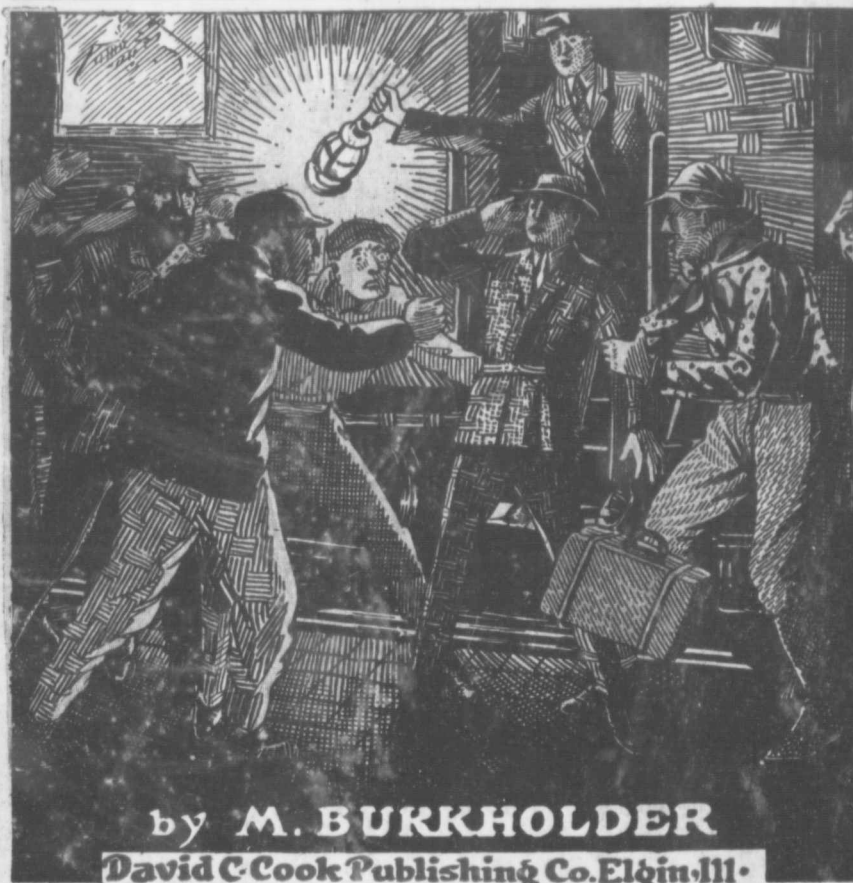


The HANG TOGETHER BOYS



by M. BURKHOLDER

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By Mabel Burckholder

CHAPTER ONE.

The Hang Together Boys.

THAT guy's lonesome!" The words floated across to Austin Gundy, as he sat waiting to be served in a little restaurant in Cochrane, known as the New York Café.

Austin had just been wondering why the café was so called. Could anything be less like New York than this new railroad town of Northern Ontario? In front of the door ran the main street, lined with some rather modern stores, banks, eating places, and private houses; but this street was soon lost in broken ground, where the bush was half cleared, and a little farther on in the dense, impenetrable northern forest. The railroad was the big thing about Cochrane, all right. It was linked up by the transcontinental with large cities to east, west, and south.

When Austin heard voices across the room, he brought his eyes back from the street to look at the two young fellows who stood with heads together near the door. Lonesome, eh? Did they refer to him? Well, they had his number all right! He was frightfully lonely, but he didn't suppose that he looked it.

The smaller boy was Stubbs. He worked around the New York Café. Austin had spoken to him a couple of times when Stubbs brought his soup. But that wasn't Stubbs' regular job—waiting on the table. He worked at dusting the counter, polishing the brass railing, and "sweeping up."

Then Austin let his eyes wander past Stubbs to look instead at the tall young man who was hunting for a vacant table. He would have taken a seat at a table near the door, but when Stubbs whispered, "That guy's lonesome," he looked up quickly, hesitated, and finally walked across and dropped into a seat near Austin. The incident amused Austin, for he knew they didn't think he had overheard. It put him on his guard. What did they want with him anyway?

The newcomer began to talk immediately. "Been in Cochrane long?" he inquired pleasantly.

"A couple of weeks."

"Thought you must be a stranger—for I think I know most of the fellows around here." Then, as Austin sat moody and silent, "How are you liking it?"

"Rotten hole!" burst out Austin, with a vehemence which surprised himself; for if anyone from back home had asked him how he liked the North, he would have said, "Fine and dandy!"

The other was quick to argue the point. "Oh, but this is going to be a big town—"

"I guess so," languidly; "but I'm not interested in going-to-be's."

"What's your line?"

Austin felt his face go red. It gave him quite a hustle to tell what his line really was. Up until a month ago it had been going to school, fooling around having a good time on his dad's money, and living in a fine house in Toronto. "I'm connected with the railroad," he explained at last.

His companion looked puzzled, but tactfully turned the subject. "My dad's in the pulp and paper business," he offered. "We've been here a long time. My name's Hunt—Bob Hunt." Then he drew from his vest pocket a small, square card, which he fingered thoughtfully and finally passed across the table.

"What's this?" inquired Austin, a bit ill-humoredly. "Ticket for some show?"

"Hardly that. It's just an announcement about our class— young men's Bible class, you know. It meets in the basement of the church over there; you can see the place from here. Say, can't you come over tonight? We're having our monthly bun-feed; it will be a splendid chance to get acquainted. Around town they call us the Hang Together Boys. We rather liked it, and adopted it for a class name. You know, in a place like this it's necessary—hanging together, I mean. There are so many strangers, and everybody is lonesome. Say, we'd love to have you drop in; will you come?" The jerky sentences showed that Bob Hunt felt it some effort to give his invitation.

Austin didn't know why he felt so contrary, but he was conscious that his aloof manner threw a wet blanket over his companion's enthusiasm. "Oh, I don't know about that," he murmured ungraciously, fearful lest he might be walking into a trap. Yet he was fearfully lonely—

"You'll like it," urged Bob Hunt. "We do all sorts of stunts, of course as long as it's suitable for a church. Do say you'll come."

Austin thought of the lonely evening that confronted him, knocking about the streets with nowhere in particular to go, and consented.

"I'll call for you," offered Bob Hunt.

No doubt that was for fear he would back out. "Don't need to," replied Austin shortly; "I've said I'll come."

