker?" exclaimed Newcome.

"Sure!"

"My only hat!"

The Pistical Four of Rookwood fairly stared at Baldy. His statement almost took their breath away.

Baldy gave them a fat wink.

"I guess I'm the galoot to skin a poker game!" he said. "Yes, sir! I reckon I am all there, just a few!"

"Well, my word!" said Jimmy Silver in astonishment.

He couldn't help being astonished. Baldy was a good cook; every man at THE POPULAR.—No. 436.

Windy River admitted that. But he was not supposed to be clever at anything else. In fact, he was supposed to be several sorts of a duffer; and was more or less made a "butt" in a good-natured way by the cow-punchers. Jimmy Silver & Co. had noticed that Baldy had a good conceit of himself; they had found him once regarding his reflection in a pocket-mirror, with looks of satisfaction—from which they deduced that Baldy considered himself good-looking—and they had kindly refrained from allowing Baldy to see them smile.

Baldy's conceit had hitherto been suppressed—there was no room for it to spread in a ranch cookhouse.

Now it was spreading with a vengeance.

Apparently he had something for it to spread upon in this instance; for a man who could win ten thousand dollars from a professional poker-player could only have a very extraordinary man. Personally, Jimmy Silver & Co. did not like poker, or any other form of gambling; but, naturally, they did not air their views among the happy-go-lucky cowpunchers.

"What you want for poker," said Baldy, "is nerve! Force of character, too—that's it! Now, I've got force of character."

"Go hon!" murmured Lovell.

"Three hundred dollars was my capital," said Baldy. "I lost it—and won ten thousand! Ten thousand of the best! What!"

"It seems hardly possible," said Raby, wondering.

Baldy chuckled.

"I wouldn't be possible to an ornary galoot," he explained. "But Tennessee ran up against a snag when he asked me to play poker! You bet! He's gone off with my three hundred dollars—and left me ten thousand of the best! Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's that?" asked Jimmy Silver curiously. "It's rather odd that he should bag your money, and you his."

"Not at all. You see, my money was in tens," explained Baldy. "I'd saved it up bit by bit. Where I lost ten, he lost hundreds."

"Yes; but—"

"He's a high-flyer, is that sport," said Baldy, with a grin. "When he won a pot, he jest shoved the little bills into his pocket—wouldn't play with small-bills—shelled out big ones of his own. And so it happened that he bagged all mine—but he left me lots in his place." Baldy chuckled again. "He lost his nerve at the finish he did—wouldn't play on till he was broke."

"Sensible man, anyhow," said Lovell.

"P'r'aps," said Baldy. "But his luck might have turned. You never know."

"That's the last," says he, when I won a big pot. 'I'm done,' says he. 'You've got a lot of little bills in your pocket,' says I. 'Try agin.' But he wouldn't. He says he wants some small change to pay his hotel bills at Red Deer tomorrow, and so he took his hoss and cleared."

"And left you rolling in it!" said Jimmy.

Baldy rustled the bills in his fat fingers.

"I guess I'm a rich man now," he said. "Jest nerve, and brains, you know—couldn't be done without brains. I've always said I was the only galoot on this ranch with any brains, the boss thrown in. And so it is. Boss Smedley!" Baldy sniffed. "Boss Smedley ain't the man to clean my boots, he ain't, and so you can tell him from me, young Silver."

"What?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Tell him I said so, and tell him—"

"I won't tell him that," said Jimmy. "I've a jolly good mind to punch your silly nose for your cheek."

"Oh, come off!" said Baldy derisively. "Who are you?"

"Eh?"

"Who are you?" demanded Baldy aggressively. "Answer me that. Who are you? Jest a little tenderfoot, what ain't fit to talk to a man like me—a rich man! When I get my ranch—I'm going to buy a ranch—I'll give you a job as chore-boy."

Jimmy Silver stared at the fat cook. Only too obviously, Baldy's wonderful good fortune had got into his head—never very strong.

