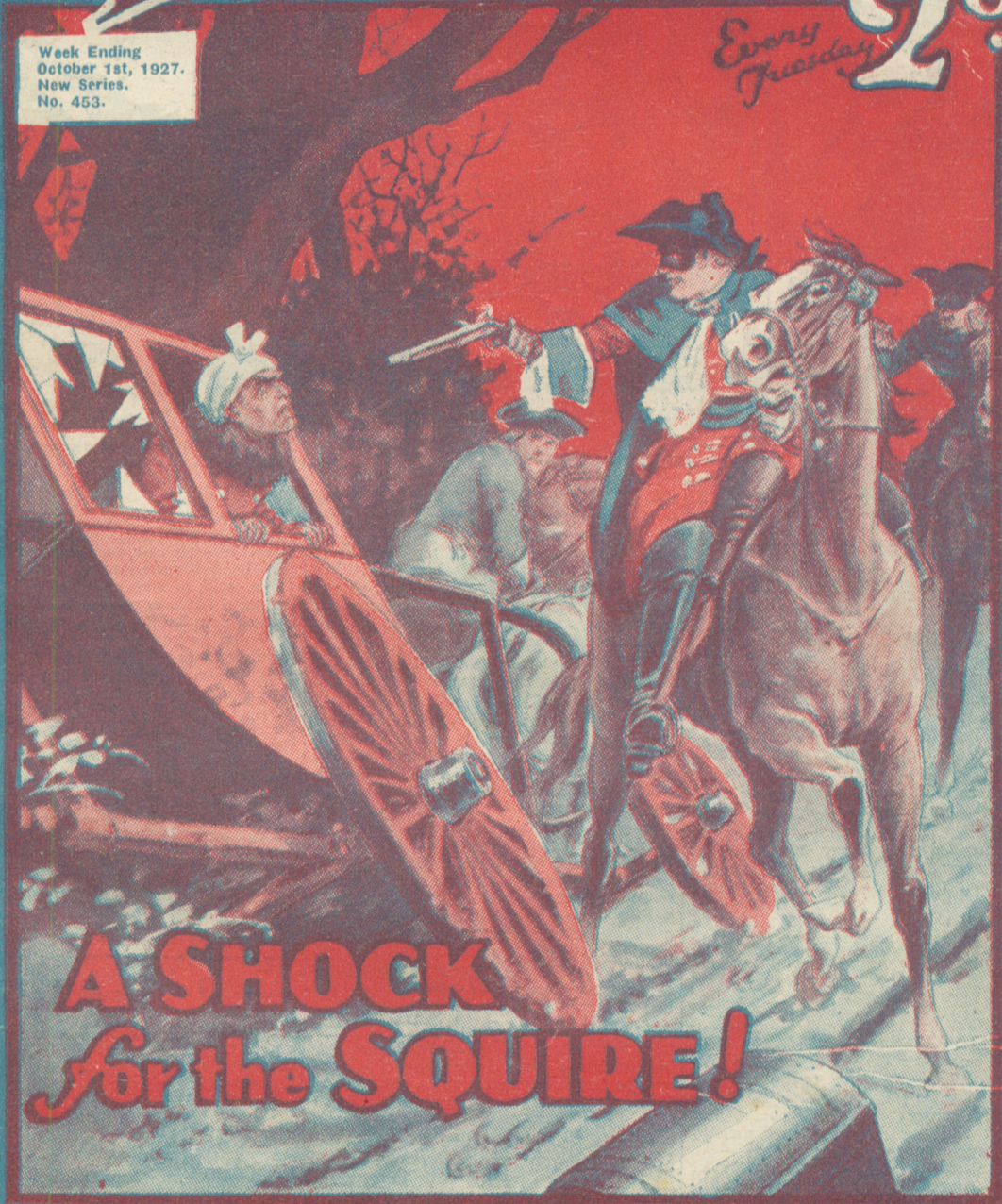


A Rousing Story of  
**GALLOPING JACK—HIGHWAYMAN** *inside!*

# The POPULAR

Every Tuesday **2d**

Week Ending  
October 1st, 1927.  
New Series.  
No. 453.



**A SHOCK**  
*for the* **SQUIRE!**



# RUCTIONS ON THE RANCH!

of the Windy River Ranch, and he gets it by very sensational methods!

Orlando Fitzroy, actor, vows vengeance on the burly foreman

# Pete Peters' Visitor!

ANOTHER ROLLICKING LONG COMPLETE STORY DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD, IN THE WILD WEST.

BY

OWEN CONQUEST.



## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Pete Peters is Not Pleased!

"W E'RE going!"

"You bet!"

"I fancy all the outfit are going," said Jimmy Silver, with a laugh. "All that can get away, at any rate. It isn't often that a theatrical company gets so far into the North-West."

"About the first time I should say," remarked Lovell.

There was quite a little outburst of excitement on the Windy River Ranch, and Jimmy Silver & Co. fully shared it. Skitter Dick had brought the news from Mosquito.

In that little timber town of North-West Alberta entertainments were few and far between, so the visit of the Hiram H. Hunker Theatre Company interested all the citizens.

Positively for three nights only, the H. H. Hunker Company were to perform "Hamlet," "Othello," and "As You Like It" in turn, thus acquainting the Windy River section with the works of the immortal William Shakespeare.

"Dollar admission, in Bunch's Hall!" Skitter Dick had announced at the ranch. "There's a dozen posters stuck up on the dead walls in Mosquito about it. Genuine Shakespeare!"

"I guess I've heard of that galoot afore," said Baldy, the cook.

"It's the Hiram H. Hunker Company," continued Skitter Dick. "They've played to crowded houses in every city from Quebec to Calgary in their Canadian tour."

"How do you know that?" inquired Spike Thompson.

"It says so on the posters."

"I guess if they'd got crowded houses in Calgary they wouldn't want to mosey along to the Windy River," remarked Red Alf.

"Well, everybody in Mosquito will roll up," said Skitter Dick.

"About a couple of dozen of galoots." "And all the cowpunchers round about who can get leave."

