

INNOCENT OR GUILTY? In spite of the fact that Monty Smith declares himself innocent of a bank robbery, he makes a desperate fight for freedom when the Mounted Police come to Windy River to arrest him!

Defying the Mounted!



A GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. OF ROOKWOOD OUT WEST.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Innocent or Guilty?

JIMMY!

Jimmy Silver's face clouded. The voice that called his name came from the barred window of the stores hut at the Windy River Ranch.

A face was looking out from the bars—a handsome face, but pale and worn and troubled. Jimmy Silver felt a pang as he looked at it. Monty Smith, the tenderfoot, was a prisoner in the hut—locked and barred in till the Mounted Police should come for him. And Jimmy Silver could not forget that he had been friendly with the tenderfoot, and that Monty Smith had done him a big service.

But Jimmy could not help him now. "Jimmy!"

The Rookwood junior stood hesitating, but at last he approached the barred window. It was early morning, and the glimmer of the rising sun was on the prairie and the rolling waters of the Windy River. Jimmy Silver was down very early that day. Lovell and

Raby and Newcome had not yet turned out.

Slowly Jimmy came up to the window of the stores hut. Monty Smith watched him eagerly.

"I'm a prisoner now, Jimmy," he said.

"Yes. I—I'm sorry!"

Jimmy was sorry enough—more sorry than he could say, in fact—that the man he had trusted had turned out to be a bank-robber, hunted by the Canadian police, with his photograph published in all the newspapers. But he could scarcely be sorry that Larry Lagden, the bank-robber of Prince Albert, in Saskatchewan, had been laid by the heels.

"You believe me guilty, Jimmy?"

The Rookwood junior did not answer. "I—I suppose you do!" said Monty Smith. "I—I suppose it's all against me! But, all the same, Jimmy, I'm not Larry Lagden, the bank-robber, and I could prove it!"

Jimmy stared at him.

"You gave your name here as Monty Smith," he said. "Baldy found out the name of De Courcy in your hat. If you're not Larry Lagden, you're the image of him. It's your photograph that's in the papers, with that criminal's name under it."

"It's his, not mine! My name is Monty de Courcy, and I call myself Smith for the reason I've given you—

because it's a more useful name in the West."

"Yes, but—"

"You don't believe me?"

"How can I?" said Jimmy. "I'd like to believe you—you know that. But you deliberately avoided meeting the Mounted Police when they were here. That doesn't look like innocence, does it?"

"They would have taken me for Lagden if they had seen me."

"Well, yes; but then when Baldy found your picture in the paper you bolted, and the punchers had to rope you in. Innocent men don't clear off like that, Monty."

The prisoner of the stores hut was silent. Jimmy Silver made a movement to pass on. The interview was a painful one to him. He did not and could not believe that Monty Smith was innocent, and yet his concern for the young tenderfoot was deep and real.

"And yet I'm innocent," said Monty Smith, detaining the Rookwood junior with a gesture. "I—I suppose there's no chance for me here. Hudson Smedley has sent word to Kicking Mule, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"The Mounted Police are coming for me?"

"To-day," said Jimmy.

Monty Smith shivered a little.

"And I'm shut up here like a wild animal in a trap!" he said bitterly. "To be taken away in irons, like a thief!"

Jimmy moved uncomfortably.

"If you're not Larry Lagden you can prove it, I suppose," he said. "But if you're not, you're his double!"

"I am his double!" answered Monty Smith. "And that's easily explained, too. He is my cousin!"

"Oh! Then you know him?"

"I've known him all his life, though we've never been very good friends. He was in the bank at Prince Albert, in Saskatchewan, while I was there working with a wheat firm."

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Jimmy looked steadily at the prisoner in the stores cabin through the barred window.

The story was plausible enough. Such a resemblance was not surprising in near relations. But—

"You left Prince Albert and came out to Alberta?" said Jimmy.

"Yes."

"After the robbery of the bank?"

"Yes."

"Didn't it occur to you that you might be spotted by the police and taken for your cousin—that it would have been safer to stay where you were known and could be identified?"

Monty Smith coloured.

"I thought of all that," he answered. "Yet you gave up your job and left the place where you were known and came looking for work among the ranches?"

"Yes."

"Well, why?" asked Jimmy Silver bluntly. "I want to believe you, if I can. You know that. But it's steep."

Monty hesitated.

