

**TRICKING THE COWPUNCHERS!** Baldy, the cook of the ranch, longs for an opportunity to shine as a hero, and as that opportunity does not come along, he makes one. The outcome of his plotting is surprising!

# The Trickster of the Ranch!



A ROLLICKING, EXTRA-LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE ROOKWOOD CHUMS IN THE WILD WEST.

By  
**OWEN CONQUEST.**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Hard Lines!

**B**ALDY, the cook, stood in the doorway of the cookhouse at Windy River and looked out on the ranch.

Baldy's fat face was dewed with perspiration and corrugated by a frown. Evidently Baldy was dissatisfied.

The scene he looked upon was cheery enough. The timber ranch-house, with its green-painted veranda and shutters, the grove of pines behind it, the long corrals, and on all sides the wide stretch of the grasslands, stretching away to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Jimmy Silver, coming out for his horse, stopped to look about him at the scene, and thought that it was very cheery indeed.

But Baldy, the cook, was frowning.

"Morning, Baldy!" called out Jimmy Silver.

The fat cook grunted.

"Anything wrong?" asked Jimmy, coming over to the cookhouse.

He rather liked Baldy. Baldy Bubbin was, perhaps, every known kind of a duffer, but he was a wonderful cook, and he was generally as good-tempered as he was fat. And Baldy's little weaknesses added to the gaiety of existence on the Windy River Ranch. Baldy, as Jimmy Silver & Co. had learned with surprise, was of a poetic temperament, with a romantic mind that soared far beyond the unromantic surroundings of a ranch cookhouse.

"Oh, nothin'!" said Baldy.

He had a frying-pan in one fat hand and a greasy rag in the other. He resumed polishing the pan with a grunt.

"Fed up!" he added, by way of explanation.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Jimmy. "Have the cowpunchers been chipping you again, old man?"

Baldy frowned more darkly.

"It's too bad," said Jimmy sympathetically, though he could not help smiling.

The Windy River outfit had not forgotten that Baldy had hidden under a bed when the rustlers raided the ranch. Poor Baldy was cast in an heroic mould, so far as his imagination went. But his fat body refused to play up to his imagination. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was very weak. Often and often had the cowpunchers heard Baldy relate tales of "derring-do"—deeds of reckless daring that had always, somehow, taken place somewhere beyond the ken of Windy River. And then the test had come, and while the schoolboys were holding the ranch-house against the rustlers, Baldy had palpitated in hiding under a bed. And it really seemed that Windy River would never forget that circumstance.

Any other man in the outfit who had shown a want of so common a quality as courage would have been ridiculed and hooted off the ranch. But Baldy was always taken as more or less of a joke. The cowpunchers chipped him good-humouredly; but they seldom allowed the topic to rest.

They did not realise how poor Baldy felt it. Indeed, they would not have expected a poltroon to have any feelings at all. A man who was afraid was scarcely reckoned a man in their estimation. But Baldy was sensitive. His great desire was to shine. He wanted all Windy River to understand that he was wasted in the cookhouse; he wanted fellows to listen with respect when he spoke. And, in actual fact, nobody ever

noticed whether Baldy Bubbin was speaking or not, and anybody who had anything to say would interrupt him ruthlessly.

Sometimes, by way of diversion, the punchers would lead him on to tell one of his thrilling tales of great deeds done at some other time, in some other place, and Baldy would quite enjoy himself, till he was interrupted by a roar of laughter, when his listeners could keep serious no longer.

"Jest figger it," Baldy would say. "There was me with me back agin the wall and six greasers with knives coming right at me. And what do you reckon I did?"

"Got under a bed!" suggested Skitter Dick.

And then a roar would drown the rest of Baldy's narrative.

And all the time Baldy was a paladin for courage, if only his fat nerves would not fail him in the moment of danger. He could picture himself facing fearful odds, and charging recklessly at innumerable foes. But in these mental pictures he was always the conqueror, and he never got damaged. In real encounters it was quite a different matter—and when rifles were going off in reality Baldy preferred cover. His spirit wandered free, as it were; but undoubtedly his fat carcass bolted for cover.

Baldy, the cook, looked morosely at Jimmy Silver. Jimmy's sympathy was not much use when Baldy could detect the lurking smile on the schoolboy's face. Baldy was, indeed, tempted to take the schoolboy by the scruff of the neck and shake him as a reward for that lurking smile, in spite of the sympathy.

He rubbed at the frying-pan till it glittered in the sunshine.

"I guess I'm fed-up!" he grunted. "There'll be trouble hyer, young Silver! I shall break out!"

"Don't do that, Baldy," said Jimmy, as gravely as he could. "They'll get another joke later on, and then they'll forget you!"

"This 'ere morning Mr. Peters looks in," said Baldy. "He didn't see me. THE POPULAR.—No. 444.

fur a second, so he calls out: "Where are you, Baldy? Is that galoot hiding under a bed agin?"

Jimmy tried not to smile.

"And I never did hide under that bed, Silver," said Baldy "I was—was just taking cover! You know, don't you, as you was on the spot?"

"Hem!"

"Do you know it, or don't you?" snorted Baldy.

"Well, I know you were found under the bed, old man!" said Jimmy.

"You know that I didn't show the white feather!" said Baldy, almost imploringly.

Baldy would have given six months' wages to find somebody who would believe in him.

Jimmy Silver coughed. He hated to hurt poor Baldy's feelings; but the fact was absolutely indisputable that Baldy had not only shown the white feather, but shown it in the most flagrant manner.

"You ready, Jimmy?" came Arthur Edward Lovell's voice, and it was a welcome interruption.

It saved Jimmy from replying to a very awkward question.

"Here I am!" called back Jimmy Silver. "So-long, Baldy!"

Baldy grunted.

Jimmy Silver walked away to join Lovell and Raby and Newcome, and the four Rookwooders led their horses out. It was a busy time at the ranch, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were going out on the range to help the cowboys. Spike Thompson and Skitter Dick joined them at the corral, and the party mounted. Thompson called out to Baldy as they started:

"Hi, Baldy!"