But it proved one of the hardest things Austin had ever set himself to do. As soon as Bob Hunt left him, he didn't want to go at all. He felt in a sort of panic about it. He go to a Sunday-school class meeting! That was a kid's affair. He hung around the restaurant, dreading to make a move. It was Stubbs, industriously brushing up and carrying out dishes, who finally roused him.

"What's the rush, Stubbs?"

"Huh! Trying to git me work done in time for the bun-feed. Let's go together," he suggested, laying aside his apron. And so it was settled.

Down the basement steps of the church they went, Stubbs leading on with assurance. The door swung open, allowing a broad band of light to illumine the hall, and Austin Gundy found himself face to face with eight or ten young fellows of his own age.

One couldn't be stiff in that company. First they had games and gymnastic stunts, and after that came the "cats." Through it all there was much noise and talking, and a little speech-making. But the spirit of the meeting was fine, and Austin heaved a sigh of satisfaction when he compared this evening with some others he had spent in Cochrane.

The boys were a friendly bunch, sure enough. There was Cecil Nye, the president. Tall and lean, spry as a cat, with quick, eager, blue eyes, he seemed to oversee the whole affair and to take it on himself to provide a good time for everybody.

Then there was Nipper Nabb, the pinched, undersized boy, who sold magazines and candy on the train. And who could forget the "dook"? He was clerk in Sutherland's drug-store; and they called him the Duke of Sutherland, or more commonly, the "dook," because he hated to soil his hands, smelled of hair perfume and other drugs, and said "Don't cher know!" in a drawling tone.

It was when the games were over and the wieners and buns were being passed, that Nysie turned to Austin. "Tell us something about yourself, Gundy. We like to hear from the new fellows. You've just come from a big city, and it's a good many months since most of us saw one. Tell us what they're doing down there."

A hush fell on the merry group. Austin felt awkward and nervous. Then an impulse seemed to urge him to speak about himself. Couldn't he open their eyes! "My name's Gundy," he said, and paused. "I'm in the publicity and advertising department for the transcontinental, down in the general offices in the city."

The boys had not before connected the name of Gundy with

that of the well-known railroad man. But now a look of surprise and interest appeared on every face.

"Your father comes up here once or twice a year, doesn't he?" asked Nysie.

"Yes, he does. He goes from coast to coast every summer. One of the duties of our department is to take pictures of all the scenery and towns along the line, and every spring dad sends out his photographers. I believe Mr. James Marsden is photographer for this part of the country."

"Phew! And you've come up to help him!" Nysie rushed to the conclusion.

"Some swell job!" agreed the boys.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know; maybe it is."

Now Nysie hadn't guessed quite right, but Austin saw no reason to set him straight. It was very pleasant for Austin to make out that he had a "pull" with the railroad.

Austin was feeling very superior, and as one untruth always calls out another, he was eager to establish more firmly the impression that he was an important person up in the north country on big business.

"When do you start?"

"As soon as I can find Mr. Marsden—"

Then Nysie spoke up, "Mr. Marsden is in town. I saw him today. I work on the railroad, too, you know—only just a common train hand—working up from the bottom. Well, Mr. Marsden came in on the train from Winnipeg this morning. Too bad Marsden doesn't know you've arrived. Say, he boards near here; he has a room only two or three doors away. Wait, all of you; I'll go and see if he's in and fetch him back with me, if possible."

Austin Gundy got a bad fright. He didn't want to see Marsden. He must prevent it; but how? It was too ridiculous!

When Nysie's flying form disappeared through the doorway, and his step echoed along the sidewalk outside, Austin sprang up. "No need to bring Marsden out at this hour; I'll



They brushed past him in the darkness, almost touching his elbow.

go over. Two or three doors from the church, did you say? Oh, yes, thank you, I know the way; I'll find him!"

But he moved too late. Crouching in the shadowy passage below the stairs, he heard Nysie returning, followed by a man he knew must be Marsden. They brushed past him in the darkness, almost touching his elbow. And when they opened the door into the classroom, which let out its broad band of light into the hall, he crouched low to keep clear of its ray. As the door shut he crept stealthily up the steps, only to spring behind a niche in the church wall, as the whole group of boys came rushing out pell-mell, followed more slowly by Mr. Hunt, the teacher, and Mr. James Marsden.

"Well, if that don't get yer goat!" exclaimed the shrill voice of Nysie.

"Mysterious, don't cher know!" murmured the "dook."

"I think you lads have had a dream," Marsden bantered them. "Getting an old fellow, like me, nearly out of bed, and all for nothing, is no joke. I tell you, Mr. Gundy's son, Austin, is at school back home."

"Then you weren't expecting to meet him?" asked Bob Hunt.

"Sure wasn't."

Nysie scratched his closely clipped head, and sputtered, "Well, if that don't beat the Dutch! Sorry I made you come out!"

As the boys went back to the classroom, and Mr. Marsden sauntered off in the direction of home, Austin Gundy stepped stiffly out of his hiding place behind the church wall and made a dash for freedom. He didn't stop to consider that running was the worst thing he could do, as it is almost certain to attract attention. He plunged down an alley. Seeing a man standing on a veranda near by, he cut into a yard, roused a sleeping dog, pushed through a fence, and fell blindly against a wire clothesline. This caught him under the chin and sent him spinning backward, sprawling at full length in a flower bed.

CHAPTER TWO.

Ross Murray's Substitute.

HELP! Help! Chicken thieves!" So shouted the woman of the house in whose flower bed Austin lay. The dog barked furiously and bounded to the end of his chain, which creaked with a horrible grind around its post.

In answer to the woman's cry for help, the man who stood on the next door veranda came around to the side of the house. Of course it was Mr. Marsden, for in his ignorance of the locality, Austin had run right into the person he was trying to avoid.

Austin could not rise. There was not time, and his head pained from hitting the hard ground. So he just looked up at Mr. Marsden rather defiantly. "I was trying to go home by a short cut," he explained rather lamely.

His father's photographer knew him at once, but was discreet enough not to fill the mouth of the neighbor woman with news. "It's all right, Mrs. Neal," he explained, helping Austin to rise. "I am acquainted with this young man; he is one of Mr. Hunt's boys. No, he's not badly hurt, I guess. He just got hung on your clothesline; really it ought not to be there."

Mr. Marsden led Austin to his own room, where the lad dropped into a chair looking ruefully at the tear in the knee of his trousers. "What are you doing here?" asked the photographer gravely.