"You've never been in such a position," he said. "I was respected in the Saskatchewan town, but everybody knew that Lagden was my cousin. He robbed the bank, injured a man there, and fled with some thousands of dollars plunder. After that, how could I stay—pointed at on all sides as the relative of a thief and almost murderer? And my likeness to my cousin made it worse. I was twice seized in mistake for him, and released again. The firm where I worked were very decent to me, but they wanted me to go. I was bringing notoriety on the place. I had to clear."

Jimmy Silver nodded. He could understand that Monty Smith's position in the town where he was known had grown intolerable—if his tale was true. But was it true?

"I came West," continued Monty. "I hoped to get away from anyone who had ever seen or heard of Larry Lagden. I dropped the name of De Courcy and took that of Smith. I wanted to bury myself in the wilds of the West till Lagden was dealt with by the police, or until the affair had died away. What else could I do?"

Jimmy was silent.

Monty Smith watched him anxiously. It was very clear that he was keen to make the Rookwooder believe in him.

"And if the Mounted Police take you and you're sent back to Prince Albert?" said Jimmy at last.

"I shall be released when I get there. There are dozens of people to swear that I am Monty de Courcy."

Jimmy breathed quickly.

"Then you've nothing to fear."

"Nothing," echoed Monty Smith. "Nothing—only a long journey by road and rail with handcuffs on my wrists, with crowds staring at me and believing me a captured criminal! I'd rather be shot!"

Jimmy shuddered.

"That's why I ran for it when that fat fool Baldy found the photograph in the paper," said Monty. "What would you have done?"

"I—I don't know! I don't think I should have run," said Jimmy. "But—but—"

"You don't believe what I've told you?"

"I'm trying to," said Jimmy desperately. "But—but—"

"Then you won't help me?"

"Help you?" repeated Jimmy.

"Help me to get out of this!" muttered Monty Smith. "You could get me out somehow—lend me a horse. Jimmy—"

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"I can't! It's impossible!" said Jimmy Silver. "If—if you could give me any proof of what you say—"

"How can I? But—but I can't stand the disgrace, the shame, the humiliation of it!" muttered the tenderfoot. "I can't face it!"

"I'll speak to Hudson Smedley, and tell him what you've told me," said Jimmy at last. "I'll do my best, Monty."

"He will not believe a word of it."

"I—I'm afraid; but I'll try."

Jimmy Silver moved on with that; he felt that if he had listened to the appeals of the man who had been his friend, he would yield—and he knew that he had no right to yield. Monty Smith, through the bars, watched him go with hopeless eyes.

Until breakfast Jimmy Silver passed by the corral fence, in deep and troubled thought.

He had trusted Monty Smith—he felt that somehow he still trusted him. But the story he had told was too strange—too steep, as Jimmy had said. If Jimmy believed it, it was pretty certain that no one else on the Windy River Ranch would do so.

To help him to escape—to help a hunted criminal to escape the police, who were in search of him—it was impossible. Would an innocent man have asked it?

"Jimmy!"

Arthur Edward Lovell's voice bawled from the direction of the ranch-house:

"Jimmy! Brekker!"

Jimmy Silver went into the ranch-house, with a troubled brow.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Baldy Catches It!

HUDSON SMEDLEY glanced curiously at his young cousin from the Old Country at the breakfast-table. He could see that Jimmy Silver had something on his mind.

"What's the trouble, Jimmy?" the rancher asked at last.

Jimmy started and coloured.

"I—I was thinking—"

"About young Smith?"

"Yes."

"It's a pesky rotten affair," said the rancher. "But you've got no call to worry, Jimmy."

"He helped me when Red Henri, the half-breed, had drawn a knife on me," said Jimmy, in a low voice.

Hudson Smedley nodded.

"I know. It's a god-darned pity; but we can't shelter a thief who came to the ranch to hide himself from justice."

"I've spoken to him this morning," said Jimmy Silver, his colour deepening. "He—he's told me—"

"It would have been wiser to keep clear of the fellow!" said the rancher, frowning a little. "But what has he told you?"

Jimmy Silver explained.

His chums listened with deep attention; the rancher listened, too, but he shrugged his broad shoulders when Jimmy had finished.

"You don't believe him?" asked Jimmy.

"Well, I should want a lot of proof before I believed a yarn like that," said Hudson Smedley, with a smile. "It might be true, of course. If so, he will be all right when they get him back to Saskatchewan."

"It's rather thick, Jimmy," said Lovell, with a shake of the head. "You're a bit soft, old chap; you let people pull your leg."

"Fathead!" said Jimmy.

"It sounds steep, anyhow," said

Raby. "Dash it all, Jimmy, anybody would spin a yarn like that when he was lagged."