"Chore-boy!" repeated Baldy, with relish. "That's about your mark, young Silver! I'll give you a job looking after my carriage, young Lovell."

"Will you, by Jove!" said Lovell.

"Sure. I'm going to set up a carriage in my town house at Calgary. Or p'r'aps a motey-car," said Baldy reflectively. "With a motey-car, I could run out to see the ranch, and see how the hands was getting on, and slang them if they was slacking. Yep! I guess it's a motey-car for me. Know anything about motey-cars, young Lovell?"

"More than you do, probably!" grunted Lovell.

"None of your cheek, young feller!" said Baldy severely, wagging an admonitory fat forefinger at the incensed Arthur Edward. "I don't take cheek from my inferiors."

"Your what?" yelled Lovell.

"Inferiors!"

"Why, you fat idiot—" roared Lovell.

"Cut it out!" said Baldy contemptuously. "If you know anything about motey-cars, I may be able to give you a job. Mind, I don't promise."

"Why, you—you—" gasped Lovell.

"You'll have to be civil, anyhow," said Baldy. "I believe in keeping my servants in their place, and don't you forget it!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, gazing at Baldy in wonder.

This was an entirely new Baldy.

"You'll have to touch your hat," went on Baldy. "Mind, the first time you don't touch your hat to your master you're fired. You touch your hat, and say, 'Yes, sir!' respectful-like. Savvy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"What are you yellin' at?" demanded Baldy resentfully. "Nothing to laugh at that I see. Don't you young cubs have the cheek to larf at me—a man what could buy you up and never miss the money. I could buy this hull ranch if I liked, with Boss Smedley thrown in."

"So you're chucking up cooking?" grinned Raby.

Baldy make a gesture of scorn.

"Cooking! Me cook! Stow it!"

"Well, you've done a lot of cooking, haven't you?" said Jimmy, laughing.

"I fancy you cut a better figure as a cook than you will as a giddy million-aite, Baldy."

"Once for all," said Baldy, "I don't want any cheek! And not so much of your Baldy! I don't permit familiarity. I'm Mr. Bubbin to my inferiors, or sir. Better call me sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

"Cut it out!" roared Mr. Bubbin.

"That's done it! No jobs in my palatial mansion at Calgary for you uns! You come monkeying around when I'm riding in my motey-car, and I'll order the pesky shower to run over you, and you may lay to that."

"Isn't he as good as a play?" said Lovell. "Of all the born idiots—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



DEALING WITH BALDY! With scarcely an effort, Mr. Hudson Smedley picked Baldy up by the back of his neck and the slack of his trousers, and carried him wriggling to the pond. There was an alarmed yell from the cook. "Yarooop! Leggo!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fistical Four. (See Chapter 4.)

"Isn't it time you got back to the cookhouse, Baldy?" asked Jimmy Silver. "The boys will be wrathful if there's no supper."

"Let 'em! Tell Boss Smedley to look for another cook," said Mr. Bubbin contemptuously. "Tell him that the gentleman who cooked for him ain't going to soil his hands with no more cooking. Tell him it's beneath his—beneath his dignity. Tell him that I washes my hands—"

"They can do with it!" remarked Newcome.

"That I washes my hands of the job and of him, too!" roared Baldy. "Tell him I've always despised him, and now I want him to know it."

"You can give him your polite messages yourself, you silly owl," said Jimmy Silver. "Now you're going to be bumped for your bad manners!"

"What! I—"

"Bump him!" chuckled Lovell.

"You pesky galoots! You cheeky greenhorns! You— Yaroooh! Ow! Wow, wow!" roared Mr. Bubbin, as the Rookwoods collared him.

Bump!

"Yoooop!"

Bump, bump!

Baldy's dollar bills flew in all directions as the grinning juniors bumped him in Rookwood style.

Then they walked out of the corral, laughing, leaving Baldy, the cook, gasping on his back.

