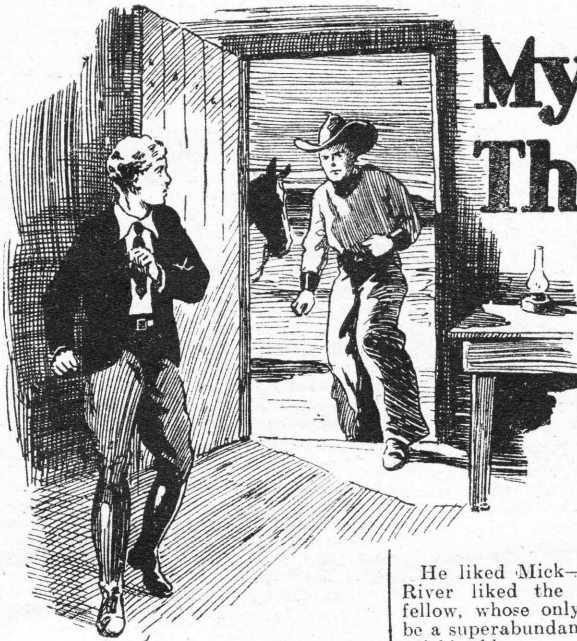


**THE ROAD-AGENT AGAIN!** A mysterious road-agent continues to haunt the neighbourhood of Windy River with great success. Who he is no one is able to discover—but Jimmy Silver has strong suspicions as to his real identity!



**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**  
**Dark Doubts!**

**T**OP of the mornin' to ye, jintlemen!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned as they were greeted by "Mick," the new hand at the Windy River Ranch.

It was a sunny morning on the Alberta prairie, and Jimmy Silver and his chums had come down to the corral for their horses. They found Ulick Fitzgerald, otherwise Mick, waiting there, with his own horse ready saddled.

"Good-morning, Mick!" answered Jimmy. "You're ready?"

"Waitin' for ye, sorr," said Mick. "The boss says you're going to ride with me to Lone Pine."

"That's it. Mr. Smedley's asked me to ride over with you and show you the place, as you're going on duty there," said Jimmy Silver.

"Thank you kindly, sorr!"

"It's a jolly morning for a ride!" said Lovell cheerily. "Let's get the gees out!"

"Love that to me, sorr!" said Mick at once. "Sure, I'll saddle up for you, and I troubling you so much."

"It's no trouble to ride over to Lone Pine," said Raby, with a laugh. "But go ahead!"

Mick saddled up Blazer and the other three horses, the chums of Rookwood watching him. The Fistical Four of Rookwood did not really want to be waited on—they had learned to "fend" for themselves since they had come to Canada. But Mick was so eager to oblige that they would not say "No."

"Jolly decent chap, that Mick!" remarked Newcome.

"Yes; can't help liking him," said Lovell, with a nod. "I like his jolly old accent best of all. There's two or three Irish chaps in the outfit, but they don't roll it out like Mick."

Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully.

# The Mystery of Mick, The Cowpuncher!

A GRIPPING, LONG COMPLETE TALE OF  
JIMMY SILVER & CO. IN THE WILD  
WEST.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the wonderful new story of Jimmy Silver & Co. which starts in this week's "GEM" Library.)

He liked Mick—everybody at Windy River liked the simple, good-natured fellow, whose only weakness seemed to be a superabundance of "blarney." But Mick's blarney was not confined to words; he was always ready to perform a service for anybody. He had won Baldy the cook's heart by lending him a hand with the extensive washing-up in the cookhouse on many occasions. Baldy hated work, and Mick seemed to like it, so they got on remarkably well. Any man who wanted a helping hand at anything had only to look round for Mick.

Even Mr. Hudson Smedley, who had not seemed to like the new man's looks much at first, had come round, as it were, and always had a cheery nod and smile for Mick.

And yet— Jimmy Silver was half-ashamed of the lurking doubt at the back of his mind.

He spoke no word of it to his chums; they would have laughed, if they had not been really shocked.

And yet— It was since Mick had come to Windy River that the first and only "road-agent" known in that section had held up the Mosquito hack on the trail, and very nearly succeeded in capturing ten thousand dollars from the mail-bags.

That, in itself, was little or nothing. There were plenty of other newcomers up and down the Windy River.

But Jimmy Silver had followed the road-agent's trail, and discovered that the unknown robber's horse had cast a shoe. And the same afternoon Mick had ridden in from the prairie on a horse that had cast a shoe.

That coincidence haunted Jimmy Silver.

For though a week had passed, no trace had been discovered of the mysterious road-agent.

The general opinion was that he had "lit out" of the section, after his unsuccessful attempt on the mails, and was now probably as far off as Saskatchewan or British Columbia, if not over the border in the States.

It was probable enough; and yet, from the fact that the robber had carefully disguised his face with a

hour-bag when holding up the hack, Jimmy was of opinion that he was a man belonging to the section—a stranger who intended to "light out" need not have taken such elaborate precautions.

And yet to connect Mick, of Windy River, with the road-agent seemed to Jimmy himself fantastic.

Yet the haunting doubt would not leave his mind, though he was half-ashamed of it, and spoke no word of it to his chums.

"Ready, sorr!" called out Mick. The juniors mounted their horses and rode out on the prairie with Mick.

Poker Smith called out to them from the bunkhouse as they passed.

"Good luck to you, Mick!"

Mick waved his hand in reply.

Lone Pine was a solitary spot, a good five miles from the ranch towards the foothills, and the turn of duty at that lonely spot was naturally not popular at the ranch.

It was one more of Mick's good-natured actions to take on Poker Smith's turn of duty there.

As a new man, Mick would not have been sent to Lone Pine, not yet, at all events; but in the bunkhouse he had heard Poker Smith's "grouching" on the subject, and had at once offered to take his place.

The offer was too good to be refused, though Poker Smith felt rather remorsefully that he was "putting on" the good nature of the Irish cowpuncher.