"I know; but—"

"Anyhow, there's nothing doing," said Newcome. "You can't help him, Jimmy, so it doesn't matter much whether you believe him or not."

Jimmy Silver did not answer that. He had not mentioned that Monty had asked him for help to escape.

"You're bound to hand him over to the Mounted Police?" Jimmy asked, looking at the rancher.

"Sure!"

"You—you couldn't give him a chance—"

Jimmy hesitated.

"What chance could I give him?" said Hudson Smedley. "His story might be true, but the chances are a thousand to one against it. It's a matter for the police to deal with. If he's innocent, he seems to have done everything he could to make himself look guilty."

"Yes, rather," said Lovell.

"The troopers will be here for him this morning," added the rancher. "They will have an accurate description of Lagden, the bank-robber. If they think that Monty Smith is the man, they must take him."

"You believe he is the man?"

"Sure!"

Jimmy Silver said no more. But when he left the ranch-house after breakfast he was in a thoughtful and worried mood. Somehow, Monty Smith's story seemed to ring true in his ears, strange as it was. And he shuddered to think of the young man, manacled and marched away like a criminal, with the finger of scorn pointed at him on all sides, and innocent all the time.

From a distance, Jimmy caught a glimpse of the prisoner's face at the window; it was white and desperate. He turned away, and went into the corral for Blazer, and saddled the horse for a ride on the prairie. He could do nothing; and that look on Monty Smith's white face haunted him.

In the stores hut the "tenderfoot" paced to and fro, his hands clenched and his face white and set. Innocent or guilty, there was despair in his heart; his faint hope in Jimmy Silver had left him now.

A fat face was framed in the little window, and Baldy, the cook, grinned in at him.

Monty Smith gave him a fierce look.

"I hear you've been spinning a good-sized yarn, young man!" grinned Baldy. "You ain't yourself, but somebody else—what?"

"You fat fool!"

"What?" roared Baldy indignantly.

Monty Smith came to the window with a gleam in his eyes. There was no glass to the window, and the shutter was open. Baldy's fat face was close to the bars.

The tenderfoot reached out suddenly between the bars, caught Baldy's fat nose between finger and thumb.

Tweak!

There was a yell of anguish from the cook.

"Yoooooohoooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pete Peters, staring at the scene from the bunk-house. "You're caught, Baldy!"

"Groogh! Led do by dose!" spluttered Baldy. "You durned galoot, led do by dose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the cow-punchers.

"Groogh! Oh! Ow! By gum, I'll drill you if you don't led do!" shrieked the Windy River cook.



HOLDING THE HUT!
 "Stand back, or—" said Monty Smith. Crash! It was Trooper Bright's carbine that rang out, and a loud cry came from the man in the hut. The bullet had struck the revolver from Smith's hand. (See Chapter 3.)

Baldy dragged at a "gun," and jerked it out of his pocket. He shoved the barrel of the revolver fairly in the prisoner's face between the bars of the window.

"Now, then, you durned galoot, if—"

Monty Smith's eyes blazed. He let go Baldy's fat nose and instantly grasped the barrel of the revolver.

Baldy had not the least intention of pulling the trigger. He carried the "gun" for swank, certainly not for use. But as the prisoner jerked at the pistol Baldy's fat finger unconsciously pressed the trigger, and there was a sharp report. The bullet scored along Monty Smith's arm, tearing the sleeve and grazing his skin. The next moment he had torn the revolver away.

A moment more and the butt of it was in his hand, and the barrel was aimed through the window at Baldy Bubbin.

"Vamoose, you fat fool!" rapped out Monty Smith.

Baldy gave him one blink, and then dodged back and ran for it. Fat as he was, Baldy disappeared round the corner of the stores hut with the speed of a

startled prairie rabbit. There was a roar from the cowpunchers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pete Peters strolled over to the window and looked in. The barrel of the captured revolver flashed before his eyes, but the foreman of Windy River did not even blink.

"I guess you'd better hand over that gun, Smith!" he drawled.

Monty Smith gave him a black and bitter look.

"I'm keeping it!" he said.

"I reckon—"

"I'm not going to be taken away alive!" said Monty Smith between his teeth. "I've told you I'm an innocent man—"

"Can it!" said Pete tersely.

"Believe me or not, as you choose! I'll never be taken out of this hut alive!" said Monty Smith.

Pete Peters looked at him fixedly, and his hand went to the gun in the holster at his belt. Monty Smith levelled the revolver.

"Touch that gun and you drop in your tracks!" he said.