"In the busy season!" said Red Alf. "I guess there won't be a crowd get off from this hyer ranch."

Red Alf proved to be a prophet. The Windy River cowpunchers were not specially "gone" on Shakespeare. As a matter of taste, they would probably have preferred lurid film drama, with plenty of galloping and shooting in it. But any entertainment was too rare to be despised, and if they could not get film thrills they were willing to put up with William Shakespeare. But there were difficulties in the way.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, Lovell, and Newcome resolved to go at once, and there was no difficulty about that. The chums of Rookwood were guests at the Windy River Ranch, and as the guests of Mr. Hudson Smedley they were free to do as they liked. It was different with members of the outfit, as they soon discovered when they interviewed Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch, on the subject.

Pete Peters didn't care "shucks" for Shakespeare, and said so, with unnecessary emphasis. As for letting men off in the busy time to go to see "gold-darned play-acting," that, apparently, was the last thing that Mr. Peters dreamed of.

As Jimmy Silver & Co. were helping the outfit in the work of the ranch, they felt that it was up to them to ask leave. So they sought out Mr. Peters and asked for leave to ride into Mosquito that afternoon. Pete Peters looked them up and down grimly.

"You ain't under my orders," he said gruffly. "If you was I'd give you a piece of my mind! Play-acting! Pooh!"

"It isn't often—" began Jimmy. "Once is too often," said Mr. Peters. "But you kids can go, and be blowed to you! Get off!"

"If we're wanted—" began Arthur Edward Lovell, rather warmly.

"How could you be wanted?" demanded Mr. Peters. "Tenderfoot ain't much use on a ranch. You ain't no use, and your best friend wouldn't go so far

as to say that you're any ornament. So hike off."

And Pete Peters turned on his heel and strode away.

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Pete isn't in the best of tempers," he remarked. "I suppose he knows that the whole outfit will want to go. It doesn't look a lively prospect for them."

Skitter Dick was the first of the outfit to try his luck. He approached Mr. Peters with an ingratiating smile.

"If you've got no use for me this afternoon, Mr. Peters—"

"Never have had any use for you, Dick Lee," answered Mr. Peters. "Why the boss pays you to loaf around this ranch is a darn mystery to me, and always was."

Skitter Dick coughed.

"Then you give me leave—"

"Not in your lifetime," said Mr. Peters. "You ain't no use, but it's my duty to see that you earn a tenth part or so of what Boss Smedley pays you for loafing around. Cut it out!"

Apparently Skitter Dick was of some use on the ranch, though the foreman declined to admit it. The Skitter retired discomfited, and a little later Spike Thompson put in a word for himself.

"There's a theatrical show at Mosquito, Mr. Peters—" he began.

"I guess I've heard of it."

"I'd like to go."

"Of course you would," agreed Mr. Peters disagreeably. "There ain't a loafer in the country that wouldn't like to chuck his work on that excuse, or any other."

"It's jest this once," urged Spike.

"It isn't," said Mr. Peters.

"Nothing doing?" asked Spike.

"Less than nothing," Mr. Peters assured him.

Baldy, the cook, was the third. But Baldy, the cook, had no better luck than the others.

"You want to amble into Mosquito to-day?" asked Mr. Peters when Baldy preferred his request. "Your leave is due, is it?"

"Nope. But—"

"But you want double leave in the busy season?"

"Not exactly. But—"

"What you really mean is that you're



asking for the loan of my boot?" suggested Mr. Peters. "Waal, I'm your man. Turn round!"

Baldy, the cook, hastily retired into the cookhouse. It was only too clear that Pete Peters was deaf to argument on this subject.

And so it came to pass that only four riders started from the Windy River Ranch on the Mosquito trail, and those four were Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. But they promised to tell the outfit all about it when they returned—which was slight comfort to the cow-punchers, who remained under the grim eye of Pete Peters.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Iniquity of H. H. Hunker!

"HERE we are!" announced Edward Lovell. Jimmy Silver & Co. had arrived.

Bunch's Hall, in Mosquito, was a large, lumber-built room in the Grand Pacific Hotel of Mosquito. On ordinary occasions it was the dining-room of the lumber hotel. After being a dining-room it was generally a smoking-room. But as the only room of any extent in the little township, it was used for all the local meetings, and on this occasion it had been hired by the H. H. Hunker Company for Shakespearean representations.

Seats were a dollar apiece. Standing room, which predominated, was half-a-dollar a head. With crowding, Bunch's Hall could have accommodated an audience of about a hundred. But Jimmy Silver & Co., after lunching at the Grand Pacific, did not see any signs of a hundred turning up. Mosquito was a busy, energetic little township, but its citizens were few in number, and generally hard at work. Mr. Bunch, who sold tickets of admission at his desk, did not seem hopeful.

"Four?" he said. "Four at a dollar each? That makes nine!"

As it was getting near time for the performance, this statement did not indicate bright prospects for the Hiram H. Hunker Company.

"Perhaps they'll pay at the doors," remarked Lovell.

"P'r'aps," assented Mr. Bunch, "and p'r'aps not. I guess it don't matter, so long as Hunker takes enough to pay me for the hall. I guess he'll just about do that."

A slim young man came in while Mr. Bunch was speaking, and the juniors glanced at him, guessing that he was a member of the theatrical touring company. He was slim, good-looking, and a little effeminate in appearance, and he looked worried.

"Seen Mr. Hunker?" he asked, addressing the hotel-keeper.

Mr. Bunch shook his head.

"Not since breakfast," he answered.

"Neither have I," said the slim young man. "I've had my suspicions for some time. How many tickets did we sell last night, Mr. Bunch?"

"Fifteen."

"How many, so far, to-day?"

"Nine."

"Holy smoke! What I want to know is, why did Hiram H. Hunker bring us here at all?" groaned the slim young man. "What a place to land us in when he flitted!"

"Flitted?" said Mr. Bunch.

"I guess that's about the size of it," said the slim young man dolorously. "There isn't a member of the company that's had any pay for three months, and what cash there was is in Hunker's hands. I guess the ghost won't walk this time."

