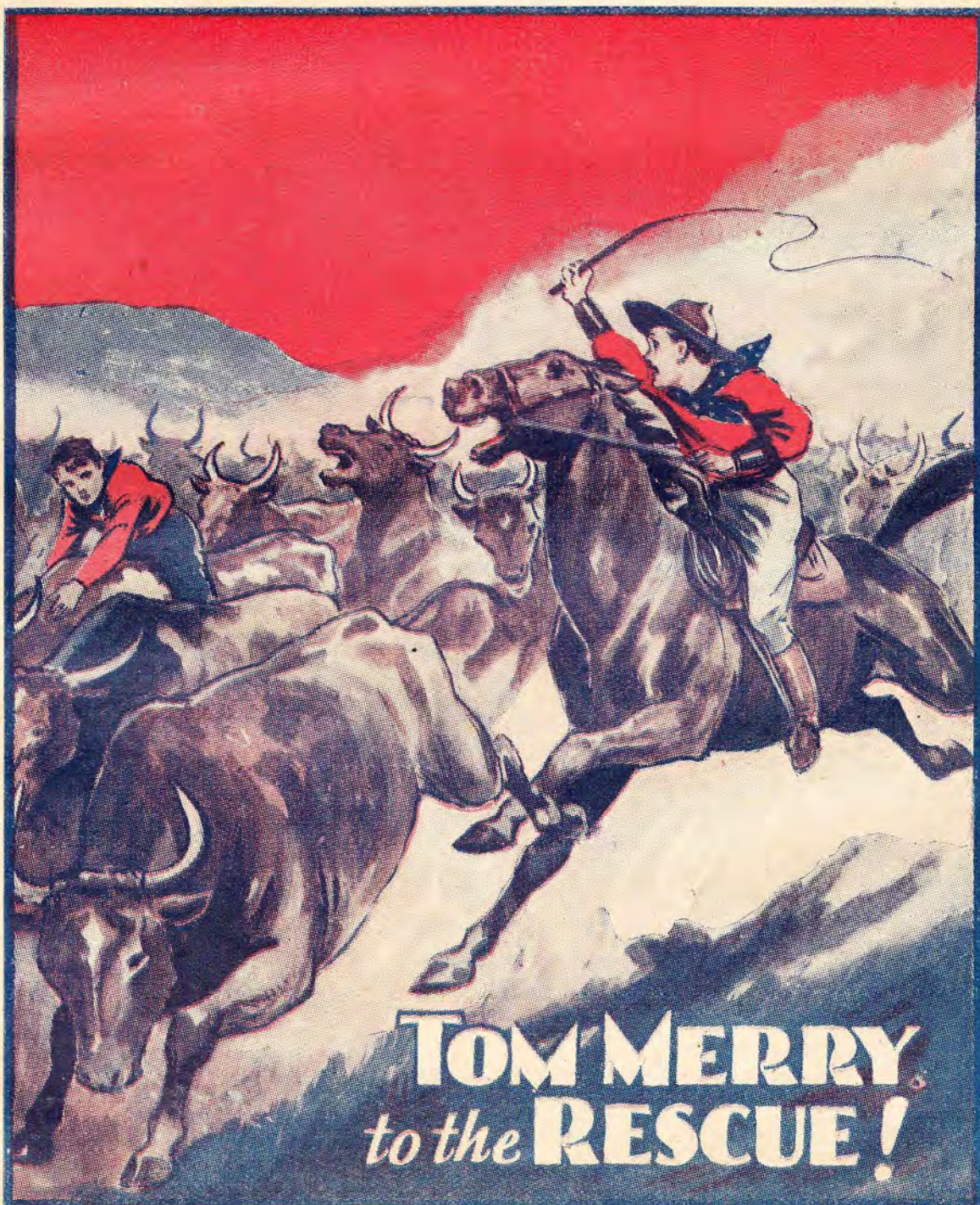


A SHILLING A WEEK FOR A YEAR—MUST BE WON! (SEE PAGE 17)

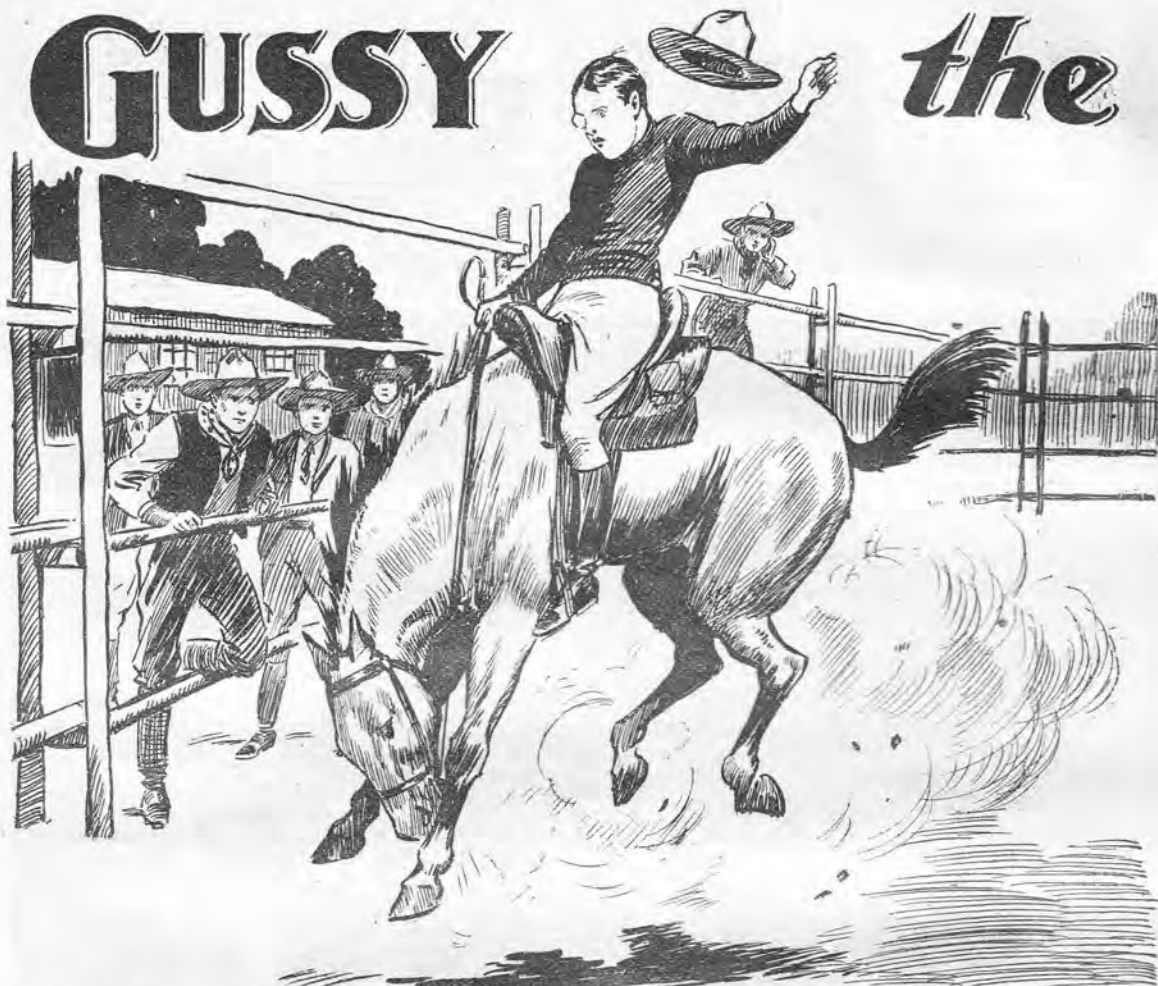
CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS—
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

The GEM

2^d



GUSSY *the*



Tom Merry & Co. set out to show the cowboys of Arizona that boys from the Old Country are not so soft as they think. And Gussy, the "dude," electrifies them all when he gets on the back of a vicious mustang!

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry & Co. in Arizona!

"ALL aboard!" sang out the stage-driver. He came out of the cabin, where the horses were changed, wiping his beard with his sleeve. The stage was standing in the trail, and the four horses had been put in.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were standing near the team, looking at them with great interest, while Skimpole was jotting down notes in his notebook. The novelty of travelling on the rough trails of the Far West in a stage-coach had not yet palled upon Tom Merry & Co., fresh as they were from England and an English school.

All was new to them—all keenly interesting. The stage-coach, the stage-driver, the four wiry horses, the log hut where the teams were changed, twenty miles from everywhere, and the dusky half-breed in charge of it, the long, long trail thick with red dust that churned up under the horses' hoofs, the vast table-land, shut in by soaring peaks and blue sky, all formed a new world to the juniors from St. Jim's.

They had seen many things that surprised them in New York, in Chicago, in the Rocky Mountains; but Arizona, as Wally remarked in his newly learned American language, "capped the stack!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake clambered on top of the coach. Arthur Augustus followed them. Colonel Stalker went inside, and so did Skimpole. The genius of St. Jim's

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sat down in a corner and put a notebook on his knee, and jotted away contentedly. Wally whistled to Pongo, who had gone to investigate a rabbit-burrow, and was not to be whistled back.

Wally started in chase of him, and Pongo dodged in the long grass.

"All aboard!" repeated the stage-driver.

"Hold on!" called out Wally. "I can't come without my dog!"

"Burst your dorg!"

And the driver gathered up his reins and cracked his whip. The team started, and the coach was in motion. Colonel Stalker, who was taking the boys to Poinsett's Ranch, the home of Tom Merry's uncle, leaned out of the window.

"Hold on, driver!" he said. "There's one of my crowd behind!"

"I guess I've got to get into Gold Brick on time," said the driver; and he squirted a stream of tobacco juice emphatically over the juniper that grew along the trail.

"I guess you'll wait!" said the colonel calmly.

"I guess I won't!" said the driver.

The colonel's hand came out of the window, and his steely eye looked up at the driver. There was a six-shooter in his hand, and it glistened in the sun.

"I guess you'll wait," he repeated, with an intonation in his voice that made the driver look round.

The stage halted.

"You're playing a full hand, pardner," said the driver, with a grin. "I guess you take the deck!"

BRONCHO BUSTER!

By

Martin Clifford.

Wally came panting up, with Pongo under his arm. He slung the dog up to the roof for Arthur Augustus to catch, and, of course, Pongo plunged on D'Arcy's knees and fastened his teeth in the leg of his trousers.

Arthur Augustus gave a wail of anguish.
"Ow! Take the howlin' brute off! He's wuinin' my twousahs!"

Wally clambered up.

"Oh, don't you begin, Guss! As if Pongo'd hurt you! Come here, old Pongo—come here, you beast, or I guess I'll larrup you some!"

Pongo crouched at his master's feet, and the stage rolled on. It bumped and jerked over a rough road.

Arthur Augustus dusted his trousers and looked at his cheerful young brother with feelings far too deep for words.

"My hat!" said Blake. "This is what I call a rough road! It's been getting bumpier and bumpier ever since we left Tombstone."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as a beastlay woad! It is difficult for a chap to keep his seat."

"Oh, it's fun!" said Tom Merry, who always looked on the best side of everything. "Besides, it's good for the liver to be shaken up like this! So long as we don't go over it's all right!"

And the stage bumped on. The trail ran directly down to the low, rocky bank of a river, which gleamed wide in the rays of the southern sun.

Arthur Augustus put up his monocle and looked up and down the river for any sign of a bridge, but there was nothing of the sort to be seen.

The stage-driver, chewing a fat Mexican cigar, drove straight on, without looking to left or right, apparently intending to plunge right into the river.

The juniors from St. Jim's looked a little puzzled, and Arthur Augustus was decidedly alarmed. He reached out with his cane and gave the stage-driver a poke behind the shoulders.

The burly driver jerked round his head.

"Thunder! Wot's the game?" he cried.

"Pway where are you dwivin' us, deah boy?"

"I reckon I'm driving you to the Gold Brick trail."

"But you are goin' into the wivah!"

"I calculate we cross the Santa Cruz every journey, sonny."

"But there is no bwidge!"

The stage-driver grinned.

"Do you mean to say you dwive through the wivah?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I kinder reckon."

And the stage-driver, without bothering himself to reply to any more questions, gave all his attention to his team. The horses evidently knew the way well, for they dashed straight on towards the water without a sign of alarm.

"Bai Jove! We shall all be drowned!"

"Rats!" said Jack Blake. "If the coach crosses this stream on every journey, I suppose it can cross it this time all right!"

"My word!" said Wally. "This is fun! We don't get anything of this sort over at St. Jim's, kids!"

"I am wathah glad we don't, Wally."

"Yes, you're such an old fogey!"

"I wefuse to be wegarded as an old fogay!"

"Then don't be one! Why, at St. Jim's now they're going in for lessons, and grinding Latin in the class-rooms, and we—"

"Well, I must say this beats Latin hollow!" said Tom Merry. "I don't know that I should care to settle here, but it's ripping for a holiday! Every chap ought to be able to rough it!"

"Yaas, wathah! I have no objection to wuffin' it, but I have a stwong disinclination to havin' my clothes wuined, you know. I have a feelin' that we shall be dweadfully splashed, even if we are not drowned!"

"Hold on!" shouted the driver.

The juniors of St. Jim's held on. The coach was dashing down the bank and the horses took to the water. Although it could not be seen by a stranger to those parts, the water was shallow here, and there was a ford across the Santa Cruz. The horses went in to their breasts, and

the water rose over the axles. The coach rocked and bumped on the sandy bed of the river.

Arthur Augustus was holding on desperately. Blake held on to the coach with one hand, and to D'Arcy's left ear with the other.

"Pway release me, Blake!" D'Arcy gasped. "You are weally hurtin' my beastlay yah, you know!"

"Wait till we're safe! Do you want me to be drowned?"

"Certainly not, but—"

"Then ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! You are hurtin' my beastlay yah! Ow!"

The lurch of the coach sent the swell of St. Jim's reeling, and tore his ear from Blake's grip.

"Ow! I'm fallin' off!"

"Hold on, duffer!"

"I wefuse to— Ow, ow!"

Skimpole put his head out of the window, disturbed by the rocking of the vehicle. He blinked round through his spectacles.

"Dear me, it feels very rough just here; and that looks like water—ow-w-w-w!"

A big splash came up and swamped the genius of St. Jim's, and he popped back into the coach, gasping like a stranded fish.

"Dear me, I am quite wet! It is undoubtedly water!"

Tom Merry clutched Arthur Augustus by the collar and held him on. The passengers and the luggage were rocking about on top of the rocking coach, and Pongo was barking furiously. The team plunged on gallantly, and went dashing up the farther side of the ford, and dragged the coach from the river. Then away merrily over the rough grass track to the west!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he wiped splashes of yellow mud from his coat with his handkerchief. "Bai Jove, I wegard this as wotten! Tom Mewwy, I am beginnin' to think that a fellow can have too much of wuffin' it!"

But Tom Merry only laughed.

CHAPTER 2.

On the Prairie!

WHOA, there!"

It was a couple of hours after the passage of the ford of the Santa Cruz. At a point where a huge ceiba-tree rose like a tower from the grass, the stage-driver pulled in his team.

The stage halted, and the juniors looked round them in wonder.

There was no sign of habitation to be seen, and they could not guess why the vehicle had stopped on such a solitude.

Behind them the dusty trail lay back to the river. Far ahead on the right rose a low range of foothills. Ahead, to the left—the south-west—a grassy plain ran on, apparently limitless, streaked here and there with scrubby bushes.

"Hallo! What are we stopping here for?" asked Tom Merry.

"I guess you light down."

"Get down? Why?"

"It's the fork!"

"The—the what?"

"The fork. Light down."

Colonel Stalker stepped out of the coach. Skimpole followed him, and the colonel signed to the juniors on the roof to alight. They scrambled down in wonder. They

did not know much about the stage trail, but they had imagined that they were going to some destination or other.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "If it's more camping out I for one have no desire to wuff it! My clothes are ruined already!"

"Get the baggage down!" said the driver.

"Lend a hand!" said the colonel.

"I guess I'm paid to drive this coach!" the man on the box remarked casually.

"I guess you'll dump that baggage down!" said Colonel Stalker.

"I guess not!"

The colonel made a step towards the driver. The juniors had known only the kindly, good-natured side of Colonel Stalker, and the revelation of the hard aspect of his nature was a surprise to them.

The colonel slid his hand into his pocket where he kept the six-shooter he had produced before. He did not show it. The driver met his eyes squarely, and then stepped down without another word.

"I guess you can't lay over old Stalky!" said the colonel.

And the driver apparently "guessed" so, too, for he brought the baggage down off the roof of the coach without further argument.

The trunks were dumped into the grass, and then the stage-driver remounted his box, and cracked his whip.

"I reckon I'll give 'em the news in Gold Brick," he said. "They'll like to know that there's a dude about. I guess so, some!"

And he drove off towards the foothills.

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"Are we staying here, sir?" he asked.

"Looks like it, sonny!" said Colonel Stalker, laughing. "The Tombstone stage-line doesn't come farther our way than this. The hearse is going on to Gold Brick. The trail forks here."

"Oh, I see!"

"That trail goes down south to the ranch."

Tom Merry & Co. looked in the direction of the colonel's outstretched finger.

A brown line of juniper marked the trail to the south-west, which had previously escaped their notice.

"Bai Jove! Have we to walk that?" asked Arthur Augustus, in alarm.

"You can walk, I suppose?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas; but I can't cawwy my twunks!"

"They can be left here."

"I should uttably wufuse to leave them here! I have already left more than half my baggage at Gwawestone—"

"Tombstone, ass!" said Blake.

"I weally do not care a wap whethah it is Tombstone or Gwawestone! I have left ovah half my twaps there, to come on by wagon, and I should absolutely wufuse to leave the west in this wild spot!"

"There's a wagon from the ranch coming," said Colonel Stalker.

"Oh, I see!"

"Blessed if I see it!" said Wally. "I kinder reckon that you're off your guess, sir! I don't opine there's any shebang passing over here!"

"Weally, Wally, I wish you would talk English!"

"Do you talk English when you're in a foreign country?"

"This is not a foweign countwy. I wufuse to wegard it as anything of the sort! You could be understood if you talked English, and I think you should show a good example to the natives."

"Rats, old son! What's the matter with good American? I kinder guess I can talk the language some! I'm pretty hefty at picking up a lingo!"

"Where's the wagon, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

Colonel Stalker grinned.

"It mayn't be in sight for a few hours. You see, the stages passes this spot every third day, going on to Gold Brick. Mr. Poinsett arranged to have the wagon meet it each time, so as to catch us when we came. He couldn't be certain within a few days when we should get here. This isn't New York, you know, with elevated railroads to travel on!"

"Oh!"

"Well, I shall be glad of a west, aftah knockin' about in that wotten old wattlewup," said D'Arcy. "I wathah think I will sit down. But pway, deah sir, what is the Gold Bwick you were alludin' to?"

"It's a camp."

"Oh! Some fellows camping out here?"

"It's a permanent camp—been in existence three or four years," explained the colonel. "It's a mining camp, you see. Fellows found gold there, and staked out claims and camps. If the claims peter out, they vamoose."

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If the place keeps on paying, the camp will grow into a town, I guess. That's how it's done in Arizoney."