He compounded matters with his conscience by presenting Mick with a huge plug of tobacco, and telling him that he was a real good sort.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rode across the sunny prairie towards the foothills, in cheery spirits; but somehow, at the back of Jimmy's mind, that haunting doubt would linger. He found himself wondering whether Mick had any ulterior motive in offering to take Poker Smith's place at Lone Pine.

Five miles from the ranch he would be alone, unwatched, and could go and come as he pleased, unsuspected. If indeed Mick was playing another part

—a lawless part—unknown to the ranchers, nothing could have suited him better than to be stationed at Lone Pine, secure from all observation.

Jimmy hated the suspicious thought, but it would not leave him. If there was anything in it, it meant that there would be a reappearance of the man in the flour-bag during Mick's turn of duty at Lone Pine. If, indeed, that should happen, Jimmy felt that he would have solid grounds for suspicion. "Penny for 'em, old chap," said Lovell, with an amused glance at Jimmy Silver's thoughtful face.

Jimmy coloured and laughed. "Not worth that," he said. "I was just thinking. Hallo! There's Lone Pine."

The lonely stockman's hut, standing at the foot of a single pine that showed far over the plain, came in sight. Red Alf was standing outside the hut, and he waved his hand to the approaching riders. Red Alf's turn of duty was over, and he was anxious to get back to the ranch and the genial society of the bunkhouse.

"Hallo! Where's Poker?" he exclaimed, as they rode up. "Goldarn my boots, don't you tell me Poker's not coming, and I've got to hang on here!"

"It's all right," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Mick's come instead of Smith."

"Gee-whiz! Poker sick?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why—"

"Mick's taken it on to oblige him."

"Waal, carry me home to die!" said Red Alf. "You're an obliging cove, Mick, and next time my turn comes round, you can oblige me in the same way, I guess. I reckon you'll get fed-up afore you've been hyer by yourself two days!"

"Sure it's all in the day's work," said Mick cheerily. "The boys have all been decent to me, and I am a new-comer from Manitoba. It's a pleasure intoirly!"

"You're welcome to it, if it's a pleasure!" grinned Red Alf. "Come in and have a bite, and then I'll show you round."

The juniors, having landed the new hand at Lone Pine, rode on over the prairie, leaving Mick to be shown round and instructed in his duties by Red Alf before the latter went back to the ranch.

"A good-natured chap, that Mick!" said Lovell. "It's not so jolly nice to be stuck for a week at a lonely place like this, with nothing but the steers for company. He's a good sort! I've got an idea!"

"You have?" asked Raby, in surprise.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass, old chap! My idea is that we'll ride over one day and give Mick our company."

"Good egg!" said Newcome.

"What do you think, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver smiled slightly.

A man stationed in that solitary spot would probably be very glad of any company that dropped in to break the monotony. But if Mick had any ulterior motive in getting to Lone Pine, unexpected company was about the last thing he would want.

"Not a bad idea!" said Jimmy.

"But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing!"

"You like that chap, don't you?" asked Lovell.

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy Silver frankly. "I do and I don't, if you can catch on to that."

"Well, I can't!" said Arthur Edward

Lovell. "I think he's all right. He's done a lot of little things for me. Let's fix it to pay him a visit during the week."

"Well, not Wednesday," said Jimmy. "We're going to Mosquito with Cousin Smedley on Wednesday to meet the hack from Kicking Mule."

"Another chance for the giddy road-agent if he's still about!" said Raby, with a laugh. "But I don't suppose the man in the flour-bag knows that Mr. Smedley is getting dollars by the mail on Wednesday."

Jimmy started a little.

"He might," he said. "He knew about the money coming up to the post-office the other time."

"But he can't know that Mr. Smedley has bought land from Grudger Grimes, and has sent for five thousand dollars!" grinned Lovell. "That jolly old road-agent isn't a magician!"

Jimmy Silver did not reply. And he was very thoughtful as he rode back to the ranch with his chums.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### At Mosquito!

MR. HUDSON SMEDLEY came out of the ranch-house on Wednesday afternoon, his riding-whip under his arm. Woo Sing, the chore-boy, was holding his horse before the porch.

"Ready, youngsters?" said the rancher, with a smile.

"You bet, sir!" said Lovell.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were already mounted. They liked the idea of riding into Mosquito Town with the rancher; and Lovell had privately remarked that they would be a safe escort in case the mysterious road-agent should turn up.

Jimmy Silver noticed that Mr. Smedley had slung on a holster with a big revolver in it, which was not his usual custom. Evidently the Canadian rancher had not forgotten the incident of the hack and the man in the flour-bag.

The five riders trotted away on the trail to Mosquito under a sunny blue sky.

They arrived at the Canadian township and stopped at the Grand Pacific Hotel, and Mr. Bunch came out to greet them.

"Not in yet, sir," said Mr. Bunch. "May come along any minute."

He was referring to the hack, which brought letters and packages up from Kicking Mule twice a week.

The rancher nodded and passed into the lumber hotel. Jimmy Silver stood and looked down Main Street towards the prairie trail by which Billy Peck's hack would come up from the south.

"Anything more heard of the flour-bag man, Mr. Bunch?" he asked.

The innkeeper shook his head.

"Nix!" he answered. "I guess he's 'lit out' for other parts."

"You don't think that Billy Peck will meet him on the Kicking Mule trail to-day?" asked Jimmy.

"Bad for his health if he does!" grinned Mr. Bunch. "There's two of the Mounted Police coming up with the hack this journey. They're coming up hyer to inquire arter the flour-bag galoot; but I guess they're too late to put salt on his tail. He's absquatulated over the border into the States before this, I reckon!"

"Well, he won't hold up the hack with a couple of Canadian troopers along with it, that's a cert!" said Jimmy.

"I guess not!"

"Here she comes!" called out Lovell.

There was a clatter of hoofs and harness, the cracking of a long whip, and the two-horse hack from Kicking Mule drove up to the Grand Pacific.