"Do you think you have a right to ask that question, sir?" returned the other a bit defiantly.

"Perhaps not; yet it is surely a question any man might put to another."

"Of course I'll tell you, if you care to know," said Austin, trying to assume a grand air. "Dad's getting out the new folders for the year (which was true) and he wants a write-up of the scenic features from here to the Quebec line; so I've come up on the job." The boy felt his face grow very red, because the last statement was not true.

"I thought Ross Murray would get that job. How much are they paying you?"

The quick question took Austin by surprise. "I don't see that you have any right—" he began.

Mr. Marsden gave him a keen glance.

Austin began to think the other not quite so "easy," and wondered if Mr. Marsden could look right through him, could see how empty were his pockets, and how weak he was from lack of enough food.

Mr. Marsden sat quietly beside a little desk, apparently not looking at Austin, or at anything in particular. "Well, well, I thought Ross Murray would land that job," he said at last. "Your father trusts him to the limit."

"Well, you see me here instead,"

Mr. Marsden wrote busily at his desk for a few minutes. Finally he wiped his pen, and looked up. "Say, do you remember those two weeks at Easter you worked for me? You called it a holiday, but we got a lot of good pictures, just the same. I meant to pay you for your work but haven't seen you since."

Instantly the magic word "pay" interested the boy. The man, having torn off a pink slip along a perforation, was actually handing it over to him—his check for fifty dollars.

"Is that enough?" he inquired pleasantly. "It is at the rate of twenty-five dollars a week."

Austin felt like shouting out his thanks, but that would have betrayed his terrible need. So he coolly nodded his approval and pocketed the check as though receiving money was an everyday occurrence with him. Soon after he arose to go.

"Well, good luck to you, Austin," Mr. Marsden called after him from the top of the stairs. "You've got a big job, and I

hope you make good. Let me know how you get along. A letter will always reach me if sent to this address. This is where I stay whenever I'm in Cochrane. Well, good-by, good-by!"

How much of the truth did Mr. Marsden guess? Would he write home and tell the folks all he knew? But Austin felt that his biggest problem was that of living up to the bluff he had started.

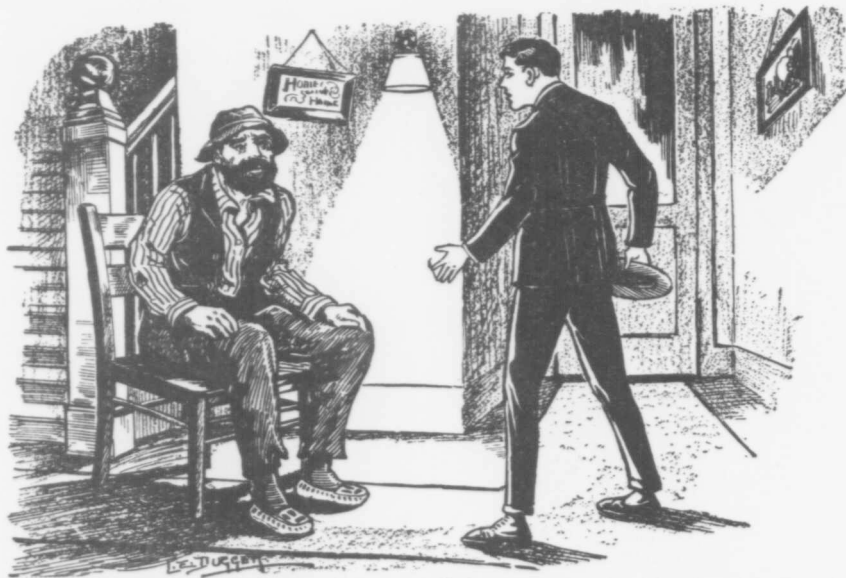
The moon shone on the little lake around which the town nestled. Over at the station a train stood, with full steam up, headed south. Austin hurried by, without looking at it. Queer he could never see a train standing in the Cochrane station, headed south, without getting a horrid lump in his throat. Ross Murray he hated. It was Murray who always got the sugarplums; it was Murray who was favored by one little advance after another. He could almost hear his father's voice:

"That's it, my boy! One little advance after another will some day land Murray at the top. But you are not content with little advances. You want me to give you the top right away. As long as I can persuade you to stay in school, I will gladly pay your expenses. But if you strike out for yourself, you must fight your way like any other young man and expect only the job you're fit for, not the one you think you are entitled to because you are my son. The railroad offers you many chances of promotion, but you must begin at the bottom and climb, like anybody else."

"I'm out for easier money than that, Dad!" Austin had smiled loftily; "you can't treat me like some of the navies in your construction gangs!"

With a lot of wild words, Austin had left the office. He'd show a few of them what he was made of! He guessed he was old enough to take care of himself.

Yet he could hardly say that his father had been angry—more sorrowful, perhaps. He had written him out a substantial check, and said as he passed it over, "Let me know if you need more."



Sitting in the hall under the dingy light, was the wildest looking bushman Austin had yet seen in the North.

Although Austin had almost disdained to take it, that same check had come in very, very handy. Now it was gone, and Mr. Marsden had handed him another. *That* would last only a few days, until he had "cinched a job." It seemed he couldn't get a foothold anywhere—Oh, yes, they wanted him as general help in the Cochrane office! Measly wages! He'd as soon go into the lumber camps, or out with the construction gang.

"Bluff!" he cried, as he turned into his stopping place; "that's my game! I've bluffed the Hang Together Boys, and I've bluffed Marsden. Say, why couldn't I carry it through to a finish? Why couldn't I bluff everybody into thinking I'm Ross Murray, or that somehow or other he's failed to show up, and I'm taking his place? If I'd write out a few letters of introduction for myself, the trappers, fur traders, hotels, and hunting lodges would receive me with open arms as the agent of A. S. Gundy! Say, old Davey Mackenzie would keep me all summer at the Abitibi fur post if he thought it would be doing dad a favor. I could put in a summer free of cost! Easy money! I'll say so!"

With his brain filled with these wild thoughts, Austin Gundy swung into his rooming house. Most likely if he had slept on his plan, it would not have seemed brilliant at all by morning, but tawdry and mean. But he had no more time to consider it. Circumstances forced him to take a stand. Sitting in the hall under the dingy light, was the wildest looking bushman Austin had yet seen in the North. He was a sight to make strong nerves quiver; so rude, dirty and savage-looking. His keen, terrible eyes from under bushy brows looked Austin through and through. Then, when he had looked to his satisfaction, this queer individual blurted out,

"Hey, now, young man! Be ye Ross Murray?"