"Ow, ow! Wow! Groogh!" gasped Baldy, as he sat up. "Oooogh! Ooooch! Me! Handling me! Ow! Oh dear!"

And Baldy, the cook, still spluttering for breath, rolled over on his fat hands and knees to gather up his precious bank bills.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Fired!"

"LYNCH him!"

"Scrag him!"

There was wrath in the cookhouse at Windy River.

Supper-time had come and gone. And there was no supper—and there was no Baldy!

Possibly, having grown wiser by his experience earlier in the day, Baldy, the cook, was giving the cookhouse a wide berth.

The cowpunchers gathered round, and made emphatic remarks on the subject of Baldy and supper; but there was no supper. The stove was cold, and Baldy conspicuous by his absence.

Pete Peters raged. He hunted for Baldy, the cook, with a quilt in his muscular hand. It was fortunate for

Baldy that Pete Peters did not find him. Skitter Dick brandished a revolver, and loudly announced his intention of shooting the cook on sight.

Red Alf, with a coiled trail-ropo in his hand and deadly determination in his face, sought for Baldy far and wide. What Pete Peters had left of him, Red Alf would have finished had Baldy been found. But Baldy Bubbin was not found. He was not a bright individual, but he was too bright to let the enraged cowpunchers find him that evening.

Baldy, the cook, was not the possessor of a horse; on his rare trips to town he would borrow a horse from the corral. As there did not appear to be any animal missing, it seemed that Baldy was not gone. It was scarcely possible that he could have started to walk, leaving his belongings behind.

His belongings were few and of little value, and perhaps Baldy, in his new opulence, might have left them behind with scorn; but certainly the fat man was not likely to attempt to walk the miles of rough prairie to Mosquito, the nearest town. He was still about the ranch somewhere, that was fairly certain, but he was keeping carefully out of sight.

The cowpunchers would have congratulated Baldy on his amazing luck.

at poker had he taken it in a different spirit. They might even have taken his amazing swank with good humour if he had still attended to his duties. As it was, they were exasperated.

Nobody expected Baldy Bubbin to be anything but a duffer, but meals were a serious thing. Baldy might be as self-important as he liked—might even declare that cooking was beneath his dignity, if he chose—so long as he handed out supper. But he did not hand it out—he was not there to hand it out—and so the Windy River outfit ragged.

Jimmy Silver & Co., after supper in the ranch-house with Mr. Hudson Smedley, came out to inquire how Baldy was getting on. They found a furious crowd in front of the cookhouse.

"Know where that fat mugwump is?" roared Skitter Dick. "I guess I want to draw a bead on him!"

"Lit out without getting supper!" gasped Spike Thompson. "I'm going to boot him till he bu'sts!"

"Better tell the boss!" said Pete Peters at last. "He will fire the fat idiot off the ranch for this! Is Boss Smedley indoors, Silver?"

"Yes," said Jimmy, laughing.

And Pete Peters, with frowning brow, strode away to the ranch-house to acquaint the rancher with the peculiar state of affairs.

Mr. Hudson Smedley raised his eyebrows when he was told. Then he laughed.

"I guess Baldy hasn't more brains than the law allows," he remarked. "Woo Sing can do for the outfit for once."

And Woo Sing, the chore-boy, was sent into the cookhouse to supply the place of the absent Baldy.

After supper—a late supper—the outfit smoked, and discussed the amazing outbreak of Baldy Bubbin, and waited for him to appear. Supper had taken the keen edge off their wrath; but certainly Baldy would have been kicked a good deal had he put in an appearance.

But he didn't!

That evening the cook was not seen by the Windy River outfit, and they turned in at the bunkhouse at last, leaving the affair of Mr. Bubbin over till the morning.

Jimmy Silver & Co., who were quite interested by this time in the fortunes of Baldy Bubbin, came out immediately after breakfast the next morning to learn whether he had turned up. They found that he hadn't, and that Woo Sing was again officiating in his place in the cookhouse. Mr. Smedley had arranged with the Chinese to take over Baldy's duties pro tem. till a new cook was found. It was clear by this time that Baldy would have to be "fired"—if, indeed, he did not intend to "fire" himself.