Mr. Bunch nodded.

THE POPULAR.—No. 453.

"I wondered why he was asking questions about the post-wagon for Kicking Mule," he remarked.

"When did it leave?" asked the slim young man hurriedly.

"Six hours ago."

"Then Hunker's at Kicking Mule by this time, and our name is Dennis," groaned the young man. "How much do I owe you for my room and grub, Mr. Bunch?"

"Five dollars."

"Then you have my sympathy!"

"I guess I'd rather have your dollars," said Mr. Bunch gruffly. "You can cut that out, Mr. Orlando Fitzroy."

"It's not a matter of choice," explained Mr. Fitzroy. "Hunker's got the cashbox, and if he's flitted the cash is nearly at Kicking Mule by this time. Anything else I can do for you?"

The expression that came over Mr. Bunch's plump face made Jimmy Silver & Co. smile.

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Mr. Bunch. "You been eating up my grub, and you tell me, as cool as you please, that you can't pay for it!"

Mr. Fitzroy shrugged his slim shoulders.

"The whole company's in the same box," he said. "There'll be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth when they find out that Hunker's flitted. You're only one of the sufferers, Mr. Bunch."

"I—I—I—" spluttered Mr. Bunch.

"If you young gentlemen have just paid for admission you had better take your money back," said Mr. Fitzroy, addressing the Rookwooders. "There won't be any performance."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look hyer, Mr. Fitzroy—" roared Mr. Bunch.

"Patience—patience, my friend!" said Orlando Fitzroy. "What have you lost? A miserable five dollars! I've lost a job and three months' salary, and now you're going to kick me out, and I haven't ten cents for a meal in my clothes."

"I guess you're right there!" roared Mr. Bunch. "I'm going to kick you out—hard!"

"It's not the first time," sighed Mr. Fitzroy. "I've been there before. This is the eleventh time I've been stranded, in Canada or the States. Get it over!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver hurriedly, as Mr. Bunch, in great excitement, whipped round from behind his desk. "Hold on! Perhaps we can help."

"I'm going to have it out of his hide!" bawled Mr. Bunch.

"Hold on, I tell you! Here's the five dollars."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bunch.

A five-dollar bill placated the hotel-keeper, so far as Mr. Orlando Fitzroy was concerned. The slim young man thanked Jimmy Silver in tones of heartfelt gratitude, with a dramatic thrill in his rather musical voice, evidently so accustomed to what Pete Peters called "play-acting" that he never quite freed himself of the manners of the stage. Then he walked away to acquaint the rest of the company with the dismal news that Hiram H. Hunker had disappeared, and that the "ghost" would not walk. Jimmy Silver & Co. went to lead out their horses. Shakespeare, evidently, was "off," and as there was to be no performance, owing to the sudden departure of the iniquitous Mr. Hunker, the Rookwood chums had nothing to do but ride back to the ranch.

"What a go!" said Raby. "We've paid a dollar each, and Bunch doesn't look like parting again, performance or no performance."

"It's a sell," said Lovell. "Peters will cackle at us when we get back, too."

"Hard cheese on those people," said Newcome. "What an awful rascal a manager must be to strand them in an out-of-the-way place like this!"

"Awful rotter!" said Jimmy. "I dare say they'll get some help from the Mosquito folks. They're good sorts here. Even old Bunch barks more than he bites, and I think he'll go easy with them."

And Jimmy Silver & Co., disappointed, but feeling a good deal more for the hapless touring company than for themselves, mounted their horses to ride back to Windy River.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### Looking for a Job!

"HOLD on a minute!"

The Fistical Four were riding out of the only street of Mosquito to the dusty trail of the prairie when they were hailed by Mr. Orlando Fitzroy. The slim young man held up his hand to them as a signal to halt, and the chums of Rookwood drew rein, wondering what he wanted. Lovell—who thought that he could guess—slid his hand into his pocket.

Mr. Fitzroy held a little bag in his hand, apparently containing all his worldly property.

"Getting out of it?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, my young friend. The attractions of Mosquito, though doubtless great, do not appeal to me," said Mr. Fitzroy. "As you so kindly settled my little bill at the hotel—I believe that shed is called an hotel—I am venturing to intrude still further upon your kindness."

"Go ahead!" said Jimmy, good-naturedly.

"There is a talk of a committee of generous-hearted citizens subscribing to help the company as far as the railroad," said Mr. Fitzroy. "But after that the prospects are not dazzling. In short, I have made up my mind to abandon, for the present, the Thespian art. Needs must when there is not a shot in the locker. I have heard that it is a busy season now on the ranches."

"That's so," said Jimmy.

"No doubt you young gentlemen belong to some ranch in this section?"

"We're staying at the Windy River Ranch."

"Perhaps you can tell me whether there is a chance of getting a job there?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

He didn't think so—not in the least! Mr. Fitzroy, with his soft hands and good-looking face and pencilled eyebrows, did not look a likely recruit for the Windy River outfit. Indeed, he looked as if he would crumple up helplessly under a day's work on the ranch.

Orlando Fitzroy read the junior's look.

"You think there's no chance for me?" he asked.

"Well—" Jimmy hesitated. "Can you ride?"

"Certainly."

"And use the lasso?"

"Hem! I can learn."

"Know anything about cattle?"

"Nothing."

"Hem! I'm afraid—"

"After all, a man can only be refused," said Mr. Fitzroy. "I'm willing to work, anyhow. Is Windy River the nearest ranch?"

"Yes."

"Then it's me for Windy River," said Mr. Fitzroy decidedly. "I suppose they can't do more than boot me off the ranch."



**A SHOCK FOR PETERS!** "Calm yourself, I beg!" said the rancher to the sobbing lady. "You claim this man Peters as your husband?" "Yes," whispered the veiled lady. (See Chapter 6.)



Jimmy Silver laughed.

"They won't do that," he said. "But I think you'd do better to get back to a town; and if ten dollars would help you, we can find it."

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell.

Orlando Fitzroy shook his head.