CHAPTER THREE.

Eastward Bound.

AUSTIN wheeled about on his rude interrogator, with the words, "And what can I do for you, sir?" "I'm here about that box of gold and silver coins," winked the bushman knowingly. "It's Black Jack's man I am; ye'll understand."

Austin nodded; he hardly knew why. Now what on earth did this mean? Box of gold and silver coins! Black Jack!

"Black Jack's all cut up about it," explained the bushman, in a mysterious whisper. "Says he never hopes to have peace till it's give back. He stole it when the railroad was bein' put through. Gundy brought it up here one time, to pay the men off. Black Jack stole it, but it ain't done him no good. He'd get pinched the minute he showed it. He's toted it all over the bush with him, an' it's never brought him nawthin' but bad luck. He lives on one of the upper arms of the White River, in a nest what I don't think you, nor any other tender-foot could find fer yerself. Seems Black Jack got word through to Gundy nigh a month ago, that he was willin' to cough up. An' Gundy offers to send up his trusty man, Ross Murray. So here ye be. Now I'm here, young man, to take ye up. Ken ye start tomorrow on the local?"

Then Austin half lifted his head, so confused with the strange things that were happening that he scarcely knew what position to take. "But I'm not Ross Murray; I'm A. S. Gundy's son."

His companion broke out into a hoarse laugh. "Well, that's all right; goin' it one better, I should say. His own son, eh! Ye don't say so!"

Austin did not know what to reply. But whatever he blurted out seemed to satisfy Black Jack's agent, who soon after went away, leaving him to the company of his own confused thoughts.

The next morning Austin got up early, bathed his head, which ached badly, and sat down to write letters. They were letters of introduction to himself, each one commencing, "To Whom It May Concern," and ending with a scrawl that was as much like his father's signature as he knew how to make it.

Putting the letters in his pocket, he went out, got something to eat at the New York Café, waved a hand to Stubbs, and sauntered over to the station. With a show of boldness he went to the upstairs offices and asked for the manager. A few minutes afterward he was presented to a portly man. "I am Austin Gundy," he introduced himself.

"Indeed! Son of A. S. Gundy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well, I am glad to see you, I'm sure. What can I do for you?"

Austin was trembling but managed to say, "I would like you to fix me up transportation from Cochrane east to the Quebec boundary. Dad has sent me on an important mission. I have a letter here from him."

While the boy fumbled for one of his made-up compositions, the manager waved him back. Evidently he had noticed a family resemblance, for Austin was strikingly like his father. "Glad to fix you up, I'm sure," he beamed.

Austin walked out, trying to look unconcerned. Down the track stood the "local," getting up steam for her eastward run. The boy boarded the train as if he owned her, the "A. Gundy" of his suit-case tag turned face upward. He knew Black Jack's agent was on board, because he had had a few words with him at starting, but it suited his dignity not to be seen with him.

As the train went swinging down the line toward the morning sun, leaving Cochrane in the distance, who should come through the car but Cecil Nye, president of the Hang

Together Boys. His keen eyes "spotted" Austin at once. "Hello, Gundy! What happened to you last night?"

"Eh?" eyeing the neat young trainman with a grand air. "Oh, I thought I'd save you the trouble of bringing Mr. Marsden in, but when I went outside I got mixed in my directions, and missed him. Saw him later though, and had a fine talk up in his room."

"So that's all fixed up, and you're starting on that wonder trip of yours."

"Sure," murmured Austin languidly, as though wonder trips were the commonest things in the world.

"Wish I was goin' with you. I do get so sick of this old train. They say they're goin' to put me on a better run soon."

"Peanuts, pop corn, chewing gum, and candy!" sang out a shrill voice at the entrance, and in stepped Nipper Nabb with a basket of sweets on his arm.

"Is Nipper on the local, too?" asked Austin.

"Sure, I told you that last night," laughed Nysie. "He and I are pals."

Nip rested his basket on the arm of Austin's seat, before he realized whom he was addressing. He looked tired and pale, rather too small for his load.

Austin selected a couple of oranges, and threw him a dollar.

"Keep the change," he said, with a grand air of indifference to money.

Nip stared at the bill. "It's too—too much!" he gasped.

"You may keep it, Nipper," cried Nysie, glad for his friend: "He means it for you; there's lots more where that came from, eh, Gundy?"

"Say," he continued, after a minute, "did you enjoy it last night? Didn't we have a great time?"

"Oh, it was all right," conceded Austin.

"Why didn't you give your name in as a member for the summer? It would have let you in on lots of nice things. We run a place in Cochrane where you can get a lunch, a hot bath, or most anything. And we'd write to you while you were away and send you the class papers. Then you'd be

there for some of the hikes likely, and for the big canoe trip every summer. Say, now—"

"Take my name if you like," laughed Austin. "How funny! Now I'm a member of a Sunday-school class, am I?"

"Yes. Associate member. Now don't forget to drop in whenever you're in Cochrane. We won't forget you. We're ready to stand by you. Guess you'll never need our help though."

"What's the end of your run?" asked Austin.

"La Sarre."

"Good! That's where I light."

"I'll show you around the place," offered Nysie.

"What's there to see?" asked Austin, rather suspiciously, for it suited him to be alone.

"Oh, the town pump, a few hundred stumps right in the middle of the main street, everybody talking French. It's just across the line into Quebec, you know."

Austin nodded. "Yes, but just now I guess I'd better get busy and write up this scenery. Great, isn't it?"

He drew out his notebook with an air of importance, and Nysie took the hint and walked away. But Austin could not write for looking out of the window. The scenery was the wildest he had ever looked at. To the right lay the sullen gray waters of Lake Abitibi, and to the left an endless procession of evergreen trees. So it was all day long. Little lakes, little towns; but dominating all, the armies of the pulp-wood forests. Owing to a slight accident, they were delayed on a siding for several hours, so that before they reached La Sarre dusk was settling over the bush. But at last the train thundered over White River bridge and slackened immediately for the station.

Austin was stiff with sitting, and he was very loathe to be dropped down in that queer French town after nightfall. Even Black Jack's agent would have been a welcome sight just then, but he was not to be seen. Then, "La Sarre!" shouted Nysie, poking his head in at the door.