Billy Peck descended from his seat, and bestowed a genial nod on the Rookwood juniors and on other acquaintances who had gathered round to witness the incoming of the stage, which was rather an event at Mosquito.

"Any hold-up?" grinned Mr. Bunch.

"Nary a hold-up!" answered Billy Peck.

He made a gesture towards two brawny, sunburnt troopers who had ridden in with the hack. Undoubtedly it would have been very "unhealthy" for the flour-bag man had he attempted to hold up the hack in the presence of the two Canadian Mounted Police.

"I guess he'd have got left this time if he had showed up," said Billy. "But I don't reckon he's hanging on in this section. There ain't room for road-agents along Windy River."

And Billy Peck went into the lumber hotel. Jimmy Silver & Co. joined him at the common table in the dining-room. Mr. Smedley had gone along to Lesage's store, which was also the post-office.

"I've told them about you 'uns at Kicking Mule," said Billy Peck, with a genial grin. "They're talking about the company handing you out something handsome, young Silver, for what you did the other day on the trail, shooting off that durned road-agent."

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"That's all right!" he said. "The company needn't worry. But I wanted to ask you something about the flour-bag man, Billy."

"Wade in!" said Billy, with his mouth full.

"After we came up that time he was too busy for talking," said Jimmy. "But when he held up the hack before we came he must have spoken to you."

"I guess he did—and right to the point—with a revolver backing up what he said!" chuckled Billy Peck.

"What sort of a voice did he have?"

"Eh? Jest the ornary sort of voice a galoot carries about with him to speak with," said Billy.

"I mean, as his face couldn't be seen, one might spot him by his voice, if he was a man belonging to these parts," explained Jimmy.

"I guess he wasn't."

"But if he was—"

"Waal, I'd never heered his toot before," said Billy Peck, "and I guess I've chinned with every galoot between Red Deer and the Windy River at one time or another."

"I mean, he might have an 'accent,'" said Jimmy. "Suppose he was a foreigner of some sort—say, a Mexican or—"

"I reckon he wasn't. I'd know a greaser's voice."

"Or—or suppose he had a Boston drawl, or—or an Irish accent—"

said Jimmy Silver carelessly.

He was getting to his real inquiry now.

But Billy Peck shook his head.

"Nary a thing of the kind," he said. "I'd know the chin of a down-east American, and it wasn't that. And I guess I'd know the voice of any Paddy or Mick, and it wasn't that. Jest sich a toot as you hear up and down Main Street of Mosquito any time. You won't catch that galoot on his dulcet tones—now, I'm telling yer."

Jimmy let the subject drop, hardly knowing whether to feel relieved or disappointed. Certainly the accent with

which Mick, of Windy River, spoke was unmistakable; and evidently Billy Peck had noticed nothing of the kind in the masked road-agent.

Lovell gave Jimmy a quick look. He had not forgotten the incident of the cast shoe.

They left the hotel to look for Mr. Hudson Smedley.

"Here you are, boys!" called out Mr. Smedley. "I've got my stuff from the post-office, and I guess we shall have a pleasant ride home by the moon. Get a move on!"

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy. The sun was setting behind the Rockies as the Windy River party mounted their horses. The moon was already up in the east, a rich silver crescent sailing in a sky of dark velvet.

It was pleasant and cool on the trail after the blazing heat of the afternoon. The last glimmer of the red sun vanished behind the distant mountains, and the silvery light of the moon glimmered over the prairie, while the riders were still several miles from the ranch.

The juniors were enjoying the ride in the quiet, peaceful moonlight. But all of a sudden the peaceful stillness of the night on the prairie was broken by a sharp challenge:

"Halt!"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Man in the Flour-Bag!

"HALT! Put up your hands!" Hudson Smedley drew in his horse.

From a dark patch of thicket through which the trail ran the

glimmer of a levelled barrel could be seen in the moonlight.

It bore full upon the rancher. Dimly, behind it, could be made out the figure of a man whose face was hidden in a flour-bag pierced with holes for eyes and nose and mouth.

Jimmy Silver's heart jumped.

It was the road-agent!

Five horses were dragged to a halt at the same moment. There was no arguing with a levelled revolver, with a finger on the trigger!

Before the rancher could have touched his own weapon a bullet would have crashed through his brain, and Hudson Smedley was no fool to run on certain death.

The advantage was against him, and he dropped his reins and put up his hands over his Stetson hat.

The juniors followed his example.

Five motionless riders sat in the trail with their hands above their heads, in the glimmering moonlight.

The robber stepped out of the thicket.

His revolver was still at a level, his finger on the trigger, his eyes gleaming over the barrel through the holes in his strange mask.

The rancher's eyes gleamed at him, but he made no sign. He sat his horse like a statue.

"That's good!"

The road-agent's voice was deep and hard. Jimmy, listening to it, was conscious of the same sense of mingled relief and disappointment that he had felt when Billy Peck was speaking to him. Certainly in that hard, grim voice there was no trace of the soft West

of Ireland accent, which would have betrayed Mick, of Windy River.

"Keep 'em up!" added the man in the flour-bag. "I guess I'm sorry to trouble you, Hudson Smedley, but I'm after the dust!"

"You'll be sorrier yet when you have to pay for what you're doing now!" said the rancher grimly.

"I guess I'm taking the chance of that. Where's the bag of dollars you have got from Mosquito?"

"What do you know about my dollars?"

"More than you might guess," said the road-agent coolly, watching the rancher like a cat over the levelled revolver. "Perhaps the postmaster in Mosquito talks too much! Perhaps Mr. Grimes told a little bird, and the little bird told me!"

"Where's the dollars?" Hudson Smedley set his teeth for a moment. Five thousand dollars was a large sum. But it was wiser to hand it over than to have it taken from his dead body.

"In my saddlebag!" he said.

"You've got a shooter there?"

"Sure!"

"Keep your hands up while I annex it."