"Bai Jove, how intwestin'! I should awfully like to have a look at the camp while we are out West!"

"You would find a lot of rough galoots there."

"I suppose they wouldn't hurt me?" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "Of course, I should wufuse to put up with any nonsense!"

The colonel laughed, and did not pursue the subject. Arthur Augustus looked for a soft spot to sit down and rest. He chose one, and sat down. He remained in a sitting posture while one could have counted the thousandth part of a second, and then jumped up with a terrific yell.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Ow! Ow!"

"Thunder!" exclaimed the colonel, in alarm. "Is it a tarantula?"

"Ow! Ow!"

"Is it a snake bite?"

"Ow! I have sat on a wotten thorn, or something!"

Jack Blake burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! He's sat on a prickly plant! It's all right, Gus; there's no danger; it's only the pain! You're all right!"

"Am I all wight?" shrieked the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's. "I wegard you as a beast, Blake! I wegard you as an uttah beast! I am sewiously hurt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This laughtah is in the vewy worst of taste, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Wally, if you cackle at your eldah bwotthah you will get a feahful thwashin', so I warn you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Skimpole was laughing, and Pongo was barking.

The colonel joined in the merriment.

"Thank your lucky stars it wasn't a bite!" he said.

"You want to look out for snakes, I guess, and for the poison spiders. You're all right!"

But Arthur Augustus did not feel all right, and it was a considerable time before he ceased to growl.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Changes His Clothes!

COLONEL STALKER produced corncake and cheese and dripped meat from his wallet, and the juniors sat on trunks and boxes and ate a hearty lunch.

They were hungry in the keen, exhilarating air of the Arizona upland. As they ate, their eyes searched the rolling plain to the south for some signs of the wagon from the Poinsett Ranch.

Tom Merry's brow was very thoughtful.

He was thinking of his uncle, and the destination he was now so near to. Gabriel Poinsett was a millionaire of the West, and he had cabled to England for Tom Merry to come out to the ranch. Instead of beginning the new term at St. Jim's, Tom Merry had sailed for America. He was enjoying the scamper across half the world hugely. He would have many tales of adventure to tell when he returned home to interested circles in the junior studies at St. Jim's. But there was a serious side to his journey.

His uncle was very rich and very eccentric. His eccentricity was sufficiently shown by a cable to England which had cost many pounds. If he liked his sister's son, he intended to make Tom Merry his heir. If he did not take a fancy to the boy, Tom Merry's expenses were to be paid and he was to go back to England.

Tom Merry was the last fellow in the world to become a fortune-hunter, and he did not give much thought to the financial side of the matter.

At the same time, he was anxious about the impression he would make upon Mr. Poinsett.

There was something very curious in being sent for to be looked at, like a parcel of goods on approval, as it were.

And Tom Merry wondered, too, what his uncle was like.

He had not seen him since he was a little child, and they would meet as complete strangers.

And so Tom, in spite of his coolness, was feeling just a little nervous about his first meeting with Gabriel Poinsett.

He thought over the coming meeting as he ate his lunch. The meal was finished, and still the wagon from the ranch had not come in sight. Blake inquired the distance, with the thought of walking it, but was discouraged by the information that it was ten or twelve miles.

Ten or twelve miles on an English road was a good walk; it was a giant's task on the rough road of the prairie.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not thinking of walking, he was thinking of the first impression he would make at the ranch, and feeling extremely worried about the state of his clothes.

As they evidently had some time to wait, D'Arcy thought of a really brilliant idea, and he began to unstrap one of his trunks.

"What are you up to?" called out Blake.

"I am goin' to change my clothes, deah boy!"

"What! You are going to what your which?"

"Change my clothes! I feel extremly untidy, and I wathah considah it would be bettah to make a decent appearence at the wanch, you know."

"Well, of all the duffers!"

"Pway do not address me as a duffah, Blake! I have no time to thwash you now!"

Blake grunted. Arthur Augustus unfastened the trunk, and proceeded to remove his outer garments.

Colonel Stalker smoked his big Mexican cigar and grinned. But the swell of St. Jim's was in earnest.

He unfolded a beautiful pair of trousers, and laid out jacket and waistcoat ready, and brushed a new silk hat.

that it was a big-limbed man in a red shirt who was coming along, and he was still half a mile away.

He dressed himself with silent dignity, taking no notice of the chuckles of the juniors. Gradually he assumed the elegant appearance the others were accustomed to see when the swell of St. Jim's sauntered into the quadrangle of the old school. His trousers had a beautiful crease, and his waistcoat contained all the hues of the rainbow, and a few more. His jacket was cut by a genius, and fitted like a glove.

His gold watchchain was of the most elegant design, his collar was gleaming, and his necktie tied as only he could tie it. His silk hat was glimmering in the sun, and his new boots rivalled it in brightness. His gloves, of lavender kid, seemed hardly the thing for the Arizona prairie, but there was no doubt that they looked very nice.

D'Arcy surveyed himself in a pocket mirror when he had finished, and appeared to be satisfied with the result. Except



"I can handle these horses as easily as anything!" panted Blake. "Ow!" There was a yell from the juniors as they were flung over, and a crash as half the luggage went bumping to the earth. "Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Mind my toppah!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Wally suddenly. "Is that a girl coming up the trail?"

Arthur Augustus, who had nothing but his elegant underwear upon his person at that moment, uttered a cry of alarm.

"Bai Jove!"

He dodged behind the pile of luggage in a second, and peeped anxiously round the corner.

"I say, deah boys, stop that idiotic cacklin', you wottahs! Pway tell me when she has gone by!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, I nevah expected a girl to pass on a lonely twail like this," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It is most unfortunate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway tell me when she has passed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful wottahs! Is she comin' this way?"

"It's all right, Gus!" shrieked Wally. "Now I look again, I can see that it is a man!"

"You feahful young wascal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus came out from behind the baggage and resumed his toilet. He looked down the trail, and found

for the slight sunburn on his face, he was the swell of St. Jim's again.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Bai Jove! It does one good to feel clean and well-dressed again!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A deeper laugh joined in the merry laugh of the juniors. The man in a red shirt was coming along the trail, and he seemed struck by D'Arcy's appearance.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Arthur Augustus put up his monocle and surveyed the big fellow calmly.

The eyeglass seemed to tickle the stranger still more.

He threw down the bundle he was carrying and fairly doubled himself up with laughter.

D'Arcy surveyed him disdainfully.

"Pway, my deah sir, what is the cause of your merriment?"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"I wegard you as an ass!"

The long-limbed miner—for such he evidently was, from his bundle and the spade and pick tied to it—straightened up at last, grinning breathlessly.

"Waal, carry me hum to die!" he gasped.
D'Arcy looked at him scornfully.
"It's alive, too!" gasped the miner. "It's alive, that's the best of it! Oh, if they could see him in Gold Brick! Haw, haw, haw!"
"I wogard your mewwiment as impertinent, sir!"
"Haw, haw, haw! I really must have a bead on the plug hat!" said the red-shirted pilgrim, groping at his belt for a revolver.

"I guess not!" said Colonel Stalker.
The big miner looked round, and perceived the colonel for the first time. His expression changed, and he doffed his broad, ragged hat.

"So you're back, cunnel?"
"I guess so, Long Jim!"
"I kinder reckon I'll have a bead on the plug hat, cunnel."

"I kinder reckon I'll have a bead on you if you do, Long Jim!"

"No offence, cunnel," said the big miner, with perfect good humour. "But—but—but is that—that dude Mr. Poinsett's nevvie?"
"I guess not."

"I kinder reckoned he couldn't be," said Long Jim. "I kinder reckoned he wasn't the nevvie of old Gabe. Is the nevvie hyer?"

The colonel jerked a finger towards Tom Merry.
"I'm Mr. Poinsett's nephew," said Tom quietly.
Long Jim looked him over.

"I guess you'll do!" he remarked.
"Thank you!" said Tom, laughing.

The big miner picked up his belongings and marched on.
"So-long, gents!" he said, and tramped up the trail.

But the juniors, looking after him, could see that he was still laughing.

D'Arcy, with his monocle screwed into his eye, looked after Long Jim, and then looked at his chums.

"If this is a specimen of the Awizonian mannaahs, I cannot say I think vevy much of the country!" he remarked.

"And if you're a specimen of England, I dare say Long Jim doesn't think much of our show!" remarked Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

The colonel rose to his feet.
"Here's the wagon!"

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry Meets His Uncle!

THE wagon had arrived.

A vehicle, with a broad, low body, set on thick wheels, and drawn by a couple of stout horses, rolled and creaked into view from the bushes of the trail.

A lad of about fifteen had charge of the horses, and he drove them carelessly enough, like one accustomed to them.

He was a curious-looking lad. His form was somewhat spare, his face thin, and his forehead a little wrinkled. He was hardly the full size of a boy of his age, but his manner was "all there."

He was dressed in leather trousers, tucked into huge boots, and a red shirt, with a belt, from which was suspended a holster. Whether the latter contained a revolver or not the juniors could not see.

This interesting youth brought the wagon to a halt with a flourish, and doffed his ragged, broad-brimmed hat to Colonel Stalker.

"Glad to see you back, cunnel."

"How's things at the ranch, Buck?"

"All serene!"

The baggage was packed into the wagon at last, and Pongo was persuaded to enter, and the juniors of St. Jim's followed.

Buck Finn mounted to his place and took the reins.

"I'll drive, if you like, Finn," said Blake politely.

Buck Finn chuckled.

"Guess you couldn't handle my team."

"Rats! I think I can drive as well as any chap in America!" said Blake warmly. "By the way, who may you be when you're at home? You've got enough nerve to be boss of the ranch!"

"My popper's foreman of the ranch."

"My uncle's foreman?" said Tom Merry.

Buck Finn looked at him curiously.

"That's about the size of it," he said.

"Well, then, you can give me the reins," said Tom Merry. "I'd like to drive, and I can handle the horses all right."

"I guess—"

"Oh, hand them over!"

Buck Finn hesitated, and then he handed over the reins.

Tom Merry took them, and began to drive.

The horses seemed to know that a new hand was on the

reins, for they began to get very restive, and turned from the roughly marked trail to the open plain.

Tom Merry, who was a good driver, soon pulled them back.

"They're easy enough to handle," Jack Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah! I could dwise them easily enough, if I had my dwivin' gloves here," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Let me take the ribbons," said Jack Blake. "I think I could drive them without so much blessed bumping, Tom Merry!"

"You're welcome to try!"

Tom Merry handed the reins to Blake. Blake knew a great deal about horses; but, as a matter of fact, he did not drive so well as Tom Merry.

The horses pulled the wagon from the trail into the deep grass, and all Blake's tugging and shouting and cracking of the whip would not pull them back.

The other juniors grinned.

"Go it, Blake!"

"On the ball, old chap!"

"Careful with that whip, deah boy! You nearly had my toppah off that time!"

"Blow your topper!" gasped Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I—I can handle these horses as easily as anything!" panted Blake. "I—I'm just givin' them a little rope, that's all. It's as easy as anything to— Ow!"

The off-wheel tilted into a deep gap in the prairie, and the wagon went over on one side.

There was a yell from the juniors as they were flung over, and a crash as half the luggage went bumping to the earth. The horses were kicking and squealing frantically.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Where's my toppah?"

"Ow! I'm hurt!"

"Thunder! It's an earthquake!" exclaimed Colonel Stalker.

Buck Finn gave a yell of derisive laughter.

"Is that the way you drive in the Old Country?"

"No!" growled Blake, staggering to his feet. "It's the way you keep the roads in this benighted wilderness!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Buck Finn ran to the head of the leading horse and dragged him to a standstill. The passengers all put their shoulders to the wagon and heaved it out of the rut. Then the luggage was replaced.

"I'll get you along all right now," said Blake.

"I wufuse to entah that vehicle if Blake dwives!" said Arthur Augustus, carefully brushing his topper, endeavouring to hide a dent in the side.

Jack Blake turned on him wrathfully.

"Why, you ass, you don't mean to say that it was my fault the rotten show toppled over in the rotten rut?"

"I wufuse to be called an ass, and I don't mean to say anythin' except that I wufuse to entah that vehicle again if you dwive!"

"Yes, rather!" said Wally. "I don't often agree with Gus, but I do agree with him there. I've only got one neck, and it's got to last me all my life! I move that Blake is scragged if he tries to drive again!"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, young Wally—"

"Wally's quite right!" said Skimpole. "I'm very glad this has occurred, as it will furnish an incident for my book of travels. But I think one accident is quite sufficient for that purpose."

Tom Merry laughed.

"The majority's against you, Blake!"

Jack Blake grunted.

"Oh, I don't care! You're a lot of asses! If there were a sensible chap among you—"

"Wats! I would wathah be a live ass than a dead, sensible chap!"

And it was Tom Merry who took the ribbons when the wagon restarted.

The driving was difficult enough, with two wild and uncertain animals over the roughest road Tom Merry had ever seen or heard of.

But the hero of the Shell at St. Jim's was quite equal to it.

He managed the team in a way that extorted the reluctant admiration even of Buck Finn, who was evidently inclined to regard the English boys with good-natured contempt.

The wagon rolled on. Above the level of the prairie ahead rose a column of smoke, and Buck Finn, in reply to a question, announced that it was the ranch.

The building came in sight soon afterwards.

Tom Merry had had a vague idea of some imposing structure something on the lines of an English farmhouse, but much larger.

What he saw was a frame house of imposing ugliness, with several smaller buildings still uglier scattered round it.

The stables and corrals were as ugly as the dwellings, and even the trees that grew round the ranch buildings hardly improved the general aspect of the place.

Near the ranch-house a big cowboy was washing himself under a pump. Several other fellows stood round a man who was examining the hind leg of a mustang, apparently on account of some injury.

A little man, with a pair of very old riding-breeches tucked into big boots, a soiled Mexican jacket, and a sombrero on the back of his head, with a face like

CHAPTER 5.

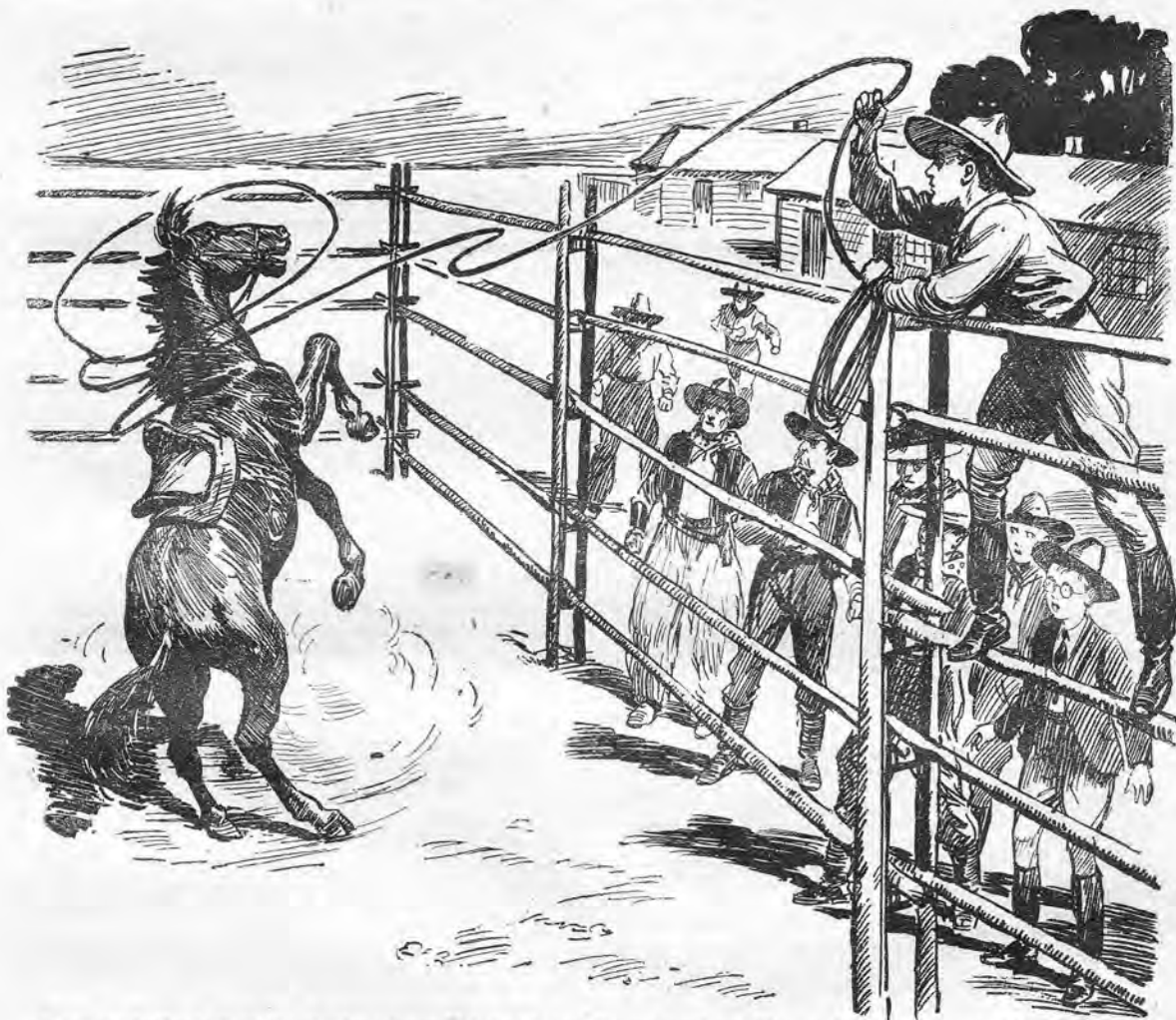
* Tom Merry's Uncle !

TOM MERRY'S uncle looked over the junior as he stepped down from the wagon.

His keen eyes searched the boy's face, and ran over his well-set, sturdy figure with satisfaction. It was easy to see that Mr. Poinsett was pleased with his first impression of his nephew.

Tom Merry coloured a little under the inspection.

He felt a great deal like a prize animal being looked over by the judges at a show, and the thought brought a smile to his lips.



Tom made the cast as the mustang tossed his head, and the moment was the most favourable possible. The rope flew from Tom's hand, the loop settled over the neck of the mustang—and tightened. "Hurrah! Roped in, by gum!" yelled Blake.

mahogany, and two eyes like gimlets, stood at the door of the ranch-house, looking out over the plain.

His eyes lighted upon the approaching wagon, and he stepped forward to meet it.

Tom Merry drew the horses to a halt.

The little man in the riding-breeches looked at him, and slowly removed the cigar from his mouth.

"I guess you handle the hosses well for a tenderfoot," he said. "Who may you happen to be, youngster?"

Tom Merry looked at him.

"My name is Merry—Tom Merry. Is my uncle here?"

"I guess so."

"Where is he?"

"Right hyer."

And the little man held out his hand, with a smile that made his mahogany face very pleasant to look upon at that moment. And Tom Merry, overcome by surprise, mechanically grasped his hand.

It was his uncle at last!

Mr. Poinsett smiled, too.

"So you're Tom!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, I'm Tom!"

"My sister's boy!" said the rancher, in a softer voice.

"You're like her. I hope we shall pull together, Tom."