Most of the cowpunchers had gone on the range when Jimmy Silver sighted a fat form coming round the corner of the bunkhouse. It was Baldy, who had evidently waited till the coast was clear before showing up. Mr. Smedley came over from the ranch-house as he caught sight of the mutinous cook.

There were a couple of the outfit at the corral, and both of them looked expressively at Baldy. But in the rancher's presence they contented themselves with looks, and refrained from giving him the kicking they had promised, and which Baldy certainly had asked for.

"So you're here, Baldy!" said Mr. Smedley, eyeing the fat cook with curious eyes.

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Baldy looked at him.

"What did you call me?" he asked.

"Baldy!"

"Mr. Bubbin to you, Smedley!" said the cook loftily.

"You pesky ass!" exclaimed the rancher.

"Don't you raise your voice to me, Mr. Smedley—I mean Smedley!" said the cook. "You treat me civil, and I'll treat you civil, Smedley! I'm willing to part friends with you!"

Jimmy Silver looked at his big Canadian cousin rather uneasily. He half-expected the big rancher to take Baldy by the neck and shake him like a rat. But Boss Smedley seemed quite good-humoured, in spite of the impertinence of the ineffable Baldy. Like many big, powerful fellows, he had a great deal of good-tempered patience with fellows less generously endowed physically. He could have knocked poor Baldy half a dozen yards with one drive of his hefty fist, and that fact probably made him extremely kind and patient with the rebellious cook.

He seemed, indeed, more perplexed than annoyed.

SCHOOLBOYS
OUT
WEST!



"SKITTER
DICK'S
SECRET!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

Next Week's Ripping Tale of the
Fistical Four in Canada.

"So you're going, Baldy?" he said at last.

"I'm going, Smedley!"

"I'm sorry! You're a born idiot, but you're a good cook! What's this I hear about your winning a big sum at poker yesterday?"

"Ten thousand dollars!" grinned Baldy.

"Impossible!"

"I guess I've got the dust in me trouser-pocket!" said Baldy. "I ain't lending you any, Smedley!"

"Well, if you're going, go!" said the rancher, still good-tempered. "I'm sorry to have to fire you!"

"Fire me!" exclaimed Baldy contemptuously. "I ain't fired! I'm going of my own accord! You're fired, Smedley! I fires you!"

The rancher grinned.

"Very well," he said. "Do you want to borrow a horse?"

"Certainly not! I want the buggy!"

"Oh, you want the buggy, do you?" ejaculated the rancher.

"I'm leaving like a gentleman," said Baldy, with dignity. "Order out the buggy! One of them cowpunchers can drive, or one of the kids. I'll give him a dollar."

"Doesn't he take the cake?" murmured Jimmy Silver, and Arthur Lovell snorted.

Raby and Newcome grinned. They seemed to find an endless entertainment in Baldy Bubbin.

Mr. Smedley called across to the corral.

"Let him have a horse, Thompson. It can be left at the Pacific, at Mosquito, to be called for."

"Sure, boss."

Hudson Smedley swung round towards the ranch-house.

"Hi!" roared Baldy.

Mr. Smedley did not turn his head. Apparently he had finished with the ineffable and egregious Baldy.

"Hi!" yelled Baldy again. "Ain't I having the buggy?"

The rancher strode on, unheeding. Baldy Bubbin made a rush after him, and caught him by the shoulder to stop him.

Mr. Smedley turned at that.

Quite gently he unhooked Baldy's grasp from his shoulder. Then he picked Baldy up by the back of his neck and the slack of his trousers. There was an alarmed yell from Mr. Bubbin.

"Yarrooh! Leggo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With scarcely an effort the big Canadian rancher carried Baldy, breathless and wriggling, towards the pond.