"By gum, you've got sand!" said the foreman of the ranch calmly. "I guess I'll hide that fool Baldy for letting you

get hold of a gun! But you'd better hand it over, Smith."

"I've told you what I mean to do!" "I calculate you'll sing to a different tune when the troopers come for you!" drawled Pete, and he strolled away, turning his back carelessly on the levelled revolver.

A few minutes later loud yells were heard from the cookhouse. The ranch foreman was letting Baldy, the cook, know what he thought of his folly, with the help of a heavy cowhide boot.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wanted!

JIMMY SILVER, as he trotted on the prairie trail on Blazer's back, caught sight of a couple of red coats and Stetson hats. He recognised Corporal Cayley and Trooper Bright, whom he had seen at the post at Kicking Mule. He joined them on the trail, to ride back to the ranch with them.

"You've got Lagden there, what?" the corporal asked.

"Either him or his double," said

Jimmy. "He says that his name is De Courcy, and he's Lagden's cousin, and very like him."

"I guess he can prove that at Prince Albert if it's the case," the corporal remarked. "I should have expected Larry Lagden, the bank-robber, to put up a better yarn than that."

"Too thin!" observed Trooper Bright. "Anyhow, he's our mutton!"

"We've got his description and his picture," said Corporal Cayley. "If he fits them he's our man."

"He fits them right enough," said Jimmy Silver. "But—"

"I guess it's O.K., then. Sergeant Kerr was pesky glad to get the news at Kicking Mule," said the corporal, with a grin. "He's telegraphed to Saskatchewan that he expects to rope in Larry Lagden here. I guess it's a leg-up for the Kicking Mule post. It ain't often that a chance like this comes our way."

The two troopers were evidently keenly anticipating the capture; but Jimmy Silver could not share their satisfaction. His face was clouded and his heart was heavy as he rode to the Windy River Ranch with them.

Hudson Smedley met them as they dismounted at the ranch-house. His bronzed face was very grave.

"You've got the man?" asked the corporal. "You haven't let him vamoose?"

"He's locked in the stores hut yonder."

"Good!"

"But he's got hold of a revolver," said the rancher. "He says there will be shooting before he's taken."

The corporal smiled.

"I guess Larry Lagden is wanted, alive or dead," he answered. "If he's keen on shooting, I guess we can give him all he wants."

"I guess so!" smiled Trooper Bright, and he unslung his carbine.

"He seems to be desperate," said the rancher.

"We've handled desperate men before."

Corporal Cayley and the trooper strode away at once to the stores hut. A crowd of the Windy River cowpunchers gathered round, looking on with keen interest, and ready to help if required. But few of them believed that there would be "trouble." Monty Smith, in the short time he had been at Windy River, had impressed them as a good-natured tenderfoot, and nothing at all in the style of a "bad man." Their belief was that he would "wilt" at the sight of the uniforms.

But Jimmy Silver was doubtful. He looked on with a clouded face, wondering miserably whether the sun was to look down upon a terrible tragedy that morning.

The stores hut was locked on the outside. Corporal Cayley turned back the key, but the door did not open.

A voice called from within:

"Stand back!"

"I guess not!" returned the corporal. "We want you, Larry Lagden!"

"I am not Larry Lagden!"

"Step out and let's get a look at you, then. I guess we don't want you if you ain't our mutton!"

"I am Lagden's cousin, and like him."

"Can it! You're our man!" said Corporal Cayley. "You've got this hyer door jammed, somehow. Quit fooling, and let us in!"

"Listen to me," said Monty Smith quietly. "I'll come out and surrender on condition that you allow me to go a free man to Prince Albert and prove

that you've made a mistake in identity, but I will not go as a handcuffed prisoner. Is that agreed?"

The corporal laughed.

"I guess not! You're going to have the darbies on as soon as I get hands on you, Larry Lagden! You're too slippery a customer, and I guess I ain't taking any chances with you! Open this door!"

"Take care! I am armed!"

"Mr. Smedley, the man's blocked the door. I guess you'll have to let us break it in."

"You're welcome to do what you think fit," answered the rancher.

"Bring an axe here, boys!" called out Pete Peters.

Pike Potter came up with the axe from the cookhouse, which Baldy used for chopping logs. Corporal Cayley took it in his sinewy hands.

He lifted the axe, swung it back over his shoulder, and brought it down on the door of the stores hut with a terrific concussion.

Crash!

The door was thick and strong, of stout pinewood, but it quivered and groaned under that hefty stroke.

There was a sharp cry from within the hut:

"Keep off, I tell you!"

"Monty's getting his mad up!" grinned Skitter Dick.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash!