"Thanks, all the same; but no," he said. "You've helped me once, and I'm not a beggar. Is this the trail to the ranch?"

"Yes; but it's a good many miles," said Jimmy. "If you really mean to go there—"

"I do."

"Then I'll give you a lift on my horse. He's carried double before."

"You overwhelm me with kindness," said Mr. Fitzroy, in his theatrical way.

But the poor young man was evidently glad of the offer, and he mounted behind Jimmy Silver, on Blazer's powerful back, in great relief.

Jimmy Silver & Co. trotted away in the golden sunset for the Windy River; and Orlando Fitzroy enlivened the route by talking—chiefly about himself. It appeared, from Mr. Fitzroy's conversation, that there was only one really great actor at present in existence, that great man's name being Orlando Fitzroy. It was by the cruel persecution of Fate that Mr. Fitzroy found his lot cast among touring theatrical companies in the West. He alluded to his fellow-players as "barn-stormers" and "strolling players," and admitted that the failure of the tour was only to be expected, since it was impossible for one good player to pull through such a crowd of duds.

It was obvious that Mr. Fitzroy had an excellent opinion of himself and his abilities; but the chums of Rookwood listened with great politeness, and allowed him to run on.

If he could find consolation for his misfortunes in "swank" there was no reason why that solace should be denied him.

He told the juniors tales of his touring adventures—of the parts he had played. Owing to his good looks—as he said—he

was often cast for feminine parts when ladies were not available. He had played Rosalind and Ophelia, as well as Hamlet and Othello and Julius Cæsar, and always with success—marked and remarkable success. The juniors did not ask him whether this included financial success. Only too obviously it didn't!

There was many a long mile to be covered on the trail to Windy River, though the juniors now knew all the short cuts; but Mr. Fitzroy's cheery chat beguiled the way, and the Rookwooders were quite glad of his company. The sun had long set when they reached the ranch, and most of the outfit had turned in at the bunkhouse.

A light was burning in Pete Peters' cabin, showing that the foreman had not yet gone to bed. But Jimmy Silver deemed it unwise for the applicant for work to disturb Mr. Peters just then. Pete Peters made the outfit work; but he worked harder himself than any, and there was no doubt that he was tired now, and not likely to be in the best of tempers.

"Speak to the foreman in the morning, Mr. Fitzroy," Jimmy suggested. "I can arrange with Baldy to give you a supper and a shakedown for the night. Anyhow, you'll want that."

And Orlando accepted gladly.

Baldy, the cook, was hospitable, and he stood the stranded Thespian a supper in the cookhouse, and provided him with a rug and a blanket on the floor for the night.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went into the ranch-house for supper, and Hudson Smedley greeted them with a ready smile.

"Back already? Weren't you going to put up at the Grand Pacific after the performance?" he asked.

"No giddy performance," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver explained how, the "ghost" having failed to walk, the Hiram H. Hunker company had broken up, instead of continuing their represen-

tations. He ventured, also, to mention Mr. Fitzroy, and put in a word for him.

The rancher looked rather grave.

"The man's not likely to be of any use on a ranch," he said. "Anyhow, it's left to Peters to take on new hands. Your protege had better apply to him in the morning."

"Yes, he's going to do that," said Jimmy. "I—I hope Mr. Peters will give him a chance."

"I guess it's not likely. Men here have to work," said the rancher dryly. "A theatre isn't exactly the place to train for rough work on a Western ranch. But, if he's good, Pete will know."

And it was left at that; but Jimmy Silver could not help thinking that Orlando Fitzroy's chances of getting a "job" at Windy River were slim—very slim indeed.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Nothing Doing!

**N**OPE!" Pete Peters was speaking, or, rather, bawling. He was, as Lovell remarked, putting on his highest gear.

"Nope! Git!"

The powerful voice of the ranch foreman was heard far and wide, as Jimmy Silver & Co. came out early in the morning. They were rather anxious to know what was to happen to Mr. Fitzroy, and they came out before breakfast to learn. Now they were learning!

Pete Peters, with a quirt tucked under one arm, stood with his big boots firmly planted, and his hands in his pockets, staring with a grim frown at Orlando Fitzroy.

The hapless young man was asking for a job, and getting some exceedingly plain talk from Mr. Peters.

Pete Peters was irritated by the whole business. There had been some "grouching" among the cowpunchers, on account of the refusal of all leave to go to the "show" the night before. Pete,



who really was a good-natured man, though his manners were rough and ready, had been made to feel that the outfit regarded him as a tyrant—as they did for a few hours, though they soon forgot all about it. This was annoyance to Pete Peters; and, at the same time, he was hard worked and anxious. Even his iron frame was not insensible to fatigue, and he had spent sixteen hours in the saddle the day before; and now he was up at dawn for another sixteen. And a bunch of steers had gone astray—possibly stolen by some rascally gang of half-breeds and run off into the foothills. On top of all this, here was one of the actors—a slim, baby-faced nincompoop, in Pete's opinion—asking for a job on the ranch, just as if he was a real man, as the foreman said in utter disgust. So Pete let himself go; and when Pete let himself go he could be eloquent.

His eloquence almost scorched the hapless Orlando.

"Nope!" he roared. "There ain't no job going on this hyer ranch for a baby-faced play-actor, with hands like a gal. No, sree! You take that from me—there ain't! You hike back to the railroad, and steal to town, and ask for a nursemaid's job there. That's your holt."

"I can work," mumbled poor Orlando. But Pete Peters did not listen.

"You work! You don't look hefty enough to play!" he snorted. "Why, I could pick you up and break you 'tween my finger and thumb!"

"I say—" began Lovell.

The foreman gave him a glare.

"Has Mr. Smedley asked you to run this hyer ranch for him, young Lovell?" he asked.

"Eh! No."

"Then don't you butt in."

"Look here, Pete—" said Jimmy Silver.

"Has the boss made you foreman in my place, young Silver?"

"No, you ass! But—"

"Then you shut up till he does. Now, you nincompoop, you apology for a moon-faced milkmaid," continued the foreman, "you git! Hear me? You vamoose the ranch instanter, before I push you down with my little finger and you fall down dead. Catch on?"