"I hope so, sir."

"You're not afraid of roughing it?"

"I like roughing it."

"Good! You can't be much of a greenhorn to handle those hosses. It was as much as Buck Finn could do, and he was brought up on a ranch."

"I guess—" began Buck Finn.

"Scat!" said the rancher unceremoniously, and Buck Finn "scatted." "I guess you're the right sort, Tom, but we'll see. Hallo, old Stalkey, I'm glad to see you again! Introduce your friends, Tom."

Tom Merry did so.

He hardly knew what to make of his uncle, and did not yet know whether he was pleased with him or not. The

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rancher's manner was curious, but Tom already knew that he was eccentric. He presented his chums. Not by the flicker of an eyelid did Mr. Poinsett show surprise when Arthur Augustus was introduced.

The appearance of the swell of St. Jim's must have struck the rancher as somewhat unique for the Arizona llanos, but he did not betray any surprise.

He greeted the juniors cordially enough, with a courtly manner that went curiously with his rough attire.

"I guess you're ready to feed," he remarked. "Finn!"

He shouted out the word "Finn" so suddenly, that Arthur Augustus jumped, and murmured "Bai Jove!"

A long-limbed, loose-jointed man in a rough shirt and cowboy trousers (or crackers) came from the group round the horses, and nodded casually to the newcomers.

This was Mr. Finn, the foreman of the ranch, and the right-hand man of Gabriel Poinsett.

"Finn, pass the word to that lazy, dirty, low-down greaser," said the rancher.

"I reckon," said Mr. Finn.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole, "I am about to see another greaser. I trust he will not be so violent as the greaser I met on the train."

Mr. Finn crossed to one of the huts, and put his head in at the door, and bawled out at the top of his powerful voice:

"Tonio!"

"Si, senior!"

"Grub!"

"Si, senior!"

"Ready?"

"Almost, senior."

"Hustle!"

"Si, senior!"

The unseen Antonio was heard bustling about. From the hut the smell of cooking proceeded, and the boys guessed that it was the kitchen of the ranch.

Mr. Poinsett led them into the main building, and though Tom Merry & Co. tried from politeness to conceal their disappointment, they did not wholly succeed in keeping a shade from their faces.

The place did not look like the residence of the Cattle King of Arizona.

The house was built almost wholly of wood with plank floors, with here and there a buffalo robe or a bearskin.

The walls were unadorned, save by a few trophies of the chase, and a map of Arizona, and another of the United States, showing the railway systems of the different states.

In the room, which was evidently dining-room, drawing-room, and smoke-room, all rolled into one, the walls were painted white, and the ceiling ditto, but smoke fumes and dust had sadly tarnished the paint.

There was a long table and rough wooden chairs, a roll-top desk, and a pipe-rack, and very little else.

The rancher looked keenly at Tom Merry.

"Kinder surprised?" he remarked.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, in his frank way.

Mr. Poinsett chuckled.

"You didn't expect to find us so rough and ready as this?"

"No."

"Well, you tell the truth, and make no bones about it, anyway," said Mr. Poinsett, with a grin of approval. "If you're afraid of a rough life—"

"I'm not."

"Then you'd like to live here for good?" said the rancher, looking him squarely in the face.

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Can't you speak?" asked his uncle.

"Yes," said Tom, with spirit. "I wouldn't like to live here for good."

"Not to go down in a will for five million or so?"

"No."

The rancher gave his peculiar chuckle.

"Good! You wouldn't like to live with your old uncle for good. You've been brought up to be too soft-handed. That's the work of Miss Fawcett, I suppose. Of course, I knew you'd be spoiled. I could trust Miss Priscilla to spoil any boy's character, I guess."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"If you're going to criticise my old governess, uncle, you had better let me clear out!" he said hotly. "You've no right to speak of her in that tone. Miss Fawcett is the best old soul in the world, and though she does try to coddle me, I can't see that I'm much worse for it. Anyway, it's only her kind heart makes her do it. I won't hear a word against her, so there! I'm willing to go straight back to England if you like."

His uncle looked at him, with a curious expression.

Handsome Tom looked at that moment—handsome and resolute, with a flush in his cheeks and a flash in his eyes.

But the rancher did not seem angered by his plain speaking. He only chuckled in that curious way that Tom Merry did not understand, and turned to Antonio, without pursuing the conversation.

Antonio, a dark-skinned Mexican, was bringing in dishes on a tray, and setting them on the table.

"What have you got to-day, Tonio?" asked Mr. Poinsett.

"The stew, senior."

"Nothing else?"

"Did you not tell me, senior, not to serve the same as at the other house?"

"Get out!"

Antonio got out.

Mr. Poinsett was evidently a martinet on his ranch, and he certainly never had to give an order twice.

The juniors were hungry enough. Night was setting in, and they had travelled far in keen mountain air that day. They took the rough wooden chairs at the table, Arthur Augustus squirming a little uncomfortably.

The rancher uncovered the big earthenware dish containing the stew.

The smell was certainly most appetising, and the boys greeted it as the rancher ladled out the mess into the plates.

Skimpole had his notebook on the table, taking notes of the room, to insert some curious facts into his book of travels concerning the homely manners of the Western American millionaires.

The room was very dusky, and Mr. Poinsett, apparently remembering suddenly that night was coming on, rapped on the table with his knife, and roared:

"Tonio!"

The Mexican slipped in at the open door.

"Si, senior."

"Lamps!"

"Si, senior."

A couple of smoky lamps were brought. They aided the scent of the stew in thickening the atmosphere of the room. The light was about sufficient to eat by, but the juniors were hungry, and they made a hearty meal.

Tom Merry was beginning to feel a little ashamed of the warmth he had shown in last speaking to Mr. Poinsett.

He felt that he ought to have remembered that his uncle was an eccentric, and made allowance accordingly.



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After the meal was over, when the rancher lighted his pipe, Tom Merry ventured to broach the subject again. "I hope you will not think I intended to be impertinent just now, sir," he said rather awkwardly; "but—" "I guess it's all right," said the rancher, with a chuckle. "I'm not angry with you, sonny. Eh, Stalky?"

Colonel Stalker blinked through a thick cloud of cigar smoke.

"The youngster's all right," he said, "and this game is rough on him."

"Bosh! It's my way, Stalky."

"I guess so, and I'm not interfering, Poinsett; but I opine—"

"Never mind what you opine, Stalky."

And Colonel Stalker smoked in silence.

The boys wondered what the two men were alluding to, but they had no idea. They were tired and sleepy, and ready for bed, and the rancher observed it.

"This way, seniors," he said.

The juniors followed him to one of the cabins, in which a candle burned. Mr. Finn, the foreman of the ranch, and father of the youthful Buck, met them near the door, and grinned at them.

"I reckon you'll find it rough quarters after the Old Country," he said.

"That's all right," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We are not grumbling."

Mr. Finn chuckled.

"No, but it's rough."

"It is wathah wuff, but we wegard it in the light of an adventure," explained Arthur Augustus, "and, weally, Mr. Poinsett is a most hospitable old gentleman."

"I calculate he's all right. You've met my boy Buck?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You like him?"

The juniors looked at one another, and were silent.



"Ow!" yelled Skimpole. A flashing hoof struck his notebook fair and square and sent it flying from his hand. Skimpole gave a gasp and collapsed on the grass!

He rapped on the table with his pipe.

"Tonio!"

"Si, senior."

"Show these young gentlemen to their quarters."

"Si, senior."

"See that there are no poison spiders in the bed, or any panthers lurking in the room."

"My hat!" murmured Blake.

"Si, senior."

"Get out, you yellow-faced coyote!"

Antonio got out, and the boys bade the rancher and the colonel good-night, and followed him. The two men remained smoking, with their feet on the stove, and talking in low tones, and their talk was punctuated by low chuckles.

CHAPTER 6.

Not Comfy Quarters!

TOM MERRY & CO. followed Antonio. They were glad to get out of the thick tobacco fumes into the passage, and gladder still to get out of that into the cool, clear air of the Arizona night.

Antonio led them straight out of the house, somewhat to their surprise.

"He's all right," said Tom Merry at last. "We haven't seen much of him so far."

"He's got nerve," said the proud father, with a chuckle. "Buck may not be much to look at, but he's got nerve. He's all there, pards."

"Yaas, I nevah noticed that any of his limbs were missing."

"I mean, he's up to snuff. I guess he would make his way in the Old Country. He'd wake 'em up!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I guess you came from a big swagger school in the Old Country," said Mr. Finn.

"Protty decent," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! St. Jim's is certainly select, not to say swaggah."

"I guess my boy Buck would get there."

The juniors stared.

The idea of Buck Finn, of Poinsett Ranch, going to St. Jim's, struck them with amazement. They concluded that Mr. Finn was only joking.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Blake, feeling that somebody was expected to laugh.

"Any joke on?" asked Mr. Finn pleasantly. "I guess my boy Buck would get ahead. He knows everything about horses and dogs, and a chap like that could soon tackle Latin and Greek, I guess."

Tom Merry did not exactly see the connection between horses and dogs and Latin and Greek, but he did not wish to wound the proud father of the hopeful Buck.

"I shouldn't wonder," he remarked.

"I reckon Buck's going," said Mr. Finn. "I've been making the dollars since Mr. Poinsett—your uncle, sir—took me into partnership. I kinder reckoned all along I'd give Buck a first chop English education. I guess an English Public school can lay over anything in New York or Boston for style, eh?"

"Yaas, that is extremewly pwobable."

"I guess it's the place for Buck. He'll get on. I guess he's going. Good-night, byes!"

"Good-night, Mr. Finn!"

And the foreman of the ranch passed on, leaving the juniors wondering whether he had been joking or not.

"This is the place, senors," said Antonio.

The juniors entered the hut, which was to serve as their sleeping quarters at the Poinsett Ranch. There was a larking grin upon the dark face of Antonio, as if he were amused at his thoughts. Perhaps the expression upon the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was also amusing to the Mexican.

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry.

The Mexican withdrew and closed the door.

The juniors looked round them.

The single candle glimmered upon the beds, which were made up on the plank floor. There were no bedsteads in the place. The toilet necessities were of the scantiest description. There was not a single looking-glass to be seen, Arthur Augustus noting that important omission at once.

"Bai Jove, deah boys!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's, as he looked round. Further words failed him, and he could only repeat feebly: "Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry's face was a study.

He looked apologetically at his comrades, and the colour began to glow in his cheeks.

"I say, you chaps, I'm awfully sorry I've got you into this! Of course, I had no idea it would be anything like this out here."

"It is rather thick," agreed Blake.

Arthur Augustus looked at him reprovingly.

"Pway don't be a wottah, Blake! Tom Mewwy natuwallly feels wathah wotten, and we ought to try to help him bear up."

"It's all right," said Wally. "Pongo likes the place."

"I am very glad this has occurred," said Skimpole, looking at the beds on the floor. "This will be a very interesting item in my book of travels."

Tom Merry was red and uncomfortable.

"Well, I can only say I'm sorry," he said.

"Pway don't wefer to it, Tom Mewwy. You natuwallly couldn't foresee anythin' of this sort. And, besides, we are pwepared to wuff it. And in my case, deah boy, I could never have consented to allow you to come out here alone. I should have felt too anxious about you."

Blake grinned.

"Don't worry, Tommy, old son!" he said, slapping Tom Merry on the shoulder. "We're all right. It's a bit of a surprise for us all. But we can go through with it, and it will be awfully good fun."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I'm glad you chaps take it so decently," said Tom Merry. "I don't mind for myself. My uncle seems to be a queer old fish, but I believe his heart is in the right place. I don't like you fellows to have to stand this, that's all."

"Oh, it's ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors, who were in fact tired enough to sleep on the floor or on the roof for that matter, turned in, and were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER 7.

Roughing It!

THE morning sun glimmered in at the windows of the cabin, but the juniors of St. Jim's were still sleeping soundly.

There were various noises from the ranch—the barking of dogs, the neighing and squealing of horses, the deep voices of men, but the sounds did not disturb the tired boys.

However, they woke at last.

There was a knock at the door, and it opened, and the greasy, grinning face of Antonio, the Mexican, appeared.

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"Will the senoritos wash?"

"Yaas, wathah! I was kept in a place in New York where I was not allowed to wash, but I pwesume things are not as bad as that here," said D'Arcy. "Pway have my bath pwepared!"

The Mexican stared, but he made his usual reply.

"Si, senor."

"That means yes, sir," explained Wally. "The Mexicans talk Spanish, you know. But this chap understands American."

"I pwefet my watah vewy warm," said D'Arcy. "And pway have some scented soap weady!"

"Si, senor!"

The Mexican disappeared.

Tom Merry was first out of the hut, and he was heard to chuckle.

Arthur Augustus followed him out, wrapped in a big bath-towel, and looked round.

In the open air on a bench a washbasin was set, with a chunk of brown-coloured soap beside it.

Tom Merry was grinning.

D'Arcy looked at the basin, and looked at the cold water in it, and then at Tom Merry, and then at several cattle-men who were grinning in the distance.

"Bai Jove!"

"Go it, Gussy! Your turn first with the bath!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, this is past a joke. Is it poss that Mr. Poinsett expects us to use this absolutely howwid awwangement?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Looks like it, Gussy."

"I—I suppose I must use it," said D'Arcy. "It is imposs to go dirty. I have not had an opportunity of washin' myself all ovah for two days, and I feel vewy wotten."

"Jolly dirty galoot you must be to want so much washin'," Buck Finn remarked.

"I wufese to discuss the mattah with you, young person."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Pway wetiah! I—"

"You can have a dip in the creek if you like," said Buck Finn. "That's what I humped along to tell you."

And he walked away whistling shrilly.

D'Arcy's face cleared.

"It's wathah cold to have a dip in the cweek," he remarked. "But anythin' is bettah than uncleanliness. Pway come on, deah boys!"

The creek certainly was cold, but the dip in the clear, clean water was welcome enough to the boys. Skimpole was the only one who declined it. He contented himself with the wash-basin, and then he took its dimensions, and made a note of the colour of the soap for his book of travels.

By the time he had finished the juniors had done their bathing, and dressed themselves.

Mr. Poinsett came out of the ranch-house, and gave them a cheery good-morning. Colonel Stalker was not to be seen.

"Ready for breakfast, I guess," said Mr. Poinsett.

"Yaas, wathah! We are extremewly peckish, as a mattah of fact, my deah sir."

"Good! Come in!"

"Isn't Colonel Stalker about yet, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

The rancher chuckled.

"He's gone," he replied. "He's got business in Gold Brick. He will be there a couple of days, so you may see him if you run over to see the camp."

The juniors brightened up.

The prospect of visiting and exploring a real Wild West mining camp was a fascinating one to them, as it would have been to most boys.

"Bai Jove, I should like to go awfully, sir!"

"Then I'll let you drive over with Buck to-morrow," said the rancher. "You'll have a look round the ranch to-day."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How did you sleep last night?"

"Sound as a top, sir," said Blake.

"Good! Here's breakfast! Tonio!"

"Si, senor!"

"Hustle, you yellow villain!"

And the Mexican grinned and hustled.

Breakfast was of a rough-and-ready but solid description, and the St. Jim's juniors, who had remarkably good appetites that morning, did their duty nobly at the table.

When the meal was over the rancher rose to his feet, and they adjourned to the open air. It was a keen, fresh morning, and the sun was shining cheerily on the grass.

"I guess I'll show you over the ranch," said Mr. Poinsett.

And the juniors followed Tom Merry's uncle upon a tour of inspection.

CHAPTER 8. The Buck-Jumper!

MR. POINSETT played the part of cicerone admirably.

He showed the boys everything there was of interest to be seen, and explained things to them in his short abrupt way. The immense corrals were of great interest to the boys. The herds of cattle on the ranch lands seemed endless.

The sight of the cowboys on their rough ponies, frequently without saddle or bridle, even, interested the juniors. The cowboys of Arizona were not exactly the picturesque figures the boys had expected to see. They were rough, long-limbed fellows, with unshaven chins and long hair, and were dressed in shirt and trousers and huge boots, all of them very much worn and extremely soiled. They cracked their whips with cracks like pistol-shots, and shouted in voices of thunder as it seemed to Arthur Augustus, at least. And the way they managed their half-tamed mustangs was admirable.

D'Arcy had an eye for the good point of a horse or a rider, and he noted the horsemanship of the cattlemen at once.

"Bai Jove, you have some good widals here, sir!" he remarked.

Mr. Poinsett laughed.

"Yes, I guess the men can handle horseflesh," he replied.

Buck Finn came up, touching his hat to the rancher, and grinning on one side of his lean face at the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Colorado's very wild, sir."

Mr. Poinsett grunted.

"Can't your popper handle him?"

"He guesses he'd better leave him alone."

"Oh, well, turn him into the corral for the present!"

"I guess I'll tell him, sir."

And Buck Finn walked away.

"Is Colowado a horse, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus, his eye beginning to glisten behind his eyeglass.

"I guess so."

"One of the best buck-jumpahs we hear about so much, I pwesume, sir?"

"Yes. No man on the ranch can ride him, but Mr. Finn ought to be able to break him in," grunted Mr. Poinsett. "Finn can handle most hosses. But he's a demon, and no mistake. I reckon I shall have to have him shot."

"I should like to see him, sir."

"Buck will take you to his corral if you like. I must run away for an hour now, but Buck will show you round."

And the rancher went into the house.

Buck Finn stopped for the juniors to come up, and walked with them to the home corral. Half a dozen ranch hands were standing by the bar of the corral with lariats in their hands, and Mr. Finn was with them, looking decidedly gloomy.

"I guess he ought to be shot," he said.

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass and surveyed the animal enclosed in the fence.

It was a splendid Mexican mustang, with a dash of the "States" horse in him, as his powerful limbs testified.

His beautifully shaped head and his bright black eyes seemed to express wickedness itself.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "What a horse!"

Mr. Finn looked at him surlily.

"What do you know about hosses?" he grunted.

"Pway don't be watty, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "I wegard that as a wippin' animal, that is all."

"Like to ride him, I guess," grinned Mr. Finn; and the cattlemen standing round burst into a loud guffaw.

D'Arcy turned his monocle calmly upon the foreman of the ranch.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Finn.

"Ho, ho, ho!" shrieked Buck.

And the cattlemen roared.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass from one to another, with a red spot coming into either cheek, and a glimmer into his eyes.

"Pewwaps you imagine that I could not wide that horse?" he said.

"Haw, haw, haw!" yelled Mr. Finn, going off into a fresh explosion. "Haw, haw, haw! Carry me hum to die!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" screamed Buck Finn. "Him ride Colorado! Ho, ho, ho!"

"I wathah think I could wide that horse."

"Oh, don't!" beseeched Mr. Finn. "Don't say it any more, sir! You gimme a pain in my ribs, I guess!"

(Continued on the next page.)



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THE OBEDIENT DOG.

Lady: "Call your dog off—he will bite me!"

Boy: "Sorry, lady, but his name's Caesar!"

—CHRISIE PRINCE, 2, Brougham Road, Southsea, Portsmouth.

HE DID!

Teacher: "Give me a sentence with the word 'demonstrate' in it."

Sambo: "De books was fallin' off de shelf, so I puts dem on straight."