The heavy axe rang again on the door with all the strength of the Canadian corporal's arms.

Trooper Bright stood by, carbine in hand, ready to shoot if shooting was wanted.

In a grinning half-circle the cowpunchers stood, evidently looking on the whole proceedings as more or less of a joke.

Only Jimmy Silver's face was very grave.

He knew Monty Smith better than the outfit did, and he knew that there was courage and determination beneath the careless, good-natured exterior of the Windy River tenderfoot.

His heart throbbed to the crashing of the axe, and at every instant he expected to hear the ring of the revolver from within.

Crash, crash!

Strong as the door was, it was not built to withstand attacks like this. A long crack showed down the centre now.

Crash!

"There she goes!" said Pete Peters.

The door split into halves. One half hung on the hinges; the other slipped out and fell to the ground. Within stood a heap of packing-cases and lumber that Monty Smith had stacked into a barricade.

"Coming out now?" shouted the corporal.

"No!"

"I guess we'll get you!"

"I warn you to keep off!"

"Can it!" said the corporal.

Crash! Crash!

The heavy axe dashed on the barricade within the doorway and sent it flying. Half the doorway was unblocked, and in the opening the white, desperate face of Monty Smith appeared, the eyes gleaming behind a raised revolver.

"Stand back, or—"

Crack!

It was Trooper Bright's carbine that rang out, and a loud cry came from the man in the hut. Jimmy Silver sprang forward, his heart throbbing. But there was a shout from the cowpunchers and a laugh.

"Well done!"

"I guess that was a bullseye—sure!"

The bullet from the carbine had struck the revolver from Monty Smith's hand, sending it spinning across the hut, smashed. Monty Smith, his arm jarred by the shock, staggered back, hardly knowing what had happened to him. Save for the numbing jar to his arm, he was not hurt; but for the moment he was too bewildered to act.

"Come on!" the corporal panted.

He dropped the axe and plunged through the tumbling barricade into the hut, with Trooper Bright at his heels.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Dead or Alive!

MONTY SMITH backed across the hut, white, desperate, savage. Innocent or guilty, he was desperate now, and fighting for his freedom. His arm tingled and hung helpless, but he had recovered his wits. The corporal and the trooper hurled the packing-cases aside and came plunging through. The cornered man was unarmed now, and they did not think of shooting. It only remained to collar him and snap the handcuffs on his wrists.

But they had not counted on the desperation of the hunted man. For a few moments, as they cleared away the barricade, Monty Smith stood leaning on the farther wall, panting. But as they came at him he made a sudden movement. Catching up a heavy stool, he leaped forward instead of waiting for the attack.

The stool crashed on the broad chest of the corporal, sending him sprawling on the floor. He went down with a yell.

Trooper Bright leaped on the tenderfoot, dodging the swing of the stool, which dropped to the floor.

They closed and struggled.

The powerful trooper had no doubt of bringing down his man in a hand-to-hand struggle and already the corporal was staggering up. But somehow Monty Smith hooked the trooper's leg, and Bright went whirling over.

He crashed on the corporal, sending him to the floor again and sprawling across him.

Monty Smith stood free and unassailed.

He made a spring for the open doorway. Before the troopers could gain their feet the tenderfoot was outside in the free air.

There was a roar from the outfit.

"He's loose!"

"Seize him!" shouted Hudson Smedley.

There was a rush.

Monty Smith's desperate eyes blazed round him for a moment, but every way of escape was blocked.

The hands of the cowpunchers were almost upon him.

But he was not captured yet. He turned and grasped at the low roof of the stores hut, and dragged himself up with the activity of a lynx. Skitter Dick grabbed at him and caught his ankle; but Monty's other foot kicked back, and the Skitter let go his hold, with a loud roar, as he caught a bootheel with his chin.

The next second Monty Smith was on the roof of the hut, and clambering thence to the ridge of the cookhouse roof.

Corporal Cayley and the trooper came rushing out of the hut, breathless and furious. But the tenderfoot was already far out of their reach.

"Surround the cookhouse!" ordered Hudson Smedley.

"You bet, boss!" said Pete Peters. "He ain't getting away!"

The shouting cowboys spread out in a wide circle enclosing the cookhouse. From the ridge of the roof Monty Smith stared down at them. On all sides his escape was cut off. He could not descend without falling into grasping hands.

Jimmy Silver called up to him: "Monty, chuck it, old man! There's no chance!"

"That's good advice, I guess!" said Pete Peters. "Cut it out, Smith! You're booked!"

"Not while I'm alive!" answered Monty Smith.