There was a chortle from half a dozen cowpunchers looking on. The Windy River outfit were rough, good-natured fellows, but they had little sympathy with softness. And undoubtedly Orlando Fitzroy did look most exceedingly "soft."

But, soft as he looked, there was a streak of obstinacy in Orlando. Instead of "getting," as it would have been wise to do, he stood his ground, and tried to argue the point.

"I can ride—" he recommenced.

"A rocking-horse, I guess," snorted Mr. Peters. "Get out of my sight, do, before you make me ill."

"But I say—"

"Not going?" roared the foreman. "Then, by gum, I'll give you a start. Hop it, lively."

The quilt slid down into Pete's hand, and he cracked the thong with a report like a pistol-shot. The long lash sang round Orlando's legs, and Mr. Fitzroy had to "hop it" very "lively" indeed. He made a backward jump, and the foreman followed him up, still cracking the whip about his slim legs.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"Look here, chuck that, Mr. Peters!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver indignantly.

"You shut up, young Silver!"

Headless of Jimmy's remonstrances, Pete Peters followed Orlando up, driving him along with the cracking whip.

The lashes of the whip did not touch

Orlando, as he "hopped" each time and escaped any hurt; but certainly, had he ceased hopping, he would have been hurt.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "I'll go! I'm going, ain't I?"

"You are!" snorted Pete. "You're going, and I'm helping you! Hop it lively!"

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

The whole crowd followed on, roaring with laughter. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed, sympathizing with the hapless victim, and yet hardly able to help smiling at the scene. It certainly had its comic side—for all but Orlando.

Hopping frantically to escape the cuts of the quilt, Orlando retreated, but as fast as he retreated, Pete Peters followed him up, cracking the whip round his legs.

Orlando was breathless, and his face streamed with perspiration; he was very nearly at the end of his tether.

"Let up!" he gasped faintly.

The foreman "let up" at last.

"Are you going?" he hooted.

"Ow! Yes! Oh dear!"

"Leg it then."

Pete Peters dropped the whip under his arm, and the breathless, perspiring Orlando "legged" it as fast as his breathless state would allow, amid roars of laughter from the outfit.

Pete, grinning, walked back to the ranch with his whip tucked under his arm, satisfied with having given a cheeky tenderfoot a salutary lesson.

Orlando Fitzroy sprinted on to quite a distance, and stopped at last, sinking into the grass from sheer fatigue. Jimmy Silver & Co. joined him, and he blinked at them pathetically.

"Rough luck, old man!" said Lovell.

"It's too bad."

"Ow!"

"I was afraid there was nothing doing," said Jimmy Silver. "You'll have to hoof it back to Mosquito now." "I've left my bag in the cook-house," groaned Orlando.

"I'll get it for you. Better not show up there again."

Jimmy Silver went back for the bag, while his chum condoled with Mr. Fitzroy. When Jimmy rejoined them, Orlando had recovered his breath, and was on his feet again. The chums of Rookwood made a collection among themselves, and handed Orlando fifteen dollars, which after some hesitation he accepted.

"Sorry you haven't had a better time at the ranch, old top," said Jimmy. "But that will see you as far as a town on the railway anyhow."

"I guess I'm not troubling the railroad yet," said Mr. Fitzroy darkly. "I ain't finished with that foreman of yours."

Jimmy looked rather anxious. It was natural enough that Orlando should be annoyed. But any attempt at retaliation was likely to be disastrous for him. The hefty foreman of Windy River certainly could have picked the slim young man up with one hand and thrown him about like a rabbit.

"It was only his fun you know," said Jimmy. "Pete's a good sort—only a bit waxy at times."

"So am I—at times," said Mr. Fitzroy. "I'm not thinking of handling him—I guess that's too big for me. But I'm going to make him sorry for himself before I've done with him. His name's Peters what?"

"Pete Peters," said Raby.

"Is he a married man?"

"Eh! No!" said Jimmy Silver, astonished by the question.

"Sure of that?"

"Yes, quite," said Jimmy. "What does that matter?"

Mr. Fitzroy grinned.

"It might," he said. "Anyhow, I'm not done with him. There's more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream, I guess. Mr. Pete Peters can handle a galoot about my size, but when it comes to brains, I'll undertake to walk all round any cowpuncher in Alberta. You tell him from me that I'm going to make him squirm."

"Catch me," said Jimmy, laughing. "He might come after you with the quilt again, if I gave him that message."

"Then I'll guess I'll go back and tell him."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy, in alarm. "I'll tell him if you like. I don't want to see you squashed like a pancake, Mr. Fitzroy."

"Good enough," said Orlando. "Thank you for what you've done, young gentlemen—you'll see me again. And don't forget to tell Peters that I'm going to make him squirm."

"Right-ho!"

Orlando Fitzroy shouldered his bag, and marched off up the trail towards Mosquito. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another, and smiled.

"Gas!" remarked Lovell.

"Yes—and I'll jolly well wait till he's some miles off, before I deliver his message," said Jimmy.

And it was not till dinner-time that Jimmy Silver acquainted Mr. Peters with the fact that Orlando Fitzroy had undertaken to make him "squirm." Pete received the information with a stare—he had almost forgotten the existence of Orlando by that time. Then he burst into a roar of laughter, which was echoed by the cowpunchers who heard of Orlando's threat.

It really did not seem probable that the slim young man who had played Rosalind and Ophelia would be able to make the burly foreman of Windy River "squirm." But, as the event was to prove, there was more in that slim young man than met the eye.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Mrs. Peters Looks In!