"Hallo!" grunted the cook.

"Lock out for rustlers while we're gone!" shouted Spike. "And, I say, Baldy, ask Boss Smedley to have a bed put in the cookhouse! You can't hide under that bunk of yours!"

And the cowboys rode off laughing, leaving Baldy, the cook, glaring after them ferociously.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Baldy's Chance!

**S**LU M HOOKEY approached the Windy River cookhouse cautiously.

A long career as a "hobo" had taught Mr. Hookey caution.

Slum Hookey was a tramp, or, in Western parlance, a hobo. For more years than he could remember Slum Hookey had tramped the plains and the hills and the streets of cities, like a lion seeking what he might devour—though he looked more like a jackal than a lion. He toiled not, neither did he spin, but he contrived somehow to extract sustenance from a hard world.

Like a gentleman of leisure, Slum Hookey spent his winters in the South, picking up the crumbs that fell from rich men's tables at holiday resorts in Florida, or annexing precarious meals at free-lunch counters in Texas.

But in the summer he drifted North, stealing rides in cattle-trucks—and stealing anything else that he could lay his hands on.

This summer he was giving Canada a turn—though, as a general rule, Mr. Hookey did not like Canada. In that hard-working land there was little use for hoboes, and a calculating-machine would have been required to figure out the number of times a heavy boot had been applied to Mr. Hookey's ragged

THE POPULAR.—No. 444.

trousers since he had crossed the "line."

A delicious scent floated from the cookhouse, and Mr. Hookey's nostrils dilated as he drew it in.

Baldy was cooking, ready for the boys when they came in from the range, forgetting his troubles for the moment in his art, as it were.

Cautiously Slum Hookey drew nearer to the open doorway.

Hospitality in the Canadian West is great; but so flagrant a specimen of the hobo as Mr. Hookey was not likely to be welcome anywhere. The chances were nine in ten that Mr. Hookey would be kicked out dinnerless; but it was the tenth chance that Mr. Hookey banked on.

There were no cowpunchers to be seen, which was a comfort to Slum Hookey. Cautiously he reached the doorway of the cookhouse and peered in.

Baldy stood at the stove, red and perspiring and busy.

Slum Hookey watched him.

There was no apparent chance of stealing anything, so Mr. Hookey gave up that idea. He had no hope of representing himself as a man looking for work; his whole appearance gave him away as a hard case. But he hoped that the cook might prove good-natured.

He coughed at last, to draw Baldy's attention.

The fat cook looked round.

Slum Hookey staggered into the cookhouse and sank on the floor. Foam appeared on his lips.

"Water!" he groaned hoarsely.

Baldy Bubbin looked at him, and crossed over to the corner and picked up a barrel-stave.

Baldy had dealt with hoboes before, and he was not to be taken in with fainting-fits and convulsions and a little soap lather on the lips.

"Where will you have it?" asked Baldy.

Slum Hookey jumped up. His first dodge had failed, but Mr. Hookey was unabashed.

"Don't hit a galoot," he said. "I'm starving!"

"Time you did, I guess!" said Baldy unsympathetically. "You've never done any work, I s'pose."

"Luck has been agin me," said Slum.

"Cut it!" said Baldy. "I give you one second to clear!"

"What about a meal?"

Baldy paused. He was a good-natured man, and it was very probable that Slum Hookey was hungry. It was no more than he deserved for his idleness, perhaps; but there it was.

"Squat on that bench, and I'll find you something," said Baldy, throwing down the barrel-stave.

Mr. Hookey squatted. Baldy handed him a tin plate with a pile of victuals upon it, and Mr. Hookey started in.

Slum Hookey put away an enormous meal. He also put away various fragments in recesses of his rags for future use. Then he gave Baldy, the cook, a winning smile.

"You're a gentleman, sir, you are!" he said.

"Cut it!" said Baldy.

"I dessay you've got some baccy," remarked Hookey next.

"Cut it!" said Baldy again.

He had no tobacco to waste on a tramp.

Then his fat good-nature overcame him again, and he cut a chunk from his plug and handed it to the hobo. It disappeared whole into Mr. Hookey's mouth, and he chewed with enjoyment.

Baldy turned to his work, leaving him chewing.

Mr. Hookey leaned back against the wall behind the bench and chewed tobacco, and rested his weary limbs. Baldy had been so good-natured that Slum wondered whether he could "touch" him for a dollar or so.

But the good-natured expression left Baldy's fat face, and he turned away from the stove, and went to the doorway for a breath of clear air.

He was thinking again!

Soon the cowpunchers would come riding in, and Baldy knew that dinner would not pass off without some of the chipping that made him wince so bitterly.

If only some ferocious rustler would have ridden up to the ranch just then, revolver in hand, Baldy felt that he would have had his chance. He would have seized the frying-pan and rushed upon the rustler, smitten him down, and kept him a prisoner for the boys to see when they came in.

His fat face brightened as he thought of it.

But, of course, no rustler would come just when he was wanted. And perhaps, deep down in Baldy's fat mind, there was a consciousness that at the sight of a "bad man" he would have bolted like a rabbit for cover.

He turned a discontented stare on Slum Hookey.

Even Baldy was not afraid of a hobo, and he could have taken the barrel-stave and chased Mr. Hookey off the ranch. That would have been an exploit, and, with a few touches of Baldy's fertile fancy, it would have grown into a much greater exploit, to be related to the outfit.

At that moment Mr. Hookey, all unconsciously, was in danger of seeing a new side of Baldy Bubbin.

But Baldy reflected in time. It was no use "telling the tale" to the outfit; they wouldn't believe him.

But Baldy's mind was working, and his glance at Mr. Hookey became more fixed and very thoughtful.

Slum Hookey rose at last.

"Making it a dollar, old sport?" he asked.

"I guess I haven't a cent to chuck away on a hobo!" answered Baldy.

"Going? Hold on a tick!"

Mr. Hookey sat down again. He still nourished hopes of the dollar. Baldy leaned on the door, and stared at Slum contemplatively.

"Can you swim?" he asked abruptly.