The road-agent was on foot. His horse was doubtless hidden in the thicket close at hand.

He stepped up to the rancher, and with his left hand drew out Hudson Smedley's revolver and tossed it away into the shadows.

Hudson Smedley debated in his mind at that instant the chance of springing on his enemy and fighting at close



**THE HOLD-UP!** The five juniors and the rancher sat motionless, with their hands above their heads, in the glimmering moonlight. The robber stepped out of the thickets. His revolver was still at a level, his finger on the trigger, his eyes gleaming through the holes in his strange mask. (See Chapter 3.)

quarters, but he abandoned the idea. The revolver muzzle was too close.

He was unarmed now, and quite at the mercy of the desperado in the flour-bag.

The road-agent stepped back, still keeping the rancher covered.

"Drop the durocks into the trail!"

Hudson Smedley silently drew out the package of dollar bills and dropped it into the trail.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on silently.

Their blood was boiling inwardly at this cool robbery, but there was nothing to be done.

The man in the flour-bag had "the drop," and that was everything, as it was clear that he would not hesitate to shoot. Jimmy Silver wondered whether he recognised the Rookwooders as the fellows who had baffled his attack on the Kicking Mule hack a week or two before.

"The kids can ride on," said the road-agent. "Ride on, you four, and keep your paws up as you go."

Jimmy looked at his Canadian cousin. The rancher nodded.

"Ride on!" he said.

The juniors rode on, guiding their horses with their knees, their hands still above their heads.

Rancher Smedley sat motionless in the saddle, his eyes gleaming at the man in the flour-bag.

Still watching him, the road-agent stooped and picked up the packet from the trail with his free hand.

"I guess I've got to make sure," he remarked. "Sit there a bit, Hudson Smedley, and don't move a finger, if you don't want the expense of a funeral at Windy River."

Hudson Smedley made no reply.

The road-agent backed into the thickets with the precious package in his hand.

There he was lost in shadow.

The rancher made no move. A move meant a shot ringing from the thicket to stop him till the road-agent had made sure that the packet contained the dollar bills he sought.

Had the rancher still been armed he would have chanced a rush into the shadowy thicket now that the robber's revolver no longer covered him. But his weapon was gone, and he was helpless.

He waited grimly.

It did not take the lurking rascal long to ascertain that the dollar bills were in the packet. His voice came sharply from the darkness of the bushes.

"You can ride on, Hudson Smedley!"

The rancher set his horse in motion.

"If you stop, look out for a bullet! Good-night, rancher!"

Hudson Smedley did not stop. It was impossible to try conclusions with the road-agent unarmed, and he had to swallow his wrath the best he could and ride on, leaving the rascal triumphant.

He passed through the belt of thicket, and rode on the trail after the Rookwood juniors.

He found only three of them when he overtook the party.

Hudson Smedley glanced over them sharply.

"Where is Jimmy?"

"He rode on ahead," said Lovell. "Blessed if I know why; but he put Blazer to a terrific gallop."

"Well, no harm done," said the rancher. "Let's get on at a gallop, too."

"That thief's got the dollars, sir?" asked Raby.

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"Sure!"

"The awful rascal!"

"I guess he won't keep them long, if the Windy River outfit know how to hunt down a bulldozer!" said Hudson Smedley.

He said no more, and the party rode on to the ranch at a gallop in the moonlight.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Innocent or Guilty?

**J**IMMY SILVER had ridden ahead of his comrades with a fixed intention.

His suspicion of Mick, the new man at Windy River, had been almost banished by the sound of the outlaw's hard, grim voice. But it had not been wholly banished.

Mick, of Windy River, had chosen to take up the lonely duty at Lone Pine, and while he was stationed there, far from observation, the flour-bag road-agent had reappeared on the prairie trails.

That fact stood in Jimmy's mind before all others. And now there was a chance of putting the matter to the test.

If Mick was still at Lone Pine in these moments, it was clear that he could not be the man in the flour-bag. And so Jimmy, spurring ahead of his comrades, left them with the impression that he was riding on to the ranch; but, out of their sight, he turned from the trail and rode for Lone Pine.

It was futile to tell his chums of his intention; he knew that they would have laughed at the idea of suspecting Mick.

And if his suspicion was groundless, obviously the less said about it the better.

Leaving the ranch trail behind, Jimmy rode at a gallop in the moonlight for the stockman's hut at Lone Pine.

The road-agent was still occupied with Hudson Smedley, and Jimmy had a good start, even if the worst was the truth, and the man in the flour-bag was indeed Mick. He could not possibly, in that case, get back to Lone Pine before Jimmy arrived there.

It was a little reckless to ride at full gallop over the rough prairie by the light of the moon; but Jimmy knew that he could trust Blazer.

The miles of grass vanished under the galloping hoofs.

Jimmy's heart was beating as he approached the lonely stockman's hut.

He hoped fervently that he would find Mick there, and thus, by finding him, clear his own mind of suspicion regarding the man.

As it was now late in the evening, Mick should have come in from his duties, and a light should have been burning in the lonely hut if the cowman had not yet gone to bed.

But when the hut came in sight at last, a dark mass in the moonlight under the solitary black pine, no light gleamed from it.

All was dark and silent as Jimmy Silver rode up and drew in Blazer before the door.

Blazer stood breathing and steaming after his rapid gallop, and Jimmy reached over and struck on the door with the butt of his riding-whip.

"Hallo, Mick!" he shouted.

The echo of his voice answered him, but there was no other answer.

Evidently the hut was untenanted.

Jimmy Silver dismounted and hitched his horse to the post, and tried the door of the stockman's hut.

He opened it and peered into the darkness of the interior.

No sound greeted him.

He struck a match, and held it up. The stove was cold; on the table lay the remains of an early meal.

Jimmy lighted a candle that stood on the table, stuck in the neck of a bottle.

The light glimmered through the little hut, and showed the cowman's bunk, with the blankets tossed carelessly aside as they had been left in the morning.