Baldy wriggled and roared with frantic energy, but there was no help for Baldy now.

Splash!

"Grooooooh!"

Baldy Bubbin sat in a foot of muddy water. Leaving him there, without a word or a glance, the rancher strode away, and this time Mr. Bubbin did not follow him. Mr. Bubbin was too busy extracting himself from mud, and wriggling and spluttering his way ashore.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Baldy's Farewell!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. wiped their eyes. The sight of the fat and fatuous Baldy crawling out of the pond was too much for them. There was not much dignity about Mr. Bubbin now. He gasped and spluttered as he scraped mud from his trousers.

He bestowed a glare upon the chortling juniors, and walked away to the corral, where Spike Thompson and Red Alf greeted him with grinning faces.

"I guess I'm having that hoss!" gasped Baldy.

"If I was the boss," said Mr. Thompson emphatically, "I'd boot you off the ranch, Baldy, and leave you to leg it to Mosquito."

"Don't you give me any cheek, Thompson. I ain't taking cheek from common cowpunchers."

Spike Thompson gave the cook an expressive glance, and made a motion with a huge fist. Baldy dodged back. Spike laughed and went into the corral for a horse.

Baldy Bubbin was soon mounted, with his few worldly belongings in a canvas sack behind him.

"Good-bye, Baldy!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"So-long, young Silver!" answered Baldy haughtily. "P'r'aps I'll find that job for you later on, looking arter my motey-car."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Git off with you, you fat idjit!" exclaimed Spike Thompson, in disgust. "I guess this outfit is fed up with you, Baldy!"

"You're a common cowpuncher, Thompson!"

Spike picked up a big quirt, and made a stride towards the horseman. Baldy hurriedly set his steed in motion.

But he did not ride out on the trail. He rode up to the windows of the ranch-house.

"Hi, Smedley!" he shouted. "Clear off, you cheeky ass!" exclaimed Lovell.

Baldy did not heed. He sat his horse under the windows and shouted:

"Smedley! Hi, Smedley!"

The rancher did not appear.

"I'm going, Smedley!" yelled Baldy.

"But I ain't fired, Smedley. You better get on to that. I ain't fired!"

"You're fired! Understand that, Smedley!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I despise you!" went on Baldy, holding his reins ready for a sudden bolt if the rancher should appear.

"I've always despised you, Smedley. You're no good, you ain't! You give me orders! Haw, haw! I guess I'm going to have a dozen galoots like you touching their hats to me in my town mansion at Calgary. You hear me, Smedley!"

Crack!

Spike Thompson had come within range with his big whip. That whip curled round Baldy with a loud crack.

"Yaroooh!" roared Baldy, almost falling off his horse.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack!

"You keep off, you common cowpuncher!" shrieked Baldy. "Oh crumbs!"

The horse began to prance, and Baldy, who had dropped the reins as the whip caught him, clutched hold of the animal's mane to save himself from pitching off. Spike Thompson, grinning, cracked the whip round him again, to an accompaniment of terrific yells from Baldy.

"Off you go, you born idjit!" said Spike.

"Ow! Help!"

The horse started for the trail at a rapid pace, Baldy still clinging to his mane.

Spike Thompson followed behind, cracking the whip.

"Git away, you low feller!" yelled Baldy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The horse broke into a gallop. Down the trail went Baldy, clinging frantically to the galloping animal's mane. In that style he disappeared from the sight of the yelling spectators.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"That fat ass is really too funny to live!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess this hyer outfit is done with Baldy," grinned Spike. "It's a durned pity! He was a better cook than the Chink. I guess I wish I'd given him some more for cheeking the boss, the pesky idjit."

Jimmy Silver & Co. watched Baldy till the fat cook was out of sight. Then they turned back to the ranch, grinning. They did not expect to see anything more of Baldy Bubbin.

Woo Sing cooked for the outfit that day, and there was much discussion among the cowpunchers on the subject of Baldy.