All at once everybody seemed to be talking French. A lot

of people had come from the little houses along the river to meet the evening train, as though that were the great event of the day. An excitable crowd, they seemed, pushing and gesticulating; surely they were more than commonly excited.

No sooner had Austin stepped down than he was surrounded by rowdies, and a big half-breed knocked his hat sideways.

"Look out there, Smarty!" growled Austin.

But no one seemed to understand him. They wouldn't stop their jabbering long enough to try.

"What are you givin' us?" shouted Nysie, who stood on the car step, hanging over Austin protectingly and waving his lantern over the heads of the crowd. "I say, what are you givin' us? Stand back, will you?"

Austin struck out with his fist, but that made matters worse.

On the instant somebody shouted, "Here he is! Here he is! Grab him!"

And Austin, bewildered and frightened almost to death, felt his arms twisted painfully and held in a crushing grasp behind his back.

CHAPTER FOUR.

Black Jack's Lair.

BEAT it—this way!" whispered Nysie. With a jerk, Austin wrenched himself free and followed Nysie, the crowd howling at his heels. He dropped his suit case and dashed out into the stump-choked street. Nysie grabbed Austin's hat from his head and stamped it into the dust, for that was what the crowd was following. Then he clapped his own blue cap over the other's eyes, giving him the appearance of a train man.

"Here he is! This way! This way!" screamed Nysie, trying to head the crowd in the opposite direction. Austin took the hint and a moment later joined vigorously in the hunt for himself, it being too dark for the rabble to distinguish individuals.

Not long after, the crowd gave up the search.

Panting and bruised, Austin stood huddled against a tool shed, demanding of Nysie and Nipper what it was all about. "Were they really after me?" he asked.

"Sure, Mike!"

"But, why?"

"Thought you might know better'n we could tell you."

"But I don't Nysie, honestly, I don't. What do you mean?"

"Well, some of the fellows back there are saying that Black Jack, who lives up the river, is much worried, because he's heard that somebody's huntin' him to punish him for some of his evil deeds. The people all hang together up here, and they won't let Black Jack be taken if they can help it. So they're on the lookout for any stranger. A very excitable people, these Frenchmen. If I were you, I'd get off without letting them know."

"I sure will! But where can I stay tonight? I daren't take a room at the hotel."

"Right you are. Come with me. I know a place."

Nysie led the way to a little house near the river, where he knocked and was admitted by a man who spoke English. "You have a friend?" asked the man.

"Yes sir. He would like to stay over night."

"All right!"

No questions were asked. Nysie had influence here, it seemed. Nipper came in soon after with the remains of Austin's suit case, and the three prepared to settle for the night, as this was the room always occupied by the two train hands when the end of their daily run landed them in La Sarre.

In the midst of his preparation for bed, Nysie turned abruptly to Austin. "Say, Gundy, are you going up to Black Jack's?"

"Yes. He sent an important message to my father asking that a man be sent up, and I am that man."

"Oh!" with vast relief. "Well, I'm glad you told us. We want to help you, and all that, but we are glad to know you're on the square. Not that we think you ain't, but we like to be able to answer people who ask questions."

Early the next morning Austin, accompanied by his two companions, went to the hotel where he found Black Jack's man rather doubtfully waiting for him. The man was profuse in his apologies for what took place the night before, but had not been able to avert the accident because Austin had seen fit to shun his company.

After a light breakfast the guide and boys walked down to the boat landing at the river, where a canoe rocked on the waves. On the shore nearby stood a tall sinewy young man with beady black eyes.

Both Nysie and Nipper greeted the man—whom they called Jet—cordially, and Austin could see that they had some sort of understanding with him. "Take good care of this boy; he is one of us and is on the square," Nysie said to the man, in a whisper.

"Jet," ordered Black Jack's man. "Hurry up, we start now."

"Sure, sure," nodded Jet.

Turning to Austin, Nysie squeezed his hand in farewell. "Here is my address. Remember, if you need any help, call upon the Hang Together Boys. But I don't suppose you will. Good-by."

Austin looked after the retreating figures of the two boys, feeling that he had lost his best friends. But it was no time to show hesitation. With an appearance of courage, he stepped into the bow of the canoe, carrying his few belongings in an old grip of Nysie's. A moment later Jet and Black Jack's man took their places, and they were off upstream.

The forest scenery was magnificent. The sun glinted through the trees and turned whole stretches of the river into molten gold. Birds sang gayly overhead. Austin wished his mind were more content so he could enjoy the beauties that Nature had so lavishly spread about.

"Are we getting near Black Jack's cabin?" he would inquire at times.

"Sure, sure!"

But still they would paddle on mile after mile.

When the sun stood directly overhead, Jet sighed, patted his stomach to indicate hunger, and ran the canoe to shore. Austin, who carried eatables for all, divided as best he knew how his supply of sandwiches and buns, and followed the example of his companions in drinking from the stream, using his hands instead of a cup. Then Jet and the other man decided to take a sleep.

Austin was too restless to sleep. Instead he drew out a map of the country and tried to figure out where he was. Just ahead of where they were, the map showed the inflowing of a tributary stream, and a waterfall. He had been told that Black Jack lived beside a waterfall. They must be nearing the place. Hark! Was that the roar of the cataract?

Finally Jet stirred, stretched, yawned, and sprang to his feet, squinting an eye at the sun. Then he awakened Black

Jack's man. Austin needed no urging to help pack up and get into the canoe. He was afraid to meet Black Jack, but he was more afraid of being caught in the bush at night.

Soon the roar of the waterfall came distinctly to his ear. When the current they pushed against broke into little rapids, the men ran the canoe ashore. Many footprints about the landing place and a well-defined trail indicated that a human habitation was not far away.

"Are we getting near there?" asked Austin, in an awe-struck voice.

"Sure, sure!"

But they walked on and on. Austin's legs felt like jelly under him. Conscience was making a coward of him. Where was the joy of adventure he had expected to experience? Wherever he turned, the word "Thief!" seemed to stand out in front of him. And other words buzzed in his ears, such as "Liar!" and "Cheat!"

The ascent was rocky and steep, but at last their destination was reached. Nestling under the shadow of a big rock, stood the rude log shanty, Black Jack called home. It had a hole for a window and a piece of board set up against the entrance for a door. A couple of Indian youths squatted on the grass before the entrance.