—FREDERICK JONES, West Ham Open Air School, Fyfield, Ongar, Essex.

THE LEFT AND RIGHT OF IT!

Skinny: "Why are you so fat?"

Fatty: "Oh, I eat what's right."

Skinny: "Then I suppose I am thin because I eat what's left!"

—REG CONLON, 53, Denton's Green Lane, St. Helens, Lancashire.

NO SUBSTITUTES!

Teacher: "Why are you late, Tommy?"

Tommy: "Father wanted me at home."

Teacher: "Wouldn't someone else have done?"

Tommy: "No, teacher. Dad was giving me a spanking."

—L. JAMES, 31, Kilmore Road, Forest Hill, S.E. 23.

WHAT DID HE MEAN?

An American touring Europe sent his son a picture postcard bearing the following inscription: "Dear son,—On the other side of this card you will see a picture of the rock from which the Spartans used to hurl their defective children. Wish you were here. Love from Dad."

—ARTHUR CROOK, 4, Birch View, Burton-on-Irwell.

IT SUITED HIM.

Prison Governor: "These paper bags are wretchedly made."

Prisoner: "I can leave if my work does not suit."

—SAM JONES, 524, Liverpool Road, Peel Green, Patricroft, Manchester.

IS THAT SO?

American tourist: "What is that small building over there?"

Englishman: "Small! That's the largest building in this town!"

American: "Why, we have buildings in New York a thousand times higher than that!"

Englishman: "Oh, quite! That's a lunatic asylum!"

—D. GRAY, 91, George Street, Paisley.

HE SPOKE THE TRUTH!

Schoolmaster: "What is the meaning of one twenty-fifth?"

Jones: "I can't remember, sir."

Schoolmaster: "If you had twenty-five boys visiting you and only one apple what would you do?"

Jones: "Wait until they had gone and eat it myself, sir."

—GORDON BRAMLEY, 46, Vicarage Lane, Belgrave, Leicester.

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"Vewy well," said D'Arcy quietly. "I will show you, deah boys. I am now resolved to wide that horse."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Blake caught the swell of St. Jim's by the arm.

"Don't be an ass, Gussy! The brute might kill you. Look at his eyes."

"I wathah think I could wide him."

"Don't try," said Tom Merry. "Let those asses cackle, Gussy. This creature is a bit different from Badger, the horse you rode in the steeplechase. Badger was a beast. But this mustang is a fiend. Look at his ears."

"Yaas; but I wathah think I could wide him."

"You'll spoil your clothes," urged Blake, with a sinking heart, as he realised that the swell of St. Jim's had made up his mind.

In his mind's eye Blake saw his elegant chum rolling on the plain, with the savage horse stamping over him, and the thought sickened him.

D'Arcy had boundless pluck, and he would have been killed a dozen times over rather than have backed down before the grinning cowboys; but the appeal made by Blake was directed to his tenderest spot. If the ordeal would spoil his clothes—

But Arthur Augustus only smiled.

"I shall change my clothes, of course, deah boy," he remarked.

"Oh!" said Blake.

"I should hardly be likely to wide a buck-jumpah in these clothes and a toppah!" said D'Arcy. "I will go and change immediately into my widin' clothes."

"But—"

"Pway don't argue, deah boy; it is a question of dig with me now, and it is absolutely imposs for me to wetweat."

And Arthur Augustus walked away towards the house to change into his riding clothes.

The foreman of the ranch and the cattlemen looked after him in doubt and wonder.

"He—he doesn't mean it!" gasped Mr. Finn.

"He does!" growled Tom Merry. "He'll ride Colorado now, hang you!"

"He's all right," said Wally. "Gussy hasn't the faintest idea how to get on with a younger brother, but he knows everything about clothes and horses. You can rely on him to judge a pair of trousers or a horse any day. He'll ride Colorado."

"Scat!" said Mr. Finn. "Why, I tell you I can't ride him!"

"I dare say you can't," assented Wally, looking over the corral fence at the horse. "I shouldn't imagine for a moment that you could, I guess."

Mr. Finn turned pink.

"You cheeky young son of John Bull! I—"

"Oh, come off!" said Wally in the charming way that made him the hero of the Third Form at St. Jim's. "None of your rot, you know. I suppose you don't reckon you can ride like my brother does!"

Mr. Finn stared at Wally, and if Wally had not been Mr. Poinsett's guest, it is extremely probable that Mr. Finn's quirt would have lashed round his legs.

As it was, the foreman of the ranch looked at him grimly, and then turned away and spoke to the cattlemen.

"Rope him in!"

Buck Finn uttered an exclamation.

"Pop! You'll never sit the brute!"

"Hold your tongue, Buck! Bring out the boss!"

The cattlemen crowded round the fence of the corral, lariats in hand.

The corral was a small one, communicating by a barred gate with the larger corral. In the smaller enclosure the mustang was within reach of the lassoes flung from outside the stake fence. There was not a man there who would have ventured inside the fence while the horse was at liberty. And they were not cowards, either.

But Colorado, the mustang, was, as they expressed it in the breezy language of the llano, a "devil." He had half-killed a former master, and Mr. Poinsett had bought him, thinking that Mr. Finn would be able to manage him. He was a splendid horse, if once his temper came under control. But Mr. Finn had tried and failed.

The evident determination of Arthur Augustus to tackle the buck-jumper had spurred on the foreman of the ranch to make a fresh attempt.

The mustang was as watchful as a cat. Again and again the cowboys flung the rope, and again and again the wily brute eluded them. Confined as he was in a narrow enclosure, he had little room to dodge, yet he contrived to elude the whirling loops continually.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled as he looked on.

The juniors at St. Jim's were Scouts, and had taken up lassoing as a part of their training.

Tom Merry, more than any of the others, had become expert in the use of a lariat, and as he looked on now it came into his mind to try his skill upon Colorado.

The fear of failure and of looking ridiculous in the eyes of men born to the use of the lariat held him back for a time. But the repeated failures of the cowboys encouraged him.

As Buck Finn's lasso slid from the glossy neck of the mustang and dropped on the grass, he jerked it back and threw it to the ground with a gesture of anger.

"It can't be did, I guess," he growled.

Tom Merry picked up the lasso.

"Let me try," he said.

Buck Finn grinned.

"What do you reckon you can do with a rope, kid?"

"Nothing, perhaps," said Tom Merry quietly. "But you don't seem able to do much, and I can't do worse than miss him, I suppose?"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

There was a roar of laughter from the ranch hands.

"Let him try!"

"Let the Britisher lasso Colorado."

And they desisted from their attempts, and left a clear field for Tom Merry.

A flush came into the cheeks of the hero of St. Jim's, and his eyes gleamed. He felt that he was being regarded in a spirit of somewhat malicious mockery, and the feeling spurred him on to do his best.

Colorado glared round, apparently surprised by the cessation of the attack, and tossed up his head and trotted round the corral.

The rope flew from Tom Merry's hand.

There was undoubtedly some luck in it, but there was skill and quickness of judgment, too, for Tom Merry had made the cast impulsively as the mustang tossed his head, and the moment was the most favourable possible.

The loop settled over the neck of the mustang, and tightened.

Tom Merry hardly knew that he had succeeded until he

Potts, the Office Boy!



felt the rope dragging through his fingers, and then he clutched at it hard.

He would have been dragged over the fence into the corral but for the fact that several of the ranch hands rushed to his aid and dragged on the rope.

The lassoed mustang kicked and reared and wriggled, and rolled over on the earth in a transport of fury.

But brawny arms were dragging on the rope, and he was dragged up to the fence and jammed there, a prisoner.

Jack Blake gave a whoop, and slapped Tom on the back with a force that made him stagger.

"Hurrah! Roped in, by gum!"

"Bravo!" yelled Wally, tossing his sombrero into the air. "Hurrah!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, pulling out his notebook. "This is really very good, and I must make a note of it. It will make a remarkable incident in my book of travels."

Mr. Finn came towards the horse, with a curious expression upon his bearded face.

"Well done, sonny!" he said.

The horse was still struggling. But the ropes held him fast. He was still saddled and bridled from Mr. Finn's previous attempt. The foreman of the ranch clambered on the fence of the corral, and dropped into the saddle and grasped the reins.

"Leggo!" The cattlemen let the horse go, and the next moment the foreman of the ranch was fighting his hardest with the most savage buck-jumper in Arizona.

CHAPTER 9. Unmastered!

TOM MERRY & Co. watched, spellbound.

The cattlemen stood round, with keenly interested faces, watching the struggle between man and horse breathlessly.

It was a terrible yet a fascinating sight.

The mustang bounded and reared, almost foaming at the mouth in fury as he felt a rider on his back.

But Mr. Finn was a good horseman, and he sat the animal well.

He had a good seat and a tight hold, and his grip on the rein was hard and steady. His face was white and set hard. His teeth were clenched. All that he knew of horsemanship, all that he had in him of strength and determination were thrown into that struggle with the savage mustang.

But it seemed to Tom Merry, as he watched, that the horse would win.

Mr. Finn was on his mettle, but he was not up to all the tricks of the mustang, and he was not lithe and active enough for the work.

Colorado was certainly what the cattlemen called him—a very devil. He reared on his hind legs, and, instead of coming down again, rolled backwards and crashed to the earth.

There was a cry of horror from the cowboys.

It seemed impossible for the foreman to avoid being crushed to death under the weight of the brute.

But Mr. Finn sprang aside in time, and the horse missed him.

But he was dismounted now.

The mustang required only a second or two to be up and at him with gnashing jaws. But Mr. Finn did not stay

to try conclusions. He made a bound for the corral fence, and was clambering over it in a twinkling.

There was a savage squeal behind him. The foreman of the ranch rolled over the fence and dropped in a gasping heap, and the teeth of Colorado gnashed on the rim of the fence. Then the brute, disappointed of his prey, cavorted about in the corral, with flaming eyes and the sweat running down his powerful limbs.

Mr. Finn picked himself up, with the assistance of his dutiful Buck, and gasped for breath, and wiped his sweating forehead with a red handkerchief.

"I swear!" he gasped. "What a hoss!"

"He'll have to be shot, boss."

"I guess he will, Dave Tutt. And it's a durned pity, too."

"Pway don't be in a hawwy, deah boys!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's had returned to the spot, having by this time changed into his riding clothes. And a very handsome and elegant figure he made in them.

"Oh, not so much chin music!" said Mr. Finn. "I've backed that brute again, and he's thrown me. Me!"

"Yaas, wathah! I saw him!"

"I guess he will have to be shot."

"I am goin' to wide him!"

"Will you stop that nonsense?" shouted Mr. Finn, exasperated. "I tell you I can't ride him."

"I dare say that is vewy twue. But I fail to see what beavin' it has upon the mattah," said D'Arcy.

"It has this bearing upon the matter, you young chump. You shan't go near that hoss."

"I wefuse to be called a chump!"

"Dummy, then," said Mr. Finn grimly. "Silly idiot! Dade!"

"I wegard those expressions as oppwobwious, and I certainly should give you a feahful thwashin; but you are probably exasperated by your failure, so I can afford to ovahlook your impertinence," said the swell of St. Jim's magnanimously.

"Waal, I swear!" gasped Mr. Finn.

"But now, my deah sir, pway let your men lasso the ewittah, and I will wide him."

"I tell you you won't!"

"But I shall insist!" said D'Arcy, evidently regarding that as a clincher.

Mr. Finn snorted.

"You can insist till you're black in the face, my son, but you won't ride that hoss. I'm not going to have greenhorns killed in my corrals. No, sir! I guess not! Boycees, you're not to rope in Colorado."

"Right, Mr. Finn!" said Dave Tutt.

And the foreman of the ranch stalked away.

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass and glanced after him, and then turned to the grinning cattlemen.

"I should be sowwy to induce you to disobey ordahs," he said. "I should pwefer the horse to be woped in. But nevah mind."

He walked towards the gate of the corral.

"Come back!" yelled Blake.

Tom Merry caught the swell of St. Jim's by the arm.

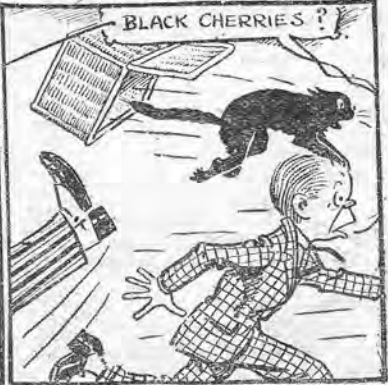
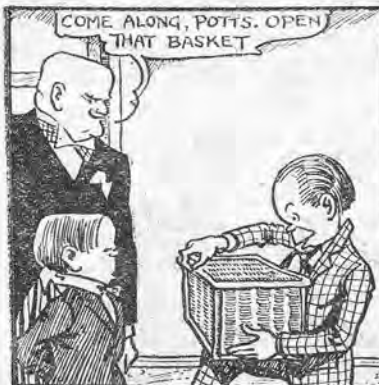
"You yong ass! Come back!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"If you're determined to ride him, we'll rope him in for you."

"It is weally hardly worth the bothah. I wathah think I

NOT SO LUCKY!



can manage him. What you wequiah for a job of this sort is a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

"Hold on, I tell you! I'll get a rope and lasso him."

And Tom Merry ran towards the rope that was lying on the grass. Blake picked up another.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, while they were thus engaged, calmly walked to the gate of the corral and unbarred it.

"He's going in!" yelled Dave Tutt.

Tom Merry spun round.

"Gussy! Come back! Come back!"

"Wats!" said Gussy cheerfully, without even turning his head.

Tom Merry and Blake dashed wildly after him, to drag him away by the hair of his head, if need be. But D'Arcy was in the corral now, and they could only gaze spellbound, their hearts thumping with fear for him.

Wally and Skimpole were calm enough. Wally, in spite of his disrespectful attitude towards his elder brother, had heaps of faith in Arthur Augustus when it came to managing a horse. Skimpole was thinking of his book of travels. Probably when he came to think of it he would have been sorry to see the swell of St. Jim's killed. But at present he was only thinking of an exciting incident for his book of travels.

Colorado seemed not to be aware for a moment or two that a biped had had the unparalleled nerve to enter his corral.

But when he saw the swell of St. Jim's calmly advancing upon him, he faced the junior and laid back his ears, and a savage gleam came into his eyes.

Tom Merry saw it, and his very heart sickened within him.

"Good heavens! Gussy will be killed!"

Blake gave a groan.

"Get a gun, somebody! But it's no good—the fiend is at him now!"

Wally's voice rang out clear and sharp:

"Go it, Gus!"

And from the swell of St. Jim's came the reply, without a trace of fear in the tones:

"Yaas, wathah!"

Colorado had stared at the junior, with his ears back, motionless for some seconds. Then he had suddenly bolted forward at him.

Tom Merry grasped the fence of the corral.

He closed his eyes for a second. He opened them again with terror, fully expecting to see D'Arcy on the ground and the savage mustang trampling over him.

Tom Merry rubbed his eyes.

Arthur Augustus had met that savage charge without turning a hair. How he did it no eye was quick enough to see; but he eluded the rush, closed up on the mustang, and was in the saddle as the baffled animal went rushing on.

The mustang did not realise it for a second or two. He slowed down and glared round in search of the junior, and then suddenly realised that the intended victim was on his back.

A squeal of mad fury broke from the animal, and then commenced a scene of buck-jumping to which the experience of Mr. Finn's was child's play.

The animal seemed to be mad with wrath and excitement.

He dashed to and fro, scraped himself against the corral fence, reared on his hind legs, plunged forward on his forelegs, and raced round the corral, and rolled on the ground.

But at every trick he found the swell of St. Jim's was his master.

D'Arcy jumped off when the brute rolled over, but he was on again in a twinkling as the mustang rose.

His grip on the reins was like iron. The lashing hoofs, the tearing jaws, had no terrors for him.

With a wrist of iron and a heart that knew no fear, a steady eye that never failed him, D'Arcy was master of the situation.

The spectators looked on, almost petrified by the sight.

There was a sudden yell.

"Look out!"

The mustang had seen at last the open gate of the corral by which D'Arcy had entered. He dashed towards it. Tom Merry sprang out of the way in time, and the frantic animal rushed through.

CHAPTER 10.

The Mustang Finds His Master!

CLATTER, clatter, clatter!

The hoofs of the enraged mustang beat a furious tattoo upon the hard ground.

Arthur Augustus dragged him to a halt outside the corral, and the cattlemen crowded back from the lashing hoofs.

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Skimpole blinked excitedly as he put down his notes. Even the Indians in the Rocky Mountains would not make so exciting an incident as this for his book of travels. But in his keen interest in his notebook Skimpole forgot that he was in a dangerous position.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Stand back, thar!"

Skimpole blinked round.

"Were you addressing—Ow!"

The lashing hoof struck Skimpole's notebook fair and square, and sent it flying from his hand.

Skimpole gave a gasp, and collapsed upon the grass.

"Dear me!"

The mustang was plunging forward in a frantic endeavour to unseat his rider, but it was in vain.

Backwards and forwards the brute went, plunging and rearing, but D'Arcy, though it seemed every moment that he must go flying over the horse's head or tail, kept his seat as if he were a part of the horse.



"Hold on!" shouted the driver. The juniors of St. Jim's held on, rocked and bumped on the sandy bed of the river. Skimpole put

"I swear!" exclaimed Mr. Finn, coming back towards the corral, attracted by the noise there. "Carry me home to die! I swear!"

And he gazed at D'Arcy in blank amazement.

Wally grinned at him.

"You can trust Gus with a horse," he remarked. "What did I tell you, old cock? I guess I was giving you straight goods!"

Mr. Poinsett came out of the house.

The noise at the corral had reached his ears, too. He looked as amazed as Mr. Finn when he saw the savage mustang outside the corral with D'Arcy "up."

"Thunder!" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry and Blake were grinning now with satisfaction. The time for uneasiness had passed. D'Arcy was evidently the mustang's master, and the contest now was only one of endurance. If D'Arcy's strength held out he would subdue the savage brute.

"Is that—that the—dude?" gasped Mr. Poinsett.

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's Gussy, uncle."

"My body and boots!" ejaculated the rancher. "What a nerve! What a wrist! What a seat! Good!"

"I guess Gussy's all there!" said Wally. "He can lay over any bullwhacker in Arizona, siree!"

The rancher chuckled.

"He's a good rider—and I took him for a lipping ass!"

The tattoo of Colorado's feet was growing slacker. Slowly, but surely, the horse yielded, with many a burst of savage passion, but each burst weaker than the last. And at last he stood still, in the midst of a wondering circle of cattlemen, and acknowledged his defeat.

"Waal, I swow!" said Mr. Finn; and even Buck Finn looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with great admiration.

D'Arcy slipped from the horse's back and patted his head, and, to the amazement of all the beholders, Colorado snuggled his muzzle against the swell of St. Jim's, and D'Arcy stroked him gently.

"Good old horse!" murmured D'Arcy, in a caressing tone. He looked round through his eyeglass. The wondering

out of place on a rough-and-ready Western ranch—but since he had ridden Colorado they were able to judge him better. A hero's heart, a nerve of iron, boundless pluck lay under the calm and aristocratic exterior of the swell of St. Jim's.