"Eh?"

"Swim?"

"I guess I've never tried!" said Mr. Hookey, with a look of distaste.

It was evident that he did not like the application of water, within or without.

"Well, I can swim," said Baldy, "like a fish."

• He paused.

"I'll tell you what happened once! Canoe turned over in the rapids—beautiful girl swept away—drowned to a certainty, but I happened to be there. I jumped in!"

"Into the rapids?" asked Slum.

"Yep!"

"You look that sort!" said Mr. Hookey admiringly.

After that Slum felt that he had earned the dollar, whether he received it or not.

Baldy nodded complacently. He had an inward feeling that the hobo did not believe a word of it; but it was pleasant not to be derided, at all events. A gentleman in Slum Hookey's position

**BALDY REDEEMS HIMSELF!** "Great pip!" came Lovell's voice. "Good for you, Baldy!" The sight was surprising enough. Baldy, the cook, streaming with water, was dragging a drenched form through the shallows to the bank. "Oh!" gasped Baldy. "That was a near thing!" (See Chapter 3.)

could not venture on the plain speech of the cowpunchers.

"Fought for my life in the raging waters!" said Baldy impressively. "Just managed to get ashore with the beautiful girl in my arms! You should have heard the cheers!"

"Fine!" said Mr. Hookey.

"I don't get justice here!" said Baldy.

"Not a splendid man like you?" asked Mr. Hookey incredulously.

"I get chipped," said Baldy morosely—"misunderstood! I guess I've been thinking of a way to set it right! You can help me!"

"Eh?"

"You'd like five dollars?"

"Sure!" said Mr. Hookey eagerly.

"You'll have to earn it!"

"Oh!" Mr. Hookey looked less eager.

"I—I guess I'd better be moving! You said your boss wouldn't like me around!"

"Tain't work!" snapped Baldy. "Falling in a river!"

"You—you'll give me five dollars for falling in a river?"

ejaculated Slum Hookey blankly.

"Correct!"

"Waal, I don't like it; but I'll do it at the price, I guess. But what's the game?"

"Five dollars and a bed for the night in a barn and a good breakfast afore you clear in the morning," said Baldy.

"How's that?"

"That hits me just where I live!" said Slum Hookey. "But what—"

"You ain't hangin' on in this section, I suppose?" asked Baldy.

"No fear! I've been booted fifteen times yesterday and to-day!" said Mr. Hookey dismally. "I'm striking out south-east. I guess I might do better in Saskatchewan. Couldn't do worse, anyhow!"

"That's good! Well, this hyer little stunt will give you a start!" said Baldy.

"Arter it's over, the sooner you git the better. Now, jest you listen to me."

And Baldy, the cook, proceeded to explain, and Slum Hookey listened, with his eyes growing wider and wider with amazement.

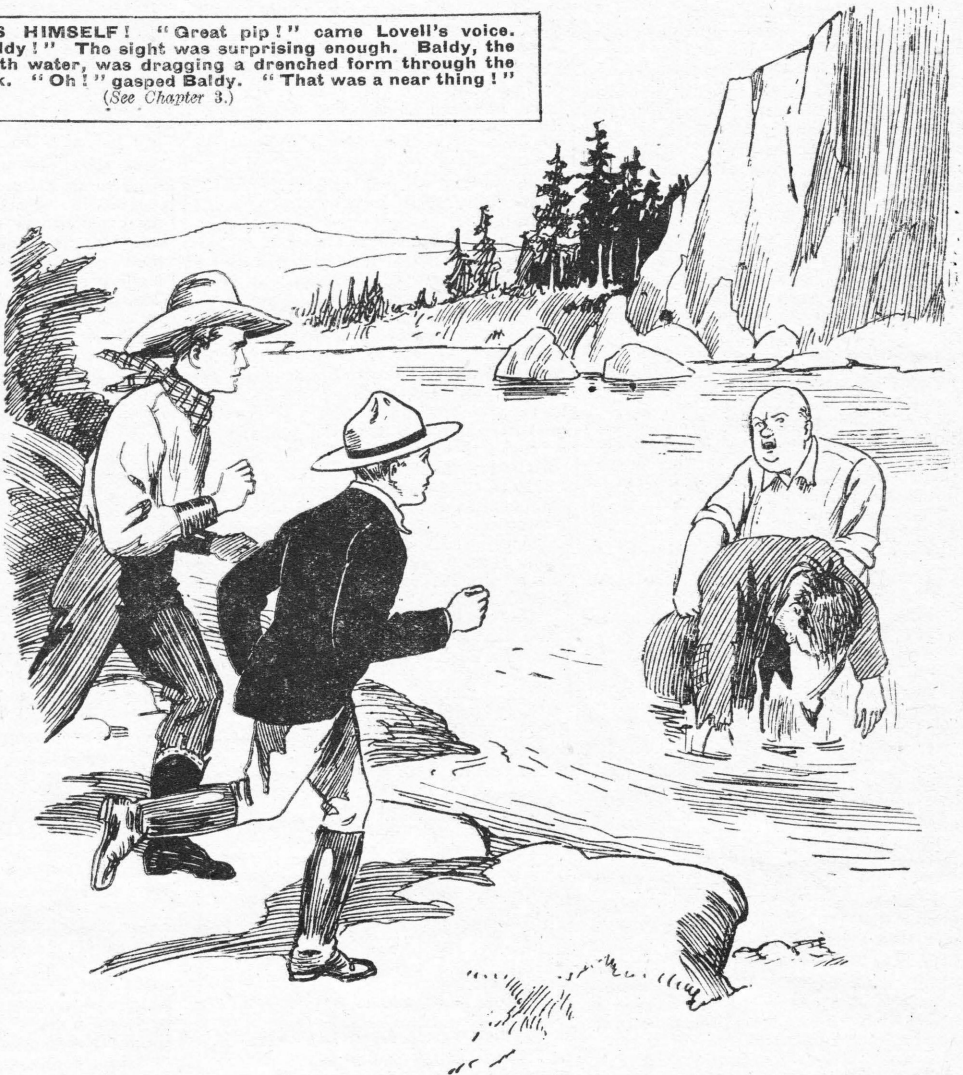
### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Rescued From the River!