Corporal Cayley set his teeth. "I guess you're our mutton, Larry Lagden!" he said. "Are you coming down off that roof?"

"No!"

"Trooper Bright, draw a bead on him, and pull trigger when I give the word."

"Yep."

Bright fetched his carbine from the hut, where he had dropped it. He loaded it carefully, and took aim at the figure sitting astride of the roof-ridge.

There was a breathless hush. Jimmy Silver's heart was sick within him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome stood very still, their faces pale.

Monty Smith looked down, and his handsome, flushed face showed no sign of fear as he looked almost into the barrel of the carbine.

"Are you coming down?" shouted the corporal.

"No!"

"You're wanted, Larry Lagden, dead or alive! I guess I'd rather take you along to Prince Albert Town alive, but take your choice. Trooper Bright, fire when I say 'three!'"

"You bet!"

The whole crowd stood icily silent now. All eyes were upon the desperate man on the roof of the cookhouse. Even Baldy had come out into the open to look on with breathless interest.

Trooper Bright took a steady aim. His eye glanced along the barrel and the carbine bore full upon the wanted man.

Monty Smith made no movement. "One!" said the Corporal.

Steady as a rock stood the trooper, steady as a rock the hunted man sat astride of the cookhouse roof ridge, looking down.

"Two!"

There was a buzz of deep-drawn breath among the watching cowpunchers. Hudson Smedley bit his underlip. But he uttered no word.

It was for the Mounted Police to deal with the situation in their own way.

"Three!"

The last word was followed by the crack of the carbine.

Crack!

Jimmy Silver gave an involuntary cry. His startled eyes watched Monty Smith, in the expectation of seeing the hapless man roll from the roof and crash to the ground. But Monty Smith did not fall. He was seen to jump violently and clutch harder at the ridge. The bullet had struck a lock of hair from his head.

"Gee-whiz!" murmured Pete Peters tensely.

"I guess you're off your shoot. Trooper Bright!" rapped out Corporal Cayley. "You'll have to burn powder again."

Jimmy Silver, watching the corporal intently, saw for a second a deflection of his eyelid, answered by a similar sign from Trooper Bright. And he realised that the shot, which had gone so close, had not been intended to strike the man on the roof. Trooper Bright was trying to scare him into surrender.

The trooper took aim again.

"Coming down?" roared the corporal.

"No!"

Crack! rang the carbine.

There was a sharp cry from Monty Smith. He clapped his hand to his shoulder.

"Winged, by thunder!" ejaculated Pete Peters.

But Monty Smith did not fall. The coat on his shoulder had been cut, the bullet had grazed his skin. But that was all, and Monty Smith realised now that he was being played with, and he burst into a scornful laugh.

The corporal muttered an emphatic word.

"I guess that jay can't be scared," he said. "Mr. Smedley, can your man lend me a ladder?"

"Sure!"

And in a few minutes a long ladder was reared against the side of the cookhouse, and the corporal mounted, followed by the trooper. Monty Smith slid down the slope of the roof, and the onlookers caught their breath, fully expecting him to slip over the gutter and come to the ground. But he stopped at the ladder, and, lying on the slope, kicked it outward.

"Look out!" roared Skitter Dick. But the warning was no use to the corporal and his follower. The ladder flew from the wall, crashing over to the ground, and Corporal Cayley and Trooper Bright dropped from it. Monty Smith clambered back to the roof ridge, panting, and on the ground, the cor-

poral and the trooper picked themselves up, breathless, bruised, and shaken.

"That tenderfoot is some lad!" said Skitter Dick admiringly.

Corporal Cayley dragged his revolver from his belt.

"You god-darned fire-eater, will you come down?" he roared.

"No!"

For a moment it was even chances whether the corporal pulled trigger or not. Monty Smith looked down at him coolly. But the corporal gritted his teeth and thrust the revolver back into his belt.

"I guess we'll have you, all the same," he said.

Monty Smith shrugged his shoulders.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Roped In!

JIMMY SILVER went into the ranch-house to dinner. For a time there was a cessation of hostilities.

Corporal Cayley and the trooper were giving the hunted man a rest, and Monty Smith was still on the roof of the cookhouse, watching for a chance to escape. But there was little chance for him. Half a dozen cowboys had been told off to watch him, and they had their lassos ready. Monty Smith could not descend without being roped in at once. Perhaps the corporal considered that he would get tired of his hopeless resistance and surrender of his own accord, but the hunted man gave no sign of it.

But when the sun was sinking towards the Rocky Mountains in the west the corporal made a move.