THE sun, sinking westward to the Rocky Mountains, glowed golden on the wide prairies. Outside the bunkhouse at Windy River the outfit, tired with the day's work, sat on benches and smoked before turning in. Pete Peters, astride of a barrel with his back against the bunkhouse, blew out thick clouds of smoke, with a face of placid contentment. A hard day's work had been done, and the cowpunchers were enjoying a little well-earned rest after supper; and Pete—satisfied with the day's work—was in the best of tempers. From the cookhouse came a musical clink of dishes and pots and pans, where Baldy, the cook, was washing up. Jimmy Silver & Co. were lying in the grass, listening to the yarns of the cowpunchers, as the sun sank towards the Rockies. It was a pleasant evening in the late Canadian summer, and peace and contentment seemed to reign on all hands.

From the rough prairie trail came a sound of wheels, and heads were turned to look. A buggy came into view, driven by a man from Mosquito—Silas Smith, who was Mr. Lesage's assistant at the Mosquito store. There was a passenger in the buggy; and the cowpunchers noted, with interest, that it was of the feminine variety—a graceful cloaked figure, with the face covered by a veil.

There was a hasty movement among the Windy River cowpunchers at this unexpected sight. Pipes were taken out of mouths, as all the crowd jumped to their feet. Every hand was ready to lift a Stetson hat at a glance from the lady in the buggy. Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped out of the grass at once. The



buggy stopped at a little distance, and Silas Smith jumped down and hitched his horse to a post. Then he came over to the group outside the bunkhouse, with a serious, not to say solemn, expression on his brick-red countenance.

"Peters here?" he asked.

"Hyer!" said the foreman.

"She's come!"

"What?"

"She's come!" said Silas, in a low voice, full of mystery. "Sorry, old man, but it had to be. She comes into Mr. Lesage's store at Mosquito, and asks if we knowed where you was. Could we refuse to answer, now?"

Pete Peters stared at him blankly. He seemed too astonished to speak. There was a murmur of surprise and interest among the outfit, and all glances were turned on the veiled lady sitting in the buggy, at a short distance, just out of hearing.

"Know him?" says Mr. Lesage. Silas went on. "Certainly, miss; he's foreman at Windy River!" And then she asks how she's to get over hyer, and the boss lends her the buggy, and tells me to drive. Could a man do less?"

"What the thunder!" gasped Pete Peters. "Are you trying to fool me, Silas Smith? What do you mean?"

"I mean that she's come."

"I can see she's come. Who is she?"

"You don't know?" exclaimed Silas.

"How the thunder should I know?"

"Ain't you never expected her to get arter you, then?" demanded Mr. Lesage's assistant, in surprise.

There was a murmur among the outfit. This smacked of mystery; and all eyes, instead of being fixed on the veiled lady, turned on Pete Peters. That burly gentleman grew crimson.

"Get arter me?" he repeated. "Why should she, or any other shemal, get arter me, Silas Smith?"

"Well, I reckoned you'd be expecting it more or less," said Silas. "When a man leaves his wife behind him in Ontario, and promises to send for her to come out to Alberta, and doesn't send, why, ain't it natural that sooner or later she should get arter him?"

"His what?" gasped Pete.

"His wife!"

"Whose wife?" yelled the foreman of Windy River.

"Yourn!"

Pete Peters' bronzed face grew redder than the sunset with wrath. He clenched a huge fist, and made a stride towards Silas Smith.

That young man dodged back hurriedly, and took refuge behind Spike Thompson.

"Let up, Pete!" he called out. "I ain't come hyer to punch you. I've come to bring your deserted wife."

"Let me get at him!" roared Pete. "I'll teach him to make jokes about deserted wives to me! All you galoots know that I never was married."

"We know you've said so," answered Spike Thompson.

"Don't you take a man's word, then?" howled the foreman, turning his wrath upon Spike.

"Sure! But if that she-critter says she's Mrs. Peters, I s'pose she knows what she's talking about. I know I ain't one to give a lady the lie, Pete Peters."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Red Alf.

"There's lots of galoots name of Peters, I s'pose," growled the foreman. "It's a mistake, and well Silas knows it. The lady won't say I'm her missing husband when she sees me."

"That's soon settled," said Skitter Dick.

The Skitter walked over to the buggy. Skitter Dick was a handsome young cowpuncher, with polished manners that

were rather rare on an Alberta ranch. He helped the veiled lady to alight with a graceful courtesy that was all his own.

"My hat!" Lovell murmured to Jimmy Silver. "This is a queer bizney. What do you think, Jimmy?"

"Blessed if I know," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Here she comes!" murmured Raby.

Leaning on Skitter Dick's arm, the veiled lady approached the group. Every hat went off at her approach, excepting Pete's. The burly foreman seemed too dazed even to raise his hat.

There was a sudden cry from the veiled lady.

"Pete!"

"She's calling him Pete," whispered Spike. "Looks as if he's the real Peters—what?"

"I guess so!" said Red Alf.

"Pete! My dear husband!"

Leaving Skitter Dick's helping arm, the veiled lady ran towards Pete Peters, with outstretched hands. The foreman of Windy River stared at her blankly.

"My dear husband, I have found you at last!" cried the veiled lady, and she threw herself into the foreman's arms.

"Oh, smoke!" gasped Pete.

He started back, almost feverishly pushing off the veiled lady's encircling embrace.

"You're making a mistake, mum!" he gasped. "I ain't your husband!"

"Pete!"

"I ain't anybody's husband!"

"Pete! Have you forgotten your own Charlotte?"

"I—I—I never had any pesky Charlotte!" exclaimed the bewildered foreman of Windy River. "It's a mistake, mum—I give you my word it's all a mistake! I never was married."

The veiled lady sobbed.

"I never, never believed that you had deserted me, Pete!" she wailed. "I always hoped to hear from you. I always believed that you would send for me as you promised when you left me in Ontario years ago. Pete! Pete! How can you be so cruel?"

"Shame!" shouted Spike Thompson indignantly.

The harassed foreman glared at him.

"I tell you—"

"His own wife!" said Skitter Dick. "I'm surprised at this, Pete—more surprised than I can say. Don't be a brute!"

"An Injun half-breed wouldn't treat his own wife like that!" commented Silas Smith.

"Pete!" wailed Charlotte.

"I tell you I ain't married, and therefore I never had no wife, no Charlotte, no nobody!" yelled Pete Peters incoherently. "This hyer is a mistake, or else it's a trick!"