Jimmy Silver stood in the doorway and looked out over the dark prairie, with the light behind him.

There was no sound of hoof-beats to be heard; only a faint, indefinite murmur of cattle on the plains.

Where was Mick?

Jimmy felt his heart throb. Had Mick been there, eating his solitary supper before the stove, all would have been well. Jimmy could have banished suspicion from his mind.

But he was not there, and his absence was at least a coincidence. It was likely enough, of course, that he had ridden far afield that day, and had not yet been able to return to his headquarters.

But it was at least a coincidence that he should be absent at the same time that the flour-bag man was holding up the rancher on the trail from Mosquito. Just as it had been a coincidence that Mick's horse had cast a shoe on the same day that the robber's horse had cast a shoe. In itself, neither incident was of great consequence; but Jimmy felt that there were too many coincidences in connection with Mick. They had a cumulative effect.

He turned back into the hut, wondering what he should do.

If Mick was the road-agent, as he suspected more and more now, if his assumption of Irish blarney and a rolling Irish accent was a cunning trick to disguise himself from suspicion, he would be coming back to the stockman's hut with the plunder of the robbery upon him.

What if he found Jimmy there?

Certainly, he was not likely to come back in his road-agent rig—he would discard the flour-bag as soon as it had served its purpose; he would ride back to the hut as Mick, the red-faced, jolly Irish cowpuncher.

If he were an innocent man, certainly he would not suspect Jimmy's object in visiting Lone Pine.

But if he was guilty?

Jimmy's heart beat.

If the man was guilty, was he not only too likely to divine the suspicion that had led the schoolboy there, and to put an end to the danger—and to Jimmy himself at the same time? The Rookwood junior would be utterly at his mercy.

And yet Jimmy determined to stay.

It was, indeed too late now for him to leave undiscovered, for as he stood in troubled thought, the sudden sound of hoof-beats rang from the prairie. A horseman was approaching the stockman's hut at a gallop.

It could only be Mick.

Jimmy felt his heart throb; but he kept a cool head. If the man was innocent, he had nothing to fear. If he was guilty, Jimmy needed a cool head to pull him safely through the next hour or two.

He crammed pine-chips into the rusty iron stove, and lighted the fire as the hoof-beats drew nearer.

The light streaming from the open door was visible at a great distance across the plains, and the oncoming

horseman certainly was already aware that the hut was now occupied. Jimmy's thought was to keep up the appearance of an ordinary visit, as if he had looked in to see how Mick was getting on at Lone Pine.

With a clatter and a jingle, the rider drew up at the door.

"Arrah, and who's making free with me palatial mansion intoirely?" called out a jolly voice.

"Little me, Mick!" called back Jimmy Silver.

"And is it Masther Silver himself?"

"That's it."

Mick came striding in. His red, cheery face beamed at the sight of the Rookwood junior.

"It's meself that's glad to see your handsome face here, me boy," he exclaimed, "and I thinking there was nobody to spake a worruid to this blessed evening! It's kindness itself for you to give me a look in like this, sorr!"

Jimmy's heart smote him.

He had a wretched feeling that he had suspected an innocent and unsuspecting man. And yet—

"And it's a foire ye've lighted for me, too!" exclaimed Mick. "Sure, it's hungry I am and ready for supper. And you'll be staying to ate a morsel with a lonely man, Masther Jimmy?"

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy Silver. "That is, if there's any supper going."

Mick laughed cheerily.

"Faith, it's the fat of the land I've got for your honour's self!" he said. "Jest a minute while I put the boss in the corral, and by the same token give him bite and sup. It's hard riding I've had the blessed day, sorr. A bunch of steers got away into the foothills, and, faith, I've worrked harrd rounding them back again! But, sure, it's all in the day's work, as I've tould Misther Peters."

Mick left the hut again, and led his horse away into the corral.

He was absent a good ten minutes, caring for the horse, as a good cow-puncher should, before he attended to his own needs.

Then he came in again bright and merry.

His open pleasure at having Jimmy's company for the evening was a reproach to the Rookwood junior.

From a locked cupboard Mick drew corneake, and ham and cold beef, and a big pie, while Jimmy made steaming coffee.

They sat down to supper on cheery terms. By that time Jimmy's dark suspicion was gone; this simple, cheery fellow simply could not be the scheming robber.

"And ye friends didn't care for the ride by the light of the moon, is it?" said Mick, as he cut a huge slice of cold beef with his clasp-knife.

"I didn't tell them I was coming," said Jimmy. "I—I had a fancy for riding over here by myself."

"And it's glad I am to see ye!" said Mick. "For, faith, I'm fed-up with Lone Pine. It's company and the boys' cheery voices that I miss, sorr. I guess I didn't know it was so lonely by a man's self when I offered to take Poker Smith's turn here. Not that I'm sorry I offered, mind ye. Poker's a broth of a boy intoirely, and he was so glad to get out of the job that it's a pleasure to oblige him. But, sure, it's very quiet and lonely, all the same, and it's kindness itself for your honour to give me a call."

"We'll all ride over together one day, Mick, if you'd care to see us," said Jimmy.

"Faith, it's a pleasure to see you any

time, sorr, but don't you let old Mick be a throuble to yourself."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Jimmy.

"And did his honour ride to Mosquito this day?" asked Mick.

"Yes; we went with him. I came across here coming back," said Jimmy. "The other fellows went on. Mr. Smedley was held up on the trail."

"Phwat!"

"The road-agent—the man in the flour-bag, you know."

Mick opened his eyes wide.

"Sure, and all the boys said he had lit out of this section," said Mick. "Is it the straight goods ye're giving me, sorr, or are ye pulling me leg, and me a tenderfoot from Manitoba."

"Straight goods!" said Jimmy, laughing. "I'm afraid the rotter has robbed Mr. Smedley, too. He made us ride on ahead."