**"HELP!"**

That shout came from the direction of the river.

The sun was setting, and in the fine, warm summer's evening a crowd of the Windy River men were



seated on the benches outside the bunk-house, smoking and yarning.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were there, though they, of course, were not smoking, and only listening to the yarns. The chums of Rookwood had had a busy day on the range, and Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch, had been pleased to say that they had made themselves useful. The schoolboys felt almost like real cowpunchers themselves as they sat and talked with the outfit after a day in the saddle.

Baldy, the cook, was in the cook-house. Supper over, Baldy ought to have been washing-up—a lengthy task at which Baldy often groused. But just now Baldy was sawing logs for the stove, washing-up being left over for the time.

Baldy was not distinguished for industry, and he was not bound to saw the logs, so there was some surprise when he started on that job. But no one wanted to say him nay. Indeed, Pete Peters told him it might bring down his fat, of which he could spare several tons without missing them. At which Baldy snorted, Mr. Bubbin having a fixed belief that he was the happy possessor of the only graceful figure at Windy River.

The trees by the river landing-place had been thinned out, and lay ready for cutting. There was plenty of sawing and chopping to be done. So

while the 'punchers smoked and yarned Baldy was working the saw in the sunset by the bank of the Windy River, all on his lonesome.

That was the situation when a sudden yell for help broke the quiet of the calm evening.

Some of the 'punchers rose and looked towards the river. Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped up at once.

"That ass Baldy fallen into the river?" yawned Pete.

"It wasn't Baldy's toot!" said Skitter Dick.

"Help!"

"Well, it's somebody up against it!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm going!"

"Help! I'm drowning!" came the yell.

Jimmy Silver broke into a run on the path through the trees to the river bank. Three or four of the cowpunchers ran after him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome joined up.

Skitter Dick passed Jimmy Silver on the way, though Jimmy was going at a good rate. The voice was calling frantically now:

"Help, help, help!"

Jimmy put on a spurt, and came out of the trees on the grassy bank at the same time as Skitter Dick.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" exclaimed Skitter Dick, in amazement at what he saw.

"My hat!" panted Jimmy.

"Great pip!" came Lovell's voice behind. "Good for you, Baldy!"

The sight was surprising enough.

Baldy Bubbin, streaming with water, was dragging a drenched, ragged form through the shallows to the bank. He dumped it down and stood gasping and streaming in full view of an astonished crowd.

"Oh!" gasped Baldy. "That was a near thing!"

Jimmy ran up to him.

"Who is it, Baldy?"

"Ask me another! Some stranger, I guess!" said Baldy.

"I guess it's a hobo!" said Skitter Dick. "I've seen him hanging about to-day along the river."

There was a groan from Slum Hookey, who lay in the grass.

"He looks purty far gone!" said Baldy, looking down on the prostrate loafer. "Touch and go, it was, pards! Never thought I'd get him out, I didn't, but I done it!"

"You went in for him?" ejaculated Skitter Dick.

Baldy looked at Skitter.

"Looks like it, don't it?" he said curtly.

"How did the galoot get into the water?"

"Fell in, I reckon," said Baldy. "I heered him yell for help when I was sawing the logs. Lucky I was there! You galoots wouldn't have come up in time!"

"I guess it wasn't very lucky!" said Pete Peters. "Nobody would have missed him if he'd stayed in, I reckon! We don't want hoboes around this hyer ranch!"

"Give me some spirits!" moaned Mr. Hookey.

"You won't get any fire-water hyer!" said the foreman. "I guess you've got enough on board, too, falling into a river like a baby!"

Mr. Hookey sat up. If there was no strong drink to be had, it was useless to be overcome by his painful experience. Jimmy Silver gave him a helping hand as he struggled to his feet.

"I ain't been drinking!" said Mr. Hookey. "I jest fell in! Caught me foot in a pesky root, and afore I knowed what was happening, there I was, drowning! Somebody pulled me out, I reckon! Who was it pulled me out?"

"There he is!" said Skitter Dick.

Mr. Hookey rushed at Baldy and gripped his hand. He shook it and shook it again, working it a good deal like a pump-handle.

"You've saved my life!" he said.

"Well, I reckon you was a gone coon if I hadn't heard you yauping!" said Baldy.

"You jumped in for me!" said Slum, still wringing Baldy's fat hand. "You might have been drowned along of me! You've saved my life! You're a brave man, you are—the bravest man I've ever struck agin! I may be only a pesky hobo, like that galoot says, but I've got gratitood in me! I shan't ever forget this! You saved my life!"

"That's all right!" said Baldy modestly. "No galoot would have stood by while a critter was drowning!"

"I guess I'd have thought you would, Baldy!" said Pete Peters, in amazement. "Where did you get the pluck from all of a sudden?"

"Look here—" began Baldy warmly.

"Jerusalem!" said Skitter Dick. "Baldy—jumping in to save a drowning man! I guess this caps the stack!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 444.

"Good old Baldy!" said Jimmy Silver.

"It beats me," said Pete Peters blankly. "Why, the water's thundering deep a couple of yards out! I'd never have believed Baldy had the grit to jump in."

"Look hyer—" roared Baldy.

"Oh, draw it mild, Mr. Peters!" exclaimed Lovell, rather hotly. "Baldy might jolly well have been drowned himself."

"I guess I nearly was with that hobo hanging on to me, and him not able to swim a stroke," said Baldy.

Pete Peters nodded.

"Well, it beats me to a frazzle," he said. "But you've done it, Baldy, and it shows that you're a bit of a white man somewhere down under your fat. I guess I'll never chuck up that bed ag'in you any more. You ain't much on rustlers, for a fact, but you've done a plucky thing this time."

"Hear, hear!" said Raby.

"Better cut in and change your clobber, Baldy; you'll catch cold," said Newcome.

"And what erbout me?" exclaimed Slum Hookey indignantly. "Ain't you got a word for a galoot what's been near drowned?"