"Pete!"

"Keep off!" yelled Pete Peters. "I won't be hugged by a shemal—and I won't be kissed! You orter be ashamed of yourself, ma'am, a-hugging a man you don't know!"

"Shame!" roared Skitter Dick.

The veiled lady tottered back as the foreman rudely repulsed her. She sank down on a bench, and her face dropped into her hands. Her slim form was shaken by sobs.

There was a long silence, broken only by the hysterical sobbing of Charlotte.

Every eye was fixed accusingly on Pete Peters.

The Windy River foreman stood rooted to the ground. Baldy, the cook, came out of the cookhouse, with a frying-pan in his hand, and indignation in his fat face.

"Don't you take on, ma'am," said Baldy comfortingly. "We're all your friends hyer, ma'am, even if your husband is a brute."

"I ain't her husband!" roared the foreman.

"Oh, can it!" said Baldy. "Think we're going to believe that this hyer shemal came all the way from Ontario, looking for you, and you a stranger to her! Can it!"

"Shame!"

"I swear that I never was married in Ontario, nor anywhere else," said Pete Peters huskily. "I don't want to be rude to any young shemal, but I ain't her husband, and never was."

"Pete! Dear Pete!"

"Don't you go calling me dear Pete, ma'am, when I ain't no relation of yours."

"My dear husband!"

"I ain't your husband!" shrieked Pete Peters. "If you was a man, I'd quit you for saying so!"

Sob!

The hapless Charlotte continued to sob bitterly, and the whole outfit gazed at Pete Peters with scorn and reproach in their gaze. And then Hudson Smedley was sighted, coming from the ranch-house.

"Hyer's the boss!" said Skitter Dick. "The boss will see right done, or I don't know him! He won't have a man on this hyer ranch who deserts his own wedded wife."

"I tell you—"

"What's the trouble here?" asked Hudson Smedley quietly; and a dozen voices were raised to explain all at once.

#### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

##### Not Pleasant for Pete!

CHARLOTTE continued to sob, while Hudson Smedley listened, in great amazement, to the explanation of the strange scene. He gave Pete Peters a very dubious look.

"You believe me, boss?" said the foreman huskily. "I give you my word, Mr. Smedley, that I've never seen that young shemal before this evening."

"I'm bound to take your word, Peters," said the rancher. "There must be some mistake. Madam, calm yourself—"

Sob!

"Calm yourself, I beg," said Hudson Smedley. "You claim this man, Pete Peters, as your husband?"

"Yes," whispered the veiled lady.

"Where were you married?"

"In Ontario, seven years ago."

"Seven years is a long time," said the rancher. "You have mistaken Pete Peters for your husband, I imagine."

"His name was Pete Peters, and he came to Alberta," said the veiled lady.

"He wrote to me once that he had a job as foreman at a ranch on the Windy River, and hoped to send for me later. He did not tell me the name of the ranch."

"Have you that letter about you now, madam?"

"It is in my trunk at the hotel in Mosquito."

"A man could ride over there," said the rancher, with a very keen look at the veiled lady.

"Let a man go," gasped Pete Peters. "If I ever wrote any sich letter I'll eat it!"

"You are the owner of this ranch, sir?" asked Charlotte.

"That is so, madam."

"Then if you will be so kind, will you send a man for my trunk? I shall stay here. I must."

"Stay here?" gasped Pete Peters.

"It is my duty to stay with my husband, even if he repudiates me," said Charlotte firmly, in spite of her weeping.

"When my trunk is brought here everyone shall see the letter you wrote me, and know that I am your wife. These



gentlemen will not see a poor, deserted woman cruelly treated."

"That we won't, ma'am!" exclaimed Spike Thompson. "You say the word, ma'am, and we'll lynch him."

"I tell you—" roared Pete Peters. "You've said enough, you have, Pete!" snapped Spike. "Ain't the lady offered to perdue your own letter, in your own fist? What more proof does any galoot want than that?"

"Sure!" said a dozen voices. Hudson Smedley looked utterly perplexed. Pete Peters looked like a man in the grip of a nightmare.

"It ain't true," he said faintly. "It's a mistake, or it's a pesky game of some sort. I never was married."

"Look hyer, ma'am—" "Oh, Pete—Pete!" cried Charlotte hysterically, and she threw her arms round the foreman's neck before he could elude her. "Unsay those cruel words! Tell me that you have not forgotten me—that you do not wish to desert your poor little Charlotte! Pete! Dear Pete!"

"Ow! Leggo!" roared the foreman. "Madam—" gasped Hudson Smedley.

"Pete! Oh, dear, dear Pete—" "Make her leggo!" gasped the foreman of Windy River in muffled accents. "She's choking me! Make her sheer off!"

"His own wife!" said Spike Thompson. "I never knowed Pete was that sort of a hoodlum. Shame!"

"Shame!" "Own your own wife, Pete," said Skitter Dick.

"This hyer shemale ain't nothing of the sort!" shrieked Pete Peters. "Shame!"

The foreman fairly dragged himself away—so forcibly that the veiled lady tottered. Arthur Edward Lovell sprang to catch her, and glared at Mr. Peters.

"You brute—" he shouted. "Look hyer—" "Let me help you, ma'am," said the chivalrous Arthur Edward, and he assisted Charlotte to the bench.

The veil had partly fallen aside, disclosing a pretty face, with red cheeks and dark lashes. Charlotte hastily readjusted it, as if to hide her blushes from the crowd of cowpunchers.

"This is a strange business," said Hudson Smedley at last. "You are very welcome, madam, to remain this night at the ranch. I will order a room to be prepared for you. When your trunk arrives from Mosquito to-morrow the matter will be cleared up."

"Thank you, sir!" said Charlotte, weeping. "I should have brought proofs with me if I had even dreamed that my dear husband would deny my claim. Oh, Pete, how can you?"

"I ain't—" "Can it!" interrupted Skitter Dick. "Don't you tell this lady she's lying, or you'll land into trouble, Pete Peters!"