"Bijou! Bijou! Good-day! Good-day!" greeted Jet.

They launched at once into an Indian conversation, which left Austin standing very awkwardly alone.

At last Black Jack's man nodded to him. "Come this way. Black Jack see you now."

With a sinking feeling in his heart, Austin entered the cabin. In the dim light, through a cloud of smoke, he saw Black Jack in the flesh. Dirty and smoke-begrimed, very fat and greasy, with a thick bull-neck and a big bushy head, the man leered up at him from a corner of the room, where he was seated on a block of wood.

Perhaps the outlaw had not always lived so. His eye showed intelligence and his speech shrewdness. He spoke English without an accent, though his habits of speech were

most careless. "Well, young un, who be ye, and what might ye be after?"

Austin's courage oozed away. What should he say to this dreadful old man? His father's name! That magic word, on which he had traded so often, came again to his lips.

"I am Austin Gundy, sir—son of A. S. Gundy."

"Humph!"

Austin gazed at him steadily, hoping his likeness to his father would become apparent. But the old man's eyes were too dim to appreciate details.

"An' if ye be Abe Gundy's son, why be ye here? Answer me that?"

"Mr.—er—Black Jack, may I speak to you alone?"

"Don't know as ye kin. See here, don't try any of yer monkey-tricks on me! I ain't as young as I onct was, an' I don't choose to be left alone with ye. Tom, you stay alongside of me. The rest of you clear out. There now, if ye want to fight, there's a matched pair." Tom was the largest and most muscular of the young Indians.

"I have no intention of fighting, sir," Austin smiled holding up his hands to show he was unarmed. "I have come on an errand from my father."

"Oh? And what might that errand be?"

"I think you know, sir. You asked my father to send up somebody."

"Humph! Answer me, will ye? What did ye come for?"

"For the box of gold and silver coins stolen from the railroad many years ago," answered Austin boldly.

Black Jack glared at him. Suddenly his face began to work as if in a convulsion, and he made his fingers move like a dumb person using the sign language.

Austin looked on in amazement.

"Do ye no understand, then?"

"I—I can't say I do, sir—I—"

"Ha! I knew it! I knew it! That finger talk was to be the sign between us. You're Abe Gundy's son about as much



"Ha! I knew it! I knew it! You're a thief!"

as Tom is! You're a fraud; that's what ye are! Yer up here to steal my money!"

"Sir, I—"

"Yes, ye are! But ye'll never get a cent of it! Tom! All of you! Ha, my stout lads, tend to his case, and hurry up about it."

Austin was terror stricken. The cords in the old man's neck and forehead stood out as if they would burst. His mouth quivered with passion. Then he relented momentarily. "Hev ye got the ring? Tell me that!"

"What ring?" gasped the boy.

"Ha! I knew it! I knew it! You're a thief! What ring, indeed? Ain't it the sign between Abe Gundy an' me? Show me the old silver ring with the death's head cut in black agate; an' then talk to me about stolen gold!"

Miserably caught, Austin realized that Ross Murray, his father's accredited representative, would carry the agate ring.

Black Jack nodded, and to Austin's horror, the young Indians rushed on him, snarling like dogs. The one called Tom sprang on him with the pounce of a lynx. For the second time since leaving civilization his hands were twisted behind his back, and held.

CHAPTER FIVE.

The Punishment.

WITH bound hands Austin was shoved along the trail that ran back to higher ground above the waterfall. He felt himself approaching ever nearer the brink of the swiftly flowing river. He was fainting with fear and weakness, but his set lips uttered no cry. They could call him thief and cheat with some truth, but they would never call him coward. There was no mercy in the terrible savage faces of his guards; therefore he begged for none.

Above the falls the river ran swiftly in a narrow channel, here and there breaking into whitecaps. An old canoe lay rotting under some trees on the shore. Austin felt himself pushed into it, and he felt the untying of the rope that fastened it to the tree. The savages jeered and hooted as they pushed him into the current.

For what seemed eternities, Austin felt the swaying, jarring motion of the boat, then a sudden jar. For a time he lost consciousness. At last he opened his eyes to find the boat stationary. He could see directly over him a great cliff. Dimly he could make out the dark shape of an overhanging tree against which his boat had lodged. Somewhere, just below, was the roar of the cataract. Then the peril of his position rushed back upon him. His boat was stuck on a snag above the falls.

How long would he rock there above the waterfall? Of course it was not a great cataract, but quite sufficient to hurl the frail canoe to destruction. What if the old rotten tree suddenly let go! And then he could think of nothing but the pain in his head.

Suddenly right above him on the bank the bushes parted,



On the bank the bushes parted and Austin saw staring down at him, the frightened face of Jet.

and Austin saw staring down at him the frightened face of Jet. "Ah! I find you at last—yet. You down there, eh?"

"Yes, Jet, I guess so."

"S-h-h! Me no tell nobody. Black Jack not know. Me say to heem, 'Dat young rascal go over de falls, sure, sure.'"

Austin saw that the man intended to remove him from his perilous position. Jet had quite a kindly expression in his eyes.

"It's the far-reaching work of the Hang Together Boys!" thought the boy, with a thrill. "They have planted the seeds of kindness in the breast of a savage. God bless them! I believe Nysie keeps watch over Jet. Perhaps Jet is one of their associate members."

This kindly deed of Jet's was without doubt the result of long talks Nysie had had with him, for when he had pulled the canoe to shore under a little cliff where they could talk undisturbed, he explained. "Nysie, he say to me, 'You must not kill, you must not steal, you must not even fight or tell lies. Now you belong to us; we help you be good an' live right.' Me laugh, sure, sure. Oh, me laugh like anything. But when me go alone in de bush, me tink, an' tink, an' tink; an' when me go steal or go fight, Nysie and leetle Nipper an' all de rest, dey seem right dere. An' dey say to me, 'Don't do it, Jet, don't do it!' An' it's just as if dey put out dere hands and stopped me. Funny, eh? So I cannot leave you. I come see if you die. I not want you to die. Bah, ain't it funny?"

As he talked, Jet worked at making the boy more comfortable. Austin was too weak to reply, but he put his arm around the neck of his rough guide, and was helped by him to a comfortable spot, about ten yards from the boat landing, and hidden from the main trail by a tangle of greenery. Here his rescuer bade him rest until he had completed a few odd jobs. Austin thought he was preparing the canoe for a run down the river to La Sarre, and soon fell into a fitful sleep.