His amazing luck in winning ten thousand dollars at poker, and the still more amazing outbreak of swelled head that had followed, made Baldy quite an

interesting topic at Windy River for a time.

Baldy Bubbin had never filled a prominent place in the scheme of things at Windy River; but now, for once, he loomed large in the public eye. The cowpunchers wondered what would become of him and his dollars, and opined that there were plenty of cute galoots not farther off than Mosquito, who would soon relieve Baldy of the trouble of taking care of his sudden wealth. But how an egregious ass like Baldy Bubbin had contrived to win such a sum from a professional sharper was so deep a problem that puzzling over it was likely to keep Baldy's memory green at Windy River for some time to come.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Decline and Fall of Baldy Bubbin!

"SIR!"

Jimmy Silver started.

It was the following day, and Jimmy had strolled down to the bank of the Windy River in the afternoon. He was surprised to hear a well-known voice hail him, in timid and respectful tones, from the trees.

Jimmy looked round in surprise.

A fat face was peering from the thickets at him. It was the face of Baldy Bubbin.

"Hallo! You here again!" exclaimed Jimmy, in surprise.

Baldy smiled—a sickly, propitiatory smile.

"It's me, sir!" he murmured.

"What are you calling me 'sir' for?" asked Jimmy.

"I hope I know how to be respectful, sir!" mumbled Baldy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I—I hope I see you well, sir!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Quite, thanks! But you don't look very chirpy, Baldy. What have you come back for?"

"How's the boss?" asked Baldy.

"Eh? Much the same as usual."

"Not mad, is he?"

*Jimmy stared for a moment, till he

remembered that "mad" was the Western word for "angry."

"No," he answered. "But what—"

"Not mad with me?" asked Baldy anxiously.

"I cheeked him, sir! I did! Didn't I, now?"

"You did," said Jimmy. "I fancy you'd better keep clear, Baldy. Aren't you off to Calgary to buy your town mansion?"

Baldy groaned.

"And the motor-car?" said Jimmy.

Groan!

"And a dozen servants to touch their hats to you?"

Groan!

"Blessed if I can make you out!" said the puzzled junior. "What's the matter with you, Baldy?"

Groan!

Jimmy Silver eyed the unhappy Baldy curiously. Obviously Baldy Bubbin was in deep trouble. Something, apparently, had gone wrong with his plans already. He looked tired and worn and dismal, in the very depths of the blues. Which was surprising enough in a man who had made such a sudden rise to fortune.

"Lost your money?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Groan!

"What do you want here, anyway?"

"I want you to put in a word for me, sir!" mumbled Baldy faintly. "You're a kind-hearted young gent, you are. Orfen and orfen I've made up a nice lunch for you to take out with you—now, haven't I?"

"You have," agreed Jimmy. "But what good will a word from me do you? I don't know anything about buying town mansions, or motor-cars, or engaging a dozen servants to touch their hats."

Baldy groaned dismally.

"That's all off, sir."

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"If you'd put in a word for me, sir,"

groaned Baldy. "I—I—I've come back arter my job, sir!"

"Great Scott!"

"I've been took in, sir!" groaned Baldy. "I've been took in suthin cruel. That there sport, Tennessee, played it low down on me, sir!"

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"But you won ten thousand dollars from him," said Jimmy Silver, in perplexity.

Baldy gave another deep groan. Evidently he was in the lowest of spirits.

"Where's the boss?" he asked.

"Over by the corral, seeing to mending the rail," said Jimmy. "Do you want to speak to him?"

"I've been hanging about for hours waiting for a chance!" groaned Baldy. "Soon as I set eyes on you, sir, I says to myself you'll put in a word for a pore galoot what is down on his luck, sir. You will, sir?"

"I will, certainly, if it will do any good," said Jimmy. "But—"

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said Baldy. "I—I say, is the outfit mad with me, sir?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Not very, I think," he answered. "They take you as a screaming joke, Baldy."