"Sure, if that thafe of the world is on the prairie, ye shouldn't have come here, sorr," said Mick, with an anxious look. "It's riding back with ye this night I'll be, sorr, and see ye safe home."

"No, you won't, not after a day's work on the plains," said Jimmy Silver, rising from the table. "I'll get off now, Mick, and you turn into your bunk."

## HERE'S SOME GOOD NEWS, BOYS!

There's a topping new story of your old favourites, Jimmy Silver & Co., starting in this week's

### GEM Library

under the title of:

## "THE ROOKWOOD DICTATOR!"

It shows Owen Conquest at the top of his form. Mind you read the opening chapters!

"But, sure, I don't like letting you go alone, sorr, if that thafe is about!" said Mick.

"He wouldn't bother about me," said Jimmy, with a laugh. "I haven't got any dollars about me. He's after big game, and he wouldn't trouble to stop me, even if he saw me. Good-night, Mick!"

Mick came to the door with him. Jimmy mounted Blazer, and shook out his reins.

"Good-night, sorr!"

Jimmy rode away into the darkness. A few minutes later he looked back, and the stockman's hut was already dark. Mick, apparently, had lost no time in turning into his bunk.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

#### The Danger of the Night!

JIMMY SILVER rode at a quick trot over the dark prairie. There was a drift of cloud over the moon, and the soft, velvety darkness shut him in on all sides. He gave Blazer a loose rein, trusting to the horse for guidance, and Blazer did not fail him.

Jimmy was thinking of Mick as he

rode away, after that last glance back at the stockman's hut, already darkened.

During supper at Lone Pine, in company with the jolly cattleman, Jimmy's suspicions had quite disappeared, and he had only thought of them with a twinge of remorse.

But away from Mick's bright and cheery face, somehow the dark doubt returned and lingered in his mind.

He was almost ashamed to let it return; but there it was.

For, after all, if Mick, of Windy River, was indeed the man in the flour-bag, he was playing a part at the ranch, and his cheery welcome of Jimmy at the hut would come naturally as part of his game.

If he was guilty, he must guess that Jimmy suspected him, and hence the Rookwood junior's sudden visit to the hut immediately after the robbery on the Mosquito trail.

His game then would be to stifle the junior's vague suspicion, and that he had certainly succeeded in doing for the time.

But after that?

Following out the train of thought, Jimmy tried to put himself in Mick's position, granting that Mick was the road-agent.

Would he not have taken the opportunity, at the lonely hut, of silencing the boy who suspected him, for ever? Jimmy had been at his mercy there.

Jimmy shook his head.

That would have been too risky. Although Jimmy's friends did not know that he had ridden to Lone Pine, the fact that he had gone there would have transpired had he been missing afterwards.

Blazer's trail could have been followed by some of the skilled trailers in the Windy River outfit, for one thing. It would have led a search-party direct to the lonely hut.

But if Mick was guilty would he allow the junior, who evidently suspected him, to return safe to the ranch with his suspicions to be communicated to others there.

Jimmy felt a thrill.

It came into his mind what Mick would do if Mick was the man in the flour-bag.

He would lull his visitor's suspicions, and allow him to ride away from Lone Pine unharmed; but he would take some measures to prevent him from reaching the ranch alive.

For the road-agent's whole game depended upon his remaining unsuspected. Once the eye of suspicion was upon him, he could never commit another robbery in the Windy River section, even if he was not brought to justice for the robberies already committed.

Jimmy's heart beat faster.

The flour-bag man, taking his life in his hand in the dangerous game he was playing, would not hesitate to purchase his safety at the cost of the life of another.

Had Hudson Smedley resisted the robbery on the Mosquito trail that afternoon the flour-bag man would have shot him dead. Indeed, it was scarcely possible for the road-agent to follow his dangerous career for long without adding murder to his other crimes.

Jimmy Silver breathed hard. If Mick was the guilty man, Mick did not mean him to reach Windy River Ranch alive that night; but he would design to make his death appear an accident.

Was that why the light in the stockman's hut had been extinguished—so quickly after Jimmy's departure—to give him the impression that Mick had

turned in, while, in reality, the man was following him on the dark prairie with murderous intentions?

Jimmy Silver could scarcely believe so, but he knew well enough that it was a real risk.

He drew on the rein, and Blazer halted.

The ringing of Blazer's hoofs on the hard prairie had filled the darkness with echoes, but as he stopped, the echoing sound of hoof-beats did not cease.

Thud, thud, thud!

From far away in the darkness there was a sound of beating hoofs, and Jimmy Silver knew that a horseman was riding there unseen.

The sound died away in the direction of the ranch.

Jimmy Silver sat his horse, motionless, listening; but the hoof-beats had died into silence.

A horseman had passed him at a distance on the prairie—riding from Lone Pine towards the ranch.

It might be some cowpuncher riding home late; but it was much more probable, Jimmy could not help feeling, that it was Mick.

It might be only another coincidence; but Jimmy could not help feeling, as he had felt before, that there were too many coincidences in connection with Mick, of Windy River.

A mile ahead of where he had stopped lay a creek which had to be crossed to reach the ranch.

The water was shallow, almost dried up by the summer heat, but the banks were steep, of crackling mud, and required careful riding. It was easy enough for a careless horse to break his neck there. Had the road-agent passed him on the prairie, to lay an ambush for him at Muddy Creek?

A cast of a lasso as he was descending the steep bank of the creek would do the trick.

Jimmy pictured the horse suddenly roped in in the gloom, and stumbling down the steep bank, hurling his unprepared rider down to death.

Such an ambush would be perfectly easy, as the creek was always crossed at the spot where the trail ran to the old ford.

Jimmy set his lips.

It was all vague, dark suspicion; and yet, granting that Mick was indeed the road-agent, the danger was real and terrible.

If a desperate man was already lying in wait for him at the ford, he had little chance of getting through alive.

After a long cogitation, Jimmy Silver wheeled his horse, and rode back towards Lone Pine.