And as D'Arcy walked away from the scene of the contest with the buck-jumper, the cattlemen gave him a ringing cheer, to which the swell of St. Jim's replied by gracefully raising his sombrero.

CHAPTER 11.

Among the Steers!

"YOU'D like to help the cattlemen?" Mr. Poinsett asked, a little later. "I can get you all good mounts, if you'd care to take a hand in the herding for the experience."

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

"Yes, rather, sir—that's just what we'd like!"

"I should say so!" remarked Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! It will be what I wegard as wippin'!"

"First chop!" said Wally. "I guess Skimmy can stay here and look after Pongo. Skimmy isn't much of a rider."

"I am not so sure of that, D'Arcy minor," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I should certainly not say that I cannot ride a mustang until I have tried to do so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is certainly nothing to cackle at in that remark, D'Arcy minor. I think it extremely probable that I could ride a mustang on scientific principles, without any previous experience of horsemanship. But upon the whole I shall stay in, I think, and make up my notebook. There is a very comfortable seat under this tree, and I will remain here."

Skimpole was left under the tree with his notebook, and the four other juniors mounted and joined the cowboys on the plain.

It was not the time of the regular "round up," which would have been exciting enough; but a certain number of cattle had to be driven off to the nearest railway depot, to be dispatched East on the cattle-cars, and Mr. Finn had orders to round up two thousand head of steers.

A dozen cowboys were employed on the task, and with them went the juniors of St. Jim's. Mr. Finn himself was in charge of the party, and there was a whispered talk between him and his employer before he mounted his horse.

"Put him through it!" the rancher concluded.

"I guess he's white!" said Mr. Finn. "From what I have seen of him, I guess he's white all through!"

"Put him through it all the same! No nincompoop from a Public school is going to have my money when I'm gone, I guess!"

"You saw the way he fooled that wagon, hum?"

"You bet! But put him through it."

And Mr. Finn nodded and rode away. The rancher chuckled, and went indoors. The cowboys dashed at a smart gallop over the plain in the afternoon sunlight.

"Where are we going, Mr. Finn?" asked Tom Merry, as they rode over the rolling prairie towards the red and glowing West.

"Bout ten miles from hyar," said Mr. Finn.

Tom Merry's eyes opened.

"Is it all my uncle's land?"

The foreman of the ranch laughed.

"I guess Mr. Poinsett's land runs straight on past Arivaca trail, and that's a good hundred miles," he said.

"Bai Jove, what a wippin' wanch! Mr. Poinsett must be a vewy wich man! Do you know, deah boys, I wathah think I should like to be a wanchah when I grow up!"

Mr. Finn grinned. Perhaps the idea of Arthur Augustus as a rancher struck him in a comical light. Dave Tutt suddenly halted and stared towards a straggling patch of bushes that grew to the right.

"I guess it's Injuns!" he said.

Mr. Finn stared at the bushes.

"I swow! Who'll ride over thar and see if thar's Injuns ambushed? We've got to pass that bush within bowshot. Will you go, young Merry?"

"Certainly!" And, without a moment's hesitation, Tom Merry turned his horse from the track they were following and dashed towards the bushes.

As a matter of fact, Tom Merry regarded this as an extremely reckless and risky proceeding—as indeed it was if hostile Indians had been ambushed there. An arrow from the bushes would have found them defenceless. But Mr. Finn had made the request in such a matter-of-fact way—as if he would just as soon have asked anybody else in the party, that Tom never thought of refusing.

He knew that the ranchmen were looking out for any sign of "fauk" on the part of the English boys, and he was

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held on. The horses dashed into the water, which rose over the axles. The coachman put his head out of the window. "Dear me! It seems very rough just here!"

and admiring looks of the cowboys were a tribute the swell of St. Jim's could appreciate.

"I wathah think you will find the horse quiet now," he remarked.

"By Jove!" cried Mr. Poinsett. "The horse is yours, young 'un, if you care to have him as a gift!"

D'Arcy's eyes sparkled.

"Bai Jove, sir, but it would be wobbin' you! He is the best horse I have evah widden, with the exception of one or two!"

"He's yours," said the rancher, "with the best set of trappings money can buy in Arizona! I guess you've won him fairly."

"I guess so!" said Mr. Finn. "Twice I've backed that horse, and twice I've had to pass in the game; and now this kid—Waal, I swow!"

"Thank you!" said D'Arcy. "Thank you very much, sir! I shall accept the horse with gweat pleasuah, and I hope to widge him in England in the D'Arcy colours, and I will let you know if he does you cweedit, sir!"

And from that moment Arthur Augustus was the hero of the cowboys. They had misjudged him on his appearance—and certainly it had to be admitted that the silk-hat and spotless garments of the swell of St. Jim's were a little

determined that they should see that an Englishman would venture wherever an Arizona cowboy would go, even if the venture was reckless and foolhardy.

Mr. Finn looked after him as the group of horsemen halted on the prairie. Jack Blake and D'Arcy and Wally exchanged glances, and left the group and rode after Tom.

"Come back!" called out Mr. Finn.

"Wats!" remarked Arthur Augustus cheerily.

Mr. Finn grinned at Buck.

"They're the right stuff, you see!"

"I guess so," said Buck. "But they don't tumble. I guess they've got a lot to learn yet, popper!"

The juniors of St. Jim's rode into the bushes. The bushes were deserted, and there was no sign whatever of Indians. Tom Merry & Co. rode back, and there was a slight wrinkle on Tom Merry's forehead. He saw that the cowboys were all grinning, and he guessed that he had been "done."

"I suppose that was a little joke of yours, Mr. Finn?" he said quietly.

"Not exactly," said Mr. Finn. "I guess I wanted to try your nerve."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You have no right to do anything of the sort. If you were a fellow of my own age I'd jolly soon give you a lesson on the subject, too!"

"Yaas, wathah! If Mr. Finn were a young man, I should wegard it impewative to give him a feahful thwashin'. As it is, I wegard him with gweat contempt!"

"Waal, I swow!" said Mr. Finn.

"In England," said Tom Merry, "we call it caddish to work off a trick like that on a stranger; that's all!" And he rode on again.

Mr. Finn hesitated for a moment, and then pushed his mustang alongside Tom's. He gave the junior a poke with the butt of his quirt.

"I guess I'm real sorry," he said. "I had a reason for putting you to the test, but never mind that. I'm sorry, sonny!"

Tom Merry's face cleared at once.

"That's all right," he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard an apology fwom Mr. Finn as settlin' the mattah in the most satisfactory way poss!"

"Only don't do it again," said Wally. "I kinder guess it rides me to have a galoot ring in a cold deck on me; and when my dander's riz you want to look out!" And Mr. Finn laughed.

They rode on at a good pace, and entered a hollow where a shallow stream ran half-hidden in the rushes and the long grass. Here a herd of cattle browsed, some of them looking up lazily as the horsemen came up.

Mr. Finn rapped out his orders sharply. The cowboys separated, and, in a semi-circle, bore down upon the herd, raving and cracking their long whips. They came at the herd from the opposite side to that in which they wished to drive them, of course. The cattle slowly and sulkily left their pasture, and were gradually driven out of the hollow up to the plain.

Mr. Finn was running his eye over the herd in a business-like way. He shouted more orders, and a couple of cowboys dashed recklessly into the heart of the herd to separate those that were required from the rest. Some of the steers were obstinate enough, and they lowed and bellowed savagely; but eventually the herd were separated, and the animals not wanted were driven back into the hollow, where they went contentedly enough.

But with the rest it was different. Not being blessed with reasoning powers, the animals had no idea that they were being driven away to the railroad cars—their ultimate destination being the canning factories at Chicago—but they knew they were leaving a green pasture for a dusty plain, and they "bucked" against it.

The cowboys cracked their whips and shouted, plunging recklessly among the herd, and more than one obstinate steer had to be driven back, with repeated blows, into the path he was required to follow.

"Look out!" yelled Mr. Finn suddenly.

A determined old steer was making a break for the open prairie, and he was followed by a number of others at top speed. It was the beginning of a stampede if it was not checked in time, and the ranchmen threw themselves recklessly in the way of the rushing steers, brandishing their whips and dealing slashing blows with them.

The juniors of St. Jim's were not slow to back them up. Tom Merry and Blake were in the midst of the cattle at once, and D'Arcy was only a moment later; and then Wally dashed to help. There was a wild cry from Buck Finn.

Tom Merry looked round.

The steer who was the original leader of the outbreak had gored the young cowboy's mustang savagely, and the animal was gasping on the ground. To fall amid that sea of

thudding hoofs, was death. The luckless mustang was trampled to death in a few seconds. Buck Finn would have shared his fate if he had fallen, too. But he was clinging wildly to the back of a steer, tossed to and fro like a cork upon the waters.

Tom Merry's face went white for a moment. The peril of Buck Finn was terrible, and none of the cattlemen were near enough to lend him a helping hand.

Tom Merry spurred his mustang on furiously, and fairly drove a path through the excited herd, his horse shouldering its way through, amid a sea of rolling eyes and tossing horns and tails. But he could not reach Buck Finn.

The steers were too thick, and thoroughly excited now, they were rushing blindly on, and Tom could only ride with the herd and gradually work his way towards Buck. But by that means he could not reach him in time.

It was evident by the expression of Buck's face that he had been hurt when his horse was knocked over, and his strength, sorely taxed by the wild tossing of the steer, was giving out.

Tom Merry set his teeth hard. He had made up his mind what to do. He quitted his mustang, and jumped astride of a steer that was rushing on alongside of him. In a minute more he had passed to another steer, and another, and reached the one to which Buck was clinging.

The animals were so closely packed that the work was not hard to one who had boundless courage and a nerve of iron.

Buck Finn's eyes were wide with astonishment as Tom Merry reached him.

"Waal, bust my boots!" he murmured.

Tom Merry sat astride of the steer. If he had slipped down beside him he would have had only a few seconds to live. But his nerve was steady, his movements sure.

He was firmly astride the astonished steer, and he gripped Buck Finn with one hand and dragged him up to a sitting posture. Riding the steer as if it were a horse, he kept a tight seat, and held Buck Finn tightly, and so dashed on with the herd.

The shouting cowboys were rounding in the runaways now, and the steer to which Tom Merry and Buck were clinging was separated from the rest, and Dave Tutt roped it in.

As the lassoed steer rolled on the prairie Tom Merry sprang clear, and fell with Buck Finn into the long grass. He was up again in a second, and helping Buck to his feet.

The young cowboy was gasping for breath, and he stood with a limp.

He grinned curiously at Tom Merry.

"You saved my life, I guess," he remarked.

Mr. Finn came up and jumped off his horse and grasped Tom Merry's hand and wrung it like a vice.

"You saved Buck's life! You're white all through, you are!"

Tom Merry laughed breathlessly.

"Lucky for both of us it turned out so well," he said.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, coming up. "That was weally wippin', Tom Mewwy! I could not have done bettah myself, you know!"

"Go hon!"

"I am speakin' sewiously, deah boy. I wegard it as an extremely gallant action, and I weally considah that you take the bun!"

And the way the cowboys looked at Tom Merry showed that they fully concurred in the opinion of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 12.

Pongo Again!

THE cattle were driven off to the railway depot, and the cowboys rode back to the Poinsett Ranch.

It was a long ride after a hard day, but the wiry men of the plains did not seem to feel it, and the juniors of St. Jim's, who were getting hardened to fatigue, stood it very well. They were pretty tired when they got in, however, with ravenous appetites, and they ate a supper that would have made Fatty Wynn of the New House at St. Jim's, in far-off England, green with envy.

Mr. Poinsett was not there, and Tom Merry asked Antonio where he was. The Mexican grinned more than ever at the question, as if he had some joke up his sleeve.

"The senor is at the other place, senor," he said.

"What other place?"

"The other place, senor."

"Yes, ass; but where is the other place?"

"Up the Santa Cruz River, senor."

"But what is it—why is it—how is it?" demanded Blake.

"The other ranch, senor."

"My hat! How many ranches has Mr. Poinsett?"

(Continued on page 19.)

FREE COLOURING CONTEST!

1st Prize:

**A SHILLING
A WEEK
FOR A YEAR.**

**MUST
BE
WON!**

2nd Prize:

**SIXPENCE
A WEEK
FOR A YEAR.**



The above colouring is all my own work.

50 OTHER PRIZES

WATCHES — MODEL
PLANES — TORCHES —
POCKET WALLETS —
PENKNIVES, Etc.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

BOYS! Here's the opportunity of a lifetime for YOU! To try to win any of the fine prizes we are offering above, you simply have to colour the picture given here, which is taken from the cover of

THIS WEEK'S ISSUE OF
THE "RANGER."

You may use paints or crayons, and don't think for a moment that you need to be a clever artist to win a prize, because neatness and originality of colouring will be taken into account, as well as your age. If you like, you may copy the colours and treatment used by the "Ranger's" special artist. If, however, you fancy you can improve on the general colour design, by all means do so! In any case, a glance at this week's cover of the "Ranger" (issue dated January 21st) is bound to assist you. So now get busy, lads, and try your hardest to win that great pocket-money prize!

You will find it best for colouring if you paste the picture on to stiff paper, or card, and allow it to dry first.

When you have coloured the picture to your satisfaction, fill in the coupon attached, IN INK, with your name, age, and address. Then cut out the whole tablet (i.e., the coupon and picture together) and post it to:

"Ranger" "Painting,"
5, Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

so as to reach that address not later than Friday, January 27th, 1933. Any efforts arriving after this closing date cannot be accepted.

NOTE: If you have pasted the picture on to card, you can address it on the other side and send it as a postcard under a 1d. stamp.

RULES.—The First Prize of ONE SHILLING A WEEK FOR ONE YEAR will be awarded for what the Editor considers the best all-round colouring received; the second prize of Sixpence a Week for One Year will be given for the next-best effort, and the 50 Consolation Prizes will follow in order of merit.

Competitors may send in as many attempts as they like, provided that each is accompanied by the signed coupon. Age will be taken into account in the adjudication, and the Editor's decision must be accepted as final and binding. No correspondence will be allowed.

Signed

Address

G

TAKE A LOOK AT—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! Have you enjoyed this week's number of the good old GEM? I thought you would. And take it from me next Wednesday's issue is even better. In

"COWBOYS OF ST. JIM'S!"

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD,

you will find a real hundred-per-cent story of your old favourites, Tom Merry & Co. For still more thrills you can turn to the next story in the series which features

LIGHTNING BRUCE BRADMAN!

Bruce is never happier than when he's up to his neck in danger, but he pulls through emergency after emergency not by luck but by honest to goodness pluck and resource. Potts, the one and only office boy, "obliges" again next Wednesday, whilst to round off the programme there will be another column of jokes from readers to whom I shall have pleasure in awarding half-a-crown apiece. If you know of any good sidesplitting jokes, send them in. Now for some pars:

THE TRAPPED SPIDER!

Did any of you see that rather remarkable photograph that appeared recently in the newspapers showing a spider which had become trapped between the dial and the glass of an alarm clock? Scientists have been keeping an eye on that spider, watching it trying to spin a web between the moving hands of the clock. Four hundred and eighty odd times up to the moment of going to press, this diligent spider tried to bind the two hands together and doubtless it was mightily mystified to account for the fact that it was a job that could not be done. But it went on trying and between times laid some eggs.

A NOVEL GREETING!

A Sheffield reader writes: "Which is the most novel New Year's Greeting Card you have seen?" And without hesitation I can find an answer. Many of my chums must have seen the New Year Card which was reproduced in a daily newspaper, showing an aeroplane sailing through the blue what time one of its passengers took a header through space. The passenger in question was wearing a parachute, of course, and the complete picture was interesting to a degree; yet it was the text of the greeting which caught my eye most. Here it is: "May you fall on your feet and into heaps of good luck in the New Year." The sender of
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this novel card was, presumably, the daring parachutist, and it is to be recorded that he landed safely—fell on his feet, so to speak! If any of you fellows have seen a more novel card than that I shall be pleased to hear about it.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Speed-hog: "We are doing sixty miles an hour. Are you game for another ten?" Passenger, almost choked with dust: "Oh, yes. I'm full of grit!"

HE STOPPED A BOMB—WITH HIS HEAD!

Yes—he did! What's more, this unique individual lived—and was none the worse for his experience. But list to the tale. A number of R.A.F. planes were practising bomb dropping, with bags of flour taking the place of the usual type of bomb carried in times of war. One of the bombs went astray and smote a man who was passing below a wallow over the head. The flour burst all over him—that was all. But now this fellow can claim that he felled a bomb with his head and escaped unhurt!

WHO'S GOING TO WIN—

Yes, who's going to win this series of Test Matches, and who is going to "lift" the Football Association Cup, asks Ted Rawlings, of Bradford. Ted must evidently think I'm a prophet of no mean order. I'm the world's worst in matters of this kind. Still, I'll endeavour to oblige. I think England will win the rubber in the Test Matches now being played "down under," and I think Arsenal will win the F.A. Cup. If I'm wrong, Ted, don't blame me. After all, you dared me to answer your double question.

VERY POINTED!

The speedboat was tearing through the water at a devil of a lick, its sharp prow almost hidden by the whirling spray. Suddenly the man at the wheel turned his racing craft, lost control for a few seconds, and tumbled into the water! When the spectators caught a glimpse of that speedboat again it had struck a near-by yacht and pierced the hull from starboard to port just like a knife that had been thrust through a chunk of butter. The yacht didn't sink despite the gaping hole on either side of its hull, for the speedboat had struck it just above the water line!

A TIP FOR YOU GARDENERS!

I expect most of you fellows have seen either on the stage, on the films, or in picture books the

Chinese Mandarin of high degree who allows his finger-nails to grow to an inordinate length. When the required length is attained, these long nails are protected by tapering metal sheaths fixed to the fingers. Well, an astute gardener has lifted the "germ" of this Chinese custom and applied it to a pair of gardening-gloves. Over the fingers of the gloves he wears a number of long claw-like steel pointers which, he claims, protect the gardener's fingers and help him considerably in a tedious job like weeding. You can make these finger sheaths yourself, with a little patience, then that weeding job which father gives you occasionally will be done in about a quarter of the time it usually takes.

THE LONGEST THROW-IN!

That's a Soccer query which comes from a keen Kent reader. Sam Weaver, of Newcastle United, holds the record for the longest throw-in from the touch-line, for he can throw a football as far as one hundred and twenty feet! With Sam, who has made a diligent study of the business, it is all a matter of timing and perfect poise. To see him throw the ball it would appear to be as easy as anything, but you try it. Many professional half-backs have tried to emulate Sam, but up to the moment he stands supreme. You can imagine the tremendous value of such a throw to the Newcastle side when the ball goes out of play somewhere near the penalty area, for Weaver can throw the ball right to the feet of his centre-forward if he should be unmarked. My Kent reader is a half-back in his school eleven, and he's been practising hard, but so far he says he can only manage to throw the ball forty feet. That's not bad for a beginner, anyway.

SOME CAT!

Cats as a rule keep well clear of water, but a cat owned by Captain A. H. Aronson not only likes water but catches fish with uncanny skill! Can your cat do this?

SOME TIGER!