Baldy winced, but he seemed relieved. "You don't think they'll boot a galoot on sight?" he asked.

"I hope not. You'll have to chance that if you want to speak to Mr. Smedley."

Baldy sighed deeply.

"I'll chance it," he said. "You come with me, sir, and put in a word for me, sir, if you'll be so good, sir!"

Jimmy Silver had not heard so many "sirs" since he had left Rookwood. He smiled and nodded.

"Come on, Baldy!" he said. "Thank you, sir!"

Jimmy Silver led the way through the trees towards the ranch, and Mr. Bubbin followed him, in an uneasy mood. When they came in sight of the bunkhouse there was a shout from Skitter Dick.

"Holy smoke! Here's Baldy agin!" "Baldy!" roared Pete Peters. "Where's my quirt?"

"They're mad with me!" gasped Baldy. "I knowed they'd be mad! You stick to me, sir!"

"Come on!" grinned Jimmy.

He took hold of Baldy's arm to encourage him, and led him onward amid surprised stares from the members of the Windy River outfit who happened to be on hand.

Mr. Hudson Smedley was inspecting a repairing job at the corral, and he glanced round and raised his eyebrows as Baldy Bubbin appeared in the offing.

He did not speak, but he eyed Mr. Bubbin very grimly as the cook came wriggling up.

"Baldy's come back, cousin Smedley," said Jimmy Silver. "He seems to want his old job back again."

"I guess he can look for another one," said Mr. Smedley briefly, and he turned back to the work that was going on.

Pete Peters came up, with a big quirt in his hand and a business-like expression on his bronzed, bearded face.

"You've come back for it, Baldy?" he asked, making a motion with the big whip.

"No, I ain't!" howled Baldy. "I say, Mr. Peters—Mr. Peters, sir—"

"Oh, gum!" ejaculated Mr. Peters. "I was a common cowpuncher yesterday, wasn't I?"

Baldy grinned feebly.

"Only my little joke, sir, which I begs you to excuse."

The lofty and dignified Baldy had fallen very low indeed. Pete Peters eyed him blankly.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" he ejaculated. "What's come over the pesky fool?"

"Mr. Smedley, sir—"

THE POPULAR.—No. 456.

"Get!" said the rancher, without looking round.

"Jest a word, sir!" said Baldy, almost tearfully. "You was always a kind-hearted gent, sir! You won't turn a galoot away without a word."

Mr. Hudson Smedley turned round impatiently.

"Look here, what do you want?" he rapped out. "You fired yourself from the ranch. I've sent already to engage another man. What do you want here, anyhow?"

"You won't get another man to cook like what I do, sir," said Baldy eagerly. "That there Chink, sir, Woo Sing, can't do it. You ask any of the boyees, sir. Mr. Peters will tell you so, sir. Won't you, Mr. Peters?"

But Mr. Peters could only stare.

"But what do you want your job back for?" demanded the rancher. "You've made a lot of money, I understand, and don't want a cook's job now."

Baldy almost whimpered.

"I was took in, sir," he groaned. "That there sport, Tennessee, won off'n me three hundred dollars in good money, what I'd saved up, sir, in fives and tens. He won it and lit out with it, sir—all I had! And that money what I won from him, sir—hyer it is!"

Dismally the wretched Baldy drew a handful of bills from his pocket and threw them on the ground. Apparently he no longer valued the wealth he had received in exchange for his three hundred dollars.

"But what—" said the puzzled rancher.

"They're no good, sir!" groaned Baldy.

"No good?"

"They're green goods, sir—sawdust, spoo!" said Baldy. "Jest sawdust, sir; the villain might as well have give me a hundred thousand—it'd only have cost him a dollar or so more!"

"Counterfeit bills!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Jest that, sir. I was took in!"

Lovell, and Raby, and Newcome, attracted to the spot by the unexpected sight of Baldy Bubbin, came up in time to hear the hapless cook's confession. Baldy gave them a miserable, pathetic glance.