When Austin awoke, he found that dawn was beginning to break. He noticed several things Jet had done for his com-

fort. A rude protection of sticks and boughs had been built over him to keep off sun and wind; the bottle of water he had emptied stood refilled near by.

Suddenly he was pierced through by a new fear. Perhaps Jet had abandoned him! After making him as comfortable as he could, what if the man had run away, fearful for his own safety! What if he had been attacked by the Indians, in whose fierce bosoms lurked no pity or Christian kindness! An hour passed in silent, anxious watching. Then with utter despondency and bitterness of spirit, Austin concluded that he had been abandoned. What was there left for him to do? Jet had no doubt taken the canoe, and how could he find his way, even if he tried to walk?

As Austin lay there idly watching the stir of the leaves in the morning breeze, two words occurred to him again and again. "Easy money!" This was the task he had set himself when he refused to work like an honest young man and decided to get his living by "bluff." Oh, if he ever got back to the good old railroad again! If he ever saw the office with his father sitting in his old place at the big desk, he would accept any kind of honest work, even though it meant starting at the bottom and working up. He had had enough "easy money" to last for a lifetime.

Austin got up, clutching the branches of a big fir, and took a few steps forward, almost to the edge of the trail. A foot-step sounded beside him; then a cough and a rough voice. But it was too late for him to hide. Planted squarely across the trail in front of him, stood the burly form of Black Jack!

Both were surprised and confused, and showed it. Austin, clutching the low branch of the evergreen, faced his huge antagonist, trembling, but with a faint curl of defiance on his lips. The big man growled low in his throat, like a dog. Neither spoke.

Then Jet appeared behind Black Jack, looking very scared but anxious to speak. "I want you be good to heem!" he thundered at Black Jack. "You big beast! I big beast too, but I sorry! Take heem to de hut; he want eat and sleep."

Jet's plain features were quite transformed. Austin could see that he stood in great fear of Black Jack; that made it all the more splendid that he should stand up and defend the helpless against the old savage.

After awhile Black Jack blurted out, "Young un, I ain't sure that you don't belong to Abe Gundy, after all. Ye be some like him in the glance of the eye. He used to look at a body with that straight, bold gaze."

No response from Austin.

"An' if ye be Abe Gundy's son, it's a sorry greetin' I give ye. I'd do anything fer Abe Gundy—him what risked his life for mine onct. But why did ye come in on me so sly-like, as if ye meant to steal the gold?"

Austin winced at the ugly word "steal," but lifted his head bravely. "You're not far from right. I am A. S. Gundy's son, but I am not his accredited messenger. I heard about the gold, and I thought I could get you to give it to me. I wanted to win the credit of restoring it to the railroad, to get ahead of another man I don't like. I counted on my looking like my father to convince you."

"Humph!"

"I'm sorry. You'll never know how sorry. But now, since I've owned up how terribly in the wrong I've been, won't you forgive me, and help me out of this? I need a rest and something to eat. I'm all in."

From that moment Black Jack's manner changed. Austin was welcomed to his hut, given something to eat, and a corner in which to rest. Black Jack talked to him a good deal that day, never weary of asking about his father, whom he declared was the best man that walked the earth.

That evening at sundown there was a great hullabaloo down at the boat landing. The dogs barked madly, the Indians gesticulated as they dashed along the path, and all were joyfully excited. Austin could not see just what was happening, but it sounded as though quite a few people were landing in canoes.

CHAPTER SIX.

When the Boys Got Busy.

WHILE Austin sat silently in his dark corner, wondering what all the noise could mean, the board that did duty as a door was pushed rudely aside. Into the dingy little place, like a streak of sunshine, burst Nysie! Then came Nipper. And wonder of wonders! Bob Hunt, Stubbs, and "The Dook," followed by three or four more of the Hang Together Boys, appeared.

"Hurrah! We have found a friend and classmate!" cried Nysie. "One we feared we might never see again! It was kind of you to take him in and care for him, Black Jack."

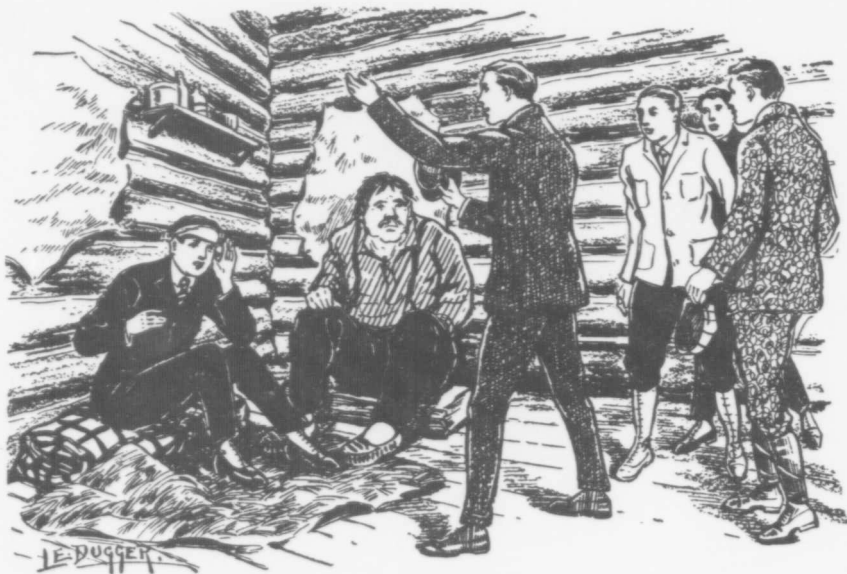
"Humph!" grunted Black Jack.

"We knew he was in danger," explained Nysie, "because the fellows down in La Sarre took such a notion against him, and declared that he was going up to rob you. They sent you up word to be on guard, and to give him more than he was looking for. And we were afraid that you might treat him rather rough, Black Jack, not realizing who he was; that's why I say it was kind of you to treat him as you did."

"Humph," said Black Jack again; and Jet nudged Nysie's arm, as if to say, "You don't know what you are talking about."

"Please tell me how you all got here," begged Austin.

"We worked the whole thing like a relay race," explained Nysie. "I worried about you after you left La Sarre till I decided something ought to be done. So I sent back word to the fellows in Cochrane with Nipper, because it wasn't my run just then. I knew the boys were just ready to start on their annual canoe trip up some of the rivers near by, so I said, 'Why not make it up the White River and find out how



"Hurrah! We have found a friend and classmate," cried Nysie.