"Oh, you git!" snapped Pete Peters. "We don't want hoboes. Like your darned cheek to come and get drowned in our river."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look hyer, I've saved that man's life," said Baldy. "I don't keer if he's a pesky hobo; I've saved his life. I'm going to give him a square supper, and a shake-down for the night after that."

"The boss," said Spike Thompson, "he's dead on hoboes."

"I guess I'll chance it with the boss," said Baldy. "You come alonger me, my man, and I guess I'll see you fixed."

And Baldy Bubbin led the rescued man away, the two of them followed by the amazed cowpunchers.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Baldy the Brave!

**B**ALDY, the cook, changed into his other suit of clothes, and came out into the sunset, looking quite a new man.

His treatment at the hands of the outfit showed a marked difference now.

Two or three of the 'punchers called out cheerily:

"Here you are, Baldy!"

"Come and squat down, old man!"

"Feel any worse for it?"

"Come and tell us all about it, Baldy!" called out Jimmy Silver.

The fat man came along to the cheery group of 'punchers, feeling—and, indeed, looking—as if he were walking on air.

He was quite a new Baldy.

If there was one thing that the Windy River outfit admired in a man, it was pluck. Without that necessary quality no man could have held up his head at Windy River.

Baldy's unfortunate way of bragging of imaginary deeds, coupled with his way of bolting like a rabbit at a sign of danger, had condemned him in the eyes of the outfit hopelessly. He was only tolerated as a butt, with more or less good-humour.

But he had retrieved himself now.

As Pete Peters had put it, he wasn't "much" on rustlers, for a fact, but he had shown sterling quality in another way.

Certainly, there was not a man at Windy River who would have stood idly

by while even a hobo drowned. But most of the 'punchers would rather have faced a "bad man" in combat than have jumped into a deep river into the frantic clutches of a drowning man.

Baldy, in his own way, had shown as much courage as could be expected of any man, and it was agreed on all sides that not a word more was to be said about his cowardice.

He had redeemed himself now, and he was "one of them." Spike Thompson, who had been keenest in ridiculing poor Baldy after his display of funk, made room for the fat cook to sit beside him on the bench. Red Alf offered his tobacco-pouch.

Skitter Dick slapped him on the back. Pete Peters gave him an agreeable nod and a grin. Baldy was feeling quite happy, and only too ready to give a full account of his perilous experiences in rescuing the hobo.

Jimmy Silver gave him a match for his pipe. Baldy blew out a cloud of smoke and looked round cheerily.

"It was tough and go," he said. "Nip and tuck, you know. I heard him yelling for help—"

"We all heard him here," said Lovell.

"I guess he must have kept on yelling arter you got hold of him, Baldy," said Spike.

"He did," said Baldy. "Scared stiff, you know. Couldn't swim a stroke, and hanging on to me like a clam. Three times I went under, and guessed I'd never come up ag'in."

"And you never let go!" said Raby.

"Nary a let go!" said Baldy. "I went in for the critter, and I meant to have him out. I wasn't the man to let go, I guess. And the way he struggled, too! Got me round the neck and dragged me under. I tell you, boys, I came near hitting him and knocking him off, but I wouldn't."

"I guess I'd have given him a sockd-lager if he'd been dragging me under," said Spike, "and pulled him out arter."

"Well, I got my head loose ag'in and came up," said Baldy. "We was swept right out into the middle of the river by that time. But I held on like thunder, and swam for my life, with him in my arms—"

"How the thump did you swim with the man in your arms?" asked Lovell, a little puzzled.

"I—I mean, I guess I had him by the collar," said Baldy.

"And swam with one hand?" asked Raby.

"Some swimmer!" said Pete Peters.

"I guess I could swim the Windy River with one hand tied," said Baldy.

"I guess there's no other galoot in Alberta could beat me at swimming. I've told you, boys, how I rescued that beautiful girl long ago in the Saskatchewan River—"

"It was the Thompson River, in British Columbia, last time you told us," grinned Skitter Dick.

"And one time it was the Fraser River," remarked Red Alf. "But it was a beautiful gal, every time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look hyer—" roared Baldy.

"Oh, let Baldy go it!" said Pete Peters, laughing.

And Baldy "went it," and for once the fat cook was fairly given his head as a reward for the courageous rescue of Mr. Hookey.

Even his story of the seven greasers who had attacked him with knives, and whom Baldy had knocked out with a leg snatched from a table in the nick of time, was related once more, and was not followed by the usual roar of laughter, though it was hard to listen to it with gravity.

Baldy had regained the good opinion of the outfit, but they did not expect him to confine himself to facts. That would have been expecting too much of Baldy.

It was quite an enjoyable evening for the cook, and he was sorry when the outfit turned in and he wended his way back to the cookhouse.

For once Baldy had filled the centre of the picture, so to speak, and his desire to shine had been gratified to the full. The respect of his comrades restored his own self-respect, and Baldy felt that life was worth living for a really plucky fellow like himself.

With the help of his powerful imagination he had almost forgotten the slender basis upon which his new reputation rested.

He was reminded of it when he came into the cookhouse. Baldy had a room built on to the cookhouse for his occupation. In that room was his bunk. On his bunk, when Baldy arrived there, was stretched the ungainly form of Slum Hookey.

"Hyer, you git outer this!" said Baldy warmly. "I've asked the boss to let you sleep in a barn, and he's said yes. You hook it out of my bunk."

Mr. Hookey eyed him curiously. "I guess I'm comfy hyer," he answered.

"Waal, git out of it!"

"I'm staying here."

"What?"

"You can have the barn," said Mr. Hookey lazily.

Baldy glared at him, and went back into the cookhouse for the barrel-stave. He had no intention of taking "lip" from a hobo.

"Git!" said Baldy, as he came back with the stave.

"I've heard what you was saying to them punchers," remarked Mr. Hookey. "You know how to tell the tale, you do."

"Are you absquatulating, or do you want this hyer stave?" inquired Mr. Bubbin.