He rose from the fence-rail and yawned and called up to the fugitive:

"I guess you're tired of sitting up there like a hen on a roost, Larry Lagden! Are you coming down?"

"No!"

"Then I guess I'm after you."

He spoke a few words to Bright, who walked away to the bunkhouse and came back with a coiled lasso on his arm. Monty Smith looked down at him, and Jimmy saw the hapless man set his teeth with a desperate expression.

"Corporal Cayley!" exclaimed Jimmy, catching his breath. "You're not going to rope him down—"

The corporal looked at him.

"Sure!" he answered.

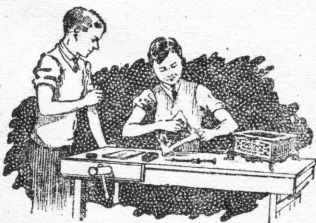
"He will break his neck, or a leg at least, crashing on the ground!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Sure!" assented the corporal again.

"But—but—"

"I guess it's his own funeral," said

(Continued on next page.)



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Corporal Cayley. "I've given him plenty of chances to come down."

Jimmy suppressed a groan. Trooper Bright was already swinging the lasso. Whiz!

The lasso flew.

The noose dropped neatly over Monty Smith's head and shoulders. He made a frantic attempt to throw it off, but did not succeed. The loop was round his waist, and a jerk of the rope tightened it there. Monty Smith clung to the ridge.

"I guess we've got him," said the corporal coolly. "Now, then, Larry Lagden, are you coming down quietly?"

"No!" shouted Monty Smith.

"Then it's your funeral. Drag on that rope, Trooper Bright."

"You bet!"

Jimmy Silver was white as chalk. Monty Smith was clinging to the roof ridge, but the steady drag on the rope was certain to tear him away from his hold. Then would come the glide down the slope of the roof, the fall over the edge, the sickening crash on the earth below. Hudson Smedley rapped out an order, and three or four cowpunchers rushed into the bunkhouse, and came back with a big blanket. They ranged themselves under the taut rope, holding the corners of the blanket for the lassoed man to fall into.

It was all that they could do, and it was something.

The corporal lent the trooper his aid in dragging on the taut rope. Monty Smith was torn from the roof ridge.

"Steady!"

Bump!

It was in the blanket that the hunted man landed, with an impact that almost tore it from the strong hands of the cowboys.

The blanket sagged down, almost touching the ground. But the cowpunchers held it, and Monty Smith was saved. He rolled dizzily out of the blanket into the hands of Corporal Cayley and Trooper Bright.

He struggled feebly, but there was no chance now. There was a sharp click as the handcuffs fastened on his wrists.

"I guess you're our mutton now, with the wool on," smiled the corporal.

He glanced round.

"You're lending us a hoss, Hudson Smedley, to get this man to Kicking Mule?"

"Of course."

Pike Potter led up a saddled horse. Monty Smith was lifted into the saddle, and his feet were lashed to the stirrups.

The unhappy man's face was white and set.

Thud, thud!

There was a sound of rapid hoofbeats on the prairie trail. In the westerling sunlight a horseman was seen spurring towards the ranch. He wore the uniform of the Canadian Mounted Police.

Corporal Cayley glanced at him.

"That's Trooper Grey, from Kicking Mule," he remarked. "I guess Sergeant Kerr is keen on news of Larry Lagden. Hallo, Grey!"

The newcomer reined in his horse.

"Message from the sergeant, corporal," he said. "Here's the telegram!"

"What gol-darned telegram?"

"You know the sergeant wired to Saskatchewan this morning, corporal. Here's the answer from Prince Albert. It came through, and the sergeant sent me off at once with it."

Corporal Cayley took the telegram. He stared at it blankly.

"Gee whiz!" he stammered.

He held it, staring at it, and a dozen

others read it as he held it. It was startling news from the police headquarters at Prince Albert, in Saskatchewan.

"Larry Lagden here, under arrest."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Cleared!

JIMMY SILVER gave a gasp of relief.

Amazed faces surrounded the bound prisoner on the horse. Corporal Cayley looked like a man in a dream.

The words of the telegram were repeated from lip to lip.

"Larry Lagden here, under arrest!"

"Larry Lagden under arrest at Prince Albert!" said Hudson Smedley blankly. "Then—then—"

Monty Smith gave a cry.

"What's that?"

"Then he's not Larry Lagden!" ejaculated the corporal.

Monty Smith panted.

His vindication had come suddenly, dramatically. There was no doubting the official telegram. While the troopers had been hunting down Monty Smith, the "wanted" man had been under arrest all the time—already in the hands of the Saskatchewan police.