Austin is faring at the same time?" The boys all caught on. You see I told Nipper. He went up to Cochrane and told Stubbs in the New York Café. Stubbs ran over and got Bob Hunt on the job; and he, in turn, told the others. Oh, they haven't forgotten anything. They're all here, and they've all brought something for your comfort, for fear you were in bad shape."

"I even slipped in a box of first aid supplies from the drug-store, don't cher know," smiled "The Dook."

Then everybody fell silent and turned toward the door expectantly. For in the rear of the remarkable procession from the river, had come a tall, distinguished-looking man.

"Dad!" cried Austin, starting forward. Then he hung his head, his lips quivering.

But his father crossed the room to where he sat, as if he were the only person in the room. "Austin! My son!"

That broke Austin down completely. With a quivering cry, he flung his arms about his father's neck, while the other people, finding something else to do all at once, walked out of the hut and left them alone.

Black Jack boasted that his hospitality was equal to the strain of entertaining a dozen new guests. His Indians had caught a fresh string of trout that evening. Bob Hunt, with his usual thoughtfulness, had brought bread and buns, tea, and some cans of beans. Nipper showed up with a pail of blueberries he had picked.

The Hang Together Boys prepared the feast on a knoll outside the hut. A fire of dry sticks soon crackled merrily, over which the trout sizzled.

Mr. Gundy and Black Jack sat in the doorway and talked, while the boys gamboled about them in wild delight.

"Don't you hope you'll look just like your father when you're sixty?" whispered Nysie, nudging Austin.

Austin nodded. "Nysie, *how* did he get here?"

"Why, Bob Hunt walked into the station at Cockrane and began explaining to the agent what we intended to do. And while he talked, he noticed a gray-haired gentleman watching

him. Soon after, the man introduced himself as A. S. Gundy; said he was anxious about his son, Austin; and asked if that was the boy who had gone up White River, and had not been heard from since. When your father learned the truth, he decided to come with us."

Austin smiled, then sighed.

"It all seems too wonderful to be true. You fellows have treated me pretty white, for an associate member."

After supper, when the boys had gone off to cut balsam boughs for their beds, Austin found himself sitting beside his father, near the bank of the stream above the waterfall. Just below he could see the tree in the water, on which the canoe had stuck. He knew he must talk things over with his father. He wanted to make a clean confession, and this was the time for it. But it was very hard to commence.

"Black Jack has handed over the gold," Mr. Gundy began, by way of opening the conversation.

Austin's eyes fell on an old silver ring on his father's finger, which was set with a death's head in black agate.

"That's where I got in wrong," he murmured ruefully; "I didn't have the ring, and I couldn't talk his sign language."

"I told him he might know my messenger by the ring," replied his father. "I gave it to Ross Murray, but took it back when I decided to come myself."

"Ross Murray! Where is he?" asked Austin faintly.

"In Cochrane. Got mixed in his instructions there for some reason. Thought he should wait till he saw Marsden. I was provoked with him, and told him so. I never saw him act so stupidly before."

"Oh, Dad, I can explain it all," cried Austin, with flaming cheeks.

"And how did Black Jack treat you?" Mr. Gundy asked after awhile. "I always thought he was not so black as he was painted."

"Dad, he would have killed me if I hadn't been your son! He just about worships you!"

"Well, he still has a sort of conscience. He told me he

couldn't keep the gold any longer. He was afraid of it. Said it never did him any good. He knew better than present it at any public place, for he would have been nabbed by the police."

Conversation flagged between them. The only sounds were the far-off shouts of the boys and the roar of the waterfall. At last Mr. Gundy asked abruptly,

"How long are you planning to stay up here, Austin?"

Austin smiled faintly.

"I have no plans, Dad."

"Well, I ought to go back to La Sarre immediately. But now since I've seen you, I realize how lonely I've been for you, and I don't want to go back alone."

"You don't have to. I'll go back whenever you say."

"But, my boy, your future; what do you intend to do?"

Austin faced his father unflinchingly. "I don't quite know. But if that job is still to be had at the railroad office at Cochrane, I guess I'll go in there, and *work*."

The emphasis on the last word was striking. His father gave him a keen, but understanding, glance. How strange those few simple words must sound to his father, whom he had wearied with his boasting about doing big things, skipping all the minor tasks. Well, he meant it! He was going to take a beginner's job, and work, work, *work*.

"Come home, my boy, if you want to," Mr. Gundy said heartily. "Don't stay up here, if you don't like it!"

"It's all right—the country, I mean," said Austin. "Yes, I guess I'll stay. Fact is, I don't want to go home while I'm such a wretched failure. I mean to learn railroading from the bottom up, and I guess there's no better place for that than Cochrane."

After a thoughtful pause he continued, "Besides, there's the Hang Together Boys. Say, they're the finest bunch of fellows I ever heard of. I'd do anything for them. They hang together all right! And they've sure hung to me. If they hadn't I'd have been a goner. I'm an associate member, you know. When I get to working in Cochrane I'll attend the

meetings regularly, and maybe I can give something to help them along, money, or something, for none of them are well off." Then he stopped in confusion. "But neither am I. I'm only a clerk at a beginner's job."

His father chuckled. "Let's call the boys in. Quick, build up the fire while I round them up. I feel inspired to make them a little speech. I ought to thank them for what they've done, and, perhaps, I can put my thanks into the form of a little gift. Do you think they could use a handful of these gold pieces? Who's their treasurer? Tell me, what do you think they need most?"

Austin Gundy worked in Cochrane for the rest of the summer, and he became an active and enthusiastic member of the Hang Together Boys. But in the autumn he took his father's advice and went back to college in Toronto. He has definitely decided to stay with his father in business, and to learn rail-roading from the bottom up. For this reason he spends his summers in the North, as soon as he is free from school, working with Mr. Marsden and Ross Murray, both of whom are northern experts.

While there he regularly meets with the Hang Together Boys. Indeed, he calls himself an active member all the year around. For while he is down in the city, he plans all sorts of nice surprises to send up to the fellows. He has just about filled their shelf with new books, and has sent up a phonograph with records. And there isn't a project they undertake, summer or winter, but he knows about it and gives his fullest sympathy and assistance.

THE END.