"Took in!" he repeated. "Took in by that there villain! Sawdust! Fancy me being took in with sawdust!"

"Sawdust means spoo paper money," Arthur Edward Lovell explained to his chums.

Mr. Hudson Smedley's grim face relaxed.

"You crass ass!" he said. "Do you mean to say that you allowed a sharper to get hold of your money and plant counterfeit bills on you in exchange?"

"How was I to know, sir?" mumbled Baldy. "I reckoned they was all right. Why, sir, I shouldn't wonder now if the galoot let me win, sir, letting me get hold of hundred-dollar bills as much as I liked, jest while he was bagging my fives and tens one at a time."

"So that accounts," Mr. Smedley smiled. "I know you hadn't brains enough to win anything at poker. I couldn't catch on. You silly coyote, you've been robbed and fooled, and you might have known it!"

"I knows it now, sir," groaned Baldy. "I takes my money into the post office at Mosquito, and Mr. Lesage, he says, says he: 'I'll have to detain you,' says he. 'The police will have to know about this,' says he, 'passing false money,' says he. 'Where did you get it?' says he." Baldy Bubbin almost sobbed. "So then I knowed, sir."

"Well, of all the silly asses!" said Lovell.

"So you've come back?" said Mr. Smedley.

"Yes, sir; arter my job. You'll forget some things what I said, sir, arter this awful bad luck."

The rancher smiled.

"You deserve to be kicked off the ranch," he said. "But I haven't engaged the new man yet; I suppose I can send word that he won't be wanted. You can get back into the cook-house."

Baldy Bubbin's downcast face brightened.

The ranch cook-house did not compare favourably with a town mansion in Calgary, a motor-car, and a dozen servants touching their hats. But it compared very favourably with Baldy's actual prospects at that juncture. The cook-house was indeed "home, sweet home" to the hapless Baldy, who had not made his fortune, after all.

"You mean it, sir?" he gasped.

"Yes. Get!"

And the rancher turned away and paid no further heed to Baldy. Pete Peters dropped a heavy hand on the fat cook's shoulder.

"Glad to have you back, Baldy," he said. "You cook better than Woo Sing. I'll put it to the boyees that they're not to lynch you. I dessay they'll let you off, though they're only common cowpunchers. I'll give you what you want myself. Savvy?"

"Oh, sir! I—"

"Hop it for the cook-house, fast as you can go!" said Mr. Peters. "I'm follering you."

He gripped the big whip. Baldy gave him one glance, and the whip another, and then he "lit out" for the cook-house as if he were on the cinder-path. After him went the burly foreman, cracking the whip and occasionally plying it round Baldy's fat legs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put it on, Baldy!" yelled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baldy Bubbin "put it on." There was no mistake about that. Breathless and spluttering, he darted into the cook-house and slammed the door after him.

Pete Peters walked away grinning.

For some minutes breathless ejaculations were heard from the cookhouse. Then the door re-opened, and a yelling Chinese whirled out. It was Woo Sing. Even Baldy could deal masterfully with the Chink, and as soon as he got his second wind he dealt with him. The sight of the Chinese among his pots and pans moved Baldy's ire and indignation.

"You durned heathen! Git!" he roared.

And Woo Sing "got"—with a shove of Baldy's boot behind to help him out of the cook-house.

When the outfit came in to supper they found Baldy, the cook, reigning in his old place. Never had there been such a supper. Baldy had exercised all his genius in preparing it—it was a propitiatory supper. And on account of that excellent supper, at least, the Windy River outfit were glad to see Baldy back again. And they did not lynch him, or rope him, or ride him on a rail; only, they chipped him unmercifully, till Baldy wished, from the bottom of his heart, that he had never heard of the game of poker, and, still more, that he had never put on "side" when he was under the delusion that he had made his fortune.

THE END.

(A yarn with a thrill—"Skitter Dick's Secret!" by Owen Conquest, next Tuesday's topping long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., out West. Don't miss it!)