"The matter must be left over till to-morrow," said Hudson Smedley. "Then it will be proved one way or the other."

"Proved enough already, boss," said Silas Smith. "I ask every gent present, would that lady come here and claim a perfect stranger for her husband when he wasn't such?"

"Sure!" said Skitter Dick. "It's plain enough."

Certainly it seemed plain enough to all the Windy River crowd. Proof was to arrive in the morning, and the veiled lady was ready to abide by it. What could be clearer? Indeed, the unhappy Pete Peters was almost wondering by this time whether he really was a married man or not!

"It's a rotten shame!" said Lovell THE POPULAR.—No. 453.

hotly. "Don't take any notice of the man, ma'am. He isn't worth it."

"You cheery young cub!" roared Pete Peters.

"You brute!" retorted Lovell.

"Silence!" exclaimed Hudson Smedley. "Silence, all of you! This matter cannot be settled until to-morrow. Madam, will you take my arm to the ranch-house?"

Charlotte rose to her feet. "Thank you, sir!" she said in a shaking voice. "You are very kind. All the gentlemen here are kind, excepting the one from whom I have a right to expect kindness—my husband. He only is cruel."

"Shame!" "Pore gal!" murmured Baldy, wiping away a sympathetic tear with a greasy sleeve. "It's a shame!"

"Come, madam," said the rancher, anxious to put an end to the scene. The veiled lady hesitated. Then, with a cry, she flung herself at Pete Peters again.

"Pete! Dear Pete!" Dear Pete jumped backwards.

"Keep off! I guess— Oh, thunder!"

The burly foreman fairly broke into a run as Charlotte ran at him with outstretched hands.

He headed for his cabin, and the hysterical Charlotte pursued him to the very door.

Slam! The door slammed almost on Charlotte's nose, and there was a sound of bolts being shot.

Pete Peters, gasping for breath, sank down on his bunk, overcome with dismay and wrath and bewilderment. The next moment a face was looking in at the window.

"Dear Pete!" Slam!

The window shutter was slammed and bolted. Charlotte tottered back with an agonised cry.

"Pete! Pete! Dear Pete!" "Go away!" roared the foreman of Windy River hoarsely. "Go away!"

"Dearest Pete!" "Go away!" "Madam—" gasped Hudson Smedley.

"Say the word, ma'am, and we'll burst in that there door and have him out!" shouted Spike Thompson.

Charlotte sobbed bitterly. "Come, madam!" urged the rancher. The veiled lady shook her head.

"No!" she said. "My husband repudiates me. He does not desire me to stay here. I shall go. I will not remain where I am not wanted."

"You cannot return to Mosquito to-night, madam!" exclaimed the rancher anxiously. "I beg you—"

"I must go!" wept Charlotte. "My husband does not want me. He deserted me in Ontario, though I would never believe it. I will go. I will not see him again. He shall not hear my reproaches. Pete! Dear Pete! One last word before I go!"

"Go away!" came a frenzied yell from the interior of the cabin.

"I forgive you, Pete!" "Go away!" "You shall never see me again!" "Go away!"

The veiled lady sobbed and tottered away towards the buggy. There was a rush of chivalrous cowpunchers to help her. Silas Smith took up the reins.

"I'll look arter you, ma'am," said Silas. "As for that brute, you're well rid of him, ma'am, you take my word."

The veiled lady took pencil and paper from a little bag on her arm, and the cowpunchers stood round respectfully

while she wrote a little note and placed it in an envelope. Then she signed to Jimmy Silver.

"Will you give this to my husband?" she said. "Not now; he is angry now. In the morning. It is my last farewell to the dear Pete whom once I loved."

"Certainly, madam!" said Jimmy. He slipped it into his pocket.

The buggy drove away over the darkening prairie. Mrs. Peters disappeared from the Windy River Ranch—for ever!

And until a very late hour that night indignant cowpunchers prowled round Pete Peters' cabin telling him through the wooden walls what they thought of him. They thought many things of him, apparently, and they told him all with emphasis.

And the door did not open. For once the hefty foreman of the Windy River Ranch took "back-chat" without a word; and, indeed, if he had ventured out of his cabin that evening, even Hudson Smedley's authority would hardly have saved him from a severe handling on the part of the shocked and indignant outfit.

Jimmy Silver presented the farewell letter the following morning. Pete Peters had to emerge from seclusion to face the new day and its work, and he came out looking quite worn and weary. Dark looks were cast at him on all sides, and there were murmurs among the cowpunchers. Pete glared at Jimmy when he handed over the letter.

"What's that?" he snorted. "Mrs. Peters left it for you last night," answered Jimmy.

"There ain't any Mrs. Peters!" roared the foreman.

"Well, there's the letter, anyhow," said Jimmy.

Pete Peters tore it open savagely. He looked at it, and the expression on his face was extraordinary. He frowned, and then he gave a gasp of relief.

"The cheery hound!" he roared. "What?"

"I guess I'll skin him!" "Him! Who?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"That pesky, ornery, goldarned play-actor!" roared Pete Peters. "Look at this hyer note, you gang of pesky jays, and then tell me whether that there play-actor was a deserted wife from Ontario!"

He flung the letter at the staring cowpunchers. In a minute more all Windy River had read it, marvelling. It was an amazing letter, and it ran:

"Pete Peters,—You made me hop, and I've made you squirm, as I said I would.—Signed,

CHARLOTTE, ALIAS ORLANDO FITZROY."

The Windy River outfit fairly gasped as they slowly comprehended. Then there was a roar of laughter that rang far over the Windy River.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "What are you cackling at, you pesky jays?" roared Pete Peters.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver. Pete Peters did not laugh. He rushed into his cabin for his gun, and then rushed to saddle his horse. Heedless of the morning's work, heedless of anything, Pete Peters dashed away at a frantic gallop in search of Orlando Fitzroy. And it certainly was fortunate for both parties that Orlando was already far beyond the borders of the Windy River section!

THE END.

(Next week's topping long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. out West, is entitled: "The Trail of the Blue Diamond!")