And another member of the cat tribe, a tiger which is owned by George Corrossella, of Los Angeles, actually smokes cigars. True, it had to be trained to do the job, but now it appears to like the fragrant weed just as much as its master from whom it takes a light!

PRIZES WORTH HAVING!

Would you like to win a shilling a week for a year? That's a fine prize! Sixpence a week for a year is second prize, while there are fifty consolation prizes of wallets, penknives, torches, etc. And all you have to do to try to win one of these grand prizes is to colour the picture which we print on page 17 of this issue. That same picture, printed in colour, is the cover of this week's "Ranger," our latest companion paper. So if you are in doubt as to what colours to use, or what colour layout to attempt, just have a squint at this grand boys' paper. When colouring our competition picture you may use either paints or crayons. Age, tidiness, and originality will be taken into consideration when entries are judged, so don't think that you have to be an expert colourist to win any of these amazing prizes. Now get busy, chums; those prizes MUST be won!

YOUR EDITOR.

GUSSY, THE BRONCHO BUSTER!

(Continued from page 16.)

demanding Tom Merry. "I have never heard of another ranch till this moment."

The Mexican looked alarmed.

"I speak too much, señors; you no tell Mr. Poinsett, or I am kicked."

"So you ought to be kicked, confound you, if you've been letting out something against your master's orders."

"Si, señor!"

And the Mexican grinned and disappeared.

Tom Merry looked very puzzled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, too, seemed to be thinking something out.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" growled Blake. "Pass the feet?"

"I wegard Mr. Poinsett as a vewy cunvius old gentleman," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "He has a vewy peculiar chuckle. Is it poss that he has been workin' off a little jape on persons whom he would natuwallly wegard as tendah-feet?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"Oh, my uncle wouldn't do that!" he said.

"No, it would certainly be wotten bad form, but he is such a vewy cunvius old gentleman in some respects."

Tom Merry was feeling a little uneasy when he went to bed that night. His uncle was so eccentric that there was no telling what curious schemes he might have in his mind, and Tom could not help observing that almost everyone about the ranch had a manner as if there was a joke of some kind in the air. But he was too tired to think much about it, and he was soon sleeping the sleep of the fagged, as Blake would have put it.

The next morning the juniors were awakened by a thumping at the door, and Buck Finn looked into the cabin. He grinned very amiably at Tom Merry as the hero of St. Jim's looked up from his rough blankets.

"Coming to Gold Brick?" he asked.

Tom Merry jumped up immediately.

"Yes, rather! Are you starting?"

"I'm taking the wagon to the fork of the trail. You will have to hoof it from there. I meet the returning coach from Gold Brick with some goods for Tombstone."

"I see. When do you start?"

"Half an hour."

"We'll be ready."

And the juniors were ready. When Buck Finn hitched in his horses, the juniors entered the wagon, Skimpole taking a fresh notebook with him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, was dressed to kill. He might have been going out for a walk on Sunday afternoon with Cousin Ethel from the pains he took with his attire.

Tom Merry & Co. did not remonstrate. The swell of St. Jim's was determined that the inhabitants of Gold Brick should see that a Britisher could dress well, and there was no arguing with him.

Wally whistled to Pongo as the wagon started, and the dog raced after them. They bumped along merrily to the fork of the trail, and there they left the wagon.

Buck Finn pointed northward with his whip.

"That's the trail! Camp's not fur."

"Thank you! So-long!"

And the juniors started off. They passed the coach a little later, and the driver gave them a shout and a grin. Then they tramped on towards the distant mining-camp. They expected to see Colonel Stalker there, and at all events the excursion was full of excitement to them.

"Pongo! Pongo!"

"Pway don't whistle in that howwibly shwill way, Wally."

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! Pongo's gone after a prairie rabbit."

"Let the bwute go, then."

"No fear!"

And Wally left the trail in search of Pongo.

"Pway go atfah the young wascal, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, in distress. "I am afwaid he will get into twouble, and I shall spoil my clothes if I go sewamblin' ovah that wockay ground."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right you are; join you in the camp."

And D'Arcy and Blake walked on, while Tom Merry hurried after Wally.

The scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's gave him a cool nod and a grin.

"Can't see the brute!" he said. "He's a little demon,

you know. Not one of those rotten tame brutes who are always slinking at their master's heels!"

"Well, he certainly isn't a tame brute; he's a trouble-some beast!"

"Oh, rats! Pongo's all right. I can't see him."

"I can't, either. Let's keep on."

They kept on; but Pongo was not to be seen.

Smoko rising ahead showed them that they were drawing near to the mining-camp, though not by the regular trail.

There was a sudden sound of snapping and snarling. Wally pricked up his ears and ran on, looking excitedly at Tom Merry.

"That's Pongo! I know his yap!"

"Look where you're going!" yelled Tom Merry.

"My only Aunt Jane! It's all right, though."

Wally was running out upon a bluff that overlooked a sudden drop in the ground ahead. He pulled up in time, and went forward more cautiously. Tom Merry ran after him. The sounds of conflict were louder and fiercer, and loud laughs could be heard. They looked down from the bluff, and saw the mining-camp below—and Pongo.

How he had got there they did not know; he usually turned up in unexpected places. He was pouncing again upon a shaggy, yellow dog that had just escaped his clutches, two or three rough-clad fellows cheering on the dogs. The yellow cur curled up round Pongo like a panther, and the combat was furiously renewed.

Wally glared down the bluff.

He could not possibly get down to the scene of the combat, and Pongo, now, was getting the worst of it. The yellow dog was on top, and Pongo was suffering. Wally glared desperately about.

"My only aunt! I must get down somehow."

Tom Merry caught him by the coat.

"You can't, and you shan't try!"

"Lemme go!"

"Rats! Hallo, Pongo's off!"

Pongo had suddenly tore himself away, and was racing up the rugged street, with the yellow dog in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER 13.

D'Arcy Does Not Drink!

TOM MERRY and Wally found a way down round the bluff, and they came down into the trail.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Blake were not to be seen. They had evidently already entered Gold Brick.

The juniors walked into the camp.

Many of the dwellers of Gold Brick were away up in the gulches, working on their claims, but there were a good many fellows in the town. In the street of Gold Brick almost every other house was a saloon, where bootleg liquor was sold quite openly, and several of them were doing a good trade, even in the morning. The camp depended for its existence as much upon the cattlemen from the neighbouring ranches, with their wages to spend, as upon the miners.

Cowboys in huge boots and spurs, and miners in red shirts, were in the street, and more than one copper-coloured Indian, Navajo, or Apache.

Jack Blake came along the street and ran into Tom Merry and Wally and stopped.

"Seen Gussy or Skimpole?" he asked.

"No. I expect Skimmy's taking notes."

"Colonel Stalker's at the Gold Brick Hotel—I've found him there. And the Redskin's with him. The chap we met in the Rockies, you know—the Blackfoot."

"The Hawk? I shall be glad to see him again."

"We're going there to lunch. Hallo, there's Skimmy! I'll go and collect him while you look round for the other ass."

And Blake rushed off.

A loud roar of laughter was proceeding from a saloon near at hand as Tom and Wally paused and looked about them, but they did not connect it with D'Arcy until a well-known voice was proceeding from the place.

"I should be sowwy to hurt the feelin's of any gentleman pwesent, but undah the cires I must uttahly and absolutely wefuse—"

Tom Merry and Wally looked at one another expressively, and D'Arcy minor grinned.

"It's Gus! He's in there!"

"The young ass! What on earth did he enter a place like that for?"

Tom Merry looked up at the saloon. There was a row of lamps in the front—unlighted now, of course—and on each lamp was daubed in red paint, the name of the place, "The Full House." That title, of course, was borrowed from the great game of poker, the national card-game of the States.

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Why the swell of St. Jim's should enter the Full House was a mystery to Tom Merry, but it was evident that D'Arcy was in trouble of some kind, and Tom and Wally looked in at the door.

"Weally, deah boys, I assuah you that I do not dwink!" It was the voice of Arthur Augustus in polite expostulation.

Tom Merry could not help grinning as he looked into the saloon; the swell of St. Jim's seemed so extremely out of place amid the rough surroundings.

There were several rough miners in the saloon, and a barkeeper with a red face leaning on the bar. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was facing Long Jim, the big miner whom the boys had met on the trail a few days previously. Long Jim seemed to be hugely enjoying the joke, and the miners round were laughing and chuckling.

"Drink it up," said Long Jim; "it'll do you good, I guess."

D'Arcy shook his head decidedly. Long Jim was offering him a drink, and the swell of St. Jim's had not the slightest intention of taking it. He did not like whisky in any circumstances, and the fearful and wonderful concoction which went by the name of whisky in the Full House Saloon was undoubtedly much worse than the genuine article.

"Weally, I do not dwink!" he repeated. "I should be vewy pleased to join you in a lemonade or gingah-beer!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Long Jim; and the spectators shrieked.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Long Jim. "Carry me home to die! Now, you've had your little joke, young galoot—now drink the whisky!"

"I am sowwy, but it is quite impos."



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With her white, gleaming sails bellying to the wind, the salt spray flying high and wide, and King of the Islands at the wheel, there's no other craft of her size in the Pacific that can touch the ketch Dawn for speed! She's brought the boy skipper and his chum Kit safely through many a breath-taking voyage of adventure among the tiny, far-flung atolls of the Pacific, but now the most perilous and amazing of them all lies ahead. Share nerve-tingling excitement and hurricane thrills with these dauntless chums in CHARLES HAMILTON'S enthralling yarn.

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Long Jim's brow darkened.

"I dessay," he remarked, in measured tones. "I dessay you don't know the customs of this hyer country!"

"Quite poss; I am weally a stwangan here, you know."

"It's a custom in Arizony to take a drink when it's offered," said Long Jim. "You cain't refuse to drink with a gentleman without insulting him."

"I should be extwemely sowwy to insult any gentleman pwsent, but I must absolutely wefuse to dwink intoxicatin' liquah."

"You'll take that drink," said Long Jim.

"Nothin' of the sort."

"Then I guess I shall be kinder insulted."

"I am sowwy. As you seem bent upon pickin' a quawwel with me," said D'Arcy with dignity, "I weally think I had bettah wetah." And he made a movement to go.

"Stand where you are!" roared Long Jim.

D'Arcy looked at him through his eyeglass.

"I am not accustomed to bein' addressed in that tone," he said. "I weward you as a wuff and wude person. I uttaly wefuse to dwink with you. I came into this place in search of a little light wewfeshment—"

"He asked me for ginger-beer, he did," said the barkeeper. "He asked me—me for ginger-beer, he did."

"I am sowwy that I appeah to have entahed the wong sort of establishment," said D'Arcy. "I meant no offence to any gentleman pwsent."

"Stand where you are!"

"I wefuse to do so!"

"Stand where you are!" repeated Long Jim, dragging at the revolver in his belt. "Now, then, hands up!"

The revolver was levelled.

Arthur Augustus looked startled. He could not believe that Long Jim would shoot, but the man had been drinking, and D'Arcy had read a great deal about the reckless shooting in Western mining-camps. The swell of St. Jim's turned pale for a minute.

"I twust," he said calmly and with dignity, "that you will not act like a murderwous wuffian! I am unarmed, havin' unfortunately left my twusty wewolvah at the wanch. I weally considah—"

"Hands up!"

Tom Merry dashed forward. He could not tell what the man meant to do, but he was naturally alarmed.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Cussy, come along! I—"

"What are you chipping in for?" said Long Jim.

"Stand back!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Hold him, pards!"

Two burly fellows grasped hold of Tom Merry and Wally in a moment and dragged them back. It was in vain for the juniors to struggle—they were as infants in the grasp of the brawny miners.

Long Jim grinned at them.

"I guess you can keep your fingers outer this deal," he remarked. "I'm kinder running this hyer show."

He turned back to Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was making a movement to go to the aid of his friends, but the revolver of Long Jim looked him fairly in the face. The miners round were serious enough now. The matter might be a joke, but when firearms entered into a joke the possibility of reckless shooting was always present—the comedy might become a tragedy at any moment.

"Hands up!" said Long Jim sharply.

Arthur Augustus did not move his hands.

"I wefuse to obey a wewquest made in such a tone," he replied; "it would be an infwaction of my dig to do so!"

Long Jim looked at him steadily. He had started ragging the dude, anticipating from D'Arcy's personal appearance that he had a lispin lah-di-dah to deal with, who would be frightened almost out of his wits by a levelled revolver. But the swell of St. Jim's was made of sterner stuff than that.

The big miner pointed with his disengaged hand at the glass of whisky still standing on the bar.

"I guess you'll drink that," he said.

"I have already declined to do so."

"You'll drink that."

"I wefuse to dwink it."

"You'll drink it," said Long Jim, "or I'll pull trigger. Take your ch'ice."

"You may do as you like," said Arthur Augustus. "You have the advantage of me at the pwsent moment, and I can only say that I considah you no gentleman. I wefuse to dwink that whiskay!"

Crack!

Long Jim had kept his word. The revolver rang out, and Arthur Augustus uttered a sharp cry and staggered.



Crack! Long Jim had kept his word. The revolver rang out and Arthur Augustus uttered a sharp cry and staggered back. His silk hat went flying through the air. "You wuffian!" he murmured. "You feahful beast! You have wuined my hat!"

CHAPTER 14.

Pongo Has a Narrow Escape!

TOM MERRY gave a cry and struggled desperately to get loose. For a moment he believed that the swell of St. Jim's had been shot. But the next moment he was reassured. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's silk hat that had received the bullet, and it had been carried off his head by the impact.

The silk hat crashed on the floor, and D'Arcy staggered with the shot. The miners burst into a roar of laughter.

Long Jim was grinning.

"I guess I'm a galoot of my word," he remarked. "I said I'll pull trigger. You'll want a new topper, I guess, young galoot!"

D'Arcy looked dazed for the moment. He had faced death, but it was only a grim joke, and it was only his silk hat that had been in danger. He looked at the perforated topper.

"You wuffian!" he murmured. "You feahful beast! You have uttably wuined my hat!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Tom Merry and Wally gasped with relief. Arthur Augustus picked up his hat, and Long Jim returned the revolver to his belt. The juniors of St. Jim's were released. Long Jim picked up the glass of whisky that D'Arcy had refused.

"I guess he's a plucked 'un, though he's a dude!" he remarked. "Hyer's to you, young galoot, anyway!" And he tossed off the whisky.

"Thank you," said D'Arcy. "I wegard this as a wathah wuff joke, but I am glad you are not such a feahful cad as I imagined."

And he walked out of the saloon with Tom Merry and Wally, leaving the miners shouting with laughter.

Tom Merry gripped the swell of St. Jim's by the arm as he hurried him up the street.

"You young ass!" he growled. "If you go into a place like that again I'll jump on your neck!"

"I was in want of a little light wewfeshment—"

"Suppose that duffer's aim had been bad?" said Wally.

"He meant to pot your hat, but he might easily have potted your brainbox by mistake! He couldn't have blown out your brains, as you haven't any, of course!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Hallo, here's the Gold Brick Hotel! We're to go in to lunch here with Colonel Stalker. The Hawk is here, too."

The boys entered the hotel—a rough-board shanty dignified with that name—and found Blake and Skimpole there with the colonel. There was an addition to the party in the person of Hawk, the Blackfoot, whom the juniors had encountered in the Rocky Mountains, on his way south to visit the Poinsett Ranch.

"Jolly glad to see you, Hawk!" said Tom Merry, shaking hands with the chief.

"The heart of the Hawk is glad as the wild birds in summer to see the young white chief once more!" said the Blackfoot.

And then they had lunch. It was a solid lunch, and the juniors did full justice to it. After the meal was over they went out to see something more of the mining-camp. It is needless to say that D'Arcy's appearance attracted some attention, but the presence of Colonel Stalker prevented any further attempt at ragging on the part of the Gold Brick miners.

The colonel was well-known and respected in the camp—and, besides, he had a reputation as a man who was not to be "fooled" with.

The juniors inspected the claims along the river—the ditches and dams, and the cradles where the gold was washed out—with great interest.

It was growing dusk when they thought of home. Wally was looking a little anxious. He had not seen Pongo since witnessing the dog-fight from the bluff. He had expected to come across his favourite during the afternoon, but nothing had been seen of the dog.

The colonel glanced at the sun. It was setting in the west towards the Rio Colorado and the mountains of California, in a blaze of purple and gold.

"I guess it's time we vamooosed!" he remarked.

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"I haven't found Pongo!" said Wally.
 "Blow Pongo!" said Blake. "It's always Pongo!
 Toujours Pongo! Blow Pongo!"

"I'm not going without Pongo!"
 They were standing in the street on Gold Brick after their tour of inspection when they spoke. Long Jim passed them with his pick on his shoulder, evidently returning from his work up the gulch.

"I guess you want to look arter your dog?" he remarked.
 Wally turned to him quickly. Rough as his joke had been in the Full House Saloon, he was evidently a kindly and good-natured fellow.

"Have you seen him?" he asked eagerly.
 Long Jim grinned.
 "Gin Sling's got him!"
 "Gin Sling?" said Wally. He had heard of an American drink of that name, and Long Jim's words puzzled him.

The big miner chuckled.
 "Gin Sling's the Chinese laundryman," he said. "He digs at the white cabin up the street thar. I just passed him, and he's got a dog in his cabin."

"What on earth can he want with the dog?" said Blake.
 "Supper, I guess!" And Long Jim grinned and passed on.

Colonel Stalker chuckled a little, and a grim smile crossed the face of the Hawk, who had just joined the group.

"Ugh! Chinese eat dog," said the Blackfoot. "Let us go!"

Wally was already tearing off towards the cabin pointed out by Long Jim. The others followed, but at a less hurried pace.

They reached the cabin. The door was open, and the Chinese laundryman could be seen sitting within, cleaning his cooking utensils before a stove. Pongo lay on the floor, tied with a strong cord so that he could not move a limb. He was whining softly.

Wally burst furiously into the cabin.
 "You scoundrel!" he roared. "Give me my dog!"
 He jerked out his pocket-knife and began to cut Pongo loose.

The Chinese jumped up so suddenly that his utensils went to the floor with a clatter. He glared excitedly at Wally.

"No takee!" he roared. "My doggee—me cookee!"
 "It's my dog, you heathen beast!"

"Me findee—slay doggee—me cookee for suppee!"
 "I'll cook you if you bother me!" growled Wally. "Get off, you rotten heathen!"

He tore Pongo loose. The dog snuggled up gladly enough in his young master's arms. But the Chinaman was looking angry. He caught up a heavy saucepan and advanced upon D'Arcy minor.

"No takee doggee!" he exclaimed.
 "Rats!"

"No takee! Me stlikee—no killee!"
 "I guess you'll go slow," drawled Colonel Stalker, looking in at the door.

The Chinaman turned towards him, and the sun glinted upon a levelled six-shooter. The heathen turned sickly in hue and dropped on his knees.

"Ow-ow! No shootee—no shootee!" he wailed.

"I guess I ought to rub you out!" said the colonel, with a grin, which the terrified Celestial was too agitated to see.
 "No shootee! Me good Chineer! No shootee!"

Wally brought Pongo out of the cabin. Gin Sling grovelled on the floor. The colonel returned his revolver to his belt.

"I guess I'll let you off, John," he remarked.
 "Me tankee! Me good Chineer!"