Corporal Cayley drew from his pocket the official description of the wanted man. He read it through slowly, and stared at Monty Smith. The description was that of the tenderfoot of Windy River; the attached photograph might have been Monty Smith's photograph. But it was evident that Monty Smith was not the man.

Monty Smith was smiling now.

"Well," said Hudson Smedley, at last, "Monty Smith isn't the man you want, corporal."

"I guess not," said Corporal Cayley slowly.

"Got that at last?" inquired the tenderfoot sarcastically. "But it's a mistake any man might have made, on my looks, and I don't bear any malice. You've given me a high old time to-day, and I'm not the man you want. Who's going to let me loose?"

He looked round, smiling.

Trooper Bright, at a sign from the corporal, began to unfasten the rope that secured Monty Smith to the horse. The corporal himself removed the handcuffs.

Pete Peters stepped forward to help the late prisoner down. A dozen cowpunchers pressed forward to shake his hand or smack him on the back.

He was cleared now, in the eyes of the Windy River outfit, and he was their comrade again.

"I guess we're done here, Bright," said the corporal, and he mounted his horse.

Trooper Bright followed his example. The two horsemen rode away.

Trooper Grey joining them, leaving Monty Smith a free man.

Monty Smith watched them disappear over the rolling prairie, in the sunset, with a curious expression on his face.

Then he turned to Hudson Smedley.

"I guess you're satisfied now that I'm not the bank-robber of Prince Albert, boss," he said.

"Quite!" said the rancher.

"Sure!" said Pete Peters.

"You should not have resisted arrest, though," said the rancher. "It was a mistake, as it has turned out; but the Mounted were doing their duty, and you were in the wrong."

"I—I know! But I couldn't face it," said Monty Smith. "I'd rather they put

a bullet through my head." He looked round.

"Well, you all know the facts now," said the tenderfoot. "And I guess, boss, that I know you don't want me on the ranch any longer. You don't want the cousin of a bank-robber at Windy River, and I know it. I'm not waiting to be fired. Good-bye, all!"

The tenderfoot walked away to the corral. Jimmy Silver caught him by the arm and swung him back.

"Hold on, you ass!" he said.

"Let up, Jimmy! I'm going."

"You need not go," said Hudson Smedley quietly. "I guess I'm not the man to be down on you for what your relation has done. You can go if you like, but if you don't like, you're welcome to stay at Windy River."

Monty Smith's handsome face brightened.

"I'd be glad to," he said. "I'll try to make myself useful, boss, so you won't be sorry for giving me a chance." And the tenderfoot stayed.

It was a couple of weeks later that Trooper Bright rode up to the Windy River Ranch, and drew rein at the bunkhouse.

"That tenderfoot galoot about?" he asked.

Baldy, the cook, looked out of the cookhouse.

"He's here," he answered. "You ain't after the man again, Bright?"

"I guess not; but I've got news for him, and for all the boys, answered the trooper. He tossed down a newspaper. "Chew on that, you 'uns."

And the trooper rode on to the ranch-house to carry his news to Hudson Smedley.

Monty Smith picked up the paper. A dozen of the outfit gathered round him to read a marked paragraph; Jimmy Silver & Co. among them. Monty Smith's face changed colour as he read:

"Larry Lagden, the bank-robber, broke gaol yesterday, and so far the police have failed to find him. A man answering his description was seen on a west-bound train, and there is a rumour that he has stolen a horse in the Black-foot Hills and fled to the west. The police in Alberta have been warned to look out for him."

"Gee-whiz!" exclaimed Pete Peters. "That ornery galoot ain't done with yet. If he came west from the Black-foot Hills, I guess he's heading for Alberta."

Monty Smith stood with a thoughtful, clouded brow as the group dispersed. Jimmy Silver stayed with him.

"The man's not likely to come up here to Windy River, Monty," said the Rookwood junior.

"I reckon that's just what he's likely to do," said Monty quietly, with a troubled look. "If he's found out I'm here he'll—"

Monty's face was deeply troubled. "He's bound to be taken before long," said Jimmy Silver.

Monty Smith nodded, and went back to the cookhouse, sorely troubled. As day followed day, and there was no news of the recapture of the bank-robber, Jimmy Silver wondered what had become of the hunted man, and whether he would ever be seen on the banks of the Windy River.

He was soon to know!

THE END.

(You'll all enjoy reading: "A Rogue On The Ranch!" next week's topping tale of the Rookwood chums out West.)