"I guess not, old man," said Slum. "You keep that stave away from me, or it won't be healthy for you. Them punchers would like to know what really happened. I guess."

Baldy Bubbin started back.

"What?" he said faintly.

"Getting hold of it?" asked Mr. Hookey, agreeably. "I thought you would in time. Better keep civil."

"I've paid you your five dollars and given you your supper," said Baldy, in a hoarse whisper. "That was the bargain."

Slum Hookey nodded.

"That was it," he agreed. "It wasn't a bad supper, either. But I've helped myself in the cookhouse since then. You didn't mind my taking the cold chicken, I suppose?"

"Why, I—I—" gasped Baldy.

"Now I'm going to sleep," said Mr. Hookey, stretching himself in the bunk luxuriously. "Weeks and weeks since I slept in a bed. Thank you, old man!"

"You're not having my bunk!" gasped Baldy.

Mr. Hookey waved a dirty hand at him.

"Go away!" he said.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You're disturbing my repose," said Mr. Hookey, with dignity. "I ain't going to be disturbed by a low-down, common cook. You clear!"

Baldy Bubbin gazed speechlessly at the rascal. It had not even occurred to the unhappy Baldy that Mr. Hookey might "go back" on the bargain he had made. A day's liberal meals, a barn for the night, and five dollars in cash formed a

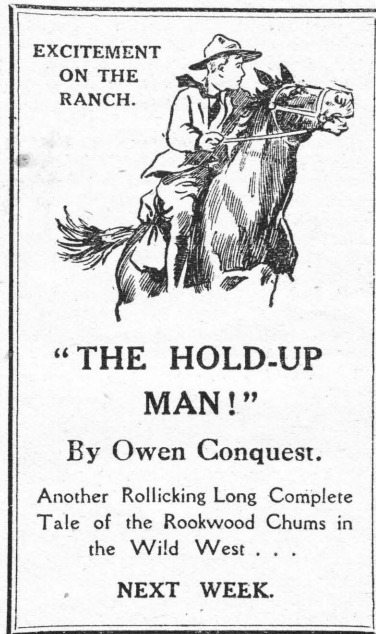
handsome reward for what Mr. Hookey had done. It was a handsome reward indeed for sprawling for a few minutes in shallow water and bawling for help!

But Baldy, whose simple mind was not equal to penetrating the unscrupulous rascality of Slum Hookey until it was too late, realised that the loafer had the upper hand now.

Baldy had tasted the delight of shining, of being recognised by the outfit as a man worthy of their association. And a few words from the hobo would dash his house of cards to the ground again.

He trembled at the thought.

The previous state of affairs had been bad enough, but what would Baldy's life be like if the 'punchers learned the facts? The ridicule that had hitherto been heaped on him would be as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine compared with the utter ridicule and contempt that would be his portion then.



Slum Hookey, sprawling luxuriously in the bunk, watched the changing expressions on Baldy's fat countenance with grim amusement. Evidently the unscrupulous Mr. Hookey derived entertainment from poor Baldy's dismay.

"Got me?" he asked affably.

"You awful villain!" groaned Baldy.

"Cut it!" suggested Mr. Hookey.

"And git!"

"Git?" gasped Baldy.

He was ordered out of his own room by this lazy, dirty, rascally loafer, whom he had befriended!

"Yep! Git!" said Mr. Hookey tersely. "Find me another blanket first and then take your face away. I don't like it!"

Baldy's grip closed convulsively on the barrel stave, but he did not dare to use it. He was at the hobo's mercy.

Silently he found another blanket for the luxurious Mr. Hookey, and then he went out of the room. Mr. Hookey grinned contentedly and settled himself down to sleep.

Baldy passed the night in a blanket on the floor of the cookhouse. His dreams were plentiful, but not happy.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Desperate Measures!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. joined the cowpunchers at an early breakfast in the sunrise the following morning. They had another day on the plains before them, and turned out as early as the outfit. Steaming cans of coffee were handed out by Baldy Bubbin, whose fat face wore a worried look. Baldy, so happy the evening before, did not seem happy in the morning.

"That hobo gone, Baldy?" Pete Peters asked, remembering the existence of Slum Hookey.

Baldy started, and coloured.

"Not yet," he answered.

"I guess I'll rouse him out, then, before I get going," said the foreman. "Which of the barns did you dump him in?"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Baldy.

"Eh? What's the trouble?"

"Nothin'," said Baldy hastily. "Don't you worry about the hobo, Mr. Peters; I'll clear him off presently."

Pete Peters shook his head.

"That kind of sneak-thief ain't safe about the place," he said. "You can give him some breakfast if you like; but he's going."

"I—I guess he's a bit seedy," stammered Baldy. "Let him rest."

"Bosh! Let him vamoose!" grunted the foreman.

"I—I saved his life, you know," said Baldy feebly.

"You ain't adopting him for that, I s'pose?" asked Pete sarcastically.

"Where is the galoot?"

"I—I let him have my bunk last night," said Baldy. "He's in my room."

"Well, you are a jay! That hobo in your bunk!" said Skitter Dick.

"Waal, as I saved his life, I feel bound to look arter him a bit," said the wretched Baldy. "The boss won't mind him hanging on here till he—till he's rested. He—he swallered a lot of water, you know."

Pete Peters grunted.

"Waal, don't have him around when I get back," he said. "No hoboos for me. If I find him hyer, I'll take my quirt to him, or chuck him back into the river. You might as well have left him there, for all the good he is, the loafer!"

And Pete Peters went to his horse.

"Cheerio, Baldy!" said Jimmy Silver. "What's the worry? You don't want to keep that hobo hanging around, do you?"

"Goodness knows I don't!" said Baldy fervently. "But—but—" he mused.

"But what, old man?"

"Nothin'," said Baldy heavily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rode away with the cowpunchers, and Baldy stood in the doorway of the cookhouse and looked after them with a heavy heart. His little scheme, which had seemed so masterly to Baldy's fat mind at the time, had recoiled on himself with a vengeance. A little too late, Baldy realised that honesty is the best policy.

But now that the cowpunchers were gone he hoped to get rid of his incubus.