And they left the cabin, leaving the unfortunate Celestial shaking like a jelly. Wally was careful to put Pongo's chain on now, and when the party returned to the Gold Brick Hotel, Pongo trotted after his master as quietly as a lamb.

"I guess we're going to ride him," said the colonel, in response to a question from Tom Merry. "I've got hosses at the hotel hyer!"

"Vewy good! I shall be glad to wide back to the wanch!"

"We're not going back to that ranch."

"No?" said Tom Merry. "Where are we going, then?"

"To Mr. Poinsett's other ranch," said the colonel, who had just opened and read a note given him by the landlord. "This is from Mr. Poinsett. He wants us to go back to the other shebang. Your traps have been sent over, and you'll find the nigger there, too."

Tom Merry remembered what he had heard from Antonio. He was more mystified than ever.

"Then my uncle has another ranch?" he asked.
 The colonel laughed.

"I guess so!"

"But—but why—I did not know—"

"I reckon Mr. Poinsett will explain."

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Tom's face set a little. He felt that he had been played with, to some extent, and he would want an explanation, too.

They mounted and rode out of Gold Brick in the dusk of the Arizona night.

Tom Merry was thinking deeply. They followed the trail towards the ranch as far as the fork, and then they turned in a new direction. The route lay more to the southward, and many a long mile slipped under the feet of the tireless horses. A dark wood loomed up ahead in the glimmer of the moon.

Thick and dark the wood looked—ceiba and malva growing thickly, interlaced with Spanish moss and heavy lianas. The path that ran through the chapparal seemed to have been hewn by an axe, as if the road-makers had been tunnelling through solid rock. Overhead, as the riders entered the path, the thick branches and thicker creepers were interlaced, shutting out every ray of the moon.

There was the sound of a horse in the deep darkness. The colonel halted, and his companions followed his example.

"Who's there?" called out Colonel Stalker. And the Hawk grasped his knife.

The juniors did not know it, but the dense chapparal was the haunt of many a "rustler" who would have been glad to demand the ready cash of the travellers at the muzzle of the revolver.

There was a chuckle from the gloom.

"It's all right, old Stalky!"

"Hallo, Poinsett!"

"I've come out to meet you," said the rancher, his voice coming strangely from the darkness, where he was quite invisible. "Are you all there?"

"I guess so!"

"You there, Tom, my lad?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Good! Come on; the ranch is ready. You ride beside me, Tom."

Tom Merry pushed his mustang forward, and felt the rancher next to him. They rode on in darkness. It was impossible to guide the mustangs; but they knew the way well enough. The chapparal was left behind, and the riders came out upon a moonlit plain.

Tom Merry looked around him.

In the moonlight he could see in the distance vast herds of cattle on the plain, moving like shadows or lying still in the grass.

Ahead was a gleam of light from a building.

"That's the ranch, Tom," said Mr. Poinsett.

As they drew nearer, Tom Merry could see that it was an imposing building—something of what he had first expected to see as his uncle's home. Round it were groves of trees, and on the flat roof could be seen palms waving their fronds in the night breeze.

The boy was more mystified than ever.

"Is this your house, uncle?" he asked in a low voice.

"I guess so, lad!"

"Then—then the other—"

The rancher chuckled.

"I reckon I'll explain as soon as we get in, sonny."

But Tom Merry's lips were set hard.

CHAPTER 15.

A Surprise for Tom Merry!

THEY dismounted at the door of the ranch, and men came forward to take the horses away. In the entrance Pompey, the darky, was waiting, and he grinned with huge delight at the sight of Tom Merry, from whom he had been separated for several days.

Tom Merry glanced about him, and gave Pomp a friendly thump on the shoulder.

"I'm glad to see Mass' Tom!" said Pomp fervently. "I see debilish glad! Mass' Tom look very well!"

"Bai Jove! This is a bit diftewen from the othah place!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The hall was paved, and led through into a courtyard in the centre of the block of buildings, the ranch, like many of the wealthier ranches of the south-west, being built in the style of the Mexican "hacienda."

In the centre court could be heard the tinkle of falling waters, where a fountain surrounded by leafy palms was at play.

The adobe walls of the house were covered with panelling or rich hangings, and feet sank into deep carpets.

The air of wealth and comfort amazed the juniors after what they had seen of the other establishment of the eccentric Mr. Poinsett.

Quiet and obedient peons—Mexican half-breed servants—showed the juniors to a large room, which was sumptuously furnished and provided with five beds.

Everything was in elegant and excellent style.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled with satisfaction at the sight of the hip baths, and cans of hot water placed ready.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, this is just what I want!" he remarked. "Aftah our wuffin' it for so long I shall simply weel in a warm bath."

"Yes, rather!" said Wally. "I hope they're looking after Pongo all right. That grinning rascal Antonio is here, and he took my dog."

"We're in the land of plenty," said Blake. "I only want to be sure that it isn't all a dream, and that we shall not wake up presently in bed on the planks in the log cabin."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me! This is really most surprising," said Skimpole. "I must make a few notes before I dress for dinner."

"Wats! The majah-domo said dinnah was at seven-thirty, and we have only half an hour to dwell," said D'Arcy severely. "I am surprised at you, Skimpole!"

"I must make a few notes—"

"Wats! Leave your wotten notes till aftahwards!"

"It is most important—"

Blake flicked the notebook out of Skimpy's hand.

"You shall have this back after dinner," he remarked.

"Really, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, duffer!"

"Bai Jove! Heah are our twunks!" said D'Arcy, with more and more satisfaction. "And heah, bai Jove, is my evenin' attiah laid out already! Why, things aren't done bettah than this at Eastwood!"

"Rather not," said Wally. "I never thought they dressed for dinner on a ranch in Arizona, but it looks like it!"

"What do you say, Merry?" asked Blake.

"Yes, rather!" said Tom.

Tom was still looking a little worried. The juniors dressed for dinner, and felt greatly refreshed after a bath and a change into fresh linen and clean clothes. They descended the stairs. The stairs led down through a covered way into the court.

The juniors glanced about them in great admiration. The courtyard was a blaze of tropical vegetation. The fountain in the centre sparkled in the moonlight.

They entered the dining-room. Mr. Poinsett, looking a very different kind of man in evening clothes, was standing before the fire.

The table was laid, with a gleam of spotless cloth and bright silver.

The juniors were more and more amazed.

The house seemed more suitable for Park Lane, in London, or Fifth Avenue, in New York, than for the wilds of Arizona. The expense of furnishing the ranch, at so great a distance from centres of civilisation, must have been enormous. It began to be evident that Mr. Poinsett was a man of taste, and that he stopped at no expense to gratify his taste.

The rancher looked at the juniors with a smile.

"Welcome to Poinsett Ranch," he said.

Tom Merry was silent. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked questions.

"I am weally surprised, if you will permit me to make the remark, my deah sir," he said. "This is vewy diffewent from the othah wanch, sir."

Mr. Poinsett chuckled.

"Yes, I guess so. But dinner is served, young gentlemen."

They dined. Tom Merry was very quiet, but Mr. Poinsett, who seemed to be in boisterous spirits, did not notice it.

Colonel Stalker was in evening clothes down to his waist, but he wore breeches and big boots, and there was the butt of a revolver showing near his spotless white shirt.

Tom Merry was the only one who was at all silent.

After dinner coffee was taken into the court, where Mr. Poinsett drew his nephew apart on a seat under a big coiba-tree, while the others lounged among the tropical ferns and flowers.

Tom Merry sipped his coffee quietly, while the rancher lighted a big Mexican cigar. He chuckled quietly as he looked at his nephew.

"I guess I've surprised you, Tom."

"Yes, sir," said Tom quietly.

"You must excuse a little harmless deception, Tom. You are my sister's son, and I wanted to put you in my will for all I die possessed of. But I didn't intend to leave my money to a nunny. I meant to make you come out here and rough it on a ranch, and prove yourself a man, before I left you my money. But it hasn't been necessary to put you through it for so long as I anticipated. You are true blue, and you've shown it at once."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I received you at the old ranch on purpose. That was my ranch twenty years ago, when I was a struggling cattle raiser, when I first came West. I let you rough it there, and I let Mr. Finn put you through a course of sprouts, as we call it out West. You stood the test well."

Tom Merry was silent.

"When I saw how you handled horses, how you took the risk of the cowboys among the cattle, I felt that you were the right stuff; but I put you to the test, all the same. But Mr. Finn's report to me after rounding-up the cattle yesterday was enough. You risked your life to save Buck Finn. You rode up to a bush to see if Redskins were ambushed there. You couldn't do more. I knew that you were grit all through, and I made up my mind that you should be my heir, and that it was time the game was played out."

"I understand."

Mr. Poinsett in his high spirits did not notice the constraint in his nephew's manner. He went on contentedly:

"You are the heir to thirty thousand acres in Arizona, of a third part of Gold-Brick Camp, and a fortune of over a million in cool cash. That's what's coming to you, Tom, when your old uncle passes in his cheeks."

Tom did not speak.

"I shall send you back to England to finish your education at St. Jim's. I want you to take Buck Finn back with you. His father is ambitious to have him educated at a first-class English school, and I know you'll lend him a hand a bit at first, Tom, like the brave lad you are."

"I'll help him all I can," said Tom Merry.

"Good! And later you'll come out West again and see

(Continued on page 23.)

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THRILLS AROUND WHEN BRUCE BRADMAN FINDS HIMSELF—

IN THE GRIP OF AHMAD DOST!



Bruce Bradman risks his life to save a girl—but he gets the shock of his life when he discovers who the girl is!

CHAPTER 1. Ahmad Dost!

BRUCE BRADMAN braked the red racing car by the edge of the precipice, squeezed his athletic form stiffly out from behind the steeply raked steering-wheel, and dismounted.

Five hundred feet below, nestling on the slopes of the deep Afghan valley, lay a village. From its cluster of square, box-like houses, blue smoke spiralled against the farther mountains, which, like tiers of seats in some stadium, rose in lofty phalanx, one behind the other.

A queer figure was the famous speed ace. He might have been a motorist from the pages of a book published in the early years of the twentieth century.

A shapeless coat of shaggy fur encased his stalwart torso. And from below it, dark cloth leggings, baggy and twisted like the nether portions of some ill-used overalls, protruded till they reached his heavy boots.

On his head, an outlandish cap of fur surmounted his goggles. As he stood there, peering down at the scene far below, his breath rose like smoke from his mouth and nostrils.

"Well, boys, we ought to be able to raise some grub of sorts down yonder," he announced, with a jerk of his thumb at the distant village. "Anyhow, I've a mind to try."

"Glad you say 'of sorts,' skipper," Joe Anson, the ex-sailor, grunted dubiously. "I ain't stowed a cargo o' vittles fit to pervision a coffin ship since we druv into this blame country."

Bruce smiled and turned to scan his three companions, who, like himself, had alighted from the bus. They, too, wore shaggy goatskin garments, and might have formed a group of pioneer motorists. The cold of the high Afghan ranges had driven them to buy what warm clothing they could from natives of the mountainous territory through which they drove.

"Joe, you're getting too deuced dainty in your old age," he retorted. "Personally, I'm so ravenous I could thrive on sour milk. Which being so, what about it?"

The shortest member of the group shuffled uneasily at the suggestion. Below a skin cap far too large for his head protruded a pair of horn rims, adorning a dark brown, fleshy nose. He was Hari, the Babu, interpreter to the party.

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"Mister and sir," he twittered, in a deprecatory tone, "I would strongly admonish exercise of carefulness. Discomfort of vacuous stomach is preferable to incised jugular. Aboriginal inhabitant of microscopic urban community down there may prove inimical. We shall be in mortal perils if peradventure we get the bird."

"We've had that so often, I reckon we can stand it once more," Bruce remarked, with a wink at the slim young man by his side. "Eh, Jimmy?"

"Sure," Jimmy Cope agreed. "We're out of grub, and something's got to be done. These Afghans don't seem to cotton to us much. They've a down on strangers. Still—"

"We can take precautions," Bruce cut in briskly. "We may as well make use of those Russians whose trail we've crossed this last day or so. I gather they're travelling with some kind of a permit from the Amir. I'm whiskery enough to have come straight from Moscow. If there's any trouble, I'll pose as one of them."

He pointed to his shaggy coat, then beckoned to the Babu.

"Come on, Hari. You're interpreter. I shall want you to do your stuff. The rest of you chaps had better stop here and mind the bus. I don't like the idea of taking her down that trackway."

Reluctantly the Babu followed Bruce Bradman along the sharp, rocky descent which wound its way to the lower levels. A few weeks previously he would have rebelled at such an order. Since then, however, hard experience had taught him that when the indomitable speed ace expressed a reasonable desire, it were wiser to obey.

As they approached the outskirts of the village, the two men found it strangely quiet. A stone wall surrounded the place, but, though the narrow gateway lay open, there was no sign of anyone about. In fact, they entered the low archway unchallenged.

A few yards farther on, however, the reason for this became plain. Between the closely snuggled houses lay an open space which, perhaps, served as a kind of market square. Here a crowd had gathered about some object stuck up on the end of a high pole.

So intent on the pole were the Afghan villagers that they did not heed the Britisher's approach. Jabbering excitedly to one another, they had their backs to the archway.

"Great Scott!"

Bruce Bradman gave a stifled exclamation and fetched up a short way behind the throng. His eyes were on the

pole and what it carried. Affixed to its top was a crude wooden cage. And in the cage, huddled against the closely criss-crossed bars, was the crouching figure of a woman.

"What the deuce is this caper?" the speedman muttered. Hari shrugged his fat shoulders.

"You make close-up observation of pleasant Afghan custom, mister. In caged beast perceptible in offing, we have female woman, doubtless spouse of infuriated Afghan gent. It is national observance that, when feminine sidekick has got her marital partner's goat, said partner shall expose her in customary cage to starve. My deduction is that we now witness such pernicious phenomenon."

"Monstrous!" Bruce breathed, aghast at the sheer inhumanity of the thing.

Hari gave another of his shrugs. It set his shaggy goat hairs dancing.

"It is immense pity, mister. And mighty tough on female woman. But this matter is veritably outside our purview. I do not favour such Chicago-like practices, but interference is inadvisable. In Rome, one does as Romans do."

"When you've done libelling two perfectly respectable towns—"

Bruce growled below his breath.

All the same, he realised that Hari spoke the truth. He had heard of this particularly barbarous custom which obtained amongst the Afghans. To attempt any interference against such odds would do the victim no good, and would certainly lead to his own and Hari's destruction.

"By gosh, it makes your blood boil!" he said gruffly. "The callous devils! I'd like to grab a crowbar and take one good smash at them. I'd—"

He broke off abruptly as the Babu nudged his arm.

The crowd had turned—had parted. Through the gap thus made in their ranks, a tall figure was striding. As he came, his stern, flinty eyes fixed themselves on the two intruders.

As tall as Bruce Bradman himself, the advancing figure stood out amongst the other Afghans as a giant amongst pygmies. His nose was sharp and aquiline as a parrot's beak. And below his cruel mouth hung a long grey beard that reached to his waist.

Across one shoulder was slung a bandolier of cartridges. At his side swung a wicked-looking scimitar. At his heels followed a squad of men carrying rifles.

The newcomer halted a yard or so of the two visitors. For an instant, his eyes glinted at them like a snake's. His jet-black pupils seemed to bore them through and through. Then his right hand swept up in a gesture, that drew a flash of light from a huge signet-ring worn conspicuously on one finger. He barked something harshly in the Afghan tongue.

Galvanised into sudden life, the wretched Hari crept forward cringing. For a minute he stood stammering out broken phrases in answer to the tall man's queries. Finally he turned helplessly to Bruce.

"This gink is high-up man. Reg'lar feller. Big noise. He is sirdar and yept Ahmad Dost. He want to know what the blazes we do here."

"Russki—Russki—" Bruce exclaimed, tapping his chest vigorously, as he stepped fearlessly up to the sirdar.

"Russian, eh?" Ahmad Dost snapped, catching the words. He added something further in his own language, and Hari turned again to Bruce.

"Now we are properly in cart through tarradiddles incapable of substantiation," the Babu wailed. "He demands to see papers and documentary evidence."

Bruce hesitated. He felt the cold, hostile gleam of those granite orbs upon him. He had an unpleasant sensation down his spine. It informed him that the sirdar was suspicious, and by no means a man with whom to trifle.

For a fleeting second he stared Ahmad Dost in the face, and in that second formed a swift opinion of him. He thrust his hand into a wallet slung at his belt, and drew out a wad of papers—passports, receipts, hotel bills, and similar written matter.

"Let him take a look at these," Bruce said, passing the papers carelessly to the Babu who, with much trembling, handed them on to the sirdar.

Ahmad Dost inspected them perfunctorily. It was obvious, as Bruce had all along supposed, he could not read. But a very big man in his own estimation, he was not going to admit as much to a couple of accursed infidels. Moreover, as Bruce had banked upon, he had also received advance warning of the Russians and their coming, with instructions from Kabul to grant them every facility.

"It is well!" he rasped, and threw the paper contemptuously at Hari's feet. "Well, gaiours, now you are here, what do you want? Since those who must be obeyed command me to serve you, may Eblis swallow you up, and your whole brood!"

Hari collected himself sufficiently to pant out that their need was food. At which Ahmad Dost nodded indifferently and barked an order.

"Ask him what that girl has done?" Bruce whispered to Hari, with a nod at the wooden cage. And, with an obsequious diffidence, the Babu piped a question.

"Tell your master, O scum of Hindustan, that she has treacherously abused the confidence of those who fed her!" Ahmad jarred. "Therefore, she dies horribly—as shall all those who think to copy her example. In these parts we know how to deal faithfully with such as think to play the role of cunning serpents. Wherefore take you your provisions, pay the price, and begone, learning your lesson."

"Yes, father and grandfather of innumerable princes," Hari whimpered, between chattering teeth, "we go—we go."

"But, by Heaven, we're coming back!" was the silent vow registered by Bruce Bradman.

CHAPTER 2.

The Rescue!

THE moon had set behind the towering, snow-capped mountains. In the depths of the valley an inky pall of blackness wrapped everything. Save for the twittering of nightbirds, all was still.

Squat phantoms in the night, the mountains stood out vaguely against the rocks and crags of the hillside as Bruce Bradman and Joe Anson picked their way cautiously down towards the village.

Its inhabitants had long since bestowed themselves for the night. Not a light gleamed beyond the low walls which surrounded it. For all the stealthy visitors could tell it might have been a place of the dead.

Yet as the two men stole nearer to the walls, a faint, though ominous noise echoed beyond the barrier of stone. It was the hollow tramp of sentries—the restless crunch and thud of rifle-butts, lowered abruptly to the ground.

At the foot of the wall Bruce Bradman halted, listening. For a little his ears strained to an analysis of the sounds. Finally he turned to whisper to the sailor.

"Ahmad Dost has posted men in the village square. They're there to make sure no one interferes with the woman. It's not going to be so easy."

"Huh! You bet it ain't! Nothin' easy you shove your paws into, admiral. Shiver my timbers, if it is!" He paused to ease his collar reflectively. "Still, 'oo's goin' to go interferin' with the wench? So far as 'is nibs can tell, I means. Sorta queer, ain't it?"