Blazer gave a remonstrating whinny; but as soon as he understood his master's intention, he trotted back the way he had come without further demur.

There was a glimmer of moonlight through the clouds now, and Jimmy Silver soon sighted the tall pine standing sentinel over the stockman's hut.

All was dark and silent there.

Jimmy Silver rode up to the door, and knocked on it with the butt of his riding-whip.

"Mick?" he shouted.

If the man was innocent—if he was there—Jimmy had an explanation ready for his return. But there came no reply to his call or to his knock.

He called again, and only the echo of his voice answered him.

Jimmy dismounted and tried the door. It opened to his touch. Within, the darkness was intense, and the

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silence unbroken. No sleeper could have slept with such utter silence.

Jimmy Silver struck a match and held it up.

The flare showed him the bunk empty, looking exactly as when Jimmy had taken his leave. Mick had not turned in at all.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. Mick was absent at that late hour.

Evidently he had ridden away immediately after Jimmy was gone.

He was the horseman who had passed Jimmy in the darkness, there could be no further doubt about that.

To make all sure, Jimmy examined the corral, and found that Mick's horse was not there. Man and horse both were gone.

"That settles it!" muttered Jimmy.

He shut the door of the hut carefully, to leave no trace of his return, and remounted Blazer.

But he did not ride towards the ford of Muddy Creek.

He was as sure as he could be now that the road-agent was in ambush for him there; and, late as the hour was, Jimmy Silver took a roundabout

## THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME!

### MAGNIFICENT METAL MODELS OF FAMOUS RAILWAY ENGINES FREE!

See Page 25.

course, to strike the creek a mile below the ford.

Blazer, evidently seeing no reason why the direct route should not be taken to where fodder awaited him, raised some objections; but Jimmy Silver overcame them with a firm hand, and the horse trotted away obediently.

In the moonlight Jimmy rode mile after mile, and struck the creek at last, far below the ford, and crossed it. Then he let out Blazer in a gallop for the ranch.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Jimmy Silver Makes Sure!

**J**IMMY SILVER was late in bed that night, and he did not soon sleep, tired as he was.

Hudson Smedley had spoken to him somewhat abruptly; he had been alarmed by the junior's absence till so late an hour. Jimmy had explained that he had visited Mick at Lone Pine, without adding any further particulars.

He was now sure in his own mind that his suspicion was well founded; but he realised that he had to have something more tangible before he could tell the rancher what he suspected.

He was thinking it over as he lay in bed that night, and when he slept at last he dreamed of Mick, masked in a flour-bag, lurking for him in the darkness at the ford, with murder in his heart.

He was still sound asleep when

Arthur Edward Lovell came into his room the following morning.

"Wake up, slacker!" roared Lovell. Jimmy started out of slumber.

"Making a day of it in bed?" grinned Lovell. "We've been down and had brekker. What made you so late last night?"

"I rode over to Lone Pine."

"More ass you, with that jolly old flour-bag merchant going the rounds!" said Lovell. "How's Mick?"

"He looked as jolly as usual," said Jimmy Silver.

"I say, there's no end of a sensation about the robbery yesterday," said Lovell. "The ranch is fairly buzzing with it."

"No wonder!" said Jimmy.

"He cleared five thousand dollars out of Mr. Smedley," said Lovell. "Mr. Smedley isn't saying much, but he looks a lot. I fancy he's going to take a lot of trouble to get after the flour-bag man."

Jimmy Silver turned out of bed, and had a late breakfast. He found that Mr. Smedley had ridden away to Mosquito. All the hands that were still about the ranch were talking of the robbery of the day before—it was the one topic at Windy River.

"I guess that flour-bag galoot will get a rope and a branch when we lay hands on him!" declared Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch. "I reckon we'll make an example of him! His sort ain't wanted on Windy River!"

"But it don't seem so pesky easy to lay hands on him!" remarked Skitter Dick.

Arthur Edward Lovell suggested a visit to Lone Pine that morning, and the Fistical Four rode away to see Mick at the stockman's hut. On the prairie trail Jimmy Silver put Blazer to the gallop and shot ahead of his chums, leaving them far behind.

They were a mile down on the prairie when he reached the ford of Muddy Creek, hot and baking in the sun-blaze.

Jimmy dismounted from his horse and descended the steep, muddy banks of the creek on foot.

His eyes sought eagerly for traces of the ambush, which, he was convinced, had been laid for him in that spot the night before.

He was not long in finding them.

In the dry mud of the farther bank, towards Lone Pine, he found the tracks of a big cattleman's boots. The most cautious tread could not have passed in such a spot without leaving a trail.

The tracks were hours old. Jimmy knew enough of trailing by this time to know that they had been made the night before. Someone had descended the muddy bank on foot, and stopped where a stunted bush grew in the mud, and waited there. That the unknown had waited there a long time was quite evident; the tracks were sunk deep in the mud where he had stood, and there were signs of trampling feet where the waiting man had changed his position.

Jimmy Silver smiled grimly as he thought of it, and he wondered how long the rascal had waited in ambush—waiting for the rider that never came!

Jimmy led Blazer up the bank, and looked for further traces on the prairie above. He found the spot where the horseman had dismounted and tethered his horse in a deep hollow thick with bushes. There were traces to be seen where the animal had cropped the bush.

"Jimmy!"

It was Arthur Edward Lovell's voice.

(Continued on page 22.)

Grundy! He had left St. Jim's in high feather! He did not look in high feather now. One of his eyes was closed. His nose, which was not small naturally, was enlarged—it looked several sizes too large for Grundy! He had a muddy, rumpled, dishevelled look all over, and breathed hard and spasmodically. He blinked at the staring juniors with one eye, which persisted in winking in a really extraordinary manner.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically. "Poor old Gwunday's had an accident! Have you been wun ovah by a motoh-cah, Gwunday?"

"Ow! No!"

"Got under a threshing-machine?" asked Cardew, of the Fourth.