What would happen if the foreman came back and found the loafer still there Baldy shuddered to think. Slum Hookey was only too likely to blurt out the facts of the case if Baldy failed to protect him.

There was a shout from the loafer's room, and Baldy started. Mr. Hookey was calling him.

Baldy went slowly in.

Slum Hookey sat up in bed and blinked at him.

"Where's my breakfast?" he said.  
"You can come out and feed," growled Baldy. "I'm giving you some breakfast afore you go."

"I guess I ain't going yet. Bring my breakfast in here."

"What?"

"Getting deaf?" asked Mr. Hookey.  
"You gôl-darned, cheeky loafer!" roared Baldy.

"Cut it!" said Mr. Hookey. "Bring me some grub—sharp!"

Baldy went back into the cookhouse with feelings too deep for words. Evidently Mr. Hookey was one of those gentlemen who, having a little power in their hands, like to use it to the uttermost.

The unhappy cook suppressed his feelings and prepared breakfast for Mr. Hookey. The loafer sat up in the bunk to eat.

He kept Baldy busy for some time. After that he condescended to roll out of the bunk and slouch into the cookhouse. Morning ablutions did not trouble Mr. Hookey—it was years since he had washed himself in the morning. "Got any bacey?" he asked.

Baldy handed over tobacco, and Mr. Hookey crammed it into his pipe and lighted up. He sat on the bench by the door and smoked in lazy comfort. There was a clinking of pots and pans as Baldy washed up in the cookhouse.

Baldy looked out at last. He was getting desperate. Suppose Hudson Smedley should walk down from the ranch-house and see the loafer smoking there? He would want to know why.

"Look here, it's time you was legging it!" said Baldy.

Mr. Hookey grinned at him over the pipe.

"I guess I'm well fixed hyer!" he said. "I ain't going!"

"You've got to go!" howled Baldy. "Cut it out!"

"S'pose the boss sees you?" snarled Baldy. "You bet he'll hoof you off the ranch fast enough!" Mr. Hookey considered that thoughtfully.

"I ain't going!" he said. "I'm all right hyer! I guess I'm going to put in a week hyer, and get a good long rest and plenty of grub and bacey and fixings! You bet your hat on that, pard! You'll have to spin your boss a yarn. Tell him you've took me on as handyman!"

"That's all right if you turn to and work!" said Baldy. "The boss would give you a job, if you come to that. There's togs to be sawn and—"

Mr. Hookey shuddered.

"You can sweep and wash up, and so on, for a day or two," said Baldy. "If you make yourself useful I can get round Mr. Peters."

"Oh, cut it out!" said Slum Hookey. "I did a day's work once—nigh on twenty years ago, it was. I never wanted no more of it! Call me a handyman if you like—"

"It won't wash if you don't wade in and work!" howled the cook.

"Then say I'm your cousin from the States, and you've just rekindled me!" said Mr. Hookey. "Say I'm ill from the duckin' in the river. Say anything you durn well like, but I ain't going!"

"The boys'll skin you if they find you loafing here!"

"Will they?" said Mr. Hookey unpleasantly. "If you don't find out some way to stop 'em, Mr. Bubbin, you're up agin trouble! I'll give the whole show away!"

Baldy, the cook, drifted back into the cookhouse in the lowest of spirits.

Mr. Hookey grinned and smoked.

THE POPULAR.—No. 444.

Somehow or other, Baldy had to see him through. He "banked" on that. If Baldy failed, Mr. Hookey would be kicked off the ranch—no new experience for him. But before he went he would give Baldy away to the outfit he had imposed upon. Slum Hookey had not the slightest scruple on that point. Baldy had to stand his friend or suffer for it.

The hapless Baldy realised it; but he realised, too, that there was "nothing doing." If the man would have worked, Baldy could have got him a job from Mr. Smedley. But the mere mention of work made Slum Hookey shudder. As soon as the cowboys came in and found the idle rascal loafing about he would be kicked out. Baldy knew that. And then, in revenge, he would give Baldy away!

Baldy almost wept at the thought of it.

Somehow or other the loafer had to be got rid of before the cowboys came in. That thought hammered in Baldy's mind. He had to go. And if he would not go he had to be driven off, at the risk of what might follow. Baldy made up his mind to that.

Having made up his mind by about noon, Baldy proceeded from thought to action.

He took the barrel-stave, and came out to speak to Mr. Hookey again. Slum had stretched himself in the grass, in the shade of the corral fence, to enjoy a nap before dinner.

He was suddenly awakened by a barrel-stave prodding into his ribs. He jumped.

"Out of it!" said Baldy.

"What?"

Crack! The stave came down across Mr. Hookey with a loud concussion. There was a wild yell from the loafer.

He leaped to his feet and jumped back, glaring at Baldy furiously.

"What's this game?" he roared.  
Baldy did not trouble to answer. He charged at Slum Hookey, brandishing the barrel-stave.

Whack, whack, whack!

Slum Hookey yelled and dodged. He was taken quite by surprise, having supposed that he had the fat cook quite under his thumb.

"Stop it!" he roared. "Let up! Let up, I tell you! I guess I'll give away the whole caboodle—Yarooop!"

Crash!

The barrel-stave broke across Mr. Hookey's bullet head. The yell the loafer gave rang to a great distance, awakening the echoes.

With the remaining half of the stave in his hand, Baldy set to work on Mr. Hookey, thrashing him unmercifully.

All the base ingratitude he had suffered from the rascal was paid for just then. Baldy was enjoying himself. Slum Hookey had to go, and this was the way to make him go. But there was policy as well as vengeance in Baldy's proceedings. The more thoroughly Mr. Hookey was thrashed the more likely he was to keep clear of the Windy River Ranch afterwards. And that was what Baldy wanted. He had to risk the rascal coming back and giving him away; but the more he thrashed the loafer the less was the risk. So Baldy fairly let himself go.

The stave crashed and crashed on the yelling, dodging loafer. Slum Hookey took to his heels, and after him went Baldy, still thrashing with the remnant of the stave.