"Yes, I've been thinking that," Bruce agreed thoughtfully. "Still, queer or not, we've got to carry on. Stand by—"

He unwound a rope from round his middle. It had a hook on one end. Stepping back, he tossed the hook neatly to the wall top, bore on the rope, and clinched the grapnel as it bit into the masonry.

While Joe steadied the rope he shinned deftly up it, and gained the summit of the stonework. The sailor followed, after which Bruce slung the rope over so that it trailed down the inner side of the wall. Then the pair slipped down it, and gained the inner ground.

Like ghosts in the gloom they crept between the houses till they reached the edge of the open space that marked the centre of the village. Here they halted, to peer forward at the gaunt gallows shape of the pole and cage that stood creaking in the wind.

Vaguely visible in the darkness were two shorter outlines—the sentries. Stationed wide apart, they kept watch and ward over the grim tragedy which the pole symbolised.

"You take the nearer. I'll deal with the fellow over there," Bruce whispered.

And dropping flat on his chest, wriggled, snake-wise, round behind the furthest sentry.

The fellow yawned deeply, and dropped his rifle to the earth upon its butt. As he rested himself upon the upright barrel, Bruce crawled up behind him.

By now Joe Anson would have marked his man. That Bruce knew, since the sailor was creeping towards the nearer sentry. Bruce waited an instant. Then, rising on his toes, he sprang at his own quarry from behind.

With a stifled oath the sentry spun—too late! Bruce's powerful fingers got him by the throat. Bruce's lightning knee drove like a ram into the small of his back. The fellow's yell died in a choking gasp. His heels flew from under him, and he went down with a thud, his rifle falling sideways from his palsied grip.

Bruce gave him an extra wrench that jerked the senses out of him, then rolled him over. As he lay senseless, the speed ace produced some twine and trussed him up.

Simultaneously the sailor dealt in like fashion with the other Afghan. So swiftly, so silently, had the two Englishmen done their work that the woman immured in the wooden cage was herself unaware of it.

"Stand by, and keep your gun ready, while I have her out," Bruce whispered.

He stepped to the pole, and with a single bound sprang half-way up it.

The cage rocked to his sudden leap. Like a monkey he gained the projecting platform which supported the cage, and hauled himself up beside it. Clinging on by one hand he wrenched an axe from his belt.

"A-a-ah!"

A sound came from the startled occupant of the cage. But a quick and warning "Shur-up!" from Bruce silenced her. Steadying himself, Bruce poised the axe.

The critical moment had come. To smash through the wooden bars meant noise, and noise meant rousing the sleeping Afghans. Yet there was no other way. Everything hung upon action—lightning speed.

Lightning was Bruce Bradman's first name. He trusted to it now. His axe rose, and with a single, shivering-crash drove at the bars with a shock that woke the echoes of the surrounding buildings.

A yell answered him. From an upper window a head thrust forth, shouting questions. Bruce ignored them. Like a maniac he plied his axe, while the wooden bars split and splintered in a hail of flying chips.

"Make it snappy, cap'n, for the love o' Mike!" Joe shouted. "The lubbers are tumblin' up!"

"O.K.! Done it!"

Bruce slashed a final, vicious stroke at the remaining bar. As it parted he dropped the axe, clutched in at a mass of draperies, and hauled the captive unceremoniously towards him.

Together they fell back heavily to earth. In a flash Bruce gained his feet. He whipped the woman up and dashed with her in his arms towards the village wall, Joe Anson lumbering at his heels.

And none too soon. From every doorway rushed a wave of Afghans. As they came they yelled to one another for information. Only the jet black of the night saved the daring intruders. Before the foe located them they had gained the base of the surrounding walls.

As Bruce fetched up, the girl gasped something in an unknown tongue—Afghan. Bruce ignored her. He flung her unceremoniously over his shoulder, and went swarming up the rope. As he went a man came dashing in out of the gloom.

Joe Anson, flat against the stonework, stepped out and swung his gun. He brought its butt down on the Afghan's head. As the fellow reeled back and tottered to the ground, the sailor sprang up the rope after his master.

Straddling the crest Bruce waited while the seaman tossed the rope clear, and sprang to earth beyond the wall. Bullets went whistling past the speedman's head as, with the coolness that was characteristic of him, he lowered his burden to the sailor's ready hands. Then he dropped lightly to the ground.

"Here—I'll carry her. You cover us!" he cried, and whipped the woman up again.

"Lawks-a-mussy!" She gave a gasp, and struggled in his grip. "Leggo, you chump. I'll oof it on me own!"

The voice was a husky Cockney baritone.

Bruce dropped the "girl," and let her run. As, with Joe, he sprinted by her side for the shadow of the hills, he flung a question.

"Who the dickens are you?"

"Syd Arper, Indian Secret Service. Got meself up as a blinkin' skirt. But they rumbled me." For a space the Cockney broke off, panting as he ran. Then he gasped out: "That old cadden Ahmad 'ad me up on the carpet. 'Ow, so yer a woman, are yer?' he sez. 'Aw ri'—well, he knows 'ow to treat woman wot ain't no good in Afghanistan,' 'e sez. So 'e shoves me in the cage to starve. They got narsty 'abits, these Afghans. And— Look out! They've spotted us!"

As the three ran up the trail a spurt of flame broke from the night behind. Bullets went humming by, and unpleasantly close.

"Right, man—right!" Bruce ordered, and dashed off the rising trackway into the scrub.

A short sprint took them to the base of a sheer precipice, where a rope dangled. While the Afghans pursued the steep ascent that was the rocky road, the trio went up the rope, hand over hand. At the top Cope and Hari were waiting with the car. While the pursuers still toiled up the steep ascent, they tumbled aboard, and with a blast of flame shooting from its long exhaust the racer shot away into the night. And as it went streaking down the mountain road, Syd Harper flung his voluminous disguise to the four winds.

It was as well he did so, for some ten miles farther on a squad of horsemen swung out from the rocks across the road, right in the racer's path. As Bruce's brakes

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went on with a scream that echoed shrieking off the hill-side, they raised their rifles to their shoulders.

The car skidded to a stand before a line of shaggy ponies. Across their heads was levelled a menacing range of rifles.

"Ah—the Russians!" an Afghan cried. "'Tis well! Ahmad Dost is anxious to have a word with you!" The speaker paused, his eyes glinting cynically. "Most anxious, O Strangers from the North!"

As, perforce, they got slowly down from the car, the five fugitives found little comfort in his sarcastic tones.

CHAPTER 8.

Bruce Bradman's Masterstroke!

AHMAD'S lieutenant—such evidently he was—scanned the quintet shrewdly for an instant. Then he signalled to Bruce. As the latter stepped forward, the Afghan made a second and even more peremptory gesture. It singled out the unfortunate Hari.

"Worshipper of cows and apes—make ready with thy lying tongue!" he ordered. "By Allah, thou wilt need it. Ahmad Dost requires an explanation!"

Uncertain of what had happened, but unpleasantly aware that fresh danger was at hand, Bruce followed the Afghan, Hari stumbling in their wake as best his failing legs would allow. Some yards away, amongst the rocks, a shepherd's hut stood. The Afghan threw the door wide.

"Master of Millions—here are the men!" he announced, motioning Bruce and the Babu into the hut.

The pair stepped in across the threshold. On a bench beyond a table sat Ahmad Dost, his hawk's eyes a-gleam with menace.

"Close the door and stand by it!" he ordered curtly. "And now, you two, how comes it that you style yourselves Russians when in fact my men encountered the Soviet's envoys twenty miles from here only this morning?"

"Are your men so sure these persons were what they pretended to be, O Ahmad Dost?" Bruce countered, as Hari translated. "You have inspected my papers. What of theirs?"

Ahmad smiled grimly.

"My officer read them. And he knows the Russian tongue." The deadly smile spread slowly along Ahmad Dost's sarcastic mouth. "I am not twice fooled. To fool me once is death. And that you have done, you beggars' spawn. So—"

As Hari gave the gist, Bruce started back. His action spelt dismay, but it had its purpose. His right hand grabbed a revolver from the lieutenant's sash; his left hand jerked his own automatic free.

"Stick 'em up!" he cried, and sprang clear, a gun levelled at either Afghan. "A sound, and I'll blow the pair of you to Paradise!"

Dost and his officer did not understand the words themselves. But there was no mistaking the tone in which Bruce uttered them. Suddenly the two raised their hands above their heads.

"Hari—pull yourself together. Get Ahmad's weapon off him," Bruce breathed; and, nerving himself, the Babu ran forward to obey. His knees were knocking with terror at his own audacity. But now Bruce had forced things to a head, the interpreter realised that boldness was his only chance of life.

"Keep that fellow covered while I deal with his chief," Bruce added.

Hari advanced on the lieutenant, the captured gun quivering in his uncertain hand.

"Exhibition of resistance, fellow, will produce resultant lethal damage!" he hissed, between gritted teeth. "Move, and I will bump you off—I will put cross upon you—I will make the croak. Get me!"

The Afghan lieutenant crouched hesitant. With a bound, Bruce reached his master, flung him backwards, and thrust a gun to his temple. In a flash Dost clutched at Bruce's gun wrist. His left hand whipped a dagger from his belt, and he stabbed viciously at the Englishman.

In the nick of time Bruce whisked aside, and the gleaming blade buried itself in the table-top. A wrench—his arm was free. He swung it up and crashed the gun down upon Ahmad's head. His claw-like fingers still clutching the dagger hilt, Ahmad Dost rolled to the floor, senseless.

Bruce twirled and rushed the officer, just as the latter leapt upon Hari. He caught him by the throat and hurled him at the wall. Gasping, the Afghan tottered forward. Bruce caught him as he came, and smashed a lightning right into his temple. Then he crooked his arm and received the fellow as he stumbled forward limply on his toes.

Bruce lowered his unconscious form to the floor, yanked his sash free, and tore it into shreds. With these he gagged

and bound him. Then he turned his attention to Ahmad Dost, who still lay like a log where he had fallen.

As Bruce bent over the sirdar his brain worked quickly. So far so good. But what of the aftermath? Only a few yards away a score of armed tribesmen waited, on guard over Cope, Joe Anson, and the all-precious car. Their eyes would be focused on the hut door—the only exit from the little structure. What would they do if the two captives emerged alone.

Bruce Bradman did not need to guess twice. He knew. In outing Ahmad Dost and his ally, they had merely fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire. There was no exit but that door. What could he do?

He paused for a fleeting second, his eyes half-closed. Then he dropped on one knee and started pulling off the gorgeous clothing which Ahmad Dost wore. Next, he slit Dost's sash in thongs, just as he had done with the lieutenant's. With the pieces he gagged and pinioned their owner.

While Hari covered and trembled by the door, he donned the commandeered raiment, wrenched the knife from the table, and, bending over Dost, cut away his splendid beard, close up to his chin.

In a few moments the clatter of the pounding hoofs died away amongst the mountains. Bruce Bradman turned abruptly to his astonished companions.

"And now, boys, we'd better beat it while the going's good," he said coolly, as he swung in behind the wheel.

Like some great red beetle, the racer blared its way along a chain of mountain tracks—up hill, down dale, round corners flanked by unguarded steeps.

For miles the surface was rough, the great car came down to a crawl. Jogging, lurching, it rumbled over miles of knife-blade flints, and when occasion offered, made up for lost time with shortlived bursts of speed.

Ceaselessly the voyagers glanced behind them for signs of mounted tribesmen on their heels. But only their own dust rose up in their wake. If Ahmad Dost's henchmen followed, they had as yet failed to catch up with their quarry.

Slowly the big car lumbered towards the winding road that swept into the deep gorge. Then, almost on the threshold of the gap, the engine petered out, and the racer came to a sullen stand.

An hour later the soft hum of a gently turning engine told



Bruce's right hand grabbed a revolver from the lieutenant's sash; his left jerked his own automatic free. "Stick 'em up!" he cried, and sprang clear, a gun levelled at either Afghan. "A sound, and I'll blow the pair of you to Paradise!"

In his pocket was a tube of rubber solution, stowed there some hours before when the last of several punctures had necessitated the patching of an inner tube. He squeezed a generous "worm" forth, and dabbed the sticky stuff upon his cheeks and chin. Then he beckoned to Hari.

"Fix this beard on me, Hari, and see you make a good job of it."

"By Heck and Pete and other notable personages, you are one hard-boiled guy!" Hari muttered, as he compelled his trembling fingers to their not unskilful task. "But, notwithstanding, I suffer grievous trepidation that they rumble us!"

"You'll suffer something a darn sight worse if they do, laddie!" Bruce assured him, gingerly fingering his new found beard, to assure himself that it hung well and true. He took up Ahmad's scimitar. "What's the Afghan for? Hurry after those other Russians! They're fakes!"

Hari translated. Bruce nodded, dragged the lieutenant out of line with the door, and threw it open.

"Right. And now—forward march. And mind you keep your tail up."

He swaggered out of the hut, hopeful that the darkness would aid his bold disguise. Through the beard he rasped an order at the waiting tribesmen, and sent them springing into the saddle with a fierce and imperious gesture. A minute, and they were galloping down the trackway. As he guessed, Ahmad's men had learnt the advisability of instant and implicit obedience to their leader's commands.

that all was well. Gathering speed, the red racer roared up into the depths of the mountain pass.

Near its mouth a squad of horsemen broke from the rocks, and bore, like a cloud of vengeful Valkyrs, down upon the trail. Some flung themselves off their steeds, and, dropping behind boulders, opened fire. The drone of bullets drove through the exhaust blare as the crimson car shot into the gap.

Then the mountains hid her, and she thundered on, the echoes of her cacaphonic blast smashing back off the beetling crags above. Dost and his Afghans vanished, lost in the mists, as, all out and reckless, Bruce bored his way through their thick white mantle.

At last the air cleared suddenly. Half-blinded by the brilliance of the noonday sun, Bruce saw a group of men dash from the roadside. He bent above the wheel, his jaw protruding.

Then he straightened up and laughed. Across the road was stretched a line of khaki. His brakes went on with a scream that hurled a mockery of laughter back at the pass where Ahmad Dost lay hidden.

It was the North-West Frontier and the British Army. Saved!

(There is another thrilling yarn of Lightning Bruce Bradman and his two pals in next week's GEM. Don't miss it!)

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GUSSY, THE BRONCHO-BUSTER!

(Continued from page 23.)

your old uncle. What do you say, Tom? Do you like the prospect I've sketched out?"

"No."

Tom Merry made the reply in a low but clear voice. The rancher started and dropped his cigar. He stared at Tom Merry.

"What did you say?"

Tom Merry stood up. He looked very handsome as he stood there in the moonlight, his face a little pale, but very resolute.

"I said 'no,'" he replied. "You have treated me badly! You deceived me—you allowed your gentlemen to make a fool of me! I've been fooled all along, and everybody, I suppose, has been grinning at my simplicity! If you had been the poorest hand on the ranch instead of a millionaire I should have felt the same towards you when I came out! I didn't come here as a fortune-hunter; I came expecting to be treated fairly, and I wasn't treated fairly! You've made a fool of me, and you can't expect me to like it! That's all!"

Mr. Poinsett's face was a study. He stared at his nephew for some moments, and then the thunderclap came.

"You impudent young scoundrel!" he roared. "Is this how you speak to your uncle, who's taken all this trouble to make a man of you? This is what comes of your being coddled by Priscilla Fawcett, I suppose!"

Tom's lips trembled.

"Don't you say a word against Miss Fawcett!" he said. "I won't stand it, uncle or not! Another word like that, and I'll leave your house this minute, if I have to walk across the prairie to the railroad!"

Mr. Poinsett started to his feet.

"Tom, don't go! You young fool, are you going to quarrel with thirty thousand acres and five million dollars?"

"Hang your acres and dollars!"

"You—you—you— But you're quite right! Come back, Tom, and hang the acres and the dollars!" gasped the rancher. "Come back, my boy! Don't leave your old uncle!"

The change in the rancher's voice melted Tom Merry's heart at once. He stopped, and looked back hesitatingly.

"Come back, Tom!" said Mr. Poinsett. "Isn't it enough when your uncle admits that he was wrong? You said the truth; I had no right to play that game on you. If I had known you I shouldn't have done it. I'm sorry, Tom!"

"Oh, don't!" said Tom. "It's all right. Only I—"

"I guess you're the nephew I've been wanting," said the rancher in a curiously soft voice. "Hang the dollars! No seeking after dead men's shoes about Tom Merry! I guess not! My lad, you shall do as you like—anything you like—only—only don't run away, my boy!"

"I won't!" said Tom, laughing. "I—I'm sorry I lost my temper, only—"

"You were right, my boy—quite right. But it's all over

now. We're friends—eh? You're not going to bully your old uncle any more?"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, coming along in time to hear the last remark. "I am surprised at you, Tom Merry! If I had an uncle like this I should make it a particular point to cherish him. If you are at all dissatisfied, I have a couple of aunts I will swop for your uncle, dear boy!"

And Mr. Poinsett roared. He was in a humour now to be pleased with anything. And the evening, after all, turned out to be the jolliest one the juniors had spent in Arizona.

The secret was out, and Tom Merry was on the best of terms with his uncle. If Tom had had at all a weak nature, he would certainly have been spoiled by the rancher. Nothing was too good for him, in Gabriel Poinsett's opinion, and everybody about the ranch, too, treated him with the greatest respect as the heir of the ranch and the great wealth of the Cattle King.

But Tom Merry was not the kind of fellow to get swelled head. He was always the same, modest and good-tempered, with the same sunny smile for everyone.

Needless to say, the juniors enjoyed the remainder of their stay in the Far West, and felt keen enough regrets when the time came to part.

Mr. Poinsett and Colonel Stalker, and Hawk the Black-foot, and Pomp, the darkey, came with them as far as Santa Fe on the return journey. Pomp was inconceivable at not being able to accompany "Mass' Tom" back to England; but he was promised that he should see Tom Merry again when the hero of St. Jim's came back to Arizona. And, meanwhile, he was to stay at the ranch—a more comfortable position than that in which Tom Merry had first found him in Chicago.

At Santa Fe, Gabriel Poinsett parted from his nephew, with a sad face. In those few short weeks he had come to be very fond of Tom, and he felt the parting keenly. The juniors waved their hands to the old man as he stood on the station with the Blackfoot and watched the departing train, Pongo also barking a farewell.

Colonel Stalker saw the boys as far as the farm in Wyoming where Blake's uncle lived, and where the boys were to spend a few days before returning to New York. Buck Finn was by this time quite one of the party, and when the chums travelled eastwards at last the American boy was looking forward eagerly to seeing the Old Country and to his new life as a junior at St. Jim's.

It was not without regret that the juniors bade farewell to the American continent; yet they gladly embarked at New York, and as they steamed past Sandy Hook they were thinking gleefully of the return to St. Jim's.

Skippole's notebooks were full—in fact, crammed—and he was quite ready to settle down in his study at St. Jim's and write his book.

Tom Merry & Co. were thinking of the reunion with all their old chums, and gladly enough they grieved the sight of the shores of Old England.

THE END.

(Tom Merry & Co. return to St. Jim's with Buck Finn in "The Cowboy of St. Jim's!" next week. Look out for this ripping yarn!)

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