"Groogh! No!"

"Whopped Gordon Gay?" asked Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Ha, ha!" roared Blake. "He looks as if he has!"

Grundy steadied himself with a grasp on the banisters, and blinked painfully at the grinning crowd.

"I did my best!" he gasped. "I—I—I made him fight! He didn't want to, but I made him! We had twelve rounds, without gloves. The funny thing is, that he had hardly a mark on him when we'd finished!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You got all the marks," said Monty Lowther. "It's only fair—you never get any in exams! You ought to get 'em sometimes!"

"I've no doubt," continued Grundy, "that the Grammar cads will say that he licked me!"

"Extremely pwob, I think!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Hasn't he?" asked Manners.

"Oh, no! Not at all! Nothing of the kind!" said Grundy, struggling for breath. "I'm not the kind of fellow to take a licking! I should have finished him in another round—I feel sure of that! But I was counted out!"

"Is that all?" asked Blake, with deep sarcasm.

"That's all!" said Grundy. "Practically, I'd licked the fellow. I don't expect the Grammarians to own up to it, but the fact remains that he was practically licked! One more round would have done it! The fact that I couldn't—I mean I didn't—get up till three minutes after I was counted out doesn't amount to much! I don't believe in rounds, if you come to that! It's a pity I didn't finish him off, because the Grammarians will be certain to make out that he licked me. It's unfortunate!"

"Very!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"However, it was as good as a victory!" said Grundy. "Oh, you're there, Wilkins! Lend me a hand, will you?"

Wilkins helped the great Grundy along the passage to his study. It was evident that George Alfred was at his last gasp.

There was a loud chortle in the Shell passage. The fact that Grundy hadn't been able to get up for three minutes after being counted out in the twelfth round was a trifle light as air to Grundy, but the other fellows seemed to regard it as rather a conclusive incident.

For a good half-hour, in Study No. 3, Wilkins and Gunn were busy ministering unto their defeated chief. During that time Grundy explained at great length how it was that he hadn't been licked, and that Gordon Gay had been practically whopped—not finished off, it was true, but to all intents and purposes whopped. And Wilkins and Gunn exhibited true friendship in heroically subduing their smiles.

And so ended Grundy's campaign against the Grammarians. But it had not quite ended the war between the rival schools.

THE END.

*(There will be another rollicking long complete story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled:*

**"SOMETHING LIKE A STUNT!"**

*By Martin Clifford,*

*next week, which deals with their fight for supremacy in the war between St. Jim's and the Rylcombe Grammar School. You must not miss this story, for it is full of lively scenes and hundreds of laughs!)*

## "The Mystery of Mick, the Cowpuncher!"

*(Continued from page 12.)*

Lovell & Co. had arrived and crossed the creek, while Jimmy was still busy picking up "sign" in the bushy hollow. Jimmy emerged from the hollow and rejoined his chums.

"Wondered where on earth you had got to!" said Lovell. "What did you leave us behind for, you ass? You seem to be getting into the habit of performing vanishing tricks lately."

"Looking for the jolly old road-agent?" grinned Raby.

Jimmy Silver laughed, but did not answer the question. The Fistical Four rode on to Lone Pine.

They found Mick, red-faced and cheery as usual, rubbing down his horse outside the stockman's hut.

He greeted them cheerily; but for a moment his eyes fixed on Jimmy Silver with a searching, penetrating look that Jimmy did not miss. But it was only for a second.

"We've come over to see you, Mick," said Lovell.

"Sure, it's good of ye intoirely!" said Mick. "It's me that's glad to see yer jolly faces in this lone spot!"

"I suppose you've got to get out on the plains after the cattle?" said Newcome.

"Yis, sorr; and it's late I am now."

"We'll keep house for you while you're gone!" grinned Lovell. "We'll have a stunning dinner ready for you when you get in!"

"Yes, rather!"

"It's a broth av a boy ye are, sorr!" said Mick. And he mounted his horse.

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"Make yerselves at home, young jintlemen!" He glanced at Jimmy Silver. "Ye got home safe last night, sorr, I see."

"Oh, yes!" said Jimmy carelessly. "If the road-agent was abroad he didn't trouble his head about me."

"You didn't lose your way?"

"Not at all. If I had, Blazer would have taken me home safely enough," said Jimmy, with a smile.

"Jimmy was jolly late in," said Lovell, "and Mr. Smedley was a bit waxy."

"Sure, I was afeared he'd be late!" said Mick. "But sure you rode straight home, didn't you, Masher Jimmy?"

Jimmy smiled cheerily. He was quite

well aware that the man was curious to know why he had not gone home by the ford.

"No; I had a ride round," he answered. "It was a lovely night, you know, and there was moonlight. And I thought the ford might be a bit risky."

"What rot!" said Lovell. "Safe enough, if you're careful."

"Not with road-agents about," said Jimmy. "Suppose the flour-bag merchant put up an ambush there, for instance?"

A steely look came into Mick's eyes, and his lips set hard like a trap. Jimmy was watching him to see the effect of his words.

"What rot!" said Lovell. "Do you think the flour-bag merchant would bother his head about you, Jimmy?"

"Well, he might!" said Jimmy.

"You flatter yourself, old man! I don't suppose he remembers your existence!" said Lovell, with a grin. "Do you, Mick?"

"Sure, I couldn't say, sorr," said Mick.

And, with a wave of the hand, he rode away over the prairie.

Jimmy Silver stood and watched him ride away. He was certain now—quite certain in his own mind—Mick, the red-faced, genial Irishman, was Irish as far as his accent and manners went—and no further. With a flour-bag over his face and a revolver in his hand, he was quite a different personage. And Jimmy Silver knew it, and he knew now that Mick knew that he knew it. And he knew that the man riding away through the sunlit grass was revolving desperate thoughts in his mind.

THE END.

*(Next week the topping story of the Rookwood Chums is entitled: "Roping in the Road Agent!")*

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