Slum let out a wild yell at every step, and still the blows descended as Baldy panted in pursuit.

"Hallo! What's all this, Baldy?" It was Hudson Smedley's voice.

The rancher stared as he came on the scene.

"A durned hobo that won't vamoose, sir!" gasped Baldy. "I'm making him git, sir!"

"Jest listen to me, sir!" howled Slum Hookey. "I tell you—Yoooop! Whooooop!"

The threatened revelation was stopped by another crashing whack from the stave. Mr. Hookey rolled on the ground.

Hudson Smedley burst into a laugh. "Don't kill him, Baldy!" he said. "You mustn't kill even a hobo, you know!"

"Yow! Help!"

Mr. Smedley walked away, much to Baldy's relief. The fat cook leaned over the sprawling loafer and whacked and whacked again. Mr. Hookey scrambled to his feet and "lit out," as he would have expressed it, for the plains. Still on his track went Baldy, thrashing away as hard as his tired right arm could go.

Baldy was fat and scant of breath, but he exerted himself in a way that was really surprising. The hapless hobo sprawled, catching his foot in a root, and Baldy panted over him.

"You'll give me away, will you? Arter I've given you five dollars and fed you like a millionaire; I'll give you suthin' to remember me by! You show your face on this ranch agin, and I'll give you some more of the same! Savvy?" said Baldy, and, invigorated by a brief rest, he started in again with the stave.

Whack, whack, whack!

Slum Hookey squirmed away, yelling, leaped up, and ran. After him rushed the breathless cook till breath at last failed him and he had to stop. Mr. Slum Hookey vanished over the prairie, still howling, and Baldy slowly took his way back to the cookhouse.

He threw down the fragment of the stave and grinned.

"I guess that was the way!" he remarked. "He won't come back arter that! I got to chance it, but I reckon he will keep clear! He won't want any more!"

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Nice for Baldy!

**J**IMMY SILVER rode up to the ranch in the sunset and stopped at the cookhouse.

"Baldy!" he called out.  
The cook came into the doorway. He gave a hurried glance round, and was relieved to see that the horizon was not blotted by the figure of Slum Hookey.

"The boys coming in?" asked Baldy.

"Yes." Jimmy looked down at Baldy with a curious expression on his face. "You turned that hobo out?"

"Yes; he's gone!"

"I wish he had!" said Jimmy. "I'm sorry, Baldy, old man—"

He paused.  
Baldy, the cook, felt his heart sink. "What's up?" he faltered. "You ain't seen anything of the man, have you?"

"I've ridden ahead to tell you, old bean," said Jimmy. "You were an awful ass, Baldy, to play such a silly trick. The man was hanging about waiting for us to come in to tell us. You seem to have scared him from coming back to the ranch, so he hung about on the trail."

Baldy gasped.  
"He's spun us the whole yarn," said Jimmy. "Oh, you ass, Baldy! I—I thought I'd ride on and give you the tip before the boys came in."

(Continued on page 27.)

**"The Trickster of the Ranch!"**

(Continued from page 12.)

And Jimmy Silver, having thus good-naturally prepared poor Baldy for what was to come, rode on to the corral.

Baldy, the cook, leaned against the door, quite limp.

"Oh, holy smoke!" he groaned. There was a thudding of hoofs, and a bunch of riders came up. The whole band were laughing uproariously. Worst of all, there was Slum Hookey, thrown like a sack of wheat across Pete's horse.

The riders halted at the cookhouse, and Mr. Hookey rolled to the ground with a howl.

"We've brought your pard back, Baldy!" roared the foreman. "Met him on the trail."

Groan from Baldy. "He's spun us a yarn!" yelled Skitter Dick. "He says you gave him five dollars to be rescued!"

Groan! "He never went into deep water at all!" shrieked Lovell. "Just sprawled in the shallows to get wet, and bawled for help for us to hear! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, Baldy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Baldy, the cook, gazed at the yelling punchers with a lack-lustre eye. He was too utterly dismayed even to take the barrel-stave to the grinning Mr. Hookey.

"I reckoned we'd bring him back and make him say so afore you, Baldy," said Mr. Peters. "Now then, you loafer, cough it up again!"

Mr. Hookey grinned. He was still aching from his thrashing, but that thrashing was to be paid for now.

"He gave me five dollars to do it," he said. "Five dollars," he says, "to let me reskoo you from drowning," he says. "I'm misunderstood hyer," he says, "and they say I'm funky," he says, "and I'm going to show 'em better," he says, "with your help," he says. "Five dollars," he says. Little enough, too, for getting wet all over. I ain't been wet all over for thirty years."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "What do you say now, Baldy?" roared Pete Peters.

There was nothing for Baldy to say. He could only blink at the yelling cow-boys and wish, from the bottom of his heart, that that wonderful scheme for establishing his reputation for courage had never occurred to him.

"Go it, Baldy!" howled Lovell. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh dear!" groaned the unhappy Baldy.

He backed into the cookhouse and

slammed the door. A terrific roar of laughter followed his disappearance.

Pete Peters wiped his eyes. "This puts the lid on," he said. "We was jays to believe a word of f--gol-darned jays! And as for this critter, who's given Baldy away after touching him for five dollars, I guess we'll make him learn that the Windy River section hasn't any use for him. Quits, boys!"

Slum Hookey gave a yell as the horsemen circled round him with the long whips cracking. For the second time that day Mr. Slum Hookey fled for his life; and this time he shook the dust of the Windy River Ranch from his feet for ever.

"Jest a joke on you, boys!" Baldy said feebly when he handed out supper. "Jest a joke—jest pulling your legs, you know! Of course, I—I was going to tell you."

"Cut it!" said Pete Peters. "Cut it, Baldy! You're jest a liar, Baldy, and a funk, Baldy; and a mean, deceiving ass; Baldy. Cut it out!"

And the hapless Baldy did. The game was up, and Baldy, the cook, found his last state worse than his first; which doubtless was just what he deserved.

THE END.

(You'll all enjoy reading: "The Hold-Up Man!"—next week's topping long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. in the Wild West.)



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